



Mordechai Gilula (1936–2002)
IN MEMORIAM

Prof. Mordechai Gilula, Egyptologist, linguist and long-time member of the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures of Tel Aviv University, passed away on August 10, 2002.

Gilula was born in Afula on January 29, 1936. He was educated in Haifa, at the Geula primary school and the Bialik secondary school. After his army service as captain of an intelligence unit, he studied History and Bible at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He wrote his MA on the Egyptian influence on the Book of Proverbs, and began his study of Ancient Egyptian, the language that was to fascinate him for the remainder of his scholarly career.

Gilula studied with Professor Hans Jakob Polotsky, founder of the Jerusalem School of Egyptological Linguistics, and with Polotsky's student, Professor Sarah Israelit Groll. Under their supervision, he wrote his doctoral thesis (*Enclitic Particles in Middle Egyptian*, Jerusalem, 1968) on the enclitic particle *js*. Gilula's choice of this topic epitomised a trait that was to characterise much of his later research: the ability to identify a key detail and to extract from it information to illuminate an entire network of syntactic relations. An English summary of this work appears in *Göttinger Miszellen* 2 (1972:53-59), and its conclusions are also outlined elsewhere, such as in Gilula's review of Helmut Satzinger's book on the negative constructions of Old and Middle Egyptian.

Following postdoctoral studies at the University of Chicago in 1969, Gilula began his teaching career at what was then the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures at Tel Aviv University. He was a lively and energetic teacher who made the Egyptian language come alive for his students. He became an associate professor in 1980.

After the peace treaty with Egypt, Gilula, together with Professor Raphael Giveon and Dr. Raphael Ventura, led several study tours to Egypt on behalf of the university's Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures.

Gilula continued his research into the Egyptian language, specialising in the syntax of the Coffin Texts, a vast and complex corpus of mortuary literature from the early second millennium BCE, "that treasure-trove of rare and important grammatical forms and syntactic patterns", as Gilula himself put it.

From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, Gilula published over 30 scholarly articles, mostly on the syntax of Middle Egyptian. Some of this work substantiated the theories of his mentor Polotsky, such as Gilula's discovery of a *tm.n.f sdm* form in the Coffin Texts, which closed the gap in the chain of evidence for the existence of the emphatic *sdm.n.f* form discovered by Polotsky. Gilula also investigated connections between Middle Egyptian and Coptic, and etymological connections between Egyptian and Semitic languages, and occasionally played a role in local archaeological debates, such as the interpretation of the drawings at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. In addition, he wrote on Egyptological topics for a general audience in the Hebrew newspaper, *Ha'aretz*.

Ill health prevented Gilula from completing the comprehensive grammar of Middle Egyptian, which was his life's project. Scholars of ancient Egyptian must view this as a great loss, since his incisive and original scholarship would have contributed many new insights to our understanding of this field.

Gilula was active in the international Egyptological community, spent sabbatical years at Oxford University and at the Sorbonne and participated in numerous international conferences, lecturing with great panache to appreciative audiences and participating with enthusiasm in scholarly debates. He was one of the participants in the first two *Crossroads* workshops on the linguistics of ancient Egyptian.

In 1986, Mordechai Gilula became seriously ill. He returned to teaching but had to desist due to failing health, retiring finally in 1994. He died on August 10, 2002 at the age of 66. He is survived by three children.

Deborah Sweeney