

Don Peretz 1922–2017

Dr. Don Peretz, a leading scholar on the Arab-Israel conflict and Palestinian refugees at SUNY-Binghamton, died on April 29 in Mitchellville, Maryland. He was 94.

Long before the Israeli revisionists of the late 1980s, Dr. Peretz wrote non-partisan accounts of the Arab–Israeli conflict that were informed by years of primary research, balanced analysis, and empathy for both sides—works that have contributed to our understanding of the conflict and the Middle East in general.

Peretz retired as professor emeritus from SUNY-Binghamton in 1992. He started his teaching career there in 1966. His students remember him as a quiet, thoughtful, and interesting professor. He was the Director of the Southwest Asia North Africa Program and was the author of *Israel and the Palestine Arabs* (1958, Washington, D.C.: The Middle East Institute), one of the first major academic studies of the 1948 Palestinian refugees. He authored eleven other books, among them *The Government and Politics of Israel* (1979, University Park: Westview) and *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising, The Middle East Today* (1990, University Park: Westview), and over 300 articles for various journals, including *Foreign Affairs* and the *Middle East Journal*.

Peretz was a fellow at the United States Institute of Peace and a contributor to the Middle East Institute. He graduated from the University of Minnesota (BA), and received his doctorate from Columbia University (MA, PhD). He was awarded a Ford Foundation grant to study the Arab refugee problem from 1952 to 1954. And he was a member of Breira—a project of concern in diaspora-Israel relations. As a young man, Peretz became a conscientious objector to war, heralding a career in peace building. He was strongly influenced by a Quaker professor at Queens College in Flushing, New York, and also by the Jewish chaplain at Columbia University, Rabbi Isadore Hoffman, an ardent supporter of Norman Thomas.

Peretz studied Japanese at the University of Minnesota and served with the US Army during World War II as a non-arms bearing Japanese interpreter for a naval medical unit in Okinawa, mostly treating civilians. “Thousands of them [Okinawans] were wounded during the American invasion,” Peretz recounted. “Many of them had hidden in caves, and to get them out, the US Army used white phosphorous bombs.” The experience, he said, “only reinforced my opposition to the war and the impact that it had on noncombatants.” He was discharged after the Japanese surrender in 1945.

Soon after, Peretz went to Palestine. He had become interested in the Palestine issue in part because he came from a large extended Sephardic Jewish family in Jerusalem, and by his father's and his own bi-nationalist humanistic Zionism. The language of his father's family was Ladino. His father's birth certificate stated he was born in 1894 in Jerusalem, province of Syria, Ottoman Empire. His paternal ancestors were expelled from Spain in 1492. Peretz said, "I was much attracted by discussions about the possibilities of compromise in Palestine between Jews and Arabs focusing on bi-nationalism. The concept was supported by world-renowned philosopher Martin Buber and the President of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Dr. Judah Magnes. I decided to go to Palestine and see for myself what was happening in the country and to meet the bi-nationalists."

Using his GI Bill educational benefits, Peretz first enrolled in Hebrew University. The day he arrived in 1946, the Irgun blew up the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, the British administrative and military headquarters in Palestine, killing 100 people. Peretz recalled that "attempts were made to draft me into the Haganah, which became the basis of the Israeli army, but instead, I became a stringer for NBC news." He ended up reporting on the Arab–Israeli conflict, which erupted in November 1947. He witnessed the mass exodus of the Palestinians who fled their homes in panic or were forced out by the Israeli army.

In 1949, Peretz applied to work with the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers), which the United Nations had selected to provide relief to the Palestinian refugees. He became head of relief work in the city of Acre and western Galilee. Peretz recounted in a conversation with Rosemarie M. Esber that "some people in the Jewish community said, 'How can a Jew be working for the Arabs like that?' He responded, "There had to be accommodation between Jews and Arabs—especially within the borders, if there was ever to be peace." That was not his first experience in field humanitarian work. He had previously worked on a Quaker project in a Mexican village near Veracruz to control malaria and dysentery.

In the 1950s, Peretz accompanied American Socialist leader Norman Thomas on a Mideast tour to visit socialist party leaders throughout the region, with Peretz providing counsel on Jewish affairs. They inquired about the status of Jews in Arab countries wherever they went. They met various Arab leaders, including Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, from whom Peretz later received a Christmas card. Peretz thought it was rare for a Jew to receive a Christmas card from a Muslim.

Dr. Peretz was born in 1922 in Baltimore, Maryland, to Haim Peretz and Josephine Lasser Peretz. He is survived by his wife of 38 years, Maya Peretz, a Holocaust child survivor, by his daughter Debbie Peretz (Marcus Brandt), and sons Jonathan Chance, and Ervin Peretz (Pauline Cooper), grandson Jonah, and cousins Edith and Hanan Schaham. ✕

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Pierre Cachia

1921–2017

Pierre Cachia slipped away peacefully on 1 April 2017, a few days shy of his ninety-sixth birthday, surrounded by his children and grandchildren. With the passing of this key architect of Arabic studies, those of us who have studied and worked with him will not only mourn the loss of a friend, teacher, and mentor, but also the irretrievable era in which a first generation of postwar American and European Arabists and Orientalists made tremendous strides in fashioning academic studies of modern Arabic literature into what it is today: grounded in native fluency of the Arabic language, informed by real experiences lived in close proximity with Arab writers and storytellers, and took seriously the concerns and priorities of Arab scholars, critics, and intellectuals.

Born in Faiyum (Fayyum) on 30 April 1921 to a Maltese father and Russian mother, Pierre grew up in Upper Egypt. He successively attended French, Italian, Egyptian, and American schools before he enrolled at the American University in Cairo, where he earned his BA degree. After war service with the British 8th Army in North Africa, Italy, and Austria, he moved to Scotland. He received his doctorate at the University of Edinburgh in 1951 and joined its faculty. He was appointed Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at Columbia University in 1975 and would remain there until he retired in 1991. However, he continued to teach and write, and in fact he published many of