The Dissemination of Scottish Enlightenment Philosophy: Publishing the Lectures of the Literati

In the 18th century, one of the most popular books, that is, *A New Geographical, Historical, and Commercial Grammar; and Present State of the Several Kingdoms of the World* by William Guthrie, first published in London in 1770, opens with a preface which comments on “the rapid progress, and general diffusion of learning and civility, which, within the present age, have taken place in Great Britain.” Eighteenth-century Britain is characterised by the enlargement of the reading audience, the development of publishing houses and the decline of censorship and repression. In such circumstances, printing and publishing played a decisive role in the proliferation of Enlightenment ideas. Furthermore, the principle of copyright, which facilitated the publication of works, was widely accepted and implemented following the enactment of the Statute of Anne in 1710.

My presentation proposes to examine the dissemination of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy, made possible thanks to the print revolution that occurred in eighteenth-century Britain. I will particularly focus on the manner in which the lectures of the Literati, at first given in the private setting of the university, became accessible to the public through publication. To this end, I will study the examples of three Enlightenment thinkers that are Adam Smith, Thomas Reid, and Adam Ferguson. The publication of the lectures of these three professors happened differently for each of them. Most obviously, for instance, Adam Ferguson’s lectures at the University of Edinburgh are still unpublished today, and are only available in their manuscript format. Thus, my presentation aims at shedding light on the historical and contextual conditions that shaped the publication of the lectures of the Literati.

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