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## *The Mediate project*

Project: Mediate

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The ERC-funded *MEDIATE* project (Middlebrow Enlightenment: Disseminating Ideas, Authors, and Texts in Europe), based at Radboud University,<sup>1</sup> studies the circulation of books in eighteenth-century Europe, focusing on books associated with the 'Enlightenment'. To do so, it is building an Open Access database housing data from a corpus of catalogues of private libraries sold at auction in the Dutch Republic, France, and the British Isles between 1665 and 1830. *MEDIATE*'s central hypothesis is that, to adequately understand the spread of ideas and books associated with the Enlightenment movement, and the processes of societal change supposedly engendered by them,<sup>2</sup> it is crucial to understand how these books were embedded in the cultural field at large. Writers are significant not only as individuals, but just as importantly, as part of a larger literary system of eighteenth-century authors, most of whom are unknown to us today. To understand the full cultural impact of any individual author, we need to view his or her texts as part of a complex literary system, or set of relations between higher- and lower-prestige texts, geographic regions and languages, and between authors closer and farther away from centres of cultural authority.

By focusing on private libraries, *MEDIATE* further aims to address the Enlighten-

<sup>1</sup> This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 682022. See also the project website, [www.mediate18.nl](http://www.mediate18.nl) [accessed January 6, 2018].

<sup>2</sup> According to the famous thesis elaborated by Daniel Mornet in his *Origines intellectuelles de la révolution française* (Paris, 1933) and taken up by Robert Darnton in *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York, 1996).

ment from a reception viewpoint, studying not only the circulation of books but also potential readers. We posit that book ownership, regardless of whether books listed in private catalogues were actually read, and even if catalogues fail to reflect the full extent of an individual's book ownership or reading during a lifetime, provides indications about the intellectual aspirations of the collector, the association of specific social or professional groups with specific kinds of reading material, the relative prestige assigned to particular books as a form of cultural capital, and booksellers' evaluation of books' monetary worth.

In its first phase, the project uses existing inventories to create a digital corpus of around 2,000 smaller to mid-size catalogues of private libraries sold at auction between 1665 and 1830. These include the corpus of Dutch auction catalogues collected by Bert van Selm and his collaborators, digitized as *Book Sales Catalogues Online* (BSCO);<sup>3</sup> and bibliographies of private library catalogues, including Bléchet and Charon for France, Munby and Coral for the British Isles, and Loh for Europe more broadly.<sup>4</sup> We focus on 'smaller' and 'mid-range' libraries, defined as those listing fewer than 1,000 books. This corpus of 2,000 smaller to mid-range catalogues will be transcribed, through a combination of optical character recognition (OCR) technology and manual post-correction, and made available as fully-searchable text files in an Open Access database. We focus on three geographic-linguistic zones – the Dutch Republic, the British Isles, and France – that were selected as broadly representative of the movement of 'Enlightenment' ideas in eighteenth-century Europe, and because of their role in networks of book production and distribution.<sup>5</sup> The project output consists of two digital databases:

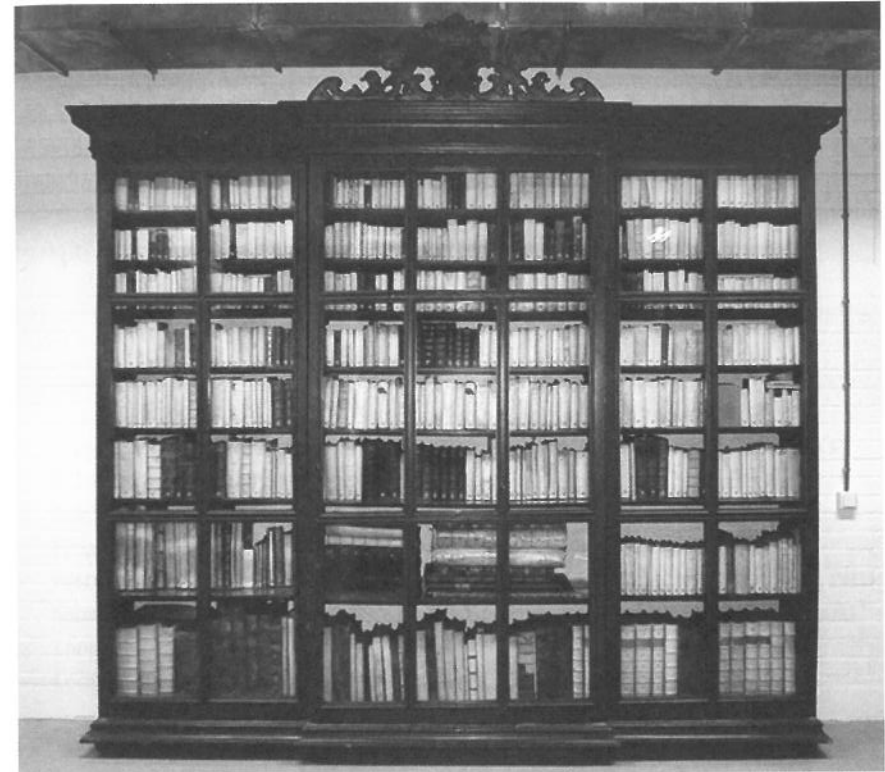
**BIBLIO** (Bibliography of Individually-owned Book and Library Inventories Online) union catalogue, containing metadata for all extant private library (sales) catalogues and inventories in the Dutch Republic, France, and the British Isles from 1665 – 1830. Data covers primarily Catalogues and Collectors.

**MEDIATE** (Middlebrow Enlightenment: Disseminating Ideas, Authors, and Texts in Europe) database, containing fully searchable transcriptions and book data extracted from a smaller corpus of around 2,000 small to mid-range – less than 1,000 books, approximately – private library (sales) catalogues from 1665 – 1830. Data covers primarily lots and items (books listed in lots).

<sup>3</sup> Including catalogues preserved in collections in the Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain, France and Russia. For a full list of libraries, see Bert van Selm, J.A. Gruys, and H.W. de Kooker, continued by Karel Bostoën, Otto Lankhorst, Alicia C. Montoya and Marieke van Delft, ed., *Book Sales Catalogues Online - Book Auctioning in the Dutch Republic, ca. 1500-ca. 1800*, primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/book-sales-catalogues-online [accessed September 6, 2017].

<sup>4</sup> Françoise Bléchet, *Les ventes publiques de livres en France, 1630-1750, répertoire des catalogues conservés à la Bibliothèque nationale* (Oxford, 1991); Charon, *Esprit des livres*; A.N.L. Munby and Lenore Coral, *British Book Sale Catalogues 1678 – 1800: A Union List* (London, 1977); Gerhard Loh, *Die Europäischen Privatbibliotheken und Buchauktionen, 7 vols. (1555-1732)* (Leipzig, 1997-2005).

<sup>5</sup> For reasons of feasibility, MEDIATE leaves out the German states and Italy for the time being, but might include them at a later stage.



Private library of Johannes de Cocq, now in the Municipal Archive of The Hague. Auction catalogue transcription in MEDIATE database: *Catalogus Insignium Librorum Medicorum, Anatomicorum, Chirurgicorum, Pharmaceuticorum, Botanicorum &c. Quibusdam viveret usus est Doctissimus Expertissimusque vir Johannes De Cocq, Medicinae Doctor Ac Practicus felicissimus, post obitum publico usui in Theatro Anatomico Hagano esse voluit, ac dono hoc ornavit*, The Hague: [s.n.], 1724

In a second phase, MEDIATE will use Linked Open Data to establish collaboration or full interoperability with a number of other digitally-supported bibliometric projects. These include Simon Burrows's *Mapping Print, Charting Enlightenment* (MPCE) database, a follow-up to the FBTEE or *French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe Database, 1769-1794*;<sup>6</sup> the U.S.-based *Footprints: Jewish Books through Time and Place* database;<sup>7</sup> the *Short-Title Catalogue Netherlands* (STCN),<sup>8</sup> based at the KB – Royal Library; and the *Universal Short-Title Catalogue* project,<sup>9</sup> based at the University of St Andrews. We further draw on the *Thesaurus of imprint places, imprint names, personal names and corporate*

<sup>6</sup> Simon Burrows, ed., *Mapping Print, Charting Enlightenment*, fbtee.uws.edu.au/mpce/ [accessed September 6, 2016].

<sup>7</sup> Marjorie Lehman, Michelle Chesner, Adam Shear and Joshua Teplitsky, ed., *Footprints* website: footprints.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/ [accessed January 15, 2018].

<sup>8</sup> KB – Royal Library, *Short-Title Catalogue Netherlands*, www.kb.nl/en/organisation/research-expertise/for-libraries/short-title-catalogue-netherlands-stcn [accessed January 15, 2018].

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Pettegree, ed., *Universal Short-Title Catalogue* project, www.ustc.ac.uk/ [accessed January 15, 2018].

names for the early modern history of the book developed by the Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL).<sup>10</sup> Such collaboration across databases is crucial to counter the biases inherent in printed auction catalogues as a source. More importantly, by creating an aggregation of eighteenth-century book history datasets, we aim to provide tools allowing users to map the circulation of books among a cross-section of readers in Europe, and to draw historically plausible conclusions about the movement of ideas during this period.

<sup>10</sup> Consortium of European Research Libraries, [www.cerl.org/](http://www.cerl.org/) [accessed January 15, 2018].

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