

## OBITUARIES

### Aaron Shaffer

1933-2004

Professor Aaron Shaffer passed away in Jerusalem on April 5, 2004, after a long struggle with a neurological-related disease.

Aaron Shaffer, born in Toronto, came to Israel with his wife Ethel and family in 1964, and taught for more than thirty years in the department of Assyriology at the Hebrew University. Shaffer received his BA in Oriental Studies at the University of Toronto (1958) and pursued his MA studies with Shlomo Dov Goitein on Geniza material at the University of Pennsylvania (1959), where he also wrote his 1963 PhD dissertation ('Sumerian Sources of Tablet XII of the Epic of Gilgameš'), supervised by Samuel Noah Kramer and Ephraim Speiser. His edition of the bilingual text of the last tablet of the Epic of Gilgameš, comparing the Sumerian and Akkadian versions of the text, remained the paramount publication of this text until it was replaced by A. George's new edition *The Babylonian Gilgameš Epic* in 2003. Twenty years after his PhD, his article 'Gilgameš, the Cedar Forest and Mesopotamian History', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103, 1983, 307-13, was a landmark in the understanding of the Sumerian sources of the epic. Throughout his career his scientific passion revolved around the Epic of Gilgameš, which, together with R.J. Tournay, he finally translated into French in 1994 (*L'Épopée de Gilgameš*, *Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient* 15, Paris).

Shaffer completed his post-doctoral studies at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, where he worked closely with Benno Landsberger and Thorkild Jacobsen (1963-4) and contributed to the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (volume B).

His main interest throughout his career was Sumerian and its relation to Akkadian. A fine example is his 1969 article 'TA ša kīma A ĩtenerrubu: A Study in Native Babylonian Philology', *Orientalia* 38/3, 433-46.

For more than three decades he made an annual pilgrimage to the British Museum, studying and copying Sumerian and Akkadian literary texts, mainly from the Woolley excavations of Old Babylonian Ur. His efforts culminated in the preparation of *Ur Excavation Texts* volume 6/3, a work he nearly completed; it will be published posthumously. This contains more than 600 literary texts and fragments, all of them hand-copied and identified by him, many joined to other previously published texts. He acted as consultant on cuneiform texts and Mesopotamian objects to the Israel Museum for many years, working especially on the Iddin-Sin rock inscription from the Zagros (published as 'Iddi(n)-Sīn, King of Simurrum: New Rock-Relief Inscription and Reverential Seal', in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 93, 2003, 1-52, co-authored with N. Wasserman and U. Seidl). He also nurtured a keen interest in West-Semitic languages, Biblical Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic in particular, manifested in his work with the late Jonas Greenfield ('Notes on the Akkadian-Aramaic Bilingual Statue from Tell Fekherye', *Iraq* 45, 1983, 109-16).

As a teacher he founded the systematic study of the various dialects of Akkadian in Jerusalem. This unique approach has been maintained up to the present. He was a pioneer, incorporating and affording access to computers for students and researchers in the Faculty of Humanities at the Hebrew University, building a comprehensive database of Sumerian literary and lexical texts.

Aaron Shaffer was a demanding person, challenging conversationalist and devoted teacher and friend, always ready to discuss difficult passages and opaque texts with students and colleagues alike. A passionate philologist, superb cuneiform copyist, and true connoisseur of ancient Mesopotamian culture, he epitomized the Golden Age of Assyriology.

Nathan Wasserman

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem