

From Paris to Moscow via Leipzig (1749–1787): Translational Metamorphoses of Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*

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Abstract

This article explores the circulation of Buffon's texts and ideas, in particular on animal species and their degenerations, from France to Germany and to Russia in the late eighteenth century. First, I outline the different agents of diffusion and their role in the biased transmission of Buffon's conceptions. Second, I focus on the first German translation of the *Histoire naturelle* and examine how, through its different features, it offered to the German audience a modified version of Buffon's work, adapted to the local demands and context. Third, I analyze a small German book on the degeneration of animals, almost wholly borrowed from that translation, published by a Russian student in Leipzig, and then translated into Russian. This case study shows the diversity of the vehicles for scientific texts and concepts, not only between two countries, but at the European level, and the oversimplifications and alterations resulting from this process.

Keywords

circulation of texts – cultural transfers between France, Germany and Russia – *Histoire naturelle* (Buffon) – species (natural history) – translation

Supplementary Material

TABLE 1 List of the volumes of the *Allgemeine Historie der Nature*, and correspondence with the first French edition (HN: *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*; HNO: *Histoire naturelle des oiseaux*).

Volume, Part	Date, cities, publishers	Corresponding volume of the first French edition	Translator	Contents
1, 1	1750, Hamburg, G. C. Grund, and Leipzig, A. H. Holle	HN, vol. 1, 1749	B. J. Zink	Method of natural history and theory of the Earth, by Buffon
1, 2	1750, Hamburg, G. C. Grund, and Leipzig, A. H. Holle	HN, vol. 2, 1749	A. G. Kästner	Theory of generation and natural history of man (1), by Buffon
2, 1	1752, Hamburg, G. C. Grund, and Leipzig, A. H. Holle	HN, vol. 3, 1749	A. G. Kästner	Description of human objects in the <i>Cabinet du Roi</i> , by Daubenton; natural history of man (2), by Buffon
2, 2	1754, Hamburg, G. C. Grund, and Leipzig, A. H. Holle	HN, vol. 4, 1753	A. G. Kästner	General texts on animals; beginning of the natural history and description of quadrupeds, by Buffon and Daubenton
3, 1	1756, Hamburg, G. C. Grund, and Leipzig, A. H. Holle	HN, vol. 5, 1755	A. G. Kästner	Continuation of the natural history and description of quadrupeds, by Buffon and Daubenton
3, 2	1757, Hamburg, G. C. Grund, and Leipzig, A. H. Holle	HN, vol. 6, 1756	A. G. Kästner	Idem
4, 1	1760, Hamburg, Grund's widow, and Leipzig, A. H. Holle	HN, vol. 7, 1758	A. G. Kästner	Idem
4, 2	1765, Hamburg, Grund's heirs, and Leipzig, Holle's widow	HN, vol. 8, 1760	A. G. Kästner	Idem

Volume, Part	Date, cities, publishers	Corresponding volume of the first French edition	Translator	Contents
5, 1	1766, Leipzig, Holle's widow	HN, vol. 9, 1761	A. G. Kästner	Idem
5, 2	1766, Leipzig, Holle's widow	HN, vol. 10, 1763	A. G. Kästner	Idem
6, 1	1767, Leipzig, Holle's widow	HN, vol. 11, 1764	A. G. Kästner	Idem
6, 2	1769, Leipzig, Holle's widow	HN, vol. 12, 1764	A. G. Kästner	Idem
7, 1	1770, Leipzig, Holle's widow	HN, vol. 13, 1765	A. G. Kästner	Idem
7, 2	1772, Leipzig, H. H. Holle	HN, vol. 14, 1766	A. G. Kästner	Idem
8, 1	1772, Leipzig, H. H. Holle	HN, vol. 15, 1767	A. G. Kästner	End of the natural history and description of quadrupeds, by Buffon and Daubenton
8, 2	1774, Leipzig, H. H. Holle	—	—	Index (new)
9, 1	1775, Leipzig, H. H. Holle	First part of HNO, vol. 1, 1770	C. J. Oehme	Natural history of birds, by Buffon
9, 2	1776, Leipzig, H. H. Holle	Second part of HNO, vol. 1, 1770	C. J. Oehme	Idem
10, 1	1779, Leipzig, J. S. Heinsius	First part of HNO, vol. 2, 1771	C. J. Oehme	Idem
10, 2	1780, Leipzig, J. S. Heinsius	Second part of HNO, vol. 2, 1771	C. J. Oehme	Idem
11, 1	1781, Leipzig, J. S. Heinsius	First part of HNO, vol. 3, 1775	C. J. Oehme	Natural history of birds, by Buffon and Guéneau de Montbeillard
11, 2	1782, Leipzig, J. S. Heinsius	Second part of HNO, vol. 3, 1775, and first part of HNO, vol. 4, 1778	C. J. Oehme	Idem