

G. W. Leibniz, *Protogaea* (1691-93)

§20 Fish expressed in slate are from true fish, and this proves that they are not tricks of nature.

If anyone would still prefer to say that burned stone is scarcely of nature, that the mud covering the fish turned to stone either through time as a result of the nature of the material, or for some other cause, through some stone-making spirit or something else, and that metallic matter took on the measurements of the fish, or that in the beginning the mass was crude and soft, or even that afterwards it was carried out by a penetrable vapour (although these ideas may be understood less easily), I do not object, nor do I dare to suggest anything certain, except what is sufficient for us, namely that fish expressed in slate are from true fish. Both the multitude of fish contained in one and the same place, and the fact that nothing is there except fish, support my opinion. As for the pontifical crown, Luther, and I do not know what other forms people mention that are delineated in the rock of Eisleben, I regard these truly as tricks, not of nature but of human imagination, which sees armies in the haze, and recognizes in the strokes of bells or drums whatever modulations it wants. And many things are of this kind, which are exhibited to the public in the cave of Baumann, namely Moses and the ascension of Christ, and other images from stone, which you wouldn't recognize unless you were warned. The splendour of things increases according to one's faith in the miraculous, [Pr p76] but while I seem to have said that we must be astounded about marvels from our regions, that is not my own belief. But faith is greatest and undoubted in the representation of the fish of Osterode and Eisleben, and one must immediately acknowledge not only the fish but also the genus of the fish and the true size and symmetry of its parts, and the scales, and everything else. The composition of the area itself constitutes a great argument. For we have said that there is a sloping vein of slate containing fish, (if I may speak in the terminology of our miners); that is, in a nearly horizontal stratum jutting out by several miles, as it now readily apparent, the fish of the same lake were pressed by a mass falling on top of them. Sizeable lakes certainly exist even now in the vicinity of Eisleben. And there you can marvel at marine fish in rock, not far from Seeburg, where there is a vast lake of salt water; and fountains of salt waters show that there are repositories of salt under the Earth, of which the most famous is the one that flows from Halle, in Saxony, eight miles from Eisleben, which some have supposed was once the cause of war between the Chatti and the Hermundures.⁷