Abstract

The Turkological Legacy of Ambassador Gunnar Jarring
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In September 1929 Gunnar Jarring travelled to Kashgar to do field work for his Ph.D. thesis on the sound pattern of Eastern Turki (Studien zu einer osttürkischen Lautlehre, Lund 1933). This was the starting-point of a life-long scholarly career devoted to the Uighur language and culture and parallel to his other eminent career as a diplomat in the service of the Swedish Foreign Ministry.

Besides his research in Uighur lexicography, folk literature and ethnology, Gunnar Jarring took a keen interest in the Central Asian region as a whole, from a linguistic and literary point of view as well as an historical and political one. A large part of his vast library consisted of publications on Central Asia, both from the region itself and from other parts of the world, not least the former Soviet Union, where Jarring was Ambassador from 1964 to 1973. His collection of Central Asia publications, which was finally taken care of by the Swedish Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, consists of almost 5000 volumes, a number of manuscripts, catalogues and maps as well as more than 3000 offprints. All of the most renowned accounts of expeditions to Central Asia from the late 19th and early 20th centuries can be found here, along with a great number of less known accounts, some of which are very rare and accessible at just a few or perhaps even no other libraries in the world. These publications provide us with an exceptionally rich material for studies of the accumulation and formation of Western knowledge on Asia in general and Central Asia in particular during the colonial era up until the cold-war era.

For several years after Ambassador Jarring’s death, this collection was deposited at Stockholm University under my responsibility as head of the Department of Central Asian Studies. In late 2011, after I had been appointed Director of the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, a decision was taken by the Royal Academy of Letters to the effect that the collection was eventually to be donated to this Institute and transferred to Istanbul.

Ambassador Jarring’s last contribution to this collection of Central Asia publications was his manuscript for the second edition of An Eastern Turki–English Dialect Dictionary. In the first edition, published in 1964, Jarring called his dictionary an “index” to his collection of Eastern Turki oral texts, Materials to the Knowledge of Eastern Turki (Lund, 1946–1951). He commented that it had been his intention to take into account all published Eastern Turki texts and to include the total word material of all these texts. However, lack of time had prevented him from doing so, he wrote, and for this reason he had decided to draw exclusively on his own material.

The desire to produce the ultimate exhaustive dictionary of Eastern Turki never left him. During the last thirty years of his life he worked constantly on this project and produced hundreds and thousands of handwritten pages. With the abundant number of references the dictionary becomes a guide to older accounts of the history and culture of the predominantly Turkic population of Xinjiang. In addition to the published, though now old and rare, sources, there is also much unpublished material referred to by Jarring. One abbreviation occurring with great frequency in the dictionary is capital “R”. In Jarring’s last published work, Central Asian Turkic Place-Names (Stockholm, 1997), this “R” was identified as unpublished materials stored in the Library of the University of Lund after the former missionary and doctor at the Swedish Mission in Kashgar, Gustaf Raquette, who later became Jarring’s teacher of Turkic languages at Lund in the 1920s.

Jarring finished his manuscript and could have it all typed before he died. He also took an active part in the preparations for the transfer of the files and printouts to the Department of Central Asian Studies in Stockholm for the final editing and publishing of the manuscript. The new edition of An Eastern Turki–English Dialect marks the end point of Jarring’s study – three quarters of a century long – on the language and culture of the Uighurs and the Turkic world at large. This manuscript together with his own copies of references for his dictionary, sometimes with notes by Jarring himself, gives us a unique chance to follow the history and development of his career as a Turkologyst and Central Asia specialist.