

Newsletter No

63

June 2016

Australian Association for Jewish Studies

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2016 AAJS Conference Report

The 2016 AAJS Conference, held at Griffith University in Brisbane, demonstrated the depth and breadth of current scholarship in Jewish Studies. In a relaxed and friendly environment the only issue was choosing which presentations to attend. Special thanks to Professor Emerita Suzanne Rutland and Dr Michael Abrahams-Sprod and their associates for putting together such a fabulous programme.



The Pratt Keynote Speaker, Dr Jeremy Benstein from the Heschel Sustainability Centre in Tel Aviv opened the Conference with his presentation, 'So Much More Than Nature: The Complex Relationship Between Jewish Thought and the Environmental Movement.' Focusing on four key areas – Theology, Anthropology, Eschatology and Politics – Dr Benstein set the tone for two days of stimulating and lively discussion.

Hannah Smith (University of Canterbury, New Zealand) explored the emergence of accusations in England in the 12th and 13th centuries that Jews ritually murder Christian children. In answering the question, 'How did these stories originate?' Hannah used songs, church manuscripts and examples to demonstrate how these medieval allegations became the foundation of a narrative tradition that persists to this day.

Weiwei Xing's presentation (Shanghai International Studies University), 'Traumatic Memories in Unnatural Space Narrative in Michael Chabon's Novels' was both inspiring, and thought provoking. Despite her luggage failing to arrive in Brisbane on the same plane that brought Weiwei to sunny Queensland, she demonstrated an inspiring calmness in her approach to her topic.

Her major themes re her topic were (a) irony over cynicism; (b) the transition/dichotomy between boyhood and manhood; and (c) notions of Jewish identity. In an informative paper, Weiwei was able to point her audience to a number of key conclusions, including a number of multiple paradoxes and contradictions and the maintenance of Jewish identity guided through the ceaseless process of 'requesting and pursuing.'

Rabbi Dr Orna Trigubuff (University of Sydney) guided us through the Lurianic Kabbalah of the 16th century. The cyclical nature of both the days of the week, and a seven-

year approach to land management was both informative and intriguing. The linking of both to the notion of restoration – *tikkun olam* – and the ‘breaking of the vessels’ was particularly enlightening – both literally, and on other levels.

Dr Anna Hirsh, Collections Registrar at the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne, shared with us many examples from the extensive collection of Jewish art and objects held at the Centre. In an informative presentation Dr Hirsh demonstrated the recurring symbolism related to the Lion, the Bird and the Vine, and their meanings when used to adorn important Jewish decorations and objects. The Lion, for example, represents Judah, the Protector and Ferocious Preserver of the Torah. We hope to see a full paper on her many fine points.

A highlight of the Conference was the Conference Dinner, held at the Margaret Street Memorial Hall behind the Synagogue. The food was great, the company and conversation stimulating. We were given a tour of the synagogue – both a humbling and spiritual experience.

Our thanks go to Dr Michael Abrahams-Sprod, the President of the Australian Association for Jewish Studies, to Professor Deborah Cao and Dr Antonio Gariano for organizing the event. Thank you Miri, for so capably looking after the Conference participants in our lunch and coffee breaks.



The 2016 AAJS conference fed our hearts, minds and souls. Thank you to the AAJS Conference Committee, Griffith University and the many accomplished presenters, a few of whom are discussed here. We look forward to next year’s conference.

Dr Vicky Schinkel



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

SYDNEY JEWISH MUSEUM
HOLOCAUST AND AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORY



Call for Papers– Australian Association for Jewish Studies

The 29th AAJS Conference, 12-13 February 2017

Narratives and Counter-Narratives: Jews, Nation and Nationhood

2017 is the anniversary of several landmark events in Jewish history. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, the partition plan of 1947 and the Six Day War of 1967 comprise only a few modern examples of events whose legacies demand a re-examination of the concepts and practice of nation and peoplehood in the longue

durée of Jewish history. An examination of the narratives and counter narratives in which these concepts are couched provide a compelling framework to examine their importance for understanding the Jewish past and also to delineate and assess their ongoing resonance in and for the present.

Debates as to what constitutes the ‘People Israel’ stretch back to antiquity, with biblical notions of who the Israelites were and what their communal obligations entailed fundamental to their identity and self-understanding. Yet, the Talmudic ideal of *Kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh* (all Israel is responsible for each other) has often been sorely tested by the travails of Jewish history. In times of persecution, the framework of peoplehood has been pushed to its limits, and dissent among Jewry has left indelible marks. Collaboration and betrayal, both real and perceived, have pushed the limits of group identity and cohesion. Yet despite these conflicts, peoplehood has prevailed as a lasting and distinctive component of both ancient and modern Jewish identities.

The theme of AAJS Sydney, Narratives and Counter-Narratives: Jews, Nation and Nationhood invites exploration of notions of the nation, peoplehood, intra-communal conflict and Klal Yisrael from all perspectives, including but not limited to the topics of nationhood and identity, society, literature, art, philosophy, language, religious, ancient and modern connections to the Land and State of Israel, the concept and practice of Klal Yisrael and the experience of peoplehood in extremis, particularly with regard to the period of the Holocaust.

Narratives and Counter-Narratives: Jews, Nation and Nationhood convenes 12-13 February 2017 at the Sydney Jewish Museum, 148 Darlinghurst Road, Darlinghurst NSW 2010. The University of Sydney’s Department of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish Studies will host the conference in partnership with the Sydney Jewish Museum.

Please submit your paper proposal by Monday 22 August 2016 to Dr Michael Abrahams-Sprod: michael.abrahams-sprod@sydney.edu.au.

Notice of acceptance will be sent out by 30 September 2016.

Submissions must include the following:

- Postal and email address
- Abstract of the paper to be presented (no more than 250 words)
- Short biographical note (no more than 50 words).

AAJS encourages students engaged in academic research to submit proposals based on their work to the conference committee.

Authors should clearly indicate their student status on their submission. Presenters are also invited to submit written articles for consideration for publication in the Australian Journal for Jewish Studies. Communication about the conference should be sent electronically to Dr Michael Abrahams-Sprod and Dr Avril Alba via Email:

michael.abrahams-sprod@sydney.edu.au
and avril.alba@sydney.edu.au.

Conference Committee:

Dr Michael Abrahams-Sprod, AAJS President, Conference co-convenor

Dr Avril Alba, Conference co-convenor

Professor Emerita Suzanne Rutland OAM

Dr Jan Lanicek

As this Conference addresses a small community of scholars, it is imperative that we all support the Association. Thus, it is a requirement that all presenters at this conference must have paid the conference registration fee, which includes the AAJS membership for 2016, by Friday 16 December 2016.

Visit www.aajs.org.au for details

A Personal Pilgrimage to AAJS Conference in Brisbane, 14-15 February 2016

It was with a little apprehension that I drove from Armidale, NSW to Brisbane to attend the 2016 version of the AAJS conference. My inquiry seemed a tricky one: Am I a half Jew? This questioning was based in several years of thinking and self journeying relating to my Jewish heritage—father a Jew, mother a Catholic—and how this query could possibly be resolved by considering a visit to the Jewish Museum Berlin and through the experiential architecture of Jewish architecture Daniel Libeskind.

The hesitation was driven primarily by fear: would the other scholars and public understand what could be considered a largely self-inflicted plight? Was it actually self-inflicted at all and was it, as several of the audience conceded, a common story relating to the conservatism of perception of what it means to be Jewish? And were some of my resultant feelings and ideas possibly pushed onto me by those around me when I was growing up, opinions and realities which were no longer relevant to me, now a father in my 40s?

I came to realize during my presentation, my musings-as-thought pilgrimage on my paternal grandparents, and how their memory seemed to be embodied in my own mind and somewhere within Libeskind's lucidly expressive architecture was that somewhere I am a Jew. Where that am or is is, somewhere I am. No denying it. On the contrary, it is something I should embrace, something I should welcome and celebrate, something I should pass onto my partner and daughter, whatever this interpretation of Jewishness may be or mean to me. My life and that of my family will be enriched as a result.

It was through intellectually and emotionally sincere discussions and a genuine openness about the possibility of reconciling some past grief that I realized the safeness of the AAJS environment and

the non-judgmentality of those present. While I may never be able to stomach another Woody Allen film, I have no doubt I will be present again at another AAJS conference. It is my intention at the next instalment to present some personal reflections of my work-in-progress resolution of my Jewish heritage with the Jewish person I am and am becoming. For this impetus, and for the recent positive interaction with those present in Brisbane, I express my gratitude.

Joshua Nash, Armidale

The Kabbalah and Quantum Physics

Which if the following have you heard off: Einstein's Relativity Theory; Schrodinger's Box; Newton's Law of Gravity; The Observer Effect?

Surprisingly, each of these scientific principles is connected through Jewish Mysticism and Quantum Physics. Which came first? Clearly the answer is Jewish Mysticism – also known as the Kabbalah.

The notion of the Kabbalah, first conceived in a formal manner by Moses De Leon in the late 13th Century, is the foundation of three of my post-graduate degrees – a Masters of Marketing Science (QUT), a Masters of Creative Writing (UQ), and a PhD in Philosophical and Historical Studies (UniMelb).

The Kabbalistic notion of the Tree of Life connects ten 'faces' of God to human consciousness. This extrapolates, in practical terms, to 'Tikkum Olum,' that is restoration, and the breaking of the vessels.

Readers are referred to Howard Smith's book, 'Let there be Light: Modern Cosmology and Kabbalah: A New Conversation between Science and Religion, (2006.) In this inspiring work Smith explains the harmonious

relationship between ancient Kabbalah and modern Cosmology. He describes, (in minute detail), how they intersect, and how ‘both of these approaches enlighten us.’

My econometric research (economic statistics) relates this notion to the four levels of times series data (in the forecasting of world-wide wheat prices). The Creative Writing research Masters used the notion of four levels as the basis of a film script (Saturn Returns). The PhD I undertook in Philosophical and Jewish Studies at the University of Melbourne (under the inspiring tutelage of Dvir Abramovich and Ziva Shavitsky) used the same idea as the basis of a ‘post’ post-modern approach to film criticism.

Expansion and contraction are each a feature of both the Kabbalah, and Quantum Physics. As Science advances concepts such as black holes, the work of Stephen Hawkins and others returns us to Kabbalistic notions.

I look forward to sharing some of the complex interactions between the two in more detail in further articles. Until then, I urge readers to explore and research both Quantum Physics and the Kabbalah.

Dr Vicky Schinkel

Commemorating the Farhud

On 1 and 2 June 1941, coinciding with the festival of Shavu’oth, the Jews of Baghdad and several other towns in Iraq were subjected to a pogrom, known as The Farhud, in which hundreds of Jews were murdered – precisely how many is unclear, with estimates ranging from 179 to up to 900. Others were assaulted and injured, and vast quantities of Jewish properties were either looted or destroyed. In 2015, Israel and Germany both acknowledged the connection of this massacre to the Holocaust, and have offered a small amount of compensation to Jews in Israel who lived through these harrowing events.

The Jewish population of Iraq has a long and proud and continuous history,

since Nebuchadnezzar took Jewish captives from Jerusalem to Babylon in 597 and 586 BCE, until the middle of the Twentieth Century. Babylonian/Iraqi Jews have been responsible for the development of the Synagogue, the Babylonian Talmud, the cycle of the readings from the Torah on Saturdays, the Siddur, and many other aspects of the common heritage of Jewish communities worldwide.

In the early Twentieth Century, Jews made up between a third and a quarter of the population of Baghdad. They were prominent in international trade, banking and the law, and participated in the development of an Iraqi literary culture, while the Iraqi musical tradition was kept alive by Jews. Indeed, in 1932, Iraqi Jewish musicians took out the top prize at the First International Congress of Arabic Music in Cairo.

Jews prospered under the British mandate between the end of World War I till 1932, on account of their knowledge of various languages and their educational advancement and many found work in the administration. By contrast, Arab nationalists resented British control. Having fought to shed the yoke of Ottoman domination, they now found themselves under the administration of a foreign, non-Muslim colonial power.

However, although Jews had been an integral part of the nation, their position was undermined by a number of factors. Even though most were not actively Zionist, Jews were inevitably associated in the minds of the majority with the Jews who were seeking to develop a Jewish nation state in Palestine, a project that raised the ire of Arabs and Muslims everywhere. This hostility was fanned by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Al-Husseini, who incited against the British mandatory government in Palestine, and against the Jews, who, he claimed, sought to encroach on the Haram Al-Sharif, the third most holy site in Islam, which happened to be the place where the two Israelite temples had stood.

Nazi propaganda entered the Arab world as soon as Hitler came to power in Germany. In Iraq, Dr Fritz Grobba encouraged the spread of antisemitic propaganda, purchasing a leading Arab newspaper which serialised *Mein Kampf*, and Arabic language broadcasts from Radio Berlin regularly reported on fictitious massacres of Arabs by Jews in Palestine, helping to foment hostility to Jews.

Many leaders in Iraq were impressed with Hitler's methods and sought to emulate them, creating parties that were modelled on National Socialism, and youth groups modelled on the Hitler Youth. The Grand Mufti, who fled to Iraq in 1939 to avoid arrest by the British, wrote to Hitler to express his admiration with the way he was dealing with Europe's "Jewish Problem", and sought his support for the Arabs to deal similarly with the Jews.

In April 1941, an army coup, encouraged by Al-Husseini and Grobba, expelled the pro-British government of the Regent, Prince 'Abd Al-illah, imposing in its stead the a regime led by Nuri Al-Sa'id Al-Gaylani, friendly to the Nazis, which sought to develop close ties with Germany. Nazi-style antisemitism was encouraged, and Jewish homes in Baghdad were daubed with red paint.

Britain, which had military bases in Iraq, rejected the demands of al-Gaylani to vacate these bases, and warfare broke out between Britain and Iraq. Although Germany sought to support the Iraqi regime, they were ineffectual, and by 30 May 1941, the leaders of the regime, together with Grobba and Al-Husseini, had fled the country.

The British troops by then had surrounded Baghdad but chose not to enter. Symbolically, it was preferable that the Prince Regent, could return as the conquering hero. On 1 June 1941, as Jews in their festive finery were

celebrating the Feast of Weeks, and some among them sought to welcome the returning Regent, they were attacked by soldiers, resentful of their defeat by the British. The anti-Jewish atmosphere encouraged by Al-Husseini and Grobba, and the belief that the Jews sided with the British, combined to create an atmosphere where mobs developed, raising their khanjars (curved daggers) in the air, calling out "Idhbahu al-Iyhud" – slaughter the Jews – a task made easier by the daubing of Jewish houses that had taken place days before.

Jewish homes were broken into, girls and women raped, and Jews of any age or gender had their heads smashed open or murdered. Many Jews, nevertheless, were saved from this treatment by loyal Arab friends and neighbours who hid them, or bravely confronted the marauding crowds to protect Jews. Such individuals indeed should be recalled as Righteous among the Nations.

On 2 June 1941, looting more than murder was the main agenda of the day, as people from outside the city who had heard of what had been happening came to share in the plunder of Jewish property. Order was finally restored when 'Abd al-illah returned to Baghdad and deployed his loyal Kurdish troops to shoot down the marauders. An estimated 400 rioters are said to have died in this way. This year, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Farhud, it will be commemorated at the Sephardi Synagogue in Sydney, located at 40 Fletcher Street, Woollahra.

In April, Dr Myer Samra spoke about the Farhud at the Plenum of the NSW Jewish board of Deputies. A revised version of his talk was published in the online journal, *Plus61J*.

The article can be accessed here: <http://plus61j.net.au/?p=4629>

Dr Myer Samra

Conferences in New Delhi and Bucharist

This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the partition of India. Yet this tragedy which resulted in over a million deaths and the displacement of 15 million people has not been commemorated in India. Indeed there is no permanent museum marking this watershed event. To mark this occasion an international conference on Mass Violence and Memory was held at O.W.Jindal Global University near Delhi in mid-May. Sponsored by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and organized by Drs Rohee das Gupta and Navras Aafeedi, as well as Professor R.P. Kumaraswamy (who was not able to attend because of the death of his father), papers covered topics from the Armenian genocide to violence in India to the Holocaust. There was also one paper dealing with responses to the decimation of the Australian aborigines from a health perspective given by public medicine specialists, Australian/Israeli Dr Peter Honeyman and Israeli Dr Eilhu Richter. European diseases had a devastating effect on the indigenous population. Dr Honeyman lives in Israel but returns regularly to Australia to work with indigenous health. The keynote address on the evolution of Holocaust memory was given by Dr Adam Sutcliffe of King's College London.



Humanum's tomb, Delhi.

L-R Dr Arpad Hornjak(Hungary), Nike Wentholt (the Netherlands), Prof Suzanne Rutland (Australia), Dr Anuradha (India), Dr Ran Shauli (Israel).

The conference finished with a panel relating to education with presentations relating to the South African Holocaust Museum in Johannesburg by Tali Nates, UNESCO Holocaust awareness by Karel Fracapane, USHMM by Krista Hegburg, India by Prof. Samik Bandyopadhyay, and Australia by AAJS member Professor Emerita Suzanne Rutland. This conference, which was extremely well organized from every point of view, proved to be stimulating and thought provoking. Following on from this conference Professor Rutland flew to Bucharest to participate in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) as part of the Australian delegation. Australia was granted observer status last year and had a seven member delegation headed by the Australian Ambassador Mr David Ritchie, AO, from Berlin. He proved an excellent Head of our delegation and is very committed to the concepts of IHRA. The other delegates were Sue

Hampel from Monash University, Drs Steve Cooke and Donna Lee-Frieze, Pauline Rockman from the Melbourne Holocaust Museum and Dr Andre Oboler, CEO of the On-line Hate Prevention Institute.



Pauline Rockman (at left) presenting her paper

After a combined meeting discussing some IHRA projects the gathering again divided into separate groups dealing with different topics relating to the Holocaust and Antisemitism. The findings of all groups were presented to the plenary on Thursday when various resolutions were voted on by the diplomatic heads of member delegations. By far the most controversial issue at the plenary was the definition of Antisemitism approved by the experts. Whilst there was overall consensus about the main definition, the examples given to illustrate the definition were opposed by a few of the member states. Whilst no country was prepared to specify their exact objections they probably related to the five examples dealing specifically with Israel. The Romanian Chair, Minhea Constantinescu, handled the situation brilliantly and eventually won a consensus by stressing that the definition applied to IHRA but was non-binding on member states. [IHRA Chair](#), Ambassador Mihnea Constantinescu, stated: “All IHRA Member Countries share concern that incidents of antisemitism are steadily rising and agree that IHRA’s Member Countries and indeed IHRA’s experts need political tools with which to fight this scourge. IHRA’s 31 member countries- 24 of which are EU member countries- are committed to the [Stockholm Declaration](#) and thereby to fighting the evil of antisemitism through coordinated international political action.”

IHRA's honorary chair is Professor Yehuda Bauer, who turned 90 during the meeting. His outstanding leadership was acknowledged by all present.

Australian delegation from l. to R. De Steve Cooke, Professor Emerita Suzanne Rutland, OAM, Ambassador David Ritchie, AO, Sue Hampel, IHRA finance executive, Katherine, Ambassador Minhea Constantinescu, Romanian Chair, Pauline Rockman, Dr Donna Lee-Frieze and Dr Andre Oboler.

Professor Emerita Suzanne Rutland

The first day and a half of the meeting was dedicated to the expert working groups dealing with education, museums, academia and communication. Each member of the Australian delegation participated in a different group with Professor Rutland and Sue Hampel in education, Pauline Rockman and Dr Lee-Frieze museums, Dr Cooke academia and Dr Oboler communications. Pauline Rockman gave a presentation to her group on the Melbourne Museum, which was very well received.



Teaching in Harare, Zimbabwe in April 2016

In April 2016 I spent another month in Zimbabwe, teaching at Holy Trinity College. This time my teaching companion was Kathleen, who is an associate of the Sisters of Sion. Our students were Catholic African seminarians and lay persons taking degree and certificate courses at Holy Trinity College (HTC) in Harare for the Catholic University of Zimbabwe.

It was 16C when we landed at Harare, a small, modern airport built by the Chinese. Though it rained two days later, the weather was mild enough and there were very few mosquitoes, despite what we had been led to expect. This time there was less water than last time in September, as there had been a time of drought, so washing in cold water from a bucket was a daily exercise. The rain then stopped definitively. WIFI was not available at all, as the server was down at the College, but we subscribed to ECO net and could receive and send emails by phone. Reading attachments was always a challenge. Our aim was to introduce our students to the first century world of the Second Temple, which we explained was the world of Jesus. Students heard for the first time about the Shema, Jewish prayer and Jewish blessings, and details of about Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. They were amazed to hear there are Jewish and Rabbinic parable parallels to the parables in the New Testament. The students were eager to learn, sometimes wanting all our notes. Books were not readily available, nor the internet, so we took all the resources we could carry.

In the end, we were to teach almost every level of student at HTC, over eighty students in all, including seminarians, diploma, and certificate students. I taught on the Pilgrimage Feasts and the Jewish roots of Christian prayer, and Kathleen on the Parables of Jesus from the Second

Temple Period. Comments such as: “It is so important to know about what we have missed,” and “Now everything makes sense,” are testimonies of how essential it is to know the Jewish context of Christianity. Perhaps the most positive result of all, was the request from several fourth year seminarians to research on a topic related to Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament for their thirty page required theses.

While we were there we attended the graduation ceremony of the Catholic University of Zimbabwe. It was out in the open under a shelter and it was raining that day. At the end there was feast for everyone. A large number graduated. Education is very important in Zimbabwe with a 95% literacy rate.



St Joseph's Parish Church, in the Waterfall District

Each Sunday, we were invited to accompany Fr. Sylvester to Mass in one of six different churches in the Waterfall area. Each time we received a special welcome, Most Sundays the congregations gave offerings to the priest, such as food stuffs, toothpaste, cooking oil or soap. These churches were overflowing, so people stood inside and sat outside. They sang full throttle in harmony with only drum and maracas accompaniment. We were witnesses to a living, faithful, joyful and generous people who suffer many hardships with the economic situation.



Apart from our teaching schedule we went to a most remarkable game park and saw elephants, rhinos, giraffes and deer and I also helped harvest corn which is ground and forms the staple food, sarza. There has been a severe drought, so the crops are not as good as usual and this is causing widespread hardship.

Dr Marianne Dacy

MEMBERSHIP FEES for the Australian Association for Jewish Studies (ABN 16535824946) are current from 1 January 2016–31 December 2016 (includes the *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* published annually and the AAJS Newsletter). (<http://www.aajs.org.au>)



Shavuot sameah!

Fees for 2016

- Benefactor: \$250.00
- Regular: \$60.00 (Aus)
- Pensioner/Full-time Student: \$25.00 (Aus)
- Institutional: \$70.00 (Aus)
- Overseas: \$80.00 (Aus)

All correspondence to:

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The University of Sydney NSW 2006
(michael.abrahams-sprod@sydney.edu.au)

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1. Pay directly into our account: BSB: 082-372; Account No: 507 802 547; SWIFT Code: NATAAU33025
2. Via the AAJS webpage <http://www.aajs.org.au> or
3. By cheque. Post to Membership Secretary, AAJS, C/- Dr Michael Abrahams- Sprod (as above)

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