



JAHN, KARL EMIL OSKAR

JAHN, KARL EMIL OSKAR (b. Brno, 26 March 1906; d. Utrecht, 7 November 1985), Czech Orientalist who specialized in Central-Asian history, Persian historiography, and Turcology; he lived and worked in Czechoslovakia, Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands. His father's family originated from German Silesia and emigrated to the Austria-Hungarian Empire, first to Vienna and then to Brünn (or Brno, presently in the Czech Republic), where his father, Oskar Jahn, held the post of Oberfinanzrat—a high-ranking revenue officer. Karl Jahn started his academic education in chemistry at the University of Brno, but after one year he went to Prague where he took up art history, history, and archaeology. He then moved on to Oriental studies, taking Semitic and Arabic studies with Alfred Grohmann and Max Grünert, and Persian and Turkish with Jan Rypka and Max Grünert. He also developed a lively interest in Slavic languages and literatures, in particular Czech and Russian. In 1929 he continued his education at the University of Leipzig, where he studied Arabic with August Fischer, Assyriology with Heinrich Zimmern, and Hittitology with Johannes Friedrich, while Hans Summe introduced him to Arabic dialectology. In 1931, after his promotion in Prague on the thesis *Studien zur arabischen Epistologie* ('Studies on Arabic Epistology,' published in 1937), Jahn briefly studied in Berlin with the Iranologist Hans-Heinrich Schaeder and with Willy Bang, a specialist on Central Asian languages and history. His interest in the history of Central Asia was intensified through his meeting with Zeki Velidi Toğan (1890-1970)—a Turkish scholar who, as a political exile, studied at the University of Vienna and became a lifelong friend of Jahn.



Having first intended to write a history of the reign of Maḥmud Ġāzān Khan (r. 1295-1304, q.v.), the zenith of the Il-khanid rule in Iran, Jahn soon realized that the most essential source, the *Jāme' al-tawāriḳ* (q.v.) written by the Il-khanid vizier Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allāh (1247-1318, q.v.), had not yet been properly edited. From that moment onwards, philological research became the focus of his scholarship. His most important contribution to Persian, as well as to Central-Asian studies, was the edition and translation of parts of the monumental *Jāme' al-tawāriḳ*—a chronicle of the Mongol history and a world-history of an exceptionally wide scope. In 1934 Jahn visited Istanbul for the first time and worked in the manuscript collections of its libraries. His Habilitation, presented at the German University of Prague in 1938, was based on a critical edition of the section of the *Jāme' al-tawāriḳ* that deals with the reign of the Il-khan Maḥmud Ġāzān. This work, accompanied by a summary of the contents in German, was printed in London in 1940 as a volume of the Gibb Memorial Series (Jahn, 1940), but it only came into the hands of the author after the end of World War II.

Having taught Turkish in Prague for a few years (1936-42), Jahn was appointed as an Assistant Librarian at the University Library of Halle in 1942. However, in 1943 he was drafted into the German army and sent to occupied Netherlands as an interpreter attached to the unit of Azarbaijanis who were set to work on German fortifications along the Dutch coast. During the final months of the war he went on a brief leave to Prague for an academic promotion, but on his return to the Netherlands in April 1945 he was unable to join his unit again. After the Germans capitulated, he came into contact with Orientalists at the University of Utrecht, and in 1948, thanks to the help of his Dutch colleagues, notably the Indologist Jan Gonda and the Leiden professor of Arabic, Johan Hendrik Kramers, Jahn was employed there as a teacher and, later, as an extraordinary professor of Turkish and Slavic languages. After the death of Kramers in 1951, Jahn was appointed extraordinary professor of Turkish at the University of Leiden in 1953, and was also charged with teaching Persian, while still continuing his assignments at the University of Utrecht.

For more than two decades Karl Jahn taught three different disciplines at the two Dutch universities. His classes covered an impressively wide range of subjects, including history of Central Asia from the earliest times until the reign of Timur and his successors, Persian historiography, reading Ottoman diplomatic documents, Islamic art and architecture, and nearly every Turkic



language. During the 1960s he supervised the preparation of *History of Iranian Literature*, written by his former teacher, Jan Rypka, and other Iranologists in Czechoslovakia, of which two Czech editions (1956 and 1963) and one German (1959) had already been published. This English edition was based on the second, much enlarged Czech edition, and was printed by the Dutch publisher D. Reidel in Dordrecht in 1968. It very soon gained the status of the standard textbook for the remainder of the 20th century. One of its merits was that it made internationally accessible important contributions of Eastern European and modern Iranian scholars to the study of Persian literature.

In 1969 Jahn made his first journey to Persia to take part, as a guest of honor, in the symposium on the works of Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allāh held at Tehran and Tabriz. The proceedings of this conference were jointly edited by Karl Jahn and John Andrew Boyle (*Rašid Al-Dīn commemoration volume*). He visited the country again in 1971, when the 2500th anniversary of the Persian monarchy was celebrated. He traveled regularly to Turkey for the purpose of studying Persian and Turkish manuscripts there. As a Turcologist, he did much to promote the study of Central Asian culture—as one of the founders of the Permanent International Altaic Conference (1957); and, from 1955 until the end of his life, as the sole editor of the *Central Asiatic Journal*. In 1965 and 1967, he lectured as a guest professor at Istanbul University and was awarded the honorary membership of the Türk Tarih Kurumu (Turkish Historical Society). In 1979 he received the Indiana University Prize for Altaic Studies.

From 1969 onwards, Jahn would spend more and more of his time in Vienna, the city where he felt most at home. In 1973, after his retirement from the two Dutch professorships, he went to live in Vienna permanently. Already a few years earlier (1970), he had become a Corresponding Member of the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Austrian Academy of Sciences)—the institution that published a series of his editions and translations of parts from Rašid-al-Din's world history (Jahn 1971, 1973, 1977, and 1980). At the same time, he held a guest professorship at the University of Vienna (1969-83). At the invitation of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, he traveled to Uzbekistan and visited Samarqand and Bukhara around 1980. In 1983 Karl Jahn returned to the Netherlands where he died two years later in Utrecht.

The variety of Jahn's teaching is also reflected in the range of subjects that he studied and about which he published. Special mention should be made of his contributions to Turcology, which include a volume on the eighteenth-century



documents in the Austrian National Archive concerning the release of the slaves (*Türkische Freilassungserklärungen*, 1963). However, by far the major place among his scholarly works is occupied by the many books and articles he wrote about the great Persian historiographer of the Mongol period, Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allāh, often nicknamed *ṭabīb* ('doctor') after the profession he had had before entering the service of the Il-khans Ġāzān and Uljāytu (qq.v.), and his universal history *Jāme' al-tawāriḳ*.

At the beginning of his academic career Karl Jahn joined the efforts of several generations of scholars to make this major historical source accessible to modern historical research, and he continued to devote most of his working life to Rašid-al-Din. At first, he set himself the task of publishing the section of *Jāme' al-tawāriḳ* which directly concerns the period of Rašid-al-Din's own career, and the period of Maḥmud Ġāzān (r. 1295-1304), who ordered his vizier to write a history of the Mongol Empire up to and including his own reign. This work, which eventually became the first volume of the *Jāme' al-tawāriḳ*, is also known under the separate title *Tāriḳ-e mobārah-e Ġāzāni*. The section published in the Gibb Memorial Series in 1940 contains the famous description of the measures envisaged under the rule of Ġāzān to reform his realm into a well-organized Islamic state. Shortly afterwards, Jahn published another section of the same volume treating the Il-khans who immediately preceded Ġāzān (Jahn, 1941 and 1957). During World War II, most of the copies of this edition, which had been printed in Vienna in 1941, were lost so that the book had to be reprinted after the war in 1957. In these early publications Jahn exhibited his great skill as a philologist, presenting the versions of the manuscripts he used comprehensively, and in a very accessible manner.

Having contributed significantly to the sources available to the historians of the Mongol period, Jahn turned his attention to the second volume of Rašid-al-Din's work, which is primarily of interest as a cultural document of an exceptional nature. It is the first truly universal history in the Islamic tradition, which also included the nations outside the boundaries of the Muslim world. In the publications of the Austrian Academy of Sciences appeared a series of books prepared by Jahn which contain the parts of this world history dealing with the history of China (1971), the Children of Israel (1972), the Franks (1977), and India (1980). The volume on India encompasses an interesting account on the life of Buddha, based on information Rašid-al-Din received in Tabriz from a Buddhist scholar. In addition to a full German



translation with detailed commentary, each volume contains facsimiles of the most important manuscripts of Rašid-al-Din's work. These publications were accompanied by a number of monographic studies that appeared mostly as articles in the *Anzeiger* of the *Östereichische Akademie der Wissenschaften*. In these essays Jahn examined the sources used by Rašid-al-Din and emphasized the significance of this monumental work of Persian historiography.

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