

Featured Faculty

William Claspy, interim director of [Special Collections and Archives at Kelvin Smith Library](#), comes to CWRU righty. His father was on the faculty of the School of Engineering, so his connection with the University goes back even before he was a student.



William Claspy
Special Collections, KSL

“I’m a double alumnus of CWRU, with a BA and MA in English,” Claspy says “and I’ve worked for the University’s libraries in various roles since 1988, most recently as a Research Services librarian for several Humanities departments. Through my work with these departments, I developed an interest and a sub-specialty in rare books, including items of Judaica. Given the amount of work I’ve done in Special Collections and Archives, I was asked to serve as interim head of the department while a search is conducted for the position.”



According to the Special Collections website, the Research Center was specifically designed to provide a protective and controlled environment for [Kelvin Smith Library](#) materials which require extraordinary care and handling, and do not circulate. The collection consists primarily of either printed books or original manuscripts and rare documents, as well as photographs, periodicals, and audio-visual recordings.

“Among our collections of note,” Claspy adds “is the [Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection](#), which contains topical reference books and encyclopedias, and is building upon history of the diaspora, Holocaust studies, folklore, mythology, art and

architecture. We also have the [Maurice Goldman](#) papers, which tell the story of a Cleveland composer and Western Reserve alum, who found success in Hollywood, but whose heart was always in Yiddish song and the development of national Israeli music. A very recent addition to our manuscript collections are the papers of [Sam Salem](#), which contain his first-person accounts of the Thessaloniki Jewish community’s migrations to Palestine and the United States. Our University Archives contain diverse materials and have been mined for topics like *The Jewish View at CWRU*, a history project that [Professor Gillian Weiss](#) and her students recently worked on.”

There are many criteria used to determine which of the [Kelvin Smith Libraries’](#) millions of items belong in Special Collections, including rarity, value, fragility, ephemeral nature, or because they are part of a distinctive subject or author collection. By acquiring, organizing, preserving and providing access to the collection through references services, finding aids, presentations and exhibits, the Special Collections Research Center is able to support the teaching and research of CWRU faculty and students, as well as the local, national and international community of scholars and researchers.

INSIDE

Featured Faculty	1
Student Essay	2-3
• Nandita Gupta	
On/Off Campus	4
• Campus ranked best for Jewish students	
• Study economics in Israel	
Post-It	4
• Michael J. Robinson	
Courses of Interest	5
Sampling of Paper Titles	6
• James E. Holiday	
• Jonathan Meckler	
• W. Harrison Smith	
• Yueer Su	
• Lina Wiley	
• Grace Piscura	
• Hazel Choi	
• Siddarth Ghanta	
• Sophia Cos	
JDST Information	7

Program in Judaic Studies

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COLLEGE OF
ARTS AND SCIENCES
CASE WESTERN RESERVE
UNIVERSITY

Riddle at the Royal Cemetery of Ur

Recognition for Outstanding Achievement

Nandita Gupta



Nandita Gupta

The ancient city of Ur was located in the desert of what is now modern day southern Iraq. Controversy exists on whether the city of Ur and the birthplace of the patriarch Abraham ("Ur of the Chaldees") are one and the same. But either way, the ancient city of Ur was a major center of such regional influence, it seems unlikely that anyone well-traveled, or living in the area, could be completely unaware of the human sacrifice practiced there. Notably, one cultural motif discovered at Ur in association with sacrificial victims, appears to find expression in the Hebrew Scripture, but in a narrative that negates the practice of human sacrifice. This suggests creative and strategic manipulation of a shared motif, to support an antithetical position.

The city of Ur became the subject of intense archeological interest in the early 20th century. From 1922 to 1934, the British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology worked in tandem to excavate the city's remains. Sir Leonard Woolley, an archaeological expert on the ancient Near East, was appointed to head the excavation (Irving and Ambers 2002: 206).

It was during Woolley's excavating effort that he unearthed evidence of human sacrifice among thousands buried in an ancient Sumerian cemetery, now referred to as the Royal Cemetery of Ur. The "royal" in the name refers to sixteen specific occupants of the cemetery recognized as royalty based on three identifying features: the characteristic vaulted tomb at

the bottom of a deep pit, expensive and abundant grave goods, and the presence of multiple burials in the deep pit (Bottéro and Finet 2001: 28). In comparison to small, shallow commoner graves, these graves were often 30 feet deep and contained objects crafted from gold, silver, and bronze (Stiebing 2009: 47). In addition to many riches, these individuals were also buried with numerous attendants, either self-sacrificed by suicide, or sacrificed by murder.

There are theories that link the practice of human sacrifice to worship of the moon god believed to reside at Ur (Bottéro and Finet 2001:40). Evidence of sacrificial practice is drawn from a prayer written by Enheduanna, daughter of King Sargon, a royal most likely appointed to the role of priestess at Ur. In her prayer she writes of people willing to die when they hear a song of mourning addressed to the goddess Innana (Bottéro and Finet 2001: 40). Although the prayer was actually written for the goddess, and not for Ur's moon god, it is because of Enheduanna's role as a priestess at Ur that some scholars link her prayer to sacrificial practices there.



Sumerian Goat in Thicket
c. 2600 BCE
British Museum, London

Whatever may account for human sacrifice at Ur, the ability of a religion to exist as a distinct entity will depend on its ability to marshal an impressive array of its own rituals and narratives (Peterson Royce 1982: 7). If opposed to human sacrifice, a new religion would typically

eliminate, or modify and repurpose rituals and narratives associated with existing sacrificial practices. In this connection, Woolley recovered two statues of a “goat in a thicket” among the royals and the sacrificial victims at Ur. The Sumerian tradition long predates the Hebrew “ram in a thicket,” although we are unaware of the accompanying Sumerian ritual or narrative. Modifying and repurposing the Sumerian goat is one way to understand how the Hebrew narrative differentiated from its Sumerian counterpart, stating that when Abraham was tested, and took his son to be sacrificed, God sent an angel to stop him and a ram in a thicket was sacrificed, instead (Gen. 22: 9-14). The narrative, included in the biblical canon, is widely interpreted to mean that human sacrifice is unacceptable to the Hebrew God, as opposed to deities like the moon god at Ur.

Unfortunately, neither cross-cultural comparison nor interpretation of available texts from Ur, provide conclusive explanations for the sacrificial practices at the Royal Cemetery, or for the presence of the “goat in a thicket” among the royals and the sacrificed attendants in the deep pit. But like their Hebrew neighbors, the Sumerians surely had their reasons, and perhaps the evidence is still waiting undisturbed somewhere in the remains of Ur. Whatever the true explanation is revealed to be, if it is ever revealed at all, it will add to our growing knowledge of the many ways that different faiths, throughout time, have grappled with distinguishing themselves in our shared human fate of death.

References Cited

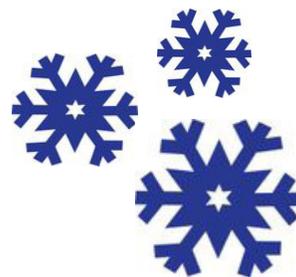
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Happy Winter Break



From the JDST eJournal!

On/Off Campus

CASE NAMED BEST OHIO CAMPUS FOR JEWISH STUDENTS

The Forward, a New York based Jewish newspaper, has published its current College Guide. The list was limited to schools ranked in the top 100 by *US News & World Report*. It included in its survey options for Jewish Studies degrees, and campus Hillel organizations. The highest ranking campus in Ohio was [CWRU](#).

Investigate CWRU's Judaic Studies website: <http://artsci.case.edu/judaic-studies/>

Investigate CWRU's Hillel website: <https://www.clevelandhillel.org/>



STUDY IN ISRAEL IN MID - MAY!

The Economics Department has added two Study Abroad courses in Israel, for Spring 2018! Courses are 1-week each (back-to-back) in mid-May. Both courses count toward the economics minor or major. For more information contact Professors Dan Shoag (dxs788), Scott Shane (sad46) or Jenny Hawkins (jhr175).

Post It!

Hi,

I've spent the last two summers volunteering with an organization called TALMA, which brings foreign teachers into Israel to teach English to the most poor and disadvantaged students. It was a great cultural experience.

I'm now a first year student in the Organizational Behavior Ph.D. Program over at Weatherhead, and I've recently published as first author on a paper called "Bringing Transgender Issues into Management Education: A Call to Action" in the *Academy of Management Learning and Educational Journal*. Good to be back!

Cheers,

Michael James Robinson, M.A., C.D.P.



Michael J. Robinson

LET'S HEAR FROM YOU!

postit@case.edu

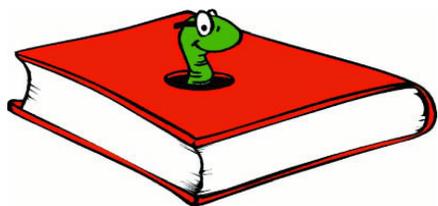


Courses of Interest for Spring 2018



JDST 101
Jews and Judaism
Jay Geller

This course provides an introduction to Jewish religion, culture, history, and life. It does not presuppose any previous study of Judaism or experience with Judaism, and it prepares students for additional coursework in Judaic studies, Jewish history, or religious studies with an emphasis on Judaism. Required for the minor in Judaic Studies.



JDST 268
Women in the Bible: Ethnographic Approaches to Rite and Ritual, Story, Song, and Art
Judith Neulander

Examination of women in Jewish and Christian Biblical texts, along with their Jewish, Christian (and occasionally Muslim) interpretations. Discussion of how these traditions have shaped images of, and attitudes toward, women in western civilization.

JDST 233
Introduction to Jewish Folklore
Judith Neulander

Exploration of a variety of genres, research methods, and interpretations of Jewish folklore, from antiquity to the present. Emphasis on how Jewish folk traditions give access to the spirit and mentality of diverse Jewish communities over time and across space, illuminating the past, explaining the present and informing directions for the future.

For courses in Hebrew and Arabic visit the Modern Languages and Literatures website:
<http://www.case.edu/artsci/dmll/>

Sampling of Final Paper Titles

A review of Student Paper Titles published over the past five years in the
JDST eJournal

A sampling of diverse interests among students in the
-Judaic Studies Program-

Maimonides and Aristotelian Rationality: Influence on Rabbinic Judaism
James E. Holiday (Spring 2013)

The Three Stooges Take on Hitler: Comedic Film as Effective Social Criticism
Jonathan Meckler (Fall 2013)

Prophetic Dreams in Torah, Tales and Popular Culture
W. Harrison Smith (Spring 2014)

Tchotchkes: Communicating Jewish Culture
Yueer Su (Fall 2014)

Women at the Well: The Bible, the Grimms and Disney
Lina Wiley (Spring 2015)

From Victim to Victor: Cinematic Evolution of the Holocaust Jew
Grace Piscura (Fall 2015)

More than Just a Housewife: The Jewish Variant of AT 510 (Cinderella)
Siddarth Ghanta (Spring 2016)

Wooden Synagogues of Poland: A Study of Cultural Adaptation
Hazel Choi (Fall 2016)

Borat: A Twenty-First Century Trickster through a Jewish Lens
Sophia Cos (Spring 2017)

The Program in Judaic Studies

By bringing a variety of fields and disciplines to bear on its subject, the Judaic Studies Program at Case Western Reserve University conveys to students the complex interaction of forces that create Jewish ethnic identity. Students completing the program will have a broad knowledge of the field along with the tools necessary for continued academic study of Jewish civilization in all its manifestations.



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Support the Program in Judaic Studies

Please consider supporting the Program in Judaic Studies as we continue building on our achievements. You can contribute to our success by making a gift to the College of Arts and Sciences. Your gift allows us to continue to offer opportunities for our students to excel academically and to conduct important research. You can give online at:

giving.case.edu



The **CWRU Klezmer Music Ensemble** (Steven Greenman, director), consisting of CWRU and CIM students, performed traditional East European Jewish instrumental and vocal folk music at a concert open to the public, in Dec., 2017.