

Preface

This volume is based on the papers presented at the 41st annual meeting of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference (PIAC), held at Majvik Castle, Kyrkslätt, close to Helsinki, Finland, on July 5 to 10, 1998. Following the meetings of 1963 and 1976 this was the third time that the PIAC gathered in Finland. The meeting brought together nearly 90 active participants, who came from as many as 18 countries of Europe, Asia, and America. Perhaps most importantly, there were many participants who represented the Altaic regions and federal republics of China and Russia, including Inner Mongolia, Buryatia, Kalmykia, Tuva, Khakassia, Altai, and Bashkortostan.

The meeting was dedicated to the memory of the great Finnish scholar Gustaf John Ramstedt, widely respected as the founder of modern Altaic comparative studies. It happened that the year 1998 marked the 125th anniversary of Ramstedt's birth, and also the 100th anniversary of the start of his first Mongolian expedition. With the kind help of Ramstedt's living descendants it was possible to arrange an exhibition dedicated to his memory at the municipal museum of Ekenäs, Ramstedt's birth town on the southern coast of Finland. The exhibition, containing a selection of Ramstedt's personal items, field notes, photographs, and original publications, was inaugurated on July 8 during an excursion visit to Ekenäs by the PIAC participants. From Ekenäs the excursion took the participants to Hangö at the southernmost tip of Finland, where the evening was spent in the former summer residence of another great Finnish scholar and traveller, Marshall C. G. E. Mannerheim.

It was decided already prior to the meeting that the conference volume would be focussed on a special theme. The theme was initially formulated as *Ancient Writing in the Altaic World*, but since it turned out to be difficult to hold to the chronological delimitation, the present volume bears simply the title *Writing in the Altaic World*. The presented selection therefore contains also some papers devoted to contemporary aspects of writing and script. Moreover, the concept of writing has been understood rather broadly by the editors in order to make space for as many

contributions as possible, without, however, compromising the basic thematic coherence of the volume.

Of the 29 papers included in this volume, all but one were originally presented at the meeting. One contribution, by A. A. Burykin, who was unable to participate himself, has been added due to its connection with the general theme. Unfortunately, several conference papers of good quality had to be left outside of this volume because of their different thematic focus. Some of these papers will appear separately in periodical publications, including the *Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne* and the *Studia Orientalia*.

Before publication, the original texts of the papers have undergone revisions and editorial changes, the extent of which varies from case to case. However, no full uniformity in technical matters has been attempted by the editors, leaving the notational and transcriptional conventions of the authors in most cases intact. This concerns also the transcription of major languages with non-Roman scripts, such as Russian, Chinese, and Written Mongol. Problems of transcription and Romanization were discussed on many occasions during the meeting, and they are also the specific topic of some conference papers. The editors feel that the extant diversity of notational conventions is still too great to make any uniform solutions possible. Most participants of the meeting would, however, agree on that the need of uniformity is urgent.

On the occasion of the publication of this volume, the editors would like to thank all authors and participants, as well as all those others whose generous help and financial contributions made the conference possible and successful. Among the latter, the two principal supporters of the meeting were the Academy of Finland and the Kone Foundation, Helsinki. Special grants for the organization of the Ramstedt memorial exhibition and the visit of the participants to Ekenäs and Hangö were given by the Finno-Ugrian Society and Helsingin Sanomat Publishing House. In view of the Turkic dimension of the meeting, and in recognition of the Finnish tradition of Altaic Studies, a grant was also kindly given by the Islamic Community of the Finnish Tatars. The editors are particularly grateful to the Daher family, who contributed to the conference both financially, in the form of a personal donation by Dr. Ymär Daher, and administratively, thanks to the constant help and advice of Mr. Okan Daher, a member of the organizing committee.

The technical infrastructure for the organizing committee was provided by the Institute for Asian and African Studies of the University of Helsinki. Of equal importance has been the positive stand of the Finnish Oriental Society, in whose old and prestigious *Studia Orientalia* the

proceedings are now published. On the more festive side, the conference participants were offered an official reception hosted by Mr. Markku Linna on behalf of the Finnish Ministry of Education. Another wonderful reception, in an outdoor environment, was kindly hosted by the municipal office of Ekenäs on the occasion of the inauguration of Ramstedt's memorial exhibition.

Finally, it is the sad duty of the editors to announce the death of Professor Pentti Aalto, the *Grand Old Man* of Finnish Altaic Studies, as well as the foremost disciple and posthumous editor of G. J. Ramstedt. While not able to participate himself in the Majvik meeting, Aalto was still quietly working at the time of the conference and sent the organizers the following message, written in English and signed at his summer residence in Västanfjärd on June 17, 1998:

«At the 1957 Congress of Orientalists in Munich there also was a possibility for the Altaistic studies to be presented. The section for these studies had, however, so few participants that the President, Professor von Gabain, asked me to improvise a 'lecture' about my travel in Mongolia earlier that summer. The visitors in Mongolia from the western countries were relatively few in those times. In spite of the relatively few participants, Professor Walther Heissig made in the section a proposal that there should be a special 'gremium' for the Altaistic studies. Although the Congress seemed rather to speak against any such need, the majority seconded his proposal. Heissig during the following winter conjured up money as by magic, so that he was able to call the first session of the 'Gremium', viz. of the PIAC, in the Max Planck Institute of the Mainz Academy of Sciences. Though there in the beginning was a lot of discussion about the name of the new PIAC, viz. was it possible [to] use the adjective 'Altaic', though nobody wanted any more to place the original home of these peoples in the Altai, or was it permissible to speak of a 'permanent' Conference, this name has been used for forty years. The number of participants has continuously grown, and at the same time, the number of publications and journals also has grown so that one does not remember even the most important among them.»

A few months after writing this message, on November 30, 1998, Professor Aalto passed away. In him the PIAC community lost one of its founding members. Aalto was probably the last great scholar who had personal reminiscences of G. J. Ramstedt. Although Altaic studies lost its official representation in the Finnish academic structure already with Ramstedt, Aalto took care of the heritage and cultivated the field until a new generation of Finnish Altaists emerged.

Before the publication of the proceedings, another message came on July 10, 1999, telling of the death of Dr. Ymär Daher, a student of Martti Räsänen and the foremost Turkologist among the Finnish Tatars. Daher

was an active participant of PIAC meetings and one of the organizers of the previous meetings held in Finland.

We dedicate this volume to the memory of these two late colleagues and PIAC participants, Professor Pentti Aalto (1917–1998) and Dr. Ymär Daher (1910–1999).

Helsinki, December 2, 1999

Juha Janhunen

Volker Rybatzki