



Touro College Graduate School of Jewish Studies

For Immediate Release

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Touro Professor of Jewish Studies Awarded Three Prestigious Fellowships

*Dr. Natalia Aleksium to Research Jews of Eastern Galicia, Jewish Scholarship
on Eve of Holocaust, and the "Cadaver Affair"*

New York, N.Y., January 12, 2012 - Professor Dr. Natalia Aleksium has achieved a trifecta in academia. An associate professor of Jewish studies at the Touro Graduate School of Jewish Studies, Dr. Aleksium has been awarded three research fellowships for the current academic year: at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York, and at the Center for Urban History of East Central Europe in Lviv, Ukraine.

"This is an outstanding achievement in academia," said Dr. Michael Shmidman, dean of Touro's Graduate School of Jewish Studies. "Professor Aleksium is an internationally renowned scholar, and these prestigious fellowships serve as eloquent testimony to her status as one of the preeminent contemporary academicians in the fields of Eastern European Jewish history and the history of the Holocaust."

Dr. Aleksium, who was born and raised in Wroclaw, Poland, has pursued her studies of Jewish history on three continents. Her fluency in Polish and intimate knowledge of Poland enhance her research of modern Eastern European Jewish history.

"Without a doubt, my personal connection draws me to Eastern European Jewish history and especially to topics in Polish Jewish history," she said. "These fellowships add to my passion as a scholar and a teacher. They will give me the opportunity to spend time in archives and libraries and to collect material I will be working on in the future. In a way, it is just the beginning."

At the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Dr. Aleksium will be researching the daily lives and 'microhistory' of Jews who lived in hiding during the Holocaust in Eastern Galicia, which today is part of the Ukraine. She said she started collecting testimonies from survivors a few years ago during a chance meeting in Israel.

"These were Jews who had survived ghettos and labor camps and then escaped to go into hiding. They talked about their experiences together in a bunker, and told stories about the complex

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relationships between parents and children. I want to understand what life was like for them, their interaction with their non-Jewish surroundings, and research whether they were assisted in any way.”

For the Dina Abramowicz Emerging Scholar Fellowship at the YIVO Institute, Dr. Aleksion is building upon her earlier research exploring the work of Eastern European Jewish historians before the Holocaust. She is examining “Aspirantur,” a non-accredited graduate program in pre-war Vilna, Poland in the mid to late 1930s that trained young Jewish scholars in various fields including philology, economics, statistics, psychology, education and history.

Dr. Aleksion will be examining mainly 14 boxes of materials at the YIVO Archives from the Aspirantur program, which are mostly in Yiddish. “I hope my research will shed new light on the vision of Jewish scholarship in Eastern Europe on the eve of the Holocaust,” Dr. Aleksion said.

For her final fellowship at the Center for Urban History in Lviv, Ukraine, Dr. Aleksion began her research last summer while also teaching a course on the history of Jews in Galicia. She plans to return to Lviv in January to continue her examination of the so-called “cadaver affair,” in which Jewish medical students in Eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s were told during the course of their studies that they had to dissect only Jewish cadavers provided by the Jewish community, a violation of *Halacha*, or Jewish law.

Although scholars have mentioned the affair, it has not been researched in-depth, Dr. Aleksion said, adding that her research will focus on the discourse about the Jewish presence in the medical profession at the time and the opposition to the cadaver affair, which included signed petitions and letters of protest sent to university authorities in Warsaw, Vilna (currently Vilnius in Lithuania), Krakow and Lwow (the Polish name for the city of Lviv, which was part of Poland from 1918-1939).

“The cadaver affair combined religious prejudice with economic competition. Radical student organizations used religious terms, speaking of Jewish and Christian corpses, not Aryan and non-Aryan corpses,” she said.

Dr. Aleksion received master’s and doctoral degrees in history from Warsaw University, and her second doctorate, in modern Jewish history, at New York University’s Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies. During the course of her graduate studies, she was a Junior Fulbright Fellow at NYU and a Lady Davis fellow at Hebrew University. She joined the faculty of Touro’s Graduate School of Jewish Studies in the fall of 2006.



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Touro is a system of Jewish-sponsored non-profit institutions of higher and professional education. Touro College was established in 1971 primarily to enrich the Jewish heritage, and to serve the larger American community. More than 18,000 students are currently enrolled in its various schools and divisions. Touro College has branch campuses, locations and instructional sites in the New York area, as well as branch campuses and programs in Berlin, Jerusalem, Moscow, Paris, and Florida. Touro University California and its Nevada branch campus, as well as Touro College Los Angeles, are separately accredited institutions governed in common by the same Board of Trustees as Touro College. For further information on Touro College, please go to: <http://www.touro.edu/media/>.

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