

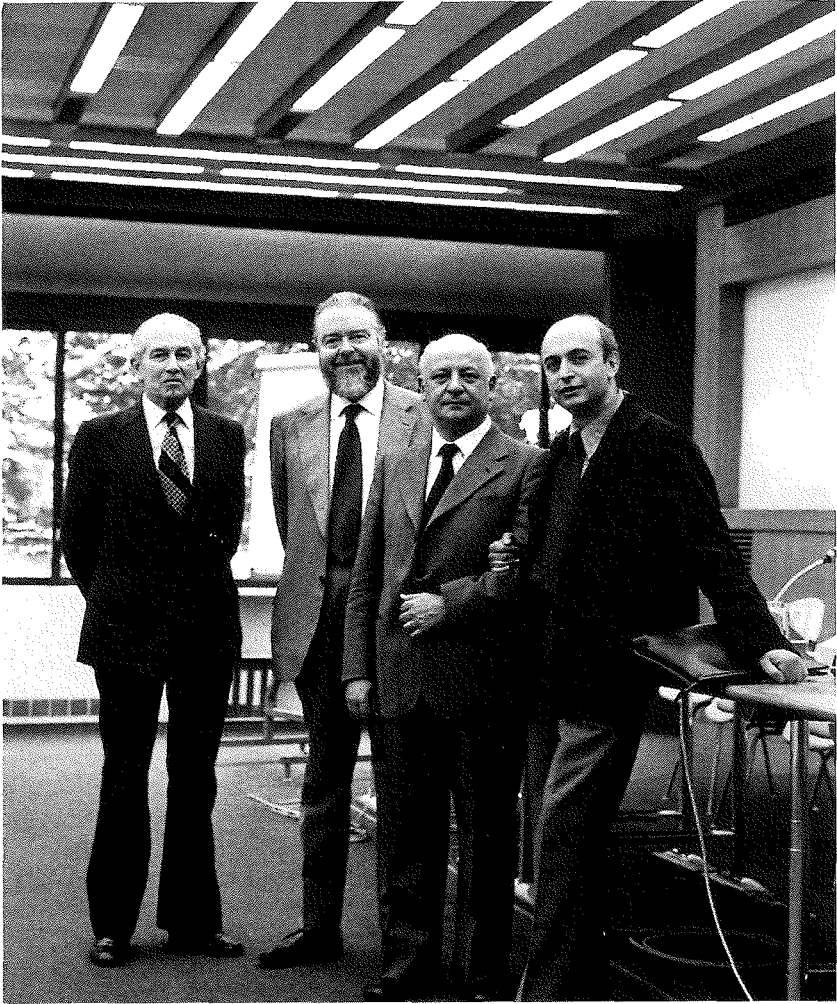
Professor
Gregory M. Bongard-Levin
Felicitaton Volume

Edited
by Professor Alexei Vigasin





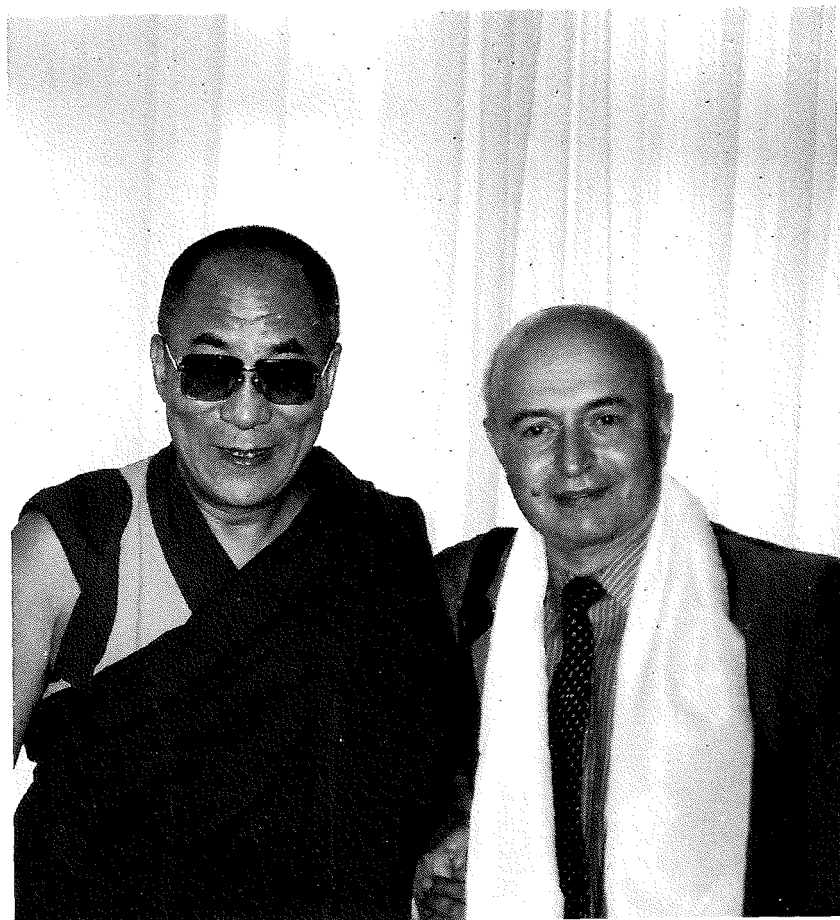
Professor Gregory M. Bongard-Levin



Prof. G.M. Bongard-Levin with Prof. Jean Filliozat, Prof. A.K. Warder and Prof. Oscar Botto, at the Second World Sanskrit Conference (Turin, June 9th-15th, 1975).



Nehru Award, 1975.



Prof. G.M. Bongard-Levin with H.H. Dalai Lama, 1992.



Annual meeting of the French Academy (Institut de France), 1998.



At University of Turin: in occasion of publishing his Felicitaton Volume
(December 14th, 1999).

INTRODUCTION

Gregory Bongard-Levin is undoubtedly one of the most outstanding, well-known and talented orientalists in Russia. On the occasion of his anniversary it is appropriate to briefly describe his life and scholarly achievements.

G. Bongard-Levin was born on August 26, 1933 in the family of professor Maxim Levin – the prominent anthropologist and ethnologist. The family traditions have determined the young man's good education, personal contacts and intellectual pursuits. He became a student of the Ancient History Department of Moscow University. It is common knowledge that the late 40-s – early 50-s were a dramatic period in Soviet history. The ideological campaigns of the period could not but impact the university – the future career of the young scholar seemed at times problematic. He had to be extremely hardworking, perceiving and courageous to attain his academic goals.

Students got good professional training at the Department of Ancient History studying Greek and Latin languages. Since his student days G. Bongard-Levin has preserved a living interest in the problem “India and Graeco-Roman World”.

When a student, along with classical education, he took up Hindi and Sanskrit and regularly went to St.-Petersburg to study Prakrit and read Ashoka's inscriptions with the well-known Indologist V.S. Vorobyev-Desyatovsky.

After World War II there was no solid Indology school left in the Soviet Union. Dogmatism and pseudo-Marxism scholasticism reigned supreme in works on general history: it was asserted that the socio-economic formation based on slavery existed in all the countries of the ancient World, and the political system was characterized by the term “oriental despotism”. Studying original

texts was not considered a necessary condition for scholarly research. However the time of G. Bongard-Levin's graduation from the university coincided with significant changes in the Soviet Union – the famous “thaw” which came into being after Stalin's death. A certain amount of freedom was allowed in academic work.

In 1956 G. Bongard-Levin managed to get a job at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences. For his thesis he choose the subject crucial to the history of ancient India – «The Formation and the System of Government of the Mauryan Empire».

The return to the Soviet Union of Professor George Roerich – famous Orientalist and Buddhologist, who had preserved the best traditions of Russian oriental studies was a stoke of luck. G. Roerich conducted an Indological seminar at the Institute of Oriental Studies and G. Bongard-Levin participated in its work. He took a full course of Sanskrit with Roerich and a course of Pali with Professor G.P. Malalasekera.

In 1960 the young scholar made a report entitled «Megasthenes and Ashoka's Inscriptions» at the XXVth International Congress of Orientalists held in Moscow. He compared “parishad” mentioned in Ashoka's edicts with «councilors» from Megasthenes' fragments, thus proving the reliability of Greek evidence about India. The report was received with interest and acclaim. Parishad was a subject of several publications by the scholar. On the basis of the Indian sources he convincingly refuted the widespread assertion about the dominance of the despotic forms of government in Ancient India.

In the late 50-s – early 60-s the Soviet Union established active ties with South Asia. The young and gifted Indologist got an opportunity to study in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) for almost a year. He improved his knowledge of Pali and Buddhist texts gathering information on Ashoka in historical tradition.

The director of the Institute of Oriental Studies was Academician Bobojan Gafurov, the former leader of Tajikistan, one of the Soviet republics of Central Asia. He attached considerable importance to the study of that region. In 1968 a major International Conference on various aspects of the Kushan problem was held in Tajikistan. G. Bongard-Levin was among its organizers. It was a

good opportunity for him to show his skills and establish extensive international contacts.

In the 60-s the Institute of Oriental Studies was working on a four-volume publication on the history of India from antiquity to the present time. A large volume on the ancient history of India was written in 1969 by G. Bongard-Levin and his colleague G. Ilyin. It became a very valuable publication and a starting point for the further indological studies. The book got positive reviews and its second edition was published in 1985, with chapters by G. Bongard-Levin amended and some of them written anew – sometimes with the help of his already numerous pupils.

In 1973 G. Bongard-Levin published the fundamental monograph «Mauryan Empire». With characteristic talent and zeal the author mobilized his colleagues to write a number of books on various subjects. Together with Dr. E. Grantovsky, a specialist on Iran, he wrote a fascinating work on the ancient history and culture of the Aryans «From Scythia to India» (the book is translated into French, English and Hungarian languages). Together with S. Tulyaev he wrote the first book in Russian on Sri Lanka's art (the book is translated into Romanian). Together with the specialists on mediaeval and modern history of India Prof. K. Antonova and Dr. G. Kotovsky he wrote a brief survey of India's history (the book is translated into English, many Indian languages, Hungarian and Czech). Together with the author of these lines he wrote «Image of India», a work on the history of Indology in Russia (published in English and Hindi). G. Bongard-Levin is the author of "Ancient Indian Civilization" published in English in India, in Bulgarian in Bulgaria, in Serbian in Yugoslavia. Several of his books are published in India – "Mauryan India" (1986), "India and Central Asia" (1971), "Complex Study of Ancient India" (1986), "Ancient Indian History and Civilization" (1998).

G. Bongard-Levin's studies of Buddhist Sanskrit and Khotanese Saka texts from Eastern Turkestan were a valuable contribution to Indology and Buddhology. In this area of research he continued the best traditions of the Russian Buddhological school. In cooperation with St.-Petersburg's Indologists and foreign colleagues he continued the classical tradition of Russian Buddhology reflected in

the famous series – “Bibliotheca Buddhica”. He is the author of many publications in various academic journals of the world, two volumes of “Indian Texts from Central Asia” (1985-1990 jointly with M.I.Vorobyeva-Desyatovskaya), a short but valuable book “Six Fragments of Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra”, published in Tokyo. In 1996 his work “Nagaropamasūtra” (together with D. Boucher, Takamichi Fukita, Klaus Wille) was published in Germany.

His impressive academic record enabled him to be elected a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences in 1981 and then in 1990 he became a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In the part few years the study of the Buddhist manuscripts from Central Asia kept in Russia has become the main sphere of his scholarly interest.

In 1989 G. Bongard-Levin became the editor-in-chief of the «Journal of Ancient History». This post has revealed his outstanding ability of an organizer. The journal which had quite a solid reputation before has become under his guidance a center of wide-ranging studies on the history of ancient civilizations. He managed to gather together young and gifted scholars engaged in the history of Egypt and Babylonia, Greece and Hellenistic states, Northern Black Sea region and Rome. Thanks to G. Bongard-Levin they got an opportunity to participate in major international projects. Since 1991 G. Bongard-Levin has been the editor-in-chief of the journal «Ancient Civilizations» published in English in the Netherlands by the Brill.

His latest passion is the study of scholarly legacy of Russian scholars in emigration. He published a number of unique archival materials from Russian and foreign archival collections. Under his supervision and with his active participation «Scythian Novel» – a huge volume of unpublished manuscripts and letters of the outstanding Russian scholar Mikhail Rostovtzeff has been published. The book is wonderfully printed and illustrated – certainly only G. Bongard-Levin was capable of performing this miracle.

G.M. Bongard-Levin is the author of 14 monographs and over 250 articles published in France, Great Britain, Italy, the United States, Germany, Hungary, Sweden, Japan, China, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and other countries. He participated in the work of a great

number of international congresses, delivered academic reports and lectures in many countries of the world. Last 10 years he is the chairman of the Center of Indological and Buddhological Studies of Moscow State University where young Indologists and Buddhologists are being trained.

G. Bongard-Levin is the winner of many awards, among them are "The State Prize of Russia" (1987), the "Jawaharlal Nehru Award" (1975), the "B.C.Law Gold Medal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal" (1969), the International Prize "The Gold Horses of San Marco" (1990), the "Cesmeo Prize" for Oriental Studies (1999). He is an Honorary Doctor of the Sarnath Institute of Tibetan Studies, an Honorary Member of the Archaeological Society of India. He was Vice-president of the International Association of Sanskrit Studies (1975-1990). He is a corresponding member of the Italian Institute of Asia and Africa, a corresponding member of German Archaeological Institute. In 1997 he was elected an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of the Great Britain. At the beginning of 1998 he was elected a Foreign corresponding member of the French Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres and in 1999 as a Foreign member of this prestigious Academy.

He is always in pursuit of something, full of creative plans, involved in so many things that another person can not even imagine. He is used to victories, always well aware of how to attain the goals set. He has many students, and among them there are Ph.D. and D.Litt. scholars and professors. He has students not only in Russia, but also in India and in Europe. His friends and colleagues know him as a very kind and helpful, considerate, vivacious and witty person. It's a great pleasure to listen to him in an academic and university auditorium and as well as at a dinner party. Despite endless, all-consuming work and demands he makes on his subordinates, he is easy to deal with. He appears to be taking life in his stride, though it is not a bed of roses and at times is very harsh to him. 65 is not an advanced age, not - if you speak about Professor G.M. Bongard-Levin.

A. Viginin