

Wilhelm Geiger¹

Wilhelm Geiger as Iranologist
by Hans Heinrich Schaeder, Berlin.

WILHELM GEIGER'S publications on Iranology, apart from some smaller contributions of a later time, stretch over a period of 27 years, from the publication of his Thesis in 1877 to the completion of the *Outlines of Iranology* in 1904. During the last decade of this first period in his life as a scholar, there are already signs of transition to his study of Ceylon and the tradition of Buddhism there, to which he devoted his later research; his first journey to Ceylon, 1895-6, can be looked upon as the turning point. Although it must be regretted for the sake of Iranology that his wide knowledge, ceaseless application and unfailing judgment did not serve it any longer, yet the science will always be obliged to him for what he has given to it the greater part of which still remains as a possession of lasting value.

He was an undergraduate during the seventies of the 19th century when Indogermanic philology was revolutionized and given a new foundation through a series of splendid discoveries. Comparative philology had become so interesting and promising that a great number of outstanding intellects from the ranks of the younger generation of scholars were attracted by it. Though the efforts of these scholars were concerned of choice with single languages, they made an essential contribution to comparative grammar and word research. In contrast to his contemporaries, Wilhelm Geiger was and remained a philologist by nature, inclination and academic training. He considered the study of the numerous languages with which he familiarized himself, neither as a purpose in itself nor, like the historian, as a mere means to an end. The study of languages and their development meant to him the direct and surest way of understanding the whole of the cultures of which they are an expression. He was captivated by the lives of civilizations with all their abundance of material and intellectual creations. His aptitude for such understanding was very considerable and enhanced by a wide and thorough general knowledge. His work as a philologist greatly benefited from an independent interest in geography and ethnology, which enabled him to describe clearly the deeply rooted connection of the civilizations he explored, and of their carriers, with the soil of their native lands; a viewpoint which was not so much a matter of course for a philologist in the seventies and eighties as it is to-day. He devoted no less interest to political history than to the history of civilization, and his

1. Wilhelm Geiger to whom Ceylon owes so much died in 1943, during the Great War. This article translated by Dr. Vally Reich, is reproduced from the *Journal of the German Oriental Association*, Vol. 98 (New Series, Vol. 23).

knowledgeable essays on the subject, concerned with the contemporary situation of Eastern Iran, when the Russian invasion of Middle Asia was taking place, display an insight into its historic and political importance surmised only by very few people in the Germany of that time. An early acquired knowledge of the Russian language—which was likewise rare with German philologists of that period—enabled him to explore the contemporary Russian literature for accounts of military enterprises, as well as to undertake journeys into Turkestan for the purpose of study and research. He did not consider it detrimental to scholarship to publish essays on these subjects, composed in his fluent and pellucid style, in popular educational periodicals or even in newspapers. As a heritage from his father, who was a Franconian pastor, the prevailing aim which ruled his work was clearly the history of religion, but this was not so readily perceived in his writings as in his lectures. The deeper meaning of his seemingly surprising transition from Iran to Ceylon becomes immediately understandable—and this was realised by W. Wüst—if it is recognised that his final interest was really concerned with the understanding of the two great Aryan founders of religions, Zarathustra and the Buddha.

Beside his wide scholarly interests and their careful and methodical development, the characteristic features of his working method and his entire disposition are a deep and genuine modesty which won him immediate sympathy ; a kindness which was objective and friendly even in opposition, though in fact he avoided disputes as much as possible ; a rigorous sense of duty, in virtue of which he carried out his studies not according to personal liking, but to the actual demands of learning, accomplishing the most toilsome and ungrateful details of work with the imperturbable and unflagging diligence characteristic of him.

His first paper on the first Fargard of the Vendidad in the Pehlevi version merits unreserved admiration for a performance by a youth of twenty years after only six terms at the University, during which he also completed his preparation for the State Examination in classical philology.

The Vendidad is the Code of Laws by Zoroaster, and its first chapter contains a list of 16 provinces of Eastern and Northern Iran. Every attempt to determine the local and temporal origin of the Avesta must inevitably derive from the interpretation of this text, but neither the plan according to which the list has been arranged, nor the precise period of its compilation has been ascertained so far. Through making a thorough study of the middle-Persian paraphrase, Geiger was able to further the understanding of the Avesta itself, and at the same time found support for the view that the applicability of the translation is not uniform for the various parts of the Avesta : it is of no value in respect of the Gathas, but, if used critically, it can be of great help for the elucidation of the later parts of the Yasna and the Vendidad and may by no means be altogether disregarded.

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Only one year after his doctor's thesis he submitted to the Faculty his probationary thesis for University tutorship; the first edition of a middle-Persian Zoroastrian writing about the omnipotence of death, a work containing a large number of quotations from lost parts of the Avesta. He added to the Persian text the corresponding Sanskrit translation, a commentary and exhaustive glossaries. In this serious work Geiger showed himself fully master of the comprehensive knowledge which is expected from the learned editor of Avestan and late Zoroastrian books. On the question of the character of the Pahlavi which was still much disputed at the time—whether mixed language or pure Iranian with Semitic ideograms—he clearly and decisively adopted the latter conception, which is now held to be the correct one. It had first been expressed by N. L. Westergaard and was to be generally recognised later.

The passage of only one year more saw the publication of his third important book which provided an introduction to the "Avestan" language—the name "Old-Bactrian" for the language of the Avesta having been abandoned. The book treats morphology shortly, in a mainly descriptive manner, and contains a large collection of readings in Avestan writing from Vendidad, Yasna and Yascht, besides the three first Gathas, again with an extensive glossary which puts great emphasis on etymology. It was published almost simultaneously with the "Manuel" of the Belgian scholar Ch. de Harlez, a book of similar structure. F. Justi's Handbook had preceded it in 1864, and another one, composed by Chr. Bartholomae, Geiger's temporary fellow-student, which is based on comparative philology and also treats the Old-Persian—a marvel of condensation and conciseness, making in fact almost too great demands on the student—was published only four years later (1883). The hope that the number of Iranologists might increase, aroused by the publication of these introductory books, remained unfulfilled on account of a regrettable, but practical consideration: Iranology was a "trade which did not pay". Truly, Indology and Indogermanic philology were by no means "gold mines", yet they were not so utterly profitless as Iranology. Thus Geiger, whose excellent *Elementary Book of the Sanskrit Language* was to be twice re-edited, was not given the opportunity of making a revised edition of his Avestan Handbook. This is unfortunate because, in my judgment, it makes the student more easily and more quickly familiar with the Avesta than any other of the existing textbooks.

When Geiger resolved in 1880 to take up higher school teaching, this change was not to interrupt his work as a scholar, although it removed him for four years from the activities of the university town, for in 1882 he completed his most extensive and important book on Iranology—a description of the civilization which forms the background of the Avestan writings, based on facts which he had carefully collected from the whole of the Avesta. This book which is both clearly arranged and attractively written has remained one of the indispensable tools of the Iranologist; it has not been replaced and will

not be surpassed for a long time. Its greatest quality is the strict impartiality with which the material is made to speak for itself without being manipulated to conform with rooted prejudices. Because of Geiger's special interest in geography, two-fifths of the book were devoted to the geographical and ethnological conditions, and he expected in consequence of this that the East-Iranian origin of the Avestan writings and the early date of their composition before the formation of the Median and Persian kingdoms would become immediately evident; but the doubts of some critics—amongst whom were F. Justi and Ch. de Harlez and even his teacher Fr. Spiegel, who wanted to locate the Avesta in the North-West of Iran at a considerable later period—caused him to take up the question once more in a separate paper corroborating his viewpoint. To-day no one doubts that Geiger's view is correct and that the North-West Iranian hypothesis is untenable; the one question still open being where and when the collection and final revision of the late Avestan writings handed down to us was made. Geiger's admirable essay on Zarathustra can be considered as an addition to his book on Avestan civilization. That paper, being published in a somewhat unusual manner, was not given the attention which it deserves: it is definitely worth reading even to-day, alongside with the description of Zarathustra by N. Söderblum, the best existing at present. With perfect clarity Geiger has made the fundamental separation between the Gathas and the later Avesta on which depends the understanding of Zarathustra.

During the eighties of the nineteenth century, his East-Iranian studies produced a number of short articles as well as two separate papers in which he proved himself anew as an expert in historical and modern geography. In 1879 Th. Nöldeke, thanks to his thorough knowledge of the *Šāh-nāme* and its language, undertook the bold task of translating into German and interpreting the little novel, handed down only in a middle-Persian version, about Ardaschir, the founder of the Sassanide dynasty, and had gained a splendid success. Geiger followed him ten years later with the translation of a piece of the old epic tradition from East Iran, the only one preserved in middle-Persian literature and which, word for word in places, has passed into the *Šāh-nāme*. The inquiry into the language of Eastern Iran in ancient times was followed naturally by a further step, leading him to the research on the modern dialects of that country. At first he concerned himself with the Balotschian, then with the Afghanian: and—on the example of H. Hübschmann in his treatment of the Ossetian—he has the merit of being the first to have clarified the vocabulary of those two languages by segregating the loan-words so that their phonetic characteristics, and consequently their position within the Iranian, became clear to the student. In doing so, however, he limited himself to indisputable facts and took care not to make then unwarrantable connections between the present-day dialects and the Old-Iranian. When at the beginning of the

20th century two middle-East Iranian languages, the Sogdian and the Sakian, were disclosed through the discovery of East Turkestan writings, the centre of gravity of Geiger's work was already placed too far away from Iran for him to have the leisure for taking part in the new research work. Yet hardly any one was so well equipped for this task as he.

He concluded his studies in Iranology in an impressive manner by his contribution to the *Outlines of Iranology* which he completed successfully, together with E. Kuhn, in the years 1895-1904. There is no detailed report on the compilation of these Outlines, as it was not Geiger's way to put his share of a work, however deserving, into the limelight; but there can be no doubt that without his self-denying application the Outlines never would have become the firm foundation for all further studies in Iranology. They have remained the standard work even after this science received a fresh impetus by the results of expeditions into Eastern Turkestan, which took place immediately after the Outlines were finished. It was a matter of course that Geiger undertook to write the Geography of Iran as well as the grammar of the Afghanian and the Balotschian; but in addition it fell to him—and this could hardly have been foreseen at the outset—to treat the bulk of smaller modern dialects, with the exception of the Kurdish and the Ossetian. A systematic treatment of those dialects had hardly been begun, although there existed all sorts of material, partly in the Russian language. Within the narrow time-limits in which Geiger had to work he nevertheless produced a pioneer work which is thoroughly admirable in the way of grouping and working out the essential linguistic characteristics. The division he made in Pamir, Caspian and Central dialects has not yet been replaced by a better one, and no one since has had the courage to make another survey of the total distribution of dialects in present-day Iran. The unfriendly criticism of his performance occasionally heard in recent times can be indulged in only by those who find it seemly to heap upon the pioneer the stones which he himself has cleared away in preparing the path. Moreover his share in the Outlines was not confined to the essays he wrote for this work: he took upon himself the compilation of the Indexes to both volumes, a task which, though largely mechanical, could be done only by one who was an expert and a true scholar. Covering nearly 200 three-column pages, these Indexes are indispensable and of inestimable help to those who use the Outlines: the daily experience of their faultlessness and completeness cannot fail to inspire grateful admiration.

After the Outlines were completed at the beginning of this century, Geiger's studies of Indology seldom let him have the leisure to write even short essays and occasional notices on Iranology. Yet when he entered upon his second term of office as Vice-Chancellor at Erlangen University his inaugural speech on the recent discoveries and explorations, making a complete, though necessarily concise survey, and later, after the war of 1914-18, his welcome of the

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important work by A. von Le Coq on the late Antiquity of Buddhism in Middle Asia with knowledgeable remarks in the "OLZ" (1923-9), demonstrated clearly that he followed the new Middle Asia research with deep and real interest. We also learn through information kindly forwarded by his wife, that towards the end of his life he studied again the great poem which is the purest and most perfect expression of the Iranian character, Firdosi's *Šāhnāme*. Thus it can be seen from his return at a very advanced age to the scholarly inclinations of his youth, that whoever once has been attracted by Iran and the research of its civilization will always remain attached to it.

Wilhelm Geiger as Indologist

by Helmuth von Glasenapp, Königsberg (Prussia).

Geiger's research work on Indology is devoted to three different subjects : to India in ancient times, to Buddhism, and to the Island of Ceylon. In each of these spheres he concerned himself equally with linguistic and cultural problems.

For the study of Indian Antiquity, a thorough knowledge of Sanskrit is indispensable. In order to convey such knowledge to the students, Geiger, when still a University Tutor in Munich, wrote his excellent *Elementary Textbook of the Sanskrit Language* (1st ed. 1888, 2nd ed. 1909, 3rd ed. 1923) which comprises a grammar as well as exercises and a glossary. Through this book many beginners have been introduced to that difficult language ; Geiger improved on it in every new edition, giving consideration especially to the language of the Veda : and he added pieces for translation from German into Sanskrit. "The Importance of Indian Antiquity for the History of Civilization" was treated by Geiger in his Erlangen Pro-Vice-Chancellor's speech (Erlangen 1901) which he revised and published in the Annual of the Munich Oriental Society, 1, p. 211-237. For the journal *North and South*, he wrote a generally comprehensible essay on "The most ancient Literature of the Indian People" (16 (1881) p. 83-105), and in the same journal he treated "The Indogermanic Myths of Death and of the Afterlife" (11 (1879) p. 84-103).

Geiger furthered the knowledge of Buddhism chiefly by the volume I, 7 for the "Outlines of Indo-Aryan Philology and Archaeology" : *Pāli : Literature and Language* (1916), which may be regarded as the best of comprehensive accounts of the sacred language in recent times. This, to the Buddhists of Ceylon and Indo-China, is the Middle-Indian Māgadhi dialect in which the Buddha preached. In opposition to other scholars (Sylvain Lévi, Heinrich Lüders) who consider the Pāli as a literary language, which is not identical with the Māgadhi, and therefore assume that the Pāli literature offers in a revised version only the translation of the old canon which was composed in Māgadhi, Geiger has always taken the conservative view "that the Pāli, although no pure Māgadhi, yet was a colloquial language whose basis was the Magadhi and which the Buddha used himself. From this we may conclude that the Pāli-

canon is an attempt to render the ' buddha-vacanam ' (the word of the Buddha) in its original form ", (p. 4).

Geiger's uncommonly profound familiarity with Pāli literature is best shown in the monograph he composed in collaboration with his wife Magdalene : " Pāli Dhamma, especially in the Canonic Literature ". By means of a very great number of quotations from the text he discusses the manifold meanings of this word which stands for " a central conception of Buddhist teaching " (p. 3). Amongst these meanings are : law, right, norm, duty, commandment, prescription, use, practice, character, teaching system, truth, quality, thing, object and many others. The meaning of the word as philosophical *terminus technicus* (" factor of existence ") was not explained in this paper ; this was left to another scholar whose writing was published two years later.

As a result of his continuous readings in Pali literature, Geiger left voluminous occasional notes on the meanings of single words which, we hope, will yet be exploited in the service of learning.

The translation of *Samyutta-Nikāya*, a collection of Buddha speeches arranged in groups (2 volumes Munich-Neubiberg, 1925, 1930) bears witness to a deeply penetrating understanding of the text combined with a perfect mastery of the language in respect of its formal structure. Only the first 16 books have been translated into German by Geiger ; so it is to be hoped that another and similarly congenial translator will be found to do the remaining forty volumes and finish the task.

Together with his wife Geiger translated likewise from the Pali *The Second Decade of the Rasavāhinī* (Reports of the Proceedings of the Bavarian Academy, Department of Philology, 1918, 5th treatise), a book of legends whose author Vedehathera lived in the 13th century C.E. (stories of the first decade had been translated previously by other scholars).

" Mythology in Buddhist Art " is the title of an essay published in the Archives for Religious Learning 5 (1902) p.177-201, in which Geiger, relying on A. Grünwedel's research, reports about the representation of supernatural beings in Buddhist art.

In this connection we must remember Geiger's very productive activity as the editor of the *Journal on Buddhism*, from July 1921 to the end of 1928 : contributions to this periodical were made by him, as well as by a number of the most outstanding scholars in Germany and elsewhere.

Buddhism and the Pāli language are the spiritual link connecting the Indian continent with the Island of Ceylon, which extends beyond it and differs essentially from India as regards ethnology and civilization. Those two branches of knowledge, which are closely connected, lead easily to that sphere of learning in which Geiger gained his greatest success : the Ceylon Research. Geiger's first publications on Ceylon date back as far as 1895, and in his last writings, which he finished shortly before his death, he still

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concerned himself with this favourite subject of his studies with which he had become acquainted personally through three visits to Ceylon.

He compiled a critical edition of Mahānāma's *Great Chronicle*, *Mahāvamsa* London, 1908, and he popularised this book by translating it into English (London, 1912, new edition 1934). This was the greatest service he rendered to the research of the past of this Island.

He then edited the text of the *Cūlavamsa*, the modern continuation of the *Mahāvamsa* (2 volumes, London, 1925, 1927), and translated it into English (2 volumes, London, 1929, 1930). Geiger's first inquiry into the problems of the *Mahāvamsa* was in his contribution to the pamphlet of Erlangen University in honour of the 80th birthday of the Prince Regent Luitpold of Bavaria (Erlangen and Leipzig, 1901); then he dealt more exhaustively with them in the book *Dīpavamsa* and *Mahāvamsa* (Leipzig, 1905) and in numerous treatises. A few smaller essays are concerned with the history of Ceylon.

Geiger has furthered most of all our knowledge of the language and literature of the Sinhalese. In the *Gurupūjākaumudī*, the pamphlet compiled in honour of Albrecht Weber (Leipzig, 1896), he examined on p. 105-7 a number of words and proved their Aryan origin. In a treatise of Munich Academy, *Etymology of the Sinhalese* (1897), he showed the Aryan origin of 1669, more words. His *Studies on the History and Language of Ceylon* (Reports of the Proceedings of the Bavarian Academy, 1941, Vol. 2, Part 4) are a supplement to these papers. In this treatise and in the *Contributions to the History of the Sinhalese Language* (*ibidem* 1942, Part 11) he discussed exhaustively the problems of the linguistic character of Sinhalese.

Already in 1900 he had treated the whole subject comprehensively in the *Outlines of Indo-Aryan Philology*, Vol. I, Part 10, under the title: "Literature and Language of the Sinhalese". His ideas on the essence and character of the Sinhalese were set forth as follows in the above mentioned *Studies* of 1941, p. 12f: "According to a quite credible tradition the first Aryan settlers of Ceylon had come from North-west India, bringing with them one of the dialects current there. This accounts for certain linguistic phenomena which Sinhalese shares for example with the Marāṭhī. Such analogies can be used on the other hand indirectly to support the traditions. But the Aryan settlement soon encountered the intellectual and economical influences of Magadha and Bengal which reached their climax with the introduction of Buddhism in the 3rd century B.C. These influences could not fail to affect the language also. From that period onward it shows certain features which are characteristic of the Eastern Indo-Aryan languages. Finally we must consider that the Sinhalese were in continuous contact with the Damīlas; but they always remained conscious of their Aryan origin. In the literary language of the older time especially—in Ceylon it is called Eḷu—the use of non-Aryan loan-words is avoided; all the more favoured are words borrowed from the Sanskrit, more rarely those from the Pāli, whereby an author could prove his scholar-

ship. But many Tamil words have penetrated into the language of the people and of commerce, and syntax and style, the special forms of expression, might have been influenced by the Dravidian”.

Geiger finally summarised the efforts he had devoted to the study of Sinhalese, in his *Grammar of the Sinhalese Language*, Colombo, 1938, (R.A.S. Ceylon Branch) and the *Dictionary of the Sinhalese Language*; the latter was compiled under his direction, with the assistance of Professor Helmer Smith and Sir D. B. Jayatilaka, a very toilsome task. It began to be published in Colombo, 1935-1938, welcomed and appreciated by experts on the subject.

Sinhalese literature was treated anew in a most concise manner in a contribution to H. V. Glasenapp's *Literatures of India* (Handbook of Literary Research, published by O. Walzel, Potsdam, 1929), p. 268-71. *The Knowledge of the Indian Nāṭi-Literature in Ceylon* is the subject of an essay in the pamphlet in honour of H. Jacobi (Bonn. 1926) p. 418-21.

The essay “Huniyam” is a contribution to the ethnology of Ceylon (Pamphlet in honour of Ernst Kuhn, Breslau, 1916, p. 185-92); it is about the rituals of spells in which a magic cord is used.

Apart from the Sinhalese Geiger has concerned himself with the study of two other elements in the population of Ceylon. In *The Language of the Rodiyas* (Reports of the Proceedings of the Bavarian Academy, 1879, p. 3-32) he states that the language of this small group of people who are considered as outcasts “is by no means an independent dialect but from the point of view of grammar is completely identical with the Sinhalese of the low classes of the population. At the same time it contains a number of words, chiefly nouns and verbs, which take the place of certain Sinhalese words. These can be derived partly from an old Aryan language-stock, partly from corrupted Sinhalese words, as far as they are not new formations of the kind of our slang”.

In the *Contributions to the Knowledge of the Language of the Veddās* (Pamphlet in honour of E. Windisch, Leipzig, 1914, p. 59-62) and in *The Language of the Veddās* (*Ind. Hist. Q.* 11 (1935) p. 504) Geiger has followed up the history of the pre-Aryan inhabitants of Ceylon of whom small numbers only survive at the present day.

He summarised his results somewhat as follows in the second essay which he wrote in English (p. 515): Only few words have been preserved from the original non-Aryan language of the Veddās, because they gradually adopted the Sinhalese colloquial language. In the pre-Aryan period the Veddās also possessed a code language of which they made use in their migrations and in hunting as well as for ritual purposes, and a number of Sinhalese expressions have likewise penetrated into this language. The necessity of enriching it with new words led to the invention of a great number of periphrastic expressions which give the code language its special character.

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In three papers Geiger treated also the language of the Maldives, that group of islands which politically forms a tributary state of Ceylon. Of these "Maldivian Studies" the 1st and the 3rd were published in the Reports of the Proceedings of the Bavarian Academy, 1900 and 1902, the 2nd in the Journal of the German Oriental Association 55, p. 371; a supplement in *J.R.A.S.*, 1902, p. 107-132. An enlarged English edition of the whole work was published under the title *Maldivian Linguistic Studies*, London, 1921.

Geiger's studies in Indology are distinguished by a clear arrangement of the material and a straightforward presentation. In the realm of learning they will be a solid foundation for further research and a rich source of inspiration for a long period to come, but the scholar himself will for ever have a place among the pioneers of Pali, Buddhist and Ceylon Research.