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Thomas Nicklas

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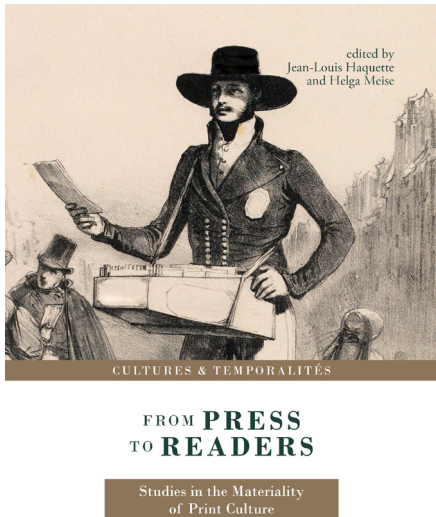


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	Auteur(s)	Thomas NICKLAS 
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# KNOWING HOW TO ACQUIRE FOR BERN

Remarks on the Donation Policy for the Bernese  
Public Library (17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

THOMAS NICKLAS

Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne, CIRLEP

**Abstract:** Jean Rodolphe Sinner (1730-1787) ran the State Library (now the Burgher Library) of Bern for a quarter of a century, from 1748 to 1776. He can be described as a “library reformer” who transformed a book depository into a public place, oriented towards the Republic of Letters and the questions of the contemporary society. Recognized as a scholar, he published a good number of *catalogues raisonnés* which marked the culmination of his activities for the promotion of the library. What is more, Sinner had completely understood that the growing reputation of the City of Bern’s library was first of all founded on book donations. The great French humanist Jacques Bongars (1554-1612) had assembled an illustrious private library which was given as a donation to the Bernese, in 1632. In the same way, an important collection of English Enlightenment works was transferred to Bern, as a gift of a generous British donor, Thomas Hollis (1720-1774), who had great sympathies for Switzerland and especially for the canton of Bern. The paper is particularly interested in this form of book transfer and

in Sinner's strategy to increase the prestige and splendour of the library, tackling the wide-spread prejudice that the Bernese Republic was a state disdainful of the arts and sciences.

ON September 1<sup>st</sup> 1749, a new French ambassador was solemnly received in Solothurn, the town that had been the residence of the French king's representatives in Switzerland since 1530. As was customary, the mayor Johannes Fries of Zurich, the governing canton, gave a (rather conventional) reception speech, to which the ambassador, Marquis de Paulmy, replied in the same style.<sup>1</sup> This diplomat was none other than Antoine René de Voyer (1722-1787), the future Marquis d'Argenson (1757), son of Louis XV's minister, a "good administrator" and above all a great lover of books.<sup>2</sup> A skillful statesman and bibliophile, Paulmy offered magnificent works to the Swiss cantons in order to mark the start of his embassy to the Confederates. To the city of Bern, the second largest state in the Confederation, he sent a volume of splendid engravings immortalising the spectacles organised by the city of Strasbourg to celebrate the King's recovery in August 1744 from the serious illness he had suffered during a stay in Lorraine.<sup>3</sup> The librarian of Bern, Jean Rodolphe Sinner, was quick to write a letter of thanks to Marquis de Paulmy, in which he spoke of the gratitude of the Bernese and of Sinner's admiration for the generous donor: "Allow me, Sir, to express to you in my own name the high esteem I have for those who cultivate letters and fine arts, and who, like you, pass on to us the works of the greatest masters".<sup>4</sup> As he had announced in his letter, Sinner had the patron's name and coat of arms inserted in the book of donations

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1. Hans Michel, *Die Ambassade des Marquis de Paulmy in der Schweiz von 1748 bis 1752. Beziehungen zwischen Frankreich und der Eidgenossenschaft in der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Thesis Bern, 1954, Affoltern am Albis, Weiss, 1954. The texts of the two speeches can be found in: Burgerbibliothek Bern (BBB), Mss.h.h. XIII/152 (11).
  2. Yves Combeau, *Le Comte d'Argenson. Ministre de Louis XV*, Paris, École nationale des Chartes, 1999, p. 106.
  3. *Représentation des fêtes données par la Ville de Strasbourg pour la convalescence du Roy [...]. Inventé, dessiné et dirigé par J. M. Weis*, Paris, Aubert, 1747.
  4. BBB, AS 4 (19), Letter from Sinner to Marquis de Paulmy (Bern, 10 October 1749).

in the library of his city.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the erudite and worldly librarian did not hesitate to establish a link between marquis de Paulmy's gift and the beautiful humanist library of the 16<sup>th</sup> century that his institution had also received as a gift, by evoking the Jacques Bongars collection, the most beautiful treasure in the Bernese collection: "[...] I dare to assure you, Sir, that your work [...] has been shelved with a precious collection of all kinds which, having once belonged to the famous J. Bongars, is today the main ornament of our library".<sup>6</sup> And Sinner suggested to the ambassador that he could have any of Bongars' manuscripts copied that might interest him.<sup>7</sup>

This justified satisfaction and pride expressed by a librarian who received a beautiful gift for the expansion of his institution draws our attention to another form of transfer of the book, the donations that enrich a community in the spirit of sharing knowledge, while at the same time highlighting the materiality of the book, its intrinsic beauty and its inherent character as a work of art. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the library of the city of Bern experienced a significant expansion thanks to such donations, which will be discussed in this article, as well as their appropriation by Bernese society, for which Jean Rodolphe Sinner had worked so hard. The fact remains that such an institution must be anchored in the collective life of a city and a territory, and it needs to attract researchers capable of valorising these collections. The history of the Bern collection, which is now quite prestigious, dates back to the period of the Protestant Reformation, when the city of Bern had established a theological college to train

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5. BBB, Mss.h.h. XII.1 *Verzeichnis der Donationen 1693-1800*, fol. 228: *Illuſtriſſimus Dominus Marchio in Paulmi, Regis Chriſtianiſſimi ad Helvetios Legatus anno legationem iniiit 1749 bibliothecam hanc publicam auxit dono ſplendidiffimo...* For books donated by Swiss libraries, see a recent article that focuses on the Zurich library (*Bürgerbibliothek Zürich*): Christian Scheidegger, "Die Stadtbibliothek Zürich und ihre Donatoren im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert", in Andreas Speer & Lars Reuke (Eds.), *Die Bibliothek - The Library - La Bibliothèque. Denkräume und Wissensordnungen*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2020, p. 399-407 here 403 note 17.
  6. See footnote 4 of this article.
  7. Danielle Muzerelle, "Le marquis de Paulmy, ses ambassades, ses idées, ses voyages", in Marie Vallon (Ed.), *Voyages de bibliothèques. Actes du colloque des 25-26 avril 1998 à Roanne, Saint-Étienne*, PU Saint-Étienne, 1999, p. 183-192 here 188.

future preachers for the Reformed Church. From 1533/1535 onwards, this institution had a library, which was largely based on the confiscated collections of former monasteries in Bern. Since 1513, there was also mention of a “*Libery*” (*libraria*) of the former Latin school, near the Collegiate Church of St Vincent. These two collections were combined to form the historical core of this first public library, which was still quite modest.<sup>8</sup> The current “Bibliothèque de la Bourgeoisie/Bürgerbibliothek” has only existed in its present legal form since 1951, but since the 16<sup>th</sup> century it has fulfilled its role as an archive to house the collective memory of the Republic. Moreover, Jean Rodolphe Sinner clearly understood this memorial dimension, since in 1762 he had the very rich illustrated chronicles of the neighbouring chancellery transferred to the library, which he conceived of as a research establishment in the historical disciplines.<sup>9</sup> These manuscripts, some of which date from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, with their many illustrations, helped to create the Helvetic Corps, disseminating a legendary vision of the Confederates’ common past and fomenting a proto-national identity, particularly among the urban elites,<sup>10</sup> which ensured the cohesion of the Confederation well beyond the crises that marked its existence.

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8. *Die Bürgerbibliothek Bern. Archiv, Bibliothek, Dokumentationsstelle*, Bern, Bürgerbibliothek, 2002, p. 9-17; Hans Strahm, “Die Berner Bibliotheken von ihren ersten Anfängen bis zur grossen Reorganisation von 1693”, in *Bibliotheca Bernensis 1974. Festgabe zur Einweihung*, Bern, Stämpfli, 1974, p. 13-44.
  9. *Die Bürgerbibliothek Bern* (fn 8), note 8, p. 85. A catalogue raisonné of the manuscripts drawn up by Sinner highlighted the importance of the library for research into Swiss history: *Verzeichnis aller geschriebenen Werke, welche die Schweizerische Geschichte angehen, und auf der öffentlichen Bibliothek in Bern sich befinden*, Bern, Hortin, 1769.
  10. Carl Pfaff, *Die Welt der Schweizer Bilderchroniken*, Schwyz, Edition 91, 1991. See also: Rudolf von Fischer, “Die Handschriften der Bürgerbibliothek als Spiegel der älteren bernischen Vergangenheit”, in *Schätze der Bürgerbibliothek Bern. Herausgegeben im Auftrag der burgerlichen Behörden der Stadt Bern*, Bern, Herbert Lang, 1953, p. 11-49.

## Wanting to shine: Jean Rodolphe Sinner, a renowned library reformer

Jean Rodolphe Sinner can be described as a “library reformer”, to use a phrase that Paul Raabe, a great librarian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, used to characterise Goethe’s work on the restructuring of the ducal library in Weimar.<sup>11</sup> In Bern, too, it was a matter of transforming a book depository into a public place, oriented towards the Republic of Letters and the questions of contemporary society. As a “man of letters with many interests”,<sup>12</sup> Sinner ran the State Library (now the Burgher Library) for a quarter of a century, from 1748 to 1776. As the son of the bailiff of (München-)Buchsee, he belonged to the patriciate of the City-State, where people devoted themselves to careers in administration (or foreign service) and made a living from the public offices of which these families had a monopoly, until the revolutionary upheavals that Switzerland was to experience from 1798. It should be noted that Sinner himself had analysed very well the specificities of the society in which he lived, remarking: “The Bernese seem to value only two states, the robe and the sword”.<sup>13</sup> Educated in his father’s house, the bailiff’s castle of Münchenbuchsee, the young man had gathered excellent knowledge in the fields of literature and history, but his appointment as director of the state library in 1748, at the age of only 18, was surprising.<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that the premature death of his father the previous year had made the appointment of the young patrician, now orphaned and destitute, rather urgent in the eyes of the men who wielded power in the aristocratic Republic. However, Sinner did not make his position at the library a sinecure, contrary to the sarcastic expectations of his friend Vincent Bernard Tscharner, a poet and budding historian, who ironically described

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11. Paul Raabe, *Tradition und Innovation. Studien und Anmerkungen zur Bibliotheksgeschichte. Mit einem Nachwort von Georg Ruppelt*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 2013, p. 143-162.

12. See the article on Jean Rodolphe Sinner de Ballaigues in the *Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse*: <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/017873/2011-07-07/>.

13. *Berne au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, par J.-R. Sinner de Baillaigues*, Bern, Dalp, 1853, p. 13.

14. Adolf Burri, *Johann Rudolf Sinner von Ballaigues 1730-1787*, Thesis Bern 1911, Bern, Buechler & Co, 1912, p. 33 and 34.

the Bernese authorities as having granted his friend “a job that gives you holidays/ a pension to entertain you/ a brief as scholar/ that authorises leisure”.<sup>15</sup> Sinner did rest on his laurels, but was very active in making the library accessible to the public and in promoting its treasures through his research and various publications. He was fortunate enough to begin a career in the Bernese administration at a very early age, which was crowned by a seat in the Grand Council (1764) and, finally, by the appointment as bailiff of Cerlier/ Erlach (1776), on Lake Biel, a position that was much more lucrative than his work in the library. His marriage to Louise Émilie de Gingins strengthened his position within the patriciate of the City-State and eventually brought him the Ballaigues estate in the Vaud Jura, which his wife inherited in 1760.

A worldly scholar, he travelled to England in 1754/1755, a country whose language he loved and whose literature he admired so much that he translated a comedy by William Congreve (*The Way of the World*).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he stayed in Paris twice (1765, 1772) where he established valuable links with librarians and booksellers in the French capital with whom he kept up a regular correspondence.<sup>17</sup> His interest in the French medieval manuscripts in the Bernese collection, of which he published extracts, annotated and commented by himself,<sup>18</sup> ensured him a certain recognition in the scholarly world of his time, which was fascinated by documents drawn from archives. His greatest project was the publication of catalogues raisonnés, which he began early in his career. The catalogue of manuscripts was a long-term project and the publication of the third and last volume in 1772 marked the culmination of Sinner’s activity for the promotion of the

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15. *Ibid.*, p. 41, and Tschärner continues in this letter, dated Frauenfeld (15 October 1748), alluding to his friend’s lack of university diplomas and titles: “This rank that You are honoured with/ Is worth the rank of a Baccalaureate/ Or of a doctor, and much better/ For many doctors do not have to live/ But You [...]” BBB, Mss. h.h. X, 106, fol. 5.
16. Hans Utz, *Die Hollis-Sammlung in Bern. Ein Beitrag zu den englisch-schweizerischen Beziehungen in der Zeit der Aufklärung*, Bern, Herbert Lang, 1959, p. 94.
17. Including the abbot Barthélemy Mercier de Saint-Léger, librarian of Sainte-Geneviève, and the booksellers Grasset and Tilliard: BBB, Mss.h.h. X/105.
18. *Extraits de quelques poésies du XIII<sup>e</sup>, XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Lausanne, Grasset, 1759.



library.<sup>19</sup> Another catalogue, that of printed books, completed the picture and enabled the scholarly community to become acquainted with all the tools available to Bernese scholarship.<sup>20</sup> To the librarian's great satisfaction, these achievements did not go unnoticed in the Republic of Letters. He received letters of praise from Strasbourg, for example, where there was a great deal of interest in the Swiss archives. Jean Daniel Schoepflin, the doyen of Alsatian historiography, followed Sinner's work which, according to him, made the Bernese library "respectable and useful",<sup>21</sup> with great sympathy. Schoepflin's main disciple, Christophe Guillaume Koch, expressed himself in the same way, praising the last volume of the manuscript catalogue in a letter to Sinner: "Your catalogue... which has done you infinite honour in France and of which I hear the highest praise every day".<sup>22</sup> And Koch published an account in the *Gazette des Deux-Ponts*, a French-language periodical published in a German principality, in which he emphasised the essential nature of the work of the Bernese librarian, transforming a hidden treasure of the state into a public good: "The manuscripts that have come down to us from the Middle Ages are those precious monuments that would shed a great light on history and literature, if we were always able to profit from them. But buried for the most part in the dust of the libraries, they are shown to the curious as rarities rather than making their full usefulness known to the public".<sup>23</sup>

The Bernese library experienced an undeniable boom in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Jean Rodolphe Sinner was therefore able to draw a quite satisfactory balance sheet of its activity, which he articulated in an indirect way in one of his late publications, the *Voyage historique et littéraire dans la Suisse occidentale*, published in 1781. In the first volume, referring to an intellectual journey from Basel to Geneva, via Biel and Neuchâtel, he quoted the Scottish theologian

19. *Catalogus codicum mss. bibliothecae Bernensis annotationibus criticis illustratus*, 3 vols, Bern, Brunner & Haller, 1760-1772.

20. *Bibliothecae Bernensis librorum typis editorum catalogus*, Bern, Wagner, 1764.

21. Schoepflin to Sinner (Strasbourg, 15 December 1767): BBB, Mss.h.h. X/105, fol. 303.

22. Koch to Sinner (Strasbourg, 16 September 1772): BBB, Mss.h.h. X/105, fol. 103.

23. *Ibid.*, fol. 87-94'.

Gilbert Burnet, a traveller (and banished exile) from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, who had published letters about his wanderings in Switzerland and Italy.<sup>24</sup> In his text, Burnet referred to the public and university library in Basel in 1685 as “the most important in Switzerland”. But Sinner had to make a correction a century later: “What may have been true then is not true now. Those of Geneva, Zurich & Bern even surpass it”.<sup>25</sup> This turn of phrase allows us to say that, proportionally, the city of Bern was able to establish itself among the cultural centres of the Confederation, even if its rivals have not been inactive during the century. And Sinner emphasizes, using the example of the Geneva library, what constituted the wealth and strength of this institution, namely donations: “The Geneva public library [...] was very small at the beginning of this century. It has been enriched by the considerable generosity of citizens and foreigners”.<sup>26</sup> This observation, made for Geneva, was also applied to the library in Bern.

## Knowing how to acquire: From French humanism to English Enlightenment

In his letter of thanks to Marquis de Paulmy, Jean Rodolphe Sinner mentioned the collection of the “famous Jacques Bongars”, of which the Bernese were very proud and to which the ambassador’s gift would be fittingly linked. In 1763, a Swiss in the service of France, the Zug scholar and military officer Beat Fidel Zurlauben,

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24. Gilbert Burnet, *Letters Containing an Account of what seemed most remarkable in Switzerland, Italy etc.*, Rotterdam, Abraham Acher, 1686.

25. (Jean Rodolphe Sinner de Ballaigues), *Voyage historique et littéraire dans la Suisse occidentale*, Vol. 1, Neuchâtel, Société typographique, 1781, p. 31. Also consult: Jean-Daniel Candaux, “La Suisse bernoise de Sinner de Ballaigues”, in Sandrine Battistini et al. (Eds.), *Les écrivains suisses alémaniques et la culture francophone au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Geneva, Slatkine, 2008, 139-146; Nicolas Morel, “Entre ‘esprit de calcul’ et ‘dons d’Apollon’: Voltaire dans le ‘Voyage’ de Sinner de Ballaigues”, *Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 8, 2017, p. 27-42.

26. *Voyage historique et littéraire dans la Suisse occidentale*, Vol. 2, Neuchâtel, Société typographique, 1781, p. 50.

wrote to Sinner from Paris that the *Bongarsiana* in Bern constituted an important link between the Confederation and France, thus emphasizing the political significance of this collection.<sup>27</sup> The great French philologist and diplomat Jacques Bongars (1554-1612), an eminent scholar who was very committed to the Huguenot cause, had assembled an illustrious private library of European humanism, comprising around 500 manuscripts and 3000 printed books.<sup>28</sup> It includes, for example, some fifty codices from the library of the Abbey of Fleury (Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire), one of the cultural centres of Christendom at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, which flourished thanks to its important scriptorium. During an incursion by the Huguenots in 1562, this rich library was systematically plundered and a scholar from Orléans, Pierre Daniel, who practised as a lawyer in Orléans and as a judge in Fleury, was able to buy a significant part of the collection from the plunderers. After his death in 1602, Bongars inherited part of the collection. Other items, including Carolingian manuscripts, came from Auxerre, a town that was also taken and looted by a Huguenot army (1567), or from Strasbourg. In the Alsatian metropolis, the cathedral chapter library was ransacked during the “Bishops’ War” that ravaged Alsace in 1592. At the time, Bongars was in Strasbourg to conduct negotiations with German princes on behalf of King Henry IV.<sup>29</sup> During his stay in Strasbourg, Bongars lived in the house of the banker René Graviseth, who

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27. BBB, Mss.h.h. X/105, fol. 18: Zurlauben to Sinner (Paris, 7 December 1763). Beat Fidel Zurlauben (1720-1799) pursued a military career in France (brigadier in 1748, marshal in 1762) and a political career in his native canton of Zug, where he was a member of the Council. At the same time, he published scholarly works, e.g. an *Histoire militaire des Suisses au service de la France* (8 vols., 1751-1753). He left an important collection of manuscripts, which is now in the Aargau cantonal library, see: Kurt-Werner Meier, *Die Zurlaubiana: Werden, Besitzer, Analysen: eine Zuger Familiensammlung, Grundstock der Aargauischen Kantonsbibliothek*, 2 vols, Aarau, Sauerländer, 1981.
28. Gerlinde Huber-Rebenich, *Jacques Bongars (1554-1612). Gelehrter und Diplomat im Zeitalter des Konfessionalismus*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2015; Ruth Kohndorfer-Fries, *Diplomatie und Gelehrtenrepublik. Die Kontakte des französischen Gesandten Jacques Bongars (1554-1612)*, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 2009; *Jacques Bongars. Humanist, Diplomat, Büchersammler*, edited by Burgerbibliothek Bern, Bern, Stämpfli, 2012.
29. Martin Germann, “Die Bongarsiana”, in *Die Burgerbibliothek Bern. Archiv, Bibliothek, Dokumentationsstelle* (fn 8), p. 93-120.

supported the diplomat's financial transactions on behalf of Henry of Navarre.

Graviseth had a son, Jacques, born in 1598, of whom the bachelor Bongars was probably the godfather. In 1615, the young Graviseth acquired a seigneurie in the Bernese part of Aargau (Liebegg Castle). As soon as hostilities broke out in the Holy Roman Empire, around 1620, the Graviseth family moved to Basel. Jacques Graviseth inherited the library from Bongars, who had died in 1612, and moved it to his new home, a beautiful Basel townhouse. In 1624, he married Salome von Erlach, the daughter of a high-ranking official of the State of Bern. Naturalized as a Bernese citizen in the same year and integrated into a guild (that of blacksmiths), did the beneficiary of this largesse make promises about the *Bongarsiana*? In any case, a few years later, Graviseth offered this treasure as a gift to the city of Bern, which accepted it with great pleasure. At the beginning of 1632, the transfer of the library to Bern from Basel, where it was still located, was arranged.<sup>30</sup> This transfer of a French humanist's research tool was both a "confessional manifesto", in favour of Protestantism under pressure in the Holy Roman Empire, and a "political sign", symbolising the City-State's strong desire to assume its role, including a cultural one, in the world of the seventeenth century, which was marked by immense conflicts between the European powers.<sup>31</sup> Going against their political claims, however, the Bernese did not pay much attention to this acquisition. Was there a fear of possible restitution claims? A first catalogue of the collection, completed in 1634, remained in manuscript form and it was not until the work of Jean Rodolphe Sinner that the collection was truly developed for

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30. Ariana Huber Hernández, "'Wegen bongarsischer arretirter liberey' – Korrespondenz zum Wechsel der Bibliothek Jacques' Bongars von Basel nach Bern", *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, 110, 2010, p. 269-276; Patrick Andrist, "Strassburg – Basel – Bern. Bücher auf der Reise. Das Legat der Bibliothek von Jacques Bongars, die Schenkung von Jakob Graviseth und das weitere Schicksal der Sammlung in Bern", *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, 110, 2010, p. 249-268.

31. Claudia Engler, "Die Bongarsiana – konfessionelles Manifest und politisches Zeichen", in *Jacques Bongars. Humanist, Diplomat, Büchersammler* (fn 28), p. 29-34.

the Republic of Letters. Thanks to him, the Bernese state could finally clear itself of the reproaches of Jacques Bongars' heirs for not doing what was necessary to make these precious manuscripts accessible to researchers. In 1658, a satirical account entitled "*Heutelia*" (an anagram of Helvetia), attributed to Hans Franz Veiras (de Verace), Bongars' former secretary and a close associate of the Graviseth family, appeared anonymously in Paris. This is a description of a journey through Switzerland by a Calvinist, a Lutheran and a Catholic priest, in which the cultural peculiarities and political problems of the Confederation in the mid-1600s are discussed.<sup>32</sup> When these travellers go on to Bern, they want to visit the city's public library, where they find that the books are covered with a thick layer of dust and conclude that nobody reads in Bern, so that this valuable collection is useless.<sup>33</sup> These were negative stereotypes, which were widespread at the time, and which librarian Sinner vigorously opposed.

It should be noted that Bern was a reformed republic and the largest republican state north of the Alps, hence the undeniable political dimension of these book donations. This is especially true for the important gift of the "anonymous Englishman". In 1767, Sinner published the first supplement to the catalogue of printed books which contained a complete inventory of the rich collection that the anonymous Englishman (*Anonymus Anglus*) had donated to the Bernese library.<sup>34</sup> Between 1758 and 1765, this British stranger sent 430 books to the Bernese and a considerable monetary donation.<sup>35</sup> A Bernese man who had lived in England for a long time, where he had married the niece of Richard Osbaldeston, the Anglican bishop

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32. Walter Weigum, *Heutelia, eine Satire über die Schweiz des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Frauenfeld, Huber, 1945.

33. Hans Franz Veiras, *Heutelia*, Munich, Kösel, 1969, p. 252: "jhr Herren müßt euch nit verwundern, daß diese Bücher staubig seynd, denn sie selten gebraucht werden, und mehr von frembden... als von den Inheimischen."

34. Hans Bloesch, "Ein englischer Gönner der Berner Stadtbibliothek im 18. Jahrhundert", in *Festschrift Gustav Binz, Oberbibliothekar der öffentlichen Bibliothek der Universität Basel, zum 70. Geburtstag am 16. Januar 1935 von Freunden und Fachgenossen dargebracht*, Basel, Schwabe, 1935, p. 112-118 here note 1.

35. Hans Utz, *Die Hollis-Sammlung in Bern. Ein Beitrag zu den englisch-schweizerischen Beziehungen in der Zeit der Aufklärung*, Bern, Herbert Lang, 1959, p. 19.

of London, acted as an intermediary in this transaction. The intermediary was Jean Rodolphe Vautravers, a member of the *Royal Society*, who was to become Benjamin Franklin's official translator. The books he sent to Berne honoured the English Enlightenment, with a focus on some of the great figures of the Cromwellian *Commonwealth*, such as John Milton, and the political thinkers who contributed to the development of liberal theories, such as John Locke.<sup>36</sup> The British library in Bern thus reflects a Whig conception of history, glorifying the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 and damning the Stuart kings for their pro-Catholic religious and absolutist political claims. It was only after the generous donor's death that the Bernese learned his identity. His name was Thomas Hollis (1720-1774) and he had been a great bibliophile and libertarian,<sup>37</sup> a critic of the United Kingdom authorities, as well as being a somewhat strange and solitary character, who suffered from his inability to enter politics, his greatest desire, due to the fact that he refused to lie or flatter...

As the young scion of a wealthy family of merchants and religious dissenters, usually in conflict with the Church of England, Hollis had undertaken the *Grand Tour* and travelled much of the continent, including Switzerland, which he admired for its independence and freedom, no doubt with illusions about the reality of socio-political life in the cantons. It should be noted that the patron gave books to other Swiss libraries as well. Zurich, Basel and Geneva also benefited.<sup>38</sup> Bern was particularly fond of the donor for one reason only, which had to do with his eccentricity and his taste for strong opinions in history and politics. Hollis had a deep admiration for General Edmund Ludlow, one of the English regicides of 1649. A prominent military figure in the *Commonwealth*, he opposed Cromwell, who had become dictator. After the Restoration of the Stuart dynasty, Ludlow fled to Switzerland, where he was taken in by the Bernese, who protected him, so that he could die quietly in his bed in Vevey (1692), unlike most of the men who bore responsibility

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36. *Ibid.*, p. 21-46.

37. Peter D. Marshall, "Thomas Hollis (1720-74): The Bibliophile as Libertarian", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 66, 1984, p. 246-263.

38. Hans Utz, *Die Hollis-Sammlung*, (fn 35), p. 81.

for the execution of King Charles. However, the honeymoon between Thomas Hollis and the Republic of Bern did not withstand the disenchantment of the donor. At the beginning of 1765, Sinner was delighted to receive an “almost royal gift” (*donum fere regium*) from England: 400 books with magnificent bindings, including important reference works of the English Enlightenment.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, however, a politico-religious affair was taking its course which led to Hollis’s disaffection with the canton of Bern.

A former Bernese pastor, Beat Herbort, published a work in which he discussed the abuse of the oath by the governments of the Helvetic republics, denying that it was a sacramental act. His book was banned by the city’s Secret Council, which considered it offensive to the authorities and the Reformed religion. Herbort, already an old man, was sentenced to house arrest and the Council ordered that copies of the offending book be burnt.<sup>40</sup> Keeping abreast of Swiss news through his correspondent Vautravets, who had moved to Biel,<sup>41</sup> Thomas Hollis was astonished to learn that the Republic of Berne was not the haven of tolerance and benevolence he had thought it was, through his travels and reading. Disappointed, he turned away from the Swiss cantons and turned his attention to the English colonies in North America, making generous donations to American libraries, including Harvard. Deprived of further English donations, Librarian Sinner had to make a virtue of necessity. Alongside the two prestigious pillars of the library, French humanist manuscripts and English Enlightenment works, he emphasized research into the history of the Confederation. The aforementioned transfer of the old Swiss chronicles from the secret chancellery to the public library was symbolic (1762). Moreover, in 1764 Sinner bought a fine historical-diplomatic collection from the son of Albrecht von Haller, Gottlieb Emmanuel, who had collected important works on

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39. *Ibid.*, p. 11. According to the observer Vautravets, the librarian was delighted: “Besonders Herr Sinner war in einer Art Verzückung” (*ibid.*).

40. Hans Utz, “Ein Opfer der bernischen Zensur: Pfarrer Herborts Buch *Versuch über wichtige Wahrheiten zur Glückseligkeit der Menschen*, 1766”, *Archiv des Historischen Vereins des Kantons Bern*, 1957, p. 102-137.

41. Where he received J. J. Rousseau in 1765.

the Confederate past, with the idea of “forming a historical library of Switzerland”.<sup>42</sup> The fundamental research by Haller, a great collector of documents, would allow a historian of the next generation, such as Johannes von Müller, to launch his great historical syntheses, which materialised as early as 1780, when the first volume of his *Geschichten der Schweizer* appeared, focusing on the founding myths of Switzerland,<sup>43</sup> profoundly influencing the popular perception of Swiss history and inspiring poets such as Friedrich Schiller...

## The transfer of books and cultural policy in the City-State

In 1748, in his somewhat capricious letter of congratulations to the newly appointed librarian Sinner, Vincent Bernard Tschärner urged his friend: “I have only one point to recommend to you, but an important one for a qualified man who has the good of the fatherland at heart. Take care to attract our idle youth to reading by a choice of books free from pedantry and in accordance with the only true modern taste. What an honour for the public, if foreigners saw in the book of control the honour and hope of the State in the ranks of those who borrow public books”.<sup>44</sup> Hence the importance of strengthening the links between the library and society, in response to these disparaging remarks by foreigners that circulated throughout the eighteenth century. As late as the 1780s, a professor at the University of Göttingen, the philosopher Christoph Meiners, who travelled extensively in the Confederation, struck the same chord.

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42. These ideas have been brought together systematically in one work: Gottlieb Emmanuel von Haller, *Conseils pour former une bibliothèque historique de la Suisse*, Bern, Société Typographique, 1771. See also Hans Haeblerli, *Gottlieb Emmanuel von Haller. Ein Berner Historiker und Staatsmann im Zeitalter der Aufklärung, 1735-1786*, Bern, Feuz, 1952.

43. Marianne Berliner Konqui et al. (Eds.), *L'historiographie à l'aube du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, autour de Jean de Müller et du Groupe de Coppet*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2004.

44. Adolf Burri, *Johann Rudolf Sinner von Ballaigues*, (fn 14), p. 41.



It is worth noting that his “*Briefe über die Schweiz*”, a collection of essays published from 1784 onwards, had a lasting influence on the way Switzerland was perceived in Germany. What is more, the work was also translated into French. In the first volume, the Göttingen preceptor harshly judged the Bernese, summarily noting their “lack of knowledge”.<sup>45</sup> Certainly, the rigidity of the state church, revealed by the affair surrounding the critical publication of the theologian Beat Herbort on the question of the oath (1766), the situation of education in the Bernese countryside, which left much to be desired,<sup>46</sup> as well as the life of the “idle” young patricians, to use the expression chosen by Tschanner, waiting for a well-paid and prestigious position within the administration, all of which were arguments in favour of the hypothesis put forward by Meiners of a Bernese Republic disdainful of the arts and sciences.

Was Bern on the map of the philosophers who revolutionised the world in the eighteenth century? The *Encyclopédie*, which devoted a long article to the city of Geneva, the birthplace of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, was also interested in the canton of Zurich, the home of great Alemannic intellectuals, such as the poet-painter Salomon Gessner, the satirist Gotthard Heidegger, a fierce enemy of novels, and the renowned naturalist Johann Jakob Scheuchzer. And Bern? Diderot wrote a few uninspiring lines about the city and canton, “and we stopped there”.<sup>47</sup> Jean Rodolphe Sinner did not question these direct and indirect judgements about the city on the Aare. In Bern, politics absorbed all public life, he noted with a certain resignation, and “Bernese politics does not go hand in hand with erudition”.<sup>48</sup> This pessimism was probably not entirely appropriate, but

45. Christoph Meiners, *Briefe über die Schweiz*, Vol. I, Berlin, Spener, 1788, p. 302.

46. Jean Rodolphe Sinner is credited with writing a highly critical essay on the situation of Bernese schools in 1765, entitled *Essai sur l'éducation publique* (Essay on public education) in 1765, which was highly critical of the state of Bern's schools; see Friedrich Haag, “Die Bemühungen der Berner um die Erziehung der patrizischen Jugend”, *Beiträge zur Bernischen Schul- und Kulturgeschichte*, 1, 1898, p. 341-497 here 355.

47. See: Béla Kapossy, “Bern und das Europa der Aufklärung”, in André Holenstein et al. (Eds.), *Berns goldene Zeit. Das 18. Jahrhundert neu entdeckt*, Bern, Stämpfli, 2008, p. 398-402 here 400.

48. Adolf Burri, *Johann Rudolf Sinner von Ballaigues*, (fn 14), p. 179.

the fact remains that a breeding ground that was not very fertile for the arts and letters needed creative people who could redouble their efforts to develop culture. Even if stereotypes and prejudices had a hard time of it, the balance sheet was not entirely negative at the end of the Bernese Ancien Régime. In 1794, an encyclopaedic description of the city and the Republic of Bern was published, whose authors emphasised the progress of science in the canton during the eighteenth century. And the public library, skillfully illustrated by Sinner, the great editor of very useful catalogues, had contributed to the new reputation of the city.<sup>49</sup>

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49. Berchtold Friedrich von Haller/ Johann Georg Heinzmann, *Beschreibung der Stadt und Republik Bern, nebst vielen nützlichen Nachrichten für Fremde und Einheimische*, Bern, Typographische Sozietät, Vol. I, 1794, p. 19-22.