

DEPARTMENT OF HEBREW LANGUAGE

UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA

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### **Prof Aharon Dolgopolsky – grounds for awarding the Israel Prize**

This is the second time I am writing reasons for awarding the Israel Prize to Prof. Aharon Dolgopolsky. I assume that the committee has my first arguments and there is no point in repeating them. I will therefore focus on what has happened since then and what can be deduced from this as regards the award.

What has happened is the publication of the “Nostratic Dictionary” (item 5 in the list of publications). The McDonald Institute in Cambridge would not have published a four-volume dictionary and website if it did not believe what was written in the preface 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 enterprise.

Unfortunately, he did not manage to set up a track for research students in Israel. During most of his teaching years in the Hebrew Language Department at the University of Haifa, there was no doctoral track at all. Outside of Israel, however, there are many students and successors in the fields of Comparative Historical Linguistics or Nostratics. To name a few (mentioned by Prof. Dolgopolsky himself): Sergei Starostin - Moscow / USA (Altaic languages, Caucasian languages and more, Nostratics); Evgenij Helimskij - Moscow / Hamburg (Indo-European, Finno-Ugric, Samoyedic, Uralic); Anna Dybo - Moscow (Altaic); Václav Blažek - Czechoslovakia (Semitic, Indo-European, Finno-Ugric, Nostratics); Gábor Takács - Hungary (Semitic, Indo-European, Finno-Ugric, Nostratics); Ilya Peiros - Australia (Sino-Tibetan and Southeast Asian Languages); Vitaly Shevoroshkin - Ann Arbor, Michigan (Indo-European, Amerindian of the Native Americans, Nostratics).

The “Nostratic Dictionary” is now considered the authoritative publication in the field, a breakthrough on a global scale. According to a recent report from the University of Cambridge (until the beginning of October 2009), the dictionary has been downloaded over 9700 times. This tremendous number of downloads is probably due to the publications in the International Linguist List, and the number of those interested around the world is constantly increasing.

If the community of Comparative Historical Linguistics accepts the Nostratic macrofamily as it has accepted the linguistic families it contains, and I believe that will indeed happen, it will be of immense importance for the further development of Comparative Historical Linguistics and for the Historical and Prehistorical study of mankind. For this reason, the Nostratic Hypothesis has attracted much interest from Prehistorical Archaeologists, as well as from Molecular Geneticists, who are also interested in the history of ancient populations and their migrations. It is no wonder, then, that a lot of the activity related to Nostratic research has been instigated by an Institute of Archaeological Research, which is also the publisher of the “Nostratic Dictionary” by Aharon Dolgopolsky.

Nostratics is a young field that has been taking up its assured position in the world of Linguistics. Its leading advocate is an Israeli professor, who has been working in Israel and has been disseminating his work from Israel for thirty-three years. The “Nostratic Dictionary”, his most

important work that ties in all his scientific scholarship, was published only a year ago, and the publisher has already decided to publish a second edition in early 2010. The amount of changes and innovations that have accumulated and the large number of interested people probably justified this decision.

Three jubilee books have been published in honor of Prof. Dolgopolsky in three different places in the world. It would be embarrassing and incomprehensible in the future if the real founder of Nostratics, the person who elevated the study of “our world” (“nostra”) prehistorical language from an unimportant and neglected discipline to an honorable position in the world of Linguistic Sciences, was not granted recognition in his own country, even though every few years this state awards a prize in the field of General Linguistics.

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