

## OXFORD SEMINAR IN ADVANCED JEWISH STUDIES

### *The Mishnah between Christians and Jews in early modern Europe*

January to June 2019

#### Project leaders:

**Joanna Weinberg (Professor Emerita Oriental Studies, University of Oxford)**

**Piet van Boxel (Emeritus Fellow, OCHJS)**

#### Core members:

**Richard Cohen (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)**

**Anthony Grafton (Princeton University)**

**Yosef Kaplan (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)**

**Thomas Roebuck (University of East Anglia)**

### CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR FELLOWSHIPS

**NEW CLOSING DATE: 15 January 2018**

In recent years it has become increasingly clear that the study of Judaism in the early modern period cannot be undertaken without setting it in a comparative context of the history of religion. One work, a monumental production in six volumes, epitomizes this cultural phenomenon, and may be claimed to be the culmination of a century and more of Christian engagement with Jewish sources. Between 1698 and 1703 Wilhelmus Surenhusius printed a Hebrew /Latin edition of the ancient corpus of Jewish law, the Mishnah, equipped with Latin translations of all sixty-three tractates, as well as the commentaries of Maimonides and Obadiah of Bertinoro, and those of a variety of Christian scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Seminar will bring together an international team of scholars to interpret the significance of Surenhusius' Mishnah edition in the light of two centuries of study of the Mishnah both by Christians and Jews. In an attempt to decode this document both from the perspective of authors and readers we will set it in its historical context, a time of significant demographic change in which the search for religious identity and the growth of new religious communities is particularly conspicuous. We will examine the intellectual biographies of the individuals whose works are appropriated by Surenhusius in order to plot the development of this type of 'ecumenical' scholarship over two centuries. In this way we will also be able to establish the network of scholars that this work represents. Included in its prefatory material is the Oxford scholar Edward Bernard's letter addressed to the Archbishop Narcissus Marsh—it is in essence a eulogy over William Guise, who was a key figure in Surenhusius' enterprise. In addition, the project will include a study of the landmark edition of Oxford's first Professor of Arabic, Edward Pococke, whose *Porta Mosis* (1655) introduced readers to Maimonides' Arabic commentary on the Mishnah for the first time.

The role of the Jews will also be examined within this intricate web of scholarly exchange. Jews living in Amsterdam fashioned the etchings that accompany the text as pedagogical tools. These illustrations, which have never been studied, are remarkable artefacts that do not conform to conventional representations of Jewish ceremonies and rites. To understand Surenhusius' work we will have to assess the extent to which contemporary Jews were part of this remarkable initiative. In addition, and parallel to our study of Surenhusius, it will be our task to pay attention to the way Jews were studying, printing and interpreting the

Mishnah, and to examine the remarkable phenomenon of Jewish fascination with Mishnah in its own right. This is the period in which Menasseh ben Israel produced a new vocalised edition of the Mishnah (1646). The new fashion for Mishnah is also exemplified by Kabbalistic focus on the Mishnah in 16<sup>th</sup> century Safed, and by the initiative of Maharal of Prague and his student Yom Tov Lipmann Heller to emphasise the fundamental importance of Mishnah (rather than Talmud and its commentaries) for traditional Jewish education.

Each week, one member of the group will present an aspect of his or her research. In addition, weekly reading sessions will be held in which selected passages from the Mishnah edition with its commentaries will be studied and analysed in view of the major questions outlined above. Weekly seminars will be convened through the duration of two Oxford terms: 13 January to 9 March 2019 and 28 April to 22 June 2019. These will offer a forum for the Fellows to address central research topics related to the overall theme of the Seminar. The concluding conference will be held from 24 to 25 June 2019.

Visiting Fellows will receive an allowance of £2,515 (*pro rata*) per calendar month for the period of their tenure. Travelling expenses up to £550 pounds sterling will also be provided, and Fellows will be provided with a college association during their time at Oxford. Applicants should indicate the specific research they would undertake in the course of Fellowship and how this research would contribute to the broader work of the project. Applications by senior scholars, and by scholars at postdoctoral and advanced doctoral level, are welcome.

**Closing date for applications: 15 January 2018**

For more detailed information see:  
<http://www.ochjs.ac.uk/academics/visiting-academics/visiting-fellows/>

For any other queries contact:  
Martine Smith-Huvers  
([registrar@ochjs.ac.uk](mailto:registrar@ochjs.ac.uk))

or contact:

Prof Joanna Weinberg ([joanna.weinberg@orinst.ox.ac.uk](mailto:joanna.weinberg@orinst.ox.ac.uk))  
Dr Piet van Boxel ([piet.vanboxel@orinst.ox.ac.uk](mailto:piet.vanboxel@orinst.ox.ac.uk))