

## 'Mendele's *Natural History* (*Toldot ha-Teva*) and the Ecology of Jewish Nationalism'

**David Aberbach** wrote his D.Phil. at Oxford and taught at Oxford, Cornell, and McGill Universities. His books on Hebrew literature include studies of Mendele Mocher Sefarim, C.N. Bialik, and S.Y. Agnon; *Imperialism and Biblical Prophecy 750-500 BCE*; *Revolutionary Hebrew, Empire and Crisis*; and *The Bible and the 'Holy Poor': from the Tanakh to Les Misérables*. Since 2019, he has been affiliated with the Environmental Change Institute at Oxford, where he has recently published a book on environmental moral dilemmas in literature from the Hebrew Bible to the present.

**Abstract:** Ancient Hebrew, replete with details of agriculture in the land of Israel, became a linguistic quarry for 19th and early 20th century Hebrew literature depicting the natural world, in scientific textbooks and in fiction and poetry. Mendele's *Natural History* (*Toldot ha-Teva*, 1862-1872), the first work of its kind in Hebrew, is a landmark in the development of Hebrew both scientific and creative. This talk explores the theme of alienation from nature in Eastern European Hebrew literature, in the writings of Mendele, Bialik, and others; and how the aim of the Haskalah (the Hebrew Enlightenment) to use Hebrew to encourage secular learning, particularly the sciences, leading - it was hoped - to greater integration of the predominantly Orthodox Eastern European Jews, was channelled after the Russian pogroms of 1881-2 into Jewish cultural nationalism.

Thursday, 23 February 2023  
6-7pm (UK time)

This lecture will be a hybrid session which will be accessible both online (see below) and in person in the Catherine Lewis Lecture Room (refreshments to follow)

No need to register if attending in person.

In order to participate in this lecture online, please register at this link:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYocuisqz4pGdwILqCR48xU8ju\\_eX0kOQQcg](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYocuisqz4pGdwILqCR48xU8ju_eX0kOQQcg)

ALL LECTURES ARE OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Refreshments to follow