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*Introduction:*

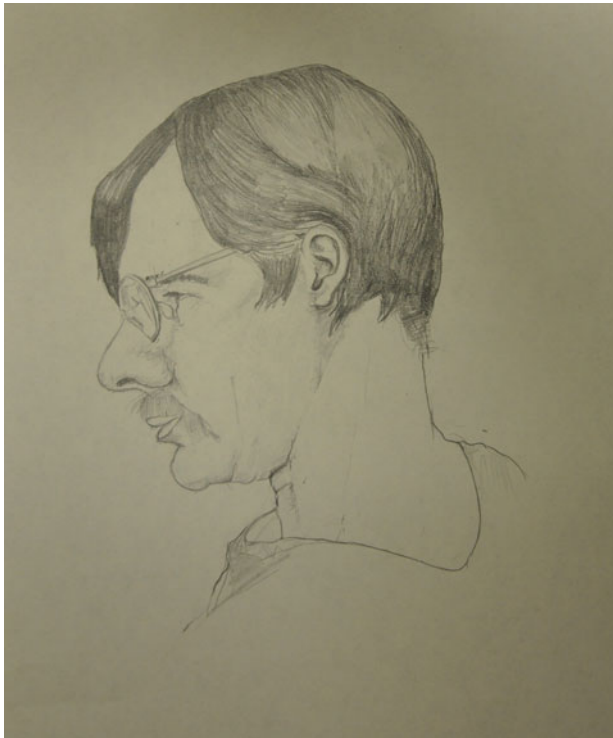
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*The Roar of Silence*

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ARASH ZEINI AND ADAM BENKATO



سید سید علی کو ۱۴۰۳

The breadth and variety of François de Blois’s erudition is such that only a long and detailed introduction could possibly do justice to his scholarly career. Anyone who knows François, the “quiet man” of Iranian studies, also knows his penchant for concision. We

have therefore decided to limit our remarks here to about the length of his legendary hand-out of Middle Persian grammar—two pages.

François de Blois was born in New York on 15 September 1948 and grew up in France, Germany, and the USA. After finishing high school in Chicago in 1966, he returned to Germany to take up the study of “Orientalistik” at the Universität Tübingen. Although François was unable to finish the programme due to difficult circumstances, the intellectual commitments from which he would never waver had been firmly established. For the next two decades, he carried out his research independently while working as a language teacher in Germany, France, Saudi Arabia, and Great Britain, where he taught English, Arabic, Persian, French, German, Greek, and Italian in various capacities. After more than a decade of publishing his research as an independent scholar, François was appointed a research fellow by the Royal Asiatic Society in 1989, with sole responsibility for continuing C. A. Storey’s bi-bibliographical survey of Persian literature. After completing that fellowship, François then held a variety of posts, including being appointed to teach Iranian and Semitic languages at the School of Oriental and African Studies and the Universität Hamburg, and holding research appointments on a number of major projects in Iranian studies, including the Manichaean Dictionary and Bactrian Chronology projects at SOAS, the Shahnama project at Cambridge, and most recently the project Calendars in Antiquity and the Middle Ages at UCL.

François de Blois has had an unusual career in two ways, which we find important to highlight for the scholarly record. Firstly, without a typical academic pedigree, François spent his career, until his retirement in 2018, without major institutional resources. Secondly, although it is not uncommon for scholars, especially those in Semitic or Iranian studies, to have a solid working knowledge of several ancient languages, it is rare for an individual scholar to attain the competency in languages and literatures such as Arabic, Persian, or Syriac, not to mention in the many ancient Iranian and Semitic languages, required to teach them at an advanced level. But it is virtually impossible to find a scholar who has the depth of knowledge and expertise necessary to publish not only a host of articles on history, astronomy, religion, and historical linguistics drawing on sources in literally all these languages, but also manuscript catalogues, monographic literary-biographical surveys, and major works on textual criticism and calendars. François’s scholarship shows a combination of breadth, variety, and depth that is unique.

François’s first monograph, published in 1990, was a prize-winning study of the origins of *Kalīla wa-Dimna*. Thirty years later, it remains the indispensable study of Burzōy’s adaptation of Indian material into the Middle Persian work that, through Ibn al-Muqaffā’, became the Arabic *Kalīla wa-Dimna*. His next major work was on the bio-bibliographical survey of Persian literature, for which he completed the part on poetry of the pre-Mongol period, from the mid-9th to the early 13th centuries. For this work, which Ehsan Yarshater once remarked was a “major event in Iranian studies”, François was awarded the Bahari Foundation prize for contributions to Iranian culture in 1998, and the combined edition of the original three fascicles was honoured with the World Book of the Year prize from the Iranian government in 2006. He was also responsible for compiling the Arabic and New Persian parts of the *Dictionary of Manichaean Texts* (2006), the lemmata of which a reviewer praised as “miniature research articles substantially improving our understanding of key terms”. In the

early 1980s, François was given access to Abbas Hamdani's private collection of Ismaili manuscripts. A life-long friendship developed between the two scholars, and many years later when Hamdani donated his collection to the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, François was asked to catalogue them. François was also commissioned to edit the Elamite version of the Behistun inscription for the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum*, but much to the regret of the scholarly community, the Elamite affliction has prevented him from doing so.

One of the most well-known aspects of François's research has been his work on calendars, a topic close to his heart. Indeed, he has written the last word on several ancient and medieval calendar traditions which have long been the subject of contentious debate. This includes the Persian and Zoroastrian calendars, and, together with Nicholas Sims-Williams, the Bactrian calendar, including a major recent collaborative volume on the chronology of the known Bactrian documents.

These two great philologists originally met through Mary Boyce. Though notorious for being strictly selective about her inner circle of friends, Mary was, the legend goes, so impressed by François' article "‘Freeman’ and ‘Nobles’ in Iranian and Semitic Languages" that she decided to admit him into her confidence. After François eulogised their friendship in a heartfelt memorial lecture to the Royal Asiatic Society, he reluctantly admitted to one of us present that Mary Boyce had only ever truly recognised three scholars in the field of Iranian studies. Though we shall not reveal the secret names, readers will surely suspect the identity of one.

It is only appropriate that this festschrift should be housed in the Royal Asiatic Society's main scholarly publication venue, as much of François's career has been interwoven with the Society, and the *Journal* has published some of his work. The contributors to this festschrift represent an international group of scholars, most of whom have been his direct colleagues or students. We, the editors of this festschrift, both had the good fortune to be students of François at SOAS. We both took seminars with him in Imperial Aramaic, Old Persian, and Khwarizmian, while one of us also studied Bactrian with him during the only time it was ever offered officially, and both of us benefited from his presence on our PhD committees.

The contributions to this issue range over a huge variety of languages, sources, and disciplines. It is a tribute to François that these contributions not only involve topics and sources with which he is totally comfortable, but indeed ones on which he has already had something to say. And, most appropriately, this festschrift also has two contributions on calendars.

François once wrote that "for the Achaemenian kings it was clearly a source of pleasure and of pride to include in their monumental inscriptions long lists of the 'lands' that made up their far-flung empire". His scholarly output is clearly a source of pleasure and of pride, and a roar of silence echoes through the far-flung empire of ancient sources which he has elucidated with his vast learning and philological acumen.

*kē-tān az abzōnīg ganj ī yazadān wazurg nām dūr-brāzišnīgīhā ud pahlom ahlāyih ī  
ruwān-bōxtišnīgīhā abartom burzišn ī xuēš abē-gumānīhā pad ēd farrox tan ud anōšag  
gyān bowandaḡīhā bauād  
fiazafī pad drōd*

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ARASH ZEINI  
Freie Universität Berlin

ADAM BENKATO  
University of California, Berkeley