

ALPS ADRIA PSYCHOLOGISTS' COMMUNITY

Ramiro Bujas and Psychology in Graz around 1900

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This presentation is not meant as *a laudatio*. An excellent appreciation of Bujas's scientific work was given by Krstić (1961). Rather, an attempt was made to gather some additional biographic data concerning Bujas as a student. Furthermore, we tried to give a short description of the Meinong school for the period between 1899 and 1906 when Bujas lived in Graz.

one of which has been submitted as a doctoral thesis (see Figure 1).

Bujas's hand-written application for admittance to the doctoral examinations (*Rigorosen*) is presented in Figure 2. As can be seen, he asked for taking his examinations in Slavonic Philology as a major subject (*erstes Fach*) and Comparative Linguistics as secondary subject (*zweites Fach*).

I

Ramiro Bujas was born in 1879 in Budva, Dalmatia. After having done his school-leaving examination at the gymnasium (grammar school) in Dubrovnik, he enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy in Graz in autumn 1899. For the academic year 1902/1903 he interrupted his studies at the Faculty of Philosophy for two semesters in order to take courses in law and political science. After his excursion into the Faculty of Jurisprudence his interests focused on philosophy and Slavonic philology. In the field of linguistics he was mainly preoccupied with physiology of articulation and psychology of language. In 1903, the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg entrusted him with investigating the various types of stressing syllables (*Akzentverhältnisse*) in "cakavian" dialects in Dalmatia, the Isles of Istria and the costal areas of Croatia. The outcome of his sojourn in St. Petersburg were two treatises,

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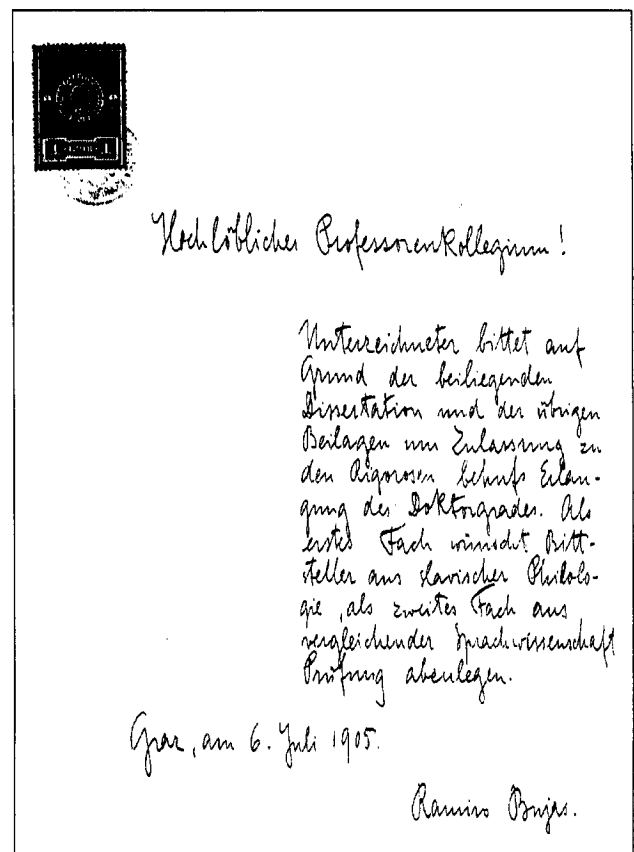


Figure 1. Ramiro Bujas's application for admittance to the doctoral examinations

The title of Bujas's thesis was *Die Betonung der cakavischen Mundarten in Dalmatien, auf den Inseln Istriens und im kroatischen Küstenlande*. M. Murko served as major reader (*Erstgutachter*); secondary reader (*Zweitgutachter*) was Karl Strekelj. Both Murko and Strekelj acclaimed his exact observational methods and his cautious conclusions. The university records (Figure 3) reveal that Bujas passed his doctoral examination with distinction (*mit Auszeichnung*). Figure 3 shows also that the examinations in Philosophy as minor subject (*Nebenrigorosum aus Philosophie*) were held by Alexius Meinong and Eduard Martinak.

Under the rectorship of Moritz Holl, professor of anatomy, and the deanship of Rudolf Hoernes, professor of geology and paleontology, the PhD was conferred on Bujas by Otto Cuntz (Promotor), professor of Roman archeology, on February 24th, 1906.

Bujas was a vigorous man. At a mature age he decided to study medicine. Like Wilhelm Wundt (1832 - 1920) he became university assistant at an institute of physiology. Supported by Smetanka, professor of physiology at the University of Zagreb, he was able to establish a psychology laboratory at Smetanka's Department of Physiology in 1920, the year of death of Meinong and Wundt. It is to be assumed that it were Meinong's and Wundt's laboratories that served as models. In 1929 he was appointed to the Chair of psychology at the University of Zagreb. Bujas was the first to establish psychology as an experimental science in Croatia. Besides experimentation (e.g., Bujas, 1932, 1933a), however, his interests included a wide range of theoretical and applied fields (e.g., Bujas, 1933b, 1937a, 1937b). It is also well known that he was a man of strong opinions, and he did not shirk controversy. In lectures given at the People's university, he struggled against prejudices, and stood up for psychology, as an experimental discipline.

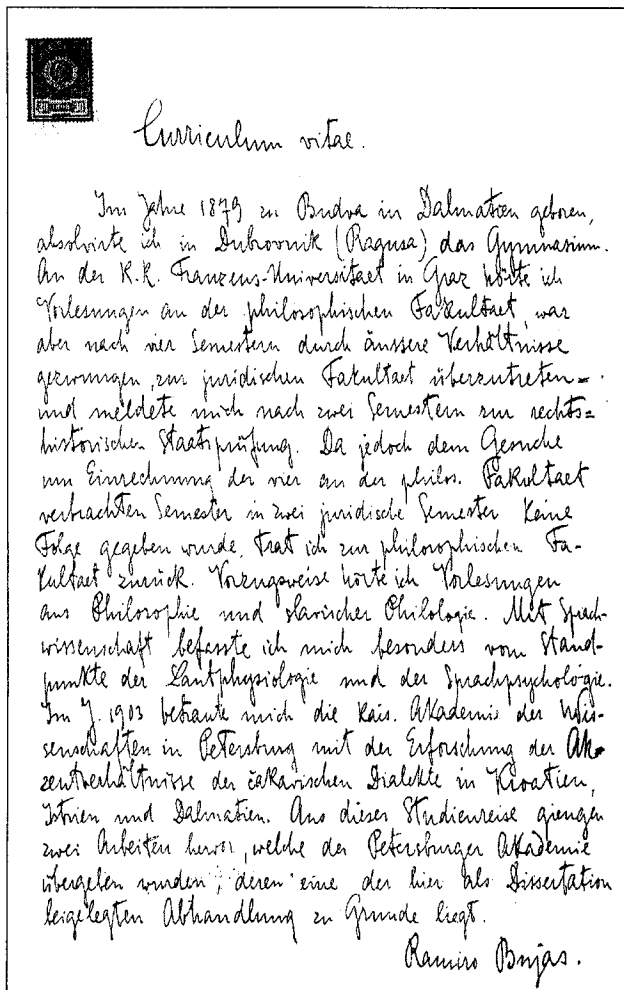


Figure 2. Handwritten curriculum vitae of Ramiro Bujas

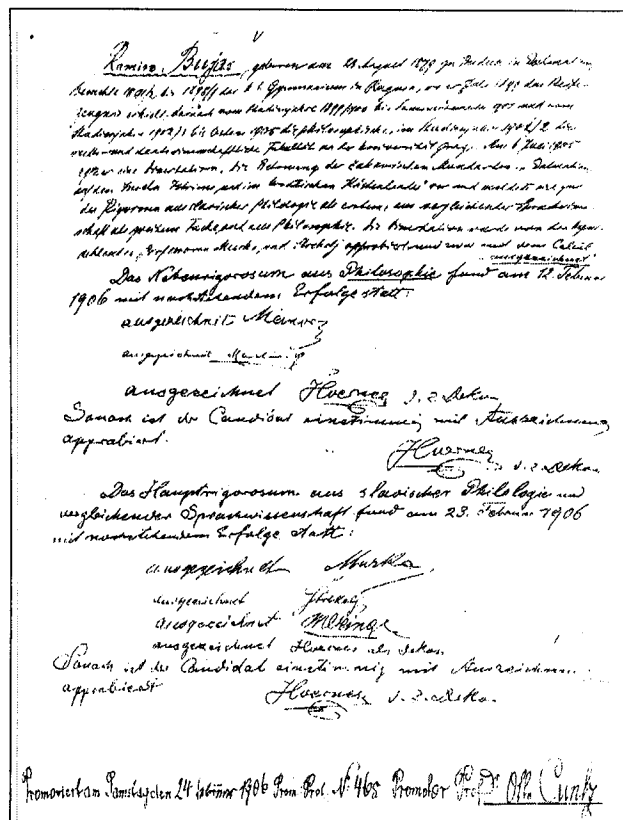


Figure 3. Record of the dean's office about Ramiro Bujas's doctoral examinations (*Prfungsprotokoll*)

II

When Ramiro Bujas took up his studies in Graz in the academic year 1899/1900, there were 107 students enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy. When he submitted his doctoral thesis in 1905, the number of students amounted to 325; ten of them were females (see Mittenecker & Seybold, 1994). Already at that time the teaching programme for psychology attracted students from different scientific fields. Benussi reported that the average student number in his lectures ranged between 170 and 200 (Antonelli, 1994). Bujas attended Meinong's lectures in psychology. In all probability, he participated also in classes held by Benussi, Martinak and Witasek.

Alexius Meinong (1853 - 1920) founded the first Austrian psychology laboratory in Graz in 1894, fifteen years after the foundation of Wundt's laboratory in Leipzig 1879. However, Meinong was mainly a philosopher and not an experimental psychologist. Since about 1900, Meinong's eye disease was growing worse. Without the support of Wittasek and Benussi it would have been impossible for him to run experiments and to give classes in experimental psychology.

Influenced by Franz Brentano's distinction between acts (*Akte*) and contents (*Inhalte*), Meinong (1899) published an article on "objects of higher order" (*Über Gegenstände höherer Ordnung, und deren Verhältnis zur inneren Wahrnehmung*). He claimed that relations and connections, though formed by a subject, have their own ontological status and subsist as ideal objects. Moreover, he spoke between founding contents (*fundierende Inhalte*) and founded contents (*fundierte Inhalte*). The relation of these types of contents is hierarchical. The founding contents were called *inferiora*, the founded contents *superiora*. Founding and founded contents, respectively, form a complex, with the real complexes being equivalent to perceptions, while the ideal complexes correspond to conceptions. According to Modenato (1995), Meinong's theory of objects (*Über Gegenstandstheorie*, 1904) may be conceived as a theory of knowledge. As has been pointed out by Krstić (1961), Bujas applied Meinong's theory of objects to issues of cognitive psychology.

It is to be assumed that Bujas as a student met also Stephan Witasek (1870 - 1915) and Vittorio Benussi (1878 - 1927). Witasek was Meinong's first assistant at the laboratory. In 1899, Witasek was qualified as a university lecturer. His postdoctoral thesis (*Habilitationsschrift*) dealt with geometric-optical illusions (*Über die Natur geometrisch-optischer Täuschungen*). Witasek strongly influenced Benussi's work on Gestalt perception. In his monograph "Principles of General Aesthetics" (*Grundzüge der allgemeinen Ästhetik*, 1904), Witasek suggested a theory

of aesthetics based on the psychological theory of values. Witasek became also well known as author of two remarkable textbooks (*Grundlinien der Psychologie*, 1908; *Psychologie der Raumwahrnehmung des Auges*, 1910).

Benussi received his PhD in December 1901. His doctoral thesis dealt with the *Zellnersche Figur*. A revised version of his thesis was accepted for publication in the highly respected journal *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane* in 1902. Since October 1901, Benussi worked together with Witasek as second staff member at Meinong's laboratory. In 1904, Benussi published his outstanding treatise *Zur Psychologie der Gestalterfassung* (*Die Müller-Lyersche Figur*), which was submitted as a postdoctoral thesis in 1905. Although Benussi designed his experiments within the framework of Meinong's theory of objects, he used Ehrenfels's term *Gestalt* and not Meinong's term *Komplexion* (Cattaruzza, 1999, p. 22). According to the conception of the Graz Gestalt school, the Müller-Lyer illusion, or more precisely, the Brentano-Müller-Lyer illusion, was considered as an illusion of production. The Graz school, and Benussi in particular, have been arguing for years with proponents of the Berlin school of Gestalt theory (especially with Wertheimer and Koffka).

When Ramiro Bujas spent his time as a student in Graz, the Graz school of psychology was on the road to international success. On occasion of the tenth anniversary of the psychology laboratory, Meinong (1904a) presented an impressive documentation of the research work done in Graz around 1900. The omnibus volume *Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie* comprised eleven contributions. Besides Meinong's treatise *ber Gegenstandstheorie*, Mally's *ntersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie des Mesens*, Benussi's article *Zur Psychologie der Gestalterfassung* and Ameseder's article *ber Vorstellungsproduktion* seem to be of special interest even for the contemporary reader. It is noteworthy that Ameseder's and Benussi's contributions were extensively reviewed by Bertrand Russel in *Mind* (1905).

III

Edwin G. Boring (1957) characterised the situation for systematic psychology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a dilemma that "lay between act and content, between Brentano and Wundt" (p. 361). However, that was also the difference between philosophical argumentation and scientific experimentation. For instance, Witasek's *Grundlinien der Psychologie* appear to be a good example of a bipartite psychology, half content, half act. In Witasek and in Benussi as well it comes clear that most data on perception can be expressed in terms of acts if

judgements are involved. The act psychologist stresses judging, the psychologist of content conceives judgements as observations of what is judged (Boring, 1957, pp. 361 and 448). In terms of act and content, Bujas represented the new experimental psychology of content, that is to say, the psychology that considered acts as elusive phenomena not being amenable to "systematic experimental inspection" (a term coined by Narzi Ach). Insistence on careful scientific technique, even when the method used was introspection, was a conspicuous feature of Ramiro Bujas's approach to psychology.

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