



Prof. Robert Solomon Wistrich
(April 1945 - May 2015)

«He died, the last prince, amid poems, phylacteries, and foot bindings. We buried him at a desolate train station. And I, who can hardly harness the storms of fantasy raging through my ancient body, I received my brother's last breath» (Isaac Babel, *The Rabbi's Son*)

We are publishing the paper that Professor Wistrich planned to present in Rome on May 20th this year within the framework of the series of conferences organised by the *International Center for Modern Jewish Civilization* at Roma Tre University, in cooperation with the *International Master on Holocaust Studies*, the *International Colloquium Between the East and the West*, the NGO *Associazione Europa Ricerca* and the journal *T^Trauma and Memory*.

Professor Wistrich's conference was to be held in the Senate Library. Many authoritative representatives of the academic and political world, among them the Hon. Piero Fassino, Mayor of

Turin and Professor Giacomo Marramao, a scholar of the Philosophy of Politics at Roma Tre University, had accepted invitations to attend this event organised by our Center in Roma Tre University.

Sadly, the day before the conference, Professor Wistrich died following a serious heart attack. His death leaves a profound void in those who knew and respected him.

The previous evening we had spoken at length addressing important cooperation projects. I met Wistrich many years ago at Heidelberg University at a conference on anti-Semitism and ever since we kept in touch by letter. We were supposed to meet again in May in Jerusalem at an International Conference on Anti-Semitism, but for health reasons I was unable to attend. I never imagined I would have to assist him far from his love ones. The previous evening, on the Janiculum Hill, I spoke to him about Benedetto Musolino, an important personality in the Italian Risorgimento who, in 1851, wrote a book in which he stated the need for the reconstruction of a national independent Jewish life in the land in which its civilisation was formed. Wistrich was not familiar with this author and was very impressed by him. We discussed the possibility of translating the book into Hebrew. This too was among his future projects.

Prof. Robert Solomon Wistrich was the Erich Neuberger Professor of European and Jewish History at the *Hebrew University of Jerusalem* and the head of the *University's Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism*. He was born in Lenger, in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic on April 7, 1945. His parents were leftist Polish Jews who had moved to Lviv in 1940 to escape the Nazi persecutions. In 1942 they moved to Kazakhstan, where Wistrich's father was imprisoned twice by the NKVD (the "People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs"). After the Second war the parents emigrated to France. Robert Wistrich grew in England, where he received his Ph.D from the *University of London* in 1974. In 1985 his study of Socialism and the Jews won the joint award of the *Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism* at the *Hebrew University of Jerusalem* and the *American Jewish Committee*. His 1989 book *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph* received the Austrian State Prize in History. His next study, *Antisemitism: The longest Hatred* (1991) won the *Jewish Quarterly-Vingate Literary Prize* in the UK a year later.

Between 1991 and 1995, Wistrich was appointed the first holder of the Chair of Jewish Studies at *University College London*, in addition to his position at the *Hebrew University of Jerusalem*. He was one of six scholars who sat on the *International Catholic – Jewish Historical Commission* from 1999 to 2001 to examine the wartime record of Pope Pius XII, with special reference to the Holocaust. From 2002, he was the director of the *Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism*, and edits its journal.

The following is the paper that Professor Wistrich planned to present and discuss with me, Piero Fassino, prof. Giacomo Marramao on May 20th. An earlier version of this paper was published in "Mosaic Magazine on line" in October 2014. In this paper sent together with an authorisation to publish it, Robert Wistrich analyses the dynamics of new anti-Semitism and the grey area enveloping it, with specific reference to the French case.

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