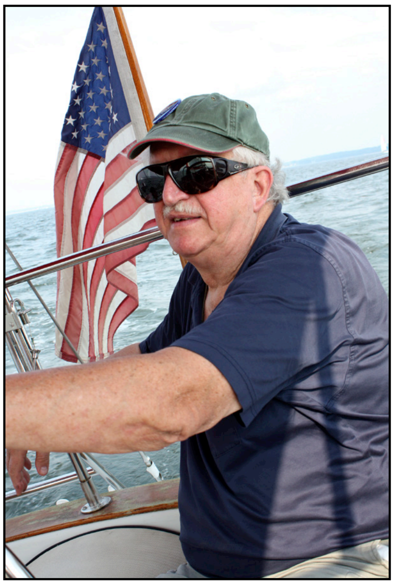
“May His Memory Be Blessed”



Remembering Kenneth G. Holum (1939–2017)

Reminiscences by:

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The ruins of Ruheibeh—Rehovot in the Negev, located in a remote corner of the Negev desert—are an impressive example of the Byzantine-period “Dead Cities.” Back in the 1980s, when Yoram Tsafrir, my teacher and mentor at the Hebrew University, began excavating in Ruheibeh, revealing its churches, buildings, alleys, and water cisterns, I frequently visited this romantic desert site. Ruheibeh could be reached only by a four-wheel-drive vehicle on a rough dirt road. That was the setting of my first encounter with Ken, who joined Yoram in the 1986 excavation season. It was an interesting combination of Israeli and American scholars and students, all staying together in an outdoor camp near

(Photo of Kenneth G. Holum by Juliette Fradin Photography)

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the site. Ken, then a young professor of classical history at the University of Maryland, headed the American team.

As a young Israeli archaeologist at the time, I had a very clear stereotype about how a distinguished American professor of history should look and behave in the unwelcoming conditions of the Negev desert, with its intensive summer heat and occasional bursts of dusty winds. To my great surprise, however, I found Ken to be the absolute opposite of my predicted images. It was clear from first sight that he was not an ordinary academic with an urban educational background but rather well acquainted with open-air surroundings, outstandingly familiar with harsh desert conditions, and even enjoying living in a tent in the middle of nowhere. I was specifically impressed by Ken's great abilities in outdoors camping, equipped with his sophisticated Swiss Army pocketknife always in his immediate reach.

Ken was helpful in solving all kinds of practical difficulties in the camp, very much attached to his students and taking care of every detail of their unique desert experience. The tall figure of Ken with his perennial smile and good humor, surrounded by his young American students and knowing precisely his way in the desert and within the ruins of Ruheibeh, is still vivid in my mind after all these years. Only years later did I discover where all this knowledge originated, as I listened to Ken's stories about his childhood on a farm in the prairies of South Dakota, a descendant of Norwegian immigrants who settled in the American West, living in conditions that were not so much different from those in the Negev camp.

Another thing that impressed me deeply during the excavations at Ruheibeh was the deep friendship that had developed between Ken and Yoram Tsafrir, as if springing from the bottom of their hearts. This long-lasting friendship was further strengthened when Ken spent a sabbatical at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Jerusalem and when Yoram was a fellow at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC.

Looking back, I believe that this was one of Ken's great qualities—the ability to make true and long-term friendships with colleagues. In his many years of excavations in Israel he forged such relationships many times: first with Yoram and then with Avner Raban from Haifa University, Ken's partner in the excavations at Caesarea Maritima. Ken's experience in Caesarea began in 1978, when he was a member of the Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima (JECM), headed by R. B. Bull on behalf of the American School of Oriental Research, with the participation of twenty-two colleges, seminars, and universities in the United States and Canada. Ken was part of the Caesarea excavations from 1978 until his last years, and the study of the capital of Palestine Prima in Roman and Byzantine times became one of his primary interests. He excavated with JECM between 1978 and 1984, and later, between 1989 and 2004, he co-headed, together with Avner Raban and Joseph Patrich, the Combined Caesarea Excavations (CCE), as a joint project of the University of Maryland and Haifa University.

Ken also directed the excavations at the Temple Platform and the warehouse quarter north of the Inner Harbor, while Avner Raban headed the Inner Harbor excavations and those in other areas to the south. The Temple Platform excavations proved to be a meticulous enterprise, as the different phases of the Roman temple, the octagonal Byzantine church, the invisible early Islamic mosque, and the Crusader church revealed a stratigraphic nightmare for archaeologists. But Ken, although he was first and foremost a historian of the Byzantine period, proved to be an excellent archaeologist as well. For years he invested all his efforts in deciphering the phases of building and development of this unique complex. In his preliminary publications of the excavations he succeeded in the interpretation of the transformation from temple to church, one of the very few such cases in Roman and Byzantine Palestine.

This multiyear project, which revealed some of the most important complexes of Caesarea that demonstrated the long sequence in the city's history from the early Roman period to early Islamic and Crusader times, was the height of Ken's archaeological work in Israel. It would be no exaggeration to say that Ken was falling in love with Caesarea. In 1988 he participated in mounting a major exhibition on the city and its history, named, after its founder, "King Herod's Dream." It seems that this was one of the outcomes of the "love affair" between a scholar of history and archaeology and the capital of Roman and Byzantine Palestine.

The long friendship between Ken and Avner Raban also proved very fruitful in terms of publications, featuring articles and archaeological reports, among them Ken's initiative of the series of "Caesarea Papers" in the *Journal of Roman Archaeology* supplements. These detailed archaeological reports and scientific publications, including Ken's interpretations of Caesarea's economy and society in Late Antiquity, constitute one of the finest examples of a detailed evaluation of a major city on the Mediterranean coast.

Ken's love for Caesarea continued during his last decade. After ending his excavations at the Temple Platform, he continued to visit the site annually, working on the publication of the final reports and advising the young generation of Israeli archaeologists. His open mind and good spirits led him to foster another collaboration, this time with the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) expedition at Caesarea, headed first by Joseph Porat and in recent years by Peter Gendelman, who continued to excavate the vaults beneath the Temple Platform. Ken's last visit to Caesarea took place in 2016, when he spent several days with Peter and his staff, discussing stratigraphic questions following their latest excavation at the site. It was a joy to follow these consultations, in which, once again, Ken's great mind and open heart were so vividly expressed.

Ken was primarily a historian, much interested in archaeology and material culture but not trained as an archaeologist. Nevertheless, he was devoted to archaeological fieldwork and interpretation, spent time and effort to study these new fields, and became a very fine and qualified archaeologist.

Some years after our first encounter in Ruheibeh, I met Ken and Marsha during their sabbatical year in Jerusalem, when Ken joined the research group at the Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS) at the Hebrew University. This group, organized by Yoram Tsafrir, focused on the cities of Palestine in Late Antiquity, following the large-scale excavations in Scythopolis-Baysan and Caesarea. The meetings included a weekly seminar in Jerusalem and occasional tours to archaeological sites throughout the country, providing an excellent opportunity to get acquainted with Ken's vast knowledge of the relevant historical background. This combination of deep knowledge of historical sources and practical archaeological experience was unique among the scholars. The addition of Ken's good humor and friendliness, together with his common sense and practical abilities, established him as one of the main "pillars" of the IAS group.

My friendship and interactions with Ken and Marsha became more significant in the last years, when they spent their summer terms in Jerusalem. Ken was working on the publications of the Caesarea excavations, and Marsha spent her time at the National Library at the Givat Ram campus of the Hebrew University, working on her research on modern Jewish history. We would meet in the morning or late afternoon at their modest B&B behind the central Jerusalem bus station. Ken and Marsha became good friends with the Jerusalemite owner of the B&B, and apparently both sides were very pleased with and looking forward to these summer encounters. In our meetings, we spent lovely times talking about what was new in archaeology here and there, and then touring the excavations in and around Jerusalem together. As usual, Ken was very enthusiastic and full of new ideas and knowledge on whatever he was looking at. Exploring new excavations in Jerusalem, he would make the connections and present the "big picture" of whatever was exposed in the corners of the Old City.

Over the years I also had the privilege of meeting Ken and Marsha at their house in Silver Spring during my occasional visits to Washington, DC, and I especially recall their warm and welcoming hospitality. This was the time, many years after our first encounter in Ruheibeh, that I learned about Ken's years as a child and young adult on the family farm in South Dakota. In these encounters I also heard about Ken's early years as a student in the big city, the change he experienced when he became attached to a young Jewish lady (Marsha), and his gradual absorption into the world of Judaism. The good humor that emanated from his stories and experiences triggered bursts of laughter: just imagine a nice protestant farm boy of Norwegian origin becoming a prominent member of the Jewish community in Maryland! In the vocabulary of his acquired Jewish tradition, Ken was first and foremost a "mensch"—a true human being with a big heart open to the world and to all his friends and fellows. As is customary to say in the Jewish tradition: may his memory be blessed, יהי זכרו ברוך .

— Gideon Avni

It is my great honor to write about my dear doctoral adviser, my Doktorvater—as the Germans still say today—and my friend and mentor, Ken Holum. It seems fitting to begin with the *proemium* with which Choricius of Gaza, a teacher of rhetoric who flourished in the mid-sixth-century city of Gaza in Roman Palestine, dedicated his funeral oration to his beloved mentor, Procopius:

> The oration laments the fact that we have the necessity for a speech of this kind; for it [the oration] honors the funeral rites of my deceased teacher, offering him this repayment insofar as it is possible.

Like Choricius, I have no doubt about the impossibility of repaying my Doktorvater for all that he has given me over the years. As ancient rhetoricians of the Greek tradition were fond of observing, experience, like the world of sense of perception, will always exhaust the capacity of speech.

My relationship with Ken Holum spanned almost half of my life and was one of the most important relationships of my life. As a means of expressing some small measure of my gratitude to this very dear friend, I wish to speak about his work as a highly influential and wide-ranging scholar, a cherished teacher of undergraduate and graduate students alike, and an outstanding and irreplaceable mentor to graduate students. My Doktorvater was a rare combination of prolific scholar and truly kind human being.

Ken was an unusual scholar. He was unusual because he was both an excellent philologist, particularly in the study of late antique Greek, and a highly accomplished archaeologist. Ken's first book, *Theodosian Empresses*: *Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*, a pioneering study of women and dynastic politics in the fifth century CE, remains a foundational analysis of the construction of imperial authority through the person of the empress. For more than thirty years, Ken was one of the leading archaeologists of the Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima in northern Israel. He published multiple excavation reports of his findings and was still writing a final volume of these reports with steady care when he became sick in February 2017. Ken also endeavored to make the site accessible to a more popular audience, coauthoring a popular history of the site with colleagues, contributing to articles on Caesarea in popular publications such as *National Geographic*, organizing exhibits at the Smithsonian, and appearing on programs on the site that aired on the Discovery Channel. His genuinely kind and gentle ways made his engagement with the interested public all the more successful.

Ken's amazing mastery of the ancient languages—as well as his remarkable facility with German—was thoroughly impressive to me as a graduate student who met with him weekly to translate hitherto untranslated late antique Greek letters from Gaza. More on this shortly. My Doktorvater had first learned Greek and Latin from German philologists in German—no small undertaking—while working for several years in Munich in the mid and late 1960s.

Ken's breadth as a historian of the sub-epochs of the Ancient Mediterranean was also remarkable. He was as comfortable teaching and speaking about classical Greece or imperial Rome as he was teaching and discussing his specialty, Late Antiquity. Strong as his technical skills in the ancillary disciplines of ancient history were, Ken was keen to deconstruct for his students many of the received scholarly categories set by some of the leading figures who, alongside Ken himself, had been pivotal in developing the academic field of Late Antiquity. In my experience, this interpretive caution, particularly in the study of the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire, distinguished my adviser from many of the early architects of our field.

Following his relatively recent illness and up until his illness and afterward, Ken continued to be as active a scholar as ever, writing the archaeological reports for Caesarea, articles, and book reviews and advising his eager gaggle of advanced graduate students.

Ken was devoted to his scholarly community of specialists working on Late Antiquity and the Ancient Mediterranean, and to scholars at all career stages as well as independent scholars and researchers. As a senior scholar, Ken was a most supportive adviser to younger colleagues. When I was a teaching fellow at the University of Tübingen in Germany (2017–18) in the Seminar für alte Geschichte, I learned in the course of several conversations with Aaron Johnson, a rising star in our field who spent the summer of 2017 in the Theology Seminar at Tübingen, that my mentor had played a key role in helping Aaron develop his first book and his approach to his sources. Aaron's description of his long discussions with Ken at Dumbarton Oaks was vividly reminiscent of my experience with my Doktorvater, and his recounting of this story about Ken—who was already quite ill by this point in mid-July—made it feel as though he were present with us on those hot, air-conditionless days in the Swabian summer sun.

Ken loved teaching, and he especially loved working with his graduate students. I remember most fondly my years as his teaching assistant, impressed by Ken's clarity as a lecturer, the conceptual apparatus undergirding each of his courses, his beautiful slideshows filled with his own pictures of various sites and antiquities, and his warmth and genuine respect for his students. Ken's courses demonstrated to students that the study of classical history contributed to the development of cognitive toolkits that had use in the interrogation of information in everyday life. Militating against "alternative facts," Ken taught that not all arguments are equal. In my mentor's classroom, the classical world was shown to be vibrantly alive in our living culture and institutions. In courses such as his "Athens as the Mirror of Democracy," students used the organization of radical democracy in classical Athens to examine their expectations and assumptions about their own representative democracy.

I began to learn to teach by watching Ken teach and by working as his apprentice. For years, he mentored me in how to teach, guiding me through various situations—the dreaded plagiarism of Wikipedia entries on the assigned book!—and teaching me how to lecture and how to teach students to read and understand ancient texts in translation. I was always asking for all sorts of advice, on my work and my teaching, and I feel and will always continue to feel the loss of this mentorship. I know it was a mentorship that was his great joy to give, a mentorship that he would never abandon, a mentorship whose values and lessons I will always carry with me. I will be looking for this mentorship and friendship the rest of my life, and it will never be replaced.

Ken was an irreplaceable adviser and teacher of graduate students. All members of my cohort will fondly recall our graduate seminars, which took place weekly in Ken and Marsha's dining room, the participants seated around the table, often nibbling on delicious cookies Marsha had baked. These lively sessions were always so exciting to me. I remember vividly how energized and exhilarated I left these discussions, unable to quiet my mind, flipping back through various issues the rest of the night, perceiving how my thinking was changing, and drawing immense pleasure from the experience.

But the highlight of my week for years and the cornerstone of my graduate work with my Doktorvater was our weekly translation meeting. We met for a couple hours a week to read very challenging Greek texts, and, to my knowledge, we were the first to translate these texts into English. The texts we read—a couple hundred virtually ignored Greek letters written by late antique teachers of rhetoric in Roman Palestine—were a study of intellectual friendships and mentoring relationships between teachers and students in the late ancient Greek East. These letters are compact gifts of antiquarian erudition, which showcase, in particular, the art of constructing expressions of intimacy and friendship in the language of classical texts. We spent long hours meditating about the nature of the relationship between teacher and student, trying to unpack the classical models of this most important relationship as expressed in late antique letters.

The letters were an ancient mirror of the remarkable relationship between mentor and advisee. They offered a familiar yet different series of registers to represent this intellectual friendship and virtual parental relationship. Not unlike the adoptive intellectual families created and the kinship language used to depict intellectual friendships in early modern European literati circles, in the rhetorical culture of late antiquity, teachers considered themselves fathers to their adopted children, their students. The term Doktorvater, in my eyes, is thus an ancient usage.

I learned the love of sources—which is the heart of philology—from Ken. Ken loved reading Greek aloud and puzzling through the constructions. For him, such activity was sheer joy. But what we both loved most was putting the letter back together again after applying the translator's razor. What were we really looking at? How was a given text a source? For what was it a source? These were wonderful conversations; they constituted the art of doing history.

In my estimation, such experiences are highly unusual among advisees. It seems rare to find such a devoted mentor who would give such individualized attention to a student, every week offering her a workshop on philology and source criticism. Upon graduating, I mourned the loss of these regular sessions, although Ken and I continued to read amazingly rich texts from late antique Gaza up until the month before I left for Germany.

I am deeply grateful for the time and training my Doktorvater has given me these many years. But above all I am grateful for Ken's loving support and kindness, which provided such a positive context for learning and growth. From my earliest acquaintance with my mentor, his learning combined with his faith in my ability inspired me to do my very best work for him. I never wanted to let down this most kind and learned friend.

I grieve for this loss. Thank you, my dear Doktorvater, for all you have given me. Thank you for our walks through ancient Attic meadows. You are missed, and we will always miss you.

— Elizabeth Conner

Middle Eastern archaeology can boast of only the occasional protagonist of the highest standing, unlike the many professed archaeologists of mediocrity or, every so often, infamy drawn to the region in the past. Not only does Ken Holum indisputably belong at the top of the protagonist category; he was also a great bloke. He stood in stark contrast to his peers and, empowered with a questioning mind and unshackled thinking, confronted head-on the rigid opinions assumed to be true by his colleagues. My introduction to Ken was through his scholarship, most notably through his pioneering work at Caesarea Maritima (Qaysāriyyat al-Shām), the onetime capital of Byzantine Palaestina Prima and a district center of early Islamic Filasṭīn. Caesarea was no inconsequential town. Located on the Mediterranean coast, its administrative and commercial strengths gathered people and attracted investment through much of the first millennium CE, and it was thus an ideal case study on the evolving social and economic conditions of Palaestina/Filasṭīn during one of the most important periods in the history of the east Mediterranean.

Early excavations by the Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima during the 1970s and 1980s took as read existing assumptions on occupational profiles at the site in the lead-up to and following the arrival of Islam, then viewed negatively as a catastrophic and fatal rupture point in history. Publications of the Joint Expedition in the 1970s state that the excavations uncovered destruction levels interpreted as caused by early seventh-century CE attacks by the Sasanids and, after them, a Muslim siege and conquest. Absolutist terms, such as "complete" and "irretrievable," were readily applied to the supposed fate of Caesarea, with "permanent desolation" the outcome. This view was widespread among archaeologists in the 1970s, yet it stood in stark contrast to that held by historians of Islam, which caused great reputational damage to archaeology among historical studies. At first, by his own admission, Ken was party to this disingenuous interpretation of Caesarea's history, but by the 1980s significant doubt as to the validity of this view began to appear in a number of Ken's publications, culminating in his ground-breaking *BASOR* publication of 1992 entitled "Archaeological Evidence for the Fall of Byzantine Caesarea." It was a remarkable, courageous, and timely turnaround by a senior member of the Joint Expedition that not only put Caesarea in a new light but also had wider consequences for understanding the archaeological reading of sites in the mid-first millennium CE.

Just about everyone trying to unravel the complexities of late antique and early Islamic history and archaeology in the region suddenly took note of the Caesarea discoveries. In my case, having already uncovered contrary evidence to unchallenged paradigms while excavating an extensive late antique/early Islamic residential quarter at Pella (Ṭabaqat Faḥl) in Jordan (1979–82), Ken's paper was a revelation; here was a significant, yet politically charged, questioning and rebuttal of a prevailing narrative widely accepted in the archaeological establishment on the nature of the Muslim takeover of Caesarea and the consequences of that occupation on the town and its people. More personally, Ken freely acknowledged the insufficiency of earlier uncritical views adopted by the

Joint Expedition to which he had initially contributed, drawing on historical sources to question them while introducing into his rebuttal fresh archaeological evidence from Caesarea, including important material compiled by Cherie Lenzen for her 1983 doctoral thesis at Drew University.

Archaeological interpretations are usually easy to dispute because of the inherent intricacies and, on the face of it, often conflicting outcomes of archaeological research. However, while demolition is easy, building an alternative explanation is notoriously difficult and time-consuming. Ken's research and publications into the 2010s sought new ways of understanding under the banner of "transitions," a concept prominent in late antique and early Islamic studies of the east Mediterranean since the 1990s. On occasions our paths crossed, and his openness and friendly disposition were immediately apparent, but it was not until a two-day conference hosted in April 2005 by Ken and Hayim Lapin at the University of Maryland that I witnessed first-hand Ken's deep understanding of the period and the breadth of his scholarship (the University of Maryland's library record of the conference publication lists more than twenty subject keywords in English alone, from ethnicity to antiquities). In the "who's who" of scholars Ken gathered for the occasion, such as Oleg Grabar, Irfan Shahîd, Sidney H. Griffith, Donald Whitcomb, and Gideon Avni, Ken's eclecticism was on full display, with papers addressing, as one catalog keyword defines it, the "intercultural communication" of the time, as different religious, ethnic, and cultural elements forged new understandings of their socially diverse world. Yes, his reach was wide, and his scholarship progressive: Ken Holum was, indisputably, a scholar of great distinction.

— Alan Walmsley