

Leo Utter, an Estonian Paper Historian 1929-2006

Leo Utter was born on November 19, 1929 in Tartu (Dorpat). After having studied mathematics in his home town he during the years 1974-75 continued his studies in technology of electronic calculating machines in Kiev. After the graduation with a degree in engineering he was first employed at the University of Tartu and then, during a long run of years, at the Institute of Astronomy and Institute of Physics of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. In addition to electronic calculating machines he also devoted his time to questions of optics and published more than 30 articles about various subjects in those fields.

Already as a young schoolboy at the age of nine years, after having discovered watermarks in stamps, Leo Utter became fascinated by them. Philately remained his hobby to that degree that he became a member of associations such as the Philatelic association of the USSR and Briefmarken-Sammlerverein in the Federal Republic of Germany. Having married in 1959 he began, together with his wife Öie, to collect paper provided with watermarks and he did this collecting in a remarkably systematic way. In the course of ten years the collection had received such dimensions that it had become well-known among experts in the Soviet Union.

To collect watermarks was, however, not unproblematic because they had been classified as state secrets! This peculiar regulation was due to the fact that Soviet banknotes were printed on paper which was provided with watermarks. It was only in 1984 Leo Utter, together with his wife, was able to publish their first article. It was printed in the volume "Musei" in Moscow.

But how to get hold of paper with historical watermarks? Leo Utter told how he had achieved an agreement with the State Archives located in Tartu. During the 1960s, when helping the Archives in measuring humidity in the stacks, he had learned that the Archives was weeding out paper which contained watermarks. On his request the Archives agreed to let him choose what he wanted. The whole business was, however, rather complicated. The Archives had to deliver the paper to recycling according to an official plan and it was forbidden to take away anything. The business was arranged in such a way that every time, when a parcel or parcels of paper had been collected, Leo Utter was given an opportunity to choose. Because the weight of the parcels had to remain untouched he bought two or three kilograms of Pravda or other Russian language newspapers to replace the loss of the weight. Of course, even this was forbidden and had therefore to be arranged without publicity. The last time, when this "exchange" took place, was around the beginning of the 1980s.

In 1989 Leo and Öie Utter met the well-known paper historian Wisso Weiss from Eastern Germany, at that time still German Democratic Republic, and the doors to the international circles of paper historians opened to them. Leo Utter became corresponding member of the IPH and member of the Deutscher Arbeitskreis für Papiergeschichte.

Leo and Öie Utter were a real team which dedicated its efforts to the research on paper history. They benefited greatly from their different skills. Leo was strong in methods based on mathematics and natural sciences, Öie brought to the team her expertise in history and the history of art. Together they published more than 35 articles in various European publications and gave more than 20 papers at international conferences. Öie Utter is continuing the work which they, in almost 50 years time, had carried out together. For instance she has recently

published two of the studies they prepared together. The first one, a short study printed in 2006 in German, deals with a mathematical approach in the study of watermarks: *Grundbegriffe für Filigranologie. Wasserzeichenkunde und Mathematik* (Tartu 2006). The most recent publication is a study on the Estonian paper mill in Rāpinā (in German Rappin) and its watermarks: *Papierfabrik in Rāpinā. Wasserzeichenkatalog* (Tartu 2008).

The Association of Nordic Paper Historians NPH arranged its annual meeting 2005 in Estonia, Tallinn and Tartu, and had a chance to visit the paper mill in Rāpinā. The participants had an opportunity to meet also with Leo and Öie Utter and to have a glimpse in the material they had collected. In an enthusiastic way they told about their research as well as their experiences during the Soviet time and gave a presentation of some of the results of their research.

Esko Häkli

Helsinki

