



## LOMMEL, HERMAN

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**LOMMEL, HERMAN**, German scholar of Indo-European, chiefly Indo-Iranian studies, and also of religious studies (b. Erlangen, 7 July, 1885; d. Prien-on-the-Chiemsee in Bavaria, 5 October, 1968). He was the son of the physicist Eugen Lommel (1837–99).

He started his studies of comparative philology, Indology, and Iranian studies at Munich University in 1905 and at the University of Göttingen from 1907, studying with Jacob Wackernagel (Indo-European), Hermann Oldenberg (Indology), and [Friedrich Carl Andreas](#) (Iranian studies). He was influenced in particular by Wackernagel, one of the foremost advocates of philological linguistics, who, was also his advisor when he was writing his dissertation (Lommel, 1912). He was qualified as a lecturer in Göttingen in 1914, and in 1917 he became the chairman of Indo-European studies at the newly-founded university of Frankfurt-on-the-Main, a position he held up to his retirement in 1950.

Quite early in his career, he focused his interests more and more on the Old Iranian and Old Indo-Aryan languages, particularly on mythological and religious studies. As a disciple of Andreas and a former participant in the Gatha seminars held by him together with Wackernagel (which resulted in the joint publication of some of the [Gathas](#)), Lommel followed in the footsteps of his teacher with the edition of the Gathas by publishing *Yasna* 43-46 (1934), 47-51 (1935a), 29 (1935-36), 32 (1938), and 34 (1942). This intensive study of the Gathas, which he carried on all his life, led to the preparation of a complete translation of the entire text. The translation was essentially done in its final



form during the early post-war years, but was declared to be more or less finished only shortly before his death and was published posthumously by Bernfried Schlerath as *Die Gathas des Zarathustra* (1971). Its rich commentary clearly reflects the fact that this work is the result of decades of thinking over each word and every statement as well as the entire message of those problematic texts. This complete translation differs from the previous articles, which are more strongly influenced by Andreas, and gives priority, not to the discussion of problems of linguistic history or the history of the oral and written tradition of the texts, but to the understanding of their content. He included annotations commenting on individual words and phrases, but he also explained in a separate section the content of each text as he understood it. In general, Lommel's Avestan studies stand out for their careful and cautious semasiological examination, as far as the meaning of the individual words and the content of the text in question is concerned. The typical feature of his methodology was to proceed from the understanding of the details to an interpretation of the whole text by moderate reference to Vedic and Pahlavi sources and thereby to deduce the religion of Zarathushtra himself.

Lommel's most significant work, *Die Religion Zarathustras* (1930), is a comprehensive view of the Zoroastrian religion, a scholarly work characterized not only by its balanced and sound understanding of the data, but also by the penetrating and sober observation of them. It has not at all become outdated yet, let alone replaced.

During the 1920s, when this book was being written, Lommel also dealt intensively with the Younger Avestan texts. A number of minor, detailed studies on Avestan issues and textual or etymological problems appeared regularly in the ten volumes of the short-lived periodical *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik*, among them the two-part substantial treatment of Younger Avestan metrics (Lommel, 1922-27) that shows Lommel in full measure as still standing under the overpowering influence of Andreas and his theories. The most important result of Lommel's creative work in that period is the translation of the *Yašts* (Lommel, 1927), which also aims at a correct understanding of the content and, therefore, at a precise rendering of the sense of the words. In later years he dealt with a number of Vedic texts, leading to the publication of his *Gedichte des Rig-Veda* (1955), which is still a valid, reliable source for its translations of some Rigvedic hymns. In his *Altbrahmanische Legenden* (1964), where he dealt with some narrative tales of Brahminical India, he considerably furthered the comprehension of that



literature by his scholarly approach in taking into account legends attested in the later Vedic literature as well as their mythical and ethnic parallels, which usually were neglected by other Indologists and Indo-European scholars.

Lommel's numerous minor studies have been in part collected in a volume of *Kleine Schriften* (1978), which contains mainly those of Indological and Indo-Iranian relevance. Several articles concerning Zarathushtra and the Avesta have been reprinted in the collective volume *Zarathustra*, edited by Bernfried Schlerath (Darmstadt, 1970).

Characteristic of Lommel's general views is his thinking in broad concepts and contexts and giving due attention to both the diachronic and synchronic points of view. Lommel was one of the first German linguists who perceived the importance of the epoch-making work, *Cours de linguistique générale*, by Ferdinand de Saussure, and therefore translated it into German (1931) at a time when such translations were not yet common at all. Also the co-operation and friendship with his colleague, the ethnologist Leo Frobenius, made him search always for broader contexts and not remain trapped in the examination of the isolated phenomena emerging from the facts attested. These principles led him also in every textual analysis; therefore, he tried to make all the Avestan and Vedic texts he dealt with accessible by the methods of comparative linguistics and to interpret them word for word as carefully as possible, and thus to understand them down to the last detail.

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