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INSTITUT FÜR TIBETOLOGIE
UND BUDDHISMUSKUNDE
UNIVERSITÄTSCAMPUS AAKH, HOF 2
SPITALGASSE 2-4, A-1080 WIEN
AUSTRIA, EUROPE

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In memoriam

Sir Harold Walter Bailey

EIVIND KAHRS

Sir Harold Walter Bailey passed away on 11 January 1996. Writing about him is writing about an institution. What is immediately striking about his scholarly life is the timespan and the sheer output. Then there are the myths, and of course the stories. A bibliography compiled when he was 70 lists more than 150 articles and nine books. After that he published extensively for another 25 years.

Sir Harold was born in Wiltshire, England, on 16 December 1899. When he was ten years old his family emigrated to start a new life farming in Western Australia, in the middle of nowhere, 200 miles east of Perth. This was hardly the most encouraging cradle for mastery of philology. There was not even a school in the area. But the young Harold used whatever he could lay his hands on to teach himself. His life might have run a different course had he not had access to a seven volume encyclopaedia, and grammars of French, German, Italian, Spanish, Latin and Greek. He also looked at Bible translations in Arabic, Syriac, Turkish, Persian, and Hindi. And there is the story of how he taught himself Japanese from the newspaper wrappings of imported goods from the local store.

In 1921 he entered Perth University to read Classics — Oriental Studies was of course not available, and took his MA in 1926 with his thesis *A Study of Religion in the Dramas of Euripides*. This was followed in 1927 by a Hackett Studentship – the first to be awarded – to go to Oxford to read Sanskrit, Avestan, and Indo-European comparative philology. Oxford did not acknowledge his Western Australian degree and he had to start over again as an undergraduate. This must have been the turning point of his life, though, and after more than fifty years in Cambridge Sir Harold once said to me “I still consider myself an Oxford man, you know”.

It was the Iranian field which had by now caught his attention, and for the rest of his life he strived to understand the developments of the

Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. In 1929 he became the first lecturer in Iranian Studies at the School of Oriental Studies in London. In the same year he embarked upon the study of a text which possibly occupied his mind more than any other — the *Bundahišn* or 'Primal creation', a kind of encyclopaedia of Zoroastrianism written in the Middle Iranian language Pahlavi. It is mainly a detailed cosmogony and cosmography based on the Zoroastrian scriptures, but it also contains a short history of the legendary Kayanids and Erānšahr in their days. The text is extremely difficult, and the work grew to unmanageable dimensions. In 1933 Sir Harold presented an unfinished version for which he was awarded his Oxford D.Phil. He also discovered that the Danish academic Kaj Barr was working on the same *Bundahišn* material and was preparing to have it published. In a very characteristic manner Harold Bailey generously handed all his material over to Barr, who did not finish it either but saw to it that the material was partly destroyed at his death. What was not destroyed created further havoc in the world of Iranian studies. Sir Harold took up again the study of *Bundahišn* later in life, and finished the monumental work in 1989.

The year 1936 presents another turning point in Harold Bailey's career. He was appointed Professor of Sanskrit in Cambridge, succeeding E.J. Rapson, and became a Fellow of Queen's College, which would be his home until he retired in 1967. Harold Bailey was not really a Sanskritist, but, as Ron Emmerick once remarked, everyone knows Sanskrit, so he continued to pursue his Iranian studies. In 1936 he also gave the Ratanbai Katrak lectures in Oxford, published as a monograph in 1943 under the name *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-century Texts*. This work ranks very high among Sir Harold's many important publications. Together with Walter Bruno Henning's *The Disintegration of the Avestic Studies* and Georg Morgenstierne's *Orthography and Sound-system of the Avesta*, it gave the field of Old and Middle Iranian studies an entirely new direction.

Interrupted to some extent by the Second World War when he had to spend time away from Cambridge to work for the Foreign Office, Harold Bailey nevertheless pursued a new line of work which he had begun already in London and which was to become his main activity for more than thirty years: the deciphering and editing of the vast mass of seventh to tenth century manuscript material in Khotanese, an Iranian language spoken in Central Asia. This constitutes his main contribution

to Buddhist Studies. Between 1900 and 1916 the scholar and explorer Sir Aurel Stein made three expeditions to Central Asia. In May 1907 a Buddhist monk showed him a vast mass of manuscript bundles which had been lying in the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas for more than a thousand years. Stein bought them for what he described as “a sum which made the British Museum chuckle” and brought them back to England. With extraordinary skill and energy Sir Harold transliterated, translated, and wrote articles on Khotanese and the people who spoke it, another monumental work which culminated in the *Dictionary of Khotan Saka* in 1979. When Sir Harold began work on Khotanese, scarcely any of the late Khotanese documents in cursive script had been deciphered. And Sir Harold was fabulously good at reading these cursive documents. He had, of course, considerable practice in reading difficult scripts, notably from his previous work on Pahlavi, which now came in handy. Naturally, errors crept in here and there, but seen as a whole, Harold Bailey’s Khotanese studies represent absolutely brilliant scholarship. Sir Harold was also able to put unrelated, non-Indo-European languages such as Chinese, Tibetan and Turkish to good use in the study of Khotanese, and also acquainted himself with a number of Caucasian languages in search of Iranian loan-words. He did also acquaint himself with languages to read their literature, particularly epics in Armenian, Georgian, and Ossetic.

Some years ago Sir Harold told me that he had started work on Khotanese in the hope that it would shed some light on the difficulties of the *Bundahišn*. He also told me that after more than forty years of Khotanese studies he had found that it had not helped his understanding of the *Bundahišn* at all. Khotanese studies, however, flourished due to the pioneering dictionary, grammar, text editions, translations and articles produced by Sir Harold over the years, and the insights gained from his studies he and others have used to illuminate problems in other Iranian and Indian languages. What was really unique about Sir Harold’s work was that he published the entire Khotanese material. This did not happen in Sogdian, it did not happen in Middle Iranian, and it did not happen in Parthian, where people were and are sitting on material, preventing others from getting access to it. That Harold Bailey transliterated and published everything testifies to the generosity and erudition characteristic of a man fully devoted to true scholarship. He will be remembered as such.