



## Mandel Postdoctoral Fellowships in the Humanities and Jewish Studies for 2017-2020 Marathon of Lectures by the Finalists

Thursday, January 12, 2017, Mandel Building, 5th Floor, Room 530, Mount Scopus

- 09:00 Asher Cohen**  
Rector of the Hebrew University      Greetings
- Daniel R. Schwartz**  
Academic head of Mandel Scholion      Opening remarks
- 09:15 Ayelet Libson**  
Intensifying Intention: The Inner World in Rabbinic Literature
- 09:45\* Oded Zinger**  
"Our matter obligates you for your family and our family are one": The Social Embeddedness of the Legal Arena According to Geniza Documents
- 10:15 Daniel Lav**  
A God One Can Worship: Contesting Ontotheology in Medieval Damascus
- 10:45\* Jonathan Brack**  
Rashid al-Din, Muhammad, and the Buddha: A Polemic against Reincarnation in Mongol Iran
- 11:15**      Break
- 11:30\* Yosi Yisraeli**  
What were Jesus and His Disciples Singing at the Last Supper?  
The Converso Crisis and the Jewish History of the Church
- 12:00\* Karma Ben Johanan**  
The Price of Brotherhood: The Jews in Contemporary Catholic Thought and the Fate of Theology
- 12:30 Allegra Fryxell**  
Once upon a time(s): Reality, Temporality, and Modernity
- 13:00\* Golan Gur**  
Music as Politics: Hanns Eisler and the Aesthetics of Socialist Realism

\*The lecture is in Hebrew

### **Ayelet Libson**

Ayelet Libson studied Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University and completed her doctorate at New York University. She is currently a Lady Davis Postdoctoral Fellow at the Hebrew University. Her dissertation, "Radical Subjectivity: Law and Self-Knowledge in the Babylonian Talmud," examined the emergence of an individual's knowledge of both physical and mental states as a determining legal consideration among the rabbis of late antiquity. Her research proposal for Mandel Scholion consists of two projects, one focusing on rabbinic jurisprudence concerning problems such as the nature of obligation and law's generality, while the other traces transitions in the development of several rabbinic terms denoting the inner world.

---

#### **Intensifying Intention: The Inner World in Rabbinic Literature**

Rabbinic law is primarily focused on actions performed by the individual, yet the interior world also plays a significant role in determining the law through concepts such as intention, will, and thought. This phenomenon is pervasive throughout rabbinic literature, yet has received surprisingly little scholarly attention .

This lecture explores the rabbinic turn to the inner world, revealing its transformation throughout rabbinic literature. While the early corpus of Tannaitic law recognized an internal mental world, that world was severely circumscribed, reflecting a subject defined primarily by action. By contrast, later rabbinic texts expand and intensify the role of various mental categories and grant intention significant value independently of action. Especially in the Babylonian Talmud, this amplified attention to the mental world corresponds to a preoccupation with the inner workings that distinguish one individual from another. Granting precedence to intention over action and to the individual over the collective ultimately leads to a novel strain of antinomism within rabbinic law. Uncovering this development sheds new light on the evolution of rabbinic subjectivity and illuminates a fundamental facet of rabbinic law as part of the broader culture of late antiquity.

## **Oded Zinger**

Oded Zinger studied history and Near Eastern studies at Princeton University. His dissertation examined the relationship between law and gender in marital disputes according to documents of the Cairo Geniza. Since then he spent two years as a Perlman post-doctoral fellow at Duke University, and currently he is a fellow of the research group on “Jewish Women’s Cultural Capital” in the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies. His research interests are the social and cultural history of Jewish communities in the medieval Islamic world, with a focus on the interaction of gender and law as reflected in Geniza documents. His research proposal for Mandel Scholion consists of a microhistory of the rabbinical court in Fustat in the twelfth century and a study of different conceptions of masculinity in the Jewish communities in the medieval Islamic world.

---

### **"Our matter obligates you for your family and our family are one": The Social Embeddedness of the Legal Arena According to Geniza Documents**

Geniza documents reveal the different ways Jews obtained legal services in medieval Egypt. Documents of different genres (letters, legal records and petitions) show Jewish legal institutions as engaged not solely in top-down supervision and correction, but also as responding to demand “from below.” Attention to how litigants accessed, used, and manipulated different legal institutions sheds light on how individual agency shaped the workings of justice. Thus, we learn how Jews experienced Jewish law and how the legal arena was embedded within the social fabric of the Jewish communities .

In my talk, I will present several Geniza documents that show how individual Jews operated within the legal arena. I will focus on the role of middlemen who connected litigants to higher legal authorities. Without the coercive measures of a state at their disposal, Jewish legal institutions depended on the willing participation of Jews who could also, if they so chose, turn to Muslim legal venues. The availability of intermediaries through which Jews could use their social capital to their advantage encouraged them to use Jewish legal institutions. By focusing on the middlemen, we can combine the view “from above” with the view “from below” and explore the legal arena as a zone of contestation between individual agency, law, communal supervision, and social status.

## **Daniel Lav**

Daniel Lav studied French Literature at the University of Chicago and completed an M.A. and Ph.D. in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Currently a Rothschild Fellow and Transregional Institute Fellow at Princeton University, his research focuses on Islamic theology and political theology, with special reference to the salafī school and its pre-modern forebears. His book *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge, 2012), based on his M.A. thesis, traces the revival of a medieval polemic on the nature of faith and its role in theo-political disputes in the twentieth century. His doctoral dissertation analyzes Ibn Taymiyya's theological system and its modern-day 'theonomic' application in response to legal-political secularization in the Muslim world. Lav's proposed research project for Mandel Scholion is titled "The One and the Many: Being and Power in Islamic Theology".

---

### **A God One Can Worship: Contesting Ontotheology in Medieval Damascus**

Medieval Muslim theology commonly defined God in an ontological register. The ubiquity of the formal ontological framework testified to the broad diffusion of Greek-Hellenistic thought in the Islamic milieu, not only among the Islamic philosophers, but also within the predominant Ash'arī school.

In my lecture I will address a thoroughgoing critique of this Islamic ontotheology by the Syrian Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 C.E.). Unlike earlier Ḥanbalīs who had shunned scholastic disputation, Ibn Taymiyya engaged the rationalist theologians and philosophers on their own terms. Attacking the priority ascribed to metaphysics, he elaborated a philosophically coherent defense of scriptural religion in which the ontological differences between God and creation are subsumed under the theme of God's power. Underlying the critique is a fundamental concern for the specific and concrete being of God, as an actor and as an object of worship, which, Ibn Taymiyya argued, was obfuscated by the abstract ontological formulae .

This critique brings into relief two contrasting and originally distinct axes of transcendence: a cratological (i.e. power-focused) axis deriving from the ancient Near East, and an ontological one deriving from ancient Greece. Using Ibn Taymiyya's polemics as an opening, I argue that the intersection of these axes in medieval theology was a source of fecund tension that reverberated throughout such topics as the divine attributes and the love relation between God and humans.

## **Jonathan Brack**

Jonathan Brack is an historian of the medieval and early modern Islamic world and the Mongol Empire. He completed his B.A. and M.A. in Middle Eastern History at the Hebrew University. His University of Michigan PhD. dissertation examines the fashioning of new discourses on authority and sacral kingship in the 13th-14th centuries in Mongol-ruled Iran. He is currently a postdoctoral fellow at HUJI in the ERC project on “Mobility, Empire, and Cross-Cultural Contact in Mongol Eurasia.” His research proposal for Mandel Scholion includes two projects: the first investigates the thereafter as a site of translation, polemics, and conversion in medieval Iran; the second examines cross-cultural exchanges and the formation of new Islamic political vocabularies after the Mongols.

---

### **Rashid al-Din, Muhammad, and the Buddha: A Polemic against Reincarnation in Mongol Iran**

Under Mongol rule (1258–1336), Iran experienced an influx of Buddhist monks who traveled from across Asia to benefit from Mongol court patronage, creating new possibilities for inter-Asian interactions and cross-cultural exchanges. One of the best studied expressions of this encounter is the “Life of Buddha” in the Indian section of a world history written by Rashid al-Din (d. 1317), who was the Iranian vizier and a Jewish convert to Islam. His account is celebrated not only for being the best informed Muslim depiction of Buddhism, but also as an attempt to make the Dharma comprehensible, and even acceptable, for a Muslim audience. That Rashid al-Din, however, also authored three treatises against the Buddhist belief in reincarnation, one of which was appended at the end of his “favorable” account on the Buddha, has hardly been noted .

In my lecture, I examine this neglected aspect of the inter-ecumenical exchange under the Mongols to explore how the Iranian vizier reshaped the afterlife of his Muslim Mongol patrons. My lecture situates Rashid al-Din’s concern with reincarnation and resurrection within the broader context of his theological writing, especially his attempt to establish a Muslim theological foundation for the sacral kingship of Chinggis Khan’s offspring, and to explain its relationship with Muslim prophethood. Rashid al-Din’s refutations suggest that in medieval Iran cultural brokerage was as much about creating difference as it was about transgressing boundaries.

## **Yosi Yisraeli**

Yosi Yisraeli graduated from the School of Historical Studies at Tel-Aviv University, where he wrote his doctoral dissertation on the theological and exegetical thought of the converted bishop of Burgos, Pablo de Santa María (ca. 1352-1435). He was a graduate fellow at the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for the Study of Conversion and Inter-Religious Encounters of Ben-Gurion and Bar-Ilan Universities. His research proposal for Mandel Scholion focuses on the development of new theological, exegetical, and historical knowledge among Jews and Christians in the first decades of the mass-conversions in Spain.

---

### **What were Jesus and His Disciples Singing at the Last Supper? The Converso Crisis and the Jewish History of the Church**

The mass conversions of Jews to Christianity in the 14th and 15th centuries created a series of social-religious entanglements that radically called into question the constituent elements of being Jewish or Christian. Recent studies suggest that in these particular circumstances notions of blood and ethnicity were elevated into principle factors in determining religious identities, thus perhaps paving the path for modern notions of race. However, these exclusive ideas were not the sole products of this vigorous intellectual scene. In those same years competing theological models that aimed to reconcile Jewish elements within Christian identity were also developed—not as fringe elements of crypto-Judaism, but as a part of alleged Christian and Jewish orthodoxies. Through new readings in their shared traditions, Jews, Christians and converts were able to recover or reimagine forgotten layers in the Jewish and even rabbinic history of the Church, in a manner that secured (from their different perspectives) the singular role of Israel in the divine plan of salvation. Although these efforts failed to prevent the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition and the blood-purity regulations, the new critical and path-breaking knowledge they produced survived via different scholarly channels and played a significant role in the transformation of Christian scholarship in the 15th and 16th centuries, far beyond the immediate context of the converso crisis.

## **Karma Ben Johanan**

Karma Ben Johanan completed her MA in comparative religion through Tel Aviv University's Adi Lautman interdisciplinary program for outstanding students, and her doctorate at Tel Aviv University's school of historical studies. Her dissertation focuses on reciprocal theological perceptions of Orthodox Jews and Roman-Catholic Christians in the decades following the Second Vatican Council. She taught at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and was a visiting scholar at the Pope John XXIII Center for Religious Studies in Bologna; currently she is a Fulbright Fellow in history at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research focuses on the cultural and intellectual history of religion, particularly issues of religious identity in contemporary Christian and Jewish communities in Europe, Israel, and the United States. Her research proposal to Mandel Scholion focuses on contemporary Jewish and Christian missionary movements, and on the way in which conservative religious communities respond to the global crisis of liberalism.

---

### **The Price of Brotherhood: The Jews in Contemporary Catholic Thought and the Fate of Theology**

At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) the Roman Catholic Church reformulated its attitude towards the modern world through rigorous theological discussions. One of the Council's most important revolutions was the change it introduced in the Catholic doctrine on the Jews. Many saw the discussion of the Jews as epitomizing the Council's entire endeavor, as it placed human rights, freedom of religion, brotherhood, and respect for the other at the center of the Church's enterprise.

However, in the following decades, the legacy of the Council itself became an identity crisis which divided the Catholic world. Some viewed the Council as a healthy move that made the Church into a relevant spiritual power in the Modern world. For others, it created a break in tradition, and sold the core of its faith for a mess of pottage.

My lecture will examine the post-Vatican II ecclesiastical discussion of the Jews in light of processes of deconstruction and re-crystallization of Catholic identity. I will argue that the shift in the Catholic discourse on the Jews from a theological-intellectual plane to an ethical-symbolic plane reflects a far-reaching transformation in the status of theology—which began to be perceived as dangerous in conservative Catholic circles and as outdated and irrelevant in liberal Catholic ones. These processes, in which the center of the gravity of the Catholic discourse was changed beyond recognition, indicate a deep hermeneutic shift, and in fact an intrinsic transformation of the entire Christian project.

## **Allegra Fryxell**

Allegra Fryxell completed a doctorate in history at Cambridge in 2016; she specializes in the modern intellectual and cultural history of Western Europe and North America. Her dissertation examined alternative conceptions of time and temporality in European modernism, ca.1890-1940, across Britain, France, Germany, America, and Italy. Currently a postdoctoral fellow at Tel Aviv University, she is expanding her dissertation into a monograph about four “modalities” or conceptions of time during this period that presented significant challenges to linear or Newtonian “clock-time” in philosophy, psychology, music, theatre/film, and science fiction. She is also starting a new project, which she hopes to pursue at Mandel Scholion, on the meanings and beliefs associated with coloured light, sound, and chromotherapy. This will add two further dimensions (colour and sound) to the invisible universe of time.

---

### **Once upon a time(s): Reality, Temporality, and Modernity**

The “tempo” of Western modernity has been a frequent focus of historical scholarship since E. P. Thompson’s ground-breaking study of work discipline, time, and capitalism in 1967. More recently, historians such as Wolfgang Schivelbush, Stephen Kern, François Hartog, and Reinhart Koselleck have argued for an “acceleration” or “compression” in conceptions of time and a “rupture” in lived experience from ca.1880 to 1940, suggesting that moderns experienced a present world torn asunder from the past that was rapidly advancing toward an unknown future. My lecture will present an equally pervasive understanding of times and temporalities in modernism that challenges these orthodox conceptions of modernity as a period that was seemingly speeding up, severed from the past, and/or defined by relativity theory. Drawing upon examples in popular philosophy, science fiction, music, and theatre, I will argue that a “palimpsestic” modality heavily influenced by French philosopher Henri Bergson’s concept of *durée* (duration) better encapsulates the complex time consciousness of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe and America, and how historical understandings of modern temporality and historicity have overlooked this important element of the modern condition. The numerous scientists, philosophers, artists, and writers who engaged with time theories, time estimation, and strategies of temporal fragmentation exemplify how modernity was not always futural and how analogic conceptions of past/present gave rise to a temporal perspective that emphasised the instability of any kind of chronology.



## **Golan Gur**

Golan Gur studied musicology at Tel Aviv University and at the University of Munich. After completing his doctoral studies in 2013 at the Humboldt University of Berlin, he was a Newton International Fellow at the University of Cambridge and a postdoctoral researcher at the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania. He taught at Tel Aviv University, the Humboldt University, and the University of Arts in Berlin. His first monograph (Bärenreiter, 2013) is an interdisciplinary study of Arnold Schoenberg and avant-garde notions of musical progress. His research proposal for Mandel Scholion consists of two projects: a monograph on musical thinking and political aesthetics in the former German Democratic Republic, and a study expanding his research of music and the labour movement to Germany between the second half of the nineteenth century and the interwar period.

---

### **Music as Politics: Hanns Eisler and the Aesthetics of Socialist Realism**

In what sense is music political, and to what extent can music – notoriously the most abstract of all arts – shape political consciousness? This question has been debated for nearly two centuries and I would like to present one example: that of Hanns Eisler, who was one of the most politically-engaged musicians of the twentieth century. Active in revolutionary circles in 1920s Berlin, he was also the composer of the national anthem of the German Democratic Republic, to which he moved in 1949 after exile in the US and appearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee. He was committed to the notion that music should address political issues and support the workers' class struggle. I explore key elements of Eisler's music aesthetics in relation to the concept of socialist realism. Understood as both a cultural policy and a theory of art, socialist realism, I argue, stood for a variety of approaches and artistic strategies, not all of them in line with Soviet and East German official cultural doctrines. Specifically, I analyze the way Eisler's work brought together some of the features of musical modernism with the musical traditions of the historical labour movement in Germany and Austria. On this basis, I propose that political genres of music, long held to be obsolete, are in fact highly relevant for the understanding of the social and ideological function of music.