

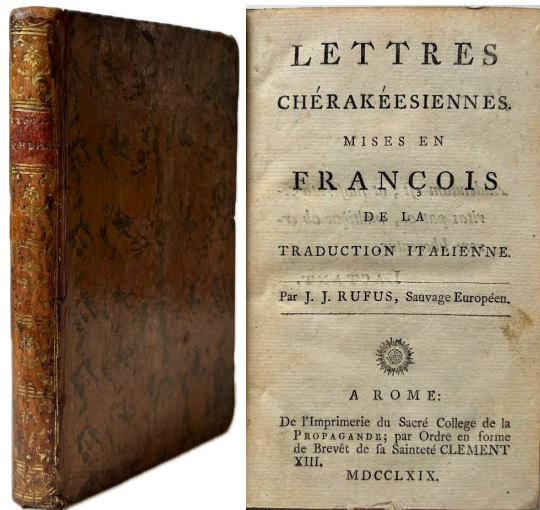
“In the manner of Voltaire... one of the most scathing productions of the anticlericals”

[MAUBERT DE GOUVEST (Jean-Henri).] *Lettres Chérakeesiennes mises en françois de la traduction italienne, par J. J. Rufus, sauvage européen.*

A Rome, de l'Imprimerie du Sacré College de la Propagande, 1769.

8°: *6 A-M⁸ N⁶ [\$5 (-*1,2,5, N5) signed]; [i-iv] v-xii, [1] 2-204 pp. Contemporary marbled calfskin, smooth spine ornamented, red title piece, edges red; tail cap damaged, corners worn, some soiling.

\$750



This rare epistolary-utopia, which incorporates the *noble savage* genre as well, first appeared in 1752 under the title *Lettres Iroquoises* (1752), and appears here under the false imprint of the Sacred College of Propaganda. This popular and anonymously published work presents a sequence of letters composed by an (imaginary) native American Cherokee (in this edition), named Igli, whose correspondence to his compatriot Alha comments on European philosophy, religion, and mores during his travels.

A critique of 18th century European life:

Igli, who begins his travels in Italy, comments upon the papal gardens, daily life in Italy, marriage customs in Europe, celibacy among priests, religious disputes (which often end in bloodshed), medical practices (“charlatanism”), the shaky ground on which European conjecture-based belief systems stand, mathematics (“a true science”), spiritualism, materialism, religious devotion and the vows of nuns, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the description of Heaven and Hell, the hypocrisy of priests, and the Inquisition, there is even an episode in which two *philosophes* debate in a café whether the earth is flat or round—all of these topics of European life are critiqued by Igli, who inevitably finds that Europeans fall well short of his own set of values.

A fascinating anticlerical tract written by a former member of the Capuchin order.

Critics have remarked the influence of Montesquieu’s *Lettres Persians*, but the work departs from the form of the epistolary novel with other literary goals in mind, *Lettres Chérakeesiennes*, “intensely interesting as a philosophic tract in the manner of Voltaire, contains nothing of the novel. The author, who is a sceptic, substitutes for the Persians of Montesquieu the [Cherokees], Igli and Alha. This work is one of the most scathing productions of the anticlericals, but is not a novel of letters.” (MacArthur, 1987).

Jean Henri Maubert de Gouvest (1721-1767) was a prolific author, journalist, pamphleteer, adventurer, who eventually served as Secretary to the King of Poland. He took orders as a Capuchin in 1740, only to break with them a few years after, precipitating his departure from France. He was able to rely on his pen and his facility with languages for his livelihood and he published more than 20 titles on historical, political, and religious matters from different European perspectives in the second half of the 18th century.

Barbier II.1271; Sabin 46910