

OR AMIR
HEBREW UNIVERSITY
OF JERUSALEM

MICHAL BIRAN
HEBREW UNIVERSITY
OF JERUSALEM

JONATHAN BRACK
NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY

Introduction

We are thrilled and honored to present this volume in tribute to our esteemed teacher, colleague, and friend, Professor Reuven Amitai, upon his retirement from teaching.

Reuven was born and raised in Philadelphia, and the city's distinctive accent as well as the experiences of his upbringing remain deeply embedded in his identity, even after decades in Israel. In 1973, he graduated from Central High School, and began his public activity, serving as the Secretary-General of *Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir* Zionist Youth Movement of North America (1975–76).



Completing his undergraduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania in 1976, Reuven moved to Israel with his *Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir* cohort. After working for several years at Kibbutz Harel, he returned to academic life to complete his M.A. at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1985). He also spent a year in SOAS, where he had the opportunity to study with experts on the Mongol Empire and the Islamic East including David Morgan, Peter Jackson, Alexander Morton, and Jonathan Riley-Smith. Returning to the Hebrew University, he pursued his Ph.D. in Middle Eastern Studies under

the supervision of David Ayalon and Peter Jackson, completing it in 1990. Following a year as a post-doctoral fellow at Princeton University, he returned to the Hebrew University where he was appointed lecturer at the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies in 1993.

Over the next thirty years, Reuven had a key role in the department, the Faculty of Humanities, and the Hebrew University more broadly, serving a host of academic positions including department chair (1997–2001), Director of the Institute for Asian and African Studies (2001–4, 2008–10), Founding Director of the Nehemia Levtzion Center for Islamic Studies (2004–7), Dean of the Faculty



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of Humanities (2010–14), Chairperson of the Library Authority of the Hebrew University (2017–23), and Academic Head of the Havazalot Program (2019–22). Reuven filled all these roles (and many more) with unwavering dedication, invariably leaving his significant mark while striving to meet the academic goals of each institution. Reuven was always able to attend to minute details while never losing sight of the bigger picture. And he always treated his colleagues with the genuine kindness and respect of a true Mensch.

During his tenure at the Hebrew University, Reuven was also a visiting scholar in several prestigious institutions including St. Antony's College, Oxford (1996–97), l'École Pratique des Hautes Études at the Sorbonne in Paris (2007), Bonn University (2004, and 2014–16 at the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg), and Villa I Tatti, the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies in Florence (2019). During the past few decades Reuven also dedicated his time to promoting Israeli-German academic relations, leading joint research projects and summer schools, heading academic committees and serving on Bonn University's Scholarly Advisory Board since 2018. At these and many other endeavors, Reuven was always successful in forging a host of amicable and fruitful cooperations with colleagues worldwide, from his native United States, across Europe, to Mongolia and further east.

Reuven's contagious enthusiasm captivated students at the Hebrew University for almost four decades. The courses he taught ranged from his mythic Introduction to the History of the Muslim Peoples, to the Crusades, the Ayyubids, the Mamluk Sultanate, the Mongols, military history, Islamization, and the history of Palestine in the Middle Ages. Reuven inspired numerous students to focus on the topics he was passionate about, and thousands of students to appreciate the importance of the Turkish-nomadic peoples in world history. Reuven's teaching transcended the confines of the classroom. He took hundreds of students and colleagues to 'Ayn Jālūt (Ma'ayan Harod), where he never got tired of reconstructing the Mamluk victory over the Mongols in 1260. His students gained first-hand familiarity with Mamluk and Crusader sites all over Israel, and some of the luckiest among them also joined the traveling seminars he held in Mongolia. Reuven mentored 14 Ph.D. and numerous M.A. students, many of whom now hold academic positions. As a devout student of David Ayalon, the founding *sultan* of Mamluk studies at the Hebrew University and worldwide, Reuven brought the *sultanate* to new heights, establishing his own regiment to carry out the mission of expanding Mamluk and Mongol studies. As his former students, we have proudly retained our bonds of *khushdāshīyah*, living in harmony even as some of us also retained a dual loyalty to the Mongol *ulūs*, under the aegis of our benevolent *ustādh*. The many contributions to this special issue demonstrate Reuven's impact as mentor, advisor, and member in dissertation committees, not



only on his own students at the Hebrew University but also in other academic institutions in Israel and worldwide.

The working title for this special issue, *Mongols and Mamluks*, refers to Reuven's groundbreaking first monograph, based on his Ph.D. dissertation, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānid War, 1260–1281* (Cambridge University Press, 1995; Mongolian translation, 2006). In this study, as in his numerous articles and chapters, Reuven examined the great war between the Mamluks and the Ilkhanid Mongols, beginning at the inception of this rivalry in the Mongol conquest of Bilād al-Shām and the battle of 'Ayn Jālūt, through its unfolding into a decades-long "cold war" interrupted by several ill-fated or short-lived Mongol attempts to conquer Syria, finally formally ending with the 1323 peace treaty. Reuven's scholarship combined an expertise in military history, an exceptional grasp of the related political, social, and diplomatic aspects, knowledge of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Mongolian, and a meticulous attention to historiography as well as material evidence, from numismatics to epigraphy. Through this unique combination of skills, erudition, and source criticism, Reuven's works presented an unparalleled understanding of this watershed moment in Middle Eastern history. Reuven made profound contributions to the study of the history of the Mamluk Sultanate, the *mamlūk* institution, and the Mamluk military system, tactics, and strategy. His scholarship on Mamluk warfare and military system also touched upon a range of additional themes, including the Mamluks' nomadic background, diplomatic and espionage histories, and border strategies under Baybars and his successors. Additionally, Reuven has dedicated scholarly attention to the historiography of the Mamluk Sultanate, Mamluk diplomatic and commercial relationships with Europe and European city states, focusing on the slave trade, as well as Crusader and Byzantine histories, and Mamluk cultural relations with the Mongols.

Concomitantly, Reuven made significant contributions to the study of the Ilkhanate and the Mongol Empire more broadly. His major intervention in the field involved demonstrating and advocating for the historical value of the Arabic sources, primarily from the Mamluk Sultanate, as an essential resource for enhancing our understanding of Mongol history, particularly the Ilkhanate and the Golden Horde. Beginning with *Mongols and Mamluks*, Reuven's scholarship opened a new phase in Mongol Empire studies by substantially expanding the pool of available sources; it established the "Jerusalem School" of Mongol studies which followed his lead.

Moreover, by combining Arabic and Persian sources with material evidence, Reuven studied aspects of Mongol and Ilkhanid military histories, and Mongol social and political culture. Focusing on the Ilkhanate, he traced shifts in Mongol political ideology, from Hülegü's adoption of the title *Īlkhān* to Ghazan's Is-



lamization and its ideological and political ramifications. Several of these contributions were re-published in his *Variorum* volume, *The Mongols in the Islamic Lands: Studies in the History of the Ilkhanate* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2007). Reuven's works have also been translated into several languages including Mongolian, Persian, and Turkish. In 2018, Reuven was awarded an honorary doctorate from the National University of Mongolia, formally marking his contribution to the field and reputation in the Mongolian academy. Explaining the decision to provide Reuven this honor, the committee wrote:

Professor Reuven Amitai...has been admitted to the degree of doctor honoris causa for his outstanding academic achievement in Mongolian studies, contribution to promoting of scholarship development and cooperation between Israeli and Mongolian universities, and his groundbreaking work in the field of Mongolian History.

In his second monograph, *Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260-1335)* (Brepols, 2013), Reuven revised and updated some of his previous studies of the Mamluk-Ilkhanid war and its ultimate peaceful conclusion, and addressed the ideological-religious elements of the conflict, which began as a clash of Mamluk Islamic *jihad* vs. the Mongol concept of a Chinggisid mandate from Heaven, but had to be reframed in light of Ghazan's conversion to Islam. This concise volume, in many ways, summarized thirty-some years of research on the topic, although several more articles have appeared since, and we expect more to come.

In the past decade, Reuven turned his attention to the history of Palestine, or southwest Bilād al-Shām, during the late Middle Ages. His research explored processes of Islamization, urbanization, and economic aspects of Mamluk rule, mainly in Gaza. Here again, Reuven combines a meticulous reading of Arabic sources with epigraphic and archeological evidence, presenting a vivid portrait of a peripheral region in the Mamluk Sultanate and its development through the Crusader, Ayyubid, and Mamluk eras. One key contribution of this research is showing that the sources call into question the predominant scholarly narrative of economic and social decline during the fifteenth century.

Reuven co-edited seven collective volumes on a variety of topics ranging from Mongol and Mamluk-related themes to the history of Eurasian nomads and Islam in Europe. Some of these volumes have already become classics in their respective fields. In total, Reuven authored more than a hundred chapters and articles, including dozens of encyclopedic entries and book reviews.

Aside from his teaching, research, and administrative roles, Reuven is first and foremost a Mensch, known for his collegiality, unpretentious wisdom,



strong sense of volunteering, and dedication to every task he shoulders. He has always had the rare ability to create *‘aṣabīyah* (comradeship, group solidarity) among the various groups he headed or was a member of. Reuven has always shown great concern for his colleagues and students, taking deep interest in the story of each undergraduate and making every effort to assist his graduate students. He took pride in his students’ successes, even when they challenged his views, and was always the first to initiate events celebrating the achievements of his colleagues and commemorating his teachers.

Reuven was also a close friend to the Armenian community in Jerusalem, working toward the commemoration in Israel of the Armenian genocide and serving as ambassador of the community in face of contemporary challenges.

It is these qualities that have made it such an easy task to gather contributions for this festschrift. The willingness and enthusiasm of so many scholars to offer their tribute to Reuven demonstrates the respect he commands in the field and the affection of his peers, teachers, and students, who represent his primary research areas: the Mamluk Sultanate, the Mongol Empire, and the history of Palestine under the Mamluks.

We extend our gratitude to Frédéric Bauden for suggesting *Mamlūk Studies Review* as the venue for publishing this festschrift. Indeed, *MSR*, where Reuven has served on the editorial board since 2003 and has published various articles and reviews over the years, is the perfect setting to celebrate his achievements. Our deepest thanks go to Marlis Saleh for her incredible efficiency and patience in managing the review and editing process of the articles.

We wish Reuven many more years of good health, productive research, and peaceful enjoyment.



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