Featured Faculty

Prior to joining Case Western Reserve University this past summer, I held research positions and taught at a number of universities including University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Boston University, Harvard University and University of Michigan. Along the way, I also found myself drawn to planning and administering learning programs in the Jewish community.

Here at CWRU my work in the community and my work in academia are no longer disjointed endeavors. I serve as Director of the Jewish Studies division of the Laura and Alvin Siegal Lifelong Learning Program, where I teach and organize a very lively host of lectures, courses, public conversations, seminars and film-screenings for the greater Cleveland Jewish community. I love to hear from individuals who come to class with their own areas of expertise. These students—lawyers, social workers, translators and others from many walks of life—help me to think about my own materials in new ways.

“What exotic Jewish customs did you see on your travels?” This is what students and friends asked most often when I returned from my first trip to Central Asia (where I did research for my doctorate in cultural anthropology). I had seen enough to regale them with tales of intrigue. But, I was interested in talking about something else.

What struck me much more than the differences I encountered while I was in Uzbekistan, was the fact that the Jews I met there welcomed me into their homes and institutions as though I was a niece or cousin.

Now that’s remarkable! I am a fourth generation Ashkenazi American. My own Eastern European family history shares little with that of Central Asia’s Bukharian Jews. What, then, might account for the powerful sense of connection between us?

This is a Jewish question. But it is a much broader one too. It is a question about the way in which people are able to maintain a sense of community that is disembedded from local space. Today it’s easy for far-away people to stay connected. But how (and why) did they do so in prior generations, when travel was expensive and risky and communication was slow?

This broad question—about the maintenance of communal ties in the face of dispersion—informs my recently published book Bukharan Jews and the Dynamics of Global Judaism (Indiana University Press) and much of my academic work.

The Alvin and Laura Siegal Lifelong Learning Program is a rewarding way to stay connected in Cleveland’s Jewish community. I welcome you to have a look at our website, and to take part in our events! http://www.case.edu/lifelonglearning

Alanna E. Cooper
Director, Jewish Studies
Siegal Lifelong Learning Program

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• Rebecca Frankel
• Bradley Lander
• Jonathan Meckler
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JDST Information

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Program in Judaic Studies
Case Western Reserve University
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Cleveland, OH 44106-7112
Office: Clark Hall, 208
Phone: (216) 368-8961
Web: case.edu/artsci/jdst
Student Awards and Honors

The Ira and Ruth Bressler Prize
To a student who has done outstanding work in the area of Jewish Studies.

Jonathan Meckler
Hometown: Pepper Pike, OH
Academic Interests: Economics and History
Extracurricular Activities: Member of the National Society of Collegiate Scholars, Hillel Jewish Student Group, and CWRU College Trivia Club.

Arielle Clayman
Hometown: Youngstown, OH
Academic Interests: Israel Advocacy, Public Health, Medical Ethics, Hebrew Language, Jewish History and Philosophy
Extracurricular Activities: I am actively involved in the Jewish Community Health Initiative (jewhealth.org) and Chabad. Additionally, I volunteer at the Cleveland Clinic.

David Pasternak
Hometown: Livingston, NJ
Academic Interests: Marketing, Accounting, and Dance
Extracurricular Activities: Hillel, Co-President of Banoti, Fellow at the Center for Civic Engagement and Learning, Footlighters, Mather Dance Collective, WRUW, Kappa Alpha Theta, and Alpha Kappa Psi

Sarah Resnick
Hometown: Solon, OH
Academic Interests: Medicine, health literacy, health care technology
Extracurricular Activities: Tennis, basketball, spending time with friends and family

The Eudese and Elmer Paull Prizes
To one or several undergraduate or graduate students who demonstrate an interest in Jewish Studies or Jewish contemporary life.

Madison Dore
Hometown: Chicago, IL
Academic Interests: Art History, Archaeology, and Judaic Studies
Extracurricular Activities: Shabbat Chair, Hillel Undergraduate Leadership Council, Treasurer, Anthropology Student Association/ Lambda Alpha Co Chair, Banoti Women’s Grp., Cleveland Hillel, Art and Art History Club, Alpha Phi Fraternity, Zeta Pi

Bradley Lander
Hometown: Los Angeles, CA
Academic Interests: Engineering, Business (Finance)
Extracurricular Activities: Jewish involvement, water polo, community service

Rebecca Frankel
Hometown: Solon, OH
Academic Interests: Pediatric medicine
Extracurricular Activities: Volunteering with Hands On Northeast Ohio, co-leader of the Pediatrics Interest Group and the Jewish Medical Student Association

Sarah Resnick
Hometown: Solon, OH
Academic Interests: Pediatric medicine
Extracurricular Activities: Volunteering with Hands On Northeast Ohio, co-leader of the Pediatrics Interest Group and the Jewish Medical Student Association
From Synagogue to Carousel: 
The Art of Holding Jewish Cultural Boundaries

Recognition for Outstanding Achievement 
Amy Wang

To be Jewish can be difficult to explain in terms of religion, ethnicity, and nationality as many Jews do not consider themselves to be religious, or to share common ancestry or history. But ethnographic study can help us understand how Jewish identity is generated, modified and maintained. As anthropologist Anya Peterson Royce states: “no group can maintain a believable (viable) identity without signs, symbols, and underlying values that point to a distinctive identity” (1982: 7). My focus will be on how Jewish communities generate, modify and maintain such symbols to create a viable, distinct identity. We will look first at premodern Poland, once home to the largest Jewish community in the European diaspora, and we will follow regional synagogue carvers to America. Because artists like synagogue carvers are designated tradition-bearers, an ethnographic approach to their American carousel carving is likely to yield more accurate ethnic information than an art historical approach.

According to her book title, Peterson Royce demonstrates that maintaining an ethnic identity requires “strategies of diversity” (1982). For Jews who settled in Poland, such strategies ranged from synagogue design, to foodways and language (Roskies: 1979). In vernacular speech, for example, the Yiddish word \textit{lehavdl} (to differentiate) became a habitual means of separating that which was Jewish from that which was not, e.g., “The rabbi and \textit{lehavdl} the governor took part in the ceremony” (Roskies 1979: 34). Hebrew, a consecrating tongue, was used in turn as a consecrating tongue to “Hebraize” the pronunciation of Polish place-names, “rendering places of Jewish habitation ‘kosher’ and eliminating any need for \textit{lehavdl} as a prefix to the names of the ‘holy communities’ thus created” (Neulander: n.d). In this way Polish Jews made the land fit for Jewish settlement, and retained their identity by creating a linguistic cultural boundary between themselves and their non-Jewish neighbors.

Polish Jews inevitably came in contact with people of other faiths and ethnicities. This type of interaction creates opportunities for cultural exchange. Such exchange occurs wherever there is close culture contact, but only as long as the borrower is able to adapt, or modify, the borrowed tradition to reinforce his own cultural boundaries—just as Polish Jews adopted, but also adapted, local Polish place-names.

In some cases, strategies of diversity were used to set Jewish communities apart from each other. By the mid 1700’s, Hasidism (a mystical religious movement) swept across most of Poland with the major exception of Lithuania, dividing the Hasidim from the Mitnagdim, their staunch Lithuanian opponents. The two communities developed distinct ways of preparing traditional foods like gefilte fish (chopped and rolled into a ball), and farfél (a noodle boiled in broth), along with distinct dialects. As Roskies states “Jews who prepared spicy fish and chopped farfel spoke a different dialect of Yiddish from those who ate sweet fish and cut their farfel” (1979: 39). Lines of cultural distinction, drawn along ideological borders, suggest some degree of strategic differentiation. But like jazz variations, which always contain the bounded structure of a core melody, distinct Yiddish dialects always remained recognizably Yiddish, and traditional foodways, no matter how distinctly prepared, always remained recognizably Jewish.

Religious symbols, above all, are held by all ethnic communities as treasured family heirlooms, handed down from generation to generation, and never entered into the mainstream; such a breach of cultural boundaries would cause the community to lose its self-definition—its very existence as a discernable cultural entity. In Jewish context, a cautionary tale from Poland notes that if a designated tradition-bearer were to do such a thing, it would be tantamount to blasphemy. In the tale, a master craftsman carves into a Torah ark a specific animal cluster unique to Jewish iconography: the leopard, eagle, deer and lion found in a tractate of the Mishnah (\textit{Pirke Avot} 5:23):

\begin{quote}
Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion, to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven.
\end{quote}

But five months later, on Shavuot, the anniversary of the day the Torah was given, the carver’s name was struck from the ark by a bolt of lightning. The baffled congregation soon learned why (Roskies 1979: 180):

\begin{quote}
The same engraver had made similar carvings in a Catholic church. This was seen as blasphemy. The heavens decided to strike out his name in punishment.
\end{quote}

If immigrant carvers transferred sacred Jewish art motifs to the American carousel, as asserted in a recent art historical study Zimilies 2007: xvi), it would be a clear violation of the values...
that underlie Jewish tradition-bearing, and not surprisingly, the assertion does not hold up under ethnographic scrutiny.

An eagle, for example, is simply a bird, an ethnically neutral image that can only gain ethnic specificity by the context in which an artist chooses to place it: as an American icon surrounded by stars and stripes on a carousel; to signify a monarchy on a royal coat of arms, or carved in a synagogue to symbolize the Diety. Of all animal symbols, the one most publicized as a sacred Jewish art motif, transferred to the carousel, is a roaring lion with a “swishing” or s-shaped tail (Zimilies 2007: xvi). But this pattern belongs to the realm of secular, traditional art. It is a classic heraldic pattern—a French tradition of “signature emblems” that emerged in the twelfth century to identify knights in jousting competitions. The attractive, ethnically neutral patterns of French heraldry were quickly borrowed into pan-European iconography (Von Volborth 1991). In heraldic tradition, the lion’s s-shaped tail is patterned to very specific poses: the s-shape is the heraldic tradition for a roaring lion rearing up on two feet, or with four feet on the ground.

We know of only one patterned heraldic lion carved for a carousel by a Jewish carver, Marcus Charles Illions, c. 1910. Illions’s lion with a “swishing” s-shaped tail was either taken from the traditional heraldic template for a lion on four feet, or was a direct copy of the same heraldic lion carved several years earlier—in 1903—by Italian Catholic carousel carver, Salvatore Cernigliaro (Manns 1990: 135; 40-41). As with eagle imagery, it is only in specifically Jewish context that heraldic lions can symbolize “lions of Judah”; the exact same lions on the State Chair of the Prince of Wales will perfectly symbolize the British monarchy. Clearly, a classic heraldic lion placed on an American carousel, void of a single Jewish symbol, is not a sacred Jewish art motif; but only a secular, pan-European art motif used by all European-trained artists, like the Catholic carver, Salvatore Cernigliaro—and later—the Jewish carver, Marcus Charles Illions.

The only way to identify an artist’s wish to make a distinctly Jewish statement, outside of Jewish context, is if the symbol he uses is “private Jewish property.” Such symbols do exist in synagogue carving, but these exclude eagles, the Decalogue, the six-pointed star, royal crowns, heraldic lions, seven-branched candelabra, or even Hebrew calligraphy, all of which are frequently found in Christian and other non-Jewish contexts. As seen in the synagogue art of Jewish carousel carvers, uniquely Jewish symbols include animal clusters from uniquely Jewish liturgical and literary traditions (as noted in the cautionary tale above), the shofar (or ram’s horn), Torah scrolls, and hands splayed in the sign of the Priestly Benediction.

Symbols like royal crowns, etc., can only be seen as distinctly Jewish in distinctly Jewish context, as when they appear in a synagogue, or in combination with symbols recognized as Jewish private property. It is therefore significant that throughout the history of American-Jewish carousel carving, not one Jewish carver transferred even one uniquely Jewish art motif onto even one carousel. This confirms that whatever their religious commitment (or lack thereof), no Jewish carvers ever betrayed the trust placed in them as designated tradition-bearers.

Rather, by restricting uniquely Jewish symbols to the synagogue, Jewish carvers for American carousels helped fortify the community’s cultural boundaries against whatever culture shocks America had in store for it.

The Jewish people, for all their different religious, ethnic, national, and cultural characteristics, form a community that depends on self-defining symbols and traditions that have sustained Jewish cultural boundaries throughout time and across the globe. Because symbols and traditions are easily blurred and lost among the many cultural pressures brought by displacement and relocation, tradition-bearers in America clearly remained vigilant, holding fast to Jewish signs, symbols and underlying values—the precious heirlooms of Jewish identity—just as they had in the European past.
References Cited


Illustration: Cernigliaro lion courtesy of William Manns.

POST IT!

As you may recall, since I retired from Case, I’ve moved to New Mexico. I recently read Jonathan Meckler’s piece “The Three Stooges Take On Hitler” (Dec. 2013). I never got to see much of the Stooges. By the time we got TV I was older, and before that, Saturday morning extravaganzas at the movie theater were off limits for my observant family. I really enjoyed Jonathan’s essay.

LET’S HEAR FROM YOU! postit@case.edu

Have a Great Summer!
C o u r s e s  o f  I n t e r e s t  
 f o r  F a l l  2 0 1 4

JDST 201
INTRODUCTION TO JUDAIC STUDIES
MW 12:30-1:45
Jay Geller

An Introduction to Jewish religion, culture, history and life, this course requires no previous study of, or experience with Judaism. 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 will be some “field” experience including a visit to a synagogue and a Jewish Museum. The course is required for the minor in Judaic Studies, but may be taken on its own.

JDST/ ARTH 220
JEWSIH TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURE
TR 10:00-11:15
Judith Neulander

The course traces tradition and transformation in Jewish artistic expression over time and across space. The semester will carry us through the Israelite phase beginning with Solomon’s Temple, to the present day in Israel and America, over the course of which 29 centuries terms like “Jewish,” and even “art,” will undergo remarkable change! There will be a fieldtrip to a Jewish Museum.

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 sampling of titles for final research papers in Introduction to Jewish Folklore JDST 233 reflects the diversity of interests in a typical JDST classroom.

Prophetic Dreams in Torah, Tales and Popular Culture
Wm. Harrison Smith

Breaking the Glass at a Wedding: Modern Beliefs on the Meaning of the Ritual
Ameera Khalid

Jewish Symbols as Cultural Boundary-Markers
Kevin Wexler

The Blood Libel from the 12th to the 21st Century
Shana Kalatardi

A Mutant, a Mouse, and an Artist: How Holocaust Memory Shaped Comic Books
Hannah Steele

You Are What You Eat: Food as an Expression of Jewish Identity
Nicole Kochman

Water in the Biblical Betrothal Type-Scene: A Symbol of Life and Regeneration
Jonathan Lee

The Golem and Post-Holocaust Literature
Nityasri Gopinath

It’s a Bird, It’s a Plane, It’s Supermentsh!: The Jewish Roots of an American Superhero
Jonathan Meckler
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

Mara Cohen Ioannides, President of the Midwest Jewish Studies Association spoke to students on “Folk Traditions for Passover and Seder” in April, 2014.