

Introduction to 'the Republic of Letters'

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The Republic of Letters was...

- The 'scientific community' of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries:
- Scholars and scientists working as professors, secretaries, courtiers, physicians, lawyers...
- ... communicating by letters about their work plans, published books, colleagues (gossip), students, universities, politics, religion...
- forming a multilayered network covering the whole of Europe

Chronology

- 1417: first mentioning of the term 'Republic of Letters' (Francesco Barbaro in a letter to Poggio Bracciolini: 'Respublica litterarum')
- 15th c: no other use recorded, but similar concepts are in use
- 1495: Erasmus starts using the term
- 16th c: frequent use of the Latin term, but also in Italian
- 17th c: communication intensifies, term now also used in the vernacular (e.g. in French)
- 18th c.: term is subject to discussions of what it means or should mean
- Rise of the historiography of the Republic of Letters
- End 18th c.: disintegration of the Republic of Letters
- Survival in the 19th c.? Republic of *Belles lettres*
- 20th c.: frequent reference to Republic of Letters by intellectuals, scientists and artists in the interwar period

Chronology (2)

- Emphasis is on the early modern period
- i.e.: ca. 1500-ca. 1800
- Most letters in our corpus are from 1600-1750

Nomenclature

- Respublica litterarum
- Respublica litteraria
- République des lettres
- Repubblica delle lettere
- República de las letras
- Gelehrtenrepublik
- Literarische Republik
- Republiek der letteren
- Republic of letters
- Respublica ('the' Republic)
- Orbis eruditus/-orum
- Orbis doctus
- Orbis literatus universus
- Societas eruditorum
- Sodalitas doctorum
- Sodalitas literaria
- Omnes (viri) eruditi
- Omnis literatorum cohors
- Commonwealth of learning
- Republic of the mind

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Geography

- In principal: a 'European' phenomenon
- As far as we know: mostly Italian, Spanish, French, German, Dutch, English
- But also Scandinavian, Polish, Austrian-Hungarian, Baltic, Russian
- Colonies: North-American, South-American, Indian, Asian
- We know still little about Greece, Ottoman Empire, Balkan

People

- People employed as scholars/scientists, by (1) schools, (2) governments, (3) churches, e.g.:
 - (1) Professors, school rector
 - (2) Court astrologers, diplomats
 - (3) Jesuit missionaries, preachers
- Independent scholars, e.g. physicians
- Rich (wo)men with leisure, e.g. aristocrats

(1) Schools: Academic contexts

- Professors, extra-ordinary professors, lectors, tutors, teachers, rectors at:
 - Universities
 - Colleges
 - Academic gymnasia (illustrious schools)
 - Latin Schools (grammar schools)
 - ‘Academies’
 - Vocational training environments?

(2) Governments: Political contexts

- Courts, state apparatus, diplomacy:
- Secretaries, librarians, diplomats, scribes, astronomers, court poets, genealogists, secretaries of (city)states,
- Occasional remunerations of professors, historians

(3) Churches: Religious contexts

- Catholic church: popes, archbishops, cardinals, bishops, priests, deacons, etc.
- Lutheran church: pastors
- Calvinist church: ministers of the word
- Anglican church: (arch)bishops, preachers
- Dozens of smaller, dissenting groups

Means of communication (1)

- Conversation (few traces left)
- Published books
- Pamphlets
- Scientific journals (since 1665)
- Poems

Means of communication (2)

- Letters (usually 1 or 2 pages)
- Survive by hundreds of thousands in original versions or in handwritten copies
- Survive also by hundreds of thousands in printed form (published by authors themselves or by students/next of kin)

Languages

- Latin dominates (1400-1700)
- Italian and Spanish used often (1500-1600)
- French becomes important (1600-1800)
- English and Dutch enter the scene (1650-1800)
- German too (1700-1800)
- Scandinavian languages? Polish? Hungarian?...

Ideals of the Republic of Letters

- Reciprocity
- Exchange of knowledge: cult of communication
- Religious tolerance
- Acceptance of political differences
- Universal knowledge for the common good
- ‘The sciences are never at war’
- Well educated rulers
- Modesty, industry, friendliness, openness, constancy, patience, forgiveness
- [In practice: many pamphlet wars, vicious polemics, personal hatred, charlatans, lying, spying, prying, plagiarism, vanity, arrogance, mudslinging, etc.].

Exchange of what?

- Attachments:
 - Poems (funerals, births, anniversaries)
 - Lists with notes and remarks
 - Tables
 - Drawings
- Manuscripts (drafts of books; old manuscripts with texts from Greek and Roman authors; ancient inscriptions etc.)
- (Proofs of soon to be) published books
- Catalogues of books
- Objects from antiquity (coins, stones)
- Natural objects/specimens (plants, bones, stuffed animals, mounted insects)
- Etc.

About what?

- Universal knowledge:
- History, poetry, antiquity, ancient literature, church history, grammar, theology, law, medicine, philosophy, (logic, physics, metaphysics, ethics, politics), mathematics, astronomy, geography, animals, plants, etc.
- About books, politics, wars, discoveries
- About each other (deaths, new talents, illnesses, family life, friends and foes)

Correspondence networks

- Metadata of letters contain:
 - Author, place, date, recipient, place
 - Additional info: indexing of named entities, synopses, language identification, library holdings, incipits (first 6-10 words),
- Links between people and places: diplomatic mail, commercial routes (book trade), travelling students carrying letters, private couriers, state-run postal systems, complaints of postage
- Problems: multiple authors/recipients, undated/approximately dated letters; unknown places
- Variations in names and place names
- Various solutions (see previous Cultures of Knowledge –seminars)

Nodes (topography):

- Courts
- Universities
- Scholarly and scientific societies
- Salons
- Libraries
- Private academies
- Botanical gardens
- Collections of coins, stones, stuffed animals, rare objects, etc.

Nodes (people)

- Famous scholars
 - Fame generates more fame
- Well connected knowledge-brokers
 - Less conspicuous, but with fat address books

Famous 'republicans'

- Angelo Poliziano (1405-1457)
- Antonio de Nebrija (1441-1522)
- Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522)
- Desiderius Erasmus (1467/9-1536)
- Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527)
- Thomas More (1478-1535)
- Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560)
- Petrus Ramus (1515-1572)
- Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592)
- Justus Lipsius (1547-1606)
- Joseph Scaliger (1540-1609)
- Hugo Grotius (1583-1645)
- James Ussher (1581-1656)
- Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680)
- Pierre Bayle (1647-1706)
- Gottfried W. Leibniz (1646-1717)
- Jean LeClerc (1657-1736)
- Voltaire (1694-1778)
- Joh. Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814)
- Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)
- Stefan Zweig (1881-1942)
- T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)

Citizens: how many?

- Ultee (1987) 1,200 'members' around 1700
- Brockliss (2013): 30,000 around 1790.
- Arenhold (1746):
 - lists 927 individual authors whose epistolaries were published (ca.1500-1746).
 - Each epistolary contains x correspondents
 - $927x$ active correspondents in 250 years
- How complete?...

Citizens:

Holy Roman Empire, 1575-1675

- Estermann (1992):
 - lists ca. 600 published (1600-1750) epistolaries of 17th-c. scholars from German territories
 - 600x active correspondents in 100 years in German lands
- Bürger (2002)
 - Lists 1020 published (1751-1980) epistolaries of 17th-c. scholars from German territories
 - 2,585 authors
 - 30,000 letters

Letters: how many?

- German Empire, 17th c.: ca. 50,000-70,000 published letters?
- Whole of Europe, published letters: 300,000? 500,000?
- Whole of Europe, 1500-1800: 1 million? 2 million?
- ?.....

How many unpublished ones?

- German Empire, 18th c: from Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz alone some 20,000 letters survive.
- Kalliope (German letter catalogue in ca. 100 German libraries, all periods):
 - 2,2 million handwritten letters
 - 237,142 individual letter writers
- CEN (Dutch letter catalogue, all periods):
 - Ca. 2 million handwritten letters
- Whole of Europe, all periods: 10 million? 20 million?
- Period 1500-1800: 1 million? 5 million?
- ?....

Problems:

- How can one visualize and analyze the geographical changes of the network over time?
- How do we visualize the accumulated biographical data of people in the network?
- Assuming we have not only metadata, but also texts of letters; how do we mine them?
- Additional metadata: current whereabouts of letters (library holdings). The history of the transmission of these letters.
- Global standards for making various, differently organized digital letter collections compatible (towards an international meta-(meta)-catalogue of letter-meta-data
- How to serve users without a complicated manual?

T.S. Eliot (1944):

All men of letters ... have, irrespective of nationality, language or political bias, a common interest, and about which we might hope to have a common mind ... Such agreement would give more content to the phrase “the republic of letters”. The “republic” or (to use a stronger term) the “fraternity” of letters, does not, fortunately, demand that all men of letters should love one another – there always have been and always will be, jealousy and intrigue amongst authors: but it does imply that we have a mutual bond, and a mutual obligation to a common ideal.