

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

30 June – 5 July 2019

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

Jerusalem and Babylon:
Past and Present

The Oxford Summer Institute on Modern and Contemporary Judaism (OSI-MCJ) was founded in 2014 under the auspices of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies by Dr Miri Freud-Kandel of the University of Oxford and Professor Adam Ferziger of Bar-Ilan University. In 2015, Professor Hartley Lachter, director of Lehigh University's Berman Center for Jewish Studies, joined them as co-convenor. The OSI-MCJ is an advanced workshop in which outstanding scholars of Jewish religion and culture from around the globe join European Jewish studies scholars for a week of intensive study and intellectual exchange. It is intended to facilitate rigorous academic engagement regarding key themes in the Jewish religion, raising innovative and challenging perspectives from a broad range of disciplines, with potential to provide novel insights into contemporary Judaism.

The 6th Annual Oxford Summer Institute on Modern and Contemporary Judaism will focus on the theme of "**Jerusalem and Babylon – Past and Present**". Participants will explore this concept as it has evolved in the course of Jewish history, thought, and culture throughout the globe – including comparisons with the rich Christian articulations on the topic. A focus of the discussion will be on the ways in-depth analysis of this notion offers tools for examining the burgeoning contemporary dynamic in which new parallel centres of Jewish civilization have arisen as original, powerful, yet highly distinctive models.

The historical origins of the "Jerusalem-Babylon" division are identified with events that took place during the sixth century BCE; the regional political environment that ultimately led to destruction of the First (Solomon's) Temple in 586, the initial resettlement of much of the Judean population "By the Rivers of Babylon," and the flow of some of the exiles back to Jerusalem that began with the "Decrees of Cyrus" in 550. Henceforth and until today, Jewish life has been structured around multiple communal centres, each with their distinctive traditions and characters. That said, often one or more locations has had an especially crucial influence on the nature of Jewish life beyond its borders.

The Babylonian (modern day Iraq) Jewish community existed throughout the Second Temple period and gained exceptional prominence after the destruction in 70 CE, first acceding to, then vying with, and eventually surpassing the Land of Israel as the religious and intellectual centre of world Jewry prior to the rise of Islam. This process

was exemplified by the preeminence achieved by the Babylonian Talmud over its predecessor.

In this light and independent of specific historical vicissitudes, quite early on "Jerusalem-Babylon," became a paradigm for the dichotomy between alternative/competing religious and cultural orientations. Indeed, in his fifth century *City of God*, Augustine built on this notion, offering Jerusalem as the symbol of an ideal religious environment in contradistinction to the secularized nature of the Babylonian domain. To be sure, the empirically superior sanctity of Jerusalem and the Land of Israel was an established Jewish principle and was preserved through religious legislation. But unlike Christians, for whom Jerusalem also served as a stronghold in subsequent centuries, throughout medieval and early modern times, the relatively weak nature of Jewish Jerusalem stood in contradistinction to the day to day realities of the various "Babylons" that arose.

This changed in the mid-20th century, when in the context of the modern State of Israel – and in parallel to the tragic destruction of historic Jewish centres in Europe as well as the decline of many North African and Asian communities, the physical Jerusalem re-emerged as a focal location of Jewish existence. Concurrent with its continued importance to others faiths and ongoing intensive political contestations, over the past seventy years it has transformed into a vital centre of Judaism — whose influence on Jewish religious, intellectual, cultural, and social life is felt throughout the globe. At the same time, North America asserted its place as heir to the various "Babylon's" of the past, with novel Jewish institutions and communal structures that have spawned considerable cultural and intellectual creativity, achieving a dominant position among the Jewish population centres throughout the world. This fresh reality inevitably invites comparison to the dual-centre model of the historical "Jerusalem-Babylon" construct.

The central question at the foundation of OSI-MCJ 2019, then, is what can be learned through a concentrated, interdisciplinary, and historical exploration of the various aspects of the "Jerusalem-Babylon" theme, and how can these insights be useful for analyzing the novel characteristics of contemporary Judaism?

We aim to attract a diverse group of scholars who are united by their ability to contribute to rigorous study of the topic at hand through preparation and presentation of original research and serious engagement with the work of others. While it is likely that many of those who will be interested in the topic will stem from academic fields such as religious studies, theology, history, and sociology of religion and religious culture, we welcome scholars from the arts and all aspects of the humanities and social sciences. In addition, inasmuch as the focus will be on Judaism, the orientation of the OSI-MCJ is comparative, and we have benefited consistently from the voices of scholars who are not specialists in Jewish studies.

Some of the possible sub-topics to be explored would examine the Jerusalem-Babylon dynamic in Judaism in terms of origins and evolution; from the perspective of Bible and rabbinic literature; in religious art, literature, philosophy, mysticism, liturgy, and

law through the ages; in modern Jewish and Zionist thought; and in a range of modern and contemporary philosophical and religious perspectives. This latter category can include an examination of Jewish power from the perspectives of gender, “Centre-Periphery” concepts, globalization, transnationalism, and the role of the internet, and developments in Jewish law. Other possible topics include the application of the Jerusalem-Babylon construct in other religious traditions, in Hasidism, and in the role of the synagogue. The final topics to be addressed will be determined, of course, by the variety and quality of those that are proposed by the participants.

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Please write in capital letters throughout

Surname: Prof / Dr / Mr / Mrs / Ms
/ Miss

Forename(s):

University/Work address:

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Telephone No: Fax No:

Mobile No:

E-mail address:

Home address:

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Telephone No: Fax No:

E-mail address:

*** Please indicate your preferred e-mail & postal address:
HOME or UNIVERSITY (delete as appropriate) ***

Signature: Date:

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INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Required documentation:

1. Completed Application Form
2. Curriculum Vitae
3. List of Publications
4. Research proposal
5. References from two academic referees
6. Relevance of the Oxford Summer Institute for your current research

Please send all documentation to:

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- a. **All documents should be sent as PDF files and submitted by email.**
- b. **Applicants should arrange for two academic references to be sent directly to the same email address.**

The closing date for completed applications is: **1 February 2019.**

Please note that the Committee will only consider complete applications. The responsibility for ensuring that references are sent by the due date rests with the applicant. The Centre will inform you of the result of your application as soon as possible after the closing date.