A Ritter Memorial in Istanbul
by Gudrun Schubert

On his extended meditative rambles with his old friend Traugott Fuchs, who had emigrated from Germany to Istanbul in 1934, Hellmut Ritter, who was then already marked by his illness, expressed the wish to be laid to his final rest in the park of the German summer-residence in Tarabya.

The place, to which he referred as 'the most beautiful spot on earth', is located in the Memorial Cemetery next to the memorial slate of Baron von der Goltz, to whose staff Ritter had been attached as an interpreter in Iraq during the First World War. From this spot, one can look far across the Bosphorus, one's sight passing through the tall old trees, down to the emerald waters and the shore beyond, which at that time was still studded with slender dark cypresses and umbrella-shaped pine trees, an epitome of the Bosphorus-landscape, which today has been replaced by innumerable houses.

Hellmut Ritter died on the 19th of May, 1971, and was buried in Oberursel, near Frankfurt. Traugott Fuchs decided to erect a stone on that place in Tarabya as a sign of lasting remembrance of Hellmut Ritter, the scholar who lived and worked on the shores of the Bosphorus for over thirty years of his life.

Unexpected difficulties arose from the fact that this particular spot lies within the precinct of the Memorial Cemetery, which is reserved exclusively for those fallen in the war. It is administrated by the German Office of War Cemeteries, which for a number of years was able to successfully frustrate any attempt to obtain permission for the erection of a memorial stone. Finally, in the course of 1986, a fortunate encounter among Germans residing in Istanbul, the German Consul-General Dr. K. Leuteritz, his cultural attaché L. Cyrus, the sculptor B. Pielemeier and the present author, made the realisation of this long-standing project possible. After a long and unedifying correspondence with the respective government officials, permission was granted in March 1986 to place the memorial stone on the meadow above the Memorial Cemetery in the vicinity of the obelisk which had been erected in memory of Helmuth von Moltke.

A slab of Travertine marble was selected in the stoneworks near the Golden Horn and transferred to the park in Tarabya, where the sculptor placed his worktent. His design was agreed upon without much ado. The text which was to be chiseled into the stone created a problem, however. It seemed wellnigh impossible to express in a few short words the vast sum of the life of the eminent scholar Hellmut Ritter. The extent of his achievements can be approximately assessed by the numerous honours which were bestowed upon him by Oriental, European and American academic institutions. The scope of his work 'embraces the field of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Kurdish and Aramaean languages, encompassing writings about grammar, dialectology, rhetoric, history, economic history, history of natural science and technology, magic, literary history, codicology, philosophy, theology, mysticism, folklore, poetry, theatre and music.' For his numerous pupils his fascinating personality and his eminent scholarship constituted, even after his death, a magnetic pole towards which they set their course.

The adjoining illustrations show the Ritter memorial with the inscriptions on the four sides which indicate, in short words, the different fields of Ritter's work.

The front inscription is as follows:

IN MEMORIAM HELLMUT RITTER PROF. DR. DR. H.C. 1892 — 1971

Underneath is the verse by Abū Tammām which Ritter gave as the motto to his work on Nizāmī’s poetical imagery:

نَقَلَ فِرَادَكَ حِيثُ شَتَتَ مِنْ أَهوَا
ما الحب الا للحبيب الأول

The inscription on the right side runs as follows:

DEM WELTWEIT ANGESEHENEN ORIENTALISTEN
(To the world-famous Orientalist).

The inscription on the back side runs as follows:

DEM VORBILDlichen LEHRER UND WEGWEISER IN DIE ZUKUNFT
(To the exemplary teacher and guide to the future).

The inscription on the left side runs as follows:

DEM ENTDECKER UND BEWAHRER GRÜNDER UND SCHÖPFER.
(To the discoverer and preserver, the founder and creator).

The young sculptor worked with untiring and unspiring devotion at the realisation of his project. He chiseled the Arabic verses following a pattern which the present author had ordered from a calligraphy student in Istanbul’s Sahhaflar Çarşısı, after he had...
made a scale model of it which had been stripped of some of its decorations.

In October 1986, the memorial was inaugurated in a small ceremony, to which the German Consul-General had invited the friends and pupils of Ritter that were still teaching in Istanbul. In addition to its function as a memorial for Hellmut Ritter, the stone should be a symbol of the collaboration among Orientalist scholars of all countries. This short report on the Hellmut Ritter memorial should remind us of the incomparable scholar whose brilliant work continues to cast its spell anew for each generation.²

NOTES

¹ Personal information given by Traugott Fuchs.
³ Fritz Meier, ibid., pp. 199-200.
⁴ Fritz Meier, ibid., p. 205.
⁷ The following obituaries of Hellmut Ritter have appeared:

At the occasion of Hellmut Ritter’s 70th birthday, there appeared 54 contributions in Oriens 15-19 (1962-1966) and 8 contributions in Şurkiyāt Meccumai 5 (1964). Among the latter was a homage to Ritter’s work by Ahmed Ateş (pp. 1-14).
The Ritter monument in its surroundings, seen from the back.
The Ritter monument. Front side.
The Ritter monument. The three other sides.