

# Translations and Academies in the Eighteenth Century: Sociability, Transnational Networks and Knowledge Circulation

International Conference

Interdisziplinäres Zentrum für die Erforschung der Europäischen Aufklärung (IZEA)  
Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle-Wittenberg, Germany, 25-27 June 2026

Organised by Giovanni Lista, Fritz Thyssen Fellow

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Halle-Wittenberg)

Call for papers

Over the past two decades, the interdisciplinary field of translation studies has increasingly focused on the historical role of translations as means for the transmission of knowledge and ideas across cultural spaces, linguistic borders and political entities. Approaching translated texts as independent artefacts embedded in multiple historical contexts has led scholars to examine how a wide range of factors shaped semantic shifts, linguistic choices or displacements of meanings in the relationship between ‘source’ and ‘target’ works. Moving well beyond the textual dimension, research on cultural translation has engaged with publication practices – such as the editorial and material aspects of a translation –; the authorial identities and agendas of the translators acting as cultural mediators and ideological gatekeepers; the networks of sponsors, distributors and booksellers that affected the commercial trajectory of translated works; and the gendered, imperial and global frameworks within which translators negotiated their activities.

This conference will explore how translation processes intersected with the institutional and performative life of academies and *sociétés savantes* throughout the long eighteenth century, pursuing a line of inquiry that has so far received only sporadic scholarly attention. Positioned as an intermediate space between universities and the world of *salons* and coffeehouses, academies operated as permeable, transnationally networked arenas of communication across social strata, where men and women of letters from diverse backgrounds translated, exchanged, and disseminated knowledge in both written and oral forms. Although they belonged to the same sphere of sociability, academies displayed varying degrees of institutionalisation – whether privately sponsored by local erudite élites, serving as flagship enterprises of absolutist governments, or supported by municipal authorities – which informed their members’ individual or collective translation projects. The diversity of their aims fostered distinctive branches of knowledge, ranging from literature, philology, and antiquities to theology, natural philosophy, and political economy, often determining the translators’ priorities. Academies also relied on diverse media and formats to produce partial or complete translations, either to reach a wider public – through their journals, *mémoires* and printing presses – or for internal use, such as manuscript minutes of proceedings and meetings. As pivotal sites of knowledge circulation in the Enlightenment period, in what ways did academies shape translational practices, and to what extent?

We invite contributions that investigate the role of translation(s) within the learned practices, institutional dynamics and transnational networks of academies across eighteenth-century Europe and beyond. Papers may address specific case studies, actors and textual artefacts; explore how academic sociability mediated the transfer and transformation of ideas across languages, disciplines and cultures; or examine the intellectual, cultural and political contexts that framed translation strategies and processes in the academies' settings. We intend to keep the conference's methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks as broad as possible, in order to foster a general reflection engaging with all areas of historical scholarship connected to the growing field of translation studies.

Potential topics likewise include (but are in no way limited to):

- Translation as academic self-fashioning or patronage (cultural/social/political status)
- Academies as 'gendered spaces' for translation (identity, membership, literary genres)
- Royally sponsored ventures/*ateliers de traduction* ('civilising', educational projects)
- Collective enterprises and processes (anonymous labour, copyists, *petites-mains*)
- Linguistic extraterritoriality/multilingualism (codification of vernacular vocabularies)
- Semantic formations and reinterpretations (academic translations of concepts/words)
- Reframing travel writing and otherness (recognition, exchange, visual translation)
- Replication of experiments (adaptation of scientific instruments, procedures and texts)
- Global academies (translation of Western models, colonial writings, indigenous voices)
- Political and economic emulation (translating reformist discourses and practices)

Keynote speakers:

Prof. Ann Thomson  
Prof. Elisabeth Décultot

Submission guidelines:

Proposals for individual papers (approx. 250 words) and panels (approx. 750 words) are welcome.

Each proposal should include a short biography of the presenter(s) (approx. 100 words).

Applications should be sent by **15 February 2026** to [giovanni.lista@izea.uni-halle.de](mailto:giovanni.lista@izea.uni-halle.de)

Selected papers will be considered for inclusion in a collective volume, to be published following the conference.

### Select bibliography:

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- Burke M. and Richter M. (eds.), *Why Concepts Matter: Translating Social and Political Thought*, Brill, 2012.
- Burke P. and Po-chia Hsia R. (eds.), *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.
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- Cook H. J. and Dupré S. (eds.), *Translating Knowledge in the Early Modern Low Countries*, LIT Verlag, 2012.
- Edmonson C. and Edelstein D. (eds.), *Networks of Enlightenment: Digital Approaches to the Republic of Letters*, Liverpool University Press, 2019.
- Erb A., *Die Deutschen Gesellschaften des 18. Jahrhunderts: Ein Gruppenbild*, de Gruyter, 2023.
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- Munck T., 'Translation and Transmission across Cultural Borders', in *Conflict and Enlightenment: Print and Political Culture in Europe, 1635–1795*, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 180–224.
- Oz-Salzberger F., 'The Enlightenment in Translation: Regional and European Aspects', *European Review of History*, 13/3 (2006), pp. 385–409.
- Reinert S., *Translating Empire. Emulation and the Origins of Political Economy*, Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Stapelbroek K. and Marjanen J. (eds.), *The Rise of Economic Societies in the Eighteenth Century: Patriotic Reform in Europe and North America*, Springer, 2012.
- Stockhorst S., *Cultural Transfer through Translation: The Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation*, Rodopi, 2010.
- Testa S., *Italian Academies and their Networks, 1525–1700: From Local to Global*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.