

## **COST Action 1310 Reassembling the Republic of Letters**

**Historiographical Meeting**  
5 - 6 November 2015, Vienna

### **AGENDA**

The Vienna meeting has been called to discuss the agenda of the Warsaw conference in June 2016. The Warsaw conference flips the agenda of the Oxford meetings in March 2015. The Oxford meeting focused on innovative digital infrastructure which could transform historiography, while the Warsaw meeting focuses on the kind of historiography which the new infrastructure could facilitate. For this reason, we have ensured that each of the six Working Groups is represented in the discussions in Vienna. We also assume that the most productive way to develop the historiographical agenda is to focus much of our work on broadly conceived case studies; so much of the Viennese meeting will be devoted to discussing what our historiographical case studies could look like. Here are some considerations that have informed our suggestions:

- The case studies should **RELATE TO THE AGENDA OF THE RESPECTIVE WORKING GROUPS**, roughly speaking: WG1: GIS; WG2: network analysis; WG3: corpus linguistics; WG4: documentation of collections; WG6: visual communication of complex multi-layer content. We have some thoughts for WG5 as well, but the WG structure should not become a straightjacket; nor does every case studies have to relate to one WG only. So please consider our suggestions as a basis for discussion.
- Something similar is true for the relationship with the technical agendas of the WGs: we should strive for a close connection with them, but not at any cost. You six have been selected as being representatives of each WG, and the respective WG Leaders have been copied in to this mail. We would like to make sure that you act as the **HINGE BETWEEN THE TECHNICAL AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL AGENDAS WITHIN YOUR SPECIFIC WG** (also being present at the respective WG meetings). This does not mean that you cannot contribute your research materials and thoughts to the case studies of other WGs.
- What you will find in the attached document are **ROUGH OUTLINES OF POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS**. Please feel free, and indeed encouraged, to think them through and suggest revisions or thorough rethinking of these ideas as you wish. However, I would like to stress that – as far as possible – the case studies be considered **THEMATICALLY** (that is: not correspondence X as a topic in itself, but a topic that can be addressed comparatively through correspondences X, Y, and Z). Hence, each case study should eventually include a number of samples from various correspondences.
- As a group, we (eight) also represent a wide **GEOGRAPHICAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL RANGE**. This is our chance to make this project truly European, and – as I am working through the people section – I will circulate next week a sort of overview document of all Action Members (including Affiliates) dealing with correspondences from a scholarly point of view. This may help us think of correspondence samples we have not learned about so far.
- We are in the privileged position of being able to really formulate **SCHOLARLY QUESTIONS** we have not been able to address up to now, because we did not have the data available or the tools for processing it. This is not only important for what we as an Action can communicate to a broader public, but especially for getting on board the scholarly community itself.

## WG1: Space and Time.

Case studies should focus on mobile entities, i.e. which move about in space and time.

1. Obviously, tracing the movement of **individual people** is a precondition, but this should not be the focus of major case studies.

2. The greatest challenge is capturing the movements of **whole communities** of people in motion.

2.a. This suggests a focus on **scholars in exile**, Greek scholars displaced from Constantinople after 1452, Jewish and Moorish scholars exiled from Iberia after 1492, Protestants and Catholics displaced by religious war and confessionalisation especially from the mid-sixteenth century onward, refugees from the wars of the seventeenth century, the Huguenot refuge before and after 1685 ... and ultimately the great intellectual displacements of the mid-twentieth century.

2.b. Other possibilities (incrementally moving from the republic of letters) include **other kinds of mobility**:

- i. The *peregrinatio academica*;
- ii. The Grand Tour;
- iii. diplomats; and
- iv. merchants.

3. Ultimately, a geography of the republic of letters will also want to map the **movement of things other than people** such as

- a. books;
- b. other collectables (antiquities, coins, natural historical specimens, etc.).

## WG 2: People and Networks.

1. **People**. One obvious approach would be to begin building a prosopography of the republic of letters by starting from a number of strategically situated correspondence networks (Erasmus, Leibniz, Voltaire, Darwin).

2. **Networks**. Here the greatest challenge is to deal with the networks, not just of individuals, but of **institutions**.

2.a. The most extensive network of learned institutions at the outset of the early modern period is undoubtedly the **religious orders**. This case study has the additional advantages of stretching back chronologically into the (early) middle ages and stretching out geographically to become the world's first global network (Jesuits).

2.b. Early modern **universities** are another useful focus: many, perhaps most, already have biographical registers of professors, which could be mined for prosopographical data systematically mapping one important dimension of early modern learned exchange.

2.c. An epoch-making development in the seventeenth century was the foundation of **academies of science**, a tradition rooted in turn in the literary academies of the earlier period, especially in Italy.

### WG 3: Texts and Topics.

1. We need to model, mine and study **individual terms**. But which ones? An obvious choice might be terms related to the “res (publica) literaria / litterarum” itself. Who uses the term? Can it be considered a term at all? How shall we distinguish “res litteraria” from “res publica litteraria”, or “république des lettres” from “republic of letters”?

2. **Which learned Latin / French / English?** We would have to tag letter samples from different periods and regions, and compare lexicon and syntax; here it would also be useful to try and find a way to measure this against the Ciceronian model, or operationalize Erasmus’ “De conscribendis epistolis” for corpus linguistics.

### WG 4: Documents and Collections.

1. **Documents:** We need a data model which allows us to track the various **states of a letter:** draft, autograph, scribal copy, extracts, etc., as well as various representations of those states (diplomatic transcriptions versus others, etc.).
2. **Collections:** One of the greatest challenges under this heading is capturing the history of existing collections of letters:<sup>1</sup>
  - a. In the first instance, this means the history of archival collections of **manuscript letters**. Can we develop a data model which allows us to show how an existing collection has been compiled from various collections assembled by various people at various times?
  - b. A second variation on this theme addresses the ways in which **printed letter collections** have been assembled<sup>2</sup>.

### WG 5: Data Exchange and Strategic Planning.

1. **HOW MANY LETTERS?** This case study would address (also mathematical) methods to get approximate, but grounded, figures for preserved / printed / mentioned or documented learned letters 1500-1800.

An Oxford mathematician helped Leigh Penman develop a very simple means of calculating the original size of an archive of correspondence which does not survive intact. It involves counting the number of references in one letter to other letters and then determining what proportion of those mentioned letters survive. This could be one basis for beginning to calculate the scale of the RL in our period.

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<sup>1</sup> **LETTERS: DRAFT – ORIGINAL – EDITION.** In such a case study, it might be worthwhile to illustrate with a few cases the sense in doing proper critical editions: how the text changes from draft to original, what we learn from this about the respective scholars, and how important it is to record this properly by way of proper editions.

<sup>2</sup> **LETTERS: MANUSCRIPT AND PRINTED.** A case study like this would address the relation between manuscript letters and printed letter collections – how complete are they, is there anything missing (in terms of number of letters, and content of the individual letter)? What is the distance in time and space between the original and the print?

## WG 6: Visualization and Communication.

NB: WG (5-)6 should provide synthetic studies. If WGs 1-4 attempt to handle the various dimensions of the republic of letters analytically, then studies pursued under the aegis of WGs (5-)6 combine various dimensions (spatial, temporal, institutional, denominational, linguistic, palaeographical, etc.) with one another into increasingly holistic case studies, for instance:

1. The **Erasmian republic of letters** and the early Reformation is an obvious one (say 1500-1536): Some materials are available in good shape already, MCMs from Poland to Spain can contribute more, *Contemporaries of Erasmus* might provide basic prosopographical data (likewise *Verfasserlexikon 1500-1520*), major Protestant correspondences could be grafted onto it; and the dynamic process in which Protestant correspondence networks spread and then rip apart the Erasmian one would be extremely instructive.
2. The **Indian summer of the Renaissance** (as Trevor-Roper called it): the era of Casaubon, Lipsius, Scaliger, Sarpi, De Thou, etc. around 1600 might be another one, which is likewise disrupted by the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War and the Synod of Dordt, amongst other things.
3. Another classic phase is the era of the early academies of science, Leibniz, and the Huguenot diaspora, c. 1600-1715.
4. **Voltaire and/or the Encyclopédists** might provide another.
5. Yet another is the biographical and natural historical correspondence from Linnaeus to Darwin.