

READING TRAVELS IN THE CULTURE OF CURIOSITY: THÉVENOT'S COLLECTION OF VOYAGES

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the circulation and use of travel writings within the seventeenth-century “culture of curiosity”, focusing on a figure at the heart of this milieu, Melchisédech Thévenot (? 1622-1692), and his edited *Relations de divers voyages curieux* (1663-1672). The Thévenot case reveals the importance of travel writing for the scholarly community in a period when the modern boundaries between disciplines were not yet formed, and when the nature of geographical knowledge was undergoing radical change. The collection, discussion and publication of the travel collection are shown to be part of the program of Thévenot’s experimental “assembly” to investigate the “arts”.

John Locke kept abreast of the scholarly news from France through the regular correspondence of Nicolas Toinard, an antiquarian and Biblical scholar from Orléans. In the summer of 1680, a mutual friend added an enquiry of his own. This friend was Melchisédech Thévenot (c. 1622-1692), whom Locke had met during his years in France (1675-79). Thévenot explained that, while reading *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, he had found a reference to some papers of Richard Hakluyt’s that had not been printed; Purchas seemed to imply that these texts deserved to be made public, and Thévenot asked Locke to make enquiries as to where these manuscripts might be. Thévenot was already a reasonably well-known collector, who had published a four-volume travel compilation, the *Relations de divers voyages curieux*.¹ He hoped that the missing Hakluyt papers might be found and printed, both for the benefit of the “Public”, and as a tribute to Hakluyt, to whom posterity would always be grateful for having brought so many texts to light which would otherwise be lost.²

¹ Melchisédech Thévenot, ed., *Relations de divers voyages curieux, qui n’ont point esté publiées; ou qui ont esté traduites d’Haclyut, de Purchas, & d’autres Voyageurs Anglois, Hollandois, Portugais, Allemands, Espagnols; et de quelques Persans, Arabes, et autres Auteurs Orientaux...*, 4 vols. large quarto (Paris, 1663-1672); augmented reissue in 2 vols. (Paris, 1696). There was also a shorter octavo volume, supplementing the quarto series: *Recueil de voyages* (Paris, 1681, reissued 1682).

² John Locke, *Correspondence*, ed. E. S. de Beer, 8 vols. (Oxford, 1976-89), vol. 2, 229-30 (Toinard to Locke, 14/24 August 1680): Thévenot writes, “... Purchas en parle

Thévenot's note to Locke provides an entry point for exploring the circulation of travel writings within the baroque "culture of curiosity".³ Thévenot, tantalized by a reference to lost Hakluyt papers, hopes to appropriate them within his own series (itself an emulation of Hakluyt); he duly sets about finding them using the method he knows best—by writing to fellow members of the "Republic of Letters". In this note to Locke, most of the key terms and images that we will find recurring as we follow Thévenot's case are present: the encyclopedic compilation, seen as a resource for posterity; the privileging of certain source-texts (usually manuscripts, and often unattainable); and, above all, the desire to bring potentially useful and hitherto hidden knowledge (especially from overseas) into public circulation, via translation and print.

A second example from the Toinard-Locke letters offers a variation on these themes. Toinard and Locke had been discussing Robert Boyle's latest book, in which Boyle described cooking meat and fish in an evacuated air-pump; this prompted Toinard to wonder whether it might be possible to use an air-pump to transform sea water into healthy drinking water. He then relates that Thévenot had once told him that in Holland, some years earlier, a man claimed to have "found this important secret" (i.e. making sea water potable) and had tried to sell his discovery to the Dutch East Indies Company, for the sum of "10,000 écus". The Company refused, and so the secret died with the man. Later, apparently, the Company regretted its decision.⁴

Such stories of ill-fated inventors abound in the correspondence and the periodicals of the time. Thévenot's Dutch anecdote can be connected

comme de pieces qui meritent d'estre données au public[.] Il faudroit s'informer en quelles mains peuvent estre tombes ces ecrits, et sauver ces ouvrages en faveur du Public et d'un homme [i.e. Hakluyt] dont on se souviendra tousjours pour l'obligation que nous luy avons de nous avoir sauvé beaucoup de bonnes choses. Il a sauvé des pieces et des ouvrages de quelques uns de nos conquerans François[.] Je vouderois bien estre assez heureux pour luy rendre la pareille et sauver de l'oubly . . . quelques-uns de ses ouvrages." Toinard (or Thoynard, 1628-1706), was an antiquarian and biblical scholar, and one of Locke's most diligent correspondents.

³ On the "culture of curiosity", see Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux: Paris, Venise: XVI^e-XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1987), 61-80; Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: museums, collecting and scientific culture in early modern Italy* (Berkeley, 1994); Neil Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity in early modern France and Germany* (Oxford, 2004).

⁴ Toinard to Locke, 24 Sept 1680, in Locke, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, 256: "Mr Tevenot m'a autrefois dit que l'on estoit tres persuadé en Holande qu'un particulier avoit trouvé il y a du tems ce secret important [i.e. of making seawater potable] avec lequel il est mort, parceque la compagnie des Indes Orientales qui s'en est bien repentie, luy avoit refusé dix mille écus qu'il demandoit pour le dire".

with a broader project to “discover” (in the sense of “uncover”) hidden knowledge, specifically the “secrets” of the *arts* (artisanal techniques). Discovering the “arts” also meant devising new techniques, new instruments and machines.⁵ As we will find, this program for collecting the “arts” is connected with travel and navigation in two senses. First, there is an emphasis on techniques that will be useful for the art of navigation; second, there is the emphasis on using travel itself as a form of *experience* which, if properly accumulated in print, will allow knowledge of nature and of techniques to be discovered and exchanged.

For historians of early modern science, Thévenot figures in the story of the private scientific assemblies that existed just before the establishment of the Académie Royale des Sciences (in 1666).⁶ For historians of travel literature, he is known for the *Relations de divers voyages curieux*, the first large-scale French travel collection, frequently cited by early Enlightenment readers. Locke made notes on Thévenot’s collection and cites it, along with other travel accounts, in his *Essay on human understanding*.⁷ Thévenot’s collection also features in the library catalogues of Voltaire, Turgot, d’Holbach, de Brosses, and William Beckford.⁸ Usually, these twin aspects of Thévenot’s career—his scientific club, and his compilation of travel accounts—are kept apart. If, however, we attempt to read the sources without dividing his interests into present-day categories, a relationship between these activities emerges. As we will see, Thévenot’s travel compilation was the product of a particular social network, and of a particular intellectual program.

⁵ On “secrets” and the “arts” in the scientific culture of the period, see William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: books of secrets in medieval and early modern culture* (Princeton, 1994); Pamela O. Long, *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship: technical arts and the culture of knowledge from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Baltimore, 2001).

⁶ Harcourt Brown, *Scientific Organizations in Seventeenth-Century France (1620-1680)* (Baltimore, 1934), 135-60; David J. Sturdy, *Science and Social Status: the members of the Académie des sciences, 1666-1750* (Woodbridge, 1995), 16-21.

⁷ John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), 71 (I.iii.9), 87 (I.iv.8). On Locke’s use of Thévenot, see Gabriel D. Bonno, *Les Relations intellectuelles de Locke avec la France*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology, 38, no. 2 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955), 83-84, 168; John Lough, “Locke’s reading during his stay in France (1675-1679)”, *The Library*, 5th series, 8 (1953), 229-58, at 239-40. See also Daniel Carey, “Locke, travel literature, and the natural history of Man”, *The Seventeenth Century*, 11 (1996), 259-80.

⁸ Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des Lumières* (Paris, 1971), 486; Henri-Jean Martin and Roger Chartier, eds., *Histoire de l’édition française*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1989-91), vol. 2, 24 (Beckford’s copy).

I

Thévenot came from a family of royal office-holders,⁹ and it seems that his collecting and scholarly projects were funded largely from private wealth.¹⁰ He is still sometimes confused with his nephew, Jean [de] Thévenot (1633-67), who made two voyages, one to the Levant, one to Persia and India (meeting his death on the way back), and wrote an account of his travels that went through several editions.¹¹ It needs to be made clear, given the confusion between the two, that Melchisédech never set foot in the Orient himself. However, he did spend some time touring Europe in his youth, possibly in the company of his nephew. Especially important were two diplomatic missions he spent in Italy in the 1640s and 1650s, where he formed friendships with members of the scholarly community, and also developed an interest in Oriental studies, partly through his acquaintance with Abraham Ecchellensis (Ibrahim al-Haqilani), a professor of Arabic at the Maronite College in Rome.¹²

Thévenot was back in Paris by 1655, where he first met Christiaan Huygens.¹³ In that period, Thévenot had close links with those Parisian scholars who pursued Skeptical and Epicurean philosophy (the so-called *libertins érudits*), especially the circle around Pierre Gassendi and Henri-Louis Habert de Montmor.¹⁴ Thévenot was frequently described as an

⁹ On the family, see BN ms fr. 29303, dossier 62724, esp. items 22-31; Thévenot was "Conseiller du Roy en ses Conseils d'Estat"; his grandfather, Melchissédec Garnier (d. 1637), had been "doyen des avocats au Parlement de Paris".

¹⁰ Jean Chapelain, *Lettres*, ed. J. P. Tamizey de Larroque, 2 vols. (Paris, 1880-1883), vol. 2, 616: Chapelain to J. F. Gronovius, 5 Feb. 1669. Chapelain says of Thévenot: "Son application a ceste sorte d'estude est d'autant plus noble qu'elle n'a rien de sordide et qu'au lieu d'y chercher autre interest que celuy de l'avantage du genre humain, il y employe avec son temps la richesse qu'il a héritée de ses pères".

¹¹ Jean [de] Thévenot, *Relation d'un voyage*, 3 vols. (Paris and Rouen, 1664-1684); "standard" edition, 5 vols. (Paris, 1689), reprinted (Amsterdam, 1727); translations: Dutch (Amsterdam, 1681-8), English (London, 1687), German (Frankfurt, 1693). On Jean de Thévenot, see Lane M. Heller, "Le testament olographe de Jean de Thévenot", *XVII^e siècle*, 167 (1990), 227-234; and the editor's introduction to Jean Thévenot, *Voyage du Levant*, ed. Stéphane Yerasimos (Paris, 1980), 5-27.

¹² On Ecchellensis (1605-1664), see Pieter J. A. N. Rietbergen, "A Maronite mediator between seventeenth-century cultures: Ibrahim al-Haqilani, or Abraham Ecchellense (1606-1664) between Christendom and Islam", *Lias*, 16 (1989), 13-41; and Gérald Duverdiér, "Les impressions orientales en Europe et le Liban", in Camille Aboussouan, ed., *Le Livre et le Liban jusqu'à 1900* (Paris, 1982), 157-280.

¹³ Jean Mesnard, "Les premières relations parisiennes de Christiaan Huygens", in René Taton, ed., *Huygens et la France* (Paris, 1982), 33-40.

¹⁴ Brown, *Scientific Organizations*; René Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 1943).

honnête homme (indeed “un des meilleurs et des plus honnests hommes de Paris”),¹⁵ and had links with the writers who articulated this particular ethic of sociability. With his private wealth, he was able to create a “cabinet” (a private museum and library, with some scientific instruments) in which he could hold meetings of scholarly friends and play host to foreign scholars when they visited Paris.

In the traditional historiography of French science, Thévenot is known for his role as a member of the Gassendi-Montmor group (the so-called “Montmor Academy”), which Thévenot hosted in the last two years of its existence (1663-1665).¹⁶ Often this group is described a direct ancestor of the Académie Royale des Sciences, although the relationship between the two is more complex.¹⁷ Despite (or perhaps because of) his prominent role as an academy-host, when Colbert founded the Académie Royale des Sciences in 1666, Thévenot was not made a member. For the next eighteen years, he withdrew from Paris intellectual life, pursuing studies at his country house at Issy.¹⁸ The literature’s traditional focus on the Académie des Sciences has led historians to “reify” the private academies of the period, to imagine them as “scientific organizations”, with a greater degree of programmatic coherence than the sources really support. In many ways, the “assemblies” that met *chez* Montmor and Thévenot were social settings resembling the other clubs and salons of the mid-century, and to some degree sharing participants and projects with them.¹⁹

¹⁵ Huygens to L. Huygens, 7 Dec. 1661, in Christiaan Huygens, *Œuvres complètes*, eds. D. Bierens de Haan and J. Bosscha, 22 vols. (The Hague, 1888-1950), vol. 3, 395.

¹⁶ On the “Montmor academy”, see Brown, *Scientific Organizations*, 64-134; Sturdy, *Science and Social Status*, 16-21.

¹⁷ Trevor McClaughlin, “Sur les rapports entre la Compagnie de Thévenot et l’Académie royale des sciences,” *Revue d’histoire des sciences*, 28 (1975), 235-42; idem, “Une lettre de Melchisédech Thévenot,” *Revue d’histoire des sciences*, 27 (1974), 123-6; Robert M. McKeon, “Une lettre de M. Thévenot sur les débuts de l’Académie royale des sciences,” *Revue d’histoire des sciences*, 18 (1965), 1-6; David S. Lux, *Patronage and Royal Science in Seventeenth-Century France: the Académie de Physique in Caen* (Ithaca, 1989), 29-56.

¹⁸ Erica Harth portrays him as one of Colbert’s “mandarins”, which is misleading: *Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France* (Ithaca, 1983), 243-50. It was only at the end of 1684 (after Colbert’s death, 1683) that Thévenot received royal patronage, when he was appointed *commis à la garde* of the Bibliothèque du roi, and a member of the Académie des Sciences a month later. He lost the library post in 1691, and died at Issy on 29 October 1692.

¹⁹ Brown, *Scientific Organizations*, tends to over-reify the groups. Contemporary sources make clear the overlapping “membership”, e.g. Ole Borch, *Olai Borrichii Itinerarium 1660-1665: the Journal of the Danish polyhistor Ole Borch*, ed. H. D. Schepeleern, 4 vols. (Copenhagen and London, 1983), vols. 3 and 4.

Thévenot's group tends to be remembered for the activities of its most celebrated members, Niels Steno, Jan Swammerdam, and Huygens. The Danish naturalist Steno (later known for his work on fossils) first made his name by dissecting a human brain before a large audience at Thévenot's, although he also anatomized insects, along with Jan Swammerdam, the Dutch microscopist, who was lodging with Thévenot at the same time.²⁰ Huygens was a regular visitor to the Paris group from the mid-1650s, and his letters are a major source for its activities, including the attempts in Paris to replicate experiments with the air-pump.²¹ The presence of such relatively canonic figures has meant that Thévenot's group is usually conceived as being primarily, even exclusively, concerned with experimental natural philosophy. However, like most contemporary "scientific" groups, the Thévenot circle set itself a wide remit, which included the improvement of navigation and the use of travellers to collect observations. It seems Huygens conceived of this as akin to Baconian natural history.²² We find evidence of Thévenot's continued commitment to collecting the arts in the letters he later exchanged with Leibniz, who had made Thévenot's acquaintance in Paris in the 1670s. As well as their diplomatic experiences, the two scholars shared an eclectic, polyhistoric curiosity. Thévenot was among Leibniz's more vociferous supporters in Paris, offering to help bring any of his projects to completion, "sur toute l'Encyclopedie"; Leibniz, for his part, tirelessly commended Thévenot to other correspondents, saying that he was "one of the most universal [men] that I know; nothing escapes his curiosity".²³

What Leibniz seems to have admired in Thévenot's work was his desire to compile and then preserve in printed form knowledge that

²⁰ J. Schiller and J. Théodoridès, "Sténon et les milieux scientifiques parisiens," in Gustav Scherz, ed., *Steno and brain research in the seventeenth century* (Oxford, 1968), 155-70; Johan Nordström, "Swammerdamiana: excerpts from the Travel Journal of Olaus Borrichius, and two letters from Jan Swammerdam to Thévenot," *Lychnos*, 15 (1954-5), 21-65; G. A. Lindeboom, ed., *The Letters of Jan Swammerdam to Melchisédech Thévenot* (Amsterdam, 1975).

²¹ Huygens, *Œuvres complètes*, esp. vols. 3-5; Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the experimental life* (Princeton, 1985), 265-76.

²² In a note for Colbert attributed to Huygens (c. 1666), Bacon is mentioned as a model for the nascent Académie des Sciences: Huygens, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 6, 95-6; also in *Lettres, instructions, et mémoires de Colbert*, ed. Pierre Clément (Paris, 1861-1870), vol. 5, 523-4.

²³ Thévenot to Leibniz, undated (autumn 1681), in Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe* (Darmstadt, 1923-), hereafter cited as *A*, 1 / 3 (series 1, vol. 3), 504; Leibniz to Pellison-Fontanier, 28 March 1692, in Leibniz, *A*, 1 / 7, 293. Thévenot's admiration is often mentioned in letters to Leibniz from other Parisians.

might otherwise be lost. One of the aims of Thévenot's group had been the recovery of forgotten inventions.²⁴ Leibniz seems to have associated Thévenot with this sort of work, as he explains in a letter of 1678 to Henri Justel, a friend of Thévenot's with similar interests (Justel, too, hosted an "academy", edited a collection of travel accounts, and kept up correspondence with the learned community abroad). For some time, there had been rumours that Justel was working towards a history of inventions.²⁵ This prompted from Leibniz a long rhapsody on how useful it would be to have a modern version of the elder Pliny's *Historia naturalis*:

... for one finds in Pliny an infinity of observations on the origins of the arts ... There are a great many things which, without Pliny, would be lost. That is why I wish that a capable person would leave to posterity a faithful portrait of our times, in respect of manners, customs, discoveries, coinage, commerce, arts and manufactures; luxury, spending, vices, corruptions, the diseases which reign, and their remedies. This person would neglect what one could learn from history, and would only attend to that which gets forgotten, and yet deserves not to be—perhaps more so than what is normally remarked. But all that requires a person with experience, with a vast range of knowledge [consommée en mille belles connoissances]. In a word, more or less the only people I know who are capable of providing this are you [i.e. Justel] and Monsieur Thévenot.²⁶

He adds that once such a compendious work was complete, posterity would follow their example, and the resulting encyclopedia would constitute "une veritable histoire du Monde". What Leibniz refers to here are the passages in Pliny that give descriptions of the "arts", like the extraction of purple dyes described in book 9, chapter 133, or the accounts of minerals, mining, painting and sculpture that occupy books 33-37. This interest in a "history of trades", or what Bacon called "history mechanical", was a project shared by many in the savant community of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and which forms the background to projects like the Académie des Sciences's *Description des arts et métiers*, the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, and eventually the

²⁴ "Project de la Compagnie des Sciences et des Arts" (?1663), in Huygens, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 4, 325-9, here 328.

²⁵ Some trace of what Justel's "history of *commodités*" might have looked like can be found in Justel to Locke, 17 Sept. 1679, in Locke, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, 106. Justel edited a *Recueil de divers voyages faits en Afrique et en l'Amerique, qui n'ont point esté encore publiez* (Paris, 1674). On Justel, see Harcourt Brown, "Un cosmopolite du grand siècle: Henri Justel," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme français*, 82 (1933), 187-201; and Brown, *Scientific Organizations*, 161-84.

²⁶ Leibniz to Justel, 14 Feb. 1678, in Leibniz, *A*, 1 / 2, 317. Cf. Brown, *Scientific Organizations*, 179.

Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers founded in the Revolutionary period.²⁷ What is striking is that Leibniz associated this sort of work with Justel and Thévenot.

II

With Leibniz's comments in mind, we can consider the activities of the Thévenot group in its heyday of the early 1660s. One document in particular has been identified as a statement of the Thévenot group's ambitions, an unsigned manuscript entitled "Project de la Compagnie des Sciences et des Arts".²⁸ This document highlights the importance of travel and geography among the goals of the Thévenot circle. The opening statement is that "the design of the Company is to work towards the perfection of the Sciences and the Arts, and to search comprehensively for everything that could be of some utility or convenience to the human race, and particularly to France". The "Project" then lists various desiderata: experiments will be done, using instruments where possible, to make new discoveries in the heavens and the earth; dissections carried out to improve medicine; new machines will be invented; the secrets of craftsmen and inventors will be made public, proposed inventions will be tested, and "Vulgar Errors" put to the test of experiment. The aim of dispelling popular errors—another familiar theme in the period—is balanced by an emphasis on the mechanical Arts, and the need to acquire and publicize the knowledge of artisans ("les Ouuriers").

A generic feature of such programmatic documents, often written for the benefit of potential patrons, was a rhetoric of utility (for example, in this text, discovering new countries is described as profitable to the state because of the new mines that will be discovered). Even allowing for this, it is worth underlining the prominence given in the "Project" to the facilitation of navigation and the advancement of commerce.

²⁷ For instance, in 1693, Leibniz was excited to hear a rumour that the abbé Bignon was planning to found a royal academy of arts in Paris, which would be a sister to the Académie des sciences. One of the initial projects for this academy was to compile a history of the arts—the first instalment of which was to have been the history of printing. However, the results were so unsatisfactory that the project was shelved. See Leibniz to Bossuet, 29 March 1693 (*A*, 1 / 9, 88); D. Larroque to Leibniz, 14 Nov. 1693 (*A*, 1 / 9, 614). See also Walter E. Houghton, Jr., "The History of Trades: its relation to seventeenth-century thought, as seen in Bacon, Petty, Evelyn, and Boyle", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2 (1941), 33-60.

²⁸ "Project de la Compagnie des Sciences et des Arts" (?1663), in Huygens, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 4, 325-329.

Moreover, the "Project" sets out a scheme to make use of travellers for the collection of information, both natural and technical:

in all occasions when curious persons travel to, or live in, foreign countries, they shall be given *Memoires* [memoranda/questionnaires], and they will be asked to examine . . . whatever is judged to be remarkable both in Nature and in the Arts.

The Montmor-Thévenot group was able to carry this out, in a fairly limited way, with François Bernier, a student of Gassendi's who had travelled across the Orient and was already living in Mughal India at the time this document was written (and communicating with Paris by letters exchanged with Jean Chapelain).²⁹ As well as sending specific questions to "curious persons" who happen to be in foreign parts already, the "Project" takes the next step, by suggesting that observers should be sent out with any long-distance voyages:

and even in long-distance voyages (*les grandes navigations*) we will attempt to send out intelligent persons specifically to remark all that is curious in the New Lands, as much in metals, animals, plants, as in Inventions and Arts.

These expert emissaries should endeavour to exchange technical knowledge with the people they encounter, and in order to improve the terms of artisanal trade, they should take suitable gifts:

And to that end, when visiting civilized countries (*les pays policés*), travellers will carry models or diagrams of the machines which we use here, so that if the foreigners do not have them, we can teach them how to use some of them, and exchange some of them for those which we do not have, or for the secrets of their arts which we do not know—something which perhaps would be difficult to get by paying money, or by some other means. Also, we will send out [with travellers] all the curiosities of Optics, Dioptrics, etc., of the Magnet, etc., so that the travellers can introduce ourselves by these means, and make themselves esteemed, since we know that it was by such means that entry was gained into some powerful kingdoms.

It seems highly likely that this last suggestion was inspired by the recent experience of the Jesuits in China, who made increasing use of ornate instrument-gifts to improve their position at the imperial court in Beijing.³⁰ The idea of sending specially-trained scientific observers to distant lands was to be realized by the Académie des sciences, partly at the instigation

²⁹ See Nicholas Dew, *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford, forthcoming), chapter 3.

³⁰ On the Jesuit astronomers' use of instruments as gifts, see Florence C. Hsia, "French Jesuits and the Mission to China: science, religion, history", University of Chicago Ph.D. diss., 1999.

of Huygens and Adrien Auzout (both members of Thévenot's group who were made members of the Académie).

One reason for accepting that the "Project" is a document from Thévenot's group is that many of the same sentiments are echoed in a "Discours sur l'Art de la Navigation" published by Thévenot as part of the supplementary *Recueil des voyages* of 1681. In this text, one of the few extended published pieces of prose by Thévenot, there is much made of the opposition between artisanal knowledge and the worthless "jeu de l'esprit" of the established sciences. Whereas scholars ("gens de lettres") have filled their libraries with endless commentaries on Aristotle, the art of navigation has advanced by the accumulated experience of pilots on the seas ("ces gens de Mer, ces gens de peu de discours"). The fact that long-distance voyages are now practicable is owed to this accumulation of experiential knowledge:

We owe this knowledge and these advantages to the useful writings and the exact observations of the navigators of past ages. Geography, and many other Arts, have likewise been improved; and similar progress would have been made in the Sciences, too, if experiments and observations had been employed in the same way.³¹

If seamen had followed the example of the learned, they would never have dared cross the Torrid Zone, America would never have been discovered, and half the world would still be in the "chaos in which the ignorance of past ages had left it". If, conversely, physicians had imitated the navigators in accumulating experience, medicine might have made more progress, and mankind would be enjoying the benefits of a great store of remedies, rather than the ill-founded dogma and false eloquence of the doctors.

It was because of the need for the accumulation of experiential knowledge that Thévenot set himself the task of collecting and translating travel accounts, mainly from English and Dutch long-distance voyages. Because these accounts contained practical navigational matter they could be of use to any future travellers, particularly French merchants. Compiling accounts which were not yet available in French and sometimes not yet even in print into a single collection had the advantage of allowing the seafarer to collate scattered data by leafing through one book. Just like the bubble levels developed in the meetings of Thévenot's group, the collection of travel texts was an instrument designed to be

³¹ "Discours sur l'Art de la Navigation", in Thévenot, *Recueil de voyages* (1681), sep. pag., 5.

of practical use for navigation.³² The same concern for publishing technical knowledge that might be useful for seafaring probably lies behind the book on the “art of swimming” that Thévenot later published, and which was read throughout the eighteenth century.³³

With wonderful optimism, the “Project” proposes that the “compagnie” will enter into communication with “all other Academies”, with savants of every country, to share news of books and to exchange local knowledge of both nature and the arts.³⁴ Correspondence will be needed for the circulation of reports on experiments and observations (including thermometer readings, magnetic variation, tides, eclipses and comets). This will make possible “une histoire de la Nature la plus universelle qui soit possible”. This “history of nature” is, clearly, impossible without collective action and transparent communication—even if this ideal might be difficult to realize in practice.³⁵ Thévenot corresponded with like-minded figures around Europe, especially Huygens (when he was in the United Provinces), Vincenzo Viviani and Lorenzo Magalotti in Florence, and Henry Oldenburg, the intelligencer for the English natural philosophers.³⁶

Thévenot’s cabinet was not just a meeting place for savants, where experiments were tried, and letters from abroad read out and discussed, but also a private museum, where visitors could examine “curiosities” and rare books. Like most other cabinets, Thévenot’s was a site to be

³² Anthony J. Turner, “Melchisédech Thévenot, the bubble level, and the artificial horizon”, *Nuncius*, 7 (1992), 131-145.

³³ Melchisédech Thévenot, *L’Art de Nager démontré par figures avec des avis pour se baigner utilement* (Paris, 1696) with reprints 1781 and 1782; English trans: *The Art of Swimming* (London, 1699), reprinted 1764 (twice), 1789, 1838. Thévenot portrays swimming as a “mechanical art” and calls for the establishment of public academies of swimming. It was with Thévenot’s manual that Benjamin Franklin taught himself to swim (see *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree et al. (New Haven, 1964), 104).

³⁴ “Project de la Compagnie des Sciences et des Arts”, 327 (“s’instruire reciproquement de ce qu’il y a de particulier dans la Nature et dans les arts”).

³⁵ David S. Lux and Harold J. Cook, “Closed circles or open networks? Communicating at a distance during the scientific revolution,” *History of Science*, 36 (1998), 179-211; Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: conduct and community in the Republic of Letters, 1680-1750* (New Haven, 1995); Lorraine Daston, “The ideal and the reality of the Republic of Letters in the Enlightenment,” *Science in Context*, 4 (1991), 367-86.

³⁶ Thévenot was writing to Magalotti from 1658 (Brown, *Scientific Organizations*, 135). There are letters from Thévenot to Vincenzo Viviani in the “Galileiana” collection of the Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Florence. The fullest account of Thévenot’s links with Florence is W. E. Knowles Middleton, *The Experimenters: a study of the Accademia del Cimento* (Baltimore, 1971), 296-308.

visited by scholars who came through Paris on *voyages littéraires*.³⁷ His collection included Greek sculpture, and some scientific instruments, but it was best known for its collection of Oriental manuscripts. After his death, the library was put on the market, and a printed catalogue published by Thévenot's friend and sometime assistant, the Arabist, Antoine Galland; after long negotiations, the collection was acquired by the Bibliothèque du roi in 1712. Leibniz, rather late in the day, made an attempt to secure the manuscripts, but in vain.³⁸

Rather than separating his collecting activity from his "academy", we should conceive of the "assemblée" as the social use of the cabinet: a collection of *curiosités* and a collective of *curieux*. The savants who met there would discuss the objects, the instruments, the experiments and dissections; and read the correspondence coming in, which often included the travel accounts Thévenot was translating. The cabinets of the *curieux* were the period's sites *par excellence* for contemplating the relationship between nature and art, and for representing materially the Plinian "history" that Leibniz had dreamt of. It is within such a site of knowledge-production that we can locate the production of the *Relations de divers voyages curieux*.³⁹

III

In an autobiographical fragment published in the sale-catalogue of his library, Thévenot describes the project to publish a collection of travel texts as a direct offshoot of the work of his "assembly":

³⁷ The Dane, Corfitz Braem, visited Thévenot's cabinet in April 1666 (see Gustav Scherz's introduction to Steno, *Epistolae et epistolae ad eum data* (Freiburg and Copenhagen, 1952), 12). Thévenot's is listed among notable cabinets in Jacob Spon, *Recherche des Antiquités et Curiosités de la Ville de Lyon . . . Avec un Mémoire des Principaux Antiquaires & Curieux de l'Europe* (Lyon, 1675), 217; Charles-César Baudelot de Dairval, *De l'utilité des voyages* (Paris, 1686), vol. 2, 685. Even after his death, Thévenot's collection could be seen *chez* his heir, Girard Garnier (Martin Lister, *Journey to Paris in the year 1698* [London, 1698], 102-4).

³⁸ Antoine Galland, ed., *Bibliotheca Thevenotiana* (Paris, 1694). See Françoise Bléchet, *Les Ventes publiques de livres en France, 1630-1750* (Oxford, 1991), 67; Margherita Palumbo, *Leibniz e la res bibliothecaria: bibliografie, historiae literariae e cataloghi nella biblioteca privata leibniziana* (Rome, 1993), 153-156; Galland, *Journal parisien (1708-1715)*, ed. Henri A. Omont (Paris, 1919), 129, 131-2.

³⁹ On Cabinets of Curiosity in general, see Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, and Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the order of nature, 1150-1750* (New York, 1998), 255-301.

Each member of the group proposed for himself a task and occupation: mine was to put together and translate into French those things in which other Nations surpass us in the Arts . . . And in order to make Geography more perfect, I put together and gave to the public three [sic] large volumes of a collection of Travels which I had been working on for a long time . . .⁴⁰

Here, as in numerous other sources, the task associated with Thévenot is the “illustration of geography” for the purpose of facilitating commerce. (Navigation was traditionally classified among the arts, rather than the sciences.) Such knowledge is presented as useful, contributing to the well-being of the French people, indeed of the entire human race.⁴¹ The emphasis on utility crops up elsewhere: Thévenot’s friend, Jean Chapelain, noted that the goal of Thévenot’s collection was to serve as a beacon for French navigators, and to facilitate commerce,⁴² but also, as he told a correspondent, to “contribute something to exercise the reasoning of the contemplators of nature”.⁴³ Very similar language is used to describe both the travel-publishing project and the “assembly”. Indeed, at one point it is implied that the voyage narratives, along with one of Swammerdam’s insect investigations, are being edited *from the records* of the Thévenot group.⁴⁴

The collection of travel accounts was already a genre with a history. Thévenot was following where Ramusio and Hakluyt had led: there had still not been a multi-volume travel collection in French.⁴⁵ Thévenot’s

⁴⁰ Thévenot, autobiographical fragment, at head of *Bibliotheca Thevenotiana*, sigs. 2r-3v.

⁴¹ Galland sings the praises of Thévenot’s “génie pour tout ce qu’il croioit pouvoir contribuer au bien & à l’avantage des hommes assemblez pour vivre les uns avec les autres”: introductory paragraph to Thévenot’s autobiographical fragment, in *Bibliotheca Thevenotiana*, sig. 2r.

⁴² Chapelain, “Liste de quelques gens de lettres français vivant en 1662”, in *Opuscules critiques de Chapelain*, ed. Alfred C. Hunter (Paris, 1936), 345: “Il a surtout une passion violente pour l’illustration de la géographie, dont il donnera bientôt des preuves au monde par la publication d’un Recueil de voyages anciens et modernes non encore vu des Français, ni quelques-uns même de personne; tous traduits par lui, ou par ceux qu’il a employés pour avancer l’ouvrage, qui a pour but de servir de flambeau à nos navigateurs et la facilité au commerce, ce qu’il accompagne de cartes très sûres qu’il a recouvrées, et qu’il fait graver avec soin à ses dépens, et en l’humeur où il est on aura de la peine à lui faire avouer ce travail, tant il est désintéressé en cette entreprise . . .”.

⁴³ Chapelain, *Lettres*, vol. 2, 349-50, Chapelain to Carrel de Sainte-Garde, 6 Feb. 1664: (“apporter de quoy s’exercer au raisonnement des contemplateurs de la nature”).

⁴⁴ The title page of one section of the *Recueil de voyages* reads: “Les Histoires naturelles de l’Ephemere et du Cancellus ou Bernard l’Hermite [. . . par Mr Swammerdam . . .], Tirées avec les Voyages precedens du Recueil des Ouvrages de l’Assemblée, qui s’est tenuë chez Mr Thevenot” (my emphasis).

⁴⁵ On earlier French travel editors, see Frank Lestringant, *Mapping the Renaissance World: the geographical imagination in the age of discovery* (Cambridge, 1994); Robert O. Lindsay,

Relations were printed in a series of fifty-five fascicles, separately paginated, bundled into the four parts of the set, each of which had its own title page and paratext. Although new title pages were printed for the reissues, it seems that there was really only one impression of each fascicle.⁴⁶

Thévenot dedicated the collection to Louis XIV.⁴⁷ In the dedicatory epistle we find a series of claims being made: how it is now the turn of France to establish a trading empire (after the Portuguese and Dutch); how Louis XIV is the glory of the age, and only France has a large enough population to colonise effectively; how the extremities of the world will be drawn out of obscurity by the king; and how it is reserved to Louis XIV to make “the whole human race . . . richer, more knowledgeable, better informed of all the advantages that men can draw from the Arts or from Nature”. Explorers would bring back “new specific remedies” unknown to European medicine, and other technical innovations—just as, Thévenot went on, in centuries past, silk, gunpowder and printing had been transferred from China to Europe. What Thévenot’s rhetoric does is to reemploy the discourse of instauration that we have seen in the documents surrounding his “academy” within the conventions for celebrating the *gloire* of the king.

The appearance of Thévenot’s collection coincided with a renewed effort—largely inspired by Colbert—to put French colonial trade on a better footing. The dedication to the king was added in the same year that Colbert launched a new *Compagnie des Indes orientales* (1664), in deliberate imitation of the Dutch East Indies Company. Likewise, the contents of Thévenot’s series reflect the preoccupation with the need for France to emulate the Dutch. The title page of the first part makes plain that some of the texts are translated from Hakluyt and Purchas, although in the end only seven of the fifty-five texts in the series were from these English collections; fifteen were from Dutch travel accounts. Perhaps more importantly, the majority of the texts relate to Asian travels: over forty of the fifty-five items published, compared with only four

“Pierre Bergeron: a forgotten editor of French travel literature,” *Terrae Incognitae*, 7 (1976), 31–38.

⁴⁶ What became the first Part appeared in 1663, the second in 1664, the third in 1666 (together with a reissue of Parts 1 and 2), and the fourth in 1672, again with a re-issue. Several fascicles were printed subsequently for a projected fifth Part—incomplete at Thévenot’s death—and were therefore added to the re-issue of 1696.

⁴⁷ Thévenot, *Relations de divers voyages curieux*, part 2 (Paris, 1664), sig. ä, ij^r-iii^r, “Au Roi”.

from the Americas (all in the fourth part, 1672). Most of the pieces were extracts rather than complete texts, and most were translations from printed European sources, although there were several texts that were previously unpublished.⁴⁸ In addition, the octavo volume of 1681 included other pieces alongside its nine voyage texts, like an account of the *Kunstkammer* of Swammerdam's father, and Thévenot's "Discours on the Art of Navigation".⁴⁹ The texts translated included, for example, a "Mémoire sur la Géorgie" by the Italian traveller Pietro della Valle, which had been sent to Urban VIII in 1627; a portion of Thomas Roe's relation of the Mughal empire first published by Purchas; and extracts from John Greaves' *Pyramidographia*, which had first appeared in English in 1646.⁵⁰ The collection was not restricted to modern travel narratives, though: the first volume included an extract from the sixth-century Byzantine travelogue of Cosmas Indicopleustes (because it included descriptions of animals from the East Indies), and brief extracts from the *Geography* of Abū 'l-Fidā, while the fourth part included the Jesuit Prospero Intorcetta's translation of the Confucian classic, the Doctrine of the Mean, under the title *Sinarum scientia politico-moralis*, along with a life of Confucius. This short text represents the first publication of Confucius in Europe (the Intorcetta text had been printed first at Goa); later, in the 1680s, Thévenot was to be involved in the Jesuits' full-scale publication of Confucian texts, the *Confucius, Sinarum Philosophus* (1687).⁵¹

Since the workings of the Thévenot group were intimately bound up with the reading and writing of letters to other scholarly circles, it comes as no surprise to find that the collection of travel texts was put together using that correspondence. Chapelain told his contacts abroad to look out for travel accounts suitable for translation.⁵² Thévenot made use of his contacts in the United Provinces to get texts relating to the Dutch East Indies trade: it was Huygens, for example, who sent Thévenot

⁴⁸ For a catalogue of the *Relations*, see Armand-Gaston Camus, *Mémoire sur la Collection des grands et petits voyages [des de Bry] et sur la collection des voyages de Melchisedech Thévenot* (Paris, 1802), 279-341, esp. 286-92. See also "Description of the collection of the voyages of Thévenot," *Contributions to a Catalogue of the Lenox Library*, no. 3 (New York, 1879).

⁴⁹ *Recueil de voyages* (Paris, 1681).

⁵⁰ On the latter, see Zur Shalev, "Measurer of all things: John Greaves (1602-1652), the Great Pyramid, and early modern metrology," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63 (2002), 555-75.

⁵¹ This is discussed in more detail in Dew, *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France*, chapter 5.

⁵² Among other examples, see Chapelain, *Lettres*, vol. 2, 349-50 (Chapelain to Carrel de Sainte-Garde, 6 Feb. 1664).

François Caron's description of Japan, which came out in the second part of the collection.⁵³ Other scholars in Holland were also brought in: Isaac Vossius obtained for Thévenot the text of Cosmas Indicopleustes that appeared in the first part.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Lorenzo Magalotti in Florence sent travel texts and maps to Thévenot, sometimes by the intermediary of travelling scholars, like Lorenzo Panciatichi.⁵⁵ The short fragment of Abū 'l-Fidā published in Part 1 was transcribed from a manuscript in the Vatican library by Thévenot's old Maronite friend, Abraham Ecchellensis.⁵⁶ This dependence on the correspondence network is occasionally acknowledged in Thévenot's prefatory notes, as a claim for the credibility of the documents he was presenting.⁵⁷

Once the texts had been collected, Thévenot would translate his selections and see them through the press. Like the process of collecting, the business of printing the translations was a function of the social network which Thévenot manipulated: the Royal Censor who signed the *privilege* to publish was his friend Henri Justel (whom we have already met), and the *privilege*'s beneficiary was Thévenot's uncle, Girard Garnier.⁵⁸

⁵³ Huygens, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, 395: Huygens to L. Huygens, 7 Dec. 1661. Huygens was related to Caron by marriage; we might speculate that the Huygens-Thévenot link facilitated Caron's move to Paris in 1665, where he was to play an important role in the history of French trade with India: see Siba Pata Sen, *The French in India: first establishment and struggle* (Calcutta, 1947). Caron's book first appeared as *Beschrijvinghe van het Machtigh Coninckrijcke Japon* (Amsterdam, 1648).

⁵⁴ Huygens, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, 347: Thévenot to Huygens, 25 Sept. 1661. However, in his "Avis, Sur le dessein, & sur l'ordre de ce Recueil" (Thévenot, *Relations*, vol. 1 (1663), sig. a ij^r-iv^r, here ij^v) Thévenot states that "Le Fragment Grec du Cosmas vient de Monsieur [Emeric] Bigot, qui l'a copié dans la Bibliothèque de Florence". Presumably both Vossius and Bigot were involved.

⁵⁵ Valentin Conrart, *Lettres à Lorenzo Magalotti*, eds. Gabriel Berquet and Jean-Pierre Collinet (Saint-Étienne, 1981), 110 (29 May 1671), 121 (10 Sept. 1671), 132 (22 Jan. 1672).

⁵⁶ See the contents page of Part 1, and the short "Avis" to the Abū 'l-Fidā section (vol. 1, sig. i iv^r, [sep. pag., 18]), mentioning only "un fameux traducteur . . . Arabe de Nation"; then in the "Avis" to Part 3 (sig. a v^r): "... Abulfeda, que le Signor Abraham Echellense avoit commencé à me transcrire d'un Manuscrit du Vatican, & que Messieurs Vossius & Golius m'ont fait copier depuis sur trois Manuscrits Arabes de la Bibliothèque de Leyde".

⁵⁷ For example, in the "Avis" to the first part, Thévenot claimed that his collection would be "autant-plus fidele & plus exacte, que ie la feray sur de meilleurs Originaux, & sur la foy de Personnes choisies entre ceux qui les ont couruës & obseruées avec plus de soin"; in the "Avis" for the fourth part, he added "j'ay fait chercher dans les plus fameuses Bibliothèques les pieces qui pouvoient l'enrichir, & il y a peu de gens de cette erudition que je n'aye entretenus & consultez sur ce dessein".

⁵⁸ Girard Garnier is named as beneficiary in the *privileges* for all four Parts (misprinted in the first as Garnel). A "Mr Garnier" is identified as Thévenot's uncle in a note attached to a letter from Thévenot to Colbert (BN ms *Mélanges de Colbert* 152,

This *privilege* was a particularly advantageous one, in that it specified protection for a period of twenty years (rather than the more usual ten), to be counted from the appearance of each volume (rather than the first). This, presumably, was arranged in recognition of the fact that the book would appear in several sections. But because the complete contents of the series could not be specified on the original *privilege*, this meant that the series was effectively open-ended. Such a flexible arrangement was presumably facilitated by Thévenot's friendship with Justel.⁵⁹

Once printed, the instalments of Thévenot's series went out through the circuit of correspondence again. Thévenot would send the fascicles as gifts to those he was in touch with, including Robert Boyle, and the Oxford-based scholars Edward Bernard and Thomas Hyde.⁶⁰ They could then circulate them further: Bernard, for instance, sent one copy to Job Ludolf, Frankfurt's celebrated expert on all things Ethiopic.⁶¹ The recipients, if they were in the position to do so, could send copies of their own books in return: Boyle made sure Thévenot got a copy of his *Observations and experiments about the Saltness of the Sea*.⁶²

What these examples underline for us is that the *Relations* were produced by collecting texts sent "in" to Thévenot by various correspondents, and then (once translated and printed) circulated back "out" again through the same network. In order to produce the series in Paris,

f. 271r), and in Chapelain, *Lettres*, vol. 2, 640. Why Garnier held the *privilege*, and not Thévenot (or a bookseller), is unclear.

⁵⁹ On the *privilege* system, see Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'Apparition du livre*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1999), 338-46. This form of "package" *privilege* is described in Elizabeth Armstrong, *Before Copyright: the French book-privilege system, 1498-1526* (Cambridge, 1990), 131-36.

⁶⁰ For Boyle, see Henry Oldenburg, *Correspondence*, eds. A. Rupert Hall and Marie Boas Hall, 13 vols. (Madison, 1965-1986), vol. 2, 430 (Oldenburg to Boyle, 4 July 1665): "Monsr Thevenot hath sent you the 2d Tome of his Curious Voyages in folio, fairly bound, wherein are contained, as far as my cursory perusal could informe me, severall things not unpleasing, and instructive both for Navigation, Policy, and Natural Philosophy, though most of it be but Traduction;" and 444 (Boyle's reply): "I have now Receiv'd Monsr Thevenot's Booke of Voyages, where I find some few things Curious enough, & however should find cause to be sensible of the Givers Civilitys". For Bernard and Hyde, see Bodleian ms Smith 8, pp. 3-5 (Thévenot to Bernard, 1673) at p. 4b; Smith 11, p. 15 (Hyde to Thévenot, 24 June 1673).

⁶¹ Bodleian ms Smith 5, p. 151 (Ludolf to Bernard, thanking him for Thévenot's edition of Intorcetta's text, no date); p. 153 (Ludolf to Bernard, 15 Dec. ? 1677, again thanking him: "pro libro La science des Chinois dicto gratias tibi ago . . ."). Ludolf was also in contact with Thévenot (here pp. 155, 157, letters of 20 Mar. 1678 and 31 Dec. 1683).

⁶² Oldenburg, vol. 10, 419-24, at 422: Jean-Baptiste Du Hamel to Oldenburg, 6 Jan. 1674.

Thévenot and his associates had to make other people, in remote locations, work for them.⁶³

Thévenot's collection of "curious voyages" can be counted as one of his more successful projects. However, as any encounter with the book makes plain, its success in bringing the series of texts together in print was qualified by the practical effects of the publication process. Firstly, the fact that the voyages were printed as independent fascicles meant that the collection as a whole was only a series of discrete fragments. Unlike later travel compendia, the accounts are not organized (either by geography or by date), nor is there an index for retrieving the information. As a result, the volumes are extremely difficult for readers to use. Thévenot *did* publish lists of the contents of the series, but these were probably designed to allow the owner to check that no parts were missing. As we have seen, each fascicle of the series was printed separately, and could be distributed privately. A set of the fragments had to be arranged by the owner before being bound; as a result, the make-up of surviving copies is always slightly different, either because some fragments are missing, or because they are differently ordered.⁶⁴

On occasion, Thévenot alludes to this problem of order within his book. In the list of contents for the first part, he wrote that readers could choose whether to put the extract from Greaves's *Pyramidographia* at the start or at the end of the volume; in his note prefacing the fourth Part, he admitted that he had to abandon his original organizing scheme as he accumulated texts ("il me sera impossible dans la suite de m'arrêter à l'ordre que je m'estois proposé au commencement"). The problem of order was discussed again in an unsigned "avertissement" prefacing the re-issue of the whole collection that appeared in 1696 (after Thévenot's death). The writer, probably the bookseller Thomas Moëtte, noted that Thévenot was always so busy adding new texts to the series that there was "some confusion in all his works", and that the *Relations* was a collection organized neither by chronology nor by the matters treated ("... qui n'ont point de suite déterminée par les faits ny par les temps"). The same text makes clear that this textual disorder is partly a function of the book's printing history:

The large number of different Relations, the interruptions in the sequence of one impression, and [the fact that] several different workers sometimes (for reasons that

⁶³ See Goldgar, *Impolite Learning*; also Lux and Cook, "Closed circles or open networks?"

⁶⁴ See Camus, *Mémoire sur la Collection*.

are unclear) worked separately on the same text, produced a kind of disorder, which was very difficult to avoid . . . One should not be surprised, then, if within this Collection one finds false signatures and page numbers which are out of sequence; and one can use the Table to find out whether one has the complete set.⁶⁵

The preface-writer goes on to assert that the disorder within the series is not to be ascribed to any moral failings on Thévenot's part (in particular, the "jealousy" typical of the "curious" ["cette jalousie qui n'est que trop commune entre les Curieux"]). It seems clear that the writer wanted to distance Thévenot from the more negative associations of curiosity. The fact that he was engaged in *commerce littéraire* with so many other respected members of the Republic of Letters is offered as proof of his seriousness. Nonetheless, the problem of order remains, and is explained by referring to Thévenot's constant deferral of bringing the book to a close.

IV

Thévenot's *Relations* is a text which seems constantly to be in danger of collapsing. The difficulties surrounding the ordering of the information presented are inseparable from the book's material composition. Adrian Johns has emphasised the degree to which the familiar bibliographic categories that we take for granted as modern readers (author, text, publisher, and date) become unstable when we consider the world of early modern print. Problems of textual stability were particularly acute, Johns shows, in the case of natural-philosophical publishing.⁶⁶ The Thévenot case reminds us that this is especially true of travel-editing enterprises.

The limits to Thévenot's project—the textual disorder that the printed pages reveal—were not unique; such bibliographic problems were shared by other large-scale editorial projects in Paris at that time. Moreover, Thévenot was to experience far greater frustrations with his plan to edit a translation of the *Geography* of Abū 'l-Fidā, which he pursued doggedly from the late 1660s until his death, and which never saw fruition. I have tried to show the importance of travel texts for the "curious" community of the late seventeenth century, and to emphasise that the site of production for Thévenot's travel series was his cabinet—in both the

⁶⁵ Thévenot, *Relations*, "nouvelle edition" in 2 vols. (Paris, 1696), vol. 1, sig. * i^{r-v}.

⁶⁶ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: print and knowledge in the making* (Chicago, 1998).

spatial-physical sense (a place) and the social sense (as a venue for meetings of scholars). Correspondence and travel between such sites was the most important way in which the Republic of Letters was constituted as an “imagined community”; and by the same token, it was only by harnessing such networks that texts like Thévenot’s could be produced at all.

Locke seems not to have replied to Thévenot’s enquiry about the missing Hakluyt papers. (Even if he had been able to acquire them for Thévenot, they still may not have seen the light of day.)⁶⁷ As we saw, Leibniz was impressed by Thévenot’s range of activities, but was also aware of the danger of spreading one’s interests too widely and never finishing anything. He jokingly compared Thévenot to Briareus, the hundred-handed monster.⁶⁸ Indeed, after Thévenot’s death Leibniz regretted how much had been lost with him.⁶⁹ This was the one of the dangers of curiosity: too many projects and too little time. There was another danger, though, which seems not to have been articulated, although Thévenot must have been aware of it. This was the fact that the nature of geographical knowledge was changing, partly because of the work of Thévenot’s friends at the Académie des Sciences. Huygens and Auzout, for example, were involved in the introduction of new methods of telescoping and timekeeping which would bring unprecedented levels of precision to cartographic and geodesic surveying. In the 1670s and 1680s, the Académie des Sciences established a global cartographic project, sending specially-trained observers with new instrument-driven techniques to destinations around France and the world. In the year Thévenot died (1692), the Académie des Sciences published its “corrected” map of France, showing the difference between the old outline of the country and the new, and the accompanying *cartouche* expressed this difference between old and new as the distinction between a cartography founded on (descriptive) “Relations” and one founded on (quantitative)

⁶⁷ After all, Jan Swammerdam left his papers to Thévenot, who failed to publish all but a couple of fragments from them before his death. Swammerdam’s manuscripts were only saved from oblivion by the diligence of his countryman Boerhaave, who tracked them down in 1727, and published them ten years later as *Biblia Naturæ*.

⁶⁸ Leibniz to Thévenot, 23 March 1691, in Leibniz, *A*, 1/6, 410: “vous deuvriés estre *centimanus* comme ce Briarée de la fable. C’est à dire vous deuvriés avoir une centaine de gens propres à executer mille belles veues que vous avés”.

⁶⁹ Leibniz to Ezechiel Spanheim, 16 April 1696, in Leibniz, *A*, 1/12, 541: “M. Thevenot avoit trop de belles choses à donner, il luy est arrivé ce qui arrive à des femmes qui sont en travail de plus d’un enfant, c’est que souvent l’un empeche l’autre sur tout quand il y a faute d’assistance”.

“Observations”.⁷⁰ It would take many decades before such a change would be completed, and the philological approach to knowledge-making would remain important for geographers; nonetheless, Thévenot’s monumental collection was built on foundations which were already, quietly, beginning to shift.

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⁷⁰ Josef W. Konvitz, *Cartography in France, 1660-1848: science, engineering, and statecraft* (Chicago, 1987); Jordan Kellman, “Discovery and enlightenment at sea: maritime exploration and observation in the eighteenth-century French scientific community”, Princeton University Ph.D. dissertation, 1997.