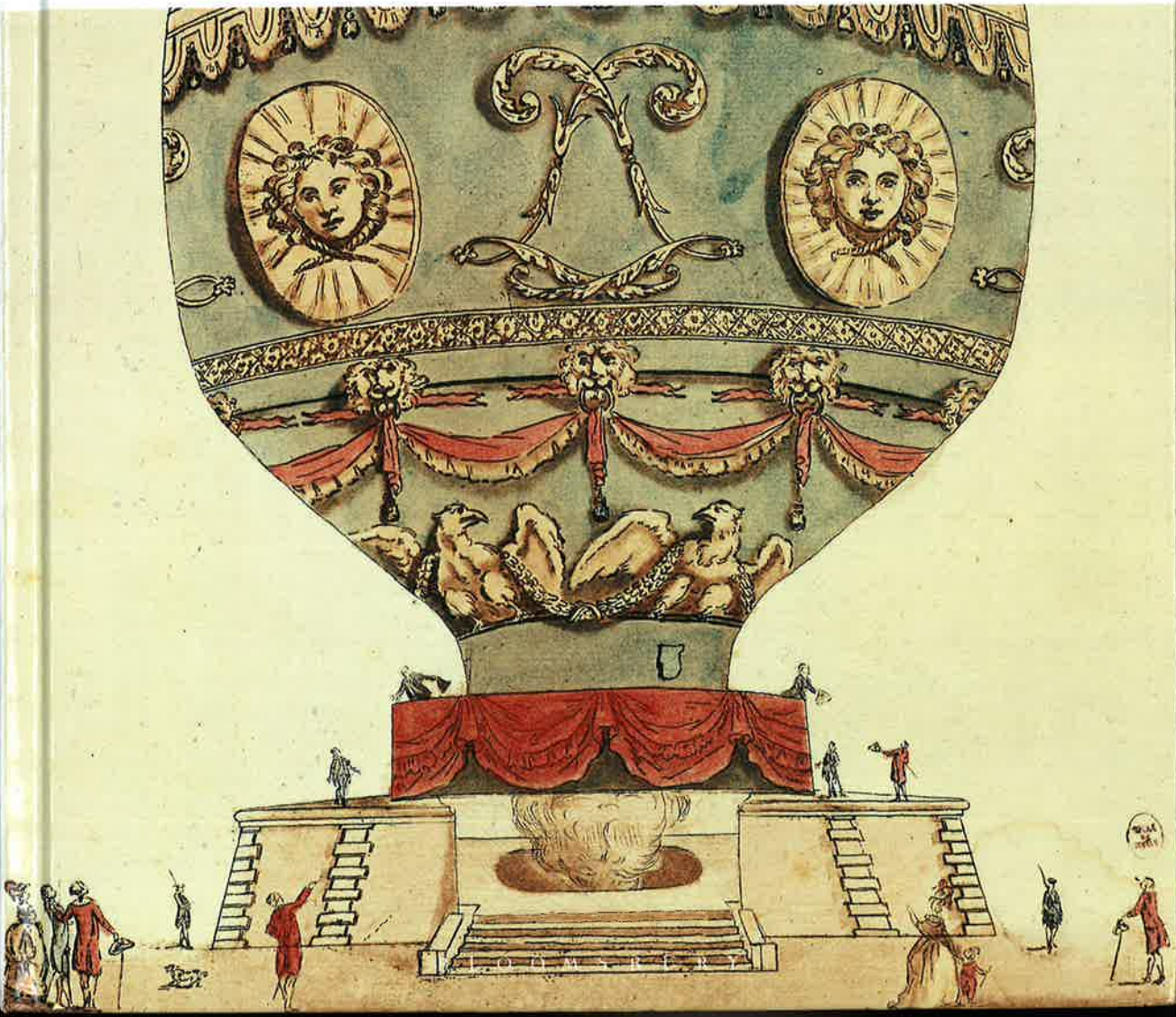


A CULTURAL HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Edited by Daniel Tröhler



CHAPTER TWO

Knowledge, Media, and Communication

STEFAN EHRENPREIS

AN EARLY MODERN KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY?

In the year 2000 the English cultural historian Peter Burke published a book on the early modern development of the “knowledge society,” which is still widely quoted today.¹ He put forward the thesis that the production and distribution of knowledge had already been a hallmark of premodern European societies, and that since the invention of printing a growing proportion of the population had been captured by the use of printed media forms. Only part of early modern knowledge was generated by science, universities, and other educational institutions, because a wide range of practical knowledge came about through crafts and the observation of nature. The connection between knowledge and social needs was crucial. An increasing commercialization of information led to the formation of professional groups that used knowledge economically and provided a knowledge-based basis for early modern capitalism. In addition to the state, the churches, universities, and publishers as well as trading companies were also carriers of knowledge production, the latter primarily with information about the non-European world. State and church attempts to control knowledge by censorship largely failed. However, the dissemination of knowledge was by no means general: the possibilities of accessing information differed considerably depending on geographical, gender-specific, and social conditions.