

The Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania

The creation of academic centers for Jewish studies, which are rapidly multiplying on campuses across North America and abroad, is a relatively recent phenomenon. These centers represent a departure from traditional programs of higher Jewish learning located in theological seminaries, which exist on the margins of academic programs of history and religious studies or in separate, Jewish studies programs at contemporary colleges and universities. The Center for Advanced Judaic Studies (CAJS) at the University of Pennsylvania, both in conception and in name, has forged a new model of postgraduate Jewish research, one that encompasses the text-based focus of traditional Jewish learning integrated within the framework of the humanities, and supported by a variety of innovative library resources and technologies.



Front page of Haggadah assembled by CJS 2000 Fellows (Christian Hebraism), image from frontispiece Latin translation of Haggadah, printed in Frankfort an Oder, 1519

The Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at Penn was established in 1993 with the merger of the University of Pennsylvania and the

Annenberg Research Institute, the successor to Philadelphia's Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning. Dropsie College, founded in 1907, was the first accredited graduate institution in the world to confer doctorates in Jewish studies. It awarded over 200 doctoral degrees in almost eighty years of existence. With the rise of university-based Jewish studies programs, the need waned for an independent, non-sectarian, non-theological college for Jewish studies open to Jews and non-Jews, men and women, regardless of financial ability. In 1986, under the leadership of Dropsie's president, David Goldenberg, with the vision of

its Chairman of the Board Albert Wood, and with the extraordinary generosity of Walter Annenberg, the College was transformed into a postgraduate academic research institute. Annenberg committed thirty million dollars, the largest gift he ever made to a Jewish-sponsored institution, in support of a "trialogue" to foster understanding among the world's three monotheistic faith communities. During this transitional period, Goldenberg revived *The Jewish Quarterly Review (JQR)*, the longest continuously published English-language journal of Jewish studies, originally founded in England in 1888. Since the 1993 merger, the *JQR* continues to appear under the aegis of the CAJS.

Today, under the dynamic leadership of David Ruderman, the Joseph Meyerhoff Professor of Modern Jewish History and Director of the CAJS, and with

the support of a devoted staff, the Center has defined its mission anew "to illuminate all aspects of Jewish learning and culture, from antiquity to the present, and to share that knowledge with the world." Each year, distinguished scholars from around the world convene in Philadelphia to ponder a chosen research theme. By design, and in keeping with the model first inaugurated during the Annenberg years, the group consists of a diverse mix of senior and junior fellows—men and women, Jews and non-Jews, each trained in an equally diverse set of disciplines and methodologies. A number of CAJS fellows regularly teach courses at Penn each year, thus broadening the range of courses offered on an annual basis. Ruderman has created a local and national lecture series that enables fellows to share their learning with the general public. Previous years' research topics include biblical history through the multiple perspectives of text, archeology and art history; Hebrew poetry and Haskalah, Christian Hebraism; modern Jewry and the arts (visual, musical, and performative); and most recently Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Biblical exegesis in comparative perspective.

The Center offers a unique environment in which to fulfill its mission. The CAJS is located in the heart of Center City Philadelphia, a block from historic Independence Hall and across the street from the American Philosophical Society, the first learned society in America founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1743. The Center's architecturally award-winning building, completed in 1988, provides a

quiet, beautiful space for intensive research. At the same time, scholars interact at weekly seminars in which they present, discuss, and debate their specific projects. The results of their research are delivered at a three-day public colloquium in the spring of each academic year.



Reading Room at the University of Pennsylvania

Ultimately, the fruits of the conference are published in an annual academic series issued by the University of Pennsylvania Press. By the end of each year, what had been a disparate collection of strangers invariably forms into a working community.

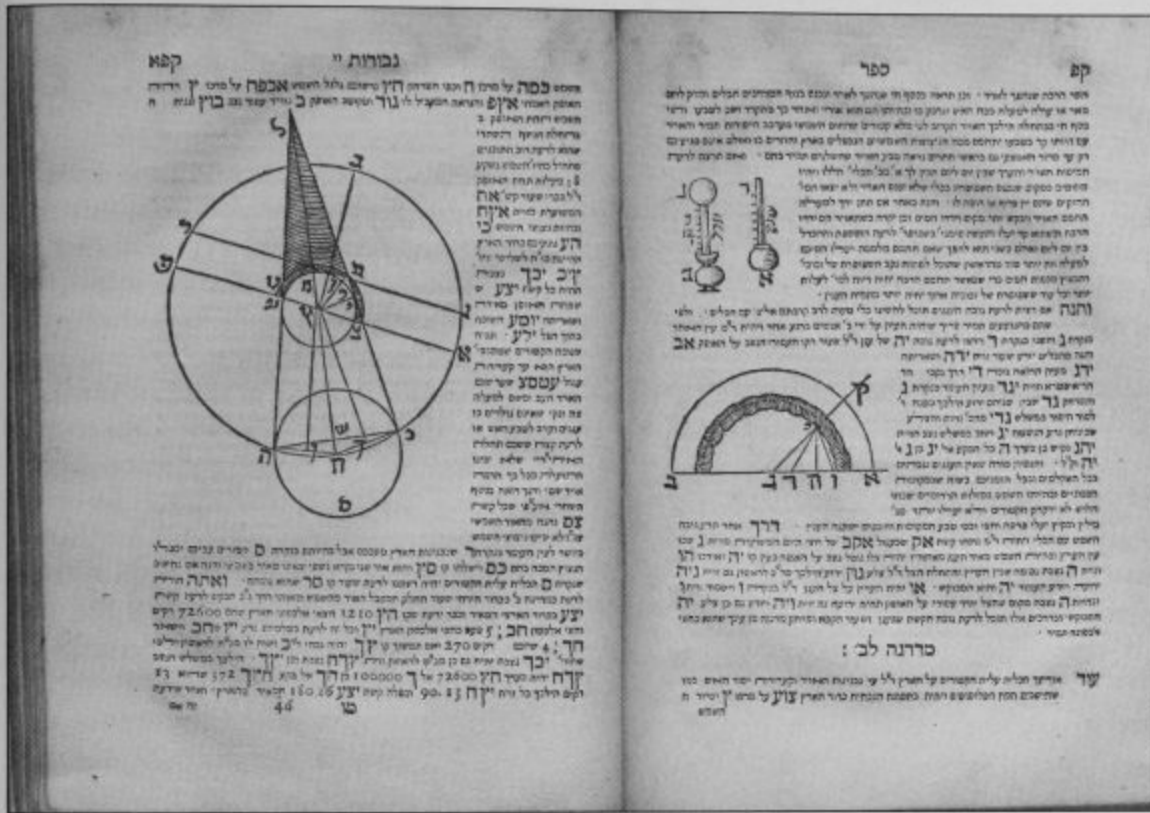
The Center's library plays a key role supporting the fellows' research. Inherited from Dropsie College, the CAJS collection contains approximately 180,000 volumes, including some 8,000 rare books, 32 incunabula, about 450 medieval manuscripts in 24 different languages and dialects, over 500 fragments from the Cairo Genizah, and a variety of scrolls, tablets, and other three-dimensional archeological artifacts. When combined with Penn's pre-existing Judaic and Ancient Near Eastern collections, Penn's overall Judaica holdings amount to nearly

400,000 volumes. This total forms one of the world's largest collections and is also qualitatively representative of the variety of Jewish experiences from Biblical times to the present day. Also noteworthy among the CAJS library's holdings are its strong collections of Judaica Americana, including the institutional archives of Dropsie College and the personal papers collections of a number of prominent nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Philadelphia Jewish leaders, such as Isaac Leeser, Sabato Morais, Mayer Sulzberger, and Cyrus Adler.

The Center and its library staff have collaborated on a number of projects. David Stern, director of Penn's Jewish studies program, conceived an

annual workshop to train interested scholars, advanced graduate students, and library professionals in the history of the Jewish book. In the spring of 2001, the CAJS hosted the first Manfred R. Lehmann Master Workshop on this subject. The workshop was taught by a former CAJS fellow, Malachi Beit-Arie, professor of codicology and paleography at the Hebrew University, and drew upon rare medieval manuscripts from the CAJS library. Similarly, this year the library has received funding to collaborate with Cambridge University Library to digitize Genizah fragments. Stefan Reif, the director of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah collection at Cambridge and a former CAJS fellow, is now working in concert with the Penn library staff to scan, catalog and create on-line links to thousands of fragments dispersed around the world.

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Diagrams from Solomon Delmedigo's *Sefer Elim* (1628), first book in Hebrew to demonstrate and advocate Copernican heliocentric model (Delmedigo studied in Padua with Galileo).

The CAJS fellows and the library also work together to mount an annual on-line exhibit highlighting the year's research theme. Each fellow contributes a brief caption explaining the significance of a particular text or image in his or her research. Seth Jerchow, the public services librarian and Web master at the CAJS library, scans the materials from the library's own collections and designs and

mounts the final exhibit. In this way, the library is able to document and disseminate scholarly activity at the Center by drawing on the unique set of individuals who come to the CAJS on an annual basis. The library's Web site www.library.upenn.edu/cjs, which is open to the public, offers one of the most comprehensive compilations of on-line Jewish

studies resources and links to the Center's Web exhibitions.

The concentration of Judaic resources at Penn—its CAJS fellowship program and exhibitions, its Jewish studies program and prize-winning faculties, its library resources and projects, its vibrant Hillel program, and its outstanding undergraduate and graduate students—has produced a new experience of Jewish learning in the university, one of pluralism, diversity, interdisciplinary creativity, and cutting-edge research. Jewish studies, once alien to

academic centers, now is itself, under the impact of the CAJS, front and center in Penn's humanities curriculum.

For more information about the CAJS, its library and programs, see: www.cjs.upenn.edu/

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