



## KENT, ROLAND GRUBB

**KENT, ROLAND GRUBB**, American scholar of Indo-European studies, who specialized also in Old Persian studies (b. Wilmington, Del., 24 February 1877; d. Bryn Mawr, Penn., 27 June 1952). He was the son of a businessman and did his first studies in classics at Swarthmore College (Swarthmore, Penn.). After receiving his M.A. in 1898, he went to Berlin and Munich universities to continue for two years his classical studies, including (apart from the languages) Greek epigraphy, history, and archaeology.

Back in the United States, he finished his studies at the University of Pennsylvania and in 1903 obtained his Ph.D. with a thesis on the history of Thessaly (Kent, 1904). In the following year he was appointed Instructor in Greek and Latin at that university. This was the beginning of a life-long career at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1909 he became Assistant Professor of comparative philology, and he was promoted to full professor in 1916; from 1942 to his retirement in 1947 his title was Professor of Indo-European linguistics. Kent rendered outstanding services to the scholarly world. In particular he was one of the founding fathers of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), and from the beginning in 1924 to 1940 he was its secretary-treasurer, before he was elected as president of the LSA for the year 1941.

His wide-ranging interests (including special problems of ethnological and religious studies) go far beyond classics and are reflected clearly in his numerous articles and reviews. He made his mark particularly by his major studies in the fields of Latin and Old Persian languages—in the latter case, Indo-Iranian had attracted his interest as early as 1913.



A short monograph unique in its kind is *The Textual Criticism of Inscriptions* (Kent, 1926). It started from an Old Persian inscription and then treated in the same manner some inscriptions in the Greek, Oscan, Umbrian, and Latin languages; it arose from a previous article dealing with the [Old Persian Bisotun](#) inscription. The reason for writing that booklet was that Kent was convinced that the criticism and emendation of inscriptions (especially those of formal character) is something quite different from the handling of manuscript texts, in which often very complicated corruption was at work. Kent tried here to determine precisely the various kinds of errors occurring in, and being typical of, inscriptions, among them various kinds of haplography and dittography of characters or groups of characters, metatheses, and the like. For that he did not prefer a classification of the causes for those errors or the results, but a simple one of omission, addition, and change of words, characters, or even single cuneiform strokes. He also uncovered special cases such as pseudo-haplography, where similar, but not fully identical, characters are concerned. Having dealt with the incorrect and sometimes barbaric language of the late Old Persian inscriptions of Artaxerxes II and Artaxerxes III already ([Ware and] Kent, 1924), he underlined explicitly that the errors of those later texts are of a quite different nature. In a word, that small book is most useful also for Iranian scholars (not only true epigraphists) because of its rich illustration and precise classification of stonemasons' mistakes.

From 1918 and to a greater extent from the early 1930s, Kent published an astonishing and continuous series of preliminary articles about Old Persian inscriptions and their interpretation, which furthered Old Persian grammatical studies very greatly. Like other scholars he followed attentively and intensively the publication of the new inscriptions excavated in Susa, Persepolis, and elsewhere; he commented upon the status of Old Persian studies and chiefly upon those new texts in a long series of articles mainly published in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (vols. 35, 1917 to 72, 1952), the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (vols. 1, 1942 to 4, 1945), and *Language* (vols. 9, 1933 to 20, 1944)—among them Kent, 1918, 1931, and 1936. After long years of preparation, that incessant treatment of problems of the Old Persian texts and language in the end led to Kent's *magnum opus*, the manual entitled *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (Kent, 1950), which he evidently was preparing bit by bit from the 1930s. In this book Kent strove for an encyclopedic and in every respect complete exposition of the grammar (phonology, morphology, syntax, and even stylistics), but in addition to that he presented an edition and translation of (nearly) all the Old Persian



inscriptions known at that time as well as a complete lexicon with full references. Even if this book nowadays is a little outdated by newly found texts and by the progress of research achieved in the meantime, it is not yet replaced in its entirety and still today is the most comprehensive account of Old Persian grammar and a valuable tool for any study of that language. Kent's rather conservative attitude to the transmitted wording of monumental inscriptions like the Achaemenid texts runs through all his Old Persian studies from the very beginning in 1918 and is mirrored also in the edition of the inscriptions found in his *Old Persian* (pp. 116-57). In this edition he attempted in particular to present a readable text and to get rid of the bothersome gaps, but by that procedure he also incurred much unjustified criticism.

Unlike the *Grammaire du vieux-perse* by Antoine Meillet and Emile Benveniste (Paris, 1931), which is a chiefly descriptive account of the Old Persian language with only rare references of a historical-comparative nature, Kent in his grammar consequently took the Indo-European proto-language as his starting-point and considered Old Persian with regard to its descent and within the context of the related Indo-European languages. That means that Kent disregarded all matters of specific Iranian relevance and did not fittingly take into consideration the data of the Avestan, Middle Iranian, and also Old Indo-Aryan languages, and only quite rarely (and far from systematically) did he take notice of the Elamite and Babylonian versions of the inscriptions.

By such renunciation of important informative material he often forwent the opportunity to establish the actual pronunciation of the Old Persian forms and to put their morphological and etymological explanation on a firm foundation and therefore sometimes came to historically impossible analyses. To exaggerate, one might say that Kent regarded Old Persian as a young descendant of the Indo-European proto-language via Proto-Indo-Iranian and Proto-Iranian, whereas he did not see it as an Iranian language within the context of the Achaemenid empire. For Kent himself stressed (explicitly at any rate in the foreword to the second edition [p. vi]), that “the volume is concerned with connections between Old Persian and Indo-European rather than between Old Persian and the later Iranian dialects.” The Indo-European perspective presents a distorted picture chiefly of Old Persian phonology anyway, for the relevant chapter gives only a historical-comparative phonology of Old Persian, which overdoes the transposition of Old Persian forms into those of the proto-language, but gives no synchronic description of the Old Persian data.



Kent also repeatedly stated his views on the various unauthentic (and even forged) inscriptions which turned up in his time, because he regarded it an important task to eliminate from the corpus all the texts which are not what they pretend to be.

A few studies of Kent's are devoted to problems of the Vedic and Avestan languages; thus he wrote about Zoroastrianism, discussed a syntactic question of Avestan, commented on the Gathas, and in a study of the name *Ahuramazda* (Kent, 1933) he attempted to present the complete evidence of the name in Old and Younger Avestan, Old and Middle Persian, as well as in the collateral tradition in the form of both the anthroponym \**Mazdaka* and the theonym [Assyr.] *As-sa-ra Ma-za-aš* and to draw from this a plausible conclusion regarding the disputed date of Zoroaster. He was also the supervisor for Maria Wilkins Smith's Ph.D. thesis, subsequently published as *Studies in the Syntax of the Gathas of Zarathushtra, together with Text, Translation, and Notes* (Philadelphia, 1929).

The other major field with which Kent's name is more closely connected is Latin. As in the case of his Old Persian studies, his textbook on Latin phonology (Kent, 1932) and the companion volume on Latin morphology (Kent, 1946) are complemented by a large number of articles on particular problems and much-disputed issues. The books are characterized by the same features as his *Old Persian*: the data presented there are collected as completely as possible; they are absolutely reliable and are clearly presented in the tradition of Indo-European linguistics in the Neogrammarians' style. In that field, too, Kent turned out to be not only a linguist, but a philologist as well, as becomes clear from his edition and translation of Varro's *De lingua Latina* "On the Latin language" (2 vols., Kent, 1938), where he endeavored to present a readable text with most of the corrupt passages and gaps found in the manuscripts convincingly restored.

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Originally Published online: October 9, 2012

[Archived version from the previous Elr. online edition.](#)

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