

ПЕРСОНАЛИИ

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URBAN HIÄRNE AND RUSSIA

In the year 1717, a book was published anonymously in Sweden. Its title was *Orthographia svecana*. Nevertheless, it was written in Swedish, not in Latin.

The text is a dialogue between the old and wise **Eustathius**, and his young pupil, **Neophilus**. They are discussing which orthography that should preferably be used, because Neophilus has in mind to publish a manuscript. Now he wants to know from Eustathius if it is advisable to use the new orthography, introduced some time ago, or rather stick to the old one, where for example *long* vowels are written with *double letters*, and that was not at all used in the new style.

Eustathius totally rejects these new ideas and defends the traditional orthography, with very sharp words against the innovative Swedish orthography, used by *Eusebius* (= Bishop Jesper Swedberg) and others. He also claims that it is only in Sweden where they want to destruct a well-functioning orthography, and he hints at other European languages which are using double vowels, especially Dutch.

Neophilus seems to accept his master's traditional opinion, and asks him where he has learnt the rules for Swedish Orthography. Here is the beginning of the answer by Eustathius, a kind of autobiography:

OS, page 5

Eust: As God has let me reach a good age, I can think back to my first childhood (when I was hardly four years old). At that time they were very cautious about it. So, when I started spelling and writing, my teacher was very careful to look after his pupils' orthography. I had, and have had ever since, an inclination towards Swedish. Because four different languages were current in my native country when I was young, namely Swedish, German, Finnish and Russian, everybody learnt the language he was brought up in, and tried to be skilled in it.

When I became older, I also practised Swedish poetry, in addition to the subjects my study prescribed. Whether my friends were right, in considering me rather talented as a poet, I cannot judge. At least I was very scrupulous in formal matters. I took after those masters who were so meticulous that if somebody made a mistake, especially in orthography, he was considered to have committed no less a crime than a person who makes flagrant mistakes in Latin. Then it was not difficult to write correctly, although we did not exactly know the rules. We knew from daily usage how to write [—].

«Four different languages were current in my native country when I was young, namely, Swedish, German, Finnish and Russian». — I hope you have started thinking about where this man can have been brought up? The right answer is: here where we are assembled now!

Everybody in Sweden knew that it was the famous archiater Urban Hiarne, life physician of both King Charles XI and Charles XII, also famous as a chymist and in all the natural sciences, who had written the anonymous book. *Eustathius* is mainly Hiarne himself as a 75 years old man. He was born in 1641 in a little village in Ingria, called *Skvorits*. After a few years his parents moved to another parish in Ingria, called *Kattila*, pretty close to Narva. But already in 1648 the father, a vicar of the Swedish Lutheran Church, and born in Varmland in Sweden already 1596, was promoted to the post as *prepositus* over the diocese of *Noteborg*, and at the same time vicar of the Swedish and German churches in *Nyen* or *Nyenskans*.

So, when Urban Hiarne (*Eustathius*) is talking about the four languages in the city where he was brought up, he is talking about the small Swedish city of *Nyen*, situated close to where the river *Ochta* falls into the *Neva*. (*Nyen* is the old Swedish name of *Neva*.)

I do not know how many in the audience who are aware of that there was a Swedish city here, when Peter the Great founded his *Skt Petersburg*, already before he had finally beaten the Swedish king Charles the XIIIth. — I am very eager to look around in *Petersburg* during this visit, because I have visited this town some times before, but I have never seen the place where the small Swedish town was situated, neither have I visited the museum that I have been told exists for this town *Nyen(-skans)*.

Now I will tell you very shortly about the life of this Urban Hiarne who was brought up right here, surrounded by not less than four languages, and among them also Russian. In his anonymous book just quoted, about Swedish Orthography, he continues soon to write what I would call a scientific essay about a universal Orthography, based on contemporary Cartesian Phonology or Phonetics, not much different than Chomsky & Halle many years later. His way of writing

about it was of course very different from Chomsky's, but I am almost sure that Hiarne knew more about his contemporary European languages than they did. Not only European languages, by the way: here in Nyen he attended the Latin Grammar school and learnt both Latin, Greek and also some *Hebrew*.

Hiarne became famous for being the greatest polyglot of his time in Sweden. There was a talk about 25 languages. It started with the four languages from his childhood, and the classical languages. German was in a way his mothertongue, because his mother Christina came from a German burgher family in Narva. In *Tartu*, where he went already when he was 14, and was immatriculated as a student in 1655, he did not stay a full year. His father had died in 1654, and soon there was a war between Russia and Sweden, which meant that both Nyen, Narva and Tartu were burnt and pillaged. He managed to escape to Stockholm, and after one year at a gymnasium in Strangnas he stayed at *Uppsala* university for five years and got his exam as a physician. After that he worked as the personal physician of generalgouvernor **Claes Tott**, in Riga in Livonia for some years, when he could revisit Ingria, the country where he grew up, as well.

But in 1669, when Hiarne had accompanied Tott to Poland, where a new king was to be elected, and where he took the opportunity to learn Polish, of course, he took the wrong boat back. So, he actually escaped from his employer Tott, in order to come to a place where «studies were flourishing», as he says. He came to London, in September 1669, and the local Swedish resident managed to get him elected as he first active Swedish scientist member of the rather new *Royal Society of London for improving natural Knowledge* (founded in 1660). Hiarnie stayed in London for one year, learnt English, of course, and took active part in the meetings of Royal Society.

At midsummer 1670 he left England for three years stay in *Paris* and France. He had even got a grant for his stay from his old employer Claes Tott, to continue his education. In France, his first project was to learn French, of course. According to his late autobiography, he could not do it in Paris, because there were too many Swedes! So he undertook a journey along the river of Loire, where still the best French is said to be spoken. He also made a short pause at the university of *Angers*, where he defended his doctor thesis in medicine, about the female breast and its deceases, with his own illustrations, in mezzotint technique that he had learnt at Royal Society the year before.

After his years in Paris he returned to Sweden, and soon he became both famous and rich, as a physician in Stockholm, and as the founder of the first Swedish Spa in Medevi. He also was appointed personal physician of king Charles XI and later Charles XII. When the latter started his long war against Russia and other states, in

order to defend his inherited Swedish empire, which finally failed, Urban Hiarne was already 60 years old, so he stayed in Stockholm. That is where we find him writing *Orthographia Svecana*, 1717, at the age of 76, a high age at that time.

It turns out that Hiarne still remembered Russian from his childhood. There are some remarks about the Russian language in his book:

OS, page 22

The Russians around Moscow and the nearby regions often modify o and e into an a, in order to make their speech sound much more magnificent according to the court style. Thus they say *padi forpudi*, **Moscow** for *Muscow*, **gawori** for *ghowori*. [Besides,..].

OS, page 51

[...] there is a soft S, [] or *Sain Hebraeorum*, pronounced with a gentle and rather subtle hissing. [—] The Polish S with an acute accent sounds the same: *sita* ‘vis Jpower’, *wies* ‘pagus [village]’, *svieje* ‘casnesco [turn gray]’, *sito* ‘cribrum [sieve]’, The same is true of the Russian letter *Sembla*.

OS, page 52

(about [Thorn, the Icelandic letter])

The Slavonians, Russians and others who got their faith as well as their letters from the Greeks, got with them also the letter [theta]. It was meant to be the same as *theta* or *thita*, and thus the words containing a th in Greek, such as *Matthceus*, *Timotheus*, *Athanasius*, *Theodorus*, are written this way. However, the Slavonians were unable to cope with the genuine pronunciation of it. Instead of [Thorn], or **th**, they said f or **ph**, pronouncing the letter *Theta* or *Thita* as **Phita**, although they have another **ph** or f, like Greek [phi] *Pert*. So they pronounce the Greek names *Matthceus* as **Matphei**, *Timotheus* as **Timophei**, *Athanasius* as **Aphonasei**, *Thomas* as **Phoma**, *Theodorus* as **Phedor** or **Feodor**.

I am sure you are better apted than me to judge whether Urban Hiarne has understood these peculiarities of Russian language and language history correctly. But you have to take into account that his mentioning of those features of the Russian language was not at all to somehow teach people Russian, just to include Russian in his overview of his Universal Phonetics, and its connection with Orthography, as arguments for the correct spelling of Swedish, according to his opinion.

If you have become interested about the guy now, I suggest you read more about him in my publications, and first maybe in the English summary of my presentation of Urban Hiarne as a linguist, in *Urban Hiarne and Cartesian Phonetics*. There is both *afac simile* rendering of the important first 60 pages of *Orthographia Svecana*, and a parallel translation of the text into English, as well as an introductory essay of about 70 pages about Hiarne.

There you can also get to know that, in Paris, he experimented with making a «speaking head», that is ‘artificial speech’. He did not quite manage of course, but he certainly learnt a lot about articulatory phonetics, probably using anatomical preparates for his experiments. The result is that his descriptions about speech sounds are outstanding for his time, much ahead of what was otherwise written by international contemporarians.

His experiments in producing «artificial speech» was by the way about hundred years earlier than later, partly successful trials, actually presented as answer to a prize question from the *Academy of St. Petersburg* in 1780–81, by the Danish professor Christian Gottlieb **Kratzenstein**. Kratzenstein’s solution is a kind of organ pipes, with peculiar shapes, to produce some vowels. It has later been shown that the same could have been done much simpler (by Robert Willis in 1821).

There is no detailed safe evidence left about Hiarne’s solution for a «speaking head», but the following suggestive lines, in page 60 of OS tell a little about it. He has then just finished an excellent systematic overview over universal phonemes:

OS, page 60

This would be useful knowledge for those who would try to make a speaking head, such as *Roger Bacon* in England once did, and *Albertus Magnus* in Regensburg. I started making one in Paris, but as the ambassador, whom I accompanied, hurried with his journey, I was forced to leave it unfinished.

So much I did learn from it, namely that if one worked on it vigorously and seriously, it would be quite feasible. Most difficult, and the highest art, would be to make a difference between the vowels. To achieve it, there must be a lot of strings or threads in the mouth and the lips, in order to extend or contract them as needed.

Not surprising that he had to leave his experiment unfinished. First in our days artificial speech has become reality, thanks to computer technology!

¹ Hiarne Urban (ca 1723, manuscript). Sjödlfbiografi / Ed. Henrik Schiick. 1916; in Uppsala universitets arsskrift, the series Aldre svenska biograjier 6.

² Hiarne Urban (ca 1717 anonymous). Orthographia Svecana. Eller den Retta Swenska Bookstafweringen, Stelt i ett Samtal emellan Neophilum och Eustathium.

³ Ohlsson Stig Orlan. 1991. Urban Hidrnes sprakvetenskapliga forfattarskap I–IV.

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II. Oforgrijpelige tanckar.A. first edition in Swedish. Ambla HB, 1991

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