

Indo-Iranian Languages and Peoples

To mark the centenary of the birth of Sir Harold Walter Bailey FBA (1899–1996) a symposium was held at Brooklands House, Cambridge, on 16–18 December 1999. The symposium was planned by Professor Nicholas Sims-Williams FBA, with the sponsorship of the British Academy and the Ancient India and Iran Trust. Dr Elizabeth Tucker, University of Oxford, reports on the event.

Sir Harold Walter Bailey FBA can be described without any risk of exaggeration as one of the most remarkable scholars of the twentieth century. Born in Wiltshire on 16 December 1899, but brought up in Western Australia without formal schooling, he taught himself one language after another, to such good effect as to win the chair of Sanskrit in the University of Cambridge at the age of 36, to become the world's leading expert in Khotanese, the mediaeval Iranian language of the kingdom of Khotan in Chinese Turkestan, and to be knighted for his services to scholarship in 1960. He was a Fellow of the British Academy for over fifty years, from 1944 until his death in 1996 – which is a record! – so it was highly appropriate that the symposium which marked his centenary should be jointly sponsored by the British Academy and the Ancient India and Iran Trust, the educational charity based in Cambridge, which he had helped to set up and to which he had left his prodigious library.



Three birthday cakes, each inscribed with the numeral 100 in the Sogdian language (photograph: R.E. Emmerick)

The three-day symposium, which began with a birthday tea-party and the First Sir Harold Bailey Memorial Lecture, delivered by R.E. Emmerick FBA, brought together 44 participants from the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Russia and the USA. The scheduled sessions at Brooklands House, held in the homely but impressive surroundings of Sir Harold Bailey's library, were interspersed by enthusiastic discussions, to which all those present could contribute. In keeping with Bailey's own publications on Indo-Iranian, the chronological, geographical and linguistic span of the papers was wide, and only a selection can be mentioned here.

James Mallory examined archaeological models that might provide clues about the migrations of Indo-Europeans to Asia, and admitted how difficult it is to identify an 'Indo-Iranian' material culture across so vast an area. His tentative hypothesis was that some Indo-European steppeland tribes had passed through the distinctive Bactria-Margiana/Oxus zone, emerging and moving southwards with the same language, but with a different material culture, social organisation and religion.

The only paper on Sanskrit was Asko Parpola's discussion of how Vedic dialect features may be correlated with the movements of Indo-Aryan tribes during the second and first millennia BC. However, Bailey's Middle Indic interests were strongly represented by three papers on the languages of Buddhism: K.R. Norman FBA on Pali, Oskar von Hinüber on Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, and Richard Salomon on the new materials available for the study of Gāndhārī.

The most archaic Iranian languages present considerable problems, because of the small size of the Old Persian epigraphic corpus, and the transmission of the Avesta via a very defective medieval manuscript tradition. Jost Gippert explained how this manuscript tradition is now being re-evaluated with the aid of present day electronic technology: a digitized database of variant readings can be used to study not only the

interdependence of the manuscripts, but also dialect variation within the corpus, and correspondences between Avestan and Vedic.

The recently retrieved Bactrian documents, dating probably from 342–781 AD, are of outstanding importance for Middle Iranian philology. Nicholas Sims-Williams reported on the linguistic discoveries, and Franz Grenet outlined the history of the Kidarite and Hephthalite kingdoms that encompassed Sogdiana, Bactria, Margiana and NW India during the 5–7th centuries AD.

Alexander Lubotsky used present-day Ossetic evidence to argue that loans from its remote ancestor, a language of the Ancient Scythians, were present in Old Persian and Avestan. Ivan Steblin-Kamenskij discussed the historical position of Wakhi in a most entertaining manner, and proved how Bailey's work is being carried on by distributing a list of 300 Wakhi addenda to Bailey's *Dictionary of Khotan Saka*.

Contributions to this splendidly successful event will be published in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*.

The following extract is taken from R.E. Emmerick's memoir of Harold Bailey, published in the Proceedings of the British Academy volume 101 (see page 29).

Incredible as it may seem, despite the fact that Bailey was publishing books and articles at an enormous rate, it should not be forgotten that he was all the time heavily engaged in teaching, much of it voluntary. Many students of the classical languages who had an interest in comparative philology used to ask him to read Vedic hymns with them, which he did with great enthusiasm, an enthusiasm that made a lasting impression on most of them. I do not know whether it was always so, but by the time I participated in these classes, reading texts with Bailey really meant listening to him etymologise each of the words of the texts successively. Grammar and syntax do not seem to have interested him very much, but sometimes he would talk for hours on the form of a single word. At a speech in Queens' in 1960 he confessed: 'I have talked for ten and a half hours on the problem of one word without approaching the further problem of its meaning.'

Bailey's teaching method was the very reverse of interactive and would no doubt be frowned upon by educationalists, but those with sufficient ability could in this way derive maximum profit from his vast resources of knowledge. Word soon got around that Bailey was a mine of information that he delighted in sharing with students and professors alike. Many who came with a simple question were amazed at the casual way in which he was able to produce from his vast library book after book and article after article that had a bearing on the question.

Bailey did take care of his students' interests. He would not only invite them to tea to meet visiting scholars, but was solicitous of their welfare in general. He was for example concerned about how Ratna Handurukande coming from Ceylon would cope with the cold and kept a thick rug on a chair in case she needed to cover her feet during supervisions. I myself was amused to receive from Bailey a letter dated 31 May 1962, in which he wrote: 'I write just to remind you that the Examination Part I (your two Khotanese Papers) begins on 4 June but suppose you will not overlook it. Best wishes, HW Bailey.'