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Endorsement of Prof. Aharon Dolgopolsky for the 2012 EMET* Prize

(*An award given in Israel for excellence in academic or professional achievements which have a far reaching influence and make a significant contribution to society.)

Prof. Aharon Dolgopolsky is today, without exaggeration, one of the most important scholars in the world in the field of Comparative Historical Linguistics. As the great linguist Vyacheslav Ivanov said about him at one of the conferences in the United States shortly before his death, he is "one of the giants of Linguistics", and he is the leading authority in the field of Prehistorical and Historical Long Range Comparative Linguistics. His contribution is immense, particularly in four areas of research: Semitic Linguistics, Semito-Hamitic Linguistics, Nostratic Linguistics, and the field termed 'Linguistic Palaeontology'. His most notable and significant achievements in these areas are listed below.

1. Professor Dolgopolsky made extensive use of the Semito-Hamitic branch of Linguistics for etymological reconstructions of Classical Hebrew that had never previously been envisioned, nor had they occurred to his predecessors. Prof. Dolgopolsky's analyses are

particularly systematic and meticulous, and they present a complete and convincing picture of the Hebrew forms he deals with. We will mention here his thorough treatment of the emphatic and lateral consonants and the phonemic stress. His work on the study of phonological and morphological changes from Proto-Semitic to Biblical Hebrew, published in Milan, Italy, may well be the most important contribution to this field in the current century.

2. Prof. Dolgopolsky made a breakthrough in Comparative Cushitic phonology. His work with the Cushitic languages actually led to the founding of the new branch: Cushitology. Most important is his work on the correspondences between the Semitic and Cushitic languages, which has greatly advanced our knowledge of the Semito-Hamitic branch of languages.
3. Prof. Dolgopolsky is the world's leading expert in the field of long-range comparison of languages. He has devoted much time and effort to investigating the connections between the Semito-Hamitic branch and the broad (main) language families of the world (Indo-European, Uralic, Altaic and others) within the framework known as the Nostratic Theory, which proposes a common origin for Indo-European, Semito-Hamitic, Uralic-Altaic and other proto-languages. Prof. Dolgopolsky is one of the pioneers and founding

fathers of this theory. His “Nostratic Dictionary” was published in 2008, and another edition, the third one, is being published, as Professor Dolgopolsky is constantly expanding and renewing this dictionary. It was published by the McDonald Institute in Cambridge. The institute would not have published a dictionary with four huge volumes and an Internet site had it not believed what was written in the introduction to the dictionary: “Aharon Dolgopolsky is today the leading authority on the Nostratic macrofamily”. This monumental work with approximately 3000 Nostratic entries (including grammatical items) together with detailed discussion of the changes in forms and meanings based on the principles of Comparative Historical Linguistics, that deepen and improve the entries - completely negates the possibility of abolishing the Nostratic Hypothesis on the grounds of lack of sufficient material or deviation from accepted linguistic methods. In this dictionary, Prof. Aharon Dolgopolsky has provided researchers with a valuable, one-of-a-kind treasure, that will endure for generations. It will be updated by his students and successors, and serve as a basis and foundation for any discussion concerning the Nostratic Hypothesis and for any subsequent proposal to change, add or subtract any small or large detail in the Nostratic project. According to a recent report from the University of Cambridge, the dictionary has been downloaded over 13,000 times. This tremendous number of downloads is probably due to the publications

in the International Linguist List, and the numbers of those interested around the world are constantly increasing as the dictionary is constantly being updated.

4. Prof. Dolgopolsky made a particularly significant and interesting contribution in the field known as ‘Linguistic Palaeontology’, in his exciting thought-provoking work, which makes use of his method for Long-Range Comparative Linguistics. In this work he came to the same conclusion reached by the renowned British archaeologist Prof. Colin Renfrew without any mutual familiarity with each other's research, and this is that the geographical origin of Indo-European languages is Asia Minor, a conclusion now accepted by many scholars of Indo-European Linguistics. This unique work testifies to Prof. Dolgopolsky's depth and breadth of vision and to his real contribution in the linguistic methods he uses; it testifies to the importance of his research, which goes beyond Linguistics itself.

5. Prof. Dolgopolsky has devoted much effort to the statistical and probabilistic evaluation of long-range linguistic relationships. His list of 25 lexical items with “most stable meanings” along with some of his statistical procedures are now widely used to prove and evaluate relationships between languages that are far removed from each other in terms of their genetic history.

Everyone recognizes Prof. Dolgopolsky's definitive contribution to the promotion of Semitic, Semito-Hamitic and Nostratic research, as well as the successful application of his linguistic method in Palaeontology. He is highly regarded among his peers worldwide, to the extent of being considered a scientific authority due to his original research and his great audacity in fields usually characterized by prevalent conservativeness. Not everyone acknowledges the existence of the Nostratic macrofamily, but the Nostratic school, founded in the 1960s in the Soviet Union, is now established in academic research. This is due no doubt to the huge contribution of Prof. Aharon Dolgopolsky, one of its first proponents and founders, who is now considered its leading advocate and most eminent representative. The constantly increasing number of supporters of this school, and even those who continue to oppose it, see in Prof. Dolgopolsky's research in this field a very important contribution, not only to the development and establishment of the Nostratic field but also to the broader spectrum of Historical Linguistics in its many aspects, shaping its progress and design.

A decisive proof of the importance of his research, even for those who do not accept the Nostratic thesis, is the seminar held by the University of Cambridge in the summer of 1998, which was entirely devoted to his book published that year, "The Nostratic Macrofamily and Linguistic Palaeontology", attended by leading scholars from around the world. This

extraordinary event, dedicated entirely to one single book, bears witness to the remarkable quality of the book itself and to the author's firm scientific renown. Furthermore, the collection of articles published in his honor by the Society for the History of Language and printed in Australia with the participation of the greatest linguists in the complex field of ancient Euro-Asiatic Languages also demonstrates Prof Dolgopolsky's high position in Prehistorical and Historical Linguistics circles.

In conclusion, Prof. Aharon Dolgopolsky, whose scientific activity is mostly carried out while sitting alone in his study, surrounded by the grammar books and dictionaries of hundreds of languages and dialects, without helpers, and assistants and research assistants and without special budgets and research funds, is undoubtedly an indefatigable and outstanding scholar. His very numerous publications published through prestigious and influential international platforms, their unique quality, their groundbreaking originality which has left its unique mark on Comparative Historical Linguistic study of the Semitic, Cushitic and Indo-European languages – the Nostratic branch of world languages, the proven international scientific prestige demonstrated in international scientific-academic activities conducted in his honor due to his groundbreaking scholarship – all these make him a very deserving candidate for the EMET prize in the field of linguistics.

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