

For a History of Historiography

Charles-Olivier Carbonell

FOREWORD

by Guido Abbattista

CHARLES-OLIVIER CARBONELL (1930-2013) was one of the founders, in 1982, of *Storia della Storiografia*, an international journal that has just crossed the threshold of 40 years of activity, an anniversary to celebrate which it seemed appropriate to repropose the paper with which the French historian inaugurated the first issue.

Carbonell studied at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Toulouse and in 1953 he obtained the CAPES (Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement du Second Degré). After some years spent as a professor of history at the Lycée Général Pierre de Fermat in Toulouse, he became assistant of Jacques Godechot from 1961 to 1967. From 1978 to 1998, when he retired, he was history professor at the University Paul-Valéry Montpellier-III. His interests ranged from history didactics, in particular the analysis, but also the writing of historical textbooks for high school, to historiography and political mythology, a subject, the latter, to which he devoted himself with pioneering studies on the communicative impact of comics. In the purely historical sphere, his interest went mainly to the history of Europe, as attested by the two-volume work he coordinated, *Histoire européenne de l'Europe* (Toulouse: Privat, 1999). With regard to the history of historiography, Carbonell was moved by a propensity to study – with regard to France especially in the nineteenth century – the relationship between history and the political and cultural context in general, the formation of paradigms and dominant forms of historical opinion and the mechanisms of their dissemination, the evolution of the his-

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Carbonell's address and its Foreword have been submitted only on an Editorial assessment.

torian's profession rather than the great historians of the past and their works. This is well demonstrated by his doctoral thesis, which became an imposing volume entitled *Histoire et historiens, une mutation idéologique des historiens français 1865-1885* (Toulouse: Privat, 1976), followed by the small volume on *L'Historiographie* (1981), for the famous series "Que sais-je?" by the Presses Universitaires de France. These works testify well to his intention to question the "disdain", as he termed it, in which the history of historiography had hitherto been held and to restore it to respectability, understanding it not only as a philosophy or methodology of history, but also, to quote Lucien Febvre, as sociology, i.e. as a form of knowledge that had evolved historically in the context of very precise and concrete conditions, until it became a discipline constructed by professionals with their own specialised profile and active within institutions, disseminated through educational institutions and deeply embedded in the national public discourses. In his "Que sais-je?" volume on *L'Historiographie*, Carbonell could argue that "there is no work in French history [recounting the evolution of historiography] from Herodotus to the present day. However, the efforts of Henri-Irénée Marrou and Pierre Chaunu have helped to overcome the sometimes-contemptuous indifference of French historians to their own discipline". And it was to Marrou and Chaunu that he declared his intention to refer, continuing their work.

Carbonell was a member of this journal first editorial board, together with Lucian Boia, Karl-Georg Faber, Andrzej F. Grabski, Georg G. Iggers, Hans Schleier and Bianca Valota. The Scientific Committee comprised a prestigious group of renowned, established historians – all now passed away – including Geoffrey Barraclough, Pierre Chaunu, Furio Diaz, Ernst Engelberg, Karl-Dietrich Erdmann, Jean Glénisson, Bernard Guenée, Arnaldo Momigliano, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Militsa Vasilevna Nechkina, Boyd Shafer, Jerzy Topolski, Leo Valiani, Rudolf Vierhaus. The birth of the journal took place at an international moment of rising interest for the history of historiography, a research perspective focused not only on methodology, philosophy of history and interpretation, but also on the history of the historical profession, the varieties of historical

writing, the institutions dedicated to historical research, and the authors who shaped a form of knowledge dealing with time and memory in historically different ways.

The international journal *Storia della Storiografia* founded in 1982 and based in Italy, with the publisher Jaca Book in Milan, was characterised from the outset not only by its full acceptance of the scholarly solicitations mentioned above, but also, initially, by its openness to the themes and inclusion of figures from the historiography of Eastern European countries. Soon, this perspective broadened and a special attention was also given to how the writing of history and participation in the international historical debate were evolving in non-European cultures, in the name of a true comparative approach in which it was intended that figures and works belonging to countries with cultural traditions diverse from Western European ones should have played a prominent role. After all, the birth of the journal was at the initiative of the most representative international forum of the historical profession. As stated in the keynote 'Notice to the Reader' at the opening of the first issue, "*History of Historiography* springs from the Commission of the same name recently formed under the auspices of the International Committee of Historical Sciences. Its explicit aim is to offer historians a truly international open forum for the discussion of the problems and methodologies of their discipline." An initiative, therefore, closely linked to the ICHS, the international organisation for which Carbonell acted as President at the time, that coordinated the World Congresses of Historical Sciences, for which it wanted to act as a tribune, so much so that for many years *Storia della Storiografia* accepted for publication essays written in four languages (Italian, English, French, German), until, since the issue no. 28 (1995), it converted into a monolingual, English periodical.

There is no need to emphasise how deeply Carbonell's reference points and wishes were rooted in the state of historical research, especially in France, in the 1970s and early 1980s. Sufficient evidence of this revival of interest in France for the history of historiography, historical discourse and memory was the work of scholars such as Henri-Irénée Marrou, Pierre Chaunu and especially Pierre

Nora, coordinator of the collective work *Lieux de mémoire* whose multi-volume publication began in the early 1980s and continued until 1992. But certainly, since those years and possibly also thanks to the contribution of specialised periodicals such as *Storia della Storiografia* and the work of one of its longest-serving editors, Georg G. Iggers, who sat in the Editorial Board from 1982 until his death in 2017, the study of the forms, moments, and protagonists of historical knowledge and writing has made great improvements in the academic research systems all over the world.

This has also depended on the role that historical knowledge, reasoning, and argumentation – for better or for worse, that is, in the form of historical awareness, but also in the form of historical ideologies, mythologies and mystifications – have conquered in the sphere of public discourse in any country and under any political regime. Suffice it to think, for instance, of the significant prominence that historical argumentation has assumed in support of the national cause in countries that have escaped Soviet dominance since the fall of the Berlin Wall – anything but ‘the end of history’ – or the impressive development of national historiographies in African and Asian countries since the 1970s, the commitment with which public memorial policies have been implemented, especially in Western Europe, with reference to the Shoa, or, again, and to come closer to home, to the attempts to redefine school history curricula in the United States particularly, but not exclusively, under Donald Trump’s presidency, in this case with an ostentatious anti-academic revisionist purpose as opposed to the historiography cultivated in universities considered to be bastions of the liberal left. We could multiply the examples, for instance by evoking the great prominence of the historical discourse of glorification of the Ottoman imperial past in Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s Turkey; or, again, by pointing out the overtly ideological use of historical themes in Vladimir Putin’s propaganda discourse in support of his policy of aggression against Ukraine; or, finally, by recalling the systematic recourse to the historical argument both for and against contemporary Israel’s policies towards Palestine. In short, historiography, historical knowledge, historical memory, but also forms

of ideology based on historical representations of the past have certainly increasingly occupied the centre of public discourse and even the mainstream media communication, offering new material for reflection to those who study the role of history, understood in all its very different meanings, in today's societies, where communication, popularization and propaganda, strengthened by the new possibilities offered by digital tools and the web, are capable of an impact that was simply unthinkable a few decades ago.

These considerations help to appreciate another important point of Carbonell's ideas as set out in the article we republish. And this is worth emphasising, because it retains considerable relevance, especially in light of the subsequent post-modernist, post-colonial and linguistic turns that have affected the writing of history since the last quarter of the twentieth century. According to Carbonell, there is no single, essential form of historical writing that has morphologically evolved following a linear progressive path from antiquity to the present day through the work of great historical figures. In his view, in the first place, historical knowledge is by no means a consolidated and untouchable set of notions that accumulate over time, it is not a cumulative kind of knowledge, but rather a form of knowledge that is constantly being modified, revised, enriched, and reinterpreted in response to the needs, viewpoints, and questions that emerge at different moments and in different historical and political contexts.

On the other hand, he actually speaks of historiography as a multiplicity of ways of dealing with and presenting the subject of history, which have played different roles in different historical, political and cultural contexts and to which authors of very different intellectual and cultural weight have contributed. The history of historiography, therefore, should in his view encompass within its horizon of analysis all the forms assumed by historical contents, including didactics, manuals, popularisation, but also propaganda by all possible means of communication. It is easy to understand the topicality of this indication, in an era such as ours in which the wealth of available means of communication – especially audiovisuals spread through the telematic network – allows for a dis-

semination of historical content that would have been unthinkable forty years ago, and sees the appearance on the communication scene of a multiplicity of figures who are not professional historians and who, however, even when they are, assume languages, tones, body postures, and communication methods that respond to aims that are not at all those of producing critical knowledge of the historical matter. Carbonell's is therefore an invitation to pay the utmost attention to all these forms of dissemination of historical notions: even if they do not occur programmatically with the aim of advancing scientific knowledge and even if they can occasionally have this effect, most certainly they fuel historical discourse, shape historical perception, can reinforce commonplaces and contribute to forming public opinion with reference to the historical past.

In conclusion, to speak of 'historiography' today only from the point of view of the production of historical research and knowledge by academic specialists in the discipline, however obviously necessary in order to understand the evolution of a specific form of knowledge and its 'scientific' status, might appear reductive with respect to the variety and complexity of ways in which historical themes enter – and in fact entered even in the distant past – to more or less overtly be part of and condition public discourse. The fact, however, that interest in historical knowledge has taken on greater depth and new facets since the years in which Carbonell hoped for a return of attention to the historical evolution of 'historiography', in no way detracts from the interest of a programmatic intervention such as the one that marked the debut of a journal, like *Storia della Storiografia*, specifically dedicated to the history of historiography and which, in its forty-plus years of activity, has sought precisely to record and give voice to many of the changes in approach and perspective which we have briefly alluded to. And if this has happened, it is also thanks to the critical contribution and suggestions of a historian such as Charles-Olivier Carbonell.

For all of these reasons, it seemed appropriate to repropose Carbonell's introduction, originally published in French, on this occasion. And, for its wider appreciation, we decided to republish it in an English version, making some minor corrections and revisions, updates or editorial adjustments when necessary.

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ABSTRACT · The history of historiography is coming to be seen as a discipline in its own right and as such is assuming greater and greater importance. Long neglected and often confused with bibliography, it has too often been considered to be the exclusive province of philosophers and “men of letters”. Now it is beginning to enjoy a new status. The effect of various and sometimes conflicting methodologies such as those of Marx, Croce, “Nouvelle histoire” and recent scientific thought, has been to point up the essential relativity of historical knowledge. This realization then renders possible a new history of historiography: one in which the essential point is not the document in itself but rather its relationship with the culture, society and ideas amongst which it has had its genesis. A consequence of this is that it is no longer the work of the ‘great’ historian which is the most rewarding to study; any work can bear witness (even in its very mediocrity) to the milieu in which it was written. This does not preclude the bibliographic viewpoint, ‘elitist’ approaches or progressionist perspective; it means that these approaches must be supplemented by new ones. The teaching of history, its popularization, the relationship between text and image, the language of history, history and myth, the various ways of representing the past, the historical component of cultural life: all of these and other questions are what direct the historian in his investigation into what we are. We do not ask of these ‘imperfect’ histories that they should reveal to us that past that they purport to portray, but rather (and this is far more interesting), that they throw light on the men who wrote them as well as on those for whom they were written. Thus the ‘historical fiction’ becomes a much more valuable document in that its revelations are all the more significant for being unintentional.

AT the dawn of the century, Charles Péguy attacked academic historians and their ‘Sorbonnard’ prison, denouncing, among other faults of Lavissee, Monod, Langlois and Seignobos, their incompetence. “Only the astronomer – said the poet – is capable of writing a history of astronomy; the doctor, a history of medicine; the painter, a history of painting [...] only non-historians can know and understand the past as specialists”.¹ At the end of the indictment, Clio was driven from her empire.

¹ Charles Péguy, *La thèse*. «De la situation faite à l’histoire dans la philosophie

And yet, in the face of the poet's excesses, can we not plead in favour of the muse and, accepting his approach as a game, recognise Clio's legitimate and inalienable ownership of a territory, that of history... of history? If only non-historians can know and understand the past as specialists, at least historians have the ultimate monopoly: knowing and understanding those who have written about the past!

The answer to those who ignore or despise the history of history is not to be found in a sophist's quip; it is, since they are more particularly recruited in the guild of historians, to be found in a historian's argument.

To those who see it as "the disgraced daughter of conceptual abstraction and bibliographic mania",² we would like to show that it is a specific, autonomous, enriching and exciting discipline; to those who think that it is useless, that it has recently become necessary; to those, more and more numerous – or, let's be modest, less and less rare – who practise it, to give additional reasons to love it, to frequent it. Without presumption.

Without presumption, because our only certainty is that of our shortcomings; that also of the narrowness of our point of view. If the aim of an international journal is to broaden the field of knowledge – and this is indeed the aim of this journal – then it is understandable that the first article it publishes should suffer from the shortcomings we have just admitted; it will thus demonstrate, through its own weaknesses, the necessity of the undertaking it inaugurates.

No doubt the first thing to do is to destroy the trial of the history of historiography. And what better method to use than the one offered by the history of historiography? Especially when the latter, after explaining yesterday's discredit, justifies its current revival.

générale du monde moderne» (Paris: Gallimard, 1927, written in 1910 as a thesis draft), 57.

² Charles-Olivier Carbonell, *Histoire et historiens, une mutation idéologique des historiens français, 1865-1885* (Toulouse: Privat, 1976), 7.

I. HISTORIOGRAPHY WITHOUT HISTORY?

VANITY. The history of historiography has been futile for two millennia, both in the West and in China.

For two millennia, historians – or those who were reputed to be historians – have regarded their predecessors with such devotion that putting their works into historical perspective was inconceivable. You can't put the absolute into perspective. What would a historian of the Ming period have gained from a knowledge of the career of Sseu-Ma T'an, of his relations with the court, of the political conditions in which he composed his *Historical Memoirs*, given that this work was for him both an indisputable source that had to be transcribed – “transmit” was Confucius' motto – and a perfect model that had to be extended? A Pyrrhonist, Montaigne certainly was. Yet it is to him that we owe the firm advice given to the historians of the time: “Let them give us history more according to what they receive than according to what they estimate”.³

As long as historiography was this slow sedimentation of knowledge preserved and transmitted, where moralizing and rhetoric prevailed over truth, it was, for those who practised it, outside history.

DEPRECIATION. The history of historiography was depreciated at its inception, and unfortunately remains so all too often even today.

With the development of the critical method, the introduction of history in universities and the formation of the first historians' guilds – professors, archivists – the history of historiography emerged, confusedly, in Enlightenment Germany. At the heart of the eighteenth century, C. M. Wieland taught it⁴ and J. A. Fabricius devoted his last work to it, a *Sketch (Abriss einer allgemeinen Historie der Gelehrsamkeit)*.⁵ German historians, moreover, contin-

³ *Les Essais*, Livre II, chapitre x.

⁴ This course, taught in 1757, was published in 1891 under the title *Geschichte der Gelehrtheit* (Frauenfeld: J. Huber, 1891).

⁵ (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1752-1754), 3 vols.

ued to take an interest in her from the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century, from L. Wachler's *Histoire de l'érudition et de l'histoire* (1812) to the *History of German historiography* by F.-X. von Wegele.⁶

But this interest was more that of bibliographers than historians. Ch. V. Langlois, in his *Manuel de bibliographie historique*, is not kind to this form of *historia historiae*. "L. Wachler, he writes, has done little more than draw up a methodical list of the principal scholars (*Historische Forschung*) and historians (*Historische Kunst*) of all times and countries, with the abbreviated nomenclature of their works. Biographical details, critical appreciations and general conditions are reduced to the simplest expression. It is well known that there is nothing more arid and ramshackle than the German *Lehrbücher* of that time: "Eine blotze Zusammenstellung einer Reihe von Namen [A mere compilation of a series of names]".⁷ Even taking into account the widespread anti-German sentiment among French historians of the time, it has to be said that the judgement is well-founded.

In fact, no one escaped the confusion between retrospective bibliography and the history of historiography. Neither Alfred Rambaud, who cited 1969 historians in the seven pages devoted to historiography in his *Histoire de la civilisation contemporaine en France* (1915), nor Ch.-V. Langlois himself who, in *La science française*, published the following year, listed 577 titles of historical works in the thirty or so pages allotted to him.

Such an approach and such treatment were not, far from it, peculiar to the German and French historians of yesteryear. They were general and have not disappeared in our time.⁸ Legitimate on the part of bibliographers, they are surprising on the part of historians. But for a historian of historiography, they can be explained because they correspond to the needs and conceptions of an era – an era that is no longer with us. Needs: to forge the tools (*corpus, mon-*

⁶ F.-X. von Wegele, *Geschichte der deutschen Historiographie seit dem Auftreten des Humanismus* (München und Leipzig: Oldenbourg, 1885).

⁷ Charles V. Langlois, *Manuel de bibliographie historique* (Paris: Hachette, 1896, 1904), 2 vols., 231.

⁸ Carbonell, *Histoire et historiens*, 50-57.

umenta, manuals, catalogues) needed to train good historians. “I know of no easier, more attractive, gentler reading than that of a catalogue”.⁹ The words Anatole France put into the mouth of Sylvestre Bonnard, a member of the Institut, could, without humour, have been those of the hundreds of scholars who, a hundred years ago, tirelessly laid the foundations of positive history. Conceptions: writing an objective history, based on ‘facts’, indisputable facts. What could be more objective than a bibliographic or bio-bibliographic catalogue when considering the history of history with such high standards?

Flattened and reduced to the level of a minor branch of an auxiliary science, the history of historiography was, at the same time, partially deserted by historians.

MUTILATION. If, as Arnaldo Momigliano has shown, the modern method in history “lies entirely in the distinction between original and second-hand sources”,¹⁰ historiographical works, which make up the bulk of second-hand sources, were, from the fifteenth century onwards, progressively depreciated and even disqualified. Following Flavio Biondo and his *Decades on the Decadence of the Roman Empire* (1459-1455), medieval historical works were discredited, with the exception of military or political ‘chronicles’, which were treated as primary sources. At the same time, the vast field of ancient historiography was sidelined by historians, not so much because it was revoked in the name of the right method – even though, since Beaufort’s *Dissertation on the uncertainty of the first five centuries of Roman history*,¹¹ a growing number of historians have expressed doubts about the value of the historical “masterpieces” of antiquity, but above all because studies on this period were left for a long time to the “literary” and, as in England even today, to the university departments of *Classics*.¹²

⁹ Anatole France, *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1881).

¹⁰ Arnaldo Momigliano, *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1955), 2 vols.

¹¹ (Utrecht: chez Etienne Neaulme, 1738).

¹² Read the pertinent remarks by Moses I. Finley in his interview with François Hartog, in Moses I. Finley, *Mythe, mémoire, histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), 253-254.

Written from a euphoric, scientific and progressive perspective, history remained largely amnesiac about itself. It was out of disdain, not gallantry, that Clio's earliest biographers, those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, make it twenty centuries younger.

“Seit der Wiederherstellung der litterarischen Kultur in Europa” [Since the restoration of literary culture in Europe], “Die Entwicklung der modern deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft” [The development of modern German historiography], “Seit dem Auftreten des Humanismus” [Since the emergence of humanism], Wachler, Giesebrecht¹³ and Wegele tell us in the very title of their studies, it is to the historiography of the modern epoch that they attach their gaze. Monod, Caveda, Wind, Milidukov, Steenstrup, Jameson, Cantù, Ludwig, Reuss¹⁴ have a similar narrowing of curiosity, their national – and, in the case of the last three, regional – viewpoint, accentuating the narrowness of their perspective.

REJECTION. It's easier to understand when it's understood in this way and treated (badly) in this way, that the history of historiography has had little appeal and has aroused the corrosive scepticism of the few historians who have taken an interest in it “from the outside”. Charles V. Langlois, for example, was one of the *maîtres à penser* – or *maîtres à ne pas penser* – of French historians of the Belle Époque, and the author, in collaboration with Charles Seignobos, of *Introduction aux études historiques* (1896), which has been described as the “bible of positivist history”. After reviewing the few works devoted since the middle of the eighteenth century to what he calls *historia historiae*, Charles V. Langlois concludes:

¹³ Wilhelm Giesebrecht, “Die Entwicklung der modern deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft” [The development of modern German historiography] in *Historische Zeitschrift*, I (1859): 1-17. The title of Giesebrecht's article is highly revealing of the threefold reductive point of view that was to dominate historiography: the progressive point of view (Entwicklung), the modernist point of view (modern) and the scientific point of view (Wissenschaft).

¹⁴ Specific references to these works or articles by French, Italian, Dutch, Russian, Danish, American, German and Alsatian historians during the nineteenth century on the history of historiography can be found in Charles V. Langlois, *Manuel de bibliographie*, 212- 33.

Nothing is more legitimate than to stop at certain points in the quest that historical science is pursuing into the past, in order to measure the ground covered and to investigate the paths that the human mind has traversed before reaching the truth. There is no objection in principle to a 'History of studies relating to a historical discipline in all times and in all countries'. But the human mind has arrived at the truth (as we know it or as we imagine it today) after so many provisional errors and thanks to so many successive corrections that it would be infinite to list in detail all the criss-crossing paths it has taken. Such an operation is possible, at the very least, if it concerns a very specific subject. For example, a history of the work relating to the guilt of Mary Stuart could be written... This would be tantamount to producing a reasoned bibliography of works on Mary Stuart. But if this is a vast discipline, there is no point in trying. A history of studies relating to classical antiquity, or to the national history of a country, can only be a more or less extensive nomenclature of the scholars and historians who have dealt with it, or a philosophical overview of the development of these studies.¹⁵

To add insult to injury, in the century of historicism – when legal, literary, artistic and philosophical studies were valid only if it was the history of law, the history of literature, the history of art or the history of philosophy – one historian, and not the least, was leaving the study of his own discipline to bibliographers and philosophers, to catalogue-pullers and concept-jugglers! With the assault on 'positivist' history, historiography at last had the chance to base itself on history, on its own history.

II. A HISTORIOGRAPHY WITHIN A HISTORY

The approaches of Croce, the Marxist historians and the new historians, though contradictory and sometimes antagonistic, all lead to the same result: the relativisation of historical knowledge and therefore the need to know how it evolves.

CROCE. The thesis of presentism, brilliantly defended by Benedetto Croce on the eve of the First World War, is well known: "All histo-

¹⁵ Langlois, *Manuel de bibliographie*, 234-235.

ry worthy of the name is contemporary history”,¹⁶ and thus made explicit: “Thus if contemporary history springs straight from life, so too does that history which is called non-contemporary, for it is evident that only an interest in the life of the present can move one to investigate past fact. Therefore, this past fact does not answer to a past interest, but to a present interest, in so far as it is unified with an interest of the present life”.¹⁷

We are less familiar with Croce as a theorist and practitioner of a total history of historiography, although his distinction between history and scholarship and the exclusion of the latter, described as pseudo-history, have limited this expansion of the historiographical field. Nevertheless, Croce rehabilitated medieval historiography on the one hand, and minor historians on the other:

History of Greek thought is not complete without taking count of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius, nor of Roman thought without Livy and Tacitus, nor of the thought of the Renaissance without Machiavelli and Guicciardini. It must open them yet wider and clasp to its bosom even the humble medieval historiographers who noted the *Gesta episcoporum* or *Historiola translationum* or *Vitæ sanctorum* or who bear witness to the Christian faith, according to their powers and in their own way, it is true, but not less than the great Augustine according to his powers. It must receive not only the hagiographical writers, but even

¹⁶ Benedetto Croce, *Theory and History of Historiography*. Translated by Douglas Ainslie (London: George Harrap, 1921), 12. See the original Italian in *Teoria e storia della storiografia* (Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Benedetto Croce), a cura di Edoardo Massimilla e Teodoro Tagliaferri con una nota al testo di Fulvio Tessitore (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2007), 12. The work, first published in German (Tübingen, 1915), with the lack of a group of pages written subsequently by Croce, and then in Italian (Bari: Laterza, 1917), was based on articles published in Italy in 1912 and 1915.

¹⁷ Croce, *Theory and History of Historiography*, 12. In Italian: “Senonché, considerando più da vicino anche questa storia già formata, che si dice o si vorrebbe dire «storia non contemporanea» o «passata», se è davvero storia, se cioè ha un senso e non suona come discorso a vuoto, è contemporanea, e non differisce punto dall'altra [...] E se la storia contemporanea balza direttamente dalla vita, anche direttamente dalla vita sorge quella che si suol chiamare non contemporanea, perché è evidente che solo un interesse della vita presente ci può muovere a indagare un fatto passato; il quale, dunque, in quanto si unifica con un interesse della vita presente, non risponde a un interesse passato, ma presente” (Croce, *Teoria e storia della storiografia*, 11-12).

obtuse philologists or sociologists who have amused us during the last decades and bear witness to the creed of positivism not other wise than as Spencer or Haeckel in their systems.¹⁸

This is a text of singular modernity, especially if we force the word 'thought' to take on not its philosophical meaning, but a broader content encompassing all the forms of representation, all the knowledge and all the values that give groups their coherence and cohesion.

MARXISM. For Marxist historians, a historical work is also correlated with the time in which it was written. But whereas Croce saw in historical activity a projection of the 'self', the proponents of dialectical materialism analyse it in terms of the theory of the "class character of historical cognition".¹⁹ "Every historical work, said Pokrovski, is above all the sample of an ideology", i.e. "a reflection of reality in the minds of men, through the prism of their class interests".²⁰ Defined as a branch of the retrospective sociology of knowledge, Marxist history of historiography suffered for a long time from a dogmatic and mechanistic approach that destroyed it. This approach was both elitist and Manichean. Elitist, since it was essentially a question of studying the 'progress', the 'development' of historical science and consequently to study the 'great' works and the 'great' historians. It was Manichean, since every-

¹⁸ Croce, *Theory and History of Historiography*, 178. See the Italian text: "una storia del pensiero greco non è compiuta senza che si tenga conto di Erodoto, di Tucidide e di Polibio, né del pensiero romano senza Livio e Tacito, né di quello del Rinascimento senza Machiavelli e Guicciardini. E dovrà allargarle anche di più e abbracciare nel suo seno perfino gli umili storiografi medievali, che notavano *Gesta episcoporum* o *Historiolae translationum* o *Vitæ sanctorum*, e che attestano il pensiero cristiano certamente secondo le loro forze e a modo loro, ma non meno di come lo attesta, a suo modo, il grande Agostino; e dovrà accogliere, nonché quei candidi agiografi, perfino gli ottusi storici filologi o sociologi, che ci hanno allietato negli ultimi decenni e che attestano il credo positivista non diversamente che Spencer o Haeckel nei loro sistemi" (Croce, *Teoria e storia della storiografia*, 153-154).

¹⁹ Adam Schaff, *Historia i prawda* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1970), English translation, *History and Truth* (Oxford-New York: Pergamon Press, 1976), 111.

²⁰ Michail Nikolaevič Pokrovskij, *Istoricheskaia nauka i borba klassov* (Historical Science and the Class Struggle) (Moscow, 1955), 10-11.

where and in all places, it set “progressive” or “revolutionary” historians against “conservative” or “anti-revolutionary” historians.²¹ Nevertheless, Marxist historians have contributed, and continue to contribute – happily in a more flexible, more open way – to setting historiography in History.

NEW HISTORY. It was up to the ‘New History’ – if by this we mean all the practices and curiosities that have arisen in the decades between the 1930s and the 1970s – to continue the movement and to show that the study of the past is a moving, open, human enterprise.

Moving: the ‘New History’ is first and foremost an ever-new history. How many territories have been discovered, explored, annexed and then, sometimes, abandoned for new historiographical Eldorados! So many methodological innovations! Gone are the days when it was enough to prolong the discourse of glorious ancestors; gone are the days, though close to us, of a unique, specific, universal and permanent historical method. Faced with this whirlwind, where the snobbery of many accompanies the inventive genius of a few, the historian knows that his/her Muse has a hundred faces. He/She also knows, far more surely than his/her predecessors, that this race is not mad; that it has its logic. Because the new history is a changing history for a changing world. When economics invaded politics, history ceased to be political and became economic; when the masses burst into history, social history was born. When the demographic decline of rich Europe was accompanied by the demographic explosion of other parts of the Southern and Asian world, demographic history was born.²² Such correlations are obvious. Gone are the illusions of a perfect historiography, immutable in its essence or progressive in its accomplishment. Historians respond to the questions of their time. But increasingly, they are answering them with questions.

²¹ Schaff, *History and Truth*, 193 ff.

²² Charles-Olivier Carbonell, *Historiographie* (Paris : Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1981), “Que sais-je?” series, no. 1966, chapter “Pour un nouveau monde une nouvelle histoire”, 111 ff.

Open. The ‘New History’ is, in effect, that of the history-problem. At the beginning of his work, the historian shows more determination to question his subject than to follow the old method of collecting and establishing texts. It is not a question of a hypothesis which anticipates the result, but of a complexification of the subject. What better reservoir of problems than historiography? What better problematic approach than one that makes use of all past approaches? This is a singular opportunity for the history of historiography, which suddenly ceases to be a dry, outdated introductory bibliography and becomes a body of interpretations. In the “Nouvelle Clio” collection by Presses Universitaires de France (subtitle: “L’histoire et ses problèmes”), for example, a series with a title that is certainly not usurped, the essential part of each book is the third. Under different titles – “Débats”, “État des questions”, “Problèmes”, “Combats” – it offers chapters which are essentially history of historiography. Jacques Godechot, in his *Les Révolutions*,²³ unfolds the multiple interpretations to which the French Revolution has given rise since Burke and Joseph de Maistre; Bernard Guenée draws up at the end of his *Occident aux XIVème and XVème siècles*²⁴ what he nicely calls “historiographical sketches”. A late emergence, still limited, but one that it is up to us to broaden. No longer a dry bibliographical introduction, the history of historiography is transformed into a long open-ended conclusion; it is no longer the genealogy of a body of knowledge but an invitation to a journey of intelligence. The current birth of an authentic history of historiography is part of a wider movement – some say a metamorphosis²⁵ – affecting the sciences as a whole.

NEW LOGIC. All sciences are human, even the most exact ones.

Subjectively, first of all, in relation to ourselves, we are inevitably the center of perspective. It was probably an inevitable naivete of science at its birth to imagine that it could observe phenomena in themselves, as

²³ (Paris: PUF, 1965).

²⁴ (Paris: PUF, 1970).

²⁵ Ilya Prigogine et Isabelle Stengers, *La Nouvelle Alliance, métamorphose de la science* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), English translation, *Order Out of Chaos: Man’s New Dialogue with Nature* (London: William Heinemann, 1984).

if they happened apart from us. Instinctively at first, physicists and naturalists worked as if they looked down from above on a world their consciousness could penetrate without being influenced by it or changing it. Now they are starting to realize that their most objective observations are thoroughly steeped in conventions chosen at the outset, as well as in forms or habits of thought developed in the course of the historical development of research. [...] In the act of knowledge, object and subject are wedded together and mutually transform each other. Whether we like it or not, from now on, as a human being, in everything we see, we find ourself and look at ourself.²⁶

That's what the palaeontologist and philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote as long as forty years ago. Does this Jesuit seem suspicious of mysticism? Let's read a Nobel laureate in chemistry, Ilya Prigogine:

Nous n'avons plus aujourd'hui le droit d'affirmer que le seul but digne de la science est la découverte du monde depuis ce point de vue extérieur auquel pourrait seul avoir accès un de ces démons qui peuplent les exposés de la science classique. Les plus fondamentales de nos théories se définissent désormais comme l'œuvre d'êtres -inscrits dans le monde qu'ils explorent. En ce sens, la science a abandonné toute illusion d'extra-territorialité théorique [We no longer have the right to assert that the only worthy goal of science is the discovery of the world from that external point of view to which only one of the demons that populate the presentations of classical science could have access. The most fundamental of our theories are now defined as the work of beings embedded in the world they explore. In this sense, science has abandoned any illusion of theoretical extraterritoriality].²⁷

²⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon: A New Edition and Translation of Le Phénomène Humain* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2003), 3-4. The original French book was written in 1938-1940, revised in 1947-48 and published after the author's death, Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1955.

²⁷ Prigogine, *La Nouvelle Alliance*, 23-24. In these pages, the Author defines his project, consisting in "affirmer l'interaction forte entre les questions produites par la culture et l'évolution conceptuelle de la science" [asserting the strong interaction between the issues raised by culture and the conceptual development of science] and "reconnaître l'importance des préoccupations culturelles, de leur fécondité historique" [recognise the importance of cultural concerns and their historical significance]. Ilya Prigogine was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1977.

Or a Nobel Prize in Physics:

S'il est permis de parler de l'image de la nature selon les sciences exactes de notre temps, il faut entendre par là, plutôt que l'image de la nature, *l'image de nos rapports avec la nature*. L'ancienne division de l'univers est un déroulement objectif dans l'espace et le temps d'une part, en une âme qui reflète ce déroulement d'autre part, division correspondant à celle de Descartes en *res cogitans* et *res extensa*, n'est plus propre à servir de point de départ si l'on veut comprendre les sciences modernes de la nature ... La science, cessant d'être le spectateur de la nature, se reconnaît elle-même comme partie des actions réciproques entre la nature et l'homme [If it is permissible to speak of the image of nature according to the exact sciences of our time, we must understand by this, rather than the image of nature, *the image of our relationship with nature*. The old division of the universe into an objective unfolding in space and time on the one hand, and a soul that reflects this unfolding on the other, a division that corresponds to Descartes' division into *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, is no longer suitable as a starting point for understanding the modern sciences of nature [...] Science, ceasing to be the spectator of nature, recognises itself as part of the reciprocal actions between nature and man [...]]²⁸

or a philosopher:

Nous entrevoyons dès maintenant qu'il s'agit de mettre en œuvre une pensée comportant sa propre réflexivité, qui conçoit ses objets, quels qu'ils soient, en s'incluant elle-même. La science classique était incapable de se concevoir comme objet de science, et cela parce que le savant était incapable de se concevoir comme sujet de la science. Désormais, nous ne pouvons concevoir de science où la science ne devienne objet de science [We can see now that it is a question of implementing a way of thinking that includes its own reflexivity, that conceives of its objects, whatever they may be, by including itself. Classical science was incapable of conceiving of itself as the object of science, and this was because the scientist was incapable of conceiving of himself as the subject of science. Henceforth, we cannot conceive of a science in which science does not become the object of science].²⁹

²⁸ Werner Heisenberg, *La Nature dans la physique contemporaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962). Winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1933, W. Heisenberg was also a historian and philosopher of science.

²⁹ Edgar Morin, *La Méthode, I, La Nature de la Nature* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1977), 386.

Let's replace 'science' in these texts with 'historiography', 'scholar' with 'historian' and we will have the most convincing assertions of the need for a history of historiography; at the limit, no doubt, another assertion, that History – defined as the whole of the human past – has no objectifiable existence and that only historiography exists. But let us leave this theoretical debate there, and return to our own field, that of the historian's craft, and, in this case, that of the historian of historiography.

III. HISTORY OF HISTORIOGRAPHIES

Too many historians have hitherto approached their subject from the narrow, too narrow, angle of growth and progress, looking back on their own discipline with the optimistic view of the philosopher of the past, holding in retrospect the optimistic view of the Enlightenment philosopher, of the conquering bourgeois of the Victorian era and the planners of the twentieth century. Following in the footsteps of historians of science, they have welcomed only 'great' historians, that is pioneers and inventors, in their Pantheon.

Measuring the historians of yesteryear by the yardstick of their own definition of the word 'science' or the expression 'scientific knowledge', they have drawn up a list of winners; they have excluded more than they have retained, praised more than they have understood. Reading them, you get the impression that Clio has been climbing the ladder of an exemplary progression for twenty-five centuries. Admittedly, she has been mediocre from time to time, so she repeated her class – it was "the great night of the Middle Ages". People talk about 'decline', 'regression'. "History – moans Charles V. Langlois – then falls back into childhood!" What's the point of dwelling on these sad episodes, which have fortunately been overcome?

PROGRESS. It seems natural to devote more space to Ibn Khaldun than to Adb el Hakam or Wasif Shah, the Arab historians for whom the driving force behind the history of ancient Egypt lay in the filters, poisons, talismans and other spells used at the court of

the Pharaohs. Is Voltaire not more important than Abbé Velly, the best-selling author of the eighteenth century, who portrayed the Frankish kings as superb lords living on love and battles, like the Marshal Saxe? At the dawn of the twenty-first century, shouldn't the battles for a new history, led by Henri Berr and François Simiand, be of greater interest to the historian of historiography than the publishing successes of Franz Funck-Brentano, a prolific author of biographies of the Man in the Iron Mask?

And yet what an impoverishment at the end of such an elitist and anachronistic approach! What a misunderstanding even of the intelligence of the historian to want to retain from one era only the seeds of the next!

Ibn Khaldun's *Prolegomena* are a masterpiece of methodological and philosophical reflection on history. But Ibn Khaldun was a loner; not only did he have no emulators, but he himself, in his *Universal History*, does not follow the rules he laid down in his introduction. Anyone wishing to know Arabic historiography should carefully avoid reading the *Prolegomena*...

As an opponent of the *histoire-bataille* (*Nouvelles Considérations sur l'histoire*, 1744) and of historiographical Eurocentrism (*Essai sur les mœurs*, 1756), Voltaire was so modern in his century that it was not until a century and a half later that his project was taken into account.

It is not that the history of the progress of historiography should escape the historian of historiography; still less that this progress is an illusion! It's been two and a half millennia since man became a historian. Who would deny that Clio has come a long way since then? Since Herodotus and Sima Qian, the discourse has gained in authenticity, depth, scope and variety. From the short time span of the memorialist, anxious to pass on to posterity the great deeds he witnessed, to the very long memory of the prehistorian, who looks ever further back to the emergence of Adam, the historian's gaze has acquired an almost infinite depth of field. And the image has become sharper; the legendary mists have dissipated or, once recovered, have become the stuff of history. To the wanderings of Herodotus, to the four corners of a small world surrounded by

monsters and heroes, to the criteria giving order to time – *Ab urbe condita, ab Adam...* – and conquer, culture after culture, the one world. For a long time under the tutelage of rhetoric, theology and philosophy, Clio struggled to establish her own identity. The historian *à la Salluste, à la Plutarque, à la Bossuet, à la Condorcet*, is being succeeded by, or rather added to a history *à la Ranke*, which is purely historical. Endowed with a method – *la méthode* –, rich in well-recognisable and easily exploitable memory deposits, served by a professional corporation, Clio was securely on the throne at the end of the last century.

Let's stop here with the biography of our Muse. Biography? No. More like a panegyric, that false genre in which the man bending over an open grave excels. But Clio is alive. Alive, that is to say, talkative, coquettish, changeable – versatile, even –, made-up or masked, protean, both servant and mistress. Already in her youth, the sculptor gave her two faces. How many faces would she need today? And why give her only one, which would merge with that of her sister Urania? The elitist and progressive point of view is, we repeat, well-founded. But it is overly simplistic. Worse still, it sometimes goes against the grain.

Consider a masterpiece like Giambattista Vico's *Scienza nuova* (1725-1744). What have historians of historiography found there so far? A luxuriantly modern work. As Alain Pons points out: "Too much admired, Vico is invested with the role of universal precursor. So, we have a pre-Romantic, Hegelian, Marxist, existentialist, structuralist Vico *avant la lettre*... A Vico who was the father of the great philosophies of history of the nineteenth century, the founder of the human sciences, and the herald of modern linguistics and anthropology".³⁰ But, you may say, Alain Pons is exaggerating. Let's read what Fausto Nicolini, responsible of an authoritative edition of the complete works of the Neapolitan philosopher, had to say.³¹ Vico is presented as the father of the theory of the 'superindividu-

³⁰ Alain Pons, "Présentation", in Giambattista Vico, *Vie de Giambattista Vico écrite par lui-même: lettres, la méthode des études de notre temps*, traduction et présentation par Alain Pons (Paris: B. Grasset, 1981), 8.

³¹ *Opere di G. B. Vico*, ed. by Fausto Nicolini (Bari: Laterza, 1911-1941), 8 vols.

ality' of history (philosophy of the immanent force), of historical hermeneutics, of comparative mythology, of the explanation of myths by the polygenesis of matter and the monogenesis of forms. Alain Pons is right:

Tirailé en tous sens, l'oeuvre perd son unité; les doctes se disputent les dépouilles qu'ils revendiquent pour leur confrérie [...] et le pauvre mort attend patiemment que l'on s'occupe de lui [Torn in all directions, the work loses its unity; the learned fight over the spoils they claim for their brotherhood [...] and the poor dead man waits patiently for someone to take care of him].³²

This is not the place to say what the meaning of *Scienza nuova* was in his time – the recent colloquia led by G. Tagliacozzo seem, moreover, to provide an answer to this question.³³

From a historical point of view, Vico is as much a traditionalist as a prophet. The 'new science' is steeped in providentialism; the cyclical laws it discovers are proof of the existence of God – a God who watches over history and who precedes by decades the God who watches over the Universe. We know that Vico was a fierce opponent of Descartes. We could not deny Vico's irrelevance. Thus, by ignoring the archaic elements of a system in the name of a progressive vision of the history of knowledge, this system has been distorted; by retaining only Vico's methodological discoveries, his scientific theology of history has been secularised. Here the impoverishment of meaning turns into a contradiction.

Is it not shocking to see some historians, following in the footsteps of the philosophers, abandoning their historical duty, which is to describe the strangeness of the past as it was? If all we retain of yesterday are the seeds of tomorrow, who will tell us about the

³² Alain Pons, "Présentation", 8.

³³ See the four collective works published on the initiative of Giorgio Tagliacozzo: *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); *Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity*, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); *Vico and Contemporary Thought*, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1979); *Vico: Past and Present*, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1981).

irreducible and vanished exoticism that makes yesterday different from today? This is just one example. We could list thousands:

- to evoke the Greek historians who succumbed to the triple temptation of rhetoric, politics and ethics at the dawn of the fourth century, and caused the work of Thucydides to fall into disuse;
- to affirm, following in the footsteps of Georges Dumézil, that Roman historiography did not emerge from the epic, but that Naevius and Ennius drew their inspiration from a highly developed priestly historiography;
- to demonstrate that Clio's baptism, far from closing a chapter – the last – in the history of historiography in Rome, contributes to the further historicisation of Latin culture, and that the posterity of Eusebius and Augustine is richer than that of Titus Livius...

INFLATION. If historiography is all the statements about the past held to be true by their contemporaries, then her field is immense and more diverse than you might think. Immense: a few precise details tell us the considerable volume of the memory deposits that each culture has created.

- In 1781, Chinese officials drew up a catalogue of the ideal imperial library, listing 3,642 historical works in 36,300 volumes and appending 6,754 others deemed to be of lesser interest.
- In his *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-ẓamān*, or *Deaths of Eminent Men and the Sons of the Epoch*, eight volumes written in the middle of the thirteenth century, the Islamic historian and biographer Ibn Khallikan (1211-1282) devoted more than a hundred notes to Arab historians.
- In the Notice to the Readers of his latest work, Bernard Guenée writes: “Au moyen âge il y eut tant d'historiens, qui ont eu tant de lecteurs et d'auditeurs; le champ de la littérature et de la culture historique, dans tout l'Occident, pendant dix siècles est si vaste que je vois trop combien de mes propres lecteurs, voyant mon titre et espérant plus seront déçus [In the Middle Ages there were so many historians, who had so many readers and listeners; the field of literature and historical culture, throughout the

West, for ten centuries is so vast that I can only imagine how many of my own readers, seeing my title and hoping for more, will be disappointed]”.³⁴

- Father Louis Jacob de Saint Charles (1608-1670), in his *Bibliographia Gallica universalis, hoc est Catalogus librorum per universum regnum Galliae annis 1643, 1644 et 1645 excusorum*, reported that 171 history books were printed in Paris in 1643, 146 in 1644 and 85 in 1645. On average, this represented one-sixth of the output of French literature.
- A century later, in 1769-1771 to be exact, historical works accounted for 20% of titles published in Germany.

We can safely go along with Pierre Chaunu when he says that, since the invention of printing, 10% of what has been printed belongs to historiography.

IMPERFECT STORIES. But some would say that there have been so many repetitions, so many re-editions, in this immense production! So many false claims too! How much of a really historical character are these thousands of works listed by the Peking librarians in 1781? Is it necessary to study all the medieval ‘universal chronicles’ when we know how closely they are related? Isn’t reading one just like reading them all? What can all those little reactionary French historians of the 1860s who founded the *Revue des questions historiques* (1866-) do for us when we have, in the 1870s, Taine and his *Origines de la France contemporaine* (Paris: Hachette, 1875-1893) on the one hand and the *Revue historique* (1876-) on the other?

To ask such questions is to confess to not having understood what a historian’s approach to historiography can offer the historian and the person with extensive general knowledge (*honnête homme*) – the person who questions the condition of the ‘scholar’ because he is questioning the human condition. But let us answer them.

It is true that most Chinese historical books are composite. Alongside the devoutly transcribed *Annals*, biographies of emperors and

³⁴ Bernard Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l’Occident médiéval* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1980), 7.

chronological tables, the best-known of them – the *Histoires officielles*, the *Shi-chi*³⁵ – include notices on augural art, monographs on rivers and roads, codes of laws and a whole bunch of other useful stuff for the good Mandarin. But to disdain them because only a small part of them is properly historical is to make a serious mistake. Should we dismiss dictionaries and encyclopaedias from the field of historiography, which give us, through their definitions and articles, the degree of truth that an era lends to the multiple elements of a fragmented past whose memory it wishes to preserve? On the other hand, the composite work refers to the condition of the historian. In classical China, the writers of *official* histories were not professional historians. They were civil servants; functionaries of time; administrators of the flowing of time, capable, if the emperor so required, of being both a surveyor of the past (chronologist) and a recorder of the present (historiographer, in the French sense of the seventeenth century), the one who preserves the vanished past (archivist), the one who questions the future (augur, astrologer), the one who makes the future favourable (calendar maker) and, by extension, the one who helps to manage people (administrators). What the *Shi-chi* reveal to us is the link between knowledge of time – in all its directions – and action in time. Of course, since Sima Tan and his son Sima Qian, the fathers of history, who were respectively the great Astrologer and Reformer of the Calendar, the status of the historian in China has evolved. A specialisation took place; a rational laicisation of knowledge emerged from the magico-propitiatory practice. But where? But how? We do not know, and we will not know as long as we prefer our lazy certainties about an unchanging China to an exhaustive study of Chinese historiography. Finally, we forget that alongside these *official histo-*

³⁵ These are the historical memoirs by Sima Qian (145-86 B. C.) first translated in French by Édouard Chavannes as *Mémoires historiques* (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1895-1905), 5 vols. After a limited translation by Herbert J. Allen, “Ssūma Ch’ien’s Historical Records”, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1894, 269-294; 1895, 93-110, 601-611, the first, extensive, but still partial English translation was by Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China, translated from the Shi chi of Ssu-ma Ch’ien* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958, 1961, 1962, 1969).

ries, there were thousands of historical works written without any commission from the imperial court. An immense and disparate production that is still awaiting its explorers.

The universal medieval chronicles are certainly better known, but just as despised. From Isidore of Seville to Antonino da Firenze, there is not one of these so-called 'dark' centuries – and they certainly are, but more because of our refusal to 'illuminate' them than because of their lack of clarity – that did not see the emergence of several of these pointillist frescoes which, following on from those of Orosius and Eusebius, sketched the route taken by humankind since Creation or since the birth of Christ. Dry, full of fables, passively compiled from previous ones, they are of no interest. Those who judge in this way are not wrong. But they are not on the same ground as we are. It goes without saying that medieval chronographies are fanciful, even fabulous, repetitive, poor and dangerous to use. Who would think of using them for what they were? But that doesn't mean that they are no longer of interest to historians. It is the history of these universal chronologies, their evolution, that interests us, not their content. Upstream erosion, flooding downstream: like a river, the series of universal chronologies has got, over the centuries, rid itself of the pagan mythological chronology, while each editor has added a little flesh to the impoverished skeleton he has passed on, in the form of a chronicle of the present day. Christianisation of culture? Was there a break with ancient culture before the great reunions of the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries? A change in curiosities and horizons: which events – mythical or real – are removed? Which are incorporated? To what extent? So many questions awaiting their answers.

As for the crowd of minor historians of nineteenth-century France, in response to the third objection raised above, they make a significant contribution to our knowledge of the 'great' historians on the one hand, and to our knowledge of their time on the other.

The thesis that Hippolyte Taine would support in his *Origines de la France contemporaine* were already to be found in the articles, opuscles and books published in the 1860s by the contributors to the *Revue des questions historiques*, who were convinced legitimists

and ultra-montains. What did Taine bring? The brilliance of his style, the spirit of synthesis and a reputation gained in fields other than historiography.

The recent colloquium in Göttingen, which this journal will report on,³⁶ revealed the importance of the authentic German university historians of the eighteenth century who were the fathers of scholarly historiography in the following century.

The second-rank historians also bring us knowledge of a 'counter-history' which reduces to more modest proportions the influence of the 'big' history. Renan's *Vie de Jésus* (1863), famous and widely disseminated as it was, did not reach a tenth of the total print-run of the countless lives of Christ, edifying as they were, which came out of Catholic and Protestant presses in the last third of the nineteenth century.

Do you want to know what image of Catharism the 'Occitan patriots' of the last century had? It is not Guizot or Michelet you need to read, but such prolific historical writers as Jean-Bernard Mary-Lafon (1810-1884) and Napoléon Peyrat (1809-1881).

As far as recent history is concerned, do we want to know how French historians reacted to the German invasion of 1870-1871? Above all, let's not read what Gabriel Monod, the founder of the *Revue historique*, wrote about it, because his account, a model of balance and objectivity, remains an exception. On the other hand, let's read what some obscure, fickle and unjustly forgotten disciples of Clio, Albert Caise (1840-1908), Adolphe de Cardevaque (1828-1899), Abbé Théophile Cochard (1836-1914), etc., wrote about it with passion, giving free rein to their nationalism and imagination. They are not giving us a lesson in sound method. But that's not what we ask of them. What we find in them is an opinion, a collective feeling; an opinion to which they bear witness while helping to shape it. Here we are at the root of the myths that are

³⁶ Carbonell is referring here to the Colloquium "German Historical Studies in the Age of Enlightenment", held at the Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte in Göttingen, Federal Republic of Germany, August 26-28, 1981, on which a note by Georg G. Iggers was published in the first issue of *Storia della Storiografia*, pp. 132-136.

being reborn – the evil Prussian, the barbaric German – of a history born of exacerbation, of feelings of revenge that would lead to another war half a century later.

IV. HISTORIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

For – and this is the essential point – the history of historiography ceases to be a narrow and closed sub-discipline, an inhospitable territory where rare historians set off, expectant or ferocious, in search of their ancestors; it also ceases to be the self-satisfied discourse that a corporation holds about itself in the light of supposedly continuous progress in knowledge. It undergoes a twofold transformation: while its content expands and deepens, its nature changes and, in a singular metamorphosis, the little auxiliary science becomes history.

The historian of historiography no longer walks the ridge lines, his eyes raised towards the “*Histoire parfaite* [perfect history]” which La Popelinière dreamed of. He embraces the crowd of ‘imperfect histories’ whose abundance and diversity, far from putting him off, delight him. Doesn’t he now have the tools to match his new ambitions: semantic analysis, whole numbers, global weighing, statistical methods, computer processing...? A century ago, Dilthey said:

The application of statistical methods to the treasures of libraries must make it possible to determine in a quantitative way the extent and strength of the directions, the occupation with individual branches, etc., the local distribution of the same. Graphical representation, which Alexander von Humboldt so happily used for comparative climatology, must increasingly unite the chronological basis, the intensity, extent and distribution of intellectual directions, occupations, etc. into a descriptive whole.³⁷

³⁷ “Die Anwendung statistischer Methoden auf die Schätze der Bibliotheken muß ermöglichen, den Umfang und die Stärke der Richtungen, der Beschäftigung mit einzelnen Zweigen usw., die örtliche Verteilung derselben auf eine quantitative Weise festzustellen. Graphische Darstellung, deren sich Alexander von Humboldt so glücklich für vergleichende Klimatologie bediente, muß die chronologische Grundlage, die Intensität, Ausdehnung und Verteilung der geistigen Richtungen, Beschäftigungen usw. immer mehr zu einem anschaulichen

From then on, the history of historiography developed in depth. All the registers of historiographical production are taken into account: scholarly works, didactic works, literary works in which the concern for writing prevails over the concern for truth or edification. From the *in folio* to the pamphlet, from the prize-winning book to the textbook, from the academic discourse to the journal article, from the bibliographical review to the synthesis with philosophical pretensions, everything is game. As a result, all Clio's disciples are taken into account: amateurs, occasional readers, professionals. Socio-functional analysis leads to a geography of history. The space is torn between centres of impulse or active regions on the one hand, and lazy, amnesiac zones on the other. It is criss-crossed by the correspondence of historians who form networks, nebulae of exchanged knowledge that defines cultural areas. Historians have explored it in different ways and for different purposes. There are those who, like Herodotus, travel and practise an ethno-history of disorientation; those who, like Chateaubriand, make a pilgrimage to the sources; those who, like young French academics at the end of the nineteenth century, go off to study in seminars across the Rhine to surpass their masters.

The social study leads on to the study of historical institutions. Learned societies, provincial or national academies, alumni of particular schools or colleges. These are all circles of sociability whose composition, organisation and style define a certain type of historian and hence historiography. Broadened in this way, the history of historiography is becoming more complex and deeper. It is deepened by the use of new techniques of investigation and by its relationship with everything that is not it. The psychoanalytical approach of a historian – Roland Barthes's *Michelet* comes to mind³⁸ – and the multiple approaches of the 'New Criticism' – one

Ganzen vereinigen", in Wilhelm Dilthey, "Über das Studium der Geschichte der Wissenschaften vom Menschen, der Gesellschaft und dem Staat", in *Die geistige Welt, Gesammelte Schriften, V. Band* (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner), 41. The English translation is ours.

³⁸ Roland Barthes, *Michelet par lui-même* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), English translation by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987).

thinks of Hans Robert Jauss's "aesthetics of reception",³⁹ for example, which focuses on the history of the changing readings that await a text beyond the time it was written. The fortunes and misfortunes of historical works are an immense field of research for historians of historiography. Arnaldo Momigliano has demonstrated its interest in the *Histories* of Herodotus.⁴⁰ Recently Pierre Vidal-Naquet, presenting a new French translation of *La guerre des Juifs*, observed: "L'histoire du 'travail' de l'oeuvre de Flavius Josèphe, pour emprunter une expression de Claude Lefort, n'a pas été faite, et c'est grand dommage [The history of the 'making' of Flavius Josephus' work, to borrow an expression from Claude Lefort, has not been done, and that is a great pity]".⁴¹

The history of historiography is no longer confined to the historian-historical work pair, but looks at other relationships. That of the historian and the Prince, for example; that of history and myth, too. "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past".⁴² It was in this theorem that George Orwell encapsulated the political philosophy of Big Brother, the all-powerful master of Oceania in 1984. In doing so, he projected into the near future the most terrifying elements of a present that he was, at the end of his life, a disenchanting witness to. Was this just a prophecy? Historians know, and must say, that one of Clío's essential functions is to create the Prince's truth, the truth that underpins, justifies and assures his power. The *griots* [storyteller, po-

³⁹ Hans Robert Jauss, *Die Theorie der Rezeption. Rückschau auf ihre unerkannte Vorgeschichte*. Abschiedsvorlesung von Hans Robert Jauss am 11. Februar 1987 anlässlich seiner Emeritierung mit einer Ansprache des Rektors der Universität Konstanz Horst Sund (= Konstanzer Universitätsreden Nr. 166) (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1998). See also in English *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982)

⁴⁰ Arnaldo Momigliano, "The place of Herodotus in the history of historiography", originally published in *History*, 43 (1958): 1-13, republished in *Studies in Historiography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 127-142.

⁴¹ Flavius Josephus, *La Guerre des Juifs*, traduit du grec par Pierre Savinel, Pré-cédé par: "Du bon usage de la trahison" par Pierre Vidal-Naquet (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977).

⁴² George Orwell, *Nineteen eighty-four. A Novel* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949).

et and repository of oral tradition] of Black Africa, too, have been able, by the skilful merging of lists and timely amnesia, to recompile a past in line with the demands of the present. Of course, the 'scientific' and 'positivist' historians⁴³ thought they had escaped from the condition of slaves, servants or functionary. Were they that naive or hypocritical? Perhaps their indifference to the history of historiography stems from their fear of seeing in the mirror of time the image of their own condition as committed patriots giving birth to the nation-state.

Therefore, history as discourse and myth as representation, far from being mutually exclusive, merge at the permeable frontiers where certainty feeds on truths and beliefs. Myth and history, at the cradle of Clio, was an affirmed filiation, as Georges Dumézil superbly established at the origins of Rome. Myth or history, it was, much later, an antinomy to which the expression 'myth or reality' still bears witness. Myth and history have become an inseparable couple. We know that the historian cannot escape this collective imagination, populated by stories and images that give cohesion to the group and coherence to the world. We also know that the work of history prolongs, rejuvenates and at best inflects the course of this silent recitation, full of true fables.

To approach the history of historiography as a historian is therefore no longer to narrow it down and confine it to narrow-minded considerations. It means broadening and deepening it to the dimensions of reality. Leaving it to the philosophers and theoreticians – who have been doing this very well for a long time – to say what Clio should have been in the past, we will say what she was. Or rather, what changing masks she has constantly covered her face with. Our ambition is based on this humble quest.

⁴³ The inverted commas indicate an ambiguity of meaning. I have denounced the one concerning the word "positivist" in relation to nineteenth-century critical historiography in "L'histoire dite 'positiviste' en France", *Romantisme*, 21-22 (1978): 173-185.

The (Un)faithful Mirror of the ICHTH: the Scholarly Journal *Storia della storiografia* and the Developments in the History and Theory of Historical Writing¹

Edoardo Tortarolo

ABSTRACT · This article examines the history and evolution of the scientific journal *Storia della Storiografia*, created in 1982 as an instrument of the Commission for the History of Historiography. The journal was established in a context marked by the Cold War, aiming to build an international network of scholars across political boundaries. Promoted by an international panel of scholars and initially edited by Bianca Valota of the University of Milan, the multilingual journal (English, French, German, and Italian) sought to overcome the political barriers of the time. The journal has always maintained a strong connection with the Commission, serving as its official ‘organ’ and supporting the scientific legitimacy of the history of historiography. In the 1990s, under the presidency of Georg Iggers, the journal underwent radical changes, reflecting new theoretical and methodological trends, such as the globalization of historical vision, the postmodern approach, and an impartial assessment of Marxist historiographies. *Storia* also responded to the challenges of digitalization and the ‘gamification’ of history, striving to maintain an open and diverse dialogue among scholars from different traditions.

KEYWORDS · Historiography, Cultural Encounters, Historical Methodology, Academic Journals, Intellectual Dialogue.

AN important instrument of the Commission for the History of Historiography, founded in 1981, was the creation of the multilingual journal *Storia della storiografia*. Its creation in 1982 followed

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closely the creation of the Commission itself, which was very much the product of Charles-Olivier Carbonell's efforts. The intellectual climate of the Cold War played an important role in the process that led to the creation of the journal. In a pre-Internet world, the creation of a scholarly journal was the only means of building a network of scholars across political boundaries. The recent biography of Karl Dietrich Erdmann by Arvid von Bassi also underlines the central role played by the desire to include the Marxist-Leninist approach to history in the international discussion led by the International Committee of Historical Sciences/Comité International des Sciences historiques (ICHS/CISH). This was also the primary concern of the Commission.² The peculiar nature of the journal stems from its function: it had to be the expression of the Commission and to lend academic prestige to its agenda.

The reason for the Italian title is self-explanatory. The driving force behind its creation was Professor Bianca Valota of the University of Milan. She taught the history of Eastern Europe with a focus on modern Romania, where she was born in Bucharest just after the end of the Second World War. She is the granddaughter of Nicolae Iorga, the historian and politician assassinated by the pro-Nazi Iron Guard in 1940. Bianca Valota's academic work and political commitment embodied the desire to overcome the political boundaries that isolated cultures that had been communicating for centuries. Quite apart from Bianca Valota's personal energy, Italy was indeed the right place to host the journal. Italy shared its eastern border with Yugoslavia. The Italian Communist Party, generously subsidized by the Soviet Union, was the largest in Western Europe, polling over 34% in the 1976 general election. In Italy at the time, dialogue between the two blocs was an obvious step to pursue an agenda of common survival. Historiographies had to play a crucial role in the collective effort of mutual knowledge and understanding.

Consequently, four languages were used in *Storia*: English, French, German and Italian. Multilingualism was a political state-

² Arvid von Bassi, *Karl Dietrich Erdmann. Historiker, Wissenschaftsorganisator, Politiker* (Oldenburg: de Gruyter, 2022).

ment. The first issue contained a short introduction in all four languages, explaining the rationale and objectives of both the Commission and the magazine. Ironically, each translation emphasized a different aspect. The translations were by no means perfectly equivalent. The English introduction promised to focus on “an ever-widening range of issues and interests” in the future. The German text hinted at the aim of allowing more countries to express their visions of the past (“weitere Länder zu Wort zu kommen”).³ Ironically, a deeply Catholic publishing house, Jaca Book in Milan, which specialises in inter-confessional dialogue, took on the task of printing the magazine and did a very good job. Public subsidies from the Christian Democratic and Socialist government, a centre-left government, facilitated the launch of the journal, which also received funding from the Italian National Research Council (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, CNR), at least in the first years of its existence. This funding was gradually withdrawn in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Georg Iggers did not publish anything in the first issue of *Storia della Storiografia*. He was one of the editors and the driving force behind the project. His participation was not only in line with his role at the 15th ICHS/CISH Congress in Bucharest in 1980, but above all with his research agenda as a mediator between different political spheres and methodological approaches. His firm belief that dialogue was the key to human life also applied to intellectual matters. Consequently, dialogue and diversity were the hallmarks of the editorial board, which included scholars from Eastern Europe such as Militsa Vasilevna Nechkina, Ernst Engelberg and Jerzy Topolski, as well as Geoffrey Barraclough, Pierre Chaunu, Furio Diaz, Karl-Dietrich Erdmann, Jean Glénisson, Bernard Guenée, Arnaldo Momigliano, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Boyd Shafer, Leo Valiani and Rudolf Vierhaus. The Editorial Committee included Georg Iggers and a carefully balanced team of distinguished and experienced scholars: Lucian Boia, Romania; Andrzej Grabski, Poland; Hans Schleier, East German Academy of Sciences; Charles-Olivier Carbonell, West German Karl-Georg Faber. The editor-in-chief was

³ *Storia della Storiografia*, 1, 1982.

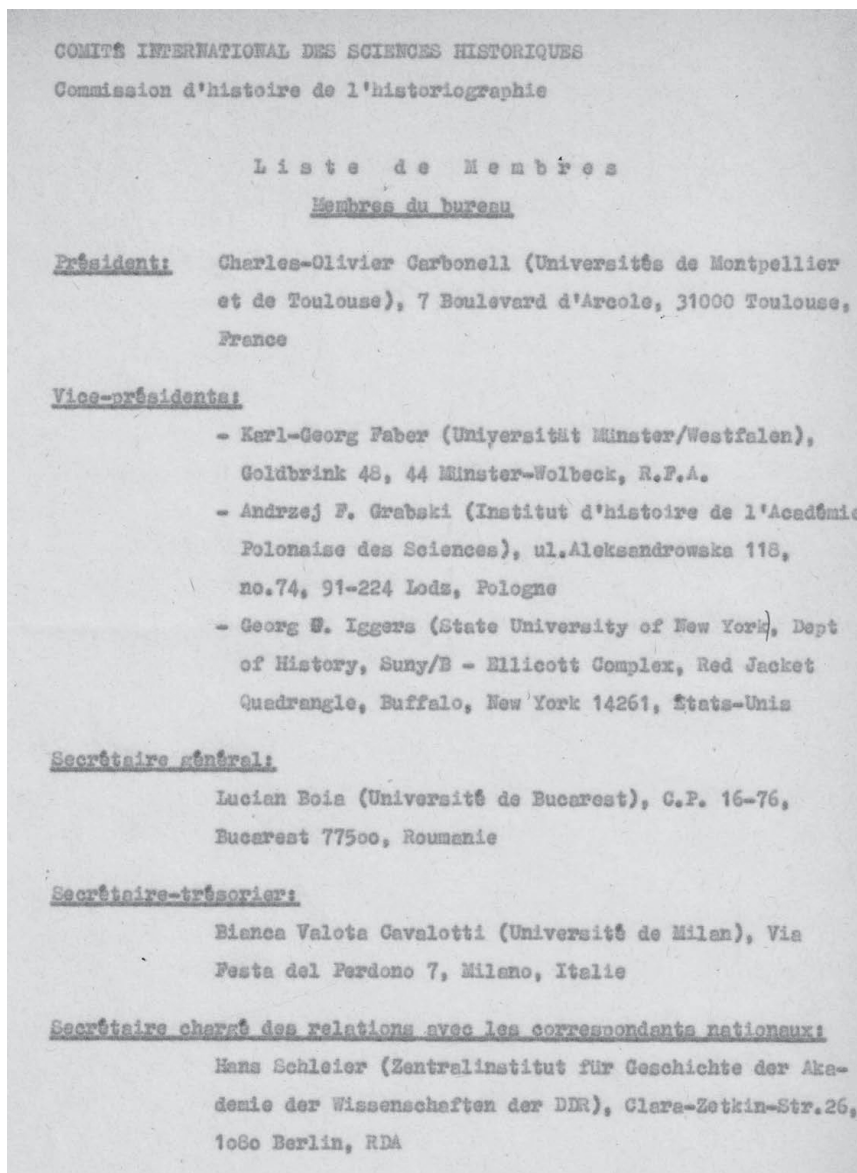


FIG. 1. Original CISH typescript with list of members of the Commission for the History of Historiography.

Bianca Valota. For ten years *Storia* was closely linked to the Commission. *Storia* was, in a sense, the 'house organ' of the Commission, or, as the Italian version of the preface put it, its "mouthpiece"

(‘organo’). The emerging discipline of the history of historiography was the focus of the essays published in the first issues, which argued for its legitimacy. Carbonell’s manifesto, “Pour une Histoire de l’historiographie”, asserted the scientific autonomy and dignity of the history of historiography against those who considered it a bibliographic mania, irrelevant and possibly harmful to the proper study of the past. Against the late-nineteenth-century positivism and a-historical structuralism that were gaining ground, Carbonell sought to expose a simplistic understanding of the ‘document’. The history of historiography, he wrote in this manifesto, was “a specific, autonomous, enriching and passionate discipline”. It was an essential part of the process by which twentieth-century culture abandoned the claim to absolute truth in historical knowledge and accepted “the relativisation of historical knowledge and, therefore, the need to know its evolution”. Carbonell identified Benedetto Croce, Marxism and the ‘Nouvelle Histoire’ as the protagonists of this birth of a true history of historiography: “The history of historiography turns into a long, open-ended conclusion: it is no longer the genealogy of a form of knowledge, but rather a ‘voyage de l’intelligence’, a journey of insightful creativity”. According to Carbonell, during the twentieth century, historical culture emancipated itself from a one-dimensional concept of truth. In the first issue of *Storia*, prominent scholars such as Fulvio Tessitore, Lucian Boia and Zhang Zhi-Lian contributed essays arguing for the existence and intellectual autonomy of the history of historiography as an independent and autonomous discipline.

Georg Iggers contributed an essay on the Göttingen School of History to the second issue, beginning a collaboration that was to last more than 30 years. The bibliography of Georg Iggers’ writings published in 2018 shows that his involvement in *Storia* was constant and remarkable, with a total of 13 contributions from 1982 to 2016.⁴

In particular, it should be emphasized that his role changed significantly during this period. I would argue that he helped to emancipate the journal from the Commission, while at the same time emancipating the Commission from its origins and recent past. In

⁴ *Storia della Storiografia*, 73 (2018): 45-67.

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FIGG. 2-3. Original tables of Contents of nos. 24 (1993) and 25 (1994) of *Storia della Storiografia*, devoted to the twentieth anniversary of *Metahistory* publication.

achieving this dual objective, Georg Iggers helped the Commission and the journal to better understand the transformation after 1989. At the 1990 ICHS/CISH Congress in Madrid, the Cold War agenda was no longer the top priority. The Commission and the journal were no longer meant to be the middle ground where representatives of two opposing views could discuss and confront each other in a neutral field. Georg Iggers helped to reframe the theoretical discussion, while keeping an eye on the actual output of historians after 1989-1990. Both the Commission and the journal benefited from Georg Iggers' quietly adventurous spirit in the 1990s and 2000s. He was President of the Commission from 1995 to 2000, succeeding Wolfgang J. Mommsen. Since 1991 he was also one of the three editors of *Storia della storiografia*, together with Guido Abbattista (University of Trieste) and myself. Both the Commission and the journal were affected by the radical changes in the political and

intellectual context. The Commission for the History of Historiography was officially renamed the International Commission for the History and Theory of Historiography at the Oslo Congress in 2000, following a lively discussion that had begun at the Montreal Congress in 1995. This was a consequence of a general reorientation from Carbonell's manifesto of 1982 to an interest in the theory of historiography, which was increasingly expressed in the Commission during the 1990s. Georg Iggers was fully aware of the growing attraction of theoretical questions and the expanding field of historical research. New questions were coming to the fore, and new areas of inquiry were gaining prominence.

At the same time, the journal seemed to have lost its focus: its association with the Commission for the History of Historiography was becoming more of a liability than a source of inspiration and effectiveness, especially in the eyes of Wolfgang Justinus Mommsen, the president of the commission from 1990 to 1995. In 1991, he made a clean break with the past and decided that the journal should go to sea and compete in the open market of ideas and subscriptions. Georg Iggers played a major role in both. He developed a keen interest in aspects of the historical debate that were crucial to him in the post-Cold War era. As a cosmopolitan historian, he was particularly familiar with the English and German historical literature.

Three aspects of Georg Iggers' scholarly interests since the 1990s stand out as particularly fundamental. 1. The globalization of the historical vision, including non-European approaches and methods; 2. the postmodern approach to history; 3. a fair, unbiased assessment of Marxist historiographies, which have been badly damaged and discredited by the collapse of the Soviet geopolitical order. Georg tackled these issues in an intellectually open and straightforward manner.

The discussion on postmodern historiography was particularly lively in the 1990s. *Storia* made a sustained effort to meet this challenge. Thanks to several collaborators, *Storia* published two consecutive issues assessing the impact of Hayden White's *Metahistory* 20 years after its publication, in 1993-1994 (nos. 24-25). Hayden

White's book challenged the traditional form of objectivity. As He Wu-yi has written, Georg admitted that "professional historiography was not entirely objective or scientific, but he did not believe that all serious historical inquiry could be reduced to ideology" or rhetorical nonsense.⁵ As well as exploring the theoretical dimensions of the postmodern paradigm, *Storia* has pursued an empirical interest in considering the different ways in which historical theories have actually been applied to the practice of historiography.

The table of contents shows the range of topics covered in the two issues devoted to *Metahistory*.

The two 1993-1994 issues are representative of the approach adopted by *Storia*. On the one hand, the collaboration with the members of the Commission and the Bureau was constant and fruitful. On the other hand, *Storia* was developing, or at least trying to develop, its own position in a field where the journal *History and Theory* was gaining a dominant position in the discussion of theoretical issues. What was most important in the 1993 issue on *Metahistory* was its contribution to the historicisation and contextualisation of historical visions and historical cultures. *Storia* has followed the shift towards a more self-reflexive approach to all questions of historical research. However, there was a strong consensus among the three editors that the empirical approach, which had been the main feature of the origins of *Storia* should be maintained, albeit under different circumstances. The two 1993-1994 issues are a case in point.

Over the past 40 years, both the Commission and the journal have undergone quite dramatic changes. With the benefit of hindsight, I would argue that both have successfully fulfilled their mission. Both have dealt with a clean break in their existence: the end of the Cold War in historiography for the Commission, and the emancipation of the journal from the Commission. Now they face a fundamental challenge, both theoretical and practical. Please allow me to spend the last minute outlining this challenge. The popularization of the Internet has affected the way we research,

⁵ He Wu-yi, "A Recollection of Georg G. Iggers", *Storia della storiografia*, 73 (2018): 39.

narrate and make sense of the past. It has dematerialized sources and means of communication to an unprecedented degree; it has widened the circle of researchers committed to professional historiography; it has also increased the number of insular and dogmatic interpretations; the gamification of history is a growing trend worldwide. The creation of the infosphere will not leave the Commission or *Storia* unaffected. What does the future hold for historians?

The two protagonists of the Commission's and *Storia*'s history, Georg Iggers and Hayden White, recognized the challenges of their time, albeit in different ways. In the present circumstances, the appropriate way to assess their role in the history of our discipline is to emphasize how unfailingly open they were in identifying and commenting on what was new, original, innovative, abrasive, thought-provoking, disturbing and offensive.