



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

Ascending and Descending

“Olim Veyordim” is the aptly chosen title of Scholion’s promising new research group, set to begin work this fall. Jacob’s dream (as related in Genesis, 28), whence the words “ascending and descending” are taken, expresses the complex connection between the realm of spirit and the physical world in the symbolic metaphor of a ladder set between heaven and earth, carrying angels up and down. Such divine intermingling with the mundane inevitably leads to fundamental questions of authority. Prophecy, dreams, visions, earthly incarnation of the divine and a plethora of other mystical experiences geared towards spiritual elevation are all irrational phenomena whose message, vivid or obscured, lacks the undisputable clout of observational fact. The “Olim Veyordim” research group hopes to illuminate

the historical gamut of association between the human and superhuman planes. The group faces an immense challenge in reconciling in-depth research with so wide-ranging a subject, every facet of which is captivating and potentially a study in itself. Well aware of the budding intricacy of their research, the group members have chosen to focus their research on a few recurring themes within the vastness of their general topic.

A theme of particular interest is the Garden of Eden, the theater of man’s earliest past, but also a place of metaphysical significance, the realm of life after death and the place to which mystics throughout the ages have aspired. The recurrence of dreams in the context of transcendence also holds significance as a passage between worlds and a means of achieving heavenly knowledge and establishing divinely inspired authority. The fact that the dream phenomenon is extremely well documented in Biblical and Rabbinic sources and is prominent in Kabbalistic and Hassidic lore promises a rich lode to mine indeed.

The research would not be complete without a thorough examination of historical figures and personalities who claim to have transcended to heaven and brought a message back with them. Alongside such human cases of transcendence lie such other-worldly phenomena such as angels, heavenly voices, demons, ghosts and their ilk, that appear to the living as a source of knowledge.

The group has also called attention to the more common forms employed by those seeking a heavenly connection, like prayer, prophecy and learning Torah; and their more direct and subversive counterparts that have always existed in parallel, like black magic, necromancy and the like. In addition, their research would not be complete without a full investigation into the effect of gender on heavenly transcendence.

The new group numbers four members, each from a different field of expertise. Together they form a composition perfectly in tune with Scholion’s interdisciplinary outlook. Prof. Rachel Elijor is currently the Head of the Department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University. Prof. Yoram Bilu, a Professor of anthropology, currently functions as co-head of the Authority for Graduate Students. Prof. Avigdor Shinan, an expert on Hebrew Literature, and Prof. Yair Zakovitch, a Biblical scholar, are seasoned collaborators whose most recent publication together, “That’s Not What the Good Book Says”, has become a best-seller in Israel.



Prof. Avigdor
Shinan, Prof.
Yoram Bilu, Prof.
Rachel Elijor, Prof.
Yair Zakovitch

The Mandel Scholarship Lecture Marathon



Dr. Emanuelle Main, Dr. Marc Caplan, Dr. Amos Morris-Reich, Dr. Uzi Liebner, Dr. Ishay Rosen-Zvi, Dr. Michael Segal, Dr. Pawel Maciejko

January 2005 witnessed the third annual lecture marathon at Scholion, where this year’s seven finalists were invited to deliver consecutive lectures. Over fifty scholarship applications were received this year at Scholion, sixteen of which came from abroad. Nineteen applicants were women, significantly more than last year’s total. The multi-disciplinary approach to Jewish studies was yet again set in evidence by the intellectual diversity of the applications, each convincingly displaying a

potential contribution to current research, unique in perspective and ambitious in scope. The academic committee had its work cut out for it, discussing each applicant at length and pensively weighing his/her individual merits. The committee finally came up with seven finalists, to be evaluated by means of a public defense of a lecture given by each on his/her thesis topic and a subsequent personal interview. On the appointed morning the candidates lectured in

turn, answering the challenges posed by the audience of assorted academics, who had gathered alongside the academic committee to test the mettle of the research aspirants. The Academic committee was left with the particular challenge of awarding only two of the seven with a post-doctoral fellowship. **Dr. Pawel Maciejko** delivered a convincing lecture under the title “Different Perspectives on Frankism”, in which he drew attention to the gradual crystallization of

Frankism as a new religious phenomenon distinct from Christianity, Sabbatianism and Rabbinic Judaism. **Dr. Maciejko** compared different contemporary accounts of Frankism by rival denominations, interpreting the movement as a product of contradictory interests and the commitments of various religious and social groups. **Dr. Ishay Rosen-Zvi** spoke of Mishnaic attitudes towards Temple rituals and traditions, elaborating on an inherent

paradoxical situation in which thematic elements relating to Temple life are presented and discussed in detail throughout the Mishnah, though by the time of its compilation the Temple had already long been destroyed. **Dr. Rosen-Zvi** then proceeded to clarify the multiple roles, Halachic, symbolic and nostalgic, that the Temple idea plays in the context of the Mishnah. Scholion looks forward to its imminent collaboration with these two promising young scholars.

Writing on the Wall

An Innovative Poster Session

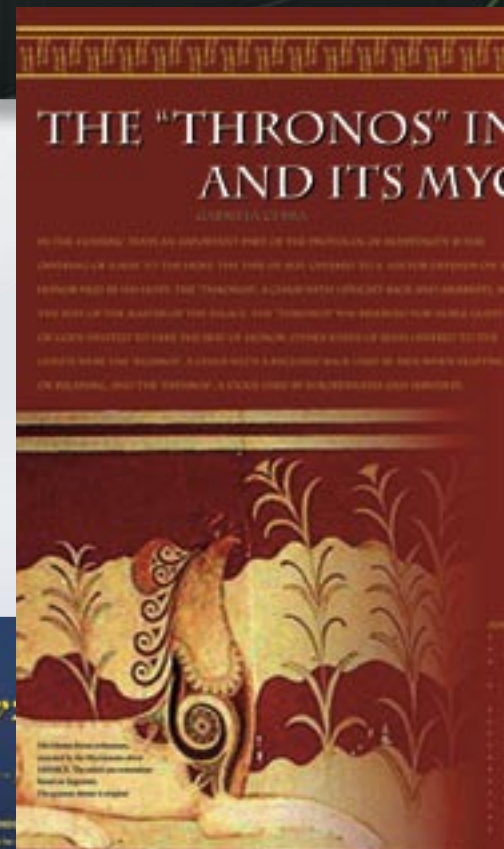
With colorful posters lining the hall and their creators offering explanations and answering questions, the entrance to the Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies had the look and feel of a sophisticated art gallery. But what was really taking place there on June 22nd was a pioneering academic exercise. Frequently used in the natural and social sciences, but rarely, if ever, in the Humanities, Scholion scholars put together a poster session which was presented at the 'Academic Cabaret', the event that marked the close of last year.

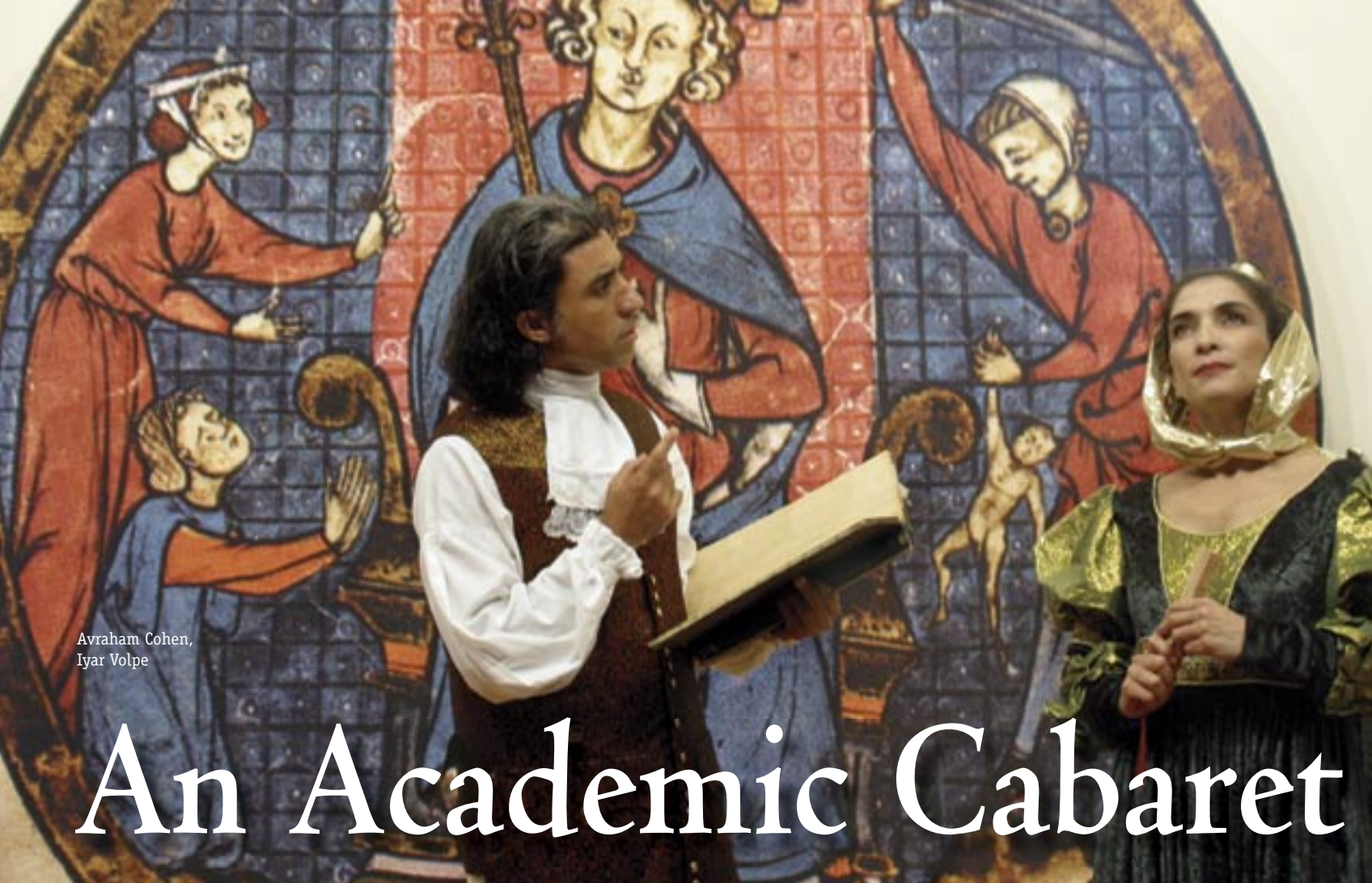
"While we are used simply to lecturing, we wanted to try out this different model for presenting research findings," explains Prof. Robert Brody of the Genizah research group. A number of scholars, including full professors, researchers and doctoral students, mostly from within Scholion, but including a few 'outside' colleagues as well, were asked to create a poster within the framework of the evening's overall theme of King Solomon. Some scholars chose a topic they were in the midst of researching; others opted for something new altogether; but for all, "there were no real models for this kind of presentation," explains Brody. "It makes scholarship more accessible, allowing both the researcher and audience greater flexibility."

"You must be very precise, in defining both your research questions and answers," says Prof. Menahem Ben-Sasson of the Canonization research group. Using a story about King Solomon that originally appeared in the 11th century and re-appeared again in the 14th century, Ben-Sasson used his poster to analyze the survival of a literary text, both in written and oral traditions. Creating a poster, he says, "is something like putting an article through a purification process." While he was not sure the audience had enough time to fully absorb each poster, Ben-Sasson says they do offer researchers a more public venue for presenting their research to the community of scholars. In fact, posters will in all likelihood be used at this year's World Congress of Jewish Studies, which is scheduled to take place in August, 2005. "The greatest challenge was to transform an abstract idea into a visual presentation," says doctoral candidate Micha Peri, whose eye-catching poster followed the fabulous descriptions of Solomon's



throne from their origins in Byzantium to their much-transformed images by the Western world. "I showed that these texts were part of a Jewish-Christian struggle over the legacy of Solomon," adds Peri, who is incorporating this research into his doctoral dissertation. He describes the process of creating a poster as completely different from any other academic writing experience. "I had to reduce the textual rhetoric to a minimum and 'paint' an argument through questions, sources and answers, to lead the viewer through my ideas." Mandel Scholar Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra admits that constraints of form and space forced him to drop important texts from his poster, "Solomon as Magician among Pagans, Jews and Christians." Interested in the exchange of cultures, Ben Ezra reveals that magic comes into play in much of his research, though King Solomon added to it a new twist. He admits, however, that he did not state a new thesis, but summarized existing research and reworked it into a brief poster, creating, he says, "something more accessible to the general reader." To what extent will poster sessions be used in the future by Humanities scholars remains to be seen. But thanks to Scholion scholars the possibility has now been put on the map.





Avraham Cohen,
Iyar Volpe

An Academic Cabaret

Celebrating another Successful Year at Scholion

King Solomon was by far the most distinguished of the guests. Indeed, he was both the inspiration and the crux of the festive evening that marked the end of the academic year at Scholion-Interdisciplinary Research Center in Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University. This "Academic Cabaret", held on June 22nd at the Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies on Mount Scopus, was graced with an expert blend of lectures and exhibitions, with musical and theatrical interludes. "Cabaret" may seem an improper designation for an academic gathering, but Prof. Israel Yuval, Scholion's Academic Head, explained in his opening words that the term was chosen expressly "to demonstrate that Academia can be attractive, pleasing and beckoning, and that Jewish Studies is hardly the lackluster archaism depicted by popular reputation, but an autonomous cultural presence, full of life and capable of arousing genuine curiosity and excitement." All this, he added, without compromising academic standards.

Since Scholion opened its doors almost three years ago, members of the first two research groups have been maximally engrossed in their own research projects, one exploring the various modes of canonization, the other attempting to understand the place of the Jews in the Byzantine world. (The third research group only commenced work this academic year.) The idea for the evening was to find a thematic common ground, where the two groups could meet and through which they could move freely and with authority. As a historic and mythic figure inspiring a world of thought among Christians, Jews and Muslims alike, King Solomon was anointed the event's thematic centerpiece.

"An exemplary king and a consummate leader – strong, imaginative and charismatic – we decided to home in on this mythical and legendary figure," explains Dr. Oded Irshai, one of the evening's organizers and member of the Byzantine Research group. Used to the casual encounter in the halls and the ever-frequent opportunities

to socialize over a cup of coffee, this was the first time the two research groups actively worked together on an academic project. This cerebral connection perhaps best exemplifies Scholion's founding principle, the importance of collaboration within an interdisciplinary framework. From the inaugural poster exhibition (see separate article) engaging both the research groups and Mandel Scholars, to the lectures interspersed with musical and dramatic presentations, "the world of King Solomon was considered from diverse perspectives, from the First Temple to the modern period," says Irshai.

Referring to Scholion as the "heart of the Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies," outgoing head of the Mandel Institute, Prof. Galit Hasan-Rokem, opened the evening, thematically entitled "A Temple of Stone and Shrine of Words: King Solomon and his Cultural Images." Welcoming the many guests, including Hebrew University President Prof. Menachem Magidor,



University Rector Professor Haim Rabinowitch, Scholion scholars, colleagues, family members and friends, Prof. Yuval noted that Mr. Morton Mandel's active involvement in Scholion continues to "open new vistas and pose new challenges for the Institute as a whole."

At the heart of the evening were four academic lectures on interwoven themes ranging from the period of Alexander the Great until the early modern period. Interspersed between the presentations were musical and dramatic interludes, including "Qoheleth," an original musical piece by Israel Prize winner Prof. André Hajdu, transcribed especially for the event; an original dramatization by playwright Yair Lifschitz; and dramatized scenes from the play, "King Solomon and Shalmay the Cobbler" by Nathan Alterman. Dr. Donna Shalev of the Canonization Group delivered the first presentation, and spoke about the "Manifestations of King Solomon in Cultural and Literary Traditions in Antiquity," comparing the adventures of Alexander the Great with those of King





Solomon. “Both collect and mete out wisdom; make peace among rivals; display leadership; colonize and build cities and temples,” adding that they were both said to “communicate with animals, possess magical powers and touch the outermost limits separating mortals from others.” Continuing under the same topic heading, Dr. Oded Irshai of the Byzantium Research Group discussed the appropriation of Jewish Jerusalem by Christianity during the fourth century. Solomon’s ancestral image, noted Irshai, was superseded by that of Jesus Christ leading to the Christianization of the Holy Land under the Emperor Constantine the Great. “In this ambitious plan,” he added, “Jerusalem and the Temple Mount assumed the lion’s share of attention in political, theological and urban consciousness.”

Prof. Robert Bonfil, also a member of the Byzantium Research Group, essentially continued where Irshai left off, exploring the perennial efforts on the part of Byzantine Royalty to outshine the great King Solomon. While inaugurating the rebuilt Aya Sofia in Constantinople, Justinianus was said to have proclaimed: “I have outdone you, Solomon!” Using an extensive slide presentation, Bonfil demonstrated how the architecture of the Temple entered the psyche of the Christian mind, influencing the design of churches, which, ironically, had direct bearing on the architecture of

the synagogues in Rome and Florence.

Concluding the academic portion of the evening, Mandel Scholar Dr. Sarit Shalev-Eyni delivered a visual presentation, revealing the complex, starkly contrasting images of King Solomon in the Ashkenazi illuminated manuscripts. Who is Solomon? He is a figure, explains Shalev-Eyni, who occupies both lofty regions ‘among the stars and celestial lights,’ as well as darker regions ‘arising from the nether worlds.’



Top: Prof. Menachem Magidor, President of the HU, Prof. Robert Bonfil, Prof. Haim Rabinowitch, Rector of the HU. Right: Prof. Israel Yuval, Prof. Robert Bonfil, Prof. Haim Rabinowitch, Prof. Menachem Magidor, Prof. David Ruderman



Prof. Robert Bonfil:



A Man for All Seasons

It might not be politically correct to label someone a gentleman, but Prof. Robert Bonfil is, well, a gentleman in the very best sense of the word. A professor of Jewish history for close to thirty years, Bonfil’s background is so diverse – he is fluent in six languages, holds a degree in physics and has rabbinic ordination – that he seems the essence of the modern Renaissance Man, which, fittingly enough, is his period of expertise. Bonfil received his doctorate in Jewish History from the Hebrew University in 1976 and began his teaching career there soon after. Winner of the Warburg Prize for Academic Excellence, he is a Corresponding Fellow of the American Academy for Jewish Research as well as the author and editor of scores (upon scores) of academic publications, in Hebrew, English and Italian. Enconced in his office at Scholion, Bonfil talks comfortably about academia and Jewish History, his three children and eight grandchildren, but is reticent about discussing his childhood. Born in Karditza, Greece in 1937, Bonfil and his parents (he is an only child) spent the war years in hiding, much of the time in caves. “Those were sad years,” recalls Bonfil. “We nearly starved.”

Following the war, civil unrest broke out in Greece and Bonfil and his family fled their home again, this time to Athens, where things were a bit more stable. Although Bonfil’s family was totally secular – “I didn’t have any Jewish education” – they packed him off to Rome to study at the Italian Rabbinic Seminary. He was all of twelve. “My parents hoped to find me a safe refuge and I hoped to find a few solid meals.” Bonfil eventually received both his rabbinic ordination, serving for a number of years as the Acting Chief Rabbi of Milan, and a degree in Physics.

While studying for the rabbinate, Bonfil spent six months in Israel, where he met his German-born wife, Eva, who was also studying in Israel. They were married in 1959, and moved to Israel in 1968, with two young children. The switch from physics to Jewish history was pragmatic rather than idealistic.

“By the time I needed a profession, too much had changed in the field of physics, so I decided to study Jewish history.” Identifying himself professionally with Manfred Herbst – the fictional hero and historian of Byzantium at the Hebrew University during the late 1930s, of S.Y. Agnon’s posthumously published novel, *Shirah* – Bonfil chose to specialize in Italian Jewry during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, because, he says, he liked the period – “it was a bit of a scholastic vacuum at the time” – and had spent a good part of his life in Italy. In recognition of the Professor’s towering scholarly achievements, a full-scale event was held in honor of his retirement from academia. Scholion was delighted to assist in the organization of such a memorable occasion, which consisted of a series of lectures on family and gender in Jewish society during the Middle Ages. Honoring the occasion were University President Prof. Magidor and Rector Prof. Haim Rabinowitch. There were five sessions with lecturers from Israel and abroad, and many of Prof. Bonfil’s former students were privileged with the opportunity to lecture in front of the distinguished audience. As befits an academic of Bonfil’s stature, the hall was filled to capacity beginning to end, much of the audience maintaining their seats throughout, while others stood in the wings, ready to replace those that could not stay. As the gathering approached a close, Prof Bonfil himself stepped up to the podium and, with a quivering voice somewhat overwhelmed by the outpour of enthusiasm shown in his honor that day, addressed the hall with his friendly air of humble dignity and muted passion. But the familiar idiom was now infused with something new, a poignant finality that hushed the crowd into an audible silence.

As a member of the Byzantium research group at Scholion where there is a “superb atmosphere of collaboration”, Bonfil continues to study the Jewish community in Greece during the Roman Empire and Byzantine period. While little actually remains there since the Turks swept through the region, the search for documentation about the period goes on. Alluding slyly to the state of research in an area wanting in documentation, the Professor explains, “You know, when historians publish their findings, ten percent is what they actually know and the other ninety percent is what they think they know.” A smile raises his cheeks lightheartedly when he says this. It is this humor that is his trademark and must be as sorely missed by Academia whence he has retired, as it is enjoyed by his colleagues at Scholion.



Mr. Shmuel Magen



Open to Interpretation

Textual Studies Scholion-Style

Dr. Donna Shalev,
Prof. Guy Stroumsa



Mr. Yosi Sofer, Mr. Roni Shweka, Prof. Robert Bonfil



The art of translation, not simply from one language to another, but from one medium to another, one culture to another, even one time period to another, was the central theme of the two-day study session in which Scholion members - from researchers and doctoral students to full-fledged professors - sequestered themselves at the Neve Ilan Guest House for two intensive and thought-provoking days of academic dialogue. Offering an alternative model to conventional conferences, the workshop, "Transfer of Culture: Translation, Revision and Interpretation," which took place June 23-24 just after the "Academic Cabaret", was marked by a strong sense of camaraderie and as Scholion Head, Prof. Israel Yuval put it: "polyphonic discourse."

It was an instance in which lecturers became moderators and teachers became students, an event in which all participants mulled over the multifarious meanings and vicissitudes of the texts they jointly studied. "The idea was to bring the two Scholion research groups together, to experience joint learning and explore not one specific topic, but the very transmission of knowledge," explains Prof. Guy Stroumsa, one of the study-session organizers and member of the Byzantine research group. "While everyone came with his/her own particular scholarly interest, the idea was to break

down intellectual barriers that recurrently consign like-minded researchers to categorical exclusivity from each other," adds Stroumsa. Each session leader was asked to present a text, not a lecture, and a joint learning session ensued. From the legends surrounding the creation of the Septuagint, the oldest Greek translation of the Bible, to the essays on translation by the twentieth century literary critic Walter Benjamin, the range of texts was great, spanning over two thousand years and encompassing the frequently overlapping intellectual history of Christians, Jews and Muslims. The idea for the two-day workshop was born in typical Scholion style - at the daily coffee break, explains Dr. Donna Shalev, of the Canonization group and co-organizer of the 'retreat.' "A unique time for the cross-fertilization of ideas and a real departure from other interdisciplinary groups, a group of us were simply discussing questions surrounding translation, and the idea for the two-day study session was born," adds Shalev. A strong believer in informal learning, Shalev says one of the successful aspects of the sessions was how scholars were all able to learn from each other. An instance of just such mutual learning came from two doctoral students, Ophir Münz-Manor and Roli Zilberstein, who presented two Byzantine elegies, one Jewish the other Christian, mourning the destruction of the

Constantinople. "The beauty of the session," notes Shalev, "was that no one had ever seen the texts before (the Greek text was translated into modern Hebrew) and everyone analyzed the similarities and differences havruta-style." Perhaps one of the most telling sessions included the screening of Nurit Aviv's film, "Language to Language." The film documents the experiences of non-native Hebrew-speaking writers and performing artists as they function creatively and successfully in a Hebrew-speaking world. Essentially the story of cultural adaptation, the film not only explored their questions of identity as artists and as individuals, but opened the forum to participatory debate, moderated by Dr. Maya

Benish-Weissman. Several among the Scholion scholars taking part, hailing originally from non Hebrew-speaking environments, were able to relate both their own personal experiences as well as their experiences as teachers and researchers.

Ms. Maya Benish-Weissman,
Prof. Amia Lieblich, Dr. Amram
Troppe, Prof. Menahem Ben-
Sasson, Mr. Yoel Regev



Dr. Oded Irshai, Prof. Israel Yuval,
Dr. Daniel Stoekl Ben-Ezra,
Mr. Ophir Münz Manor



A trip to Caesarea

On a warm Friday in the midst of spring, the Byzantine group went on a field trip to the Roman and Byzantine excavations in Caesarea Maritima. Guided by Prof. Joseph Patrìch from the Institute of Archaeology at the HU, himself the head of an expedition team during

the 90s at Caesarea, the group couldn't have had a better guide. The findings were described in great detail by Prof. Patrìch and exposed the group to some of the most interesting facets of private and public life in a Late Roman and Byzantine important city in the Land of

Israel. Walking through the historical ruins of times long gone the group compared the material remains of the past with the textual heritage of the period. The members of the group accompanied by friends and family enjoyed a scholarly experience and social outing.



Prof. Robert Bonfil,
Mr. Zvi Stampfer,
Mr. Yosi Sofer, Dr. Rina
Talgam, Prof. Josef
Patrìch



The Show Must Go On



Anat Zamshteigman, Odelia
More-Matalon, Tamar Michael,
Merav gerry



Based on Prof. Amia Lieblìch's original work, *Seder Nashim*, the Beer-Sheva Municipal Theater has produced an evocative drama entitled "A Child of My Own." While Lieblìch's book is based on 26 interviews with women living in post-modern family situations, the play, written and directed by Hagit Rehavi Nikolayevsky, focuses on four separate stories, each containing a model of an unconventional family. Lieblìch, a member of Scholion's Canonization Research Group, was involved in all aspects of the production, from auditions to dress rehearsals—except, that is, in writing the script. "While I aim to keep my writing accessible, I have no talent in that area," admits Lieblìch, who adds, "it was very moving to see my work on stage." So much so that this consummate documenter of Israeli society is now writing an academic paper on "the transformation of life into a book, and a book into a play." The performance drew a full house of lively show-goers, including the entire Scholion family, who were delighted to laud their colleague's artistic achievement during an enjoyable evening out at the Jerusalem Theater.

Scholion Takes Part in 29th Convention on History

Every year the Zalman Shazar Center of Jewish History together with the Israeli Historical Society (headed by Prof. Michael Heyd, himself a member of Scholion) convenes a three-day conference around a historical theme. This year's conference began in April, 2005 and dealt with the correlative concepts of calendar, time and anniversary in society, culture and conscience, aptly headed by a piece of rhetorical poetry from the Book of Job, spoken by God himself: "Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth?" This year's conference was especially significant for Scholion – indeed, no less than six members actively participated. Dr. Oded Ir-Shai was the first Scholion member to address the conference in his discussion, on the first day of the conference, of the debate surrounding the exact time of Easter in the Early Church. Day two was dominated by lecturers from Scholion, where two of the three sessions convened that day were composed exclusively of Scholion members. Grouped under the idea of "Time in

Society", Prof. Rachel Elior led with a lecture on the polemic between the priests and the Rabbis on Calendrical issues in Jewish life. Prof. Israel Yuval followed with a learned elucidation of the intricate relationship of Jewish and Christian concepts of time, after which Prof. Menahem Ben-Sassoon closed the session with a lecture on the passage of time in the Genizah society. The next session also belonged to Scholion, and consisted of consecutive lectures by Dr. Rina Talgam and Dr. Sarit Shalev-Eini. The former expounded on the evolution of the Zodiac through time from Greco-Roman civilization to Byzantium, while her colleague unfurled the history of the illuminated Ashkenazi Mahzor (High-Holiday Prayer Book).



Recent Activities by Scholion Members

Members of Scholion are more than willing to actively participate in academic conferences, as guest lecturers or official organizers. This year has certainly been no exception in this regard. Leading off with an impressive display of charisma, Dr. Sarit Shalev-Eini put her hand to organizing last year's Conference on Jewish Art, the 36th in number, which took place on Lag BaOmer, 2004. The day-long conference was brought to a close with a performance by the prominent musician Yair Dalal, to the delight of all attending. Having enjoyed some theatrical success in the autumn of 2004 with a popular stage adaptation of her recent work, Prof. Amia Lieblich had already been invited to the Knesset to lecture at a

conference on the contributions of female MKs to legislation for women. In line with her recent area of research, Prof. Lieblich spoke about women and the modern family in Israel from a research perspective. Mandel Scholar Dr. Manuela Consonni took it upon herself to arrange a conference in memory of Haim Enzo Sereni. This conference in April, 2005 took place at Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and brought together an impressive number of cultural, academic and political institutions in a significant show of collaboration and sponsorship, including the Italian Embassy in Israel, the Italian Cultural Center, Irgun Olei Italia, and the Israeli Foreign Ministry, among others.

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