



MELZER, UTO

MELZER, UTO (b. Graz, Austria, 18 October 1881; d. Graz, Austria, 22 February 1961; photograph at [Universitätsbibliothek Graz](#)), born Utho Ottomar Melzer Edler von Tapferheim, teacher, author, and independent scholar. His principal contribution to Iranian studies is a thesaurus of Modern Persian posthumously published in 2006 as *Farhangnevīs*.

Life. His father Ignaz Melzer (1817-1906) was born in Bukovina, which today is split between Ukraine and Romania. In 1830, the family was raised to noble rank (Rastegar and Slaje, p. 15, n. 1). Ignaz Melzer served as regular officer in the Habsburg army from which he retired as captain (*Hauptmann im Ruhestand*). His wife Sara Heinrike Nagy (1854-1927) was born in Bologna (Italy), and Uto was the second of three children. Uto never married, and from 1906 onwards his widowed sister, Olivia Laur (1880-1969), and her children lived with him.

Melzer was educated in Graz, and graduated in 1900 from a teacher's college (*Lehrerbildungsanstalt*). Until 1903 he worked at various middle schools (*Hauptschulen*) in South Styria, and was afterwards transferred to Graz. Melzer published his first textbooks and poetry, characterized by a pan-German nationalism, while he was still in his 20s. From February 1915 until October 1918 he served in a riflemen's battalion of the Habsburg army (*K&K Feldjäger Batallion Nr. 9*) in Russia and Italy. At the end of World War I he was honorably discharged at the rank of first lieutenant (*Oberleutnant der Reserve*).

Melzer was active in the *Tannenbergbund*, a veteran's organization that was



closely aligned with the reactionary political activities of General Erich Ludendorff (1867-1937). In September 1934, Melzer was forced to retire as a middle school teacher, but continued to publish poetry, political essays, and middle school textbooks on German and Western history until 1936 (Rastegar and Slaje, pp. 53-55). For a short time, between May 1938 and January 1939, he returned to teaching as the acting director of a middle school (*Hauptschuldirektor*) in Graz. Only after World War II did Melzer again occasionally publish poetry, and in 1952 and 1955 he served as editor of a local *Schiller-Jahrbuch* (*ibid.*, p. 54).

In 1960, about a year before his death, Melzer bequeathed his valuable library (for more detailed information about its contents, see Rastegar and Slaje, pp. 56-100), as well as his notebooks and papers to the university's library (Universitätsbibliothek Graz). A significant part of this comprehensive reference library was integrated into the general collection, while the personal archive entered the library's special collections (for Melzer's life, see in particular MSS 2078/66, 2078/68-Urkunden, and 2078/69-70; cf. list in Rastegar and Slaje, p. 50.)

Iranian Studies. In the fall of 1919, Melzer enrolled at the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Graz (*Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz*) as a part-time student of comparative linguistics (see [AUSTRIA ii. Iranian Studies](#)), and in the fall of 1921, he became a full-time student. Melzer focused on Iranian languages (see [IRAN vi-vii](#)), and attended courses with the Semitist Nikolaus Rhodokanakis (1876-1945), the Sanskritist Johann Kirste (1851-1920), and the Indo-Europeanists Rudolf Meringer (1859-1931) and [Hans Reichelt](#) (1877-1939). But he also took classes with the Romance scholar Adolf Zauner (1870-1940) and the philosopher Hugo Spitzer (1854-1937). Melzer's dissertation was supervised by Reichelt, and on 12 July 1923, at the age of 41, Melzer received a PhD for his thesis about Semitic words, in particular Semitic verbs, in Middle Persian: "Beiträge zur Erklärung der semitischen Wörter im Mittelpersischen, vor allem der semitischen Zeitwörter, nebst Anhang: Ausführliches Verzeichnis der semitischen Zeitwörter im Mittelpersischen."

In the years immediately following his dissertation, Melzer published three studies about Middle Persian (1925, 1927a, 1927b), and among his unpublished papers and notebooks is the manuscript of a Middle-Persian dictionary (Rastegar and Slaje, p. 25, no. 9). Melzer, like his colleagues, followed the now superseded approach of interpreting Semitic heterograms (see [HUZWĀREŠ; IDEOGRAPHIC WRITING](#)) as Iranian, but the dictionary is still of value because



of the wealth of the compiled material (Walter Slaje in Lochner, p. 53). In the 1930s, Melzer turned to Modern Persian, which henceforth became the focus of his scholarly work. Short articles about medieval Persian literature (1936, 1937, 1939) and the posthumously published German translations (1991, 1993, 1994, 1999) document the intensity and wide range of his research.

Between 1923 and 1941 Melzer's articles and reviews appeared in Oriental studies journals (Rastegar and Slaje, pp. 51-53). In 1956, the academic publishing house Harrassowitz issued his study of Modern Persian phraseology, *Sechzehnhundert Sätze Persisch*, which was subsequently reviewed in the important German language journals of Oriental studies (Rastegar and Slaje, pp. 51-52). Manfred Mayrhofer's account (Rastegar and Slaje, p. 6) of his introduction to Melzer in 1947 suggests that Melzer kept in touch with the Indo-European studies faculty and students of the University of Graz. There is no indication that he ever traveled to Iran or any other Near Eastern country.

Persian Lexicography. Melzer's personal archive contains transcripts of Middle Persian and Modern Persian texts, made on the basis of all accessible editions and frequently taking into account variant readings. He translated large portions of Western textbooks, such as the *Chrestomathie persane* (2 vols., Paris, 1883-85) by Charles Schefer (1820-98) and the *Contes persans en langue populaire* (Copenhagen, 1918) by Arthur Christensen (1875-1945). He also rendered into German the greater part of Persian anthologies, such as the *Majma' al-foṣaḥā* by Reẓāqoli Khan Hedāyat (1800-71) and *Poets of the Pahlavi Regime* (Bombay, 1933) by Dinshah Irani (1881-1938). Melzer translated extensive portions of the poetic works of Rudaki (10th century), Ferdowsi (ca. 940-1019 or 1025), Neẓāmi (1141-1202 or 1209), Sa'di (d. 1292), Rumi (1207-73), Hafez (ca. 1315-ca. 1390), and Jāmi (1414-92). He worked, furthermore, on translations of non-fictional prose literature (see ADAB), such as the first half of the *Ketāb al-abnia 'an ḥaqā'eq al-adwia* by Abu Maṣṣur Mowaffaq b. 'Alī al-Harawī (10th century), the *Safar-nāma* of Nāṣer-e Ẓosrow (1004-1072 or 1077), and the *Siāsat-nāma* by Neẓām-al-Molk (ca. 1018-92). Conversely, Melzer compiled several literary anthologies whose manuscripts comprise several thousand pages, and which are in some cases print-ready.

This intensive occupation with Persian literature ensured that Melzer himself translated, at least in excerpts, most of the works that he referenced in his research on Persian lexicography, relying on the editions that he had collected for his private library. Among the more than 20,000 manuscript pages of



Persian texts, accompanied by German translations, the preliminary work for his Persian-German/German-Persian dictionary is particularly prominent. The approximately 4,500 pages, preserved as bound books and in notebooks, and 33 boxes of index cards document that Melzer pursued his most ambitious project with undiminished diligence for more than thirty years. The collected material for a Persian-German dictionary amounts to more than 76,000 entries in the published edition, and constitutes an incomparable thesaurus of Modern Persian that reveals surprising details that would be of particular value for further lexicographic work.

The preparation of Melzer's lexicographic research for publication was accompanied by the digitization of his data. This process transformed an abundance of sometimes puzzling, unordered index cards, notes, and so forth into uniformly laid-out entries that represent the collective literary wealth of the Persian language from the mid-9th to the mid-20th century. Both the Department of Linguistics at the University of Graz and the Commission for Iranian Studies (which in 2002 was transformed into the Institute of Iranian Studies) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences have unstintingly and vigorously supported this complex undertaking since the 1980s by providing indispensable financial resources and staff. In 2006 the four volumes of Melzer's *Farhangnevīs* already included the lexicon's digital version on a CD-ROM, but in 2007 this digital database was reissued with enhanced search functions that allow for searching both Persian and German words. For the foreseeable future, the *Farhangnevīs* will supplement the existing, more practically oriented Persian-German/German-Persian dictionaries.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Finding aids for Melzer's personal archive are listed on the website of the library of the University of Graz; search at www.uni-graz.at/ubwww/ub-sosa.htm or www-classic.uni-graz.at/ubwww/sosa/nachlass/index.php (accessed 28 July 2008).

Biographies and Studies.



“Uto von Melzer,” *Graz University Library*, available at www-classic.uni-graz.at/ubwww/sosa/nachlass/person/melzer/biographie.php (accessed 28 July 2008); there is also an undated photo of Melzer in uniform, with a military decoration.

F. Lochner von Hüttenbach et al., *Indo-Iranische Sprachen und Kulturen: 100 Jahre Forschung und Lehre in Graz – Begleitband zur Ausstellung anlässlich des Melzer-Symposiums 1991*, Graz, 1991; for Walter Slaje’s survey of Melzer’s contribution to Iranian studies, see pp. 48-54 and pls. 7-10, 14.

N. Rastegar and W. Slaje, *Uto von Melzer (1881-1961): Werk und Nachlaß eines österreichischen Iranisten*, Veröffentlichungen der Iranischen Kommission der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 20, Vienna, 1987; the frontispiece shows an undated portrait (after 1945?) and the eighth chapter (pp. [115-24]) reproduces seven pages of Melzer’s handwritten notes and two of his ex-libris.

Selected Publications.

For a complete list including Melzer’s poetic, educational, and political writings, see the bibliography in Rastegar and Slaje, pp. 51-55.

“Die aramäischen Zeitwörter im Mittelpersischen,” *WZKM* 32, 1925, pp. 116-32.

“Verstümmelte semitische Wörter im Mittelpersischen,” *WZKM* 34, 1927a, pp. 51-53.

“Zur Aussprache der aramäischen Zeitwörter im Mittelpersischen,” *Zeitschrift für Semitistik* 5, 1927b, pp. 312-38.

“Über einen Vers Anwāris,” *WZKM* 43, 1936, pp. 19-20.

“Über einige Verse Rudakis,” *ZDMG* 111, 1937, pp. 404-406.

“Zwei ungedeutete persische Verse aus dem Siyāsat-nāma,” *ZDMG* 93, 1939, pp. 294-95.

“Zu ‘Antara’s Mu‘allaqa,” *ZDMG* 94, 1940, pp. 106.

Sechzehnhundert Sätze Persisch, Wiesbaden, 1956.

Posthumous Publications.



Translations.

Erzählungen aus Persien: Persische Prosa aus elf Jahrhunderten, ed. N. Rastegar, Arbeiten aus der Abteilung "Vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft" Graz 3, Graz, 1991; with Persian text.

Nāṣer-e Kōsrow, *Safarnāme: Das Reisetagebuch des persischen Dichters*, ed. Manfred Mayrhofer, revised by N. Rastegar, Arbeiten aus der Abteilung "Vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft" Graz 5, Graz, 1993.

Jalāl-al-Din Rumi, *Nie ist wer liebt allein: Mystische Liebeslieder aus dem Diwan-i Šams*, ed. N. Rastegar, revised by Monika Huttenstrasser, Studienbücher zur persischen Dichtung 1, Graz, 1994; with Persian text and the translations of Vincenz von Rosenzweig (1791-1865).

Idem, *Mondenschöner, schlafe nicht: Ruba'iyat – 102 Mystische Vierzeiler*, ed. N. Rastegar, revised and supplemented by Monika Huttenstrasser, Studienbücher zur persischen Dichtung 2, Graz, 1999; with Persian text.

Lexicography.

Farhangnevīs: Materialien zu einem Persisch-Deutschen Wörterbuch, ed. N. Rastegar, Denkschriften der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 339/Veröffentlichungen zur Iranistik 35, 4 vols. plus CD-ROM, Vienna, 2006; the text by Dina El Zarka and Bernhard Scheucher was originally published as "Eine lexikographische Fundgrube: Uto von Melzer's Persisch-deutsches Wörterbuch," *ZDMG* 151, 2001, pp. 69-101.

Farhangnevīs: Datenbank zu Uto von Melzers lexikographischen Materialien: Persisch-Deutsch / Deutsch-Persisch, ed. N. Rastegar, Veröffentlichungen zur Iranistik 38, Vienna, 2007; this CD-ROM offers the possibility of searching the thesaurus in both German and Persian.

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