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Nicholas Sims-Williams

NICHOLAS JOHN SIMS-WILLIAMS was born on 11 April 1949 in Chatham, the son of Rev. Michael V. S. Sims-Williams and Kathleen née Wenborn, one of a pair of twins and the youngest of five children. After developing an interest in ancient languages and cultures while at Borden Grammar School in Sittingbourne, he was admitted to Trinity Hall, Cambridge to read Oriental Studies. His first interest was in Sanskrit, which was taught by Professor JOHN BROUGH, but students were expected to take a second option and he chose Iranian, which was taught by Dr ILYA GERSHEVITCH. So inspiring was the latter's teaching that he soon found that Iranian had become his main concern. The only other student in GERSHEVITCH's class was URSULA SETON-WATSON, and Nicholas and Ursula got married in 1972, at the end of their course together. After graduating with first class honours, he was awarded a research studentship at Trinity Hall from 1972 to 1975, followed by a Research Fellowship at Gonville and Caius College in 1975. However, he resigned the latter in 1976 to take up a position as lecturer in Iranian Languages at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He became Reader in 1989, Professor of Iranian and Central Asian Languages in 1994 and, after taking early retirement, Research Professor in 2004.

As a student of WALTER B. HENNING, ILYA GERSHEVITCH had been profoundly moulded by the study of the Iranian Turfan texts. It was he who enthused Nicholas for this wide, diverse and largely unexplored field. While reading OLAF HANSEN's 1954 edition of the Christian Sogdian manuscript C2 with his teacher, Nicholas noticed many inaccuracies, misreadings and unsolved problems. So much so, that the need for a new and, in contrast to HANSEN's, complete edition became evident, together with a fresh collation of all its extant fragments. Between 1972 and 1976 Nicholas carried out most of the work on this new edition, for which he was awarded not only a Ph.D. by the University of Cambridge in 1978 but also the Prix Ghirshman of the Institut de France in 1988.

At the time, the surviving fragments of the MS C2 were in the custody of archives located in what were East and West Berlin: the then Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR and the Museum für Indische Kunst of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz in West Berlin (Dahlem). Thus Dr GERSHEVITCH's young, boyish-looking PhD-student became involved in the problems of a city that was divided between the "free" and the "socialist" worlds. He lived in West Berlin, but in order to carry out his work in East Berlin, had to cross the border daily and endure the security checks and interrogations of the DDR border

control officers at Berlin Friedrichstraße. In addition, his archival work also met with obstacles. The West Berlin fragments were secreted in the Museum für Indische Kunst, but were discovered by chance by WERNER SUNDERMANN. When he told Nicholas, the Museum was upset that their secret was out. After the reunification of Germany, however, these fragments were returned to the Academy. The East Berlin texts had been reserved, after the death of W. B. HENNING, to be published by the Academy's own specialist, WERNER SUNDERMANN. The latter, however, quickly recognized that the young iranist was a truly remarkable scholar. Even if he did not always speak them fluently, his understanding of foreign languages was striking. Moreover, in linguistic discussions he combined sound common sense with deep insight into the essence of a problem, and unpretentious modesty with ingenuity. Consequently the Academy made an exception to its rule that unpublished texts are reserved for publication by in-house specialists by giving permission for unpublished fragments associated with published ones (and for already published texts) to be put at the disposal of its visiting scholar. They were even more ready to do this since SIMS-WILLIAMS agreed to publish his text edition in the Academy's own series of *Berliner Turfantexte*. It became vol. XII and appeared in 1985 as *The Christian Sogdian Manuscript C2*. His text edition is unsurpassed and has completely replaced that of HANSEN. Not only that, but SIMS-WILLIAMS included a "Morphological analysis of C2", and this represents a significant step towards the Grammar of Christian Sogdian that still remains to be written.

By the time his edition of C2 appeared, SIMS-WILLIAMS had already published more than forty articles and reviews. They include editions of smaller Sogdian texts, in particular those in the British Library (see below, fn. 20), and, moreover, numerous important articles on Sogdian palaeography, grammar, and lexicon. One would not detract from SIMS-WILLIAMS' other excellent achievements during this early phase of his scholarship by stating that his contributions to Sogdian palaeography and grammar were perhaps the most important ones. They significantly correct and enrich our understanding of the Sogdian language.

Sogdian palaeography and grammar

In his very first publication in 1972, SIMS-WILLIAMS argued that the Buddhist Sogdian preposition which previously had been read *rm* should instead be read 'M. The latter renders Aramaic 'am 'with' and is thus heterographic for Sogdian *δn(n)* 'with'.¹ In other articles he pointed out misleading and unjustifiable inaccuracies that had become customary in the transliteration of Sogdian texts written in Sogdian script. Once put forward, his corrections were so obvious

1 "A Sogdian ideogram." In: BSOAS 35.3 (1972), pp. 614–615.

that one can only be astonished that no one else had suggested them before. For instance, he demonstrated that in word-final position the letter *gimel* (γ) is almost always distinct from *cheth* (x) in the Mug documents and Buddhist manuscripts,² and that in addition initial and medial γ and x are also systematically distinguished in a Manichaean Sogdian manuscript.³ This seemingly trifling observation entirely changed the transliteration system of Sogdian by putting an end to the indiscriminate use of either γ or x for both γ and x . Spellings like γw for xw or $mz'\gamma\gamma$ for $mz'yx$ are no longer acceptable.

In a sophisticated sketch of the representation of the Sogdian sound-system by means of the Sogdian script, he showed that the voiced plosives [b, d, g] are represented by the same letters *pe*, *tau* and *caph* as their voiceless counterparts [p, t, k], but that they normally only occur either in foreign words or as allophones of [p, t, k] after the vocalic nasal [m̄]. By contrast, the letters *beth*, *lamed* and *gimel* are reserved for the voiced fricatives [β, δ, γ], which had developed from the OIr. voiced stops, while use of the letter *daleth* is confined to the ideogram 'D 'to'. Furthermore, he deduced the phonemic status of vowel quantity from the effects of the Rhythmic Law.⁴

In one of his most important contributions to Sogdian grammar, SIMS-WILLIAMS established the phonological basis of the Sogdian Rhythmic Law,⁵ that determining and all-pervading principle of Sogdian phonology and morphology discovered by P. TEDESCO and further elaborated by W.B. HENNING and I. GERSHEVITCH. TEDESCO had noted the morphological effects of the Rhythmic Law, whereby light stems retain a vocalic ending which is lost in heavy stems, while GERSHEVITCH had observed that the position of the stress determines whether word-final syllables are kept or drop off. However, it was not clear as to what made a stem light or heavy. SIMS-WILLIAMS argued against GERSHEVITCH's claim that all light stems were monosyllabic and that there were heavy stems consisting of two short syllables. Moreover, he showed in detail and conclusively (p. 213):

that those heavy syllables previously regarded as containing a short vowel "in position" before a consonant cluster (*xw*, *rC*, *mb*, *nC*) in fact contain a long vowel or diphthong. A heavy syllable may therefore be defined very simply as a syllable which contains a long vowel or diphthong.

2 "Notes on Sogdian palaeography." In: BSOAS 38.1 (1975), pp. 132–139.

3 "Remarks on the Sogdian letters γ and x (with special reference to the orthography of the Sogdian version of the Manichean church-history)." In: W. SUNDERMANN: *Mitteliranische manichäische Texte kirchengeschichtlichen Inhalts*. Berlin 1981 (BTT XI), pp. 194–198.

4 "The Sogdian Sound-System and the Origins of the Uighur Script." In: JA 219 (1981), pp. 347–360.

5 "The Sogdian 'Rhythmic Law'." In: W. SKALMOWSKI/A. VAN TONGERLOO (eds.): *Middle Iranian Studies. Proceedings of the International Symposium organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to the 20th of May 1982*. Leuven 1984 (OLA 16), pp. 203–215.

He thus significantly simplified GERSHEVITCH's complicated and inconsistent description of a heavy syllable by including sequences of short vowel plus *ə*' or *m* into his own definition of long vowels and diphthongs. Having established the phonological basis for the origins of the morphological categories of 'light' (stems which have no long vowel) and 'heavy' stems (those which do have a long vowel or diphthong), he introduced the consequent use of a final hyphen to distinguish light stems (e.g. *wn-* 'to do') from heavy ones (e.g. *wyn* 'to see').⁶

In other articles he examined the far-reaching effects of the Rhythmic Law in the history of Sogdian syntax and inflectional and derivational morphology. For instance, in an investigation of the processes which led to the double system of light and heavy stems in nominal morphology, he argued against the likelihood of TEDESCO and GERSHEVITCH's explanation, according to which the oblique suffix *-ī* was borrowed from the gen.sg. of light stems, because in some Christian Sogdian manuscripts the pointing indicates the vowel-quality *-ī̄* for the oblique suffix, but *-ē̄* for the gen.sg. He proposed instead that the oblique marker results from the regular phonetic development of unstressed *-ya* in the loc.sg.m. (< **-ayā*), loc.sg.f. (< **-āyā*) and gen./abl.sg.f. (< **-āyāh*), and supported his explanation with an analysis of the syntactic function of the relevant forms in folios 30–120 of the MS C2,

a source which is not to be regarded as typical but rather as outstanding for the exceptional clarity and internal consistency of its grammatical system.

His study demonstrates that the oblique suffix *-ī* (< **-ya*) is "well entrenched" in all those syntactic functions where the equivalent light stem ending is *-ya* (< **-yā*), i.e. in the loc.sg. of masc. nouns, the gen.-loc.-abl.sg. of fem. nouns and the gen.-loc.-abl. pl. of masc. and fem. nouns.⁷ Moreover, he surveyed the development of OIr. *-a-*, *-aka-* and *-ā-*, *-ākā-* stems in both Khotanese and Sogdian. Accepting TEDESCO's theory of the loss of intervocalic *-k-*, he proposed a convincing explanation of the origins of the inflection of Sogdian contracted stems.⁸ He noticed that old dual forms had come to be used not only after 'two' but also after higher numbers, and he therefore adopted the term "numerative" for this grammatical category, which exists alongside the singular and plural. In the same article he also put forward an explanation for the plur. suffix *-yšt* which is attached to certain masculine light-stem nouns denoting animals or persons. According to him, the plur. suffix *-yšt* was already formed in OIr. times and is made up of the nom.sg. in **-īš* to which the collective-abstract suffix **-tā-* was attached. Moreover, by comparing Sogd. *wyrqyšt* 'wolves' < **wṛkīš-tā-* directly

6 CLI, p. 181f.

7 "The double system of nominal inflexion in Sogdian." In: TPS 1982, pp. 67–76.

8 "Chotano-Sogdica II: aspects of the development of nominal morphology in Khotanese and Sogdian." In: GH. GNOLI/A. PANAINO (eds.): *Proceedings of the First European Conference of Iranian Studies held in Turin, September 7th–11th, 1987 by the Societas Iranologica Europaea*. Vol. I. Rome 1990 [1991], pp. 275–296.

with Ved. *vykīh*, he retrieved an equivalent for the sigmatic nom.sg. of the Ved. *vykī-* declension not certainly attested elsewhere in Iranian.⁹ In an investigation of some suffixes in the light of the Rhythmic Law, he established the phonological basis for the distribution both of the abstract nominal suffixes *°yāk* and *°yā* (< **°yākā* after light and **°yākā* after heavy stems respectively) and of *°yā* and *°ī* (both < **°yā*).¹⁰

In the Sogdian pronominal system, SIMS-WILLIAMS identified a suppletive system of the ‘second person’ demonstrative pronoun *š-/t-* ‘iste’, which he derives from OIr. **aiša-/ta-*. This system is in addition to that of the ‘first person’ *y-/m-* ‘hic’, *š-/t-* ‘iste’, and ‘third person’ *x-/w-* ‘ille’. He thus demonstrated that Sogdian expresses a three-way deictic contrast involving pronominal stems inherited from Old Iranian and continued in modern East Iranian languages.¹¹

SIMS-WILLIAMS surveyed new formations in the Sogdian verbal system (forms in *-āz*, the middle of the imperfect, the precativ, and the irreal) in the abstract of a congress paper.¹² In one of his more recent studies he presented a new theory of the origin of the Sogdian potentialis in three separate constructions and of its use to express anteriority. Moreover, he proposed a new and convincing etymology for the ending *-ta* in the intransitive and passive potential (both formed with suffix *-ta* and the auxiliary *βw-* ‘to become’) by deriving it from the nom.sg. of the agent noun in *-tar-*, an explanation he strongly supports with evidence for the same construction in Vedic and Avestan, where agent nouns with suffix *-tar-* are likewise combined with the copula *bhū* and often express or imply potentiality.¹³ His contributions to Sogdian syntax include the discovery that the imperfect tense is not negated, except in late texts. He established the rule, previously observed only in Choresmian, that in negative clauses the present indicative or injunctive is used, with or without the enclitic particle *-β(y)*, instead of the imperfect.¹⁴

His chapter “Sogdian” in CLI offers the most up-to-date and comprehensive account of Sogdian grammar.¹⁵ Moreover, he has significantly contributed to the corpus of Sogdian electronic texts on JOST GIPPERT’S TITUS homepage (Thesaurus Indogermanischer Text- und Sprachmaterialien). In all his articles, only some of which are summarized above, SIMS-WILLIAMS has made important

9 “On the Plural and Dual in Sogdian.” In: BSOAS 42 (1979), pp. 337–346.

10 “Some Sogdian denominal abstract suffixes.” In: AcOr 42 (1981 [1982]), pp. 11–19.

11 “The triple system of deixis in Sogdian.” In: TPS 92/1 (1994), pp. 41–53.

12 “The development of the Sogdian verbal system.” In: A. WEZLER/E. HAMMERSCHMIDT (eds.): *Proceedings of the XXXII International Congress for Asian and North African Studies, Hamburg, 25th–30th August 1986*. Stuttgart 1992, p. 205.

13 “The Sogdian potentialis.” In: M. MACUCH/M. MAGGI/W. SUNDERMANN (eds.): *Iranian Languages and Texts from Iran and Turan. Ronald E. Emmerick Memorial Volume*. Wiesbaden 2007 (Iranica 13), pp. 377–386.

14 “On the Historic Present and Injunctive in Sogdian and Choresmian.” In: MSS 56 (1996), pp. 173–189.

15 “Sogdian.” In: CLI, pp. 173–192.

contributions to a general Sogdian grammar which is yet to be written. For this and other reasons it would be valuable to republish his *opera minora* in a thematic order.

Works on other Iranian languages

Alongside these studies of Sogdian, NICHOLAS SIMS-WILLIAMS has contributed to the investigation of other Middle Iranian idioms (especially Khotanese), Old Persian, Avestan and non-Iranian Near-Eastern languages. For instance, he clarified a well-known but corrupt passage in the Avestan Yima-story in Vīdēvdād, chapter 2, by restoring the verb *aiβisuua- as a thematic aorist, and linking it to the nasal-infixed present *sumb(a)- which is continued in Sogd. swmb/swβt- ‘to pierce, bore’.¹⁶ Other examples are his explanations both of the fossilized Manichaean Middle Persian inflectional endings of relationship nouns and of the linking vowels that occur when enclitic pronouns and adverbs are attached to their hosts.¹⁷ Shortly afterwards, SKJÆRVØ’s article “Case in inscriptional Middle Persian, inscriptional Parthian and in the Pahlavi Psalter”¹⁸ showed that the two scholars’ independent researches complemented and confirmed one another in numerous ways.

Many of NICHOLAS SIMS-WILLIAMS’ linguistic discoveries are relevant not only to Iranian but also to Indo-Iranian, indeed Indo-European philology. Examples include the Iranian evidence he retrieved for the sigmatic nom.sg. of the IE *vṛkīb-*declension, see above, and his suggestion that the 2sg. imperative form *trš* (alongside the 3pl. *trš’nt*) in the Rustam fragment points to a heavy stem (< **taršā-*) rather than the light one of the inchoative present (IE **tr̥s-ské/ó-*), which is unattested in Sogdian.¹⁹ The meaning ‘to flee’, which he posits on the basis of the context of P 13.1–2, agrees not only with the evidence of other Iranian languages but also with Greek τρέω ‘to flee from fear, flee away’, e.g. Iliad 11.745 εἰτρεσαν ἄλλυδις ἄλλος ‘they fled one hither, another thither’.

Other Text editions

An outstanding example of his smaller Sogdian text editions is the *editio princeps* of eighteen Sogdian fragments in the British Library.²⁰ This heterogeneous

16 “Avestan suβrā-, Turkish süvre.” In: L. BAZIN/P. ZIEME (eds.): *De Dunbuang a Istanbul. Hommage à James Russell Hamilton*. Turnhout 2001 (Silk Road Studies 5), pp. 329–338.

17 “Notes on Manichaean Middle Persian Morphology.” In: StIr 10 (1981 [1982]), pp. 165–176.

18 StIr 12 (1983), pp. 47–62 and 151–181.

19 IJ 18 (1976), p. 58.

20 IJ 18 (1976), pp. 43–83.

collection includes both the famous epic Rustam fragment (no. 13) and the Zarathustra fragment (no. 4) containing two lines of the Avestan *Aṣəm vohū* prayer in early Sogdian language. His long-standing work on the Sogdian Ancient Letters led to the translation or complete edition of letters 1, 2, 3, and 5.²¹ Of particular historical importance is letter 2, which became the subject of a detailed study by SIMS-WILLIAMS and FRANTZ GRENET, confirming HENNING's dating of the letters to shortly after AD 311.²²

SIMS-WILLIAMS produced the complete and definitive decipherment of the Middle Iranian (mainly Sogdian) inscriptions of the upper Indus valley,²³ contributed decisively to the understanding of the Sogdian fragments from Leningrad (St. Petersburg),²⁴ edited the Middle Iranian fragments in Helsinki²⁵ and, jointly with JAMES HAMILTON, eight Sogdian documents from Dunhuang.²⁶ He also provided reliable and illuminating help to SUNDERMANN and many other colleagues in their editions of various Turfan texts and other works. More could be said, but special prominence should be given to his collaboration with FRANTZ GRENET on the very old Sogdian inscriptions from Kultobe.²⁷

- 21 "The Sogdian Ancient Letters", internet publication under: <http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/sogdlet.html>. Cf. N. SIMS-WILLIAMS: "Towards a new edition of the Sogdian Ancient Letters: Ancient Letter 1." In: É. DE LA VAISSIÈRE/É. TROMBERT (eds.): *Les Sogdiens en Chine*. Paris 2005, pp. 181–193; "The Sogdian Ancient Letter II." In: M. G. SCHMIDT/W. BISANG (eds.): *Philologica et Linguistica. Historia, Pluralitas, Universitas. Festschrift für Helmut Humbach zum 80. Geburtstag am 4. Dezember 2001*. Trier 2001, pp. 267–280; "Sogdian Ancient Letter II." In: A. L. JULIANO/J. A. LERNER: *Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China: Gansu and Ningxia, 4th–7th century*. New York 2001, pp. 47–49; (with F. GRENET and É. DE LA VAISSIÈRE): "The Sogdian Ancient Letter V." In: *Alexander's Legacy in the East: Studies in honor of Paul Bernard*. Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, 1998 [2001] (BAI n.s. 12), pp. 91–104.
- 22 F. GRENET/N. SIMS-WILLIAMS: "The Historical Context of the Sogdian Ancient Letters." In: *Transition Periods in Iranian Ancient History. Actes du symposium de Fribourg-en-Brisgau (22–24 mai 1985)*. Leuven 1987, pp. 101–122.
- 23 *Sogdian and other Iranian Inscriptions of the Upper Indus*. I and II. London 1989 and 1992 (Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, Part II Inscriptions of the Seleucid and Parthian Periods and of Eastern Iran and Central Asia, Vol. III Sogdian).
- 24 "The Sogdian fragments of Leningrad." In: BSOAS 44 (1981), pp. 231–240; "The Sogdian fragments of Leningrad II: Mani at the court of the Shahanshah." In: BAI n.s. 4 (1990), pp. 281–288; "The Sogdian fragments of Leningrad III: fragments of the Xwāstwānīft." In: A. VAN TONGERLOO/S. GIVERSEN (eds.): *Manichaica Selecta. Studies presented to Professor Julian Ries on the occasion of his seventieth birthday*. Louvain 1991, pp. 323–328.
- 25 N. SIMS-WILLIAMS/H. HALÉN: *The Middle Iranian fragments in Sogdian script from the Mannerheim collection*. Helsinki 1980 (StOr 51.13).
- 26 N. SIMS-WILLIAMS/J. HAMILTON: *Documents turco-sogdiens du IX^e–X^e siècle de Touenhouang*. London 1990.
- 27 N. SIMS-WILLIAMS/F. GRENET: "The Sogdian inscriptions of Kultobe." In: *Shygyys* 1 (2006), pp. 95–111; and (with F. GRENET and A. PODUSHKIN): "Les plus anciens monuments de la langue sogdienne: les inscriptions de Kultobe au Kazakhstan." In: CRAI 2007 [2009].

Bactrian

The most exciting development in Iranian studies during the last two decades was doubtless the rediscovery of the language and literature of ancient Bactria, a fortunate by-product of the tragic events in Afghanistan. During the 1990s a number of leather documents with Bactrian writing began to appear in smugglers' markets in Pakistan and soon the trickle became a stream. The largest portion of these were acquired by the London art collector DAVID KHALILI and it was at the suggestion of Professor DAVID BIVAR that the owner showed them to NICHOLAS SIMS-WILLIAMS and eventually entrusted him with their publication.

Prior to the new discoveries, the only really substantial Bactrian texts known to scholars were the inscription from Surkh Khotal, discovered in the 1960s, and the unique Bactrian text in Manichaean script from Turfan. The latter has to this day still not been published (an edition and translation by SIMS-WILLIAMS is forthcoming in the festschrift for WERNER SUNDERMANN), but it had been studied by ILYA GERSHEVITCH, with whom SIMS-WILLIAMS read it while a student. Already in 1989 SIMS-WILLIAMS published a brief sketch of Bactrian in the *Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum*, largely on the basis of the Manichaean text, but also taking into account all the other then available texts, meagre though they were. The new documents from Afghanistan brought with them an enormous increase in the materials for the study of the language and history of Bactria, but at the same time they threw up a huge number of new problems. To begin with, they are written in a Greek-based cursive script that was, to be sure, already partially known from a handful of documents, but which had still not been entirely deciphered. Having first unlocked the secret of the script, SIMS-WILLIAMS set out to unravel the language. A preliminary report on the new documents was published in 1997 in his inaugural lecture at SOAS.²⁸ At about the same time as the leather documents, the important Bactrian inscription of Rabatak from the reign of Kanishka came to light. Jointly with his colleague JOE CRIBB of the British Museum he was awarded the Hirayama prize in 1997 for their work on the decipherment and interpretation of this inscription.²⁹ A first volume of the leather documents was published in 2001³⁰ and a second volume

28 *New light on ancient Afghanistan: the decipherment of Bactrian*. London 1997.

29 N. SIMS-WILLIAMS/J. CRIBB: "A new Bactrian inscription of Kanishka the Great." In: SRAA 4 (1996), pp. 75–142; N. SIMS-WILLIAMS: "Further notes on the Bactrian inscription of Rabatak, with an Appendix on the names of Kujula Kadphises and Vima Taktu in Chinese." In: N. SIMS-WILLIAMS (ed.): *Proceedings of the Third European Conference of Iranian Studies*. Part 1: *Old and Middle Iranian Studies*. Wiesbaden 1998 (Beiträge zur Iranistik 17), pp. 79–92.

30 *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan I: Legal and Economic Documents*. Oxford 2000 [2001] (Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum. Part II: Inscriptions of the Seleucid and Parthian Periods and of Eastern Iran and Central Asia. Vol. III).

in 2007.³¹ Both volumes contain a detailed grammatical sketch of Bactrian and a complete glossary of all the then published documents (in the narrower sense of the word, that is: without the inscriptions and coin legends), with etymologies and comparative material. The grammar and vocabulary in the second (2007) volume incorporate and expand upon those in the first (2001) volume and give thus an up-to-date overview of the language. In February 2009 the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran awarded NICHOLAS SIMS-WILLIAMS the International Book of the Year Prize for his *Bactrian Documents*. As a result of his work Bactrian has now become not only one of the most important Middle Iranian languages, but also one of the best studied and most expertly described of all the pre-modern Iranian languages. Students of Iranian linguistics will henceforth ignore it at their peril.

The significance of the new documents for the history and geography of ancient and early mediaeval Afghanistan has only just begun to be studied, but SIMS-WILLIAMS has already made ground-breaking observations on these matters as well. A study of the month-names and the day-names in the Bactrian documents by SIMS-WILLIAMS, in conjunction with that of the month-names of ‘the people of *Tukharistan’ in one of the tables added to al-Biruni’s *Chronology* by DE BLOIS, has made possible the reconstruction of the Bactrian calendar³², while an examination of the Bactrian documents edited by SIMS-WILLIAMS gave the impetus to a solution of the problem of the Bactrian era by DE BLOIS³³ and thus to a reliable chronological framework for the Bactrian documents and inscriptions. But this is just the beginning of a new epoch in the study of the history of ancient Afghanistan.

Nicholas Sims-Williams as a teacher

Although NICHOLAS SIMS WILLIAMS’ teaching activities at SOAS officially ended in 2004, there are numerous students and colleagues who have been and, metaphorically speaking, still are sitting at his feet in London, Cambridge and many other places throughout the world in order to learn from his immense knowledge of and deep insight into things Iranian and Central Asian, and to benefit from his clear and precise presentation of their subject matter. We could

31 *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan II: Letters and Buddhist Texts*. London 2007 (Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum. Part II: Inscriptions of the Seleucid and Parthian Periods and of Eastern Iran and Central Asia. Vol. III).

32 N. SIMS-WILLIAMS/F. DE BLOIS: “The Bactrian calendar.” In: BAI X (1996 [1998]), pp. 149–165; *idem*: “The Bactrian calendar: new material and new suggestions.” In: D. WEBER (ed.): *Languages of Iran: Past and Present. Iranian studies in memoriam David Neil MacKenzie*. Wiesbaden 2005 (Iranica 8), pp. 185–196.

33 F. DE BLOIS: “Du nouveau sur la chronologie bactrienne post-hellénistique: l’ère de 223/224 ap. J.-C.” In: CRAI 2006 [2008], fasc. II, pp. 991–997.

do no better than quote the words of his distinguished pupil, Professor YUTAKA YOSHIDA of Kyoto, who expresses the indebtedness and gratitude he owes to his teacher in the following words:

The oldest letter I have from Nicholas is dated 26th July 1979, when he sent me his comments on my master's thesis, which I had posted on 20th July, just one week before. The type-written letter (these were the good old days!) comprises five full pages containing his comments on every detail of my not very long paper on the Sogdian infinitives. At that time he was 30 and I was 25. In my letter accompanying the thesis I asked him about the possibility of studying Sogdian at SOAS and his letter ended with "It would give me great pleasure if you were able to come to study in London". It took me two years to finally find a scholarship to study with him.

I learned Sogdian, Khotanese, Old Persian, and Western Middle Iranian from him within no more than two terms during 1981–82. I still remember very well how in the SOAS library he first gave me the photographs of Sogdian manuscripts, subsequently published by Werner Sundermann in his "Kirchengeschichte", and told me to prepare the text and translation. The Sogdian lesson, which lasted a whole afternoon, was given in the library of his house on 38 Parolles Road. As a foreigner I found then and still find it difficult to follow English spoken by mother-tongue speakers, but I could understand his English without difficulty. When I indicated that to him, he was very pleased and told me that he tried very hard to speak English in such a way that I could follow him.

Among the Sogdian texts I read with him were old photographs of two relatively large fragments, which were suspected to belong to the same manuscript. I had discovered them in one of the store houses of Kyoto University and brought them to England so that I might read the difficult text with Nicholas. The provenance of the photographs and the location of the original fragments were unknown. Just before I left England I spent a week in Germany to see more photographs of Sogdian manuscripts preserved in Hamburg. I was also hoping to find out whether the originals of the photographs from Kyoto University were preserved in the Berlin collection. When I shared my plan with Nicholas, he insisted that I should not only search for them but should also pay careful attention to discovering whether there were any additional fragments which could be joined to them.

A few days later I was most excited to find out that the manuscript of the so-called "Job Story" once published by Henning precedes the Kyoto fragments without a gap. I had always suspected that Nicholas, who had also examined the Hamburg photographs, had pretended not to know the fact so that I might be the first to discover it. When reading fragments Nicholas always required me to infer what was lost in the missing part; otherwise one would not be able to piece them together to make larger texts and eventually discover many interesting facts. His edition of C2 is full of such insights and is a masterpiece of Sogdian philology, which no one else could have produced. I also admired him when I found out that all his joinings of the Leningrad fragments published by Ragoza were borne out by the Chinese texts on their reverse which I had a chance to examine; he was not even misled by Ragoza's wrong measurements of the fragments.

It is not possible to fully explain how much I owe him. Even today I send him e-mails from time to time always asking him for help in matters of Sogdian philology. His answers are something like a learned article which I can only cite in my paper. One recent instance is my question about the contents of an unpublished Sogdian fragment belonging to the Otani collection and currently housed in the Lushun Museum. It is a wonderful piece containing the names of Rustam, Senmurgh, Godarz, etc. who are mentioned in sentences like “May you be a brave rider just like brave Rustam!”. On the very same day I received his answer in which he drew my attention to the Vishtasp Yasht. I am very lucky to be of similar age, because I can learn from my teacher even when I become very old!

It is perhaps not out of place to mention here the generous help that Nicholas has often given to so many of his students and colleagues, whether by devising creative schemes to get them employment, or by reading and advising on drafts of their articles and books. His work, for example, in editing the volumes of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum*, far exceeded what is normally required.

General appraisal

Scholarly activity of this intensity is uncommon, and more so since it has gone along with other academic obligations in universities, academies and other scholarly bodies as well as with various private and social engagements. To contribute to the progress of the humanities with such a wealth of publications is due to more than exceptional intellectual capacity. It is also the result of a critical restriction of effort to the essentials and of the patient acquisition of the latter by studying, learning and reflecting.

NICHOLAS SIMS-WILLIAMS was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1988, Corresponding Member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in 1990 and *Associé Étranger* of the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* in 2002. He was Visiting Professor at the *Collège de France* in 1998–1999, at the University of Rome ‘La Sapienza’ in 2001 and, in 1998–2000, at Macquarie University, Sydney, where he was also Adjunct Professor in 2004–2006. He gave the Ehsan Yarshater Distinguished Lectures on Iranian Studies, in which he surveyed the newly discovered Bactrian documents, at Harvard University in 2000. He raised ca. £ 900,000 in total of Government funding for two major research projects (*Manichaean Dictionary* and *Bactrian Chronology*) both of which he directed between 2000 and 2007. He is Member of the *Kommission “Turfanforschung”* of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, vice-president of the Philological Society of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (president 2003–2007), for many years Secretary and from 2002 Chairman of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum*, Chairman of the Linguistics and Philology section of the British Academy (from 2004), British Academy representative to the

Union Académique Internationale (from 2004), Treasurer of the Ancient India and Iran Trust, Cambridge, editor of *Beiträge zur Iranistik* (Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden) and associate editor of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, to which he has contributed numerous articles. He has also been or is serving on the editorial board of several Journals, including the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, *Studia Iranica* and the *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*.

On December 14, 2001 a group of iranists from several countries benefited from another of SIMS-WILLIAMS' many talents. It was the day of a commemoration ceremony in honour of the late RONALD E. EMMERICK in Hamburg. The musical part of the ceremony was written by NICHOLAS SIMS-WILLIAMS as a composition for violin, viola and cello, the three instruments representing the three eminent iranists that we had lost in that particular year: RONALD E. EMMERICK, D. NEIL MACKENZIE and ILYA GERSHEVITCH. The work was later published in *East and West*.³⁴ Those who know Nick well will be aware that music is his favourite leisure time occupation. He enjoys listening to it and his knowledge is immense. He plays the piano and performs in concerts on the French horn, often with Ursula, herself an accomplished oboist, and has written many compositions himself. In addition to "In Memoriam", his published works include a Partita for oboe, cor anglais and bassoon (1993) and a Serenade for ten wind instruments (1997).

It is not the rule that scholars meriting a festschrift receive one at the still youthful age of sixty. We trust, however, that many more colleagues than those who have contributed to this volume agree that it is more than justified to offer these articles to NICHOLAS SIMS-WILLIAMS, the sexagenarian. We regard the fact that so many of Nicholas' colleagues and ex-students consider him worthy of a festschrift at such a young age to be a promising sign that he will continue to enrich our knowledge of philological, linguistic and religious matters in and beyond Iran in numerous ways and for many years to come.

WERNER SUNDERMANN, ALMUT HINTZE and FRANÇOIS DE BLOIS

34 "In Memoriam." In: EW 51 (2001), pp. 423–425.