

2006 REFERENCE AWARDS PRESENTATION -- 2007

The RAS awards committee reviewed many excellent books for our 2006 reference and bibliography awards. We have continued the practice we started last year of awarding an honorable mention in each category. In an interesting coincidence, three out of the four works were published in Israel, and all of the authors are Israeli. Unfortunately, none was able to join us tonight.

Let me first thank the members of my committee: Glenn Ferdman, Leah Greenfield, Elliot H Gertel, Cheryl Jaffee, Rachel Simon and Yaffa Weisman.

I would also like to thank the donors. The reference award has been donated for a number of years by Dr. Greta Silver of New York. Similarly, we have benefited for a long time from the generosity of our own member Eric Chaim Kline, who has donated the bibliography award. Please take a bow.

The winner of the reference award is Prof. Joshua Blau, emeritus professor at the Hebrew University. The honored work is entitled

מילון לטקסטים ערביים-יהודיים מימי הביניים

Dictionary of Medieval Judaeo-Arabic texts

Published by the Academy of the Hebrew Language and the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

This incredible dictionary is arranged by Arabic heading, followed by Hebrew script, and then the meaning in English and Hebrew. This is followed by forms of the word in context, their translation into Hebrew and citations. Reference is made to classical Arabic dictionaries as well as modern scholarship. This dictionary is extremely important not only for research into linguistics, but it facilitates research into Judeo-Arabic culture, encompassing literature, philosophy, religion and science. It is a major research tool that will have substantial influence on the research of the subjects just mentioned.

In brief remarks sent to us, Prof. Blau says that he is very much honored to receive the award. I quote:

“I have worked on this dictionary about twenty years, ten years in preparing the manuscript -- and ten additional years in preparing the manuscript for publication.”

This clearly is the work of a lifetime. I informed Prof. Blau of the award in a telephone call to Jerusalem. He expressed his extreme delight at the honor. He also said that he would be coming to the US in March to accept the Franz Rosenthal prize for his lifetime achievements from the American Oriental Society. It is not often that a lifetime of scholarly achievement can be crowned with such a magnificent work.

The recipients of the reference award honorable mention are Mathilde A Tagger and Yitzchak Kerem for their work *Guidebook for Sephardic and Oriental Genealogical Sources in Israel*, published by Avotaynu. Ms. Tagger is a retired librarian. For two decades she was chief librarian of the Atmospheric Sciences Dept. of the Hebrew University. Following that she spent a decade as scientific counselor at the Israeli Ministry of Science and Development. She has published many works and articles on Jewish genealogy. Prof. Yitzchak Kerem is a historian of Greek and Sephardic Jewry. He has taught, among other places, at Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece and at the Hebrew University. He is the founder of the Institute of Hellenic-Jewish Relations at the University of Denver. He is known to many of you as the editor of the valuable online newsletter *Sepharad*, which lists conferences, courses, events and publications relating to Sephardic Jewry.

The guidebook contains information about forty countries and geographical regions. Sources listed include selected Hebrew periodicals, burial societies, archival items, research institutes, immigrant and other ethnic associations, agricultural settlements, synagogues, memorials for Holocaust victims and homes for the aged. A wide range of appendices include information on such subjects as Jerusalem voters to the Sephardic Community Council (1939), birth and death dates of rabbis from Libya from 1588 to 1960, and Yemenite rite synagogues in Israel arranged by locality and name.

As you can see, this book contains a wealth of information for historians, anthropologists, and other scholars.

In her remarks to us retired librarian Mathilde Tagger writes: “If I only could be in person with you tonight, I would certainly feel in my own world.” She goes on to describe how it took her four years to research nine generations of her family. Her research took her from Turkey to Livorno, to Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, France, Uruguay, Los Angeles, and of course Israel. She discovered that there was a need for a guide to Sephardic genealogical resources.

Yitzchak Kerem has also sent remarks to us, thanking us for the honorable mention. He says that in preparation for the book he traveled to over forty ethnic centers and special research institutes in Israel.

Congratulations to our honorees.