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REVIEWS

Andre Holenstein, Hubert Steinke, and Martin Stuber, eds.
*Scholars in Action: The Practice of Knowledge and the Figure
of the Savant in the 18th Century, Volumes 1 and 2.* 502+430
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Kristen M. Schranz*

The two-volume *Scholars in Action: The Practice of Knowledge and the Figure of the Savant in the 18th Century* is an ambitious collection of papers that were presented at a conference honouring the 300th anniversary of the birth of Swiss polymath, Albrecht von Haller. Although many chapters focus on Haller's scholarly pursuits, the compilation also investigates the broader culture of knowledge production in eighteenth-century Europe by examining the ways *savants* or learned individuals from different social, cultural, and economic contexts used innovative forms of communication, representation, and institutional supports to produce, validate, and apply new forms of knowledge. The chapters draw on a variety of visual and textual sources, including architectural plans, book reviews, pamphlets, personal letters, prefaces, travelogues, and even a diorama of a Freemason lodge.

The collection is divided into six parts (three in each volume). Each part groups together papers that explore a specific type of scholarly activity. The first part demonstrates how *savants* gained support and recognition for their intellectual work by publishing and presenting themselves respectably, as well as through patronage and membership in esteemed institutions. Particularly notable is Laurence Brockliss's chapter on the complexities of the Republic of Letters in eighteenth-century Europe. Building on his previous work on the "mini-Republics" of the Enlightenment (2002), Brockliss explores the systems of meritocracy and reciprocity that governed this constellation of scholarly correspondents. He also shows how the ideal of freely sharing useful information was often impeded by the reality of unequal knowledge exchange and impolite behaviour. Also of note is I. Fleßenkämper's study of academic patronage in Scottish universities. Fleßenkämper demonstrates that skillful lecturing was more highly valued than publishing, offering a stark contrast

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to the wider Republic of Letters that emphasized and rewarded publishing over teaching.

The second part of the first volume explores the ways scholars acquired, organized, and evaluated knowledge, including the way Haller's book reviews helped guide his readers' opinions and built up his scholarly reputation (see Florence Catherine and Anne Saada's chapters.) The third part emphasizes how learned individuals responded to the diverse political, religious, and scientific polemics of their day. Kirill Abrosimov does an excellent job challenging some key tenets of the Habermasian public sphere by showing how, in the case of Voltaire's Calas affair, emotional appeals trumped rational arguments, and concealment of information was often more beneficial than the "greatest possible degree of publicity" (p. 365).

Turning to the second volume, part four traces how knowledge was presented and circulated by scholars. Private letters, published texts, journals, and travelogues enabled a new "global education" (see Karl S. Guthke's chapter). In this part, Simona Boscani Leoni evaluates the critical role of correspondence networks and questionnaires in gathering and exchanging information about natural history. Also of interest is Clorinda Donato's investigation of inter-language mediators in scholarly networks. Looking more specifically at the production of knowledge, part five highlights practices of observation and experiment in the work of a *savant*. While Lorraine Daston scrutinizes observational methods, Simone De Angelis sheds new light on Haller's medical controversy with Georg Erhard Hamberger, revealing that it was not evidence that was being disputed, but rather different beliefs about sources of authority. Lastly, the sixth part examines the role of learned experts in advising and serving governmental bodies. In his chapter, Holger Böning establishes the new image of an enlightenment scholar: preoccupied with knowledge for its own sake but also set on making knowledge practical for the common good. In Barbara Braun-Bucher's research, Haller also emerges as a social climber who depended on numerous publications, vast correspondents, and connections with noble leaders, advising the latter on topics of education, governance, legal matters, morality, and resource management.

While each chapter provides excellent entry points into specific topics of interest, some parts of the editors' introduction to the collection need greater clarity and organization. The first half of the introduction provides some key signposts for what the volumes accomplish, specifically the role and legitimation of the scholar in knowledge production and the importance of the social, political, and economic contexts of those operations. The introduction's account of the six parts, however, leaves the reader with the impression that the whole compilation will focus on Haller. The editors give a summary of how chapter groupings relate to parts of Haller's life but

it's not made clear that some papers will explore themes beyond Haller's work. Additionally, the editors' preview of these thematic parts proceeds in a different sequence than the actual text does, making it seem like the introduction was composed before the sections were properly ordered.

That said, at the end of the introduction, the editors provide a useful discussion about linking up both the history of scholarship and the history of science with the more general studies of the early modern era. The editors identify three specific areas that require future research: the role of scholarly activities in government administration, the relationship between the history of science and the understanding of the Enlightenment, and the outworking of economic activities in history of science research. Still, concerning their discussion of the last area, it is a little surprising to see the editors plead with the reader to "turn away from the heroes of science to consider those actors who brought about the merging of useful technical knowledge and the spirit of entrepreneurship" (p. 41). It could be argued that the various social, cultural, and spatial "turns" of the past few decades have already moved historians away from such a narrow research approach. Perhaps epitomized in Patricia Fara's *Science: A Four Thousand Year History* (2009), historians have now generally eschewed "heroes of science" to focus on the more "mundane" or hidden contributions to knowledge production.

As a whole, this compilation has much to offer. Seeing as the contributors come from a wide range of academic interests (including historians of education, literature, medicine, politics, and science) this collection offers a multiplicity of interpretations and research sources that will appeal broadly to readers and researchers interested in the complexity and diversity of eighteenth-century scholars and scholarship. Whether through their growing interest in the natural world, the increase of their publication outlets and correspondence networks, or the enlightenment of their bodies and minds, eighteenth-century scholars individually and collectively produced, evaluated, and diffused a new culture of knowledge that is worthy of detailed study. Although these volumes may be criticized as Eurocentric—it was based on conference papers in honour of Haller, after all—they purposefully bring to light recent scholarship from French, German, and Italian speaking regions, discourses that are often left out of Anglo-American research. Not only were many of these chapters translated specifically for this publication, but also the numerous footnotes throughout the text shed light on a plethora of French, German, and Italian sources still unknown to most English-speaking academics.

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REVIEW: Holenstein et al, eds. Scholars in Action

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