Heinrich A. Stammler
1912-2006
In memoriam

Heinrich A. Stammler was born December 15, 1912, in Jena, Germany. He passed away November 29, 2006, in Lawrence, Kansas, surrounded by his family, his wife Ursula Hofmann Stammler, his daughter Andrea Lewis and her husband Patrick, his son Christopher Stammler and his wife Kathren, and three grandchildren, Annika and Aidan Lewis and Elijah Stammler.

Having received a classical education at gymnasium in Hanover and Greifswald, Professor Stammler studied Slavic languages and literatures at the Universities of Greifswald (while still at gymnasium), Munich, and Prague. While in Prague he met the famous Eurasianist thinker, Petr Savitsky, who urged the young student to dedicate himself wholly to Russian. During the academic year 1934-1935 he worked at the German Embassy in Moscow. In 1937 he completed his Ph.D. in Slavic on Russian folk poetry (“Die russische geistliche Volksdichtung”) at the University of Munich. The same year Professor Stammler moved to Bulgaria where he taught at the Svishtov Business College until 1940. During these happy three years he perfected his Bulgarian language skills and became friends with a number of Bulgarian poets like Teodor Trajanov. Between 1940 and 1942, when he was drafted into the army, he worked briefly in the German Embassy in Sofia. In 1945 he became a prisoner of war under the Americans.

After the war Professor Stammler returned to Munich and taught English and Russian to future interpreters at the Dolmetscher Institut. In 1953 he came to the United States where he taught at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. He and his wife moved to the University of Kansas in 1960, and in 1962 he became the first chair of the new Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. A Slavic scholar with deep knowledge of continental philosophy and Eastern Orthodox thought, Professor Stammler made the Department famous for its offerings in Russian and Slavic intellectual history, a tradition that continues even today.

Professor Stammler was the epitome of the philologist and humanist: he studied, interpreted, and passed on to later generations the broad picture of the achievements of centuries of human culture. Anyone who conversed for more than a few minutes with him rapidly appreciated his encyclopedic
knowledge of languages (he knew at least eight), linguistics, literature, philosophy, and history.

As a Slavist, Professor Stammler published articles in all three branches of the Slavic language family—South, West, and East Slavic. In addition, he translated Bulgarian and Russian poetry into exquisite German. Most recently, in 2000, his outstanding translations of Baratynskii were republished in a second edition. He may have enjoyed one of the longer publication track records in memory, extending over sixty years from 1939 to 2006. In May of last year he re-issued a small but rich booklet of haiku that he had composed.

With his usual modesty Professor Stammler once said that he felt he lacked the “langer Atem” (the stamina) to write monographs and books. This assessment had little to do with reality. His book-length translation of the Russian philosopher and critic, Vasilii Rozanov, his monograph on Rozanov, his lengthy work on the poet Nikolai Kliuev, and his articles on Merezhkovsky and Solovyov broke new ground. Professor Stammler addressed issues in literature and culture that might not have been very popular at the moment, but which later attracted a great deal of attention and stimulated further work. Such was his work with the older generation of Russian symbolists, Russian philosophy, and his work with the Bulgarian symbolist, Teodor Trajanov.

Professor Stammler represented an essential link in the chain of generations through which the Russian cultural renaissance extending from 1890 to 1930 has been kept alive. He studied in Munich with the well-known philosopher and cultural historian, Fedor Stepun, who himself played a part in that flowering of Russian philosophical and religious culture. Professor Stammler brought those intellectual riches with him when he moved to the United States in the early 1950s and to Kansas in the early 1960s. That there are currently three faculty in the Slavic Department and one in the Philosophy Department who write and teach on philosophical and intellectual-historical themes, and particularly the era of the Russian Renaissance, is a sign that the tradition he brought to the United States and founded at the University of Kansas is alive and well.

On the lighter side, Professor Stammler collected and loved to read and reread P. G. Wodehouse books. In a way, he lived that era: to the end of his days he was always the impeccable dressed gentleman, coming to even the
most informal gathering in a jacket and tie. He had a superior memory, and even to his last days he could quote long passages of German and Russian poetry and loved to sing songs and tell jokes. In his later years he would reread Augustine in Latin just to keep that wonderful memory in shape.

In a very real sense Professor Stammler represented what the “globalized” world could be—not the domination of one language and culture over all others but the capacity to function in many cultures and languages, supported with intimate knowledge and deep respect for their peoples and traditions.

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