

JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

UNIVERSITÄT HAMBURG

ACADEMIC YEAR 2017/18

**INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH
PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION**

**MAIMONIDES CENTRE
FOR ADVANCED STUDIES**
JEWISH SCEPTICISM

EMMY NOETHER RESEARCH GROUP
EARLY MODERN MUSAR

PROJECT
PESHAT

PROJECT
SFORNO



JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION
UNIVERSITÄT HAMBURG
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WORDS OF WELCOME

As in the two previous years, this booklet is intended to inform and update the reader about the research conducted at the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion at the Universität Hamburg. In this issue, I would like to draw attention to three impressive performances by five members of our research team.

Firstly, Daniel Davies, Florian Dunklau, and Michael Engel successfully completed the first three-year funding period of the “PESHAT in Context” project. The project was renewed by the German Research Foundation (DFG) for a second three-year period. It is planned to run for twelve years.

Secondly, I am pleased to announce that Patrick B. Koch has been accepted to the Emmy Noether Programme run by the German Research Foundation. He will establish a research group dealing with the topic “Jewish Moralistic Writings (Musal) of the Early Modern Period: 1600–1800.” The group will consist of four junior researchers. It is the first of its kind in Jewish studies in Germany.

Thirdly, Giada Coppola and Florian Dunklau completed the first funding period of the Sforzo project. The project was renewed for a second funding period.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) for their generous financial support, the leadership of the Universität Hamburg, the members of the Maimonides Centre’s Advisory Board and Board of Trustees for their advice, and the administrative staff for supporting us in the day-to-day business.

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

Giuseppe Veltri
Hamburg, October 2017

GIUSEPPE VELTRI



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

Giuseppe Veltri is a full professor of Jewish philosophy and religion at the Universität Hamburg and director of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies. He was previously a full professor of Judaic/Jewish studies at Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg (1997–2014). Since November 2010, he has also been a professor (h.c.) of comparative religious studies at the Universität Leipzig. Giuseppe Veltri is a member of the Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur (Mainz/Germany), the Accademia Ambrosiana (Milan/Italy) and the Accademia Pontaniana (Naples/Italy).

He is the chief editor of the *European Journal of Jewish Studies* (Brill) and the *Studies in Jewish History and Culture* (Brill) and *Jewish Philosophy, Thought and Religion* (De Gruyter) series. Among his recent publications are *Sapienza Alienata. La Filosofia ebraica tra mito, scienza e scetticismo* (2017); *Oltre le Mura del Ghetto: Accademie, Scetticismo e Tolleranza nella Venezia Barocca* (2016 with Evelien Chajes), *A Mirror of Rabbinic Hermeneutics* (2015), and *Scritti politici e filosofici di Simone Luzzatto* (2013). His research fields are Jewish cultural history, Jewish philosophy in the Renaissance and early modern period, magic, biblical tradition, and translations.

RACHELI HALIVA

Racheli Haliva is a junior professor of Jewish philosophy and religion and has been one of the co-directors at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies since December 2015. She earned her PhD at McGill University in Montreal, Canada 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 the Religion] and *Teshuvat Apikoros* [A Response to the Heretic],” was completed under the supervision of Professor Carlos Fraenkel and Professor Lawrence Kaplan. She is currently writing a book based on her dissertation.

Her main interests are Jewish Averroism, medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy, political philosophy, 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 Averroes' confident rationalism with Maimonides' scepticism. The Jewish Averroists sought to re-establish the authority of Aristotelian philosophy as taught by Averroes 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 also had to respond to the sceptical elements in Maimonides' thought.

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



STEPHAN SCHMID

Stephan Schmid is a professor of the history of philosophy in the philosophy department at the Universität Hamburg. He works on epistemology and metaphysics in the early modern and late Scholastic period.

At the Centre, Stephan Schmid works on rationalism and scepticism in Spinoza and Maimon. As a first step, he reconstructs Spinoza's anti-scepticism based on his adherence to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). As a second step, he examines Salomon Maimon's adaption of Spinoza's radical rationalism and his sceptical conclusions. The project's main question is: why did Spinoza think that we can defeat the sceptic on the basis of the PSR while Maimon thought that radical rationalism dooms us to scepticism about the empirical world?



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



וְכִן הִתְחַלְתִּי לִדְרוֹשׁ וְלַחְשֹׁד מִתְחַלְתִּי בִּי אֵלֶּם אֲהֵא אֶתְכֶם
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פרק ארבעה וחסמים

INSTITUTE
FOR
JEWISH
PHILOSOPHY
AND
RELIGION

**INSTITUTE
FOR
JEWISH
PHILOSOPHY
AND
RELIGION**

THE INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

In April 2014, the Universität Hamburg founded a Chair of Jewish Philosophy and Religion with the appointment of Professor Giuseppe Veltri. For the first time in its history, the university created a framework for the academic study of Judaism, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration across the fields of Jewish studies, philosophy, early modern 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 Sforso projects, as well as the research group on Jewish moralistic writings.

Teaching takes place 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 to discuss further developments. A public lecture series about the rich variety of Jewish languages (2016) and depictions of God in Jewish art (2017) introduced the local academic staff and guest speakers to Hamburg. 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.

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 a great emphasis on imparting the requisite 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.

Students will be given the opportunity to attend lectures and workshops at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies and will gain credits for participating. Thus, the connection between the Centre and the Institute fosters a learning environment among 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). A Hebrew placement test can be taken. Courses are taught in German and English.



ULRIKE HIRSCHFELDER

Ulrike Hirschfelder has been a lecturer in Hebrew at the Universität Hamburg since fall 2016. She studied Jewish studies and English philology at the Freie Universität in Berlin, the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She completed her MA at the Freie Universität Berlin.

She has worked as a researcher on academic projects on ancient Jewish mysticism and magic. She also works as a translator: most recently, she translated the 1947–8 Hebrew lectures by Hans Jonas into German (in *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* II,3). She holds the position of lecturer in Hebrew at the School of Jewish Theology at the Universität Potsdam.

LECTURER



ZE'EV STRAUSS

After undergraduate studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Ze'ev Strauss pursued studies at Universität Heidelberg, where he acquired his MA in philosophy in 2013. In May 2017, he defended his PhD at the Heidelberg philosophical seminary, which inquired into the role of Philo of Alexandria within the framework of German idealism. During his PhD studies, he also wrote a master's thesis in Jewish studies at the Hochschule für Jüdische Studien.

**RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE**

Ze'ev intends to undertake two main research projects: one entailing a survey of the usage of Philo of Alexandria within the works of prominent figures of the Haskalah and the other centring on the scholastic reception of Jewish Neoplatonism.



LILIAN TÜRK

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE



Lilian Türk is a research associate at the Institute, where she teaches courses on Yiddish language and culture. She wrote her PhD thesis on the religious anarchist Abba Gordin (1887–1964) and on non-conformist religious self-locations in the weekly paper *Fraye Arbeter Shtime*. She is presently preparing an analysis of Gordin's Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew writings.

Lilian Türk was a research fellow at the graduate college “Religious Non-Conformism and Cultural Dynamics” at the Universität Leipzig. She studied Yiddish and Hebrew at Vilniaus Universitetas, New York University, Tel Aviv University, and at Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. During and prior to her studies, she worked at Alyn Hospital in Jerusalem, as a student assistant at the Simon-Dubnow-Institut Leipzig, and at Hatikva Dresden, a society for general education on the Jewish history of Saxony.

SOFIA HERNANDEZ

SECRETARY

Sofía Hernández has been the secretary of the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion at the Universität Hamburg since June 2017. She holds a degree in law (lic. iur.) from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and she is also a legal assistant. She provides administrative support for the Sforno, Peshat, and Emmy Noether projects.



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 the enquiry of a “perpetual student” who harbours doubts about different dimensions and systems of (secular or revealed) knowledge and questions authority. It is not merely an intellectual or theoretical worldview; it also implies an attitude toward life that provides a basis for numerous and diverse phenomena and informs essential processes and categorizations within Jewish philosophy, religion, literature, and society. More specifically, scepticism is applied to expressions of social deviance from, and conformity with, political structures, as well as to systems of governance when responding to and in exchange with adjacent cultures.

By further opening up this unexplored field, scholars considerably profit from comparative perspectives. Gaining new insights into both Western philosophy and culture and its inherent connections to texts and other manifestations of Eastern cultures is essential to mapping the transcultural dimensions of the research field.

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



PUBLICATIONS

Jewish Thought, Philosophy, and Religion

This series of publications aims to present a wide spectrum of studies and texts related to Jewish thought, philosophy, and religion—from antiquity to the present. It seeks to highlight the multiplicity of approaches within Judaism and to shed light on the interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish thought. The series will include monographs, collected essays, and editions of sources.



Studies and Texts in Scepticism

The series *Studies and Texts in Scepticism* contains monographs, translations, and collected essays exploring scepticism in its dual manifestation as a purely philosophical tradition and as a set of sceptical strategies, concepts, and attitudes in the cultural field—especially in religions, perhaps most notably in Judaism. In such cultural contexts scepticism manifests as a critical attitude towards different dimensions and systems of secular or revealed knowledge and towards religious and political authorities. It is not merely an intellectual or theoretical worldview, but a critical form of life that expresses itself in such diverse phenomena as religion, literature, and society.

Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies

The Yearbook mirrors the annual activities of staff and visiting fellows of the Maimonides Centre and reports on symposia, workshops, and lectures taking place at the Centre. Although aimed at a wider audience, the yearbook also contains academic articles and book reviews on scepticism in Judaism and scepticism in general. Staff, visiting fellows, and other international scholars are invited to contribute.

degruyter.com

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees monitors the activities of the Maimonides Centre and issues reports on development and research. Meetings are convened annually and a report on the Centre's activities is produced.

CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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ADVISORY BOARD

The Advisory Board is comprised of nine distinguished senior scholars from the Universität 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

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Professor of Theoretical Philosophy

PROF. DR. JOHANN ANSELM STEIGER

Professor of Protestant Church History

LIBRARY

The Library of Jewish Scepticism is a special collection comprised of books purchased from the individual budgets of the Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion and the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies. We collect works both on general and on specifically Jewish philosophy, works of and about scepticism, and secondary literature on secular and religious criticism of faith and authority in Judaism.



We aim to provide visiting fellows and members of staff with specialist source texts and secondary literature relevant to their current research projects. We provide access to electronic resources by direct purchase, by cooperative purchasing, or via the national subject service platform in Jewish Studies (Fachinformationsdienst Jüdische Studien). We also handle interlibrary loan requests and provide document delivery and bibliographic services.

At the Universität Hamburg, we liaise and cooperate closely with the State and University Library Carl von Ossietzky; the Central Library for Philosophy, Classics, and History at the Universität Hamburg; the Institute for the History of the German Jews; the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures; the Asien-Afrika-Institut; and the Faculty of Humanities Library Committee.

Our collections are recorded in national and international online public access catalogues and made available to readers on site. Many e-resources can also be accessed off-site.



RACHEL AUMILLER

Rachel Aumiller received her doctorate in philosophy from Villanova University (2016). Her dissertation “The Laughing Matter of Spirit” offers a brief history of how history became a laughing matter (i.e. the Hegelian-Marxist framing of history as repeating in tragic and comic stages). She was a 2015–16 Fulbright scholar to Slovenia, where she trained in the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis.

As a research associate at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies, she is writing on the dialectical relationship between scepticism and speculative metaphysics. She is also responsible for the MCAS publication series, published by De Gruyter.

**RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE**



YOAV MEYRAV

Yoav Meyrav will be a research associate at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies in 2018–19, where he will be the managing editor of the *Encyclopaedia of Scepticism*. He studied philosophy at Tel Aviv University, where he wrote his dissertation about Themistius’ paraphrase of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 12. He is interested in the transmission and reception of metaphysics from antiquity to the Arabic and Hebrew worlds.

He is currently editing and analysing the little-known *Metaphysical Treatise* by the thirteenth-century Andalusian philosopher Moshe Halevy, which is an attempt to undo the harm Halevy believes Averroes caused to the soundness of the philosophical tradition when he criticised Avicenna’s metaphysics.

**RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE**



BILL REBIGER

Bill Rebiger studied Jewish studies and philosophy at the Freie Universität Berlin and at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (PhD Freie Universität Berlin, 2004). He has written several studies and books on rabbinic and Heikhalot literature, medieval Jewish magic, and Jewish-Christian relations. His research focuses on the sceptical strategies of the early opponents of the Kabbalah by studying, translating, and discussing relevant texts. He undertakes 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.



**RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE**

MARIA WAZINSKI

Maria Wazinski is the academic coordinator of the Maimonides Centre. She studied at Martin-Luther-Universität 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. Prior to taking up her current position, Maria Wazinski was a research associate with the “PESHAT in Context” project in 2014–15. She is currently enrolled in a part-time MBA programme in higher education and research management. Her research interests include the political philosophy of the Middle Ages, Judaeo-Arabic, Judaeo-Persian, and Middle Eastern politics and history.



**ACADEMIC
COORDINATOR**

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 and to provide bibliographic services. She studied Jewish studies, modern history and library science in Berlin and Jerusalem, specialising in the history of the Hebrew book.

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.

LIBRARIAN



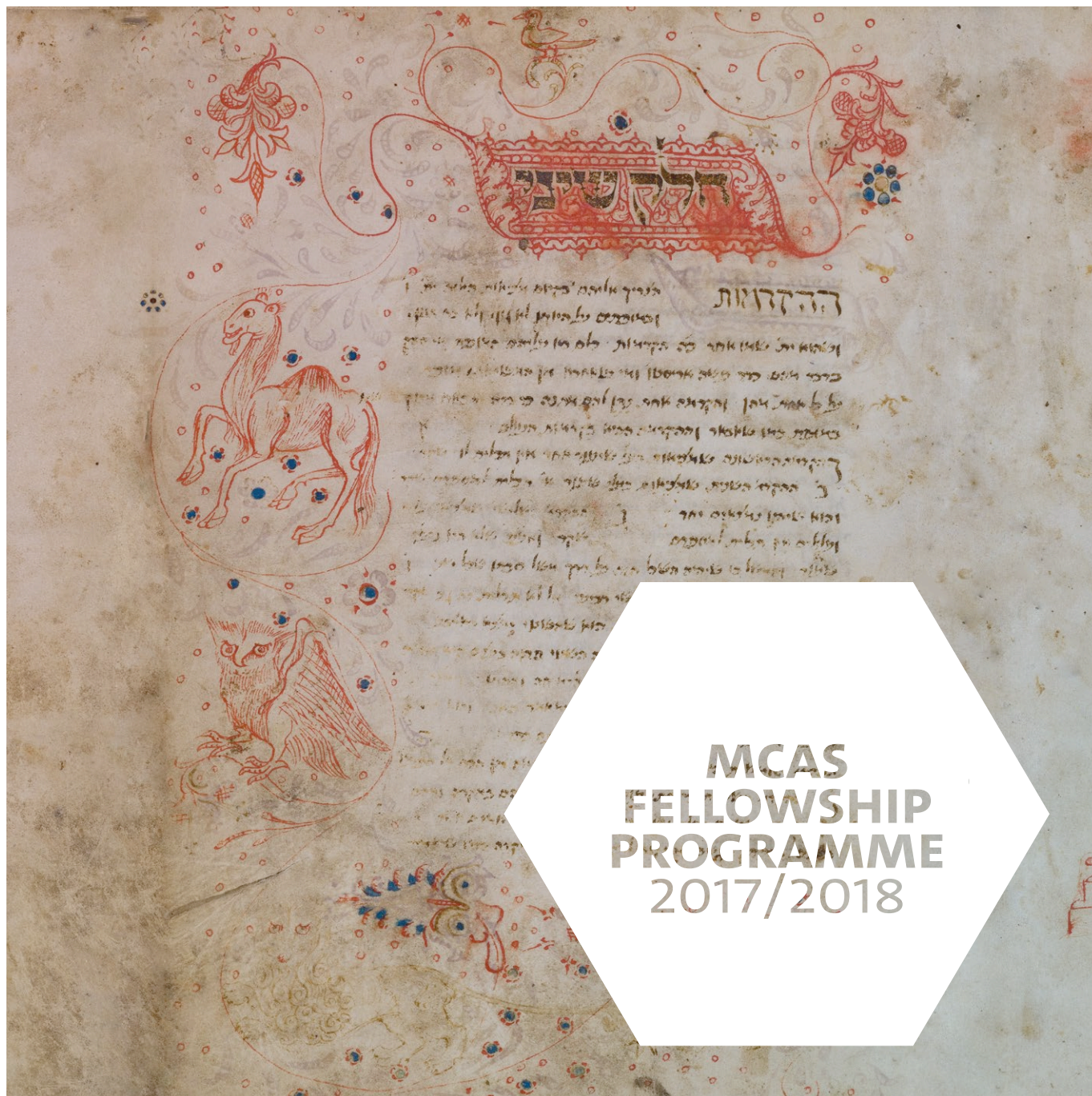
CHRISTINE WAGENER

Christine Wagener has been a project assistant at the Maimonides Centre since August 2017. She has a qualification in wholesale and foreign trade from the Handelskammer Hamburg.

For the last eighteen years, she worked as an executive assistant in the production industry. She is responsible for day-to-day administration and acts as a personal assistant to Giuseppe Veltri in all matters related to the Maimonides Centre.

**PROJECT
ASSISTANT**





**MCAS
FELLOWSHIP
PROGRAMME
2017/2018**

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 Maimonides Centre for one term (six months). Individual arrangements, such as divided stays, may be considered. Senior Fellowships are intended for scholars who have held a PhD for five years or more at the time of invitation/application and for those who have achieved an equivalent level of academic qualification, e.g. professorship.

Junior Fellowships

Junior Fellowships are awarded to PhD students and postdoctoral scholars who are involved in projects corresponding to the research topics of the Centre. There are two categories of early career researchers:

1. Senior Fellows may propose a PhD or postdoctoral candidate for the same period of their own fellowship.
2. PhD and postdoctoral candidates can be awarded a fellowship for a period of three months to one year.



GUIDO BARTOLUCCI

Research Project: “Was Solomon a Sceptic?”: Eighteenth-Century Lutheran Theology and the Birth of the Definition of Jewish Scepticism.

In 1704, the Lutheran theologian Jakob Friedrich Reimmann (1668–1743) published an anonymous treatise on Solomon as a sceptic philosopher. He maintained that all the Jewish Patriarchs could be considered sceptic philosophers, and in order to demonstrate his statement he examined several biblical books (among them paying special attention to those of Job and Ecclesiastes) by adopting definitions used in classical philosophy. Reimman developed his analysis by focusing on the history of Jewish philosophy, on scepticism, and on the connection between them and Lutheran theology. The great originality of his text, however, is the attempt to build the category of Jewish scepticism, which appears for the first time together with a debate on the Jewish tradition.

A study of these works would be of great interest for at least two reasons. As has been said, the study of scepticism in early modern Germany is still an unstudied field, especially in relation to Lutheran theology on the one hand and the Aristotelian tradition on the other. Analysing Reimmann’s work would allow us to enrich the complex history of scepticism in the modern age. The second aspect is linked to the same idea of Jewish scepticism. The notion of Reimann’s scepticism and the way he combined it with the Jewish tradition and the work of Solomon is very important for the understanding of not only some aspects of Jewish scepticism, but also how this kind of scepticism was seen and acknowledged by the Protestant tradition.



SENIOR FELLOW

FEBRUARY 2018

—
JULY 2018

Guido Bartolucci (PhD, 2004) is an assistant professor of early modern history at the Department of Political and Social Sciences, Università della Calabria.

ARYEH BOTWINICK

Research Project:

The Community of the Question: Negative Theology in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Thought

Aryeh Botwinick is working on a two-volume work entitled *The Community of the Question: Negative Theology in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Thought*. The book will consist of discussions of a wide range of texts and thinkers from the Hebrew Bible to Maimonides, Nahmanides, Ibn Ezra, Hasdai



SENIOR FELLOW

JUNE 2018

—

JULY 2018

Crescas, Judah Halevi, Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Hobbes, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Emmanuel Levinas, Joseph Soloveitchik, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Derrida, and a comparative assessment of the role of negative theology in Christian and Islamic thought through an examination of writings by St. Paul, St. Anselm of Canterbury, Meister Eckhart, and Nicholas of Cusa, as well as the Qu'ran and Avicenna. The *Community of the Question* will attempt, through an examination of these sources, to trace how the most significant theoretical result of negative theology—just as in many respects the most significant theoretical result of scepticism itself—is to expose the limitations of reason preoccupied with exposing the limitations of reason, and to establish the

lineaments of a way of life that is post-rational. In the case of negative theology, this means clearing the ground for the emergence and flourishing of mysticism.

Aryeh Botwinick is professor of political science and Jewish studies at Temple University in Philadelphia.

DANIEL BOYARIN

Research Project: Talmudic Scepticism?

In two very distinct earlier projects, I identified a significant aspect of scepticism in the Babylonian Talmud that is specific to the Babylonian Talmud and was perhaps generated in the latest redactional levels of that signature and foundational text. The first was carried out a couple of decades ago on the endless dialectic of that Talmud (as opposed to the Palestinian Talmud's habitus of deciding who is right and wrong in a given discussion). Although this has seemingly (and sentimentally) been read as an openness to different views, I tried to show that it was actually a closing down of the possibility of rational decision-making between oppositional opinions. There is, therefore, a strong element of scepticism involved vis-à-vis rationalism, or even rationality. The second project that identified scepticism in the same level of the text was the much more recent project published as *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis*, in which I attempted to show that there is a collection of legendary rabbinic biographies in the Talmud that exposes the rabbis as grotesques closely related (at least typologically) to such genres as Menippean satire in Hellenistic/Second Sophistic writing. I argued there that, once again, and as in Menippean satire, intellectuals are both advancing their programme of rationality and amelioration while at the same time (unsystematically) expressing their deep doubt of its success, or even possibility of success. In the current project, I wish to look for these strands in much less obvious places: in an extended passage, an entire chapter, of the Babylonian Talmud, namely the second chapter of the Tractate Pesahim. I plan a critical edition of and commentary on this chapter emphasising the redactional activity and layers that make up its tightly edited style (it is itself a masterpiece of the redactor's art in the Bavli). As an important part of identifying this late layer of editing that actually consisted of making the Talmud, I will be looking to see whether my former hypotheses of scepticism at work in this latest layer of the production of the Talmud holds up over an extended single redacted text (as opposed to pulling raisins out of a cake). I am looking for positive results, but am prepared for negative ones as well. Either would be telling.

Daniel Boyarin is Hermann P. and Sophia Taubman Professor of Talmudic Culture at the Departments of Near Eastern Studies and Rhetoric, University of California at Berkeley.



SENIOR FELLOW

MAY 2018

—

AUGUST 2018

ANDREAS BRÄMER

Research Project: The Dialectics of Critical Jewish Scholarship. Rabbi Abraham Geiger, Jewish Theology, and the Quest for Metaphysical Knowledge

During my fellowship at the Maimonides Centre, I plan to dedicate my research to Rabbi Abraham Geiger (1810–74), both an intellectual spearhead of liberal Judaism and an iconic figure of critical

Jewish scholarship in Germany during the era of *Verbürgerlichung*. Geiger's theological agenda reveals a twofold scepticism (in an extended rather than specific sense) that historians of the Jewish religion seem to have neglected thus far. I wish to present Geiger as a theological pioneer who chose to deconstruct the orthodox belief system without, however, feeling the desire to offer some clear guidance on the essential affirmations of Judaism himself. Geiger was a sceptic insofar as he applied historical-critical methods to the

Written as well as to the Oral Torah, which, as God's creation, he sought to deconstruct. However, his scepticism also shaped his own restraint in reformulating a Jewish creed for the nineteenth century. Although he could not avoid references to metaphysical aspects of Judaism altogether, he generally chose to avoid such contemplations in his writings. The project aims to investigate this reluctance and to explain it in its historical context of internal Jewish confessionalisation.

Andreas Brämer is associate director at the Institute for the History of the German Jews in Hamburg.

SENIOR FELLOW

NOVEMBER 2017

—

FEBRUARY 2018



BERNARD COOPERMAN

Research Project: Scepticism as Habitus. Halakhic Authority Constructed and Contested in an Early Modern Port Community

In the Jewish context, the development of scepticism can be traced not only in systematic works of philosophy and theology, but also in the strengthening or loosening of the bonds of public and private halakhic observance. In the twin Jewish communities of Pisa and Livorno, we find rabbinic and lay intellectuals striving to establish behavioural norms and social hierarchies in the face of complex and contradictory pressures characteristic of the cultural ambience of former conversos. The task was complicated by their geographic and commercial location within the Mediterranean world and by their close ties to the Jewish cultural life of North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean. Cultural frictions were inevitable in such an atmosphere, and the ample communal records show us both the repeated efforts to create religious discipline and the reaction such efforts inspired. My work will focus on the efforts of one particular figure, Raphael Meldola, to articulate a rationalised and systematic rhetoric of halakhic normativity. Scepticism, I assume, was articulated in sets of daily practices that formed a habitus rather than a systematised ideology of change. The sceptic did not so much undermine an existing order as participate in a cultural debate that would be rationalised only slowly as part of a continuing discourse over proper cultural norms.



SENIOR FELLOW

MAY 2018

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AUGUST 2018

Bernard Cooperman holds the Louis L. Kaplan Chair of Jewish History at the University of Maryland.

HEIDRUN EICHNER

Research Project: Scepticism in Islamic Theological Manuals of the Ash'ari School

Heidrun Eichner's project investigates the presence of elements of sceptical thought in the context of Islamic religious thinking. The focus is on the Ash'ari theological school, more precisely on how authors of systematic theological treatises rework the material at their disposal and on how their individual approaches shape Ash'arism into a system which has a dynamic historical development. Emphasis will be placed on identifying how specific elements that may be labelled as "sceptic" operate within the context of the system of Ash'ari theology and how they are modified in the course of doing so. This includes the context of classical scholastic manuals written by Muslim theologians between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, e.g. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī, and 'Aḥud al-Dīn al-Ījī. Topics traced and investigated will include the four types of a generic denial of a source of knowledge which were first discussed by S. Horvitz, and how authors deal with the claim that "it is the first obligation of a believer to have doubts about God." In addition, she will work on an annotated translation of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī's "Chapter on Knowledge" from his *K. al-Uṣūl*.



SENIOR FELLOW

APRIL 2018

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SEPTEMBER 2018

Heidrun Eichner holds a chair of Islamic studies at the Universität Tübingen.

TALYA FISHMAN

Research Project:

Legal Indeterminacy and the Limits of Knowledge in Medieval Rabbinic Writings of Islamic Lands

Informed by the Aristotelian tradition and by the writings of Muslim scholars such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Bajja, medieval Jewish philosophers in Islamic lands were discussing the limits of human knowledge at the very same time that halakhists of these lands were explaining the presence of *mahloqot* [unresolved controversies] in the Babylonian Talmud. However, Jewish philosophical writings on epistemology have not been brought into conversation with the theories of legal controversy that were developed by rabbinic scholars of antiquity and the Middle Ages. The case of Maimonides, both philosopher and halakhist, argues eloquently for the need to do so. Bridging the realms of philosophy/theology on the one hand and law on the other, I will explore the ways in which Rabbanite Jews of the medieval Islamic world addressed topics such as the taxonomy of Jewish law, questions of certainty vs. probability, and the existence of divergent legal perspectives and practices. These issues were very much alive for them, given the Qaraites' rejection of Oral Torah and rabbinic authority and the systematisation, by *hadith* scholars, of epistemological criteria for authenticating traditions.

Talya Fishman is an associate professor of Near Eastern languages and civilizations and of Jewish studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

SENIOR FELLOW

MAY 2018

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JUNE 2018



TIMOTHY FRANZ

Research Project: A Critical Reconstruction of the Philosophy of Solomon Maimon

Maimon is known as a powerful but obscure post-Kantian sceptic. To “critically reconstruct” his philosophy means to interpret it with respect to his own intention: “to uncover the given defects and holes in the critical philosophy, and to set up a new theory of thinking according to the demands of my own criticism.” Maimon, in contrast with his usual portrayal as a sceptical empiricist where strict rationalism fails, developed this “new theory of thinking” as a substantiation (rather than stultification) of Kantian critique. Accordingly, thinking, in order to be critical and determine the criteria for objectivity, must generate, objectify, and validate itself: it must be reflective.

JUNIOR FELLOW

APRIL 2018

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SEPTEMBER 2018



The claim is that the derivation of practical and theoretical consequences from reflective thinking sets Maimon uniquely apart; and while he prefigured neo-Kantian philosophy (Lotze’s validity logic, Cohen’s emphasis on genesis rather than synthesis, Cassirer’s functional relations), he receives truer fulfilment in the work of more recent “post-neo-Kantians” such as Hans Wagner and Kurt Zeidler. The value of the project should not lie merely in attention paid to “neglected” texts, but in working out the nature and consequence of reflection.

Timothy Franz is a PhD candidate at the New School for Social Research in New York City.

FRIEDHELM HARTENSTEIN

Research Project: Theology of the Old Testament

It is a matter of debate between Christian and Jewish theologians whether a “theology of the Old Testament” should be written, since this is necessarily not only a historical but also a subjective hermeneutical venture. However, while being aware of the possibility of different approaches, it is a promising challenge to attempt a fresh comprehensive survey of the concepts of God, Israel, and humankind in the Hebrew Bible in the light of modern exegesis, the history of religions, and cultural studies. The monograph to be finished at the Maimonides Centre will present the ancient Jewish writings collected in the Masoretic canon in a systematic manner and as the outcome of the emergence of monotheism, with a special focus on the concept of creation. The project assesses specific problems of thought in the arena of creation theology which have remained unsolved. This is where scepticism comes into view as a specific way of questioning traditional truths, e.g. in texts of critical wisdom such as Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Psalter, and as a formative principle for discourses that increasingly realise how the very fabric of the problems of evil, justice, and truth prevents definitive answers. In this respect, the hermeneutical value of the image ban, as well as that of the poetics of transcendence in biblical traditions, will be further explored and emphasised.



SENIOR FELLOW

OCTOBER 2017

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MARCH 2018

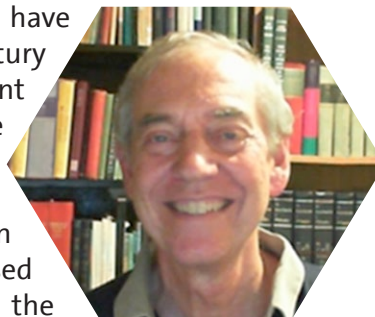
Since 2010, **Friedhelm Hartenstein** has been chair of the Institute of Old Testament Studies II at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

STEVEN HARVEY

Research Project: Seeking Knowledge in a Seemingly Uncertain World

Leading scholars (several of whom are fellows at the Maimonides Centre) have adopted increasingly radical views on the limitations of knowledge for Maimonides and certain later Jewish thinkers. From this perspective, one wonders whether pure bookish learning and demonstrative reasoning were considered sufficient for attaining true knowledge and perfection. This question has recently led me to reconsider the role of observation, oral reports, and experience for late medieval Jewish thinkers in the study of physics, astronomy, meteorology, zoology, medicine, dreams, and prophecy. For example, to what extent did Maimonides consider experience (*tajriba*) to have epistemological relevance outside of medicine? How did thirteenth-century Hebrew encyclopaedists use experience to counter Averroes' argument that theoretical knowledge cannot be acquired in dreams? Did the growing scepticism of medieval Jewry's leading scientist, Gersonides, lead him to abandon the search for truth in natural sciences and instead devote his energies to observation and mathematical calculation in his attempt to solve problems associated with astronomy? My proposed research project for the MCAS focuses on such questions. It concerns the limitations of human knowledge and the turn towards experience and observation in the search for certainty.

Steven Harvey is a professor emeritus of philosophy at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat-Gan.



SENIOR FELLOW

JANUARY 2018

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MARCH 2018

WARREN ZEV HARVEY

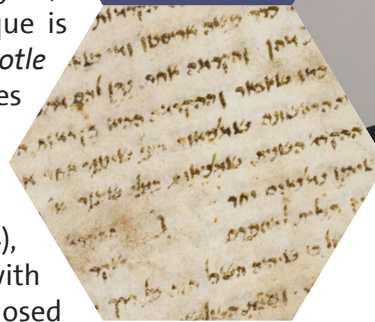
Research Project: Hasdai Crescas' Sceptical Critique of Maimonides

In his *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides (1138–1204) anchored Jewish religion in Aristotelian science and philosophy. Rabbi Hasdai 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.

SENIOR FELLOW

FEBRUARY 2018

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MARCH 2018



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

TSIPPI KAUFFMAN

Research Project: Childhood as Scepticism in Hasidism

One of the canonical texts that nourished Hasidic literature is the *Zohar*. A fascinating literary character who appears in the *Zohar* is the “*yanuka*”—a young child who challenges authority figures. The *yanuka* is defiant and rebellious. His profound wisdom casts doubt on formal wisdom.

Scholars of the *Zohar* have noted that the *yanuka* matches the *puer* archetype discussed by Jung and his disciples. Jung’s child (*puer*) archetype represents a number of central ideas: a return to the primal source; renewal; a connection to the unconscious; a wholeness that goes beyond differences; and crossing of cultural boundaries. We might say that the child archetype represents scepticism.

In light of the fact that Hasidism as a socio-religious movement behaved like an impudent child casting doubt on the traditional values of Jewish life, I wish to explore how Hasidism institutionalised subversive childishness in such a way that it had an impact in opposite directions. On the one hand, this institutionalisation lent support to scepticism as a religious stance whose aim was to challenge complacent, traditional religiosity in order to seek infinite religious truth that lies beyond any consolidated human category. On the other hand, this institutionalisation itself emptied the scepticism of its power.

Tsippi Kauffman is a faculty member of the Department of Jewish Thought at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat-Gan.



SENIOR FELLOW

JULY 2018

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AUGUST 2018

MARGIT KERN

Exhibition Project: Visual Scepticism. How Images Doubt

Images as media of knowledge production play a more prominent role today than ever before. Because of its specific technical preconditions, the photographic image is especially associated with a high degree of authenticity and the capability to depict the truth. In the digital era, these rather problematic predicates, as the indexical promise of truth, persist. Against this background, the question of how images are able to make an issue of their own status as media of knowledge production gains greater importance; they exhibit this status on the one side and doubt it on the other.

Until now, the analysis of positions of scepticism in art history has been made by connecting philosophical movements to iconographies of images. The few publications which have dealt with scepticism ask above all how philosophical texts were reflected in works of art. The exhibition project here chooses a different approach. It explores only visual discourses which do not depend on previous texts. It will ask how images, because of their particular medial structure, were sites of performative processes which can be compared to dialogical strategies of scepticism. The main thesis of the project is that, in this case, contradictions and negations arise which have the character of medial self-interrogation.



Margit Kern is a professor of art history at the Universität Hamburg.

SENIOR FELLOW

OCTOBER 2017

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MARCH 2018

CORINNA KÖRTING

Research Project:

Malachi—Questioning the Un-Questionable. Developing Tradition through Discussion

Part of Jewish scepticism is a specific culture of debate. Malachi represents an important step in the Second Temple period between the literary production of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible literature and the further development of tradition through debate. Since the nineteenth century, it has been disputed whether the book is based on oral admonitions or rather a dialogical-didactic form of speech that must be compared to the didactics of the early Synagogue.



The commentators' point of departure was the distinction between oral and written debate, ranking oral debate first. Today it seems that we need to go in the other direction, coming from literature to examine its influence on oral debates.

SENIOR FELLOW

APRIL 2018

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SEPTEMBER 2018

Following these lines, other aspects must be taken into account: Malachi places his argument on the horizon of protology and eschatology, in the perspective of the Torah of Moses and the final ratification of prophecy by Elijah. The thesis of the research project is that the Book of Malachi presents a debate with God himself, questioning the deepest ties between him and his people, and the awareness that this kind of debate will come to an end. However, it finally functioned as a model

for further development of tradition by discussion—a specific culture of debate.

Corinna Körting is a professor of Old Testament studies and history of ancient Near Eastern religion at the Universität Hamburg.

Research Project: The Anti-Sceptical Potential of Thomas Reid's Common Sense Philosophy



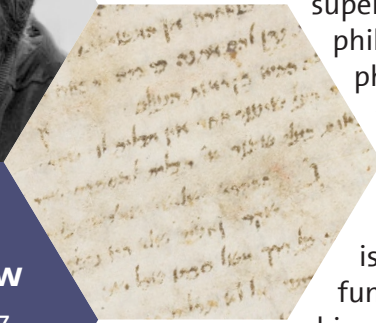
JUNIOR FELLOW

OCTOBER 2017

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One promising strategy for dealing with scepticism is to appeal to common sense. Thomas Reid (1710–96) developed a theory of common sense that validates this appeal, if successful. By rejecting the theory of ideas and by putting his own theory of perception in its place, Reid's theory of common sense is far superior to those of Moore, Wittgenstein, and contemporary philosophers. However, the fruitfulness of Reid's philosophy depends in part on just what role common sense plays. It is arguable that it is common sense that shields his theory of perception, but this theory of perception makes the role played by common sense in his broader theory much more plausible. So, there is a question of whether common sense sits at the very fundament of his theory, or whether it is dependent on his other views. Thus, this project aims (i) to explore the relationship between Reid's common sense philosophy and his other views, especially his theory of perception, and (ii) to argue that Reid, who is mostly seen as fighting Humean scepticism, has in fact enough material to argue against other forms of scepticism as well.



Lukas Lang is currently working on his PhD under the supervision of Professor Stephan Schmid. His project explores the anti-sceptical potential of Thomas Reid's common sense philosophy and contrasts it with the theories of Moore and contemporary philosophers.

HANNA LISS

Research Project: Scepticism in Medieval Ashkenaz and the Tosafists as Masterminds—The Glosses in MS Vienna Cod. hebr. 220 and Their Critical Discourse Against Traditional Exegesis

Hanna Liss will contribute to the question of scepticism by writing a case study on the dissemination and transmission of sceptical thought in Medieval Ashkenaz by investigating the exegetical glosses to a Rashi recension in MS Vienna Cod. hebr. 220, a great many of which are very similar to the Torah commentary attributed to Rashbam. These Tosafists' glosses portray a sceptical view of the Midrashic tradition of the so-called Rishonim (in particular Rashi) by focusing on the plot of the biblical narrative and its storyline, the psychology of the biblical characters, or on contemporary profane lore and knowledge.

However, the fact that the glosses with their external *mise-en-texte* represent the *consensus magistri* shows that notwithstanding their new exegetical approach, they aim to appear to be attempting to integrate older traditions. Liss's study will demonstrate that the intellectual elite in Ashkenaz and Northern French developed a sceptical approach towards rabbinic tradition that differed from its Oriental and Sefardic counterparts not only as regards the subjects to be dealt with, but also regarding the external form of the writings (*mise-en-texte*; layout).

Since 2003, **Hanna Liss** has been chair of the Department of Bible and Jewish Exegesis at the Center for Jewish Studies Heidelberg and the University of Heidelberg.



SENIOR FELLOW

OCTOBER 2017

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MARCH 2018

DIEGO LUCCI

Research Project: Socinianism and Scepticism: Theological, Moral, Legal, and Political Thought in Sceptical Terms from Socinus to Locke

Diego Lucci's research project focuses on the sceptical elements of Socinian theology, moral philosophy, legal theory, and political thought from Socinus to Locke. The Socinians' moralist soteriology, their views on the superiority of God's revealed word over the law of nature, and their endorsement of pacifism and toleration resulted from their scepticism about the human ability to recognise salvation by grace alone, to fully comprehend and respect the law of nature, and to define unquestionable dogmas. Socinianism influenced Dutch Remonstrantism and English Arminianism, particularly the Great Tew Circle, in matters of salvation, morality, the primacy of divine revelation, and "comprehension" of different beliefs within the community of Christians. However, it was John Locke who, in his religious writings of the 1690s, complemented Socinian doctrines with an essentially sceptical epistemology based on his way of ideas and historical biblical criticism. Thus, this project aims to reassess the impact of Socinian scepticism on Locke, as well as Locke's contributions to the development of Socinian and sceptical methods and theories.



Diego Lucci is a professor of philosophy and history at the American University in Bulgaria.

SENIOR FELLOW

FEBRUARY 2018

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JULY 2018

ARIEL MALACHI

Research Project: Reason and Revelation: Sceptical Aspects in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*

Ariel Malachi's project deals with Aristotelian logic and epistemology, their sceptical use by religious thinkers to criticise philosophy, and their impact on the thinker's religious standpoints. At this stage, the study focuses on Judah Halevi's sceptical criticism of Aristotelian philosophy and its function within his defence of Judaism as presented in his *Book of The Kuzari*. At the heart of the research is the suggestion that for Halevi, the same logical, epistemological, and sceptical philosophy-criticising approach brings one to rule rationally in favour of Jewish revelation. This innovative suggestion, based on careful and critical reading of the original Judeo-Arabic text, attempts to reconstruct Halevi's attitude towards philosophy and rationalism, as well as its impact on the exegesis of revelation from a new perspective. Ariel Malachi's general plans are to expand his research and to explore the functions of logic and epistemology in the writings of other medieval Jewish thinkers, such as Abraham Ibn-Daud and Maimonides.

Ariel Malachi is a PhD candidate in the Department of Jewish Philosophy at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat-Gan. He is also a jurist, holding a Bachelor of Laws degree (LLB.) from Bar-Ilan University. He is a member of the Israel Bar Association and is licensed to practice as a lawyer.



JUNIOR FELLOW
AUGUST 2018

Research Project: Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss on “Jewish Scepticism”

There is a standard narrative about Hannah Arendt. She was a sceptic regarding human rights: from the early 1940s on, she insisted in her writings that universalised human rights ignored the difference between humanity and humankind, and that because of this ignorance, human rights were defending an abstract idea of human beings. As a consequence, Arendt invoked the formulation “the right to have rights” as the one true human right. “The right to have rights” has become part of the standard repertoire of current debates about refugees, statelessness, and the struggles of modern democracies.

However, nobody has defined the meaning of “sceptic” or “scepticism” here, or explored it in greater detail. It is at this crucial point that my research project begins. If Arendt was indeed a sceptic, what made her philosophically sceptical? Answers to these questions will form the foundation for three inquiries that are essential to my research project:

1. To what degree is Arendt’s “scepticism” a response to the Holocaust and its consequences?
2. Can similarly sceptical reactions to the Holocaust and its consequences be found in other Jewish thinkers of her generation?
3. If there are such similarities, would it not be necessary to address this particular scepticism as a new form of Jewish scepticism and to define it more precisely?

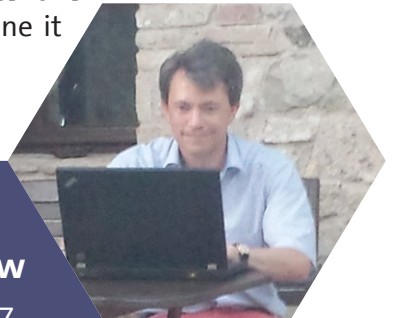
THOMAS MEYER obtained his doctorate (2003) and completed his Habilitation (2009) at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. After that, he received several fellowships and visiting- and guest-professorships at Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, ETH Zürich, University of Chicago, Vanderbilt University, Wake Forest University, Boston University, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, and Universität Hamburg.

SENIOR FELLOW

OCTOBER 2017

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DECEMBER 2017



ISRAEL NETANEL RUBIN

Research Project: Scepticism and Use of Sceptical Methods for Theological Purposes

Beside the classical scepticism for the sake of scepticism, sceptical methods have been used throughout history for other reasons as well. This happened as philosophers and theologians used sceptical arguments to doubt the ability of reason to recognise the world, when their true purpose was not scepticism *per se*, but rather the establishment of alternative, irrational ways of knowing reality. It can be said that in such cases, scepticism is used cynically, but it is still important to investigate this special use of scepticism and to understand its connections to classical scepticism.



One of the common cases of the tendentious use of scepticism occurs when science and religion clash. In such cases, several apologetic theologians attempt to beat rationality at its own game by using sceptical methods as a tool to challenge the scientific worldview. Historically, the first widespread use of such scepticism was made, beginning in the eighth century, by the Islamic Kalam. This approach continues to this day and is heard, for example, during debates between evolutionists and their religious opponents.

JUNIOR FELLOW
NOVEMBER 2017
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OCTOBER 2018

In this context, I would like to explore the historical use of scepticism and sceptical methods as part of Jewish rabbis' and theologians' confrontations with the contradictions between reality as described by science and the reality described in halakhic literature.

Israel Netanel Rubin received his PhD from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in which he discussed the limitation of God's omnipotence and the problem of God's subordination to laws of logic and mathematics in Jewish philosophy and theology.

DAVID RUDERMAN

Research Project: The London Missionary Alexander McCaul and his Assault on the Talmud



SENIOR FELLOW
FEBRUARY 2018
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MARCH 2018

David Ruderman's research will focus on the London missionary Alexander McCaul, one of the primary leaders of the famous *London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews*, his assault on the Talmud, the very interesting converts he attracted, and the debate he engendered in the mid-nineteenth century with Jewish thinkers, especially Eastern-European *maskilim*. The topic of scepticism insinuates itself into the project in the revival of the Jewish-Christian debate engendered by McCaul's attack on the Talmud and rabbis. Both sides use sceptical arguments to undermine the certainty of their opponent's positions. This of course is standard in all Jewish-Christian debates, but the present debate applies methods of modern scholarship in highly innovative ways, particularly by using historical arguments about ancient history and culture. After winning the loyalty of several Jewish intellectuals to his cause, several of them change their positions vis-à-vis the missionary of the London Society and offer a sceptical critique of the very foundations of Christianity, and its need to save the souls of Jews, by obliging them to relinquish Rabbinic Judaism. Their arguments are highly revealing when defining and redefining the implications of being a Christian and how Jews and Christians could co-exist.

David Ruderman is Joseph Meyerhoff Professor of Modern Jewish History at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

JOSE MARIA SANCHEZ DE LEON SERRANO

Research Project: Crescas and Spinoza on Scepticism and the Metaphysics of Infinity

This project intends to examine the largely unexplored connection between scepticism and the notion of infinity by focusing on the philosophies of Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340–1410/11) and Baruch Spinoza (1632–77). The points of contact between these two thinkers on the question of infinity, as well as on a number of related issues (such as determinism, God's attributes, etc.), have been long acknowledged by commentators. But no less significant than their affinities are their diverging positions on philosophical knowledge, which in the case of Crescas appears to be moderately sceptical and in the case of Spinoza decidedly anti-sceptical. This divergence has its roots in the very same notion that connects their respective philosophical approaches: infinity. As this project will show, the admittance of the notion of infinity in the philosophical discourse is, to a large extent, responsible for the spread of scepticism in the early stages of modern thought, insofar as this notion subverts the cosmological order that prevailed for almost two millennia. Crescas, who is one of the first advocates of actual infinity, is also one of the first examples of the kind of scepticism induced by the idea of infinity. By the same token, an adequate response to this kind of scepticism required the elaboration of a new conceptual framework in which the notion of infinity could be accommodated. Spinoza's account of infinity counts among the most accomplished attempts to provide this conceptual framework.

José María Sánchez de León Serrano earned his PhD in philosophy at the Universität Heidelberg. Before coming to Hamburg, he held a postdoctoral fellowship at the Martin Buber Society of Fellows at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.



SENIOR FELLOW
NOVEMBER 2017
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OCTOBER 2018

JÜRGEN SARNOWSKY

Research Project: Miracles and Scepticism in the Fifteenth-Century Empire

Fifteenth-century spirituality was already extremely individual, often focused on acquiring as many indulgences as possible for the salvation of one's soul. Thus, the relationship with saints and miracles was a very personal one, and people expected that saints would respond to their gifts. In consequence, saints and miracles could be put to the test, which did not always end in a positive result.

The project aims to collect and analyse late medieval examples for this kind of scepticism, starting from three cases from the Holy Roman Empire and Prussia: (1) the canonisation process of Dorothea of Montau in Prussia, which failed even though many testimonies were heard; (2) the discussions of the "holy blood" of Wilsnack, focusing on the spiritual value of two hosts consecrated before a fire which afterwards turned red and finally lost their physical appearance; (3) the critical attitude of pilgrims such as Arnold von Harff when they encountered the same relics at different sanctuaries. In each case, there will be an analysis of the basic arguments, how they were substantiated, and their consequences. The final aim is a tentative evaluation of the role of scepticism in late medieval popular beliefs.

Jürgen Sarnowsky has been a professor of medieval history at the Universität Hamburg since 1996.



SENIOR FELLOW

APRIL 2018

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SEPTEMBER 2018

ODED SCHECHTER

Research Project: Scepticism and Hermeneutics—Spinoza's New Hermeneutics

Part of a larger research project, this project plays a fundamental role in explicating the significance of literal sense reading in modern hermeneutics; the larger project examines different aspects of literal sense reading, among them metaphysical commitments, its ethical and political implications, and the new role hermeneutics plays in modernity, secularism, and the Bible.

Spinoza's new method is tightly connected to Cartesian doubt. Within that context, the role of scepticism in Spinoza's new method of reading is of crucial importance for the examination of modern hermeneutics in general as much as for the understanding of Spinoza's political philosophy.

The examination of this issue is divided into three parts: The first part of this project is focused on the importance of Cartesian doubt to Spinoza's new hermeneutics. The second part is focused on the apparent difference between Spinoza's *TTP* and his *Ethics* concerning the Cartesian *epoché*. The third part is focused on the appropriation of the distinction between spirit and letter into Spinoza's new method.

Before coming to Hamburg, **Oded Schechter** was affiliated with different universities, among these are the University of Chicago, Universität Potsdam, Princeton University, and the Higher School of Economics in Moscow.

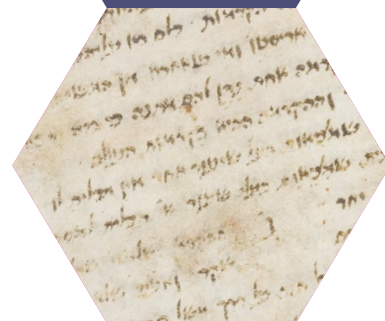


JUNIOR FELLOW

OCTOBER 2017

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SEPTEMBER 2018



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.



SENIOR FELLOW
SEPTEMBER 2018

Emidio Spinelli is a full professor of the history of ancient philosophy at the Department of Philosophy, Sapienza-Università di Roma.

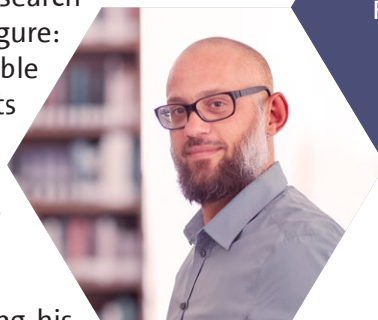


RONNY VOLLANDT

Research Project: Saadiah's *Tafsīr* in the Context of Scriptural Scepticism in Geonic Times

The Classic Geonic period (850–1100 CE) marks a period of transition in the intellectual history of Judaism, a caesura no less cutting than that between the Second Temple and Rabbinic times. In Iraq, the old centres of learning and religious governance, the academies of Sura and Pumbedita—the *yeshivot*—flourished, and by the turn of the ninth century had moved to the political capital of the 'Abbasid Empire, Baghdad. Palestine had its own competing Gaonate.

In Geonic times, the Written Torah moved back into focus in its own right. Some voices from the fringes of the Geonic establishment (such as some proto-Qaraites) go as far as calling for a complete rejection of the Oral Torah, yet also the Geonim themselves, to a certain extent, began to question the reliability of its transmission. My research project concentrates on one prominent figure: Saadiah Gaon (882–942). His Judaeo-Arabic Bible translation is one of the most influential texts produced in that language. He oscillates here between partial rejection and necessary (as well as expected) approval in refuting indiscriminate Qaraite scepticism.



SENIOR FELLOW

FEBRUARY 2018

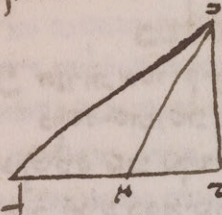
—

AUGUST 2018

The most powerful instrument for implementing his complex understanding of the acceptance of tradition and its rejection for a broad audience was his Arabic translation of the Torah, the *Tafsīr*, which was widely disseminated and which I propose to investigate with particular focus on the context sketched above.

Ronny Vollandt is a professor of Jewish studies at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

משה העליון אי ווען בעה שימא וועט א נפיל
 העמוד אשר יפול עליו פעמים .. דעין זה



שעפר עליו וזעם א"י ויהיה
 העמוד י"ב והקו העליון עד
 מקומו העמוד שהוא קו"ל ה
 קנה וזו העמוד שהכח

עליו כ"י הו בעצמו יתר על הכח ז"א בע
 בעצמו וז"ל בעצמו בעו הכח א"י ב"ד ש"א
 פעמים ומקרה לך נמצאת נכוח העמוד
 כל משולש זה הו"ל יהיה אשר יהיה והכח
 העליון אשר יעשה וצ"ח לזויה החדה בעצמו
 יתר פחות מאשר יהיה והכח השתי העליון

הנשארת כל אחד מהם בעצמו וז"ל
 יהיה והכח העליון אשר יפול עליו
 וזה שכן נפיל העמוד וכן הו"ל
 פעמים .. דעין זה

א"י נשדה והעמוד שזעם
 אשר הוא הנפילה ששה
 העמוד שהכח א"י
 והכח א"י בעצמו בעו
 והכח א"י כ"ד ש"א פעמים
 וז"ל שכן וז"ל הוא העמוד
 ע"פ לכח נכ"ל וז"ל העמוד

PROJECT
 PESHAT

PROJECT PESHAT

About PESHAT

“PESHAT in Context” is a long-term project funded by the DFG. The acronym stands for the project’s focus on premodern **P**hilosophical and **S**cientific **H**ebrew **T**erminology. PESHAT will create an online multilingual thesaurus of medieval Hebrew philosophical and scientific terminology, incorporating the language’s historical development in various cultural and linguistic environments.

It will be a useful research tool for scholars in Jewish studies, Islamic and Arabic studies, classics, medieval studies, the history of science, and philosophy. The new thesaurus is a 21st-century upgrade of, and supplement to, Jacob Klatzkin’s *Thesaurus philosophicus linguae hebraicae et veteris et recentioris*, published in 5 volumes in Berlin in 1928–33.

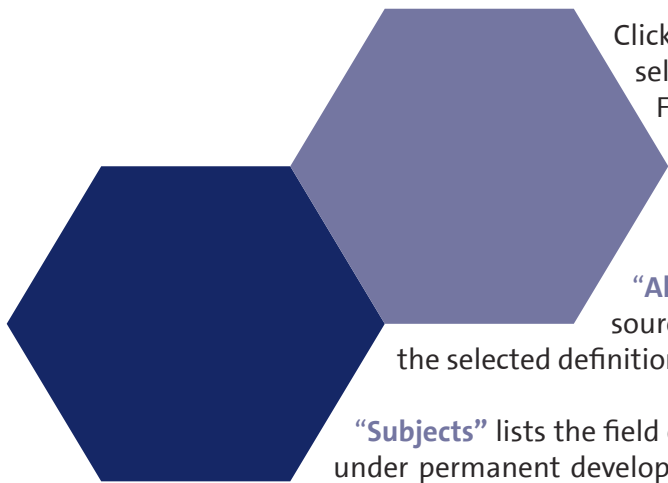
The project is supervised by Professor Giuseppe Veltri and Reimund Leicht (Hebrew University Jerusalem). Resianne Smidt van Gelder-Fontaine (Universiteit van Amsterdam) acts as an advisor. The project team consists of three research associates in Hamburg: Daniel Davies, Florian Dunklau (part-time), and Michael Engel.



האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים
THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY of JERUSALEM
الجامعة العبرية في القدس

Various search options are offered by the PESHAT database. With **“Lemma Search”** the user can search for Hebrew philosophical terms. When typing a word into the left-hand field, a list of possible lemmata is automatically and instantly created in the right-hand box. A particular lemma may have multiple definitions. After selecting the lemma of interest, an overview of all recorded definitions is given. At the top of that list, the **standard lexical** form of the term is displayed.

Each definition represents a particular meaning of the lemma appearing in medieval texts recorded in the database. For each of those definitions, additional information can be displayed or hidden.



Clicking **“Equivalents”** shows a list of equivalent terms for the selected definition in various languages (including Arabic, French, German, Greek, and Latin).

“Secondary Sources” opens details of scholarly works relevant to the lemma’s definition. Clicking on

“All Quotes” displays all passages from the medieval Hebrew sources in the database for which the lemma is documented in the selected definition.

“Subjects” lists the field of topics for which a definition is relevant. The database is under permanent development and maintenance by researchers at the Universität Hamburg.

peshat.gwiss.uni-hamburg.de

DANIEL DAVIES

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

Daniel Davies has been a research associate at the Universität Hamburg since 2015. He earned a PhD from Cambridge University and a BA from the University of Birmingham. His publications include a monograph entitled *Method and Metaphysics in Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed* (Oxford University Press, 2011), which was honoured by the Association for Jewish Studies book awards in the category of Philosophy and Jewish Thought. Alongside this, he has published a number of chapters and articles and is currently co-editing a volume on Maimonides' philosophy. His research interests include medieval philosophy, philosophy of religion, comparative theology, and Jewish theology.



MICHAEL ENGEL

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

Michael Engel completed his PhD at Wolfson College, Cambridge under the supervision of Professor John Marenbon. He has taught medieval philosophy and medieval Jewish philosophy at the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge, King's College London, and the Universität Hamburg. Before arriving in Hamburg, Michael Engel was a postdoctoral member of Clare Hall, Cambridge and at the Warburg Institute, London. His main research interests concern the medieval and Renaissance Aristotelian traditions. He has published in various international journals, and his monograph on Elijah Del Medigo was published by Bloomsbury in 2016.





PROJECT
SFORNO

PROJECT SFORNO

The DFG-funded project entitled “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 (Università di Bologna) acts as advisor, and the team of research associates consists of Giada Coppola and Florian Dunklau.

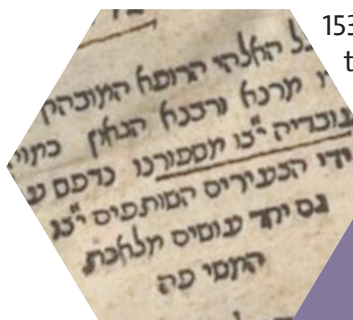
With an anticipated total duration of six years (2015–21), the project will rediscover ‘Ovadyah Sforno (c. 1475–1550) and his significance for the intercultural exchange between Jewish and Christian scholars belonging to the contemporary intellectual elite. The particular context is the Renaissance’s late heyday of Aristotelian philosophy and the Scholastic tradition during the last decades of the sixteenth century.

The “*Light of the Nations*” and its commentary

Sforno’s only philosophical treatise, *Or ‘Ammim*, was first published in Bologna in 1537. Its Latin version, the *Lumen Gentium*, was printed in 1548 and dedicated to the French king, Henry II. The *Or ‘Ammim* is considered the last summa to have been written by a Jewish author. The classical questions of medieval philosophy are raised in 15 theses (*quaestiones*), including, for example, *creatio ex nihilo*, divine omniscience, will, and providence, and the immortality of the human soul.

Or ‘Ammim was extensively commented on within Sforno’s lifetime by one of his pupils, Elia of Butrio (mid-16th century). The manuscript of this commentary at the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma remained unstudied for centuries. With regard to its structure, it might be called a “Menorah” for the “Light of the Nations,” since Butrio intended to uncover the multiple

references to both Jewish and non-Jewish philosophical writers whom Sforno had not openly quoted in his treatise.



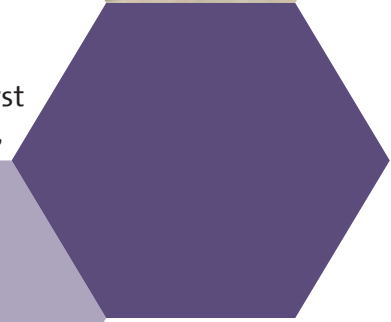
Goals of the project

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 was 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. It is an important example of the reciprocity of input between Christian culture and Jewish philosophy.

The project will provide a new edition of the Hebrew version and a first critical edition of the Latin version, based on the available sources, which will be accompanied by English translations.

A broad commentary will shed light on the philosophical arguments and concepts as well as the lexicographical and exegetical aspects of the work. A study of its Hebrew and Latin scientific and philosophical language will generate a synergic effect with the DFG-funded "PESHAT in Context" project. The publication of the first edition of Elia de Butrio's extensive commentary on *Or 'Ammim* will provide an initial study of its reception history.

An international symposium entitled "Lost & Found in Translation: "Ovadyah Sforno and His World" was held in Hamburg in January 2017. The next conference, with an accompanying workshop, is scheduled to take place in October 2018.



GIADA COPPOLA

Giada Coppola has been a research associate at the Universität Hamburg since September 2015. As part of the Sforno project, she attends to the Latin translation of Sforno's *Or 'Ammim* [Light of the Nations], entitled *Lumen Gentium*.

She studied philosophy and the theory of human science at the Università degli Studi Roma Tre and completed her PhD at the INALCO (Paris) under the supervision of Professor Guetta and Professor Matassi (Rome). Her dissertation was entitled "David ben Yehudah Messer Leon, a thinker of the Renaissance between Aristotelism and Platonism." From 2014 to 2015, she worked on a collaborative research programme conceived at the INALCO and the MSHL-funded ALIENTO project.

RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE



FLORIAN DUNKLAU

Florian Dunklau is a research associate for two projects. Since February 2014, he has been a research associate for the "PESHAT in Context" project, in which he focuses on translations of Maimonides' works. He also supports the project's administration and its online database. In September 2015, he joined the "Sforno" project (part-time) preparing the Hebrew edition of the *Light of the Nations* with an English translation.

Florian Dunklau completed his MA in Jewish and Arabic studies at Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg with a thesis on three chapters of the *Or 'Ammim*. He is writing his PhD thesis on Elia de Butrio's "*Menorah*" (Commentary) to the *Or 'Ammim*.

RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE





ספר

שבת מוסר

הלז הנכבד והנחמד אשר חברו החכם השלם הדיין
המצויין הרב כמוהר"ר אלי' הכהן נר"ו מתושבי ק"ק
אומי"ר יע"א אשר פעל ועשה ורבים השיב מעון **לשבת פושעי**
וחטאים הגיע לפרשת דרכי' דרך סלולה לרבי' ליראי' ולחושבי
שמו פתח להם פתח פתוח כפתחיו של אולם להחזיק **מוסר**
ה' ודרכיו הישרים זכה וויכח את הרבים וכות הרבים תלוי בו :

יען ראיתי ספר הנחמד הזה שיש בו חועלת גדול לנשמה * ומימיו נוי מים
חיים רבים שחננו וישחולמו * והראשונים כבר נפלו ונחצרו בעלמא *
ולרוב חיבתן חיבת הקודש הראשוני אזדבנא * כביטורה נטרס קיץ אשר הרוזה
אוחה צעודה צכמו יצלענה * שטו העם ללקט ולא מלאה * לכן ארצו
בגבור הללי למנהג בסיפור מלה לזכות זה עם נוי מנה * להציא תחת מכבש
הדפוס חדש שלי צייר לכן נאכה ויפה כלבנה :

עוים * בנהג מדויקת לא כראשונים שעלו כל
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ירדא
יצ"ו בעל מרפס

אד

מית לעזה ככל אשר יורד :

ישראל קורט
מחבר

EMMY
NOETHER
RESEARCH
GROUP:
EARLY
MODERN
MUSAR

EMMY NOETHER JUNIOR RESEARCH GROUP

“JEWISH MORALISTIC WRITINGS (*MUSAR*) OF THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD: 1600–1800”

The vast body of Jewish moralistic writings (known as *musar* in Hebrew) still enjoys great popularity in a traditional Jewish context. In the early modern period, it was one of the most popular genres of Jewish literature. There are, however, very few academic studies available that thoroughly investigate this literary corpus. The Emmy Noether Junior Research Group will fill this gap by compiling an inventory that systematically documents *musar* works composed between 1600 and 1800. The inventory, which will include works in Hebrew, Yiddish, Judeo-Spanish, and Portuguese, will not only include classical bibliographical data, but will also present the structure and content of the works, their objectives as formulated by their authors, and their intended readership, as well as the works mentioned, quoted, or paraphrased in them.



The group project will be supplemented by individual studies that will give the group's members the opportunity to evaluate the data brought together in the inventory. With the help of various methodological approaches, they will, *inter alia*, be able to identify different schools, literary genres, and literary strategies, while also investigating the role *musar* literature played in the process of transferring theoretical discourses into practices of everyday life.

The Emmy Noether Junior Research Group will consist of four researchers led by Patrick Benjamin Koch. It is the first of its kind in Judaic and Jewish studies in Germany. This special programme, funded by the German Research Foundation, supports outstanding young researchers in order to prepare them for leading academic positions.



PATRICK BENJAMIN KOCH

Patrick B. Koch is the principal investigator of the Emmy Noether Research Group. He studied Judaic studies and religious studies at the Freie Universität Berlin and at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he graduated with an MA in Jewish civilisation in 2007. He earned his PhD at the Department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University in 2012. After post-doc positions at Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, and the Center for Jewish History in New York City, he worked as a research associate at the Universität Hamburg between 2014 and 2017. 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. 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.



**PRINCIPAL
INVESTIGATOR**

CHAIM ELLY MOSESON

Chaim Elly Moseson earned his BA at Columbia University, where he studied literature and philosophy, and completed his MA and PhD in religious studies at Boston University. His dissertation focused on the earliest sources for the teachings of the Besht and their transmission within the Hasidic movement.

His research interests include early modern Jewish movements and literatures, the cultural and political functions of texts, and the intersection of literature, psychoanalysis, and religion. His focus in the research project is on *musar* literature written in Yiddish and the role they played in constructing and disseminating religious ideals and cultural norms to a particular readership.



**RESEARCH
ASSOCIATE**

ASSOCIATED PROJECT

“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.

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-Universität 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.



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A red ink drawing on aged, textured paper. The drawing depicts a horse and rider in profile, facing left. The horse is in a trotting or running pose. The rider is seated, holding a long, thin staff or spear that extends forward. A decorative, swirling line follows the horse's tail and curves around its hindquarters. Below the horse, there is some faint, illegible text in a script that appears to be Hebrew. A large, white, hexagonal shape is superimposed on the lower-left portion of the image, containing the word "IMPRESSUM" in a bold, sans-serif font.

IMPRESSUM

IMPRESSUM

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Elijah Ben Solomon Abraham Ha-Kohen, Shevet Musar. Fürth (Pseudo-Sulzbach), 1761.

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