

University of Pennsylvania Jewish Studies Program
“The Scales of Suffering: Neo-Lachrymosity and the Writing of Jewish History”
Monday, March 31, 2025
Penn Museum (East Entrance)
8:30 a.m. – 6:45 p.m.

Co-conveners: Professor Joshua Teplitsky and Professor Simcha Gross

In recent years historians of Jewish life—from the Ancient Mediterranean to the modern Americas—have begun to wonder if perhaps we have written suffering and sadness too far out of the stories we tell. In this conference, an international group of scholars will examine the balance between the weight of suffering with accounts of creativity, adaptation, and joy in Jewish life. Incorporating voices from diverse periods and places, it aims to foster a fresh and critical conversation about stories of suffering and the possibilities for reimagining its role in Jewish historiography.

SCHEDULE FOR THE CONFERENCE

Sunday Evening, March 30

6:30 Dinner for presenters and invited guest (Penn Hillel, Steinhardt Hall, 215 S 39th St.)

All sessions will be held in Classroom L2 at the Penn Museum (East Entrance)

Monday, March 31

8:30 Coffee and Breakfast

9:00-9:15 Greetings (Joshua Teplitsky and Simcha Gross)

9:15-10:45 **Session I: Ancient**

Chair: Natalie Dohrmann, University of Pennsylvania

Paper 1 – Ross Shepard Kraemer, Brown University

“‘Neolachrymosity?’ The Mediterranean Diaspora in Late Antiquity”

Paper 2 – Seth Schwartz, Columbia University

“Did the Jews of Asia Minor have a Lachrymose History?”

Paper 3 – Ishay Rozen-Zvi, Tel Aviv University

“How Normal Are the Rabbis? Four Case Studies”

10:45-11:00 Coffee Break

11:00-12:30 **Session II: Medieval**

Chair: TBD

Paper 1 – Paola Tartakoff, Rutgers University

“Lachrymosity and Jewish Exceptionalism: What can we learn from the historiography of medieval Jewish conversion?”

Paper 2 – Hartley Lachter, Lehigh University

“Terrors of History: Medieval Kabbalah and the Lachrymose Reading of Jewish Experience”

Paper 3 – Ephraim Shoham-Steiner, Ben Gurion University

“‘The Scales of Suffering’ and the ‘correct weight of Cologne’: A Proposal for Writing Medieval European Jewish History”

Paper 4 – Sarah Pearce, New York University

“All Joy is Darkened, the Mirth of the Land is Gone”: Approaching Affect in the Maimonidean Archive”

12:30-1:30 Lunch for presenters and invited guests (Classroom L1)

1:45-3:15 **Session III: Early Modern**

Chair: Anne Albert, University of Pennsylvania

Paper 1 – Adam Teller, Brown University

“Lachrymosity and Anti-Lachrymosity: Untying the Knot”

Paper 2 – Tamar Herzig, Tel Aviv University

“Contending with Female Slavery, Sexual Violence, and Jews in the Early Modern Era”

Paper 3 – Debra Kaplan, Bar Ilan University

“Beyond Expulsion? Finding Balance in Writing Early Modern Jewish History”

3:15-3:30 Coffee Break

3:30-5:00 **Session IV: Modern**

Chair: Ben Nathans, University of Pennsylvania

Paper 1 – Elissa Bemporad, CUNY Grad Center

“A Tale of Suffering or a Tale of Success? Rethinking Soviet Jewish Historiography Through the Lens of (Anti-)Lachrymosity”

Paper 2 – Ethan Katz, University of California, Berkeley

“Can Wartime Resistance Be Both Successful and Lachrymose? The Strange Alliance of Jews and Arch-Conservatives That Liberated Algiers in 1942”

Paper 3 – Lila Corwin Berman, New York University

“Golden Age, Golden Cage? Liberating American Jewish History from Gilded A/Illusions”

5:00-5:15

Break

5:15-6:45

Session V: Rebalancing the Scales: The Future of the Past

Chair: Joshua Teplitsky, University of Pennsylvania

Paper 1 – David N. Myers, University of California, Los Angeles

“Sage Politics or Lethal Subordination: Rethinking the Legacy of the Royal Alliance in Jewish History”

Paper 2 – Magda Teter, Fordham University

“Missing Voices: Antisemitism Studies and Jewish Suffering”

Paper 3 – David Engel, New York University

“Reflections on ‘Neolachrymosity’”

7:00

Dinner for presenters and invited guests (Hall of Flags, Houston Hall, 3417 Spruce Street)