



HENRIK ZILLIACUS
23.1.1908 – 9.1.1992
IN MEMORIAM

A few days after the Epiphany in 1992, we received the message that Professor Henrik Zilliacus had passed away. We were not prepared for this – many of us had talked with him in late autumn or shortly before Christmas or sent a Christmas greeting to his home. Although he was nearing his eighty-fifth year, and although he had lately suffered from weakening eyesight, his mental vitality was so strong that we almost forgot the fact that the time of man is limited. He even had published a new book last autumn, a collection of essays.

Henrik Zilliacus was the leading teacher and educator of the present generation of classical scholars in Finland, and it is largely due to him that the study of antiquity in our country is today internationally well known. Starting in 1944, he held the Chair in Greek literature at the University of Helsinki for thirty years. All the present professors in Greek and Latin, as well as the major part of the teaching staff in classics, are his pupils – and so are many others in the fields of theology, history, Indology, Romance studies and German philology. Many of them have said that Henrik Zilliacus' classes were the most important part of their university studies.

Henrik Zilliacus' influence derives from his own research work. It had a broad scope, extending from the classical to the Byzantine period, from linguistic studies to history, from Greek to Latin, from literature to papyrological and epigraphical documents. His doctoral dissertation "Zum Kampf der Weltsprachen im oströmischen Reich" was published in 1935. The echoes of this theme, which is very modern in its combination of historical and sociolinguistic aspects, can still be noticed in the studies of our young scholars of today. Henrik Zilliacus continued his productive research activity not only throughout his career as a professor but also after his retirement.

It was typical of Henrik Zilliacus' research activity that he inspired others to follow his example. In many respects he was the pioneer of

modern trends of research policy. International co-operation, interdisciplinary research, education of postgraduate students by means of team projects were living realities for him long before they began to be promulgated as novel methods in research. Under his directorship of the Finnish Institute in Rome in Villa Lante during the period 1956-59, Henrik Zilliacus was the prime mover of the Finnish study of epigraphics. He gathered around him a team of young scholars whose work was later published as the first part of *Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae* - a study in two stately volumes of the Christian inscriptions of the Vatican museum. The extensive range and high quality of this team become evident from the mere names of its members – apart from Henrik Zilliacus himself, the authors are Rolf Westman, Iiro Kajanto, Patrick Bruun, Jaakko Suolahti and Henrik Nordberg. The tradition of interdisciplinary studies has been continued in all subsequent research teams of the Institute, and everybody who has taken part in one of them will bear witness to the fruitfulness of this approach.

Another team was formed by Henrik Zilliacus on the field of papyrology, which he always had very much at heart. As a group of graduates from the sixties, we learned to know teamwork at its best when we read and unravelled the papyri and prepared the editions for publication, helping and criticizing each other in the process. It seemed that this was a great joy to our teacher, too – we felt it for instance when he came, before a seminar, to the little room consecrated to Greek in the department of Antiquity in our library, where tables were covered with books and we tried feverishly to find solutions to the remaining mysteries of the papyrus text in question. Softly smiling, he remarked: "This reminds me of an ant-hill." He also took us out of our room and led us on study trips to Greece, to congresses in Oxford and Brussels, and to do research in Vienna, so that we found both opportunities to work and friends and helpers in the international community.

What was the secret of Henrik Zilliacus' influence? He was never intrusive, neither as an authority nor as an example. He never told us what to do or acted as an overseer of our doings. Under his guidance we were free to do what we wanted and to choose our research subjects from fields we were interested in. The result is the versatility of the study of antiquity found in Finland today. Henrik Zilliacus could, however, be exacting, even severe, as we all knew, but mainly his guidance was humane, deeply considerate. He was a model for his students, but he was our friend, too.

As the chairman of the Society for Classical Philology and the chief editor of *Arctos*, Henrik Zilliacus served our society for a long time, and the society granted him its first honorary membership. Both in our own meetings and elsewhere we could often enjoy his vigorous, refined, and well-structured lectures. After his retirement, he published these together with other treatises in five collections of essays.

The farewell lecture he gave when retiring from his chair of in 1974 was one of his most memorable addresses. Its theme was freedom from prejudice as a characteristic of Greek literature. This feature – the self-sufficiency, *autarkeia*, of the Greek *logos* – was especially near to him. In his lecture he described this feature as it appeared in the works of different authors as a search for the truth, a self-reliance and independence from religious or political authorities. The lecture is published in the collection of essays entitled "The Living Tradition". Towards the end of the essay, he characterizes Plato's philosophical dialogues as follows: "It may seem surprising that so many of Plato's dialogues at least appear to end into *aporia*, leaving the question open. But their finesse lies partly in this very fact. The chain of evidence seems to be conclusive, but the authoritative *quod erat demonstrandum* never comes. The reader may draw conclusions for himself, as far as he is able to do so. At the moment the snare is ready to be drawn tight, the game is set free. It is better to have a living bird in the woods of thought than a dead dogma in your hand - dare we interpret so?"

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Maarit Kaimio
The Classical Association of Finland
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