

REMEMBERING FUAT SEZGIN – AN OBITUARY

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With the death of Fuat Sezgin (1924-2018) not only Turkey, but all of the Islamic world and in fact the fields of Islamic studies and the history of science as a whole have lost one of their great scholars, a person who devoted his whole long life to making Islamic thought and especially the rich treasuries of Arabic manuscripts better known to the world at large. Born in Bitlis and raised in Istanbul, he studied at the University of Istanbul where he had the occasion to work closely with the famous German orientalist Hellmut Ritter under whose guidance he was able to master modern methods of research and scholarship. But he was not a blind follower of Western Islamicists and orientalists. Already in his doctoral thesis which was on al-Bukhārī he demonstrated that in contrast to the views of Western orientalists going back to Goldziher and his students the *ḥadīths* recorded by al-Bukhārī were not invented in the 3rd/9th century and then attributed to the Prophet of Islam, but went back to the 1st/7th century and the lifetime of the Prophet.

The political upheavals in Turkey in 1960 resulted in Sezgin being expelled from the University of Istanbul. A year later he left Turkey for Germany and settled in Frankfurt where in 1965 he became professor of the history of natural science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe Institute. It was there in Frankfurt that he founded the Institute of the History of Arab-Islamic Science and began a lifetime of intense and

meticulous study of Arabic manuscripts. His greatest achievement of those decades of ceaseless research was the “updating” of Brockelmann’s famous *Geschichte* outlining and describing Arabic manuscripts. But Sezgin went far beyond Brockelmann and visited numerous manuscript libraries throughout the width and breadth of the Islamic world as well as the West, discovering numerous manuscripts that were unknown before him. The result of this long effort was his *magnum opus*, the seventeen volume *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums* which is one of most important reference works in Islamic studies and is bound to remain an indispensable source for decades to come. Sezgin was such a prolific scholar that besides this monumental opus, he wrote other notable books including a five-volume work on the history of science.

Fortunately, Turkey recognized the great scholarship of Sezgin in his lifetime although he had migrated to Germany. In Ankara a square with his bust was named after him in a ceremony in which he was present and knowledge of his works are disseminated widely among scholars in his homeland.

With his death not only Turkey, but the whole world of Islamic studies has lost one of its outstanding scholars but his works is bound to remain alive for a long time to come. *Raḥimabū Allāh*.