



Three generations of the Zartoshty family graced the dedication of the Zartoshty Brothers Hall. From left, grand-daughter Anahita Jamshidian, Mobed Mehraban Zartoshty and daughter Vida Jamshidian.

## Iranica at SOAS: a Brief History

Origins and development of the world's leading center of Zoroastrian and Iranian studies

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The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) was established in 1916 as a distinct college of the University of London for the learning and research of dead as well as living (both major and lesser known) Oriental and African languages and dialects and their cultures.

Zoroastrianism, within the context of Iranian studies, has been taught here since its earliest days. By Iranian studies or Iranistics I mean the study of pre-Islamic Iran, which was geographically a broad cultural continuum stretching from Iraq to Xinjiang, the westernmost province of the People's Republic of China. Persian studies, on the other hand, deals with the study of medieval and modern Iran and Perso-Islamic culture. Despite a tendency to conflate or denote either one loosely, one must distinguish and periodize Iranian studies from prehistory to the Arab conquest. Programs are offered in both Iranian and Persian studies at SOAS.

Inasmuch as *Ervad Dr. Jamshed Unvala* taught as Lecturer in Iranian Languages and Indo-Germanic Philology in 1921-23, the formal beginnings can be traced to a lectureship funded by the school and partly through Parsi benefaction. *Professor Sir Harold Bailey* served as the first Parsee Community Lecturer as this appointment came to be designated from 1929 until his departure in 1936 for the University of Cambridge. *Walter Bruno Henning*, one of the greatest Iranists of the last century and a protégé of F. C. Andreas of

Zartoshty family" for honoring the ZTFE with their presence. He described Mobed Mehraban as the "greatest living Zoroastrian philanthropist of our times" and promised to make this "the finest Zoroastrian institution in the Western world."

In a moving response, Mobed Mehraban spoke of the tradition of charity that had been inculcated into him and his brother by their father Jamshid. Referring to the vast sums they have donated, he said, "We are simply doing our duty. To give is very easy, to put that donation to good use is a big job." He praised the work of the ZTFE and expressed his fond hope that the new Centre and the Atash Dadgah would soon be commissioned.

Mobed Mehraban made yet another generous pledge: the Zartoshty Family will match pound for pound all other monies raised by ZTFE for the refurbishment of the new Center and the Atash Dadgah building. [From ZTFE Newsletter, June 2001].

### Chair in Zoroastrianism established at SOAS

The School for Oriental and African Studies, London University, in conjunction with ZTFE, organized a Special Lecture in memory of the Late Mobed Faridoon Zartoshty. The lecture, on "Reward and Recompense in Zarathushtra's Message" was delivered by Dr. Almut Hintze, the current Zartoshty Brothers Lecturer at SOAS.

The Zartoshty Brothers Chair in Zoroastrianism has been established at SOAS. ZTFE's past president Rusi Dalal gave a background of Zoroastrian studies at SOAS; the many distinguished academics associated with this subject at SOAS; and how the Chair came to be established – thanks to an endowment of £210,000 by the Zartoshty Brothers. A special memento was presented to Mobed Mehraban by Prof. John Hinnells on behalf of SOAS and ZTFE. It was a memorable event hosted by this most prestigious seat of religious studies.

Göttingen, Germany, then succeeded him as the next Parsee Community Lecturer in 1936 and rapidly rose to a Senior Lecturer (1939-47). Henning left Germany as he would not compromise with the Nazis and because his wife Maria Polotsky (sister of the renowned scholar H. J. Polotsky) was a Jew. With the outbreak of war, SOAS was evacuated to Cambridge and the government interned Henning along with other German residents. *S. H. Taqizadeh*, the Iranian savant and later ambassador to Great Britain also taught during this period.

When the school reopened after the war in London, Henning spent the academic year 1946-47 as Visiting Professor of Indo-Iranian studies at Columbia University, New York. When he returned he was promoted with a change of title to Reader of Central Asian studies in 1947. He was elevated in the same year to a Professor of Central Asian studies, a chair he held until poor health compelled him to move to the University of California, Berkeley in 1961. One of his pupils and the doyenne of Zoroastrian studies, *Mary Boyce*, succeeded him as Professor of Iranian studies from 1963 to 1982. Earlier, Boyce had been a Lecturer (1947-58) and Reader in Iranian studies (1958-63). Another distinguished pupil of Henning is *David Neil MacKenzie* who studied as well as taught at SOAS as Lecturer in Kurdish (1955-61), Lecturer in Iranian Languages (1961-65) and Reader in Iranian Languages (1965-75). MacKenzie subsequently left to become Professor of Iranian studies at his teacher's *alma mater*, the University of Göttingen in 1975.

*A. D. H. Bivar* arrived at SOAS as Lecturer in Central Asian Art and Archaeology (1960-86) and later became Professor of Iranian Studies (1987-92). Bivar's courses in historical geography, art and archaeology, numismatics, and glyptics, enriched a curriculum otherwise solely philological in scope. (Textual and inscriptional remains basically determine the study of ancient Iran and the first

demand made on the student is a linguistic understanding of these sources without which further inquiry is inconceivable.) *Shaul Shaked*, an Iranist and Semitist of rare breadth, was briefly an Assistant Lecturer (1964-65) before returning home to teach at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. *Ronald Emmerick*, today's foremost expert on Khotanese and a student of H. W. Bailey, also was a Lecturer in Iranian studies (1964-67). *John Hinnells*, a name more familiar to Zoroastrians, especially Parsis, first came to SOAS for postgraduate work in 1965-67; he returned in 1993 as Professor of Comparative Religion and to chair

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the newly founded Department for the Study of Religions until his retirement in 1998. *Philip Kreyenbroek*, a former student of Mary Boyce, was appointed as Lecturer in Modern Iranian Languages (1988-93) and then Reader in Iranian Languages and Religions (1993-96). He then left to succeed MacKenzie in Göttingen.

*Nicholas Sims-Williams* and Almut Hintze teach Iranian studies at present. Since 1994, Sims-Williams, the world's leading authority on Bactrian and Sogdian, and the most outstanding pupil of the late *Ilya Gershevitch*, has been Professor of Iranian and Central Asian studies. He had been a Lecturer in Iranian Languages (1976-89) and Reader in Iranian studies (1989-94) before assuming the mantle in this line of succession. *Dr. Almut Hintze* is the Zartoshty Brothers Lecturer in Zoroastrianism at SOAS since September 2000. A newly endowed position, it was

established thanks to the munificence of two outstanding Zoroastrian philanthropists, Mehraban Zartoshty and his recently departed brother Faridoon. Two anonymous donors have also bequeathed by legacy sums that will eventually upgrade the lectureship to that of a chair in professorial capacity. Prior to her appointment, Hintze, who had studied at Oxford, Erlangen and Berlin, and is an acclaimed Indo-Iranist of the German tradition, had taught as a Visiting Lecturer in Zoroastrian studies (1998-2000). Visiting scholars in the past have also been *Jes Asmussen*, *Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin*, *Desmond Durkin-Meisterer*, and *Samuel Lieu*.

A range of Old, Middle and New Iranian languages are taught at SOAS: Old Persian, Avestan, Parthian, Pahlavi, Manichean Middle Persian and Parthian, Sogdian, Bactrian, Khotanese, Persian, Kurdish, Pashto, and Baluchi. Courses in Zoroastrianism currently available at the undergraduate and postgraduate level are: “Zoroastrian Set Texts (Avestan)”, “Zoroastrian Set Texts (Pahlavi)”, “Zoroastrianism in the Ancient and Modern Worlds”, “Text and Context in Zoroastrianism”, “Zoroastrianism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives”, and “Zoroastrian Literature in Translation”. Instruction in Sanskrit and Gujarati has been available for well over half a century at SOAS too should the student choose to focus on Parsi literature and history.

The list of those who have studied either full or part time at SOAS certainly reads as a who's who in Iranian scholarship: *Mary Boyce*, *Christopher Brunner*, *Carlo Cereti*, *N. K. Chegini*, *Vesta Curtis*, *Almut Degener*, *Richard Frye*, the late *Ilya Gershevitch*, *Georgina Herrmann*, *Mahmoud Jaafari-Dehaghi*, *John Hinnells*, *D. N. MacKenzie*, the late *Mahyar Navabi*, *Jenny Rose*, *James Russell*, *D. Sarkarati*, *A. Shapur Shahbazi*, *Shaul Shaked*, *Sarah Stewart*, the late *Ahmad Tafazzoli*, *Alan Williams*, *Y. Yamamoto*, *Ehsan Yarshater*, and *Yutaka Yoshida*.

Three Parsi-Zoroastrians can also be counted among SOAS alumni: *Dastur Hormazdyar Mirza* and the late *Ervad Peshotan Anklesaria* who received doctorates under W. B. Henning in 1942 and 1958 respectively; and *Dastur Firoze Kotwal*, a postdoctoral research fellow under Mary Boyce in 1966-67 and temporary Lecturer in Zoroastrian rituals in 1973.

Links between SOAS and the Americas are also long-standing. While *Frye* and *Russell* of Harvard and *Yarshater* of Columbia were at SOAS, *Martin Schwartz* studied at Berkeley under Henning, and after the latter's untimely demise, by correspondence with Ilya Gershevitch, Henning's oldest SOAS student.

Thanks to the Zartoshty brothers, SOAS is now the only institution in the world where the first ever post in Zoroastrian studies exists. Under the aegis of the *Zartoshty Brothers Fund*, extremely generous bequests have also been made to the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute and the Bombay Parsee Punchayet Trust Funds and Properties. It is now possible for the former to reprint rare works on Zoroastrianism and the latter to offer scholarships and sponsor popular lectures on religious topics across India for the laity.

Another first at SOAS is the inauguration of the *Faridoon Zartoshty Memorial Lecture* series in May 2001. This complements the annual *Dastur Sohrab Kutar Memorial Lecture* instituted at the school in 1998 by Dr. Shirinbanoo Kutar in memory of her husband and High Priest of the British community. Both these endowments now make it possible to invite leading Iranists to deliver public lectures at SOAS on a topic pertaining to Zoroastrianism.

That all this has come to fruit is doubtless due to the solid foundation that had already been laid since the last century. At a time when Iranistics both in terms of funding and numbers languishes around the world—especially the U.S. where the disparity between abundant

### *To the Zarathushtis of USA and Canada,*

Speakers at North American Congresses since the early 1970s, and in various newsletters, have called for the establishment of a post in Zoroastrian Studies at a major university. Such a post has now been established at the School of Oriental and African Studies, a college of the University of London with a high international reputation. Two anonymous benefactors have willed legacies substantial enough for an endowed professorial Chair to be established there in due course. In order to enable teaching and research to begin at once, the Zartoshty brothers made a generous donation, which has been supplemented by SOAS itself. Dr Almut Hintze was appointed the Zartoshty Brothers Lecturer in the summer of 2000, and she has started courses at undergraduate and graduate level. SOAS is an appropriate place for this unique post, because of the range of scholarship among its faculty members, its outstanding library and the proximity of other libraries such as the British Library with its records from the old India Office. London is also the base of the oldest Zoroastrian diaspora association, namely the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE), and SOAS has a long tradition of working together with Zoroastrians from both India and Iran.

What we are now seeking to do is to raise funds to enable Zarathushtis, as well as non-Zarathushtis, to study their noble religion, at whatever level is appropriate. All donations to the Zoroastrian Studies Fund are being recorded in a book of donors held at SOAS. Large donations may have a named Scholarship. Those making donations in North America may wish to know that the US-based CAF America can accept donations on behalf of SOAS, which will then be tax deductible for US citizens. Details can be obtained from Professor Brian Bocking (Study of Religions, SOAS, Thornhaugh St., Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG) or a gift form can be obtained directly from CAF America, King Street Station, 18000 Diagonal Road, Suite 150, Alexandria, VA 22314-2840.

FEZANA policies and newsletters have frequently given priority to the importance of a good education in Zoroastrian Studies for the younger generation if they are to withstand the pressures of the melting pot and of wider society in the New World. How can the young preserve their identity if they do not have a good basic knowledge of the history and traditions of their community? The courses offered at SOAS can make a valuable contribution to the task of handing on the Zarathushti heritage through imparting knowledge and scholarly training both to future teachers and to those simply wishing to learn. The qualifications which can be obtained there range from one-year certificates to doctoral degrees. Details of course options can be had from Dr Almut Hintze at SOAS. We hope that some of the Zarathushti associations in USA and Canada will follow the example of ZTFE in promising support for any of their members accepted for such studies at SOAS.

**John Hinnells**

*On behalf of the Zartoshty Brothers Lectureship Committee*

resources and stark reality is lamentable—it is heartening to note that this heritage of learning in Iranistics at SOAS simply never did and still does not exist elsewhere. ■

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