

CORRESPONDANCE DE PIERRE BAYLE

Edition en 14 volumes

Direction générale: †Elisabeth Labrousse et Antony McKenna

The Huguenot writer, Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) needs little in the way of introduction. Author of the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, defender of toleration and indefatigable critic of superstitions of all kinds, Bayle's influence as a man of letters and an unquiet intellectual is substantial and well-documented.

Bayle's letters, dating from his early twenties, reveal that he was ever anxious to establish what was then called a 'commerce de lettres' with anyone, but particularly with learned men who could furnish him with news of all kinds: news of battles during Louis XIV's European wars; news of the latest books; news concerning the nobility, the court and the petty nobility of all of the regions of France, but notably of his own county of Foix. As he became well known, his ambition to have a network of correspondents throughout the world became more of a reality, finally blossoming into an enviable 'commerce de lettres' when he became editor and principal author of the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* from 1683 to 1687. When he gave up this project, as a result of ill health, his correspondence diminished slightly only to take off again in the 1690s when he began work on his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*. Then, as when he was writing the *Nouvelles*, Bayle wrote begging information and books from anyone willing to supply his avid and tireless curiosity.

Of this life-long devotion to scholarly exchange some 1700 letters are extant, as far as we know (new finds would of course be welcome). Of these, about 950 are from Bayle to others and about 750 are addressed to Bayle by his correspondents. Through the centuries some 950 letters have been published, although in some cases they contain errors of transcription or attribution and the eighteenth-century editors – particularly the Jesuits – tailored the letters to suit a certain image they already had of Bayle. There has as yet been no critical edition of the correspondence.

There are good reasons to undertake the ambitious project of publishing a critical edition of the extant letters. Firstly, our edition will enable us to correct the errors of transcription and attribution which have been introduced voluntarily or involuntarily into the published letters over the years. Secondly, and more importantly, the publication of the complete extant correspondence will not only give scholars unlimited access to the letters, which are scattered throughout the world, it will also help to create a more accurate portrait of the man who wrote them.

Bayle's correspondence provides us with an image of what it was like to be a scholar in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Reading Bayle through his letters will reveal his sources of information, his curiosities, his reading, the genesis of some of his ideas, which appear in embryo form in some of the early letters, his griefs and joys, his family ties and intellectual friendships. Thus we will be able to recapture a more in-depth impression of his past, his own time and his intellectual development.

To this end, a team of scholars was constituted by the late Elisabeth Labrousse (Paris). The editorial team is now constituted by the following members: Antony McKenna (Saint-Etienne), co-ordinating editor, Hubert Bost (Paris), Wiep van Bunge (Rotterdam), Edward James (Cambridge), Eric Olivier Lochard (Montpellier), Bruno Roche (Saint-Etienne), Fabienne Vial-Bonacci (Saint-Etienne).

Vf

VOLTAIRE FOUNDATION • UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

email@voltaire.ox.ac.uk www.voltaire.ox.ac.uk