Polonia

Estudios
Latinoamericanos

Sociedad Polaca de Estudios Latinoamericanos

ISSN 0137-3080

Original title / título original *Ona legends, tales, etc., an unpublished manuscript by E. Lucas Bridges from the manuscript remains of Martin Gusinde SVD.*

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Published originally as/ Publicado originalmente en: *Estudios Latinoamericanos*, 21 (2001), pp. 125-135.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36447/Estudios2001.v21.art8>

Estudios Latinoamericanos is a journal published by the Polish Society for Latin American Studies (Polskie Towarzystwo Studiów Latynoamerykanistycznych).

The Polish Society for Latin American Studies is scholarly organization established to facilitate research on Latin America and to encourage and promote scientific and cultural cooperation between Poland and Latin America.

Estudios Latinoamericanos, revista publicada por la Sociedad Polaca de Estudios Latinoamericanos (Polskie Towarzystwo Studiów Latynoamerykanistycznych).

Sociedad Polaca de Estudios Latinoamericanos es una asociación científica fundada con el fin de desarrollar investigaciones científicas sobre América Latina y participar en la cooperación científica y cultural entre las sociedades de Polonia y América Latina.

Ona legends, tales, etc.,
an unpublished manuscript by E. Lucas Bridges
from the manuscript remains of Martin Gusinde SVD

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To Prof. Per Denez in admiration of his selfless crusades for Brezhboneg.

PREFATORY NOTE

The present paper appeared first in the collective volume: *Breizh ha Poblou Europa / Bretagne et Peuples d'Europe / Brittany and the Peoples of Europe, Pennadou an enor da / Mélanges en l'honneur de / Articles to honor Per Denez*, edited by Herve ar Bihan, published by Hor Yezh and Klask Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes 1999, France, pp. 427-441. It appears here by permission of Professor Per Denez and Herve ar Bihan, to whom our gratitude is respectfully acknowledged.

The main text remains unchanged, but the bibliography has been slightly added to and brought up to date by the original author with the help of dr Mariusz Kairski of the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań.

A brief afterword has also been added in an attempt to answer the most frequent questions directed to me in connection with my two papers dealing with the languages of Tierra del Fuego, both now reprinted in *Estudios Latinoamericanos*.

It is my pleasant duty to thank dr Mariusz Kairski for his steady encouragement and help in my Fuegian researches. Had I only received half such encouragement at the time of going through Martin Gusinde's papers in 1981 and 1982!

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Remote as it may seem at first, Tierra del Fuego can claim a Celtic connection. When Michael D. Jones was about to set up his dream Wales, Y Wladfa, in Patagonia, just across the Magellan Straits to the north, ,.... Charles de Gaulle warned that the Celtic settlers in Patagonia must ensure

that the aboriginal inhabitants, the Araucan Indians, retained their cultural and political rights and would thereby be persuaded to support the colony" [Peter Berresford Ellis, *The Celtic Dawn*, Constable Publ., London 1993, pp. 64-65]. This quote from the great Breton activist and humanist shows how far was Charles de Gaulle „Senior" (1837-1880) ahead in his views in comparison with his better-known namesake of the 20th century. Today Tierra del Fuego is all but deserted of its aboriginal population, while the Indians of Patagonia are on the wane. How poignant to remember that it was the great Breton scholar, himself a son of a conquered people, who warned his fellow Celts to respect the rights of a people so remote in terms of geography, yet so close in terms of human experience.

The following paper is essentially an edition, with what I think is the basic bibliography, of an interesting collection of materials on the folklore of the Ona, also known as Selk'nam, one of the three main Indian nations in Tierra del Fuego. The manuscript comes from the pen of E. Lucas Bridges, the son of the Rev. Thomas Bridges (1842-1898), the well-known Yahgan/Yamana lexicographer. Both the father and the son count among the world's supreme authorities on all things Fuegian. The manuscript presented below was found by this author in the manuscript remains of Martin Gusinde SVD, the last great researcher on Fuegian peoples (a few years after his expeditions in 1916-1923 there were no Fuegians left who continued their original way of life).

The undersigned discovered Martin Gusinde's „Nachschlass" at the Anthropos-Institut, St-Augustin bei Bonn, in late 1981. However, as I was in Bonn as a Humboldt Fellow in a very different field, I had neither the time nor the money to pursue Fuegian researches as a sidetrack, even though I was fully aware of the extreme importance of the papers. A preliminary report, describing the papers, was first accepted as important, and then declared valueless by the same journal, and the ROLEX project based on them met similar fate (see Bibliography). Following a rather cool reception in Bonn, the entire matter was given a truly Arctic (in terms of temperature) welcome in Norway, where this author had to hibernate for over a dozen years, suffering unemployment, neglect, and worst of all, the infuriatingly patronising attitude of the pure-blood Nordics of the self-proclaimed „world's richest country" (needless to say, moneywise only).

It was only after my return to Poland in October 1992 that I could continue working in my fields of interest, and to bring out various papers prepared during the long hibernation just to fill up the time and preserve sanity.

This paper, being essentially the edition of an unknown manuscript, is limited in apparatus criticus to the barest minimum. The complete text of the preliminary report on M. Gusinde's papers, submitted to the XL volume of *Lingua Posnaniensis*, will give full references to the books and papers necessary for placing Martin Gusinde's papers in the proper context.

I realize that being officially a linguist, I could and indeed should be expected to provide a broader scientific framework for the manuscript presented below. Unfortunately, I could not do it, and for a very simple reason - none of the Ona grammars and dictionaries (listed in the preliminary report) were available to me at either Bonn or Norway (not to mention Poland), and I had no financial possibilities for field research in Fireland. I think that while I consider it my responsibility

to make the manuscript available, I can hope that my elders and betters in Fuegian studies will know what to do with it.

It is my pleasant duty to thank The Anthropos-Institut at St. Augustin: Father Josef Henninger who was the first to tell me about Martin Gusinde's papers, Father E. J. Luzbetak - then the Director - for permission to conduct the archive research and to publish the Fuegian findings, Mr. Hans Keuthmann who helped me to go through the papers, Dr. Ursula Hahn the Librarian of the Anthropos-Institut at the time I was in Bonn, and last but not least, to Mrs. Birgit Lenz-Volland for her unfailing help in locating the rare Fuegiana in the uncatalogued parts of the Anthropos library.

I am also gratefully indebted to Prof. Johannes Wilbert for placing a complete set of his South American oral literature collection at my disposal. Over a decade later, I still do believe I will have the chance of using it fully some day.

It is with ever-fresh gratitude that I recall the never-failing help of Miss Kathleen Cann, then the Archivist to the Bible Society, London, without whom so many of my works would never have a chance of materialising. In this case, I thank her for a complete copy of the Bible Society's papers, connected with the Rev. Thomas Bridges and the Fuegian Mission.

My final thanks are to the *Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung* in Bonn-Bad Godesberg, whose Fellowship in 1981-1983 enabled me to visit the Anthropos-Institut and discover Martin Gusinde's papers.

All but a few Fuegian aborigines now remain, their languages and cultures being yet another victim of the white Christian man's greed, stupidity and genocidal racism. Let us hope that Breton in particular, and the Celtic languages in general, shall not follow those whom Charles de Gaulle „Senior“ wanted to protect a hundred and thirty years ago.

MARTIN GUSINDE'S NACHSCHLASS: FUEGIAN PAPERS

Since my main assignment under the Humboldt Fellowship was in an entirely different field, I could ill afford to give Martin Gusinde's papers the time and care they deserved. They remained untouched since Gusinde's death in 1969, and as I saw them, they formed - literally - a roomful of papers, photographs, and negatives, lumped together with no order or arrangement.

Their physical volume is simply staggering. It has taken several days just to „sift through“ the collection and separate the major Fuegiana, and more items kept turning up until the last day of my work in the archive. I am certain that the most of the papers dealing with Tierra del Fuego have been check-listed in my notes and in the forthcoming preliminary report, but I am equally convinced that much more will turn up when a systematic, page-by-page survey of the entire collection is undertaken. To give one example, who could expect that a manuscript dictionary of the Ona/Selk'nam language, running up to well over 2000 entries, would be packed together with Gusinde's private letters and family papers?

The Fuegian papers in the collection cover all the three languages of Fireland: Yahgan/Yamana, Ona/Selk'nam, and Alakaluf (the latter is also known as Halakwulup, but this name does not

appear in the collection). Each language is represented by voluminous glossaries on cards, or in notebooks so large that they well deserve the name „dictionaries”. The Yahgan/Yamana and Ona/Selk'nam manuscript materials have been collected by Gusinde himself. The Alakaluf papers, besides seven vocabularies taken down by Gusinde, contain two more, at least one of which - dated 1915 and compiled by someone named R.D. Benore of Punta Arenas - seems to be completely unknown.

The existence of „something” known as Haush, Aush, or Eastern Ona, and variously claimed to be a separate language or a dialect of Ona/Selk'nam, has not escaped Gusinde's attention. His papers include a collection of notes on what he called „Haush”, and its distinctive features as compared with Ona/Selk'nam.

It seems clear from the collection that Gusinde intended to write a comprehensive grammar of the Ona/Selk'nam language. The relevant papers here are 34 skeleton chapters, each containing words and sentences illustrating one particular aspect of the language (nouns, verbs, pronouns, etc.).

Besides purely linguistic materials, the collection contains a great variety of other items, like various papers (manuscripts, typed or printed) by other authors on all aspects of Tierra del Fuego. The names of the authors of those papers read like a who's who of Fuegian studies: F. Lahille, W. Beccera, A. Whiteside, R. Lehmann-Nitsche, F. Hestermann, W. Koppers, J. Williams, E. Lucas Bridges, E.M. Hornbostel, and many more. Together with Gusinde's own notebooks, these papers add to a comprehensive collection discussing almost all the aspects of the aboriginal Fuegian civilization.

I realize that the above is just a bird's eye-view of the collection, but I cannot go into details here, if only for reasons of space. The division of the collection, and its topical parts, are discussed in more details in my preliminary report, which I still hope will see the light some time.

„ONA LEGENDS, TALES, ETC.” - DESCRIPTION OF THE MANUSCRIPT

The manuscript titled *Ona legends, tales, etc.* fills nine sheets sized approximately 21 x 29 cm, with between 21 and 25 lines to a page. It is signed „S.L. Bridges” at the end of the last page, and after comparing it with the other manuscripts and signatures in letters, I think it is in Lucas Bridges's own handwriting. The top right corner of the first page shows the name „Lucas Bridges” in Gusinde's handwriting, followed by an (a) in parentheses which is underlined twice. The collection is not dated, and gives no obvious hint as to its date of origin. Clipped together with it there is a typed letter from Museo Mitre to Gusinde, dated Buenos Aires 16.09.1925; however, as the subject matter seems totally unrelated, and the letter is addressed to Gusinde at Mödling, it cannot be of help in dating the manuscript.

The text itself is not clearly divided. It opens with four tales, none of them titled but still with obvious beginnings and ends, and follows with a collection of notes on various Ona matters

without any division. All the Ona names are written in the so-called Yahgan phonetic alphabet created by the Rev. Thomas Bridges. On the left margins, these names are given in approximate pronunciations. In a few places, the text contains some German words, probably added by Gusinde to help getting the exact meaning of the English word.

It seems of interest to mention that Martin Gusinde's name does not appear in Lucas Bridges's classic *Uttermost Part of the Earth*, even though the book contains a separate appendix titled *Comments on the Work of Other Writers*. From the manuscript in question alone, it is clear that the two men did meet (it is known well enough that no researcher could work with the Fuegian Indians without the help of the Bridges family), and I have found a letter from Lucas Bridges (then in England) to Martin Gusinde (then in Austria), dated 20.07.1928, in which L. Bridges writes about the Indians with whom Gusinde seems to have been working in the field. I think that more materials dealing with Gusinde's work in Tierra del Fuego should be still in the hands of the present generation of the Bridges family in Argentina.

In the following section of this paper, I shall give the full text of the manuscript. To make it clearer, I have divided it into subject units, and added punctuation where its absence seemed obvious.

„ONA LEGENDS, TALES, ETC.” - THE TEXT BY LUCAS BRIDGES

Hamn is a ghost. Ordinary men cannot see it, but doctors can. Ordinary men can hear it. It comes with tidings of fights or deaths and hovers about at night round the Ona camp. Men have been somewhat hurt with it, yet the nearest description of it is that it looks like flour and shows the hearts of those who have died.

When a dog dies, they may put it down to a fox doctor, *afc k'coun*¹, fox's witchcraft.

* * *

Long ago Cuen, the Sun, and Cerra the moon were man and wife, till the moon began to think that she was equal to the man. Then the sun smote her in the face and would have killed her, but she ran away. He chased her [*End of Page 1*] and she jumped off a cliff with him after her, and started to drift round and round the world without going down till Com'pe, a great doctor, wanted to get married but his married (*sic*) but his sweetheart would have nothing to do with him as she was so shy with the sun and the moon looking on, so Com'pe told them to go down, and they did, but soon came up again. Since they have steadily been getting lazier, spending more time down and less time up. The Sun is still cross with the Moon and still chases her, but he cannot catch her, for they are never seen together. By and by Com'pe wanted to marry a second wife Oclta Okricin's sister²,

1 Marginal gloss: *as k'youn*.

2 Marginal gloss: the name in the Bridges script.

very beautiful to look upon. Okricin was a fine young fellow, tall, slender, white and a good hunter, but he did not want to give his sister to Comípe [*End of Page 2*] to be his second wife, because he loved her very much.

Comípe got vexed and turned him into the screech owl fec³, and told him he should no longer eat guanaco meat but mice, and should hide in old trees so as not to see the sun. Then Comípe went to Oclta⁴, but she would have nothing to do with him, she was so angry with him for having changed her brother, so he got wild [*and, PK*] said: „you shall be black a [= *and ?*, *PK*] naked, you shall have no clothes or fur-feathers, you shall go about at night and not in the day. people shall be afraid to see you, and if they do see you they will get sick and die.”

* * *

3 young Ona were with us one day when a bat⁵ fluttered close to our faces; they were very much alarmed and said that they would die or have misfortune.

During the next year 2 died and [*End of Page 3*] one lost his father, brother and sister. A thing like this of course tends to strengthen the Ona belief in their stories.

* * *

Kaeisn⁶ was a man from the frozen South. So cold is his country that he could find no water, it was frozen; so the marrow in his bones dried up. He was a quarreller and a strong wrestler. He came to Ona land and met Kiaiyesk⁷. They started to wrestle furiously. Kiaiye, sk got him hold by the throat with one hand and by the back of his head with the other; and put out such force that he gave him a tap beneath and a flat heall (hit)⁸ with his right hand, and with his left left a white path on the throat.

Kaeisn⁹ took hold of Kiaiyecek round the middle and twisted his back so that Kiaiyecek the black shag stands as though he had a broken back. Kaeisn has changed his *mause*¹⁰ to *bareaj*¹¹, the large vulture. He is the [*End of Page 4*] doctor of the South wind and it is at his command the snow comes.

3 Marginal gloss: *wol sit*.

4 The name is in the Bridges script, I follow the previous marginal gloss.

5 Text gloss: *Fledermaus*.

6 This is a marginal gloss, in which a letter similar to an „f” is superimposed on the „s”; the name in the text is in the Bridges script.

7 This is a marginal gloss, the name in the text is in the Bridges script.

8 His insertion is in the text above the word „heall”, *PK*.

9 This is a marginal gloss of the same name in the Bridges script. but note the extra vowel, *PK*.

10 *Sic* ! underlined in the original. Could it be a „name” ? *PK*.

11 Marginal gloss: *kourkai*.

* * *

When Kamsuat was a lad, he was a Kloketen, and he went on a long journey by himself. He went very far away northward, and when he came back, he told the people that in the country where he had been the leaves of the forest were green in summer, red in autumn, fell off in winter and budded (*sic*) in spring. The people laughed at Kamsuat and called him a liar, for at that time all trees were evergreen, and the people could not believe that there was any other hue. Kamsuat went off angry and came back in the shape of the first parrakeet with the green leaves of summer on his back, and the red leaves of autumn on his tail and breast; and now he perches on the branches, and when they are green he paints them red with [End of Page 5] his breast; and when people pass, he makes a great noise and is supposed to cry. „What did I tell you before, when you would not believe me ? But now you see that what I said was true.”

Kamsuat is now called Kernpm¹².

* * *

The noisy little birds are also supposed to be very spiteful in their twitterings, and make great fun of the unsuccessful hunter when he is returning from his chase, boasting of the great deeds they did when they were men; they are also supposed to warn guanaco of the approach of the hunter.

* * *

Geip, sparrow and *üka*¹³, the robin redbreast, when they were men, had rather a serious quarrel and *üka* seized Geip by the throat with one hand and by the back of his head with the other, thus giving him a white mark on his [End of Page 6] throat and a top (? PK) knot on his head.

* * *

These lads are able to shift for themselves, they are called Kloketen till they become men. During this time they must not play or laugh much, but learn to hunt and make arrows.

* * *

Ceip¹⁴, with a mighty effort, got away from his enemy and gave him a blow on the nose that caused the blood to run down over his breast, and that stain he could never get rid of.

¹² This is a marginal gloss, the name in the text is in the Bridges script.

¹³ Marginal gloss: *suko*.

¹⁴ This is a marginal gloss, the name in the text is in Bridges script.

* * *

The Ona believe that all the stars were once persons; but they only have the names and histories of some 20 or 30. Insects, birds, all animals except foxes and dogs, mountains, cliffs, rocks, almost every thing that has a name except thorns¹⁵ and smaller plants, were once people. The wind Sinar, for instance, was a great man; his wife was the whale Ochin, one of their daughters [*End of Page 7*] Simere ctam is the humming-bird (kolibri)¹⁶. I have seen an Ona pick up a small beetle from a path and put it on a branch¹⁷ so that it should not be trodden on, because it was a good doctor when it was a man.

* * *

When two large companies of Ona meet, on fairly friendly terms they often run a race of from two to six miles. All the men join in, from 14 to 40 years of age, unless they are sick or in mourning. They do not have any prizes, and even the last keeps on till the end of the race. They also wrestle, company against company, but only a pair at a time, as form (*sic*) as one pair goes down another pair are ready to start. The men form an inner ring round the wrestlers, and the women and children around and side. They wrestle on soft ground, so that no one shall be hurt. If two men find they are fairly equal, they go on wrestling [*End of Page 8*] with short intervals till one or other has all enough and says so; the other is considered the victor.

* * *

They play shooting arrows among themselves but - never (*original's stress, PK*) company against company. A strong man will shoot an arrow 200 yards, but will not shoot at guanaco more than 40 yards away. The One have splendid sight, and follow the track of a man over camp and stony ground in a manner it is not possible to explain.

* * *

They are very much afraid of sickness they believe the doctors give them but have no fear of dying fighting¹⁸; they are dreadfully revengeful, and few men of 30 have not committed one murder at least.

S.L. Bridges

15 This word is rather unclear in the manuscript.

16 this is the manuscript insertion, not this editor's remark.

17 Facing this line there is a marginal gloss reading „Butter-fly?“.

18 These words are faced by an „!“ on the margin.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A minor point first: Lucas Bridges's first Christian name was Stephen („S" in the signature ending the text). He preferred to use its Spanish equivalent „Esteban", usually just the initial, as evident from the title page of *Uttermost Part of the Earth*. To the readers of the latter, almost every section of *Ona legends, tales, etc.* will recall numerous similar passages in E. Lucas Bridges's autobiography. Since I am primarily concerned with bringing this text to the attention of those better qualified than myself to evaluate it, I prefer not to go into such comparisons.

The text, as it now stands, is obviously a „raw material" towards some larger work. We do not know whether it has been continued or enlarged after the present version was handed over to Martin Gusinde. J. M. Cooper's bibliography (p. 72) lists only two manuscripts by Lucas Bridges, both of them being Ona vocabularies. As far as I could check, no more papers of this kind seem to be extant in Gusinde's manuscripts - but here I have to repeat that a systematic study of the entire collection may well yield many more unexpected treasures.

The few actual tales included in the manuscript are so short and terse that I hesitate to attempt at motive indices to them. Some of these tales resemble similar ones included in Gusinde's *Die Feuerland-Indianer* now available in English renderings by Johannes Wilbert; some others seem - to me - totally different. Comparative indexing of mythological motives is not my field, and I prefer not to touch it. Still, the main similarities and differences between our MS and Gusinde's published collection will instantly be obvious to anyone who has read both. The myths of the sun and the moon, some elements of bird-myths, tantalizing hints about the Kloketens, the superstitions connected with the bats, are some of such self-apparent points. One might wish Lucas Bridges included at least one full star-tale, of which according to the text there were „20 or 30" ! Only a few stories published by Gusinde and translated into English by J. Wilbert do contain the motive of men turning into stars.

On the other hand, the few glimpses of the Ona daily life - the bat superstition, the races, the wrestling matches, passing remarks about guanaco hunting and the path-finding abilities of the Ona - give us a direct, if only too scant, insight into the world of the Ona which is no more. I think that the manuscript deserves being printed if only for these few lines, which will speak volumes to all those who know Lucas Bridges's *Uttermost Part of the Earth*.

As I could check in London in 1985, the printing types of the Bridges script got destroyed during the war. No other fount is known to exist. The Ona, the Yahgans, and the Alakaluf are all but gone, too, with the world of linguists looking indifferently as the last people who may know bits and pieces of spoken Ona or Yahgan die out before our very eyes. With the thousands of words, phrases and sentences suddenly available in Gusinde's papers, we now have the unique and last chance to make a linguistic survey of Tierra del Fuego with the help of its last surviving natives. This opportunity will never repeat - never. I want to place here a call for help - any help - towards such a project.

Let me conclude this paper on a personal note. My interest in Tierra del Fuego originated from

a chance purchase - in late 1979- of a second-hand copy of Lucas Bridges's *Uttermost Part of the Earth*. As so many others, I too was captured by that book from its very first page, and have been trying to collect various materials on the Fuegian Indians, and the Rev. Thomas Bridges, ever since. Therefore, I regard it as more than a simple coincidence that my first published paper in this field is a presentation of Lucas Bridges's own manuscript. It is my fervent hope that this paper, when printed, will fall into the hands of one of the members of the Bridges family, or someone who knows one of them. The Bridges family, and they alone, can give answers to almost all the questions concerning the various manuscript vocabularies of Ona and Yahgan, and very likely of Alakaluf as well. I shall welcome any letters which might help me to get in touch with the Bridges family and those interested in *Tierra del Fuego*. The many questions posed by what we now know about Ona, Yahgan and Alakaluf still wait to be answered.

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ADDENDUM

The Bridges script referred to throughout the paper is the script created by the Rev. Thomas Bridges for the Yahgan language, also known as Yamana, the main language of Tierra del Fuego. David Diringer, in his invaluable *The Alphabet. A key to the History of Mankind* [1st ed. London 1948] describes this script in the last chapter, „Conclusion”. In the subsequent, two-volume edition of *The Alphabet*, which I know but have no access to, the *Bridges script* is given in one of the plates in vol. II.

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- Vol. I pp. 527-528: Tierra del Fuego, general
- Vol. I pp. 529-532: Aonik'enk or Tehuelche
- Vol. I pp. 535-537: Selknam („Ona” in other sources)
- Vol. II pp. 904-908: Qawasqar („Alakaluf” in other sources)
- Vol. II pp. 1123-1126: Yahgan or Yamana.

NOTE: Haush or Eastern Ona, whatever it was, is not listed separately by Fabre, which may only mean it is extinct by now.

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McEWAN Colin, Luis A. BORRERO, Alfredo PRIETO (Eds.), 1997 - *Patagonia, Natural History, Prehistory and Ethnography at the Uttermost End of the Earth*, British Museum Press, London. This volume is an excellent introduction to all aspect of Fuegian studies, particularly to someone who has no access to Martin Gusinde's monumental work „Die Feuerland-Indianer” or more recent works published in Chile and Argentina. Its bibliography, pp. 186-196, is of special interest, as it covers all the topics involved, not only linguistics.

RASPAIL Jean, 1984 - *Qui se souvient des hommes...*, Editions Robert Lafont, Paris.

RASPAIL Jean, 1990 - *Kłóć pamięta ludzi z Ziemi Ognistej*, PIW, Warszawa.

AUTHOR'S AFTERWORD

One of the questions most frequently asked me in connection with my two papers dealing with Martin Gusinde's Fuegian materials is, why have I done so little, and why have I chosen such a brief sample of what is actually available. The reasons are simple: facing no interest in my work, having no funds to copy the papers found and at the same time having to concentrate on my Humboldt project. I had to limit myself to what appeared most advisable, and still does so after two decades: listing the papers, outlining their contents, and giving a sample that was both brief, self-contained, and authored by an authority whose name could be expected to attract attention. It was hardly possible to do more, particularly when facing criticism of the kind mentioned briefly in the

After more than two decades since my first preliminary report on Gusinde's papers I still cannot understand why I was criticised for quoting statistical material from the *Ethnologue*. I stand by every word I wrote in my two papers and my two ROLEX projects.

Saving the last vestiges of the languages of Tierra del Fuego is still possible, and Martin Gusinde's papers – if properly arranged and edited – may be the project's inexhaustible source. „Qui se souvient des hommes...” of Tierra del Fuego?

And who cares, anyway?