

Jews and the Worlds of the Ancient Mediterranean (Palermo, 7–8 Jul 26)

Palermo, Sicily, Jul 7–08, 2026

Deadline: Mar 15, 2026

Briony Truscott

Jews and the Worlds of the Ancient Mediterranean: Archaeology, Scholarship, and Networks of Collecting (c.1840–1940).

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as traditional biblical narratives faced modern critique, Jews turned to archaeology to redefine their historical place and identity. Archaeological discoveries, from the Jewish catacombs of Rome to the synagogues of Galilee, from the Cairo Genizah to excavations across Egypt, Syria, and the Ottoman Empire, became tools for unearthing a complex, sometimes unexpected and multifaceted past that could challenge existing narratives about the ancient world, and also sustain new forms of belonging.

Jewish collectors, dealers, and scholars navigated a complex terrain: on one hand, the perceived tension between the "Hebraic" tradition, rooted in biblical text and an aniconic aesthetic, and the "Hellenistic" world of classical archaeology, with its celebration of the human body and visual form. Yet this classical tradition also embodied foundational values of European culture that Jews sought to claim as their own heritage. On the other hand, many Jewish scholars expanded the geographical boundaries of archaeology itself, turning eastward to embrace 'Oriental' archaeology and the study of the civilisations and historic cultures of the ancient Mediterranean, a move that affirmed the Jewish contribution to European scholarship, whilst also redrawing the boundaries of the academic field.

None of these developments can be separated from the histories of state-formation, imperial expansion and anticolonial resistance, nor from the development of new heritage legislation designed to control the excavation and export of antiquities. This conference seeks to connect material finds and developments in scholarship with overarching political, commercial and ideological pressures to explore the dialogue between modern Jews and the plural heritages of antiquity.

We welcome papers that explore these themes through geographical case studies and specific historical moments. In keeping with the location of Palermo, we are particularly keen to receive proposals which explore the place of Jews and Jewish culture within the crossroads of the Mediterranean and Western Asia in the period from 1840 to 1940.

Submission Guidelines

We invite proposals for 20-minute papers addressing any of the themes outlined above. Please submit:

- An abstract of 300 words

- A brief biographical note of 100 words

Deadline for submissions: 15 March 2026

Notification of acceptance: 3 April 2026

Please send submissions to: briony.truscott@history.ox.ac.uk

Practical Information

The conference will be held at Palazzo Butera, an 18th-century aristocratic palace in Palermo's historic Kalsa district, overlooking the sea. Selected papers from the conference may be considered for publication in an edited volume or special journal issue.

Conference Support

This conference is supported by the John Fell Fund (University of Oxford), The Jewish Country Houses & their Worlds project (University of Oxford), Palazzo Butera and the Museo Ebraico di Roma.

We will contribute substantially to travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs, but expect participants to seek additional and alternative funding wherever possible. Travel bursaries may be available for early-career scholars and speakers traveling from outside Europe (details to be confirmed).

See the full Call for Papers for conference themes: <https://jch.history.ox.ac.uk/article/call-papers-jews-and-worlds-ancient-mediterranean-archaeology-scholarship-and-networks>

Reference:

CFP: Jews and the Worlds of the Ancient Mediterranean (Palermo, 7-8 Jul 26). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 14, 2026 (accessed Apr 7, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/51723>>.