
Educated at Oxford University, David Crackenthorpe has lived thirty-five years in southern France, the setting for several of his award-winning novels. His knowledge of the rugged landscape of the Cévennes enhances the verisimilitude of The Camisard Uprising, providing vivid descriptions of its peaks and valleys, towns and hamlets, present buildings and past battlefields. Research for his novels Stolen Marches and Horseman, Pass By (both 2001) enables him to draw intriguing parallels between the Camisards and the Albigensians, the Jews under Nazi rule and the French Resisters.

Crackenthorpe’s background as a novelist enriches his narrative in other ways. He provides physical descriptions and character sketches of all the key figures: François de Langlade du Chayla, Jean Cavalier, Nicolas de Lamaignon de Basville, the comte de Broglie, the maréchal de Montrevel, Abraham Mazel, Pierre Laporte, Jacques de Julien and Laurent Ravanel. Amidst the bloodshed of this violent uprising, the author interjects humour. He cites contemporaries who compared the Camisard prophets to Balaam’s ass, attributed their atrocities as much to the influence of eau de vie as to the Spirit, shares Basville’s quip that ‘it requires patience to endure [de Broglie’s] moods’ and highlights the irony that at the Battle of Almansa an English prince (James II’s bastard) commanded a French army against an English army led by a French marquis with an Irish earldom.

Crackenthorpe also sprinkles his book with insightful quotes: Elie Marion explaining how it felt to prophesy; Clement XV’s outburst that Protestantism should be ‘extirpated to the point of abolishing its name and memory’; the Archbishop of Arles gloating that suppressing the Chambres de l’Edit ‘will force more conversions than all our preaching and missions could in a century’; and Cavalier’s quip that the Camisards were as ‘foxes tracked by a pack of hounds’. While General de Julien called the Camisards ‘vermin’ whom he would ‘send to the Indies, males to one island, females to another’, the Camisards considered the royal troops ‘scum’ to be ‘wiped out’. Meanwhile Bishop Flechier, an advocate of ‘holy violence’, asserted, ‘There is nothing so useful … as to teach Christians of our day to die well’.

Unexpected tidbits confront the reader at every turn of the page: that 10 per cent of Catholic men and 4 per cent of Catholic women could sign their names versus 44 per cent of Camisard men and 17 per cent of Camisard women; that after 1685 only 1.4 per cent of Huguenot exiles came from the Cévennes; that Locke paid £3 to watch a dancing master broken on the wheel in Paris; that there were 120 female Camisard fighters and 51 prophetesses; and that some men dressed as women and ‘fought like Devils’ in battle. Crackenthorpe regales us with tales of Camisards marching with royal soldiers’ ears skewered on their bayonets, of 40,000 Camisards walking on hot coals and writhing in convulsions and of the Camisard leader Servas dressing his men in uniforms stripped from the dead and wounded.

While its interesting narrative will delight the general reader, this book will disappoint most historians of eighteenth-century France. Of the 70 works cited in the bibliography, only 16 (23 per cent) are primary (and rarely archival) sources, while 54 (77 per cent) are secondary books. Frequently the author forgets to footnote anything, including block quotations. The paucity of notes is reflected in the fact that chapters one, three and four average one note per page; chapters two, five and eight have one note for every two pages; and chapters six and seven contain only one note for every three pages. Nearly every time the author refers to an eighteenth-century document in the text, he cites a secondary source in the endnotes, indicating, perhaps, that he spent
Enlightenment and Utility: Bentham in French, Bentham in France


An impressive addition to the Cambridge University Press ‘Ideas in Context’ series, Emmanuelle de Champs’ Enlightenment and Utility: Bentham in French, Bentham in France gives us a Bentham who is both familiar and strange. This new French Bentham guides us through a transatlantic matrix of utilitarian liberal reform ideas that began in the eighteenth century, spanned the French Revolution and dissipated only in the mid-nineteenth century. Fluent and authoritative, de Champs’ narrative demonstrates the way in which historical contextualisation—which depends not only on erudition but on intelligent and imaginative judgements about how to construct a relevant context—can alter the landscape of scholarship both on well-mined figures in the history of political thought and on traditions of thought.

Enlightenment and Utility is organised chronologically around Bentham’s engagement with France: his early decision to write in French; his career as a translator and pamphleteer; his engagement not only with Helvétius, but also with theorists such as d’Alembert, Morellet, Chastellux and Voltaire; his reflections on the French Revolution; and his collaboration with epigone and fellow travellers in the creation of Benthamism. Bringing Bentham into focus through a French prism reveals him as a self-conscious transmitter of ideas who continually adjusted these ideas to the circumstances of different audiences for maximum impact (for example in his presentation of Voltaire’s Le taureau blanc). It also reveals the way in which an ambition to mediate a broader movement of liberal reform shaped his emerging legal and political projects and led to a certain carelessness about texts, translations and the dissemination of his own works— an apparent idiosyncrasy that has always puzzled Bentham scholars.

Let me give a few examples of ways in which de Champs’ treatment of the development of Bentham’s ideas as a transatlantic dialogue helps to clarify some interpretive conundrums in Bentham scholarship. One still encounters the assumption that there is a significant break between an early politically agnostic Bentham focused on legal reform and a late politically engaged Bentham focused on radical democratic politics.