

Call for Papers

Conference Details

Conference Title

One Biography, Multiple Places: The Life and Work of Shmuel Hugo Bergmann Between Prague and Jerusalem (1883–1975)

Date: November 3-5, 2021

Venue: Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

Background

In recent years, there is growing interest amongst scholars in various aspects of Shmuel Hugo Bergmann's life and thought. Notwithstanding his importance and impact as a philosopher, theologian, political thinker, and academic leader, relatively little research was dedicated to him. Therefore, the first international Bergmann conference reflects that gap and intends to contribute to the study of his political and intellectual activities.

A volume of collected studies based on the lectures presented at the conference will be published.

Event Rationale

The conference will address the multiple aspects of Shmuel Hugo Bergmann's political, scholarly, and cultural activities. Originally from Prague, where in the first two decades of the 20th century he took part in the Jewish-cultural renaissance of the local German speaking community, Shmuel Hugo Bergmann moved to Palestine in 1920, where he assumed an influential role within the Jewish yishuv. He soon became a leading institutional figure associated with the development both of the Jewish National Library (of which he was the first director) and the Hebrew University (where he served as the first rector). At the same time, in light of his active advocacy of bi-nationalism and Arab-Israeli dialogue, and by virtue of his participation in various other political and labor organizations, Bergmann emerged as an important point of reference for left-wing Israeli discourse.

In Prague Bergmann studied philosophy with Anton Marty, a member of the Brentano School, and was influenced by the philosophy of Bernard Bolzano, to whom he dedicated his first monography. After graduation Bergmann worked as librarian in the Charles University Library in Prague between 1906 and 1919. In Prague, Bergmann was an active member of the cultural and philosophical Salon of Berta Fanta (his mother-in-law), along with other Jewish intellectuals of his generation including Felix Weltsch, Max Brod, Albert Einstein, and Franz Kafka. Bergmann also counted among the leaders of the Bar Kochba movement, an association for Jewish students at the Charles University that through the help of Martin Buber contributed to the cultural renewal of Western-European Jewry at the beginning of the 20th century. Bergmann served as the chair of Bar Kochba in 1903 and in that year played also an important role in coordinating the activity of all Jewish students organizations belonging to the Austrian Empire.

Immediately after the first world war, Bergmann first served in the delegation representing Czechoslovak Jewry at the Paris Peace Conference and then moved to London, where he worked as an

employee at the Educational Department of the World Zionist Organization. Later on, in May 1920 Bergmann emigrated with his family to Palestine and settled in Jerusalem where he was appointed the first director of the Jewish National and University Library (1920–1935). From 1928 on Bergmann lectured in modern philosophy at the newly established Hebrew University and in 1935 he was nominated full professor in the Department of Philosophy. In the same year he was elected the first Rector of the Hebrew University (1935–1938). During his office, Bergmann contributed greatly to the enhancement of the University's stature and helped to determine the direction of its academic activity. During the visit of T. G. Masaryk, the first Czechoslovak President, in Palestine in 1927, Bergmann became his guide. Immediately after World War II, Bergmann came to Prague and organized in cooperation with the Prague Jewish Museum, together with Gershom Scholem, the transport of valuable Hebrew books that were collected by the Nazis in Theresienstadt to Palestine.

Bergmann soon became a leading philosopher and cultural figure in Israel and in the Jewish world as a whole; he was responsible for the translations of Germany philosophy into Hebrew, participated in the national public debate, was a founding member of the Israeli Academy of Sciences and was twice granted the Israel prize (in 1954 for his work in humanities, and in 1974 for his special contribution to society and the State of Israel). Besides his interest in philosophy, mathematics and natural sciences, Bergmann also showed great interest in religion, mysticism, and Western esotericism. His influences included Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, and Sri Aurobindo.

Starting from the late 1920s, Bergmann's became one of the leading intellectual voices in the contemporary pre-state and later Israeli political debate, always in favor of a peaceful solution and advocating a separation between religion and the state, cautioning his readers against abandoning Judaism altogether for the sake of a secular Zionism devoid of spirituality. In particular, from the late 1920s, Bergmann was active (together with Gershom Scholem, Judah Leon Magnes, Martin Buber and others) in the Brit Shalom movement, which called for a dual-national state, and advocated peaceful coexistence of Jews and Arabs in Israel/Palestine.

Coorganizers:

Centre for the Study of the Holocaust and Jewish Literature, Faculty of Arts, Charles University

Goldstein-Goren Department of Jewish Thought, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Leibniz-Institut for Jewish History and Culture – Simon Dubnow

S. H. Bergmann Center for Philosophical Studies at the Hebrew University

The Masaryk Institute and Archive of the Czech Academy of Sciences

The Moses Mendelssohn Center for European Jewish Studies, University of Potsdam

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Dr. Olaf Glöckner, The Moses Mendelssohn Center for European Jewish studies, University of Potsdam

Submission Guidelines:

Below, find list of topics and themes that you can submit to:

- 1) Hugo Bergmann: One biography and multiple places
- 2) Bergmann and contemporary Jewish thought
- 3) Bergmann and contemporary European philosophy
- 4) Bergmann in Palestine/Israel between politics, and institution
- 5) Bergmann, Kabbalah, and Esotericism

Please submit a proposal of 250 words along with a CV or short biography to email: shbergmann.prague@gmail.com by June 30, 2021. Notification of acceptance will be distributed by July 31, 2021.

Link to the conference website: <https://holokaust.ff.cuni.cz/en/2021/01/04/one-biography-multiple-places-the-life-and-work-of-shmuel-hugo-bergmann-between-prague-and-jerusalem-1883-1975/>