On the 24th of April, 1967, the President of the IAHR, Prof. Geo Widengren of Uppsala University, celebrates his 60th birthday. Those of us who know him well, and especially those who have seen him in the saddle, would not believe it, but it is, nevertheless, true. Of course this is not the occasion for a final evaluation of a scholar's career, but it is an opportunity for the editorial board of the Numen and the executive committee of the IAHR to convey, on behalf of all the readers and members, their congratulations to a great scholar and to express their appreciation for good leadership.

Anyone who has learnt to know Geo Widengren as a scholar will be aware of one great passion that is visible throughout his work, namely his striving towards objectivity. This writer remembers with gratitude the criticism to which he subjected the first draft of parts of a textbook in comparative religion which I had submitted to his judgment. Not one single depreciative adjective that tended to evaluate other religions in terms familiar to those who share the Western-Christian cultural heritage, was left unnoticed, and the adjectives were accordingly changed in the final version of the book in order to be as fair as possible to the believers of other religions. It seems advisable that this article applies a similarly objective approach in order to be fair to its object — he would certainly not appreciate any empty panegyric.

Geo Widengren received decisive impressions from his teacher in the field of comparative religion, Professor (later on Bishop) Tor Andrae. From him he learned a critical attitude toward evolutionism as a method in comparative religion, high respect for the importance of text studies in religious research, and a strictly historical approach to the study of religion. In all his works these principles have been guiding marks which he has never lost out of sight.
A philologically sound study of the texts is a predominant feature of all that Geo Widengren has written. From his doctoral dissertation of 1936, which was a vigorous attempt to interpret both the Israelite and the Babylonian religion as religions in their own rights, to his latest comprehensive work, *Die Religionen Irans*, this trait has always been characteristic: there is not a lot of talking around the texts, but first of all the texts themselves are allowed to speak in the light of a congenial interpretation. No obstacle has been too great, no language has been too difficult in this effort to let the documents of every religion speak for themselves.

The anti-evolutionistic trend is visible in Widengren's second large work, *Hochgottglaube im alten Iran*. Even if this is first and foremost an investigation of ancient Iranian religion, it has also another aim, namely to show that the belief in high gods is present in an environment where even the slightest possibility of influence from Christian or Islamic missions was out of question. It is thus an answer to those evolutionists who maintained that the belief in high gods among non-literate peoples is due to Christian or Islamic influence.

This work is important also from another point of view. It initiated a long series of studies in the field of Iranian religion, a field that has come to absorb more and more of Widengren's interest. In this area he was a student of H. S. Nyberg, who at the time when Widengren was in the beginning of his academic career had just published his epoch-making work on the religions of ancient Iran. Widengren has been able to build on the foundations laid by Nyberg and to develop his ideas further in many directions.

As a corollary to this Iranian involvement may be regarded the keen interest that Widengren has always taken in Gnostic studies. He is an eager defender of the idea of the Iranian origin of Gnosticism, which he has developed in a number of works. When the study conference on Gnosticism was held at Messina in 1966, it was a matter of course that he should deliver the introductory lecture.

It serves no purpose to enumerate the various religious phenomena that have been the object of Widengren's attention and research. Suffice it to mention one more item: the institution of sacral kingship. Five of his books carry the sub-title King and Saviour. It seems to have been at his suggestion that this became the topic of the Rome congress in 1955, and he himself delivered one of the general lectures,