

REBECCA SCHARBACH WOLLENBERG

2167 Thayer Building
Jean & Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies
202 S Thayer St
Ann Arbor, MI, 48104

EDUCATION

Ph.D. with distinction, History of Religions, University of Chicago (2015)
M.A. magna cum laude, Jewish Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2006)
B.A. with general and departmental honors, History, University of Chicago (2002)

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

2024- Associate Professor of Judaic Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
2018-2024 Assistant Professor of Judaic Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
2015-2018 Postdoctoral Assistant Professor, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

SELECTED RESEARCH AWARDS AND GRANTS

American Academy of Religion, Regional Development Grant, 2025*
Michigan Humanities Collaboratory Proposal Development Grant, 2025 (\$46,171)**
Wallenberg Institute Research Grant, 2025 (\$40,000)***
Society of Biblical Literature, A. R. Pete Diamond Award for Integrative Scholarship, 2022*
National Endowment for the Humanities, Fellowship, 2021 (\$60,000)
Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, Senior Research Grant, 2021 (\$6,000)
American Academy of Religion, Individual Research Grant, 2019***
MCubed Collaborative Diamond Grant, 2019 (\$60,000)
Society of Biblical Literature, David Noel Freedman Award in Hebrew Bible Scholarship, 2018*
National Endowment for the Humanities, Summer Stipend, 2018 (\$6000)
Society of Biblical Literature, De Gruyter Prize for Biblical Studies and Reception History, 2016*
American Academy of Religion, Regional Development Grant, 2016*
American Academy of Jewish Research, Special Initiatives Grant, 2016*
Michigan Society of Fellows, Fellowship, 2015-2018 (\$180,000)
Medieval Academy of America, E.K. Rand Dissertation Grant, 2013*
Martin Marty Center for the Advanced Study of Religion, Junior Fellowship, 2012*
Joseph M. Kitagawa Fellowship for History of Religions, 2006*
Luckens International Prize in Jewish Thought, 2006*

* Grant awarded less than \$5000

** With Deborah Forger and Sangseraima Ujeed

*** With Mostafa Hussein, Bryan Roby, and Adi Saleem

SELECTED TEACHING AWARDS AND GRANTS

Provost Teaching Innovation Prize, 2025 (\$5000)
Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Religion Grant, 2025 (\$29,370)
Gilbert Whitaker Fund for the Improvement of Teaching, 2025 (\$9400)**
Provost Teaching Innovation Prize (with Yasmin Moll), 2023 (\$5000)

PUBLICATIONS

Long form monograph:

The Closed Book: How the Rabbis Taught the Jews (Not) to Read the Bible (Princeton University Press: 2023)

Reviewed by: Association for Jewish Studies Review, Reading Religion (American Academy of Religion), Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Journal of Jewish Identities, Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Ancient Jew Review, Gospel Coalition, Theology.

Short form monograph:

The Abrahamic Vernacular Elements in Religion and Monotheism (Cambridge University Press: 2024)

Articles in Academic Journals:

8. "Parchment Skins and Human Skins: Some Thoughts on the Permeability of Text and Material Environment in Late Antique Jewish Reading Cultures" *Hebrew Studies* 64 (2023), 1-20.
7. "A King and a Scribe like Moses: The Reception of Deuteronomy 34:10 and a Rabbinic Theory of Collective Biblical Authorship," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 90, (2020), 207-224.
6. "The Book that Changed: Tales of Ezran Authorship as a Form of Late Antique Biblical Criticism" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138.1 (2019), 143-160.
5. "The Bad Wife Who Was Good: Woman as a Way of Life in Genesis Rabbah 17:3" *Prooftexts* 37.1 (2018), 56-85.
4. "The Dangers of Reading as We Know It: Sight Reading as a Source of Heresy in Classical Rabbinic Literature" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85.3 (2017), 709-745.
3. "אני יי רפאך: A Short Note on εγω ειμι Sayings and the Dangers of a Translation Tradition" *Novum Testamentum* 59.1 (2016), 20-27.
2. "The Ghost in the Privy: On the Origins of *Nittel Nacht* and Modes of Cultural Exchange" *Jewish Studies Quarterly* (Winter, 2013), 1-34.
1. "Voiler les matrones et dévoiler les vierges : pratiques juives et exégèse chrétienne dans la Carthage du III^e siècle" *Asdival: Revue d'Anthropologie et d'Histoire des Religions* (Winter, 2010), 40-49.

Essays in edited volumes:

4. “Outside Bible Readers as an Author Character in Rabbinic Literature: Using Attribution to Preserve and Contain Subversive Positions” in *Authorial Fictions and Attributions in the Ancient Mediterranean* ed. Chance Bonar and Julia Lindenlaub (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024), 71-84.
3. “The Changing Apocalypse: Apocalyptic Literature as a Provisional Genre in Early Rabbinic Judaism” in *Re-Imagining Apocalypticism: Apocalypses, Apocalyptic Literature, and the Dead Sea Scrolls* ed. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Matthew Goff. Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2023), 357-376.
2. “The Treasure Hunt for Biblical Origins: Or, Why Do We Need to Know Who Said What, When, and to Whom?” in *Law, Society, and Religion: Essays in Memory of George E. Mendenhall*. ed. Bernard M. Levinson. Special issue for *Maarav: A Journal for the Study of the Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures* 24 (2020) 75-84.
1. “The (Re)birth of a Book: ‘Noachic’ Writing in Medieval and Renaissance Europe” in *Noah and his Book(s)* eds. Michael E. Stone, Aryeh Amichay, and Vered Hillel. Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature series (June, 2010), 113-133.

Short articles:

4. “Polemic Judaism,” *Encyclopedia of Biblical Reception* (Berline: De Gruyter, 2025)
3. “Did Ezra Reconstruct the Torah or Just the Script?” *TheTorah* (February 2024)
2. “The Closed Book” *Ancient Jew Review* (May 2023)
1. “Biblical Studies, Jewishly” *Association for Jewish Studies Perspectives: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Autumn, 2018)

Recent writing in service to the profession:

4. Miriam Goldstein, *A Judeo-Arabic Parody of the Life of Jesus: The Toledot Yeshu Helene Narrative* (Mohr Siebeck: 2023), *Review of Biblical Literature* 2024
3. Jonathan Zecher, *Spiritual Direction as a Medical Art in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford University Press: 2022) *Journal for Early Christian Studies* 2024
2. A. J. Berkovitz, *A Life of Psalms in Jewish Late Antiquity* (University of Pennsylvania Press: 2023), *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2024
1. Mira Balberg, *Fractured Tablets: Forgetfulness and Fallibility in Late Antique Rabbinic Culture* (University of California Press: 2023), *Journal of Religion* 2024

Pedagogy Publications:

- [*The Pluralism Workbook*](#) (Spectrum Editions: 2024)
[*The Pluralism Playdeck*](#) (The Pluralism People: 2025)^{***}
[*Talking Maize and Blue*](#) (University of Michigan Orientation Module)^{****}

^{***} In collaboration with Norielis Botello Cruz, Julian Creutz, Michael Hong, and Sangseraima Ujeed.

^{****} In collaboration with Paul Resnick (chair), Angela Dillard, and Alex Halderman.

TEACHING

Additional Pedagogy Initiatives and Grants

Long-Term Series Organized:

- 2025-2027 *Religion in Real Time: Teaching Religion as a Resource at a Public University* (in collaboration with Melissa Borja, Cameron Cross, Deborah Forger, Yasmin Moll, Swapnil Rai, Sangseraima Ujeed, and Trent Walker)
- 2026 *Pedagogies for Cultivating Difficult Conversations* Center for Research on Learning and Teaching Workshop Series (in collaboration with Matthew Kaplan, Malinda Mattney, Paul Resnick and Debbie Willis)
- 2025-2026 *Dialogue and Donuts* with the Pluralism Playdeck funded by the Wallenberg Institute (in collaboration with Sangseraima Ujeed)
- 2025-2026 *Photovoice for Dialogue Across Difference: An Experiential Student Event Series* funded by the Wallenberg Institute (in collaboration with Kelly Dunlop, and Christine Modey)
- 2019-2022 *The Abrahamic Sensorium: An Experiential Student Event Series* funded by MCubed (in collaboration with Yasmin Moll)
- 2018-2019 *Judaic Studies Learning Circle: Teaching Race, Gender, and Sexuality across The Curriculum*, Faculty Communities for Inclusive Teaching Initiative, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching

Small Grants:

- 2024 Lost Books that Rewrote the Bible Through Their Material Culture, Instructional Development Fund Project, University of Michigan Center for Research on Teaching and Learning.
- 2024 Arts at Michigan Course Connection Grant: Biblical Lamp Making Workshop from Claywork Studios with Yiu Keung Lee
- 2019 Integrating a Sensory Pedagogy into “What is Judaism?” Instructional Development Fund Project, University of Michigan Center for Research on Teaching and Learning.
- 2017 Arts at Michigan Course Connection Grant: Abrahamic Masculinity with Razi Jafri
- 2016 Hypertext as a Pedagogical Tool in the Teaching of Premodern Texts, Instructional Development Fund Project, Center for Research on Teaching and Learning.

Undergraduate Research Projects and Mentoring Programs

- 2024 An Alternative Biblical History, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Project
- 2024 The Abrahamic Vernacular, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Project
- 2022 The Abrahamic Vernacular, Community College Research Scholar Program at Michigan, 2022
- 2020 The People’s Bible, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Project, 2020-2021
- 2020 Advancing the Abrahamic Sensorium, Community College Research Scholar Program at Michigan, 2020
- 2019 The Problem with the Bible, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Project, 2019-2021

- 2019 Abrahamic Vernaculars, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Project, , 2019-2020
- 2019 MCubed-UROP Summer Fellowship Program
- 2018 The Closed Book: Iconic Uses of Biblical Text, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Project, 2016-2021.
- 2018 The Rabbis and Their Books: Early Rabbinic Reading Cultures in Comparative Perspective, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Project, University of Michigan, 2016-2018.
- 2017 Research Scholar Program, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program.
- 2016 The Apocalyptic Imagination in Ancient Judaism, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Project, University of Michigan, 2016-2017.
- 2016 The Sages and the Letter: Classical Rabbinic Theories of Writing and the Book, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Project, University of Michigan, 2015-2016.
- 2015 Ghosts, Gorillas, and Other Liminal Beings: Reconstructing Rabbinic Definitions of Humanity through Tales of the Not-Quite-Human, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Project, University of Michigan, 2015-2016.

Courses taught

Talking Maize and Blue (Campus Wide, University of Michigan)
Judaic Capstone Research Course (University of Michigan)
Transcultural Studies: Diasporas (University of Michigan)
Religions of the Jews (University of Michigan)
The Book of Genesis: Reflections on Human Nature (University of Michigan)
Modern Questions, Biblical Answers (University of Michigan)
What is Judaism? (University of Michigan)
Lost Books that Rewrote the Bible (University of Michigan)
Biblical Masculinities (University of Michigan)
Introduction to Methods and Topics in Judaic Studies (University of Michigan)
The Problem with the Bible (University of Michigan)
The Bible from Antiquity to Modernity (University of Michigan)
The Rabbinic Mind: Introduction to Talmud (Oberlin College)
Jewish Life and Practice: Introduction to Judaism (Oberlin College)
Reading Cultures (University of Chicago)

Graduate Committees and Theses:

Dissertation Committees:

Ronald Ruark

Comprehensive Examinations Committees:

Joshua Scott (2017)
Hannah Roussel (2018)
Ronald Ruark (2023)
Parks Mason (2025)

Master's Theses:

Jeremy Ray, M.A. Transcultural Studies (2020)
Dyanna Bateman, Transcultural Studies (2023)

Undergraduate Honors Thesis:

David Zwick (2021)

SELECTED CONFERENCES AND LECTURES

Speaker series organized:

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| 2019-2022 | <i>Remapping Peoples of the Book: Theorizing Abrahamic Vernaculars</i> (in collaboration with Cameron Cross, Aileen Das, Hussein Fancy, Webb Keane, Gottfried Hagan, Sol Hart, Ellen Muehlberger, Yasmin Moll, Bryan Roby, Ryan Szpiech, and Ruth Tsoffar), interdepartmental series, University of Michigan. |
| 2016-2018 | <i>Beyond the Book: On Non-Biblical Judaism(s)</i> , University of Chicago, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and University of Notre Dame. (In collaboration with Simeon Chavel, Jay Crisostomo, Rafael Rachel Neis, Tzvi Novick, Jordan Rosenblum, Devorah Schoenfeld, and Abraham Winitzer.) |

Selected Talks and Lectures:

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| 2025 | “The Ghost in the Privy” University of Wisconsin, July 14 th , 2025 |
| 2025 | “The Abrahamic Vernacular,” The Coproduced Religion Project, May 19 th , 2025 |
| 2024 | Review of Monika Amsler, <i>The Babylonian Talmud and Late Antique Book Cultures</i> , Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, November 23 rd , 2024 |
| 2024 | “For Your Own Protection: The Closing of the Rabbinic Canon” Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, November 24 th , 2024 |
| 2024 | <i>The Closed Book</i> Plenary Book Panel, Midwest Regional Meeting for Biblical Studies, March 17 th , 2024 |
| 2023 | “The Not Yet Torah: Rabbinic Tales of Illegible Revelation” Association for Jewish Studies Conference, December 18 th , 2023 |
| 2023 | “Vintage Talmud” Roundtable, Association for Jewish Studies Conference, December 17 th , 2023 |
| 2023 | Review of Kelly Iverson, <i>Performing Early Christian Literature</i> , Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, November 20 th , 2023 |
| 2023 | Review of Jon Levison, <i>The Greek Life of Adam and Eve</i> Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, November 19 th , 2023 |
| 2023 | “The Closed Book” Elizabeth A. Clark Center for Late Ancient Studies, Duke University, October 5 th , 2023 |

- 2023 “The Abrahamic Vernacular: Rivals Thinking Together” Padnos Public Engagement Lecture, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- 2022 “Provisional Texts: Changeableness of Script in the Early Rabbinic Imagination” Association for Jewish Studies Annual Conference, December 19th, 2022
- 2022 Permeable Text: The Intertextuality of Script, Bodies, and the World in Early Rabbinic (Bible) Reading Practice, Society for Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, November 20th, 2022
- 2022 “A Book that Kills: Stories of Love Death and Betrayal at the Hands of the Biblical Text” (A.R. Pete Diamond Award lecture), Society for Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, November 20th, 2022
- 2021 “A Response on Dura: The Permeability of Text, Image, and Body in Early Rabbinic Thought” Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, November 21st, 2021.
- 2021 “The Problem with the Bible: What Early Christian Reading Habits Taught the Rabbis about the Hebrew Bible” Winter Shapiro Lecture, Catholic Theological Union of Chicago, March 1st, 2021.
- 2020 “Killer Bibles: Mass Death as a Results of Bad Torah in Early Rabbinic Literature” Association for Jewish Studies Annual Conference, December 15th, 2020.
- 2019 “The Problem with Writing: Rabbinic Notebook Culture and the Challenges of Textual Communication,” pre-circulated essay, *Cultures of Reading in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Jews, Christians, Greeks and Romans*, Duke University, October 29th, 2019.
- 2018 ““They Were Experts, We Are Not Experts”: Rabbinic Valorization of Literacy Failures” Association for Jewish Studies Annual Meeting, December 16th-18th, 2018.
- 2018 “Will the Real Woman Please Stand Up?” in (Re)constructing the Religious Thought and Practices of Women in Ancient Israel and Early Judaism, Association for Jewish Studies Annual Meeting, December 16th-18th, 2018.
- 2018 “The Book that Changed: Tales of a Non-Mosaic Bible” (Freedman Award Lecture), Society of Biblical Literature, November 26th, 2018.
- 2018 “Bible as Image: Visual Interpretation of Written Text in Classical Rabbinic Traditions,” Materializing Ancient Judaism, University of Michigan, April 9th-10th, 2018.
- 2017 “The Changing Apocalypse: Apocalyptic Literature as a Provisional Genre in Early Rabbinic Judaism” The Sense(s) of History: Apocalyptic Literature and Their Temporalities, Enoch Colloquium, Harvard University, November 16th-18th, 2017.
- 2017 “The Problem with the Bible: Jewish Ambivalence Towards the Biblical Text After the Rise of Christianity,” Michigan Society of Fellows, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, March 7th, 2017.
- 2017 “The Unread Bible as Image: When Written Text Becomes Pictograph” Study of Judaism Section, American Academy of Religion, November 18th-21st, 2017.
- 2017 “The Taste of Torah: God's Breath as an Argument in Favor of Mikra over Masoret as the True Manifestation of the Sinaitic Revelation,”

- Midrash Section, Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, November 18th-21st, 2017.
- 2017 “A Disappointing Scripture: Critique of Written Text as a Vehicle for Divine Revelation in Early Rabbinic Narratives about the Second Tablets,” Bible in Ancient and Modern Media Section, Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, November 18th-21st, 2017.
- 2016 “Unreadable Scriptures in Late Antique Judaism and Christianity,” Symposium on Sacralization and Secularization, University of Michigan, March 28, 2016. (Extended dual-author lecture with Eva Mroczek.)
- 2016 “A Makeshift Scripture: Early Rabbinic Doubts Concerning the Status of the Biblical Text in Light of Late Antique Christian Parallels,” Association for Jewish Studies Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA, December 18th-20th, 2016.
- 2016 “Biblical Studies Jewishly” in *Who Let the Bible into AJS?* Association for Jewish Studies Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA, December 18th-20th, 2016.
- 2016 “Sight Reading as a Source of Heresy: Early Rabbinic Ambivalence about Extracting Meaning from Written Documents” Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, San Antonio, TX, November 19-22, 2016
- 2016 “Hypertext as a Pedagogical Tool in the Teaching of Midrash” Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, San Antonio, TX, November 19-22, 2016
- 2016 “Revisiting the Possibility of Rabbinic Apocalyptic,” Society of Biblical Literature Midwest Annual Meeting, Bourbonnais, IL, February 5-7, 2016
- 2015 “Rabbinic Reading Practices and the Emergence of an Oral Bible,” Association for Jewish Studies Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, December 13-15, 2015
- 2015 “Visual Midrash or the Bible as Image” Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA, November 21-24, 2015
- 2014 “Rabbinic Practices of (Bible) Reading: Unlinking the Written and the Oral,” Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA, November 22-25, 2014

RECENT COMMITTEE AND SERVICE WORK

2025

University of Michigan committees:

Religion Major Ad Hoc Committee (Chair), University of Michigan

Talking Maize and Blue Taskforce (Core Team), University of Michigan

Judaic Studies Executive Committee, University of Michigan

Transcultural Studies Advisory Board, University of Michigan

Medieval and Early Modern Program Steering Committee, University of Michigan

Frankel Institute Steering Committee, University of Michigan

LSA LEAD Fellowship, NCID at the University of Michigan

National committees:

Society of Biblical Literature, Early Christian-Jewish Relations Unit (co-chair)

Association for Jewish Studies, Scholars of Color Fellowship Committee

Association of Jewish Studies, Scholars of Color Fellowship Mentors

2024

University of Michigan committees:

Advisory Committee for the University's Principles on Diversity of Thought and Freedom of Expression, University of Michigan

Judaic Studies Executive Committee, University of Michigan

Transcultural Studies Advisory Board, University of Michigan

Medieval and Early Modern Program Steering Committee, University of Michigan

Frankel Institute Steering Committee

Middle East Studies Search Committee for Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic Lectureship

Middle East Studies Lecturer Review Committee

Selection Committee for Provost's Teaching Innovation Prize, University of Michigan

LSA LEAD Fellowship

National committees:

Society of Biblical Literature, Early Christian-Jewish Relations Unit (co-chair)

Association for Jewish Studies, Scholars of Color Fellowship Committee

National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend Fellowship Review Panel

LANGUAGE CERTIFICATIONS

Aramaic (two years of graduate coursework at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

French (certified with University of Chicago reading exam)

German (certified with University of Chicago reading exam)

Greek (two years of graduate coursework at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Hebrew (certified with Hebrew University of Jerusalem fluency exam)

Italian (certified with Columbia University fluency exam)

Latin (reading knowledge, no certification).

CURRENT PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Academy of Religion

Association for Jewish Studies

Society of Biblical Literature