

Presentation of Anthony and Michael Aris

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I am grateful to the organisers as well as to Anthony Aris' family who have asked me to present to you the two remarkable persons whom we have gathered this evening to remember and to honour.

We are all very, very sad that Anthony Aris is not here this evening. After more than a year of illness, during which he showed great strength and courage, and his family stood by him with great love and unfailing support. Anthony passed away in peace, in his own home, on the 14th of October. Many of you will also, I am sure, have been present at his funeral which took place in London yesterday. On behalf of all of us present here, I wish to express our deepfelt sympathy with Anthony's wife Marie-Laure, with their daughter Arabella and their son Roderick, with Anthony's and Marie-Laure's grandchildren, and with Anthony's sister Lucinda. For countless others, including myself, Anthony was a very dear friend, whom we shall always think of with much love and always miss, a man of extraordinary gentleness, culture, openness, and loyalty.

The Aris Lecture was originally designed by Anthony to commemorate his twin brother Michael, who passed away 16 years ago. However, Anthony was eventually prevailed upon to call this event "The Aris Lecture" in acknowledgement of the fact that he, too, had played a significant role in promoting Tibetan studies in Great Britain and, indeed, worldwide.

Anthony was born on the 27th of March, 1946. He went to Worth Abbey School in Sussex, and studied Anthropology at Durham University in the late 1960s. In the 1970s he travelled in India, Nepal and Bhutan. At this time he also met Marie-Laure, whom he married in 1975. Over the years, Anthony and Marie-Laure continued to travel

throughout the Himalayas, especially Bhutan, and eventually also acquired a beautiful holiday home in Thailand.

However, it is as a publisher that Anthony has made a lasting contribution to Himalayan and Tibetan Studies. He founded Serindia Publications in 1975, which for 25 years was a successful and, in Marie-Laure's words, "animated" publishing business. This resulted in a great number of exquisitely produced volumes in many different fields of scholarship related to Tibet, Bhutan, and the Himalayas in general. I can do no better than to quote a few lines from Anthony's obituary written by his Bhutanese friend Karma Phuntso in the Thimphu newspaper *Kuensel* last Saturday:

"We often give credit only to the author of the book and overlook the work of the publisher. Yet, it is often the publisher who makes a substantial difference in how the book looks... and in the overall ranking of the book and its subject in the eyes of the readers. Anthony Aris was a publisher par excellence, who made such difference to the books he published."

Among these numerous publications, there is one which I think merits particular mention, not only for its sumptuous production, but also for its intrinsic importance, namely *Tibetan Medical Paintings*, which appeared in 1992. This publication contains the high-quality reproduction of 77 paintings, copies of a unique set of medical paintings commissioned in the 17th century by the regent of Tibet, Sangyé Gyatso. In fact, if Anthony had not taken on the publication of these paintings more than 20 years ago, the immensely fascinating book by professor Janet Gyatso, *Being Human in a Buddhist World: An Intellectual History of Medicine in Early Modern Tibet*, published just a little more than half a year ago, could hardly have been written, as it refers to these paintings on almost every page. This is just one example of how Anthony's engagement with the Himalayas and Tibet sowed seeds which will continue to yield rich harvests.

Anthony was not only a professional and passionately engaged publisher, he was also what I would call a social entrepreneur, in the very best sense of the word. With his open personality and great gift of listening, this came naturally to him. His brother Michael, a short time before he passed away in 1999, had taken the first steps towards setting up a Tibetan and Himalayan Studies Centre in Oxford, with the financial backing of generous benefactors, in particular the Koerner and the Rausing

families. Anthony brought this project to a successful conclusion, enlisting the patronage of the Prince of Wales for the continued appeal for funding. The Centre is now located here at Wolfson College, which also hosts the Lecturership dedicated to Tibetan and Himalayan Studies which was created in the year 2000. In bringing all of this about I think it would be very difficult to overrate the importance of Anthony's patient, diplomatic, and dedicated efforts.

As mentioned, Anthony and Michael were not only identical twins, but their lives overlapped in many significant ways. They both studied at Durham, Michael graduating in modern history in 1967. Only a few months later, he travelled to Bhutan where he became the private tutor of the children of the royal family. Soon Anthony, too, visited Bhutan, in those days a truly remote and hidden land. In Michael's case, the five years he spent in Bhutan were decisive for his later career: he became the undisputed authority on Bhutanese history worldwide, and the author of a series of groundbreaking studies in this field.

In this regard it is impossible not to point to Michael's study *Bhutan. The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, which appeared in 1979, a revised version of his doctoral thesis from the School of Oriental and African Studies. A completely original work, based on historical sources unknown until then, it has remained the fundamental study of Bhutan's history. I would also like to mention his subsequent book, *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives: a Study of Pemalingpa (1450-1521) and the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683-1706)*, published in 1989. In this case, his impeccable standards of historical scholarship aroused for a time a certain amount of animosity in Bhutan, but this was a price Michael surely had foreseen and which he was willing to pay, rather than compromising his intellectual integrity.

Michael was also deeply interested in the culture, history, and religion of Tibet. Like so many of us, he became acutely aware of the many distressing problems and challenges facing the Tibetan people in the present political situation. He was, however, no political activist. He chose instead to manifest his solidarity by contributing towards establishing Tibetan Studies in the West on a solid footing, especially through the International Association for Tibetan Studies, of which he was a founding member and on the board of which he served until the end of his life. In fact, he was the convenor of the first international seminar of the association, which took place at St. John's College in Oxford in July 1979.

In September 1999 I gave the memorial address at the function honouring Michael in the Sheldonian Theatre. I would like to repeat a few words of what I said then:

"We can be quite sure that Michael's legacy not only here at Oxford, but also in the international academic world in which he lived and worked, will be secure, and that Michael's name and those of his benefactors will be remembered with much gratitude and pride by many generations of students and scholars."

Michael's deep personal involvement with Burma, through his marriage with Aung San Suu Kyi, is well known. Nevertheless, his discreet yet tireless lobbying on behalf of his wife and in preparation of the day when the Burmese people might enjoy basic freedoms, will, I think, only be fully acknowledged when all relevant archives become accessible to future historians. Anthony, too, has been a true friend of Burma, and was engaged for many years in providing support for Burmese students in exile.

Both Michael and Anthony were masters of the English language, their style in prose as well as speech characterised by elegant ease. This was simply a reflection of the profound and humanistic culture and engagement with life which they shared, in equal measure, but in different ways. One expression of this wide-ranging culture, of which some may not be aware, is that Anthony gradually developed a lively interest in Western art, and in the course of the last year of his life he and I had a number of immensely enjoyable and mutually stimulating visits to art exhibitions in London, ranging from Turner to Henry Moore, from Viking art to contemporary Iranian art.

Born on the same day, their rich and active lives following separate yet frequently intersecting paths, Anthony and Michael Aris will always represent creativity, commitment, loyalty, and friendship. They were men whose lives were guided not only by their intellects, but above all by their hearts. For this, and for their enduring legacy, we honour them this evening.