



TEDESCO, PAUL MAXIMILIAN

TEDESCO, PAUL MAXIMILIAN (b. Vienna, 5 May 1898; d. New Haven, Conn., 17 December 1980), Austrian scholar of Indo-Iranian studies.

The son of a civil engineer from a Jewish family from Slovakia, Paul Tedesco attended grammar school in Vienna and, beginning in 1916, studied Indo-European languages with Paul Kretschmer (1866-1956) and Romance studies, later in particular Indology with Leopold von Schroeder (1851-1920) and Iranian studies at the University of Vienna. He regarded himself, as far as Iranian is concerned, chiefly as a pupil of [Bernhard Geiger](#). In 1920 he obtained his doctorate and in the following year he took his finals as a teacher of Greek and Latin. In 1925/26, after having published a number of articles, he made an application to qualify as a university lecturer in Iranian philology; though insistently supported by Geiger, that application was rejected by the majority of the faculty's professors under the pretext that Tedesco was oriented too one-sidedly towards linguistics and had not yet demonstrated any study of the literature, culture, and history of Iran. In this way (which was not uncommon in those times), a scholarly career was blocked to this young Jewish scholar. Though not only Geiger, but also other influential scholars like [Antoine Meillet](#) and [Friedrich Carl Andreas](#), recommended him as a scholar of particular standing in Iranian studies, Tedesco did not succeed in gaining a toehold even elsewhere, notably as a lecturer in Iranian studies at the School of Oriental Studies, University of London, where his application twice remained without success, since in 1929 [Harold W. Bailey](#) was preferred to him and in 1936 [Walter Bruno Henning](#). Thus he had to earn his living by



teaching at various Viennese grammar schools from 1925 to 1936. He took a sabbatical for two years in order to carry out studies into the verbal system of the Slavic languages, when he was dismissed on racial grounds, after the Anschluss of Austria by the German Third Reich in 1938.

Tedesco had to leave his homeland for reasons of race. His mother and his younger brother who remained behind fell victims some years later. In 1938, he left Austria and emigrated to the United States (becoming a citizen in 1944). Franklin Edgerton (1885-1963), the Indologist at Yale University, who regarded Tedesco as a brilliant Indo-Iranian linguist, secured a research position supported by the Rockefeller Foundation for him at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. Thus Tedesco, after the long dreary and desperate years in Vienna, at last had the opportunity to work as a scholar and to publish a number of articles, which from now on were written only in English. In Princeton, he worked together with and advised (even if sometimes rather critically) [Ernst Herzfeld](#) when he wrote his *Zoroaster and his World* (Princeton, 1947; cf. p. viii), but in 1943 he moved to Yale University, where in 1952 he was appointed associate professor of Indo-Iranian and Slavic Languages. From 1960 to his retirement in 1966 he taught at Yale as the Edward E. Salisbury Professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology.

Tedesco's high standing as an Indo-Iranian linguist is primarily based on the studies published in his youth during the early Viennese period of work as one of the pioneers of research in the Middle Iranian Turfan texts. But these studies were preceded by the (handwritten) doctoral thesis "Das iranische Partizipial-Präteritum" (1920), which due to Nazi racial politics is no more existent in any library and of which even the number of pages is unknown. All we know about it, comes from Geiger's report: Obviously it was the first systematic account of the Middle and New Iranian past tense constructions with participial formations and their history (as attested in published texts), to which he added studies of similar expressions in the Indo-Aryan and Aramaic languages, by which the importance of the study was increased considerably. Above all, Tedesco furthered the study of Iranian dialects, as Geiger stressed, owing to his thorough knowledge of them.

Tedesco's publications were characterized by comprehensive knowledge of the sources used and by sure command of (Neo-grammarians style) linguistic methodology. They may be divided into an early group, centered on the Middle Iranian languages—those articles having established his high esteem in Iranian studies and his influence until today—and a second group written



later in the United States and dealing chiefly with the etymology of Sanskrit words.

Early in the 1920s, Tedesco was working mainly on problems of the [Sogdian](#) and Khotanese languages which only at that time had become better known by reliable text-editions; on the basis of that material Tedesco examined the relations between those two languages very carefully and thus brought out their characteristic phonological and morphological correspondences. And it was he who established numerous phonological rules and explained morphological and etymological connections and peculiarities, which now are common knowledge. Several profound studies of Sogdian questions brought even a number of general problems of the Iranian linguistic history nearer to a solution. For example, on the basis of the attested case-forms he was able to cast light on the nominal inflection of those East Iranian languages and only by this actually to constitute the East Iranian language group as such. Characteristic of his method of working is that for etymological problems his argumentation is based more strongly on the better-understood Sogdian material, whereas for morphological questions he was more dependent on the archaic Khotanese language.

The most important discovery connected with Tedesco's name is the so-called Sogdian Rhythmic Law, which had far-reaching consequences for both nominal and verbal inflection and word-formation. Depending on their prosodic structure, one has to separate heavy stems (with long vowels or diphthongs) that caused the drop of final vowels, from light stems, in which any inherited final vowels are better preserved. In connection with his Sogdian studies Tedesco even provided conclusive proof of the fact that despite some clear differences the modern [Yaghnobi](#) language is a continuation of medieval Sogdian (for all this see esp. Tedesco, 1926a).

Other articles went beyond East Iranian and included the West Iranian and even the New Iranian languages, e.g., when he studies the formation of present stems in *-a-* and *-aya-* (Tedesco, 1923b) or the formation of the numerals of the second decade (eleven to nineteen) and their mutual influence (Tedesco, 1922).

A second focus of Tedesco's Iranian research is the study of the Middle Persian and Parthian languages, the main features and dialectal differences of which he in all clearness worked out of the Turfan texts, so that he was able to establish a thorough examination of the dialectological connections and



differences not only of the Middle Iranian languages, but of the whole of the Iranian linguistic family in his famous “Dialektologie der westiranischen Turfantexte” (Tedesco 1921 [1924]). The prime concern of this weighty and quite significant article, however, is a methodologically rigid study of the two West Middle Iranian dialects (called by him cautiously the Northwest and Southwest [SW] dialect respectively) as they are attested in the Turfan texts. He tried to identify the main phonological and other features characteristic of the two dialects and to expound their relations to the other ancient or younger Iranian languages, so that a quite comprehensive overall view resulted.

Among the numerous characteristics typical of Northwest-Iranian (including the modern dialects) are *z* (vs. SW *d*), *s* (vs. SW *h* < **θ*), *y-* (vs. SW *ǰ-*), *-δ-* (vs. SW *-y-*), *hr* < **θr* (vs. SW *s*), *b-* < **du-* (vs. SW *d-*), *št* (vs. SW *st*) or the verbal stems *kar-* (vs. SW *kun-*) “to make, to do” and *wāž-* (vs. SW *gōw-*) “to speak, to say”. It was Tedesco who first brought out those differences. But on that occasion he also realized that in reality things are much more complex, *viz.* that neither Turfan Middle Persian nor New Persian are exact continuants of the inscriptional Old Persian language, that there have been other Northwest-Iranian dialects (not attested directly) than the Parthian one of the Turfan texts (e.g., the one showing *-h-* vs. Northwest *-δ-* and Southwest *-y-*, as one can detect it in Armenian borrowings), and that Baluchi clearly belongs to the Northwestern group.

That Northwest dialect, which commonly is regarded as the language of the Parthians and was described by him for the first time in a more precise manner, Tedesco found also in some forms of the Graeco-Parthian [Avroman documents](#) (Tedesco, 1926b); and he also classified the Avestan language as belonging to this subgroup, because it was different from both East-Iranian and Southwest-Iranian as to the phonological rules.

Several among those early articles went beyond Iranian and included the Indo-Aryan languages, especially those of the Middle and New Indo-Aryan periods, with which he was well acquainted, too (see already Tedesco, 1923a); for example, he collected all the Indo-Iranian present stems and participial forms, which continue Proto-Indo-European **sed*, so that the result was a full collection of the forms, in which the verb “to sit down, to take a seat” is realized (Tedesco, 1923 [1924]).

Old Indo-Aryan etymology was the focus of Tedesco’s attention after his emigration. As is well-known, in contrast to the Vedic vocabulary, which for



the most part is inherited from Proto-Indo-Iranian, that of younger (i.e., post-Vedic) Old Indo-Aryan is much less clear as regards its origin. Often several opinions are competing with one another, insofar as some scholars think of a Proto-Indo-European origin of a certain word, whereas others assume a borrowing from either Dravidian or from one of the Austroasiatic languages or even from the Middle Indo-Aryan vernaculars. In the last-mentioned case, it may be quite possible to establish contacts to lexemes of the related Indo-European languages, but just on the assumption that other phonological changes effective only in the Middle Indo-Aryan period did work here in addition. Tedesco devoted himself to research into that Middle Indo-Aryan “substratum” layer in the Old Indo-Aryan vocabulary with enthusiastic dedication, without, however, being able to convince all of his fellow-scholars, since his proposals were often based on unproved hypotheses and secondary spontaneous sound changes like aspiration, deaspiration, nasalisation, cerebralisation, etc., the exact conditions of which are not known.

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