

19TH-CENTURY ATTEMPTS AT THE CREATION OF A UNIVERSAL PHONETIC ALPHABET: FROM VOLNEY TO PASSY

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This paper surveys the various attempts to establish a universal phonetic alphabet during the period between Volney's *Alphabet européen* (1819) and the foundation of the International Phonetic Association by Paul Passy, Henry Sweet, Otto Jespersen, and others in 1888 and the subsequent creation of an 'international' phonetic alphabet.

Emphasis is placed on those 19th-century approaches that have been either totally ignored or treated inadequately in Albright's (1958) account of the pre-history and background of the IPA. Albright, for example, is heavily bi-ased in favour of the British tradition(s); not only is his chapter entitled "Early Backgrounds" exclusively devoted to 16th and 17th century phoneticians in England (John Hart, Wilkins, Holder, and others), but also the subsequent chapter entitled "Nineteenth Century Backgrounds" deals almost exclusively with Anglo-Saxon efforts in the field, in particular the work of A. M. Bell, A. J. Ellis, I. Pitman, and Henry Sweet.

It appears that the first scholar to take up Volney's suggestions was A. A. E. Schleiermacher (1787-1858), who in 1835 published a 700-page study on writing systems, to which he added an "Alphabet harmonique pour transcrire les langues asiatiques en lettres européennes". (Pickering's proposals of 1818 were made independently of Volney's, but they suggest that the development of a universal phonetic alphabet was 'in the air' at the beginning of the 19th century.) In 1864 Schleiermacher published a revised German version of his earlier proposal; by that time, however, many other attempts had been made throughout Europe to develop universal systems of phonetic transcription of non-Indo-European languages, of which the following authors may be taken as representative (ignoring the British contribution to the field): Alexandre Erdan's (alias Alexandre André Jacob, 1826-78) *Congrès linguistique: Les révolutionnaires de l'A-B-C* (Paris, 1854); Richard Lepsius' (1810-84) *Das allgemeine linguistische Alphabet* (Berlin, 1855; 2nd rev. E. ed., London, 1863); Felix Heinrich Du Bois-Reymond's (1782-1865) *Kadmus, oder allgemeine Alphabetik* (Berlin, 1862), and perhaps also Paul Jozon's (1836-81) *Des Principes de l'écriture phonétique et des moyens d'arriver à une écriture universelle* (Paris, 1877).

The present paper attempts to redress the balance of previous scholarship and hopes to make a contribution to the historiography of phonetics,

References

- Albright, R. W. (1958): The International Phonetic Alphabet: Its backgrounds and development. Bloomington: Res. Ctr. in Anthropol., Folklore & Linguistics.
 Austerlitz, Robert (1975): "Historiography of Phonetics: A bibliography". In: Current Trends in Linguistics, vol.13.1179-1209. The Hague: Mouton.