

# TASG NEWS

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## JOHN R WALSH

1919-1993

John Walsh, formerly Senior Lecturer in Turkish at the University of Edinburgh, died at his home in Winchester on 22 November 1993 at the age of 74. An American citizen, born in 1919 to recently-naturalized Irish immigrant parents and brought up mainly in New York, he came to Europe with the United States army during the Second World War. In 1945 his military superiors sent him to study Arabic, Turkish and Islamic History on a one term (sic) course at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies. Though brief, this offered a tantalizing glimpse into another cultural and intellectual world, and determined the nature of his future career. Marriage to his English wife, Viv, in 1944 ensured that he would pursue this career in Britain.

Taking a full four-year degree at SOAS, Walsh graduated in Turkish in 1950. The pattern of his 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. On graduation, Walsh was immediately appointed to a newly-created Lectureship in Turkish at Edinburgh University, where he remained until his retirement 30 years later in 1980. Single-handedly, he established Edinburgh as a recognised centre for Ottoman Turkish studies, gaining the respect and admiration of colleagues in Turkey as in western Europe and North America.

Walsh is best described as a student of the Ottoman mind. His research ranged through the historiography, *divan* poetry and *inşa* prose of the pre-Tanzimat period. Among his published work are major articles on the historiography of the sixteenth century Ottoman-Safavid conflict, on Yunus Emre, and on the seventeenth century prose-stylist Nergisi; many of his translations of poetry appear in the *Penguin Book of Turkish Verse*. Sadly, no book appeared, though his files contained the material for several critical editions, meticulously transcribed.

Walsh was first and foremost a teacher, who believed in passing on the fruits of his research not on paper so much as in person to his research students, in the true *silisile* tradition of his subject. He was an excellent and much appreciated research supervisor, and was particularly concerned to develop students' interests in the unfashionable field of Ottoman literary studies.

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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, Wittke and Arat, and history through Wittke'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-