

Obituary for Prof. Em. Rex Sean O'Fahey

Rex Sean O'Fahey was Emeritus Professor of the History of the Middle East and the Sudan at the University of Bergen. After studying (1962-66) African and Middle Eastern history at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London, he was awarded a doctoral scholarship to write a history of pre-colonial Darfur under the supervision of the late P.M. Holt. In 1967, he took up a lectureship at the University of Khartoum, where he taught for three years (1967-70). After a year at Edinburgh University, he moved to the University of Bergen, where he remained until his retirement in 2013.

Professor O'Fahey was an authority in a History of Durrur sultanate and Sufi brotherhood in the Sudan. The list of his published books includes:

1. (with J.L. Spaulding) *Kingdoms of the Sudan*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1974, ix + 235 pp.
2. (with M.I. Abu Salim) *Land in Dar Fur. Charters and related documents from the Dar Fur Sultanate*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1983, xv + 165 pp. [repr. Paperback]
3. *Enigmatic Saint. Ahmad ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition*. London: Christopher Hurst, 1990, xvii + 261 pp. Transl. by Abu Dharr al-Ghiffari Bashir 'Abd al-Habib, al-Wali al-'alim Ahmad ibn Idris wa'l-madrasat al-Idrisiyya. Khartoum, n.d. [c. 2007], 238. Privately published by the Adarasa [the descendants of Ahmad ibn Idris] of al-Mawrida, Omdurman.
4. *The Writings of Eastern Sudanic Africa*, compiled by O'Fahey et alii, being vol. 1 of the *Arabic Literature of Africa (ALA)*, ed. J.O. Hunwick & R.S. O'Fahey,. Leiden: Brill, 1993, xv + 434.
5. (with Bernd Radtke, John O'Kane & Knut S. Vikør), *The Exoteric Ahmad ibn Idris. A Sufi's critique of the Madhahib & the Wahhabis*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000.
6. *The Writings of the Muslim Peoples of Northeastern Africa*, by O'Fahey et alii, being vol. 3, fascicle A of *ALA*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003, xxii + 174.
7. *The Darfur Sultanate*. London: Christopher Hurst, 2009, xix + 357.
8. *Darfur and the British. A sourcebook*. London: Christopher Hurst, 2016, xi + 347.

O'Fahey's collection at Bergen University

About his private collection, Professor O'Fahey wrote:

Apart from my collection of books and pamphlets (about 2,000 items) and my research, reading and field notes, the bulk of the papers are mimeographs or photographs of originals in private or public collections. These mimeographs, predominantly in Arabic, almost certainly constitute the largest body of indigenous Sudanese material now in a public collection outside the Sudan. They were collected and copied during the course of my professional career (1966-2013). Researchers of my generation who went into African studies in 1960s were usually forced to become their own archivists in the sense of first needing to find the sources, whether written or oral, before they could begin to write. By choosing to write on Darfur in the Sudan, I inadvertently chose a country where the national archives, set up in the early 1950s by my teacher, P.M. Holt, and my mentor in Khartoum, the late Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Salim, Holt's successor as Director of the National Records Office, was a haven for researchers both in terms of sources and not least in encouragement.

Professor O'Fahey died in Oslo on 9 April 2019. His death is a great loss to his students, colleagues, Sudanese studies and academia at large. He was invariably helpful and constructive, and a man of profound knowledge in areas of his specialization. He was a pioneer scholar in Darfur studies. His books and articles, invariably clearly and informatively written, will continue to be consulted and read for a good many years.

Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, Doha