

OBITUARY

SIR GODFREY DRIVER

The death of Professor Sir Godfrey (Rolles) Driver on 22 April 1975 at the age of 82 deprives SOAS of a friend and supporter of long and distinguished standing. He was elected an Honorary Fellow in 1963 and served on the Governing Body as representative of the British Academy from 1955 to 1967.

The foundation of his learning was in classical studies at Winchester and as a scholar at New College, Oxford, 1911–15, where he won the Pusey and Ellerton and Senior Kennicott Hebrew Scholarships. He was appointed Fellow and classical tutor in Magdalen College in 1919 (Fellow, 1919–62, and at times Vice-President; Honorary Fellow, 1962). War was to interrupt his studies on two occasions. In the first World War he served in Belgium and France, and in Serbia with an Anglo-Serbian hospital and in Postal Censorship. He was wounded and won the Military Cross and, as an Intelligence officer with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, gained first-hand experience of the Middle East. From this arose his *Report on Kurdistan and the Kurds* (Mt. Carmel, 1919), a subject to which he returned in his first contribution to the *Bulletin of the School* (II, 2, 1922, 197–213) and in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1921, 4, pp. 563–72. Already he displayed a lively interest in matters linguistic, historical, and religious. This brought him into early contact with other teachers at London's School of Oriental Studies. In war days he used his time to further his knowledge of Semitic dialects and wrote a competent *Grammar of the colloquial Arabic of Syria and Palestine* (1925).

While still at school he had helped to compile the index of A. Cowley's second edition of Gesenius's *Hebrew grammar* and after his return in 1920 to Oxford, where the whole of his academic life was to be spent, he maintained a steady flow of articles, notes, and reviews. In these he studied the vocabulary of the Old Testament and proposed varied solutions to many difficult words and texts in Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac, Arabic, and Akkadian. With L. Hodgson he published the Syriac text of *Nestorius, The bazaar of Heracleides* (1925). He was always well aware of the criticism that he sometimes 'chanced his arm' with his innovatory suggestions. His up-to-date and wide-ranging reading embraced most Semitic languages and dialects and those who accuse him of ignoring advances (for example in Ugaritic in the New English Bible) sometimes overlook the fact that many of his proposals were first made at a time when these subjects were imperfectly understood, given exaggerated importance, or subject to various theories and interpretations as some are yet. If he seemed occasionally to rely overmuch on possible Arabic cognates for etymological reference, it is still noteworthy that many of his suggestions still stand the test of time even in the light of James Barr, *Comparative philology and the text of the Old Testament* (1968).

Professor Driver's interests were never confined to linguistics and philology.



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More than many Hebraists he entered personally into the whole range of Assyriological studies. The indefatigable Stephen Langdon, Shillito Reader and Professor of Assyriology in Oxford (1908–37) encouraged him to work first-hand on the cuneiform script and publish letters of the First Dynasty of Babylon (Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Texts, III, 1924). He also prepared long and detailed articles on Cappadocian texts in the Ashmolean Museum and even though later demands on his time prevented further major publications in this field he always kept abreast of developments. His *Assyrian laws* (1935) and the complementary *The Babylonian laws*, I (1952), written in collaboration, for the legal commentary, with his friend Sir John Miles (Vol. II, 1955, the Akkadian text, translation, and philological notes by Driver himself) are still indispensable volumes for the student of ancient law.

In his *Problems of the Hebrew verbal system* (1936) Driver argued forcibly for the composite nature of Hebrew and drew extensively on Akkadian forms to explain the so-called ‘wāw consecutive’ construction. Always grateful for his father’s scholarship and influence, he was particularly pleased that he had been able to contribute to a fundamental aspect of Hebrew grammar on which his distinguished parent had himself written in his *Hebrew tenses* (1892). Of this Driver wrote *כבוד איש כבוד אביו*. He had a deep sense of the value of family ties and owed much in his 50 years of married life to the companionship of Lady Driver. If he himself had hoped for a son to follow him, he was more than compensated in his three daughters.

In 1928 he was appointed Reader in Comparative Semitic Philology and continued to maintain detailed records for a revised edition of *A Hebrew and English lexicon* (1906) of which his father had been an editor with F. Brown and C. A. Briggs. His ambition to see this fulfilled within his lifetime was not to be realized for the accumulation of new data outstripped the time he was able to devote to the task himself. Nevertheless this necessary project still proceeds on the solid basis of his records and of the encouragement he gave to his co-editors. Professor Driver always acknowledged suggestions, notes, and justifiable criticisms—indeed he often made these of others trenchantly, but without malice and with mutual regard—usually in a miniscule hand on post-cards. The writer, like many of his former students, is indebted for this, for his friendship and encouragement as well as for his infectious enthusiasm and the way he freely shared new ideas and changes of opinion.

Professor Driver would have made an admirable Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford and been a worthy successor to his father in this also. Unfortunately, the chair was then traditionally associated with a Canonry tenable at Christ Church, Oxford, and as a layman he was ineligible. As a loyal churchman and an upright man ‘who feared God and set his face against wrongdoing’ (his own rendering of Job i, 1, NEB) he would never have sought orders merely to gratify a personal ambition. That he concentrated on philological rather than on theological comment on the Old Testament was in part due to deference to the unhappy and sometimes unreasoning reaction of more conservative elements

to his father's writings on literary critical problems and work on the Revised Version. Despite this, Driver acted as joint editor of the *Journal of Theological Studies* (1933–40); he served as the President of the Bibliographical Society (1937–8) and the Society for Historical Theology (1950–1) in Oxford. From 1935 to 1939 he was Grinfield Lecturer in the Septuagint.

The second World War again interrupted Driver's work with the call to national service. He was able, however, to put his earlier wartime and peacetime experience to good use in his work for the Ministry of Information at home and in the Middle East where he was responsible for Government publications in Hebrew and Arabic. To aid him he roped in former academic colleagues. They, and doubtless others, will recall among other memories that of their chief engaged in a vigorous correspondence in the *Palestine Post* in which he often queried the wisdom of some of the new words then being coined in Modern Hebrew for everyday usage. He found time to deliver the 1944 Schweich Lectures for the British Academy of which he had been elected a Fellow in 1939. These, as *Semitic writing from pictograph to alphabet* (1948) brought together his notes and reading over a wide range of subjects. They showed his usual thorough and vigorous approach to a complex subject. He did not hesitate to contradict the common assumption that the Sinaitic script was the link between Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Phoenician script, as opposed to the Byblos. His survey is still one of great value and a third and revised edition, based on the notes he was compiling almost to the time of his death, is in the press.

When the Curators of the Bodleian Library acquired a collection of Aramaic documents in 1943–4 the task of editing them was entrusted to Driver. This he did in *Aramaic documents in the fifth century B.C.* (1954, revised 1957) making due acknowledgement to the notes and assistance of Professor W. B. Henning, then at SOAS, and others. As the Ugaritic tablets were published Professor Driver studied them methodically and yet interpretatively both in lectures and in his own researches in the course of which he prepared his own annotated text, as was his wont. These were published as *Canaanite myths and legends* (1956). At the same time he was taking an interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumrān in 1947–56 and played a salutary part in exposing the weakness of some arguments then adduced to support their antiquity (*The Hebrew Scrolls*, 1959). He did not deny their antiquity though he espoused a minority view as to their date and purpose in his *The Judean Scrolls: the problem and the solution* (1965).

Professor Driver's primary interest was always Biblical Hebrew and in his last two decades he devoted increasing time and energy to the New English Bible project for which he will justly be remembered throughout the English-speaking world. All who knew him are aware of the individual mark he left upon the translation of the Old Testament as is attested, but not explained, in the somewhat sketchy L. H. Brockington, *The Hebrew text of the Old Testament* (1973). When Driver gave what eventually became his final paper to the

Society for Old Testament Studies, in January 1971, he described part of his thinking behind some of the readings adopted and was uniquely accorded a standing ovation. He had been a member of the Society since 1924, its President in 1937–8 ('the year in which the Society came of age'). He was elected President of the International Organisation for the Study of the Old Testament for 1953–6 and President of the Oxford Congress in 1959. As Joint Director of the New English Bible (1970) with C. H. Dodd he was deservedly awarded an honorary Litt.D. of Cambridge (1964) when a similar honour had been bestowed by Oxford on Professor Dodd. Professor Driver had earlier been made an honorary D.D. of Aberdeen (1946) and Manchester (1956) and an honorary D.Litt. of Durham (1948). He was appointed C.B.E. in 1958 and knighted for services to scholarship in 1968. The Oriental Institute of the University of Oxford, opened in 1960, will stand as a permanent memorial to his vision and endeavours on behalf of all such studies within his university.

For his seventieth birthday, 20 August 1962, some colleagues from 10 different countries presented their tribute in articles edited by D. Winton Thomas and W. D. McHardy, *Hebrew and Semitic studies presented to Godfrey Rolles Driver* (1963), with a selected bibliography of his writings (pp. 191–206); but so wide was the circle of former students in this country and his impact on Semitic studies that a further volume (*Journal of Semitic Studies*, VII, 2, 1962) added another 17 articles. In all, three of the authors were, or are, Regius Professors of Hebrew and at least another 10 of his former students hold professorships in various branches of Semitic studies. It would be through their on-going research, as much as through his own varied contributions that Professor Driver would wish to be remembered.

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