



KAEMPFER, ENGELBERT

KAEMPFER, ENGELBERT, German physician and traveler to Russia, the Orient, and the Far East (b. Lemgo, Westphalia, 16 September 1651; d. Lemgo, 2 November 1716). He was one of the keenest observers of foreign cultures of his time. Although his observations while in Persia did much to enhance Western knowledge of the Safavid court and the site of Persepolis, it is for his oft-translated description of Japan that he is best remembered in Europe.

Sources. The chronology of Kaempfer's life and travels and his scientific projects were made known first by pastor Johann Berthold Haccius's funeral sermon (*Die beste Reise eines Christlichen Kämpfers nach dem himmlischen Orient*, Lemgo, 1716). The first biographical study was written by the Swiss Johann Caspar Scheuchzer, who translated his *magnum opus* into English (Kaempfer, 1727). Christian Wilhelm Dohm's introduction to his edition of Kaempfer's *History of Japan* (Kaempfer, 1777-79; repr. 1964) is an enlightened view on the latter's life and works. Also of importance is Kaempfer's *Liber Amicorum*, in which his relatives, acquaintances, and colleagues made dated entries (Meier-Lemgo, 1952).

After Kaempfer's death, his literary estate was bought by Sir Hans Sloane and incorporated into the archives of the British Museum. Today most of his archives are preserved in the British Library, the British Museum, and the Natural History Museum in London, except for a few documents scattered in various locations in England and Germany (Bonn, 1979). The considerable library of Engelbert and his father, with 2,095 titles, was sold by auction; the printed catalogue (*Catalogus verschiedener rarer und auserlesener Theologisch-*



Juristisch-Medicinisch-Philosophisch-Philologisch und Historischer Bücher, Lemgo, 1773), bears testimony to the erudition and scientific interests of the bourgeoisie of that time.

Life and works. Kaempfer was born the second of three sons of the vicar of St Nicolas Church, Johannes Kemper. Later (1673), Engelbert would change his name to Kaempffer, or Kempfer, an example of the baroque propensity for symbolic and metaphorical unscientific etymologies ('Kaempfer' means 'combatant,' 'warrior'). Engelbert's education followed a circuitous course from Lemgo to important academic schools and universities in northern Germany and Poland. In 1673, he graduated from Danzig (today's Gdansk) with an essay entitled *Exercitatio politica de majestatis divisione in realem et personalem*. He then traveled to Poland and Prussia, where he pursued the life of a wandering student, moving from one university to another and focusing mainly on medicine and foreign languages.

Having chosen to settle down in Sweden (1681), where he enrolled at Uppsala University, he won the esteem of several influential notables, through whom he was finally appointed as secretary to a legation destined for the Russian and Persian courts (1683). The purpose of the Swedish legation was to gain direct access to the much-coveted Oriental goods and raw materials, thereby avoiding the added costs of the Dutch carrying trade and of the long sea routes off South Africa. A first attempt had failed in 1679. The second one, headed by the Dutch [Ludvig Fabritius](#), set out on March 20, 1683 and traveled to Finland, from Turku through Helsinki to Nyenskans (today's St. Petersburg), and then to Narva in Estonia, the last Swedish-held town (Meier-Lemgo, 1968, p. 171). On July 10, it reached Moscow. Here Fabritius had to negotiate the terms for the storage of the materials bought for Persia. On September 5 the legation sailed on the rivers Moskva, Oka, and Volga down to Astrakhan, where it arrived on November 1 (Schippan). Here they had to hire a ship to cross the Caspian (November 12-22, 1683) to reach Nisābād, from which they followed established caravan routes over Šemača, Rašt, Sāva, Qom, and Kāšān to Isfahan, the capital of the Safavid state, which they reached on March 29, 1684 (Hüls, p. 168).

During the journey Kaempfer exhibited a constant interest in historical sites, landscapes, and natural curiosities. He interviewed inhabitants, travelers, or soldiers, asking for information about local features. In addition, he sketched views of people, objects, and towns (see, for example, buildings and gardens of Qazvin and Kāšān in Sloane Mss. 2923); his sketchbook (British Museum, Dept.



of Oriental Antiquities, Or. Cup12. Sh.2) shows several drawings by him as a gifted amateur anxious to convey accurate information in as much detail as possible. On various occasions he left the Swedish group to visit special sites, such as Mount Barmach and, nearby, the oil sources of the Apsheron peninsula near Baku. He had clearly intended to provide a description of his travels that would provide more detailed information than those already furnished by his predecessors. To this end he carried with him the bulky travelogue of [Adam Olearius](#), whose descriptions did not always meet with his approval (he noted, for example, that the latter's ground plan of Qom was as similar in its depiction of its original as a cow to a windmill). This stresses Kaempfer's critical eye and scientific rigor. His method entailed collecting as much data as possible in order to convey a complete picture of a foreign culture to his readers. This kind of work can be described as practical 'fieldwork,' somewhere between discovery and scientific research in the modern sense of the term (Haberland, 1993).

When Kaempfer arrived in Isfahan he followed his inquiries while employed at the Swedish legation. During his nearly 20-month stay in Isfahan (March 29, 1684- November 20, 1685) he carried out a methodological survey of the town. He walked several times through it, visited various gardens and places, and completed a comprehensive investigation of its structure. His manuscripts in the British Library reveal how intensively he tried to understand the plan of the Persian capital. A rough list gives an impression of his persevering diligence: Sloane-Mss. 2907 fol. 92v to fol. 109v contain texts about palaces and gardens in Isfahan and other Persian places which were later included into the printed version of the *Amoenitates*; Sloane-Mss. 2910 fol. 86r to fol. 106v contain shorts texts, plans, and drawings of entrances, gardens, vestibules, pavilions, and water basins of the following gardens in Isfahan: Bāg-e Kālvāt, Bāg-e Čehel Sotun, Bāg-e Angurestān, Bāg-e Goldasta, Bāg-e Mostman (or Mostmand), Bāg-e Bolbol, and Bāg-e Hazār Jarib; Sloane-Mss. 2920, 2923 and 5232 also contain drawings and lists of measures of Isfahan's palaces and gardens.

The diplomatic aim of the Swedish legation in Isfahan brought Kaempfer to the court, where he could observe Persian customs, manners, and rituals. Thus the first part of the *Amoenitates* has an extensive description of the shah himself, his coronation, the state of the Safavid realm in 1684, the army, the princes, the clergy, and the religious edifices ("aedificia sacra") and the provincial governors. He describes, in addition, the buildings of the court in all



their splendor as the most important place of interest of the capital (“primo magnificentia urbis Regiae”), its palaces and gardens, the ladies’ chambers (“gynaeceum”), the cavalry, and, last but not least, the reception of the legation at the court. All this is laid out in 250 pages in quarto. Although some of Kaempfer’s observations were taken directly from witnessing certain events of public life, most of his information originated from the superior of the Capuchins in Isfahan, [Father Raphaël du Mans](#), who had lived there from 1647 and was one of the most learned connoisseurs of Persia at that time. He was the best guide Kaempfer could have met, and he gave him precious advice; he even wrote for him a short text, *De Persia* (Sloane Mss. 2908).

Kaempfer stayed in Isfahan until the end of the Swedish negotiations. Afterwards he decided not to return with the legation, but to proceed further into Asia for more studies. To this end he entered the service of the V.O.C. (Dutch East Indies Company: see [DUTCH-PERSIAN RELATIONS](#)), which was the largest European employer in Asia, and enrolled as a surgeon. To take up his new appointment, he traveled with a caravan along the usual southward route, from Yazd to Naqš-e Rostam, Persepolis, Shiraz, Jahrom, Lār, and Bandar-e ‘Abbās, where he had to wait for a V.O.C. boat to take him to his new destinations.

The fruits of this travel are detailed descriptions of various sites in the second part of the *Amoenitates*: the grave of the famous Persian poet Hafez in Shiraz, winemaking and various natural landmarks such as Mount Benna, or relicts of the biblical deluge; Sloane-Mss 2912 contains several drawings of gardens and buildings in Shiraz of varying quality. The route led also to the most important sites of Persepolis and Naqš-e Rostam. Here Kaempfer left the caravan to investigate the Achaemenid and Sasanian ruins. During three days (from December 2-4, 1685) he examined every structure belonging to the palaces and other buildings almost without taking any time off. His descriptions, along with those of [Jean Chardin](#) and [Cornelis de Bruijn](#), lay the groundwork for further research. Kaempfer meticulously measured the sites as far he was able, but he could not recognize the significance of the arrangement of buildings, though he did understand their secular and princely character as a residence of a Persian ruler. Of paramount importance is his drawing of a part of the inscriptions, later printed in the *Amoenitates* (1712, p. 333). He was the first to identify the cuneiform signs as linguistic items and to give them a still valid name (“characteribus peregrinis, formam habentibus cuneolorum,” *Amoenitates*, p. 331). As early as 1694, the *Philosophical Transactions* (No. 210)



had published a drawing of the palaces of Persepolis sent by Nicolaes Witsen; he had received it from Fabritius, who had asked Kaempfer to draw it for this purpose (Kaempfer, 2001b, p. 288). This is the first ‘modern’ and objective representation of the palace in the sense that it is devoid of personal invention and imaginary embellishments. Kaempfer’s observations are considered an important step in deciphering the Achaemenid and Sasanian cultures (Wiesehöfer; Drijvers, 1989, and 1993b). However, he and Chardin have been severely criticized by Cornelis de Bruijn for their allegedly inaccurate descriptions and drawings (see [DE BRUIJN](#)), though de Bruijn fails to mention that he himself had stayed there nearly three months (November 1704 to the end of January 1705) and, as a learned artist, had drawn all the structures directly from nature (as Kaempfer had done), and that he had a better engraver than Kaempfer.

On December 29, 1685, Kaempfer reached Bandar-e ‘Abbās, where he was to stay for two and a half years. Because of the tropical climate, he soon fell ill and nearly died. To recuperate, he traveled to the mountains north of Bandar-e ‘Abbās to a place called “Seyahu” (Siāhu), where he stayed from June 23 to August 22, 1686. He also traveled to the date gardens near Bandar-e ‘Abbās, observing the gardeners’ work and customs; these observations found their way into the fourth part of the *Amoenitates* on the history of the date palm, its botanical characteristics, and its importance for Persia’s economic and social life (Kaempfer, 1987). Though Kaempfer did not, as his predecessors had done, unveil the mystery of the sexuality of the date palm tree, his observations are in many areas the basis of modern botanical research. The engravings of the harvest in a date garden, the lodging of owners and incoming workers, and the musical instruments which are played after the harvest are, in comparison to other engravings of the *Amoenitates*, impressive and lively (*Amoenitates*, between pp. 710 and 711, p. 733, p. 741).

Kaempfer left Persia on June 30, 1688, bound for Batavia (now Jakarta), the V.O.C. headquarters, where he stayed from August 17, 1689 to May 6, 1690, when he received his appointment as surgeon at the V.O.C. factory in Deshima, western Kyushu. He was to stay in Japan from September 24, 1690 to October 30, 1692, another most rewarding part of his travels in Asia.

Kaempfer returned from Asia in October 1693 and enrolled at the University of Leiden. Having finished his thesis, he graduated on April 22, 1694 as a Doctor of Medicine. His thesis, *Disputatio Medica Inaugurationis Exhibens Decadem Observationum Exoticarum*, appeared at Elzevier’s in Leiden (see



Carrubba, 1996). Slightly altered, it is also incorporated as part three in the *Amoenitates* (*Amoenitates*, 1712, pp. 503-658). The chapters on torpedo fish, mummy (*mumiyeh*), and the Dracunculus worm are especially related to Persia (see Bowers and Carruba, 1970, 1982; *Amoenitates*, 1712, pp. 509-15, 516-24, 524-35).

Returning home in August 1694, Kaempfer bought the Steinhof in Lieme, a small village near Lemgo, and practiced as a surgeon. On December 7, 1698 he was sworn in as court physician at the court of the Lippean Count Friedrich Adolph in Detmold. On November 8, 1700 he married the young Maria Sophia Wilstach, with whom he had three children, who all died in their infancy. Altogether Kaempfer's last years were unhappy ones—he was unable to publish his Oriental and Asian researches (only the *Amoenitates* was published eighteen years after his return; *Amoenitates*, 1712), and he failed to gain a permanent and socially acceptable position as professor or librarian. Being surgeon at the court in Detmold took too much time and prevented him from engaging in further research, and he felt embittered for having venues and opportunities barred to him in his final years.

Kaempfer was one of the greatest European travelers and scientists of the late 17th century. He reached new heights in describing foreign cultures. His methodology developed from a purely humanistic 'curiositas' attitude, which he tested out during his early travels and sojourns in different towns and countries, to a highly differentiated and more scientific system of collecting information and materials. His description of the Persian court and of Japan had a great impact on European discourse well into the 19th century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Kaempfer's works.

Werke, ed. D. Haberland, W. Michel, E. Gössmann, et al., Munich, 6 vols.: I, *Heutiges Japan* (2001a), ed. W. Michel and B. J. Terwiel; II, *Briefe 1683-1715* (2001b), ed. D. Haberland; III, *Zeichnungen japanischer Pflanzen* (2003a), ed. B. Hoppe; IV, *Engelbert Kaempfer in Siam* (2003b), ed. B. J. Terwiel; V, *Notitiae Malabaricae* (2003c), ed. A. Gaur; VI, *Russlandtagebuch 1683* (2003d), ed. M.



Schippan.

Flora Japonica (1712), repr. with comm. W. Muntschick, Wiesbaden, 1983 [contains the fifth part of the *Amoenitates*].

The History of Japan, London, 1727, 2 vols.; new ed., Glasgow, 1906, 3 vols.; repr. as *The History of Japan, together with a Description of the Kingdom of Siam, 1690-1692*, New York, 1971.

Kure, Shūzō, *Kenperu Edo sanpu kikō* (Kaempfer's journal of travel to the court of Edo), Tokyo, 1928-29; facs., Tokyo, 1966 [tr. of "Geschichte und Beschreibung von Japan, Book I (only in parts), IV, V, Appendix II].

Geschichte und Beschreibung von Japan. Aus den Originalhandschriften des Verfassers, Lemgo, 1777-79, 2 vols.; repr., *Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte der Geographie und der Reisen* 2, 2 vols., Stuttgart, 1964.

Icones selectae plantarum, quas in Japonia collegit et delineavit Engelbertus Kaempfer, London 1791; repr. with comm. P. Kapitza, H. Hüls, and T. Imai, Berlin, Deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, Heidelberg and New York, 1980.

Phoenix persicus. Die Geschichte der Dattelpalme, ed. and tr. W. Muntschick, Marburg, 1987 [contains the fourth part of the *Amoenitates*]. *Curious Scientific and Medical Observations. Fascicle III*, ed. and tr., R. W. Carrubba, The Library of Renaissance Humanism, Carbondale, Ill., 1996.

Kaempfer's works selected, edited, and translated by others. B. M. Bodart-Bailey, ed. and tr., *Kaempfer's Japan. Tokugawa Culture Observed by Engelbert Kaempfer*, Honolulu, 1999.

K. Meier-Lemgo, "Das Stammbuch Engelbert Kämpfers," *Mitteilungen aus der lippischen Geschichte und Landeskunde* 21, 1952, pp. 142-200.

Idem, ed., *Engelbert Kaempfer. Die Reisetagebücher* (Erdwissenschaftliche Forschung II), Wiesbaden, 1968.

East Meets West. Original Records of Western Traders, Travelers, Missionaries and Diplomats to 1852. Part 2: Papers of Engelbert Kaempfer (1651 – 1716) and related sources from the British Library, 10 reels, 35 mm positive microfilm, Marlborough, Wiltshire, 2000 [contains the manuscripts of the British



Library].

Secondary sources. B. Bodart-Bailey, "Kaempfer Restor'd," *Monumenta Nipponica* 43, 1, 1988, pp. 1-33.

Idem and Derek Massarella, eds., *The Furthest Goal. Engelbert Kaempfer's Encounter with Tokugawa Japan*, Sandgate, 1995.

G. Bonn, "Der wissenschaftliche Nachlass des lippischen Forschungsreisenden Engelbert Kaempfer im Britischen Museum," *Lippische Mitteilungen aus Geschichte und Landeskunde* 48, 1979, pp. 69-116.

Idem, *Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716). Der Reisende und sein Einfluss auf die europäische Bewusstseinsbildung über Asien* (Europäische Hochschulschriften III, 968), Frankfurt/Main, 2003.

J. Z. Bowers and R. W. Carrubba, "The Doctoral Thesis of Engelbert Kaempfer on Tropical Diseases, Oriental Medicine, and Exotic Natural Phenomena," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 25/ 3, 1970, pp. 270-310.

C. de Bruijn, *Aanmerkingen over de printverbeeldingen van de overblyfzelen van het oude Persepolis uitgegeven door de Heeren Chardin and Kempfer*, Amsterdam, 1714.

R. W. Carrubba and J. Z. Bowers, "Kaempfer's First Report of the Torpedo Fish of the Persian Gulf in the Late Seventeenth Century," *Journal of the History of Biology* 15, 2, 1982, pp. 263-74.

J. W. Drijvers, "'Deez tekende en schreef niet anders dan hij zag.' Cornelis de Bruijn, Nicolaes Witsen en Gysbert Cuper," in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, ed., *Persepolis en Pasargadae in wisselend perspectief. Iraanse oudheden beschreven en getekend door Europese reizigers* (Phoenix 35/1), Groningen and Leiden, 1989, pp. 63-80.

Idem, "Persepolis as Perceived by Engelbert Kaempfer and Cornelis de Bruijn," in Haberland, 1993b, pp. 85-104.

D. Haberland, *Von Lemgo nach Japan. Das ungewöhnliche Leben des Engelbert Kaempfer 1651 bis 1716*, Bielefeld, 1990.

Idem, "Zwischen Wunderkammer und Forschungsbericht – Engelbert Kaempfers Beitrag zum europäischen Japanbild," in D. Croissant and L.



Ledderose, eds., *Japan und Europa 1543 – 1929* (Katalog der Berliner Festspiele), Berlin, 1993a, pp. 83-93.

Idem, ed., *Engelbert Kaempfer, Werk und Wirkung: Vorträge der Symposien in Lemgo (19-22.9. 1990) und in Tokyo (15.18.12.1990)* (Boethius 32), Stuttgart, 1993b.

Idem, “Nulli peregrinatorum secundus.’ The Critical Edition of the Printed and Unpublished Works of Engelbert Kaempfer,” *IIAS Newsletter* 3, Autumn 1994, pp. 56-57.

Idem, *Engelbert Kaempfer 1651-1716. A Biography*, tr. Peter Hogg, London, 1996 [enlarged and revised tr. of Haberland, 1990].

Idem, ed., *Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716). Ein Gelehrtenleben zwischen Tradition und Innovation* (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen 104), Wiesbaden, 2004.

Idem, “Engelbert Kaempfer,” in W. E. Gerabek et al., eds., *Enzyklopädie Medizingeschichte*, Berlin and New York, 2005, p. 713.

G. Homayoun, *Iran in europäischen Bildzeugnissen vom Ausgang des Mittelalters bis ins achtzehnte Jahrhundert*, Hamburg, 1969.

H. Hüls, “Auf den Spuren Engelbert Kaempfers im Iran,” in H. Hüls and H. Hoppe, eds., *Engelbert Kaempfer zum 330. Geburtstag. Gesammelte Beiträge zur Engelbert-Kaempfer-Forschung und zur Frühzeit der Asienforschung in Europa* (Lippische Studien 9), Lemgo, 1982, pp. 167-82.

S. Klocke-Daffa, J. Scheffler and G. Wilbertz, eds., *Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716) und die kulturelle Begegnung zwischen Europa und Asien* (Lippische Studien 18), Lemgo, 2003.

M. Lazar, “The Manuscript Maps of Engelbert Kaempfer,” *Imago Mundi* 34, 1982, pp. 66-71.

W. Michel, “Engelbert Kaempfers merkwürdiger Moxa-Spiegel. Wiederholte Lektüre eines deutschen Reisewerks,” *Dokufutsu bungaku kenkyū* 33, 1986, pp. 185-238.

S. Schuster-Walser, *Das safawidische Persien im Spiegel europäischer Reiseberichte (1502-1722)*.



Untersuchungen zur Wirtschafts- und Handelspolitik, Baden-Baden and Hamburg, 1970.

B. Spuler, "Fremde Augen. Überlegungen zu Engelbert Kämpfers Reisebeschreibungen," *Materialia Turcica* 7/8, 1981/82, pp. 325-335.

S. Troebst, "Narva und der Aussenhandel Persiens im 17. Jahrhundert. Zum merkantilen Hintergrund schwedischer Grossmachtpolitik," *Studia baltica stockholmiensia* 11, 1993, pp. 161-78.

F. Vollhardt, "Engelbert Kaempfers (1651-1716). Beschreibung seiner Japanreise und ihre Wirkung im 18. Jahrhundert," in Xenja von Ertzdorff and Gerhard Giessemann, eds., *Erkundung und Beschreibung der Welt. Zur Poetik der Reise- und Länderberichte . . .*, Amsterdam and New York, 2003, pp. 521-40.

J. Wiesehöfer, "'A me igitur . . . Figurarum verum auctorem . . . nemo desideret.' Engelbert Kaempfer und der Alte Iran," in Haberland, 1993b, pp. 105-32.

Idem, "Engelbert Kaempfer in Naqš-i Rostam und Persepolis," in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and J. W. Drijvers, eds., *Through Traveler's Eyes. European Travelers on the Iranian Monuments: Proceedings of the 1989 Groningen Achaemenid History Workshop*, Achaemenid History VII, Leiden, 1991, pp. 71-87.

G. Wilbertz, "Handwerker, Hexen und Gelehrte. Studien zur Familie Kemper/Kaempfer in Lemgo," in S. Klocke-Daffa, J. Scheffler, and G. Wilbertz, eds., pp. 41-92.

(Detlef Haberland)