Content

Conversion and Ideology: Variations of the Theme

Keren Abbou Hershkovits

Conversion to Islam had many implications for a person, in particular for the legal status of those who converted individually. Should previously married couples be set apart? What happens to children? Are they to be converted automatically when their parents convert? And what about situations in which a grandfather converts, does it have any implication pertaining to the legal, religious and spiritual status of his grandchildren?

All these questions received continuous attention throughout the ages by different scholars of different legal affiliation. While legal discourse is usually very clear and ascertains that a Muslim woman should not be married to non-Muslim, anecdotes portray a somewhat different reality and that patriarchy might have had far more grey to it than black and white.

I will suggest that the diversity of narratives indicates that reality was far less rigid than legal discourse conveys. The gap between legal discourse and various narratives suggest that the assumption according to which medieval narratives are nothing but a contemporary construction of the past portraying idealized figures and episodes must be re-examined. This lecture will focus on episodes of converting spouses and children, and discuss the prevailing patterns and choices of people: those who leave their home (parents, spouses), those who choose to remain at with their family, and those who trigger conversion.

Conversion through Concubinage in the Cairo Geniza Documents

Moshe Yagur

One of the ways to convert to Judaism in medieval times was through slavery. A slave purchased by Jews was immersed in a ritual bath, males were circumcised, and the slaves were obligated to observe some of the commandments. Yet the slaves were not fully converted, and were considered "no longer gentiles, but not yet Israelites". Upon manumission the slaves were considered fully converted, and were allowed to join the Jewish fold. This path of conversion was known and practiced, as can be learned from the Cairo Geniza documents.

In my talk I will focus on an understudied type of conversion to Judaism, and that is conversion through illicit concubinage. I will argue that examining the gendered aspect of manumission reveals a recurring pattern in the Jewish society of medieval Islam. By this pattern, Jewish male owners who had sexual intercourse with their non-Jewish female slaves (which was illegal according to Jewish law), were incentivized to manumit them, or to deny their slave and gentile identity altogether. This habit is attested to in sources of different genres, in the Geniza and in contemporary sources. By this pattern, Jewish male sexual desires were a key factor in the identity change of female slaves – from slavery to freedom, from gentile to Jewish, and from single to married. Occasionally we can even look at cases were gentile identity of the female slave, or of her children from such illicit intercourse, was hidden or outright denied, sometime with the cooperation of religious leaders.

As part of my talk I will survey a few documents which will demonstrate this phenomenon from different aspects. Using these examples I will then discuss issues stemming from this pattern, such as agency in conversion, conversion and socialization (especially through marriage), gender in conversion and manumission, and questions of ownership, identification and identity.

Family ties and religious conversion seen through legal sources from the early Islamic period

Uriel Simonsohn

Conversion to Islam in its early centuries posed a variety of social problems to legal scholars of different religious backgrounds. In addition to questions pertaining to communal affiliation, economic transactions, ritual requirements, and legal status, collections of legal opinions and regulations highlight the problem of familial commitments. It is in this context that Muslim and non-Muslim legal authorities issued opinions and instructions in matters of inheritance, the religious identity of children, burial procedures, the validity of marital and levirate bonds, and more. Seen from a social historical perspective, legal deliberations and stipulations allow us a cautious peek into the intimate realm of private households. It is here in this private sphere of social life, often concealed from historiographic records, where converts and their family members were often found amidst a subtle tension between communal and family loyalties. In this talk I will survey a sample of legal cases found in Islamic, Jewish, Christian, and perhaps also Zoroastrian, legal sources in an attempt to discuss the challenges posed by conversion to Islam to family households in the early Islamic period.

Jewish-Christian Dialogue in 18th Century German Hebraism

Ofri Ilany

The paper will deals the relation between Jews and Christians within 18th Century German Hebraism. In the 18th century, German universities became the center of biblical scholarship in Europe. German scholars published dozens of works about the Old Testament, examining the Bible's compilation as well as the historical events it describes. German poets, translators and thinkers, primarily Protestant, adopted the Hebrew Model as a cultural ideal.

One of the presumptions of the Christian Hebraist ideal is the essential distinction between "Hebrews" and "Jews". Nevertheless, despite its Christian character, Hebraist discourse was relatively accessible to Jews, facilitating various kinds of relations, albeit limited, between Christian and Jewish writers. The lecture will survey a few such interactions throughout the eighteenth century.

The Relationship between the Jewish Leadership and the Muslim Government in 12th Century Egypt - New discoveries from the Cairo Geniza

Amir Ashur

In some cases, the Jewish leadership had to apply to the Muslim government to take action in Jewish internal affairs. In this paper I will show some examples for such interference and will uncover for the first time a new discovery from the Geniza that might be connected to the leadership controversy that divided the Jewish community at the last decades of the 12th century - between Maimonides and Sar Shalom Halevi.

Between Jews and Christians:
Messianism in Early Modern maps of the Holy Land

Pnina Arad

The proselyte Abraham bar Yaakov, who lived in Amsterdam at the end of the 17th century, is known from the Passover Haggadah that he engraved in 1695 (the so-called "Amsterdam Haggadah"). In an unprecedented and innovative manner, bar Yaacov incorporated a map of the Promised Land in the cycle of illustrations of the Haggadah. In the context of the Passover Seder, the map was meant to convey the principal message of the Haggadah: to recall and commemorate the Exodus and to reinforce the expectation of a future salvation and a return to Zion.

Bar Yaacov's map belongs to an early modern group of Jewish and Christian maps of the Promised Land that show the Exodus. In this lecture, I aim to examine some of these maps in light of the messianic beliefs that prevailed in the Low Countries at the time. I aim to show that the map of the Promised Land was not just a nostalgic cartographical depiction of the land, but a platform to express actual religious perceptions and inter-faith dialogue.

Conversion of Place and Intertextual Utopia in Antonio León Pinelo's
El Paraíso en el Nuevo Mundo

Cynthia Gabbay

My study offers a poetic reading of *El paraíso en el Nuevo Mundo*, written in 1656 by a Spanish *converso*: Antonio León Pinelo. The author grew up in what would later be Argentina and completed his studies in Peru. Later he served the Spanish crown as its official Chronicler of the Indies. He knew the American landscapes well and, even more so, the bibliography written on those lands – a topic on which he wrote while demonstrating his abnormal genius and erudition in the *Epítome de la Biblioteca Oriental y Occidental* (1629). His work *El Paraíso* seeks to demonstrate that the Biblical Paradise was placed in the Amazon, a case he proves by a detailed knowledge of the facts, while using diverse theological and geographical sources in different languages, including Hebrew. My study will focus on the semantic fields used by León Pinelo in order to depict an exact mosaic of his paradisiacal utopia. While the author decided not to publish the immense work (composed by a thousand pages) during his lifetime because of the fear of being accused of being a Judaist or a crypto-Jew (his grandfather was burned by the Inquisition following similar accusations), this creation faithfully represents the utopian spirit of his era that looked to enlarge geographic as well as spiritual frontiers.

Back to Jerusalem: A Chinese Christian Vision of Globalization

Gideon El'azar

"Back to Jerusalem" is a Chinese Evangelical movement based on a symbolic geography of Christian expansion. The movement contends that throughout history, Christianity has spread westwards from its origin in the Holy Land to Europe, the New World and finally, in the modern era to East Asia. According to the movement's vision, it is the emerging Chinese church that has been allotted the divinely ordained task of spreading the gospel further, through the Muslim , Buddhist and Hindu countries laying to the west of China and all the way back to Jerusalem. Completing the full circle of the globe will mark a triumph for Christianity and hasten the coming of the messianic age. Accordingly, with the funding and encouragement of western Evangelicals, the movement plans on sending out 100,000 missionaries to different destinations in Asia and the Muslim world.

In this lecture, I will attempt to explain the Back to Jerusalem movement as a Christian commentary on the current process of China's rise to power. Through analyzing the was the Chinese state employs the "silk route" metaphor and based on the movement's written material as well as interviews of Back to Jerusalem activists, I attempt to demonstrate the way the movement's vision mimics the state's efforts to promote its centrality within the Asian continent. At the same time, at the micro level, I will also address the movement as a means for Chinese individuals to build a new life for themselves outside of China.

Connections and loyalties in the early Islamic era – the Muakha

Bat Chen Druyan

In 622 Muhammad migrated from Mecca to Medina with a few of his followers, the Muhajirun. In Medina they were received and supported by the Ansar, the converts to Islam and early followers of Muhammad in Medina. When the Muhajirun arrived, the Prophet formed alliances of brotherhood (*mu'akhkha*) between them. Most of the couples were composed of one Muhajir and one of the Ansar, but there were several important exceptions. The brotherhoods were a new social institution in the Arabian Peninsula that has received little attention from scholars of early Islam.

In this lecture, I will examine several couples and offer observations about their social characteristics. I will inquire about the social standing of each of the couples – were they of similar backgrounds? Similar social standing before Islam? Was this a means for merging the Ansar with the Muhajirun and creating a new type of social bond?

Based on my readings so far, I propose to view the Muakha institute as a social experiment initiated by the Prophet to merge between Ansar and Muhajirun. A close reading of the sources suggests that this social experiment of the Muakha institution was not very successful, since we do not have examples from later periods and it seems that the Prophet abandoned this project.

An analysis of a mass conversion event: the case of Lecce in 1495

Nadia Zeldes

An important distinction should be made between forced conversions ordered by rulers, and pressure to convert coming from popular elements. The second type is usually characterized by certain features common to most such events: a generalized state of anarchy, riots, sack of property, destruction of debt notes, threats of death, or outright massacre. The mass conversion of the Jews of Lecce (in the Kingdom of Naples) in March 1495 belongs to the second category and displays many of these features.

This lecture will strive to isolate the elements necessary for the occurrence of a mass conversion event, and at the same time point out the special circumstances surrounding the forced conversion of the Jews of Lecce.

The Catholic Community in Ethiopia during the Gondärine Period:
A Socio-Historical and Intellectual Profile (1632-1668)

Leonardo Cohen

Over the past fifteen years, there have been considerable advances in the research on the Jesuit mission to Ethiopia (1555-1632). For several decades after its establishment, the Society of Jesus focused its efforts and resources on converting the Ethiopian Empire to Catholicism. The early years of this enterprise yielded marginal gains. However, from the early seventeenth century, though, Catholicism managed to position itself as an important religious and political force in the royal court. Emperor Susənyos went so far as to receive communion in 1622, thereby inaugurating a decade in which Catholicism was the empire's official religion. However, the land was concomitantly beset by internal strife, which culminated in Susənyos' resignation, his successor's decision to revert back to the Orthodox faith, and the expulsion of the Catholic Patriarch.

The aim of the proposed paper is to suggest an outline for the history of Ethiopia's Catholic community in the aftermath of these difficult setbacks. Furthermore, I hope to discern the Catholic Reformation and Iberian mindset during this period by means of a rigorous analysis of the Catholic literature that was written in Ethiopia at the time. As the official religion of state, Catholicism permeated different sectors of Ethiopian society and became a potent cultural force. A case in point is the bevy of monks and nobles that embraced the Latin faith and remained loyal to the Jesuits even following their ouster. In sum, I am proposing a micro-history that will examine the development of a small community through the lens of its daily activities, which were shaped by the socio-historical events of the day. To this end, the study will delve into the background of the community's members, the ways they expressed their unique communal Catholicism, the group's cultural, ritualistic, and intellectual features, and its relations with political factors. Moreover, I will grapple with the question of how this community survived for thirty years under precarious conditions.

The Cultural History of Muslim-Christian Polemics in the Crusading Near East

Uri Shachar

The thirteenth century saw a remarkable surge in the number of polemical tracts that were composed and disseminated in the Eastern Mediterranean. Both Muslim and Christian authors became involved in cycles of polemical exchanges that lasted for decades. This corpus was viewed as an intellectual inflection of the militant hostility that is frequently associated with the period of the crusades, a hostility that is all too often imagined to have been aligned on, and further entrenched rigid religious fault lines. Recently, however, scholars have begun to reconsider the nature of this exchange, allowing for the possibility that this unusually energetic polemical correspondence is, rather, a reflection of unique conditions that enabled a constructive dialogue. The rhetorically anti-Muslim epistle written by Paul of Antioch, for example, is seen to have triggered this series of spirited responses precisely because it provided Muslim scholars with hermeneutical tools to view their own religion in a helpful manner. The following talk seeks to trace and characterize the intellectual and cultural circumstances that made such interchange possible. It dwells on a wide range of narrative sources, in romance, Arabic, and Hebrew which give account to the ways in which authors viewed inter-religious polemical dialogue, as a mutually stimulating form of intellectual exchange.

The Ambiguous Figure of the Jew in Javanese Literature

Ronit Ricci

In his article "Global and Local in Indonesian Islam" (1999) Martin van Bruinessen mentioned briefly the rise of anti-Semitism in Indonesia, noting that translations from German, Russian and English via Arabic have had great impact on modern Indonesian attitudes towards Jews and Judaism. What were some prevalent images of the Jews in an earlier period, when much of the literature was translated or adapted from Arabic and Persian sources and prior to the dissemination of European ideas and biases?

In this paper, I explore how Jews were represented in several eighteenth and nineteenth century Javanese manuscripts. I consider perceptions and imaginings of Jewish protagonists, Jewish history and the relationship of Judaism to Islam and Christianity in a land where 'real' Jews were virtually unknown. I suggest that despite their absence Jews, and perceptions of them, were significant in the formation of Javanese-Muslim identities.

""Wink-Wink" Conversion, "Win-Win" Conversion: Dramaturgical Collaborations in Contemporary Giyyur in Israel"

Michal Kravel-Tovi

Over the last two decades, the conversion of non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union to Israel has sparked a heated debate among policy makers, rabbis, politicians and diasporic communities. Prominent among these debates are questions and suspicions regarding the sincerity of FSU converts as well as the sincerity, or religious integrity, of the conversion agents themselves.

In this presentation, I problematize the common skeptical Israeli views of "wink-wink conversion" as a mutual deception based on agreed-upon lies, wherein conversion agents are perceived as permitting candidates to present falsified religious personas. Alternatively, I maintain that the actual performance evades a clear line between sincere and fraudulent conversions.

Suggesting an account of morally-loaded and deeply-engaged "win-win conversion," I distinctively show how the Jewishness of both the Israeli state and Israeli citizens is coproduced.

I further argue that this "co-production" is dramaturgical in nature. Both sides of these institutional relations are preoccupied with questions of religious sincerity. Alongside these preoccupations, conversion candidates and state agents also become enmeshed in mutual practices of what sociologist Ervin Goffman describes as impression-management, role-play, and "passing." Rather than flagrantly learning to pretend at piety, as cynical observers may contend, conversion candidates learn from teachers, rabbis, and other court bureaucrats how to play the role of a credible convert.

Implicitly, and yet unmistakably, conversion agents direct, stage, and fine-tune believable conversion performances, helping to construct the very performances they wish to endorse.

Power Struggles, Democracy and Religion –
Religious Conversion in the Indian Secular State

Ayelet Harel-Shalev and Noa Levy

In many democracies, constitutionally, the official character of the state in no longer defined in religious terms. In secular states, consequently, the state ensures freedom of religion to its citizens and do not tend to intervene in individuals' beliefs. The topic of religious conversion, nevertheless, might present a challenge to the secular nature of the state. India constitutionally declared its secular and democratic characters. At the same time, the Indian case illustrates a continuing discomfort with religious conversion; particularly, religious conversion to non-Indic religions. The unique socio-political reality of India, comprising caste, a history of recurring conquests, forced conversion and delicate inter-religious relations, affects religious-related policy making in the predominantly Hindu state. The research analyzes power struggles and alterations in India's policy directives vis-à-vis the phenomenon of religious conversion from 1947 until the present by mapping legislation and jurisdiction in India that has affected religious conversion.

Conversion and Secularization: Transition options from Judaism to Christianity and the making of modern Jewish identities

David Sorotzkin

The lecture will examine two basic paradigms of Judaism in Christian discourse in the middle ages and early modern period. The first, Judaism as unchangeable entity which cannot be transformed by conversion; the second, Judaism as rabbinic "shell" that can be removed through conversion. The first paradigm can be traced, among others, in some expressions of Petrus Venerabilis (d. 1156), in the praxis of the Spanish inquisition, in the later writings of Martin Luther (d. 1546). Later, during the Enlightenment, it is found in statements made by Johann Gotlieb Fichte and other opponents to Jewish emancipation, and in anti-Semitic conceptions of Jews. The second paradigm draws from a classic conception of conversion. In the early modern period in can be traced, among others, in Christian ethnographic accounts on Jews, some of which written by converts. This later paradigm is transformed, in late modern times, into a liberal conception of Jews. The lecture will demonstrate the ways by which these two paradigms shaped various sides of Jewish secularization.

"Soon in Our Days...."
Temple Mount as a Junction of National- Religious Beliefs

Sarina Chen

Along the history Temple Mount was a destination for many conquests that had dramatically changed its surfaces and had given the holy site different religious identities. The desire to convert the identity of the site was an integral part of the plans of every political power until the British conquest.

Today, on site, there are Muslim sanctuaries. While Christian pilgrims "see" there the second Temple building that was destroyed almost two thousand years ago, Jewish zealots groups foresee on the same place the future and desired Temple.

The lecture exams the dialectic way the Temple Mount activists are framing and shaping the desired Temple and convert the excising Muslim scope to a "Jewish territory". It will be shown by analyzing maps, internet sites and photomontage picture of Jerusalem.

Between Dream and Experience – Comparing the Two Stories of the King of the Khazars Conversion to Judaism in *The Kuzari*

Ehud Krinis

Judah Halevi's famous theological treatise *The Book of Refutation and Proof on Behalf of the Despised Religion* (*Kitāb al-radd wa'l-dalīl fī al-dīn al-dhalīl*), commonly known in its Hebrew translation as the *The Kuzari*, includes two stories depicting the conversion to Judaism of the King of the Khazars – one of the book's two main protagonists. The first story, located at the beginning of Book I of the treatise, attracted much scholarly attention whereas the second story, located at the beginning of Book II – almost none. Against this scholarly background, my lecture will seek to demonstrate that the second conversion story, which is the more elaborate and comprehensive among the two, is also the more relevant one to the *The Kuzari*'s overall message.

Umar Ibn al- Khattab's Conversion: Narrative, History and Society

Alon Dar

'Umar ibn al- Khattab's conversion to Islam in 618AD (some argue 616) was celebrated as a victorious event by the evolving Muslim community. His highly esteemed status in Mecca, combined with his physical strength, helped the community to withstand the pressures placed on them by the Quraysh. Due to its importance, it is not surprising that the sources present different versions of this event.

By scrutinizing several of these accounts, this article uses 'Umar's conversion as a case study for the understanding of conversion in early Islam. First, it explores the way conversion to Islam was perceived and told in its first centuries, as well as how future chroniclers added new dimensions to the story. Second, it seeks to shed light on the Muslim community in Mecca by examining the tribal, social and political turbulence that conversion caused.

'Almost a Christian': Uncertainties and decisive factors on the threshold of baptism from late Medieval Germany

Ahuva Liberles Noiman

Understanding those who chose to exclude themselves from Judaism or at least chose not to return to Judaism after baptism is a step on a different path on the way to a better understanding of the Jewish community through its boundaries. Based on Hebrew and German resources from late medieval German Lands, many of them not published or examined until now, this research focuses on converts and almost converts who tell first hand of a large spectrum of Jewish identities that shift from Christianity to Judaism and are influenced by new and former religious, economic and family ties.

"*¿Qué cosa es, señor, mandar su alteza quitar los vestidos moriscos?*
Conversion, Clothing and *Moriscos* in Early Modern Spain"

Carla Ramos García

In 1566 the *Morisco* Núñez Muley addressed a *Memorial* to the President of the Royal Court and Chancery of the City and Kingdom of Granada to ask for the cancellation of the Pragmatic which forbade different *Morisco* practices. Among those practices was the special clothing of this group. Núñez Muley's defense exemplifies the polemic that was carried out around *Morisco*'s costume since the forced conversion of the Muslims in Spain at the beginning of the XVI century. It was a process that included other cultural practices (like food) and other religious groups (especially Jewish converts) and through it the authorities tried to demarcate the boundaries of the orthopraxis over the orthodoxy. In order to succeed, they insisted in the categorization and the suppression of the practices that they considered inherent in other belief. But, on the opposite side, other personalities like Núñez Muley tried to defend those habits.

I will focus my presentation on the discussion about this topic that took place in Spain in the Early Modern Period, and I will consider the function of clothing during the conversion process, that is, how and why the costumes identified the *Moriscos* with their former religion.

Self-Hate, Identity and Conversion: The Case of Jewish Supporters of the BDS

Yair Neuman, Dan Assaf and Yochai Cohen

Voluntary conversion has been traditionally associated with treason and self-hate. From a psychological perspective, conversion involves a rejection of a certain collective identity in favor of another and as such is hypothesized to be accompanied by self-hate. Since the emancipation, converted and assimilated Jews have been hypothesized to suffer from self-hate although there is no consistent empirical research supporting this hypothesis. One possible and indirect way of examining this self-hate hypothesis, emerges from the analysis of assimilated Jews who are active in anti-Israeli boycott movements. They define themselves as Jews, clearly identify with the idea of assimilation, and selectively operate against Israeli-Jews. In this study, we aim to address the challenge of testing the self-hate hypothesis by analyzing a massive number of texts and by using state-of-the-art scientific tools of data analysis. Overall, we have retrieved and automatically analyzed 1508 texts written by Jewish anti-Israeli bloggers. The findings may be summarized as follows:

- Anti-Zionist Jewish supporters of boycott movements define their Jewish identity in contrast with Jewish-Israeli identity.
- They conceive themselves as emancipated Jewish liberals who are in an identity conflict with the "barbarian" and "fascist" Israeli-Jewish.
- According to the collective representations presented in the analyzed blogs the Jewish writers describe themselves as introverts and the Israeli Jews are described as extravert, arrogant and paranoid.

These findings are in line with previous conceptualizations of self-hate among Jews and provide us with a deeper understanding of psychological aspects associated with logic of the conversion.

Elijah the Prophet in Medieval Europe: Master Converter or Defender of Obstinate Refusal?

Chana Shacham-Rosby

Elijah the biblical prophet appears in post-biblical and apocalyptic literature, both Jewish and Christian.

This lecture will focus on Elijah's character in relation to conversion in medieval Germany/Ashkenaz. While Christian apocalyptic narratives cast Elijah as successfully converting the remaining Jews, for Jews Elijah was a symbol of staunch loyalty to their faith. The lecture will explore how these conflicting perceptions of Elijah's figure were expressed and possibly aware of each other.

Prophecy, Conversion and 'Religion'
in the Letters of Benedictus Sebastian Sperling

Alexander van der Haven

The archives of the *Geistesministerium* of Hamburg hold two letters from Amsterdam that Benedictus Sebastian Sperling wrote to his mother in 1682, explaining to her the ground for his conversion from Lutheranism to Judaism. These letters reveal a subculture in which religious conversion and prophecies of the end of time are grounded in a concept of 'religion' that although it tends to declare the 'truth' of one religion over the others, is not exclusivist. In the letters Sperling wrote that while he had converted from the Lutheran faith to Judaism, his conversion should not negatively affect their warm filial relations because although Judaism holds the correct interpretation of the Bible, both Judaism and Lutheranism – as well as Calvinism and Islam – had specific, positive, roles to play in what Sperling thought was the unfolding scenario of the end of time. In this scenario, Sperling claimed, Lutheranism and Calvinism served as the heralds of the end of days as well as the two forces that would facilitate the main condition for the messianic era to begin, the return of the Jews to their ancestral homeland. My lecture will explore how Sperling understood the relationship between his conversion and his eschatological expectations, and how these were fundamental to the genesis of a general notion of 'religion' as a cross-denominational phenomenon. I will also place Sperling's views in the context of Jean Bodin's influential notion of a universal religion as well as more contemporary eschatological views popular in Hamburg and Amsterdam, such as that of the Danish self-proclaimed messiah Oliger Paulli and the convert Moses Germanus (Johann Peter Späth).

On Falling Angels and Flying Maidens: Between Judaism and Christianity and between Myth and Reality in Medieval Europe

Avital Davidovich Eshed

The myth of the falling angels and the effects of their presence in our world, in its biblical variation of the encounter between the sons of God and the daughters of man (Genesis 6:1-4), captured the imagination of medieval Jews and Christians. Jewish exegesis and Midrash literature often present this story as an expression to the deterioration of humanity and as one of the motives for God's decision to erase his creation with the flood. This line of interpretation reappears in different medieval Ashkenazi Jewish sources. These sources articulate the sin of the angels, describing its outcomes and portraying the deeds of the angels since. These stories are raising fundamental theological questions concerning the existence of evil and its role, the nature of sin, the possibility of salvation, the limits of movement between the human and the divine, and more. They also touch upon a fundamental cultural question concerning the importance of boundaries and the consequences of breaking them.

The paper will discuss Jewish and Christian traditions regarding the story of the falling angels, and will point to the ways in which these traditions, which deal with the dramatic encounter between well-separated categories, reflect on their medieval authors perspectives regarding the cultural encounter between Judaism and Christianity. The way in which the mythological encounter – in the vertical dimension between heaven and earth – reflect on the historical cultural encounter – in the horizontal dimension between Jews and Christians.

Alonso Fernández de Madrigal, and the Christian Biblical Criticism of the 15th Century

Yosi Yisraeli

The *converso* crisis of the 15th century has famously facilitated new kinds of anti-Jewish literature and policies. In the struggle against the successful assimilation of converts into their Christian environment, long standing anti-Jewish elements of Christian thought were re-organized into a discriminatory and segregational ideology that depicted the Jewishness of *conversos* as an eminent threat to the spiritual and political prosperity of the Christian society. Not the least of theses "threatening" Jewish qualities was the use of Hebrew language and especially of Hebrew Scriptures. By the end of the century, the ownership of a Hebrew Bible, let alone a recitation of Hebrew verses, were considered (occasionally) as a credible evidence of judaizing. However, this antagonism towards the Hebrew was not immediately forged, and in the decades before restrictions were enforced, the influx of learned Jewish converts indeed left an impact on Iberian (Christian) biblical studies.

This chapter in the history of Christian scholarship has not been fully explored yet, and in this paper I intend to address one of its principle characters: Alonso Fernandez de Madrigal (c.1410-1455) – the bishop of Ávila, a prominent scholars and a key figure in the University of Salamanca (who was not a convert). As we shall see, in his extensive biblical commentaries Madrigal expressed some highly un-common views with regard to the literal sense and the authority of the Hebrew language, which served as a base for his loud criticism of the Christian translations and exegetical traditions of the Middle Ages. In just few years, some of his ideas would be considered heretical in the Iberian Peninsula, a fact that may account to their abandonment. Yet some of these notions, I will argue, have anticipated similar trends in the Italian so called "biblical humanism," that was taking its first steps toward Hebraic studies in those years.

Contextualizing Balthild's Ring Conversion and Hegemony in Seventh-Century East Anglia

Yaniv Fox

In 1998, a farmer and metal-detector aficionado made an amazing find in a field outside Norwich: a tiny gold ring. The ring was in fact a seal matrix, which bore on its obverse the name BALDEHILDIS, otherwise known to have been the name of a famous Merovingian queen (and, posthumously, a saint) of Anglo-Saxon origin, Balthild. On the reverse, the seal had an engraving of what seems to have been a couple engaged in a sexual act. What could this possibly mean? Did the ring belong to the queen and if so, how are we to understand the additional imagery it contained? And how could one explain its peculiar location, moreover? Since it was uncovered, the ring has garnered much scholarly attention, the most recent of which rejecting its association with Balthild.

In this paper I shall offer an alternative explanation, placing the ring in the context of Frankish religious and political hegemony over the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the late seventh century.