

JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

ACADEMIC YEAR 2016/17

**INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH
PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION**

**MAIMONIDES CENTRE
FOR ADVANCED STUDIES**

JEWISH SCEPTICISM

PROJECT
PESHAT

PROJECT
SFORNO



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WORDS OF WELCOME

In the academic year 2016–2017, we are celebrating the third anniversary of the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion. Much has happened since our founding. The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) has granted funding for the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies (MCAS) and the Sforno project. The 'PESHAT in Context' project began its work at the University of Hamburg. The team has grown from two members in April 2014 to twenty in November 2016. Two professors have been appointed, and they also serve as co-directors of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies: Racheli Haliva is the new junior professor of Jewish philosophy and religion; Stephan Schmid is professor of the history of philosophy. In October 2016, the Faculty of Humanities introduced a Master's programme in Jewish Philosophy and Religion, the first of its kind in Germany. The Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies has successfully completed its first year of activity, full of vivid discussions, debates, workshops, dialectical and reading evenings, and, of course, research into Jewish philosophical and cultural scepticism. With this second edition of the booklet, we would like to give the reader an overview of the wide variety of projects, activities, and research conducted in the field of Jewish philosophy and religion at the University of Hamburg.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank those who have made the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion, the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies, the PESHAT and Sforno project possible: The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) for the generous financial support, the President of the University of Hamburg, Professor Dieter Lenzen, the University's Vice Presidents, Professor Jetta Frost and Professor Susanne Rupp, the Chancellor of the University, Martin Hecht, the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Professor Oliver Huck, Professor Michael Friedrich from the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Professor Benjamin Schnieder from the Department of Philosophy, and Professor Anselm Steiger from the Graduate School for Research into Trans- and Interdenominational Permeability for supporting the establishment of an Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion at the University of Hamburg, the members of the Advisory Board and Board of Trustees of the Maimonides Centre for their advice and the administrative staff for supporting us with the day-to-day business.

I would like to express my special thanks to my team for their great dedication, engagement and enthusiasm.

I hope you find this booklet informative and inspiring.

Giuseppe Veltri
Hamburg, November 2016

GIUSEPPE VELTRI

Giuseppe Veltri was appointed professor at the newly established Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion at the University of Hamburg in April 2014. From 1997–2014, he held the chair of Judaic/Jewish Studies at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. His research interests are the religion of ancient Judaism, medieval philosophy, the culture and philosophy of the Renaissance and Early Modern period, and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* [Jewish Studies].

Giuseppe Veltri has devoted much of his research to the study of Renaissance philosophy and religious views. He received funding from the DFG to translate and publish the philosophical sermons of Yehudah Moscato and has organised several conferences and symposia on Jewish intellectual life during the Early Modern period, both in Italy and elsewhere. Giuseppe Veltri also headed another DFG-funded research project about this period: the preparation of an edition of the works of Simone Luzzatto. In January 2013, Giuseppe Veltri was elected a corresponding member of the Accademia Pontaniana, Naples, and in February 2014 he was elected an ordinary member of the Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz.

Giuseppe Veltri has published monographs and articles in a number of languages. His most recent publications are *Mirror of Rabbinic Hermeneutics. Studies in Religion, Magic, and Language Theory in Ancient Judaism* (2015) and *Language of Conformity and Dissent: On the Imaginative Grammar of Jewish Intellectuals in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (2013).

A portrait of Giuseppe Veltri, an older man with grey hair, smiling, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a patterned tie. The portrait is set within a hexagonal frame.

**PROFESSOR OF
JEWISH PHILOSOPHY
AND RELIGION**
MCAS DIRECTOR

RACHELI HALIVA

Racheli Haliva has been a junior professor and one of the co-directors at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies since December 2015. She earned her PhD at McGill University in Montreal in 2015. Her dissertation entitled 'Isaac Polqar—A Jewish Philosopher or a Philosopher and a Jew? A Study of the Relationship between Philosophy and Religion in Isaac Polqar's *'Ezer ha-Dat* [In Support of Religion] and *Teshuvat Apikoros* [A Response to the Heretic]' was completed under the supervision of Professor Carlos Fraenkel and Professor Lawrence Kaplan.

**JUNIOR PROFESSOR
OF JEWISH
PHILOSOPHY AND
RELIGION**
MCAS CO-DIRECTOR

She is currently focused on composing a book based on her dissertation. Her main interests are Jewish Averroism, medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy, political philosophy, the philosophy of religion, and Jewish converts in the Middle Ages.



At the Maimonides Centre, she is currently focusing on scepticism and anti-scepticism in medieval Jewish philosophy. In particular, she is concentrating on the Jewish Averroist school, whose members' key challenge was to reconcile Ibn Rushd's confident rationalism with Maimonides' scepticism.

The Jewish Averroists sought to re-establish the authority of Aristotelian philosophy as taught by Ibn Rushd and to reconcile it with the principles of Judaism. Since they also saw themselves as the intellectual heirs of Maimonides with regard to the philosophical interpretation of Judaism, they needed to respond to the sceptical elements in Maimonides' thought.

STEPHAN SCHMID

Stephan Schmid is professor of the history of philosophy at the Philosophy Department at the University of Hamburg and one of the co-directors of the Maimonides Centre. He joined the Department and the Centre in August 2016, coming from the Humboldt University Berlin, where he worked, under the supervision of Professor Dominik Perler, on early modern epistemology and metaphysics (in particular on early modern conceptions of ideas and teleology) and on late Scholastic metaphysics (in particular on Francisco Suárez's theory of causation and modality).

Stephan Schmid's historical interests are late-medieval and early modern philosophy, and he is particularly intrigued by transformations of philosophical ideas and theories in these period, which often take a much more complex line than assumed. Systematically, he is interested in (big) epistemological and metaphysical questions such as questions about the intelligibility of reality, the nature of intentionality, and the metaphysics of modality.

At the Maimonides Centre, Stephan Schmid will work on a two-tiered project on rationalism and scepticism in Spinoza and Maimon. As a first step, the project reconstructs Spinoza's anti-scepticism on the basis of his adherence to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) and its semantic foundations. As a second step, the project will be concerned with Salomon Maimon's adaption of Spinoza's radical rationalism and will explore his sceptical conclusions. The fundamental question of his project is: why did Spinoza think that we can defeat the sceptic on the basis of the PSR, while Maimon thought that radical rationalism undermines the possibility of any empirical knowledge for finite beings and thus inevitably dooms us to scepticism?



**PROFESSOR
OF THE HISTORY
OF PHILOSOPHY**
MCAS CO-DIRECTOR



וְכִן הָיְתָה הַדָּבָר וַיִּהְיֶה מִחֲשָׁבָה בְּכַדָּם אֲדֹנָיִם אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 עַד שֶׁיָּצִיאוּ בַּעֲלֵי הַמִּצְוָה בְּעֵינֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת יִצְחָק וְשֶׁ
 יִצְחָק הָיָה יוֹדֵם שֶׁעַל שְׂמֹחֶת עַד הַחֹמֶץ בְּמִצְוַתוֹ
 הַחֹמֶץ אֶת־כֹּהֵן וְכִי יִשְׁכַּח

פרק ארבעה וחמשים


INSTITUTE
FOR
JEWISH
PHILOSOPHY
AND
RELIGION

**INSTITUTE
FOR
JEWISH
PHILOSOPHY
AND
RELIGION**

THE INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

In April 2014, the University of Hamburg founded a Chair for Jewish Philosophy and Religion with the appointment of Professor Giuseppe Veltri. For the first time in its history, this University has created a framework for the academic study of Judaism, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration across the fields of Jewish studies, philosophy, Early Modern period studies, and manuscript studies. The Institute is part of the Department of Philosophy and operates in close cooperation with researchers and fellows based at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies and with the teams running the PESHAT and Sforzo projects.

The Institute is building a research collection of source material and secondary literature in Hebrew and Jewish studies, with special emphasis on Jewish philosophy and religion. In building the collection, the Institute works in close collaboration with the Central Library for Philosophy, Classics, and History and the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies. Books, periodicals, and access to full-text databases are available on-site to members of the University of Hamburg and guests.




Teaching and research are supported by Hamburg's good library resources in the fields of Hebrew and Jewish studies, and specialist collections in Jewish philosophy. Teaching is based in the Master's programme in Jewish Philosophy and Religion, and in lecture series which are open to the public. The Institute hosted a conference in the summer of 2015 which reflected on the state of Jewish Studies in Germany after the Shoah. Researchers from across the country were invited to give an account of the past years and discuss further developments. A lecture series in the summer term of 2016 discussed the rich variety of Jewish languages. The lectures introduced the local academic staff working with Jewish languages and guest speakers as well.

Research at the Institute covers a broad range of topics in the field of Jewish thought, from antiquity to the present, with an emphasis on Jewish philosophy in the Middle Ages and in early modern times, on Musar literature and Kabbalah, and on modern philosophy of religion in Yiddish. Jewish philosophy is perceived both within the framework of philosophy and as a distinct phenomenon that evolved through exchange with other Jewish and non-Jewish intellectual traditions.

MA PROGRAMME JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

In October 2016, the Faculty of Humanities introduced a Master's programme in Jewish Philosophy and Religion, the first of its kind in Germany. The programme covers a broad range of topics in the field of Jewish thought from antiquity to the present and places great emphasis on imparting the requisite language skills.

The focus of the Master's programme is to teach themes, *topoi*, and structures of thought in Jewish philosophy and religion and to teach the respective language skills. It challenges students to work independently and systematically with sources, to explain and contextualise historical documents and religious phenomena, and to develop creative solutions for research questions in philosophy and the study of religions. Regarding themes and *topoi*, the programme covers the broad range of Jewish philosophy and religion from antiquity to the present. Regarding language skills, the programme has a strong emphasis on Hebrew in its different stages.



Lectures and workshops are organised by the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies and international scholars will present the latest research in their fields. Students will be given the opportunity to attend and get credits for participating. Thus the connection between the Centre and the Institute fosters a learning environment between students and researchers from different countries.

Students interested in applying should have a good command of English (level B2 or equivalent) and Modern Hebrew (level Beth or equivalent). Courses are taught in German and English.

PATRICK BENJAMIN KOCH



RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

Patrick B. Koch has been a research associate at the Institute since September 2014. After completing his undergraduate training at the Free University Berlin, he continued his studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he graduated with an MA in Jewish civilization in 2007. He earned his PhD in the Department of Jewish Thought of the Hebrew University in 2012, specialising in Kabbalistic moralistic writings, particularly those written in the second half of the sixteenth century in the Galilean town of Safed. His dissertation was supervised by Professor Jonathan Garb.

Patrick B. Koch's research interests include Jewish moralistic writings (*musar*), Kabbalistic literature, Hebrew printing culture of the Early Modern period, Jewish ethics, and the comparative study of spirituality.

During the academic year 2013–14, Patrick B. Koch was Prins Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Jewish History, New York. From 2012 to 2013, he worked as a postdoctoral research fellow at Humboldt University Berlin, and in 2011–12 as a visiting lecturer at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. In 2015, he was awarded the Ephraim E. Urbach Post-Doctoral International Fellowship for Jewish Studies funded by the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, New York, in cooperation with the World Union of Jewish Studies. His monograph *Human Self-Perfection: A Re-Assessment of Kabbalistic Musar-Literature of Sixteenth-Century Safed* was published with Cherub Press, Los Angeles, in 2015.

At the University of Hamburg, Patrick B. Koch teaches introductory courses in the religious studies programme, as well as seminars at the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion.

YONATAN MEROZ

Yonatan Meroz has been a research associate at the Institute since 2015. He holds an MA in Arabic language and literature from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. During his work at the Centre for the Study of Judaeo-Arabic Language and Culture at the Ben-Zvi Institute, Jerusalem, he acquired a thorough knowledge of manuscripts from fields such as Rabbinic and Karaite Bible exegesis, theology, and philosophy.

During his work on a research project headed by Professor Menahem Ben-Sasson on the Maimonidean dynasty, Yonatan Meroz concentrated on the writings of Maimonides' descendants, which display strong Sufi influences. His MA thesis contained an analysis and a critical edition of an anonymous medieval Judaeo-Arabic polemic against Maimonides, a text which is likewise heavily indebted to Sufism.

Meroz has contributed to a research project headed by Professor Sarah Stroumsa and Professor Sara Sviri, investigating early Andalusian philosophical mysticism. His translation from Hebrew to English of volume four of the sermons of the Italian Renaissance preacher Yehudah Moscato has been published by Brill. Yonatan Meroz was previously a research associate on the DFG-funded PESHAT project. He is currently working on his PhD project.



**RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE**

LILIAN TÜRK

Lilian Türk is a research associate at the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion, where she teaches courses on Yiddish language and culture. She defended her PhD in 2014 on the religious anarchist Abba Gordin (1887–1964), his Yiddish writings, and the disputes around him. The processes of ‘group building in the weekly Yiddish-anarchist paper Fraye Arbeter Shtime 1937–1945’ were the focus of analysis. Professor Giuseppe Veltri and Professor Shlomo Berger (ז"ל) supervised the thesis. Since then, her research interest has been a broader focus on modern philosophy of religion in Yiddish, but also Gordin’s Hebrew and Russian writings, his religious anarchism, and esotericism.

Lilian Türk was trained as magistra in political sciences and Judaic/Jewish studies at the Universities of Leipzig and Halle-Wittenberg (2002–9) and was then research fellow at the Graduate School ‘Religious Non-Conformism and Cultural Dynamics’ at the University of Leipzig (funded by DFG), where she completed her PhD (2009–14). She studied Yiddish and Hebrew at Vilnius University (2011, 2013), New York University (2010), Tel Aviv University (2006), and during her magistra training at the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg.

**RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE**



Lilian Türk further worked as an intern at Alyn Hospital Jerusalem (2006–7), as a student assistant at Simon Dubnow Institute Leipzig (2005–6), and as a voluntary intern at Hatikva Dresden with the ‘Bildungs- und Begegnungsstätte für Jüdische Geschichte und Kultur Sachsen e.V.’ [Society for Education on the Jewish History of Saxony] group.

MAIMONIDES CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

The 'Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies (MCAS)' is a DFG-Kolleg-Forschergruppe, directed by Professor Giuseppe Veltri. It opened in October 2015 and is planned to run for eight years. The central aim of the Maimonides Centre is to explore and research scepticism in Judaism in its dual manifestation of a purely philosophical tradition and a more general expression of sceptical strategies, concepts, and attitudes in the cultural field.

Scepticism is understood here as an enquiry of the 'perpetual student' who harbours doubts about different dimensions and systems of secular or revealed knowledge, calling authority as such into question. Scepticism does not represent an intellectual or theoretical worldview, but rather an attitude that provides a basis for numerous and diverse phenomena. Scepticism addresses fundamental processes and categorisations in Jewish philosophy, religion, literature, and society. More specifically, the term scepticism is applied to expressions of social deviance from, and conformity with, political structures. It is also applied to systems of governance, when responding to and being in exchange with adjacent cultures.

Scholars at the Centre will benefit from comparative perspectives, gaining new insights into Western philosophy and culture and their inherent connections to texts and manifestations of Eastern cultures and thought. This will be essential to mapping the transcultural dimensions of this barely explored field of research.

The Maimonides Centre is designed to offer outstanding conditions for research and for a fertile exchange of ideas. The successful creation of an inspiring atmosphere, favouring original research based on continuous dialogue, will depend on the establishment of an interconnected academic community of scholars. Experts from many different fields will gather in Hamburg in order to develop innovative approaches and methods.



Research undertaken at the Centre will complement and strengthen already existing research structures at the University of Hamburg. In such a rich collaborative context it will become possible to explore the history of ideas, concepts, paradigms and structures of thinking in European philosophy, to which much Jewish thought substantially belongs, and also in the philosophy of Non-European cultures. Particular attention will be devoted to the Early Modern period, a core research field at the University of Hamburg. Humanist and early modern Europe, a period of rediscovery and reinterpretation of early scepticism, can be seen as an era offering a host of incentives for the exchange of ideas and concepts. Structures of sceptical thinking left a lasting impact on philosophy, religion, the sciences and the arts of subsequent centuries.



LIBRARY

The growing library is made up of two collections: that of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies and that of the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion, which was founded at the University of Hamburg in May 2014. As a specialist library in Jewish studies, it aims to provide visiting fellows and local researchers with source texts and secondary literature relevant to their projects, and with access to relevant electronic databases. We collect publications on general and Jewish philosophy, works of and about scepticism, and literature on secular and religious criticism of faith and authority in Judaism. The collections are recorded in online public access catalogues and made available onsite (it is not a lending library). We work in close cooperation with the Central Library for Philosophy, Classics, and History at the University of Hamburg, and with the library of the Institute for the History of German Jews.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees monitors the activities of the Maimonides Centre and issues reports on development and research. Meetings will be convened annually and a report on the Centre's activities will be produced. One task of the Board of Trustees is to evaluate the Maimonides Centre every two years to help improve it in every aspect.

CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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represented by the Second Mayor and Senator for Science,
Research and Gender Equality, Katharina Fegebank

UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

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represented by the President, Prof. Dr.-Ing. habil. Prof. E.h. Edwin J. Kreuzer

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Philipps-Universität Marburg

ERCK RICKMERS

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ADVISORY BOARD

The Advisory Board is comprised of eight distinguished senior scholars from the University of Hamburg. They supervise the activities of the Maimonides Centre in the areas of research and development and thereby ensure the operation of the research group. Members of the Advisory Board and the directors of the Centre are jointly responsible for the annual research programme and the selection and invitation of fellows.

CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY BOARD

PROF. DR. KATAJUN AMIRPUR

Professor of Islamic Studies

PROF. DR. DOERTE BISCHOFF

Professor of German Literature

PD DR. ANDREAS BRÄMER

Deputy Director of the Institute for the History of the German Jews

PROF. DR. MICHAEL FRIEDRICH

Professor of Chinese Studies

PROF. DR. MARGIT KERN

Professor of Art History

PROF. DR. INGRID LOHMANN

Professor of Intellectual and Social History of Education

PROF. DR. BENJAMIN SCHNIEDER

Professor of Theoretical Philosophy

PROF. DR. JOHANN ANSELM STEIGER

Professor of Protestant Church History

KAROLIN BERENDS

PROJECT ASSISTANT

Karolin Berends has been a project assistant at the Maimonides Centre since August 2015. She holds a diploma in business administration from the University of Applied Sciences, Wilhelmshaven.

She is responsible for day-to-day administration and acts as personal assistant to Giuseppe Veltri in all matters related to the Maimonides Centre.



FELIX PAPENHAGEN

Felix Papenhagen studied Jewish studies and European ethnology in Freiburg im Breisgau. His MA thesis examined the life and work of the Israeli singer-songwriter Meir Ariel. His PhD research, a qualitative study of the 'new wave' of Jewish religiosity in Israeli popular music, was undertaken with the Graduate School 'Religious Non-Conformism and Cultural Dynamics' at the University of Leipzig. He received his PhD from Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. His new book *'Wem gehört der Schrank mit den heiligen Büchern?' Jüdische Religion im Kontext israelischer Populärmusik* ['To Whom Belongs the Jewish Bookshelf?' Jewish Religion in the Context of Israeli Popular Music] appeared in September 2016.

Papenhagen's current project focuses on the modern reception and the cultural representations of pessimistic and sceptical theorems and their derivations and stances within the wider cultural field and public discourse in Israel. It must be clear from the beginning that such stances in relation to the encompassing promising and optimistic idea of Zionism would at most suffer a shadowy, balancing existence, albeit one which is continuously necessary.

He studies those existences through the collection, translation, and contextualisation of crucial, albeit heterogeneous sources from around the turn of the last century until today. He searches for reasonings, affinities, and continuities and asks whether one can trace an intellectual and action-guiding impact of ideas from more or less known thinkers and poets, such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Berdichevsky, Shestov, Zeitlin, Brenner, Huxley, Adorno, and Yehoshua up to very recent voices; in short: people who are indeed labelled and negotiated—correctly or not—as sceptical or pessimistic, often in a not-so-philosophical, yet nevertheless serious and existential manner.

A portrait of Felix Papenhagen, a man with curly brown hair and a light beard, wearing a brown jacket over a white shirt. The portrait is set within a white hexagonal frame.

**RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE**

BILL REBIGER

Bill Rebiger is a research associate at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies. He studied Jewish studies and philosophy at the Free University Berlin and at the Hebrew University Jerusalem (PhD Free University Berlin, 2004), writing his dissertation on 'Sefer Shimmush Tehillim: The Book of the Magical Use of Psalms.' He has written several studies on Rabbinic and Heikhalot literature, medieval Jewish magic, and Jewish-Christian relations. Among his books are *Gittin–Scheidebriefe* (2008), *Sefer ha-Razim I und II–Das Buch der Geheimnisse I und II*, edited with Peter Schäfer (2009, 2 vols.), and *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim–Buch vom magischen Gebrauch der Psalmen. Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (2010).

His current research focuses on the sceptical strategies of the early opponents of the Kabbalah. The period in question stretches from the emergence of the Kabbalah around 1200 CE until the seventeenth century, when Leon Modena (1571–1648) composed the first full-fledged criticism of the Kabbalah entitled *Ari Nohem* [The Roaring Lion]. Rather than writing a comprehensive history of the early opponents, Rebiger intends to focus on sceptical, anti-sceptical, and non-sceptical modes in specific discourses and case studies. Therefore, the aim of his research is twofold. Firstly, he would like to study, translate, and discuss relevant texts written in opposition to certain claims of the early Kabbalah. Secondly, he would like to undertake a systematic study of the different claims of the early kabbalists and the arguments against them in order to discuss the diverging sceptical, anti-sceptical, and non-sceptical modes of polemics and dispute. The results will be presented in a series of articles and eventually revised in a monograph.



**RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE**

SILKE SCHAEPER

Silke Schaeper took up the position of librarian in October 2015. Her role at the Centre is to establish and manage the library, to provide bibliographic services, and to co-produce the Centre's yearbook. She studied Jewish studies, modern history and library science in Berlin and Jerusalem, specialising in the history of the Hebrew book.

LIBRARIAN

After graduating from the Hebrew University (PgDip 1989, MLS 1995), Silke Schaeper worked as a curator and cataloguer of special and Hebraica/Judaica collections in Jerusalem, Manchester, Wolfenbüttel, and Oxford. She has published her own research on library history and bibliography.



MICHELA TORBIDONI

Michela Torbidoni has been a research associate at the Maimonides Centre since October 2015. She studied philosophy at the Sapienza University of Rome, where she earned her PhD in 2013 with a dissertation on Spinoza's pantheism as mysticism in the context of neo-idealistic philosophy, under the supervision of Professor Irene Kajon. Her areas of research are early modern philosophy and modern Jewish scepticism, as well as the interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy in nineteenth- and twentieth-century France and Italy. Michela Torbidoni has spent one year at INALCO (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales) in Paris and was a research associate at the Institute of Judaic/Jewish Studies of Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, as a member of the DFG-funded project 'Werk und Wirkung des Rabbiners und Philosophen Simha (Simone) Luzzatto (1583?–1663).'

Michela Torbidoni is currently preparing the first English edition of Luzzatto's philosophical work *Socrates, or On Human Knowledge* (1651). Alongside the translation from Italian into English and the critical apparatus of the new edition, the project offers a new inquiry into the main philosophical issues discussed by the Rabbi in his sceptical writing. The result of the current research, focused on Luzzatto's criticism of the concept of authority and his pessimistic approach to time and memory, will be published as appendices to the forthcoming edition.



**RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE**

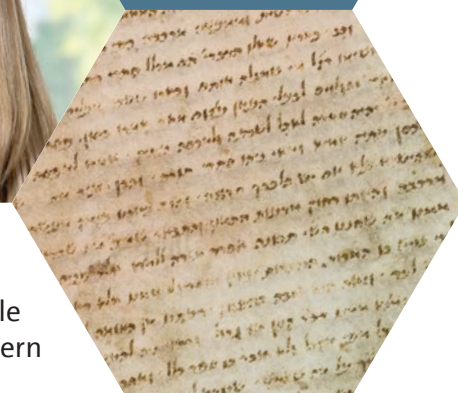
MARIA WAZINSKI

Maria Wazinski is the scientific coordinator of the Maimonides Centre. She studied at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg and at Cairo University. She holds a BA in Middle Eastern studies and political science and an MA in Arabic/Islamic studies and Judaic/Jewish studies. Her 2014 MA thesis in the field of Iranian studies is entitled 'The Jangal Movement as reflected in the newspaper 'Jangal' and in the contemporary press: The Jangal Movement as portrayed by itself and by others.' Prior to taking up her current position, Maria Wazinski was a research associate in the 'PESHAT in Context' project in 2014–15. She is currently developing her PhD project and is also enrolled in a part-time MBA programme in higher education and research management.

Her research interests include political philosophy of the Middle Ages, Judaeo-Arabic and Judaeo-Persian as well as Middle Eastern politics and history.



**SCIENTIFIC
COORDINATOR**





**FELLOWSHIP
PROGRAMME**
2016/2017

FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

The Maimonides Centre considers the fellowship programme to be its central component. It offers a flexible curriculum that allows internationally established scholars, as well as aspiring junior researchers, to participate for extended or shorter periods of time, with the option of returning to the Centre at a later point. The individual research projects presented by the fellows contribute to the comprehensive textual and historical framework of the Maimonides Centre.

SENIOR FELLOWSHIPS

MCAS Senior Fellowships provide a framework for established scholars with an international reputation to pursue their research at the Centre, for one or two terms.

JUNIOR FELLOWSHIPS

Junior Fellowships are awarded to PhD students and post-doc scholars who are involved in projects corresponding to the research topics of the Centre.

GUIDO BARTOLUCCI

RESEARCH PROJECT: JEWISH SCEPTICISM AND JEWISH POLITICAL TRADITION WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN DEBATE ON THE KING DURING THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

This project intends to explore Jewish scepticism as a methodology of investigation within the Jewish political tradition, and, in particular, within the Jewish reflection on monarchy. Within Judaism, in fact, we can find a broad and articulate discussion on the issue of authority in all its aspects, including the political one. The debate on monarchy, amongst other topics, particularly reveals the articulation of this tradition, which, in proposing a multiplicity of different interpretations (for and against the institution of a king) according to the sceptical method, actually serves to threaten its authority. This Jewish political tradition (and its texts), however, did not remain confined to the Jewish world, but it was widely spread within Christian political thought in the Early Modern period. We can identify the sixteenth century as the age when the interest in Jewish political history grew exponentially. Scholars today agree that Calvinism played a central role in the development and spread of the Jewish political tradition within the Christian world. It would be interesting to reconsider the contribution that Jewish thought made to the Christian world, analysing within these works the role played by the Jewish sceptical method in investigating political authority. The main purpose is to show how the Jewish debate about kingship contributes to re-enforcing the desacralisation of the figure of the king, which began with the English revolution.

Guido Bartolucci is assistant professor of early modern history at the Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Calabria.



SENIOR FELLOW
JANUARY 2017
—
JUNE 2017

ROI BENBASSAT

RESEARCH PROJECT:

YESHAYAHU LEIBOWITZ — STRICT ORTHODOX PRACTICE AND UNBOUND SCEPTICISM

Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–94) was an Israeli scientist and religious thinker who exerted a considerable influence on the views of intellectuals as well as the wider public regarding religious, moral, and political issues. Amongst other publications, he has written a book on Maimonides' faith. Roi Benbassat will explore Leibowitz's sceptical approach to four interrelated themes: the legitimacy of scepticism in the Jewish religion, the conflict between religion and science, the moral status of Judaism, and Judaism and the 'Jewish state.' Leibowitz's challenging insights regarding 'religious knowledge' has granted him the title of 'a destroyer of idols.' In his view, the Jewish religion is defined by the institution of Halakha alone, namely by its system of duties, whereas any other feature of Judaism (beliefs in particular) is dismissible. Thus, Judaism is conceived as a normative system, and faith in it as a commitment to a legal system. Leibowitz's sceptical attitude is drawn in various depictions of his concept of Judaism. He argues that Jewish faith is a volitional decision that does not rely on any belief or reasoning. He also claims that Jewish faith is essentially in conflict with humanism and other moral standpoints. His sceptical attitude goes as far as claiming that God's existence cannot be assumed or justified by our cognitive capacities, but only by willingly accepting the authority of the Jewish law (Halakhah). The Torah, as he puts it, is 'data preceding recognition of the Giver of the Torah.'



JUNIOR FELLOW
OCTOBER 2015
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DECEMBER 2016

Roi Benbassat earned his PhD at Université de Paris 1 and Tel Aviv University. Before coming to Hamburg, he held a Minerva Foundation postdoctoral fellowship at Free University Berlin.

HARALD BLUHM

RESEARCH PROJECT: WHAT IS ZETETIC POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY? THE CASE OF LEO STRAUSS

Harald Bluhm's contribution will consist of two parts. The first is a review essay on the differences between the recent American and German literature on Leo Strauss. In the US, Strauss's thinking is a matter of political and philosophical debate, while in Germany there is no academic school of Straussians, nor a political wing of Straussianism. Starting from this observation, Bluhm will shed light on how the American and German literature interprets Strauss' political philosophy. Strauss' scepticism, inherent in his philosophical return to Plato and Socrates, will arise as an essential question.

The second contribution is a paper on when and how Strauss coined and used the term 'zetetic.' Bluhm will analyse the way Straussians developed this term as a label for his political philosophy. Bluhm aims to clarify the distinctive character of Strauss' understanding of 'zetetic' political philosophy as a kind of sceptic *prima philosophia*. The starting point for his research is the current increase in literature and journals devoted to 'zetetic philosophy.' In discussing these subjects, Bluhm will focus on the differences between zetetic, sceptic, relativist, and historicist approaches.

Harald Bluhm is professor for political theory and history of ideas at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg.



SENIOR FELLOW
OCTOBER 2016
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MARCH 2017

TERESA CALIGIURE

RESEARCH PROJECT: A CASE OF ETHICAL SCEPTICISM IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY: FRANCESCO PETRARCA

Teresa Caligiure's research project will investigate the ancient sources of the sceptical attitude present in the philosophical and moral writings of Francesco Petrarca. The cultural debates around these sources, which were held between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, have greatly influenced the thinking of Humanism during the Renaissance in Italy and Europe. The appearance of a 'sceptical Petrarca' in his work, will not only touch upon the ethical individual, but also contextualise it with regard to the political situation in which he lived and worked.

This project will address the issue of scepticism in Petrarca's works, particularly in the *Secretum*, the *De ignorantia*, the preface to the second book of the *De remediis*, in some letters and other works. It is worth investigating how Petrarca retains Augustinian ideas, according to which doubt turns into dialogue between man and the truth. As is shown in Petrarca's controversial work *De ignorantia*, his point of view is polemically in contrast to the acceptance of Aristotelian principles and radical Averroism en vogue during his time.

Teresa Caligiure earned her PhD in medieval Italian literature in 2011. She was a postdoctoral research fellow at the Humanities Faculty of the University of Calabria (2013–15), where she taught language skills.



SENIOR FELLOW
OCTOBER 2016
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MARCH 2017

EVELIEN CHAYES

**RESEARCH PROJECT: GENDER AND MODES OF SCEPTICISM IN AND OUT OF THE VENETIAN GHETTO.
SARA COPIO SULLAM AND THE ACCADEMIA DEGLI INCOGNITI**

The research project of Evelien Chayes investigates early seventeenth-century debates between Venetian Jews and members of the Accademia degli Incogniti on the immortality of the soul and body-soul dualism, debates which have been held for millenia. While they each pursued this theme along their own lines, their texts are highly conscious of ancient traditions (Greek and Latin, Jewish, Christian), with special attention to Aristotelian as well as Pythagorean principles and to Jewish learning.

The soul was the central topic *par excellence* of the Italian academies since 1550, and in the Incogniti's 1635 *Discorsi*, this core matter experienced an epistemological shift, strongly influenced by an increasingly sceptical approach. We can directly connect this orientation to contemporary sources, notably Jewish ones, concerning immortality and the transmigration of the soul. This research will uncover intellectual efforts and exchanges on the part of hitherto obscure or unstudied rabbis and Christians in the Veneto in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Evelien Chayes teaches at the Université Bordeaux Montaigne. Her PhD (received from the University of Amsterdam, 2007) treated the early modern reception and reworking of the ancient book-lore on precious stones.



**JUNIOR FELLOW
WINTER TERM
2016/17**

CEDRIC COHEN-SKALLI

RESEARCH PROJECT:

DON ISAAC ABRAVANEL AND THE ROLE OF SCEPTICAL ARGUMENTS IN THE DELIMITATION OF RELIGION

Cedric Cohen-Skalli's research project will focus on the new delimitation of the realms of religion and science suggested by Isaac Abravanel in his philosophical and exegetical works written in the historical context of the Iberian and Italian peninsulas in the fifteenth century. Cohen-Skalli believes that this new delimitation of religion and science, shared by many Jewish philosophers of the fifteenth century, can be best studied in the works of Isaac Abravanel, since they display their Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Greco-Roman background more explicitly than most other works of fifteenth-century Jewish philosophers. Cohen-Skalli's intention is to show how this new delimitation of religion and science is grounded on sceptical claims on the limitation of human knowledge and on the uncertainty of scientific models. These sceptical claims play an essential role in the delimitation of the realm of religion and its distinction from scientific epistemological models. The sceptical argumentation often functions as a discursive justification and preparation for a more fideistic or literal approach to religious events like miracles or prophecy in Abravanel's work. The sceptical arguments used by Abravanel are not meant to invalidate either science or philosophy, but to justify the possibility of religious events defined as 'supernatural.' The sceptical argumentation that Abravanel developed has often been approached by modern scholarship as marking the end of medieval Jewish philosophy (Leo Strauss) or as a sign of Jewish backwardness *vis-à-vis* early modern rationalism (Benzion Netanyahu). Cedric Cohen-Skalli's hopes to demonstrate that Isaac Abravanel's disjunction of the realms of religion and science participated in the re-definition of religion, philosophy, and science in the Early Modern period.



SENIOR FELLOW

JULY 2017

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SEPTEMBER 2017

Cedric Cohen Skalli teaches early modern and modern Jewish philosophy at the University of Haifa.

RESEARCH PROJECT: SCEPTICISM, DECEPTION, AND OMNIPOTENCE IN EARLY MODERN SCHOLASTICISM

In his First Meditation, Descartes introduces the most radical of sceptical hypotheses: the possibility that we are being deceived by an omnipotent being. Although Descartes is famous for this hypothesis, the question of God's veracity appeared on the Scholastic scene in the fourteenth century. Because God is traditionally conceived as morally perfect, and deception is a moral defect, there is pressure to deny that God can deceive us, and scholastics were well aware of the fact that the possibility of divine deception seems to lead quickly to various forms of scepticism.

Nonetheless, there are philosophical as well as scriptural reasons to say that God can deceive us. On the scriptural side, several passages in the Old Testament assert that God not only can deceive people, but does: for example, 'I the Lord have deceived that prophet' (Ez. 14:9). On the philosophical side, it is traditionally thought that God is omnipotent, and for an omnipotent being, it would be easy to say something false, to lie, and to cause someone to have false beliefs. The research project focuses on three aspects of the debate about divine veracity as it appears in early modern Scholasticism: the tension between moral perfection and omnipotence, the relationship between divine deception and scepticism, and the relationship between Scholastic and Cartesian conceptions of deception.

JUNIOR FELLOW
MARCH 2017
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FEBRUARY 2018



Brian Embry earned his PhD in philosophy from the University of Toronto in 2015, with a research focus on early modern philosophy. After receiving his PhD, Brian took up a lectureship in philosophy at the University of Toronto, which will finish in 2017.

GAD FREUDENTHAL

RESEARCH PROJECT: COSMOLOGY, PROBABILISTIC ASTROLOGY, AND RATIONALITY IN THE THOUGHT OF RABBI LEVI BEN GERSON (GERSONIDES, 1288–1344)

Gad Freudenthal's research will focus on Rabbi Levi ben Gershom, or Gersonides (1288–1344), certainly the European medieval Jewish scholar who best qualifies as a philosopher-scientist. To put it in a nutshell: notwithstanding his commitment to rationalism and to Aristotelian natural philosophy in its Averroean formulation, Gersonides drew substantially on the astrological body of knowledge; indeed, he made it into a cornerstone of his natural philosophy. Freudenthal will ask: how did Gersonides reconcile his thorough empiricism and rationalism with his explicit vindication of astrology and his reliance on it as a resource for trustworthy knowledge? Freudenthal's hypothesis is that at least a part of the answer is to be found in Gersonides' original use of the notion of (statistical) probability and of probable truth.

**SENIOR FELLOW
SPRING 2017**



Freudenthal has begun to probe Gersonides' thinking on this issue and at present it seems to him that it is the theoretical notion of (frequentist) probability that provided Gersonides with a basis for the idea of statements that are only probably, but not certainly, true. This construal makes the argument in favour of astrological knowledge methodologically unobjectionable; it is no less rational than that of any modern scientist.

Gad Freudenthal is senior research fellow emeritus with the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) in Paris. His last fellowship was at the Institut d'Études Avancées in Nantes, France (2015–16).

RICO GUTSCHMIDT

RESEARCH PROJECT: THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NEGATIVE THEOLOGY



JUNIOR FELLOW
MARCH 2017
—
AUGUST 2017

Philosophical scepticism and negative theology are both concerned with the limits of language and thought. Particularly, in their deepest and historically most influential forms, both traditions are best understood not as a species of philosophical thesis, but rather as something that enables a particular form of experience and self-transformation with respect to these limits.

According to Pyrrhonism, sceptical disturbances lead to the attitude of *ataraxia*, or tranquility. A similar therapeutic understanding of scepticism can be found, for example, in the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Thompson Clarke, and Stanley Cavell. On the other hand, negative theology is traditionally understood as a *via negativa*, a way to a deeper form of faith. This can be found in the writings of the main representatives of negative

theology as Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, Maimonides or Nicholas of Cusa. By means of a comparison of scepticism and negative theology, this project investigates the respective strategies of a non-theoretical, performative representation of the limits of language and thought. This will contribute to a better understanding of these limits and, thus, demonstrate the philosophical significance of negative theology.

Rico Gutschmidt received his PhD in philosophy from the University of Bonn in 2009. In 2016, he worked as a visiting scholar at the University of Chicago on a research project on scepticism.

OREN HANNER

RESEARCH PROJECT: PHILOSOPHICAL SCEPTICISM AND THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURES: THE INDIAN BUDDHIST THINKER VASUBANDHU AS A CASE STUDY

Like various other religious and philosophical traditions, Indian Buddhism has questioned the reliability of our common knowledge and its sources. The present study examines the issue of philosophical scepticism towards truths conveyed in religious texts, which involves a fundamental tension between two modes of cognition acknowledged by Buddhist thinkers: critical rational inquiry on the one hand, and the reliance on the authority of scriptural testimony on the other. It will attempt to answer a set of questions concerning the interplay between the two, such as: in what sense is a scripture a source of knowledge? What role does scepticism play in extracting knowledge from religious texts? Should reason receive priority over scriptural dogma or vice versa?

To clarify and answer these questions, the study will draw on the work of the Indian Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu (late fourth to early fifth century CE), who was both one of the few Buddhist scholars to theorise about the requirements for a critical assessment of scriptures and a commentator whose interpretations of Buddhist texts were highly influential in India as well as in the Buddhist traditions of China, Tibet, and Japan. In particular, the research will focus on two works attributed to Vasubandhu: *The Proper Application of Exegesis* (Sanskrit: *vyākhyā-yukti*) and *A Commentary on 'Distinguishing between Phenomena and Their Real Nature'* (*dharma-dharmatā-vibhāga-vṛtti*).

Oren Hanner completed his PhD at the Numata Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Hamburg in 2016, with a dissertation on the notion of moral agency in the thought of the Buddhist thinker Vasubandhu.



JUNIOR FELLOW
OCTOBER 2016
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MARCH 2017

YUVAL HARARI

RESEARCH PROJECT:

DREAM ENQUIRY: THEORY AND PRAXIS OF DREAMING IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN JUDAISM

Yuval Harari will work on a chapter of his planned book about a branch of Jewish magic dealing with practices for manipulating dreams. The primary sources for his research are Jewish manuscripts of magic and practical Kabbalah, in which practices of dream magic are explicit and abundant. He will also consider and include Halakhic, Kabbalistic, and narrative sources. Both dreams and magic undermine the borderlines of nature and society and are in conflict with 'rational' interpretations of the human experience. Despite engendering scepticism and ridicule, they retained a strong hold on Jewish communities, both East and West. 'Dream enquiry,' which seems to have been a prevalent practice in the medieval and early modern periods, is an especially interesting test case for this debate. Dream request, or better, dream enquiry, is the most common pattern of magic dream divination in Jewish culture. The most significant source for understanding this practice, the worldview in which it was anchored, and the criticism and disdain it raised, are the dozens of recipes for dream enquiry scattered in the broad and yet unexplored corpus of Jewish manuscripts of magic and practical Kabbalah from the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. Yuval Harari's research will focus first and foremost on this corpus, aiming at a comprehensive survey of the phenomenon and its place in Jewish thought and action.



SENIOR FELLOW
AUGUST 2017
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SEPTEMBER 2017

Yuval Harari teaches Jewish thought and folklore at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

WARREN ZEV HARVEY

RESEARCH PROJECT: ḤASDAI CRESCAS' SCEPTICAL CRITIQUE OF MAIMONIDES

In his *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides (1138–1204) anchored Jewish religion in Aristotelian science and philosophy. Rabbi Ḥasdai Crescas (c. 1340–1410 or 1411), in his *Light of the Lord*, presented a radical critique of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics and rejected Maimonides' approach. According to him, human reason can prove the existence of a first cause, but cannot prove God's unity or goodness, that is, it cannot prove the personal God of the Bible. Religion, he argues, is based on prophecy, not philosophy.

Crescas' critique is analysed in H. A. Wolfson's *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (1929). Crescas argues against Aristotle's theories of space, time, the impossibility of a vacuum, and the impossibility of actual infinity. His sceptical arguments are based on a critical examination of Aristotle, Averroes (1126–98), Maimonides (1138–1204), and Gersonides (1288–1344). They show an affinity with Nicole Oresme (1320–82). Instead of Aristotle's closed universe, Crescas conceived a universe infinite in space and time. His sceptical views left an impact on Spinoza.

Warren Zev Harvey is professor emeritus in the Department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he has taught since 1977.

SENIOR FELLOW
FEBRUARY 2017
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MARCH 2017



ADI LOURIA HAYON

RESEARCH PROJECT: FROM DESCARTES' DOUBT TO BRUCE NAUMAN'S SENSUAL PRAXIS

Adi Louria Hayon's research project centres on the relationship between modern art and philosophy, in particular on how we may consider the art of American artist Bruce Nauman through René Descartes' methodological scepticism. The question at hand is whether post-minimalist art may offer a systematic process akin to methodological scepticism in order to afford us an insight into the questions of the existence of external reality and the finite nature of objective knowledge. Allying himself with the sceptic, from the late 1960s Nauman began developing a practice that exposes the contraptions of sense perception through a series of methods that include the impediment of visual apparatuses, failures, blinding mechanisms, chance operations, and a turn to the sonorous, a sense considered minor in the plastic arts.

JUNIOR FELLOW
NOVEMBER 2016
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JANUARY 2017
&
JULY 2017
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SEPTEMBER 2017

Focusing on the nature of knowledge and its production, this project will address the issue of methodic doubt by investigating the concepts of anamorphic images and distortions in relation to the operation of perspective and the problem of illusionism; the concept of self-deception in relation to technology and instrumentality; and the concept of suspension of judgment as a solution to the enactment of false knowledge and a threat to freedom.



Adi Louria Hayon is an assistant professor in the Art History Department at Tel Aviv University. She earned her doctorate at University of Toronto in 2013.

EHUD KRINIS

RESEARCH PROJECT: SCEPTICAL MOTIFS IN JUDAH HALEVI'S *KUZARI*

Ehud Krinis seeks to explore various sceptical motifs in Judah Halevi's twelfth-century Judaeo-Arabic dialogue, commonly known as the *Book of Kuzari* or the *Kuzari*. These sceptical motifs include, among others, Halevi's criticism of rational contemplation (*ītibār*) and inductive reasoning (*istidlāl*); the preference of the 'naturally gifted persons' (*al-maṭbū'ūn*), who receive religious truths by sparks of inspiration, over the non-gifted, who need to immerse themselves in study in order to acquire the articles of faith; and the supremacy of religious understanding gained by direct experience over that gained through discourse.

Krinis hopes to demonstrate that Halevi's scepticism is intriguing and provoking, not only in the ways in which he uses it in the *Kuzari* to tackle his opponents' approaches, but even more so in the ways he directs it at approaches espoused by his spokesman in the dialogue: the Jewish sage (*habr/haver*). By pursuing this direction of investigation, Krinis ventures to claim that Halevi's scepticism culminates in implicitly calling into question the usefulness of the discursive format of his own *Kuzari*.

Ehud Krinis earned his PhD at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (2008). He was a fellow at the Center for the Study of Conversion and Inter-Religious Encounters at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in 2015–16.



SENIOR FELLOW
APRIL 2017
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SEPTEMBER 2017

RESEARCH PROJECT: LINGUISTIC SCEPTICISM

- From Isolation to Community. Sceptical Strategies in Landauer's Anarchy (March–August 2016)
- Limits of Language. Limits of Understanding. Linguistic Scepticism in Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein (September 2016–February 2017)



JUNIOR FELLOW
SEPTEMBER 2016
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FEBRUARY 2017

Libera Pisano's research is structured into two main sections and deals with linguistic scepticism among pairings of German-Jewish thinkers of the last century: Mauthner/Landauer and Rosenzweig/Wittgenstein. The historical context is the so-called *Sprachkrise*, a complex critique of language diffused in the philosophical and literary debate before World War I. In her first six months of research, Libera Pisano analysed the *logos-scepticism* in Mauthner's philosophy as the theoretical premise of the anarchist thought of Gustav Landauer by shedding light on the turn of linguistic scepticism into a political praxis and a mystical conception of community. For the second part of her research, she has chosen to investigate the different approaches of Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein as two manifestations of the constellation of *Sprachkrise*, which—despite their apparent

divergences—is the common thread linking these different authors. Libera Pisano will attempt to show how reflection about the limits of language, the relevance of the apophatic moment, the critical attitude towards the tradition, and the new task of philosophy—the main features of both Rosenzweig's and Wittgenstein's thought—stem from the radical linguistic scepticism present in the cultural debate of that time.

Libera Pisano earned her PhD in theoretical philosophy at Sapienza University of Rome in 2014. She was visiting research fellow (post-doc) at the Humboldt University Berlin in 2014–15.

ALMUT-BARBARA RENGER

RESEARCH PROJECT: BETWEEN FASCINATION AND SCEPTICISM: CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY FIGURES IN RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

Almut-Barbara Renger's work at the Maimonides Centre is based on foundational studies resulting from her research on one of the most distinctive social forms of religious community, the so-called master–disciple relationship. Expanding on these studies, the project investigates issues of ambivalence and scepticism toward religious and philosophical authority by pursuing one of the central research objectives of the Centre: the examination of whether the method of enquiry, as implied in the term 'scepticism,' could be regarded as an anthropological constant in the context of an alleged dialectic difference between 'Eastern' and 'Western' philosophy and culture.

In light of this objective, the project examines the extent to which attitudes and approaches comparable to the sceptical posture and practices of Greco-Roman antiquity as outlined by Sextus Empiricus can be identified in the cultural and religious history of both Europe and Asia. It is through its comparative perspective, which takes the sceptical posture of antiquity as its starting point and *tertium comparationis*, that the project makes a valuable contribution to the Centre. Its enquiry is not intended as an attempt to arrive at normative statements concerning the languages, cultures, religions, and world-views it focuses upon in interdisciplinary discussions. Rather, using analytical descriptive approaches to enquire into similarities, parallels, and analogies, the aim is to avoid generalisation and to open up scope for differentiation.

Almut-Barbara Renger is professor of ancient religion, culture, and their reception history at the Free University Berlin.



SENIOR FELLOW
JULY 2017
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SEPTEMBER 2017

RESEARCH PROJECT:

SCEPTICISM AND ANTI-SCEPTICISM IN THE JEWISH INTELLECTUAL DEBATE OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY ITALY

Asher Salah's project focuses on the context and the uses of the term 'sceptic' in the writings of Italian rabbis in the nineteenth century. Scepticism appears to be a central topic in the debate concerning the Jewish Reform, playing a crucial role in the revival of the anti-Karaitic polemic in nineteenth-century Italian Judaism. The interest in recovering classical defences of Jewish oral law is attested by the numerous translations into Italian of the *Mate Dan* by David Nieto, by the renewed interest in the commentaries of Yehudah Halevi's *Kuzari*, and by the proliferation of self-defined 'anti-Karaitic' tractates, targeting not only contemporary deist philosophies and religious reforms, but first and foremost positivistic systems of disbelief and secularism. At the same time, Italian rabbis in the nineteenth century engaged in an unprecedented programme of dogmatic interpretation of Judaism. The debate concerning scepticism sheds new light upon the Jewish response to modernity and emancipation in Italy, the challenges to rabbinical authority, the convergence of Catholic and Jewish apologetics in the frame of a growing estrangement from religious practices, and the continuities and discontinuities with previous Jewish philosophical traditions.



Asher Salah is a senior lecturer at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He was a fellow at the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies in 2011–12 and in 2014–15.

SENIOR FELLOW
JULY 2017
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SEPTEMBER 2017

BENJAMIN SCHNIEDER

RESEARCH PROJECT:

THE STRUCTURE OF REASONS AND GROUNDS: SCEPTICISM AND THE *PRINCIPLE OF SUFFICIENT REASON*

One of the most influential arguments in favour of scepticism relies on the structure of reason-hood: in order to classify as knowledge, a belief must be supported by a reason. In order to lend robust support to a belief, however, a reason must itself be supported by another reason. But since we have finite minds, any sequence of reasons we can entertain comes to a halt somewhere and terminates in a reason which is itself unsupported by any further reason. This seems to show that none of our beliefs enjoy the sort of support that is required for the belief to count as knowledge.

The current project explores the basic assumptions behind this argument by diving deeper into theories of reasons and their structure. The topic will be approached with a focus on the traditional debate about the so-called *Principle of Sufficient Reason*, examining contributions from philosophers such as Baruch de Spinoza, Christian Crusius, Salomon Maimon, and Bernard Bolzano.

Benjamin Schnieder is professor for theoretical philosophy at the University of Hamburg, where he is also the director of the Phlox research group.



SENIOR FELLOW
OCTOBER 2016
—
MARCH 2017



CHARLES SNYDER

RESEARCH PROJECT: PLATO AND THE ART OF ACADEMIC SCEPTICISM

Charles E. Snyder's project explains why both doctrinal and anti-doctrinal interpretations of Plato fail to identify the *art* of Plato's sceptical philosophy. His project recovers and enlarges a third paradigm of interpreting Plato that conforms to the way the sceptical Academy received his dialogues. Snyder argues that the doctrinal interpretation fails to explain why Plato cast philosophical arguments and beliefs in the form of dramatic dialogues, not treatises; the anti-doctrinal paradigm, on the other hand, cannot discern the practical knowledge, or the non-doctrinal know-how, exhibited by Socrates in the activity of philosophical inquiry. For Snyder, the many difficulties that emerge from the demand for definitions (e.g. virtue in the *Meno*, knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, temperance in the *Charmides*, courage in the *Laches*) find a positive solution in the art of Socrates' dialectic. In the give and take of argument, Socrates exhibits the practical knowledge that virtue and knowledge are irreducible to propositions, definitions, and demonstrations.

Arcesilaus the sceptic is primarily a practitioner of this art, emulating Socrates in challenging the conceited dogmatism of other philosophers.

This means, for Snyder's project, that Arcesilaus exhibits non-propositional knowledge by showing that virtue and knowledge cannot be defined or proven. Part three of the project argues that the modern tradition of interpreting Academic scepticism according to a narrow scheme of pure epistemology is fundamentally flawed, distorting the character and virtue of scepticism in antiquity.

Charles Snyder earned a PhD in philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York City. In 2015–16, he was a postdoctoral research fellow at the Hannah Arendt Center, and a teaching fellow at the Bard Prison Initiative in New York.

JUNIOR FELLOW
OCTOBER 2016
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MARCH 2017



EMIDIO SPINELLI

RESEARCH PROJECT: ANCIENT SCEPTICISM, ITS PHILOSOPHICAL SELF-JUSTIFICATION, AND ITS POLEMICAL TOOLS: *CONTRA DOGMATICOS, SED PRO SCEPTICA PHILOSOPHIA*

This project aims to offer a first analysis towards a general introduction to Sextus' Pyrrhonian philosophy. Accordingly, it will pursue the following goals:

1. A global picture of the self-justification of his 'movement' (see especially the first book of his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, chs. 1–30);
2. A new philosophical attention to the relationship between some dogmatic assumptions about the notions of truth and the practical consequences they can or should have;
3. A running commentary that reveals some crucial aspects of the Pyrrhonian attack against any kind of subsistence of the demonstration/ἀπόδειξις;
4. An analysis of those passages where Sextus attacks some notions of dogmatic logical doctrines, for example: division, whole/parts, genera/species;
5. Finally, the research will focus on a more global topic, namely the destruction of any reasonable concept of the body as well as the soul, both considered as basic components of human beings in their capacity of acting as alleged criteria of truth.

Emidio Spinelli is a full professor of the history of ancient philosophy at the Department of Philosophy, Sapienza University of Rome.



SENIOR FELLOW
MARCH 2017
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JUNE 2017

JOSEF STERN

RESEARCH PROJECT: MAIMONIDES' SCEPTICAL CRITIQUE OF PROPHECY AND THE PARABLE OF THE AQEDAH

Josef Stern's objective is to complete a monograph on Maimonides' sceptical critique of prophecy. According to Maimonides, prophecy is an ideal state of intellectual perfection yielding a 'knowledge' whose representations are a function of both the intellect and the imagination, a state articulated in the Torah by the condition that all (non-Mosaic) prophecy must occur in a dream or vision. This characterisation immediately raises an epistemological question: with respect to any given prophetically apprehended proposition, how does the purported prophet know that he intellectually apprehended its content, which in turn is represented in an imaginative form, and that he did not instead imagine that he intellectually apprehended that content? An answer would require a criterion for distinguishing objects of the intellect from those of the imagination. However, Maimonides argues that humans have no such criterion, leaving him at a sceptical impasse, unable to justify his claim to knowledge. This, Stern argues, is what Maimonides means by the challenge posed by 'false'—*deceived* rather than *deceiving*—prophets. To explore this, Stern analyses Maimonides' idea of prophecy, prophetic verification, and prophetic intuition (*hads*), the tension for him between the intellect and imagination in light of the major dispute over the status of the modalities among the Arabic philosophers, his critique of the epistemic status of the certainty of the prophet, and the normative consequences of this sceptical critique for the prophetic life and commandments.

SENIOR FELLOW
NOVEMBER 2016
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MARCH 2017



Josef Stern is William H. Colvin Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the University of Chicago.

MÁTÉ VERES

RESEARCH PROJECT: SCEPTICISM AND RELIGION IN THE HELLENISTIC AGE AND BEYOND

Ancient Greek sceptics insisted that one should not hastily accept philosophical tenets in place of customary beliefs and practices, since restructuring one's life around philosophical dogma would lead to a deplorable life of the mind and to an unappealing way of living. Instead, one should continue to investigate in the hope of eventually getting it right, and base one's actions, until the results are in, on the customs and laws of one's land.

In his dissertation, Máté Veres examined the role of such sceptical arguments concerning theology in selected works of Cicero and Sextus Empiricus. After providing a close reading of relevant passages, Veres situated their position in the broader context of the purpose and methodology of sceptical argumentation. In Hamburg, Veres will prepare papers based on his results, and broaden the scope of the sources discussed. He hopes that his stay will contribute to the preparation of a monograph on the role of scepticism in Hellenistic theological debates. Furthermore, Veres will return to a topic that partly motivated him to take up his research: David Hume's philosophy of religion and the influence of classical scepticism on his philosophical outlook. Veres aims to argue in a paper that Hume engages with, and eventually transforms, the ancient sceptical legacy.

Máté Veres is a PhD candidate from the Central European University. During his studies, he was a visiting student at the Faculty of Classics at the University of Cambridge, a Fulbright visiting graduate researcher at the Sage School of Philosophy, Cornell University, a junior bursary recipient at the Hardt Foundation, and a junior fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna.



JUNIOR FELLOW
JANUARY 2017
—
DECEMBER 2017

KATJA VOGT

RESEARCH PROJECT: SCEPTICISM AND THE JTB ACCOUNT OF KNOWLEDGE

The so-called JTB account of knowledge states that knowledge is a kind of belief, namely, belief that is true and justified. In a famous paper, Edmund Gettier (1963) observes that the JTB account is taken more or less for granted across different positions in epistemology. Arguably, this applies to positions throughout many centuries. In this project, Katja Vogt aims to show that the JTB account came to be established in epistemological theories that take knowledge of God as their primary concern, and that it owes much of its intuitiveness to the tradition of seeking to know God. In this tradition, scepticism takes the form of what Vogt calls Belief Scepticism: scepticism introduced as a method for distancing oneself from beliefs, and ultimately validating beliefs that are antecedently held. Here, the JTB account is a natural fit. In making this argument, Vogt is continuing her ongoing research on scepticism, including work on the differences between ancient and later scepticism, as well as a more recent project (co-authored with Jens Haas) on the nature of ignorance.

Katja Maria Vogt is professor of philosophy at Columbia University, New York.



SENIOR FELLOW
SPRING 2017

DIRK WESTERKAMP

RESEARCH PROJECT: SCEPTICISM AND SCHEMATISM: THE LOGOTECTONIC PROGRESS OF TRANSCENDENTAL SCEPTICISM FROM MOSES MENDELSSOHN TO SALOMON MAIMON

The period between Kant's sceptical refutation of Moses Mendelssohn's reification of metaphysics and Salomon Maimon's scepticist meta-critique of Kant's critical transcendentalism seems to be one of the most fruitful periods of scepticism, albeit not fully illuminated in its inner logic of argumentation. Dirk Westerkamp's research project seeks to examine the debates and arguments of transcendentalism's encounter with scepticism in the early 1790s.

Emphasis is thus given to the logotectonic (that is: rational) structure of philosophical and sceptical reasoning during the period between Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden* and Maimon's *Neue Logik* (1785–1794/5). The project will thus focus on the relationship between rationality, symbolic language, and schematism in Mendelssohn, Kant, Jacobi, Reinhold, and Maimon. The project shall result in a text of some 150 pages, which will form the core chapters of a book on the topic.

Dirk Westerkamp is professor of theoretical philosophy at the University of Kiel. He has been a research fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, at Harvard University, and at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences.



SENIOR FELLOW
APRIL 2017
—
SEPTEMBER 2017

ELLIOT WOLFSON

RESEARCH PROJECT: DREAMING, SCEPTICISM, AND THE ROLE OF METAPHOR IN KABBALISTIC LORE

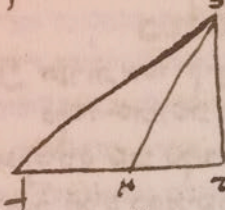
Wolfson's thinking has been especially inspired by the desire to forge an alliance between the spirit of Jewish philosophy and scepticism, that is, to survey the panorama of the former through the speculum of the latter. By scepticism, he means the anxiety that ensues from the fact that it is entirely possible that we do not know what we think we know, either about the external world or the nature of other minds, as Descartes famously argued in the first of the *Meditations on First Philosophy* in his insistence that, from a sentient perspective, we cannot ascertain the 'sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep.' Many philosophers since antiquity to the present have pondered the epistemological question and the ontological assumptions that emerge therefrom: if we have no means to distinguish clearly between reality and the dream, then the very criterion to establish the distinction between truth and untruth is undermined; moreover, the scepticism that would deny the difference, for instance, between dreaming that one is awake and awakening from one's dream is itself weakened by the fact that the measure of our judgment is impaired by the fact that the disparity between fact and fiction is problematised by the dream imagination. Wolfson's project will consist of examining the paradox of metaphor as the oxymoron *fictional truth*, a truth whose authenticity can be gauged only from the standpoint of its being, in Kabbalistic sources with a special focus on Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, Shneur Zalman of Liadi, and Solomon ben Ḥayyim Eliashiv.



SENIOR FELLOW
APRIL 2017
—
JUNE 2017

Elliot R. Wolfson, a fellow of the American Academy of Jewish Research and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, is the Marsha and Jay Glazer Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies and Distinguished Professor of Religion at University of California, Santa Barbara.

משה הצליח את וויהן בזה שיצא וטעה לנפילה
העמוד אשר יפול עליו פועלים ..
דמיון זה



שעקר עליו כן ונלע א"כ
ויהיה ד' ויהיה
העמוד י"ב והקו העשירי עד
מפלו העמוד שהוא קו"ד ה'
הנה וכן העמוד שהכח

עליו כן יגדו בעצמן יתר על הכח ב"א בע'
בעצמן וא"כ בעצמן בזה הכח א"כ ב"א ש"א
פועלים ומפנה לך ועצמה נכוח העבוקט ..
כל משולש חד הוויה יהיה אשר יהיה והכח
העליו אשר יעשה וציר לוניה החדה בעצמן
יגדו פחות מאשר יהיה והכח השתי העליות א

הנשארה כל אחד מהם בעצמם וקו
יהיה והכח העליו אשר יפול עליו
וגדו שכן נפילה העמוד וכן הו'
פועלים .. דמיון זה

א"כ נשדה והעמוד שגדו
אשר הוא הנפילה שגדו
העמוד שהכח א"כ
והכח א"כ בעצמן כגדו
והכח א"כ כ"ד ש"א פועלים
והכח א"כ ויהיה
נ"כ לנכח וכו' ומה העמוד

נ"כ

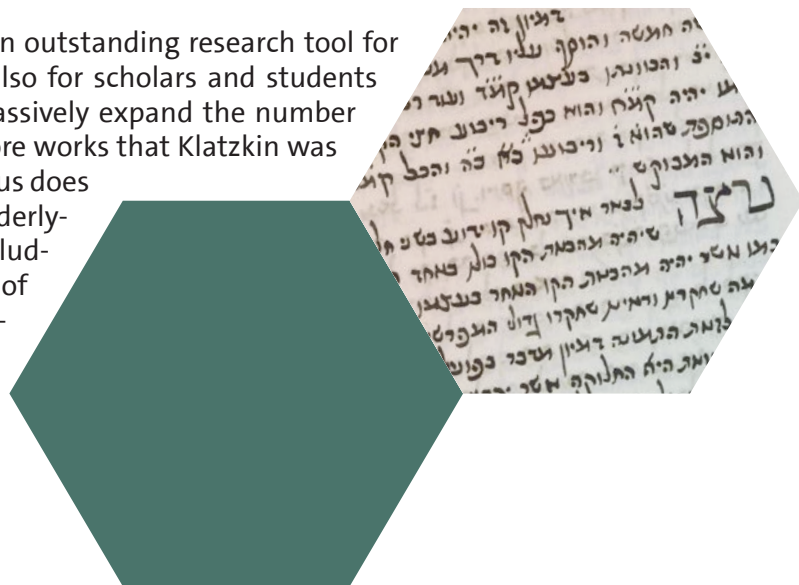
PROJECT
PESHAT

PROJECT PESHAT

‘PESHAT in Context’ is a DFG-funded long-term project (2014–26). It investigates the emergence and development of Hebrew philosophical and scientific terminology from the premodern period in its cultural and historical context. The project is supervised by Professor Giuseppe Veltri and Reimund Leicht (Hebrew University Jerusalem). Resianne Smidt van Gelder-Fontaine (University of Amsterdam) acts as an advisor. The project team consists of three research associates in Hamburg: Daniel Davies, Florian Dunklau (part-time), and Michael Engel.

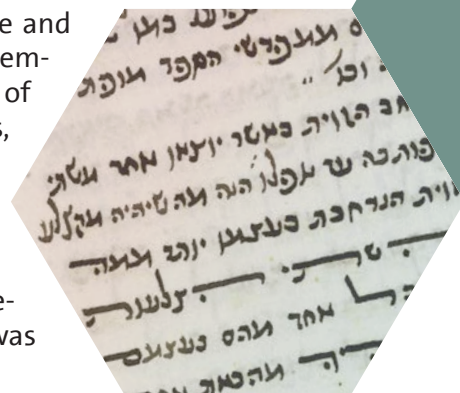
Hebrew philosophical and scientific literature emerged during an exceptional period of rich cultural transfer, during which texts were translated into Hebrew from Arabic or Latin and also from Hebrew into Latin. This multilingual and multicultural background will be documented in an innovative online thesaurus (www.peshat.org). The new thesaurus is an upgrade of and supplement to its printed predecessor, Jacob Klatzkin’s *Otsar ha-munahim ha-filosofiyim: Thesaurus philosophicus linguae hebraicae* (5 vols., Berlin, 1928–1933). Klatzkin’s work remains unsurpassed (3042 entries; some 1200 pages in four volumes, plus one volume of texts). He studied a large amount of philosophical texts in Hebrew, both in printed texts and handwritten manuscripts, and compiled the philosophical terms they contained.

For over 80 years, Klatzkin’s work has been an outstanding research tool for any student of Jewish intellectual life, but also for scholars and students of related fields. ‘PESHAT in Context’ will massively expand the number of terms explained and will include many more works that Klatzkin was able to examine. Moreover, Klatzkin’s thesaurus does not offer the Arabic or Latin source terms underlying the Hebrew, nor its Greek equivalents. Including source terms will aid our understanding of terms appearing in translations. It will be possible for users both to examine a translator’s accuracy, and, also, to easily view differences between the ways in which two or more translators rendered technical terms.



In the new database, each Hebrew term is accompanied by explanations, definitions, and extensive quotations from a vast array of Hebrew sources that document its precise usage. Together with detailed background information, including geographical and chronological data, the exact circumstances in which a term was formed are highlighted. With the addition of parallel quotations in Arabic and Latin, and equivalent terms in several languages, it will be an indispensable tool for the comparative study of terminology on a linguistic and historical basis. It will benefit scholars in Jewish studies, Islamic and Arabic studies, classics, medieval studies, history of science, and philosophy.

The project will host triennial conferences, which will summarise and discuss the findings and put them into an interdisciplinary academic context. Regular project evaluation also draws on the results of these conferences. Researchers from the fields of Arabic languages, Islamic philosophy, Latin studies, historical terminology, philosophy, and the digital humanities will convene with those in the history of Jewish thought. The first conference organised by the 'PESHAT in Context' team, entitled 'First Conference of the *Officina Philosophica Hebraica*: Terminology Formation, Translation Procedures and Philosophical Debates in Twelfth Century Judaism,' was held in Hamburg in April 2016.



In addition to producing the database, results of the research undertaken in the framework of the project will be published as *Officina Philosophica Hebraica*, which will include the proceedings of regular international conferences on the study of premodern philosophical terminology. The first of four projected volumes will be published in 2017. They will present a synthesis of research on the development of Hebrew philosophical and scientific terminology in a specific period of time. They will present the work of the team and of the scientific community on the study of Hebrew terminology and are intended to support future research on Hebrew philosophical and scientific literature. The publications will be produced in close cooperation with the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies.

DANIEL DAVIES

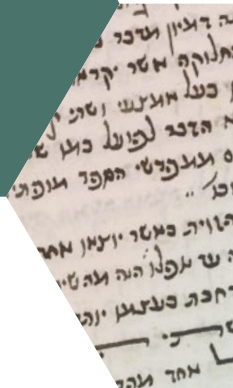
Daniel Davies has been a research associate at the University of Hamburg since May 2015. He earned his PhD at the Divinity Faculty at Cambridge University, supervised by Tony Street, where he also studied for an MPhil. Before arriving in Hamburg, he worked at the Genizah Research Unit and was a Spalding Fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge. He has lectured courses at Canterbury Christ Church University and Leo Baeck College, London. In the 'PESHAT in Context' project, he is focusing on translations of Arabic texts.

His main research interests relate to medieval philosophy, philosophy of religion, comparative theology, and Jewish theology.

Daniel Davies has published a variety of chapters and articles, and a monograph entitled *Method and Metaphysics in Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed* (2011), which was honoured by the Association for Jewish Studies book awards in the category of Philosophy and Jewish Thought. Alongside these works, he also translated Galen's *On Character Traits*, included in the volume *Galen: Psychological Writings* (2014), for the Cambridge Galen Translations.



RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE



MICHAEL ENGEL

Michael Engel has been a research associate at the University of Hamburg since June 2015. He studied at Tel Aviv University for his BA and for his Master's degree. He completed his PhD at Wolfson College, Cambridge, under the supervision of Professor John Marenbon. He taught medieval Jewish philosophy at the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge University, where he served as affiliated lecturer. Michael Engel was also a postdoctoral member of Clare Hall, Cambridge, and a Francis Yates Postdoctoral Fellow at the Warburg Institute, London.

Michael Engel's main focus in the 'PESHAT in Context' project is the examination and implementation of the Latin equivalents of Hebrew philosophical and scientific terms from the Middle Ages.

His main research interests are medieval and Renaissance Jewish philosophy, particularly the relations between medieval Jewish philosophy and Latin Scholasticism.

He has published in journals of medieval philosophy. His monograph on Elijah Del Medigo was published with Bloomsbury Publishing in 2016.





PROJECT
SFORNO

PROJECT SFORNO

The DFG-funded project 'Between Two Worlds: The Tractate *Or 'Ammim* [Light of the Nations] of the Last Jewish Scholastic Philosopher 'Ovadyah Sforno in its Hebrew and Latin Versions' is chaired by Professor Giuseppe Veltri. Professor Saverio Campanini (University of Bologna) acts as advisor. The team of research associates consists of Giada Coppola and Florian Dunklau (part-time).

The philosophically trained Jewish theologian 'Ovadyah Sforno (1475?–1550) is considered the last Jewish Scholastic author. Sforno published only one philosophical work, entitled *Or 'Ammim* [Light of the Nations], which he made available to a Christian humanist readership through his own translation into Latin, under the title *Lumen Gentium*. Within an anticipated total duration of six years (2015–21), the project will rediscover 'Ovadyah Sforno and his significance for the intercultural exchange between intellectuals and circles of Christian scholars and humanists and an elite of Jewish intellectuals. The particular context is the Renaissance's late heyday of Aristotelian philosophy and the Scholastic tradition during the last decades of the sixteenth century.

The discovery of a variant autograph version of the summarising chapter of *Or 'Ammim*, which was unknown to former editors of Sforno's oeuvre, as well as the neglect of the Latin text, makes it necessary to provide a new edition of the Hebrew version. A first critical edition of the Latin version, on the basis of the available printed sources, will be accompanied by an English translation and critical commentary.

Further research will concentrate on the sources of Sforno's philosophy and his terminology. Comparing the two versions will shed light on the development of the Hebrew scientific and philosophical language of the Middle Ages, which will generate a synergic effect with the DFG-funded 'PESHAT in Context' project. At a concluding stage of the project, Sforno's use of philosophical arguments and concepts in his exegesis of Biblical passages will be analysed.



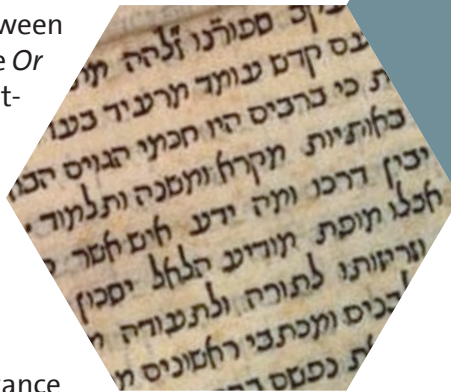
PROJECT SFORNO

A two-volume edition is planned, containing the edited Hebrew and Latin texts in synoptic form with the respective English translations in four columns, together with a critical apparatus and lexicographical commentary, as well as Hebrew-to-Latin and Latin-to-Hebrew indices at the end of the first volume. The second volume will contain a philosophical commentary on the text, as well as essays on lexicography and the relationship between Sforno's exegesis and philosophy. An international symposium entitled 'Lost & Found in Translation: 'Ovadyah Sforno and His World' will be held in Hamburg on January 18–19, 2017.

The Light Of The Nations

Or 'Ammim was first published in Bologna in 1537. The *Lumen Gentium* was printed by Anselmo Giaccarelli in Bologna in 1548, and dedicated to the French King Henry II. This is an important example of the reciprocity of input between Christian culture and Jewish philosophy. The *Or 'Ammim* is considered the last summa written by a Jewish author. The classical questions of medieval philosophy are raised in 15 theses (*quaestiones*), including, e.g., creatio ex nihilo, divine omniscience, will, and providence, and the immortality of the human soul.

Sforno's stance against an uncritical acceptance of Aristotelian methodology and adherence to the heretical doctrine of the eternity of matter made him appear to be an opponent of philosophy in general. However, he was nevertheless convinced of the truth of the Torah as a consequence of its philosophical rationalism. Sforno's work is unique in early modern Jewish philosophical literature. By examining the processes of compiling, editing, and translating a work from Hebrew into Latin by a single person, who is both author and translator of that work, we hope to gain crucial insights into the transfer and exchange of philosophical and scientific ideas at the intersection of Judaism, Scholasticism, and Islam.



GIADA COPPOLA

Giada Coppola has been a research associate at the University of Hamburg since September 2015. She studied philosophy and theory of human science at the Università degli Studi Roma Tre, and completed a PhD in the Department of Languages, Literature, and Societies (Philosophy) at the INALCO, Paris, in July 2013, under the supervision of Professor Alessandro Guetta and Professor Elio Matassi (Roma Tre).

Her dissertation was entitled 'David ben Yehudah Messer Leon, a thinker of the Renaissance between Aristotelism and Platonism.' From March 2014 to July 2015, Giada Coppola worked on a collaborative research programme conceived at the INALCO and the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Lorraine named the ALIENTO project, which stands for 'Linguistic Analysis and Intercultural Aspects of Sapiential Statements and Their Transmission from East to West and West to East.'

For the Sforzo project, Giada Coppola attends to the Latin translation of Sforzo's *Light of the Nations*, entitled *Lumen Gentium*. The Latin version can be considered a re-working of Sforzo's ideas for a Christian public.



**RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE**

FLORIAN DUNKLAU

Florian Dunklau is a research associate for two projects. Since February 2014, he has been a part-time research associate for the 'PESHAT in Context' project. In the framework of the project, he focuses on the development of Hebrew philosophical terminology in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* in the translation of Samuel ibn Tibbon. He also supports the project's online database. In September 2015, Florian Dunklau joined the Sforno project as a part-time research associate and is preparing his PhD within the project.

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

Florian Dunklau completed his MA in Jewish and Arabic studies at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. His main research interests are Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Hebrew manuscripts, and Jewish local history of North Germany.



ASSOCIATED PROJECT

RESEARCH PROJECT AT THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF MANUSCRIPT CULTURES

‘MAGIA FIGURATA:’ THE VISUAL EFFECT OF JEWISH MAGICAL MANUSCRIPTS OF THE EARLY MODERN ERA

The DFG-funded ‘Magia Figurata’ project is part of Hamburg University’s Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC, also ‘SFB 950 Manuskriptkulturen in Asien, Afrika und Europa’). It is conducted by the project’s principle investigator Professor Giuseppe Veltri and research associate Michael Kohs with the purpose of undertaking a detailed analysis of the material and visual characteristics of early modern manuscripts containing Jewish magical texts. Key questions are:

- Which materials were employed to produce the Jewish magical manuscripts and how were they used?
- How are the manuscripts visually designed and structured, and according to which principles? Which pictorial means and elements (e.g. ornamental lettering, cartouches, magic symbols, diagrams, and other images) were employed?

The project aims to gain a better understanding of the materiality of manuscripts of Jewish magical texts. It will also investigate the use and impact of their visual and pictorial elements, that is, the role played by the materiality, lettering, images, and other pictorial elements in the production and structuring of such manuscripts. It will simultaneously examine the influence and impact of Jewish magical manuscript culture as well as finally acknowledging the central role played by the scribes in the production of magical manuscripts.



**CENTRE FOR THE
STUDY OF
MANUSCRIPT
CULTURES**

MICHAEL KOHS

Michael Kohs has been a research associate at the University of Hamburg since 2015. He completed his MA in Judaic studies and linguistics at the Free University Berlin. From 2012 to 2015 he received a PhD scholarship from Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg to write his thesis on the typology of texts in the magical fragments from the Cairo Geniza. Since 2015, he has been working in the 'Magia Figurata' project.

His main research interests are Jewish magic, Hebrew codicology, and the Jewish history of Berlin.



Further information:
www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de

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Student of Philosophy



The background image is a piece of aged, textured paper with a yellowish-brown hue. In the center, there is a red ink drawing of a horse and rider. The horse is depicted in profile, facing left, with its front legs raised as if in motion. The rider is seated on the horse, holding a long, thin object, possibly a staff or a sword, which extends horizontally to the left. Below the horse, there is a line of red ink text, which appears to be a Hebrew inscription. A large, white, hexagonal shape is superimposed over the lower-left portion of the image, containing the word "IMPRESSUM" in a bold, sans-serif font.

IMPRESSUM

IMPRESSUM

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Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies

JEWISH SCEPTICISM