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A JAPANESE PORTRAIT OF HEINRICH BÜRGER

by

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With one plate

Recently I came across a portrait of Heinrich Bürger made when, as a secretary to Philipp Franz von Siebold, he visited Edo (now Tokyo) in 1826. This portrait is a rough sketch, and so far probably is the only portrait of him in existence. It was made by Watanabe-Kwazan (written also as Kwazan Watanabe after the western manner), an eminent artist, who, at that time, was also highly distinguished as a scholar of western thinking, a consequence of his Dutch learning.

The present sketch was found in a collection of Watanabe's works owned by an old family, Kasuya by name, residing in the town of Kira in Aichi Prefecture. Watanabe's last place, Tabara, is located south of Kira beyond the Bay of Mikawa. Watanabe died there in 1841.

Bürger's biographic data remained practically unknown until 1962, when his life (he was born in or around 1806 and died in 1858) and work were brought to light by Mrs. M. J. van Steenis-Kruseman (1962). Before Mrs. van Steenis's paper was published, all that we knew about Bürger was that he had served as a pharmacist in a hospital in Java and that in 1825 he was sent from Java to Dejima of Nagasaki to become Von Siebold's assistant. In March of the year following his arrival in Japan, Bürger was granted the opportunity to travel to Edo, when, as a secretary to Von Siebold, he joined the Dutch embassy on its customary visit to the Shōgun in Edo. The embassy left Nagasaki in February 1826 and arrived in Edo at the beginning of April. After staying in Edo for forty days, the embassy returned to Nagasaki in the second half of May. Both on the journey outward and back Bürger helped Von Siebold in taking meteorological observations and in collecting minerals, animals and plants.

During his stay in Edo Von Siebold came into contact with a number of noted Japanese physicians and scientists as well as with scholars of western

learning, all of whom paid visits to "Nagasakiya", the hotel of his sojourn, located east of the Shôgun's castle. Like Von Siebold, Bürger too was host to such guests at his room in the hotel. Among these visitors on one day Watanabe was present and, on the impulse of the moment, he seized the opportunity to make a sketch of the fraternizing company in Bürger's room. As an artist, Watanabe was highly distinguished for his skill in both portrait and landscape painting. It stands to reason that he was a painter of the Japanese school, but in point of technique he was much under the influence of western painting. It might be stated that, in Japan, impressionism originated in his works.

In the present sketch the scene of Bürger's company is delineated with a hair pencil and in India ink on a sheet of Japanese paper, 27 x 38 cm in size. In all its correctness the sketch visualizes to us the atmosphere of a Dutch scientist's temporary room in Edo in 1826, depicting furniture, lamps, teapots and cups, as well as Dutch books and a microscope. Watanabe's keen eyes did not fail to see even the symbol of the Federated East India Company (V. O. C., for Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) on the front of Bürger's portable desk.

As far as appears from this sketch, Bürger must have been a tall man with black hair: The sketch also shows that Bürger in 1826, at the age of about twenty years, was short-sighted, wearing a pair of glasses. In his travel diary, Von Siebold (1897:195) described Bürger as: "Herr Sekretär Bürger, ein schwarzer Lockenkopf von echt kleinasiatischer Rasse.....". Mrs. van Steenis-Kruseman (1962:496) noted that Bürger came from a family of Jewish descent of Hameln on the Weser, Hanover, Germany.

I have not succeeded to identify all the persons squatting around Bürger who, in this picture, is writing something at his desk. But the guest of honor on this day was probably Narusé-Hayatonoshô, the lord of the castle of Inuyama north of Nagoya. It is known that Narusé was a man who was strongly interested in Dutch learning; he was referred to by J. Cock Blomhoff under the name Johannes Wilhelms. The man squatting in Japanese fashion on one side of the table and facing Bürger's back, is probably Narusé, behind whom his son stands. The other men behind them are their retainers. The man squatting between Narusé and Bürger is a Japanese-Dutch interpreter. The rear view of Watanabe himself, squatting, is also shown, viz., as the second from the right.

Like Von Siebold during this stay in Edo, Bürger provided solutions to various questions posed by his visitors. There exists a document in which the names of minerals are given by Bürger in answer to questions by the noted naturalist Shidara-Shiyô in Edo.

After Von Siebold's stay in Nagasaki came to an unfortunate end, leading to his departure from Japan, Bürger remained in Nagasaki and pursued his scientific activities as Von Siebold's successor, collecting zoological and botanical specimens to be sent to Holland. Among such collections made by him was an outstanding collection of fishes, together with a manuscript on the subject, upon which the Pisces volume by C. J. Temminck and H. Schlegel in Siebold's *Fauna Japonica* was based (Boeseman, 1947).

Finally, I wish to express my cordial thanks to Mrs. M. J. van Steenis-Kruseman and Dr. L. B. Holthuis for their kindness to present this paper for publication in *Zoologische Mededelingen*. My profound gratitude is also due to Mr. Nuiémon Kasuya, the owner of the sketch dealt with here, who gave me permission to reproduce it for the present paper.

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