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Obituary:

In Memory of Ada

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## In Memory of Ada

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### MAGDALENA LUSZCZYNSKA

Writing about Professor Ada Rapoport-Albert, or Ada, as all her students and colleagues knew her, I find myself at a loss for words: how can one possibly do justice to the memory of such an extraordinary person? This volume is going to include excellent pieces remembering her as a distinguished scholar who redefined any area of research she worked on, a brilliant and inspirational lecturer, a demanding but always fair and supportive tutor, and as a friend to many, many people. I wanted my contribution to be a testimony to how deeply she touched people's lives even in her minor, perhaps even unknown to many, roles.

I met Ada as an undergraduate student at University College London's Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department (HJS). She became the supervisor of my B.A. thesis, and when I considered pursuing my Ph.D. at UCL, she agreed to supervise my doctoral thesis. Eventually I chose to leave for Hebrew University, but even this hard decision was helped enormously by Ada's advice and encouragement.

I took every course Ada taught during my time at HJS but the one I remember distinctly well was the 2010/11 Advanced Modern Hebrew class. Every session, Ada had us gather round the table in her office, making the course seem more like a collaborative translation project than an undergraduate class. We read journal articles and excerpts from monographs, we debated and discussed, and above all we listened. Each sentence offered endless possibilities for Ada's erudition and extensive knowledge to shine. New Hebrew-language expression brought up anecdotes from academia, stories about her childhood in Tel Aviv, and her life as a student in London. On other occasions, she took us on etymological journeys from Aramaic to biblical Hebrew and Yiddish and back to Zionists' linguistic choices. And she listened to us attentively, respected every contribution, and took time to discuss, explain, and correct mistakes.

Why would a distinguished professor, who divided her time between research and administrative responsibilities as department head, choose to teach a language course?

To me, Ada's Hebrew class is a micro-historical narrative, which by focusing on a seemingly dismissible detail, brings to light the whole array of qualities that made Ada an unforgettable academic personality: her abiding passion for rigorous scholarship, the pleasure she took in teaching, her generosity with time and advice, her vivid sense of humour, and her unparalleled gift of story-telling.

Now, a decade later, as a postdoctoral researcher living in Tel Aviv, Hebrew has become my primary language. Still, every now and then I suddenly notice an expression that I first learned in Ada's office, remembering her through her language. Each time, invariably, I feel grateful and humbled that I had the privilege of learning from her.