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## Feeding the Disenfranchised, the Orphan, the Widow, and the Dead

By the start of my senior year, I felt sure of my research skills. With only my one CORE and 3 minor requirements left to finish, I decided to fill my schedule with classes for my own enjoyment. One of these was Dr. Suriano's research seminar entitled "Death and the Afterlife in Jewish Cultures." Classes in the Jewish Studies department have often appealed to me; however, I had always found other classes more relevant to my academic and career goals. Ancient burial rituals are of great interest to me, therefore I could not pass up the opportunity to devote my time to such a research project when my schedule finally allowed it. As the research paper had the potential to be the last major undergraduate research endeavor, I decided to challenge myself in both the topic and scope of my research: One last hurrah!

I spent many an evening discussing ancient Israelite practices after class with Dr. Suriano, pouring over books and debating the lecture topics. Each time I thought I had a solid thesis idea, Dr. Suriano would help me determine if sufficient publications existed on the topic. The answer was usually no. I turned to the library course reserves available on Canvas for our class to use as it contained both required and recommended further reading all at the click of a button. After selecting a few readings pertaining to the ancient practice of feeding the dead, I began to realize that I could create a research project on the topic if I also included primary sources. In order to locate these ancient sources, Dr. Suriano pointed me in the direction of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, an online resource to which the University of Maryland library system subscribes. In the fourth volume of the second addition, I found a comprehensive article, "Burial," that recorded many biblical and post-biblical sources describing Israelite and Jewish burial practices. Although I did not draw directly from this article in my paper, this was one of the most helpful tools over the course of my research.

Another online subscription of the University of Maryland library system that I found particularly useful was the Bar Ilan University Responsa: Global Jewish Database. After scouring the Maryland Hillel's Judaic library just, I was disappointed to find that many of the Midrashic, Talmudic, and apocryphal works were not included. I was pointed in the direction of Bar Ilan University's Responsa and was relieved to find many of the ancient sources I needed available in their original Hebrew and Aramaic online. While my understanding of ancient Hebrew is average, and my comprehension of Aramaic is far worse, I was unwilling to give up. Enlisting the help of friends, rabbis, roommates, and cousins, I sifted through many chapters of Hebrew and Aramaic, translating as I went, looking for references and insights into the ancient Jewish perspective on grave goods.

While Bar Ilan's database held many of my sought-after books, there were a few more primary sources I still could not find. In addition, I also wanted to find some of the works in English. Unfortunately, finding the titles for primary sources in order to search for them online is not easy, especially when one needs to search in a different language. I contacted Yelena Luckert, the UMD librarian specializing in Jewish and Slavic Studies, with the hope that she would be able to help me find the

books I needed within the UMD system. Sure enough, Ms. Luckert promptly informed me of the titles and codes for the works I was looking for in multiple languages and told me where I could find the books. In this way, Ms. Luckert proved that there is no computer-generated replacement for the human librarian. I owe her many thanks. Similarly, when I was off campus and had trouble signing in to a database for which I was sure UMD had subscription, I contacted the Media Resources Librarian, Andrew Horbal, for assistance. I appreciate his helpfulness and prompt response. It is good to know that there are UMD librarians on my side and eager to help.

I did not feel personally impacted by UMD's decision to join the Big Ten until I discovered WorldCat. While at first it seemed like a borrowing service like any other, its advantages soon became apparent. There was never a limit to the number of books I could request and the rate at which the books were sent to me was astounding (and the updated pick-up service at McKeldin also makes the process more efficient). In addition, there were no recalls on the books I received through UBorrow and the number of renewals was not limited, which was not the case for many Interlibrary Loan books. My main advice for anyone beginning to dabble in research at the University of Maryland is as follows: Look through the Classic Catalog first of books held within the UMD libraries, then through UBorrow, after that WorldCat, and finally Interlibrary loan.

If any of the librarians who helped me with my research are reading this essay, I would like to thank you for discussing my research topics with me and even career options, and I appreciate all the time you spent helping me hunt down sources. As of right now, I hope to return to UMD and to McKeldin Library especially as a graduate student. With every source and book that I read, I found ten more footnotes to track down and analyze. During the research process I realized that I am not done with the research process. I succeeded in challenging myself with my research ambitions and I realize that I am not yet done pursuing the challenge. There are so many more documents to look through, languages to learn, and burial practices to analyze. The Research Port is a wonderful tool for finding articles, but I am also really excited to use the new Article Express and I hope that it will become available to undergraduates soon!