

**Noémie TONNAIRE, “Creating a postal route in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: the itinerary from Dijon to Auxerre via Vitteaux” (“Monter une route en Poste au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle : l’itinéraire de Dijon à Auxerre par Vitteaux”), master’s thesis in modern history directed by Christine Lamarre, Université de Bourgogne, 2005, 124 p.**

The eighteenth century was a turning point in the history of roadway politics. A provincial concept of the “road” held sway at a time when the network of roads in France was becoming ever more dense. This thesis aims to demonstrate how the section of the major postal road between Dijon and Auxerre that connected the capital of Burgundy with Paris transformed the towns and villages on its route. The reader is plunged into the everyday life of a new road, with its issues and struggles for influence.

First of all, it transformed the landscape it traversed, at a time when a technological revolution was beginning to take off. The colossal project of building infrastructures for the road was undertaken, representing significant technical prowess.

The passage of postal roads through towns and villages seems to have been an important economic issue, if we put any store by the numerous social conflicts it generated. It allowed some merchants, postmasters and innkeepers to become richer. Post- and relay stations and the villages that are on the current trajectory connecting Dijon and Auxerre, when compared with the villages that were on the line in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but later abandoned, were affected differently, but in general the consequences did not match the anticipated effects. The towns and villages that were expecting great things by being on the postal route were disappointed in many ways.

At the tumultuous end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the building of a new postal road gave rise to many social conflicts. There were many differences of opinion on where the road should be laid. The forced labor service owed to the crown or “corvée royale” of building and maintaining highways met with severe opposition, while road conditions became poorer and poorer. The abolition of the “corvée royale” cut a broad swath in the financial history of French roadways. But it could not resolve the problem of deteriorating roads, since the Revolution soon followed its suppression.

Although French roads were extremely neglected during the revolutionary period, the road that connected Dijon with the capital via Vitteaux was well maintained by the Post Office and suffered less than others. This may explain why its itinerary was not questioned or reconsidered by the Revolution. The current road is nearly identical to the course it traveled in the Enlightenment.