

THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

JEWISH STUDIES PROGRAM

cordially invites you to a lecture by

Israel Bartal

(Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel Academy of Sciences)

Bentham and the Rabbi: A Story of Two Book-Lovers

On December 9, 1787, the renowned English philosopher of Utilitarianism Jeremy Bentham was traveling through Eastern Europe, where his brother Samuel, a prominent engineer and industrialist, was serving in the employ of Prince Potemkin and Empress Catherine the Great. Jeremy spent some time with his brother hoping to implement some of the innovative architectural ideas that he was developing in his “Panopticon.” In the course of a journey through the town of Slonim (now in Belarus), Jeremy discovered to his chagrin that he was unable to find a vacancy at any of the town’s respectable inns. He was forced to lodge for the night with a Jew, a rabbi who was the proprietor of a hardware store. Bentham was surprised to note that his host possessed two glass-enclosed bookcases that housed between 250 and 300 volumes. The rabbi took particular pride in two scientific works in his collection: a book on astronomy to which he had added a diagram of his own, and a Hebrew edition of Euclid's Elements. Prof. Bartal will discuss this lesser-known encounter, revisiting the conventional historiography on late 18th century Eastern European Polish and Jewish enlightenment.

Tuesday, March 07 at 6 p.m.
Gellner Room, Monument Building



Israel Bartal is member of Israel Academy of Sciences, Professor Emeritus at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the former Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at HU (2006–2010). From 2006 till 2015 he served as the chair of the Historical Society of Israel. He served as director of the Center for Research on the History and Culture of Polish Jewry, and the academic chairman of the Project of Jewish Studies in Russian at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Professor Bartal was the co-director of the Center for Jewish Studies and Civilization at Moscow State University. He focuses his research on the history of the Jews in Palestine, the Jews of Eastern Europe, the Haskalah Movement, Jewish Orthodoxy and modern Jewish historiography. Professor Bartal taught at Harvard, Johns Hopkins, McGill, University of Pennsylvania and Rutgers University, as well as at Moscow State University (MGU). Bartal is one of the founders of *Cathedra*, the leading scholarly journal on the history of Israel, and had served as its co-editor for over twenty years. Since 1998 he was the editor of *Vestnik*, a scholarly journal of Jewish studies in Russian. From 1995 to 2003 he chaired the Israeli history high-school curriculum committee. Bartal has published many books and numerous articles in several languages on the history and culture of East European Jewry, Palestine in the pre-Zionist era, and Jewish nationalism.