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JACKSON, ABRAHAM VALENTINE WILLIAMS

JACKSON, **ABRAHAM VALENTINE WILLIAMS** (b. New York City, 9 February 1862; d. New York City, 8 August 1937; FIGURE 1, FIGURE 2), pioneer of Iranian studies in America and prominent Iranist for half a century, twice president of the American Oriental Society, honorary president of the American Institute for Persian Art and Archaeology, and honorary member of the Royal Asiatic Society and of the Société Asiatique; he was honored by the king of Persia with the decoration (*nešān*) of the lion and the sun (see DECORATIONS) and was recipient of an honorary degree from Dār al-Fonun, Tehran. He married twice, Dora Ritter in 1889 (d. 1909), and Kate Brigham in 1911; he had no children.

Biography

Jackson was born into an old New York family and was given the name of his maternal grandfather, Abraham Valentine Williams, former president of the Board of Aldermen of New York City. Jackson attended both public and private schools in the city and, in 1879, he entered Columbia College as a freshman, marking the beginning of a long and productive academic career, during which, to the time of his death, he never left Columbia University, save for numerous trips abroad. He studied Classics as an undergraduate, but he also developed a lively interest in comparative philology and studied Anglo-Saxon, Persian, and Sanskrit, the latter under Edward Delaven Perry (d. 1938). Together with other upperclassmen, he also organized a lecture series on

"Comparative Philology," a subject to which he was to return later in life in his 1908 pamphlet entitled "Philology." He began the study of Sanskrit in his senior year in college and, inspired by Perry, continued his graduate study after receiving the bachelor's degree with honors at the top of his class in 1883. Following a path trod by many, the study of Sanskrit led him to Avestan (q.v.), taught for the first time in America by E. Washburn Hopkins. His graduate career was short, as he went from A.M. (1884) to L.H.D. (doctor of humane letters; 1885) to doctor of philosophy (1886) in two years. In 1904 he received the honorary LL.D. (doctor of laws) from Columbia University.

A year after receiving the doctor of philosophy, Jackson was employed for a year at Columbia as an Assistant in Anglo-Saxon and Instructor in Indo-Iranian language. A personal and unsolicited letter from the Harvard Sanskritist, Charles Rockwell Lanman, to the president of Columbia, recommending that the young Jackson be sent to Germany to deepen his knowledge, resulted in the granting of leave from the university to spend a year and a half at Halle, Germany, where he studied Avestan and Sanskrit with Karl Friedrich Geldner (q.v.), Sanskrit and Prakrit with Richard Pischel, and Anglo-Saxon with Eduard Sievers, and in the summers of 1891 and 1892 again with Geldner in Berlin. It was Geldner whom he particularly always regarded both as a guru and a friend. At a time when there was disagreement among Sanskritists over the value of native traditions in the interpretation of Sanskrit texts, Geldner and Pischel carried the banner of "Indien für die Inder." Their influence is evident in the importance that Jackson attached to understanding and valuing native Iranian traditions, as seen especially in his *Zoroaster*, his several extended journeys to Persia and India, and his two travel books, *Persia Past and Present* and *From Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam*.

Jackson's appointment in 1891 as Adjunct Professor of English is testimony both to his breadth of learning and to an attitude toward disciplinary boundaries different from that prevailing in America a century later. A heavy teaching load, as much as twenty hours per week, forced him to pursue his researches late into the night, as he had done as a student (cf. Jackson, 1931, pp. 151-52, and Haas, p. 242). The year 1895 marked his appointment as professor and head of the new Department of Indo-Iranian Languages and Literatures, and the Oriental studies component of his teaching began to outweigh English literature (Jackson, 1931, p. 155).

Although he was born and raised, went to college and graduate school, and

taught all his life in New York, Jackson was no stay-at-home. Beyond his early years studying in Germany and frequent trips to Europe to attend international conferences, the spirit of scientific curiosity and adventure led him to Persia and India on seven separate journeys between 1901 and 1926. The first of these was to India, where he established lifelong contacts with members of the Parsi community there. The most arduous and adventurous of his travels came in 1903 in an extensive tour of Persia and Central Asia, an account of which was given in his *Persia, Past and Present* (1906). That trip was followed by two more trips in 1907 and 1910. The latter two were woven together to form the narrative of his *From Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam* (1911). He returned to India in 1911. He returned to Persia in 1918-19 as a member of the American-Persian Relief Commission to Persia at the time of World War I, eventually traveling around the world. In 1926 he made his final journey to Persia and India. In his last three trips he enjoyed the company of his wife.

Jackson was afflicted by a severe illness in the summer of 1931 which made him unable to engage in extensive travel and generally forced him to limit his activities. In 1935 he retired to become Professor Emeritus in Residence, in recognition of his ongoing scholarship and involvement with Columbia. He died on 8 August 1937 before he could complete a second book on Manicheism. Reminiscences of those who knew him paint a picture of a great gentleman, always impeccably dressed, a humane yet demanding teacher, whose fair judgment was revered throughout the university. He avoided writing book reviews out of a gentleman's respect for colleagues and desire not to provoke acrimonious controversy. A former student and later editor of the *Columbia University Quarterly* recalled a lecture that Jackson gave to a student group, The King's Crown. Doubtful that this old philologist would have anything interesting to say to a cross-section of undergraduates, they were won over "when we discovered that the most disreputable and untrustworthy looking of the caravan shown in the lantern slides was none other than our professor himself" (Bakhmeteff, p. 181).

Works

Between 1888 and 1893 Jackson published two short monographs and two books dealing with the Avestan language and literature, all with the publisher Kohlhammer who possessed the elegant Avestan fonts used in the Niel Westergaard and later the Geldner editions of the Avesta. These works, especially the *Reader* (1893), used the original script to a far greater extent

than in subsequent scholarly works to the present. The first (1888) is a study of *Yasna* 31, which presents the text in Avestan script with a translation on opposite pages. The philological notes have transliterated verses at the head of the commentaries of the individual verses. The provisional system of transliteration employed here was to be significantly revised in his short monograph on the Avestan alphabet (1890), the latter then providing the model for his *Avestan Grammar* (1892) and *Reader* (1893). More on Avestan was planned. The *Avestan Grammar* was published as Part I, and in his preface (p. x) he stated that a second volume, Part II, which would contain "a sketch of the syntax, with a chapter also on Metre, is already half in print and is shortly to appear." Unfortunately this was never published. Further, Montgomery Schuyler, in the preface to his publication of an index to the Avestan fragments mentions "the Avestan dictionary which Professors Geldner and Jackson are to make" (p. ix). With the appearance, first of Christian Bartholomae's comprehensive grammar of Avestan and Old Iranian in the *Grundriss* (1895), then of his *Wörterbuch* (1904; see BARTHOLOMAE), the dictionary project was, apparently, abandoned. Extensive marginalia in Jackson's copy of Ferdinand Justi's *Handbuch* (in the possession of the present author) point to such a lexicographical undertaking. It may well be that the imminent publication of Bartholomae's grammar caused the cancellation of Jackson's *Avestan Grammar*, Part II. Although Bartholomae's transliteration system became the standard in the field and remained so until the recent revisions of Karl Hoffmann (1989, q.v.), Jackson's remarks on the Avestan alphabet are significant for the history of Avestan studies. Particularly interesting is the table showing sixteen different scholarly systems of transliteration going back to Anquetil du Perron (q.v.). Jackson himself had gone over to Bartholomae's system in his *Zoroaster* (1898).

As a student of Sanskrit under Edward Perry, Jackson was certainly familiar with the latter's *Sanskrit Primer*, as have been many generations of American Sanskritists; yet it was the example of William Dwight Whitney's *Sanskrit Grammar* and Charles Rockwell Lanman's *Sanskrit Reader* that provided the models for Jackson's *Grammar* and *Reader*. It is clear from the plan of the *Grammar* that Jackson had as his objective a comprehensive reference work, like Whitney's, that would be accessible to students taking their first steps in Avestan. To this pedagogical end, he relegated matters of philological detail that need not burden the beginner to small print. As its subtitle declares, the *Grammar* presupposes that the user has a basic knowledge of Sanskrit and employs Sanskrit as the constant frame of reference for much of Avestan

grammar. While this approach risks giving the impression that Avestan is a peculiar form of Sanskrit, the pedagogical advantage is superior over Hans Reichelt's *Elementarbuch*. The thirty-three page Introduction provides sufficient cultural and linguistic background to show that Avestan is a thoroughly Iranian vehicle of cultural expression.

In a way, Jackson's works on Avestan have been the victims of history. First, Bartholomae's grammatical chapters in the *Grundriss* and then his *Wörterbuch*, as they became standards in the field, marginalized Jackson's works. Later, after the publication of Hans Reichelt's *Awestisches Elementarbuch* (1910) and later of his *Avesta Reader*, Jackson's contributions seemed all the more outmoded. Nevertheless, Jackson's *Grammar* has maintained its usefulness not only for those unable to read German, but also for the vast majority of students who come to Avestan through the prior study of Sanskrit.

The most important book of Jackson perhaps was *Zoroaster, the Prophet of Ancient Iran* (1898). As suggested above, Jackson was not among those who belittled indigenous traditions, nor did he embrace positivistic historiography. Not so naive as to believe in the fabulous accounts contained in traditional sources and in Classical and Arabic histories, he had, nevertheless, an abiding faith in basic historicity of these sources. As he put it: "This mass of Zoroastrian patristic literature [recently translated by West in the series SBE] tends largely to substantiate much that was formerly regarded as somewhat legendary or uncertain. This has resulted in placing the actual tradition on a much firmer basis and in making Zoroaster seem a more real and living personage. . . . In taking a position so much in accord with tradition with regard to Zarathushtra I might adopt the plea which the old Armenian annalist, Moses of Khorene, employs in another connection: 'there may be much that is untrue in these stories, there may be much that is true; but to me, at least, they seem to contain truth'" (pp. vii-viii). These remarks may strike the reader as naive. If the attempt had been to establish an historically verifiable biography, the book would have been short, indeed. What Jackson wished to accomplish was to create a narrative of the life of the prophet based on the sources and "to lay these down for reference and judgment" (p. 4). Whether one will want to follow him to the extent that he endorsed the historical veracity of the traditions, will depend on one's critical judgment. A lasting achievement of the book is that it lays out a synthesis of the sources that allows us to perceive the prophet as his tradition perceived him.

Zoroaster is divided into two major sections. The first section is the biography of the prophet in eleven chapters and a conclusion (pp. 1-143) designed for the general reader. The second contains in seven appendices (pp. 147-294) both detailed studies and collections of data that are of interest mostly to the specialist and which, in one way or another, support or document the positions taken in the biographical section. Here one finds extensive discussions of Zarathushtra's dates and of his native land and his place of ministry. Even if one does not agree with Jackson's conclusions, the mass of evidence brought to bear in each case can still serve as a point of departure for anyone researching these issues. Concerning Zarathushtra's dates, the traditional figure of 258 years before Alexander is defended, with obvious consequences for the chronology of events in the life of the prophet. Concerning his homeland, a bipartite solution is offered. The preponderance of evidence from the Pahlavi sources points to the northwest, specifically Atropatene (i.e., Azarbaijan, q.v.), yet the Avesta together with the later sources seem to exclude the northwest in favor of eastern Iran. Jackson's explanation of this is that modern Azarbaijan was indeed Zarathushtra's natal home (*Zoroaster*, pp. 16-17, 205 ff.). A prophet exiled by his own people, he eventually gained a favorable reception in the east and it was from there that the new religious movement returned to the West. Other appendices which give all passages containing references to Zarathushtra's name by Greek and Latin authors, as well as allusions to him in various literatures, remain excellent sources for research (*Zoroaster*, pp. 182-225).

During the first decade of the 20th century, most of Jackson's energies were devoted to traveling and writing two major books reflecting his experiences in Asia and Persia. He also managed to edit a nine-volume *History of India*, the ninth volume of which is his collection of "Historic Accounts of India by Foreign Travelers." *Persia, Past and Present* (1906) and *From Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam* (1911) were written as companion volumes. The former follows an itinerary that began in Moscow, descended through the Caucuses into the western Iranian plateau as far as Shiraz, then doubled back through Yazd, Tehran, and the western Caspian. There was also an eastward excursion as far as Samarkand, but its description was left out. The latter is actually a synthesis of the two trips of 1907 and 1910, insofar as their itineraries partially overlapped as far east as Mashad and Ṭus. Although a third volume was planned to cover the itineraries through Central Asia, it never appeared.

As its subtitle, *A Book of Travel and Research*, suggests, *Persia Past and Present* was a bold attempt to combine a traveler's journal with a scholar's observations and reflections concerning events of the distant past. Not far removed from his *Zoroaster*, in which many pages had been devoted to establishing the place of Zarathushtra's birth in Azarbaijan, of his missionary activity in the east, and the triumphant return of his faith to western Persia under the Achaemenids, Jackson plotted his itinerary to follow the steps of the prophet and the course of the Good Religion. Even if one does not agree with his geographic reconstructions, one reading *Persia* a century after its writing cannot help but to be caught up in the author's enthusiasm as the land of Zarathushtra and of Cyrus and Darius (qq.v.) unfolded before him. There is a quaint 19th-century romanticism in much of Jackson's writing. For example, while approaching the Caucuses by train, he is caught in a reverie of Prometheus Bound. "Far in the distance I could picture the desolate vulture peak, where the demigod lay chained in fetters . . . I could hear faint echoes of the dialogue with Io and mutterings of the titan's curse against the wrath of Zeus . . . For a moment, Greek mythology, classic reminiscences, and thoughts of college days made me forget that the land of my quest was Iran, not Hellas" (p. 3). In contrast, the book is also full of down to earth descriptions of the hardships and perils he encountered, when, after leaving the railroad behind in Erivan, he traveled by carriage and horse along caravan routes through the ice and blizzards of March. Of the road from Aḥmadābād to Taḵt-e Solaymān (q.v.), he wrote: "The snow lay two feet deep on the side of the hills and sometimes three or four in the gullies. Twice that day the horse which I rode went down under me in the treacherous depths. The glare from its white surface . . . was dazzling and set up a painful inflammation in my eyes . . . As darkness began to fall, the mountain gorges became dangerous because of robbers, and at each turn of the road it interested me to watch the two guards lower their guns to the saddle-bow" (p. 122).

Among the many fascinating descriptions of ancient sites, a report of a visit with the Zoroastrians of Yazd, and details of all sorts of aspects of the life of the contemporary Persia, the two chapters devoted to Behistun/Bisotun (q.v.) illustrate well the way Jackson was able to sustain a narrative weaving together adventure, ancient history and recondite paleography (*Persia*, pp. 175 ff., 353-400). Half a century had passed since Henry C. Rawlinson had personally examined under great duress the inscription of Darius. His work had been pioneering and solid, but many questions and problems with the decipherment remained, and no one since had undertaken a reexamination.

For Jackson it was a four-day journey by horse from Hamadān (q.v.). As an introduction to that journey, he devoted a chapter, giving an excellent review of the site from Classical references through the stages of decipherment of Georg F. Grotefend (q.v.) and Henry Rawlinson (*Persia*, pp. 176-79). A wonderful description of the approach to the mountain still covered in April snow sets the scene for the arduous ascent to the high ledge that gives access to the inscription and sculptures. One can understand the thrill of the philologist to witness at last the actual cuneiform that rendered him insensitive to the peril to his life, as when he was drawn up by ropes or held by his Persian companions as he leaned out over the abyss to snap a photograph. Yet, for Jackson this was all incidental "to the far more interesting and important matter of what I was able to note, verify, or restore" (*Persia*, p. 196). Twelve pages of learned paleographic commentary is then devoted to sometimes verifying Rawlinson's reading, sometimes offering different readings of his own. Only "the westering sun warned me that I must descend for the last time from the rocky height" (*Persia*, p. 208).

"Zoroaster, the founder of Persia's ancient religion, ran as a minor chord through the pages of the earlier volume; in the present volume Alexander the Great, upon whose track I have followed so extensively, adds another connecting link between the interests of East and West, while Omar's home, as goal to visit, gave to the journey the semblance, at least, of a pilgrimage" (*From Constantinople*, p. viii). So wrote Jackson in the Preface to his second book of travels in Persia. While this volume continues the plan of the first, in weaving present observations with Persia's past, it is much more about the present. Whereas *Persia* tended to give a picture of an archaic country rooted in ancient traditions, *From Constantinople* presents a view of a nation beginning to move forward into the 20th century along with its rich cultural heritage. There is a greater awareness of the strategic position of Persia in global politics, particularly in respect to imperial Russian and British imperialistic objectives. Chapters on "Baku, the City of Oil Wells" and "Teheran and the Newer Persia" stand in contrast to "On the Track of Alexander the Great" and "The Tomb of Omar Khayyam." The lasting value of the book is the eyewitness account and photo documentation of Persia at a particular time in its modern history. As a literary composition it is not as successful as *Persia*. Because it is a conflation of two trips, the narrative is sometimes confusing and a bit artificial. The digressions into Zoroastrianism and Persia's past, which are more integral to the flow of the narrative in *Persia*, often seem forced or uncontrolled. A case in point is a long digression on a patently Hindu temple in

Baku (established by traders) that was thought locally to be Zoroastrian. In excruciating detail over fifteen pages Jackson established the curiosity's Hindu credentials. One wonders whether the project had become too tedious to sustain the third volume which he envisioned.

Jackson's love of classical Persian poetry, first aroused in his college days, begins to show in the pages of the two travel books, where places visited evoked quotations from the great poets. Already, in 1908, he delivered seven lectures at John Hopkins University and then in 1919 three lectures at the University of Chicago, all on early Persian poetry. The publication in 1920 of a small volume entitled *Early Persian Poetry form the Beginnings down to the Time of Firdausi* presented the substance of those ten lectures. Indeed, the style in which most of the chapters are written suggest public oratory. The book stands somewhere between a brief literary history and an anthology, with a greater emphasis on the poets and their background, than on their poems. Only two samples of pre-Islamic poetry are given: a Gathas (q.v.) of Zarathushtra (*Y*. 44) and a brief passage from the *Mehr yašt* (*Yt*. 10.13-14), both in Avestan, not Persian. The short discourse on Pahlavi literature betrays the general lack of understanding of the principles of Middle Persian verse, which was prevalent at the time. In his own translations of selected fragments of the early poets and of three longer passages from Ferdowsi (q.v.), Jackson demonstrated a real talent for transforming the Persian into elegant English verse. An example of his translation of the following quatrain by Abu Šakur (q.v.) Balḵi will illustrate the point:

Ey gašta man az ḡam-e farāwān-e to past,
Šod qāmat-e man ze dard-e hejrān-e to šast.
Ey šosta man az farib o dastān-e to dast,
Ḵod hič kas-i ba-sirat o sān-e to hast?

Through grievous pangs for thee I am bowed low;
Neath separation's burden bent I go.
But ah! with hands wash'd of thy guile and wile!
None e'er had moods and whims like thine, I know.

Zoroastrian Studies (1928) is a collection of various writing. The bulk (215 pages) is taken up with the publication of the original English text which was translated into German for the chapter "Die iranische Religion" in the *Grundriss* (1903). Although Jackson claimed in the Preface (p. vii) that the original had "undergone so many alterations or has been expanded by so

many additions [usually indicated by enclosure in square brackets], that this part may be regarded in large measure as a new contribution," a comparison of the two texts shows that, except for the additions so indicated, little was done to revise the text itself. The bracketed material is mostly confined to further bibliography, with comments on developments in scholarship relevant to the topics at hand. The one major addition is an addendum of seven pages dealing with Manicheism, the subject of his last major publication. In any case, the monograph length essay presents a comprehensive history of Iranian religion, almost exclusively defined as Zoroastrianism, from the Indo-Iranian period to contemporary Zoroastrianism in Persia and India, with emphasis on the latter, though it will be remembered that he had visited Zoroastrians in Yazd in the course of his travels. Jackson's approach to the religion is similar to what he had followed in his *Zoroaster*. That is, there is a marked reliance on traditional sources of the Sasanian and Islamic periods to illuminate the often fragmentary testimony of the Avesta; and there is also a concerted effort to portray continuity in Zoroastrian theology throughout the faith's history. The remainder of the book (pp. 219-86) contains a long essay on "The Zoroastrian Doctrine of the Freedom of the Will" and miscellaneous notes on a variety of subjects.

Studies in Manicheism was Jackson's final major work. It was completed at the end of 1930 but was not published until 1932. The dates are significant, as he could only refer to unpublished materials of Friedrich C. Andreas. Just at this time, these texts, thoroughly edited by Walter B. Henning (q.v.), were about to be published as *Mitteliranisches Manichaica aus Chinesisch-Turkestan*. In addition, Henning's groundbreaking *Das Verbum* appeared in 1933. The work itself is a collection of various studies, some previously published, which Jackson made over the period of a decade. There is a general survey of Manicheism, followed by six philologically detailed studies of several Turfan and Book Pahlavi texts covering some 200 pages. Study VIII is a translation of Theodore Bar Khoni on Mani by Abraham Yohannan ("On Mānī's Teachings Concerning the Beginning of the World") with notes by Jackson. The remaining five studies are essays on a variety of subjects. One suspects that Jackson's deteriorating health may have been decisive in leading him to construct his last two books as studies, that is, as collections of already published material and previously unpublished short pieces on loosely related subjects. In the preface to *Studies in Manichaeism*, he alludes to a comprehensive work on Manicheism to which he regarded the present work as prolegomena. Sadly he passed away before bringing this to completion.

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