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Editors' Foreword

In May 2017, the XXVIII Baltic Conference on the History of Science was held at the University of Tartu. As the central theme, the event was dedicated to the 250th anniversary of the birth of Georges Frédéric Parrot, the first rector of the reopened University of Tartu in 1802. The conference was attended by several outstanding academic leaders and historians of science from different countries such as Philippe Taquet, former President of the French Academy of Sciences and Eberhard Knobloch, former President of the International Academy of the History of Science and a highly recognized Leibniz scholar, among others. As an afterglow of the event, the current issue of our journal has now been published.

There are but few great men to whom life has given the chance to be a three-time rector of the University of Tartu and also an advisor to two Russian emperors. Georges Frédéric Parrot, a close friend and a state counsellor of Alexander I and a wise advisor to Nicholas I, had the chance to experience this special role. Parrot left behind a solid epistolary correspondence with both emperors, and the total volume of Parrot's letters to Alexander I comes second after the Emperor's correspondence with his former tutor, Frédéric-César de La Harpe. Andrei Andreev has contributed a substantial overview of this topic in this issue.

Parrot was an original thinker and a real Enlightenment era literary man *Homme de Lettres* in the local cultural space. His correspondence with the two emperors reflects the educational, academic and political landscape in the first half of the nineteenth-century Russian Empire. But why was Parrot so actively thinking along these topics? Georges Frédéric Parrot is well known as the first rector and a professor of physics, but he is less associated with his real field of profession which he obtained in one of the best European higher education schools in the 18th century, *Hohe Karlsschule*, founded by Karl Eugen, Duke of Württenberg and named Stuttgart University from 1781 onwards. Parrot studied state administration or Cameralistics and received a multidimensional preparation in various fields related to state governance. His childhood and university friend, the famous natural scientist Georges Cuvier walked the same path—in addition to his academic work, he ascended to become one of the main figures of the Napoleonic era education and the Grand Master of the Imperial University. Considering the tense relations between France and Russia, this situation also influenced the relations between the two men, even though they pledged friendship to each other during the school years. However, in his scientific work, Parrot remained true to the French method of natural sciences. Parrot also

succeeded in establishing a great physics laboratory at the University of Tartu. Lea Leppik touches upon this theme more closely in her article.

Parrot's views were shaped by the motto of the French revolution—liberty, equality, fraternity—but he remained supportive of the principle of enlightened monarchy, where the sovereign's primary responsibility is to follow the law of nature (*le droit naturel*) and make its people happy. Parrot's thoroughly humanistic and liberal worldview, brave mind, temperament and passion for truth often led him into conflicts with obscurants, also the emperors were not comfortable with his ideas because they painfully scraped the surface of the shortcomings of the Russian Empire. However, at the same time he possessed the necessary sharp foreign perspective with devotion that benefitted the development of education in the Russian Empire, including the construction of the Pulkovo Observatory, which turned out to be one of the best observatories of the 19th century. Parrot's activities in the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences is explored in the article by Ekaterina Basargina, the new findings of which are the sketches of the Pulkovo Observatory, which confirm Parrot's capability as a spatial planner and engineer. In addition, there are three communications, also by Russian scholars, which provide interesting information about Parrot and his age.

It is gratifying to know that Russian historians have found Parrot and are rediscovering him. But Estonian readers, who owe gratitude to Parrot for opening up the doors of the university for the peasantry and for creating the educational system in the Baltic governorates, will soon have the chance to read about Parrot's life in the forthcoming monography by Epi Tohvri that hopefully will be shortly published in other European languages.

Unfortunately, the issue concludes on a sad note. Two outstanding historians of science in the Baltic region have recently passed away. Arnis Vīksna from Latvia has dedicated his research mostly to the history of medicine. Juozapas Algimantas Krikštopaitis, however, was much more than a historian of science. He was a long time chairperson of the Lithuanian Association of the History and Philosophy of Science and has served several terms as president of the corresponding Baltic Association. He was holding both of these positions until his passing away on November 10 this year. Juozas Krikštopaitis was the member of the Editorial Board of our journal since its founding in 2013. Our very good colleagues will be remembered and their work continued.

Epi Tohvri
Guest Editor of the issue

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