

## Featured Faculty

In January 2011, **Professor Jay Geller** will join the **Program in Judaic Studies** and the **Department of History** as the **Samuel Rosenthal Professor of Judaic Studies**. An expert on the Jews of central Europe, Geller comes to **CWRU** from the **University of Tulsa**, where he has taught for eight years.

Geller's interest in Jewish history developed at an early age, hearing stories of his ancestors' immigration to 19th-century Texas, where they established a dynasty of frontier rabbis. From the American Southwest, he followed the family history back to Europe, visiting villages in Galicia and the Jewish district of Vienna. Later his scholarly interests spread to Berlin and Jerusalem, and he has lived in both cities. He has explored the Jewish heritage of Germany, where Jews played a central role in the urbanization of society, and the Jewish heritage of Israel, where Zionists tried to build a modern, Europeanized homeland amidst the Arab culture of the Levant.

As an undergraduate at **Princeton University**, Geller focused on the history of modern Germany and Eastern Europe. He continued with this subject in graduate school at **Yale University**, where he wrote a dissertation on West German politics and Jewish organizations in the late 1940s and 1950s. This thesis grew into his first book, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany*, published by Cambridge University Press. In it, Geller explores the reestablishment of organized Jewish life in Germany after 1945 and the relationship that national Jewish institutions had with political leaders in East and West Germany. During his research, he was surprised to discover that Jewish groups in the United States and Israel ostracized the Jewish community in Germany, forcing German Jews to seek help from non-Jewish



*Professor Jay Geller*

Germans. In West Germany, politicians supported the Jews as a way to prove their own democratic credentials, while East German communist leaders persecuted Jewish organizations and their leaders.

Geller's current project is a study of the experience of ordinary German Jews over the course of two centuries, seen through the lives of a single family: the Scholems. Beginning with Scholem ben Elias and his wife Zipporah through the lives of their great-great-grandsons, the famous scholar Gershom Scholem and the Communist revolutionary Werner Scholem, Geller traces the German Jews' path of assimilation and social mobility that came to an end during the Holocaust. German Jews, including the Scholems, became refugees in foreign lands or prisoners in camps inside their own country. With Scholem family members scattered around the world, Geller's research traverses Israel, Germany, Australia, Britain, and the United States.

At CWRU, Geller looks forward to teaching a wide variety of courses on Jewish history, politics, and society. His course in Spring Semester will be **The Holocaust (HSTY/RLGN 254, T/R 1:15-2:30)**.

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# Miriam's Cup: Transforming Tradition

By Laura Boylan

Inherent in the word "tradition" is a sense of timelessness and immutability. Tradition enables us to connect with our ancestors and honor our Gods through the performance of prescribed rituals. It provides us a sense of constancy and stability in uncertain times. Yet, tradition must adapt to changing times to maintain its relevance and survive. As a society's beliefs and values shift, so too must the rituals that represent the core tenets of its identity. In fact, one could argue that the most stable aspect of any tradition is its ability to change (Neulander). Modern Jewish feminists have leveraged tradition's capacity to evolve by integrating symbols of female empowerment into traditional ritual (Adelman 152). For many Jews, the traditional Passover seder now includes a Miriam's Cup to represent the importance of Miriam's contributions to the Exodus.

Miriam's Cup, which accompanies Elijah's Cup in an increasing number of households, was first initiated in 1989. A women's Rosh Hodesh group had been meeting in Boston to explore their spirituality and find inspiration from Judaism's historical heroines (Adelman 153). The group had a discussion about the legend of Miriam's Well, which sustained the Israelites as they travelled through the desert.

Inspired by her meditation on Miriam, one of the members decided to include Miriam's story in her family's Shabbat (Cohen). She set out a glass with water in it to represent Miriam's vital role in Exodus. This innovation quickly assimilated to the Passover table, and spread to the Jewish community at large. One of the women felt that "it was as if Kos Miriam [Miriam's cup] already existed and was just waiting to be discovered" (Cohen). The successful proliferation of Miriam's Cup indicates a wider yearning for women's recognition in modern times.

To understand the significance of Miriam's Cup, one must explore what Miriam symbolizes for modern day women. In the Bible, Miriam is noted for her diligence, courage, and redemptive attributes (Adelman 157). It was Miriam who prophesized that her younger brother Moses would free the Israelites from slavery. It was she who ensured that Moses was protected by Pharaoh's daughter, and nurtured by his own mother. It was Miriam who led the community in rejoicing when they crossed the Red Sea, and during 40 years of wandering in the desert, it was Miriam who summoned a redemptive well of spring

water wherever they wandered. Miriam's role seems so crucial in Exodus that her exclusion from the seder is rather jarring.

The growing ubiquity of Miriam's Cup underscores Jewish hunger for a resonant feminist symbol. It reaffirms the values and beliefs of many modern families who seek to avow the importance of Jewish women (Adelman 160). By including a simple cup of water to represent Miriam's Well, families symbolically exalt the virtues of all women who, like Miriam, provide protection, redemption, and nurturing care. In a 2003 New York Times article, Debra Nussbaum Cohen notes that Miriam's Cups "have been growing in popularity since they were introduced about a decade ago. Today they are a popular hostess

gift brought by seder guests as well as a staple of feminist Passover tables, and are sold in just about every Judaica store and catalog." Rather than an extremist feminist movement, Miriam's Cup has gained acceptance in many moderate Jewish households. However, innovations are not readily absorbed into tradition by all.

For many, the "immutability" of tradition must be preserved; Miriam's Cup is considered an unnecessary and even impertinent addition to the sacred Passover seder. Rabbi Avi Sharfan of the Orthodox group Agudath Israel of America explains, "We would regard the inclusion of a new ritual or ritual object to be superfluous and of questionable propriety" (Nussbaum Cohen). Indeed, change of any sort is unsettling to traditionalists. If one is raised to believe that a ritual has been conducted the same way for all time and is unaware of the

incremental adaptations that have likely occurred, initiating a new way of doing things may indeed feel blasphemous. Rabbi Avi Sharfan summarizes, "We perceive the Jewish religious tradition, its practices and mitzvah objects to be holy and not in need of improvement or updating" (Nussbaum Cohen). The balance of adopters and stalwarts will determine the long-term inclusion of any adaptation.



Laura Boylan



*Miriam's Cup and Elijah's Cup are increasingly sold together.*

Other examples of Jewish ritual change help illustrate the historical reinvention of tradition. Recent examples of “new tradition” include Esther and Vashti flags for Purim and placing an orange on the seder plate to represent LGBT inclusion (Nussbaum Cohen). Nussbaum Cohen points out that recent innovations have roots “in the ‘do it yourself Judaism’ first articulated by the egalitarian Havurah movement born in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s.” However, it is remiss to say that the Havurah movement was the sole initiate of ritual change. A simple yet emblematic example is the invention of prayer in place of sacrifice during the Jewish exile to Babylonia. The following story from Nussbaum Cohen’s article on Passover exemplifies that malleable nature of tradition:

Traditionalists perceive Jewish religious tradition, its practices and mitzvah objects, to be holy and not in need of improvement or updating.

Miriam’s cup reaffirms the values and beliefs of many modern families who seek to avow the importance of women in Jewish religious tradition, practices and mitzvah objects.

*“A few years ago I had to pause and remember to put a [Miriam’s] cup on the table, though it is almost automatic now,” [Professor Lefkowitz] says. “My kids would think something was missing if it wasn’t there for the Passover Seder,” she says, adding “It takes only one generation for things to feel authentic. Because what feels authentic is what we grow up with.”*

Miriam’s Cup has filled a gap in the Passover seder for many Jewish families yearning for a symbol to represent their values. The permanency of these values and the willingness of Jews to invent “new tradition” will determine the future of Miriam’s Cup. Tradition must serve both as a source of stability and an expression of identity. The evolution of tradition is determined by the balance of these forces.



Miriam by Mark Chagal

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- Neulander, Judith. Class lecture, CWRU. Fall 2010.
- Nussbaum Cohen, Debra. “Religion Journal: Recasting Jewish Rituals with Modern Additions.” *The New York Times* 12 Apr. 2003: 10.

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## Study Abroad Program in Jerusalem



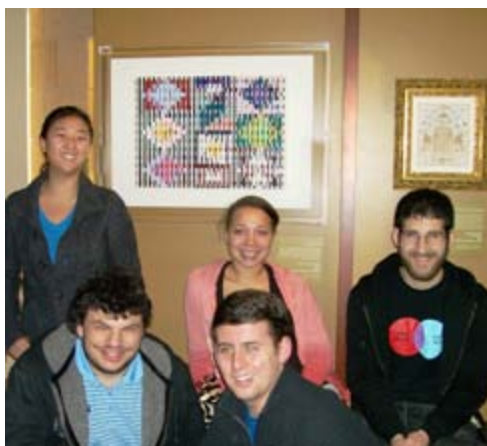
The College of Arts and Sciences at CWRU, in partnership with **Hebrew University** and with start-up funding from **Masa Israel**, will be offering a study-abroad program in Jerusalem, Israel beginning in the 2011-2012 academic year. Students from a wide array of majors and from all religious backgrounds are encouraged to apply. Most programs will be semester-long, but year-long opportunities are also possible. Internship opportunities will be available. If you have any questions, please contact **Associate Dean Jill Korbin, College of Arts and Sciences** ([jill.korbin@case.edu](mailto:jill.korbin@case.edu), 216-368-4413).

## MJSA Conference at CWRU

The **22nd Annual Midwest Jewish Studies Association Conference** was held at Case Western Reserve University in October 2010. *JDST 220* students were guests at the conference, and at the accompanying **Polish Wooden Synagogue Exhibition**.

Portions of **The Wooden Synagogue Exhibition** are now on public display in the **Cleveland Hillel** sanctuary at CWRU.

Photo (L to R): **Teddi Jacobson** and **Lindsey Rubino**.



## Maltz Museum Field Trip

Framing a work by Yaacov Agam at **The Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage**:

Back row (L to R) **Hanna Kim, Brittany Adams, Noah Swartz**.

Front (L to R): **Steven Oppenheim and Daniel Kaufman**.

# Post It



Just wanted to write you about my trip to Greece this past July.

Driving through the mountains I saw old stone churches, and homes for monks and nuns carved into the cliffs. One could see plainly how Christianity came into the beautiful lands of ancient Greece, and set its views over the ones already established.

Many churches and monasteries were built on top of mountains or cliffs, and when I asked why, I was told "So they are closer to God!"

It was as though everything we learned in class kept falling into place!

Thanks for making this trip so memorable,

*David Freno*

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LET'S HEAR FROM YOU! [postit@case.edu](mailto:postit@case.edu)



# Courses of Interest for Spring 2011

## **RLGN 233**

### **INTRO TO JEWISH FOLKLORE**

(also offered as JDST/ANTH 233)

Judith S. Neulander

Folklore is the world's most powerful vehicle of cultural expression, vital to the continuity of group identity. Tradition and transformation in 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 modern times in Israel and the USA.

## **RLGN 254**

### **THE HOLOCAUST**

(also offered as HSTY 254)

Jay Geller

The Holocaust is one of the major events defining the 20th century. Combining racial ideology, scientific technology, and modern industrial organization, the Nazis created a modern definition of genocide as they and their allies targeted Jews, along with certain other groups, for extermination. The course provides an overview of the historical, political and social contexts out of which the Holocaust grew. The main emphasis of the course will be on the Holocaust itself in all of its forms across Europe. The course concludes with a consideration of post-Holocaust issues such as the life of survivors and commemoration of the Holocaust.

## **RLGN 283**

### **MUHAMMAD--THE MAN AND THE PROPHET**

Ramez Islambouli

In its own time, the life of the Prophet Muhammad (c.570-632 CE) was as crucial to the unfolding Islamic ideal as it is today. Beginning with Muhammad's lifetime, Muslims have had to strive to understand the meaning of his life and apply it to their own. We have a long history of Islamophobia in Western culture, where due to religious rivalries, a distorted version of Muhammad's life has become one of the received ideas of the West. Muhammad strove for peace in war-torn Arabia, campaigned against greed, injustice and arrogance, and devoted himself to enlightened spiritual guidance. We entered another era of history on 9/11/2001, and we must strive with the same intensity to develop an accurate perspective on Muhammad and his message.



## **RLGN 350/450**

### **JEWISH ETHICS**

(also offered as JDST 350)

Peter J. Haas

The course focuses on conceptualizations of good, evil and the moral life as these have taken shape within the Jewish tradition from Antiquity to Modern times. The course will proceed through three stages. The first part of the course introduces classical Rabbinic Judaism and the major religious, legal and moral texts it has produced. The second part of the course is devoted to examining the content of Jewish ethics, looking specifically at issues of life and death such as birth control, abortion, euthanasia, suicide and capital punishment. The third segment will examine the variety of modern Judaisms and how each has reframed the nature of Jewish ethics in light of modern biomedical discoveries.

## **RLGN 313**

### **TOPICS IN BIBLICAL LITERATURE: LEGENDS OF GENESIS**

Timothy K. Beal

The Book of Genesis—Bere'shit in Hebrew—is both familiar and strange. On the one hand, its characters and their stories are well known: Eve and Adam, Cain and Abel, the Flood, Babel, Sarah and Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael, the binding of Isaac, Jacob's ladder, the coat of many colors, and so on. And its themes of certainty, love, lust, faith, murder, betrayal, fear and hope continue to resonate today. On the other hand, these stories also live in our world as strangers in a strange land: odd and often disturbing narratives and characters, including the biblical deity, that sit uneasy in contemporary culture. In our close reading and study of Genesis, we will plumb both literary and theological dimensions of these legends. We will also examine several works of contemporary art and philosophy that engage them, from Haydn's "Creation" oratorio to R. Crumb's comic book, *The Book of Genesis Illustrated*.

See the [Modern Languages and Literatures](#) website for courses in Hebrew and Arabic.

# Sampling of Final Paper Titles

A sampling of titles for final research papers in *Women in the Bible* RLG 268 reflects the diversity of interests in a typical JDST classroom.

*Rebekah: An Iron Will in the Bronze Age*  
**Becky Glass**

*Generative and Regenerative Waters: The Eternal Feminine in Biblical Symbolism*  
**Jack Rooney**

*The Women Behind Moses' Success*  
**Von Rease**

*The Matriarchal Presence in Patriarchal Religions*  
**Allison Colgrave**

*"Give Me Children or I Shall Die": Barren Women in the Bible*  
**Niccole DeMartini**

*The Blessed Virgin: Representations of Mary in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*  
**Abi Pink**

*Jezebel: Queen of Israel, Priestess of Ba'al*  
**Amanda Robinson**

*Junia/Junias: A Problem of Gender and Vocation in the Early Christian Church*  
**Nadra Williams**

*Hearts of Gold: Paths to Redemption for Biblical Harlots*  
**Katie Paul**



# Happy Holidays from the JDST eJournal!



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## 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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