

***EX ORIENTE LUMINA***  
***HISTORIAE VARIAE MULTIETHNICAE***

**Festskrift tillägnad Juha Janhunen  
på hans 61. födelsedag 12.2.2013**



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**Edited by**

**Tiina Hyytiäinen, Lotta Jalava,  
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## FINNISH STUDENTS OF ORIENTAL PHILOLOGY IN ST PETERSBURG

*Klaus Karttunen*

Travel for study has always been one of the major reasons for travelling. Even when there were competent teachers at home, a foreign degree had its fascination and travelling as such was quite rightly considered educational. In ancient times, the Romans completed their rhetorical studies in Athens or Rhodes. Students from all over the Islamic world crowded the schools of Baghdad and Cairo. Ancient Indians headed for Taxila or Varanasi. In Central and Northern Europe, the so-called “Grand Tour” was the necessary conclusion to the studies of scholars and the nobility in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This lure of study travel was also known in Finland.

In the Catholic Middle Ages, the great majority of the few Finnish students seeking higher education went to the ancient and venerable University of Paris.<sup>1</sup> This was abruptly stopped at the time of the Reformation. Together with Sweden, Finland adopted the Lutheran creed, while Paris remained Catholic and was thus considered completely unacceptable. Then it became most natural to go to Wittenberg, where Luther himself and some of his closest collaborators were teaching. In the seventeenth century, the Lutheran universities of Northern Germany were still in fashion, but now especially noblemen started to challenge confessional prejudices by visiting the Netherlands, England, and even France.

The University of Finland was founded in Turku in 1640 and remained the sole university in the country until 1918. In 1828, it moved to Helsinki and thus became the University of Helsinki.<sup>2</sup> After 1640, it became customary to commence studies at Turku, but those who had money and connections concluded them in some other university. In the eighteenth century, these study tours usually included Germany, the Netherlands, and France. Some were content with just the other native universities, Uppsala, Lund, and (until 1710) Tartu. A special

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1 A few selected Prague or Leipzig instead, especially around 1400, when the war made Paris practically impossible to reach. See Nuorteva 1997.

2 When Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy ruled by the Russian emperor in 1809, the capital was soon (1812) moved to Helsinki as the emperor saw Turku as too close to Sweden, which had formerly ruled the country. The university remained in Turku, but after a disastrous fire devastated much of Turku in 1827, the decision was made to also move the university.

case was Greifswald in the part of Pomerania ruled by Sweden from 1648–1810. This old university thus offered the opportunity to study in a German university without leaving one's native country.

The years 1808/09 meant a complete change in the position of Finland. What had been just a part of Sweden became an autonomous Grand Duchy ruled by the Russian emperor. The change was reflected in many areas. The Bishop of Turku became the Archbishop of Finland and the University of Turku became the University of Finland or the Imperial Alexander University. Up to this point, the university had had close ties with Uppsala, but soon they started to loosen. The move of the university almost 200 km to the east also meant that Uppsala became physically more distant and St Petersburg closer. It also became customary to elect a member of the imperial family, often the heir apparent, as the Chancellor of the University.

Even before this, there had been some casual cases of scholarly contacts between Finland and St Petersburg. The founding of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in 1724 by Peter the Great had immediately given St Petersburg an important place on the scholarly map of Europe, while the good salaries and the relative freedom of research offered by the Academy attracted many famous scholars to the new capital of Russia. The publications of the Academy were received and also read in Turku.

The first Finnish member of the Academy was the astronomer and mathematician **Johan Anders Lexell** (1740–1784). He started his career in Turku, but obtained a position in St Petersburg as early as 1768. In St Petersburg, he collaborated with Leonhard Euler and published some important works before his career was cut short by his early death. At the Academy, he worked as *observator* and Professor and became a full Academician in 1783.

The next case already comes close to my subject, Asian Studies. After a brief period at Turku, **Erik Laxman** (1738–1796) started his career as a tutor near St Petersburg in 1760. Here he soon attracted the attention of the Academy with his botanical studies, which he continued in 1763–70 in Siberia, serving as a Lutheran minister in Barnaul. In 1770–1773, he represented economy and chemistry at the Academy, but did not thrive in the atmosphere of the capital. For a while he was in disfavour and had to work as a local petty official (*ispravnik*) in Siberia. In 1784 he obtained a permanent grant from the Academy for mineralogical investigations. Using Irkutsk as a base, he explored lands as far as the Lena and the Sea of Okhotsk. In addition to numeral botanical, zoological, and mineralogical studies he also made ethnographical observations among different peoples. He had a wide correspondence with many colleagues, including some of the most famous scholars of Europe (Kalm, Gadd, Porthan, and Mennander

in Turku, Vargentin and Linnaeus in Sweden, Diderot in France, and Pallas in Russia, to name just a few). His son was **Adam Laxman** (1766–18??), a naval officer, who helped his father in his research and led the first Russian expedition to Japan in 1790.

But now we must move on to the nineteenth century and restrict our survey to Oriental scholars. Starting with Alexander Amatus Thesleff (1778–1847) and Christian Steven (1781–1863), there were a number of Finnish military officers and officials in Russian service, who also gained reputation as scholars, but I shall concentrate on professional scholars. The first of them was **Anders Johan Sjögren** (1794–1855), who moved to the Russian capital soon after completing his MA at Turku in 1819. In the years 1824–1829, he travelled around Northern Russia and collected a great amount of scientific, historical, linguistic, and ethnographical materials concerning the local Finno-Ugrian peoples. The expedition was not financed by the Academy, but with a grant given by the Finnish government. In 1827 he became a corresponding member of the Academy, in 1829 Adjunct, in 1831 Extraordinary, and in 1844 full Academician. From 1834 onwards, he was also the librarian of the Academy.

Sjögren had problems with his eyes and in 1835 he followed the recommendation of doctors and took a leave for recovery in the Caucasus. However, here he soon again became engaged in fieldwork, resulting in the deterioration of his health but also in the first scholarly grammar and dictionary of the Iranian Ossetic language.<sup>3</sup> After his return from the Caucasus in 1838, his failing health did not permit further strenuous fieldwork, although he twice visited Livonia and studied the local Finno-Ugrian minorities. His work in St Petersburg as an organizer of further field research became more important. He was also known as a dependable supporter of Finnish scholars and students arriving in the city.

The first to come to St Petersburg with the definite intention of undertaking Oriental Studies there was **Gabriel Geitlin** (1804–1871). He had originally been interested in Russian and studied the language for one year in Moscow in 1826–1827. In 1826–1834, he taught Russian at the University of Finland, but when it was decided that the new chair of Russian would only be open to native Russians, he decided to change his field. The major achievement of this period was the then largest Russian–Swedish dictionary (*Ryskt och svenskt handlexikon*, 1–2. 1833–1834).

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<sup>3</sup> *Osetinskaja grammatika / Iron a vzagahur das ist ossetische Sprachlehre*. St Petersburg 1844 (more than one thousand pages, including a dictionary) and “Ossetische Studien mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die indo-europäischen Sprachen. 1. Die Selbstlaute”, *Mémoires de l'Académie Imperiale* 6:7, 1848: 571–652.

The Professor of Oriental Languages at Helsinki, Hans Henrik Fattenborg, retired in 1831 and there was no fully qualified successor available. Geitlin knew some Hebrew and Arabic, probably also Persian,<sup>4</sup> and so he decided to try his luck. In St Petersburg, he concentrated on Persian under the guidance of F.-B. Charmoy and Mirza Topčibašev.<sup>5</sup> The result of his stay in St Petersburg in 1834 was a dissertation containing a specimen of the *Pandnāme* of Sa'dī with a Latin translation (*Specimen academicum Pandnameh sive Librum Consiliorum Scheich Musliheddin Saadi Schirasiensis Persice interpretatione Latina notisque illustratum sistens*. 56 + 24 pp. Helsinki 1835). This was considered sufficient and Geitlin then became the Professor of Oriental Languages at Helsinki (1834–1849). In his teaching, he had to concentrate on Hebrew, but Arabic and Persian were in the curriculum as often as there were any students interested in them. He also published several studies on Persian literature and a grammar of Persian in Latin. Finally, he applied for and got the chair of exegetics in the Theological Faculty, perhaps to make space for his brilliant student, G.A. Wallin, although the post in theology also meant a much better salary.

In 1840, the University of St Petersburg made an important and at that time, I think, rather unusual decision to hire an Arabic scholar to teach Arabic at the university. The Egyptian Šayḥ Muḥammad 'Ayyād al-Ṭanṭawī (1810–1861) had already achieved some reputation as a scholar and writer. He arrived in Russia in 1840, never to see his homeland again, except during a short visit in 1844. He was duly promoted to a full professorship in 1847, but we learn that he was not very happy in the Russian capital. His Russian colleagues tended to ignore him and he had only a few students. Among them, however, the Finns seem rather prominent.

The first and foremost is, of course, **Georg August Wallin** (1811–1852). He was born in the Åland Islands and came to Helsinki in 1829 to study Oriental Languages and other subjects at the university. He was certainly talented, but apparently had some difficulties in finding his own line as he took no less than seven years to complete his MA. We know that he was also interested in Finno-Ugrian studies and he was apparently one of the few students attending the Sanskrit classes given by the Associate Professor Wallenius since 1835 (on him, see Karttunen 1997a). In the end, however, he gave his undivided attention to Arabic, supplemented by the other main languages of Islam, Persian, and Turkish. What was exceptional in those times was that Wallin was especially

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4 Carl Gustaf Sjöstedt (1809–1834) had taught the language in the 1820s. See Halén 1990: 46.

5 François-Bernard Charmoy (1793–1868/69), French Persian scholar, Professor of Persian in St Petersburg in 1817 or 1822–1835, and Mirza Topčibašev (1790–1868), of Azeri origin, his colleague.

interested in the spoken language, and his dissertation of 1839 discussed the difference between modern and classical Arabic (*De praecipua inter hodiernam Arabum linguam et antiquam differentia*, 47 pp. Helsinki 1839). (Aalto: 1971: 37 ff.)

In Sveaborg Fortress outside Helsinki, there was a Russian garrison and there he found a Tatar Mullah with whom he could get some practice in languages. In 1840–1842, we find him in St Petersburg, where he conducted further studies under al-Ṭanṭāwī, Dorn, and Muhliniski.<sup>6</sup> It seems that he became a personal friend of al-Ṭanṭāwī, who later visited him in Helsinki in 1843. Another friend was Sjögren.

Wallin's great Arabian explorations in 1843–1849 do not interest us here. After them, he became Geitlin's successor as Professor, but died after two years in the middle of negotiations with British and Russian geographical societies about extensive new explorations.

We must not forget that also the great pioneer of Uralic studies, **Matthias Alexander Castrén** (1813–1852), had close ties to St Petersburg. His great expeditions in Northern Russia and Siberia were financed by the Imperial Academy and organized by Sjögren. In fact, the original idea was that Sjögren himself should go, but his failing health changed the plans and young Castrén was selected instead. The choice was lucky indeed, and in 1841–1844 and 1845–1849 Castrén collected an enormous amount of linguistic, ethnographical, and even archaeological material among the Uralic and Altaic peoples of Northern Russia and Siberia. He died young, in May 1852, almost half a year before Wallin, leaving the major part of his collections unpublished. Anton Schiefner undertook to edit them on behalf of the Academy and the twelve volumes of the *Nordische Reisen und Forschungen* appeared in 1853–1862.<sup>7</sup> The work contains more than 4,000 pages, but some of the material still remains unpublished.

When Wallin's death in 1852 again emptied the chair of Oriental Languages at Helsinki, the previous situation of 20 years before repeated itself: there was no competent successor to be found. Again, two young men from related fields, the Sanskritist Kellgren and the Greek scholar Lagus, decided to try their luck. **Herman Kellgren** (1822–1856) had started as a Sanskritist (and a national romantic poet), who studied Indology under Brockhaus at Leipzig and under Burnouf at Paris. He became an unsalaried Docent of Sanskrit at Helsinki, but

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6 Bernhard von Dorn (1805–1881) German Academician and Persian scholar, from 1826 in Russia; Anton Osipovič Muhliniski (Polish Antoni Muhliński; 1808–1877) Polish Professor of Turkish at St Petersburg University.

7 Anton Schiefner (1817–1877), Estonian-German Indologist and Tibetologist, Academician in St Petersburg.

the chances of getting a better position were meagre (Karttunen 1994 and bibliography; 1991).

Kellgren had learned some Arabic and Persian as a student, so he decided to go to St Petersburg to deepen his knowledge. In the spring of 1853, he studied Arabic with Wallin's old teacher, al-Ṭanṭāwī, Persian with Mirza Kazem-Bek, and Turkish with Anton Muhlinski. He became friends with Schiefner – there are 19 long letters written by Schiefner to Kellgren in 1853–1856 (and eight to his widow in 1856–1863) preserved in the National Library of Finland (Karttunen 1991). After one term, Kellgren moved on to Leipzig to benefit from the lectures of the famous Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer in Arabic.<sup>8</sup> These studies resulted in a two-part dissertation about pronominal endings in the three main languages of Islam and, after much discussion, secured him the chair in Helsinki. However, his time was destined to be almost as short as Wallin's as he died two years later.

After Kellgren's unexpected death, he was succeeded by his former rival **Wilhelm Lagus** (1821–1909). At the time of Wallin's death, Lagus had been in Athens, after a period of fieldwork dealing with the Greek remains and living Greeks of Southern Ukraine and the Crimea. In order to qualify himself in Oriental languages, he went to Vienna and studied Turkish and Arabic under Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall and Jakob Goldenthal. He never studied in St Petersburg, but he had close ties with several colleagues there. In the 1990s, I found in the archives of the Academy a letter in Latin, written in 1854, where Lagus described to the Academician Dorn his Crimean explorations and the difficult process of filling the chair. I published the text and a Finnish translation of this letter in the Festschrift of my teacher Pentti Aalto (Karttunen 1997b).

**Ernst August Strandman** (1832–1900) was a student of Lagus and then his successor. Soon after his MA examination, he went to St Petersburg and studied there in 1860–1863 and 1864–1865, mainly under Chwolson and Kelzi.<sup>9</sup> His doctoral dissertation of 1868 consisted of a critical analysis of the manuscript of an Arabic work about literary history kept in St Petersburg.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, his promising career was soon cut short by a severe eye disease. He could barely

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8 Mīrzā Muḥammed [Māmed] 'Alī Kazem-Bek (Russian Aleksandr Kasimovič Kazem-Bek; 1802–1879), Azerbeidžanian Oriental Scholar, Professor of Persian at St Petersburg; Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer (1801–1888), Professor of Arabic at Leipzig 1835–1888.

9 Chwolson or Daniil Avraamovič Hvol'son (1819/20–1910), a converted Jew from Lithuania; 'Abdallāh Kelzī (Fēdor Ivanovič Kel'zi; 1819 – St Petersburg 1912) a Catholic Armenian from Aleppo.

10 *De viris illustribus libro Arabico Tarjamāt al-mutaqaddamīna min al-šu'arā 'i commemoratis dissertatio*. 85 pp. Helsinki 1868. Both Wallin and Kellgren had also studied and published manuscripts kept in St Petersburg.

read any longer, but as there were no pensions at that time, he kept the chair and offered some teaching in a dark room.

Finally, I must take up some lesser names. The young Turkologist **Emil Hårdh** (1841–1919), a student of Lagus, continued his studies at St Petersburg and Kazan Universities and conducted some linguistic fieldwork among the Tatars of the Kazan area, but his scholarly career stopped after two articles and he became a schoolteacher. **Reinhold Tötterman** (1835–1907) was a Hebraist and Syriologist, who studied in St Petersburg (1866–1869) under Chwolson, later also in Leipzig. He was interested in Jewish traditions; in St Petersburg and on a trip to Lithuania, he contacted local Jewish communities. He then became the Professor of Old Testament Studies at Helsinki. **Karl Fredrik Eneberg** (1841–1876) studied Arabic in St Petersburg some months in 1870, but then went to Germany. Later, he moved from Arabic studies to Assyriology and died in Mosul at the very beginning of promising fieldwork. In St Petersburg, he had also looked for archival material about Laxman requested by his teacher Lagus, who was writing Laxman's biography (Lagus 1880).

Strandman was the last since, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the attraction of Germany became so great that St Petersburg could no longer compete. It is true that Finnish scholars – archaeologists (e.g. A.M. Tallgren), Finno-Ugrists (e.g. H. Paasonen) and natural scientists (e.g. A.K. Cajander) – made extensive field expeditions to various parts of Russia up to the time of the Revolution,<sup>11</sup> but the only ones still interested in studying in Russia were interested in Slavonic languages. Thus, the beginning of the twentieth century saw the entrée of the first generations of Finnish scholars of Slavonic and Russian, such as Jooseppi Julius Mikkola (1866–1946), Jalo Lahja Kalima (1884–1952), and Viljo Johannes Mansikka (1884–1947).

To conclude this brief survey, I would like to list a few Russian scholars who visited Finland. I have already mentioned that al-Ṭanṭāwī visited Wallin in Helsinki in 1843. The Academician Otto Nicolaus Böhtlingk (1815–1904), the famous Indologist, spent several summers in Finland in the 1860s.<sup>12</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Assyriologist Abraham Sarsowsky (1878–1914) lived a number of years in Wiborg and then moved to Italy. The Egyptologist Vladimir Vikentjeff (died 1960) spent many summers in Loviisa and occasion-

11 The funding for the majority of these expeditions came from Finland (or from Finnish organisations). The Imperial Academy financed at least the botanical expeditions of V.F. Brotherus to Transcaucasia in 1877 and 1881.

12 In Böhtlingk 2007, I found letters dated in Jollas (near Helsinki) in 1861, in Wendelä in 1862, in Leppelä in 1863 and 1864 and 1865, in Juustila in 1867 – all these near Wiborg (part of Finland until 1944).

ally visited Helsinki, but he seems to have had more friends among Steinerians than scholars. After the revolution he moved to Egypt. A few Kalmyk students spent their holidays in Finland assisting G.J. Ramstedt on his extensive Kalmyk dictionary (published much later as *Kalmückisches Wörterbuch*. Lexica SFU 3. 1935). The Mongolian scholar and friend of Ramstedt Andrej Rudnev (1878–1958) had a Finnish wife and thus visited Finland quite often. They happened to be on a visit to Wiborg in 1918 when the border was closed and he had to remain in Finland for the rest of his days (Janhunen 2004). Another Mongolist, Nicholas Poppe (1897–1991), spent his summers as a child in Parikkala in eastern Finland and became fluent in Finnish. His academic career started in St Petersburg and later on led him to Seattle.

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