

Winter 2013 e-newsletter



In this issue

Scholars, Artists Connect at Conney Conference

Biennial gathering continues to influence landscape of Jewish arts

Coffee, Courtship, and Community

Tracing the role of public spaces in Jewish life

New Technology Sheds Light on Ancient Writings

Scholarship trains PhD student for cutting-edge research

Going Global

UW-Madison junior Jacob (Jake) Beckert discovers Israel through immersion

Quiz Yourself: How's your Yiddish?

Match the Yiddish word to the English definition and see if you are a Yiddish maven.

From the Dean's Desk

Scholars, Artists Connect At Conney Conference

Biennial gathering continues to influence landscape of Jewish arts

by Allison Bloom



“Diasporas” is the theme of this year’s Conney Conference (April 9-12 at UW Hillel), the popular biennial gathering of working artists (and their creations) and scholars of contemporary and historical Jewish arts. The conference is a cornerstone of the [Conney Project on Jewish Arts](#), initiated in 2005 by University of Wisconsin-Madison Professor Douglas Rosenberg (Art, Jewish Studies) to raise awareness of Jewish art and scholarship and support new work.

Featuring performances and presentations by artists working in theater, dance, music, multi-media installation, and creative writing, the conference also highlights research papers presented by scholars from around the world. This year’s keynote speaker, Josh Kun, director of the Popular Music Project at USC Annenberg, brings a wealth of knowledge about popular music, the cultures of globalization, the U.S.-Mexico border, and Jewish-American musical history. Other conference highlights this year include:

- A highly anticipated performance of *If the Whole Body Dies: Raphael Lemkin and the Treaty Against Genocide*. Written by UW-Madison Professor Emeritus Bob Skloot, the play follows the story of Raphael Lemkin, the Polish-Jewish lawyer who coined the term “genocide” and his attempts to lobby the United Nations to adopt a treaty against genocide. Skloot’s play has been performed many times around the world, but this is a rare opportunity to see it in Madison.
- The Jewish Choreographers and Performers Workshop, which will provide mentoring for dancers and other performers exploring Jewish identity in their work. Facilitated by Judith Brin Ingber, a longtime Conney participant and active choreographer, the workshop will take place at the Gates of Heaven, the nation’s fourth oldest synagogue, now located in James Madison Park.

Sponsored by the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies through a generous gift from Marv and Babe Conney, the Conney Project on Jewish Arts is a dynamic force in the field of Jewish arts and scholarship, inspiring new books, courses, and artwork. Brin Ingber recently edited and published a book, *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance* (Wayne State University Press, 2011), which grew out of past Conney Conference papers.

According to Rosenberg, papers and presentations submitted for consideration this year were dominated for the first time by Ph.D. candidates—evidence of the field’s continued growth and the Conney Conference’s leading-edge relevance. He also pointed out that lectures from past Conney Conferences are available online and have been downloaded more than 6,000 times, demonstrating that even past conference topics continue to interest a wide audience.

Rosenberg credits the experimental, “practice-theory” Conney Conference with opening up new ways for artists and scholars to connect, interact and explore.

Coffee, Courtship, and Community

Tracing the role of public spaces in Jewish life

by Laurie Silverberg



What did it mean to be Jewish in the urban centers of Europe during the late 19th and early 20th centuries? How did Jews create community away from religious institutions? These questions form the heart of Sarah Wobick-Segev's research—a project that has taken her to Berlin, Paris, and Israel. After receiving her PhD in History from UW–Madison in 2010, she spent two years as a Jim Joseph Fellow at Syracuse University. This past fall, Wobick-Segev returned to UW–Madison as the Weinstein Post-Doctoral Fellow in Modern European Jewish History.

I recently sat down with Sarah to learn more about her research.

What led to your interest in patterns of public consumption and public spaces among European Jews?

It started with two seminars in my first semester of graduate school. I took a class on consumption with Rudy Koshar and a class on anti-Semitism with David Sorkin. When I told David Sorkin I was writing a paper on coffeehouses for Rudy Koshar, he gave me a book on the anti-Jewish Hep Hep riots of 1819. The Hep Hep riots in Hamburg started in coffeehouses. I thought, "Now there is something interesting." In fact, all the major Hep Hep riots started in public spaces—spaces that were emblematic of the Jewish role in German society.

Why focus on public spaces?

If these spaces can be emblematic of the role of Jews in German society, they can also be emblematic of the place of Jews in their own worldview and their own society. In the early 19th century, cafés were symbolic of the "Jewish question" from a non-Jewish perspective. By the end of the 19th century, these same spaces were emblematic of the Jews' "Jewish question:" what is it to be Jewish in the modern world? How do you maintain a Jewish identity while at the same time being a European citizen?

Describe the role that the café and other public spaces played in Jewish life.

It was in those spaces that Jews started to congregate and do things outside of the synagogues—i.e., going to a café and holding a Purim Shpiel, or having balls for Hanukkah and Purim. These spaces were also important for Jews to start making their own matches and for educating children through summer camps and youth movements. Families were no longer observant, and yet they wanted to remain Jewish. The situation today, in which the JCC and Hillel are just as if not more important than the synagogue for many people, has its origins in the late 19th century.

How did the emergence of public spaces affect courtship patterns?

Until the late 19th century, a majority of Jews married through matchmakers or through family associations. The notion of a companionate marriage existed as an ideal but not in practice. But by the late 19th century, families would cover up an arranged marriage by having people “accidentally” meet in public spaces, and I argue that there came a point at which they decided they could just skip the middleman.

Why keep up the appearance of an impromptu meeting?

There was a rhetoric of love that emerged in the early 19th century, a belief that love should precede marriage. Some people argue that this was what [prompted the move away from matchmakers], but I argue that it’s not enough. Unless you have a place to meet people independently, you’re just going to get set up by your parents or someone else. These new spaces allowed individuality and individual autonomy.

How does it feel to be back at UW–Madison?

I love it. It’s like coming home.

New Technology Sheds Light on Ancient Writings

Scholarship trains PhD student for cutting-edge research

by Mary Ellen Gabriel



Near the Syrian oasis of Palmyra (a little over a hundred miles from Damascus), kings and other personages lie buried in a vast necropolis, or “city of the dead.” Inside the tombs and towers are burial chambers, each with a headstone inscribed with vital historical information dating from the late first century BCE to the third century CE.

But the inscriptions can be difficult to read. Time, looters, the weather, and war have eroded the fine chiseling, and scholars have, in some cases, been forced to rely upon educated guesswork to translate the inscriptions.



“It’s rife with errors,” admits Nathaniel Greene, a PhD candidate in Hebrew and Semitic studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, describing *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, the only comprehensive volume containing transcriptions of all known Palmyrene texts.

Greene aims to change that. Using a new digital technology—reflectance transformation imaging, or R.T.I.—that helps shed new light on ancient works, Greene will travel to New England and the Mid-Atlantic this summer to take a series of deftly lit photographs of burial headstones and other related Palmyrene epigraphs. Back in Madison, he’ll use high-tech software to “read” the light patterns in astounding detail.

“With R.T.I., I can detect features that can’t be seen with the naked eye,” he explains.

Before using the advanced software, Greene first had to learn to take good pictures. Through the Center for Jewish Studies, Greene applied for, and received, the [Ida and Isaac Lipton Scholarship for Domestic Study](#), which allows undergraduates and graduate students to pursue educational opportunities that are not available at UW-Madison within the United States.

Greene chose to travel to the University of Southern California for a week of intensive training with experts in the West Semitic Research Project, who have pioneered the use of R.T.I. for translating ancient inscriptions.

Experts Bruce Zuckerman and Marilyn Lundberg taught Greene how to operate an advanced digital camera, position the flash, and master the light from various angles. Then they trained him to use R.T.I. software that reads the light/shadow patterns in his photographs and provides a three-dimensional map of the writing surface. (For an example of how this works, visit the [Cultural Heritage Imaging](#) website)

Translating ancient inscriptions, says Greene, is vital to an understanding of scribal culture, which helped give rise to many Semitic languages, such as Aramaic, Hebrew, and Phoenician. Every stroke of the chisel—or the pen—tells a story, whether on the stones Greene studies, or on papyrus, vellum, or leather. With the new digital imaging methods, scholars can see every shadow, every displaced fiber or grain of rock, detailing just how the scribes formed their letters. And that, says Greene, reveals volumes about who they were, where they came from, and what (and whom) they were commemorating.

“Scribal culture is very illuminating,” says Greene. “The languages were developing and people were beginning to differentiate themselves based on their uses of it. Through the writing, we can begin to trace the rise of national identity.”

R.T.I. has the potential to provide further confirmation, outside the Bible, that certain figures existed. In some cases, it can help establish the provenance of statues and other monuments. It also helps archaeologists, art history experts, and other scholars understand and contextualize their findings.

Epigraphy—or the study of ancient writings—is vital to the preservation of Jewish history. Greene hopes epigraphy will become more of a focal point at UW-Madison, and intends for his research to play a role. When he travels to the East Coast this summer, along with fellow graduate student Catherine (Cate) Bonesho, Greene will bring a whole new set of skills—thanks to his week of training funded by the Ida and Isaac Lipton Domestic Scholarship Award.

“There’s this whole corpora [of Palmyrene inscriptions] that are just sitting there, waiting for someone to come along and photograph them correctly—and then read them,” he says.

Going Global

UW-Madison junior Jacob (Jake) Beckert discovers Israel through immersion

By Mary Ellen Gabriel



Every week, Jake Beckert and his roommates at the University of Haifa visit the Shuk, an open-air market where the sights, sounds and smells resemble something out of the movie “Aladdin.” They pick up produce, meat, and “fish so fresh, many of them are still moving.”

Then Beckert and his roommates—all of whom are Arab—make a feast for dinner.

Cooking, eating, and talking (not to mention hiking, drinking, and studying) with the diverse student body at the University of Haifa has opened Beckert’s eyes to Israel’s complexity. He’s met Bedouins, Christian Arabs, Russian immigrants, and many others whose “amazing stories defy expectations.” Beckert, who received the 2012 Tobias Major/Certificate Scholarship Award for general excellence in Jewish studies, wants to study Israeli history and society. There is no better way, he says, than immersion.

“To truly understand Israel, you have to live here,” says Beckert.

I asked Jake — who hails from the Milwaukee area — to share a little of what he’s seeing, doing, and learning this year.



Why the University of Haifa, Jake?

When I was in high school, I spent five months living on a kibbutz in Jerusalem. I decided I wanted to spend my entire junior year of college living in Israel, but not in Jerusalem, where it's very easy to live in an American bubble. At Haifa, I am in a truly international school that's fairly well integrated into the rest of the university. Although my classes are in English — at least this semester — I live in the dorms with a diverse student body.

Tell us about your life there.

When it's warm, everyone goes to the beach—it's such a great way to relax here. It's hard to say my favorite hiking place—some of the waterfalls here are amazing. But the Golan desert is unlike anything we have in Wisconsin. If you don't talk, there is 100% silence. You can go miles without seeing anything else move.

Has your experience clarified your academic direction?

One thing I really want to research is the Israeli experience after the completion of army service. It's a tradition to go on a long trip — between four months to a year — to places like Thailand, India, Brazil, as well as North America and Australia. I've heard all sorts of amazing stories: the reasons people go, where they stay, the locals' impressions of Israelis. It's hard to say exactly what the purpose is, but I think that escape plays an important role. I think Israelis need to go somewhere where people don't care about the [Arab-Israeli] conflict.

You received \$3000 from your Tobias Major/Certificate Scholarship. How has it helped you this year?

Israel is a very expensive country — Tel Aviv is more expensive than New York City — which can be very hard for a student. Since I don't have to worry constantly about penny-pinching, I am able to experience the country to its fullest. Besides having fun and seeing amazing places, there are so many important benefits to studying abroad. It can totally change your perspective on your own society and the world. You realize what a small bubble you live in, and how much you take for granted.

Quiz Yourself: How's your Yiddish?

Match the Yiddish word to the English definition and see if you are a Yiddish maven.

Match the terms on the right to their matching definitions on the left. Answers below!

minor (often technical) malfunction	glitch
nerve, guts, audacity	kosher
comic theme, a comedian's routine	lox
knick-knack, trinket	tchotchke
drag, haul, make a tedious journey	schmaltz
upright, decent person	spiel
cured/smoked salmon	schlep
clumsy person	chutzpah
appropriate, legitimate	mensch
excessive sentimentality	klutz

ANSWERS

minor (often technical) malfunction | glitch
nerve, guts, audacity | chutzpah
comic theme, a comedian's routine | spiel
knick-knack, trinket | tchotchke
drag, haul, make a tedious journey | schlep
upright, decent person | mensch
cured/smoked salmon | lox
clumsy person | klutz
appropriate, legitimate | kosher
excessive sentimentality | schmaltz

From the Dean's Desk



I am delighted to write to you from the College of Letters & Science, the heart of UW-Madison where students learn to make a good living and lead a good life. When I think of the contributions that our departments make to the state and the world, through research, teaching and public service, I am reminded why I have spent 30 of my happiest and most rewarding years here.

As you have heard, public higher education is at a crossroads, with funding sources in flux. I have asked all departments to carefully consider collaborations, outreach strategies, and student programs that will continue to ensure a world-class 21st century education. The Center for Jewish Studies has risen to this challenge. Over the past two years, the Center has doubled the number of students in its Jewish Studies major and certificate programs, seen dramatic increase in attendance at public events in Madison, and forged enriching partnerships across the state, including with the Jewish Museum Milwaukee.

Indeed, the Center for Jewish Studies has much to celebrate. Alumni and friends should feel proud of the vibrant, engaged community of faculty, staff, students and alumni. New honorary CJS affiliates include luminaries Ben Sidran, Nathan Englander, and Paul Buhle. Special events are hosted by alumni across the country. The Center's ties are strong and enduring.

I invite you stay connected to your alma mater. I appreciate your feedback and support and I want to thank you for all that you do.

On, Wisconsin!

Gary Sandefur,

Dean of the College of Letters & Science