

# Leibniz's Last Letter on Linguistic Matters

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**Abstract** We reproduce in what follows the last writing published in life by G.W. Leibniz (1646-1716) on linguistic topics. Together with other works by scholars of the time, Leibniz's essay served as an introduction to an important collection of versions of the *Pater noster* in many different languages (Chamberlayne ed. 1715). In his critical remarks, the philosopher not only summarises his main ideas about the importance and method of linguistic comparison, but also integrates them with interpretative insights from neighbouring fields, such as numismatics, archaeology, and the history of writing systems. The editor's commentary gives information on the historical and theoretical context in which Leibniz writes and on the numerous authors and works mentioned in the text.

**Keywords** G.W. Leibniz. Linguistic comparativism. Writing systems. *Pater noster*. *Ora-tio dominica*. John Chamberlayne.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Leibniz's Latest Reflections on Linguistic Issue.



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## 1 Introduction

The long letter published here<sup>1</sup> belongs to the last period of Leibniz's philosophical and scientific activity. It was printed for the first time in 1715 and, to the best of my knowledge, has never been reproduced or discussed before in recent times. (Its reprint in Dutens' 1768 collection of Leibniz's works has no philological significance). In the following pages, the reader will find some information about its composition and the topics it deals with. As a preliminary remark, it must be said that this letter to John Chamberlayne is part of that section of Leibniz's work that concerns the theoretical, historical and comparative study of historical-natural languages. This is a field often neglected by scholars, who have mainly focused on strictly philosophical and logical topics. However, the importance of Leibniz's linguistic studies was already recognized in the nineteenth century (in the valuable books by Neff 1870-71) and at the beginning of the twentieth (Pietsch 1908-09). In times closer to us, it was only with the posthumous publication (1973) of Sigrid von der Schulenburg's research (dating back to the 1930s) and with some essays by Hans Aarsleff (1964, 1969) and Albert Heinekamp (1972) that Leibniz "als Sprachforscher" acquired full standing as an object of study. Since then, several scholars have investigated both the observations which Leibniz devoted to individual languages and language families and the role that historical-natural languages play in the philosopher's theory of knowledge. Leibniz the linguist, therefore, is no longer regarded merely as the theorist of the "characteristica universalis", but as a real philosopher of language who (by contrast to what Cassirer supposed in 1923) studied the semantics of ordinary languages and those of artificial languages within the same theoretical framework.<sup>2</sup>

This new strand of studies has concentrated in particular on Leibniz's vast erudite correspondence, beginning in the early 1690s, and on those works in which the topic of historical-natural languages plays a central role. In this regard, it is worth mentioning, first of all, the third book of the *Nouveaux Essais sur l'entendement humain* (1703-05) and then the writings from his late maturity: the *Brevis designatio meditationum, ductis potissimum ex indicio linguarum*, published in 1710 as an introductory essay to the *Miscellanea Berolinensia* of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, and the unfinished *Epistolica de historia etymologica dissertatio* (1711-12), a real handbook of

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**1** I would like to thank Dr. Sergio Knipe for his valuable help in the stylistic revision of this paper. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers whose suggestions helped me to improve its first draft.

**2** See especially Heinekamp 1976; Mugnai 1976; Dascal 1978; Gensini 1991; Poser 1996.

“Leibnizian linguistics”, so to speak. Other important materials can be found in the *Collectanea etymologica*, published posthumously in 1717 by Leibniz's former secretary Johann Georg von Eckhart (1664-1730), in the *Otium Hanoveranum: sive, Miscellanea, ex ore & schedis illustris viri [...] Godofr. Guilielmi Leibnitii*, published by Joachim Friedrich Feller (1673-1726) in 1718 and, finally, in his fundamental *Commercium Epistolicum* with the great German Semitist Hiob Ludolf (1624-1704), published by August Benedikt Michaelis (1725-1768) in 1752.

For an overview of the results achieved by studies concerning these aspects of Leibniz's production, I will simply refer to the volume of various authors edited by Wenchao Li (2014), as well as Van Hal (2015), which includes extensive bibliographical references; another very useful book is Michael C. Carhart's *Leibniz Discovers Asia* (2019), which offers an overview of the philosopher's orientalist interests.

## 2 Leibniz's Latest Reflections on Linguistic Issue

Leibniz's last piece of writing on linguistic matters was the letter (a typical *Epistolaris dissertatio* according to the standard of his times) addressed to the English gentleman and courtier John Chamberlayne (1668-1723). It appeared in the important collection of versions of the *Our Father* in many different languages that Chamberlayne published in 1715 with the title *Oratio dominica in diversas omnium fere gentium linguas versa et proprijs cujusque linguae characteribus expressa* (Amsterdam, typis Guilielmi & Davidis Goerei).

Along with Leibniz's contributions, the book also included a number of essays by scholars from various lands: Englishmen like William Nicholson, Jerreel Jones, and Leibniz's correspondent William Wotton; Dutchmen like the famous Adriaan Reeland and Willem Surenhuis; another member of the philosopher's circle, the Frenchman Mathurin Veyssier de La Croze; and, finally, Germans like Leibniz himself and Johann Joachim Schröder. The editor was a young scholar of German origin, David Wilkins, whom Chamberlayne had entrusted with the task of collecting the necessary materials, and integrating them with a numbers of versions of the *Pater noster* which he already had. Chamberlayne had reserved for himself the diplomatic part of the enterprise, which also had to do with the political relations between the Crown and the Elector of Hannover, two illustrious members of the Protestant world (this aspect of the question is somewhat evident throughout the exchange of letters with Leibniz, which began in 1703 and intensified after 1710).

Chamberlayne's invitation for Leibniz to submit an essay of his own is included in a deferential letter to the philosopher from West-

minster, dated 24 November/5 December 1713 (*T*, 1713, no. 439) (“vous qui peutetre entendez plus de ces versions là qu’aucun autre, et qui connoissez le Genie de Toutes”). As a matter of fact, unlike other scholars involved in the book, Leibniz had not yet published any far-reaching works on such a difficult subject, except for the 1710 essay *Brevis designatio de originibus gentium, ductis potissimum ex indicio linguarum* – the dissertation that opened the *Miscellanea* by the Berlin Academy of Sciences, which he himself had founded in 1701 – and for shorter papers in scholarly journals. However, his reputation as an expert in the study of languages was immense: since 1687 the philosopher had been exchanging letters with the most important scholars in the field (the great German Semitist Hiob Ludolf being a relevant case in point); he had inspired both mature and upcoming researchers to undertake original investigations on German, Slavic, and African languages; and had also encouraged both Ludolf and his Swedish friend Sparwenfeld to compile a synopsis of all known alphabets and their characters to facilitate mutual comprehension. Other very important philological essays (such as the *Epistolica de historia etymologica dissertatio*, of 1711-12) lay unfinished on his desk and were destined to remain unknown, along with his valuable logical papers, until the twentieth century.

The invitation reached Leibniz in Vienna, which he had moved to in mid-December 1712. During his lengthy stay in the city, he had embarked upon diplomatic tasks: this was a delicate phase of the long War of the Spanish Succession, which the Hanover Elector, unlike the Emperor, expected to be continued; but Leibniz was also trying to make the most of the Emperor's benevolence (in April 1713 Charles VI had appointed him as *Reichshofrat*) in order to pursue some scientific tasks, including the idea (or, perhaps, the dream) of establishing another Academy of Sciences at the very heart of the Holy Empire. Notwithstanding his engagements, Leibniz soon found some time to meet with Chamberlayne's expectations. On the one hand, taking part in the enterprise was a significant acknowledgement of his own position, not only as a philosopher and theologian, but also as a philologist; on the other, owing to his quarrel with Newton, which had prompted the Royal Society to officially accuse him of plagiarism, Leibniz's relationships with English intellectual circles were strained. It was no coincidence, moreover, that in the following months Chamberlayne worked hard to resolve the controversy with Newton, unfortunately without success.

Leibniz's dissertation “*insigni viro Johanni Chamberlaynio*” bears the date of 13 Jan. 1714. Already on 18 February 1714, the English gentleman acknowledged its receipt, admitting that Leibniz's letter had reached him “3 or 4 weeks” earlier and that he had not yet had time to reply. Eventually, he declared himself pleasantly surprised at Leibniz's timely answer, and attributed a few minor mistakes in the

text to the latter's haste. Of course, Leibniz had written without having access to his usual resources: the books in his library in Wolfenbüttel. For many references included in his essay, he had to rely on memory, a circumstance that explains a couple of *lapsus* which will be indicated in the footnotes, and that, to tell the truth, apparently escaped even Chamberlayne's and Wotton's revision.

Up until now, Leibniz's last piece of writing on language had not attracted enough scholarly attention to receive an updated edition or a commentary. The promised fifth series of the Akademie-Ausgabe, *Sprachwissenschaftliche und Historische Schriften*, will probably fill this gap. (A full transcript of the letter is already available in *T* for the year 1714). I have decided to provide a provisional edition of the text, enriched with historical references, sources etc., with the limited aim of contributing to the knowledge of this important, but often underrated, aspect of Leibniz's work, which surely helps us to better understand both his cultural background and the role he played in his times, as a scholar and, in some sense, as a linguist.

In the repertoire of *Pater noster* editions that concludes the first volume of his *Mithridates* (1806), Johann Christoph Adelung devoted two full pages to Chamberlayne's book. He appreciated the richness of the collection and its novelty compared to previous attempts, and made some considerations about the critical papers included in it. Leibniz (and other contributors) seemed to him to "repeat things already known" (1806, 665). What should today's reader make of this judgement, which is rather harsh, if not rash?

In a sense, Adelung's critical remark was correct. Unlike other scholars involved in the enterprise (e.g. Reeland and Wilkins, both engaged in the study of Egyptian topics) Leibniz offered no new empirical data but focused on methodological considerations, so to say. After a review of the first collections of *Pater noster* and their valuable authors (Conrad Gessner, Hieronimus Megiser, Andreas Müller etc.), Leibniz had presented and concisely discussed a number of questions debated by scholars at that time. These had to do not only with the classification of the main language groups (as had been the case in the *Brevis designatio*) but also with the role that other fields of study, namely archaeology and numismatics, could play for historical-linguistic purposes. In these pages, contemporary scholars will discover other features of the philosopher's multifaceted scientific profile: his admirable familiarity with the literature on the ruins of Palmyra and Persepolis, through which it was probably possible to shed light on the history of the Near East, and particularly of Syria, in its connections with the Greek-Latin world; his tendency to address difficult questions concerning the history of alphabets, including the origin of runes, the influence of the Greek alphabet on both Slavic ones, Glagolitic and its successor, Cyrillic; some still mysterious cases, such as cuneiform writing or the *Tabulae Eugubinae*,

apparently based on Etruscan, and so on. Further intriguing issues concern Leibniz's concept of Celtic ("id est Germanicae Gallicaeque gentes"), Ulfila's authorship of the *Codex Argenteus*, and the peculiar position of Chinese, in which the spoken language and the written (ideographic) one take independent paths. In essence, the philosopher confirms the positions he had defended both in his rare essays and in his still unpublished work (particularly in the *Epistolica de historia etymologica dissertatio* addressed to Eckhart and destined to introduce the forthcoming *Collectanea Etymologica*). These views are not original *stricto sensu*, but, if viewed in the context of the erudite debate of those days, they show the imprint of the scholar's balanced perspective, free from any temptation to bend the study of antiquities in a nationalistic sense. All in all, Leibniz's letter to Chamberlayne is probably a minor piece of his immense scientific production, but one that deserves attention both in itself and for what it tells us of the philosopher's range of interests, which he continued to expand until the last months of his busy life.

A few remarks are in order, here, to illustrate the criteria I have followed in my work. I had no intention to offer a real *critical* edition of the text. Instead, I have tried to provide the reader with a *provisional* edition, adapted to modern reading habits, and integrated with all the useful information I have been able to gather. I hope this will help the reader to extricate him/herself from the mass of references and names (not always easy to identify) quoted by the author. To this end, invaluable help has come to me – as to any other Leibniz scholar – from the online resources made available by the Leibniz Archiv in Hannover. The *Vorversionen* of the correspondence (that will be included in the first series of Leibniz's historical and erudite *Briewechsel*) have proved especially valuable.

I have used the first edition of the *Dissertatio*, published in 1715, leaving aside its reprint in the Dutens's 1768 edition, which is damaged by a number of mistakes. In order to facilitate reading, Latin accents indicating the syllables' quantity have been removed (along with other merely graphic conventions, such as *rectè* instead of *recte*); abbreviations have been solved; punctuation has been adapted to modern usage, when necessary; also the usage of capital letters (notoriously broad in Leibniz's times) has been modernized. Proper names, given in the text in their humanistic form, have been quoted in their 'normal' form in the footnotes. In a couple of (probably obvious) cases my researches have been unsuccessful.

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**Figures 1-2** (Following pages) Manuscript of Leibniz's 1715 Letter to Lord Chamberlayne. Courtesy of the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek - Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek. Shelfmark: Noviss 452, 3, 4

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Chamberlayne

Aleph  
insigni Viri Edwardo Chamberlano  
Johanne Guilielmo Leibnitio  
p. d.

Non sine applausu intellectus consilium  
libere videtur proles auctas et emanatas  
Oratione dominica multarum linguarum  
id est enim id specimen ~~linguarum~~ <sup>multarum</sup> ut <sup>non</sup> ~~linguam~~ <sup>linguas</sup> ~~conferat~~,  
et solendum est nihil simile aut <sup>simile</sup> ~~simile~~  
in mentem venisset, et quo ad <sup>res</sup> ~~res~~  
transmisti potuissent ~~aliquid~~ <sup>aliquid</sup> ~~linguam~~ <sup>linguas</sup> ~~vellemus~~ <sup>vellemus</sup>  
notitia quod nunc ~~invenire~~ <sup>invenire</sup> ~~quales~~ <sup>quales</sup>  
primis quod ~~sciam~~ <sup>sciam</sup> ~~genere~~ <sup>genere</sup> ~~hoc~~ <sup>hoc</sup> ~~est~~ <sup>est</sup>  
comparandarum ~~underung~~ <sup>underung</sup> ~~seel~~ <sup>seel</sup> ~~Oratorum~~ <sup>Oratorum</sup>  
Dominicarum ~~loca~~ <sup>loca</sup> ~~comparat~~ <sup>comparat</sup> ~~apud~~ <sup>apud</sup> ~~est~~ <sup>est</sup> ~~quam~~ <sup>quam</sup> ~~pro~~ <sup>pro</sup> ~~Mikrodia~~ <sup>Mikrodia</sup> ~~addidit~~ <sup>addidit</sup> ~~quam~~ <sup>quam</sup> ~~illustrat~~ <sup>illustrat</sup>  
Nepheus ~~pro~~ <sup>pro</sup> ~~vegit~~ <sup>vegit</sup> ~~hieronymus~~ <sup>hieronymus</sup>  
restita ~~clarus~~ <sup>clarus</sup> ~~deinde~~ <sup>deinde</sup> ~~vesper~~ <sup>vesper</sup> ~~frances~~ <sup>frances</sup>  
Wilkinus ~~Episcopus~~ <sup>Episcopus</sup> ~~Cepherus~~ <sup>Cepherus</sup>  
pro clare suo operi ~~lingua~~ <sup>lingua</sup> ~~philosophia~~ <sup>philosophia</sup>  
et Characteribus universalibus ~~etiam~~ <sup>etiam</sup>  
Oratione dominica polylitteras ~~subjecit~~ <sup>subjecit</sup>  
~~Oratorum~~ <sup>Oratorum</sup> ~~etiam~~ <sup>etiam</sup> ~~frances~~ <sup>frances</sup>, ~~postor~~ <sup>postor</sup> ~~alicubi~~ <sup>alicubi</sup>  
in Livonia si bene meminere tale quid in publicum  
emissis, et ~~est~~ <sup>est</sup> in lingua septentrionalibus  
emendate ~~etiam~~ <sup>etiam</sup> non inutiliter ~~comparat~~ <sup>comparat</sup> potuit  
restat. <sup>Novissime</sup> ~~Novissime~~ <sup>Andreas</sup> ~~Andreas~~ <sup>Muller</sup> ~~Muller <sup>patricia</sup> ~~patricia~~  
Puffenbagen ~~pro~~ <sup>pro</sup> ~~vegit~~ <sup>vegit</sup> ~~frances~~ <sup>frances</sup>  
vir ~~linguam~~ <sup>linguam</sup> ~~etiam~~ <sup>etiam</sup> ~~invenire~~ <sup>invenire</sup>  
restita ~~emissa~~ <sup>emissa</sup> et matera ~~indagator~~ <sup>indagator</sup>.  
~~est~~ <sup>est</sup> ~~aditorum~~ <sup>aditorum</sup> ~~significatum~~ <sup>significatum</sup> ~~aut~~ <sup>aut</sup> ~~frances~~ <sup>frances</sup>,  
Centum ~~linguarum~~ <sup>linguarum</sup> ~~Orationum~~ <sup>Orationum</sup> ~~etiam~~ <sup>etiam</sup> ~~frances~~ <sup>frances</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup>  
lylabbum ~~edidit~~ <sup>edidit</sup>, et ~~pronuntiationem~~ <sup>pronuntiationem</sup> ~~Characteribus~~ <sup>Characteribus</sup>  
popularum ~~pluribus~~ <sup>pluribus</sup> ~~quibus~~ <sup>quibus</sup> ~~labari~~ <sup>labari</sup> ~~potuere~~ <sup>potuere</sup> ~~addidit~~ <sup>addidit</sup>,  
quod ~~quod~~ <sup>quod</sup> ~~non~~ <sup>non</sup> ~~frances~~ <sup>frances</sup> ~~non~~ <sup>non</sup> ~~nisi~~ <sup>nisi</sup> ~~typographi~~ <sup>typographi</sup>  
numera ~~pro~~ <sup>pro</sup> ~~erant~~ <sup>erant</sup>. Et ~~miros~~ <sup>miros</sup> ~~eos~~ <sup>eos</sup> ~~qui~~ <sup>qui</sup>  
opus in ~~Anglia~~ <sup>Anglia</sup> ~~primum~~ <sup>primum</sup> ~~est~~ <sup>est</sup> ~~quod~~ <sup>quod</sup>  
~~revertens~~ <sup>revertens</sup> ~~pro~~ <sup>pro</sup> ~~reudi~~ <sup>reudi</sup> ~~curaverunt~~ <sup>curaverunt</sup>, ~~aut~~ <sup>aut</sup> ~~rem~~ <sup>rem</sup>,  
vires ~~clarissimum~~ <sup>clarissimum</sup> ~~ignorantibus~~ <sup>ignorantibus</sup>. ~~non~~ <sup>non</sup> ~~nam~~ <sup>nam</sup> ~~diffimulasse~~ <sup>diffimulasse</sup>  
non ~~potest~~ <sup>potest</sup>. ~~ita~~ <sup>ita</sup> ~~editionem~~ <sup>editionem</sup> ~~amplius~~ <sup>amplius</sup> ~~et~~ <sup>et</sup>  
correctorem ~~moliebatur~~ <sup>moliebatur</sup>, et ~~post~~ <sup>post</sup> ~~numquam~~ <sup>numquam</sup> ~~aliquid~~ <sup>aliquid</sup> ~~simile~~ <sup>simile</sup> ~~videre~~ <sup>videre</sup> ~~memini~~ <sup>memini</sup>~~

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Hispanam linguam vellem Hispanum  
Ceteri Britannici vel Vasconici Moderni similes  
Fuisse credibile est quia sibi in appennini montibus  
quibus Romanis, Gallicis, Vasconis, non parit.  
Et crederetur ex hac lingua etiam de stirpem Galliam, Aquitaniam, Alpes et Norboniam  
Gothorum stirpem esse, sicut a Celtica lingue  
si verum fuisse esse apparet, quae apud Pannonios  
aliquos est, et Gallica praevalens, quae apud Pannonios  
et alibi fuerit. Nomen verum est nomen  
scriptum verum in Vasconum linguam translatam  
haberi, nec etiam Hispaniam linguam exire. Hae

Interdum verum in Vasconum linguam translatam  
haberi, nec etiam Hispaniam linguam exire. Hae  
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haberi, nec etiam Hispaniam linguam exire. Hae

Interdum verum in Vasconum linguam translatam  
haberi, nec etiam Hispaniam linguam exire. Hae



## Dissertatio Epistolaris to Lord Chamberlayne (1715)

### Insigni viro Johanni Chamberlaynio, Godofridus Guilielmus Leibnitius S[alutem] P[lurimam] D[icit]

Non sine applausu intelligo consilium tibi esse, reddere praelo auctas et emendatas Orationes Dominicas multarum linguarum. Id enim specimen philologicum utilissimum censeo, et dolendum est nihil simile antiquis in mentem venisse, quo ad posteros transmitti potuisset aliqua linguarum veterum notitia, quae nunc intercidere, quales multas Mithridates Rex Ponti sine interprete intellexisse dicitur, aut quibus Romani ad Pontum per interpretes, centum et amplius cum vicinis populis commercia agitabant, Plinio teste.<sup>3</sup>

Primus, quod sciam, Conradus Gesnerus hoc corrogandarum undecunque Orationum Dominicarum consilio usus est, quas suo *Mithridati* addidit, illustrato deinde a Christ[iano] Wasero.<sup>4</sup> Rem egregie provexit Hieronymus Megiserus, vir multarum linguarum peritia clarus.<sup>5</sup> Deinde vester Johannes Wilkinsius, Episcopus Cestriensis, praeclaro suo operi *Linguae philosophicae & characteristicae universalis*<sup>6</sup> etiam Orationes Dominicas polyglottas sed latinis notis subiecit. Reuterus etiam, pastor alcubi in Livonia, si bene memini, tale quid in publicum emisit, et in linguis septentrionalibus emendate edendis non inutiliter consuli potuit.<sup>7</sup>

Novissime Andrea Müllerus, patria Greiffenhagius, praepositus berolinensis,<sup>8</sup> vir linguarum omnigenarum peritia eminens et

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**3** See Plin., *Nat. Hist.* 7.24 on this: *Mithridates, duarum et viginti gentium rex, totidem linguis iura dixit, pro contione singulas sine interprete adfatus.*

**4** Leibniz is referring to Conrad Gessner's (1555) well-known collection of *Pater noster*, which was constantly quoted in the literature of his times. Gessner (1515-1565) was a prominent Swiss naturalist, whose *Historiae animalium* (1551-58), in four volumes, represented a masterpiece of Renaissance zoology. The *Mithridates* was expanded and reprinted in 1610 (Tiguri) by Kaspar Waser (1565-1625), whom Leibniz apparently mistakes for 'Christianus'.

**5** Hieronymus Megiser's (1554-1618/9) collection (1603) included fifty version of the *Pater noster*.

**6** Leibniz is referring to John Wilkins's (1614-1672) *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical language* (1668), a work that he elsewhere extensively discussed in connection to the aims and possible structure of the *characteristica universalis*.

**7** Johann Reuter (Jānis Reiters) is the compiler of a collection entitled *Oratio Dominica XL Linguarum* (Rigae 1662), which Leibniz read in its 2nd edition (Rostochii 1675). More information on Reuter's work was given in *ED* § 25 (Gensini 1991, 235).

**8** Andreas Müller (1630-1695) played a significant role in the history of Leibniz's interest in linguistic matters. His promised *Clavis sinica*, that is, a 'key' to gain access to the still mysterious Chinese ideograms, was long awaited by Leibniz, but never revealed (see the sketch put forward in Müller's *Propositio super Clave sua sinica*, Berolini 1674). The first edition of his *Orationis Dominicae Versiones [...] fere centum* was published in 1680 under the pseudonym of Thomas Ludekenius. The second, posthu-

praeterea indagator abditorum significatum acutissimus, centum Orationum Dominicalium syllabum dedit, et pronunciationi lectionem in characteribus populorum plerisque, qui haberi potuere, addidit, quanquam libro non nisi typographi nomen praescripserit; et miror, eos qui opus in Anglia primum recudi curaverunt, auctorem virum clarissimum ignoravisse, nam dissimulasse non putem. Ipse editionem amplio rem et correctiorem moliebatur, et posthumum aliquid olim videre memini.

Majoris molis, sed majoris etiam fructus erat, quod Geogius Hornius<sup>9</sup> moliebatur. Cogitabat ille scilicet primum caput Geneseos polyglottum nobis dare, quae specimina linguarum ampliora et ditiora haud dubie (cum in Oratione Dominica non nisi pauca vocabula habeantur) magis profutura essent ad naturam, indolem, originesque linguarum noscendas et posteritati commendandas.

Sane exigua nobis hodie veterum linguarum notitia est, quia (ut jam dolens dixi) veteres tali invento caruere. Andreas Acoluthus<sup>10</sup> apud Vratislavienses theologus, in literatura orientali bene versatus, linguam hodiernam armenam, multum cognationis cum vetere aegyptiaca habere credebat, sed mihi argumenta ejus minus satisfaciebant. Rectius nuper Lacrosius<sup>11</sup> vir egregie doctus (qui praeclaram in lingua armena excolenda operam navavit) detexit ex quibusdam veterum locis, linguam Medorum convenisse cum hodierna armena, cujus etiam peculiare sunt characteres satis antiqui.

Quas Indica apud veteres appellantur, pleraeque hodierna linguae persicae convenire, observavere viri docti, et praesertim celeberrimus

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mous edition, which Leibniz refers to, was published in Berlin (1703), by Sebastian Gottfried Starcke, along with a detailed biography of the philologist.

**9** Georg Horn (1620–1670), a German historian and a geographer, was professor at Leiden University from 1653 until his death. Among his many works, it is worth mentioning *Arca Noae, sive historia imperiorum et regnorum condito orbe ad nostra tempora* (Leyden and Rotterdam, 1666).

**10** Andreas Acoluthus (1654–1704), a German orientalist, was professor at Breslau. In a letter to Leibniz dated 27 Aug. 1695 (A I 11, no 438) he had expressed the opinion that the philosopher criticizes both here and elsewhere (see, e.g., his letter to Sparwenfeld of November 1698 (A I 14, fn. 435). Among Acoluthus's works, his *Specimen alcorani quadrilinguis* (1701) is worthy of mention.

**11** Leibniz is referring to the French scholar and orientalist Mathurin Veysseyre de La Croze (1661–1739), librarian at the King's court in Berlin, with whom Leibniz exchanged many letters on linguistic topics (Chinese, Albanian, "Epirotica lingua", etc.) from March 1704 to 1716. Already in a letter of 30 Oct. 1709 (T, 1709, no. 34) La Croze announces his intention to devote himself to the study of Armenian, in the hope of being able to write "un Lexicon qui vaudra mieux que celui de la langue Esclavonne". La Croze also admits that he has undertaken a very serious commitment, because "je ne connois point de langue au monde plus difficile, ni plus singulière".

Relandus.<sup>12</sup> Illud indagatu dignum esset, an lingua Ignicolorum,<sup>13</sup> qui in Persia supersunt, vel certe librorum veterum, quos illi servare dicuntur, toto genere ab hodierna persica differat, an potius quod malim, non sit nisi dialectus servantior antiqui; et quibus literis scribatur.

Extant apud Palmyrenos et alibi in Syria, et vicinis locis complures inscriptiones antiquae duplices, partim lingua et characteribus gentis, partim graece expressae, quae magno studio ex ipsis saxis describi deberent. Inde fortasse constitui alphabetum posset, et linguae indoles tandem cognosci, cum graeca versio adsit, et nomina propria interveniant quorum eadem fere in patrio et graeco sermone pronuntiatio erat. Angli vestri palmyrenaenum egregium specimen dedere,<sup>14</sup> sed multa adhuc supersunt. Syriaca illae litterae longe differunt ab iis quae hodie syriacae habentur, et proprius ad hebraicos fontes accedunt; veterum inscriptionem literarum syriacarum, Deum *Malach belum* nominatum in ipso saxo Romae olim eruto, graece explicatam, in collectione veterum inscriptionum habemus;<sup>15</sup> sed cum male descripta videretur, diu frustra quaesita, nuper iterum Romae reperta accuratiusque delineata, rem studiose curante R.mo Doctissimo Blankino,<sup>16</sup> quem admodum

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**12** Adriaan Reland (1676-1718) was a Dutch orientalist, who became Professor of Oriental Languages at the University of Utrecht in 1701, at the young age of twenty-five. Leibniz probably has Reland's 1701 *Oratio pro lingua Persica et cognatis literis orientalibus* in mind. It is important to remind the reader that the case of the Persian language had been a focus of interest for early comparativism since around 1650, when distinguished scholars such as Pierre Saumaise (see below, fn. 46) and Zuerius Boxhorn (following Elichmann's steps) had noted unexpected similarities with German. The Persian language was on its way to becoming a relevant *trait d'union* between the Far East and Europe.

**13** *Ignicoli*, that is, 'fire worshipers', was the name given to the inhabitants of Old Persia, because of the prominent role that fire played in their religion.

**14** Leibniz is referring to the news about the ruins of the ancient city of Palmyra that Rev. William Halifax had given in the *Philosophical Transactions* in 1695-97. The similarity which Leibniz grasped between the writing of the extant records and the Hebrew alphabet was later confirmed. The Palmyrene language belongs to the western group of aramaic tongues.

**15** This inscription (discovered in the so-called *Horti Carpenses* in Rome) was reproduced by Jan Gruter (1560-1627) in his repertoire *Inscriptiones antiquae totius orbis Romani, auspiciis Jos. Scaligeri ac M. Velseri accedunt XXIV Scaligeri Indices* (1601, 86), and later in 1685, along with the bas-relief bearing it. In the first decades of the 18th century it was often discussed, as it was a valuable record of those oriental traditions and myths that were arousing much interest in France, England and elsewhere.

**16** Francesco Bianchini (1662-1727), an historian from the Physical-Mathematical Academy of Rome, had been in contact with Leibniz since 1689, at the time of the philosopher's *iter italicum*. In his role as the *camerarius* of pope Clement XI, Bianchini was appointed 'President of Rome's Antiquities', a role that gave him the opportunity to investigate Rome's archeological heritage in depth.

ad me perscripsit Gisbertus Cuperus,<sup>17</sup> vir magnorum in rem literariam meritorum. Nihil est simplicius et nihil tamen obscurius characteribus, qui in ruinis Persepolitianis extant,<sup>18</sup> pulcherrimo monumento architecturae sculpturaeque orientalis Graecorum opera, antiquitate transcendentis; in quo noscendo Chardinus gallus,<sup>19</sup> sed a vobis velut adoptatus, et nuper Bruinius batavus egrégiam operam editis in publicum delineationibus navavere.<sup>20</sup> Si aliquando describeretur diligenter quidquid illius scripturae illic extat (quae ex meris triangulis varie positae constat), fortasse velut cryptolytica arte,<sup>21</sup> aliquid inde erui posset; quo enim plura specimina habentur, eo facilius est ad interpretandum aditus. Wanslebius erfodiensis,<sup>22</sup> Jobi Ludolphi excellentis viri<sup>23</sup> sectator, juvenis a serenissimo Ernesto Saxoniae Duce Gothano ac postea (cum dominicani ordinis vestem sumsisset) a Rege Christianissimo, praeclaro consilio in Orientem missus, retulit, in Aegypto alicubi cryptas concameratas reperi, plenas characterum veterum, qui si excriberentur, fortasse aliqua

**17** The Dutch historian and politician Gisbert Cuper (1644-1716) was a protagonist of Leibniz's erudite correspondence from 1700 to 1713. He constantly kept Leibniz informed about scholars and writings being published in the field of Orientalism. Also important were his contacts with La Croze, another of Leibniz's privileged correspondents in his late years.

**18** As is made clear by the subsequent remarks about the 'triangular style' of these writings, Leibniz is referring to the cuneiform writing typical of the Persepolitan inscriptions, whose origins date back to the first millennium B.C. Some first examples of it had been published by the Italian voyager Pietro Della Valle in 1625.

**19** The French scholar Jean Chardin (1643-1713) had provided fascinating illustrations of Persepolis' ruins in his 1686 *Voyages*, a book that quickly enjoyed international renown and was translated into English. After leaving France because of the persecution of Huguenots, Chardin was appointed jeweler at the Court of Charles II. A member to the Royal Society since 1682, Chardin published the final, augmented version of his major work in 1711.

**20** Leibniz is referring to Cornelis de Bruyn (Bruyn) (1652-1726/7), a Dutch painter and voyager, who during his 1704 trip to the Near East visited Persepolis' ruins. The splendid drawings of them he provided in his *Travels into Muscovy, Persia and Parts of the East-Indies* (1711) have always attracted the attention of Orientalists.

**21** A kind of cryptography. Interest in 'secret or 'encrypted' writing was widespread in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century culture.

**22** The German philologist Johann Michael Vansleb (1635-1679) went on missions to Ethiopia on behalf of Ernest the First of Saxonia-Gotha and later, after settling in France, to Egypt on behalf of Louis XIV ("rex Christianissimus"). Leibniz has in mind his *Nouvelle Relation en forme de Journal, d'un Voyage Fait en Egypte par le P. Vansleb, R.D., en 1672 & 1673*, published in 1677.

**23** The great German semitist Hiob Ludolf (1624-1704) is probably the most important of Leibniz's correspondents on linguistic topics. The letters exchanged by the two scholars, whose importance is widely acknowledged, were collected and published by A.B. Michaelis under the title of *Commercium epistolicum* (Gottingae 1755). Ludolf's rich erudite production included, among other things, *Grammatica aethiopica* (1661, 2nd ed. 1702), *Historia aethiopica* (1681), *Grammatica linguae amharicae* (1698), *Lexicon amharico-latinum* (1698).

inde lux hauriri posset. Passim etiam apud Indos orientales, et in aliis orbis locis, incogniti characteres hominum certe (veterum scilicet habitatorum) vestigia reperiuntur, quorum nihil negligi vellem.

*Semper tibi pendeat hamus:  
Quo minime reris gurgie, piscis erit*<sup>24</sup>

Linguae punicae specimen in Plauti *Menaechmis*<sup>25</sup> extat: Josephus Scaliger agnovit punica latinis reddi, et nonnullam linguae lucem attulit;<sup>26</sup> promovit Thomas Reinesius<sup>27</sup> vir magnae doctrinae in Linguae punicae ἱστοροῦμένοις; sed Samuel Bochartus<sup>28</sup> maxime scenam illam plautinam illustravit, et detexisse visus est binarum ibi linguarum specimina extare, punicae sive phoeniciae a Carthaginis conditoribus illatae, et libycae veteris.

Sed in Europam transeamus. Reperiuntur in Hispania nummi non pauci, characteres veterum Hispanorum praeferentes, quibus scilicet usi erant, antequam a Carthaginensibus et Romanis subigerentur, et quos aliquandiu sub Romanorum Imperio retinere. Tale quosdam exhibuit Antonius Augustinus,<sup>29</sup> plures nostris fere temporibus Johannes de Lastanosa,<sup>30</sup> vir non vulgaris inter Hispanos doctrinae, libello proprio, in eam rem edito, protulit. Sed magnum eorum numerum habet cl. Baryus vir insignis, et diu apud Hispalim batavae nationis Consul. Cum autem et non raro reperiantur nummi signati

<sup>24</sup> The quotation is from Ovidius, *Ars am.* 3.425-6.

<sup>25</sup> Memory has apparently failed Leibniz, who knew Plautus's comedies well. Indeed, it is in *Poenulus* (Act V, vv. 930-49) that we find the famous passage in the Punic language, extensively discussed by philologists and historians in the seventeenth century.

<sup>26</sup> Leibniz is probably referring to Joseph-Juste Scaliger's (1540-1609) *Opus de emendatione temporum* (1598). In the Appendix titled *In Fragmenta Notae*, p. XXVII, Scaliger provided a translation of two Punic words quoted in Plautus's *Poenulus*. The great Italian scholar also suggested that the Punic language had nothing to do with Arabic, but showed striking affinities with Hebrew. See his *Epistola ad Stephanum Hubertum* in Scaliger: "At Plautinae Poenuli dialectus parum à puritate Hebraismi abest" (no. 362; 1627, 701).

<sup>27</sup> The German physician and philologist Thomas Reinesius (1587-1667) had authored *Istoroumena linguae punicae* (Altenburg 1637), to which reference is made here. With respect to the controversial question on the relationship between Punic language and Arabic, he agreed with the "perspicacissimus Scaliger" (1637, caput XII, § 7); see also above, fn. 26.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Bochart's (1559-1667) *Geographia Sacra* (1646) was another monument to Baroque erudition, and was constantly referred to by historians and philologists. What Leibniz has in mind, here, is the *Pars posterior*, book II, ch. 6.

<sup>29</sup> The Spanish bishop Antonio Augustin (1517-1587), a pupil of the Italian jurist Andrea Alciati, was well-known, among other things, for his interests in the field of numismatics. Leibniz had seen his posthumous *Diálogos de medallas, inscripciones y otras antigüedades* (I have access to a later, 1744 edition).

<sup>30</sup> Refer to Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa's (1607-1681) *Museo de las medallas desconocidas españolas* (1st ed. 1645).

eisdem figuris, nunc latinas nunc hispanicas notas praeferentibus, et vocabula interdum sint nomina propria hominum aut locorum, non desperem, aliquando veteris scripturae hispanicae alphabetum inde constitui posse. Frustra fuere, qui runicos characteres in Hispanicis quaesivere, quasi Gothi intulissent; longe etiam vetustiores sunt hi nummi Gothorum irruptionibus.<sup>31</sup>

Ipsam linguam veterum Hispanorum biscainae vel vasconicae similem fuisse credibile est, quae sese in asperrimis montibus contra Romanos, Gothos, Saracenos tueri potuit. Et credibile est hanc linguam etiam se non nihil per vicinam Galliam, Aquitanicam scilicet, et Narborensis diffudisse, sed a celtica, id est gallica vetere, et germanica longe diversam esse apparet.<sup>32</sup>

Passim in Italia reperiuntur inscriptiones, characteres hetrusco, nemini intellecta sed non ideo probae quod a viris praeclaris, alias inscriptiones edentibus, neglectae plerumque sunt atque suppressae. Et si enim nihil in iis intelligamus, non ideo subtrahendae fuere inquisitioni posteritatis. Tabula Eugubina quam Bernardinus Baldus<sup>33</sup> commentario illustravit, viri doctis suspecta habetur: Curtii autem Inghurami *Etruscas antiquitates* plane fictitias esse constat,<sup>34</sup> et justissimam in eos censuram Leo Allatius exercuit.<sup>35</sup> Celtarum id est Germanorum Gallorumque veterum characteres nuspiam

**31** It is likely that Leibniz is referring to the Danish scholar Ole Worm (Wormius) (1588-1654), whose *Antiquitates Danicae* (1651) included ill-founded opinions on the origins of the runic alphabet. See A I 17, no. 261. In taking this stance on the alleged influence of the Goths, Leibniz was drawing on his own personal conclusions about the history of German peoples. Refer to his *Dissertatio de origine Germanorum* (currently ascribed to 1697) for further details (D IV 2, 198-205).

**32** On many occasions Leibniz suggested that the Basque language bore no visible relations to other linguistic families. For instance, in the classification of European languages he put forward in *ED*, § 11 (1991: 210), where he correctly identified a (Neo-)Latin, a Germanic, a Slavic group etc., Basque is presented as an isolated case.

**33** The Italian mathematician Bernardino Baldi (1553-1617) was also known for his antiquarian interests. Reference is made, here, to Baldi's interpretation of one from a set of seven *tabulae* discovered nearby Gubbio in the mid-fifteenth century. (The *tabula* on which Baldi commented corresponds to the fourth one of today's editions). The language they are written in is Old Umbrian, but the Italic alphabet used for the first five was mistaken by Baldi for the Etruscan one. This circumstance sparked a long debate, which was to last up to the eighteenth century, on the false premise that they were a valuable document pertaining to the mysterious Etruscans' language. Baldi's booklet, titled *In tabulam aeneam eugubinam lingua hetrusca veteri perscriptam, divinatio*, was published in 1613.

**34** The Tuscan archaeologist Curzio Inghirami (1614-1655) had published his *Etruscarum Antiquitatum Fragmenta* in 1637. The documents were a real forgery, which aroused great curiosity and attracted severe criticism.

**35** Leone Allacci (1586-1669), a scholar and a librarian, was one of the prominent pol-ygraphs of the seventeenth century. In 1669 he was appointed keeper of the Vatican Library. His *Animadversiones in Antiquitatum Etruscarum Fragmenta ab Inghirami* edita (1640) were aimed at demonstrating Inghirami's "insignem fraudem".

habentur. Loquor autem de temporibus, quibus Romani in Galliam Germaniamque irrupere, graecis literis Gallos veteres passim usos constat, propriarum literarum nulla vestigia extant, nullas tamen omnino habuisse asseverare minime ausim. Linguam Gallorum veterum affinem ei fuisse, quae in Britannia minore, et in Britanniae majoris partibus superest, ibique wallica ab anglo-saxonicis gentibus appellatur, post tot argumenta insignium virorum dubitari amplius non debet.<sup>36</sup>

Re diligentius considerata, Gallorum veterum linguam non eandem quidem germanicae ut princeps geographorum Philippus Cluverius existimabat,<sup>37</sup> sed tamen valde cognatam fuisse reperio; ita ut adhibitis praesertim veteribus Germanorum vocabulis, inspectisque originibus, semigermanicam appellare ausim, vel ipsius wallicae sive aremoricae indicio. Nempe una olim magna gens ante historiam memoriam a Tanai, Danubio, et Scythia veniens per Germaniam Galliamque se diffudisse videtur, scissaque fuit in dialectos, quae locorum admistisque aliis populis in diversas ut fit linguas abiere; et cum pars migrantium a Danubio et Thracia [in] Graeciam penetraverit, tam multa graeco germanicoque sermoni communia esse mirum adeo videri non debet.<sup>38</sup>

Celtas (id est germanicas gallicasque gentes) Italiam incoluisse ante Graecorum adventum res ipsa loquitur. Gentes enim (et si contradicat Tacitus)<sup>39</sup> terra facillime, mari difficulter et serius propagabuntur; cum navigandi ars sero innotuerit, itaque lingua latina ex celtica graecaque compos[i]ta est. Et quo antiquior est celtica, hoc melius latinas origines ex ea illustrari posse putem.

Et cum insulae et peninsulae colonos accipere soleant ex vicino

<sup>36</sup> The passage is consistent with Leibniz's well-grounded opinion that the languages at issue formed a single, Celtic family. See, e.g., *ED* § 11 (Gensini 1991, 211). Further detail in his 1710 *BD*.

<sup>37</sup> Leibniz is referring to the German historian and geographer Philipp Clüver (1580-1622), the author of *Germaniae Antiquae libri tres* (1616). Widening the traditional concept of 'Celtic', Clüver had suggested that all peoples included under that label in essence spoke the same language: "Illyrios, Germanos, Gallos, Hispanos, atque Britanos, unam eandemque inter se habuisse linguam, variis tantum dialectis distinctam etc." (1616, I, 49).

<sup>38</sup> In this passage Leibniz summarizes concepts extensively expressed in the *Breve designatio* (1710). Following the steps of Jornandes, who had described Scythia as a "vagina gentium", the philosopher suggested that Europe had been populated by means of a big migratory process which had begun in the east and gradually expanded westward, reaching the Atlantic Ocean, with ramifications to the north (Scandinavia) and south (Greece-Italy). Over time, and depending on the place, the original Scythian tongue had divided itself into a number of languages and their dialects, corresponding to the language families of the present day. For details on Jornandes's view, see his *De origine actibus Getarum* (Jornandes 1872, chap. V) and below, fn. 41.

<sup>39</sup> See Tacitus, *Germ. 2: quia nec terra olim, sed classibus advehebantur qui mutare sedes querebant etc.*

continente, consentaneum est, quemadmodum Angli hodierni Britanniae incolae nobis antiquam Saxonum linguam melius saepe referent quam ipsi Saxones hodierni, ita antiquos Britanniae incolas, quos Wallicos dicunt, multo antiquiorum Oceani germanici gallicique incolarum (Cimbrorum fortasse pro parte, unde et Cimbros sese vocant) linguam representare.

Hebraeos vero antiquiorum his Britannorum colonos per hos veluti patres indicare avos suos, antiquiores adhuc Cimbris ipsis Celtas cismarinos, ad tertiam ut sic dicam celtismi generationem. Ut ita in Hibernis non Celtae Caesari contemporanei [,] imo nec horum ut sic dicam patres, ut a Britannis Caesari contemporaneis; sed Britannorum Caesari contemporaneorum patres et Celtarum Caesari contemporaneorum avi quodammodo nobis exhibeantur. Per patrum autem vel avorum gradus hic intelligo non hominum, sed nationum generationes sive propagationes, qualis fit, quoties gens aliqua per magnam migrationem exundat.

Unde incogniti veterum Hispanorum et Hetruscorum characteres orti sint non constat; ex Oriente (an per Phoenices?) profluxisse suspicio est. Sed quae postea in Europa visa sunt alphabeta et hodieque ex monumentis noscuntur, germanicarum scilicet slavonicarumque gentium; omnia ni fallor ex literis graecis romanisque sunt formata.<sup>40</sup> Post eos qui graece, latineque scripsere nullus extat in Europa scriptor antiquior autore libri, qui *Codex Argenteus* appellatur, et fragmentum versionis sacrorum Evangeliorum continet ex Werdensi Westphaliae monasterio perantiquo in Sueciam translatus, nunc Upsaliae servatur, antiqua dialecto Germanica Scriptum esse dubitari non potest. Viri docti hactenus ad Ulphilam<sup>41</sup> et Gothos Danubio vicinos retulere, meo iudicio recte, etsi celeberrimus et de literaria septentrionali meritissimus vir Georgius Hikkiesius<sup>42</sup> novissime dubitaret, et ad Francos vel aliam teutonicam gentem propriorem haec referre maluerit, credo quod sibi persuadere non posset Gothos

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<sup>40</sup> As always, Leibniz did not allow himself to be misled by nationalistic prejudices and guessed the most historically plausible solution, often confirmed by later investigation.

<sup>41</sup> The Gothic bishop Ulfila (or Wulfila, ca. 311-ca. 383) played an important role in the history of Germanic languages, because of his translation of the Holy Scripture. What remains of his work can be read in the famous *Codex argenteus* (the name comes from the silver ink used in its compilation), which was found in the Benedictine Monastery of Essen, in the sixteenth century. This valuable code is now preserved in the University library of Uppsala.

<sup>42</sup> A clergyman and scholar, the Englishman George Hickee (1642-1715) devoted himself to the investigation of Anglo-Saxon antiquities. The “very recent” book being referred here is Hickee’s *Linguarum veterum septentrionalium thesaurus grammatico-criticus et archaeologicus* (1705), which Leibniz extensively discussed in his still unpublished *Observata quaedam occasione Thesauri linguarum septentrionalium Hikkiesiani* (1711?), in Hann. Ldb. Ms. IV 441, ff. 3-14. On the ‘German’ character of the Gothic language, see esp. p. 1r, 3rv.



usque adeo teutones fuisse. Sed nomina veterum regum Gothorum nil nisi teutonicum spirant, et librum pertinere ad gentem Graeciae vicinam res ipsa loquitur, quia non latinam *Vulgatam*, sed graecos fontes interpres sectatur; et alphabetum ipsum manifeste ex graeco formatum est, sed populos teutonicos a Graecia remotiores literis ex romano alphabeto corruptis usos constat, et in Scripturae Sacrae interpretatione latinis magis sequuntur. Itaque Codicis Argentei autorem, Ulphilam vel Wulfilam, Gothorum episcopum habendum censeo, jam veteribus celebratum quod etiam literas Gothis dedisse dicatur.<sup>43</sup> Quam rem ita interpreto, ut in ordinem modumque redegerit literas, quae jam ex Graecis corruptae a gente ac vicinis per commercia usurpabantur; quod etiam de russionum characteribus (etsi posterioribus) intelligo, quorum Cyrillus quidam autor habetur unde Cyrillici appellantur.

Post *Codicem Argenteum* proxima antiquitate monumenta literaria europaea, de quorum aetate constet, sunt anglo-saxonica, nam Walli proprias literas non habent et quae afferunt vetera fragmenta suae linguae sunt incerti aevi. Runicorum etiam aetas incerta est. An vero Angli vel Saxones suas literas in Britanniam secum attulerint, an a Britannis didicerint, non dixerim. Si Caedmonis esset, quod Franciscus Junius edidit anglo-saxonicum specimen, antiquissimum foret,<sup>44</sup> sed Hikkiesius merito dissentire videtur.

Illud credibile est circa eadem tempora literaturam romanam paulatim in Septentrionem ultimum pervasisse et in Scandinavia runas peperisse. Nam ex literis romanis maximam partem corruptas apparet, neque nullum est monumentum runicum, unde colligi possit magna antiquitas; plerasque cruces pr[a]eferunt et Christianismum,<sup>45</sup> vix habebuntur de quibus certo pronuntiari possit Caroli M[agni] aetatem praecessisse, etsi antiquiora esse alia non negem, sed quae non dignoscuntur. Salmasius runas etiam nomen a Romanis habere conjectabat,<sup>46</sup> non sane inepte: sed opponi tamen possunt aliorum aetatis, id est gothicae, foeminae saegae sive magae, arcanorum

<sup>43</sup> Other scholars (such as La Croze) believed that the language commonly called 'Gothic' instead had French origins. See David Wilkins's considerations on this delicate point in his *Preface* to Chamberlayne (1715, 2r-3v).

<sup>44</sup> The German François du Jon (Franciscus Junius, 1591?-1677), a pioneering personality in the history of German philology, published *Caedmonis monachi paraphrasis poetica Genesis ac praecipuarum sacrae paginae historiarum, abhinc annos M.LXX. Anglo-Saxonice conscripta, et nunc primum edita* in Amsterdam in 1655. Caedmon, a seventh-century Anglo-Saxon poet, authored a short prayer (known as *Caedmon's Hymn*), which is counted among the early documents in Old English.

<sup>45</sup> The sign of the Cross.

<sup>46</sup> The Frenchman Claude Saumaise (1588-1653), an outstanding antiquarian and Hellenist, had explained his opinion in a famous passage of his *De hellenistica commentarius*: "Nam forma earum [scil. Runicarum] ex Graecis omnino efficta & expressa detur. Nisi quis potius putet a Romanis imitatas, & inde dictas Runicas quasi *Rumicas*, id est

magicorum, ut credebatur, compotes;<sup>47</sup> et *raunen* Germanis est loqui, ratiocinari, consussurare; consentiunt *reim*, *rythmus*, *rime*, ἀριθμός numeri, nam ligata erant numeris secretiora verba, et magi excantare dicebantur: et cum literae inter Barbaros initio arcanae essent, arcanarum notarum appellatio literis mansit, etiam cum publicae esse coepere. *Aliorunae* appellatio hodieque Germanis superest, et de re magica usurpatur, et plantis ἀνθρωπομόρφους, qualis mandragora habetur, tribui solet: sed fraudes sunt circulatorum ex radice bryoniae formari figurae creduntur.<sup>48</sup>

Alphabeta hodierna europaea omnia ex latinis formata sunt, demtis duplicibus sclavonicis, uno cyrulico, alterum (ut parum apte vocant) glagolitico, quae ambo magis ad graecos fontes accedunt.<sup>49</sup> Male hoc posterius nonnulli Autori S[ancto] Hieronymo gente illyrio tribuunt falsa persuasione linguam veterem illyricam ex sclavonicarum genere fuisse: sed Slavi sero in Illyrium venire, nec ante Justiniani M[agni] tempora veteres Illyrii erant celtici generis, linguaque ut arbitror, germanicae gallicaeque nonnihil cognata utebantur. Et credibile est ejus reliquias in peculiari quadam lingua Epirotarum hodierna superesse, cujus specimina edita vidi.<sup>50</sup> Slavonicam linguam hodie illyricam vulgo vocant, quod Slavi in Illyrio consedere. Quae nunc notarum literiarum genera apud Indos habeantur, docent viri docti qui res indicas tractavere et in primis egregius Lalovera<sup>51</sup> siamensi legatione clarus, et alia multiplici eruditione etiam mathematica

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*Romicas*. Licet etiam a Graecis Constantinopolitanis, qui Romaioi Ῥωμαῖοι proprie appellabantur, *Romicas* dictas opinemur" (1643: 382).

**47** Leibniz is referring to Jornandes's *De origine actibusque Getarum* (= Gothorum; a.D. 551?), a historical compilation based on a much larger, but unfortunately lost, work by Cassiodorus (ca. 485-ca. 580). The reference to the *Haliurunnae*, "foeminae [...] sive magae", quoted by Leibniz is included in the chap. XXIV. Later on, in chap. LI, Jornandes speaks of Ulfila as of the man who taught Goths the alphabet. The long and complicated debate on the issue of the Gothic language and runes was initiated by the important book *De litteris et lingua getarum sive gothorum* (1597) by the Dutch humanist Bonaventura Vulcanius (1538-1614).

**48** Even today it is widely believed that the root of the plant called bryony resembles a human arm.

**49** The Glagolitic alphabet was introduced in the ninth century by the Bizantine monks Cyril and Methodius. Modelled after the model of the Greek cursive script, this alphabet preceded Cyrillic, which in the course of time superseded it, ultimately spreading throughout the Slavic world. The Glagolitic alphabet, however, was to survive among the Croats, who followed the Roman rite.

**50** The "Epirotica lingua" corresponds to the Albanian language. Leibniz was indebted to his friend La Croze for information and records concerning it (see above, fn. 11).

**51** Simon de la Loubère (1642-1729), a French mathematician and diplomatic, and a correspondent of Leibniz was sent by King Louis XIV to Siam (present-day Thailand) in 1687. From this experience he derived the travel book *Du Royaume de Siam* (1691), that enjoyed international renown and was soon translated into English. The "Indian things" being referred to by Leibniz include information about time measurement and astronomy in the East Indies. They can be found in the second section of the book.

insignis. Tartari orientales, qui Sinarum Imperio potiti sunt, peculiari habent scribendi genus, quod ad prononciationem quidem, non plane ad Alphabetum revocatur; ediditque aliquod ejus specimen vir variae magnaeque doctrinae Melchisedec Thevenotus,<sup>52</sup> Bibliothecae regiae Parisinae praefectus.

Postremo Sineses ipsi tanquam alterius orbis homines et linguas habent et scripturam toto caelo a nostris diversas. Lingua eorum verbis constat paucis sed velut musico cantu mirifice variatis: scriptura autem ad prononciationem plane non refertur, sed ad ipsos rerum significatus. Unde eadem scriptura a diversis non in diversis tantum linguis, sed in eadem etiam lingua diversimode legi potest, ita ut verbum verbo (vel potius notae) non reddatur. Et eum fere in modum chymici apud nos suos quos vocant processus, suasque formulas scribunt, nisi quod passim vocabula linguae quisque suae admisceat.<sup>53</sup> Eundem in modum Petrus Herigonus<sup>54</sup> ex Societate Jesu *Cursum Mathematicum* dedit, qui apud diversas gentes legi posset. Japanenses certe Sinensium notis utuntur etsi diversissima sit lingua.

De caetero in meis quoque schedis non nulla erunt, quibus augeri fortasse Orationum Dominicarum syllabus posset,<sup>55</sup> sed nunc ab iis remotus ago, et nihil eorum te, vir celeberrime, fugere arbitror. Vir eminentis doctrinae Eduardus Bernardus tabulam alphabetorum harmonicam aere expressam in publicum miserat,<sup>56</sup> in quam commentarium pollicebatur. Utinam ille inter schedas affectus extaret, aut a viro paris eruditionis suppleretur. Idem de Jobi Ludolphi magni viri promisso Πολυγλωττάτου dixerim, qui commentario rerum aethiopicarum tabulam addere pollicitus fuerat, qua cuique alphabeti

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**52** Leibniz is referring to the French orientalist Melchisédech Thévenot (1620?-1692), also a reputed cartographer and a voyager. Among other things he published a *Recueil de voyages [...] dédié au Roi* (Parigi, 1681). The sample (*specimen*) quoted above should be the Malabaric alphabet published as an appendix to Thévenot's *Voyages de Mr. De Thevenot contenant la Relation de l'Indostan, des nouveaux Mogols, & d'autres Peuples & Pays des Indes* (1684, 264-5).

**53** The topic of Chinese characters and their relation to the spoken language is a recurrent one in Leibniz's writings. Suffice it here to remind the reader of his 1697 collection *Novissima sinica*, as well as of his correspondence (1697-1707) with the French jesuit Joachim Bouvet (1656-1730), who spent about forty years at the court of the Chinese emperor Kangxi.

**54** Leibniz is referring to the French mathematician Pierre Hérigone (ca.1580-1643/4), who made large use of symbols in his *Cursus mathematicus* (6 vols, 1632-42).

**55** The posthumous *Collectanea Etymologica*, edited by Leibniz's former secretary Johann Georg Eckhart in 1717, include further versions of the *Pater noster* in languages such as Samoyed, Mari and Mongolian. Leibniz had received these valuable samples from his friend and correspondent Nicolas Witsen (1641-1717) in the years 1697-98. See *CE* II: 361-84.

**56** The Englishman Edward Bernard (1638-1697), Professor of Astronomy at the University of Oxford, had included a synopsis of all the known alphabets in his *Orbis eruditi Literatura a caractere samaritano deducta* (1689).

latini literae diversae pronuntiationes ascribi debebant, quas apud diversos populos habet.<sup>57</sup> Sed nescio quam ob causam edere distulit, quo factum est ut utilis labor plane interciderit; putem tamen non difficulter ab alio restitui posse nec incommode tale quiddam tuo labori adjiceretur. Quod superest vale, et rem bene gere. Dabam Viennae Austriae, 13 Januarii 1714.

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- A I = *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe. Series 1: Allgemeiner politischer und historischer Briefwechsel*. Darmstadt; Leipzig; Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- BD = "Brevis Designatio meditationum de originibus gentium, ductis potissimum ex indicio linguarum". *Miscellanea Berolinensia ad incrementum Scientiarum, ex scriptis Societati Regiae Scientiarum exhibitis* etc. Berolini: Sumptibus Johann. Christ. Papneii, 1-16.
- CE = *Collectanea Etymologica, illustrationi linguarum, vetersi Celticae, Germanicae, Gallicae, aliarumque inservientia. Cum praefatione Jo. Georgii Eccardi*, Hanoverae, sumptibus Nicolai Foersteri. (Reprographischer Nachdruck der Ausgabe 1717, Hildesheim-New York, Georg Olms Verlag 1970).
- D = *Opera Omnia, nunc primum collecta, in Classes distributae, praefationibus & indicibus exornata, studio Ludovici Dutens*, tt. I-VI, Genevae, Apud Fratres de Tournes 1768.
- ED = "Epistolica de historia etymologica Dissertatio". Gensini (1991, 191-271).
- T = "Transkriptionen zu Briefen der Reihe I und III". <https://www.gwlb.de/Leibniz/Leibnizarchiv/Veroeffentlichungen/Transkriptionen.htm>.

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**57** Concerning Leibniz's relationship with Ludolf see above, fn. 23. In this context, his works *Grammatica aethiopica* and *Lexicon aethiopico-Latinum* (1661) are referred to. It is important to remark that in a letter of 19/29 December 1697 (A I 15: 30-3) Leibniz suggested that Ludolf devote himself to the realization of a 'harmonic table' of alphabets. This had to be done by means of Latin letters, in order to enable all scholars to have access to exotic languages and their pronunciations. Leibniz made similar suggestions to another correspondent and friend of his, the Swedish Johan Gabriel Sparwenfeld (1655-1727), whom the philosopher held in high esteem on account of his expertise in Slavic languages. In both case his hopes were dashed.

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<sup>58</sup> In recent years, the literature on Leibniz's ideas on language(s) has grown considerably. Due to obvious space constraints, I have included here only works actually quoted in the introduction or in the footnotes. For a detailed bibliography, refer to the data collected under the title "Leibniz-Bibliographie" in the journal *Studia leibnitiana* (vols. 1-31, 1969-99). For the following years, refer to the resource available online (<https://www.leibniz-bibliographie.de/>) on the website of the Leibniz-Archiv in Hannover. Both the contributions published in Li (ed.) (2014) and the review-essay by Van Hal (2015) include many references which are relevant for our topic.

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