

The forgotten linguist, Gerhard Friedrich Müller

The work of Gerhard Friedrich Müller (1705–1783) has been studied extensively by historians and ethnographers. He was considered a renowned scholar in his time already and his prominence in ethnography and historiography remains. However, his linguistic work had a different fate, since he has been completely forgotten as a linguist.

He was born in North Rhine-Westphalia and he moved to Saint Petersburg in 1725. He was appointed as a professor of history in 1730 and collected a large corpus of linguistic, ethnographic and historical data as a leader of the great expedition exploring Siberia between 1733 and 1743.

At the beginning of the journey, in 1733, he did research in Kazan for a couple of months. The result of this work is the manuscript titled *Описание живущих в Казанской губернии языческих народов* [A description of the pagan people of Kazan Governorate] containing an eight-language glossary (1759: in German, 1791: in Russian). The languages of the glossary are the following: German/Russian, Tatar, Mari, Chuvash, Udmurt, Mordvin, Permic and Zyrian.

After arriving home, Müller did not publish the material he collected in Siberia for a long time. As a consequence, the academy ordered him to hand over his material to J. E. Fischer, who replaced him in the Siberian expedition in 1740. Fischer's book titled *Sibirische Geschichte* (1768) was written on the basis of this corpus.

It was also Fischer who compiled the dictionary titled *Vocabularium Sibiricum* (1747) containing 300–300 word from 40 languages. According to historians of science, Fischer's book is an adaptation of Müller's collected material. Eberhard Winkler's research from the recent past supports this view, as well as the study I conducted on the Mordvin material from the dictionary. (It is also to be noted however, that Fischer's work is one of the most prominent forerunners of Finno-Ugric comparative historical linguistic research owing to its etymological references.)

Fischer became a renowned scholar with the help of Müller's work. This is why Müller should be acknowledged as a prominent figure in the 18th century Finno-Ugric history of science.

Keywords: G. F. Müller, J. E. Fischer, Siberian expedition, eight-language glossary.

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