

OBITUARY

Miroslav Marcovich

18 March 1919 — 14 June 2001

Miroslav Marcovich, Professor Emeritus of the Classics at the University of Illinois, Urbana, died at his home in Urbana on June 14, 2001. He was 82 years old and is survived by his wife Verica of Urbana and son, Dragoslav (Michael), a chemist, of Pensacola Beach, Florida.

Marcovich's connections to the Israeli academic community were several. He served on the international editorial board of this journal for many years, was visiting professor at Tel Aviv University in 1991, and was honored by the Israel Academy of Sciences with its most prestigious award, appointment as Albert Einstein Fellow, in 1989-90, one of numerous national and international awards that he received during his long and distinguished career. His work in ancient Greco-Roman religion and in Patristics brought him into frequent contact with Jewish texts and he was able to put his knowledge of classical Hebrew to good use in innovative interpretations (see e.g. at *JTS* 1974, 447-51, *ZPE* 1983, 155-71).

Marcovich was born in Belgrade on March 18, 1919. A student of the classics, he began his professional career as a Byzantinist, a disciple of and assistant to the preeminent Byzantinist of the time, Georg Ostrogorsky. After serving as a translator during the war, he took up a position as Lecturer of Classics at the University of Belgrade in 1946 and stayed till 1954. In that period he published inter alia *Die Byzantinischen Urkunden im Staatsarchiv Ragusa*. From Belgrade Marcovich moved to India for a year and in 1955 became Professor of Classics and Philosophy at the Universidad de Los Angeles in Merida, Venezuela, a post which provided him the perquisite of spending one term each year at Cambridge, where he and his wife bought a house for their regular stays.

In 1969 Marcovich moved to Urbana, where he succeeded Alexander Turyn, and remained for the rest of his life. He thoroughly enjoyed living in the small but cosmopolitan community and took full advantage of its rich cultural life, being a familiar face with Vera at classical music concerts. He retired and became Professor Emeritus in 1989. He is sorely missed by friends, family, colleagues and the scholarly community.

Marcovich had visiting appointments at many institutions: in 1954 at Visabharati University in Santiniketan, in 1962-3 at the University of Bonn, in 1975 at the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), in 1979-80 at the University of Michigan, in 1984 at Trinity College, Dublin, and in 1991 at Tel Aviv University.

Many awards came his way during the course of his career. Among these were the Silver Cross (Mt. Athos, 1963), Guggenheim Fellowships (1981 and 1984), National Endowment for Humanities Fellowship (1990) and the Einstein Fellowship mentioned earlier. In 1994 he was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters by the University of Illinois.

Marcovich served as Head of the Classics Department at Urbana from 1973-77. He was founder and first editor of the journal *Illinois Classical Studies*, and was a member of the advisory committee of the *TLG* from 1973 till 1980.

The quality, quantity and range of Marcovich's scholarship was astonishing. Some thirty-five books and 300 articles issued from his pen, many of them in his period of 'retirement'.¹ From Sanskrit texts to Byzantine ones, from pagan to Christian, from Greek poetry to renaissance Latin, from Croatian oral poetry to Gnosticism, from paleography to the history of religion — Marcovich seemed to cover nearly everything. He was, almost certainly, the preeminent Patristics textual scholar of his time. He once expressed his regret to me that he would not have enough

¹ For a full bibliography up to 1993-4, see *ICS* 18 (1993), 1-17 and 19 (1994), 1.

time to re-edit the entire series, *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller*. His edition/commentary on the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus has been translated and revised several times since its appearance in 1967 and remains the standard work. His authoritative edition of Origen's *Contra Celsum* appeared several months after his death.

Marcovich's many editions of Patristic texts were a marvel of 'exact and creative textual criticism, in the best tradition of editing the classical texts', as one reviewer wrote. Marked by his superb paleographical skills, his thoroughness, his brilliance at emendation and his incredible learning, these editions are in fact commentaries as well as critical texts. Readers who have them immediately recognize a Marcovich-edition by their full double apparatus, the one providing all the necessary information to make an informed judgment about the text, the other replete with parallels, many never noticed before, that are sometimes merely interesting, other times illuminating in novel and critical ways. As Professor Adrados recently summed it up, Marcovich's life-work was a κτήμα ἐς αἰεί.²

It is right — and Marcovich would have wanted it — for the role his wife played in his scholarly labors to be acknowledged. Vera was his manager. She managed her own and Miroslav's schedules and activities so as to maximize the amount of time he had for his work. She was ever his helpmate. She is renowned for the parties and dinners she held for Miroslav's colleagues and their friends. She has always been as gracious a host and splendid a cook as one could hope for.

Marcovich wrote his own epitaph and I conclude by quoting it. It gives a sense of the person he was and the values he held:

*I served the Lord, I loved my wife,
And taught my students light and flame,
I raised some Greeks from dust to life,
And never cared for praise or fame.*³

Howard Jacobson

² F.R. Adrados at *Emerita* 69 (2001), 153, an appreciation of the man and scholar.

³ I am indebted for help to my colleague, Professor David Sansone, and to his obituary of Marcovich at *Gnomon* 2001, 746-8.