

Zwi Yavetz

The Jews in Czernowitz; History of Antisemitism in Antiquity



Born in Czernowitz in 1925, emigrated to Israel 1944, studied in Jerusalem and Oxford and started an academic career first at the University of Jerusalem and then at the University of Tel Aviv. Since 1970I was at the Fred-Lessing-Professory of Ancient History at Tel Aviv University and retired in 1990. I have recently been appointed as distinguished Professor at the City University of New York (there is no mandatory retirement in America). I was visiting professor at many Universities and would like to give particular mention here to Oxford, Cornell, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania, Munich, Frankfurt and Pavia. I was also a member of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and last year won the Israel Prize in History, which is the highest award in the country. — Address: School of General Studies, Queen's College, The City University, 65-30 Kissena Boulevard, Flushing, NY 11367, USA.

When I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg in October 1990, I submitted two research projects. I intended to finish a first draft of the third part of a trilogy. I had published a book on Augustus and one on Julius Caesar. I re-wrote the book on Ceasar and it was published in December 1990 in Paris in French, but I have also submitted to the press a different version in Hebrew which will appear most probably in September or October 1991. These two things kept me busy with proof-reading because I had written the text before I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg. In Berlin I analysed the problem of Caesarian '*Wahnsinn*' by asking the question whether it was sheer craziness or just hypocrisy or could one perhaps find assistance in this craziness. I have completed almost 50 % of the manuscript for publication, i.e. the chapters on Tiberius and on Gaius Caligula (approximately 250 pages). I hope to finish the chapters on Claudius and Nero next year and subsequently submit my book for publication.

My second major problem consisted of an attempt to write a history of the Jews in Czernowitz from the days of the pre-fascist regime of Goga and Cusa in 1937— 38 through the so-called regal dictatorship of King Karl II., Hohenzoller of Sigmaringen, till the annexation of the Bukovina by the

Soviet Union in June 1940. I am glad to report that this project is almost completed as I have finished the first draft (400 pages) which consists of three parts: first my own memoirs, second a historical essay based on books and documents on the history of Romania and Bukovina between 1937 to 1940, and the third most important part which dealt with the *mentalité* of the people who lived in those years in the Bukovina without knowing the development of future events, i.e. outbreak of World War II and the conquest of Bukovina by the German and Romanian troops. This was a complicated project because I needed documents and journals which were not available in Germany and, in spite of the tremendous effort of the ladies of the Wissenschaftskolleg's library, I was unable to get the necessary tools. However, Mrs. Bottomley found out where these materials could be found and I hope to be able to put my hand on them before I submit the book for publication (the book has been accepted on the basis of one chapter by Dvir, a publishing house in Tel Aviv, and by the University Press of Berkeley, University of California). The main topic of the book deals with history and memory and, since I had the honour to deliver a lecture on this topic at the Wissenschaftskolleg, I asked Mr. Prasser to tape the lecture and, instead of writing a long report, I will leave the cassette with Mr. Prasser. I would also like to mention that, having been a freshman in modern history, I was glad to hear that my first article in modern history has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Contemporary History* which is published in London.

One never knows where a new research project can lead. I had to deal mainly with problems of antisemitism in Romania and for purposes of comparison I delved into the problem quite deeply and studied the origins of antisemitism in the ancient world. *Nolens volens* I happened to be in the position of the third almost finished manuscript on four stages of ancient antisemitism. I have delivered my findings in a talk in one of the Tuesday Colloquia and shall say only briefly what my findings are: first of all, I am sure that one should not use the term antisemitism for antiquity and stick rather to Mommsen's terms *Judenhaß* and *Judenhetze*, nor do I intend to find a new definition for antisemitism. Disliking most modern definitions I am happy with the definition "dislike of the unlike" and since historians do not process the truth to investigate the development of hatred (that should be left to social psychologists or sociologists or anthropologists) I also suggested dropping the question "why antisemitism?" and replacing it by the question: "Who were the antisemites in various periods of history and what made them tick?" I can not agree with the theory that antisemitism is an eternal phenomenon because it appeared, disappeared, and reappeared in history time and again. It is futile to argue against racial, social, religious, and economic theories which explain antisemitism. Eventu-

ally most scholars in the western world will reject a mono-causal interpretation and propose a combination of all these factors — a pretty banal solution. I have therefore identified four major stages in the ancient world and give here a very brief outline: stage one is the anti-Jewish outbreak in Elephantine in Egypt in 411 B.C. The story is told in some Aramaic papyri which were found in Egypt in the beginning of the 20th century and correctly analysed for the first time by Eduard Meyer. The second stage was the anti-Jewish hatred in Alexandria in the third century B.C., in the days of Ptolomey Philadelphus II following the translation of the Bible from Hebrew into Greek, while in 411 the leading figures involved in the anti-Jewish riots in Elephantine were Egyptian priests who hated the Persian invaders and identified the Jews as tools of Persian domination, the second period of anti-Jewish feelings was led by Egyptian intellectuals who felt offended by the statements in the second book of the Bible, Exodus. The third stage deals with anti-Jewish feelings of the hellenized population in Syria and Asia-Minor following the alliance which came about in 161 B.C. between the Roman Empire and Judaea. The fourth stage is in my opinion connected with the outbreaks in Alexandria in the days of the Roman emperors Caligula and Claudius, but I would rather not specify my views because this is as yet my last and unfinished chapter. But I am also glad to report that I have signed a contract with the University of California Press.

I am pretty satisfied with the results of my work which could not have been fulfilled without the otium granted by the Wissenschaftskolleg.