OBITUARY

JOHN BROUGH

31.8.1917--9.1.1984

John Brough, Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Cambridge, died on 9 January 1984. He had been due to retire on 30 September 1984. Born in 1917, he was educated at Dundee High School, and then read Classics at the University of Edinburgh, obtaining the M.A. degree with First Class Honours in 1939. He came to Cambridge as an Affiliated Student, and was placed in the First Class in Part II of the Classical Tripos in 1940, and in Parts I and II of the Oriental Languages Tripos in 1941 and 1942 respectively.

He had meanwhile been working in agriculture, and during the period 1943-44 was an agricultural research assistant. In 1944 he was appointed as Assistant Keeper in the Department of Oriental Books and Manuscripts in the British Museum, where he remained until 1946. From 1945 to 1948 he was a Fellow of St John’s College, Cambridge, and in 1945 he was awarded the D.Litt. degree of the University of Edinburgh for work based upon the Gotra-Pravara-Mañjarī. In 1946 he was appointed lecturer in Sanskrit at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and in 1948 he was elected to a Chair in Sanskrit at the University of London, and was appointed head of the Department of India, Pakistan and Ceylon at the School of Oriental and African Studies. In 1961 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy, and in 1967 he became Professor of Sanskrit at Cambridge.

In 1953 the work he had submitted for the D.Litt. degree was published in book form (The early brahmanical system of gotra and pravara, Cambridge University Press). This included the first critical edition of a very difficult text, whose manuscript tradition had been badly corrupted, with an English translation, and an introduction dealing with the organisation of ancient brahmanical society in exogamous clans (gotras). He had meanwhile published two articles in the same field (“The early history of the gotras”, in JRAS 1946, 32-45 and 1947, 76-90), and a later note on the Brahmin clans appeared in JAOS (74, 4, 1955, 263-66).

His work in the field of Sanskrit grammatical and linguistic studies led to the publication of papers on the theories of general linguistics in the Sanskrit grammarians, and on Indian theories of meaning (TPS 1951, 27-46 and 1953, 161-76), and a growing involvement with the grammar of Sanskrit and other Indian languages is shown in his study of the Lilātilaka (a Sanskrit tract on Malayalam grammar and poetics) in BSOAS XII, 1, 1947, 148-62, and a paper on Audumbarayana’s theory of language in the same journal (XIV, 1, 1952, 73-77).

His field of activities expanded from India proper to the neighbouring regions, and he published papers on Nepalese legends and Buddhist ritual in Nepal in Indo-Iranian Journal 27 (1984) 167.
An increasing interest in Buddhist texts resulted in his examination of the common introductory phrase “Thus have I heard” in BSOAS XIII, 2, 1950, 416-26. The emphasis upon Buddhism became marked in his masterly review article on Edgerton’s Dictionary and Grammar of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (BSOAS XVI, 2, 1954, 351-75), which made a valuable contribution to the subject, since it dealt at length with the idiosyncrasies of Nepalese scribes. In a detailed examination of the varieties of language used in Buddhist Sanskrit texts more than the three varieties defined by Edgerton were identified, and a strong case was made for the retention of the term “Buddhist Sanskrit” as well as the introduction of Edgerton’s “Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit”.

The opportunity afforded to his colleague Professor R. S. Rice to photograph the unpublished portions of the Ms. Dutreuil de Rhins in Leningrad led to John Brough being asked to prepare an edition of all that was known to exist of that text. In a typically methodical way he prepared himself for this task by examining all material in the Kharoṣṭhī script which had been published to that date, and in fact adding to that material by publishing an article on a Kharoṣṭhī inscription from China (BSOAS XXIV, 3, 1961, 517-30). The Gāndhārī Dharmapada (Oxford University Press, 1962) will undoubtedly be regarded as the definitive work on the subject, and specialists will consider it to be Brough’s greatest contribution to Buddhist and Indological studies.

The book is not, however, restricted to Indian studies, for the extensive notes contain frequent comparisons with Chinese and Tibetan versions of the Dharmapada, Udānavarga, and other texts. The very long introduction deals not only with the problems of the Kharoṣṭhī script and the Gāndhārī language, but also with the relationship between Indian and Chinese versions of Buddhist texts. It was this latter aspect of his studies which occupied an ever greater part of Brough’s time for the remainder of his life. An examination of an alleged translation of Āryaśūra’s Jātaka-mālā appeared in Asia Major, N.S. XI, 1, 1964-65, 27-53, but his interest in the extra-Indian cultural field was not restricted to literature as his “Comments on third-century Shan-shan and the history of Buddhism” (BSOAS XXVIII, 3, 1965, 582-612) and his supplementary note on the same subject (XXXIII, 1, 1970, 39-45) show.

John Brough’s hobbies were music and gardening. His interest in horticulture not only led him, with his wife Marjorie, herself an expert botanist, to lay out and cultivate a fine garden at their home in Bishop’s Stortford, but also involved him in a controversy with R. Gordon Wasson, when the latter attempted to identify the Soma plant of the Vedas with the mushroom Amanita muscaria. His review article on Wasson’s book (BSOAS XXXIV, 2, 1971, 331-62) and a subsequent paper on the Soma-mushroom theory (Ind. Taur. I, 1973, 21-32) dealt with the botanical