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SCRIPTA CLASSICA ISRAELICA

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FOR THE
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OBITUARIES

John Glucker

1933–2024



The death of Professor Emeritus John Glucker is a great loss to the community of classicists. He was one of the best philologists and a leading scholar in ancient philosophy.

Glucker studied Philosophy, History, and Classics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he attained his Master of Arts degree. After studying for his PhD degree at Oxford University, he taught Classics at the University of Exeter between 1964 and 1978, when he came back to Israel and affiliated with the Department of Classics at Tel Aviv University as an Associate Professor. In 1984 Glucker became a full professor. He held a fellowship at the Center of Hellenic Studies in Washington D.C. and was a President of the Israel Society for the Promotion of Classical Studies.

After his retirement in 2001, he taught at the University of Crete at Rethymno and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Athens.

John Glucker's research focused mainly on Hellenistic and Roman philosophy—especially the Athenian Academy, the Stoics and their interrelations, but also on Cicero, Greek and Latin languages and literature, and the history of Classical Studies. His numerous articles and books showcase his immense erudition and philological skills in these areas.

Glucker's book *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, Göttingen, 1978) is a painstaking examination of the history of the Academy and the Stoic School, showing—against the *communis opinio*—that the Academy continued to exist until c. 80 BCE with the death of its last scholar, Philo of Larissa, in Rome, and that the Athenian Neo-Platonic School, which started in the fourth century CE was not part of the Academy but a new institution.

His ardent belief in the importance of the transmission of Classical Studies and the philological tools to Israeli students found expression in the publication of four books—two introductory books to Greek philosophy (*The Rise of Greek Philosophy* and *Introductory Chapters to Plato*), a critical essay on other publications in this field (*Greek Philosophy's New Clothes*), and an introduction to philology (*From Sylvester to the Elders of Zion: An Introduction to Philology*). In 2020, a collection of his articles, *Classics and Classicists: Selected Essays, 1964–2000*, was published (ed. by Amos Edelheit, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publisher).

Glucker also co-edited important books on Greek and Latin philosophy and languages: *Jacob Bernays. Un philologue juif* (with André Laks, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 1996), *Greek into Latin from Antiquity until the Nineteenth Century* (with Ch. Burnett, London: Warburg Institute; Turin: Nino Aragan, 2012), *Plato and his Legacy* (with Yosef Z. Liebersohn and Ivor Ludlam, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), and *Platonic and Ciceronian Studies* (with Amos Edelheit and Ivor Ludlam, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023).

Glucker's interest in the transmission of Classical texts and the Classical tradition is shown in his translations and scientific editing of others' translations into Hebrew. Thus, he translated from the French Alexander Koyré, *Introduction à la lecture de Platon* (1979 עם עובד 1979), and translated from Hebrew into English Yeshayahu Leibowitz's *The Faith of Maimonides* (1987), and David Flusser's *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity* (1993). He edited and wrote introductions to Aviva Katzir's Hebrew translations of Cicero's *De natura deorum* (1992 בר-אילן), *De finibus bonorum et malorum* (1997 בר-אילן), and *De officiis* (בר-אילן, 2003).

יהי זכרו ברוך

Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz

EULOGY FOR JOHN (YOCHANAN) GLUCKER

**Delivered by His Friend and Former Student, Yosef Z. Liebersohn At His Funeral, 29
December 2024**

(Translated by His Daughter, Ruth Ludlam)

Many years ago, I lost my mother, and a few years ago I lost my father, too. Now I am orphaned once again. Not just me, but many of those present here. I have had a few days to think to myself what was John's secret charm. What attracted so many people to him, from a variety of backgrounds, ages, religions, and positions. I believe it was a rare combination of modesty and toughness. Modesty with others and toughness with himself, but above all, like a halo permeating all aspects of life—his uncompromising truth. The respect John gave to every person *qua* person was evident immediately upon meeting him. His quiet speech and ability to listen to others (about which I will expand later) were well-known. I remember that when he taught at Bar-Ilan University, he used to put on a yarmulka immediately upon entering the university gates. I naively thought that this was related to his religious past, and this was just a matter of nostalgia, but I was wrong. In one of the emails I received yesterday from an overseas colleague I wrote to about John's death, he wrote that he had felt something was wrong when he hadn't received the traditional greetings John used to send him each year for Christmas, and he quoted John's opening: 'To my Christian friends'. It wasn't one religion or other, but respect for people before anything.

Even when he was critical—and he criticized many people—his criticism was respectful, if sometimes stinging, and John knew how to sting. In a reply to the author of an article in *Katharsis* (the review journal he edited) who had complained that John hadn't answered him, he wrote, and I quote: 'I am very sorry that the *Katharsis* editorial board members do not meet the high standards of service that a person like you deserves. In many cases I know about, ordinary people would be willing to wait more than one day for a reply to their letter, even by email'.

But John's modesty was first and foremost toward the texts he read and analysed and toward the authors who had lived before him, throughout the generations, all the way back to antiquity. This modesty went hand in hand with his toughness and strictness, first and foremost with himself. His consciousness that he was only one link in a long chain of people who respect the treasures of

human wisdom that span many generations and who try to contribute their modest share accompanied him in all his research. I remember that when I was in my first year at university, I asked him who he values as a researcher. After a few seconds, he answered: ‘Scaliger was a serious person’. I went searching where this Scaliger was teaching and where he lived, until I discovered to my amazement that this researcher was from the sixteenth century. This was the academic human space in which John lived.

Yet, the crown jewel in John’s character was the halo of truth. At every layer of his life, he was loyal to his truth. Everyone who met him, even for just a few minutes, immediately experienced this truth in all its force. There were some who were distanced by this truth, but those who were enchanted by it immediately followed him and never left him. John’s truth was famous. He gave no discounts to anyone. He demanded from others what he demanded from himself. Flattery was anathema to him. Students who tried to flatter him encountered penetrating eyes that left no room for doubt. The word he hated most was *κολακεία*, flattery in ancient Greek. Still, his truth was visible most of all in his regard for the texts he read, studied, and analysed. He was never deterred from changing his opinion, and often—some would say too often—he faced the text and said ‘I don’t know’. Some would say he paid a heavy price for this, but the immense esteem he enjoyed in the academic world, and his many and varied friends joined by this truth, outweigh the heavy price he might have paid. One of the famous sayings in the Jewish tradition is ‘The Lord is truth and his seal is truth’. The power of the truth—if it is genuine and uncompromising—is that it penetrates and illuminates itself, its owner, and its surroundings and doesn’t require any aid or social circles. It maintains itself, for generations. Its seal leaves a mark for generations.

John was not a hugging and kissing person, but his empathy and love were much deeper. When the violinist Itzhak Perlman was told that Jascha Heifetz’s playing was ‘cold and alienated’—Heifetz’s face was expressionless while he played—Perlman replied: ‘Cold playing? I have never heard warmer playing’. When John loved someone, this was expressed in his eyes and his general facial expression, and the loved one felt this with penetrating force. In opposite cases, John did not ‘spare the rod’ (Proverbs 13:24). More than anything, he hated lies and cutting corners, which he considered worse than lies. This toughness with others went hand in hand with his own modesty, and in fact stemmed from it. He was not sparing his honour, but rather the honour of the study tradition he had received from his family and teachers, and which he considered his duty to pass on to the next generations.

John loved life, and life loved him. Death he did not love. When my father died, he called and quietly, almost begging and half-stuttering, tried to explain to me that he doesn’t feel comfortable condoling the bereaved, and in fact he asked me to forgive him for not coming to pay a condolence visit. But when the late Professor Sohlberg, his good friend, died, he called me and to my surprise, asked to attend the funeral. And it was not easy. He could hardly walk, but still insisted on accompanying the deceased to the gravesite. The effort was so great that he was unable to return on his own. I was forced to leave him sitting on a stone somewhere in the cemetery in Petach Tikva, to wait almost half an hour for the crowd to leave the area, and only then I came with my car to pick him up. When I asked him why he attended this funeral, he replied, and I quote: ‘When you are in Sohlberg’s company, you behave differently’. He was not speaking only about David Sohlberg. Whether he knew it or not, he was also speaking about himself.

There is a legend about a Rabbi among the first generation of Talmudic Sages. After he died, his students gathered and decided to commemorate him by each student adopting a good characteristic the Rabbi had possessed. Nobody thought about a memorial, an evening in his honour, or a commemorative volume. Rabbi Yosef decided to adopt his characteristic of never looking outside his four walls. After a while, when he saw that he was unable to keep his promise, he blinded himself.

Of course, John’s most prominent quality was his uncompromising truth, but I have no pretensions of trying to apply even part of this divine quality as it was expressed in John. I thought

about adopting a more human quality, and out of nowhere I recalled a quality I had never really noticed, perhaps because it had been so natural for John. I suddenly remembered that I had never heard him interrupting others or cutting off their words. I had never heard from other people that John had interrupted anyone or even raised his voice, not in personal conversations with friends, not in his lessons, and not at conferences. Moreover, John listened to every speaker until they finished, and waited a few seconds to make sure this was not a pause but really an end, and only then started speaking. And believe me, in many cases already from the first word he knew exactly what the other person wanted to say, and despite this he treated every speaker with respect and listened to the end. I thought to myself that maybe I could adopt this quality, perhaps not fully, but the effort is worthwhile. Particularly in our Western society—and especially in Israel—where there is so much verbiage and so little listening, this effort would be a worthy commemoration of a man who deserves it.

I visited John at home a few days before he entered hospital. During the conversation, I mentioned that I had turned sixty that week. John was happy, and as was his habit, said, ‘Well, good, good’. I asked ‘What’s good? What have I done?’ Then, to my amazement, he mumbled, perhaps to me and perhaps to himself, ‘And what have *I* done?’

Rest in peace, John! You have done so much, and I am not speaking only about research and publications. You have touched so many people. Your penetrating eyes left nobody indifferent when you looked at them. The truth in you attracted people to you, and the people who became attracted to you also connected with each other, people who were different from each other in every sense, but together they were all John’s students. You influenced us, your students, not with hugs or kisses or any other such means. Your influence was in your very presence, and by your very being, you turned us into who we are—you made us into human beings. I wish we know how to preserve what we have received from you and to pass it on. This must have been your wish.

We are in the midst of Hannukah, when we add the Hallel to our prayers. Today, when I said the Hallel during the morning prayer (Shaharith), two sentences stood out to me, with which I want to take my leave of you. John, these are sentences you grew up on, you knew them by heart, and you understood them better than me. I will also read them in the language you loved so much:

non moriar, sed vivam: et narrabo opera Domini

Aperite mihi portas justitiae, ingressus in eas confitebor Domino

Haec porta Domini, justi intrabunt in eam

I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.