


Compte-rendu

Hartmut Walravens, Agnes Stache-Weiske. *Der Linguist Anton Schiefner (1817–1879) und sein Netzwerk. Briefe an Emil Schlagintweit, Leo Reinisch, Franz v. Miklosich, Vatroslav Jagić, K. S. Veselovskij, Eduard Pabst, Vilhelm Thomsen und andere.* Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2020. 937 pp., ill. (Philosophisch-historische Klasse Sitzungsberichte, 908. Band; Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens, Nr. 105.) ISBN 978-3-7001-8397-6

Alexander Zorin
(Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

his book continues the series of volumes of letters composed by the well-known Saint Petersburg philologist Franz Anton (Russian: Anton Antonovich) Schiefner (1817–1879) to a broad circle of scholars who studied various fields of Oriental and European philology and history in the second half of the 19th century.¹ A Baltic German, Schiefner left his native Reval (presently, Tallinn, Estonia) for the capital of the Russian Empire to hear law but his interest in languages soon made him travel to Berlin where he mostly

¹ The previously published volumes* are: 1) «Freilich lag in den zu überwindenden Schwierigkeiten ein besonderer Reiz...». Briefwechsel der Sprachwissenschaftler Hans Conon von der Gabelentz, Wilhelm Schott und Anton Schiefner, 1834–1874. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2008. 210 S. (Sinologica Coloniensia 26.); 2) St. Petersburg und Livland — und die Entwicklung der estnischen Literatur. Anton Schiefner (1817–1879) und Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882) im Briefwechsel (1853–1879). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2013; 3) Anton Schiefner (1817–1879) und seine indologischen Freunde. Seine Briefe an die Indologen Albrecht Weber (1825–1901), Rudolf Roth (1821–1895) und William Dwight Whitney (1827–1894) sowie den Indogermanisten Adalbert Kuhn (1821–1881). Mit Anmerkungen, kleineren Arbeiten Schiefners und Register bearbeitet und herausgegeben von H. Walravens und A. Stache-Weiske. Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften 2015. 455 S. (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte 868.); 4) Anton Schiefner: Briefe und Schriftenverzeichnis. Briefe an Bernhard Jülg (1825–1886), Karl Ernst von Baer (1792–1876), Reinhold Köhler (1830–1892), Victor Hehn (1813–1890), August Friedrich Pott (1802–1887), Ernst Kuhn (1846–1920), Lorenz Diefenbach (1806–1883), Ernst Förstemann (1822–1906) und Karl Dzialzko (1842–1903). Ediert und herausgegeben von H. Walravens und A. Stache-Weiske. Wien: Österr. Akademie der Wissenschaften 2017. 530 S. (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte 884; Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens 94.). * The first two volumes were edited by H. Walravens, the other two by him and A. Stache-Weiske.

studied Sanskrit for two years. After his return to Saint Petersburg and several years of teaching Greek and Latin at the First Saint Petersburg Gymnasium, he started a career at the Imperial Academy of Sciences that proved very successful. He was a prolific author and editor of scholarly works, curated the Tibetan and Mongolian collections of the Asiatic Museum, headed the Second Department of the Academy's Library² (1862–1879) and the Museum of Ethnography (1856–1878). The latter was reorganized, by his suggestion, into the Museum of Ethnography and Anthropology in 1878.³ Schiefner had a lot of contacts in Europe and served as a tireless commutator between Western and Russian scholars (the latter included people of various ethnical backgrounds). This resulted in a large corpus of letters kept mostly in German archives. These materials remained virtually unknown by the beginning of the 21st century. It is a great merit of the German scholars Hartmut Walravens and Agnes Stache-Weiske (1962–2021) that a big part of them has been published, providing a lot of important details about the development of Indian, Tibetan, Finnish, Caucasian, Slavic, Chinese and some other studies in Europe in the 19th century. Sadly, the latest volume turned out to be the last one in Agnes Stache-Weiske's life.⁴

The volume includes letters to eighteen scholars but almost eight hundred pages of it are dedicated to the first six figures listed in the subheading of the book, namely the Tibetologist Emil Schlagintweit (1835–1904), the scholar of Ancient Egypt Leo Reinisch (1832–1919), the Slavacists Franz von Miklosich (1813–1891) and Vatroslav Jagić (1838–1923), the scholar of Estonian history Eduard Pabst (1815–1882) and the economist Konstantin S. Veselovskij (1819–1901) who was the powerful permanent secretary of the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences for more than thirty years (1857–1890).⁵ Although Schiefner

² In 1819, the Library was divided into two departments: the First (Russian) and the Second (Foreign). This basic division existed till the end of the 1910s.

³ It is also known as the *Kunstkamera*. Although there is a chronological gap between the first Russian museum founded by Peter the Great in 1714 and this 19th century institution the latter can be considered the main inheritor of the former's collections and also its historical building located in the very heart of Saint Petersburg.

⁴ See her obituary published in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (by M. Pelz; April 12, 2021): <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/ebersberg/agnes-stache-weiske-weiske-grafing-1.5262012> (access 05.01.2021).

⁵ The other correspondents of Schiefner represented with fewer (in certain cases, single) letters in this volume are: J. K. Grot (1812–1893), V. Thomsen (1842–1927), H. Brockhaus (1808–1877), L. Friedländer (1824–1909), K. Halm (1809–1882), R. Harrison (1827–1897), L. Holland (1822–1891), C. Justi (1832–1912), M. J. Müller (1809–1874), R. Rost (1822–1896), F. Zarncke (1825–1891), M. von Goethe (1820–1883). The letter sent to the Munich Iranist and Arabist Marcus Joseph Müller concerns E. Schlagintweit and is mentioned further in my review.

was hired by the Academy to follow Jacob Schmidt's (1779–1847) Tibetan studies and he, indeed, made an outstanding contribution to this field,⁶ his epistolary legacy is not particularly rich in this respect. Emil Schlagintweit was the only correspondent with whom he mostly discussed issues related to Tibet, its language and literature.⁷ Therefore, albeit the other parts of the present book are interesting in many respects, I will limit my review with the Schlagintweit section.

Emil Schlagintweit was the younger brother of Hermann (1826–1882), Adolf (1829–1857) and Robert Schlagintweit (1833–1885) who made a famous scientific expedition to the Deccan, the Himalayas, Karakorum and Kunlun mountains in 1854–1857. In 1857 Adolf Schlagintweit tried to make a separate expedition to Eastern Turkestan but was beheaded in Kashgar, being mistaken for a Chinese spy. The other two brothers safely returned to Europe and brought a vast collection of various artefacts, including numerous Tibetan books, pieces of Buddhist art, ethnographic objects, etc.

Although Emil did not take part in his brothers' endeavor the consequent arranging and study of the Orientalist materials they collected became his life's work. Regretfully, he failed to make it his profession but it was Anton Schiefner who tried to help him get support from the Bavarian officials. All he could do, however, was to write a letter to M. J. Müller, the secretary of the Royal Bavarian Academy of Sciences, and draw his attention to Schlagintweit as a promising German Tibetologist and Buddhologist. In this letter, dated from August 13, 1863 (see pp. 879–880), Schiefner reported shortly about his younger colleague's book "Buddhism in Tibet" — largely depending on the preceding works by K. F. Köppen (1808–1863) and V. P. Vasilyev (1818–1900), it presented, nevertheless, some new facts about peculiarities of Tibetan Buddhism. Schlagintweit's choice of English as the language of his book was apparently a clever decision because the above-mentioned authors had their books written in or

⁶ Apart from a series of papers on various issues connected with Tibetan book collections, language and lexicography, he published several books, including the first European translation of a Bon text (*Über das Bonpo-Sûtra: «Das weisse Nâga-Hunderttausend»*. St. Petersburg: Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1880) and the collection *Tibetan tales derived from Indian sources* (first in English, Schiefner's German text being translated by W. R. S. Ralston; London: Trübner, 1880).

⁷ Schiefner touched upon some Tibetan lexical issues in his numerous letters to Albrecht Weber and, even more important, shared with him some details on the sad conflict between him and Vasily Vasilyev about the publication of Schiefner's German translation of Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India* (St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1869). See the volume published by H. Walravens and A. Stache-Weiske in 2015; the block of letters on Vasilyev was first published separately by Hartmut Walravens in both German and his English translation: Walravens H. "Letters of A. Schiefner about V. P. Vasil'ev". *Pis'mennye pamiatniki Vostoka*, 1(8), 2008, pp. 251–264.

translated into other main European languages, hence the English reader was a more promising target at that time.⁸ The editors of the volume notice that Müller's reaction to Schiefner's letter was obviously positive since, in 1866, Schlagintweit was successfully elected corresponding member of the Royal Bavarian Academy of Sciences (p. 878). However, his hopes to become a professor of Tibetan were futile and he had to start an administrative career in 1867. This certainly obstructed his further Buddhist and Tibetan studies to some extent. Still, about one hundred of his 129 publications (see the list on pp. 43–57) were issued after 1867.

Without doubt, "Buddhism in Tibet" played a very important role in Schlagintweit's biography as an orientalist. An autodidact in regard of Tibetan (and Sanskrit), he needed help in dealing with Tibetan texts he wanted to introduce in his first book. It was his great luck to find, in Schiefner, a person who would not refuse his numerous linguistic and organizational queries. Schlagintweit acknowledged Schiefner's help in the foreword to his book in the following way: "In my studies of Tibetan I have been greatly assisted by Mr. A. Schiefner at St. Petersburg, to whose publications I shall often have occasion to allude. This gentleman also afforded me the welcome opportunity of laying the verbal explanatory details of the priests in loco a second time before a Lama, the Buriat Galsang Gombojew, who is engaged at St. Petersburg as teacher of Mongolian;⁹ he made for me, besides, various abstracts from books contained in the imperial oriental libraries having a bearing upon these objects" (p. x). The letters published by H. Walravens and A. Stache-Weiske show that Schiefner's "assistance" was great, far exceeding the amount of support that a recognized scholar would usually find appropriate to lend to an almost complete stranger. It suffices to mention that Schiefner had to check rather long lists of Tibetan words and expressions Schlagintweit did not understand or copied with orthographic mistakes and had to

⁸ According to F. W. Thomas (1867–1956), who wrote an obituary for Schlagintweit, "The value of the work resided largely in the fact that it was the first account of Tibetan Buddhism to be accompanied by descriptions and representations of the actual objects and implements used in worship", see: Thomas F. W. "Dr Emil Schlagintweit". *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 37, Issue 1, pp. 215–218.

⁹ Galsan[g] Gomboev (1822–1863) was a learnt Buryat lama who started his teaching career in Kazan University and then moved to Saint Petersburg along with the Faculty of Oriental Languages in the mid-1850s. He published several important papers and was elected corresponding member of the Oriental Department of the Imperial Archaeological Society. Thanks to Schiefner's mediation he rendered contents of some Tibetan texts for Schlagintweit (it was a paid work) but, at least in regard of *Mani Kabum*, Gomboev used its Mongolian version, see: Vostrikov A. *Tibetan Historical Literature*. Tr. by H. Ch. Gupta. Calcutta: R. D. Press, 1970, pp. 52–53.

consult some Tibetan works to find information that could be useful for his correspondent.

It is known that Schiefner was eager to help colleagues but it is also quite clear that Schlagintweit himself was a persistent person, although in a polite way. It was remarked by Schiefner in a long letter about their early contacts sent to his close friend Weber and quoted by the editors in their introduction (pp. 58–63). Writing about the meeting he had with Emil and his brother Hermann in London in July 1863, Schiefner commented on them: “These gentlemen are obliging and complaisant to a very high degree, in spite of their sincerity, which is not often found among the Germans and which is probably borrowed from the English and French, in relation to their plans for the future, so that I could not refuse their request to write to M[arcus] J[oseph] Müller” (“Verbindlich u[nd] gefällig sind diese Herren, trotz ihrer bei den Deutschen nicht oft vorkommenden u[nd] wohl von den Engländern u[nd] Franzosen entlehnten Aufrichtigkeit in Betreff ihrer Zukunftspläne, in einem sehr hohen Grade, so daß ich ihnen die Bitte an M[arcus] J[oseph] Müller zu schreiben, nicht abschlagen konnte”).

Schiefner was not always happy to be associated with Schlagintweit's writings. In his letter from April 9, 1865, Schiefner had to reprimand firmly the colleague for the claim that his conclusions expressed in the paper *Der Gottesbegriff des Buddhismus* (in *Sitzungsberichte der k. bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 1864, 1, 8) were shaped due to his meeting with Schiefner (p. 88). The critical approach to Schlagintweit's work on Bon religion is also found in Schiefner's letter (1879) to the American Indologist W. D. Whitney (1827–1894), quoted by the editors (p. 66). Nevertheless, Schiefner's attitude to Schlagintweit was benevolent and the editors must be right assuming that, over time, he developed an opinion on Emil as a serious researcher (*ibid.*). Moreover, Schiefner was certainly interested in the Schlagintweits' collection of Tibetan books and paid a visit to Emil's home, the Jägersburg (near Eggolsheim, Franconia, Germany).

The Schlagintweit section of the book is also supplied with Emil's history of his family (p. 24–42) and some additional documents kept together with Schiefner's letters such as an anonymous account of the Moravian Mission in Tibet (Indian parts of historical Tibet are meant here) and materials concerning the foundation of the monastery of Hemis, in Ladakh. The latter prove that Schlagintweit published Schiefner's preliminary translation of the founding inscription of that monastery; as Schiefner had clearly stated that he did not want this to be printed in this unrevised form Schlagintweit added a footnote: “For the kind information about peculiar expressions I am indebted

to Mr. A. Schiefner, Petersburg" ("Für freundliche Mittheilungen über eigenthümliche Ausdrücke bin ich Herrn A. Schiefner in Petersburg verbunden").¹⁰

The documents published by H. Walravens and A. Stache-Weiske are very important for the history of the 19th century Tibetology that developed rather quickly even though Paris was the only place in Europe at that time where Tibetan was officially taught at the university level. The scholars who preceded (and, certainly, prepared!) the boom of Tibetology in the second half of the 20th century should not be neglected. In this regard I would like to point out that it is truly weird to read the following passage in the introduction to the otherwise excellent and very important online project "Collecting the memories of the pioneers of Tibetan Studies": "The field of Tibetan Studies is relatively young. Although Tibet has been by limited avenues explored for several centuries, Western academic research has focused on Tibet mainly from the beginning of the 20th century, typically in search of Tibetan translations of Indian and Buddhist treatises. Tibetan Studies emerged as a unique academic discipline only during the 1960s and 1970s, when large numbers of Tibetans followed the Dalai Lama into exile".¹¹ This attitude seems to be based on the dubious position that an academic discipline must be taught at the universities to be called this way. However, the history of science knows other forms of producing knowledge about the world, first of all academies of sciences, that could (and still can) unite learned people in their striving for scholarly progress.



¹⁰ See Schlagintweit E. "Tibetische Inschrift aus dem Kloster Hemis in Ladakh". *Sitzungsberichte der kön. bayer. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München*, 1864, II, pp. 305–318.

¹¹ URL: <https://oralhistory.iats.info/> (access 05.01.2021).