

OBITUARY

Zvi Yavetz

(1925-2013)

Zvi Yavetz was the most exuberant of men. Many of the qualities he had are found frequently among academics: intelligence, intellectual curiosity, learning, energy and wit. But whatever he undertook and wherever he appeared, it was his sheer exuberance that made him unique, that allowed him to deliver where others would have failed, because they would have been cautious or hesitant. He brought to every one of his numerous endeavours an enthusiastic energy, untrammelled by egocentric inhibition, turning so many of them into success. The results are familiar to most readers of this journal. He was one of the founders of Tel Aviv University as a whole and its Department of History in particular and, as a teacher, made generations of students aware of ancient history as a vibrant, attractive, and even relevant topic. He applied modern concepts to the study of ancient history and thus ensured its appeal to a modern audience. He enjoyed spreading an interest in ancient history, but insisted on quality, on intellectual breadth and scholarly integrity while training graduate students. Yet he always was aware of the truth that human weaknesses must be tolerated with humour rather than disdain.

Among his numerous publications the first that should be mentioned is his book *Plebs and Princeps* (1969), which represented a new perspective on the relationship between the Roman Emperor and the urban population of Rome, ideas which, characteristically, came to him upon observing the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, while he was involved in the development of the University of Addis Ababa. The interaction between ruler and ruled and the nature of Roman imperialism continued to be the guiding theme in his publications, in *Caesar and his Public Image* (1983) and in his biographies of Roman emperors which represent to some extent an Oxford tradition continued in Hebrew, in Israel. Through these books, and as a teacher, he brought Roman history to the Israeli public.

Having said this one should emphasize his remarkable loyalty — loyalty above all to his family, to friends from his native Czernowitz, to fellow members of the Palmach, to the department at Tel Aviv which he established and to numerous acquaintances abroad, notably his teacher, Ronald Syme. Yet this loyalty did not prevent criticism of his friends, or the recognition of merit outside his own circle, as I can witness myself, who did not come from Czernowitz, did not serve in the Palmach, or belong to his University department and yet profited from his encouragement.

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