

**G. W. LEIBNIZ'S PHILOSOPHY AND
PRACTICAL PROJECTS**

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**Licentiate thesis
Markku Roinila**

8. A GREAT MISSION : RUSSIA

In 1659 Leibniz composed a memoir entitled "*Specimen demonstrationum politicarum pro rege polonorum eligendo*", in which he tried to solve the problem of Polish succession by using axiomatic arguments. The memoir was composed on Baron Boineburg's behalf and its goal was to promote Elector Schönborn's candidate to the throne. In the memoir Leibniz expresses his deep contempt against the Russians and regards them as "the Turks of the north".¹ *Specimen*...was made under a Polish pseudonym and the main purpose of the pamphlet was that Poland and the princes of Germany should form an alliance to prevent a danger from the north - Schönborn's candidate's rival was a Russian aristocrat.²

Approximately twenty years later Leibniz took a renewed interest in Russia. This was partly due to the interest in China (the relations between Russia and China were improved after agreement of Nerpinisk in 1689³), partly due to the interest in the different languages, dialects and cultures in Russia and the unknown Siberia. By this time Leibniz was an active participant in the study of languages. The most important reason, however, according to many commentators, notably Benz, was Russian's new Czar, Peter the Great.

Peter had been travelling around Europe "incognito" and aroused interest seldom been laid upon a Russian prince. However, still in 1698 Leibniz wrote to Thomas Burnett : "...yet I am a little in the sentiment of the Czar of Muscovy, who, I have been told, admired certain ingenious machines more than all of the pictures which he was shown in the royal palace."⁴ In the light of this letter, one could suspect that the influence Benz devotes to Peter the Great is somewhat exaggerated. His continuing interest in China and also the intense study of Eastern languages could be seen as equal factors in Leibniz's awakened attraction to Russia.

¹Benz, *Leibniz und Peter der Grosse*, p. 4-5.

²Guerrier, *Leibniz in seinem Beziehung zu Russland und Peter dem Grossen*, p. 5.

³*Handbuch der Geschichte Russlands*, Bd. 2, I, p. 236.

⁴L, p. 3.

Leibniz entered into correspondence with some experts on Russia including Croze, Royal librarian of Prussia, Ludolph, orientalist, Cuneau, chancellor of Frederick I, Witsen, the mayor of Amsterdam, Sparvenfeld, philologist and Huyssen, Czar's legal counsellor.¹

Eventually Leibniz reached two important conclusions :

- 1) Russia is a Tabula rasa, an empty table and a perfect proving ground for Leibniz's educational and scientific ideas
- 2) Russia is located between Europe and China and is thus a bridgehead to get East within the Christian sphere of influence.

For Leibniz Peter the Great was an instrument - by using him one was able to raise Russia into a cultural entity, which will unite Europe and China into a big Christian commonwealth. Leibniz saw himself as God's tool leading mankind to a greater harmony. One has only to lead Peter's attention to matters concerning the promotion of science and religion in his country.

An extract from Leibniz's memoir to Czar (December 1708) :

"The real goal of the study is human happiness, in other words a lasting pleasure, attainable to so many individuals that they would not live in idleness... to use their talents to practise unpretentious virtue, to attain blameless knowledge of God and to promote common good."²

A political scheme was flickering in the background : an alliance with Russia would strengthen the Holy Empire's position against the Turks and France. Leibniz acted later

¹FC, p. xxxiv.

²"Der wahre Zweck der Studien ist die menschliche Glückseligkeit, das ist zu sagen eine beständige Vergnügung, so viel bei menschen thunlich, und zwar also dass sie nicht in müssiggang und üppigkeit leben, sondern durch eineungefärbte Tugend und rechts chaffene erkenntniss zur Ehre Gottes und gemeinem Nutzen das ih rige nach eines jedem Talent beyt ragen."

Guerrier, *Leibniz in seinem Beziehung zu Russland und Peter dem Grossen*, p. 95.

as an intermediary between the Emperor and the Czar. Poland would also be a good addition to the alliance.¹ There were, however, some controversies concerning the status of Ukraine (which was a osmanian-tatarian borderland) between Poland, Austria and Russia.² Although Peter was very eager to form an alliance against the Turks, the treaty of Carlowitz in January 1699 between Austria, Poland and Venice on the one hand and the Turks on the other, dashed his dreams.³

Leibniz tried to find influential persons who had close contacts to the Czar. At first he tried to advance through Czar's portrait painter Lubanecky.⁴ Exchange of letters led to contact with Huysen, Czar's legal councillor, in 1703. In Russian court Leibniz's name was familiar to artillery general and councillor Bruce, who as a mathematician knew him well from his achievements in differential calculus.⁵

Correspondence between Huysen and Leibniz carried on until 1707 while Huysen acted as Russian agent in Vienna. Then Huysen's post was inherited by baron Urbich, who had been corresponding with Leibniz about day-to-day politics since 1687.⁶ Leibniz set his hope on the ending of the Great North War in order to persuade Charles XII to participate to an alliance against France and to invite Russians to help to discourage the Turks.

Urbich and Leibniz composed a plan, in which Sweden and Russia make peace and Russia sends 15 000 men to strengthen the Emperor's army against France and the Turks. Peter took interest in the plan, but it was never realized because of the battle of Poltava. Peter had a 30-year truce with the Turks and was suspicious towards Austria because of the treaty of Carlowitz.⁷

Peter's victory in Poltava raised Leibniz's expectations, but it was soon found out that Charles XII was not beaten altogether. A great opportunity for Leibniz opened in 1710

¹Guerrier, *Leibniz in seinem Beziehung zu Russland und Peter dem Grossen*, p. 24.

²*Handbuch der Geschichte Russlands*, Bd. 2, I, p. 238.

³Donnert, *Peter der Grosse*, p. 58.

⁴Guerrier, *Leibniz in seinem Beziehung zu Russland und Peter dem Grossen*, p. 41.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷Marshall, *Peter the Great*, p. 14.

when Czarevitch Alexej and a Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel princess Charlotte got married. Peter the Great participated in the ceremony himself. This was a result of heated diplomatic discussion between Hanover and the Czar since Elector Georg Ludwig shared a former opinion with Leibniz and regarded Russians as the "Turks of the north".¹ An ally between the two followed, however, and Peter agreed to support the Elector's claim to Bremen and Verden.² Leibniz had no small part in this himself - in a secret visit to Vienna in 1708 he had discussed of the marriage with Urbich.³

Through Anton Ulrich, Duke of Wolfenbüttel Leibniz managed to get an audience with the Czar in Torguau 28. or 29. 10. 1711.⁴ Leibniz gave him a memoir, where he presented a program consisting of plans for printing trade and publishing, secondary schools, agriculture, research of the magnetic declinations of Russian soil, research of slavonic languages, promoting the manufacture industry and, most important of all, founding of an academy.⁵

Other topics in the audience concerned the mapping of Siberian area and improving the sea- and landroutes, Leibniz's plan of sending an expedition to find out about the border between Asia and North America and the aforementioned political alliance against France. Leibniz suggested also that the Czar should initiate communication with China for the purpose of learning the sciences and arts known in the East but not in Europe. He also mentioned the "connection" between the hexagrams of the I Ching and his binary arithmetic.⁶

Peter was very courteous towards Leibniz and let him have lunch in his table. After some problems things got on so well that Leibniz got to see the Czar for the second time and was nominated a privy councillor in Karlsbad 1. 11. 1712.⁷ He now engaged into tight

¹Guerrier, *Leibniz in seinem Beziehung zu Russland und Peter dem Grossen*, p. 88.

²Marshall, *Peter the Great*, p. 19.

³Aiton, *Leibniz, a Biography*, p. 309.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Richter, *Leibniz und sein Russlandbild*, p. 14.

⁶Although he here claimed Bouvet's discovery concerning the relativity as his own. Aiton, *Leibniz, a Biography*, p. 310.

⁷Donnert, *Peter der Grosse*, p. 204.

exchange of letters with high officials in Russian court. Leibniz never travelled to Russia, which was probably a mistake, since one could assume that to capture the whole of Peter's attention requires a constant presence in the court: Leibniz could still have been somewhat suspicious about Russia - a revealing note is known: the Dutchess of Orleans, having heard of Leibniz's journey and meeting with the Czar, remarked that he was wise not to wish to go to Moscow, which must be a wild place.¹ Leibniz must have been well informed of that opinion.

Leibniz wrote to Sophie in 9. 11. 1712 that he was now offered the opportunity to be the Solon of Russia, but his task would not take too much time, for he preferred the shortest laws like the Ten Commandments and the twelve tables of the Romans.² Leibniz was now very optimistic about the future, but he was not aware that the Czar's interest towards his plans was not necessarily binding. It is told, that Peter attended the Anglican service in his visit to England so convincingly that many thought, that he would abolish the Greek-Catholic church from Russia altogether. The opinion was shared by the Jesuits in Vienna.

According to Guerrier, the Czar's interest in Torguau concerned primarily Leibniz's ideas about the observations of the magnetic declinations of Russia and the study of Slavic languages.³ The philosopher did not interpret his intention that way. He was overwhelmed of thought of what would be found out once the study of vast Russian empire should begin. New knowledge about China could also be gained. For the third audience with the Czar in Bad Pyrmont, May 1716 Leibniz planned to present him his calculating machine. "It will someday be of assistance to the Emperor of China!"⁴

However, knowledge was not meant to proceed to one way only. The Academy of Berlin would be one main agent in the civilization of Russia. The Academy would especially prepare an expedition to be sent to China.⁵ The final goal would be an encyclopedia,

¹Aiton, *Leibniz, a Biography*, p. 311.

²Ibid., p. 310.

³Guerrier, *Leibniz in seinem Beziehung zu Russland und Peter dem Grossen*, p. 136.

⁴Richter, *Leibniz und sein Russlandbild*, p. 52-53.

⁵Guerrier, *Leibniz in seinem Beziehung zu Russland und Peter dem Grossen*, p. 26.

which would consist of the whole of Western and Chinese wisdom in one volume.

Political conjectures were the main topic in the correspondence between Leibniz and the high court officials of Russia and Austria, which followed. One of the goals of this diplomatic activity was to achieve an alliance between England, Russia and the Emperor. In Pymont one of the main topics was to relax the tension between Russia and Austria.¹ He also drew up a plan of a collegial administration system, which partly resulted to a reform in Russian administration in 1719.²

The charm of the Czar did never cease in Leibniz's eyes. After Pymont he wrote to Bernouilli 26. 6. 1716 : "The better I know the character of this prince, the more I admire him."³ The Czar's interests still concerned mostly about practical matters in science. For example, Leibniz's calculating machine was received favourably by Peter.

8. 1. The Promotion of Arts and Sciences in Russia

Leibniz also took the opportunity to present a new memoir about the promotion of science and education in Russia. This report reflects extremely well the grandiose nature of Leibniz's plans. At first he distinguishes three main areas of promoting arts and sciences in Russia⁴ :

1) Acquiring the necessary resources. This consists in books, museums, instruments and a theatre of natural arts. Also a library and a printing press is necessary. Leibniz recommends a few smaller libraries in order to spread the civilization into a larger area. The book should be in many different languages, but most books should be written in

¹Guerrier, *Leibniz in seinem Beziehung zu Russland und Peter dem Grossen*, p.142.

²Schneider, *Justitia universalis*, p. 104. The reform was made, however, after the model of Sweden - a former swedish civil servant, Heinrich Fick, was the leading influence behind the reformation. Marshall, *Peter the Great*, p. 46.; Donnert, *Peter der Grosse*, p. 134.

³"Ego pane integro octiduo in acidulis Pirmontans Magni Russorum Monarchae asseclam egi, et quanto magis hujus Principis indolem perspicio, tanto eam magis admiror."

Guerrier, *Leibniz in seinem Beziehung zu Russland und Peter dem Grossen*, p. 174 & 361.

⁴*Ibid.*, p.349.

Latin. Besides small libraries, one main library is needed, where one can find the main literature of all sciences. Leibniz finds books of mathematics, physics and history most useful. The museum should consist of collections of coins, medals and other curiosities. In the theatre of natural arts one could find various inventions, minerals, flowers, fruits, fish and an anatomical theatre.

2) Educational reform. Comprehensive schools are to be of three kinds : schools of virtue, schools of languages and schools of art. In schools of virtue religiousness, goodness, and humility will be taught. The Socratic ideal is the model for these virtueschools and they would prepare children to comprehend (Leibniz's conception of) morality and justice.

The language schools are meant primarily to the children of artisans. The curriculum would consist of foreign languages needed in trade and for the more advanced pupils there will be teaching of French, Latin, Greece and Arabian languages. From 1665 there had been a latin school in Moscow, which was meant for russian diplomats and in 1685 a language school was established by Jesuits in Moscow, which became a very important medium in bringing western influences to russians, since it developed to a many-sided educational institution for civil servants and scientists.¹

The art schools are basic schools with bias on catechism and Holy Scriptures. In the curriculum there will also be arithmetic, music, geometry, geodesy and housekeeping. At first the cloisters would function as the centers of education.²

Universities are to be founded in order to educate the civil servants. These universities should be independent as in Germany. The teaching of vernacular and rhetoric should be in the forefront. Other main topics should include mathematics, medicine, jurisprudence and theology. Moscow, Kiova and Astrakhan are recommended as places to found these institutes. In Kiova there was already a Collegium, which gained the name of academy in 1701 by Peter the Great and was an important place of learning in South and South-

¹Donnert, Peter der Grosse, p. 194-95.

²Richter, *Leibniz und sein Russlandbild*, p. 107-109.

West Russia.¹

3) The most vital task in Russian civilization belongs to the academy. The plan of Russian academy is in line with Leibniz's other similar plans and the academy of Berlin would act as a model. Leibniz was well aware of Peter's interests and accordingly emphasized the importance of an academy to the shipbuilding industry.² The capital for the enterprise would be supplied by means of calendar monopoly, lottery and the profits from the printing press. The President of the academy should be the Czar's privy councillor. The main task for the academy would be to produce an encyclopedia.

Leibniz's memoir was crafted with thoroughness and with great details and gained some support. Financial problems and the Great North War were a hindrance though, and the most important institution of the memoir, the academy, was not founded until nine years after Leibniz's death in 1725. The academy did not resemble Leibniz's plans, but the spirit was somewhat kept alive by the Leibnizian professor, Christian Wolff, who was nominated to vice-chancellor of the academy.³

Leibniz used a lot of time in the study of Slavic languages and Russian geography. He drew out a seven-point program of the study of Russian geography.⁴ One of his suggestions, the exploration of the Bering Strait, was realized after Leibniz's death.

Leibniz's achievements in the field of linguistics were published in a publication of the Berlin academy. He assumed, intuitively, that all languages have their root in the same

¹Donnert, *Peter der Grosse*, p. 194.

²"Finally, your Majesty can achieve great advantages to shipping when letting observe the magnetic declinations of the empire. That way can the longitude or the way from east to west, or with a word, the way to the sea be found not entirely without problems but with a much more easiness."

("Lezlichen können S. Gr. Cz. Mt. ein grosses zur Schiffahrt beytragen wenn Sie in dero weiten Reich und angrenzenden Landen die variationem magnites fleissig observieren lassen, wodurch diesem Geheimniss näher zu kommen. Dadurch die Ausführung der Longitudinum oder wie weit man von Ost gegen Westen und mit einem Wort die stelle, auff welcher man sich in der See Befindet, wo nicht völlig auszumachen, doch umb ein grosses zu verbessern.")

Guerrier, *Leibniz in seinem Beziehung zu Russland und Peter dem Grossen*, p. 360, Richter, *Leibniz und sein Russlandbild*, p. 122.

³Donnert, *Peter der Grosse*, p. 208.

⁴Richter, *Leibniz und sein Russlandbild*, p. 93.

origin, the *Ursprache*. The theory was traditional and not correct, but Leibniz is widely recognized as a pioneer in systematic linguistics.¹

10. 2. Russia - a Gateway to the East?

Russia was one of the main interests to Leibniz during his about 20 last years. The most hindering obstacle to the realization of his plans was the Great North War. Economics were in poor condition because of the war and Peter's interests were directed to the war. It is clear that Russia was only a medium to Leibniz, who was ultimately interested in combining the European and Chinese cultures.

The basis for Russian-Chinese relations was dictated by the treaty of Nerpinisk in 1689. The treaty was a compromise, which enabled the trade with Peking.² At the same time religious activities began in China. In 1692 a foreign craftsman were sent to begin to build an orthodox church.³ The relations with China soon got worse. The Chinese accused the Russian merchants of cheating⁴ and the orthodox religion was not received favorably by neither the Chinese nor the Jesuits in China.

Leibniz idea of a conference between all Christian confessions (with help from the Czar) did not catch fire for the same reason. Peter the Great seemed to have been really interested of this idea : he allowed a Catholic church to be build in Moscow and admitted a pass to Jesuits to travel to China via Russia. On the other hand, Peter had also other motifs - he wanted to bring closer the Orthodox and Catholic church in order to have better opportunities to interfere to politics in Poland.⁵ All this worried Leibniz and he began to suspect that Peter would not tolerate the Protestant confessions - they did not gain the same benefits in Russia as the Catholics did.⁶ A possible explanation to the Czars behaviour, who wad a lot of protestant friends and was generally tolerable to other

¹Richter, *Leibniz und sein Russlandbild*, p. 87.

²*Handbuch der Geschichte Russlands*, Bd. 2, I, p. 366. Between 1698 and 1722 14 caravans were sent to Peking. Ibid., p. 367.

³Ibid., p. 237.

⁴Ibid., p. 367.

⁵Benz, *Leibniz und Peter der Grossen*, p. 31-32.

⁶Guerrier, *Leibniz in seinem Beziehung zu Russland und Peter dem Grossen*, p. 26.

religions, could be found in the Russian clergy, which was very conservative and opposed all reforms.