

PETER BURKE



*Varieties
of Cultural
History*

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PETER BURKE

Polity Press

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Preface



The aim of this collection of twelve essays is to discuss and illustrate some of the main varieties of cultural history which have emerged since the questioning of what might be called its 'classic' form, exemplified in the work of Jacob Burckhardt and Johan Huizinga. This classic model has not been replaced by any new orthodoxy, despite the importance of approaches inspired by social and cultural anthropology.

The collection opens with a chapter on the origins of cultural history which raises general questions about the identity of the subject. The chapters on dreams and memory are substantive but they are also comparative and they too attempt to engage with general problems in the practice of cultural history.

There follow five case-studies of early modern Italy, which was the main area of my research from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. All these studies are located on the frontiers of cultural history (in the sense of areas only recently explored) and also on cultural frontiers – between learned and popular culture, between the public and the private spheres, between the serious and the comic.

Then come two essays on the New World, especially Brazil (a new world I discovered only a decade ago). They focus on romances of chivalry and on carnival but their essential concern is with cultural 'translation' in the etymological, literal and metaphorical senses of that term. Particular emphasis is placed on the consequences of cultural encounters, whether they should be described in terms of mixing, syncretism or synthesis.

The volume ends with two theoretical pieces, an essay on mentalities which offers both a criticism of that concept and a defence of the approach associated with it against recent critics, and a general discussion of varieties of cultural history, comparing and contrasting the classic style with the 'new' or 'anthropological' one and attempting to answer the question whether the so-called 'new' cultural history is condemned to fragmentation.

The ideas presented here have developed out of a kind of dialogue between sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources, earlier historians (Jacob Burckhardt, Aby Warburg, Marc Bloch, Johan Huizinga), and modern cultural theorists, from Sigmund Freud, Norbert Elias and Mikhail Bakhtin to Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, and Pierre Bourdieu. In the essays which follow, I shall be trying to avoid the opposite dangers of new-fangled 'constructivism' (the idea of the cultural or discursive construction of reality), and old-fashioned 'positivism' (in the sense of an empiricism confident that 'the documents' will reveal 'the facts').

I dedicate this book to my beloved wife and fellow-historian, Maria Lúcia Garcia Pallares-Burke.

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I

Origins of Cultural History



There is no agreement over what constitutes cultural history, any more than agreement over what constitutes culture. Over forty years ago, two American scholars set out to chart the variations in the use of the term in English, and collected more than two hundred rival definitions.¹ Taking other languages and the last four decades into account, it would be easy to collect many more. In the search for our subject it may therefore be appropriate to adapt the existentialists' definition of man and to say that cultural history has no essence. It can only be defined in terms of its own history.

How can anyone write a history of something which lacks a fixed identity? It is rather like trying to catch a cloud in a butterfly net. However, in their very different ways, Herbert Butterfield and Michel Foucault both demonstrated that all historians face this problem. Butterfield criticized what he called the 'Whig interpretation of history', in other words the use of the past to justify the present, while Foucault emphasized epistemological 'ruptures'. If we wish to avoid the anachronistic attribution of our own intentions, interests and values to the dead, we cannot write the continuous history of anything.² On one side we face the danger of 'present-mindedness', but on the other the risk of being unable to write at all.

¹ Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952).

² Butterfield (1931); Foucault (1966).

Perhaps there is a middle way, an approach to the past which asks present-minded questions but refuses to give present-minded answers; which concerns itself with traditions but allows for their continual reinterpretation; and which notes the importance of unintended consequences in the history of historical writing as well as in the history of political events. To follow such a route is the aim of this chapter, which is concerned with the history of culture before the 'classic' period discussed in the concluding chapter, in other words before the term 'culture' came into general use.³

In this case the present-minded questions are the following: how old is cultural history, and how have conceptions of cultural history changed over time? The difficulty to be avoided is that of giving these questions equally present-minded answers. The problem is a slippery one. We are not the first people in the world to realize that culture, as we now call it, has a history. The term 'cultural history' goes back to the late eighteenth century, at least in German. Johan Christoph Adelung published an 'Essay in a history of the culture of the human race', *Versuch einer Geschichte der Kultur des menschlichen Geschlechts* (1782), while Johan Gottfried Eichhorn published a 'General history of culture', *Allgemeine Geschichte der Kultur* (1796–9), presented as an introduction to the 'special histories' (*Spezialgeschichte*) of the different arts and sciences.

The idea that literature and philosophy and the arts have histories is much older. This tradition deserves to be remembered. The difficulty is to do this without falling into the error of imagining that what we have defined (and indeed in some places, institutionalized), as a 'subject' or 'subdiscipline' existed in the past in this form.

In some respects the most historically minded manner of approaching the problem would be to tell the story backwards from today, showing how Huizinga's conception of cultural history differs from that of the 1990s, how Burckhardt's differed from Huizinga's, and so on. In liberating us from assumptions of continuity, however, this backward narrative would obscure the ways in which practical, partial and short-term aims and motives (such as civic pride and the search for precedent) contributed to the development over the long term of a more general study often

³ Bruford (1962), ch. 4.

pursued for its own sake. The best thing to do is perhaps for the author to share the difficulties with the reader in the course of the narrative. In other words, like some contemporary novelists and critics, I shall try to tell a story and at the same time to reflect on it and even, perhaps, to undermine it.

Whenever one begins the story, it can be argued that it would have been better to have started earlier. This chapter begins with the humanists of Renaissance Italy, from Petrarch onwards, whose attempts to undo the work of what they were the first to call the 'Middle Ages' and to revive the literature and learning of classical antiquity implied a view of three ages of culture: ancient, medieval and modern. In fact, as the humanists well knew, some ancient Greeks and Romans had already claimed that language has a history, that philosophy has a history, that literary genres have a history, and that human life has been changed by a succession of inventions. Ideas of this kind can be found in Aristotle's *Poetics*, for example, in Varro's treatise on language, in Cicero's discussion of the rise and fall of oratory, and in the account of the early history of man given in the poem of Lucretius on the nature of things (so important for Vico, and others in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries).⁴

History of Language and Literature

However, the humanists had a more dramatic story to tell about language and literature than their ancient models. A story of barbarian invasions and of the consequent decline and destruction of classical Latin, followed by an account of revival, the work (of course) of the humanists themselves. In other words, an age of light was followed by the 'Dark Ages', followed in turn by the dawn of another age of light. This is the story which emerges from some Italian texts of the early fifteenth century, Leonardo Bruni's lives of Dante and Petrarch, for example, the history of Latin literature written by Siculo Polenton, or the historical introduction to Lorenzo Valla's Latin grammar, the *Elegantiae*.⁵ This interpretation of the history of literature formed part of the justification of the humanist movement.

⁴ Edelstein (1967).

⁵ Ferguson (1948), 20ff.; McLaughlin (1988).

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, debates about the relative merits of Latin and Italian as a literary language and the best form of Italian to use generated research into the history of language by Leonardo Bruni, Flavio Biondo, and others. They discussed, for example, what language the ancient Romans had actually spoken, Latin or Italian.⁶ In the early sixteenth century, the humanist cardinal Adriano Castellesi produced a history of Latin, *De sermone latino* (1516), divided into four periods – ‘very old’, ‘old’, ‘perfect’ (the age of Cicero), and ‘imperfect’ (ever since). Another humanist and critic, Pietro Bembo, who did as much as anyone to freeze Italian at a particular point in its development, allowed one of the characters in his famous dialogue on the vernacular, the *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525), to point out that language changes ‘like fashions in clothes, modes of warfare, and all other manners and customs’ (book 1, chapter 17).

Northern humanists, at once imitators and rivals of their Italian predecessors, amplified the story by drawing attention to literary and linguistic developments in their own countries. In France, for instance, two humanist lawyers, Étienne Pasquier in his *Recherches de la France* (1566) and Claude Fauchet in his *Origine de la langue et poésie françoises* (1581), chronicled and celebrated the achievements of French writers from the thirteenth century to the age of François I and the Pléiade.⁷ In England, a discussion of English poetry from Chaucer onwards can be found in the treatise called *The Arte of English Poesie* published in 1589 and attributed to George Puttenham. A history of Spanish, *Del origen y principio de la lengua castellana*, was published by Bernardo Aldrete in 1606, in the same year as a similar study of Portuguese, *Origem da língua portuguesa*, by the lawyer Duarte Nunes de Leão. The Germans had to wait until the later seventeenth century for an equivalent history, just as they had to wait until the seventeenth century for an equivalent of the poets of the Pléiade, but the history, when it arrived, was more elaborate and comparative. The polymath Daniel Morhof placed the history of the German language and German poetry in a comparative European framework in his *Unterricht von der Teutschen Sprache und Poesie* (1682).⁸

Building on these foundations, a number of eighteenth-century

⁶ Grayson (1959).

⁷ Huppert (1970).

⁸ Batts (1987).

scholars produced multivolume histories of national literatures, notably those of France (by a research team of Benedictine monks headed by Rivet de la Grange), and of Italy (compiled single-handed by Girolamo Tiraboschi). The breadth of Tiraboschi's notion of 'literature' is worth noting.⁹ In Britain there were similar plans afoot. Alexander Pope put forward a 'scheme of the history of English poetry'; Thomas Gray amended it. Meanwhile, the history had been undertaken by Thomas Warton. Warton never went beyond the early seventeenth century, but his unfinished *History of English Poetry* (4 vols, 1774–8) remains impressive.¹⁰

Monographs were also written on the history of particular literary genres. The French Protestant scholar Isaac Casaubon published a study of Greek satire in 1605, and John Dryden, following his example, wrote a *Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693) discussing its development from what he called the 'rough-cast, unhewn' extempore satire of ancient Rome to the polished productions of a period when the Romans 'began to be somewhat better bred, and were entering, as I may say, into the rudiments of civil conversation'. Again, the rise of the novel in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was accompanied by investigations of its oriental and medieval origins by the polymath bishop Pierre-Daniel Huet, in his *Lettre sur l'origine des romans* (1669), and following him by Thomas Warton, who inserted into his history of poetry a digression 'On the Origin of Romantic Fiction in Europe'.

History of Artists, Art and Music

It is hardly surprising to find men of letters devoting attention to the history of literature. Art was a less obvious object for a historian's attention, even in the Renaissance. Learned men did not always take artists seriously, while artists generally lacked the kind of preparation necessary for historical research. When, in fifteenth-century Florence, the sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti produced a literary sketch of the history of art in his autobiographical *Commentaries*, he was doing something rather unusual.¹¹

⁹ Escarpit (1958); Goulemot (1986); Sapegno (1993).

¹⁰ Welles (1941); Lipking (1970), 352f.; Pittock (1973), ch. 5.

¹¹ Grinten (1952); Tanturli (1976).

We ought not to take Vasari for granted either. He was remarkable in his own day because he had a double education, not only a training in an artist's workshop but a humanist education sponsored by Cardinal Passerini.¹² His *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, first published in 1550, was written, so the author tells us, in order that young artists might learn from the example of their great predecessors, and also (one may reasonably suspect) for the greater glory of his adopted city Florence, and his patrons the Medici (it was in fact published by the Grand Duke's press).¹³

However, Vasari's book is much more than a work of propaganda. It is also, of course, a good deal more than a biographical collection. The prefaces to the three parts into which the work is divided include an account of the rise of art in antiquity, its decline in the Middle Ages, and its revival in Italy in three stages, culminating in Vasari's master Michelangelo. It has been shown by Ernst Gombrich that Vasari's developmental scheme was adapted from Cicero's account of the history of rhetoric. Without Vasari's double education, such an adaptation would have been virtually inconceivable, even if we allow for the fact that Vasari was helped by a circle of scholars including Gianbattista Adriani, Cosimo Bartoli, Vincenzo Borghini, and Paolo Giovio.¹⁴ Vasari's concern with art rather than artists was given still more emphasis in the second edition (1568).

Vasari's book was treated as a challenge. Artists and scholars from other parts of Italy compiled lives of local artists in order to show that Rome, Venice, Genoa, and Bologna were worthy rivals to Florence. However, they paid much less attention than Vasari had done to general trends in art. The same goes for responses to Vasari outside Italy, in the Netherlands, by Karel van Mander in *Het Schilderboek* (1604), and in Germany, by Joachim von Sandrart in his *Deutsche Akademie* (1675–9), who argued that the age of Albrecht Dürer marked the shift of cultural leadership from southern Europe to the north. It was only in the mid-eighteenth century that Horace Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting*, intended as a Vasari for England (Walpole joked about his 'Vasarihood'), found room not only for biographies but also for chapters on the 'state of painting' at different periods, the equiva-

¹² Rubin (1995).

¹³ Cf. Chastel (1961), 21ff.

¹⁴ Gombrich (1960a).

lent of the chapters on economic, social and literary history to be found in the contemporary *History of England* by David Hume.¹⁵

The rise of what it is retrospectively convenient to call the history of art as opposed to the biographies of artists took place earlier in studies of classical antiquity, for a sufficiently obvious reason. Despite the famous anecdotes of Greek artists told by Pliny (and adapted by Vasari), little was known about Apelles, Phidias and the rest, making it difficult to organize a study of ancient art as a series of biographies. The Florentine scholar Gianbattista Adriani, who composed a brief history of ancient art in the form of a letter to Vasari (1567), to help him in his second edition of the *Lives*, chose to arrange it around the idea of artistic progress. Other studies of ancient art were made by the Dutch humanist Franciscus Junius in his *De pictura veterum* (1637), and by André Félibien (historian of buildings to Louis XIV, apparently the first post in art history ever to be created), in his *Origine de la peinture* (1660).¹⁶

Félibien's essay on the origin of painting and Huet's on the origin of romances were written in France in the same decade, the 1660s, as if expressing a more general change in historiographical taste. In the tradition of Félibien was the work of the court painter Monier, *Histoire des arts* (1698), originally lectures for students of the Royal Academy of Painting. Monier's cyclical interpretation began with the rise of art in antiquity and proceeded to its decline in the Dark Ages and its revival between 1000 and 1600. The relatively early dating of the revival allowed Monier to give an important role to the French, like Pasquier and Fauchet in the domain of literature.

The outstanding achievement in this area, Johan Joachim Winckelmann's great *History of Ancient Art* (1764), should be considered not as a radically new departure but as the culmination of a trend, a trend which was encouraged not only by the example of histories of literature but also by several new cultural practices, among them the rise of art collecting, the art market and connoisseurship.¹⁷

The history of music, on the other hand, was virtually an eighteenth-century invention. Some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars, such as Vincenzo Galilei (father of the scientist)

¹⁵ Lipking (1970), 127f.

¹⁶ Lipking (1970), 23ff.; Grinten (1952).

¹⁷ Grinten (1952); Alsop (1982).

and Girolamo Mei, had been well aware of changes in style over the long term and indeed discussed them in their comparisons of ancient and modern music published in 1581 and 1602 respectively, but their aim was simply to attack or defend particular styles. In the eighteenth century, on the other hand, there was an explosion of interest in music history. In France, one major study, *Histoire de la musique*, was published in 1715 by the Bonnet-Bourdelot family, and another was written, but not published, by P. J. Caffiaux, a learned Benedictine who was, appropriately, doing for music something like what his colleague Rivet was doing for literature. In Italy, Gianbattista Martini published an important study of the music of antiquity, *Storia della musica* (1757). In Switzerland another Benedictine, Martin Gerbert, made an important contribution to the history of church music in his *De cantu et musica sacra* (1774). In England, Charles Burney and John Hawkins were contemporaries and rivals, Hawkins with his *General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1766) and Burney with *A General History of Music* (1776–89). In Germany, J. N. Forkel of the University of Göttingen summed up the work of the century in his *Allgemeine Geschichte der Musik* (1788–1801).¹⁸

The History of Doctrine

The histories of language, literature and the arts seem to have begun as side-effects of the Renaissance. The Reformation also had its historical by-products. As the humanists defined their place in history by dividing the past into ancient, medieval and modern, so did the reformers, who saw themselves as going back behind the Middle Ages and reviving Christian antiquity or the ‘primitive church’, as they called it. Histories of the Reformation begin with the Reformation itself. Among the most famous were the *Commentaries* of Johann Sleidan (1555) and the *Acts and Monuments* of John Foxe (1563). They tended to be histories of events or histories of institutions, but some of them – like their

¹⁸ *Grove's* (1980), article ‘Caffiaux’; Heger (1932); Lipking (1970), 229ff., 269ff.

model the *Ecclesiastical History* by the early Christian, Eusebius of Caesarea – found a place for the history of doctrines.¹⁹

The concern with changes in doctrine can be seen with still greater clarity in the seventeenth century. On the Protestant side, Heinrich Altting's *Theologia historica* (1664) argued for a 'historical theology' on the grounds that church history was not only the story of events but also of dogmas (*dogmatum narratio*), their corruption (*depravatio*) and their reform (*reparatio, restitutio, reformatio*). On the Catholic side, the idea of change in the doctrines of the church was more difficult to accept, despite the example of the Spanish Jesuit Rodriguez de Arriaga (d. 1667), who presented what has been called 'one of the most extreme theories of development ever put forward by a reputable Catholic thinker'. Arriaga, a professor in Prague, taught that the proclamation of doctrine by the church 'is the making explicit what was not explicit, and need not have been implicit, earlier'.²⁰

It was easier to accept change in the history of heresy, as some seventeenth-century Catholic histories of the Reformation did: Florimond de Raemon, for example, in his *Histoire de la naissance, progrès et décadence de l'hérésie de ce siècle* (1623); Louis Maimbourg, in his *Histoire du Calvinisme* (1682); and, most famous of all, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet in his *Histoire des variations des églises protestantes* (1688).²¹

These three works were not exactly examples of the study of the past for its own sake; they were highly polemical. The books of Maimbourg and Bossuet were written for a political purpose, to support Louis XIV's anti-Protestant policies at the time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. However, their central idea that doctrines (at least false doctrines) have a history, an idea expounded most fully, brilliantly and destructively by Bossuet, was to have a considerable appeal outside the polemical context in which it was originally developed. It was deployed, for instance, by an apologist for unorthodoxy, Gottfried Arnold, in his *Unpartheyische Kirche- und Ketzer-Historie* (1699–1700). For Arnold, church history was little more than the history of

¹⁹ Headley (1963); Dickens and Tonkin (1985). On Eusebius, Momigliano (1963).

²⁰ Chadwick (1957), 20, 45–7.

²¹ Chadwick (1957), 6–10.

heresies, some of which hardened into official doctrine (as Luther's had done), only to be challenged by later generations.²²

From the history of religious doctrine it seems no great step to its secular equivalents. Yet in this area (unlike art history or the history of literature and language), there seem to have been few significant developments before the year 1600. Perhaps the need to assess past achievements was a by-product of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, in which the 'new' mechanical philosophy, as it was often called, became a matter for debate. In any case, the seventeenth century saw a number of histories of philosophy, including Georg Horn's *Historia philosophiae* (1655) and Thomas Stanley's *History of Philosophy* (1655). In the eighteenth century the trend continued with A. F. Boureau-Deslandre's *Histoire critique de la philosophie* (1735), and Jacob Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae* (1767).²³ A certain Johannes Jonsonius even produced a history of the history of philosophy, published in 1716.

The classical exemplar for the history of philosophy was the *Lives of the Philosophers* written in the third century AD by Diogenes Laertius, a model which Eusebius adapted in the following century for his account of early Christian sects and which Vasari reshaped still more radically for his lives of artists.²⁴ This biographical model remained a tempting one. However, attempts were also made to tell a story as well as to collect biographies, to practise what Thomas Burnet (nearly three centuries before Foucault) called 'philosophical archaeology', and to write the intellectual history not only of the Greeks and Romans but also of the 'barbarians', as in the case of Otto Heurn's *Barbarica philosophia* (1600) and Christian Kortholt's *Philosophia barbarica* (1660). Scholars studied the ideas of the Chaldeans, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Carthaginians, the Scythians, the Indians, the Japanese and the Chinese (Jacob Friedrich Reimann's history of Chinese philosophy was published in 1727).

Some of these histories were written for their own sake, others with polemical intent, for example to encourage scepticism by emphasizing the contradictions between one philosopher and another. They modified the traditional biographical framework by discussing the development of philosophical schools or 'sects', as in the *De philosophorum sectis* (1657) of the Dutch scholar

²² Seeberg (1923); Meinhold (1967).

²³ Rak (1971); Braun (1973); Del Torre (1976).

²⁴ Momigliano (1963).

Gerard Voss, or by distinguishing periods, as Horn did, contrasting the 'heroic', 'theological or mythical' and the 'philosophical' ages of Greek thought.

The phrase 'history of ideas' is generally believed to have been launched by the American philosopher Arthur Lovejoy when he founded the History of Ideas Club at Johns Hopkins University in the 1920s. It had actually been employed two hundred years earlier, by Jacob Brucker, who referred to the *historia de ideis*, and by Gianbattista Vico, who called in his *New Science* for 'una storia dell'umane idee'.

The History of Disciplines

Out of the history-of-philosophy tradition branched a number of studies of specific disciplines.²⁵

On the arts side, the history of rhetoric and the history of history itself deserve to be mentioned. A French Jesuit, Louis de Cresolles, produced a remarkable history of the rhetoric of the ancient sophists, the *Theatrum veterum rhetorum* (1620), in which he discussed, among other topics, the training of the sophists, the competition between them, their income, and the honours they received.²⁶ The first history of historical writing was produced by the seigneur de La Popelinière in his *L'Histoire des histoires* (1599), arguing that historiography went through four stages – poetry, myth, annals and finally a 'perfect history' (*histoire accomplie*), which was philosophical as well as accurate.²⁷

The history of the graduate discipline of law also attracted considerable interest. Fifteenth-century humanists such as Lorenzo Valla and Angelo Poliziano concerned themselves with the history of Roman law as part of the ancient Roman world which they were trying to revive, criticizing the professional lawyers of their own day for misinterpreting the texts. Valla and Poliziano were amateurs in this field but they were followed in the sixteenth century by scholars such as Andrea Alciato and Guillaume Budé who were trained in both law and the humanities. One of these humanist lawyers, François Baudouin, went so far as to suggest that 'historians would do better to study the

²⁵ Graham et al. (1983); Kelley and Popkin (1991).

²⁶ Fumaroli (1980), 299–326.

²⁷ Butterfield (1955), 205–6; Kelley (1970), 140–1; Huppert (1970), 137–8.

development of laws and institutions than devote themselves to the investigation of armies, the description of camps of war, the tale of battles and the counting of dead bodies', a critique of 'drum-and-trumpet history' of a kind which would become commonplace by the eighteenth century.²⁸

In the case of medicine, some sixteenth-century physicians (notably Vesalius and Fernel), took sufficient interest in history to place their own work in the context of the intellectual revival or Renaissance through which they were living. The first substantial study of medical history, however, was published considerably later, at the end of the seventeenth century. This history of medicine by Daniel Leclerc (the brother of the critic Jean Leclerc) begins by surveying earlier studies and dismisses them for concentrating on biography. 'There is a big difference between writing the history or biographies of physicians', he remarks in his preface, '... and writing the history of medicine, studying the origin of that art, and looking at its progress from century to century and the changes in its systems and methods ... which is what I have undertaken.' Leclerc's title page also emphasizes his concern with medical 'sects' along the lines of the interest in sects of the history of philosophy, which he seems to have taken as his model.

Unfortunately, Leclerc's account (like Martini's history of music) never got beyond classical antiquity. For the modern part of the story it was necessary to wait until 1725 and the second volume of Freind's *History of Physick*, which took the story from the Arabs to Linacre (deliberately stopping short of Paracelsus). As his title page boasted, Freind differed from Leclerc in concentrating on 'practice'. His second volume is as much a history of illness (notably the sweating sickness, venereal disease, and scurvy) as it is a history of medicine. It is almost a history of the body.

In the historiography of most other disciplines, the eighteenth century marks a turning point. For example, although a short account of the development of astronomy was given by Johan Kepler, this history was much amplified by Johann Friedrich Weidler (1740) and by Pierre Estève (1755).²⁹ Estève criticized his predecessors for being too narrow and tried to produce what

²⁸ Kelley (1970).

²⁹ Jardine (1984).

he called a 'general history' of astronomy, linked to other intellectual changes, as well as a 'particular' history focused on detail. In Voltairean style he declared that 'the history of the sciences is much more useful than that of the revolutions of empires.'

In the history of mathematics, studies of the lives of mathematicians on the model of Diogenes Laertius were followed in the eighteenth century by more ambitious enterprises. Pierre Rémond de Montmort intended to write a history of geometry on the model of the existing histories of painting, music and so on, but died in 1719 before he could carry out his plans. The *Histoire des mathématiques* (1758) by Jean Étienne Montucla, a member of Diderot's circle, criticized the biographical approach, just as Leclerc (discussed below) had already done for medicine. Montucla aimed instead at making a contribution to the history of the development of the human mind.

So did the author of *Geschichte der Chemie* (1797–9), a history of chemistry which made a considerable effort to place the development of the subject in its social, political and cultural context. This monograph was presented by its author, J. F. Gmelin, a Göttingen man, as a contribution to a series of histories of arts and sciences from the time of their 'Renaissance' (*Wiederherstellung*) onwards, a project on which a society of learned men was currently at work. The milieu of the new University of Göttingen seems to have been particularly favourable to cultural history. Forkel was writing his history of music there at much the same time as Gmelin was working on the history of chemistry.³⁰

With the history of disciplines we may group the history of inventions, which goes back to the Italian humanist Polydore Vergil at the beginning of the sixteenth century and his *De inventoribus* (1500). Polydore's concept of 'invention' was a wide one by modern standards. For instance, according to him, the English parliament was invented by King Henry III.³¹ Two inventions dear to scholars, writing and printing, had monographs devoted to them in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Writing was studied by Herman Hugo (1617) and Bernard Malinckrott (1638), and their works were used by Vico for his now famous

³⁰ Butterfield (1955), 39–50; Iggers (1982).

³¹ Hay (1952); Copenhaver (1978).

reflections on orality and literacy. Samuel Palmer's *General History of Printing* (1732) was the work of a scholar-printer.

The History of Modes of Thought

Another development from the history of disciplines was the history of modes of thought.³² This development bears a striking and not altogether illusory resemblance to some of the 'new directions' preached and practised today. It is necessary to walk an intellectual tightrope at this point in order to give the eighteenth-century historians of mentalities the credit that is due to them without turning them into clones of the French historians associated with the journal *Annales*.

In the seventeenth century, John Selden had already recommended to the listeners to his Table-Talk the study of 'what was generally believed in all ages', adding that in order to discover this, 'the way is to consult the liturgies, not any private man's writings.' In other words, rituals reveal mentalities. John Locke was acutely aware of differences between modes of thought in different parts of the world. 'Had you or I' (he wrote in *Concerning Human Understanding*), 'been born at the Bay of Saldanha, possibly our thoughts and notions had not exceeded those brutish ones of the Hottentots that inhabit there.' This relativist argument, nourished by recent accounts of Africa, gives obvious support to Locke's polemic against innate ideas.

It is not such a long step from a concern with variations in thinking in different places to a concern with different periods. It may well have been the revolution in thought associated with the rise of the 'mechanical philosophy' which made some Europeans aware of the intellectual 'world they had lost'. Curiously enough, the eighteenth-century scholar Richard Hurd employs a similar phrase when discussing the rise of reason since Spenser's day. 'What we have gotten by this revolution, you will say, is a great deal of good sense. What we have lost is a world of fine fabling.'³³ At all events, one finds this awareness in Fontenelle, in Vico, in Montesquieu and elsewhere in the eighteenth century, especially in the context of attempts to understand alien features of early literature and law.

³² Crombie (1994), 1587–633.

³³ Quoted in Pittock (1973), 85.