



# WESTERGAARD, NIELS LUDVIG

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**WESTERGAARD, NIELS LUDVIG**, Danish orientalist scholar with special interest in Indology (b. Copenhagen, 27 October 1815; d. Copenhagen, 9 September 1878; [Figure 1](#)).

Westergaard, the son of a master carpenter, started in 1833 studying Old Nordic and Sanskrit languages at Copenhagen University. His interest in these languages had been aroused by one of his teachers at the grammar school through the well-known works of Rasmus Kristian Rask (d. 1832), a language scholar and a leading promoter of comparative linguistics. In April 1838, he went for a few months to Bonn to study [Avestan](#) and [New Persian](#) with Christian Lassen, one of the then leading research scholars concerning the Old Persian [cuneiform](#) inscriptions. He then turned to Paris, London, and Oxford, where he studied and copied Sanskrit manuscripts, before returning to Copenhagen in September 1839 (see Schmitt, 1993, p. xi, with further references).

At the beginning of his career (before 1841), Westergaard's scholarly work was concentrated on Sanskrit, because his main purpose was to make available the native Indian writings of Sanskrit grammar and lexicography. His first book, *Radices linguae Sanscritae* (1841), a dictionary of the Old Indo-Aryan verbal roots arranged according to the final letters and presenting also detailed references to the literary sources, resulted from extended studies of Sanskrit



manuscripts kept in the above-mentioned libraries. To that book he added also a critical edition of Pāṇini's *Dhātupāṭha*, which was his basic text. The *Radices linguae Sanscritae* is one of his major books, if not the most important one, since it was of great significance for the Sanskrit philology of that time, and it became dispensable only in 1875, when the great, so-called Petersburg dictionary by Otto von Böhtlingk (1815-1904) and Rudolf von Roth (1821-1895) was completed. At the same time, he wrote also a small comparative study (1840-44a) about the connections between Sanskrit and Icelandic, which in a way is a supplement to Rasmus Rask's famous work of 1818 about the origin of the Old Nordic language.

A three-year trip to [India](#) and Persia (May 1841-May 1844), financially supported by the Danish king Christian VIII, to whom Westergaard had dedicated the *Radices*, brought him into contact with the Zoroastrian communities (see [PARSI COMMUNITIES i](#)) both in [Bombay](#) and in Persia. He had had it in mind, since a young age, to work on and publish the manuscripts once brought to Copenhagen by Rask, whom he admired and revered all his life. In Bombay he dealt in particular with the Parsis' traditional languages, namely Avestan and Middle Persian (Pahlavi). Then in January 1843 he turned to Persia to see the famous cuneiform inscriptions of the [Achaemenid](#) kings. There he was able to buy in [Yazd and Kerman](#), the main centers of the Persian Zoroastrians, eight Zoroastrian manuscripts, among them *Dādestān ī mēnōg ī xrad* and *Dādestān ī dēnīg*. They are all now parts of the famous [Codices Hafnienses](#), kept at the Royal Library in Copenhagen. He was even allowed there to study their shrines in all details and to see also a Zoroastrian burial place (*daḱma*; see Schmitt, 1993, pp. xii f., with further references).

The more significant outcome of his trip to Iran, however, is the fact that on three occasions he collated again the [Persepolis](#) cuneiform texts that had been known since Carsten Niebuhr, who, during his short visit to Iran in 1765, copied a good number of Achaemenid inscriptions. Westergaard copied for the first time the great inscriptions of [Darius I's](#) tomb in [Naqš-e Rostam](#); he did this in summer 1843 under great difficulties in the blazing sun that detracted from his view of the target. The fact that he was the first traveler well acquainted with the research in the field and with the related Avestan and Sanskrit languages made his copies most reliable. At his last visit in Naqš-e Rostam in the first days of July 1843, he had a serious attack of fever and survived only because of the devoted care by some clergymen in [Shiraz](#) and both the Catholic and the Armenian archbishops of [Isfahan](#) (Thomsen, p. 254).



Westergaard came back from the Orient with a wealth of numerous manuscripts as well as copies of inscriptions he had made in Persia and India (here esp. [Ashoka](#)'s inscription of the Girnār mountain). Immediately after the return from India and Persia, he became a lecturer in Copenhagen University, in 1845 he was appointed extraordinary professor, and in 1850 full professor, of Indian and Oriental philology (Thomsen, p. 255; Christensen and Seemann, p. 442).

Westergaard gave the copies of the Old Persian texts to his teacher Christian Lassen (1800-1876) and devoted himself to the study of the inscriptions of the second type of cuneiform writing in the language we now call [Elamite](#), which he first called "Median" and later "Sakian" (Westergaard, 1856; Thomsen, pp. 257-58). He was the first to make serious attempts to decipher the more complicated Elamite script with its more than 100 characters, but without a word-divider (as we have it in Old Persian) and to analyze the Elamite language by means of the bilinguistic method of comparing with a text in a better-known language. With use of the Naqš-e Rostam text (DNa), which contains names of several countries and peoples, he had increased the number of longer bilingual texts known, and above all the number of proper names known, in a decisive measure, thereby becoming a forerunner of Elamite studies. In two rather long articles (1840-44b and 1845), which are basic means to the understanding of the Elamite writing system and the Elamite inscriptions, he was able to establish with a measure of certainty the phonetic value of some 80 characters by comparing proper names with their Old Persian equivalents. On the basis of the results achieved by the names, he tried also to isolate the other single words of the text, to read them, and to establish their meaning. Later, when he examined the more extensive Elamite version of the [Bisotun](#) text as edited by Edwin Norris in 1855, he could modify considerably the results that his British friend had achieved (Westergaard, 1856), owing to his sound sense of judgement, his keen power of observation, and his stringent methodology. Regrettably this study remained quite unknown (presumably because of its language) and was only rarely quoted by subsequent scholars, although Westergaard had established the phonetic value of several characters more correctly than Norris.

After he had published some Indological teaching materials (1846a and 1846b) and also, depending on the preliminary work of [Friedrich Spiegel](#), a catalog of the Indian and Iranian manuscripts of the Copenhagen libraries (1846c), he edited for the first time in Europe a complete Middle Persian text, the



*Bundahišn*, on the basis of some Copenhagen manuscripts (1851); it is a facsimile edition after codex K 20, to which is added a publication of the Sasanian King Šāpur I's rock inscriptions at Ḥājiābād in order to make clear the difference between Book Pahlavi and the inscripational language. Following this, he published the exemplary first edition of the complete corpus of the Avestan texts (Westergaard, 1852-54) after having also collated in 1850 the Avestan manuscripts kept in the libraries of London, Oxford, and Paris. This edition, titled *Zendavesta*, was printed in Copenhagen with very fine types cut on Westergaard's advice after the letters of the best and oldest manuscripts (K 1 and K 5).

Westergaard's *Zendavesta*, which was printed in four installments from 1852 to 1854, was the first edition containing the entire corpus of the texts and is the final point and the highlight of the first period of Avestan studies marked by Rasmus Rask and Eugène Burnouf. The editor's intention was "to give as good and correct a text as possible, attempting thereby to reach the Sasanian original" (p. 23), without intending, however, to record all the orthographic variants of the manuscripts. Only on the foundations laid by Westergaard was it possible to begin the thorough study of the texts and their language, although Westergaard himself did not realize the plan to follow it up with a complete dictionary, a grammar, and edition of the Middle Persian translation of the Avesta with an English translation (see below). In his edition are missing, moreover, texts not available to him or not yet known at all at that time, such as *Aogəmadaēčā*, *Nērangistān*, *Pursišnīhā*, *Vaeθā*, and *Frahang ī Oīm* (for the contents of Westergaard's edition, esp. in comparison with Karl F. Geldner's edition, see Schmitt, 1993, pp. vi-ix).

After having finished the edition of *Zendavesta* in 1854, which marks the point separating two quite different periods in his scholarly work, Westergaard in some kind of self-isolation confined himself to publish only in Danish (and no more in German or English) and on entirely different fields, above all on Indian history. The two main reasons for that were, on the one hand, his patriotism and nationalist views concerning the tight political situation in Denmark in those years of the Schleswig-Holstein question (a controversy between Denmark, Prussia, and Austria over the status of Schleswig and Holstein), and, on the other, the premature death of his wife, which caused him to care for his four little children all by himself. Nevertheless, his later historical works on the most ancient period of Indian history, which were based on Vedic sources, and on the date of Buddha were of some influence



(e.g., Westergaard, 1862), because they were translated by a friend of his (A. F. Stenzler) into German.

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