

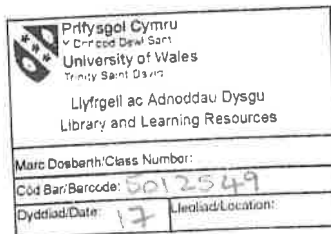
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HOW THE PAST WAS USED

Historical Cultures, *c.*750–2000

Edited by
Peter Lambert & Björn Weiler

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Introduction

PETER LAMBERT & BJÖRN WEILER

HISTORICAL CULTURE, as defined for the purposes of this volume, encompasses the totality of means and media by which societies, groups and individuals engaged with the past and expressed their understanding of it. The individual chapters treat not only producers, but also the consumers of the past; they address not only historical writing, but also the literary, pictorial and ritual representation of history; they concern not only the oeuvre of professional historians, but also that of poets, clerics, novelists, administrators, political activists, and journalists.¹ We are, furthermore, concerned less with the accuracy of the past thus fashioned than with what the various types of engagement can tell us about the wider intellectual and cultural framework within which they took place. Every society has desired some sort of knowledge of a past. But how it (or some of its members) selected that past, how it was verified, by what means and with what sensibilities impressions of it were then conveyed to others, often tells us much more about the concerns of those commissioning, producing, consuming and debating such representations than about what had actually happened. Rather than viewing this as a flaw, however, for which past cultures ought to be reprimanded, we see it as an opportunity. After all, because having a history was so important, debates and disputes surrounding reconstructions of the past can reveal intellectual fault-lines and currents that otherwise remain hidden from view. Equally, the seeming remoteness of a past could provide a secure space within which to evaluate and judge, but also come to terms with the present. Exploring how the past was used is thus about much more than just the writing of history.

Historical culture furthermore encourages us to move beyond hierarchies, which, even in current scholarship, exaggerate the significance of academic

¹ A comparable approach is that of Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, 2nd rev. edn (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), which should, in fact, be required reading for anyone interested in historical culture.

history. While due attention is paid in this volume to historical writing, we largely eschew the works of professional historians. Where we do engage with them, it is not to characterise them as a breed apart, but as integral parts of historical cultures, shaping and being shaped by them. This allows us not only to explore a more representative sample of how engagements with the past normally took place, but also to move beyond a sometimes determinist narrative that dominates much modern scholarship on the subject. Most recent surveys of history and historiography sketch a trajectory from the nineteenth century to the twentieth (with at best a nod to the Enlightenment, and, in adventurous cases, the Renaissance). In the process, they spin a tale, almost Whiggish in its outlook, of steady progress from Ranke to the present, combined with some lamentations about (and more recently, celebrations of triumph over) a post-modernist challenge. History is thus portrayed as an inherently modern phenomenon and at least implicitly defined as what is practised by academically trained, professional historians.²

One recent study, by Georg G. Iggers and Edward Q. Wang, stands out among the rest—and not only because of its genuinely global approach to academic historiography. Iggers and Wang also insist that it is in general a besetting sin of most approaches to the history of historiography ‘that they take historical scholarship too seriously, more or less at face value, not fully recognising the extent to which scholarship in the west and in non-western societies was very much part of a broader historical culture’. That they themselves concentrated on textual academic histories nevertheless was perfectly legitimate. An endeavour to encompass the full range of the practices of historical culture in a single coherently argued volume would indeed be beyond any two historians’ competence—and an impracticable undertaking in any case. As Iggers and Wang themselves put it, doing full justice to historical culture would demand ‘a “thick description” in the mode of Geertzian cultural anthropology to reconstruct the web of meanings which constitute the historical outlook of a culture.’ That is precisely where

² See, for instance: Stefan Berger, Heiko Feldner and Kevin Passmore (eds), *Writing History: Theory and Practice* (London: Hodder, 2003); Jeremy Black, *Historiography: Contesting the Past, Claiming the Future* (London: Social Affairs Unit, 2011); Eileen Ka-May Cheng, *Historiography: An Introductory Guide* (London: Continuum, 2012); Peter Claus and John Marriott, *History: An Introduction to Theory, Method and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2012); Stefan Berger and Bill Niven (eds), *Writing the History of Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). Similarly, the *Oxford History of Historical Writing*, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) covers roughly a millennium in each of the first two volumes (beginnings to 600, and 400–1400), 400 years in the third (1400–1800), 150 years in the fourth (1800–1945), and sixty-five in the fifth (developments since 1945). This results in an author in volume 2 having to cover, in one chapter, the writing, over a thousand-year period, of universal history—never the least popular or most concise genre of historical writing—in all of Western and Eastern Europe and the whole of the Islamic world (none of them known for their lack of historiographical endeavour), while volume 5 dedicates an equal length chapter each to the writing of history since 1945 in France, Britain, Germany, Italy and the Balkans (though the several hundred million speakers of Arabic still had to share one chapter). A laudable exception is Daniel Woolf, *A Global History of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), which, however, explicitly excludes all types of engagement with the past that cannot be classified as historical writing.

we hope that the present collection of essays will make a contribution. The individual chapters below constitute micro-level analyses; several might certainly be described as offering ‘thick description’. It is precisely in their ‘local colour’ that historical cultures reveal themselves. Only once they have been understood in their own terms does it become legitimate to begin to make comparisons and show connections between them or to suggest patterns among them. Iggers and Wang further point to the pitfalls that await any attempt to ram minute depictions of historical culture into a single narrative. It is, they warn, illusory to conceive of cultures as ‘integrated systems’. In fact, they are prone to exhibit ‘many contradictory aspects that resist being subsumed in a system’.³

Iggers’ and Wang’s suggestion that the habit of treating the modern discipline of history as if it stood outside the framework of historical culture be dropped is timely. We would add that, even in modern times, professional historians in the Rankean mould were the exception, not the rule. This was true even in nineteenth-century Germany, the first home of the modern, university-based profession of academic history. There, what were arguably the great public controversies about the national past focused on the Thirty Years’ War. As Kevin Cramer has amply demonstrated, these were by no means dominated by the contribution of the university professors. While new archival research was one facet of the debates which marked their modernity, the terms of debate had been established before the advent of professionalisation, and the fresh research did not fundamentally alter them. Besides, the discovery of rich seams of primary source materials was more often the fruit of the labours of amateur historians delving into the records of local archives than of professional historians working in what rapidly became their preferred research destination: central state archives. Academic historians, meanwhile, were quite as likely to make their contributions in the shape of historical novels, plays and epic poems as through the genre of historical writing that was the hallmark of their discipline.⁴ In comparable developments in England, as Paul Readman has shown, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century academic historians were implicated in grand public commemorations of ‘national heroes’, but had neither initiated them nor set their tone.⁵ Daniel Woolf has asserted that the ‘professionalisation’ of ‘historical culture’ may be distinguished as a phenomenon of the nineteenth century. But this generates a confusion of historical culture with historical scholarship, and so neglects everything from the continuing rise of the historical novel through to that of the historicising pageant in the same period. Since we are interested in the role of the past in intellectual and cultural discourses, then we cannot limit ourselves

³ George G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang with contributions from Supriya Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (London: Pearson, 2008), p. 4.

⁴ Kevin Cramer, *The Thirty Years’ War and German Memory in the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

⁵ Paul Readman, ‘The Place of the Past in English Culture c. 1890–1914’, *Past & Present* 186 (2005), 147–199.

solely to the products of those academically trained to engage with it. Nor should we confine ourselves to those who, in terms of approach and method, seem to foreshadow our own. Doing so would mean misrepresenting both the legacy on which modern approaches to the past built, and their distinctiveness. It also would mean arrogantly imposing a rather narrow set of practices as normative, and doing so for no better reason than that they are the ones we have ourselves been trained to apply and practise. The ways and means with which societies at different points in time engaged with their past are too rich and varied not to deserve exploring on their own terms, and in relation to their particular social, cultural, religious and political contexts.⁶ Ensuring chronological breadth has therefore been a central aim in putting together this volume, with over half of its chapters treating the period before 1700. This, we hope, will help restore some historical perspective to the study of history and its uses.

Just as the concept of historical culture encourages us to look beyond modernity, it also spurs us to look beyond the west. Almost two-thirds of the chapters in this book therefore deal with regions other than Western Europe. Just because those active in different cultures did not write like Prussian bureaucrats does not mean that they lacked a past, that they did not have highly developed conventions for engaging with it, or that indigenous users did not exercise agency in adapting and adopting practices from different cultures with which they had come in contact. That the Malay word for museum derives from the Dutch equivalent is thus of less importance to us than how non-western producers of historical culture went about constructing a past, irrespective of whether or not they drew on external models in the process. In any case, societies did not operate in complete isolation from one another. Ottoman historians, for instance, used Arabic, Greek and Persian models, while in seventeenth-century India poets happily drew on Mughal conventions as well as Sanskrit traditions to produce Hindi historical literature. It is similarly the case that nineteenth-century theorists and practitioners of history, such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel or Leopold von Ranke—however dismissive they may have been of non-western historical practices—were deeply influenced by the discovery of and fascination with Asia in Enlightenment Europe. In fact, Hegel (who produced a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*) shared an interest in Sanskrit writings with, among others, Wilhelm von Humboldt, who initiated the university reforms that made possible the Rankean ideal of professional, academically trained historians in the first place.⁷ To some extent, at least as far as the

⁶ See, for similar points, made in relation to the study of political thought, Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1: *Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). We are, of course, aware of the irony that we are applying the conceptual toolkit of the modern academic historian to these sometimes rather different modes of engagement with the past. But, then, just because we find the toolkit especially helpful, this does not mean that it is the only one available. Similarly, as historians respectively of the Third Reich and Europe in the age of crusades, we would point out that suggesting a period or movement is worth exploring does not mean we should seek to copy or emulate it.

⁷ Michael Hulin, *Hegel et l'Orient* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1979); Bradley L. Herling, *The German Gita: Hermeneutics and Discipline in the German Reception of Indian Thought, 1778–1831*

contributions to this volume are concerned, too clear a distinction between western and non-western uses of the past would therefore miss the point. We will return to possible reasons for the commonalities and parallels emerging in this volume, but suffice it to state here that we are dealing neither with anthropological universals nor simply the products of western cultural imperialism. Commonalities do become apparent, but only if we approach non-western historical cultures on their own terms, as something worth taking seriously exactly because they reflect particular cultural norms and practices.

This book offers a framework for comparison, not a handbook; a series of snapshots, not a comprehensive panorama in the manner of Wang Hui or Xu Yang.⁸ In short, we seek to show how, as a conceptual tool, historical culture may help make comparison possible while simultaneously allowing room to identify the culturally and historically contingent. We address what historical culture is, how it operated, and what it can reveal about the wider cultural, religious and social contexts within which it was practised. We believe that, used as it is here, the concept has the potential to offer new insights, approaches and lines of enquiry. What we offer is not a comprehensive overview. We do, though, hope to sketch a useful approach towards broad comparisons across cultural spheres, with a deep chronology, and considerable geographical range that simultaneously avoids the pitfalls so commonly associated with global or world history. What we have done here will not, of course, work in every context and for every topic. Yet, as we also hope to show, trying to transcend often artificial boundaries of periodisation, and being curious about how different cultural spheres dealt with comparable experiences, promises to reveal unexpected vistas, surprising continuities and unforeseen patterns of change.

The remainder of the introduction is intended as a guide with which to navigate a route through this volume. Readers may, however, find it useful to consult the online abstracts of chapters before returning to our prefatory musings, since we discuss overarching patterns, instead of summarising individual contributions.⁹ We begin by outlining the genesis of the concept 'historical culture'. We were not, after all, the ones to coin it. That it has been employed in meaningful ways most visibly and frequently by modern German and French historians working on late modern western Europe will make outlining the development all the more important in a volume like ours. We follow this historiographical sketch with a phenomenology of historical culture, based on the specific case studies below. This, we hope, will give readers a better sense of what abstract terms mean in practice, but also an incentive to test and, if necessary, revise our reading. With these prolegomena out of the way: what, then, is historical culture?

(London: Routledge, 2006). For the European discovery of Asia: Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens. Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1998).

⁸ <http://www.mcah.columbia.edu/nanxuntu/html/scrolls/index.html>, accessed 23 March 2016.

⁹ See https://www.academia.edu/32670446/How_the_Past_was_used_historical_cultures_c._700-2000_ed._Peter_Lambert_and_Bj%C3%B6rn_Weiler_Proceedings_of_the_British_Academy_Oxford_Oxford_University_Press_2017_.

What is Historical Culture?

PETER LAMBERT

This volume is about how, *in past societies*, the past was used. When we set out to gather a collection of essays on the uses of the past, it was emphatically not with a 'presentist' agenda. We had no desire ourselves to achieve measurable 'impact' by dint (say) of collaborating with a museum in order to encourage some imagined 'best practice', drawn from historical precedent, as to the display of the past. Instead, we wanted to know what kinds of history had an impact, and what was known and considered worth knowing about the past at a variety of points in the past, and in as diverse a range of societies as possible. We were interested in the *sense* of history that people had. That, of course, is knowable only through the ways in which their knowledge was expressed.

It may well be that the very notion of 'uses of the past' will trigger different expectations among different readers.¹⁰ Some might think immediately of history as a compendium of lessons, so that just as we might hope each to learn from our individual experience, so we might learn from the successes and the failures of others, and on a grand scale. The notion of history as *magistra vitae* itself has a venerable ancestry, and if academic historians are now prone to sneer at it as a simpleton's delusion, they will also acknowledge that there is merit in continuing to think about it.¹¹ Three grounds for doing so may immediately be advanced. First, the fact that it once attracted people to learning about the past more often than it now appears to do, and had a much more powerful hold on the historical imagination, will encourage a trained historian to ask why it did so. Second, however, a wish to learn by example from—and not just about—the past may persist rather more widely than academic historians like to acknowledge. Third, the line of thinkers about the past who warned against the straightforward adoption of what might appear as past model behaviour because such behaviour might have wholly different consequences in a later and signally changed context is itself impressive in its antiquity. Tellingly, the chapters in the present volume are quite as likely to address endeavours to learn from the past in the setting of late modernity as in any other era. And those attempts prove often to have been sophisticated.

But of course there are, and have long been, other kinds of spirit in which the usefulness of the past may be conceived. The deliberate, manipulative abuse of the past in the service of politics, or of an individual's or a family's reputation, is a familiar trope. So also is its unwitting misuse by those who, out of similar motives

¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, then, historians have themselves addressed a profusion of kinds of use of the past. Recent surveys include Jeremy Black, *Using History* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005); Margaret MacMillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (Croydon: Profile Books, 2010).

¹¹ For a recent revival of the idea, see Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

to those of the fraud or forger but without malign intent, have seen in it only what they were predisposed to see. In either case, myth intrudes into history or substitutes for it entirely. Forged or at least invented pasts have at least the virtue of being imaginative constructs—and of susceptibility to exposure. But distortion could also be achieved through selective destruction, and sometimes by means of the systematic obliteration of the metaphorical traces of the past in popular memory or its literal traces in artefacts or the built environment. Late modern regimes and movements have surely at once enjoyed unprecedented technological powers of destruction and an unusual degree of commitment to using them. These have ranged from the 'soft violence' of post-totalitarian regimes through to the erasure of memory and history—by genocide and via the annihilation of buildings and monuments associable with totalitarian regimes or with movements like Isis/Daesh. Not even the latter seek to destroy *all* pasts. Only the pasts of the 'degenerate' or apostate, the dissident or the heretic, the alien neighbour or intruder were or are the targets. Such inconvenient pasts once removed, the 'truth' of one's own past might emerge in its full glory, free from the rival lure of perhaps still older pasts and rescued from the threat of being overshadowed by more recent ones.

The creativity of the forger and destructiveness of the iconoclast have both contributed to the construction of identities. So too have shared memories, and the actions of those who conveyed them across generations. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of any human community without some sense of a shared past—in other words, of social memory—as one of its defining features. Regardless of time and place, *that* is reflected in every one of the chapters below.

A final use of the past, and one that is perhaps too readily overlooked, is that the acquisition of knowledge of it may serve simply to satisfy curiosity. Curiosity's close ally is entertainment. Both may be linked to study of the past 'for its own sake'. Historians, and perhaps especially historians of historiography, have no grounds for sneering in this regard. Leopold von Ranke, whose own reputation as the founding father of modern academic history has only relatively recently been dented, according to an oft-repeated account was first inspired by the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Only on discovering that primary sources told a still more interesting story than Scott did he turn himself into an historian. But the tale of his conversion appears likely to be apocryphal. Its wide dissemination makes perfectly good sense in light of one respect in which his reputation has survived untarnished, namely his unequalled accomplishment in promoting a new, 'scientific' (for which read scholarly) approach to the pursuit of history, and so also in promoting himself to mythic status as its progenitor.

'Historical culture' is a concept still relatively unfamiliar even among academic historians, and perhaps especially so in Britain. A trawl through an older literature in English in search of the term would be unrewarding and, from the point of view of our use of it, downright misleading. It may be encountered sporadically in English-language literature before the 1980s, but serves as a kind of throwaway allusion to an amorphous array of understandings or uses of the past and is undefined. In 1986, however, an oft-cited work re-introduced 'historical culture', and

did so in what was simultaneously a far more systematic way and one completely at odds with our own understanding. Sande Cohen's study identified 'historical culture' specifically with academic history—and proceeded to lambast it.¹² He defined his own 'intellectual ethic' as 'anticapitalism' and *therefore* as 'the basis for a rejection of historical thinking'.¹³ We would counter that 'historical thinking' has served plenty of people (beginning with Karl Marx) as 'the basis for a rejection of capitalism', but that in and of itself it is neither 'reactionary' nor 'progressive'. And we employ historical culture very differently: to encompass the sum of actions and media with which individuals and communities have treated the past. The concept thus embraces social memory and history alike, and myths and fictions as well as verifiable history, and literary works, inscriptions, buildings, material culture, performance and oral traditions as well as historiographical texts. Predicated on an already existing historical *consciousness* (which in turn is identifiable in virtually every historically knowable society), its core concern is thus with the *representation* of the past.

By extension, historical culture may be interpreted as comprehending not only the production of works engaging with the past, but also their uses and reception. This broader approach brings with it several advantages: it allows us to recognise just how essential engagement with the past was (and of course still is) to human societies, even if the manner in which that engagement was pursued does not necessarily meet late modern, professional academic definitions of 'history' or 'historical research'; the range of processes and media through which the past was apprehended, studied and represented; the range of uses to which it was put (whether with a clear aim to establish a usable past, or in a more happenstance and incidental fashion); and the range of actors involved in dealing with the past (authors, scribes, readers, listeners, archivists). Moreover, precisely because having a past and disseminating knowledge of it were deemed so important, we can trace numerous debates that transcend simple binaries of elite and popular, but that still shed light on the intellectual and cultural paradigms that conditioned how past societies engaged with the past.

The expression 'historical culture' and the emphasis on representation it brings with it suggest a 'cultural turn' even in approaches to the development of historiography, and more broadly affinities with the 'new' cultural history. The variety of participators in its production and reception and the array of kinds of representation of the past it incorporates seem to echo the ambitions of the French Annales School historians and their emulators to create an *histoire totale*. The appearances are emphatically *not* deceptive. It is under precisely these intellectual stimuli that contours of the field we call 'historical culture' were first drawn, and their influence has remained vital over the subsequent quarter of a century

¹² Sande Cohen, *Historical Culture: On the Recording of an Academic Disciple* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

¹³ Cohen, *Historical Culture*, p. 10.

in which historical culture has gained in currency. It was in Germany that the first attempts at systematic definition of historical culture—of *Geschichtskultur*—were undertaken. And in German the concept has remained significantly more familiar than in English.¹⁴ But it would be quite wrong to draw the inference that (perhaps in common with modern academic history itself) the concept is therefore a product of a German national academic culture. Rather, it took shape in the context of a relatively belated German receptivity to the 'new' cultural history.¹⁵ One of its facets was the awakening of an equally delayed interest in the work of the Annales, and especially of the medievalist Georges Duby. His interest in the contexts in which events unfolded, and in the representation of events in chronicles, in traditions, in songs and in different kinds of historiography were precisely what, for the German historian Ulrich Raulff, created the opening for 'the characteristic questions posed by "*Geschichtskultur*"'. Raulff went on to provide his own definition of *Geschichtskultur*—which dovetails with our own.¹⁶ Within Germany, there were other approaches to the field, however. These grew out of concerns with academic historical pedagogy,¹⁷ and with the place of history in *contemporary* society. The latter is true especially of the work of Jörn Rüsen, whose understanding of 'historical culture' is essentially presentist. He emphasises twentieth- and twenty-first-century media as co-constitutive aspects of historical culture, and alerts us to ways in which current developments in historical culture may even open perspectives on the future.¹⁸ We do not share a desire to narrow the use of 'historical culture' to an issue of university history teaching, nor do we see any reason to limit its application to contemporary society. But we do share Rüsen's desire to overcome propensities to explore different kinds of engagement

¹⁴ A Google Advanced Search for '*Geschichtskultur*' resulted in 78,600 hits; one for 'historical culture' produced 208,000. To put that in context, for '*Geschichte*' there were 201 million hits, while for 'history' there were 3,670 million. And then, of course, the hits for '*Geschichte*' obviously include the very many which refer not to 'history', but to 'story' (accessed 26 January 2016).

¹⁵ See Klaus P. Hansen (ed.), *Kulturbegriff und Methode. Der stille Paradigmenwechsel in den Geisteswissenschaften. Eine Passauer Ringvorlesung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), on the 'cultural turn' in German academic settings; see in particular the chapter by Ulrich Raulff, 'Von der Kulturgeschichte zur Geschichtskultur. Eine wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Skizze', pp. 133–48, for a more particular discussion of the emergence of *Geschichtskultur*.

¹⁶ Raulff, 'Von der Kulturgeschichte', pp. 144–6; Frank Hadler, 'Geschichtskultur und Historiographiegeschichte' in Matthias Middell (ed.), *Dimensionen der Kultur- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Festschrift für Hannes Siegrist zum 60. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2007), pp. 273–88. Hadler notes the habit of some German scholars in the field of *Geschichtskultur* of 'forgetting' foreign precursors, and identifies Polish as well as French initiatives that predated German ones.

¹⁷ See e.g. Bernd Schönemann, 'Geschichtskultur als Forschungskonzept der Geschichtsdidaktik', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtsdidaktik* 1 (2002), 78–86.

¹⁸ Jörn Rüsen, 'Geschichtskultur als Forschungsproblem' in Klaus Fröhlich, Heinrich Theodor Grütter, and Jörn Rüsen (eds), *Geschichtskultur (= Jahrbuch für Geschichtsdidaktik 3)*, (Pfaffenweiler: Seelze-Welber: 1992), pp. 39–50; Rüsen, 'Was ist Geschichtskultur? Überlegungen zu einer Art, über Geschichte Nachzudenken' in Klaus Füllmann et al. (eds), *Historische Faszination. Geschichtskultur heute* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau, 1994), pp. 3–26.

with the past as if they were virtually hermetically sealed off from, or even radically opposed to one another. That ambition runs through the present volume.

It also distinguishes our work from most studies of how the past was understood and represented. Here, the overwhelming trend, like that of the discipline of history in general and the development of work on historical culture notwithstanding, has been of specialisation and fragmentation. The host of studies of late-modern academic history serve as a case in point. As they have evolved, they have gone a long way toward overcoming tendencies to understand their subject either as so many copies of an original 'German model' or otherwise in straightforwardly national contexts. Recent work has frequently been comparativist, has focused on cultural transfers across national borders, and brought a global perspective to bear.¹⁹ Concentrating on what is distinctive about that professional and largely university-based approach to historical research, writing and teaching, these studies still run the risk of telling too triumphalist a story and treating that one particular kind of scholarship (their own) as if it were inherently and in every way superior to all other approaches. This is a dangerous conceit. It re-introduces the myth of scholars working in splendid isolation from the cultures that surround them. As Michael Zuckerman has acidly observed, 'If you think academics live in ivory towers, you probably still believe in Santa Claus and the tooth fairy.'²⁰

Facile as it is to cast academic historians as disinterested and 'objective' (and, by implication, to caricature all others engaged in the representation of the past as partisan, as deceitful at worst and self-delusional at best), that is nevertheless how the pioneers of academic history in the nineteenth century and many of their twentieth-century successors liked to see themselves (and to castigate their amateur rivals). Disinterestedness and the quest for objectivity are in a sense at the core of academic historians' own foundation myth. As John Edward Toews has argued, Leopold von Ranke's own development as an historian can be understood only in relation to the emergence of a Prussian state-sponsored historical culture from which Ranke benefited (for instance through his appointment as official Prussian state historiographer in 1841) but which he certainly did not generate, and which involved the power-political ambitions of the king and the work of historicising composers like Mendelssohn and architects like Schinkel no less than it rested on written histories. Ranke turned from Liberalism toward Conservatism not (only) because he began to adopt and internalise the perspectives of the authors

¹⁹ Eckardt Fuchs and Benedikt Stuchtey (eds), *Across Cultural Borders: Historiography in Global Perspective* (Lanham, MD, Boulder, CO, New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Gabriele Lingelbach, *Klio macht Karriere. Die Institutionalisierung der Geschichtswissenschaft in Frankreich und den USA in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).

²⁰ Quoted on the dust jacket of Jon Wiener, *Historians in Trouble: Plagiarism, Fraud, and Politics in the Ivory Tower* (New York: New Press, 2007). Wiener's study itself catalogues sins committed by US academic historians, in contravention of the rules governing their craft—and notes that whether or not they 'got away' with their misdeeds has little to do with the sins themselves, and much to do with US political culture.

of the papers of state in which he began to immerse himself, but because that research brought him into the company of conservative elites and statesmen.²¹ In the next generation, the 'Prussian School' historians nevertheless quarrelled with his seeming detachment. And then Friedrich Nietzsche notoriously damned all academic historiography as if it suffered—essentially from being as dry as dust—precisely because it strove for objectivity. He could, as Georg Iggers and Q. Edward Wang have pointed out, hardly have been more wrong in his characterisation of professional historians 'retiring into ivory towers'. In fact, 'notwithstanding their claims of objectivity, they wrote history with a political purpose, distorting the past in the service of ideology.'²² In this respect, the borders between pre-modern and modern historical cultures become permeable to a degree that makes them almost invisible.

There is a plethora of recent studies of memory, and especially of how *societies* have remembered.²³ These works together constitute a field which, the variety of nomenclatures ('collective', 'public', 'social' and 'cultural' memory among others) its practitioners prefer notwithstanding, vies with historical culture in its capacity to overcome the fragmentation of work on representations of the past. Wulf Kansteiner notes that it embraces a flotilla of 'research agendas that used to sail under separate colours'—the history of mentalities, of everyday life and of popular culture among them. He indicates also its close relationship with the study of historical consciousness.²⁴ Scholars within the field have identified the malleability and unreliability of memory—even where they have not dwelt on its shortcomings. As with historical culture, so with 'social memory': its study has not been used principally to provide windows onto the events that were consigned to memory, but to explore, for example, the processes by which some memories were validated while others were repressed, and to recover their modes of transmission. It is really not the memories themselves that are examined, indeed, but how people expressed or represented them. The difference is analogous to the distinction between historical consciousness and historical culture.

²¹ John Edward Toews, *Becoming Historical. Cultural Reformation and Public Memory in Early Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), *passim* and, for Ranke, pp. 374–6.

²² Iggers and Wang, *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, p. 132.

²³ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) are landmark studies in the development of the field. See also Kerwin Lee Klein, 'On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse', *Representations* 69 (2000), 127–50, and, for a recent review of methodologies and of empirical studies, Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

²⁴ Wulf Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies', *History and Theory* 41 (2002), 179–97, at 182.

Other immediately adjacent fields which memory studies have 'annexed' include work on commemoration,²⁵ and on oral tradition.²⁶ In each of the latter, historians and historiography rear their heads as component parts of the object of study. We have already noted the presence or complicity 'even' of academic historians in commemorations. The role of historiography in oral tradition extends beyond the obvious fact that many oral traditions are now accessible only because they were written down. There is also a phenomenon of 'feedback' which has frequently bedevilled their analysis. As literacy advanced, so written histories, like cuckoo eggs in another bird's nest, were apt to find their way into oral traditions. From one point of view, of course, these do appear as unwelcome intruders. They may readily seem to be contaminants which have distorted even where they did not altogether subsume stories simply told. The latter may indeed have changed over time (whether through osmosis or the divergent understandings of successive generations responding to their own experiences and priorities), but had at least once been pristine in their orality and so more 'authentic'. On the other hand, the processes through which oral traditions absorbed historical literature to give rise to new narratives of the past are themselves worth unpicking. The incorporation of elements of historical writing into oral tradition is neutral in relation to 'truth value'. An oral tradition may in fact be enriched by the fruits of research-based historical writing.

Should historical writing, while often integral to commemoration and oral tradition, be regarded as standing outside the framework of memory? Here, historians disagree. For Tony Judt, memory functions as a closed system. It is self-confirming and self-reinforcing.²⁷ It may of course be jolted, but always by external stimuli. In the case of post-1945 European memories of the Holocaust and of collaboration with Nazism, fundamental transformations of social memory are clearly observable. However, Judt argued, they cannot be explained by any kind of dynamic operating within the 'collective' memory-bank. Rather, he insisted, 'the instrument of recall ... was not memory itself. It was *history*, in both its meanings: as the passage of time and as the professional study of the past—the latter above all.' Critical and unsettling by definition, professional historiography unflinchingly serves the purpose of disenchantment. Here, Judt was expressing the orthodox definition of academic history as the intractable enemy of social memory and corrective to its inherent lapses and errors. Thus, and in Allan Megill's view, 'in its demand for proof, history stands in sharp opposition to memory.' Approvingly, Judt quoted Yoseph Hayim Yerushalmi: 'Only the

²⁵ A good starting-point is John R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²⁶ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) remains indispensable.

²⁷ Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Heinemann, 2005), p. 380.

historian, with the austere passion for fact, proof, evidence, which are central to his vocation, can effectively stand guard.'²⁸

There are three problems with Judt's view. First, it treats memory as if it existed independently of human agency, as a sort of unthinking organism. Second, as his own depiction of European memory for years after the end of the Second World War amply demonstrates, historians long failed to challenge the complacencies of memory.²⁹ Trained academic historians who worked not only under the dictatorships of the twentieth century but also in the wake of their demise regurgitated and legitimated the tropes of the memory cultures which surrounded them.³⁰ These historians hardly appear as the gatekeepers of veracity—and so also of history itself—that Yerushalmi, Judt and a host of others insist they should have been. Third, increasingly many historians apprehend not only historical writing as such, but their own profession as being party to social memory and its construction. This is true of recent interpretations of the first generations of academic historians, as we have seen. Kevin Cramer put the case forcefully: 'nineteenth-century German historical work on the Thirty Years' War was itself "memory work", a therapeutic process of preserving and transmitting collective remembrance in order that the past might serve the present. Functioning in this way, history writing becomes a commemorative (and mnemonic) act.'³¹ One implication is clear. Twentieth-century professional historians who, as co-authors of social memory, colluded in repression and distortion of the past are not easily to be dismissed as having fallen from a gold standard of the discipline established at the point of its own foundation. Through their command of philology and hermeneutics, historians unquestionably had the wherewithal to expose forgeries. And they made ample use of it. But the *narrative* element that was just as firmly embedded in their craft allowed them to manipulate and re-invent the past nevertheless. 'Perhaps', Kansteiner suggests, it would be more reasonable to define history 'as a particular kind of cultural memory.'

The jury is still out. There is no unanimity as to whether history and memory stand together in a joint enterprise, or whether they are fundamentally at odds with one another. In any event, historical culture has a conceptual and practical advantage over 'social memory'. Conceptual, because it is sturdily immune to embroilment in the difficulty that still plagues discussion of memory studies: whether to opt for the in- or exclusion of academic history from their terms of reference. History was inscribed into its domain *ab initio*. Practical, in part for that

²⁸ Judt, *Postwar*, p. 802. For similar statements, see Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning'.

²⁹ Judt, *Postwar*, pp. 803–5.

³⁰ Volodymyr V. Kravchenko, 'Ukraine Faces Its Soviet Past: History versus Politics versus Memory', in Jie-Hyun Lim, Barbara Walker and Peter Lambert (eds), *Mass Dictatorship and Memory as Ever Present Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 87–119; Naoki Sakai, 'History and Responsibility: On the Debates on the *Shōwa History*', in Lim, Walker and Lambert, *Mass Dictatorship*, pp. 120–38.

³¹ Cramer, *The Thirty Years' War*, p. 183.

very reason. Because critical history is present in historical cultures—of course not only, but perhaps especially in late-modern settings—they have the potential to transcend the moral and intellectual polarities of ‘ourselves’ and ‘others’. And that holds for polarities which are rather more important than the one allegedly describing the relationship between ‘us’ professional historians and the amorphous body of ‘others’ who display some sort of interest in the past. They may, as Rüsen has argued, serve to overcome ethnocentrism. ‘Ethnocentric master narratives’ have proliferated ‘in a multitude of different cultures’ and given rise to civilisational clashes. But the task of overcoming them through ‘the logical principles of historical thinking’ proves ‘rather simple’. First, a ‘*principle of equality*’ must be established in the comparison of ‘self with others’. A ‘*mutual recognition of differences*’ will result, but not as a ‘dividing force’. On the contrary, ‘mutuality realizes equality’. Second, ‘it is necessary to break the power of self-esteem’ and to cease ‘devaluing ... others’. This is achievable only by ‘*integrating negative historical experiences into the master narrative of one’s own group*’.³² In respect of Europe, he mounts a persuasive case for identifying this as a process already well underway. Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust are no longer treated in Germany as if they had been the work of a handful of Nazis alone. Elsewhere in Europe, they are no longer attributed simply and exclusively to Nazi Germany. Spurred on by having to deal with the man-made catastrophes of the twentieth century, national historical cultures have been prone to try to lay claim to the moral high ground. Wherever this occurs, ‘the dark side of oneself is projected and exterritorialized onto the features of the others.’ Thus, ‘we’ are always ‘cultured’ or ‘civilised’; ‘they’ are invariably ‘brutal’ and ‘barbarians’ (the pattern has a long ancestry in historical cultures, as Rüsen notes). But latterly the same historical cultures have begun to confront these bleak chapters in their pasts, and to recognise them as part of *their own* histories. The moral certitudes of national identity are being punctured and a distinctively European historical culture—with all its implications for the construction of identity—is (however patchily and haltingly) beginning to emerge.³³

Similarly, Jie-Hyun Lim has identified the recent transnational growth of a distinctive kind of nationalism. In lieu of celebrating national *martyrs* (who, after all, struggled and fell for a cause), it espouses a collective national *victimhood*. It does so especially in order ‘to circumnavigate potential or actual charges of complicity with “mass” dictatorships’ or at least of collusion in covering up their crimes. Direct ‘complicity’ is ‘selectively forgotten’; legal charges are

³² Jörn Rüsen, ‘How to Overcome Ethnocentrism: Approaches to a Culture of Recognition by History in the Twenty-First Century’, *History and Theory* 43:1 (2004), 118–29; quotations at 124–5. Emphasis as in the original.

³³ Jörn Rüsen, ‘Future-Directed Elements of a European Historical Culture’ in Q. Edward Wang and Franz L. Fillafer (eds), *The Many Faces of Clio. Cross-cultural Approaches to Historiography* (New York and Oxford: Berhahn, 2007), pp. 163–71; quotation at p. 166.

sometimes sidestepped; ‘moral opprobrium’ may give way to ‘public sympathy’.³⁴ ‘Victimhood nationalism’ can perform ‘magic’, Lim argues, for instance by dint of turning individual Polish perpetrators of the Jedwabne in July 1941 into victims first of ‘fascism’ and ‘capitalism’ and then of the Communist regime. Lim notes the complicity of historians in the construction of self-enclosed ‘victimhood nationalisms’, and therefore concludes with a kind of call to arms: historians now are duty-bound to confront it. The means at their disposal are clear. These include recognition of the fact that victim and perpetrator are capable of changing places over time and that, depending on circumstance, an individual may be a victim in one way yet a perpetrator in another. Only comparativist and transnational approaches to these difficulties can lead us out of the impasse of rival ‘victimhood nationalisms’.³⁵ The result would not only be a healthier historical culture by the measure of human rights, for example. It would also be better history. Specific responsibilities would displace ahistorical categories of ‘collective guilt’ (or ‘collective innocence’).

The identification of historiography with myth-making and myth-breaking alike leads into a further avenue which has deeply influenced the thinking behind this book. In 1983, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger introduced the paradoxical notion that ‘traditions’ were ‘invented’.³⁶ Symbols and rituals which had every appearance of time-honoured authenticity proved again and again to be of recent provenance. In Britain, Europe and even Africa, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the mass production of emblems and ceremonies which warrant the name ‘tradition’ for two reasons: they were designed to seem old and they *worked*. In the process, they gave *national* communities in particular a veneer of rootedness in a deep past. Continuities were asserted and sharp breaks concealed. But, alert as Hobsbawm and Ranger were to the emotional appeal of the repertoire of invented traditions, it was largely with the emotions of the inventors themselves that they were concerned. Explaining their attractiveness to the mass consumers of ‘national’ costumes, for example, and to ordinary participants in ritual celebrations of the nation, was of relatively little interest to them.³⁷ Perhaps, since they were concerned with forgeries of a sort, Hobsbawm and Ranger were also less appreciative of the imagination and creativity involved in their making. National invented traditions and the closely related phenomenon of national master narratives of history have enjoyed an enduring appeal which

³⁴ Jie-Hyun Lim and Peter Lambert, ‘Introduction: Coming to Terms with the Past of Mass Dictatorship’, in Lim, Walker and Lambert, *Mass Dictatorship*, pp. 1–13, at p. 2.

³⁵ Jie-Hyun Lim, ‘Victimhood Nationalism in the Memory of Mass Dictatorship’, in Lim, Walker and Lambert, *Mass Dictatorship*, pp. 36–61.

³⁶ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

³⁷ For correctives, see Readman, ‘The Place of the Past’, 149 and 198–200, and Terence Ranger, ‘The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa’, in Terence Ranger and Olufemi Vaughan (eds), *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-Century Africa: Essays in Honour of A. H. M. Kirk-Greene* (Oxford: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 78–82.

their rivals have not.³⁸ For us, given our commitment to a *transnational* approach, that does of course present a problem. Only by identifying why the national paradigm has resonated with so many people for so long is it possible to build effectively on those kinds of scholarship which have attempted to challenge national historiography.³⁹

Spawning an array of studies far too numerous to list here, the concept of the 'invention of tradition' made a signal contribution to constructivist approaches to national history. But traditions have been invented in contexts and for purposes other than national ones. And, while Hobsbawm and Ranger did not pretend that the invention of tradition was wholly peculiar to the late modern period, they paid scant attention to its appearance in other periods or cultures unaffected by nationalism (and, in some late modern cases, even hostile to it). This volume goes some way toward redressing the balance.

Historians may have made key contributions to the invention of tradition. But, as exemplified by Hobsbawm and Ranger, historians have been at the forefront in 'exposing' them as inventors, not faithful presenters of pasts. A shared professional identity and training has thus permitted diametrically opposed agendas to be realised by academic historians. Once again, they appear in the guise of myth-makers at one moment, and myth-breakers at the next. To establish that fact is not to say that 'anything goes'—to surrender to extreme relativism. The difference between mythologising and critical engagements between the past remains. The presence of both, the ambiguities of and contradictions within historical scholarship and historical cultures, are a shared concern of the essays that follow.

Themes in Historical Culture

BJÖRN WEILER

All human societies of which we know engaged with their past. How they did so, however, what they deemed worth remembering, the means by which such remembrance occurred, or the materials on which it drew, remain historically and culturally contingent. Universality does not equal uniformity. Still, being aware

³⁸ Here, the work of Stefan Berger and his various collaborators has been groundbreaking. See Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore (eds), *Writing National Histories: Western Europe since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1999); Stefan Berger (ed.), *Writing the Nation. A Global Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (eds), *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Religion and Gender in National Histories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (eds), *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (eds), *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

³⁹ Matthias Middell and Lluís Roura (eds), *Transnational Challenges to National Historical Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

that modes of expression, the kind of questions people asked and the kinds of aspects of history they deemed relevant, were rooted in specific social, cultural and historical contexts, should not mean that we ignore shared patterns, lines of tradition or structural features that transcend the historically contingent. Only by being aware of the latter will we be able to identify what was specific and unique about the former, and it is only then that we will be able to trace change over time. What follows will trace some of those patterns. More specifically, it will consider a series of interlocking themes: the importance of truthfulness, the challenges those engaged in constructing the past faced in their efforts and the interaction between producers and consumers of historical culture. The list of themes is by no means exhaustive. We outline a phenomenology of historical culture based on a series of snapshots, not a model to be universally applied. Those with expertise in different periods, cultures and genres are very much invited to add to what we propose here, to modify and even challenge this sketch. It stands to hope, though, that what follows will provide a helpful point of entry both into this volume, and the wider phenomenon of historical culture.

The Desirability of a Past

Having a past and knowing it was considered both desirable and necessary. In the twelfth century, the English chronicler Henry of Huntingdon remarked that animals and brutes had in common the fact that they lacked knowledge of their origins and of the affairs of their homeland. In fact, brutes were worse than beasts: while the latter could not have a past, the former wilfully refused to have one.⁴⁰ A knowledge of antecedents, an understanding of whence a community, individual, people or realm had sprung, was a mark of civilisation. Many of the writers and actors treated in this volume would have agreed. In fact, most of them were concerned with uncovering, defending, constructing or invoking a past (all of which could, of course, overlap). But where did this need for a past come from?

Perhaps the best way of approaching the question is by considering *how* history was used. To begin, many representations of the past were consciously aimed at both a contemporary and a future audience. Thus Henry of Huntingdon asked those who, around the year 1135, would read his text, to include him in their prayers.⁴¹ His may have been an especially optimistic aspiration—though, given his continuing reception, perhaps not unduly so. He does, however, reflect a wider pattern, namely that most *writers* of history sought to benefit posterity. Inscribing

⁴⁰ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum (History of the English People)*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 4–5.

⁴¹ 'Now I speak to you who will be living in the third millennium, around the 1135th year. ... I, who will already be dust by your time, have made mention of you in this book, so long before you are to be born, so that if—as my soul strongly desires—it shall come about that this book comes into your hands, I beg you, in the incomprehensible mercy of God, to pray for me, poor wretch. In the same way, may those who will walk with God in the fourth and fifth millennia pray and petition for you, if indeed mortal man survives so long', Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, pp. 118–19.

an event potentially ensured its survival beyond the lifetime of the individual. In the very act of recording the past, the foundations were laid for its memorialisation.⁴² Similar reasons may have motivated an array of writers to extend coverage to their own time, as Michael Attaleiates did in eleventh-century Byzantium, the Oxford Anonymous in fifteenth-century Turkey, or Herrera and the author of the Hindi *Binhai Raso* in sixteenth-century Spain and Mughal India respectively. This should not surprise. So many of them, as we will see, struggled with the inherent fragility of the past, with the fact that so much of it had been forgotten, and had to be pieced together laboriously from often fragmentary sources. In fact, such concerns surface even in the twentieth century, which is, after all, why the activists of *La Rosca*, discussed below by Joanne Rappaport, strove to retrieve and preserve peasant memories. Many of these authors therefore wrote fully alert to the ease with which deeds and individuals could be forgotten and with which memories faded. They sought to rescue not only what was recoverable of the remote past, but also to prevent the affairs of their own age from falling into oblivion.

The moment a text had been put in writing, it could more easily be disseminated. The same logic applies to enactments of the past, such as the *Odwira* festival in Ghana or the Thai royal barge ceremony, explored respectively by Richard Rathbone and Matthew Phillips. Unless recorded on film, for instance, those remained, even if frequently performed, inevitably transient. The performance was its own and, at least in theory, sole record. It was of course discussed and debated, it was talked and sometimes even written about. While the act itself was fleeting, it was still designed so that a memory of its performance would continue and would perhaps be echoed in future re-enactments. Yet that memory remained inherently oral, personalised and highly situational. By contrast, the major advantages of a written text were that it could easily be shared and that its content was controlled largely by the person or persons who first produced it. At a later stage, readers and listeners might of course dispute, alter and even comprehensively refashion a narrative. Still, even with the inevitable printing errors, scribal mistakes and so on, the form in which a text was at first disseminated was mostly determined by its producers.⁴³ Naturally, not all materials, especially in manuscript form, were meant for wide dissemination. Sometimes, they could simply serve as *aides-mémoire* (though even then their content could, in one way or another, reach a public), and they could provide careful records of

⁴² See also: Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, trans. David Henry Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁴³ Those need not, of course, be identical with the author. See the important work, in a European context, by Roger Chartier, *The Author's Hand and the Printer's Mind: Transformations of the Written Word in Early Modern Europe* (London: Polity Press, 2013); Armand Petrucci, *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

contentious matters that still merited reporting so that, at some point in the future, their contents would be made known.⁴⁴

What was it, then, about history that made its preservation so desirable? Why did individuals and communities go to very considerable lengths to record their understanding of the past? In this context, a key role must be assigned to the inherent truth claim of history. In the seventh century, the Spanish cleric Isidore of Seville, himself channelling classical Roman thought, distinguished between three types of narration:

Histories are true deeds that have happened; plausible narrations are things that, even if they have not happened, nevertheless could happen; and fables are things that have not happened and cannot happen, because they are contrary to nature.⁴⁵

Isidore was one of the most widely read authors of the European Middle Ages, and versions of his statement resurface throughout western historical culture: history was distinguished from other types of writing because it recorded what had actually happened. There was, at least in theory, no room for invention. In the twelfth century, such ideas were taken further still: because a knowledge of the past allowed for God's plan to be understood and uncovered, accuracy and truthfulness in the writing of history were required.⁴⁶ Similar sentiments surfaced in different cultural contexts. When the North African merchant-administrator Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) composed the *Muqaddima*, the book-length preface to his monumental world history, the *Kitab al-I'bar*, he also dealt with the importance of writing truthful history. In fact, many of the early sections of *Muqaddima* consisted of illustrations of just how frequently errors had been committed by Ibn Khaldun's predecessors, a list of reasons why such mistakes could occur in the first place, and suggestions as to how they could be avoided.⁴⁷ Sima Qian (145/35–86 BCE), perhaps the first known professional writer of history, had composed the *Shiji*, a monumental history of China, as a text combining basic annals, a biographical dictionary of officials and scholars, and the history of important ruling houses. Much of the *Shiji*'s meaning is detectable only by tracing individuals across the various sections, whose entries could offer subtly different interpretations of their careers and actions. Throughout,

⁴⁴ See, for instance: Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); On-Cho Ng, 'Private Historiography of the Late Ming: Some Notes on Five Works', *Ming Studies* 18 (1984), 46–58; Jennifer W. Jay, 'Memoirs and Official Accounts: The Historiography of the Song Loyalists', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 50 (1990), 589–612; Polly Jones, 'Iurii Trifonov's Fireglow and the "Mnemonic Communities" of the Brezhnev Era', *Cahiers du monde Russe* 54 (2013), 47–72.

⁴⁵ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, trans. Stephen A. Barney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 67.

⁴⁶ Sigbjørn Sønnesyn, 'Eternity in Time, Unity in Particularity: The Theological Basis of Typological Interpretations in Twelfth-Century Historiography', in Marek Thuc Kretschmer (ed.), *La typologie biblique comme forme de pensée dans l'historiographie médiévale* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 77–96.

⁴⁷ On Ibn Khaldun see: Allen Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun. Life and Times* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Orange Trees of Marrakesh: Ibn Khaldun and the Science of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

however, the emphasis on truthful narration was key: meaning could be uncovered only if events were faithfully recorded. In fact, Sima Qian famously incurred the displeasure of Emperor Wu when he refused to condemn one of the ruler's generals. In consequence, the historian suffered not only the punishment of castration (in lieu of death), but also great ignominy: customarily, he should have committed suicide (still a more honourable death than execution). Instead, Sima Qian decided to brave the social opprobrium of being a convict eunuch in order to complete his historiographical endeavours.⁴⁸ Writing history, in short, was about uncovering what was true, even at considerable personal cost to the author.

Simultaneously, what truthfulness meant remained subject to interpretation. It often extended beyond mere factual accuracy, to include, for instance, moral truths—what an action meant, what the moral lessons were that had to be drawn from it.⁴⁹ More importantly, what actually happened could be difficult to ascertain, and it could prove easier and more fruitful to reconstruct a likely course of events that would explain the moral outcome of what was known. Other factors also came into play. Ibn Khaldun may have listed among the possible reasons for untruthful history the need to flatter those in power, an undue reliance on authorities, the fact that historians (as scholars) often had little experience of the world of politics, that they did not know enough about distant regions, or that they sought to fill gaps in their evidence by imagining how things could have happened. Yet this seeming proximity to modern practices and concerns should not deceive. One of the first examples that Ibn Khaldun gave for untruths in history relates an anecdote about Alexander the Great, told by Al Masudi (896–956), among the most famous of medieval Arabic historians. Alexander, in trying to build Alexandria, found that work was frequently interrupted by monsters in the sea. He therefore dived into the harbour, and on resurfacing drew images of the *jinn* he encountered. Having been cast into iron, those were placed under water, and successfully scared off the monsters whose likeness they carried. Ibn Khaldun's objections were threefold: first, no ruler would survive going diving—he would instantly be deposed by his people for acting in so reckless a fashion. Second, *jinn* took no physical form, and could thus not possibly be depicted and scared off by their own images. Third, people who went deep into the sea would suffocate because the balance of humours in their body could no longer be maintained.⁵⁰ Ibn Khaldun was clearly

⁴⁸ Steven W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Grant Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo: Sima Qian's Conquest of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Hans Van Ess, 'Recent Studies on Sima Qian', *Monumenta Serica* 49 (2001), 517–28.

⁴⁹ Michael Nyman, 'Sima Qian: A True Historian?', *Early China* 23 (1998), 203–46.

⁵⁰ Examples from the Ibn Khaldun are taken from the translation produced by Franz Rosenthal, *The Muqaddima by Abd ar Rahman bin Muhammed ibn Khaldun*, 3 vols (New York: Pantheon, 1958). The online version used here does not, however, contain page numbers: https://asadullahali.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/ibn_khaldun-al_muqaddimah.pdf. The Alexander episode is followed by footnote no. 3. Rosenthal's original text, difficult to find as it is, remains to be preferred to more easily accessible English versions, which offer heavily abbreviated renditions of Rosenthal's translation.

rooted in a distinctly medieval approach to what could be true. What was deemed plausible and truthful did, after all, change over time. It was historically and culturally contingent. In some contexts, hermits in the woods could, through the force of prayer, conceivably reassemble and revive the dismembered remains of a ruler's progeny (as in Matthew Paris's *Lives of the Two Offas*, studied here by Björn Weiler); twentieth-century Nazis could be their own ancestors reincarnated, as Peter Lambert suggests; also, in the twenty-first century, Oreos could convey secret Templar imagery to their unwitting consumers.⁵¹ This, it is worth emphasising, does not mean that all statements are equally true—we are dealing not with disputed facts, but, first, with different readings of, and with different traditions of reading the evidence, and, second, with different expectations as to what was possible, and how to go about verifying it. History was truthful, but what that meant reflected broader cultural and religious horizons of expectation.

Of course, different concepts of historical truth also helped determine how the past was represented, and how the newsworthy was identified and selected—and we will return to this point. What matters here, though, is that history was expected to record things that had actually happened, deeds that had really been performed, and individuals who had indeed acted as described. It was the historian's duty to establish and then faithfully record the events and people of the past. This assumed truthfulness lent writings about the past their particular usefulness. It also enabled and gave potency to engagements with the past other than historical writing—be this the Hindi poets recounting episodes from the Mughal succession wars, studied here by Allison Busch, or writers of historical fiction using the wars between Widukind and Charlemagne to fashion a suitable past for the Third Reich. The premise of utility based on truth also applied to performative invocations of the past, as in 1990s Ghana or Cold War Thailand. They allowed for a heroisation of the past as a means of commenting on the present.⁵² Such representations were not required to be historically accurate to the same degree as historical writing, of course. They introduced fictional elements into a past known to be true. Whether explicitly or not, such renditions marked a particular period or point in history as either especially glorious or shameful, and in the process used it to uphold or reject certain values associated with that past, or sought to locate in a past known to be true antecedents for the norms and practices of the present. The historical context, in short, provided the interpretative framework within which the actions of fictional characters could be approached and understood. It also

⁵¹ As suggested in 2014: <http://gnosticwarrior.com/oreo.html> (accessed 27 January 2016; I am grateful to Richard Barton for this reference).

⁵² See, for comparable examples, Nicholas Greene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Peter Stamatov, 'Interpretive Activism and the Political Uses of Verdi's Operas in the 1840s', *American Sociological Review* 67 (2002), 347–66; Jim Kitses, *Horizons West. Directing the Western from John Ford to Clint Eastwood*, 2nd edn (London: British Film Institute, 2004); Stephen To, *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema. The Wuxia Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). See also, more generally, Pam Cook, *Screening the Past. Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2005).

heightened the veracity of the fictional, and the distinction, drawn by Michel de Certeau, between the true and the real.⁵³ Nazi novels about Widukind provide a case in point: while verifiably untrue in terms of historical accuracy, they nonetheless employed a known historical context to convey what their authors perceived to be the real essence of that past, and of the truth they deemed it to hold for the present.

The inherent truthfulness of the past could thus convey on it an almost sacral character. This was literally so when a sacred text delineated the origin as well as the early history of a people—as in the Bible or the Koran. Equally, many myths of kosmogogenesis, of the creation of the world, inevitably link the group recounting the myth to the divine, cosmic or otherwise transcendental origins of the human species, assigning the particular community a status of prominence that clearly set it apart from others.⁵⁴ Secular origin myths could also seek to incorporate texts and narratives that provided hallowed origins of quasi-sacral status. Examples would include the descent from Troy, so central to medieval European refashionings of dynastic, communal or regnal identities; or the role of Tacitus's *Germania* in early and late modern constructions of the German past.⁵⁵ We should similarly note the importance of key dates and occasions—the foundation of a monastery, for instance (as with that of St Albans), an act of conquest (Constantinople in 1453) or the beginnings of a settlement (Iceland). Other points of commemorating or establishing origins—such as, for instance, independence days—could also be imbued with a quasi-sacral character. Such events crystallised an essential historical truth that legitimised a particular set of values and institutions. In like vein, an uninterrupted past could matter. In Thailand, it denoted a seemingly unique status (Siam had never formally been colonised by western powers). In China, the long run of imperial Chinese history made it possible to situate the humiliation of the Opium Wars, the Boxer Uprising and the horrors of the Japanese occupation as but the most recent in a long run of foreign invasions that, in the end, were nonetheless overcome by the vigour of a superior Chinese culture and civilisation. The further back in time a community's origin could be located, the stronger its assumed unity, resilience and legitimacy. Alternatively, novelty could, of course, mark legitimacy—as with the American Revolution, or the establishment of the Soviet Union. Even there, however, a point of origin was needed (and became

⁵³ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Though also representative of the chronological and cultural myopia evident in so much work on historical culture, nonetheless still relevant: Hayden White, 'Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality', *Rethinking History* 9 (2005), 147–57.

⁵⁴ Mircea Eliade, 'Cosmogonic Myth and Sacred History', in his *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 137–51; Patrick D. Nunn, 'Fished Up or Thrown Down: The Geography of Pacific Island Origin Myths', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93 (2003), 350–64; Patrick D. Nunn, 'Myths and the Formation of Niue Island, Central South Pacific', *Journal of Pacific History* 39 (2004), 99–108.

⁵⁵ Christopher R. Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book. Tacitus's Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

itself a focus of celebration and memorialisation), and the quest for antecedents did not by any means become obsolete.⁵⁶ Even a conscious rejection of the past anchored itself in relation to a historical truth.

Taken together, these factors help explain why having a past was deemed desirable. The inherent truthfulness of history was key. The past did, for instance, allow for lines of tradition to be established, and it provided a means of evaluating, coming to terms with and understanding the present. Establishing ancestry connected present practices with an idealised past.⁵⁷ The emphasis on the settlement of Iceland by aristocratic families fleeing the rising power of the kings of Norway thus contextualised the form of social organisation developed by the twelfth century; Roman law formed the roots of Byzantine legal practice; the *Odwira* festival linked the power of the chiefs and of the king to the Asante empire of old; while the royal barges reflected an image of Thai nationhood centring on Siam's antiquity and independence. Equally, establishing traditions helped verify them. Much early Arabic historical writing consisted of biographical dictionaries to help confirm the lines of transmission for *hadith*, sayings of the Prophet.⁵⁸ Similarly, in legal scholarship both history and the tradition of juridical exegesis contribute to interpretations of the law.⁵⁹ Points of origin furthermore aided in legitimising claims and actions. Equally, though, a knowledge of history could provide a means for overcoming it: past events showed how best to avoid the snares of human folly, and create a new society instead.⁶⁰ Celebrating the past and overcoming it alike required that it was known and truthful: even if a version of the past was rejected as false, this presupposed that it was overcome by something verifiably true.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Peter Onuf and Nicholas Cole (ed.), *Thomas Jefferson, the Classical World, and Early America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Carl J. Richard, *The Golden Age of the Classics in America. Rome, Greece, and the Antebellum United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁵⁷ Mineke Schipper, Shuxian Ye and Hubin Yin (eds), *China's Creation and Origin Myths: Cross-cultural Explorations in Oral and Written Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Joanne Harriet Wright, *Origin Stories in Political Thought: Discourses on Gender, Power, and Citizenship* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004); Gert Melville and Karl-Siegbert Rehberg (eds), *Gründungsmythen, Genealogien, Memorialzeichen: Beiträge zur institutionellen Konstruktion von Identität* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau, 2014).

⁵⁸ Michael D. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mun* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁵⁹ See, for instance, Mark Tushnet, 'Interdisciplinary Legal Scholarship: The Case of History-in-Law', *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 71 (1996), 909–35, especially at 925–34; Patrick J. Charles, *Historicism, Originalism and the Constitution: The Use and Abuse of the Past in American Jurisprudence* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2014); David A. Strauss, *The Living Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁶⁰ Teofilo F. Ruiz, *The Terror of History: On the Uncertainties of Life in Western Civilization* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

This does not mean that such readings and traditions went unchallenged. In fact, even once a point of origin had been established, its meaning and relevance could be disputed. Writers were aware of historical change. Michael Attaleiates, the eleventh-century Byzantine legal scholar and historian, whose writings are considered here by Dimitris Krallis, may thus have greatly admired the Roman past, but he was also aware that some practices of republican Rome no longer applied to imperial Constantinople. Other Byzantine writers were more ambivalent: while they perceived themselves as the true Romans, they also sought to overcome or even erase the empire's pagan past. Similar issues were at stake when writers in the Third Reich clashed over the respective merits of Widukind and Charlemagne: this was, after all, also a debate over which line of tradition the Nazis should uphold, and hence what form the new society of the Reich should take. Most of the contributions assembled here were made possible precisely because there was some dispute over what a particular past meant or how it was supposed to be interpreted. A disputatious character is, of course, also at the heart of the self-image of modern historians as myth busters,⁶¹ but the willingness to use the past to show what truly had been (often so as to sketch what ideally should be) is by no means peculiar to the twentieth century.

In establishing precedent, many uses of the past fashioned models. In seventeenth-century India, the *Binhai Raso* celebrated the willingness of Hindu Rajput soldiers to die in the service of their Muslim overlord: they performed in exemplary fashion their warrior *dharma* or duty in accordance with prescriptions from the *Bhagavad Gita* written perhaps 1,500 years earlier. The evil deeds of past actors also needed recording, both so that the consequences of their actions could be understood and so that moral lessons could be drawn from them. Similar thinking appears to have underpinned Matthew Paris's writing about the foundation of St Albans. It may also have motivated Antonio de Herrera y Tordesilla, who is the focus of Richard Kagan's chapter. In early seventeenth-century Spain, Herrera took to task Pedro Arias de Ávila, the first Spanish governor of Castilla de Oro (roughly today's Panama), for his many cruelties and transgressions. Unsurprisingly, therefore, highlighting particular virtues in a predecessor, for instance, or as representative of an idealised status quo ante, could become a means of criticising the present. Dimitri Kastritsis's contribution to the volume suggests as much, when an impoverished forebear of the victorious Ottomans received lavish rewards for his building works, after Sultan Mehmed II had famously executed his court architect. Finally, uncovering a past might become a means of challenging the present. The activists of *La Rosca* in Colombia not only sought to write a history that had been ignored by literate elites, but also to encourage a revolutionary movement

⁶¹ 'History is by its nature a critical, sceptical discipline. Historians commonly see one of their main tasks as puncturing myths, demolishing orthodoxies and exposing politically motivated narratives that advance spurious claims to objectivity.' Richard J. Evans, 'The Wonderfulness of Us (the Tory Interpretation of History)', *London Review of Books*, 17 March 2011, 9–12, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n06/richard-j-evans/the-wonderfulness-of-us>, accessed 14 December 2016.

among peasants that revived long abandoned modes of working and holding the land. Their view of history was at once that it should have an eminently practical purpose and a moral underpinning. The quest for moral examples in the past ran through classical Greece and Rome and onward through the medieval period. It was never altogether given up—even among the professional academic historians of the late twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. 'Even by the ultra-rational demands of my profession I was always a "reasoner"', Tony Judt asserted in 2010. But that was most certainly *not* intended to convey an impression that Judt might have been a 'dry-as-dust' empiricist. Rather, his text continues, 'Of all the clichés about "History", the one that appealed to me most was the assertion that we are but philosophers teaching with examples. I still believe that is true ...'⁶²

History (as Judt immediately went on to note) could be morally useful only if it was true. Wilfully false or badly researched history betrayed both the ethical impetus of writing about the past, and the past itself. This ethical imperative should be taken as a warning against adopting too simplistically instrumentalised an understanding of historical culture.⁶³ Because the past was meant to be true, its representations could, of course, be utilised. Simultaneously, that very truth provided a means with which to challenge readings of the past, and it established a nexus of moral obligations for those producing representations of it: they should not wilfully misrepresent history, as doing so would betray the moral principles inherent in writing about it in the first place. However, once a reading of history had been put forth, its meaning became difficult to control. The nature of a given historical culture often reveals itself in the tension between the representation and the reception of the past. Reception is not passive, and audiences' and readers' agency is no less important than that of performers and writers. This is most evidently the case with enactments of the past where audience reaction (and the representation of audience reactions) ultimately defined the meaning of a performance.⁶⁴ But written works, too, could be appropriated and given meanings other than those intended by their originators. Historical culture, after all, treats not only what people wrote about the past (or how they otherwise represented it), but how their reconstructions could be used by others. Equally, explicit reference, for instance, to the utility of a work, or its suitability for legitimising concepts and institutions, could cloak more complex aspirations. The frequent references to 'historical materialism' in works produced in Eastern Europe during the Cold War, or, in a modern British context, to the economic, social and cultural 'impact' of a grant applicant's research need not be insincere. But they could hide, or even

⁶² Tony Judt, *The Memory Chalet* (London: William Heinemann, 2010), p. 11.

⁶³ On which see also: Sigbjørn Olsen Sonnesyn, *William of Malmesbury and the Ethics of History* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012). The twelfth-century chronicler provides a suitable corrective to the claims of novelty made in David Carr, Thomas R. Flynn and Rudolf A. Makkreel (eds), *The Ethics of History* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004).

⁶⁴ Key in this context will be Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual. Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

make possible in the first place, less overtly instrumentalising uses of the past by dint of cloaking them in a veneer of compliance with dominant ideologies.

We would thus be well advised not to lose sight of the possibility that sometimes a major impetus for engaging with the past may have been something as simple as trying to figure out why, for instance, so many Roman statues in Constantinople had been removed from their pedestals, why twelfth-century Iceland had four courts and the Althing administer justice, or where the Thai royal barge ceremony came from. Individuals may equally have been motivated by the intellectual thrill of trying to piece together from disparate and fragmented materials a plausible and coherent version of history. And there may have been a sense of nostalgia at play when fourteenth-century writers of Icelandic sagas recorded the glory days of the settlement period, well knowing that they described a society that was irretrievably lost. Last but not least, writing about the patterns of succession in imperial China, as in the work of the twentieth-century Chinese historian Rao Zongyi (whose oeuvre is here explored by Timothy Barrett), could become a means of escape, of seeking refuge in a very different past, though one that made it possible to endure the present. Of course, those reconstructing the past were in turn formed by, responsive to and engaged with the norms and conventions of their contemporaries and immediate forebears. How they interpreted their evidence, how they selected it, why they thought past records needed updating, what was deemed worth remembering, and how findings were communicated, reflected wider social and cultural practices. That is, after all, why the media and practices of historical culture provide so rewarding a point of entry into studying the intellectual and cultural horizons of past societies. But servicing or questioning abstract conventions was not necessarily the sole or even main motivation driving such efforts. It is, however, the complex interplay between norms, their interpretation and the attempts of individuals—be they producers, performers, patrons or participants—to engage with, evaluate and even escape the former, that ensured the vibrancy of historical cultures, their longevity and their appeal as a window onto the past.

The Materials of the Past

How did those engaging with the past seek to recover it? All were aware of and had to deal with its inherent fragility. On a most elementary level, this means that sources have gone missing. Natural disasters played their part, as did accidents. In 2009, for instance, building work on the underground train system in the German city of Cologne led to the collapse of the municipal archive, with about a third of the surviving holdings seriously damaged, and others lost.⁶⁵ In 1764, only 400 volumes survived a library conflagration at Harvard, and those only because they had been on loan to faculty and students.⁶⁶ The vicissitudes of war and plunder,

⁶⁵ http://www.koeln.de/koeln/nachrichten/stadtarchiveinsturz/drei_jahre_nach_dem_archiveinsturz_alles_im_plan_571579.html, accessed 28 December 2015.

⁶⁶ http://library.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/HLPS_fire_history.pdf, accessed 28 December 2015.

where the actual destruction of a heritage could, of course, be desired, but where it could also be an incidental side-effect, fall in a like category. Yet there was also the fear that events, deeds and individuals be forgotten. Especially writers of contemporary history often sought to preserve the memory of their own days. Conversely, rescuing a more distant past from perceived oblivion has, of course, been a recurrent theme in representations of history. Roots and antecedents needed to be established, ancestors and founders rescued from neglect. However, forgetting could be intentional as well accidental. The former would include the Roman practice of *damnatio memoriae*, when the names of those deemed guilty of grave crimes were erased from the official record. It would also cover the desire of movements or regimes to purify a past by ridding it of memories and memorials viewed as embarrassing or shameful, or as unduly deflecting from a seemlier and more desirable version of history. Such efforts include the iconoclasm practised in sixteenth-century Europe, with the beheading of religious statues and the whitewashing of churches; the destruction of non-Islamic remains or those not representing the right kind of Islam, in Timbuktu, Palmyra and Bamiyan; or the toppling and removal of statues and memorials. They could also be driven by a desire to pass over traumatic or shameful experiences with silence—as with depictions of the Holocaust in post-Second World War West Germany, or the experience of the Second World War in Thailand (which had, after all, allied with Japan, and whose political elites, post-1945, sought to establish the kingdom as the USA's most reliable ally in Southeast Asia). Of course, the further back in time we go, the more difficult to trace such acts of willed forgetting will be—at least, if they were successful. Yet we should not exaggerate the frequency or effectiveness of such endeavours: pre-modern regimes rarely had the capacity to exert full control over historical culture. Even in a modern context, alternative discourses of history have proven remarkably resilient, even toward the onslaught of totalitarian regimes in full control of media, education and the public sphere. A more widely practised (and often more successful) approach was to fashion a particular version of the past as heroic, and to construct as morally antagonistic other parts and agents of history. However, rather than being cast into oblivion, the latter still served as moral exemplars: not as indicative of good deeds to emulate, but of bad ones to shun.

In practice, as Patrick Geary has pointed out, cultural and social shifts were far more important in causing forgetting and oblivion than conscious action by regimes.⁶⁷ As we will discuss, those recording the past inevitably selected what they deemed worth remembering. Much fell by the wayside because it was thought irrelevant. Those engaging with the past are inevitably at the mercy of those who had preserved the materials on which they draw. Furthermore, being able to recover the past was subject to changing cultural conventions and norms. Materials could

⁶⁷ Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

be lost because they were not deemed worth preserving, or because they were no longer decipherable (for instance, because practices of handwriting or record keeping had changed). Equally, the language in which the past was recorded rarely remained static. Written sources in particular could thus become inaccessible, not least perhaps because later generations lacked familiarity with the language and cultural reference points of an author and his readers. Material culture was subject to similar shifts—the meaning of images and monuments was rooted in specific cultural contexts that, over the course of time, transformed or were lost.

This inherently fragile, fraught and fragmented nature of the past is worth keeping in mind when we consider, for instance, the efforts of the thirteenth-century English monk Matthew Paris to write the history of his community at St Albans. Active in the 1250s, he voiced his disappointment that, even 450 years after its foundation, the monastery still lacked a history of the king who had first endowed it. Similarly striking is just how little the community—otherwise famed for its historiographical output—knew about its past. This was partly because so much of the early history of St Albans was an invented tradition, rooted in the twelfth-century imagination more than in early medieval reality, but also because much had been lost during the Viking invasions, much was written in languages that could no longer be read, and because many St Albans traditions were questioned by other religious communities. Comparable challenges faced those Ottoman historians who, after the capture of Constantinople in 1453, sought to incorporate that dramatic event into an established framework of Turkish, Islamic and Greek history. Even more so than Matthew Paris, the composers of the *Oxford Anonymous* and the *Book of Saltuk* had to forge multifarious and often contradictory sources into a coherent interpretative whole. Similarly, Haki Antonsson demonstrates just how difficult it is to interpret even as well studied a genre as the Icelandic sagas, at least in part because we lack the necessary cultural reference points. The fragmentation of the past means that it has to be pieced together from a range of disparate materials. Those doing the reassembling, in turn, aimed to fashion a past that was accessible, and that met the conventions and cultural norms of the audience they sought to address. In the process, they often deepened rather than bridged the chasm between the past and the present. Faced with a relative scarcity of written materials (penned exclusively by partisans of the victorious Carolingians), participants in the debate on the relative merits of Widukind and Charlemagne in the Third Reich often resorted to fictional forms. In novels, epic poems and plays they imagined an idealised Germanic past with clear implications for their own culture. Equally, archaeological evidence could be used to create spaces of memory for which otherwise very little or no evidence survives. Hence the imagined location of the site of the original *Irmingsul*, the sacred oak of the pagan Saxons, among the Externsteine, a geological rock formation devoid of evidence of pre-Christian activity, in the 1930s.

In short, partly because the past was so fragile and fragmented, those constructing it had to draw on a vast range of sources. Buildings, the landscape, physical objects, fictional narratives, ritual and oral tradition—a by no means

exhaustive list—are covered in this volume alone. History, as we practise it, is an inherently literary activity: we either prioritise written materials or ultimately transform into writing our interpretation of the non-literary evidence. Our understanding of the past is similarly dependent on those observing, commissioning or producing these non-literary remains to provide us with a written guide on how to read them, or at least on how they may have been read in the past.⁶⁸ Yet this preference, understandable as it is, should not blind us to the degree to which historical culture was often either itself non-literary, or used as its starting point unwritten materials. In fact, a recurrent theme in this book is the very materiality of the past. Much of it centred on physical remains and the landscape. When the author of the Icelandic *Laxdaela Saga* drew attention to the foundation of Helgafell, which took place long after the action of the saga had concluded, then this was a means of situating both the saga and the community in a concrete geographical, but also a distinctly historical place. Matthew Paris wrote the history of a community whose very location reflected, memorialised and established a sacral landscape: St Albans was built around what had been identified—by a pillar of light from heaven, no less—as the burial place of St Alban. That the abbey is situated on a hill overlooking the old Roman town of Verulamium, where the saint's martyrdom had unfolded, only adds to the symbolic significance of the monastery's location. The landscape could also become a means by which to structure history. The earliest Icelandic historical writings listed the places where the first few generation of Icelanders settled, and ordered the island according to the four quarters of the community's legal system. This constitutes a marked departure from how Scandinavian origin tales were normally constructed (as a sequence of kings). In doing so, these texts commemorated an idealised past that was built on this very difference: the origins of the twelfth-century Icelanders were not, as in Norway, rooted in the actions of rulers, but in those of an aristocratic elite that sought to escape the power of kings.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ For useful case studies see: Anne Murphy, *The Materiality of the Past. History and Representation in Sikh Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps. Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), 11–35; Rhian Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Dana Leibsohn, 'Nahua Writing after the Conquest: Pictures, Texts and Translations in the "Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca"', in Virginia Gueda and Jaime Rodríguez (eds), *Five Centuries of Mexican History/Cinco Siglos de Historia de Mexico* (Mexico: no publisher, 1992), 64–76; Dana Leibsohn, *Script and Glyph: Pre-Hispanic History, Colonial Bookmaking and the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2009); Camilla Townsend, 'Reading Symbolic and Historical Representations in Early Mesoamerica', *Latin American Research Review* 47 (2012), 177–86.

⁶⁹ See also: Pim den Boer, Heinz Duchardt and Georg Kreis (eds), *Europäische Erinnerungsorte*, 3 vols (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011–12). The key figure in this strand of thinking about historical culture is Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*, trans. Lawrence Kritzman, 3 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996–8). For non-western examples: Stephennie Mulder, *Shrines of the 'Alids in Medieval Syria: Sunnis, Shi'is and the Architecture of Coexistence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); Thomas A. Wilson (ed.), *On Sacred Grounds. Culture, Society, Politics, and the Formation of the Cult of Confucius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

In other instances, especially where an urban landscape is concerned, it was the ubiquity of the past that mattered, as with the Roman statues in Byzantine Constantinople, while the fact of Constantinople's Christian imperial past led to debates among the victorious Ottomans on how far they should be obliterated, and how far appropriated. The decision, in the eighth century, to topple pagan statues in Constantinople could echo similar debates: on the one hand, Constantinople was a Roman city, and these statues were remnants of a Roman past that was itself sacralised. The Roman empire had, after all, been legitimised by the fact that God, who could have done so at any time, had chosen to become human during the reign of the first emperor. Equally, pagan relics could not be allowed to occupy so prominent a place in a Christian capital. In each instance, it was the physical landscape, the assemblage of buildings, statues and architectural remains, that provided the starting point for engaging with the past, the site where this engagement took place and the means through which it was accomplished. More importantly still, the process occurred as much in terms of creating, destroying or rebuilding physical remnants as it did through the latter's place in written accounts, where they frequently formed the starting point of historical interpretation.

We should further note the importance of more mundane artefacts and of pictorial representations of the past. When, from c.1247, Matthew Paris produced an appendix of documents to his world chronicle, the *Chronica Majora*, he also included a list of gifts received from prominent patrons: cloaks, rings and liturgical vestments. Many of these, in turn, were cross-referenced in the main narrative of the *Chronica*, with the text and the list of gifts becoming mutually reinforcing stimuli for remembering both the benefactors and the occasion or individual to which their gift referred. Similarly, the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nürnberg in Germany possesses one of the largest collections of everyday items from the seventeenth century to the present—votive offerings to saints' shrines, medical equipment, children's toys, household items and so on. It did so partly because it had been conceived in the mid nineteenth century as a collection to spur memory and memorialisation of a shared German national heritage.

Pictorial representations served a similar role. They could take a variety of forms. Temple sculptures and the lavish wall paintings of medieval European churches, for instance, used visual shortcuts and iconographic markers—such as the instruments of martyrdom of medieval saints—as reminders of complex religious narratives. Equally, coins could tell elaborate tales about the past—like the one issued by the Austrian mint in 2009, commemorating the imprisonment, in 1192, by the duke of Austria of King Richard I of England on his return from the Third Crusade. Intriguingly, the iconographic detail reflected the legends surrounding the king's incarceration, not what we know of its historical reality.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ <https://www.muenzeoesterreich.at/produkte/richard-loewenherz-in-duernstein>, accessed 17 June 2016.

Yet elaborate iconographic programmes should not be mistaken as simply a means for instructing the illiterate. They often employed highly complex allusions, in all likelihood devised in collaboration with the patron commissioning a piece, that could be deciphered only by those of a sufficient grounding in and familiarity with traditions surrounding the past celebrated and depicted—a problem that faced those middle Byzantine observers discussing Roman statues as much as Matthew Paris when confronted with Anglo-Saxon images, Nazis restoring Germanic cult sites or the president of Ghana on attending the *Odwira* festival. In many instances, in fact, written explanations were needed to identify, for instance, particular saints and actors, or to explain the meaning of a painting, sculptural programme and so on.

The interplay between written and material representations of the past is illustrated repeatedly throughout this volume. An especially striking example is the importance of pictorial representation. Matthew Paris's *Lives of the Two Offas* was lavishly illustrated, with images on top of each page that expanded upon the main narrative. It was only through a combination of both that the full meaning of the text could be gaged. Similarly, *La Rosca* produced illustrated histories that combined written text with illustration to offer narratives of a past that extended from the Spanish Conquest to the present day. There were, of course, differences between the two. In all likelihood, Matthew Paris wrote for a mixed audience of Latinate monks and elite patrons with at least some grasp of Latin. Illustrations were an expression of prestige and wealth. They increased the splendour of the manuscript and singled it out from the more mundane fare of monastic scriptoria, such as property records. They also highlighted the importance of the matter at hand (no less would do for an account of the abbey's foundation), and offered a guide to contemplation, as well as an aid to ordering and understanding the text. They may even, we may speculate, have been an advertisement for further patronage. *La Rosca*, by contrast, designed its efforts as history for the functionally illiterate, and used images alongside tape recordings to disseminate and make accessible a community's past to those of its members who could not read (or who could not afford books). These representations were similarly made available in multiple copies, specifically in order to achieve as wide a circulation as possible. And by encouraging peasant activism, they did, of course, pursue political aims that would in all likelihood have been abhorrent to the St Albans monks. Like the medieval text, however, *La Rosca*'s illustrated histories aimed to incite a particular course of action: they tended to focus on heroic peasant leaders of the 1920s and 1930s, presenting them as inspiring examples to emulate. Within very different social and cultural contexts, *La Rosca* and the monk employed similar techniques.

The Colombian example should further alert us to the importance of oral tradition. In fact, almost every chapter deals with examples of oral testimony providing either a source for constructing the past or a means of reviving it. This is most evidently the case in Joanne Rappaport's contribution, but equally applies to Richard Rathbone's exploration of the *Odwira* festival in twentieth-century Ghana, or that of early Ottoman history by Dimitri Kastritsis. The *Book*

of *Saltuk*, produced in the 1470s, collected tales and oral traditions about Sari Saltuk, a thirteenth-century Muslim holy man. Even Matthew Paris, it seems, may have drawn on oral testimony, while the Icelandic sagas manifestly revised and adapted stories that had been in circulation for some time. In fact, Karin Barber has drawn attention to the sophisticated nature of oral story telling that allowed for the memorisation and passing on of complex narrative patterns, and its equally complex interaction with written culture.⁷¹ Similarly, some communities and individuals operated in a cultural context where the written codification of the past was not normally practised, partly perhaps because other means of commemoration and memorialisation existed.⁷² Oral and written portrayals of history could thus be mutually reinforcing. Not only did written materials draw on oral ones, but they could also be produced for oral performance and transmission. In the case of *La Rosca*, this was a key means of disseminating knowledge of the rural past. In ninth- to eleventh-century Byzantium, we even have evidence for literary salons, while official pronouncements, even laws and war reports, were designed for a public reading. As far as the Icelandic sagas are concerned, it is likely that the codified texts were read out, or that they served at least as a guide for performance and retelling. In fact, in much of medieval Europe, reading was a social practice: what Henry Bainton has termed literate sociability. Texts constituted a starting point for discussion as much as an *aide-memoire* for debate or personal recollection, for pondering and evaluation. Reading history was a social, not a solitary practice.⁷³ Similarly, rhythm, poetics and style could serve as mnemonic devices, as in Maheshdas Rao's *Binhai Raso*. Such patterns were by no means a mark of pre- or only partially literate societies. Most of the papers assembled here had initially been put in writing for oral performance before being refashioned for publication. In between, they were discussed, debated, criticised and then rewritten. Equally, most of us use notes for undergraduate lectures as a guide, as a reminder of what we intend to convey, but the actual content and delivery of a lecture reflects factors as diverse as audience response, ideas that occur in the process of delivery, questions raised by students and so on. The written and the

⁷¹ Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁷² See, for instance, Thum, *Sacred Routes*; Thomas A. Dowson, 'Reading Art, Writing History: Rock Art and Social Change in Southern Africa', *World Archaeology* 25 (1994), 332–45; Ray P. Norris and Bill Yidumduma Harney, 'Songlines and Navigation in Wardaman and other Australian aboriginal cultures', <http://arxiv.org/abs/1404.2361> (accessed 18 January 2016). The point is especially important in an Indian context, where conventions of historical writing were rather different from that of neighbouring Chinese and Arabo-Persian cultures: Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600–1800* (New York: Other Press, 2002); Romila Thapar, *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁷³ Henry Bainton, 'Literate Sociability and Historical Writing in Later Twelfth-Century England', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 34 (2011), 23–40. See also Paul Saenger, *Space between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

oral were, in short, closely entwined, and this is inevitably reflected both in how the past was represented and how it was recovered.

These examples should further alert us to the inherent performativity of the past.⁷⁴ Ritual and ceremonial constituted both a tool for using history, and a source for its recovery.⁷⁵ The *Odwira* festival in late twentieth-century Ghana may serve as example. Partly harvest festival, partly an occasion for spiritual and physical purification, partly a means for staging and displaying power, the festival's performance reflects the complex history of post-colonial Ghana. Its revival in the 1990s was the result of improving economic fortunes, but also of attempts to fashion truly indigenous forms of social organisation, untainted by the legacy of colonialism, and a rejection of dominant political forces within the post-colonial state.⁷⁶ Ceremonies like *Odwira* reasserted, evoked and celebrated a particularly glorious past amongst the Akan-speaking inhabitants of Ghana, much of it centring on the imperial past of the Asante kingdom. Thus the 1995 festival celebrated continuity with a glorious past, but also restored continuity with a time before recent political and economic travails. It enacted and commemorated history.

One of the striking parallels between the *Odwira* festival and the Thai royal barge ceremony is the extent to which both were performed for an outside audience, which then itself became part of the spectacle. The earliest depiction of the ceremony in Ghana was a sketch produced by a visiting European in 1817, while the 1995 event was broadcast by CNN. The Thai barges, similarly, were initially aimed at an outside audience (mostly of visiting diplomats), while in the 1960s they were directed specifically at American tourists, designed to serve both as an expression of Thai tradition and the kingdom's place within a western community of anti-communist and capitalist economies. Both in Ghana and Thailand, furthermore, the actual performance was subject to frequent reinterpretation. Each case reflected often heated debates about what constituted a usable past, and the relationship between indigenous tradition and the contemporary world. For much of the early period of Ghana's independence, ceremonies like *Odwira* had been frowned upon as an expression of archaic local and regional power, associated with kings and chieftains, and disputed by the centralising and modernising government. In Thailand, invocations of modernity clashed with the apparent archaism of the barge ceremony. The ritual act was the canvas onto which attitudes towards, fears about and hopes deriving from the past could be projected.

⁷⁴ On which see also: Jürgen Matschukat and Steffen Patzold (eds), *Geschichtswissenschaft und "performative turn": Ritual, Inszenierung und Performanz vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau, 2003); D. M. Dean, Yana Meerzon and Kathryn Prince (eds), *History, Memory, Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁷⁵ It is worth noting that the distinction between 'ritual' and 'ceremony' was itself a means of using the past for contemporary ends, as argued by Buc, *Dangers of Ritual*.

⁷⁶ For much of the context, see also Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs. The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana, 1951–60* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2001).

The importance and manifold uses of ritual and performance surface throughout this volume. When the Byzantine *Patria* made reference to the hippodrome, it certainly invoked memories of Justinian's massacres, but also of its role in the imperial coronation ceremony. In fact, the way a ceremony was described situated it within a historical context easily recognisable to a text's audience.⁷⁷ Just as material artefacts could become a starting point for constructing a past, so also could ritual acts. Matthew Paris, for instance, may have been inspired to write his *Lives of the Two Offas* when it was decided that Offa be included in the communal liturgy as the founder of St Albans. In fact, many hagiographical writings were composed to inform, reflect or complement the liturgical commemoration of saints.⁷⁸ Ritual and ceremonial could also—more poignantly and concisely than the written word—link different parts of the past to create an entirely new interpretation of history, as when in 1938 a museum in honour of Widukind was opened at Enger in Germany. The ceremony included an SS honour guard, and simultaneously linked Widukind to the commemoration of the German soldiers fighting in the First World War, and the contemporary heirs of Widukind. Four years later, during festivities celebrating the anniversary of Charlemagne's reputed birth, the act of performance connected the first medieval emperor both to German nationalists in the Rhineland during the 1920s, and the Third Reich. Ritual created its own version of the past.

Let us now turn to written sources for the reconstruction of the past. Those, obviously, included historical narratives, as well as other materials dealing with the past: saints' lives, for instance, foundation narratives and archival remnants. The usefulness of the latter was by no means recognised only by professional historians in the Rankean mould. In eleventh-century Constantinople, Michael Attaleiates both had access to and wrote about laws and imperial administrative decrees. It also seems that Maheshdas Rao expected his audience to be familiar with Mughal administrative practices: at least his use of Persian to evoke the language of the Mughal chancery would suggest as much. Matthew Paris included the foundation charter of St Albans in his collection of materials on the abbey's history. Perhaps the most striking example in this volume of the importance of the archival record is presented by Richard Kagan. Herrera stressed that he was departing from previous writers about the governance of Castilla de Oro by prioritising materials available in the Spanish royal archives: as they contained royal documents, they could not possibly be anything but true. In his almost exclusive reliance on archival materials, Herrera was unusual, not only in the context of this volume, but also among his contemporaries. Kathryn Burns has drawn attention to the reputation in colonial Peru of notaries—and by implication of the archival

⁷⁷ See also Philippe Buc, 'Writing Ottonian Hegemony: Good Rituals and Bad Rituals in Liudprand of Cremona', *Majestas* 4 (1996), 3–38 (Chapter one of his *The Dangers of Ritual* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002)).

⁷⁸ See, for instance, Margot E. Fassler, *The Virgin of Chartres: Making History through Liturgy and the Arts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

record they produced—as meretricious pedlars of falsehoods. It was an attitude perhaps reflected in Herrera's emphasis that he used *royal* (rather than, it might be inferred, notarial) archives.⁷⁹ Most pre-modern writers about the past already knew the lessons that Natalie Zemon Davies or Arlette Farge have stated anew for modern academic historians: the bureaucratic record could contain its fair share of the invented and fictional.⁸⁰

Writers were, however, rather reluctant to engage with the straightforwardly fictional, unless fictions dealt with events taken to be true, but for which sources were otherwise lacking. It was in this spirit that Icelandic saga writers used Skaldic poetry—a highly complex verse form with intricate rhyme, meter and highly allusive language (a 'feeder of ravens' was, for instance, a sword)—either as a source for or further illustration of particular events and individuals. In like vein, the first detailed account of the Ottoman conquests up to the reign of Bayezid I was contained in a verse history of Alexander the Great, who was taken to be a model of rulership and conquest. Equally, of course, historical narratives could influence literary interpretations of the past, with Third Reich fiction about Widukind and Charlemagne the most striking example in this volume. There was a distinct literary quality to writing about the past. Yet, there were also clear stylistic markers which were intended to distinguish the fictional from the factual. Using western conventions as examples, one was the use of prose. Another was that of Latin as opposed to the vernacular (though with important exceptions). In fact, one of the reasons why Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Britons*—tales of middle-eastern migrants from Troy settling Britain—became so popular was that it employed stylistic markers of reputable history. Similar conventions are, incidentally, apparent in a modern context. Fritz Vater's SS Widukind novel, *Weking* (first published in 1938), paraded the research underpinning it in a scholarly apparatus, complete with maps, genealogical tables and ten pages of endnotes. Simon Schama, in turn, a frequent presenter of historically themed TV shows, freely inserts fictional passages in his academic writings, while E. P. Thompson wrote non-historical fiction. In nineteenth-century Germany, historians frequently disseminated findings about the Thirty Years Wars by penning novels rather than scholarly articles. Comparable practices seem to have been at play in Mughal India: Maheshdas Rao inserted occasional passages of documentary prose into his otherwise verse composition, and would probably have expected his audience to note that different registers of writing denoted different types of information.

Moreover, most writers of history were neither trained nor expected to be writers solely of history. Rather, they engaged in reconstructions of the past

⁷⁹ Kathryn Burns, *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁸⁰ Natalie Z. Davies, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987); Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

alongside a whole range of other activities, and it was in relation to these that most of them had learned how to distinguish fact from fable, or how to establish and convey truthfulness. In a medieval European context, most chroniclers, if monks, were librarians, cantors (in charge of the liturgy) or even abbots. Writing about the past was by no means even the central focus of their activities. They wrote much else aside from history. Ralph Niger, for instance, author of the only universal chronicle written by an Englishman in the twelfth century (though a non-monastic cleric), was primarily a theologian and Biblical commentator, while Henry of Huntingdon also penned a didactic poem on the medicinal qualities of herbs.⁸¹ In Byzantium, Michael Attaleiates and Michael Psellos—two of the most important writers of history in the eleventh century—were imperial administrators. Similar patterns apply elsewhere. Thus Ibn Khaldun was a merchant and government official. He is mostly known (and, it seems, mostly wanted to be known) for his world history, yet also wrote treatises on Islamic theology, Sufism, and an autobiography.⁸² Hakim Abu 'l-Qasim Ferdowsi Tusi, on the other hand, was a wealthy landowner and professional poet, whose *Shāhnāma* (begun c.970) remains the national epic of Iran and helped establish Persian as language of historiographical record in much of the Islamic world, including Mughal India.⁸³ The chief exception to this general pattern was China, which, at least from the Song dynasty onwards, albeit building on earlier antecedents, had a tradition of official and professional writers of history.⁸⁴ Even there, however, Sima Qian was employed as the imperial court's chief astrologer.⁸⁵ Late modernity offers numerous examples conforming to the same pattern. *La Rosca* numbered among its members mostly sociologists, while contributors to this volume include anthropologists and literary scholars. Likewise, in modern English usage, labelling someone a 'historian' can refer to the Regius Professor of History at Cambridge; a presenter of historically themed television shows, but with limited academic training in history;⁸⁶ or a disgraced politician writing about the past.⁸⁷ Those engaging with the past were rarely just historians.

⁸¹ A. J. Duggan, 'Niger, Ralph (b. c.1140, d. in or before 1199?)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20192>, accessed 29 January 2016; Henry of Huntingdon, *Anglicanus ortus: A Verse Herbal of the Twelfth Century*, ed. Winston T. Black (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

⁸² Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun*; Dale, *Orange Trees of Marrakesh*.

⁸³ A. Shapur Shahbazi, *Ferdowsi: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1991); Olga M. Davidson, 'The Text of Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāma* and the Burden of the Past', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113 (1998), 63–8.

⁸⁴ Qn-cho Ng and Q. David Wang, *Mirroring the Past. The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), pp. 135–66; Li Honqi, *The New and the Multiple: Sung Senses of the Past* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2004); Denis C. Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History under the T'ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁸⁵ Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, pp. 55–72.

⁸⁶ See, for instance, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/dan-snow-history-boy-876350.html>, accessed 15 December 2016.

⁸⁷ Brendan Simms, 'The Great Huckster: Boris Johnson's Ruthless Distortions of History', *New*

At the same time, the absence of a caste of professional interpreters of the past—tied together by shared training and methodology—did not mean that authors lacked a shared understanding of what distinguished history as a genre from other types of writing. They read the works of their predecessors and of each other; many knew the Classical writers of history; and they obviously agreed on general external markers of history. In a range of pre-modern contexts, handbooks of rhetoric provided a common tool for learning how to structure a narrative, whether fictional or factual.⁸⁸ In the Islamic and Byzantine worlds as much as the west or China, education required the acquisition of a literary language distinct or even one wholly different from the vernacular. Consequently, most authors will have been familiarised with basic rhetorical devices as part of their training and language acquisition. Even in Iceland, where the authorship of sagas is difficult to ascertain, the likely prominence of churchmen in their production would suggest a familiarity with basic models of the classical style.

All of this has implications, especially for how writers about the past approached the task. They were faced with a vast array of materials, often difficult to access and sometimes more difficult still to interpret. Recording and preserving history was about so much more than simply finding out what happened. Authors had to establish what was trustworthy and reliable about their sources. But how they distinguished history from fable, and the place they granted to plausible narration was culturally and historically contingent. Furthermore, they had to ascertain what was useful. Not everything could be reported, and not everything was worth reporting. On occasion, the evidence was insufficient, yet enough of a consensus existed, or a personal conviction or educational impetus was strong enough, to allow it to seem legitimate or possible to plug the gaps with reasonable assumptions as to what could plausibly have happened. It is to these assumptions of what constituted a useful past and how the sources for its recovery were selected that we will now turn. After all, not every kind of past was deemed reputable (and thus usable), and while authors and performers of history drew on a vast range of materials, they did not do so indiscriminately.

A Useful and Elite Past: Producers and their Audiences

A useful past, it might appear, was almost always an elite one. With the important exception of Joanne Rappaport's contribution, the chapters in this volume deal predominantly with sultans, kings and emperors, aristocratic elites and government officials as the focus, producers of or audience for history. This is true even of vernacular texts such as the middle Byzantine *Patria*, the early Ottoman *Book*

Statesman, 22 May 2016, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2016/05/great-huckster-boris-johnson-s-reckless-distortions-history>, accessed 13 June 2016.

⁸⁸ Matthew Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400–1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Anthony Grafton, *What was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

of *Saltuk*, or the *Binhai Raso*. Just because a text was written in the vernacular does not mean that it was directed at a popular audience. Similarly, the mass of subjects made an often only passing appearance. The most explicit reference to the people at large in Matthew Paris's *Life of the Two Offas* was a blind man who, having stumbled across the young man's severed head, alerted Offa II to the murder of his putative son-in-law. In many Icelandic family and outlaw sagas, the main narrative function of non-elite characters was to be killed, or to illustrate—by their sheer overwhelming number—the heroism of a principal character. Yet we can also detect subtle variations. Partly because of their humble status, members of the populace could provide a moral counterfoil. One of the accounts of the origins of Constantinople circulating after 1453 was thus that Hagia Sophia (the chief church of the city) had been built by a poor boy who was richly rewarded for his efforts—unlike Mehmet the Conqueror's architect, who had been beheaded for his labours. Similarly, the social context of writing mattered. It was rather more difficult to take no notice of the people in densely populated cities like Constantinople. Consequently, even if they did not feature prominently, the citizens still surfaced frequently. The example of Nikephoros Phokas's (d. 969) ill-fated military parade in the Hippodrome may serve as example. Designed to show strength to the inhabitants, it instead invoked memories of a massacre inflicted on the citizens by Justinian 400 years earlier. Riots and bloodshed ensued. Just because the populace did not normally feature, does not mean that it did not matter, still less that it had no historical consciousness of its own. However, save in some late modern contexts, that consciousness is knowable to us very largely only when it provoked actions that caused difficulties or crises for elites.

A comparable situation emerges with performances of the past. Ultimately, both the Thai royal barge ceremony and the *Odwira* festival in Ghana were to a considerable extent designed for an elite audience. Proximity and even access to the event was a marker of status, with the wider populace relegated to providing a supposedly respectful backdrop. Moreover, the actual past invoked was, as we have seen, an elite one: the *Odwira* festival, combined, as it was in 1995, with the twenty-fifth anniversary in office of Otumfuo Nana Opoku Ware II, the Asantehene, paramount chief of the Asante, celebrated the restoration of chieftains and the power of the Asantehene's pre-colonial forebears. In Thailand, the royal barge ceremony similarly projected an image of the Thai past that centred on the country's independence from colonial rule, made manifest in the unbroken succession of its kings. Even myths and legends related to elite members of society: when dealing with the affair of the 'false Mustafa', the 'Oxford Anonymous' was still, in all likelihood, describing an Ottoman prince. That focus reflected the vagaries of survival, but also the particular relationship between patrons and producers of history, and the social context of both.

On an elementary level, evidence relating to elite groups was more likely to survive. Sometimes, it was simply valuable or visible enough to merit preserving. Equally, however, it was frequently the association with a particular individual

or event—such as a saint or the founding of a city—that meant materials were preserved for their associations with that particular past. This was especially true in the case of physical objects (such as the Thai royal barges, Roman statues or the urban landscape of Constantinople). It was also in relation to these that the reinterpretation and refashioning of history could most easily be accomplished. In most contexts, a random plough, hard hat or pair of sleeve stockings, associated with a person of neither distinction nor typicality, were unlikely to hold much commemorative value.⁸⁹

There could also be institutional reasons for this pattern of survival. In this connection, the importance of religious archives needs to be noted. Communities that, by their very definition, transcend the lifespan of an individual were more likely to accumulate and gather the kind of materials on which later reconstructions of the past would build.⁹⁰ Such longevity was, of course, dependent on the sacral legitimacy of the community. Its holdings belonged not to individual members, but to the saint served or the deity venerated. It need not even be the case that such communities collected systematically. The Cairo Geniza, for instance, an unsurpassed archive for Jewish life in medieval Cairo and the Eastern Mediterranean, survived because the community's reading of Mosaic law prohibited it from discarding written texts.⁹¹ Even in the same culture, furthermore, different attitudes towards the written word prevailed. In South Asia, Jain and Buddhist religious communities centred their devotions on written materials, while Hindu ones did not.⁹² Sacred institutions were, of course, particularly exposed to the vagaries of history—they could be plundered, suppressed and their holdings destroyed and dispersed, precisely because of their religious function, longevity and the wealth and symbolic significance they had accrued as a result. The sacral sanction could be ignored by outsiders, or challenged by a community of erstwhile devotees. There was nothing inevitable about the survival of such institutions as repositories of the past. If they did endure, however, they held out the promise of truly perpetuating the memory of donors, members and patrons.

⁸⁹ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country—Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (London: Viking, 1997).

⁹⁰ See for particularly useful case studies: Caroline Humphrey and Hülrebaatar Ujeed, *A Monastery in Time: The Making of Mongolian Buddhism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Herman Peterson, 'The Genesis of Monastic Libraries', *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 45 (2010), 320–32; R. M. Thomson, 'The Library of Bury St Edmunds Abbey in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *Speculum* 47 (1972), 617–45.

⁹¹ Adina Hoffmann and Peter Cole, *Sacred Trash. The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza* (New York: Schocken, 2011).

⁹² Donald Clay Johnson, 'The Western Discovery of Jain Temple Libraries', *Libraries & Culture* 28 (1993), 189–203; Ma Yi-Yi, 'Burmese Sources for the History of the Konbaung Period 1752–1885', *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 6 (1965), 48–66; Kurtis L. Scheffler, *The Culture of the Book in Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Justin Thomas McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words: Histories of Buddhist Monastic Education in Laos and Thailand* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

A comparable pattern applies to governmental offices, (until recently) university libraries and so on: their institutional longevity helped ensure the accumulation of materials. Exactly what they collected was, of course, again historically and culturally contingent. Administrative materials played an especially important role in the west, while the preservation of letters, pamphlets, booklets and so on, was equally pronounced in a later Ottoman or an imperial Chinese context. Simultaneously, in the pre-Ottoman Middle East, while clearly operating a far more sophisticated administrative and legal system, and in a society with far more widespread literacy than most of Western Europe, the relevant documents were often considered too ephemeral to be worth preserving.⁹³ Still, irrespective of the type of materials collected and how they were accumulated, the ability to preserve and assemble them required a measure of wealth and expertise exceeding that of most of the populace. Texts and artefacts had to be maintained, and there had to be sufficient interest in and awareness of them to do so, as well as the necessary technical expertise to be able to use them, all of which required surplus wealth. Institutional longevity helped attract further patronage, and further duties of commemoration. In medieval Europe, this could mean that monasteries were tasked with writing the history of a dynasty, or that they commemorated ancestors through their liturgy.⁹⁴ The founding and endowment of madrasas and mosques, of university colleges, chairs, buildings and departments, of museums, libraries, hospitals and other municipal spaces, the bequeathing of archives and papers, the establishment of charitable trusts, US-style presidential libraries and so on, similarly aimed at the establishment of an institution and the preservation of a donor's memory well beyond his lifespan or that of his immediate descendants. The recipient institutions did not act for purely altruistic motives either. Knowledge of the past carried with it cultural prestige, status and standing. Only the truly wealthy were able to extend their patronage in a manner that was easily recognised and remembered, and they paid generously for this service. Inevitably, those social and material influences helped shape the selection of what was deemed worth preserving.

Moreover, just as preserving remnants of the past required the resources to do so, so did the commissioning, recording and performing, as well as the consumption of history. We have already noted that most authors of historical works formed part of an educated elite. Often, that status reflected technical expertise rather than economic clout—the ability to read and write, of course, and then to decipher

⁹³ For an important case study: Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands. A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2012). This needs to be read alongside Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England, 1066–1307*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012).

⁹⁴ See the important case studies by Nicholas L. Paul, *To Follow in their Footsteps. The Crusades and Family History in the High Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Rewriting Saints and Ancestors: Memory and Forgetting in France, 500–1200* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

different types of script, and to command a variety of languages. Moreover, in most societies, either the register employed or the language used for representing the past were different from the vernacular and everyday usage. In fact, even when something was penned or performed in the vernacular, that did not necessarily make it easily accessible. Maheshdas Rao wrote the *Binhai Raso* in Dimgal, a dialect of Hindi appreciated in western India for its bardic qualities but not readily accessible beyond the select communities in which the text was performed. Similarly, Niketas Choniates, one of the outstanding chroniclers of Byzantium in the early thirteenth century, wrote in so complex a Greek that simplified versions of his text had to be produced for people to be able to read it. Moreover, writing in a different language could be a sign of education and standing, because it established connections with a particular cultural heritage or because it allowed materials to circulate across linguistic boundaries. In a European context, and deep into the twentieth century, Latin established a link with Roman antiquity and Classical culture (with all its religious connotations). It also denoted membership of a community of civilised nations, bound together by their use of Latin. Similar processes drove the use of Persian at the Mughal court, of Greek in the Ancient Mediterranean and of Chinese in Japan and Korea.⁹⁵ Here, parallels with the common use in modern academic writing of English are striking: it denotes participation in an international linguistic, academic and economic culture that reflects positively on those producing as well as those funding the scholarship disseminated. Employment of a particular language of historical culture could generate prestige for those producing history as well as their patrons. This also meant that it was not always necessary to be able to read the language in which a text was fashioned. What mattered were the connotations of cultural prestige and the potential for dissemination. Of course, all this also made renditions of the past accessible to only a limited number of recipients. That audience, inevitably, helped determine what was held to be worth recording and considered suitable for use.

Moreover, in non-print cultures, actually possessing (or being able to commission) a manuscript required wealth. Where they can be surmised, the recipients of Matthew Paris's vernacular texts included the highest ranks of the English aristocracy, while the *Binhai Raso* was similarly produced for a noble elite.⁹⁶ Even when print was available, before the mid nineteenth century, when the development of wood-pulp-based paper made books cheaper to produce, possessing a

⁹⁵ Peter H. Lee (ed.), *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization I* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 516–17; Bjarke Frellesvig, *A History of the Japanese Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 257–96.

⁹⁶ See, for other important examples, Oren Margolis, *The Politics of Culture in Quattrocento Europe: René of Anjou in Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity Before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

library or acting as a writer's patron required wealth.⁹⁷ Such considerations were even more pronounced in the case of performances of the past. Matthew Phillips points to debates about the escalating cost of maintaining and displaying the royal barges in Cold War Thailand, while the especially splendid *Odwira* of 1995 also reflected the reviving economic fortunes of Ghana. In a similar vein, actually producing sites for the ritual display of the past, as with the *Externsteine*, necessitated a considerable financial outlay. Even history departments at modern universities depend on public subsidies, tuition fees or—for the more fortunate—sizable endowments. Commissioning or supporting constructions of the past has never been cheap.⁹⁸

This elite context helps explain both the particular focus of so many producers of historical culture and the particular evidence they used. They recorded events of the kinds most relevant to the social groups within which they moved, whom they sought to address and who supported their endeavours. This, however, is also where shifts over the last 200 years become most visible. A combination of closely intertwined technological, social, political, economic and cultural changes inevitably influenced the production and representation of the past. What constituted elite status underwent fundamental changes, and a 'democratisation' of the production and consumption of the artefacts of historical culture is observable. Six factors stand out. First, the availability of cheap paper for printing in the nineteenth century, and of the mass paperback in the twentieth, resulted in the rapid increase in the volume of printed materials. Second, the emergence of mass media like television, radio and internet social media greatly expanded the audience that could be reached with, and of producers that engaged in, constructions of the past. Third, devices like tape and voice recorders, cameras and video equipment allowed different readings and uses of the past to be more easily recorded and disseminated. Fourth, mass public education resulted in considerably increased levels of literacy, and thus expanded the range of both consumers and producers, while also necessitating renewed efforts to develop a coherent, quasi-communal historical narrative. Fifth, the impact of urbanisation concentrated ever greater numbers in the kind of civic space that brought with it greater political involvement for a far wider section of society. Finally, the rise of mass political and labour movements gave a political voice to parts of society not previously regular or even legitimate participants in public political and cultural discourse. This shifting context inevitably also changed how and by whom the past was used, and

⁹⁷ See, for instance, Joseph P. McDermott, *A Social History of the Chinese Book: Books and Literati Culture in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006); Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: 'How to Play the Game of Life'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Teodoro Hampe-Martínez, 'The Diffusion of Books and Ideas in Colonial Peru: A Study of Private Libraries in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 73 (1993), 211–33.

⁹⁸ See, for a detailed case study, Richard J. Kagan, *Clio and the Crown: The Politics of History in Medieval and Early Modern Spain* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

what was taken to be a past worth using.⁹⁹ Of course, the resulting rupture should not be exaggerated: as we have seen, sufficient continuities remain to ensure that we can fruitfully compare patterns in societies as diverse as thirteenth-century Iceland, seventeenth-century India and twentieth-century Ghana. But these changes should also alert us to the importance of the interaction between users and producers of historical culture, where, after all, many of those transformations had their greatest impact.

That, for most of the period and most of the cultures covered here, historical culture remained an elite activity, did not mean that the populace at large was excluded from its consumption or creation. It did, however, normally lack the resources to communicate and preserve its understanding of the past beyond a generation or two. What we have to rely on instead are echoes and faint traces. Most of the evidence will be found in the kind of documents that scholars of historical culture have not so far consulted as a matter of course. John Maddicott, for instance, has pointed to what can be found in English administrative sources, which often recorded jury testimony on property transfers or legal disputes. These were rarely dated by year, but rather with reference to 'the time when x happened'. They contain valuable information about what was remembered, or the events used to order and structure historical time.¹⁰⁰ Inquisition records, early modern trial proceedings and the like may also offer glimpses—albeit of course highly redacted ones—of engagements with the past beyond elite discourses. Similarly, ethnographic work will prove useful. In fact, the archives of *La Rosca* may themselves provide rich materials for rural images of the past, and Joanne Rappaport has shown elsewhere how indigenous traditions can be employed to develop an anthropology of the past.¹⁰¹ These renditions of the past were not simply copies of an elite narrative, and could include rather different readings of history—what was remembered and how—as well as inversions of elite ones.¹⁰² A case in point is provided by the illicit cult of Simon de Montfort. Having led a rebellion against King Henry III of England, and even taken the king captive and seized control of the reins of power, Simon was killed in battle in 1265. His corpse was dismembered, with parts dispatched to the chief cities of the realm for display (a treatment normally reserved for traitors after their execution). Within a few years, however, Simon became the subject of an unofficial, popular cult, though one

⁹⁹ A classic case study of this impact on uses of the past remains Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 1991).

¹⁰⁰ J. R. Maddicott, 'Politics and the People in Thirteenth-Century England', *Thirteenth Century England* 13 (2013), 1–14.

¹⁰¹ Joanne Rappaport, *The Politics of Memory. Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1998); Joanne Rappaport, *Cumbe Reborn. An Andean Ethnography of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). See also: Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

¹⁰² Methodologically key: James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

supported by some members of the ecclesiastical elite.¹⁰³ We could leave it at that. After all, sufficient other examples survive where a cruel death resulted in an unofficial saint's cult. Perhaps the most famous is that of the Holy Greyhound, St Guinefort.¹⁰⁴ These cults were not necessarily motivated by politics. However, in de Montfort's case, trial records and jury proceedings reveal so broad a backing for the rebellion he led that the foremost expert on the period has described de Montfort as the first leader of a political movement in English history.¹⁰⁵ In this sense, evidence for the cult provides a rare glimpse into alternative discourses about the past, while simultaneously illustrating the immense difficulties we face in tracing them.

Even in a late modern context, it is worth noting, audience responses and alternative discourses can be difficult to trace. They occur most frequently when interpretations of the past were performed. Riots in the Rhineland in the 1930s provide an especially striking example. A play about Widukind offered a reading of Charlemagne that conflicted with the views of a section of the local population to such an extent that Nazi storm troopers had to guard the performance, and police were brought in to quell the ensuing disturbance. Hostile audience responses also surface in Ghana in 1995, when the President's attempts to utilise the *Odwira* festival for his own ends met with open hostility, or in Thailand during the Cold War, when the 1957 barge ceremony was described in terms that portrayed it as an abject failure. As with all performances of this kind, the audience's response could interrupt the display or deprive it of the very public without which acts of symbolic communication simply could not function. Yet we are often still dependent on elite participants to convey views of the event and its meanings. It is thus almost impossible to find records from non-elite Thais as to how they understood the event, and even in Nazi Germany, much of the debate about Widukind and Charlemagne was conducted between members of an educated or at least politically powerful elite, even if it does appear to have engaged unusually many Germans.

More significantly still, further research into audience responses will help broaden our understanding of just how widely divergent readings of the past could be.¹⁰⁶ There rarely, if ever, was such a thing as a wholly uncontested history.

¹⁰³ Claire Valente, 'Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, and the Utility of Sanctity in the Thirteenth Century', *Journal of Medieval History* 21 (1995), 27–49; John St Lawrence, 'A Crusader in a "Communion of Saints": Political Sanctity and Sanctified Politics in the Cult of St. Simon de Montfort', *Comitatus* 38 (2007), 43–68.

¹⁰⁴ Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹⁰⁵ D. A. Carpenter, 'Simon de Montfort: The First Leader of a Political Movement in English History', *History* 76 (1991), 3–23.

¹⁰⁶ In this context, recent work on memory and oral history could prove useful, a distinctly presentist point of view notwithstanding. See, for particularly striking examples, Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Aleida Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma. Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*,

Social or 'collective' memory was never all-inclusive. In fact, almost all the chapters deal with versions of the past that responded to challenges, or that themselves constituted challenges to established readings of history. While using the past was chiefly an elite activity, it does not follow that a particular reading was generally accepted even within a given elite. In a pre-modern context, we do, of course, face the problem that an audience's response can sometimes be difficult to ascertain. We can count the number of manuscripts produced, as they tell us something about the popularity of a given text. Readers also selected materials, deemed some episodes more relevant than others, added or amended information and so on, all of which offer valuable clues about their uses of the past. We are, in short, often dealing with living manuscripts rather than firmly codified texts. In other instances, however, the approach quickly reaches its limits. Most of the Icelandic sagas survive in manuscripts produced several centuries after their initial codification. This reveals something about their enduring popularity, but not their contemporary reception. Pragmatic factors also come into play. Matthew Paris's *Lives of the Two Offas* may have been his most widely disseminated text, but he was remembered even at St Albans mainly for his gargantuan *Chronica Majora*, a world history that, in its modern printed edition, runs to about 3,000 pages, well beyond the endurance levels even of most medieval scribes. In other cases, part of the prestige associated with a manuscript may have been that it remained a single copy or that it circulated only among a very select group of recipients. The *Binhai Raso* may prove a case in point, as do the 'private' histories that became popular in China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁰⁷ Similar problems do, however, apply in a late modern context. We simply do not know what most private readers made of Nazi novels about Widukind, for instance, while the mere fact that a book sold widely tells us little about what readers thought of it.¹⁰⁸ In a late modern context, audience and public opinion surveys, whether conducted for commercial or political purposes, may be able to bridge some of these gaps.

One way of dealing with the problem of audience response is to keep in mind that the producers of history were themselves part of an audience. They did, after all, read the writings of their predecessors and peers, and took quill to parchment (or pen and brush to paper, and digits to keyboard) at least partly in response to earlier work. Matthew Paris wrote his history of Offa II to invalidate the widespread image of his community's founder as a murderous tyrant; and Herrera developed a proto-Rankean faith in the archive so as to produce a history that, he claimed, would do away with the legends and myths populating the writings of his predecessors. Similar motivations are evident in the works of Ottoman historians or of Rao Zongyi. Interpretations of the past rarely stood still: most were

trans. Sarah Clift (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); Aleida Assmann and Linda Short (eds), *Memory and Political Change* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹⁰⁷ Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, 204–22.

¹⁰⁸ Methodologically useful: Robert Darnton, 'First Steps Towards a History of Reading', *Australian Journal of French Studies* 23 (1986), 5–30.

continuously revised, revived and revisited, adopted and modified, defended and challenged.

Of course, writers of history and their sponsors remain, as we have seen, part of a small section of the overall population. We have also seen how the relatively narrow group of those sponsoring and perusing reconstructions of the past created an environment that favoured particular forms and styles of expression, and a particular understanding of what constituted a usable past, thereby creating further markers of cultural and social distinction.¹⁰⁹ One of the most marked changes of late modernity is, however, that expert status could itself provide a means of challenging readings of the past. Partly because of social background, partly for their education, historians are sometimes seen as representative of an establishment in need of challenging.

In January 2014, Michael Gove, a member of the British Conservative Party and the then government minister in charge of secondary education in England, published an opinion piece in the *Daily Mail*, a mass circulation tabloid with a distinctly right-of-centre editorial line. There, he lambasted academic historians for perpetuating myths about the ineffectiveness of British military leadership during the First World War, and of the war as an act of shambolic and unnecessary bloodshed. To Gove, that reading was representative of wider left-wing hostility towards British heroism and valour. In fact, the piece was titled 'Why does the Left insist on belittling true British heroes?' A key target of the politician's ire was the former Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, Richard Evans, who, while not an expert on the First World War, has published extensively on the history of Europe between 1890 and 1945. The attack left most professional historians of the First World War bemused, not because many of them held the views attributed to them, but because precisely those views had most forcefully been expressed by a Conservative member of parliament, a Conservative prime minister and the former editor of newspaper supporting the Conservative Party.¹¹⁰ But then Gove's article was not really concerned with the finer points of historical scholarship on the First World War. Rather, it aimed to assert a particular reading of the past, one that sought to uphold and enshrine a version of British history and British values more in tune with those of the *Daily Mail* and its readers.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ For late modern parallels see: Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Niklas Luhmann, *Soziologische Aufklärung: Aufsätze zur Theorie sozialer Systeme* (Cologne and Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1970).

¹¹⁰ Michael Gove, 'Why does the Left insist on belittling true British heroes?', *Daily Mail*, 2 January 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2532930/MICHAEL-GOVE-Why-does-Left-insist-belittling-true-British-heroes.html>, accessed 7 February 2016. For Evans's response, see his, 'Michael Gove shows his ignorance of history—again', *The Guardian*, 6 January 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/06/richard-evans-michael-gove-history-education>, accessed 7 February 2016. The Conservative politicians and journalists were Alan Clark (MP), Winston Churchill and Sir Max Hastings.

¹¹¹ This was not, of course, the first spat between Evans and Gove. They had clashed six months earlier over the national curriculum. See <https://www.history.org.uk/secondary/news/1724>, accessed 15 December 2016.

There are two reasons why the piece matters here. First, it exemplifies the degree to which elite or expert status could itself constitute an argument for rejection: Evans was tainted less by views he did not actually hold than by his prominent status as an academic and professional historian. In the eyes of Michael Gove and the *Daily Mail*, that, almost by definition, put him on a part of the political spectrum that was perceived as hostile to 'traditional British values'. Gove also invoked a popular understanding of history as something that not only academic historians could do.¹¹² In a sense, because an academic position is not necessary for writing history, Evans's very status predestined him for criticism, especially if it could be associated with a particular political stance. In this respect, Gove's approach reflects a wider trend, by no means limited to the Right: the dismissal of expert opinions because those voicing them can be portrayed as part of an elite or establishment.¹¹³ Second, the attitude is especially pronounced when the issue at stake is viewed as central to the identity, culture or economic experience of a group or individual. In the case of Michael Gove, this meant fundamental questions about what constituted Britishness.¹¹⁴ The debate about the First World War was therefore less about the origin and conduct of the war, than about the role of one's interpretation of it in constructing a useful and reputable version of the past. Precisely because history was meant to be true, a reading that violated one's own understanding of the past and the lessons to be drawn from it could only be wilfully false. If so, this could help explain the forcefulness of Gove's stance. He viewed, or at least he portrayed himself as viewing, the issue of how the Great War was remembered as one that went to the very heart of British identity. It was a debate over what was worth preserving and celebrating about the British past, and, by implication, what kind of society one envisaged Britain should be.

Much about the 2014 debate was distinctively late modern—most importantly, the presence in it of a career politician pitted against a qualified expert; the representation of the latter by the former as being disqualified from holding a legitimate view precisely because of his status as an academic historian; and the medium in which it began (a mass-circulation tabloid). Yet that there should have been a debate about history and its meaning in the first place resonates with developments that surface throughout this volume. Almost every reading of the

¹¹² Gove's piece also reflects a pervasive anti-intellectualism in British public discourse. In June 2016, it was, after all, Michael Gove who declared that the British people should not be guided by expert opinion in making decisions of profound constitutional, political and economic consequence: Henry Mance, 'Britain has had enough of experts, says Gove', *Financial Times*, 3 June 2016, <https://next.ft.com/content/3be49734-29cb-11e6-83e4-abc22d5d108c> (accessed 3 July 2016).

¹¹³ The classic treatment is: Jerome Ravetz, 'Anti-establishment Science in some British Journals', *Sociology of the Sciences. A Yearbook* 3 (1979), 27–37.

¹¹⁴ This does not, of course, rule out the possibility of political calculation. The article thus formed part of a traditional strategy to equate criticism of British institutions with a lack of patriotism. See, for instance, Geoffrey Levy, 'The Man who Hated Britain', *Daily Mail*, 27 September 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2435751/Red-Eds-pledge-bring-socialism-homage-Marxist-father-Ralph-Miliband-says-GEOFFREY-LEVY.html>, accessed 15 December 2016.

past faced challenges. Sometimes this could mean outright rejection, sometimes a simple refashioning, or debate over how, within a shared framework of interpretation, key events and individuals could best be understood. But there hardly ever was anything like undisputed history. Simultaneously, and this brings us back to the overarching theme of this volume, such debates were rarely just about history. Rather, they often reveal broader concerns, ranging from the philosophical (how truth was to be ascertained and represented) to the religious (how to engage with remnants and traditions originating in a different faith) and the social and political (how a community was to be governed, or who should legitimately form part of a political community). A past was needed, because having one lent credibility and legitimacy to a cause, an institution, society or even individual. On occasion, where the past in question was distant, it allowed for debates to be conducted that had clear contemporary relevance, but, by being rooted in a time long ago and far away, also provided a space where contemporary concerns could more safely be raised. This does not diminish the importance of such debates—on the contrary, it allowed them to be conducted more freely and openly, and, precisely because they dealt with the past, ensured their survival and continuing reception. What made history an especially useful vehicle for such debates, and what contributed to vitriolic outbursts like Michael Gove's in 2014, is its inherent truth claim: it was meant to deal with a verifiable sequence of events and individuals, and thereby either establish how things really had been, or allow for moral and religious lessons to be drawn with which to evaluate the affairs of the present, and shape the future. For these reasons, how societies constructed a past, how they used it, and how they defined what constituted a usable past, greatly expands our understanding of the cultural and intellectual framework within which contemporaries thought, acted and communicated with each other. The study of historical culture is about much more than just how the past was written.

2

Imagining Rome in Medieval Constantinople

Memory, Politics and the Past in the Middle Byzantine Period

DIMITRIS KRALLIS

THIS CHAPTER EXPLORES the use of the past in two classes of texts that open a window into Byzantine notions of the polity. The *Parastaseis Syntomai Chronikai* and the *Patria* of Constantinople, two texts treated by scholars as representative of 'popular' views on history, are set against the more erudite legal and historical work of the eleventh-century judge Michael Attaleiates.¹ These works, dating to the eighth, tenth and eleventh centuries, actively evoke the Roman past, both proximate and truly distant. The perspective of our sources changes as we move from popular to elite explorations of history. The *Parastaseis* and the *Patria* focus on Constantinople, the empire's capital, while the work of Attaleiates has wider horizons, notable for its focus on both international and domestic affairs. In both sets of texts, however, the polity, conceived from the distinct perspectives of the Constantinopolitan populace and the *noblesse de robe*, looms large.² Our sources,

¹ Anonymous, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople: The Patria*, trans. A. Berger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. xviii on the *Patria* as a record of 'popular' history of Constantinople; A. Kazhdan, *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 1586 on the *Patria* as a political pamphlet; *Michael Attaleiates: The History*, trans. A. Kaldellis and D. Krallis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. vii–xix for a short biography of Attaleiates; D. Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh Century Byzantium* (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2012), pp. 1–42 for a more detailed biographical sketch. All references to Attaleiates' *History* in the original are to I. Bekker, *Michaelis Attalioetae Historia* (Bonn: CSHB, 1853).

² I owe the dual focus on popular and elite uses of the past in this written form of the original paper to the question asked in the course of the symposium by Janet Nelson, who sought a better understanding of the ways in which political ideas circulated in Byzantium outside the narrow peer groups of intellectuals. While answering her question is a task much larger than the chapter at hand, I do believe that the 'popular' material included here helps put in context the erudite musings of Attaleiates and his peers.