

# Proposals of the Fellows who arrived after 30 June, 2016

## Dr. Evelien Chayes

Junior Fellow

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris

Project: Gender and Modes of Scepticism in and out of the Venetian Ghetto: Sara Copia Sulam (1592–1641) and the *Accademia degli Incogniti*

Period of Fellowship: July 2016

Unlike the Venetian poetess Gaspara Stampa, who kept a salon during the early sixteenth century, the Jewish writer Sara Copia Sulam transgressed the boundaries that early seventeenth-century Venetian society set out for such a woman. Don Harran (2009) observed that she 'broke the rules[,] read, wrote, studied, and speculated; she opened her house to Jews and Christians; she sounded them out for their views on poetry, philosophy, and religion; and she defended her person against slanderers and her faith against scoffers.' Copia Sulam probably served as a courtesan, deploying her skills in order to publish her own works while struggling not to betray her identity as a Jew or as a female intellectual. She was subject to a simultaneously eroticising and anti-feminist male environment, sharing the predicament of contemporary Venetian women of artistic and intellectual ambitions and achievements, like the singer-composer Barbara Strozzi and the literary nun Arcangela Tarabotti. But Copia Sulama's commitment, from a learned Jewish viewpoint, to the philosophical debate evolving around the (im)mortality of the soul and its relation to the body and terrestrial matters, placed and kept her at the core of intellectual life and emancipatory discourse. Beyond the connotative influence of her Jewish identity, her immediate environment, the Venetian ghetto, performed as a 'laboratory' for experimental, polymorphic scepticism, wherein scientific approaches were tested against the background of Talmudic learning and continuous, critical reading of mystical texts. Copia Sulam's salon, we have every cause to presume, was hospitable to exchanges of poetry and music between Jews and non-Jews, and she was close to rabbi Leone da Modena.

The poetess corresponded with Baldassare Bonifacio and Ansaldo Cebà, both in their time members of the *Accademia degli Incogniti*, whose lives and works are listed in the 1647 *Glorie degli Incogniti*. Although having been a *habitué* of her salon and despite calling himself Copia Sulam's 'pupil', Baldassare Bonifacio aggressed Copia Sulam in 1621, accusing her in a public letter of denying the immortality of the soul. She refuted his accusation and their polemics were eventually published by Antonio Pinelli in Venice. Neither Bonifacio nor Cebà could refrain from pressing Copia Sulam to convert to Christianity. In her correspondence with Bonfaccio, her firmness and intellectual superbness elicited disdainful and notably misogynistic re-

plies. In the case of Cebà, with whom she exchanged letters and poems between 1618 and 1622, the tone was more respectful, even amorous.

Copia Sulam and the *Incogniti* were especially keen to develop body-soul dualism, inscribed in ongoing millenarian debates. While pursuing this question along their own lines, they did not fail to heed ancient traditions—Greek and Latin, Jewish and Christian—with special attention to Aristotelian as well as Pythagorean principles and to Jewish learning. The soul, its ascent by the dialectics of intellect and will, and its transmigration, was the central topic *par excellence* of the Italian academies since 1550. In the *Incogniti*'s *Discorsi* of 1635, this core issue experiences an epistemological shift. It is 'free will' that now challenges cognition and established authority itself; will has become desire for nothing but *libertà*. Reason replaces not only authority, but also intellect as the motor of man's striving for knowledge.

We can connect this orientation towards the immortality and transmigration of the soul directly to contemporary—including Jewish—sources. In their *Discorsi* on debates in the domain of natural philosophy, the *Incogniti* show direct inspiration by talmudic and kabbalistic sources. At the same time, as several historians have noticed, the *Incogniti*, as authors of *novelle*, became involved not only with religious scepticism but also with the (rhetorical) promotion of libertinism and sodomy in correlation with misogynistic ideas. The most flagrant and famous specimen is Antonio Rocco's *Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*. The context these writings allude to is one of theatre, farce and opera, wherein drag queens appear. Misogyny, and the central role accorded to figures or variants of conversion and disguise manifest in the *Incogniti*'s writings, makes the plural connections indwelling in Copia Sulam's intellectual defence and self-definition all the more interesting. While historians of recent decades have shown interest in her case, we require assessments of her writings via an approach that centralises themes (and schemes) of gender, scepticism and emancipation, taking into account the use the poetess makes of the different learned traditions evoked above.

Some of Copia Sulam's poetry was composed in response to poems that the two men dedicated to her, some is found in manuscript in the 'Notices from Parnassus' (Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Ms Cicogna 270). It shows some concession to eroticising within a male-female relationship defined by her counterpart. Her prose, however, exhibits strong non-conventional tones, corrective of her male opponent(s). Or, to use different terminology, her poetry can be perceived as masculine-normative, and her prose as feminine-authoritative, unconditioned as well as unconditional.

How does Copia Sulam's 1621 *Manifesto* correspond with or fit with the current of Venetian scepticism between 1580 and 1650? I propose to analyse her argumentation in the context of older traditions: into what argumentative and philosophic traditions does she inscribe her work, how does she perceive her work within her contemporary intellectual environment, in particular that of the writings of the *Incogniti* and as related to the multiple environments of Leone da Modena?

The project aims to

- 1) extend Giuseppe Veltri's studies by illuminating the role of gender through the prism of Jewish philosophy and mysticism in Copia Sulam's management of the debate within the context of a society of forcibly-controlled female sexuality.
- 2) clarify the role of philosophic and literary genres in her writing and interplay with the *Incogniti*.
- 3) analyse on a more specific level, the function of the distribution of role-plays (as in theatre) in behaviour and discourse of conversion and emancipation, with attention to Copia Sulam's differentiated treatments—her stance in prose, her stance in poetry.
- 4) explain the role of different argumentative traditions—Jewish, Aristotelian and Pyrrhonian—in Copia Sulam's sceptical discourse.

Finally, in collaboration with other Fellows at the Centre I propose to prepare a first solid scholarly Italian edition of Copia Sulam's complete works, accompanied by a palaeographic study of her unpublished autographs and a book-historical analysis of manuscripts and earliest editions of her works.

**Prof. Dr. Yuval Harari**

Senior Fellow

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva

Project: Dream Enquiry: Theory and Praxis of Dreaming in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism

Period of Fellowship: July to August 2016

Aiming to publish a book dedicated to Jewish dream magic, I have already completed two chapters that deal with dream divination through the dead and through demons. The bulk of evidence regarding dream-divination by means of magic, however, is related to 'dream enquiry' (*še'elat ḥalom*), that is, dream divination through angels or direct contact with God. During my stay at the Centre I intend to focus on this issue and write the third chapter of my planned book.

The primary sources for my research are Jewish manuscripts of magic and practical Kabbalah, in which practices of dream magic are explicit and abundant. I also take into consideration halakhic, kabbalistic and narrative sources, which shed light on the phenomenon and especially on the attitude of Jewish elites towards it and the debates concerning its legitimacy and efficacy. Both dreams and magic undermine the borderlines of nature and society, they are in conflict with 'rational' interpretations of the human experience. Although they raised scepticism and ridicule, the topic of dreams and magic kept a strong hold among Jews in the East and West alike. 'Dream enquiry,' which seems to have been a prevalent practice in the medieval and early modern periods, is an especially interesting test case of this debate. Posing a *she'elat ḥalom* in order to gain 'one sixtieth of prophecy' from God's mes-

sengers was not perceived as sinful by everyone, let alone as useless—unlike the illicit appeal of magical practices for dream divination through ghosts and demons. On the one hand, then, it was criticised and condemned as ‘magic’ and ‘idolatry’ by those who aimed at maintaining the normative practices of contact between man and Heaven. On the other hand, it helped laymen as well as rabbis to attain desired knowledge in various fields, including the Halakhah. My study will concentrate on this controversial practice and its place in Jewish culture.

*Še'elat ha-ḥalom* is the common pattern of magic dream divination in Jewish culture. In Jewish textbooks of magic (*grimoires*), this term is usually used to denote a ritual act that involves an adjuration. This act aims at the summoning of an angel or another holy agent to one's dream—for the purpose of attaining required knowledge from him; or this act aims at the calling of certain hidden information to reveal itself in the dreamer's mind—either explicitly or through a certain sign, e.g. a vision or a biblical verse. A few aspects of this cultural phenomenon have been discussed in a handful of works by scholars like Israel Ta-Shema, Nahman Danzig, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Moshe Idel, Ephraim Kanarfogel, Gideon Bohak, Alessia Bellusci and myself. None of them takes into consideration instructional books of magic outside the Cairo Genizah.

Initiated actions for dream revelation are absent from the Bible. The story of Solomon's dream in Gibeon after the massive sacrifice at the local high place might be a rare echo of shrine incubation (2 Kings 3). But that is all. In talmudic times, the rabbis were apparently acquainted with this and other practices of dream enquiry that prevailed in their vicinity. However, no concrete information concerning ‘dream man’ (*iš ha-ḥalom*) or ‘the master of dream’ (*ba'al ha-ḥalom*), whom they mention, or concerning the way to manipulate them, is exposed in their writings. In contrast, among the early Jewish mystics dream enquiry was one of the prominent expressions of human control over angels. In Heikhalot and Merkavah literature detailed instructions are given for the adjuration of the ‘Prince of Dream’ (*śar ha-ḥalom*) to occur in one's dream and to reveal to him any required information.

Evidence concerning dream enquiry highly expands throughout the Middle Ages. Karaite polemic writings that ascribe this praxis to the rabbanites, as well as the letter of the sages of Kairouan to Rav Hai Gaon and his responsum, attest to the place of dream enquiry among Jews living in the Muslim world at the turn of the first millennium. Sources from the beginning of the second millennium that originate in France and Ashkenaz demonstrate its importance also in this region. Dream enquiry is mentioned in biblical and talmudic commentaries; in the influential and widely referred-to work of R. Jacob of Mervege, *Še'elot u-Tešuvot min ha-Šamayim* (‘Heavenly Responsa’), dating to the early thirteenth century; in the writings of Ashkenazi pietists, first and foremost in *Sefer Hasidim*; in prayer books; and in many writings of both Halakhah and Kabbalah. The main source of information concerning this practice in both east and west, however, are manuscripts of magic and practical Kabbalah.

Many recipes for dream enquiry, mainly from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, were found in the Cairo Genizah and many more are included in later litera-

ture from all over Europe. Instructions vary from one recipe to another, but behind them a ritual pattern can be identified that includes (in diverse combinations): purity, fast, immersion, prayer and adjuration. In order to enable the continuous performative effect of the adjurations and the holy names interwoven in them throughout the night sleep, they have to be written down either on parchment or paper, or on the body itself, particularly on the left hand. The answer is commonly expected to occur in the dream itself in an audial or visual pattern. In rare cases the answer is expected to be written down on a blank sheet of paper which is to be placed under the dreamer's head.

The praxis of dream enquiry spanned the Jewish world and was apparently carried out by members of all layers of society. At the beginning of the sixteenth century it was incorporated by R. Shlomo Almoli into his highly influential theory of dreams. At the end of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth century instructions for *še’elat ḥalom* were collected by great authorities like R. Haim Vital and R. Moses Zacuto and saved in their books of magical recipes (*Sefer ha-Pe’ulot* and *Sefer ha-Sodot*). Rabbis and Kabbalists referred to dream enquiry, questioning or supporting its validity and efficacy, up to the twentieth century.

The most significant source for understanding this practice, the worldview in which it was anchored, and the criticism and disdain it raised, are the dozens of recipes for dream enquiry scattered in the broad and yet unexplored corpus of Jewish manuscripts of magic and practical Kabbalah from the Middle Ages and the early modern period. My research will focus first and foremost on this corpus, aiming at a comprehensive survey of the phenomenon and its place in Jewish thought and action. The results will be published as a chapter of my planned book on Jewish dream magic.

**Prof. Dr. Almut-Barbara Renger**

Senior Fellow

Free University Berlin

Project: Between Fascination and Scepticism: Charismatic Authority Figures in Religion and Philosophy

Period of Fellowship: July to September 2016

The type of charismatic authority figure which acts within hierarchically organised social structures as a teacher in the field of religion and philosophy, and in the broader context thereof, laying claim to specific knowledge (usually revelation-based knowledge), wisdom and/or truth, has been omnipresent in the cultural and religious history of Europe since antiquity. Writings on this type have reflected the fascination associated with such actors, but also scepticism and ambivalence, right up to the present. Alongside exaltations, consisting solely of the veneration and glorification of a charismatic leader and teacher figure, are also found condemnations, denouncing the religious or philosophic ‘master’ as the exploiter of those

subject to his authority, as well as reflections on his charisma, which coalesce amidst the tensions between faith and doubt, commitment and critique.

In my project I will examine this ambivalence and scepticism, and by doing so use the example of this type to explore a central focus of enquiry at the Centre: the relationship between scepticism and authority. This relationship will be the focus of my investigation, supported by reflexion in the tradition of historical philology and literary studies as well as by orientation towards the sociology of religion and historical anthropology. The spectrum of actors extends from Pythagoras to Apollonius of Tyana, on through to charismatic leaders of recent new religious movements, such as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh/Osho, whose impacts testify in exemplary fashion to the volatile nature of the dynamics between 'East' and 'West' in a religious context.

I intend to scrutinise the claims to authority laid by such actors and the understandings of legitimisation linked with these claims, and investigate the recognition and denial of their authority by other individuals and organisations within and outside of the groups and communities in which they operate. The project will devote particular attention to cognitive and emotional aspects and to concepts constitutive for the withdrawal of an authority previously recognised or the recognition of an authority previously denied, such as faith and doubt, trust and distrust.

Sceptical depictions of persons and figures who correspond to the charismatic type of authority figure under investigation, for instance those mentioned in the Platonic Socrates dialogues or in works by Lucian of Samosata, lend succinct expression to this ambivalence vis-à-vis authority as well as the associated claim of validity and understanding of legitimisation. Recognising no dogma, scepticism contrasts each judgement with an opposite judgement that appears equally plausible. Authority has thus always been subjected to scrutiny.

Focusing on this topic, I am aiming to pursue one of the central research objectives of the Centre: an examination of 'whether the method of enquiry, as implied in the term "skepticism", could be regarded as anthropological constant in the context of an alleged dialectic difference between "Eastern" and "Western" philosophy and culture' (Veltri). In light of this objective, I will examine the extent to which attitudes and approaches comparable to the sceptical posture and practices of antiquity can be identified in the cultural and religious history of Europe (as possible consequences of ancient scepticism) or in non-European contexts, particularly in Asia.

It is through its comparative perspective, which takes the sceptical posture of antiquity as its starting point and *tertium comparationis*, that my project can make a valuable contribution to the work of the Centre. The aim is to use analytical descriptive approaches to enquire into similarities, parallels, and analogies in various languages, cultures, religions, and world views; through interdisciplinary discussions involving representatives not only from the fields of Jewish and Religious Studies, but also a whole series of other disciplines in the Humanities, Cultural Studies, and Social Sciences. This enquiry is not intended as an attempt to arrive at normative statements or definitions of the nature of phenomena with respect to human beings,

philosophy or religion. Rather, my objective is to contribute to the understanding of the philosophical and religious contexts specific to each case, while avoiding generalisation and premature conclusions about commonalities. The aim will be to use metalinguistic categories and concepts that permit systematisation on a scientific basis and open up scope for differentiation.

To this end, I would like to define guiding questions and concepts in connection with a review of primary and secondary sources, in consultation with other Fellows and members of the Centre. Focuses of enquiry will include, for instance, how and when faith, doubt, trust, and mistrust take shape; what chain of psychosocial reactions they entail and how their relation to authority is characterised in terms of effect, e.g. stabilising or destabilising.

I plan to prepare a publication, either a special journal issue or a monograph in the Centre's publication series 'Jewish Thought, Philosophy, and Religion.' I look forward to contributing to Reading Evenings and Dialectical Evenings at the Centre, dedicating sessions to figures such as scholarchs, religious leaders, priests, prophets, scribes, and Torah scholars—agents in leadership and teaching positions to whom certain persons or groups turn for guidance with respect to their own thinking or behaviour, yet whose authority can also be called into question. The aim of my planned publication is to examine such actors with a view to two considerations: one being the form of organisation they act within, the other, the cognitive and emotional aspects and concepts that are constitutive for the recognition and withdrawal of their authority, such as faith and doubt, trust and mistrust. I shall examine the relationship between these aspects and authority, on the one side; and the agents' claims to the validity of their knowledge, wisdom and truth, on the other.

**Dr. Asher Salah**

Senior Fellow

Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Project: Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in the Jewish Intellectual Debate of Nineteenth-Century Italy

Period of Fellowship: July to September 2016

In his influential work 'The History of Scepticism', edited and expanded on in several editions from 1960 to 2003, American historian of philosophy Richard H. Popkin (1923–2005) identifies the early modern recovery of Pyrrhonian scepticism and its application in religious polemics as a major source for modern Western thought. More specifically in the Jewish context, scepticism in the early modern period has been instrumental in contrasting the corrosive attacks of rationalism and of experimental sciences on the revealed religions. Demonstrating the weakness of every philosophical enquiry was a way of strengthening the truths of faith and introducing doubts about the disruptive power of reason. This explains the appeal of Pyrrhonian pos-

tures to many Jewish apologists in Europe in the period marked by what Pierre Hazard has called ‘the crisis of reason.’ Italy has been an important crossroads and a breeding ground for Jewish sceptic thought, as demonstrated by the example of the epistemological scepticism of Simone Luzzatto, distinct but at times dangerously close to the theological scepticism promoted by Spinoza and his followers.

The situation changes radically at the turn of eighteenth century with the slow, sometimes hindered, yet unrestrainable advance of the emancipation process of the Jewish minority in Italy. The term ‘sceptic’ now became unequivocally endowed with extremely negative connotations on the side of the defenders of traditional religion. Scepticism, together with its corollary ‘indifferentism,’ was associated with agnosticism, thus becoming the bogeyman uniting Jewish conservatives and reformers in their fight against the progressive alienation of the vast majority of Jews from every kind of religious practice and belief.

This is why, for instance, the orthodox Elia Benamozegh (1822–1900), a noted kabbalist, highly respected in his day as one of Italy’s most eminent Jewish scholars, attempted to discredit the whole philological enterprise of the Italian Jewish orientalist David Castelli (1836–1901), who was inspired by contemporary biblical criticism, accusing him of having transformed the book of Qohelet into a modern manifesto of sceptical thought.

The liberal modernist Felice Momigliano (1866–1924), promoter of an ephemeral reform movement in Italy, directed a similar accusation against the Italian Jewish semitist Giorgio Levi Della Vida (1886–1967), for having been perverted by ‘the scepticism that afflicts the Jewish people, which is typical of peoples in their way to decomposition.’ The two had previously been companions in the fight for reforms in Judaism.

My research project aims to analyse the context and the uses of the term ‘sceptic’ in the writings of Italian rabbis of the nineteenth century. It will include a survey of the term ‘sceptic’ and its occurrence in the Jewish press of the time, in private correspondences, in doctrinal pamphlets and in biblical exegesis.

In particular, I will focus on the revival of the anti-Karaite polemic in nineteenth century Italian Judaism. The Karaites, a Jewish sect with origins in the eighth century, rejected the authority of the postbiblical Jewish tradition. Karaite Judaism attracted the attention of many Christian Hebraists in the early modern period. In the 1674 French edition of Leon Modena’s *Historia de’ Riti Hebraici*, the translator Richard Simon (1638–1712), an Oratorian priest, added two essays on the Samaritans and the Karaites. Jews also used the label of ‘Karaite,’ and sometimes the terms ‘Sadducee’ or ‘Boethusian,’ in order to discredit those in their community who doubted the validity of the Oral Law, such as Immanuel Aboab (1555–1628), Isaac Orobio de Castro (1617–1687), or Moshe Hagiz (1671–1750) in Amsterdam; Avraham Viterbo (late seventeenth c.–early eighteenth c.) in Venice; and David Nieto (1654–1728) in London. Johann Christoph Wolf (1683–1739) refers in his bibliographical oeuvre *Bibliotheca Hebraea* to a work by Modena on the Karaites, now lost, similar to another work in defence of the oral tradition by Simone Luzzatto. These are but a few examples

demonstrating the importance of the Karaite question in religious polemics, not only among Christians but also within the Jewish community in the early modern period.

However, in the nineteenth century 'Karaitic' is a label targeting contemporary—not only deist—philosophies and religious reforms, but first and foremost positivistic systems of disbelief and secularism. The interest in recovering classical defences of Jewish Oral Law, in order to counter modern phenomena of assimilation, is attested by the numerous translations into Italian of the *Maṭe Dan* by David Nieto, by the renewed interest in the commentaries of Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, as well as by the proliferation of self-defined 'anti-Karaitic' tractates signed by the most illustrious representatives of the Italian rabbinate, such as Avraham Cologna (1755–1832), Eliseo Pontremoli (1778–1851) and Isaac Samuel Reggio (1784–1855), for whom the word 'Karaite' is often associated with the figure of the modern sceptic.

As part of the effort to counter the spread of sceptical ideas, Italian rabbis in the nineteenth century engaged in an unprecedented and intensive activity of dogmatic interpretation of Judaism—carried out, among other ways, through the printing of countless catechisms conceived for the Jewish educational system.

Moreover, the philosophy of emotions developed by Samuel David Luzzatto and the counter-enlightenment thrust present in Catholic romanticism, which exerted a momentous influence on Jewish intellectuals trained at the rabbinical seminaries of Padua and Leghorn, has to be understood against the backdrop of the fundamental refusal of the heritage of Jewish scepticism that was so important in the apologies of Judaism written in the early modern period. Thus, particular attention will be devoted to the virulent debates stirred by the appreciation of the figure of Spinoza and his intellectual legacy, as well as to the reception of Kant in traditional Jewish circles in nineteenth-century Italy.

I shall argue that scepticism is the best way to understand the Jewish confrontation with the challenges of modernity and emancipation in Italy. On the one hand, anti-sceptical stances crosscut the divide between orthodoxy and reform, which concerned only a minority of the Jewish population in Italy, shifting the focus unto the less-studied but wider debate between religious and secular Jewish thinkers. On the other hand, scepticism allows insight into the intellectual dimension of Jewish attitudes toward secularisation, a dimension that is expunged when using exclusively socially connoted terms such as 'assimilation' and 'segregation'. From the vantage point of the battle against or in favour of sceptically-oriented philosophies, such as criticism, materialism, positivism, and agnosticism, it becomes possible to pinpoint important cultural phenomena that have been overlooked by contemporary scholarship of nineteenth-century Italy, such as those concerning the challenge to rabbinic authority, the convergence of Catholic and Jewish apologetics against modernity, as well as the continuities and discontinuities with previous Jewish philosophical traditions.

**Dr. Cedric Cohen Skalli**

Senior Fellow

University of Haifa

Project: Don Isaac Abravanel and the Role of Sceptical Arguments in the Delimitation of Religion

Period of Fellowship: July to September 2016

Don Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508) was a renowned political, commercial, and intellectual Jewish figure. He lived and operated in Portugal and Castile, and after the 1492 expulsion found refuge in southern Italy and Venice. He is acknowledged as one of the first early modern Jewish thinkers to integrate the humanistic trends of the Renaissance into his exegetical and philosophical work, and also as one of the leaders of Sephardic exiles in the years after the expulsion. His monumental oeuvre comprises biblical exegesis, philosophical tracts, and messianic works. It can be seen as a project that not only stands in the long tradition of Jewish medieval philosophy, but also opened itself to the new Renaissance trends. For this reason, Don Isaac Abravanel was an important transitional figure which embodied many of the ambiguities of early modern Jewish existence and thought.

In a certain sense, Abravanel's large exegetical and philosophical oeuvre epitomises the final period of Jewish medieval philosophy. It is deeply marked by an epistemological and theological evolution, being informed by (1) a transformation of the definition of philosophy and its relation to science, religion, and history; (2) a change in the perception of medieval Aristotelian philosophy and a renewed access to other ancient traditions such as Stoicism, Platonism, Hermetism, and Republicanism; (3) a preference for more direct models of interaction between humans ('rhetoric'), between man and God ('fideism,' 'direct providence'), and between God and the world, often expressed in the rejection of the earlier central role of the *intellectus agens* ('active intellect'). Moreover, Abravanel's work is also defined by a new attitude towards religious and literary sources, which takes further into account the historical and rhetorical conditions of their composition.

The research which I intend to develop at the Center will focus on the new delimitation of the realms of religion and science suggested by Isaac Abravanel in his philosophical and exegetical works, written in the historical context of the fifteenth-century Iberian and Italian peninsulas. I believe that this new delimitation of religion and science, shared by many Jewish philosophers of the fifteenth century, can be best studied in the works of Isaac Abravanel, since they reveal—more than any other works of fifteenth-century Jewish philosophers—their Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Graeco-Roman background. My intention is to show how this new delimitation of religion and science is grounded on sceptical claims on the limitation of human knowledge and on the uncertainty of scientific models. These sceptical claims play an essential role in the delimitation of the realm of religion and its distinction from scientific epistemological models. The sceptical argumentation often functions in Abravanel's work as a discursive justification and preparation for a more fideistic

or literal approach to religious events like miracles or prophecy. The sceptical arguments used by Abravanel are not meant to invalidate neither science nor philosophy, but rather to justify the possibility of religious events defined as 'supernatural'. This sceptical argumentation developed by Abravanel has often been approached by modern scholarship as marking the end of medieval Jewish philosophy (Leo Strauss), or as a sign of Jewish backwardness vis-à-vis early modern rationalism (Benzion Netanyahu). In my intended research, I hope to demonstrate that the disjunction of the realms of religion and science made by Isaac Abravanel contributed to a redefinition of religion, philosophy, and science in the early modern period.

The research on Isaac Abravanel which I intend to develop further during my stay at the Centre builds on many years of research in the field of early modern philosophy. In my work, I attempt to disclose new connections between Jewish and Christian thinkers and to develop a new cultural and social framing of early modern Jewish thought. The current project is part of my broader investigation into fourteenth- to sixteenth-century Jewish thought, which seeks to propose a new picture of the Jewish encounter with Renaissance humanism.

During my stay, I plan to write an article on Abravanel's new delimitation of science and religion focusing on his use of sceptical claims. To this end, I intend to study Abravanel's later works written in Italy during the years 1492–1508, especially *Mif'alot Elohim*, *Šamayim Hadašim*, and his Commentaries on Genesis and Ezekiel.

