

Ancient Worlds in a Digital Realm

WANDERING OBJECTS: COLLECTING AND INTERPRETING JEWISH THINGS

21st-century perspectives on Judaica a Jewish material culture

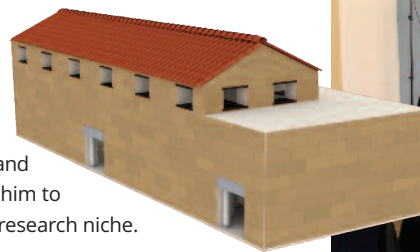


The idea of how Jewish objects can wander from one place to another and can be collected in many ways were at the center of a sold out, three-day conference co-hosted with the NC Museum of Art last November. The Wandering Objects conference probed the changing meanings of Jewish ritual objects and material culture through their display and interpretation in museums, and as instruments of inquiry and education. The keynote speaker was Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblatt, chief curator of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw and professor, New York University. Other conference speakers included curators, art historians, folklorists, anthropologists, religious scholars, philosophers, cultural critics, private collectors, and community leaders. Support for this program was generously provided by the Slomo and Cindy Silvian Foundation, Inc., David Berg Foundation, Judaic Art Endowment at the North Carolina Museum of Art, Abram and Frances Pascher Kanof Lecture Fund at the North Carolina Museum of Art, and the Friends of the Judaic Art Gallery at the North Carolina Museum of Art. Additional support was provided by Debbie and Mike Rubin in honor of Lawrence J. Wheeler, Dr. Ugo Goetzl and Ina Wallace, Marion Meyer-Robbay and Stanley J. Robbay, Lisa and Michael Sandman, and Iris and Stephen Weiss.

As an inquisitive child growing up in Kentucky, Brad Erickson asked a lot of questions. But he didn't get the answers he was looking for.

"I always had questions about the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. Questions like, 'Did this really happen this way?' and 'Did these people really exist?' More often than not, I would get short answers along the lines of, 'This is way it is because the Bible says so.' I continued to ask these types of questions and by the time I arrived at college, I learned there was an entire field of biblical and religious studies. And I was hooked," said Erickson. "Following my undergraduate work, I attended Duke Divinity School where I had my first real taste of archaeology. When I decided to pursue a Ph.D., there was no question about where I wanted to go. The only person I could imagine working with was the Center's Jodi Magness, Kenan Distinguished Professor for Teaching Excellence in Early Judaism. While still at Duke, I joined the first season of the excavation at Huqoq in the Galilee of Israel and very quickly I realized there is nothing else in the world I would rather be doing. It was in Huqoq that I decided to pursue a Ph.D. in Ancient Mediterranean Religions from Carolina's department of religious studies."

But his childhood experiences also led Erickson along another academic path, and this unique combination of skills and interests has allowed him to create a very specific research niche.



ABOVE: The exterior of the synagogue of Sepphoris.
RIGHT: Brad Erickson showing community members his virtual reality program that allows users to walk through models of ancient synagogues.

GRADUATE STUDENT PROFILE Brad Erickson



"As a kid, I always liked tinkering with computers. I built my first computer when I was a sophomore in high school,

using money I had saved from lifeguarding. I also loved playing around with computer programs that let me create new things from a blank canvas, such as 3D modeling software. But by the time I started college, I had given up what I thought was a hobby that I no longer had time to do."

That all changed during his second year at UNC, when the Research Laboratories of Archaeology (RLA) hosted a multi-day workshop on the process of making 3D models from 2D photographs. It was at that workshop that Erickson realized that his neglected childhood hobby was not only useful for the field of archaeology, but it was becoming a necessary tool to document cultural heritage and material culture.

"After taking the RLA workshop, I dove headfirst into exploring the uses of 3D modeling for archaeology. This exploration led to my dissertation

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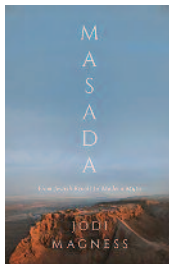


From the Director's Desk

By Ruth von Bernuth

*Seymour and Carol Levin Distinguished Professor
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Faculty Book: "Masada: From Jewish Revolt to Modern Myth," by the Center's Jodi Magness, is being released this spring by Princeton University Press. The book provides a new account of the famous site and story of the last stand of a group of Jewish rebels who held out against the Roman Empire.



It is so nice to have spring come to Chapel Hill, as it's always a time when students are



enjoying the campus and friends, whether biking to lunch, playing frisbee on the quad, or simply cramming for an exam under a tall oak. But it is especially enjoyable this year, after some very

difficult national events in fall semester. Please know that our faculty members are working closely with students as they navigate challenging times and try to make sense of their world. I won't pretend that we have all the answers the students need, but we are keeping an open door for them and doing our best to fuel conversations. One new initiative that our undergraduate intern is overseeing is having open hours at the Center, where students can just come in and do homework and be together in a quiet space on campus. Another group of

undergraduate students is now coming to the Center weekly to hold a Jewish studies reading/discussion group. The fact that our students are requesting time together for these academic pursuits demonstrates their amazing strength of character.

I hope you can experience springtime on campus as well, by joining us on April 13-15 for a conference honoring our late colleague, Jonathan M. Hess. **Moments of Enlightenment: German Jewish Interactions from the 18th Century to the Present**, will offer talks and discussions with many of Jonathan's colleagues and former students, with a focus on understanding German Jewish literature and culture.

Our lectures and student programs are only possible to organize because of your support, for which we are immensely thankful. Please let me know if you have any questions or wish to learn more about our Center's faculty, students and programs.

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topic, which analyzes the use of cosmological narrative in ancient Judaism, specifically, in the ancient synagogue. By that I mean that multiple ancient synagogues contain a zodiac panel within their

mosaic floor. These panels consist of a representation of the four seasons, the twelve signs of the zodiac, and the Greek sun god Helios. Due to the way many of these mosaic floors were preserved—and the era in which they were excavated—no high-detailed, fully-colored image exists of the entirety of these floors. For this reason, I traveled to Israel on a summer stipend from the Center to take photographs of the synagogue floor remains and turn those images into 3D models that users could view, rotate, and now even explore in a virtual reality environment. Being able to examine, measure, and study an archaeological site remotely thanks to the 3D models has allowed for new insights into several of the ancient synagogues.

"Research can unfortunately be expensive to pursue. Because of the supporters who have generously donated to Center, I have been able to complete projects that I otherwise could only have dreamed of."

While at Carolina, Erickson has received research and travel grants and summer stipends from the Center. He is currently the Center's Goodman Fellow, which comes with a full year of financial support so he can focus his energy on his dissertation.

"Research can unfortunately be expensive to pursue. Because of the supporters who have generously donated to Center, I have been able to complete projects that I otherwise could only have dreamed of. I am so thankful to the Center and the donors who have made my research possible."

In addition to his coursework and research, Erickson has worked at UNC Makerspace for two years making 3D prints, consulting on 3D modeling projects, and teaching and creating workshops for students, faculty, and staff. After completing his Ph.D. next academic year, he hopes to work in a university setting where he can continue to both teach and engage with digital archaeology.

Levin Professorship: Ruth von Bernuth, director of the Center and professor in the department of Germanic and Slavic languages and literatures, has been named the founding Seymour and Carol Levin Distinguished Professor. This professorship supports programming for the Center's students and faculty.



Antisemitism and the Jewish Experience in the South: If you missed our Oct 29 Margolis Lecture with NY Times reporter Jonathan Weisman, video of the talk is available to view on our Vimeo site [visit jewishstudies.unc.edu for the link]. This event, a conversation between Weisman and Ryan Thornburg, UNC School of Media and Journalism, focused on Weisman's book, "(((Semitism)))" and drew a crowd of 400 faculty, students and community members.



New Exhibit: Professor Gabrielle Berlinger's class, JWST 481: The Changing Lives of Jewish Objects, created a new exhibit that is housed in the Center's office in Pettigrew Hall. In December, the students held a reception for their exhibit: *Where Is My Grandparents' Hanukkah Lamp? Jewish Objects on the Move*.



A Summer of Travel and Reflection

By Kendra Watkins '19

In the summer of 2018, I had the opportunity to study pre-war Jewish life and the Holocaust in Poland with the Center's Karen Auerbach, associate professor, as part of the Burch Field Research Seminar. Though the program was only five weeks long, we were able to travel across the entire country, stopping in several cities and towns along the way.

Our program began not long after the Polish government approved a law which would limit free speech around the responsibility or collaboration of Poland and Polish citizens in the crimes of the Holocaust. We had the chance to meet with several journalists and historians to hear their perspective on what this law is meant to accomplish, and to learn about the social and cultural shifts of the last 20 years that led to it, as well as its impact on their own work. Being in Poland during this cultural shift led to many interesting



conversations with my classmates and gave me a new perspective through which to view the political situation here in the United States.

Over the course of the program we visited several concentration, death, and labor camps. While these visits were emotional, our encounters with Jewish death in Poland were counterbalanced with the complicated story of contemporary Polish Jewish life. The Jewish Cultural Festival in Krakow, in particular, highlighted the ways in which the preservation of Jewish culture in Poland is an intentional, collaborative effort on the part of both Jews and non-Jews, and those from Poland and abroad. This led me to think more deeply about the Jewish diaspora and the connection, or lack of connection, between diasporic communities.

Though I had learned about the Holocaust both in classes and from my community, being in Poland and experiencing the culture helped me to better contextualize the knowledge I brought to the experience and to build on it.

Throughout the trip, I spent time reflecting on the extent I was experiencing these sites as a student or as a Jewish person, and what it means when those two parts of myself come together. I knew that I would pursue Jewish studies when I transferred to UNC, and I'm glad that I was able to incorporate this study abroad experience into the Jewish studies program. I would like to offer my gratitude to Stuart Eizenstat, whose support enabled me to participate in this program, and also to the Gilman International Scholarship.



ABOVE: The travel group viewed photographs of Jewish heritage sites in Poland at the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow.

BELOW LEFT: Kendra with Eric Sklut '80, chair of the Center's advisory board and supporter of the Center's undergraduate internship program.

Kendra Watkins '19, is pursuing a sociology and Jewish studies double major at Carolina and holds an Associate in Arts degree from South Piedmont Community College. This academic year, she is serving as the Center's Lori and Eric Sklut Undergraduate Intern and she also works as a research assistant in the department of religious studies. The Texture of Memory summer 2018 trip to Poland, which was part of UNC's Burch honors study-abroad program, brought seven undergraduate students to sites of prewar Jewish life and the Holocaust throughout the country. This incredible learning opportunity received support from Stuart Eizenstat, '64, and was led by the Center's Karen Auerbach, associate professor and Stuart E. Eizenstat scholar, department of history.

▶ CAMPAIGN UPDATE

The accomplishments of the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies are direct results of generous donations from alumni and community members, and likewise, the future success of the Center will depend on private support. The unrestricted dollars provided by alumni and friends through the Fund for Jewish Studies have a tremendous impact on everything we do and annual gifts at all levels are essential for the Center to maintain its reputation for excellence while expanding its academic and public outreach programs for future generations. Donations made to the Center also count toward the fundraising goal of the Campaign for Carolina. You can use the enclosed gift envelope to mail in your gift, or use the online giving form, found on our web site. To learn more, please visit: jewishstudies.unc.edu.



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We're also on Facebook, Twitter, Vimeo, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn and our social media links are available on our home page jewishstudies.unc.edu.



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Please join us April 13–15

JONATHAN M. HESS SYMPOSIUM AT UNC CHAPEL HILL
MOMENTS OF ENLIGHTENMENT
German Jewish Interactions from the 18th Century to the Present

One way to encounter misrepresentations and stereotypes—and to understand its meaning—is to study history and culture. This was one of the scholarly goals of the late Jonathan M. Hess, who led the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies for its first 10 years, and later served as department chair of the department of Germanic and Slavic languages and literatures.



The Center is co-organizing, in collaboration with the department of Germanic and Slavic languages and literatures, a symposium honoring Hess and his work. The symposium will capture

the breadth and depth of his scholarship and teaching under the title: Moments of Enlightenment: German Jewish Interactions from the 18th Century to the Present and it will take place in Chapel Hill, **April 13–15, 2019**. The event is open to the public, no tickets or reservations required.

Saturday night, the conference opens with a keynote address by Martha Helfer, of Rutgers University, titled: Maurice Sendak's *Dear Mili: A Contrapuntal Elegy*. The next day is a full day of talks and roundtable discussions, which continue Monday morning. Nearly 50 colleagues and former students are scheduled to participate in the conference. The full program and all event details can be found online at: jewishstudies.unc.edu.

To honor Hess's commitment to supporting junior scholars and cultivating future faculty leaders, the College has established the Jonathan M. Hess Career Development Term Assistant Professorship. The fund, which will support a term professorship for a tenure-track assistant professor in the fine arts and humanities, was made possible through generous gifts made to the College in Hess's memory.