



GHILAIN, ANTOINE

GHILAIN, Antoine (b. 25 January 1901 in Petit-Rœulx-les-Braine, Hainaut, Belgium; d. 1 April 1947 in Arquennes, Hainaut, Belgium), Roman-Catholic priest, secondary school teacher of Latin and Greek, scholar of Manicheism, and pioneer of Parthian linguistics ([FIGURE 1](#)).

Ghilain was born in a hamlet in Wallonia, the French-speaking region of Belgium. After his education at the secondary school of Saint Vincent in Soignies, Hainaut, he attended the Roman Catholic seminaries of Bonne-Espérance, near Binche, Hainaut, and Tournai, Hainaut, to study philosophy and theology, and in 1924 he was ordained and received holy orders. As was customary, the Church sent the young priest to the Belgian Catholic University of Leuven (Université Catholique de Louvain) to obtain a teaching license as secondary school teacher of Latin and Greek, and in 1926 Ghilain was advanced to *candidatus philologiae classicae*. Ghilain taught advanced Latin and Greek at the Roman-Catholic secondary school Institut Saint-Joseph in La Louvière, Hainaut, until 1946 when he was released from this post.

In addition to his demanding teaching responsibilities, Ghilain continued with his academic work at the University of Leuven. The commitment documents his intellectual stamina and iron will, as he had to travel by train between La Louvière and Leuven, even in the dark days of World War II when Belgium was under German occupation. In 1931, he obtained his M.A. in Oriental studies (*licentiatus philologiae orientaliae*) with high marks. He completed his doctorate in Oriental philology and history in 1939, and in 1942 he was appointed lecturer (*maître de conférences*) of Avestan, Pahlavi, and Manichean



studies. Ghilain enjoyed geometry and poetry in his spare time, and according to contemporary accounts, his lectures combined precision with eloquence.

The famous biblical scholars Monsignor Louis-Théophile Lefort (1879-1959) and Lucien Cerfaux (1883-1968) had introduced Ghilain to Manicheism, and subsequently Ghilain visited [Walter Bruno Henning](#) (1908-67) in Göttingen and Berlin and, after 1936, in London. After finishing his M.A., Ghilain dedicated himself to Iranian studies because he was enthralled by the discovery of new Middle Iranian languages as well as by the Manichean documents in Chinese Turkestan. He assisted Henning with the preparation of the indices for the third volume of Andreas' *Mitteliranische Manichaica aus Chinesisch-Turkestan* (1934). Ghilain also prepared an index for Henning's dissertation on the Turfan fragments (defended in Göttingen in December 1930, and published in 1933); this index was published separately in 1937.

Ghilain conceived his own dissertation as the Parthian counterpart to Henning's dissertation. His *Essai sur la langue parthe* (1939) was inspired by [Emile Benveniste](#) (1902-76), and documents his ambition to contribute groundbreaking research to the field of Iranian studies. In the introduction he described an enhanced classification of the Parthian textual material, discerning two periods: the living language of the 3rd and 4th centuries, and the dead language used in the Manichean church in Chinese Turkistan after 600. Since Henning had supplied Ghilain with a number of hitherto unpublished testimonies, his study is quite exhaustive, and only a few verbal forms have escaped his attention. Ghilain considered his description of the Parthian language within a comparative historical framework as part of a future Parthian grammar, which his untimely death prevented him from writing. His dissertation was immediately received as a prominent contribution to Iranian historical grammar, and in 1940 Henning published a positive review, recording just a few mistakes, omissions, and emendations. The valuable book still occupies a unique place in Parthian grammatical studies, and will continue to serve as an indispensable reference tool until the future publication of a complete Parthian grammar. (In 1967, Wojciech Skalmowski published an article on the noun in Parthian, which is still the only study of the subject, and an important lexicographical tool for Manichean Middle Persian and Parthian, compiled by Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, was published in 2004).

Ghilain had told his younger colleague Gérard Garitte (1914-92), a specialist of the church in Georgia, that the fundamental objective of his secular



publications was to understand the history of early Christianity. As a genuine linguist, Ghilain argued that only the meticulous analysis of the grammatical and lexical material could direct the historian of religion to the accurate study of the Manichean system. He applied this approach to the Middle Persian fragments M473a and M473b, and published the results in the article “Un feuillet manichéen” (1946). [Friedrich Carl Andreas](#) (1846-1930;), [Abraham V. W. Jackson](#) (1862-1937), and [Friedrich W. K. Müller](#) (1863-1930) had already studied these Manichean fragments, but Ghilain was the first to recognize that M473b must precede M473a.

In 1946, his ascetic lifestyle, in combination with his dual responsibilities as schoolteacher and university lecturer, finally took their toll. Ghilain’s health deteriorated to the point that he became bedridden in late December 1946. Since he had been released from his teaching duties at the secondary school, he was appointed assistant parish priest in Arquenes, a village in Hainaut. But Ghilain passed away during the last days of his sick leave, on 1 April 1947, a few days before Easter.

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