

OBITUARY

PROFESSOR WALTER SIMON, C.B.E., F.B.A.

Walter Simon died at the age of 87 on 22 February 1981, after a lifetime devoted to the cause of scholarship. In the twenty years that had passed since his retirement he continued to play an active part in academic life, determined, as he once confessed, never to undertake any examining, and anxious to repair deficiencies which he knew to exist in his reading but which remained undetected by his friends. It was in these relaxed times that some of his colleagues learnt to know him best.

Two formative influences affected Simon's professional interests and approach to Asiatic studies; first, the initial training that he had received in romance and classical philology at the University of Berlin (1911–14); and second his work as a librarian, first at Kiel and later at Berlin. It was while he was engaged in such work that he undertook a second occupation, in his spare time. This was the task of studying Chinese language and sinology, which he did at the feet of Otto Franke. In 1926 his old university appointed him lecturer in that subject and he was soon promoted professor (1932). Very shortly afterwards he spent a year as an exchange visitor to the National Library, Peiping, and it was at this time that he had opportunity to make personal contact with scholars such as Yüan T'ung-li and members of the staff of *Academia Sinica*. Obligated to leave Germany shortly after his return to Europe, he was one of those distinguished scholars who were brought to England with the help of the Academic Assistance Council, and whose enforced flight from Hitler's régime served to enrich the British and American intellectual scenes so vividly. In these circumstances Simon served as lecturer, reader, and finally as Professor of Chinese at the School of Oriental and African Studies, until his retirement in 1960.

Volume X of *Asia Major* (New Series) was dedicated as an anniversary volume to mark Simon's 70th birthday, in 1963. The first pages carry a list of over 80 items that derived from his pen, compiled by his old friend Bruno Schindler. A quick glance shows how Simon's devotion to philological questions ran from his earliest publication ("Charakteristik des judenspanischen Dialekts von Saloniki", 1920) to the latest that is mentioned there ("Tibetan *par*, *dpar*, *spar*, and cognate words", 1962); subsequent contributions to *Asia Major* and the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* demonstrate how this interest was maintained to the point of publication until 1980. Latterly, the greater part of his studies was concerned with problems of Tibetan phonology. One of his initial contributions in this field, as early as 1930, had been entitled "Tibetisch—Chinesische Wortgleichungen: ein Versuch".

In addition, many of Simon's articles and reviews were concerned with Chinese philology. Pupils and colleagues recall how an interest in the particles

bih, *wey*, and *erl* first started from questions raised in the classroom and ended as a series of articles, of which the author generously distributed offprints. Perhaps the most outstanding of his published contributions to bibliography lies in *Manchu books in London: a union catalogue*, published in collaboration with H. G. H. Nelson in 1977. From the modest statement of the preface it may be observed that work on this catalogue had been started before 1940; like many other bibliographical lists it passed through a number of vicissitudes before seeing the light of day. In the event the work is a fine and beautiful production, reaching far beyond the author's original intentions, in that it forms a union list of items held in seven libraries. Each entry is annotated, and the catalogue ranks as a pioneer venture and as a permanent contribution to scholarship.

So far from restricting his interests and efforts to the higher reaches of scholarship, Simon saw the need for publications on a different level, so as to meet the growing demands for training in Chinese language. Such demands had been stimulated by the needs of war, and then peace, and Simon's active and enthusiastic response, in collaboration with Evangeline Edwards, was to leave a permanent mark on Chinese language teaching. By recruiting and training a team of assistants and colleagues, both Western and Chinese, Simon showed how spoken and written forms of contemporary Chinese can be taught both as a living language and as part of a scholastic discipline. He insisted that a knowledge of modern Chinese, so far from being merely a tool to be acquired for utilitarian purposes, forms an essential part of a scholar's equipment and an integral element in the continuity of the Chinese tradition.

There resulted a series of textbooks and manuals, written either by Simon himself or with the co-authorship of others, and designed to serve the needs of the time, when opportunities to visit China were rare or non-existent, and when contacts with Chinese individuals were difficult to establish outside the classroom. These books used *Gwoyew Romatzyh* as the medium of romanization, and it was one of Simon's convictions at the time, that this form was likely to instil a readier familiarity with tones and other aspects of pronunciation. As the years passed, he realised that while GR had served a useful purpose, other developments had reduced its potential importance. Of the publications that emerged from this stage of Simon's work, it was perhaps his *Beginners' Chinese-English dictionary of the National Language (Gwoyew)*, in 1947, that brought the most long-lasting benefit to students.

Simon played a major part in the implementation of the Scarborough report, in two ways. First, he was engaged in selecting, advising, and training graduate students in sinological research. Secondly, he built up a complement of university teachers committed to promoting subjects such as Chinese history, art, and archaeology. In these ways he laid the foundations for research programmes of the future; broadened the scope of Chinese studies; and showed how a place must be found for Chinese civilization in a wide range of disciplines.

At the same time that he was organizing courses in modern Chinese, Simon was himself contributing several courses of teaching, one of which concerned bibliography. This was intended for those embarking on research, and matched his continual interest in building up the collections of the British Museum and the School of Oriental and African Studies, where he was often ready to show his pupils how books should be used. At least one junior researcher can recall how the master once came down to the library, then in the basement, and himself mounted a step-ladder to assist a young man to find the edition that was recommended.

Together with Schindler, Simon took a leading part in reviving *Asia Major* when the new series started publication in 1949, and he acted as sole editor from 1965 until its final issue ten years later. Both here and in his advice to the Editorial Board of the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* he was responsible for setting the high professional standards required for publications in sinology. A number of scholars are deeply grateful for the guidance which he provided, often for an author's first *opus*, and for the steadying influence which he exerted over young and perhaps over-enthusiastic reviewers. It may be remarked that a high proportion of Simon's own writings took the form of valuable and constructive reviews, published in these and other journals. The *Bulletin* itself devoted one of its issues to celebrate his 80th birthday.

The public honours that Walter Simon received (FBA 1956; CBE 1961; Royal Asiatic Society gold medal 1977) form some measure of the recognition due to his services. Before his time, British sinology had consisted of the names of a few scholars, and some of the main contributions, such as those of Arthur Waley, had been achieved outside the universities. Following Walter Simon's work and example, Chinese studies found a recognized place in undergraduate courses at a number of seats of learning in Great Britain. His particular gifts lay in combining the approach of a professional philologist and scholar with an appreciation that the main value of Chinese studies lies in their contribution to the humanities. "A training in Chinese ennobles", he once remarked, when taking part at one of the Junior Sinologues' conferences. Here and elsewhere he was always a stimulating companion, whose presence was marked by a wholesome sense of humour and fun. Walter Simon possessed a most endearing personality, whose human touch aroused an immediate response, particularly among the young, and now evokes happy memories.

The following entries (excluding reviews) supplement the list of publications drawn up by Bruno Schindler and published in *Asia Major*, New Series, X, 1963, 1–10. Abbreviations are used as follows:

AM *Asia Major*, New Series

BSOAS *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*

1965

81. "Obituary of Dr. Bruno Schindler", *AM*, XI, 2, 93–100.

1966

82. "Tibetan *nyin-rañs* and *t'o-rañs*", *AM*, XII, 2, 179–84.

1967

83. "The Tibetan particle *re*", *BSOAS*, XXX, 1, 117–26.
84. "Obituary: Arthur Waley", *BSOAS*, XXX, 1, 268–71.

1968

85. "Tibetan *re* in its wider context", *BSOAS*, XXXI, 3, 555–62.

1970

86. "A note on the Tibetan version of the *Karmavibhaṅga* preserved in the MS Kanjur of the British Museum", *BSOAS*, XXXIII, 1, 161–6.

1972

87. "Tibetan *lh-* and *hr-* in alternation with other initial consonantal clusters, or with simple initial *l-* and *r-*", *AM*, XVII, 2, 216–22.
88. "An incomplete copy of a *sūtra* incorporated in the Peking print of the Tibetan Kanjur", *BSOAS*, XXXV, 2, 334–7.

1974

89. "Loss of *l* or *r* in Tibetan initial consonantal clusters", *BSOAS*, XXXVII, 2, 442–5.
90. "Vowel alternation in Tibetan", *AM*, XIX, 1, 86–99.

1975

91. "Tibetan initial clusters of nasals and *r*", *AM*, XIX, 2, 246–51.
92. "Iotization and palatalization in classical Tibetan", *BSOAS*, XXXVIII, 3, 611–14.

1977

93. *Manchu books in London: a union catalogue* (co-author with Howard G. H. Nelson). London, British Museum Publications for the British Library.
94. "Alternation of final vowel with final dental nasal or plosive in Tibetan", *BSOAS*, XL, 1, 51–7.

1979

95. "Tibetan *stes*, *stes-te*, etc., and some of their Sanskrit correspondences", *BSOAS*, XLII, 2, 334–6.

1980

96. "Some Tibetan etymologies of semantic interest", *BSOAS*, XLIII, 1, 132–6.

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