

In Memoriam

HEINZ BECHERT
(26 June 1932 – 14 June 2005)

The premature death of Prof. Bechert, after two apoplectic strokes, has bereaved the scholarly world of one of its most distinguished representatives in the fields of Indology and Buddhist Studies. His sphere of academic activities was, indeed, vast. First of all, his great interest in the land and people of Sri Lanka, his frequent visits to the island and prolonged stays there, suggest his having been Wilhelm Geiger's successor or 'scientific heir'. Bechert composed an obituary in memory of Geiger which appeared in the Copenhagen Critical Pāli Dictionary, vol. II, fasc. 2 (1962), pp. ix – xiv. Geiger had written down his memoirs in two manuscript volumes containing details both of his personal and professional life. These materials were made accessible to Bechert by one of Geiger's sons. Moreover, Geiger's own collection of letters from colleagues and other materials had been entrusted to Bechert by Geiger's family, enabling him thus to edit Wilhelm Geiger's literary remains. First, H. Bechert's "Bibliography of Wilhelm Geiger's Writings" was published in Labuhēṅgoḍa Candaratana (ed.), Gayigar Samaruva, Geiger Commemoration Vol., Colombo, 1967. Then, Geiger, *Kleine Schriften zur Indologie und Buddhismuskunde* (v. Glasenapp Foundation, vol. 6), ed. by H. Bechert, was published (Wiesbaden, 1973), and in 1977 Bechert's biography of Wilhelm Geiger. *His Life and Works* was brought out in Colombo. At the conclusion of his book on Geiger, he paid tribute to his eminent predecessor in the following words: 'Wilhelm Geiger is not likely to be forgotten wherever there is still an interest in those subjects which he studied...' In the opinion of the present writer these remarks referring to Geiger can, with good reason, also be applied to Bechert himself because he was in the forefront among scholars of a new generation who opened up new vistas by complementing textcritical-cum-historical approaches in their respective subjects by anthropological, phaenomenological and sociological methods, ensuring thus a much more comprehensive understanding of the subject being dealt with and avoiding methodological onesidedness. Hopefully, the following biographical sketch may throw some light on Bechert's great scholarly achievements thanks to his having successfully employed multidisciplinary approaches.

Heinz Bechert was born in Munich as son of a lawyer which fact, in all likelihood, accounts for the later Buddhologist's keen interest, inter alia, in the corpus of juridical texts pertaining to the ancient order of Buddhist monks and nuns (*vinaya*). Bechert's interest in legal matters as treated in the Vinaya can certainly be taken for granted due to the fact that he supervised a number of impressive doctoral theses exploring aspects of Sangha law and succeeding in breaking new ground.

In the 1950s Bechert enrolled at Munich University where he read Classical Philology, History, Indology and Tibetology, and he also studied at Hamburg University for some time. In 1956 he obtained his doctorate from Munich University for his identifying and editing manuscript remains from Central Asia belonging to the *Anavataptagāthā* and *Sthaviragāthā*. His doctoral thesis was published under the title *Bruchstücke buddhistischer Versammlungen aus zentralasiatischen Sanskrithandschriften* (Berlin, 1961). As the very title of this publication shows, the second main field of Bechert's interest was early Sanskrit Buddhism as it has become accessible through the substantial manuscript remains from Central Asia. From 1956-61 Bechert served as Research Assistant at Saarbrücken and also was a research fellow in Colombo (1958-59). Having shifted to Mainz University, he again held a research assistant's post (1961-64) and was 'habilitated' (D.Litt.) there by a dissertation on the history of Sanskrit literature of the Sinhalese; this 'habilitation' thesis, considerably enhanced and updated, was only brought out (Vienna, 2005) shortly before his death, entitled *Eine regionale hochsprachliche Tradition in Südasien: Sanskrit-Literatur bei den buddhistischen Singhalesen*. Having been appointed Reader at Mainz University, after six months he was offered a professorship in 1965 to succeed Ernst Waldschmidt as Head of the Department of Indology, Göttingen University. Shortly after, under the new directorship, the Göttingen department was renamed "Seminar für Indologie und Buddhismuskunde". During his tenure, Bechert was invited to Yale as Visiting Professor two times (1969-70, 1974-75).

As official successor of Waldschmidt, the quondam doyen of German Buddhology, at Göttingen Bechert both continued the latter's scientific projects and initiated new ones. In terms of Buddhist philology and cultural history the two most important, enduring and ongoing serial publications are a) the *Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden* (Sanskrit Manuscripts from the Turfan Finds) of which nine tomes have appeared (1965-2004), tomes 6-9 co-edited by Bechert; b) the lexicographical exploitation of mainly MS materials from Central Asia, published as *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden / Sanskrit Dictionary of the Buddhist Texts from the Turfan Finds and of the Canonical Literature of the Sarvāstivāda School* of which so far 17 fascicles have been published (Göttingen, 1973-2004), begun by E. Waldschmidt and under H. Bechert as editor-in-chief (fascicles 1-16). Furthermore, just as Bechert had previously edited Geiger's *Kleine Schriften*, together with P. Kieffer-Pülz, he first edited Gustav Roth's *Indian Studies* (Selected Papers), Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica No. 32, Delhi, 1986, and subsequently E. Waldschmidt's *Ausgewählte Kleine Schriften* (v. Glasenapp Foundation, vol. 29), Stuttgart, 1989.

Under the sponsorship of the Commission for Buddhist Studies, Academy of Sciences at Göttingen, Bechert convened altogether four international symposia between 1974 and 1988. As the titles of the published Proceedings, ed. by H. Bechert, indicate, at the symposia a broad spectrum of Buddhological topics was covered: a) *Buddhism in Ceylon and Studies on Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries* (1978); b) *The Language of the*

Earliest Buddhist Tradition (1980); c) *Zur Schulzugehörigkeit von Werken der Hīnayāna-Literatur* (On the School Affiliation of Works Pertaining to Hīnayāna Literature), 2 vols. (1985-87), and d) *The Dating of the Historical Buddha*, 3 vols. (1991-97). So as to make the results of the latter symposium more readily available and stimulate further research on this important topic, after singling out key contributions to the controversial issue and after translating relevant papers, originally presented in German and French, into English, the proceedings were republished in one volume under the editorship of H. Bechert and entitled *When Did the Buddha Live? The Controversy on the Dating of the Historical Buddha* (Delhi, 1995). To all these Proceedings - and particularly to the latter - as well as to numerous journals around the world, Bechert contributed authoritative articles some of which, in addition to their English and German versions, were translated into various modern Asian and Western languages. Apart from convening the said symposia, it was Bechert who launched two research projects: 1) the *Bibliographische Erfassung der buddhistischen Sanskrit-Literatur* (Bibliographical Stocktaking of Buddhist Sanskrit Literature), and 2) the *Beihefte*, i.e. the Supplements to the above-mentioned *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*. As for the former project, under Bechert's general editorship and the auspices of the Göttingen Academy, so far two publications have seen the light of day: a) Akira Yuyama, *Systematische Übersicht über die buddhistische Sanskrit-Literatur I. Vinaya-Texte* (1979), and b) Ernst Steinkellner and M. Torsten Much, *Texte der erkenntnistheoretischen Schule des Buddhismus* (on Buddhist logic) (1995). Concerning the latter, Bechert edited and co-edited many Supplements (the first of which appeared in 1989), treating two main subjects, viz. 'Sanskrit Texts of the Buddhist Canon: New Discoveries and New Editions', by various hands (*Beihefte* 2, 4, 6), and 'Examinations of Pieces of Buddhist Literature' (*Beihefte* 5, 8). Very much in use is *Beiheft 3, Abkürzungsverzeichnis zur buddhistischen Literatur in Indien und Südostasien* (an exhaustive list of abbreviations with bibliography), being an important research and study tool (1990). Another study tool, often employed in the Indology departments of German universities is *Einführung in die Indologie* ('Introduction to Indology') (Darmstadt, 1979), edited and co-authored by H. Bechert and G. von Simson. In respect of South and South-East Asian textual studies, Bechert co-edited, *Singhalesische Handschriften* (3 fascicles, Wiesbaden, 1969-97), and *Burmese Manuscripts*, Part I (Wiesbaden, 1979), Part II (Stuttgart, 1985). He also edited *Sanskrittexte aus Ceylon* (Munich, 1962) and, with Heinz Braun, *Pāli Nīti Texts of Burma* (PTS, 1981). Bechert's magnum opus is surely his trilogy *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravāda-Buddhismus* ('Buddhism, State and Society in the Countries of Theravāda Buddhism'), Vol. 1: Grundlagen, Ceylon ('General and Theoretical Fundamentals, Sri Lanka') (Frankfurt, 1966; repr. Göttingen, 1988); Vol. 2: Birma, Kambodscha, Laos, Thailand, Exkurs über Vietnam (Wiesbaden, 1967; considerably enhanced republication, Göttingen, 2000); Vol. 3: Bibliographie, Dokumente, Index (Wiesbaden, 1973). Especially Vol. 2 of the trilogy is a richly documented social history, enhanced by a masterly sociological study of what the author calls 'Buddhist modernism' or 'modern Buddhist revivalism'.

As a matter of fact, H. Bechert's contributions to textual criticism, to numerous felicitation volumes, conference proceedings, various encyclopaedias, dictionaries of literature etc., are far too many to be enumerated here. Lastly, mention should be made at least of the attractively published *The World of Buddhism*, edited by H. Bechert and R. Gombrich (London, 1984), to which Bechert, apart from his foreword and bibliography, contributed "To be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist": Buddhism in Burma" and "Buddhist Revival in East and West". On the occasion of his 60th and 65th birthdays two felicitation volumes were brought out in his honour. The first is entitled *Studien zur Indologie und Buddhismuskunde*, edited by R. Grünendahl, J.-U. Hartmann and P. Kieffer-Pülz, *Indica et Tibetica* 22, Bonn, 1993, the second *Bauddhavidyāsudhākarāḥ* ('Receptacle of the Nectar of Buddhist Studies'), *Indica et Tibetica* 30, Swisttal-Odendorf, 1997. In both volumes extensive bibliographies list the œuvre of Bechert, including his monographs, edited texts, papers and book reviews.

The present writer, when reviewing Bechert's republication of *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 2, for a Festschrift published in Bangkok (2003), wrote that he "does not know of any other social history of South-East Asia presented in such detail and with its immense material handled so judiciously. Therefore, he has nothing but admiration for Heinz Bechert's work which is the result of painstaking and methodologically impeccable research for so many years." Here it may be stressed that these remarks can also be justifiably applied to all that Professor Bechert has written at the apex of his scholarly career and even before. Dr. Gustav Roth, the doyen of German Indology and Heinz Bechert's former associate, who recently celebrated his 90th birthday near Göttingen together with many colleagues from all over Germany and abroad, said at the loss of his old friend, thus articulating the feelings of many colleagues: "I greatly miss him."

– Bhikkhu Pāsādika