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The Dustbin of the Republic of Letters Pierre Bayle's "*Dictionaire*" as an encyclopedic palimpsest of errors

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Abstract: Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, a landmark in intellectual history, is a curious text. Originally intended as a collection of all errors, it became an encyclopedia of everything, enfolding rampantly growing footnotes that commented on every imaginable topic. Instead of looking at Bayle's theoretical statements in the *Dictionnaire*, I explore Bayle's writing practice, his critical method and his practice of forming judgments. A close study of the textual, paratextual and contextual characteristics of the first entry of the *Dictionnaire* (the entry "Abaris") allows me to find out how Bayle made up his mind at every stage during a contemporaneous controversy on divination. In this way, we are able to see Bayle's mind in action while he is judging the contradictory information he receives and the to-and-fro movement of changing opinions he is confronted with. This examination yields new insights to Bayle's practical attitudes towards key issues in his oeuvre, including scepticism, rationalism, superstition and tolerance. At the same time, the article clarifies how Bayle was involved in the Republic of Letters and how he related to his local context in Rotterdam.

Keywords: Bayle, critical practice, superstition, error, credulity, scepticism, *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, paratext, Aymar, divining rod, Republic of Letters, toleration.

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Introduction

On March 7th 1697, the French Huguenot exile Pierre Bayle reported on a new cure that was popular in the Netherlands. A German doctor claimed to cure all kinds of diseases by putting a sympathetic powder in the urine of the patient, and other empirics had started to imitate him. Bayle took their claims seriously and did not consider such a cure at a distance impossible, physically speaking. He even ridicules the established physicians who rallied against the new remedy. Bayle joked that they reject everything they do not understand as impossible.[2] Later, however, in the addenda to the entry "Abaris" in the second edition of his *Dictionnaire*, Bayle made a volte-face in his judgement. Now he followed the authority of the established physicians and rejected the phenomenon as illusory. Ironically (and implicitly referring to himself), he adds that those who had been tricked had switched their opinion from approval to the utmost disdain.[3]

This little episode turns around an issue that was central to Bayle's work, and to the reception of his ideas in the Enlightenment. Bayle was one of the most prominent thinkers at the turn of the seventeenth century. A central figure in the flourishing Republic of Letters, he maintained an extensive correspondence network that provided him with crucial information.[4] Bayle published the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* from 1684 till 1687, but it was especially his *Dictionnaire* that made a huge impact and became one of the most read works in the eighteenth century. His work was closely studied by the major thinkers of the Enlightenment and Bayle would become widely

[2] Bayle to Mr. ***, 7 March 1697 in Pierre Bayle, "Lettres de Mr Bayle," in *Oeuvres diverses de Mr. Pierre Bayle*, vol. IV, La Haye: Compagnie des libraires, 1737, pp. 525–888, 735–736. In the following, we will refer to Bayle's correspondence by mentioning the correspondents and date. Because a new critical edition of all Bayle's correspondence is being published by the Voltaire Foundation in Oxford, which will replace the older editions, references to pages and editions are not given here. The older editions are the 1737 edition given above and reprinted in volume IV of Pierre Bayle, *Oeuvres Diverses*, Hildesheim, 1968. More correspondence can be found in Émile Gigas, ed., *Choix de la correspondance inédite de Pierre Bayle, 1670–1706*, Paris, 1890.

[3] Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, Rotterdam: Leers, 1702, vol. 1: *Additions et corrections pour le Ier Tome*, p. ii–iii.

[4] Excellent biographies of Bayle are Elisabeth Labroussse, *Pierre Bayle*, La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, n.d.; Hubert Bost, *Pierre Bayle*, Paris: Fayard, 2006. For an analysis of his thought, see especially Elisabeth Labroussse, *Hétérodoxie et rigorisme*, La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964; Elisabeth Labroussse, *Notes sur Bayle*, Paris: Vrin, 1987; Antony McKenna and Gianni Paganini, eds., *Pierre Bayle dans la République des Lettres: Philosophie, religion, critique*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004. For his early correspondence network, see Antony McKenna, "Les réseaux de correspondance du jeune Pierre Bayle," in *La Plume et la toile. Pouvoir et réseaux de correspondance dans l'Europe des Lumières*, ed. Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, Arras: Presses de l'Université d'Artois, 2001. For Bayle's later correspondence network, see Antony McKenna, "Les réseaux au service de l'érudition et l'érudition au service de la vérité de fait : le Dictionnaire historique et critique de Pierre Bayle," *La Lettre clandestine* 20 (2012) (forthcoming).

known for his critical spirit, his rejection of "superstition" and his plea for tolerance.[5] Bayle presented himself, for instance during the controversy with Pierre Jurieu, as a critical thinker opposing fanatics, idolaters and impostors. Bayle's volte-face in the episode mentioned above shows, however, that although being a "critical spirit" may be good in theory, one faces considerable challenges in practice. Indeed, how should one decide which beliefs should be struck down as credulous and which opinions should be tolerated?

In this paper, I will look in detail at Bayle's practice of forming judgments and of writing his *Dictionnaire*, and I will analyze some of the practical problems he faced. I will do this by exploring how Bayle developed the entry "Abaris", the very first entry of the *Dictionnaire*.[6] Bayle's stratified practice of writing makes it possible to uncover how his thinking developed, between different drafts before publication as well as between different editions. First, this entry is special, because it incorporates long discussions of a controversy that raged at the time Bayle was writing the different versions of the entry. Because the phenomena described were so uncommon, and Bayle did not immediately know what to think of it, the entry "Abaris" allows us to see Bayle in the process of making up his mind. We can trace the changes in judgment Bayle made about this contemporary event by pairing a study of the paratext of the *Dictionnaire* with a study of the historical context (especially the streams of information he received through the Republic of Letters).[7] Second, much of this entry treats diviner who had found criminals with his divining rod, and this provoked important questions of credibility, superstition and even toleration for Bayle. This case sparked an international controversy, with important reverberations in Bayle's hometown of Rotterdam, and this gives us insight in to how Bayle related his local context to the Republic of Letters. Finally,

[5] Cf. Werner Schneider, "Concepts of Philosophy," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Knud Haakonssen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 26–44. See also Antony McKenna, "Pierre Bayle et la superstition," in *La Superstition à l'âge des Lumières*, ed. B. Dompnier, Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998, pp. 49–65. It should be noted here that the notion of superstition was changing in Bayle's time. From a more narrowly defined worshipping of false religion, it slowly extended to a more general credulity.

[6] Ruth Whelan has made close studies of individual articles dealing with superstition, but has not paid attention to the evolution of the articles, to Bayle's critical practice and to his evolving judgments over time. Others have described in general how the *Dictionnaire* came into being, without looking at the evolution of concrete articles or without even taking into account the differences between editions. In particular, scholars have not connected Bayle's thought with the textual, paratextual and material history of the *Dictionnaire*. See esp. Ruth Whelan, *The Anatomy of Superstition: a study of the historical theory and practice of Pierre Bayle*, Oxford, 1989. Leny van Lieshout, *The Making of Pierre Bayle's Dictionaire*, Amsterdam: Holland University Press, 2001. Emile Gigas, "La première ébauche d'un ouvrage célèbre," *Bulletin de la Commission de l'Histoire des Eglises Wallonnes* 7 (1896), pp. 65–74. Leif Nedergaard, "La genèse du 'Dictionaire historique et critique' de Pierre Bayle," *Orbis Litterarum* 13 (1958), pp. 210–227.

[7] For the notion of paratext, see esp. Gérard Genette, *Seuils*, Paris: Seuil, 1987.

in studying the entry "Abaris", I will show that Bayle's *Dictionnaire* resembles a palimpsest, or rather a sedimentation process, in which the historian can uncover, like a paleographer, detective or geologist, layer after layer of a passionate controversy that raged at the turn of the eighteenth-century.

Bayle's critical spirit

Bayle was notorious as a controversial thinker and some contemporaries considered him even an outright sceptic.[8]

Nevertheless, reason is not powerless for Bayle, and he was never a radical sceptic,[9] otherwise the project of his *Dictionnaire* would make no sense. Rather, he believed that we can train our judgement by making critical assessments of historical facts. This was the aim of his *Dictionnaire*: an encyclopaedic dictionary meant to educate the public and to eradicate the multitude of errors that had crept into the body of knowledge. Bayle believed that knowledge had been corrupted because errors were uncritically copied and widely disseminated. Instead of carefully checking the available sources, using sound judgement as well as textual criticism, people were perpetuating the same mistakes again and again. In contrast, in his "critical" *Dictionnaire,* Bayle tried to correct these errors by reading different authors, comparing them and applying common sense. He even took into account the particular interests of the authors in order to assess their veracity and prejudices, aiming at weeding out errors

[8] In his *Examen du pyrrhonisme ancien et moderne* (1733), the Swiss theologian Jean Pierre de Crousaz accused Bayle of a corrosive scepticism, a complete menace, responsible for all what went wrong in the world. For Bayle in the context of scepticism, see e.g. Richard Popkin, "Scepticism," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Knud Haakonssen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 426–450. The question of Bayle's scepticism has continued to spark vigorous debate up to the present. For the most recent discussion of Bayle's scepticism, see José Maia Neto, "Bayle's Academic Scepticism," in *Everything Connects: In Conference with R.H. Popkin*, ed. J.E. Force and D.S. Katz, Leiden: Brill, 1999, pp. 264–275; Frédéric Brahami, *Le Travail du scepticisme. Montaigne, Bayle, Hume*, Paris: P.U.F., 2001; Thomas M. Lennon, "What Kind of a Skeptic Was Bayle?," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26. 1 (2002), pp. 258–279; Gianluca Mori, *Bayle: philosophe*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999; Gianluca Mori, "Scepticisme ancien et moderne chez Bayle," in *Libertinage et philosophie au XVII^e siècle: La résurgence des philosophies antiques*, ed. Antony McKenna and Pierre-François Moreau, Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2003, pp. 271–290; Gianluca Mori, "Pierre Bayle on scepticism and 'common notions'," in *The Return of Scepticism. From Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle*, ed. Gianni Paganini, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003, pp. 393–413; Kristen Irwin, "La philosophie comme méthodologie: la conception sceptico-rationaliste de la raison chez Bayle," *Kriterion: Revista de Filosofia* 120 (2009), pp. 363–376; Jean-Luc Solère, "Scepticisme, métaphysique et morale: le cas Bayle," in *Les « Eclaircissements » de Bayle*, ed. H. Bost and A. McKenna, Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010, pp. 499–524.

[9] Bayle's alleged "scepticism" has several dimensions, but in this article, I will focus almost exclusively on the "sceptical" aspect of Bayle's historiography..

in history and philosophy.[10] Bayle's method was essentially textual, however, and was applied to fiction and history in a similar way.[11] Many of his entries dealt with mythological or semi-mythological figures, such as Abaris, a Scythe purported to be able to fly on a golden arrow he received from Apollo. From the text of the *Dictionnaire*, it is not even clear whether Bayle thinks this was a historical or rather a mythological figure.

In the notes to the Abaris entry, this textual methodology confronts Bayle with a problem. Here, Bayle analysed contemporary events, and finding the truth of the matter was crucial but difficult. How should we make judgements about such contemporary historical facts and the knowledge about nature they presume? Bayle's critical method was usually limited to checking and pitting written sources against each other. The authority of the written text was very important for Bayle, but in this case, authoritative sources did not yet exist. How do we know whether putting a sympathetic powder in someone's urine might actually cure the person, for instance? In such cases, Bayle's approach would typically be textual, assessing the authors, the contexts and the different probabilities of the different written opinions. For Bayle, physical explanations could be at most probable and were never certain. Indeed, during the controversy about the marvellous urine-cure, he derided the physicians because they denied as *impossible* everything they did not understand. Bayle, in contrast, was convinced that all explanations refer to what we cannot fully understand, and all physical principles are in the end self-contradictory.[12] Therefore, Bayle's first opinion that he did not think the cure impossible should not surprise us; it is rather his later change of opinion that is striking.[13] In his *Dictionnaire*, he suddenly seems certain that the cure was a deceit. He even gives a "psychological"

[10] E.g. the entry "Horace (Publius)", note A, in Bayle's *Dictionnaire*. For Bayle's historiographical method in its context, see Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote. A Curious History*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, chapter 7. Jacob Soll, "Empirical History and the Transformation of Political Criticism in France from Bodin to Bayle," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64.2 (2003), pp. 297–316. Dario Perinetti, "Philosophical Reflection on History," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Knud Haakonssen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 1107–1140.

[11] It was not uncommon to see history as a purely textual discipline, see e.g. Pascal: "*Dans les matières où l'on recherche seulement de savoir ce que les auteurs ont écrit, comme dans l'histoire (…), il faut nécessairement recourir à leurs livres, puisque tout ce que l'on en peut savoir y est contenu d'où il est évident que l'on peut en avoir la connaissance entière et qu'il n'est pas possible d'y rien ajouter.*" Blaise Pascal, "Préface sur le Traité du vide," in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Louis Lafuma, Paris: Seuil, 1963, p. 230.

[12] Cf. Charles Larmore, "Scepticism," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 1145–1194.

[13] In fact, during the controversy, the proponents of the cure took a position that closely resembled Bayle's position. They rejected the theoretical criticism of established physicians, and admitted they did not understand how it worked. Philosophical reasoning was quite useless against the proof of experience, they maintained.

explanation of why so many people were taken in: they were attracted by its marvellous nature; or maybe they were fed up with the ineffectual cures of established physicians, and people just liked to exasperate them. Bayle seems to have fumbled in changing his judgment, however, going against his own principles in favor of the accepted authority of established medicine.

This and similar episodes are crucial for understanding Bayle's project of a critical *Dictionnaire*. In the secondary literature, there has been a lot of discussion of Bayle's theoretical views, based on fragments dispersed in the *Dictionnaire*. Bayle's pronouncements are often taken out of their specific contexts, however, and integrated in a "philosophy" that was never systematized by Bayle himself. In contrast, a close study of Bayle's reaction to contemporary controversies brings into focus the actual problems Bayle was confronted with in making judgments and forming beliefs, and it raises the question of how his *Dictionnaire* was actually construed. He had originally conceived of his *Dictionnaire* as a point-by-point rebuttal of the famous (but not critical) *Grand Dictionnaire historique* by Louis Moréri. Indeed, he strongly insisted on the necessity of evidence and rigorous critical assessment. Nevertheless, Bayle often also asserted that human reason was unable to attain conclusive evidence (except for a few "common notions"). Furthermore, experience was equally problematic. In early modern natural philosophy, experiments became important to judge claims about the natural world, but natural philosophers knew that experiments were not self-evident or uncontroversial affairs.[14] Witnesses were needed to attest to the results, and in its turn, the credibility of these witnesses needed to be ascertained.[15] Bayle himself was not a natural philosopher, and his judgement could only be based on the critical assessments of witnesses, of probabilities, and of comparisons between reports, credibility and authority.

So after all, maybe it should not come as a surprise that Bayle, after careful consideration, sided with the authority of the medical establishment in the case of the urine-cure. Bayle respected the authority of various disciplines, and he had no reason to believe he knew better.[16] But on what grounds could the other position be rejected? Michael Ayers has argued that, according to Bayle, we have to arrive at our beliefs through a critical assessment of probability, experience and feeling. Of course, others doing the same may arrive at different conclusions. "There is no criterion of truth outside our feelings to decide

[14] Furthermore, experiments were not yet accepted as an evident methodology for natural philosophy. Experiments were often treated as curiosities, concretely for the case studied below, see e.g. a journal review on Vallemont's experimental method in "La Physique Occulte," *Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique* 25 (1693) n° Septembre, pp. 268–270.

[15] See e.g. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth,* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995.

[16] See e.g. Hubert Bost, *Pierre Bayle. Historien, critique et moraliste*, Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2006 (esp. Chapter 1).

between us", Ayers writes, "Bayle did not conclude, sceptically, that both sides should suspend belief, but that neither is in a position to claim the right to persecute the other on the basis of the truth of its own beliefs."[17] One positive consequence Bayle was able to derive from this epistemic stalemate, according to Ayers, was the importance of toleration. As we will see, however, as with judgments and beliefs, this toleration is not so easy to maintain in practice. In the next sections, I will analyze in detail how Bayle assessed beliefs, credibility and toleration in the concrete case of the "Abaris" article.

The writing of the first Dictionnaire entries

"Around the month of December 1690," Bayle wrote, "I made the plan to compose a critical dictionary that would contain a collection of the mistakes that were made, by those who made dictionaries as well as by other writers, and which would enlist under each name of a man or a city all the errors that were disseminated about this man or city."[18] From 1689 onwards, Bayle had collected notes for a corrected edition of the famous (but uncritical) dictionary by Moréri.[19] The project fell through, however, because there were already too many competing corrected editions in progress.[20] In consultation with the publisher Reinier Leers, Bayle decided to write his own critical *Dictionnaire*, which would not contain a narrative with the current state of knowledge, but only an enumeration of the errors found in other works. At the end of 1692, Bayle published the *Projet*, a first sketch of his *Dictionnaire*, which presented a selection of entries together with an explanation of his project. He made clear that it was not easy to collect all the errors about a certain subject, because of the need to read diverse authors, the criticisms of their views by others, the rebuttals

[17] Michael Ayers, "Theories of Knowledge and Belief," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Michael Ayers and Daniel Garber, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 1003–1061. Quotation p. 1041. Ayers supposes that the argument for ignorance holds for all kinds of beliefs; we will come back to this later in this paper.

[18] Pierre Bayle to his nephew Gabriel de Naudis, 22 May 1692, cited in Paul Hazard, *La Crise de la conscience européenne (1680–1715)*, Paris: Fayard, 1961, p. 104–105. In fact, a first announcement of this work was already made by Bayle's publisher Leers in the September–November 1690 issue of the *Histoire des Ouvrages des Savans* (p. 136). Leers had already started printing in December 1690, when the entries for the first three letters of the alphabet were already complete, so it seems plausible that Bayle had rethought his project a few months before. They had to interrupt work on the *Dictionnaire*, however, because of a controversy instigated by Bayle's colleague Pierre Jurieu. See also Bayle, "Projet d'un Dictionaire Critique à Mr. De Rondel," the introduction to Pierre Bayle, *Projet et Fragmens d'un Dictionaire Critique*, Rotterdam: Leers, 1692. The introduction to the *Projet* does not have page numbers, and for convenience, I will refer to the paragraph numbers in the margins.

[19] The manuscript of Bayle's notebook is kept in Copenhagen: Pierre Bayle, *Tenerali delinea errorum alicuius momenti emendatorum*, Royal Library, Copenhagen: ms Thott 1205, 1689.

[20] See e.g. Van Lieshout, *The Making of Pierre Bayle's Dictionaire*, pp. 1–7.

by the original authors, and even this was not sufficient to form a good judgement on the topic. Searching and rebutting errors is like a hunt, Bayle muses, sometimes easy, when one finds the game already killed or driven in a corner, at other times difficult, when the animal evades the blow or stages a vigorous counter attack, even if it is already pierced by a hundred spears (*Projet* §3).

Bayle advises to suspend judgement, but only as an instrumental strategy, until you have collected all the necessary information and have heard all sides of the debate. His project aims at assisting people in this task. Bayle did not want to present "his" truth, but to present all sides of the debate impartially (*Projet* §3 and §9). Ideally, when his project is completed, one would only have to consult a certain article in his *Dictionnaire Critique* in order to know what to believe. If a certain claim is mentioned in the *Dictionnaire*, it should be rejected as false; but if it is not mentioned, Bayle remarks somewhat naïvely, one can be sure it should be true. He imagines that one would use such a *Dictionnaire Critique* for assuring oneself that what other books and dictionaries mention is actually true. Such a critical *Dictionnaire* would be a touchstone of all these other books, "la chambre des assûrances de la Republique des Lettres" (*Projet* §4).

His *Projet,* published in 1692 had not received the favorable reception he had hoped and he had to abandon his ambitious if somewhat naïve plan. It turned out that the "goût qui est à la mode" was not really interested in a collection of all kinds of errors, big and small, and his readers thought it a vain pursuit. In his *Projet*, Bayle had made a big show of defending the usefulness of his projected "Dictionary of errors."[21] He tried—rather unsuccessfully—to defend the letters and the arts against the supposed superior usefulness of artisanal work, by stressing their power as diversions and as culture of the soul. A collection that listed all the errors in literary and historical works had the additional advantage of showing the vanity of the sciences and the weakness of man's spirit, mortifying man's pride to great moral advantage. His critics were not convinced by this additional advantage, however, and Bayle acquiesced to the demands to write a more standard dictionary. This would become his *Dictionaire [sic] Historique et Critique*, published at the end of 1696 ("Privilège" 1697). Apart from reciting errors, he also added a narrative with the true account (historique). He now devised his composition of an entry in two parts: one part purely historical with a narration of facts, the other part a long commentary in footnotes, with proofs and discussions. Here, he followed his passion of attacking many errors; he even included some philosophical tirades, and pleased his readers by including more modern history.

Because most errors in Moréri were in the entries on mythological figures and ancient history, also the core of Bayle's own interests and expertise, he had focused his energies there. It turned out that this was exactly the area that his public did not find appealing. As a result, Bayle claimed he had to throw away

[21] Pierre Bayle, *Dictionaire [sic.] historique et critique*, Rotterdam: Leers, 1697, p. 1

much of the preparatory material that he had already collected (in fact, he tried to incorporate it in other entries wherever he could). This is the context for understanding the genesis of the "Abaris" entry of the *Dictionaire*. Although Bayle did not write his entries strictly in alphabetical order, the bulk of his earlier work focused on the first letters of the alphabet.[22] This is already clear in his *Projet*, where sketches of the entries A to C dominate the volume, and when he mentions the biblical figures he had already prepared.[23] There was also a good practical reason for starting with A: the printer already started printing the beginning of the book in July 1693, while Bayle was still writing the consecutive entries, a process that would continue until the summer of 1696.

Abaris, a figure from ancient history, had supposedly travelled through the air, carried by a magical arrow given to him by Apollo. The entry "Abaris" is not yet part of the entries in the notebook that Bayle started in October 1689, nor is it part of the selection of entries published in the *Projet*. Because its focus is on a mythological figure, Abaris starts with an A, and Bayle corrects in note D the dictionaries of Louis Moréri and Charles Etienne, we can surmise that the entry Abaris was started after the publication of the *Project*, in May 1692, but probably before receiving the criticism on the *Projet* by his readers. In this period, Bayle was starting work on his *Dictionnaire* in earnest, commencing with A, but he still aimed at writing a *Dictionnaire* of errors and he still focused on mythological and ancient figures. This was in the summer and fall of 1692.[24] After mulling over the criticism on the *Projet*, he decided to change tack, he wrote to Silvestre in September.[25] Bayle now needed to adapt the older mythological material to his new plan. If he wanted to include it in his *Dictionnaire*, he needed to better capture the tastes of the public.[26] Bayle therefore included in the entry on Abaris his associations with a simultaneous controversy about a diviner. During exactly these same months, from August 1692 onwards, the French newspapers reported on a diviner who was able to trace criminals with his divining rod. Apparently, Abaris' arrow had the quality of showing him the way he had to follow, and this reminded Bayle of those who can find their way with a divining rod. After consideration, Bayle wrote, if everything they told about this rod was true, it was no less marvelous than the arrow of Abaris. Indeed, it was not only reputed to find treasures, metals and boundary stones, but thieves, murderers and adulterers as well.

[22] Although Bayle usually worked on the entries in alphabetical order, his method of writing was to a large extent associative, and he sometimes started to work on a later entry already if he thought of the topic by association.

[23] See the side note p. iii. in Bayle, *Dictionaire*, 1697 edition.

[24] From Bayle's correspondence, it is clear that he requested information, in particular for the B articles already, between August and October 1692 (but he continued to ask for information about A articles until September 1693).

[25] Bayle to Silvestre, 19 September 1692.

[26] Bayle, *Dictionaire*, 1697 edition, p. ii.

Bayle's changing assessment of the Aymar case

Bayle for the first time mentioned the divining rod controversy in his 11 November 1692 letter to his old friend Vincent Minutoli. He writes: "I would have a thousand things to say and to ask you about the young man who sees on the water the trace of a ship on which a murderer is fleeing."[27] In the summer months, the news had broken that a diviner had been able to find the trace of three fugitive murderers by means of his divining rod. On Saturday the 5th of July 1692, robbers had murdered a Lyonnais wine merchant, Antoine Boubon Savetier, and his wife. The officials of Lyon, confronted with this case, made little progress, until a young wine merchant told them about someone with a reputation to find murderers by means of a divining rod. This farmer, Jacques Aymar Vernay [Vernin], started his quest, guided by his rod, travelling over roads and rivers, for hundreds of miles, finally capturing one of the murderers. In the August issue of the *Mercure Galant*, the first details of the case were recounted in a letter by the Royal Prosecutor in Lyon, and a further expansion was printed in the September issue.

Bayle writes to Minutoli that he would be curious to read the letters by the physicians Panthot and Barbeyrac, who had endeavored to explain this curious phenomenon. The letter by Panthot was widely distributed in pamphlet form in the autumn of 1692, and it also appeared in the October issue of the *Mercure Galant*. In the December 1692 issue of the *Bibliothèque universelle et historique*, Jean Le Clerc reported positively on the work by two other provincial physicians, Chauvin and Garnier, who had witnessed the case and put forward their own explanations. The facts of Aymar's accomplishments were recorded in legal documents and testified to by magistrates and other honourable men. The magistrates of Lyon had already performed some simple tests; they buried the murder weapon and some other tools, for instance, and asked Aymar to find them, and to distinguish the murder weapon from the others. What was decisive for the conviction and execution of the criminal, however, was that he—after some wavering—had actually confessed to the crime.

All these events were related in the first reports of the case. The controversy shook the Republic of Letters, and vigorous discussions and disputes, in which many leading intellectuals took interest, started off in books, pamphlets and in the primary journals of the time. In the following sections, I will show how new developments were transmitted by correspondence networks and were publicised by journalists and publishers. Bayle, as a central node in the Republic of Letters, received the news, communicated about it, and tried to make up his mind. By looking at his correspondence, but also by studying textual traces and temporal markers in his published work, we will reconstruct how he reacted to the news, how he weighs the evidence, how he makes his judgements and how

[27] Bayle to Minutoli, 11 November 1692.

he finally presents it in his published work. This entry is a special case that allows us to see how the evidence changed and how Bayle's judgement developed during the period that he was writing and revising the *Dictionnaire*. By unravelling this controversy, we can show Bayle's thinking in action.

In the entry "Abaris", the discussion of the various stages of the Aymar case took over most of the space in interminable footnotes, overcrowding the article.[28] The *Dictionnaire* is an interesting instance of a text in which developing authorship is still visible, where the different stages of the text are preserved in little hints that we can read as a palimpsest. In a real palimpsest the old text has been effaced in order to reuse the parchment for a new text. In Bayle's writing, however, there is no such destructive moment. In fact, as Bayle himself explains, he hardly deleted any text in the consequent editions of the *Dictionnaire*.[29] Bayle kept adding to the articles, without much revising the already existing text. As we will see in our analysis of the entry "Abaris", he did not only do this between different editions, but also while writing up the article for the first edition. In this sense, the text is less a palimpsest than a sedimentation of new materials, ideas and judgements. The exact metaphor to use here is not so important, however. What counts is to make use of the textual, paratextual and contextual information in order to uncover the dynamic nature of the text.

Bayle gives textual hints as to the temporality of his writing, but especially the paratextual elements, i.e. the preface, the lay-out, the division of the paragraphs and Bayle's special use of different kinds of footnotes and marginalia, can tell us a lot about how this text was constructed, corrected and amended over time. This also has a bearing on Bayle's assessment of the Aymar case. We can read his shifting assessment of the divining rod case from this text, depending on the stage of the controversy and the new information he received. In order to get a full picture of Bayle's developing judgement, we should therefore include the contextual elements related to the controversy. Here we see again an analogy with a palimpsest, the reconstruction of the historicity and evolution of a document, in this case by a hermeneutical and historical approach, paying attention to traces of the genesis of the text, to correspondences with contemporaneous events, and to textual temporal indices. Step by step, this will allow us to uncover Bayle's changing judgements.

[28] Bayle, *Dictionaire*, 1697 edition, art. *Abaris*, p. 1–5. For Bayle's footnotes in the context of the history of footnotes, see Grafton, *The Footnote. A Curious History*.

[29] 1702 edition, p. xiv. The only exception was the entry "David", which had provoked negative reactions, and which he redressed significantly. This was due to Bayle's quarrel with Jurieu and the Consistory of Rotterdam. For Bayle's writing habits, see Van Lieshout, *The Making of Pierre Bayle's Dictionaire*, pp. 55–68.

The first edition of the Dictionnaire (1696/7)

In the winter of 1693, Bayle was working hard on his *Dictionnaire*. He had just abandoned his old Project of writing a dictionary of errors and he was now revising the old material, especially on the first letters of the alphabet, which he still wanted to incorporate. In a letter of 24 March 1693, he writes that he is completely immersed in writing his *Dictionnaire*, although he is still disillusioned about giving up his older Project.[30] During his work on the entry "Abaris", he is struck by the controversy on the divining rod that had started in France. In the January issue of the *Mercure Galant* (p. 24-46), Bayle read the opinion of a much admired philosopher, Nicholas Malebranche, on divining rods. Malebranche had been asked to pronounce himself on the subject some time before. The local bishop in Grenoble, Camus, was worried about the religious legitimacy of these divining practices.[31] His former student, Pierre Le Brun, had then asked advice from the philosophical luminary of his order, Malebranche. The latter replied that material causes always worked in the same way on the body, given similar circumstances, but this was not the case for the divining rod. The rod did not work in the hands of everyone, the practice seemed to involve the intentions of the diviner and it was not clear how the physiology of a murderer would be different from that of a good person. Because Malebranche could not find a natural explanation, he condemned the practice and attributed the successes of the divining rod to the involvement of demons.

When Bayle was mulling over Malebranche's striking opinion, noting it down for his *Dictionnaire*, he received further news on the case. "While writing this", Bayle remarked in note B of the "Abaris" entry, "I learn that the most important of these diviners with the rod, who made last summer in Lyon astonishing trials of his art, has been summoned to Paris, and on that great Theatre he has made many discoveries." The February issue of the *Mercure Galant* (pp. 311-313) mentions indeed that Aymar was brought to Paris by Monsieur le Prince (the Prince de Condé). It is claimed that by means of his *baguette*, Aymar had found hidden gold and silver, as well as border markers, and traced two stolen candlesticks to the goldsmith were they had been sold.[32] In January

[30] Bayle to Silvestre, 24 March 1693: "*Il se fait trop de Dictionnaires; le Public en sera rebuté avant que le mien paroisse ; néanmoins jacta est alea ; je ne voi pas comment je pourrois reculer honnêtement.*" He had to carefully construct his own niche as to avoid overlap with existing dictionaries and dictionaries in progress (see also the introduction to the 1697 edition).

[31] After some tests and experiments with dowsers, Le Brun concluded that they lost their divinatory powers after asking the Lord to take away their gift if it came from the devil. This was one of the reasons why Le Brun thought that the devil was involved, and he reported his findings to Malebranche. See especially Le Brun, "A Monsieur ***. Chanoine de l'Eglise Cathédrale de Grenoble" in Pierre Le Brun, *Histoire critique des pratiques superstitieuses*, vol. 3, 2nd ed., Paris, 1732, pp. 210–218.

[32] This story was reprinted in the March 1693 issue of the *Mercure Historique et Politique*, pp. 316–317.

and February 1693, public consensus recognized the startling powers of the rod, but many attributed it to the devil.[33] Bayle reflects this judgment in his remarks on the case. There were many well attested facts, and Bayle could agree with the January issue of the *Mercure Galant* (p. 15), which stated: "The facts are attested by a hundred witnesses, proficient, critical, attentive, & the circumstances are of such a nature, that cunning would never have been able to see things through." Furthermore, the use of a divining rod was a relative although, but it had recently become a rather common practice, used in the French provinces and in Germany. It is exactly because the facts were so unambiguous that one could not dismiss it as a fable or a fraud. At the same time, many savants did not believe that it could be natural, so for them, the only reasonable option left was to attribute the efficacy of the divining rod to the devil. As Bayle writes in note B, it has forced many people, because of these "*phenomenes incontestables*" to say that demons can produce a hundred things. Bayle, probably with some irony, considers that Aymar's baguette bestows retroactively more credibility on the story of the arrow of Abaris. This provokes some erudite musings in which Bayle associates the rod with other kinds of rods, such as the rod of conjurers, which originally derived from the use of the rod in sorcery, but also other historical and mythological rods with special powers, such as the rods of Mercury, Minerva, Circe, Moses and the Brahmans.

Bayle is rather neutral in this first account of the controversy. It is clear that he was very curious when he first heard the news and wrote to Minutoli in November 1692. He had some suspicions on religious grounds, however, because he added: "How to reconcile this with the book of *Proverbs of Salomon*?"[34] These proverbs seem to deny mankind knowledge of wondrous things, such as divining, and it is not clear therefore whether it is a legitimate practice. Nevertheless, Bayle was not in favor of a demonic explanation, unlike those who argued for a theological approach.[35] Bayle took their arguments

[33] Apart from Le Brun's and Malebranche's interventions, there is another long text defending a demonic explanation in *Mercure Galant*, Janvier 1693, pp. 225–284. In the March 1693 issue of the *Mercure Historique et Politique*, it is asserted that this phenomenon will pose difficulties for Bekker and others who deny the action of the devil, and it is noted that even Malebranche, normally against demonic explanations, now had to resort to the Devil.

[34] Bayle refers to *Proverbs* 30:18–20: "There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not:/ The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid. / Such [is] the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness." (King James Bible)

[35] In the *Journal de Sçavans*, 1695, p. 441, it was argued that only theologians have the right te decide over such suspect phenomena as the divining rod. In contrast, Bayle did not look unfavorably upon the work of Anthonie Van Dale, Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle and to a lesser extent Balthasar Bekker. They all argued that demons had no or little power in the world. The first article of Bayle's *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*, March 1684, laude Van Dale: "*c'est rendre plus de service que l'on ne pense à la Religion que de réfuter les faussetés qui semblent la*

into consideration, but would pinpoint some specific problems with it. The demonic case rejects the hypotheses that the divining rod is a trick or that it can be explained naturally, and they stress the reality of the phenomena. What they do not explain, however, is why the devil, the sworn enemy of the human race, would help mankind find criminals and uncover other kinds of abuse. If it is not clear whether the divining rod is a natural phenomenon, the effect of fraud, or caused by demons, the only thing we can do is to suspend our judgment. Bayle uses subtle ambiguity and irony to describe the case, so he does not have to take sides, and he avoids making an explicit judgment. Despite his enthusiasm, it is not entirely clear whether he believes in the powers of the divining rod, even if he promotes its utility. He may be employing irony, or at least he might be hedging himself against later developments that could contradict him.

When he starts to write about the divining rod controversy in the *Dictionnaire*, he first uses the conditional : "*si tout ce que l'on en dit étoit veritable*". After more news comes in, however, he seems to use a different terminology and tends to accept the "*tant de decouvertes*", "*phenomenes incontestables*" and "*epreuves suprenantes*".[36] One could imagine that Bayle would be sympathetic towards another article that appeared in the February issue of the *Mercure Galant.*[37] The author argued that we do not know enough about natural forces, and even if natural philosophers propose unconvincing theories, this is not enough reason for ascribing certain phenomena to the devil. If we did, all kinds of sympathy, gravitation, light and many other phenomena would

favoriser. Les Pères de l'ancienne Eglise n'ont pas été assez délicats dans le choix des preuves [...]c'est à nous qui vivons dans un siècle plus éclairé à séparer le bon grain d'avec la paille, je veux dire, à renoncer aux fausses raisons, pour ne nous attacher qu'aux preuves solides de la Religion Chrétienne, que nous avons en abondance." The controversy around Bekker's work was in full swing in 1693 and 1694, during the divining rod controversy. On 5 March 1693, Bayle writes to Minutoli that *l'Histoire de la diablerie de Loudun* had just been printed in Amsterdam. The book shows that the pretended possession of the nuns was all a deception and Bayle adds: "*On fera plaisir à Mr. Bekker de réduire à des illusions & à des Artifices humains une affaire comme celle-là.*"

[36] There may be some irony here, but Bayle keeps his assertions ambiguous. It is important to note that Buissière attests that everyone believed in the rod at the time, and that "*dans cette chaleur il n'estoit pas permis à un homme raison[n]able de s'op[p]oser à ce tore[r]nt*" (Buissière to Bayle, 25 July 1698). Note also that a similar action at a distance is responsible for both the divining rod and the urine-cure, which Bayle accepted in the beginning and rejected later.

[37] In fact, Bayle criticizes the article in the entry "Zahuris" of his *Dictionnaire*. He does not touch on the main argument of the article, but rejects its wrong representation of Martin Del Rio's views. This is, however, at a much later stage in the controversy, when Bayle is writing the letter Z. Van Lieshout suggest Bayle had started earlier on the "Zahuris" article, prompted by the association with the Aymar case elaborated in "Abaris" (Van Lieshout, *The Making of Pierre Bayle's Dictionaire,* p. 63). I would object that Bayle does not have the controversy freshly in mind when he wrote the "Zahuris" article, because he wrongly remembers Aymar's first name as Pierre instead of Jacques. If Bayle did write this entry in the fall of 1696, the Aymar case must have made a considerable impression upon his mind, something that is corroborated by the fact that he made so many additions to the entry.

be demonic. Such a view mirrors Bayle's conviction that reason is limited and that we cannot penetrate the secrets of nature. Bayle's epistemic convictions and his interest in errors, mythology and judgment made him curious about this case. Indeed, he promises more on the subject in an article under the heading "Rabdomantie". He would never publish such an entry, however, maybe because by the time he arrived at writing the R entries, the controversy had taken some unexpected turns.

As is clear from the first pages of the January issue of the *Mercure Galant*, an abundance of facts confirmed the efficacy of the divining rod. These successes were corroborated by the new experiments executed by the Prince de Condé and reported in the February issue of the *Mercure Galant*. In the following months, people presented more natural explanations of the phenomenon: Comiers presented his views in the March issue of the same journal, and Pierre Lorrain de Vallemont published a book length study and natural explanation of the Aymar case at the end of March.[38] Some dissenting voices were also heard, however. In the March issue of the *Mercure Historique et Politique* (p. 329), it is suggested it might be a fraud after all, and the case might be similar to the story of the golden tooth or the prophets of the Dauphiné.[39] The author had also read an English account of diviners in Ceylon who used the rod for finding criminals, but upon closer inspection it proved to be a hoax. It must have been around the time Bayle read these articles, in April 1693, that he added a sentence to the main text of the "Abaris" entry. He wrote: "If the arrow [of Abaris] had had the gift that one attributes to the rod of Jaques Aymar, he would have been able to do great service to the world."

The idea of the usefulness of the divining rod had been circulating for some time. Chauvin, in a letter to Mme la marquise de Senozan, and printed in various venues, had written that it was "a discovery, so useful for the conservation of the good and of the life of man."[40] Also the author of the *Mercure Historique et Politique* article mentioned above suggested that people would now be afraid to hide their money from the tax collectors. Bayle concurred

[38] Pierre Lorrain de Vallemont, *La Physique Occulte, ou Traité de la baguette divinatoire*, Paris, 1693.

[39] Bayle's attention will have been picqued by the mention of the *Camisards*, who were central in his controversy with Jurieu. For the golden tooth, see Robert Jütte, "A Medical Miracle Revisited: The Enlightenment Debate on a Miraculous Golden Tooth," in *Medicine and Religion in Enlightenment Europe*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, pp. 195–204. For the prophets, see Koen Vermeir, "The 'physical prophet' and the powers of the imagination. Part I: a case-study on prophecy, vapours and the imagination (1685–710)," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 35. 4 (2004), pp. 561–591.

[40] Pierre Chauvin, *Lettre de M. Chauvin [...] a madame la marquise de Senozan, sur les moyens dont on s'est servy pour découvrir les Complices d'un assassinat commis à Lyon, le 5. de Juillet 1692*, Lyon: Chez J. Bapt. et Nicolas De Ville, 1692. Chauvin rejected the pirated editions of his letter and the version published in the October 1692 issue of the *Mercure Galant*.

when he added a footnote G to the "Abaris" entry (and he added a cross-reference in the margin of footnote B, to make clear that a new stage of the discussion continued later in the text). Jealousy would be unnecessary, Bayle claimed, because the baguette would make sure no adultery would be committed, and everyone would make sure to keep an upright reputation. "The greatest number of crimes, the most dangerous sins, know that those who commit them in the hope that the public will know nothing about it, will cease at the memory of the rod." An article in the April edition of the *Mercure Historique et Politique* (pp. 447–448) even suggests it is a plot by the state : "the Ministers of France use everything [...] in order to frighten the people & to force them to bring to the *Monnoyes* the money that most of them have hidden."

When Bayle wrote footnote *G*, however, some more doubts had been thrown on the feats of Aymar. Bayle usually added notes progressively while he was working on an entry, and textual and contextual factors confirm that some time elapsed between notes B and G. Indeed, at the end of April, a report about a failure by Aymar also appeared in the *Journal des Sçavans*.[41] The procurator of Paris confirmed some of the successful experiments by the Prince de Condé, but the Prince had also asked him to take Aymar to some crime scenes, and there, the rod remained immobile. This procurator, M. Robert, also alluded to more failures by Aymar, which the Prince would publicize shortly. Some time may have passed between Bayle's judgment of the utility of Aymar's rod in the main text of the entry, and the footnote, in which he incorporates the recent negative news. Bayle highlights the new developments by means of textual temporal markers. "I just learned", he writes, "that those who counted on so many advantages, & so many victories over the unbelievers, find themselves far out in their reckoning." Nevertheless, "*quoy qu'il en soit*", he is explicit that he will not take back his words about the utility of the divining rod.[42] The new information did not prompt him to change his views; he even strengthens his rhetoric: "In the hands of such a great traveler as Abaris [circulating everywhere the virtues of the rod], the rod would have occasioned the reformation of morals by everyone." Bayle in these passages is still fascinated by the divining rod as well as with the twists and turnings of the controversy. This history in itself merits a whole article, he proclaims, and he again projects to deal with it in the entry *"Rabdomantie"*.

An important turning point in the case took place in April and May of 1693. The Prince de Condé presented Aymar as a curiosity to noblemen and dignitaries, and he had to solve thefts and find hidden gold or silver. Aymar

[41] "Extrait d'une lettre écrite au P. Chevigny, Assistant du Pere General de l'Oratoire", in *Journal de Sçavans*, 27 April 1693.

[42] This confirms the fact that Bayle almost never changes text previously written. The announcement here also seems to reflect explicitly on his conviction that he does not need to retract the previous judgment.

was brought to the duchess of Hannover (residing at the *hôtel de Guise*), for instance, to the mansion of M. de Gourville and to the castle of Chantilly (the residence of the Condés). In the reports, publicised by de Condé's followers in many journals and broadsheets during May and June 1693, it was stressed that Aymar failed miserably each time in turn. The *Mercure Galant* published the denunciation already in its April 1693 issue (pp. 262–294); and the *Mercure Historique et Politique* (May 1693, pp. 558–567), cited by Bayle, included fragments from letters by M. Robert and the House of Condé in which Aymar's failures were recounted. These reports even suggest that the first accounts of the successful experiments with de Condé had been misleading and erroneous. The author stated that the proofs of the failure of Aymar are so strong that no one dares to contradict them. Many savants concurred: the journal issue mentions that Abbé Nicaise, for instance, a regular correspondent of Bayle who wrote to him about the Aymar case, had become convinced that Aymar was a fraud.[43]

Bayle closely follows the opinion of the author of the *Mercure Historique et Politique* article when he added a new note H to his text, probably in June 1693. This later addition reflects a very different judgment, and the language is now stark and condemning: "Mr. le Prince de Condé […] has turned round all the trophies of the partisans of Jaques Aymar. This poor man has failed so pitiably the tests of his powers which one has wanted to make at the Hôtel de Condé, that he has lost his whole reputation." The time for doubting and suspending judgment is over: "*il n'y a plus de lieu à chicaner sur l'incertitude*". Suddenly, the Aymar case acquires new importance for Bayle, because it is now clearly one of these errors and illusions that he set out to battle with his *Dictionnaire*. He is aware that even the best minds are so easily tricked by impostors. He disagrees with those who say that they lived in an enlightened time ("*un siecle aussi philosophe*"), and that impostors were now more easily exposed than in earlier, more credulous times. It is true that there are more people now capable to combat illusions, but "*notre siecle est aussi dupe que les autres*". Just like before, the world likes all the impostures that flatter its passions, and it does not respect con men less. Bayle gives a long citation from the *Mercure* article, chiding Vallemont and others for still defending Aymar, and for trying to cook up credible explanations for his failure.

Again, the temporal indications in the text hint at the speed of the events, which took Bayle by surprise: "one has just heard that the rule of this rod has been very short, & that it has found its fatal hour at the Hôtel de Condé" he adds to the main text. In note H, he states: "Hardly has it lasted in Paris as much time as it takes to compose & to print an article of this Dictionary". Indeed, as we have seen, he started to compose the Abaris entry in the fall of

[43] In his letter to Bayle, 26 June 1694, Nicaise writes for instance about a new edition of Le Brun's book. Although this case is worn-out, he writes, he hopes the book will be well received.

1692, when the news about Aymar was broached, and he has been adding to the article continuously since then. Now the case seemed to be closed already, and he could still incorporate it in the final version of the article. Bayle must have incorporated these new developments in June, after receiving the May issue of the *Mercure Historique et Politique*. On 29 June, Bayle mentions in a letters to Minutoli and Constant that they will start printing his *Dictionnaire* soon, and he considers the first pages of the *Dictionnaire* ready for the press. The Abaris entry would only be printed mid September, however, because the publisher had to wait for the new type that he had ordered especially for the *Dictionnaire*.

By the 14th of September, when Bayle had just received the first printed pages, his passion and indignation ignited by the Aymar case had calmed somewhat. In a letter to Vincent Minutoli, he writes more positively about Vallemont's defence of Aymar (the *Physique Occulte* had just been reprinted in Amsterdam) and he seems to like the fact that Vallemont explains everything mechanically, by means of flows of corpuscles, without having recourse to demons or spirits, as Malebranche had done.[44] Much more had happened by this time: many more defences and detractions of the Aymar case had been published, and although Aymar's feats might have been definitively rejected in Paris after the experiments by Condé, things were not so clear cut in the Republic of Letters. There were virulent controversies on the divining rod in the popular journals, such as the fight between Comiers and Le Brun in the summer issues of the *Mercure Galant*. Also Bayle's close acquaintances wrote about the case. In September, for instance, Le Clerc gave a long and rather positive review of Vallemont's book in his *Bibliothèque universelle et historique* (pp. 268–278).

By September 1693, Balthasar Bekker had also published the last two books of his *Betoverde Weereld*, in which he defended Vallemont's Cartesian explanation of the divining rod. Bekker's work was well known to Bayle, and he respected it. Bekker had read about the negative results of the Prince de Condé's experiments, and carefully weighed all the testimonials. What cut the knot to the advantage of Aymar, Bekker pointed out, was the fact that some credible men had themselves the gift of dowsing. Furthermore, it became clear that Cornelis van Beughem, a good friend of Bayle as well as Bekker, was a dowser too. A few experiments by a prejudiced and sceptical Prince could not stand up against so many positive testimonials, especially if Bekker's personal relations were involved.[45] In November, Bayle's friend Henri

[44] Bayle to Minutoli, 24 September 1693: "*On a réimprimé à Amsterdam le livre de Mr. De Vallemont, Prêtre & Docteur en Théologie, sur la Baguette Divinatoire. Il explique tout ce qui fait Jaques Aymar, par la Mécanique, & les Ecoulemens de Corpuscules, sans recourir à la direction d'aucun Esprit, comme le P. Malebranche. Le Livre est assez curieux.*"

[45] Balthasar Bekker, *Betoverde Weereld*, Amsterdam: Daniel Van Den Dalen, 1693, Book 4, chapter 23. The French edition, Balthasar Bekker, *Le Monde Enchanté*, Amsterdam: Pierre Rotterdam, 1694, contains some additions but the general argument remains the same.

Basnage de Beauval gave a critical but not unsympathetic review of Vallemont's book in his *Histoire des ouvrages des savans* (pp. 98–116). After reading Vallemont's work, the real efficacy of the rod was still left in doubt (p. 99), Basnage thought. Although it was quite possible that the case was a delusion, like the case of the golden tooth (a famous imposture exposed by Anthonie Van Dale), Vallemont has written a very nice work that will keep the reader attentive and gratify his curiosity (p. 116).

Of course, Bayle was not able to take any new developments or literature into account after the pages were printed in September 1693. Furthermore, he had a lot of personal problems at the time, due to his quarrels with Pierre Jurieu. This took so much time and energy that some days he could hardly concentrate on his *Dictionnaire*, he claimed. On 30 October 1693, Bayle was dismissed from his post as professor at the Ecole Illustre at Rotterdam. Jurieu would continue to pester him by accusing Bayle of all kinds of misdeeds and by denouncing Bayle's published work, including his *Dictionnaire*, with the Rotterdam authorities. The first volume of the *Dictionnaire* was finally ready in August 1695.[46] Booksellers ordered so many copies that the publisher was obliged to do an extra print run of 1000 copies, but he forbade Bayle (who would like to keep adding and correcting) to make substantial changes.[47] In the Abaris entry, Bayle only made two small changes, one of them adding an erudite comment to his discussion of the utility of the arrow of Abaris and the rod of Aymar: they did not have to fear the accusation of uselessness made by Origen. This is nevertheless striking, because he had already debunked the divining rod in the rest of the text. Had he changed his mind again and did he become more positively disposed towards the rod?

[46] Bayle to Constant, 22 August 1695.

[47] Bayle to Constant, 4 July 1697. The changes were also listed in a short section "*additions & corrections*", to the 1st tome of the 1697 edition of the *Dictionaire*, pp. 1353–1358.

A new controversy

The first edition of Bayle's *Dictionnaire* finally appeared at the end of October 1696. In the beginning, it circulated with some difficulty because of war embargos and because the book was censured in France. The work received a mixed response in the Republic of Letters and provoked quite a scandal.[48] By May 1698, the first edition was sold out, and the work of finalizing a second edition now started in earnest. Bayle had already been writing additional entries, but he now started his revisions of the letter A in earnest, based on criticisms he had received. As before, the printers tried to keep pace with him. By August 1698, Bayle had completed the revisions of the letter A, correcting errors, incorporating all kinds of changes he desired to make or requested his by readers, and adding many new entries.[49] Bayle complains about the heavy workload this imposed on him: "It is very difficult, while the printers work without a break, for the author to satisfy these three things: to make the revision of two big folio volumes, to augment them by more than a third, & to correct the proofs."[50]

Between the completion of the first edition and the work on the second edition, the divining rod controversy had taken a few new turns. When Du Bos wrote to Bayle in April 1696, the Aymar case was still on everyone's mind. A new wonder had been reported in Bretagne (an apparition of an army in Ruvengal), but no one believed it: "The adventure of the rod of Aymar has put everyone on guard, from the moment it is about a prodigy."[51] Bayle did not believe that a critical spirit held sway, however.[52] He thought that the last years had been particularly bad for the Republic of Letters. The war made communication difficult and there were only few new books available in the Netherlands.[53] "The News of the Republic of Letters is quite sterile here", Bayle wrote, "The war occupies everyone's mind. The Sciences have never been so little cultivated here, as they are now."[54] Furthermore, critical spirit had to make room for commercial interests, and good authors did not get their work published in Holland.[55] Publishers only reprinted some small popular books from Paris, filled with *faits divers*, such as books about the divining

[48] Abbé Renaudot was charged with examining the *Dictionnaire*, and it was considered heretical on four counts. It was therefore not allowed to be printed and circulated in France. For the reception of the *Dictionnaire*, see e.g. Bayle to Le Duchat, 5 January 1697; Du Bos to Bayle, 15 June 1697.

[49] Bayle to La Monnoye, 18 August 1698.

[50] Bayle, *Dictionnaire,* 1702 edition, p. xiv.

[51] Du Bos to Bayle, 27 April 1696.

[52] See also Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, 1697 ed., p. 5, note H.

[53] See Bayle to Minutoli, 26 August 1694. Pieter Rabus also wrote that there were not many foreign books around to review because of the state of war: see *De Boekzaal of Europe*, July–August 1694, p. 119.

[54] Bayle to Constant, 29 November 1694.

[55] Bayle to Du Bos, 21 October 1696.

rod. Indeed, Vallemont's popular book had a second edition in Amsterdam in 1696.[56] Bayle complains about the tastes of the time, but he intimated that the publishers did not mind, as long as they were able to sell their books.[57] At the same time, however, journals were flourishing.[58] Bayle kept a close eye on all the different journals that were appearing at the time. There were the important ones that have been mentioned already, often edited by close acquaintances of Bayle, but numerous new ones sprang up. In these years, a *Gazette des Savans* had been launched in Geneva, a *Courrier Galant* in Amsterdam, and in Utrecht, the Latin *Nova Bibliotheca* was initiated.[59] After asking Bayle for advice, D'Artis had started his *Journal d'Amsterdam*,[60] and a *Nouveau Journal des Savans* was created by Chauvin. Pieter Rabus, based like Bayle in Rotterdam, edited a journal in Dutch, the *Boekzaal van Europe*, which could boast a lot of readers, Bayle remarked.[61]

If he had known Dutch, Bayle would have been able to read the curious news of a new divining rod controversy in his own town, Rotterdam, in the May–June 1696 issues of the *Boekzaal van Europe*. In these pages, the correspondence between Rabus and the famous Dutch microscopist Antoni van Leeuwenhoek was published (pp. 495–500, 522–525). New feats of divining had sprung up in Holland, and Rabus asked Leeuwenhoek to study the divining rod with his microscope. Leeuwenhoek was fascinated and did a number of successful experiments. His microscopic studies did not give any more insight, however, and after the diviner he worked with had lost his gift, Leeuwenhoek did not pursue his research further.[62] Of course, it is exactly during this time that Bayle was overburdened with finishing the second volume of the first edition of his *Dictionnaire*. Between March and October 1696, Bayle writes, he was pressured to the extreme by his publisher, and he did not have time for anything but finishing his *Dictionnaire*.[63] Still, Bayle was interested in the journals, and he followed them regularly, even to the extent that he gets annoyed that he had to read so much repetition of the same reviews and articles in the different journals.[64]

[56] In a letter to Bayle, Buissière bragged that his denunciation of Aymar in 1694 had caused much chagrin to "the abbot of Vallemont *and his publisher*" (my italics), recognizing the commercial interests involved in these controversies. See Buissière to Bayle, 15 July 1698. Buissière criticism did not hinder the publication of many reprints and editions of Vallemont's work, however.

[57] Bayle to Constant, 31 May 1696. See also Bayle to Minutoli, 26 August 1694.

[58] See Bayle to Minutoli, 8 March 1694; Bayle to Mr.*** [Du Bos], 24 June 1697.

[59] Bayle to Minutoli, 5 November 93; Bayle to Minutoli 5 March 1693; Bayle to Mr.*** [Du Bos], 24 June 1697 respectively.

[60] See Bayle to D'Artis, 8 August 1693.

[61] Bayle to Minutoli, 8 March 1694.

[62] Cf. the July–August 1696 issue of *De Boekzaal of Europe,* pp. 152–156.

[63] Bayle to Le Duchat, 5 January 1697.

[64] Bayle to Mr.*** [Du Bos], 24 June 1697.

In fact, many of Bayle's close personal acquaintances were involved in this Dutch divining case. The controversy originated in a visit by Cornelis van Beughem to Rabus, on the 12th of May 1696. Pieter Rabus was a teacher at the Erasmian high school of Rotterdam and belonged to a circle of poets, booksellers and literati. He founded an intellectual journal, the *Boekzaal van Europe,*[65] styled after Bayle's *Nouvelles* but published in Dutch, opening the Republic of Letters to a new, eager and growing public in Dutch bourgeois society. Rabus was known for his fight against ignorance, credulity, and dogmatism, and sided with his friends Bekker and Van Dale in the fight against popular credulity. Cornelis van Beughem, a publisher and famous bibliographer from Emmerich, made regular visits to Holland for his bibliographical work and regularly visited Bayle as well as Rabus on the way. Rabus and Beughem were colleagues in the publishing business and they were on friendly terms. Curious about the recent fad about divining, and being told that Beughem had the gift of divining, Rabus proposed a trial. After some successful demonstrations, Van Beughem suggested that the spectators take a try. One by one, they tried, without success, but when Rabus' wife took her turn, the twig shook and trembled almost as strongly as in the hands of Van Beughem.[66] As a result, Rabus became an ardent supporter of divining with a rod, published many articles on this topic in the *Boekzaal*, and performed tests with his wife in the presence of many witnesses in different locations in Holland. In the autumn of 1696, for instance, Rabus and his wife were travelling from North-Holland back to Rotterdam, and they met Rabus' publisher, Pieter Van der Slaart, in Amsterdam. Van der Slaart, a close connection also of Bayle, organised some new tests and demonstrations for a company of sceptical literati and publishers.

Living in a literary profession characterised by intense competition, relations were often tense, and this showed in the course of the events. Even after experiments that one side considered entirely satisfactory, the other side did not want to give credit to Rabus and his wife. This started a vehement controversy, fought out between different factions in the publishing world, and publicized in pamphlets, books and journal issues during 1697. Major Dutch intellectuals became involved, such as Van Leeuwenhoek, already mentioned, but also Anthonie Van Dale, Benjamin Furly, the poet Katharine Lescailje and many others. The linguists Lambert Ten Kate and Jan Trioen, members of the *Collegium Physicum Harlemense*, became Rabus's strongest opponents. They were *Collegiants*, a religious sect known for their abhorrence of authority and hierarchy, and this reflected in their sceptical attitude and radical progressive

[65] On Rabus and the *Boekzaal*, see esp. J.J.V.M. De Vet, *Pieter Rabus (1660–1702), een wegbereider van de Noordnederlandse verlichting*, Amsterdam, 1980; Hans Bots, ed., *Pieter Rabus en de Boekzaal van Europe (1692–1702)*, Amsterdam: Holland University Press, 1974.

[66] On this controversy, see Koen Vermeir, "Circulating Knowledge or Superstition? The Dutch Debate on Divination," in *Silent Messengers: The Circulation of Material Objects of Knowledge in the Early Modern Low Countries*, ed. Sven Dupré and Christoph Herbert Lüthy, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011, pp. 293–328.

ideas. Their religious and social convictions determined their epistemic attitude and their dismissal of the divining rod.[67]

Bayle personally knew many of those involved in the controversy. Rabus was an acquaintance and Bayle lauded Beughem for his bibliographical work while the latter provided Bayle with books. Bayle had been an international contact for Leeuwenhoek for some time and he knew Anthonie Van Dale well. Furthermore, he was a close friend of Furly, the rich merchant who hosted an intellectual salon ("the Lantern") and who served as a contact between Bayle, Locke and Shaftesbury.[68] It was Furly who hosted one of the experiments with Rabus' wife, and it was said that he was entirely convinced of the efficacy of the rod. At the house of Van Dale, Rabus' wife did more tests in the presence of more than ten sceptical spectators, but this time, she failed to get it right. Rabus blamed the failure on the presence of so many people in a small room, and all had golden coins in their pockets, which disturbed the proper working of the divining. Katharine Lescailje, however, showed everyone how one could manipulate the rod by sleight of hand, bolstering the case of the sceptics.[69] In the last days of May 1697, at the instigation of the bookseller Wetstein, another close friend of Bayle, experiments were performed with the son of Van Beughem, at the house of the merchant Pieter Coolaart in Haarlem, in the presence of Anthonie Van Dale.[70] This time, the experiments were successful,

[67] See Vermeir, "Circulating Knowledge or Superstition?", pp. 318–325.

[68] On Rabus e.g. Bayle to Minutoli, 8 March 1694; on Beughem see Bayle to Minutoli, 5 March 1693; on Leeuwenhoek, see e.g. Cluver to Bayle, 8/18 June 1685; and Justel to Bayle, 10 August 1684. On Furly, see W.H Barber, "Pierre Bayle, Benjamin Furly and Quakerism," in *De l'humanisme aux Lumières. Bayle et le protestantisme. Mélanges en l'honneur d'Élisabeth Labrousse*, Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1996, pp. 623–634. For local sociability in Rotterdam, see Jori Zijlmans, *Vriendenkringen in de zeventiende eeuw. Verenigingsvormen van het informele culturele leven te Rotterdam*, The Hague: Sdu Uitgevers, 1999.

[69] The copies in which the details of this case are described can be found in libraries in Rotterdam and The Hague. The first pamphlet, Anonymus, *Nodige Verantwoordinge van de Heer Pieter Rabus, en Juffr. zyn Huysvrouw, Tegens de Amsterdammers en Haarlemmers. Niet gelovende de werking der Wichelroeden*. 24 pp. can be found bound into the copy owned by the Municipal Library of Rotterdam of Pieter Rabus, *De Weergalooze Dichter P.J. Beronicius, ten deele voor de Nederduitsche vertaalt. Met een bijvoegsel in de voorreden van 's mans leven door P. Rabus. De tweede druk*, Amsterdam, 1692 (Municipal Library Rotterdam, sign. 1394 F7). The second pamphlet, Anonymus, *Panegyricus voor den onvergelijkelijken heros Panour Gopolusopho Pantographus sijnde een vervolg van de nodige verantwoording voor de heer P. Rabus*, is part of the Dutch Pamphlet Series at the Dutch Royal Library in Den Haag, pamphlet nr. 14404.

[70] I found the original manuscript of the proceedings**,** written down by Izaak vander Vinne, in the Amsterdam University Library: Izaak vander Vinne, *Ondervindingen wegens de Wichelroede* (1697) Manuscript, Bijzondere Collecties Universiteitsbibliotheek Amsterdam, hs. VIII E2. Vander Vinne reported Coolaart's eyewitness account and wrote it down on the 23rd of June 1697. On Wetstein, see e.g. Bayle to Mr***, 31 March 1698. Wetstein also served as a contact point and relay station for Bayle's correspondence, see e.g. the letter of Wetstein to Ménage, 22 February 1691 (printed in Richard G. Maber, ed., *Publishing in the Republic of Letters: The*

and Vander Vinne, who reported the case, believes that Coolaart was convinced that it was a natural phenomenon. Coolaart did not want to express his judgement publicly, however, and he even asked the participants to keep their meeting secret, because he did not want to become part of a scandal.

At the height of this controversy, in May and June 1697, Bayle wrote to the young Du Bos, one of his important informants in Paris, for advice. "There is in Harlem a Society of physicists", he writes, "that occupies itself with doing experiments. They have recently published a letter in Flemish against the author of a *Journal des scavans* [the *Boekzaal*] that is published every second month here in the same language." Bayle explains that the subject of the dispute is the wife of this author, who is supposed to find gold with a divining rod. "It is certain that this rod has turned in the presence of many people," Bayle continues, "but the physicians of Harlem […] pretend that she makes the rod turn by sleight of hand when she knows that there is gold close by."[71] After some delay, Du Bos answered dismissively that the Dutch "bourgeoises" probably flaunted an old Parisian fashion. "No one here doubts that Jacques Aymar was nothing more than a rogue and that he would find no one to dupe anymore among the savants."[72] Bayle concluded that the Parisian elite had made up its mind concerning the divining rod. In his reply to Du Bos, Bayle states that "one of our unbelievers, having succeeded in being present, remarked that it is nothing more than sleight of hand, and he has made the rod turn on a thousand occasions, without that there had been gold nor silver around him."[73] Even if he had briefly wavered, influenced by the opinion of his close associates and the local Dutch intelligentsia (Bekker, Van Dale, Leeuwenhoek, Furly, Van Beughem, Rabus, and others were sympathetic towards the divining rod or even practiced divining), Bayle decided to follow the Parisian point of view. He did not even incorporate the Dutch controversy in his *Dictionnaire*. As always, Bayle was focused on textual source criticism, and he found hearsay or personal experience more difficult to deal with. Furthermore, as Du Bos's answer had shown him, including the Dutch event could only invoke the ridicule of his peers. Bayle's local sociability and professional

Ménage–Grævius–Wetstein Correspondence 1679–1692, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005, p. 125). Wetstein would also be involved in publishing the 1730 edition of Bayle's *Dictionnaire*.

[71] Bayle to Du Bos, 13 May 1697 (The letters Bayle refers to are the pamphlets mentioned in note 74). I would like to thank Antony McKenna for sending me his transcription of this letter.

[72] Du Bos to Bayle, 14 June 1697. The letter also mentions the "sotises" presented in the *Théâtre Italien* by Gherardi, a book Bayle certainly knew (according to Du Bos). If Bayle had indeed read the *Théâtre Italien*, he might have enjoyed a comedy on the divining rod parodying the Aymar case. Jean-François Regnard, "La Baguette de Vulcan," in *Le Théâtre Italien*, ed. Evaristo Gherardi, vol. IV, Amsterdam: Braakman, 1701, pp. 211–238.

[73] Bayle to Du Bos, 12 August 1697. Bayle remarks that the physician Christian Hartsoeker would publish a letter in which he explains "mechanically" the movement of the rod. Such a publication by Hartsoeker is unknown to us. Note that to explain something "mechanically" means here "by pressure of the hand", while for Vallemont it meant "by a theory of invisible corpuscles".

relations did not countervail the dismissive attitude of Bayle's international contacts. For Bayle, the sceptical and dismissive stance in the last version of his "Abaris" article therefore still adequately reflected the consensus in the international Republic of Letters.

In the meantime, however, fresh news about Aymar himself had reached Bayle. In the April 1697 issue of the *Mercure Historique et Politique* (p. 440–441), it was reported that Aymar was still active in the province, even after being rejected in Paris. This time, Aymar had found the parents of a foundling with his rod. Bayle decided to include this story, because it was an interesting new development in the Aymar case: it had appeared in an international journal, and was easy to rebut. It became another layer to the "Abaris" entry in the 1702 edition of the *Dictionnaire*, adding to an already extensive set of footnotes on the Aymar case, now running to several pages.[74] By the time he was finishing the second edition of the "Abaris" entry, Bayle had finally made up his mind about the divining rod, and he decided to chastise the journalists who reported the story. He argued that we cannot be certain of the truth of this story published in the *Mercure*, and he even casts doubt on the honesty of the journalists. The story was probably just invented by them: there are always people who love fiction, and ill-intentioned journalists know that few people will take the trouble to check the veracity of the story. Here we can see Bayle's strong criticism of the dissemination of errors—sometimes by conscious fraud—coming to the fore. His method of textual criticism prompted him to look for vested interests behind the text. Even if the story were true as narrated, Bayle argued, it is not enough to convince the incredulous. Indeed, there are other explanations possible, and one does not have to accept that divination with a rod is possible. Bayle now also suggested specific interests that might have guided the actions described by the journalists: maybe Aymar knew everything about the secret relationship of the foundling's parents by informants. It might all be a frame-up, and Aymar's informants probably had their reasons for bringing it to light in this way, without exposing their identity or intentions.[75]

One year later, not long after adding these new developments to the entry on Abaris and sending the final copy to the printers, Bayle received a letter by Pierre Buissière, the apothecary of the Prince de Condé. Buissière had written a detailed denunciation of Aymar, published anonymously in 1694, which had not been noticed by Bayle. Here Buissière pointed out that many misleading accounts of the first experiments initiated by the Prince de Condé had circulated. Aymar's supporters had even "written in Holland and England, & had presented all these impostures as something true and certain", something

[74] Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, 1702 edition, art. *Abaris*, note H. Bayle now added marginal notes to the earlier material, giving temporal indications that it was written in 1693.

[75] On Bayle's criteria for distinguing impostors from fanatics and on the causes of error, see Bost, *Pierre Bayle. Historien, critique et moraliste*, p. 26; Labroussse, *Hétérodoxie et rigorisme*, Ch. 3

Buissière set out to rectify in his printed letter.[76] When he read the first edition of the *Dictionnaire*, however, he found that Bayle too "was not entirely well informed".[77] Also a Huguenot, forced to convert after the Edict of Nantes, Buissière was a great admirer of Bayle's independent spirit, and he took the liberty to send this printed letter to Bayle, via the intermediary Mr. Ogier. Bayle inquired for more information, and Buissière sent a long letter, dated 25 July 1698, in response. Note that the printing of the letter A for the second edition of the *Dictionnaire* began on 26 May 1698, the entry "Adam" was being printed in June, and on 18 August, the letter A was ready. Bussière's letter came too late, therefore, for inclusion in the text of the second edition. Bayle was fascinated by the new material, however, and added it to the first volume of the second edition as "*Additions & corrections pour le I. tome*" (these would be incorporated in the body of the text in a later 1706 edition).

The letter provided Bayle, as he put it, with the "most positive proof" that Aymar was a cheat, and he copied and paraphrased long passages from it in the final notes to the Abaris entry. Buissière described how Aymar had confessed his imposture to the Prince de Condé. After this admission, Buissière wrote, Aymar received 30 golden coins from the Prince, so that he would return to his village. Buissière also mentions a fourteen-year old boy, who had been trained and managed by a gentleman to do similar tricks with a divining rod. After shutting him up for several days without contact with this gentleman, some money, promises and threats made the little boy confess that it was all a trick. For Bayle, this was conclusive evidence, but he did not consider that the Prince too might have had specific interests in exposing Aymar, nor does he criticize the means by which the confessions were extorted from the diviners. (Balthasar Bekker, in this respect was different. In the chapter after his account of the Aymar case, he explained why the confessions of those accused of magic should not be trusted, partly because of perverse juridical procedures, partly because the victims had an overheated imagination).[78]

Indicating that he was still very much preoccupied with the case, Bayle kept adding to the note when he received more information. He worked on the addenda till the end, in the fall of 1701, before finishing the second edition of the *Dictionnaire* in November–December 1701. In the final changes to the "Abaris" addenda, he included Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's opinions on the divining rod. Indeed, in 1694, Leibniz had already written on the Aymar case, but Bayle only took notice of it in a work by Georg Pasch.[79] Leibniz

[76] Pierre Buissière, *Lettre à M. l'abbé D.L., sur les véritables effets de la baguette de Jacques Aymar*, Paris, 1694. (Citation from p. 14.)

[77] Buissière to Bayle, 25 July 1698. I am grateful to Antony McKenna for giving me access to the manuscript of the letter and for his corrections to my transcription.

[78] Bekker, *Betoverde Weereld*, Book 4, Chapter 24 (*idem* in the 1694 French edition).

[79] Georg Pasch, *De inventis nov-antiquis*, Leipzig, 1700, p. 779. Note that Kurfürstin Sophie Charlotte of Hannover, a close friend of Leibniz, met Bayle on 26 October 1700. She had

explained that he knew about the Aymar case through personal connections and patronage networks. He got an account from Benedicta Henrietta Philipina, the Duchess of Hannover (the widow of Johannes Friedrich von Hannover), who lived in Paris at the time of the controversy. A sister-in-law of the Prince de Condé, she had been involved in the experiments with Aymar, and she had discovered that he was a fraud.[80] Leibniz also cultivated a correspondence with Abbé Nicaise and other friends of Bayle on the subject. In one of his letters, he had a good laugh at the Cartesians who tried to explain the case without making sure about the facts.[81] For Bayle, all these attestations from leading figures in the Republic of Letters proved that Aymar was a fraud, and he left aside a closer investigation of the Dutch controversy. He might have recalled his own phrases written years before, in a letter to Minutoli: "I have never better understood until this hour […] how much it is dangerous to be mistaken, when one applies one's judgment to things far away."[82] He did not take the step of getting involved and making a personally informed judgment, however, when these things came closer by.

Rationalism, scepticism and superstition

In this paper, I have shown how Pierre Bayle changed his assessment of a wondrous event that took place while he was composing the first article of his *Dictionnaire*. Bayle's dictionary was like the result of a long sedimentation process, and can be read as a palimpsest. By careful textual, paratextual and contextual analysis, I have uncovered the different stages in the composition of the Abaris entry. This approach is especially effective because of Bayle's curious writing habits and his "encyclopaedic" passion for adding material without changing or removing earlier text. Bayle's textual practice also reflects his critical method and epistemic attitude. In his *Projet*, he explained that he aimed at representing different sides of a discussion (for reasons of

earlier taken an interest in the Aymar case (she was the niece and sister-in-law of Benedicta Henrietta Philipina, who was involved in the unmasking of Aymar by the Prince de Condé) and had corresponded with Leibniz about it. One may wonder whether it might have been a topic of discussion between Bayle and Sophie Charlotte.

[80] See Leibniz to Tenzel, 16 January 1694. The case was also publicized for the German public in Wilhelm Ernst Tenzel's journal, the *Monatliche Unterredungen*, 1693, pp. 606–617.

[81] In a letter to some of Bayle's friends, including Daniel Larroque, on 19/29 June 1693, and Nicaise, on 15 mai 1693, Leibniz claims that they had also done many experiments with divining rods in Germany. See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe. Erste Reihe: Allgemeiner politischer und historischer Briefwechsel*, vol. 9: 1693, Berlin: Akademie-Ausgabe, 1975, pp. 486–488; and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften*, ed. Karl Immanuel Gerhardt, Berlin: Akademie-Ausgabe, vol. 2, p. 540 respectively.

[82] Bayle to Minutoli, 11 March 1691.

"prudence")[83], and his layered system of footnotes and marginal notes allowed him to make different kinds of comments. He interpreted his task as a work of "compilation", projecting to make an "*Ouvrage de compilation*" rather than an "*Ouvrage de raisonnement*".[84] Too much focus on reason would only lead to controversies, he judged, which would be unpleasant for everyone.[85]

Bayle's original plan was to write a *Dictionnaire* that would contain a collection and refutation of all the errors that circulated in the Republic of Letters, something he called at some point the "dustbin of the Republic of Letters".[86] The entry "Abaris" was started during the transition between this old project and the new *Dictionnaire*, and it kept evolving in its different stages and editions. In this way, the Aymar case becomes a touchstone that guides and changes Bayle's thinking about errors. In the *Projet*, he still had a rather pedantic view of the errors of the Republic of Letters, as the collection of all the mistakes in Moréri's and other dictionaries, and he refused to make a difference between significant and insignificant errors.[87] Most of the errors he corrected were erudite references and citations considering mythological figures, and from the start he had difficulties justifying the utility of this enterprise.[88] In the confrontation with the Aymar case, however, although in some sense an insignificant affair, he became more sensitive to the rejection of concrete errors in judgement. In his reaction to the case, we can follow Bayle's development as a critical writer.

So how did Bayle finally make up his mind in the concrete case of the Aymar controversy? I have shown that Bayle informed himself about multiple opinions and authorities. In this respect, the Republic of Letters was crucial for his view on knowledge and critical practice. He needed the constant influx of letters, the journal issues that recounted the latest developments in the case, the summaries of the recent books published on the matter, in order to make an assessment and to weigh the different opinions. In the beginning, he was careful not to make an explicit judgement, using ambiguous terms that could be read as subtle irony. Indeed, Bayle defended a suspension of judgement until all sides of a controversy were heard, including the reciprocal rebuttals and replies (*Projet*, §3). Far from taking any extreme position by endorsing or rejecting the phenomenon, his first judgement seems rather neutral (Buissière even felt compelled to set him straight and to send Bayle his devastating critique of Aymar). Bayle safeguarded himself by means of conditionals such as "*si tout ce que l'on en dit étoit veritable*" or "*quoy qu'il en soit*", maintaining

[83] *Projet,* §3.

[84] *Projet,* sig *2 recto, and the preface to the 1697 edition of the *Dictionnaire*, p. 7.

[85] *Projet*, sig *3 recto.

[86] "Un ramas des ordures de la Republique des Lettres", see *Projet*, §5.

[87] *Projet*, §7.

[88] See the long but unconvincing defence in the *Projet* (§ 8) and the disavowal of his *Projet* in the preface to his *Dictionnaire* (1697 edition).

the ambiguity, but he did not restrain himself in extolling the utility of such a rod. According to his principles, the phenomenon itself was certainly not impossible, physically speaking, so he was open to positive as well as negative proofs. Only when he received "clear" evidence (however difficult this was to establish), about the experiments of the Prince de Condé, he made stronger pronouncements that Aymar was a fraud.

It should be noted that Bayle's eventual denunciation of Aymar should not be reduced to a typical "Enlightenment" criticism of superstition. Such a view on "superstition" would be anachronistic and it would be a misinterpretation of Bayle's engagement with the case.[89] In the *Dictionnaire,* he gave a general critique of all kinds of mistakes, including both popular and scholarly errors. Furthermore, Bayle's criticism of Aymar should not be put in terms of rationalism versus superstition. The Aymar case could very well be defended on rational grounds, and Vallemont elaborated a book-length Cartesian natural philosophy of the divining rod. What is more, the most important rationalists of the time, such as Malebranche, and the fiercest critics of popular credulity, such as Bekker and Van Dale, all accepted that the divining rod actually worked. The divining rod could be interpreted as "superstition", but only in the traditional sense of the word, namely, as excessive or illegitimate religion.[90] The question of the "naturalness" of divining with a rod was therefore central to the debate. Interpreted as a practice only efficacious because of an implicit pact with the devil, it became the main example around which Le Brun wrote his *Histoire critique des pratiques superstitieuses*.[91] Importantly, it was possible for the famous critic of superstition, Balthasar Bekker, to invert Le Brun's reasoning. He defended the naturalness of Aymar's feats in order to attack what he considered "superstitious", i.e. Le Brun's own excessive belief in the power and involvement of the devil in this world. By considering the divining rod as a part of Cartesian natural philosophy, he could denounce Le Brun as "superstitious".

Bayle's changing assessment of the Aymar case partly informed and partly followed a more general evolution in his thought. In the *Projet*, he was still very optimistic about the possibility of correcting errors of fact. He assumes that everyone will be able to agree about errors of fact, when confronted with

[89] In his book on the comet of 1680, Bayle did make a contribution against "superstition", in its still dominant sense of false religious belief, by arguing that the comet was not a sign of God, only a natural phenomenon that followed the laws of nature.

[90] Divination, the searching for hidden things, usually by an implicit or explicit pact with the devil, was one of the traditional instances of "superstition". Cf. Bernard Dompnier, "Les hommes d'Eglise et la superstition entre XVIIe et XVIII siècles," in *La Superstition à l'âge des Lumières*, ed. Bernard Dompnier, Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998, pp. 13–47.

[91] Le Brun published his first response to the Aymar case in Pierre Le Brun, *Lettres qui découvrent l'illusion des philosophes sur la baguette*, Paris: Jean Boudot, 1693 (Reprinted in 1696), a work which was later expanded into his Pierre Le Brun, *Histoire critique des pratiques superstitieuses*, Paris: J. de Nully, 1702 (a work which went through many subsequent editions).

the detailed proofs, "because the proofs of an error of fact are not the prejudices of a nation, or of a particular Religion, they are Maxims common to all men."[92] Already somewhat suspicious of abstract reason, however, he wanted to avoid metaphysics and theology because of their controversial nature. In contrast, historical facts could attain the status of "common notions" on which everyone can agree. With historical analysis, "one shows certainly the falseness of many things, the uncertainty of many others, and the truth of many others".[93] Dismissing historical Pyrrhonism, Bayle argued that history can even attain a "degree of certainty more indubitable" than geometry (even if we have to admit that history and geometry concern different *kinds* of truth and certainty). Nevertheless, already in his *Projet*, Bayle expressed a kind of "scepticism" that would become central to his methodology; or to put it in a better way, from his personal experience of scholarship, he came to recognize the challenge that came with a critical spirit: "After having read the Critique of a Work, one believes oneself disabused of many false facts, that one had taken for true while reading them. One passes thus from affirmation to negation; but if one reads a good response to this Critique, one hardly omits to go back to one's first affirmation about certain things, while on the other hand, one passes to the negation of certain things that one had accepted at the word of this Critique. One experiences a similar revolution, when one has read a good retort to the response. Well then, is this situation not capable of throwing most readers into continual mistrust (*défiance*)?"[94]

This is Bayle's concrete "scepticism", originating in his own personal experience: the wavering of belief he is enduring, based on contrary "revolutions" in opinion. This is not the "scepticism" described in the notes of the articles *Pyrrhon* or *Zénon d'Elée*, but it is the critical spirit, the mistrust that defies dogmatism, that lies at the core of his project. In the *Project*, Bayle was still optimistic about attaining historical truth and certainty, and this was also necessary to start the project, but he is also keenly aware of the problem he faces. This predicament became even clearer in the course of the Aymar case: Bayle received contradictory evidence, for and against Aymar, with every piece of news he received from the Republic of Letters. Bayle came to see that reason usually does not lead to the resolution of a debate, and is not able to halt the perennial movement of criticism, reply and retort. When he is writing the *Dictionnaire*, it becomes clear that he is more interested in this movement of the critical spirit than in the uncontroversial facts. The "true", "historical" part of an entry is represented in the main text, which is usually shallow and short, while the unending to-and-fro of opinions and controversies are explored in the

[92] *Projet,* §9. For an analysis of common notions or maxims in Bayle, see Mori, "Pierre Bayle on scepticism and 'common notions'."

[93] *Projet,* §9.

[94] *Projet,* §4.

dense and interminable footnotes.[95] It is important to resolve debates if possible, although in many cases one needs to take a stand even if there is no absolute certainty possible. Bayle's comes to see most of historical knowledge as fallible, as always revisable, and his work is an ongoing project that he knows he cannot possibly complete on his own. He admits of his possible errors, he asks the advice and criticism of his peers, and he is always prepared to make revisions and corrections in the different stages and editions of his work.[96]

During the Aymar case, Bayle became more and more aware of the difficulties involved in establishing natural and historical truth. Reason was weak in deciding about the principles of nature, and Vallemont, Rabus as well as Malebranche and Le Brun had rational arguments to defend their mutually conflicting views.[97] Also, empirical evidence was difficult to judge. Vallemont had noted in the introduction to his *Physique Occulte* that he had taken care to do many experiments with Aymar, three hours a day, for a period of one month. The facts were therefore well established and he could be sure it was not a new "golden tooth" case. Yet it is exactly on this point that Vallemont becomes the laughingstock of Leibniz and Du Bos.[98] If one month of repeated experiments is not sufficient to make a justified assessment, however, how should one decide on the case? Du Bos reads into Vallemont's claims, assuring the veracity of the facts, the exaggeration and trust-winning language of a con man. But did Leibniz, Du Bos and Bayle have better grounds for denying the working of the divining rod, if they based their judgment only on hearsay, personal correspondence and published accounts? At least, Buissière did his own

[95] The theoretical question whether Bayle was a "sceptic" is not so relevant for this article. Furthermore, Bayle did not aim to be a systematic philosopher, and his theoretical views that we can find in footnotes and clarifications are part of this to-and-fro of opinions, which were made in specific contexts of controversies, responses and defences. More important, I believe, is to understand his critical method and practice, which includes his method of "compilation", his special use of footnotes to present different points of view, his critical apparatus for establishing historical proof, all of which are crucial for his epistemic goals. In order to correct concrete errors and attain specific historical truths, it is not useful to pit rationalism and scepticism against each other. Instead, it is crucial to present and analyse different accounts, in order to make arguments do concrete work for specific purposes, to present all the available proofs, and to avoid prejudice and overhasty conclusions.

[96] See the preface to the 1697 edition of the *Dictionnaire*, p. 8

[97] Bayle complimented Vallemont on his rational (mechanical) explanations of the divining rod, but he never cared to engage with them.

[98] For Leibniz, see Leibniz to Basnage (no date), in Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften*, vol. 3, p. 113. Du Bos writes : "Ce qui est de plus plaisant pour un philosophe dans cette histoire c'est que Vallemont asseure au comencement de son livre, que l'avanture de la dent d'or raportée par M. Vandale, l'a rendu sage, et que auparavant entreprendre l'explication du prodige il s'est assuré de son existence. Fiez vous après cela aux dépositions des autheurs!" (Du Bos to Bayle, 27 April 1696). Of course, Du Bos did not know that it would be Van Dale himself who would judge rather favorably on the divining rod, and he would host experiments with the divining rod a few months later.

experiments with Aymar, but on what grounds did Bayle consider him more credible than Vallemont? In the *Projet*, Bayle explains that historical certainty is possible, but only when all sides of the controversy have already agreed that there is a fact of the matter.[99] The problem with the Aymar case is that, if he is an impostor, the reported feats may all be "fictional". Buissière even assumes a conspiracy, in which Aymar's supporters uphold the fiction, because they gain by it (because they are part of the plot, or because describing such marvels allows them to sell their books). In the end, Bayle even considers that the journalists reporting on the case are con men, who try to sell attractive stories that no one will care to check. Bayle needed to make a judgement on the natural possibility of divining, on the veracity and correct interpretation of the actual course of historical events, and on the credibility of his sources. This was not an easy task, because everything could be cast into doubt in infinitely different ways.

In his writing, Bayle tried to avoid being subject to doubts and wavering in opinion as much as possible, by carefully framing and formulating his judgments, yet as we have seen, he was still susceptible to this oscillating movement. He was thrown in doubt once more when the controversy flared up in his own town, Rotterdam, with many of his acquaintances involved. As is clear from his correspondence, he informed himself again about the consensus on the divining rod in the Republic of Letters. It was only with the letters of Du Bos and Buissière, confirmed by news of Leibniz's opinion, that Bayle finally made up his mind. "*Dans la derniere évidence*", he wrote, Aymar himself had confessed that he was a fraud, and it seemed difficult to argue with that (if one overlooks how this admission was extorted). When we place Bayle in his local context of a renewed divining controversy at Rotterdam, it becomes conspicuous that he avoids any personal experience, even if he is very curious about the phenomenon. This is in marked contrast to the Dutch savants, like Bekker, Van Dale, Van Leeuwenhoek or Rabus, who did actual experiments with the divining rod. Given Bayle's contacts with these men, it would not have been difficult to become personally involved if he had desired to do so. He may have wanted to keep his impartiality, or maybe he felt more comfortable examining texts instead of real experience. In any case, it remains striking that when the controversy raged around the corner, he rather chose to inquire about the prevailing opinion in Paris.

On the one hand, the Aymar case brings the weakness of Bayle's method to the fore, which guarantees no final stability. On the other hand, instead of despairing in the face of historical uncertainty, Bayle views this weakness as a strength, because it allows reinforcing one's critical spirit, to "fortify one's judgment against the habit that one has of reading without attention, & of

[99] The disagreements he can solve are only about the relations between these facts, e.g. whether "a certain Prince has ruled before or after another" (*Projet*, §5.) To avoid complications, Bayle excludes fictional accounts, and presumes his information is not of the kind "reported by Ariosto, or by the other narrators of fictions" (*ibid.*).

believing without examination."[100] In the end, Bayle tried to resolve the sceptical stalemate on the Aymar case, the to-and-fro of opinions, not by reason or experience, but by following the consensus that had developed in the Republic of Letters, which, for Bayle, centered around the social and intellectual elite in Paris. Seeing Aymar as an impostor also confirmed Bayle's ingrained mistrust of fads and enthusiasms. It was more attractive to accept the authority of an urban and political elite over matters of fact than to inquire more into the troubling developments closer to home.[101]

Conclusion

Instead of studying the theoretical assertions that we can find dispersed in Bayle's oeuvre, I have focussed on his actual critical method and practice in writing his *Dictionnaire*. In this article, I have analysed in detail the textual and paratextual characteristics of the "Abaris" entry, by looking at notebooks, announcements, prefaces, the page layout, the way footnotes are presented, temporal indications in the text, cross-references, corrections and addenda, as well as changes between subsequent print runs and editions. I have combined this approach with a study of contextual information, such as Bayle's pronouncements on how he composed the *Dictionnaire*, the timing and contents of correspondence as well as the timing of the publication of books and journal issues read by Bayle. In this way, I was able to show the evolution of the entry, the additions made at different stages, and the changes of emphasis and judgement introduced by Bayle. I have shown that Bayle's practice is complex, sometimes full of conflicts and contradictions, and is not reducible to the theoretical views he formulated in the footnotes to some of his entries. Indeed, in the *Projet*, Bayle already mused about the problems involved in putting theory into practice, admitting that any ideal of perfection would be lost, and that the result would be a motley and mishmash without uniformity (*Projet*, §5).

I have argued that looking at Bayle's method and practice gives us insight to his concrete epistemic preoccupations. During his response to the Aymar case, he needed to judge the inflow of contradictory arguments and information, and he becomes more critical of the power of reason and experience to solve important problems. Most importantly, Bayle needed to assess the credibility of his informants, and in the end, he decides to take the side of the political elite, ignoring the opinions of his friends and associates in his hometown. In the course of this controversy, an opposition was constructed between the opinions held by the elite members of the Republic of Letters and local or provincial beliefs. As

[100] See the entry "Horatius (Publius)" in the *Dictionnaire*.

[101] In natural philosophy, the social rank of witnesses was very important for establishing matters of fact. (See Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*.) Furthermore, the House of Condé had shown itself rather favorable toward Protestants (visible e.g. in their continuing support for Buissière), which may have made a positive impression on Bayle.

a result of Bayle's intervention and the wide circulation of the *Dictionnaire*, the divining rod would become dismissed as "superstition" (in the modern sense) by Enlightenment critics. At the very end of the notes to the Abaris entry, Bayle compared the Aymar case to the wondrous cure mentioned in the introduction of this article, affirming that it is all popular credulity. At the same time, he becomes more pessimistic about the impact of his fight against errors and credulity. People do not need much coaxing by others; their own credulity is sufficient in itself to be seduced by deception and imposture, Bayle writes. Furthermore, this credulity seems to be incurable. Even if a cheat is exposed, people forget it very quickly, and in a few years, we will see the same comedy all over again. For Bayle, the story of Aymar's new successes in the province was sufficient proof of this. Reason is indeed limited in its power, also in convincing others, and error might in the end have the upper hand.

The last known episode of the Aymar case can serve as a final illustration that Bayle's critical practice kept challenging and eluding his theoretical views. Bayle is widely known and respected for his promotion of toleration. He himself was a victim, of course, of Huguenot persecution and of the intolerant accusations and harassments by Jurieu. Bayle's *Commentaire Philosophique* was one of the major early modern arguments for toleration, and instigated a long polemical battle with his foe. Although Bayle believed that epistemic errors had to be corrected when possible (despite all the difficulties involved), he argued that theological errors should be tolerated. He argued that certainty was impossible to achieve in matters of religion, and therefore toleration for alternative opinions was imperative.[102] Although Bayle thought it was possible to arrive at certainty concerning many factual errors and commons notions, it was clear that many historical and natural facts remained uncertain, and his argument seems to imply that one should tolerate nonreligious opinions too.[103] What is more, religious, epistemic and even moral errors were often intertwined; sometimes they even became indistinguishable, complicating Bayle's argument for toleration and his fight against errors.

The Aymar controversy was such a case that was very difficult to handle, not only because it was so hard to reach a final conclusion on the case with any certainty, but also because it blurred the boundaries between the realms of the natural, the religious and the moral.[104] On the one hand, divining was considered superstitious by Le Brun and Malebranche, that is, for them it was an illegitimate religious practice or a religious error, and interpreted in this way, Bayle's argument for toleration would seem to hold. On the other hand,

[102] One could never know that one might oneself end up with the alternative point of view. Bayle, after all, converted from Protestantism to Catholicism and back to Protestantism within only two years (1669–1670).

[103] See e.g. Ayers, "Theories of Knowledge and Belief."

[104] See e.g. Koen Vermeir, "The 'physical prophet' and the powers of the imagination. Part II: a case–study on dowsing and the naturalisation of the moral, 1685–1710," *Studies in history and philosophy of biological and biomedical sciences* 36.1 (2005), pp. 1–24.

those who argued that divining was a natural phenomenon had to admit that it crossed the borderline with the moral. (How could the rod distinguish a criminal from someone else, if the only difference between them is a moral state of guilt?) Indeed, Bayle extolled the possible moral utility of the divining rod, before he came to see it as a deception. Finally, if Aymar was an impostor, the people he had accused would probably be innocent, making the fraud not only epistemically but also morally perverse.

In a final episode, the Aymar case would take again a new twist, making a correct judgment on the case all the more pressing. One year after Bayle's second edition was published, Aymar was put into service by the Maréchal de Montrevel, who had been ordered to put down the rebellion of the *Camisards*, the coreligionists of Bayle still living in the south of France.[105] In September 1703, Bâville, the administrator of the province, brought Aymar to the Cévennes in order to find and identify Protestant dissenters. Aymar used his divining technique at the site where a shepherd had been killed, and he found eighteen suspects hidden in a nearby farm. On his indication, these Huguenots were summarily executed.[106] This episode evokes one of Bayle's crucial conundrums after he published the *Commentaire*: was it necessary to tolerate the intolerant? Bayle's argument seemed to lead to such a conclusion, even if he was uneasy about it.[107] Bayle was sure, however, that tolerance was not appropriate when the civil order was threatened. This is arguably what was at stake in the Aymar case: the diviner accused innocent people and later he even became an instrument of religious and political persecution, menacing civil society. This cynical account of Aymar's feats and the ensuing argument of intolerance only had force, however, if one could know for certain that Aymar was indeed a fraud. If his talents were genuine, as Bayle himself had pointed out, he would be a great blessing for society. (Some even suggested that the moral benefits would still be there, even if Aymar was a fraud, because as long as everyone believed in the power of the rod, people would behave impeccably). It became therefore crucial to solve the epistemic question, whether

[105] In contrast to Jurieu, who was one of the strongest promoters of their cause, Bayle condemned their violent rebellion and their religious fanaticism. The *Camisard* rebellion led to a religious civil war, in which the French Protestants attacked villages, burned houses and killed the Catholic villagers, out of revenge for a terrible repression. In his turn, the Maréchal chased and executed the protestant rebels. Bayle did not know this when he finalized his second edition at the end of 1701, but Aymar would become involved in this violent conflict.

[106] L'Ouvreleuil, a Catholic historian who recorded this story, wrote that at the time few people still believed in the rod. He thought that it probably worked by means of a tacit or explicit pact with the devil. From this reflection, he jumps to the fanaticism of the *Camisards*, which to him also seems to be diabolical. He suggests that one diabolical trick might be used to eradicate another diabolical evil. See Jean-Baptiste L'Ouvreleuil, *Le fanatisme renouvellé*, vol. II, Avignon: Joseph-Charles Chastanier, 1704, pp. 73–74.

[107] Gianluca Mori, "Pierre Bayle, the Rights of the Conscience, the 'Remedy' of Toleration," Ratio Juris 10.1 (1997), pp. 45–60.

divining with a rod was a natural phenomenon or whether it was a sham, with certainty, before condemning Aymar and bringing action against him.

The Aymar case exasperated Bayle to such an extent, that his final repudiation of the diviner casts a remarkably unenlightened shadow over his work. In order to avoid such impostures again, Bayle advised that the magistrates of the city of Lyon should have shown to burn Aymar alive as a wicked magician ("*faire brûler tout vif comme un malheureux magicien*"). Furthermore, they should have presented him the executioner, with all the instruments of the rack, to substantiate the threat ("*ils lui eussent presenté le Bourreau avec tous les instruments de la question*"). According to Bayle, this would quickly have procured a confession of how Aymar had secretly learned all about the assassination in Lyons. In this way, the magistrates would easily have found out the cheating by which he had been able to follow the criminals.[108] Just like judgments about facts, toleration looked good in theory, but it was more difficult to achieve in practice.

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