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Chronicles

Conference report: *Naigeon and the Mémoires historiques et philosophiques sur la vie et les ouvrages de Denis Diderot*, 28th March 2025, All Souls College, University of Oxford

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Jacques-André Naigeon (1735-1810) is often found «tra ombre e Lumi» or «à l'ombre des Lumières», to borrow the title of Mario Cosenza's 2020 intellectual biography. This conference, organised by Caroline Warman (Jesus College, University of Oxford) with the support of Jesus College and the Voltaire Foundation, brought together scholars from the UK, France, Italy, and the USA to share recent or ongoing research on Naigeon's life and work.

Naigeon's *Mémoires historiques et philosophiques sur la vie et les ouvrages de Denis Diderot*, published posthumously in 1823, blend intellectual biography with annotated bibliography and formed part of Naigeon's broader strategy for publishing Diderot's complete works. The conference sought to open new critical perspectives and methods for understanding Naigeon's life and writing, restoring him to his rightful place at the centre of Enlightenment literary culture.

In her opening remarks, Caroline Warman emphasised that Naigeon – often misidentified as the subject of Fragonard's *Portrait d'un jeune artiste* – remains a marginal figure in the literary history of eighteenth-century France. The research projects showcased during the conference look to address this gap. The first of three panel sessions, chaired by Kate Tunstall (Worcester College, University of Oxford), began with a paper by Emmanuel Boussuge (CELLF, Sorbonne Université) titled «Il s'agissait d'abord d'une note de bas de page...». Boussuge traced the complex material history of Naigeon's papers and presented a second manuscript of the *Mémoires* (the RDS manuscript). Written in the hand of Charles-Claude Naigeon, his younger brother and copyist, this manuscript includes marginal and inter-linear annotations by Jacques-André. Further analysis of the manuscript will allow for a richer understanding of the text, its complex history and origins, and the collaborative endeavour of the Naigeon brothers.

Mario Cosenza (Università di Napoli Federico II) then explored Naigeon's political thought in his paper «Témoigner le matérialisme. Naigeon et la Révolution?». Drawing on Naigeon's *Adresse à l'Assemblée nationale sur la liberté des opinions, sur celle de la presse* (1790), Cosenza argued that Naigeon sought to evoke a dialectical and dialogic relationship between

political authority and the *philosophes* at the time of the Revolution.

In the second session, chaired by Holly Rowe (Lincoln College, University of Oxford), Claire Fauvergue (Université Paris Lumières) examined how Naigeon edited (and modified) Diderot's *Encyclopédie* articles on philosophy for publication in his *Dictionnaire de philosophie ancienne et moderne* in the *Encyclopédie méthodique*. Comparing how Diderot's articles were categorised in the *Encyclopédie* and the *Dictionnaire*, this paper traced the editorial interventions – notes, modifications, and cross-references – introduced by Naigeon with the aim of situating Diderot more firmly within the history of philosophy.

Stacey Herbert (independent digital curator) and Caroline Warman (Jesus College, University of Oxford) then presented their collaboration to create *Naigeon's Diderot*, a digital workspace and valuable scholarly resource. This digital edition enables readers to visualise and explore how Diderot's *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* and *Eléments de physiologie* are woven into Naigeon's *Mémoires*, which incorporates extensive quotations – often reorganised or rewritten – from these two source texts. This project sheds new light on Naigeon's complex role in publishing and disseminating Diderot's works, and on his editorial activity more broadly.

In the final session, chaired by Olivia Russell (St Hugh's College, University of Oxford), Glenn Roe (Jesus College, University of Oxford) identified Naigeon's use of ideas and citations from works by the baron d'Holbach in his *Dictionnaire de philosophie ancienne et moderne*, as revealed by sequence alignment analysis. The ERC-funded ModERN project (Modelling Enlightenment: Reassembling Networks of Modernity through data-driven research), which aims to develop new digital tools to reconstruct and analyse eighteenth-century information networks, continues to enrich our understanding of Enlightenment print culture, textual reception and reuse, and literary collaboration.

In a paper titled «Diderot historien des arts selon Naigeon», François Pépin (IHRIM, ENS de Lyon) examined how Diderot's *Encyclopédie* entry on *Art* is presented by Naigeon in the *Mémoires*. Pépin showed that Naigeon took issue with Diderot's explanation of the role of chance (*hasard*) in artistic invention; in editing Diderot's work, Naigeon simultaneously sought to correct and critique his ideas.

Finally, Ruggero Sciuto (University of Southern California and the Voltaire Foundation) considered Naigeon's role in writing and publishing two works by d'Holbach: the *Lettres à Eugénie* and *Lettres philosophiques*. This method of collaboration differs from

Naigeon's editorial interventions after Diderot's death; he was directly involved in revising and rewriting some of d'Holbach's works, with the baron's knowledge. Digital d'Holbach, a born-digital scholarly edition of his complete works directed by Ruggero Sciuto, will further elucidate Naigeon's role in d'Holbach's literary output.

The conference concluded with a discussion about potential future collaboration. The research presented throughout the day points to new directions for scholars interested in Naigeon's life and work, as well as for those engaged with digital humanities, literary networks, and the transmission, transformation, and reception of ideas in eighteenth-century France.