

Miriam Nicoli. *Les savants et les livres: Autour d'Albrecht von Haller (1708–1777) et Samuel-Auguste Tissot (1728–1797).* (Travaux sur la Suisse des Lumières, 16.) 365 pp., illus., index. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013. (Cloth.)

This is a book with a bold title: “The Savants and Their Books.” It deals with two central components of the Republic of Letters, the description of which almost constitutes an explanation of the Republic itself. One would expect there to have been a lot of research done on this topic. There are, of course, well-known studies on the business of publishing, on the rhetorical strategies of authors, and—more recently—on the early modern management of information. Our understanding of all the different levels of scholarly practice related to books is, however, still rather fragmentary. And that is the gap *Les savants et les livres* intends to fill.

Considering the roughly thirty thousand scholars in the late eighteenth century and the millions of scholarly letters preserved in the archives, Miriam Nicoli has made a good decision. She neither selected a single figure to investigate nor collected an abundance of the information available on a great variety of scholars. At the heart of her study are Albrecht von Haller and Samuel-Auguste Tissot, two very prolific but very different authors who were active during the so-called “second” revolution of the book (which saw a tripling in book production within several decades). Their correspondence of 950 letters furnishes the main stock of information, supplemented by their exchanges with Johann Georg Zimmermann, Charles Bonnet, and other scholars in their large networks. Enriched by further published and archival material, these sources offer a great number and variety of descriptions and reflections regarding the production of books, originating as they do from scholars with many similarities of background, despite their ideological and biographical differences.

From a methodological point of view, Nicoli’s approach may be described as a guided tour through the vast landscape of book management. Adopting mainly the perspective of the

authors, she examines the procurement and reading of books, note taking, critical evaluation, the role of copyists, translators, and illustrators, and other editorial and financial aspects of production. Nicoli stresses the flexibility of the system of production, which nevertheless had many—albeit fragile—rules. As the authors were confronted with a great variety of tasks, it comes as no surprise that Nicoli identifies the pressures of time as a “leitmotiv” of scholarly complaints.

The book is not a simple description; nor is it based on a more general theoretical framework or explanatory model. In the author’s own words, it is a “microhistorical reconstruction” that generates principles and characteristics of book production and relates them to actual discussions in the history of science. It thus lacks a more general view that would tie all these elements together and furnish a proper description of the “culture” of book management. Such an analysis remains to be made. Nicoli does, however, present a real treasure trove of information, examples, remarks, and interpretations that will stimulate further research in the history of scholars, the book, and knowledge in general. As such, this is a well-balanced and comprehensive survey of all these practices that in fact quite fittingly bear the title *Les savants et les livres*.

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