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THE TENTH EDWARD ULLENDORFF MEMORIAL LECTURE

Professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann
Massada Fellow, Worcester College, Oxford

The Fascinating and Multifaceted 3,300- year Evolution and Regeneration of Hebrew

Professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann, D.Phil. (Oxon.), is listed among Australia's top 30 'living legends of research' by The Australian newspaper (2024). He received the Rubinlicht Prize for his outstanding contribution to Yiddish scholarship in 2023. He is the author of *Revivalistics: From the Genesis of Israeli to Language Reclamation in Australia and Beyond* (Oxford University Press, 2020), the seminal bestseller *Israelit Safa Yafa* (Israeli – A Beautiful Language; Am Oved, 2008) and *Language Contact and Lexical Enrichment in Israeli Hebrew* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Abstract: Hebrew was spoken after the conquest of Canaan (c. thirteenth century BC) and was the language of the Iron Age kingdoms of Israel and Judah during in c.1200-586 BC. It was a continuation of Canaanite, a Northwest Semitic language. Following a gradual decline (for example, Jesus was a native speaker of Aramaic rather than Hebrew), Hebrew ceased to be spoken by the second century AD. The Bar-Kokhba Revolt against the Romans in Judaea in AD 132-5 marks the symbolic end of the period of spoken Hebrew. For more than 1700 years thereafter, Hebrew was a sleeping beauty. It served as a liturgical and literary language, and occasionally a lingua franca for Jews of the Diaspora, but not as a mother tongue.

The formation of the "Revival Language" known as "Israeli" and "Modern Hebrew" was facilitated at the end of the nineteenth century by native Yiddish speaker Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858-1922), school teachers, authors and other intellectuals. They understood the "trinity" of modern nation-statehood (langue-land-lens, i.e. language, territory, heritage) and sought to further the Zionist cause. Earlier, during the Haskalah (enlightenment) period of the 1770s-1880s, writers such as Méndele Móykher-Sfórim (originally Shalom Abramowitsch) produced works and neologisms which eventually contributed to Revived Hebrew. However, it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that the language was first spoken.

This accessible, entertaining and scholarly talk will demonstrate the multi-layered and multi-sourced nature of Revived Hebrew.

**Week 1, Thursday, 15 October 2026
6:00 pm (UK time)**

This lecture will be a hybrid session which will be accessible both online (see below) and in person in the Catherine Lewis Lecture Room, Clarendon Institute. Refreshments to follow.

In order to participate in this lecture online, please register at this link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/eEoIx2_NT2a017QS34Nx4Q

ALL WELCOME!

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