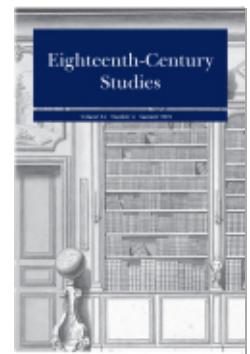Enlightenment? What Enlightenment? Reflections on Half a
Million Books (British, French, and Dutch Private Libraries,
1665–1830)

Alicia C. Montoya

➡ For additional information about this article

Enlightenment? What Enlightenment? Reflections on Half a Million Books (British, French, and Dutch Private Libraries, 1665–1830)

Alicia C. Montoya

In the summer of 1779, having filed for bankruptcy after a series of unfortunate business ventures, the Paris-based, former treasurer of the Ponts et Chaussées and *secrétaire du Roi* Gabriel Prévost saw his small but choice library of 673 books confiscated and put up for auction.[1] A catalogue was drawn up, and the sale took place over a seven-day period, August 20 to 28. Manuscript notes in one of the copies suggest that all lots found buyers.[2] The highest price, an impressive 992 *livres* and 19 *sous*, was fetched by a 33-volume folio set of Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, including also the four volumes of *Suppléments* published in 1776 and 1777. Other exceptional prices were paid for a magnificent copy of the Cassini map of France, consisting of 204 sheets pasted on canvas (730 *livres*); and a 17-volume, quarto set of Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* (380 *livres*) and his *Histoire naturelle des oiseaux* (331 *livres*). Despite these standout prices, most books however went for more modest sums, with the majority sold for prices varying between one and five *livres*.

Gabriel Prévost's library would, on the face of it, appear to be a model Enlightenment library, containing the major works of the most well-known *philosophes*. Most books had been acquired by Prévost himself as he made his way through the ranks of the French Ponts et Chaussées administration: almost half dated from

after 1740.[3] Besides the *Encyclopédie* and Buffon's works of natural history, the catalogue also listed a 30-volume, quarto set of Voltaire's complete works, sold for 217 *livres*; Montesquieu's *Œuvres* (London, 1767), as well as separate editions of his *Esprit des lois* (Leiden, 1749) and *Lettres persanes* (Cologne, 1744), Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire Historique & Critique* (Amsterdam, 1734); and works by Locke, Berkeley and others. Despite the supposed dearth of books by Rousseau in French private libraries,[4] the catalogue reported both his *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris, 1768) and—albeit with no author name in the lot description—his *First discourse*.[5]

However, a closer look at the catalogue complicates this straightforward Enlightenment narrative. For all the books by Voltaire, Rousseau, and other Enlightenment authors, taken together, represent no more than a few dozen titles, among a collection that numbered 673 books. Put somewhat differently, these Enlightenment titles accounted for no more than 10% of all books listed in the library catalogue. The *philosophes*, in fact, were not the most frequently reported authors in Prévost's library: the most cited author was Cicero, not Voltaire. This raises questions concerning the real impact of Enlightenment works, when these are set off against the larger mass of reading material available to eighteenth-century readers. How, in other words, can Enlightenment be measured, or expressed in quantitative terms? What does the 30-volume set of Voltaire's complete works represent, exactly, when juxtaposed to the 87 volumes of theological works also present in Prévost's library, including ten volumes of sermons by Bourdaloue, thirteen volumes by Massillon, and five by Tillotson? And how does book ownership relate to actual reading practices, and how do numbers translate into influence and intellectual change?

Such questions have become particularly pressing in recent years, as historians increasingly use "big data" methods in book history. Thus a 2012 review of Simon Burrows' pioneering *French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe, 1769–1794* (FBTEE) database, that aggregated data on 413,000 sales of 4,000 editions of books recorded in the archives of the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel (STN), appeared characteristic of an emerging malaise. The reviewer, Robert Darnton, noted wryly that "Enlightenment Europe as seen by the statistics of the FBTEE is a Europe without much Enlightenment."[6] In Burrows' presentation of the data, indeed, against the backdrop of the vast numbers of books traded by the Swiss publishing firm, the best-known works of the Enlightenment appeared decidedly minor. What impact could be assigned, for example, to the *Œuvres de Rousseau*, Darnton fretted, knowing that the 1,312 copies sold by the STN pale in comparison to the 8,428 copies of the now-forgotten *Mémoire apologétique des Genevois* sold by the same firm?[7]

In this essay, I use digital tools to ask how we can leverage "big data," or extremely large bibliographic corpora, to study the history of the Enlightenment. Ever since intellectual historians started experimenting with digital, quantitative tools, their transformative potential to not only expand, but fundamentally alter the datasets we work with has been evident. Thus in an article provocatively titled "Style, Inc: Reflections on 17,000 titles (British novels, 1740–1850)," Franco Moretti set a methodological challenge, and a quantitative bar, that the present essay would like to follow up.[8] What happens, I ask, when the dataset we work with is no longer hundreds or even thousands of books, but half a million, in a

more accurate—but still grossly insufficient—reflection of the ever-expanding book market in eighteenth-century Europe?[9] How did readers and interpretive communities situate the handful of titles we recognize today as belonging to the Enlightenment canon within a larger intellectual context? Was Gabriel Prévost's an "Enlightenment library," and how many books—and what kind—might it take to constitute such a library? To answer these questions, I draw on findings from a large-scale historical bibliometric database currently under construction, with funding from the European Research Council, MEDIATE (Measuring Enlightenment: Disseminating Ideas, Authors, and Texts in Europe, 1665–1830), to explore how quantitative methods might help us gain some purchase on the circulation of books, and potentially, on broader reading cultures that were both the result of personal taste, and of collective habits and accumulated cultural capital, incarnated by hundreds and thousands of physical books brought together in eighteenth-century personal libraries. I argue that these libraries provide unique insight into how readers interacted not only with books, but also through them, with the past: physical books functioned both as vehicles transmitting the ideas of long-dead authors, and as tangible, material remnants from that past.

THE MEDIATE DATABASE

The MEDIATE database seeks to model the circulation of books in western Europe over a time-span covering nearly two centuries, and overlapping for a substantial period with the Enlightenment. To do this, the project team is currently turning into structured data the contents of a corpus of 600 printed catalogues of private libraries mostly sold at auction in the Dutch Republic, British Isles, France and Italy between 1665 and 1830.[10] To date (April 2021) 580 of the 600 catalogues have been sourced, transcribed and integrated into the database.[11] Book titles reported in these catalogues have been identified and matched to over 9,000 authors, with 40% of the items in the database currently matched to standardized Virtual International Authority Files (VIAF) author identifiers, thereby enabling researchers to statistically manipulate the data. Although 40% is far from the total, matched items do include the most frequently reported authors, warranting some preliminary overviews despite the necessary data health warning inherent to a database still under construction. An estimated 4% to 5% of the books are labelled "unspecified" because the lot descriptions—for example, "Un paquet de livres dépareillés" or more tantalizingly, "a Choice Collection of Plays and Pamphlets"—are too vague to admit identification. Besides books, the database further contains over 20,000 non-book item records such as prints, coins and medals, scientific instruments, and natural history specimens.

The particularity of these catalogues is that they represent the second-hand book trade, a segment of the eighteenth-century market that has received relatively little attention in book history, that has instead typically focused on the production and distribution end of the book cycle, on new titles rather than old. Yet there are indications that many, if not most readers acquired books through the second-hand book market, with auctions as a prime venue, and that second-hand sales accounted for a substantial proportion of all eighteenth-century book transactions—although to date, no reliable figures exist measuring the exact size

of this market.[12] As David McKitterick notes, in an important work on the subject, "not just the quantity of, but also the trade in, old books was far larger than that of new ones."[13] In the eighteenth century as today, new books sat on readers' shelves next to older ones, with books crossing temporal as well as linguistic and geographic borders. Private library auction catalogues hence provide insight into the complex relation and interactions between the new and the old, and between the major works of the Enlightenment and those that came before.

Collectively, these 580 (and eventually 600) library auction catalogues list over half a million individual book items (including multi-year runs of periodicals or multi-volume works such as the *Encyclopédie*, counted as a single title). Although half a million books might sound like an impressive number, in fact MEDIATE focuses primarily on smaller and medium-size catalogues, or catalogues listing fewer than 1,000 lots and thereby representing, size-wise, the lower 50% of the corpus of extant private library auction catalogues.[14] The smallest library is that of a Madame de La Borde, tentatively identified as the aristocrat Pauline Louise La Borde, whose collection of 38 books, possibly confiscated by the revolutionary authorities, was sold in Paris in 1793.[15] The largest individual collection is that of Dissenting minister Samuel Bourn, sold in London in 1771, and numbering 2,992 items.[16] These are both outliers, however. Only nineteen catalogues in the corpus—eleven eighteenth-century ones, and eight from before 1700—number over 2,000 items.[17] The largest proportion list between 501 and 1,000 items (table 1).

Table 1. Size of Collections in the MEDIATE Database (n = 580)

Number of Items	Number of Collections	Percentage of Collections
< 500	135	23%
501–1,000	216	37%
1,001–1,500	155	27%
1,501–2,000	55	9%
2,001–2,500	12[18]	2%
2,501–3,000	6[19]	0,1%
3,001–3,500	1[20]	0,02%

The project focuses on these relatively smaller libraries for several reasons. First, the smaller size of these libraries increases the likelihood that they describe real collections, rather than catalogues "salted" with extraneous material by booksellers eager to dispose of unwanted stock.[21] Just as importantly, MEDIATE seeks to document the reading preferences not of the best-known eighteenth-century bibliophiles and intellectuals, whose libraries have in many cases already been researched, but libraries accumulated by more obscure readers.[22] In an earlier iteration of the project, these libraries had been hypothesized as potentially describing

an eighteenth-century literary field that might be described, anachronistically, as reflecting "middlebrow" taste. Smaller collections, according to this hypothesis, were more likely to have been assembled by members of an intellectual sub-elite, by consumers of Enlightenment culture rather than its direct producers.[23] This motley population of library owners ranges from schoolmasters and clergymen, sawmillers and insurance brokers, to novelists and East India Company officers. Table 2 groups the library owners identified to date—about three-quarters of the total—into eight broadly defined professional categories (with a single owner sometimes appearing in multiple categories). The largest group, "law and government," were mostly officials and magistrates working in the French and Dutch government administrations. These are followed by "religion," primarily Anglican or Dutch Reformed clergymen. Some 6% of the library owners were members of the medical professions, such as physicians and apothecaries, while 3% were university professors.

Table 2. Library Owners by Professional Category

Professional Category	Percentage of Total Owners
Law and Government General	21%
Law and Government: Diplomat	1%
Law and Government Total	**22%**
Religion	**18%**
Scholarship and Education General	6%
Scholarship and Education: University Professor	3%
Scholarship and Education: Schoolmaster or Tutor	2%
Scholarship and Education: Librarian or Archivist	1%
Scholarship and Education Total	**12%**
Arts and Literature General	3%
Arts and Literature: Visual Arts	2%
Arts and Literature: Performing Arts	1%
Arts and Literature Total	**6%**
Industry and Commerce General	4%
Industry and Commerce: East or West India Companies	1%
Industry and Commerce: Book Trade	1%
Industry and Commerce Total	**6%**
Medicine	**6%**
Military and Navy	**4%**
Finance	**3%**
Unidentified	**23%**

The MEDIATE corpus was further drawn up to ensure a roughly even distribution of libraries, across different national contexts, throughout the eighteenth century—since representativity is an illusory ideal, given preservation bias issues, estimated catalogue survival rates of 10–20%, and our still imperfect knowledge of this type of source material.[24] Because booksellers frequently mixed in other libraries, unsold stock, or loose volumes from other collections into catalogues that purported to describe only the library of the named owner, the MEDIATE database either excludes such problematic catalogues—as revealed by additional research, for example in booksellers' guild records—or splits out the different collections, where possible.[25] Hence, the collection count differs from the catalogue count, and the database allows historians to query either entity.[26] For the pre-1700 period, Dutch libraries are overrepresented, since the United Provinces was the region in which the practice of auctioning private libraries was most widespread then: 50 of the 180 collections from before 1700 are Dutch. The dataset further includes 160 Dutch, British, and French collections dating from after 1700, and ten Italian post-1700 collections. Finally, the 600-collection dataset includes 43 female-owned libraries.[27]
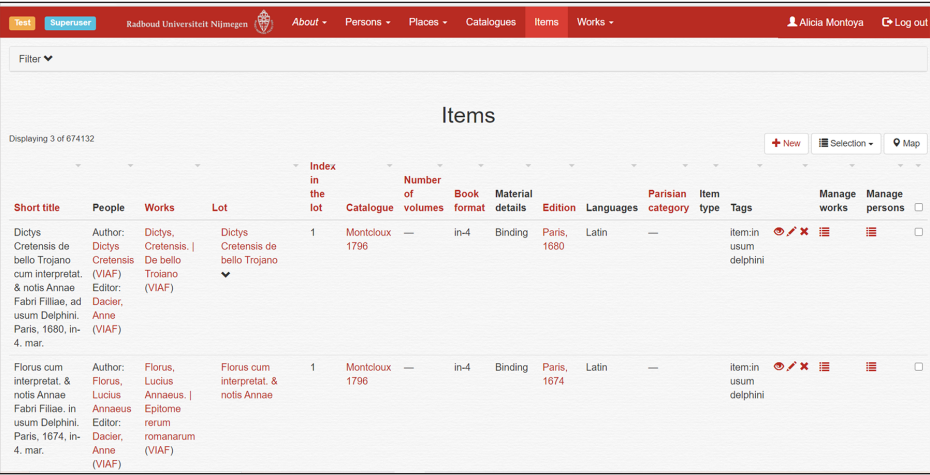
Two final notes of caution are called for before embarking on a preliminary analysis of the MEDIATE data. First, in focusing on private library auction and sales catalogues, this project posits that the evidence they provide on book ownership sheds light on the intellectual self-fashioning of collectors, the association of specific social or professional groups with specific kinds of reading material, the prestige assigned to particular books as a form of cultural capital, booksellers' evaluation of books' monetary worth, and relations between different types of bibliographic genres, including catalogues.[28] In other words, these catalogues tell us much, but not necessarily about actual reading practices—except in the rare cases where the books reported provide material evidence, such as annotations by the library owner, pointing to their use.[29] It is altogether possible that books recorded in private library auction catalogues were not read, or functioned primarily as material supports showcasing the learning of the library owner. As an enduring literary *topos* would have it, invoked by authors from La Bruyère to Lord Chesterfield, it was supposedly common practice for collectors to amass large libraries of books in order to appear cultured, without actually reading any of them.[30] Additionally, auction catalogues provide a snapshot view of a library frozen at a particular moment in time—typically, the moment of the owner's death, and of its own dispersal—so they tell only a piece of a complex story. To uncover the full story of eighteenth-century book and reading culture, historians will need to aggregate evidence from multiple sources, including publisher's archives, probate inventories, library lending records, and ego-documents, none of which is sufficient on its own to provide an accurate picture of the full range of eighteenth-century interactions with the printed word.[31] Nonetheless, regardless of whether and how books were read by their owners—cover to cover, browsed, or merely dipped into, in the discontinuous reading fashion so common in the eighteenth century—book acquisition and ownership can be construed as markers of social and intellectual aspirations, and of library owners' wish (or that of the heirs selling their libraries) to display their identification with specific communities of readers.[32] In this sense, the possession of Enlightenment reading material can usefully be understood as a proxy for other ways of participating in the Enlightenment movement of ideas.

The second caveat concerns the European-wide nature of the corpus. The eighteenth-century book market, for new books as well as for second-hand books sold through auction, was intrinsically transnational.[33] But this does not imply that printed library catalogues were similar throughout Europe. One of the challenges that the MEDIATE project addresses is seeking ways to make valid comparisons between different geographic regions, taking into account significant differences in cataloguing and auctioning practices between regions. Broadly speaking, Dutch library auction catalogues until the mid-eighteenth century reflected a scholarly tradition of book auctioning dominated by Leiden booksellers, who maintained strong business ties to the city's university, and considered academic collections as their mainstay. Dutch library owners were more often members of the professorate than library owners elsewhere, and the proportion of books in Latin in these libraries is consequently higher. In a sample corpus of 72 Dutch catalogues of libraries auctioned between 1670 and 1750, over half of all titles listed were in Latin, versus 29% in Dutch, and 11% in French.[34] Unlike the situation in France and the British Isles, where auctions were heavily concentrated in the capital, Dutch auctions were spread across several major urban centres. On the other hand, French metropolitan catalogues—certainly those comparable in size to the learned Dutch libraries—often bear a more bibliophile stamp, with particular attention paid to the ordering and presentation of books, the material qualities of the books described, and the classification systems pioneered by Parisian booksellers. In the British Isles, London dominance as the locus for library sales meant that library auctions there catered to a different public again. Targeting a less professorial, socially more diverse audience, some British catalogues deliberately blurred the edges between auctions of libraries *stricto sensu*, and auctions of household goods that also included a library. Auctioning practices in the British Isles increasingly showcased the figure of the collector, with well-attended, theatrically staged auctions of household goods allowing members of the general public to take a peek into the lives of the high and mighty.[35] This was, then, another auctioning culture, more focused on the auction as commercial spectacle, than on the continent. Such national differences between auctioning practices mean that French, Dutch and British library sale and auction catalogues must in some respects be treated as different genres, responding to different needs, requiring different typologies, and subsequently rendering any aggregating analysis or comparative approach a delicate exercise in approximation.

DISTANT READING THE MEDIATE DATABASE: CATEGORIES AND FREQUENCIES

Given the impossibility of studying the thousands of titles in the MEDIATE database—or even a representative sample—individually, using the close reading techniques that have long been the mainstay of literary scholarship, making sense of the MEDIATE data instead requires what Moretti has described as "distant reading," or "formalism without close reading." Rather than searching for works by specific authors, as book historians have hitherto done when examining auction catalogues, this approach proceeds by picking out general, quantifiable trends, focusing on relations between authors and titles rather than on individual items.[36] But since, as Moretti adds, "quantification can only occur if its basic units are reasonably well-defined," the first step in this process is to create such units.[37] Thus,

each book Item record in the database is made up of several properties (screenshot 1): the exact item listing, transcribed verbatim; VIAF Persons (authors, translators, editors, illustrators, etc.) related to the Item; VIAF Works related to the Item; the text of the full lot, transcribed verbatim (in most cases, identical to the individual item); the order in which the item is listed in the lot; short catalogue name; number of volumes; book format; material details, if reported (binding, illustrations, interleaving, annotations, etc.); date and place of publication, if provided (or in some cases, as established by additional research); language of the item; Parisian booksellers' category; item type (for material other than straight books, these are "manuscript," "maps (loose)" and "prints and etchings"); and a number of tags for specific types of item (review journals, lecture notes, library auction catalogues, etc.). Additionally, there are a number of other, currently non-functional properties.[38] Book items currently include titles in 51 languages, the most common being French, English, Dutch, Italian, Latin, ancient Greek, and Hebrew.[39]

Screenshot 1.

Because data enrichment work has hitherto focused on VIAF authors, with 9,000 identified so far, a first, global way to pick out general trends in these eighteenth-century private libraries might be to focus on the top forty-five authors, or the 0.5% that are most frequently reported in the collections. This category represents, by any measure, the absolute best-sellers in the dataset: these authors are documented in 246 to 544 library auction collections, or 42–94% of the current total. Initial, raw numbers, covering the long period 1665–1830, and excluding unspecified books, are presented in Table 3. I define authorship here and throughout this essay expansively, including also translators, editors and commentators, as well as the database categories "author (possible)," "author (attributed)," and their various permutations, both to accommodate catalogues' sometimes approximative title listings, as well as early-modern definitions of authorship, that may differ significantly from modern ones.

Table 3. Most Frequently Reported Authors, 1665–1830

	VIAF Author	Percentage of Libraries	Parisian Category
1	[The Bible][42]	94%	R
2	Ovid	79%	BL
3	Virgil	77%	BL
4	Horace	76%	BL
5	Cicero	74%	H, BL
6	Erasmus	70%	R, BL
7	Tacitus	69%	H
8	Hugo Grotius	68%	R, L, H, BL
9	Terence	66%	BL
10	Homer	66%	BL
11	Seneca	65%	BL
12	Flavius Josephus	64%	R, H
13	Plutarch	64%	H, BL
14	Caesar	60%	H
15	Quintus Curtius	60%	H
16	Juvenal	59%	BL
17	Livy	59%	H
18	Sallust	55%	H
19	Fénelon	53%	R, BL
20	Suetonius	53%	H
21	Pliny the Elder	52%	AS
22	Samuel von Pufendorf	52%	L, H
23	Plautus	51%	BL
24	Milton	50%	R, H, BL
25	Justin	50%	H
26	Lucian of Samosata	48%	BL
27	Cervantes	48%	BL
28	Lucan	47%	BL, H
29	Lucretius	46%	AS
30	Voltaire	46%	R, L, AS, H, BL
31	Pliny the younger	46%	BL
32	Xenophon of Athens	45%	AS, H
33	Florus	44%	H
34	Persius	44%	BL
35	Augustine of Hippo	44%	R
36	Joseph Addison	44%	R, H, BL
37	Thomas à Kempis	44%	R
38	Cornelius Nepos	44%	H
39	Gilbert Burnet	44%	R, H
40	Martial	43%	BL
41	Lipsius	43%	R, H, BL
42	Theophrastus	43%	AS, BL
43	Aristotle	43%	AS, BL
44	Montaigne	42%	BL
45	Herodotus	42%	H

Besides listing the most frequently reported authors, the table also proposes a global categorization of these titles according to eighteenth-century actors' categories. In this context, the most relevant categories are provided by the so-called *système des facultés*, or five-part subject categorization system developed by Parisian booksellers to structure large auction catalogues.[40] Each book was assigned to one of five categories, each of which could be further subdivided into ever-more specific subcategories. In using this system, booksellers imposed a specific hierarchy of knowledge on libraries. Theology and religion came first ("R" in Table 2), followed by law ("L"), arts and sciences ("AS," including also philosophy), history ("H," including geography), and literature or *belles-lettres* ("BL"). Importantly, these categories do not always map neatly onto other schemas. Thus works by classical authors figure in all five categories: Ovid and Horace in *belles-lettres*, Livy in "history," Aristotle in "arts and sciences," and so on. On the other hand, subjects that are today considered separate, such as geography and history, or philosophy and medicine, were lumped together into single categories—respectively "history" and "arts and sciences."[41] In Table 3, I have assigned Parisian categories to the works of the most frequently reported authors in the period 1665–1830.

The Parisian categories offer a first means to distant read Table 3. The most frequently referenced are the two categories of *belles-lettres* (26) and history (22). These are followed, at some distance, by religion (13), arts and sciences (6), and law (3). This distribution is similar to long-term patterns documented by historians studying book production trends in France, who have noted the decreasing importance of religious works, and the rise of history and *belles-lettres*, in the course of the eighteenth century.[43] However, a slight nuance is warranted. While religion garners only thirteen hits, in absolute numbers religious books remain omnipresent: the Bible alone, present in 94% of all libraries, accounts for some 7,500 individual book items, or almost 2% of all books in these libraries. Counting works rather than authors would further add to the absolute total of religious titles, since many of these—such as books of hours, missals, breviaries or catechisms—are anonymous works, that hence fall outside any author count. Finally, a proportion of the 4–5% "unspecified books" are devotional works, sermons, or other religious ephemera judged of limited monetary value by auctioneers. This last detail serves as a reminder that auction catalogues display only part of collectors' interaction with print culture— indeed, possibly only the most public-facing one, and the one that best related to the interests of the broader interpretive and consumer-culture communities targeted by bookseller-cataloguers.

A second approach might focus on ranking individual authors. The Bible, the absolute best-seller in Table 3, is followed—at considerable distance—by three classes of books. Four major authors cross the 70% threshold: Ovid, Virgil, Horace, and Cicero. They are flanked by a category of second-tier "top" authors, present in 60–70% of all collections: Erasmus, Tacitus, Grotius, Terence, Homer, Seneca, Flavius Josephus, and Plutarch. It is only in this second tier that the first two modern authors make their appearance: Erasmus and Grotius. Then come a much larger group of "top" third-tier authors, reported in 50–60% of the libraries: Caesar, Quintus Curtius, Juvenal, Livy, Sallust, Fénelon, Suetonius, Pliny the Elder, Samuel von Pufendorf, and Plautus. Finally, there is a longer string of authors whose works occur in fewer than half of the collections. Only one eighteenth-century author,

Fénelon, makes it past the 50% threshold. The rest follow after: Voltaire, ranked in 30th position (46%), Joseph Addison at 36, and Gilbert Burnet at number 39, just within the top 0.5% range.

The most conspicuous pattern revealed by this overview is clearly the large number of classical authors among the most reported in eighteenth-century private library auction catalogues. Fully eighteen of the twenty-two authors present in over half of the libraries date back to classical antiquity. Only four modern authors make it into the elite group of authors present in over 50% of the libraries, and of these only two, François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon (1651–1715), archbishop of Cambray, and the natural-law jurist Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694), could arguably be described as early Enlightenment (albeit not necessarily secular) authors. The others are a humanist straddling the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), and the seventeenth-century jurist Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). Three of these authors, perhaps significantly, owed at least part of their literary fame to commentaries, editions and continuations of works by classical authors higher up on the list. Erasmus had edited Cicero's *De officiis* in 1501, while Grotius had edited the works of the Roman historians Tacitus and Lucan. Fénelon produced no editions of classical texts, but his best-selling pedagogical novel, that largely accounts for his high standing in the table, *Les aventures de Télémaque, fils d'Ulysse* (1699), was conceived as a sequel to Homer's *Odyssey*. This suggests that some of the commercial success of these modern authors might be accounted for by a trickle-down effect, or success by association with classical Antiquity.

Not only are the majority of the authors in Table 3 old. Their books often were, too. Graphing the dates of publication of the books reported in collections from the period 1750–1800, as the database allows us to do (screenshot 2), shows that although the majority of books sold during these years dated from the eighteenth century—68% of the dated books—the proportion of older books was still considerable. Collectively, the 236 libraries sold during the second half of the eighteenth century still recorded 43,330 books printed before 1700, and 5,988 from before 1600. Taken together, these numbers about authors and publications underline the continuing importance of the old editions sitting next to new ones on the shelves of eighteenth-century private libraries.
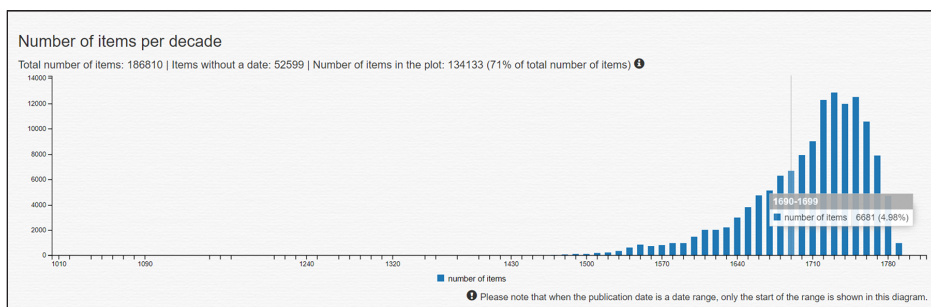
Screenshot 2. Date of Publication of Books in Libraries Sold in 1700–1750

EXPLAINING THE SUCCESS OF THE CLASSICS

The exceptional prestige accorded by eighteenth-century readers and bibliophiles to the authors of classical Antiquity has been noted by book historians such as Kristian Jensen, who has studied how value was expressed, among other things, through the materiality of the books collectors amassed: "bindings are rarely uniform but rather articulate a hierarchy among their books, the classics being given the most expensive treatment."[44] The enduring appeal in the eighteenth century of books by classical authors in general, and by a number of names in particular, is the subject of a large body of literature. Thus, Dan Edelstein has proposed to consider Enlightenment culture as a form of late humanism, shaped fundamentally by the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*—that was, in significant ways, "won" by the Ancients rather than the Moderns. Chantal Grell has explored in detail the influences of classical Antiquity on French Enlightenment literature. And more recently, several book-history micro-studies have focused on the enduring appeal throughout the eighteenth century of specific ancient genres such as epigrams.[45] Moving from these general accounts to aspects specific to books in auction catalogues, at least three additional factors can be proposed to explain the attraction of the classics for eighteenth-century library owners: the foundational role of classical authors in educational curricula, the weight of inherited material culture and social practices; and the emergence of an antiquarian book market.

While the most straightforward explanation for the massive presence of classical authors in eighteenth-century libraries might be that these were schoolbooks left over from an earlier stage in the collector's life, this is not entirely borne out by the data. The classics had indeed long dominated school curricula, with the *imitatio auctorum* as a guiding principle. The most widely reported classical authors in the libraries were also the most widely used in schoolroom settings. Cicero above all was the backbone of curricula, followed by Caesar, Sallust and Phaedrus, and the poets Virgil, Horace, and Ovid.[46] All but Phaedrus appear in the top 0,05% of most frequently reported authors. Phaedrus appears in place 50, in 40% of the collections. Lot descriptions in the catalogues explicitly designate some 600 books as *ad usum delphini*, or originally destined for schoolroom use. However, these represents only 0.1% of books in the database, and an estimated 1% of all books by classical authors.

A further indication of the use to which the classics were put might be the language of publication. Books read in the original, it could be hypothesized, were more likely to have been read in a classroom setting than modern translations, especially those of a *belle-lettriste* character that enjoyed exceptional literary prestige, and that would instead serve primarily for personal reading.[47] Table 4 provides an overview of the language of the works of the four most cited classical authors, as well as the four most cited modern authors. It shows that among the classics, Cicero is most frequently found in Latin, in 73% of occurrences. The most frequently read in translation is Ovid. However, without additional analysis of the specific editions involved, it remains unclear whether the catalogues support the thesis of massive numbers of books by classical authors simply carried over from their owners' earlier, adolescent years. At most, the evidence so far underlines important differences between book sales—most books historically going

to educational and religious institutions, and being acquired for educational or devotional purposes—and reader taste, and the necessity to distinguish carefully between book ownership and personal reading choices.

Table 4. Language of Books by Highest-Ranked Classical and Modern Authors

Language	Ovid	Virgil	Horace	Cicero	Erasmus	Grotius	Fénelon	Pufendorf
Latin	49%	63%	67%	73%	72%	66%	9%	36%
French	16%	10%	11%	14%	6%	6%	72%	35%
English	15%	12%	10%	7%	5%	4%	12%	18%
Dutch	13%	7%	4%	1%	12%	23%	11%	11%
Italian	3%	3%	<1%	<1%	<1%	-	2%	-
Spanish	<1%	<1%	<1%	-	-	-	<2%	-
German	-	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	-	<1%	<1%
Welsh	-	-	-	-	-	<1%	-	-
Gaelic	-	1%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arabic	-	-	-	-	-	<1%	-	-
Greek	-	-	-	<1%	<1%	-	-	-
multiple	4%	4%	7%	3%	3%	<1%	<1%	-

An alternative hypothesis might hold that these books by Latin and Greek authors were another kind of inherited volumes, passed on from a parent or family member, from one generation to the next, and no longer reflecting current literary preoccupations. However, various elements seem to invalidate this hypothesis. First of all, the publication date of books by the top four classical authors, when reported, show that eighteenth-century editions were almost as numerous as earlier ones (Table 5). For all four authors, the highest proportion of editions date from the first half of the eighteenth century. Further underlining the fact that editions acquired by collectors were often modern ones, 1% to 5% even date from the nineteenth century. Eighteenth-century translations by Anne and André Dacier, or Michel Mattaire's acclaimed editions, such as his 1715 Virgil, dominate many of these libraries, suggesting that eighteenth-century readers' interest in the Latin and Greek classics was very much a modern phenomenon. The modernity of the classics is further attested by the popularity of supporting works like Conyers Middleton's *Life of Cicero* (1741), present in dozens of libraries, or novelistic spin-offs such as Jean de La Chapelle's *Amours* of Tibullus (1712) and Catullus (1713)—as it is, indeed, by the eighteenth century's best-selling title of all, Fénelon's *Télémaque* (1699).

Finally, as interesting as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editions, are at the other end editions of the classics from before 1600, or even before 1500, the realm of the incunabula. There appears to be a very slight negative correlation between the overall success of classical authors and the number of incunabula editions of their works in the libraries. Cicero, the least popular of the top-four

Table 5. Publication Date of Books by Highest-Ranked Classical Authors

	Ovid	Virgil	Horace	Cicero
1450–1500	1%	1%	1%	1%
1501–1550	4%	4%	3%	8%
1551–1600	6%	7%	7%	13%
1601–1650	13%	16%	13%	9%
1651–1700	30%	20%	19%	22%
1701–1750	34%	29%	38%	35%
1751–1800	10%	18%	17%	11%
1801–1840	2%	5%	2%	1%

classical authors, reports the largest number of pre-1500 editions, as well as the largest proportion (22%) of pre-1600 editions. Rather than assuming that these are legacy books, another explanation may point, instead, to the antiquarian value that some of these books were acquiring in the eighteenth century, as a new appreciation was emerging of the historical significance of specific kinds of books.[48] The occasional use of terms such as "rare," "lib. rarus" or "Editio princeps" to describe them in the catalogues indicates that such considerations were not absent even from these relatively small collections. As Cicero became less interesting for the content of his works, then, some editions of his books may have gained new value as material objects. The most tangible products of the beginnings of printing in Europe, incunabula were increasingly integrated by eighteenth-century historians into a narrative of human progress, culminating in the Enlightenment itself.[49] Early editions of the classics had, beyond this, philological significance. In the eyes of some scholars, "a number of fifteenth-century editions as well as editions by Aldus Manutius . . . competed with manuscripts for textual importance."[50] Scholarly and historical valuations hereby intersected with commercial interests, strengthening the prestige accorded these early editions in the new market for luxury goods, conceived as part of polite culture, that was also developing in the eighteenth century.[51] In bringing these different values together, early editions of the classics might allow even owners of modest book collections to acquire for themselves a piece of history, underscoring the self-conscious modernity of their Enlightenment worldview, and new relations to the past taking shape in these years.

DIACHRONIC APPROACHES: EVOLVING READER TASTE

Of course, the prevalence of Greek and Latin classics, and the absence of Enlightenment authors from the top segment of top-ranked authors is hardly surprising, given that Table 3 provides an overview of the entire MEDIATE dataset, beginning with catalogues of libraries sold at auction as early as 1665, just as the early Enlightenment was taking off.[52] Given the inherent time lag of auction catalogues, that described libraries typically sold after the death of the owner and

therefore reflected books acquired several decades previously, works by Enlightenment authors could not be expected to appear in the earliest catalogues. It would be manifestly impossible for a high Enlightenment author like Voltaire, whose first major publication dates from 1718—tellingly, his Sophocles adaptation *Œdipe*—to appear in any of the 115 libraries sold before then. A more diachronic approach is therefore needed to nuance preliminary observations about the predominance of classical authors in eighteenth-century libraries. Table 6 hence shows the occurrence of the top-ranked authors across the period 1670–1830,[53] segmented into 20-year intervals:[54]

Table 6 shows that, even when differentiating between periods in the eighteenth century, the weight of the classics still remains substantial. Of the 240 slots available, only 92 are occupied by post-classical authors—and only fifteen of these are eighteenth-century authors (marked bold in the table). However, nuancing this picture somewhat, these 41 modern authors represent 59% of the top-ranked authors in the long eighteenth century. In other words, there are more modern authors, but no single modern author is as ubiquitous as a classical author. The segmentation also allows us to add other nuances to our analysis. For Table 6 shows, too, that over the course of the eighteenth century, different classical authors met with different receptions, and that there were distinct fashions—some of them short-lived—in the reception of specific authors. While the list of top-ranked authors overlaps largely in different periods, with ten authors—Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Cicero, Plutarch, Livy, Tacitus, Josephus, Terence, and Seneca—appearing in all timeframes, others enjoyed a more fluctuating appeal. Suetonius appears in four slots, between 1670 and 1750, but disappears from the top-30 thereafter. The diminishing appeal of Aristotelian science is reflected in Aristotle's disappearance from the top-30 after 1710. Pliny's *Naturalis historia* fares slightly better, appearing in five time slots, but item descriptions suggest that his work was valued as much for its material aspect as for its scientific content. Justin and Augustine similarly make a relatively modest showing, appearing in three time slots at the beginning of the period, before being eclipsed by other authors after 1750.

The most interesting cases from an intellectual history perspective, however, are those classical authors who actually gained appeal during the course of the eighteenth century, suggesting that rather than being perceived as hold-outs from a previous age, they acquired new relevance at specific moments in time, in new contexts. Such is the case for Homer, who enters the lists in 1690–1710, and does not leave again; Juvenal, who appears in the same period, and similarly holds on to his position, almost uninterrupted, into the nineteenth century; and Lucretius, who surfaces in 1731–1750, and reappears at the end of the century, in 1791–1830. All three cases seem related to specific cultural moments. In Homer's case, a major role must surely be attributed to Anne Dacier's popular translation of his *Iliad* (1699), read by contemporaries as a pro-Ancient manifesto, and the ensuing *Querelle d'Homère*, that marked the last stage of the European-wide *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. (And of course, the enduring popularity of Fénelon's *Télémaque* would have played its bit in the Homer wars.) Anne Dacier is, by far, the most frequently reported female author, appearing in 33% of all libraries. Juvenal, on the other hand, appears to be a particularly English phenomenon, driven in large measure by the 1693 translation of his satires by Dryden and his collaborators,

Table 6. Author Ranking per Twenty-Year Period, 1690–1830

	1670–1689 (n=36)	1690–1710 (n=51)	1711–1730 (n=58)	1731–1750 (n=78)	1751–1770 (n=79)	1771–1790 (n=105)	1791–1810 (n=75)	1811–1830 (n=90)
1	Bible	Bible	Bible	Bible	Bible	Bible	Bible	Bible
2	Erasmus	Erasmus	Ovid	Cicero	Horace	Horace	Virgil	Ovid
3	Grotius	Virgil	Curtius	Ovid	Ovid	Ovid	Ovid	Virgil
4	Seneca	Grotius	Seneca	Virgil	Grotius	Virgil	Horace	Horace
5	Cicero	G.J. Vossius	Cicero	Erasmus	Tacitus	Voltaire	Voltaire	Voltaire
6	Lipsius	Seneca	Grotius	Horace	Cicero	Homer	Cicero	Milton
7	Aristotle	Ovid	Erasmus	Seneca	Pufendorf	Tacitus	Fénelon	Fénelon
8	Livy	Calvin	Plutarch	Tacitus	Erasmus	Cicero	Homer	Tacitus
9	Plutarch	Augustine	Josephus	Caesar	Virgil	Curtius	Cervantes	Cicero
10	Pliny the Elder	Plutarch	Horace	Terence	Josephus	Terence	Marmontel	Homer
11	Virgil	Cicero	Virgil	Plutarch	Fénelon	Fénelon	Addison	Terence
12	Tacitus	Buxtorf the Elder	Tacitus	Grotius	Terence	Erasmus	Terence	Plutarch
13	Caesar	Terence	Caesar	Juvenal	Cervantes	Josephus	Tacitus	La Fontaine
14	G.J. Vossius	Horace	Justin	Fénelon	Seneca	Pufendorf	Erasmus	Grotius
15	Josephus	Aristotle	Homer	Josephus	Curtius	Grotius	Juvenal	Pope
16	Calepinus	Livy	Livy	Curtius	Burnet	Juvenal	Josephus	Addison
17	Horace	Lipsius	Suetonius	Livy	à Kempis	Addison	Plutarch	Juvenal
18	Terence	Beza	Strada	Sallust	Addison	Plutarch	Caesar	Montesquieu
19	Pierre du Moulin	Homer	Juvenal	Plautus	Voltaire	Caesar	Steele	Livy
20	Suetonius	Suetonius	Pufendorf	Pufendorf	Livy	Milton	Montesquieu	Erasmus
21	Selden	Caesar	Lipsius	Homer	Homer	Seneca	Sallust	Robertson
22	Justin	Pliny the Elder	Terence	Justin	Le Clerc	Pope	Seneca	Josephus
23	Buchanan	Tacitus	Plautus	Le Clerc	Plutarch	Steele	La Fontaine	Rollin
24	Augustine	Descartes	Descartes	Lucretius	Steele	Montesquieu	Grotius	Rousseau
25	Beza	Bacon	Euclid	Bayle	Pliny the Elder	Sallust	Pope	Sallust
26	Sallust	Josephus	Lucian	Florus	Leti	Pliny the Elder	Plautus	Seneca
27	Heinsius	Juvenal	Sallust	Suetonius	Milton	Le Clerc	Corneille	Lucretius
28	Ovid	Valerius Maximus	Augustine	Cornelius Nepos	Phaedrus	Bayle	Richardson	Steele
29	Calvin	Scaliger	Commynes	Pliny the Elder	Pascal	Cervantes	Lucretius	Caesar
30	Plautus	Farnaby	Vossius	Boileau	Bayle	Livy	Livy	Boileau

and the ensuing flourishing of Juvenal tags in influential publications ranging from *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* to Alexander Pope's *Dunciad* (1728–1743). If the eighteenth century was the age of discontinuous reading, as has been argued, then Juvenal, by furnishing a mass of quotable soundbites, was one of its major suppliers.

Perhaps the most compelling case of all, however, is that of Lucretius, who makes a first appearance in the 1730s, and resurfaces during the last decades of the eighteenth century. Here again, specific translations played a role. In England, Thomas Creech's translation of *De rerum natura* (1682), followed by his edition of the Latin text (1695), clearly leave their mark in the libraries. But it is in France especially, with the publication of Melchior de Polignac's refutation of Lucretian materialism, *Anti-Lucretius* (1745), that the debate on atomism surged. Reported in 15% of all libraries after 1745, Polignac's magnum opus is an indirect indicator of the appeal that Lucretius' materialistic philosophy may have had for the generation of readers also encountering the controversial works of Denis Diderot and the baron d'Holbach for the first time. In fact, Diderot's most Lucretian, openly materialistic text, his *Rêve d'Alembert*, would only be published posthumously, in 1830. This points to the possibility that eighteenth-century audiences may have accessed innovative, materialist views as much through eighteenth-century renderings of Lucretian atomism as through the writings of the *philosophes*. Lucretius editions and translations, in this sense, can be construed as being very much part of Enlightenment thought, but with new ideas framed in ways that moored them for eighteenth-century readers to the past. This is a more conservative narrative, then, than accounts of the relation between Enlightenment books and revolution that privilege only eighteenth-century authors. Enlightenment books could indeed lead to intellectual ferment, but those Enlightenment books had not necessarily been written by eighteenth-century *philosophes*.[55]

The diachronic segmentation throws up a number of further patterns. One is the difference between topical authors, whose commercial success was relatively short-lived, and authors whose consistent presence in the top-30 testifies to an enduring appeal. Two-thirds of the authors—six from classical antiquity and twenty modern ones—appear only once on Table 6, ranging from historians Famiano Strada in 1711–1730 to abbé Charles Rollin in 1811–1830. Samuel Richardson, similarly, makes an appearance in 1791–1810, but does not hold onto his position afterwards. Since Richardson's best-selling works, *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, were published in 1740 and 1748, this suggests that the initial life-cycle of works enjoying great commercial impact might be in the range of 50–60 years, from the date of first publication to the eventual disposal of once successful titles on the secondhand book market. Of course, works by Richardson—and by Strada, Rollin, and many others—remained in libraries and on the market for many years later, and were re-printed and imitated by others, but this initial period marks the point at which they met their greatest acclaim.

Other authors enjoyed a more durable success. Thus Théodore de Bèze, Calvin and Descartes appear in two slots, around the turn of the century, in the period 1670–1730. They are flanked in these years by other religious authors, such as Augustine, Hebraist Johannes Buxtorf, and Huguenot theologian Pierre du Moulin the elder. This phenomenon must be attributed at least in part to the overrepresentation of Dutch catalogues in this period, accounting for 62.5% of all

pre-1700 libraries. Context-specific factors explaining the strong performance by Descartes, Calvin and Bèze in these years include the polemic advent of Cartesianism in the Dutch Republic at the end of the seventeenth century, as well as the quarrels between various Protestant denominations, especially Voetian and Coccejan factions, that reached boiling point in the final decades of the seventeenth century, and may have entailed a return to the foundational texts of the Dutch Reformed faith.[56]

What of the canonical authors of the high Enlightenment, then? Between the classical "backlist" and the larger number of momentarily successful moderns on the other, thirteen post-classical authors emerge as durable values during the long eighteenth century, taken here as the period 1690–1830, and remain in the top-30 for six decades or longer: Cervantes, Milton, Bayle, Le Clerc, Pope, and Montesquieu (60 years); Pufendorf, Voltaire, Joseph Addison, and Richard Steele, whose *Spectator* is second only to Fénelon's *Télémaque* in terms of visibility in the libraries (80 years); and above all Fénelon, whose name figures in five of the eight time-slots, or a period of 100 years. Here too, fashions come and go. Pierre Bayle figures in the top-30 lists throughout 1731–1790, but falls outside afterwards, as his most cited title, the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, first published in 1697, is superseded by other publications like the *Encyclopédie*. Significantly, the two authors in this list whose status today as Enlightenment figures is undisputed, Voltaire and Montesquieu, also recur in other eighteenth-century sources. Thus, studies that have text-mined the *Encyclopédie* for its citation practices conclude that "what stands out in particular is the overwhelming presence of the two standard-bearers of the French Enlightenment, Montesquieu and Voltaire."[57] Again, to understand the full impact of any one author, historians will need to aggregate different kinds of book-history source material.

The strong showing of Pufendorf, who surfaces in the top-30 in 1711–1730, and holds on to his position for an eighty-year period, points to other commonalities. For although Pufendorf is remembered today primarily as a jurist, in the eighteenth-century libraries it is his historical works that are most referenced. The most frequently reported is his *Einleitung zu der Historie der vornehmsten Reiche und Staaten in Europa* (1684), that can arguably be described as the first comprehensive work of modern European history.[58] It is reported in French (52%), English (21%), Dutch (19%) and Latin (7%) translations, with only a single occurrence of the original German version. Given this reader preference for history, it seems not insignificant that other top-ranked Enlightenment authors are also most often recorded as historiographers. The most successful works by Voltaire are his *Henriade* (1723) and *Histoire de Charles XII, roi de Suède* (1731), while Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* (1748) straddles the two fields of history and law, looking towards France's medieval past to draw lessons about the type of political constitution best suited to the modern French.[59] Despite writing in different epochs, Pufendorf, Voltaire, and Montesquieu thus share an interest in a specific kind of history: recent rather than ancient, focused on modern European states—Sweden and France, Russia and beyond—but often viewed within a comparative, even global perspective. Modern history, then, appears to be a modest new accent in the French, British and Dutch libraries sold at auction in the period starting around 1711, possibly reflecting larger changes in viewing the past, and making way for new readerly engagements as the eighteenth century unfolded.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT LIBRARY?

If it is primarily the authors of classical Antiquity that dominate the top in libraries sold in 1670–1830, this raises the question of where, exactly, the mainstream Enlightenment—i.e. the Enlightenment of Voltaire, Rousseau, and their companions—is to be located in these libraries. In the final table, I therefore home in on the tail end of the long eighteenth century, the forty-year span from 1790 to 1830. By this date, all the authors of the Enlightenment canon had published their major works; many were no longer living. However, because of auction catalogues' built-in time lag, this data likely reflects fashions several decades earlier, in the 1760s through 1800s. Table 7 now omits all pre-1700 authors and itemizes only the eighteenth-century authors who make it into the elite 1% class of top-ranked authors, or the first 90 out of a total of 9,000 authors and available ranking slots. In order to cast a wide net, I adopt a catholic definition of the eighteenth century, and include as an eighteenth-century author anyone who published one or more works after 1700, even if their career had begun (many) decades earlier.

Table 7. Top-Ranked Eighteenth-Century Authors in Libraries Sold, 1790–1830

Rank	VIAF Author	Percentage of Collections	ParisianCategory
5	Voltaire	74%	R, AS, H, BL
7	Fénelon	69%	R, BL
12	Joseph Addison	60%	R, H, BL
20	Alexander Pope	56%	BL
22	Montesquieu	55%	L, H, BL
23	Jean-François Marmontel	54%	H, BL
24	William Robertson	53%	H
26	Richard Steele	52%	BL
30	Jean-Jacques Rousseau	51%	L, AS, BL
32	Charles Rollin	49%	H, BL
35	Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux	47%	BL
38	David Hume	46%	AS, H
40	René Aubert de Vertot	45%	H
41	Alain-René Lesage	45%	BL
42	John Locke	44%	R, L, AS, BL
46	Buffon	44%	AS
48	Pierre Bayle	43%	R, AS, H, BL
54	Denis Diderot	41%	AS, H, BL
59	Jonathan Swift	40%	R, BL
61	Samuel Richardson	40%	BL
63	Laurence Sterne	39%	R, H, BL
64	Guillaume-Thomas Raynal	39%	H
67	Humphrey Prideaux	38%	R, H
71	Abbé Prévost	38%	H, BL
73	Henry Fielding	37%	H, BL
76	Fontenelle	37%	AS, BL
77	Gilbert Burnet	36%	R, H
78	Nicolas Lenglet Dufresnoy	36%	H, BL
80	Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet	36%	R, H
82	Abel Boyer	36%	H, BL
84	Tobias Smollett	35%	H, BL
85	Jean Le Clerc	34%	R, AS, H, BL
90	André Dacier	34%	BL

By 1790–1830, close to a third of the authors in the top 1%—or 33 in all, occupying 37% of the available places—are eighteenth-century authors. This means that even at the very end of the century, the majority of top-ranking authors in eighteenth-century libraries were still Latin and Greek classics, with modern authors in the minority. Nonetheless, once the classical authors are filtered out, new patterns become visible. Analyzing the list using the Parisian booksellers' categories shows that the two categories of history and *belles-lettres* remain dominant, but they have lost some ground to the rising categories of "arts and sciences." The category of *belles-lettres* is marked by the appearance in the top-30 of a new phenomenon, the English novel, exemplified by authors like Swift, Richardson, and Sterne. The capacious Parisian category "history," that also includes geography, now covers several travel narratives. And the historical works of Voltaire and Montesquieu, encountered already in earlier libraries, are now flanked by the Scottish Enlightenment historians William Robertson and David Hume. All four share a shift away from narratives focused on the great men of the past, toward new variety of so-called "philosophical history," paying more attention to cultural factors and to the history of *moeurs* or customs, as in the title of Voltaire's famous *Essai sur les moeurs* (1756). Ancient history is represented by Charles Rollin, and ecclesiastic history by Humphrey Prideaux and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet. A contemporary fascination with the Americas speaks through several titles by authors such as Robertson, with his *History of America* (1777), Marmontel, with *Les Incas ou la destruction de l'empire du Perou* (1777) and especially Raynal and Diderot's critical account of European colonialism in their *Histoire des deux Indes* (1774). The corpus of history titles on the whole remains, however, both backward- and forward-looking. Modern European history sits next to ancient history, and the philosophical history of the Enlightenment neighbors works like Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681), still firmly rooted in a providentialist, Catholic Counter-Reformation tradition of historiography.[60]

The history books in libraries sold in the period 1790–1840 might well testify to a late eighteenth-century, intense engagement with works of history, used by readers—as documented by their reading notes, as recently studied by Mark Towsey—as a way to situate themselves in their rapidly changing, contemporary world.[61] More generally, it is also a reflection on the Enlightenment's new relation to historiography. David Hume described the eighteenth century as "the historical age," while the German author-bookseller Friedrich Nicolai wrote that "history is carrying the torch of the Enlightenment."[62] Perceptions of the past were central to the Enlightenment movement, with its emphasis on philosophical history, the conjectural histories of *philosophes* like Rousseau, or even the natural history of Buffon, whose descriptions of the world's fauna begin with a disquisition on the age of the earth. Building on the thesis that the eighteenth century shaped a new form of historicism, that regarded the past as fundamentally different from the present, Reinhard Koselleck has argued that the period 1750–1850 also constituted a turning-point or *Sattelzeit*, characterized by a shift from cyclical to linear ideas of time.[63] This is a shift, of course, that is especially relevant during the revolutionary years, or precisely the decades examined here, the period from 1790 to 1830, in which books in libraries reflect how conceptions of evolution might fuse with actual historical revolution.

As noteworthy as the interest in history per se, finally, is the kind of history these late eighteenth-century libraries document. Despite the presence still of some ancient history, such as Rollin's works, this is primarily modern history—and most often, modern European history. Analogies could be drawn between the events described in these books and library owners' present-day concerns, as with Vertot's series of *Révolutions*, for example, or Robertson's reflections on the newly independent United States. In this way, the appeal of historiographic works could be considered part of a continuum linking interest in classical authors on one hand, with contemporary preoccupations on the other. Just as fifteenth-century editions of Cicero could be valued for recalling a decisive moment in European history, and Lucretius could be read as an Enlightenment author, so these works of history might help readers position themselves in their own modern history-in-the-making. History, as a collective narrative, intersects in these libraries with personal memory, in the form of books owned, used, and treasured in various ways.

CONCLUSION: EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BOOKS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE PAST

What is, then, "the Enlightenment library," and have digital tools helped unearth it in the 580 eighteenth-century library auction catalogues currently aggregated in the MEDIATE database? Answering this question depends largely on how the "Enlightenment library" is defined. If, most crudely, Enlightenment is defined simply as a set of specific ideas, laid down in a canonical set of texts, then our findings are bound to disappoint. There are, on the whole, relatively few books by Enlightenment authors like Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau in these libraries. As in Gabriel Prévost's 1779 library, they represent, at best, no more than 10% of the half-million books recorded in MEDIATE. If, however, Enlightenment is defined more expansively as an ongoing intellectual debate, "a series of processes and problems, rather than as a list of intellectual projects which could be resolved quickly and neatly," then the sheer diversity of books found in these private libraries makes more sense.[64]

Among the processes and problems addressed by these libraries, surely one of the most salient is how eighteenth-century individuals positioned themselves temporally in their changing world. Books provided a way to relate oneself to the European past out of which the Enlightenment present had grown, according to newly historicist, evolutionary conceptualizations of the movement of history. They did so in two ways. There was, first, the past described in the books, by classical historians like Tacitus or Flavius Josephus, by ecclesiastic historians like Bossuet, or by the leading *philosophes*, Voltaire and Montesquieu. But there was also a second past: the books themselves, tangible pieces of evidence or relics from a past that was no longer immediately available to eighteenth-century readers. This is perhaps the ultimate meaning of the massive presence of classical authors in these eighteenth-century libraries. As the past came to seem more remote, so did these material supports—including incunabula, the first printed works in European history—become more meaningful to their owners. The MEDIATE database thus reveals the multiple temporalities at work in eighteenth-century libraries, where most texts dated from long before the owner's own active life—even if editions might be of more recent date. These eighteenth-century "private" libraries showed

a public face in that they represented accumulated culture, inherited books or older works that enjoyed enduring cultural prestige, as well as more recent acquisitions. By studying them at scale, distant reading their contents rather than focusing on individual owners or titles, the coexistence of old and new is made manifest, thereby fundamentally complicating overly progressivist narratives of intellectual influence and change, and shifting attention towards books not only as vehicles for ideas, but as themselves providing the material basis of memory.

NOTES

1. The catalogue lists 674 lots. However, lot 421 is empty. On Prévost, see Anne Jolly, *Financer le service des Ponts-et-Chaussées: La gestion du trésorier général Gabriel Prévost (1748–1778)* (Paris: Ecole nationale des Chartes, 2015).

2. Erfgoedbibliotheek Hendrik Conscience, Antwerp, shelf mark 70848.

3. Born in 1724, Prévost would have been sixteen in 1740, making this a plausible moment for him to start acquiring books on his own. Of the 649 books with a date of publication, 295, or 45%, date from 1740 or later.

4. In his groundbreaking study of 500 French library auction catalogues, Daniel Mornet found only a single copy of Rousseau's *Contrat social*, a "problem" that inspired much subsequent research. Daniel Mornet, "Les Enseignements des Bibliothèques Privées (1750–1780)," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 17, no. 3 (1910): 449–96; Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: Norton, 1995).

5. Described as "Discours qui a remporté le Prix de l'Académie de Dijon. Genève, in-8." *Catalogue des livres de la bibliothèque de M. Prévost, Ancien Trésorier des Ponts et Chaussées* (Paris: Dessain Junior, 1779), p. 6, lot number 71. It was sold for 2 *livres*, 2 *sous*.

6. Robert Darnton, review of *The French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe, 1769–1794*, *Reviews in History* 1355 (December 2012), online: *https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/1355*. [accessed April 1, 2021].

7. Burrows has subsequently drawn out the implications of these findings, questioning the suitability of the provincial STN data to study the European-wide spread of Enlightenment ideas. Simon Burrows, *The French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe II: Enlightenment Bestsellers* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

8. Reprinted in *Distant Reading* (London–New York: Verso, 2013), 179–210.

9. As many as 300 million books may have been produced in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic alone, while European-wide book output by the second half of the eighteenth century has been estimated at 628 million copies. Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, *The Bookshop of the World: Making and Trading Books in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2020), 1. Eltjo Buringh and Jan Luiten van Zanden, "Charting the 'Rise of the West': Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe, A Long-Term Perspective from the Sixth through the Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Economic History* 69, no. 2 (2009): 409–45.

10. 495 of the 580 catalogues are straightforward auction catalogues. Others bear printed prices (21 British catalogues), or might originally have been created for another purpose, despite also functioning as auction catalogues (49 French and Italian catalogues). Fifteen are printed French book inventories drawn up after the owner's death for other purposes, such as bequeathing a personal library to a religious institution.

11. Unfortunately, the Corona lockdown since 2020 has left the MEDIATE project unable to source the last catalogues. The corpus is large enough at present, however, to support preliminary analysis and some approximative conclusions.

12. Part of the problem is that throughout the early modern period, booksellers carried both new and second-hand books, with the distinction between them only becoming common in the early nineteenth

century. John Feather, "The Book Trade and Libraries," in Giles Mandelbrote and K.A. Manley, eds., *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 2: 1640–1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 308.

13.   David McKitterick, *The Invention of Rare Books: Private Interest and Public Memory, 1600–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018), 20.

14.   About 50% of the extant Dutch private library catalogues fall into this size range. It is more difficult to calculate the percentage of British and French catalogues that do so, given the lack of a comprehensive overview of extant catalogues for those regions.

15.   La Borde's collection is recorded in the appendix of another collection, of a certain Madame d'Escars. Both names are manuscript additions, possibly in the hand of bookseller Guillaume de Bure, in the copy at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, shelf number Q-8773. *Catalogue des Livres du Citoyen *** dont la Vente se fera le Lundi 13 Mai 1793, & Jours suivans* (Paris: Citoyen Bizet–Guillaume de Bure l'aîné, 1793.)

16.   There are various reasons why the database contains some larger catalogues. A few list several collections mixed together. Others are catalogues whose number of pages suggested a small library, but which contained some lots listing dozens or even hundreds of books.

17.   Three of these are Italian. Given the scarcity of Italian private library auction catalogues, as well as of seventeenth-century British and French catalogues, criteria for inclusion were stretched somewhat to accommodate these.

18.   Including one multi-owner collection, that lists two libraries sold together, whose contents are not differentiated within the catalogue.

19   Including two multi-owner collections.

20.   One multi-owner collection.

21.   As Michael Suarez writes, "perhaps the best rule of thumb for the reliability of book-auction catalogues is to consider whether the total number of lots is a reasonable figure, given the wealth and reputation of the presumed owner. . . . In general, it may be said for the second half of the eighteenth century that any individually-named sale exceeding 2000 lots must be highly suspect, unless the former owner was a renowned collector." Michael F. Suarez, "English Book Sale Catalogues as Bibliographical Evidence: Methodological Considerations Illustrated by a Case Study in the Provenance and Distribution of Dodsley's *Collection of Poems*, 1750–1795," *The Library*, 6th series, 21 (1999): 330.

22.   For example, in overviews like Claude Jolly, ed., *Histoire des bibliothèques françaises*, vol. 2: Les bibliothèques sous l'ancien régime 1530–1789 (Paris: Editions du Cercle de la Librairie, 2008) or Mandelbrote and Manley, eds., *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*.

23.   Alicia C. Montoya, "Middlebrow, Religion, and the European Enlightenment: A New Bibliometric Project, *MEDIATE* (1665–1820)," *French History and Civilization* 7 (2017): 66–79, *http://h-france. net/rude/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/vol7_Montoya.pdf* [accessed April 1, 2021].

24.   On preservation issues, see Helwi Blom, Rindert Jagersma and Juliette Reboul, "Printed Private Library Catalogues as a Source for the History of Reading," in Mary Hammond, ed., *The Edinburgh History of Reading: Early Readers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2020), 256.

25.   On this practice, see for British catalogues Suarez, "English Book Sale Catalogues as Bibliographical Evidence," 321–60. In the Netherlands, official regulations forbade the practice, but the records of city booksellers' guilds reveal many cases in which booksellers circumvented the rules, by adding an appendix to the main collection, by using the phrase "voor 't grootste gedeelte naagelaten door" ("mostly left by"), or simply by sprinkling a few loose books through the catalogue. Thus the catalogue of the library attributed to a certain François van der Hoop, sold in 1794 in The Hague, was followed by a "Tweede catalogus" ("second catalogue") of books, attributed to the solicitor D. Bouwens, but also including four lots of books that had belonged to a certain Miss de Longeau. Only the annotations in the copy preserved in the Hague municipal archives reveal this insertion. *Catalogue d'une Magnifique Collection de Livres, en Tout Genre de Littérature, Facultés et Langues, la Plus Grande Partie Très Proprement Reliée, Delaissée Par Feu Messire François Van Der Hoop, dans son vivant Conseiller & Thrésorier-Général des Sept Provinces-Unies* (The Hague: I. Van Cleef and B. Scheurleer, 1794), call

number Hgst 1871. In all such cases of "salting," the MEDIATE database creates separate Collection records for the inserted books. Further, catalogues that describe only part of a collection are designated as such. However, such precision is dependent on ongoing research, making data subject to change.

26. The collection and collector counts further differ slightly from the catalogue count because some catalogues contain multiple collections. Conversely, some collections were the object of multiple catalogues drawn up at different moments.

27. This is a slight overrepresentation relative to the number of extant catalogues of female-owned collections. However, preservation rates of female catalogues appears to be lower than male ones. In the Netherlands, the survival rate of male catalogues from 1711–1800 is 16%, while that of female catalogues is only 6%. This lower survival rate is likely due to the generally smaller size of female collections—and hence, their limited interest from an eighteenth-century bibliophile perspective. On survival rates, see Rindert Jagersma, "Dutch Printed Private Library Sales Catalogues, 1599–1800: A Bibliometric Overview," in Arthur der Weduwen, Andrew Pettegree, and Graeme Kemp, eds., *Book Trade Catalogues in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 87–117.

28. On the aspirational aspects of auction catalogues, and their relation to other eighteenth-century bibliographic genres, see my "Building the *Bibliothèque Choisie*, from Jean Le Clerc to Samuel Formey: Library Manuals, Review Journals and Auction Catalogues in the Long Eighteenth Century," in der Weduwen, Pettegree, and Kemp, eds., *Early Modern Book Trade Catalogues*, 426–62.

29. Annotations, when recorded in the lot description, are searchable in the MEDIATE database through a dedicated Person role ("annotator") category. In a few cases, we have also been able to trace the specific copy sold at auction in a modern library.

30. Respectively in *Les Caractères*, "De la mode," and in Chesterfield's famous "Beware of the bibliomanie" letter of March 19, 1750. This *topos* goes back to Antiquity, with Lucian already mocking contemporaries who supposedly collected extensive libraries of Greek books to appear cultured. Jean de La Bruyère, *Les Caractères, précédés des Caractères de Théophraste*, ed. Robert Pignare (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1965), 336. Lord Chesterfield, *Letters*, ed. David Roberts (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), 201–02. Lucian, *The Dead Come to Life or The Fisherman. The Double Indictment or Trials by Jury. On Sacrifices. The Ignorant Book Collector. The Dream or Lucian's Career. The Parasite. The Lover of Lies. The Judgement of the Goddesses. On Salaried Posts in Great Houses*, trans. A.M. Harmon. Loeb Classical Library 130 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1921), 173–212.

31. For an initial attempt to compare data from auction catalogues and publisher's archives, see my "Mornet Reloaded: Counting Enlightenment Bestsellers," in Warren Boutcher and Shanti Graheli, eds., *Bestsellers in the Pre-Industrial Age* (Leiden: Brill), forthcoming.

32. On the discontinuous nature of eighteenth-century reading, as well as private libraries' often collective function, see Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2017).

33. McKitterick, *The Invention of Rare Books*, p. 42 and elsewhere.

34. Alicia C. Montoya and Rindert Jagersma, "Les Livres Français dans les Catalogues de Vente aux Enchères des Bibliothèques Privées (Provinces-Unies, 1670–1750)," in Mathilde Bombart, Sylvain Cornic, Edwige Keller-Rahbé, and Michèle Rosellini, eds., *"A qui lira": Littérature, Livre et Librairie en France au XVIIᵉ Siècle* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2020), 733–46.

35. Cynthia Wall, "The English Auction: Narratives of Dismantlings," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, no. 1 (1997): 1–25.

36. See Blom, Jagersma, and Reboul, "Printed Private Library Catalogues," for an overview of scholarship on private library auction catalogues. There has been some digitization of metadata and source material, for example Annie Charon, ed., *Esprit des livres*, *http://elec.enc-sorbonne.fr/cataloguevente/* and Karel Bostoen, Otto Lankhorst, Marieke van Delft, and Alicia C. Montoya, eds., *Book Sales Catalogues Online*, *https://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/book-sales-catalogues-online*. The MEDIATE project is however the first to move beyond this repository function, using digital tools to statistically analyze this type of material.

37. Moretti, "Style, Inc.," 180.

38.   Such as annotated prices, whose transcription and interpretation present multiple issues. For a tangential discussion of prices, see Alicia C. Montoya and Rindert Jagersma, "Marketing Maria Sibylla Merian, 1720–1800. Book Auctions, Gender, and Reading Culture in the Dutch Republic," *Book History* 21 (2018): 56–88.

39.   Other languages that appear several hundred times in the catalogues are German, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, classical Syriac and Chaldean. Remaining languages range from Welsh and Icelandic to Tamil, Malay, Malagasy and Massachusett.

40.   Helwi Blom, "Philosophie ou Commerce? L'Evolution des Systèmes de Classement Bibliographique dans les Catalogues de Bibliothèques Privées Publiés en France au XVIIIᵉ siècle" in Frédéric Barbier, István Monok and Andrea Seidler, eds., *Les Bibliothèques et l'Economie des Connaissances / Bibliotheken und die Ökonomie des Wissens 1450–1850* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtár és Információs Központ, 2020), 203–34.

41.   On the difficulties this categorization system presents to modern bibliometric database projects, see Simon Burrows, "Troubling Taxonomies," in *The French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe*, 77–89.

42.   This is an aggregate category, including all denominations and versions, since the catalogues' bibliographically imprecise descriptions often hinder exact identification. A breakdown into some individual components would rank the Christian Bible (Old and New Testament) in first place, in 87% of all libraries, the New Testament in 75% of the libraries, between Virgil and Horace, and the Psalms between Tacitus and Grotius, in 69% of all libraries.

43.   Geneviève Bollème, ed., *Livre et société dans la France du XVIIIᵉ siècle* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965).

44.   Kristian Jensen, *Revolution and the Antiquarian Book: Reshaping the Past, 1780–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 74.

45.   Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010); Chantal Grell, *Le Dix-Huitième Siècle et l'Antiquité en France: 1680–1789* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1995). See also Larry F. Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient: Literature and History in Early Modern France* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2011) and on epigrams, Thomas Velle, "Mobile Ideas and Re-Used Latin: Epigrams as a Transnational Genre," in James Raven and Mark Towsey, eds., *Exchanging Knowledge: Ideas and Materialities* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer), forthcoming.

46.   On the most frequently used authors in French Jesuit schools, see Grell, *Le dix-huitième siècle et l'antiquité*, 8–9, 101, 298–300.

47.   Roger Zuber, *Les "belles infidèles" et la Formation du Goût Classique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1968).

48.   McKitterick, *The Invention of Rare Books*; Jensen, *Revolution and the Antiquarian Book*.

49.   Jensen, *Revolution and the Antiquarian Book*, 8–31.

50.   Ibid., 71.

51.   John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London–New York: Routledge, 1997).

52.   Jonathan Israel's particularly early—but not uncontroversial—dating of the Enlightenment makes it start around 1650, with the impact of Cartesian thinking.

53.   The earliest period, 1670–1689, needs to be approached cautiously, since Dutch catalogue over-representation in these decades hampers diachronic comparisons.

54.   Another option, weighting author scores by counting occurrences only after the date of their first publications, is impeded by lack of long-run datasets. To weight late eighteenth-century authors, we would need library auction catalogue data for the entire nineteenth century, which is however not available, since changes in book production and distribution after 1830 fundamentally transformed the auction market.

55.   A comprehensive account of the Enlightenment reception of Lucretius is surprisingly lacking. See however Eric Baker, "Lucretius in the European Enlightenment," in Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie, eds., *Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 274–88; and W.R. Johnson, *Lucretius and the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000).

56.   Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001).

57.   Dan Edelstein, Robert Morrissey, and Glenn Roe, "To Quote or not to Quote: Citation Strategies in the *Encyclopédie*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74, no. 2 (2013): 235.

58.   The eight-volume French version published in 1753–1759 adopted the title *Introduction à l'histoire moderne, générale et politique de l'univers*. This edition, substantially expanded by Antoine-Augustin Bruzen de La Martinière, Thomas-François de Grace, and Anne-Gabriel Meusnier de Querlon, is the most frequently reported French version in the MEDIATE database.

59.   For a breakdown of history titles, see my "Mornet Reloaded: Counting Enlightenment Bestsellers."

60.   Tamara Griggs, "Universal History from Counter-Reformation to Enlightenment," *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 2 (2007): 219–47.

61.   Mark Towsey, *Reading History in Britain and America, c. 1750–c. 1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019).

62.   Cited in Stefan Berger and Christoph Conrad, *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 43.

63.   Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972, originally 1936); Reinhard Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunf: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979).

64.   Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 2.