

THE FAILURE OF THE GERMANO-PERSIAN KINSHIP. AROUND THE *POLYGLOT BIBLE*

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Paru dans *Histoire des langues et histoire des représentations linguistiques*
(Actes du colloque SHESL-HTL-SIDF-GEHLF2016, Paris, 21 janvier 2016)

Abstract

We consider how the idea of a Germano-Persian kinship was rejected particularly in the British circle of scholars centered on Brian Walton's *Polyglot Bible*, (1654). We first treat of the context and main issues of a discovery which could have opened the road to a precursor of modern Indo-European comparativism. The diversions or disroutings took various forms: comparative parceling (John Greaves, *Elementa linguae persicae*, 1649), reversion of the parceling (Edward Bernard in Hickeys' *Institutiones grammaticae anglo-saxonicae, et moeso-gothica*, 1689), war-contact hypothesis (Thomas Hyde, *Historia religionis veterum Persarum*, 1700), grammatical occultation (Angelo à St. Joseph, *Gazophylacium*, 1684). However, Marc Zuer Boxhorn's precursory views about the Scythian origins are kept alive by Brian Walton). We include those diversions in Leibniz' thinking as reflected in his correspondence, especially with Johan Gabriel Sparfwenfeld (*Leibniz Bref till Sparfvenfelt 1695-1700*, 1883).

Key words

Pre-comparatism, Scythian theory, German-Persian kinship, London Polyglot, conceptual diversion, Leibniz

Résumé

On considère comment l'idée de parenté entre perse et langues germaniques, héritée de la linguistique flamande de la Renaissance, s'est dévoyée au cours du XVII^e siècle, particulièrement dans le milieu des chercheurs britanniques qui évoluent autour de la *Bible polyglotte* de Londres. On envisage d'abord le contexte et les enjeux d'une découverte qui pouvait ouvrir la voie à un pré-comparatisme annonciateur du comparatisme indo-européen moderne. Les procès de diversion ou d'égarement de l'apparement sont de divers types : parcellisation comparative, réversion de la parcellisation (E. Bernard), hypothèse du contact militaire (Thomas Hyde), occultation du critère grammatical (Ange de Saint-Joseph). Le comparatisme de Marc Zuer Boxhorn (milieu du XVII^e siècle), le plus avancé de l'époque, reste cependant favorablement apprécié par Brian Walton, l'éditeur de la *Polyglotte*. On inscrit l'évolution générale du principe germano-persan dans la correspondance de Leibniz et particulièrement dans ses échanges avec Johan Gabriel Sparfwenfeld (*Leibniz Bref till Sparfvenfelt 1695-1700*, 1883).

Mots clefs

pré-comparatisme, théorie scythique, parenté germano-persane, Polyglotte de Londres, détournement conceptuel, Leibniz

In a letter of 1693 to Marie de Brinon, Superior of the Maison royale de Saint-Louis, which would later become the Saint-Cyr institution, Leibniz referred to the “incursions of the Scythians into Palestine” related by dom Pezron, the well-known Celticist, as the author of an *Essay of a literal and historical commentary on the prophets*¹. Pezron’s observations may take on “great importance”, especially for someone who – “like me” – “is curious about everything that concerns the Scythians”.

Leibniz, who is generally attributed a dominating position in the history of linguistic comparativism, had been fully aware of the old hypothesis which considered “Scythia” to be the cradle, or *vagina*, of the European nations and languages for a long time. Hans Arens’ assertion that the religious theory of the Hebrew-mother-tongue remained practically “unwavering during the whole 17th century” had been already been undermined at the time when Arens was writing, in the fifties, since Arno Borst published his memorable *Turmbau von Babel* (1957-1963). “Books have their own destiny” (Terentianus Maurus). Or, more accurately: “Books have their fatum, when they are too big”. Borst’s one, of 2320 pages, was devoted to a limited number of brave readers. This means that it too often remains neglected, or is somewhat forgotten, among today’s researchers.

As early as 1953-1954, Giuliano Bonfante, with that natural erudite character typical of Italian historical knowledge, opened the way to a revisited research with his “Ideas on the kinship of the European languages from 1200 to 1800”. The same typical opening spirit characterized the American George Metcalf, an Anglicist, whose first articles go back to the beginning of the fifties. His 1974 synthesis of “The Indo-European hypothesis in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries”, in a reference book, gave the Scythian model a central position. The historical construction had only to be completed by another article on Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn, “The first historical linguist”, by Jack Fellman, published in one of the main periodicals in the field, *Linguistics*, in 1974. We take the time to remind the reader of those old red-letter works because we have to keep in mind that, during those years, a typical French handbook for students and even scholars was Georges Mounin’s 1967 *Histoire de la linguistique*, not so accurate about European comparativism².

Thus, we must salute as a very useful initiative the 2013 reedition of Metcalf’s articles on pre- or paleo-comparativism, by Toon Van Hal and Raf Van Rooy, in a volume untitled *On Language Diversity and Relationship from Bibliander to Adelung*³. The same could be said of Thomas Lindner’s chapter on “Zur (Vor-) Geschichte der Sprachvergleichung” in his fourth volume of the *Indogermanische Grammatik* (2015).

¹ PGB, t. IX, n° 95, p. 112. I warmly thank Toon van Hal and Reuben Pitts for corrections and suggestions provided to this paper.

² I have noted several times that the reeditions were not revised.

³ Van Hal has undertaken a complete reappraisal of the Flemish history of the Scythian theory. See his bibliography in *Moedertalen en taalmoeders’. Het vroegmoderne taalvergelijkende onderzoek in the Lage Landen*, Brussel, Paleis der Academiën, 2010, p. 572-573 (Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten). We must fear that in some countries, due to the fact that it is written in Flemish, Van Hal’s great book will not receive the attention it deserves. To some extent, he would follow in Boxhorn’s footsteps – which would not be a small honour – as the latter persisted in publishing his discoveries in Flemish, and not in Latin.

A chapter is devoted to “Skytische Theorien”⁴. But we must also stress the fact that Van Hal has worked along the lines opened by his master Pierre Swiggers at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, whose precursory articles are listed in Van Hal and Van Rooy’s book. In short, the Scythian hypothesis, as a prefiguration of Bopp’s Indo-European theory, is now a well-known chapter in the history of linguistics⁵.

The success of the Scythian theory in the Reformed countries is easily understandable, as it broke with the Mediterranean and classical tradition of the Hebrew-mother-tongue, supposed to be engraved in marble by the Babel/Bible story. In fact, as has been observed, the miraculous preservation of Hebrew at Babel, due to Heber’s loyalty to God, who regarded the construction of such a high tower as an impious challenge, was not so strictly imposed by the Scriptures⁶. Leibniz was evidently convinced that the world settlement after the Flood by Noah’s children could not obviate the fact that the Europeans had a common cradle situated in the East, a point of origin that he searched towards the Urals. He was no less conscious of the heterodox flavor of such a genealogy, which had been proven for a long time by lexical and even morphological correspondences discovered between many European languages: hence the variations of Leibniz’s prudent discourse on the subject.

At the origin of some of the most puzzling correspondences, we find somebody working for the famous Christoffel Plantijn in Antwerp: Frans Ravelinghen, or Franciscus Raphelengius⁷. Analogies linked Flemish words with Persian ones of close phonetic and semantic similarity. Ravelinghen communicated his observations to Bonaventura de Smet, aka Vulcanius⁸, and to Justus Lipsius, who gave them a large publicity through a letter to Hendrik Schott published in his *Epistolarum selectarum centuria tertia ad Belgas* (1602)⁹. But here Lipsius found an occasion to display his high-level criticism and declared that he was not convinced by the lexical correspondences – more than thirty – and even the morphological similarities of verb inflections: he had experienced too many odd? parallels established by German historians between their language and the classical ones, at a time when the Germans were claiming more room in the gallery of European culture and antiquity, since the discovery of Tacitus’ *Germania*. Moreover, he had to keep at a distance the comparison established by the famous Jan van Gorp, or Goropius Becanus, between the languages of the Flemish people, their ancestors the Cimbers and the Cimmerians of the Black Sea: an ancestry that drew *in spe* the travels of the Europeans from India, following the “course of the sun”.

Thus, in this context, the discovery of the Germano-Persian correspondences could have anticipated in some way what would be scientifically demonstrated by the Sanskrit revelation. Those were the main pillars of the supposed kinship between the two languages¹⁰. Something of the future of paleo-comparativism, potentially leading to a

⁴ *Indogermanisches Grammatik*, hrsg. von Thomas Lindner, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2015, Band IV/1. *Komposition. Addenda et Corrigenda I. 2. Wissenschaftshistorische und bibliographische Vertiefungen*, p. 260 sq.

⁵ In Italy, for example, the Bonfante tradition has been illustrated by Stefano Gensini, Claudio Marazzini, Mirko Tavoni, etc. See the Bibliography below.

⁶ Droixhe 1978, p. 34 sq.

⁷ Van Hal 2009.

⁸ Cazes 2006 ; Van Hal 2010b.

⁹ Droixhe 1978, p. 56; Deneire / Van Hal 2006.

¹⁰ Van Hal 2010c.

real pre-comparativism, also hinged on the opinion of another great philologist, Joseph Justus Scaliger, who, motivated by the same reasons that persuaded Lipsius, declared that there was no proven *cognatio* between languages so distant from each other. A more strictly spatial criterion had to operate. Confirmations and extensions of the linguistic affinity were put on the table by other historians, such as Johannes Elichmann¹¹. The affinity seemed evident to Claude Saumaise, who inscribed it in the genealogy of European languages¹². But a dispute with Boxhorn, who had had the same idea at the same moment at the same university of Leiden – an unfortunate concatenation of circumstances – led him to give up the hypothesis¹³.

There was a request for more validations of the German-Persian relationship. It was to such an expectation that an answer was provided by a number of philologists working in the sphere of the London *Polyglot Bible* – the subject of this paper. Published from 1654 to 1657, the Bible took into account nine languages, including Persian. In the circle of scholars who worked in the field around Brian Walton, director of the enterprise, the first to bring up the question of the famous correspondences was John Greaves.

1. Greaves's comparative parcelling of the Germano-Persian affinities

Greaves, or Graevius, was an orientalist and professor of astronomy at Oxford. He first acquired a good reputation by collecting Greek, Arabic and Persian manuscripts in the Middle East and making them known in Europe during his travels, especially in Rome. He was appointed in Oxford in 1643. In 1649, he published his *Elementa linguae Persicae*, but we learn from the dedication to the polymath John Selden that he had in mind to publish his book nine years before. “Deprived of types and distracted by more important concerns (as he undertook travels in the Orient), he decided that he had to delay this work until times more convenient”. Thus, the words listed below could have been drafted around 1640.

It is stated at the end of the book, after Graevius has written about Persian: “I think that there is no other language, among the Oriental ones, which needs such a small number of rules, or which agrees so much with the European ones” (*cum Europaeis magis consentiat*)¹⁴. “I find many words which show an exact conformity with the English, with the same meaning, and almost the same number of letters”. They are displayed in three columns. We have transliterated in European characters what seem to be the Persian words indicated by Greaves¹⁵. We have indicated the analogies already mentioned by Lipsius.

Latin	English	Persian
Tonitru	<i>Thunder</i>	[tundar] ¹⁶
Malus	<i>Bad</i>	[bād badast “addicted to pleasure”; bādaj “pestilential carbuncle”; bādi farang “venereal disease”; bāi “bad,

¹¹ Droixhe 1978, p. 81-82; Van Hal 2010d.

¹² Droixhe 1978, p. 90-91; Considine 2010.

¹³ Droixhe 1978, p. 92 sq.; Droixhe 2007, p. 55-74: « Boxhorn: l’invention du prototype européen »

¹⁴ Graevius 1649, p. 89-90.

¹⁵ By referring to Richardson 1806.

¹⁶ Richardson, p. 305.

		corrupt, wicked”] ¹⁷
Melior	<i>Better</i>	[beḥt “better”] ¹⁸
Lemures	<i>Fairies</i>	[paryān “fairies”] ¹⁹
Frater	<i>Brother</i>	Beradar (Lipsius)
Filia	<i>Daughter</i>	Dochtar (Lipsius)
Foemina	<i>Maid</i>	Madach (Lipsius)
Tonsor	<i>Barber</i>	[barbar “barber”] ²⁰
Ostium	<i>Doore</i>	däre (Lipsius)
Labium	<i>Lip</i>	[lab “lip”] ²¹
Cervical	<i>Boulstar</i>	[biṣṭar “bad, matrass, bolster, etc.”] ²²
Supercilium	<i>A brow</i>	[abrū “eye-brow”] ²³
Umbilicus	<i>Navel</i>	[nāf “navel”] ²⁴
Vinculum	<i>Bond</i>	band (Lipsius)

Some identifications need to be explained. For *malus/bad*, we have gathered several words or phrases involving the same ‘bad’ or a negative meaning: “badly devoted to pleasure”, “bad boil”, etc. In Latin, the *lemures* designated ghosts or phantoms (hence the name of the animals, due to their large eyes and their screams). Cotgrave’s *French and English Dictionary* of 1611 translates *fairie* by “fée” and refers to the Latin meaning in the article *feé, feée*: “fatall, by appointed, destined; also, taken, bewitched, or forespoken; also charmed, inchaunted”²⁵.

The lexical selection reveals that special attention is paid to anatomical vocabulary: “lip”, “brow”, “navel”. The importance given to that field was, at the same time, explicitly formulated by Jan de Laet, director of the Dutch Company of West Indies, one of Scaliger’s students, in his reply to Grotius’s *On the origin of the peoples of America*. De Laet’s *Notae ad dissertationem Hugonis Grotii* of 1643 recommends basing the comparative search of linguistic kinship on “the names of things that are particular and the most common to the nation taken into account”²⁶. Such are the names of the parts of the body, those of the numbers from one to ten, those of the different parents, etc.²⁷

¹⁷ Richardson, p. 149-51.

¹⁸ Richardson, p. 202.

¹⁹ Richardson, p. 220.

²⁰ Richardson, p. 171.

²¹ Richardson, p. 806.

²² Richardson, p. 181.

²³ Richardson, p. 7.

²⁴ Richardson, p. 1038.

²⁵ Considine 2008, p. 157.

²⁶ De Laet 1643, p. 30-35 ; Droixhe 1987, p. 72-73.

²⁷ William Jones, in the famous discourses which from 1786 to 1791 lay the foundations of comparatism, takes the opportunity to repeat the instruction to avoid the false suggestions of lexical borrowings. His lecture *On the Persians* (1789) favoured a comparison which involved the names of “material elements, parts of the body, natural objects and relations, affections of the mind, and other ideas common to the whole race of man” (Jones 1807, III, p. 119-120 ; Aarsleff 1967, p. 130-131).

The lines which follow the list of the Englo-Persian correspondences shed light on the concept implied by such a “conformity”. “There are other words whose origin seems to be derived from Latin words”. Greaves mentions: *father* > *fadar*, *mother* > *madar*, *sinus* > *šinaḥ* “bosom, breast”, *jecur* > *jigar* “liver”²⁸, *jugum* > *jugh*, *chugh*, *chügh*, *yügh*, *yögh* “yoke”, etc.²⁹ This suggests that the Persian words above would also “be derived” from English ones. Where we were expecting the sign of a kinship a linear descent or a borrowing is in fact most probably postulated. The historical and genealogical relationship is subject to a “parcelling” that splinters the family-tree into a series of separate boxes labelled “From English to Persian”, “From Latin to Persian”, etc. So we can agree with T. Van Hal that Greaves, “although offering an overview of parallel words, does not advance an explanation for the correspondences”, even if he cannot be absolutely ranked among the scholars who would “limit themselves to the observation of similarity without reflecting on a possible explanation”³⁰. The expression “be derived” indicates some attempt at explanation. We must take into account the fact, stressed by Van Hal, that “Greaves does not confine himself to English equivalents but includes Latin equivalents as well”.

2. Reversing the comparative parcelling

Another professor of astronomy at Oxford provided another version of the “parcelling” process. The genealogical relationship between English and cognate languages is reversed by Edward Bernard as it appears in the title of his *Etymologicon Britannicum. Vocabulorum Anglicorum et Britannicorum origines Russicae, Slavonicae, Persicae et Armenicae*. This essay was first annexed to Runof Jonsson, or Runolphus Jonas’ pleasantly entitled *Recentissima antiquissimae linguae septentrionalis incunabula, id est grammaticae Islandicae rudimenta*, published in Oxford at the address of the “Sheldonian Theater” in 1688, after a first edition in 1651 at Copenhagen. The *Etymologicon* was then added, with Jonas’ grammar, to the *Institutiones grammaticae Anglo-Saxonicae et Moeso-Gothicae* published by George Hickes from the same address in 1689. Bernard’s text is the same in those books. The reason for those cumulative issues is clear: each book participated in a new stage of historical and comparative linguistics. A completely philological approach to the kinship between the old Germanic languages, especially connected with English and the Icelandic, and almost every European language, was displayed.

In my 1978 book, I selected from Bernard some Germano-Persian similarities with a hypothetical projection towards an Indo-European origin. I propose here another short list of those similarities situated within a wider perspective of European analogies, for the letters A-B. A complete analysis of the lexicon, in alphabetical order, would easily convince the reader that the idea of a European kinship was being suspected.

English	Anglo-Sax.	Gothic	Island.	Persian	Latin	“Britt.” Welsh/ Irish	Slavonic
<i>after</i>		<i>afar,</i> <i>afaruh</i>		<i>abar</i>			
<i>am</i>	<i>eam,</i>	<i>im/is/ist</i>	<i>em</i>	<i>im/i/est</i>	<i>sum/es/est</i>		

²⁸ Richardson, p. 343.

²⁹ Richardson 1806, p. 342, 358, 361, 1156.

³⁰ Van Hal 2010b, p. 156-157.

	<i>eom</i>						
<i>ape</i>				<i>puza</i>		<i>ab, eppa/ aprhawnog capuchin monkey</i>	Bohem. <i>opicze</i>
<i>as quam</i>				<i>az</i>			
				<i>bach, bacha</i>		<i>bach, bachgen parvus, parvulus > child, young</i>	
	<i>banc, banke ripa, agger, tumulus</i>		<i>backe ripa, ora</i>	<i>panka</i>	Dalmatian <i>bok latus</i>		Bohem. Polish <i>bok latus</i>
<i>bad</i>				<i>bad, batar pejor</i>			
<i>bright</i>	<i>berth</i>	<i>baikht</i>		<i>bartu</i>		<i>berth splendor</i>	
<i>bake</i>				<i>bochtan, bocht, bochta</i>			
<i>band, bond, binding</i>	<i>banda</i>	<i>bandi, bindan legare</i>	<i>band</i>	<i>band, band- cerdan ligare</i>			
<i>barre obex</i>			<i>barrah</i>				
<i>base vitis, humilis, pravus</i>			<i>bast, basy</i>				
<i>beare portare</i>		<i>bairan</i>	<i>boran</i>	<i>berva, burdan</i>			<i>para</i>
<i>bearer bajulus, portator</i>				<i>burdbar, barbar</i>			

From this table it can be inferred that the comparison has been substantially extended. Bernard's *Etymologicon britannicum*, of course, took advantage of the two books to which it was annexed. But the Celtic languages were also connected to the Germanic and Latin family – see *ape*, *bank*, *bear* – as were the Slavic ones: our list does not sufficiently illustrate the relationships with the Russian. On the one hand, the language of the Goths is regarded as the first to be born from the dispersion of the Tower of Babel. In a paper by Bernard addressed to Hickes, at the beginning of the 1689 edition,

he writes that “the Goths undertook the construction of the Tower without any intermediary”. He frowns when he sees that “other scholars greatly pride themselves on finding this cradle in the Hebraic or Phenician origins” (more or less like Bochart), or in the “dialects of Jon and Javon”, viz. the Greek. He places on the same level of doubtful ideas the “necessary kinship between the Anglo-Saxon and the Persian, which they do not demonstrate”.

Bernard also mentions those who, “because the Gallic people has in the old days developed in this island some Celtic language, without establishing the fact once and for all, are searching for its root in Asia”? However, the hypothesis of an Asian origin, he feels, could explain the affinities with the Russian and Slavic languages, if we take into account a possible migration from the surroundings of the Black Sea. It is a fact that those Russians and Slavs have given “their way of living and speaking to the inhabitants of Cappadocia [Turkey], of Colchis [Georgia], of Iberia [another name designating an area of Georgia]”. A road for travel from East to West was drawn between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea.

3. Walton: Boxhorn eagerly welcomed

The Scythian theory was taking shape. The *Polyglot Bible* of London was published under the direction of Brian Walton from 1654 to 1657, with many collaborators, including John Greaves³¹. The first volume contains his *Prolegomena*, which were reproduced separately. The sixteenth *Prolegomenon*, *De lingua Persica*, has third and fourth sections entitled “Many Persian words are the same in German and in English” and “On the origin of this *convenientia*”³². His list combines borrowings from Lipsius and Greaves. Explaining this lexical congruity is not “really easy”. “There is no historical monument bearing witness to any trade”, between the Anglo-Saxons and the Persians, or to “any colonies sent by one part to the other”. Walton explicitly proposes an explanation that ruined the hypothesis of kinship and rejected it: the similarities result from a contact, a mixing of cultures. Walton follows Scaliger’s and Bochart’s refusal or scepticism about a *convenientia*. He repeats the former’s assertion that “nihil tam dissimile esse alteri, quam Teutonismus linguae Persicae”. He understands Samuel Bochart’s doubts about such an hypothesis but he must also consider with him that “so many examples have been accumulated by learned men that they are almost reliable”.

Concluding that “it is difficult to assert anything certain on that question”, Walton concedes another possibility. “However, I find likely Boxhorn’s opinion, which must be welcomed eagerly, I believe, until something more probable may be asserted”. Boxhorn had written:

The origin of this type of words is to be searched for neither among the Persians, nor among the Germans, but among those from whom the Persians as well as the Germans have received them – from the Scythians or Tartars, whose incursions into the Orient as well as into the Occident introduced some similar and identical words into very distant countries.

The readers of the *Polyglot Bible* did not have to be dreamers to imagine what the William Jones and Bopp generation will check in great detail with enthusiasm with the discovery of Sankrit, so far from Boxhorn’s twenty years of precursory loneliness.

³¹ Schenker 2008, p. 781 sq.

³² Walton 1654, p. 607 sq.

4. Hyde: the war-contact hypothesis

Among Walton's collaborators for the Persian version of the Pentateuch is registered Thomas Hyde, author of a Latin *History of the religions of the old Persians* (1700). At the very end of the first part of his book, in chapter 35, which deals with *modern and ancient Persian and its dialects*, Hyde repeats some of the correspondences listed by Greaves (names of relationship, *barber*, *brow*, etc.) to which are added a few new ones, mainly taken from his field of research: Pers. *wäl* / Engl. *whale*³³, names for "god", "devil".

The well-known similarities are explained by the fact that the "language of the Medes", with whom the Persians were generally confused, had been mixed with the "Teutonica seu Gothica" during the "Bellum Persicum" related by Procopius. Herodotus had written that the "Goths or Getes and Massagetes" stayed around the river Cur and the Ararat for "twenty-eight years": "It is not surprising if their words and sentences intruded into the language of the Medes". "And there is nothing amazing if, as a result of the war between the Parthes and the Romans, some Latin words have also been detected in the Partho-Median".

5. Ange de Saint-Joseph: the reason for grammar lost in the lexical landscape

If anyone had a good opportunity to observe the relationships between the European languages and Persian, it was the Father Ange de Saint-Joseph, or Ange de La Brosse. He stayed in Persia, Turkey and Arabia for fourteen years, where he collected the materials for his *Gazophylacium linguae Persarum* published in 1684.

Its third chapter is entitled "De linguae Persicae cum Europaeis analogia"³⁴. On the one hand, it is a synthesis of the best observations produced by the Flemish comparative tradition. Thus, he particularly refers to Flemish words, even when there are other Germanic equivalents: "*Bend* ligament, Belg. *band*", "*Bed* malus, Belg. *Bed*", "*Berber* barbitonsor, Belg. *Barbier*", "*Beheter* melior, Belg. *beeter*", "*Der* porta, Belg. *door*", "*Has* octo, Belg. *acht*", etc. But he also borrows some morphologic analogies from this Flemish tradition, and specially from Boxborn. "If we consider all the infinitives, they end in *en*, *den*, *ten*, as in Flemish: *maken*, *doen*, *bieben*, *wesen*", etc. The Persian comparatives are also in *-ter* like Fl. *grooter*, *beeter*, etc., and the diminutives in *-ke*.

On the other hand, as we have noticed elsewhere, Ange de Saint-Joseph attributes also the analogies, to a large extent, to cultural borrowings, as in French *jasmin* (< Pers. *yāsamīn*). Moreover, he had no way to distinguish the borrowings from Arabic: "*Talq* > talchum", "*Tarif* > "inter mercatores usurpata vox *tariffa*", "*Zafferon* > zaffaranum". Some Persian words, when compared to European ones, draw attention by a regular phonetic change: *paradisus* > Pers. *fardeus*, *porphirius* > *farfarious*, *piper* > *pelpel*, *felfel*.

Once again, the inevitable lexical tangle obscured what was more significant and convincing from the point of view of morphology.

6. Epilogue

Leibniz' correspondence shows a repeated removal of the Germano-Persian kinship in the diversion or distraction of the Scythic theory. Perhaps there is no part of this correspondence which is more illustrative, from that point of view, than his exchanges

³³ Richardson 2008, p. 1093.

³⁴ Angelo à S. Joseph 1684, p. 5 sq.

with Johan Gabriel Sparwenfeld, long since published by Harald Wieselgren, which would surely deserve a new edition, considering the additional letters offered in the new edition of the edition of the Berlin Academy.

Something like a first crack in Leibniz' total conviction about the kinship appears in his letter of December 6, 1695, to Sparwenfeld. It is the first letter reproduced by Wieselgren³⁵.

Scholars have frequently talked about the cognation of Persian with German, but, as I decided to examine this closely, I found the similar words in smaller number than I have believed. It is true that it is often difficult to retrieve the similarities when we are not completely acquainted with the languages.

From this moment on, Persia, for Leibniz, becomes just a step or platform on the way to Moscovia, which results in many confusing considerations. His letter to Sparwenfeld of January 1697 interrogates him about the “grammar of the Tartarians” and the relationships of “the Siberians, Circassians, Kalmucks, Mongols, Uzbeks” with the Hungarians³⁶. He also believes that the Gothic of Crimea “is related to Turkish” and he wonders if that relationship extends to the language of the Kalmucks. Sparwenfeld encourages Leibniz to keep up his research in this direction³⁷. When he hears that the travelers Brenner and Polhem are in Persia, he expects that they will provide “specimens of the unknown Scythian languages”: that is to say the ones spoken “between the Tanaïs” – the Don – “and the Volga”.

If we limit ourselves to Leibniz' letters of 1697, the new meaning given to the word “Scythian” would reach another point in a letter to Lorenz Hertel³⁸. The fact that the “young Sir Brenner is now in Persia with Sir Fabritius, Swedish ambassador”, could shed a new light upon “the Scythian or Tartarian languages”. Equally suggestive is a letter of November 1697 to Sparwenfeld where we read: “Sir Witsen had written to me that the Usbeqs speak a language very close to the Persians; it is known, moreover, that the Persians and the Parthians are the same thing. And it has been believed that the Parthians have a Scythian origin”³⁹.

Thus, the fading away of the Germano-Persian question is clearly associated with the search for a European linguistic cradle looking towards the foothills of the Urals, instead of the surrounds of the Black Sea. The Scythic idea took on a colour which had no longer had anything in common with a sort of proto-Indo-European “mother-tongue”. This undermined the comparative system drafted by Boxhorn, Salmasius and the Flemish research⁴⁰. After the misappropriations and misuses of the Germano-Persian correspondences, the fact that Leibniz himself is distracted from what they revealed sounds, to some extent, like putting the discovery under the bushel, at least for the time being.

³⁵ Leibniz 1883, p. 3 sq.

³⁶ PGB, t. XIII, n° 329, p. 544.

³⁷ PGB, t. XIII, n° 382, p. 637-643. In a letter to Francesco Palmieri, Leibniz goes back to the languages of the “Circassians, Tcheremissians, Kalmucks”, etc. in order to “learn through them which regions of Scythia the Huns and the Hungarians come from” (PGB, t. XIII, n° 224, p. 367).

³⁸ PGB, t. XIV, n° 59, p. 75.

³⁹ PGB, t. XIV, n° 435, p. 760.

⁴⁰ Droixhe 1978, p. 86 sq.; Considine 2010; Van Hal 2010a, 2010 b; Nieuwstraten 2012, etc.

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