



## OLSHAUSEN, JUSTUS

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**OLSHAUSEN, JUSTUS**, German theologian and Oriental scholar, one of the pioneers of Iranian studies in the German-speaking countries (b. Hohenfelde, Steinburg district in Holstein, 9 May 1800; d. Berlin, 28 December 1882).

*Life and general survey.* Being destined for theology and having learnt the rudiments of Hebrew from his father, the son of a country parson enrolled in 1816, only 16 years old, in the University of Kiel for theology and Classical studies, where, apart from Greek and Latin, he mainly was engaged in the study of the Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic languages with J. F. Kleuker (1749-1827), who had translated Anquetil-Duperron's (q.v.) *Le Zend-Avesta* into German (*Zend-Avesta: Zoroasters Lebendiges Wort*, 3 vols., Riga, 1776-77). In 1819 Olshausen transferred to Berlin University, where Oriental studies at that time had not yet blossomed, and learnt Persian with C. L. Ideler (1766-1846).

After half a year's work as a private tutor in Olpenitz, the many-talented young philologist was able to carry on his Oriental studies, from autumn 1820 to spring 1823, at Paris University, owing to a traveling scholarship granted to him by the Danish king (who was also the sovereign prince of the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein). That stay in Paris brought the decisive turn in Olshausen's life: there A. I. Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838) became his principal teacher, and Olshausen devoted himself primarily to Arabic and Persian, which languages he learnt truly from the bottom up, so that only now could his deeper and thorough Oriental studies begin. From that time he was familiar also with Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), who later was able to intervene decisively in Olshausen's life. His Iranian studies benefited from his



former Classical philological training, so that one can rightly call Olshausen a scholar of ancient Iranian philology and history.

Back in Kiel, he obtained his doctorate on 18 October 1823 with an unpublished thesis on the Persian verb (Olshausen, 1823), and already on 4 November 1823 he was appointed extraordinary professor of Oriental languages at the University of Kiel. From 1825 to 1828 he stayed some time in Copenhagen, and for a longer period once more in Paris for study of Avestan manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale, just as he later repeatedly and for quite some time worked under the king's orders in Copenhagen to catalogue the Arabic and Persian manuscripts of the Royal Library (see Olshausen, 1851, and Olshausen, 1857; this work is his only contribution to Arabic and New Persian studies).

He enjoyed a good reputation and high esteem, not least with the Danish king, who supported him by scholarships, salary increases, and the like; thus on 16 January 1830 he was promoted to full professor, and, his first wife having died quite soon after marriage, he married in 1831 Marie Luise Michaelis (1805-1874), a granddaughter of the famous Göttingen orientalist J. D. Michaelis (1717-1791). Having built up Oriental studies at Kiel University and standing out for his marked talent for organization and administration, he was elected as Rector of his university for five terms (1836/37, 1839/40, 1840/41, 1845/46, 1846/47); and in recognition of his services, he was given the Danebrog Order by the Danish king in 1840, and the title of Etatsråd was conferred on him in 1845.

Nonetheless, in 1848 Olshausen was one of the leading champions of the uprising in the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein against their Duke, the King of Denmark. Olshausen became a member of the national assembly of the Duchies and its first vice-president; the provisional government named him as trustee (Kurator) of the university, in which function he later was confirmed also in the regular manner. He protested against the stringent Danish treatment of the Duchies and provocatively returned the decorations awarded to him by the king. Therefore Olshausen was removed from the trusteeship and, along with seven other professors, was dismissed from his professorship in June 1852, when the Duchies were again firmly in the king's hands. But on recommendation of Alexander von Humboldt he was appointed professor of Oriental languages and chief librarian at the University of Königsberg in Prussia (today's Kaliningrad, Russia) on 2 July 1853 with the special task of reorganizing the library facilities there. Owing to his talent for organization,



the Prussian government appointed him in December 1858 to the office of a Privy Councillor in the ministry for education, cultural, and medical affairs, where he became the official responsible for all the universities in the kingdom of Prussia and thus had a great deal of influence. In 1860, he was elected member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, but only after his retirement in 1874 did he have more time for research and scholarly publications.

In general, the outstanding feature of Olshausen's publications is their neat and thorough methodology; also remarkable is the wide knowledge displayed in both the Iranian and the Semitic field in ancient and modern times. But one should not forget that he always strove to publish only what he regarded to be complete and finished.

*Iranian studies.* From the very beginning we find in Olshausen's oeuvre Iranian studies and publications on the Hebrew language and the Old Testament, side by side. After having worked on the New Persian verbal system in his doctoral thesis, he turned more and more to the older forms of Iranian languages known at that time at least to some extent—first to Avestan and later also to Middle Persian. During his second stay in Paris he began to prepare an edition of the Avestan texts on the basis of the Paris manuscripts brought back from India by Anquetil-Duperron and then deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale. He prepared extensive copies of those codices and collated them quite carefully. The text he dealt with first was the *Vidēvdād* (at that time commonly called “Vendidad” [q.v.]), and the first and only fascicle of his work, which came out in 1829 (Olshausen, 1829a), was a critical edition of *Vd. fargard* 1 to 4.6 in lithographic form, based though on only a few manuscripts. This was originally intended to be a large-scale project, since, in addition to editing the text itself, he had planned also to describe the manuscripts, to record all the variant readings, to write a grammar, and to draw up a dictionary. With this (kernel of an) edition of the *Vidēvdād*, Olshausen was to become one of the first scholars in all Europe who dealt with Old Iranian, about the same time as Franz Bopp (1791-1867), Rasmus Rask (1787-1832), and Eugène Burnouf (q.v.). But already with this first instalment the ambitious plan came to an end, and it was not pursued further. Olshausen stopped it because in the same year Burnouf's lithographic edition of the Vendidad Sade began to appear. Moreover, he was of the opinion that on this nearly uncultivated field he was not able to keep to his desired policy to publish if possible only those studies that he regarded as perfect and



incontestable.

In the same year 1829 another work of equal importance was published by Olshausen that likewise was to remain incomplete. Together with his friend Julius Mohl (1800-1876), the future translator of the *Šāh-nāma*, he intended to publish a collection of all statements about the Zoroastrian religion found in New Persian literature. In the only fascicle published (Olshausen, 1829b) two important texts are included which Olshausen could edit from Paris manuscripts. One is the shorter version of the treatise titled *'Olamā-ye Eslām* (q.v.) “The Islamic learned men” (pp. 1-10), which explains the doctrines of Zarathushtra’s religion and has some significance for the history of that religion. The other text is a likewise interesting, short account found also in the *Rīvayats*, which gives some information about the state of the Avestan corpus in Sasanian times.

The most important contribution to Iranian studies connected with the name of Justus Olshausen is his decipherment of the Pahlavi legends of Late Sasanian coins (see Olshausen, 1843; [Figure 1](#)), by which he became almost a second decipherer of the Pahlavī script after Silvestre de Sacy. When dealing with the Copenhagen manuscripts and cataloguing them, he studied the legends of Late Sasanian and even later coins of the early Islamic period, where he found New Persian words written in Pahlavi script. He was the first scholar to read those Late Sasanian coin legends correctly and also those of the Arabo-Sasanian governors of Tabaristān, where in the beginning, that is, immediately after the Arab conquest, we find also Pahlavi legends. In a sense he continued thus what Silvestre de Sacy had begun in his *Mémoires sur diverses antiquités de la Perse et sur les médailles des rois de la dynastie des Sassanides ...* (Paris, 1793) with the decipherment of the inscriptions and coins of the Early Sasanian kings. The later coins, which show shapes of characters that are totally different from the earlier ones, had been left aside, undealt with before Olshausen. Only he was able to prove that the script and language of those Late Sasanian coin legends were the same as those of the so-called Book Pahlavī of the Zoroastrian literature and that they continued to be used also after the decline of the Sasanian empire, viz., on the coins of the first Arabic caliphs (cf. also Olshausen, 1847; 1854). Olshausen’s decipherment was of great significance for Pahlavi palaeography and for understanding of the development of that script and of the language and the history in general, because of the chronological evidence gained in this way.

To the same complex of themes belong a number of later treatises written



after Olshausen's retirement from the ministry service. The extensive and exemplary study about the names *Parθava* "Parthia" and *Pahlav* (Olshausen, 1876a; see also Olshausen, 1880b) turns out to be the result of many years' collecting and repeated, thorough thought. He examined all evidence available, from Iranian sources and beyond, concerning Parthia, the Parthian language, names, history, and geography as well as the testimonies of the multi-faceted term *Pahlav*, and he could not only clarify that *Parθava* and *Pahlav* are one and the same term, but also cast light on the many different meanings of *Pahlav*. In passing, he dealt with the use of writing on the Arsacid and Sasanian coins, and seemingly Olshausen was the first to distinguish the two kinds of writing on the Early Sasanian inscriptions as *Pahlavī* script and *Pārsī* script, respectively (pp. 754 f.). Having stated the shift of the meaning of the term *Pahlavī* in Islamic (New Persian) times, he raised the question whether or not it is justified to use *Pahlavī* as the name of a language. It is a matter of fact that in this discussion also the famous passage in Ebn al-Moqaffa' (q.v.) and similar evidence is fittingly examined. Many details of the heterographic writing system (see HUZWĀREŠ and IDEOGRAPHIC WRITING iii), revealed by non-Aramaic word order and by morphological mistakes, could be settled—mainly, the differences between the heterograms used in the different groups of texts. In particular, Olshausen made a clear distinction between the older Pahlavi of the Early Sasanian inscriptions and the language of the Zoroastrian books, reviewed the various theories current at that time about the origin of that system, and dealt with the manifold problems (caused by the formal identity of *r* and *l*, *n* and *r*, etc.) that make reading and understanding the texts written in the later cursive variant of the script so difficult.

In another article (Olshausen, 1878) Olshausen dealt with a number of Arsacid (q.v.) and Sasanian inscriptions, based only on the illustrations and drawings found in the then available secondary literature, because he never had walked on Iranian soil: the Greek inscriptions at Bisotun, the Pāikuli inscription (of which only 32 blocks were known to him), the Kirdīr (see KARTIR) inscriptions of Naqš-e Rostam and Naqš-e Rajab, and the minor inscriptions at Bīšāpur, Ṭāq-e Bostān, and Persepolis. The last study he was able to finish before his fatal illness (Olshausen, 1883) took up questions concerning "Pahlavi" again (saying that the term indicated that something was regarded as "remembered from the Iranian past"), and he emphasized that the language written in that script was not homogeneous, but varied considerably across space and over time. Therefore he considered it advisable to use a more general name for it



like Middle Iranian or Middle Persian instead of *Pahlavī*. In this study, which was addressed to linguistic readers, particular attention is given to the Pahlavi glossaries listing the Semitic words used (i.e., actually the Aramaic heterograms) with the Iranian counterparts that must be pronounced instead and are written first in Pahlavi and later (to rule out any ambiguities) also in Pāzand script; eventually there were even New Persian translations in Perso-Arabic script. In the course of transmission of the glossaries of the original type, inevitably mistakes occurred that cast no good light on the texts' reliability; therefore the main object of Olshausen's efforts is to eliminate those errors from the texts.

In addition, even if more incidentally, Olshausen pursued studies of more general historical interest. In Olshausen, 1880a he tried to establish the meaning and origin of several names of rank known from the Arsacid empire, such as *suggeneis* "cousins, kinsmen," *megistānes* "grandees" or similar institutions. The emendation of the ethnonym *Elumaioi* (of a people supposed to have lived south of the Caspian Sea) into *\*Delumaioi* "Deylamites" (q.v.) in Polybius 5.44.9, substantiated by Olshausen (1880c) in great detail (although he did not realize that it was indicated in a word already by Th. Nöldeke [q.v.], *NGWG*, 1874, p. 197), has been widely adopted by historians and historical geographers, whereas the editors of Polybius's text remained sceptical. The object of another short article (Olshausen, 1876b) is the identification of Ptolemy's Mount *Masdōrān* (*Masdōranōn óros*) with the *Kuh-e Mozdurān* in northeastern Khorasan Province and an attempt at an etymological interpretation of this name (as from *\*mazdā- ahura-*). Olshausen had even less success with regard to understanding of the personal names ending in MPers. *veh*, etc. (Olshausen, 1881, pp. 684 ff.).

*Other fields of studies:* The other main field of Olshausen's oeuvre is Semitic, in particular Hebrew and Old Testament, studies; these were written mainly during the time of his Kiel professorship, when he also gave lectures about the Old Testament. Here he always raised the question, whether the transmitted form of the text really is the original one, and in all his exegetical as well as grammatical studies he endeavored first of all to find out the original wording of the passage in question and to eliminate all later influences and changes (see Olshausen, 1826; 1836; 1870). As a result of decades of Hebrew studies, he published a Hebrew textbook (Olshausen, 1861) dealing with the script, phonology, and morphology (but not with the syntax, since in later years he scarcely carried out any Semitic studies). The guiding principle of his



understanding of Hebrew grammar was the conviction that the Hebrew language has evolved from some language that stood on the same level as Arabic. That means that for him the early Arabic language was typologically closer to the Semitic proto-language than the earlier attested, but historically much younger, Hebrew language and that the Hebrew forms found in the Bible were to be explained from the Arabic ones and not vice versa.

Contrary to some studies on Semitic (mainly Phoenician) toponyms (cf. Olshausen, 1853; 1879) which are of less importance (even if he undertook in 1853 to prove the existence of several Phoenician colonies in the Mediterranean area by means of toponyms), a highlight of Olshausen's Semitic studies is the article on the newly deciphered Assyrian language (see Olshausen, 1864). He examined there for the first time from the viewpoint of Semitic comparative grammar, in an entirely impartial manner what was the linguistic result of the decipherment of the Assyrian cuneiform writing achieved only shortly before by Julius Oppert and some other scholars.

Only a casual work, though a quite interesting one, is the study of the Arabic captions of the illustrations found in a peculiar manuscript of Ptolemy's *Geography* (Venice, cod. Marcianus gr. 516). From "*Sulṭan Arslān*" and "*hē megálē Chátō*" ("the great Lady," that is, Arslān's sister, the wife of Sultan Mehmed, the conqueror of Constantinople) he was able to shed light on a highly interesting historical context.

As regards an overall appreciation of Olshausen's Iranian oeuvre, one always has to take into consideration that even at the time of his death we had knowledge of only one Middle Iranian language (viz., Middle Persian) and of only a much smaller part of the (older) inscriptions and coins than today, but did not know anything about the Parthian language nor the texts written in the Manichean script. As other obstacles we have to add that the monuments themselves could not be studied so easily by personal inspection or in excellent photographs (as nowadays) and that many essential tools such as grammars, dictionaries, or even reliable text editions were not yet at hand. We must not forget that Olshausen had died long before the decisive turning-point of Iranian studies in the decade between the years 1895 and 1904.

A complete list of Olshausen's publications seemingly has never been drawn up.



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