

**EAJIS Conference Grant Programme 2019/20**

***REPORT***

***Annual Conference of the British and Irish Association for Jewish Studies***

***World in Crisis: Reflections and Responses from Antiquity to the Present***

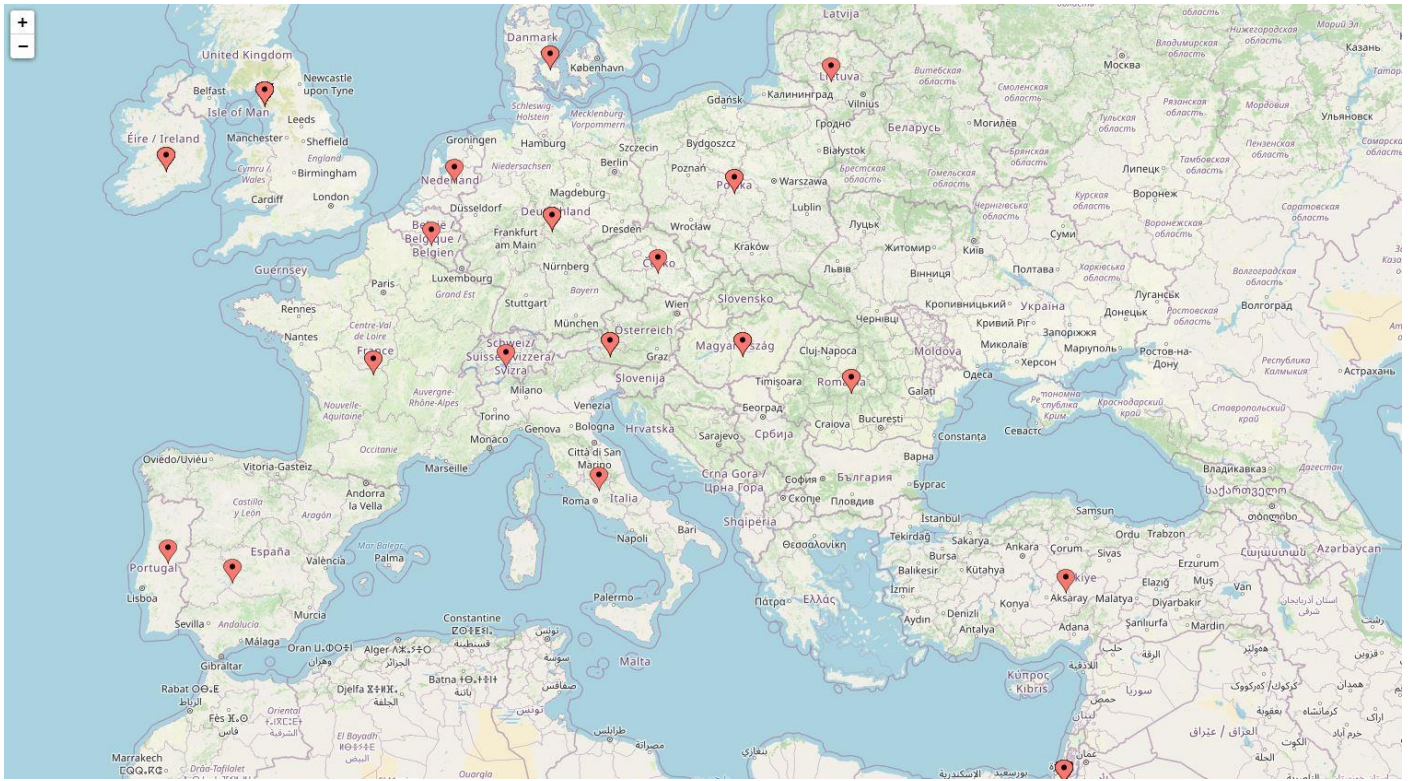
***Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/non-Jewish Relations and University of Southampton, UK***

***5-7 July 2021***

The Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/non-Jewish Relation of the University of Southampton was honoured to host the annual conference of the British and Irish Association for Jewish Studies (BIAJS) from 5-7 July 2021. The theme for the conference was ‘World in Crisis: Reflections and Responses from Antiquity to the Present’ and was a timely and important opportunity to explore significant, longstanding or contemporary issues of crisis and response, and the place of Jews, Judaism and Jewish Studies within this. The conference theme was designed to facilitate the exploration of Jewish perspectives on a world in crisis, whether real or imagined, in different spaces from antiquity to the present. The conference aimed to bring together scholars from diverse academic disciplines to explore Jewish perspectives of dramatic or perceived social, political, historical, ideological or religious change, originating from within Jewish worlds and without. The conference assessed Jewish engagement with change and crisis throughout history from the local to the transnational, including within the context of relationships with non-Jews.

The Parkes Institute of the University of Southampton was the official host of the BIAJS conference. The conference was originally due to be held in July 2020, but due to the pandemic was postponed for a year. As it happened, an in-person conference was still not possible in 2021, and so the conference moved to an online format. The organising team used a conference platform called whova, which ensured effective management of all the online sessions and zoom links. It also ensured a level of security for the conference. While some aspects of meeting in-person were missed, the fact that the conference was online ensured BIAJS was able to reach wider and more diverse audiences, scholars were able to participate that would normally find the travel difficult or expensive, and the lack of travel contributed to reducing the carbon footprint of the conference.

The theme of the conference proved to be of interest to a diverse range of scholars. The Call for Papers initially went out in 2019 and was reissued in 2020 after the conference was postponed. BIAJS received over 250 proposals over the course of the two years. Of the proposed papers, 170 were delivered during the conference. 253 colleagues registered and there were 236 active attendees throughout the conference, so the conference saw a high level of sustained engagement despite the online format. The following maps plot the reach of the conference and show attendees by country. They highlight the truly international and global nature of the conference. The first map represents countries with attendees around the world, and the second map focuses on countries in Europe:



The programme for the conference covered diverse chronologies, geographies, languages and disciplines in Jewish Studies. Papers highlighted the multiplicity of Jewish approaches to a world in crisis from resistance to rationalisation, whether literary or visual, and with an interdisciplinary perspective that characterises Jewish Studies. The conference provided a forum for reflection and critical contributions to significant, long-standing or contemporary issues of crisis and response, and the place of Jews, Judaism and Jewish Studies within this. There were 60 sessions during the conference, two keynote lectures and a final plenary panel.

A great deal of attention was given to planning the intellectual coherence of each session, which usually consisted of three papers (20 minutes per paper followed by 10 minutes of questions), although some sessions had two or four papers. The vast majority of papers spoke to the theme of the conference and broadly speaking covered subjects such as Jews and theological, religious, philosophical or ideological crisis, Jews and political engagement or activism, cultural or social crisis and responses, Jewish literary explorations of crisis whether real or imagined, visual representation of crisis in museums, art, film and television, antisemitism, nationalism and populism, reception, legacy and re-imagining of crisis, and also challenges to concepts of crisis in Jewish history and culture. As usual with BIAJS conferences, papers on topics unrelated to the conference theme were also very welcome as an opportunity to discuss current work-in-progress.

Inclusivity was a foundational principle in the planning of the conference. The intention was to have mixed gender panels throughout, and the range of paper proposals meant that mixed panels were possible in the vast majority of cases, but there were still a number of single-gender panels. In particular, there were 12 all-women panels, and 5 all-men panels out of 60 sessions in total. The majority of all-men panels were in the pre-modern sessions, and the majority of all-women panels were in the modern sessions. The organisers also successfully aimed for a range of career stages to be represented across and within each session. The sessions were organised across five or six parallel strands as follows:

Monday 5 July 2021

09:45-10:15		Introduction: Helen Spurling and Claire le Foll				
Session	Strand A	Strand B	Strand C	Strand D	Strand E	
10:30-12:00	1 <i>Kingship and Crisis</i>	<i>Religious Crisis in the Medieval Period: From law to liturgy</i>	<i>Yiddish Responses to the Khurbn</i>	<i>'Orthodoxy' facing Crisis 16th-21st Centuries</i>	<i>Antisemitism and Activism</i>	
12:00-12:15	Post-Session Networking					
12:15-13:00	Break					
13:00-14:30	2 <i>Intermarriage as a Question of Crisis</i>	<i>Crisis in Communities in the Early Modern Period</i>	<i>Yiddish Culture in Modern Britain</i>	<i>The Crisis of Modernity</i>	<i>Antisemitism around the World</i>	
14:30-14:45	Post-Session Networking					
14:45-15:15	Refreshment Break					
15:15-16:45	3 <i>Jewish/non-Jewish Relations in Late Antiquity</i>	<i>Transmission of Knowledge in the Face of Crisis</i>	<i>Yiddish Theatre and Poetry</i>	<i>Identity Crisis in Modernity</i>	<i>Crisis in Communities in the Modern Period</i>	
16:45-17:00	Post-Session Networking					
17:00-18:00	<b>BAJS Annual General Meeting</b>					
18:00-18:30	Refreshment Break					
18:30-19:30	Keynote Lecture <b>Hindy Najman</b>					

Tuesday 6 July 2021

		Strand A	Strand B	Strand C	Strand D	Strand E
09:00-10:30	4	<i>Contact and Conflict with Hellenic Culture</i>	<i>Apocalypticism from the Emergence of Islam to the Crusades</i>	<i>Aspects of Zionism</i>	<i>Diasporic Jewish History: Theory and Response</i>	<i>Challenges for Rabbinic Leadership</i>
10:30-10:45		Post-Session Networking				
10:45-11:15		Refreshment Break				
11:15-12:45	5	<i>Crisis in the Second Temple Period</i>	<i>Who would save us? Competing messianic models in rabbinic literature and the Zohar</i>	<i>Challenges of Zionism</i>	<i>Post-Holocaust Philosophy</i>	<i>Jewish Heritage in/and Crisis I: Memorialisations</i>
12:45-13:00		Post-Session Networking				
13:00-14:00		Break				
14:00-15:30	6	<i>The Temple and Responses to its Destruction</i>	<i>Responding to the Violence of 1391</i>	<i>Response to Crisis in Eastern Europe</i>	<i>The Holocaust</i>	<i>Jewish Heritage in/and Crisis II: Museum Crisis and Critique</i>
15:30-15:45		Post-Session Networking				
15:45-16:15		Refreshment Break				
16:15-17:45	7	<i>Interpreting Abrahamic Crisis Narratives</i>	<i>Teaching and Children's Publications in Times of Crisis</i>	<i>Approaching Crisis through German-Jewish Writings</i>	<i>Photography Capturing Crisis</i>	<i>Jewish Heritage in/and Crisis III: Museum history and politics in the Israeli context</i>
17:45-18:00		Post-Session Networking				
18:00-18:30		Refreshment Break				
18:30-19:30		Keynote Lecture <b>Stefanie Schüler-Springorum: 'Missing Links: Religion, Race, Resentment'</b>				

Wednesday 7 July 2021

		Strand A	Strand B	Strand C	Strand D	Strand E	Strand F
09:00-10:30	8	<i>Rabbinic Sources that Define Historical Crisis Situations</i>	<i>Antisemitism: Informal Discussions</i>	<i>Crisis in American Art and Literature</i>	<i>Contested Spaces in Britain</i>	<i>Jewish Heritage in/and Crisis IV: Museum and display politics</i>	<i>Perspectives on Family, Gender and Sexuality</i>
10:30-10:45		Post-Session Networking					
10:45-11:15		Refreshment Break					
11:15-12:45	9	<i>Crisis and Response through Psalms and Poetry</i>	<i>PGR/ECR Career Development Session</i>	<i>American-Jewish Identities</i>	<i>Migration to Britain</i>	<i>Jewish Heritage in/and Crisis V: Libraries/archives and Crisis</i>	<i>Jewish Marriage outside the State Rabbinate in Contemporary Israel</i>
12:45-13:00		Post-Session Networking					
13:00-14:00		Break					
14:00-16:00	10	<i>Grammar, Calendars and Manuscripts</i>	<i>Approaches to Biblical Crises</i>	<i>Exploring Activism</i>	<i>Researching Jews and Muslims as figures of alterity in contemporary Europe</i>	<i>Jewish Heritage in/and Crisis VI: Round Table Discussion</i>	<i>Multidisciplinary Tools for Resolving Worldwide Conflicts in the Jewish Family: Between Jewish law and Civil law</i>
16:00-16:15		Post-Session Networking					
16:15-16:45		Refreshment Break					
16:45-17:45	11	<i>Crisis and Comparative Literature</i>	<i>Music and Conflict</i>	<i>Concepts of the State of Israel</i>	<i>Lithuania in the Twentieth Century</i>	<i>Approaches to Ritual</i>	
17:45-18:00		Post-Session Networking					
18:00-18:30		Refreshment Break					
18:30-19:30		Plenary Panel <b>Jewish Studies Addressing Questions of Crisis</b>					

Our two keynote speakers were women with deeply impressive research profiles and outstanding records in academic leadership – special thanks go to Hindy Najman and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum for agreeing to take on the important role of keynote-speakers. Hindy Najman from the University of Oxford is Oriel and Laing Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture and Director of the Centre for the Study of the

Bible in the Humanities. Her rich and thoughtful lecture on ‘Crisis and Recovery in Ancient Judaism’ considered narratives of loss and dislocation in ancient Jewish texts, and explored ways of recovering hope and life after fear and loss. Stefanie Schüler-Springorum is Director of the Center for Research on Antisemitism, Co-Director of the Selma-Stern-Center for Jewish Studies, and also Director of the Berlin branch of the Center for Research on Social Cohesion. Her thought-provoking lecture was on ‘Missing Links: Religion, Race, Resentment’, which explored the relationship between religion and racism in European Judeophobia from pre-modern to modern times.

In addition to the two keynote lectures, there was an important final plenary panel on ‘Jewish Studies Addressing Questions of Crisis’. The speakers represented a range of institutions involved in Jewish Studies in the UK and consisted of Maria Diemling (Christ Church Canterbury), Hannah Ewence (Chester), Charlotte Hempel (Birmingham) and Adam Sutcliffe (King’s College London). This session was a significant opportunity to discuss questions of crisis and response across chronologies and how work in Jewish Studies can contribute to understanding and addressing questions of crisis – whether longstanding or contemporary. Each panellist offered reflections both on themes that had emerged from the conference, but also issues facing Jewish Studies today, including representing the importance of our work in the face of challenges to the value of humanities and social sciences, as well as what we can do as scholars in Jewish Studies to contribute actively beyond academic circles to major issues relevant to our field.

In addition to the keynotes and plenary panel, the conference held two special sessions embedded within the programme:

The first of these special sessions was a dedicated space for informal discussion and support around dealing with antisemitism in a Higher Education setting. The session was chaired by members of the BIAJS ‘Antisemitism working group’ established in January 2021. The working group aims to support those who face issues around antisemitism whether in working life, policy-making at institutional level, or teaching, and the goal is to offer research expertise and professional support for those in Jewish Studies who are facing challenges associated with antisemitism. This session at the conference was one of the first initiatives to emerge from the group, and it provided a space where conversation was led by the concerns of attendees on issues related to antisemitism and the ways in which BIAJS could offer support.

The second special session was a dedicated space for early career researchers. The session was led by BIAJS Committee member Katharina Keim, who is the Association’s postgraduate and early career researcher representative. This session focused especially on offering a networking opportunity and support for doctoral students and early career researchers and provided a space for discussion of experiences of research in Jewish Studies during a pandemic. It is a priority of BIAJS to cultivate the next generation in Jewish Studies, and the organisers were delighted to include the participation of a noteworthy number of doctoral students and early career researchers in the conference with 67 papers offered by those at this stage of their career. Due to a significant grant from the European Association for Jewish Studies (EAJS), the organisers were able to make the conference free to attend for all doctoral students and early career researchers in Europe. In addition, substantial donations to the Parkes Institute meant that the organisers were able to extend the offer of free attendance to all doctoral students and academics currently without a full-time permanent position beyond Europe. The organisers are hugely grateful for the support of the EAJS and donors to the Parkes Institute.

A particularly successful innovation at the conference was the inclusion of informal networking time. Space for networking was embedded in the programme after each session and before the breaks to provide an opportunity for the introductions and discussions that usually underpin conferences between sessions.

These sessions were fully utilised throughout the conference and provided an engaging means of making new professional links or renewing existing contacts, and continuing discussions begun in the formal part of the sessions. It provided a much-needed means for participants to connect with each other.

In the case of a conference of this size and with so many parallel sessions, it is difficult to give a detailed overview of all sections and papers that comprised the event, and reflection on the discussions, questions and answers that followed each presentation. Nonetheless, different members of the BIAJS committee and Parkes Institute were able to attend the vast majority of the sessions and it is clear to all that the quality of the papers was outstanding and the level of discussion was very high indeed. Papers addressed crisis in a variety of arenas of life from the political to the existential, and analysis of reactions to and representation of times of crisis did much to shed light on diversity within the Jewish experience in different contexts. A number of approaches or key questions emerged across different geographical contexts and chronologies, especially questions of antisemitism, the challenges of modernity, cultural responses to crisis (including a number of papers on Yiddish), reception history and comparative analysis in exegesis, and understanding historical, religious or philosophical crises. There was also a major strand consisting of six sessions on 'Jewish heritage in/and Crisis' which was organised by Eva Frojmovic (Leeds) and highlighted the current importance of this area of research in Jewish Studies. The conference achieved its goal of bringing together scholars working on diverse aspects of Jewish Studies to address the theme of crisis, and there is no doubt that new thinking and research directions were debated and discussed. The conference really highlighted the relevance and vitality of Jewish Studies, but also just how much Jewish Studies can contribute to thinking about questions of crisis, and strategies for moving on beyond crisis.

The organisers are indebted to all those who contributed to the planning and organisation of the BIAJS annual conference. The BIAJS committee and the board of the Parkes Institute were instrumental in the planning and organisation of the conference. The conference received excellent support from the Digital Coordinator of the Parkes Institute, Katie Power, along with Claire Wilkins who was vital in helping on the administrative side. Each session had a technical host who are doctoral students of the University of Southampton, and who expertly and professionally ensured the smooth running of the conference: Anoushka Alexander-Rose, Hannah Capey, Ben Giordano, Emily Hooke, Dora Vrkic, Zack White and Nicola Woodhead. Abaigh McKee compiled the conference booklet with great diligence and attention to detail. Finally, the organisers would like to emphasise again their gratitude for the support of the European Association for Jewish Studies.

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