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REMEMBRANCE

RICHARD L. CHAMBERS: A LIFE IN TURKISH STUDIES

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Richard L. Chambers was a professor of Turkish language and history at the University of Chicago. Finding material for this essay on his life was extraordinarily difficult; for a long time it was impossible even to find a copy of his CV. He never published his own book, that advertisement for scholarship that is characteristic of academics. There is not even a gravestone, as he declined to be buried in the family cemetery plot, nor was there a memorial service. He used to complain that he received no recognition for what he had done, but he did not seek recognition or parade his accomplishments. Yet his life and academic career parallel and intertwine with the development of Middle Eastern and Turkish studies in America, to which he made important contributions. This essay was put together through Google searches, speeches that he himself gave on the development of Turkish Studies, contributions from those who knew him, and at long last, a rather skimpy CV. The result is only a sketch, a mere outline, of his many activities and contributions.

Richard Chambers was born in Brundidge, Alabama, to Eunice and Leon Chambers on 27 September 1929, and died in Montgomery, Alabama, on 1 August 2016. He went to college immediately after World War II, when America emerged from isolationism and began paying greater attention to the world around it. He studied diplomatic and Middle Eastern history at the University of Alabama with Professor Frederick Cox (who later founded the Middle East Center at Portland State), obtaining his BA in 1950. He must initially have intended to go into diplomacy, because he immediately gained a BS in Foreign Service from Georgetown University and a fellowship at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. Something changed his mind, however, because he then pursued an MA in History at Alabama, graduating in 1955, just when Middle Eastern studies began to expand nationwide. He moved to Princeton, the first real center for Middle East studies, obtaining a second master's in 1958 and a PhD in 1968, studying with Ottoman historian Lewis Thomas. Thomas notoriously required a biography for a dissertation, and Richard's was on Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, the nineteenth-century Ottoman intellectual, historian, and statesman.

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In those days it was typical to begin teaching after finishing the doctoral coursework and to write the dissertation on the job. Chambers started teaching in 1958 at the American University in Cairo, then spent two years at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, where thirty years later he still spoke feelingly about the cold and snow. He was hired as an instructor in Turkish and Turkish Studies at the University of Chicago in 1962, becoming an Assistant Professor in 1965 and an Associate Professor in 1971. Soon thereafter, promotion standards began to change, as we know, and Professor Chambers taught Turkish and Ottoman history and language as an Associate Professor until his retirement in 1995. He initiated the teaching of these subjects at Chicago and built up the Turkish studies program with a series of distinguished visiting professors, including Fahir İz and Günay Kut from Turkey. Together they successfully inaugurated additional permanent positions in history and language. He fondly remembered the days when they taught with him at Chicago and often reminisced about those times, when money for Middle East studies was abundant and Turkish Studies was a rapidly-growing field. To serve it, he negotiated the hiring of the Ottoman historian Halil İnalcık, who for thirty-seven years after the death of Ömer Lütfi Barkan was the pre-eminent historian of the Ottoman Empire in the world, as well as MacArthur Fellowship awardee Cornell Fleischer after Professor İnalcık's retirement. For Turkish language, he lured Robert Dankoff away from the University of Arizona.

Professor Chambers' students seem to have been inspired by him; they say, "He became my *hoca* (teacher)," and "He remained an inspiration and a mentor." "Dick was a man of integrity." "One of the leaders in his field." "What influenced me, both then and in the long term, was his teaching, his kindness to and respect for his students, his intellectual curiosity and his knowledge of and enthusiasm for Turkish culture, which he was always glad to share." "Dick always treated his graduate students with respect and civility." "Above all he was a wonderful human being, always cheerful and positive." Many students recognized him as one of the most humane professors in the Department. He had his blind spots, but he was never impolite even to those he disapproved of. Having worked for him, I can vouch for his kindness and humanity as well as the respect he had for others' ideas and efforts. The faculty and students at Portland State emailed me to say that they are still appreciative of his contributions to their program.

During his career as a student and faculty member, Richard Chambers witnessed or was involved in the foundation of almost all the main organizations in Middle Eastern and Turkish studies. At Princeton, he held one of the early Ford Foundation fellowships for Middle Eastern studies,

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which were initiated in 1951. The Social Science Research Council (SSRC) began promoting the study of the Middle East in 1956, and the NDEA Title VI centers and FLAS (Foreign Language and Area Studies) fellowships started operations in 1959, fostering the study of critical languages and cultures. In 1960, the Peace Corps was established, which gave many Middle East specialists in that era their first exposure to Middle Eastern cultures and languages. Since its 1964 inauguration, the American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT) has funded over 700 projects in the archaeology, history, and culture of Turkey and supported many more with its libraries and hostel facilities. Chambers received one of ARIT's early fellowships, in 1965, later held a number of offices in that organization, and was elected president in 1985; more on that below. The Council for American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC) was organized in 1981, and ARIT was a founding member. In 1966 a meeting of faculty in the Middle East field established the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and its two journals, the *MESA Bulletin,* now the *Review of Middle East Studies* (RoMES), and the flagship journal in the field, the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). This meeting took place at the University of Chicago, where Chambers was teaching. In the 1970s and 80s he served on several of its committees and was a candidate for President in 1984. The Turkish Studies Association (TSA, now called the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association or OTSA, so as not to be confused with airport security) was founded in 1971 with Chambers as treasurer, showing that he was intimately involved in the inception of this organization. He subsequently served on the board and chaired the prize committee. In 1982, together with Ahmet Evin of Penn, he organized a summer language program for advanced Turkish in Turkey and codirected the program until 1988. To support it, in 1985 he and a few other Turkish language teachers established the American Association of Teachers of Turkish (AATT, now AATTL, Turkic Languages), and served on its board of directors. He also served the Institute of Turkish Studies (ITS), founded in 1982, and the International Association of Middle Eastern Studies (IAMES). He was on the advisory committee for Islam Centennial Fourteen, and the boards of two journals, *AGES*, published in Riyadh, and the *Journal of Arab and Islamic Studies*. He directed the University of Chicago's Center for Middle Eastern Studies from 1979 to 1985 and served twice as acting director, organizing the office and establishing effective procedures for the Center's activities. Chambers had great administrative and organizational ability, and immense dedication to the work of organizations that support the study of Turkey and the Turkish language, for which he was awarded the MESA Service Award in 1998. Even before these great accomplishments, in 1977,

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he had already received the Education Award from the American-Turkishlp Council.

Academically, these are not the things that get you promoted. Faculty and students in the field, however, benefited enormously from the programs he initiated and helped to develop. Most of the active non-native-Turkish-speaking scholars of my generation and those that followed gained their Turkish fluency through the summer Turkish program at Boğaziçi University that Chambers cofounded. That program itself was instrumental in the development of Turkish language teaching in Turkey, the creation of rival programs at other universities and in other Turkic-speaking countries, and the development of teaching methods and publication of materials for teaching Turkish to foreigners. The AATT (now AATTL), which it spawned, has done much the same on this side of the Atlantic. The Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association has enlisted most North American scholars in the field and publishes a journal (formerly the *TSA Bulletin*, then *Journal*, and now JOTSA, *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*) to which most have contributed; back issues are now available online. And scholars and students from a number of fields, from archaeology to political science, have stayed at the ARIT hostel, attended and/or given lectures there, and used its libraries. These organizations have shaped the field, given its practitioners tools for success, and continue to provide an outlet for their productivity. If we cannot call him a pioneering scholar, as I suppose the pioneering scholars belonged to a generation before his, we can say that Richard Chambers was one of the pioneering organizers in the field of Turkish studies, a man whose work made possible studies in Turkish language and literature, history, art history, and all the disciplines from archaeology through Arabic and Byzantine studies to anthropology, architecture, musicology, or political science, whose research takes place in Turkey.

Chambers, in his term as ARIT president, set the directions that ARIT followed for the next three decades; he made several advances that stabilized the organization and made it better able to carry out its functions. He succeeded in raising the basic government support grant by over 40 percent and reorganized the budget so that the funds could be applied to ARIT's basic needs for the building and directors' salaries, and so that the expenditures could be made, not on the basis of a fiscal year ending in the middle of the summer, but on the basis of the program period, which followed the academic calendar. The match he made between ARIT and the summer language program at Boğaziçi University gave the summer program the stability to apply for Fulbright funds over the long term. This began ARIT's search for additional grant funding beyond their original funding sources that

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flowered in later years with the reception of grants from six or eight different institutional donors. Chambers also developed a plan for fundraising in the private sector and carried out initial forays in that direction. As part of that effort, he created the Friends of ARIT in North America, built up the list of ARIT alumni, and had his administrative assistant start a newsletter to inform them about ARIT's operations and encourage them to donate on an individual level. He tirelessly met with government officials in Washington and Ankara to create goodwill for ARIT and to locate new sources of funding and new ways that ARIT could contribute to smoothing the path of American students and scholars in Turkey. And he constantly worked to make ARIT better known and appreciated among potential donors, government officials, and scholars in Turkey and the United States.

His work for AATT was no less foundational. He made early tape recordings for Turkish language classes. He participated in a Turkish language workshop in 1966 convening teachers from all over the country to discuss how Turkish should be taught to English speakers and to develop new materials. In 1969, they began to discuss setting up a summer Turkish program with the president of Robert College, and Chambers was charged to coordinate programming and funding. The transformation of the Bebek campus of Robert College into Boğaziçi University and growing unrest in Turkey put plans for the program on hold during the 1970s, but after the 1980 coup, conditions stabilized enough for efforts to be resumed. By 1982 Boğaziçi's Institute of Comparative Languages and Literatures had developed a program, and a grant proposal hastily put together by Chambers and Ahmet Evin from the University of Pennsylvania secured funding from Fulbright Group Projects Abroad. The following summer the program began. Student response was greater than expected, and has continued to sustain high enrollment numbers in the years since. Continued funding depended on broadening the program's institutional support, and Chambers brought the program to ARIT, which agreed to back the program institutionally. The program revealed wide discrepancies in the way that Turkish was taught in America and highlighted the need for greater standardization and criteria for progress. The teachers of Turkish held two additional language teaching workshops, and one participant recalled how central Chambers' encouragement and leadership were in establishing the American Association of Teachers of Turkish.

Many scholars shy away from these administrative responsibilities, preferring to work on their scholarship. Yet without people who pick up these tasks, the pursuit of scholarship would be vastly more difficult. In fact, Professor Chambers was not a prolific author; beyond the

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never-published dissertation, he had two edited volumes, nine articles, and some encyclopedia articles and book reviews to his name. The first of his edited volumes, however, had an enormous impact on the field. It was *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century*, which he edited with William R. Polk in 1968. Chambers often warned, on the basis of the difficult experience he had with that book, never to produce an edited volume (he probably did the lion's share of the work, although he was still a student, working on his dissertation and teaching full time). Nonetheless, the book was for decades one of the core works on late Ottoman history, and it is still valuable. Reviews of it appearing over the period 1969–72 were quite favorable. Michael Hudson, in a 1970 *American Historical Review* article, stated that the papers were "of almost uniformly high quality" and that the value of the book lay in "its penetrating descriptions of change in the Middle East" (91–92). A review in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* specified what was penetrating about them: the editors' discussion of the agencies of modernization (M.E.Y. 1970, 447). The book seems to have been one of the first to emphasize the contributions to modernization of Middle Eastern states and individuals; the reviewer, identified only by initials, complained that it shortchanged the contributions of the West. Little did he realize that he was assisting at the inception of a significant revision in the way the Middle East was written about—one that the authors of some recently published books foolishly think they are inventing now. A 1971 review by Nikki Keddie in *Political Science Quarterly* complimented the editors on a useful and attractive book but wished they had included a more substantial general conclusion, which she then proceeded to supply (364–66). After commenting on individual articles, she drew the broader conclusion that the evidence in the volume supported a nonlinear view of modernization that was not progressive but included significant negative or "reactionary" features, including the rigidification of the position of women and the conservatism of al-Azhar, the reinforcement of notable power and economic disparities, and the undermining of local autonomy by centralization processes. The book thus had more to say about twentieth and twenty-first century trends than its title would suggest and was useful beyond its stated corner of the field.

The reviewers generally praised the labors of the volume's editors. Hudson considered that, "given the state of theory and the limitations of the conference method, the editors have done a commendable job" (1970, 91). Norman Itzkowitz, in a review in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, prophetically opined that the conference volume might completely replace the traditional *Festschrift*, (1971, 153–55) making this book an early instance

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of a genre that now indeed nearly dominates the field. George Rentz, in the *Middle East Journal* of 1970, drew attention to the geographical imbalance of the volume and quibbled with the terminology, but allowed that the papers "add to our knowledge" (177–78). Itzkowitz, on the other hand, singled out the editorial skill of Richard Chambers in handling the Turkish materials. Chambers later remarked that since at that time there was no standard transliteration system, it had been nearly impossible to get the authors to adhere to any consistent standard at all. L. Carl Brown's 1972 review in *Middle Eastern Studies* congratulated the editors on "a job well done" and judged that the introduction "does a masterly job of summarizing the main points in each chapter while at the same time clarifying several of the issues discussed" (119–23). He saw the book as raising the question of the extent to which research should be "guided by the sources" or by theoretical and methodological questions, addressed to area specialists or to a more general social science audience. He encouraged comparison within the Middle East region and between the Middle East and other regions. This suggests to me that *Beginnings of Modernization* was not merely a successful summation of the state of the field at that moment but contained the seeds of many of the questions that engaged Middle East scholars for the next several decades. Not a negligible accomplishment.

Chambers' second volume edited, together with Günay Kut, was the 1977 book, *Contemporary Turkish Short Stories*, an intermediate-level reader for a second-year Turkish class. The one review of this book that I could find was written by Ahmet Evin in the *MESA Bulletin* (1977, 61–62). Evin drew attention to how competence in modern literary Turkish would help to close the wide gap between modern Turkish and Ottoman. The book played a significant role in Turkish language learning in the decades after its publication. The production of not one but two such helpful volumes indicates Chambers' concern for the field of Turkish studies in general, not just for individual topics or even disciplines, but for wider historical and pedagogical problems. How much faster our fields would progress if more scholars shared those concerns!

Chambers' articles range from one published in 1962 while still a student, through the 1970s and 80s. The earliest, "The Civil Bureaucracy: Turkey," appeared in *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey*, an edited volume by Robert Ward and Dankwart Rustow (1964). It concerns the nature of the association between the Ottoman civil bureaucracy and the transformation and modernization of the empire in the nineteenth century. Chambers begins by discussing the modernization of the bureaucracy itself, from the reforms of the Tanzimat up to 1960. This is a synthesis without notes,

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but made original by a thorough comparison between the Ottoman and modern Turkish bureaucracies with respect to structures and institutions, staffing and attitudes. He goes on to consider the role of the bureaucracy between sultanic absolutism and popular politics. The continuity between the Ottoman and Republican bureaucracies seems to have been broken at the institution of the multiparty government of 1950, which brought "changes in the social and occupational complexion of political leadership," the advance of the private sector, and the entry into public service of people from non-official careers. He concludes, however, that as long as government was the primary agent of modernization, the bureaucracy would play an influential role in the process of change.

The article that Chambers included in *Beginnings of Modernization* is a history of a peculiar institution, the Ottoman school in Paris (1968, 313–29). He called it "Notes on the *Mekteb-i Osmani* in Paris, 1857–1874" because he was aware he had accessed only part of the potentially available documentation. With documents from the Foreign Ministry Archives, he produced a detailed history of the school's short life. He concluded that the school's early closure was due to its high cost, the drop in France's military prestige after the Franco-Prussian War, and the foundation of Galatasaray Lisesi, equal or better in quality. Importantly, examining the personnel of this school and their later careers casts doubt on the standard generalization about the late Ottoman elite, that it can be divided neatly into the traditionally religiously educated and the secular modernized.

The article, "The Ottoman Ulema and the Tanzimat," in the 1972 volume *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis*, considers the nineteenth-century reform period as a forerunner of trends in modern Turkey. It traces the Tanzimat-era decline in the ulema's reputation and role to the prior elimination of the janissaries, the ulema's military support; the bureaucratization of the religious establishment (especially the *şeyhülislam*ate and the *evkaf*); sultanic control of legal change; the upgrading of the civil bureaucracy; and the establishment of non-religious educational institutions. The religious institution's resistance to modernization, particularly of its educational system, made it increasingly irrelevant, and many who were *medrese*-educated ended up working in the new sultanic institutions. Chambers describes a number of these crossover ulema and details their contributions. The creation of the *Mecelle*, the modernized Ottoman law code, and the participation of some ulema, particularly Ahmed Cevdet, in modernization efforts help explain the ulema's loss of status in the modern Turkish experience (and, one might argue, the more recent rise of lay religious leadership).

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In 1973, Chambers published an article in the flagship Middle East journal IJMES on the education of Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, and with it the educational system of the Ottoman empire. The article looked at schools and teachers in both Cevdet's hometown of Lofça and Istanbul, as well as the scholarship of the mid-nineteenth century. Chambers' portrait of Ahmed Cevdet highlighted his wide-ranging interests, his scholarly ability, his connections in Istanbul elite society, and his critical conservatism combined with his public service in a period of transition. "Disillusioned by the failure of the Tanzimat," he concluded, "to stem the dissolution of the empire and disenchanted with the increasingly Western and secular tone given to the reform movement by men such as Midhat Paşa, Cevdet appears to have accommodated himself all too well to the conservative and Islamic-oriented regime of Abdülhamid II." A sigh of disappointment on page 464.

In 1976, Chambers made a presentation at the 8th Türk Tarih Kongresi, the Turkish equivalent of the AHA, on the Encümen-i Daniş, the Ottoman Academy of Learning, which existed from 1851 to 1862. The article, published in 1981, considered the Academy's linguistic and educational reforms, its role in the emergence of a modern educated elite, the nature of Ottoman politics which helped determine the success or failure of reform programs, and the overreliance on patronage and prestige that led to the society's early death. Through Cevdet Paşa and his work, Chambers concluded, the Encümen left an indelible mark on some late Ottoman cultural developments, especially the simplification of the written Turkish language. A Turkish translation and appreciation of this article was published by Ahmet Karaçavuş in *Türk Dünyası İncelemeleri Dergisi* in 2009, testifying to its ongoing usefulness.

For the first volume of the journal *Archivum Ottomanicum* in 1984, Chambers wrote an article about Ottoman–Egyptian relations in the mid-nineteenth century and the ambassador Keçecizade Mehmed Fuad. According to Cevdet Paşa who accompanied him to Egypt, the grand vizier Mehmed Reşid was not pleased with the outcome of the negotiations. His displeasure contributed to the breakdown of relations shortly thereafter, when Fuad became Foreign Minister. Cevdet, who tried not to take sides against either man, was "shunned by both camps," and Chambers concluded that this affair hastened the break within the Ottoman reforming elite that helped end the Tanzimat.

Chambers had plans for other articles but apparently did not complete them. His early articles made large comparisons that viewed twentieth-century developments as continuations of nineteenth-century trends. Increasingly, however, he searched for the telling details that would explain rather well-known historical changes. This is not a method much employed today, as it does not lend itself to theoretical explication or comparison,

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but concerns itself with the specificities of particular events. The shift in scholarship toward theory in the 1980s may in part explain Chambers' decreased productivity in that period.

Even after retirement, however, he produced retrospective pieces and gave talks that sought to preserve the memory of the developmental period when he and his colleagues had created the institutional shape of the field of Turkish studies. This is fortunate, because it is all too easy to forget the institutional pioneers, who left few works of scholarship of their own but facilitated so many by others. Many scholars of my generation and those that followed would not be where they are today without the organizational work of Richard L. Chambers.

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