introduction, Family Directories and the Commodification of Ancestry in the Long Eighteenth Century in Britain, Oxford University Press.

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Introduction

> Those gentle historians dip their pens in nothing but the milk of human kindness. They seek no further for merit than the preamble of a patent, or the inscription of a tomb. With them every man created a Peer is first a hero ready-made (…). They, who alive, were laughed at or pitied by all their acquaintance, make as good a figure as the best of them in the pages of Guillim, Edmondson and Collins.[1]

In *A Letter to a noble Lord* (1796) Edmund Burke commented on the 'gentle historians' and the many family directories that were published in London at that time. He was referring to compilers such as John Guillim (*A Display of Heraldry*, 1610), Arthur Collins, whose *Peerages* had been printed throughout the eighteenth century (13 editions in total), and Joseph Edmondson, who published a luxurious folio entitled *The Baronagium Genealogicum* (1764) and *A Companion to the Peerage of Great Britain and Ireland* (1776). They were mostly indexers, journalists, heralds like Edmondson, or self-proclaimed 'authors' like Collins. Their publications typically listed all the names, deeds, pedigrees, alliances, and descendants of all living peers (*Peerages),* baronets (*Baronetages),* and later the gentry that were related to the family. Some took the form of lists, charts or lengthy family trees, while others contained anecdotes and narratives.

Between the *Baronage*, published in 1675 by William Dugdale, and the serial directories of John Debrett and John Burke in the 1820s and 1830s, numerous ancestry-related texts were published, ranging from inaccessible heavy folios to a very diversified range of directories. As these works grew in number, they were sold in different formats and prices and circulated

[1] *A Letter from the Right Honourable Edmund Burke to A Noble Lord on the attacks made upon him and his pension, in the House of Lords, by the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Lauderdale* (London, 1796), 40. See also the French translation, *Lettre de Mr Burke à un noble Lord* (Londres), 1796.

throughout Britain and its colonies. Their purpose was to satisfy dynastic pride, to provide a variety of information on titled families (names, connections, and locations), or to fulfill historical and antiquarian interests. Hence, these publications met the various needs of titled families as well as those of the urban middling-sort. Family members were often actively involved in the making of these directories by sending the publishers personal details or by contributing long letters on pedigrees and various historical anecdotes. At first financed by subscriptions, these texts drew the interest of larger groups of London booksellers who shared copyrights of increasing value. In 1725, Collins's *Peerage* was valued at £21, whereas in 1857, Henry Colburn sold John Burke's *Peerage and Baronetage* for the hefty sum of £4900.[2] In the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of individuals claimed to be connected to ancient families. However, we do not know much about these peculiar directories, their production process, their place in the wider book market, and the extent of their circulation among the public. Far from being politically neutral, these publications raised many debates on their legitimacy, their reliability at a time of rapid social change. Contemporary pamphlets and novels abounded with allusions to these texts. As they were very familiar to the public, they were mostly only mentioned in passing and so their wider significance is open to debate.

1. 'The milk of human kindness'

Burke's quotation fully illustrates this point. Borrowed from *MacBeth,* the expression 'the milk of human kindness' can either refer to a compassionate impulse or designate excessive sentimentalism.[3] The sarcastic tone used by Burke suggests that it was used in a derogatory manner. The quotation was much later interpreted as conveying a sense of 'squeamishness', a

[2] On Collins'copyrights, see the catalogue for the sale of William Taylor's copies at the Queen's Head Tavern in Pater-Noster-Row, on Thursday, the 3rd of Febr. 1725. Longman trade sales (1718-68), BL, Sale Catalogues, C170. aa.1. On Colburn, see John Gough, *The Herald and Genealogist*, vol. 3 (London, 1866), 359.

[3] 'I fear thy nature: It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness To catch the nearest way'. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, in Stanley Wells et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Shakespeare,* 2nd edn., (Oxford, [1986] 2005), (I, v, 15-17); James Adair in his pamphlet against slavery used the expression in a positive way, meaning empathy. James Adair, *Unanswerable arguments against the abolition of the slave Trade* (London, 1790), 45.

‘lady-like fear of hurting people's feelings by telling the truth’, and heralds and biographers were compared to writers who dipped their pen in ‘honey-water, essence of violets, or parfait amour’.[4] Burke’s pamphlet was a targeted swipe at the Lords Bedford and Lauderdale, his personal enemies who attacked him for having accepted a pension from Pitt. Burke, in turn, accused them of fooling themselves by thinking their families came from time immemorial and reminded them that their ancestors owned their prominence to the dissolution of the monasteries and the liberalities of Henry VIII. Similar criticisms had been made before, notably in 1719 by Richard Steele who mentioned ‘the milk such nobles are nursed up with, is hatred and contempt for every human creature but those of their imaginary dignity’.[5] If the negative meaning of this expression was pretty straightforward, the wider implication of Burke’s criticism had been amply commented on and led to conflicting interpretations.

A first one, formulated by radical writers, relates more generally to the vexing resilience of an aristocratic culture to which the many amateur historians and family history compilers contributed. William Cobbett quoted Burke to direct his attack on some other magnates who had been unfairly celebrated despite having engaged in corrupt activities in the East India Company.[6] After the Great Reform Act, William Carpenter, the London publisher of the *Political Magazine*, added to the list of the ‘gentle historians’ other compilers such as John Debrett and John Burke, for their ‘servile, if not sordid adulation’ for the titled families’.[7] Another radical journalist claimed that the strength of aristocratic prejudices protected these compilers from public scrutiny and deplored the devastating effect of their publications: ‘the sons of painters and cotton-spinners declare themselves ready to defend the aristocracy to the

[4] From a reviewer about a *New Navy List* published by Joseph Allen (1846) in *The Spectator*, vol. 20 (1847), 882.
[5] Richard Steele, *The Plebeian. By a Member of the House of Commons* (London, 1719), 8. *The Plebeian* was later reedited by John Nichols in 1789.
[6] Cobbett mentioned the case of Lord Seymour ‘who lived till the year 1708 and being an ancestor of dukes of Somerset his memory is honoured with a very encomiastic display by Collins of his incorruptible, inflexible consistency, disinterested patriotism and numerous other virtues. Thus it is, as Mr Burke says, “These gentle historians” etc.’, *Cobbett’s Complete Collection of State Trial*, vol. 8 (London, 1810), 131.
[7] *Peerage for the People* (London, 1837), 7.

death'.[8] Under the spell of these directories, many individuals were led to ignore their own family history, sacrificing the memory of their close and worthy ancestors to aristocratic chimera: 'Men are to be found capable of drawing a sponge over whole generations of their kindred for an apparent increase of proximity to their pedigrees' whereas 'we should have equal reason for honouring our own ancestors, however plebeian'.[9]

Burke's quotation, however, has also been interpreted in the opposite way. 'Gentle historians' such as Arthur Collins or Joseph Edmondson were accused of debasing noble values, by indiscriminately blending old families with newcomers. In his *Biographical Peerage of the British Empire*, Sir Egerton Brydges claimed that his work will be be 'very different from former compilers of Peerages; of whom Burke speaks with so much elegance and just humour!'[10] He made sure that 'the families of true celebrity will be at once distinguished from those who are obscure' as the pen of the historian 'is guided by sounder test of fame; or less equivocal marks of infamy'.[11] Brydges, in a later review of John Burke's compilation complained that the 'new purchasers who call themselves gentlemen have come into their places, there of a new class (…) sprung from tailors and pawnbrokers, Jews, jobbers and contractors from public speculators and adventurous upstarts'.[12] In the Tory *Quarterly review*, Burke's quotation was reused in order to call for more 'personal encouragement and pecuniary resources' to help to produce respected family compilations. The absence of 'any attractive family history' risked undermining the position of the elite and depriving their heirs of constructive and stimulating examples.[13]

There is a third interpretation which moves away from the debate around the survival or the debasement of noble values. If one narrowly defines the context of Burke's *Letter*, it appears

[8] *The London and Westminster Review*, vol. 27 (July 1837), 102.
[9] Ibid., 102.
[10] Brydges, *A Biographical Peerage of the Empire of Great Britain* (London, 1808), preface, 1.
[11] Ibid., 2.
[12] (Sir Egerton Brydges), *Fraser's Magazine*, vol. 7 (June 1833), 645.
[13] *The London Quarterly Review*, vol. 72 (1843), 90.

that he was not aiming at the compilers as such but rather at the readers who were conceited enough to take their tales at face value. Burke's comment fitted into the growing literature on reading and its dangers which followed the rapid expansion of the book market in the Romantic period.[14] Histories of reading have warned us against the temptation of singling out one interpretation of a book at the expense of others. If he was condemning the way Bedford and Lauderdale used to read these compilations, Burke was not an enemy of genealogies as such. In a rather utilitarian argument, he had formerly stressed the need of fables and myth in the creation of social distinctions against the levelling principles of the French republicans.[15] Fictions about heroes and ancestors' deeds were not simply to be dismissed if they served a wider social purpose that went beyond one's narrow, self-centred family pride. But if complacent and gullible aristocrats started believing in their own family myth, they would be likely to end up like their French counterparts. Burke's views may be compared to Francisco de Goya's aquatint *Asta su abuelo* (1799), reproduced on the frontispiece. Number 39 in the *asnerias* series, the illustration depicts 'a poor animal turned crazy by genealogists and royal heralds'.[16] The caricature can be seen as a condemnation of the resilient influence of the aristocratic culture, or else as a critique of its abasement through the selling of donkeys' genealogies. As well as vain aristocrats, donkeys embodied in Spain the emerging urban elite. Some are portrayed as vain lawyers or clueless doctors.[17] Alternatively, Goya may have alluded to the rather strange and fantastic effect these serial compilations may have had on some customers. They were deluded into seeing themselves as fashionable and worthy

[14] See William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, 2004), 131; Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books. Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (New Haven, 2017), 256-7.
[15] 'The government of a civil society always involved this kind of trade-off, which created distinctions in order to serve the goals of justice and the common welfare', Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*: *The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, 2015), 716.
[16] 'A este pobre animal lo volvieron loco los genealogistas y reyes de Armas'. The latter comment is found on the copy preserved in the Prado (n°G02127).
[17] John Dowling, 'Burros and Brays in Eighteenth-Century Spanish Literature and Art', *Hispanic Journal*, vol. 4, n° 1, (1982): 7-21 at 15.

stallions from a long and worthy line, while they appear to the spectator as they truly are.[18] In the late eighteenth century, there were widespread European debates on the need to better accommodate the memories of noble families to the requirements of more inclusive national narratives. Linda Colley demonstrated that the landed class had to reinvent its sense of honour to 'convince others – and itself – of its right to rule and its ability to rule'.[19] Similar views were expressed in Germany by August Wilhelm Rehberg in the *Essai sur la noblesse allemande* (1803).[20] A failure to do so would bring about, at best, comical creatures such as Goya's ass, or, at worst, blood-thirsty monsters, such as the French Jacobins.

2. Defining the subject and its periodisation

For all its ambiguity and its richness, Burke's quotation offers a good starting point for considering the significance of family directories in the long eighteenth-century Britain. Eager to distance themselves from antiquarians and genealogists, historians have for long considered these publications with much circumpection. A titular figure, Augustus Freeman condemned them in the strongest terms in the *Contemporary Review* (1877).[21] As a positivist historian, he was keen to distinguish his archival expertise from amateur work. While he understood the need of families to rehearse their own stories, the publishers who made a profit from them deserved the blame. These dubious compilations contrasted with more reliable undertakings, such as *The Great Landowner* by John Bateman in 1883: a vast and systematic

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[18] On Goya and lunacy, see Peter K. Klein, 'Insanity and the Sublime: Aesthetics and Theories of Mental Illness in Goya's Yard with Lunatics and Related Works', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 61 (1998): 198–252.

[19] Linda Colley, *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, 1992), 193.

[20] Martin Wrede, « De la haute noblesse à la semi-noblesse. Formes d'existence nobiliaires en Europe au XVIIIe siècle », in Nicolas Le Roux, Martin Wrede (eds.), *Noblesse oblige : identités et engagements aristocratiques à l'époque moderne* (Rennes, 2017), 47-71.

[21] On his rant against Bernard Burke: Edward Augustus Freeman, 'Pedigrees and pedigree-makers, *Contemporary Review*, vol. 30 (1877), 12.

enquiry which was conducted through corresponding with all the most affluent families.[22] It is only when the herald G. E. C. Cokayne carried out more critical editions of the *Peerage* (1887-98) and *The Baronetage* (1900) that these compilations were viewed with less suspicion. As a result, for many decades, historians who worked on demography, social and family history have privileged Cockayne's editions over previous compilations. John V. Beckett in his attempt to 'count the aristocracy' relied on Cockayne editions' as opposed to the 'contemporary listings of doubtful accuracy'.[23] In most historical studies of the period, these compilations are primarily used for the sake of a larger argument on British society and are not considered objects worthy of detailed consideration in their own right. David Cannadine only referred to the growing significance of 'consolidated systematic guides to the titled and leisured class' which were conducted on a British and imperial scale.[24] Dror Wahrman mentions in passing 'the inventor-cum-publicist William Playfair' and his *British Family Antiquity* (1809), as well as Sir Egerton Brydges and the reedition of Collins' *Peerage of England* (1812): both illustrated 'the quest for a new image of praise-worthy aristocracy' against the 'middle-class idioms'.[25] Should these compilations be seen as mainly a loyalist and circumstantial response to revolutionary events or rather as an already well-established commodity?

To provide a satisfying answer, one should take a long view and consider the commercial ancestry behind the emergence of Burke's and Debrett's directories. Richard Cust rightly argued in favour of a major gap between the intense 'pedigree craze' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and a 'gothic revival' which was defined by 'a very different set of

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[22] Barbara English, 'Bateman Revisited. The Great Landowners of Great Britain', in Didier Lancien, Monique de Saint Martin, Pierre Bourdieu (eds.), *Anciennes et nouvelles aristocraties de 1880 à nos jours* (Paris, 2007), 75-90.

[23] *The Aristocracy in England, 1660–1914* (Oxford, 1986), 483; John Cannon, *Aristocratic Century. The Peerage of Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1984).

[24] David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, 1990), 13.

[25] Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class. The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780–1840* (Cambridge, 1995), 165.

preoccupations'.[26] Daniel Woolf contended that after the late sevententh century, 'genealogical knowledge more generally had increased in value as a species of cultural currency' and therefore became 'erratic, undisciplined, or shallow'.[27] Hence the eighteenth century is either seen as the end of a former lineage culture or as predating the age of Burke's and Debrett's.[28] However, from 1700 to 1840, it appears that ancestry was at the centre of important entrepreneurial activity. Publishers labelled their directories with a whole range of titles: *Compendium, List, Companion, Synopsis, Account, View, Dictionary, Biography, History, Register.* In the many library and auction catalogues, they were classified in different categories such as 'References', 'Dictionaries', 'Heraldry', 'Miscellanies', 'Antiquaries'.[29] In 1830, compilers such as William Perry defined his activity as an 'art, or science or branch of literature'.[30] Directories were also classified as being part of the 'nomenclators, which constitute the useful part of the modern library'.[31] Their lack of clear generic boundaries may be considered as an epistemological weakness, but it was also indicative of a process of redefinition which took place in the cultures and representations of ancestry.

This book attempts to provide a missing link between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries and by doing so questions the narrow definition which is too often attributed to ancestry. These compilations were not only perceived as registers of pedigrees but were endowed with transformative effects on the whole society, whether it be nefarious or positive.

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[26] Richard P. Cust, 'The culture of dynasticism in early modern Cheshire', in Stéphane Jettot and Marie Lezowski (eds), *The Genealogical Enterprise. Social Practices and Collective Imagination in Europe (15th–20th century)* (Bruxelles, 2016), 209-33, at 33; Nigel Ramsey (ed.), *Heralds and Heraldry in Shakespeare's England* (Donington, 2014).

[27] Daniel R. Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past*: *English Historical Culture, 1500-1730* (Oxford, 2003), 113–115.

[28] David Allan also wondered about the Scots and what they 'were doing between the celebrated historical productions of the sixteenth-century Renaissance and the "historical age" confidently detected by David Hume in the Third quarter of the eighteenth.' David Allan, '"What's in a Name?": Pedigree and Propaganda in Seventeenth-Century Scotland', in Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay (eds), *Scottish History: The Power of the Past* (Edinburgh, 2002), 147-67, at 149.

[29] See for example in London the catalogues of John Noble's circulating libraries in 1746 and of William Bent, *The London Catalogue of Books in all Languages* (1773).

[30] *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 100, part. 2 (1830), 410.

[31] 'A guide to the new-english tongue must have as great a sale as the British Peerage, Baronetage, Register of Races, List of the Houses, and other such like nomenclators, which constitute the useful part of the modern library', *World,* 12 Dec. 1754, no. 102.

They not only reflected profound changes within the social elites but contributed to make them acceptable and even legitimate. Such undertaking, which relied on a considerable correspondence networks, continued to reflect important currents in knowledge creation and politics, in ways which have not previously been documented.

This book starts with the ending of Heraldic visitations by the College of Arms, which was mainly caused by the violence of partisan struggle in 1688 and not by a declining interested in genealogy.[32] Unlike the Heraldic visitations, the first directories published in 1709-1715 had the advantage of being printed in London and circulated throughout Britain. Families were able to make their ancestors more widely known than through simple registering at the College of Arms. By doing so, they contributed to modify the way their past was expressed and conveyed to a wider public. At the other end of the period, the Great Reform Act can be seen as a significant moment in the redefinition of the national elite. The meaning of this pivotal event was warmly celebrated by John Burke. He saw his cheaper dictionaries as a contribution to a decisive political shift and to the strengthening of a new inclusive elite, whose openness would be demonstrated by 'a family history as perhaps the annals of no other country could produce' which included 100 000 individuals.[33] Hence, it will be demonstrated that the nature and scale of these directories changes over time, and becomes more commercialised and larger in scope.

This research has been inspired by different studies conducted on continental Europe.[34] In the late seventeenth century, in most capitals, a distinctive trend could be observed with the decline of luxurious decorated volumes and the rise of cheaper compilations and collections,

[32] 'Visitations were abandoned after 1688, but reputedly because it was thought the Tory gentry would ignore William III's commission', Michael John Sayer, 'English Nobility: The Gentry, the Heralds, and the Continental Context' (Norfolk Heraldry Society, 1979), 14. Antony Wagner laid the blame on the Whigs. Commenting on the 'breakdown in heraldic authority', he accused the Whig grandees of having 'little interest in the strict regulation of a privilege – that of bearing arms – which they and the poorest gentry shared', *English Genealogy* (London, 1972), 117.

[33] *The Times*, January 23rd 1829. Simultaneously, William Berry launched a serie of 'County Genealogies' starting with Kent and Sussex.

[34] For a recent overview see Stéphane Jettot and J.-P. Zuniga (eds), *Genealogy and social status in the Enlightenment* (Liverpool, 2021).

which were consumer-driven and linked to urban growth and to a much higher circulation of prints.[35] In the German Empire, the *Special Genealogien* dealing with the territorial ruling houses were gradually replaced by the spread of *Staatskalender*, which provided an annual list of officeholders. This shift did not lead to the irrelevance of genealogies, nor the dismissal of birth over merit. Family directories were instead reconfigured to uphold the legitimacy of a renewed social elite.[36] In France, it has been argued that before the abolition of nobility, genealogical practices were closely kept under the administration of the State and the official 'genealogistes du roi' in the *Cabinet des Titres*. However, royal monopoly on genealogies may have been overestimated as it was challenged by various commercial undertakings in many cities and provinces.[37] In Paris, the *Grand Dictionnaire de la Noblesse* by Louis Moreri, for example, went through eight editions between 1698 and 1725. It played a significant role in ennobling actors and literary authors and functioned as a 'laboratory' where new social values were put to the test.[38] Moréri's *Dictionnaire* was part of the redefinition of the notion of credit and reputation. As genealogies became part of a commercialised knowledge on an unprecedented scale, the ability of the French 'ancien régime' to discuss and reinterpret the noble values of birth and lineage should not be underestimated.

3. Ancestry and genealogy: a brief state of the field

[35] Dorit Raines, *L'Invention du mythe aristocratique. L'image de soi du patriciat vénitien au temps de la Sérénissime* (Venezia, 2006).

[36] Bauer Volker, 'The Scope, Readership and Economy of Printed Genealogies in Early Modern Germany: "Special Genealogien' vs. Universal Genealogien"', in Stéphane Jettot, Marie Lezowski (eds), *The Genealogical Enterprise*, 287-301.

[37] William Doyle insisted on 'the pitiless and incorruptible scrutiny of the king's *juges d'armes* or his genealogist, Chérin', *Aristocracy and its Enemies in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford, 2009), 10; on a less centralised perspective on French genealogical practices, see Valérie Piétri, « Les nobiliaires provinciaux et l'enjeu des généalogies collectives en France », in Olivier Rouchon (ed.), *L'Opération généalogique. Cultures et pratiques européennes, XVe-XVIIIe siècles* (Rennes, 2014), 213-243.

[38] Jean-Luc Chappey, *Ordres et désordres biographiques. Dictionnaires, listes de noms, réputation des Lumières à Wikipédia* (Seyssel, 2013), 102. See also the egalitarian effects of the 'the great chain of buying': Colin Jones, 'The great chain of buying: Medical advertisement, the Bourgeois public sphere, and the origins of the French Revolution', *American Historical Review*, vol. 101, n° 1 (1996): 13-40 at 14.

Beyond the specific subject of family directories, it is worth mentioning at least three recurring themes in the existing research on ancestry and genealogy.

A first category of publications deals with the importance of representations and objects in the establishment of social hierarchies. It has been only relatively recently that historians were urged by sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu to become more 'agnostic' and to pay more credit to the beliefs and assumptions of the individuals.[39] Far from being impartial judges retrospectively assessing the objective tenets of social hierarchies, they ought better to record contemporary representations. In France, ethnologist such as Françoise Zonabend carried out some collective enquiries with several social and cultural historians, such as André Burguière and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, which led to the rehabilitation of genealogies as proper objects of scientific inquiry.[40] Moving away from the 'factual criteria' such as acres, positions or wealth, social historians and demographs have been increasingly interested in the way individuals and communities portrayed themselves through their own narratives. Defining who was a gentleman and who was not is no longer presented as a positivist process.[41] Eighteenth-and nineteenth-century elites have been reconsidered by various historians who have stressed the need better to take into account the strength of the 'symbolic and social imaginary'.[42] Social identities were not only defined by 'objective criteria' but by representations and judgments exchanged on a daily basis. They are also firmly rooted in a larger material culture and in consumption habits.

[39] Pierre Bourdieu, « La noblesse : capital social et capital symbolique », in *Anciennes et nouvelles aristocraties de 1880*, 333.

[40] « La culture généalogique », *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, vol. 46, n°4, (1991): 761-847 ; Germain Butaud and Valérie Piétri, *Les enjeux de la généalogie (XIIe-XVIIIe siècle) : pouvoir et identité* (Paris, 2006).

[41] Cyril Grange, *Gens du Bottin Mondain. 1903-1987. Y être, c'est en être* (Paris, 1996) ; Robert Descimon and Élie Haddad (eds.), *Épreuves de noblesse. Les expériences nobiliaires de la haute robe parisienne (XVI^{e}-XVIII^{e} siècle)* (Paris, 2010).

[42] Among many references, see in particular Sarah Mazah, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie*. *An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850* (Cambridge Mass, 2003).

In a seminal work, Neil McKendrick demonstrated that the marketing strategies of Boulton and Wedgwood relied on a complex interplay between exclusivity and inclusiveness, between aristocratic patronage and the wider public, while John H. Plumb wisely reminded us that 'the minds of men can carry contradictory ideas, even contradictory hopes, with consummate ease. The acceptance of modernity does not imply the rejection of all tradition'.[43] Similarly, genealogical artifacts should not only be considered in isolation as historical discourses but as 'potent things', as portable objects of consumption, which interacted with other commodities such as letters, gravestones, furniture, carriages, libraries or portraits.[44] They fit also into the 'urban cultural service' which helped thousands of visiting landowners to navigate their way in the metropolis, 'away from their county networks surrounded by a sea of strange faces'.[45] James Raven demonstrated that a London cartel of powerful 'book trade entrepreneurs' provided a large gamut of publications, which 'became prominent exemplars of the new decencies adorning the homes of propertied men and women'.[46] Many overlaps existed in the consumption patterns of elite families, when they resided in their country estates or in their London lodgings. The role of aristocratic suppliers is now better documented in the local communities as well as in the capital.[47] Similarly, family directories played a significant role in creating cohesion and distinction both on a local and national scale.

A second theme deals with the relevance of genealogies beyond their function of establishing social status. They resisted their reduction to mere social-status-signalling documents and

[43] Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb (eds), *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington, 1982), 71-5 and 316; on material culture and consumption, see Bruno Blondé, Natacha Coquery, Jon Stobart and IIja Van Damme (eds), *Fashioning Old and New. Changing Consumer Patterns in Europe (1650-1900)* (Turnhout, 2009).
[44] On objects and social practices, see Gianenrico Bernasconi, *Objets portatifs au Siècle des Lumières* (Paris, 2015); Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles (eds), *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions Through History* (Oxford, 2018).
[45] Peter Clark and R. A. Houston, '*Culture and leisure*, 1700–1840', in Peter Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. 2 (Cambridge 2000), 575-615 at 592.
[46] James Raven, 'Production', in Peter Garside, Karen O'Brien (eds), *The* Oxford *History of the Novel in English*, Volume 2: *English and British Fiction. 1750*-1820 (Oxford, 2015), 26.
[47] Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, *Consumption and the Country House* (Oxford, 2016).

generated a growing field of micro-studies in which the diverse motives of individuals, families and communities are explored in a more nuanced manner. Differences regarding the content and format of genealogies could be accounted for by divergent rationales, such as specific family expectations, religious and various political agendas. Researching the Peers' demographic behaviour, Thomas Hollingsworth reflected on the *Peerages* and their unreliable use of data. Moving away from passing a moral argument, he pondered the fact that these compilations catered to different needs. Collins' first *Peerage* in 1709 mainly dealt with the 'the character and achievement of former members of the family but generally omitted dates of birth of Peers' sons and sometimes even of peers'.[48] Conversely, he noted that the *Peerage* (1827) published by the Innes sisters, was more likely to integrate the families of the younger sons. Hollingsworth pointed out the necessity better to contextualise these *Peerages* in order to understand their internal rationale, temporarily leaving aside the question of their reliability. Collins' pedigrees were shaped by the need to provide eminent ancestors for the new peers created after 1688, whereas Innes' *Peerage* was aimed at providing data on close kinship.

Hence, genealogies are seen as ego-documents, texts that provided insights into the strength and nuances of different family cultures. They were used to cultivate a sense of familial belonging and to reinforce the links between generations and to incorporate people from a wide range of social classes. Families and their close or their extended kinship did not fit into clear-cut social distinction. Although often from an unequal status, close and remote kin exchanged letters on their ancestors, thus maintaining solidarity and emotional bonds.[49] Such exchanges were not intended to be simply recreational or limited to a narrow private circle.

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[48] Thomas H. Hollingsworth, 'The demography of the British peerage', *Supplement to Population Studies,* vol. 18, n°2 (1964): 73-76.

[49] Hence family archives represent a powerful epistemological tool to reconsider social history under a new light: see Helen Berry and Elizabeth Forster (eds), *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007); François-Joseph Ruggiu, *L'individu et la famille dans les sociétés urbaines anglaise et française (1720-1780)* (Paris, 2007), 45-56; Henry R. French, 'The "Remembered Family" and Dynastic Senses of Identity Among the English Gentry c. 1600-1800', *Historical Research*, vol. 92, n°257 (2019): 229-246.

Kate Redford demonstrated that far from conveying a so-called modern intimacy, eighteenth-century family portraits fit into the partisan struggles between whigs, tories and jacobites.[50] Genealogies were instrumental in providing partisan and confessional identities in many circumstances. In the early modern Europe, interest in the descent of ruling families was mostly linked to larger projects related to local and national history.[51] In the urban sphere, political debates and identities, too, were shaped by the invocation of the family past. For example, it provided a sense of purpose to the Jansenists craftsmen in Paris who were actively engaged in the struggle against the absolute monarchy. What was at play was not the quest for prominent ancestors but rather the display of their close alliances and strength of their local standing. The horizontal bonds long established between neighbouring families were indeed more significant than the antiquity of their lineages.[52] In eighteenth-century London, outsiders hoping to make their way into public life used their ancestry to reinforce their trustworthiness. This 'dynastic sensibility' was demonstrated by William Beckford's seal in 1739, for example, which corresponded to his grand-father's arms, William Beckford of Mincing Lane, 'a connection which would simultaneously gain him status within both the City and a wider social orbit'.[53] Family directories were also closely linked to the reconfiguration of urban histories, which are now understood as instrumental in the expression of civic values in the Enlightenment and the Industrial revolution. The deeds of the urban dynasties were included into larger narratives which appealed to the upper middle-sorts and which incorporated

[50] Kate Retford, 'Sensibility and genealogy in the Eighteenth century family portrait: the collection at Kedleston hall', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 46, n°3 (2003): 533-60 at 548.

[51] There is a considerable scholarship on this subject, see in particular: Roberto Bizzochi, *Généalogies fabuleuses. Inventer et faire croire dans l'Europe moderne* (Paris, 2010) [first published, Bologna, 1995] ; Hilary J. Bernstein, 'Genealogical History and Local History. André Duchesne and the History of France', in *Historical Communities. Cities, Erudition, and National Identity in Early Modern France* (Leiden, Boston, 2021), 235-275.

[52] N. Lyon-Caen and Mathieu Marraud, « Multiplicité et unité communautaire à Paris. Appartenances professionnelles et carrières civiques, XVII[e]-XVIII[e] siècles », *Histoire Urbaine*, vol. 40, n° 2 (2014): 19-35.

[53] Perry Gauci, *William Beckford. First Prime Minister of the London Empire* (New Haven, 2015), 54.

archaeology, philology, numismatics, documentary, and natural history.[54] Antiquarians, authors of urban and county histories though often derided, 'were important actors in that explosion of print and ideas, that thirst for knowledge and understanding which some have called the British Enlightenment'.[55]

A third theme relates to the circulation of genealogical knowledge accross geographic areas and its complex reception, which involves many changes in meanings and usages. The 'social circulation of the past' has been dealt with convincingly by Daniel Woolf. But far from being restricted to one nation, genealogies provided ways of reasoning, of ordering facts and memories which crossed from one country to another. In the early modern age, textual communities in Europe shared the same interest in dynasties, heraldries and its complex jargon. Several studies have demonstrated the existence of a 'republic' of eminent genealogists which was animated through the exchange of correspondence and manuscripts.[56] In France as in the British Isles, there is plenty of evidence which makes the case for the intense circulation of knowledge and practices. French 'nobiliaire' were influential in the production of the first English reference book. The publication of the first catalogue of Names and titles by Thomas Milles, the 'Catalogue of Honour' (1610), was inspired by Claude Paradin's *alliances genealogiques* (1561). Chamberlayn's *Angliæ Notitia, or The Present State of England* was an adaptation of *L'Estat Nouveau de la France* (Paris, 1661). William Dugdale, too, in the preface of his *Baronage*, recognised his debt to André Duchesne and his histories of Guines, d'Ardre et de Coucy (1631), as well as his *Histoire d'Angleterre*,

[54] Rosemary Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1997); Helen Berry, Jeremy Gregory, *Creating and Consuming Culture in North-East England, 1660-1830* (London, 2019); Huw Pryce, *Writing Welsh History: From the Early Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford, 2022); Nicholas Canny, *Imagining Ireland's Pasts: Early Modern Ireland through the Centuries* (Oxford, 2021).
[55] Rosemary Sweet, *The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Hambledon and London, 2004), 3.
[56] Jean Boutier (ed.), *Étienne Baluze (1630-1718). Erudition et pouvoirs dans l'Europe Classique*, (Limoges, 2008). On the 'archival turn' among European historians, see Markus Friedrich, *Die Geburt des Archivs. Eine Wissensgeschichte* (Munich, 2013); Alexandra Walsham, 'The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe', *Past & Present*, vol. 230, n° 1 (2016), 9–48; Liesbeth Corens, *Confessional Mobility and English Catholics in Counter-Reformation Europe* (Oxford, 2019).

d'Écosse, et d'Irlande (Paris, 1614). In the late seventeenth century, Huguenots who settled on the British Isles contributed to the transfer of antiquarian methods. In many ways, British directories copied or responded to French nobiliaires and vice versa. Jacobite exiles crafted pedigrees which stood uneasily between English and French norms.[57] British Peerages were translated as 'nobiliaire', thus enabling comparisons with their French counterparts, like Lodge's *Irish Peerage*, which was translated and sold in Paris in 1779.[58]

Along with the significant circulation of knowledge, it is now well established that urban elites on both sides of the Channel were equally invested in enquiries about their own ancestry. Old genteel families and town gentry would engage in such leisurely activity through learned societies, informal meetings and the making of urban histories.[59] They contibuted to the creation of amateur knowledge networks which were discussed by Steven Shapin in relation to seventeenth-century science.[60] It was only during the French Revolution that a shared genealogical culture was temporarily ripped apart. The antiquary James Dallaway mentioned 'the total abolition of titular dignities which throw a melancholy grace over the detail of honours, which have been so rudely torn from their native branches'[61]. Using the metaphor of a tree, he depicted the British Isles and France as having shared the same roots since the Norman conquest. However, in the post-revolutionary time, everywhere in Europe, genealogies were beginning to be shaped by a national agenda. In Italy, the compilation of the 'famous Italian families' *Famiglie Celebri Italiane*, undertaken by the

[57] Stéphane Jettot, « Les vaincus des guerres civiles : exil et réinvention de soi dans la gentry jacobite irlandaise (XVII[e]-XVIII[e] siècle) », in Emmanuel Dupraz and Claire Gheeraert-Graffeuille (dir.), *La Guerre civile : représentations, idéalisations, identifications* (Rouen, 2014), 77-94.

[58] 'Monsieur Collins nous a donné une nouvelle edition corrigée et augmentée de son nobiliaire d'Angleterre: *The Peerage of England'*, in *Bibliothèque raisonnée des ouvrages des savans de l'Europe*, (June 1741), 469. *Pairie d'Irlande, Ou histoire généalogique de la noblesse actuelle de ce royaume; Par M. Lodge, député teneur des archives de la tour de Bermingham* (Paris, 1779).

[59] François-Joseph Ruggiu, *Les élites et les villes moyennes en France et en Angleterre (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris, 1997).

[60] Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth, Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, London, 1994).

[61] James Dallaway, *Inquiries into the origin and progress of the science of Heraldry in England* (London, 1793), 364.

patrician Pompeo Litta Biumi (1781-1851), could be seen as a reaction to the French invasion and the promotion of republican values. In Britain, the making of William Playfair's *British Family Antiquity* in 1807 was explicitly challenging the enlightened ethos and the French Revolution.[62]

In the European colonies, various artefacts such as bibles, family trees or almanacks were moved across the Atlantic and were reconfigured to better suit local expectations. Like the Britons at home, American colonists were encouraged by the State to take part in the celebration of the Hanoverian dynasty. Such interest was not only state-generated, however, as both elite and non-elite communities 'asserted familial connections to achieve credit, inherit property, or argue for their freedom from slavery'.[63] Comparison between the French and the British colonies are also helpful. Whereas the French nobility benefited from a firm legal framework on both sides of the Atlantic, the cultural aspect of the British gentility generated much anxiety among the colonial elites. Reference books such as *Peerages* and *Baronetages* were useful for any gentleman in the British colonies eager to 'assess his own status or to gain insight into the status of his neighbours or prospective marriage partners'.[64] In Spanish America, the colonial society embraced the enlightened values of merit and professional skills promoted by the administration even though colour remained a key criterion in the social hierarchies.[65] During the American Revolution, there was a 'contemporary nervousness about the contingency and unreliability of identities'.[66] The

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[62] Cinzia Cremonini, « Les 'généalogies crédibles' de Pompeo Litta, entre tradition et innovation » and Jean-François Dunyach, « Le British Family Antiquity de William Playfair (1809-1811), une entreprise généalogique », in Stéphane Jettot, Marie Lezowski (eds), *The Genealogical Enterprise*, 303-339.

[63] Karin Wulf, 'Bible, King and Common Law: Genealogical Literacies and Family History Practices in British America', *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 10, n°3 (2012), 470; see also her forthcoming book *Lineage: Genealogy and the Power of Connection in Early America* (Oxford, 2023).

[64] François-Joseph Ruggiu 'Extraction, wealth and industry: The ideas of noblesse and of gentility in the English and French Atlantics (17th–18th centuries)', *History of European Ideas*, vol. 34, n°4 (2008), 451.

[65] Arnaud Exbalin and Brigitte Marin (ed.), « Polices urbaines recomposées – Les *alcaldes de barrio* dans les territoires hispaniques, XVIIIe-XIXe siècle », *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* (2017). http://nuevomundo.revues.org/70742.

[66] Dror Wahrman, 'The English Problem of Identity in the American Revolution', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 106, n°4 (2001): 1236-1262 at 1259.

colonial elite who was keen to attach their family to British Imperial gentility redirected its genealogical impulse towards a more republican mindset. Landed elite and the upper middle classes started to collaborate on collective and inclusive compilations such as *The Genealogical Register of the First Settlers of New England* by John Farmer (1829).[67]

4. Method and sources

Critically engaging with this rich field of existing research, this book is organised in three parts. The first section covers the significance of *Peerages* and *Baronetages* in the history of books and readership in the long eighteenth century. It explores their financing, their marketing, and the various ways of reading them. As in many subjects related to the history of books, the scarcity of materials left by London booksellers presents a significant challenge. However, among the considerable printed sources accessible in the British libraries or in the digital collections, many references as possible have been collected to the publishing process.[68] In the first appendix are listed all the *Peerages* and *Baronetages* published, their authors, publishers, prices and formats. The authors' prefaces provided many clues as to the general uses the public was expected to make of the directories. They were instrumental in identifying the growing number of names and connections which circulated in the larger public spheres in the provinces, in London and in the colonies. As such, they were used as portable gateways to navigate and to be seen in many social circles. Some of these compilations were used as didactic tools in order to make historical knowledge more accessible. Some others were clearly designed as rare and expensive status objects intended at

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[67] On the new genealogical 'regime' after the American Revolution, see François Weil, *Family Trees. A History of Genealogy in America* (Cambridge Mass. 2013); Francesca Morgan, 'A Noble Pursuit? Bourgeois America's Uses of Lineage,' in Sven Beckert and Julia B. Rosenbaum (eds.), *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2010), 135-151.

[68] *The English Short Title Catalogue, Eighteenth-Century Collections Online, The Waterloo Directory, 17th and 18th Century Nichols Newspapers Collection, Nichols Archive Project, The John Johnson Collection, British Library Newspapers, The Times Digital Archive, The British Newspaper Archive, The History of Parliament, The UCL Legacy of Slave Ownership*; *The Clergy of the Church of England Database 1540-1835*.

distinguishing wealthy families and collectors from the middle classes. Although we will see this functional approach does not do justice to the unpredictable ways in which readers were using these publications. Printed genealogies, notably after 1760, coulde be instrumentalised to sustain radical ideas.

The second part focuses more precisely on the families' expectations as they are expressed in their hundreds of letters to the publishers. This unique source-base enables us to to gather much evidence on their status, their residence, their occupations and their political inclinations. Of these directories, families were simultanenously the subject, the main readership and the co-author. While genealogical guides were published in London, they relied on a constant flow of information from the counties to the centre. And reciprocally, their local standing was reinforced by these national directories. This interconnectedness between provincial circles and the London market place will be a guiding principle. Letter-writing has been recognized as an important tool to create virtual sociability among the elite, but it was also an essential tool in the publishing business. The commercial success and growing spread of these publications relied on a new relation between ancestry and the 'public'. In the early modern period, most families were more likely to refute any involvement in the crafting of their pedigree and were keen to hide their participation. The credibility of their claims was better established if certified by an authority outside the family circle.[69] In the eighteenth century, publishers were more likely to stress the participation of the 'public', understood as co-authors as well as informed consumers. As a consequence, the heralds and their expertise came to be challenged by elite amateur knowledge networks in the counties.

[69] Olivier Poncet, « Cercles savants et pratiques généalogiques en France (fin XVI[e] siècle–milieu du XVII[e] siècle) », in Olivier Rouchon (ed.), *L'opération généalogique*, 112.

The importance of ancestry within hundreds of households has been explored through the case studies of three compilations published in 1727-41, 1801-5 and 1832-38.[70] Far from being neutral, these directories were defined by different expectations and historical references and reflected the political claims and self-justifications of different parts of the social elite. If many correspondents were guided by the defense of their honour and their social status, one should resist a narrow utilitarian approach.[71] Individuals are motivated by unconscious impulse which cannot be easily reconstructed. Many families also genuinely believed that their participation fitted into a wider enlightened scheme. They saw their involvement, and, in particular, the disclosure of their archives, as an act of generosity and as a duty to inform and educate the public about certain periods in British history.

These letters also illuminate our understanding of how family values were negotiated and adapted to the client's needs.They provide a more nuanced picture than the well-ordained prescriptive literature on patriarchy and lineage. Although their contributions were rarely acknowledged, many women were at the centre stage of the publication process, either as the main correspondents or as providers of data to their husbands or sons.

The third and final part of this study deals with the making of these compilations and the problem of their credibility. As in other periods, the notions of truth and untruth were closely related to a social context. As they were mostly from a modest background, compilers were struggling to defend the reliability of their works. There are countless derogatory comments among the polite circles or in the literary magazine about these 'unworthy hacks' and the 'servile' and 'mercenary' authors. Some were even chastised during public trials and condemned as fraudster or impersonator. Despite such negative publicity, most of these guides were commercially viable and sometimes even highly successful. If many compilers

[70] Appendix 3: Thomas Wotton's correspondents (1727-1740); appendix 4: William Betham's correspondents (1803-1805); appendix 5: John Burke's correspondents (1828).

[71] On the relation between archival practices and social status, see the stimulating introduction by Joseph Morsel, in Laurent Vissière, Philippe Contamine (eds), *Défendre ses droits, construire sa mémoire. Les chartiers seigneuriaux, XIIIe-XXIe siècle*, (Paris, 2010), 10-17.

remained obscure, a few managed to tap into the genealogical resources they gathered in order to engineer their own social status and to increase their literary reputation. Some obtained a benevolent treatment from various institutions such as the College of Arms, the Royal society and the many local antiquarian circles. They were instrumental in establishing the credibility of the compilations. About their customers, publishers had a vested interest in maintaining a collaborative and harmonious relationship. However, when conflicts arose, whether they were engineered or not, some were crafty enough to fashion themselves as honest brokers against bullying clients.