

# The David Patterson Lectures Week 1

Professor Yoram Meital  
(Ben-Gurion University)

## Beyond Bricks and Mortar: Synagogues and Jewish Life and Heritage in Cairo

**Yoram Meital** is a professor of Middle East Studies at Ben-Gurion University. He has conducted extensive research on various topics related to Arab societies during the modern era, focusing on Egypt's social, cultural, political, and legal history. Between 2017 and 2021, he served as the historical consultant to the Jewish community in Cairo, where he played a pivotal role in documenting and preserving Egyptian-Jewish heritage. This endeavor culminated in his recently published book, *Sacred Places Tell Tales: Jewish Life and Heritage in Modern Cairo*. Professor Meital's current research initiative, "The Living Archive of Jewish Life and Heritage," explores the material history of Jewish communities across the Middle East and North Africa.

### Sacred Places Tell Tales

**Abstract:** Amid ongoing war and geopolitical upheaval in the Middle East, it's crucial to note that this hasn't always been the prevailing situation. Egypt's Jewish community, once numbering over 80,000 in 1947, now consists of only a few remaining members. Cairo's twelve surviving synagogues stand as enduring storytellers of the social, cultural, and religious shifts that have shaped Egyptian society and its Jewish community since the late 19th century. Through their architecture, locations, and activities, these synagogues offer profound insights into the development of modern Jewish sociocultural identity among Cairo's Sephardi, Ashkenazi, and Karaite communities. They also mirror broader changes in Egypt over recent years. Despite the dwindling Jewish population, there's a growing interest in preserving Jewish heritage. This renewed focus on heritage conservation is intricately linked with contemporary debates regarding Egyptian society, including its historical and evolving identity. Egyptians converse about the Jewish past, along with that of other minorities, to support their diverse

**Thursday, 16 October 2025  
6 pm (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 Theatre at the Clarendon Institute.

In order to participate in this lecture online, please register at this link:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/DQoPjwnUQuy5QkK8Px4NuQ>

**ALL LECTURES ARE OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC  
Refreshments to follow**

YORAM MEITAL