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International Interdisciplinary Conference
January, 14–15 2025

Before the Statue of Apollo: Jews and the Classics in the Longue Durée

Unitobler, Lerchenweg 36, F 005

Organized by:
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Throughout history, Jewish culture has maintained a complex and multifaceted relationship with the Greco-Roman world, marked by both fruitful exchange and tense conflict. As Shaul Tchernichovsky's poem "Before the Statue of Apollo" (1899) poignantly reflects, this "ancient quarrel" characterized antiquity and reverberates into modernity. In antiquity, coexistence was not always peaceful, both from a political and from a religious-cultural point of view: The celebration of Hanukkah marks the conflict between the Maccabees and the "Hellenized Jews" (mityevanim) against the Maccabees; later, Rome, the destroyer of the Second Temple, was identified with Edom, the Biblical enemy of Israel.

Nonetheless, the contribution of the Greek and Roman world to Jewish culture is undeniable: For example, in terms of literary and intellectual history, the coexistence "under the same roof" generated a broad array of Jewish texts in Greek and brought about a productive encounter of Judaism with Platonism and Neoplatonism; linguistically, over three thousand linguistic loanwords from Greek and Latin are attested in rabbinic literature and in the Talmud; as for the arts, the decoration of ancient synagogues is clearly influenced by Graeco-Roman artistic models. In modernity, the understanding of the ancient encounter of Judaism and the classical world became key to the construction of a new, modern Jewish identity as well as to the definition of its relationship with non-Jewish culture.

Inspired by Tchernichovsky's fascination with classical culture, this interdisciplinary conference brings together a diverse group of scholars from various disciplines, backgrounds, and institutions to critically examine this multifaceted relationship. We broadly define this interaction as encompassing cultural, linguistic, literary, artistic, philosophical, religious, and lifestyle aspects. By transcending specific eras and fields of study, we seek to explore this dialogue in a *longue durée* perspective, from antiquity to the present day.

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Tuesday, 14.01.2025

- 9.30 René Bloch, Antonio Dell'Acqua, Giacomo Loi
Welcome and Opening Remarks
- 10.00 Catherine Hezser, SOAS University of London
The Significance of the Classical World for the Science of Judaism
- 10.30 Jodi Magness, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Alexander the Great and the Elephant Mosaic at Huqoq
- 11.00 Coffee Break**
- 11.20 Zeev Weiss, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Dining at the Table of the Rich: The Adoption of Roman Dining Customs in Jewish Circles
- 10.50 Ann Killebrew, Penn State University
The Impact of the Graeco-Roman World on Jewish Funerary Practice and Imperial Cults in Roman Palestine (1st Century BCE - 3rd Century CE): The Archaeological Evidence
- 12.20 Discussion
- 13.00 Lunch**
- 14.30 Antonio Dell'Acqua, University of Bern
Nero, Iudaea and the Jews: A Roman Emperor Seen from a Jewish Perspective
- 15.00 Steven Fine, Yeshiva University
Before the Statue of ... Titus: Roman Material Culture in Rabbinic Tales of Titus and the Gnat
- 15.30 René Bloch, University of Bern
Beyond Josephus: Where There Secular Jews in Graeco-Roman Antiquity?
- 16.00 Coffee Break**
- 16.20 Simon Goldhill, University of Cambridge
Do Jews Take Their Clothes off Too?
- 16.50 Discussion
- 19.30 Conference Dinner**

Wednesday, 15.01.2025

- 9.30 Giacomo Loi, University of Haifa
What's Jewish About Jewish Classical Reception? Or: The Anxiety of Belonging and of Difference
- 10.00 Katell Berthelot, CNRS – Aix-Marseille University
Jews and the Discourse of Citizenship: From Antiquity to Modern Times
- 10.30 Maren Niehoff, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Roman Models for the Interpretation of the Sabbath in Hellenistic Judaism
- 11.00 Coffee Break**
- 11.20 Miriam Leonard, University College London
Greeks and Jews: Myth-Making in "The Birth of Tragedy"
- 11.50 Francesca Gorgoni, Bar-Ilan University
The "Hebrew Homer". Homer the Poet in Jewish Medieval Philosophical Sources: A Survey
- 12.20 Discussion
- 13.00 Lunch**
- 14.30 Piero Capelli, University of Venice
How Much "Greek Wisdom" in the Hebrew Bible? On Hellenic Literary and Philosophical Models in the Song of Songs and in Qohelet
- 15.00 Anna Angelini, University of Siena
Talking Nature Between Jewish and Greek Tradition
- 15.30 Coffee Break**
- 15.50 Vered Lev Kenaan, University of Haifa
Marc Chagall's Odyssey
- 16.20 Adam Goldwyn, North Dakota State University
Antisemitism and Philhellenism in the Life and Work of Jewish Translators of Cavafy
- 16.50 Discussion and Final Remarks