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In memoriam Sevir B. Chernetsov (1943–2005)

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projektes wählte er sich ein methodisch völlig anders gelagertes Gebiet: Die neusüdarabische Sprache Mehri. In langer und intensiver Arbeit mit einem Mehri-Sprecher, der zu diesem Zweck nach Heidelberg eingeladen wurde, sowie während zweier Forschungsreisen im jemenitischen Mahra-Land konnte er umfangreiche Sprachdaten erheben. Seine Habilitationsschrift stand kurz vor dem Abschluß, als er eine letzte Reise unternehmen wollte, um noch vereinzelte Lücken zu schließen. Am Morgen des 3. September flog er mit einem Inlandsflug von Sanaa nach Ġayda im Mahra-Land, wo ihn sein Hauptinformant ʿAskari Ḥuḡayrān Saʿd mit dem Auto vom Flugplatz abholte. Auf dem Weg in die Stadt geriet das Fahrzeug von der Fahrbahn ab. ʿAskari wurde schwer verletzt, Alexander Sima überlebte jedoch nicht. Am 11. September wurde er in Neusiedl beigesetzt.

Neben seinen zahlreichen Arbeiten über die für Äthiopien so wichtige Nachbarkultur Südarabien, die für einen so jungen Wissenschaftler durch ihren Umfang ebenso wie durch ihre hohe Qualität beeindruckend, hat Alexander Sima auch über äthiopistische Themen im engeren Sinne gearbeitet und dabei Beiträge über äthiopienbezogene Epigraphik³ sowie äthiopische Syntax und biblische Textkritik⁴ vorgelegt. Für die *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* verfaßte er zahlreiche Beiträge.⁵ Am Rande erwähnt seien auch seine Beiträge zur nordwestsemitischen Epigraphik.

Der frühe Tod dieses so ungewöhnlich produktiven und vielseitigen jungen Gelehrten, der dabei über ein so angenehmes Wesen und geradezu ansteckende Fröhlichkeit verfügte, reißt in die deutschsprachige Semitistik eine nicht zu schließende Lücke. Er hinterläßt Frau und eine Tochter.

In memoriam Sevir B. Chernetsov (1943–2005)

DENIS NOSNITSIN, Universität Hamburg

Dr. Sevir Borisovich Chernetsov, a distinguished Russian specialist in the field of Ethiopian studies, died on 3 February, 2005. He was born on 15 December, 1943 in the city of Kostroma, where his mother was evacuated during

³ Epigraphische Notizen zu Abraha's Damminschrift (CIH 541), *Arabian Archeology and Epigraphy* 13, 2002, 126–132; Abschied vom "herrlichen" Land *Mṣ*. Eine alte crux in der Trilingue des ʿĒzānā (RIE 185 und RIE 185 bis), *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 93, 2003, 227–231.

⁴ *konä yəqättəl* in einer Wiener Handschrift des äthiopischen Danielbuches. Ein Beitrag zur Textgeschichte des altäthiopischen Daniel und zur Sprachgeschichte des Gəʿəz, *Oriens Christianus* 87 (2003), 123–129.

⁵ Abraha, I 42–43; Agʿazi, I 144–145; Almaqah, I 203; ʿAstär, I 387; Bəḥer, I 522; Cosmas Indicopleustes, I 806–807; Daʿmat; Gdrt; Himyarites, Book of the; Maḥrəm; Mədr.

World War II; his father was a Red Army officer. Soon after the end of the War his family moved to St. Petersburg (then Leningrad). Chernetsov entered Leningrad State University and studied at the Oriental Faculty, Chair of African Studies (Ethiopian philology). He graduated in 1967 and received a position at Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (known as the *Kunstkammer*), in the Department of African Ethnography. While working there, Chernetsov completed his “candidate to doctor” thesis (Russian equivalent to Ph. D.) “Ethiopian Magic Scrolls: the experience of philological and ethnological study” in 1974, under the scholarly guidance of Dmitrij Alekseevich Olderogge (1903–1987), a corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and, by then, one of the leading scholars of African studies in the USSR. In 1984, Chernetsov presented his doctoral monograph (Habilitation) “The Ethiopian feudal monarchy in the 13th–16th centuries”¹. Chernetsov worked in the *Kunstkammer* all his life; from 21 October, 2002 until his death, he was in charge of its African Department.

It is difficult to reveal in the several lines of this note the originality and erudition of Sevir Chernetsov, for which he was highly respected and liked by both Russian and foreign colleagues and students. His scholarly career started in Leningrad of 1960–70s and developed in the vivid atmosphere of Leningrad’s intellectual community. The *Kunstkammer* (historically – Russia’s first museum) was a unique establishment, which united on its premises both an ethnological museum and a research institution. The Department of African Ethnography was headed by Olderogge and was known for its atmosphere of active – and very creative – scholarly communication between colleagues (most of them later becoming prominent specialists, too). Chernetsov gained there access to rich first-hand materials: large collections of photos, specimens of material culture, manuscripts, paintings gathered mostly by the late 19th-/early 20th-cent. Russian travellers to Ethiopia². This compensated for the rarity of chances to participate in scholarly life abroad and to visit African countries. As time showed, the latter circumstance did not prevent Chernetsov from establishing himself as a scholar; rather, it contributed, in a particular way, to his capacity for reaching a deep understanding of any subject he took for his research.

Since the early 1990s, Sevir Chernetsov won a wider recognition in Russia and abroad. This happened in tough conditions: the state support of scholarly institutions and scholarship was quickly decreasing; the fall of the pro-Soviet regime of Mengistu Haile Maryam in 1991 meant a drastic reduction of public interest towards Ethiopia in Russia, and this in addition to the fact that Cher-

¹ Which had been published as: *Efiopskaja feodalnaja monarhija v XIII–XVI vv.*, Moscow: Nauka, 1982.

² They comprise ca. one third of 12,000 item-large African collection of the *Kunstkammer*.

netsov's studies were largely devoted to the problems of Ethiopian medieval history – an exotic and rather little-known subject even in Russian academic circles. However, in 1994 and 1999 S. Chernetsov was invited to visit and teach at the Oriental Seminar of the University of Mainz; in 1990–2004 he actively taught at the St.-Petersburg University, sharing his knowledge with any interested student; he participated in the edition of several scholarly journals as a member of the editorial board, co-editor or co-ordinator; he participated in numerous conferences in Russia and abroad (including the 15th International Congress of Ethiopian Studies at Hamburg). In the same period, S. Chernetsov published most of his articles.

The range of Chernetsov's scholarly interests was, indeed, impressive. Having a background in Ethiopian magic literature and historiography, he published Russian translations of the chronicles of Śārṣā Dəngəl (plus “the History of the Galla” by Baḥrəy), Susənyos, Yoḥannəs I, Iyasu I, Bākaffa, Iyasu II and Bərhan Mogäsa, Iyo'as, and “histories” of Mika'el Səḥul and Ḥaylä Mika'el³. He touched and wrote upon quite a number of topics, some of which would be considered traditional for a scholar of “classical Ethiopian Studies” (Church history, Ethiopic literature), but some – quite unexpected, like the position and role of women in medieval Ethiopia. One can recall, for example, Chernetsov's afterword to the Russian translation of “The Emperor”, a much discussed book by R. Kapuściński describing the fall of Ḥaylä Šəllase I⁴, which explains its peculiarity and effectively removes the ground for any misunderstandings the book may have caused elsewhere. Chernetsov's view on any subject was remarkable for its originality and depth. He had an ability not to get lost in details and to find the internal logic in any historical phenomenon; “he always catches the point”, as some colleagues have said about him. This ability fully revealed itself in his articles written for different lexica and reference works. Ca. 40 of them were penned for the 1st volume of *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, which was a subject of Chernetsov's scholarly attention during recent years, including, literally, the last days of his life. All in all, Chernetsov published five books (the sixth is currently in print) and nearly 90 articles (excluding reviews and articles for reference-books).

³ *Efiopskije broniki XVI–XVII vekov* (“Ethiopian Chronicles of the 16th–17th cent.”), Moscow: Nauka, 1984. *Efiopskije broniki XVII–XVIII vekov* (“Ethiopian Chronicles of the 17th–18th cent.”), Moscow: Nauka, 1989. *Efiopskije broniki XVIII veka* (“Ethiopian Chronicles of the 18th cent.”), Moscow: Nauka, 1991. The consequent representation of the Ethiopian history was continued in: *Efiopskaja feodalnaja monarhija v XVII v.* (“The Ethiopian feudal monarchy in the 17th century”), Moscow: Nauka, 1990. Full bibliography of S. Chernetsov will appear in: *Varia Aethiopica. In Memory of Sevir B. Chernetsov (1943–2005)*, St. Peterburg, in preparation.

⁴ German translation: R. KAPUŚCIŃSKI, *König der Könige. Eine Parabel der Macht*, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1984.