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Les modes de sociabilité au château de Coppet à l'époque de Germaine de Staël (1766-1817). By MARTINA PRIEBE. Geneva: Droz, 2017. 168 pp.

In its endeavour to cast new light on the forms of sociability practised at Coppet during the height of its fame as the centre of European liberal opinion, Martina Priebe's study makes connections between the internal layout of the château, its furniture, the daily routines of life there, and the ideas that circulated among the intellectual networks of which it was the physical centre. It traces its interest in the concept of sociability to pioneering work by Maurice Agulhon in *Le Cercle dans la France bourgeoise: 1810-1848. Etude d'une mutation de la sociabilité*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1977, and uses for its structure the approach to the study of literary sociability outlined by Anthony Glinoer and Vincent Laisney in "Sociabilité", in *Socius: ressources sur le littéraire et le social*, http://ressources-socius.info/index.php/lexique/21-lexique/165-sociabilite. Using their criteria as chapter headings has obvious attractions in theory, but it is often confronted in practice with either severely limited or totally absent Coppet-specific evidence. Rather than simply admitting that there is insufficient evidence, Priebe occasionally draws inferences about the sociability of a Swiss château and its elite visitors from work related to, for example, the Parisian bourgeoisie, often without any real acknowledgement of the obvious limitations of such an approach. Conversely, the author explicitly rules out using comparisons with nearby châteaux, which might nevertheless have provided clues as to how distinctive Coppet doubtless was. Although these methodological limitations ultimately mean that the reader is left with more questions than persuasive answers, there are useful aspects to this study. It draws together in one place information from a variety of often unpublished sources, especially in the annexes, where one finds for example lists of visitors to Coppet classified by nationality and the dates of Staël's stays there. We learn something about the broad outline of a typical day at Coppet in the season, and information about the evolving internal layout of the buildings helps to understand the fluid boundaries between relatively private and relatively shared spaces: Priebe's comparison of Germaine to an old-régime monarch, conducting conversation with guests from her bed, or while dressing, lingers in the memory as a sign of the priority she accorded to intellectual exchange over more recent conceptions of privacy. Attention is drawn to the importance of the seasons and of the weather in making Coppet such a popular gathering place: between the spring and November, it could be a quite literal shelter from a storm for those travelling to or through the Alps, in addition to the more metaphorical protection it offered to political exiles. Although the author sees Coppet as a place in which many modern ideas were developed and tested, and therefore as a *lieu de mémoire*, much of the evidence in this richly-illustrated volume actually points to how fascinatingly strange Staël's Coppet would appear to a 21st-century time traveller.

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