



KONOW, STEN

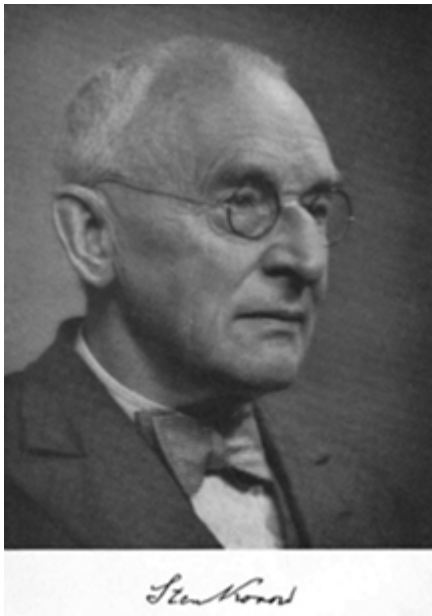


Figure 1. Sten Konow. Photograph after his *Primer of Khotanese Saka*, Oslo, 1949, frontispiece.

KONOW, STEN (17 April 1867 – 29 June 1948), Norwegian orientalist ([Figure 1](#)). His father was a clergyman, belonging to a family of Bergen merchants whose ancestors came from Schwerin, Germany. After his matriculation in 1884, Konow studied Classical and Germanic philology at the University of Oslo (then Christiania), where he got his philological (Cand. Philol.) degree in 1891.



He was early attracted by the Indian culture and began his Sanskrit studies individually as a student. He studied Indian philology and comparative Indo-European linguistics in Halle and Berlin (1886-87, 1891-93), and took his doctor's degree in Halle in 1893, with the thesis "Ueber das Sāmavidhāna-brāhmaṇa." He was an assistant librarian in the Oriental Department of the Royal Library in Berlin 1894-96. In 1896, he was appointed lecturer and 1899 reader ("docent") of Indian philology at the University of Oslo. From 1900 to 1903, he was Sir George Grierson's assistant in his work on the *Linguistic Survey of India*, and, in 1906, he went to India as Government Epigraphist for India. He took part in excavations and traveled widely in the country. He returned to Norway in 1908, and in 1910 a personal chair of Indian philology was created for him at the University of Oslo. In 1914, he was offered a chair of Indian culture and history in Hamburg. There he remained till 1919, when he returned to Oslo. There, he was professor of Indology till his retirement in 1937, except for the years 1924-25, when he was a visiting professor at the Rabindranath Tagores International University Visvabharati. In 1922, he founded, in collaboration with Danish, Dutch, and Norwegian colleagues, the periodical *Acta Orientalia*, whose chief editor he was until his death. That same year he also founded the Norwegian Oriental Society, whose president he was almost till his death.

Konow was an all-around Indologist, whose extensive scholarly work covers most branches of Indian studies. His occupation with Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India*, where he edited half a dozen of volumes on various languages, resulted in a long series of studies of Tibeto-Burman, Munda, and Dravidian languages. In 1913, he edited a dictionary of Bashgali, a Kati dialect, accompanied by an analysis of the Kafir languages, where he pointed out, for the first time, that Kafiri, but not the Dard languages, shared certain isoglosses with Iranian.

During his stay in India (1906-8), Konow was mainly concerned with epigraphy, and was for a long time editor of the *Epigraphia Indica*. His most important part in this field was the edition of the Kharoshti inscriptions in 1929.

In close relation with his work on North-West Indian epigraphy was his interest in the manuscript discoveries in Central Asia, that revealed the expansion of Indian culture in this area. Apart from documents in Indian languages from Sinkiang, his main contribution in this field were his pioneering studies of Khotanese Saka. As early as 1912, he edited two



manuscript fragments in this language, followed by a series of text editions and articles on the language. In 1932 came his Saka Studies, and in 1941 his *Khotansakische Grammatik*. His *Primer of Khotanese: Grammatical Sketch, Chrestomathy, Vocabulary, Bibliography* was published posthumously in 1949. The identification of a separate Saka dialect (Tumshuqese; *Ein neuer Saka-Dialekt*, 1935; see also *Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap* 14, 1947) was also due to him.

Apart from his extensive scholarly works Konow wrote a number of popular studies, both books and articles, on Indian culture, history, and politics.

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