

IN MEMORIAM

Derek Hopwood OBE (1933–2020)

Dr. Derek Hopwood OBE, who died in Oxfordshire on March 23, 2020, at the age of 86, was one of the pioneers of the Cold War-era academic field that came to be known as Middle Eastern studies.

Hopwood came to Oxford in the early 1950s to read Arabic in an age of decolonization, or to borrow the phrase coined by his later colleague Elizabeth Monroe, toward the end of Britain's moment in the Middle East. As Derek recalled in a letter, he was taught by a distinguished group of Orientalists – H.A.R. Gibb, who “whipped through Arabic grammar in one lecture,” Richard Walzer “whose main interest was Greek philosophy” and for whom Arabic was “a dead language like his Greek and Latin,” and A.F.L. Beeston, the Laudian Professor, who could spend an entire hour's lecture “translating one line of pre-Islamic poetry.” As an undergraduate, he did not study with Albert Hourani, who lectured to a small group of modernists in Magdalen College. Derek's one point of contact with the modern Middle East came through his Arabic lessons with Palestinian Professor Walid Khalidi, who famously resigned his Oxford post in protest against Britain's role in the 1956 Suez Crisis when Derek was still an undergraduate.

Following his undergraduate studies, Derek Hopwood served for two years of national service in the British Army in the then-Kingdom of Libya. This first visit to North Africa reinforced his interest in the modern Arab world, and after completing his military service Derek returned to Oxford in 1962 for doctoral study under Albert Hourani's supervision. Fluent in Russian and Arabic, he chose to write on Russian interests in Palestine in the nineteenth century. He completed the thesis in just three years, and published his findings in his classic monograph, *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine, 1843–1914* (Oxford University Press, 1969).

Hourani recruited Hopwood to the Middle East Centre in St Antony's College, where Derek was to spend the rest of his academic career. Appointed Middle East Bibliographer in 1966, Derek developed the Centre's

library collection into a world-class resource with works in European and Middle Eastern languages to satisfy the needs of an advanced research community. Derek had a lifelong passion with library sciences, and some of his happiest moments were spent traveling across the Middle East and North Africa with his dear friend and colleague Dr. Mustafa Badawi, the University Lecturer in Modern Arabic Literature, to acquire books for the library. He generously shared his bibliographic experience, serving as founding Secretary and Chairman of the U.K. Middle East Libraries Committee (MELCOM), and its international branch, Melcom International.

Alongside his work in the library, Hopwood researched and taught in the modern history of the Middle East alongside his mentor, Albert Hourani. He held the University Lectureship (later promoted to Reader) in Modern Middle Eastern Studies from 1972 until his retirement in 2000, and supervised a number of doctoral candidates in Oxford. He also enjoyed a prolific career as an author, publishing no fewer than seven single-authored books and seven edited volumes that ranged from Egypt and Syria to Sudan and Iraq, from the study of Mamluk shadow theatre to sexuality in the colonial encounter.

Hopwood was part of an intellectual community, hand-picked by Albert Hourani, that placed Oxford at the very forefront of Middle Eastern studies, including Roger Owen (economic history and politics), Mustafa Badawi, Peter Lienhardt (sociology), and Robert Mabro (economics and energy studies). Following Hourani's retirement in 1971, Hopwood took turns with his colleagues in serving as Director of Oxford's influential Middle East Centre – a post he held for fifteen years off and on. Relations were not always easy between these colossal scholars, and no small amount of sibling rivalry developed in their bid for Hourani's approval. Yet it was a source of great pleasure to Derek toward the end of his life to enjoy a warm exchange with Roger Owen, who reached out to celebrate Derek's final book, *Islam's Renewal: Reform or Revolt*, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2018.

An institution builder, Derek Hopwood played a leading role in the creation of the British Society of Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES), for which he served as Secretary and President between 1973 and 1989. He was the founding President of the European Association of Middle Eastern Studies between 1992 and 1997. He held visiting professorships in Provence, Khartoum, Ain Shams, and Penn. He was recognized for his lifelong contributions to Middle Eastern studies with an OBE in 1998, and the BRISMES Award for Services to Middle Eastern Studies in 2003. ✂

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