

ИСТОРИЯ И МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЙ НАУКИ

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DIRECTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE AND SCHOOLS IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Abstract

After a short terminological introduction, this article discusses the origin of schools as collective knowledge producers. European historiography had not seen such schools until Leopold von Ranke started his teaching, which included historical research through seminars. His school became paradigmatic. However, from the late 19th century, nationalist historians, who rallied around political ideas rather than around new historical knowledge, challenged the Rankean conception. Another challenge came from historians gathering around a French journal, the *Annales*. From Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, these historians had different ideas about historical research, but there were links between the conceptions of history in the second and third generation of editors. Thereby, they also came to precede the present with its different directions of historiography based on ideas of fruitful areas for research.

Keywords: historiography, school of historiography, direction of historiography, nationalism, fruitful research, new knowledge, Leopold von Ranke, Ernst Bernheim, Johann Gustav Droysen, Heinrich von Treitschke, Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, Georges Duby, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie

Introduction

Historiography can be defined either broadly or narrowly. In the broad sense, every book or writing that treats a subject from the past is an example of historiography, with no distinction of the level of ambition of a person. It subsumes schoolbooks, popular overviews, dissertations, and academic handbooks under the label of historiography. However, there is also a narrower sense of the term that has the *transformation of historical knowledge* in view. It is hardly meaningful to talk of “schools” of historiography concerning schoolbooks and surveys. Such schools relate to the production of historical knowledge and to its content. A vital element of schools of historiography is the production of *new knowledge*. Another important element is the *evaluation of different sorts of new knowledge*. Results that are *fruitful for further research* are nowadays regarded as a prominent value, often attached to prize-winning research. When different sorts of problems are considered as fruitful, we will get different directions of historiography which pursue parallel tracks rather than compete with each other.

These reflections may serve as a guide for the use of crucial terms in the following parts of my talk.

From Antiquity to 1750: Masters – but teachers?

Most scholars share a well-established opinion that historiography of the Antiquity superseded that of the medieval times in terms of research and knowledge presentation. This does not imply that there were schools of historiography in ancient Greece, though the masters Herodotus and Thucydides were well known and praised. However, they had no pupils around them, and no official educational function. An odd fact is that Sima Qian in China who worked in the 2nd century BCE, performed such a function, but his influence peaked in the early part of what is called in Europe the High Middle Ages, i.e., a thousand years after the death of Sima.

Nor were there any real schools of historiography during the European Middle Ages and the two next centuries. It is true that annals and chronicles followed patterns, but these patterns had more to do with the text form than with the content. In Europe, there were some recognised masters of history writing, but they had no real function as teachers because universities were not the abode of these masters.

Teachers and disciples: Enlightenment and early 19th century

With the lively and varied historiography of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, one might expect that European historiography should differentiate according to knowledge criteria. This is hardly the case. The famous narrators in the English language, William Robertson, David Hume, and Edward Gibbon, were not active at any university and had no close associates. The same holds true for Voltaire, whose influence was great on the continent. It was only in Germany that historians had a close bond to universities before 1800, but in German universities reigned rivalries and political enmities caused by the division of the country in many states. Some university professors of history were influential but often more as political agitators than as producers of historical knowledge. In Italy, an awakening archival and historical interest around Lodovico Antonio Muratori in the mid-18th century was a stimulus for the national sentiment that grew in the following century. However, even though Muratori was popular, erudition was regarded as a private affair, as stated by Edoardo Tortarolo [1, p. 369]¹.

Thus, in several European countries, there were historians who influenced their readers or other audiences, but their influence was mostly local and still not focused on their view of historical knowledge.

Leopold von Ranke:

Research seminars and disciples. Internationalisation

In the 19th century, universities played a great role in Germany as platforms for professors to have their voices heard (contrary to France, where Napoleon's policy was to muzzle universities and replace them with specialist schools). German professors were active in politics, as is well known, but also in scholarship. Many historians such as August Ludwig von Schlözer, Friedrich Christoph Schlosser, Georg Gottfried

¹ I want to underline that I have profited much from different contributions in the four volumes of *Oxford History of Historical Writing* also for the rest of this article.

Gervinus, Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren, Heinrich Leo, and Friedrich Ludwig Georg von Raumer wrote big books, which became well-known all over Europe. Yet, most of them had no, or few and insignificant, pupils.

Leopold von Ranke was different. He brought together a circle of prominent historians around him. Such Germans as Heinrich von Sybel, Georg Waitz, Wilhelm Giesebrecht, and Ernst Herrmann belonged to those who gathered around Ranke in his famous invention, seminars for research in history. Seminars meant teaching research, something that was quite new then. Foreign scholars also participated in these seminars: young historians from many countries in Europe, further some from the USA, and a few from Japan and China. At his seminars, Ranke taught methods for historical work and let his disciples demonstrate their abilities and discuss their problems [2]. He did more than this. During the seminars and lectures for a wider audience, he tried to make them understand his own specific theory of history, with the state and its different organs in the centre. The point was to lay bare the historicity of the whole setup, which formed the state [3, pp. 86–89]. Another of his rules for concluding on historical events and actions was that historians must try to understand them from the preconditions and prejudices of the time when the actors lived or the events occurred.

Many of Ranke's disciples and, later on, the pupils of his disciples became professors in Germany or their home countries, and they made Ranke's teaching known in the entire Europe and many countries beyond it. Ernst Bernheim, a disciple of Georg Waitz and through him close to the heritage of Ranke's ideas, was a well-known medievalist who wrote a comprehensive textbook of historical methods and theory (first published in 1889) that became the most celebrated of its kind and was used in university studies of history all over Europe. Through Ranke and his disciples and through Bernheim's textbook and many other ways, Ranke's ideas spread, which triggered the establishment of a Rankean school. A school of historiography is characterised by a common notion of what fruitful research is and how it is done, and, in that sense, Ranke's school was paradigmatic. Through the network created by Ranke's disciples and their teaching, the Rankean school had a firm standing by Ranke's demise in 1887, and its doctrine was dominant (with small amendments) in Europe until the Second World War. It became too widespread to be a social community, but it was the very nucleus of international historical professionalism.

Nationalist directions as counter-movement

The success of Ranke's school (with some internal dissensions that I ignore here) gave rise to different criticisms from other professors of history. First out was Johann Gustav Droysen. He had published a booklet on the historical method, which largely dealt with a taxonomic system of historical writing [3, pp. 103–109]². Politically, Droysen was a pronounced Prussian nationalist with strong feelings about Germany's ongoing formation as a state, where he favoured and propagated the so-called "Little German" solution of Prussian growth.

A rise in the assessment of Droysen's theoretical achievement came rather long after his demise with the discovery of his unpublished manuscripts for lectures on the histo-

² After his death, Droysen's *Grundriss der Historik* was published with his more comprehensive manuscript for his lectures on the historical method and theory. On Droysen, see [4; 5].

tical method and theory. He was by no means content with Ranke's high reputation as a methodologist and theoretician. He was disappointed at his own lack of a wide school of disciples and did not hide that Ranke, with a professorship in Berlin, the Prussian capital, was not suited for this post because of his internationalism [3, pp. 90–91; 5].

Droysen was not alone. During the second half of the 19th century, quite a number of German historians sided with the rising ambitions of the German state through Otto von Bismarck and the Emperor Wilhelm II. One of these was Heinrich von Treitschke³. Treitschke's nationalism differed from Droysen's as he had greater views of Germany's place in the world.

Treitschke had chosen the law faculty for his higher education, and his dissertation dealt with a problem of economics. Later, he switched his interest to history and lectured successfully in Leipzig on historical subjects without a proper chair. He got one in Kiel in 1866 but felt ill at ease with its liberal atmosphere and after a year changed to Heidelberg before he, in 1873, became Ranke's successor in Berlin.

Treitschke was a very popular lecturer and author in Germany. His fame was great in Germany as an authority on politics, but with his national pathos, he was not internationally highly esteemed, except by those who sympathised with German politics. Thus, he was no school founder in history, even though his ideas found many historians as avid consumers.

Abroad, the national theme gained a hearing as well. Historians in different countries copied Treitschke's ideas, not in the sense of German nationalism, but as given a new sense translated to the situation of their own country. Each country found their own interpreters of the general national theme of how neighbours had wronged their country [6]. Despite its widespread occurrence, nationalist historiography has not formed a school with teachers and disciples assembled around the central theses.

Annales as a school in constant dissolution

The Paris-based journal *Annales* and the historians who have been its editors, collaborators or just sources of inspiration during its existence since 1929 have played an important role in historiography not only in Europe. It has also given rise to a wide literature on its importance. However, one may wonder if there is really *one* school behind the journal during its long existence. Peter Burke, the renowned English historian, has written an often-cited book with the title *The Annales School* (its first edition dates back to 1987, the second one to 2014) [7], and this may be taken as a sign of the appropriateness of the "school" label. Nevertheless, as I mentioned earlier, a school of historiography is an ambiguous designation. A school may be a group of people collaborating for a certain end, or it may be a specific purpose, which several people find commendable and want to unite their forces to realise. In some cases, these two senses may coincide and thus give the same result, but they may also deviate. The crucial factor is if the group or the specificity of the end is most weighty.

In the case of the *Annales*, we have a journal that has been led by charismatic leaders of at least three generations, who have had collaborators and supporters of their own generation. Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, who founded the journal, were researchers of rather different interests. Bloch's primary interests lay in social history,

³ On Treitschke, see [6].

which he wanted to explore not only numerically, but also in the different views of life that underpinned social stratification. The frailty of the social edifice is a cornerstone. Febvre, on the other hand, was much more of a cultural historian with an empathic understanding of ideas stemming from earlier periods.

The period of the two founders was followed by the one-man leadership of Fernand Braudel⁴. This shift meant important changes. Braudel's primary aim was to widen the outlook over the world. The Mediterranean in the late 16th century gave a perfect outlook over the currents of goods and values that flowed in and out, gave rise to power, and created upheavals. Some collaborators followed him on his exciting intellectual journey, but some did not. The journal's content became more and more varied.

The third generation was the one of the mentalities. This generation, with Georges Duby, François Furet, Emmanuel Le Roi Ladurie, and Jacques le Goff, included no longer one recognised leader. Instead, the differences in the knowledge interest motivated the specific investigations that the *Annales* accepted for publication. The interest in historical anthropology connected these historians with many articles in the *Annales* from the time of Bloch and Febvre, and anthropology continued to be an undercurrent in the history of the *Annales*. Now it flowered more than ever with an emphasis on mentalities studied through microanalyses of different cultural milieus and different periods of history.

In the *Annales* of later years, it is difficult to find one leading theme. Different themes seem to be picked up from the rich history of the journal and appear to fit together. The historians subsumed under the designation "the Annales school" are in fact hardly a school in a qualified sense. Bloch was an early social historian; Braudel is one of the initiators of a direction favouring global history; the mentality researchers are among the many who launched microhistory; and within the Annales group there are now also gender historians. They represent a number of different directions of historiography, but these directions are not accidental. They seem to bear a common signature of their period of occurrence as pointing out fruitful research fields for new knowledge of history. Therefore, the "school" designation seems not quite wrong, even though I prefer "directions" in the plural for what the Annales groups have achieved.

Conclusion: Schools of historiography and fruitful directions

In this paper, I have tried to highlight some important turning points in the development of historiography, which recent historiographical research has mainly overlooked. The difference that I have made between schools and directions is more than sheer terminology. Schools have a common theory of history and theory of knowledge. Directions have a common evaluation of the possibility to reach important new knowledge within a specific field of research.

I find these differences in the cohesion between historians altogether neglected, though it started long ago. The development goes from a vague recognition of masters during the Antiquity and the Middle Ages to an unstructured teacher-pupil relationship around the turn into the 19th century; further, via Ranke's clear-cut school of historiography to the directions with pronounced evaluations of what fruitful further research might concentrate on. These directions, social history, microhistory, global

⁴ On Braudel, see [7–9].

history, and gender history, build on the conviction that their field is fit for fruitful investigations that may result in new knowledge of different sorts. Together with a new political history, which is founded on cooperation with the social sciences, and a new economic history that tries to build a connection between economy and society in the past, these directions have left strict school formations and teacher-disciple doctrines to the past and encourage an open inquiry after new knowledge in their field.

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Исследовательские направления и научные школы в историографии

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена особенностям появления и формирования историографических школ как коллективных объединений исследователей для совместного производства исторических знаний. Кратко рассмотрен основной понятийный аппарат историографии. Отмечено, что основоположником

историографической школы в Европе был Л. фон Ранке, который ввел в академическую практику историографические семинары. Школу Л. фон Ранке можно охарактеризовать как парадигматическую. В конце XIX в. его взгляды начали жестко критиковать историки-националисты. Их идеология основывалась на принципах политического национализма и была лишь косвенно связана с вопросами получения нового исторического знания. Еще одной противоборствующей стороной стало сообщество историков, объединившихся вокруг французского исторического журнала «Анналы». Эти историки, начиная с Марка Блока и Люсьена Февра, по-разному понимали суть исторического исследования, но примечательно, что второе и третье поколения редакторов журнала имели во многом схожие точки зрения. Рассмотренные этапы развития историографии привели к возникновению в ней различных исследовательских направлений, в фокусе внимания которых оказались наиболее актуальные вопросы развития исторического знания.

Ключевые слова: историография, историографическая школа, направление историографии, национализм, плодотворные исследования, новое знание, Л. фон Ранке, Э. Бернгейм, И.Г. Дройзен, Г. фон Трейчке, М. Блок, Ф. Бродель, Ж. Дюби, Э. Ле Руа Ладюри

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