

OBITUARIES

Mordechai Gichon

1922-2016

Mordechai Gichon passed away on 19 September 2016 at the age of 94. He was one of the outstanding Classical archaeologists and military historians of Israel during the last decades. He was born in Berlin, to the Jewish family Gicherman. The family moved in 1934 to Tel Aviv, then Mandate Palestine, where Mordechai studied at the Ben-Yehuda gymnasium and then at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he concentrated on archaeology and history.

Prompted by the dramatic events of that time, Gichon began a long-lasting military career. In 1940, he joined the Haganah, and in 1942 he enlisted in the British Army, taking part in various actions of World War II and afterwards in organizing illegal immigration of Holocaust survivors to Palestine. He was discharged from the British Army in 1946, and returned from Europe to Palestine where he resumed his studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. After a short break, he rejoined military service before and after the Israeli War of Independence as a member of the Israel Defense Forces. He served in the military intelligence unit at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel until 1963.

Gichon continued his studies throughout his military service, and completed them afterwards with a PhD on the 'Palestinian Limes' (submitted in 1969). During these years he joined the newly established Tel Aviv University becoming Head of the Department of Military History, and later (1965) co-founded (with Professor Shimon Applebaum) the Division of Classical Archaeology at the Department of Classics, Tel Aviv University where he was appointed Associate Professor in 1971 and Full Professor in 1980. He retired from this department in 1990.

Already between 1956 and 1970, partly during his PhD studies, Gichon conducted a survey in the Central Negev focused mainly on the remains of fortified sites and their hinterland. The latter played, in Gichon's opinion, a crucial role in the maintenance of the largely fragile border of the Roman Empire in the desert regions. He surveyed and recorded about 150 sites, of which many have been lost since due to the developments in that area. The results of his work were used for his PhD Dissertation regarding the Limes in the Negev, which, unfortunately, remains unpublished. However, Gichon has published more than 100 articles emerging from his pioneering research.

Immediately after joining the Department of Classics, Mordechai initiated and developed the pedagogic and research program for the Division of Classical Archaeology. This included emphasizing the Classical world (language, art, archaeology) and its impact on the Near East. An important part of this activity was the organization of field research in the ancient Negev, as a continuation of his research done for the PhD. Thus excavations at En Boqeq (1968-1970), Migdal Tsafit (1975), Mezad Tamar (1973-1976) and Tel Malhata (1979) became teaching, training and research projects preparing a whole generation of scholars in this field. His publication of the monograph 'En Boqeq I' (in 1993) represents one of the outstanding archaeological and historical reports concerning the Byzantine period. It was followed with the publication of 'En Boqeq II' (in 2000) (co-authored with Moshe Fischer and Oren Tal) which focused on the Early Roman period of the Dead Sea area. These publications made an important contribution to our knowledge of the fringe areas of Ancient Israel and as such have been highly appreciated by the scholar community in Israel and beyond. They also led to challenging discussions and debates about the character and role of the limes and its hinterland in the Near East. Due to his study of the limes in the Near East, Mordechai became one of the leading promoters of the International Conferences on the Study of the Roman Frontiers (Limes), where he was several times honored with special distinctions. In 1967 he co-organized (with the late Shimon Applebaum) the International Limes Conference in Tel Aviv.

In 1970 Mordechai Gichon formed the Israel Milestones Committee (IMC) (<http://milestones.kinneret.ac.il/en/>) as a branch of the International Curatorium of the Corpus Miliariorum, and later (1976) he initiated and founded the Israeli Committee of the Study of Roman Roads and Milestones in which he remained active till his retirement. On behalf of this institution and the Department of Classics Gichon conducted and supported a series of surveys and excavations along central roads of ancient Israel, mainly between Jaffa and Jerusalem. Thus, at his initiative, a large scale survey was carried out in that region by Benjamin Isaac, Israel Roll, and the author of this obituary, all close collaborators of Mordechai. At the same time, Gichon organized a large scale excavation project focused on ancient Emmaus and its surroundings. As a result of this project, remains of ancient Emmaus (such as a completely preserved Roman period bath house), the fortified site of Horvat Aqed (remains of the Hellenistic period and hideouts of the period of the Bar Kokhva Revolt) and the road station at Horvat Mazad (Early Roman Jewish pilgrims' station) were unearthed and published. This activity (1977-1983) had a strong impact on the research of ancient roads and their hinterland.

Mordechai's scientific activity covers a large span of diverse fields beyond those of the limes and the communication system in the Land of Israel. Among other things, he had a special interest in military history and geography in general, and that of Napoleon's era in particular, as well as the impact of the Bar Kokhba Revolt.

The military history of the Land of Israel was close to Mordechai Gichon's heart also due to his active military career and the experience he accumulated, mainly as an intelligent officer. His book, *Battles of the Bible* (London, 1978; rev. ed. 2002), written together with the former President of the State of Israel, the late Chaim Herzog, which has been translated into many languages, is considered a masterpiece of the history of military and intelligence activity in the Land of Israel through the ages. As part of his interest in military history, Mordechai had a deep knowledge and sympathy with Napoleon and his time, serving for many years as the Head of the Napoleonic Society in Israel and publishing books and articles on this topic as well. While Mordechai's main focus was on Napoleon's activity in the Holy Land, he knew how to find a balance between personal sympathy with this outstanding historical figure and his innovative achievements (such as the emancipation of Jews in Europe) and the negative impact of some aspects of his personality and actions.

Perhaps the dearest subject to his heart was research on the Bar Kokhba Revolt. After the discovery of the Bar Kokhba hideouts at Horvat Aqed, Gichon felt especially challenged by this topic. Just a couple of weeks before his death, the Hebrew version of his monograph about this revolt was published (*A Star Came out of Jacob. Bar Kokhba and His Time*, Tel Aviv, 2016). In discussions we had at the celebration of his 94th birthday (August 2016), he shared with me the fact that he is working on an English version of this book! Regrettably this has not come to fruition.

Mordechai Gichon's career is characterized above all by his deep involvement in field work together with the use of written sources of all kinds covering a large spectrum from Hebrew and Aramaic through Greek, Latin and Arabic. He was always ready to share his vast knowledge in various fields lecturing before non-academic circles and publishing his opinions in popular journals. Many generations of students and archaeologists have benefitted from Mordechai's teaching and guiding. His office in the Yad Avner facilities of the Division of Classical Archaeology at Tel Aviv University was always attended by scholars from Israel and abroad asking for his help and advice. Through the years, many young scholars were 'recruited' (as he liked to term it) by him and joined the Faculty becoming leading scholars in the field. One of them is the author of this obituary. I owe him a good part of my career and remain grateful for the humane way he combined close daily cooperation with the experience of a traditional teacher.

Mordechai Gichon earned numerous awards, such as that of the Volkswagen Foundation and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, all of them used for promoting the excavations and the publication

projects mentioned above. He was married from 1948 to Chava Goldberg (who passed away in 2015). The couple had three children and numerous grand- and great-grandchildren.

The family of Classical archaeologists and historians in Israel has lost one of its important members as well as one of its most humane representatives.

May his memory be blessed.

Moshe Fischer

Yechiel Max Zlattner

1926-2014

On July 12th, 2014, several weeks after his eighty-eighth birthday, Yechiel Max Zlattner, a former teacher at the Division of Ancient History of the Department of General History, University of Tel Aviv, passed away. His life, like most of his contemporaries, was shaped by the Holocaust and its aftermath.

Yechiel, the Hebrew name, which he adopted after his arrival in Israel, was born as Max Zlattner in the year 1926. He was the only son of a middle-class notary and a house-wife, who lived in the city of Košice in eastern Slovakia, at the time part of the Republic of Czechoslovakia. This city is located near the Hungarian border, a fact that had a decisive impact on his life as well as of his parents later on. Košice of the twenties and thirties had a flourishing and vibrant Jewish community, which was later entirely annihilated in the Holocaust. In the local *Gymnázium* he acquired a vast basic education, and a profound knowledge of Latin, which assisted him many years afterwards.

The peaceful life of the Jews in Košice came to an end with the dissolution of the Czechoslovakian Republic after the Munich Agreement of September 29th, 1938. A month later, in October 1938, southern and eastern Slovakia, including the city of Košice, passed over to Hungary.

Sometime later, Yechiel and his parents moved to Budapest. There, despite the persecutions of the Nazis and their Hungarian collaborating government, the three managed somehow to survive, while most of their relatives perished.

In 1944, at the age of eighteen, Yechiel was called to a compulsory labour-service in one of the work-battalions, which the fascist regime established for the Jewish men. Under the conditions of the on-going war and the anti-Jewish persecutions of the government, very few survived of those battalions. As he recounted, the young Jews who were called with him to that service were most fortunate, because they were drafted relatively late. Since in that year the Eastern (namely, the Soviet) Front was rapidly moving westward, no Jewish work-battalions could be sent eastward any more, and they were therefore stationed inside Hungary.

Moreover, Yechiel and some of his comrades were assigned to a battalion, commanded by a Hungarian army officer by the rank of a captain, who was an honest person. Hence, unlike many other such units, no recruit of that battalion suffered from persecution. Accordingly, after the War, those who formerly served under him gratefully testified in favor of their humane commander.

That period of persecution finally ended in January 1945, with the Soviet occupation of Budapest, which saved the last Jewish community in Hungary. By that time Yechiel was already released from his unit, and unwillingly became a witness of the battle on Budapest. Yet, despite the liberation of the city, the Jewish survivors had to deal with another double threat — hunger and cold. As a result of that freezing cold, his fingers lost their sensitivity.

Three years later, after the State of Israel was established in May 1948, Yechiel immigrated to the new-born state, and joined Kibbutz Tel-Yitzhak, near Netanja. After some months in the kibbutz, he was called to military service. Later on he joined the standing army, became an officer