

BOOK REVIEW

SERGEI STADNIKOV AND OTTO FRIEDRICH RICHTER'S LEGACY

Indrek Jürjo & Sergej Stadnikov (eds.). *Briefe aus dem Morgenland – Otto Friedrich von Richters Forschungsreise in den Jahren 1814–1816*. Hamburger Beiträge zur Geschichte des östlichen Europa 20. Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2013. 313 pp. ISBN 9783 8300 72898.

This year Sergei Stadnikov¹ would have been celebrating his 60th birthday, but unfortunately he died untimely on 26th June 2015. At the beginning of the volume, which is dedicated to the memory of Sergei Stadnikov, Dr. Mait Kõiv writes:

Sergei Stadnikov developed his scholarly interests in two principal directions. He was fascinated with the Old and Middle Kingdom literature and ideology, especially the questions of royalty, eternity and the universalist pretensions of the rulers. Besides the numerous articles on the subject, and the translation of 'The Story of Sinuhe', he completed the translations of Ptahhotepi elutarkus (The Instructions of Ptahhotep) and Amenemhet I õpetus oma pojale Senusertile (The Teaching of Amenemhet to His Son Senusert), all supplied with exhaustive commentaries. In the other direction, he researched the history of Egyptology and Ancient History in general, publishing on the development of Egyptian and Near Eastern studies in 19th century Estonia, particularly the University of Tartu, and on the discussion of Ancient History in Germany before the Second World War (Kämmerer & Kõiv & Sazonov 2016: IX).



One of Stadnikov's last monographs published outside Estonia was a book titled *Briefe aus dem Morgenland – Otto Friedrich von Richters Forschungsreise in den Jahren 1814–1816*. This monograph was compiled by historian Indrek Jürjo and Egyptologist Sergei Stadnikov, and is written in German. Unfortunately, Dr. Indrek Jürjo (1956–2009), one of the authors and compilers, died some years before the monograph was published.

All chapters of this book, comprising 313 pages, are built up in a logical way, being clearly structured in chronological order. It fits in the scope of Oriental studies (see *Some additional remarks*), containing a detailed introduction, exhaustive commentaries and notes that provide a historical overview of the life, research, and travels across the Middle East of the famous Baltic-German Orientalist Otto Friedrich von Richter (1791–1816) (Stadnikov 1991: 195–203; Stadnikow 2003: 125–161; Jürjo & Stadnikow 2007).

Despite his short life span (he died at the age of 24 in 1815), Otto Friedrich von Richter can be considered as an important researcher in the field of Oriental studies of his

time, especially Egyptology and Nubian studies. His studies concerning Ancient Nubian civilization, history, and culture were very important (see more in von Richter 1822).

Although this book consists mainly of von Richter's published letters written during his voyages through the Levant between 1814 and 1816, and the commentaries added by Sergei Stadnikov and Indrek Jürjo, it can also be classified as a monograph, because the authors' joint commentaries and analytic remarks provide a very good synopsis of von Richter's biography, voyages in the Middle East, and scientific research.

Firstly, in the "Biographische Einleitung", S. Stadnikov and I. Jürjo cover the origins and childhood of O. F. von Richter in Väimela (Võru County, Livland). Moving forth through O. F. von Richter's studies at several European universities, such as Moscow, Heidelberg, and private studies in Vienna (Austro-Hungarian Empire), Stadnikov and Jürjo estimate that von Richter's studies at those universities and in Vienna in the field of Oriental studies were very successful (p. 56).

Already at Moscow University (summer 1808 – spring 1809) student Otto F. von Richter showed his significant interest in the Middle East and ancient history, as well as classical and Oriental languages. After one academic year in Moscow, Richter decided to continue his education in Europe, in some prominent German university, and for that reason he chose Heidelberg, where he started studies in the autumn of 1809. At the University of Heidelberg, O. F. von Richter continued his studies in the Middle Eastern field; he also learned Arabic, Persian, and Turkish languages (pp. 26, 34). After his studies in Heidelberg, O. F. von Richter moved to Vienna. The period (1811–1813) that he spent there was a difficult time in Europe. When the whole Europe was engaged in Napoleonic wars (1799–1815) and destruction, Richter began his studies in Vienna, where he met famous Orientalist Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856), who became his mentor and teacher during his private studies in Vienna, which lasted approximately for two years. It is worth mentioning that at the beginning of the nineteenth century von Hammer-Purgstall, as Indrek Jürjo and Sergei Stadnikov opine, was probably a leading person and most prominent scholar in Oriental studies in German cultural space. Additionally, Richter visited different lectures and seminars at the University of Vienna. He studied oriental languages and other disciplines (pp. 34, 45).

When returning to Livland from Western European countries (Germany and Austria), Richter was already a highly educated Orientalist, having learned the Arabic language, Middle Eastern history and culture, as well as local Middle Eastern customs (p. 56). For a whole year, from the summer of 1813 until the summer of 1814, O. F. von Richter stayed at his home in Väimela. Unfortunately, this short period in Richter's life could be designated as the 'dark period', because we have practically no information about Richter's activity during that year. The only information we have is two of his letters addressed to the famous Orientalist Hammer-Purgstall: one of them from Tartu (Dorpat), dated 25th September (7th October), and the other one from Väimela, dated 3rd June (25th June) 1814 (p. 56).

In 1814 Otto Friedrich von Richter began his voyage to the Middle East, and it turned out to be quite successful in the field of Egyptology and Nubian studies. In the Middle East O. F. von Richter collected quite a good collection of oriental manuscripts and artefacts (among them Egyptian mummies, statuettes, and scarabs), hieroglyphic texts, etc., took notes, and kept a diary. Together with another traveller, Sven Fredrik Lidman,² O. F. von Richter hoped to present the results and analyses of their joint

research to the public in Europe and in Russia after their return, and also continue research later on. Unfortunately, von Richter unexpectedly died of a serious disease in Izmir, while en route through the Ottoman Empire, when returning to Europe from his travel in the Middle East on the 31st of August 1816.

In the introductory chapter, Stadnikov and Jürjo provide the readers also with a good and detailed review of von Richter's scientific legacy, which was sent by the Russian embassy in Istanbul to Richter's father in Livland after the scholar's death. His father, Otto Magnus von Richter, decided to donate his son's legacy to the University of Dorpat Library and to the University of Dorpat Art Museum. It included not only his coin collections, personal books, notes, manuscripts, diaries, and annotations, but also Egyptian mummies – children's mummies, a dog's and an ibis's mummy among them – as well as other artefacts, such as statuettes, scarabs, and hieroglyphic texts (p. 66). At the end of this chapter, the authors present detailed written commentaries and analyses.

The second chapter of the book is titled "Briefe aus den Jahren 1814–1816", and consists mainly of letters written by O. F. von Richter to his father Otto Magnus Johann von Richter (1755–1826) and to his mother, Anna Auguste Charlotte von Richter (1770–1823). In these letters, von Richter conveys his impressions, speaks about his adventures as well as the results of his research during his trip to the Orient in the years 1814 through to 1816. This section is accompanied by profound commentaries and analyses made by Stadnikov and Jürjo and forms the core of the book – a capacious chapter comprising 175 of some of its best pages. This chapter consists of Richter's 33 letters to his parents, written during his travels to Russia, Ukraine, and the Middle East in the years 1814–1816, accompanied by very profound and detailed commentaries, with analysis done by I. Jürjo and S. Stadnikov (pp. 221–262). In these detailed commentaries Jürjo and Stadnikov explain definitions and geographic locations, historical events that took place in Richter's lifetime, and other historical events that were mentioned in Richter's letters. They also give a good and detailed overview of different historical figures (among them diplomats, scholars, Orientalists, friends, family members, and teachers of Otto F. v. Richter, etc.). For example, Stadnikov and Jürjo provide quite a long commentary about ancient Edfu (Kurth 1994) in Egypt (pp. 242–244), and about the Valley of the Kings, which O. F. von Richter visited in June 1815.

However, there are some small drawbacks as regards this book. For example, it lacks cartographic material presenting the Middle Eastern region at the beginning of the 19th century, which could provide the readers with an overall picture of the physical, cultural, and political geography of the time and places where von Richter travelled. Along with it, the authors could also have included a map showing the areas of Egypt and Nubia, enriched with a short overview of the history of Ancient Egypt and Nubia, as well as chronology.

To sum up, such a study of the life and activities of O. F. von Richter is important, because von Richter was the pioneer of Oriental studies in Estonia and his unique collection of manuscripts as well as artefacts have become important objects of research for many years.

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Notes

- ¹ Sergei Stadnikow was born in Pärnu on 20th July 1956.
- ² Sven Erik Lidman (1784–1845) was a Swedish Orientalist, traveller, and diplomat. He was Associate Professor of Arabic Languages at the University of Uppsala and in 1811 he became a preacher in Istanbul.