

## Communications

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*Ed. note:* The Bulletin is one of the journals for which ABC-CLIO is seeking abstracters.

## In Memorium

## Aydın Sayılı, 1913-1993

Prof. Dr. Aydın Sayılı's long and productive life spanned much of the twentieth century and the first seventy years of the Republic of Turkey. Perhaps no other person perceived more acutely both the wisdom of the Turkish past and the modern knowledge of the Turkish present. His vantage point in time and his unusual personal qualities provided him with an angle of vision at once illuminating and unique.

After graduating from secondary school in Ankara, Aydın Sayılı won a scholarship from the Turkish government to pursue his higher education in the United States. In 1942 he received the first doctorate in the history of science awarded by at Harvard University. Returning to Turkey in 1943, he began his long and distinguished academic career in the College of Letters of what soon became Ankara University. He rose rapidly to full professor, and just ten years later was appointed to the newly established independent chair in the history of science. He held that chair for thirty years until his retirement from teaching in 1983. During much of that time he also served concurrently as chairman of the Department of Philosophy.

Aydın Bey wrote on such nationally and linguistically separated thinkers as Aristotle, Copernicus, Goethe and George Sarton. He published analyses of research on a wide range of scientific subjects including astronomy, mathematics, medicine, neutron theory and optics, as well as commentaries on the pseudoscien-

ces of alchemy and astrology. His primary focus, however, was on the development of scientific thought throughout the Islamic world from premedieval times to the present. Ninety of his 119 publications (books and articles) are devoted to that specialty in which he made the modern world cognizant of the fact that scientific theory and methodology were never monopolies of Western Civilization.

Professor Sayılı's longest and most definitive enunciation of that thesis can be found in his book, *The Observatory in Islam and Its Place in the General History of the Observatory*. First published in Ankara by the Turkish Historical Society in 1960, it was reprinted in New York in 1981 by Arno Press. Demonstrating first the importance of astronomy to Moslem religion and to the claims of astrologers, Professor Sayılı proceeded to describe in detail the operations of observatories at Baghdad, Balkh, Cairo, Damascus, Dinavar, Istanbul, Shiraz and Tabriz between the ninth and fourteenth centuries. He marshalled an overwhelming body of evidence to show that the astronomical observatory as we know it—a specialized institution comprising its own scientific staff and equipment—was a product of Islamic culture. In a major review of the book in 1962 in *Isis* (Vol. LIII, pp. 237-239), E.S. Kennedy concluded, "By writing it Professor Sayılı has earned the gratitude of all persons interested in the history of the exact sciences in antiquity."

Along with the history of natural science Aydın Sayılı had a broad interest in other areas of learning. He frequently provided advice and assistance to colleagues working in the humanities and social sciences. The Archive of Turkish Oral Narrative was only one of the many beneficiaries of his generous help. Among his various contributions to the Archive were, for example, extended commentaries and bibliographies on such diverse and somewhat esoteric subjects as (1) the tradition of the Bird of Fortune (*Talih Kuşu*) in Middle Eastern literature and folklore, and (2) religious practices, past and present, of the extremely ancient cult of Hızır. He was, to a degree, a modern avatar of those Renaissance scholars who took all knowledge to be their province. He was fluent in five foreign languages (Arabic, English, French, German and Persian) besides his native Turkish.

What could illustrate his catholicity of interest more than his tenure as President of the Atatürk Kültür Merkezi (Ataturk Culture Center), one of the three component organizations of the Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu (Atatürk Supreme Council on Culture, Language and History)? Under his leadership the Culture Center became (among other things) the Turkish near equivalent of the French Academy. Aydın Bey spent countless hours editing and guiding through the press the numerous books published by the Center. Not the least of Aydın Bey's skills was his ability to discover and encourage talented and promising younger scholars.

The American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson once observed, "An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man." Whatever new and exciting programs the Atatürk Culture Center may undertake in the present and in the future, it may well always remain within the long shadow cast by Aydın Sayılı.

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