



Student Views on the MPhil in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (Pathway A: Muslim-Jewish Relations) at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge



Elisheva Rosen-Malkiel

Two days before Passover 2017, just after my return to Israel from Cambridge, a young Israeli man was shot by a Palestinian. That evening, I was sitting at a bus stop in Jerusalem feeling afraid and hopeless. The bus arrived and as I got on I noticed that the entire interior was covered in silver foil. This was a timely joke, playing on the custom of many Jews to cover their kitchen counters with silver foil for Passover. This gesture, performed by the bus driver, was intended to make people laugh and to brighten the days of his passengers. The bus driver was an Arab.

The complexity of any relationship, particularly the one between Muslims and Jews, is difficult to understand from the outside. If you're not living a relationship, it can feel challenging, if not nigh impossible, to understand it. Or at least that's how it usually is. In the MPhil in Muslim-Jewish Relations, it didn't feel that way at all. The discourse was respectful but diverse, open but bold. The teachers displayed professionalism and scholarly integrity and expected us to do the same. The deep understanding of the intricate and complex historical and contemporary relations between Muslims and Jews was evident.

Coming from the conflict zone that epitomises the dispute between these nations, it was extremely meaningful for me to take a step away from my personal experiences and delve into the rich history of these nations. I learned of the strong ties between Jews and Muslims and how each community delicately (and sometimes forcefully) made its mark on the other. This was made all the more powerful by having the opportunity to work on some of the Cairo Genizah manuscripts, widening the story of the relationship for me. Touching volatile topics with such a diverse group of students made it a challenging and enriching experience for me.

Looking back, I think the most powerful part of studying MJR was how empowering it was. I was lucky enough to be guided by the most talented teachers. They had trust in me, patience and professionalism. They helped me gain new skills and advance my research expertise. Most importantly, I was given the independence, confidence and tools to develop my ideas with academic rigor and honesty, without compromising on my desire for creativity. My teachers changed the way I perceive myself and my capabilities, on an academic, professional and personal level.

Today, back in Israel, I will be running a programme designed to empower and aid Ethiopian women to reach their academic potential. I advance towards this role with a prayer that I will be able to pass on what I received when studying MJR: to provide these women with the trust and tools to fulfil their potential and grow confident in themselves as intelligent, capable and creative women.



Gretchen Belnap

This programme allowed me to critically engage historiographies of Muslim-Jewish relations from both the pre-modern and modern period. Delving into the Cairo Genizah (a repository of medieval Jewish manuscripts) and the scholarship thereof has markedly changed the way I perceive scholarship of historical Muslim-Jewish relations, and has furnished me with the tools to engage historiographies of the Middle East and North Africa with an eye to the centrality of documentary (and further, archaeological) material in such endeavours. The Woolf Institute provides regular opportunities to engage with scholars in related fields, and to participate in a number of lectures, workshops, and conferences related to the study of religion and society. I consider such experiences an equally important part of my study and training at Cambridge.



Madeleine Ary

This course was intellectually rigorous and stimulating, requiring me not only to engage deeply with the religious and cultural history of these two intersecting faiths, but to step back and gain a wider, theoretically grounded view of interfaith exchange across civilizations and centuries. I could not have asked for more dedicated instructors; they willingly took on the extra role of mentor, helping me feel almost immediately at home in this new intellectual community. Their guidance and recommendations helped launch my career spectacularly. I am exactly where I had hoped to be in my career, and much of it is due to the experiences I gained from this course.



Mohammad Shomali

Completing the MPhil in Muslim-Jewish relations at the University of Cambridge has been an incredibly enriching experience. The course provides many opportunities to see each topic from many different perspectives which is a very significant achievement especially in a field like Muslim-Jewish relations. All different sides are presented, and students are not only allowed but also encouraged to form their own opinion independently. Of course, the course is very demanding, yet I felt well supported at all times. The course instructors are knowledgeable, helpful, and very approachable. The students are also from diverse backgrounds which adds to the value of the experience. This MPhil course has been a highlight in my life.