



4-1-2001

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#### Recommended Citation

Gilb, Corinne Lathrop (2001) "In Memoriam: Roger Williams Wescott, 1925-2000," *Comparative Civilizations Review*. Vol. 44 : No. 44 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol44/iss44/7>

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## In Memoriam: Roger Williams Wescott, 1925-2000

Scholarship is by its nature communal. When an individual scholar dies, his ideas and his scholarly work live after him. And so it will be with Roger Williams Wescott, who died late last year at the age of 75. We will continue to cherish the memory of this unusually erudite, perpetually curious, quietly witty, civilized man.

He was a linguist, like his direct ancestor, Roger Williams, who with four others founded the first English settlement in what later became Rhode Island, was the chartered colony's governor between 1654 and 1657, became famous in American history books as a champion of religious liberty, and wrote *A Key into the Language of the Indians*.

After graduating first in his class at Princeton in 1945, Roger Wescott received his Ph.D. in Linguistics from that university in 1948. His senior thesis was entitled "Europe's Great Age: A Study of the Baroque" but it presaged his interest in comparing world civilizations. Influenced by anthropologist Alfred Kroeber, between 1948 and 1952 he was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University in England, finishing a dissertation entitled "Some Criteria for a Comparative Study of Civilization." After teaching "An Introduction to Western Civilization" at the University of Florida in 1950 and 1951, in 1952 he spent a year doing historical research in Europe. Beginning in 1953, he taught "The Social History of Western Civilization" at Boston University. To get an opportunity to include more non-Western comparisons, he volunteered to offer two evening courses at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education: "The Philosophy of History" and "Historiology."

After these few years of teaching, he obtained a Ford fellowship to do anthropological field work in Nigeria, focusing on language, and especially the Bini language. His *A Bini Grammar* was published by the U.S. Office of Education in 1963. In 1957 he was given a tenured post at Michigan State University in the Social Science Department, but his proposed courses on "Non-

Western Civilizations” and “The Taxology of Civilizations” were not adopted. Subsequently Wescott founded and directed an African Language Program at the University.

The International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations had been founded in Salzburg, Austria in 1961, with Harvard’s Pitirim Sorokin as its president. In 1963 Wescott’s lecture to a Yale University anthropology seminar was entitled “Counting and Classifying Civilizations.” Between 1964 and 1966 Wescott taught at Wilson College.

He found his academic home at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey where he taught between 1966 and 1991. He began there as a professor of anthropology in the Social Science Division of the College of Liberal Arts, where he founded Drew’s anthropology department and served for 12 years as its chair. From that base he offered interdisciplinary courses on “Our Future,” “African Ethnohistory” and “Comparative Civilization.” He was also professor of linguistics in the Humanities Division of the university’s graduate school and directed Drew’s linguistics program for 13 years. When the ISCSA foundered in Europe, Wescott was contacted, and he facilitated its re-founding in the U.S., served as its president between 1992 and 1995, and remained an active member until he died.

His publications proliferated: In 1966 his chapter, “Historiology and Anthropology” appeared in Sorokin’s *Sociological Theories of Today*. In 1969 Funk and Wagnalls published his book, *The Divine Animal: An Exploration of Human Potentiality*. In 1970 his “The Enumeration of Civilizations” appeared in *History and Theory*. His piece on “Linguistic Iconism” appeared in *Language* in 1971. In 1972 his chapter, “Historiology: The Term and the Concept” was included in John P. Sedgwick, Jr.’s *Rhythms of Western Art*. In 1973 he published “Anthropology and Futuristics.” He incorporated his chapter, “The Origin of Speech,” in a book on *Language Origins*, which he edited and which was published in 1974. *African Studies* published his “Tonal Iconicity in Bini Color Terms” in 1975. *Futurics* published his “Libration and Liberation: Thoughts on

Living Beyond the Earth” in 1977. His “Sound and Sense” appeared in *Linguistics* in 1980; also in 1980 his *Essays on Phonosemic Subjects* was published by Jupiter Press. In 1984 the *International Social Science Review* published his “Boundaries Between Civilizations”. In 1987 his “Protohistory: The Transition from Pre-Civil to Civil Society” was a chapter in Matthew Melko’s and Leighton Scott’s *Boundaries of Civilizations*.

In addition to these and numerous other publications, he was active in other ways. He took off spring semester in 1980 to voyage to Asia, Africa and Europe aboard the S.S. Universe, teaching “Folklore and Comparative Religion” in this floating college sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh. In 1982 and 1983 he was a forensic linguist for the New Jersey state courts. Between 1985 and 1988 he hosted a statewide New Jersey cable television program called “Other Views”. From 1988 to 1996 he was first vice president of the International Organization for the Unification of Terminological Neologisms, overlapping this task with his time as ISCSC president.

In 1988-1989 he left Drew for a year to be the first holder of the Endowed Chair of Excellence in Humanities at the University of Tennessee, returning to direct Drew’s Behavioral Science Program between 1989 and 1991. His scholarly publications continued in the ‘90s. In June, 1990 his “Synchronisms” was printed by the Chronology and Catastrophism Workshop at Stopley, Bedfordshire, England. In 1994 the *New England Antiquities Research Association Journal* published his “Types of Cultural Diffusion”. During the ‘90s he co-edited two journals, *Futurics* and *Forum Linguisticum*. He was also a frequent contributor to *Comparative Civilizations Review*, served as vice president of the Association for the Study of Language in Prehistory and first vice president of the World Bank of International Terms. In the year of his death he published two books, one on great catastrophes and another entitled *Comparative Civilizations: An Unconsensual View*, published by Atherton Press. The word “unconsensual” in this latter book reflected Wescott’s strongly

held belief that scholars should keep their minds open to views that challenged received opinion since – in the long run – such views might turn out to be correct. Galileo comes to mind.

His writing style was lucid and graceful. He was innately a gentleman while refusing to be bound by conventional wisdom and continually rejoicing in the coining of neologisms. We will miss him, and we should. He was one of a kind and a role model for scholarship driven by curiosity rather than careerism, an exceptional scholar and an exceptional man.

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Samuel P. Huntington.