In Memoriam, Professor Joshua Blau ז"ל (1919–2020)

Joshua Blau
 September 22, 1919–October 20, 2020

News of the passing of Prof. Joshua Blau, Professor Emeritus at the Hebrew University and one of the world's seminal Semitic linguists, reached us while this volume was in preparation. For more than seventy years Prof. Blau was a transformational researcher, a highly esteemed scholar admired by generations of students and by his students' students. We at the *Journal of Jewish Languages* were honored having Prof. Blau on our Advisory Board for the last eight years since the journal's inception.

Prof. Joshua Blau was, first and foremost, an influential Semitic linguist, a giant scholar, who had made countless outstanding contributions in the fields of Hebrew, Arabic, Judeo-Arabic, and other Semitic languages. His prolific research, which extends over dozens of monographs and more than 300 research articles, is too broad to justly describe here. As a journal dedicated to Jewish languages, we shall focus here on his most pivotal contributions to the field of Judeo-Arabic – the three foundational pillars that have become an unimpeachable source for all Judeo-Arabic research that followed.

The first pillar is Blau's *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic*. The *Grammar*, based on his PhD dissertation, was first published in 1962. A second

extended and revised edition was published in 1980 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press). In the years since, the *Grammar* became a cardinal resource for all Judeo-Arabic scholars.

The second pillar is his monograph *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study of the Origins of Neo-Arabic and Middle Arabic*. *The Emergence* was first published in 1965 – merely three years after publication of the *Grammar* – by Oxford University Press, with two revised editions in 1981 and 1999 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute). In this acclaimed monograph, Blau lays out, for the first time, a broad perspective for the historical and linguistic processes that led to the emergence of Middle Arabic in general, and to the development of medieval Judeo-Arabic in particular.

The third pillar of Blau's work is his *Dictionary of Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Texts*. For decades Blau collected material for the *Dictionary* from all the texts that he had read and worked on over the years. Although a first draft was submitted to the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities in 1991, work on the *Dictionary* continued for over a decade, and it finally appeared in 2006 (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language & The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities).

Obviously, Blau's contributions span far and wide even beyond these seminal works, including, to mention just a few, a critical edition of Maimonides' *Responsa* with a Hebrew translation and annotations (Jerusalem: Mekitze Nirdamin, 1959–62, 1986; the last revised edition was updated by Blau himself in 2014 when he was 95 years old), *A Grammar of Christian Arabic* (Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus SCO, 1966–67), *A Handbook of Early Middle Arabic* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University 2002), and recently with Prof. Simon Hopkins, *Early Judaeo-Arabic in Phonetic Spelling* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2017).

Fitting to the inspiration and marvel that he was, Blau continued to work and publish till his very last days at the age of 101. His 140-page article on Alfasi's dictionary *Jāmi' al-'Alfāz* (introduction and entries starting with Alef) had just appeared on the same week of his passing (*Ginzei Qedem* 16, 2020). Additional monographs and papers written by Blau are still pending publication.

Beyond his own research, Blau was also deeply involved in the broader academic community. He enjoyed multiple research collaborations with his peers, was the president of the Academy of the Hebrew Language (1981–1993), the founding president of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies (1984–1997), and a member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities (since 1968). Blau received numerous awards, including the Israel Prize (1985), Yitzhak Ben-Zvi Lifetime Achievement Award (1980), Rothschild Prize (1992), the City of Jerusalem's award (2002), and honorary doctorates from prestigious universities and leading research institutes worldwide.

The *Journal of Jewish Languages*, its editors, and its publishing house, Brill, extend their deepest condolences to his family and friends.

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