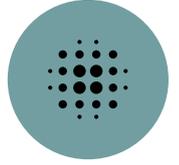


ONE BIOGRAPHY, MULTIPLE PLACES: THE LIFE AND WORK OF SHMUEL HUGO BERGMANN BETWEEN PRAGUE AND JERUSALEM (1883–1975)



PANEL 5

Bergmann in the World



ARIE M. DUBNOV

A Part of Asia or Apart from Asia? S. H. Bergmann, the Asian Relations Conference in Delhi, and the boundaries of Zionist Asianism, 1947-56

On March 23, 1947, the soon-to-be Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, wearing his staple mandarin-collared coat and white Gandhi hat, opened the Asian Relations Conference in Delhi. A self-proclaimed "great gathering of the nations of Asia," the conference brought together almost 200 delegates from twenty-eight countries, many of which were in the midst of struggles for independence against the slowly receding European empires. Amid this forest of delegates from across the Asian continent was a ten-member delegation representing the Yishuv, the Jewish community in pre-1948 Palestine, chaired by Shmuel Hugo Bergmann (1883-1975). The aim of my talk is to locate this affair within a longer history of what I propose to dub as "Zionist Asianism": an effort to forge political ties and reimagine the Jewish political renaissance that would parallel and collaborate with non-European and non-Western nationalisms. Offering a mix of cultural and diplomatic history, my talk situates Bergmann's activity within a context of pre-1947 Zionists' attempts to establish relations with nascent Asian states and the ways in which this political and discursive field declined after 1948, until its almost entire demise during the aftermath of the 1956 Suez War. I suggest seeing Zionist Asianism as a sentiment as well as a political strategy, which grew out of an inherent cultural ambivalence concerning the Otherness of the Jew that animated Zionist thought from its inception and tied to an immanent tension within Jewish nationalism, in which "Western" perceptions of the modernizing Zionist project clashed with conceptions that emphasized the Jews' Semitic "Easternness." Bergmann's shift of the gaze eastwards, I suggest, should be reassessed against this background.

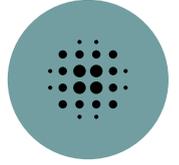


SHIMON LEV

"I Read Sri Aurobindo to Find Some Light in our Difficult Days": Hugo Bergmann's Encounter with India, Aurobindo, and the Mother

The encounter of the Austro-Hungarian-born Jewish philosopher and Zionist Shmuel Hugo Bergmann (1883-1975) with the Indian philosopher and Guru Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), and with Aurobindo's collaborator and successor, the Mother - born Mirra Alfassa (1878-1973) - is relatively unknown. Bergmann's papers, which are located in the National Library of Israel and at the Hebrew University (both in Jerusalem) reveal that alongside his better-known political interests, Bergmann kept numerous articles, newspaper cuttings, papers, letters, reports, and notebooks (full of illegible comments) relating to Aurobindo and the Mother.

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As I will discuss in my presentation, Bergmann also published articles about Aurobindo's philosophy, made references to him in lectures and writings, and mentioned him in his diaries.

Importantly, his interest in Aurobindo's philosophy is also revealed in his correspondence with Dr Indra Sen (1903–1994) – an ardent and a prominent devotee of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and it is preserved as part of the Bergmann archive. This presentation draws mainly on the archival material located in Jerusalem to offer the very first appraisal of Hugo Bergmann's interest and relationship with Aurobindo and India. It also presents his ambivalent views on the Mother, particularly as revealed in his correspondence with Sen. The paper frames this by discussing Bergmann's political activities and his visit to India during the Asian Relations Conference of 1947 in New Delhi.

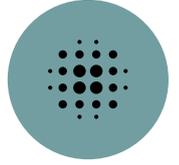


SAMUEL GLAUBER-ZIMRA

***“I Frequently Hold a Telepathic Dialogue with You”:* The Correspondence of Shmuel Hugo Bergmann and R. Zalman Schachter-Shalomi**

Shmuel Hugo Bergmann (1883–1975) maintained a decade-long correspondence with R. Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (1924–2014) following the latter's visit to Israel in 1958. The unpublished correspondence between the two men, who were separated in age by more than four decades, reveals a close bond of friendship and a shared intellectual and spiritual curiosity. Schachter-Shalomi's letters, written in a deeply personal tone, provide a window into his whirlwind activities during these formative years in which he lay the groundwork for what would become the Jewish Renewal movement. Notably, Schachter-Shalomi in 1963 shared with Bergmann his recent experimentation with LSD, providing the latter with encouragement and instructions for taking his own trip, while Bergmann introduced Schachter-Shalomi to the works of Hillel Zeitlin, a pre-war Jewish religious thinker whose writings inspired Schachter-Shalomi in part to form the B'nai Or Religious Fellowship in the 1960s. Schachter-Shalomi likewise confided in Bergmann his efforts to form a spiritual fraternity in Winnipeg, Canada, where he then served as Hillel director at the University of Manitoba. Bergmann, for his part, expressed hopes that Schachter-Shalomi would return soon to Israel to serve as the spiritual leader of the Amanah circle, an organization of Zionist intellectuals who sought to bring about a non-Orthodox religious revival in Israel. A considerable part of the correspondence relates to the publication of a Hebrew translation of Schachter-Shalomi's first book, *The First Step*, arranged by Bergmann under the auspices of the Amanah circle. Together, the correspondence of Bergmann and Schachter-Shalomi gives insight into the religious counter-culture in both Israel and North America as it developed in the late 1950s and 1960s.

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Bergmann in the World



ENRICO LUCCA

Fighting for the Future of European Jewry: Hugo Bergmann in Sweden (1947–1948)

Drawing on archival sources both from Sweden and from Israel, diaries as well as institutional and personal letters, I would like to reconstruct a fascinating chapter in Bergmann's life: his stance in Stockholm from July 1947 to November 1948 as an educator of the local Jewish community, which marked Bergmann's return to Europe after the Second World War and the Holocaust. Over the course of the fifteenth months that he actually spent in Sweden, Bergman held two cycles of public lectures, attended by an audience of both Jews and non-Jews, preached in the Synagogue at least two times each month, organized a study circle for young people dedicated to discussing religious themes, promoted the creation of a liberal Jewish youth group where he regularly lectured, took great interest in organizing and updating the library of the community, and tried to give new life to the local Hebrew language circle. All these different activities, each of them well documented through archival sources, intersect with a general need for reorganization of the Swedish Jewish community, which at that time had to face at least three important issues: the necessity to deal with the huge number of refugees, mostly German and Polish Jews; the tensions within the local Jewish community between the liberal and the orthodox faction, and the problems of finding a new rabbi, who would be invested of the difficult task to replace Markus Ehrenpreis. This chapter of Bergman's life proves particularly significant at least for two reasons: we can trace on the one hand—especially through his correspondence, his view on current events in Palestine, very often marked by doubts, fear, and frustration (for a moment Bergmann even pondered not to come back to Palestine); on the other hand, we trace his efforts to find a place where to keep the tradition of European Judaism alive after the Holocaust. In this sense, it is particularly interesting to analyze Bergmann's lectures on modern Jewish thinkers, which—published first in Swedish and later in English—will finally contribute to shaping the first canon of modern Jewish thought.