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Improvement in the English Translations of Albrecht von Haller's *Usong* (1771)

LAURA TARKKA

Abstract: The political novel *Usong* (1771), written by the Swiss physiologist Albrecht von Haller (1708–1777), is set in the fifteenth century and tells the story of a Mongolian prince who becomes the Emperor of Persia and redesigns the government of his empire to promote the happiness of his subjects. Interestingly, this novel soon appeared in two competing English translations, published in 1772 and 1773. While contemporary reviewers focussed on the question of whether the language of Haller's 'oriental history' was imaginative enough, this article argues that the English translators interpreted *Usong* in the context of the early modern culture of improvement.

Keywords: Albrecht von Haller, improvement, James Hutton, Joseph Planta, oriental despotism, political novel, reviews, translation history

From a posthumous English description of Albrecht von Haller's (1708–1777) career published in William Coxe's *Travels in Switzerland* (1789) and reprinted in *The Annual Register* in the following year, British readers learned that the renowned Swiss scientist Haller had written 'three political romances, *Usong*, *Alfred*, and *Fabius and Cato*, which treat of the despotic, monarchical, and republican governments'.[1] According to this description, in *Usong* (1771), Haller 'sketches, with a masterly hand, the abuses of absolute authority, and sets forth, in the character of the principal personage, the happy effects which may be derived from a virtuous and intelligent sovereign, even amidst the horrors of oriental despotism'.[2] By considering references to 'the happy effects' in *Usong* as signifiers of the early modern culture of improvement, this article argues, first, that Haller's 'political romance' was permeated by the notion of improvement and, second, that this was recognized by contemporary English translators. Accordingly, translations are perceived as carrying evidence of a transnational culture.

Previous scholarship has examined *Usong* as a political novel [Staatsroman] and a 'mirror for princes' [Fürstenspiegel] in a tradition beginning with Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (*c.* 370 BC) and most famously continued in the early modern period by François Fénelon's *Les aventures de Télémaque, fils d'Ulysse* (1699).[3] Interestingly, soon after being published in German, *Usong* was translated into English by two different translators. Yet, although the English translations were already mentioned in the work of Max Widmann in 1894, they have not been systematically analysed, and neither has their reception.[4] The only study on the first translation was published by Carol K. Bang in 1940, and the second one has, to my knowledge, not received scholarly attention at all.[5] As such, it seems that the history of *Usong*'s reception in Britain has been bypassed as an insignificant matter. This is probably due to the relatively low degree of literary merit found in the novel and its modest success compared with a phenomenon like Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774), which took Europe by storm only a few years later and is consequently well known also to modern readers. A closer comparison can be drawn with

the works of Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813), whose political novel *Der goldne Spiegel oder die Könige von Scheschian* (1772) was, like Haller's *Usong*, set in Asia.[6] This novel was, however, not translated into English, and although Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon* (1766–1767) appeared in London as *The History of Agathon* (1773) and was reviewed as a 'philosophical romance', its narrator admits that details relating to economic improvement or 'political œconomy' are 'not consistent with' its 'plan' that focusses on the protagonist's moral character.[7]

Haller's reputation as a novelist does not equal that of Goethe and Wieland, but the fate of his *Usong* illuminates international and interlingual relations in eighteenth-century culture particularly well because it appeared in two competing English translations. In fact, the publishers of the second translation publicly attacked the first translator Joseph Planta (1744–1827) in an advertisement prefixed to their own version, and Planta complained about the matter in his private correspondence. A controversy like this seems to call for a comparative analysis delving into the differences between the translations. In such a comparison, focussing on the competence and individual strategies of each translator would yield a display of two divergent versions of *Usong*, potentially revealing that one translation was better than the other in transferring Haller's work from Switzerland — and more widely the German-speaking territories of continental Europe — into the British target culture.

Yet, the approach which this article takes to the notion of culture in translation is neither normative nor focussed on national character. Instead of perceiving translation as a crossing of cultural borders and asking how the two English translations differed from the source text and from each other, I suggest, first, that Haller's work reflected a trans-European culture of 'improvement'.[8] Second, I argue that both of Haller's English translators, recognizing this, chose to amplify the notion of improvement in their renditions of *Usong*. This gesture of recognition and amplification is therefore one example of the diverse forms of political and scientific transnationalism sustained by the work of eighteenth-century translators.[9]

It has been observed that 'the semantics of political concepts are not the same in different countries', and similarities in the translations of a single novel hardly suffice to prove otherwise.[10] However, they do suggest that Haller's English translators found something in his oriental history which was familiar enough to be labelled with the language of 'improvement'. In fact, the omnipresence of improvement in this period may have been the reason why its significant role in Haller's first political novel appears to have escaped the attention of most early commentators and, consequently, also the notice of the scholars who have later analysed *Usong* in its original German dress. My contention is, therefore, that the necessity of translators to engage comprehensively with the substance of *Usong* resulted in translation choices testifying to a *shared* understanding of what the work was mainly about: a virtuous despot's life-long dedication to improvement, which was the cause behind the 'happy effects' of his reign mentioned by Coxe above.

I. The Culture of Improvement

As defined by Paul Slack, improvement means 'gradual, piecemeal, but cumulative betterment'.[11] The objects of early modern improvement varied greatly, since in the parlance of this period, both individual capabilities and the material circumstances of entire societies could be 'improved'. According to Slack, the culture of improvement developed in England already in the seventeenth century, and by the beginning of the eighteenth

century, it 'had become part of the collective mentality' to a degree that distinguished England from other countries.[12] The English 'Age of Improvement', which Asa Briggs perceived as starting from 1784, can in fact thus 'be backdated by at least a century'.[13] Recent research has, however, pointed to the presence of cultures of improvement also in other parts of Europe.[14] As argued by Adriana Luna-Fabritius, Ere Nokkala, Marten Seppel, and Keith Tribe, 'improvement' is observable throughout early modern Europe 'as a leading concept used by those promoting the advancement of the capabilities of individuals as well as of the resources of whole societies and states'.[15] According to Seppel, 'an "improving" way of thought' was widespread not only in England but also in the German lands 'from at least the closing decades of the seventeenth century'. Thus, 'Germany may have lagged behind England somewhat', but 'in the German territories the concept of *Verbesserung* is already present in sixteenth-century literary and administrative language, denoting reorganisation and better management'.[16] Indeed, Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon* from 1746 gives numerous uses for the word *Verbesserung* and mentions 'improvements [Verbesserungen]' in general as 'an increase [Vermehrung]' brought about by a natural cause or human effort [Fleiß] in such a way that a thing becomes 'more complete and more useful' [vollkommener und nützlicher].[17]

Haller was, of course, Swiss rather than German, but he was inextricably linked with the German literary and scientific language via his contribution to *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*: between 1745 and 1777, he wrote nearly 9000 book reviews for this leading German review journal.[18] To mention some relevant examples, in 1770, he reviewed the 1768 volume of the journal *Wienerische Nachrichten und Abhandlungen aus dem Oeconomie- und Cameral-Wesen*, as well as a book entitled *Betrachtungen über die Verbesserung des Landwesens in Dännemark, von einem Patrioten entworfen*.[19] Significantly, Seppel has also pointed out that in the eighteenth century, improvement 'was closely linked with the spread and activity of economic and patriotic societies', and Haller was likewise personally involved in projects of this kind via his activity in the Economic Society of Berne.[20] In fact, there is even indication that Haller wrote *Usong* at the request of this society.[21] The author of *Usong* was, in other words, both a reader of improvement literature and a patriot improver himself. Accordingly, the fact that he dedicated a lot of space to descriptions of improvement in *Usong* is much less surprising than that this has not been highlighted as a significant facet of the novel.

Certainly, there have been scattered mentions of the 'improvements' [Verbesserungen] introduced by the novel's protagonist, emperor Usong, as he redesigns the government of Persia to promote the happiness of his subjects.[22] However, in previous research on *Usong*, *Verbesserung* has been used synonymously with the word *Reform*, and without explicit connection to the early modern culture of improvement.[23] This is worth pointing out because 'in the eighteenth century "reform" could mean either a movement back to earlier conditions, or a movement forward to new conditions'.[24] Moreover, the legislative language of the period was 'more likely to use the term *Verbesserung* ("improvement") than "reform", in the sense of betterment, reorganisation or innovation'.[25] Considering the absence of the noun *Reform* and the verb *reformieren* in Haller's original text, he therefore seems to have had a different idea of the meaning of these words than modern readers of *Usong*.

Before showing how translations — as close readings — indicate that improvement has been a persistent blind spot in discussions of *Usong*, I will begin with a brief introduction of the novel, followed by a discussion of the two English translation projects. I will then present some glimpses of how the translations were reviewed by three anonymous critics in contemporary British review journals and, in addition, by James Hutton (1726–1797),

whose manuscript review survives in the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek in Hanover, Germany. After this, I will examine the actual translations, juxtaposing them with Haller's original text. Most significantly in this regard, Slack has argued that the word 'improvement' was an English coinage, and that 'no other European language had a synonym for it', while Seppel contends that the term *Verbesserung* was largely synonymous and had, by the eighteenth century, 'become a popular keyword in German politico-economic literature'.[26] Taking my cue from these conflicting views, I will compare the two English translations of *Usong* with the German original to see when the translators used the noun 'improvement' and the verb 'to improve', and whether the German words *Verbesserung* and *verbessern* can be taken as their equivalents. The contrast which I will draw between the readings of contemporary reviewers — who mostly ignored the subject of improvement — and those of the English translators — who recognized it as important — serves to underline how deeply rooted the culture of improvement was in the 'collective mentality' of the eighteenth century.

II. Haller's 'New Telemachus' and Its Translation Into English

Albrecht von Haller was one of the most prominent scholars of his time: a physiologist, an anatomist, a botanist, a poet, and, less famously, a political author. He taught at the University of Göttingen from 1736 to 1753 but eventually decided to return to his native city, Berne, the capital of an aristocratic republic belonging to the Swiss confederation. There he took on several public offices and was, in his mature years, much preoccupied with questions regarding good government, as evidenced by his three political novels which focus on different polities.[27] The history of these novels is documented by Haller's correspondence with the Genevan scholar Charles Bonnet (1720–1793). In November 1769, Haller wrote to Bonnet that during sleepless nights, he had got the idea of writing 'a Telemachus' but could not find the time to execute this plan.[28] The 'new Telemachus' — a reference to Fénelon's novel — then appears frequently in the Haller-Bonnet correspondence until in March 1770, Haller starts to refer to this writing project as 'Usong'.[29] In this correspondence, the novel is not, however, connected to the notion of improvement.

On 25 May 1771, Haller told Bonnet that he had completed his 'little philosophical novel' [ce petit roman philosophique], 'a true history, but ornamented'.[30] Later, he noted that the work was 'not a Telemachus' [ce n'est pas un Telemaque] after all, because there was 'no mythology, and the government is discussed in great detail'.[31] In Haller's words, the novel consisted of 'eulogies to virtue' and 'some ideas to diminish the inconveniences of monarchy'.[32] Indeed, to briefly summarize the novel, *Usong* is story of a Mongolian prince who is the epitome of virtue: he is good-natured, brave, intelligent, and handsome — in short, the ideal monarch. After visiting China, Egypt, and Venice, Usong ends up becoming the Emperor of Persia and marries a Chinese princess, whose life he once saved when she fell into a pool in her private garden. As an emperor, Usong takes care of his people and dedicates every hour of his day to promoting their welfare. He points out that he is sensible of his enormous duties, but that they do not feel like a heavy burden, because he finds his happiness in serving his subjects and his ambition is to be virtuous and to bring about good things.[33] As acknowledged by Haller in the preface, the story is partly based on the history of a real fifteenth-century ruler, Usong Hassan (or Uzun Hasan). However, Haller took the liberty to add some romantic elements such as the love story with the Chinese princess Liosua and the story of Usong's virtuous daughter Nuschirwani.[34] The

narrative of Usong's travels and the description of how he rearranges the government of Persia also derive from Haller's imagination.[35]

As pointed out many times in previous research, the influential German journal *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* published a scathing critique of *Usong*, written anonymously by Isaak Iselin (1728–1782).[36] Although the German reception of the novel has been discussed before, this review deserves mention here because Iselin — who was also Swiss — used the word *Verbesserung* to describe the substance of *Usong*. He complained that 'the way in which Usong undertakes the improvement of Persia' [wie Usong die Verbesserung Persiens unternimmt] is disorderly and that Usong does not consider 'to which improvements his subjects are ready' [zu welchen Verbesserungen seine Unterthanen reif seyn oder nicht]. Thus, to Iselin, Haller's work did not seem to be written according to any proper plan.[37] Responding to this critique in *Göttingische Anzeigen*, Haller defended himself by declaring that the plan of the work [Grundriß] should appear clear: Usong first improved [verbesserte] the system of taxation, then the militia, then the police and the system of justice, and, finally, religion.[38] It is significant that, when provoked to analyse his work in public, Haller himself presented it as a novel about improvement. Moreover, this previously unacknowledged aspect of the public exchange between Iselin and Haller is also curious for two other reasons. First, it is an occasion where two Swiss republicans are referring to the projects of a despot as improvements, and second, one of them presented improvement as a gradual process while the other called for a clear-cut plan. I will return to the matter of Usong's status below, but here, it is simply worth noting that to the two Swiss men, improvement seems to have been a concept readily available but blurry around the edges.

Meanwhile in Britain, *Usong* had been translated twice. The reason for this was that Queen Charlotte, who hailed from the German duchy of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, had indicated her wish to see Haller's novel translated into English. The first translator to complete his work was Joseph Planta, a Swiss immigrant who worked at the British Museum.[39] Planta had his *Usong. An Eastern Narrative* printed already in 1772, but it was not long before the other translation *Usong. An Oriental History* appeared in 1773. The identity of the second translator is not known, but the publishers Wilkie, Heydinger, and Leacroft were clearly furious that Planta's translation had entered the market first. Incidentally, their version was reprinted in 1784 with a new title for another bookseller, W. Lane. I will also return to this reprint below.

It is difficult to tell precisely which aspects of *Usong* appealed to Queen Charlotte, but notably the dedication of the second translation compared the Persian emperor to George III and Empress Liosua to Queen Charlotte. This was certainly meant as a flattering comparison, even though the Kingdom of Great Britain was famous for its balance of powers and Usong's power was absolute. The second translation also contained an advertisement in which Wilkie, Heydinger, and Leacroft openly attacked the first translator Planta, though confusing him with his father Reverend Andreas Planta (1717–1773).[40] Calling Planta's translation 'surreptitious', Wilkie, Heydinger, and Leacroft claimed that Planta had translated indirectly from the French, whereas their own version was from the German original. They wished to make the case that Planta had conducted himself unfairly, and so they had decided 'to acquaint the Public in general, and the Trade in particular', with their version of the circumstances attending the translation project. The advertisement recounted how Haller's work had been presented to the Queen and how she had 'expressed a wish of seeing it soon translated into English'. In a sarcastic tone, it then noted that 'This hint was sufficient to set a Labourer in the Gospel Vineyard to work' and that 'Rev. Mr. Pl–a' had 'INTERESTEDLY published his Translation' despite being told that another one 'was in hand'. The accusation was followed by an appeal to the public in

defence of the rights of translators: 'whether this be not dishonourable, unfair, and totally unbecoming the character of a clerical Translator, who highly declared himself void of self-interest, let the Public determine'.[41]

Wilkie, Heydinger, and Leacroft perhaps slandered Planta publicly for fear of losing the market to a translator who, with his Swiss background and studies at the University of Göttingen, was better connected to Haller than the anonymous translator behind their competing version.[42] Indeed, Planta sent his translation as a gift to Haller along with a letter dated on 30 April 1773. As he wrote, 'the first attempt' of his 'inexperienced quill' [ce premier essai de ma plume novice] was not to be considered as a 'faithful interpretation' but a 'feeble tribute' to Haller, and he had had to get it printed 'as quickly as possible' [avec tout le hate possible]. Planta also told Haller that he had been attacked by booksellers who had published another translation 'recommended to the public by reflections injurious to the respectable memory of my father' [recommandée au public par des reflexions injurieuses a la memoire respectable de feu mon Pere]. Expecting that these booksellers had already sent Haller a copy of their version, Planta suggested that he judge the merits of each translation himself.[43]

Only a few days later, Planta also wrote to the Swiss physician Johann Georg Zimmermann (1728–1795), Haller's biographer and former student, who had been appointed as the first physician [Leibmedicus] to George III in Hanover.[44] In this letter, Planta complained even more bitterly about the advertisement printed by Wilkie, Heydinger, and Leacroft. As he wrote, the same bookseller (Wilkie) who had published Zimmermann's *Vom Nationalstolze* (1768) 'in disguise' [en Mascarade] — that is, badly translated into English — had now also published a translation of *Usong* 'in opposition' to Planta's translation [en opposition a la mienne]. This was sold on 'a better market' [a meilleur marché] and promoted by claiming that Planta's translation was 'surreptitious', 'stolen', and indirect [surreptice pillée, traduite de seconde main du françois] and by resorting to 'reflections injurious to the respectable memory of my father'.[45]

Haller's own reaction to the translations was frustration. In his correspondence with Bonnet, he lamented that in both of the two 'English editions', *Usong* had been 'crippled' [estropié].[46] Later, he told Bonnet that Planta's two-volume translation was the 'less bad' of the two.[47] Writing to Eberhard Friedrich von Gemmingen (1726–1791), he first called both English translations 'very mediocre', although he found that of Planta slightly better.[48] Soon after this, he declared that only one of the English translations was 'mediocre' and neither of them was good.[49] In *Göttingische Anzeigen*, Haller's critique was both more specific and more measured, as he observed that the translation published by Wilkie, Heydinger, and Leacroft was 'neither perfect nor unfaithful', with 'reduced sublimity and somewhat cold expression' [einen Abgang an Erhabenheit, und etwas kalte Ausdruck]. According to the same article, 'the young Mr Planta' did not seem to have translated from the French. His translation appeared 'also correct in many places, although in some others the translator has not caught the meaning of the author clearly'.[50] As his comments indicate, Haller was interested in how his work was translated but felt uncomfortable with the results.[51]

III. British Reviews of Usong

While Iselin had shown disappointment with Haller's novel in *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, the British reception of *Usong* did not start any better. In February 1773, *The Monthly Review* mentioned Planta's translation briefly in its Monthly Catalogue, under

the heading 'Miscellaneous'. The reviewer, probably William Woodfall (1746–1803), was clearly not thrilled with *Usong. An Eastern Narrative*, since he wrote[52]:

> The life and adventures of this hero afford ample room for the play of a warm imagination; but a warm imagination happens not to be the talent of this celebrated Author; and therefore these two volumes, though they are innocent and useful in their precepts and instructions, will rather, through the tameness and coldness of the Writer, serve to exercise the Reader's patience, than contribute to his entertainment.[53]

Later, *The Monthly* also published an article under the heading 'Correspondence', in which a 'gentleman who signs J. H. complains of our account of *Usong*'. As 'J. H.' wrote, he had been 'ravished with' the translated work and 'happy and warm again in reading the original'. He assured that 'a warm imagination is the talent of Haller, which all the chastity of his judgment cannot extinguish'. Moreover, he was 'happy in living to see such a book as Usong in the hands of princes, or within their reach'.[54] *The Monthly*'s response to this was, however, cold:

> we have only to regret, that we are not so sensible as he is, to all that fire and flame which he has found in Usong [...] When Usong is seated on the throne of Persia, his regulations are wise and good; but the Author's manner of relating them is minute and unpleasing. Moral and political improvements should have some circumstances in them extremely striking, or be related in a very agreeable manner, to engage the attention of an English reader.[55]

As it appears, the reviewer had felt impatient when reading Haller's work, but significantly, he also provided information about *how* he read it. First, despite finding that *Usong* contained 'minute' relations of political 'regulations', he critiqued it as a novel rather than a political treatise and made it clear that in this regard, it did not meet his expectations. Second, however, he acknowledged that 'moral and political improvements' constituted the actual substance of the work and thus agreed not only with Iselin's aesthetic opinion but also with his interpretation of *Usong* as a novel about 'improvements'.

By contrast, *The Critical Review* reviewed the second English translation — *Usong. An Oriental History* — and presented Haller's prose in a more positive light. The reviewer admitted to have been pessimistic about seeing 'a name so great in physic, having entered the field of romance'. In other words, he had not expected that Haller, as a distinguished medical scientist, could write a novel, 'a work of fancy'. However, this reviewer also told the British readers that 'the pleasure we received from the perusal of his Oriental history exceeded greatly the preconceived idea we had formed on that subject'.[56] *The Gentleman's Magazine* — reviewing Planta's translation — likewise wondered about Haller's '*real* motives' for 'a work so foreign to his pursuits in the early part of life'.[57] The reviewer observed that 'Haller's Usong, like Telemachus, is trained from his youth in social virtue, and, in his riper years, is furnished with sentiments that would do honour to the wisest of Kings'.[58] As such, this review recognized that Haller had taken inspiration form Fénelon and perceived 'social virtue' as the main topic of *Usong*, thus placing the novel in the 'mirror for princes' tradition.

What the reviews published in the three journals had in common was that all of them mentioned Haller as a famous author but expressed surprise about the fact that he had written a novel. Therefore, the reviews focussed on the question whether Haller's prose was entertaining and imaginative enough to merit the readers' attention. There is, however, also a fourth British review, which was circulated privately shortly after Haller's

death. In October 1778, James Hutton wrote to Zimmermann and mentioned that he had attached to his letter something meant for Jean-André de Luc (1727–1817). The attachment was open, so that Zimmermann could also read it, and it was written 'to a certain Person'.[59] It was a review of *Usong* in which Hutton commended Haller's description of the duties and the good education of Princes. As he wrote,

> Much of this may be supposed to relate to Princes born to absolute Power, but almost every principle is very justly applicable to Princes of this country, for though, according to Form, Princes here are restrained by the Constitution, yet, in effect, a King here can do almost every thing.[60]

Since this little review was signed by 'A Reader', at first glance, it looks like it was intended for publication. However, the fact that Hutton had written it 'to a certain Person' rather suggests that the review was meant to be circulated privately. Indeed, further on in the actual letter, Hutton indicated that publishing the review could have had negative consequences, since he noted: 'I mean earnestly what I say about Usong. But to print it, would only give handle in this Country to blame & would produce no good'.[61]

This comment probably related to Hutton's point that the 'Principles' of *Usong* would be applicable in the Kingdom of Great Britain because the power of the King was 'in effect' almost absolute. By contrast, Hutton thought that the German political context could usefully accommodate such principles, because he continued: 'But those in Germany if they had a farthing's worth of heart & sense & good Intentions might use that Book'. In short, Hutton seems to have thought, like Queen Charlotte, that *Usong* provided some valuable lessons for the British as well as for the Germans. The letter also suggests that Hutton could be the J. H. behind the defence of *Usong* which had appeared in *The Monthly Review*. This seems likely, given the similarity of the views presented in these texts.

Hutton is, of course, best known for his work on geology, but like many of his friends in Scotland (and George III), he also had an interest in agricultural improvement.[62] He had inherited two farms in Berwickshire and after studying agricultural practices in Norfolk and Suffolk in 1752, spent roughly a decade improving his own farm, Sleighhouses.[63] His efforts in this practical science are recorded in a manuscript entitled *Elements of Agriculture*, which, however, he never published.[64] Thus, although Hutton's review is only explicit about his appreciation of Haller's description of a good education, he could probably relate to the protagonist of *Usong* as a kindred spirit devoted to the pursuit of improvement.

Still, it is true that good education plays a major role in *Usong*, since the virtuous prince gains political wisdom from travel and conversation with wise men from different parts of the world. Moreover, Usong affirms that the best way of securing an empire is to educate the future ruler well.[65] For this purpose, he even gives written instructions, which were to be consulted after his death. These instructions attracted interest in both Britain and Germany, since they were published separately by *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* in 1773, as 'The Art of Reigning; or, the Instructions of a Persian Prince to His Son', and subsequently translated back into German.[66] Writing to von Gemmingen, Haller himself commented on this aspect of *Usong* in a manner which suggests that he perceived the education of princes as important even if not a guarantee of public happiness:

> Of course, all is lost if the monarch is evil [böse]. One must try to prevent that and educate him well. If the grandfather [der Stammvater] is an Usong, it is not impossible to educate an Ismael well, who would educate his successor well. However, one cannot truly help a despotic government [Allerdings ist bey der despotischen Regierung keine wahre Hülfe].[67]

However, the topic of education constitutes only a part of the substance of Haller's political novel. Based on what has been observed above, it appears that for contemporary readers, the theme of improvement was clearly observable but either too obvious to mention or not readily associated with the genre of 'mirror for princes'. Significantly, however, it is highlighted in the preface to the reprint of the second English translation, which was entitled *The Virtuous Prince; or, Travels and Adventures of Usong. An Oriental History* (1784). It is worth noting that in contrast to other versions of the work, Haller's name did not appear anywhere in this reprinted translation. The omission could have several reasons, but one of them is that Haller's fame as a scientist had caused general prejudice against the novel. In lieu of Haller's own preface, a new 'Preface to the Reader' summarized the content of *Usong* in the following words:

> The intent of this Book is to shew, by historic facts, the conduct of a Prince, emulous, and zealous to improve his kingdom, and render happy his subjects; a conqueror is here displayed, who by his abilities and virtues arrived to power; and who by exercising those virtues, enriched, and extended his dominions.[68]

Importantly, like Iselin, the reviewer writing in *The Monthly Review*, and Haller himself, the editor of the 1784 reprint thus resorted to a reference to improvement when discussing the substance of the novel. In the next section, I will therefore ask whether Haller's two English translators also read *Usong* as a story of improvement, and argue that, judging by their translation choices, this was indeed so.

IV. 'Improvement' in the Two English Translations

As noted above, improvement could, in the eighteenth century, refer to 'the advancement of the capabilities of individuals as well as of the resources of whole societies and states'.[69] In accordance with this, *Usong* includes several passages about the improvement of Usong's knowledge. Strikingly, however, Haller's German original uses different words in each of them, while the English translators tended to use the verb 'improve' — and, once, the noun 'improvement' — in conjunction with 'knowledge'.[70] This suggests that in the British target culture, the notion of improving one's own knowledge was strong. However, to see if the translations also manifested an understanding of improvement as a culture relating to the political economy and material progress of societies and states, special attention should be paid to such points of the narrative of *Usong* where the protagonist is depicted either contemplating or actually promoting the happiness and progress of entire societies. For, according to Seppel, economy and agriculture 'stood out particularly' 'in the agenda of improvement'.[71]

Early in the story, Haller draws on the eighteenth-century idea of stadial history, according to which the peoples of the world go through different stages as they gradually develop civilization.[72] This occurs when, as a foreign captive in China wishing to familiarize himself with the Chinese society, Usong considers his kinsmen, the Mongolians, who are still barbarians in that they have not settled down to practise agriculture and commerce.[73] Interestingly, the translation choices of the two English translators were identical regarding the use of the word improvement in this passage, since, according to their phrasing, the Mongolians, as a people, were 'susceptible of every improvement that could render/could contribute to render them a great and prosperous nation/Nation'.[74] The moment is a highly significant one in the novel, because here, young Usong comes

to think about the improvement of the living conditions of an entire society for the first time, and decides to learn about China to improve the condition of his own people in Mongolia. The agreement of the translators is all the more noteworthy, since Haller's original formulation 'daß sie alle Anlage zu einem glücklichen Volke hätten' [that they possessed all the foundation for becoming a happy people] does not immediately suggest the use of the word 'improvement'.[75] It is therefore possible that the second translator, having found this a challenging sentence to translate, consulted Planta's version and decided to copy his wording.

The second noteworthy passage regarding the subject of improvement is one where Usong sees the city of Anah for the first time. This would be the very first city which he would come to rule, and thus this moment is also of great importance in the narrative. In this case, the narrator does not report Usong's own thoughts but introduces the idea of improving land with the labour of men in a separate clause:

> 1771, 77: Schon sah er von weitem Anah, eine lange Statt an beyden Ufern des Euphrats, das Ziel der Wüste, wo die Erde wiederum ihren Schmuk annimmt, den die Arbeit der Menschen verbessert.
>
> 1772, I, 107–08: He came in sight of *Anah*, a large city on the skirts of the desart [sic], and far extending on both the banks of *Euphrates* – Here the ground resumes its wonted pride, and men improve it by their assiduous labour.
>
> 1773, 58: He already perceived from afar, Anah, a long town on both sides of the Euphrates where the desart [sic] ends, and the earth again appears with those embellishments which the industry of man improves.

That the German verb *verbessern* was translated with the English verb 'to improve' in both translations suggests that Haller and his translators referred to an idea which was current in both languages. *Verbessern* is not, however, always translated as 'to improve'. In another sentence clearly containing the notion of societal improvement, one might have expected that it would be, but the translators have made different choices:

> 1771, 106: Er aber überdachte nunmehr, wie Persiens elender Zustand zu verbessern wäre.
>
> 1772, I, 145: And now were all his thoughts turned to the best means of extracting *Persia* out of its deplorable condition.
>
> 1773, 78: The chief object of Usong's consideration now was to raise Persia from the miserable condition into which it was sunk.

Instead of 'to improve', Planta here opted for the verb 'to extract' and the second translator the verb 'to raise.'

However, in a passage which could serve as a textbook example of the culture of improvement, both translators do seem to have read Usong's words as referring to this culture, despite translating the passage slightly differently. The first translation uses the verb 'to improve' once and the second one twice, in different places:

> 1771, 113: [...] und der wird mein Freund seyn, sagte er, der seinen Acker am besten baut, und die meisten wohlgezogenen Kinder dem Staate schenkt. Ueberall berief er die Künstler und die Handelsleute; er ermunterte sie, ihm anzuzeigen, was Kunst und Natur an jedem Orte hervorbrächten, was beide mehrers hervorbringen könnten, was die Lage und die Eigenschaften jeder Gegend für Waaren am leichtesten und wohlfeilsten zu zeugen versprächen: und die Mittel, wodurch diese Früchte des Fleißes, und der göttlichen Güte, verbessert und vermehrt werden könnten.
>
> 1772, I, 155–156: "And he shall be my friend," said he, "who best cultivates his land, and supplies the state with the greatest number of well-educated children." He assembled from all parts the best artists and labourers: he encouraged them to acquaint him

> freely with the various products of art and nature, in all their different quarters; how both could be improved; what commodities the site and quality of every spot promised to yield in greatest plenty and perfection; and by what means these fruits of the human industry and heaven's bounty could be still more encreased and meliorated.
>
> 1773, 83: [...] "and him, said he, shall I esteem my friend, who most improves his land, and gives to the State a numerous, well-educated offspring." In every place where he came he assembled the Artificers and Tradesmen, desiring them to acquaint him with the products of art and nature; which of the two produced the most, what the soil and situation of each country seemed best adapted to afford in plenty; together with the means by which such fruits of industry, and gifts of the divine bounty, might be multiplied and improved.

Sometimes, the English translators even perceived the notion of improvement where it was not explicitly mentioned in the source text. An example of this occurs when Usong's Venetian friend Zeno explains how in a free society such as the republic of Venice, arts and crafts develop through emulation. With the character of Zeno, Haller added a republican voice to the story of an ideal absolute monarch, and suggested that a passion for glory encourages the artist to produce something better than others.[76] In the words of Planta, this is how 'the arts flourish and improve'.[77] The second translator, however, referred to the notion of improvement in negative terms when he had Zeno explain that in China, where the son is 'trudging in the steps of his father', 'he transmits, unimproved to his son, the art just as he received it from the hands of his father'.[78] Interestingly, the verb *verbessern* occurred in neither of the corresponding sentences in the source text. The same phenomenon is visible also in another point of the narrative in which Usong is concerned with the improvement of arts. In this case, he seeks to promote silk production, which his Chinese wife Liosua had introduced to Persia.[79] Again, both translators referred to improvement in different sentences even though corresponding words were lacking in the source text.[80] As such, it seems that to the translators, the presence of the concept of improvement was so clear that it deserved to be made explicit.

The most telling piece of evidence of a translator's reading of *Usong* as a book about improvement can be found in the narrator's discussion of Usong's reorganization of Persia's tax system. Here, the second translator chose to rewrite a medical metaphor by which Haller described the political economy of Persia. The paragraph is about a small import duty, by means of which Usong wished to keep track of imports and exports. The source text mentions that in this way, he was able to discover 'wounds' through which Persia was losing its 'lifeblood' [Usong machte durch denselben die Wunden ausfündig, wodurch Persien seinen Lebenssaft verlohr, und wurde gewarnt, sie zu stopfen].[81] Planta translated this metaphorical expression rather faithfully as 'and thus found out the sore that exhausted *Persia*'s vigour, and the means to heal it'.[82] The second translator, however, interpreted the metaphor in positive terms, translating it as 'which led him to a discovery of the means whereby the wealth of Persia might be improved', thus replacing Haller's medical language with the idiom of political economy.[83] Translation choices like this could well be the reason why Haller preferred Planta's translation to the second translation. Regarding the culture of improvement, however, the latter translation is more interesting because there, the anonymous translator took the liberty to overlook the verbal clothing of Haller's idea and to instead present an interpretation of the gist of the sentence.

As the above examples demonstrate, Haller and his two English translators all drew on the language of improvement which reflected a trans-European culture. Nevertheless, one central aspect of *Usong* sits uneasily with this and should therefore be pointed out: the fact

that the protagonist of the novel is an absolute monarch. Indeed, according to Slack, this form of government was the 'last thing English improvers wanted or needed', and as also argued by Seppel, while reforms 'implied a government action from above', 'improvements in agriculture and other *oeconomia* spheres could be effected by any practical person'.[84] If this was so, why did Haller choose to combine the stereotype of oriental despotism with the language of improvement, which often implied non-governmental enterprise, either in the form of selfless patriotic initiative or, in more negative terms, an improving landowner's or a projector's private interest?[85]

I would like to draw attention to the fact that *Usong* is a work of fiction in which Haller describes the oriental despot in the most unrealistic terms: as a prodigy with an instinctively 'noble disposition', a naturally benevolent ruler who does nothing but seek to improve the living conditions of his people.[86] In Planta's wording, 'Indefatigable in his labour, always cheerful and ready in fulfilling the duties of his high station, *Usong* was daily improving the constitution [die Einrichtung] of his empire'.[87]

That this was not meant as an apology for absolutism in Europe is indicated by several details, which have already been registered in previous research.[88] The conundrum of *Usong*'s depiction of benign despotism is, I think, best considered with three points in mind. Firstly, Haller noted in a letter to Bonnet that the novel contained 'some ideas to diminish the inconveniences of monarchy' [quelques idées tendantes a diminuer les inconveniens de la Monarchie] and in *Göttingische Anzeigen* that the work was meant to show how 'despotic power could be softened' [gemildert].[89] This external evidence points to scepticism towards absolute power. Secondly, Haller draws on Montesquieu's thoughts on the influence of climate on government: *Usong* includes a passage where the Venetian Zeno explains to young Usong that people of the coldest north live entirely without government, that societies sustained by hunting live in liberty and equality, and that in the agricultural societies of the mildest regions, kings have been able to subject the 'soft' yet quarrelsome orientals.[90] Later in the novel, Haller then has the old Usong affirm that 'a free constitution does not seem appropriate for the dispositions of oriental people', because their passions can only be checked by monarchic power.[91] Thus, absolute monarchy is presented as a necessary evil belonging to the oriental context. Thirdly, there are a couple of characters in *Usong* who, in conversation with the protagonist, explicitly question the reasonableness of the rule of one, and in so doing introduce a faint but nevertheless significant polyphony into the novel.[92] As such, it seems indeed that Haller used the oriental setting as a means of providing both critique and good examples for the consideration of European monarchs, without claiming that absolute monarchy was an appropriate form of government in Europe.[93] Interestingly, at around the same time, Haller's erstwhile student Zimmermann was also ruminating the question whether pride in monarchies was justified and displayed sympathies for the enlightened absolutism of the Prussian monarch Frederick II.[94]

When it comes to the English translators' readiness to interpret *Usong* as a story about improvement, I think it may be argued that they recognized Haller's writing as a literary experiment.[95] Thus, they could overlook the fact that the improving protagonist was an oriental despot and translated his efforts as they found them in the source text: as successful projects of improvement. Indeed, as Hutton's reaction indicates, some Britons could perceive the virtuous despot Usong as an admirable figure worth emulating. As for German readers, Eberhard Friedrich von Gemmingen had been moved to tears by Haller's novel, and while he wished to challenge a few points in Usong's way of governing, he promised Haller 'to send the book to a ruling prince who has all the will to become what your Persian was'.[96] In 1777, von Gemmingen even suggested presenting the book to the

emperor (Joseph II), if this had not already been done.[97] In a another letter, however, he worried that 'less astute readers' would transfer [versezen] Usong's reign directly to Europe: 'Then would that which in the Orient is a good deed become an evil one [ein Übel]'.[98] Thus, it seems that some readers took the idea of climate-based government seriously. As Haller also learned in 1774, he had succeeded in providing counsel for real-life rulers, since Ferdinand the Duke of Braunschweig was relishing *Usong* on a daily basis, despite having already read the novel many times over.[99]

To return to the relationship of *Usong* and its English translations, perhaps the best evidence that they communicated a shared awareness of the culture of improvement is a passage in which ageing Usong, when discussing the most important aspects of government with ambassadors from Mongolia, Patan, and Venice, falls silent, with new plans of improving the government of his empire hatching in his brain:

> 1771, 353: Der Kaiser schwieg, aber es stiegen doch in seinen Gedanken Entwürfe einiger Verbesserungen auf, die er nachwärts ins Werk setzte.
>
> 1772, II, 220: The emperor ceased: but some new plans of improvement occurred to him, which he afterwards brought into execution.
>
> 1773, 266: The Emperor desisted; some new plans of improvement occurred to him, which he afterwards put into execution.

The German word *Verbesserung* was here effortlessly translated as 'improvement' by both translators, and I would argue that the original German quote also establishes improvement as Usong's main concern by implying that both his past and future efforts are to be perceived as 'improvements'. In fact, the English translation of Wieland's *Agathon* features a similar notion in the negative statement 'All plans for improvement were rejected under the odious title of innovations', which in the original German version reads 'alle Vorschläge zu Verbesserungen würden unter dem verhaßten Namen der Neuerungen verworfen'.[100] This substantiates the argument that 'improvement' was a transnational concept, although it should be noted that *The History of Agathon* was printed for Heydinger and could therefore have been translated by the same person as *Usong. An Oriental History* (1773).

Moreover, in *Usong*, plans of improvement are not called reforms. Indeed, only once in one of the English translations is such a word to be found. This is when Planta translates 'Usong war zu einsichtsvoll, als daß er alles auf einmal übernommen hätte' as '*Usong* was too provident to attempt all necessary and useful reformations at one time'.[101] Illustrative of the gradual and piecemeal manner in which Usong improves Persia, this single occurrence of 'reformations' is the exception proving the rule that *Usong* related to a culture usually referred to with the word 'improvement'.

V. Conclusion

In this article, I have directed attention to the fate of Haller's *Usong* in Britain to argue that translations should be studied not only to attain knowledge about cultural differences but also to highlight the translingual and transnational stretch of some cultures, such as the early modern culture of improvement. Drawing on recent research, I have thus corroborated the argument that this culture was indeed a trans-European phenomenon current in Switzerland and Germany as well as in England. However, I have also shown that in the eighteenth century, the patriotic language of improvement could be applied to the discussion of absolute monarchies, as in the case of the fictionalized emperor Usong, who was presented as the epitome of virtue while also technically an oriental despot. In this

regard, the fact that Haller's *Usong* was not a political treatise but a 'romance', a novel featuring completely fictional episodes for the entertainment of the reader, should not be forgotten. When reflecting on how, on the pages of Haller's work, the culture of improvement combines with the notorious notion of oriental despotism, the impact of the minor characters questioning the legitimacy of the rule of one therefore also needs to be acknowledged.

As I have shown, the two English translators of *Usong* used the language of improvement even more readily than Haller himself. This could mean that topics such as the improvement of one's own knowledge and the improvement of the arts were more strongly associated with the culture of improvement in Britain than in Haller's original context. As I suggested in the beginning, some of the translation choices of the English translators can, however, be read as amplifications of a notion which they recognized as familiar. Overall, it seems clear that behind the oriental scene onto which Haller projected his discussion of absolute monarchy, the notion of improvement played a decisive role in this historical yet also utopian sketch of a happy empire. At least to some eighteenth-century readers, the virtuous efforts of the despot Usong were thus recognizable as projects of improvement. This made his character seem relatable and worth imitating also in the European context, even though, as Haller wrote to von Gemmingen, one could not 'truly help a despotic government'.

NOTES

1. William Coxe, *Travels in Switzerland*, 2 vols (T. Cadell, 1789), II, p. 267; *The Annual Register* 1790, 'Characters', p. 7.

2. Coxe, *Travels in Switzerland*, II, p. 267.

3. Max Widmann, *Albrecht von Hallers Staatsromane und Hallers Bedeutung als politischer Schriftsteller* (Biel, 1894); Dalia Salama, *Albrecht von Hallers "Usong": ein orientalisierender Staatsroman* (Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2006); Florian Gelzer and Béla Kapossy, 'Roman, Staat und Gesellschaft', in *Albrecht von Haller: Leben – Werk – Epoche*, ed. by Hubert Steinke, Urs Boschung, and Wolfgang Proß (Wallstein Verlag, 2008), pp. 156–81; Christoph Schmitt-Maaß, *Fénelons "Télémaque" in der deutschsprachigen Aufklärung (1700–1832): Teilband II* (De Gruyter, 2018); Christoph Schmitt-Maaß, 'Vom politischen Ideal zum politischen Idyll: Die Rezeption von Fénelons *Télémaque* durch Haller und Wieland', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 87.1 (2018), 24–34; Christopher Meid, *Der politische Roman im 18. Jahrhundert: Systementwurf und Aufklärungserzählung* (De Gruyter, 2021).

4. Widmann, *Hallers Staatsromane*, pp. 66–67. See also Schmitt-Maaß, 'Vom politischen Ideal', p. 25; Schmitt-Maaß, *Fénelons "Télémaque"*, p. 848.

5. Carol K. Bang, 'Haller and Wieland', *Modern Language Notes*, 55.2 (1940), 110–17.

6. Meid, *Der politische Roman*, pp. 333–97; Schmitt-Maaß, *Fénelons "Télémaque"*, pp. 908–45.

7. *The Monthly Review*, 50 (1774), 176; Christoph Martin Wieland, *The History of Agathon*, 4 vols (C. Heydinger, 1773), IV, p. 25. On *Agathon* as a 'deconstruction' of the political novel, see Helge Jordheim, *Der Staatsroman im Werk Wielands und Jean Pauls* (Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2007), pp. 97–146.

8. Compare with Peter Burke and R. Po-chia Hsia, 'Introduction', in *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Peter Burke and R. Po-chia Hsia (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1–4 (p. 3).

9. See Patrick Leech, 'Translation and Transnational History in the Eighteenth Century', in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation History*, ed. by Christopher Rundle (Routledge, 2022), pp. 408–21.

10. Jörn Leonhard, 'Translation as Cultural Transfer and Semantic Interaction: European Variations of *Liberal* Between 1800 and 1830', in *Why Concepts Matter: Translating Social and Political Thought*, ed. by Martin J. Burke and Melvin Richter (Brill, 2012), pp. 93–108 (p. 94).

11. Paul Slack, *The Invention of Improvement: Information and Material Progress in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 1.

12. Ibid. See also Peter Borsay, 'The Culture of Improvement', in *The Eighteenth Century 1688–1815, The Short Oxford History of the British Isles*, ed. by Paul Langford (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 183–210 (pp. 184–86).

13. Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement* (Longmans, Green and Co, 1959), p. 1; Marten Seppel, 'The Evolution of the Concept *Verbesserung* and the Anonymous German Discourse of Improvement', in *Political Reason and the Language of Change: Reform and Improvement in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Adriana Luna-Fabritius and others (Routledge, 2023), pp. 44–64 (p. 55).

14. Carl Wennerlind, 'The Magnificent Spruce: Anders Kempe and Anarcho-Cameralism in Sweden', *History of Political Economy*, 53.3 (2021), 425–41 (pp. 438–39).

15. Adriana Luna-Fabritius and others, 'Introduction: Reform and Improvement in Early Modern Europe', in *Political Reason and the Language of Change: Reform and Improvement in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Adriana Luna-Fabritius and others (Routledge, 2023), pp. 1–20 (p. 2).

16. Seppel, 'Evolution', p. 44.

17. *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon Aller Wissenschaften und Künste* 47 Ver – Vers (Johann Heinrich Zedler, 1746), p. 147.

18. Claudia Profos, 'Literaturkritik', in *Albrecht von Haller: Leben – Werk – Epoche*, ed. by Hubert Steinke, Urs Boschung, and Wolfgang Proß (Wallstein Verlag, 2008), pp. 182–98 (p. 182).

19. [Albrecht von Haller], 'Albrecht von Haller über Wolf (1768) in den GGA, 19. April 1770', *hallerNet* <https://hallernet.org/data/review/02828> [accessed 30 August 2024]; [Albrecht von Haller], 'Albrecht von Haller über Betrachtungen (1769) in den GGA, 1. Dezember 1770', *hallerNet* <https://hallernet.org/data/review/03035> [accessed 30 August 2024].

20. Seppel, 'Evolution', p. 54; Martin Stuber and Regula Wyss, 'Der Magistrat und ökonomische Patriot', in *Albrecht von Haller: Leben – Werk – Epoche*, ed. by Hubert Steinke, Urs Boschung, and Wolfgang Proß (Wallstein Verlag, 2008), pp. 347–80 (pp. 364–68).

21. Schmitt-Maaß, 'Vom politischen Ideal', p. 27.

22. Widmann, *Hallers Staatsromane*, p. 119; Salama, *Hallers "Usong"*, pp. 130, 156, 240; Schmitt-Maaß, 'Vom politischen Ideal', p. 28; Meid, *Der politische Roman*, pp. 276, 300.

23. Salama, *Hallers "Usong"*, pp. 128, 154, 175, 280; Gelzer and Kapossy, 'Roman', p. 176; Schmitt-Maaß, 'Vom politischen Ideal', p. 28; Schmitt-Maaß, *Fénelons "Télémaque"*, pp. 815, 825; Meid, *Der politische Roman*, pp. 290, 297, 299–300.

24. Luna-Fabritius and others, 'Introduction', p. 4.

25. Ibid., p. 5.

26. Slack, *Invention*, pp. 5–6; Seppel, 'Evolution', p. 51.

27. Meid, *Der politische Roman*, pp. 273–74; Stuber and Wyss, 'Der Magistrat', pp. 354–71.

28. *The Correspondence Between Albrecht von Haller and Charles Bonnet*, ed. by Otto Sonntag (Verlag Hans Huber, 1983), Albrecht von Haller to Charles Bonnet, 12 November 1769, pp. 842–43. See also Albrecht von Haller to Samuel-Auguste-André-David Tissot, 19 September 1771, *hallerNet* <https://hallernet.org/edition/letter/14212> [accessed 30 August 2024].

29. *Correspondence*, Bonnet to Haller, 26 December 1769, p. 846; Haller to Bonnet, 7 January 1770, p. 850; Bonnet to Haller, 16 January 1770, p. 852; Haller to Bonnet, 21 January 1770, p. 855; Haller to Bonnet, 4 March 1770, p. 864; Haller to Bonnet, 26 July 1770, p. 887; Bonnet to Haller, 11 August 1770, p. 888.

30. *Correspondence*, Haller to Bonnet, 25 May 1771, p. 940.

31. *Correspondence*, Haller to Bonnet, 1 August 1771, p. 953.

32. *Correspondence*, Haller to Bonnet, 26 August 1771, p. 956.
33. Albrecht von Haller, *Usong. Eine Morgenländische Geschichte in vier Büchern* (Verlag der neuen Buchhandlung, 1771), pp. 227–28.
34. Haller, 1771, 'Vorrede', *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, 1771.2 (1771), p. 1294; Widmann, *Hallers Staatsromane*, pp. 60–62; Salama, *Hallers "Usong"*, pp. 173–75; Gelzer and Kapossy, 'Roman', pp. 156, 161–62; Meid, *Der politische Roman*, pp. 289–90.
35. Widmann, *Hallers Staatsromane*, p. 61; Salama, *Hallers "Usong"*, p. 175.
36. Meid, *Der politische Roman*, p. 302; Schmitt-Maaß, *Fénelons "Télémaque"*, pp. 845–46; Gelzer and Kapossy, 'Roman', p. 165; Widmann, *Hallers Staatsromane*, p. 215.
37. *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, 18 (1772), p. 462.
38. *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, Zugabe, 1773, p. cclxxvi.
39. P. R. Harris, 'Planta, Joseph (1744–1827), Librarian', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 3 January 2008 <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22353> [accessed 30 August 2024].
40. Albrecht von Haller, *Usong. An Oriental History in Four Books* (J. Wilkie, C. Heydinger, and S. Leacroft, 1773), 'Advertisement', n.p.
41. Ibid.
42. Harris, 'Planta', n.p.
43. Joseph von Planta to Albrecht von Haller, 30 April 1773, *hallerNet* <https://hallernet.org/data/letter/06484> [accessed 30 August 2024].
44. Markus Zenker, *Therapie im literarischen Text: Johann Georg Zimmermanns Werk »Über die Einsamkeit« in seiner Zeit* (Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2007), pp. 25, 42.
45. Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, MS XLII 1933 A II 72 Joseph Planta, Joseph Planta to Johann Georg Zimmermann, 4 May 1773.
46. *Correspondence*, Haller to Bonnet, 29 June 1773, p. 1089.
47. *Correspondence*, Haller to Bonnet, 24 April 1774, p. 1118.
48. Albrecht von Haller to Eberhard Friedrich von Gemmingen, 28 July 1773, *hallerNet* <https://hallernet.org/edition/haller-gemmingen/letter/16978> [accessed 30 August 2024].
49. Haller to von Gemmingen, 25 September 1773, *hallerNet* <https://hallernet.org/edition/haller-gemmingen/letter/16979> [accessed 30 August 2024].
50. *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, Zugabe, 1773, pp. cclxxv–cclxxvi.
51. For example, *Correspondence*, Haller to Bonnet, 15 November 1771, p. 978.
52. Benjamin Christie Nangle, *The Monthly Review, First Series, 1749–1789: Indexes of Contributors and Articles* (Clarendon, 1934), pp. 47, 238.
53. *The Monthly Review*, 48 (1773), 160–61.
54. Ibid., p. 248.
55. Ibid., p. 248.
56. *The Critical Review*, 35 (1773), p. 195.
57. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 43 (1773), p. 189.
58. Ibid., p. 190.
59. Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek, MS XLII 1933 A II 47 James Hutton, James Hutton to Johann Georg Zimmermann, 6 October 1778.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Briggs, *Age of Improvement*, p. 39.
63. Ray Perman, *James Hutton: The Genius of Time* (Birlinn, 2022), pp. 42–48, 51–59.
64. Ibid., p. 248.
65. Haller, 1771, pp. 226, 340–41.
66. Schmitt-Maaß, 'Vom politischen Ideal', pp. 24–25; Bang, 'Haller and Wieland', pp. 110–17.

67. Haller to von Gemmingen, 20 September 1772, *hallerNet* <https://hallernet.org/edition/haller-gemmingen/letter/16972> [accessed 30 August 2024].

68. [Albrecht von Haller], *The Virtuous Prince; or, Travels and Adventures of Usong. An Oriental History* (W. Lane, 1784), p. i. The 1773 translation has been edited from page 313 onwards, with several sentences cut.

69. Luna-Fabritius and others, 'Introduction', p. 2; Slack, *Invention*, p. 1.

70. Haller, 1771, pp. 36, 57, 62, 380; Albrecht von Haller, *Usong. An Eastern Narrative*, 2 vols (Printed for the Translator, 1772), I, pp. 51, 81, 87–88, II, p. 255; Haller, 1773, pp. 27, 43, 46, 287.

71. Seppel, 'Evolution', p. 52.

72. See, for example, Sundar Henny, 'Einleitung', in *Isaak Iselin: Geschichte der Menschheit*, ed. by Sundar Henny (Schwabe Verlag, 2018), pp. XVII–XXXIX (pp. XX–XXI, XXIX–XXXVI); László Kontler, 'Translating Scottish Stadial History: William Robertson in Late Eighteenth-Century Germany', in *Early Modern Cultures of Translation*, ed. by Karen Newman and Sophia Bevacqua (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), pp. 236–49 (pp. 239–40).

73. Haller, 1771, p. 24; Meid, *Der politische Roman*, pp. 292–93.

74. Haller, 1772, I, pp. 34–35; Haller, 1773, pp. 18–19.

75. Haller, 1771, pp. 23–24.

76. Haller, 1771, pp. 58–59.

77. Haller, 1772, I, pp. 82–83.

78. Haller, 1773, p. 44.

79. Haller, 1771, p. 187.

80. Haller, 1772, I, p. 253; Haller, 1773, p. 136.

81. Haller, 1771, pp. 120–121.

82. Haller, 1772, I, p. 166.

83. Haller, 1773, p. 88.

84. Slack, *Invention*, pp. 224–25; Seppel, 'Evolution', p. 53. See also Luna-Fabritius and others, 'Introduction', p. 7.

85. On projectors, see David Alff, *The Wreckage of Intentions: Projects in British Culture, 1660–1730* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), pp. 25–29.

86. Haller, 1771, p. 10; Haller, 1772, I, p. 14.

87. Haller, 1772, I, p. 190; Haller, 1771, p. 138.

88. Gelzer and Kapossy, 'Roman', pp. 175–76; Schmitt-Maaß, *Fénelons "Télémaque"*, p. 844; Meid, *Der politische Roman*, pp. 296–97.

89. *Correspondence*, Haller to Bonnet, 26 August 1771, p. 956; *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* 1771.2, p. 1295; Schmitt-Maaß, *Fénelons "Télémaque"*, p. 825. See also the preface to Haller's *Fabius und Cato* (1774), cited in Meid, *Der politische Roman*, p. 274.

90. Haller, 1771, pp. 55–57; Meid, *Der politische Roman*, pp. 281, 294–97.

91. Haller, 1771, p. 348. My translation.

92. Haller, 1771, pp. 341–46, 354–55; Salama, *Hallers "Usong"*, pp. 107, 212, 280; Meid, *Der politische Roman*, pp. 275, 293–94, 296–98.

93. See Salama, *Hallers "Usong"*, p. 281.

94. See Laura Tarkka, 'Johann Georg Zimmermann's Internalised Republicanism', *History of European Ideas*, 50.8 (2024), 1381–98 (p. 1386); Simone Zurbuchen, 'Theorizing Enlightenend Absolutism: The Swiss Republican Origins of Prussian Monarchism', in *Monarchisms in the Age of Enlightenment: Liberty, Patriotism, and the Common Good*, ed. by Hans W. Blom, John Christian Laursen, and Luisa Simonutti (University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 240–66.

95. See Meid, *Der politische Roman*, p. 275.

96. von Gemmingen to Haller, 27 September 1771, *hallerNet* <https://hallernet.org/edition/haller-gemmingen/letter/02345> [accessed 30 August 2024].

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100. Wieland, *The History of Agathon*, III, p. 238; Christoph Martin Wieland, *Geschichte des Agathon*, 2 vols (1767), II, p. 180.

101. Haller, 1771, p. 185; Haller, 1772, I, p. 251.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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LAURA TARKKA is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Jyväskylä. Previously, she worked at the University of Turku, where she completed the project 'The Circulation, Transformation, and Reception of Johann Georg Zimmermann's *Von dem Nationalstolze*, 1758–1805'. Her research interests include translation history, travel writing, and eighteenth-century periodicals.