

Fifth Annual
OXFORD SUMMER INSTITUTE
ON MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY JUDAISM
(OSI – MCJ)

2 July – 9 July 2018

Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies
in conjunction with the
Phillip and Muriel Berman Center for Jewish Studies, Lehigh University

Gender and Judaism:
Perspectives from the Study of
Comparative Religion and Transnationalism

The Oxford Summer Institute on Modern and Contemporary Judaism (OSI-MCJ) is an academic seminar framework founded in 2014 by Dr Miri Freud-Kandel of the University of Oxford and Professor Adam Ferziger of Bar-Ilan University under the auspices of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies. It is intended to raise innovative and challenging perspectives that have the potential to influence broader thinking about contemporary Judaism. It functions as an advanced workshop in which a combination of outstanding senior scholars of Jewish religion and culture from around the globe join with UK based experts and a select group of European Jewish studies scholars for eight days of intensive study and intellectual exchange.

The 5th Annual Oxford Summer Institute on Modern and Contemporary Judaism will be convened by Miri Freud-Kandel, Adam Ferziger, and Hartley Lachter (Lehigh University) and will examine the interface between gender and Judaism, particularly as viewed from the perspectives of comparative religion and transnationalism.

Academic study of Judaism has been enriched considerably through intensified focus on the role of gender identity, and the introduction of gender as a category of analysis. Every subfield in Jewish Studies has grown in new ways and developed fresh questions by deploying gender as both a vital area of research and as a valuable interpretive lens for examining and reconsidering their primary materials. A rich body of scholarship has also been produced over the last few decades regarding gender and religion in Christianity, Islam, and Eastern religions. One goal of our gathering this year is to explore how these resources can be utilized by specialists in Jewish Studies for comparative purposes.

An additional analytical framework that has gained traction in scholarly discourse is that of transnationalism. The increasingly globalized nature of the contemporary world has inspired scholars to rethink the role of geography, political structure, migration, transportation, and communication in the formation of ideas and identities. It is our goal further to explore how this vantage point can usefully be employed in academic research on gender and Judaism.

The aim of the OSI-MCJ 2018, then, is to enrich and diversify the study of gender and Judaism by addressing it through comparative tools, specifically in relation to other religions, and to transnational trends and perspectives. To this end, we will bring a diverse, international group of scholars together with a particular focus on examining the different ways that gender informs Jewish discourses and practices in a variety of geographic and religious contexts. While the main focus will be on modern and contemporary forms of Jewish thought and expression, pre-modern examples will also be introduced to enrich the conversation.

Some of the possible topics to be explored include: Religious Leadership and Gender; Religious Law and Gender; Ritual and Gender; Gender and Judaism in Europe; Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion; Jewish Denominations and Gender; How the Academic Study of Gender and Judaism differs in various parts of the world; Gender and Spirituality; Gender and Religious Identity; Gender and Conversion; Gender and Mysticism; Gender and Bible Study; Gender, Death, and Burial; Gender and Fertility; Gender and Zionism; Gender and Religious Education; Gender and Religious Innovation; Gender and Pilgrimage; Gender and Sacred Space. The final topics to be addressed will be determined, of course, by the variety and quality of those that are proposed by the participants.

To reiterate, many of these topics have been addressed in the context of Judaism and in other faith communities, and as in the past, we intend to invite outstanding figures both from within Oxford as well as other institutions of higher learning who will present their findings and analyses in respect to the religious frameworks that they study. Beyond the specifics of each presentation and discussion, the question that will sit at the foundation of this seminar is: what can be learned about the role of gender in the evolution of modern and contemporary Judaism by addressing this issue through the lenses of comparative religion and transnationalism?