

OBITUARY

Itzhak F. Fikhman

(September 30, 1921- March 6, 2011)

Professor Itzhak F. Fikhman passed away on March 6, 2011 at the age of 89. He died at home, with his loving and caring wife Bella at his bedside. Fikhman's life was not an easy one. Like most European Jews of his generation, Itzhak Fikhman lost much of his family, in his case his parents, who were murdered by the Nazis during the Second World War. Fikhman himself survived only due to the timely, if forced, immigration from his hometown of Kishinev to Georgia. The experience of the Holocaust naturally left its mark on Itzhak Fikhman, who was immensely proud of the central role played by the Soviet Union in the victory over Nazi Germany.

The trauma of his youth accounts for the decision Fikhman took later in life, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989: fearing a new surge of anti-Semitism, Fikhman left his beloved Leningrad leaving behind many friends and an excellent working environment, and moved to Israel, a new, harsh land, whose language and mentality were at that time completely foreign to him. This step is a difficult one to take at any age, but all the more so at the age of nearly seventy. Fortunately, Itzhak Fikhman was warmly welcomed, and appointed Professor Ordinarius at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a rare honor which shows the extent to which his work was admired by the Israeli scholarly community.

Itzhak Fikhman had to deal for much of his career with scholarly isolation. Like most citizens of the Soviet Union, Fikhman had been unable to travel outside the Eastern Bloc. His contacts with colleagues in the West were thus reduced to correspondence. Consequently, much of Fikhman's work was written in Russian for the Russian-speaking scholarly community, a fact that made his large corpus inaccessible to non-Russian-speaking scholars. Fortunately, this regrettable state of affairs was remedied to some extent in 2006, thanks to the initiative of Professor Andrea Jördens of the *Institut für Papyrologie* at the University of Heidelberg. During his academic career, Fikhman produced no less than 184 publications (among them five books). Of these publications, twenty-eight were collected by Jördens in a monograph titled *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im spätantiken Ägypten: Kleine Schriften Itzhak F. Fikhman (Historia Einzelschriften, 192, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2006)*. Eight of the excellent papers incorporated in the monograph that had originally been published in Russian were translated into German, and were thus made accessible to many scholars for the first time. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im spätantiken Ägypten* offers us a glimpse of Fikhman's fields of research over a period of more than thirty years (1965-1996).

Itzhak Fikhman was what we in the trade call "a documentary papyrologist". A weak eye from an early age impeded Fikhman from editing papyri himself, but he was a careful and critical reader of the editions of others, and was able, owing to his inexhaustible knowledge of the historical context, to revise and offer numerous corrections to a large variety of published texts. Fikhman's vast erudition and intimate familiarity with literary, legal, and epigraphic sources allowed him to integrate them all into his studies of documentary papyrology.

Until his immigration to Israel, Fikhman's research had focused on Late Antiquity, roughly between the late third and the seventh centuries CE, and on two geographic settings in particular: the Hermopolite and the Oxyrhynchite nomes. Oxyrhynchos was also the subject of a monograph

he published in Russian in 1976.¹ Although Fikhman occasionally published on other topics as well, he was first and foremost a social historian, whose studies focused on classes, social groups and personal status. Fikhman studied associations in the Roman and Byzantine periods and the professionalization and specialization of craftsmanship, as illustrated by the increasing spectrum of terms used for the designation of artisans in the Byzantine period.² Fikhman also studied the decline and disappearance of slavery in Late Antique Oxyrhynchus, and the rise, within the same social and geographic setting, of other, occasionally less formal forms of dependency. Particularly noteworthy is Fikhman's seminal article on the *Coloni adscripticii*.³

Fikhman also studied the "ruling classes". His period of interest begins at the acme of the municipal elites, a time when these elites played a predominant role in the administration, economy and society of the Egyptian *chōra*. Fikhman followed the decline of the municipal elites in the Byzantine period, comparing in particular the nature and pace of that decline in the Oxyrhynchite and Hermopolite nomes. In the Byzantine period the municipal elites were superseded by a new, rising force: the large estates. Thanks to Fikhman's complete command of the Oxyrhynchite source material, he was able to study the best documented large estate of the Byzantine period — that of the family of the Apiones — long before the archive of this family's estate became in the last decade a fashionable object of research.

Upon his immigration to Israel, Itzhak Fikhman turned his energy to a new direction. In 1964, the late Alexander Fuks and Menachem Stern completed their work on the third volume of the *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, an enterprise launched seven years earlier with the publication (together with Avigdor Tcherikover) of the first volume. When Fikhman immigrated to Israel in 1989 he initiated the publication of a fourth volume, containing all the papyrological material relating to Jews that had been edited since the publication of the previous volumes. During the next twenty years Fikhman conducted much preliminary work, publishing updates and corrections to the material incorporated in the first three volumes. Fikhman also collected, as minutely, painstakingly and systematically as always, material for the new volume, but in the last years his health, especially his eyesight, rapidly deteriorated — a very frustrating experience for him. Consequently, Itzhak Fikhman was never able to complete the work on the new book.

Itzhak's erudition, kindness and hospitality, will be greatly missed by all.

יהא זכרו ברוך

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¹ И.Ф. Фихман, Оксиринх - город папирусов, Москва 1976.

² И. Ф. Фихман, Египет на рубеже двух эпох: ремесленники и ремесленный труд в IV - середине VII в, Москва 1965.

³ I.F. Fikhman, 'Coloni adscripticii — ἐναπόγραφοι γεωργοί in den Papyri' in A. Jördens (ed.), *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im spätantiken Ägypten: Kleine Schriften Itzhak F. Fikhman (Historia Einzelschriften*, 192, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2006), 190-250.