



BEČKA, JIŘI

BEČKA, JIŘI (b. Prague, 16 October 1915; d. Prague, 21 December 2004), a noted Czech scholar of Iran, Afghanistan, and particularly, Tajikistan. He began his studies at Charles University, Prague, in 1936, enrolling at the faculty of law while at the same time attending courses in Persian, Arabic, and Turkish at the faculty of philosophy under such eminent teachers as Jan Rypka and Felix Tauer. The Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia during World War II interrupted his studies, but soon after the war, in 1945, he graduated from the faculty of law. From 1947 to 1952 he was secretary of the philosophical faculty at Charles University. From 1952 he worked as the chief librarian and later on as researcher at the Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. In his studies he concentrated on aspects of oriental literature, especially on those of Iran, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan, and in time won universal acclaim as an authority on Tajik culture.

In 1954 he graduated from the philosophical faculty, having presented a thesis on “*Margi sudkhūr* (The Death of the Usurer) by Sadriddin Ayni – an Image of the Central Asian Society at the end of the 19th and the Beginning of the 20th Century.” The CSc (Candidate of Sciences, a second degree equivalent to the German *doctor habilitatus*) was conferred on him in 1960 for his scholarly work, *The History of Tajik Literature*. It was later translated into Persian as *Adabiyāt-e fārsi dar Tājikestān*, (Tehran, 1994). From 1959 to 1964 he was the chief editor of the journal *Novy Orient* (The New Orient), and between 1960 and 1968 he was a member of the editorial board of the “*New Orient Bimonthly*.” In 1990, after the downfall of the communist regime in



Czechoslovakia, he became a member of the editorial board of the Czech scholarly journal *Archív Orientānī* (*ArOr*).

He visited Tajikistan in 1958 and Afghanistan in 1963 in relation to his scholarly research. During the political upheavals of the “Prague Spring” of 1968, he withdrew from his official functions but continued his studies on the history of the literature and languages of eastern Iranian lands. He attended scholarly conferences and congresses in Moscow, Dushanbe, Alma Ata, Ashkhabad, Tehran, Shiraz, Kabul, Berlin, Bamberg and Paris. He was a member of the *Societas Iranologica Europaea* from 1987, and of the Commission for the Study of Central Asia (UNESCO).

After the foundation of the Independent Republics (former Soviet Republics) in Central Asia, he published articles on their ongoing cultural issues, including “Zentralasien im Umbruch: aktuelle kulturelle Entwicklungen in Tadschikistan,” *ArOr* 62, 1994, pp. 140-53, and “Literature and men of letters in Tajikistan,” *Journal of Turkish Studies* 18, 1994, pp. 25-40 (special issue in honor of Annemarie Schimmel). In recognition of his work on Afghan literature and languages (Dari and Pashto), in 1963 he was elected an honorary member of the Institut Linguistique d’Afghanistan. In recognition of his scholarly contributions to Tajik culture he was awarded the Mirzo Tursunzoda Prize in 1989.

Jiři Bečka’s scholarly interests extended far beyond the field of literature and included such topics as linguistics and the history of oriental scholarship in Czechoslovakia. The list of items in his bibliography from 1943-2003 contain 1,058 items and attest to the wide range of subjects that he covered in books, articles, reviews, and translations in several international academic journals. In the last years of his life he was active in the “Society for promoting cultural ties between the Czech Republic, Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan” (*Anjoman-e dusti-ye Āek-o Irāniān, Afġānhā wa Tājikān*), and from 1998, together with J. Panzovā and R. Mirchī, he edited the small magazine *Bustān* which published articles on cultural and literary topics related to Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, with translations of poetry. One of his last contributions in English was a short biographical entry on his late colleague [Adēla Křikavovā](#) for the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

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Major works by Jiří Bečka.

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Other works.

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(Manfred Lorenz)

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