

## **Itamar Singer (\*26th of November 1946, † 19th of September 2012)**

"Life is bound up with death and death is bound up with life. A human does not live forever. The days of his life are counted." (Prayer of Kantuzili; translation by Itamar Singer.)

Itamar Singer was born on the 26th of November 1946 in Dej, Rumania. His parents, both Holocaust survivors, met in Rumania after the War. His mother Gertrude came from a German-speaking family from Tchernovitz, Bukovina, his father Zoltán from a Hungarian-speaking family from Dej, Transylvania. Itamar's father, a community leader, was repeatedly imprisoned by the communist regime for his Zionist activities, until emigration visas, after years of denial, were finally granted in 1958. Upon their arrival in Israel, the family settled in Holon, which then became home for Itamar. During one summer vacation from high school Itamar participated as a volunteer in the Arad excavations conducted by Yohanan Aharoni, his first experience in field archaeology.

From 1965 to 1968 Itamar studied at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, obtaining his B.A. in the departments of Archaeology and Geography. During these and the following years he participated in excavations at Megiddo, Beersheva, Tel Malhata, Tel Masos and Hanita. From 1969 to 1973 he fulfilled his military duty as an officer in the Air Force, serving as an aerial-photograph interpreter. Simultaneously, he completed his M.A. studies at Tel Aviv University in the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures. His M.A. thesis "Geographical Aspects of the Proto-Hattian Problem", written under the supervision of Aharon Kempinski, anticipated his future research into the ties between history, geography and theology.

From 1973 to 1975 Itamar continued his Hittite studies with Heinrich Otten in Marburg. His dissertation, "The KILLAM Festival", completed in 1978, was published in *Studien zu Bogazkoy-Texten* (1983-1984). It was the first complete edition of a major Hittite festival and it quickly became a highly influential study of Hittite religion.

Upon returning to Israel, Itamar joined the staff of the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures, where he became a full professor in 1996 and where he continued teaching until his retirement in 2006. Between 1984 and 1995 he also taught at other institutions in Israel.

Itamar's primary interests in the historical domain lay in the international affairs of the 13th century BC, the Golden Age of what he has termed the *pax hethitica*. Many of his studies dealt with the diplomatic relations between Hatti and the other great powers as well as with the Hittite domination of Syria, and especially the kingdoms of Amurru and Ugarit. At the same time, his continued interest in Anatolian religions led to an edition and in-depth study of

Muwattalli's Prayer (1996). His interest in the prayer genre culminated in his English translations of the best-preserved "Hittite Prayers" in the Writings from the Ancient World series (2002).

Published in 2009, Itamar's book "Ha-hittim ve tarbutam" ("The Hittites and their Culture") was the first full-length treatment of Hittite history and culture to appear in Hebrew. Its publication was the realization of Itamar's long-standing desire to present Hebrew readers with a more accessible route to a distant culture from long ago, one that nonetheless maintains much relevance for those interested in the history of Israel and the whole region in antiquity. This book has sparked an interest in all things Hittite for many young students who study Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern studies.

In 2011 a volume titled "The Calm before the Storm" (edited by Billie-Jean Collins) brought together over 40 of Itamar's previously published studies, including his political histories of Ugarit and Amurru. The volume's epilogue includes his defence of Hittite historiography as a response to postmodern trends in ancient Near Eastern studies, driven by his life long commitment to the search for the historical truth.

A volume of contributions from colleagues, friends and students in honour of Itamar entitled "Pax Hethitica" and edited by his former students was published in *Studien zu den Bogazkoy-Texten* (2010).

In 2010 Itamar was awarded the prestigious Emet Prize, sponsored by the Office of the Prime Minister of Israel.

During his long tenure at Tel Aviv Itamar carried almost single-handedly the banner of Hittite studies in Israel, and his classes and seminars on Hittite language and culture were regularly attended by students from numerous universities. Itamar's commitment to his research and teaching was contagious, and despite the relative obscurity and humble resources of the field, he supervised over the years a large number of MA and PhD theses. His belief in and personal concern for his students led him to involve many graduate and undergraduate students in his research projects. Several of his former students now hold academic positions in Israel and abroad.

Itamar was married to Graciela Noemi Gestoso, an Argentinian Egyptologist. Alongside his academic duties and interests, Itamar has been involved in various philanthropic and political activities, notably the Israeli Peace Movement.

Itamar passed away on the morning of the 19th of September 2012 after battling a long illness.

*Yoram Cohen, Amir Gilan and Jared Miller*