Preface

The critical edition of Moses de León's *Sefer ha-Rimmon* was prepared as a Ph.D. dissertation in the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University in 1984-86. I want to thank my advisers, Professors Marvin Fox and Michael Fishbane, who ably guided me through the travails of dissertation research and who graciously gave of their time. Several other colleagues deserve special thanks for showing interest in my work and offering useful criticism and suggestions: Professors Daniel Matt, Moshe Idel, and Yehuda Liebes. I also wish to express my gratitude to Professor Jacob Neusner, the senior editor of Brown Judaic Studies, for agreeing to publish my manuscript, and to Mr. Dennis Ford of Scholars Press for his patience in helping me get the manuscript into shape for publication.

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Finally, in the midst of preparing this volume news of the untimely death of Professor Alexander Altmann reached me. Such news, though surely a grievous moment for the scholarly world at large, brought with it a particular anguish for me. Not only did Professor Altmann serve on my dissertation committee, but he was instrumental in getting me to undertake the project of editing Moses de León's *Sefer ha-Rimmon*. I recall well the afternoon when Professor Altmann greeted me so graciously at his home in Newton in order to discuss my dissertation plans. We sat for quite some time in the parlor, discussing various possible topics, when at last he said that he thought the *Rimmon* was the best idea. At that point he proceeded to tell me an anecdote which he repeated publicly at the dissertation defense. He informed me that
many years before he wanted to edit the Rimmon himself. When he approached Scholem with the idea, the latter asked him not to undertake such a project for it was his intention to edit that text. Scholem suggested (ironically, perhaps) that instead Altmann edit de León’s ‘Or Zaru’a. Professor Altmann consented and, as we know, Scholem never did get around to editing the Rimmon. Professor Altmann thus encouraged me to help fulfill a personal desire of his by editing this voluminous work of de León. At the conclusion of the doctoral defense, with the critical edition that I prepared before him, Professor Altmann repeated the story, this time adding that he had indeed experienced great pleasure in knowing that one of his students had realized an unfulfilled goal of his own.

Though the above anecdote is deeply personal, I believe it reflects well on the nature of this scholar, his unmatched human decency, dignity and civility, his genuine concern for the welfare and progress of his students. I will cherish his words for the duration of my life, knowing that all the hard work that went into editing this text was surely not in vain. It seems only fitting that the critical edition of Sefer ha-Rimmon published here be dedicated to the memory of Professor Altmann.