

OBITUARY

Israel Roll

(1937-2010)

Professor Israel Roll died on June 20, 2010 after a courageous two-year struggle with his illness. He was one of the most prominent classical archaeologists in Israel and a highly esteemed member of the Faculty of Humanities at Tel Aviv University.

Israel Roll was born in Constanța on the Romanian Black Sea coast and immigrated to Israel in 1951. In 1960 he began studying at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, concentrating on archaeology, under the tutelage of the late Professor Michael Avi-Yonah, and on Jewish history. He graduated in 1964, and upon completion of his BA studies was awarded a scholarship to study classical archaeology towards a Diplôme d'Études Scientifiques (DES) at the University of Paris (Sorbonne) (1964-1965). He then received an additional grant from the Sorbonne so that he could continue for a Doctorate (IIIe cycle) in classical archaeology, which he completed in 1970 under the supervision of the late Professor Gilbert Picard. An abridged version of his outstanding dissertation (*Recherches sur l'iconographie mithraïque dans l'Orient romain*) was published as a paper entitled 'The Mysteries of Mithras in the Roman Orient: The Problem of Origin' (*Journal of Mithraic Studies* II.1 [1978], pp. 53-68). Throughout the years he spent in Paris, Israel Roll, who loved field work, often came for short visits to Israel and joined the late Dr. Jacob Kaplan in many of his excavations in Tel Aviv and its vicinity, such as Jaffa and Yavneh-Yam. The publishers of these excavations made use of many of Roll's notes and drawings; so did I, as director of the Yavneh-Yam excavation project.

Upon his return to Israel in 1970, he was appointed Research Fellow at the Department of Classics, Tel Aviv University. He assisted Professor Mordechai Gichon in his excavations at the 'En Boqeq oasis on the shores of the Dead Sea and taught courses in classical archaeology. Some years later he was appointed senior lecturer at the Department of Classics and taught in the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures as well. In those years, he became deeply involved in the thematic surveying of Roman roads and milestones in Israel, a topic which he assiduously pursued in the years that followed, so much so that his name became practically synonymous with his research subject all over the world, and Israel Roll became known as: 'Mister Roman roads of Israel'. He surveyed and excavated road stations, and particularly sections of paved Roman roads, in order to define Roman building techniques as well as their chronology across the Imperial Palestinian highways; he contributed immensely to the reading of inscribed milestones and to their evaluation in light of the relevant written sources, with the help of which he aimed to reconstruct the Roman communication system in Roman and Byzantine Palestine. Israel Roll's studies of Roman roads and milestones culminated in numerous articles and monographs, such as *Roman Roads in Judaea I: The Legio-Scythopolis Road* (with B. Isaac, Oxford, 1982); *Roman Roads in Judaea II: The Jaffa-Jerusalem Roads* (with M. Fischer and B. Isaac, Oxford, 1996); and the chapter on Roman roads in *Tabula Imperii Romani* (Y. Tsafir, ed., Jerusalem, 1994). Recently, unfortunately only after Roll's death, the first Volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palestinae* (ed. H. Cotton et al., Jerusalem, 2010) has appeared, containing his great contribution to the chapter on inscribed milestones uncovered in Israel.

Israel Roll was a prominent field archaeologist, and took part in many excavations, such as Mezzad Tamar (1973-1975), Tel Ya'oz (1981), the Roman temple at Tel Kedesh (1981-1983, together with M. Fischer and A. Ovadiah) and especially Apollonia-Arsuf (1977-1984, together with E. Ayalon; and later on his own 1990-2006). Excavations in the latter site produced three

monographs: *Apollonia and Southern Sharon: Model of a Coastal City and Its Hinterland*, Tel Aviv 1989 (with E. Ayalon; in Hebrew); *Apollonia-Arsuf: Final Report of the Excavations. Volume I: The Persian and Hellenistic Periods*, Tel Aviv, 1999 (with O. Tal); and *The Encounter of Crusaders and Muslims in Palestine*, Tel Aviv 2007 (edited together with O. Tal and M. Winter; in Hebrew). In addition to systematic, well-documented and highly skilled excavations, he brought about a change in the status of the site and turned it from a neglected place to a well-protected and frequently visited national park (2001) which was formally recognized by the World Monuments Fund in 2004 as one of the one hundred most endangered world monuments. In 2006 it was also included in the UNESCO tentative list of world heritage Crusader castles. The excavations at the fortified castle of Apollonia-Arsuf (then called *Arsur*) during 1998-2000 kindled his interest in the Crusader period in Palestine, and thence he began to participate extensively in relevant international conferences and contributed many scientific publications on the subject.

Israel Roll's early interest in ancient religions and cults and their artistic representations found expression in his academic career and in his publications of the results of his excavations at Tel Kedesh; thus, until his last year of teaching (before he retired in 2006), he offered courses on various phenomena and themes of Graeco-Roman and oriental religion and cult on a yearly basis, culminating in a unique series dedicated to the twelve Olympian gods, which, unfortunately, he was unable to complete before his retirement. In our joint publications of the results of the excavations of the Roman temple at Tel Kedesh (Upper Galilee), Roll made a unique contribution to issues concerning cult and religion of the site and its area by examining them against the background of those of the Greco-Roman Near East.

Professor Israel Roll was one of the principal promoters of classical archaeology in Israel, and he combined fieldwork and historical research to show how the Land of Israel served as a bridge between the Orient and the Greco-Roman world. To spread this message among as wide a crowd as possible, he devoted himself to teaching not only in the university, but in many more popular educational institutions all over the country.

During the years 1996-1998, Israel Roll was Head of the Department of Classics at Tel Aviv University. For many years he was member of the Managing Committee of the Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University, and co-editor of *Salvage Excavation Reports*, the publication series of the institute, until 2007.

Over the years, I had the privilege of being Israel Roll's colleague and friend, personally learning to appreciate his humane character as he peacefully bridged over discrepancies. He was a warm family man — husband to Yael and father to Ranit and Noa — who knew how to create the perfect balance between family needs and an academic life.

We have lost a remarkable scholar, a true intellectual, a wonderful teacher and above all a “*mensch*”. He will be greatly missed by all.

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