



האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
The Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies

SCHOLION

NEWS

Spring 2003 • Volume 01

Scholion

Interdisciplinary Research Center in Jewish Studies

January 2002 marked the inauguration of the Hebrew University Scholion Interdisciplinary Research Center in Jewish Studies, with its academic activities commencing this past October. Committed to maintaining the University's role as the most important intellectual center in the Jewish world, it was through the initiative of HU President Professor Menachem Magidor and the generous support of Mr. Morton L. Mandel of the United States that this interdisciplinary Jewish think tank was established. Professor Israel Yuval was appointed Academic Head of the Center and Mrs. Naama Shpeter, its Administrative Director.

With its breathtaking views of the Judean Desert, Scholion is located in the new World Center of Jewish Studies on Mount Scopus and "is already contributing to the cross-

fertilization of international scholarly discourse," says Yuval, a specialist in Jewish-Christian relations and polemics in the Middle Ages and winner of last year's Bialik Prize.

Aimed at investigating specific areas of Jewish studies within broad cultural contexts, there are two distinct tracks within Scholion: the Mandel Scholars Program and the Interdisciplinary Research Group in Jewish Studies. Every year two promising post-doctoral candidates in Jewish studies or related areas receive a three-year scholarship that enables them to continue their research. In addition, one research group of eight scholars is selected annually and funding is provided for its activities for three years. Each group comprises four senior researchers from diverse areas of expertise and four doctoral students. The



researchers continue teaching at the university on a reduced schedule, "ensuring that dialogue extends into the classroom," says Yuval, "while at the same time maintaining a permanent scholarly presence at the Center."

This year's inaugural group is focusing on issues of canonization and includes scholars not only from the fields of Jewish history, Hebrew literature and Talmud, but also from psychology, philosophy and sociology. The two Mandel

"To understand Jewish identity and continuity, it is necessary to delve into the way texts and collective memory are constructed, preserved and adapted. Committed to enriching and expanding the field of Jewish Studies, Scholion has already several astounding academic achievements to its credit and is poised to attain all the goals set by its founders."

Professor Menachem Magidor
President, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Scholars in residence are Dr. Amram D. Tropper and Dr. Yaron Ben Naeh. Next year's research group and Mandel Scholars have already been chosen and will begin working in October 2003.



Photo inset: Professor Israel Yuval and Mr. Morton Mandel

Dear Friends:

Little more than six months has passed since the Scholion Interdisciplinary Research Center in Jewish Studies opened its academic doors. It is with great pleasure that I welcome friends

and members of Scholion to our Inauguration Conference dedicated to the ongoing scholarship of our first research team's project: Modes of Canonization—The Case of the Cairo Genizah.

Investigating specific areas of Jewish studies within broad cultural contexts is central to Scholion. And while there are many great Jewish studies centers around the world, nowhere else is the concentration of scholars higher than at the Hebrew University. In addition, we are able to benefit from the University's wealth of outstanding scholars in the many related fields in the humanities and social sciences. While Jewish culture is comprised of so many diverse—and often conflicting—groups and ideologies, our aim is to create a vibrant academic community that will engage in broad-minded intellectual and cultural dialogue whose impact will reach far beyond this ivory tower. And certainly there is no better place for this dialogue than in the multi-cultural, multi-faceted city of Jerusalem.

Our current scholars—eight members of the interdisciplinary research group and two Mandel Scholars—have already succeeded in creating at Scholion a dynamic and open environment of intellectual exchange. Next year's scholars have already been chosen and by the 2005 academic year, Scholion will house a permanent cohort of three research groups, comprising 24 researchers and a cadre of six Mandel scholars.

To open an academic center in these precarious economic and political times takes a certain measure of courage and a firm belief in the enduring value of scholarly research. I would like to express my deep appreciation to Professor Menachem Magidor, President of the Hebrew University and to Mr. Morton Mandel for their initiative, support and visionary commitment to interdisciplinary research and Jewish scholarship.

Israel Yuval

Professor Israel Yuval
Academic Head
Scholion—Interdisciplinary Research Center in Jewish Studies

Photo inset: Professor Menachem Magidor, President, the Hebrew University and Professor Israel Yuval



Scholion: What's in a Name?

A cultural legacy cannot be passed on without interpreting it anew. In Greek Scholion means "interpretation" or "explanation" and Scholion might therefore be thought of as a Greek name for a *Beit Midrash*, where people deal with the exegesis of canonical writings, where it is the primary mission of scholars to interpret, evaluate and explain. The very act of receiving or accepting a text requires the active participation of the recipient, by means of his or her own interpretation. Those who research texts are cultural directors, bringing to every production old canons while offering a different interpretation of them. And that is why Scholion is the ideal name for this new interdisciplinary research center in Jewish studies.

But why use a Greek word for a Jewish studies center? Why not choose from the many comparable concepts in Hebrew? First, cultural research cannot be carried out only within the confines of the culture being investigated, but must adapt the currency of other, proximate cultures. In Jewish tradition, outside cultures were referred to as "Greek wisdom," therefore a Greek name such as "Scholion" provides just the right metaphor for a University Beit Midrash which seeks to place Jewish culture within a wider cultural context, to place it at the center of general cultural debate.

In Greek, the word Scholion has another meaning, one that is less serious. The word also means "leisure," and there is a connection between cultural leisure and leisurely study. This connection is expressed by the rabbinic sages in Mishna Megilla (1:3): "What is a large city? Every city that has in it ten idlers; fewer than this—it is a village." During the Middle Ages, they called idleness broad-mindedness, because only a person with free time could allow himself to indulge in spiritual or intellectual matters.

It is Scholion's goal to promote an interdisciplinary approach that does not ignore any point of view or possible research perspective, to join in designing a new Israeli and Jewish cultural and literary canon. Scholion is open to all those for whom Jewish culture is valued: researchers in the humanities, students of the social sciences, legal scholars, artists, musicians, and anyone who is prepared to be one of the "idlers of Jerusalem."

Survival Tactics



Modes of Canonization: The Case of the Cairo Genizah

Why do certain texts achieve canonical status while others are lost or forgotten? This question arises in all areas of the humanities, in historical investigations of social and legal phenomena, among sociologists of culture and historical anthropologists, and among students of collective memory and the organization of knowledge. It is a question of special interest to Jewish textual scholars, focusing as it does on the creation of "the library of Judaism," the principal means of ensuring the cultural continuity of a people separated from its homeland throughout most of its existence. The very definition of this "library" has become central to current discussions of Jewish identity and continuity, touching on questions of survival and acceptance in broad cultural contexts.

It is these questions that Scholion's inaugural research team has been addressing, using the Cairo Genizah as its test case. Unlike most manuscripts preserved in libraries, the Genizah fragments were discarded after use. Representing the creative

output of world Jewry from the 9th to 13th centuries, the Genizah enables scholars to compare what has survived elsewhere with the fragments it has preserved. The group has been studying what has been lost and is trying to develop models, based on a very substantial database, which might explain the selection of some works and the rejection of others.

An interdisciplinary collaboration made up of experts in various fields of Jewish studies, social scientists and cultural historians, the research team is attempting to pose broad-ranging questions that go beyond the unique case of the Cairo Genizah. Among its goals is to raise basic methodological issues and explore models for investigating the survival, evolution and demise of cultural artifacts and creations, especially in the contexts of Jewish and Israeli culture. The adaptation of the medieval High Holiday *U'Netaneh Tokef* prayer, found also in the Cairo Genizah, into a purely secular context is but one example of how ceremonies and songs become part of the Israeli canon, or our collective memory.

Senior members of the research team include: **Professor Menachem Ben-Sasson**, Professor of History of the Jewish People and former Rector of the University; **Professor Robert Brody**, Head of the Talmud Department and Professor of Talmud; **Professor Amia Lieblich**, the Artery Professor of Personality Studies in the Department of Psychology; and **Dr.**

Christoph Schmidt, Head of the Department of German Language and Literature. All are members of the Hebrew University faculty. Young researchers in the group comprise: Zeev Elkin, Department of History of the Jewish People; Maya Weisman, Department of Psychology; Yoel Regev, Department of Literature; and Zvi Shtampfer, Department of Talmud.



From left: Prof. Menachem Ben-Sasson, Dr. Christoph Schmidt, Prof. Robert Brody and Prof. Amia Lieblich



Above: Commentary by Maimonides on The Mishnah, Seder Nashim. MS Morocco-Egypt, 1161-1168. Jewish National and University Library.

Left: Illuminated page of child's alphabet primer. Egypt, 11th century (?). Reproduced with the permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Mandel Scholars (2002-2005)

Dr. Amram D. Tropper

It was towards the end of his undergraduate career at Harvard University, where he majored in philosophy, that Dr. Amram Tropper became enthralled with the history of the Jews during the Graeco-Roman period. Particularly intrigued by "the importance of the broad historical matrix of the Graeco-Roman world for understanding ancient Jews and Judaism," Tropper enrolled in the Jewish history department at the Hebrew University. In his Master's thesis, he compared innovative aspects of fasting in the Jewish world of the Second Commonwealth with certain Hellenistic paradigms. Tropper then went on to write his doctoral dissertation at Oxford University, an examination of the mishnaic tractate *Avot* in light of the local Jewish environment as well as the ambient cultural atmosphere of the contemporary Near East. His study will soon be published by Oxford University Press in a revised version, *Wisdom, Politics, and Historiography: Tractate Avot in the Context of the Graeco-Roman Near East*.

As a Mandel Scholar, Tropper intends to continue to explore cross-cultural themes, researching Jewish thought and culture within the context of the gentile cultural milieu. "While common ground across diverse cultures usually reflects a shared heritage or environment," says Tropper, "differences illumine the contrasting social and cultural configurations of each particular group, and these two elements together supply a contextual and highly nuanced interpretation of Jewish culture." Using this cross-cultural approach, Tropper is currently turning his attention to children. From filial piety to the legal status of the minor to sentimental attitudes towards children, Tropper has begun exploring the cultural significance of children and childhood in rabbinic literature as compared with attitudes amongst contemporaneous pagans and Christians. While inquiry into the role of children in ancient societies has flourished in classical studies, Tropper says, "it has yet to receive the attention it deserves within the ancient Jewish context."



Dr. Yaron Ben Naeh

Ottoman Jewry has been the focus of Dr. Yaron Ben Naeh's intellectual research at the Hebrew University for well over a decade. With undergraduate and graduate degrees in Jewish History (as well as a B.A. in Archeology), Ben Naeh's doctoral dissertation depicts Jewish society in the large cities of the Ottoman Empire during the 17th century. Investigating the legal and social status of the Ottoman-Jewish community, Ben Naeh's study will soon be published (in Hebrew) by Magnes

Press in a revised version, *Ottoman Jewry in the Seventeenth Century*. Winner of numerous awards and scholarships, Ben Naeh has published a number of articles exploring inter-communal relations and poverty within the Ottoman-Jewish community, as well as such topical issues as gender and homosexuality, delinquency and the concept of honor and shame.

During his tenure as a Scholion Scholar, Ben Naeh plans to broaden his research, investigating the social, cultural and mental aspects of Jewish life throughout the Ottoman Empire, from the 16th until the mid-19th centuries. From family and marriage to childhood and old age; from questions of material culture and consumerism, according to Ben Naeh, these aspects of Jewish life cannot be viewed in a vacuum, but emerge, he says, "from the reality in which Jews interacted with Muslims and Ottoman culture on a daily basis." Fluent in English, French, German, Ladino, Arabic and modern and Ottoman Turkish, Ben Naeh, who has been teaching in the Jewish



Above center: Multi-lingual lottery ticket for the benefit of Jewish orphans, 1874, Izmir.

Left: Constantinople, 17th century.

Courtesy of Yaron Ben Naeh.

history department at the Hebrew University for the past five years, says he hopes at Scholion to broaden his understanding of other Jewish communities under Islam, both pre-modern and modern, "in order to expand the scope of topics upon which I will lecture and research in the future."

Scholion's Second Cycle of Scholars Chosen

While the selection of Scholion's first two Mandel Scholars and inaugural research team was performed under rigid time constraints—full-scale academic activity began only a few short months following the decision to open the Center—the second cycle of scholars were chosen according to fixed, yet innovative procedures, which will continue to serve Scholion in the future.

In addition to the standard request for a résumé and letters of recommendation, Mandel Scholar applicants were asked to submit dissertation evaluations and future research plans, providing the Academic Committee a much broader view of the applicants' scholastic potential.

After an academic subcommittee narrowed down the choice to seven candidates, the final selection took place at an intense two-day meeting of the entire Academic Committee (December 19-20, 2002). Unique to the whole procedure was the 'lecture marathon,' during which the seven candidates presented their research under equal conditions.

Professor Menachem Magidor and **Professor Haim Rabinowitch**, President and Rector of the University, attended all the lectures, together with the other members of the Academic Committee and leading researchers in relevant fields. An unprecedented departure from the standard procedure of selecting candidates by confidential committees, young researchers were exposed to the appraisal of Academic Committee members and leading scholars in an atmosphere of scholarly discourse.

Following an informal luncheon—yet another opportunity to get to know the candidates firsthand—the Academic Committee conducted personal interviews with each young scholar. Decisions were made only after committee members heard the impressions of researchers who attended the lectures and discussed their own preferences. There was nearly unanimous agreement between both faculty and the Academic Committee members as to the two most outstanding candidates

to be named Mandel Scholars, 2003-2006: **Dr. Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra** (Department of Comparative Religion) and **Dr. Sarit Shalev-Eyni** (Department of History of Art). Their selection confirms Scholion's commitment to interdisciplinary research and an open attitude towards Jewish Studies.

With three research proposals on the table, the Academic Committee went on to select the 2003-2006 Scholion Interdisciplinary Research Group, choosing the one dealing with Byzantine Jewry. In addition to the seriousness of its research objectives, this group was chosen as it plans to use the three years at Scholion to establish a new study program at the Hebrew University.



"I have been involved in supporting a number of research programs, and Scholion is perhaps the most fascinating and promising project I have encountered thus far."

Mr. Morton Mandel
Chairman of the Board
Mandel Foundation



Dr. Sarit Shalev-Eyni

With a doctorate in Art History from the Hebrew University, Dr. Shalev-Eyni has been exploring the theological and political aspects of Jewish art in the Middle Ages. Her current research is focused on the 13th century Ambrosian Bible, the earliest illuminated Bible known from South Germany. As some of the most typical iconographic and stylistic features of Ashkenazi German Jewish illuminated manuscripts—

animal headed figures, dragons and hybrids—appear first in these three volumes, a careful study of them is expected to shed light on some of the most problematic phenomena in Ashkenazi illuminated manuscripts. In addition, the Ambrosian Bible is the first known example of eschatological illustrations, popular in Christian manuscripts of the time, which found their way into illuminated Hebrew Bibles and prayer books. Studying the manuscript in relation to Christian iconography, Shalev-Eyni intends to evaluate the reciprocity between Jewish and Christian eschatological iconography and thought.

Mandel Scholars (2003-2006)

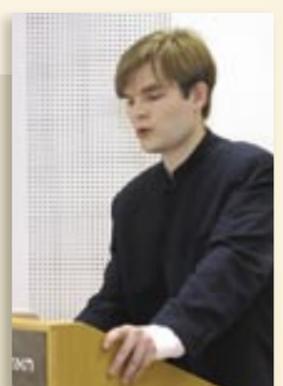


The old "Scholion" in Benei Berak Haggadah for Passover, Northern Italy and Germany, around 1460, MS British Library.

Dr. Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra

Dr. Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra received his doctorate in Comparative Religion from the Hebrew University, writing his dissertation on "The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity." His general field of scholarship deals with Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism, New Testament and Early Christian literature and his research plans include, what he calls, the

"understudied" field of religious rituals and liturgy, as well as the question of collective identities of Late Antique Jewish and Christian groups. He also plans to investigate relations between Jewish and Christian liturgical lections and initiate a project collecting the vast, complex and scattered evidence for Christian lectionaries, research them from a comparative perspective and make them accessible for a wider audience. In addition to "its exquisite scholarly discourse," Ben Ezra says the Hebrew University is an excellent place for his studies "since Jerusalem's different brands of Jewish and Christian movements make the city into a 'laboratory' for anybody interested in researching ritual."



On the Map

The Jews Between Minority and Majority Cultures: The Case of Byzantium

To place Byzantium on the map of Jewish Studies is the goal of Scholion's second research team, whose work will commence this coming academic year. Responding to a dramatic dearth of sustained study on any of the multiple aspects of Byzantine Jewry, the research group intends to launch an interdisciplinary research project focusing on the cultural history of the Jews of Byzantium through a millennium of continuous, rich and complex creativity in all fields. They will also explore the oft-ignored link between the other great blocs of cultural Jewish identity that existed prior to modernity, in Europe and Islamic lands. To a significant extent, both the Jews of Eastern Europe—in lands of Orthodox Christianity—and those communities in the former Ottoman Empire are the heirs of the Jewish communities of the Byzantine Empire.

In addition, the group plans to develop a method that will lead to a better, more precise understanding of the mechanisms of communication and transmission of knowledge between minority and majority cultures. The model the group

seeks to build will help explain the complex and dialectical cultural relationships—not yet properly analyzed—between majority and minorities in other cultural contexts: Jewish-Muslim and Jewish-Christian relations in Islamic lands, as well as Orthodox-heterodox Christian relations in Byzantium.

Finally, and perhaps most important, it is the group's goal to generate the momentum needed to continue this kind of interdisciplinary research beyond the three years of the project. In short, to establish a new field of study and transform the Hebrew University, located, after all, in the Holy Center of the Byzantine Empire, into a significant center for Byzantine studies at an international level.

Senior members of the research team include: **Professor Robert Bonfil**, Department of the History of the Jewish People; **Professor Guy G. Stroumsa**, Martin Buber Professor of Comparative Religion; **Dr. Rina Talgam**, Department of History of Art; and **Dr. Oded Irshai**, Department of the History of the Jewish People.



From left: Prof. Guy Stroumsa, Dr. Rina Talgam, Dr. Oded Irshai, Prof. Robert Bonfil



Synagogue mosaics, Sefhoris (Zippori), 5th century CE.

Courtesy of Dr. Zeev Weiss, Institute of Archeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.



"We want to see our students as true partners, even when they disagree with our opinions and our interpretations. If we succeed, we will prove that Scholion is the present-day incarnation of the traditional Jewish Beit Midrash, where group learning fulfilled a central function."

Professor Israel Yuval
Academic Head
Scholion-Interdisciplinary Research Center in Jewish Studies

General Editor: Naama Shpeter
Editor: Shelley Kleiman
Design: Janis Design

Scholion Steering Committee

Mr. Morton L. Mandel
Chairman of the Board
Mandel Foundation

Mrs. Barbara Mandel
Mandel Foundation

Professor Seymour Fox
Mandel Foundation

Mrs. Annette Hochstein
Mandel Foundation

Professor Mordecai Nisan
Mandel Foundation

Professor Menachem Magidor
President of the Hebrew University

Professor Haim D. Rabinowitch
Rector of the Hebrew University

Professor Israel Yuval
Head of the Center

Professor Gabriel Motzkin
Dean, Faculty of Humanities

Professor Galit Hasan-Rokem
Head of the Mandel Institute of
Jewish Studies

Scholion Academic Committee

Professor Menachem Magidor
President of the Hebrew University

Professor Haim D. Rabinowitch
Rector of the Hebrew University

Professor Israel Yuval
Head of the Center

Professor Gabriel Motzkin
Dean, Faculty of Humanities

Professor Galit Hasan-Rokem
Head of the Mandel Institute of
Jewish Studies

Professor Gideon Shimoni
Head of the Institute of
Contemporary Jewry

Professor Sarah Stroumsa
The Mandel Institute of Jewish
Studies; The Institute for Asian
and African Studies

Professor Ruth Gavison
The Faculty of Law

Professor Moshe Halbertal
The Mandel Institute of Jewish
Studies; General Humanities—
Philosophy

Professor Eliezer Goldschmidt
Faculty of Agricultural, Food and
Environmental Quality Sciences

Professor A.B. Yehoshua
Author

Professor Peter Schaefer
Department of Religion, Princeton
University

Professor David Rudermann
Center for Advanced Jewish
Studies, Philadelphia