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Early Arabic Studies in Western Europe: Letters from Marcus Welser to Marquard Freher, 1611-1612, on Arabic Epigraphy

Paul Botley

This article provides annotated Latin texts, and modern English translations, of two previously unpublished letters from Marcus Welser to Marquard Freher. The letters illustrate the attempts made by two intelligent and well-connected German students of late Antiquity to make use of Arabic inscriptions for their historical research. The letters show an early attempt to understand the context and production of early Islamic coinage, and they demonstrate the limited scholarly resources available to both men in 1611-1612. Some of these resources will be outlined in this article, but the letters tend to confirm that at this date, viewed from southern Germany, the state of Arabic learning in Europe was such that a great deal of effort could be spent in the pursuit of some very uncertain results.¹

The two letters in question have been hiding in plain sight in an easily accessible manuscript in one of the world's great research libraries. They came to light during the preparation for publication of the correspondence of Isaac Casaubon from his time in England, that is, from 1610 until his death in 1614. Many of the letters received by Casaubon are in the British Library, gathered in a single large but orderly collection by Casaubon's son Meric (1599-1671) in the years after his father's death. These volumes, five in total, were arranged by Meric in alphabetical order by correspondent. They eventually entered the library of Charles Burney (1757-1817), and on Burney's death the collection was acquired by the British Library where it remains today.²

¹ For a general account of the state of Arabic studies in Germany in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, see J. Fück, *Die arabischen Studien in Europa bis in den Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, 1955, pp. 44-47; J. R. Jones, *Learning Arabic in Renaissance Europe (1505-1624)*, PhD thesis, University of London, 1988, pp. 161-66; G. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth-Century England*, Oxford, 1996, pp. 35-40. I am grateful to Dr Iman Sheeha (Brunel) for her help with the Arabic text in the letters edited in the present article. | ² For the fortunes of Casaubon's papers after his death, and for the Burney manuscripts in particular, see P. Botley and D. van Miert, eds, *The Correspondence of Joseph Justus Scaliger*, 8 vols, Geneva, 2012, 1, pp. xvii-xxviii, and P. Botley and M. Vince, eds, *The Correspondence of Isaac Casaubon in England*, 4 vols, Geneva, 2018, 1, pp. 40-50.

It was immediately apparent that one autograph letter bound in the fourth volume, addressed to Marquard Freher by Marcus Welser, was not part of Casaubon's correspondence.³ It later became clear that another autograph letter in the same volume, lacking its envelope and assumed to have been addressed by Welser to Casaubon, was not in fact addressed to Casaubon at all.⁴ Further study revealed that Welser's letter was also addressed to Freher and that these two letters were part of a conversation about Arabic inscriptions which Welser and Freher had wanted to bring to Casaubon's attention.

Neither letter from Welser to Freher has been published before. They do not appear in collected works of Welser published in 1682, the single largest printed collection of Welser's letters.⁵ The autographs do not appear in Magnus Ferber's careful modern inventory of Welser's correspondence.⁶ They are, naturally, omitted from the new edition of Casaubon's correspondence. Their position, buried and uncatalogued among Casaubon's remaining unpublished correspondence, is likely to hide them from scholars for some time, yet it is their location within this correspondence which helps make sense of them. In these circumstances, it has been thought worthwhile to edit and publish both letters separately here. Like most of the scholarly correspondence of the early seventeenth century, they are written in Latin. Because they may be of interest to a much broader readership than those who read that language, they are supplied here with an English translation.

The two correspondents Welser and Freher were well known in their day, but they are now obscure enough to require some introduction. Welser was born in Augsburg into a rich and well established merchant family in 1558. In his youth he spent many years studying in Padua, Rome and Venice. He sustained his connections with Italy throughout his life, and a number of Italian letters

³ This is the second letter edited below, of July 1612. | ⁴ This is the first letter edited below, of November 1611. In the nineteenth-century manuscript index bound at the front of London, British Library, Burney ms 366, both letters are inventoried as though they were addressed to Casaubon. | ⁵ Welser, *Opera historica et philologica, sacra et profana Nec non vita, genus, et mors auctoris nobilissimi, accurante Christophoro Arnoldo*, Nuremberg, 1682, pp. 787-886, contains 155 letters. | ⁶ M. U. Ferber, 'Scio multos te amicos habere': *Wissensvermittlung und Wissenssicherung im Späthumanismus am Beispiel des Epistolariums Marx Welsers d. J. (1558-1614)*, Augsburg, 2008, anhang. A manuscript copy of the first letter to Freher is recorded on p. xlvi: no. 1098 (111123); the second does not appear in this inventory.

survive from his pen.⁷ Returning to Germany in the 1580s, he rose to high office in his native city, where he died in 1614. Welser was a staunch Catholic, and his publications include the lives of several saints connected with Augsburg in the 1590s.⁸ Some of his earliest work was on Latin inscriptions.⁹ His work as an historian and antiquarian included an account of the early history of Augsburg published in 1594, and another of the early history of Bavaria in 1602.¹⁰ He was instrumental in the publication of the so-called *Tabula Peutingeriana* in Antwerp in 1598.¹¹

Welser's network of correspondents was often pressed into service for his historical researches. He corresponded regularly with Joseph Scaliger in Leiden from 1598 about ancient and medieval history, inscriptions, numismatics, and astronomical observations. Long before the date of the exchange with Freher, he had made use of his Italian connections to exploit sources written in Oriental languages. In 1602, for example, Welser had borrowed Scaliger's rare manuscript of liturgies in Coptic with an Arabic translation, and sent it to Rome for translation.¹² A similar practice is shown by another letter contemporary

⁷ Welser, *Opera historica et philologica, sacra et profana Nec non vita, genus, et mors auctoris nobilissimi, accurante Christophoro Arnoldo*, Nuremberg, 1682, pp. 869-82, nos 82-101. | ⁸ *Conversio et passio SS. martyrum Afrae, Hilariae, Dignae, Eunomiae, Eutropiae; quae ante annos paullo minus 1300 Augustae Vindellicorum passae sunt. Cum commentario Marci Velseri*, [Venice, Aldus Manutius, 1591]; *De vita S. Udalrici Augustanorum Vindellicorum episcopi quae extant: pleraque antehac nunquam edita*, Augsburg, ad insigne pinus, 1595. | ⁹ *Inscriptiones antiquae Augustae Vindellicorum: Duplo auctiores quam antea editae, et in tres partes tributae. Cum notis Marci Velseri*, Venice, apud Aldum, 1590. | ¹⁰ *Rerum Augustanarum Vindellicarum commentarii nominis et populi eius originem, urbis Augustae situm, insignium eiusdem explicationem, coloniae deductionem, aedificiorum cum publicorum tum privatorum splendorem, religiosam aequae ac civilem Reipub. constitutionem, nec non a primo deductae coloniae ad usque annum Christi D. LII. historiae continuationem continentes, per ... Marcum Welserum, patricium Augustanum octo libris conscripti*, Frankfurt, sumptibus ac typis Egenolphianis, 1594; *Rerum Boicarum libri quinque: historiam a gentis origine, ad Carolum M. complexi*, Augsburg, ad insigne pinus, 1602. | ¹¹ *Tabula itineraria ex illustri Peutingerorum Bibliotheca quae Augustae Vindel. est. Beneficio Marci Velseri Septemviri Augustini in lucem edita*, Antwerp, 1598. For Welser's life and works, see Welser, *Opera historica et philologica, sacra et profana Nec non vita, genus, et mors auctoris nobilissimi, accurante Christophoro Arnoldo*, Nuremberg, 1682; *Biographie universelle* 44, 1843-1865, pp. 465-66; *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 41, 1896, pp. 687-90; R. J. W. Evans, 'Rantzau and Welser: Aspects of Later German Humanism', *History of European Ideas* 5, 1984, pp. 257-72. | ¹² See P. Botley and D. van Miert, eds, *The Correspondence of Joseph Justus Scaliger*, 8 vols, Geneva, 2012, 4, pp. 214-15, 260-62, 273-78, 340-42, 362-65.

with the exchange examined in the present article: in a letter of 8 November 1612, Welser wrote to Johannes Kirchmann in Rostock sending an impression of an ancient ring with inscription. In the same letter, he also spoke of the symbols to be found on a ‘Maronite’ coin in his possession.¹³

Freher was a great expert on coins, and the familiar tone of his letters with Welser had developed through a long and regular correspondence. In his youth, Freher (1565-1614) had studied first at Altorf, and then at Bourges under the eminent legal scholar Jacques Cujas. Freher was professor of Law in Heidelberg from 1596 and became a counsellor to the Elector Palatine Frederick IV (1574-1610). It is from 1596 that his earliest extant correspondence with Welser dates.¹⁴ He was brought to Scaliger’s attention by Welser in 1600, and six letters from Scaliger to Freher are extant, belonging to the years 1601-1606.¹⁵ In 1602 Scaliger sent Freher a short treatise on a medallion in Freher’s possession, and the treatise was published alongside another by Freher in Leiden in 1604.¹⁶ In 1606, Freher sent Scaliger another medallion for his opinion.¹⁷

The first letter edited in the present article is Welser’s letter to Freher of 23 November 1611. With it, Welser enclosed a copy of an early Islamic coin. This copy was probably cast in sulphur, wax or plaster, and the fragile medium

¹³ P. Burman, ed. *Marquardii Gudii et doctorum virorum ad eum epistolae. Quibus accedunt ex Bibliotheca Gudiana clarissimorum et doctissimorum virorum, qui superiore et nostro saeculo floruerunt; et Claudii Sarravii Senatoris Parisiensis epistolae*, Utrecht, 1697, no. 101, pp. 186-87. | ¹⁴ As appears from the inventory in M. U. Ferber, ‘*Scio multos te amicos habere*’: *Wissensvermittlung und Wissenssicherung im Späthumanismus am Beispiel des Epistolariums Marx Welsers d. J. (1558-1614)*, Augsburg, 2008, anhang, p. iii. | ¹⁵ Freher is mentioned in a letter from Welser to Scaliger of December 1600 (P. Botley and D. van Miert, eds, *The Correspondence of Joseph Justus Scaliger*, 8 vols, Geneva, 2012, 3, pp. 539-40). This is Freher’s earliest appearance in the extant correspondence. | ¹⁶ The treatise accompanied Scaliger’s letter to Freher of 26 February 1602. The letter and treatise are published in P. Botley and D. van Miert, eds, *The Correspondence of Joseph Justus Scaliger*, 8 vols, Geneva, 2012, 4, pp. 218-26. The treatise was first published with Freher’s work in: *Constantini Imp. Byzantini Numismatis argentei expositio duplex, Iosephi Scaligeri, Iul. Caes. F., Marquardi Freheri, M. F.*, [Leiden], 1604, sigs A1v-A4v. | ¹⁷ For this medallion, see Scaliger’s letter to Freher of March 1606 (P. Botley and D. van Miert, eds, *The Correspondence of Joseph Justus Scaliger*, 8 vols, Geneva, 2012, 4, pp. 218-26). For Freher’s life and works, see *Biographie universelle* 15, 1843-1865, cols 132-33; *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 7, 1877, pp. 334-35; *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 5, 1960, pp. 392-93; W. Kühlmann, V. Hartmann and S. El Kholi, eds, *Die deutschen Humanisten: Dokumente zur Überlieferung der antiken und mittelalterlichen Literatur in der frühen Neuzeit*, 2 vols, Turnhout, 2005, vol. 1: Marquard Freher.

may explain why it is now lost. Welser sent the image in connection with Freher's work *Pomponius*, a treatise on ancient coinage. This substantial work had been in hand since at least 1598, but it was never published and is now lost, so we do not know what, if anything, Freher made of Welser's coin.¹⁸ Welser's letter is evidence that in 1611 Freher's work was known to contemporary scholars, and that there was still hope for its publication.

The Arabic script on the coin was unintelligible to Welser, and he had previously sent it to an Italian friend Bernardino Baldi for translation. Baldi (1553-1617), known as a linguist, a poet, and for his publications on ancient and contemporary science, was at this date in Urbino.¹⁹ In 1612, he dedicated two works on Vitruvius to Welser, and in 1613 his work on the so-called Iguvine Tablets, a set of bronze panels inscribed in the ancient language of Umbria, was sent to Welser and published in Augsburg.²⁰ Baldi had sent Welser an Italian translation of the Arabic legends on Welser's coin, presumably with a letter of 1611 now lost.²¹ In the surviving copy of this translation, Baldi expressed some uncertainty about his transcription of the text, and Welser's

¹⁸ Freher mentions this work in his preface to an earlier publication on coinage: 'nec vetabo quin idem hoc maioris operis ἀποσπασμάτων Pomponii nostri de veteri numismate, simul aliquem gustum praebeat; quem affectum dudum et tibi ostensum iamque amicorum tantum non conviciis quotidie efflagitatum brevi ... extrudere paramus' (Freher, *De numismate census, a Pharisaeis in quaestionem vocato. Dissertatio theologistorica*, Heidelberg, apud A. Cambierum, 1599, sig. †3r). The work also appears in letter to Konrad Rittershausen (Rittershusius) dated 6 November 1599: 'Pomponium meum quem de hoc deliciarum genere scripsi, brevi spero appariturum. Figurae, quae hactenus moratae, iam sub praelo sunt' (Freher, *De secretis iudicii olim in Westphalia aliisque Germaniae partibus usitatis, postea abolitis commentariolus*, Regensburg, 1762, p. 219). I have corrected 'caelo' to 'praelo' in this latter quotation. |

¹⁹ For Baldi, see I. Affò, *Vita di Monsignore Bernardino Baldi da Urbino, primo abate di Guastalla*, Parma, presso F. Carmignani, 1783; R. Amato, 'Baldi, Bernardino', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 5, 1963; A. Serrai, *Bernardino Baldi: la vita, le opere, la biblioteca*, Milan, 2002. | ²⁰ For Baldi's works on Vitruvius, see below, note 44. For the Iguvine (or Eugubine) Tablets, see J. W. Poultney, *The Bronze Tables of Iguvium*, Baltimore, 1959; A. Prosdocimi, *Le tavole iguvine, I*, Florence, 1984. The published work was: Baldi, *In tabulam aeneam Eugubinam, lingua Hetrusca veteri prescriptam, divinatio*, Augsburg, ad insigne pinus, 1613. A manuscript of the same work was sent by Janus Gruterus via Jacques Bongars to Casaubon in 1611, and is today among Casaubon's papers in Oxford: Bodleian Library, Casaubon ms. 11, fols 153r-159r. See P. Botley and M. Vince, eds, *The Correspondence of Isaac Casaubon in England*, 4 vols, Geneva, 2018, 1, pp. 289-90. | ²¹ No letters from Baldi to Welser are recorded in Ferber's inventory of the correspondence: see above, note 6.

turn of phrase recorded his own doubts about Baldi's Arabic scholarship: 'Arabismi peritiam profitetur', he writes, 'he claims knowledge of Arabic'.²²

Baldi's uncertainty prompted Welser to seek a second opinion on the matter, and he asked Freher to show it to Jakob Christmann. Christmann (1554-1613), among the earliest western students of Arabic, was at this date, like Freher, in Heidelberg.²³ He had occupied a position at the University of Heidelberg since 1584, but Welser's letter shows that he did not know him personally. Fearing that Christmann would be tempted to agree with Baldi's rendering, Welser asked Freher to show him the coin and its legends before he showed him the translation. As something of an afterthought, Welser suggested that Freher might consider consulting Casaubon on the Arabic text. The fact that this letter survives today among Casaubon's correspondence is good evidence that Freher took up Welser's suggestion. That Freher did so may indicate that Christmann's rendering was as unsatisfactory as Baldi's. Casaubon's knowledge of Arabic, never profound, was very rusty indeed by 1612, and he probably had little to add on the matter.²⁴

The coin itself has not been identified, but it was evidently struck in the seventh century by the new Islamic rulers of north Africa and the eastern Mediterranean in imitation of a Byzantine exemplar. Welser's coin must have been large enough to contain all the text rendered by Baldi, and it must have been in fairly good condition for Baldi to attempt his transcription and translation. There seems to have been no mint-name on the coin, which is not unusual for such pseudo-Byzantine coinage. Welser says nothing of the design on the reverse of the coin, although we do have a record of the legend. Welser compared it to the image of a Byzantine coin of the Emperor Heraclius (610-641) which he found in the monumental ecclesiastical history of Cesare Baronio under the year 627. Welser does not say whether his own coin is made of gold, silver or bronze, but the coin depicted in Baronio's work was of gold.²⁵

²² For Baldi's Italian translation, see figure 1 and below, note 37. | ²³ For Christmann, see *Biographie universelle* 8, 1843-1865, pp. 239-40; *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 4, 1876, p. 222. | ²⁴ For Casaubon's Arabic studies, see A. Hamilton, 'Isaac Casaubon the Arabist: "Video Longum esse iter".' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 72, 2009, pp. 143-68. | ²⁵ Welser refers to a woodcut image which appears in Cesare Baronio, *Annales Ecclesiastici*, vol. 8, Rome, 1599, p. 289, reproduced in the present article as figure 2. The coin shows two emperors, and the smaller figure is Heraclius' son Constantine Heraclius (also called Heraclonas or Heracleonas), co-emperor on the death of his father and then, briefly, sole emperor in 641. The three crosses which appear in the image of the coin in Baronio's work are absent from Welser's coin.

Baldi had proposed that the coin was dated according to the Christian reckoning, *anno Domini* 610. The year is implausibly early, and the coin in question was probably struck in the middle decades of the seventh century.²⁶

The second letter edited in the present article is Welser's next extant letter to Freher, dated 11 July 1612. Welser claimed that their correspondence had been interrupted by his recent illness, and this letter may well be the first he had sent to Freher since his letter of November 1611. From it we learn that Welser had received from Freher a copy of an Islamic coin, copies of three inscribed Islamic amulets, and at least two printed books. Once again, Welser had sent Freher's Arabic material to Baldi in Urbino for translation. Baldi's lost reply had indicated that with regard to the coin he was unable to add very much to his earlier comments.²⁷ Baldi did, however, provide transliterations and translations of the text of Freher's three amulets, semi-precious stones inscribed with short pious statements in Arabic. Baldi once again emphasised his uncertainty in the matter, and Welser passed the translations on in his letter to Freher.

This time, Welser made use of another Arabic scholar who had recently arrived in Italy. Copies of the three amulets and two coins were also shown to Diego de Urrea (d. 1616).²⁸ Born in southern Italy, Urrea had been captured by Turkish raiders as a boy, and went on to receive an excellent education in an Ottoman madrasa in north Africa. He rose to high office under the Ottomans, but eventually reconverted to Christianity in Italy in 1589. Moving to Spain in 1591, he held the Chair of Arabic at Alcalá de Henares from 1593 to 1597. In Spain in 1596 and 1597 he worked to translate the 'lead books of Sacromonte', forged Arabic documents purporting to be of great antiquity. He returned to Italy, and to Naples, in 1611. Welser's letter places him in Milan the following year, and if this is not a slip or a misunderstanding on Welser's part, it provides new evidence for the last years of Urrea's life.²⁹ Urrea disagreed with Baldi's translation of the inscription on one amulet, and stated that the Arabic texts on

²⁶ For the characteristics such Islamic coinage in the seventh century, see T. Goodwin, 'An Introduction to Arab-Byzantine Coinage', in T. Goodwin and R. Gyselen, *Arab Byzantine Coins from the Irbid Hoard, Including a New Introduction to the Series and a Study of the Pseudo-Damascus Mint*, London, 2015, pp. 1-60 (pp. 12-30). | ²⁷ No such letter from Baldi to Welser appears in Ferber's inventory: see above, note 6. | ²⁸ For Diego de Urrea, see M. García-Arenal and F. R. Mediano, *The Orient in Spain: Converted Muslims, the Forged Lead Books of Granada, and the Rise of Orientalism*, tr. C. López-Morillas, Leiden, 2013, pp. 225-41. | ²⁹ F. R. Mediano, 'Diego Urrea en Italia', *Revista Al-Quantara* 25.1, 2004, pp. 183-201. The present letter is not mentioned in Mediano's essay.

Freher's coin and on Welser's coin were very similar. Urrea's confidence in his judgements contrasts sharply with Baldi's tentative stance.

The two letters edited and translated in the present article show that some German scholars, baffled by Arabic inscriptions but sensing their value for their own researches, were able to consult several experts: Baldi and Urrea in Italy, Christmann in Heidelberg, and Casaubon in London. It is notable that Welser chose to consult Baldi, far away in Urbino, before he turned to Christmann in Heidelberg, and that Casaubon was a distant fourth on his list of preferred experts. Had Joseph Scaliger (d. 1609) been alive, he would certainly have been asked about the inscriptions, but the letters were written during an *interregnum* in Arabic studies at Leiden: Thomas Erpenius' appointment as professor of Arabic at the University of Leiden was still some months away when Welser wrote to Freher in the summer of 1612.³⁰

The Letters

Both letters from Welser to Freher are published here for the first time. The Latin text of the letters is edited here from the autographs, and both letters are supplied with an English translation. In the Latin text, all abbreviations have been silently expanded, and capitalisation and punctuation have been modernised throughout.

The autograph of the earlier letter from Welser is London, British Library, Burney 366, fol. 316r-v. There is no envelope, and the cast of the coin and the translation of Baldi which were enclosed with the letter have been lost. A copy of this letter, collated below, also survives in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Collection Dupuy 583, fol. 80r-v. This manuscript preserves at the foot of the letter a copy of the address, probably incomplete, from the lost envelope (fol. 80v). Beneath the letter, in the same hand, are transcriptions of the Arabic text, with transliterations and Italian translations (figure 1). These are evidently the translations which Baldi sent to Welser, and which are noticed in the letter itself. They are recorded in the footnotes to the edition below.

The autograph of Welser's later letter to Freher is London, British Library, Burney 366, fol. 321r-v. For this letter, the envelope survives, bound

³⁰ Erpenius announced his appointment at Leiden in a letter to Casaubon of February 1613 (P. Botley and M. Vince, eds, *The Correspondence of Isaac Casaubon in England*, 4 vols, Geneva, 2018, 3, pp. 371-74).

with it as fol. 322r-v. The address, however, was damaged when the seal was removed, and a reconstructed text is supplied below.

The preservation of these two autograph letters from Welser among Casaubon's correspondence requires some explanation. Both were probably forwarded to Casaubon by Freher, although there is nothing in the extant correspondence between Freher and Casaubon to support this contention. There is likewise no indication in Casaubon's extant correspondence of any reply to these inquiries. Casaubon, like Freher, had corresponded with Welser since 1596, and although Casaubon's latest extant letter to Welser is of 1607, the two men seem to have exchanged letters until at least May 1613.³¹ In a letter to Casaubon of February 1613, Freher asked, elliptically and cryptically, in a brief postscript what answer he should give to Welser.³² It is possible that Freher forwarded to Casaubon Welser's letter of July 1612 with this letter of February 1613; but it is equally possible that Freher was reminding Casaubon of an earlier question he had posed in a letter now lost. He reminded Casaubon that he had not yet received a response in April 1613.³³

³¹ Casaubon's latest extant letter to Welser, dated 1 September 1607, is in Casaubon, *Epistolae, insertis ad easdem responsionibus, quotquot hactenus reperiri potuerunt, secundum seriem temporis accurate digestae*, Rotterdam, 1709, no. 609, pp. 321-22. Welser's latest extant letter to Casaubon is dated 22 May 1613 (P. Botley and M. Vince, eds, *The Correspondence of Isaac Casaubon in England*, 4 vols, Geneva, 2018, 3, pp. 525-26). | ³² In Freher's letter to Casaubon of February 1613: 'quid Welsero rescribam?' (P. Botley and M. Vince, eds, *The Correspondence of Isaac Casaubon in England*, 4 vols, Geneva, 2018, 3, pp. 385-87). | ³³ Freher's letter to Casaubon of April 1613 is in P. Botley and M. Vince, eds, *The Correspondence of Isaac Casaubon in England*, 4 vols, Geneva, 2018, 3, pp. 464-66.

Letter One: Marcus Welser (Augsburg) to Marquard Freher
[Heidelberg], 23 November 1611

Address: Viro nobili et clarissimo Marquardo Frehero.

Salve, vir nobilis et clarissime.

Nummum Arabicum veterem nactus, cuiusmodi perpaucos exstare mihi
persuadeo, statim in mentem venit eum *Pomponio* tuo deberi. Nam si tu forte
5 cogitationem *Pomponii* edendi deposuisti, nos, ne nescias, promissum munus
strenue flagitare perseveramus.³⁴

Ectypon itaque ad te mitto, una cum interpretatione hominis amici Itali,
qui Arabismi peritiam profitetur.³⁵ Si annotatio anni 610 fidem mereatur,
reliqua meo animo valde verisimilia accidant. Phoca enim hoc anno occiso,
10 Heraclius iniit.³⁶ Sed me cum interpretis haesitatio sollicitum habet – sic enim
sibi ‘videri’ ait, plane sibi ‘constare’ non asserit – tum vehementer dubito an
Arabes illa praesertim aetate Christi aera fuerint usi.³⁷ Clarissimum

9 accidant] accidunt *PBnF* 10 sollicitum] sollicitum *PBnF*

³⁴ For Freher’s lost treatise *Pomponius*, see above, note 18. | ³⁵ The coin has not been identified. The ‘ectypos’ (a transliteration of ἔκτυπος) was not a drawing, but a cast in plaster, wax or sulphur included with Welser’s present letter to Freher and since lost. Welser had used the same word to describe the reproduction of a coin which he sent to Joseph Scaliger in January 1605: see P. Botley and D. van Miert, eds, *The Correspondence of Joseph Justus Scaliger*, 8 vols, Geneva, 2012, 5, pp. 493-94. This translation, evidently also enclosed with the present letter to Freher, survives in a copy now in Paris: see below, note 37 and figure 1. From Welser’s letter of 1612 below, it appears that it was made by Bernardino Baldi (1553-1617), for whom see above, note 19. | ³⁶ The Byzantine Emperor Phocas was executed in 610 by his successor Heraclius (c. 575-641). | ³⁷ For Baldi’s notes, see figure 1. They read: “Sopra la testa picciola pare che siano queste parole: “Bno Caisar Const.”; cioè, “figliuolo di Cesare Constantino” Nel rovescio nel margine alla destra, di chi legge, pare che siano queste lettere: “Già malo marri”; cioè, “Vennero le ricchezze del signore” Nel margine opposto, seguono come pare: “Sanath hasarue sesmea”; cioè, “anno decimo seicentesimo” Nel corpo con lettere maggiori leggesi in questo modo ... “Fatura Allàlo Nisero el Cabbiro Amiro Mariche Marri Chanechan le Caisar”; cioè, “fece Dio aiutatore grande, imperante, signor de signori eleggendolo in Cesare” (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Dupuy 583, fol. 80v). Welser doubts that the Arabs in the early seventh century would have made use of a calendar which reckoned the years from the birth of Christ.

Christmannum, cuius rerum litterarumque Arabicarum cognitionem commendari audio, quaeso consulas: illi nummum primum sine scheda ostendas, ne quis praeiudicio locus sit; postquam sententiam elicueris, tum etiam schedae videndae copiam facias.³⁸ Quidquid respondebit, si me amas, diligenter perscribe;³⁹ quin etiam si tanti videbitur, nummum Casaubono in Britanniam cum amicissima a me salute censendum trans mitte, sed una cum delineatione sigilli capistrati quam dudum a me habes.⁴⁰ 15

Octavo tomo Baronii anno 627 Heraclii aliquot nummi exstant, neque ille quem secundo loco posuit multum a nostro abit, sive maiorem minoremque imperatorem respicias, sive vestis genus, et fibulam an nodum in dextro humero; absunt a nostro cruces, forte quod Arabes non Christiani cuderint, et maioris imperatoris capitis ornamentum differre videtur.⁴¹ Sed haec talia non sunt perpetua, et antiquitatis aerugo saepe eorum speciem mutat quae in aspero nihil differebant.⁴² Ne multa, si de annorum numero 610 semel constet, reliqua omnia satis plana et certa sint.⁴³ Hoc ergo ante omnia constituendum est. 20

Vale. 25

Augustae Vindelicorum, 23 die Novembris anno 1611. 30

Tuus,

Marcus Velsesus.

17 nummum] *om. P^{BnF}* **26** nume[ro] *abscondit LBL*

³⁸ For Christmann, see above, note 23. | ³⁹ No such letter from Freher to Welser has come to light. | ⁴⁰ The ‘delineatio sigilli capistrati’ seems to refer to a drawing of an impression in a seal. It must have been sent with an earlier letter, and it has not been located. | ⁴¹ For this woodcut image, see figure 2, and above, note 25. | ⁴² ‘In aspero’ seems to mean ‘in a coin rubbed clean’ [of rust]. | ⁴³ ‘Ne multa’: that is, ‘ne multa dicam’. The phrase was regularly abbreviated.

Translation:

Greetings, my noble and distinguished friend.

Having acquired an old Arabic coin, of which I believe there are very few in existence, I immediately thought it should appear in your work *Pomponius*. For
5 if you have by chance put aside your idea of publishing *Pomponius*, you should know that we are still eagerly asking for the promised work.

And so I am sending to you an image of the coin, together with the translation of an Italian friend who claims knowledge of Arabic. If the record of the year 610 is to be believed, then to my mind everything else seems very
10 plausible. For Phocas having been killed in this year, Heraclius' rule began. But the translator's uncertainty concerns me (for he states that 'it seems to him', not that he is sure) and I very much doubt that the Arabs, particularly at this early date, used the Christian era. Do please consult the eminent Christmann, whose knowledge of Arabic studies I hear praised. First show him the coin without the
15 translation, so he can have no preconceptions; after you have had his opinion, then let him see the translation. Whatever he says, as you love me, write carefully. If the matter seems worthwhile to you, send the coin to Casaubon in England with my warmest regards, along with the drawing of the fastening seal which you had from me some time ago.

20 In the eighth volume of Baronio, under the year 627, there are some coins depicted, and the one he placed second is rather like ours, whether as regards the younger or the older Heraclius, the type of clothing, and the pin or knot on the right shoulder. The crosses are missing from our coin, perhaps because Arabs not Christians struck it, and the ornament of the head of the
25 older emperor seems to differ. But things such as these are not permanent features, and often the rust of age changes the appearance of those things which when cleaned do not differ at all. In brief, when once the number of the year 610 is sure, then all the rest will be clear and certain. For this reason, this matter must be decided first of all.

30 Augsburg, 23 November 1611.

Yours, Marcus Welser.

Figure 1: Copy of Baldi's transcription in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Dupuy 583, fol. 142v.

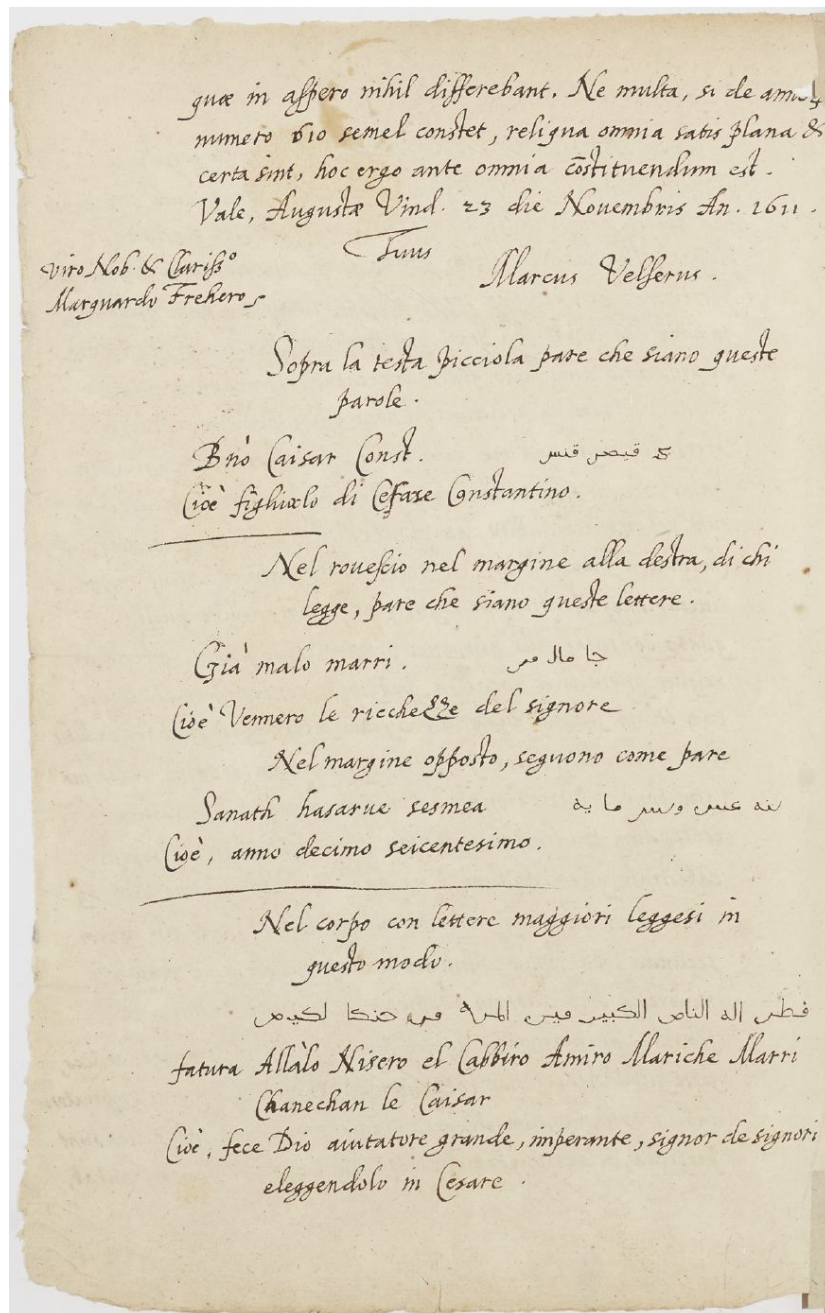




Figure 2: Heraclius and Heracleonas from Cesare Baronio, *Annales Ecclesiastici*, vol. 8, Rome, 1599, p. 289 (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, H.eccl. 33-8). The legend should read: 'DD NN HERACLIUS ET HERA. CONST. PP. AUG.'

Letter Two: Marcus Welser (Augsburg) to Marquard Freher (Heidelberg), 11 July 1612

Address: Viro Nobili et clarissimo Mar- / quardo Frehero Consiliario / [Electora]li Palatino, domino et / [amic]o observando. / Heidelberg.

Salve, vir nobilis et clarissime.

Serum responsum gravis et diuturna valetudo, quae me a multis iam mensibus misere exercet, excusat. Neque tamen interea tempus mihi perire passus sum.
 5 Nam ectypon nummi tui statim Urbinum misi, ad Bernardinum Baldum, cuius est prior de Heraclio coniectura, quique superioribus nundinis commentariolum *De scamillis imparibus Vitruvii* dedit, proximis *De verborum Vitruvianorum significatione* daturus est.⁴⁴ Is negat sibi quidquam, praeter id quod ex meo

⁴⁴ For the word 'ectypon', see above, note 35. For Bernardino Baldi, see above, note 19. The first of the works mentioned in the letter is: *Scamilli impares Vitruviani, a Bernardino Baldo Urbinate nova ratione explicati; refutatis priorum interpretum, Gulielmi Philandri, Danielis Barbari, Baptistae Bertani sententiis*, Augsburg, ad insigne pinus, 1612. The treatise attempts to explain the meaning of the phrase 'scamilli impares', 'unequal steps', in Vitruvius, *De architectura*, 3.4. The second work, a glossary of terms in Vitruvius, is: *De verborum Vitruvianorum significatione. Sive Perpetuus in M. Vitruvium Pollionem commentarius. Auctore Bernardino Baldo Urbinate, Guastallae Abbate. Accedit vita Vitruvii, eodem auctore*, Augsburg, ad

nummo coniecerat, liquere, aut ullam ex tuo novam lucem affulgere. Gemmarum etiam, quarum ectypa misisti, interpretationem vehementer incertam esse scribit quod litterae punctis destituantur, sine quibus, exempli gratia, scire nequeat an primus qui occurrit character ۛ pro ن 'n', ب 'b', ل 'l', ت 'th' aut denique pro ث accipiendus sit. Sibi tamen videri inscriptiones sic legendas:

1. 'Allaho natretre selimo'. 'Deus fortitudo est hominis perfecti', sive 'Deus fortitudo eius perfecta'.

2. 'Billahi natretre lam cossera'. 'In Deo fortitudo eius non frangetur'.

3. 'Tecum in eo sit Deus'. Arabica non ascripsit.

Sed longe aliter Didacus Urea, Regius Mediolani Arabicae linguae interpres, primam gemmam legit, 'Lallahi naphseh Salnatsar'.⁴⁵ 'Deo' (aut si pro 'Lallahi' 'Balahi' legatur, 'in Deo', vel 'cum Deo') 'anima Salnatsar'. Addit solenne esse Turcis propria nomina annulis insculpere, cum voto et precatiuncula aliqua. Nummum tuum parum a meo differre hic quoque existimat, nisi quod in eo vocabulum لنا, id est, 'nobis', quod in meo desideretur, appareat. Nihil praeterea occurrit. Si Christmannus etiam vester silet, tum ad Casaubonum eundum censeo.⁴⁶

Pro literariis donis magnas gratias habeo. In extremo *Philoponemate* haud dubium Augustanum illum immodico elogio magis oneras quam ornas, et aemulorum invidiae exponis.⁴⁷ Electoralem quaestionem nolim nimis calidis animis agitari, ne odiorum aliquando aut saltem suspicionum inde sementis

¹² ۛ addidit supra lineam LBL ²⁵ Balahi] sic LBL ²⁹ occurrit] forte LBL

insigne pinus, 1612. Both were printed in Augsburg and dedicated to Welser. The former had appeared earlier in the year at the spring bookfair in Frankfurt; the latter was to be published at the autumn bookfair. | ⁴⁵ For Diego de Urrea, see above, note 28. | ⁴⁶ For Jakob Christmann, see above, note 23. | ⁴⁷ Welser has received: Freher, *De Statura Caroli Magni Imp. Φιλοπόννημα*, [Heidelberg], [1612]. The final lines of this tract quote a letter from Welser, although he is not named (p. 11). That the letter was his is acknowledged by the appearance of this fragment in Welser, *Opera historica et philologica, sacra et profana Nec non vita, genus, et mors auctoris nobilissimi, accurante Christophoro Arnoldo*, Nuremberg, 1682, p. 908.

35 inter inclytos Principes.⁴⁸ De cetero verum tibi fatebor, pleraque mihi huius
argumenti ante Caroli bullam obscura et fere inextricabilia videntur.

Bibliothecae nostrae praefectus monet, ex ea apud te esse a multis iam
annis codicem manuscriptum legum Longobardicarum, quam tuo commodo
remitti cupit.⁴⁹

40 Vale.

Augustae Vindelicorum, 11 die Iulii anno 1612.

Tuus,

45

Marcus Velserus.

Translation:

Greetings, my noble and distinguished friend.

My late reply is excused by the serious and lengthy illness which has wracked
me now for many months. But I have not allowed the time to go to waste. For I
5 sent an impression of your coin immediately to Bernardino Baldi in Urbino,
who proposed the earlier conjecture regarding Heraclius. Baldi published *On
the 'scamilli impares' of Vitruvius* at the spring bookfair, and will publish *On
the meaning of words in Vitruvius* at the autumn bookfair. He says that he
knows no more than he has conjectured from my coin, and that your coin
10 throws no new light on the matter. He also writes that the interpretation of the
gems (of which you sent impressions) is extremely uncertain because the letters
lack vowel-points, without which it is impossible to know, for example,
whether the first letter which arises should be read as 'n', 'b', 'i', 't' or 'th'.
However, he thinks the inscriptions should be read as follows:

15

⁴⁸ Welser seems to have received: Freher, *De electoratu S. Rom. imperii, Comitivae Palatinae Rheni antiquitus adnexo et cohaerente. Ad Cl. V. Christophorum Gewoldum I.C. et Consiliarium Ducalem Bavaricum, Epistola Responsorio*, Heidelberg, typis Gotthardi Vogelini, 1612. Freher's prefatory letter to Gewold is dated 1 April 1612. |

⁴⁹ The 'praefectus' is David Hoeschel (1556-1617), for whom see *Biographie universelle* 19, 1843-1865, p. 496; *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 13, 1881, pp. 176-77; *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 9, 1972, cols 368-69.

1. 'Allaho natrete selimo'. 'God is the strength of the perfect man', or 'God, his strength is perfect'.
2. 'Billahi natrete lam cossera'. 'In God his strength is not broken'. 20
3. 'God will be with you in that'. He did not write the Arabic next to this.

But Diego de Urrea, the professor of Arabic at Milan, read the first gemstone very differently: 'Lallahi naphseh Salnatsar'. 'To God' (or, if 'Balahi' is read instead of 'Lallahi', then 'in God' or 'with God') 'is the soul of Salnatsar'. He added that it was a religious practice among the Turks to engrave proper names on rings, with a vow and some short prayer. He also thinks that your coin differs little from mine, except that on yours the Arabic word لنا appears, that is, 'to us', which is missing from mine. Nothing else presents itself. If your Christmann is also silent, then I think you should approach Casaubon. 25

I am very grateful for the literary gifts you sent. At the end of the tract on Charlemagne, you burden rather than adorn that man from Augsburg with excessive praise, and you expose him to the envy of his rivals. I would rather the Electoral question were not debated by minds which are too crafty, lest they sometimes sow hatreds, or at least suspicions, among the renowned princes. As for the rest, I confess to you that before the bull of Charlemagne many parts of this discussion seemed obscure and almost impenetrable to me. 30

The person in charge of our library advises that you have borrowed from it for many years a manuscript of the laws of Lombardy which he would like to have returned at your convenience. Farewell. 35

Augsburg, 11 July 1612.

Yours, Marcus Welser. 40