



GEIGER, BERNHARD

GEIGER, BERNHARD, scholar of Indo-Iranian studies (b. 30 April 1881 in Bielitz, the present-day Bielsko-Biała in Poland; d. 5 July 1964 in New York; [Figure 1](#)). Geiger studied Hebrew and Arabic before being persuaded by Leopold von Schroeder to turn to Indian and Iranian studies. Among his teachers in Vienna, Bonn, Prague, Göttingen, and Heidelberg were the Indologists Leopold von Schroeder, Moriz Winternitz, and Franz Kielhorn and the Iranists Friedrich Carl Andreas (q.v.) and Jacob Wackernagel. He received his doctorate in 1904 with a thesis on the pre-Islamic Arab poet Ṭarafa b. ‘Abd (“Die Mu‘allaqa des Ṭarafa,” *WZKM* 19, 1905, pp. 323-70; 20, 1906, pp. 37-80). The stimulus to his first Indological treatise, on Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya*, came from Franz Kielhorn; in it, Geiger contributed to the understanding of one of the major works by Indian grammarians. He received his *habilitation* and became university lecturer for Old Indian and Old Iranian philology at the University of Vienna in 1909. He was appointed extraordinary professor there in 1919, but, being Jewish, he was dismissed in 1938 after the *anschluss* with Nazi Germany. Geiger emigrated to the United States in 1938, held a chair as professor of Iranian and Related Languages and Literatures at the Asia Institute in New York from 1938 to 1951, and taught at Columbia University after 1951 as visiting professor.

From about 1909, Geiger’s research centered on Avestan and Zoroastrian studies as well as the Middle Persian language. His major work was *Die Aməša Spəntas: Ihr Wesen und ihre ursprüngliche Bedeutung* (Vienna, 1916), in which he attempted through a comparative approach to comprehend the nature of



this group of (six or) seven Aməša Spəntas (q.v.) “Holy Immortals” first created by Ahura Mazdā and to make clear, contrary to the views of James Darmesteter and Charles de Harlez, that the abstract meaning of their names was the original one. In his view they were originally personifications of abstract ideas and were related to natural and earthly spheres only gradually. Being convinced that the Aməša Spəntas were of Indo-Iranian origin and related to the Vedic Ādityas, he made a great effort to uncover correspondences and similarities of myths, religious ideas, and means of linguistic expression between the Vedas and the Avesta. His careful observations on proto-Aryan phraseology and on poetic language in general represented the most fruitful methods introduced by him and have been of special relevance for subsequent research since those parallels, though harder to recognize, are much more conclusive than mere lexical similarities. But not all of his proposals gained acceptance, e.g., his identification (by means of persuasive arguments in their use) of Av. *spaniih-* and *spəništa-* (comparative and superlative to *spənta-* “holy”) with Ved. *pānyas-* / *pānīyas-* and *pāniṣṭha-* respectively: the existence of forms like Khot. *śśandrāmata* and Arm. *Sandaramet* alongside *Spandaramet* and Av. (*spəntā*) *Ārmaiti* (q.v.) prove an original Indo-Ir. **ću-* and require a Vedic equivalent with *śv-*. Another point, treated in more detail in one of his later articles (of 1934), was his view that Ved. **rtá-* and Av. *aśa-* mean “the right” as cosmic power. Such work by Geiger provided proof of his full control of both Vedic and Avestan scholarship, however.

Geiger’s contribution to *Die Religionen der Erde in Einzeldarstellungen* (Leipzig and Vienna, 1929, pp. 232-63), “Die Religion der Iranier,” has been regarded as the most valuable part of that collection by one of the most competent historians of religion, Carl Clemen (q.v.).

A detailed critique of Johannes Hertel’s controversial *Die arische Feuerlehre* (Leipzig, 1925), which Geiger had undertaken and which must have been nearly finished in 1938, obviously could not be published after his emigration and the loss of his papers. Thus regrettably we have only Geiger’s short article “Der Planet Venus im Awesta?” (*WZKM* 45, 1938, pp. 109-20) to illustrate Hertel’s untenable theories and his linguistic ignorance (so great that Geiger could even joke about Hertel’s “Saxonian dialect of Sanskrit,” p. 117).

Geiger is also the author of some publications which, although relatively few in number, are characterized by a vast knowledge of Iranian studies and by the most exact observation of the smallest details. This combination of skills



occasionally enabled him to understand passages of some texts more fully than anyone before or to be the first to understand them at all. All these studies testify to his astonishing familiarity with the Middle Persian sources (esp. Pahlavi literature) and their vocabulary. Of particular importance are Geiger's philological and linguistic contributions concerning Talmudic-Aramaic words of Iranian origin. They are more or less unknown among Iranists since they were published only in Hebrew translation in *Additamenta ad librum Aruch Completum Alexandri Kohut* (ed. S. Krauss, Vienna, 1937), a supplementary volume to a great medieval Talmudic encyclopedia edited in the late 19th century. In these articles, for the first time, a scholar specialized in Middle Iranian who had also studied Semitic languages, dealt with the materials borrowed from Iranian.

In 1956 Geiger published "The Middle Iranian Texts" (in C. H. Kraeling, *The Synagogue, The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report 8/1*, New Haven, Conn., 1956, pp. 283-317). It remains the authoritative edition of the texts found in the synagogue of Dura-Europos (q.v., ii. Inscriptions), i.e., of twelve Middle Persian *dipinti* and three Parthian graffiti from the short period when that city was occupied by the Persians under Šāpūr I (ca. 252/253 C. E.). It was intended to be accompanied by an *editio major*, which Geiger projected for the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* (III/III/1); instead, Richard N. Frye later published only a set of photographs.

Finally, Geiger's collaboration in preparation of a synopsis of the peoples and languages of the Caucasus region, in which he was responsible for the sections on Iranian languages and the New Aramaic Aisor language, should be mentioned.

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"Anmerkungen zum 'Frahang i Pahlavik'," *WZKM* 26, 1912, pp. 294-306.

"Zum Postwesen der Perser," *WZKM* 29, 1915, pp. 309-14.

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