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NEJAT GÖYÜNÇ: A PERSONAL REMEMBRANCE

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I still remember with fondness the day in late 1972 on which I first met Nejat Bey. I had gone to meet Cengiz Orhonlu at the *Edebiyat Fakültesi* and after our fourth cup of coffee and a like number of cigarettes he told me that we would be joined for lunch by a friend, who, like me, worked on the *tahrir defters*. Shortly thereafter the door opened and in walked Nejat Bey. From the moment we met he treated me as a colleague (rather than as a newly arrived American graduate student who had still done nothing more than find my way to the *Başbakanlık* and call up the first indecipherable register for Trabzon). His sincere interest in what I was working on, together with his overwhelming modesty and humility, were irresistible and I soon found myself feeling that the unraveling of the mysteries of the Ottoman archives might indeed be a doable task.

It was not only the circumstances of our introduction, but also the fact that in terms of genuine humanity Nejat Göyünç and Cengiz Orhonlu were more than just colleagues, which forever links these two scholars in my mind. They both were unstinting in sharing their knowledge with not only their own students, but with the ever-growing number of young American and European scholars working in the archives. Both were outsiders who had arrived at their positions via circuitous routes: Cengiz Bey after working as a *memur* in the *Başbakanlık* Archives and Nejat Bey after graduating from İstanbul University, had taught high school in Mardin before completing his doctoral studies in Germany (a path virtually unknown in the Turkish university system of that era). Finally, both were scholars in the truest sense of the word. They were

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linked by an unshakeable commitment to helping their (and others) students and by a true dedication to the development of the fledgling field of Ottoman studies.

I next saw Nejat Bey (who was then teaching at Hacateppe University in Ankara), in the courtyard of İstanbul University in Monday, June 14, 1975, where we and several hundred friends and colleagues had gathered for the funeral of Cengiz Orhonlu who at age forty-nine had passed away while working at his desk (with coffee and cigarette in hand) the previous Friday. *Nur İçinde Yatsın*. Joined in grief our friendship was cemented on that tragic day.

For the next twenty-six years that friendship grew and it is no exaggeration to state that Nejat *Bey's* humanity and gentleness served as a model for me (as it did for countless colleagues and students throughout Turkey and the world). Regardless of the vicissitudes of his own fate, I never heard a negative word from his mouth about any of those individuals who from ignorance, jealousy or petty spite were to shunt him about the country from one to another provincial university. Indeed, whether in İstanbul, Ankara, Malatya, Mardin, Konya, Bursa, Balıkesir or Gebze, he was never to lose sight of what for him was his real vocation: the training of his beloved students. When I began teaching at Princeton in the early 1990s and sending him my own students, he likewise looked after them (Baki Tezcan, and Tom Papademetriou come to mind) as if they were his own.

In countless evenings spent together on the balcony of the Göyünç's Sultantepe apartment, evenings in which we watched the teeming traffic of the Bosphorus and enjoyed delicious meals from Ayten *Hanım's* kitchen and hours of stimulating conversation (punctuated by Nejat Beys frequent trips to his library, only to emerge with yet another new book or article to show me), I was introduced to the true meaning of scholarship. Namely, a willingness to share one's knowledge with others. It was this trait which marked the true measure of Nejat Bey's humanity and greatness. One evening in particular is sharply defined in my memory. The Göyünçs had invited my wife Demet and I for dinner together with my former professor Andreas Tietze. As the evening progressed I realized that, without knowing exactly why, I had always associated Tietze and Nejat *Bey* in my mind. As the three of us sat chatting and

watching the lights of the city across the Bosphorus, I suddenly understood why I had always thought of these two great scholars together. The answer was simple, I had never heard either say a single negative word about another scholar in the field, and each, regardless of their own commitments, were never to busy to put aside their own work to help both students and colleagues.

Typically, when in his single move outside the confines of the academy, he accepted the Ecevit government's offer to become Director of the *Başbakanlık Arşivi* in 1978, the first things Nejat *Bey* undertook were efforts to make that facility more user friendly to students and scholars. During his all too short tenure he initiated the radical policy of opening the archives to scholars on Saturday mornings, a policy which acknowledged the fact that the only chance many younger over-worked scholars had to visit the facility was on the weekend, as well as the fact that many foreign visitors came for limited periods which were cut even shorter when they were unable to work on the weekends. During the few short months this policy remained in effect, it was always Nejat *Bey* who greeted each new Saturday morning arrival.

For the handful of foreign scholars then in İstanbul (including Suraiya Faroqhi, Klaus Kreiser, Hans Georg Majer and myself), the opening of the archives on the weekend was a blessing, for it provided us not only the opportunity to work but to meet on a regular basis with Nejat *Bey* and to share in the plans he was formulating for a wide-ranging series of publications of key archival materials. These included a corpus of the *kanunnames* contained in the *tahrir defters* (a project he and I were planning to work on together), as well as the publication of selected volumes of the early *mühimme* registers and facsimile editions of key *tahrir defters*. While, today, a quarter century later, many of these projects have actually come to fruition, we should not lose sight of the fact that it was Nejat *Bey* whose vision first foresaw them.

Similarly, when he decided that the Archives needed a periodical and began raising funds to cover the cost of the venture, it was young scholars that he had in mind. As he stated in the Preface of Volume I of *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, its aim was to provide a venue for the publications of young scholars, and a perusal of the past twenty plus years output illustrates the extent to which he never deviated from that goal. That by the time Volume I was ready for publication Nejat *Bey* had been removed from the position of Director of the

Başbakanlık meant that what had been intended as an archival periodical became instead an effort of love on his part. No matter that the names Halil İncicik and Heath Lowry appeared on the cover as co-editors, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* was Nejat Göyünç's journal. He created it, nurtured it and the generation of young scholars whose first publication appeared in it, submitted their manuscripts to Nejat Hoca. He in turn often hand-delivered the off-prints to the contributors. Indeed, in the early years, he often paid the pre-publication expenses (typesetting, etc.) from his own pocket.

As if to prove the truth of the old adage: '*no good deed goes unpunished*,' no sooner had Nejat *Bey* been replaced as Director of the archives, than a series of unfounded charges relating to his tenure were leveled against him. These included claims that by allowing foreigners into the archives on the weekend he had facilitated their "stealing" Turkish treasures by allowing them to photocopy documents they were working on, and various other groundless claims. As always, no matter how deeply he must have felt such slanders, Nejat *Bey* ignored such barbs. When, as was often the case, he found himself together with their creators, he greeted them kindly and moved on.

Among the many outstanding aspects of Nejat *Bey*'s character, it was perhaps his unflinching commitment to doing what was right (regardless of the consequences), that stands out most in my mind. Three examples immediately come to mind:

a) Shortly after it appeared in 1981, my first book: *Trabzon şehrinin islâmlaşma ve Türkleşmesi, 1461-1583* was banned in Turkey. While Boğaziçi University which had published it was ordered not to sell any more copies until told differently (something which took ten years), some fifty copies had already been distributed to colleagues in Turkey. Word quickly spread that something was wrong with this work and its presence was generally ignored in Turkey for the next decade. There was one exception. Fully aware of what he was doing, Nejat *Bey* wrote and published a well-balanced review in Volume III of *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*;

b) In 1980-1981, Kamuran Gürün, the Secretary General of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, invited a large group of Turkish historians to a meeting in Ankara. At that point in time Turkish diplomats around the world

were under attack from a variety of Armenian groups claiming to seek justice in the name of their ancestors who had been the victims of what they described as a genocide in the course of the First World War. Gürün, frustrated by the lack of any scholarly work devoted to the question of Turkish-Armenian relations in the Ottoman period, sought the advice of the Turkish historians and offered the support of his office to any scholars who would research and write on the question. Out of the close to two hundred participants in the meeting Nejat Göyünç was the only historian to respond. His *Osmanlı İdaresinde Ermeniler* which appeared in October of 1983 remains one of the most useful works on the question written by a Turkish specialist on Ottoman history. It too was later used against him by those who found it to sympathetic to the Armenians;

c) Finally, in 1997, when his last major publication (co-authored with Wolf-Dieter Hütteroth) *Land an der Grenze: Osmanische Verwaltung im heutigen türkisch-syrisch-irakischen Grenzgebiet im 16. Jhrhundert* appeared, it too ran afoul of the authorities. While published in İstanbul, a key part of the work was a series of maps Hütteroth had published in Germany. When the maps were shipped to Turkey for insertion in the book they were confiscated by the military authorities who objected to some of the Arabic, Armenian and Kurdish sixteenth century place names on them. Until he died Nejat Bey patiently continued to attempt to secure the release of his maps.

In late May of 1991 I had driven from Ankara to Bursa in order to photocopy some documents from the microfilms of the Bursa *sicils*. Having finished earlier than expected I stopped by Uludağ University to say hello to Yusuf Oğuzoğlu. In the course of our conversation he mentioned that Nejat Bey was in the building and teaching a course for them and would be returning by bus later that day to İstanbul. I immediately suggested to Yusuf that he cancel Nejat's ticket and proposed that I would surprise him at the end of his class and drive him back to the city. When his class let out and Nejat saw me waiting in the hall he immediately agreed to my proposal, but added the apology that he had to speak to some of the students for a couple of minutes. For the next hour I watched in awe as student after student approached the *Hoca* and, regardless of their questions, received his full attention and often a suggested reading (which given the state of the Uludağ library he often promised to bring with him when he returned the following week). Watching those interactions and the looks of affection which passed between students and teacher, I was

once again reminded of our first meeting thirty years earlier. Nejat *Bey*, far from changing, still remained first and foremost the *Hoca*.

As we drove to İstanbul, neither of us were aware that the hours we were spending together would be the last we would ever share. We talked of families, mutual friends and our current work. He told me how much he enjoyed teaching at Bursa, Balıkesir and Gebze (blithely passing over the strain of constantly moving about the country by bus and the impact his frequent travel had on his weakened heart - he had been living with a pacemaker since his heart actually stopped in the mid-seventies while he was teaching at Hacettepe in Ankara), how some of his students had developed a serious interest in Ottoman history. As we stood on the deck of the ferry crossing the Marmara I remember asking if he ever thought of retirement. He responded by saying: '*We don't have enough professors of Ottoman history to meet the needs of all the newly-created universities. Who would do it if I didn't?*'

It was less than a month later, while recovering in an İstanbul hospital from surgery on a broken knee, that my cell phone rang and a friend relayed the news of Nejat *Bey*'s death. Unable to move, let alone to help bury my friend, I spent a great deal of time in the next few days thinking about a life which had meaning for so many.

Quietly, calmly and unflinchingly Nejat Göyünç did what he thought was right. He did so regardless of political currents and seemingly undaunted by the possible impact his actions might have on his own career and life. To those who didn't know him he may have seemed stubborn or naïve. However, to those fortunate enough to have had their lives intersect with his, he stands as a model (no matter how difficult to attain) of what should be rather than of what all too often is.