

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS MENAHEM MANSOOR**

Dr. Menahem Mansoor, Joseph L. Baron Professor Emeritus of Hebrew in the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies, died on Sunday, October 21, 2001 at the age of ninety.

Menahem was born in Port-Said, Egypt, on August 4, 1911. At the early age of thirteen, he was sent by his parents to Palestine so he could receive a Hebrew education at the Herzliah High School in Tel Aviv. He continued his studies at the University of London and Trinity College, Dublin, where in 1944 he earned a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies and Semitic Languages. During World War II he served with the British Ministry of Information on the Middle East and, later, as Education Officer in Jerusalem.

After the establishment of the State of Israel, he was the Chief Interpreter in the British Embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel, serving as a liaison between the embassy and Israeli Government offices. On November 29, 1951, he married Claire D. Kramer. Three years later he was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to pursue his research on ancient Hebrew manuscripts at Johns Hopkins University. He also taught at Baltimore Hebrew College. In 1955 he was called to fill the chair of the newly established UW-Madison Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies. He served as chairman of the department for twenty two years and led its development into one of this country's leading centers of Hebrew Studies. During this time he also developed the first US correspondence courses in Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, and Jewish Cultural History for the UW-Extension.

Menahem was among the first scholars associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls and made important contributions to establishing their meaning and their significance. He published the first translation of the Thanksgiving Hymns that were among the scrolls, and in 1964 published one of the earliest books on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Among his other major publications are: *The Book of Directions to the Duties of the Heart* (translation and critical introduction), a sixteen volume chronological, biographical and documentary *Political and Diplomatic History of the Arab World*, and *An Introduction to Jewish History and Thought*. He also authored a dozen textbooks in Hebrew and Arabic as well as two audio-based courses in Hebrew and Arabic for Linguaphone.

Deeply committed to the Wisconsin Idea, Menahem was well known, and constantly sought throughout the state as a compelling speaker in his various areas of expertise. In 1959 he initiated, and subsequently led, twenty-six UW Study Travel Seminars in the Lands of the Bible, which took over eight hundred participants on study trips to Israel, Egypt and Greece. He maintained close contacts with many of the participants who continued to meet on an annual basis and fondly referred to themselves as MP's (Mansoor's Pilgrims). A group of Madison MP's were among the first members of the Madison Biblical Archaeological Society which Menahem founded in 1967 and which is still operating today. The monthly meetings and distinguished speakers that MBAS sponsors keep interested Madison residents informed of recent developments in biblical scholarship and archaeological discoveries. To advance this objective further, Menahem initiated and curated two major exhibits in Biblical Archaeology on campus (1964 and 1975). He designed the exhibits "to illustrate the life, art, religion and culture in the lands of the Bible over a span of several thousand years of history and to help visitors understand the Bible within the historical framework of ancient Near Eastern Mediterranean civilization and peoples. This sense of purpose defined Menahem's work both as a scholar and as an educator. The over 90,000 people who visited the 1975 exhibit inspired Menahem to organize a third exhibit, Sign, Symbol, Script: An Exhibition on the Origins of Writing and the Alphabet, which opened in April of 1983 at the State Historical Society. During his retirement, he produced a video on *The Origins of Written Communication and the Birth of the Alphabet*, which is now widely distributed.

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In recognition of his many accomplishments, Menahem was awarded an honorary doctorate by Edgewood College in Madison and by Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. He also received the Friedman Prize, awarded by the Association of Hebrew Language and Culture in America for his contributions to Hebrew culture. He served as president of the Midwest Branch of the American Oriental Society and of the Society of Biblical Literature. He was also elected vice-president of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Literatures.

When Menahem retired in 1982, Governor Lee Dreyfus wrote to him,

The most important thing for all of us who have had the privilege of knowing you is your natural and abiding sense of curiosity. Menahem, everything you say and do demonstrates a love of knowledge and learning. A teacher teaches primarily what he is, rather than what he knows. And what you are will live long after both you and I are gone. Your influence is absolutely not calculable.

To which Dean E. David Cronon added: “Even more than most faculty members, as you retire you can have a very real sense of satisfaction for what you created here—a flourishing Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies that we will be an enduring legacy for the future. We are very much in your debt.”

Menahem maintained an active professional, communal and social life many years after his retirement. He is survived by his wife, Claire, his daughter, Yardena, his son, Daniel, and four grandchildren.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

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