Constructing European Historical Narratives in the Early Modern World

Edited by Hilary J. Bernstein, Fabien Montcher, and Megan Armstrong

CONSTRUCTING EUROPEAN HISTORICAL NARRATIVES IN THE EARLY MODERN WORLD

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Constructing European Historical Narratives in the Early Modern World

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Detail from Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen (c. 1504–1559), *Kriegszug Kaiser Karls V. gegen Tunis (1535): Die Eroberung und Plünderung von Tunis* (Emperor Charles V's Campaign Against Tunis (1535): The Conquest and Looting of Tunis), 1548/1550 (charcoal and watercolor on paper; mounted on canvas). Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. © KHM-Museumsverband.

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Introduction*

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The early modern period experienced an unprecedented increase in historical narratives. Historical authorship and readership went through a process of expansion, as historical narratives were often constructed through collaboration. This growth and diversification in historical experience reached its peak in a European context marked by civil and religious wars. From the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century, these conflicts generated a wide array of intellectual, spiritual, and social anxieties. Historical narratives were in high demand, especially since history was expected to entertain as well as to inform in the face of these anxieties. Such concerns were not exclusive to Europe, but they were intimately connected to the first real period of globalization, initiated during the fifteenth century in Southern Europe, which challenged traditional ways of thinking about both local and world histories. This movement conditioned the access to and promotion of scattered source materials, which were necessary to craft new historical narratives. Access to these sources contributed to the reconfiguration of the communication networks through which historical information was collectively constructed. Global historiographical interactions fostered by long-distance travel and imperial conquests pushed European historical writers to learn from and collaborate with representatives of other traditions of historical thinking. These interactions became crucial when composing "large-scale" histories. Simultaneously, European history became the subject of historical narratives produced outside of Western Europe.[1] In a nutshell, historical narratives helped make sense of what contemporaries perceived as a much expanded and fragmented universe within which traditional linguistic, religious, communitarian,

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1. On the influence of Indo-Persian historiography on Spanish and Portuguese historiographers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and on the treatment of European history by Safavid and Mughal historians, among others, see Subrahmanyam, "On Early Modern Historiography," esp. 427.

and institutional traditions, among others, needed to be reaffirmed and/or transformed.

Historical writings offered a reprieve from contemporary anxieties while generating new ones related to the past.[2] While historical writings reinforced mechanisms of distinction out of a sense of urgency, a polyphony of voices emerged through them. More than focusing on the sole and exclusive patrimony of learned men, this volume therefore reflects on the interpersonal, spatial, multi-situated, material, and eco-linguistic dimensions of the act of writing history from local, regional, and transregional perspectives. These perspectives often overlapped with one another, feeding the idea, or perhaps the illusion, of a shared European historical culture. The focus of the volume is thus on the ways that resorting to history helped to explain a broad array of concerns that people confronted throughout the early modern European cultural sphere and the interrelated ways that individuals and groups of writers attempted to make sense of their experiences through establishing meaningful continuities or discontinuities between past, present, and future.[3]

This volume is articulated around three major contributions to the history of history across the early modern world. First is the acknowledgment that history writing was an important way that people from numerous social settings and backgrounds sought to make sense of their world and to reflect on questions of identity, privilege, community, and rights. Although the chapters in this volume are certainly concerned with "official" historians and humanist scholars, they also address the notaries, abbesses, would-be nobles, and pastors who developed historical narratives to meet their own needs. As polyphonic and negotiated, European historical writings often accounted for or erased historical narratives produced by a wide array of historiographical agents and institutional bodies positioned all around the world. Histories composed outside of Europe, such as the *Nueva corónica* (c. 1615) by the native Quechua historian Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, are best understood when read as large-scale petitions that aimed to promote and challenge projects of good governance—in the case of the *Nueva corónica*, carried away in the viceroyalty of Peru—in royal chronicles authorized by King Philip III back in Spain.[4] As the chapters demonstrate, the resort to the past provided opportunities to normalize views of the present, but the ways that would-be historians interacted with each other and with existing textual and oral

2. See Lambert and Weiler, *How the Past*.

3. For more on this topic, see Bonin et al., *À la croisée*.

4. Masters, *We, the King*, 268.

traditions simultaneously allowed for conversations and sometimes disagreements about the meanings of the important concepts and claims they were seeking to articulate.

Second, considering the interpersonal dimension of early modern historical writing, the contributors to this volume track historical narratives beyond the exclusive realm of chronicles and formal histories. They recognize how *historia* functioned as a powerful epistemological tool used to describe both natural and cultural phenomena across a wide variety of scholarly and scientific disciplines.[5] Our contributors emphasize how historical narratives became ubiquitous across a wide range of discourses concerned with the construction of the past. From court cases to abbey chronicles to genealogical claims, the analysis of historical writings in Europe cannot be limited to exclusive court settings. Finally, the chapters also expose the variety of sources at play in early modern history writing and discuss how the developing understanding of reliable sources and historical proof influenced the possibilities for successful narratives constructed from them. Not least among these sources, the growing influence of archival materials in various forms, the importance of personal testimonies, and the resort to material evidence all had a significant impact in the construction of historical knowledge. Departing from these ideas, this introduction offers further thoughts on historical context as well as interpretative themes in order to establish further connections between the contributions gathered in this volume.

Historical writing and prescriptive claims about the past in early modern Europe

History, as a fundamental value and explanatory resort, was arguably a defining characteristic of European cultures in the early modern period. Not only had the humanist movement reintroduced learned elites to classical forms of history writing and taught scholars to think historically on a range of issues, from the evolution of the Latin language and Roman law to the development of the Christian church, but as Daniel Woolf points out for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, all levels of society were profoundly conscious of a sense of the past. Attempting to explain why this "social circulation of the past" was more intense and more focused in the early modern period than in previous centuries, Woolf claims that once the general pace of change accelerated in the sixteenth century, all people could witness these kinds of

5. Pomata and Siraisi, *Historia*.

developments, encouraging a consciousness of difference and evolution over time.[6] This explication for the growing tendency to explain human experiences, from familial identities and national origins to antiquarian remains and "changes in the land," is debatable, but the intense engagement with the past and its use to make arguments about the present are not. All of the contributions to this volume make this ubiquity and diversity of historical thinking in the early modern period abundantly apparent.

As Anthony Grafton has been at pains to remind us, the historical discipline as we practise it today was professionalized in the nineteenth century, but many of its characteristic questions and practices had a long history going back to the Renaissance period. If Leopold von Ranke is generally credited with a fascination with archives and a resort to footnotes to illuminate how the European concert of nations "essentially was" in the early modern period, the study of the rules of evidence—involving both the reliability of contemporary witness and the authenticity of documents—and the ways that this evidence was signaled and deployed in historical texts long predated Ranke's time.[7] Ranke, moreover, was more a notional enthusiast for archival research and extensive footnoting than an active practitioner; rather, he was a master of historical narrative.[8] As students of European historiography have long recognized, important theorists of historical practice, such as Lorenzo Valla, Louis Le Roy, Juan Páez de Castro, Jean Bodin, Luis Cabrera de Córdoba, Agostino Mascardi, Jean Mabillon, and many others, entered into a generations-long textual debate over the "art of history," not only articulating rules for determining the reliability of authors and use of evidence but also investing history with the ability to explain human societies on a grand, even world-wide, scale.[9]

To be a historian often meant to be a polymath, but historical narratives were also composed by a wide array of men and women who collaborated with or took their distance from humanists. Considering the interactive practice of history, medicine, botany, and law, among other disciplines, as well as the fact that profiles of historians, physicians, natural philosophers, and lawyers were often embodied by one person or one community, history occupied multiple positions within the constant reordering of the *literarae humaniores*.

6. Woolf, *Social Circulation*, esp. 19–43. See also Poole and Williams, *Early Modern Histories*.

7. Grafton, *What Was History*; *Footnote*.

8. Grafton, *Footnote*, 61, 71. For Ranke's narrative power, it suffices to read any one of his major works. See also F. Gilbert, *History*, chps. 2–3; Friedrich, *Birth of the Archive*.

9. Kelley, *Foundations*; Huppert, *Idea of Perfect History*; Blair, *Theater of Nature*; Barret-Kriegel, *Les historiens*; Grafton, *What Was History*. For an earlier period, see Mori, *Historical Truth*.

As Michael Friedman explains in this volume, more than a random branch of a static tree of knowledge, *historia* kept changing positions in relation to other disciplines, such as philosophy and theology, among others.[10] The making of historical narratives remained highly experimental and multidisciplinary. During the early modern period, the stakes behind the composition and consumption of historical narratives were ever shifting, and the contents and practices of history became even more entangled with contemporary contingencies and presentism.

The humanist movement, as it first developed in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy and then spread to other parts of Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was key to introducing and reinforcing history as a concept with fundamental explanatory power. As humanists studied classical literature, history, law, and material culture, they began to see the ancient world not only as a pinnacle of human endeavour and a model to emulate but also as a series of recognizable moments in which language, customs, and institutions had been subject to change. From the ancient world, humanist scholars further borrowed different historical genres, including the acts of great men, the antiquarian focus on institutions and material culture, and the engaged narratives of ecclesiastical history, and embroidered on them.[11] As Donald Kelley has demonstrated, the study of Roman law provided an important context for this kind of historical consciousness. As jurists came to see the *Corpus Juris Civilis* not as a text whose disparate parts needed to be reconciled but as an accretion of laws instituted over centuries, they helped to develop both a sense for how human institutions could change over time and a set of practices for uncovering textual accretions to an evolving record. The evolutions of legal theory and historical writing were thus mutually reinforcing endeavours.[12]

It was once common to see this kind of historicizing humanist culture and the development of natural philosophy as being on diverging tracks by the seventeenth century, with the "Ancients" exalting textual authority above all, and the "Moderns" valuing the power of experience and experimentation. It is now becoming increasingly evident, however, how much "humanism" and "science" had in common, at least in terms of the scholarly practices underwriting both. As Richard Yeo makes clear, natural philosophers such as Francis Bacon and John Locke developed their theories using seemingly

10. On the ordering of libraries and knowledge organization systems through the history of early modern prints, manuscripts, and libraries, see Sordet, *Histoire du livre.*

11. Momigliano, "Ancient History"; Van Liere, Ditchfield, and Louthan, *Sacred History*.

12. Kelley, *Foundations.*

traditional scholarly practices such as intensive note-taking and commonplacing.[13] Further, as Jacob Soll and his fellow contributors to "The Uses of History in Early Modern Europe," a special issue of the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, demonstrate, the kinds of evidence developed by humanists and adopted in early modern historical works pervaded numerous disciplines not normally associated with these forms of proof. Not the least of these was the field of medicine. For example, Girolama Mercuriale (1530–1606), physician to Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, combined his philological approach to ancient medical texts with an antiquarian interest in classical sport, while Georg Palma (1543–91), a Nuremburg doctor, used his library of medical texts as a foundation to work out a series of notes for best practices and remedies that he developed over the course of his life, thus melding the consultation of written sources and a record of personal experience.[14]

Indeed, the growing enthusiasm for history and its means of evidence and argument encouraged some of the most significant preoccupations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Among these was certainly what Woolf calls the "genealogical imagination," as families began to cast their identities in historical terms and to connect their contemporary status, wealth, and power with a long record of transmission of inherent qualities, such as nobility or purity of blood, and significant alliances.[15] Several chapters in this volume address these concerns of family tradition, descent, and nobility, as well as the arguments that could arise in relation to them, including those by Hilary J. Bernstein, Richard Ibarra, Brian Sandberg, Jonathan Spangler, and Weiao Xing. As Roberto Bizzocchi suggests, the many fabled genealogies produced in this period were by no means the product of an unreasoning credulousness or lack of sophistication in approach to sources but rather the result of families' intense desires to establish unique historical identities, rooted in distant and noble origins, even at a time when it was becoming increasingly imperative to certify nobility through administrative procedures. Such imaginary genealogies played a crucial role not only in offering a long line of descent for individual families but also in providing a connected history for the kingdoms, principalities, and their peoples, which structured European politics and society in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.[16] Recourse to the forgeries of Annius of Viterbo, discussed in this volume by Anita Guerrini, was thus so common and so tenacious, since his way of accounting for

13. Yeo, *Notebooks*.

14. See Soll, "Introduction"; "Healing"; Siraisi, "History"; Murphy, "Common Places."

15. Woolf, *Social Circulation*, ch. 4.

16. Bizzocchi, *Généalogies fabuleuses*.

the origins of contemporary political entities linked and hierarchized their formation through a series of fabled founders from the depths of Biblical antiquity, connected via relationships of familial descent.[17]

Genealogical explanations for contemporary power structures and social relationships thus became ubiquitous throughout early modern Europe, and genealogical research proved an active driver of scholarly erudition. In sixteenth-century Rome, Onofrio Panvinio's career led sequentially from genealogies of Roman noble families to a detailed history of papal elections, while in England, official heralds rode the circuits to confirm the historical backgrounds of county families.[18] In France, Italy, the Iberian Peninsula, and the German lands of the Holy Roman Empire, genealogical histories developed as a significant genre by the early seventeenth century and gradually broadened their scope to present a picture of the entire nobility of a given region by the eighteenth century.[19] As Markus Friedrich suggests, genealogical research practices created both a pan-European "republic of genealogists" and a collection of selected documents and archivally generated facts, which he identifies as a form of "big data" from the early modern period.[20]

History, of course, was far from the unique preserve of erudite scholars and other professional writers. As theorists of early modern "ego-documents" have demonstrated, the impulse to record personal experiences and to chronicle the history of one's family and community was strong in the early modern period, and as literacy spread from professional elites to craftspeople, so did the desire to leave a written record that was often designed to instruct future generations.[21] From the *ricordanze* of Renaissance Florence and the family books of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Nuremberg and Augsburg to the *livres de raison* of early modern France to the chronicles of Reformation England, men and some women, from virtually all walks of life, thought about their own lives and their families' fortunes historically and deliberately left testimonies that they expected to contribute to a continuing memory of their personal, familial, or community identities.[22] Just as the tendency to leave evidence of

17. Bizzocchi, *Généalogies fabuleuses*, 29–46; Grafton, *What Was History*, 150–51; Rothstein, "Reception."

18. Bauer, *Invention*; Woolf, *Social Circulation*, 99–137; Ailes, "Can We Trust."

19. Butaud and Piétri, *Les enjeux*; Poncet, "Cercles savants"; Friedrich, *Maker of Pedigrees*; Kagan, *Clio and the Crown*, ch. 4.

20. Friedrich, "Genealogy," 67, 81.

21. Dekker, *Egodocuments and History*; Amelang, *Flight of Icarus*.

22. Chiappelli, *Memory, Family, and Self*; Certin, "L'entreprise généalogique"; Matchinske, *Women Writing History*; Mouysset, *Papiers de famille*; Walsham, "Chronicles"; Luciani, "De l'espace

one's own life in the form of occasional jottings or more systematic memoirs grew in the early modern period, so did the idea of expressing important ideas through collective biography. Indeed, as Judith Pollmann has shown, memory provided an important structuring principle for making sense of the world, and this predilection for associating past and present experiences encouraged a profoundly historical approach to social groups and political communities.[23] From local histories of religious communities, towns, and provinces to narratives addressing the evolution of principalities, kingdoms, empires, and the papacy, historical projects encouraged collaborative efforts to sift through the range of remaining testimonies and the documentary record of numerous institutional bodies to formulate implicit or explicit arguments about the legitimacy and value of current social, political, or religious organizations, founded on a cushion of historical narrative.[24] The chapters in this volume by Indravati Félicité, Héloïse Hermant, Linda Lierheimer, Nicholas Schapira, and Katherine Elliot van Liere particularly address these concerns.

None of these historical tendencies would have been possible without changes in literacy, the development of archival practices, and the increasing value of written proof over the course of the early modern period. As Randolph Head and Markus Friedrich relate, as political actors from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries began to see documents as containing information that could be of use in asserting their own authority, they supported the development of dedicated archives, in which a series of finding aids, including inventories and registries, could enable the deployment of past records for the successful governance of their lands and communities.[25] And as Bernstein, Hermant, and Spangler demonstrate in their respective chapters, the resort to such documents inevitably encouraged the formulation of historical narratives, as current assertions of, or conflicts over, authority came to be explained through a series of discrete actions embedded within a range of demonstrative texts.

From the end of the sixteenth century onward, European historical narratives experienced an empirical and material turn that was in part a reaction

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domestique"; Winn, "La mise en scène."

23. Pollmann, *Memory*.

24. Reinburg, *Storied Places*; Ditchfield, *Liturgy*; Coulomb, "Des villes de papier"; Van Bruaene, "L'écriture"; Bernstein, *Historical Communities*; Hermant, *Les chroniqueurs d'Aragon*; Van der Steen, *Memory Wars*. See also the articles collected in the two special issues of *Histoire urbaine* dedicated to this topic: Schapira et al., "Activité historienne."

25. Head, *Making Archives*; Friedrich, *Birth of the Archive*. See also Waddell, "Writing History from Below."

against parallel sceptical and political concerns.[26] During this period, as Bernstein, Félicité, Friedman, Hermant, and Ibarra show, entanglements between historical accounts and literary and administrative reports were tied to the development of administrative procedures. On the other hand, administrative procedures inspired historical narratives and drew focus to a history of the present.[27] The history of early modern historical narratives, which centred on *l'histoire du temps présent*, could not be separated from the information revolution that emerged from the seventeenth-century global crisis. Due to this correlation, historians thought more intensively in comparative, connected, and global terms, especially when considering the tendentious dimension of historical sources related to events that had just occurred.[28] In the context of the news revolution of the seventeenth century, European historical narratives became conditioned by imperial and colonial logics determined by recent history.

Yet the newfound emphasis on historicizing the present emerged alongside a comparative trend that relied on ancient precedents. World historical narratives crafted in Europe or by European subjects presupposed comparative worldviews articulated around natural law, replacing the linear aspect of previous universal histories. These world historical narratives found their justifications in allusions to immemorial times and shared human nature. When these worldviews and the alleged laws they rested on started to be compared or connected to historical narratives that were not conditioned by old or local European traditions, a set of new or underappreciated indeterminacies emerged. These indeterminacies challenged the universal logics that had been generated from the belief that history could only exist and be claimed if linked to immemorial order. Instead, new seventeenth-century forms of world history fuelled the sceptical understanding of the past. Under the guise of these new accounts, historical narratives took as many shapes as the sources they used, inhabiting new visual and material guises.[29] These new world histories provided a privileged way to challenge and/or reform colonial and imperial logics that were codependent on an older, normative understanding of history. In Spain, the world histories composed by Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, one of Philip III's royal historiographers, conflicted with what

26. Pomata and Siraisi, *Historia*.

27. Folger, *Writing as Poaching*.

28. See the works of Helmers, esp. "History as Diplomacy."

29. On the visual and material turn of early modern historical cultures, see Haskell, *History and Its Images*; Momigliano, *Classical Foundations*; Palos i Peñarroya and Carrió Invernizzi, *La historia imaginada*; Miller, *History and Its Objects*.

other historiographers and aristocrats wanted the recent history of the Iberian monarchies to be.[30] The contributions of Ovanes Akopyan, Ibarra, Lierheimer, Junko Takeda, and Xing analyze how historical narratives were crafted from a multitude of spaces, situated within and beyond Western Europe.

As a result of all of these connected phenomena, reference to the past became a significant way for individuals and communities to make sense of and validate their current identities, just as historical narratives provided a method to connect the meanings of the past with the significance of the present. The range of historical practitioners thus proved large and their characteristics diverse, just as the arguments they sought to convey varied greatly, as did the specific practices they used to select and deploy their evidence. This volume, in following some of these authors in attempting to assert agency and define their identities in historical terms, in examining the kinds of communities constructed through historical narratives, and in studying disembodied phenomena that could be addressed through a combination of resort to textual traditions and examination of lived experience, aims to give voice to this diversity. At the same time, this volume seeks to emphasize the overlapping ways in which historical narratives were used to make vital arguments in many of the important spheres of life that Europeans encountered, from their own life histories to their chosen familial, religious, and political communities, to their travels abroad and their violent colonial experiences in varied corners of the early modern world.[31]

Enforcing or contesting the past: Zones of engagement

Though the intense European engagement with the past was not limited to European territories, it was produced and controlled primarily within a predominantly Western European Christian world. In the early modern period, this world was riven by religious and civic conflicts. This volume thus reflects on the diversity of agents, practices, and sources that conditioned the intensity of this engagement, while suggesting that this intensity was not exclusive to Europe. In fact—and as Félicité, Ibarra, and Xing's contributions in this volume show—European historical narratives operated within a broader and wider ensemble of early modern historical cultures. Their subjects were not limited to political and ecclesiastical history. A new set of subjects was

30. Montcher, "Acquérir." On royal historiographers in early modern France, see Ranum, *Artisans of Glory*. For a comparative study of these figures, see Grell, *Historiographes en Europe*.

31. See, for example, Voigt, *Writing Captivity*.

available to be historicized, despite the desire of the makers and consumers of historical narratives to render these narratives exclusive by underplaying their ties with other forms of representing the past.

Considering the diversity of crafts and skills associated with the construction, circulation, transformation, and consumption of historical narratives, the diversity of agents involved in all stages of these iterative processes developed equally diverse representational practices. As Guerrini, Van Liere, Lierheimer, Ann Moyer, Schapira, and Xing show, the variations of these practices expanded the range of historical sources used to think about the past. These contributors explain how new ways to think about the production of communal identities via linguistic, religious, and antiquarian practices bolstered the contributions of marginalized agents who also contributed to the European craze for all things history related. A collective will of ordering, enforcing, erasing, and criticizing historical narratives channelled this enthusiasm. This might well be seen as paradoxical since it promoted as much as it limited the diffusion of historical narratives. However, part of the intense European engagement with the past consisted of establishing or imposing a "right way" to do and apply history, as Bernstein's and Hermant's contributions especially show. The specific case studies of agents, practices, and sources discussed in this volume expose tactics and strategies devised to support the idea that a rightful or truthful past existed somewhere and at some point across Europe during the early modern period.[32]

The uses and abuses of history writing

The intensity of the engagement with the past was used to identify, condemn, and reform what contemporaries perceived as historical abuses. While reacting to these perceived abuses, early modern societies perfected specialized mechanisms (e.g., censorship) and institutions (e.g., inquisitions) to control all kinds of historical creations, performances, and exchanges. The intensity of the engagement with the past was only rivalled by the intense desire to tame the ideas that came out of this engagement. The general understanding of what history was or should be thus ended up being conditioned by institutions and individuals preoccupied by the ordering of historical narratives with respect to a broader range of disciplines that authorized knowledge. In a context within which the elaboration of historical narratives could have a profound

32. On the antecedents of this story and its impact on late Renaissance historical cultures, see Mori, *Historical Truth*.

impact on social change, the early modern period marks a turn towards the disciplining of historical knowledge.[33] As Ibarra shows in his chapter, historical narratives became part of civil and ecclesiastical court cases and vice versa. More than limiting historical creativity, the historical narratives that spread within court cases became an occasion to develop family and community history throughout a network of institutions and intermediaries specialized in locating and extracting information from repositories often situated far away from one another. And as Félicité and Xing show, the acceleration of human circulations during the early modern period bolstered the ability to compose history across long-distance political, religious, and cultural boundaries.

Historical scepticism

The conception of historical narratives as unfinished works across long-distance boundaries promoted collaborative and transgenerational enterprises of historical writing. Early modern history books are filled with references to historians who were unable to finish their works. The unfinished nature of historical works was also used as an instrument of political and religious criticism. The late sixteenth-century political turn of history was accompanied by a sceptical reaction. The history of this reaction is fundamental in order to understand the collaborations, doubts, and eco-linguistic considerations that conditioned the European historical narratives presented in the second and third sections of this volume. Many philosophers and some historians argued that the reconstruction of past events could not be trusted, not only because of a lack of evidence but also due to the poetical limits of historical imagination. Historical judgement needed to be suspended while a methodological doubt was introduced into historical narratives. This methodological doubt soon became one of the main epistemological categories that instead of announcing the end of history, reinforced the idea that historical narratives should rely on a common historical method. Commenting on plausible doubts when reflecting on the limits between fiction and history reinforced the fiduciary contract established between historical narratives and their readers.[34] In Europe, these narratives aimed to convince their readers of the universality of the European historical way of thinking.

33. Esteve, *Disciplining History*. On how this disciplining affected other forms of knowledge that were deeply intertwined with historical thinking, see Marcus, *Forbidden Knowledge*.

34. See the epigraph to the conclusion of Gilbert's *In Good Faith*.

Historicizing the present

The study of early modern European historical narratives could not be reduced to the exclusive and universalizing theories diffused in humanistic "arts of history." More than just enhancing a method and preconfiguring the modern birth of history, sixteenth-century "arts of history" had participated in the advent of a culture of control that bolstered the normative nature of historical narratives. Often composed by jurists and other legal professionals, as well as churchmen, abbesses, or natural philosophers (see Lierheimer, Schapira, and Friedman in this volume), who claimed a monopoly over historical writings, these "arts" had limited the practice of history as well as the profile of agents who could make an intervention in historical works. Since history was not defined as a discipline attached to specific institutions or to one homogeneous method shared by one single community of professionals, the contributions of the second section of this volume show how a plurality of historical narratives thrived during the early modern period along with a plurality of cooperators who produced that history.

Although many agents contributed to producing history, they were not always credited. The European "theft of history" was not yet fully operative, although "arts of history" and histories written based on the precepts publicized by these "arts" were transforming historical narratives into discursive devices that overshadowed the contribution of a wide array of agents involved in the making of historical knowledge. As histories were published, these protagonists were often erased. In other cases, and as Xing underlines in his chapter, these protagonists were purposefully overexposed in historical narratives. The goal consisted of fostering a more efficient assimilation of these protagonists within European and colonial religious and political communities. The publication of European historical narratives aimed to obscure the fact that during ancient and present times, European actors had mostly improvised imperial expansion while putting themselves at the mercy of local informants who allowed them to reorient themselves in a world they did not control. At best, some authors acknowledged occasional collaborations with intermediaries, but they did so to communicate how resourceful and ingenious they were. The discreet roles of Indigenous intermediaries in European historical narratives or displaced religious groups, committed to the narration of the recent past and connected to the experience of European subjects in or across unfamiliar environments, are reminders that the natural order that underpinned the historical projection of Europeans across the globe depended

on their ability to undermine others' histories, especially those that did not rely on "arts of history."[35]

While "arts of history" were used to delineate a European field of historical narratives, other historical narratives circulated throughout Europe. These narratives were often mediated by historians and translators who were looking for ways to adapt these historical narratives to the theoretical, methodological, and linguistic molds and precepts publicized by "arts of history." The contributions to this volume question how receptive historiographical workshops, whether they were very local (see Schapira in this volume) or very official (see Van Liere and Moyer in this volume), remained open to historical narratives that shared neither the same prescriptive codes nor the same languages as they did.[36]

The inflation of titles and mushrooming of self-proclaimed historians put them in a position of expendable collaborators on the European political stage. In this context, many official and self-proclaimed historiographers distanced themselves from groundwork in archives and libraries. More than just limiting the practice of history to a set of politicized historical accounts dedicated to the present, the empirical turn of history widened the divide between historians of the present who thought of themselves as direct observers of a history in the making and other historians who were charged to investigate the material dimension of a distant past. These other narratives often came out in print in Europe as appendices to European histories. In parallel, not all European historical texts were published in Europe. These works interacted with broader bibliographical corpuses across time and space. They were also put at the disposition of displaced and colonial European representatives who were living "abroad," while being adapted and transformed by them (see Xing in this volume). Through these narratives, European powers induced many to think that historical narratives that did not share the precepts elaborated by "arts of history" could not play a role in European imperial and colonial orders.[37]

The theoretical divide between historians of the present and antiquarian-like historians interested in the material remains of distant and more recent pasts was used as an excuse to distinguish among titles given to historians

35. Goody, *Theft of History*; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*. On historical narratives developed by displaced religious minorities in early modern Europe, see Green-Mercado, *Visions of Deliverance*; Cohen Skalli, *Don Isaac Abravanel*; Girard, "La construction."

36. See Ballan, "Borderland Anxieties."

37. Amer Meziane, *Des empires*.

who, in practice, were not as disconnected from one another as they appeared or pretended to be. The officialization of historical practitioners via the granting of titles happened in a context marked by the displacement, looting, and relocation of libraries and archives. These repositories put at the disposition of historians an unprecedented amount of information. A wide array of non-official historians who were expert in handling this information proliferated. It then became important for historians to distinguish themselves among their alleged peers. While many claimed, sometimes fraudulently, to have received a title or a licence to conduct historical research, others positioned themselves as mercenaries of knowledge willing to deal with punctual research dossiers while composing reports that could later be incorporated, or not, in official histories.[38] Powers that employed official historians also relied on mercenaries of knowledge, trying to convert them into hired pens to carry on specific research.[39] As the contributions of the second and third sections of this volume illustrate, these hired pens became useful in the context of mid-seventeenth-century wars of propaganda as well as during peace negotiations, when ambassadors and historians who self-fashioned themselves as expert negotiators needed to rely on updated information to foster a diplomacy of history across and beyond Europe.[40]

Professional or would-be professional historians often expected to receive privileges, salaries, rents, titles, and offices in exchange for their work. They looked for ways to elevate their status while distinguishing themselves among diverse social milieux.[41] Their distinction strategies encouraged the commodification of historical knowledge. They composed historical narratives to be sold.[42] Within this market, the demand for original narratives was high, and the consumption of histories could not be limited to the reading of official histories. The chapters in this volume by Félicité, Lierheimer, Sandberg, Takeda, and Xing reflect on how actors living in missions, colonies, and embassies situated in and out of Europe mobilized a contingent of *procudadores* (procurators) in charge of securing their own representation amid the composite territories they lived in or traveled through.[43]

38. Montcher, *Mercenaries of Knowledge*.

39. Kagan, *Clio and the Crown*; Jouhaud, *Les pouvoirs*; Schneider, *Dignifying Retreat*.

40. Montcher, "Portable Archives."

41. Viala, *Naissance de l'écrivain*; Sapiro, *Sociology of Literature*.

42. Montcher, "Autour de la raison d'État."

43. Masters, *We, the King*.

Despite this diversity of historical narratives, being able to ask and to propose answers to questions such as "What is or was history?" and "How can one write histories of the world or parts of it?" resulted in acts of domination. The privileges that allowed individuals and communities to formulate such questions were often passed to elites that elsewhere around the world could reproduce the same questions while fuelling the fiction of their ties with Europe as the main centre for the creation of historical narratives.[44] Many other ways to think with the past were overlooked, and in some cases willingly dismissed, creating a European sphere of ignorance regarding other historical sensibilities and ways of constructing the "past."

As Hermant has pointed out in her study of the early modern chroniclers of the Kingdom of Aragon, writing history corresponded to "a *dispositif*, a collective practice, and a microphysics of powers."[45] When applied to European historical narratives, the term *dispositif* is pertinent because the individuals and groups that elaborated and consumed historical narratives operated across a polycentric ensemble of cities, villages, kingdoms, and composite states. They did so as much at the micro level as on a transnational scale. In fact, the Kingdom of Aragon is a good example of a political and multilingual entity that formed part of a composite monarchy. The cultural, jurisdictional, and territorial bounds of this kingdom transcended the limits of the Iberian Peninsula. The historical narratives that came out of the kingdom could be highly regionalized or worldly in scope. At the same time, Aragonese historical narratives, as was the case of other histories produced across Europe, were codependent on non-European historiographical practices and historical categories. Unfortunately, few comparative studies of histories and historiographers created across early modern Europe exist.[46] These historical narratives inspired other historical cultures as well as staunch and negative reactions against them. Could European narratives be defined based on their lack of engagement with narratives that challenged them? Or should the category of European historical narratives be dismissed in favour of case studies that revealed the improvised dimensions and improbable connections that European historical narratives maintained with other historical cultures? These are questions that the readers of this volume should keep in mind. Answers to these questions remain as diverse as the disciplinary backgrounds of the authors who contributed to this volume. The main goal of this

44. Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write*. As a way out of a European exclusive practice of history, see Iggers, Wang, and Mukherjee, *Global History*; Woolf, *Global History*.

45. Hermant, *Les chroniqueurs d'Aragon*, 12.

46. Subrahmanyam, "On World Historians"; Grell, *Historiographes en Europe*.

volume consists of fostering more comparative and connected studies of early modern historical narratives notwithstanding genre, linguistic, geographical, religious, and political divides.

Volume roadmap

This volume is thus organized to illuminate historical narratives ranging from those most concerned with the self—revealing questions of personal or familial agency and identity—to those in which groups of writers collaborated to produce engaged narratives, to those focused on broader, disembodied concepts, such as language development and geographical features, using a significant mixture of textual references and personal experience. It deliberately mixes studies from numerous parts of Europe and its colonial outposts, juxtaposes writings by published scholars with the manuscript testimonies of occasional memorialists, and only observes a loose chronology internal to the other organizational categories.

The first section, ranging from early sixteenth-century Seville to early eighteenth-century Martha's Vineyard, addresses ways that individuals made use of historical narratives to present a preferred view of their own actions or their family's characteristics, whether that family was socially or spiritually defined. Richard Ibarra thus discusses how several merchant families of Genoese descent in sixteenth-century Seville, Valladolid, and Oaxaca, Mexico, continued to claim this Genoese ancestry over generations, employing Genoese definitions of lineage to assert claims to nobility and purity of blood that would be officially recognized in the Spanish world. Through an examination of court cases before the chancelleries of Valladolid and Granada and the Mexican Inquisition, Ibarra charts how families presented their histories in court in ways that overlapped with numerous published family histories, which also marshalled genealogical arguments to establish nobility and refute charges of *converso* or *morisco* descent. Whereas Ibarra's families of Genoese origins were called on to defend their claimed elite status, Brian Sandberg's French noble families, largely from the Southern provinces of Languedoc and Provence, used religious narratives focused on crusading experiences and the French Wars of Religion to bolster their special qualities as a military elite. The crusades of the high Middle Ages continued to loom large in family memory, principally because the French nobility in the sixteenth century interpreted their actions during the Wars of Religion through a crusading lens and participated actively in the Catholic military orders that continued to structure political and religious relationships in the Mediterranean according to the

fault lines of a crusading ideology. Therefore, both in works of circumstance designed to praise these families and in genealogies produced for the Church and the monarchy, the record of a crusading past continued to be highlighted.

Although the vast majority of historical narratives were written by men in the early modern period, women did increasingly take up the quill to note important experiences, assert authority, and define the nature of their communities, whether familial or spiritual.[47] Linda Lierheimer emphasizes the importance of historical writing by female religious in seventeenth-century France by focusing on three nuns from different orders who each used their writings to highlight the fundamental qualities of their religious communities. Where Françoise-Madeleine de Chaugy, sister of the Visitation, used a four-volume collection of biographies, or "Lives" of important Visitandine "mothers" as a way to mark the bravery of widows in leaving their former lives and families to embrace their spiritual calling and to unite dispersed religious houses in an affective community of remembrance, Ursuline Marie-Augustine de Pommereu used her chronicle history of the Ursuline order to create a kind of "family history," connecting Ursuline nuns and their houses in both time and space. Benedictine nun Jacqueline Bouette de Blémur, by contrast, included both male and female Benedictine saints in her writings, thus emphasizing the roles that both women and men had played in the Benedictine order over time. None of these female writers worked in a vacuum, collecting personal testimonies and documents from their sisters in constructing their works; Blémur, moreover, participated actively in erudite circles in Paris that revolved around the Maurist abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. While Lierheimer addresses where these historical works were published and thus became available to a wider community of readers, Nicolas Schapira discusses the nearly contemporary chronicle begun by Jeanne d'Allonville, abbess of Sainte-Catherine-lès-Provins, and continued by subsequent abbesses, which remained in manuscript. For d'Allonville, the challenge was not to use history to testify to the unique aspects of female religious community defining her order but rather to assert the privileges of her house within the wider urban community as well as her authority over her sisters. Nevertheless, whether in seventeenth-century Paris or Provins, it is instructive to remember that early modern women engaged actively in the culture of history writing and even erudite scholarship, even as they adapted these practices to their particular purposes.

At roughly the same time that Lierheimer's nuns turned to historical narratives to help to define and enhance their communities' particular

47. Luciani, "De l'espace domestique"; Mouysset, "Male or Female"; Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles*.

understandings of spirituality, devotion, and organization, Avétik Vardapet, one-time Armenian Orthodox patriarch at Istanbul, was recounting his own life in a defensive attempt to present his actions as favourable to France and to Catholicism. A prisoner of King Louis XIV and writing from the Bastille, Avétik made careful narrative choices, not only to cast his behaviour in a positive light to his captors but also to limit the kinds of information they were seeking from him in the first place. Junko Takeda, in situating this memoir within the context of diplomatic missteps between France and the Ottoman Empire and fundamental hostilities between the Roman Catholic and Armenian Orthodox Churches, demonstrates that even in this wider climate of prejudice and conflict, Avétik still managed to shape his own representation. She explains how "under pressure, he managed his own silences and produced a narrative that gave the secretary [Pontchartrain] no choice but to allow his conversion and emancipation," whereas Pontchartrain, for his part, ultimately lost "narrative control" of the diplomatic situation.

This first section concludes with Weiao Xing's study of Experience Mayhew's *Indian Converts* (1727), a work that sought to inform readers on both sides of the Atlantic of Indigenous people's capacity for conversion and living a proper Christian life. Organized as a collective biography illustrating the pious lives and good deaths of the Wampanoag over several generations, the text simultaneously testified to the important role that the Mayhew family had played in converting and ministering to Wampanoag families on Martha's Vineyard since the mid-seventeenth century. Some of this local expertise was demonstrated in Mayhew's command of the Wampanoag language, investing him with a knowledge of the people and their ways sufficient to testify to their spiritual abilities and potential. Although he interacted with the Indigenous people as a pastor rather than from a position of religious consanguinity, Mayhew's impulse to use collective biography as a means of creating an image of Protestant spiritual community and of placing himself in a position to define it bears similarities with Lierheimer's Catholic religious, who also reinforced the outlines of their spiritual family through historical discussions of its members who embodied its values in an idealized way. Mayhew's attempt, moreover, to delineate a Christian community that included both English and Indigenous peoples also resonates with Kate Elliot van Liere's study of Ambrosio de Morales, a sixteenth-century historian from Cordoba, who sought to place martyrdom at the centre of Spanish historical identity.

In its second section, this volume turns to studies that focus on engaged narratives that often resulted from collaboration on historical projects. Of

course, many of the chapters in the first section also demonstrate the importance of consultation, sharing of sources, and elaboration on existing texts. These modes of collaboration added depth to historical projects and ensured that many historical narratives reflected the work and points of view of disparate authors. Lierheimer and Xing, in particular, emphasize how the historians they study were able to complete their works through acquiring testimonies from numerous abbeys (in the former case) and from deceased family members (in the latter case). In this section, however, the emphasis is on how these implicitly or explicitly collaborative projects worked to uphold political authority, define the nature of the community, and argue for important privileges and rights. The chapters in this section proceed from the most particular, with arguments for the continuing relevance of important noble families within the French monarchy, to the most global, with competing narratives over the rights of rival European trading companies to operate within the colonial sphere and within the framework of the developing law of nations.

Two chapters focused on the ways that genealogical narratives could be invoked to argue for enduring political significance open this second section. While Jonathan Spangler examines how great noble families in England and France, including the Howards, Douglases, Courtenays, and Montmorencys, commissioned genealogical works in order to support their continuing influence within the evolving structures of the early modern state, Hilary J. Bernstein emphasizes the collaborative work of a group of French erudite scholars, including André Duchesne, the Sainte-Marthe brothers, and Christofle Justel, who became foremost practitioners of genealogical research and writing in the first half of the seventeenth century. And where Spangler takes a broad view of the genealogical genre, using prefaces and dedications to demonstrate its importance in upholding the pretensions of the connected French and British ancient nobility, Bernstein examines the detailed conversations and exchanges of documents concerning the descent of the ancient counts of Auvergne and Carolingian dukes of Aquitaine, which were of crucial import to both the pretensions of Catherine de' Medici and her heirs in the sixteenth century and to the ambitions of the house of La Tour d'Auvergne in the seventeenth. Bernstein's study of this process of collaboration, accretion of knowledge, and its impact on the development of specific historical narratives should further be connected with Hermant's analysis of the ways that Francisco Andrés, official chronicler of Aragon from 1643 to 1656, interacted with local writers and Spanish national historians in his work on *Annals of the Crown of Aragon*.

With Nicolas Schapira's study of history writing in Provins, a mid-sized town in Northern France, the focus shifts from the significance of lineage to

the ways that multiple authors, writing historical texts in varied social and professional settings over several generations, contributed to a generalized representation of the harmonious relations between the local community and the French monarchy.[48] Surveying the significant number of people who were drawn to record aspects of their town's history, from priests and an abbess to notaries and judicial officials, Schapira emphasizes that much of this writing occurred in the face of political conflict and demonstrates how manuscripts that were first written within the private sphere came to be circulated within the urban community, referenced by many, and used in subsequent accounts. It was this kind of localized historical writing that also formed one of the ingredients for Andrés's official work as chronicler of Aragon. As Hermant demonstrates, Andrés actively worked to build trust with local elites, seeking local documents and testimonies to inform his greater, composite history of the Kingdom of Aragon, but he also faced pressure when his uses of these histories did not conform to expectations. The Aragonese perspective in turn informed histories of the Spanish kingdom as a whole, so that "a multidirectional process of narrative weaving" underwrote official history writing in early modern Spain. This focus on chronicling the past of a kingdom and thereby understanding its significance historically should be understood as one case of many in which writers attempted to define a people's characteristics or a nation's identity as rooted and explained in its past. Other examples in this volume include Morales's concern to define Spanish history through the power of its martyrs, as well as the ways that both Ann Moyer and Anita Guerrini link histories of language with questions of national or communal identity.

Progressing from families and lineages to local communities to kingdoms, this section concludes with Indravati Félicité's examination of historical narratives intended to support or to undermine the rights of competing European trading companies to operate in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In particular, the Habsburg's creation of the Ostend Company quartered in the Austrian Netherlands touched off arguments over the company's legality and led to developed historical treatments of the conduct of the Dutch East India Company and of Anglo-Dutch relations designed to defend the rights of the Ostend Company to operate in Asia and Africa. As Félicité points out, since definitions of sovereignty, commercial law, and the law of nations were still in the process of articulation, historical narratives proved a more accessible way than legal argumentation to frame the issues at hand. She also emphasizes that these narratives served to give voice to political powers,

48. For more on this topic, see, Breen, *Law, City, and King*; Bernstein, *Between Crown and Community*.

such as the Holy Roman Empire, which ultimately failed to assert dominance within the European colonial system.

With the third and final section, the volume transitions to less embodied subjects, such as language, religious tradition, giants and their archeological remains, mathematics, and volcanoes, to explore the ways that historical narratives here too were instrumental in their understanding. Characteristic to each of these discussions is the way that the kinds of textual references and analyses developed within the humanist tradition were placed in relationship with extratextual experiences through examination of material remains, discussion of personal experience, or references to contemporary practice.

Ann Moyer's chapter focused on the development of the study of the Florentine language in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries demonstrates how typically humanist interests could be broadened and adapted to other historicizing approaches. Just as Italian humanists focused on the evolution of the Latin language over time, so they now turned to understanding the vernacular in a systematic way, conceptualizing the history of language as akin to the physical development of an individual. As in the study of Latin, identifying model practitioners was an important element in studying the Florentine language historically, with Petrarch and Boccaccio chosen as exemplary authors and editions of the *Decameron* serving as a battleground of debate. Nevertheless, the evolution of the vernacular posed a special problem, in that living speakers could always provide evidence at odds with textual examples, leading scholars to mine literary sources not only for their content but also for evidence of speech acts that could help in formulating rules of linguistic development. As Katherine Elliot van Liere explains, the question of how to value different forms of evidence also concerned the Cordoban historian Ambrosio de Morales as he wrote his *Coronica general de España* (1574–86) and other works. Especially concerned to argue that it was Spain's martyrological tradition that defined its national identity more profoundly than its monarchical history, he emphasized the qualities of courage, virtue, and perseverance that Spain owed to its long history of martyrs and the continuity of the cult of the saints, even in the face of the period of Muslim domination. This question of cultic continuity, however, inevitably placed local church tradition in conflict with textual authority. Moreover, Morales's historical work on the Spanish cult of the martyrs led him to take an active role in the discovery and translation of relics, which he strongly identified with Cordoban martyrs.

Anita Guerrini's discussion of the persistent belief that the ancient ancestors of the English, Welsh, Bretons, and Dutch could have been giants links the concerns with language and national identity explored in the previous two

chapters. As Guerrini explains, the fascination with national origins linked with a mythic past, most characteristically articulated through the forgeries of Annius of Viterbo, had a long history, so that by the turn of the seventeenth century, scholars were still concerned to weigh textual traditions with archaeological evidence to resolve the question of whether their ancestors had indeed been giants. This discussion was closely linked to theories about the identity and language of the Celtic or Gallic peoples in antiquity as well as to arguments about the nature of fossils and Neolithic remains, such as Stonehenge and the *hunebads*, or megalithic tombs, in the Northern Netherlands. Giants, connected as they were to the original greatness of European founders, proved persistent, even as natural historians developed other ways to understand the material evidence.

In contrast to the other chapters in this volume, Michael Friedman's study of Joachim Jungius's *Texturæ Contemplatio*, a manuscript compilation of notes that this seventeenth-century natural philosopher and mathematician from Hamburg assembled on the practice of weaving, demonstrates that a combination of textual references and notes on artisanal practice could lead to results that were deliberately ahistorical, emphasizing continuity over change. In assembling his notes, Jungius both distorted his classical and contemporary sources and ignored the significant evolutions in weaving practices that had taken place in early modern Hamburg, all with the goal of defining weaving as a continuous practice stretching from antiquity to the seventeenth century. Although his collection of facts followed the most up-to-date understanding of how to combine textual commonplacing with observations of real-world practice, the overall message contained in Jungius's notes reveals his deliberate ignorance of actual weavers in Hamburg in the service of a systematic, unchanging understanding of the process of textile production. Friedman's study thus proverbially marks how the exception proves the rule.

Finally, Ovanes Akopyan's work on the early modern treatment of volcanoes explores how these landmarks came to be understood both as places of memory and as an "intellectual laboratory," in which antiquarian studies served as the framework where both written histories resting on a foundation of classical texts and narratives of personal experience converged to explain the properties of physical sites. Beginning with the discussions of Pietro Bembo and his father and continuing with the works of Philipp Clüver, Athanasius Kirscher, and Giovanni Alfonso Borelli, Akopyan also notes how the historicization of natural objects in the early modern period paved the way for their aestheticization, which would become a hallmark of Romantic treatments of the same subject.

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