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OBITUARIES

Rosa Last

1931–2026



Rosa Efimovna Last was born in 1931 in Magnitogorsk, in the Ural region, USSR. As a child, she spent three years in an orphanage as a consequence of her parents' persecution by the Soviet regime. In 1937, her father was arrested on charges of counterrevolutionary activity for the Polish Military Organization, which was dissolved in 1921, sixteen years prior to his arrest. He was convicted and executed. After his arrest, her mother was charged with harboring counterrevolutionary espionage and sabotage activities. She was sentenced to three years in a correctional labor camp. She served this sentence first in Magnitogorsk prison and then in Karlag. After this period of imprisonment, Rosa Last lived with her mother in Ufa and Gorky. In 1955 she graduated from the Department of History at Gorky State University, where she met the physicist Isidor Last, whom she married in 1961. In 1956 she enrolled in the graduate school of Moscow State Pedagogical University and in 1965 she defended her dissertation entitled, *The Plebs of the City of Rome and Its Role in the Crafts Colleges in the Last Century of the Republic*. She taught Classical History and Latin at the History Department of Bashkir State University and supervised the archeological excavation that unearthed the Roman garrison of ancient Chersonesos, outside Sevastopol. Still working on her dissertation, she published her first article on the agrarian law of Servilius Rullus. She continued with articles on the Roman plebs and tradesmen, which appeared in various periodicals, including the leading Soviet journal for the study of the ancient world, *Vestnik Drevney Istorii, Journal of Ancient History* (1963 and 1968). Later, her interest in Roman social history also included professional corporations, manumissions and freedmen, Roman onomastics, and other subjects (*Vestnik Drevney Istorii* 1970, 1972, 1976, and other publications).

In 1977 she emigrated to Israel with her mother, husband, and son, Mark Last, currently a professor of computer and information science at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. She taught Latin at Tel Aviv University from 1979 to 1983 and at the University of Haifa from 1979 until 2008, where she also taught Latin epigraphy. In Israel she continued her prolific research activity. Following her move to Israel, she published 30 articles in international journals, such as the prestigious *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*. These articles are mainly devoted to Judea in the Roman period and are based

on her analyses of Latin inscriptions found in this region. The popularization of ancient history, especially Jewish history, for the Russian-language audience, was very important to her. Her book *Emperors and Jews*, which appeared in Russian in 2013, is based on papers published in various periodicals and on conversations about ancient history on *Reka*, the Israeli Russian-language radio channel. The book covers a variety of subjects related to the Jews of Palestine and their role in the Roman Empire, spanning a kaleidoscope of characters, famous or anonymous, from all walks of life. She introduces her readers to Roman history and literature, the archaeology of Palestine and Italy, inscriptions and triumphal arches, using ancient evidence to tell human stories, and making the past relevant and emotionally engaging.

This brief survey is not just a description of Rosa Last's biography and academic achievements. It is a window onto her personality. By showing her devotion to the study of the classical world, it reveals her determination in the face of the challenges of immigration. Moving from the Soviet Union to Israel, she changed her research focus and began to study the history of this region in the Roman period, and rapidly adapted to a new academic culture, where English is the scholarly language and Hebrew is the teaching language. It also reveals her generosity which finds expression in her popular works on Roman history and the broadcasted conversations on Radio *Reka*. Having had the privilege of being her student, I came to know these two sides of her personality: a revered teacher who sets high and rigorous standards, on the one hand, and a warm—almost motherly—person who openhandedly shared with us her vast knowledge, on the other.

I took her Latin class only because it was compulsory for history students at the University of Haifa, but this requirement opened the path that I took in my life. The passion for the classical world that she bequeathed to her students and the joy of studying Latin with her, led me to study also Ancient Greek and thus played a decisive role in shaping my career as a historian of ancient philosophy and science. I learned from her more than Latin. I learned how to learn a language and how to teach it. When I was asked for the first time to teach Ancient Greek at Tel Aviv University, Rosa Last served as my model. I followed and am still following her pedagogical methods and more importantly her uncompromising commitment to teaching. One of the manifestations of this commitment was the happiness that beamed from her face when we—her students—succeeded in translating complicated Latin sentences. This happiness is the most vivid memory I have of her. She is surely remembered this way by her other students who, like me, are still indebted to her. May her memory be blessing.

Orna Harari
Tel Aviv University

* I thank Professor Yulia Ustinova for her help in writing on Rosa Last's publications in Russian.