



## THE ALMANACH DE GOTHA - PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND CIRCULATION OF A FRENCH-LANGUAGE ALMANAC IN EUROPE AT THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AND THE FIRST DECADES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

*The Almanach de Gotha - production, distribution and circulation of a French-language almanac in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century*

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**ABSTRACT** *The Almanach de Gotha, published in French in Gotha in Germany between 1764 and 1944 first by the publisher Dieterich and then by the publishers Ettinger and Perthes for almost two centuries, was the reference genealogical almanac for the European aristocracy of the 18th century, the 19th century and first half of the 20th century. The almanac published not only detailed genealogical information, but also a calendar, literary anecdotes and extracts from novels, and multiple information on fashion, literary and theatrical novelties, scientific innovations as well as significant historical events.*

*Starting from theoretical and methodological reflections, this contribution aims to first highlight the process of manufacturing this almanac, and then its distribution and reception among a fundamentally elitist and transnational public. The case of the censorship of the almanac in 1808 by Napoléon Bonaparte who was very sensitive to the aristocratic and royal genealogies published in the Almanach de Gotha, is also analyzed, certain orientations of which could fundamentally call into question Napoléon's legitimacy and that of the princes that it he had placed on European thrones, in particular members of his own family. This contribution is linked to a research project, carried out in cooperation with York-Gothart Mix (München), on French-speaking almanacs in the German cultural and linguistic area between 1700-1815. Based on detailed bibliographic research, partly in archives, it essentially concerns the first period of publication of this almanac, that is to say the years 1764 to 1830.*

**KEYWORDS** Almanac; Court culture; Francophone culture; Censureship; Materiality of print media; Enlightenment; Popular versus aristocratic cultures.

**RESUMEN** *El Almanach de Gotha, publicado en francés en Gotha, Alemania, entre 1764 y 1944, primero por la editorial Dieterich y posteriormente por las editoriales Ettinger y Perthes durante casi dos siglos, fue el almanaque genealógico de referencia para la aristocracia europea de los siglos XVIII, XIX y la primera mitad del siglo XX. Este almanaque no solo incluía información genealógica detallada, sino también un calendario, anécdotas literarias, extractos de novelas, y diversos datos sobre moda, novedades literarias y teatrales, innovaciones científicas, así como acontecimientos históricos relevantes.*

*A partir de reflexiones teóricas y metodológicas, esta contribución tiene como objetivo destacar, en primer lugar, el proceso de elaboración de este almanaque, seguido de su distribución y recepción entre un público fundamentalmente elitista y transnacional. Asimismo, se analiza el caso de la censura del almanaque en 1808 por parte de Napoleón Bonaparte, quien mostró gran sensibilidad hacia las genealogías aristocráticas y reales publicadas en el Almanach de Gotha. Algunas orientaciones contenidas en el almanaque podían cuestionar de manera fundamental la legitimidad de Napoleón y la de los príncipes que había colocado en los tronos europeos, en particular a miembros de su propia familia.*

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Esta contribución se vincula con un proyecto de investigación realizado en colaboración con York-Gothart Mix (Múnich), centrado en los almanaques francófonos en el ámbito cultural y lingüístico alemán entre 1700 y 1815. Basado en una investigación bibliográfica detallada, en parte desarrollada en archivos, este estudio se concentra esencialmente en el primer periodo de publicación del almanaque, es decir, los años comprendidos entre 1764 y 1830.

**PALABRAS CLAVE** Almanaque; cultura cortesana; Cultura francófona; Censura; materialidad de los medios impresos; Ilustración; culturas populares frente a culturas aristocráticas.

## 1. Historical and theoretical issues

Almanacs - a periodical characterized by its annual publication - are undoubtedly one of the fields of research neglected by the Information and Communication Sciences (ICS), whereas in other fields and disciplines, like book history, cultural history and also literary history, we can observe a growing interest in this media genre during the last decades (Braida 1989; Fischer/Haefs/Mix, 1999, Botrel 2003, 2006, 2015; Rospocher/Salman/ Salmi 2019), even if significant parts of this very heterogenous and extremely large corpus has not yet been explored. The term 'almanac' covers, in fact, a great heterogeneity of different forms and sub-genres, which enjoyed their largest diffusion and greatest socio-cultural importance between the mid-seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, and has since experienced a long period of loss of influence. In contrast to the modern period (16th-18th centuries) and the first part of the 19th century, the almanac as a publishing genre, in its many different forms (Grand-Carteret 1896/1968), has, since the second half of the 19th century, in fact been no more than a socially marginal, and often folkloric, medium of information and communication. In South American societies (Lüsebrink, 2019) and in French-speaking Quebec and Canada, however, almanacs retained an important socio-cultural role until the 1930s and sometimes beyond (Lüsebrink/Mix/Sorel, 1999; Lüsebrink 2014; Loyola, 2020).

Between the two poles of widely circulated almanacs, often also called 'popular almanacs', and almanacs intended for an elite audience, which could be conceptualized through Pierre Bourdieu's approach distinguishing between the 'mass cultural field' and the 'restricted cultural field' (Bourdieu, 1991; Jurt, 2023), we can, in fact, locate a multiplicity of sub-genres that reflect similarities in the different European and American (post-)colonial cultures. At the popular (or mass<sup>1</sup>) cultural pole (or field) are situated almanacs of the *Messenger Boiteux* or *Mathieu Laensbergh* type, characterized by a narrator who aims to be close to the social strata and uses short narrative forms that lend themselves to oral reading (Greilich 2005, 2006; Greilich and Mix, 2006; Lüsebrink, 2000). From a theoretical point of view, this type of almanac is therefore structured by semi-oral media forms, straddling the written, printed and oral worlds; it is largely made up of oral forms of communication transposed to the written word (such as anecdotes, proverbs, dialogues, etc.). At the same time, it encourages readers to

1. This term of „mass culture“ is not entirely adequate for societies of the 16th–18th centuries where literacy rates were generally below 30% and where only a minority of the population had direct access to printed media.

read the almanac aloud, leading the audience to ‘re-oralise’ written and printed textual forms.<sup>2</sup> Analyzing the forms and functions of almanacs as a medium of widespread social circulation from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries means, on the one hand, taking account of their complex intermediatic anchorage, linking the written and printed word to the visual and oral, through very different and historically specific configurations. The almanac series of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries primarily contained illustrations on wood; those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries increasingly included illustrations on copperplate, sometimes drawn by renowned artists; and the series of the nineteenth century, considerably enlarging the presence of images, increasingly included photographs and reproduced drawings.

Against the background of the historical context and the theoretical considerations outlined above, this article is based on the hypothesis that almanacs had important social, political and cultural functions in all areas of life in the early modern period, including elite cultures. It aims to analyse the forms and functions of almanacs in the specific cultural field of court culture, using the example of the longest-lived and most influential almanac in this field in early modern Europe, the *Almanach de Gotha*, published in French in the German-speaking cultural area.

## 2. Methodological considerations

The history of the almanac goes back to the very origins of printing in the West, at the end of the sixteenth century (Fritsch 1968, 14; Bunzel 1999). As the theoretical considerations outlined above show, it represents a complex printed object: generally made up of several types of texts (or textual genres, Gülich/Raible, 1972, Rétat, 1990), almanacs were at the same time intermediatic printed objects rooted in forms of visual communication, on the one hand, and, on the other, in forms of oral communication in its various generic forms (anecdotes, proverbs, songs, rumours, dialogues). Seen from this angle, an analysis of almanacs from the early-modern period requires the use of at least three sets of methodological tools.

In order to account for the specific material features of almanacs, it is first necessary to draw on the history of the book and the tools for describing and analyzing printed matter that it has developed over the last few decades, emphasizing the semantic (i.e. meaning-producing) importance of material elements such as format, layout, paper quality, the structure of the title page and interleaved titles, and the vignettes. The analysis of these elements is closely linked to the study of editorial production structures determined by precise and restrictive institutional and legislative frameworks (granting of printing privileges or permissions, control of the print market, role of censorship), publishers’ objectives and the related forms of distribution, among which, for almanacs, peddling networks played a leading role (Chartier 2021; McKenzie 1991; Fontaine 1993; Chartier/Lüsebrink 1996). Secondly, the heterogeneity

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2. See on this concept which has been introduced notably by the German academic Fritz Nies, specialist in Romance philology (Lüsebrink, 1994).

of the texts that make up the almanacs requires recourse to textual and generic concepts and methods of analysis (Gülich/Raible 1972) as well as to the conceptual and analytical apparatus of intermediality (Rajewski 2002). The relationship between texts and images in the almanacs is characterized by what Irina Rajewski defines as a ‘media combination’ (‘Medienkombination’), involving the sometimes complex anchoring (Barthes 1964, pp. 43-45) of images in different textual elements, such as captions and ‘explanations of the engravings’, often placed at the beginning of the almanac and accompanied by brief narratives. Thirdly, methodological approaches to the use, circulation, appropriation and reception of texts and media are essential in order to understand the readership and their reading habits. Methodological tools have been developed from this perspective in recent decades, notably in literary theory (Jauss 1990; Evans 2014; Iser 1990, 1991) and in cultural history (Chartier 1984, 1987, 1993). However, their application to historical corpora from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries very often comes up against a lack of sources (such as readers’ testimonies) and requires either recourse to new or alternative sources, which are sometimes difficult to explore (like inventories after death), or a meticulous textual analysis of the almanac corpus itself, aiming at collecting and analyzing traces of reading (such as annotations). The materiality of the text can also reveal a specific readership which may be deduced from the cultural horizon invoked (intertextual references, cultural knowledge) and lead to hypothesis on the possible or probable socio-cultural affiliation of the ‘implicit’ readers (Iser 1971).

### 3. The *Almanach de Gotha* - a European aristocratic periodical

The *Almanach de Gotha*, which is the focus of this study, was published in French in Gotha, Thuringia, from 1763 to 1944. It was the best-known French-language almanac published in Germany, and also the longest-lived in the German cultural and linguistic area of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Lüsebrink, 2011). The idea of placing the presentation of a complete picture of the princely and ducal houses of Europe at the heart of the almanac was not entirely new. It had been preceded, in France as well as in the German-speaking cultural and linguistic area, by several almanacs and other periodical productions in the first half of the eighteenth century bearing in their title the term ‘genealogical’, such as the *Almanach astronomique, historique et oeconomique* published in Berlin between 1727 and 1732 which contained, as its subtitle indicates, ‘A genealogical list of the births of the Princes & Princesses of Europe.’ («Une liste généalogique de la naissance des Princes & des Princesses de l’Europe»). However, the publishing house of Johann Christoph Reyher, publisher to the Court of Gotha, and the publishers who succeeded him, were eventually able to hold their own against major competitors based in towns much larger than the small residential town of Gotha. These competitors included the publisher and bookseller Varrentrapp in Frankfurt am Main and Mainz, which competed with the *Almanach de Gotha* in particular in the 1750s and 1760s with its *Neues genealogisch-schematisches Reichs- und Staats-Handbuch* (1742-1805, ‘Genealogical and schematic manual of the Holy Roman Empire’). Unlike the *Almanach*

*de Gotha*, the latter was published in German, but it also contained 'The Genealogy of all the Sovereign & Regnant Houses of Europe, with the principal political, Civil & Military State of several Courts, their Ministers Resident outside [...]':<sup>3</sup> *The Almanach de Gotha* thus had a specific profile that distinguished it from other court almanacs. In contrast to the *Almanach Royal de France*, which was created in 1683 and published until 1792 (Brondel 2008) serving as a model for numerous 18th-century court almanacs, like the *Almanach de la Cour palatine à Mannheim* (Fickert 2013), the *Almanach de Gotha* was not limited to one royal court, but aimed to provide a constantly updated overview of all European court houses.

The *Almanach de Gotha* was created at a time - the sixties of the eighteenth century - that can be considered the apogee for this specific type of periodical represented by the editorial and media genre of the almanac, before it was increasingly challenged by other forms of press, such as newspapers and magazines. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, almanacs occupied, in fact, only a few rather marginal niches in the European periodical market (Fritsch 1968, 17).<sup>4</sup> Almanacs were published once a year, usually between mid-November and the first few weeks of December, and were bound to contain a calendar as well as numerous other headings, depending on their design, the publishers' objectives and socio-cultural circumstances. In general, but not in all cases, they represented a widely circulated form of printed matter, with a large variety of sub-genres, reaching almost all social strata, from the elite to the semi-literate fringes that made up part of the readership of popular almanacs, such as the *Messagers boiteux* and *Mathieu Laensbergh* series.<sup>5</sup>

The success of the *Almanach de Gotha*, which was one of the almanacs aimed at the social elite, can be explained firstly by its use of the French language, the language of most European princely courts from the mid-seventeenth century until the early nineteenth century, and the most important language of international diplomacy until the First World War; and secondly by the fact that it was aimed not primarily at the Roman-German Empire, but at Europe as a whole. Its success may also be explained by its completeness and reliability, qualities that were associated with its brand image from the 1760s onwards. Finally, right from the start, the *Almanach de Gotha* included, at least for several decades, until the end of the eighteenth century, a large 'Varieties and Anecdotes' section, which was a welcome addition to the central but rather dry section of the table of members of the princely houses, and which quickly grew in importance. During the first decades of its existence, the *Almanach de Gotha* thus took on the structure of an encyclopaedic almanac (or yearbook), going far beyond the objectives of a purely genealogical almanac. For example, it included information on the different countries of the world, their geography, surface area and most important

3. *Gazette de Cologne*, n°XVI, 25 février 1763, s.p. [p. 4]: « La Généalogie de toutes les Maisons Souveraines & Rég-nantes de l'Europe, avec l'État principal politique, Civil & Militaire de plusieurs Cours, leurs Ministres Résidents au dehors [...] »

4. Fritsch 1968, 17, underlines, in fact, that the almanac had lost its important role in cultural history with the advent of daily and weekly newspapers, Sunday newspapers and a multitude of similar periodical publications.

5. See on the *Messenger Boiteux*: Desponds 1996 et Greilich/Mix 2006 and on the *Almanach de Mathieu Laensbergh*, also called, appelé « Almanach de Liège », the PhD thesis in history by Simon Dagenais 2016.

cities, as well as their military personnel and their economic resources<sup>6</sup>; and it devoted part of its 'Varieties' section to novelties in the fields of fashion and gastronomy, technical and scientific inventions and included reports on foreign countries, sometimes very distant, and their populations and customs.

Throughout its history, the *Almanach de Gotha* was published not by large publishing houses, but by relatively modest publishers with close ties to the Court of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. The publisher Reyher, who launched the French-language almanac in 1764 and ceded in 1765 the publishing rights while continuing to print it, was succeeded from 1765 by the publishers Mevius and Dieterich, and from 1775 by the Ettinger publishing house, all based in Gotha. From 1765 onwards, these publishers published, alongside the French version of the almanac, a German version entitled *Gothaischer Hofkalender*, an almanac that had itself taken over from a German-language genealogical almanac published between 1740 and 1765 by Reyher under the title *Gothaischer Genealogischer und Schreibcalender*. The prospectus of new titles published by Ettinger in 1797 reflects the rather average size of this publishing house: 28 titles are listed, four of which are in Latin and three in French. The presence in this prospectus of two other German-language almanacs - alongside the *Almanach de Gotha* in both its French and German versions - namely a theatre almanac (*Theaterkalender*) and a daily pocket almanac (*Tägliches Taschenbuch*) intended in particular for travellers ("besonders für Reisende"<sup>7</sup>), attests to the publisher's interest, and a certain specialisation, in this type of periodical. For financial reasons, Ettinger subsequently sub-leased ("verpachten") the rights to publish the Gotha almanac to his colleagues Perthes and Dürfeld, also publishers in Gotha, while taking an active part in its design and distribution until 1828. In 1828 Ettinger transferred the rights to Justus Perthes and his heirs, a medium-sized publisher who had, among other things, published a French edition of Voltaire's *Œuvres complètes* in 1785 and Goethe's 'Metamorphoses of Plants' (*Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen*) in 1790.

The idea, and probably also the economic and financial motivation, for the creation of the *Almanach de Gotha* originally came from the Duke of Saxe-Gotha, Frederick III, and his wife Luise Dorothea. This idea was closely linked to the Duke's cultural policy of making the Court of Gotha known far beyond the borders of the Holy Roman Empire and to present it as an enlightened and cosmopolitan place. In 1763, at the instigation of Frederick III, a short-lived French-language periodical called *Almanac nécessaire*, edited by Wilhelm von Rotberg, a councillor at the Court of Gotha, was first published in Gotha, followed in 1764 by the *Almanach de Gotha, contenant diverses connoissances curieuses et utiles*, edited by Emanuel Christoph Klüpfel (1712-1776), a French-speaking (and Francophile) tutor at the Ducal Court, who had been entrusted with the education of Crown Prince Frederick, whom he had accompanied also during his stay in Paris between 1747 and 1750. In parallel with the French version, Klüpfel also produced a German-language version of the *Almanach de Gotha* in 1765,

6. See on this development : Diesbach, 2012 : 14–15.

7. *Verzeichnis neuer Verlagsbücher der Ettingischen Buchhandlung in Gotha*, s.l.n.d. [1797], s.p. [p. 3].

entitled *Gothaischer Hofkalender zum Nutzen und Vergnügen eingerichtet auf das Jahr 1765*, published by the same publishers.<sup>8</sup>

## 4. Generic structure and social functions

The central part of the almanac, the genealogical table of the princely and ducal houses of Europe, had a dual function, both of representation and legitimisation. The genealogical table of Europe's high aristocracy attached to the courts (as opposed to the feudal or Landed aristocracy), was in fact a kind of 'atlas of power', a "vademecum"<sup>9</sup> of the aristocratic and princely high society in Europe at the time. It was consulted primarily for pragmatic purposes, so that the right titles could be used in correspondence and personal contacts at diplomatic meetings or on traditional journeys such as the 'Grand Tour' through France and Italy. Consultation of the *Gotha* was intended to avoid quarrels of precedence and problems of etiquette, particularly on the international stage, whether in the diplomatic context or at social gatherings of the European high aristocracy, at parties and weddings and, from the 19th century onwards, at meetings in the great seaside resorts and spas such as Carlsbad, Cannes, Baden-Baden, Spa or Vittel. In this way, the *Almanach de Gotha* intended to avoid communication misunderstandings and missteps that could lead to unfortunate consequences. From a pragmatic point of view, the *Almanach de Gotha* was also an indispensable information tool for planning suitable weddings and avoiding mishaps. It listed the descendants of great families, both married and unmarried, and among them those who were virtually available within a relational economy woven by the European aristocracy of the modern era, and to a certain extent also of the contemporary era, through multiple kinship links that were often judiciously considered and taken into account in the constitution of one's descendants.

But the *Almanach de Gotha* also served as a reference for strategies to legitimise power. It was the reference guide for the European high nobility and the aristocratic families. In the eyes of the European elites of the time, but also in the eyes of the wider public, appearing in this almanac was striking proof of the legitimacy of the titles held, implying a very high social status and referring to a system of inheritance and a historical genealogy. 'A mention in the *Almanach de Gotha* was the best consecration one could find for a career as a man of the world.'<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the *Almanach de Gotha* was, in Ghislain de Diesbach's words, 'a vast family album, showing the predominance of certain races, certain dynasties such as the Saxe-Coburgs or the Hesse-Darmstadts who, although ruling modest countries, played a fairly considerable role in Europe by serving as stud farms - or harems - where the great

8. See on the origins and the history of the *l'Almanach de Gotha* : Fritsch 1968 ; Wendelmuth 1912 and the « Geschichte des Hofkalenders, » in: *Gothaischer genealogischer Hofkalender nebst diplomatisch-statistischem Jahrbuch auf das Jahr 1863*. Hundertster Jahrgang. Gotha, Justus Perthes [1867], pp. III-XXIV (sur les origines *ibid.*, pp. VII-VIII).

9. Mix, 2013, here p. 41.

10. Diesbach 2012, p. 22 : « Une mention dans *l'Almanach de Gotha* était la meilleure consécration qu'on pût trouver à une carrière d'homme du monde. »

imperial or royal houses came to find husbands for their daughters.’<sup>11</sup> Year after year, the almanac documented the state of Europe’s high aristocracy, revealing to public opinion the private details of its members: their age, marital status, profession, decorations, promotions and the family and social network to which they belonged (Fritsch 1968, 27). This legitimising function of the *Almanach de Gotha* explains the willingness, indeed the eagerness, of the European princely courts to continually provide the almanac’s editors with the most up-to-date information, and their determination to verify it. The information published and distributed by the *Almanach de Gotha* was based on a contract of trust guaranteeing its accuracy and veracity, as well as its political neutrality. The information was collected by the Almanac’s editors from court and state chancelleries (‘Hof- und Staatskanzleien’) throughout Europe. With the support of the Chancellery of the Court of Saxony-Gotha, the editors sent out information sheets every year to all the courts present in the almanac, seeking to gather the most up-to-date information, and did not hesitate to repeat their enquiries if replies were lacking or slow in arriving (Fritsch 1968, 23).

For the first half-century of its existence, i.e. until the 1820s, the *Almanach de Gotha* consisted essentially of four parts, each consisting of different textual (sub)genres: firstly, a calendar section, which in principle is part of any almanac in the early-modern period and which was not to be removed from the *Almanach de Gotha* until 1928; then a section containing information of everyday and pragmatic use, such as weights and measures and their conversion, the main currencies in use, calculation tables and a list of the distances between the main towns in Europe. From the 1790s onwards, this section was expanded to include statistics (on population, the economy, government revenue, etc.), which would become increasingly important from the first decades of the 19th century onwards. Thirdly, between 1764 and the mid-1830s, the *Almanach de Gotha* included a ‘variety’ section containing, on the one hand, amusing stories and anecdotes and, on the other hand, encyclopaedic articles on fashion, new inventions, voyages of exploration, ‘exotic’ peoples and faraway lands, and philosophical and scientific questions. Until the early years of the French Revolution, this part of the *Almanach de Gotha* contained also numerous articles reflecting enlightened and progressive positions on political, economic, social and cultural issues. However, these positions were based on the concept of an enlightened monarchy that was also advocated at the time by the Duke of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg, Frederick III, and his wife Luise Dorothea who was in contact by letter with leading representatives of the Enlightenment movement in France and Germany, including Voltaire, Melchior Grimm and Luise and Johann Christoph Gottsched. The *Almanach de Gotha* for 1790, published at the end of 1789, featured a series of prints showing identification figures who, from the perspective of the almanac, have made a significant contribution to the progress of humankind and in particular to the development of Europe, such as Christopher Columbus, James Cook and King Gustavus Adolphus and Queen Christine of Sweden. According to the ‘Explanation of the Prints’ at the beginning of the almanac, these

11. Diesbach 2012, p. 23: « un vaste album de famille, montrant la prédominance de certaines races, de certaines dynasties comme les Saxe-Cobourg ou les Hesse-Darmstadt qui, bien que régnant sur de modestes pays, jouaient un rôle assez considérable en Europe en servant de haras – ou de harems – où les grandes maisons impériales ou royales venaient chercher des maris pour leurs filles. »



engravings are intended to show ‘that we are tending by degrees towards greater perfection’: ‘Almost all these subjects are proof that our Europe is approaching perfection more and more.’<sup>12</sup> In the last decades of the eighteenth century, leading German writers, philosophers and scholars contributed to the *Almanac de Gotha*, helping to spread the ideas of the political and scientific Enlightenment, including the writer and philosopher Georg Christian Lichtenberg, the anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach and the mathematician Johann Heinrich Voigt. Among the many articles testifying to the enlightened positions taken, the one published in the *Almanac de Gotha* for 1793 seems particularly committed. Published without an author’s name, but possibly written by J.F. Blumenbach, and tracing in a very precise manner the history and the political and economic stakes of the transatlantic slave trade and the institution of slavery in the European colonies in the Americas, this article condemns them severely and without restriction and asks, in a fiery pathetic rhetorical style, for their abolition, two years before the law abolishing slavery and the slave trade in France and the French colonies: ‘May heaven grant that the political circumstances & the influence that the abolition of this traffic could have on the trade & possessions of individuals, do not delay its complete destruction in the other nations of Europe.’<sup>13</sup>

The genealogical part, establishing a table of the princely houses of Europe, and constituting the central section of the almanac, was subdivided into three sub-sections: the first part was devoted to the genealogy of the sovereign houses of Europe as well as, after 1815, the houses that had been dispossessed after the Congress of Vienna; the second part concerned the houses of the Mediated Lords of Germany, i.e. the dukes and duchesses; the third part included the other princely houses of Germany and Austria-Hungary as well as the ducal houses of France, Belgium and the United Kingdom and certain princely houses of Spain, Italy and France (Diesbach 2012, 22).

From 1768 onwards, the *Almanach de Gotha* also included illustrations (copperplates) which in the early years were entrusted to a well-known artist and engraver, Daniel Chodowiecki. Initially of a mythological and allegorical nature, the visual world of the almanac first expanded to include engravings showing scenes from fashionable literary texts such as *Oberon* by Wieland, *Gil Blas* by Lesage, *Le Mariage de Figaro* by Beaumarchais, *Caroline de Litchfield* by Isabelle Monolieu (Baroness de Polier) and later from novels by Walter Scott. There was also, in the 1780s and beginning 1790s, a focus of the engravings on ladies’ hairstyles, especially from Paris and Berlin. From the 1790s onwards, the focus was increasingly on portraits of men, and from 1795 on portraits of famous women, the portraits of the Prussian Princesses Louise Auguste Wilhelmine Amalie and Friederike Caroline Sophie Alexandrine de Prusse being the first to be published in the columns of the *Almanach de Gotha* (Fritsch 1968, p. 33). The illustrations were generally used in both the French and German versions of the *Almanach de*

12. *Almanac de Gotha*, 1790, no pag.: «que nous tendons par degrés vers une plus grande perfection » : «Presque tous ces sujets sont une preuve, que notre Europe approche de plus en plus de la perfection. »

13. « Esclaves nègres », *Almanac de Gotha pour 1793* [1792], p. 14-18, here p. 18 : « Fasse le ciel que les circonstances politiques & l’influence que l’abolition de ce trafic pourroit avoir sur le commerce & les possessions des particuliers, ne retardent pas son entière destruction chez les autres nations de l’Europe. »

*Gotha* (respectively *Gothaischer Kalender zum Nutzen und Vergnügen*) and, also in order to save additional costs, included bilingual captions (Saffroy 1959, p. 431).

## 5. Evolution of the *Almanach de Gotha*

The most important developments, first and foremost in terms of its materiality, concerned the considerable increase in the number of its pages, which rose from twenty pages in 1765 to almost a thousand pages from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, with the almanac becoming, over and above the dynastic information still central to it, a veritable manual of information and knowledge in the fields mentioned. The *Almanach de Gotha* continued to aim at a readership linked by its very high social status and its knowledge of the French language and culture, constituting a common foundation of cultural and historical references. An Italian-language edition also appeared in Venice in the 1780s. From 1795 onwards, the *Almanach de Gotha* was enriched by the inclusion of statistics, and from 1824 onwards it also contained, alongside genealogical tables of European princely dynasties, later expanded to include the highest offices in the army, administration and justice, a 'diplomatic directory' with the names of ministers, ambassadors and, from 1802 onwards, consuls. Initially, and until the first decades of the 19th century, the *Almanach de Gotha* focused solely on Europe, but in the course of the 19th century it also included countries in America (starting with the United States) and certain Asian countries, such as Japan, and North Africa, and henceforth also included republics. The political and geographical map covered by the *Almanach de Gotha* reflected the concept of 'Culture' and its degree of refinement, its reference being a highly developed culture that its editors saw as embodied first and foremost by European societies marked by the 'progress of all human knowledge alongside & with the help of Philosophy. This eurocentric conception of cultural and social progress is emblematically illustrated by the 'Explanation of the Figures' showing the different degrees of cultural evolution of mankind published in his edition for 1785.<sup>14</sup> While the text of the explanations, part of an 'intermediatic combination' (Rajewski 2002) characteristic of the *Almanach de Gotha*, summed up a philosophy of historical and civilisational progress that was to be found at the time notably in Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs*, the images - very fine copperplate illustrations by Chodowiecki - transposed them placatively into the world of visual signs (Illustration n°1). However, the last three illustrations, and the explanatory texts that accompany them, reflect a Rousseauist vision of history, associating luxury and depraved morals with the decadence and decline of society. Stigmatising 'inordinate luxury' (« luxe démesuré »), 'affectation of manners and taste' (« l'affectation en fait de mœurs et de goût ») and 'unnatural dress' (« habillemens contre nature ») characterizing the tenth degree of the (possible) evolution of human societies, the editors of the *Almanach de Gotha* then pointed out the dangers of 'excessive culture' (« excès de culture »), a 'loss of bodily strength' (« perte des forces du corps ») and 'ever-increasing luxury' (« luxe toujours

14. « Explication des douze figures », in: *Almanac de Gotha pour 1784*, s.p., [pp. 1-8, ici p. 7] : « progrès de toutes les connoissances humaines à côté & par le secours de la Philosophie ». The quote refers to the ninth level of evolution of human societies, the following three being marked by decadence..

croissant ») leading to an ‘aversion to work’ (« l’aversion pour le travail »), to ‘vaine gossip instead of knowledge and philosophy’ (« bavardage au lieu de savoir & de Philosophie ») at the eleventh stage of human cultural development (Illustration n°2). The editors of the *Almanach de Gotha* thus confronted their aristocratic readers with the dangers of an overly sophisticated civilisation that is fundamentally opposed to the principles of natural law. The last potential stage in the evolution of societies involves an ‘abomination of morals’ (« abomination des mœurs ») and widespread decadence: ‘Excessive efforts in everything that concerns civil society. Incredulity, Despotism, & as for taste - jousyoux and brimborious.’<sup>15</sup>

The legitimising function of the *Almanach de Gotha* may be illustrated by a striking event in its history. In 1808, three editions of this almanac were published, quite exceptionally. The first edition, which came off the printing presses of C.W. Ettinger in Gotha in mid-november 1807, was banned by Napoleon’s censors because the information it contained called into question the new dynastic order established by Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, who had named a number of his brothers and sisters, as well as loyal companions, to European thrones, thus considerably reorganising the territorial and dynastic order after the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 and following Napoleon’s military victories between 1804 and 1807. However, ignoring these political changes from the outset, the genealogical section of this first edition of the almanac for 1808 kept the princes and dukes deposed by Napoleon Bonaparte in their places, by mentioning them in the almanac along with their ancestral titles. This edition was quickly seized by the Napoleonic censors, but some copies had already been sold and distributed. Part of this censored edition was subsequently published clandestinely with a new title page and a false indication of the place of publication, in this case ‘Leipsic’. Under pressure from the Napoleonic authorities and censors in Paris, who drew up a profoundly revised edition of the almanac and passed it on to the publisher in Gotha, Ettinger published a new edition of the almanac with the Gotha place of publication for 1808, probably in mid-December 1807, i.e. about a month later.

In this new reprinted version, which consisted of just 54 pages instead of the original 112 in-12° pages, the following major changes were made: no fewer than 93 names were removed from the ‘List of princes, sovereigns and other illustrious persons of Europe’. In order to give the impression that almost all of Germany was part of the Rhenish Confederation dominated by imperial France, the ‘Table of German princes and states that did not join the Rhenish Confederation’ (« Tableau des princes et des États allemands qui n’ont point accédé à la Confédération rhénane ») was removed. The title of the “Précis historique de la domination des Anglais sur la mer » (‘Historical summary of the English domination of the sea’) was changed to « Précis sur la domination sur la mer des peuples modernes » (‘Summary of the domination of the sea by modern peoples’) and stopped at the time of Louis XIV, leaving out the British naval hegemony in the 18th century and the crushing defeat of the French fleet at Trafalgar in 1804. The portraits of William Pitt, British Prime Minister, Admiral Nelson and Joachim Murat, Grand

15. *Almanac de Gotha pour l’année 1785* [1784], « Explication des douze figures » [p. 1-8, here p. 7-8]: « Efforts outrés dans tout ce qui concerne la société civile. Incrédulité, Despotisme, & quant au goût – jousyoux et brimborious. »

Duke of Berg, King of Naples and brother-in-law of Napoleon Bonaparte, which appeared in the calendar section of the first edition of the almanac, were removed. Some dates are also missing in the new edition of the 'Chronique des années 1806 et 1807', such as that of the death of the writer Sophie de La Roche, a friend of the German writer Wieland and known for her critical stance towards Napoleon Bonaparte. Numerous details were also changed or deleted from this chronicle, such as those reporting the French Emperor's entry into Jena on 14 October 1807, following the victory of his army in the battles of Jena and Auerstedt, where the sentence « Weimar et Jéna sont livrés au pillage » ('Weimar and Jena are left to pillage') was deleted. Finally, we note that the reference to Napoleon in this chronicle, where in the first edition he was mentioned only by his name, is almost everywhere replaced by the title 'The Emperor' ('L'Empereur'<sup>16</sup>). In this way, the censors scrutinised the censored first edition of the *Almanach de Gotha* with great care, in order to ensure that the reprint provided a vision of the dynastic cartography of Europe that corresponded as closely as possible to Napoleon's political aims.

Over and above the permanence that represented its 'brand' and its 'label' - the presence of constantly updated tables of Europe's dynasties - the *Almanach de Gotha* underwent a number of significant changes in the 19th century that were largely due to changes in the media landscape of the time, linked in particular to the growing importance of daily newspapers and the emergence of a number of increasingly specialised journals. In addition to the expansion of the content of information on reigning dynasties and the inclusion of non-European countries, the first decades of the 19th century saw the disappearance of the 'Variety' section of the almanac, with its amusing anecdotes, its advertisements for luxury products, particularly in the field of fashion, and, finally, its encyclopaedic nature, which brought together new knowledge from a wide variety of fields in an unsystematic way. In the *Almanach de Gotha*, for example, readers could find a 'History of the Wig' (« Histoire de la perruque ») in 1780, an 'Abridged History of Music in Russia' (« Histoire abrégée de la Musique en Russie ») in 1782, a 'List of some excellent delicacies with addresses of suppliers in Paris' (« La liste de quelques friandises et gourmandises d'excellente qualité avec l'adresse de fournisseurs à Paris ») in 1790, and a whole series of articles on the history of astronomy in the issues of the almanac published between 1798 and 1803. This type of information disappeared in the first decades of the 19th century, as other genres and media, such as illustrated magazines and encyclopaedic dictionaries, took it over, benefiting in many ways from their larger size and format, which allowed for in-4° or in-folio illustrations. The transformation of the content of the *Almanach de Gotha* which went hand in hand with a greater specialisation of the almanac as a 'dynastic vademecum', is also reflected in its subtitle 'containing various curious and useful knowledge' (« contenant diverses connoissances curieuses et utiles ») which disappeared from 1790 onwards. The Gotha Almanac was then published without any further additions to the title, before taking on the subtitle 'Diplomatic and Statistical Yearbook for the Year' from 1849 until 1944.<sup>17</sup>

16. See *Almanac historique généalogique pour l'année 1808* [1807]; *Almanac de Gotha pour l'année/1808* [1807]; and on the censorship also Chénédolle 1849.

17. « Annuaire diplomatique et statistique pour l'année ». See on this point Fritsch, 1968, pp. 135–170, here p. 135.

A comparison of the structure and content of two editions of the almanac, one published in the seventies of the eighteenth century and the other in the twenties of the nineteenth century, is likely to illustrate these changes in detail and highlight the transformation of generic structures as well as the editorial and political issues involved. First of all, the two almanacs have the same material structure: they were printed in 12-inch format, with a comparable number of engravings (12 engravings in 1786, 10 in 1824), as well as a calendar section and, as a central element, the 'Genealogy of the Sovereigns of Europe'. However, this section almost tripled in volume (73 pages in 1786 and 193 in 1824) and in 1824 also included information on the history and renown of a selected number of princely houses. In both 1786 and 1824, the publisher offered two physical versions of his almanac: one cheaper, priced at 12 Groschen in 1786, and unbound, the other more expensive, at 16 Groschen, 'bound, in varnished parchment and gilded on edge' (« relié, en parchemin vernissé et doré sur tranche »), aimed primarily at the aristocratic public of the princely courts, while the cheaper version was intended primarily for commoners and middle-class people with contacts with the princely courts, such as scholars, booksellers and publishers, deliverymen and administrative staff. In 1824, buyers also had a choice between a gilt-edged, paperback edition in a slipcase and a deluxe edition costing twice as much, 'on glued vellum paper, elegantly bound in morocco'.<sup>18</sup>

Despite these common features, which reflect the editorial, material and generic continuity of the almanac, the differences are obvious when comparing the two editions. In addition to the genealogical section, the 1786 edition contained numerous articles on a wide variety of subjects, ranging from an article on different calendars and the 'different ways of starting the day' (among the Greeks, Chinese and many other peoples) to articles on the 'Principal discoveries made in Europe in recent centuries' and a long article on the peacock in 'Natural History'. Readers could also find precise information on luxury products and objects such as oysters and foreign birds, for which the almanac even gave current prices. In the 1824 edition, all this information and headings have disappeared, along with information on the main fairs and markets in Europe and the post office couriers (horse and cart), which readers of the *Gotha Almanac*, which had to be published once a year, could now obtain in a much more precise and up-to-date way in other types of publication. The *Almanach de Gotha* thus evolved from a genealogical almanac with an encyclopaedic dimension into an almanac that was almost exclusively genealogical and diplomatic, with a significant statistical component.

The *Almanach de Gotha* continued to be published in French throughout the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, until its demise in 1944. The evolution of its content shows that its cultural universe of reference gradually detached itself from its initial hegemonic French reference and incorporated other cultures, particularly the Anglo-Saxon aristocratic culture. The engravings accompanying the two editions of the almanac we had focused on are highly symptomatic in this respect: the 1786 edition, still published by Ettinger, featured twelve in-folio engravings depicting an aristocratic lifestyle that was both

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18. « Avis », in : *Almanach de Gotha* pour l'année 1824 [1823], p. 104 : « sur papier velin collé, relié élégamment en maroquin. »

transcultural and trans-European, but still strongly influenced by French culture ; while the ten engravings inserted in the 1824 edition of the almanac published by Perthes show two portraits, that of Duke Frederick IV of Saxe-Gotha and that of the English Foreign Secretary George Canning, and six engravings illustrating scenes from Sir Walter Scott's historical novel *Kenilworth* (1821), followed by two 'Views of the environs of Constantinople.' From a German genealogical almanac published in French and reflecting French cultural hegemony throughout Europe at the end of the 18th century, the *Almanach de Gotha* had thus become, from the 1820s onwards, a reference directory in the field of diplomacy and international relations, now also including 24 blank pages for writing daily notes. In this way, the *Almanach de Gotha* came to occupy an essential position for another century in a multipolar Europe and in a world entering a new era in which the United States of America and the colonial possessions of the European powers also began to play an increasingly important role.

Despite the permanence of its title, its basic concept, its place of publication and, to a large extent, its audience, the content of the *Almanach de Gotha*, as well as its formal and textual materiality, had undergone fundamental transformations over the 180 years of its existence, caused by the transformation of the media landscape as well as by the ground-breaking social and cultural transformations that had taken place first during the 19th century and since World War I.

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