

*From Cairo to the Cloud to Tel Aviv on Fire:*  
News from the AJS Film Committee, Fall 2019  
by  
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At the forthcoming AJS conference, the Film Committee will host the annual film festival and the pedagogical session. As usual, the screenings, which will take place during the first two days of the conference, will be introduced by filmmakers and scholars.

The opening film is a winner of top prizes at the Haifa and Venice film festivals and Luxembourg's nominee for the 2020 Oscars: *Tel Aviv on Fire* (Israel/Luxembourg, 2018) by writer-director Sameh Zoabi. The satirical plot follows Salam, a young Palestinian man whose creative career is on the rise on a soap opera popular with both Israelis and Palestinians. Salam's daily commute from the Ramallah location through the Israeli checkpoint leads to encounters with an IDF officer who develops an interest in the show as he contends with opposing views on how the show should end. Dalit Katz (Wesleyan University) will introduce the film.

Our program continues with the documentary selection. For the first time, we include an interactive documentary, *Jerusalem, We Are Here* (Canada/Israel/Palestine, 2016, dir. Dorit Naaman), which is available online in an open access. This award-winning documentary digitally brings Palestinians back into the Jerusalem neighborhoods from which they were expelled in 1948. The film consists of self-guided virtual tours of the neighborhood as it is today and as it was in 1948, interactive maps from different eras, testimonials and photo archive. Olga Gershenson (University of Massachusetts Amherst) will present the documentary and show how it can be effectively used in classrooms.

*From Cairo to the Cloud: The World of the Cairo Geniza* (Canada, 2018) explores the treasure trove of the Cairo Geniza, a discovery that revolutionized our understanding of 1000 years of Jewish life in the heart of the Islamic world. Over a half million Geniza documents, including religious texts, medical prescriptions, love letters, marriage contracts, and children's school lessons, expose a veritable Facebook of the Middle Ages. In this film, three generations of renowned scholars reveal their insights in a cinematic "master-class" of Judeo-Arabic history and culture. Participants include Mark Cohen, Avraham Udovitch, and Marina Rustow of Princeton University, as well as Neil Danzig and David Kraemer of the Jewish Theological Seminary. The filmmaker, Michelle Paymar will introduce the screening and will take questions afterwards.

We are particularly pleased to present *Who Will Write Our History* (USA, 2018, directed by Roberta Grossman and produced by Nancy Spielberg), based on the 2007 book by Samuel Kassow (Trinity College). The documentary tells the story of *Oneg Shabes*, the secret archive that documented the life of the Warsaw Ghetto. The archive was built by historian Emanuel Ringelblum, who assembled journalists, scholars and artists imprisoned in the ghetto to collect thousands of pages of eyewitness accounts, drawings, posters, and poems from daily life during the Holocaust. Samuel Kassow will introduce the film, and the filmmaker, Roberta Grossman, will take questions after the screening.

The program closes with *Promise at Dawn* (France, 2017), a sweeping drama based on the acclaimed autobiographical novel by Romain Gary, born Roman Kacew in 1914 Vilna. A World War II aviator, diplomat, filmmaker, and the husband of Jean Seberg, Gary was raised by a determined, passionate Jewish mother (Charlotte Gainsbourg); Gary became a celebrated novelist and the only writer to have twice won the Goncourt Prize for French Literature. Catherine Portuges (University of Massachusetts Amherst) will introduce the film.

This film program is a culmination of our year-long curating and planning. As members of the Film Committee, we negotiate with distributors for the privilege of screening the most exciting new features and documentaries relevant to AJS audience free of charge. Public performance rights can be quite expensive, and we are grateful for distributors' cooperation in waiving fees in exchange for promotion of their films through our screenings. We hope that the festival films will be useful to you, whether for your research, teaching, or public programming. The printed conference program will include distributor contact information—please ask your libraries to order the films, or contact distributors directly. Your response to our program will help us secure cooperation from distributors in creating free screenings for future AJS conferences.

The Film Committee also brings to you a pedagogical session, *Teaching through Film*, which this year will focus on the Hebrew Bible. This session brings together scholars of religion, literature, and film to share experiences using film in their courses. Wendy Zierler (Hebrew Union College) will demonstrate the pedagogical method of “Inverted Midrash,” the backbone of her “Reel Theology” course and her book, *Movies and Midrash*. She'll present a #MeToo-centered examination of the film *Crimes and Misdemeanors* in conjunction with the biblical story of David and Batsheva (II Samuel 11-12). Jessica Carr (Lafayette College), will discuss the film *Noah* in conjunction with Genesis 5-11 and 1 Enoch to teach about the process of canonization and the importance of Second Temple literature. Rachel Havrelock (University of Illinois at Chicago) will show how the triad of Moses-Yocheved-Tziporah as depicted in *The Ten Commandments*, *Prince of Egypt*, and *Gods and Kings* opens up questions of race, Jewishness, and negotiation of ethnic difference.

We look forward to seeing you at the screenings and the pedagogical session celebrating the importance of cinema and media in scholarship and teaching. We value your feedback and appreciate your thoughts on films and formats you might like to see included in future conferences. See you at the movies!