

NOTES AND NEWS

OBITUARIES



PROFESSOR JOSEPH NAVEH, a giant of Semitic epigraphy and palaeography, passed away on 11 November, 2011. His death is a great loss to the field of North-West Semitic studies and in particular to the disciplines of epigraphy and palaeography. Naveh had an extraordinary eye for the different scripts used in antiquity and possessed high sensitivity for language usage in ancient Hebrew and in the various branches and epochs of Aramaic. This, coupled with the ability to make balanced and level-headed judgements of philological and historical circumstances in connection with the epigraphical material he was interpreting, made him an exceptionally gifted scholar. He never sought to go beyond the province of his competence and knowledge, but within the limits he imposed on himself he was a virtuoso. Thus, at one point he formulated rules guiding the work of an aspiring epigraphist (*On Sherd and Papyrus. Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from the Second Temple, Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods*, Jerusalem, 1992: 208–212 [Hebrew]); these are mostly rules that advocate humility and a ready acknowledgement of the limitations of the power of the scholar working on inscriptions. He concludes

with a disarming disclaimer (pp. 211–212): ‘It would be over pretentious if I were to claim that this book has fulfilled all the rules set up above. I am convinced that the reader will find that I have committed both sins of commission and omission with regard to those rules. Applying discretionary reasoning cannot be entirely objective. A different scholar may reach a conclusion that is different from mine, perhaps even one that is diametrically opposed to it. Scholars invest in their work something of their own personality and world-view, and their investigation is thus necessarily subjective’.

Having had the good fortune to work with him over a long period of time, I developed a great respect for his sound evaluation of the sense of a text, for his open-mindedness concerning the various possibilities of interpreting a difficult passage in an inscription or a manuscript document, and for his commonsense approach to the historical context in which a text may have been created. Once he had weighed the various possibilities for understanding a passage, he would reach a firm conclusion that was, as a rule, quite convincing.

His books and articles have become the standard tools of the trade, and several have become authoritative handbooks for scholars and students. His style of writing was always lucid, straightforward and sparse.

He was fair-minded and helpful when asked for advice, and was always kind and dedicated to his students and colleagues, but could be impatient with colleagues who professed to have easy solutions to scholarly questions, who sought to appropriate the work of other scholars, or who acted otherwise unethically. In most cases

his interlocutors respected his stand and realised that he was not being vindictive for personal reasons.

He was born in 1928 in a town known in Hungarian as Munkács (Mukačevo in Czech). At the time, the town was part of Czechoslovakia, but it has changed its political affiliation several times in the course of the past century as the result of wars and international agreements and is now part of the Ukraine. The Jewish community in Munkács may have formed a majority of the population in the 1930s. They usually spoke Hungarian and represented all walks of modern Jewish life: orthodox and ultra-orthodox, Hasids, Zionists and assimilated Jews. Naveh attended the Hebrew school in Munkács, which may suggest that his parents were Zionists. He came to Israel after World War II and was drafted into the Israeli army in 1948.

Joseph Naveh studied Bible and archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and wrote his Ph.D. dissertation under Professor Nahman Avigad on the development of the Aramaic script; in 1970 this work was published by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities (titled *The Development of the Aramaic Script*). While still a student, he worked at the Israel Department of Antiquities (later the Israel Antiquities Authority) and eventually held the position of chief archaeologist for the Jerusalem region. He resigned this post when he was appointed at the Department of Archaeology of the Hebrew University. His main research interest since then was the development of the Hebrew and Aramaic scripts and the reading and interpretation of Semitic inscriptions. He later belonged to the Department of Ancient Semitic Languages and was subsequently affiliated with the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. Although he retired in 1997, he continued to conduct research and pub-

lish until his final illness, when his eyesight failed.

His field of expertise covered the entire gamut of West Semitic epigraphy. He published 19 books and over 220 articles in English and Hebrew, some in collaboration with colleagues. A list of his publications can be found in the final book he published, a selection of his English articles, *Studies in West-Semitic Epigraphy* (Jerusalem, 2009).

Among his most noteworthy publications is *Early History of the Alphabet. An Introduction to West Semitic Epigraphy and Palaeography* (Jerusalem — Leiden, 1982; 2nd rev. ed. 1989; a Hebrew edition also appeared in 1989). This has become a standard work of reference and an indispensable tool for all epigraphists and others interested in the development of the Semitic alphabet. He also published two collections of Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions, addressed both to specialists and to the wide public: *On Stone and Mosaic. The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues* (Jerusalem, 1978) and *On Sherd and Papyrus. Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from the Second Temple, Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods* (Jerusalem, 1992), both in Hebrew, in which he gave his own definitive readings of all the extant inscriptions. He published jointly with the undersigned two volumes of magic texts, mostly in Aramaic: *Amulets and Magic Bowls. Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1985; 3rd ed., with additions and corrections, published in 1998) and *Magic Spells and Formulae. Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1993). These contain an edition and translation with commentary of a number of amulets on metal from Palestine and adjoining areas, pottery incantation bowls from Babylonia, and magic fragments from the Cairo Geniza, mostly on paper.

Among his other publications, one might single out the Aramaic and Hebrew ostraca found in Masada by Yigael Yadin (published in Yadin, Y., Naveh, J. and Meshorer, Y., *Masada I. The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965, Final Report*, Jerusalem, 1989) and a collection of Aramaic ostraca of the fourth century BCE found in Idumea, in collaboration with Israel Eph'al (*Aramaic Ostraca of the Fourth Century BC from Idumea*, Jerusalem, 1996). In addition, numerous articles, including his discussion of the North-Mesopotamian Aramaic script (The North-Mesopotamian Script-type in the Late Parthian Period, *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 [1972]: 297–304) and the decipherment of a North-Mesopotamian inscription (Lightfoot, C.S. and Naveh, J., A North Mesopotamian Aramaic Inscription on a Relief in the Tigris Gorge, *Aram* 3 [1991]: 319–336), should be mentioned, as well as several articles on Nabataean, Jewish Aramaic, Mandaic and Samaritan amulets.

One volume prepared by Naveh in cooperation with the undersigned is scheduled to appear in the near future. *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria* (to be published in London by the Nour Foundation) contains 30 documents on leather and 18 wooden sticks found in Afghanistan and dating mostly from the fourth century BCE, pertaining to the end of the Achaemenian rule and the first years in the reign of Alexander the Great. I am glad that I could break the news of its impending publication to him shortly before he passed away.

As Naveh was keenly interested in the development of the alphabet and the script-types of the Semitic alphabetical writing, he devoted some of his most important articles to this subject, as well as the general survey that he included in his book on the development of the alphabet.

In particular, he discussed the scripts in early Philistia, in ancient Samaria, the North-Mesopotamian script type of the late Parthian period, and the origins of the Mandaic script. With regard to the Mandaean, Naveh came to the conclusion that their script is a variety of Eastern Aramaic and cannot be used as an argument for a western origin of the Mandaean community (The Origin of the Mandaic Script, *BASOR* 198 [1970]: 32–37).

An issue that engaged Naveh's attention was that of establishing the connection between the Semitic and the Greek scripts. It is generally acknowledged that the Semitic script is the source from which the Greek alphabet derived, but Naveh was among those who questioned the current assumption concerning the date and precise origin of the Greek forms of the alphabetical script. He came to the conclusion, on the basis of the shape of the letters, that the Greek borrowing of the alphabet took place much earlier than the eighth century BCE, the date generally assumed by scholars. His conclusion, developed in several articles over a period of some two decades, remained firm: 'I have become convinced that any scholar who possesses a thorough knowledge of the development of the scripts cannot escape the conclusion that the archaic Greek script must have branched off from the West-Semitic alphabet some time around 1100 B.C.' (Semitic Epigraphy and the Antiquity of the Greek Alphabet, *Kadmos* 30: 143–152, esp. p. 152; reprinted in *Studies in West-Semitic Epigraphy*, Jerusalem, 2009: 114).¹

¹ Earlier discussions of the problem of the borrowing of the Semitic script by the Greeks appear in 'Some Semitic Epigraphical Considerations on the Antiquity of the Greek Alphabet' (*AJA* 77 [1973]: 1–8) and 'Proto-Canaanite, Ar-

His discussion of fake epigraphical documents is no less important than the study of genuine inscriptions. The section titled 'Dubiosa' in his *Studies in West-Semitic Epigraphy* contains three articles discussing inscriptions that purport to be ancient, which he shows (in one case with I. Eph'al) to be of doubtful authenticity.

Professor Joseph Naveh served on the Council of Israel Exploration Society for many years and in recent years was ap-

chaic Greek and the Script of the Aramaic Text on the Tell Fahariyah Statue' (in Miller, P.D., Hanson, P.D. and McBride, S.D. [eds.], *Ancient Israelite Religion. Essays in Honor of F.M. Cross*, Philadelphia, 1987: 101–113).

pointed honorary member. He was on the editorial board of many of the Society's publications, and published extensively both in English and in Hebrew. He was a member of the Advisory Board of *IEJ* since 1969 and played an active role in peer reviewing submissions in his field of expertise. The Board of Governors of Israel Exploration Society decided to dedicate to him a volume of its *Eretz-Israel* series, a publication that will now, regrettably, become a memorial volume.

The death of Joseph Naveh leaves a great void in the community of scholars of West-Semitic epigraphy and palaeography. He will be sadly missed by his many colleagues, students and friends.

SHAUL SHAKED