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Sanskrit Roots in the Swiss *Idiotikon*: Early Indology in Switzerland between National Identity Formation and European Imperial Imaginaries

Claire Louise Blaser

ABSTRACTS

Während die Geschichte der orientalistischen Wissenschaften im Falle Deutschlands und der europäischen Grossmächte bereits eingehend erforscht wurde, fehlen solche Studien im Kontext der Schweiz. Dieser Beitrag widmet sich der Entstehung der Indologie als wissenschaftliche Disziplin in der Schweiz mit einem Schwerpunkt auf Zürich. Er verortet diese Entwicklung zunächst in der breiteren Geschichte des akademischen Orientalismus in Europa und zeigt, wie stark Schweizer Wissenschaftler und Universitäten in das transnationale – und oft auch transimperiale – Feld der Indologie des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts eingebettet waren. Andererseits fokussiert der Artikel vier Wissenschaftler – Heinrich Schweizer-Sidler, Adolf Kaegi, Eduard Schwyzer und Emil Abegg –, die zwischen 1841 und 1955 an der Universität Zürich Sanskrit und Kurse in indischen Studien unterrichteten. Dabei beleuchtet er die disziplinären Verflechtungen der frühen Indologie in Zürich sowie auch die lokalen und nationalen Kontexte, die die Interessen, Karrieren und wissenschaftliche Tätigkeit dieser Akademiker prägten. Insbesondere die Beteiligung der vier Wissenschaftler am schweizerdeutschen Wörterbuch (dem Schweizerischen *Idiotikon*) zeigt auf, wie sie ihre Expertise als indogermanistische Sprachwissenschaftler in den Dienst nationaler Identitätsbildung stellen konnten und wollten und gleichzeitig jenen Diskursen wissenschaftliche Autorität verliehen, die für die Schweiz eine fortgeschrittene Zivilisationsstufe in der eurozentrischen Weltordnung beanspruchten.

In stark contrast to Germany and major European imperial powers, the genesis of Orientalist scholarship in Switzerland remains unstudied. This contribution traces the development of

Indology as a scholarly discipline in Switzerland, with a focus on Zurich. First, it locates this development in the history of academic Orientalism in Europe more broadly, showing how Swiss scholars and universities were embedded in the highly transnational – and oftentimes transimperial – field of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indology. Second, the article zooms in on four scholars – Heinrich Schweizer Sidler, Adolf Kaegi, Eduard Schwyzer, and Emil Abegg – who taught Sanskrit and courses in Indian studies at the University of Zurich between 1841 and 1955. It illuminates the cross-disciplinary entanglements of early Indology in Zurich, as well as the local and national contexts that shaped these scholars' interests, careers, and scholarship. By stressing in particular the involvement of the four scholars in the compilation of a dictionary of the Swiss German language (the Swiss *Idiotikon*), I argue that they were able and willing to put their expertise as Indo-Germanic historical linguists in the service of projects of national identity formation while also lending scientific authority to the claim for Switzerland's advanced status on the Eurocentric world map of civilizational development.

The first full professorship for *Sanskrit und Sprachvergleichung* (Sanskrit and Comparative Languages) at the University of Zurich was established in 1864 for Heinrich Schweizer-Sidler (1815–1894). Two years earlier, an interdisciplinary and cross-generational project had been launched by Swiss scholars to record and catalogue as many Swiss German dialects as possible from across space and time in the *Schweizerisches Idiotikon*, a dictionary of the Swiss German language. Schweizer-Sidler had encouraged the initiator of the *Idiotikon* in his vision, was one of five signatories of the public appeal that launched the project, and helped secure funding for it from the Swiss government.¹ The two scholars that succeeded Schweizer-Sidler to the Sanskrit chair in Zurich, Adolf Kaegi (1849–1923) and Eduard Schwyzer (1874–1943), both lent their names and time to the *Idiotikon* project, too. These three professors were the earliest representatives of Indological scholarship at the University of Zurich (UoZ).² They were primarily Sanskritists and comparative linguists, yet their status as experts in these fields could be put in service of the nineteenth-century project of “national integration” in Switzerland: They supported the claims being made at the time that Swiss German was a distinct and unitary “language” and as such held a privileged position in the Indo-Germanic linguistic – and

1 On the history of the *Idiotikon*, see W. Haas, *Das Wörterbuch der schweizerdeutschen Sprache: Versuch über eine nationale Institution*, Frauenfeld 1981; E. Ruoss, *Schweizerdeutsch und Sprachbewusstsein: Zur Konsolidierung der Deutschschweizer Diglossie im 19. Jahrhundert*, Berlin/Boston 2019, pp. 285–295; C. Landolt/T. Roth, *Schweizerisches Idiotikon – Wörterbuch der schweizerdeutschen Sprache*, in: A. N. Lenz/P. Stöckle (eds.), *Germanistische Dialektlexikographie zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart 2021, pp. 143–173.

2 The German terms used by the scholars themselves and their contemporaries to denote their fields of expertise are manifold: *vergleichende / historische / indogermanische Sprachwissenschaft*, (*indogermanische Sprachvergleichung*, *indogermanische Linguistik*, *Indogermanistik*, *indogermanische Philologie*, *klassische Philologie*, *germanische Philologie*, *indische Philologie*, and less commonly *vedische Philologie*, *vergleichende Grammatik*, *Altertumskunde*, or *Indologie*; they also used *indische Studien* as an umbrella term to refer to their discipline more broadly. When I use the terms Indologists/Indology to refer to these scholars/their scholarship, I am imposing a later understanding and terminology on them and in the process reducing them to one particular aspect of their scientific identities/activities.

civilizational – genealogy. The emergence of Indological scholarship in Zurich, the Swiss *Idiotikon*, and the scholars involved in both were all embedded in a provincial and yet worldly bourgeois elite in nineteenth-century Switzerland. This article will broach the history of the beginnings of Indology in Switzerland through the political and social entanglements of the discipline and its representatives in Zurich, on the one hand, and by relating the particularities of this history to the development of the discipline in Europe more broadly, on the other hand. It thereby seeks to address the striking lack of historical studies on the Orientalist disciplines in Switzerland in general and on Indology in particular.³

In what follows, I illuminate the history of early Indology and related fields in Switzerland from the perspective of cross-border as well as cross-disciplinary entanglements. First, I locate Switzerland, Swiss scholars, and Swiss nationalist discourses in the transnational field of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Indology in Europe, showing that mobility and exchange between scholars, institutions, and places were an integral part of the Orientalist sciences in Switzerland. Second, I contextualize the historical development of Indology at UoZ and introduce the scholars that represented the discipline there between the 1830s and 1930s. I then, thirdly, outline the local environment that these “armchair scholars” were embedded in and point to some of the transimperial links that shaped them. In the final section, I come back to the Zurich Indologists’ links to the *Idiotikon* and situate comparative Indo-Germanic linguistics in relation to Swiss national history.

1. The International Congress of Orientalists in Geneva, 1894

Switzerland’s “characteristic attitude” during the late imperial period was aptly described by Patricia Purtschert as one combining humility and modesty towards European colonial powers with blatant admiration for imperial culture.⁴ We find a striking illustration of this at the tenth International Congress of Orientalists of 1894 in Geneva, which was the first and last to be held in Switzerland.⁵ The president of its organizing committee

3 A short and relatively superficial overview on the history of Indology as an academic discipline in Switzerland can be found in A. Etter, *Die Indologie in der Schweiz*, in: P. E. Erismann (ed.), *Indien sehen. Kunst Fotografie Literatur*, Bern/Baden 1997; for an overview of the pre-academic history of Indian studies in Switzerland, see C. Régamey, *Un pionnier Vaudois des études indiennes: Antoine-Louis de Polier*, in: G. Bonnard/R. Stamm (eds.), *Mélanges offerts à Monsieur Georges Bonnard, professeur honoraire de l'Université de Lausanne, à l'occasion de son quatre-vingtième anniversaire*, Genève 1966, pp. 183–209.

4 P. Purtschert, *Kolonialität und Geschlecht im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Geschichte der weißen Schweiz*, Bielefeld/Boston 2019, p. 308.

5 For an early history of the Congress, see P. Rabault-Feuerhahn, „Les grandes assises de l'orientalisme“: La question interculturelle dans les congrès internationaux des orientalistes (1873–1912), in: *Revue germanique internationale* 12 (2010), pp. 47–67; P. Servais, *Scholarly Networks and International Congresses: The Orientalists before the First World War*, in: W. B. Rayward (ed.), *Information Beyond Borders*, London 2014, pp. 85–95; for background on the Geneva Congress in particular, see D. Savatovsky, *Une école à Genève avant l'école de Genève: Saussure et le Xe Congrès des Orientalistes (1894)*, in: *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 37 (2015) 2, pp. 17–31.

was Eduard Naville, a professor of Egyptology at the University of Geneva and famed archeologist under the aegis of the British Egypt Exploration Fund.⁶ In his welcome speech, Naville addressed Switzerland's, and more specifically Geneva's, position in the field of European Orientalist studies:

*[W]hen one considers that we hereby claim to be imitating what some of the biggest cities of Europe have done, that we are going to try to keep pace with Paris, London, Petersburg, Berlin, Florence, Vienna, Stockholm, [...] one could rightly charge us with recklessness, one could reproach us for forgetting our smallness.*⁷

Modesty infuses Naville's comparisons between Geneva and the grand European "capitals of science" as well as between Switzerland's "smallness" and the "four great powers" surrounding it. He then added, however, that the Swiss were "not too small to live and act as free men" and that they could "expand in the domain of the intellect" instead of expanding territorially.⁸ Politically as well as scientifically, Switzerland was neutral ground, he explained, and thus the ideal place to forget about "the role your country plays in the European concert or in the New World" and to take refuge in the apolitical "objectivity" of science.⁹

Both Switzerland and the city of Geneva were indeed odd choices to hold one of the oldest and most prestigious international academic gatherings in Europe at the time. The choice certainly does not indicate a special standing of Swiss scholars or universities in the field of Orientalist studies in late nineteenth-century Europe. As Paul Oltramare, a Sanskritist and professor for history of religions at the University of Geneva, noted:

*Not only does Geneva not have the resources of the big capitals in which the orientalists had previously gathered, but it has never even been, like Leiden, for example, an active centre of oriental studies.*¹⁰

Scholars from Switzerland had also not constituted a sizeable part of congress attendants in preceding years.¹¹ Furthermore, no Swiss university, learned society, or government entity had sent official delegates to any of the previous congresses, as many other European polities did. The answer to the question "Why Geneva?" lies somewhere else: The previous, ninth, congress had been overshadowed by a schism in the Orientalist community in Europe. The conflicting factions consequently held two separate events

6 T. Gertzen, Henri Édouard Naville (1844–1926). Ein Ägyptologe der 'Alten Schule', in: *Kemet* 15 (2006) 4, pp. 70–72.

7 Actes du dixième Congrès international des orientalistes: session de Genève, 1894. Partie 1, Leiden 1897, p. 56. This and all subsequent translations are mine.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., pp. 59–60.

10 P. Oltramare, Le dixième congrès international des orientalistes Genève (3–12 Septembre 1894), in: *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 30 (1894), pp. 188–95, at 188.

11 Congress proceedings show the following numbers for members from Switzerland: 11 in 1873 (Paris), 1 in 1874 (London), 2 in 1876 (Petersburg), 3 in 1878 (Florence), 4 in 1881 (Berlin), 8 in 1883 (Leiden), 6 in 1886 (Vienna), 6 in 1889 (Stockholm/Christiania), and 3 in 1892 (London). The Geneva Congress, by contrast, was attended by 161 members from Switzerland. Those in the "Indian section" were primarily comparative linguists.

in London within a year of each other, each claiming to be the “rightful” successor of the eighth congress.¹² The “essential mission” of the 1894 congress was “to bring an end to the misunderstandings that still divided the world of orientalists”;¹³ Geneva was proposed “a common terrain of reconciliation” and chosen “in the best interest of science”.¹⁴ Three different national tropes are visibly at play here: The idea of Switzerland as neutral and conciliatory terrain within Europe, the ostensible Swiss veneration for its more powerful European neighbours, and finally the indisputability of its “belonging” to the enlightened, cultured, and liberal core of European modernity. Cornelis Tiele, the official representative of the Dutch government at the Orientalist Congress in Geneva, took up this exact discourse in his closing remarks:

*Switzerland does not possess any colonies, and it lacks the political motive to concern itself with oriental languages. But the biblical, philological and historical sciences have always found eminent and fortunate masters amongst its scholars. [...] Allow me, therefore, gentlemen, our hosts, to extend a fraternal salute to you in the name of your Dutch collaborators, my compatriots! [...] Here, like there, [we find] the reformed religion preponderant, the simplicity of mores, the love of liberty and of independence, as well as a certain determination to achieve the goals that we set for ourselves.*¹⁵

Such assertions of Switzerland’s scientific prowess and liberal “progressiveness” were not performed on an obscure academic stage, as one might think. Both a result and catalyst of the increasing (Eurocentric) internationalization of the sciences in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, international congresses like the Orientalist one doubled as arenas for the negotiation of national symbolic authority in Imperial Europe.¹⁶ The political significance of the Congresses in *fin-de-siècle* Europe is evident in the practice of engaging sovereigns and members of ruling families as honorary presidents/patrons of the events as well as in the custom of having a roster of official delegates representing state governments/ministries, universities, and learned societies from across the world. The line-up of speakers at the opening ceremony of the Geneva Congress also clearly indicates the importance Swiss authorities accorded to it: The first to speak was the highest official in the country, i.e. the president of the Federal Council of Switzerland, a post held at the time by Emil Frey (1838–1922). He was followed by the highest cantonal authority, the president of the State Council of Geneva Eugène Richard.

The speeches and discourses held on the side-lines of the International Orientalist Congresses make clear to what extent scientific prestige and achievements had become a matter of nationalist politics as well as inter-imperial competition in the course of the

12 On the reasons for the split, see Rabault-Feuerhahn, “Les grandes assises de l’orientalisme”.

13 Ultramaré, *Le dixième congrès international des orientalistes*, p. 189.

14 H. Cordier/G. Schlegel, *Congrès international des orientalistes de Genève*, in: *T’oung Pao* 5 (1894) 1, pp. 65–6, at 65.

15 *Actes du dixième Congrès international des orientalistes*, pp. 137–139.

16 Servais, *Scholarly Networks and International Congresses*; P. Rabault-Feuerhahn, *War(s) and peace: the role of international conflicts in the reorganization of Orientalist knowledge, as exemplified by the history of Orientalist congresses*, Centre for the Historiography of Linguistics, KU Leuven (Online Workshop) (2021).

nineteenth century.¹⁷ The discipline of Orientalism was no exception to this, given the high stakes involved for various interested parties in a discipline that had been accorded the discursive “power to geopolitically reorganize the history of world civilizations”.¹⁸ The Geneva Congress of 1894 shows that Switzerland was seen as a legitimate political player in this largely intra-European game of global classifications, even as its scholarly achievements in the field of Orientalism were understood to be relatively marginal. Notwithstanding, there were enough scholars at the University of Geneva with the necessary academic standing to form a qualified Organizing Committee, which included Ferdinand de Saussure besides the above-mentioned Naville and Oltramare. The extended “General Swiss Committee” boasted the main orientalist scholars claimed as its own by the hosting country, including Adolf Kaegi as official delegate from the University of Zurich, Eduard Müller-Hess from the University of Berne, the Geneva native Charles Rieu representing University College London, and the Lucerne-based expert of “Austro-nesian” languages, Renward Brandstetter, serving as official representative of the Dutch colonial Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences.¹⁹ There may be no “Swiss school” of Orientalist studies in terms of a distinctive scientific tradition, but an exploration of the history of Indology in Switzerland can provide access to historical ideas about Swiss national self-understanding and how it imagined its position in the Eurocentric world order of the late colonial period.

2. Intra-European and Transimperial Mobility in the Field of Indology

A defining feature of the field of Indology in Switzerland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was its high level of integration into webs of scholarly mobility in Imperial Europe. Histories of entanglement between the dominant “schools” of French, German, and British Orientalism leave no doubt as to their mutual interdependence: French Sanskritists and manuscript collections were foundational to German Indology,²⁰ while a few decades later, scholars trained in German universities were called upon to fill positions at English universities as well as in British India.²¹ German govern-

17 The tension between the increasingly transnational European sciences and the rise of national/imperial rivalries has been discussed extensively in the case of British-German interactions in knowledge production. See H. Ellis/U. Kirchberger (eds.), *Anglo-German Scholarly Networks in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Leiden 2014; and U. Kirchberger, *Between transimperial networking and national antagonism: German scientists in the British Empire during the long nineteenth century*, in: A. Goss (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Science and Empire*, London/New York, NY 2021, pp. 138–147; for a salient case study, see M. von Brescius, *German Science in the Age of Empire: Enterprise, Opportunity and the Schlagintweit Brothers*, Cambridge 2019, especially pp. 323–333.

18 K. Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire*, Cambridge, MA 2014, p. 21.

19 On Brandstetter, see R. Blust/J. Schneider (eds.), *A world of words: Revisiting the work of Renward Brandstetter (1860–1942) on Lucerne and Austronesia*, Wiesbaden 2012.

20 P. Rabault-F Feuerhahn, *Voyages d'études et migrations savantes: Paris, lieu fondateur et provisoire de l'indianisme allemand*, in: *Revue germanique internationale* 7 (2008), pp. 139–156.

21 Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, pp. 17–40; P. Rabault-F Feuerhahn, *German Indology Challenged: On the Dialectics of Armchair Philology, Fieldwork, and Indigenous Traditions in the Late Nineteenth Century*, in: C. Engberts/H. J. Paul (eds.), *Scholarly Personae in the History of Orientalism, 1870–1930*, Leiden 2019, pp. 99–117.

ments in turn enticed their scholars in British service to procure manuscripts for German state collections from India.²²

Histories of Indology increasingly highlight the essential role of transnational scholarly mobility for the construction of “national schools”, yet they still tend to obscure or subsume the role of regions like Switzerland, which were not accorded a “national label” in the intellectual marketplace of Indian studies in the first place.²³ Just as the recent impetus to “rethink colonialism from its margins” has expanded colonial history beyond “a handful of imperial ‘metropolitan countries’ and their respective colonies”,²⁴ so the history of Orientalism, too, can be fruitfully expanded by a shift of perspective to its “margins”. Historical scholarship on Italian Indology in the nineteenth century, for example, has explored its privileged connections with Orientalist scholarship in Goa and Portugal, but also drawn attention to the fact that Italy boasted more Indology chairs than either France or Britain by the late nineteenth century and hosted an Orientalist Congress before Germany.²⁵ Other studies have focused on Orientalisms in Russia, the Ottoman Empire, or East-Central and Southeastern Europe. They illustrate how heterogeneous perspectives within Europe and at its edges resulted in a host of varying imaginaries, mental geographies, knowledge traditions, and tropes of “the Orient”, all while retaining “continuities in orientalist values, themes, attitudes, and strategies across European boundaries”.²⁶ These “marginal” regions were connected amongst themselves as well as with “major” Orientalist traditions: German-origin scholars, for example, played a role in the professionalization of Orientalist disciplines in Tsarist Russia and the Habsburg Monarchy, where cities like St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Prague became centres of Indological scholarship in their own right.²⁷ Russian scholars, in turn, lent crucial material support for German-led Orientalist pursuits like the Turfan expeditions into Central

22 Rabault-Feuerhahn, *German Indology Challenged*, p. 110.

23 P. Rabault-Feuerhahn, *Comparative Mythology as a Transnational Enterprise: Friedrich Max Müller’s Scholarly Identity through the Lens of Angelo De Gubernatis’s Correspondence*, in: *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 85 (2016) 2–3, pp. 145–158, at 157.

24 P. Purtschert/H. Fischer-Tiné, *The End of Innocence: Debating Colonialism in Switzerland*, in: P. Purtschert/H. Fischer-Tiné (eds.), *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking colonialism from the margins*, Basingstoke 2015, pp. 1–25, at 8; see also Purtschert, *Kolonialität und Geschlecht*, pp. 310–312.

25 Rabault-Feuerhahn, *Comparative Mythology*, pp. 149–150; F. L. Vicente, *Orientalism on the Margins: the interest in Indian Antiquity in nineteenth century Italy*, in: *Res Antiquitatis: Journal of Ancient History* 1 (2010), pp. 11–37; F. L. Vicente, *Other Orientalisms. India between Florence and Bombay (1860–1900)*, New Delhi 2012.

26 J. R. Hodkinson/J. Walker, *Introduction*, in: J. R. Hodkinson et al. (eds.), *Deploying Orientalism in Culture and History: From Germany to Central and Eastern Europe*, *Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture*, Rochester, NY 2013, pp. 1–14, at 1–2; an early essay influential for the idea of ‘multiple Orientalisms’ was U. Makdisi, *Ottoman Orientalism*, in: *The American Historical Review* 107 (2002) 3, pp. 768–796; on Russian Orientalism, see also D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian orientalism: Asia in the Russian mind from Peter the Great to the emigration*, New Haven 2010; V. Taki, *Orientalism on the Margins: The Ottoman Empire under Russian Eyes*, in: *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12 (2011) 2, pp. 321–351; P. Bornet/S. Gorshenina (eds.), *L’orientalisme des marges: Éclairages à partir de l’Inde et de la Russie*, Lausanne 2014.

27 See in particular the contributions by Jobst and Lemmen in: R. Born/S. Lemmen (eds.), *Orientalismen in Ostmitteleuropa: Diskurse, Akteure und Disziplinen vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Bielefeld 2014.

Asia in the early twentieth century.²⁸ Finally, just as imperial history tends to sideline “entire empires”,²⁹ so the history of European Orientalism, too, is biased towards imagining Indology as made up of British, French, and German scholars working primarily on and with sources from northern British India. One example for this are Dutch Orientalist studies: The dominant “German tradition” in this country came to be overshadowed by the “Greater India Studies” paradigm, which expanded the horizon of Indology and its underlying assumptions towards the study of Southeast Asia and, in doing so, relied on “transcolonial knowledge networks” made up of British “explorers” as well as French scholars.³⁰

Switzerland, even as it remained marginal to centers of European colonial and scientific power in popular imagination, was also integrated into the transimperial labour market that shaped the careers of so many British, German, French, and other Orientalists. Sanskritists like Charles Rieu (1820–1902) of Geneva, Hermann Brunnhofer (1841–1916) of Aarau, or Ernst Leumann (1867–1945) of Thurgau found employment in England – be it in the manuscript collection of the British Museum in London or as assistants to Monier-Williams and Max Müller in Oxford – at a time when non-professorial positions for experts in Indian studies were virtually non-existent in Switzerland.³¹ During the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s, Orientalist disciplines became more established in Switzerland and also attracted scholars from abroad: The influential German philosopher and philologist Paul Deussen (1845–1919) got his start at the University of Geneva, where he introduced the study of Sanskrit in 1873.³² In 1858, the newly established Chair for Oriental Languages at the University of Bern went to the Austrian Orientalist Aloys Sprenger (1813–1893), who had studied in Vienna, London, and Leiden and is mainly known today for his long career as a senior civil servant in the educational system of the British East India Company.³³ His successor, the Prussian Eduard Müller-Hess, held a PhD from Leipzig and had worked in England before spending three years in British

28 J. Kaplan, *The Turfan Expeditions and the Instrumentality of Philological Knowledge*, Centre for the Historiography of Linguistics, KU Leuven (Online Workshop) (2021).

29 D. Hedinger/N. Heé, *Transimperial History – Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition*, in: *Journal of Modern European History* 16 (2018) 4, pp. 429–452, at 443.

30 Y. D. Spoelder, *Staging the Nation Beyond the Raj: Transcolonial Knowledge Networks and Visions of Greater India, 1800–1950s*, PhD Thesis, Freie Universität Berlin, 2020, pp. 116–121; see also M. Bloembergen, *The Politics of “Greater India,” a Moral Geography: Moveable Antiquities and Charmed Knowledge Networks between Indonesia, India, and the West*, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63 (2021) 1, pp. 170–211.

31 G. S. Woods/N. Banerji, Rieu, Charles Pierre Henri, in: H. C. G. Matthew/B. Harrison (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford 2004; E. Kuhn, Hermann Brunnhofer 1841–1916, in: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 71 (1917) 4, pp. 431–437; A. Bigger, Leumann, Ernst, in: *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* (HLS) (2008), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/044654/2008-12-04/> (accessed 21 February 2021).

32 A. Hübscher, Deussen, Paul Jakob, in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (1957), <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118671707.html#ndbcontent> (accessed 21 February 2021).

33 S. Procházka, Sprenger, Aloys (1813–1893), *Orientalist*, in: *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon* (2007), https://www.biographien.ac.at/oebl/oebl_S/Sprenger_Aloys_1813_1893.xml (accessed 21 February 2021); on an assessment of his legacy in British India, see G. Minault, Aloys Sprenger: German Orientalism’s ‘Gift’ to Delhi College, in: *South Asia Research* 31 (2011) 1, pp. 7–23.

Imperial service as a government epigraphist and archaeological surveyor in Ceylon. He taught Sanskrit, Pali, and English in Bern from 1888 until 1923.³⁴

Throughout the nineteenth and well into the early twentieth century, the educational trajectory of Orientalist scholars from Switzerland included a stay abroad to study with renowned scholars in their field. Some cantonal education councils supported such trips with travel scholarships for promising young scholars. The young Sanskritists and Indologists sometimes learned in Paris, London, Edinburgh, or Oxford, but the German states remained the most preferred destination by far. Since Switzerland did not hold notable collections of Indian manuscripts, most philologically oriented Indologists also relied on access to libraries in imperial capitals. It is clear that this scholarly mobility within metropolitan Europe was considered the rule rather than the exception. For the scholars-in-training, it not only served the purpose of acquiring knowledge and bettering one's career outlook, but it also constituted a veritable rite of passage for young bourgeois men from Switzerland to cement the "cosmopolitan" character of their learnedness.

3. The Beginnings of Indology in Zurich

The first university in Switzerland to officially offer courses in Indian studies or Indian languages was likely the University of Zurich, itself only established in 1833: Bernhard Hirzel (1807–1847), who had studied comparative Indo-German linguistics with Franz Bopp in Berlin and Sanskrit with Antoine Léonard de Chézy at the Collège de France in Paris, offered "Sanskrit Grammar for Beginners" in the winter semester of 1837/38 as *Privatdozent* (PD, designating an officially qualified instructor of higher education that did not draw salary from the university).³⁵ Reportedly, only one student signed up for the class and Hirzel became absorbed in local politics and personal turmoil soon afterwards.³⁶ It was not until his former student Heinrich Schweizer-Sidler (1815–1894) began teaching *Sanskrit, indogermanische Sprachwissenschaft*, and *deutsche Grammatik* as PD in 1841 that Sanskrit found a permanent home in Zurich. Schweizer-Sidler was promoted to extraordinary and then ordinary (i.e. full) professor for *Sanskrit und Sprachvergleichung* at UoZ in 1849 and 1864, respectively. He is credited with introducing

34 A. Bigger, Müller-Hess, Eduard, in: Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz (HLS) (2010), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/043935/2010-08-17/> (accessed 21 February 2021); on his activities in Ceylon, see P. Bornet, From the Emic to the Etic and Back Again: Archaeology, Orientalism, and Religion from Colonial Sri Lanka to Switzerland, in: P. Bornet et al. (eds.), "Masters" and "Natives": Digging the Others' Past, Berlin et al. 2019, pp. 177–196.

35 Bericht an den Hohen Erziehungsrath über die Wirksamkeit der Hochschule während des Sommersemesters 1837 & Wintersemesters 1837/38. Staatsarchiv des Kantons Zürich, Z 70.3091; see also P. Aerne, Pfarrer Bernhard Hirzel, Anführer des Putschzuges – Beiträge zu seiner Biographie, in: Züriputsch. 6. September 1839 – Sieg der gerechten Sache oder Septemberschande, Pfäffikon/Uster 1989, pp. 63–121, at 70 and footnote 22.

36 A. Etter, Bernhard Hirzel: Der erste Sanskritist an der Universität Zürich und Übersetzer von Werken der indischen Kunstichtung, in: Züriputsch. 6. September 1839 – Sieg der gerechten Sache oder Septemberschande, Pfäffikon/Uster 1989, pp. 122–130.

Sanskrit as an obligatory element into the philological curriculum at Zurich, which was not common at other Swiss universities at the time.³⁷

During the course of Schweizer-Sidler's tenure in Zurich, three more Chairs that comprised elements of Indian studies in their scope were created across Switzerland: one for *orientalische Sprachen* in Bern (1858, held by Sprenger), for *vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft* in Basel (1874, held by the Sanskritist and Classicist Franz Misteli), for *histoire et comparaison des langues indo-européennes* in Geneva (1891, held by Ferdinand de Saussure), and, shortly thereafter, a chair for *Sanskrit und indische Literatur* at the Catholic University of Fribourg (1903).³⁸ Beginning in the 1950s, more chairs were established throughout Switzerland for Indology proper, i.e. with a primary focus on history, religion, cultures, literatures, or modern languages of the subcontinent.³⁹ Thus, Indian studies in Switzerland, similar to Germany and Austria, were conducted primarily within the framework of historical and comparative linguistics until well into the first half of the twentieth century, and as separate from *Orientalistik*, which was the purview of philological and archaeological work on the "Biblical" regions of the Near East.⁴⁰

The scholars that represented Indology at UoZ during its emergence between 1840 and 1930 – Schweizer-Sidler, Adolf Kaegi, and Eduard Schwyzer – also were Indo-Germanists first and foremost. Still, it was their particular expertise in Sanskrit and Vedic studies that qualified these three scholars for professorial positions in comparative Indo-Germanic linguistics. As Andrea Polaschegg and many other scholars researching the history of German(-speaking) scholarship on India have shown, the two disciplines stood in a dialogical relationship with each other: "The formation of historical-comparative linguistics would have been just as unthinkable without the scientific rediscovery of the Indian past as the formation of Indology would have been without those historical-comparative approaches."⁴¹ Schweizer-Sidler, Kaegi, and Schwyzer had trained in the comparative tradition of Bopp and, later, the Leipzig school, which propagated the reconstruction of an Indo-Germanic "ur-language" and a strict focus on "laws" of phonetics, thought to be equal to the "universal" laws of natural sciences. All three combined their Sanskrit and Indo-Germanic studies with extensive scholarly activities in the field of classical philology, which is also what they are most renowned and remembered for today.⁴² The

37 A. Surber, Heinrich Schweizer-Sidler geb. den 12. September 1815, gest. den 30. März 1894, Berlin (1898), p. 103.

38 U. Altermatt, Die Universität Freiburg auf der Suche nach Identität: Essays zur Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der Universität Freiburg im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Freiburg 2009, p. 423, n. 68; at the University of Lausanne, Sanskrit was also being taught from 1903 onwards by the PD Hans Schacht.

39 Lausanne: *Slavic and Oriental Languages and Cultures* (1949), Basel: *Comparative Linguistics with Special Focus on Indology* (1962), Zurich: *Indology* (1967). PDs teaching Indology without their own chair existed earlier, as in Zurich with Emil Abegg from 1919 to 1955, or Georges Cuendet in Geneva from 1938 to 1963.

40 Good overviews of the field's development are found in: A. Polaschegg, *Der andere Orientalismus: Regeln deutsch-morgenländischer Imagination im 19. Jahrhundert*, Berlin/New York 2005; S. L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship*, Cambridge 2009; P. Rabault-Feuerhahn, *Archives of Origins: Sanskrit, Philology, Anthropology in 19th Century Germany*, trans. D. Bach and R. Willet, Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 67–134.

41 Polaschegg, *Der andere Orientalismus*, p. 187.

42 For Schweizer-Sidler, it was a German edition of Tacitus' *Germania*, for Kaegi it was his world-famous Greek gram-

close association of Zurich's Sanskrit chair with classical philology was important to the university, which relied on it to cover the large teaching load in Greek and Latin. It was left to the individual professors to decide how much time they were willing and able to devote to literary or cultural studies of historical Indian texts. Besides Sanskrit language classes and text studies (e.g. of the *ṛgveda*, the *meghadūta*, or the *bhagavadgītā*), their offerings regularly included courses on, for example, comparative mythology (Schweizer-Sidler), history of Indian literature or religions (Kaegi), or culture and society of the Indo-Germans (Schwyzer). During the tenure of Schwyzer, who was much less drawn towards Indian philology and cultural studies than his predecessors, the Prussian-born PD Wilhelm Jahn covered Sanskrit and Prakrit teaching, Vedic studies, and very popular courses on "The Life and Teaching of Buddha" or "The History of Indian Religion and Philosophy".⁴³ From 1919 onwards, the more "Indological" teachings were taken over by a different PD, Emil Abegg (1885–1962) from the canton of Zurich, who had been a student of both Schwyzer and Kaegi.

In 1927, Schwyzer followed a call to the University of Bonn and later to Berlin onto the Chair for *indogermanische Sprachvergleichung* where he stayed from 1933 until his death in 1943.⁴⁴ At this point, a request of the Philosophical Faculty was filed that a separate extraordinary professorship be created that would relieve the chair for "*vergleichende indogermanische Sprachwissenschaft, verwandte Disziplinen der klassischen Philologie und Sanskrit*" (as it had been called since Kaegi took over in 1893) from its teaching responsibilities in classical philology. This "split" of the chair would have considerably expanded the professors' scope to devote resources to domains like comparative religion, cultural history, or anthropological studies – which is where Abegg's expertise lay.⁴⁵ Like in Germany and certainly elsewhere in Europe, personal patronage played a decisive role

mar textbooks (that were translated in many languages and continued to be reprinted until the mid-2000s), and Schwyzer's major work was the re-edition of Karl Brugmann's *Griechische Grammatik*.

43 Jahn, Wilhelm, 1909–1918/Statistik über die Frequenz der Vorlesungen von Privatdozent Dr. Wilh. Jahn (1918). Staatsarchiv des Kantons Zürich, U 109.6.113.

44 Schwyzer was successful in Germany and even elected to the Prussian Academy of Science in 1937. There are virtually no references to his reactions to the rise of the Nazi regime during his time in Germany or the today contentiously discussed links between his own discipline and National Socialist ideology in the documents that I have sighted. This would support the claim made by his son, Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer, that he clung to "an illusion of freedom", which was "the freedom of a snail that has retreated into its shell". See H.-R. Schwyzer, Eduard Schwyzer, 1874–1943, in: 114. Neujahrsblatt zum Besten des Waisenhauses in Zürich, herausgegeben von der Gelehrten Gesellschaft, Zürich 1951, p. 49. The debate on continuities between Aryanism in German Indology and National Socialist imaginaries was launched by S. Pollock, *Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj*, in: C. A. Breckenridge/P. van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, Philadelphia, PA 1993, pp. 76–133; for later contributions to the debate, see Marchand, *German Orientalism*, Chapter 7 and Epilogue; S. M. Hawthorne, *Origins, Genealogies and the Politics of Identity: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Myth*, PhD Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2007; K. Poewe/I. Hexham, *Surprising Aryan Mediations between German Indology and Nazism: Research and the Adhuri/Grünendahl Debate*, in: *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 19 (2015) 3, pp. 263–300; B. Roy, *Friedrich Max Müller and the Emergence of Identity Politics in India and Germany*, in: *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 85 (2016) 2–3, pp. 217–228.

45 Protokoll des Regierungsrates des Kantons Zürich. 1. Januar bis 31. Dezember 1927. Als Manuskript gedruckt./Aktum Donnerstag, den 10. März 1927/Universität, Zürich (1927). Staatsarchiv des Kantons Zürich, MM 3.41 RRB 1927/0430.

in chair appointments.⁴⁶ This dynamic created an almost dynastic line from patron-professors to their “chosen” mentees that patiently advanced through the academic stepping stones of Gymnasium teacher, (unsalaried) *Privatdozent*, and *ausserordentlicher Professor* before eventually replacing their patron as *Ordinarius*. Such had been the pattern of succession from Schweizer-Sidler to Kaegi and Kaegi to Schwyzer, and it made Emil Abegg the most evident candidate to replace Schwyzer in 1927. The faculty’s request to separate a Sanskrit/Indian studies chair from that in classical philology and Indo-Germanic linguistics was refused, however, leading the committee in charge of selecting Schwyzer’s successor to argue that Abegg was “out of the question” because “his special qualification lies in the field of Indology”; they needed someone who “could be called upon for contributions in the Philological Department in a similar fashion to Prof. Schwyzer”.⁴⁷ Abegg had broken with the pragmatic “Zurich tradition” of combining ancient (Indian) and classical philology with comparative linguistics. Instead, he began to move towards “younger” approaches in both Indian Studies and linguistics – on the one hand, his Indological scholarship was oriented towards anthropology (*Völkerkunde*) and ethnopsychology (*Völkerpsychologie*); on the other hand, he took a “general linguistics” approach focused more on synchronic comparison of language *systems* rather than diachronic reconstruction of language *families*. Abegg nevertheless remained at UoZ for the rest of his career as a *Titularprofessor* without a fixed salary. While the university administration failed to see value in his scholarly activities in the late 1920s, they did pave the way for the establishment of a Chair for Indology at UoZ in 1967.⁴⁸ Moreover, Abegg’s research attracted plenty of interest from the side of students and other scholars: his courses were amongst those attracting the highest number of listeners (between 15–50) at Schwyzer’s (later Leumann’s) chair and he was regularly called upon by the Zurich-based Carl G. Jung to provide insights on “Indian Psychology”.⁴⁹ Ironically, Abegg’s bread job consisted of teaching elementary Latin and Greek at the Law Faculty of UoZ.

46 I. Sengupta, State, University and Indology: The Politics of the Chair of Indology at German Universities in the Nineteenth Century, in: D. T. McGetchin / P. K. J. Park / D. SarDesai (eds.), *Sanskrit and ‘Orientalism’: Indology and Comparative Linguistics in Germany, 1750–1958*, Delhi 2004, pp. 271–305.

47 Protokoll [10. März 1927]. Schwyzer’s position instead went to Manu Leumann (1889–1977), who had studied and worked in Germany and was the son of the Swiss émigré Sanskritist Ernst Leumann. Primarily preoccupied with classical languages and ancient philology, he made a better replacement for Schwyzer in the eyes of the faculty, who also explicitly referred to his “Swiss heritage” as an asset.

48 That position went to Paul Horsch (1925–1971) of Oberegg (Appenzell Innerrhoden), who had previously studied in Cambridge and taught at Visvabharati University in India. A. Bigger, Horsch, Paul, in: *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz (HLS)* (2005), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/044653/2005-06-08/> (accessed 21 February 2021).

49 A full index of all lectures given by Abegg including student numbers are found in: Abegg, Emil, 1918–1928. Staatsarchiv des Kantons Zürich, U 109.6.135; the correspondence between Abegg and Jung from 1912 until 1959 can be found in the Jung estate held at ETH’s university archive: Jung, Carl Gustav (1875–1961): wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz 1899–1961. Hochschularchiv der ETH Zürich, Hs 1056.

4. Local Entanglements: Armchair Scholars in Imperial Zurich

As far as scholarly habitus goes, Schweizer-Sidler, Kaegi, Schwyzer, and Abegg represented the ideal-type of an “armchair philologist”. Colleagues, friends, and mentors described them as epitomes of the “unworldly [*weltfremd*] Professor” and underlined their “loyalty” to the fatherland and “father-city” [*Vaterstadt*].⁵⁰ True to the humanistic ideal of an erudite scholar imbibed with protestant work ethic, they are often praised for their “indefatigable zeal” and immutable sense of responsibility,⁵¹ the “rigour” and “strictness” in what they expected of themselves and their students,⁵² and their ability to work with complete “self-sacrifice” and “renunciation”.⁵³ Schweizer-Sidler refused a “call” to August Schleicher’s Chair for Comparative Linguistics, German and Sanskrit in Prague because he allegedly “could not bring himself to leave his home[town]”.⁵⁴ Kaegi is reported to have rejected the suggestion of the German Indologist Georg Bühler to join the latter in British educational service in India with the statement that “engaged [men] do not go to India”.⁵⁵ German universities believed it “futile” to “call” Schwyzer to a chair in Germany because he was “so entangled with his hometown and his Swiss homeland”.⁵⁶ Indeed, Schwyzer initially refused an offer from the University of Bonn in 1926 before changing his mind and leaving Switzerland in 1927. Emil Abegg, finally, was described by one of his former students as “one of the last representatives of the world-removed [*weltfern*] professor, which had been at home at the German University”; he reportedly felt aversion towards all “garrulous sociability” and singled out his 1921 meeting with Rabindranath Tagore as particularly uncomfortable in this regard because he “never had a vivid rapport [*lebendige Fühlungnahme*] with India”.⁵⁷

Still, opportunities for Schweizer-Sidler, Kaegi, Schwyzer, and Abegg to venture beyond their armchairs existed plenty. On the one hand, the four scholars attended gatherings like the aforementioned International Orientalist Congresses, but also others like the Congress of German Philologists (*Philologenversammlung*) or the International Linguistic Congress. On the other hand, the four early representatives of Indian studies in Zurich also contributed to making their field more broadly known in Switzerland. Kaegi, Schwyzer, and Abegg wrote for the newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* relaying information about scholars or publications in Indian studies.⁵⁸ As was common at the time, all of

50 C. E. Dubler, Erinnerungen an Emil Abegg, in: *Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques: revue de la Société Suisse-Asie* 15 (1962) 1–2, pp. 85–94; Surber, Heinrich Schweizer-Sidler.

51 Surber, Heinrich Schweizer-Sidler, pp. 100, 119.

52 E. Schwyzer, Ansprache, in: *Ansprache*, Dr. Phil. Adolf Kaegi, gew. Professor an der Universität Zürich, geb. 30. Sept. 1849, gest. 14. Febr. 1923, Zürich 1923, pp. 15–18, at 72.

53 J. Lohmann, Eduard Schwyzer, in: *Gnomon* 20 (1944) 1, pp. 59–62, at 60.

54 A. Gessner, Heinrich Schweizer-Sidler (1894), pp. 4–5.

55 Schwyzer, *Ansprache*, p. 70.

56 A. Debrunner, † Eduard Schwyzer, in: *Museum Helveticum* 1 (1944) 1, pp. 3–12, at 4.

57 Dubler, *Erinnerungen*, p. 92.

58 A. Kaegi, Max Müller. Separatabdruck aus der ‘Neuen Zürcher Zeitung’ vom 2. bis 8. Januar 1901, Zürich 1901; E. Schwyzer, Die Anfänge der indischen Studien und die Schweiz: Entwicklung und erste Blüte der Indologie,

four of them taught at Swiss higher schools before becoming professors at the university. They mainly taught Latin, German, or Greek, but occasionally gave private lessons in Sanskrit to interested high school students or spoke about their research in extracurricular lectures.⁵⁹ In one such lecture on Vedic philology, Kaegi praised the Vedas as a “literary relict of long bygone times” that shed “the brightest spotlights on the different conditions of life in both the classic and contemporary civilizations”, concluding that those who ignored their value were “missing a sense for the history of humanity”.⁶⁰

As the century progressed, the scholars also increasingly gave “public” lectures in the learned societies and bourgeois associations mushrooming across Zurich. These spaces provided a site for the city’s bourgeoisie – constituted of heterogeneous professional backgrounds – to gather, meet, and constitute themselves as a social class on the basis of acquiring a shared, cosmopolitan “common knowledge”.⁶¹ Lectures held there catered directly to the needs and interests of an urban, industrialist bourgeoisie in Zurich eager to partake in the *Bildungsbürgertum* of the learned and cultured elites. For the latter, public lectures were a way to present their work to a wider, respectable public, justifying its value and solidifying their own social standing outside academia.

A prime forum for scholars to present their research were the popular *Rathausvorträge* (Town Hall Lectures) that started in 1851.⁶² Schweizer-Sidler (in 1856 and 1860), Kaegi (in 1877 and 1898), and Schwyzer (in 1904 and 1914) all gave public lectures at the town hall on topics such as Indian poetry, ancient literature, mythology, or the relevance of Indian studies in general. Schweizer-Sidler spoke on the last point in 1860, before he was named full professor and his field was securely established at the university. He set out to convince the elite lay audience of the universal value of ancient Indian texts in a way that echoes Kaegi above:

*The Sanskritā gave the powerful impulse and forms still and now the mightiest instrument for the successful exploration and penetration of the noblest [...] languages nurtured and cherished by the most important minds in the cultured countries of Europe.*⁶³

in: Neue Zürcher Zeitung (1918), p. 1; E. Schwyzer, Die Anfänge der indischen Studien und die Schweiz: 2. Der Anteil der Schweiz, in: Neue Zürcher Zeitung (1918), pp. 1–2; E. Schwyzer, Die Anfänge der indischen Studien und die Schweiz: 2. Der Anteil der Schweiz (Schluss), in: Neue Zürcher Zeitung (1918), p. 1; a full list of Schwyzer’s contributions over the years can be found in: Schwyzer, Eduard (1874–1943) / Verzeichnis der in der Neuen Zürcher Zeitung erschienenen Aufsätze von Eduard Schwyzer, nach Jahren geordnet. Universitätsarchiv Zürich, AB.1.0917.

59 A. Kaegi, Der Rigveda, die älteste Literatur der Inder, Programm der Kantonsschule in Zürich wissenschaftliche Beilage 1878–1879, Zürich 1878; H. Schweizer-Sidler, Drei öffentliche Vorträge (über historische Sprachforschung) zum Besten der Sammlungen der h. Töchterschule und des Lehrerinnenseminars Zürich, 1880.

60 Kaegi, Der Rigveda, die älteste Literatur der Inder, p. 10.

61 A. Tanner, Arbeitsame Patrioten – wohlstandige Damen: Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit in der Schweiz 1830–1914, Zürich 1995, pp. 424–426.

62 G. Seferovic, Die Zürcher Rathaus- und Aulavorträge (1851–1961), in: Commentationes Historiae Iuris Helveticae 7 (2011), pp. 111–183, at 111–112. Some of the lectures were later published. See, for example: H. Schweizer-Sidler, Die Bedeutung der indischen Studien, Zürich 1861; E. Schwyzer, Das Problem einer Universalsprache. Akademischer Rathausvortrag, gehalten am 9. Februar 1905 in Zürich, Wetzikon 1906.

63 Schweizer-Sidler, Die Bedeutung der indischen Studien, p. 2.

The list of speakers that Schweizer-Sidler, Kaegi, and Schwyzer shared the stage with at the Town Hall Lectures between 1851 and 1918 reminds us of the deep ties of Zurich's elites with European colonialism: Oswald Heer, professor for botany and director of the Botanical Garden, and Otto Stoll, professor for geography and the first director of the Ethnological Collection at UoZ, for example, were frequent speakers. The first relied on naturalist collections brought to Switzerland by Swiss *émigrés* from places like the Dutch East Indies and his work gave a critical impetus to the scientific discourse on a "tropical origin of the Alps" that mirrored a colonialist civilizational narrative.⁶⁴ The second drew comparisons between the "savages" of Africa, Siberia, or America and those of the poor or peasant populace in Europe in his ethnopsychological work to argue that only the "enlightened, educated" classes could rise to "intellectual freedom".⁶⁵ Beginning in the late 1880s, the programme increasingly featured lectures on "study trips" that Zurich-based scholars had undertaken into French, German, British, and Dutch colonies in Africa, Polynesia, Southeast and South Asia, or the Amazonas.⁶⁶ Swiss and/or private commercial and scholarly interests in extra-European territories met and could turn mutually beneficial in such fora. Anthropological or naturalist societies are often cited as case studies in this regard,⁶⁷ yet when considering disciplines like Indology, it becomes evident that humanistic societies and congregations were part of the same "Transimperial Bourgeoisie".

Indeed, a similar convergence of interest guided a recommendation to the Philosophical Faculty at UoZ in 1918 to create a Chair for Oriental Languages, focused on Modern Arabic, Turkish, and Islamic Studies. Schwyzer was one of three professors who wrote in support of the plan, arguing that knowledge of modern "Islamic" languages and culture would soon be of high importance for a city home to a "significant business class [*Kaufmannschaft*]". The professors underlined that such course offerings already existed in the trade hubs of Berlin, Hamburg, Vienna, and Paris.⁶⁸ The university commission approved and hired Jean Jacques a.k.a. Johann Jakob Hess of Solothurn, who had studied in Berlin and Strasburg and had served in the Survey Department of the British Government in Egypt.⁶⁹ As may be recalled, nine years later, the same body refused to create a chair focused on Indology for Abegg. This goes to show how decisions about the "usefulness" of knowledge in Orientalist sciences could certainly be influenced by the

64 B. C. Schär, On the Tropical Origins of the Alps: Science and the colonial imagination of Switzerland, 1700–1900, in: Purtschert/Fischer-Tiné (eds.), *Colonial Switzerland*, pp. 29–49.

65 C. Dejung, From Civilizing Missions to Racial Warfare: Class Conflicts and the Representation of the Colonial World in European Middle-Class Thought, in: C. Dejung/D. Motadel/J. Osterhammel (eds.), *The Global Bourgeoisie*, Princeton 2019, pp. 251–271, at 266.

66 See the list of lectures provided in Seferovic, *Die Zürcher Rathaus- und Aulavorträge*.

67 See A. Zangger, Patriotic Bonds and the Danger of Estrangement: Swiss Networks in Colonial South-East Asia, 1850–1930, in: Purtschert/Fischer-Tiné (eds.), *Colonial Switzerland*, pp. 91–109, at 98–99.

68 Protokoll des Regierungsrates des Kantons Zürich. 1. Januar bis 31. Dezember 1918./Aktum Donnerstag, den 28. Februar 1918, vorm./Universität, [außerordentliche] Professur und Wahl, Zürich (1918). Staatsarchiv des Kantons Zürich, MM 3.32 RRB 1918/0509.

69 Ibid. See also A. Weibel, Hess, Johann Jakob, in: *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* (HLS) (2011), <https://hls-dhss.ch/de/articles/044730/2011-03-10/> (accessed 21 February 2021).

needs of Swiss “economic imperialism”. To this we may add that whatever could be “useful” in the field of Indian studies would at the time have been covered by Hans Wehrli (1871–1945), successor of the above-mentioned Otto Stoll to the Chair for Geography, who specialized in *Wirtschaftsgeographie* (Economic Geography) and *Völkerkunde* (Anthropology) of South Asia and was a “field scholar” who travelled to various colonized regions in South Asia during his life.⁷⁰ Abegg assisted Wehrli with the South Asian holdings of the Ethnological Collection at UoZ and used objects brought to Switzerland by Wehrli for illustrative purposes in his classes.⁷¹ Besides the transnational webs in which the early Indologists at UoZ were embedded in, local cross-disciplinary and extra-academic webs of class-based belonging thus also shaped the personal and professional worlds of Schweizer-Sidler, Kaegi, Schwyzer, and Abegg.

5. Sanskrit Roots in the Swiss German *Idiotikon*: Dialectology and Indology in Switzerland

All four of the early representatives of Indology at UoZ were embedded in Zurich’s cosmopolitan bourgeoisie in manifold ways: Schweizer-Sidler was a member of the prestigious Antiquarian Society and a co-founder of the Swiss Association of Gymnasium Teachers; Kaegi occupied important posts at the university, the church, and on the city’s education board, all while “cultivat[ing] noble conviviality” in the Zurich Men’s Choir;⁷² Schwyzer held memberships and lectures in the Society for German Language, the Antiquarian Society, and Zurich’s *Gelehrten Gesellschaft* (Society of the Learned); Abegg, finally, was involved in the Geographic-Ethnographic Society, the Psychology Club, and the Swiss Society for Asian Studies. Yet one association looms larger than others in the lives of the early Zurich Indologists: the Association for the Swiss German Dictionary (*Verein für das Schweizerdeutsche Wörterbuch*, heretofore referred to as “the Association”). Its goal, as outlined in a public appeal to the population of Switzerland in 1862, was to “collect” Swiss German words in a dictionary (an *Idiotikon*) that would “preserve” these dialects before they disappeared or became “soiled” through assimilation to High German. The call was signed by the governing committee of the newly established Association, with Heinrich Schweizer-Sidler listed as the first name.⁷³

Schweizer-Sidler stayed involved in the *Idiotikon* project for the rest of his life. He encouraged and supported its founder, Friedrich Staub, and advertised the undertaking

70 A. Steinmann, Hans J. Wehrli, in: *Mitteilungen der Geographisch-Ethnographischen Gesellschaft Zürich* 42, pp. 5–11.

71 Dübler, *Erinnerungen*, p. 86; E. Abegg, *Die Indiensammlung der Universität Zürich*, in: *Mitteilungen der Geographisch-Ethnographischen Gesellschaft Zürich* 35 (1934/35), pp. 1–172; Abegg, Emil, geb. 11.1.1885, *indische Philologie*, allg. Sprachwissenschaft/Frequenzverzeichnis der Vorlesungen von Herrn Privatdozent Professor Dr. Emil Abegg, vom Sommersemester 1940 an. Universitätsarchiv Zürich, AB.1.0002.

72 E. Schwyzer, Adolf Kaegi. Geb. 30 September 1849, gest. 14. Februar 1923, in: *Jahresbericht über die Fortschritte der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* 206 (1925), pp. 61–85, at 67.

73 Haas, *Das Wörterbuch*, pp. 17–25.

publicly.⁷⁴ The affiliation between dialectology and Indo-Germanic linguistics in Zurich did not end with Schweizer-Sidler: Kaegi volunteered to “collect words” “from within the living speech of the people [*des Volkes*] in his home area” as a high school student. After obtaining his PhD, he worked in the *Idiotikon*’s Zurich office and became a member and eventually president of the Association’s board.⁷⁵ Schwyzer worked full time as editor for the *Idiotikon* for fourteen years, also undertaking field trips to alpine Switzerland and northern Italy in the service of word collection. He went part-time after his promotion to full professor in 1912 and remained reviewing editor after his move to Germany in 1927. He authored many entries and was a close associate of the *Idiotikon*’s editor-in-chief Albert Bachmann.⁷⁶ Emil Abegg wrote his doctoral dissertation at UoZ with said Bachmann on “The Sounds of the *Mundart* of Urseren” (1910).⁷⁷ His stint as editor at the *Idiotikon* office, which began right afterwards, only lasted for two years, before Abegg decided to dedicate his career entirely to Indology.⁷⁸

The work of these scholars for the *Idiotikon* draws attention to the entanglement of early Indology in Switzerland with nationalism. Although conceived explicitly as a “scientific” project, in the popular imagination and outward self-fashioning the *Idiotikon* was primarily a “national work” (*Nationalwerk*). The public appeal of 1862 called it a “national monument [...] in which the way of thinking, the history, the customs and culture of at least the entire German Switzerland shall mirror themselves”.⁷⁹ The *Idiotikon* thus constituted one of a number of “national monuments” – both physical and ideological – raised in Switzerland during the second half of the nineteenth century, a crucial time for nation-building efforts in the young nation state.⁸⁰ In a plea for financial assistance to the Swiss Federal Council in 1873, co-authored by Schweizer-Sidler, the Association went as far as to argue that Swiss German dialects constituted a matter of “political sovereignty and independence”:

74 See H. Schweizer-Sidler, Ueber unsere Mundarten und ein Wörterbuch derselben Vortrag gehalten in der antiquarischen Gesellschaft in Zürich den 8. Januar 1881, Zürich 1881.

75 Schwyzer, Adolf Kaegi, pp. 69–70.

76 Debrunner, † Eduard Schwyzer. My thanks go to Christoph Landolt from the Swiss *Idiotikon* for sharing his valuable knowledge on this topic with me.

77 *Mundart*, meaning “mouth type”, was and still is used to designate the German dialects spoken in Switzerland; they are distinguished from the *Schriftsprache*, the written (Standard) German.

78 P. Horsch, In memoriam Emil Abegg: 11.1.1885–12.2.1962, in: *Asiatische Studien. Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asien-Gesellschaft = Études asiatiques: revue de la Société Suisse-Asie* 15 (1962) 1–2, pp. 81–85, at 81.

79 H. Schweizer-Sidler et al., Aufruf betreffend Sammlung eines Schweizerdeutschen Wörterbuchs, Zürich (1862), p. 2; See also I. Werlen, ‘... unter Beihülfe aus allen Kreisen des Schweizervolkes’ – das *Idiotikon* als ‘nationales Wörterbuch’, in: 150 Jahre Schweizerisches *Idiotikon*: Beiträge zum Jubiläumskolloquium in Bern, 15. Juni 2012, Bern 2013, pp. 47–57.

80 For example, in 1881, the same year that saw the publication of the first volume of the *Idiotikon*, the anniversary of Switzerland’s “founding date” on the 1st of August 1291 was celebrated as “National Day” for the first time. Ten years later, the construction of a national museum (*Landesmuseum*) in Zurich was decided and the national library opened shortly thereafter in Bern. Amongst many others, see: O. Zimmer, Competing memories of the nation: Liberal historians and the reconstruction of the Swiss past 1870–1900, in: *Past & Present* 168 (2000) 1, pp. 194–226.

*Our Swiss Mundarten are [...] by no means simple deformities [...] of the contemporary so-called high German language; they rather have their rightful historical place as branches of a language tree, which – equal to the High German one – grew out of a single root, but which autonomously grew linguistically independent in the course of the political and social detachment of Switzerland from the German Empire.*⁸¹

This not only illustrates to what extent Swiss nationalist discourse at the end of the nineteenth century was bound up with anxieties about a newly unified German neighbour, but also the importance of refuting the idea that Swiss German constituted a “corrupted” form of the high-brow variant spoken by the German *Bildungsbürgertum*. Building on the romanticist imagination, historians and philologists began to redefine *Mundart* as an “artefact of a long bygone time”, which was not only of sentimental, but also of *scientific* value as “a ‘window’ into the past”.⁸² Schweizer-Sidler described it as an “effervescent source” that granted scholars access to “all types of documents from earlier times”, which is reminiscent of the language he and Kaegi used to talk about the value of studying Indian texts.⁸³ All of this notwithstanding, actual etymological research resulted in different conclusions: in an article on “Indo-Germanic Remains in the Swiss German Vocabulary”, Schwyzer concluded there was little positive proof that *Mundart* had “preserved” elements of a Proto-Indo-Germanic “ur-language” and stated that “few Indo-Germanists [...] will be] searching for new etymologies in the Swiss German *Idiotikon*, and generally surely rightly so”, implying that Swiss German was not actually a “treasure trove” providing privileged access to predecessor languages.⁸⁴ The expertise of Schweizer-Sidler, Kaegi, and Schwyzer was useful to the *Idiotikon* and the broader effort to rehabilitate Swiss German dialects less in terms of actual research findings and more in terms of the symbolic authority they lent this nationalist project.

To illustrate how the status of Swiss German was of political concern beyond the narrow confines of a scholarly and political elite between Zurich and Bern, let us briefly return to the International Congress of Orientalists at Geneva in 1894. There, in his opening speech, Naville – a French-speaking professor of Egyptology (concerned with archaeological, not philological, artefacts) in a French-speaking Swiss city – held a passionate plea in defense of Swiss *Mundart* in front of the prestigious international audience:

But do not close your ears to the German of the Swiss, don't even shrug it off, as it is for us a tradition of the past, a heritage that we seek to conserve. [...] You must agree that this energetic language – that which you call ‘coarse’ [derb] in German, is suitable for the rawness of our mountains and the harsh life that those who inhabit them live. And above all, as I am speaking to philologists, remember that if the Germanic apostle Ulfilas

81 H. Schweizer-Sidler/K. Thomann, An den hohen Bundesrath der schweiz. Eidgenossenschaft, Zurich (1873), p. 4.

82 Ruoss, Schweizerdeutsch und Sprachbewusstsein, p. 147.

83 Schweizer-Sidler, Ueber unsere Mundarten, p. 4.

84 E. Schwyzer, Ein indogermanischer Rest im schweizerdeutschen Wortschatz, in: J. Friedrich (ed.), Stand und Aufgaben der Sprachwissenschaft: Festschrift für Wilhelm Streitberg, Heidelberg 1924, pp. 344–350, at 344.

[...] came back to preach in our middle [...] it would likely be a Bernese peasant who would understand him best.⁸⁵

6. Conclusion

The “insertion” of Swiss German into the genealogical tree of the Indo-Germanic language family was a specifically Swiss reading of a paradigm that owes its existence to European overseas colonialism. Territorial expansion provided European powers as well as political entities on the margins of colonizing Europe access to historical, textual, and palaeontological sources that expanded popular historical consciousness beyond biblical sources and regions. Out of this twofold expansion emerged various efforts to hierarchically categorize the world in relation to a universal teleology of civilizational development with central and northern Europe at the helm. This Eurocentric ordering of the world always also included knowledge production about entities within Europe – usually in the form of an “urban discourse about non-urban worlds, and a lettered, bourgeois discourse about non-lettered, peasant worlds”.⁸⁶ Previous studies on natural history as well as *Völkerkunde* and *Volkskunde* (anthropology and folklore studies) have shown how in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Switzerland, the use of “tropical” knowledge to advance understanding of the “primeval Alps” (and vice-versa) was a well-established approach.⁸⁷ The connection between Indology and Swiss German dialectology shows that comparative historical linguistics is another field where Swiss national identity construction interlinked with broader European discourses about the world as seen through “imperial eyes”.

Categories of difference that were often employed in colonial contexts were projected onto the “ancient” and “raw” *Mundarten* of Switzerland: these seemingly existed in an ahistorical, asocial limbo under constant threat from the forces of modernization. This romanticist/colonialist trope “denied coevalness”⁸⁸ to Swiss German, but it was also a tool to disprove the dialects’ alleged inferiority to High German. Schweizer-Sidler, Kaegi, Schwyzer, and Abegg, the four men that I have somewhat anachronistically identified as the first “Indologists” of Zurich, are representative of a turn-of-the-century “Switzerland [that was participating] in the construction of a European, imperial order of knowledge”.⁸⁹ They were four of few acknowledged experts on Indo-Germanic historical linguistics in German-speaking Switzerland of their time. As authoritative figures in the

85 Actes du dixième Congrès international des orientalistes, pp. 60–61.

86 M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation*, New York 1992, pp. 34–35.

87 Schär, *On the Tropical Origins of the Alps*; P. Harries, *From the Alps to Africa: Swiss missionaries and the rise of anthropology*, in: *Ordering Africa: Anthropology, European Imperialism, and the Politics of Knowledge*, Manchester 2007, pp. 201–224.

88 The phrase goes back to J. Fabian, *Time and Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, New York, NY 1983; for a recent discussion of the transposition of this concept onto ‘Alpine’ populations in Switzerland, see Schär, *On the Tropical Origins of the Alps*.

89 B. C. Schär, *Bauern und Hirten reconsidered: Umriss der ‘erfundenen Schweiz’ im imperialen Raum*, in: Purtschert et al., *Postkoloniale Schweiz*, pp. 315–331, at 322.

elite society of cosmopolitan Zurich, these philologists lent their expertise and names to the *Idiotikon* and in the process provided scientific authority to this “book of spells” that was to unearth the “heretofore unnoticed treasure” of Swiss German dialects by transforming them from “alleged coal” into “pure gold”.⁹⁰

The combination of a “patriotic” interest in Swiss German dialectology with “scientific” activity in Indo-Germanic linguistics and Indian philology reflects the multiple, overlapping frames of reference that structured the social and intellectual worlds of Schweizer-Sidler, Kaegi, Schwyzer, and Abegg. While they all took pride in their local rootedness and national patriotism, they were equally shaped by the transimperial connections that shaped Zurich as well as cross-border disciplinary networks in Orientalist studies. To conclude from the relative non-usefulness of the Zurich Indologists’ knowledge for Swiss overseas interests and their “armchair habitus” that their work and life were untouched by the world-savvy Zurich bourgeoisie’s imperial connections and colonialist preconceptions would be imprudent at best. No matter how close the four scholars came to embodying the scientific persona of the unworldly armchair philologist, international congresses and the cosmopolitan congregations of bourgeois Zurich were part and parcel of their personal and professional worlds. It is where they met scholars with whom could correspond, share literature, or exchange thoughts.

It is therefore important to consider and remember that these were also spaces infused with white supremacist, patriarchal, and colonialist ideas of what constitutes knowledge or who is an appropriate “subject” and who an appropriate “object” of study. The organisers and members of the International Orientalist Congress, for example, often underlined the congress’ intercultural and collaborative character. Yet, whether scholars from “the Orient” could participate and their scholarship should be considered of scientific value were highly charged questions in these settings, revealing the political dimension of “knowledge production” in the transnational, Eurocentric field of Orientalist studies in *fin-de-siècle* Europe. As the French archaeologist Baron de Baye put it succinctly in 1889:

*The Stockholm Congress was made up of two quite separate elements: the Orientalists, the Orientals. The first constituted the scholars whose studies have the Orient as object. The second formed the picturesque part [...].*⁹¹

Moreover, the “national schools” approach to the history of European Orientalism means that despite the abundance of studies on “German Indology”, they rarely pay detailed attention to developments in regions of German-speaking Europe that fall outside the territory of modern Germany. As this study as well as those on other “Orientalisms of the margins” have shown, however, when we consider the practical side of doing research in Orientalist “sciences” in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, national bounda-

90 Schweizer-Sidler et al., Aufruf, p. 2.

91 B. J. de Baye, Le congrès international des orientalistes à Stockholm, Paris 1889, p. 2. For an in-depth discussion, see Rabault-Ferrière, “Les grandes assises de l’orientalisme”.

ries recede into the background. In their stead surface close-knit webs of exchange, collaboration, and institutional mobility that connected German-speaking scholars across Europe with each other and beyond, with European colonial powers and those on the “margins” of that power.