

in particular controlled their self-presentation through “codified conversation” (7). Bellefonds-Villars knew she had to be entertaining yet tasteful in her style, and she was of course wary of including too much detail about the queen and about the Spanish court, as she knew her letters would be intercepted and read. At the same time, she knew one of her intended readers was Madame de Maintenon, and via her, Louis XIV, so she was performing an important function in the ever delicate game of diplomatic exchanges, in a political space that was only recently locked in a vicious war against France.

Her letters, Hester explains, are therefore masterfully filled with indirect expressions, allusions, and double negatives—she expected her French correspondents to read between the lines. They are also full of insights into the mind of a French woman living in Spain, and therefore a good example of travel literature of the time: she is intrigued by women’s hairstyles and social rituals and repulsed by the religious fanaticism as displayed in the *auto-da-fé* or the wild and barbarous bullfights she witnessed. In the end, though the Marquise de Villars attempted to present herself in her correspondence as neutral and merely a dutiful ambassador’s wife without political ambitions of her own, Spanish authorities accused her of being too close to Queen Marie-Louise and of attempting to influence a pro-French faction at the Spanish court, and she was obliged to leave Madrid, even before her husband’s embassy had formally ended.

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Unimpeded Sailing: A Critical Edition of Johann Gröning’s “Navigatio libera” (Extended 1698 Edition). Peter Maxwell-Stuart, Steve Murdoch, and Leos Müller, eds.

Brill’s Studies in Maritime History 6. Leiden: Brill, 2019. 162 pp. €95.

When reflecting upon the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, international relations scholars are likely to recall just a couple of developments: perhaps 1648, the Treaties of Westphalia and the purported dawn of a sovereign state-system in Europe, or perhaps 1713, the Treaty of Utrecht and the rise of balance of power discourse. But arguably, the looming diplomatic preoccupation and font of a voluminous literature in international thought in these years was the question of neutrality, neutral rights, and neutral trade. Lost writings are now surfacing again and receiving careful scholarly attention, and *Navigatio Libera* by Johann Gröning (first edition 1693, second edition 1698) deserves a central place in a body of work that cannot be neglected if we want to understand the era properly. This fine production of the second edition, with generous expository material and

wonderful footnotes, is one to note. The translation has been done meticulously by Peter Maxwell-Stuart, who also provides an essay on Gröning's use of Latin. And there is an indispensable introductory essay by two experts on neutral rights, Leos Müller and Steve Murdoch, which ably places Gröning's book in historico-legal context.

Gröning was born in the North German city of Wismar, on the Baltic Sea, in 1669 and died there in 1747. Wismar joined the Hanseatic League in 1259, and from 1648 to 1803 was a Swedish possession (territory held onto after losing so much in the Great Northern War of 1700–21). Geography was twice destiny. First, Gröning wrote the book to ingratiate himself with the Swedish authorities and obtain a posting as a tribunal *referendarius* (a sort of high-level legal arbitrator)—an honor he was never granted, though he came to hold two doctorates in law and wrote several other books on legal matters (and numismatism). His topic here is a well-timed, lengthy effort to support the Swedish and Danish insistence that they be able to trade with France unhindered during the Nine Years' War (1688–97), a position the English and the Dutch were dead set against and had the power to punish.

Second, being a German speaking for Swedes and Danes was a fraught task, and Gröning's first edition attracted criticism, which he rounds upon in a revealing seventeen-page "Essay in His Own Defence" at the beginning of this edition (including Gröning's reproduction of a two-page letter from Samuel von Pufendorf). The Nine Years' War was most broadly a renewed, Continent-wide, Catholic vs. Protestant struggle, propelled by the efforts of Louis XIV to expand his territory and influence by inflicting himself upon the Dutch and the Holy Roman Empire primarily. Sweden was an avowed rival of Denmark in these years, struggling for control of the Baltic, and it frequently received subsidies from Louis XIV. Sweden linked up with Denmark at the beginning of the war but vacillated regularly; the two did at least agree that they both wanted to profit from the war by trading copiously with both sides. This did not necessarily sit well with Protestants, with Dutch and English commentators, and with many Germans (depending on their links to French money or Catholic power). Gröning is forced to backpedal on his sympathies for James II and apologize to William III, for example.

What were the issues of the time? Most central were disputes over the line between the high seas, where free navigation was felt to rather obviously derive from natural rights, and territorial waters that states could legitimately control. Where did territorial ownership of the sea begin? (The custom of a three-mile limit would soon be established.) Just as controversial was the status and problem of privateering and the fate of seized ships. Gröning supplies myriad historical examples from the previous two hundred years of conflict and copious citations of classics—Hugo Grotius, John Selden, Claude Morisot, Alberico Gentili, Pufendorf, and many others—to make his arguments. He had to walk a tightrope, balancing between Swedish/Danish preferences

for enclosed seas for themselves in the Baltic, with general advocacy of trading and shipping rights for neutrals nonetheless. The result is a gem of erudite reflection and argumentation, undeniably of interest to historians of international thought, intellectual history, international law, and the era in question.

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Before Enlightenment: Play and Illusion in Renaissance Humanism.

Timothy Kircher.

Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 326. Leiden: Brill, 2021. x + 294 pp. €108.

The concept of human activity and discourse as a *Theatrum Mundi* richly resonated in Renaissance culture. Timothy Kircher has pursued and elaborated on this idea in a book that makes the argument that humanist philosophy follows this metaphor in a profound way, and consequently challenges Paul O. Kristeller's remark that humanism made only modest contributions to philosophy as a discipline. For Kircher, the medium is, in effect, the message, in which dialogue offered particularly substantial and sophisticated insights into the human condition and rational mind. This was true both in closed dialogue, in which the intent of the discussion is made manifest by one of the interlocutors, and more so in open dialogue, in which no clearly formulated message is revealed, whereas many interpretations of a subject are rehearsed through wordplay and contrasting perspectives spoken by various characters.

This also appears in genres other than the dialogue. The play of language itself is a highly evolved humanist skill, which identifies both the reader and the creator of literature as *homo ludens*, using the accumulation of knowledge, skill in writing, and a desire to reveal what is good and true as a kind of epistemological game, the purpose of which is serious and whose development assumes the unstable essence of the human condition. For Kircher, humanists registered in this intellectual exercise fall into the categories of finders and seekers: those whose intent is to state the conclusions of their learning and experience, and those who see the exercise itself as revealing how the true and good might be understood by others.

This dual approach depends largely on the humanist authors' view of mankind. Our imperfect and indeed transient nature must be accommodated, restricted as we are by time, death, and an imperfect understanding of all things because of our earthly condition. This is, of course, as Kircher richly illustrates, a Platonic concept, and his analysis of how this animates humanist thought is a particularly useful and interesting aspect of his book. Humanity is necessarily confined by time—and mortality—so we must discover alternate means to understand or even identify the true, the good, or the infinite. This then requires the use of less linear instruments in our quest for transcendent truth