

## Featured Faculty

When I came out to Ohio twelve and a half years ago as visiting faculty at **Oberlin**, I did not expect to stay in the Buckeye State more than 10 months. And having completed my doctorate in European History and Jewish Studies at **NYU** I would have laughed at anyone who suggested I had a future administering a university's lifelong learning program, spending more time dealing with budgets and marketing than I would with research and teaching. But following my short stint at Oberlin I did in fact remain in Ohio, first as faculty then as Provost at the **Siegal College of Judaic Studies** in Beachwood, where I was able to teach in my field of modern Jewish history, but also develop a sub-specialty in contemporary American Jewish life, specifically as it relates to technology. My experience at Siegal taught me the tremendous value of adult education and the pleasure of sharing one's academic expertise with students of many ages who bring a wealth of life experience, and their own educational backgrounds to create a unique learning environment.

I now have the privilege of directing Case Western Reserve University's efforts in this arena as **Executive Director** of the newly established **Laura and Alvin Siegal Lifelong Learning Program (SLLL)** here at CWRU. This new initiative, which is supported by the **Jewish Federation of Cleveland**, brings the adult education legacy of Jewish Studies activities from Siegal College in Beachwood together with a broad range of programs that have operated out of the Continuing Education office of the College of Arts & Sciences, such as Senior Scholars, Off-Campus Studies, Scholars on the Circle, and others. Additionally we are offering new programs and partnering with other schools and departments throughout the university to promote the wealth of public programming that CWRU already provides to the general community.

Our division is tasked with providing non-credit higher educational activities to our neighbors throughout Northeast Ohio, both bringing them to



Brian Amkraut

programs here at University Circle and reaching out to them by providing classes and lectures closer to their homes. The university is such a tremendous resource of exciting people and ideas, we have a unique opportunity to supplement our core missions of scholarship, research, undergraduate, and professional training with intellectually engaging lifelong learning programs.

Since the **Jewish Studies** component is such a critical piece of **SLLL** I am pleased that colleagues inside the university have already offered their services to the Program, with Peter Haas giving a short course on Western Cosmology this past fall and Jay Geller offering a couple of sessions on Herzl this coming spring; I hope to draw on other faculty and colleagues with Jewish Studies interests to teach for the Program as well. The Siegal Program is also serving to directly augment the university's Jewish Studies activities in our region in a number of ways. Along with me, my two colleagues from Siegal College, Dr. Moshe Berger and Hebrew Activities Coordinator Nili Adler, have joined **CWRU's College of Arts and Sciences** as visiting faculty, and our program currently sponsors a distinguished lecture series, which has already brought some of the finest Judaica scholars to address our community in Northeast Ohio. What is most exciting about this project is that we are currently at the very early stages, with the opportunity to develop new plans and new programs to strengthen the University's commitment to lifelong learning in the future.

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## Program in Judaic Studies

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Coming Soon!!!

## WOMEN in TIMES of PERSECUTION in JEWISH FOLK LEGENDS

Professor Haya Bar-Itzhak, of the University of Haifa, Israel, will discuss Eastern European legends about women in times of persecution, from the 17th century to the Holocaust.

It might be assumed that female characters in the legends of a patriarchal society would be passive victims, but the opposite is true.

Prof. Bar-Itzhak will discuss reasons for patriarchal legitimation of women who entered the public sphere as active and brave heroines.

**ATTENDANCE IS FREE, ALL ARE WELCOME!**

Friday, Feb. 22, 2013

Time: 10-11 AM

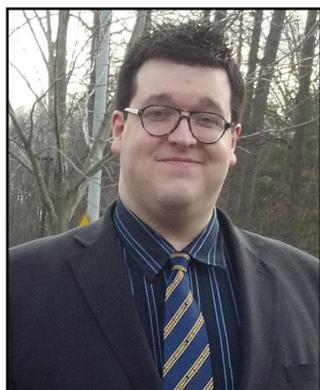
Place: Dampeer Room, KSL



Jewish woman of valor  
seventeenth century folk art

Sponsored by:  
The Judaic Studies Program  
The Siegal Life Long Learning Program  
The Women's and Gender Studies Program

## POST IT!



Michael Robinson

Hi There—

As with all things, the pursuits of scholarship never end! After my experiences at Case I finished a Music Education degree at CSU—graduated cum laude and found a job in the Cleveland area right away.

But one of your courses stayed with me; it was a springboard for looking into various religions and religious traditions, especially how music interacts with the sacred. Pretty fascinating stuff!

While looking into grad programs I found the MA in Religious Studies at CWRU and instantly my curiosity was piqued. I really do miss being a student too much to ignore that urge.

Michael Robinson

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



# Punk Torah: Tattoo Art and Jewish Tradition

Recognition for Outstanding Achievement  
Caroline Roth

As tattoos and other forms of body modification become increasingly common with the maturation of the Millennial Generation, many Jews are torn between these forms of self expression and the traditions of their faith. Traditionally, the act of tattooing oneself is forbidden in both Torah and Talmud, but the widespread notion that tattooed individuals cannot be buried in a Jewish cemetery is actually absent from Jewish law. Lack of any real consequence for violating the prohibition suggests to some Jews that it lacks real importance, opening the door for debate on tattoos as Jewish body art.

The very first mention of tattoos within the Judeo-Christian canon occurs in Leviticus 19:28, which states that one should not cut one's body or tattoo oneself. The prohibition refers only to acts of bereavement, but it was expanded to include all tattoos in Halakhic sections of the Talmud. This is as far as any official text legislates, though by extension an individual who was willingly tattooed would be considered an apostate Jew, or one who had renounced the religion. Taking this one step further, it would not make sense for one who had renounced the Jewish faith to have a Jewish burial. This series of conjectures most likely accounts for the notion that Jewish burial is forbidden to those with tattoos. The notion does not, however, hold up under close inspection, an issue first brought to public attention in the aftermath of World War II.

During the war, Jews placed in internment camps were humiliated with dehumanizing, forcible tattooing. Afterwards, many survivors felt they were left with a brand against their faith, and many of the dead were unable to receive Jewish burial and mourning while their status as Jews or apostates was debated.

Ultimately the general consensus was that, because they had not willingly disobeyed Jewish law,



Caroline Roth

these individuals would not be regarded as apostates. Overall this served as a loophole for avoiding the discussion of intentional body modification and the issue was largely dropped until tattooing became more common and accepted by the general public.

In the past it would have been unlikely for a relatively conservative and religious individual of any faith to have any tattoos. This type of body art was part of an aesthetic reserved for circus performers, gang members and any other form of rebel or pariah. But during the late twentieth century, tattoos started to become a fashion statement particularly attractive to suburban adolescents. An increasing number of individuals are now torn between staying true to the laws of Judaism and enjoying the same stylistic expression as others in their age demographic.

Perhaps the most interesting facet of this debate is that many, if not most rabbis, acknowledge that Talmudic law does not prevent an individual from being buried in a Jewish cemetery<sup>1</sup>. In fact many believe that such a minor transgression can be overlooked, particularly since the decision to administer or deny a Jewish burial has always been, and remains at the discretion of individual burial societies, rather than the rabbinic or nonexistent written laws.

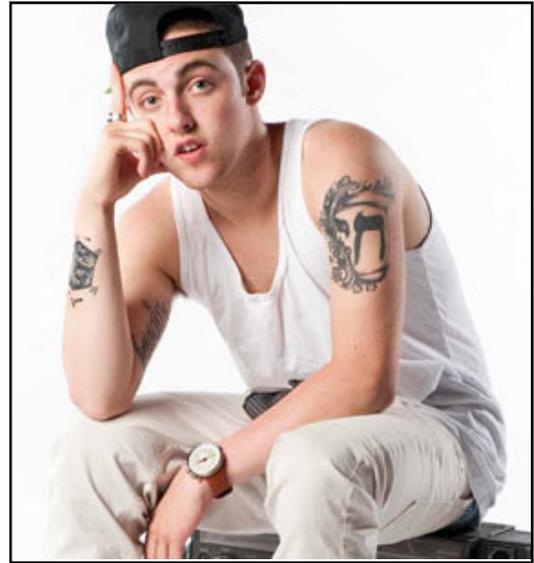
Some youth take this relatively lax policy even further and believe their faith to be perfectly

compatible with body modifications like tattoos.

They embrace body art, even using it to express, rather than denounce, their Jewish heritage. These individuals believe that tattooing symbols such as Hebrew script or the Star of David can be, quite literally, wearing their hearts on their sleeves. Unsurprisingly, such attitudes do not always sit well with more traditional thinkers. The resulting clash has led to an interesting subculture of tattooed Jews seeking to redefine and educate others on their views of Judaism.

One forum for tattooed Jewish youth that attracts considerable media attention is "Tattoo Jew," a documentary on the debate now in progress.<sup>2</sup> This film is currently collecting accounts of many young tattooed Jews and their struggles with rejection by families and religious communities. Some even more controversial public figures are young rabbis, getting tattooed and joining the movement of body modification activism.<sup>3</sup> Some of these rabbis claim tattoos draw them closer to their religion, even writing theses, or in one case, running a blog as part of the website "Punk Torah."<sup>4</sup>

As in any religion, Judaism will always have strict adherents that denounce any form of body modification or deviation from canon law. Tattoos, however, represent a growing challenge to established tradition on an increasingly common form of modern folk art.



Punk Rocker Mac Miller

## References Cited

<sup>1</sup>Zivotofsky, Ari. "Orthodox Union." Accessed October 16, 2012. [http://www.ou.org/index.php/jewish\\_action/print/69707/](http://www.ou.org/index.php/jewish_action/print/69707/).

<sup>2</sup>Abrams Andy. "Tattoo Jew." Last modified 2011. Accessed October 16, 2012. <http://www.tattoojewmovie.com/>.

<sup>3</sup>Torgovnick, Kate. "Skin Deep: For Some Jews, It Only Sounds Like 'Taboo'." The New York Times, Fashion & Style Section, July 17, 2008. Accessed October 16, 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/17/fashion/17SKIN.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/17/fashion/17SKIN.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1)

<sup>4</sup>Patrick Aleph. "Punk Torah" (blog), <http://punktorah.org/category/featured-blogs/patrick-aleph-featured-blogs>.

# Courses of Interest for Spring 2013



## **WOMEN IN THE BIBLE: ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACHES TO RITE, RITUAL, STORY, SONG AND ART**

**JDST/WGST/RLGN 268**

Judith Neulander

From Ishtar to Esther, the Christian Marys to the Muslim Mary, we will explore strategic and creative ways that rabbinic—as well as other traditional interpretations—have shaped images of, and attitudes toward women in western civilization. Using folkloristic theories and ethnographic methods we will come to understand how varying views of these women inform and challenge gender roles today.

## **JEWS IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE**

**JDST/HSTY 218**

Gillian Weiss

Through a selection of inquisitorial transcripts, government records, memoirs and historical literature, we will explore such topics as persecution, conversion, messianism, toleration, emancipation and assimilation in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.



## **ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL SPAIN**

**HSTY/CLSC 206**

Elizabeth Todd

The course will focus on the history of the Iberian Peninsula from before the Roman conquest to the Iberian, Greek and Carthaginian settlements, through Roman, Visigothic and Muslim rule, to the conquest of Ferdinand and Isabella of the last non-Christian territory in 1492. Issues of conquest, frontier, cultural diversity, tolerance and intolerance will be examined.  
HSTY/CLSC credit only

## **HEBREW**

**HBRW 102 - Elementary Modern II**

**HBRW 202 - Intermediate Modern II**

**HBRW 302 - Advanced Modern II**

Yoram Daon

Leap into the time of an ancient civilization that gave the world the Bible. Step back into our class and confront a vibrant, living, constantly developing language. Imagine those who once spoke the same language, wrote the same script, read the same vowels, and time becomes irrelevant. Ancient? Mysterious? Romantic? Modern? Magical? Immortal? Yes—modern Hebrew is all that, and more!

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

## Recognition for Outstanding Achievement

Jennifer Rosen

Jennifer did her final research paper **Not Your Average Kugel: Jewish Family Foodways in American Modernity** for Introduction to Jewish Folklore, JDST 233. Her research examines American adaptations of traditional Jewish foodways at the family table, and in broader communal contexts. Her work demonstrates the power of foodways to act as catalysts for storytelling, personal bonding, and other dynamics that strengthen family and community ties. Her research also breaks ground on the role of the Jewish bakery in the constitution of Jewish community. Jennifer's work, of value to ethnographic investigators, has been accepted to **Digital Case**, the electronic research archive of the **Kelvin Smith Library**.



Jennifer Rosen



*From the JDST eJournal*

# Sampling of Final Paper Titles

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

*Not Your Average Kugel: Jewish Family Foodways in American Modernity*  
Jennifer Rosen

*Klezmer: The Trip to America*  
Michael Anderson

*Origins, Adaptations and Evolution of Jewish Fairytales*  
Anna Ryazanskiy

*Up from the Ashes: The Afterlife in Jewish Thought Down through the Ages*  
Joey Rooney

*The Blood Libel: A Study in Anti-Semitic Folklore*  
Michael Ling

*Jewish Folk Dance: Performing Ethnic Identity*  
Priya Sharma

*A Feast of Earth, Sea and Sky: The Fauna of Jewish Folklore*  
Nathan Soulier

*Seinfeld: Covert Jewish Humor in Mainstream America*  
John Fortunato

*An Affront to God: Thoughts on the Tower of Babel*  
Nathan Jackson

# 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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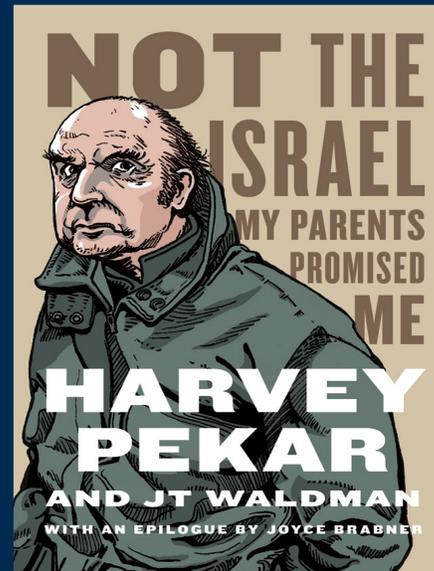
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## Support the Program in Judaic Studies

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](http://giving.case.edu)



Students gathered with the Cleveland community for a discussion of the late Harvey Pekar's final book, Oct. 2012.

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