



Scholars Commemorate Ephraim E. Urbach

Ephraim Elimelech Urbach was the fourth president of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities – after Martin Buber, Aharon Katzir and Gershom Scholem. Born in 1912, Urbach received his ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau and his doctorate from the University of Rome. He taught at the Seminary until his emigration in 1938 to Israel, where he served as director of a religious secondary school, as a chaplain in the British Army and as a supervisor in the Ministry of Education before serving as a lecturer (1953) and later a full professor (1958) of Talmud and Midrash at the Hebrew University. He was appointed Chairperson of the Academy's Section of Humanities in 1963 and served as the Academy's President from 1980 through 1986.

Urbach was one of Israel's preeminent scholars of Jewish Studies, specializing in the history of the halakha and of rabbinic thought. His careful, in-depth research covered the "big issues" of practically every branch of talmudic and rabbinic literature. His monumental work *Ba'alei Ha-Tosafot* (1955) won him the prestigious Israel Prize in Jewish Studies. His other widely acclaimed books include *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (1969) and *The Halakhah: Its Sources and Development*, both of which have been published in English translation. His longest-running project was a scholarly edition of the classic *Arugat Ha-Bosem* (1939–1963). He also published many shorter essays and articles, in which he often took an independent intellectual or political stand. Some of these are included in his *Collected Writings in Jewish Studies* (in English), edited by Robert Brody and Moshe D. Herr.

Urbach's personality linked sharp intelligence, vast knowledge, personal warmth and a willingness to lead rather than follow the crowd. Though he was one of Israel's best-known intellectual figures, he was also known for his humility. Responsible and decisive, he devoted much effort to encouraging a new generation of young Israeli scholars of Jewish Studies.

In 1996, five years after his passing, six such scholars met under the Academy's auspices to discuss his legacy and to present scholarly papers in his honor, and these have now been published by the Academy in an attractive Hebrew volume entitled *Issues in Talmudic Research* (2001). The diversity of its contents – ranging from Menachem Kister's study of the dynamics of monotheism, to Mordechai Sabato's work on manuscripts of the talmudic tractate Sanhedrin, to Simcha Emanuel's portrait of R. Baruch of Mainz – gives an idea of the wide scope of Urbach's Judaic knowledge and interests.



The
Forum

is published quarterly by the American Foundation for Basic Research in Israel, a non-profit, tax-exempt organization registered in the State of New York (USA).

The American Foundation for Basic Research in Israel (AFBRI) supports the development of science in Israel and facilitates the participation of the international donor community in this endeavor.

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