When last in Israel, Prof. Judith Neulander spoke at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute on “biological Judaism”; specifically, on popular use of disease as a Jewish ethnic marker. Updated excerpts from her interview by David’s Star Magazine appear below.

Q: Define what you call “biological Judaism”
Religious identity cannot be biologically inherited; it can only be acquired by learning. To insist otherwise is to repatriate 19th century race-science, to invent “biological Judaism.”

Q: How did the inventing of biological Judaism come to be?
The notion that Jews comprise a human subspecies, or “race,” first gained traction in the years flanking the turn of the 20th century. For example, in 1878, Sir Francis Galton, father of eugenics, used newly-discovered photography to sweep multiple images of Jewish adolescents into a single racial “type”; a biological science fiction. Subsequently, ethnographic theories, methods and techniques were developed, helping to limit such adventurism in academe.

But in the 1980s, ethnographically naïve academics in New Mexico began sweeping Hispanic and Jewish cultural similarities into a single “crypto-” (or “secret”) Jewish “type”; an ethnographic cultural fiction. With completion of the Human Genome Project, and following Galton’s notion that he could register “types” of the racial and diseased, they began using disease as a Jewish ethnic marker. But it’s impossible to use any disease shared by Jews and non-Jews to ferret out “hidden” Jews in any non-Jewish population.

Q: Why is it impossible?
Because the non-Jewish population will always be so much larger than the tiny Jewish minority, the vast majority of afflicted people will always be non-Jews—even if frequency of the disease is higher among Jews. A form of breast cancer with significantly higher frequency among Jews is a good example: for every Jew with that form of breast cancer, there will be roughly a dozen non-Jews.

Q: How can the public determine that something is either a cultural or a biological fiction?
Recognition that two different populations share similarities should never be given, or taken, as evidence that the two populations are one-and-the-same, or even related. Clearly, swastikas woven into 19th century Navaho blankets are not evidence of 19th century “Navaho Nazis.”

Q: How does this relate to the JDST Program at CWRU?
Today, we live in a volatile world too dangerous to tolerate the pseudo-ethnography and quack medicine of 19th century race-science. CWRU is at the forefront of reducing ethnographic naïveté in Judaic Studies, having added ethnographic theory, method and technique to our curriculum.
The Art of Jewish Gravestones

Recognition for Outstanding Achievement
Meghann McMahon

Grave markers have served many cultures throughout history, set out as reminders of those who have passed away. The stylistic elements found on tombstones vary widely over time and across space. But in addition to revealing their historical period, and geographic location, tombstones use a plethora of symbols to tell tales of the deceased; they are able to inform us not only of names and dates of birth and death, but also of “a person’s religion, ethnicity, social membership, occupation, and thoughts on the afterlife” (Keister). Exploring the inscriptions and symbolism found on Hebrew tombstones reveals that by the 19th century, Jewish tombstone carving had developed into a highly stylized communicative art form.

The first Jewish burial is referenced in Scripture (Genesis 23:19) when Abraham buried his wife Sarah in a cave in the field of Mamre. Archaeologists have discovered ornamental Jewish catacombs from the early CE, further evidence of cave burial as a Jewish custom, its popularity extending through the Babylonian period and into Roman Palestine. With the arrival of Romans in Judea, the practice of ground burial and private plots began. By medieval times, the widespread belief that heavy stones helped to retain the dead was assimilated into Jewish burial practices, and Jewish cemeteries with tombstones became more widespread.

It was during the Renaissance that “sepulchral art developed into a definite and formidable style ... however, human imagery was strictly forbidden” (Menachemson). Gravestone imaging was a subject of rabbinic concern, given the prohibition of “graven images” as mandated by the Second Commandment. But once Greek and Roman headstone carvings gained rabbinic acceptance as purely aesthetic, and not idolatrous, Jews were able to incorporate classical design elements into their tombstones.

By the 18th century, Jewish tombstone carving reflected a community in diaspora. In English-speaking countries, for example, gravestone inscriptions included both the English and Hebrew names of the deceased, as well as secular and Hebrew dates of birth and death. The Hebrew dates correspond to the Jewish calendar, which dates the creation of the world 3,760 years before the Christian calendar. Phrases found on the tombstones tell us more of the story, where different transcriptions allude to different Jewish cultural groups. For instance, on an Ashkenazi (Germanic, East European) tombstone, one would typically use the phrase “po pitman,” meaning “here lies.” But on a Sephardi (Iberian) tombstone the phrase “matzevet kevurah,” meaning “monument of the grave of” would be used instead (Isaacs). These distinctions reflect a long history of dissension between these two communities, inspiring them to “strategies of cultural diversity” (Peterson Royce), even in their tombstone traditions.

By the 19th century, attributes of a more personal nature also began to appear on Jewish tombstones. Different animal symbols allude to different family names or ancestors, such as the lion symbolizing the family name Leib or the tribe of Judah, and the stag indicating names like Hirsch or Zvi. Other etched symbols were related to liturgical practices of the faith. For instance, two hands in the posture of the Priestly Blessing were carved on tombstones of descendants of the High Priest, or kohane (Anglecized to “Cohen”), whereas an etching of a pitcher indicated the tombstone of a Levite, a descendant of the ancient tribe of Levi, which saw to rites of Temple purification and priestly hand-washing. Other familial traits typical of these gravestones included symbols such as books, representing intellectual pursuits, or inkwells, representing writers. Images of coins being placed in charity boxes represented a trait of the deceased.
who was especially generous (Gruber). Candles were commonly found on the tombstones of Jewish women, reflecting their central role in the Sabbath candle-lighting ritual.

Although grave marker carvings are commonplace today, the particular etchings of Jewish tombstones, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, evolved as a highly stylized art form. Symbols found on tombstones allow us to better understand those who have passed away, whether they allude to the person's social status, religious faith or ancestry. The development of symbolism and funerary art throughout history allows the story of the deceased to be told. They say dead men tell no tales; tombstones, on the other hand, tell a great story.

References Cited:


Happy Winter Break

From the JDST eJournal!
Prof. Timothy Beal is editor-in-chief of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and the Arts*, a comprehensive 2-volume set named Best Reference Work in the Humanities, by the *Library Journal*, 2015. The work is now available online, and at KSL.

In Nov. 2016, *The Jewish View at CWRU: Campus Activism 1967-1973* opened at KSL, featuring an exhibition and an alumni panel of student activists, and current researchers. The project is supported by The Program in Judaic Studies and the Freedman Center for Digital Scholarship. The exhibition is on display at Kelvin Smith Library through March 2017.

Hi There,
Since graduating with a minor in JDST, I’ve just completed the last semester of my doctorate; I’ve also completed my dissertation, and I’ve passed my DMA qualifying exams. In fall semester I took my last ever academic class in musicology at CWRU, and taught a course of my own for the music theory department at CIM. I just wanted to say your classes were wonderful, and I still reference some of our notes and materials, even now!

Becky Glass

**LET’S HEAR FROM YOU!**

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Courses of Interest for Spring 2017

JDST 254
The Holocaust
Jay Geller

This class seeks to answer fundamental questions about the Holocaust: the German-led organized mass murder of nearly six million Jews and millions of other ethnic and religious minorities. It will investigate the origins and development of racism in modern European society, the manifestations of that racism, and responses to persecution. An additional focus of the course will be comparisons between different groups, different countries, and different phases during the Nazi era. Also offered as /RLGN/HSTY/ETHS 254.

HBRW 101
Elementary Modern Hebrew I
Yasuhiro Shirai

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!

JDST 314
Mythologies of the Afterlife
Judith Neulander

This course provides a multidisciplinary approach to the idea of an afterlife, and its manifestation in diverse cultures. We will examine the way varying views of the afterlife influence religion, popular culture and palliative care, and how human creativity has shaped the heavens, hells, hauntings and holidays of diverse populations over time and across space. Students will come to see the afterlife as an integral part of human history and experience, not only because it helps us die with better hope, but also because it helps us to live more richly. Also offered as RLGN 314.

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 Women in the Bible JDST/RLGN/WGST 288 and Jewish Traditional Art and Architecture JDST/RLGN 220 reflects the diversity of interests in a typical JDST classroom.

Women in the Bible JDST/RLGN/WGST 288:

Women of the Exodus: Midwives to the Birth of a Nation
Jonathan Meckler

The Story of Jezebel: Sinner or Saint?
Garret Borawski

An Analysis of Marian Theology in Official and Folk Religion
Rob Semco

A Position of Reproach: Portrayal of the Barren Woman in the Old and New Testaments
Jamie Miles

The Color Red and Women in the Bible
Jake Olzewski

Women in Ministry: An Evaluation of Biblical References and Practice
Amanda Kruszewski

Jewish Traditional Art and Architecture JDST/RLGN 220:

The First Wave Hits the Atlantic Shore: Jewish Artistic Expression in Colonial America
Nicole Elston

Looking Through the Lens of Jewish Tradition: An Analysis of Ethnic Group Photography
Somya Ravi

Nazi Plunder: A History of Artistic Loss and Redemption
Vishnu Akella

From Ancient Tyre to Art Nouveau: Jewish Artistic Affinity for Timely Styles and Timeless Justice
Brian Mandel

Wooden Synagogues of Poland: A Study of Cultural Adaptation
Hazel Choi
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.

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:

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