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In Memoriam: Professor Moshe Fischer (1945–2021)



On August 22, 2021, our friend and colleague Professor Emeritus Moshe (Ladislav) Fischer, one of the most prominent archaeologists of the classical periods in Israel, passed away. He was a highly esteemed member of the Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of Humanities of Tel Aviv University, as well as a corresponding member of the German Institute of Archaeology (DAI).

Moshe, who was born in Braşov, Romania (Transylvania) in 1945, completed an M.A. in ancient history and archaeology at the University of Bucharest in 1968 and immigrated to Israel in 1970. After serving in the Israel Defence Forces and participating in and conducting archaeological excavations for several years in Israel, he began his formal Ph.D. studies in 1975, and in 1979 submitted to the Senate of Tel Aviv University a Ph.D. dissertation titled ‘The Development of the Corinthian Capital in Palestine from Its Beginning until the Constantinian Period’, under the supervision of the late Professor Emeritus Mordechai Gichon. The dissertation, which was approved in 1980, paved the way for Moshe to begin lecturing in the classical archaeology section of the Department of Classical Studies of Tel Aviv University. He became a tenured senior lecturer in 1987, an associate professor in 1995, and a full professor in 2000. In 2005, Moshe moved with his colleague and friend, the late Professor Emeritus Israel Roll, to the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures, as part of a structural reform in the Faculty of Humanities. During his academic career he was a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (1985–1990, 2004 and 2009), and he taught as a visiting professor in institutions in Israel (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and University of Haifa) and abroad, including Oberlin College (Ohio, USA), University of Canterbury (Christchurch, New Zealand), Johns Hopkins University (Maryland, USA), Fudan University (Shanghai, China) and the University of São Paulo (Brazil).

Moshe conducted many archaeological excavation and survey projects, both jointly and on his own. Major projects include the following:

- ‘En Boqeq, on the Dead Sea shore (1976, 1977, 1980 and 1981), the (agricultural) oasis and the site of an Early Roman industrial complex (*officina*);
- Meẓad Tamar, in the Eastern Negev Highlands (1973–1976), a Roman- and Byzantine-period fortress along the road to the Dead Sea;

- The Roman bathhouse at Emmaus (1977–1978 and 1981–1982); Khirbet el-ʿAqd, a Hellenistic-period fort and Roman-period fortifications and subterranean hiding complexes from the two Jewish revolts (1978–1980 and 1983); and Ḥorvat Meṣad, a way-station on the Roman road from Jaffa to Jerusalem (1977–1980). These three sites were included within a broader regional project that focused on Roman roads and associated sites in the western Judaeen Hills and later formed part of Moshe’s work, *Roman Roads in Judaea II: The Jaffa–Jerusalem Roads* (co-authored by B.H. Isaac and I. Roll; Oxford, 1996);
- Tel Kedesh, in the Upper Galilee (1976, 1977, 1981, 1983 and 1984), a monumental, well-preserved Roman-period temple;
- Khirbet Zikhrin, in the western Samaria Foothills (1982–1989), a multi-period (Hellenistic to Ottoman) rural site;
- Yavneh-Yam, on the Mediterranean coast between Jaffa and Ashdod (1992–2011), the harbour town of inland Yavneh, which was inhabited from the Middle Bronze Age II through the beginning of the Crusader period;
- The Map of Yavneh survey, a regional project that emerged from the Yavneh-Yam excavations and constituted part of the Israel Archaeological Survey.

In addition, Moshe participated in the final publication of excavation projects led by his institutional peers, including I. Roll’s excavations at Tel Yaʿoz (published in *Tel Aviv* 35 [2008]) and Apollonia-Arsuf, as well as Z. Herzog’s excavations at Tel Michal and I. Beit-Arieh’s excavations at Tel ʿIra and Ḥorvat ʿUza, all published in the Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University. Moshe also took upon himself the final publication of the remains from the Hellenistic to Ottoman periods unearthed during M. Kochavi and P. Beck’s excavations at Tel Aphek/Antipatris.

Moshe’s areas of expertise lay at the heart of European classical archaeology as established in the 19th century—i.e., Greece and Rome (in their broadest sense) as comprehensive Mediterranean cultural agents. His Ph.D. dissertation, in addition to its catalogue, focused on the connection between East and West and the impacts of this connection. This work accorded him international prestige and the status of world expert in provincial architectural decoration in the eastern part of the Roman Empire—in particular after it was published in German as *Das korinthische Kapitell im Alten Israel in der hellenistischen und römischen Periode: Studien zur Baudekoration im Nahen Osten* (Mainz, 1990). Consequently, he became highly active in the Association for the Study of Marble & Other Stones in Antiquity (ASMOSIA), serving as the association’s Councilor until his final days.

The connection between Israel and the Greek and Roman worlds in the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods served as a major point of departure in many of Moshe Fischer’s studies. One of these was his monograph on marble imports to Israel during the Roman period, *Marble Studies: Roman Palestine and the Marble Trade* (Konstanz, 1998). The analysis of the Land of Israel as an ‘actor’ in a large-scale imperial system was also manifest in the final reports of his excavations, including *ʿEn Boqeq: Excavations in an Oasis on the Dead Sea, II: The Officina, An Early Roman Building on the Dead Sea*

Shore (Mainz, 2000) and *Horvat Meşad: A Way-Station on the Jaffa–Jerusalem Road* (Tel Aviv, 2012).

Other studies, published as articles in peer-reviewed journals and chapters in refereed scientific collections, deal with the architectural decoration of buildings, both civil (urban basilicas) and religious (temples, synagogues and churches), providing an often innovative angle on their religious-social function and their historical framework, both political and chronological. As a derivative of these studies on architectural decoration, Moshe has continued to advance, over the past two decades, the study of the import of marble, in many cases using isotope analysis in order to determine the source of quarry.

Another aspect of Moshe Fischer's research was the initial publication of the results of his excavations and surveys of various sites. Noteworthy are his frequent contributions to excavations of his peers, to whom he imparted of his vast knowledge and his good will, whether on the stratigraphic-architectural level or in the processing of small finds (such as pottery, metal, stone and architectural elements), attempting, in quite a few cases, to provide a broader context to questions concerning the reconstruction of past societies. Moshe's collegiality towards his peers and especially his students, who in many cases served as equal research partners, was always evident. Due to his international reputation as a leading scholar of classical provincial archaeology, Moshe was a member of the editorial boards of the *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, *Ancient West and East* and *Peuce*. At Tel Aviv University, he served as a member of the editorial board of the Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology and a co-editor of the Salvage Excavation Reports series.

Many students have completed their M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations under Moshe Fischer's supervision. He was known to be a dedicated supervisor, who pushed his students to realise their potential—a caring and helpful mentor whose advice was always prized. He was known to be the 'saviour' of many of his academic colleagues in Israel and abroad, always willing to help those in whom he believed, advocating—sometimes discreetly and at other times openly—for their academic advancement, sidestepping university politics and always preferring the greater good.

Moshe was a warm family man—a devoted husband to Greta, a proud father to Yair and Shay and a loving grandfather—who knew how to create the perfect balance between family needs and a demanding academic career. He was a keen traveller who mastered ancient and modern languages, loved prose, poetry, music, theatre and film and shared these passions with those close to him. With Moshe's passing—after a four-day hospitalization in the intensive care unit of the Galilee Medical Center following a sudden, severe blood clot in his brain—we have lost a remarkable scholar, a true intellectual, a wonderful educator and, above all, a true *mensch*. On a more personal note, we had the privilege over the years to be Moshe's students, colleagues and friends. We each had a somewhat different, but at times overlapping, 'history' with Moshe throughout our professional career. He will be sadly missed by his colleagues and friends, especially those who worked closely with him and had the opportunity to benefit from his knowledge and to experience first-hand his charming personality.

Oren Tal and Itamar Taxel