



# SCHOLION

SCHOLION - INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH CENTER IN JEWISH STUDIES

# NEWS

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האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים  
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies

## Celebrating the Founding of Scholion - Interdisciplinary Research Center in Jewish Studies

Magic was in the air as hundreds of guests gathered at the new World Center of Jewish Studies on Mount Scopus on May 22nd to celebrate the founding of the Hebrew University Scholion Interdisciplinary Research Center in Jewish Studies. The festive evening, marked by just the right ambiance—good food, tasteful décor, a beautifully assembled exhibition and brilliant lectures—came at the conclusion of Scholion's inaugural conference, “*Bella libellorum: Books and Works Fighting for Their Lives*,” which took place on May 21-22 and was organized by the Center's first research group. Among the evening's honored guests were Hebrew University President Prof. Menachem Magidor and Scholion friend and supporter Mr. Morton L. Mandel, who described the event as “nothing less than inspiring.”

Since Scholion opened its doors almost a year ago, members of the first research group, who come from various disciplines, have been investigating why certain texts achieve canonical status while others are lost or forgotten, using the Cairo Genizah as its test case.

From large-scale copies of thousand-year-old documents to the arresting food platters inspired by recipes and other food-related documents found in the Genizah to an exhibit of important and rare manuscripts from

the Cairo Genizah on loan from the Jewish National and University Library, the Genizah was, indeed, a very palpable presence at this exciting event, organized by Mrs. Naama Shpeter, Scholion's Administrative Director. Background music played by “Revi'iat Ram” a string quartet comprised of Hebrew University students, accompanied guests as they progressed from the reception area to the exhibition to the ground floor where the main event was held.

The theme of the evening, “Cairo – Magenza – Beit Hashita: Stages in the Metamorphosis of *Unetane Tokef*,” was chosen to exemplify Scholion's raison d'être, the importance of collaboration within an interdisciplinary framework. Welcoming colleagues and guests, Prof. Israel J. Yuval, Academic Head of Scholion, noted that it is the Center's mission to “play a formative role in shaping the new Israeli and Jewish canon.”



Left to right, from above:  
Prof. Menachem Magidor,  
Mr. Morton Mandel and  
Prof. Israel J. Yuval;  
Guests from Beit Hashita,  
Mr. Morton Mandel and  
Prof. Amia Lieblich;  
Prof. Yuval and Prof. Galit  
Hasan-Rokem;  
A selection of the evening's  
many guests.

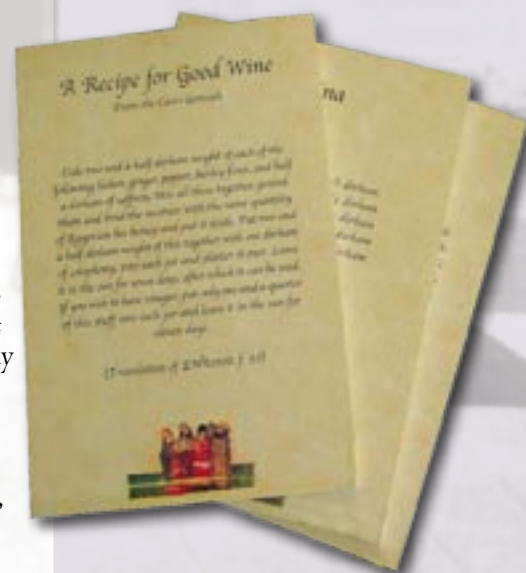
By tracing the wanderings of this ancient liturgical piyyut, from the land of Israel through the medieval Ashkenazi communities to 19th century Germany and back to modern-day Israel, members of the research group were able to provide the audience with a taste of their research concerns. According to Prof. Robert Brody, who introduced the evening's program, *Unetane Tokef* can be counted among a selection “of cultural works seeking success and survival in a competitive environment.” Adopted most recently by a secular kibbutz to memorialize its fallen soldiers, the poem, noted Brody “has undergone a remarkable metamorphosis which gives it additional currency and cultural resonance.”

During the course of the evening, each of the speakers added to the audience's understanding of the ways a canonical work—specifically *Unetane Tokef*—is created. “It is the nature of canonical works that it is renewed in various times and places thus retaining its freshness and relevance over time,” noted Prof. Menahem Ben-Sasson, a member of the research group, a Professor of History of the Jewish People and former Rector of the University. Looking ahead to future years of dynamic research, Ben-Sasson went on to suggest that “exploring ways in which works are accepted through the mediation of canonical systems in various periods can facilitate an intergenerational dialogue in Jewish culture, granting depths of meaning to cultural works.” (Due to the death of his father, Prof. Ben-Sasson was unable to attend the evening and his address was read by Prof. Sarah Stroumsa, Professor of Arabic Language and Literature and of Jewish Thought.)

The evening was capped by a screening of Yehuda Yaniv's film showing the memorial ceremonies held at Kibbutz Beit Hashita as well as a live performance of Yair Rosenblum's modern rendition of *Unetane Tokef* by kibbutz member and singer Hanoach Albalack. To close the evening, President Magidor thanked the entire Scholion team and particularly Mr. Mandel for his deep commitment to the Center. For his part, Mandel summarized the entire conference as “spectacular, beautifully planned, beautifully presented, its serious content offering a taste of many good things to come.”

*Unetane Tokef is a perfect example of how an ancient source can be a wellspring for creating current Jewish cultural identity. That is exactly what we are trying to do at Scholion.*

**Prof. Menachem Magidor,**  
President  
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem



## Take-Out in the Levant

It was not your standard cocktail reception fare. Based on authentic 10th-13th century Levantine cuisine, the dazzling platters of dried and fresh fruits, smoked fish and eggplant dishes were accompanied by enlarged copies of recipes, letters and lists of foodstuffs found in the Cairo Genizah. The ancient documents held many surprises. Certain fruits, for example, like bananas, cherries and apples—thought to be purely of European origin—were eaten in great quantities in Egypt and Syria, as well as in Eretz Israel, Lebanon and North Africa. Fish was often smoked and herring was considered a treat. “The populace was a highly sophisticated one, importing delicacies and purchasing ready-made foods, including bread and other baked goods,” according to Dr. Miriam Frankel, who provided the academic culinary advice.



# History Revealed: An Exhibition of Manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah



While some guests participating in Scholion's festive opening were indulging their palette on techina, eggplant and dried fruits, others feasted their eyes on documents over 500 years old. Indeed, one of the many highlights of the evening included a unique exhibit of some 50 manuscripts and manuscript fragments from

the Cairo Genizah collection of the Jewish National and University Library. Complementing the two-day international inaugural conference, "*Bella Libellorum*: Books and Works Fighting for their Lives," organized by Scholion's research group, it was the first public exhibition of its kind. A reservoir of sources, many of which did

not survive the test of time, Scholion researchers have been using the Cairo Genizah as a point of departure as they continue

to study modes of canonization, exploring why certain treatises last far beyond the era in which they were written while others warrant only a short shelf-life. Characterizing the multi-faceted nature of the Genizah, the objects on display ranged from the 9th to 13th century and included segments of rabbinic literature and halachic (Jewish legal) writings to biblical commentaries, liturgical poems, meditative and polemical works, as well as linguistic, mathematical and historical documents. Among the central items were a 10th century Byzantine scroll, devoted mostly to an interpretation of the Book of Ezekiel; a responsa booklet written—also in the 10th century—jointly by Rabbi Sharira Gaon and his son, Rabbi Hai

Gaon; as well as a legal document from Eretz Israel, dated 1023. Also on display were several letters, including a 12th century missive from the head of the Kararite community in Jerusalem to the sect's followers in Egypt, a 16th century letter, written in Yiddish by

an anxious mother to her son living in Egypt and a 13th century receipt for matchmaking expenses.

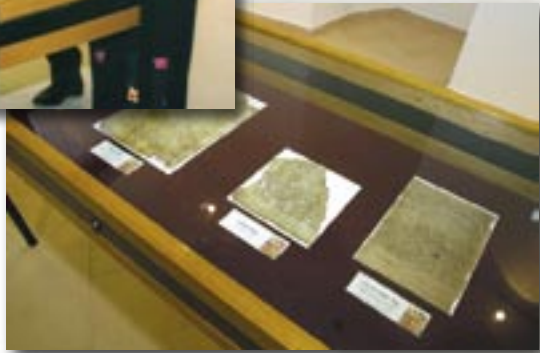
Accompanying the exhibit was an audio-visual presentation and catalog, which included a historical survey on the evolution of the Genizah by Prof. Menahem Ben-Sasson, as well as a description of the Genizah contents by Prof. Robert Brody, both of whom belong to the Scholion research group. Zvi Shtampfer, a research student and member of the Scholion group, was the driving force behind the exhibition, supervising the selection of items, preparation of décor and publication of the

catalog. Also contributing to the success of the exhibition was Rafael Weiser, director of the Jewish National and University Library's Department of Manuscripts and Archives, as well as Tova Szeintuch, director of the Restoration and Preservation Laboratory.



Above: Mr. Zvi Shtampfer and Prof. Robert Brody present the documents on display to Mr. and Mrs. Morton and Barbara Mandel, Prof. Seymour Fox and Mrs. Annette Hochstein.

Documents on display courtesy of the Jewish National and University Library.



## Scholion Inaugural Conference: “*Bella Libellorum*: Books and Works Fighting for their Lives”

Under the banner, "*Bella Libellorum*: Books and Works Fighting for Their Lives," the first Scholion research group held its inaugural conference on May 21-22, 2003 (19-20 Iyar 5763). In addition to members of the research group, who are exploring "Modes of Canonization: the Case of the Cairo Genizah," participants included colleagues from other faculties and departments at Hebrew University, as well as scholars from Tel Aviv University, Bar Ilan University, Haifa University, the Bezalel Academy and New York University.

The distinctive approach of Scholion, an interdisciplinary research center in Jewish Studies, shaped much of the conference. Examining how canons are created—what qualities or processes differentiate works which become cultural assets from those whose shelf life is short—the conference dealt with issues relevant to many fields, including sociology, anthropology, history, art, literature and midrash. Mr. Morton Mandel, a supporter of and partner in the Scholion Center and Prof. Menachem Magidor, President of Hebrew University were among the honored guests at the opening session, which was chaired by Prof. Galit Hasan-Rokem, head of the newly-named Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies. Other speakers at the first session included Prof. Gabriel Motzkin, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Prof. Nachman Ben Yehuda, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, as well as



*Our goal at Scholion is not necessarily to be current, but rather to be relevant. This will be achieved by bringing together older and younger researchers and by promoting an interdisciplinary approach that does not ignore any point of view or possible research perspective.*

**Prof. Israel Yuval, Academic Head**

Scholion—Interdisciplinary Research Center in Jewish Studies

ethnographer Prof. Yoram Bilu, who described how researchers become participants in the process of canonizing the materials that they themselves are studying.

During the second session, the floor was handed over to senior members of the Scholion research group—Prof. Menahem Ben-Sasson, Prof. Robert Brody, Prof. Amia Lieblich, and Dr. Christoph Schmidt—who presented their initial findings of the joint project. Approaching the question of canonization from a variety of perspectives, the scholars focused on three themes: Firstly, the unique characteristics of the Genizah materials and the potential they hold for further research; secondly, the main methodological approaches which emerge from the canon and pertain

to the question of survival as well as the construction of relevant models from different fields, including the visual arts; and, finally, modes of acceptance and rejection of works in modern Jewish and Israeli culture.

As the conference progressed, it became increasingly clear that future research on the multifaceted question of canonization holds enormous potential. And in light of the great interest that emerged from this conference, the first Scholion research group has already embarked on a second year of in-depth and diverse scholarly work. The conference ended with a festive evening celebrating the founding of the Scholion — Interdisciplinary Research Center in Jewish Studies.



# Unetane Tokef: A Poem for all Seasons



"Let us relate the power of this day's holiness for it is awesome and inspiring." Presenting a kaleidoscopic history, ranging over several continents and over 1,500 years, *Unetane Tokef* has enjoyed a colorful and fascinating history to this day. At the celebratory evening marking the founding of Scholion, members of the first research group traced the various stages in the life of the poem and its canonization.

"*Unetane Tokef* belongs to the genre of piyyut or Hebrew liturgical poetry, which compete within a clearly defined and circumscribed area—to be incorporated within communal prayers, either in place of or in addition to segments of standard liturgy," explained Prof. Robert Brody, Head of Hebrew University's Talmud Department and Professor of Talmud, a member of the group, who introduced the evening's program. What was it about this text that aroused so much emotion in various communities and among different populations and what factors led many communities to incorporate *Unetane Tokef* in their High Holiday prayers and other communities to pass it up, were among the many questions Scholion researchers addressed during the course of the program.

*We have completed Scholion's first year of research activities, and are now looking forward to opening the Center's second year, during which two new Mandel Scholars will be joining us — Dr. Sarit Shalev-Eyni and Dr. Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra. We also welcome the four members of the new research group exploring "The Jews between Minority and Majority Cultures"— Prof. Robert Bonfil, Prof. Guy Stroumsa, Dr. Rina Talgam, and Dr. Oded Irshai.*

*The makeup of the Scholion family testifies to the Center's openness. Two of the incoming Mandel Scholars and two members of the new research group are not associated with the Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies. Indeed, members of the research community from other faculties should see this as a declaration of our intentions and an invitation to participate in the range of intellectual and research activities offered by Scholion, without regard to institutional or disciplinary affiliation.*

*The new group is expanding the scope of Scholion's research to extend from the southern shores of the Mediterranean to the sea's northern coast. Today, when the boundaries of the State of Israel are drawn through hostility and bloody conflict, it is of the utmost importance to become integrated into the furthest corners of our geographical context, all the while our route begins in the distant past.*

*For Scholion, which seeks to bring together "Greek wisdom" and Jewish culture, the opportunity to delve into Jewish life in Byzantium is especially significant.*

*Israel Yuval*



## Through the centuries

Legend has it that Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, a Jewish martyr who refused to convert to Christianity, composed the poem around the year 1,000 C.E. and ordered R. Qalonymus to disseminate the poem throughout the Diaspora. Known in both European prayer books and the Cairo Genizah, Mr. Avraham Fraenkel suggested that the poem's origins go back much earlier and can be traced to Eretz Israel during the first centuries C.E. "A universal poem dealing with Everyman standing before God, it took on a new significance during the period of the Crusades," explained Fraenkel.

According to Prof. Israel Yuval, a specialist in Jewish-Christian relations and polemics in the Middle Ages, medieval Jews offered a new interpretation of the piyyut by changing the meaning of "holiness" from a transcendental one to a martyrological one, thus recycling an age-old motif—a heavenly vision of divine judgment—which served Christians when they endured religious persecution. By comparing *Unetane Tokef* and the Christian liturgical poem *Dies Irae*, Yuval pointed out the enormous heritage the two religions shared and "the conflict and competition between them." As a result, he adds, "*Unetane Tokef* emerges as a powerful expression of the uniqueness of Jewish culture as well as its discourse with other cultures."

During the 19th century, the legend of Rabbi Amnon of Mainz acquired new meaning, serving as a basis for a novel understanding of Jewish-Christian relations. Examining Leopold Stein's 19th century poetic legend on the martyrdom of Amnon from Magenza, Dr. Christoph Schmidt, a senior member of the research group and Head of the Department of German Language and Literature, described the literary evolution of *Unetane Tokef* among reformed Jews in Germany. "The legend of Rabbi Amnon," said Schmidt "has become the psychological drama of a liberal Jew facing German romantic culture." And it is this interior torture, he says, "which in fact replaces the real martyrdom of physical torture and distortion."

*There is a long road before us in which numerous works are to be investigated, works which convey the very drama of the human spirit—works created for their own time and endowed with significance for later generations.*

**Prof. Menahem Ben-Sasson**  
Professor of History of the Jewish People

## A contemporary rendition

Professor Amia Lieblich, also a senior member of the research group and the Artery Professor of Personality Studies in the Department of Psychology, discussed how members of the resolutely secular kibbutz, Beit Hashita, adopted this ancient liturgical poem as a vehicle for expressing the loss of their sons during the Yom Kippur War. The 1990 musical rendition of *Unetane Tokef* by then kibbutz resident Yair Rosenblum is but one example of how poems and songs become part of the modern Israeli cannon, or, as Lieblich would put it, "our collective memory." Adapted by synagogues in Israel and abroad, even making its way into recording studios, according to Lieblich, it is the universality of the text's language, together with the legend of the martyred Rabbi Amnon transformed into IDF soldiers and the stirring melody—a blend of modern and traditional, Ashkenazi and Sephardi—which contributed to the revival of prayer in secular Israel.

Top: Hanoach Albalack performs the modern musical rendition of *Unetane Tokef*.

Among the evening's guests and speakers, top to bottom, right: Prof. Israel Yuval, Mr. Morton Mandel and Prof. Amia Lieblich. Top to bottom, left: Dr. Amram D. Tropper, Dr. Christoph Schmidt, Prof. Sarah Stroumsa, Ms. Miriam Goldstein, Dr. Avraham Fraenkel, and Prof. Robert Brody.



**Dr. Donna Shalev** has recently joined Scholion's first research group as it commences its second year exploring the question of canonization. A classical philologist, Shalev received her training at the Hebrew University and Oxford University and her current research interests include the culture of dialogue, Latin syntax and Arabic language and literature.





# Taking The Show On The Road

## A Joint Scholion-Beit Hashita Ceremony

Every year, for the past three decades, members of Kibbutz Beit Hashita gather together on Yom Kippur to memorialize their eleven sons who were killed in combat during the 1973 War, and this year, members of Scholion traveled north to join the kibbutz in a joint ceremony. The idea for the event, which took place on October 1st was conceived following the success of the May symposium, "Cairo-Magenza-Beit Hashita: Stages in the Metamorphosis of *Unetane Tokef*," which a number of kibbutz members had attended.

"We wanted to get to know the community where a certain mode of canonization had taken place," noted Scholion Head Prof. Israel Yuval, who was part of the Hebrew University delegation.

Following an informal meeting with a number of veteran kibbutz members, the Hebrew University guests joined the rest of the kibbutz members in the communal dining hall where the ceremony was held. Interspersed with musical interludes, the names of each fallen soldier were read, including a short biography and a



Above, clockwise: Prof. Israel Yuval, Mr. Hanoch Albalack, Prof. Amia Lieblch, Prof. Avigdor Shinan (second from left) and members of Beit Hashita; Hanoch Albalack performs at the kibbutz ceremony; Prof. Amia Lieblch.

description of how they fell in battle. Following the kibbutz memorial ceremony, Hebrew University scholars took the stand.

Prof. Avigdor Shinan of the Department of Hebrew Literature analyzed how composer Rosenblum adapted the ancient poem—including deleting three central lines—to answer the needs of a modern secular community. Prof. Yuval then compared *Unetane Tokef* with Christian liturgy and early eschatological works, such as the Book of Revelations and famous Requiem sequence, *Dies Irae*. Intimately familiar with the kibbutz, Prof. Amia Lieblch, senior member of the Scholion research team studying canonization, showed how a fundamentally religious poem was translated into secular and Zionist terms. "More than simply an academic exercise," Lieblch went on to say, "the study of *Unetane Tokef* may be seen as an exploration of an important cultural process taking place in Israel today."

## The Russian Connection

Both senior and young members of Scholion's first research group recently participated in an international conference, "Writers, Books and Libraries in Judaeo-Arabic Culture," which



took place at the Center for Biblical and Judaic Studies at St. Petersburg State University. Organized by the Hebrew University and the Ben-Zvi Institute, over 100 scholars—most of them from Israel—attended the conference, which took place August 25th-28th.

In addition to presenting its initial research

findings regarding modes of canonization, Scholion scholars were, in fact, given an excellent platform for introducing Hebrew University's newest research center and demonstrating the importance of interdisciplinary research in the area of Jewish studies. Scholion's young researchers and advanced students gained much from the experience of participating—some for the first time—in an international conference, including preparing lectures as well as taking part in numerous and diverse intellectual exchanges and discussions. Professors Menahem Ben-Sasson, Amia Lieblch and Robert Brody were among the senior Scholion researchers who took part in the conference. Being introduced to the wealth of Genizah documents located in St. Petersburg was considered one of the highlights of the conference and Scholion researchers expressed an interest in returning to Russia, both to further their research and to lecture in universities there.

*Times and cultural milieu do change, history takes its own course, and some traditions revive and survive in complicated ways. Unetane Tokef refers to fate and human control on the one hand, and to memory on the other. Unetane: we are telling, therefore we remember. And this is what we can tell now about this holy day, as we stand together on our memorial day, with our modern ritual, say the people of Beit Hashita.*

Prof. Amia Lieblch  
Artery Professor of Personality Studies,  
Department of Psychology

## Beyond the Ivory Tower

Young and old, secular and religious, over 500 people filled the auditorium and adjacent halls at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem on October 2nd for an evening symposium dedicated to the metamorphosis of *Unetane Tokef*, sponsored jointly by Scholion and the Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History. Prof. Avigdor Shinan, who spoke the previous evening at Beit Hashita, chaired the event. Mr. Avraham Fraenkel spoke about the ancient origins of the poem until the medieval story of R. Amnon of Mainz, claiming that the martyred German Jew was of Italian descent and was not a mythological figure as many scholars claim. While comparing *Unetane Tokef* with Christian texts, Prof. Israel Yuval showed how the piyyut is a Jewish alternative—"the concept of giving man a chance to repent"—to the Christian eschatological notion of divine last judgment. Prof. Amia Lieblch talked about Beit Hashita and the kibbutz's role in canonizing *Unetane Tokef*.

"The evening epitomizes our goal to reach out beyond the ivory tower," says Yuval. "In addition to dealing with questions of serious



Speakers address a full house at the Van Leer Institute.

scholarly content," he adds, "we also hope to engage the general public in a broad-minded intellectual dialogue, raising questions of relevant cultural implications." The overwhelming—and for some, surprising—success of the evening attests that this goal is already being met.

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