

Translating Jewish Cultures

The Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan invites applications for residential fellowships over the 2020-2021 academic year to study the intersection of translation studies and Jewish studies. The Frankel Institute will bring together a group of scholars to consider how the study of translation might enrich and complicate our understanding of Jewish cultures from antiquity to the present. We invite scholarship that interprets the debates surrounding (national) translation projects, as well as the terms and metaphors for translation that have circulated in Jewish writing and thought over the centuries. Projects could also interrogate the figure of the Jewish translator as a cultural mediator.

Whether through the Septuagint translation of the Bible, nineteenth-century translations of “world literature” into Jewish languages, or today’s translations of Hebrew literature for global markets, Jewish cultures have been formed and reformed through multi-directional translation practices. This theme year seeks to advance the study of translation writ large by inviting projects that critically engage with the interdisciplinary field of translation studies. The Frankel Institute encourages scholarship that considers how the study of Jewish translation histories and practices stands in dialogue with recent theoretical developments, informed by postcolonial theory, gender studies, transnationalism, and world literature studies. How have translational power asymmetries played out in the case of Jewish minorities living among other nations while wielding their own religious and/or cultural authority? How was translation used to promote, but also repress, exchanges around Jewish scripture, law, and thought, allowing the dissemination of Jewish ideas and the incorporation of foreign concepts into Jewish thought?

By bringing together scholars working in translation studies across a range of regions, languages, and periods, the “Translating Jewish Cultures” fellowship year will promote a productive exchange among fields that have been historically studied in separate departments and forums. To this end, we are also interested in thinking of modes of translation that go beyond the written word—for instance, dance, theater, and music—as well as relations across different textual genres (e.g., poetry and law). We further invite projects that consider Jewish translation into non-Anglophone and non-European languages and welcome cross-cultural studies that move beyond traditional East and West divides, focusing on negotiations among “minor” languages or on transnational Jewish literary networks.