

Semitic Studies in Memory of
Moshe Held

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Preface

Professor Moshe Held was an extraordinary teacher, a widely admired scholar, and an engaging personality. He was also the guiding spirit behind those of his graduate students who in 1968 founded this *Journal*. It would have been our great delight to have presented him with a *Festschrift* upon a timely retirement from Columbia University, where he was Professor of Ancient Semitic Languages and Literatures. Very sadly, upon his untimely death on June 6, 1984, it became immediately clear that we would produce a volume of this *Journal*, in which he saw fit to publish a number of his own articles, in memory of our teacher.

Professor Held meant a great deal to many scholars the world round. A memorial meeting took place at Columbia University the year following his demise. Many colleagues and students from various institutions attended, and Professor William W. Hallo of Yale, a longtime friend of Held's, lectured. The American Oriental Society, at whose annual conferences Professor Held routinely delivered papers, dedicated a session to his memory. The *Jewish Quarterly Review*, published by Dropsie College, where Held began his professorial career, devoted Volume 76, number 1, July 1985, to his memory. An international array of senior scholars contributed to that special issue, *Essays in Memory of Moshe Held*. Colleagues and students of Held's in the State of Israel composed a substantial volume in his memory as a special issue of the journal *Beer-sheva* (Volume 3, for 1988).

We are pleased to complement those volumes with the present, unique collection. *Semitic Studies in Memory of Moshe Held*, comprising Volume 19 of the *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*, features the work of scholars who earned the Ph.D. degree largely under Professor Held's tutelage. The sixteen contributors represent three-fourths of those who completed the Ph.D. as students of Professor Held, at Dropsie and Columbia. This volume, accordingly, displays both the depth of expertise and breadth of scope that reflect what may be loosely called the "Held school." Every contribution in some way attests to our mentor's diverse specialties, from Assyriology to Arabic, with an eye always on the Hebrew Bible.

The *Journal* could not have published this special expanded issue as a memorial tribute to Professor Held had we not received generous support from institutions and foundations that wished to share in honoring the great lamented scholar. With deep gratitude and appreciation we thankfully acknowledge the assistance of:

The Louis and Minna Epstein Fund of the American Academy for Jewish Research;

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Brief reviews of Professor Held's life and work have appeared in the *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* (Volume 52 for 1985), by William W. Hallo, and in *Essays in Memory of Moshe Held* (1985), by Stephen J. Lieberman. We have accordingly decided not to repeat a full story here. We have, however, composed a portrait of Professor Held as our teacher; and we have reproduced a complete listing of Professor Held's publications, to which reference will be made within the present volume. It is our sincere hope that together with Professor Held's own inimitable writings, this collection of his students' scholarship will serve as a measure of the unique contributions Moshe Held has made to what we know of the Bible and the ancient Near East and of the ways by which to study them.

Publications of Moshe Held*

- "*The Goddess Anath* by Moshe David Cassuto," *Megillot* 9 (1952), 351-54 [in Hebrew].
1. "A Biblical Crux and Its Parallel in Ugaritic (The Root *šrd* in the Bible and in the Ugaritic Writings)," *Eretz Israel* 3 (1953; Cassuto volume), 101-3 [in Hebrew].
 2. "Moshe David Cassuto as a Philologist," *Leshonenu* 18 (1953), 50-52 [in Hebrew].
 3. "More Pairs of Parallel Words in the Bible and in the Ugaritic Writings," *Leshonenu* 18 (1953), 145-60 [in Hebrew].
 4. "Studies in Ugaritic Lexicography and Poetic Style" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1957).
 5. "*mḥš*/**mḥš* in Ugaritic and Other Semitic Languages (A Study in Comparative Lexicography)," *JAOS* 79 (1959), 169-76.
 6. "A Faithful Lover in an Old Babylonian Dialogue," *JCS* 15 (1961), 1-26.
 7. "A Faithful Lover in an Old Babylonian Dialogue: Addenda et Corrigenda," *JCS* 16 (1962), 37-39.
 8. "The *yqtl-qtl* (*qtl-yqtl*) Sequence of Identical Verbs in Biblical Hebrew and in Ugaritic," in *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman* (Leiden, 1962), 281-90.
 9. "The Action-Result (Factitive-Passive) Sequence of Identical Verbs in Biblical Hebrew and Ugaritic," *JBL* 84 (1965), 272-82.
 10. "Studies in Comparative Semitic Lexicography," in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (*Assyriological Studies* 16; Chicago, 1965), 395-406.
- The Publications of Dr. Moshe Held, with Indexes and References in Akkadian, Hebrew and Ugaritic*, ed. Chaim Cohen and David Marcus (New York, 1967).
11. "The Root *zbl/sbl* in Akkadian, Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew," *JAOS* 88 (1968; E. A. Speiser Memorial), 90-96.
 12. "Rhetorical Questions in Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew," *Eretz Israel* 9 (1969; W. F. Albright Volume), 71-79.
 13. "Philological Notes on the Mari Covenant Rituals," *BASOR* 200 (1970), 32-40.
 14. "Studies in Biblical Homonyms in the Light of Akkadian," *JANES* 3 (1970-1971), 46-55.
 15. "Pits and Pitfalls in Akkadian and Biblical Hebrew," *JANES* 5 (1973; The Gaster Festschrift), 173-90.
 16. "Hebrew *ma'gāl*: A Study in Lexical Parallelism," *JANES* 6 (1974), 107-16.
 17. "Two Philological Notes on Enūma Eliš," *S. N. Kramer Anniversary Volume*, *AOAT* 25 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976), 231-39.

* Numbered items are so referenced in the article by Chaim Cohen, who indexes Professor Held's "interdialectal distributions."

18. "On Terms for Deportation in the Old Babylonian Royal Inscriptions with Special Reference to Yaḥdunlim," *JANES* 11 (1979; M. M. Bravmann Memorial), 53–62.
19. "Studies in Biblical Lexicography in the Light of Akkadian, Part I," *Eretz Israel* 16 (1982; H. M. Orlinsky Volume), 76–85 [in Hebrew].
20. "Marginal Notes to the Biblical Lexicon," in *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry* (Winona Lake, IN, 1985), 93–103.
21. "Studies in Biblical Lexicography in the Light of Akkadian, Part II," in *Studies in Bible Dedicated to the Memory of U. Cassuto* (Jerusalem, 1987), 104–26 [in Hebrew].

Professor Moshe Held:

Our Teacher

The basic facts of Professor Moshe Held's career cut a simple outline. Born in Poland in 1924 and raised in Tel Aviv, he was educated in Hebrew Literature, Bible, Classical Arabic, and Semitics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and in ancient Near Eastern studies and Assyriology at the Johns Hopkins University and the University of Chicago. Johns Hopkins awarded him the Ph.D. in 1957 for his dissertation on Ugaritic and comparative Semitic lexicography and on aspects of Northwest Semitic poetic style. Held was, in his own words, an "eternal student," whose searching mind and ironclad memory absorbed an extraordinary knowledge of all major branches of the Semitic languages. His scholarship won recognition through a Guggenheim Fellowship, an appointment at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem, numerous invitations to teach and lecture, and the worldwide esteem of colleagues. His presentations at academic conferences were famous for their penetrating depth and erudition.

They were also famous for Held's powerful, dynamic personality. It was this amalgam of textual erudition, passion for scholarship, personal charm and wit, and boldness of spirit (כשמו כן הוּא) that attracted to him waves of students, wherever he went. His formal teaching career began at Dropsie College in Philadelphia, and he soon began a part-time service at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York that would last for a quarter century. In 1966 he was appointed to head the program in Ancient Semitic Languages and Cultures at Columbia University, where he enjoyed for some years the largest classes in advanced Akkadian in the world. He graduated over twenty Ph.D. students and even more M.A.'s. He died in 1984 in Beer-sheva, where he was teaching as a visiting professor at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

Professor Held's detailed studies on matters of Akkadian, Northwest Semitic, and comparative Semitic philology and poetics will surely edify and impress scholars and students for all time. What only those who knew the man will know is what a captivating and inspiring teacher he was. His excitement for his subject was wonderfully infectious. Full of confidence, energy, and opinions, Held ran his classes as high-level seminars. Adding jokes and diatribes in equally large proportions, once he had brought the stew to a boil, he maintained the heat and kept stirring until, he would bemoan, he ran out of gas.

To say that Moshe Held was one of a kind is no exaggeration. In a typical class, after the coffee and the "warm-up," he would rant about some topic or person related to the general subject of the class, interact with the audience—he relished a packed house—and then, often at the prompting of a student near the back, sit down and enter the world of the text. No one loved an ancient text more. He loved every word, every nuance, even (though he sometimes pretended to be shy about it) the grammar.

His notes were packed, and packed again, with every parallel he could find, any passage that might elucidate or add a shade of meaning to the text before him. Held would persevere "until three in the morning," straining to understand a word a mite better.

What made Professor Held so great a teacher is that, as he would say, he did not merely serve the meal—he took you into the kitchen. He would lay bare his entire research trail, the odyssey from text to text. He would reveal his questions, his false starts, his hunches, his outrage at other scholars, his method, his discoveries, and—finally—the answer. A paragon of intellectual honesty, Held would only give a positive answer when he was positive of the answer. A negative solution, he would say, is also a solution. Sometimes, he would write on the board, the only translation of a text is:

Moshe Held threw himself into his teaching with a vengeance. And that's not all he threw. He would always be criticizing the superficial etymologies one would find in the various dictionaries of ancient Semitics. Once, more than a little upset with a particular etymology in the Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew lexicon, Held hefted the sizable volume and, in disgust, hurled it across the classroom. His students counted themselves fortunate that that lesson went right over their heads. Held's lessons were memorable.

Held's memory was inimitable. He could recite nearly any text in Hebrew, Akkadian, or Ugaritic by heart. His range spanned the Old Babylonian royal inscriptions and Mari letters and the modern poetry of Bialik, which, to declaim properly, he would pronounce Ashkenazi style. It was as though any literature he studied was, as he would say, his *Muttersprach*. He was proud to have been invited to record an Akkadian passage for the Smithsonian. Held's amazing recall made him shine at scholarly meetings. Responding to a paper, he would quote texts by heart in rapid fire, much to the chagrin of the speaker who might be searching frantically through his or her notes for a reference.

While Held's performance as teacher, speaker, or respondent tended to the flamboyant, his writing was almost the opposite. In print he was the model of decorum: sober, dispassionate, cautious, thorough, and, above all, meticulous. He would not publish before rechecking every citation in the original sources, even at the proofreading stage. He considered it the essence of professionalism to get every reference correct, from the page, to the line, to the diacritical marks—the *shmitchik*'s as he called them. For Professor Moshe Held, one could hardly be expected to get any of the big things right if any of the little ones was wrong. Held's scholarship was serious to the utmost.

ana šimtiššu ītalak, he has gone to his fate.
יהי זכרו ברוך, may his memory be blessed.

The editors.