

HA-KOL

The Newsletter of the Judaic Studies Department
at Binghamton University

Allan Arkush, Editor

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No. 2

THE SEARCH IS ON!

As all of our local readers and many of our far-flung friends and supporters already know, the Judaic Studies Department and the History Department are busy looking for a new professor. The advertisements we have placed in various professional journals announce that we are seeking an expert in nineteenth and twentieth century Eastern European Jewish history. The ideal candidate for this position would be someone fluent in Russian, Polish, Yiddish, Hebrew, and maybe a couple of other relevant languages as well. He or she would be vastly knowledgeable about all aspects of the social, intellectual and political history of the Jews of Russia, Poland, Romania, Hungary, etc., and capable of teaching courses in the history of Eastern Europe in general.

That may sound like too much to ask for, but it really isn't. We can say this with considerable assurance, now, after having received some extremely impressive applications and having held a number of preliminary interviews at the Association of Jewish Studies conference in Boston in December. There are indeed people out there who fit our bill and who are interested in coming to Binghamton. We will be bringing a few of them here very soon for more extensive interviews and, if all goes well, we will be able to welcome our new faculty member in this semester's final newsletter. More than this we cannot tell you right now. But isn't that enough?

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

While we really cannot tell you anything more about the search itself right now, we can tell you a little to place it in context. We should explain that the particular focus of our search is a result of Dean Polachek's recommendation that we work together with the History Department in order to locate a new faculty member who can meet its needs as well as ours. The successful candidate will, in fact, hold a joint appointment in the History Department. Since their highest priority right now is to find an expert in Eastern European history, we are now

looking together for an Eastern Europeanist who specializes in Jewish history.

The current condition of our university has made this collaboration necessary. If, indeed, we had been completely free to set our own priorities, we would probably have sought a specialist in ancient or medieval Jewish history. And that is what we will look for at the next opportunity. For the time being, however, we are quite content to be able to hire an expert in an area to which our department has never really given the attention it deserves. And we are more than gratified to be able to draw upon the great expertise of the History Department in conducting our search.

THE STORY NEXT TO THE STORY

Hebrew isn't being spoken around the Judaic Studies offices as much as it used to be. We don't have the same critical mass of Israelis on our staff that we had some years ago. As some of our graduates might be surprised to hear, there was a point last year when it seemed as if English might rule unchallenged as the Judaic Studies Department's lingua franca. The likelihood of any such occurrence has diminished greatly, however, since the advent of our new Yiddish teacher, Jack Weinstein.

English is still holding its own, but Yiddish has unexpectedly and with shocking rapidity emerged as a strong challenger to its hegemony. It's not that we have all suddenly become fluent in the language. Really, it's only Jack Weinstein who is fully at home in Yiddish. But he's completely at home in our offices, too. He's there, it seems, all day long, escorting into his office an unending stream of students. They come mainly for help on their Yiddish assignments. But they sit and shmooz (in Yiddish), and sing (in Yiddish), and God knows what else (in Yiddish).

This might sound innocent enough. But a suspicious pattern is becoming visible. Here are just two recent episodes that indicate what is going on:

- 1) A student is sitting in the Department chairman's office. A first-time visitor, she is asking about the requirements for fulfilling a minor in Judaic Studies. Jack Weinstein walks into the office, takes one look at the student, and utters her name in a sorrowful tone of rebuke. After a brief pause, he points directly at her and thunders, "A traitor! This one is a traitor." And he shakes his head mournfully. "She took Yiddish 101 and didn't come back for 102."

"I couldn't do it, Mr. Weinstein," she apologizes, with real regret in her voice. "It conflicted with a course that I absolutely had to take for my major. I wanted to take it, but I couldn't."

"That was last year!" Jack triumphantly announces. "Ploni ben Ploni took 101 last year and is taking 102 next spring. That can be done! Maybe you'll need to brush up a little (and for that I can help you). But it can be done!"

2) The department chairman walks past an open door, from which he hears Jack Weinstein announcing to a student that "You don't have to learn English..." He immediately breaks into the conversation, angrily insisting that knowledge of English is indeed necessary. Jack finishes his interrupted sentence: "I was only saying that you don't have to learn English in order to read French literature," or something like that.

This might all seem harmless enough, but it is also possible that more is happening than meets the eye. What is going on here, really? Why are our Yiddish enrollments higher than ever before? Was Jack really telling the truth when explained away his dismissal of the need to learn English? Why isn't our department enough for him? Why is he teaching Yiddish at the Jewish community center in the evening? Why is he teaching it at BOCES as well? Is it merely a coincidence that we are being directed to look for a specialist in East European Jewish history, or is this in some unknown way part of a scheme that Jack Weinstein has cooked up?

THE MISSING LINKS

In the current environment, it seems almost subversive to mention the Stillmans. It's hard to believe, isn't it, that Binghamton was once the site of conferences on Sephardic Jewry, of all things. Yedida, by the way, has just notified us that the proceedings of the second (and, alas, final) Sephardic conference held in Binghamton (in 1991) will soon be appearing in print. And Norman has sent us a copy of his latest book, Sephardic Religious Responses to Modernity. The published text of lectures he gave at the University of London some years ago, it is dedicated to the Stillmans' friend and ours, Mrs. Jennie Eber of Binghamton.

Things would be different here, obviously, if the Stillmans were still around, filling the air with Hebrew and, for that matter, Moroccan Arabic, and providing a solid bulwark against the relentless advance of Yiddishkeit. But Jack, of course, knew this as well as we do. That's why he arranged to have the University of Oklahoma steal them away from Binghamton.

**COURSE OFFERINGS
JUDAIC STUDIES DEPARTMENT
SPRING 1997**

CORE COURSES

JUST 241/HIST 241	BIBLICAL HISTORY /	SUSSMAN	TR 10:05-11:30
JUST 243/HIST 243	MEDIEVAL JEWISH HISTORY/	SHEPKARU	MW 3:30-4:55

TOPICS COURSES

JUST 247/HIST 247	REBIRTH OF ISRAEL /	ARKUSH	TR 10:05-11:30
JUST 281F/HIST 298B	THE FUTURE OF THE JEWS/	ARKUSH	W 6:00-9:00 **
JUST 282J/ARTH 282J	ZIONISM & THE AMER FILM/	ABEND	TR 2:50-4:15 *
JUST 282P/COLI 282P			
ARTH 282P	ISRAELI PROSE /	ABEND	M 3:00-6:00 **
JUST 288D	DEAD SEA SCROLLS /	ROEMER	TR 4:25-5:50 *
JUST 391	PRACTICUM IN COLL TEACH/	STAFF	TBA
JUST 395	INTERNSHIP /	STAFF	TBA
JUST 397	INDEPENDENT STUDY /	STAFF	TBA
JUST 480E/HIST 480E	AMERICAN JUDAISM /	SUSSMAN	T 1:15-4:15
JUST 491	PRACTICUM IN COLL TEACH/	STAFF	TBA
JUST 497	INDEPENDENT STUDY	STAFF	TBA
JUST 499	SENIOR THESIS	STAFF	TBA

LANGUAGE COURSES

HEBREW 102	(01)	ELEMENTARY HEBREW II /	SHEPKARU	MW 9:40-10:40
				TR 10:05-11:05
	(02)	ELEMENTARY HEBREW II /	SHEPKARU	MW 10:50-11:50
				TR 11:40-12:40
HEBREW 204		READINGS IN HEBREW LIT /	SHOER	MW 5:30-7:00
HEBREW 331H		HEB LITERATURE: BIBLE /	ARKUSH &	
		& MODERN PERIOD	SHEPKARU	T 3:00-6:00
HEBREW 391		PRACTICUM IN COLL TEACH/	STAFF	TBA
HEBREW 397		INDEPENDENT STUDY /	STAFF	TBA
HEBREW 597		INDEPENDENT STUDY /	STAFF	TBA
HEBREW 707		RESEARCH SKILLS /	STAFF	TBA
YIDDISH 102		ELEMENTARY YIDDISH II /	WEINSTEIN	TR 1:15-2:15
				W 1:10-2:10
YIDDISH 391		PRACTICUM IN COLL TEACH /	WEINSTEIN	TBA
YIDDISH 397		INDEPENDENT STUDY /	WEINSTEIN	TBA

* 2-CREDIT MINI COURSE BEGINS 1ST HALF OF THE SEMESTER
(1/21 - 3/10)

** 2-CREDIT MINI COURSE BEGINS 2nd HALF OF THE SEMESTER
(3/11 - 5/9)

Attentive readers of our course list will notice the reappearance of the name Sussman. It's not always on our list. As a member of the History Department, Lance sometimes goes an entire semester without teaching a course for us. This semester, however, we are happy to be able to announce that he is giving us a double dose. Double Sussman -- but no Morell. As you may have guessed, he's on sabbatical. The last time we heard from him he was having trouble with his computer, which is no doubt being given a substantial workout as its owner proceeds with his research.

WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON AROUND HERE?

We had a party back in October for our faculty, majors, minors, and other friends. It went well enough. A lot of people came and talked and ate a lot of food.... We have some speakers tentative scheduled for later in the semester, but it's too early to say anything about them yet... Not much else to report...

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Not having had any fresh thoughts in the last several months, our editor has declined to write an editorial for the current issue. His editorial in the previous issue of Ha-Kol evoked no controversy, but it did elicit one e-mail response, which we reprint below:

Hi, Allan--Just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate your continuing to send me Ha-kol, even though it's been aeons since I was Judaic Studies bibliographer for the library. I quite miss my Hebrew classes, and hope I can get back to them someday...when I retire and have more time??? So much fun, so little time! I'm sure someone must have said that. Anyway, what prompted me to write is that I thought the most recent issue of Ha-kol was a particularly good and well-written one and I especially liked your Editorial! One of the things that I specifically liked about our Judaic Studies program when I was enrolled was that I was NOT made to feel like an outsider, even though I'm about as "WASP" in my background as it's possible to be! I loved the Hebrew language, and I really enjoyed--and learned some very valuable and useful things from-- my contact with Jewish culture. Anyway, I think that to be ethnocentric in choosing either instructors or students for any ethnic studies program is simply racial prejudice in one direction or another. Heavens, where would we be if only Anglos were allowed to teach English lit.? Heaven forbid! Thanks very much for an excellent article. I'm looking forward to more of the same!

Jeanne Eichelberger