

Judaic Studies Program
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JUDAIC STUDIES NEWSLETTER

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History Department

1. Sephardic Studies Conference A Huge Success!

From April 5-7 the State University of New York at Binghamton sponsored the first Sephardic Studies conference in North America. A topic often neglected in traditional Jewish Studies, the attendance and scope of inquiry at this event demonstrates that the history of the Jews of North Africa, Spain and the Middle East has not been forgotten by many of the major scholars of the world. At this international forum a wide variety of areas such as, history, philosophy, linguistics, literature, and biblical studies were addressed as they apply to the study of both present day and historic Sephardic Jewry.

Apart from presentations of papers, this conference was marked by a number of special presentations. On its first day an audience of approximately 100 was delighted by a showing of Haim Shiran's movie "Pillar of Salt", based on Albert Memmi's novel about the Jews of Tunisia. Following the presentation, Mr. Shiran answered questions about the movie, which was originally made for Israeli educational television. The second day of the conference featured a full day of presentations by such notables as professors Jay R. Berkovitz from the University of Massachusetts, Israel Katz of New York University and Zvi Zohar of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. The participants of the conference were then entertained with a Sephardic music concert by Flory Jagoda and her Children. On the final day of the conference a plenary session entitled: "Sephardic Studies - An interdisciplinary Encounter" offered a captive audience exposure to a wide variety of approaches in the study of Sephardic Jewry by such exemplary scholars as Professor Dov Noy from The Hebrew University and our own Norman Stillman of SUNY-Binghamton.

Both Yedida K. Stillman, director of Judaic Studies at SUNY-Binghamton and George Zucker, from the University of Northern Iowa, are to be congratulated for their conception and direction of this event. Hopefully, its Overwhelming success will serve as an inducement of similar meetings in the future.

By Andrea Tyndall, Dept. of
History

2. Impressions of the Sephardic Studies Conference

"Just a few words to express my thanks to you and to your staff for the highly commendable intellectual experience which you have accorded us in the recent International Conference on Sephardic Studies, Which you initiated and brought to fruition. I was greatly impressed by both the array of prominent scholars which you have managed to assemble at the SUNY-Binghamton campus and the scholarly profundity and diversity of their presentations. I found the high visibility of Dean Gitlitz and his amicable and intellectual interaction with the participants quite remarkable. I also admired the gracious hospitality and warm support of your local community."

Reuben Ahroni,
The Ohio State University

"Je tiens a vous remercier pour votre tres chaleureuse hospitalite lors de mon sejour a Binghamton et pour les efforts que vous avez faits afin que notre colloque soit le plus convivial et le plus interessant possible."

Joelle Bahloul,
Indiana University

"Rosemary and I both have attended many such gatherings but we never appreciated and enjoyed any of them as much as the one that you and George put together. It was instructive and enjoyable at the same time. Meeting a great number of old friends and making new ones was one of the highlights. I hardly remember any conference so well put together. Not only the actual sessions were welcomed for the high quality of papers presented, but the cordiality extended to us was unequalled. Thank you and all of your colleagues for such a great experience."

Isaac Jack Levy,
University of South Carolina

"I would like to congratulate you and your staff and students for a well-conceived, balanced and thoroughly enjoyable conference last weekend at Binghamton. The mix of high intensity paper sessions and relaxed free time resulted in excellent discussion. The hospitality afforded both by the University and your colleagues also made for the relaxed atmosphere. You certainly made a task for yourself not only in planning the scholarly sessions, but also the home hospitality and vast network of transportation. It was a job extremely done well."

Annette B. Fromm,
The Gershon & Rebecca Fenster
Museum of Jewish Art

"I would like to say how heartened and impressed I am by the warm welcome and fine hospitality extended to us by the members of the Jewish community here. It is quite remarkable to find such an involved and participant Jewish community here, 'way up' in New York State. Thank you for your generous hospitality, and keep up the vibrant Jewish life you have created." (The Reporter—April 23, 1987)

Zvi Zohar,
Shalom Hartman Institute and
Institute of Contemporary Judaism,
Jerusalem

Special Thanks!

On behalf of the International Conference on Sephardic Studies and the Judaic Studies Program at SUNY-Binghamton, we would like to thank the following families who graciously hosted our guest speakers from around the country and the world:

Ruth & James Gitlitz	Dora & Steven Feuer
Carol & Stanton Drazen	Flora & Bernard Rosefsky
Linda Davidson & David Gitlitz	Diane & Harold Herz
Ruth & Howard Buschman	Barbara & Arie Ullman
Audrey & Samuel Morell	Leslie & Samuel Levine
Michael Taub	Susan & Gerald Hubal
Judie Pletter	Libby Tucker & Jeffrey Gould
Susan & Brian Savitch	Marilyn & Joseph Aigen
Reva & Howard Rittberg	Naomi & Seymour Staiman
Marcy & Gavriel Yonaty	Naomi & Richard Shore
Ruthann & Burton Koffman	Irit & Benzion Boukai
Shirley & Barrett Raff	Claire & Leon Golstein
Muriel & Stephen Major	
Niti Merhavy (for concert flyer and program)	
We wish to specially thank Susie & Brian Savitch.	

By the way, a number of telegrams arrived with greetings and wishes for the success of the Conference including one from Rabbi Professor Samuel Rene Sirat, the first Sephardic Chief Rabbi of France.

The Sephardic Studies Conference was sponsored by SUNY-Binghamton, University of Northern Iowa, Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies, Broome County Jewish Federation, Mr. Jack Newman, S. Levy Incorporated, Iowa Electric Light and Power Co., and The Lucius N. Littauer Foundation.

3. Holocaust Course Students Attend Albany Conference

On Monday, April 7, a group of students from the Holocaust lecture course taught by Professor Hertz attended a conference on "Writing and the Holocaust". The conference, sponsored by the Center for Humanities and the Office of General Studies at the State University at Albany in conjunction with the New York State Writers Institute, focused on the methodological problems encountered by historians, philosophers, poets and novelists who attempt to convey the nature of the Holocaust experience to an audience without personal memories of the Second World War.

In the morning session on Monday, Prof. Philip Hallie explored the representation of evil and the significance of ethical ambivalence during the Holocaust. His studies of French rescue efforts, and the unique case of a German major who assisted these efforts, shattered the notion of the Third Reich as a monolithically evil state and revealed some of the unexplored aspects of life in epach. Poet William Heyen then read from his own collection of Holocaust poems and discussed how the form of poetry effects the meaning for various audiences.

The afternoon session that same day was dedicated to the explanation of memory and the interpretation of survivor testimony. Presentations by Lawrence Langer and Lore Segal provoked strong reaction from the many survivors and children of survivors attending the conference.

Also at the Cultural Education Center, in the form of a permanent exhibit, is the collection of photographs and historic reproductions of the Holocaust years entitled "Bitter Hope". A clear and balanced overview of the years 1933 -45 in Germany is complemented by a presentation on the 928 survivors brought to Oswego, NY in the final years of the war.

By Steve Amato and Timothy Houlihan,
Department of History

4. Undergraduate Student Life On Campus

Despite the large Jewish Community at SUNY-Binghamton the Jewish Student Union (JSU) relies on a small but dedicated number of students to propagate the Jewish feeling on campus. Not to emphasize the negative qualities of the JSU, but it is an important factor in programming. SUNY-Binghamton possesses a large number of Jewish programs, but unfortunately they are not used to their full extent. For example, at the Israel Festival held the weekend of February 15, only a small number of students took advantage of the day-long activities, which featured speakers, food, and media presentations.

On February 19, Professor Yossi Umbert of Tel Aviv University gave an intimate and very constructive presentation/discussion on the current situation in Lebanon.

In celebration of the holiday of Purim the JSU sponsored a party. The JSU tries to raise the Jewish awareness of the student population by presenting activities which incorporate Judaism with secular activities. Another program the JSU participated in this year was the visit of Elie Wiesel to campus.

To supplement these special events there is a weekly radio show on WHRW which is a mixture of news, culture and Jewish interest stories. There are also weekly Shabbat services. To help get over the "Binghamton Blues," there is occasional Israeli Folk dancing, which always help raise participants' spirits.

Also on campus there is an organization called Chabad, which tries to bring religious Judaism to the students in a way in which they can incorporate it into their lives. They hold lectures, talks, and discussions, in addition to Shabbat services and learning.

Off campus is found the Bayet, a Jewish communal house which is open to guests during the week and on Shabbat, enabling students to enjoy the day in an intimate atmosphere. They also hold a weekly yiddish club in which a few students informally study yiddish with Professor Michael Taub in Ulpan style.

By Ronny Weinstein

5. Dean Gitlitz Okays Search to Fill Vacant Judaic Line

Dean David Gitlitz announced to a meeting of Judaic faculty that he is giving them the go ahead to fill the Judaic Studies Line which was left vacant this year by the departure of David Biale. A search committee will be formed headed by Leon J. Goldstein. Filling this vacancy will go a long way to help us meet staffing demands for our courses, particularly, the core courses.

6. Miscellaneous

In March, the JSU published Nachalah, a revived student publication dedicated to Jewish themes.

For "Yom Hashoah" ----- commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt in April, 1943 ----- the JSU and other campus groups sponsored a talk by Tuviah Friedman, Israel's leading Nazi hunter.

Finally, your generous support for our program is always vitally needed and deeply appreciated. Contributions may be sent to SUNY Foundation Judaic Studies Account #524.

You may wish to know that any other contribution that you might make to the SUNY Foundation you can specifically earmark it - "for the Judaic Studies Program #524."

Once again thank you and have a wonderful summer.