



GROTEFEND, GEORG FRIEDRICH

GROTEFEND, GEORG FRIEDRICH (b. 9 June 1775 in Hannoversch-Münden, d. 15 December 1853 in Hannover), German philologist and scholar of oriental studies. His father, Johann Christian Grotefend, was the head of the shoemakers guild in Hannoversch-Münden. In 1795 Grotefend enrolled at the University of Göttingen to study theology and philology. Having already worked at a grammar school in his student days, he chose teaching as a career and remained a teacher all his life, first in Göttingen, then in Frankfurt on the Main, and from 1821 as the director of the Lyceum in Hannover.

Grotefend's first publication was a paper concerning "a universal script" (*Commentatio de pasigraphia sive scriptura universali*, Göttingen, 1799). Grotefend worked also on German, the classical languages, historical geography, numismatics, and problems of education. He made pioneering studies important to the understanding of Lycian and Phrygian texts (1833) as well as the languages of ancient Italy (1835-39; 1839; 1840-42). He was also involved in founding the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*.

Grotefend gained fame as a scholar for his successful attempt to decipher the Old Persian variant of the cuneiform script found on the Persepolis inscriptions (Wiesehöfer, pp. 231-38). Assuming that these were inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings, he was able to ascertain the approximate phonic values of about ten signs by following the pattern of the Sasanian royal inscriptions



in Middle Persian, which had been deciphered only a few years earlier by Antoine Silvestre de Sacy. On 4 September 1802 he presented his paper “Praevia de cuneatis, quas vocant, inscriptionibus Persepolitans legendis et explicandis relatio” (Preliminary report on the reading and interpretation of the so-called cuneiform inscriptions from Persepolis) to the Göttingen Academy of Sciences, followed by three more papers (notices by Tychsen; cf. de Sacy, esp. pp. 456 ff.). The first account published by Grotefend himself was “Ueber die Erklärung der Keilschriften, und besonders der Inschriften von Persepolis,” in A. H. L. Heeren, *Ideen über die Politik, den Verkehr und den Handel der vornehmsten Völker der alten Welt* I, 2nd ed., Göttingen 1805, pp. 931-58 (3rd ed., 1815, pp. 564-603; 4th ed., 1824, pp. 325-61). The full text of the four papers was published much later by Meyer (1893), and a facsimile of the first one has recently been published by Riekeley Borger (1975).

Grotefend regarded himself only as the decipherer of the texts and did not attempt to interpret them from philological and historical viewpoints. His efforts at understanding the cuneiform script, however, laid a foundation for other scholars to build upon by referring to related languages and using additional texts (see Borger, 1975-78). Grotefend published a few more papers dealing with Old Persian inscriptions. His later publications on cuneiform texts, however, are rather insignificant and often misleading, due to his lack of necessary knowledge of the relevant Oriental languages.

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