
Recollections of Menahem Max Schiffer

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Max Schiffer was a truly admirable mathematician. Already as an undergraduate at Brown, I read some of his earliest papers about variational methods in conformal mapping. Right after George Springer and I arrived at Harvard to become graduate students there, George discovered Schiffer over in Stefan Bergman's office with Richard von Mises, and he urged me to go introduce myself. I quickly made friends with Max and we started a fruitful collaboration that lasted for twenty years. We soon wrote a joint paper that preceded my Ph.D. thesis, which was stimulated by the activities in Bergman's office. I learned how to write mathematical papers from Schiffer and he taught me his generous outlook on joint work. His advice has guided me through all the remaining phases of my career.

Schiffer's variational method for conformal mapping is one of the most original and effective tools of modern analysis and applied mathematics. The generalizations to fluid dynamics and plasma physics have had a significant effect on computer codes that have turned out to be very successful in those fields. The theory is a delightful combination of complex analysis and partial differential equations. In his work Schiffer made remarkable contributions to both pure and applied mathematics. His good taste in elegant proofs and his solid grasp of mathematical physics were a source of inspiration for those with the good fortune to become his collaborators. His optimism and imagination made it a joy to go explain to him a theorem whenever one had the good luck to find something new.