Passing of Prof. Arthur A. (Aryeh) Goren

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H-Judaic is greatly saddened by the passing of Arthur A. Goren (1926-2022), Russell and Bettina Knapp Professor Emeritus of American Jewish History at Columbia University, and before then Professor of American Jewish history at the Hebrew University. Best known for his books on the New York Kehillah and on Judah Magnes, Goren was one of the most respected and creative scholars of American Jewish history of his generation. His appointment to Columbia, where he was the first holder of the Knapp chair, was a turning point for the field as a whole.

Prof. Goren donated his papers to the American Jewish Historical Society and to Columbia University. The following biography appears as part of the finding aid to his papers at Columbia (https://findingaids.library.columbia.edu/ead//nnc-rb/lpdp_12483420):

Arthur Aryeh Goren was born Arthur Gorenstein on February 15, 1926, in Chelsea, Massachusetts. His parents, Saul and Lillian Gorenstein, were Labor Zionists and Goren was raised in Habonim (“the builders”), a halutz (pioneer) youth movement in Washington, D.C., and New York City. He enlisted in the army reserves when he turned eighteen in February 1944 and completed his freshman year of Hebrew Studies at the Teacher’s Institute of Yeshiva College while preparing for the army. He entered the service in July 1944 and trained in Mississippi. He was never posted overseas and was discharged in December 1945, at which point he went directly to a Habonim convention.

He made aliyah (immigrated) to Israel in 1951 “to fulfill his youthful Zionist dreams. Those ideals also included fighting ‘with like-minded people everywhere for the emergence of a better society.’”¹ He completed a Bachelor of Arts in Jewish History at the Hebrew University in 1957, and continued with some graduate studies in History at the same institution from 1958 to 1959. As a veteran, he attended the Hebrew University on the GI Bill. He then returned to the United States, completing both a Master’s of Arts in 1964 and a PhD in United States History in 1966 at Columbia University. Just prior to graduation, he Hebraicized his last name to “Goren.” (His research papers from his time as a student at the Hebrew University all bear the last name “Gorenstein.”).

Goren returned to Israel and taught at the Hebrew University from 1966 to 1988. He then went back to Columbia University and was the Russell and Bettina Knapp Professor of American Jewish History from the chair’s establishment in 1988 through his retirement in 2005. Specializing in “social and cultural Jewish history of the United States”² he has published numerous books and articles, including seminal works in the field. Some of his publications include The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews (1999), Studies in American Civilization (1987), The American Jews: Dimensions of Ethnicity (1982), Dissenter in Zion: From the Writings of Judah L. Magnes (1982), and New York Jews and the Quest for Community: The Kehillah Experiment 1908-1922 (1970), which “is considered a landmark contribution to the field of American Jewish history.”.

Goren held visiting positions at Brandeis University, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Jewish Theological Seminary, and a Charles Warner Fellowship at Harvard University. He has held numerous positions on boards and committees, including Chairman of the Department of American Studies at the Hebrew University from 1970 to 1973 and again in the 1980s. He was a member of the
American Jewish Historical Society’s Academic Council, and served on the editorial boards of American Jewish History, the Journal of American Ethnic History, and the YIVO Annual. In 1998, he received a Jewish Cultural Achievement Award for Historical Studies from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.


We extend deepest sympathies to his family, friends, and legions of students and admirers, and express gratitude to Prof. David Assaf for the news of Prof. Goren's passing.

Jonathan D. Sarna

Chair, H-Judaic