

# **Report of the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies**

**TWELFTH ACADEMIC  
YEAR 1983-84**



**Edited by  
RICHARD JUDD**

the proceeds were for charity.

35. *The Oxford Programme in Yiddish*. Last year's *Annual Report* described the consolidation of Oxford as one of the world's major centres for the study of Yiddish. From 1979 the Oxford Centre has hosted the quadrennial *International Conference on Research in Yiddish Language and Literature* and from 1982 the annual *Oxford Programme in Yiddish*. The Centre has also facilitated the essential research on the collection of Old Yiddish books in the Bodleian Library, a collection which contains many unique items and is the most complete in the world.

In what represents the first full-time academic appointment in Yiddish in the United Kingdom, the Centre now has its own Fellow in Yiddish, Dr Dovid Katz. Among the many achievements of this energetic young scholar has been the founding of the intensive one month summer course in Yiddish language and literature known as *The Oxford Programme in Yiddish*. This year the third *Programme* was held from 6 to 31 August and attracted a record number of 62 students from nine countries. The Faculty was also enlarged to provide an even wider coverage of subjects.

The number of instructors this year was increased to five. These were Mr Chris Hutton, 26, of Wolfson College, Oxford and Columbia University, New York; Dr Dovid Katz, Barnett Shine Fellow in Yiddish Studies at the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies and Director of Studies for the *Programme*; Mr Dov Ber Kerler, a graduate in Yiddish Literature from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who has just become Oxford University's first D.Phil. candidate in Yiddish studies; Mr Yitskhok Niborski, lecturer in Yiddish literature at the University of Paris VII; and Ms Elinor Robinson, of Columbia University and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York. It was noted that the programme featured the world's youngest faculty, and one of the most qualified. An entirely new development this year was the twice-weekly seminar on the history of all languages created by Jews, conducted by the world's leading authority on comparative Jewish linguistics, Professor Paul Wexler of Tel Aviv University.

The heart of the *Programme* was the intensive language instruction each morning from 9.30 to 1 p.m., which was divided into four levels: *Yiddish I* (elementary), *Yiddish II* (intermediate), *Yiddish III* (advanced) and *Yiddish IV* (higher advanced – a seminar on literature, stylistics and teacher training). In addition to extensive written daily homework at all four levels, students in the two higher levels were required to submit longer term papers. Topics chosen this year included the rise of the New York Yiddish theatre, the history of Yiddish folksong, and the impact of Yiddish on modern Dutch. Mr Niborski gave a course on the thematics of

mysticism in modern Yiddish literature while Dr Katz concentrated on the evolution of modern Yiddish stylistics.

In addition to workshops, Yiddish films and folk-music sessions, the afternoon and evening programme of supplementary activities featured a series of lectures by distinguished speakers. On 8 August the doyenne of the London Yiddish stage, Ms Anna Tzelniker, spoke vividly 'On the History of the London Yiddish Theatre'. The following day Mr William J. Fishman, Senior Fellow in Political History at Queen Mary College, University of London, delivered the Second Annual Avrom-Nokhem Stencl Lecture in Modern Yiddish Literature, with the title 'Morris Winchevsky and *Dos poylishe yidl*: 100 Years in Retrospect'. Winchevsky (1856–1932) was the first great Yiddish poet of London and the founder, exactly 100 years ago, of the first socialist Yiddish newspaper in this country. In contrast, the Avrom-Nokhem Stencl Lecture is named after the last great Yiddish poet of Whitechapel, A. N. Stencl (1897–1983). Stencl's poetry was itself analysed meticulously by Professor S. S. Prawer, FBA, Taylor Professor of the German Language and Literature in the University of Oxford. Professor Prawer entitled his lecture, which was delivered on 13 August, '*Dos finfte rod funem vogn?* Problems of a Yiddish Poet in London'. Dr S. J. Zipperstein, Frank Green Fellow at the Oxford Centre, lectured on 'Social and Cultural Characteristics of the Russian Pale of Settlement' and the following day, 16 August, Sholem Aleichem was honoured by a lecture commemorating the 125th anniversary of his birth in 1859. Dr Schneier Levenberg, the head of the Jewish Agency in Britain and an authority on Yiddish literature, entitled the lecture 'Sholem Aleichem: Man, Writer and Zionist'. Speaking in Yiddish, he laid stress on the humorist's celebrated visit to London in 1906 which resulted in his well-known chapter *London, farvos brenstu nisht?* (London, why don't you burn down?) recounting the struggles of the Whitechapel Jewish community. The vote of thanks was offered by Mr Hersh Smoliar, the Yiddish author who led a number of partisan groups in the forests of Eastern Europe during World War II. Mr Ian Mikardo, MP for Bow and Poplar, and Mrs Mikardo were among the guests at the lecture. Mr Hayim Pinner, the Secretary-General of the Board of Deputies, presided.

Another lecture in Yiddish was given by the veteran journalist I. A. Lisky, the editor of *The Jewish People*. On 20 August he addressed the *Oxford Programme in Yiddish* on the subject 'Tendencies in the History of the London Yiddish Press 1884–1984'. He concentrated on the social and political attitudes of various editors and journals since 1931, the year he settled in England.

On 22 August Mr Fishman made a second contribution to the *Programme*. He led the students on a historical walking tour of the East End of London, starting from the Whitechapel Art Gallery, Whitechapel

played a pivotal role in the westward expansion of Yiddish literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The following day Professor Carey S. Crantford introduced the students to a parallel phenomenon, in a lecture entitled 'The Persistence of Sephardi Culture and Vernacularism in the New World'.

The graduation ceremony took place at Yarnton Manor on 31 August 1984, and was addressed by Dr David Patterson, President of the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies. After the distribution of the Certificates of Completion (in English and Yiddish) a huge bouquet was presented to Ms Jean Nightingale, in recognition of her outstanding efforts in ensuring that the *Programme* ran efficiently.

So great is the level of interest in this intensive course that plans are being finalized for *The Oxford Programme in Yiddish 1985*.

36. *Classes in Yiddish*. As in previous years, the Centre provided classes in Yiddish throughout the year to members of the University and the wider public at its teaching rooms in the centre of Oxford. Classes were given at Elementary, Intermediate and (for the first time) Advanced Level by Dr Dovid Katz, the Barnett Shine Fellow in Yiddish Studies at the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies.

37. *Summer Colloquia at Yarnton Manor*. The Oxford Centre, resembling in this respect the University of Buckingham, organizes a Summer Term during the Long Vacation between the customary three. It has become a tradition that *Summer Colloquia* take place in the President's study at Yarnton Manor, at which the Summer Visiting Scholars of the Oxford Centre conduct seminars on a topic within their focus of research.

During the summer of 1984 the Yarnton Manor estate was occupied by a group of younger scholars of great ability, and it was from among these that the speakers were chosen. The series was organized and chaired by the Librarian of the Centre, Mr Richard Judd. Care was taken as far as possible to avoid clashes with the lectures held under the auspices of *The Oxford Programme in Yiddish*, described in paragraph 35 above.

The series opened with a well-researched paper by Dr Mitchell Cohen with the title 'First Clash: Origins of the split between Left and Right in Israeli politics'. The paper analysed the emergence of Jewish and Zionist political parties, the early evolution and rise of the Zionist Labour Movement and its conflict with the right wing Revisionists in the late 1920s and 1930s. It analysed the differing Zionist agendas of Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky and sought to explain the political victory of Labour as part of the prehistory of Israeli political parties.

Dr Daniel Boyarin followed with a stimulating lecture (in Hebrew)

entitled 'Literary Criticism and Text Criticism – A New Edition of the Mekhilta'. Giving examples from Lauterbach's edition of the *Mekhilta of R. Ishmael*, he showed how the biblical *lemmata* are totally integrated into the *darshan's* discourse. A new edition, he said, would need the joint skills of two disciplines, the skill of the philologist and the skill of the aesthetic critic. He stressed that a different sense is hidden in the manuscripts which was not fully recognized in the two previous scientific editions. Good as these are in their way, they failed to recognize the *literary* value in the variants among the manuscripts.

Professor Bernard Wasserstein, whose book *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939–1945* has become required reading on the subject, lectured on 'The Anglo-Jewish Leadership in the Nazi Period'. Professor Wasserstein began with the important point that there were no ethnic lobbies in British politics, in contrast to the situation in the USA. Although information about the persecutions of Jews was published from an early date on the front pages of the *Jewish Chronicle*, full recognition came slowly. The lecturer's conclusion was that any judgement on the behaviour of the Anglo-Jewish leadership during 1939–45 must be grey, not black and white; and he cited the fact that the Anglo-Jewish community spent over £3,000,000 on housing refugees in the United Kingdom.

38. The 6th Hebrew Scientific European Congress was organized by Brit Ivrit Olamit at University College, London, from 10 to 13 September 1984. Among the lectures given was one by Dr George Mandel, Fellow of the Oxford Centre, who spoke in Hebrew on Ben-Yehuda and Professor Joseph Halévy. On 13 September the Congress moved to the Oxford Centre's premises at Yarnton Manor, where after lunch and a speech of welcome by Dr David Patterson, two more lectures were given in the Long Gallery.

39. *Publications of the Oxford Centre*. The First Annual Avrom-Nokhem Stencl Lecture in Modern Yiddish Literature was delivered before the *Oxford Programme in Yiddish* on 4 August 1983. The lecturer was Professor S. S. Praver, FBA, Taylor Professor of the German Language and Literature in the University of Oxford, and the lecture has now been published by the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies. Professor Praver's text, in which he described Stencl, the poet of Whitechapel, as a 'great and complex modern poet', includes an appendix of Stencl's poetry in the original Yiddish. The lecture was edited and seen through the press by Dr Dovid Katz, the Oxford Centre's Fellow in Yiddish Studies.

The Dov Biegun Memorial Publications Fund was established at the

PROFESSOR A. HUSS worked on the translation from German into Hebrew of various scattered writings of Gershom Scholem. These writings, from the years 1917–1933 and referring to various subjects, have not been published before in any language and will be collected into a volume to be published soon by Am Oved. They provide a great deal of information about the inner development and the attitudes of a unique and prominent personality in the field of modern Hebrew studies.

MR R. C. JUDD assisted in the editing of many of the Centre's publications, including *Oxford Centre Papers* and *Centre News*, and compiled and edited this *Annual Report*. He organized and chaired the *Summer Colloquia* at Yarnton Manor during August 1984. His review of Michael N. Dobkowski (ed.) *The Politics of Indifference* was published in the *Journal of Jewish Studies* vol. XXXV, no. 1 (Spring 1984).

DR S. KAMIN converted her Ph.D. thesis for the Hebrew University of Jerusalem into a book to be called *Peshuto shel Mikra u-Midrasho shel Mikra*. It will be published by the Magnes Press and examines Rashi's exegetical categorization with respect to the distinction between *Peshat* and *Derash*. Dr Kamin served as a tutor on medieval Jewish exegesis and lectured both at Leo Baeck College, London, and the Oxford seminar *Problems of Jewish History and Literature* chaired by Dr G. Vermes. Both lectures dealt with various aspects of the relationship between Rashi's exegesis on the Song of Songs and Christian exegesis on the same book. She continued her research on the relationship between medieval Jewish and Christian exegesis of the Old Testament, and wrote three book reviews which will appear in the *Journal of Jewish Studies*.

RABBI S. KARFF completed a first draft of an essay entitled 'The I and the We: Judaism's Resources for Personal Religion'. The essay addresses the question of how a tradition which regards the concept of Israel as an ontological entity accommodates the individual Jew's need for a personal relationship to the sacred. Rabbi Karff focused on rabbinic midrash and medieval *musar* literature, and he writes that it was a rare privilege to examine portions of Israel Al-Nakawa's *Menorat ha-Ma'or*, a 14th century work whose only extant manuscript is part of the Bodleian Library (Ms. Opp. 146).

DR D. KATZ served as Director of Studies of *The Oxford Programme in Yiddish* and taught the courses *Yiddish III* and *Yiddish IV* which formed part of it. He taught classes in Yiddish throughout the year at the Centre's teaching rooms in the centre of Oxford. In December 1983 he represented the Oxford Centre at the Annual Meeting of the American

Association of Professors of Yiddish in New York City, and at a series of meetings in Amherst, Massachusetts, during January 1984 he negotiated an agreement in principle with the National Yiddish Book Center for the one-time purchase of a ready made library in Yiddish Studies. This would serve the needs of Oxford students studying Yiddish as an option towards the BA in Modern Languages, the M.St. and M.Phil. in Modern Jewish Studies, and for M.Litt. and D.Phil. research degrees; the purchase will be effected, on behalf of the Taylorian Library, as soon as the necessary funding materializes. Meanwhile he co-ordinated a book-collection project to enhance the Yiddish holdings of the Taylorian Library. Dr Katz worked with Professor Mikhl Herzog (who was a Visiting Scholar at the Centre for 1983–4) on Volumes I and III of the *Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry*. He delivered a lecture entitled 'From Regensburg to Oxford: the first thousand years of Yiddish' before Oxford B'nai B'rith, and co-ordinated public relations on the Centre's historic progress in Yiddish Studies. His contribution 'Hebrew, Aramaic and the Rise of Yiddish' was published in J. A. Fishman (ed.) *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages* (Leiden, 1984) pp. 85–103, and he edited and saw through the press Professor S. S. Prager's *A. N. Stencl: Poet of Whitechapel*, which was the first Annual Avrom-Nokhem Stencl Lecture in Modern Yiddish Literature delivered before the *Oxford Programme in Yiddish* during 1983. Aptly, it was published by the Oxford Centre itself in July 1984. Dr Katz reviewed Joshua A. Fishman (ed.) *Never Say Die! A Thousand Years of Yiddish in Jewish Life and Letters* (The Hague, &c., 1981) in a review article entitled 'On the Sociology of Yiddish' in *Jewish Frontier* (New York), vol. li, no. 2 (541), (February 1984) pp. 25–7.

Under work in progress, Dr Katz did further work on his forthcoming book *Christian Studies in Yiddish, 1514–1862*, and his *Yiddish I. An Introductory Grammar* is to be published by Duckworth of London. The Tagore Institute of Creative Writing, Besantnagar, Madras, India is to publish an essay of his on Yiddish language and poetry, and his article 'Joseph Herz and Western Yiddish of the Early Nineteenth Century' will appear in *Nachrichten für den jüdischen Bürger Fürths* (published by the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Fürth). His essay on the historical reconstruction of the Semitic component in the earliest Yiddish, with special reference to phonology, will appear in a volume edited by Professor B. Hrushovski of Tel Aviv University, and an essay on the genres of pre-nineteenth century studies in Yiddish will be part of the forthcoming Festschrift in honour of Sol Liptzin, edited by Mark Gelber of the Ben Gurion University of the Negev.

DR E. LIEBER continued to edit and translate the hitherto unpublished medieval Hebrew encyclopaedia attributed to Asaph the Physician.