The new "philosophical" approach

Realisations:

- Artificial languages ("characters")
- Abstract/formulaic approaches to natural languages
- Theories of the origins of language
- Classifications of languages, typologies

Often combined in particular discussions

(In some ways these were present earlier too)

The origins of language

Not a historical issue!

Fundamentally a theoretical question (then called philosophical question) of how language functions & what role it plays

- Sporadically discussed in Antiquity (cf. Plato's *Cratylus*)
- In Middle Ages the Genesis-story taken more or less for granted, but what was the language Adam & Eve spoke? Hebrew?

The origins of language

Hotly debated question in 18ᵗʰ century & later

Cartesian view of the 17ᵗʰ century (← René Descartes):

- reason & knowledge are private achievements
- mental discourse does not need language
- communication compromises knowledge
- language tends to fall victim to distorting forces of rhetorics, emotions, persuasion
- the ideal is emotion-free information language
- → "cognitive appropriation of language" (H. Aarsleff)

The origins of language

Hotly debated question in 18th century & later

Cartesian view of the 17th century:

- Language is split into two:
  - natural, cognitive, descriptive
  - unnatural, tainted by passion

  the former was the language of the Golden Age of perfect communication and harmony

The origins of language

Cf. Leon Panetta on President Obama:

"Obama approaches things like a law professor in presenting a logic of his position. There is nothing wrong with that. We want to have a president who thinks through the issues. My experience in Washington is that logic alone doesn't work. Once you lay out a position, you are going to roll up your sleeves and you have to fight to get it done. That is key in Washington." (7th Oct 2014, MSNBC)

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    (cf. also Leibniz: words with and without meaning)

The origins of language

Anti-Cartesian backlash in 18th century (George Berkeley, David Hume, Etienne B. Condillac, with John Locke an important influence):

- belief in small beginnings and progress in the development of communication and knowledge
- humans are social beings by nature
- language also developed in a social context
- instinct and sympathy are fundamental forces, also in development of language: combination of instinctively affective communication and reflectively conceived signs

The origins of language

Anti-Cartesian backlash in 18th century

"The best method of explaining and illustrating the various powers of the human mind... arises from an examination of the several ways of communicating our thoughts by speech, and from attention to those literary principles which contribute to persuasion and entertainment." (Adam Smith *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, quoted from Aarsleff in *Cambridge History of 18th Century Philosophy*, p. 452)

The origins of language

Anti-Cartesian backlash in 18th century

- Language is inherently creative, rhetorical expressivism is at its heart
- Language is part of man's natural history: gradual development in the context of social interaction
- Language influences the way speakers see the world ($\rightarrow$ *Weltansicht* 'vision of the world')
- All forms of communication and expression are theoretically interesting: pantomime, dance, music, acting, poetry etc.

The origins of language

Sum: cognitive or social function primary?

Cartesian view (17th c.) favours cognitive, later views (18th c.) favour social-emotive origins

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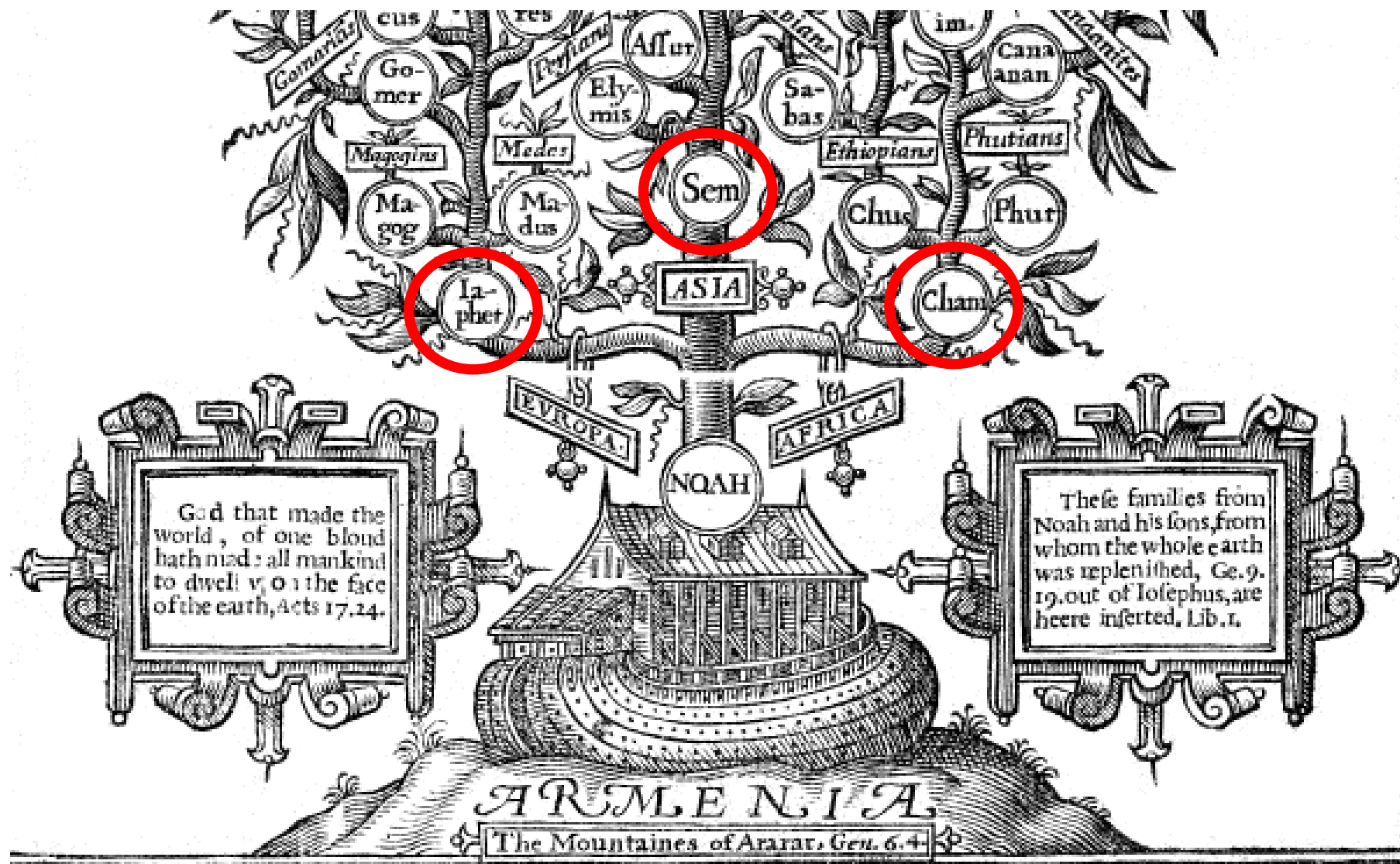
(In some ways these were present earlier too)

The classification of languages

- Classification an issue only since the 16th century
- Before 18th c. , based on words; e.g. J.J. Scaliger (~1600): *Deus/Theos/God/Boge*-languages
- Noah's sons: Sem, Ham, Japhet →
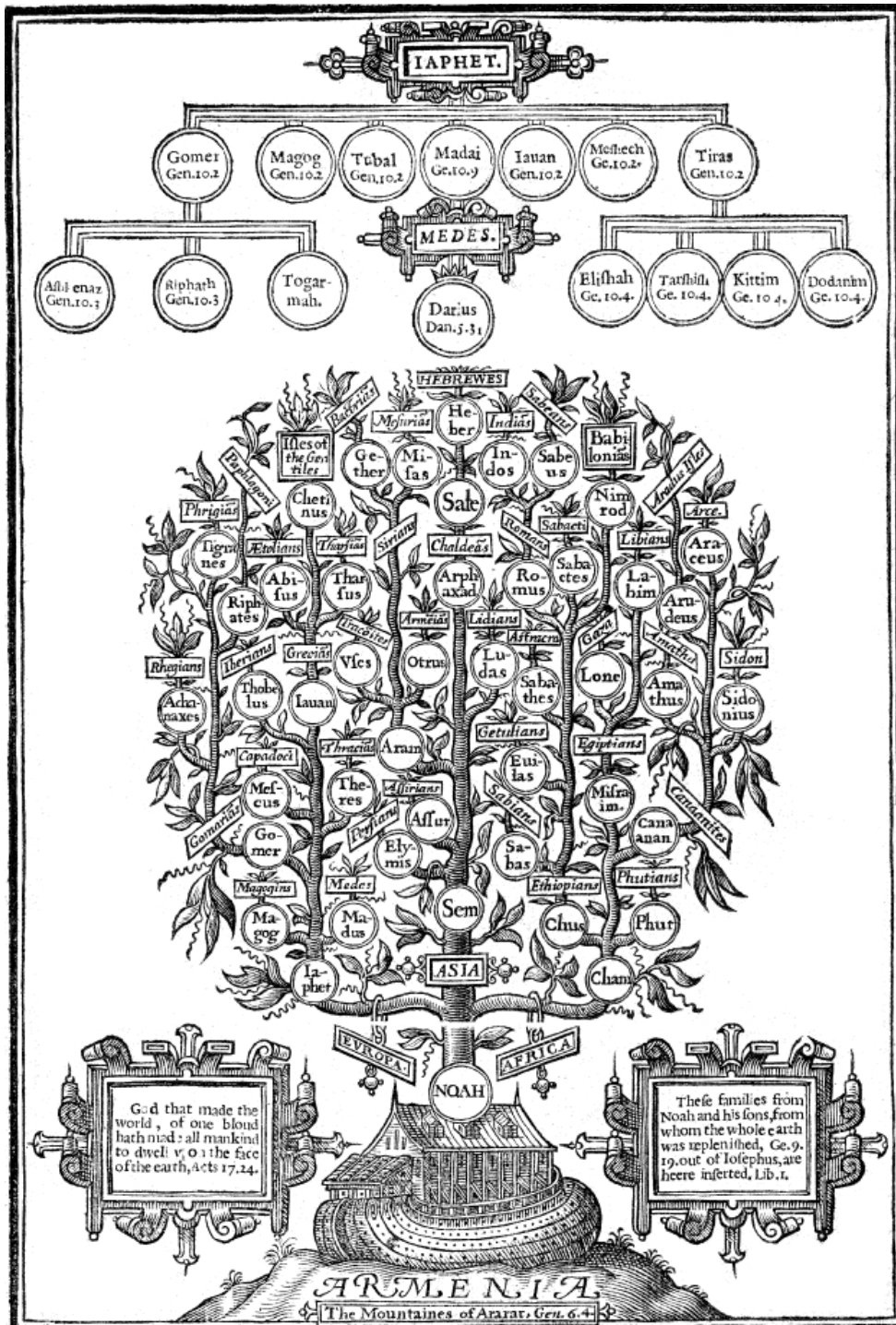
Noah's family tree, illustration from the King James Bible (1611)

→ lower half enlarged in next slide

Gomer · Gomer · Magog · Madai
Persians · Assur · Sem
Elymis · Sabas · Canaan
Medes · Ethiopians · Phutians
Magog · Madus · ASIA · Chus · Phut
Iaphet · Cham

EVROPA · AFRICA

NOAH

God that made the world, of one bloud hath made all mankind to dwell vpon the face of the earth, Acts 17.24.

These families from Noah and his sons, from whom the whole earth was replenished, Ge. 9. 19. out of Iosephus, are heere inserted, Lib. 1.

ARMENIA

The Mountaines of Ararat, Gen. 6.4.

The classification of languages

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- Noah's sons: Sem, Ham, Japhet
- *Matrices linguae*: languages that underlie groups of supposedly related languages
- Groups generally recognised: Germanic, Romance, Slavonic, Semitic, "Scythian"...
- Radical change in 18th c.: interest turns to syntax and its relation to thought; *grammaire générale* (cf. abstract approaches above, e.g. Port Royal)

The classification of languages

Typical treatment of the issue (e.g. *Encyclopédie*): Analogous languages vs. transpositive languages

- Analogous languages: very little morphology, typically SVO, NAdj (e.g. French)
- Transpositive languages: more morphology, free word order, more prone to follow "the whims of imagination, passion, emphasis" (e.g. Latin)
- Syntax seen as the heart of language
- *Le génie de la langue, Sprachgeist* (the spirit / genius / genie of the language)

Late 18th century: summary of trends

- More and more data available, though of variable quality
- Comparison of languages for classification
  - words
  - structures, esp. syntax
- General linguistics emerges (functions, origins of language, its relation to thinking & *Weltansicht*)
- Emerging historical consciousness (in general too)
  - earlier for Romance languages, cf. Dante
  - somewhat later for other languages

Late 18ᵗʰ century: comparative linguistics

János Sajnovics: *Demonstratio idioma ungarorum et lapponum idem esse* (1770)

- Sajnovics: Jesuit astronomer, mathematician
- rigorous comparison of Hungarian and Saami (Lapp)
  - vocabulary as well as morphological structure
- proof of relatedness!
- odd chapter on relatedness of Chinese and Hungarian
- material collected & work written while on astronomical fieldwork in Vardø →

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- material collected & work written while on astronomical fieldwork in Vardø with fellow Jesuit Maximilian Hell
- presented at Copenhagen Academy, great success
- does not cause stir in Hungary
- work not continued (hard times for Jesuits after 1773)

Late 18th century: comparative linguistics

The discovery of Sanskrit & its relatedness to
   European languages
- Sanskrit:
    - language of Ancient India
    - Middle and Modern Indic languages derive from it
    - great literature, important religious function
    - used for serious writing until modern times
    - function similar to that of Latin in Europe
    - not known in Europe by anyone
    - many manuscripts in Paris (brought by missionaries in
       17–18th centuries)

Late 18th century: comparative linguistics

The discovery of Sanskrit...

- India:
  - administration managed by East India Company
  - administrators, judges and several army officers were university graduates with solid philological background
  - many of them interested in Indian culture
  - Asiatic Society 1784, Asiatic Researches 1786
  - important texts published, translated, some even make their way to Europe
  - Fort William College (founded in 1800 in Calcutta by Gov. Lord Wellesley): training of administrators, including oriental languages & culture

Late 18th century: comparative linguistics

The discovery of Sanskrit...

- – Charles Wilkins: the first European who really knew Skt., translated Bhagavad-Ghita & Hitopadesha; typographer!
- – Nathaniel Brassey Halhead: derives Latin and Greek from Skt. in a private letter (1779)
- – Henry T. Colebrooke, professor of Skt at Fort William
- – Alexander Hamilton, army cadet, on return first professor of Skt in Europe (Hertford College, Oxford)
- – Sir William Jones, judge, Persian expert, first president of Asiatic Society, often seen as the founder of Indo-European linguistics (a bit of a misunderstanding): Third Anniversary Discourse (1786) →

Late 18ᵗʰ century: comparative linguistics

"The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists: there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the Gothic and the Celtic, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanskrit; and the old Persian might be added to the same family..."