



A journal published by The Judaic Studies Program & the Samuel Rosenthal Center for Judaic Studies.

Featured Faculty

In this Issue:

[Featured Faculty](#)

[Student Awards and Honors, p.2](#)

- Zachary Rubin
- Lila Robinson
- Barak Daon
- Ariella Goldman

[Recognition for Outstanding Achievement, p.2-3](#)

- Larimee Cortnik
- Jason Velazquez

[Student Short Essay, p.3-4](#)

[Courses of Interest for Fall 2008, p.5](#)

[A Sampling of Final Paper Titles, p.5](#)

[Off to Grad School! p.6](#)

- Josh Prager

[Contact Us, p.6](#)

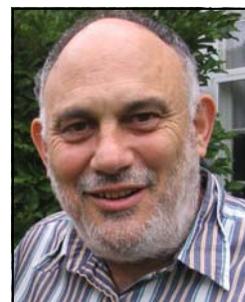
Professor Peter J. Haas

Over the course of his studies in pre-med, Prof. Peter Haas' interests drifted more and more to biblical studies, and then to Judaism. By his senior year, he decided to go into Jewish Studies. Having come from a family of Holocaust survivors who no longer practiced Judaism, he had, however, very little background. Haas enrolled in **Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR)** to learn Hebrew and the rabbinic texts. He was a member of the first HUC-JIR class to spend the first year in Israel.

After four years of study at HUC, Haas was ordained as a Reform rabbi and was awarded a **Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters**. It was now time for graduate school, but after 8 years of uninterrupted study since high school, Haas decided to take a study break. This break took the form of three years of active duty as a **US Army Chaplain**. The first two years of his tour were spent at Fort Knox, KY, where his first daughter was born. At the beginning of his third year, Chaplain Haas suddenly received orders posting him in Seoul S. Korea. He spent the next twelve months as "chief rabbi" of South Korea.

At the conclusion of this tour of duty, Haas returned to the States and in August, 1977 matriculated in the graduate program in "History of Religions: Judaism" at **Brown University** with a secondary concentration in ethics. His son was born in 1978, and Haas joined the **Rhode Island National Guard** to serve as chaplain in an artillery brigade for the next three years. In **1980, Ph.D.** in hand, Dr. Haas, along with wife and two children, drove to Nashville, TN, where he took a three-year position as Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies at **Vanderbilt University**. A third child, a daughter, was born in Nashville. To support this family, Haas transferred his commission and served until he retired in 1996 as a **Lieutenant Colonel in the Tennessee National Guard**. His first book dealt with moral theory and the Holocaust, combining his interest in Jewish history and in military ethics.

After three years and no donor, the three-year position at Vanderbilt was extended for another three years, and then became permanent. After a national search, Haas was appointed to the position with tenure and was promoted to Associate Professor. He remained in this



Professor Peter J. Haas

position for the next 12 years, teaching Judaism, Holocaust, First Year writing, and Ethics.

Happily for **Case Western Reserve University**, Haas accepted a position here, and began teaching in January, 2000. He was asked to take over as **Chair of the Department of Religious Studies** in 2003, and he has been fulfilling that job ever since. That same year saw the beginning of the first minor in **Judaic Studies at Case**.

Although the move from Tennessee was hard, Haas and his wife never looked back. Both have enjoyed the rich cultural life in **Cleveland and CWRU**, and with all its problems, it has been a good place to work. With their youngest daughter choosing to move back to Nashville after college, the Haases get back regularly to their old stomping grounds.

"It is odd," says Haas, "but I think I have been doing the classic Jewish migration backwards. I grew up in the sunbelt (south Texas), and have gradually moved north. It would be totally fitting if it turns out that my final move will be to New York. For now, though, I am perfectly content to be right here."

Student Awards and Honors

The Ira and Ruth Bressler Prize



Zachary Rubin

Hometown:
Naperville, Illinois

Academic Interests :
Pre-medicine, major in biology and minor in chemistry

Extracurricular Activities:

I am a member of Phi Delta Epsilon (a medical fraternity), Mortar Board National Honor Society, Jewish Student Group, and I play the trumpet in a jazz combo called *Ma Sheh'bah La*.

The Ira and Ruth Bressler Prize:

To a student who has done outstanding work in the area of Jewish Studies.

The Eudese and Elmer Paul Prizes:

To one or several undergraduate or graduate students who demonstrate an interest in Jewish Studies or Jewish contemporary life.

Outstanding Achievement:

Larimee Cortnik and **Jason Velazquez** have been recognized for outstanding achievement.

Larimee is recognized for ethnographic research done for *Women in the Bible: Ethnographic Approaches to Rite and Ritual, Story, Song and Art* - JDST 268 (Prof. Neulander).

Jason is recognized for his short theme paper, "The Hebrew Alphabet and Jewish Art" - JDST 220 (Prof. Neulander). His paper appears in this edition of the JDST e-journal pages 3-4.

The Eudese and Elmer Paul Prizes



Lila Robinson

Hometown:
Brunswick, Ohio

Academic Interests :
I returned to college in 2007 after a hiatus of 32 years! The experience has been a revelation to me. I plan to become a degree candidate in the coming year, majoring in Religious Studies and Women's Studies.

Extracurricular Activities:

I am the Administrator for the Department of Organizational Behavior at the Weatherhead School of Management at CWRU. I volunteer at the Brunswick Food Pantry and am Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the Brunswick Alumni Community Theatre. I have been married for 23 years to husband Jim and am the proud mom of Michael and Kenneth, both in college.

Hometown:
Lehavim, Israel

Academic Interests:
Chemistry, Cognitive Science, Music, Hebrew.

Extracurricular Activities:
Hillel, Jewish Student Group (JSG); *Ma Sheh'bah La* Jazz Group; Swimming; Squash Club; Commuter Club; Juggling Club.



Barak Daon



Ariella Goldman

Hometown:
Newton, MA

Extracurricular Activities:
Jewish Student Group, Hillel's HEEpB, and clinical shadowing.

Academic Interests :

Religious studies and pre-Medical, specifically the academic study of Judaism, religion and contemporary culture, and a variety of medical topics.

Recognition for Outstanding Achievement

Larimee's 20 interviews for *Women in the Bible: Ethnographic Approaches to Rite and Ritual, Story, Song and Art* (JDST 268), have met requirements of the **Case Social/Behavioral Science Institutional Review Board**, and have been accepted to **Digital Case**, the scholarly archive of the **Kelvin Smith Library**. Larimee conducted research on beliefs about two Jewish women who appear in the *New Testament*: the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. Her research does not evaluate the veracity of any belief; rather, it provides an overview of beliefs across several different religions. The data is useful for examining differences between the historical record and what is preached from the pulpit, as well as differences between what is preached from the pulpit and what is believed in the pew.



Larimee Cortnik

The Hebrew Alphabet and Jewish Art

Recognition for Outstanding Achievement Jason Velazquez



Jason Velazquez

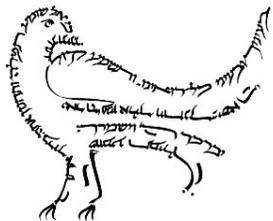
“In the beginning” God created the world in all its glory by setting unto it His commands. There are many translations and interpretations of this story held by biblical scholars. One interpretation, told to me by my rabbi a few months before my bar-mitzvah, claimed that the very letters and words of the Hebrew language were the fire of life itself, and that they shaped the world around us. The impact of this belief on Jewish culture is significant to be sure. It has at least three major influences on Jewish art. The first is the exclusive use of hand-written Hebrew to create Torah scrolls. The second is the art of Hebrew micrography, the manipulation of Hebrew words to draw pictures, without

using lines. The third is the formulaic use of Hebrew letters as a protective device in magic amulets.

The Torah, the hand-scribed scroll used in the practice of Jewish ceremony, is in itself a great work of calligraphic art. It must be painstakingly hand-written without error, and with such grace and dexterity, it takes years of training before a scribe is ready to produce his first Torah. If a word or even a single letter were to be written incorrectly, it is understood that this “would be the equivalent of destroying the world,” for the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are believed to be the building blocks of Creation (Ungerleider-Mayerson 1986: 26). Certainly, if God had commanded “let there be blight” instead of “let there be light” we would all be in a lot of trouble!

The actual literary content of the Torah has also shaped Jewish art. For example, the Second Commandment states (Ex. 20:4):

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. . .



Hebrew micrography is the art of using letters to draw without lines.

them, nor serve them” (Ex 20:5), it is widely assumed that the prohibition is only against creating images for the purpose of idolatry. But lasting uncertainty has inhibited art-

Because this statement is immediately followed by “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to



In Jewish mystical tradition the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are the fire of life itself.

Illustration courtesy of Rachel Adler Design
contact/Racheladlerdesign@gmail.com
blog/Racheladlerdesign.blogspot.com

imaging among Orthodox populations in both Judaism and Islam. An exception to this inhibition is found in micrography; the manipulation of written text to draw images without violating the Second Commandment. Use of the alphabet to draw is justified according to the notion that the Hebrew letters existed with God, before Creation, and are therefore so sacred they could not possibly be used to do any wrong; even if someone were to try, the attempt would simply fail. Such faith in the sanctity of the alphabet also finds expression in Hebrew magic amulets.

Magic in the ancient world was often wrought by curses, charms and spells. But Jewish variants of these incantations used only passages from the Torah or other religious texts, so the concept of evil or “black” magic was foreign to Jewish magic-making (Trachtenberg 1982: 22). Written amulets consisted of Hebrew sacred text, and codes to evoke the desired effect, often using permutations of the names of God, names of angels, and curious configurations with purposes that

remain unknown to this day (Trachtenberg 1982: 141).

Ancient amuletic tradition lives on in the modern mezuzah, a small, hollow cylinder with a little scroll inside that contains the *Sh'ma*, the universal declaration of Jewish faith. The mezuzah is placed on the doorframe of the home, and sometimes on doorframes within the home. Rabbis in the fourteenth century standardized its amuletic content because too many people were writing popular spells inside their mezuzahs, hoping to keep demons at bay. Since there was no prohibition concerning the back of the parchment, a magic permutation of the first three words of the *Sh'ma* was inscribed there, along with the word *Shaddai*. These inscriptions are still found on the back of modern mezuzah scrolls. The word *Shaddai* is loosely translated as “Almighty,” but it is actually an acronym for “*Shomer Daltot Yisrael*,” meaning “guardian of Israel’s doors” (Trachtenberg 1982: 148). The Hebrew letter *shin*, the first letter in the protective name *Shaddai*, looks like the English letter “W,” and is often seen through a window in the mezuzah case, or is displayed on the exterior of the case as part of its artistic decoration.



Shaddai is inscribed on the back of mezuzah scrolls; here, the calligrapher has adorned the letter *shin* with a tiny, graceful crown.

Belief in the sacred power of the Hebrew alphabet has

played a huge part in Jewish art history, as reflected in the great skill required of Torah scribes. The standards required of these scribes reinforced the sanctity of the alphabet, perhaps influencing its use in magic amulets, and in the development of Hebrew micrography. Together, these creative uses of the Hebrew alphabet reveal the great extent of its influence on Jewish art.

The Torah Precepts Scroll from the Dead Sea Scroll Collection, late first century BCE-early first century CE.



References Cited

Trachtenberg, Joshua. 1982. *Jewish Magic and Superstition*. New York: Atheneum.

Ungerleider-Mayerson, Joy. 1986. *Jewish Folk Art: From Biblical Days to Modern Times*. New York: Summit Books.

Courses of Interest for Fall 2009

JDST 101:

Introduction to Judaic Studies

Peter J. Haas (MWF 9:00 - 10:15)

An introduction to the academic study of Judaic religion and culture, this course does not presuppose any previous study of, or experience with, Judaism. The course takes an interdisciplinary approach to Judaic Studies, drawing on a variety of methods used in the Social Sciences and Humanities. Through the use of these methods, the students will examine the diverse issues and questions that are driving the current field of Judaic Studies and come to conclusions about the state of the question. There may be some "field" experience, like a visit to a synagogue or to a Jewish museum. *Required for the Minor in Judaic Studies.*

JDST 233:

Introduction to Jewish Folklore

Judith S. Neulander (T/R 10:00-11:15)

Jewish myth and magic, festival and foodways, folktales, art, music and more, will give us access to the spirit and mentality of the many different peoples who have carried these traditions from remote Middle Eastern antiquity to the present day in Israel and the U.S.A. We will follow Jewish folklore as it shapes, and is shaped by, the vast expanse of western history and civilization.

POSC 379/479:

The Middle East: Politics, Economics, and American Policy

Peter W. Moore (MWF 11:30 - 12:20)

This is an introductory course about Middle East Politics, in regional as well as international aspects. Though popular today for regrettable reasons, the Middle East is nevertheless one of the world's most fascinating and diverse regions. In this course we will explore broad social, economic, and political themes that have defined the region since the end of World War Two. Since this is an introductory course, a major goal will be to gain comparative knowledge about the region's states and peoples. The 22 countries that comprise the modern Middle East are quite diverse; therefore, we will only be able to focus on a few cases in depth. A second goal is to examine and use the tools and theories social scientists employ to answer broad questions related to the region, such as: How have colonial legacies shaped political and economic development in the Middle East? How do oil, religion, and ethnicity interact with politics? How have external powers affected the region's political development? What drives regional conflict? In short, this course will tackle the controversial issues and dilemmas of the region, but from an analytical vantage. We want to try to answer *why* questions about the region, not simply *what* and *how*.

A Sampling of Final Paper Titles

A sampling of titles for final research papers in *Jewish Traditional Art and Architecture JDST 220* reflects the diversity of interests in a typical JDST classroom:

- **Women of the Book: Jewish Women's Book Art**
Liz Carney
- **The Mezuzah in Naperville Illinois: Spiritual Meanings and Social Functions**
Zachary Rubin
- **Artistic and Photographic Images of the Holocaust**
Sabrina Herman
- **Wooden Synagogues: Lost Architectural Masterpieces of Eastern Europe**
Fred Chen
- **Judy Chicago: Influence of Jewish Identity on Her Art**
Byron Ling
- **Degenerate Art: The Destiny of Non-Aryan Art in Nazi Germany**
Alexandra Ash
- **Through the Prism of Politics: Marc Chagall's *Jerusalem Windows***
Joshua Goldberg
- **Agam: Rendering a Jewish Perspective of Reality**
Jacob Wagner
- **Judith and Holofernes: Their Evolution in Jewish Art**
Beth Bai

GOING OFF TO GRAD SCHOOL!

Congratulations to:

Josh Prager



Harvard Divinity School,
Cambridge, MA

Master of Theological Studies,
Religion, Ethics and Politics

Subscribe now

Click here if you would like to be added to the mailing list to receive free copies of the **JDST e-journal**. Please list your name in the body of the e-mail.
Thank you.

Editor: **Judith Neulander**
Co-Director, Judaic Studies Program
Department of Religious Studies
judith.neulander@case.edu
216/ 368-4156

Contributing Editor: **Peter J. Haas**
Abba Hillel Silver Professor of Jewish Studies
Chair, Department of Religious Studies
Director, Samuel Rosenthal Center for Judaic Studies
peter.haas@case.edu
216/ 368-2741

Design: **Taylor Hall**
Office of Interdisciplinary Programs and Centers
College of Arts and Sciences
taylor.hall@case.edu



Mather House, Home of the Judaic Studies Program

Contact Information

Judaic Studies Program
www.case.edu/artsci/jdst/
216.368.2741

Samuel Rosenthal Center for Judaic Studies
rosenthal.case.edu
216.368.2741