

**Nora Gädeke, ed. *Leibniz als Sammler und Herausgeber historischer Quellen*, Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, ISBN 978-3-447-06624-2, 260pp.(Wolfenbüttler Forschungen, vol. 129). Price: 59 euros.**

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With some notable mainly German language exceptions<sup>1</sup> modern authors have not devoted nearly as much attention to Leibniz's work as a historian as they have to his philosophical and mathematical works. Nonetheless, it is worth remembering that, as the general editor points out in her introduction, it was his Latin editions of mainly mediaeval historical works that were printed in his lifetime and not so much his philosophy or his mathematics. The papers in this volume are also all in German and represent the proceedings of the symposium held in the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel (HAB) in 2007 on the occasion of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the first volume of his *Scriptores rerum Brunsvicensium*. As is generally known, Leibniz was appointed privy counsellor and librarian by the Hanoverian duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg in 1676. The duchy acceded to the status of an electorate in 1692. However, already in 1685 the duke Ernst Augustus commissioned Leibniz to write the History of the House of Guelph and, five years later, after travelling all over Europe in search of archival material, Leibniz took up the post of librarian at another Guelphian court in Wolfenbüttel at the Bibliotheca Augusta (now HAB), which was also to provide him with a substantial portion of the material he eventually published. He held the two posts, counsellor and librarian, at the two courts, until his death in 1716. During that time he produced a number of historical works, although finally he never fulfilled the ducal wish of writing the History of the Guelphs from its beginnings until the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Leibniz had definite views on what history should be, its degree of certitude and how it should be practised. He expressed these in various memoranda and letters from 1670 onwards.<sup>2</sup> In common with many writers of his era he assimilated history to natural science, and more especially in this case to the anatomy of the human body with chronology corresponding to the skeleton and genealogy the nervous system, both chronology and genealogy being the most easily ascertainable just like the skeleton and the nervous system in medicine. On the other hand, history of human motives etc. was the most open to questioning just as the study of the human mind was the most problematic part of medicine.<sup>3</sup> In a similar spirit he advocated the use of objects such as medals, coins etc. as historical sources along

with written material in establishing the accuracy of chronology and genealogy. In the NE of 1703/1704 he subjected historical science to the logic of probability and in 1709 he argued, against the “historical Pyrrhonism” of Christian Thomasius, Bayle and Bierling, that, similarly to a legal tribunal, a historian should accept reasonably certain evidence unless several clear opinions to the contrary existed. Moreover, although Leibniz says relatively little about sacred history, it is plain that it is there that some of the most direct links can be made between his concept of history and his ontology. The most revealing statement he makes on this is to be found in his *Nouvelles Ouvertures* of 1686 where he emphasises that Ancient History is indispensable in guiding us towards the revealed nature of History and its close links with divine providence, which does not dispense the historian from adopting a strictly scientific procedure in his work and from establishing clear criteria for the probability of the facts he relates, given that he possesses the traces of God’s wisdom which are present in our souls as innate ideas.<sup>4</sup>

This theoretical infrastructure, however, was not an aspect the workshop intended to handle and so nothing is said about it in the introduction. The same introduction emphasises instead Leibniz’s distinction between public history and arcane or secret history, also known as anecdotal history after Procopius’ *Anecdota* (*historia publica* and *historia arcana/anecdota*) articulated in his preface to the *Codex iuris gentium* (1693)<sup>5</sup> which was his first historical work of any note. The distinction shows, as Gädeke points out, Leibniz’s preference for “public history” as being founded on official documents and therefore bearing a greater degree of probability or certitude than “secret” or “anecdotal” history, the latter being founded on the historian’s personal knowledge obtained from hearsay, private documents etc. and often containing scandalous details of an eminent person’s life. Leibniz only ever produced one “specimen historiae arcanae” in his career which was the (scandalous) *Life* of pope Alexander VI by Johannes Burchard (1450-1506) the master of ceremonies at the papal court from 1483 until 1506 with Leibniz’s preface, which, as M. Palumbo shows in her contribution, cost Leibniz direct access to the Vatican Archives after the publication was censured and Leibniz wrongly accused of illicitly copying the material from the Vatican Archives. Within the realm of public history, Leibniz judged the publication of official documents to be the most easily ascertainable part of history writing (*pars historiae certissima*). All his historical works are therefore collections of public documents and he never produced any narrative history in the modern sense of the word. His conception of history was rooted in legal theory and in the juridical conception of proof, which, as S. Waldhoff

points out in his contribution, no doubt accounts totally or partly for his interest in historical objects as corroborative evidence to written sources. That being said, Leibniz produced the following collections of documents as librarian and privy counsellor to the Guelphs, apart from minor historical publications, the already mentioned *Codex iuris gentium* published between 1693 and 1700 and the *Vita Alexandri VI* which he excerpted from Burchard's *Liber notarum* and published in 1696 as a "specimen of secret history." The two other collections are entitled respectively *Accessiones Historicae. Scriptores rerum germanicarum ex manuscriptis eruti*, published in 1698 and *Scriptores rerum Brunsvicensium illustrationi inservientes* published in 1707-1711. The *Accessiones*, as their subtitle shows, are in fact a collection of medieval chronicles which were originally planned for publication in 1694. These include the hitherto unpublished *Chronicle* of Alberic of Troisfontaines and the *Chronicon* of Johann of Winterthur. The *Scriptores* is a similar fuller collection of pre-Reformation authors intended to give the ducal family and the wider public a foretaste and a glimpse of the opus in progress and of the sources of the *Annales*, which remained unfinished on Leibniz's death. In his letter of 15 February 1704 to Andreas Gottlieb von Bernstorff, who was still the Guelphian prime minister at the time, Leibniz makes it plain that the motivation of the work is highly political as it aims to make the other imperial states feel envy thus causing them to emulate the Guelphs and to give the latter added prestige by showing the Guelphs' Italian and pan-German connexions, as against the more local roots of the other imperial dynasties. Finally the *Annales*, closely and critically based on sources, turned out to be the crowning of Leibniz's achievement as historian although, as Martina Hartmann points out in her article, they were not in fact published until 1843-1847 in the edition of Georg Heinrich Pertz, the director of *Monumenta Germaniae historica*.

As I said, the present volume does not seek to answer any of the more theoretical problems concerning Leibniz as historian, nor does it aim to offer a synoptic overview of Leibniz's historical production, its scope and aims or any insight into the philosophical and political motives behind it. It also ignores Leibniz's view of sacred history as noted above. The purpose of the present volume, as the editor says, is rather to ask and, if possible, to answer questions such as: how much of Leibniz remains behind the collections of other people's writings that he published? What is his understanding of a "historical source" and what in his view constitutes a "collection of historical documents"? How does he present the documents? Gädeke thinks that Leibniz envisaged his collecting and publishing work as a foundation

for future, more global collections of historical documents such as *Monumenta Germaniae historica* were to become. She also notes that Leibniz did have a project of founding an Institute of German History in 1696. She further points out that his historical collections were also impacted by the existence of the “République des Lettres” governed by the ideals of communication and mutual, albeit not unflinching, generosity in providing material. The question of Leibniz as precursor to modern mediaeval studies, although not studied in depth as such, is also broached in the introduction and in M. Hartmann’s contribution in particular.

The seven contributions vary in quality, as is almost invariably the case with volumes of Conference Proceedings. All in all, however, the chief merit of the present volume is the historical detail of some of the articles which show the “nuts and bolts” of how Leibniz went about collecting materials and objects and the obstacles he encountered. Most interesting and most informative in this respect are the contributions of Stephan Waldhoff and Margareta Palumbo, entitled respectively “Medaillen, Sigilla und andere Monumenta. Leibniz als Sammler und Interpret von Sach- und Bildquellen” (pp.49-118, by far the longest in the book) and “*Sed quis locus orbis nobis plura dare posset et meliora quam Roma? Die Römische Kurie und Leibniz’ Editionen*” (pp. 155-188).

In his richly illustrated piece Waldhoff considers that Leibniz in the wake of Dom Mabillon and the Maurists viewed visual supports as part of historical documentation. Using Leibniz’s manuscript notes on seals, medals etc. now held by the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Library in Hannover, Waldhoff establishes that Leibniz intended to illustrate his *Annales* with pictures of these and similar public memorabilia such as coins with portraits of particular rulers on one side and an allegory of ruling style on the other side, custom that goes back to Roman times.

The merit of Margherita Palumbo’s article on the Roman curia and Leibniz’s historical works especially his publication of an excerpt from Johannes Burchard is to present for the first time the *Protocollum* of the Index Congregation, which dealt with the matter. The document reproaches “the heretic” Leibniz with disloyalty, breach of confidence and stepping over the limits as well as insult to the papacy given that Burchard was considered a heretic. The main reason for this reproach was the Congregation’s suspicion that Leibniz had copied the manuscript illicitly during his 1689 stay in Rome. In fact he had access to the HAB copy of the manuscript and was unaware of the censure but he sensed that something was wrong when his request for the Ms. of Carlo Margarini’s continuation of *Bullarium Casinense*, an official collection of papal documents, was ignored. The *Gesta pontificum*

were from then on forbidden ground especially for a heretic such as Leibniz who had already betrayed Rome's confidence. In 1704 the French bookseller, Deseine wrote to Leibniz, informing him that the Roman curia were somewhat angry with him because of his publication of Burchard as they thought Leibniz had illicitly procured himself a copy from the Vatican. On hearing the news Leibniz changed his strategy vis-à-vis the curia, ceased asking Rome for loans directly and began to use intermediaries such as Jacques Lelong behind whom he masked his requests. This guaranteed him the necessary access to the Vatican Library whose collections he prized above all others.

The remaining contributions include Klaus Graf's piece on Ladislaus Suntheim (1440-1512) as precursor to L's concept of genealogy based on documents and facts. As Leibniz never showed any interest in Suntheim, apart from publishing one of his texts, this remains a matter for speculation unless further evidence can be found. The article by Volkard Huth discusses Leibniz's treatment of commemorations and compares it with some present day "memory" historians. In fact, the article focuses more on authors such as Karl Schmid (1923-1993), one of the foremost "memory historians" of recent years, and tries to show that Leibniz was in some sense a forerunner of the genre although he did not take these questions as far as the recent school.

Malte-Ludolf Babin's informative article on Leibniz's connexions with the Netherlands focuses particularly on Leibniz's correspondence with the Bollandist Daniel Papenbroch, one of Leibniz's historian correspondents over a period of several years and in fact the only noteworthy historian other than Ludovico Muratori with whom Leibniz was in regular contact over a period of time. Babin sees the durability of the Leibniz- Papenbroch correspondence as due to their common conviction that sources were decisive for history-writing. In all, Papenbroch leant Leibniz four Mss: the *Annales Magdeburgenses*, the *Chronicle* of Thietmar of Mersburg, the *Liber Eliensis* and the *Werden Cartulary*. Babin rightly sees Papenbroch's willingness to help Leibniz with search for documents as not disinterested. It was linked to the Jesuit's hope of seeing Leibniz convert to Catholicism. Babin also correctly sees a confessional issue in Papenbroch's refusal to help Leibniz with his attempt to hold off Jesuit missionaries' scientific work in China in the hope of seeing a similar Protestant mission there. Leibniz's dialogue with Papenbroch as a whole was marked by confessional differences which Leibniz partly managed to surmount by making the work of the Bollandists appear acceptable to Protestants when he portrayed the *Acta sanctorum* as a general treasure store of history, which

did not stop him warning its readers against the dangers of saint worship.

Thomas Wallnig's article on Leibniz's amanuensis Johann Georg Eckhart argues that Leibniz viewed his historical production as their common enterprise, a product of a workshop or a studio (analogous to e.g. Rembrandt's). This would mean that Eckhart's own putting himself forward as co-author with Leibniz has a basis of truth even though he has often been viewed as a plagiarist. At the same time it shows that Leibniz's historical productions were also his own work and that he left his stamp on it, albeit a less distinct one than on his philosophical or mathematical works.

In her contribution, M. Hartmann makes some pertinent observations on Leibniz's *Annales imperii* and its edition by Georg Heinrich Pertz (1795- 1876), the director of *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. Pertz considered the unfinished and unpublished *Annales* to be Leibniz's greatest historical work. Originally Leibniz had planned a history of the Guelph dynasty until the 17th century but with time he cut down the closing date to 1235, then 1024. In fact, he only got up to 1005 when the endeavour was interrupted by his death. The end product, however, his initial intentions of glorifying the Guelphs notwithstanding, was not just a history of a dynasty but a universal history of the entire German Empire which took root in the Guelphs. Pertz for his part undertook the edition because the climate of his time was favourable to the making and publishing of works of history. As regards the quality of the contents of the *Annales*, Hartmann draws our attention to Leibniz's inclusion of many historical portraits of Charlemagne's family members, his refusal to make any moral judgements and his equal treatment of men and women. She also notes that Leibniz does not have Charlemagne die in the *Annales*, but passes over his death in 814 in silence only referring very briefly to his funeral.

In all, this is a useful volume for the following reasons. Firstly, it shows some of the "nuts and bolts" of Leibniz's historical endeavours. Secondly, its rather limited scope brings to our attention the amount of work that still remains to be done on Leibniz the historian, his place in the historical debates of his time and his conception of history as a science. More specifically, it helps us situate Leibniz rather better in the "historical Pyrrhonism" debate.<sup>6</sup>

REVIEW OF GÄDEKE, ED.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> See especially Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Schriften und Briefe zur Geschichte*, [collection of documents related to Leibniz's activity as historian] eds. Malte-Ludolf Babin and Gerd van Heuvel (Hannover: Hahn, 2004) : Rüdiger Otto, "Leibniz als Historiker : Beobachtungen anhand der Materialien zum Sachsen-Lunenburgischen Erbfolgestreit." In: *Labora diligenter*, eds. Martin Fontius; Hartmut Rudolph, Gary Smith (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999, pp. 197 – 221); Rüdiger Otto, "Leibniz' Codex juris gentium- eine Bestandsaufnahme, *Studia leibnitiana* 35 (2003), 162-193; Günter Scheel, "Leibniz als Historiker des Wolfenbüschers." In : *Leibniz. Sein Leben, sein Wirken, seine Welt*, eds. W. Totok and C. Haase, (Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschichte, 1966), 227-276. The most important French work on the subject is Louis Davillé, *Leibniz historien. Essai sur l'activité et la méthode historiques de Leibniz* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1909). The present reviewer is currently working on a monograph length study on *Leibniz and the protestant theology of his time* which will include at least one chapter on Leibniz's approach to history in general and to sacred history.

<sup>2</sup> Nearly all published by Babin and van Heuvel (2004), 57-103.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Babin/van Heuvel (2004), 69-76.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Babin/van Heuvel (2004), 63-64.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Babin/van Heuvel (2004), 131-217.

<sup>6</sup> Carlo Borghero does not include Leibniz, except incidentally, in his classic study *La certezza e la storia. Cartesianesimo, pirronismo e conoscenza storica* (Milan : Angeli, 1983)