

Thomas A. Sebeok
The Seventeenth Century Cheremis:
The Evidence from Witsen
in:
M. Black and W.A. Smalley (eds.)
On Language, Culture, and Religion:
In Honor of Eugene Nida
The Hague, 1974

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY CHEREMIS: THE EVIDENCE FROM WITSEN

THOMAS A. SEBEOK

For Eugene Nida: "pour étendre les progrès de la lumière de l'Évangile". (Witsen to Leibniz, May 22, 1698)

... It appears to be the will of God that science should encompass the globe and should now come to Scythia, and that for this purpose its instrument should be Your Majesty; for you are so situated that you can take the best from Europe on the one side and from China on the other and, through good institutions, improve upon the achievements of both. Indeed, since in most parts of your empire all studies are as yet in a large measure new and resemble, so to speak, a *tabula rasa*, it is possible for you to avoid countless errors which have crept in gradually and imperceptibly in Europe. It is generally known that a palace built altogether anew comes out better than one that is rebuilt, improved upon, and much altered through many centuries (Vernadsky 1972: 366, after Ger'e 1873: 207).

This fragment of a memorandum addressed to Peter the Great, who reigned over Russia from 1689 to 1725, was drafted by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz on January 16, 1712 – one of the many letters he penned to the Czar from the time the two men met at Torgau, in October 1711, until Leibniz's death, in 1716. The correspondence bears witness to Leibniz's lively interest in the Czar's activities, and to the possibilities of scientific discovery in Russia. When Leibniz encountered Claudio Filippo Grimaldi in Rome, in 1689, and learned from that Jesuit Father of his plans to return to his missionary activities in China by land – specifically via Muscovy – his curiosity was much aroused by this as yet hardly encompassed, let alone explored, Eurasian land mass which he once characterized as *le pays... du Nord de l'Europe et de l'Asie... si importante de nostre globe*.

Thomas A. Sebeok is Distinguished Professor of Linguistics and Chairman of the Research Center for the Language Sciences at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

A year later, from a letter dated December 4, he therefore received with keen attention a piece of news, communicated to him by the librarian Henri Justel, that *une carte de Tartarie* had been printed in 1687 (it has not been ascertained whether Leibniz had been aware, since as far back as October 1684, of the earliest public announcement of this forthcoming project, placed by Gijsbert Cuper, in the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*). He promptly disseminated reports of this welcome publishing event to several of his professional acquaintances, as can be read from such letters of his (in part still unpublished, but preserved in the Archives of the Public Library of Lower Saxony, in Hannover) as the one he wrote to Father Grimaldi, on June 10, 1691. He did not, however, actually get a chance to see and examine this map until 1694, when a copy reached him in Hannover through the good offices of one Heinrich Hüneken, a resident of The Hague. Leibniz reciprocated by sending the author a copy of his *Codex juris gentium diplomaticus*, receipt of which was acknowledged in 1697.

The author of this famed map was Nicolaas Witsen (born in Amsterdam on May 8, 1641, died in Amsterdam on August 10, 1717), who, since his voyage to Moscow at the age of twenty-three, had gained great reputation as one of Europe's most knowledgeable experts on Russia. Upon receipt of his map, Leibniz resolved to profit as much as he could from Witsen's experiences, and to exploit his contacts. Accordingly, he initiated a correspondence in 1694, whereby Witsen's role eventually (after September 6, 1697) became that of a middleman, a sort of culture broker, for which he was exceptionally well-fitted, if only because of his situation as a prominent Netherlander. At the end of the seventeenth century, after all, the universities of his country were teeming with scholars and students from all parts of Europe. A hub of intellectual life, The Netherlands also became a place of refuge for French Huguenots and English academics alike. Amsterdam alone boasted of some four hundred printing establishments and bookshops; indeed, Witsen himself was heavily involved in publishing activities – he certainly had a hand in the publication of practically any work having to do with Russia.

After an initial exchange of politely formal letters between Leibniz and Witsen, three full years were to elapse before the resumption of their correspondence on a regular, full-scale basis. This renewal of contact was quite evidently triggered by a major event, namely, the arrival in Holland of Peter the Great in 1697. The following brief excerpt about Peter's studies and work in Amsterdam is taken from the preamble to the Naval Service Regulations of 1717 (of special interest is

the fact that the Czar inserted certain passages himself, which are reproduced in italics):

Thus he [Peter] turned all his thoughts to building a fleet; and when, on account of the Tatar attacks, Azov had been besieged, and later successfully taken, he could not bear to deliberate long over his unalterable desire but quickly set about the work. A suitable place for shipbuilding was found..., skilled shipwrights were called in from England and Holland, and a new enterprise was started in Russia in 1696 – the building of ships, galleys, and other boats – at great expense. So that this work would be established in Russia forever, he decided to introduce this art among his people. For this purpose he sent a large number of noble-born persons to Holland and to other states to study naval architecture and seamanship.

And what is even more remarkable, the monarch, as if ashamed to lag behind his subjects in this art, himself undertook a journey to Holland, and in Amsterdam, *at the East India shipyard*, he devoted himself, together with his other volunteers, to learning naval architecture; in a short time he perfected himself *in what a good ship's carpenter should know*, and with his own labor and skill he built and launched a new ship (Vernadsky 1972: 313, after Ustrialov, 2, 1858-1863: 400).

Witsen was Burgomaster of Amsterdam as well as Director of the Netherlands East India Company at that time (Bodel Nijenhuis 1855). Peter lived in his house during a portion of his sojourn, and the Russian guests were, so to speak, under Witsen's patronage (cf. the remark of H. Doerries referred to in Müller 1955: 7, fn. 1). Peter himself, incidentally, was adequately versed in the Dutch language, having studied it with Andrew Winius, a man of Dutch origin who served as one of the *d'iaki*, or clerks, of the Posol'skii Prikaz, his Foreign Office (Baxrušin 1955: 44).

Leibniz, who was fascinated by the Czar, now sought to establish and maintain contact with him through Witsen. Their first face-to-face encounter was not to take place until 1711, however, and his report concerning that occasion was to constitute the subject of Leibniz's last letter to Witsen. Leibniz endeavored to garner all available information from him pertaining to the Czar's peoples and territories. Witsen was evidently impressed by Leibniz's character and motivation for wanting to secure Peter's good will and cooperation. Persuaded accordingly, Witsen set in train his far-flung contacts, and proceeded to respond to and satisfy, step by step, Leibniz's numerous demands until his final known reply, dated November 29, 1712; after that, it seems, Leibniz let their epistolary relationship lapse.

The Leibniz-Witsen correspondence as a whole (thoroughly and illuminatingly discussed by Müller 1955) covers five main sets of topics,

including missionary activities, questions of mathematics, China and Japan, all interspersed with political and scientific news, as well as many details of an ethnographic character, the emphasis depending on the problem area that occupied Leibniz at the time of writing. But the persistent central theme, a small part of which concerns us here, remained Russia and Peter the Great. Leibniz asked Witsen to urge the Czar to order the collection of research materials, particularly for the purposes of comparing languages; this request was in good conformity with his philosophy of language, especially insofar as it related to his conception of etymology on the one hand, and his general philosophical system on the other (cf. Aarsleff 1969). He was, however, aware that his linguistic concerns might seem to conflict with his other interests. On July 25, 1697, that is about six weeks before he even commenced his exchanges with Witsen, he had written to another correspondent, Palmieri:

Quant à la diversité des nations je souhaiterois fort de pouvoir obtenir des échantillons des langues de ce pays là, sçavoir de celles, qui sont entièrement différentes de la Russienne par exemple de celle des Czircasses, Czeremisses, Kalmucs, Sibériens, etc., et peut estre qu'on apprendra par là de quel endroits de la Scythie les Huns et les Hongrois sont sortis. Et comme maintenant la juridiction du Czar va jusqu'aux frontières des Tartares de la Chine, cette information servira à mieux connoistre und grande partie du globe terrestre. Les différentes races des nations ne se pouvant mieux discerner que par les langages et leur harmonie ou cognation. Je vous supplie d'insinuer tout cecy de bonne manière, et même (si cela se peut commodément) sans beaucoup de bruit. Car bien des gens ne se soucient pas de ces curiosités, qu'ils s'imagines estre inutiles. Vous n'est pas de leur sentiments et moy non plus (Ge're 1873: 10-11; Aarsleff 1969: fn. 11).

In this letter, he mentions explicitly, and, so far as I have been able to verify, for the first time, the Cheremis, who today constitute the fourth largest Finno-Ugric ethnic group in the Soviet Union, concentrated now, as they were then, mainly in the upper Volga Basin (Sebeok 1956a).

The youthful Witsen journeyed to Moscow as a member of Jacob Boreel's 1664-1665 trade delegation, whose objective was to improve commercial relationships between their country and Russia. Even though Witsen's family had been trading with the Russians since about the beginning of the seventeenth century, this circumstance did not smooth his way or make his stay any easier; it was, in fact, fraught with the familiar difficulties that have beset generations of travelers to that country. Witsen was assigned a "guide", who incidentally kept him under

close observation, necessitating the use of subterfuge to realize certain meetings, for example, his clandestine rendezvous with the banished Patriarch Nikon. In view of the paucity of contemporary evidence (cf. Gebhard 2, 1881-1882), it must be assumed that, while in Russia, Witsen was already pursuing his life-long quadruple path: commercial, political-diplomatic, scientific, and missionary – the latter on behalf of the reformed church (or, as he wrote to Leibniz on May 22, 1698, “pour étendre les progrès de la lumière de l’Evangile” – Eckhardt 1717: 364).

Witsen knew better than anyone that his 1687 map was inaccurate: large regions beyond the Urals lay still unexplored, indeed, were rightly suspected to be awaiting discovery and exploration. Not surprisingly, his descriptive account of *Noord en Oost Tartarye*, first printed in Amsterdam in 1692, suffered from the same inevitable deficiencies, compelling its self-critical author to make constant revisions. In 1705, he permitted the publication (also in Amsterdam) of a second, improved edition, but this, too, failed to satisfy his scholarly standards. Although he continued the process of revision up to his last years, he could not bring himself to issue a third edition, because, being unable to collect firsthand the data that he felt he needed, he was forced to fall back upon the uncertain accounts of travelers who seldom possessed either the background knowledge or the means required to conduct proper field work (on Witsen’s sources, see Trisman 1951). Both the first and the second editions were rapidly exhausted and became exceedingly rare. Nonetheless, for the purposes of what follows, the 1785 reprinting of the latter, in possession of the Houghton Library, has proved equally serviceable.

In the second edition of his *Noord en Oost Tartarye*, Witsen provided two sorts of information pertaining to the Cheremis: an ethnographic sketch, and a single linguistic text. According to Leibniz,

Die Erforschung des Landes, der geographischen und klimatischen Gegebenheiten muss ... durch die Erfassung und Beschreibung aller Volks- und Stammstypen ergänzt werden, also der Menschen, die diesen weiten, kaum bekannten Raum Nordeuropas und -asiens bewohnen (Müller 1955: 25).

His twin goals were to ascertain how the different races and ethnic groups fit together, and what linguistic criteria could be adduced to support their relationship. From such knowledge, he had hoped to be able to infer the provenance of all these populations, and perhaps ultimately the origin of man. Witsen became Leibniz’s most tireless informant in this quest; the data he furnished fueled Leibniz’s intuitive classification of the languages within his purview, in 1710 (cf. Richter 1946; Water-

man 1963). In this scheme, as against his other major branch, "Aramaic", the Finno-Ugric languages and Samoyede fell into that subdivision of the "Japhetic" branch which he designated "Scythian", a term deriving from the name of the region that he had assumed to have been the homeland – or *vagina populorum*, as he once called it – of the inhabitants of vast reaches of contemporary Europe and northeast Asia. Of the four subdivisions of Scythian, the third constituted an accurate classification of what are now called the Uralic languages, that is, Finno-Ugric plus Samoyede, with Cheremis being presumably subsumed by Leibniz under *Finnisch*, a term he applies ambiguously to both an entire family of languages and to one subclass thereof.

A primary set of data upon which his linguistic classification was founded consisted of interlinear versions of the Lord's Prayer assembled from as many languages and dialects as possible. He importuned many of his Russian connections with such requests, for, as he explained in 1698,

Wenn man das *Vater Unser* in solchen Sprachen erhalten könnte, mit einer Uebersetzung zwischen den Zeilen in einer bekanntern Sprachen, würde es gut seyn, um solche Sprache besser gegen andere zu halten, deren *Vater Unser* man bereits hat.

According to Aarsleff (1969), he made at least a dozen similar requests, "apparently without much success, though the great compilation he had in mind was later made..." (this subsequent project, carried out during the reign of Catherine the Great [1762-1796], under the overall direction of Pallas, is discussed in Sebeok 1960). However, one respondent who did not let Leibniz down was Witsen, who, "Comme je vois, que vous désirez d'avoir le *Pater noster* en des Langues de Pais éloignez" (Eckhardt 1717: 361, dated October 16, 1697), had supplied him, by the turn of the century, with texts not only from over half a dozen Uralic and Altaic – or, as Leibniz termed them, *Türkisch* – languages, but also from Hottentot, including the *Symbolum Apostolicum* and the Ten Commandments in this African language (Eckhardt 1717: esp. 375-384). The Mongol text, which he obtained himself "avec beaucoup de peine" from a native slave at the Embassy of Muscovy, led him to remark, in a letter dated December 4, 1697, on his informant's limitations:

La stupidité de ce Moegal, qui est ici, est si grande, qu'on ne peut pres, que tirer de sa bouche aucune connoissance, ni de sa Patrie, ni de Mœurs du Pais (Eckhardt 1717: 361-362).

No wonder he mistrusted information that, by necessity, came to him secondhand (or worse) from his "amis de Mosco" (Eckhardt 1717: 367), whose identity and methods of data gathering have, on the whole, remained opaque (cf. Trisman 1951).

In his letter of July 21, 1698, he signals to Leibniz that more versions of the Lord's Prayer would be forthcoming, and, almost a year later (with a letter dated July 5, 1699), he encloses three such texts, one of them in Cheremis. This text, constituting the earliest coherent document in that language, with a Dutch interlinear translation, has been published twice: first, on page 622 of the 1705 edition of Witsen's *Noord en Oost Tartarye* (also reproduced in subsequent reprintings, and in Figure 1, below); second, as a part of the Witsen-Leibniz correspondence (Eckhardt 1717: 369-370). The two versions differ in some minor graphic details,

Het Vader Onze in de Ceremisse Tael.

Onze Vader ,	<i>Memnan uzin ,</i>
die daer zyt	<i>ilimazet</i>
in de Hemelen ,	<i>Kinsfuluste ,</i>
Uwe Name worde	<i>tinin liumet</i>
geheiligt ,	<i>volgufertes ,</i>
Uwe Koninkryke	<i>Tinin Vurduschn</i>
kome ,	<i>tooles ,</i>
Uwe wille geschiede,	<i>Tinin jerek ilies ,</i>
zoo als in de	<i>kesu i</i>
Hemelen ,	<i>Kusfuluste ,</i>
alzoop op der Aerden,	<i>i ijulnin ,</i>
ons dagelijks Brood ,	<i>memnon kedzin Kinde,</i>
geeft ons heden ,	<i>puske malana ikelfet ,</i>
ende vergeeft ons	<i>i kode malana</i>
onze schulden ,	<i>memnon suuluk ,</i>
als wy vergeven	<i>kesu me kondena</i>
onze schuldenaren ,	<i>malano tuirulisticzy ,</i>
en leit ons niet	<i>i rzurty memnon</i>
in verzoekinge ,	<i>i langoske ,</i>
maer verloft ons	<i>i utura memnon</i>
van den Boozen.	<i>i Jalaez.</i>

Figure 1

e.g. as to the representation of some of the vowels: *memnon* (1705) vs. *memnan* (1717) "our", *Jalaez* (1705) vs. *jalaz* (1717) "evil", etc. Although it is difficult to be certain, internal evidence suggests that, of the dozen or so dialects spoken by the Cheremis, the text at hand corresponds to the pattern coded as *KK* (in Sebeok and Zeps 1961: 16), that is, the one spoken today in and around Koz'modem'jansk, and especially

important as it had served as the basis for the Western literary standard of the Cheremis.

In *Noord en Oost Tartarye* (1705), the Lord's Prayer is embedded in a matrix of ethnographic observations about the Cheremis, running (double column) from page 619 through page 623, and mentioned again in the third paragraph of page 883. Wisen's account presents a unique source depicting important aspects of Cheremis life in the seventeenth century, which may be favorably compared with later, successively more scientific reports (e.g. those enumerated in Sebeok 1956a or Sebeok and Ingemann 1955). In conclusion, by way of a modest contribution to ethnohistory, I append a lightly edited and annotated English translation of the relevant passages; their full analysis and critical evaluation must, however, await a future occasion.

[619] The Cheremis.

The Cheremis are neither baptised, nor circumcised, and therefore pagans: they live around the city Nizhni Novgorod, in the woods, on both sides of the Volga river: they live in the area between Vjatka and Voločda, as far as the river Kama.

Near the little town of Vasiligorod, which is built entirely of wood, by Czar Ivan Basilevits, who occupied it with soldiers, to support the Crimean Tatars, lying on the Volga, there live also Cheremis Tatars, occupying an area well above Kazan. The river Sura flows past the aforementioned town, which was formerly the separation between the Russian and the Kazan areas.

These people are fast walkers, and they are good archers. They are also grouped with the Tatars: have a special tongue: were formerly in the power of the Kazan Czars.

There is little wheat in their land; but it [620] is brought there, and exchanged against skins. Some of the Cheremis live in houses; but most of them live in tents on the field. The men desert the women if they have not borne children within three years.

These peoples pay tributes to their Majesties the Czars — in fodder.

The Cheremis use no other weapon than bow and arrow. They are divided into Nagornoi, or Pogorski, and Loegowooi, or Lugowiki; have a special language, and consist of a little over 20,000 souls. They all work the land, or are hunters, and they have many children; although they are not always enthusiastic [about them], perhaps because they wed young; because they marry in their twelfth or thirteenth year, particularly the wealthy. They make their bows and arrows for the hunt, but they also use dogs. The men are dressed like the Russian peasants: they know nought of priest or church; much honey and cattle is found with them; most of them are pagans, but a few are Moslems; they use many carts and horses; they live quietly, and in peace, except that at the time of Stenko Rasin's defection they defected with him but when he was conquered and tried many of them perished.

They marry as close a relative as they desire, and they don't know incest.

They follow here the inhabitants of the island of Ceylon, because the present king of that island, son of Raja Singa, whom he sired by his eldest daughter, has again married his own sister, a pious man, according to their overpious law. They [i.e., the Cheremis] bury the mead in jars, and pots, under the soil, and when this becomes sour it intoxicates the more readily: they also have beer and brandy; they love as food cabbage and cucumbers: there are no whores among them, and the person guilty of fornication is killed; they are very much inclined to drink. They worship trees and idols, put animals on wooden sticks, which they then leave about and worship. They don't know how to write. [Cf. Sebeok 1956b.] They live around, and in the neighborhood of Kazan. They don't know wine. They burn their cadavers, or these are buried, and sometimes they are thrown in the water. They take two, three, or four wives, as many as they can feed.

If they take an oath, they take a piece of [620/2] bread on two points of two sabers, and the person who takes the oath has these stuck in his mouth: other people drink salt water when they take an oath.

The men shave their entire head, but not the beard.

The women go around in a strange clothing, with wide sleeves, as the Japanese do, and the seams have been sewn on the outside with blue silk; they wear wide trousers, which one can see — there are no skirts covering them; and shoes of tree bark, they take hold of a wooden spade, or wooden cap by the middle, which they fasten high up, and this is decorated with cowries, bells, clocks, and these dangle before their forehead and down towards the shoulders, have long strands at the back, which trail behind them, and sometimes they stick copper or silver coins on their forehead: just as the women in Vjatka, a city of their Majesties the Czars, wear wide wooden caps on their head.

It is peculiar that, although these Cheremis live in houses, they have no villages. Each has a dwelling in the woods, so far from the next person that one cannot reach another by shouting.

The following was related to me in writing from a neighboring place about the Cheremis.

The homes of the Cheremis peoples start at Vasiligorod, a city which existed before, called after the Czar by that name, and built by him: they live in the region on both sides of the Volga, to the city Kazan; they live for the most part in huts; their daily food is game-roast and fish; they are good archers, and they urge their children to practice archery. It is said that they are faithless, rapacious, and cruel people, but otherwise not malicious of character. One differentiates between Pogorski and Lugowiki, the former bear the names of mountains because they live on the mountainside, or the high side on the right side of the Volga; the latter, of the low country, because they live on the left side of the Volga, in the plains, which is a fat land, rich in woods and trees: the former, for lack of feed, have their cattle graze on the latter's pastures, or have them fatten up there. They use the same language.

These pagan Cheremis, have the following customs which do not [621] differ much from those of the Circassians: their children, when they are half a year old, are given a name, usually after their parents, on a day set aside for the purpose [cf. Sebeok 1950], no writings are found with them, nor is any religion propagated by teaching; nevertheless most of them recognize and worship

only one immortal benevolent God, whom they sometimes invoke; but they also invoke the Sun and the Moon; particularly the Sun in the spring, because the soil, cattle, and men benefit from its force and benefaction; and if they dream of any animals during the night, then they worship these the following day. When one asked one of them about the beginning of the world once, he answered, *Čort snai*, i.e., ask the Devil about it; on which occasion, when he was interviewed further, whether they knew the devil, he said, the Cheremis knew him very well; the devil was a spirit, which could do men a lot of harm, and did do a lot of harm to the Cheremis if they did not propitiate him by appropriate offerings.

The most important part of their idol-worship seemed to consist of offerings, about which they report the following.

The offerings have to take place at certain places, viz., forty *verst* [about 2/3 mile] south of Kazan, near a marsh at the river Nemda, where, according to them, the devil is living, and anyone who appears there without offerings or gifts, dries up immediately, yes exhaustion overcomes him so quickly that he can hardly go home from there. Ten *verst* from there is another water well-known among them, called Schoksihem, lying between two mountains, this is only two Dutch ells deep, but it nevertheless never freezes, however cold the winter. Here, as they say, the devil is also living, and is much more powerful and strict than at the aforementioned place, and is therefore greatly feared by the Cheremis, and taken to be much holier than Nemda; but no offerings may more be made at Schoksihem, and any Cheremis who approaches this water too closely, or steps into it, will have to suddenly fall down and die, but strangers and Christians are not harmed by this.

Their offerings consists of oxen, cows, and sheep, they cook the meat over a fire, stretch against the same fire the skin on poles, and then hold the dish with the cooked meat in one hand and a bowl of mead in the other hand, [621/2] and pronounce the following words. "I offer this to God, he certainly will be willing to take this from me, and in return provide me with oxen, sheep (this, or something else they desire), go hither Thou offering, and take my request to God;" after which he throws both the meat and the mead against the stretched skin, into the fire. If a wealthy person dies among them, his best horse is consumed at the usual offering place by the relatives and friend, the deceased is lowered in the earth and his clothes are hung up there.

They take as many wives simultaneously as they desire, and as they can manage; although these wives, among others, were relatives and sisters, whom they buy, as many as they desire, and as many as they can support. The dress of the men consists of a long skirt and stockings: when they are married, they shave their head bare, but the unmarried ones leave a pluck of hair on their skull, some braid them together: the children who are most dear to the parents wear a ring through the nose. The women go about with uncovered face, hung with coarse cloth and linen, and wrapped; the wealthy ones are dressed in stockings and over-skirts, like the men, except that they often wrap their head in a white cloth: a bride wears an ornament over her head, an ell long, as a horn, at the end of which there hangs a silk tassel with many colors, and in the midst of this there hangs a little bell. So much for the report that was sent to me.

Many believe that after 1,000 years men come back to this life, and in this they

appear to follow the old Pythagorists. If someone dies, they bury him according to his vocation: if he was a farmer, then they place farmer's gear over his head on the grave; if he supported himself with bees and honey, a beehive, etc. They give the deceased a flint stone in their grave, so that he can make a fire at the time of his resurrection; and also an axe, so he can build himself a hut. They have nothing in common with Christianity, nor with the *Alcoran*, except for a few who are Moslems, although a few of them have been converted to Christianity through the zeal of the Muscovites. They are all subject to their Majesties the Czars; and, it is said, they take the loyalty oath as follows: two swords are placed crosswise [622] on a table, and each one who has to take the oath sticks his head under the cross of the swords, and so receives, from the hands of the Russian Chancellor, a piece of bread, cut in a square; after which he withdraws his head again: the meaning is that they will remain loyal to the Czar until the sword, i.e., until death, the Czar who supports them and gives them bread.

Here follows the *Pater Noster* in the Cheremis language (see Figure 1, above).

These Cheremis are archenemies of the Kalmucks, as well as of the Crims [Tatars], to whom they are held, and if necessary are forced.

The describer of the land, Maginus, says of the Cheremis, and Mordvins, that they live in dense woods without houses; that they speak their own language, and that some of them are supposed to be Moslems; that both men and women walk fast, and both carry bows: they feed themselves (he says) with honey and game: they rarely eat bread; they dress in shaggy skins.... They sometimes offer animals to God, and they stretch the skins on sticks, and perform ceremonies before them, by throwing a bowl full of mead down before them, which they then throw on the fire near this stretched skin, praying for cattle, and all temporal abundance. They also worship Sun and Moon: sometimes they honor animals, and cattle of which they have dreamt during the night. They use a language which differs from that of the other Tatars. [622/2] If someone is buried, they hang his clothes from a tree, slaughter a horse, if he was a man of means, and consume it at the side of a river. The men there wear long linen skirts: they shave their head bare; but the unmarried ones wear a pluck of hair in the back, which is sometimes tied up. The women wear coarse white linen clothes: the head considerably wrapped up. So far Maginus. The principedom Cassinov, or Cusimut, is near here, on the Oka. The inhabitants there lean towards Tatar ways, both in language and otherwise. The women blacken the nails of their fingers, and go bareheaded.

The clothes of the Cheremis, according to a story told me by a Persian merchant who traveled there, are often of white cloth and Russian linen skirts, men and women almost the same way and the same shape, so that you cannot tell one from the other by their clothes, except that the women are bareheaded, and one sees a braid hanging down from the back, with a horse tail or a cow tail tied to the end; which is stuck in the belt which men and women wear around their waist. The virgins and young girls wear a thin little board, six or eight *duim* ["thumb", or centimeter] wide, of white polished wood, above

the forehead, standing up, about three span high, which bends forward a little: at the top of this little board there hang, made of wood and other material, half moons, which dangle against each other, and make a noise and a movement; and this serves them as ornament, and entertainment. They live in the woods, in a few houses. If a child is born, they plant a tree, and watch it grow and yearly increase a branch, by which they remember the age of the child, since they know nothing of reading or writing, and cannot count either; under the tree, particularly the ones planted for daughters, they are used to bury a kind of large earthenware pot, or *pottise*, near the root. This jar is filled with a beverage prepared in a special way, and closed off, the earth on top, and left thus closed until the child marries, when it is opened and drunk to make merry the mutual families and relatives; being that this beverage, which is then very fresh and strong, is intoxicating. [623] They do not know offices; they support themselves with shooting, fishing, hunting, and a little plowing of land.

They know nothing of God or Heaven, nor what the world is like, nor what goes on in it: they are naive and bad: their only religion consists of asking advice and help from certain priests who pretend they can practice witchcraft and can confer with the devil; these [priests] then beat on a little drum, mutter a few words under their breath, and then declare that this animal, or no animal, has to be slaughtered, either a sheep, a billy-goat, a cow or a horse, and that the skin has to be placed on a pole, and has to be worshipped, as the need requires, either for health, for the increase of cattle, for a good catch, or fishing, and good crop, because all their expectations are focused on temporal comfort, and well-being; and one sees therefore displayed at almost every house some kind of stretched skin, at the top of some pole, for which this poor people bows. These people reach a high age; and eye witnesses have told me that they have seen and spoken with people a hundred and thirty years old.

One doesn't hear of entertainment among them. There are not many of them, and it seems that previously they have been either disposed of, or have moved, or have died out: one often doesn't see a house for ten miles in their region. All the houses look alike, and are bad. The most important household item is a kettle.

They hunt with dogs, but also shoot the game with arrows, and the fish with blunt darts, although they also have badly made nets for catching fish. They carry bow and arrow, but no rifle; they make their journeys from one place to another on foot.

They are not pretty, but ugly, but they don't have such flat faces as the Samoyedes; about in the middle between those and other people.

To transport wares or loads they also use deer before the sleighs in the winter, or little carts in the summer.

In these areas are found the heaviest pole trees that are found anywhere. So much for the report by the aforementioned Persian traveler.

Then, on page 883, there is the following additional and final reference to the Cheremis:

Neither are counted to the Tatar races the Cheremis, the Chuvash, Votjaks, and other peoples, who all have the same religion as the Mordvins. There are

some people among the aforesaid peoples, particularly among the Cheremis, who adhere to the Tatarian faith (i.e., the Moslem faith). These peoples are not forced to participate in the Muscovite campaigns, although they recognize their Majesties the Czars and pay tribute to him: a similar subordination and service is true of the Samoyedes, and other peoples living near the Ice Sea, which are all differentiated by special language and religion: and these people extend as far as the very high mountains adjacent to Siberia.

REFERENCES

- Aarsleff, Hans
1969 "The Study and Use of Etymology in Leibniz", *Studia Leibnitiana, Supplementa* 3, (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner), 173-189.
- Baxrušin, S. V.
1955 *Naučnye trudy* 3:1 (Moscow: Akademiia Nauk SSSR).
- Benz, E.
1947 *Leibniz und Peter der Grosse* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter).
- Bodel Nijenhuis, Johannes T.
1855 *Verspreide bijzonderheden over Mr. Nicolaas Cornz. Witsen, burgemeester van Amsterdam* (Arnhem: J. A. Nijhoff).
- Braudo, A.
1904 "'Vitzen' [Witsen]", *Entsiklopedičeskij slovar' Brokgauza-Efrona* 6 (St. Petersburg), 568-569.
- Eckhardt, Johan Georg (ed.)
1717 *Illustris viri Godofr. Gvilielmi Leibnitii Collectanea etymologica, illustrationi lingvarum, veteris celticae, germanicae, gallicae, aliarumque inservientia* (Hannover: Nicolai Foerster).
- Gebhard, Johan F.
1881- *Het leven van Mr. Nicolaas Cornelisz. Witsen (1641-1717)*, 2 vols. (Utrecht: 1882 J. W. Leeflang).
- Ger'c, Vladimir
1873 *Sbornik pisem i memorialov Leibnitsa otnoriaščixsia k Rossii i Petru Velikomu* (St. Petersburg: Akademiia Nauk).
- Müller, Kurt
1955 *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz und Nicolaas Witsen* (Berlin: Akademie Vlg.).
- Richter, Liselotte
1946 *Leibniz und sein Russlandbild* (Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften).
- Sebeok, Thomas A.
1950 "Concerning Cheremis Names", *Language* 26, 276-278.
1956a *The Cheremis* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files).
1956b "Cow Swallows Book: An Instance of Cheremis Nativism", *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher* 28, 215-219.
1960 "Eighteenth Century Cheremis: The Evidence from Pallas", *American Studies in Uralic Linguistics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications), 289-345.
- Sebeok, Thomas A., and Frances J. Ingemann
1955 *The Supernatural* (= *Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology* 22) (New York).
- Sebeok, Thomas A. and Valdis J. Zeps
1961 *Concordance and Thesaurus of Cheremis Poetic Language* (The Hague: Mouton).

Trisman, V. G.

- 1951 "Russkie istočniki v monografii N. Vitsena 'Severnaia i vostočnaia Tataria'",
Akademiia Nauk SSSR. Institut ethnografii. Kratkie soobščeniia 13, 15-19.

Ustrialov, Nikolai G.

- 1858- *Istoriia tsarstvovaniia Petra Velikogo*, 5 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tip. N-go
1863 otdeleniia Fobstv. Ego Imp. Vel. Kantseliarii).

Vernadsky, George, et al. (eds.)

- 1972 *A Source Book for Russian History from Early Times to 1917*, Vol. 2: *Peter the Great to Nicholas I* (New Haven: Yale).

Waterman, John T.

- 1963 "The Languages of the World: A Classification by G. W. Leibniz", *Studies in Germanic Languages and Literatures* (Seattle: Washington University), 27-34.