Polonsky Academy

Van Leer Institute

Jerusalem

**Re: Letter of Recommendation for Niran Garshtein for the Polonsky Postdoctoral Fellowship**

I would like to offer a very warm recommendation for the candidacy of Niran Garshtein for the Polonsky postdoctoral program at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem. Over the last several years, I have had the pleasure of closely following the candidate’s development into a young and very promising scholar, watching him actualize his scholarly potential. I have had numerous and varied opportunities to witness his exceptional academic capabilities and his pleasant personality. Garshtein participated in several academic courses that I taught, I was among the referees of his thesis, and he also contributed an article to one of my books. As I will detail below, both Garshtein’s excellent academic abilities and his sociable and pleasant personality make him an outstanding candidate who is especially appropriate for the prestigious Polonsky Fellowship. Moreover, the type of research that the candidate intends to carry out as a fellow in the program is especially well-suited to an intellectual framework in which a group of scholars working in diverse fields sits together under one roof – his scholarship has exceptional potential both to contribute to and to benefit from the work of other members of this group.

From the earliest stages of our acquaintance, Garshtein demonstrated great interest in the study of medieval science and philosophy. At that point, I was already deeply impressed with his intellectual curiosity, his sharp insights, and his excellent analytical capabilities. I was also impressed by his willingness to invest efforts in acquiring proficiency in the languages necessary for conducting scholarship on the Middle Ages, which led him to take multiple courses in Arabic, Latin, and French. It was thus not surprising to see the candidate, in due course, succeed in establishing a reputation as a young scholar of the reception of sciences among Jews in the Middle Ages – one whose published research has achieved academic prominence. Garshtein’s articles have been published in important fora, and several more articles and encyclopedia entries that he has written recently are also expected to appear in respectable academic publications, including in books published by Brill, Bloomsbury, and Albin Michel. The candidate was also selected to participate as a visiting scholar at the Ptolemaeus Arabus et Latinus project, under the directorship of Leibniz Prize winner Prof. Dag Nikolaus Hasse, where he will carry out research on a scientific work translated from Arabic into Hebrew in the mid-thirteenth century.

I was pleased to find out that Garshtein also intends to produce the first critical edition of the entire astronomical section of Levi Gersonides’ *Wars of the Lord* – a project of very considerable importance. This section of Gersonides’ book, comprised of 136 chapters, is undoubtedly the most original work on astronomy written in Hebrew during the Middle Ages, and it is one of the most important astronomical works written in the Middle Ages in general. In recent years, the work has received increasing scholarly attention, and Garshtein’s publication of a critical edition will make an enormous contribution to the broader scholarly community. Scholars of Gersonides and of medieval Jewish thought will, of course, benefit from it greatly; but so, too, will those dealing with history and sociology of science, history of astronomy, the study of empirical science in the Middle Ages, philosophy of science, the relationship between science and theology, the interactions between scientists belonging to different religions, and the Hebrew scientific terminology of the Middle Ages. The fact that study of Gersonides’ astronomical work touches upon many diverse areas of knowledge – historical, scientific, social, cultural, theological, and hermeneutical – makes it especially appropriate for the prestigious Polonsky Fellowship. I am certain that Garshtein’s research has exceptional potential to benefit from the presence of learned scholars working in a diverse range of fields, and also to contribute greatly to those scholars’ own research.

The candidate’s suitability for the Polonsky Fellowship shines through not only in his exceptional academic capabilities and the fact that his research area has much to offer and to gain from scholars working in diverse fields; but also in Garshtein’s sociable and pleasant personality, as well as the great interest he takes in research dealing with various subjects adjacent to his own areas of research. Garshtein is an affable, honest, and modest person. He has demonstrated great diligence, initiative, and very high levels of motivation and intellectual curiosity. One example demonstrating this is the fact that Garshtein played a very active role in establishing a forum for doctoral candidates in the Department of Jewish Thought. This forum endeavors to create interdisciplinary study groups and to provide opportunities for advanced doctoral candidates to present the fruits of their research. Garshtein is gifted with metilulousness, persistence, and the ability to invest significant effort, as well as a love for his research. He is always prepared to ask and consult with others, to listen and to learn, and also to share his own knowledge and ideas generously. In fact, Garshtein is already involved in fruitful and amiable discourse with leading scholars (in various fields), both within Israel and abroad, and he engages very appreciatively and respectfully withe them all. I am thus completely certain that Garshtein’s integration into the scholarly community of the Polonsky Fellowship will be smooth and natural, and that he will take a very active part in scholarly discussion with other members of the group. His academic talent, the subject of his research, and his personality traits position Garshtein, without any doubt whatsoever, as an exceptionally suitable candidate for the prestigious Polonsky Postdoctoral Fellowship. In light of the above, I offer my warmest recommendation for Niran Garshtein’s candidacy for the program.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,