

OBITUARY

Dr Dennis Walker

(7 December 1944 – 22 July 2020)

We sadly announce that a senior and diligent member of the Advisory Board of the *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society (Historicus)* Dr. Dennis Walker is no more with us. He was a kind and cooperative reviewer for the *Historicus* and *Hamdard Islamicus* as well. He was buried in Dandenong South - a suburb in Melbourne, Australia. His old friend and colleague Prof. Garry W. Trompf has authored his obituary. (Editor)

Dr Dennis Walker was an Irish Australian academic from Melbourne. Experiencing anti-Irish discrimination during his formative years, he developed a lifelong interest in and sympathy for many minority groups. Drawn to Arabic at a young age, he became an intrepid scholar of Islamic currents outside the main stream of the Muslim tradition. His greatest publishing achievement was the masterwork on Black Islam or the Nation of Islam in the United States, *Islam and the Search for African American Identity* (2005), with articles leading up to this vast tome being seminal for the critical study of such intriguing and renowned figures as Wallace Fard, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Warith Deen, Louis Farrakhan and Muhammad Ali. But his attention to minority Muslim thought and movements was very far-reaching, if not virtually global in its scope.

Dr Walker took his doctorate from the Australian National University in 1992 on pan-Arabism and neo-Pharaonism in British Egypt (from the 1890s until just after the Second World War). The Egyptian Muslim intellectuals espousing these nationalist causes ran against the grain of Muslim universalism, and I can remember him explaining to me in the late 1970s how Middle Eastern anti-colonial independence movements involved collaboration between Western-acculturated Muslims and Christian thinkers, with the latter much more used to the resuscitation of “nations.” With the guidance of

Dr Nasseh Mirza, Dr Walker was able to research relevant pre-1952 Arabic newspapers in Egypt in the 1970s, while he earned his spurs as a young academic in the then Department of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Melbourne.

The great strength of Dr Walker's research was his meticulous attention to primary sources, particularly to newspapers and pamphlets from the last two centuries (and not just in Arabic). This is still showing with his recent ordering of materials about Islam for special collections at Monash University, where he became a Fellow of the Asia Institute. Only months before his death he revealed an early immediate post-War pamphlet defending Islam in Australia (largely by Indian immigrants), and discussed it for the Australasian Muslim paper *Amust*. He was a great help in representing Islamic Studies within the Centre for Millennial and Apocalyptic Studies (Universities of Sydney and Bedford), and he always kept up a lively interest in Gnostic Islam, especially Isma'ilism, and in such minority Gnostic religions in the Muslim world as Mandaeism and Druzism.

To the end he was working on Middle Eastern nationalism, preparing a book on the Maronites; but his most preponderant concern was with Muslim 'enclaves,' not only in the United States, but in a variety of marginal contexts, including southern Thailand and northern Malaysia, even on Mindanao in the Philippines, and of course he considered the plight of "Arab-speaking minorities" of Palestine. In short, Dr Walker was a living treasure of all the information and critical reflection on his chosen areas of expertise, and in a way that made him rather indispensable as a resource person for very many people worldwide. He will be sorely missed by all his colleagues and associates, not least among those who edit and read *Hamdad Islamicus* as well as *Historicus*. He is survived by his two sons al-Radi and al-Junaid.

Garry W. Trompf

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