

## The “Language of Canaan”: Pietism’s Esoteric Sociolect

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### Abstract

Dieser Aufsatz behandelt die soziolinguistische Innovationen deutscher Pietisten des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts, ein Register das sie selbst als die “Sprache Canaan” bezeichneten. Dieser Soziolekt (Gruppensprache) war ein Ausdruck eines esoterischen Weltbildes, das im Pietismus weit verbreitet war. Pietisten inszenierten sich als “wahre” Christen im Kontrast zu ihren nichtpietistischen Zeitgenossen, die sie als “weltlich” bezeichneten. Als “wahre” Christen verstanden sie sich als Adepten, die in der Lage waren, die tiefere (esoterische) Bedeutung der heiligen Schriften—and eine heilige Semiotik der Welt selbst—dechiffrieren zu können. Der Aufsatz umreißt die kulturellen und sozialen Funktionen, die die Sprache für Pietisten erfüllte und verfolgt die esoterische Ansichten der Pietisten zurück zu den Schriften des lutherischen Pastors, Johann Arndt, der ein Anhänger Paracelsus war. Schließlich präsentiert der Aufsatz ein Beispiel wie Pietisten die Sprache Canaan eingesetzt haben, um radikale soziale und theologische Stellungnahmen zu argumentieren.

### Keywords

Pietism; Arndt; Boehme; Jahn; prophecy; Halberstadt; conventicles; rebirth; signature doctrine, theosophy

### Language as Social Marker in Pietism

This article explores the socio-linguistic innovations of eighteenth-century German Pietists, a register that they themselves referred to as the “Language of Canaan.”<sup>1</sup> This unique sociolect (group language) was but one of many esoteric models of knowledge taken up by Pietists, who styled themselves as “true”

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<sup>1)</sup> Hans-Jürgen Schrader has identified Pietist language as a major research lacuna and has summarized the scant research carried out to date: Schrader, ‘Die Sprache Canaan’. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

Christians and thus adepts who—in contrast to “worldly” contemporaries—could understand the deeper (esoteric) significance of Scriptures and indeed, the semiology of the world itself.<sup>2</sup>

Pietism was a socio-religious revival movement sweeping through the German-speaking lands of Europe beginning in the mid- to late seventeenth century and continuing through much of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> It was closely related to religious reform movements throughout Europe and the North American colonies, leading some scholars to conceive of a “Transatlantic Evangelical Revival Movement”, of which German Pietism was but one part.<sup>4</sup> At any rate, German Pietism did not gel into one single denomination, but included reform movements in the Lutheran and Calvinist churches as well as spin-off separatist groups. Yet all of these reformers, despite a wide variety of beliefs, understood themselves as part of the same movement, since they all shared certain concerns: a desire for a more heart-felt religion, more lay participation in church matters (although understandings of “church” varied), greater emphasis on the Bible, conventicles as a way to promote fellowship and the experience of “re-birth” (Wiedergeburt).<sup>5</sup> Pietists soon came to see themselves as the “born-again”, the “true” Christians, or the “children of God”, in contrast to so-called “outer Christians” (Scheinchristen), or “mouth Christians” (Maulchristen), who, they believed, adhered merely to the outer trappings of religion, giving it lip service, but not truly living according to a higher standard.

Pietists, especially more radical Pietists, began to do whatever they could to set themselves apart from their “worldly” neighbors and the “corrupt” official state churches, which they referred to as “Babylon” (Babel).<sup>6</sup> Pietists rejected

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<sup>2)</sup> On the relationship between esotericism and Christianity in the Early Modern period, see Neugebauer-Wölk, ‘Esoterik’.

<sup>3)</sup> That is, this was the “classical” period of German Pietism. The movement continues in other forms to the present day. Scholars have not been able to agree on a definition of Pietism, its time span or even its geographical boundaries. For a review of the approaches, see Strom, “Problems.”

<sup>4)</sup> See the following: Ward, *Evangelical Awakening*; Lehmann, et al., *Jansenismus*, and Martin, ‘Female Reformers.’

<sup>5)</sup> Pietist and Mennonite immigrants transported the notion of “re-birth” to the North American colonies. The concept still thrives in conservative Christian circles in the U.S. and indeed, throughout the world. In such communities, being “born-again” is central to group identity and inclusion, just as it was for eighteenth-century Pietists.

<sup>6)</sup> The term “Radical Pietist” and who counted as one is just as contested as the term “Pietism”. See Schneider, *German Radical Pietism*, especially 1–10.

“worldly” entertainments such as card playing and dancing, ostentatious displays of wealth such as jewelry or luxurious clothing and—key for this inquiry—a “worldly” use of language. Interestingly, Pietists’ language did not parallel their dress habits by stressing simplicity over standard norms. To the contrary, their “Language of Canaan” was incredibly complex, full of Biblical citations, neologisms, allegory, emotional excess and even orthographical innovations.<sup>7</sup>

Pietists believed that the Language of Canaan was an outward sign of the “born-again” which set them apart from, and indeed *above* their non-Pietist contemporaries. The most radical among Pietists exaggerated linguistic difference the most. To produce this register, Pietists adapted Biblical language and made obscure, allegorical references to Scripture. They also borrowed vocabulary, grammar and even grammatical moods from other languages and idioms. Most significantly, they drew upon esoteric discourses like alchemy, theosophy and Cabala, sources that many of the day, not only Pietists, believed to contain secret, arcane knowledge that had been handed down through the ages and that might hold the key to unlocking authentic meanings of Scripture.

In the German-speaking lands, the notion of an elite, esoteric “true” Christianity stems especially from Johann Arndt (1555–1621), often understood as the literary father of Pietism.<sup>8</sup> The first of Arndt’s *Four Books on True Christianity* (*Vier Bücher von wahrem Christenthumb*), was published in 1605, the other volumes came out in 1610, and the work quickly became one of the most popular of the Early Modern period.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, Arndt had not

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<sup>7)</sup> Although the different streams within the Pietist movement each developed their own special terminology, certain Pietist texts, such as biographies, exhibit a great deal of similarity in structure and in vocabulary across the varieties. This indicates that Pietists of all flavors were reading the same literature (Langen, *Wortschatz*, 10–12). Indeed the spread of Pietism and the growth of the book market went hand-in-hand between 1650 and 1750 (Schrader, *Literaturproduktion*).

<sup>8)</sup> Scholars have traditionally seen Arndt as the inventor of many of Pietism’s key concepts, but have posited Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705) as the founder of Pietism as a socially coherent movement. In his monumental study of Arndt, Hermann Geyer lays bare the hermetic sources of Pietism (Geyer, *Verborgene Weisheit* and Geyer, ‘die pur lautere Essenz’).

<sup>9)</sup> The first version of *True Christianity* was entitled, *Die Bücher vom Wahren Christentum*, which appeared in 1605. In 1606 Arndt published the expanded *Vier Bücher von wahrem Christenthumb*. A plethora of editions followed under varying titles and spellings (some posthumously) in various languages, some including emblems, poems and a register. In 1679, with the addition of two appendices, the work was published as *Sechs Bücher vom Wahren Christentum*.

studied theology, but medicine.<sup>10</sup> He was an adherent of Paracelsus and in his *True Christianity* Arndt draws on hermetic ideas to develop a semiotic cosmology in which all the world is a text that only the “born-again” can decode.<sup>11</sup> As early as 1596 Arndt had written on the holy connection between signs (things in the world) and the signified (their mysterious inner meanings).<sup>12</sup> Arndt’s writings contributed to Jakob Böhme’s “signature doctrine” and to the Rosicrucians’ “Book of the World”, so that the esoteric idea of a symbolic world permeated with secret, holy meanings spread even further.<sup>13</sup> In fact, a range of thinkers believed that the inner (God-given) essence of things was reflected in their outer forms. These thinkers thus recognized no boundary between the era’s natural philosophy and religion.<sup>14</sup> Yet it is through Johann Arndt’s extremely popular writings that this kind of “natural physiognomic mysticism”<sup>15</sup> infiltrated Pietism, and with it the Lutheran Church and mainstream German society. Importantly, Pietists and others read Arndt to mean that, as with other things in the world, the outer appearances of *people* reflected an inner essence. Those influenced by Arndt thus saw a need to set themselves visually and behaviorally apart.<sup>16</sup>

For Pietists, the world itself constituted a kind of “text.” The movements of clouds and stars, the behavior of plants and animals, and the dreams of men and women, were all regarded as divine symbols, with language itself as the most profound form of signification. Pietists thus understood the “Language of Canaan” to be God’s language, the language of the Garden of Eden and of the first Christians. Pietists knew, of course, that people had spoken other languages in Biblical times. Indeed, they emphasized study of the ancient languages, especially Greek and Hebrew, in order to read Scripture, whenever possible, in the original. According to Pietists, the fall into sin had perverted

<sup>10)</sup> Schneider, ‘Johann Arndts Studienzeit’, 145–155.

<sup>11)</sup> Compare Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis*, 43–48; and Warncke, *Sprechende Bilder*, 161–193.

<sup>12)</sup> Arndt, *IKONOGRAPHIA*.

<sup>13)</sup> See Weeks, *Boehme*; compare Neugebauer-Wölk, “Esoterik”, 145–146.

<sup>14)</sup> These thinkers include Heinrich Khunrath, Aegidius Gutmann, Robert Fludd and Oswald Croll, among others.

<sup>15)</sup> Rothacker, *Buch der Natur*, 14.

<sup>16)</sup> Arndt’s notion of “true” Christians who looked and acted differently from the corrupt “world” around them influenced many separatist groups. For example, Arndt’s writings were extremely popular among Mennonites and Amish throughout the Early Modern period, although to what extent the groups drew from Arndt’s writings is not clear.

the original “Language of Adam”, which had further mutated after the hubris of the Tower of Babylon. Pietists thus believed that God expressed himself in different idioms to different peoples. The “Language of Canaan” was *God’s* German, French, Dutch or English.

In contrast, Pietists defined the “worldly” by linguistic separation. Pietists often pointed out that the children of Babylon could neither understand the “children of God” nor one another. One Pietist remarked of a famous linguist renowned for his mastery of languages: “What does he use it for? How many souls does he bring to Jesus? If he understands all of the languages of the world, but can’t speak the Language of Canaan through which he can speak to God and God to him?”<sup>17</sup> “True believers” of all nations could thus understand the Language of Canaan, but the “worldly” everywhere were excluded—lack of faith meant lack of understanding.

An exclusive language laden with obscure references helped Pietists to create and perpetuate a unique group identity, especially important in areas where Pietists were persecuted. Opponents ridiculed their language as “dark” and “ambiguous,” pointing especially to their use of theosophic terms.<sup>18</sup> In her play, *Pietism in Petticoats* (*Die Pietisterey im Fischbein-Röcke*), Luise Gottsched ridiculed Pietist speech as a series of silly catchphrases strung together by speakers who were ignorant of any real underlying meaning.<sup>19</sup> In one exchange, the Pietists, “Mrs. Gullible” (Frau Glaubeleicht) and “Mrs. Bickering-Home” (Frau Zanckenheim) argue over the meaning of the Pietist concept of “rebirth” (Wiedergeburth) and its relationship to Sophia and the “heavenly essence”. The discussion turns *ad absurdum* when Mrs. Bickering-Home understands the term, “fountain of the heart” (Quell-Wasser des Herzens), to mean “bath water” (Wasser-Bad).<sup>20</sup> Gottsched has the ladies mouthing phrases that the women themselves do not understand, phrases that entered German Pietism

<sup>17</sup>) The quote is from He(i)nrich Wilhelm Ludolf who was himself multi-lingual. The original: ‘Was macht er für einen Gebrauch davon? [...] Welche und wie viele Seelen bringt er vermittelst dieses Talents zu Jesu Christo? [...] Wenn er alle Sprachen der ganzen Welt verstünde/ und könnte die Sprache Canaans nicht/ durch welche er mit Gott/ und Gott mit ihm/ kan sprechen?’ (quoted after Schrader, ‘Die Sprache Canaar’, 406).

<sup>18</sup>) The anti-Pietist periodical, *Unschuldige Nachrichten* (also called *Fortgesetzte Sammlung von Alten und Neuen Theologischen Sachen*) contains many such complaints about Pietist language. See, for example, the discussion of the second volume of the *Berleburger Bible* (1728), *Unschuldige Nachrichten*, vol. 29 (1729), 257.

<sup>19</sup>) Gottsched, *Die Pietisterey*, esp. 86–89, 92–96, 101–102, 130–132.

<sup>20</sup>) Gottsched, *Die Pietisterey*, 86–87.

less through the writings of Jakob Böhme (these were long suppressed in Germany) than through the translated works of the English Philadelphians or through Pietists such as Johanna Eleonora Petersen (1644–1724) and Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714) who had been influenced by the Philadelphians.<sup>21</sup>

Yet I refer to the Language of Canaan as an “esoteric sociolect” not only because of the ubiquity of theosophic, cabalistic and alchemical concepts in Pietist speech, but also because of the secret, exclusive nature of this non-standard register. Pietists believed that their ability to understand this mysterious, dense language proved them to be God’s “chosen” people, in contrast to the “worldly” who could not understand the Language of Canaan. As one Pietist noted, “the language of the Children of God is foreign to the foreigner.”<sup>22</sup> Pietists even went so far as to refer to the language of outsiders as the “*lingua draconis*”, or “language of the beast” mentioned in the Book of Revelations, and they sometimes contrasted the “language of the serpent” (*Sprache der Schlange*) to their own “tongue of angels” (*Engels Zungen*).<sup>23</sup>

In their battles with officials, Pietists claimed that they had access to the language of the Holy Ghost, while “the school scholars” (*die Schul-Gelehrten*)—that is, the university-educated, orthodox church officials who opposed Pietism—relied on their “serpents’ cleverness” (*Schlangen-Klugheit*), that is, the artificial, corrupted knowledge of the world. Pietists’ anarchistic claim that God himself was speaking to them and giving them instructions in a language that only they could hear and understand was perhaps the most radical tenet of Pietism—one that made the movement very attractive but also very vulnerable.

### Prophetic Speech as One Example of the Language of Canaan

Scholars have barely begun to study the implications of the Language of Canaan for the development of Pietism, not to mention the broader cultural implications. Relying on archival documents, I would like now to turn to one instance in which the Language of Canaan was deployed to argue radical social and religious positions.

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<sup>21</sup> On the channels of reception and the impact of Böhme’s Sophia doctrine on German Pietism, see Martin, ‘*Göttliche Sophia*’.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted after Schrader, ‘*Die Sprache Canaan*’, 406.

<sup>23</sup> *Revelations 13:11*. The commentary in the Pietist-produced “Berleburg Bible” discusses the differences in worldly and godly language: *Heilige Schrift*, VII, Berleburg (1739), 354.

In the early 1690s a prophetic wave swept through Pietist circles. Through the medium of the Language of Canaan, divine “tools”—so-called *Werkzeuge*—delivered spoken and written messages during conventicle meetings that were ostensibly from God. Utterances included direct channeling of God or Jesus, as well as dialogues with God, Jesus or angels. Writings included a wide range of genres, including divinely-inspired poetry and songs, interpretations of symbolic dreams, chiliastic warnings, divine dictation and even the emergence of strange letters and symbols written in blood upon the bodies of the prophets.<sup>24</sup>

Pietists believed that the apocalypse foretold in the Book of Revelations was dawning and that God was trying to communicate in these “last days” with his true followers through signs, miracles, dreams and prophecy. These were bleak times in the Holy Roman Empire. The half-century following the devastating Thirty Years War (1618–1648) was marked by plagues, wars and economic crises, all of which seemed to fulfill Biblical prophecies about the end of mortal time. Even the persecution that Pietists faced in many regions confirmed that they were God’s chosen people, so that some Pietists even sought persecution as a validation of their faith.<sup>25</sup> The prophetic Book of Isaiah predicated that those who remained true to God during the trials of the “last days” would speak the “Language of Canaan”, and the Book of Joel predicted that even the lowliest in society, women and slave-girls, would begin to prophesy.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, in late 1691 or early 1692, a poor servant woman, Anna Margaretha Jahn, began to experience divine visitations, what contemporaries referred to as “raptures” (Entzückungen), or “ecstasies” (Ekstasen).<sup>27</sup> In contrast to many other Pietist mystics who entered trance-like states, Jahn’s encounters with

<sup>24</sup> For an overview of the divine visitations of the “tools”, see Martin, ‘Werkzeuge’.

<sup>25</sup> For example, after a missionary visit to Germany, the Quaker, William Penn records in his diary a comment by Johanna Eleonora Merlau (later Petersen) that, ‘it will never be well with us [Pietists], till persecution come, & some of us be lodg’d in the Stadthouse, that is, the prison’. The entry is from August 21, 1677. See Dunn *The Papers of William Penn*, 447. For more on the Merlau-Penn exchange, see Martin, ‘Female Reformers’, here: 42–43.

<sup>26</sup> The Language of Canaan is mentioned in Isaiah 19:18. The passage in Joel is in 2:28–29 in English Bibles. Because of differences in chapter divisions between Luther’s translation and traditional English Bibles, the passage appears in Joel 3:1–2 in the Luther Bible. Both French and English writers had made reference to the Language of Canaan in the seventeenth century, but none developed the concept to the extent of Pietists (Schrader, ‘Die Sprache Canaan’, 407).

<sup>27</sup> On Jahn, see Martin, ‘Werkzeuge’; Mori, *Begeisterung*, 137 f., 154–158 and 216 f.; Shantz ‘Politics’; as well as multiple references in Witt, *Bekehrung* (1996).

the divine were more physical. On one occasion, she shook and pounded her chest.<sup>28</sup> Another time, she reportedly screamed, clapped her hands and fainted.<sup>29</sup> And on at least one occasion, she “crowed like a rooster” and “bleated like an ox” during a church service.<sup>30</sup>

Divine possessions such as those experienced by Jahn were not an invention of Pietism but rather a transformation of an older cultural pattern. A rich text corpus records incidents of both divine and demonic “possession” since the sixteenth century in all the German-speaking lands.<sup>31</sup> Such experiences were part and parcel of the world-view that obtained in the Early Modern era and were thus too part of Pietism. Magical and esoteric beliefs permeated Christianity, especially in the minds of regular folk.<sup>32</sup>

Many, but not all, of those who experienced visitations in the 1690s were simple women from the lowest strata of society. These women rarely acted as full-blown prophets. Typically they entered a trance-like state in which they stared straight ahead and did not react to outer stimuli. Sometimes they sat silently with folded hands, other times they chanted hymns or poems. Sometimes the illiterate women invented new songs or poems that their fellow Pietists took as linguistic proof of the divine status of their utterances. Similarly, when some sang in High German, although they usually were able only to speak dialect, this too served as evidence that the episodes were “real”.

Pietists interpreted the behavior of the enthusiastic women semiotically, as signs from God. The first crude “ecstasies” paved the way in Pietist circles for more narrative forms of communication with God such as symbolic dreams and predictions about the future. Most of those who later acted as prophets were from a higher social rank than these first women who experienced “ecstasies.” In general, the women prophets could read and record their own messages, they had the means to travel to spread news of their experiences with others and had enough education to interpret the underlying meanings themselves. A detailed history of how simple possessions evolved into full-blown prophecies in Pietist conventicles would go beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>28)</sup> Mori, *Begeisterung*, 138.

<sup>29)</sup> Feustking, *Historie*, 221.

<sup>30)</sup> Jahn probably wanted to disrupt preaching that she disagreed with. Such disruptions had a long history among dissident groups. For the reference to her behavior, see [Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 122. Carpzov published the polemical work anonymously.

<sup>31)</sup> See Blackwell, “Narratives”, 241–257.

<sup>32)</sup> Martin, “Werkzeuge” explores more fully these phenomena as a cultural pattern.

cle.<sup>33</sup> Here I would like simply to highlight the linguistic and esoteric aspects of prophetic Pietist speech, focusing on Anna Margaretha Jahn as a case study.

Jahn is an interesting example since she was one of the few women who experienced both simple, trance-like possessions as well as more narrative forms of prophecy, making predictions about the future and even travelling to share her messages with other Pietists. For a short time, the illiterate daughter of a poor salesman in the small central German town of Halberstadt was one of the most prominent figures among radical Pietists.<sup>34</sup> Pilgrims came from afar to participate in Pietist conventicles where Jahn was present, in hope of witnessing one of her prophetic episodes first-hand. Under the auspices of the Pietist-oriented pastor, Andreas Achilles, one such gathering of the “born-again” took place on December 22, 1692 in Halberstadt.<sup>35</sup> According to the records, Jahn was leading a prayer when a higher power took control of her faculties and she spoke thusly:

Praise/Praise/Praise/ [...] / Praise the Lord on high/ [...] / rejoice/rejoice/ [...] because he and no other is the only God/ [...] / Yes Father/ Yes Father/ it was pleasing before you [...] my mighty arm will scatter the liars/ [...] I will spare none/ whoever does not accept my truth/will be cast into the fiery pit/yes/yes/yes/I the Lord Jehova have spoken/I am with my Zion.<sup>36</sup>

Jahn begins speaking in her own voice, praising God. Yet she abruptly breaks off and speaks to God directly, apparently answering questions or commands

<sup>33</sup>) On this development, see Martin, ‘Werkzeuge’.

<sup>34</sup>) Jahn was from Halberstadt, but spent much of her time in the radical Pietist stronghold of nearby Quedlinburg. The prophetic wave of Pietism emanated principally from these towns in the Harz mountains, as well as from the neighboring central German cities of Erfurt and Halle.

<sup>35</sup>) The meeting took place at the home of the Schlütte family ([Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 136). The father of the family held an important governmental post (*Raths-Kammer*) and his son held a position at the St. Moritz church in Halberstadt ([Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 126).

<sup>36</sup>) Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Chart 278, Nr. 1 (unpag). The events have been recounted almost identically to the manuscript account in Gotha in [Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, here: 133. Hereafter I cite only the pages in [Carpzov]. I have retained the original spellings: Jubel/Jubel/Jubel [...] Jubel dem Herrn in der Höhe/ [...] frolocket/frolocket/ [...] denn er heist Gott und keiner mehr [...] /Ja Vater/ Ja Vater/ so war es wolgefällig vor dir [...] mein mächtiger Arm soll die Lügner zerstreuen/ [...] ich schone nicht/ wer nicht in meiner Warheit erfunden wird/wird in den feurigen Pfuhl geworffen/ ja/ ja/ ja/ Ich der Herr Jehova habe es geredt/ ich bin mit meinem Zion.

that only she can hear ("Ja Vater"). Then, just as suddenly, God begins to speak through Jahn, "my mighty arm will scatter the liars [...] I the Lord Jehova have spoken". Jahn leaves little doubt to whom the messages are directed. "I am with my Zion" expresses God's solidarity with Pietists, who saw themselves as God's chosen people, as "Zion".

Jahn's speech slipped easily from a first-person prayer in her own voice, to a dialogue with God, to a first-person imperative, ostensibly spoken in the voice of God. The manner of delivery also lent her speech authenticity. When speaking in the voice of God her voice became deep and masculine—according to witnesses and to a Pietist physician who later examined her, far too deep for a young woman to have produced on her own.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Jahn and other prophets chanted or sang their messages. The sing-song cadences further served to distance their prophetic vocalizations from standard speech.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The religious addresses of Jahn and other Pietist prophets have been preserved because contemporaries recorded them. Gebhard Levin Semler, a theology student active in Pietist circles, became known as the recorder of Jahn's prophetic messages. Jahn could not read and write, but during this same meeting on December 22, 1692 the oracular voice commanded:

Repetitions and fragmentary speech were typical of Jahn's prophecy. They lend a certain poetry to the speeches, but also communicate that Jahn was struggling to transmit the messages accurately: In the grip of cosmic forces, she could hardly be expected to speak in a calm, flat voice. Jahn was apparently a frail woman and witnesses claimed that she could have only withstood

<sup>37)</sup> This was the medical opinion of Dr. Friedrich Hoffmann: 'Von der Medicorum der Ärzte Bedenken über des inhaffirten Semlers und der Jahnin Complexion Konstitution', printed in [Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 164.

<sup>38)</sup> [Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 130–131; 133.

such powerful episodes with supernatural assistance.<sup>40</sup> The confidence with which Jahn spoke contradicted every assumption about a small, poor woman from the lowest levels of society—further linguistic proof of her status as a true “tool” of God.

In this case, Jahn was especially motivated to have her words recorded. Prophetic messages were sometimes addressed to specific individuals and this one concerned Jahn’s former pastor, Johann Christophorus Wurtzler. Jahn had been involved for some time in a nasty public dispute with the orthodox Lutheran pastor who had contested Pietist beliefs in general and especially Jahn’s assertion that she was a chosen “tool” of God. Jahn had enraged Wurtzler by claiming to be free of sin and therefore not in need of his services as father confessor. The dispute between Wurtzler and Jahn worsened when she began to attend the church services of the Pietist-oriented pastor Andreas Achilles, instead of her assigned church. Achilles was well connected in Pietist networks. He had been friends with the Halle Pietist leader, August Hermann Francke, since the two had studied together in Leipzig. In January of 1690 Achilles had taken up his post in Halberstadt as pastor of the Heiligeistspital, an institution for the poor. He soon initiated conventicle meetings and began to draw followers such as Anna Margaretha Jahn.<sup>41</sup>

On December 19, 1692, at the height of the conflict between the Pietists (led by Achilles) and the orthodox Lutherans (led by Wurtzler), the latter had died. Wurtzler’s death seemed to the Halberstadt Pietists like a sign from God, so that when they met just three days later it was perhaps inevitable that Jahn’s prophecy would concern her former pastor. Nonetheless her bold message surprised those in attendance: Jahn claimed that her prophetic dictation would reanimate the dead pastor, proving once and for all that she was right and he was wrong. In her speech before the gathered assembly, Jahn condemns the pastor for not “answering the call of God,” that is, for not supporting Pietists, and for instead putting his faith in “worldly” institutions, that is, the official Lutheran church. Jahn, ostensibly acting as a mouthpiece for God, calls Wurtzler a “tyrant” who let himself be “worshipped” by the “heathens” who attended his church.<sup>42</sup> In this she emphasizes the esoteric

<sup>40</sup>) Thus argued the Pietist physician, Dr. Hoffmann ([Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 164).

<sup>41</sup>) Martin, ‘Werkzeuge’; Shantz: ‘Politics’, 131–135.

<sup>42</sup>) [Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 127–128.

Pietist trope of the corrupt outer church in opposition to an underground “true” church of believers.

Illustrating the poetry and power of the Language of Canaan, Jahn addresses the dead pastor in all three voices of the Trinity:

I the Father know you not / but I do know my child; I the Son have not illuminated you / but I have illuminated my child; I the Holy Ghost / have not given you peace / but I have given it to my child.<sup>43</sup>

The illiterate Jahn presents herself in one sentence as the mouthpiece for all three persons in the Trinity, but also as a “child.” In the rest of the lengthy speech, she further styles herself as God’s “Lioness” and “Bride” while the pastor is “Babylon,” a “whore” and too many other epithets to list here.<sup>44</sup> In the voice of God, she proclaims that Wurtzler’s sins will not be forgiven, at which point the oracular voice responds to pleas for mercy for Wurtzler. It is not clear whether these pleas for mercy came from the gathered Pietist audience or from Jahn herself. At any rate, according to the transcript the Lord was not to be persuaded:

No / no / no / no / no / no / I do not hear you / no [...] Sins / sins against the Holy Ghost / they will not be forgiven / also not in the future world [...] I do not hear you / I the GOD JEHOVA who reveals himself in these times / has spoken. [...] This the living God has testified in great power through his tool, the maiden Jahn.<sup>45</sup>

Jahn’s address ends with the command that the prophetic dictation be sent to Wurtzler’s home where reading it aloud would, she maintained, cause the pastor to rise from the dead.<sup>46</sup> When the prophetic episode ended, the Pietists

<sup>43</sup>) [Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 128: Ich der Vater kenne dich nicht / aber wol mein Kind; Ich der Sohn habe dich nicht erleuchtet / aber wol mein Kind; Ich der heilige Geist / habe dir nicht Friede gegeben / aber meinem Kinde.

<sup>44</sup>) [Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 128–129.

<sup>45</sup>) [Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 129–130: Nein / Nein / Nein / Nein / Nein / Nein / ich höre dich nicht / [...] Die Sünden / die Sünden in dem H. Geist / die werden nicht vergeben / auch nicht in der zukünftigen Welt. [...] Ich höre dich nicht / ... Ich der GOTT JEHOVA der sich zu diesen Zeiten offenbahret / habe es geredet. [...] Dieses hat der lebendige Gott in grosser Kraft bezeiget (sp!) durch seinen Werkzeug die Jungfer Jahnin.

<sup>46</sup>) The reanimation of the dead is also a recurrent theme in earlier, pre-Pietist narratives of possession. This is explored more fully in Blackwell, ‘Narratives’, 241–257, and Martin, ‘Werkzeuge’.

in attendance asked if Jahn were sure that this particular message was from God. She assured them that it was and that the letter must either be read aloud in the presence of the corpse or at least be placed in Wurtzler's hand.<sup>47</sup>

The Pietists in Jahn's circle were not the riffraff of society. They included Pietist-oriented pastors ordained in the Lutheran Church, local city officials from wealthy bourgeois families, members of the aristocracy and university students, all of whom put enough stock in Jahn's prophecies to carry out her extraordinary wishes. The Halberstadt Pietists thus sealed Jahn's prophetic missive in an envelope and sent it to Wurtzler's home, whereupon the man's shocked family wasted no time in reporting the matter to the authorities.

Despite the tense situation with city officials, Halberstadt Pietists met again the following day.<sup>48</sup> Once again, Jahn served as a "tool" for the channelling of divine messages. This time, in a chanted dialogue with God, Jahn communicates God's wish that the Pietists help to heal a local Jewish woman:

You Lord/you speak Lord/.../yes/yes/yes/yes/I have heard you/I speak/I speak/I speak/you/you/should have her come the daughter/the daughter/the daughter of the house/the house/the house of Judah/of the house of Judah. I/[...]hurry/hurry/hurry/and fetch her here/hurry/hurry/hurry/hurry/and fetch her here/don't you understand me/don't you understand me/don't you understand me/you don't understand me/they won't be able to understand it/Ah/ah/ah/you show them/I have heard you/let her come/let her come/the daughter/the daughter of my people [...] I want to free her from her bonds.<sup>49</sup>

Again, the Pietists in Jahn's circle exhibited little doubt. They went to the Jewish quarter and managed to convince the sick woman to return with them to hear Jahn's preaching, which, the Pietists asserted, would heal the woman. Despite a lengthy address in which Jahn appealed to the Jews to convert to

<sup>47</sup> [Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 130.

<sup>48</sup> They met Friday, December 23, 1692, once again in the home of the Schlütte family in Halberstadt.

<sup>49</sup> [Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 132: Du Herr/du Herr sprichst/.../Ja/Ja/Ja/Ja/Ich habe dich erhöret/ich spreche/ich spreche/ich spreche/Ihr/Ihr/solt kommen lassen die Tochter/die Tochter/die Tochter von dem Geschlechte/Geschlechte/Geschlechte Juda/von dem Geschlechte Juda. [...] /eilet/eilet/eilet/und holet sie her/eilet/eilet/eilet/und holet sie her/verstehet ihr mich nicht/verstehet ihr mich nicht/verstehet ihr mich nicht/ihr verstehet mich nicht/sie werden nicht verstehen können/Ach/ach/ach/zeige du es ihnen/ich habe dich erhöret/laß sie kommen/laß sie kommen/die Tochter/die Tochter meines Volcks [...] Ich will sie erlösen von ihren Banden.

Christianity, the woman's condition did not improve. The sick woman and the Jewish neighbours who had accompanied her left the conventicle meeting in anger. Pietists claimed that the "Spirit" had not yet fully inhabited Jahn and tried to talk the woman into staying. Yet the party of Jews went home to face an angry rabbi who punished them for attending a Pietist meeting.<sup>50</sup>

This latter episode illustrates Pietists' fascination with Judaism and with the Jewish scriptural tradition in particular. Indeed, at one point during her preaching, Jahn proclaimed:

My servant Moses stands before me with the tablets / ah / ah laughing / and the prophets who have prophesied in my name / but the lamb has eradicated the signature which was against us.<sup>51</sup>

Here both God and the forces of evil take form as language. The Ten Commandments—"the tablets"—and the speech of the prophets represent God, while the "writing against us" stands for worldly limits on the prophets and ultimately for Satan. Here Jahn is directly quoting Scripture. Colossians 2:9–15 contrasts Christ's power to awaken sinners to a rebirth with worldly legalism. The passage states that Christ takes these "writings that were against us, which originated in regulations ... and nails them to the cross".<sup>52</sup> Colossians goes on to say that Christ disarmed worldly authorities and made a public spectacle of them. Jahn's prophecy recalls this passage for her Pietist audience, suggesting that, with Wurtzler's death, Christ has once again triumphed over evil. Jahn believed that her prophecy, and thus Scripture, would be fulfilled when a letter containing her words was delivered to the dead man. With the reanimation of the pastor, Christ would make a "public spectacle" of the worldly power that had fought against Jahn's Pietist circle.

As was typical for the era, Jahn knew the Bible intimately, not from reading, but from hearing it read aloud. Yet her uses of Scripture reveal that she was also

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<sup>50</sup> Those who participated reportedly had to eat and sleep on the floor for the next four weeks. [Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 137.

<sup>51</sup> [Carpzov], *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 136: Mein Knecht Moses stehet vor mir mit den Tafeln / ach / ach lachend / und die Propheten die da geweissaget haben in meinem Nahmen / aber das Lamm hat ausgetilgt die Handschrift / so wider uns war.

<sup>52</sup> According to the Luther Bible of 1545: Christus ... "ausgetilgt die Handschrift, so wider uns war, welche durch Satzungen entstand und uns entgegen war, und hat sie aus dem Mittel getan und an das Kreuz geheftet". Later versions tend to translate "Schuldbrief" (bond, borrowers' note) instead of "writing".

familiar with the discourses of radical dissenting literature that asserted a “true”, inner Christianity struggling against a corrupted “worldly” church. Although Jahn herself was illiterate, the Pietist groups that she kept company with spent much of their time reading aloud and discussing radical literature.

In fact, Andreas Achilles, the preacher who acted as Jahn’s spiritual advisor and as leader of the Halberstadt Pietists, promoted such literature. In 1692 he penned a defense of himself, answering charges that he spread heretical literature.<sup>53</sup> Achilles admitted that he did recommend books as a form of edification, but denied that the texts were heretical. After the Bible itself, Achilles recommended Arndt’s *Garden of Paradise* (*Paradiesgärtlein*) and his *True Christianity*. In the defense, Achilles specifically answered the criticism that he had recommended the writings of Jakob Böhme. Achilles denies this, saying that since he could not understand Böhme, he felt he could not recommend him. His library nonetheless contained copies of texts by Böhme, Jane Leade and other radicals.<sup>54</sup>

Achilles was not the only one in Halberstadt who had to answer to the authorities for his unorthodox activities. In January 1693, just one month after these events, authorities cracked down on prophetic Pietism and a number of participants were jailed, exiled or suspended from their jobs. Officials took both Anna Margaretha Jahn and her recorder, the student Semler, into custody and ultimately banned them from the city.

## Conclusion

Anna Margaretha Jahn and other Pietists challenged rational models of knowledge and put forth a magical, esoteric world view. They saw themselves as the “born-again”, adherents of a “true” Christianity that had survived underground through the ages. As such, they were adepts who were able to decode and understand messages from God that were not available to others. Scripture contained hidden with it the blueprint for the cosmos. Those, like Jahn, who mastered the “Language of Canaan” could not only foretell the future, they could also enact magical feats, such as the reanimation of the dead.

Prophetic speech such as that exhibited by Anna Margaretha Jahn is but one form of the Language of Canaan. Pietists’ linguistic and semiotic practices were much broader and included phenomena such as the random drawing of lots

<sup>53</sup> Achilles’ defense was not available to me. I quote after Shantz, ‘Politics’, 143–146. Shantz postulates that Achilles may have sought to cultivate a distinct Pietist reading culture.

<sup>54</sup> Shantz, ‘Politics’, 145.

to discern God's will, the emergence of divine writing directly on the bodies of prophets in blood and even eating Bible verses written on paper in order to affect real change in the world. The range of performative situations for the enactment of the Language of Canaan was conditioned by the social context of chiliasm and religious fundamentalism—phenomena that are still shaping the world in dramatic ways.

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