

Gábor Gelléri, Lessons of Travel in Eighteenth-Century France. From Grand Tour to School Trips, Woodbridge (The Boydell Press) 2020, VIII–235 p. (Studies in the Eighteenth Century, 7), ISBN 978-1-78327-436-9, GBP 75,00.

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During the early modern period, travelers were able to rely on a very particular genre to help prepare them for their classic Grand Tour, the so-called *ars apodemica*. It provided both practical as well as more philosophical advice to travelers about what to see and visit *en route*, how to take notes about which subjects, the moral and physical dangers to be avoided, along with a long list of other suggestions. »Lessons of Travel« delves into the historical development of this specific genre in France. During the last few decades – particularly in the wake of Justin Stagl – these treatises on educational travel have drawn much attention from academics. Indeed, this begs the question whether there was a need for a new book about the *ars apodemica* at all, however, after reading Gelléri's book, the answer to this question is in my view without doubt in the affirmative. »Lessons of Travel« is unquestionably *vaut le voyage* (worth the trip) or rather *mérite d'être lu* (a must-read). Why?

Firstly, it is the case that a historical knowledge gap (or gaps) exists. Whereas a growing body of books and articles has spelled out the rise of the genre – and of educational travel in general – in Britain, the Low Countries, the Holy Roman Empire, and other European regions, far less is known about its development in France. Moreover, a great deal of this historiography tends to focus on the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries – the genre's heyday –, while the »long« eighteenth century is often overlooked. Gelléri therefore truly charts new ground by tracing the development of French *ars apodemica* from the late seventeenth century to the end of the revolutionary era.

Yet, there is more, much more, to this book because, by introducing an exceptionally wide definition of the apodemical treatise, Gelléri offers a genuinely trailblazing perspective. While a strict definition often leads to a rather tired exegesis of a limited set of canonical, humanist texts by the likes of Theodor Zwinger, Hieronymus Turler, Justus Lipius, Michel de Montaigne and others of that ilk, Gelléri casts his net much wider and looks for echoes of the apodemical tradition in eighteenth-century dictionaries and encyclopediae, in treatises for courtiers and diplomats, in Abbé Pluche's »Spectacle de la Nature« (1732–1742), in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's bestseller »Émile ou De l'éducation« (1762), and in the Lyon prize-content (1785–1787).



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The breathtaking reach of the book mirrors its author's own education: a PhD in French from the University of Budapest (2005), another in History from the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in Paris (2009), not to mention an MA in Cultural Anthropology. »Lessons of Travel« perfectly illustrates the boons of such a broad, interdisciplinary lens or *ipse dixit* Gelléri: »I have not yet decided whether I am an historian, a literary scholar or maybe a specialist of historical anthropology and must admit I am happy to live in uncertainty on this point.« True to his own word, Gelléri combines, merges and confronts a meticulous literary analysis of both the historical continuities and changes of the *ars apodemica* as a genre, along with a historical interest in how these treatises reflected – or informed – Enlightened debates.

The idea of studying the entire breadth of treatises on educational travel is refreshing too; not only are the overtly positive ones included, but so are those adamantly opposed to the idea of travelling, as are all those hundreds of others reflecting a myriad of opinions on the matter in between these two poles. Laudable, too, is the fact that Gelléri considers a whole range of texts that were targeted at readers from numerous different backgrounds, including courtiers and diplomats, but also merchants and school masters. However, this meticulous approach – the extremely fine-grained analysis of hundreds of texts, arguments, and authors – also has its limitations. As a historian, sitting somewhere between the fields of cultural and social history, I frequently caught myself asking the question »So what?«.

Literally hundreds of mentors, sages and philosophers may have thought seriously about how useful travel could possibly be and, furthermore, developed an intricate series of arguments both pro and contra, nevertheless, the question remains as to how this theory actually (re)shaped patterns of travel on the ground, or – vice versa – how new travel trends prompted a new round of rhetorical quibbling. In the introduction Gelléri does in fact already nip this question in the bud by stating that he intends only to look at theory, not practice. I feel it is nonetheless a pity that he does not engage more systematically with the recent scholarship on the Grand Tour – and early modern travel patterns in general – such as that by Rosemary Sweet, Sarah Goldsmith, and myriads of others in order to identify these cross-overs between theory and practice. The book would have been all the richer and more interesting.

This is no more than superficial hairsplitting however because »Lessons of Travel« remains, in essence, an extremely well-researched, well-argued and well-written book that deserves to be read not only by specialists in travel history and the *Grand Tour*, but also by scholars who take a keen interest in the intellectual history of eighteenth-century France and Europe. Hence, a trip to the bookshop is certainly *vaut le voyage*.



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