

## Universities and Nation Building

**Veranstalter:** Franz Rosenzweig Minerva Research Center (FRMRC)

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The focus of the conference was the history of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem during the British Mandate period, while attention was paid all along to the general context of the research devoted to the study of universities and nationality during the first half of the twentieth century. In accordance, some of the speakers discussed other study-cases of European and Mediterranean universities such as the universities of Prague, Cairo University and Istanbul University, and the various ways in which their histories were integrated into national developments.

The conference took place at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem as part of a research project conducted by the Franz Rosenzweig Minerva Research Center in cooperation with the Deutsches Literatur Archiv, entitled: „The Historical Archive of the Hebrew University: German-Jewish Knowledge and Cultural Transfer, 1918-1948“. The project, supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation, is carried out by a team of research students dedicated to the tasks of physical preservation, recataloguing and research of materials from the archives which are dated between 1919 and 1948.

The conference commenced with a graduate student workshop titled „Josef Horowitz and the Hebrew University's Institute of Oriental Studies: The Founding Memorandum“ and directed by SABINE MANGOLD-WILL (Cologne). The workshop consisted of a joint close-reading of a memorandum prepared by the renowned German-Jewish professor of Semitic languages from Frankfurt, Josef Horowitz, and designated for the university administration. The memorandum discusses the establishment of an independent institute for Oriental Studies in the Hebrew University. As part of the process of knowledge transfer from Central-Europe to Palestine, Judaic Studies were separated from the core of Ori-

ental Studies. This distinction was first institutionalized in the earliest stages of the Hebrew University as a research institute. The memorandum reverberates a long-standing debate with regards to the different approaches towards teaching Arabic in the local academic system: the oriental fashion, with the strong emphasis on classic grammar, being lifted against the counter-approach, marked by the pressing necessity to teach Arabic as a spoken language. This approach, known as „the Arabic way“, was apparently treated by German-Jewish philologists with disdain. In addition, what seems striking in Horowitz's pedagogic method, as described in the report and highlighted during the discussion, is the fact that two Semitic languages – Arabic and Hebrew – were being bridged by the German language. Interestingly, the memorandum also includes a report on the first seminars taught within the framework of the institute already in 1926 (conveyed throughout by a German-Hebrew translator). These were in fact the very first research seminars in the Humanities to be taught in the Hebrew University since its inauguration in 1925.

The keynote lecture, given by Mangold-Will, was dedicated to the Institute of Oriental Studies, seen through the prism of German-Jewish Orientalism and Bi-cultural Nationalism, as these were reflected by the institute's founders and tone-setting lecturers of the initial years. Mangold-Will maintained that the founder, Josef Horowitz, deeply influenced by his experiences from the years he spent teaching in Aligar, India, was advocating a model of a national, yet multi-cultural university. He was striving for a Pan-humanistic approach within a dominant framework of a national commitment, and was looking for ways to integrate the intellectual life within the university with the campus's surrounding realities.

The first panel of the conference „Universities and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: Europe and the Middle-East“ began with a talk by KADER KONUK (Duisburg-Essen) on German intellectual emigres in Turkish universities and the rise of the Humanist tradition in research. Konuk's opening words on the departure to exile of Turkish academics during present days, was a grave reminder of

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the apparent relevance of this field of research to our own times. Konuk's talk portrayed the formation of the humanist movement beginning at the late 1940s, and the contribution of German intellectuals, the majority of whom Jewish, to this process. The movement nurtured the concept of academic autonomy within the Turkish space. However, so far as European notions of Humanism and Cosmopolitanism, as the ones promoted by figures such as Erich Auerbach, were embraced in the 'new' surrounding, they never managed to transcend national frontiers. Following right after was a talk by KATERINA CAPKOVÁ (Prague) dedicated to the role of German speaking Jewish professors at the universities in Prague between 1918 and 1948. Capková approached the topic through the 'Samuel Steiner Affair', a rector at the German university in Prague who was forced to resign his post in 1922 after being submitted to immense pressure by students and staff. Further, the university's role within the academic structure of the Third Reich was discussed, what later served as a background for addressing the case of the German-Jewish literary scholar Josef Körner, whose figure represents the grim situation which German-Jews encountered during the immediate post-war period. Körner, who was expelled from the University following the Munich Agreement and later sent to Theresienstadt, has lost his Czech citizenship following his return to the capital, as he was considered above all, a German. HAGGAI ERLICH (Tel-Aviv) sealed the panel with a talk on universities and the developing concepts of Arab and Egyptian nationalisms during the first half of the twentieth century. He focused on the case of the University of Cairo, describing its establishment in 1925 as one of the most striking achievements during the inter-war period in Egypt.

The second panel was entirely devoted to the archive of the Hebrew University as a unique research depository as well as a subject for historical examination. All the participating speakers also took part in the research project described above. The panel offered a broad perspective on the question of how certain organs within the entire body of a national university correlate and interact with means and interests of outside insti-

tutes, which are projected onto the university, and in the case of the Hebrew University, this becomes even more apparent during the pre-state years, indeed the years of 'Nation Building'. YAEL LEVI (Jerusalem) provided historical backgrounds for the discussion, by shedding light on the earliest debates concerning the establishment of a Hebrew university, going back to the 1880s. She offered a unique glance by examining the reflections of these debates as they appeared in Jewish newspapers in America, Europe and Palestine. These debates preceded, and later ran parallel to the outspoken commitment to the cause which was shared by central fractions of the Zionist movement. In fact, representatives of various leaderships of Jewish streams and communities in Europe were discussing the need to establish a university for Jews – not necessarily a Hebrew one and not necessarily in Palestine. Levi's talk emphasized the change of approach towards the idea of a Hebrew university occurring within the leaderships of dispersed Jewish communities, before and after World War I. ENRICO LUCCA (Jerusalem) revealed in his talk on the establishment of the national/university library, the complex institutional conflicts between the Zionist Executive and the university administration with regards to the university library as a national library. The relating disputes are well documented in the university archives, and especially in the correspondences of the library's first director, Hugo Bergmann (whose intellectual biography Lucca is writing), and who envisioned the library as a completely autonomous and independent institution.

ANNA KAWALKO (Jerusalem) introduced into the general discussion the notion of cultural deconstruction, by presenting the case of the Hebrew University's vehement efforts to acquire one of the largest and most important German-Jewish libraries, the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau, as part of the broader aim of (re)creating the Jewish culture in Palestine/Israel. Through this case, Kawalko managed to portray the university's stance towards heirless Jewish cultural property, and its effect on concrete collections which found their way into an accumulated and unified material body named „Diaspora Treasures“. The fate of the Breslau collec-

tion, as described by Kawalko, served well to exemplify the emergence of a new vocabulary set introduced into the debates over Jewish cultural property during the 1940s and onwards, that which included a conceptual shift from 'Jewish communities', to a 'Jewish people'.

ADI LIVNY (Jerusalem), the coordinator of the preservation and research project, concluded the panel with a talk on the founding story of the establishment of the Hebrew University on a plot of land („the Gray Hill estate“) that was purchased by the Zionist Institutions during World War I, from the Christian British Sir John Gray Hill. Livny depicted the university's extensive development beyond this original plot of land already during the 1920s. Through her findings based on her research in the university archives, Livny engages with the history of complicated affairs of land acquisition, which included controversial practices such as land expropriation, enabled by the Government of Palestine. Livny pointed out at the illuminating fact, that the aforementioned land affairs, with which the university was occupied well into the 1940s, were nevertheless not integrated into its official history. Their importance, she argues, lays in underlying the university's role as an agent of nation building; a role that was not limited only to its symbolic significance, but also included a practical end by actively contributing to the Zionist settlement enterprise.

Closing the conference was a roundtable discussion on 'How to write a university history?' chaired by YFAAT WEISS (Jerusalem), director of the Franz Rosenzweig Minerva Research Center. Weiss was joined by URI COHEN (Tel-Aviv University) author of a monograph on the history of the Hebrew University, ASSAF SELZER (Haifa) author and editor of the fourth volume of the series „The History of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem“, and OFER TZEMACH (Jerusalem), director of the archival department. The discussion among the participants and the audience went along the lines of transmission from a pre-state institution to a national, state-oriented institution. Addressing the nature and character of the university during the early decades, Weiss commented that some of the founding figures of the establishment,

all immigrants, brought along different landscapes, whether lingual, experiential or traditional. All these were weaved into the institutional bodies comprising the entire establishment.

Addressing the topic of the archives themselves, Cohen shared his opinion that the most striking asset of the archive of the Hebrew University lays in the fact that its holdings reflect the most important cultural establishment created by the Zionist movement. He also commented on the swiftly changing political environment during the first three decades of the university's existence, and the various ways in which these changes effect the course of its development, and especially, as Weiss also pointed out, during the phase of transition from functioning as a pre-state project inspired by a spiritual Zionist vision, to a state university pre-se, which later serves as a lighthouse for other Israeli universities.

Perhaps it would make sense to close this report with a thought expressed by Selzer during the discussion, a one that hovers above any attempt at historicizing an institute such as a university. Selzer is convinced that it is impossible to write the history of the university as such, but only to add different sorts of historical layers one on-top of the other, or side by side, thereby suggesting that this history will continue to be written. Continue it will indeed, as the work on the fifth volume of the series „The History of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem“, dedicated to the period of 1948-1967 has very recently begun.

#### **Conference overview:**

##### *Opening lecture*

Chair: Yonatan Mendel (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem/The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute)

Sabine Mangold-Will (University of Cologne): „German-Jewish Orientalism and Bi-cultural Nationalism: Establishment of the Hebrew University's Institute of Oriental Studies“

##### *Universities and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: Europe and the Middle East*

Chair: Liat Kozma (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Kader Konuk (University of Duisburg-Essen): „Replacing Ottoman Heritage with Huma-

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nism: German Émigrés at Turkish Universities“

Katerina Capková (Institute for Contemporary History, Czech Academy of Sciences):

„Neither Aryan nor Czech: German-speaking Jewish Professors at the Universities in Prague 1918-1948“

Haggai Erlich (Tel-Aviv University): „Universities, Arab and Egyptian Nationalisms in the First Half of the Twentieth Century“

*From The Archive of the Hebrew University*

Chair: Lina Barouch (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem/ Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach)

Enrico Lucca (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem): „A „National“ and a „University“ Library? A Conflict between Institutions“

Anna Kawalko (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem): „Between Nation-Building and Cultural Deconstruction: The Hebrew University and the Transfer of the Breslau Rabbinical Library to Jerusalem in the Immediate Postwar Period“

Yael Levi (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem): „„Out of Zion Shall Go Forth the Law“? The Debate over the Hebrew University in the Jewish Press Before and After War World I“

Adi Livny (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem): „„The Grey Hill Myth“ Or: The Yet-to-be-written History of the University’s Lands in Mount Scopus“

*Round Table Discussion: How to Write a University’s History*

Chair: Yfaat Weiss (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Participants: Uri Cohen (Tel-Aviv University) / Assaf Selzer (University of Haifa) / Ofer Tzemach (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

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