

Obituaries

John Cooper (1947–1998)

John Cooper, the E. G. Browne lecturer in Persian at the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Cambridge, died after a heart attack outside Reims in northern France on Friday, 9 January 1998, while driving home from holiday. At a time when the academic study of Persian is in retreat in the Western world, his premature loss is felt all the more acutely.

John was born on 24 August 1947 in Brighton. He was an only child. His father was a bank manager and the family moved to London with the father's promotion. John's early education at Highgate School was mainly in the sciences (mathematics and physics) and in 1970 he graduated from St John's College, Oxford, with an M.A. in psychology and physiology. His exposure to the Middle East started, as for many others, in its western-most extremity, North Africa, where for five years on leaving Oxford he worked as director of studies in English language at International House in Casablanca.

John's excellent knowledge of Persian and long-standing involvement with Iranian studies began in 1975, when he went to Masjid-i Sulayman as an English language instructor to the Iranian army. Iran proved very much to his liking and the following year he was appointed a Lecturer in Physiology at Jundi-Shapur University in Ahvaz. During this period, he converted to Islam following the death of a close friend. It was a natural step to seek an Islamic education and he followed courses in Islamic law and philosophy at the Islamic Dar al-Tabligh at Qum, at the same time himself providing lectures in English language. Thus he came to live through the Islamic revolution that destroyed the Pahlavi regime and, with it, normal relations with the West. His contacts within Iran's new clerical ruling class and his intimate knowledge of the Islamic sciences gave him the equipment he needed to pursue an academic career in England, with the opportunity, denied to most of his compatriots, to travel regularly to Iran.

On his return to England in 1981, John registered as a D.Phil. student at the Oriental Institute in Oxford, working on a thesis entitled "Intellect and Language: A Case Study of the Philosophical Foundations of Shi'ī Legal Methodology" under the supervision of Professor Madelung; this study of Usulī *fiqh*, using modern semiotic methods, was regrettably left still incomplete. In the meantime, John continued to publish English translations of a variety of religious texts in both Arabic (notably from Book IV of al-Kulayni's *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* and volume I of al-Tabari's *Tafsīr* on the Qur'an) and Persian (notably some of the writings of Murtaza Mutahhari). Many of these were published by the former World Organization for Islamic Services (WOFIS) in Tehran between 1978 and 1983, with his role as translator not always acknowledged. Other translations appeared in *Power and Authority in Shi'ī Islam*, edited by S. A. Arjomand (SUNY, 1988) and in *A Revolution Betrayed*, edited by Haleh Afshar (Macmillan, 1985). His own book, *A Manual of Islamic Beliefs and Practice*, written with Ali Muhammad Naqvi and Kalbe Sadeq Naqavi, was published in two volumes by the Muhammadi Trust in London (1990–92).

John's remaining published work is relatively scant, including half a dozen articles and a considerable number of entries in the forthcoming *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Arabic Literature* (eds. J. Meisami and P. Starkey) and *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (ed. E. Craig). These posthumous publications will reveal his extensive knowledge of the field and his commitment to sharing it. At the time of his death, John had just finished work on editing a collection of papers entitled *Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond*, together with Ron Nettle and Mohammed Madmod, to be published by I. B. Tauris; this arose from a conference in Oxford in 1996, at which his own contribution was a presentation of 'Abd al-Karim Soroush's views of 'Ali Shari'ati.

In addition to his own work, John had a hand in numerous other publications thanks to his own academic book and journal production partnership, IM-PRINT, which he started in Oxford in 1989. This drew on his computer skills and earlier research on entering and formatting machine-readable texts, carried out for the Oxford Text Searching System between 1987 and 1989. This business was wound up on the death of his partner, by which time John had moved to Cambridge and a temporary lectureship in Persian.

At Cambridge, John proved to be a great asset to the program in Islamic and Middle Eastern studies, over and above the main function of his lectureship, to provide teaching in Persian language and literature. His expertise in Shi'ism, Sufism and Islamic religious sciences were naturally called upon in a variety of ways; given the direction of Islamic and Iranian studies in recent years, he was able to bring a crucial element to the Cambridge undergraduate Tripos and to the range of courses offered at graduate level. He was also much in demand as a supervisor of M.Phil. and D.Phil. dissertations. John's post was funded by generous Iranian benefactors outside the university and was not a permanent position. Funding was sometimes intermittent and John was often faced with the uncertainty of not knowing whether his job would be renewed for the coming academic year. He bore this unsettling situation with remarkable calm, but it naturally affected his commitment to long-term research projects; nevertheless, he continued to involve himself heavily in the demands that Cambridge exacts even from those whom it does not choose to acknowledge, with an unselfishness that was characteristic of him. It is ironic that it had at last been possible, due to the generous bequest of the late Mr. Fereidun Soudavar, to make his position a little more secure, and John was half-way through the first of a five-year appointment when he died.

Perhaps more than for his own published research, which does not amply reflect the range and quality of his learning, John will be remembered both as a most sympathetic, decent, and approachable person and as an outstanding university teacher. His enthusiasm for the subject, generosity with his time, and interest in his students made him a popular figure who would normally hear of their problems and plans long before his less humane colleagues. His knowledge and experience of Iran was also increasingly valuable to, and valued by, the Persian academic establishment in England, where he was a member of the governing council of the British Institute of Persian Studies and a constant source of practical advice and assistance to all those wishing to pursue their studies in Iran. His wide links and linguistic ability made him a most important element in the slow development of workable relationships between the Iranian authorities and the

European academic community. At the same time, he was heavily involved with institutions of Islamic learning in London. He was a trustee of the Muhammadi Trust in Bayswater and editor of their journal, *Alserat*, and a member of the Board of the Irshad Trust. He also played an advisory role in the setting up of the College of Islamic Sciences in Finchley Road and served on the editorial board of its journal.

John had a great love of life and a passion for travel. His death will be greatly mourned by his colleagues and by an international cast of friends.

Charles Melville

Richard W. Cottam (1924–1997)

Richard Cottam, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Political Science and the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh, died on 29 August 1997, after a long illness. He had spent nearly fifty years as a scholar of Iranian politics and international relations and an advocate of political liberalization in Iran. His passing will be mourned by the entire community of Iran scholars and by the thousands of Americans and Iranians whose lives were touched by this gifted scholar and teacher.

Dick Cottam was born in Provo, Utah, on 1 October 1924. He attended public schools and the University of Utah, where he initially majored in pre-medical studies. After serving in the United States Navy during World War II, he graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Utah in 1948 with a degree in political science. He subsequently began graduate studies in political science at Harvard University and was drawn to the nationalist movement then emerging in Iran. Working under the direction of the late Rupert Emerson, he studied Persian and obtained a Fulbright fellowship to do his dissertation research in Iran during the 1951–52 academic year, completing his Ph.D. in 1953. In 1951 he married his high school sweetheart, the former Patricia Ferrell, who has had a distinguished career as a senior research scientist at Carnegie-Mellon University.

Seeking an opportunity to continue his research on Iran, Cottam entered government service as an Iran specialist in June 1953. He was not involved in the CIA-led coup of August 1953, which brought down the government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq and severely weakened Mosaddeq's National Front movement. He strongly opposed the coup, believing that the United States should support rather than subvert popular movements like the National Front, and he told his superiors that the coup was a serious mistake.

In 1956 Cottam was sent to Iran to serve in the American embassy, remaining there until 1958. His main responsibility during this period was to monitor the National Front, with which he had established close contacts in 1951–52. Throughout this period he encouraged his superiors to adopt a positive view of the National Front and encourage the Iranian shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, to cultivate their support. He also undertook covert operations aimed at encouraging the Shah to embrace the National Front and promote political liberalization, placing articles in the Iranian press aimed at achieving these goals and helping