



JUNKER, HEINRICH FRANZ JOSEF

JUNKER, HEINRICH FRANZ JOSEF, scholar of Iranian, Indo-European, Korean, and general linguistics (b. 26 March 1889, Offenbach/Main, Germany; d. 3 April 1970, Berlin; [Figure 1](#)). Junker's interest in exotic scripts and in languages in general inspired him to take up Iranian studies. He often said that it was his training in shorthand writing that first led him to try to read texts in Oriental scripts. That he became a specialist in Old Iranian philology is due to the influence of his teacher [Christian Bartholomae](#), whom he met in Giessen and whom he followed to Strasburg and Heidelberg as his *Spezialschüler* (special pupil).

Junker chose as the subject of his thesis one of the most difficult and linguistically important Pahlavi texts, the Middle Persian dictionary of heterograms (a most appropriate term applied by Junker to Middle Iranian Aramaic spellings; see [IDEOGRAPHIC WRITING](#)) and their eteographic explanations, commonly known as *Frahang ī pahlawīg*. The thesis "Prolegomena to the Frahang ī Pahlavīk" was accepted in 1911, and the Ph.D. degree was awarded to Junker in 1912. The full edition of the *Frahang* text was published that same year as *The Frahang i Pahlavīk*, being the subject of his Habilitation (Junker, 1912a). The edition is an excellent, strictly methodical philological achievement, and its main merit is the use of more and better manuscripts than Salemann and others had been able to use in their earlier editions. A serious drawback was Junker's disregard of the genuine character



of the heterograms and his unwillingness to try to decode their basic Aramaic forms. Later, Junker readily hailed Erich Ebeling's studies on the Semitic part of the *Frahang* (see Ebeling, 1941). But it took seventy-six years before a completely new edition by an expert in both Iranian and Semitic languages appeared in print (Nyberg, 1988). Junker himself returned to the subject in 1955 with a booklet entitled *Das Frahang i pahlavik in zeichengemäßer Anordnung* (1955b). Although it was meant to be a modest, serviceable *hilfsbuch* (reference book) for students, it took into account the results of the contributions of Semitic studies that were by then accessible and noted, whenever possible, the older spellings of the Pahlavi Psalter. Junker's edition of 1912 became a basic work of Iranian studies. The Persian edition of the *Frahang* by M. J. Maškur (1967/68) is based on Junker's work.

The other major achievement of those years was Junker's expedition, jointly undertaken with Robert Gauthiot in 1913, to the Zarafshan valley in Russian Central Asia where the Yaghnobi people, an ethnic minority, were living. Junker gave a brief report about the expedition in "Yaṅnābi-Forschungsreise 1913" (1914b [1915]). The Yaghnobi language was important for both Gauthiot and Junker, since the linguistic position of Yaghnobi as an offspring of an ancient Sogdian dialect related to classical Sogdian was already known. Junker took an interest in the living language as such and gave relevant descriptions of its "literature" and dialectal grouping (1914a; 1930b).

During World War I, Junker served in a prisoner-of-war camp as an interpreter and translator.

In 1919, Junker received a call to the University of Hamburg as *extraordinarius* professor of Comparative Linguistics. In 1923 he became full professor (*Professor Ordinarius*) at the same university. It was in those years that Junker began, or accomplished, his most multifarious contributions to Old Iranian studies, of which he became a leading representative.

Junker contributed his opinion to the discussion, current at that time, of a possible influence of Iranian religion on other religious traditions. A particular problem of this kind was expertly discussed in his published lecture "Über iranische Quellen der hellenistischen Aionvorstellung" (1923b; cf. also 1925a). Junker tried to show that the *Chronos apeiros* and the *apeiros aiōn* of the inscription of [Antiochos of Commagene](#) were inspired by speculations about the Iranian Zurvān. Admittedly, this has remained a disputed, but stimulating, hypothesis, and a number of (unfortunately) forgotten, but nevertheless



remarkable observations are to be found in this work, for instance, on the striking parallels between Manichean and Zoroastrian mythology.

In his study “Das Awestaalphabet und der Ursprung der armenischen und georgischen Schrift” (1925b, 1926a; repr., 1927a), Junker expressed sound criticism of the then famous and widely accepted “Andreas theory” (see [ANDREAS](#)), especially of its one-sided explanation of the transmitted Avestan text as a transcription of a Pahlavi (i.e., [Arsacid](#) text, but only in order to subscribe to the paleographic principles of Andreas’s theory. For confirmation, correction, or improvement of the “Andreas theory,” which has never been completely explained, he adduced the Armenian and Georgian alphabets, which, he postulated, went back to the Middle Iranian alphabets and proved the origin of the Avestan alphabet before 400 CE. This early origin of the Avestan alphabet allowed him to derive its letters from a combination of Middle Persian and Parthian letters. But if Junker’s thorough and learned study proved anything, it was the speculative character of any paleographic derivation of Avestan, Armenian, and Georgian letters from older Iranian alphabets, except for those Avestan letters that are evidently identical with those of the Pahlavi alphabets (Book Pahlavi, Psalms, inscriptions) in shape and sound value. A brief English summary of Junker’s essential ideas is given in “The Origin of the Avestan Alphabet” (1930a).

In addition to the above, a number of concise studies on special problems were produced in those years, such as: “Türkisch *Šimnu* ‘Ahriman’” (1925c), in which Junker, for the first time, suggested an Iranian etymology for Old Turkish *Šimnu* “devil” (convincingly, even if his explanation is in need of revision).

In 1926, Junker was given the prestigious chair of Sanskrit and Comparative Linguistic Studies at Leipzig University, held before him by Karl Brugmann. He became director of the Institute of Linguistics at Leipzig University and, in 1929, a member of the Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften; all this meant intensive work on languages and linguistic problems other than Iranian (see, e.g., 1931, 1935 [1936]).

However, the flow of studies on Iranian subjects did not end. Worthy of mention are his pioneering work in Bactrian studies (1930c) and an excellent analysis of the orthographic devices of a late Middle Persian text for rendering precisely the sound system of the text in Pahlavi letters; influence from both Pazand and (Islamic) New Persian spellings is proved (1932).



In 1933, Junker unfortunately became involved in the political affairs of the Third Reich, and in that year he became a member of the NSDAP, the National Socialist party led by Adolph Hitler. He soon ran into trouble with party authorities, however, because of an earlier initiation into a Masonic lodge. Either Junker left the party in 1939, or a party court declared his membership null and void—it is unclear which, or if both happened successively. However, Junker did keep his academic positions. In 1945, immediately after the collapse of the National Socialist regime and while still under American occupation, Junker was dismissed (he retired “on demand”) from Leipzig University and was excluded from the Academy of Sciences of Saxony.

In the ensuing years Junker worked as a “freelance academic author” and translator; among other things, he edited *Sprachphilosophisches Lesebuch* (1948) and published *Russische Lehrbriefe* (1952). He worked hard to regain his academic position at an East German university, and in 1951 he was appointed Professor Ordinarius for Iranian studies at the Humboldt-Universität Berlin (East). Many more university obligations soon followed. In 1953 he became director of the Institut für Iranische und Kaukasische Sprachen (since 1958 called the Vorderasiatisches Institut); in 1953 he was acting director and then director of the Indogermanisches Institut (since 1959 named the Sprachwissenschaftliches Institut); from 1959 onwards he was deputy director of the Ostasiatisches Institut and head of the department for Korean studies. Junker had first taken an interest in Indo-European loanwords in Korean and then extended his studies to Korean in general as a non-Indo-European contrastive language.

Junker’s accomplishments were officially honored several times, for instance, by his receiving the “Verdienstmedaille der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik” (Medal of Merit of the German Democratic Republic [G.D.R.]), and in 1960 the high-ranking title of “Hervorragender Wissenschaftler des Volkes” (Excellent Scientist of the People). On the occasion of his seventieth birthday, two issues of scholarly journals were devoted to him (*Zeitschrift für Phonetik, Sprachwissenschaft und Kommunikationsforschung* 17/6, 1964; and *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientalforschung* 11/1, 1965). Junker formally retired in 1960 but remained acting director of the Vorderasiatisches Institut until 1968, and accepted teaching obligations until 1969.

The manifold non-Iranological scholarly and administrative activities and obligations beginning in the 1930s, a growing isolation from the scholarly world, and, last but not least, the effects of his unhappy political career



became serious impediments to Junker's further work in the field of Iranian studies. His own publications in this area from the two last decades of his life (see Bibliography) by no means maintain the standards of his earlier works, and, worse still, a growing idiosyncratic refusal to apply common ethical concepts to Old Iranian social life rendered his own work difficult (see, e.g., *Deutsche Literaturzeitung für Kritik der internationalen Wissenschaft* 88, 1967, col. 118).

On the other hand, Junker earned merit as the editor of works of others (for instance, Tavadia, 1956; Rypka et al., 1959) or as their collaborator (with Altheim and Stiehl, 1949; and with Tavadia, 1959). He was also organizer and co-author of the great team project involving himself and [Bozorg Alavi](#), *Persisch-deutsches Wörterbuch* (1965a, and subsequent editions), the first comprehensive Persian–German dictionary and still an indispensable vademecum of Persian studies. Junker taught and trained a number of students, some of whom later held academic positions: in Berlin, Eckhardt Fichtner, Georg Hinch, Manfred Lorenz, Werner Sundermann, Peter Zieme; in Manchester, Paul Luft; in Leuven, Wojciech Skalmowski; in Baghdad and Sulaimaniya, Kamal Fuad (Kamāl Fo'ād).

It is certainly to be regretted, at least from the point of view of Iranian studies, that Junker did not devote all of his scholarly energies to the promotion of Old Iranian studies, although this field owes much to him. On the other hand, it was Junker who, during the partition of Germany, upheld and continued the tradition of Iranian studies in the G.D.R. In Junker's bequest some unfinished studies and essays were found; only a part of them is traceable now.

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