

The late Professor Rabbi Samuel Klein

by S. YEIVIN

On April 22, 1940, died at Jerusalem, after a short illness, Professor Samuel Klein, who held the chair of the Historical Topography of Palestine at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Samuel Klein was born at Szilas-Balhas, in western Hungary, on Nov. 17, 1886. His father, who was the Rabbi of the Jewish community of that town, taught the boy his first steps in Hebrew and Bible. The father continued to take interest in and supervise his son's education even in later years. Young Klein became first a pupil of the local Jewish elementary school (1893-1897); later, in 1905, he graduated from the Government Gymnasium at Budapest, where he attended at the same time the Jewish Talmud-Torah directed by the well-known Jewish scholar Prof. W. Bacher. During the years 1906-1909 he studied at the *Hochschule für Wissenschaft des Judentums* and the *Freidrich-Wilhelm Universität* of Berlin. In 1909 he received the degree of Ph. D. at the University of Heidelberg on a thesis entitled: *Beiträge zur Geographie und Geschichte Galiläas*, which was his first important contribution to the science of Historical Topography of the Holy Land. In the autumn of the same year he was given investiture as a Rabbi by the *Hochschule* in Berlin as well as by three Rabbis in Hungary (as was customary among Hungarian Jewry). The same year he was appointed Rabbi at Dolnja Tugla in Bosnia, which post he held for three years. In 1913 he married the daughter of Rabbi Yehiel Hershkowitz of Budapest. The same year he was appointed Rabbi at Érsekujvar in Hungary. At the outbreak of the World War of 1914-1918 he was enlisted and served as military Rabbi with the Austro-Hungarian army, without relinquishing his post at Érsekujvar; for with the consent of the military authorities he was able to devote two months every year to the interests of his community. After the war, when Érsekujvar became Czechslovak territory,

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as Nové-Zámky, he continued to take care of the spiritual needs of its Jewish community.

It was during these early years of his career that he made numerous important contributions to Palestinology, and laid the foundations of that branch of Historical Topography, which he made into an independent discipline, namely the study of the topographical data strewn about in the vast literature of the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds and other post-biblical Jewish sources.

In 1908 he published his first article: *Der hebräische Name der Battof-Ebene*, in *ZDPV*. This was the first indication of the line of research which he proposed to follow. His thesis (see above) was a larger and more important contribution, in as much as he first showed there what scientific use he intended to make of his studies of post-biblical sources: the application of the hitherto neglected documents to the tracing of the *Siedlungsgeschichte* of the post-exilic period. Here the historical-topographer definitely became a historian. His way of closely associating the two disciplines manifests itself in the numerous articles and monographs published during these early years of his scientific career: *The estates of R. Juda Ha-Nasi*, *JQR* 1912; *Das Ostjordanland in den halachischen Midraschim*, *Festschrift D. Hoffman*, 1914; *Zur Geographie Palästinas in der Zeit der Mischna*, *MGWJ* 1917; *Jüdisch-palästinisches Corpus Inscriptio-num*, 1920; *Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte Galiläas*, 1923; *Galiläa von der Makkabäerzeit bis 67*, 1927; *Das tannaitische Grenzverzeichnis Palästinas*, *HUCA* V, 1928; *Narbatta und die jüdischen Siedlungen westlich von Samaria*, *MGWJ* 1930; and a large number of articles and monographs written in Hebrew.

In 1924 he was appointed the first professor of the then newly opened Institute of Jewish Studies, which was to form part of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, officially inaugurated in April 1925. In 1924/25 he lectured at Jerusalem, returning to his community in Nové-Zámky at the end of the academic session. At the beginning of the following session he came back to Jerusalem. In 1926 the death of his parents severed the last ties that bound him to Czechoslovakia. He obtained leave from the University of Jerusalem for the years 1927–1928 in order to make his final arrangements for definitely leaving his Rabbinical post at Nové-Zámky. In the spring of 1929

he settled at Jerusalem, where he spent the rest of his life.

His wrestling with ancient literary sources and documents, which were not always explicit and reliable as to their information, or transmitted erroneous versions and spellings, drew him yet into another field of research; he could hardly avoid the task if he wished to make full scientific use of the materials contained in those documents. This was the "assaying" of the documents in question, and the extraction of the relevant topographical and historical data contained in them. There again a series of articles and notes spread over a long period of years clearly shows that this branch of research was not accidental with him but a vital and organic part of his work. The first article of this series was *Hebräische Ortsnamen bei Josephus*, *MGWJ* 1915. Various articles dealt with the *Onomasticon*, and later with various Jewish and Christian sources, such as the *Vitae Prophetorum* (*Sefer Klausner*, 1937), *Itinerarium Burdigalense* (*Zion* VI, 1934), the letter of Rabbi Menahem of Hebron (*BJPES* VI, 1938).

Klein showed himself a master of combinations, an adept of comparative topography and anthroponymy. It was he who connected 'LYQM N'R YKN (Eliakim, the Steward of Joiakim) of the stamped impressions on jar-handles of the VIIth-VIth cent. B. C. with *Jokim, and the men of Chozeba... the potters... there they dwelt with the king for his work.* (I. Chron. XX IV, 22-23). It was he who connected the obscure *Ionios Sephorenos* of a tombstone from the Monteverde catacomb at Roma with the equally obscure *Bar-Yohannis* of the midrashic story of Esther-Rabba. These identifications, however hazardous they may seem or be, were never an aim in themselves; they only served as stepping stones in drawing interesting conclusions as to the economic or cultural history of the period or place concerned: A state industry of the last days of the Judaeen kingdom; a side light on the Jewish community of Rome in the early centuries of the Christian era: an important paper industry which came to an end in or about the VIIIth cent. A. D.; etc.

Finally, all these preparatory studies, all these carefully accumulated raw materials, began to take definite shape in crowning researches: *Tóledót Hayyisúv Hayhúdi be-'Eres Yisrá'él* (The History of the Jewish Settlement of Palestine in the Vth-XIXth cent. A. D.), *Tóledót Haqírat 'Eres-Yisrá'él bas-Sifrut Ha'ivrit ve-Hakklálit* (The History of Palestine Exploration in

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Hebrew and Universal literature); *Sefer Hayyisuv* (The book of Settlement). Fate did not allow him to finish the work that was his one purpose in life. Of the series of volumes, in which he planned to summarise his researches on Palestinian historical topography and *Siedlungsgeschichte* of the post-exilic periods, he published only the first volume: 'Eres Yehúdáh (Judaea); he left in manuscript a second volume: 'Eres Haggálil (Galilee). Samaria, Transjordan and the Decapolis have not been completed.

His research brought him into close connections with the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society almost from the first days of his residence in Palestine. He soon became a leading figure in the councils of the society. He was its president for the last eight years, and a member of the editorial board of the Bulletin and the Library of Palestinology. He took an active part not only in the scientific work of the Society but spent a lot of his time attending to its administrative and financial needs.

It is impossible to close this notice without paying homage not only to the scholar Klein, but also to the *man* Klein. His modesty, his unfailing courtesy, the charming manners with which he received every one, the personal interest he took in his colleagues and students, his never failing readiness to help with word and deed were a source of permanent pleasure to all those of his friends, collaborators and students, who were privileged to work with or under him in various scientific or social enterprises.

Klein died, but his spirit endureth among us for ever!