

INTRODUCTION

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The following articles, all written by friends, colleagues or students of D.S. Richards, are intended to serve as a token of our deep respect for him as friend, colleague and teacher, and to bear witness to his long and distinguished career as a scholar.

Donald Sidney Richards was born in Bristol in 1935 and came up to Oxford in 1953, reading Greats (*Litterae Humaniores*) at Merton College before turning to Arabic and Persian for his degree, which he took in 1957. He then spent two years in the Navy, during which time he added Russian to his Greek, Latin, Arabic and Persian, and returned to Oxford in 1959 at the invitation of Professor A.F.L. Beeston; with the encouragement of both Freddie Beeston and Albert Hourani, he applied and was appointed to a Lectureship in Arabic in the Faculty of Oriental Studies in 1960. (Research for the D.Phil. was started but abandoned, which was hardly rare in those days; besides, he had already proved himself to his teachers.) In 1967 he was elected to an Official Fellowship at St Cross College, where he served as Vice-Master from 1991–1995, by which time he had completed several sabbaticals, including one in 1983, when he was Senior Research Fellow at the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. Most important, of course, he had married Pamela, with whom he came to share not only an unflagging enthusiasm for Arabic, the Middle East and local history, but a son (Martin) and a daughter (Lucy). In 2000, Donald retired from the same Faculty and post to which he had first been appointed—some 40 years of learning and teaching. Were we to read it in a scholar's *tarjama*, we would all be tempted to reckon it a mere *topos*. Having learned from Donald that texts are rarely that simple, however, we would think again.

What can one accomplish in 40 years? One can endure, which is how many lecturers who first came to Oxford in the 50s and 60s might choose to describe their experience in the 90s and 00s. The Oxford of Donald's early years could boast many of the greatest Orientalists of the twentieth century, including H.A.R. Gibb, Samuel Stern and Richard Walzer; it was also gloriously naïve of Teaching

Quality Assessments, Research Assessment Exercises and the culture of fetishized procedures they represent. I know that Donald does not regret leaving these behind. But beyond enduring, one can leave a legacy, and this Donald has done.

Generations of students have benefited from his gentle but sure-handed guidance through Final Honours School options and conventions as labyrinthine as the Mamluk Jerusalem that he, more than any other scholar of his generation, has charted. (In the matter of options and conventions, as in many other academic matters, Donald sorted out the messes left by noisier Oxford colleagues; always affable and unflappable, he quietly and efficiently got things done.) Nearly as many students he taught how to read and write Arabic—undergraduate and graduate alike, some willingly, others only under duress (when they had failed to prepare translations, he would translate for them—the text had to be gotten through). And insofar as the curriculum accommodated it, he taught history too, in lectures and text-reading classes; undergraduates and graduates broke their teeth on Miskawayh and Ibn Athīr with Mr Richards. All of this said, it is the smallest of his constituencies—his fellow scholars—who enjoy what may be the richest of his legacies, and, now, liberated from the academic schedule, the one into which he still makes regular contributions. It is principally the scholarship of D.S. Richards that the present volume celebrates.

Texts, Documents and Artefacts is the theme of this Festschrift because they are the stuff of his scholarship. To many, Donald is known either as the editor of two influential collections of economic and social history (*Islam and the Trade of Asia*, Oxford, 1970; *Islamic Civilisation 950–1150*, Oxford, 1973) or as the historian behind the definitive guide to the architecture of Mamluk Jerusalem (*Mamluk Jerusalem: An Architectural Study*, London, 1987). But to those who know better, Donald is an Arabist. Trained originally as a classicist, he devoted most of his published scholarship to construing the meanings of Arabic words. Anyone who knows Arabic well knows that this is not as simple as it may sound, just as anyone in Oxford who has struggled with palaeographic or epigraphic problems in Arabic knows where the solutions were to be found. Art historians made a habit of appearing in the Oriental Institute's common room with blurry photographs of inscribed Mamluk ewers and lamps, hoping to find Donald at coffee: "I can see the *lām*, but what do you make of that?" Or this very afternoon, when I invited him to examine a

colophon on one of the Bodleian's copies of al-Ṣafadī's *al-Wāfi bi'l-wafayāt*: "Yes, one sees *bi-ishārat al-amīr*, but one would expect *bi-rasm* because that's what's on the documents . . ." No one else around the table knows these documents as he does, so we dunk our biscuits in assent, while I pause before putting another question: "What about *this*?"

Although Donald's teaching career began and ended at Oxford, and the influence of Oxford Oriental Studies upon his research interests is clear enough—after all, Gibb had worked on the biographers of Saladin, and Stern on the Sinai documents—Donald made documentary Arabic a career-long specialty, devoting countless hours to deciphering and discussing a range of documents, chiefly from Jerusalem, Fustat/Cairo and the Sinai, which throw light on the social, political and religious history of the pre-modern Near East. A second area of expertise, the historiography of the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, emerged in the 1980s. Like many Oxford scholars who had the pleasure to begin his career when learning was assumed rather than assigned a crude number value, he published at his own pace; but unlike many of those Oxford scholars, his pace accelerated during the latter part of his career: the last three years alone have seen the appearance of his long-awaited edition of years 650–709 AH of the *Zubdat al-fikra fī ta'rikh al-hijra* and his translations of *al-Nawādir al-sultāniyya wa'l-mahāsīn al-Yūsufiyya* and the Saljuk section of Ibn al-Athīr's *Kāmil*.

The articles published in this Festschrift range nearly the length and breadth of Islamic studies, but in their close engagement with the written word, they all honour D.S. Richards and his scholarship.

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