

these problems, focusing on a variety of Middle East elites and how they dealt with rapid change.

If I may add a personal word, I began a lifelong relationship with Frank Tachau at Rutgers, first as a student and, later, as a colleague and friend. Dr. Tachau's class was my first introduction to Middle East studies, and it helped shape the trajectory of my career. Along with many other of his students, I appreciated not only what I learned from him in the classroom but what I learned from a lifetime of association with him. ✂

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Michael J. Zwettler 1940-2010

MICHAEL J. ZWETTLER, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR EMERITUS AT Ohio State University, died of cancer on 25 January 2010. He was a well-loved member of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (and its earlier incarnations, beginning with "Department of Romance Languages—Arabic Section") where he taught Arabic language and literature for thirty-five years.

Michael was perhaps best known for his monograph *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry: Its Character and Implications* (1978), in which he applied the Parry-Lord theory of formulaic composition and rendition to early Arabic poetry. In doing so he covered a much wider range of material than might be expected, with the result that the book remains essential reading for anyone concerned not only with early poetry but with the development of the Arabic language. Scholars have debated at length the question of the language of this poetry: was it the everyday language of the Bedouin, as tradition claimed? Michael argued no, it was a special idiom reserved strictly for formal occasions, utilizing various dialectal features and archaisms (of which the *i'rab*, the system of case and mood markings, was one), and his arguments have become a standard component of the discussion on the history of Arabic.

The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry remains a fixture on Ph.D. reading lists for its important treatment of poetic and linguistic topics, and

if not everyone was convinced of the suitability of applying oral-formulaic theory to Arabic poetry, there was nonetheless near-unanimity that the exercise was an especially stimulating one, in the best intellectual sense. It is a mark of his scholarly integrity that he was fond of recommending, unprompted, to colleagues and students the annotated translation of Gregor Schoeler's articles, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* (2006), even though one of the chapters is devoted to a harsh critique of Michael's book. Asked about this, he said, "It's very intelligent criticism, and I have no problem with that, in fact I appreciate it." (Of course, he did add, when prompted, that he hoped to respond to Schoeler someday.)

Michael was clear about his scholarly interests. Not for him the vulgarities of the modern period, which seemed in his view to begin sometime in the late-Abbasid era ("anything after the Mongols," he loved to say, "you can read about in the newspapers"). He was drawn further and further back in time, in a quest to reveal more about the period (and the language) that captivated him. His last great project was an extensive study of the oldest substantial example of written Arabic, the Namāra inscription, found in southern Syria and dated to the early fourth century CE. This required a massive amount of training and familiarity with Roman and early Sāsānian history, various forms of Aramaic, Epigraphic South (as well as North) Arabian studies and the genealogy and tribal history of the pre-Islamic Arabs, among other topics. All this Michael undertook with the remarkable blend of avid enthusiasm and meticulous attention to detail that characterized everything he did. Several articles from this project have been published, and Professor Linda Jones Hall of St. Mary's College in Maryland will be leading an effort to bring his nearly-completed typescript to completion and to see it through publication.

His perfectionism made the prospect of submitting something to print an agonizing one. The downside of this was that his list of publications is not long; the upside was, as he liked to point out, that he had absolutely no qualms or regrets about what he had written, and he was justly proud of whatever appeared under his name. One of Michael's most singular qualities was the pleasure he took in having such high standards and expectations. He clearly enjoyed playing the pedant, never happier than when simmering with indignation at some linguistic impropriety or crime against philology. But below the simmering indignation there was a grin and an admission that although he took such things seriously, he didn't really take them *that* seriously. He never laughed at others, but he constantly made fun of himself.

Seldom *bien pensant*, always *bon vivant*, he let his conversation reflect his enthusiasms and his generosity: “You really must eat at Chez Fulān and tell me what you think, and when will someone do a proper investigation of the origins of Arabic prose, and why is there no expanded English translation of Reckendorf’s *Arabische Syntax* and wouldn’t that be that a good project for you, and would you like these tickets to Tosca tonight because due to a scheduling conflict I’ll be at a lute concerté....”

He is survived by his partner Eugene Meyers and his sister Rebecca Zwetler. Michael did not want a funeral or memorial service. He asked instead that his friends gather in the springtime and hold a party in his memory and this we did. There was not much discussion of Michael’s academic achievements and erudition that day. Although his death is a great loss to scholarship, those who knew him will feel even more deeply the absence of his wit, his good cheer and his kindness. ✂

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