

RESEARCH SEMINAR:

**Yitzhak Baer and Leo Strauss: The Rediscovery of
Isaac Abravanel's Political Thought in the late 1930s**

Dr. Cedric Cohen Skalli (University of Haifa)

This seminar will focus on the intellectual background of a major breakthrough in the modern study of Abravanel's work and life: the rediscovery of his political thought, especially of his republicanism, by German Jewish Scholars after the fall the Weimar Republic. This rediscovery during the first years of the Nazi Regime can be attributed to the commemoration of the 500 anniversary of Abravanel's birth in 1937. The articles of Yitzhak Baer and Leo Strauss are the best known contributions, and reflect opposing views on the subject. Divergence also featured in the path out of Germany these two intellectuals took: Baer immigrated to Palestine in 1930 and joined the Hebrew University while Strauss left Germany in 1932 for France and England and later immigrated to the US in 1937 and joined the New School.

This seminar will reconstruct the Baer-Strauss debate on Abravanel's "republicanism" and its larger intellectual context. For Baer, the novel Jewish-Christian cultural type of Abravanel is the expression of his social position as a Court Jew and also the backdrop for the elaboration of his new social, historical and political conceptions, which unfortunately proved unfruitful in a time of absolutism, expulsions and persecutions. For Strauss, Abravanel's Jewish-Christian ambiguity destroyed the authentic philosophical understanding of Jewish Law. Abravanel's "Christian" misunderstanding of the political essence of Jewish philosophy hastened the decline of Jewish philosophy. Whereas Baer discloses in Abravanel the first Jewish republican thinker, Strauss sees but "the last of the Jewish philosophers of Middle Ages."

Thursday, 19th March 2020 | 10:00-14:00
Room 665, Education Building, University of Haifa

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