

# **UC Davis Jewish Studies Year in Review**

Fall 2021 - Spring 2022





In 2021 - 2022, Jewish Studies wished a happy retirement to our two longest-serving directors, Diane Wolf and David Biale, who built our program from the ground up. Celebrating their careers and thanking them for their decades of service—in true UC Davis style, as you’ll see as you read on—we considered how to build on their legacy of scholarly engagement and outreach while continuing along some new paths we have been treading since the upheaval of 2020.

Hybrid programming has made our events more accessible and increased our national and international impact. The pathbreaking online New Directions in Jewish Studies Lecture Series, a competitive program that supports scholars working outside the tenure track, completed its second successful year, and has served as a model for at least two other programs in the country. We’re not done—our next competition is already open, and we look forward to hosting three more New Directions Lecturers in 2022-2023. We were also able to return to safely run in-person events: UC Davis hosted a workshop of the California Working Group on Jews in the Maghrib and the Middle East, renewing our commitment to the study of Judaism in its global diversity—ethnic, racial, and linguistic.

Read on to see how our Jewish Studies undergraduates are making us proud with their commitment and creativity; how our graduate students are blazing new paths in the study of Jewish culture and history; and how our faculty are leading the field in vital areas like Russian culture, race in America, and Digital Humanities. And please join me in thanking two of the heroes of this past academic year: Program Assistant Benjamin Fisher, PhD Candidate in Religious Studies and scholar of Jewish thought, and Malia Serafin, UC Davis Graphic Design student, who’s responsible for our new look. We anticipate 2022-23 with high hopes and big plans: please read on to find out more, and join us!

**Eva Mroczek, Director**

2021-2022 Steering Committee:  
David Biale, Benjamin Fisher, Bruce Haynes, Jenny Kaminer, Sven-Erik Rose, Yael Teff-Seker, Seth L. Sanders, Diane Wolf, Shahar Zaken

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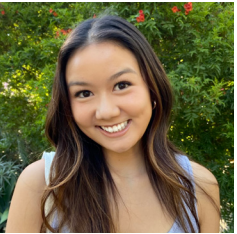
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# Student Awards

## Don Kunitz Award for Excellence in Jewish Studies



**Eva Anderson**  
is a second-year cognitive science major minoring in Jewish Studies and dance. Her interest in Jewish Studies comes from a desire to learn more about the history of her religion, and to be an active participant in continuing conversations around Jewish values. Eva plans to pursue a career in modern dance and attend graduate school for neuroscience. Her winning project is a dance performance highlighting some darker aspects of the biblical story of Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi: Ruth, the foreigner, performs physical labor for Naomi, gives birth to a child that would continue Naomi’s family line, and is then left out of the story, as the townspeople chant, “a son is born to Naomi.” The video can be found here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_JtU8HEsk-4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JtU8HEsk-4)



**Maggie Tran**  
is a fourth-year student studying International Relations and History with a minor in Public Health Sciences. In the future, she hopes to attend law school and travel. Her project, “Assigning Responsibility in ‘Woe to You’ & ‘4580,’” is a paper analyzing literary representations of the Holocaust in poems by Yitzhok Katzenelson and Yehoshue Perle.



**Megumi Suzuki**  
is a senior at UC Davis majoring in History with a minor in Jewish Studies. In the future she plans to pursue an MBA and a Master’s Degree in English. Her project, “In Memory of Anna Nikolayevna Temkin,” focuses on the fascinating differences between Isaiah Spiegel’s “The Death of Anna Nikolayevna Temkin” (1941) and “A Ghetto Dog” (1949). The changes to the story after the Shoah add nuance to the important discussion about Holocaust memory and demonstrate the importance of reading Shoah literature written both during the years of its unfolding and afterwards.



images: Don Kunitz  
via:[jewishstudies.ucdavis.edu/awards-jewish-studies-uc-davis](https://jewishstudies.ucdavis.edu/awards-jewish-studies-uc-davis)

## Jewish Studies Minor Scholarship



**Shoshana Fendel**  
is a third year English major at UC Davis. They have studied Yiddish and are planning to pursue further Jewish studies after college.



New Directions In Jewish Studies Lecture Series

Lectures Through the Year

Launched in 2020, the “New Directions in Jewish Studies” Lecture Series at UC Davis promotes cutting edge research in Jewish Studies by scholars working outside the tenure track (i.e. a permanent academic position).

The first program of its kind, it has served as a model for at least two other Jewish Studies programs in the country. This year’s four lecturers were selected in a competitive process from over 130 applications—from postdoctoral fellows, visiting instructors at colleges and seminaries, independent scholars, and administrators. The process introduced us to the extraordinary range and quality of research being done in Jewish Studies today – often with little institutional support.

Winning lecturers received a generous honorarium to deliver an online talk and were paired with an expert discussant in their field. Students, faculty, community members, and scholars worldwide learned about the intersection of disability studies and classical rabbinic literature; criminals and vagabonds in medieval Jewish societies; the relationship between anti-Judaism and anti-Blackness through the lens of Black writers during WWII; and Jews in underground economies on the Soviet frontier.

The program has been well received by the scholarly community: since we launched the program, every senior scholar we have invited to serve as a discussant has enthusiastically agreed!

**October 27 — Lital Levy, Princeton University**  
*World Literature, Translation, and Diaspora: The Intimately Global Journey of Grace Aguilar’s The Vale of Cedars*

**February 22 — Jan Grabowski, University of Ottawa**  
*The Last Days of Emanuel Ringelblum: Hunting Down the Jews in Hiding, Warsaw, 1943-44*

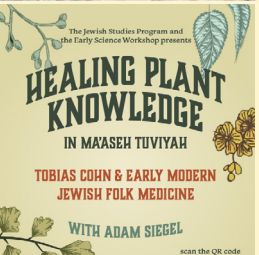
**March 3 — Klaus Hödl, University of Graz, Austria & Max Kade, Distinguished Visiting Professor at UC Davis**  
*Crime and the Experience of the Everyday in Jewish and Non-Jewish Relations*

**March 11 — Rabbi Tamar Manasseh and Maud Newton**  
*Ancestor Trouble: A Religious and Political Dialogue*

**April 6 — Adam Siegel, UC Davis**  
*Healing Plant Knowledge in Ma’aseh Tuviyah: Tobias Cohn and Early Modern Jewish Folk Medicine*

**April 27 — Itay Eisinger, UC Davis**  
*Fighting to Fight: Israeli Women Combatants in Myth, Reality, and Representation*

**April 28 — Susan Miller, UC Davis**  
*Susan Gilson Miller in conversation with David Biale: Years of Glory: Recovering the History of the Holocaust in North Africa*





# Checking in with Dr. Yael Teff-Seker

The Jewish Studies program continues its partnership with the Israel Institute, which allows UC Davis to host a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow in the study of Modern Israel.

2021-2022 marked the second year of the fellowship for Dr. Yael Teff-Seker, who specializes in the social, cultural, and political aspects of environmental policy and sustainability. This year, she continued to bring her on-the-ground experience in environmental initiatives in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan – and her vision for the peace-building potential of cross-cultural work around shared environmental concerns – to students, scholars, and the local community.

Following up on a massive inaugural online conference last year, Dr. Teff-Seker hosted the **Second Annual International Conference on Environmental Conflict and Cooperation** both locally at UC Berkeley and globally online. Supported by the Helen Diller Institute for Jewish Law and Israel Studies, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Arava Institute, this year’s theme was “Bridging the Gap: Connecting the Dots in a Fragmented Environmental Field.” Scholars, policymakers, and NGO representatives discussed the concrete possibilities of collaboration around environmental goals – particularly, in line with Dr. Teff-Seker’s own interdisciplinary concerns, how the social sciences and humanities might contribute to integrating environmental knowledge into societal rituals, practices, and identity.

More locally, Dr. Teff-Seker connected these very themes in a three-part lecture series at Congregation Beit Haverim in Davis: she spoke on on environmental cooperation in the Middle East, environmental ethics in Judaism, and peace education in Israeli and Palestinian textbooks. Her own research blossomed, with published work on noise pollution and wildlife, agri-environmental schemes in Israel, and the result of a longer-term ethnographic project: interviews conducted while walking in nature, including Israel’s Negev desert, about how people of diverse identities and cultures connect with the natural world. As with all of Dr. Teff-Seker’s research, this work has a real payoff: understanding how people relate to our shared natural world is part of the life-and-death work of environmental preservation and sustainability.

Spearheaded by Professor Emerita Susan Gilson Miller, we were proud to host the first in-person workshop in three years of **The California Working Group on Jews in the Maghrib and the Middle East** ([caljemm.org](http://caljemm.org)) at UC Davis on May 10-11. Judaism and Jewish life have always been multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-racial; Cal JeMM brings together scholars who specialize in the study of Middle East and North African (MENA) Jews from medieval to modern times.

“Visualizing Scholarship on the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in the Next Decade” brought together faculty and graduate students from Jewish Studies Programs at other UCs and from various private universities throughout the region to discuss current themes in the burgeoning field of the history and culture of Middle Eastern Jewry. Lively exchanges among the twenty-five attendees

# Jewish Studies Hosts CalJEMM Workshop on Jews of the Maghrib and the Middle East

on topics such as Memory Studies, Middle East and Diaspora Studies, and pedagogical issues were interspersed with convivial mealtimes and many opportunities for intensive one-on-one conversations.

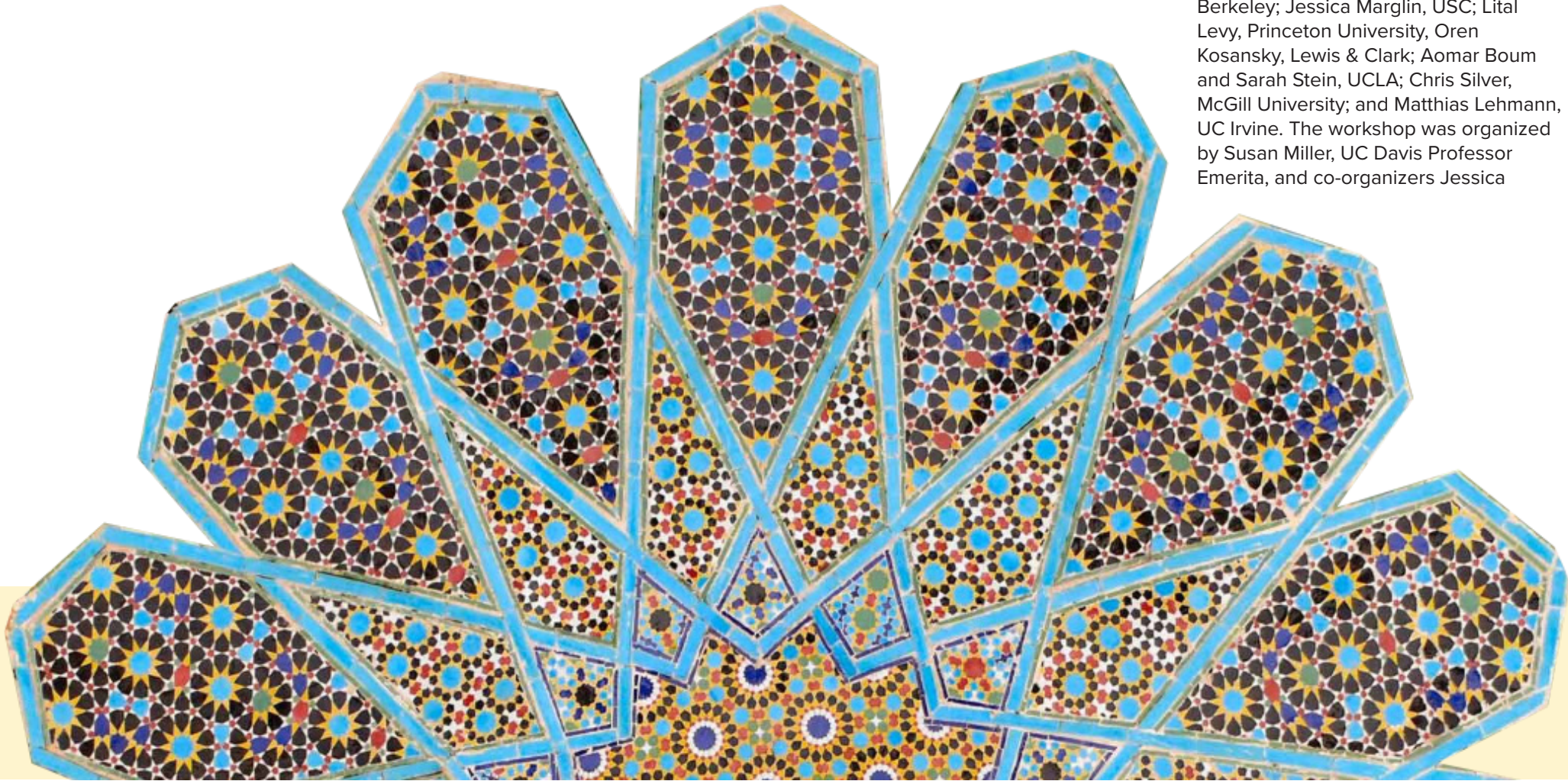
The Provost’s Office and the Dean of Letters and Science at UC Davis helped to fund the event, which marked a return of Cal JeMM to in-person gathering. Among the scholars of Middle Eastern Jewish Studies who attended the workshop were Alma Heckman, UC Santa Cruz; Emily Gottreich, UC Berkeley; Jessica Marglin, USC; Lital Levy, Princeton University; Oren Kosansky, Lewis & Clark; Aomar Boum and Sarah Stein, UCLA; Chris Silver, McGill University; and Matthias Lehmann, UC Irvine. The workshop was organized by Susan Miller, UC Davis Professor Emerita, and co-organizers Jessica

Marglin, chair of CalJEMM, and Emily Gottreich of UCB.

Jewish Studies at UC Davis has emerged as a pillar of CalJEMM and similar initiatives highlighting Jewish communities of the non-Western world. California has become a premier location for this burgeoning field of study, with related courses offered within the UC and CSU systems, as well as at other private universities on the West Coast. CalJEMM gives special attention to cultivating doctoral students who specialize in Jewish Studies rooted in the Muslim World, giving them the opportunity to meet with other scholars to promote this vibrant area in Jewish Studies for future generations.



We congratulate  
Dr. Teff-Seker on an  
incredibly productive year!







# The End of an Era

*Happy Retirement to Longtime Jewish Studies Directors  
David Biale and Diane Wolf*



Over the past quarter century, Diane Wolf and David Biale built the UC Davis Jewish Studies program from the ground up—and in June 2022, we wished both of our long-serving and beloved directors a happy retirement. We miss you already, Diane and David, and will work to sustain and grow what you have built here!

**On June 2, 2022, Emanuel Ringelblum Distinguished Professor David Biale celebrated his retirement after twenty-three years at UC Davis. His final lecture at the Manetti Shrem Museum, part of his Memory of the Holocaust class, became an international event:**

both in person and online, hundreds of students and colleagues attended the class to honor Professor Biale's distinguished career as a scholar, teacher, and mentor. With expertise that ranges across 3,000 years of intellectual and cultural history, Biale is the author and editor of nine books on themes of power, sexuality, secularization, and mysticism in Jewish history and culture. He is a Guggenheim Fellow and a three-time winner of the National Jewish Book Award. He has advised dozens of graduate students, many of whom have gone on to their own careers as scholars

of Jewish thought, history, and culture. After a standing ovation, Professor Biale received a surprise serenade by the UC Davis School of Music's Brass Quintet and a reception in his honor. Former and current students, colleagues, and friends gathered to toast Professor Biale at the Good Life Garden, in the shade of fig trees and against the backdrop of the scenic vineyards of the Robert Mondavi Institute—a fitting tribute to an inspiring career of creativity, courage, and integrity!



Diane Wolf's work primarily focuses on family dynamics amidst structural transformations with an emphasis on gender. The author and editor of many books and scholarly articles, including the acclaimed *Beyond Anne Frank: Hidden Children and Postwar Families in Holland* (2007), she has published on feminist sociological methodology, children's agency, and childhood memory, identity, and trauma in the postwar and post-Holocaust context. Her most recent work analyzes inter-generational transmission of trauma among families of Holocaust survivors. An alumna of UC Berkeley and



Cornell University, she taught sociology at the University of Washington before joining the Department of Sociology at UC Davis in 1989. A recipient of the UC Davis Faculty Development Award and the Jesse Bernard Book Award from the American Sociological Association, she has made a profound impact on the UC Davis community as a teacher, mentor, Work-Life Advisor.

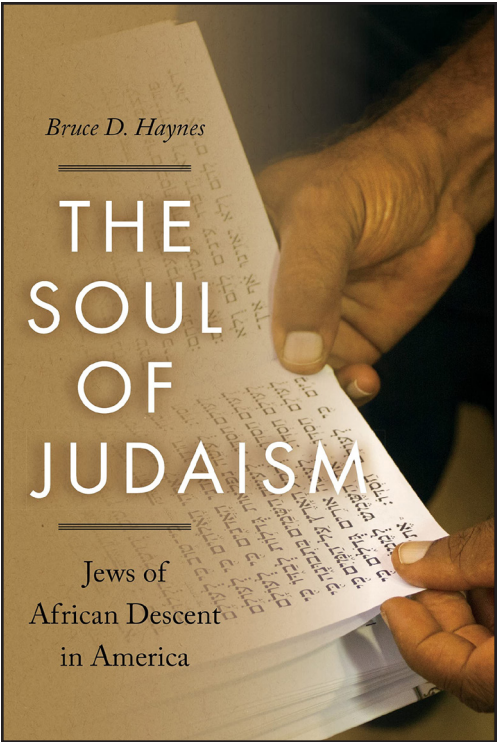
**How many professors get their own parade and a chance to literally smash the patriarchy—at least in pinata form—at their retirement celebration? Perhaps only Diane Wolf, now Professor Emerita of Sociology, who retired after thirty-three years of groundbreaking scholarship and extraordinary mentorship work at UC Davis. Escorted from her final faculty meeting by the UC Davis School of Music Samba Ensemble/Brazilian Bateria, Professor Wolf's grand entrance to her reception at the Sproul Courtyard was only appropriate to the legacy she leaves.**



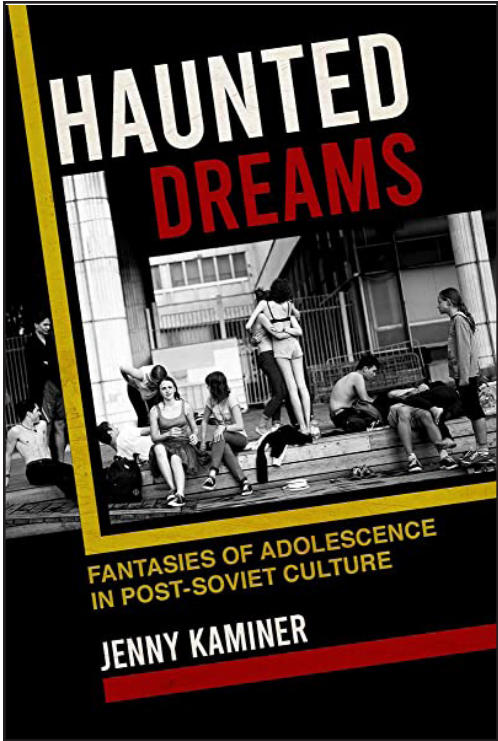
# Faculty News

**Bruce Haynes (Professor of Sociology)** has been especially active in public scholarship and outreach on Jews of color and the relationships between racism and antisemitism in America. With bylines in the Forward and other online venues and many invited talks all over the country—from New York to Charleston to San Francisco, for both academic audiences and the broader public—Professor Haynes is a leading national voice on these issues, and the impact of his award-winning book, *The Soul of Judaism: Jews of African Descent in America* (NYU Press, 2018), continues to deepen.

**Jenny Kaminer (Department Chair of German and Russian)** published her new book, *Haunted Dreams: Fantasies of Adolescence in Post-Soviet Culture* (Cornell University Press), the first study in English devoted to cultural representations of adolescence since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. *Haunted Dreams* shows how Russian writers, dramatists, and filmmakers use the figure of the adolescent to think through questions of violence, gender, and the many fissures of post-Soviet society during these tumultuous decades. Both “theoretically sophisticated” and “highly readable and engaging,” according to Prof. Kaminer’s peers, the study will be crucial for anyone interested in contemporary Russian identity.



**Seth Sanders (Professor, Religious Studies)** launched a new Digital Humanities project, Pentateuch.Digital. The Torah and its contradictions are arguably the heart of Judaism, but why was it built so strangely? With its two alternative creations in Genesis 1-3 and three competing sets of divinely revealed laws in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, the Bible’s challenging stories and commandments provide the foundation for the creativity of Midrash as well as clues for historians. But even though scholars agree on its main building blocks, they have never been available



for the public or students to read. With a grant from the Jewish Studies program, Prof. Sanders created the first open-access edition of what scholars agree is the Bible’s Founding Document at pentateuch.digital. This project let Sanders apply for and receive a further \$24,000 UC Davis Large Grant in Aid of Research which will let him work with incoming Religious Studies graduate student Walker Rhea to develop the project into the foremost open-access resource for understanding the composition and literary values of the Hebrew Bible. Follow our progress on twitter at @BibleContra!

# Graduate Student News

**Benjamin Fisher**  
**PhD Candidate, Religious Studies,**  
**Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory**

Benjamin Fisher received an archival research fellowship from the Leo Baeck Center and the DAAD for his dissertation on critiques of myth in German-Jewish thought. Noting the commonplace opposition between Judaism and myth more broadly, this project uncovers its specific origin. Ben demonstrates that the German-Jewish rejection of myth was formulated in response to anti-Jewish sentiments in the European study of mythology and rising racial antisemitism, and he discusses the implications of this for contemporary debates over race, religion, and disenchantment. He presented his work at the Society for Jewish Ethics and the Western Jewish Studies Association, had an article published on Jacob Taubes and Jewish messianism, and participated in the Cornell Summer School of Criticism and Theory.

**Sicily Lerner**  
**PhD Student, Comparative Literature**

Sicily Lerner is going into the second year of her PhD in Comparative Literature. Over the summer, she has been continuing projects begun in her first year on topics including Hegelian aesthetics and Surrealism; a gendered political reading of Lamentations based around the Hegelian dialectic; comparative work across readings of Bruno Schulz, Franz Kafka, and Marc Chagall; and an examination into the role of editorship in Holocaust texts. In this upcoming year, she is looking forward to continuing coursework, as well as teaching her first course as an instructor, “COM3: Existentialism, Love, and Despair.”

**Anya Free**  
**PhD Candidate, History**

Anya Free is in the final stages of research and writing for her dissertation, “War and Terror in Leningrad: The case of the Museum of Defense of Leningrad in the Context of the Soviet War Museums Culture (1944-1953).” This year she also completed a project on technological, cultural, and economic exchanges between Venice and the Ottoman Empire from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century for the UCI History Project. Lastly, she developed a program with the Davis Institute for Diversity, Equity, and Advancement on “Parenting in the Pandemic” and participated on a panel sponsored by the Davis Humanities Institute on the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

**Aron Tillema**  
**PhD Candidate, Religious Studies**

Aron Tillema received a Dean’s Summer Fellowship for his dissertation on one of the strangest books of the Bible: Jonah, which features a grumpy prophet and a man-eating fish. While the book may sound like a parody, Aron shows it may have hit differently for ancient people living under an oppressive empire—and asks how contemporary religious communities interpret it in light of their own reflections on violence and conflict. Aron presented his research at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting and the Western Jewish Studies Association conference, where he won the Baron Award for Best Graduate Student Paper, and saw the acceptance of a peer-reviewed article on gender and interpretation in the book of Lamentations.

**Gabi Kirk**  
**PhD Candidate, Geography, Designated Emphasis in Feminist Theory & Research**

Gabi Kirk conducted six months of dissertation fieldwork in Palestine-Israel, with a focus on Jenin, Ramallah, and Jerusalem. In spring she taught her first class as an associate instructor, Gender and Postcolonialism, for Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies at UC Davis. In 2022-23, she looks forward to upcoming publications in *Historical Materialism* and *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, continuing the writing of her dissertation, and applying for academic jobs.





# Courses

**Jewish Studies also continued to offer a number of intriguing courses to UC Davis students this year!**

- David Biale (History)** continued his popular courses on the history and memory of the Holocaust, as well as an upper division class on gender and sexuality in Jewish history.
- Itay Eisinger (Middle East/South Asia Studies)** continued to head up the Hebrew language courses and curriculum, teaching students at both the elementary and advanced levels.
- Eva Mroczek (Religious Studies)** offered courses on major issues in the history and interpretation of the Tanakh/Hebrew Bible, specifically centered on evil and suffering, gender, and sexuality, as well as Introduction to Judaism.
- Sven-Erik Rose (German)** taught on the German-Jewish author Franz Kafka and a graduate seminar on German-Jewish modernism in literature and philosophy.
- Seth Sanders (Religious Studies)** taught courses on comparative death and afterlife traditions with a strong focus on biblical and ancient Jewish texts, as well as the Tanakh/Hebrew Bible in its Ancient Near Eastern context.
- Yael Teff-Seker (Sociology/Religious Studies)** taught across disciplines on the sociology of gender as well as ethnic and religious conflict over natural resources in the Middle East and Israel.

# Design Credit

Malia Serafin  
4th Year  
Design and Psychology  
portfolio: mseraf.in

Thank you for letting me work with the Jewish Studies Program this year! It has been a pleasure telling your stories, and I can't wait for the next year.



image via: jewishstudies.ucdavis.edu

# Looking ahead to next year

## UC Davis Jewish Studies & Mondavi Center presents: Recovered Voices

In April 2023, the UC Davis Jewish Studies Program will partner with the Ziering-Conlon Initiative for Recovered Voices Program at the Colburn School of Music. This program encourages greater awareness and more frequent performances of music by composers whose careers and lives were disrupted—or worse—during the years of the Nazi regime in Europe. For more than 25 years, Maestro James Conlon—artistic director and conductor—has championed works and drawn deserved attention to composers whose names and works had very nearly been eliminated from history. This two-day event will feature performances by a Chamber Orchestra (4/10) and Chamber Music Ensemble (4/11)

made up of Colburn students and led by Maestro Conlon. This will be followed by “Recovery of Memory and Culture After the Holocaust,” a symposium featuring Maestro Conlon, Emanuel Ringelblum Distinguished Professor Emeritus David Biale, Professor of Comparative Literature Sven-Erik Rose, and Professor Emerita of Sociology Diane Wolf. These events are provided free to the public with support from donors to the Mondavi Center’s Artistic Ventures Program.

- Judaism and Antifascism Conference**  
Is there a distinctively Jewish tradition of resistance to totalitarian political movements? How might it build on Jewish texts, thought, religious practice, and historical experience? In Spring 2023, a graduate student-led hybrid international conference hosted by UC Davis will bring together scholars, journalists, and artists to discuss Jewish cultural and political resistance to fascism, both past and present.
- West Coast Ancient Judaism Workshop**  
From San Diego to Seattle, the West Coast boasts a wealth of scholars specializing in the texts, traditions, and history of Jews in antiquity. In partnership with other UCs, the UC Davis Jewish Studies program will offer a chance for this scholarly community to reconnect, re-energize, and forge new collaborations after a long period of pandemic isolation.

image: James Conlon, Artistic Director and Conductor  
via: mondaviarts.org

