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Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, ed., *La Communication en Europe de l'âge classique au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Éditions Belin, 2014). 356 pp. 33€ (cl). ISBN-10: 2701182522.

Review by Jill Walshaw, University of Victoria.

This book treats the theme of communication in the early modern period in all its aspects, from physical infrastructure, to a variety of vectors (letters, learned journals, institutions and meeting places), to the travels of a host of protagonists, including scholars and journalists, pastors and priests, diplomats and princes. Although France holds a certain pride of place, the focus is resolutely European and even global, with trans-Atlantic communications included in more than one instance. It builds on some twenty years of intensified study of the process of communication demonstrating that the focus has moved away from the more abstract study of the diffusion and circulation of ideas towards a perspective that prioritizes the *practice* of communication, identifying individuals and following their communicative strategies as they negotiated space at the local, regional, national and international level. Project director Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire argues that by taking this original, yet practical approach, his team has identified a “European Age of Communication” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (p. 6), an age that gave birth to a Europe that was startlingly modern in its communicative mechanisms and networks.

It is significant that Beaurepaire speaks of the work of his team, for this is not simply an edited volume of solicited chapters or of individual contributions. *La communication en Europe* is the result of a four-year collaborative research project under the umbrella of the CITERE program (“Circulations, Territoires et Réseaux en Europe de l'âge classique aux Lumières”), funded by the Agence nationale de la Recherche (ANR) and supported by the Institut universitaire de France.[1] Its seven chapters and approximately 350 pages are the work of an international team of twenty scholars. Thirteen of the group are based at French institutions, with six other Europeans (from Italy, Belgium, Sweden and Finland) and one anglo-American, Kenneth Loiselle of Trinity University in San Antonio, whose work on friendship and networking in the eighteenth century makes him a good addition to the team.[2] Thus, these are the *authors* of the book, not *contributors* to it. Two chapters represent more individual endeavors, but the remaining five are co-written by an average of five scholars each, under the direction of one or more chapter coordinators. The coherence achieved in this exercise is, I would argue, somewhat limited: with individual studies neither completely independent nor blended into homogenous chapters, it retains some of the character of a collection of individual projects. Nevertheless, and entirely apart from its scholarly achievements, *La communication en Europe* provides an intriguing publication model in an age when research funding seems increasingly targeted to collaborative efforts.

One of the most prominent features of *La communication en Europe* is its incorporation of a large number of original figures, primarily maps. Indeed, visual content occupies most or all of seventy-two pages, approximately twenty percent of the main body of the book. While this cartographic leaning recalls two key historical atlases of communication before and during the French Revolution, the atlases are in a different category.[3] They are indispensable if relatively brief reference works with shorter text segments, compared to the wider-ranging collection of in-depth, archivally-based case studies

represented by the Beaurepaire volume. And, compared with the standard monograph, the maps here are used not just as illustrations but as an integral part of the authors' arguments.

The book aptly begins with the infrastructure of communication—roads in particular—examined from the perspective of travel. Stéphane Blond coordinates the first chapter, where, in a series of case studies (for example, on the emergence of travel maps as a genre, on a travel guide written by the Protestant Louis Dutens (1730–1812), and on the work-related travels of military engineer Jean Thomas) we perceive an itinerary of key destinations according to contemporaries. Dutens' guide was clearly aimed at a nervous audience, with tables enumerating expenses, exchange rates, and various units of measurement, and advising travelers to calculate travel times carefully (pp. 23, 26–29). And the peregrinations of the elite remind us of the social importance of hubs such as the town of Spa, where an ever-increasing number of visitors flocked for the benefits of being seen as much as for their health (p. 42).

Chapters two and three work well together, addressing the communication networks of the scientific community. The authors of chapter two (coordinated by Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire) go beyond the classic notion of the "Republic of Letters" to focus on individual scholarly strategies, including personal contacts, scientific collaboration, and publishing networks. While traditional correspondence continued to be important, the development of the periodical press and of learned journals in particular was key to building multi-faceted communications, and the increasing reach of scholarly publishing networks emerges clearly from the maps. Chapter three (coordinated by Jeanne Peiffer and Patrice Bret) focuses on the importance of translation to the continued expansion of scholarly communication. As international readership grew and translation became more common, journals that failed often did so for linguistic reasons. On the other hand, as scientists sought to learn about work being done in foreign countries, translation paved the way towards more specialized journals and a narrowing of disciplines (p. 104). As in chapter one, the case studies included here focus on the practices of contemporaries rather than the history of institutions. Smaller centers emerge as important because of the presence of a particular scholar or learned journal, while more established universities barely register in the networks of correspondents.

Half-way through the book, in chapter four, we are invited by Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire and Héroïse Hermant to take a step back and consider early modern communication using the notion of "dispositif," a plan or mechanism with many individual parts developed in order to overcome an obstacle or to achieve a goal. In the context of the authors' work, such mechanisms are seen to exist where the goal is to circulate illegal literature, or to overcome institutional or social barriers. This chapter focuses on several case studies in a laboratory-type atmosphere, as we examine how the actors perceived the communicative tools at their disposal and how they were inventive and strategic in their actions. For example, Florence Catherine demonstrates how the Swiss *philosophe* Albrecht von Haller used different avenues of communication to defend his position with respect to La Mettrie and Voltaire (p. 194), and Antony McKenna undertakes a similar project with respect to the intellectual quarrel between Pierre Bayle and Pierre Jurieu (p. 202).

The chapters that follow build on this careful attention to individual agency in case studies while exploring further aspects of communication. Chapter five, co-authored by Emmanuelle Chapron and Anne Saada, engages with scholars of book history, examining the library not in an institutional sense but in its relationship with booksellers and consumers and with intellectual and political milieux. Comparing readership, book acquisition, and reputation of libraries in the cities of Florence (with its deep-seated political and cultural foundations) and Göttingen (in contrast, "lacking any scholarly tradition"), in particular, the authors suggest that the centrality of the library in the eighteenth century was not a given, but rather, a deliberate attempt on the part of the institution to insert itself into the scholarly urban landscape. Chapter six, by Daniel Droixhe, treats us to a micro-historical account of a 1760s police investigation which aimed to discover the inner workings of a network of illegal books in

Paris. The secret agents sent in to round up the distributors of *livres clandestins* were surprised to find that most of the guilty parties—the criminals responsible for undermining public opinion—were women (p. 267).

Finally, chapter seven, coordinated by Kenneth Loïselle, Gilles Montègre, and Charlotta Wolff, returns to the domain of interpersonal correspondence to focus specifically on the emotional and self-reflective aspects of communication. The social import of letter-writing, the concrete materiality of the act, and the behaviors and norms that it brought with it, were experienced by all correspondents, from Philip II as he wrote to his daughters (p. 304) to the friendly correspondence between a parish priest and a physician in Dauphiné (p. 323), marking it as one of the quintessential practices of early modern elite culture. In the end, the collaborative model used here, with co-authored chapters and multiple case studies, speaks to the central objective of the work to use concrete instances and the lives of ordinary individuals to shed light on a complex process of change, as Jean Boutier points out in his lucid conclusion (p. 344).

In one sense, this book will be of interest primarily to specialists. Scholars of the emergence of the scientific disciplines, of the multitude of overlapping intellectual exchanges of the eighteenth century, and of the educated elite across Europe and beyond, will certainly zero in with delight on one or another of the research findings presented in this densely packed and tremendously useful collection (and it is indeed unfortunate, for this reason, that the work lacks an index). In that same vein, it is important to recognize what this book is and what it is not. It is largely unconcerned with the non-elite, with the varied means of communication among the wider population, both urban and rural. The volume is presented as a “bilan d'étape,” a first stage in a longer-term project. The implication is that future expansion will address how European networks engaged with the challenge of extra-European communications (p. 8), but an equally fruitful avenue could see the creativity and cartographic expertise of such a team harnessed to examine the “age of communication” from below, its impact on broader society rather than on remarkable individuals. Without using the well-worn image of a “trickle-down” model, the nature of communications was also changing in popular quarters in this period, just as it was among the educated elite.

That said, in both its method and its observations, this work highlights a number of key elements that will be of interest to all scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The theme of Protestantism appears as a leitmotif throughout the book, the result of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and the creation of an educated, well-connected and resourceful Protestant diaspora throughout Europe. And while Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire is adamant that the goal is not to paint a “nostalgic and narcissistic” image of harmonious communication across borders (p. 5), the blending of case studies demonstrates how individual relationships and networks worked to create a space for communication which did, in fact, go beyond institutional and political boundaries. Still owing something, therefore, to the older model of the international “Republic of Letters,” the association with particular institutions and structures has been replaced by a much more nuanced view of communicative strategies and objectives, a dynamic picture worthy of an era of change.

NOTES

[1] <http://citere.hypotheses.org/>. The program has resulted in five other publications since 2010, and Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, who acts as the program's coordinator in addition to his faculty appointment at the University of Nice Sophia-Antipolis, is listed first as editor for three of them.

[2] Kenneth Loïselle, *Brotherly Love: Freemasonry and Male Friendship in Enlightenment France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[3] From the Éditions de l'ÉHÉSS, the series *Atlas de la Révolution française* selected "Routes et communications" as its first volume of ten back in 1987: Serge Bonin and Claude Langlois, *Atlas de la Révolution française. 1. Routes et communications* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1987); more recently, Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire and Silvia Margazalli co-wrote the *Atlas de la Révolution française, Circulation des hommes et des idées, 1770-1804* (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2010).

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