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Hartlib, Samuel

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Title*

Hartlib, Samuel

Alternate names

Hartlieb, Samuel

Gartlib, Samuel

Hartlibius, Samuel

Dates and places of birth and death*

Born: 1596-1600, Elbing (Elbląg) (Prussia, Kingdom of Poland).

Died: 10 March 1662, Westminster, London.

Abstract*

The main aim of Samuel Hartlib was to provide an advancement of learning finalized to the amelioration of the material conditions of men and the pursuit of a religious peace i.e. the unification of the Protestants. To this aim, inspired by Comenius, he devoted his efforts or gathering knowledge by the creation of a society or office of learned men (in technical fields, philosophy, and theology), and by the establishment of a network of correspondents (the Hartlib Circle). The method of discovery underlying his program of advancement of learning was inspired by Bacon's *Novum Organum* and by Jacopo Aconcio's method of analysis, while the categorization and transmission of knowledge had to be based on commonplace books and artificial languages. His plan of economic improvement, to be fulfilled mainly through the amelioration of husbandry, was motivated by the Puritan Millenarianism to which he adhered.

Biography*

The life of Hartlib is documented mostly by his letters and papers, rediscovered in 1933 (Turnbull 1947; HP). He was born in Elbing around 1600 from a German royal merchant and a half-English woman, whose father was a deputy of the English Company of trade in the Baltic. Hartlib was educated in Brzeg (Silesia) probably until 1621, although in 1614 he matriculated at the University of Königsberg (Turnbull 1920, 5). Between 1621 and 1626 he was in England, where he studied in Cambridge under John Preston. He settled in London from 1628 (Turnbull 1947, 11-15, 34; Dickson 1998, 146), likely under the suggestion of John Dury, minister in Elbing between 1625 and 1630, as part of his efforts to reconcile the Protestants (Turnbull 1920, 7-13). Moreover, he moved to England as a consequence of the Hapsburg and Catholic conquest of the region of Elbing (Trevor-Roper 1967, 231-234). In England Hartlib pursued a program of reform of learning by establishing a school in Chichester, although unsuccessfully (Hartlib 1630). Moreover, he developed a program of reform of all knowledge, having been acquainted with Comenius's *Janua linguarum* (1631) and with the draft of the *Pansophia*, which he published in 1637 and 1639 (Webster 1970a, 22-25; Čapková 1994, 80-85). This program was the outcome of a movement of reform set by Ramus, Keckermann and Alsted (Hotson 1994 and 2011) and served both for the

advancement of learning and for religious peace (Clucas 1991; Houston 2014, 124-131). To these aims, Hartlib first envisaged the creation of a “Societas Reformatorem et Correspondency” (1634) (Dickson 1998, 148-158), and then (together with Dury) of an “Office of Public Address in Spiritual and Temporal matters”, i.e. an institute intended to the gathering of information and to the accomplishment of Bacon's and Comenius's scientific and educational programs (Hartlib 1647, 1648; Slack 2015, 102-116). Moreover, he devoted some short treatises to the attempts of unifying the Protestants (Hartlib 1641, 1643), and to recollections of others's essays, mainly in husbandry. In developing his project of gathering knowledge, Hartlib the “intelligencer” came to form a Circle, primarily constituted by himself, Dury and Comenius (Trevor-Roper 1967, 219-271), and involving several experts with whom Hartlib corresponded in around 4,718 letters (EMLO). The Hartlib Circle included Robert Boyle, Gabriel Plattes (author of the Utopian dialogue *Macaria*, 1641), William Petty, John Milton, Theodore Haak and Henry Oldenburg. Members of the Circle formed in 1646-1647 the 'Invisible College' that would later inspire the birth of the Royal Society, although Hartlib did not establish or set the program of both (Turnbull 1953; Webster 1974 and 1975, 58). For his writing and projects he spent all his provisions and obtained from the Government of the Commonwealth a pension in 1647. Still, he died in needy conditions in 1662 (Turnbull 1920, 48-51, 62).

Innovative aspects and influences

Hartlib's program of reform consisted of 1) the gathering of information and observations, and 2) their categorization in a unique body of knowledge (*pansophia*) (Clucas 1991, 35). This program relied on the methodology expounded in Bacon's *Novum Organum*, which Hartlib opposes the 'systematic' approach of Cartesian and Scholastic philosophy (Yeo 2010, 188-194), and on Jacopo Aconcio's method, consisting of the analysis of notions and facts as the main source of knowledge in science and religion (Clucas 1994, 58-62). Moreover, Hartlib's program required a method of teaching, learning and transmitting knowledge: accordingly, he appropriated the method of epitomization of John Harrison (Clucas 1994, 64-68; Yeo 2007 and 2010), and recommended the use of summaries and commonplace as the most viable means in learning and disseminating knowledge. This method, which in Hartlib's plans had to be taught to children in order to enhance their memory, would inspire William Petty's pedagogy (Petty 1647; Yeo 2007, 11-17 and 2010, 190-191). Moreover, Hartlib promoted the use of artificial languages, and availed the system of abbreviations of George Dalgarno (Slaughter 1982, 104-116, 120-122; Strasser 1994; Lewis 2005). Hartlib's program was aimed to practice: first and foremost, to husbandry, as testified to by his collections of technical essays (Hartlib 1651a, b, 1653a, b, 1655a, 1659) and by Plattes's *Macaria* (Webster 1972), expounding advices for the economic improvement of England. Moreover, Hartlib supported the reform of teaching by the creation of new academies centred on technical disciplines, such as those one can find in John Milton's *On Education* (Raylor 1993 and 2010). Husbandry was central to Hartlib's interests as it allowed to put in practice his Baconian method, moreover, it was a means for the understanding of nature, as husbandry was based on the knowledge of alchemical elements (Matei 2012 and 2013; Houston 2014, 129-132). Also, it served to the transformation of the world that was a main ideal of Puritanism, to which Hartlib adhered (Jue 2006, 67-68). In his views, the amelioration of the world would lead to the fulfilment of the providential plan of God and to the beginning of the Millennium (Hartlib 1651c; Webster 1979; Mulsow 2001; Jue 2006, 77-84; Matei 2011; Houston 2014, 125-126). Hartlib even sponsored colonial projects as part of his project, such as those of the Huguenots Hugh L'Amy and Peter Le Pruvost (Irving 2008, 47-68; Leng 2009).

Cross-References (if there are any; please include a list of other entries in this encyclopedia that may be of further interest to your readers.)

Bacon, Francis

Baconianism

Haak, Theodore

Milton, John - Renaissance Philosophy
Education - Renaissance Philosophy
Alsted, Johann Heinrich
Comenius, J. A.
Keckermann, Bartholomaeus
Descartes, René - Renaissance Philosophy
Ramus, Petrus
Ramism
Dialogue
Epistle/Letter
Chemistry
Elements, Natural
Experiment
Observation - Renaissance Philosophy
Practical Knowledge
Scientific Academies
Peace
Utopia - Renaissance Philosophy
Wars of Religion
Aconcio, Jacopo
Academies
Commonplace book
Economy and Trade
Encyclopedia and Encyclopedism
Textbook
Treatise
Puritanism
Analysis/Resolution
Commonplace

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