NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

HENRY M. HOENIGSWALD
1915–2003

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A Biographical Memoir by
GEORGE CARDONA

Biographical Memoirs

HENRY M. HOENIGSWALD

April 17, 1915–June 16, 2003

BY GEORGE CARDONA

H ENRY M. HOENIGSWALD, professor emeritus of linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, died on June 16, 2003, in Haverford, Pennsylvania. Henry began his career as a classicist. He contributed articles on Etruscan and Latin and important studies in Greek phonology, morphology, and metrics, the last of which he completed just before his death. He was, in addition, a well-versed Indo-Europeanist and contributed to Indo-Iranian linguistics; further, during the Second World War, he was engaged in modern Indo-Aryan and produced a handbook of Hindustani. Henry's greatest contributions to linguistics, however, are of a more general theoretical nature. He was a major figure in seeking to understand and clarify the principles that underlie great work in historical-comparative linguistics, especially as practiced by the nineteenth-century neogrammarians and their successors. Henry contributed fundamental studies in these areas, including an early article on sound change and its relation to linguistic structure, a basic study of the procedures followed in phonological reconstruction, an equally fundamental study of internal reconstruction, and a definitive monograph on language change and linguistic reconstruction.

Henry—named Heinrich Max Franz Hönigswald at birth—was born on April 17, 1915, in Breslau, Germany (now Wrocław, Poland), into an academic family, the son of Richard Hönigswald, an eminent professor of philosophy at the University of Breslau. Henry received a traditional education at the Johannes-Gymnasium in Breslau and, after his father moved to the University of Munich, at the Humanistische Gymnasium in Munich, which he entered in May 1930 and from which he graduated with honor and distinction in the spring of 1932. He went on to study at the University of Munich, where from 1932 to 1933 he pursued studies in the Department of Humanities, working with such scholars as Eva Fiesel, an authority on Etruscan, and the renowned Indo-Europeanist Ferdinand Sommer. The latter was also a friend of the Hönigswald family.

Henry became interested in the classics, Indo-European, and linguistics at an early age. Years later he reminisced (1980, p. 23) about how his interest in these areas was first aroused:

My story is very different. I suppose I was a fairly typical product of German secondary education. We had a Greek teacher who must have had a course in Indo-European and who taught us some of the things he knew. I bought Kiecker's Historical Greek Grammar ("Sammlung Göschen"[1]) and one birthday I got Brugmann's *Kurze vergleichende Grammatik*. Since then I knew I wanted to be a classicist or, even better, a linguist.

As was true for many scholars of that time, Henry's family was subjected to the dictates of German Nazism. His father was nominally a convert to Christianity (his mother died when Henry was only six)—and Henry was confirmed in the evangelical church, but these were formalities to ensure tenure at a university and a place in civil society for an intellectual family that was ancestrally Jewish—though they rejected all religion and superstition—in a place in Ger-

many (Silesia) that was quite intolerant of Jews. For this ancestry they paid a price. In 1930 Richard Hönigswald shifted from Breslau to the University of Munich, but by 1933, Jews were forbidden to attend German universities, so that Henry then began a period of scholarly wandering. He went first to Switzerland, where from 1933 to 1934 he studied in Zurich with the classicist and Indo-Europeanist Manu Leumann and was a fellow student of the Hellenist Ernst Risch, with whom he maintained a lifelong friendship. In the fall of 1934 Henry moved to Italy, where he continued his studies at the University of Padua and in the summer of 1935 passed an intermediate examination, again with honor and distinction. He proceeded to work on a doctoral thesis on Greek word formation while completing a preparatory paper on the relationship between Sanskrit and Avestan. When his mentor, Giacomo Devoto, moved from Padua to Florence, Henry followed and received his doctorate (D.Litt. summa cum laude) in 1936 from the University of Florence, with a dissertation on the history of Greek word formation (*Geschichte der griechischen Wortbildung*), a work that to my knowledge has never been published. He went on to receive the *perfezionamento*, a research degree, from the same university in 1937. From 1936 to 1938 he held his first academic appointment, as a staff member in the Istituto di Studi Etruschi, Florence.

Politics then intervened once more. Foreigners who had come to Italy after 1918 were obliged to leave the country, so that Henry could not remain in Florence for the winter semester of 1938-1939; he moved back to his family in Munich. On March 26, 1939, Henry left Bavaria for Switzerland in the company of his father, stepmother, and sister, taking refuge in Braunwald in Glarus in preparation for going to the United States. However, Henry was not included in the family permit for departure and had to remain behind. On

September 22 he finally obtained passage on a ship from Genoa and arrived in New York in October 1939. These early experiences left deep impressions, and in later years both Henry and his wife were devoted to the cause of human and civil rights and were active members of local and national organizations supporting these rights.

In the United States Henry at first continued a life of scholarly peregrination. Between 1939 and 1948 he held positions as research assistant, lecturer, and instructor at Yale University—where he was research assistant to Edgar Sturtevant—the Hartford Seminary, Hunter College, and the University of Pennsylvania, then associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin (1947-1948), in addition to a one-year stint (1946-1947) in the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. Department of State. During this time, in 1944, Henry married Gabriele ("Gabi") Schöpflich, herself an accomplished classicist, whom he had met years earlier while they were both students in Munich. Gabi died in 2001.

In 1948 Henry joined the University of Pennsylvania, succeeding Roland Grubb Kent. Promoted to the rank of full professor in 1959, he made Penn his academic home for the remainder of his career, though he was invited to and visited several other universities in the United States (University of Michigan, Georgetown—where he held the Collitz Professorship in the Linguistic Institute in 1955— Princeton, Yale), in Europe (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven; St. John's College, Oxford; University of Kiel); and in India (Deccan College, Poona [now Pune]). During his long and distinguished tenure at Penn, Henry was the major force in strengthening the linguistics department, founded by Zellig S. Harris, which he served as chair from 1963 to 1970 and cochair from 1978 to 1979; he remained a Nestor for the department long after.

In America Henry interacted with many major scholars who had a strong influence on his thinking and work. He also encountered "innumerable new things to learn" (1980, p. 25), such as articulatory phonetics, phonemics, and the anthropological approach to linguistics. Of paramount importance for a young scholar coming from his background, there was the feeling of freedom and exposure to new vistas accompanying this. Henry put it well when he said:

In 1939—half a year after Sapir's death—I found myself at Yale as Sturtevant's research assistant. Quite aside from the inextricable connection (for me) with my escape to personal freedom, I wish I could convey the headiness of the experience—no amount of picture painting of my Old-World inter-war background as I have attempted it can describe it.

Henry received his share of deserved honors. He was elected to the American Philosophical Society in 1971, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1974, and the National Academy of Sciences in 1988. He was elected a corresponding fellow of the British Academy in 1986, and was a fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (1962-1963) as well as a Guggenheim fellow in 1950. He was also elected president of the Linguistic Society of America in 1958 and the American Oriental Society in 1966. In addition, Henry received the Henry Allen Moe Prize of the American Philosophical Society in 1991. He also received honorary degrees from the University of Pennsylvania (L.H.D. in 1988) and Swarthmore College (L.H.D. in 1981). Upon his retirement in 1985 Henry was honored by colleagues and friends with a felicitation volume, published two years later (Cardona and Zide, 1987) and in 1986 the American Oriental Society dedicated a number of its journal to Henry.

Several threads are discernible in Henry's work, and he felt the need to express himself (1980, p. 27) on how he would "like to think that the various different tasks which I

have tackled over the years and which keep me busy now, somehow hang together, however much each one of them may have depended on inevitable accident." To begin with, there is the philology; various papers dealing with topics in Etruscan, Greek, and Latin, as well as a smaller number of articles treating issues in Indo-Iranian and Sanskrit. To a very large extent, however, what motivates these studies is an underlying quest for generalization: methods and principles governing how languages change over time and how one goes about reconstructing an ancestral protolanguage. The need to find these principles and to make explicit the methods followed in historical and comparative linguistics occupied him throughout his career. Henry mentioned (1980, p. 24) his early preoccupation with such issues, including his wish that comparative evidence be presented "upward in time as inference, and not downward as history."[2] The close attention to principles and methods also led Henry to be involved closely with the history of the field to which he contributed. He was particularly careful to distinguish between the concrete work that such giants of nineteenth-century Indo-European linguistics as Karl Brugmann and Jacob Wackernagel carried out and the theoretical "preachments," as he occasionally called them,[3] of August Leskien, Brugmann, and others. This attention to methods and the history of his field complemented Henry's interest, in his later years, in the related area of cladistics (Hoenigswald and Wiener, 1987).

In view of Henry's constant preoccupation throughout his professional life with methodology and procedures for reconstruction—he went so far as to speak on occasion of algorighms[4]—*Language Change and Linguistic Reconstruction* may justifiably be considered his major work. This monograph is certainly the principal recapitulation of thinking that went back to his very early years, results of which Henry

published in a series of articles (1944, 1946, 1950), the
earliest of which appeared when he was not yet 30 years
old. In accordance with the only procedure he thought
proper—namely, presenting historical materials "upward in
time as inference, and not downward as history" for pur-
poses of reconstruction—Henry did not follow here the cus-
tom observed in the usual textbooks on the subject. It is
noteworthy, for example, that he did not begin with any
discussion about the regularity of sound change[5] or use
Proto-Indo-European constructs and Grimm's and Verner's
laws as illustration; moreover, the great majority of examples
used to illustrate procedures and principles are from such
well-attested languages as English, Latin, and Romance lan-
guages.[6] He also diverged from the usual practice by deal-
ing first with morphological change and only later with sound
change. It is only after treating grammar and semantics,
ending with a chapter (7, pp. 68-71) on the reconstruction
of grammatical and semantic features, that he proceeds to
treat sound change and the comparative method with re-
spect to phonology and its reconstruction.

   In all this, Henry was rigorously formal and, it is im-
portant to emphasize, treated changes in terms of distribu-
tion, saying, for example (1960, p. 15), "Note that these
four classes are defined entirely by their distribution of the
segments A and B—and they may or may not have other
distinguishing characteristics." While dealing with the dis-
tribution of elements, both phonological and morphologi-
cal, he made use also of what he called "nil" and symbol-
ized $\emptyset$.[7] Further, nil could be a primitive, not merely an
absence due to loss. Thus, for example, while illustrating
unconditioned sound loss with the example of early Latin
hortus (garden), which in later Latin has no *h-*, Henry op-
erates not only with the change $h > \emptyset$ but also with a change
$\emptyset > \emptyset$, as in *ortus* (risen), which lacked any initial conso-

nant in both early and late Latin. He notes in this context, "in fact, any conveniently assumed number of Ø's may be posited as occurring between any two segmental phonemes found in sequence. Thus, the environment of Ø in English includes *t—i,# —t*, but not *#—ŋ*." This emphasis on distribution went beyond phonology and morphology to include semantic change. Accordingly, Henry notes (1960, p. 45),

> The phrase "semantic change" or "change of meaning" is properly applied to morphs; if a morph at a later stage appears otherwise than as a part of a corresponding morpheme—if, in other words, it has changed its morphemic environment—it is quite rightly said to have changed its meaning. Thus *avunculus, cēace-cheek, flesh, meat,* taken as morphs (i.e., identified phonemically) have all undergone semantic change.

Earlier in the same work (1960, p. 29) the approach in question is made more explicit in a section entitled "One-to-One Replacement by Existing Morphs (Semantic Change)," in which are charted possible environments (I, II, III, IV) for old English *wonge* (cheek) and *cēace* (jaw) and their modern English counterparts, respectively *cheek* and *jaw.* This formal approach could appear deceptively simple, as when Henry dealt with what he called the principal step in comparative grammar in a remarkably short compass (1950).[8]

Henry's consistent probing into the methods and principles underlying concrete work in historical linguistics was also colored by a healthy skepticism. It is typical, for example, that the title of his contribution to a volume on universals (Hoenigswald, 1966) is a question, that he does not simply assume there are given universals merely to be exemplified. It is also typical of Henry's nature that he ends this essay with a view to the future, noting that transformational grammar "may also bring new principles of importance to an understanding of the universals of change."

Henry's healthy skepticism combined well with his background as a philologist and his search for principles and methods to produce insightful work on the history of linguistics. A citation from his paper on the history of the comparative method (Hoenigswald, 1966, p. 1) will serve to illustrate:

Existing self-description, being itself a phenomenon in the history of scholarship, must not necessarily be taken at face value. On the other hand, the business of gleaning procedures, principles, and presuppositions from an analysis of the record is a slow process which has been engaged in for some areas but not for others. Yet it alone can yield the substance in which we are interested.

Among the "few strands" he had to offer in what he called "this rich tissue," one brings neatly to the fore Henry's attitude and insight: the interpretation of the famous statement made in 1786 by Sir William Jones, with which he dealt on more than one occasion (e.g., 1963, pp. 2-3; 1974, p. 349). Jones's words, which Henry cited almost in full (Hoenigswald, 1963, p. 2), are:

The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either; yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in roots of verbs, and in the forms of grammar, than could have been produced by accident; so strong, indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three without believing them to have sprung from some common source which, perhaps, no longer exists. There is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothick* and the *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*; and the old *Persian* may be added to the same family, if this were the place for discussing the antiquities of *Persia*.

Henry's careful reading of Jones's proclamation, taking it in the context of its time, rules out any possibility that Jones had in mind a protolanguage as reconstructed through modern methods or a procedure for recovering such a source.

Contrasting the procedure followed in comparative linguistics with what Jones said and alluding to the possibility of wrongly reading such a procedure into this statement, Henry remarks (1963, p. 3), "We are asked to imagine that Jones had in some intuitive fashion subjected Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit to a similar process, and had been forced to conclude (as indeed we would now be forced to conclude) that the ancestor was unlike each of the three. But this cannot be right." He then goes on to demonstrate how this reading of Jones's statement could not be correct.

Henry was keenly aware of the intellectual legacies to which he was heir. Forty years after leaving Europe, he would say in recollection (Hoenigswald, 1980, p. 24):

About the substantive work I learned from such masters as Sommer, Fiesel, Leumann, and Devoto and from fellow students like Ernst Risch. From Leumann, in particular, I learned more, namely that there are formalisms in historical linguistics which have little to do with sound laws, and that you can discuss them observing and analyzing the masterpieces of the Brugmanns and the Wackernagels, and, in general, the riches of the scholarly record. Leumann's paper on the mechanics (note the word!) of semantic change[9] seems to me to be one of the greatest methodological gems, for all its hardnosed factualness. My own first publications were case histories having to do with the "mechanics" of the word-formation.

It is evident that in Manu Leumann, who also was a Homeric scholar and a Latinist, Henry met not only a mentor at a time of need but also a kindred spirit. For Henry's work and reminiscences of his early school days show a brilliant intellect given to detailed investigations of problems whose solutions are amenable to formalism. It is just as evident that Henry later met with an equally sympathetic and brilliant spirit, Zellig S. Harris, with whom he had a

long and close relation, personal as well as intellectual. The emphasis on distribution that permeates Henry's work is to be seen also in the theoretical linguistic work Harris carried out in the last century from the 1940s to the early 1990s.[10] Henry and Harris met regularly during the sixties, seventies, and eighties to discuss problems of common interest. It must not be forgotten that Harris began his career as a Semitist, so that Henry's investigations into historical and comparative linguistics could meet with a sympathetic and comprehending mind in these discussions.

Henry's association with Zellig Harris was but one in an extensive network of friends and colleagues. At the time he came to Penn, the linguistics department was in its infancy, with Harris and Leigh Lisker, a phonetician, as colleagues, later to be joined by the logician Henry Hiż. When I joined the department in 1965—after five years in the Department of South Asian Regional Studies—it was a very small close-knit group of scholars who not only regularly met to exchange ideas but frequently also attended one another's seminars. Henry was central to this group. He also showed extraordinary warmth and lack of pretense. I have personal memories of joint seminars we gave in which we both could freely exchange opposing views in search of better solutions to problems of common interest, though I was more than 20 years his junior. During those years, although our linguistics department was itself quite small, the University of Pennsylvania could boast of an outstandingly broad and distinguished array of programs in various allied areas, including the classics, Indic, Iranian, Baltic, Slavic, Germanic, Semitics, and Sumerology. Moreover, through the organization of teaching units known as graduate groups, members of the linguistics department regularly taught in other departments, so that there was an exhilarating interaction of colleagues and students, who could

take courses across departmental borders. In this atmosphere, Henry thrived and, with a superb talent for social as well as intellectual intercourse, he maintained and promoted the study of linguistics, strengthening the department with his service as chairman over many years. These activities extended well beyond the confines of Penn, and over generations Henry was a prime defender and promoter of the fields he cultivated, in universities both here and abroad as well as in learned societies.

Henry was also extremely generous toward young scholars worthy of support, a generosity that was rewarded with feelings of intellectual admiration and personal warmth toward him on the part of an array of many scholars who went on to excel. In this spirit it is fitting, I think, that I end this essay citing the whole of a Sanskrit couplet whose last part was used to end the foreword to Henry's Festschrift:

vidvadvattvañ ca nṛpatvañ ca naiva tulyaṁkadā cana |
svadeśe pūjyate rājā vidvān sarvatra pūjyate ||[11]

CHRONOLOGY

1918	Born April 17 in Breslau, Germany (now Wrocław, Poland)
1932-1933	Studied in the Department of Humanities, University of Munich
1933-1934	Studied at the University of Zurich, Switzerland
1934-1935	Studied at the University of Padua, Italy
1935-1936	Studied at the University of Florence, Italy
1939	Emigrated to the United States
1944	Married to Gabrielle L. Schöpflich
1945	Naturalized citizen of the United States
1954-1958	Editor, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
1968-2003	Advisory board, *Language and Style*
1968-1992	Member, editorial board, *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics*
1968-1974	Member, corporate visiting committee for the Depart ment of Foreign Literatures and Languages, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
1977-2003	Associate editor, *Indian Journal of Linguistics*
1978-2003	Consulting editor, *Journal of the History of Ideas, Journal of Indo-European Studies*
1978-1984	Chairman, overseers committee to visit the Depart ment of Linguistics, Harvard University
1984-2003	Advisory board, *Diachronica*
1985	Retirement dinner, University of Pennsylvania, at which he was presented with a prepublication copy of *Festschrift for Henry M. Hoenigswald*
1985-2003	Consultant, *Biographical Dictionary of Western Linguistics*
1986	Member, comparative linguistics delegation, IREX
1987	Member, organizing committee, Colloque Meillet
2003	Died, Haverford, Pennsylvania

AWARDS AND HONORS

1942-1943	Fellow, American Council of Learned Societies
1950	Guggenheim fellow
1956	Newberry Library fellow
1958	President, Linguistic Society of America
1962-1963	Fellow, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Palo Alto, California (with fellowship from the National Science Foundation)
1966-1967	President, American Oriental Society
1971	Elected to the American Philosophical Society
1974	Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences
1981	Awarded L.H.D. honoris causa, Swarthmore College
1986	Elected corresponding fellow, British Academy
1988	Elected to the National Academy of Sciences; awarded L.H.D. honoris causa, University of Pennsylvania
1991	Awarded the Henry Allen Moe Prize by the American Philosophical Society

PROFESSIONAL RECORD

1936	D.Litt., University of Florence
1937	Perfezionamento, University of Florence
1936-1938	Staff member, Istituto di Studi Estruschi, Florence
1939-1942	Lecturer, research assistant, Yale University
1942-1943	Lecturer, Hartford Seminary Foundation; Hunter College
1943-1944	Lecturer in charge, Army specialized training, University of Pennsylvania
1944-1945	Lecturer, Yale University
1945-1946	Instructor, Hartford Seminary Foundation
1946	Lecturer, Hunter College; visiting associate professor, University of Michigan (Summer Institute of Linguistics)
1946-1947	P-4, Foreign Service Institute, Department of State
1947-1948	Associate professor, University of Texas at Austin
1948-1959	Associate professor, University of Pennsylvania
1952	Visiting associate professor, University of Michigan (Summer Institute of Linguistics)

1955	Senior linguist, Deccan College Postgraduate Research Institute, Poona; visiting associate professor, Georgetown University (Collitz Professor, Summer Institute of Linguistics)
1959-1985	Professor, University of Pennsylvania
1959	Visiting associate professor, University of Michigan (Summer Institute of Linguistics)
1959-1960	Visiting associate professor, Princeton University
1961-1962	Visiting professor, Yale University
1963-1970	Chairman, Department of Linguistics, University of Pennsylvania
1968	Fulbright lecturer, University of Kiel, Germany; visiting professor, University of Michigan (Summer Institute of Linguistics)
1976-1977	Fellow, St. John's College, Oxford, and Fulbright lecturer, Oxford University
1978-1979	Cochairman, Department of Linguistics, University of Pennsylvania
1985-2003	Professor emeritus, University of Pennsylvania
1986	Visiting staff member, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, Belgium
1991	James Poultney Lecturer, Johns Hopkins University

MEMBERSHIPS

American Academy of Arts and Sciences
American Association for the Advancement of Science
American Oriental Society
American Philological Association
American Philosophical Society
Archaeological Institute of America
Friends and Alumni of Indo-European Studies, UCLA
Henry Sweet Society
Indogermanische Gesellschaft
International Society for Historical Linguistics
International Society of Friends of Wrocław University
Linguistic Society of America
Linguistic Society of India
Linguistics Association of Great Britain
National Academy of Sciences
New York Academy of Sciences
North American Association for the History of the Language Sciences
Società di Linguistica Italiana
Societas Linguistica Europaea
Studienkreis Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft

NOTES

1. Henry is referring to E. Kieckers, *Historische griechische Grammatik,* Berlin: de Gruyter, 1925-1926.

2. In a typically self-deprecating manner, he went on immediately to add, "Not exactly original thoughts."

3. For example, "Here we are once more up against the gap between substantive practice and theoretical preachment" (Hoenigswald, 1978, p. 28) and earlier in the same paper (p. 21), "There were those who had no stomach for general talk and who preferred practicing to preaching."

4. For example, "In any event Rask is no closer than Jones to the idea of an algorithm for reconstruction" (Hoenigswald, 1974, p. 351).

5. In fact, Henry considered the regularity principle a defini-

tional matter and said, for example (Hoenigswald, 1978, p. 25), "But, one may ask, just what is a 'sound change' apart from its regularity?"

6. There are, of course, places where he could not avoid doing otherwise. For example, in dealing with differentiation (contrast developing from allomorphs) as well as what he termed "phonemic affinity in replacement partners from dialect borrowing," he found it necessary (Hoenigswald, 1960, pp. 39-40, 51-52) to use as an example the reconstructed Proto-Indo-European *leukᵂ and its reflexes in Indo-Iranian and Sanskrit.

7. As opposed to zero, which is (1960, p. 35, n. 8) an allomorph. In slightly different terms, "zero" denotes the absence of a morph in a context where a morph is expected (e.g., "fish" used as a plural is formally comparable to "dishes," with an overt plural marker, so that it can be said to have a zero allomorph of a plural morpheme or to have zero as a replacement for a plural marker. On nil, see also Hoenigswald (1959).

8. Henry's mode of presentation was always very concise, without verbosity or excessive use of examples, depending instead on formalism. This is evident in both *Language Change and Linguistic Reconstruction*—the text of which covers only 168 pages, including the bibliography and index—and, even to a larger extent, in his later collection of three articles (1973).

9. Leumann (1927).

10. For a perceptive appreciation of the contrast between Harris's distributionalist view and what Goldsmith refers to as the mediationalist view that has dominated theoretical work in American linguistics since the late 1950s see (Goldsmith [2005, pp. 719-724]).

11. Freely translated: Being a king can never be compared to being a learned man; a king is honored in his own country, a learned man is honored everywhere.

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