

The Newsletter of the
Judaic Studies Department
Yedida Stillman and Allan Arkush
Co-Chairs

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Ha-Kol הקול

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Michael Taub, Editor

Number 1

Fall Courses

Hebrew 101 – Weitz, Abend, Morell
Hebrew 203 – Y. Stillman, David
Hebrew Poetry and Prose – Taub
Biblical Hebrew – Levin
Basic Hebrew Grammar for
Israeli Americans – Morell
Jeremiah: Prophecy and History –
Morell
Judaism-A Religious History –
N. Stillman
Second Temple – Arkush
Modern Jewish History – Arkush
The Holocaust – Hertz
Philosophy of Religion – Goldstein
Bible, Part II – Levin
Women in Jewish Law – Morell
Sephardi History and Culture –
Y. Stillman (10/21-12/10)
Contemporary Judaism – Sussman
(10/21-12/10)
American Jewish Fiction – Taub
The Arab Israeli Conflict – Peretz
Genocide – Bar On
Medieval Islam – N. Stillman
Yiddish 101 – Taub

In This Issue

Lecture Series	Page 2
Our Majors Write	Page 2
Donations	Page 3
Alumni News	Page 4
Faculty News	Page 4
Essay by N. Stillman	Page 5
Morocco Bound	Page 6

Greeting for the New Year

from the new editor

It is customary to start a new year by reflecting on the past and looking ahead to the future. As we enter our third year as a department, we look back upon numerous gratifying successes and at the same time are forced to acknowledge some of our shortcomings. Our courses last year were filled beyond capacity, our fundraising efforts were more fruitful than we might have expected in these hard times, our visiting professorship, lecture programs and exhibits have enhanced our program and the intellectual life of the community at large, and we have kept our good humor in the face of much adversity.

We recall with fondness Edwin and Yaara Seroussi, who last year came to Binghamton from Bar Ilan University and Beit Shemesh Senior High. In their place (although, of course, they can never be replaced), we have a number of new Israeli recruits, Rachel Weitz, Ilana David and Dror Abend.

Last year's series of exhibits and lectures concluded with the Margolis lecture by Professor Lynn Davidman of Brown University on women seeking a path to traditional Judaism, an event which brought together an unusually large gathering of campus and community members. In the coming year we once again anticipate stimulating lectures in the JUST Lunch series and in the context of our new mini-course on Sephardic Jewry (see below), and in our faculty's presentations at the JCC/ College of Jewish Studies Program.

Last year we had the second largest number of graduating majors in the fourteen years of the major's existence. We miss the students who have graduated and departed, but we are more than happy to have a whole new crop of unfamiliar faces assembling in our crowded classrooms.

As for our shortcomings.... On reflection, we are not quite able to think of any. If any of our readers can refresh our memories, we would be grateful for whatever helpful suggestions they could send us.

ראש השנה

Our Majors Write

DIANA EPEL spent the summer in the Catskills studying traditional Judaism in the "Ivy League Torah Study Program".

She writes: "There was a definite "when in Rome" agenda which meant that all of us, despite the heat wave, had to dress in keeping with the laws of modesty." She describes the curriculum as a combination of religion, languages (Hebrew, Yiddish), history, and current issues. The program, Diana reports, also included day trips to the hasidic communities of Crown Heights and Monsey.

In the beginning, she concludes, "We were scared of the new world we were about to enter. It seemed to us so unrealistic." But, as it turned out, "When the time came to go, we were scared to leave what had become our safe, comfortable reality of the traditional Jewish world, and enter the bizarre culture we had once called reality."

TANYA TIAMFOOK, one of our 10 Dorot fellows in Israel, spent the summer at Machon Ora, a Yeshiva for women, in Jerusalem. There she studied a variety of subjects ranging from religion to Hebrew. She tells us that she learned a great deal about Judaism, its commandments, the role of women in Jewish society. One of her fondest memories is celebrating Shavuot at the Western Wall: "During the trip I was fortunate to arrive just in time for Shavuot. Being at the Wall surrounded by my fellow Jews filled me with true happiness. It was always my dream to someday visit Israel. Now my dream is to live there."

She adds: "Israel has helped me feel honored and proud to be a Jew. I cherish my memories and am grateful for being awarded this uplifting opportunity to study and live in the country of my people."

Thanks to I. J. Rosefsky

or The Magic of Our Newsletter
By Yedida Stillman

Two days after our last newsletter went out, I received a phone call in the Judaic Studies Office from Dr. I.J. Rosefsky informing me that he read in the newsletter that we needed another printer in the office for our entire department. Prior to calling us, he had already called a computer store and arranged for them to send one to us — the best. I was, needless to say, speechless and very grateful on behalf of all our faculty.

Around the same time, an avid supporter of our efforts here, who wishes to remain anonymous, began sending us valuable books worth hundreds of dollars, including the new English version of the Steinsaltz Talmud. Readers may recall that a similar plea once landed us a fax machine kindly donated by Mr. J. Dockster. So, in view of our supporters' generosity and our past successes, we thought we would issue a New Year's wish list — and see what happens.

1. a photocopying machine
2. Funding for two mini-courses in the spring, one on Jewish art and architecture, and another on peace prospects in the Middle East (both to be taught by specialists brought in from the outside).
3. Money for additional secretarial time. Believe it or not, we do what we do with only a part-time secretary. We have a great secretary, and we would like to have more of her.

Well, that's our list — and now we'll just hope for a repetition of the good fortune we have enjoyed in the past.

Sephardim: Hispanic Jewish Culture

Lecture Series

1. Prof. Ben Braude, Boston College, "The Contribution of Ottoman Jewry to Modern Jewish History", Nov. 1
2. Prof. Guy Haskel, Oberlin Col. "The Jews of the Balkans and the End of Sephardic Culture", Nov. 8.
3. Prof. Edwin Seroussi, Bar Ilan Univ., "Sephardic Music", Dec. 6.

Meetings are held Mondays 3:30-5:00, Science I, Rm. 140.

The public is invited

Just Lunch

tentative titles and schedule

1. Professor Melvin Shefftz, "Jews and Europe's Left", Oct. 13.
2. Professor Saul Levin, "Reading the Torah", Video and discussion. Oct. 27.
3. Professor Milton Kessler (No title yet)

Meetings are held Wednesdays. We provide coffee, tea and cookies. Bring lunch.

Donations

Since the last Newsletter we have received donations of various amounts from these friends of Judaic Studies: Andrew and Rachelle Zalman-Miller, Elliot Hoff, Adam Edwards, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Stromberg, Mr. and Mrs. Barry Greenblatt, Ms. Susan Werner, Ms. Cindy Moskowitz, Mr. and Mrs. Gary Steinberg, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Friedman, Mr. and Mrs. Ken Kaiserman, Dr. and Mrs. Elmer Zinner, Mrs. Bessie Pierson, Dr. and Mrs. Donald Bronsky, Ms. Sharon Major, Mr. and Mrs. David Symons, Mr. and Mrs. William Fine, Dr. and Mrs. Stephen Schneider, Mr. and Mrs. Brian Savitch, Mr. A. Rivel, Mr. and Mrs. Marc Ben Ezra, Mr. Myron Rumeld, Mr. and Mrs. Craig Somers, Ms. Susan Neuberg, Ms. Sharon Gross, Dr. Michael Gold, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Kassen, Mrs. Joyce Stillman, Profs. Norman and Yedida Stillman, Mr. Michael Berman, Dr. Jeffrey Berger, Ms. Andrea Kalish Aaron, Mr. and Mrs. Gary Finkel, Mr. William Hardigg, Ms. Dina Towbin, Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell Karlick, Mr. and Mrs. John Simonson, Mr. and Mrs. Allen Zwickler, Ms. Cheryl Winkler, Mr. Ian Winkler, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Firer, Mr. Stuart Kahn, Dr. Janet Schmuckler, Mrs. Lisa Mendelsohn, Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Shefftz, Ms. Hazel Groman, Ms. Nancy Gebel, Ms. Lorraine Ginsburg, Ms. Amy Lynne Griggs, Mrs. Anne Weisbrod, Dr. Eric Steckler, Mr. Harris Tilevitz, Mr. Gregory Rozines, Dr. Kenneth Roth, Ms. Ditah Rimer, Mrs. Irene Reiss, Ms. Nancy Pike Kreinik, Ms. Susan Lorin, Ms. Emilie Kovit, Ms. Sheryl Silver, Ms. Deborah Shemony, Mr. Scott Sheflin, Ms. Cathy Satz, Ms. Linda Neuwirth, Mr. and Mrs. Phil Piaker, Mr. and Mrs. Abe Piaker, Dr. and Mrs. Richard Shore, Shoshana Gross, Mr. and Mrs. Sy Klionsky, Dr. and Mrs. William Pine, Dr. and Mrs. Stephen Schneider, Shari and Eric Lustig, Susan and Phillip Neuberg, Mr. Paul Klotz

Dorot Foundation Scholarships

Our department was selected to receive ten Dorot scholarships for summer study in Israel, each worth \$1000. Judaic Studies majors and others competed for these awards. These students were the recipients: Jamie Luff, Orit Levy, Marina Khvatynk, Eileen Biondi, David Perel, Lior Greenberg, Eva Farkash, Monika Vaida, Tanya Tiamfook, Rebecca Kaiser. On May 4 they were the guests of President DeFleur and Dean Brehm.

The Littauer Foundation

The Littauer Foundation awarded \$15,000 to expand our Judaic collection at the library. This endowment will enable the Department to purchase books from the interest on this account. This generous gift will enable us to subscribe to otherwise unavailable publications (cut by the library to save money), and books the library had never intended to, or could not, acquire.

The Lowe Foundation

The Lowe Foundation continues to support Hebrew instruction. Their gift enables us to hire Hebrew instructors, freeing regular faculty to teach other courses. It must be noted that we are a small department offering a disproportionately high number of classes.

The Jesselson Foundation

Their support helped mount an exhibit of photographs on Ethiopian Jews at the University Art Gallery.

The Jewish Chautauqua Society

This regional organization awarded \$1000 to Professor Lance Sussman to teach a course in Judaism. The course is "Contemporary Judaism", and will be taught from 10/21 to 12/10.

Community Development Committee

The Community Development Committee of the Judaic Studies Department held its first meeting of the year September 8. It was attended by Marilyn Aigen, Bruce Becker, Shirley Bronsky, Sharon and Edward Major, Abraham Piaker, Shirley Raff, Barbara Rosenberg, Gail Schneider, Theodore Sommer, and special guest, Cecil Popolo, a local artist. Y. Stillman, A. Arkush, L. Sussman, and S. Hubal, represented Judaic Studies. Dean Brehm dropped by briefly to extend best wishes for the coming year. Yedida spoke on our academic excellence while stressing the need for financial assistance to maintain current operations.

The discussion then turned to the possibility of purchasing a painting by Mr. Popolo, "Elie Wiesel and the Torah" for the university, through fundraising efforts. The committee also heard of the department's plans to create a Hebrew language instructorship, a position that would require raising ten thousand dollars. The feeling was that both goals are achievable. Ted Major volunteered to chair a sub-committee to focus on these two matters.

Alumni News

Weddings, weddings, weddings...

NICOLE TAUBKIN got married, JAMES OPPENHEIM tied the knot, JENNIFER RAPPAPORT went under the chupa, SHOSHANA GROSS heard "harei at" from SANDY BODZIN and SHARI TELLERMAN is now the wife of ERIC LUSTIG. Oppenheim and Rappaport live in Israel. To all, Mazal Tov!

ABBY AARON and MICHAEL PITKOVSKY, formerly of Riverdale, the Bronx, made aliyah and live in Jerusalem. Behatzlacha! Congratulations!

MARK KAISERMAN spent the summer and much of the previous year in Jerusalem at an HUC institute in preparation for his rabbinical studies starting this fall at HUC in Cincinnati. His letter reveals a busy schedule, stimulating times with students from other countries and religions, and lasting impressions of holiday celebrations and Yom Hashoa commemorations. Most impressive to this "Newsletter" editor, a theater enthusiast, is Mark's involvement in a production of Harold Pinter's classic, "Betrayal". He played the role of Robert. A Rabbi and an actor! Imagine that!

Faculty News and Research

Yedida K. Stillman

Yedida was reelected to the board of the International Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies at its biennial meeting in Israel this past June. Her book *New Horizons in Sephardi Studies*, co-edited with George Zucker was published by SUNY Press, and her article "Der Marokkans-joods materiele cultuur en folklore" appeared in a book *Joden onder de islam* published by Joods Historisch Museum and Waanders Uitgevers in Holland. Just before school began, she lectured at Amsterdam University's Summer school in Amsterdam together with her colleague-spouse.

Norman A. Stillman

In addition to attending the Judaeo-Arabic Society Conference in Israel and lecturing in Amsterdam with Yedida this past summer, Norman was also scholar-in-residence at Brandeis University's Distinguished Leaders' Institute, where the topic was "Understanding Islam." He published an article "Het joodse leven in de islamitische wereld" in *Joden onder de islam*. Under a grant from the Amado Foundation, he carried out research in France and Israel for a book in progress on North African Jewry and together with his colleague-spouse was the subject of a feature article in the Dutch weekly *NIW*.

Sam Morell

A large part of Sam's summer was taken up by the wedding of his son Eitan to Varda nee Linzer from Silver Spring, Md. The young couple made alya and are currently living on the West Bank. Still, Morell found time to participate in the World Jewish Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, where he spoke on his research on Radbaz, a great Sephardic Rabbi/scholar of the 16th Century.

Allan Arkush

Allan has spent most of the summer finishing his book, Moses Mendelsohn and the Enlightenment, to be published next year by SUNY Press.

Michael Taub

Last June Michael gave a paper at the annual conference of the National Association of Professors of Hebrew. His essay on the Yiddish Theatre appeared (In Polish translation) in the last issue of Pamiętnik Teatralny, of Warsaw. He wrote papers for upcoming conferences in Warsaw, SUNY Cortland, and Toronto. He edited a special issue of Modern International Drama, on Israeli Drama, to appear in November. He received a grant to study Yiddish holdings of the Federal Theatre Project at George Mason University.

A Visit to an Old Mokum

By Norman A. Stillman

For ten days in August, Yedida and I lived in the heart of the old Jewish section of Amsterdam. This neighborhood was once home to more than 70,000 Jews, most of whom perished in the Holocaust. The Jews had been such an important part of Dutch life that many Hebrew words entered into everyday Dutch speech. Amsterdam itself is universally called Mokum (from Hebrew *makom*) in Dutch slang, and names of famous Jewish citizens of the past mark streets, buildings, and parks. Today, most of the remaining community lives outside the city center in the suburb of Amstelveen. But there are still important Jewish monuments and a few focal points of Jewish life in the old neighborhood. One of these is the imposing Portuguese Synagogue, or Snoga (pronounced *snokheh*), built in 1675 and depicted in drawings and painting by Rembrandt and other Dutch masters. The synagogue has recently been restored to its full glory after several years and more than 2 million dollars in renovations.

While in Amsterdam, we attended services at the Snoga and were fortunate enough to attend a Bar Mitzvah. The boy, who had an angelic face and voice to match, not only read the Torah and Haftarah, but also had to recite the prayer for the welfare of the monarchy in old Portuguese. Like all officiants at the service, he had to wear a top hat, which no amount of padding could keep from slipping down over head. The father, a transplanted Israeli married to a Dutch Jewess, had invited most of the Amsterdamer Israelis who own many of the pizza and shwarma restaurants — and they seem to be at every street corner — in town. What was perhaps most impressive about the Shabbat service at the Snoga was the fact that many loyalists walk every Saturday for an hour and a half to get there from Amstelveen where most now live.

For our first Shabbat in Amsterdam, we learned that a certain Mrs. Hertzberger had a sabbath table (a *shabbes tisch*) that took guests. Her home was right down the street from our apartment. We arrived to find another couple who were introduced to us as an Israeli engineer and his wife from Afula (the town whose main claim to fame in Israel is its superb roasted sunflower seeds). After chatting in Hebrew, we switched back to English for the sake of our hostess, who spoke several languages, but whose Hebrew was not her strongest. (Her daughter, who was also there, was a lawyer who had gone to NYU Law School and spoke excellent Hebrew.) But then I overheard Mr. Miller speak to his wife quietly in French. He was born in Belgium, had fought in the French army, and was married to an Algerian. With Yedida being a Alliance Israelite Universelle alumna,

we switched over to French. The next guest to arrive was an Israeli in the computer software business. He turned out to be Moroccan, and for the rest of the evening the conversation continued in five or six languages. Mrs. Hertzberger is an elegant and rather arty woman. She heads an Jewish theatrical group that performs in Jewish communities in Holland and Belgium. She also was a superb cook and a gracious hostess. Over the years many visitors have sat around her table, and it turned out that we knew some of them. In fact, all of us at the table had mutual acquaintances. As they say, "it's a small world," but the Jewish world is even smaller!

Certainly one of the most moving Jewish sites in the neighborhood is the former theater, now a museum, to which Jews who had been rounded up by the Gestapo were taken for holding on their way to the concentration camps. Across the street was another building with a plaque noting that it was the holding center for the children who were separated from their elders across the street.

The reason for our being in Amsterdam in the first place was to teach an intensive summer course for the University of Amsterdam's Summer School. The course on "Jews in the Islamic World" was being held at the Joods Historisch Museum which is located across the street from the Snoga. The Museum is an enormous complex of connected buildings that were once the principal Ashkenazi Synagogues of Amsterdam — the Grote Synagogue (pronounced *Synakhokhe*), the Nieuwe Synagogue and the Neie Sjoel. The magnificent museum collection and educational programs are directed by an enthusiastic and dedicated staff, mostly of young people, under the leadership of Judith Belinfante. The course was being held at the museum because it was presently show a major exhibition on the Jews of the Islamic world. The thirty students enrolled in the course ranged in age from late teens to late seventies and included the vice president of the Dutch Jewish University Students Association, a doctoral candidate in Islamic studies, and a former justice of the Supreme Court of the Netherlands. The group was lively, highly articulate, and responsive. Although we have been to Holland many times over the past few years and have many friends and colleagues there, we had not spent such an extended period in Amsterdam for a long time, nor had we seen so much of the its Jewish life. We found ourselves enamoured all over again with the genuine and easygoing warmth of the people and by the charms of Mokum.

Stillman Follows Rabin to Morocco

Yitzhak Rabin's recent and highly publicized stopover in Morocco has undoubtedly left many people with the impression that this Arab country has only now broken ranks with its sister nations and turned a friendlier face towards Israel. In fact, Rabin's visit marks the culmination of a long series of high-level contacts between Morocco and Israeli and Jewish organizations. Yedida Stillman has for quite some time been taking part in these rapproachments; shortly she will return to her native country on a working trip for the World Monument Fund. Yedida has a strong interest in the welfare of Morocco's Jewish community and the preservation of its unique heritage. She has participated in the Jewish Heritage Council's endeavors to advise the Moroccan Jewish community and the government on the protection and preservation of that country's most important Jewish monuments, including synagogues, cemeteries, and other sites.

On this particular visit Yedida and her group will meet with Morocco's ministers of culture and tourism, and, perhaps with King Hassan.

We are proud of her involvement in this effort, glad that she can squeeze in a quick trip to Morocco into the middle of the semester, and hopeful that while there she will not try to finish off Rabin's work.

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