

The Academic Library as an Agent of Enlightenment: William Robertson, Exploration Narratives, and the University of Edinburgh Library in the 1760s

Within the context of Eighteenth-Century Studies, the University of Edinburgh is too often remembered as the institution that denied David Hume its Chair of Moral Philosophy. Although that decision indicated the traditionalism of the body that governed the University, the Edinburgh Town Council, the actual intellectual milieu at the University was not clearly traditional. My research focuses on the connections between the 'heart' of the University, its Library, and the life of the mind in Enlightenment Edinburgh; my primary archival sources include borrowing and acquisition records kept by the Library during the 1760s. I argue that far from demonstrating institutional conservatism, these records show the University's commitment to subjects engaging the contemporary intellectual vanguard. I am particularly interested in the growth of the Library's holdings in exploration and travel narratives and will discuss this collection as a case study in acquisition patterns during the first years of William Robertson's administration.

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