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## JOHN R. WALSH

John Walsh retired in 1980 as Senior Lecturer in Turkish at the University of Edinburgh after a thirty-year teaching career. In a field where numbers are few, demands high, and scholarly reputations but slowly acquired, Walsh succeeded single-handedly in establishing Edinburgh as a recognized centre for the study of Ottoman Turkish literature, gaining the respect and admiration of colleagues in Turkey as in western Europe and North America.

Born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1919, Walsh grew up in New York, and came to Europe with the United States army during the Second World War. His introduction to oriental studies - a one-term course in Arabic, Turkish and Islamic history at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in late 1945 - was at the instigation of the US military authorities. Though brief, this offered a tantalizing glimpse into another cultural and intellectual world, and determined the nature of his future career. Demobilised from the army in 1946, Walsh opted for a full four-year degree at SOAS, graduating with first class honours in Turkish in 1950. The pattern of this undergraduate training set the style and standards of his academic future: Arabic, Persian and Turkish were studied in more or less equal proportions for the first three years, supported by classes on Islamic history and institutions; only in the final year was Turkish studied exclusively, with language and literature classes given by Mundy, Wittek and Arat, and history through Wittek's famous seminar. Perhaps the fundamental lesson learnt from such a curriculum was that the true Ottomanist is quite other than a Turkologist, and requires a command of all three major Islamic languages of the Middle East. This is the harsh reality which was, and is, instilled kindly but rigorously into the mind of every young researcher who seeks his advice.

The Turkish post at Edinburgh was one of the postwar initiatives taken in the wake of the 1947 Scarborough Report which recom-

mended expansion in oriental studies in British universities. Walsh was invited to be the first holder of this post (then at New College, Edinburgh) in 1950. However, despite government concern for the maintenance of academic expertise in areas such as Turkish, public interest was minimal and students everywhere slow to appear. In the early years of his appointment Walsh was able to devote considerable time to laying the practical foundations for his discipline in its new environment. An extended period of research in major libraries throughout Turkey during 1951-52 brought a new acquaintance with the country and its scholars, and a large haul of books and microfilms for his personal collection and for the Edinburgh library. An avid book collector, he acquired over the following years an incomparable collection of reference and secondary works, of histories, *divans* and *münşeat* collections in Ottoman, and of the major European sources relating to the Ottoman empire, both travelogue and history, from the 16th century onwards. During the 1950s, he also spent time cataloguing manuscripts. An early article, 'The Turkish manuscripts in New College, Edinburgh' (*Oriens* XII (1959), 171-89) lists a small collection of twenty volumes in Ottoman and eastern Turkish collected c. 1819-25 in Astrakhan by a Scottish missionary. A later, much larger project, the listing of c. 160 Turkish manuscripts at the John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, though virtually complete, remains unpublished. Meanwhile, he had published in transcription a short text by Mustafa Ali from the sole Ottoman manuscript in the National Library of Scotland, 'Müverrih Ali'nin bir istidanamesi' (*Türkiyat Mecmuası* XIII (1958), 131-40).

Another aspect of Walsh's early years in Edinburgh was his study of other non-Middle Eastern or Islamic languages which might in any way prove useful for the Ottomanist. These included, in addition to the Hebrew he had begun at SOAS, such geographically dispersed languages as Mongolian and Serbo-Croat. Italian, however, proved to be the most appropriate to one of his main interests, that of how the Ottomans represented their state in historical writing. In 'Giovanni Tommaso Minadoi's history of the Turco-Persian wars of the reign of Murad III' (*Proceedings of the 25th International Congress of Orientalists, Moscow 1960, Moscow 1963, II, 448-54*),

he showed how the contemporary account of a Venetian observer in Aleppo could be used to good effect for comparative purposes with the Ottoman chronicles of the period. Later, in 'The revolt of Alqās Mīrzā' (*WZKM* 68/1976, 61-78), he used letters in Persian from a collection of early Safavid *inṣā* to illuminate the chronology and circumstances of a specific incident in the 1540s.

Perhaps the most widely-read and influential of Walsh's writing is his principal article on this theme, 'The historiography of Ottoman-Safavid relations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' (in B Lewis and P M Holt (eds), *Historians of the Middle East*, London 1962, 197-211). A piece of bold, suggestive writing full of well-founded reflections and critical insight, this is an essay in methodology and preception of history which faces in many directions. Firstly, Walsh stressed that any piece of conscious historical writing, whether rich or poor in explicit factual content, is in itself a part of the historical record :

'Historiography is as much the result as it is the record of events, and ... react[s] variously to the circumstances in which it is produced, in accordance with the temper of its times. In its prejudices and its assumptions, in its omissions no less than in its contents, it is the reflection of the inconstant human situation, and even where it is least informative it supplies us with data which no explicit statement could convincingly express, and which, perhaps, are as valuable to the understanding of the past as the dates and deeds.'

Culturally and chronologically distant, both Ottoman and Safavid writers applied different historiographical conventions to those of the modern historian. Without an understanding of these, and of the outlook of the society which produced and received them, the value of these texts cannot properly be assessed. Tone is equally as important as content, especially in a work which has war as its central theme and, as in at least the Turkish accounts of the late 16th century Ottoman-Safavid conflict, one which is inspired by the spirit of religious and political polemic.

Above all, Walsh maintained, Ottoman historiography was a major literary genre, and must be interpreted primarily in terms of

its literary tradition. It was, in fact, the principal vehicle for 'creative' prose writing, and as such was subject to strict literary conventions, in terms both of concept and of the expectations of its audience. Much historiography has a distinct moral purpose :

'In all may be seen the same preoccupation with events in themselves, and these events are invariably given an individual human motivation. The paradox here is that the individuals are rarely presented as personalities, but rather remain obscured behind the tired formulae of praise or blame ... events are invariably self-contained, and rarely escape from a narrative context which literary considerations have made selective and artificial to the point of abstraction; ... interpretation is confined to drawing a moral or confirming a revealed truth.'

In order properly to understand and appreciate such histories 'where method is often makeshift and facts are always discretionary', both the literary ambience and the psychologies of individual authors must be taken fully into account. In all historiography, but particularly in conventional Ottoman texts, 'it is in the degree that they express the feeling of events that [such works] have their chief value as a presentation of the past'. In other words, Ottoman historiography is less about 'what really happened' and more an expression of the interests and concerns of the state's governing elite.

Finally, however much the study of Ottoman history may be directed increasingly by archival considerations, mere accumulation of facts alone is ultimately sterile. Without the insights into opinion and ethos provided by historiographical criticism, 'the documents and statistics are as lifeless as the hands that wrote them'. With this as his guiding principle, Walsh steered research students who came to Edinburgh thinking they would study history into the rather different sphere of historiography, into the establishment and the critical evaluation of a basic text. Work on the *Selimname* literature, on Ottoman-Hungarian campaigns of the 1590s, and on the unpublished section of Selaniki's history was all inspired by this concern.

A contribution to Walsh's historical study which is not explicit in his writing but which nevertheless provided an essential pers-

pective, came from his regular undergraduate teaching of Islamic history from the 7th to the 20th centuries, and from his postgraduate guidance in seminars and research supervision. Jointly with Professor W. Montgomery Watt, he supervised several doctoral theses on subjects as diverse as early Umayyad power struggles, Tabari's history, the theological school of Abu Hanifa, 12th century Islamic Spain, and the origins of Wahhabism. Whilst on the one hand constrained to undertake such broad responsibilities by the small size of the Edinburgh department, on the other hand Walsh has always been acutely conscious of the continuity and traditions of his principal discipline, with a grasp of broad essentials which frequently escape the scholars of a younger generation, who are perhaps more privileged in the availability of research materials but more circumscribed in their interpretative horizons.

Walsh's interest in the literary aspects of historical writing developed naturally into study of the development and aesthetic of the *inşa* style of rhetorical prose in which a number of Ottoman histories were written. Although on *inşa* in its primary meaning of epistolography, the Ottomans produced a substantial corpus of instruction manuals and collections of exemplary letters, *münşeat mecmuaları*, modern scholars have largely viewed such writing as the convoluted contrivance of an artificial culture and have accordingly neglected them. However, taking the view that no literary form will survive unless it has an appreciative audience, Walsh strove here, as in his studies of *divan* poetry, to see into the mind of the Ottoman litterateur, in order to understand the cultural values which underlay the creation and enjoyment of the *inşa* style, both in correspondence and in other literary forms :

'That there is a fallacy in neglecting one of the most specific and characteristic of the cultural activities of Ottoman civilization is too apparent to require demonstration; and even those who are disposed to ignore the aesthetic documentation of the past must still accept responsibility for a correct understanding of texts, the language and style of which, even when disclaiming artistic intent, derive their ideals and standards from the great masters of prose.'

His interest has ranged over the entire period of classical Ottoman *inşa*, from the late 15th century *Gülşen-i inşa* by the Nakşbendi *şeyh* Mehmed b. Edhem, to the *münşeât* of Nabi (d. 1712; his critical editions of both works remain unpublished), and to the compilation of one of the last major exponents of the genre, the poet and stylist Kani (d. 1791; cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., IV, 544). Supervision of a doctoral thesis on Ottoman contributions to Islamic rhetoric from the standpoint of the late-Tanzimat literary debate was an extension of this interest; another aspect was explored in a thesis comparing the development of literary Persian and Turkish in the *Kalile ve Dimne* stories. Foremost of Walsh's own research in this field is his work on Nergisi (d. 1635), perhaps the pre-eminent Ottoman prose stylist. An edition of Nergisi's collected letters, 'The Esalibü 'l-mekâtib (Münşe'ât) of Mehmed Nergisi Efendi' (*Archivum Ottomanicum* I/1969, 213-302), and unpublished editions of Nergisi's *hamse* and his panegyric account of Murtaza Paşa's 1626 Hungarian campaign, *El-vaşfu 'l-kâmil fî ahvâli 'l-vezîri 'l-'âdil*, have been prepared. Sustained literary critical assaults on *inşa* texts of this nature would yield much of value on Ottoman self-perception and image, aspects of the past which often seem unnaturally static and alien.

Any research into Ottoman cultural and intellectual development must take into account its fundamental religious aspect, in terms both of the learned hierarchy of *ulema* and of mysticism. Part of Walsh's contribution in this sphere has been in biographical study, with brief notices in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* on, for example, the learned dynasties of Fenarizade (15th and 16th centuries) and Dürriizade (18th and 19th centuries) and on Nevizade Ata'i; a thesis was also prepared under his guidance on 17th century *ulema* in Şeyhi's biographical dictionary. To these may be added further supervised work on Ottoman legal and religious developments in the early 17th century. In larger part, however, Walsh's contribution has been to reveal the influence of the *telkke* in modulating the tenor of Ottoman divan poetry.

In 'Yunus Emre: a 14th-century Turkish hymnodist' (*Numen* VII/1960, 172-88; reprinted in *Yunus Emre and his mystical poetry*, ed. Talat Sait Halman, Bloomington, Indiana 1981, 111-26), Walsh

showed how Yunus Emre's poems, conceived in the heterogeneous religious environment of 13th and 14th century Anatolia, consciously reflected 'Islam as adapted to the spiritual needs of the people' in an area but superficially Islamicised and with a strong liturgical tradition. Yunus offered a form of religious practice more sympathetic and acceptable than the 'uncompromising intellectualism' of 'text-book Islam'. 'Communal, assertive and confessional, simple and reiterative, spontaneous and unaffected', Yunus' hymns must also be considered as distinct from the self-conscious, artistic didacticism of other forms of religious verse. Written for use in *tekke* services, 'accompanied by the singing and dancing of the congregation', the hymns of Yunus and his imitators offered an attractive vehicle within Islam for the lyrical expression [of] innate religious sentiments' at the popular level.

A similar reaction to the social and intellectual straitjacket of religious orthodoxy may be detected in later Ottoman divan poetry. In his study of the 15th century poet Şarîca Kemal ('The divançe-i Kemâl-i Zerd (Şarîca Kemâl)', *Journal of Turkish Studies* 3/1979, 403-42), Walsh concludes :

'Imitative, mannered and artificial though it may seem, divan poetry was the response of the Ottoman spirit to the stultifying, joyless religiosity which at all periods posed a threat to human values; as also, it was the revulsion of the Ottoman mind from the obscurantist banalities and slovenly style of popular religious verse. To be a poet was, above all, to assert a social attitude, and it was men of the cast of Şarîca Kemâl who first wrought to make of poetry a means whereby this philosophy could be expressed in the face of an inimicable orthodoxy.'

Walsh's thesis is that the mystic philosophy which provided the ethos for Ottoman poetry was influenced less by the classic works of Persian and Arabic literature and more by the specifically Turkish development of the Anatolian *tarikats*. This theme is pursued in 'Yunus Emre and divan poetry' (*Journal of Turkish Studies* 7/1983, 453-64). Between the hymns of Yunus and the *gazels* of later Ottoman poets Walsh identifies a strong connecting strand of 'humanism', clearly detectable in the verse of 16th-century founders



of the divan tradition such as Necati, Zati and Hayali, and implicit in the work of their successors. The dominant contrast in form and style between the compositions of Yunus and those of the divan poet often successfully masks a continuity of concern; it has obscured the fact that the main audience for divan poetry was one 'conditioned [by the *tekke* poets] to accept a less rigid attitude towards religion and human behaviour than the orthodox establishment was prepared to countenance'. Outwardly, however, the two traditions still appear incompatible. To the poets of an imperial age seeking to create an elegant Ottoman idiom, Yunus' simple Turkish appeared unsophisticated and inadequate, and his verse insufficiently disciplined. To minds attuned to the demands of the *ilmü 'l-belağa*, the exemplary rhetoric of the written word, the oratorical character of Yunus' simple, repetitive style appeared harsh. To a governing class continually disturbed by the threat of heterodox sedition in Anatolia, the hymn tradition with its emphasis upon the extraordinary powers of the provincial dervish had little appeal. Walsh points out a characteristic of divan poetry that, while disdaining this type of disreputable, rabble-rousing dervish, the divan poet invariably took as his 'persona' the 'Yunus-type dervish', the one who truly seeks union with God: it is in this philosophical sense that 'the voice of Yunus Emre, its accents polished, its vocabulary refined' influenced the spirit of divan poetry.

It is perhaps from his study of Ottoman divan poetry that Walsh has gained the greatest intellectual reward and personal satisfaction. In the latter respect, a long epistolary friendship with Ali Nihat Tarlan was particularly valued. Walsh's fascination with the Ottoman thought-world expressed in this poetry, his sympathy with its modes of expression, its strengths and its weaknesses, was instantly apparent to his students. Postgraduate research on the biographical dictionaries of poets, *tezkere-i şuara*, and on the divans of the 15th-16th century poets Mesîhi and Tacizade Cafer Çelebi was inspired by his enthusiasm. For others, a hint of this understanding may be gained not only through the articles mentioned here, but also through his careful translations, notably the section 'Divan poetry', in *The Penguin Book of Turkish Verse* (ed. Nermin Mene-mencioglu, Harmondsworth 1978, 61-119).

The study of Ottoman literary history according to modern critical standards is developing only at a slow pace, both inside and outside Turkey. The wealth of material which now lies unread, let alone unappreciated, is daunting. Even a scholar of Walsh's standing hesitates to attempt more than an outline of the development of Turkish literature. Though intended primarily as introductions for the non-specialist, his two articles surveying both Ottoman and modern Turkish literature nevertheless contain valuable assessments for the more informed student ('Turkish literature', in *Guide to Eastern literatures*, ed. D.M. Lang, London 1971, 153-75; and 'Turkey: bibliographical spectrum', *Review of National Literatures* IV/1, 1973, 113-32). Other comments on the nature and interpretation of Turkish and Ottoman literature lie buried in sharp, discriminating book reviews.

A true scholar is more than the sum of his publications, in Walsh's case very much more. His chief concern has always been with the development of knowledge and understanding to hand on to his students, expecting to see in return a broadening of their own intellectual and personal horizons. Ultimately, the pedagogic role has always taken precedence over that of the researcher. For many Turks and non-Turks who have studied with him, the exacting yet inspiring standards of a dedicated and generous teacher have transformed nascent enthusiasm into satisfying commitment. A rather shy perfectionist with the compensating strength of intellectual confidence, a critical mentor who yet commands affection and respect, in his quest for understanding in a vast sphere accepting the reality of human inadequacy, Walsh is, perhaps, practicing the 'philosophic humanism' of the Ottoman divan poet.

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