

Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies  
A Recognized Independent Centre of the University of Oxford

## **NEWSLETTER 2 - December 2009**

Welcome to the second issue of our electronic newsletter. It announces an exciting new lecture series in London, which will take place between January and March 2010, and is designed to showcase the Centre's Fellows. A brief description of the lectures follows below.

We would also like to take this opportunity to wish our readers all the best for the festive season and a happy and healthy New Year!

The Editor

### **Oxford Jewish Studies in London: Jews and the World**

In a brand new initiative, the Centre's Fellows will be delivering a series of lectures about their work at the London Jewish Cultural Centre, bringing Jewish Studies at Oxford to a wider audience.

Lectures will take place on Mondays at 8pm at the London Jewish Cultural Centre, Ivy House, 94-96 North End Road, NW11 7SX

11 January: **Professor Hugh Williamson**

When does the history of Israel begin?

There are many textbooks called 'A History of Israel' or the like, but they vary enormously in where they begin their narrative and what sort of history they attempt to write. In this lecture, the reasons for this bewildering state of affairs will be discussed (including attention to archaeology as well as written sources), and some suggestions will be made about what the word 'Israel' refers to in the Bible and what sort of history of Israel we can sensibly try to write.

18 January: **Professor Martin Goodman**

Judaism and Christianity in the early centuries: the ways that never parted

It has been argued in recent years that both Jews and Christians expressed such varied theologies and practices during the first three centuries of Christianity that to describe them as two separate religions in these early years is to be misled by hindsight. The lecture will explore the arguments for and against this view.

25 January: **Dr Alison Salvesen**

The debt of Christianity to Jewish biblical scholarship

The early 3rd to 5th centuries CE mark the period when both Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity moved from their formative to their institutional phase. Anti-Jewish polemic became ever sharper on the Christian side, and yet during this influential stage the foundations were laid for continuing recourse on the part of the Church to Jewish scholarship on the Hebrew Bible. The lecture investigates the legacy of this period.

1 February: **Dr Adam Silverstein**

The legal status of Jews under Islamic rule

If Islamists get their way we might all find ourselves living under Islamic rule in the UK and elsewhere. What will that be like for Jews? Although it is impossible to predict the future, in this case the answer to our question is rather simple: Jews will live under Islamic Law as they did for some thirteen centuries. In this talk the status of Jews in Islamic Law will be discussed and some unexpected conclusions will be reached.

8 February: **Dr David Rechter**

The Jewish Question and Modern Jewish Politics

The Jewish Question was, for Jews and others, an open wound in European society from the Enlightenment of the mid-late eighteenth century to the Holocaust, when the Nazis implemented their "final solution". This lecture will

trace the close relationship of the Jewish Question to the development of modern Jewish political ideologies and movements, such as Zionism and other forms of nationalism, socialism, liberalism and politicized Orthodoxy.

15 February: **Dr Eliyahu Stern**

From Einstein to the Vilna Gaon: The Secret behind Jewish Genius

Jewish history is replete with great figures from Moses to Einstein who are identified with the texts and theories they begat. Before Einstein however, it was above all the famed Rabbi Elijah of Vilna, known simply as "The Vilna Gaon", who defined the idea of genius and gave modern Jews a model for intellectual achievement as a means for social advancement, and the lecture will examine his place in the Jewish tradition.

22 February: **Dr Aaron Rosen**

How to Paint a Jewish Jesus: What Jews and Christians Can Learn from Marc Chagall

How did a Jewish artist from a Hasidic background become one of the greatest Crucifixion painters of the modern era? Who was this Jesus that Chagall painted again and again for over sixty years, and how might he speak to both Jews and Christians? Often dismissed as merely a brilliant colourist or a painter of fantasy, Marc Chagall used the figure of Jesus to say serious things about persecution, redemption, and religious co-existence. The lecture will take us through some of Chagall's most iconic works in search of new theological insights, and new avenues for interfaith dialogue.

1 March: **Dr Jordan Finkin**

The discourse of the Jewish joke

Jewish humour is a recognizable category, if one that is notoriously difficult to define. By taking the joke as the largest and most easily comprehensible genre of Jewish humour, the lecture will analyze the Yiddish roots of Jewish humour, especially through the notion of Jewish discourse - the patterns of thought and language which mark so much of modern Jewish culture - and will trace the influence of humour on the development of modern Yiddish literature.

8 March: **Dr Raffaella Del Sarto**

Between rhetoric and reality: Israel and the European Union

Due to the burden of history, relations between Israel and the EU have never been easy since they began fifty years ago. The consistent patterns which have come to characterise EU-Israeli relations include the repeated arguments over Middle Eastern politics which contrast markedly with excellent economic relations. A clear difference between public perception and the reality of bilateral relations can be found in both Israel and Europe. The talk will shed light on the underlying reasons for these ambivalences while also discussing recent developments.

15 March: **Dr Joanna Weinberg**

Jews and Judaism in the eyes of Christians in the early modern period.

This lecture will discuss the approach of Christian Hebraists to Jewish literature. The early modern period - from the end of the fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth century - sees a blossoming of study by Christians of Jewish literature in all kinds of forms. Texts are translated into Latin, then discussed and rejected. There was a clearly a strong attraction to Jewish sources usually accompanied by contempt for the Jewish people - but not always. The talk will address the complicated ways in which these Christians appreciated Jewish culture.

22 March: **Dr Piet van Boxel**

The Bodleian manuscripts as a meeting place of cultures

The Bodleian Library holds one of the finest collections of Hebrew manuscripts that tell the often forgotten story of intellectual transmission, cultural exchange and practical cooperation, social interaction and religious toleration between Jews and non-Jews in the Muslim and the Christian world during the late Middle Ages. In this lecture examples from this treasure-trove will be presented in digital form.

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