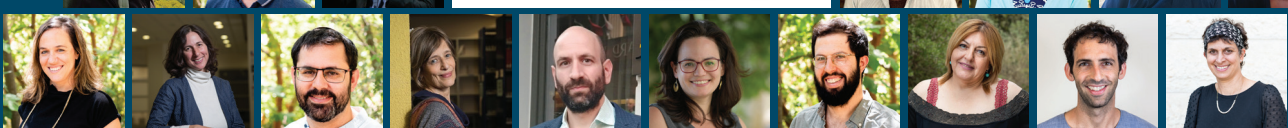




Mandel Scholion Interdisciplinary Research Center  
in the Humanities and Jewish Studies

# Celebrating 20 Years: 2002-2022

Special Edition



# Table of Contents

## Mandel Scholion Celebrating Twenty

<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>From the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation</b>	
Prof. Jehuda Reinharz .....	8
<b>From Our Academic Heads</b>	
Prof. Israel J. Yuval .....	11
Prof. Daniel R. Schwartz.....	14
Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten.....	16
<b>From Our Academic Committee</b> .....	18
<b>"Surveying Scholion at Twenty</b> .....	23

## Year in Review 2021/2022

<b>Looking Back at 2021/2022</b> .....	28
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### Mandel Scholion 2021/2022

#### Research Groups

Setting Tables: Eating, Social Boundaries, and Intercultural Transfers .....	31
Past and Past Perfect .....	33
The Evolution of Attention in Modern and Contemporary Culture .....	36
Research Groups Seminars .....	38

#### Mandel Fellows

##### Departing Fellows

Farewell from Dr. Hadar Feldman Samet .....	42
---	----

##### Current Fellows

Dr. Céline Debourse .....	44
Dr. Ofir Haim .....	45

Dr. Michael Lukin .....	47
-------------------------	----

#### Research and Public Activities

Monthly Pan-Scholion Seminars .....	48
Conferences and Events .....	50
Research Tours .....	54
Ph.D Student's Initiatives .....	59

### Mandel Scholion 2022/2023

#### Our New Research Group

Remapping Ancient Elites: Between East and West.....	62
--	----

#### Our New Mandel Fellows

Dr. Sivan Goren-Arzonny .....	63
Dr. Ortal Harush .....	64
Dr. Yakov Z. Mayer.....	65

#### News

##### Upcoming Research Group (2023/2026)

Passivities: Modes of Feeling, Modes of Knowing .....	67
---	----

<b>Publications</b> .....	68
---------------------------	----

<b>Awards</b> .....	68
---------------------	----

<b>Promotions and Appointments</b> .....	69
--	----

# Mandel Scholion Celebrating Twenty

## Introduction

*“Perhaps more than any other discipline, the humanities stress creativity, critical thinking, and honest deliberation. For centuries it has formed the foundation of any well-rounded education.”  
(Morton Mandel)*

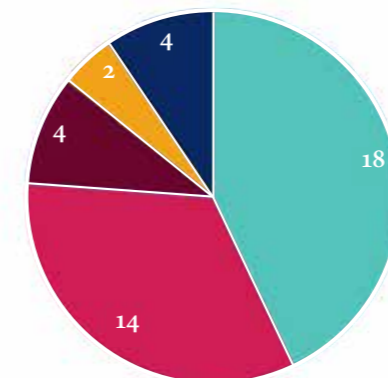
Morton Mandel was a believer in the importance of humanities. He saw “education as the only medicine for a better world” (Interview, 2014). His decision that the Mandel Foundation would invest in the humanities at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, first by establishing the Mandel Scholion Center and then the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, was driven by his desire to invest in education in Israel that would have an impact on the world. Celebrating 20 years since the foundation of Mandel Scholion - Interdisciplinary Research Center in the Humanities and Jewish Studies is a moment to reflect on

some of what has already been accomplished and on the challenges that still remain.

The Mandel Scholion Center was founded at a time when the humanities in Israel and at the Hebrew University were in dire straits. During this period, often referred to as the “lost decade,” budgets were slashed and hires frozen. Faculty members felt both isolated and dejected and newly minted PhDs were finding it almost impossible to find jobs. The founding of the Mandel Scholion Center, under the direction of Prof. Israel Yuval, was meant to counter these problems.

### The Center has two components:

1. Every year two postdoctoral fellows are chosen from a pool of over 100 of the best and brightest recent PhDs in Israel and worldwide. The chosen scholars are offered a three-year post-doctoral position during which time they are expected to pursue their research as well as given the opportunity to teach, an important experience for their personal development as future faculty. To date there have been 49 Mandel Fellows. Among those who have finished their stay here, over 90 percent have gone on to tenure-track jobs.
2. The second component of Mandel Scholion is the research groups. Every year the Center holds a competition open to HUJI faculty, who come together to propose a joint topic for interdisciplinary research. Beginning with four senior faculty members, each group includes core faculty in the humanities alongside social scientists as well as faculty from other universities. Each group is chosen for a three-year tenure, which means that at any given time we have three research groups in residence at Mandel Scholion. Once the group is chosen, the senior faculty publish a call for doctoral students, ultimately selecting four doctoral candidates and a research assistant. The group as a whole explores its topic, making the most of the diverse methodologies and perspectives that each brings from his/her discipline. The group is entitled to a generous budget, scholarships for the students, and, for the senior members, a partial exemption from teaching duties. At the end of their tenure they hold an international conference and publish a book. Twenty research groups have already concluded their time at the Center and the twenty-first, to begin in Fall 2023, has already been chosen.



■ Appointments at HUJI      ■ Appointments Elsewhere in Israel  
■ Appointments Abroad      ■ Senior Positions in Libraries  
■ Without Positions

## A Community of Learning

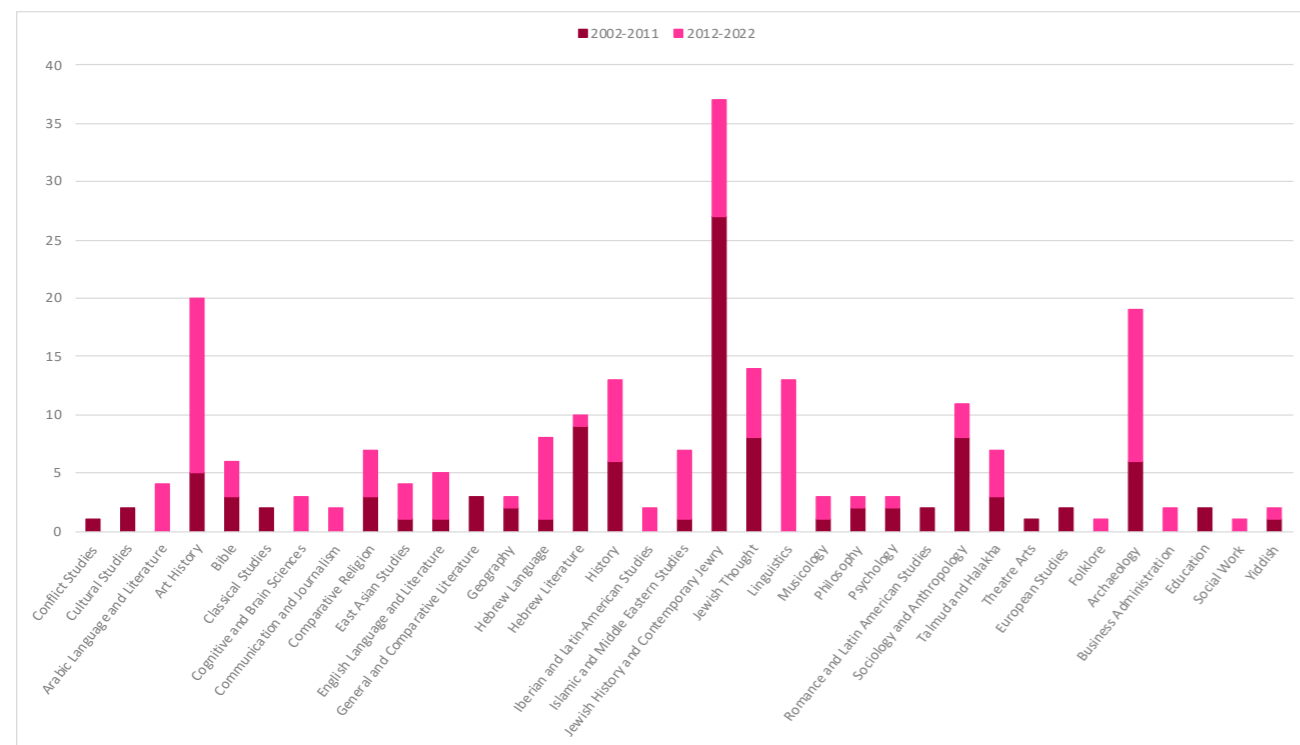
Mandel Scholion has attracted excellent postdocs over the years. Many former postdocs are now faculty at all the Israeli universities and around the world and the Scholion traditions of learning together and producing excellent research have thus migrated to other places. The members of the Center affirm the success of creating a haven for scholarship. (See the results of our survey of Mandel Scholion alumni in this newsletter). One can say with certainty that by founding Mandel Scholion and then the Mandel School, Morton Mandel succeeded in his goal of creating a community of learning that provides an unparalleled experience within an academic setting that spills over in myriad ways into academic communities in Israel and around the world, Israeli society, Jewish communities worldwide, and the wider educated society at large.

Morton Mandel believed that: "The humanities classroom is where ancient meets modern, history touches modernity, and new ideas and ways of thinking are born." (2011) However, the experience at Mandel Scholion

exceeds that of any classroom. One of the characteristics of all professional training, humanities included, is the narrowing of the scope. One begins university education with a broad spectrum of topics studies, in the U.S. with a core curriculum across the disciplines, in Israel and Europe in a narrower manner. As one advances, horizons become narrower, rather than broader. Sub-sub-specialization becomes the name of the game, whatever the field. Such depth provides great pleasure for those who pursue it, but comes with a price. It is relatively rare to be able, at a later stage of one's career, to broaden one's horizons, to learn from others who do different but related things. Time spent at Mandel Scholion provides exactly such an opportunity, creating a well-rounded and wide ranging community of learning.

## Looking Ahead

What has changed at Mandel Scholion over these two decades? A first change took place a decade ago when the scope of the Center was broadened to include all of the Humanities rather than just Jewish Studies.



The establishment of the Mandel School at the same time provided opportunities for the members of the center to interact with other postdocs from the Martin Buber Society, as well as the many graduate students participating in the Faculty of Humanities' honors MA and PhD programs, which was also housed in the Mandel School. My predecessor, Prof. Danny Schwartz, oversaw this change and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him and Prof. Israel Yuval, the first academic head, for their vision and leadership.

Another recent change, reflecting shifts in society at large and at HUJI in particular, is our newly redesigned logo. The original logo of Mandel Scholion was from the 15<sup>th</sup> century Rothschild Miscellany. The image from this beautiful early modern haggadah featured five rabbinic-looking men in conversation and perfectly captured the spirit of conversation and engagement that remains an ideal at Scholion.



With our new logo, however, we sought to remove the all-male presentation and to broaden the lens to include all religions and cultures. Designed as three gates, paving the way to new knowledge and reflecting different cultures, we hope it will be a harbinger of what we seek to achieve in the years to come.

Gender equality continues to be a challenge, as pools of postdoctoral applicants are still two-thirds male and one-third female. Despite this, I believe that it is challenge we are contending with relatively successfully, as we strive each year for a balanced gendered community. In addition, over time, we support more and more of our members in

their focus on Islam, Christianity, Asian, and African culture alongside the important emphasis on Jewish studies and Western civilization. There is still progress to be made here.

Finally, the bridges of the logo do not just reflect these broader focus areas, but also our goal to disseminate our research outside the university, both in Israel and internationally, beyond the current scholarly articles and conferences. It is my hope that at our next milestone celebration we will have made progress with this as well.

Our slogan at Mandel Scholion is "Thinking Independently Together." It is thanks to Morton Mandel's vision and generosity and the continued support of the current President and CEO Prof. Jehuda Reinhartz and the entire board that we are able to do so. We also feel very fortunate to enjoy a fruitful partnership with the university's management, Hebrew University President Prof. Asher Cohen, Chancellor Prof. Menahem Ben-Sasson, and the rectors.

Morton Mandel said: "Our investment in the humanities at The Hebrew University is an investment in the future of Israel and her people (June, 2011)." He also stated: "we see the rise of humanities as a way that could contribute to a better world (June, 2009). It is our hope to continue contributing to these goals.

Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten  
Academic Director

# From the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation

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## Celebrating Mandel Scholion at Twenty

It took Mort Mandel some time to decide how to put his gift to the Hebrew University to best use. He knew that he wanted to make a substantial donation to Israel's oldest university, the first *Hebrew* university in the world. He also knew that he wanted this donation to have the *humanities* as its focus. Beyond these two tenets, and the conviction that whichever form this gift ended up taking, it had to be absolutely unique, beyond this all else remained undetermined and open. His conversations with the university's leadership at the time were lengthy, and during the process ideas were suggested and tossed aside for other, better, more creative ones. And all through these discussions and debates the friendship – already solid – between the Mandels and the Hebrew University grew stronger.

Israel Yuval, a professor of medieval Jewish history at the university, was recruited for the task by the university's then president, Menachem Magidor; their combined energy and creative vision was the foundation for the primary iteration of this twenty-year long cooperation. The idea that was, under their guidance, finally chosen was simple, and revolutionary in its simplicity. It consisted of two words – *excellence* and *community*. Two words the grouping of which was outright radical within the academic landscape of Israeli humanities at the time, where scholarship was largely solitary and proprietary.

With the opening of the Mandel Scholion Research Center in 2002 and the first three-year interdisciplinary research group, the seeds of change had been sown, and a quiet revolution was underway. Eight scholars from different disciplines in the humanities gathered around one table to discuss one theme. They met each other in the halls, they conversed by the coffee machine, they visited each other's offices – and the spirit of exchange saturated the air. Scholars were not holding on to ideas, but sharing them; researchers were not working solitarily in their offices, they were gathering to debate in communal spaces; ideas were hatched and formed not through the prism of one discipline but engaged with holistically through the kaleidoscope of several. And indeed, a community of excellence, based on the vibrant interchanging of ideas, was beginning to take shape. It was, as Mort had hoped, absolutely unique and wonderfully exciting.

The foundation of the Mandel School for Advanced Studies in the Humanities in 2012 was the natural culmination of this process, with two inspired leaders at the helm: Professor Danny Schwartz and Professor Elisheva Baumgarten. Many more humanities disciplines came to be included in the Mandel community, and many more members were invited to join in, from M.A. and Ph.D. students to the three lucky annually selected post

doctoral fellows. A beautiful building was built to host this outstanding community and with every year that goes by it seems its walls can barely hold the force of creativity within.



Humanities disciplines seem to bear the brunt of our scientific, technological age. They no longer form the core of most undergraduate students' higher education, and are frequently exiled to the margins of universities' curricular and financial commitments. Mort's insistent focus on the humanities had been remarkable in light of this era's concerns, and visionary in terms of its results. The spirit of the Mandel School vitalized the entire humanities community in Israel and reinforced its teaching, research, and standing. It is hard to think of a more successful realization of its founder's dream,

and I confess that every time I visit the building, I am moved anew to witness the fruit of this experiment and the evidence it provides that thinking truly matters.



Professor Jehuda Reinharz  
President  
The Mandel Foundation



From the Left: Jehuda Reinharz and Morton Mandel.  
Photo: Mandel Foundation-Israel

*The Mandel Scholion Center has had three academic heads since its inception. We asked each of them to reflect on their experiences.*

## Prof. Israel J. Yuval

2002-2012

### What was the inspiration for Mandel Scholion?

In order to explain the inspiration behind the Mandel Scholion Center, I'll begin with a story. Sometime after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Roman emperor decided, according to the story, to allow it to be rebuilt – but then he changed his mind. The sense of disappointment was great and renewed calls for another revolt were heard. R. Yehoshua ben Hananya, described as a “Escolastika d’oraita” (a scholar of the Torah) succeeded in convincing the nation to act with political restraint. This pair of words – one Greek and one Aramaic – is indicative of his erudition. Only a person with such a broad education, Hellenistic and Jewish, was able to convince the nation to avoid disaster. The vision of Scholion was to establish a generation of Jewish studies researchers who would be such scholars and who could go on to become leaders in the academy and society.

Jewish culture has always moved along a spectrum between “oraita” and “escolastika.” The choice to call the center “scholion” (a Greek word that means comment or interpretation) was intended to express our conviction that Jewish culture cannot be understood in isolation but only as a vibrant entity constantly developing through its contacts and interactions with the cultures that surround it.

Another source of inspiration came from the opposite direction; from the awareness that “oraita” has what to

contribute to “scholastica” as well. A first aim of Scholion was to show the affinity and relevance of Jewish culture to general culture. The second contribution of “oraita” to “scholastica” relates to the learning experience itself. Traditional rabbinic education is warm, with an emphasis on learning together (*hevruta*). The Mishnah calls this “*dibbuk haverim*” – one of the 48 conditions under which Torah is taught. The Talmud, for example, poses questions even when they have no answers. The university, on the other hand, is a colder institution, seeking scientific truths. The vision of Scholion was to combine these two types of learning – the warmth and dialogic nature of traditional education with the critical eye and search for the truth of scientific education.

### What has the Center accomplished?

Mandel Scholion has brought about a change in methodology in the Humanities. The work of researchers and students has become more integrative, and academic dialogue has improved. Young research students have developed increasing rhetorical abilities and are afforded many opportunities to present their research even in its initial stages, and learn from the critiques and responses they receive from colleagues, teachers, and other researchers. In the distant past, whenever I traveled abroad for research, I envied the conditions under which my colleagues worked. This has changed since the establishment of Scholion and especially since

From Our Academic Heads

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the opening of the Mandel Building. One my colleagues recently remarked that in all of the United States there is no center for research in the Humanities that compares with the Mandel School – not in terms of its quality, number of researchers, work conditions, or beauty.

**We'll be happy if you share with us anything that comes to your mind regarding the Center**

The first research group at Scholion dealt with canonization, researching the factors that ultimately determine which work becomes a classic and which forgettable (Mozart or Salieri). In one of their sessions the group explored the history of the piyyut “*U’netane tokef*,” written in the Land of Israel during the first centuries CE, found in the Cairo Geniza, and part of the Ashkenazi rite for the High Holidays. In 1990, while living on Kibbutz Beit Hashitah, composer Yair Rosenblum put the piyyut to music in memory of the 11 kibbutz members killed during the Yom Kippur War. The festive opening event of Scholion was dedicated to this piyyut. Several short lectures were given by group members and other scholars on the history of the text. This was followed by the screening of a film produced by group member Prof. Amia Lieblich about Yair Rosenblum and the piyyut. The event concluded with a moving musical rendition of the Beit Hashitah version of the poem. It was a rare combination of academic research and the contemporary Israeli experience. The event drew a large crowd, with

senior University administrators and directors of the Mandel Foundation, including Morton Mandel himself, in attendance. I remember the event as a real game changer. Unfortunately, we were not cognizant of this at the time, and failed to film the event in order to turn it into a collective Scholion memory.

**What changed after you became Director of the Mandel School?**

After concluding my role as director of Mandel Scholion in 2010, my place was filled by Prof. Daniel Schwartz, who had himself been part of a research group several years before. It is not easy to be second. But Danny continued to develop the unique essence of the center with charm, creativity, and genius until he was appointed director of the Mandel School in 2019. In parallel, in my new role as director of the Mandel School beginning in 2012, I had the job of integrating four different units within the school – the program for honors master’s students, the honors program for doctoral students, the Mandel Scholion Center, and the Buber Fellowship program. It was challenging to navigate the path between managing the entire school and giving autonomy to its different units and their directors.

There is now a third generation, allowing the reorganization of the school and center as Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten assumes her role as academic head. I hope

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Elisheva will retain Mandel Scholion as a workshop for new ideas while avoiding becoming too entrenched in any particular path. Mandel Scholion was established in response to a specific reality, which has since changed. The reorganization taking place now will better integrate the Mandel Scholion Center within the Mandel School. I am confident that the Mandel Foundation will help Prof.

Baumgarten bring to fruition innovative ideas that will promote the Humanities Faculty and its researchers.

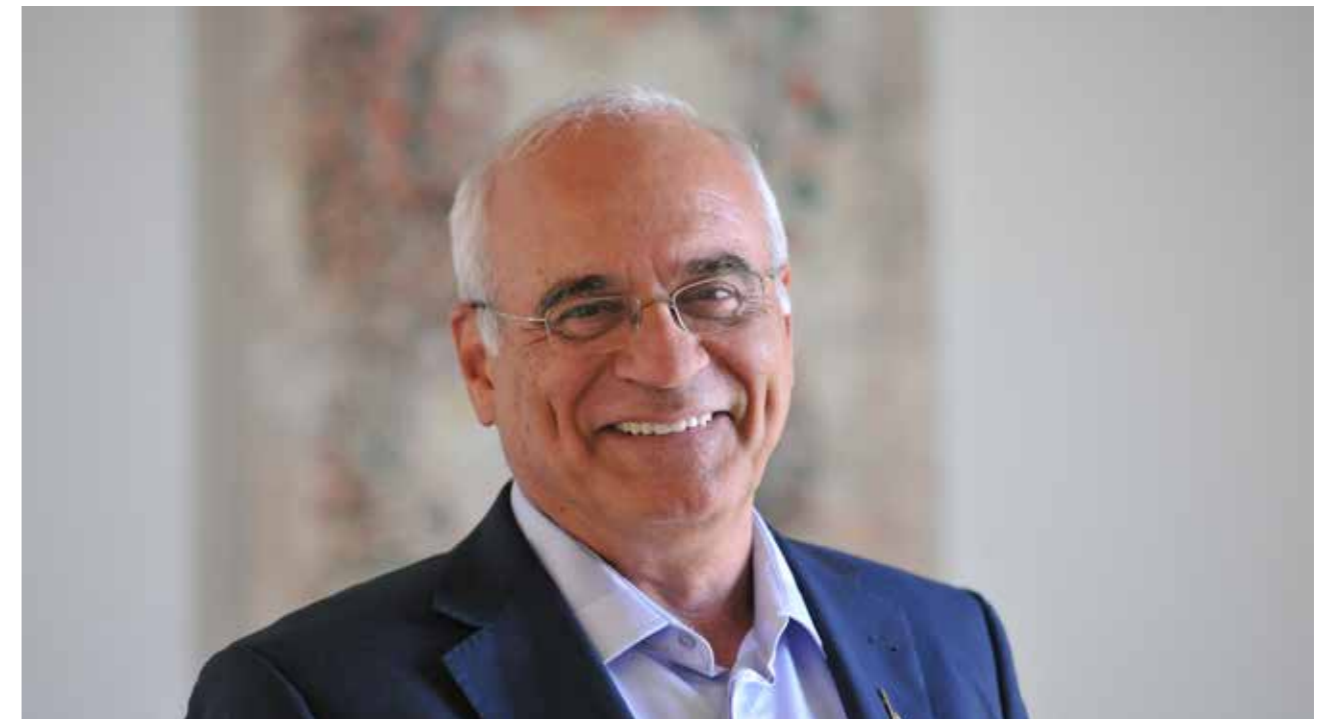


Photo: Bruno Charbit

# Prof. Daniel R. Schwartz

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2012-2019

## What made you apply to the Center?

In the several years of the Center, I applied three or four times until my group was accepted. I applied because I looked forward to the opportunity to devote major blocks of time to research and writing in a congenial environment, rather than my small and isolated room in the Humanities Building.

## What do you think is the greatest importance of the Center?

I think the Center's importance is in the way it supplies its fellows with the support and environment that allow them, as best as possible, to fulfill their potential. In essence, it challenges the fellows who are lucky enough to be chosen to make the most of the opportunity offered to them.

## We would be happy if you could share one special memory from your time as the academic head of the Center.

As was sometimes the case, one of our doctoral students was asked to present a summary of her work at a meeting of the Mandel Foundation and the JAT (Joint Advisory Team). Around the table sat all the bigshots from the Mandel Foundation, beginning with Mort Mandel, and all of those of the Hebrew University, beginning with the president, rector, and dean – and when she began to talk it was obvious that she was terrified and would rather

be anywhere else. Mort Mandel interrupted her after her first two or three sentences and asked something to clarify what she does, expressed interest in it, and managed to manipulate the conversation in such a way that she was soon totally at ease and talking quite freely about her work and her research group—and I remember being jealous of someone who cared to do that and knew how to do that.

## Was there a change in your perception of the Center when you became head of the school? And if so, what was the difference?

After eight years during which, for me, the Center was something to help administer and run, together with my partners on the administrative staff, upon moving to the administration of the Mandel School the Center was transformed, for me, into something to defend

## We'll be happy if you share with us anything that comes to your mind regarding the Center?

In the world of humanities research, in which scholars typically work completely alone and isolated, the Center is unique insofar as it brings scholars together, in groups that agree on common projects, work as neighbors in the same hallways, and hobnob around the same coffee machine. Finding the right balance between allowing scholars time to work alone, as was always the case in the humanities, and encouraging them to work together,

which might be the way of the future but we won't know unless we try it, is one of the main challenges the heads of the Center must face.



Photo: Bruno Charbit



# Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten

Since 2012

## What do you think is the greatest importance of the Center?

I think its importance is different for each of the groups who spend time here. For the postdoctoral fellows, the Center allows them a period of intensive research, alongside an opportunity to gain teaching experience and meet peers, whether these are more or less experienced than they are, and learn from them. This is a period in which they can finish their first books and develop their next projects, and it affords them the ability to hit the ground running when they (hopefully) find tenure-track appointments. The success of our fellows to date (over 90% have gone on to obtain tenure-track appointments) is an indication that this does, in fact, work.

For doctoral students this is an opportunity to expand their horizons in areas close to their chosen field of expertise and meet many models of scholarship. For senior scholars who are already faculty, the Mandel Scholion Center provides a respite from some of the intensity of the teaching that is part of their lives and provides them with a haven in which to pursue research in a group rather than a solitary way. It is also an opportunity for intense mentoring and work with a variety of students and colleagues.

## We would be happy if you could share one special memory from your time as the academic head of the Center.

The past three years, during which I was academic head, were profoundly impacted by Covid-19, as a result of which we were unable to meet in person in an organized way. Especially lacking were the informal exchanges in the kitchen and halls. In March 2021, when restrictions eased, one of the first things we did was hold a "Mentoring Day," during which we brought together all the members of Mandel Scholion, and held conversations about a wide range of topics that pose challenges for the doctoral students, the postdocs, and faculty members at large. The joy in the halls was palpable that day. The event was such a success that we repeated it in 2022 and have copied its format to other forums as well.

## Was there a change in your perception of the Center when you became head of the school? And if so, what was the difference?

I was familiar with the Mandel Scholion Center for many years, both before I joined the faculty at HUJI and after. I don't think I was able to appreciate the importance of physically sitting together and encountering colleagues daily. The offices and the opportunity to meet are truly a gift.

## We'll be happy if you share with us anything that comes to your mind regarding the Center

For me, one of the most special days at Mandel Scholion is Friday. On Fridays, there is no obligation to be on campus. There is no teaching, no meetings, etc. Yet, every week, half a dozen people come to Mandel Scholion on this day to do their work and use their offices. Those are moments of special creativity, and it is inspiring to see colleagues who are so dedicated that they make it their business to find time to come to campus every Friday. For me, these are among the best moments of every week.



Photo: Bruno Charbit

# From Our Academic Committee

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The members of our academic committee are charged with selecting the finalists for the postdoctoral Mandel Fellow positions. Each year some 100 to 150 candidates apply and the committee members review the applications, interview the candidates and ultimately choose two or three. Being on the academic committee requires a huge commitment of time and effort. We would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank all of our committee members over the past two decades since Mandel Scholion was founded, who gave so generously of their time and expertise.

*We asked our current committee members to share their experiences of being on the committee and tell us what impact they think the Mandel Scholion Center has had. Below, is a brief précis of their remarks.*

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## **Prof. Menahem Ben-Sasson** President and Chancellor of the Hebrew University, Chair

Chairing this committee is a triple learning experience: the preparation of the material, the surprising and instructive encounter with the candidates, and the rich discourse of the committee members. Mandel Scholion is unique in giving the humanities a central place among



all areas of research and creating a role model of high threshold for training humanities researchers, encouraging a multidisciplinary vision in humanities research, and maintaining the connection between the Center and its graduates as they move on to the various universities.

## **Prof. Nissim Otmazgin** Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, HUJI

Being part of the academic committee is challenging. It is extremely difficult to choose only a few recipients from a long list of outstanding applicants, but the result is well worth the effort: a new group of brilliant minds that joins Mandel Scholion every year. Mandel Scholion presents a successful model to train exceptional advanced graduate students in the humanities.



## **Prof. Daniel R. Schwartz** Head of the Mandel School for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, HUJI

Being part of the academic committee involves lots of materials to read, lots of learning about new fields, and



lots of anguish about ranking candidates. The Mandel Scholion Center has allowed scores of young scholars to bloom and fulfill their potentials, many of whom are now working in the humanities in Israel and abroad. It also constitutes a model for work in the humanities that enables individual scholars to pursue their projects at the highest level in a wider context that allows for interdisciplinary enrichment.

## **Prof. Mira Balberg** University of California, San Diego

I would call this experience of being part of the academic committee "agony and ecstasy." Agony, because trying to select among so many outstanding and deserving candidates borders on impossible. Ecstasy, because the scholarship we get to familiarize ourselves with is so exquisite in breadth, depth, and innovation - it is truly inspiring.

Beyond the fact that the Center provides both livelihood and community to outstanding scholars and allows individuals to foster and cultivate their research under the best possible conditions, it also makes an important statement regarding the value and importance of the humanities. The fact that so many resources are allocated toward a humanities center, and that it is considered the jewel in the crown of a leading research university, gives



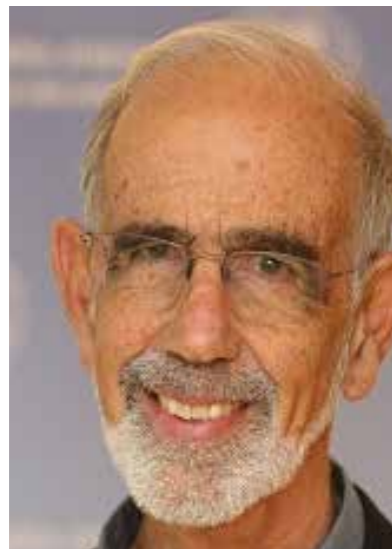
other universities in Israel and in the world something to aspire to emulate.

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**Prof. Yoram Bilu**

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, HUJI

Sitting on the academic committee provided me with a golden opportunity to meet some of the brightest young scholars in the humanities across the world and to be acquainted with their cutting-edge studies. My impression is that graduates of the Center are overrepresented in research universities - at least in Israel.



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**Prof. Leore Grosman**

The Institute of Archeology, HUJI

Being part of the Scholion Mandel committee is a rewarding academic experience. As part of the committee, I had the privilege to become acquainted with colleagues at the cutting-edge of humanities scholarship. The decisions that we had to make were challenging since the applicants are all leading young scholars who will push forward humanistic research in future decades. Nevertheless, we were rewarded by the sense of duty and privilege that comes with difficult decision-making and the fact that we were able to award a number of deserving scholars with an amazing academic opportunity.

The Center provides a temporary home for leading scholars in the Humanities. The reputation of the center is reflected in the high number of tenure-track positions that obtained by its graduates. The working environment at the Center allows researchers to advance their personal research agendas while simultaneously being exposed to new domains of scholarship.



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**Prof. Benjamin Pollock**

Department of Jewish Thought, HUJI



to learn about their original projects. Each year, we sign off with the clear sense that the future of the humanities is bright. At a time when governments are investing less and less in humanities research and education, Mandel Scholion serves a decisive role, by creating a vital environment that encourages the highest excellence in humanities research.

It is an honor to serve as a member of this committee together with such broad-minded colleagues. There's no question that what makes serving on this committee so inspiring is the opportunity to meet the exceptional post-doctoral candidates, and

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**Prof. Judith Schlanger**  
Oxford & EPHE

Being a part of the Mandel Scholion community has been a privilege. I have been constantly awed by the quality and the passion for research of the candidates that the project has attracted. Mandel Scholion Center is a unique incubator for ideas in humanities.



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## Prof. Ofra Tirosh-Becker

Department of Hebrew and Jewish Languages, HUJI

Being a member of the Mandel Scholion Academic Committee was a unique experience which I cherish. The candidates that apply for the Scholion post-doctorate fellowship are exceptional, representing the crème de la crème of their respective academic fields. During the interviews we get to meet these brilliant young scholars, and it is gratifying to see the quality of the new generation of humanities scholars, who will soon take their place among the faculties of the best universities worldwide. The committee meetings themselves are a testimony to the dedication of all its members striving to meet the goals of the Mandel Scholion Center.

Since its inception, the Mandel Scholion Center has drawn outstanding young scholars of the humanities from all over the world. The daily interaction of these young scholars among themselves, with senior faculty and with graduate students is fertile ground for fruitful and perceptive research. These are later presented in conferences in Israel and abroad and get published in prestigious venues. The research groups that work under the auspices of the Mandel Scholion Center study topics at the forefront of humanities through continuous brainstorming and mutual fertilization.



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## Prof. Leona Toker

English Department, HUJI



I find serving as a committee member an above-board well informed academic process. The Mandel Scholion Center contributes to fostering a new generation of researchers and to the continuity of knowledge.

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# Mandel Scholion at Twenty

## Surveying Members, Past and Present

In honor of Mandel Scholion's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we asked Prof. Lilach Sagiv (Business School, HUJI), a Mandel Scholion group member (2014-2017, 2018-2021), and Adva Liberman, her doctoral student, to conduct a survey of all past and present Mandel Scholion members. Two hundred online questionnaires were sent out. Of the 130 people who responded, 88 (46 men and 42 women, more than a third) fully completed the questionnaire, so only their responses were analyzed.

The survey was comprised of four sections. Section One consisted of a values questionnaire. Unrelated to the Center, this component is standard in many surveys and serves to provide an overall sense of the participating population. In Section Two, each respondent was asked to clarify their position at Mandel Scholion (how many times they were fellows, at what stage of their career) and to describe the Mandel Scholion Center in three words. Most of the words chosen reflected the cooperative social environment at Mandel Scholion, or the research and growth that was the hallmark of their time there. Others noted the supportive infrastructure and financial assistance included in the program. Section Three asked respondents to express the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements concerning the goals of Mandel Scholion and their experience at the Center. Finally, in Section Four, they were invited to make suggestions for future activities and practices.

### Personal Values Questionnaire

The personal values questionnaire indicated that our respondents, not unusually, assign the highest importance to benevolence values, which reflect the concern for the well-being of those around them. Characteristic of academics at large, one highly regarded value was self-direction, reflecting the importance of independence and a desire to learn new things. As Sagiv and Liberman explained, this is an indication that the people being surveyed are not outliers. Lack of variance in answers to the satisfaction questions did not allow to test whether certain types of people are happier or less happy at Mandel Scholion.

### Mandel Scholion in Three Words

Two hundred and forty three words or phrases were recorded, of which less than 10 were categorized as negative while 13 could not be categorized as either positive or negative.

The infographic below expresses the variety of responses: 22% of the respondents spoke about the support they received; 14% spoke mentioned collegiality; 12% mentioned the comfort of the office; and 9% praised the creativity.

Overall, the answers reflect the opportunity, provided by the Center, to conduct research and to learn, as well as the importance of the peer network and sense of social support.

# Mandel Scholion in a Nutshell\* —

**Excellent Work Conditions**  
Fascinating Topics  
Research and Learning  
Intellectual Challenges  
**Creativity**  
Social  
Great Coffee  
Networking  
Interdisciplinarity  
Excellent Colleagues  
Support and Ambiance  
Support and Ambiance  
Cutting Edge Research

\* based on this survey of Mandel Scholion Alumni, 2022

## Satisfaction

Section Three of the questionnaire focused on the overall sense of satisfaction resulting from time spent at Mandel Scholion. The respondents were asked to rate a series of questions on a scale from 1 to 7, with 7 being the most positive answer. Sixty percent of the respondents rated their stay as a 7, and said that they would highly recommend Mandel Scholion to colleagues. The mean answer for both these questions was over 6. In addition, over 50% of respondents said they would very much like

to return to Mandel Scholion, with most of the answers to this question above 5.

The respondents then had to note their agreement with statements regarding the way the Center is run. For example, participants were asked if there was too much or too little supervision, too many or too few activities, enough room for personal initiative, and so on. Here too, overall satisfaction was evident, with Sagiv and Liberman indicating that this high rate of satisfaction is very unusual in comparison to other surveys.

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It was of course very gratifying to read and see the measure of success we have achieved. Below are some of the responses we received in the sections where people could comment freely:

“Mandel Scholion allowed me the time to grow as a scholar, a teacher and a peer.”

“My time at Mandel Scholion contributed enormously to my development as a young scholar. Meeting with both the other young scholars at Mandel-Scholion and with other scholars at the HebrewU presented me with the demands and challenges of high-quality and innovative scholarship.”

“It allowed me to take my academic endeavors seriously. I think this is of utmost importance and not at all trivial at Hebrew University (and Israeli universities generally speaking), where PhD students can often feel displaced and invisible.”

“Structurally having a post doc while between the doctorate and the job was crucial to my career. I don’t think I would have gotten a job without this time. The teaching experience and organizing the conference were especially useful, and just generally access to the resources at the center, and the supportive and collegial attitude of professors at the center and at Hebrew university.”

## Room for Improvement and Change

The final part of the survey asked respondents to make suggestions for the future. Among these suggestions were closer mentoring of doctoral and postdoctoral fellows, a number of administrative suggestions regarding budgets, more room for personal initiatives, more interdisciplinarity, and the need to have a better alumni network. They also proposed furthering opportunities to host more scholars from abroad as well as better preparation for the time spent at the Center, allowing fellows to capitalize even more on the experience. We are currently exploring different ways to process and implement these comments.



The survey reflects our belief that a clear and comprehensive understanding of what has and hasn’t worked to date and of the new directions research in humanities is taking is imperative to the continued success of the Center. It is of utmost importance to us to listen to the voices of the members of our community and to seek ways to improve the experience of those who conduct their research here. We hope that what we have learned from this survey, along with our constant pursuit of new paths, will allow the Mandel Scholion Center to continue to flourish as it moves into its third decade.



The feasting scene in the Orpheus Mosaic, Sepphoris. Courtesy of Sepphoris Excavations, The Hebrew University in Jerusalem.  
Photo: Gabi Laron

Year in Review 2021/2022

# Looking Back at 2021/2022

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This fall we were finally able to open the doors of Mandel Scholion, after a year and a half of forced closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The past year has thus been marked by a new and deep appreciation for all the familiar hallmarks of a "regular" academic year; there was a sense of joy in all the in-person meetings and chance encounters in the hallways, among both colleagues and students. Whether masked or unmasked, with the exception of a brief period in the late winter-early spring, our activities took place on campus, our offices were filled, and we were all able to do our work.

The three research groups at the Center this year, described in the pages that follow, each afforded us unique opportunities to learn from each other. We began the year with a research trip curated and guided by the "Past Perfect" research group, now in its second year at the Center. Touring the Jezre'el Valley, we learned about its settlers and rulers throughout history, from the Bible to the Zionists, with Mamluk and Ottoman stops on the way. Our first-year group, the "Evolution of Attention" research group, introduced us to their subject of study by presenting the change in attention spans that have taken place in modernity, using modern art and literature as well as memes and decision-making mechanisms. This diverse group, which includes scholars from the humanities and cognitive psychology, allowed an appreciation of how similar questions are asked in different ways across fields of knowledge. Finally, in March, the "Setting Tables" Research Group, now in

its third and final year at Mandel Scholion, organized an international conference during which we had the pleasure of learning about commensality from international and Israeli scholars. Especially exciting were the talks given by the doctoral members of the group, as they allowed us to see how their knowledge, methodologies, and practice had advanced during their years in the Center. These activities were complemented by the weekly seminars for each research group and the monthly seminars attended by all.

As in previous years, we had a large pool of applicants for our Mandel Scholion postdoctoral fellowship and went through the excruciating process of choosing three new Mandel Fellows: Ortal Harush, an archeologist, Sivan Goren-Arzonny who studies medieval Indian poetry, and Yakov Mayer who studies the printing of Hebrew books in early modern Italy. Our deliberations were conducted under the direction of the university's chancellor, Prof. Menahem Ben-Sasson, with all of our Academic Board members participating. We were happy to welcome Prof. Mira Balberg (University of San Diego) to our committee this year and Prof. Tamar Wolf-Monzon, who served as an ad-hoc member. This year also marked the last year in which Prof. Yoram Bilu and Prof. Ofra Tirosh-Becker participated in our discussions and I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of them for their many years of hard work as part of this committee.

As in previous years, we are bidding an early farewell to one of our Mandel Fellows. Dr. Hadar Feldman Samet is

leaving us after two years (rather than three) to assume a tenure track position in the Department of Jewish History at Tel Aviv University. Hadar is the 38<sup>th</sup> Mandel Fellow to have gained a faculty position. We wish her much luck in this next stage of her career.

We are also bidding farewell to Prof. Danny Schwartz. Danny was a Mandel Scholion group member, the academic head of the Center, and, for the past three years, the head of the Mandel School. His efforts and his wisdom have guided us at the Center and helped to ensure that the members of Mandel Scholion optimize both their time together and the time spent on their own research. He taught us that being at the Mandel School is an opportunity not to be taken for granted and has always encouraged members to maximize to the fullest the extraordinary gift they have received. On behalf of the Center faculty and students, we extend our profound thanks to him for all that he has done for the Mandel School in particular and for the Faculty of Humanities at the Hebrew University in general, and are grateful that he has agreed to continue to be a member of our academic committee. We wish him many more years of fruitful and enjoyable research.

As always, this moment of coming to the close of one academic year and soon to embark on preparations for the next, is an opportune one for extending our thanks to our partners at the Mandel Foundation. We are grateful

to Prof. Jehuda Reinharz, Dr. Tamar Abramov, and Moshe Vigdor, for your ongoing support and partnership. We also extend our thanks to Hebrew University President Prof. Asher Cohen and the rector, Prof. Barak Medina, for their help and assistance, as well as to our partners in the Faculty of Humanities. We are looking forward to working with the new rector, Prof. Tamir Sheafer. Our thanks also go to Ms. Irina Dostov, the Mandel School's administrative director, and above all, to the staff of Mandel Scholion: executive director, Ms. Moran Zini-Gradstein and her team - Noa Goldberg, Dafna Israel, Nitsan Israeli, and Adar Karfiol Neeman. Little would be possible without you!

Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten

Academic Director



Photo: Bruno Charbit

# Research Groups

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## "Setting Tables: Eating, Social Boundaries and Intercultural Transfers"

2019-2022

All humans must eat (and drink), yet this very biological fact makes eating the most self-centered, most individual practice there is, noted the great sociologist Georg Simmel in his classic "Sociology of the Meal". "The shared meal" Simmel argued, "turns 'the exclusive selfishness of eating' into a habit of being gathered together such as is seldom attainable on occasions of a higher and intellectual order. Persons who in no way share any special interest can gather together at the common meal." This insight on commensality as a social act of coming together is as fresh today as it was in 1910. After three years of working closely together on commensality we can safely add to Simmel that every now and then you might cross paths with people who are wonderful not only to eat with - but also to engage with intellectually. This is what our group has been.

This summer marks the culmination of our collective and individual endeavors to shed light on practices of commensality in different eras and from a variety of disciplines and analytical perspectives. Our main goal has been to better explain how different patterns of eating together shape and are being shaped by concrete societal, material, cultural and political forces. The key problematics our group had set out to explore is what does it mean to treat commensality as a social practice? What are the specific cultural meanings and social implications of eating together? And how to best capture and study the historically-changing ways in which eating together

delineates social and symbolic boundaries? Arguably, eating practices (and the procuring of food more broadly) are governed by seemingly universal cultural and social logics; they delineate inner and outer-group ethnic, gender and class divisions. However, how do these supposedly universal social logics operate under specific historical and cultural conditions?

Our first year together as a group was dedicated to acquainting ourselves with each member's research project. The second year was all about expanding beyond the boundaries of our group's disciplinary, period, and topical research interests. The perspectives of our guest lecturers sharpened the analytic tools required for understanding how commensality, eating with/out others, delineates social boundaries and fosters intercultural contacts. During our final year at Mandel Scholion, we engaged in organizing our concluding international conference, titled: "Setting Tables: Commensality, Social Boundaries, and Inter-Cultural Exchange." The conference was a great success, enabling us to present our work to a wider audience of food studies scholars. We are currently preparing a volume of collected essays, which we hope will expose the Israeli reader to the notion of commensality as a major component of human experience as reflected in a wide range of social practices, from architecture and art, through sermons, law, and literature, to political organizations.



Despite the extraordinary challenges our group faced due to the global pandemic, we leave Mandel Scholion feeling not only grateful but also tremendously content, individually as well as collectively. Grateful, for the opportunity to learn new approaches from and with our colleagues, embracing in the process new ways of thinking that are sure to enrich our individual research for

years to come. Content, for being able to work together in a way that far exceeded our expectations.

**Group Members: Prof. Yair Furstenberg, Dr. Dana Kaplan, Prof. Nathan Wasserman, Prof. Zeev Weiss, Dr. Nadia Beider, Adi Namia-Cohen, Hadass Shambadal, Shlomi Tzemach, Dafna Israel**



South American GADNA Group at Lunchtime near Michmoret. Photo: Cohen Fritz, Government Press Office

## "Past and Past Perfect"

2020-2023

Our research group is composed of researchers studying societies in the Near East and the Mediterranean during ancient and medieval times, and has set out to focus on how pre-modern societies looked at their own past: What role did their perception of the past play in their own present? And what role did their "present" play in their conception of their past? This double historical view permits a better understanding of each of the studied societies. For the second year of the group's activities, we picked the theme "Continuity and Change" to deal with the sense (or illusion) of endurance and transformation, in spite – or as a result – of ethnic, religious or political changes. The group's activities were held both on and off campus. Presentations by group members included:

Reuven Amitai's lecture was titled "Shared and Divergent Memories in Mamluk-era Gaza." During the Mamluk era (1260-1516), Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived in the city, a prosperous provincial capital for much of Palestine. The Jews and Christians had shared "memories" of the biblical story of Samson to describe the city's past, and for Christians, there was also an awareness of the ancient grandeur of the place. For Muslims, however, the city's past revolved around the presence there of the grave of Muhammad's great grandfather, as well as it being the birthplace of the great legal thinker al-Shafi'i (767-820). Thus, evidence suggests that there was little sense of a shared past between the hegemonic Muslim society and the Christians and Jews who lived in or passed through the city.

Nili Wazana, during a tour of the City of David in Jerusalem, spoke on the biblical description of the capture of Jerusalem by David (2 Sam 5:6-8), focusing on the gap between the biblical story and the archaeological data, which does not support the claim that Jerusalem was conquered at the end of the Late Bronze Age. She suggested that the story be understood as fictional, along with the stories of conquest of the land from the Book of Joshua, and posited that the it had originally been written in the context of the earlier period and was transferred from that period to the time of David in order to connect the city closely with him and differentiate it from all other sites. Thus, Jerusalem is the last conquered city in the land of Israel, just as it is the last place to gain holy status (2 Sam 24) It is this "lateness," Wazana maintained, that served as an indication of its "chosenness."

Nili also gave another lecture that focused on the ways the Book of Joshua distinguishes between the Israelite conquest of the "south," which later becomes the kingdom of Judah, and that of the "north," which becomes the kingdom of Israel.

Uzi Leibner's paper, "Second Temple and Post-Second Temple Era Synagogues: Evolution or Revolution?," was based on recent discoveries of public structures from the Second Temple period buried beneath Late Roman synagogues. Uzi proposed that the early structures were also synagogues. This conclusion is important for

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understanding the dispersion of synagogues during the Second Temple period, narrowing the chronological gap between them and those of the later Roman period, and supporting the idea that the latter developed organically from the former, and not ex nihilo. It is significant that they are all located beneath later synagogues, as it points to long-lasting local traditions for specific locations of public structures of this kind in rural communities.

Ronnie Agassi Cohen talked about the conquest of Constantinople as a turning point in Ottoman historiography. She showed that it is only following this event that the Ottomans began to write their histories more systematically, using these texts to shape both their past and present.

Reut Ahdut led a group discussion on Josiah's reform in 2 Kings 22-23, analyzing the biblical text in light of the article by political philosopher Leo Strauss in which he discusses how the technique of "writing between the lines" helped philosophers, writers, and historians express opposition to a totalitarian regime. Exploring the biblical text through this technique, Reut revealed the possibility of criticism of Josiah's reform and its perception as a truncation of the tradition.

Anita Reisler presented her analysis of a case study she is researching for a chapter in her PhD dissertation. The topic of her lecture was: "Dreams of Power – Depiction or Vision in Theodoret of Cyr's *Ecclesiastical History*." Hearing the interdisciplinary group members' perspectives from their respective fields provided further insights that she intends to implement in the chapter.

Off campus, we organized excursions in the Jerusalem area that helped shed light on various ways that past societies saw their past and utilized it for their present:

1. We visited the City of David in Jerusalem, guided by Nili Wazana.
2. We visited the L.A. Mayer Museum for Islamic art, led by head guide Jenya Furman. Besides looking at the exquisite permanent exhibition, which provides a comprehensive and sweeping indication of the material and cultural splendor of the pre-modern Islamic world, we saw how often the pre-Islamic and Islamic past was portrayed in this ongoing artistic endeavor. An added treat was the special exhibition on the history of coffee in the Islamic world and beyond.
3. In our tour to Abu Ghosh we visited the Benedictine Monastery, where Brother Olivier elaborated on the monastery's rich history, guiding us through the beautiful church and crypt. He also talked about his own story and what daily life is like in the monastery today. Then, we were invited to the house of `Isa Jabir, former mayor of Abu Ghosh, who spoke to us about the village's history and how the locals treated it in both the past and the present. Finally, we visited the new Ahmad Kadyrov Mosque and talked about its interesting story and its connections to Abu Ghosh's (imagined and otherwise) past.
4. Our final local "expedition" was to the Israel Museum, where we visited the "How Long Is Now?"

exhibition that presents continue works dealing with the ways artists see their past and use it in their art. We had the privilege of talking with the curator, Orly Rabi, who spoke about the works in the exhibition, their history, and their meanings. We talked about how this unique exhibition came to be and what we can learn about how people see their individual and their collective past.

5. In July 2022, the group traveled to Rome, exploring the city and its surroundings up close – with an emphasis on the ways in which the ancient past was reflected over the centuries.

In addition, in November 2021, the group organized an overnight trip to the Jezreel Valley for the entire Scholion community. Stopping at various sites from different eras: biblical, Roman, medieval, and the time of the Zionist

settlement, we examined how memory was preserved and molded. Almost all members of the group gave talks or led discussions during this enjoyable and informative excursion.

For more details of both trips, see Research Tours below.

**Group Members: Prof. Reuven Amitai, Prof. Uzi Leibner, Prof. Nili Wazana, Prof. Alexander Yakobson, Reut Ahdut, Ronnie Agassi, Inbal Lev-Ari, Anita Reisler, Noa Goldberg**



A 12th-century mural in the church in the Benedictine Monastery in Abu Ghosh. Photo: Ronnie Agassi Cohen



Victor Emmanuel II Monument and the Imperial forums of Rome from Trajan's Market. Photo: Noa Goldberg

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## "The Evolution of Attention in Modern and Contemporary Culture"

2021-2024

The initial stage of the project was devoted to the constitution of a shared body of knowledge, and to the discussion of the fundamental concepts of our topic. We also planned the two central activities to which the group is committed as part of the Scholion program, namely the introductory talk for the general Scholion meeting (winter 2021) and the group tour (fall 2022).

During our weekly meetings, we created a shared pool of sources and terms, culled from our respective research and disciplines. Each of us presented the backdrop to her/his research, its theoretical and critical scope and the fundamental research questions. We also visited a few museum exhibitions in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, guided by Gal and Nitsan, that shed intriguing light on the concept of attention and its interrelations with modernity, as well as one to Ayelet Landau's lab, where questions related to attention are posed in a measurable way. This year-long process allowed the group to inquire about possible conceptual slippages and ambiguities, to learn the central ideas and assumptions involved in different disciplinary discourses, and to think together about possible directions for future work. Based on the group's initial discussions, we prepared an introductory presentation for the general meeting of all Scholion groups. Preparing for the presentation compelled us to formulate our individual topics and our shared interests in a clear manner, something that proved extremely helpful in our ensuing discussions.

The concluding months of meetings have been devoted to sharing new directions in our research. Yael presented a sampling of the critical corpus on attention in fiction. Hadas presented the theoretical background to the study of emplacement in live videos on social media. Tamar discussed the canonization of classical music in 19th-century Germany and its implications for listening norms and notions of "elevated" attention. Aysheh discussed the role of attention as a moderator between values and behaviors. Ofer showed how the focus on attention influences the analysis of historical photography. Sara invited her supervisor, Prof. Paul Frosch, from the Hebrew University communication department, to present a different approach to the relations between attention and photography.

Our weekly meetings in the second half of the year also enabled us to plan our mutual work for the coming 2022/2023 academic year. Our first main enterprise is the 2022 tour that will introduce Mandel Scholion members to various aspects of our project. Thinking about the tour channeled us to phrase our premises, ambitions, and the potential outcomes of our project, in terms that combine reflections and experience. In light of to the group's focus on post nineteenth-century urban attention, we opted for an urban tour and have decided to explore places that would "activate" visitors and lead to an engaged, interactive, and immersive experience that

would affect attention not only through ideas and rational thought but through emotive and physical experiences.

The tour will thus include a variety of related sites: the Trappist Monastery of Latrun will enable us to discuss conceptual alternatives to modernity's role in the revolution of attention; "Dialogue in the Dark," a permanent exhibition at the Holon Museum for Children, will facilitate a discussion on the relationship between attention and perceptions; and the Tel Aviv Museum will provide the backdrop for a discussion on canonization and attention. To demonstrate and examine further the interactions between the modern urge of documentation and the revolution of attention in the 1920s-1930s, we will lead a demonstrative "experiment" during the trip: participants will be asked to take a leisurely stroll along a busy street in the city and use their (cell phone) cameras to narrate their experience.

**Group Members: Prof. Ofer Ashkenazi, Prof. Ayelet Landau, Prof. Yael Levin, Prof. Gal Ventura, Tamar Kojman, Sara Kopelman, Aysheh Maslemani, Hadas Schlussek, Nitsan Israeli**



Germany in the mid-1930s. In the midst of the National Socialist turmoil, a Jewish boy is sitting and calmly reading a newspaper in the middle of the street. Oblivious to the city around him, he focuses on the news, the weather, or the comic strip. The photograph comprises a variety of tensions related to attention: engrossed in the local newspaper, the boy exhibits his attachment to the place while sitting on a suitcase, an emblem of migration and transit. The eerily empty street paints the situation as simultaneously mundane and strange.

Photo: Anita Lamm's family album, Germany, 1933

# Research Groups Seminars

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## “Setting Tables” Seminars:

**Prof. Yair Furstenberg** | HUJI

*The Passover Seder according to the Literature of Hazal*

**When is Food a Luxury?** | Group Discussion

*Following the Reading of the Article “When is Food a Luxury?” by Marijke Van der Veen (2003).*

**Tzipori National Park** | Field Trip

*Led by Prof. Zeev Weiss, who has directed the excavations in the ancient site of Sepphoris since 1990.*

Photo: Amit Even

## “Past and Past Perfect” Seminars:

**Prof. Reuven Amitai** | HUJI

*Shared and Divergent Memories in Mamluk-era Gaza*

**City of David, Jerusalem** | Tour

*Led by Prof. Nili Wazana*

**The Museum of Islamic Art in Jerusalem** | Tour

**Abu Ghosh** | Tour

*The Benedictine Monastery and the New Mosque*

**Prof. Uzi Leibner** | HUJI

*The Synagogues of the Early Roman Period*

**Ronnie Agassi Cohen** | HUJI

*Between Continuity and Change: The Conquering of Constantinople, Historical Writing, and the Development of Imperial Ottoman Identity*

**Prof. Theo Maarten van Lint (University of Oxford)** | HUJI

*A Tale of Loss and Glory: The Life and Work of an 11th century Armenian Polymath and its Resonance Today*

**Orly Rabi** | The Israel Museum

*Tour of the “How Long Is Now?” exhibition*

**Reut Ahdut** | HUJI

*“Writing Between the Lines” in the Josiah Reform 2 Kings 22-23*

**Anita Reisler** | HUJI

*Dreams of Power: Depiction or Vision in Theodoret of Cyr’s Ecclesiastical History*

**Rome** | Tour

*5-10 July, 2022*



Group Trip to Sepphoris. Photo: Amit Even

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## “The Evolution of Attention” Seminars:

**Landau Lab** | Tour of Prof. Ayelet Landau’s Brain Attention and Time Lab

**The Israel Museum** | Tour led by Prof. Gal Ventura and Nitsan Israeli

*Satirist Supreme: Honoré Daumier and 19th-Century Paris*

**Tel Aviv Museum of Art** | Tour

*The retrospective exhibition of Yayoi Kusama, followed by a discussion with the Museum’s Director, Tania Coen-Uzzielli*

**Prof. Paul Frosh** | HUJI

*The Morality of Inattention in Pre-digital Media*



Photo: Noa Goldberg



Photo: Noa Goldberg



Photo: Shahar Molcho

# Mandel Fellows

## Departing Fellows

### Farewell from Dr. Hadar Feldman Samet

For the past two years (2020-2022), I have had the good fortune to be a Mandel Scholion postdoctoral fellow, during which I enjoyed optimal conditions to pursue my research and advance professional objectives, while getting to know wonderful and inspiring people. The diverse and interdisciplinary nature of the Mandel Scholion Center has enabled me to have daily and ongoing interactions with experts in various fields, so that on the same day I could, for example, have conversations on issues related to arts and musicology, early modern Muslim societies, medieval poetry, and biblical history. I am deeply grateful to the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation, as well as to the directors and my friends and colleagues at the Center, for the many hours of cordial support and stimulating exchanges, which made these formative years very meaningful. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten, Prof. Daniel Schwartz, Ms. Moran Zini Gradshtein, Ms. Yana Mahlin-Abramovich, and all of Scholion's senior researchers, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students.

As a Mandel fellow I worked on several projects exploring the lives of Jews in Muslim societies during the early modern and modern eras. Making use of cross-

cultural and interdisciplinary approaches, I focused on communal life, performative rituals, theology, musical traditions, and daily practices. A substantial part of



my time was dedicated to my research on the history of the Sabbatian movement in the Ottoman sphere. This included completing several articles, editing a monograph titled *Sabbatian Songs of Faith: Ritual, Community, and Interreligious Encounters in the late Ottoman Empire* (to

be published by Magnes Press), and working on a new book, in collaboration with Dr. Avner Peretz, that presents an annotated scientific edition of a previously unexplored multilingual ritual song-collection manuscript, including a comprehensive translation and historical introduction. The latest publication I completed offers an elaborative examination of the Sabbatian communities' appropriation of the constitutive Islamic performative ritual known as the mevlid, in the context of nineteenth century sociopolitical transformations. During my time at the Mandel Scholion Center I also delved into new projects: the first examines the affinities



The Sabbatian Mevlidi Şerif Hadash, Ben Zvi Ms. 2273, page 1

and tensions between mystical traditions and social processes of modernization in the late nineteenth century, while the second explores the cultural and devotional lives of Jewish communities living in the early modern Eastern Mediterranean basin, through the lenses of music and interfaith encounters. In addition, I had the honor and pleasure of sharing my research and academic experience in local and international conferences, seminars, and professional development workshops, as well as teaching courses in three different departments: Comparative Religion, Jewish Thought, And Jewish History. This summer I will be joining the Department of Jewish History at Tel Aviv University as a senior lecturer, where I will continue to teach and research the multifaceted and fascinating field of the history of Jews in the Islamic world.

# Current Fellows

## Dr. Céline Debourse

A large part of my work over the past few months was related to finalizing my book, *Of Priests and Kings: The Babylonian New Year Festival in the Last Age of Cuneiform* (Leiden: Brill) which has now been published, and tying up some loose ends of my dissertation research. I have finished one article titled “Late Babylonian Temple Ritual Texts with Cultic Commentaries: Aspects of Form and Function” (WZKM 112) and am working on two others that I was invited to contribute to the respective volumes *Jehu’s Tribute: What Can Biblical Studies Offer Assyriology?* (eds. R. Thelle & J. Cooley) and *The Library of Akkadian Literature 1: Enūma Eliš* (eds. S. Helle et al.). A volume on festivals in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean, which I co-edited with R. Da Riva and A. Arroyo and to which I also contributed a paper, will be published shortly. I have also given two talks in Israel about my previous research and continue to be involved in collaborations with researchers from the CoE ANEE, University of Helsinki. Two additional papers are ready to be submitted for peer-review, one on “digital lexical approaches to the foreign other” with M. Wasmuth and another containing the publication of a Nebuchadnezzar cylinder is forthcoming..

I have also been working on some of the questions related to my current research project, which I presented at several conferences over the course of the summer and autumn (Thessaloniki, EABS, SBL). One aspect that I have studied is the structure of the Babylonian priesthood, how it was remunerated, and the role of women in it. I have submitted this paper to the *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*. The

courses that I am teaching this semester also closely relate to my current research. Furthermore, I am currently working on several articles in collaboration with Uri Gabbay, in which we take a closer look at specific rituals and ritual texts.

Finally, I continue to be involved in the project of M. Jursa and N. Wasserman on Late Babylonian priestly literature. Together with another project member I presented a paper at the Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in July. I am also working on the edition of several Late Babylonian temple ritual texts for the planned monograph. My “extracurricular” academic activities include participation in two separate discussion groups on Mesopotamian ritual (one international, one at HUJI) and the maintenance of my blog ([tuppublog.wordpress.com](http://tuppublog.wordpress.com)).



Fragment of the so-called Eulogy of the Elder Brother, in which the high priest of Babylon is praised in the highest terms by the god Marduk himself. Hand copy of BM 32374 (Debourse 2022, 173).

## Dr. Ofir Haim

During my first year as a Mandel postdoctoral fellow (2021/22), I have focused on three topics:

**East Iran:** I have finalized the project’s database, which consists of proper names, toponyms, goods, currencies, and weights and measures. The database will be utilized for future publications on the archive of Yehuda ben Daniel, the earliest layer of the “Afghan Genizah.” I am currently preparing for publication an article regarding the emergence of the New Persian language and its



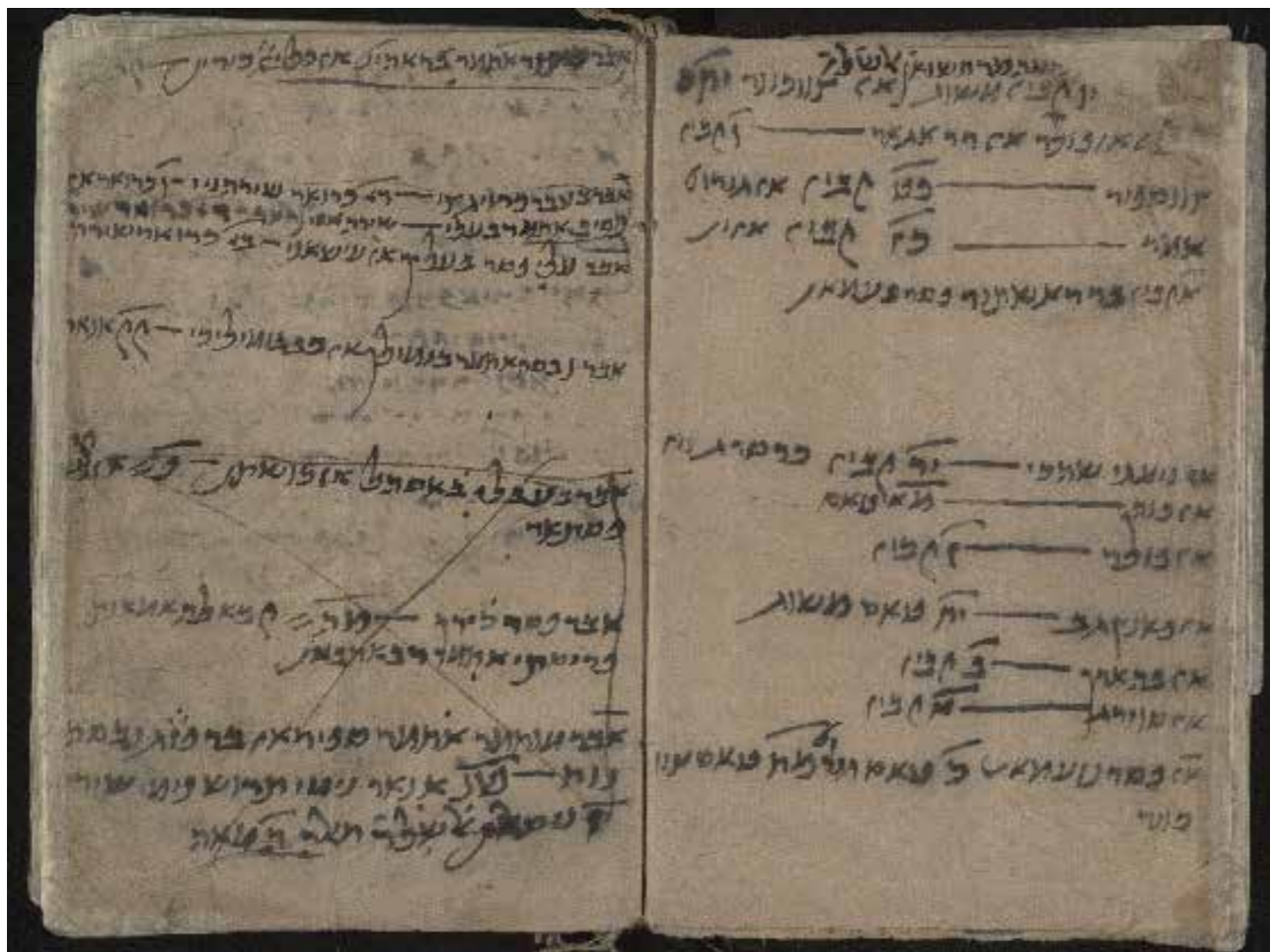
status vis-à-vis Arabic among the Muslims and Jews of eastern Iran. It will be based on a group of hitherto unknown legal documents, from the archive mentioned above, in Arabic, New Persian, and Judeo-Persian. Moreover, as part

of my effort to provide a holistic picture of the social and political reality of the early Ghaznavid state (977-1186), I have written a paper regarding the Islamization process of eastern Afghanistan on the eve of the establishment of the Ghaznavid state. Using newly discovered sources from the “Afghan Genizah” I attempt to show how the Samanids, the Ghaznavids’ predecessors, tried to establish Islamic rule along the Indian frontier during the tenth century. I have presented my findings in the Fifteenth International Colloquium “From Jāhiliyya to Islam” (the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem, 4-7 July, 2022), and hope to publish the paper soon.

### **Commerce Between the Persian Gulf and Egypt:**

Over the past year, I have worked on a monograph with several colleagues from Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (Andreas Kaplony) and Hamburg University (Ludwig Paul and Maximilian Kinzler). This monograph concerns an interesting set of documents from the Cairo Genizah, which are written in a mixture of Judeo-Persian and Arabic. Focusing on the activities of several bilingual Jewish merchants, we intend to publish this unique corpus in order to shed light on the little-known commercial ties between the Persian Gulf to the eastern part of the Mediterranean basin.

**Karaism in Iran:** I have begun to revise my dissertation, which concerns Judeo-Persian Karaite exegesis and its contacts with Judeo-Arabic literature in order to publish it as a monograph. As part of the revision process, I intend to add a discussion on the emergence of Karaism in this vast region. I have started to collect materials for this discussion, including new fragments from the commentary on the book of Daniel by Binyamin al-Nihāwandī, one of the forerunners of the Karaite movement who lived in western Iran in the first half of the ninth century. I have presented these fragments at the virtual conference “Rabbinization and Diversity: Methods, Models, and Manifestations Between 400 and 1000 CE” (23 March, 2022). Over the next few months, I intend to delve into several other fragments that seem to belong to al-Nihāwandī’s commentary on Genesis.



Jerusalem, National Library of Israel, Ms. Heb. 8333.220=4, fols. 8v-9r. Two pages from Yehuda ben Daniel's account book, datable to the early eleventh century. On the right - his income from landed property; on the left - debts owed to him by several individuals. Courtesy of the National Library of Israel.

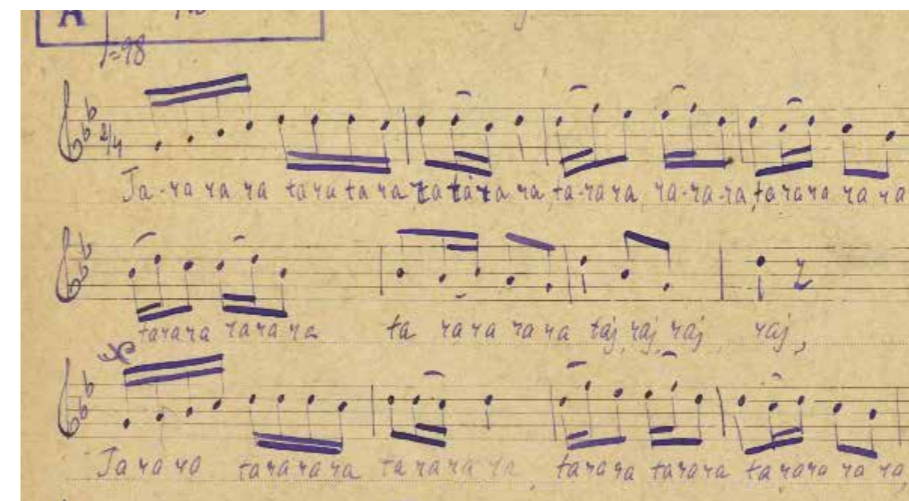
## Dr. Michael Lukin

My studies in the fields of Yiddish, folklore, and ethnomusicology were presented at three conferences (respectively): "Functions of Translation in Folk Paraphrases on



Psalm 118," *Yiddish and Translation*, CERMOM, National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilisation and Maison de la culture yiddish: Bibliothèque Medem; "The Yiddish Folk Song in the Post-Postmodern Age: Back to the Essence," *Annual Inter-University Folklore Conference*, Bar Ilan University; "Time in Eastern-Ashkenazi Cantorial Improvisation," *World Congress of Jewish Studies*, The

Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In addition, I am currently working on two research projects: "Audio-Recordings of Yiddish Songs in Canadian Archives," funded by The Leonid Nevzlin Research Center for Russian and East European Jewry, and "Crowdsourcing Information on Old Hasidic Nigunim," which began last year as a research-activity pilot generously funded by the Mandel Scholion Center, and recently won further funding by KKL-JNF. I also coordinated the musicology sessions and musical events of the 18<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Jewish Studies; taught the course "Ethnomusicology: Music in Jewish Culture and Society" at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; participated in the "Dialogue Sessions" of *The Folkslid* research group, led by Prof. Mark Slobin; and collaborated with Ukrainian scholars within a bilateral 2019-2022 research project.



Hassidic *nigun*, Rovno (Ukraine), 1912. From the Vernadsky Library Collections, Kiev.



# Research and Public Activities

## Monthly Pan-Scholion Seminars

**10 October, 2021**

“Past and Past Perfect” seminar, in preparation for the upcoming Mandel Scholion trip

**16 December, 2021**

“Evolution of Attention” seminar: Introducing the Project

**13 January, 2022**

Dr. **Ofir Haim** (Mandel Fellow)

‘And there are about 80,000 Jews in it’: Real and Imagined in the History of the Jews of Ghazni (Afghanistan) in Light of New Data

**28 April, 2022**

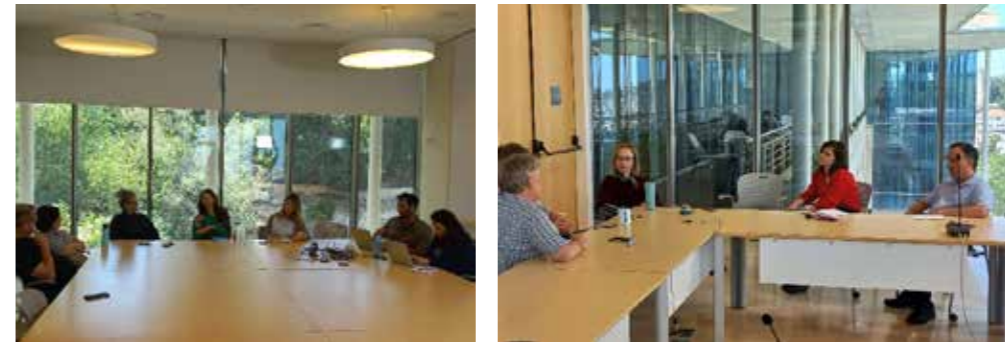
Dr. **Céline Debourse** (Mandel Fellow)

Cult and Temple in Babylon after 484 BC in Text and Practice



**12 May, 2022**

Mentoring workshops led by Mandel Scholion senior researchers



**23 June, 2022**

“Setting Tables” seminar: Concluding the Project



The seminar began with a brief address to the Hebrew University community by Ukraine’s President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

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## Conferences and Events

**2 September, 2021**

### Rosh Hashanah Toast

The first gathering of the year was dedicated to bidding farewell to the research group “**In Someone Else’s Shoes**” (2018-2021).



Photos: Bruno Charbit



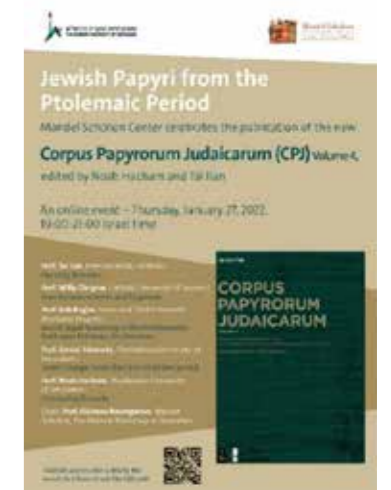
**27 January, 2022**

### Jewish Papyri from the Ptolemaic Period

Between 1957 and 1964 the famed historian and papyrologist Victor Tcherikover, in collaboration with historians Alexander Fuks and Menahem Stern, all from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, edited a three-volume publication – the old *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*. In this publication, which they divided chronologically into three phases (Hellenistic-Ptolemaic, 332 BCE-30 CE; Early Roman, 30-117 CE; Late Roman-Byzantine, 117-630 CE) the editors collected, translated, and commented on all the Greek documentary papyri that had been published up to their time in which Jews were mentioned. Now, over sixty years later, a continuation of this project was initiated by Noah Hacham of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tal Ilan of the Freie Universität Berlin. The book-launch of January 27, 2022, hosted by Mandel Scholion, celebrated the publication of the first of three books in the renewed series. Vol. IV, like vol. I, is dedicated to the Ptolemaic period and records over 100 papyri that mention Jews and/or Judaism, that have been published since 1964, including documentary as well as literary papyri and papyri associated with Jews in languages other than Greek (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Demotic).

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The editors spoke at the beginning and the conclusion of the evening. In the interim, three speakers appraised the value of the new publication – Prof. Willy Clarysse of Leuven University, a renowned papyrologist and Demotologist, and the editor of *Trismegistos*, a valuable internet site for papyri (<https://www.trismegistos.org/>); Prof. Robert Kugler of Lewis and Clark College in Portland Oregon, who has studied the Jewish Ptolemaic politeuma papyri of Herakleopolis in Egypt and contributed to the newly published volume; and Prof. Daniel Schwartz, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a historian of Judaism in the Hellenistic and Roman period. All three scholars spoke of the importance of the new publication for the study of Judaism in the Ptolemaic period, both in Egypt and elsewhere. Prof. Hacham's work on this volume was done during his stay at Mandel Scholion (2014-2017).



**8-10 March, 2022**

### Setting Tables: Commensality, Social Boundaries, and Inter-Cultural Exchange: An International Workshop

In March 2022, the “Setting Tables: Commensality, Social Boundaries and Inter-Cultural Exchange” research group held an international workshop in the Mandel Building on the Mt Scopus campus.

The first semester of the 2021/22 academic year was devoted to preparation for the conference. Group members read the works of potential keynote speakers and debated whom to invite. Attention was also devoted to the selection of academics from Israel and the construction of panels that would be interdisciplinary in nature but centered on a single theme. Finally, each group member presented his or her research and received constructive feedback from the rest of the group.

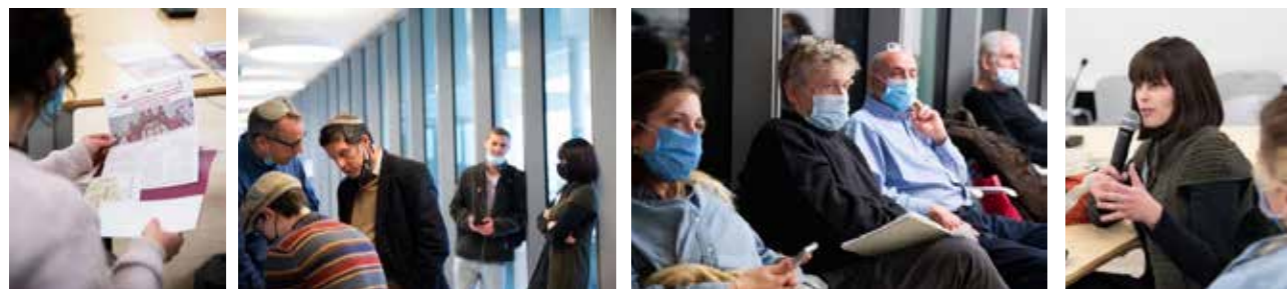
The conference was a great success, bringing together scholars from a wide variety of fields: from anthropology to literature and Assyriology to socio-biology, and from academia and beyond. The sessions were constructed thematically, highlighting similarities that cross disciplinary, temporal, and regional boundaries and thus enriched the lively debates that occurred during the conference.

Due to the constraints imposed by the uncertainty regarding the possibility of international travel during the global coronavirus pandemic, scholars from overseas such as Krishnendu Ray (NYU) and Stefania Ermidoro (Università Ca' Foscari) addressed the audience via zoom. They focused on the social function of eating together and the significance of non-participation in communal meals.

The main themes of the conference were the role of eating in constructing identity – whether on the basis of ethnicity, religious, or class, and how the act of eating

or abstention is interpreted – be it politically, socially, psychologically, or in literary form. Participants in the conference presented case studies focusing on the importance of space and material culture in shaping the varied meanings of eating, from street food to upper class banquets, the monastery dining hall to culinary tours. Some speakers focused on specific foodstuffs, tracing the economic, social, and political implications of quotidian food choices, while others highlighted the discourse surrounding decisions regarding with whom and for what purpose eating occurs.

This conference highlighted the need for greater scholarly focus on eating and non-eating, emphasizing the social understandings and functions that are central to a seemingly simple biological necessity. Interdisciplinary discussions challenged scholars to account for different disciplinary approaches and to problematize assumptions that are limited to a specific place, time, or methodological approach.

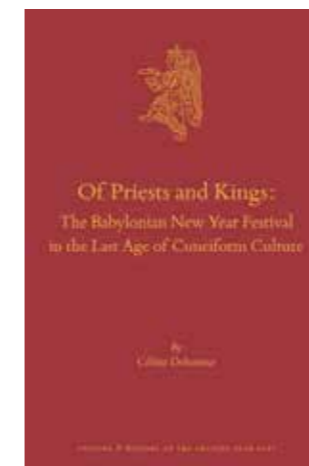


Photos: Yam Traiber

## 23 May, 2023

### Launch of Céline Debourse's new book

We celebrated the release of Dr. Céline Debourse's new book, *Of Priests and Kings: The Babylonian New Year Festival in the Last Age of Cuneiform Culture* in a zoom event we hosted together with the University of Vienna. Brief lectures were given by Prof. Uri Gabbay of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Prof. Bert van der Spek of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, as well as greetings from Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten, academic head of Mandel Scholion, and Prof. Michael Jursa of the University of Vienna.



The book, published by Brill, examines the Late Babylonian ritual texts of the New Year Festival. In her research, Debourse demonstrates how these texts “reflect the Babylonian priesthoods’ fears and aspirations of that time much more than an actual ritual.”



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## Research Tours

### 4-5 November, 2021

#### Northward Ho!

#### Some Recollections from the Mandel Scholion Excursion to the Jezreel Valley

For the first time since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic in Israel, the entire Mandel Scholion community was able to set out on an excursion. Led by the “Past and Past Perfect” research group, more than thirty colleagues – from senior faculty members to doctoral students, along with all the administrative staff – headed north on Thursday, 4 November 2021 for a day and a half of guided visits to several sites in the Jezreel Valley (‘Emek Yizra`el, in Arabic Marj Banu/Ibn `Amir; also known as the Plain of Esdraelon). The goal was to examine how the memory of the past – going back at least to Biblical times – was experienced in this historically loaded region. Of particular interest, and fitting the *raison d’être* of our research group, was seeing how past inhabitants and societies in the region viewed their own past and how the past was viewed in the centuries to follow, but before the modern period. We feel that through this trip we succeeded in conveying the essence of our group to the entire Mandel Scholion community, and at the same time conducted a lively and fruitful discussion among ourselves.

The first stop was Beth She'arim: we had a quick tour led by Prof. Uzi Leibner, who talked about the invention and further use of the legend about the site being that of the later Sanhedrin, and of how this was the first archeological excavation to be conducted by the Hebrew University’s then recently founded Institute of Archaeology (we later saw a short film from that period about the excavation). From there, we walked up to the statue of Alexander Zayd, and discussed how his memory was preserved already in the 1940s by the still relatively new settlements in the area and in general in the pre-State Yishuv. The next stop was Kfar Yehoshua, where we were treated to a guided tour of the Ottoman-Mandate railway museum. PhD student Ronni Agassi then gave a short, but detailed lecture on the historical background of construction in the Jezreel Valley during the late Ottoman period, which was followed by a talk by PhD student Inbal Lev-Ari on the modern statue “Venus Collecting Onions” by Eli Shamir, and how this relates to various older artistic and cultural traditions. From there, the entire group boarded the modern Jezreel Valley railway, which we took to Afula; lunch was a “traditional” hummus-based meal (a nice example of a new Israeli tradition, albeit with a connection to older indigenous eating habits in the country).

Having already gotten some background information on the Labor Movement settlements – moshavim and

kibbutzim – in the Valley, we then proceeded to `Ein Harod (Ichud), to visit a museum devoted to Israeli art, built in 1948. While the collection there is ever changing and contemporary, the museum building (with its large library) is itself a monument to a past (and perhaps lost) time in kibbutz and Israeli culture. A former curator, Dr. Galia Bar-Or, gave us an interesting talk about the history of the museum, and how its basic concept has changed over the years. The final stop that first day was Gid`ona, a cooperative settlement near Ma`ayan Harod, where we spent the night. However, before “hitting the sack”, we enjoyed a film “Midnight in Paris”, written and directed by Woody Allen, which provided an entertaining yet thought-provoking treatment of memory and nostalgia.

Our first stop the following day was the mausoleum of Yehoshua and Olga Hankin with its view of the Valley, where Prof. Nili Wazana gave a lecture on the biblical `Ein Harod, and we also heard the story of the Hankins, and noted the clear inspiration of the tombs at Beit Sha`arim

(the lands of which were purchased by Y. Hankin for the Zionist Movement) on their burial structure. After a quick walk through the area of the spring, the group moved to the Yizra`el Observation Point, where Prof. Reuven Amitai talked about the famous battle of `Ayn Jalut, that took place between the Mamluks and Mongols, and how this crucial battle was subsequently remembered in Arab historiography and popular memory. Following a short hike to `Ein Yizra`el, PhD student Reut Achdut spoke about the development of the story of Nevot Ha-Yizra`eli in the Bible.

After partaking of some delicious sandwiches, we boarded the bus for the trip back to Jerusalem. All participants expressed their satisfaction with the program and its execution, as well as the exemplary logistical arrangements. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the group’s coordinator, Ms. Noa Goldberg, as well as the administrative director of Scholion, Ms. Moran Zini Gradshtein, for all their assistance in organizing the trip.



Photos: Moran Zini Gradshtein



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## 26 May, 2022

### Mandel Fellows in Jerusalem

Mandel Postdoctoral Fellows spent this day learning about each other's research. The day began at the National Library, where Dr. Michael Lukin explained the genesis of the library's Hebrew and Jewish music collection and Dr. Ofir Haim showed us documents from the so-called "Afghani Geniza." At the Bible Lands' Museum, Dr. Céline Debourse guided us through parts of the exhibition. We concluded with a guided tour of the Hebrew Music Museum where we learned about a variety of instruments and heard them played and Dr. Hadar Feldman Samet discussed how she, as a historian of texts, came to be interested in the performance of the texts she studies.

All in all, this was a fascinating experience, allowing our postdoctoral cohort to get to know one another better and allowing for a more in-depth understanding of each other's research. We hope to continue with such short excursions in the future.



Photos: Moran Zini Gradshtein

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## 5-10 July, 2022

### The "Past and Past Perfect" Excursion to Rome

From 5 to 10 July 2022, the "Past and Past Perfect" research group embarked on a study tour of the city of Rome, during which we became much better acquainted with the city and its surroundings – with an emphasis on how the ancient past was reflected over the centuries that aligned with the aims of our group – to understand how past societies (particularly in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions) understood, portrayed, and used (or misused) their own pasts.

This was not the Rome of the average tourist. Led by our extremely knowledgeable (and amiable) local guide, Dr. Roberta Bernabei, we visited spectacular buildings (including the remarkable Villa Adriana in nearby Tivoli) from various periods of the Roman Republic and Empire, churches with antecedents in Late Antiquity (even pagan times) with fascinating art and decoration compiled over the centuries, the extensive gardens (with impressive statuary and fountains) of a Renaissance estate, and modern edifices, and learned about how the people of Rome and their rulers used their past to shape their present – especially in times of social, political, cultural, and religious change. Group member Prof. Alex Yacobson's ongoing comments and lectures were both edifying and entertaining, contributing to a much deeper understanding of these processes in Rome – often with a connection to Jewish history. In addition, through the good offices of Prof. Nili Wazana, we were able to visit the



The Basilica di San Giovanni in Laterano. Photo: Roberta Bernabei

Pontifical Biblical Institute, including a tour of the library, and meet with Prof. Peter Dubovsky SJ, who lectured to us on the memory war of the Neo-Assyrian state against the Kingdom of Elam, and the parallels with the Trajan's Column (It. *Colonna Traiana*) in Rome, commemorating the conquest of Dacia (Romania). In fact, much attention during the trip was devoted to this remarkable structure, trying to understand its original message, and then its

later function in the Roman landscape and self-image.

Clearly, all members of the group (four professors, four doctoral students and our excellent and efficient M.A. student and coordinator, Noa Goldberg), will return to Rome with a somewhat different perspective and, we can venture to say, to their own research with a richer and more sophisticated outlook.



The Canopus, Villa Adriana. Photo: Roberta Bernabei

## Ph.D Student's Initiatives

**7 February 2022**

**"Writing Marathon"**

The "Greenhouse for Arabic-speaking Doctoral Students group" conducted a "writing marathon" in the Mandel Building. This day was led by the group leaders Aysheh Maslamani ("Evolution of Attention" research group) and Ward Awad. The meeting was held in a hybrid format and included writing periods as well as discussions of productive work techniques. The participants were twelve Arab doctoral students from different disciplines. The breaks between the writing sessions allow the doctoral students to get to know each other and share their research for the first time.

The academic director of Mandel School for Advanced Studies in Humanities, Prof. Daniel Schwartz, and the academic director of Mandel Scholion Research Center, Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten joined for part of the day. They were the first who encouraged to establish this group. Furthermore, they offered to host the group meetings in the Mandel Building to serve as a constant place where the group members could easily meet. Prof. Schwartz talked about the history of the establishment of Mandel School and the environment and the support that it seeks to provide the graduate and doctoral students in the faculty.



Photo: Daniella Michaeli

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## 24 February, 2022

### Writing Binge: A Ph.D Initiative

At the end of February, we held a “writing binge” for the Ph.D. students at Mandel Scholion led by Sara Kopelman (“The Evolution of Attention” research group). The idea was to spend a day focused on writing, allowing the group environment to maximize productivity. The day was held from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., using the “Pomodoro” technique. This method uses a timer to split the day into smaller sessions that allow for short (25-minute) intervals separated by short breaks (between 5 minutes and 15 minutes). Each period is called Pomodoro (the Italian word for tomato).

The Ph.D. students prepared for the binge – setting both realistic objectives and an ideal goal, read relevant materials, and prepared themselves for the day, resulting in both a fun and productive experience. Additional events of this sort were held throughout the spring term.



## 26 June, 2023

### Work-Life Balance Workshop

Mandel Scholion researchers and PhD students participated in mentoring workshops organized by the doctoral program at the Mandel School.



Coming Up at Mandel Scholion  
2022/2023

# Our New Research Group

## "Remapping Ancient Elites: Between East and West"

2022-2025

They say that history is written by the victors. The same can be said for our understanding of a community's elite. Ancient elites are viewed through many layers of transmission and interpretation, primarily through the prism of canonization. The elites we are familiar with successfully established their world views and narratives as the normative ones. So, for example, reading only rabbinic literature written by rabbis in the Land of Israel and the Sassanian Empire, one would be forgiven for thinking that no other elite groups existed within their surroundings.

The research group "Remapping Elites" thus seeks to take a new look at ancient elites by using non-canonical materials to arrive at a more accurate and diverse picture. Material evidence, including magic bowls, as well as Christian and pagan literature are adduced to provide a change in perspective and view the canonical elites through the eyes of their competitors. Asking how alternative elites can be identified using the available historical and archaeological evidence, the group also seeks to explore the ways such elites organized themselves and their values, by which they promoted their interests in society. How did they compete with the elite that ultimately became the dominant one? Which factors can explain the demise of certain elites and the success of others?

Furthermore, the group will focus on two areas that have been neglected in the study of Late Antiquity, namely the Land of Israel and the Sassanian Empire, with the aim of integrating these regions into broader scholarly debates, in order to both benefit from insights that have emerged in adjacent areas and to produce relevant data for other fields.

**Group Members: Dr. Avner Ecker, Dr. Avigail Manekin-Bamberger, Prof. Maren Niehoff, Dr. Yakir Paz, Alon Brand, Shir Huri, Rachel Rosenbaum Lederman, Oz Tamir, Maayan Sasson**



Jewish Aramaic Incantation Bowl (6th-7th c.; Nippur, Mesopotamia), The Metropolitan Museum of Art

# Our New Mandel Fellows

Dr. Sivan Goren-Arzonny

Sivan Goren-Arzonny completed her doctoral studies in the Department of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2019. Between 2019 and 2022, she was a postdoctoral fellow at the Harvard Society of Fellows. Sivan studies literature composed in Kerala, now a state in South India, to explore the foundation and consolidation of South Asian vernacular literary cultures between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. Her corpus of study includes long poems composed in Sanskrit, South Asia's cosmopolitan language, and in Manipravālam (literally, "gem-coral"), a literary idiom combining Sanskrit with Kerala's spoken language. This corpus has rarely been studied and never before translated into other languages. The main question that motivates her research is how groups of individuals develop local literature after centuries of confining the composition of literary texts to the cosmopolitan language. She is

specifically interested in the representation of women in premodern literature and women's place in the development of vernacular literature in Kerala. Her areas of interest further include literary theory, world literature, vernacular literary cultures, and South Asian poetics. Sivan is currently working on two book projects: one based on her doctoral research, entitled "Sweet, Sweet Language: Tracing a Vernacular Literary Culture in Premodern Kerala" and the other a monograph studying the *Lilātilakam*, a fourteenth-century Sanskrit composition on the grammar and poetics of Maipravāam.



A palm-leaf manuscript from Kerala, South India. Poems initially copied on palm-leaf manuscripts were later printed. This leaf is inscribed with verses from a Sanskrit poem, and was copied using the Malayalam script.



## Dr. Ortal Harush

Ortal Harush completed her doctoral studies and obtained her Ph.D. from the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2021. Her dissertation explored the significance of variability and assessed whether collective and individual signatures are observable through an advanced shape analysis of ceramic vessels. The study, focusing on a single ceramic type, involved three-dimensional (3-D) processing to extract accurate geometric parameters and develop quantitative and objective tools to identify individual and social signatures. The dissertation is comprised of three studies, all published in peer-reviewed journals, following a common thread examining minute differences within ceramic vessels.

This research has contributed to the understanding of ceramic production mechanisms and social processes in the archaeological record. Thus, topics such as skill development and knowledge transmission were

integrated into the research to comprehend the production mechanisms and the artisan's personal and cultural choices projecting directly onto the final product's morphological features.

During 2021/2022, Harush was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, where she established the university's new computational archaeology laboratory. The lab, launched in 2020, specializes in the production of high-resolution 3-D models of various objects, from bones and seeds to ceramics and flint, offering students and scholars alike the opportunity to utilize the diverse tools available to scholarship through 3-D scanning. It also provides



Finding a personal style (Harush et al 2019): This study searched for a definition of style that could be tested using quantitative means. A group of students from the Ceramic Department of the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design (Jerusalem, Israel) was instructed to produce the same part of a storage jar repeatedly for several days, following a strict protocol. All the produced items were 3D scanned to extract accurate geometric parameters for examining minute morphological variations, identify distinct pottery styles, and distinguish between the individual potters who participated in the experiment.

## Dr. Yakov Z. Mayer

an educational space for students interested in the potential of 3-D scanning and researches new methods for collecting, processing, and analyzing computational data.

In the coming years (2022–2025), Harush plans to focus on her research project “*Think Globally Act Locally: The Dynamics between Imperial Systems and Local Ceramic Production.*” The project will focus on recognizing the mutual impact of large systems (empires/cities) and small-scale systems (periphery/villages), exploring whether the existence of a centralized system affects the level of local production. This question projects onto the relationship between the center and the periphery and the diffusion of ideas between them, both crucial elements for studying long-term cultural change mechanisms. For the project, the Roman Empire is taken as an example, comparing two local centers under its power: Cambridgeshire (in collaboration with the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge) and Jerusalem (in collaboration with the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Israel Antiquities Authority).

Yakov Z. Mayer's work focuses on medieval and early modern Hebrew book cultures. In his book, *Editio Princeps: The 1523 Venice Edition of the Palestinian Talmud and the Beginning of Hebrew Printing* (Magnes, 2022), Mayer examines the moment of transition of Talmudic literature from manuscript culture to print culture. The book is based on the dissertation he wrote under the supervision of Prof. Elchanan Reiner and Prof. Maoz Kahana from the Tel Aviv University's Department of Jewish History, completed in 2019. He then spent 2020/2021 at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, as a post-doctoral fellow at the Kreitman School for Advanced Graduate Studies and as a fellow in the ERC group JEWFACT. During 2021/2022, Mayer was a Starr fellow at Harvard University



While at Mandel Scholion, Mayer intends to expand his research on the Venetian printing industry, with the goal of writing a monograph about the early phase of Hebrew printing in Venice, which shaped the content of the Jewish bookshelf in many ways. He is excited and looking forward to the work in Mandel Scholion and the many collaborations and new opportunities to come.



On the right: *The Palestinian Talmud Venice edition, 1523.* On the left: *MS Leiden Or. 4720, which was used as the “printer's copy” for the creation of this edition.*  
Photo: Yakov Z. Mayer

# Upcoming Research Group\_\_\_\_\_

## "Passivities: Modes of Feeling, Modes of Knowing"

2023-2026

The opposition of passion and action pervades Western epistemological self-understanding. It is arranged in metaphors that contrast the mind as a mirror, passively reflecting external reality, to the mind as a searching lamp, projecting its own light on its surroundings. It is embedded in the philosophical polemic between a materialist notion of human existence as a passive reaction to external stimuli, and the idealist celebration of human creative capabilities fashioning their own environment. The dichotomy thus constitutes the dynamic interface between human mental processes and the external world, providing the foundational framework for any cognitive act. Critically assessing this interface and the subtle moments of passivity it involves, our interdisciplinary project suggests tackling



it from two angles, one historical, focusing on early modern Europe as a transitional phase, and the other, critical and philosophical, examining the notion of passivity from a phenomenological point of view.

Our collaborative project takes its cue from Edmund Husserl's intuition that a passive order of experience undergirds all phenomenological processes. This moment represents an epochal shift in the history of ideas, an Archimedean point where passivity ceases to be perceived as a lack of initiative or a failure of the individual will. The aim of our research is to trace the genealogy of this founding moment, to chronicle the way it problematized the traditional hierarchical distribution of the active/passive binary opposition, and to explore its implications for the fields of science, art, and aesthetics in the formation of modernity.

Challenging long-standing assumptions about models of moral agency and epistemological mastery, our research will invite a re-examination of passivity not only in the realms of aesthetics and affect theory but also in the political sphere. The project will approach the concept of passivity in a comparative and multidisciplinary way, combining a history of emotions with a material history of science, and putting these in dialogue with the discourses of art and literature, thus suggesting a novel point of departure for a synthetic examination of the historiography of culture.

**Group Members:** **Prof. Ruben Borg** (English Department), **Prof. Raz Chen-Morris** (Department of History), **Dr. Lola Kantor-Kazovsky** (Department of Art History), **Prof. Gur Zak** (Department of General and Comparative Literature)

Rembrandt, Portrait of Jan Six (1647).

*The image is a portrait by Rembrandt of his friend Jan Six. The figure is seen standing but at rest, absorbed in reading. The body language suggests passivity without implying dejection, suffering or diminished presence.*

# Publications

- The “**Liturgy and Arts**” research group (2015-2018) has published its work in a book of the same name. The book examines how local and global memories were created in the Holy Land and Europe.
- **Prof. Zeev Weiss’s** (member of the “Setting Tables” research group) most recent book **Sepphoris: A Mosaic of Cultures** (in Hebrew), was published by Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi.
- Mandel Fellow **Dr. Céline Debourse** published her first book **Of Priests and Kings: The Babylonian New Year Festival in the Last Age of Cuneiform Culture**. The book was published by Brill.
- **Prof. Nathan Wasserman**, member of the “Setting Tables” research group, together with Dr. Elyze Zomer, co-authored the book, **Akkadian Magic Literature. Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian Incantations: Corpus – Context – Praxis**, published by Harrassowitz-Verlag.
- **Dr. Dana Kaplan**, member of the “Setting Tables” research group, together with Prof. Eva Illuz, co-authored the book, **What is Sexual Capital?**, published by Suhrkamp Verlag in German in 2021 and in English in 2022.
- **Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten** has published her new book, **Biblical Women and Jewish Daily Life in the Middle Ages** (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).

# Awards

- **Prof. Yael Levin**, member of “The Evolution of Attention” research group, won the Adam Gillon Award from the Joseph Conrad Society of America for her book **Joseph Conrad: Slow Modernism**, published by Oxford University Press in 2020.
- **Shai Satran**, member of the 2017-2021 “In Someone Else’s Shoes” research group, was awarded a post-doctoral scholarship to MIT’s STS Program and Faculty of Anthropology.
- **Ronnie Agassi**, member of the “Past and Past Perfect” research group, was awarded the Azrieli Scholarship for doctoral students for 2022/25.
- **Shlomi Zemach**, member of the “Setting Tables” research group, was awarded The Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture scholarship for doctoral students.
- **Adi Namia Cohen**, member of the “Setting Tables” research group, was awarded the Rotenstreich Scholarship for outstanding Ph.D. students in the humanities, given by the Council for Higher Education (VATAT).
- Warm congratulations to the following Mandel Scholion alumni and current members on receiving **ISF personal research grants: Prof. Nathan Wasserman, Dr. Jonathan Vardi, Prof. Galit Noga-Banai, Prof. Yair Furstenberg, Prof. Rina Talgam**. Congratulations to Mandel Scholion’s academic head **Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten** and to **Prof. Ariel Knafo-Noam** who were awarded the **ISF breakthrough research grants**.

# Promotions and Appointments

- Mandel Fellow **Dr. Hadar Feldman Samet** was appointed as a senior lecturer (tenure track position) in the Department of Jewish History at Tel Aviv University, starting Fall 2022.
- **Dr. Nadia Beider**, member of the “Setting Tables” research group, received her Ph.D from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- **Dr. Nadia Beider** was awarded a two-year postdoctoral fellowship by the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe to research contemporary European antisemitism at the Social Research Institute, University College London
- **Prof. Yair Furstenberg**, member of the “Setting Tables” research group, was granted tenure and promoted to the rank of associate professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- **Prof. Yael Levin**, of “The Evolution of Attention” research group, was appointed Associate Provost of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem’s Rothberg International School.
- **Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten**, has been appointed academic head of the Mandel School, a position she will fill along with her role as academic head of the Mandel Scholion Center. The Mandel graduate program (formerly under the purview of the academic head of the Mandel School) will be led by faculty member Dr. Abigail Jacobson. We are delighted that Elisheva is remaining with us at Mandel Scholion!

**Mandel Scholion Interdisciplinary Research Center in the Humanities and Jewish Studies**

Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School for Advanced Studies in the Humanities

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