

Mapping the Latin Enlightenment¹

Latin Enlightenment: A Contradiction in Terms?



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A reading of the French *philosophes* could lead one to believe that ‘Latin Enlightenment’ is, indeed, a contradiction in terms; that Latin literature was a fast-fading footnote by at least the middle of the eighteenth century. In his preface to the *Encyclopédie* Jean le Rond D’Alembert conceded the usefulness of Latin as a scientific language but – prematurely, if not mischievously – declared its use to be in general decline. The cultivation of literary, humanistic Latin by modern writers was, according to D’Alembert, ‘ridiculous’.² This was not, in fact, a new view in France. Seventeenth-century style-setter Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, a partisan and imitator of the *anciens*, expressed contempt for modern Latin poetry in his letters to Brosette.³ But if D’Alembert poured scorn on the Latin scientific verse of Jesuit physicist, Roger Boscovich, whom he abhorred, he was perhaps not quite so indifferent to the judgment of contemporary Latin scholars as his public scoffing would suggest.⁴

Recent scholarship in intellectual history has treated us to assorted national and cultural Enlightenments (conservative, moderate, radical, religious, Counter-, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish ...) and most recently to a ‘Super-Enlightenment’. Our project and website offers, we hope, the first lineaments of a Latin one.⁵ We should clarify, however, that its primary purpose is not so much to weigh into contemporary debates about the extent or meaning of ‘Enlightenment’ as to explore and map largely uncharted territory in the intellectual and literary history of the long eighteenth century (c. 1650-1800). This territory has been neglected or underestimated for the simple reason that it is *in Latin*. We submit that its neglect must lead at best to an incomplete, at worst a distorted, view of the geography of science and scholarship in this period. While scholarly lip service is sometimes paid to Latin’s continuing function as a learned *lingua franca* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Latin works of all but the most conspicuous philosophers, scientists, and scholars languish unread. We simply cannot assume that Latin writers routinely resisted or even blindly echoed ‘mainstream’ Enlightenment views. Sometimes they were carrying on their own, private, conversations – and it is on a sample of these that we invite you to eavesdrop through our website.

² I thank Hans Helander for bringing this passage to my attention. See also, *inter alia*, D’Alembert’s article ‘Collège’ in the third volume of the *Encyclopédie*. On the other hand, he was not entirely immune to the charms of Latin rhetoric, and published a translation of Tacitus in 1758.

³ E.g. his letter to Brossette of 6 October 1701. Some neo-Latin poets aspired or dared to translate Boileau’s works into Latin, e.g. François Gacon, discussed by Christopher Allen in ‘Boileau’s *Art poétique* Latinized’ in *Latinity and Alterity in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Yasmin Haskell and Juanita Ruys (Tempe, AZ: 2010), 79-96.

⁴ He was surprisingly sensitive to criticisms aired in then unpublished Latin verses by Dutch physician, and fellow member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, Gerard Nicolaas Heerkens (on whom, see below).

⁵ E.g. Roy Porter and Mikulás Teich, *The Enlightenment in National Context*; Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment and Enlightenment Contested*; John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2003); David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment* (Princeton, 2008); Franco Venturi, *Settecento Riformatore*, &c; Jacob Soll (ed.), “The Republic of Letters between Renaissance and Enlightenment,” Special Issue of E-journal, *Republics of Letters*, published by Stanford University (2003); Daniel Edelstein’s digital archive of the ‘Super-Enlightenment’, at Stanford University: <http://collections.stanford.edu/supere/>.

Italia erudita et illuminata

Many eighteenth-century Latin texts may be downloaded from digital libraries now proliferating on the Internet.⁶ We have at best a partial vision, though, of their wider contexts and of the remoter connections that existed between them. In particular, scant attention has been paid to the *social* dimensions of scholarly and scientific exchange in Latin in this period, to communities of Latin users and their local and international networks, to their ideological allegiances, and to their intersections/ coincidence with vernacular literary and scientific communities. It is only by surveying the Latin cultures of Italy, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Britain, Croatia, Hungary, Sweden, Poland, Spain, Portugal ... not to mention the New World and Asia, that we will begin to appreciate the more subtle topographical contours of learning and science in the long eighteenth century, in both national *and* international context.

It seems fitting to begin our mapping enterprise with Italy, not just because Italy was the birthplace of Latin and of Renaissance humanism, but also because that country's relative benightedness vis-à-vis Enlightenment France has been proverbial since the reign of the *philosophes*.⁷ Of course Italy was no more culturally cohesive in the eighteenth century than it was in the Renaissance.⁸ Different centres and communities were swept up by diverse intellectual passions. We note the continued importance of Padua for medicine (e.g. Giambattista Morgagni) but also for philology (Jacopo Facciolati and Egidio Forcellini). Rome was, predictably, pre-eminent in antiquarian studies but was also the centre of a Renaissance of Latin scientific poetry engaging with the latest experimental research (especially in the ambit of the Jesuit Collegio Romano)⁹; Venice was the first Italian city to be 'electrified' but in some other respects remained a backwater. Naples had always hosted philosophical rebels, from Giordano Bruno and Tommaso Campanella in the sixteenth century to the freethinking 'Academy of the Investigators' in the seventeenth; from the middle of the eighteenth it distinguished itself in progressive political economy.¹⁰ But a figure such as Giambattista Vico exemplifies the enduring influence of Latin humanism in Enlightenment Naples: he was the author, after all, not

⁶ See, e.g., the wonderful CAMENA: Lateinische Texte der Frühen Neuzeit, hosted by the Library of the University of Mannheim: <http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/camenahtdocs/camena.html>; diverse digital projects at the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: <http://www.hab.de/bibliothek/wdb/projekte-e.htm>; and Dana F. Sutton's Analytic Bibliography of On-Line Neo-Latin Texts: <http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/bibliography/index.htm>.

⁷ See especially Françoise Waquet, *Le modèle français et l'Italie savante* (Rome, 1989).

⁸ See the introduction to John Robertson, *The Case for Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680-1760* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 22-3.

⁹ See Yasmin Haskell, *Loyola's Bees: Ideology and Industry in the Jesuit Latin Didactic Poetry* (Oxford, 2003), chapter 4.

¹⁰ See especially Robertson, *The Case for Enlightenment ...* (2005).

just of the *Scienza Nuova* but also of the *Institutiones Oratoriae* and *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia*.¹¹

Given this rich and changing landscape, it would be impossible for our small team to furnish, at this early stage, anything like a comprehensive map of Latin usage in eighteenth-century Italy. Moreover, we want our website to begin to be useful before we, or indeed *you*, our readers and potential collaborators, have had time to explore even the most significant regions, institutions, individuals, genres, and publications. Rather than offering a bird's-eye view, then, we propose to take some small steps at ground level first, adopting a more serendipitous approach. We invite you to join us in following in the footsteps of a well-connected, if today relatively unknown, Latin Grand tourist. The mid-century journey through Italy of the cosmopolitan Dutch physician and Latin poet, Gerard Nicolaas Heerkens (1726-1801), will provide the first contours of our map – and, we hope, a glimmer of Enlightenment!

Gerard Nicolaas Heerkens: a Latin Boswell on the Grand Tour

Before he set foot in Italy Heerkens had already established cordial relations with some of the big names of the French Enlightenment, including Fontenelle, celebrity ‘electrician’ Jean-Antoine Nollet,¹² and Voltaire. Like his contemporary, James Boswell, Heerkens had a talent for friendship and was keenly aware that this afforded him a privileged position to observe the men and manners of his time. Like Boswell, Heerkens relished the role of behind-the-scenes commentator, but he seems also to have nurtured greater personal ambitions in both the literary and scientific spheres. Alas for poor Heerkens, his choice of language, in hindsight, was less fortunate than that of his Scottish contemporary. Heerkens was a lifelong champion of the use of Latin over its modern competitors, especially French. And his choice of Latin *verse* as vehicle even for scientific publication has removed him from view of many Enlightenment historians. In Latin verse Heerkens published many books of medical epigrams, as well as longer medical and natural-historical didactic poems; he also made pointed observations on human nature in verse satires, historical annals and ‘icons’, and a travelogue on his journey to Italy in 1759-60 comprising elegiac letters to his friends.

One of Heerkens’ few prose works is a delightfully readable four-book account of his Italian journey, the *Notabilia* (‘Noteworthy Things’). By clicking on the links you will find translated extracts from this journey, with supplementary information about the cardinals, librarians, poets, historians, antiquarians, and physicians Heerkens encountered in Italy, and their connections with Latin circles abroad. Maps of the Netherlands, Germany, and France, the locations of Heerkens’ core network, are very much work-in-progress at this stage. Our hope is that the journey will continue, in time as well as space!

¹¹ And of course we should not forget Pietro Giannone, author of the (posthumously published) ‘Discorsi storici e politici sopra gli annali di Tito Livio’.

¹² On Nollet’s own journey to Italy see Paola Bertucci, *Viaggio nel paese delle meraviglie* (Turin, 2007).

About us

Professor YASMIN HASKELL (University of Western Australia, Perth)

Yasmin is the originator and leader of the project and is working primarily on a monograph on the Latin works and networks of Heerkens (for Duckworth). She is also preparing an anthology of Latin scientific poetry from the long eighteenth century. During his first trip to Paris in 1748-9, Heerkens busied himself not just with his medical and legal studies but also with an ambitious three-book didactic poem on the 'health of learned men'. 1749 was a significant year for the genre of Latin scientific verse, especially by Jesuits. It saw the first edition of Father François Oudin's anthology of *Poemata didascalica*; it was also the year in which Italian lexicographer, Giampietro Bergantini, published the first volume in a projected series of editions of Latin poems on the arts and sciences by Jesuit authors.¹³

Dr MAURIZIO CAMPANELLI (University of Rome, La Sapienza)

Maurizio's contributions take their bearings from his census of Latin works written in eighteenth century Italy. He has so far gathered thousands of items, covering elegiac, didactic and satiric poetry, academic oratory, biography, historical and scientific prose, and antiquarianism. He is publishing a periodical survey of authors, works and topics pertaining to 'Settecento latino' in *L'Ellisse*, an Italian scholarly journal which unusually reserves space for neo-Latin literature in Italy *since* the Renaissance (<http://www.lellisette.net/>). The first three instalments have already appeared in recent issues of the journal.¹⁴

Maurizio is currently working through the Latin writings of the Arcadians, especially the three volumes of *Arcadium carmina* (Rome, 1721, 1756 and 1768) and the forty-five literary manuscripts still preserved in the archive of the Accademia d'Arcadia. The Arcadia was by far the most important literary network in eighteenth-century Italy, with extensive ramifications abroad (Spain, Portugal, Poland, France, Germany, Netherlands, etc). It is an ideal starting point for exploring relationships and strains in the Italian *Res publica litterarum* in the long eighteenth century. To date, only the Academy's Italian writings

¹³ Namely Francesco Savastano's *Botanicorum libri iv* (Venice, 1749). See Haskell, *Loyola's Bees*, Conclusion, and *ead.*, 'Didac-tech? Prolegomena to the Early Modern Poetry of Information', in *Variantology 1: On Deep Time Relations of Arts, Sciences and Technologies*, ed. Siegfried Zielinski and Silvia Wagnermeier (Cologne, 2005), 209-22.

¹⁴ Two further articles, 'Primizie antiquarie e teorie filologiche nella Roma del '700: qualche spunto dall'ee dei *Fasti Prenestini*' and 'Il *Sermo de Romana Architectura* di Fabio Devoti: un ignoto capitolo della *querelle* degli antichi e dei moderni', are forthcoming in miscellaneous volumes.

have received any significant scholarly attention.¹⁵ Within the ambit of the Latin writings of the Arcadians, Maurizio is mining a rich and hitherto unexplored vein of satire.

Finally, together with Agata Pincelli, Maurizio will appraise more thoroughly than ever before the debate(s) over the use of Latin that took place in Italy throughout the eighteenth century, involving all the major cultural centres in the peninsula. Many theoretical treatises were written on this topic both by supporters and detractors of Latin, regarding literary as well as scientific language. There is also much discussion embedded in prefaces, letters, orations and other literary and scientific texts. Reconstructing the main lines of this debate will help us appreciate how great a role Latin played in shaping Italian linguistic and literary identity during a period that regarded itself as a second Renaissance. In a century of transition and linguistic fluidity, the Italian language (and culture) faced pressure from several foreign languages, especially French. In this context Latin was often considered the best hope for achieving distinction on the European stage – without repudiating a distinctively Italian literary identity.

Dr MARIA AGATA PINCELLI (independent scholar, Rome)

Agata's main contribution to the project will be the production of a bio-bibliographical archive of Italian men and women of letters and science who used Latin as their principal medium of exchange. The availability of detailed information on Latin writing in Italy during the eighteenth century should be a significant boon for scholars hoping to understand the Latin Enlightenment in Europe more widely: Italy regarded itself, and was regarded in many countries abroad, as a touchstone of modern Latinity.

To begin with, Agata will concentrate on a prosopography of Heerkens' contacts, especially as revealed through the *Notabilia*. Following on from her recent editorial work on Italian Renaissance antiquarian writers, notably Biondo Flavio, Agata will also turn her attention to the largely untapped tradition of antiquarian literature that flourished in eighteenth-century Italy, principally in Latin.

Dr JAN WASZINK (University of Rotterdam)

Jan initially helped Yasmin piece together Heerkens' literary legacy from libraries and archives in the Netherlands (in Leiden, Zwolle, Groningen, the Hague, Haarlem, and Rotterdam). In the course of his bibliographical searches he discovered that the letters of an important eighteenth-century Dutch Latin network to which Heerkens belonged are conserved to this day at the Leiden University Library. Cornelis Walraven Vonck was a jurist, man of letters, and publishing entrepreneur who gained a reputation as an enemy of orthodox Calvinism; he later became town secretary of Nijmegen. After a new

¹⁵ Which may be confirmed by consulting 'BiGLI: Bibliografia generale della lingua e della letteratura italiana', 1991-present.

controversy there, Vonck converted to Catholicism and moved to a professorship at the University of Mannheim. Other scholars in his circle besides Heerkens include Italian historian Castruccio Bonamici, Cardinal Angelo Maria Querini, French Jansenist poet, Louis Racine, and French poet and Academician, Jean-Jacques LeFranc, Marquis de Pompidon. Vonck provides a useful point of departure for the Netherlands page of our virtual atlas. Jan hopes to produce a prosopography of Vonck's Latin network, supplementing material in the Leiden University Library with other documents and sources.

Jan has published extensively on the Dutch humanist and political author, Justus Lipsius. He is currently working on a general history of Tacitism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Dr GIOVANNI TARANTINO (International Consortium for Research in the Humanities, Ruhr University Bochum, Germany; honorary research associate, University of Western Australia)

Giovanni is an historian of early modern free thought and his current research focus outside our project is Sinophilia, Tacitism and unbelief in Enlightenment Britain. He is working towards an annotated edition of an unfinished History of England by Thomas Gordon (d. 1750), coauthor of *The Independent Whig* and *Cato's Letters* and a popular translator of Tacitus and Sallust. As 'our man' in the radical Enlightenment, Giovanni will pay particular attention to the politics of translation of Classical and more recent Latin texts during the long eighteenth century. Of course Latin itself was not necessarily eschewed by freethinkers, especially outside of France and England. It was Christian Wolff's *Oratio de Sinarum philosophia practica*, for example, that saw him banished from Prussia under pain of death.

Giovanni is interested in the libraries of early modern intellectuals, and has already produced a catalogue raisonnée of the books belonging to freethinker Anthony Collins (d. 1729).¹⁶ For our project he will explore and appraise Heerkens' library.

Colloquia illuminatoria

Heerkens' life and legacy serve as a springboard to the separate and collective research projects and interests of our team. In addition to exploring the maps we invite you to join our conversations on:

¹⁶ *Lo scrittoio di Anthony Collins (1676-1729): i libri e i tempi di un libero pensatore* (Milan, 2007). The Scuola Normale Superiore at Pisa and the University of Cagliari are hosting a research project and website on philosophers' libraries://picus.sns.it/biblioteche_dei_filosofi/.

- 1) The use of Latin *versus* the vernacular in science and literature during the long eighteenth century and the relationship, if any, *between* Latin and vernacular versions of apparently commensurable genres, e.g. satire, georgic, dialogue, and scientific didactic poetry.
- 2) The evolution of *distinctive* Latin genres and discourses in this period; the recuperation of perhaps overlooked Latin authors and their contributions of potential significance for intellectual and literary history (including, but not limited to, antiquarians, ‘medievalists’, local historians ...);
- 3) Different Latin styles as ‘code’ for identifiable religious and political opinions;
- 4) Translations of classical and more recent Latin writers into the vernacular, as well as translations of vernacular texts into Latin – and the political dimensions to these activities.
- 5) Circles of Latin correspondence from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries;
- 6) The relationship of Latin Enlightenment to other Enlightenment(s), and its chronological and geographical extent vis-à-vis the latter.

We warmly invite you to submit questions, corrections, supplementary information, bibliography, and so on. Material offered for publication on our website will be subjected to professional editorial control and, if included, duly acknowledged. In the longer term we anticipate establishing an international board of editors willing to develop further national pages of our virtual atlas.

Yasmin Haskell (May 2010)