

## *The Study of Zoroastrianism in Europe and North America*

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With at present only an estimated 120,000 Zoroastrians world wide, one might be tempted to think that Zoroastrianism is taught and studied at only a handful of universities around the world. When looking more closely, however, one discovers that there is a substantial number of academic institutions which cover at least some aspects of the religion. Many scholars working on the topic hold university positions in departments such as Near and Middle Eastern Studies, Indo-European philology and the Comparative Study of Religions. However, when they leave or retire, the new postholder would not necessarily have an interest in Zoroastrianism. Thus, while there have been generations of scholars working on Zoroastrianism, until recently there has been no university post exclusively dedicated to this religion.

by *almut hintze*

In recent years the Zoroastrian willingness to give charitably has benefited the academic study of the religion at various universities, including the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London (SOAS), Claremont Graduate University and Stanford. Moreover, Zoroastrians have endowed lecture series at Oxford (Ratanbai Katrak lectures), Paris (Katrak lectures, which have now lapsed) and SOAS (Dastur Dr Sohrab Hormasji Kutar Memorial Lecture; the funds were raised through the good offices of the World Zoroastrian Organisation). Such contributions from within the community have been warmly welcomed and supported by both academic institutions and individual scholars.

### **1. SOAS**

SOAS has a long-standing history of benefactions by Iranian and Indian Zoroastrians as well as non-Zoroastrians for the study of Zoroastrianism.

1.1. The Parsee Community's lectureship at SOAS  
From 1929 to 1947 the Bombay Zoroastrian community funded a post named the "Parsee Community's Lectureship in Iranian Studies" at SOAS. Sir Harold Walter Bailey was the first postholder and, after taking up the Chair of Sanskrit at Cambridge, he was

succeeded by Walter Bruno Henning. The post seems to have lapsed in 1947 when Henning was promoted to a Readership at SOAS. Since the background of this post is not widely known, details, based on the Annual Reports and the minutes of the Governing Body and Academic Board of SOAS, are provided in what follows.<sup>1</sup>

The Annual Report for the year ending 31 July 1929, p.6 states that:

Thanks to the initiative of the veteran scholar, Dr Modi, funds for a lectureship in Iranian Studies have been provided for a period of five years by the Parsee Community in Bombay. Its title will be "The Parsee Community's Lectureship in Iranian Studies. The Governing Body welcomes the establishment in the School of this important branch of Oriental Studies, for which provision is made nowhere else in this country.

The minutes confirm that Dr J J Modi "was instrumental in procuring a number of the subscriptions promised" and that it was at his suggestion that the title of the lectureship should be "The Parsee Community's Lectureship in Iranian Studies."<sup>2</sup> The lectureship was first instituted for the academic session 1929–30 at a minimum salary of £440 per annum for

five years and the following benefactors had promised contributions for the teaching of Avesta and Pahlavi:

Sir Dorabji Jamsetji Tata (17/11/28) 5 years at £100

Per Dr Modi:

Ratan Tata Charities £100

Bai Ratanbai Edulji Bamji (conditional on the class working well) £ 80

Marwanji Muncherji Cama (if he lives for 5 years) £100

Nowroji Maneckji Wadia Charities £100

Sir Dhunjibhoy Bomanji £100

Total: £580<sup>3</sup>

An Advisory Committee, responsible for the appointment, was formed, and its members were The Director (Sir E Denison Ross), Dr L D Barnett, Sir Wolseley Haig and Professor R L Turner, and the post was advertised. Minute 117 of the Government Body meeting of 11 July 1929 states:

(1) That in accordance with G(overning)B(ody) M(inute) 68 of 31 May, an Advisory Committee of the Academic Board had been appointed to consider and report on applications for the lectureship in Iranian Studies for the session 1929–30 and to report to the Committee of Management; (2) that the Committee of Management had decided that the title of the lectureship should be: – “The Parsee Community’s Lectureship in Iranian Studies;” and (3) that applications could be received up to 1<sup>st</sup> October, one having already been received from a very distinguished scholar.<sup>4</sup>

The minutes of the Government Body meeting held on 24 October 1929 record that:

the Academic Board had considered the Report of the Advisory Committee on the appointment to the Parsee Community’s Lectureship in Iranian Studies and they resolved that the appointment of Mr H W Bailey, MA (Western Australia), BA (Oxon.), as Lecturer in Iranian Studies for the Session 1929–30 provisionally, be approved at a salary of £450, the duties to begin at the earliest possible date.<sup>5</sup>

In the subsequent year 1930–1934 H W Bailey was re-appointed annually to the

post, the account tables in each of the Annual Reports showing the income from donations for the Lectureship as being £580. In the Annual Reports for the years ending 31 July 1935 and 1936 the income for the Lectureship was £400. Moreover, the composition of the group of donors has changed. The Annual Report for the year ending 31 July 1935, p.13 states:

The contributions for the Parsee Community’s Lectureship in Iranian Studies are to be continued for a further period. The School is much pleased that the important work of Dr. H.W. Bailey is thereby enabled to continue, and the School is grateful to the Trustees of the N.M. Wadia Charities, the Trustees of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, the Trustees of the Sir Ratan Tata Charities, and the Parsi Panchayat Trustees, for their generous contributions towards the Lectureship. In connection with these grants the School much appreciates the valuable assistance of His Excellency the Right Honourable Baron Brabourne, Governor of Bombay, Sir Phiroze Sethna, and Mr R P Masani.

When Bailey left SOAS in 1936 to take up the Chair of Sanskrit in the University of Cambridge, W B Henning, who was then working as an editor of the Manichaean Turfan fragments at the Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin, was appointed as his successor. The terms of the appointment were that the salary was dependent on the “Parsee community in Bombay” and was “only guaranteed for one year more” with the prospect of another five years of funding.<sup>6</sup> Like Bailey, Henning was re-appointed on an annual basis, but a document in his personnel file records that in July 1939 the Secretary of the School wrote to inform him of the following:

- The Wadia Trust was to give £100 for the next session
- The Tata Trusts had refused
- There had been no contact with the representatives of the Parsee Panchayat
- Lord Horlech was to approach the Parsee community in general although there was not much hope for success.



Nevertheless at the Heads of Department committee meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1940

Henning's reappointment to the Lectureship was confirmed for three more years (1940–1943), although he was interned as an 'enemy alien' on 12th May 1940 and released within a year. Henning was re-appointed again as the Parsee Lecturer in Iranian Studies from 1<sup>st</sup> October 1943 to 30th September 1946, and was subsequently re-appointed to the post on 13th December 1945 for the three sessions 1946–49. It appears that Henning's post was funded by SOAS to a large extent from 1940–41 and entirely after his promotion to a Readership in Central Asian Studies on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1947. There are no further indications in the records of what became of the Parsee Lectureship and whether funds continued until the end of the 1948–49 session. Subsequently the Parsee Lectureship lapsed. When Henning accepted the professorship at the University of Berkeley in 1961, Mary Boyce, who had been lecturer at SOAS since 1947, succeeded him as Professor of Iranian Studies (retired 1982), and with the appointments of Nicholas Sims-Williams in 1976, Philip Kreyenbroek (at SOAS 1988–96), John R Hinnells (at SOAS 1993–1998) and A D H Bivar, SOAS continued to have a very strong tradition of teaching and research in Iranian Studies and Zoroastrianism.

1.2. The Zartoshty Chair in Zoroastrianism at SOAS  
In the 1990s, a group of scholars at SOAS, especially the late Mary Boyce and John Hinnells, undertook to find ways of endowing a chair in Zoroastrianism at SOAS in order to protect the study of this religion from the vagaries of public funding and economic pressures and thus ensure its teaching and research in perpetuity. Helped by members of the local Zoroastrian community of London, the SOAS scholars joined efforts not only with the brothers Faridoon and Mehraban Zartoshty, the well-known Iranian Zoroastrian philanthropists, but also with an anonymous Iranian benefactor.

Mary Boyce and the Iranian benefactor committed by legacy sums substantial enough to ensure that in due course there

would be an endowed professorial Chair in the subject. Meantime the Zartoshty brothers made a generous donation which allowed teaching to begin in autumn 1998 through a part-time lectureship to which Almut Hintze, then Research Fellow at Clare Hall College, Cambridge, was appointed. At the end of the first trial year the Zartoshty Brothers made another very substantial donation to endow the part-time post in perpetuity and after a further year the School authorities decided to contribute additional funding to raise the Zartoshty lectureship to being a full time one, so that from October 2000 it became possible to take Zoroastrianism at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Subsequently Mr Mehraban Zartoshty, whose brother Faridoon had passed away in 2001, made further substantial donations towards the post's endowment, and after the death of Professor Mary Boyce in 2006 the proceeds from the sale of her estate went into the endowment of this post, together with the contribution of the Iranian benefactor. As a result, SOAS prides itself in having the first endowed position in any western university to be permanently dedicated to the study of Zoroastrianism.

The endowment of the Chair in Zoroastrianism at SOAS is a great example for the fruitful collaboration between an academic institution and members of the Zoroastrian community. Moreover, the Zartoshty Brothers have gifted money to the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe for grants to be made to Zoroastrians to undertake postgraduate study at SOAS, and several Zoroastrian students have already benefited from the Zartoshty scholarships. Excellent relations continue to exist between SOAS and all sectors of the community. At undergraduate level Zoroastrianism can be studied as part of a three-year BA Religions degree or as a "floater" as part of any other undergraduate degree at SOAS. At postgraduate level courses on Zoroastrianism are available to students reading for the one-year MA Religions degree as well as to PhD research students. Moreover, students of all levels are encouraged to study at least

some of the languages of the Zoroastrian tradition, especially Avestan and Pahlavi, but also New Persian and Gujarati, all of which are taught at SOAS. Some of the other Iranian languages, in particular Sogdian, Khotanese, Choresmian, Bactrian, which Professor Nicholas Sims-Williams used to teach, have been available occasionally since his retirement in 2004. His post remaining vacant, an endowed lectureship in Iranian languages would ideally complement the Zartoshty Chair in Zoroastrianism at SOAS and ensure a brilliant future of Iranian Studies which have such an illustrious history at SOAS.

## 2. Claremont Graduate University

In recent years a lectureship in Zoroastrianism has also been established in perpetuity in the School of Religion at Claremont Graduate University, California. The endowment comes from gifts of various donors and was arranged through the Zoroastrian Council, one of eight councils through which the School of Religion cultivates its relationships with religious communities in the region. Dr Jenny Rose currently holds the post as Adjunct Professor and teaches one class a year on Zoroastrian Studies, there being two separate courses, which alternate year by year.

## 3. Stanford University

In addition, Dr Rose is also a Visiting Associate Professor at Stanford University, teaching one class on Zoroastrian Studies to undergraduates through the Department of Religious Studies. There is also a Stanford University Zoroastrian Group that sponsors a Zoroastrian Lecture series, consisting of lectures by individual scholars from different universities around the world.

## 4. Toronto

A Chair in Zoroastrian History was established in 2006 at the University of Toronto at Mississauga. The post, which is fully funded by the University of Toronto, was created at a time when Professor Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi was Chair of the Department of Historical Studies, a transdisciplinary department newly formed

in January 2005 by the merging of Classics, Religion and History. With a view to developing a cohesive History of Religions programme, Professor Tavakoli-Targhi successfully argued that the History of Zoroastrianism provides the “missing link in the historical understanding of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and South and Central Asian Religions.” The post was advertised in 2006 and during the search process the University worked closely with the Zoroastrian community of Toronto, particularly with Ervad Dr Jehan Bagli. The successful candidate, Dr Enrico Raffaelli, was appointed to take up the post on 1 July 2007. He contributes to the undergraduate and doctoral programmes in the History of Religions and the Graduate Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations on the Mississauga Campus and to the doctoral programme in the Graduate Department and Centre for the Study of Religion at the St. George Campus of the University of Toronto. It is hoped that in due course the position in Zoroastrian History will be supplemented with an externally funded position for the teaching of Avestan and Pahlavi. With a very high concentration of Zoroastrians in Toronto, Professor Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi is confident that this remains a realistic goal.

## 5. Other universities where Zoroastrianism can be studied

In addition, there are several other universities where Zoroastrianism is taught by virtue of the post holders' research interests. They include in North America Berkeley (Martin Schwartz), the University of California, Irvine (history and culture of Ancient Persia, Touraj Daryaee), Harvard (Profs Oktor Skjaervo), Columbia University (Center for Iranian Studies), Concordia University, Montreal (Richard Foltz and Mark Hale); in Europe Manchester (Alan Williams), Bergen (Michael Stausberg), Berlin (Maria Macuch), Gottingen (Philip Kreyenbroek), Leiden (Albert de Jong), Paris (Jean Kellens, Philip Huyse, Frantz Grenet and others), Liege (Eric Pirart), Salamanca (Alberto Cantera), Ravenna/Bologna (Antonio Panaino), Rome

(Carlo Cereti, Mauro Maggi), Jerusalem (Shaul Shaked), and other places.

## 6. The Ancient India and Iran Trust, Cambridge

In 1979 a group of five scholars (Sir Harold Walter Bailey, Raymond and Bridget Allchin, Jan and Joanna van Lohuizen) put together their own private funds to purchase 23 Brooklands Avenue in Cambridge, England, a splendid Victorian residence which became the home of the Ancient India and Iran Trust. The Trust, a registered charity, houses a library covering all aspects of ancient India and Iran and includes the collections of H W Bailey and Mary Boyce. It hosts conferences and lectures, offers scholarships to researchers wishing to consult its collections, and is open to anyone interested in the subject areas it covers.

This survey does not lay any claim to being exhaustive. More places where Zoroastrianism is studied could be added and much more could be said about those mentioned above, but I had to be selective due to space limitations. However, I hope it has become clear that Zoroastrianism remains an academic subject that continues to fascinate a vibrant group of students of the finest calibre and that has enjoyed vital financial support from both private and public, Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian sources.

Notes:

1. I would like to thank Kate Harvey, Clerical Assistant to the Directorate at SOAS for her help in accessing and collecting the details provided here.
2. SOAS Government Body Minutes vol.XIII, Oct. 1928–July 1929, p.120 (11 July 1929).
3. SOAS Government Body Minutes vol.XIII, Oct. 1928–July 1929, p.53, Minute 68 (Friday, 31 May 1919).
4. The Governing Body Minutes, vol. XIII, Oct. 1928–July 1929, p.112, Minute 117 (11 July 1929).
5. The Governing Body Minutes, vol.XIV, Oct. 1929 – July 1930, p.6, Minute 17.
6. This is stated in W B Henning's personnel file. The Government Body Minutes of the year 1936–37 record details about the appointment of W B Henning to the Parsee Community's Lectureship in Iranian Studies (pp. 9–10), details of the benefactors donating to the Lectureship for that session (p.21),

confirmation of continuation of the Lectureship for three further sessions, 1936–39 (p.98) and a report on the session's work including details of income, subjects taught, and numbers of students (p.173).



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*Haptanghaiti (2007). She has also published a study of the semantics of words for 'reward' in Vedic and Avestan (2000). Her current projects are an Introduction to Zoroastrianism and an edition, translation, commentary and dictionary of the Avestan Yasna.*

## Wires were crossed -

Apologies are due to Farrokh Vajifdar for inventing a new version of the Avestan dictionary on his behalf, though unintentionally!

I refer to Hamazor Issue 3/2009, p14, "Of Gathalogues and Gathalogistics".

**The Yasna 29.4c should have read:**

hvo vichiro ahuro

atha na anhat

yatha hvo vasat

Thank goodness for British humour & Farrokh who has taken this *faux pas* in his stride! - Ed.