



In Memoriam Walther Aichele¹⁾

27th January, 1889 — 1st May, 1971

*Über eine Summe minutiöser
Einzelkenntnisse . . . führt
der Weg zu den größeren
Aspekten²⁾.*

Walther Aichele was born on January 27, 1889. He studied theology, and later also Oriental philology, at the Universities of Heidelberg, Halle/Saale and Freiburg. In 1913 he took his Ph. D. degree at Heidelberg on a thesis entitled *Biblische Legenden der Sch'iten aus dem Prophetenbuch des Hoseinî* (published in 1915).

On completion of his university studies Aichele became a research fellow at the Seminar für Kolonialsprachen of the Kolonialinstitut in Hamburg, working as assistant to professor Meinhof. During the First World War he performed his national service as an interpreter with the Turkish army, being taken prisoner of war by the British in Egypt in 1918. He returned to Germany in 1919, where he became a research fellow at the Seminar für Afrikanische und Südseesprachen of the newly founded University of Hamburg. There he first took up the study of Indonesian languages and literatures in the widest sense of the word.

His academic career suffered greatly at the hands of the Nazi regime, of which he was an avowed opponent. He received no promotion, nor was he allowed to leave the country for a long-due visit to Indonesia for purposes of research or for attending international scholarly congresses, being classed as "politically unreliable". He was rehabilitated in 1946, and was appointed extraordinary professor in 1949, becoming head of the Seminar für Indonesische und Südseesprachen in Hamburg at the same time. He went into retirement in 1954.

His academic merits no less than his courageous political attitude won him special recognition in the Netherlands, where he counted a number of good friends among his fellow scholars. He was appointed honorary member of the Dutch Oriental Society in 1956, and of the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde in 1959.

Walther Aichele's memory will live on in the academic world as that of a gifted and original scholar in the field of Indonesian studies, and as such he will be commemorated in this obituary. It is obvious from the brief biographical outline above as well as from his bibliography, however, that he entered the Indonesian world via another field of Oriental studies — a not uncommon phenomenon in this subject; one need only mention such

¹ For this obituary grateful use has been made of biographical and bibliographical information kindly made available by Mrs. E. Aichele. For detailed references the reader is referred to the bibliography published in *Oriens Extremus* VI, 1 (1959). A more up-to-date version of Aichele's bibliography has been printed in *Bydragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* Vol. 128 (1972), pp. 212—213.

² W. Aichele, *ZIES* 21, p. 248.

names as H. Kern, C. Snouck Hurgronje or O. Dempwolff. Aichele had a very wide range of interest indeed; besides his early study on biblical legends in Arabic legendary traditions he devoted special and sustained attention to the language and literature of the gypsies, as is attested by two phonetic studies on their language which appeared in 1920 and 1957 respectively. His only publication in book form, furthermore, was also devoted to the gypsies; it was a collection of *Zigeunermärchen* (1926) and was published in the series *Märchen der Weltliteratur*.

In the same year 1926 a study was published in which the link between Aichele's Near Eastern and Indonesian studies became apparent. The study in question is his review of Hellmut Ritter's wellknown book *Karagös, Türkische Schattenspiele*. From this review it is clear that he was making a thorough study of the Javanese *wajang* (shadow play) theatre at the time, and that he was well aware of the fact that the solution of problems as to the origin and development of a cultural phenomenon such as the shadow play can only have some chance of success if it is placed in a broad framework of general cultural history, taking into consideration Near Eastern, Indian and Chinese as well as Indonesian material.

One year later his *Alljavanische Beiträge zur Geschichte des Wunschbaums* appeared in the Meinhof Festschrift. In contrast with the review of Ritter's book, here the study of Javanese culture is already the main focus of Aichele's interest, more particularly so the *Old Javanese Rāmāyaṇa* (to be referred to as *OJR* in the remainder of the present paper), the translation of a large fragment of which is included in his article.

Apparently the language and literature of Ancient Java caught Aichele's fancy soon after he turned his attention to Indonesia; he straightaway set about tackling some fundamental problems in two papers, on *Die Form der Kawidichtung* in 1926, and *Das Problem des Kawi* in 1927. In the earlier paper he emphasized the strong Indian influence, not so much of the old epics but rather of the later *Kunstdichter*, on the Javanese court poets. As for the language used in their poetry he pointed out that ancient Javanese poets cannot possibly have made use of the spoken language of their time. He argued that Old Javanese is a literary idiom bearing a special character and is therefore better referred to by the special name *Kawi*. Already in an unpublished paper read at the German Orientalistentag in that same year, Aichele seems (according to the abstract of his address in *ZDMG* 80) to have put forward a hypothesis which was to become one of the central themes of his work, i.e. that the literary idiom we call Old Javanese, apart from having undergone strong Sanskrit influence, must have been characterised by "eine absichtliche Beimischung von Sprachgut aus Indonesischen Schwestersprachen". In the other paper, again of a fundamental nature, published in the *Feestbundel (Festschrift)* of the Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen (1929), this idea was further elaborated and its plausibility demonstrated with the aid of a number of examples.

With this approach Aichele from the very beginning established a link between his work in the respective fields of comparative Indonesian lin-

guistics and Old Javanese philology, a link which he always considered essential. This was not a novel thought, as some of his great predecessors had consciously and successfully worked from a similar starting point, from Wilhelm von Humboldt to Van der Tuuk and Kern, to mention but a few. As late as 1967 Aichele once more explicitly stressed the essential role of Old Javanese in the field of Indonesian studies, in a passage in which he rather ruefully complained that with the revival of Indonesian philology in Germany "ihr Herz, nämlich die Altjavanische Sprache und Dichtung, nicht die Zuneigung (findet), deren es so bedürftig und in hohem Maß würdig wäre". The same profession had flown from his pen as much as forty years earlier, in the introductory paragraph of a "kleinere Mitteilung" (in *ZIES* 21), in which a better reading of a passage of *OJR* was suggested, and he for one has always remained faithful to it. The interdependence of linguistic and philological studies, and the necessity for both purposes, of detailed attention to problems of textual criticism have also always occupied a major place in Aichele's work, beginning with his papers in 1927. Moreover, it is certainly no mere coincidence that in these studies Aichele has always turned by preference to *OJR*, the most difficult but also most fascinating and from a philological viewpoint most rewarding of all the texts of Ancient Java. For though this text, which furnishes examples for every single aspect of Old Javanese philology and linguistics, often raises extremely difficult problems, it offers the philologist continuous opportunities to score minor triumphs and find scholarly satisfaction for that very same reason. Throughout his life Aichele has convincingly demonstrated the truth of the words with which he concluded one of his abovementioned "kleine Mitteilungen" (that of 1931): "So darf wohl die philologische Untersuchung ihren Platz einnehmen als ancilla der Linguistik, wie sie ihrerseits, ohne eigenen Schaden zu nehmen, nicht an den Ergebnissen der Sprachforschung vorbeigehen kann." The same issue of the *Zeitschrift* contains an article on Old Javanese professional names in which Aichele, in a discussion of some Old Javanese terms, showed how by combining linguistic, literary, philological and culturo-historical data we are able to gain a deeper insight into the meaning of such much discussed terms as *Kabaya* and *Bhujangga*. He returned to the latter word again in a detailed paper written in 1955, on the basis of new materials and re-interpretations of old materials.

After 1931 Aichele's scholarly productivity as manifested by his printed papers decreased, and one will certainly not be very far wrong in supposing that for this sensitive and finely strung man the political atmosphere in Germany of the thirties was detrimental not only to his academic career, but no less so to his work as a scholar. Such work must have become well-nigh impossible for him. Yet, little as he published, it is obvious that the same problems from the paper of 1929 kept intriguing him: Aichele became more and more convinced that Old Javanese as a literary idiom had formed part of an older literary tradition in Indonesia, from which it must have derived much more than we can tell so far. In a paper read before a meeting of the German Oriental Society in Bonn (1936), of which only an abstract has been published, he suggested that he had found what might be a trace

of one of these sources in the introduction to an Old Malay inscription of 686. In this introduction, written in a largely incomprehensible language which Aichele designated as a *frühindonesische Literatursprache*, he recognized elements of Malagasy on the one hand, and some languages of East Borneo and North Celebes on the other, and he traced back some elements of Old Javanese to this hypothetical literary idiom.

It was also Aichele who put the Norwegian missionary Dahl on the track of a special linguistic relationship between Malagasy and Maanjan, a South-east-Bornean language, to which Dahl was later to devote his wellknown dissertation *Maigache et Maanjan. Une comparaison linguistique* (1951; see p. 23) the main thesis of which, however, has failed to find favour with most scholars in the field.

Aichele came onto much firmer ground when he investigated the influence of Old Malay itself on Old Javanese. This he did in a very important paper of 1943. Here he shows with the aid of a wealth of examples how complicated the history of a great many words in the old literary languages of Indonesia must have been: whereas on the one hand Old Malay contains a number of elements which for formal and other reasons should be described as loans from a hypothetical Old Batak, on the other hand many elements of Old Malay are found in the Old Javanese language of inscriptions and other texts. Aichele also rightly pointed out that in many cases the process of borrowing from Sanskrit must have been much more complex than was generally assumed, as words of Indian provenance must have constituted frequent elements of intra-Indonesian cross-borrowing.

After 1950 a new series of articles by Aichele appeared. Basically they all deal with the same old problems. The same lines of research are extended, and similarly the philologico-literary analysis is continued, displaying the same accuracy and conscientiousness marking all of Aichele's work. The series opens with a re-interpretation of a curious passage in the fourteenth century *kakawin Nāgarakṛtāgama*, describing the performance of the famous king Hayam Wuruk as an actor and a dancer (*Festschrift Van Ronkel*). And in several other publications textual criticism is exercised and new interpretations of passages in *OJR* and other texts are suggested. All of them are fragmentary, he himself calling one of his last articles (in *BKI* 123, 1967) "Fragmente: Kleine Beiträge zur Interpretation Altjavanischer Dichtung".

Similarly the linguistic lines are extended. In the first volume of *Oriens Extremus*, to which Journal the author was to contribute several more papers, he published an article entitled "Sprachforschung und Geschichte im Indonesischen Raum" in which he reacted critically, from a methodological viewpoint, to Dempwolff's major book on Austronesian comparative linguistics. Here he proves with the aid of many ingenious and relevant examples that "die systematische Sprachvergleichung einer Ergänzung durch sprachgeschichtliche Untersuchung bedarf" (*OE* 1954, p. 109), and demonstrates how the detailed study of the individual history of words and other linguistic elements is indispensable. Among other things he points out how in this field too the relative chronology of linguistic change can often be established by such detailed study of individual words. Again the interest is

focused mainly on Malagasy, Old Malay and Old Javanese, and again comparative linguistic studies, especially that concerning the word *wahuta*, are seen to be of direct relevance for the interpretation of Old Javanese inscriptions, and consequently for an understanding of certain aspects of the cultural history of Ancient Java.

Still more outspoken is Aichele's criticism of Dempwolff's approach to comparative linguistics in a paper published two years later: "Beiträge zur Indonesischen Sprachgeschichte" (*OE*, 1956). Basing himself specifically on material derived from the Philippine languages this time, Aichele again proves how complicated the history of an individual word often can be and how cautiously one should go about the application of sound-laws in this vast area in which so much interaction and mutual influencing between languages and cultures has taken place. In the same year (*Festschrift Jäger*) Aichele wrote a paper taking him into a completely new and hitherto practically neglected field — that of the comparative study of syntax in Indonesian languages — thereby showing that even in old age he did not lack the courage to strike into new courses.

After 1960 Aichele's publications grew more infrequent again — he had passed the age of seventy and his health had become impaired, so that it looked as though only *Fragmente* could be expected from him for the rest of his life. But the small group of scholars who followed Aichele's work with closer interest were to be once more surprised by another article published by the scholar, by now an octogenarian, in *OE* 16 (1969). This paper, bearing the title "Vergessene Metaphern als Kriterien der Datierung des altjavani-schen Rāmāyaṇa", is dedicated to the memory of that other great scholar George COEDÈS, who had just died. The impression given by the title is that here we have yet another paper of a specialistic and fragmentary nature, which, full of interesting and erudite observations for the connoisseur though it may be, is hardly of interest to a broader group of people. And indeed this article is far from easy to read, containing a considerable amount of detail and a great many digressions, while it is anything but explicit in its conclusions or spectacular in the formulation thereof. But even so, this paper shows Aichele once more at his best, putting into practice the principle expressed very early in his life in the quotation heading this obituary. In fact the paper can be said to close the circle. For where he had commenced his studies of Old Javanese with *OJR* 45 years earlier, Aichele now brought these studies to a conclusion in this paper with reference to the same *OJR*. And a sensational conclusion it is! Taking as starting-point the results of a study by Poerbatjaraka (from the same year 1926 in which Aichele first ventured out on the study of *OJR*), according to which *OJR* is by far the earliest Old Javanese literary text, written around 900 A. D., Aichele, in agreement with Hooykaas, argues not only that the *OJR* was intended as a model and textbook for Old Javanese poetics, but also that the text contains references, especially in Cantos 24—25, to actual persons and events in Ancient Javanese history, and more specifically to King Pikatan and his enemy Bālaputra, whom we know from inscriptions of around 856 A. D. Aichele concludes that *OJR* is contemporaneous with ratu Pikatan, and

by a comparison of *OJR* with the inscription of 856 glorifying Pikatan, he points out striking similarities between the two texts. Several lexicographical digressions again testify to Aichele's tremendous erudition in this field. In the final part of the paper he returns to the role of *OJR* in the cultural history of Ancient Central Java, and puts forward the plausible hypothesis that a number of verses of Canto 25 contain references to the main temple of the famous Shiwaitic complex of Prambanan (Lara Djonggrang). The author considers this passage to be a very early interpolation (after 856) in the poem, of which the earliest version must have been written before 856.

Taking a comprehensive view of the whole of Aichele's work as a philologist it is impossible to conclude that he was a great scholar in the same way as such men as Kern or Van der Tuuk, who have left a monumental academic legacy. In fact, for a long life devoted to the pursuit of Indonesian studies his work rather deserves to be called modest. Nor will his name live on as that of a great scholar in that he was an innovator who built impressive new systems or developed spectacular theories and laid a new and lasting foundation for the study of Indonesian linguistics — in this respect Aichele was no Meinhof or Dempwolff either. His theoretical contribution to Indonesian studies is again of more modest import.

Modesty is in fact the word that best characterises this scholar: and it is also the dominant impression I have retained of the man Aichele from the one and only personal encounter I ever had with him, in 1966, when he was already an old and physically disabled man. He was keenly aware of the limits of his own knowledge, as well as of the limits necessarily imposed by the nature of his field of studies on the knowledge of its votaries. Such limits oblige the scholar to be modest. This kind of modesty has nothing to do, however, with pettiness of ideals, narrowness of aim or lightness of responsibility. It is this very limitation of our knowledge and the difficulties of the subject that force one to exercise the utmost accuracy and precision — to work *gewissenhaft*, to use a word from his own native language. It is in this word *gewissenhaft* that the man Aichele and the scholar Aichele found their synthesis. His conscience was intransigent — whether he was confronted by the inhumanities of a Nazi regime or was facing the solution of the minutest problem of Old Javanese philology. His whole life and work bear testimony to this *Gewissenhaftigkeit*. That is why, despite all modesty, he was even so a great scholar and a great man.

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