



MÜLLER, FRIEDRICH

MÜLLER, FRIEDRICH, Austrian scholar of linguistics and ethnography (b. Jemnik, Bohemia, 5 March, 1834; d. Vienna, 25 May 1898; [Figure 1](#)). The son of a chemist and head of a sulphur firm, he enrolled in 1853 at Vienna University for classical studies as well as Sanskrit and comparative philology, in particular with Anton Boller (1811-1869), the first holder of this chair. After having completed the courses, in 1858, he took up the position as a librarian in the university library, and from 1861 in the imperial and royal court library (present-day Austrian National Library). At the end of 1859 he obtained his doctorate from the University of Tübingen *in absentia*, his study on “Der Verbal Ausdruck im ârisch-semitischen Sprachkreise. Eine sprachwissenschaftliche Untersuchung” (1857/58) being approved as his dissertation (see Schmitt, 1995). Already in the following year he qualified as a university lecturer for general linguistics. In 1866 he was appointed extraordinary professor of Oriental languages at Vienna University, and in 1869 he succeeded his teacher Anton Boller as full professor of Sanskrit and comparative philology. From 1869 he was a full member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna, in the publications of which institution a major part of his minor studies (with far more than 1,000 pages) were printed.

Müller was an extremely versatile linguist, who published on languages of all the five continents, on ancient and recent Indo-Aryan languages as well as on Semitic idioms, on Altaic and Caucasian languages, on those of Australia, Austronesia, and the Americas, and not least on a number of African languages. From his student days he used to learn a multitude of languages by



self-study; in later years he learned mostly on the basis of materials collected by missionaries and people participating in scientific expeditions. He pursued an objective of a sort of universal linguistics and undertook to build a bridge from linguistics to ethnology and anthropology.

In particular, Friedrich Müller is the founder and main advocate of the so-called “linguistic ethnography.” He worked on a genealogical classification and a description of all the languages around the globe known at his time (and often examined for the first time by himself). On several occasions (first in Müller, 1867/68, then again in Müller, 1873) he presented such a classification of both all the languages and all the human races. Under the influence of the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel, a strong advocate of Darwin’s theory of evolution, he changed it to that rather strange and often ridiculed system set forth in his *Grundriss der Sprachwissenschaft* (4 vols., Vienna, 1876-88; repr., Hildesheim, etc., 2004), in which one finds a survey of the human races differentiated by both language and hair (but not the shape of the head), that is, the languages of the woolly-haired races (“der wollhaarigen Rassen”) the smooth-haired races (“der schlichthaarigen Rassen”) and the curly-haired races (“der lockenhaarigen Rassen”).

Special interest was focused by Müller on the Iranian languages, including Armenian, which he reckoned, like many other scholars, to the Iranian family of languages. He continued, however, in doing so even after Heinrich Hübschmann (q.v.) had proved that Armenian is an independent branch within the Indo-European family of languages (see Müller, “Über die Stellung des Armenischen im Kreise der indogermanischen Sprachen,” *Sb. der Akademie der Wissenschaften* 84, 1876/77, pp. 211-32). Erroneously Müller laid too much weight on etymology and on single words that he did not recognize fittingly as borrowings. But, apart from this, he was one of the pioneers who, in view of the still stagnant state of Pahlavi studies, thought it was necessary to do more intensive research in the modern Iranian languages and dialects in order to become better acquainted with Iranian as a whole and to throw light on Pahlavi by this means. Thus the Academy’s *Sitzungsberichte* contain, not only various multi-part serials of treatises dealing with the Avestan and Armenian languages, but also others on New Persian (and its dialects), on Ossetic and Pashto, treating all levels of phonology and morphology and in part even having an explicitly comparative orientation: “Beiträge zur Lautlehre der neupersischen Sprache” (2 parts, 1862-63); “Über die Sprache der Avghânen (Paxto)” (2 parts, 1862-63); “Beiträge zur Kenntnis der



neupersischen Dialekte” (3 parts, 1864-65), and so on.

Seemingly he himself was rather disappointed and dissatisfied with those studies, because he did not find enough criteria of some relevance for judging the pre-modern history of the Iranian languages and for establishing a genealogical tree of them. For that reason the comparative grammar of the Iranian languages, at which many of his publications seemed to be directed and which the experts in the field expected from him, never came into being.

In his later years Müller himself turned again to the Pahlavi texts themselves in order to further their interpretation and the understanding of their language; so he published contributions to the textual criticism and the explanation of *Mēnōg ī Xrad* (*Sb. der Akademie der Wissenschaften* 125/1, 1892, pp. 1-42), *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr* (*ibid.*, 136/6, 1897, pp. 1-25), and *Andarz ī Ādurbād ī Mahraspandān* (*ibid.* 136/8, 1897, pp. 1-25).

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