A new face in the Religion Department this year is Beth Kissileff, who joins us as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion specializing in Judaic Studies. Professor Kissileff sat down with NumeNews to answer some questions about herself...

**NumeNews: How did your interest in the study of religion develop?**

**Professor Beth Kissileff:** When I went to college I was an English major. I was becoming more interested in Judaism, so I thought that while I was taking literature courses I also wanted to think about Jewish literature and how to read it in a serious way. I took some Bible courses as an undergraduate and I realized at a certain point I couldn’t go further without knowing Hebrew. In my junior year I traveled to Israel to study the Bible and Hebrew texts and I got really immersed in it. But at the same time, I missed the university, the sharpness and the rigor of academic inquiry. I missed literature. Ever since then I’ve been trying to unite my interest in literature and in Jewish texts. This year, working in the Religion Department, I’m able to do that; it’s very satisfying for me.

**NumeNews: What matters to you and why?**

**BK:** I was just teaching my Intro to Judaism class and we were studying the Bible and how it was put together – the documentary hypothesis. I think what most people forget is that all people have doubts and insecurities and too much certainty about anything can be dangerous. The Bible has so many interpretations that it’s important not to be too certain or you’ll misunderstand the text. In anything, in life, in literature, in politics, it’s a difficult thing if people are too certain. It’s valuable to know where difficulties lie. That’s something that matters to me…

**NumeNews: What do you like teaching at Carleton so far?**

**CM:** Teaching at Carleton is a great joy. Such wonderful, vibrant students and the most welcoming, wonderful faculty. It is a gift to be here!

realizes she needs something of what they have. She begins her year in Jerusalem as an observer and an outsider and a future professor of Religion but by the end of the year she becomes more connected to the land and the people of Israel in a way she didn’t expect. In the end, it’s about the changes a modern, skeptical person can undergo and still remain herself. The idea of possibility, even where there is doubt, is one of the themes of the book. In a class my character attends on Shavuot (a Jewish festival marking the Law being given by God to Moses on Mount Siani), the teacher reads from Stanley Kunitz’s poem, The Layers. “Though I lack the art/To decipher it/No doubt the next chapter/In my book of transformations/is already written.” The novel is about the attempt to decipher a life even when art is lacking.
**Prof. Anne Patrick on Medical Leave**

Shortly after returning from a three-week study tour of Israel, Jordan, and Rome in early June, Professor Anne Patrick learned she would need to receive ongoing chemotherapy for the metastatic breast cancer for which she has been treated since the fall of 2002. Because of this need for increased medical care she accepted a leave from the College and cancelled her classes for 2008-09, although she is available for advising students this fall.

On September 25 she gave an illustrated presentation on the study tour in Professor Catherine Michaud’s seminar on Women and Christian Traditions, describing highlights of her study of “inclusive biblical history” in Israel and Jordan with New Testament scholar Carolyn Osiek, and “women in early Christian art” in Rome with art historian Janet Tulloch.

Professor Patrick is now completing a book for Continuum International, *Conscience in Context: Vocation, Virtue, and History*, and making plans to retire to the Washington, DC area, where her religious community, the Sisters of the Holy Names, and many of her family members are located.

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**How I Know the Earth is Older Than 6,000 Years**

By Nick Merkelson ‘09

This summer I was a volunteer field archaeologist at the Field School for Quaternary Palaeoanthropology and Prehistory of Murcia, S.E. Spain, run by the Department of Biology at the Universidad de Murcia. I spent six weeks in the province of Murcia excavating at two Palaeolithic cave sites, Cueva Negra (Black Cave) and Sima de las Palomas (Dove’s Hole). This research project has been ongoing for the past fifteen years, and each year it draws archaeology and anthropology students from all over the world.

My personal highlight of the dig at Sima de las Palomas was finding a 40,000 year old Neanderthal cranium and mandible (see image). The skull, which is crushed and cemented into a large block of breccia, is the second skull discovered at this site. When I was scraping the loose sediment off the breccia (a coarse-ground sedimentary rock produced by volcanic activity or erosion) in the lab, I recognized a small (~1 cm) cranial suture near the skull’s brow ridge. I held the block in front of me and noticed a lower jaw with its mental foramen (a hole through which the mental nerve and vessels passes) and broken teeth. I also saw a brow ridge and what appeared to be eye sockets. Once it was confirmed to be a skull, the excavation’s principal investigator called in a geneticist from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology to...

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**Researching Islam in Mongolia**

By Kevin Close ‘09

This summer I traveled to Mongolia as part of a Larsen Experiential Scholarship. I lived and conducted fieldwork among a small Western Mongolia Islamic ethnic group called the Khoton. The Khoton, thought to have been brought to Mongolia as a slave race, have had a rough history of religious and cultural oppression under nomadic kings and Communist government. In 1990, when Mongolia democratized, the Khoton were again allowed to practice religion, but many of their traditions had been forgotten.

The Khoton currently face the challenge of rebuilding their religious community with little knowledge about their history or about Islam in general. On the surface, none of their practices resemble traditional Islam, instead appearing more similar to the forms of shamanic Buddhism practiced by many Mongolians. There are only two Qurans in the village however there are forty or fifty individuals who perform rituals and claim to have contact with spirits.

Motivated by a desire to rediscover their Islamic roots, some Khoton have reached out to the international Islamic community, sending students to study in Turkey and acquiring outside funding for the construction of a mosque. Others believe that these efforts are futile and that the Khoton should retain their current religious practices. I was able to study the Khoton at this critical moment in their religious and community development and observe the complications of recreating a religion.
2008-2009 ACADEMIC YEAR COURSE LISTING

Fall 2008

100  Christian Theology, Slavery, and Racial Justice (Pearson)
110-1  Introduction to Religion (Elison)
110-2  Introduction to Religion (Jackson)
120  Introduction to Judaism: Ancient (Kissileff)
152  Religions in Japanese Culture (Sango)
231  Protestant Thought (Pearson)
255*  Social Engagement in Asian Religions (Sango)
263  Sufism (Jackson)
274*  The Sacred Journey: Exodus & Other Literary Pilgrimages (Kisseleff)
324*  Women and Christian Traditions (Michaud)
353*  Hindu Hierarchies: Caste in Theory and Practice (Elison)

Winter 2009

110  Introduction to Religion (Pearson)
140  Religion and American Culture (Perez)
150  Religions of South Asia (Elison)
151  Religions in Chinese Culture (Sango)
220  Hebrew Bible (Kissileff)
236*  Gender and Religion in the African Diaspora (Perez)
300  Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion (Pearson)
358*  Zen, Nationlism, and Orientalism (Sango)
399  Senior Research Seminar (Jackson)

Spring 2009

110  Introduction to Religion (Sango)
122  Introduction to Islam (Jackson)
241*  Envisioning Vodou: Haitian Popular Religion (Jackson)
244*  Prophetesses & Prostitutes, Murderesses & Matriarchs: Gender Roles in the Hebrew Bible (Kissileff)
257*  Buddha (Jackson)
259  Visual Cultures of South Asia (Elison)
270  Philosophy of Religion (Pearson)
282*  World Turned Upside Down: Carnival in Cross-Cultural Perspective (Elison)
284*  Virgin of Guadalupe (Perez)
327  Genesis (Kissileff)
329  Theology, Pluralism, and Culture (Pearson)

*Denotes new course offerings

How I Know...continued from page 2

take samples for Neanderthal DNA testing. There was also a press conference announcing the new skull, televised across Spain on national news networks. Though it may be another ten years until the skull is published in a scientific journal, I feel privileged to have contributed my part to the study of prehistoric humanity in Europe.

New Courses 2008-2009

236. Gender and Religion in the African Diaspora; E. Perez  This course explores the role of women and constructions of gender in four religions of the African Diaspora (Haitian Vodou, Cuban Lucumi/Santeria, Brazilian Candomble/Macumba, and Jamaican Rastafarianism), as well as one continental West African tradition. The course’s main objectives are to acquaint students with the range of prominent positions that women have held in these religions; to investigate how these religions have organized women’s ritual practice; to draw distinctions between the ideal female religious subject and the everyday experiences of actual women in these traditions; and to consider their worship and representation of female deities.

241. Envisioning Vodou: Haitian Popular Religion; E. Perez  This course explores a religious tradition vital to the culture of Haiti, examining Vodoun against its African background, in its practice in Haiti and the Haitian diaspora, and over against its depictions in American popular culture as “Voodoo.”

244. Prophetesses and Prostitutes, Murderesses and Matriarchs: Gender Roles in the Hebrew Bible; B. Kissileff  This course focuses on the roles and activities of women in the Hebrew Bible. By carefully examining selected stories, we will discover that women - as poets (Deborah), theives (Rachel), disguisers (Rebekah) and betrayers (Delilah) - had manifold ways of exercising power. We will read accounts of a woman who dresses as a prostitute (Tamar), and actual prostitute (Rahab), a witch (the witch at Endor), evil queens (Athalath and Jezebel), and erotic poetry in a woman’s voice (the Song of Songs). We will analyze these stories through the lens of modern Biblical scholarship and emphasize current feminist approaches to Biblical Studies.

255. Social Engagement in Asian Religions; A. Sango  This course explores religions in contemporary Asia while focusing on their energetic engagement with social and political issues and crises. In Vietnam, Burma, and Tibet, for example, Buddhists famously protested against war and violence by quietly marching, fasting, or immolating themselves. Yet in Japan and China, many religious groups are criticized for having justified imperialism, engaged in terrorist activies, or beome mere money-making machines. Can religions serve as a vehicle of social and political activism? Do they potentially change or passively maintain the status quo? We will critically examine both examples and counter-examples of social engagement in Asian religions.

257. Buddha; R. Jackson  Buddha, “the awakened,” is the ideal being - and state of being - in all Buddhist traditions. This course will explore the contours of the Buddhist ideal as revealed in legendary narratives, devotional poems,
274. The Sacred Journey: Exodus and Other Literary Pilgrimages; B. Kissileff
This course will examine what it means to take a journey from a religious perspective. Beginning with the Book of Exodus, we will move on to a cross-cultural survey of pilgrimages and journeys, reading selections from Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales and the medieval pilgrimage of Margery Kempe. We will read philosophers of religion such as Mircea Eliade and consider such nineteenth century pilgrims and Mark Twain and Herman Melville. Jewish notions of yearning for Zion, a comic account of a trip to the Holy Land by S.Y. Abramovitch, and Bruce Chatwin’s Songlines, a meditation on nomadism and morality, conclude the course.

282. The World Turned Upside Down: Carnival in Cross-Cultural Perspective; W. Eliason
A comparative approach to carnival and related rituals of social inversion. Theoretical inquiry into carnival has traditionally pivoted on the question of resistance: Is dancing in the street a mechanism of social change? Landmark works to be considered include Bakhtin’s Rabelais and His World and Huizinga’s Homo Ludens. Ethnographic and historical accounts, supplemented by musical and film resources, will introduce representative carnivalesque obserances: Holi in India, Holy Week in Guatemala, the World renewal movements of Edo-period Japan, the Diggers and Levelers of early modern England, and of course Carnival in Brazil and Trinidad. When the rhythm calls, the government falls!

284. The Virgin of Guadalupe; E. Perez
This course examines the apparition of the Virgin Mary called the Queen of Mexico and Patroness of the Americas, placing particular emphasis on the diverse appropriations of her image. Beginning with her precursors in the Old and New World, we approach Guadalupe as a tool with which to pry open questions central to Mexican history and identity, including issues of gender, ethnicity, class, nationalism, and representations with regard to Guadalupe and devotional objects more generally. The course concludes with a consideration of the Virgin’s contemporary materialization as a symbol to be not only displayed and consumed, but also embodied.

324. Women and Christian Tradition; C. Michaud
Based on the premise that religion has been a predominant shaper and enforcer of women’s images and roles in culture and society, this seminar will explore and assess the ways the Christian religion, with its notions about women, has affected women’s identities and social roles throughout the centuries. Equally, however, the seminar will examine the ways women from the outset shaped Christianity, culture, and their own spiritual lives.

353. Hindu Hierarchies: Caste in Theory and Practice; W. Eliason
This seminar will investigate two aspects of India’s “peculiar institution”: caste hierarchy as lived in historical and present-day Hindu communities; and discourses of caste as conceived, justified, and reformed within Hindu thought. Alongside mythological and shastric texts taken from the classical Brahmanical corpus, we will consider a range of alternatives to orthodox caste dharma (varnashramadharma) as advanced by lower-caste voices, exponents of Bhakti devotionalism, and modern critics such as Gandhi, Ambedkar, and Periyar. We will also pursue critical readings of analytic frameworks developed to study caste, foregrounding the work of theorists such as Dumont, Srinivas, Beteille, Marriott, and Dirks.

358. Zen, Nationalism, and Orientalism; A. Sango
To most people in the west, the term “Zen” means a religion of serene meditation, simple aesthetics, healthy food, or the key that unlocks the art of just about anything. We will challenge the commonly accepted images of Zen and reveal its active (and often problematic) engagement with social and political issues in modern and contemporary societies. Why did Japanese Zen monks justify and participate in Japan’s modernization, nationalism, and imperialism? How did they reinterpret Zen when trying to introduce it to the Western audience? How did Westerners, in turn, understand and represent Zen as a religious of the mysterious orient?