

ON THE TRANSLATIONS OF KARL ERNST VON BAER'S LATIN DOCTORAL THESIS ON ESTONIANS' ENDEMIC DISEASES (1814) INTO OTHER LANGUAGES

TIIU KASMEL, JAAN KASMEL

Centre for Physical Anthropology, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia

ABSTRACT

Karl Ernst von Baer (1792–1876), who is considered one of the most renowned natural scientists of the 19th century, graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Tartu (then the Imperial University of Dorpat) in the summer of 1814 by defending his doctoral thesis *On Estonians' Endemic Diseases*. According to the requirements at that time, the thesis was written in Latin. In the Middle Ages, Latin was a language of science and culture in a number of European countries; it was also the language of tuition at universities. The following disruption in the natural development of Latin made it a dead language. This may also be considered one of the reasons that have hindered researchers from thoroughly studying Baer's doctoral thesis.

The materials of Baer's 180th birth anniversary conference arranged in Tartu were gathered into the collection *Folia Baeriana* I, published in 1975. As the interest in Baer's works persists nowadays, a decision was made to publish his original works in Estonian translation. The above-mentioned collection was the first to contain the full Estonian translation of Baer's doctoral thesis (translated by Ü. Torpats). The thesis was also printed as a separate book in 1976 and 2013. Thus, it has been possible for everyone who knows Estonian to read the Estonian translation of Baer's doctoral thesis for nearly 40 years. During this time, the significance of English as the language of science has essentially increased in the world. No answer could be found, however, to the question whether Baer's doctoral thesis is available for researchers in English, either in full or partially. To overcome this possible deficiency, we present in this article, the English translation (by I. Anvelt) of the chapter from Baer's doctoral thesis where he gives an overview of Estonians' body build and mentality, as this is of interest from the viewpoint of anthropology.

It might be hoped that by the 190th anniversary of the discovery mammals' (including humans') ovum by Baer, the full English translation of Baer's first research paper, his doctoral thesis, would be available for researchers.

Keywords: *Karl Ernst von Baer, Estonians' body build and mentality*

Karl Ernst von Baer (1792–1876), a graduate of the University of Tartu, which will mark its 383rd anniversary in October this year, can be considered one of the most renowned natural scientists of the 19th century [10].

Professor Hans Trass, Academician of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, said when laying a wreath at the pedestal of the monument to Baer on 28 February 1990, Baer's birth anniversary, "I was asked about the ten greatest graduates of the University of Tartu. I cannot give a full answer to this, but I know who the first one is – this is BAER. [9]"

His work and activities have influenced the development of embryology, zoology, geography, geocryology, ichthyology, geomorphology, archaeology, ornithology, botany and climatology.

K. E. von Baer might also be called an ethnographer, anthropologist, medical scientist, historian, bibliographer, philosopher, populariser of science, reformer of education and science in Russia, researcher of local history and manor economy manager (1834–1866 he was the owner of Piibe and Selli manors in the Estonian guberniya of Tsarist Russia) [11].

A few years ago, Aadu Must, Professor of Archival Studies at the University of Tartu, public figure and politician, relying on sources found in Russian archives, discovered the surprising fact that K. E. von Baer was also one of the founders of the Russian analytical intelligence service and its main ideologist [1].

Archive dossiers may still hide many unknown materials and facts about K. E. von Baer.

The first step in his long and fertile career as a scientist was writing the doctoral dissertation *On Estonians' Endemic Diseases* from June to August 1814. The dissertation was written in Latin, as was then required, and was defended in front of the Council of the Faculty of Medicine of the Imperial University of Dorpat (the present University of Tartu) on 29 August of the same year [4, 8] (Figure 1).

The documents on the defence of his doctoral thesis and the preceding exams are preserved in the Estonian Historical Archives in Tartu as a sepa-

rate storage item. Along with documents in German and Latin on 17 pages in total, the file also includes Baer's doctoral thesis in Latin (88 pp.), his doctoral diploma and the diploma given to him by the Medical Faculty of the University on the 50th anniversary of the defence of his doctoral thesis [8].

In 1972, more than forty years ago, at a conference to mark Baer's 180th birth anniversary, Tullio Ilomets, Associate Professor of Tartu State University (now the University of Tartu), made a presentation *On the defence of Karl Ernst von Baer's doctoral dissertation* [8].

An extended version of the presentation was published on pages 113–140 of the collection *Folia Baeriana I* issued by the Estonian SSR

Academy of Sciences and the Estonian Naturalists' Society (Tallinn: Valgus, 1975, 184 pp., 1000 copies) (Figure 2). It shows that, in addition to the above-mentioned archive file, the author had used 13 other publications [5].

Baer's Latin doctoral dissertation, which consists of a preface and five chapters, and the Latin materials of the archive file were translated into Estonian by Ülo Torpats, then a lecturer of Tartu State University.

The editorial board of the collection *Folia Baeriana I* included H. Haberman, T. Loit, P. Määrsepp, K. Paaver, E. Parmasto, E. Varep.

The collection was compiled by M. Valt and T. Ilomets, edited by V. Kaavere and T. Sutt; the cover design was made by I. Pääsuke.

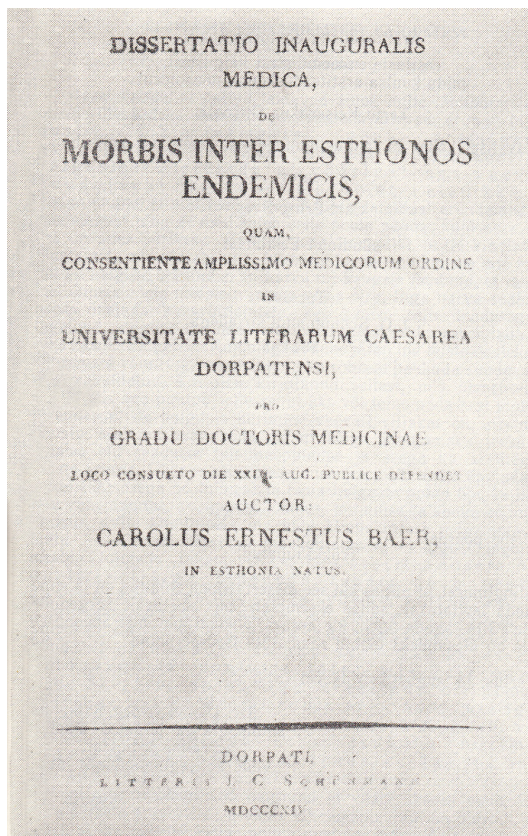


Figure 1. Title page of K. E. Baer's doctoral thesis (1814). (Printed XXIV, corrected in ink XXIX – the latter is correct)

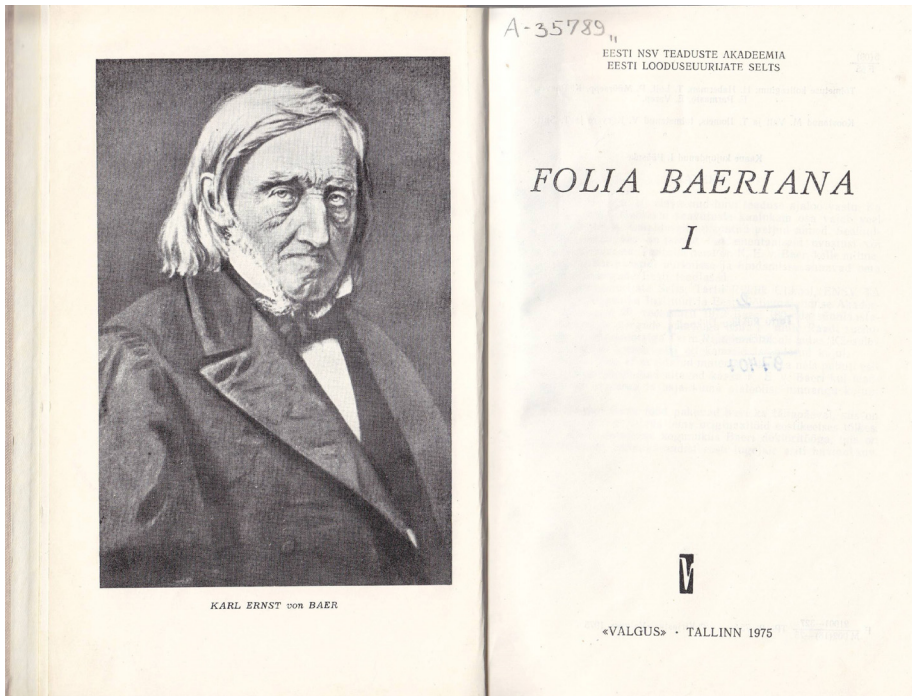


Figure 2. Title page of the collection *Folia Baeriana I* (Tallinn, Valgus, 1975), on the left K. E. v. Baer.

This collection marks the beginning of publication of Baer's original papers in Estonian. The first to be published in Estonian was the translation of his thesis written in Latin – on pages 141–181 of the collection [5]; the translator Ü. Torpats had done his work excellently.

In the following year, 1976, Ü Torpats' Estonian translation of Baer's dissertation appeared on pages 7–56 of Issue 33 (977) of *Loomingu Raamatukogu* series in 25,000 copies [6] (Figure 3).

The preface on pp. 5–7 was written by H. Haberman; K. E. v. Baer's autobiography is presented on pp. 57–58; V. Kalnin's article "Notes and explanations to K. E. v. Baer's doctoral thesis" is published on pp.59–62, and the best-known short biographies are given on pp. 63–64.

In 2013, Ü. Torpats's Estonian translation of K. E. v. Baer's doctoral thesis was published for the third time by Hea Lugu publishers in Tallinn as a smallish (172×114×18 mm) very beautifully designed book of 151 pages in 1000 copies [7] (Figure 4).

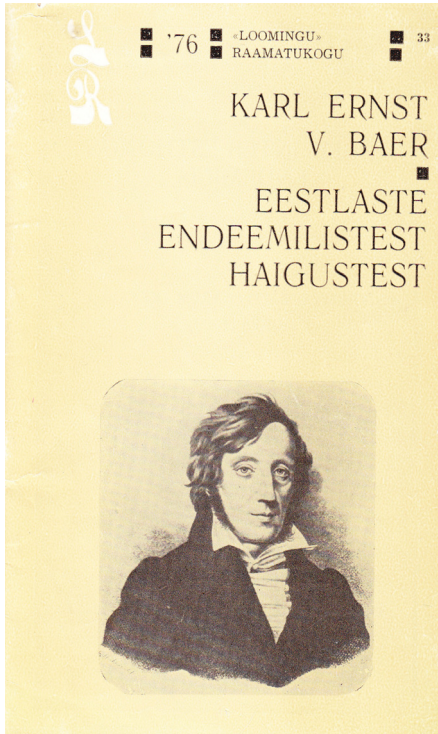


Figure 3. Cover page of issue 33 (977) of Loomingu Raamatukogu series (Tallinn, 1976) which includes the Estonian translation of Baer's doctoral thesis.

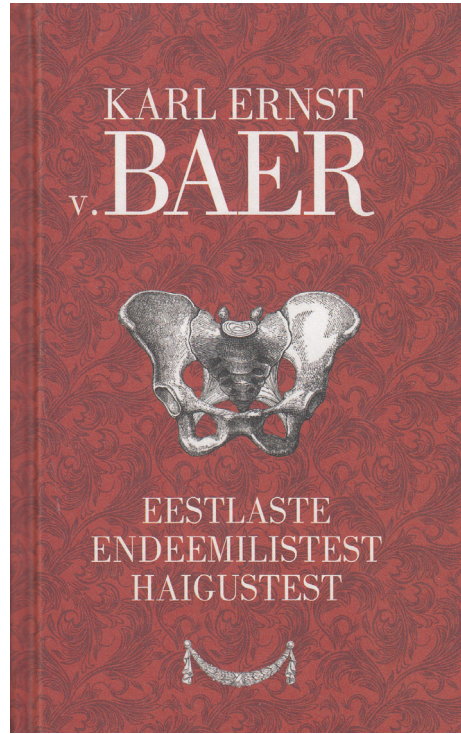


Figure 4. Cover of the Estonian translation of K. E. v. Baer's doctoral thesis published in Tallinn in 2013.

The contents page of the edition on p. 5 shows that the preface on pp. 7–10 was written by historian of science E. Tammiksaar PhD; the Estonian translation of Baer's thesis is given on pp. 14–135. It is followed by K. E. v. Baer's autobiography; the main short biographies are on pp. 145–148 and the chronology of K. E. v. Baer's life on pp. 149–151.

Thus, it has been possible for everyone who knows Estonian to read the Estonian translation of Baer's doctoral thesis for more than 40 years. The reader can find interesting and pleasant but also derogatory facts and opinions on Estonians, as for Baer, Estonians were merely an object of research. The thesis deals with the actual way of life and health status of Estonian serf peasants in the early 19th century, thus being a valuable source on the history of sanitation and hygiene in Estonia [11].

The printed version of Baer's doctoral dissertation in Latin, like its reprint made in Berlin in 1938, where the introduction had been translated into German, have become bibliographical rarities [9] (Figure 5).

Relatively little has been written about his doctoral thesis as a medical-geographical study. The papers describing it have been limited to summaries of the chapters and do not contain any analyses of problems. The main reasons seem to be the local character of the theme, treatment of a geographically limited area and the fact that the thesis was written in Latin.

Baer's choice of the theme for his doctoral thesis *On Estonians' Endemic Diseases* was influenced by Daniel Georg Balk (1764–1826),

Ordinary Professor of Pathology, Semiotics, Therapy and Clinic. Balk can be regarded as an outstanding physician in the Baltics at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. He also contributed to the development of anthropology at the University of Dorpat (Tartu) and in Tsarist Russia from 1802–1817 [12].

In his autobiography, Baer notes that he felt well prepared for the theme, as in his boyhood he had accompanied his private teacher when the latter visited peasant families to treat illnesses. Command of the Estonian language enabled him to communicate directly with the country people; when collecting specimens for his herbarium in Estonia and Livonia, he learned to recognise many medicinal plants.

In his thesis, Baer relies on observations made at the clinics of the University of Tartu, Riga military hospital and on expeditions as well as on literary sources that describe Estonians' way of life and health status [9].

The second chapter of Baer's doctoral thesis (*On Estonians' customs*) is of particular interest from the anthropological point of view, as it provides an

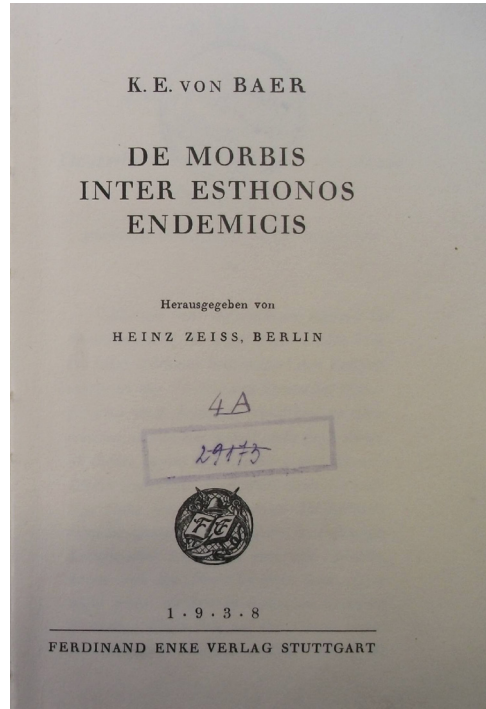


Figure 5. Title page of the reprint of K. E. v. Baer's doctoral thesis (1814), Berlin 1938.

overview of the Estonian people in general, their dwellings, clothing, food and drink. In § 14, it also describes Estonians' body build and mentality (Figures 6–9); in the two last paragraphs, respectively, their personal hygiene and lifestyle during different seasons.

The short description of Estonians' *habitus* (body build) compiled by him in Latin is a characteristic example of the anthropological thought of his period [14].

The second chapter of K. E. v. Baer's doctoral thesis in Latin, "On Estonians' customs" where paragraph 14 describes Estonians' body build and mentality has been used by researchers in a shortened version in translation into Estonian and Russian [4].

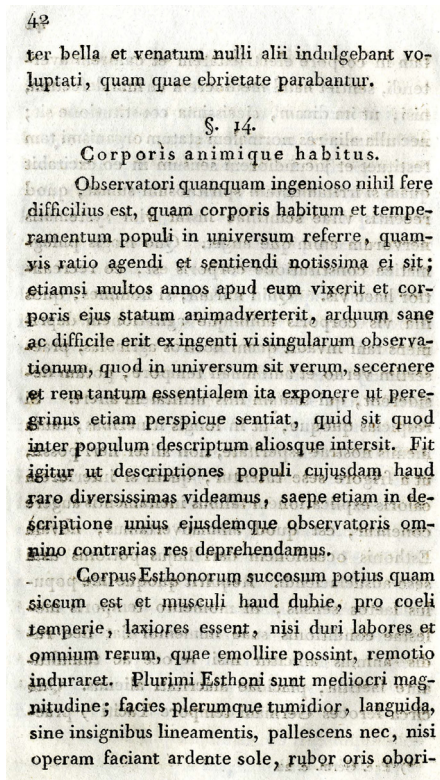


Figure 6. Page 42 of § 14 "Body build and mentality" from Chapter II "On Estonian's customs" of K. E. v. Baer's Latin doctoral thesis.

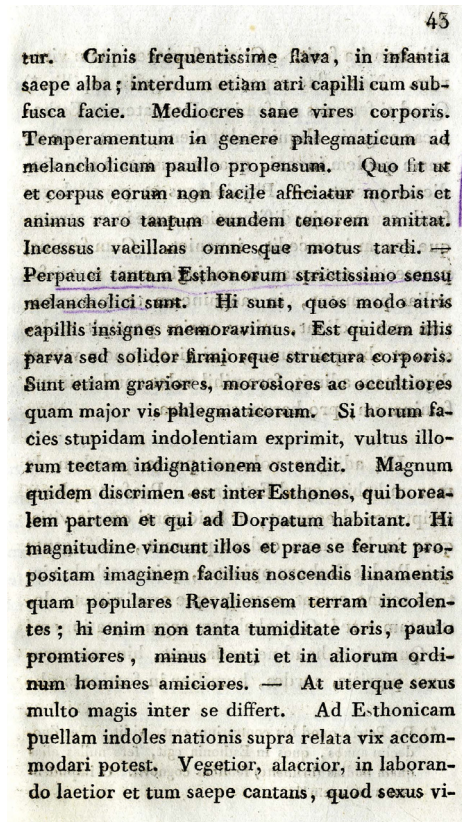


Figure 7. Page 43 of § 14 "Body build and mentality" from Chapter II "On Estonian's customs" of K. E. v. Baer's Latin doctoral thesis.

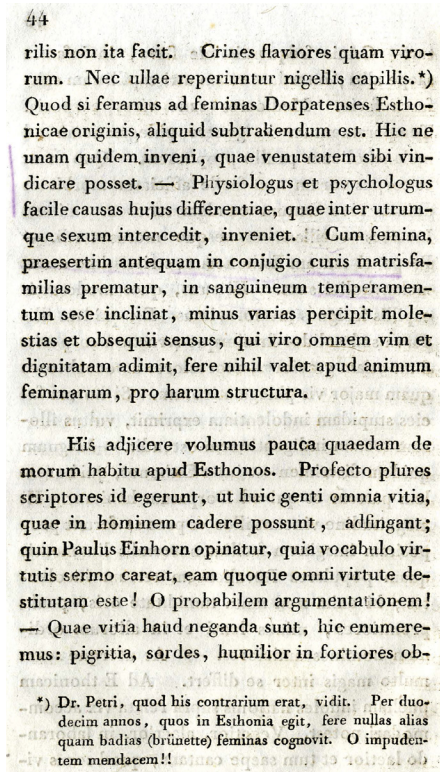


Figure 8. Page 44 of § 14 “Body build and mentality” from Chapter II “On Estonian’s customs” of K. E. v. Baer’s Latin doctoral thesis.

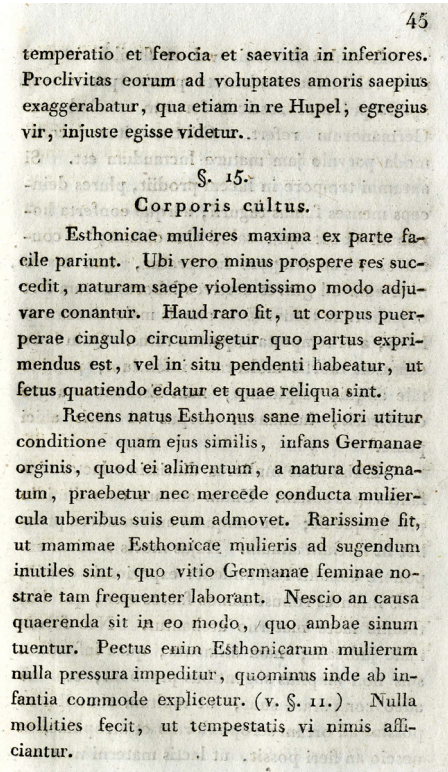


Figure 9. Page 45 of § 14 “Body build and mentality” from Chapter II “On Estonian’s cus- toms” of K. E. v. Baer’s Latin doctoral thesis.

For example, Prof. Juhan Aul has used it in his doctoral thesis *Lääne-Eesti maakondade eestlaste antropoloogilisi tunnuseid ja tõuline kuuluvus* (Anthropological features and racial affiliation of Estonians in the counties of West Estonia) in 14 typewritten lines on p. 17 [2]. Juhan Aul published the same excerpt in 15 lines in his article in Estonian “Eesti antropoloogilise uurimise senine viljelemine ja tulevikuülesanded” (Development of Estonian anthropological research until now and its future tasks) [3].

J. Aul has also published the same excerpt in 17 lines on p.6 of his monograph *Antropologija estonceev* (Anthropology of Estonians) in Russian in 1964 [14].

Linda Kongo, Academic Secretary of the Estonian Naturalists’ Society, published in 1999 an article in Estonian, “Eesti LUS-i osa antropoloogilises uurimistöös” (The role of the Estonian Naturalists’ Society in anthropological

research), where she used ten lines characterising Estonians from the full Estonian translation of Baer's Latin doctoral thesis in *Folia Baeriana I* (1975) [13].

Here we publish §14 from the second chapter "On Estonians' customs" from Baer's doctoral thesis in English (in Ilmar Anvelt's translation). We hope that this will make it easier for researchers to get an overview of the problems of Estonians' body build and mentality.

Chapter II

On Estonians' customs

§ 14

Body build and mentality

Even for a sharp-witted observer, nearly nothing is more difficult than to describe the body build and temperament of a nation in general. Even if its way of action and mentality are well known to him; even if he has lived among this nation for many years and has paid attention to its physical condition, it proves extremely difficult to distinguish from among innumerable individual observations those which are generally correct, and to present only the essential part in such a way that even a foreigner would understand by which the described nation differs from others. Therefore, it happens that we often see very different descriptions about some nation and often notice downright contradictory things in the description of the same observer.

The body of Estonians is juicy rather than dry, and their muscles, considering the nature of the climate, would definitely be more flaccid if not the hard work and lack of all comforts had not hardened them. Most Estonians are of medium stature; the face is usually quite sturdy, dull, without noticeable features and pale; only if they work in the hot sun, the face reddens. Hair is most often blond, in childhood often white; black hair and swarthy complexion also occur. The bodily strength is rather medium; the temperament is generally phlegmatic with a slight tendency to melancholic. Therefore, their body is not particularly receptive to diseases, and their spirit only seldom loses its usual disposition. The gait is faltering and all movements slow. – Only very few Estonians are melancholics in the strict sense – those about whom I just noted that they stand out by their black hair. Those are, by the way, of small stature but with a firmer and stronger body build. They are also more serious, obstinate and uncommunicative than the phlegmatic majority. While the face of the latter expresses dull-witted numbness, the melancholics' look shows hidden indignation. By the way, there is a great difference between the Estonians

living in the northern part of the country and in the vicinity of Tartu. The latter surpass the former in their growth and they have a candid appearance because their facial features that are more easily understandable than those of their compatriots living around Tallinn; they do not have so sturdy faces; they are somewhat more prone to action, less slow and more friendly to people of other classes. – Both sexes, however, differ much more from each other. The national character described above can hardly be attributed to Estonian girls. They are more lively, quicker, merrier when working and love to sing at work, which the menfolk usually do not do. Their hair is more yellowish than that of men's, and none of them is black-haired 1).

1) Dr. Petri has seen quite the opposite. During the twelve years he was active in Estonia, he claims to have seen almost only swarthy women. Oh, what a shameless liar!

If we wanted to transfer this to the women around Tartu, some things should be crossed out. By the way, I have found no one here who might consider herself beautiful. The physiologist and the psychologist can easily find the reasons for the differences between the genders. As the woman, particularly before she is encumbered by the worries of the mother of the family, tends towards the sanguine temperament, she is less sensitive to various kinds of hardships; the sense of subjugation which robs the man of all his strength and dignity, means next to nothing to women, considering their constitution.

I would like to add a few words about the moral character of Estonians. Too many writers have attempted to blame all kinds of faults on this nation; thus, Paul Einhorn thinks that this nation is completely devoid of virtue, as the word virtue is claimed to be lacking in their language. Oh, what a laudable argumentation! Of the faults that cannot be denied, I would enumerate here: laziness, dirtiness, excessive humility to the mightier and cruelty and atrociousness to their inferiors. Their tendency to sexual pleasures has often been exaggerated; even such a wonderful man as Hupel seems to have been unfair in this respect.

All of this gives us reason to consider Baer's doctoral thesis the first paper that thoroughly dealt with Estonians' anthropology and marked the beginning of Estonians' anthropological research. Because of its description of Estonians' body build and appearance, the thesis can also be considered an anthropological-medical-geographical study.

Acknowledgment. The authors are greatly thankful to Ilmar Anvelt MA, Lecturer at the Department of English, University of Tartu, for his kind help.

REFERENCES

1. Ajaloolane: Karl Ernst von Baer oli Venemaa luure asutaja (2010). Postimees, 10.01.
2. Aul J. (1937). Lääne-Eesti maakondade eestlaste antropoloogilisi tunnuseid ja tõuline kuuluvus: Matemaatika-Loodusteaduskonnale *doctor philosophiae naturalis* astme omandamiseks esitatud väitekirj. Tartu.
3. Aul J. (1938). Eesti antropoloogilise uurimise senine viljelemine ja tuleviku-ülesanded. In: Omariikluse süvendamisel. Tartu: Ü. S. Raimla kirjastus, 74–79.
4. Baer K.E. (1814). De morbis inter esthonos endemicis. Dorpati.
5. Baer K.E. (1814). Eestlaste endeemilistest haigustest. In: *Folia Baeriana I*. Tallinn: Valgus, 1975, 141–181.
6. Baer K.E. (1814). Eestlaste endeemilistest haigustest. In: “Loomingu” Raamatukogu, 33. Tallinn: Perioodika, 1976, 7–56.
7. Baer K.E. (1814). Eestlaste endeemilistest haigustest. Tallinn: Hea Lugu, 2013.
8. Ilomets T. (1975). Karl Ernst v. Baeri doktoritöö kaitsmisest. In: *Folia Baeriana I*. Tallinn: Valgus, 113–115.
9. Kaavere V. (1992). Baer. Tartu.
10. Kalnin V. (1967). C. E. Baeri doktoriväitekirjast. Nõukogude Eesti Tervishoid, 3: 228–229.
11. Kalnin V. (1976). Ääremärkusi ja selgitusi K. E. v. Baeri doktoriväitekirja juurde. In: “Loomingu” Raamatukogu, 33. Tallinn: Perioodika, 59–62.
12. Kalnin V. (1996). Daniel Georg Balk. In: Eesti arstiteaduse ajaloo. Ed. V. Kalnin. Tartu: 25–29.
13. Kongo L. (1999). Eesti LUS-i osa antropoloogilises uurimistöös. In: Eesti Antropomeetriaregistri Aastaraamat 1999. Tartu, 17–24.
14. Aul' J. (1964) Antropologija èstoncev. Tartu = Ауль Ю. (1964). Антропология эстонцев. Тарту.

Address for correspondence:

Jaan Kasmel
Centre for Physical Anthropology
Struve 2, Tartu 51003, Estonia
E-mail: jaanjasmel@hotmail.ee