

ANNUAL REPORT 2016

Department of Jewish Studies

Submitted by

Carlos Fraenkel, Chair

June 1, 2017

Faculty

Professors

David Aberbach, on sabbatical leave, winter 2016

Carlos Fraenkel (Joint appointment with Philosophy)

Gershon D. Hundert

B. Barry Levy

Associate Professors

Eric Caplan (Joint appointment with the Faculty of Education), on sabbatical leave, winter 2016

Yael Halevi-Wise (Joint appointment with English), on sabbatical leave, winter 2016

Lawrence Kaplan, on sabbatical leave, winter 2016

Assistant Professor

Daniel K. Heller

Faculty Lecturers

Lea Fima

Esther Frank

1. Research and Publications

Members of the department published a number of high profile books and papers in 2016. Lawrence Kaplan, professor of rabbinics and Jewish thought, published *Maimonides: Between Philosophy and Halakhah* with Ktav press. The book contains an annotated edition of the lectures on Maimonides that Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, a seminal figure in modern-orthodox Judaism, gave in 1950-51. In these lectures one of the greatest modern Jewish thinkers engages the greatest medieval Jewish philosopher on perennial issues at the core of Jewish thought: how faith relates to reason, how philosophy relates to the divine law.

Carlos Fraenkel's *Teaching Plato in Palestine: Philosophy in a Divided World* came out in paperback with Princeton University Press. It was a finalist for the 2016 Sheikh Zayed Book Award in Arabic Culture in Other Languages. The German (Hanser) and Spanish (Ariel) translations also appeared in 2016. The German version was one of the best German non-fiction books in March 2016 (No. 2) selected by *Norddeutscher Rundfunk* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Important research contributions include peer-reviewed articles in high-class journals by Yael Halevi-Wise ("La formation d'une identité israélienne dans l'oeuvre de A.B. Yehoshua," *Psychanalyse et Littérature: Une journée avec Avraham B. Yehoshua, revue Lacanienne de Paris*) and Dan Heller ("Between Defense and Attack: Revisionist Responses to Anti-Jewish Violence in 1930s Poland")

[„Między obroną a atakiem: syjoniści-rewizjoniści wobec przemocy antyżydowskiej w Polsce w latach trzydziestych”] *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*). Lawrence Kaplan had a particularly productive year; besides the book, he published two peer-reviewed journal articles and one peer-reviewed book chapter, including “Saving Knowledge,” an essay on Solomon Schechter’s ‘Nachman Krochmal and the Perplexities of the Time’ in *Jewish Quarterly Review*. Carlos Fraenkel published two peer-reviewed book chapters and continued to develop a public-intellectual voice with a commentary in *Boston Review* and a critical review essay of Salman Rushdie’s latest novel in the *London Review of Books*.

Papers in 2016 were presented all over the world. Here is a representative sample: David Aberbach spoke at Cambridge University; Yael Halevi-Wise in Jerusalem; Dan Heller at the University of Sidney and Monash University; Gershon Hundert at Brown University; Lawrence Kaplan at the University of Hamburg; and Carlos Fraenkel gave the keynote lecture at the Philosophicum Lech in Austria and spoke at events in Vienna, Potsdam, Chicago, Stanford, and Barcelona.

A full list of the publications and other scholarly contributions of the department in 2016 is available here: <http://www.mcgill.ca/jewishstudies/publications/publications-2016>

Gershon Hundert continued to hold three grants: a Rothschild Foundation Europe Grant for “Recovering the Records of European Jewry: The Pinkassim Project,” as one of three principal investigators; a SSHRC Insight Development Grant for “Recovering the Records of European Jewish Autonomy 1500-1800”; and a SSHRC Insight Grant for “Experiencing Change: A Galician Jewish Wine Merchant in the 18th Century.” Carlos Fraenkel received a James McGill Professorship.

During the winter of 2016, three faculty members were on sabbatical leave and held prestigious positions at academic institutions abroad. David Aberbach was at the London School of Economics; Yael Halevi-Wise was Visiting Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of Haifa; and Lawrence Kaplan was a Research Fellow at the Maimonides Center for Advanced Jewish Studies at the University of Hamburg.

The department successfully concluded its search for an assistant professor in the area of Jewish History and Culture with a focus on Jews in Arab Lands. We were able to attract our first-ranked candidate, Christopher Silver (PhD candidate, UCLA), who works on the rich interactions of Jews and Muslims in popular culture in North Africa in the 20th century, in particular the outsized role played by Jewish musicians and Jews in the music industry in shaping modern North African culture. In the department he will cover a long-neglected, yet immensely important area that is both of great intrinsic interest and of special relevance in the current geo-political climate. Chris is also well placed to forge links between Jewish Studies and other departments in the Faculty of Arts, in particular Islamic Studies and History, as well as the Faculty of Music.

2. Teaching and Learning

Dan Heller was awarded the H. Noel Fieldhouse Award for Distinguished Teaching from McGill's Faculty of Arts, recognizing his impressive achievement as both an excellent and a very popular teacher.

Although a large number of our faculty were on sabbatical leave for part of 2016, we were able to cover all core areas in our undergraduate and graduate program, not least thanks to our Flegg postdoctoral fellowship program. In the winter of 2016 two Flegg fellows were on campus: Igor de Souza (PhD University of Chicago) continued to teach classes in Jewish thought; Ori Yehudai, (PhD University of Chicago and postdoc at NYU), a specialist in modern Jewish history, co-taught a seminar on history and memory in Israel with Prof. Heller. This was an excellent opportunity for our advanced students to get a taste of scholarship in the making as they were exposed to the methodological and interpretative differences between the two instructors. In the fall of 2016 Ofer Dynes joined us as Flegg postdoctoral fellow, our first choice out of more than 50 applicants. Ofer completed his PhD with distinction at Harvard with a dissertation titled *Discipline and Publish: Jews, the Logic of the State, and the Beginning of Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature (1806-1845)* The survey class Ofer taught for us in the fall—"Holocaust Literature: Critical Thinking in Dark Times"—was one of our most popular classes with 48 students enrolled.

In addition to the Flegg postdocs we also were able to hire excellent course lecturers, most importantly Rina Michaeli, who has taught with great success 4 Hebrew language classes for us in 2016-17 and will continue to teach for us in the future.

We have a sizable cohort of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows working on a wide range of topics in Jewish studies. Hence postgraduate education in the department is of considerable importance. Carlos Fraenkel has supervised our Flegg postdoctoral fellow Igor de Souza, who offered classes in Jewish thought that benefitted in particular our PhD and MA students working on Jewish philosophy in its Islamic and Christian contexts. Dan Heller and Gershon Hundert supervised two Flegg postdoctoral fellows: Ori Yehudai, who joined the department in 2015-16, and Ofer Dynes who arrived in the fall of 2016. We continued our successful "lunch-and-learning" events for graduate students and faculty in both the winter and the fall of 2016. In the winter, Dr. de Souza presented a sketch of the research he carried out during his two years at McGill. In the fall, Dr. Dynes spoke about the projects he will pursue at McGill and how they build on and expand the work he did in his dissertation. We have also continued to provide our graduate students with opportunities to develop their teaching portfolios. Thus Bakinaz Abdalla who is working on medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy taught two very successful classes in Jewish thought.

Yiddish language and culture has been a crucial area of research and teaching in the department since the days of Ruth Wisse. After the retirement of Anna Gonshor, our faculty lecturer in Yiddish, in 2014 we experienced a temporary decline of our Yiddish program. All the more we are very excited about

having successfully concluded a search for a new Yiddish faculty lecturer in which we were able to attract our first-ranked candidate, Dr. Yuri Vedenyapin, to McGill. Yuri was our first choice by far. He comes from a similar position at Harvard and is universally acclaimed as the best teacher of Yiddish language and literature in the world. He is also an outstanding scholar (PhD, Columbia), but his main vocation is teaching which makes him such a good fit for this position. He is also an excellent fit with our department's strongest cluster in Eastern European Jewish history and culture, as well as with our cluster in Jewish literature, but he will also be able contribute to the Faculty of Arts at large (German, Russian, History etc.).

Since the summer of 2011, the department has offered an intensive seminar on Eastern European Jewish music in partnership with KlezKanada, Canada's largest annual festival of Jewish/Yiddish culture and the arts. Taught by Hankus Netsky—professor of music at the New England Conservatory, leader of the Klezmer Conservatory Band, and musical director for Itzhak Perlman's recent recordings of Jewish music—the course combines classes on Jewish music with personal encounters with outstanding Jewish musicians and attendance at nightly concerts. In 2016 more than a dozen McGill students attended the event for a full week in mid-August.

Greatly enriching were also several public lectures for which the department was able to attract outstanding speakers. In the winter of 2016 Professor Israel Bartal, Avraham Harman Chair in Modern Jewish History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, gave the 2016 Levites Annual Lecture on “Writing Jewish History in the Jewish State: Revisiting Israeli Historiography.” In the fall of 2016 prominent Jewish-American composer Bruce Adolphe, presented a guest-lecture on “What does it mean to write Jewish music?” The department also co-sponsored a lecture with the Institute of Comparative Law by Profs. Yuval Sinai (Netanya) and Binyamin Shmueli (Bar Ilan) on “Maimonides and Contemporary Tort Theory: Law, Religion, Economics, and Morality” (February 2016).

3. Involvement in the community

Members of the department hold appointments on the editorial boards of leading journals in their fields, serve as peer reviewers for articles, book manuscripts and funding agencies, and are external reviewers for other programs in Jewish studies. Eric Caplan remains the Vice-President of the Mordecai M. Kaplan Center for Jewish Peoplehood; Gershon Hundert continues his tenure as president of the American Academy for Jewish Research; Carlos Fraenkel serves as the subject editor for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and is one of the three editors of the series, *Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Conflict, Reception and Mediation* (Walter de Gruyter); Yael Halevi-Wise is a member of the executive board of the Canadian Society for Jewish Studies.

In addition, members of the Department put their expertise and talents in the service of the community at large in various ways. Many are frequent speakers at synagogues, study groups, and other Jewish communal institutions. The most important engagement with Montreal's Jewish community was the

2016 Flegg Annual Lecture, an extraordinarily successful combination of recital and lecture, titled “Forbidden Voices: A Tribute to Jewish Holocaust Composers.” It introduced over 200 attendees to the music of Jewish composers who were persecuted, murdered or otherwise affected during the Holocaust. It was a unique opportunity to hear Jewish music that has rarely or never been performed and to rescue it from silence and oblivion. This was not only an academic achievement, but arguably an act of cultural justice. Dr. Liane Alitowski, lecturer in Jewish music in our department who is an accomplished concert pianist herself, was the architect of the event in collaboration with Prof. Eric Caplan. She performed the pieces in collaboration with musicians from McGill’s Schulich School of Music as well with Cantor Gideon Zelermeyr and the choir from the Shaar Hashomayim synagogue. The participants introduced each composer and sketched the often tragic circumstances under which the pieces were composed. The event fits, I believe, the spirit of the Flegg Annual Lecture series particularly well since both music and the memory of the Holocaust resonate across the spectrum of Jewish denominations. As the fantastic turnout demonstrated, the event brought members of all walks of Jewish life in Montreal together.