



MACKENZIE, DAVID NEIL

MACKENZIE, DAVID NEIL (b. 8 April 1926, London- d. 13 October 2001, Bangor, Wales), distinguished British scholar of Middle and Modern Iranian languages with an impressive record of publications ([FIGURE 1](#)). He was always called Neil to be distinguished from his father who was also named David. He went to school in Slough, Windsor and Cambridge. In the shadows of the royal castle of Windsor his father helped ex-servicemen to get work. During the Second World War his mother and sister were evacuated to Canada while he stayed with his father. In November 1943, Neil, not yet 18, volunteered for military service, was shipped to India, and participated in the final stages of the fighting in Burma. Then his regiment was transferred to Peshawar in the North-West Frontier Province of British India, where he served as a supply officer, and this afforded him the opportunity to immerse himself in Pashto, which he picked up with ease. This exhilarating experience formed the basis of his interest in Iranian languages. Upon his decommissioning before the partition of India, he returned to England, and decided to avail himself of government assistance provided to ex-servicemen who wished to pursue higher education. Though still comparatively young, he had gained maturity through the experience of the war years, as had many of his generation. He went back to Cambridge, where, as he bleakly observed, an inscription was added to the monument to the foot-soldier of World War I on Hills Road to commemorate the servicemen of World War II as well. He learned that the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies, which was now back in London after the temporary transfer during the war to Cambridge, would be the institution most suited to his interests. He enrolled



there in September 1948, but as Pashto was not offered, he chose Persian, and completed the three-year course for a B.A. in mid 1951 under A. K. S. Lambton (who deplored his Indian pronunciation of Persian words). He married in the same year.

MacKenzie was introduced by Mary Boyce to Walther [Bruno Henning](#), who supervised his studies for an M.A. degree. This was a period of intense work on Old Persian and Avestan (and also Old Indian), and of introduction to the Middle Iranian languages based in particular on original material from Henning's extensive set of photographs of the Iranian fragments in the Turfan Collection housed in Berlin. The philological work was supplemented by training in general linguistics. In 1953 he was awarded "M.A. in Old and Middle Iranian." From 1951 he had also studied Kurdish with C. J. Edmonds, and now he decided to embark on a study of Kurdish dialects. From the autumn of 1954 he, accompanied by his wife and their two small children, spent ten months in various parts of Iraqi Kurdistan where he collected the material needed for the purpose. He had intended to spend some time in Turkish Kurdistan as well, but was refused permission to enter the region. Back in London, he was appointed, at the end of 1955, "Lecturer in Kurdish" at the School of Oriental and African Studies, which in 1957 awarded him a Ph.D. for the dissertation "A dialectological survey of Northern and Central Kurdish." During this period two more children were born. He was promoted to "Lecturer in Iranian Studies" in 1961, and to "Reader" in 1965. In 1975 he was appointed as the successor to [Walther Hinz](#) to the chair of Oriental Philology, later renamed Iranian Studies (Seminar für Iranistik), at the University of Göttingen where his late teacher W.B. Henning had studied under [F. C. Andreas](#). Here he was to stay until retirement in 1994. His first marriage having ended in divorce, he remarried in 1981, but this one, too, came to dissolution in 1988. After retirement he moved to Llanfairpwll in Wales. A car accident and a heart problem necessitated two serious operations, one resulting in impairment to his short-term memory. In spite of the uncertainties caused by this, he somewhat recovered. Following a short illness he died in Bangor, Wales, on 13th of October 2001.

MacKenzie's scientific achievements are very wide-ranging. His home ground was Pashto and Kurdish but he gradually extended his scope to cover Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian and Khwarezmian, in fact all the Middle Iranian languages except Sakan and Bactrian, the latter very sparsely represented until recent discoveries.



His first publications were articles on Kurdish, including one demonstrating (independently of Soviet scholars) gender in the Kurdish *ežāfa* (1954), and a mastery study locating Kurdish linguistically and geographically within the Iranian language area as a southwestern language which spread northwards and, in part, southwards again absorbing considerable Gurāni elements (1961). His first book, *Kurdish Dialect Studies* (2 vols., 1961 and 1962), the printed version of his doctoral thesis of 1957, is the groundbreaking study of the Kurdish dialects of Iraq. The first volume contains a detailed description of the phonology, morphology and syntax of the language material divided into two main groups, the Northern and Central dialects; the second provides the documentation in the form of extensive continuous texts with translation. He also made the tape recordings on which the printed text and the grammatical studies were based available to anyone interested in them. He collected the word material from the texts on slips, which presumably are in his papers. In 1960 he visited the Soviet Union and met the eminent Soviet scholars of Iranian of his day. On that visit he was taken to some Kurdish villages in Armenia where, as he enjoyed recounting, he, confusing two Kurdish suffixes, gave a toast not with the intended *à l'amitié* ("To friendship!") but to *à l'amour* ("To love!"), much to the amusement of his hosts. He later worked on a collection of Kurdish texts given to him by Basil Nikitine. He prepared all the stories for publication but published only one in the *Journal of Kurdish Studies*, I (1995), with an introduction detailing the difficulties posed by Nikitine's mixed transcriptional system. Though he was quite confident that he had reconstructed the texts correctly, the loss of Nikitine's original manuscript in the post made him reluctant to publish his version of the texts because he could no longer document all the details. Nevertheless, the surviving photocopy of Nikitine's manuscript should be sufficient to document the basis on which MacKenzie worked. He supervised the translation of Bedir Khan and R. Lescot, *Grammaire kurde (Dialecte kurmandji)* (Paris, 1970) into German by H. Shahidi (1986).

He had first heard some Gurāni while collecting Kurdish material in Iraq, and his interest in it grew during work on the relative position of Kurdish. In 1957 he met in London a native speaker of the Gurāni dialect of Awromān, and took the opportunity to work with him systematically. This resulted in *The dialect of Awroman* (Hawrāmān-ī Luhon, Historisk-filosofisle Skrifter IV/3, Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, Copenhagen, 1966). He regarded this dialect as "probably the most archaic and best preserved of the group" (p.4). He described its phonology and morphology, made some observations on



syntax, and included texts, vocabulary and index. He also published an article on Zaza (1995).

On Pashto his works include *A Catalogue of Pashto manuscripts in the libraries of the British Isles* (jointly with J. F. Blumhardt, 1965), and a translation of poems by a 17th century Pathan warrior poet in *Poems from the divan of Khushāl Khān Khattak*, (1965) as well as various articles on Pashto language, with attention to the question of standardization (1959, 1997), and on Pashto literature, such as the forms of Pashto verse (1958, 1995) and proverbs in Pashto (1985). On standardization he took the position that the writing system should aim to bridge differences rather than accentuate them, a pragmatic approach that refuses to confuse the interests of the dialectician with those of the users of a literary language. He was particularly anxious to present his views on the neglected subject of Pashto verse. W. Heston enlisted his help as a consultant in a project to collect a large body of Pashto language material in digitized form.

In his “Notes on the transcription of Pahlavi,” (*BSOAS* 30, 1967, pp. 17-29), a review article on H. S. Nyberg’s *Manual of Pahlavi*, (1964), MacKenzie set out the criteria for a unified approach to the phonology of Manichean and Zoroastrian Middle Persian, which aimed to arrive at the language as it was spoken in the 3rd century C.E., and to thereby transcend the conflicting and confusing mixture of historical and “phonetic” spellings in the non-Manichean sources. He was aware of the risk of opting for a transcription for a literary language attested for the most part in sources of a much later date, but could count on the relative stability of this literary idiom down to a time well after the Sasanian period. His *Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*, Oxford, 1971 (reprinted with Addenda and Corrigenda 1986; hereafter cited as *CPD*), provided the details in the form of some 4,000 words and set the standard which nearly all modern editions of Pahlavi texts follow. The dictionary itself contrasts in its somewhat stark conciseness with Nyberg’s more discursive *Glossary* (1974), but includes much more material and an invaluable English-Pahlavi index as well as a Pahlavi key. The *CPD* is an extract of a dictionary on slips that he probably started to compile as a student and that he added to over the years. This valuable material is preserved amongst his papers. Apart from containing a greater range of vocabulary and, naturally, more tentative readings and difficult words, it reflects his unpublished work on such texts as the *Bundahišn* and the *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādsprahm*. The *CPD* was digitized with his consent and can be searched online



(<http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/indologie/lil/cpd-search.html>); the material has also been incorporated into TITUS (s. <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/iran/miran/mpers/>). A translation into Modern Persian was made without consulting him.

He held the unique native lexicological work on Pahlavi, the *Frahang ī Pahlavīk*, in no high regard (see *EIr.* X, pp. 123-125), and deemed it unfortunate that Nyberg's edition of this text was published posthumously (see his review in *OLZ* 86, 1991, cols. 68-71). He could point out that some Arabic words had entered the work, that it is often not easy to arrive at a correct interpretation of the entries in the *Frahang*, and that many heterograms seem to be spurious. While much of MacKenzie's criticism is justified, it must be balanced by reference to Shaked's demonstration of the genuine Aramaic nature of many of the heterograms listed in the *Frahang* though not attested in any text (S. Shaked, "A dictionary of Aramaic ideograms in Pahlavi," *JAOS* 113, 1993, pp. 75-81), leaving open the option of seeing the *Frahang* as a window —albeit tiny— on an extensive lost literature in Pahlavi. He presented an exemplary re-edition of the fragments of *Šābuhragān*, an original work in Middle Persian by the religion's founder, Mani, in two articles (1979, 1980). There he credits W. Sundermann with many observations, thus marking the beginning of an enduring contact with W. Sundermann and the *Turfanforschung* in Berlin.

In 1989 MacKenzie re-edited the four Middle Persian inscriptions of the Zoroastrian chief priest Kirdēr. His presentation of Kirdēr's four inscriptions (two long and two short inscriptions) as one synoptic text is driven by the need to reconstruct the great part of the text common to the various versions of which the longer ones are extensively damaged. His attention to the size of gaps is a great help in the evaluation of restorations and shows clearly how Kirdēr re-used his own material. This contrasts with Gignoux's independent studies of the inscriptions (Gignoux 1968, 1972, 1991), which aims at an understanding of Kirdēr's specific intention in each.

Throughout his career MacKenzie published articles on Pahlavi topics. Many dealt with individual words, e.g. " 'sheep' and 'show' " (1966) and "master of ceremonies" (1970), but many concentrated on points of grammar: "indirect affectee" (1964), on the agreement of the auxiliary not with the logical object of the transitive verb in the past tense but with the indirect object, the indirect affectee, a topic he elaborated further in the addenda on pp. 305-6 of *Iranica Diversa* and to which Tafazzoli devoted an article (1986); "stance and existence" (1986) (on which see Skjærvø 1997, 166-170); "compound abstracts"



(1990); and “postposition” (1990). His lifelong interest in grammar suggests that he might have thought of preparing a grammar of Middle Persian. But he apparently did not record his extensive knowledge and keen observations systematically, though some observations will be on the slips of his Pahlavi dictionary. Similarly, although he worked on the *Bundahišn*, he did not publish, apart from an invaluable article on its Zoroastrian astrology (1964), his edition of this difficult text, as he regarded too many problems, particularly the identification of the many animals and plants mentioned, as too great. He made his English translation available privately to a few scholars. See also Cereti-MacKenzie, forthcoming, listed below.

Of MacKenzie’s many reviews the extensive one on Michael Back’s, *Die Sassanidischen Staatsinschriften*, (1983) is particularly valuable for the amount of detailed material it adds. There, in insisting on the limitations of Pahlavi spellings, MacKenzie takes a position quite opposed to that of Back, who used them in a brave effort to set up a rhythmic law to explain final -y. MacKenzie considered the effort quite futile. His review of D. Monchi-Zadeh’s (*Die Geschichte Zarēr’s* (an edition of the *Ay(y)ādgār ī Zarērān*, 19081), is a careful reworking of many parts of this important secular Middle Persian text with an unmistakable Parthian element, in which he supplied many new readings, interpretations and emendations (as well as rescuing some old ones). In his treatment of the Middle Persian inscription of Ābnun from Naṣrābād near Barm-e Delak (1993) he was reluctant to accept P. O. Skjærvø’s readings (1992), on the basis of which the latter established forms of the imperfect in the text (1997). It is surely significant that the forms Skjærvø established conform to what that might be expected, and is actually attested in Khwarezmian. For the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* he edited the fascicles of the works of Diakonoff and Livshit on the Parthian Economic Documents from Nisa (1976-2001) and also published an article on the personal names attested in them (1986). He also showed interest in the archaic traits of Judaeo-Persian by publishing a number of articles (1966, 1968, and forthcoming).

His work on Sogdian, an Eastern Middle Iranian language, concentrated on Buddhist Sogdian texts. His re-edition of the text *The “Sūtra of the causes and affects of actions” in Sogdian* (1970) was intended as an introduction to one of the longest Buddhist Sogdian texts. Because the amount of work done on the text since R. Gauthiot’s edition of 1926 made it, as he says, “now far from convenient to use the original edition,” he presented the text in transliteration with a translation, notes and a glossary. This in turn elicited a number of



valuable reviews. He then re-edited the larger Buddhist Sogdian texts in London in *The Buddhist Sogdian texts of the British Library*, 1976 (see the additional material in the review by N. Sims-Williams in *IJ* 20, 1978, pp. 256-60); this book includes additions to *The “Sūtra of the causes and affects of actions” in Sogdian* (including those suggested by the reviewers of that work) and a corrected reprint of his very useful glossary (first published in 1971) of Buddhist terminology in Chinese and Sogdian together with the equivalents in Sanskrit. He devoted some articles to Christian and Manichean Sogdian and, among other things, succeeded in 1958 in identifying two pages of a Sogdian version of part of the Parthian Hymn Cycle *Huyadagmān*. There he also confirmed the correct transcription and interpretation of the title of the work. A Sogdian dictionary on slips is also amongst his papers.^f

In the field of the Khwarezmian, he edited part of a dictionary from Henning’s papers, *A fragment of a Khwarezmian dictionary*, 1971, to which he added an equally large supplement containing the articles cross-referenced by Henning’s articles referred. In 1971 and 1972 he published five reviews of J. Benzing’s *Das chwaresmische Sprachmaterial*, a study of the Arabic work with extensive Khwarezmian glosses, *Moqaddemat al-Adab*, and took Benzing, who was not a scholar of Iranian, severely to task. Benzing duly incorporated most of MacKenzie’s suggestions in his *Chwaresmischer Wortindex* (1983), which contained the index and glossary to his edition of the *Moqaddema*. He further produced a series of valuable articles on complex Khwarezmian matters such as the imperfect stem (1975), the use of *shadda* (as a mark of accent, 1989) and the intricate system of clitics (1993). Especially notable was his publication of the book *The Khwarezmian element in the Qunyat al-munya*, 1990 dealing with the Khwarezmian and the Arabic text (the latter translated in conjunction with H. Amarat), in which the Khwarezmian material was transmitted. This edition also contains a glossary and notes and a facsimile of the manuscript C2311 (with a Cyrillic C) of the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, and thus presents a comprehensive edition of “the most reliable (Khwarezmian material) that we have” (p.5). He also reviewed (in 1988) M. Samadi’s, *Das chwaresmische Verbum*, 1986, which is a systematic study of all attested Khwarezmian verbs, and (in 1991) Humbach’s treatment of Khwarezmain in *Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum*.

A major part of his criticism of Benzing’s work had been the latter’s failure to recognize one and the same word in different and even defective spellings. MacKenzie attempted to resolve at least some of the difficulties caused by the



lack of pointing or the inconsistent pointing of the manuscripts. These difficulties were to dog him in his work on a dictionary of Khwarezmian, which he had started in the late 1960s and to which he was to devote himself with long breaks during retirement. The complex nature of the material and his dissatisfaction with some of the work he had already done made it a very time consuming task and one which he, despite great efforts, was not able to complete. His papers contain the final form of just over a third of the dictionary along with a rudimentary handwritten version of the whole work.

In 1999 C. Cereti and L. Paul edited under the title *Iranica Diversa* a two-volume collection of MacKenzie's articles with an appendix containing corrections, revisions and additions by MacKenzie and an extensive word index. MacKenzie took the opportunity to re-set some articles to make up for misprints in the original publication (e.g. his review of R. Schmitt (ed.), *Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum*, particularly the part covering Humbach's article on Khwarezmian), or to improve on the presentation, though an error in the preparation of the book undid some of this. In the reprint of "Shapur's shooting" (1978), only the philological part is included since he did not want to repeat the speculation in the original because it turned out to be an ingenious effort to explain article concerning [a copy of Shapur's Ḥājiābād inscription on a silver plaque which S. Shaked (1990) was able to demonstrate as a forgery.

MacKenzie was quick to recognize the potential of computers long before the existence of the personal computer. With the help of the Computing Center of the University of London and later of the *Gesellschaft für wissenschaftliche Datenverarbeitung* of the University in Göttingen, he digitalized various texts, mainly in Pahlavi, extensive Manichean Western Middle Iranian material (in conjunction with S.N.C. Lieu and W. Sundermann) as well as all the Khwarezmian material available in Arabo-Persian script. He also digitalized Kurdish and Zaza material. Using the Oxford Concordance Program he produced word-in-context concordances of the files and also of Sogdian material placed at his disposal by N. Sims-Williams. These became an important aid in his own work and in that of a few colleagues. Some of these files are now in the Oxford Text Archive and TITUS and accessible through the Internet. When the computer became affordable he was able to transfer the files to his own computer, which made working with them a lot easier, though he was reluctant to rely on virtual texts alone. Additionally, he applied himself to the representation of the texts and designed the necessary fonts for his own and others' use. He became quite expert in producing "camera-ready" versions



of Iranological works difficult to set and selflessly undertook this task also for colleagues.

He was a philologist who with perseverance and the gift of expressing himself absolutely clearly was able to gain and convey his conception of what a text meant. In the vast field of Iranian studies he concentrated on the basic philological work to be done and achieved a great deal in widely different areas. Since he avoided overweening theoretical models, his descriptions have stood the test of time and will continue to be valid. He had a very fine ear and was able to distinguish and reproduce small differences in speech sounds. In Iraqi Kurdistan this allowed him, for example, to reproduce at his own pace in the evenings the Kurdish texts he recorded during the day and so to discuss the texts with the informants in an effective manner that made much use of the acumen of his informants and their ability to analyze their own language.

His pragmatic approach also saw him tend towards synchronic language descriptions, though particularly in the field of Middle Iranian the diachronic ‘deciphering’ of many individual words in the texts had to remain an important factor. Always a champion and guardian of good scholarship, he was a severe judge of his own and others’ ideas. He was prepared to share his knowledge with everyone and did this with generosity and humor. In his teaching and in private he was at the same time articulate of his own views and responsive to the views of others.

He was concerned to stay within the confines of what he deemed knowable. In particular, he was not inclined to discuss or to judge the religious worlds that present themselves in many of the texts he studied. To Gignoux’s question “À quoi sert l’étude d’une langue si elle ne débouche pas sur une histoire de l’humain, restant en quelque sorte comme désincarnée?” (Gignoux 2000, p. 312), he surely would have answered “life is too short.” He saw himself as just one scholar playing his part in an endeavor pursued by many, each with his own interests, and insisted that the philological side be secure before the content emerging from that be subjected to closer scrutiny and be used to make general statements contributing to a broader picture.

He served as the Treasurer of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* from 1970 to 1995. He became a member of the Commission responsible for guiding the work of the Turfan Study Group (‘Turfanforschung’) in the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities from its inception in 1994 up to his death. The British Academy elected him a Senior Fellow in 1996. He



was presented with a *Festschrift* on his 65th birthday: *Corolla Iranica*, Papers in honor of Prof. Dr. David Neil MacKenzie, ed. by R. Emmerick, D. Weber, Frankfurt am Main, 1991.

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