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Paul Pelliot

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Paul Pelliot

The loss of Paul Pelliot, within seven months of Maspero's death, was a misfortune as cruel as unexpected. He had attended the Hot Springs Conference early in 1945 and lectured at several American universities, staying in England for a few days on his return. Back at Paris, he developed cancer and passed away at the Hôpital de la Salpêtrière on 26th October.

Professor Pelliot was an Honorary Member of this Society as well as of the North China Branch, a Vice-President of the India Society, and a Corresponding Member of the British Academy, and he held honorary degrees of Cambridge, Hong Kong, and McGill universities. British sinologists share the grief of their French colleagues.

Pelliot was born at Paris on 28th May, 1878. Having graduated in Chinese and in Sanskrit he joined, in 1899, the Mission archéologique d'Indochine at Hanoi, then on the verge of being transformed into the École française d'Extrême-Orient. In three journeys to China between 1900 and 1902 he collected the nucleus of a magnificent Chinese library for the School, where he held the chair of Chinese from 1901. 1906 to 1909 were spent on another mission to China and Chinese Turkestan, when he secured for the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris about 30,000 volumes of Chinese printed books and 4,000-5,000 manuscripts in Chinese, Tibetan, Eastern Iranian, Soghdian, Uighur, and Tokharian, collected mainly at Kucha and at the Tun-huang caves. Pelliot at once realized the value of the Tun-huang library and his discoveries caused a sensation among learned circles in the East as well as the West. A Professorship of the Languages, History, and Archæology of Central Asia fell to him as the natural reward, the chair being specially created at the Collège de France in 1911. More duties and honours accrued to him, the more his leading position among French orientalists became established. He was elected a Member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres in 1921 and President of the Société Asiatique in 1936.

Western sinologists recognized Pelliot as their master. An indefatigable worker, his literary production has been immense. It is scattered in a score of journals, especially the *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, the *Journal Asiatique*, and *T'oung-pao*, of which he was co-editor from 1920 and editor from 1925. Many of these papers are of considerable length, but to stress

their occasional character they were never published as books. Reviews and bibliographical records form a substantial component of his work. He did more than anyone else in his time to combat amateurism, still the great danger to Far Eastern studies, by this self-denying effort.

A great collector, Pelliot was the first European scholar to acquire an adequate knowledge of Chinese bibliography. His insistence upon a strict presentation of sources marked a notable advance in the methods of sinology. His interests were catholic, and there is no field of Chinese and related studies which did not benefit from his activities (*Notes de la bibliographie chinoise*, 1902, 1909; *Une bibliothèque médiévale retrouvée au Kan-sou*, 1908; *L'édition collective des œuvres de Wang Kouo-wei*, 1929; *Le Chou king en caractères anciens*, 1916; *À propos du Keng tche t'ou*, 1913; *Les "Conquêtes de l'empereur de la China"*, 1921; *Les grottes de Touen-houang*, 1920-4; *Jades archaïques de la Chine* *appart. à M. C. T. Loo*, 1925). The part of Pelliot's work devoted to border provinces and China's relations to the outside world may seem disproportionate. Primarily, he had to answer the pressing claims of more developed sister-branches of learning, seeking information from Chinese sources, but his stupendous erudition was genuinely attracted by the very difficulty of the task. Even his remarkable contributions towards the history of religion in China were concerned with the imported rather than the indigenous forms. (*Un traité manichéen retrouvé en Chine*, with Chavannes, 1911-13; *Chrétiens d'Asie centrale et d'Extrême-Orient*, 1914; *Meou-tseu*, 1920; *Les Mongols et la papauté*, 1922-1931.) He was to become the uncontested authority on China's foreign contacts. (*Le Founan*, 1903; *Deux itinéraires de Chine en Inde à la fin du VIII^e siècle*, 1904; *Les grandes voyages maritimes chinois au début du XV^e siècle*, 1933-6; *Origine des relations politiques de la France avec la Chine*, 1930.) Problems of Altaic, and especially Mongol philology and history occupied Pelliot increasingly during his late years. This work had no time to mature fully. His edition of the "Mongol Secret History" remains unpublished. His "Notes on the Proper Names and Oriental Words in Marco Polo" will, it is hoped, appear in Professor Moule's edition in this country.

G. HALOUN.