



**PROFESSOR PIRHIYA BECK (1931–1998)**

*IN MEMORIAM*

Pirhiya Beck was born in Sokal, Poland and grew up in Tartakow. At the age of four she emigrated to Mandatory Palestine with her family. Two years later her father joined them and they settled at Herzliya. Pirhiya went to elementary school in Herzliya and high school at Tikhon Hadash in Tel Aviv. After graduation, she did a half-year National Service at Kibbutz Erez where she contracted rheumatic fever. After recovering, she continued her education at the Gordon Teachers Seminary in Haifa. After this, Pirhiya obtained her master's degree in Bible studies and archaeology at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. For a livelihood she taught Hebrew at the Ma'bara (new immigrants settlement) of Hartuv near Beit Shemesh.

During this time Pirhiya participated in her first excavation at Nahariya, where she unearthed a stone mould for casting the image of a female divinity.

From 1955 on she took part in all the seasons of the Hazor excavations. Between 1958–1960 Pirhiya and her friend Uza Zevulun collaborated with Ruth Amiran in the voluminous publication *The Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land*, which to this day remains the only textbook on the ancient pottery of the Land of Israel. In 1961 she participated in the first excavation season at Arad, and between 1962–1963 she worked at the Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv.

Pirhiya began doctoral studies in archaeology at the University of Chicago in 1963, but fell ill. A year later she went to Columbia University to study with Edith Porada, the world authority on ancient seals and Near Eastern art. In 1967 Pirhiya completed her Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Problems in the Glyptic Art of Palestine* - a study of two groups of Palestinian glyptic art: the impressions on potsherds of the Early Bronze Age and the cylinders of the Mitannian style, both of which demonstrate the hybrid character of Canaanite art.

Upon her return to Israel Pirhiya Beck joined the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies as lecturer in Palestinian and Mesopotamian archaeology. From 1985 to 1989 she served as head of the department. Pirhiya collaborated with Moshe Kochavi on his excavations at Aphek-Antipatris (1972–1985) and at Tel Hadar, the major site of the Land of Geshur Project from 1987 until last summer. Her lucid presentation of the ceramic sequence of Middle Bronze Age Aphek and her joint paper with Moshe Kochavi and Ram Gophna on the fortifications of Middle Bronze Age Coastal sites are crucial for the understanding of the period.

Pirhiya Beck was a meticulous, cautious and unrelenting scholar. She had a particular way of studying artefacts, that anyone who knew her could not mistake. She would raise her spectacles and turn the object over and over with her delicate fingers, scrutinizing its details with great attention. Thus her beautiful hand holding an Iron Age metal god was immortalized in Yigael Yadin's book *Hazor - the Head of All Those Kingdoms*. In her opening remarks to the Catalogue of Cult Objects of the Edomite shrine of Horvat Qitmit Pirhiya stresses her perception regarding the importance of the verbal description in the visual analysis of art: "The detailed description of each object given in the Catalogue is an integral part of the discussion and should be read with it. I consider careful study of the descriptions to be essential for interpretation of iconography." Pirhiya taught her students the importance of a thorough description of each detail in a work of art, which ensued after a long and intensive exposure to the work, and which would create "the imaginative participation" of the scholar in the artist's creation. She started a seminar entitled 'Eclectic Art', meeting regularly at her home, where she trained students in methods of reading ancient works of art.

Treating art as an independent text, Pirhiya abstained from a mechanical pairing of a visual representation with a written source. Pirhiya refrained from using the vast iconography of the Ancient Near East as an obvious tool for the interpretation of Biblical imagery. A prime example is her comprehensive treatment of the painted and inscribed pithoi from Kuntillet 'Ajrud. Many a Biblical scholar readily interpreted the two similar figures on Pithos A as Yahweh and his consort Asherah, showing that the accentuated circles on the chest of the smaller figure, which is partly overlapped by the larger figure, prove her feminine character as a wife who follows in the footsteps of her husband. Pirhiya showed that the two figures are none but the dwarf god Bes, and that not only were they not drawn together by the same hand, the larger one being later than the right-hand one, but the inscription was added with a thinner brush in a cursive script.

In 1993, in recognition of her profound comparative studies of the art of Palestine with the arts of the surrounding cultures, the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, awarded Pirhiya Beck the Schimmel prize, citing her numerous publications. Among these are papers on the cult stands from Ta'anach, the Chalcolithic basalt house-altars and copper standards, and the schematic statues from Hazor. Two valuable contributions entitled "Issues in the History of Early Bronze Age Art in Eretz Israel" and "The Figure of the Ruler and Related Problems in Middle Bronze Age Art" were published in *Cathedra* (Hebrew) in 1995 and 1998 respectively. These two articles and many others, such as the Catalogue of Cult Objects and Study of Iconography in *Horvat Qitmit* (edited by I. Beit-Arieh, Tel Aviv, 1995) and "Horvat Qitmit Revisited Via 'En Hazeva" published in *Tel Aviv* 23 (1996) were to be chapters of a comprehensive volume Pirhiya intended to write on the ancient art of Palestine. Each one of these articles tackles a different issue and places it within the larger framework of the art of Syria-Palestine.

Pirhiya fell ill with cancer in 1982. Nothing in her daily life and conduct disclosed her illness. She went on working with enormous energy and exuberance. She was always available to her friends and colleagues. Her devotion to her students knew no limits. Professor Pirhiya Beck died suddenly on 28 August 1998. We remember her with love and gratitude.

*Irit Ziffer*