

Fellowship Opportunity

Theme 2017-18

Jews and the Material in Antiquity

The Frankel Institute's 2017-2018 theme year will ask how Jews in the ancient world related both to matter itself and to issues of materiality. How did ancient Jews sense, understand, and even construct material entities such as artifacts, bodies, environments, and so on? How did those who were not Jewish perceive or represent the relationships between Jews and matter? Finally, how has the history of Jews and matter been reconstructed in modern scholarship and how might scholars approach the nexus of Jews and the material more productively?

The challenge of addressing these questions necessitates a comparative perspective in which Jewish experience is firmly situated within its various historical contexts. In recent years, scholars have come to emphasize the religious formations that existed within the wider cultural landscape of the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern world. Jewish communities and lives were inextricably intertwined with other social and religious formations in the urban landscapes and built environments of the ancient world. The focus on the material dimension of Jewish antiquity calls for an integrative approach to ancient Jewish studies and to a comparative and collaborative approach to antiquity more broadly.

Applications are encouraged by scholars working on topics related to Jews and materiality in antiquity. Topics can include, but are not limited to, sacrificial discourse, Jewish liturgy, Jewish spatial and architectural practices, the relationship between divinity and materiality or immateriality, sensory regimes, ritual artifacts, religious law related to property, performance of gender and the history of the Jewish body, and conceptions of matter and cosmogony. Applications from scholars of antiquity whose work is not strictly Jewish studies are particularly welcomed, including those working on relevant topics in early Christianity, or religions in the Roman and Sasanian empires. The Frankel Institute also encourages joint applications from pairs or teams of scholars working on collaborative projects. Applicants should work broadly in the Mediterranean basin or western Asia from the Hellenistic to the early Islamic eras.