

REPORT ON THE 12TH CISMOR CONFERENCE ON JEWISH STUDIES

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The Twelfth Annual CISMOR Conference on Jewish Studies (CJS12) was held in Kyoto, Japan on September 30 and October 1, 2023. CISMOR is the acronym for the Center for Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions, at Doshisha University. The Center has been holding international conferences on Jewish Studies in relation to the other monotheistic religions or to Japanese culture, annually or biannually, since 2005. The proceedings of the conferences are edited and published in print and online.

CJS12 was organized – as was CJS10 reported on *HHE* 23 – through a collaboration between CISMOR, Doshisha University’s School of Theology, and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev’s Heksherim Research Institute for Jewish & Israeli Literature & Culture, with the participation of numerous scholars from Japan, Israel, USA, and Europe. The title and theme of the conference was: “Garden, Orchard and Nature in Jewish and Japanese Culture, Literature and Religion.” It was the fourth conference of the twelve held so far to explore religious and cultural aspects in modern Japanese and Hebrew literatures, following CJS6 (which focused on the revival of Hebrew culture), CJS9 (dedicated to the work of Yoel Hoffman) and CJS10 (the place of Christianity in modern Hebrew and Japanese literatures).

The current conference was divided into seven sessions, the first of which began with greetings and opening words by the host, Ada Taggar Cohen, the director of CISMOR. This was followed by two papers. Shimon Adaf of Ben-Gurion University read a paper titled “Looking for the Real: The Case of the Garden,” in which he argued that modern Hebrew writers had to deal with the traditional religious Jewish way of viewing nature with suspicion. In his own writing Adaf has been trying to merge the Jewish traditions and the Modern Hebrew cultural sensitivities, often by reinterpreting the concept of the Garden, one of the most charged images in Jewish mysticism. Hanna Soker-Schwager, also from Ben-Gurion University, introduced a study titled “The Scent of Oranges and Yellow *Calicotome* Flowers in Anton Shammas’ *Arabesques*,” describing parts of her dialogue with the author who left Israel soon after publishing

his seminal novel, and his constant movement between Arabic and Hebrew.

The second session was devoted to the Japanese side of the conference. Aida Yuen Wong of Brandeis University spoke about “Confucian Morality in Japan’s Daimyo Gardens.” Analyzing the structure of three major gardens constructed during the Edo Period (1603–1867), she explained how the true importance of those gardens lies in their role as expressions of good governance and self-cultivation by their owners. Ivo Smiths of the University of Leiden spoke about “Textual Landscaping: Poetry and Garden Design in Classical Japan.” Going further back in time to the Heian Period (794–1185), he showed how garden design and poetic imagination went hand in hand.

The third session of the day was dedicated to Hebrew poetry. Anat Weisman of Ben-Gurion University read a paper titled “Metamorphosis into Trees: Natan Zach, David Avidan and Yona Wallach,” in which she focused on the correspondence between human beings and trees, and the various ways these are used in poetry. Vered Shemtov of Stanford University spoke of “Nature, Gardens and Ownership in Romantic Hebrew Poetry,” dealing with the poetry of M. Z. Mane, and in particular H.N. Bialik. Finally, Mei-Tal Nadler of Ben-Gurion University read a paper titled “‘Not with Romantic Yearning, only with Passion to See Future in Retrospect’: Nature, Matter, and Culture in the Poetry of Meir Wieseltier,” focusing on Wieseltier’s book *Greek Island*.

The fourth session opened the second day of the conference and was dedicated to Hebrew prose. Michal Ben Naftali of Ben-Gurion University gave a paper titled “Still life: Gardening in the Cemetery in Yehudit Handel’s Late Prose,” in particular in her novel *Har Hato’im* (“The Mountain of Loses”). Lilah Nethanel of Bar Ilan University read a paper titled “The Orchard of Knowledge: Representations of the Faustian Tragedy in 19th Century Hebrew Literature,” exploring the relations between Goethe’s play and its early Hebrew adaptation. Noam Krohn-Borojovich of Ben-Gurion University introduced a study titled “The Sycamores Garden: The Myth of Urbanism in Modern Hebrew Literature,” exploring the tension between the rural ideal and the urban reality in Hebrew writing.

The fifth session offered a mixture of the Japanese and Hebrew sides of the conference. In her paper “The Flight of Jonah: A Practical Reading of the Book of Jonah from the Perspective of Ecological Hermeneutics,” Kaori Ozawa of Kobe College tried to answer the question “Why Did

Jonah Flee from the Lord's Command?". Shirah M. Cohen of the University of Haifa introduced parts of her study under the title "Music, Nature, and the Subconscious in Uri Nissan Gnessin and Shiga Naoya," exploring the combined use of Western classical music and nature imageries in the works of Modernist Hebrew and Japanese writers.

In the sixth session, Yigal Schwartz of Ben-Gurion University spoke about "The Mythoflora of Israeli Literature," focusing on works by Natan Alterman and Amos Oz. Hiroshi Ichikawa of Tokyo University spoke on the subject of "Meditation on the Real and the Ideal in Religion through the Symbolism of the Garden" exploring both Japanese tradition and the thought of the Talmudic Sages.

The seventh and final session turned to the poetry of a more distant past. Haviva Ishay of Ben-Gurion University read a paper titled "The Stars of the Garden Beds Shone – Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Flowers Poetry," examining the semantic fields and image systems of the various flowers in Hebrew and Arabic poetry in Andalusia. Naoya Katsumata of Kyoto University introduced a paper titled "Flora and Fauna in Hebrew Liturgical Poetry (Piyut) – Real or Imaginary?", asking whether botanical references in the Piyut reflect reality or merely referencing biblical and rabbinical sources. Finally, Doron B. Cohen of Doshisha University offered the closing words to the conference, while introducing H.N. Bialik's poem *Yesh li gan* ("I have a garden") in Hebrew and two English translations.

The papers read at the conference are now in the process of being prepared for print and are expected to be published as Volume 12 of the series *CISMOR Conferences on Jewish Studies* during 2024. Previous volumes can be read online free of charge on the CISMOR website: <http://www.cismor.jp/jp/series/judaic/>.