

Near Eastern Studies in Memory of
M. M. Bravmann

The Journal
OF THE ANCIENT NEAR
EASTERN SOCIETY OF
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 11: 1979

602 Kent Hall, Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027

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US ISSN 0010-2016

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The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University welcomes articles on all aspects of the ancient Near East. Manuscripts, which must be typed, and all illustrations should be sent to the Editorial Office at 602 Kent Hall, Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027. A style sheet will be sent on request to prospective contributors.

The Journal is now published in one double-issue per annum.

Subscription Information: Vol. 12 (\$15 for institutions; \$10 for individuals); Back Issues: Vols. 6, 7, 8, 9 \$10 each; Vol. 5 (*The Gaster Festschrift*) \$20; Vol. 4/2 \$3; Vol. 4/1 \$3; Vol. 3/2 \$3; earlier volumes are available bound from AMS Press, 56 E. 13th St., New York, NY 10003; and on microfilm from Information Handling Services, P.O.B. 1213, Englewood, Colorado 80110, Attention: MED/CFE. Foreign orders: add \$1 for postage. Students will receive a 20% discount on current issues; proof of student status should accompany order.

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Preface

We wanted to present Dr. Meïr M. Bravmann, colleague of many of us and teacher of us all in one way or another, with a tribute, a *Festschrift*. Out of shyness and humility he was not especially enthusiastic. But it was not long after our initial conversations that he unexpectedly died, in September 1977. Though greatly saddened by his passing, we are nonetheless pleased and proud to honor his name and his life with this memorial volume. The contributors are all colleagues, students, friends of Dr. Bravmann. A glance at the Table of Contents reveals the eminent scholarly circles in which he walked.

In preparing this special issue of the *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* I have been fortunate to have had the unstinting help of our all-volunteer board and staff. Our new production company, headed by Mr. Gary A. Tuttle, has worked with us closely and conscientiously. The Editorial Advisory Board served from the very beginning of the project as a true committee of active editors. I offer each my deep thanks. We all thank the contributors for submitting studies that are worthy of the scholar whom we are memorializing.

Several friends and co-workers of Dr. Bravmann's have assisted us in gathering information concerning his life. I wish to thank especially Dr. Mark Jupiter, Ms. Mary Ann Miller, and Ms. Jane Hunt of the Columbia University Library.

Finally, we are all indebted to the Louis and Minna Epstein Fund of the American Academy for Jewish Research and to Columbia University for subventions without which this volume could not be published. We appreciate their generous assistance and acknowledge the tribute to Dr. Bravmann's memory that their grants bespeak.

Edward L. Greenstein

M. M. Bravmann: A Sketch

Columbia University Library users often saw him scurrying about the main floor, from the cataloguing room to the catalogue to the vast stacks and back again. He was a determined ball of energy, who went swimming several times a week and shuffled faster than many people can walk. To his fellow librarians at Columbia, where he worked for nearly the last thirty years of his life, he was the enigmatic Mr. Bravmann. To those conversant in the fields of Semitic languages and literatures, he was perhaps the last of the great comparative Semitists. His breadth and depth of knowledge in Arabic language and literature has been equalled by very few. As for comparative Semitic linguistics, he may be said to have almost single-handedly carried the analytical perspectives and synthetic scope of Delitzsch, Nöldeke, Barth, and his teacher Brockelmann into the midst of the twentieth century. In many ways Bravmann's death marks the end of an irretrievable, irrepressible epoch in Semitic scholarship.

Bravmann was extremely creative and productive, but he led most of his life stooped under the weight of misfortune. Meir Moshe Bravmann was born July 3, 1909, in a small town in southern Germany. From 1927 to 1932 he studied Semitic languages at the University of Breslau, where he earned the Ph.D under Brockelmann. His dissertation, *Materialien und Untersuchungen zu den phonetischen Lehren der Araber*, was published at Göttingen in 1934. Bravmann began an academic career, working as an assistant for the Oriental Seminar, University of Giessen. But when the Nazis took power in 1933, Bravmann, like so many fellow Jews and others, was dislodged from his ladder to a professorship. Later, in the United States, he would sue the West German government for damages resulting from his forced change in profession, from academician to librarian.

In 1934 he moved to Jerusalem, where he worked as a research assistant, then instructor of Semitic philology, at the Hebrew University. He was not admitted to the professorial ranks, and in 1951 he came to New York. After scrounging for a living through part-time teaching at New York University and private tutoring, he was referred to the Columbia University libraries, where he was hired in 1952 as a cataloguer. He arranged to teach part-time as an adjunct professor at Dropsie College and at Columbia, where at various times he taught Syriac, Comparative Semitic Grammar, and advanced Arabic, as well as supervising several dissertations and advising numerous others.

He made few friends in his career, but those he made admired him deeply. He never married and lived alone. Bravmann belonged to the American Association of University

Professors, as well as other scholarly organizations, but with some justice he felt snubbed by the academic world.

He worked on his research in relative isolation but indefatigably, using all his spare time at the library and most of his evenings to produce a large body of studies and reviews, most of which have been incorporated into his books. These works clearly demonstrate the penetration of his acumen and the wide range of his interests—from early Arab love lyrics and the psychology of religion to Akkadian morphology and general linguistics. His books include, in addition to his dissertation:

Studies in Arabic and General Syntax (Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale: Cairo, 1953);

The Arabic Elative: A New Approach (E. J. Brill: Leiden, 1968);

The Spiritual Background of Early Islam: Studies in Ancient Arab Concepts (E. J. Brill: Leiden, 1972); and

Studies in Semitic Philology (E. J. Brill: Leiden, 1977).

He also contributed chapters to the following books published by the Human Relations Area Files, New Haven, and edited by Raphael Patai: *The Republic of Lebanon* (1956); *The Republic of Syria* (1956); and *Jordan* (1957).

At the time of his death he had planned to write a book on the modern Jewish Arabic dialect of Baghdad. Although he did not live to see that project through—not to see the publication of this volume, which was initiated as a *Festschrift*—he had the pleasure of seeing in print his last book, *Studies in Semitic Philology*, on which he had worked several years, revising and translating studies written over the last four decades. These *Studies* will long stand as a fitting monument to the creative brilliance and impressive erudition of a very great scholar.

Bravmann died in a New York City hospital, September 16, 1977.

E. L. G.