

OBITUARIES

Shalom Perlman

1919 - 2008

Shalom Perlman, who left us on the 17th of September 2008, will be remembered by his friends, colleagues and pupils first and foremost as an indefatigable fighter for the preservation and advancement of Classical Studies in Israel. He was one of the founders of the department of Classics at the Tel Aviv University, and for a long period he acted as its head, stirring it through a troubled sea of difficulties with remarkable success. Throughout his career as a scholar, a teacher and an academic administrator, he was guided by the strong conviction that cultivating the study of the foundations of Western Civilization was a task of the utmost importance in a society greatly in need of solid unifying cultural guidelines, precisely because of the large diversity of the ethnic cultures that had to be amalgamated into one whole. It is a tribute to his strong personality that at times when respect for the study of Humanities in general, and for Classics in particular, appeared to be increasingly on the wane, he always knew how to hold true to their word those in positions of power and influence who were prepared to pay lip service to the importance of the study of Classics in Israeli universities.

He was born in Ternopol, in Eastern Galicia (Western Ukraine today). He acquired his flare for Classical Languages at the Classical Gymnasium in his home town, and after his immigration to Israel in 1937, he continued his studies of Latin and Greek under the instruction of Moshe Schwabe, Avigdor Tcherikover, and Hans Lewy. Already his MA thesis on Aristophanes' *Pax* reveals many of the qualities of his future scholarship, namely an accurate and penetrating interpretation of the texts, which combines the erudition of a skilled philologist with the insight of a gifted historian. His doctoral dissertation, *The Athenian Orators and their Audience*, was completed and submitted in 1955. In writing his thesis, he made the most not only of the inspired supervision of Avigdor Tcherikover and Alexander Fuchs in Jerusalem, but also the supervision of G.E.M. de Ste. Croix in Oxford, where he spent time as a British Council visiting scholar. While working on his dissertation Perlman also taught History at high schools as well as Classical Languages at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He was repeatedly invited to lecture at prominent universities in the USA, and was a visiting scholar at the Fondation Hardt at Vandoevres,

The hallmark of his published studies was sound and exacting scholarship. His consistent attention to detail in the analysis of source material led to a synthesis that conveyed fresh insights even when he was apparently dealing with well-explored subjects. It was his unshaken conviction that in the domain of Classical Studies in general, and Greek History in Classical Studies in particular, there was hardly any area that could not be described as well surveyed. This conviction induced him to prefer quality to quantity and made him take a firm stand against the prevailing vogue to inflate to the dimensions of bulky books subjects that might be effectively dealt with in concise articles. The collection of articles that he edited, dedicated to the rising influence of Macedon in the fourth century BCE, and its ever growing involvement in inter-polis relations in Greece, bears witness to this approach.¹ These short studies help to illuminate a much dealt with issues from many possible viewpoints, and his introduction serves a most useful guideline,² while

¹ S. Perlman, ed., *Philip and Athens* (Cambridge, Heffer & Sons, 1973).

² *Ibid.*, pp. vii-xiii.

his own contribution highlights the personality of Isocrates not as a detached theoretician, but as an acute political observer, alert to the realities of his own time, whose political program could not be dismissed out of hand as completely irrelevant.³ Perlman returned to the subject of Philip of Macedon's policy towards the Greek *poleis* many years later, once again, in a study that reveals his ability to tackle a major problem, to bring together and analyze all the relevant details, and to reach firm conclusions — all this in the framework of a lucid and succinct paper. The panoramic picture which emerges shows how such concepts as Symmachy and Common Peace help to understand the expectations of Philip's supporters in the Greek city states as well as the achievements of his diplomacy.⁴ Other of his widely cited and frequently referred to articles are characterized by the same skillful attention to detail and wide historical outlook.⁵

His articles in Hebrew disclose an additional feature: accessibility to a wide readership which manifested itself in surveys of the development of particular institutions, social phenomena, or concepts, over extensive spans of time, in a clear and engaging manner. Once again his conviction about what was really needed in the field in our day and age must be noted. Perlman strongly believed that it was the terse and skillful presentation of a problem with wide ramifications, showing the general curious reader, even if he was not an initiate in the inner sanctum of Classical Scholarship, the means of tackling it, which would help to bring home the relevance of Ancient Greece to our times. Thus he introduced the problem of migration and colonization in the Greek world,⁶ tackled the question of loyalty to the Greek *polis* in the Classical Period,⁷ showed how the history of the Panathenaea could be used to shed light on the use of religion in Athenian politics,⁸ and highlighted conflicting attitudes to public activity through the debate about rhetoric and philosophy as represented by the works of Isocrates on the one hand and Plato on the other.⁹

The preference of quality to quantity characterized his attitude both to the members of the department of Classical Studies of which he was Head from 1968 until his retirement in 1988 and to those of the Faculty of Humanities of which he was elected Dean in 1969 and served in this capacity until 1977. Not once did he contend against appointment and promotion committees which betrayed a habitual rigid reluctance to start considering true quality before having satisfied themselves that a candidate has turned out a sufficient quantity of printed paper, and to impress it upon them that in some areas short, original, well-researched, well-documented studies might be as important as books, and deserving the same degree of international recognition.

Though the Department of Classical Studies at the Tel Aviv University thrived under his sure and inspired guidance, he encouraged young scholars not to content themselves with the instruction of its excellent staff, but to pursue their studies and acquaint themselves with a wider range of views and approaches in other important centers of study abroad. He never lost contact

³ 'Isocrates' *Philippus* — a Reconsideration', *ibid.* pp. 104-15 (reprinted from *Historia* 6 (1957) 306-17.

⁴ 'Greek Diplomatic Tradition and the Corinthian League of Philip of Macedon', *Historia* 34 (1985) 153-74.

⁵ 'A note on the Political Implications of Proxenia in the Fourth Century B.C.', *CQ* New Series 8 (1958), 185-91; 'Quotations from Poetry in Attic Orators of the Fourth Century BC', *AJP* 85 (1964) 155-172; 'Panhellenism, the Polis and Imperialism', *Historia* 25 (1976) 1-30; 'The Ten Thousand — A Chapter in the Social and Economic History of the Fourth Century', *Rivista storica dell'antichità* 6/7 (1976/7) 241-84; 'Athenian Democracy and the Revival of Imperialistic Expansion at the Beginning of the Fourth Century B.C.', *CP* 63 (1968) 257-67.

⁶ 'Migration and Settlement in Classical Greece', in Avigdor Shin'an, ed., *Migration and Settlement in Israel and among the Nations* (Jerusalem, 1982) 29-47.

⁷ 'Loyalty to the Greek Polis in the Classical Period', *Zemanim* 20 (1982) 28-35.

⁸ 'The Panathenaea: Religion and Politics in Ancient Athens', *Zemanim* 25/6 (1987) 33-41.

⁹ 'The Two Rival Philosophies in the Fourth Century BCE', *Zemanim* 34/5 (1990) 117-23.

with those who followed his counsel and went abroad, extending his constant help and support. When meeting them, either abroad or during their visits home, he always found the right words of encouragement, and he never tired of struggling to obtain for them the material resources necessary for the continuation of their studies.

His pupils will always remember him with profound affection and gratitude, and cherish the memory of his classes in which he inculcated in them an uncompromising passion to verify the facts on the basis of a careful study of the sources and developed their sense of criticism that would guard them against the charm of clever, far-reaching, but unfounded hypothesis. His research students will never forget how in moments of misgiving and despair he knew how to use his dry sense of humor to put them back on track.

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