

SUMMARY

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*Who is the Author of the Enlightenment  
Pamphlet “Letters on Reval?”*

This article weighs the arguments for and against the claim that Johann Christoph Petri (1762–1851) was the author of the pamphlet *Briefe über Reval* (Letters on Tallinn). Although Petri has been accepted as its anonymous author by everyone writing about him, and is so recognized in general texts, in some recent analyses by German historians (Gerd Ueding, Josef Huerkamp and Georg Meyer-Thurow), it is Christian August Fischer who emerges as a possible author of the work. Fischer was a literary figure in late Enlightenment-era Germany, the author of 75 published works of fiction, travel literature, and political studies. He even became professor of “cultural history and the fine arts” at Würzburg University for a brief period 1804. Fischer had some contacts with the Baltic provinces, travelling in May 1795 to Riga via Lübeck. At the beginning of 1796 he was somewhere in the vicinity of Lake Peipsi when he wrote, using the nom de plume “Trolling” the belletristic book *Ueber die falschen Bäuche* (False stomach).

The attitudes towards the Baltic-German community reflected in “Letters on Tallinn” are clearly different from those contained in Petri’s confirmed works. The author of “Letters” seems to be native German who happened to spend a brief time in the Baltic lands, but who does not even try to hide his contempt and distaste for the Baltics as a backwater of German culture. Petri’s attitude, however, is mostly favourable, and appreciative of the Baltic-German cultural level. It must thus be noted that on the basis of existing information, it is not possible to assign authorship conclusively to either Fischer or Petri since there are arguments in favour of both. Petri’s authorship of this work, which our cultural historians have so far firmly supported, is now under serious doubt, and the scales are rather weighed in Fischer’s favour.