



Book Review:

Translation and Transfer of Knowledge in Encyclopedic Compilations, 1680-1830, ed. by Clorinda Donato and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink. University of Toronto Press, 2021. [Превод и трансфер на знания от енциклопедични издания, 1680-1830.]

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Encyclopaedias as knowledge reservoirs served a much greater role than an impartial onlooker might suggest. *Translation and Transfer of Knowledge in Encyclopedic Compilations, 1680-1830* is a profound and well-researched read into the topic of how encyclopaedias from the above period played a role in translation and transfer of knowledge between European countries at the time, how they raised and educated generations of readers, who not only sought useful reference in the encyclopaedic works, but who were also shaped in equal measure by the facts, views, summaries and outlines in these books. The encyclopaedias of the Enlightenment developed in various ways in 18th century and how this

complex and yet, fascinating process, took place, lies at the heart of this multi-faceted book. Encyclopaedias, in themselves, were ever evolving projects and as the book shows, displayed various degrees of adaptation, selective incorporation or translation. As their number progressed in the 18th century, they relied on an increasingly expanded pool of references, overcoming the so-called “national” approach and motivated the universalization of knowledge. In addition, by tracing the history of the main encyclopaedic works of the time, we get an important perspective on the reading preferences of European societies engaged in trade, crafts and arts. The book also allows us to trace the evolution of knowledge – a fascinating process on its own.

One might wonder why the emphasis of the book is on translation and transfer of knowledge. However, it is precisely in the 18th-century and even earlier encyclopaedias that all the essence of translation work and knowledge transfer is met. Even though the authors of these works could draw from a very generous international pool of references to compile and draft their editions, each encyclopaedia was unavoidably enriched with national specifics in a time where nationalism had not yet crystallized, but whose early seeds could be felt, rather than seen, growing. As much as educated audiences across countries were quite similar in background and characteristics, their national specifics played a perceptible role and were taken into account by the authors, as the book suggests throughout. Also, many other encyclopaedias, not necessarily of French authorship and origin, also require our attention, such as the German and Dutch ones. They are unjustifiably left in the shadow of the *Encyclopédie*.

The book helps us to perceive encyclopaedias not only as a collection of knowledge, but also as a wider cultural phenomenon where transfer of knowledge and translation in themselves constitute a fascinating subject of research. Encyclopaedias were much more than a tool for spreading general knowledge. As the book shows, the history of their making is as intriguing as their content. Innumerable translations, revisions and adaptations were in a wide circulation when it comes to encyclopaedic works.

There is no doubt that one of the main functions of encyclopaedias was to summarise the available information on a particular subject of the time, to explain, clarify and delve into a particular sphere of human knowledge, so as to reflect the realities of the period. Their natural role was to accumulate the latest knowledge and be up-to-date. An excellent example of such work is the very first economic encyclopaedia titled *Dictionnaire universel de commerce* published in 1723 and analysed in Chapter One *The Savary des Bruslons’ Dictionnaire universel de commerce, Translations and Adaptations* (Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink). This impressive work, in the spirit of the time, codified the commercial and economic knowledge and practices of the 18th century and at the same time, as so

many of its contemporaries, adheres to a line of continuation in terms of earlier works. The author traces the history of its coming into being and the impressive amount of work put into identifying its sources of information and their subsequent compilation. Put into a wider political context, *Dictionnaire universel de commerce* reflects a reality where increasing colonialist tendencies are the implicit driving forces behind the need for such work. Its significance, especially in Great Britain, reflects the growing importance of trade and commerce for the political influence of 18th-century states. It is indicative of the need for a practical and quick reference to matters of international trade. The produced broad historic context allows us to make our own observations and to draw conclusions, which overcome the narrow academic-like perspective.

However, when we look at a single example of an encyclopaedia, regardless of whether it has a general or more specialized focus, we need not forget that these children of Enlightenment – as different as they may be, display certain common characteristics pertaining to their conception, drafting and implementation as published works. There is a certain creative matrix running through the landmark books of the time. An encyclopaedia undoubtedly relied both on earlier printed editions and first-hand non-polished materials designated for personal use. Let's add to this the authors' own commentaries and interpretations and the result is a substantially different work, original in its own way in terms of structure, impact and style, not without its critical attitude to its foregoers, albeit paying due respect to the original sources. What is amazing is that such work always remains a work of progress – constantly supplemented and enriched with new information and new sources as the respective field progresses.

Can we really assume perfection in terms of the result in such cases? Certainly not and maybe we should not. However, early Enlightenment encyclopaedias constitute a huge admirable effort, which collected the best available knowledge of the time. Or at least that was what they were aiming for. Their wide translations (however, not without national-specific adaptations) in Europe were a sign of a knowledge-greedy audience, in the instance of *Dictionnaire de commerce* – of professional merchants and non-professional curious readers.

The process of knowledge transfer refers to the fascinating work of encyclopaedists who dig and unravel information, compile and collect it, analyse and re-shape it, so that the finished work is not only substantially different from its original sources, and thus far from a mechanic composition of its separate parts, but also an intriguing process not devoid of its challenges and problems. Various articles in the book point to this. More often than not, brave authors of encyclopaedias were not able, for various reasons, to rely solely on “domestic produce” in their respective home countries. Sometimes they had to resort to materials from different cultural spaces and adapt them to the target

national audience. This was an industrious task, which involved careful picking of source materials, a huge amount of meticulous synthesizing and filtering, a very good knowledge of the target readership and laborious translations – tasks for which there were not too many enthusiasts. As the article on *The Cultural and Aesthetic Challenges of Translating English and German Articles on the Performing Arts in French Eighteenth-Century Encyclopedias* (Alain Cernuschi) suggests. This article deals with the knowledge transfer in the field of the performing arts. In tracing back the original sources of a published encyclopaedic work, we might encounter curiosities where some French scholars used English translations of earlier French materials. Examples of more straightforward pathways include, for instance, English articles on theatre and arts in the Cyclopaedia, which were translated into French and were later incorporated in the French *Encyclopédie*. In any case, it becomes less of a surprise why many encyclopaedias produced in different countries shared common references. This spillover of knowledge played a significant democratization role across the countries and fostered the appearance of a more educated and enlightened audience compared to previous decades.

When it comes to translations, curiosities could not be avoided sometimes. This is evidenced by the entry of the word “camel” in the *Basler Lexikon* as explained in *Camels in the Alps? Translation, Transfer and Adaptation in Dutch Encyclopedias and Their European Predecessors* (Ina Ulrike Paul). The article deals with a work which was specially written for Dutch readers and whose aim was to promote arts and sciences for that very audience. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the Dutch audience was very practically oriented and valued useful, rational information, which prompted the authors to omit everything unnecessary and to make certain adaptations to the physical appearance of the editions. In general, the history of the Dutch encyclopaedias reveals interesting features of knowledge transfer and translations, typical of the era. Above all, they reflect the scholarly culture of the time in which borrowings and intertwined professional and personal relationships were the norm. Multi-volume encyclopaedic book series focusing on a variety of subjects, publication process of which spread over decades, required such borrowings from other works so as to be up-to-date and relevant. However, it would be too simplistic to assume that the new works were merely mechanic translations of older ones. Most encyclopaedias developed independent identity and their growing number in a given country (with some boasting more editions than others) meant that there was also a kind of competitions between encyclopaedists. Not before long, there would occur a certain genre fragmentation with various works addressing different audiences, which would pave the way for the rise of the thematic encyclopaedias. And with that, readers’ expectations were more and more taken into account. They also witness to a certain degree of intellectual exchange in Europe at that time.

Of course, not all influences were contemporary. Some works testify to more classical and neo-classical approaches and the wide use of the Latin language, as elaborated in *Translation and Transfer of Knowledge in the Encyclopédie Méthodique* (Kathleen Hardesty Doig). However, the choice of language for a given topic often depended on the state of knowledge in the respective country – extensive reading in English was carried out in terms of medicine and physiology as those sciences were considerably advanced in England. Those works were to be later translated and cited in various French encyclopaedias. In picking their sources, the contributors to encyclopaedic works had a really sharp and lucid eye for what was to remain over the centuries. Not that they ignored older works – but they adapted them to the modern audience.

In terms of national specifics, a certain unavoidable impact of politics on encyclopaedias should be mentioned. In a time when the questions of identity increasingly began to be a subject of discussion among the educated circles, the geopolitical presence of a country also meant presence in their encyclopedias. For some smaller countries producing their own encyclopaedic works with “national” content for their own audience became more than an intellectual pursuit, but rather a reaction to the French dominance, as shown in *Branding Knowledge through Translation in Late Eighteenth-Century Encyclopaedias: Italy, Spain, and Switzerland* (Clorinda Donato).

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the book is the chapter on Encyclopaedic Writing, which studies the specifics surrounding the writing style of encyclopaedias. Developing a certain style to match the readership’s preferences was a challenge of its own. It had to strike a fine balance between facts and entertainment; the content had to be condensed and concise, written in an understandable style, the knowledge provided had to be accessible, but not at the expense of factually correct information, and most of all – not losing focus on the underlying goal – reaching as large an audience as possible.

The rise of the encyclopaedia in Europe, especially in the 18th century, signifies a dynamic intellectual exchange on the continent. Encyclopaedism, as a concept and as a practical implementation, was simply on the menu of the day. This book – extremely informative and profoundly written, explores the process of the tracing of ideas and their transforming force enshrined in the popular encyclopaedia and its various national transformations. It takes stock of numerous landmark titles of the time and carefully studies the very complex links and relations between sources, authors and audiences giving at the same time a much needed historical context so that the curious reader could fully grasp the impact and influences that were at play. Thus, it fully lifts the veil to the spirit of an era where all new is good, where fresh research is always welcome and appreciated, and where multiple areas of human progress were at the focus at the same time. Apart from often being a

truly commercial endeavour, the encyclopaedia never deviated from its noble mission – to enlighten and provide knowledge to both specialized and general audience.