

The Jewish World Map

Global Geography in Jewish Writing and Experience

Abstracts and Biographies

1-3 September 2025 | University of Haifa and The Open University of Israel

Session 1: Biblical Literature

Chair: Cana Warman, Ben-Gurion University

10:05–10:30

Guy Darshan, Tel Aviv University

Two Types of mappae mundi Reflected in the Table of Nations

Abstract

While several recent studies on the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 identify a basic layer accompanied by a series of additions, the most compelling explanation for the chapter's composition is that it weaves together two independent and distinct narrative strands, each recounting a different story about the development of peoples in the postdiluvian world. Each strand reflects a fundamentally different world map of humanity: the Priestly layer presents a tripartite mappa mundi, while the non-P (still more convenient and accurate to refer to as Yahwistic) layer in the chapter reflects a quadripartite division of the world. In this paper, I will characterize each narrative strand and its respective geographical and historical worldview, and propose an explanation for their emergence against the backdrop of related traditions in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean.

Biography

Guy Darshan is an Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible and currently serves as the Chair of the Department of Biblical Studies at Tel Aviv University. He received his academic training in Hebrew Bible and Classical Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and served as a Fellow in Judaica at both Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania. His research focuses on the formation of biblical literature within the cultural context of the ancient Near East, particularly the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as on the textual history of the Bible and the processes of canonization.

10:30-11:00

Nili Wazana, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Every place on which the sole of your foot treads on: Between Restricted Borders and World Dominion in the Bible

Abstract

The Bible is a recruited, ideological text that serves the worldviews of its authors. It contains no pictures, tables, or maps. When the text refers to geography, it delineates territory in words. In this lecture, I will compare two worldviews regarding the territory of the Land of Israel that are reflected in the biblical text: one is polycentric, according to which the Land of Israel is a limited territory with neighbors who also have their own defined domains, and the other is monocentric, imperialistic, according to which the entire world is subject to Israel's rule. I will particularly focus on the concept of "every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon" (Deut. 11:24; Josh. 1:3) in the context of the second conception, and will examine its meaning and function in defining universal dominion.

Biography

Nili Wazana is affiliated with the Hebrew University. She is the academic head of the 'Revivim' program, an excellence training program for teaching Bible and Jewish studies, and of the MA program 'The Bible and the Ancient Near East' at the Rothberg International School at the Hebrew University. She deals with the history of ideas in the biblical period,

and particularly with Deuteronomistic historiography. She examines the position of biblical authors in the context of 'the voice of the vanquished'.

11:00–11:30

Danel Kahn, University of Haifa

Mapping Divine Judgment: The Geographical Horizon in Biblical Oracles Against the Nations

Abstract

The prophetic books of Amos, Second Zechariah, Isaiah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel contain significant collections of oracles directed against foreign nations. These pronouncements reveal not only theological perspectives on divine justice but also demonstrate the prophets' geographical awareness and worldview. This lecture examines how these oracles map the known world of ancient Israel and reflect evolving geopolitical realities across different prophetic periods.

The geographical scope of these oracles extends in concentric circles from Israel's immediate neighbors—Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Ammon—to regional powers like Egypt, Tyre, and Damascus, and finally to distant imperial centers such as Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. This pattern reveals both practical knowledge of trade routes and political relationships, and a theological understanding of Yahweh's universal sovereignty extending beyond Israel's borders.

Particularly noteworthy is how the geographical focus shifts across prophetic periods, reflecting changing political realities. Earlier prophets like Amos address primarily local powers, while later prophets increasingly focus on imperial threats. The lecture will analyze how geographical references in these oracles reflect actual historical developments and demonstrate the prophets' remarkable awareness of international affairs. We will also explore how these geographically-structured oracles functioned rhetorically within their original contexts and how they contribute to our understanding of ancient Near Eastern geopolitics.

Biography

Prof. Dan'el Kahn is a scholar in the field of Ancient Near Eastern history, specializing in Egyptology, Neo-Assyrian and Biblical studies. He currently serves as a Professor at the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Haifa in Israel.

Kahn's academic contributions focus primarily on the interactions between ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia during the first millennium BCE. His research concentrates on the political and cultural relationships between these major civilizations, particularly during the Neo-Assyrian and Babylonian periods.

Among his notable works are studies on the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty of Egypt (the "Kushite" period), the campaigns of Assyrian kings into Egypt, and comparative analyses of Biblical and extra-Biblical historical sources. In 2020 he published: Sennacherib's campaign against Judah: a source analysis of Isaiah 36-37 at Cambridge University Press.

Session 2: Second Temple Literature and Rabbinic Literature

Chair: Hillel Newman, University of Haifa

11:45-12:15

Cana Warman, Ben-Gurion University

Worldview and World Map

Abstract

In my lecture I intend to discuss the types of maps found in works written in Judah of the third and second centuries BCE.

- The Book of the Watchers, that is chapters 1-36 of 1 Enoch, presents various maps, with no attempt to unify them. The common denominator of all of them is a clear disregard for any scientific consideration and an effort to provide hope for readers grappling with the question of theodicy.
- The author of the Genesis Apocryphon, which is contemporary with the Book of the Watchers, chooses the opposite path. He does deal with theological questions, but not through a map or maps. The map he draws, when describing the division of the world among the sons of Noah, is the one known and accepted in educated Greek-speaking circles of his time. His innovation lies in the translation of this scientific achievement from Greek to Aramaic.
- The Book of Jubilees reflects the incentives of both 1 Enoch and the Genesis Apocryphon. It adopts the map found in Genesis Apocryphon, translates it into Hebrew, and adds details that are missing from it. The updated map, however, enables the author to present his chauvinistic worldview, the superiority of the Jewish people.

Biography

Cana Werman is a professor at the Department of Jewish History at Ben-Gurion University. Her research concentrates on Jewish literature from the Hellenistic-Roman era, with a particular emphasis on texts from the Second Temple period. It involves a study of the development of Halakha, Jewish-Hellenistic thought, early Christianity, messianic expectations, apocalyptic literature, and the socio-political context influencing historical events and the people experiencing them.

12:15-12:45

Omer Shadmi, University of Haifa

A rabbinic world: the Bavli's mental map and official divisions in Late Antiquity

Abstract

Geography is a field of research set to survey the world's spaces whose roots are in the Greco-Roman world. During the centuries of antiquity, the field was developed based on certain epistemological assumptions. By the Modern era, geography became the central framework for organizing the world's spaces. The rabbinic corpus of Late Antiquity, however, does not share the same assumptions and its organization of spaces does not easily lend itself to geographical analysis. Acknowledging the epistemological frameworks is the first step in removing scholarly biases and addressing rabbinic conceptions of the world's spaces. After a comparison of the epistemologies underlying the spatial worldview of the rabbis and of Greco-Roman geographers, this paper will examine the mental map of the Bavli's Mesopotamia. This mental map will be viewed as extremely self-centered in its interest and as forming autonomous rabbinic units that replace imperial and other divisions and take part in the formation of rabbinic identities.

Biography

Omer Shadmi recently submitted his PhD dissertation titled "The Imaginary Geography of the Babylonian Talmud" in the Department of Jewish History, University of Haifa.

Session 3: Jewish Descriptions of the World Against the Backdrop of Greco-Roman Geographical Descriptions

Chair: Richard Talbert, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

14:15-14:45

Geoffrey Herman, École Pratique des Hautes Études – PSL, Paris

The Changing Jewish Geography of Sasanian Babylonia

Abstract

Our knowledge of Jewish settlement in Sasanian Babylonia is mainly limited to the familiar literary sources at our disposal, of which the Babylonian Talmud has pride of place. Indeed, the systematic identification of Jewish settlements in Babylonia mentioned in the Talmud was one of the earliest projects in scientific Jewish scholarship, as it emerged in the 19th century and continued throughout the 20th century, including volumes authored by Abraham Berliner, Adolf Neubauer, Jacob Obermeyer, B-Z. Eshel and Aharon Oppenheimer. Nevertheless, the critical examination of the textual variants of the literary sources, which has improved immensely in recent years, and the close study of internal Talmudic data, allows for greater precision and nuance in plotting the Jewish settlement patterns and its dynamic over the course of time. This paper will provide examples of such shifts, and offer some new identifications.

Biography

Geoffrey Herman (PhD : Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006) is Directeur d'études at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Université Paris, Sciences et Lettres ; in the Vth Section, (Sciences Religieuses), where he holds the chair of Judaïsmes antiques et littérature rabbinique classique. The recipient of the Bertel and Eliezer Shimshon Rosenthal Prize for Talmudic Scholarship in 2015, he spent 2018 as a member of the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

The area of his research is Jewish history in antiquity, with a focus on the Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era, which he seeks to understand in the light of the broad Sasanian culture. On the topic of Babylonian Jewish geography he has published two articles, "Babylonia of Pure Lineage: Notes on Babylonian Jewish Toponymy" (2018) and "'There we sat down': Mapping Settlement Patterns in Sasanian Babylonia" (2018).

14:45-15:15

Reuven Kiperwasser, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

What is the World Like? - Rabbis and their cosmographic imaginations between East and West

Abstract

This presentation is dedicated to questions of cosmography in Talmudic Judaism. Talmudic cosmography is rarely the focus of scholarly attention, and the only study devoted to the subject is Gad Ben-Ami Zarfati's article in Volume 35 (1965) of Tarbiz, who correctly noted that the rabbis still use the ancient Babylonian model of the universe. My research introduces additional nuances, drawing on some traditions that have not been analyzed before. Analyzing exegetical texts depicting the movement of the sun around the disk of the Earth, floating on the waves of the world's oceans, I want to show how observation of nature and mythical views complement each other. The Universe and its physical phenomena were perceived as a living being, inhabited by animated subjects and forces.

Biography

Reuven Kiperwasser specializes in rabbinic literature. He is a research associate Ben Gurion University in Negev and teaching in Polis, Institute for Humanities, Jerusalem. His research interests include the interactions between Iranian mythology, Syriac-Christian storytelling, rabbinic narrative, and trans-cultural relationships between textual communities of Late Antiquity. Schechter publishing house published his critical edition of Kohelet Rabbah (7-12) with an introduction and commentary in 2021. Braun Judaic Studies published his book Going West in 2021. A collection of papers he edited with Geoffrey Herman Expressions of Skeptical Topoi in (Late) Ancient Judaism was published by De Gruyter in 2021. A new book written together with S. Ruzer and A. Kofsky, titled: Late Antique Jewish and Christian Travelogues was published in 2025 by De Gruyter.

15:15-15:45

Daniela Dueck, Bar Ilan University

Common sense geography - the oral goes written in Biblical and Classical texts

Abstract

This lecture examines how everyday geographical knowledge was preserved when oral traditions were committed to writing in both Biblical and Greco-Roman texts. I analyze passages containing geographical information—distances, directions, and landscape descriptions—that reveal non-technical, experience-based spatial understanding rather than measured precision. These "common sense" geographical references reflect how ordinary people conceptualized and navigated their world before the development of formal geographical science.

The Biblical material provides rich examples of spatial descriptions based on travel time, visual landmarks, and relational positioning. Similar patterns emerge in classical texts, particularly in works drawing from non-specialist sources or describing peripheral regions. By comparing these traditions, I demonstrate the persistence of vernacular geographical frameworks even as more technical approaches developed.

This comparative analysis reveals how ancient texts preserved multiple layers of geographical knowledge, where elite scientific traditions existed alongside practical, localized spatial understanding. The similarities across different cultural traditions suggest common cognitive patterns in how humans process and communicate spatial information—patterns that persist from antiquity through the present day despite technological advancement in geographical measurement and representation.

Biography

Professor Daniela Dueck serves as Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Professor of Classical Studies and ancient history at Bar-Ilan University. A scholar of ancient geography and historiography, she is internationally recognized for her work on Strabo and geographical knowledge transmission in classical antiquity. Her publications include "Strabo of Amasia: A Greek Man of Letters in Augustan Rome," (Routledge), "Geography in Classical Antiquity," (Cambridge University Press), and "Illiterate Geography in Classical Athens and Rome." (Routledge). Professor Dueck specializes in analyzing fragmentary texts, reconstructing ancient spatial perspectives through interdisciplinary approaches.

Session 4: Medieval Era

Chair: Katrin Kogman-Appel, University of Münster

16:00-16:30

Saskia Dönitz, University of Münster

The Medieval World as Seen by Josippon

Abstract

The Book of Josippon offers its own world view expressed in the way the author structured geography and described landscapes within the depiction of Jewish history during the Second Temple period. Peoples and countries mentioned reflect a religious worldview that closely links history and geography. Most famous is the first chapter which provides a table of nations based on Genesis 10 and Flavius Josephus. Not only are the nations listed, they are also located within the medieval ethical and geographical distribution providing an example of how biblical ethical knowledge is reinterpreted geographically in medieval Jewish thought. It demonstrates the way how European Jewish identity was constructed through the adaptation of biblical genealogy.

The book was revised several times and translated into many languages including Arabic, Yiddish, Ladino and Ethiopic showing the impact of Josippon on its audience during the Middle Ages and beyond. Thus, the world view of Josippon was carried into all four corners of the medieval world.

Biography

Dr. Saskia Dönitz is a senior scholar in medieval Jewish studies, currently serving as a replacement professor at the Institute for Jewish Studies at the University of Münster. Her expertise includes medieval Jewish literature, history and literature of Byzantine Jewry, and Hebrew literature in medieval Italy. Her doctoral dissertation (2008) focused on Sefer Yosippon and its reception in the Middle Ages. She has published extensively on Byzantine Jewry, Jewish-Christian relations, intellectual networks in the medieval period, and manuscript studies.

16:30-17:00

Ossnat Sharon-Pinto, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Jewish Travelogues' Transition into the Early Modern Era: Space, History and the Self

Abstract

Following my graduate research, I present here the outline of a planned book that offers rigorous consideration of the field of Jewish travel literature at a transitional period in its development: the turn from the medieval to the early modern. Using three case studies from the late 15th to early 17th century, I aim to demonstrate the inherent potential of the literary analysis of works describing forms of “real” space and experience. Sustained attention to the poetics of these (ostensibly) descriptive texts affords a window into their creators’ and audiences’ implied conceptions of fundamental ontological categories such as self, history, and of course – space.

In my first case study I examine the 1481 travelogue of Meshulam da Volterra as a defining example of contemporaneous Italiano itineraries. As one of the earliest modern Hebrew works depicting specific personal experience, I examine this work through the categories of mortal danger and fear to demonstrate how such common features of early modern travel propelled a novel form of narrative into existence. My second case study is the first, and comprehensive, printing of Eldad ha-dani literature of the ten lost tribes (~1470-1480) – to be close-read as an counterfactual historiographical endeavor, rather than contextualized as a messianic one. My third case study will follow the afterlife of the medieval Sivuv Petahia mi-Regensburg, as reframed and reworked in Hebrew and Yiddish into a variety of print products that depict a rich, kaleidoscopic and ontologically layered image of the near East. In all cases, I aim to show the crucial connection between the mapping of space and the discursive understanding of one’s world.

Biography

Dr. Ossnat Sharon-Pinto is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Hebrew University. She studies early modern European-Jewish narrative, employing a literary toolkit to ask questions in the realm of cultural history. Her graduate research focused on early modern Jewish travel literature, and spatiality remains a focal point of much of her work. She is currently co-writing a handbook on early modern Yiddish translations of German prose for a DFG project

headed by Dr. Aya Elyada alongside Prof. Astrid Lembke of Mannheim University. Her works on early autobiography and popular translated prose are due to appear this fall in AJS Review and JQR, respectively.

17:00-17:30

Avishai Bar-Asher, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Paradise Lost? The Search for the Garden of Eden in Medieval Jewish Thought

Abstract

In my lecture “Paradise Lost? The Search for the Garden of Eden in Medieval Jewish Thought” I will explore how the concept of the Garden of Eden evolved within medieval Jewish thought, with particular attention to esoteric traditions. Focusing on three major interpretive models, the discussion traces how each framework engages with and reworks earlier approaches. These shifting conceptions of paradise illuminate broader transformations in medieval Jewish theology, theosophy, mysticism, and biblical hermeneutics—offering a window into how sacred space and eschatological themes were imagined, reimagined, and layered over time.

Biography

Professor Avishai Bar-Asher is the Sol Rosenblum Chair in Jewish History and an Associate Professor of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Department of Jewish Thought. Bar-Asher's research focuses on various chapters in the history of Jewish esotericism, from the Hekhalot literature, through Sefer Yeşirah, to Medieval Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah, to later phases in the history of kabbalistic literature. He serves as the Head of the Department of Jewish thought at the Hebrew University.

Session 5: A View from the East, North Africa and the Mediterranean

(Sponsored by The Ben Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East)

Chair: Oded Irshai, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

09:30-10:00

Menashe Anzi, Ben-Gurion University

Jews in the Modern Indian Ocean: A Shared Space

Abstract

This lecture aims to introduce a common geographical framework for understanding the lives of Jewish communities along the shores of the Indian Ocean during the modern era. Recent scholarship on the Indian Ocean World, often termed the “Oceanic Turn”, has explored transnational connections across South Asia, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula, and East Africa, emphasizing the economic, cultural, and trade networks that linked these regions. However, despite the rich diversity of communities inhabiting this maritime space, the role and experiences of Jewish populations have been largely overlooked. I propose that this oceanic framework offers a valuable lens through which to examine Jewish presence and interactions across these interconnected coastal zones, thereby integrating Jewish histories into broader regional narratives.

The lecture will focus on several individuals who traveled between the diverse shores of the Indian Ocean at the dawn of the modern era, using their stories as a window into the shared cultural traits that connected Jewish communities across the region. These examples will illustrate how Jewish identities and practices were shaped by this dynamic, transnational space.

Biography

Menashe Anzi is a Senior Lecturer in the Jewish History department at Ben-Gurion University, Israel. His areas of specialization include the history of Yemenite Jews, the relationship between Jews and Muslims in Islamic cities, and the trade networks and Jewish migration along the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. His book, *The Şan‘ā’nis: Jews in Muslim Yemen, 1872–1950* (2021, Zalman Shazar Center, in Hebrew), was awarded the Ben-Zvi Institute Prize in 2022. From May to July 2025, he is serving as a Plumer Visiting Research Fellow at St Anne’s College, Oxford.

10:00-10:30

Dotan Arad, Bar-Ilan University

Karaite Spatial Perception in the Early Modern Period

Abstract

For centuries, Karaite communities have existed under the rule of various states, in both the Islamic and Christian worlds. The Ottoman conquests changed the picture of the Karaite world. From then on, different communities of Karaites, speaking various languages, found themselves under one imperial rule. In this lecture, I will examine the worldview of Karaite Jews in the 16th-18th centuries. How did a Karaite Jew in Cairo, Damascus, or the Crimean Peninsula imagine the map of Karaite communities spread across the region? How were the connections between the communities actually maintained? Which communities functioned as central hubs in this network of connections? In my lecture, I will examine these questions, primarily in light of documents from the Cairo Genizah, and through them, I will attempt to sketch the perception of the Karaite space in the early modern period.

Biography

Dotan Arad is teaching at the Department of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry at Bar-Ilan University. He also serves as the head of the Oded and Toni Eliashar Center for the Study of Sephardic Jews in the Land of Israel. His new book was published very recently: Dotan Arad and Esther-Miriam Wagner, *Wisdom and Greatness in One Place: The Alexandrian Trader Moses Ben Judah and his Circle* (Cambridge 2025).

10:30-11:00

Miriam Frenkel, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and The Ben Zvi Institute

India as Image and Reality in the World of Medieval Jews in the Lands of Islam

Abstract

Abstract:

As demonstrated in the pioneering research of S.D. Goitein and in recent scholarship, medieval Jews living in Islamic lands were well aware of the Indian subcontinent. Its western regions were home to Jewish communities, and trade relations with India were both intensive and routine. Yet in travel narratives, theological writings, and even halakhic discussions, India is often depicted through a lens of imagination and myth—as a lost paradise, the dwelling place of the Ten Lost Tribes, or the epitome of a pagan and primitive world. In this lecture, I will explore the tension between actual knowledge of India and its place in the imagined cartography of medieval Jewish thought. I aim to analyze and explain this disparity and what it reveals about the construction of cultural and religious identity.

Biography

Miriam Frenkel is Professor Emerita at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where she taught in the Departments of History and Jewish History and served as Head of the School of History. Her research focuses on the history of Jews in Islamic lands during the Middle Ages, the Cairo Geniza, and Jewish-Muslim relations. She has published extensively in these fields, including numerous articles and several books. Professor Frenkel currently serves as the Director of the Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East. She is the editor-in-chief of the journal *Ginzei Qedem* and a member of the editorial board of *Zion*.

Session 6: Jews and the Age of Discovery

Chair: Micha Perry, University of Haifa

11:15-11:45

Andrea Schatz, King's College London

Pieces of Places: Abraham Zacut's World and Its Reconfigurations in the Sixteenth Century

Abstract

In 1504, Abraham Zacut completed *Sefer Yuhasin*, his history of the transmission of halakhic knowledge from the earliest beginnings to the generation of the expulsion from Spain. The book ends with a supplement on world history that offers notes on events in numerous places across Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. This paper will compare Zacut's narrative mapping of the world for his readers in the diaspora to its main source before tracing the shifts that occurred, when his supplement was re-written and re-configured in the course of the sixteenth century, first in Constantinople and then in Ashkenazic Europe. What parts of his world were lost, what fragments were preserved, and what kind of knowledge was gained? What was the role of local geographical traditions, and what was the significance of global perspectives? In pursuing these questions, this paper explores how the loosely assembled narrated worlds of Hebrew historical writing can shed light on exilic consciousness and the *imago mundi* of early modern Jews.

Biography

Andrea Schatz is Professor of Jewish Studies at King's College London. She has held fellowships at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies in Philadelphia, Princeton University and the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study. Her publications explore Jewish perspectives on language, nation and diaspora in the eighteenth century and, more recently, early modern Jewish approaches to exilic history. Andrea is a founding member of the Digital Forum of the European Association of Jewish Studies and co-edits the Brill Series in Jewish Studies.

11:45-12:15

Moti Ben-Melech, Herzog College

Imagining Communities: Encounters with the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel in Late 16th Century

Abstract

The myth of the Ten Lost Tribes and the expectation of their eventual reunion with the Jewish people has accompanied Jewish history for more than two millennia. Yet, throughout this long period, Jewish society showed relatively little interest in the fate of the tribes, in attempts to locate them, or in establishing contact with them. On the rare occasions when such interest did arise, it did not necessarily stem from genuine concern for the tribes themselves, but rather from the challenge that their presumed existence posed to Jewish society at a given time and place.

Examining these rare moments of engagement with the Ten Tribes can therefore shed light on Jewish self-perception in specific historical contexts.

In this lecture, I will focus on two sources from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that describe the Lost Tribes, arguing that they reflect a shift in the Jewish attitude toward them. This shift, I suggest, was shaped by the adoption of the discourse of cultural superiority that was emerging in Europe during this period—an outlook that was also embraced by Jewish society. This adoption compelled Jews to redefine their relationship with the Ten Tribes, imagined as living somewhere in the East, outside the bounds of Western civilization.

Dr. Moti Benmelech is a senior lecturer in the history department at Herzog Academic College (Israel). His research focuses on social, cultural and religious history of early modern European, especially Mediterranean, Jewry and their interrelationships, with special attention to messianism and the search for the lost tribes of Israel during the Age of Geographical Discoveries.

He is the author of "Shlomo Molcho, the Life and Death of Messiah ben Joseph" (printed in Hebrew in 2017).

Biography

Moti Benmelech is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at Herzog College. He specializes in the history of Jewish society in the Mediterranean basin, particularly in Italy during the early modern period. His research focuses on messianism, the search for the Ten Lost Tribes, the world of conversos, sermons and their dissemination, and domestic violence in Jewish society in Italy.

His book "Shlomo Molcho: The Life and Death of a Messiah ben Joseph" was published by the Ben-Zvi Institute in 2017 and received an honorable mention from the Shazar Prize Committee of the Historical Society of Israel in 2018.

12:15-12:45

Zur Shalev, University of Haifa

Discovering Jewish Geography in Early Modern Europe

Abstract

In recent decades the study of early modern geography has taken a fruitful humanist turn. We now understand better the mechanisms of textual transmission, translation, and appropriation that characterized the production of geographical knowledge at the time. My presentation highlights a less familiar chapter in this process: the Christian reception of medieval Hebrew travel texts and related materials. This corpus became more accessible to Christian readers once Hebrew texts appeared in print during the sixteenth century. I will look at a few notable early modern Christian Hebraists (such as Benito Arias Montano, Gilbert Générard, Sebastian Münster, J.H. Hottinger) and examine these scholars' various engagements with these seemingly outdated Hebrew travel tales. What, I ask, was the significance of these texts for members of the republic of letters during an age of new geographical and religious discoveries?

Biography

Zur Shalev (Princeton, 2004) is an early modern European historian based at the University of Haifa. He specializes in cultural and intellectual history, with particular interest in geographical and religious thought and in Oriental scholarship. Current projects are: The reception of medieval geographical Hebrew texts in early modern Christian Europe; learned travel to the Levant in the 17th and 18th centuries. Since 2016 he co-edits Mediterranean Historical Review (Routledge).

Session 7: Textual Territories: Mapping Jewish Literary Worlds

Chair: Guy Miron, The Open University of Israel

14:15-14:45

Oded Cohen, The Levinsky-Wingate Academic College and Tel Aviv University

"For Nothing Was Hidden from Our Sages": The Map of the World and Jewish Truth in the Age of Discoveries and Distant Voyages

Abstract

The lecture will explore an anonymous, artistically illustrated Hebrew manuscript from the 17th century titled *Zurat Sidrei Olam* ("The Form of the Orders of the World"). The manuscript presents a cosmological and geographical worldview, discussing the structure of the universe and the solar system, the influence of celestial bodies on the character of different lands and their inhabitants, and the elemental composition of the Earth. The lecture will examine the manuscript's author as one who seeks to reconcile contemporary scientific and geographical knowledge—including ideas emerging in the Age of Discovery—with traditional Jewish sources. Through this synthesis, the author aims to demonstrate that Jewish wisdom had already encompassed scientific truths. The manuscript serves as an example of Jewish intellectual engagement with early modern knowledge, as well as of the ongoing effort to uphold the authority of tradition in the face of new empirical knowledge.

Biography

Dr. Oded Cohen teaches history at The Levinsky-Wingate Academic College and is a research fellow at The Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Public Humanities, Tel Aviv University. His research deals with the cultural role of Early modern Jewish wanderers, including rabbinic emissaries, vagabonds, immigrants and book-printers in the Mediterranean and European regions, and with questions concerning the self-images of wandering Jews following their encounters with different societies, knowledge and cultural spaces. His book: "'Ever Turning Blows the Wind': Cultural Spaces in Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azulay's World", was published by The Hebrew University Magnes Press.

14:45-15:15

Avriel Bar-Levav, The Open University of Israel

Mapping the World of Jewish Books

Abstract

In this lecture, I will explore the changing definitions of the world of Jewish books, and the various ways to map it. The starting point will be the first Jewish printed bibliography, *Siftei Yeshenim* by Shabbethai Meshorer Bass of Prague (Amsterdam 1680), and I will analyze other attempts as well.

Biography

Prof. Avriel Bar-Levav teaches in the department of History, Philosophy and Judaic Studies at the Open University of Israel. He is co-editor of the English scholarly journal *Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture*, published by Brill. His recent publications include a 4 volumes introduction to Jewish mysticism, which he wrote with Moshe Idel, published by the Open University of Israel Press; and the chapter "The Emergence of the Printing Self: Egodocuments and Micro-egodocuments in Jewish Paratexts from Manuscript to Print", in *Premodern Jewish Books, Their Makers and Readers in an Era of Media Change*, published by Brepols.

15:15-15:45

Dina Stein, University of Haifa

Standards of Measure: Mapping the Dov Noy Archive of Israeli Folk Literature

Abstract

The Israel Folktale Archives named after its founder, Dov Noy, offers detailed meta-data, search categories for navigating through the dense material. One such category is biblical verses, which I view as a semiotic system governed by rules of selection and combination. Mapping verses is devoid of human agency, befitting the structural

distant point of view. In contrast, trying to reach a systemic outline of the biographies and correspondence is bound to run into difficulties.

Biography

Dina Stein studies and teaches Rabbinic and folk literature in the department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature. Her latest book *Poetic Memory: Reading Ancient Traditions in the Israel Folktale Archives*, named after Dov Noy (Magnes, 2023, Hebrew). She is the academic head of the archives

Session 8: Jewish Responses to the Modern World

Chair: Eyal Ben-Eliyahu, University of Haifa

16:00-16:30

Maoz Kahana, Tel Aviv University

Worlds Beyond Words: Rabbi Nachman of Breslov's World Maps at the Crossroads of Renaissance and Counter-Enlightenment

Abstract

This lecture explores Rabbi Nachman of Breslov's imaginative "world maps" as sites where early modern Jewish thought engages with broader European cultural currents. Moving between Renaissance humanism, the scientific revolution, and Counter-Enlightenment critiques, the talk examines Nachman's narratives of exploration and discovery, showing how his stories reframe mystical knowledge as new "geographies" of the sacred. The contrast between Renaissance and Enlightenment thought here serves to expose a significant historical distinction: the fertility of the Jewish-rabbinic encounter with Renaissance imagination and its enchanted worlds of discovery, versus an intuitive resistance to the Enlightenment's inward journeys of self-exploration. Through these textual cartographies, Rabbi Nachman positions Hasidic thought at a surprising intersection of tradition, innovation, and global imagination.

Biography

Professor Maoz Kahana is an Associate Professor of Jewish History at Tel Aviv University, exploring the entangled realms of rabbinic literature and European intellectual culture in the early modern period.

His recent book, *A Heartless Chicken: Religion and Science in Early Modern Rabbinic Culture* (Bialik Institute, 2021), uses the case of a real 17th-century heartless chicken to examine the unstable intersections of halakha, mysticism, and the emerging scientific revolution in the early modern era.

Kahana's forthcoming monograph, *Pan and Bacchus in the Judengasse* (Hebrew edition, Haifa — Bahat Prize; English edition forthcoming with Stanford University Press), traces the surprising encounters between rabbinic writings and Greco-Roman mythology in early modern thought.

His current research integrates legal, literary, and material sources to illuminate the dialogue between rabbinic scholarship and broader European culture, including Renaissance humanism.

16:30-17:00

Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, New York University

Menasseh Ben Israel and the Theological Origins of World History

Abstract

The presentation re-examines the thought of Rabbi Menashe Ben-Israel, exploring his writings as a representation of Jewish geographical thought during the early modern period—the age of sail and discovery. Casting Ben-Israel against the contemporary geographical thinking about global space, this presentation exposes the theological origins of Ben-Israel's ideas about global space and history.

Biography

Zvi Ben-Dor Benite is Professor of Chinese and World History, Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, and Professor (by courtesy) of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University. He is the author of *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Harvard, 2005); *The Ten Lost Tribes: A World History* (Oxford, 2009); and co-editor of *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Culture, and Politics* (Brandeis, 2013); *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty: Global and Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept* (Columbia University Press, 2017), and *Time and Language: New Sinology and Chinese History*, (Hawaii University Press, 2023). Among other topics, he writes mainly on Early Modern Chinese intellectual history, Early Modern World History and geography, Asian Islam, and Middle Eastern Jewish history.

17:00-17:30

Tal Kogman, Tel Aviv University

Geography and the 'Jewish Point' in the Textbooks of Samson Bloch Ha-Levi

Abstract

This lecture explores the geography textbooks of Samson Bloch Ha-Levi, published in Hebrew during the first decades of the 19th century. Rather than subordinating modern science to religious tradition, Bloch highlighted what might be called 'The Jewish Point' – a distinctive geographical perspective focusing on biblical sites, Jewish communities around the world, prominent figures from Jewish history, and the linguistic and cultural connections between Jews and other nations. Drawing on contemporary science, Bloch used a modern geographical-scientific vocabulary while also emphasizing Jewish suffering and introducing the areas where our ancestors lived. His goal was not only to expand the geographical knowledge of young Jewish readers but also to cultivate a modern Jewish consciousness and strengthen Jewish identity. Bloch's geographical writings embody an educational vision aimed at constructing a hybrid Jewish identity – deeply anchored in historical tradition yet fully engaged with the modern world.

Biography

Dr. Tal Kogman is the head of the Unit of Cultural Research at the School of Cultural Studies, Tel Aviv University. Her research focuses on the processes of modernization and secularization in Ashkenazi culture in the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly in the context of the Haskalah movement. She examines the popularization of knowledge and modern practices, the dissemination of modern educational models and new conceptions of childhood, and the formation of attitudes toward nature and the animal world within the Jewish modern context.

Session 9: Jewish Emigration and Mental Maps from Central Europe and the World Map

Chair: Marcos Silber, University of Haifa

09:30-10:00

David Jünger, University of Rostock

When liturgy became reality. German Jews travelling to Palestine 1933–1938

Abstract

Before the 1930s only a tiny proportion of German Jewry had emigrated to Palestine. When the Nazis took power in 1933, however, an increasing number of German Jews started to think of Palestine as a possible place of refuge. Although most of them did know Erez Israel as a religious space, they did not know much about Palestine as a real, mundane place. Thus, it began a collective and individual journey to discover Palestine in the form of photo books, travelogues, and even tourist trips to the Holy Land, with most of the travelers returning to Nazi Germany. In my presentation I will look at those attempts to discover the place Palestine and to reconcile it with ideas and expectations of the holy space Erez Israel.

Biography

Dr. David Jünger is an affiliated member of the Research and Documentation Centre on the History of Dictatorships in Germany at the University of Rostock. He received his PhD from the University of Leipzig. His research focuses on Modern German and American Jewish History, Modern European History and the History of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. From 2012 to 2017 he worked at the Free University Berlin, from 2017 to 2021 at the University of Sussex, where he was also the Deputy Director of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies and from 2021 to 2024 at the history department of the University of Rostock. He is currently finishing his second book about the life and times of the German-American rabbi Joachim Prinz (1902–1988), which will be published in 2025.

10:00-10:30

Martin Goodman, Oxford University

The Jewish World Map of Isaac D'Israeli

Abstract

Isaac D'Israeli (1766-1848), the father of the British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, was a prolific and learned author with a wide reputation in London literary circles in the first half of the nineteenth century. A humanist who was influenced both by the French Enlightenment and by the Romantic poets, Isaac had no interest in organised religion and resigned his membership of Bevis Marks synagogue in 1816, but he continued to present himself as a Jew until the end of his life, retaining a strong interest in the fate of Jewish communities in the contemporary world. His *Genius of Judaism* was published under his name in 1833 and in the last years of his life he composed a detailed history of the Jews which was published anonymously shortly after his death in 1848 as a *Sequel to the histories of Josephus*. A striking feature of the *Sequel* is Isaac's concern to impress upon his readers, insofar as was possible with the information he could acquire, the exotic nature and wide geographical spread of Jewish communities and their distinctive relationships with their host nations over the centuries.

Biography

Martin Goodman is Emeritus Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Oxford and a former President of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, where he is now a Supernumerary Fellow. Trained in Oxford as an ancient historian, he taught Roman History at the University of Birmingham for nine years from 1977 before returning to Oxford, where he taught Jewish Studies from 1986 until his retirement in 2021. He has published widely on different aspects of Jewish and Roman history, with a focus on the history of the Jews in the Roman world.

10:30-11:00

Daniel Mahla, University of Haifa

Haunted Itineraries: Germany, Europe, and the Spatial Imagination of Israeli Travel

Abstract

This paper examines how Israeli travel guides to Europe from the 1960s to the 1990s constructed Germany as both a desirable destination and a site of historical trauma. It explores how these texts positioned Germany as a symbolic gateway to Europe, reflecting broader Israeli ambivalences between Western aspiration, Zionist identity, and Holocaust memory. The analysis sheds light on how Jewish-Israeli spatial imaginaries navigate the tension between cultural affinity and historical rupture.

Biography

Daniel Mahla is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Jewish History at the University of Haifa and the Haifa Center for German and European Studies. His research focuses on modern Jewish history, particularly in Central Europe and Palestine/Israel. In 2020, he published *Orthodox Judaism and the Politics of Religion: From Prewar Europe to the State of Israel*. Currently, he is engaged in two projects: one examining Israeli discourses on Europe, and another exploring the transmission of German-Jewish heritage across generations of Yekkes in Israel.

Session 10: Mental and Visual Maps

Chair: Martin Goodman, Oxford University

11:15-11:45

Meron Piotrkowski, Oxford University

Mapping the Jews of Ancient Egypt: From the Hellenistic Period to the Arab Conquest

Abstract

This paper presents MI-JEDI, an interactive map of the Jews of Egypt based on documentary (papyri) and epigraphic evidence, tracing Jewish settlement and migration from the Ptolemaic through the Byzantine periods. By visualizing geographical shifts, continuity, and disappearance of communities, the project highlights urban and rural distribution, the impact of the Diaspora Revolt (115–117 CE), and the transformation of Egyptian Jewry in its aftermath. Case studies from the Fayum, Antinoopolis, Oxyrhynchus, and Upper Egypt (Edfu) illustrate patterns of resilience, decline, and cultural adaptation. The map demonstrates how digital tools can illuminate Jewish history in Egypt across centuries of political and social change.

Biography

Meron M. Piotrkowski (Ph.D., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2015) is Associate Professor of Ancient Jewish History at the University of Oxford. A historian of antiquity, he specializes in the Second Temple period with a particular focus on the Jewish Diaspora in Egypt. He is the author of *Priests in Exile: The History of the Temple of Onias and Its Community in the Hellenistic Period* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2019) and a contributor to the new *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* (vols. IV–VII, eds. N. Hacham and T. Ilan). His current book project focuses on the History of the Jewish community of Oxyrhynchus in Egypt during the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods.

11:45-12:15

Katrin Kogman-Appel, University of Münster

Time and Space in the Maps of Elisha ben Abraham Cresques (Majorca 1325–1387)

Abstract

One of the most remarkable features of fourteenth-century portolan charts is the way political entities are marked. Elisha ben Abraham Cresques, a resident of the City of Majorca, modern Palma, was a Jewish mapmaker in the service of Peter IV of Aragon from c. 1350 until his death in 1387. Elisha was also a trained illuminator and, thus, decorated his most famous map, the so-called Catalan world map with a wealth of small vignettes. He not only added small flags to indicate political powers, as other portolan chart makers did, but also abundant ruler portraits, in the Middle East, in Africa, and in Asia. My presentation will revisit Cresques's cartographic work from the point of view of political space and historical time. As a brief case study, I shall study how the Mamluk state is visualized in terms of time and space in three maps associated with Elisha Cresques. My argument will then be put into relief by looking at Christian works from the same time, which seem to represent alternative positions.

Biography

Katrin Kogman-Appel is a Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Münster. Previously she taught at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (1996–2015). She has published work on ancient and medieval Jewish art and is particularly interested in Hebrew manuscript illumination and its cultural and social contexts. In 2015 she won an Alexander von Humboldt Professorship.

She is the author of *Jewish Book Art Between Islam and Christianity* (Brill 2004), and of *Illuminated Haggadot from Medieval Spain* (Pennsylvania State University Press 2007), which won the Premio del Rey Prize of the American Historical Association in 2009. A *Mahzor from Worms. Art and Religion in a Medieval Jewish Community*, a monograph on the Leipzig Mahzor (Harvard University Press, 2012) was a finalist of the National Jewish Book Award (scholarship). Her most recent monograph is *Catalan Maps and Jewish Books. The Intellectual Profile of Elisha ben Abraham Cresques (1325–1387)* (Brepols, 2020). She is just finished a monograph on the Passover Haggadah as a stand-alone book and its ritual uses between the thirteenth and the seventeenth centuries.

12:15-12:45

Eliezer Baumgarten (University of Haifa) & Uri Safrai (University of Haifa and Herzog College)

Jerusalem Between the Sephirot: The Kabbalistic Tree as a Cartographic Image

Abstract

This lecture examines the ilanot that developed within the Kabbalistic tradition of R. Joseph Gikatilla through a visual-cartographic lens, situating them within the broader cultural context of the medieval period. A close reading of the ilanot reveals that they are not merely abstract theological representations, but visual spaces that employ the same strategies found in medieval Christian maps of Jerusalem: narrative layering of events and figures from different periods, the central placement of Jerusalem as the sefirah of Malkhut, and a sharp distinction between sacred interior and threatening exterior. These features place the ilanot within a shared visual discourse that uses cartographic conventions to construct a theological-political narrative and position the viewer within it.

Beyond the comparative dimension, the lecture emphasizes the ritual-performative aspect of the ilanot, which embeds the individual within the sacred space they depict. The identification of the human body with the Temple, the home with the borders of the sefirot, and the commandments as mechanisms of protection and reinforcement, all point to the ilan as a dynamic “map of battle” that invites real participation. The lecture thus proposes a methodological framework that views these ilanot not only as representations of cosmic order, but also as instruments of active engagement in the spiritual struggle over the heavenly Jerusalem

Biography

Eliezer's research focuses on Kabbalah in the early modern era, with particular attention to questions of knowledge transmission across cultural spaces between East and West, and between center and periphery. He also serves as the head of the Digital Humanities Lab at the University of Haifa.

Uri Safrai is a lecturer and the head of Tvunot Publishing House at Herzog College. His research centers on issues of ability and power in the writings of Kabbalists active in the Ottoman Empire during the early modern era.

Eliezer and Uri are both collaborators in the Ilanot Project, directed by Prof. Yossi Chajes at the University of Haifa.