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## The Beneficed Broker: John Henry Ott and Anglo-Swiss Confessional Networks after the War of the Spanish Succession

This article studies the gradual institutional integration of Anglo-Swiss confessional networks after the War of the Spanish Succession. It focuses on the role of Johann Heinrich Ott (1693-1743) from Zurich, who moved to Britain in 1716 and became a secretary and librarian to William Wake, the archbishop of Canterbury. While, in the late seventeenth century, confessional contacts between Swiss and English ministers were primarily based on personal relationships and Huguenot networks, Anglo-Swiss relations became mediated by the English missionary societies and their secretaries during the War of the Spanish Succession. Yet the institutionalisation of Anglo-Swiss networks did not end with the war. As a transnational broker, Ott became involved in irenic projects with Anglican clergy, French Jansenists and Swiss Reformed ministers in London, Paris, Geneva and Zurich. Looking at Ott's social networks, his institutional role and what Craig Robertson has recently termed "information labour," this article argues that an *institutional reframing* of Anglo-Swiss confessional networks and their brokers took place between 1700 and 1720. The article suggests adding the figure of the "institutional broker" to existing typologies of early modern brokerage. As a beneficed broker of the church, Ott was defined by corporations as much as by border zones.

Keywords: Anglo-Swiss networks; brokers; institutionalisation; confessional culture; Church of England

### 1. Introduction: A Tale of Two Societies

On 1 September 1727, in the year of the ascension of George II, William Wake, the archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to the Duke of Newcastle, the Secretary of State, on account of his Swiss secretary, Johann Heinrich Ott (1693-1743) from Zurich (see Fig. 1):



The Magistrates of the Suisse Cantons having agreed upon 2 Letters in Answer to his Majesties gracious Letter sent to Them, have instead of sending Some Messenger on purpose with Them, as formerly, sent them to Mr Ott, their Country-man, and eldest Son to one of their Chief Ecclesiastical Dignitaries[,] the Archdeacon of Zurick, To be presented by him to his Majesty in their Names. Your Grace, I believe, Knows that he is one of my family [that is, living in Wake's household in Lambeth], and beneficed in Sussex [as a deacon and priest], and by Naturalization become His Maj's Subject, and how far all this may render him unfit, to deliver these Letters himselfe I cannot tell, but humbly submit it to Your Grace's determination (251).

The magistrates of the Old Swiss Confederacy attempted to use Ott as a local go-between for two formal letters written to congratulate George II in the name of the Thirteen Cantons.<sup>1</sup> Yet this informal method of diplomatic delivery was not accepted by Wake, as Ott had been naturalised as a British subject and beneficed as a priest in Sussex. Moreover, the Swiss cantons had previously used dedicated messengers for such occasions. The archbishop thus sent his protégé to the Duke of Newcastle for further instructions. Compared to the often haphazard diplomatic missions of earlier Anglo-Swiss go-betweens in the seventeenth century, the Ott affair raises the issue of the “routinisation” of transnational agents and their services by religious and state institutions (Raj, “Mapping Knowledge Go-betweens” 145). To what degree can a naturalised and beneficed Swiss migrant in London who served the Church of England still be active as a broker in Swiss and English social networks? Wake's letter also sheds light on the broader reframing of the exchanges between Swiss and

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful for the helpful feedback on this paper by Ina Habermann, Nadine Amsler, Vivienne Larminie, Sarah Rindlisbacher Thomi, Thomas Archambaud, Stefanie Heeg and the anonymous reviewer. I also thank Adrian Miqueu for his valuable comments on Turretini and his Anglo-Genevan network of correspondence. The research on which this article is based has been generously funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). Micol Barengo at the Huguenot Library in London has patiently supported my research with the Ott papers, for which I am very grateful. I would also like to thank the librarians at Lambeth Palace Library in London, Christ Church Library, Oxford, and the British Library, whose knowledge and patience have allowed me to follow Ott's hidden archival traces. Four letters from Ott to Wake, all of which were sent in 1723 and are kept at Christ Church Library, have been edited by Leonard Adams (vol. 4, 246–248; 251–255; 260–262; 267–270; compare with 271; vol. 5, 31). In the following, I consistently quote from the original manuscripts (or copies of manuscripts) of Ott's letters to Wake and other correspondents.

English divines in the early eighteenth century, which witnessed an institutionalisation of confessional networks.

This article traces the institutional career of the Swiss minister Johann Heinrich Ott, who found work as a secretary in England in 1716. It highlights the *institutional integration* of Anglo-Swiss confessional agents after the War of the Spanish Succession. After moving to Britain, Ott was naturalised as John Henry Ott. He found work as a secretary and librarian to William Wake, the archbishop of Canterbury, who was both involved in irenic projects with Anglican clergy, French Jansenists and Swiss Reformed ministers and the colonial ventures of the new missionary societies. Ott's biography not only provides a case study of early modern mobility, but also a "moving story" that can "tell us about something other than movement" too (Ghobrial, "Moving Stories" 246), namely the role of institutions in creating and maintaining transnational networks of exchange.

Following the early modern globalisation between 1600 and 1800, mobility played an increasingly important role in early modern societies, as recent approaches to connected and global histories have illustrated. Informal agents who moved "in-between" cultural worlds have particularly caught the interest of historians. In recent studies on "trans-imperial subjects" (Rothman 3), mobile agents such as ministers, soldiers or diplomats were especially highlighted. Anglican ministers in the Levant, for instance, served as hubs for learned networks of Arabic scholarship between England and the Ottoman Empire (Mills 4), while travelling chaplains supported the global expansion of the British Empire in the seventeenth century, working alongside mercenaries, diplomats, merchants, adventurers, governors and other travellers (Games 9–13). Both as "double agents" within the early modern Republic of Letters (Keblusek 1–9) and as local translators in the "brokered world" of colonial contexts (Schaffer et al. ix–xxxviii), migrants often took on ambivalent roles as cultural brokers, who have been cast as "strangers" with complex hybrid identities (Subrahmanyam 173–178).

In the late seventeenth century, Swiss and English divines maintained close contacts, based on the "Protestant International" and Swiss-Huguenot networks (Nishikawa, *English Attitudes toward Continental Protestants* 178–258; Schmid, "The Ott Papers" 84–87; compare with Clark and Ledger-Lomas 23–52; Greengrass 9–28; Holt 375–382). In the 1680s and 1690s, Anglo-Swiss confessional networks were often tied to individual latitudinarian divines, such as Gilbert Burnet, who travelled to

the Swiss cantons in 1686.<sup>2</sup> Brokers who mediated between the Reformed Church and English clergy, such as Johann Baptist Stoppa, the secretary of Oliver Cromwell in the 1650s, and Johann Conrad Werndly, the chaplain and secretary to the English envoy in Bern in the early 1700s, had considerable freedom in their initiation of transconfessional relations.<sup>3</sup> Yet once the new English missionary societies, the *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (SPCK) and the *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (SPG) were established in 1698 and 1701, respectively (the SPG with a royal charter), these correspondences became institutionalised. The new secretary of the two societies, John Chamberlayne, who would later be replaced by Henry Newman, from then on managed the Swiss correspondence, copying, translating and reading the letters from Swiss clergy in their meetings in London. Swiss intermediaries who had initiated bilateral exchanges, such as Werndly, who had previously mediated a correspondence with Henry Compton, the bishop of London (Léchet 80), accordingly lost some of their influence to the institutional secretaries (compare with Nishikawa, “Between Anti-popery and European Missions” 174).

The close relationship between Swiss ministers and the SPCK, the SPG and English clergy more generally, Eamon Duffy has claimed, allegedly ended after the War of the Spanish Succession in 1714. Duffy sees this Anglo-Swiss “correspondence fraternelle” as a “product of a sense of crisis, of a [P]rotestantism under threat” during the War of the Spanish Succession, before the SPG increasingly turned towards its colonies after the Peace of Utrecht (280). Yet Maria-Cristina Pitassi has shown that Genevan exchanges with the Church of England were in fact particularly close after 1716 (235), indicating an *institutional reframing* of Anglo-Swiss Protestant networks rather than their premature end. After a phase of institutional stabilisation, during which transnational brokers lost some of their mediating functions to the secretaries, agents like Ott could profit from new “structural holes” (Burt 15–16) between Swiss and English confessional networks. They became part of a new phase of institutionalisation that was mainly orchestrated by the Church of England and its project of confessional unity, which was based on its own episcopal hier-

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *Dr. Burnet's Travels, or Letters Containing an Account of What Seemed Most Remarkable in Switzerland, Italy, France, and Germany, &c* (Amsterdam: Savouret and Fenner, 1687).

<sup>3</sup> I am currently working on a more extended research article on Werndly's work as an Anglo-Swiss intermediary.



archy. This created new boundaries for processes of brokerage, as the introductory example has illustrated.

If institutions are seen from a praxeological perspective, namely as “practice-arrangement bundles” (Schatzki 34; my translation; compare with Bredecke 15; Füßel 26), one can observe a process of institutionalisation taking place from seventeenth-century “projectors” and other transnational intermediaries to Ott’s services as an agent and beneficed cleric for the Church of England in Paris, Geneva and London. Institutions such as the SPCK or the SPG engaged in practices of network-building just as much as individual brokers or gatekeepers (compare with Schmid, “Türhüter des Wissens” 600; Rexroth 11–37). Furthermore, recent studies by anthropologists have emphasised that modern state or NGO brokers do not work as isolated third party agents, but are active in larger institutional environments (Bräuchler et al. 292); as “assemblers” rather than as mediators, they collect information in organisational networks, thriving in changing and difficult social conditions (Koster and Leynseele 803–813). Institutional brokers in early modern Europe thus often worked in precarious circumstances and were highly dependent on their political, confessional and institutional environment, which was susceptible to change.

Looking at Ott’s social networks, his institutional boundaries and what Craig Robertson has recently termed “information labour” (25–26), my article argues that an *institutional reframing* of Anglo-Swiss confessional networks and their brokers took place between 1700 and 1720, influenced by the rise of the SPCK and the SPG. As a beneficed broker of the Church of England, Ott, along with other Anglo-Swiss agents, was thus defined by corporations as much as by border zones. Accordingly, I suggest adding a fifth function to Kapil Raj’s helpful differentiation of the “four major functional types of go-betweens” (“Go-Betweens, Travelers, and Cultural Translators” 41). Together with the “interpreter-translator,” the “merchant banker,” the “comprador” and the “cultural broker” listed by Raj, the role of “institutional brokers” deserves to be studied in its own right (compare with Raj, “Mapping Knowledge Go-betweens” 108, where Kapil Raj lists “five [instead of four] major functional types of intermediaries,” including the “legal representative” and, instead of the cultural broker, the “knowledge broker”). The institutional careers of brokers in particular would merit study, such as in the Dutch, British and French East India Companies or the scientific academies established during the Enlightenment. In what follows, I will thus in turn highlight Ott’s activity as a *migrant*, as an *institutional agent* and as an *information labourer*.



**Figure 1.** Portrait of John Henry Ott from the collection of Johann Caspar Ott in Zurich. Based on a drawing from 1719, the Swiss artist Johann Rudolf Holzhalb produced the etching posthumously in 1779. Zurich, Zentralbibliothek: Ott, Johann Heinrich (g) I, 1. With kind permission, Zentralbibliothek Zürich.

## 2. The Migrant: Networks of Support

When the young Johann Heinrich Ott from Zurich came to London in 1716 by way of Geneva, Lyon and Paris, he did not enter a completely foreign world. As his diary and his correspondence make clear, the young migrant built his travels on a tight network of transnational support. On his arrival, he visited Johann Conrad Werndly from Zurich, who had become a vicar of the Church of England in Buckinghamshire, and who was related to Ott's family. Ott's travels thus illustrate "the full succession of stages from origin and exit to transit and resettlement" (Lougee 2), which characterise the history of migration. Ott's grandfather was the celebrated

theologian Johann Heinrich Ott from Zurich, who maintained a scholarly exchange with the theologians Johann Heinrich Hottinger, John Amos Comenius and John Dury (Schmid, “The Ott Papers” 85). Together with Hottinger, Ott’s grandfather himself travelled to England as a student. In Zurich, he was part of a group of Reformed ministers led by Hottinger who were involved in transnational networks of informal diplomacy (compare with Rindlisbacher Thomi 183–328). After his studies with the theologian Jean-Alphonse Turretini in Geneva, the younger Ott received a Genevan passport for his travels (Ott 227) and letters of recommendation by his father Johann Baptist Ott, the Swiss naturalist Johann Jakob Scheuchzer from Zurich and his patron Turretini from Geneva. Ott thus built on the same network of scholarly, confessional and familial ties, which earlier Anglo-Swiss agents had accessed to move to London, and which Sugiko Nishikawa (*English Attitudes toward Continental Protestants* 178–258) has described in detail.

Anglo-Swiss confessional ties between Swiss and British communities provided a crucial network of support for Ott. In 1716, the Irish Presbyterian Samuel Haliday in Geneva wrote to the nonconformist minister Edmund Calamy on account of Ott. Since Ott’s

Fortunes [are] not allowing him to satisfy his Curiosity by traveling [through] Europe at his own Charges, he intends to try it in England, [if] he can find an opportunity of accompanying in his Travels some Person of Note to whom he may be [...] usefull by reason of his [...] Skill in the study of Antiquities (236).

In addition to Ott’s financial worries, which indicate a position of precarity, Haliday mentions the manuscript from the abbey library of Saint Gall, which had been copied by Ott’s father for Richard Steele, who published it as *An Account of the State of the Roman Catholic Religion Throughout the World* in London in 1715.<sup>4</sup> The report had originally been written in 1678 by Urbano Cerri, the secretary of the Roman office for missionary work, the *Propaganda Fidei*. As a field report of Catholic missions abroad, it contained valuable information on the administration of Catholic missionaries and their work (Windler 135). The Ott family’s contribution towards the appropriation of Catholic information for Anglo-Protestant political propaganda was highlighted by Haliday for Ott’s introduc-

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<sup>4</sup> Urbano Cerri, *An Account of the State of the Roman Catholic Religion Throughout the World... to Which is Added a Discourse Concerning the State of Religion in England*, translated by Richard Steele (London: Roberts, 1715).



tion, and would later also be noted by Turretini in a letter to Chamberlayne (243), revealing the confessional and colonial competition at the heart of Ott's Anglo-Swiss networks of Protestant patronage in 1716:

This will be delivered you by the Rev. Mr. Ott of Zurich Junior. He is the son of a Minister of very uncommon Learning & Worth, to whom Sir Richard Steele is oblig'd for the Account of the Roman Catholick Religion &c which gave occasion to that Dedicatory Epistle which you so justly admire (236).

Ott donated the manuscript from Johann Baptist Ott's estate, which is mentioned here, and which was probably used by Steele in 1715, to Lambeth Palace Library in 1717 (Cerri 1v).

His patrons from Geneva and Zurich, especially Turretini and Scheuchzer, also opened up new relationships to scholars. When Ott stayed in Geneva, he had already made first contacts with English travelers (Ott 204). In 1716, he was recommended to the collector Hans Sloane (Sloane 234) and the geologist John Woodward (Scheuchzer 238) in London, who were correspondents of Scheuchzer in Zurich (Boscani Leoni 191–258), and for whom Werndly already served as an agent in the early 1700s. Similarly, the contact with John Chamberlayne and Henry Newman, the secretaries of the powerful new missionary societies, the SPCK and the SPG, would prove valuable to Ott's career. Turretini wrote to Chamberlayne in October 1716, thanking him for sending an English translation of Jean-Frédéric Ostervald's *Arguments of the Books and Chapters of the Old Testament with Practical Observations*, which had just been published by the SPCK in London (242).<sup>5</sup> Ott would later meet Chamberlayne and Newman in person, as he recorded in his diary (341/2–341/3). At the same time, Turretini presents Ott to William Wake, who was made archbishop of Canterbury in 1716, the same year in which Ott came to England (see Fig. 2). Acting as a messenger, Ott delivered Turretini's letter personally to the prelate in London (Turretini 244). Ultimately, after Turretini and Johann Baptist Ott created increasingly tight circles of correspondence, using various social intermediaries, to “work” Hans Sloane, John Chamberlayne and the archbishop, Ott would be taken on as Wake's secretary and librarian at Lambeth Palace. Although Ott did not interact directly with the missionary societies, Chamberlayne and

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Frédéric Ostervald, *The Arguments of the Books and Chapters of the Old Testament with Practical Observations*, translated by John Chamberlayne, 2 vols. (London: Downing, 1716).



Newman thus played a crucial role in the support network that helped the young Swiss migrant find a post in the church once he settled in Britain.



**Figure 2.** Letter of recommendation for John Henry Ott by Jean-Alphonse Turretini, which he sent to William Wake (1 October 1716). Oxford, Christ Church Library: Wake Papers, vol. 31, fol. 50r-51r, here fol. 50v. A copy of the letter in Ott's hand is held at London, Huguenot Library: F/OT/3, p. 244. With kind permission, Christ Church Library.

While Ott entered these Anglo-Swiss networks as a confessional intermediary, he was naturalised in Britain by Act of Parliament in 1721 (Act 257; Shaw 126). After his studies at the Collegium Carolinum in Zurich until 1715 (Testimonial 1) and a year in Geneva until 1716, he enjoyed a rapid preferment within the Church of England. Ott became Wake's personal secretary and librarian and was ordained as a deacon, priest and rector of Blackmanston in Kent in 1721. The senate of Zurich wrote to Wake to congratulate Ott as one of its citizens on his naturalisation and his advancement as a cleric in the same year (Zurich no. 12/[1]). Finally, after having been made Master of Arts in 1722, Ott became pre-

bendary of Litchfield Cathedral in 1723 and prebendary of Peterborough in 1730.<sup>6</sup> Even if Ott's cultural identity had never been defined by an unspecified, cosmopolitan "in-between" due to his strong Anglo-Swiss ties of patronage, his political identity as a British subject and his role in the Church of England were now more clearly determined.

In his letters to Wake from Geneva in the 1720s, Ott spoke self-consciously of furthering the cause of "our King, and Nation" (209v) while taking pride in the fact that the Genevan clergy and magistrates "looked upon me as belonging to Your Grace's Family" (210r) in England. Ott was employed as a messenger to carry Wake's letters to Swiss clergymen. In 1723, for instance, he carried one of Wake's letters to the magistrates of Zurich (Zurich no. 159/[1]), and in 1726, he reported from Geneva that he "went yeasterday to deliver Your Letters in Town" (208[a]r). At the same time, Ott regularly brought back books and coins for Wake and Sloane from their contacts in Zurich and Geneva (Ott 210r-210[a]r). As the introductory anecdote above has made clear, the boundaries of his agency as an intermediary who was naturalised and beneficed in his new home did not allow for official missions to the Hanoverian court.

### 3. The Agent: Institutional Boundaries

Between the Revolution of 1688-1689 and the end of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1714, English dignitaries often kept foreign secretaries as transconfessional agents to engage with contacts and to gather intelligence abroad as "information professionals" (Schaich 75). John Tillotson, the archbishop of Canterbury, was assisted by Louis-Compiègne de Veil, a Huguenot refugee (Massil 10), while the Duke of Marlborough used

<sup>6</sup> See London, Lambeth Palace Library: Act Book, VB 1/6/370 (4 June 1721), ordination deacon; VB 1/6/372 (25 June 1721), ordination priest; VB 1/6/372 (26 June 1721), collation R. Blackmanstone, Kent; VB 1/6/394 (1722), degree M.A.; VB 1/6/407 (1722), collation R. East Horsley, Surry; VB 1/6/423 (1722), presented by archbishop to option, V. Bexhill, Sussex; VB 1/7/2 (1723); ceded R. East Horsley, Surry; VB 1/7/6 (1723), presented to archbishop's option, prebendary Lichfield Cathedral; VB 1/7/298 (1728), nominated six preacher Canterbury Cathedral; VB 1/7/216 (1730), presented to archbishop's option, prebendary Peterborough. Compare with London, Lambeth Palace Library: Subscription Books, VG 1/7 f 107r-v (3 June 1721; 25 June 1721; 26 June 1721), ordination deacon, ordination priest and rector of Blackmanston, Kent; VG 1/7 f 112 (28 July 1722), rector of East Horsley, Surrey.

Adam de Chardonnel, another Huguenot migrant, as personal assistant (Pohlig 102; Gwynn, *Huguenot Heritage* 148). It is possible that Wake had appointed Ott with similar goals in mind. In 1727, the year of the ascension of George II, Ott took notation for a *Memoire sur la maniere dont on pourroit trauailler a La Reunion des Protestans* for the archbishop (Wake 253a-253c), which was conceived as a “dessein,” a *design* that lists the necessary steps to bring about a union of Protestant churches. The plan might have been set up for the ascension of George II and intended as a programme for his reign.

Wake’s transconfessional design for a Protestant union in the reign of George II was part of a larger scheme to organise an Anglo-Gallican union of churches, which should reflect the new Anglo-French diplomatic alliance against Spain after the death of Louis XIV in 1715 (Arnold 122). Ott was sent to Paris as an agent for the Church of England, where he would meet the Irish-French priest Patrick Piers de Girardin, who had initiated a correspondence with Wake to discuss the project of an Anglo-Gallican union. The chaplain of the British ambassador in Paris, William Beauvoir, wrote to Wake that “a friendly correspondence may in time open insensibly their Eyes; & perhaps afterwards incline the Court to shake of the Yoke of Rome” (cited by Arnold 131). Yet Ott’s role as Wake’s confessional agent in Paris would be severely limited by the institutional boundaries set up by Wake’s episcopalianism and the underlying political agenda of the British Empire.

After 1715, confessional relations between the Church of England and the Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed churches in continental Europe shifted gears (for the following, see Arnold 121–133; compare with Conway, “Christians, Catholics, Protestants” 833–862; Conway, *Britain, Ireland, and Continental Europe* 162–188). In 1717, French Jansenists at the Sorbonne protested against the papal bull *Unigenitus* (which until 1715 had been enforced by Louis XIV), openly rebelling against the authority of Rome. The new Whig ministry in England used this opportunity to form an alliance with Philipp II, Duke of Orléans (regent for the young Louis XV) and the Jansenists against Jesuit and Spanish influence at the French court. Jansenist theologians like Pierre François Le Courayer, Louis Ellies du Pin and Girardin started an Anglo-Gallican correspondence from 1717 to the 1720s, gaining access to Wake through the English chaplain William Beauvoir in Paris (Gres-Gayer 61). Wake followed the new Whig ministry in their support of the French Jansenists. His irenicism was part of a larger political agenda that took advantage of the Jansenist



rebellion in 1717 to increase British political and religious influence abroad.

Yet for Wake, the episcopacy of the Church of England and the revoking of papal authority more generally were a necessary requirement for an intercommunion with other confessions, which ultimately made any such union impossible. Wake and Ott also worried that English freethinkers such as John Toland might lead continental Protestants away from the Church of England. In 1726, for instance, Ott visited the Jesuit Dominique de Colonia in Lyon who, Ott worried, “had of late read several English books, and named several different authors as Toland, Collins [...] and some others mostly of the same stamp, who I could easely perceive gave him a very wrong notion of the Church of England as indeed many of the forreiners have” (208v). Already in 1719, Wake had asked Genevan ministers to publicly reject the freethinkers (Pitassi 241). Moreover, the confessional talks were hampered by the ambivalent character of Girardin, who had cleverly made use of the correspondence with Wake to try to secure a position for himself in France. He won the patronage of Wake and the Princess of Wales, but his plan ultimately failed (Gres-Gayer 68).

Nonetheless, as Wake’s multilingual, transconfessional intermediary, Ott was sent to Paris on numerous occasions to convene with Girardin, acting as an intermediary by corresponding with Girardin on Wake’s behalf and vice versa. In 1719, while Wake stayed with Girardin in Paris, Ott wrote to him from Lambeth, soon travelling to Geneva, Zurich and Paris himself, where he would meet Girardin in 1720 (Ott 75r-75[a]r). Meanwhile, Ott sent reports to Wake, and procured books for Lambeth Palace. In 1723, Ott met the Jansenist Le Courayer in Paris, who was a canon and librarian at the abbey of St Genevieve, and who was a mutual friend of the French Arabic scholar John Gagnier in Oxford. Ott gives a lively account of his visit to Paris to his friend, Scheuchzer’s son Johann Caspar Scheuchzer in London, with whom he regularly corresponded in English:

J come now, to tell you about our staying at Paris, we performed the Journey from Calais to Paris by post in three days, as soon as we came Hither, we had a very good opportunity of going to Versailles, & Seeing the entry, & audience of the Venetian Ambassadour, & of being present several Times at the Kings, & Queen’s dinner, or supper: we staid three days in seeing the Curiosities of Versailles, Trianon, Marly etc. after our return to Paris, we had Employed our Time, in delivering several commissions, & conversing with Learned men, amongst othere J waited of Father Courayer Librarian of St Genefieve, who returns his thanks to Mr. Gagnier for

his present, J find they have there a very good Opinion of Mr Gagnier, & His Learning [...] (302r-302v).

In 1726 and 1729, Ott would again visit Girardin in Paris, whose “great design was to heal the schism between the Churches of England and France, and through this ‘reunion’ to start a process of uni[fi]cation of Christianity,” as the church historian Jacques Gres-Gayer (63) noted. However, as Ott recalls, Girardin “has very few friends at Paris; J almost thought He would stay, and settle himself in England” (Ott 211).

Ott’s transnational service as a confessional agent in Paris was bound to the Church of England and its representatives. While seventeenth-century “double agents” had procured news, books and other objects for their noble patrons and “projectors” and “interlopers” suggested great designs for local or global enterprises, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries often saw intermediary figures become part of institutions, such as the newly established scientific academies in London, Paris and Berlin, whose secretaries acted as an “information factory” of scholarly exchange (Pal 126–158). Since the early Stuart period, “projectors” had been playing an important role in the organisation of local and global projects, as Vera Keller (3–36) has recently illustrated. Submitting petitions for designs to the king by making grand promises about the public benefit of their global projects, these “interlopers,” as Keller calls them (15), were central actors in the transatlantic slave trade. But towards the end of the seventeenth century, the relationship of individual agents and go-betweens with political, economic and religious corporations in Britain changed, which was reflected by the institutional incorporation of the East India Company into the British state following the Revolution of 1688-1689 and what Philip Stern has called “venture colonialism” more generally (257). The “Anglican revival of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries” similarly inspired “public and private institution-building,” which led to the establishment of the SPCK and the SPG (Sirota 2). The missionary societies “emerged out of a host of other projects that failed or went unrealized” and represent a lasting institutional outcome of the “programs of Anglican renewal” (Sirota 71).

By the early eighteenth century, public support for profit-seeking entrepreneurs had turned into resentment, reflecting, according to Koji Yamamoto, a larger tendency towards a “taming” of capitalism and its culture of progress (267–279). Changing public sentiment towards “projectors” arguably might not have led to a “taming” of early modern capitalism (Keller 14). But public scrutiny in Britain contributed towards the larger institutional reframing of Anglo-Swiss confessional relations

through the missionary societies, by calling into question the role of brokers such as Werndly. At one point, Compton had been concerned that Werndly “was going further than politic” in his transconfessional project as a secretary to the English envoy in Bern (Gwynn, *The Huguenots in Later Stuart Britain* 421; compare with Nishikawa, “The World of J. C. Werndli” 166–172). On the Swiss side, Ostervald shared these feelings of concern towards Werndly (Lécho 82–83).

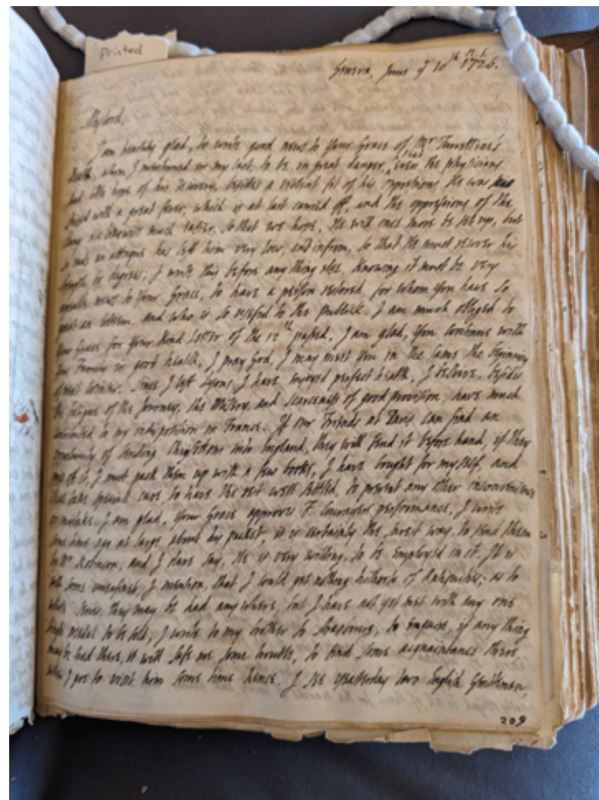
These changes in sentiment are also reflected in Wake’s misgivings about Ott’s receipt of a letter for George II mentioned above. Ott’s service as a naturalised agent of the Church of England limited his agency as a broker who mediated between two parties, since he was formally beneficed by one of these corporations. The “negotiated space” of multiple, equal actors becomes an “invited space” opened up to the young broker by an institution that maintains epistemic supremacy (Koster and Leynseele 809). While Werndly acted as an independent third party between Swiss and English churches, Ott served the Church of England as an arbiter between French and Swiss ministers on the one hand and the episcopate of the Anglican ministry in England on the other hand.

#### 4. The Secretary: Information Labour

Ott’s contribution as a transnational agent of the Church of England included not only his support for Wake’s unionist project, but also what historians of information have termed “information labour.” In his history of the filing cabinet, Craig Robertson has illustrated how in the twentieth century, “information labour” took on the form of professionalised office work (176–193). Robertson defines the term as an “instrumental encounter between people and information” which “requires neither thought nor interpretation and does not directly produce knowledge” (176). This form of “manual labor” (176) approaches “information as an object to be processed, stored, and accessed” in the gendered context of the modern office (26). The Swiss ministers who moved to Britain during the eighteenth century performed similar tasks of information management as secretaries, chaplains and librarians within the institutions of the state or the Church of England. Yet early modern information workers such as Ott did not make use of filing cabinets in offices, but rather sold their manual expertise in organising, archiving, copying, sending, cataloguing and collecting information to decentralised organisations, often as a service in networks of clientelism.



Because of the overproduction of young academics at universities in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in the Holy Roman Empire, a surplus of graduates led to what Martin Mulsow has called an “intellectual precariat” that eventually forced students to explore new activities (Mulsow, *Knowledge Lost* 8–11 and 34; Chartier 127–150). Swiss academics like Werndly and Ott left Zurich and Geneva and moved to England to find a suitable placement. The letters of recommendation by Turretini thus specially advertised Ott’s talents as a “grand antiquaire” (241) and “grand medailliste” (242), especially as Ott’s father, Johann Baptist Ott, had been noted as a numismatist too. These letters were not written as introductions for a leisurely grand tour in England, but as serious references towards securing a position and a steady income. Indeed Wake hoped to acquire a representative collection of ancient coins and medals, and Ott would provide the necessary expertise to collect and catalogue these little objects of value.



**Figure 3.** Letter of John Henry Ott to William Wake from Geneva (10 June 1726). Oxford, Christ Church Library: Wake Papers, vol. 31, fol. 209r–209[a]v, here fol. 209r. With kind permission, Christ Church Library.

As young scholars were sometimes engaged as brokers and translators in the Republic of Letters, it is possible that Ott’s information work simi-

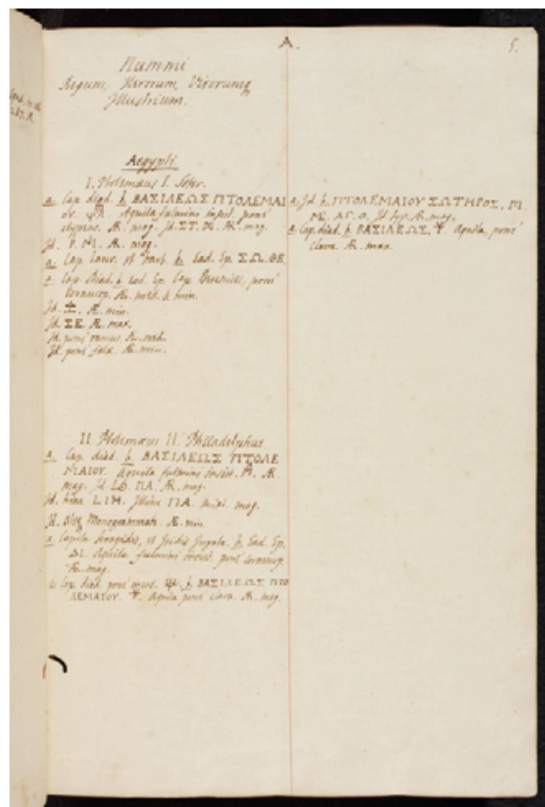


larly served as a coming of age ritual to a more permanent position (compare with Schmid, “The Student as Broker” 38–39 and 43–46). As Wake’s agent, Ott was sent to Geneva, Paris and Zurich so as to search for rare coins, medals and books for the archbishop and other English scholars, such as the collector Hans Sloane and his secretary in London, the Zurich-born Johann Caspar Scheuchzer. In London, Ott visited Sloane’s household and his cabinet of coins, as he recalls in his diary. On 28 December 1720, he wrote: “In ye evening J went to S.<sup>r</sup> Hans Sloane who will talk with me next about his Medalls & D.<sup>r</sup> Scheuchzer” (341/2). From Zurich, Ott reported to Wake in 1726 that he only found some “common Imperial ones [that is, ancient Roman imperial coins], which are already in Your Collection,” while a Genevan minister “found a great set of consular and imperial denarii” at “an exorbitant price” so that he could not acquire the coins, although he “found not one of them wanting” in Wake’s collection (Ott 210r). In the end, Ott procured three sets of contemporary medals produced by Jean Dassier, the Genevan medallist: one set for Wake, one for Sloane and one for himself. As a transnational broker, Ott thus acted as an “assembler” of information and objects across networks (Koster and Leynseele 803–813).

While he did not find a post in Zurich before 1716, Ott now enjoyed the ministers’ respect as the archbishop’s agent. In Geneva, Ott visited ministers of the *Vénérable Compagnie des Pasteurs*, such as Turretini, his patron, Bénédict Pictet and Jean Sarasin (Ott 209[a]r), in order to convey Wake’s personal greetings (see Fig. 3). Similarly, in Zurich, Ott met the ministry on Wake’s behalf: “J waited on some of our Magistrates, who all with the Antistes, and the professors charged me to make their compliments agreeable to you; as likewise Mr Osterwald, whose letter J received just now” (Ott 210v). In his letters, Ott insinuated that his preferential treatment by the Swiss clergy was only due to his powerful patron, but his coquetry also reveals a sense of pride. In 1726, he reports to Scheuchzer from Geneva that he will go “this afternoon both with Your Letter, and to an Entertainment, which the Company of the Clergy are pleased to make on my account or rather Mylord Archbishops, for myself do neither court, nor deserve such honours” (352v–353r).

Moreover, Ott’s tasks of procuring books, coins and information often overlapped in a way that is typical of information brokers, whose characteristic “role ambiguity” has been pointed out by recent scholarship (Schaffer et al. xviii–xix). The private and the public and business and pleasure usually go hand in hand. Wake writes to Turretini in 1729, for instance, during one of Ott’s visits to Geneva, that since he had “this Op-

portunity of paying my respects to you by my library-keeper Mr Ott” (279), he would direct the Genevan to Ott for a report of news, writing: “As to my own particular circumstances, I Must refer you to Mr Ott for an account of them” (280). When Ott is visiting Paris in 1729, he has the double task of meeting Girardin for transconfessional talks, while searching for rare coins. Wake writes to Girardin from London: “Among other Medals I have desired Mr Ott to get me some of the present popes, & his predecessors. I have one or more of every pope, save only of Pope Gregory the 14th of whom I have none, & I should therefore desire one or more” (282). The Anglo-Gallican correspondence about the unity of the church was thus not a one-sided affair under British leadership. Wake himself shrewdly used Girardin and his other Jansenist contacts in Paris to search for rare books, coins and helpful information for his own ends—and his personal pleasure as a wealthy collector.



**Figure 4.** William Wake’s catalogue of Greek coins, which was probably drawn up by John Henry Ott, ca. 1720. Oxford, Christ Church Archives: Arch. Coll. Fol. 6, here p. 5. With kind permission, Christ Church Library.

Finally, Ott catalogued Wake’s collection of coins. Wake commissioned catalogues of ancient Greek and Roman coins, which had been “assiduously kept by an amanuensis, with occasional entries by Wake

himself" (Sutherland 141). At Christ Church, Oxford, I was able to locate a large-scale manuscript catalogue of Greek coins in folio format (see Fig. 4). The catalogue is without any indication of its author or date of production, but a comparison with Ott's handwriting in his own correspondence with Wake's hand (especially the visibly different slant of the letter "e"), suggests that Ott was the "amanuensis" responsible for drawing up the manuscript. With the help of Ott's diary, it is furthermore possible to date the catalogue, since Ott, after a few earlier entries which relate to his cataloguing of Wake's collection, writes on 26 December 1720: "J finish'd ye Cataloge of ye Medalls for Mylord" (341/2). Similarly, Ott copied at least some of the incoming letters of the archbishop (for example, Wake's letters to Turretini or Girardin mentioned above), but Ott might have copied the letters for his personal use. He also seems to have numbered copies of his own outgoing correspondence, as the lists of letters in his diary indicate (for example, 341/10). As Wake's transnational agent, secretary and librarian, Ott thus helped to maintain the archbishop's paper archive and collection of objects through his information labour.

## 5. Conclusion: A Beneficed Broker

In 1716, Ott had looked like a precarious young theologian, searching the libraries of Geneva—without success—for "a book of Calvin against Servetus" on account of Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (Ott 202; my translation).<sup>7</sup> He would certainly have been suited to become one of Martin Mulsow's "radicals" of the early Enlightenment underground (*Enlightenment Underground* 5). However, by 1727, the same youth had become a highly professional agent for the archbishop of Canterbury, Lambeth Palace and the Church of England. Ott's transformation from a migrant into a beneficed broker of the Anglican establishment reflects the *institutionalisation* of Anglo-Swiss confessional networks between 1700 and 1720. Unlike the figure of the "stranger" coined by the German sociologist Georg Simmel, Ott *belongs* to the group which he entered as a migrant; as a beneficed priest, he even profits from the rents of the land in his new home (compare with Simmel, "The Stranger" 402–403).

<sup>7</sup> The title in question is probably Jean Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate, contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani* ([Geneva]: Stephani, 1554). I am very grateful to Anja-Silvia Goeing for her help in identifying the book.



My article has traced the gradual institutional reframing of Anglo-Swiss confessional exchange after 1716, focusing on the correspondence between Reformed, Jansenist and Anglican ministers. It has shown that Ott's institutional brokerage was often ambiguous and anything but clear-cut, involving not only confessional exchange, but also canny political, material and personal ends. Moreover, Ott's activity as a transconfessional intermediary filled the vacuum left behind by the SPG and the SPCK, which had supported continental Protestants in the early eighteenth century (Nishikawa, "The SPCK in Defence of Protestant Minorities" 738–739), but whose attention shifted to the American colonies after the War of the Spanish Succession. By the late eighteenth century, the "international Protestantism nurtured by the SPCK [...] was profoundly limited," since "the organization did not promote deep or substantive ties among Protestants" (Engel Carté 102). The "Protestant International" has been seen as an early modern form of "Anglophone globalization" (Clark and Ledger-Lomas 24) and can even be associated with an early modern "archaic globalization" (compare with Bayly, "Archaic Globalization" 14–29; Bayly, "'Archaic' and 'Modern' Globalization" 47–73). Yet this larger trend of proto-globalisation can still be accompanied by local events of disruption, as microhistorians have argued (compare with Biedermann 13–32; Ghobrial, "Introduction" 1–22). After all, the second half of the eighteenth century saw the disconnection of the two missionary societies from the communities of continental Protestants to which they had been connected.

While before 1714 the societies managed their confessional networks and correspondence with Swiss divines through their secretaries, Ott could take over the institutional tasks of Anglo-Swiss network-building for the Church of England in the 1720s. Individual and institutional forms of brokerage converged in Ott's networking practices, since both organisations and individuals are constituted by the same "bundles of practices" (Schatzki 34). The figure of the global information broker has too often been cast as a border-crossing *solitary*—maybe inspired by Simmel's metaphor of the "third party" (Simmel, "The Triad" 155)—without sufficient notice being taken of its institutional entanglements. Yet Ott's career was characterised by multilingualism and transnational mobility as much as by hierarchical organisations operating across territorial borders. A more institutionally grounded discussion of global information flows also takes into account the constraints and uncertainties of transnational exchange. The episcopacy of the Church of England (compare with Arnold 129), for instance, severely limited Ott's agency in Paris. My article thus

suggests adding the figure of the “institutional broker” to the existing research typology of early modern brokerage.

Most importantly, the case of Ott reveals that ministers from the Swiss cantons and its allied members remained important partners for the Church of England, its missionary societies and Anglo-Swiss confessional networks at large even after the end of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1714. Turretini, Ostervald and other ministers simply continued their correspondence with English clergy under new institutional circumstances. As Anglo-Swiss confessional exchange was to be increasingly based on the irenic policies of the Church of England and the Anglo-French diplomatic alliance after the death of Louis XIV, individual actors had to operate in a changing institutional environment. Ott went on to have a successful career, receiving multiple benefices during the 1720s and ultimately becoming a domestic chaplain and a canon of Peterborough, before passing away prematurely in 1743, leaving behind a transnational family network (Schmid, “The Ott Papers” 86).<sup>8</sup>

Finally, Ott’s career indicates that early modern information labour can be seen as a rite of passage for young academic graduates en route to a more stable position in the church hierarchy. Ott’s information service for the Church of England was limited to his years of “qualification” for a more permanent post during the 1720s. Gaining recognition for his supporting work for William Wake both in intellectual circles in London and among the Reformed ministers and magistrates of Geneva and Zurich, this young agent of transnational exchange would soon become a successful member of the Protestant establishment and a representative of the Church of England.

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<sup>8</sup> See London, Lambeth Palace Library: Register of Noblemen’s Chaplains, F V/1/XI f 123 (17 April 1739), chaplain to John, Earl of Hyndford. Compare with London, Lambeth Palace Library: Act Book, VB 1/8/249, 250 (1743), six preacher, Canterbury Cathedral and R. Blackmanstone, dead; VB 1/8/269 (1743), prebendary Berkswich and Whittington and Baswich, Lichfield Cathedral, dead.

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