

IN MEMORIAM

SIR GERARD CLAUSON

1891—1974

It will be very hard for all of us to accept the fact that Sir Gerard has left us. His suggestive personality, his thought-provoking, and never compromising scholarly work became in a short time an integral part of Altaic studies. His main interest lay always in the history of the Turkish languages, though his horizon included Chinese texts in Tibetan script, Tangut problems, Arabic and Persian relations, too.

In the very centre of his studies stood the older history of the Turkish languages. He recognized that there were two essential points from where a promising approach could be made to the unsolved problems of early Turkish linguistic history: the relationship among the earliest Turkish and Mongolian languages and a detailed historical and etymological study of the language of the earliest Turkish monuments.

His paper «The case against the Altaic theory» was aimed at the first point. He attacked the theory of the genetic relationship among the Altaic languages — a hypothesis which had played a fundamental role in a former period but was petrifying into a dogmatic theory — and forced even those who were in favour to look for new arguments and new material. With this paper the question was transformed from an academic commonplace into a moot point, a crucial issue of Altaic studies. With the fresh eye of those not overtrained by professional academic education, he could make many valid observations. At the same time his papers showed a unique ability to acquire all the essentials of the former achievements in his field of interest, and this provided a solid foundation for his observations.

His work «An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth Century Turkish» remains a fundamental and indispensable tool of historical Altaic linguistics. The most important merit of his work is that it unites the etymological and the historical survey of the early Turkish lexical stock. Unlike his predecessors he did not restrict himself to the compilation of comparative dictionary. He tried to fix the first occurrence of the given word, outlining the historical changes both in the form and the meaning of the word, and always offering an interpretation of the word within its actual context. He attempted to distinguish among old dialectal differences hidden by the imperfectness of the writing systems, and tried to sketch the geographic distribution of words and contrast the old and recent data. His etymological hints and analyses of the morphological structure are thus supported by a comprehensive array of data. Probably some of his conclusions the reader will not agree with but every user of this book will agree with the main principles. Moreover, everybody working in the field of Altaic linguistic history will consider this work as an indispensable daily companion.

Those who had the privilege to know him personally will always remember his spirited contributions to international Altaic studies. We were especially glad to welcome him among our guests in Hungary in 1971. On this occasion in acknowledgement of his scholarly achievement and his good relations with Oriental studies in Hungary, the Hungarian Kőrösi Csoma Society conferred upon him the title of honorary fellowship.

His memory and his life-work will remain with us.

A. Róna-Tas