Précis du siècle de Louis XV (I-III)

Introduction, chapters 1-43, Appendices, Représentation des Etats de l'empire, Histoire de la guerre de 1741

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The Précis du siècle de Louis XV is an account of Voltaire’s own world. His sources are the memoirs of leading military or political figures, many known to him personally, the wide range of archives and state papers to which he had access as historiographe de France, what he reads in the press, and what he picks up in conversation. We have moved from Voltaire historian to Voltaire the shrewd eye-witness, writing with vivacity of what he has seen and heard.

In this edition the editors present a comprehensive introduction to the work, detailing the genesis and evolution of the text through its many iterations. The introduction is followed by the 43 chapters of the Précis, continuing the story from the death of Louis XIV, through the Regency, the War of Austrian Succession, and the Seven Years War, Voltaire finally turning his attention to French domestic politics and the attempted assassination of the king by Damiens, in the context of the struggle between the crown and the parlement.

Also included is a full critical edition of the Histoire de la guerre de 1741, which was later partially absorbed into the Précis and consequently has never before been included in its own right in an edition of Voltaire's complete works.

The text is supported by an extensive apparatus of variants and paratexts, as well as an edition of a newly discovered text of 1744 which may be attributed to Voltaire, the Représentation aux États de l'Empire.

Contributors: Janet Godden, James Hanrahan, John Renwick, Ruggero Sciuto

Table of Contents:

II: Chapters 17-43, Appendices 1-4, Représentation aux États de l'Empire (OCV, vol.29B, 2020)


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John R. Iverson

This edition should make it possible to study these works in new ways and will substantially expand our understanding of Voltaire’s work as an historian. Bravo!