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OBITUARIES

Sir Gerard Clauson (1891-1973)

Sir Gerard Clauson, KCMG, OBE, FSA, who died on 1 May 1973, was, in the course of his 83 years, a man of many parts: a soldier, a public servant, a high-level business man, and an outstanding learned orientalist, in particular, a turcologist.

Born in 1891 of a military family, he was educated at Eton and became a scholar at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he read Mods and Greats, but already showed an interest in and a flair for languages beyond the classical and western European worlds. During his early years he won various university prizes for Asian studies, such as the Boden Sanskrit scholarship in 1911, the Hall-Houghton Syriac prize in 1913, and the James Mew Arabic scholarship in 1920. During the First World War he fought as an infantry officer, and then was on the General Staff at Gallipoli and in Egypt and Iraq, further increasing his interest in the Middle Eastern lands, and also gaining for himself both an O.B.E. in the military division and a Croix-de-Guerre with palms. The advent of peace enabled him to resume the Civil Service career which had been interrupted in 1914, and from then until 1951 he enjoyed a distinguished career at the Colonial Office. Ending up as Assistant Under-Secretary there, he played a prominent part in the Imperial Economic Conference at Ottawa in 1932, and was chairman of the International Wheat Conference in 1947 and the International Rubber Conference in 1951. His professional concern with commodities like rubber enabled him to begin a new career on retirement from the Civil Service on the board of Pirelli (Britain), where he eventually became Chairman.

However, we are concerned here primarily with Clauson the scholar. In the spacious interwar years, it was easier than now for a senior civil servant to pursue an outside interest, as the careers in the literary sphere of such figures as Sir Edward Marsh and Humbert Wolfe exemplify. Clauson published in *JRAS* (1928) a significant article on a fifteenth-century Turkish manuscript in the British Museum written in Uighur characters, and continued during his Civil Service years to keep abreast of work in the field of turcology, in which there were then, apart from Sir E. Denison Ross, virtually no other British scholars of significance. But with his retirement from official service, his qualities as a scholar could now fully burgeon. A series of articles appeared from his pen in such journals as the *JRAS*, the *Central Asiatic Journal*, *Asia Major* and *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, and it became evident that it was the proto-history and the early history of Turkish (he abominated the designation 'Turkic') and other languages of Inner Asia like Mongolian which especially fascinated him. He was fully conversant with East European scholarship--that of countries like Russia, Finland, Hungary and Poland, where the most important work in Altaic studies was being done--visiting these lands and keeping up close links with leading scholars there. The Royal Asiatic Society was always an institution dear to his heart; he was an active council member and then President, and had the honour of receiving from Her Majesty the Queen the Society's Gold Medal for 1973, its sesquicentennial year. He was equally concerned latterly with the Permanent International Altaic Conference, a body of specialists on the history, languages and cultures of the Inner Asian peoples, and in 1969 received the Indiana University Prize for his contributions to those studies. Also, during the period 1957-65 he was a member of the

governing body of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

Sir Gerard Clauson will be especially remembered by future generations of scholars for the three important books which he published in his later years. In his *Sanglax, a Persian guide to the Turkish language* (Gibb Memorial Series, London 1960), he printed the facsimile text of the *Sanglakh* of the eighteenth century Persian official Muhammad Mahdi Khan, a work that was basically a dictionary of Chaghatai Turkish, but with considerable attention to the large Mongolian element which had entered Eastern Turkish over the centuries; to this text he prefixed a valuable introduction and indices of the words given in the dictionary. In his *Turkish and Mongolian studies* (Royal Asiatic Society Prize Publication Fund, London 1963), he vigorously combated the so-called 'Altaic theory', the idea that Turkish, Mongolian and Tungusic are genetically related and descended from a single proto-Altaic language, like the linguistic families such as the Indo-European, the Semitic and the Finno-Ugrian ones. He believed that such groups as the Turkish languages and Mongolian had developed in isolation from each other--especially as there was no shortage of *Lebensraum* in Inner Asia!--and that common features were the result of subsequent linguistic and cultural contacts. But his supreme work, a book which Turkish scholars will certainly consult for decades to come, is his monumental *An etymological dictionary of pre-thirteenth century Turkish* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1972), in which he endeavoured to list all the purely Turkish words occurring in the standard languages (that is excluding the remnants of languages of the *l/r* Turkish group, of which the only surviving representative today is Chuvash) before 1200 A.D. Since he also gives citations and parallels in the more modern Turkish languages, the dictionary partakes of the nature of a historical thesaurus of the early Turkish language, and accordingly marks a great advance on earlier works which were concerned with particular regions of the Turkish linguistic area.

Clauson the man was the exact opposite of the dull pedant; he had an impish and irreverent sense of humour, which comes out in unlikely corners of his published works, and he was a stimulating conversationalist and companion. He had his prejudices: he regarded most modern linguistics and linguisticians as pretentious, and as a lover of the classics and of the English language, found their jargon repulsive (he complained only recently that the very word 'linguistics' was 'the base-born offspring of a Latin stem and a Greek suffix!'). He thought of himself as an old-fashioned philologist, and held that Turkish language studies had not yet advanced to a stage where the methods of modern structural linguistics could yield anything of value. Although he might, in a kindly and graceful way, deflate pretentious scholarship, he was entirely free from the *odium academicum*, and would often remark that, being a private scholar not intimately connected with the university and academic world, he had no need to worry about what colleagues thought of him or whether his own career would be affected by anything which he wrote. He was invariably willing to share his erudition. The present writer recalls that, on the occasions when he used to consult Sir Gerard on some point of early Turkish, a lengthy reply in a neat handwriting would promptly appear, almost by return post; and if he did not know the answer himself, he would write off to someone who did. His death certainly leaves a gaping hole in the exiguous ranks of British turcologists.

C.E. Bosworth