
Obituary

D. N. MacKenzie (8th April 1926–13th Oct. 2001)



D. N. MacKenzie was a scholar of Middle and Modern Iranian languages who has left an impressive body of publications.

He was born in London and brought up in Slough, Windsor and Cambridge. The Second World War was decisive in his life. His mother and sister evacuated to Canada but he stayed with his father. At the age of 17 and a half he volunteered for military service and was shipped to India. There he was involved in the final stages of the fighting in Burma after which his regiment was transferred to Peshawar in the North-West Frontier Province of British India. As a supply officer he was able to immerse himself in Pashto, a difficult Eastern Iranian language which he picked up with ease. This exhilarating experience was to form the basis of his interest in Iranian languages. He was decommissioned before the partition of India and, back in England, decided to study. Since Pashto was not on offer he opted for Persian at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. After completing his three years for a B.A. in 1951 (under Prof. A. K. S. Lambton who deplored his Indian pronunciation of Persian words), M. Boyce introduced him to W. B. Henning who guided him into the study of the Iranian languages and in particular, to Middle Iranian. He married in 1951. In 1953 he completed his 'M.A. in Old and Middle Iranian'. From the autumn of 1954 he and his family spent ten months in Iraqi Kurdistan where he collected the material for his doctoral thesis. His attempt to cover the Kurdish dialects of Turkey failed at the border. At the end of 1955 he became 'Lecturer in Kurdish' at the School of Oriental and African Studies, where he was promoted in 1961 to 'Lecturer in Iranian Studies' and in 1965 to 'Reader'. In 1975 he was appointed to the chair of Oriental Philology in the University of Göttingen where he stayed until retirement in 1994. When his first marriage ended in divorce he married for a second time, in 1981. He divorced again in 1988. After retirement in 1994 he moved to Llanfairpwll in Wales. He underwent two serious operations, one of which impaired his

short-term memory but despite this he recovered his rhythm. After a short illness he died in Bangor on the 13th of October 2001.

His scientific achievements are very wide-ranging. His home ground was Pashto and Kurdish but he gradually extended his scope to cover all the middle Iranian languages except Sakan and the until recently very sparsely represented Bactrian.

His first publications were articles on Kurdish, including one demonstrating (independently of Soviet scholars) gender in the Kurdish *izafet* (1954) and an attempt to locate Kurdish linguistically and geographically within the Iranian language area. His first book, *Kurdish Dialect Studies* in two volumes, 1961 and 1962, the printed version of his doctoral thesis of 1957, is the groundbreaking study of the Kurdish dialects of Iraq. Volume one contains a detailed description of the phonology, morphology and syntax of the language material divided into two main groups; Volume two provides the documentation in the form of extensive texts with translation. In 1960, during a visit to the Soviet Union, he went to some Kurdish villages in Armenia where, as he enjoyed telling, he gave a toast not with the intended *à l'amitié* but *à l'amour* confusing the Kurdish suffixes much to the amusement of his hosts. He later worked on a collection of Kurdish texts given to him by Nikitine. He prepared all the stories for publication but published only one in the *Journal of Kurdish Studies*, I, 1995. He supervised the translation of Bedir Khan and Lescot, *Grammaire kurde (Dialecte kurmandji)* into German by H. Shahidi, published in 1986.

In 1966 he published *The dialect of Awroman*, the study of a Gorani dialect from Iran, based on work with a good informant who he chanced to meet in London!

He published an article on Zaza.

His works on Pashto include *A Catalogue of Pashto manuscripts in the libraries of the British Isles* (jointly with J. F. Blumhardt), 1965, and a translation of poems by a seventeenth-century Pathan warrior poet in *Poems from the divan of Khushâl Khân Khattak*, 1965 as well as various articles on Pashto language and literature. He was also involved as a consultant in W. Heston's project to collect a large body of Pashto material in digitised form.

His 'Notes on the transcription of Pahlavi' 1967 (which is also a review of the text volume of Nyberg's *Manual of Pahlavi*, 1964) set out the criteria for a unified approach to Manichaean and Zoroastrian Middle Persian; his *Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*, 1971 (reprinted with Addenda and Corrigenda 1986), a small, rather modest looking book, provided the details in the form of ca. 4,000 words. The dictionary contrasts in its somewhat stark conciseness with Nyberg's more discursive *Glossary* 1974, but includes much more material and an invaluable English-Pahlavi key. He turned to the Manichaean text *Šābuhragān*, an original work in Middle Persian by the religion's founder, Mani, which he re-edited in two articles in 1979 and 1980. In 1989 he re-edited the four Middle Persian inscriptions of the Zoroastrian High priest Kerdīr. Throughout his career he published articles on Pahlavi topics. He worked on the Bundahišn but apart from an article on 'Zoroastrian astrology in the Bundahišn', 1964, he did not want to publish his edition of this difficult text, as he regarded too many problems as insolvable. He made his English translation available privately to a few scholars. He wrote extensive reviews of Back's, *Die Sassanidischen Staatsinschriften*, and Monchi-Zadeh's, *Die Geschichte Zarer's*. For the Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum he edited the fascicles of Diakonoff and Livshits's work on the Parthian Economic Documents from Nisa (1976-2001) and also published an article on the personal names attested there. He also wrote a few articles on Judaeo-Persian.

His work on Sogdian, an Eastern Middle Iranian language, began with re-edition of the text *The "Sutra of the causes and affects of actions" in Sogdian*, 1970 intended as an introduction to one of the longest Buddhist Sogdian texts. He then re-edited the larger Buddhist Sogdian texts in London in *The Buddhist Sogdian texts of the British Library*, 1976; this book includes additions to *The "Sutra of the causes and affects of actions" in Sogdian* and a corrected reprint of a glossary (first published in 1971) of

Buddhist terminology in Chinese and Sogdian together with the equivalents in Sanskrit (cf. the review by N. Sims-Williams in *IJ* 20, 1978, 256–60). In some articles he dealt with Christian and Manichaean Sogdian texts.

On yet another Eastern Middle Iranian language, Khwarezmian, he produced part of a dictionary from Henning's papers, *A fragment of a Khwarezmian dictionary*, 1971, to which he added an equally large supplement containing the articles to which the cross-references in Henning's articles referred. In 1971 and 1972 in a series of five articles he reviewed in a regrettably caustic manner J. Benzing's edition of the Khwarezmian material in the *Muqaddimat al-Adab*, an Arabic work with extensive Khwarezmian glosses. He published the book *The Khwarezmian element in the Qunyat al-munya*, 1990: This also includes the Arabic text (translated by MacKenzie and H. Amarat) in which the Khwarezmian material was included. Some articles tried to position Khwarezmian within the Iranian languages and dealt with the complex system of suffixes in Khwarezmian. He also reviewed M. Samadi's, *Das chwaremische Verbum*, 1986. A major part of his criticism of Benzing's work was the latter's failure to recognize one and the same word in different spellings. He also attempted to resolve at least some of the difficulties caused by the lack of pointing or the inconsistent pointing of the manuscripts. These difficulties were to dog him in his work on a dictionary of Khwarezmian, to which he devoted himself with long breaks in retirement. The complex nature of the material and his dissatisfaction with some of the work he had already done made it a very time consuming task and one which he, despite great efforts, was not able to complete.

In 1999 C. Cereti and L. Paul edited under the title *Iranica Diversa* a two-volume collection of MacKenzie's articles including corrections and revisions in an appendix. MacKenzie took the opportunity to re-set some articles to make up for misprints in the original publication (e.g. his review of R. Schmitt (ed.), *Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum*, in particular on Humbach's article on Khwarezmian therein) or to allow a better presentation, but in the latter case the actual printing undid this.

MacKenzie was quick to recognize the potential of computers long before the existence of the Personal Computer. With the help of the Computing Centre of the University of London and later of the Gesellschaft für wissenschaftliche Datenverarbeitung of the University in Göttingen he digitized various texts, mainly Pahlavi, Manichaean Western Middle Iranian and, latterly, Kurdish and Zaza. With the help of the Oxford Concordance Program he produced word-in-context concordances of this material. These became an important aid in his own work and in that of a few colleagues. Some of these files are now in the Oxford Text Archive and TITUS and accessible through the internet. When the computer became affordable he worked on the representation of the texts and designed the necessary fonts. The considerable effort required to achieve a 'camera ready' version of a scholarly work did not daunt him and many works, his own as well as those of colleagues, owe their pleasing appearance to his skills.

He was a philologist who with perseverance and the gift of expressing himself absolutely clearly was able to gain and convey his conception of what a text meant. In the vast field of Iranian studies he concentrated on the basic philological work to be done and achieved a great deal in widely different areas. Since he avoided theoretical models, his descriptions have stood the test of time and will continue to be valid. He had a very fine ear and was able to distinguish and reproduce small differences in speech sounds. On the troop ship to India in 1944 he learned Welsh songs from a choir some fellow-soldiers formed and, living in retirement in Wales, could still remember them well.

He discussed over the years with himself and others the advantages of diachronic and synchronic language descriptions and tended towards the synchronic, though the diachronic 'deciphering' of many individual words in the Middle Iranian texts had to remain an important factor. He was a severe judge of his own and others' ideas; equally he was prepared to share his knowledge with everyone and did

this with generosity and humour. In his teaching and in private he was at the same time articulate of his own views and responsive to the views of others.

He was concerned to stay within the boundaries of what to him was knowable. In particular, he was not inclined to discuss or to judge the religious worlds that present themselves in many of the texts he studied. On the other hand, the conciseness of many of his published remarks seems to assume a community of knowledge that was not necessarily available to his readers to the same degree. It may be that the same assumption was behind the reviews he wrote and was responsible for the almost indignant tone in some of them.

He was forthright but he also had the gift of an easy manner which could melt the barriers of formality. Occasionally he showed that his military experience at a young age left a mark on him in terms of self-discipline and an easy but decisive manner when in a group. He was eminently approachable. He welcomed many a visitor to his home. He did not hesitate to go out of his way to help others.

He was treasurer of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* from 1970 to 1995. He became a member of the Commission responsible for guiding the work of the Turfan Study Group ('Turfanforschung') in the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities from its inception in 1994 up to his death. The British Academy elected him a Senior Fellow in 1996.

He was presented with a *Festschrift* for his 65th birthday: *Corolla Iranica*, Papers in honour of Prof. Dr. David Neil MacKenzie, ed. by R. Emmerick, D. Weber, Frankfurt a.M., 1991.

D. Weber is preparing a commemorative volume.

The bibliography of his works in *Corolla Iranica*, 1991, was supplemented in *Iranica Diversa* II, 683-5, which took the list up to 1998.

DESMOND DURKIN MEISTERERNST