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A more fitting title for this new, informative book would perhaps run Doers of Humanities in Nineteenth-Century Germany or even Doings of Humanities since Nineteenth-Century Germany. Instead of focusing analysis on scholarly practice, as suggested by the title’s Doing, its chapters accommodate diverse lines of sight onto workers and workings, as in consequences, of humanistic scholarship. The volume began as an international symposium – ‘a conversation,’ as its introduction has it – held in Jerusalem in 2017, funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, and dedicated to ‘the past and present state of the humanities’ (p. 1). The curiosity in the past is thus driven by an interest in the present, an attempt not only to recognize the formative influence of nineteenth-century German-language scholarship but also to reflect on ‘how this tradition might inform the practices of the humanities nowadays’ (p. 1). In this way, the aim represents what Reinhart Herzog once called the ‘strong use of historiography’ or the ‘steering function’ of disciplinary histories, which, in the nineteenth century itself, became intimately intertwined with institutional history and the politics of research.¹

Edited volumes like these are never easy, from corralling contributors to herding all the peripatetic papers into a single fold to shepherding presentations into publications. Anyone with past involvement in such projects, as author or as editor, will appreciate the good work of Efraim Podoksik on an effective introduction, one able to locate unifying principles for the book, to formulate key themes that bind certain chapters together, to encapsulate contributions whilst indicating points of contact, and even to offer important directions for analyzing the formation of disciplines, in their consolidation and their differentiation. He also knows how to

please a crowd, with an introduction, and larger volume, that highlights the legacy of Alexander von Humboldt.

As for structure, the book is divided in three parts, after the editor sets the stage. Each identified with one key theme, they cover Historical Imagination, Studying the Beautiful, and Crossing the Borders: themes later, and better, described as historicism, theorizing the beautiful, and the standing of the humanities vis-à-vis the natural or exact sciences (p. 5). The chapter headings, which also name the discipline concerned, make for awkward titles at times, as ‘nineteenth-century Germany’ already features in the volume’s subtitle. Part 1, on historical approaches, includes ‘Philosophy: Philosophy, History of Philosophy, and Historicism’ by Forster; ‘Theology: Why Theology? Strategies of Legitimation: Protestant Theology in German Protestantism’ by Graf; and ‘History: Between Archival Research and Aspirations to Leadership in Society: 19th-century Germans as Practitioners in History’ by Daniel Fulda.

Part 2, on aesthetics (which does not exclude a historical approach to art), comprises ‘History of Art: Winckelmann’s Model of Art Historiography and Its Reception in the Late 18th and 19th Century’ by Elisabeth Décultot; ‘Literary Studies: Two 19th-Century Models of Literary Studies: August Wilhelm Schlegel and Friedrich Nietzsche’ by David E. Wellbery; ‘Classical Philology: German Altertumswissenschaften, “Professorenhaarspalterei” and Organising the Classics in the 19th Century’ by Christiane Reitz; and ‘Renaissance Studies: the Mother of Modernity: Jacob Burckhardt and the Idea of the Renaissance in 19th-Century Germany’ by Martin A. Ruehl.


This multiauthor volume does not present any one theoretical, methodological, empirical, or historiographical intervention as a whole. The chief consistency across Doing Humanities in Nineteenth-Century Germany is a common concern with ‘today.’ Thus, with his accustomed, and admirable, ability to build an argument, Forster contends the history of philosophy proves to be an integral part to the discipline itself – as standard in Germanophone yet sorely lacking in Anglophone philosophy – although the chapter does make the reader feel like an eavesdropper on an internal debate among philosophers. Through his inquiry into past ‘strategies of legitimation’, Graf, too, asserts with force the analytical importance of theology for fields in cultural studies, correcting along the way an unfortunate, yet not infrequent, equation in British
and North American scholarship of German Protestant theology with the figure of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Graf argues convincingly for the depth and nuance that theological research adds to understanding cultural, intellectual, social, political, and religious history in Europe, even if the argument largely surrenders the claims to normativity so customary for theology. In like manner, Wagner expands on Fritz Ringer, with the conclusion encapsulating the entire argument: an argument stressing the crucial role of causality in Weber’s thought and, even more, the relevance of that thought to contemporary neuroscience and philosophy of mind.

Although the volume does not advance a single argument greater than the sum of its parts, some of those parts are great. Trabant, as said, provides a different way to trace the periods and priorities of linguistic study, and does so with a chapter that looks beyond the borders of the German lands and even Europe.

In his gripping chapter on historical thinking, Fulda leaves the emperor not fully naked but scantily clad as he traces the literary and philosophical dimensions to the priorities and practices of von Ranke, looking back to aesthetics and epistemology of Goethe and forward to perception of the historical in the surrounding world of Burekhart and to the politics of disseminating knowledge with the usual suspects of Droysen, Mommsen, Freytag, and von Sybel.

Advancing insights big and small and providing plenty of pointers for future research, Wellbery’s chapter serves as a model for how to develop a clear and concise, if not always fully balanced, thesis. He finds in the models of Schlegel (idealism) and Nietzsche (historical anthropology) ‘the epistemological possibilities of literary study’ (p. 111) and shows a deep integration, even unity, of theory, history, and criticism in the former and in the latter an aesthetic analysis that stresses an embodied individual and collective life.

With her careful reading of Winckelmann, Décultot reveals the narratological drive hard at work in his history of art, where ‘style’ operated not only as a category to categorize eras of artistic development but also as a vehicle to organize ancient peoples themselves, based on their correspondence to an ideal succession of styles. She then tracks reactions to this ‘dramaturgy of history’ (p. 96) in Comte de Caylus and Herder.

In his beautifully written essay, Ruehl presents a rich, dynamic exploration into the Renaissance idea as formulated by Burckhardt, addressing everything from its contested place in constructions of modernity to its historiographical structuring vis-à-vis the Middle Ages and Reformation to its disputed patrimony in Southern and Northern Europe. Ruehl rests not there but presses on to consider the Renaissance in relation to burning questions of bourgeois consciousness: on religion and secularism; culture, education, and politics; forms of governance; and national identity. He concludes with an insightful review of the contrasting fates of the
Renaissanceidee in German and North American historiography in the second half of the twentieth century.

Other chapters make their particular intervention or the general stakes less clear. Klautke offers a solid overview of the life and legacy of Völkerpsychologie (translated as folk psychology, peoples’ psychology, or ethnopsychology), although the chapter remains rather descriptive.

With a surprisingly literary approach, Ette reads travel writings by Humboldt and Adelbert Von Chamisso to highlight the connection of scientific inquiry and personal experience, whereby his discussion of the latter figure proves to be the more revealing, and more relevant, for the aims of the volume.

If, as Reitz says, ‘it would be presumptuous to aim at new insights’ on Wilamowitz given the cottage industry around him (especially by William M. Calder III), one wonders why she chose to focus on him in the first place. Her chapter takes us down well-worn paths in the story of Wilamowitz as a cipher for the history of classical scholarship. But almost en passant, the text points to more exciting, less traveled pathways that could lead to more commanding vistas on the history of classics: on classical antiquity in the aristocracy, on the construction of ‘objectivity’, on the affordances of wealth to choices of scholarship, on university architecture, on fundraising, administrating, and lobbying (perhaps part of what the humanities have always been), on wives, daughters, and granddaughters bequeathing so many essential sources, on the foundation of the Proseminar, on the importance of infrastructure to scholarship, on the choice in partners for large projects, on the standardization of formats for editions, on the choice of publishing houses, on international cooperation in classics, on the colonial arrangements that allowed for source procurement, on the emotion in classical philology. All this shows us what can yet be done for the history of classics, even with a tired guide like our Wilamowitz.

Overall, this book is filled with fathers, some by declaration, others by implication. Authors invoke ‘founding fathers’ of sociology (Georg Simmel), art history (Johann Joachim Winckelmann), social anthropology (Bronislaw Malinowski) and the German Archaeological Institute. They evoke Wilhelm Schlegel and Friedrich Nietzsche as progenitors for literary studies, Leopold von Ranke for history, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (and his father-in-law Theodor Mommsen) for classics, Jacob Burckhardt for Renaissance studies, Alexander von Humboldt for linguistics, and Moritz Lazarus, Heymann Steinthal, and Wilhelm Wundt for Völkerpsychologie. But not everyone is meant for disciplinary monogamy. We see some nineteenth-century figures flirting with other fields. Burckhardt, Nietzsche, and Wundt as well as the Brothers Humboldt and Schlegel refuse to let themselves be bound to a single chapter. We also witness Goethe, Herder, and Hegel spreading their ‘seminal’ ideas throughout all kinds of study.
Men dominate not only as the content but also the contributors, with two out of the twelve chapters written by women. Freud does not feature in the volume, but one wonders what he might have to say.

In terms of historiography, to understand the human sciences in nineteenth-century Germany, this volume tells the history of disciplines, and does so by telling the stories of scholars. The chapters tend to run Big Discipline – Big Name(s), a more conventional approach. As Constanze Güthenke writes in her own book on German scholarship of the nineteenth century, also published in 2020, ‘The biographical and personal have had a solid part in how the discipline looks at itself, and its historiography, even if the parameters are changing, has remained indebted to biographical models of one kind or another to an ostensibly self-evident degree’. The volume mirrors, then, its objects of analysis: through its dedication to thinkers (‘great men’) who did much to shape the current state of their fields and its demarcation of disciplines, both well-established and emerging in the period. As the chapters on philosophy and classics themselves observe, both Hegel and Wilamowitz fashioned histories of their disciplines. Their (long) nineteenth-century accounts continue to shape the way those fields are defined, constructed, and narrated into the twenty-first century – the protagonists, borders, questions, and conclusions.

Convention marks these histories in their tellers, too. Most of the authors in this book – like most of those who write on the history of scholarship – are ‘practitioners’ of the disciplines they explore: and well-known ones to wit, such as Michael N. Forster on philosophy or Friedrich Wilhelm Graf on theology. As suggested in certain cases by extensive self-citation, we’ve heard some of these stories before. Yet the volume does not hide this internal perspective, selecting specialists with ‘an interest in the different aspects of the historical emergence of that discipline’ (p. 1). More entrenched historians may find confirmed some of their usual suspicions about ‘disciplinary histories,’ i.e., those written within, by, and for a given field: a narrative preference of rational development, a priority of content over context in the life of ideas, and a proclivity for teleology. However, such internal perspective – also as usual – brings real advantages as well, able to draw on familiarity with disciplinary logic, mastery of analytical techniques, expertise in the data itself, and awareness of little-known ideas, debates, texts, entanglements, and roads not taken or abandoned. It is precisely with such specialist, insider knowledge that the linguist Jürgen Trabant composes his incisive account of linguistics, which offers a new chronology (beginning not in

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1816 with Bopp but in 1804 with Alexander von Humboldt) and new structure (‘project India’ and ‘project America,’ or historical and anthropological approaches), with a distinctive narrative device in transcontinental perspective (a history of objects, in the books on American languages that Humboldt brought to Europe).

While the book remains true to its title in concentrating on the nineteenth century, historians of scholarship would have benefited from more sustained assessment of what made humanistic study – and its crises – different in this period from what preceded and succeeded it. Likewise, the introduction does well to refer to ‘disciplines-in-the-making’ and to attend to the porous boundaries between natural and human science, yet students of knowledge-making could have gained further advantage from more substantive discussion of what constituted a discipline in general or a humanistic one in particular (from diverse opinions at that time to differences from developments between then and now) as well as a more detailed explanation of the criteria for inclusion in the volume (or exclusion, in the case of musicology, anthropology, archaeology, etc.). So too, other historians would have profited from more robust engagement with the transnational and colonial dimensions of academic achievements, the impact of institutional, organizational, and financial arrangements on knowledge production, and the role of objects, media, and technology in human science.

The lack of internal cross-referencing among the chapters – let alone incorporation of the information given or the arguments made by fellow contributors – shows a missed opportunity for revealing the inter-/trans-/multi-disciplinary nature of humanistic scholarship in this time and place, as those disciplines themselves were being articulated into their now recognizable forms. While, for instance, Wundt appears in his dedicated chapter on Völkerpsychologie as well as in chapters on philosophy, sociology, and linguistics, the travels of Alexander von Humboldt feature in two chapters that sit like lonely silos beside each other. Although the challenge of integration is pretty much par for the course in the genre of ‘edited volume’ – and thus by no means specific to this sample – some do shoot under par. An epilogue could have done much to tie the chapters and the take-aways together. As it stands, the reader finishes the last one, on sociology, and comes to an abrupt end: left feeling not entirely unlike Humboldt, whose travel diary after a perilous journey – analyzed by Ette – records, ‘I see myself again, hanging over this terrible abyss’ (p. 223).

While the publisher should be commended for using paper sustainably produced, at €124.00 ($150.00) per volume, Brill could have served its authors, and its readers, better. The book is rife with technical errors: inconsistency, even in single chapters, between 19th and nineteenth; mistaken styles of quotation marks (‘rational’ [p. 277]); erratic citations of editors and
translators in the footnotes (ed., (eds.), ed. by); ungrammatical possessives (‘to Wilamowitz energetic engagement’ [p. 137]); missed italics for titles of books; both German and English spelling of cities (Munich vs. München, Vienna vs. Wien); reversed places and publishers in bibliography (Weidmann: Leipzig [p. 137]); and commas lacking aplenty. Less pedantically, the frequent jumble of en-dashes and hyphens causes confusion on occasion, and one particular oversight unhelpfully refers the reader to something unspecified ‘(see )’ (p. 62). Sometimes the original German accompanies a translation; other times, no translation is provided, which then does provide a barrier to those who do not understand the language. In short, the responsibility for copyediting was apparently pushed onto the authors and the editor themselves, a thankless yet skillful task – one that should not be left to contributors to execute or public funding bodies to subsidize but rather to the publisher’s own production process, especially for a press of such profile, proportions, and prices.

Altogether, the volume represents yet another good entry in the series Scientific and Learned Cultures and Their Institutions, which has become a major forum for the history of the sciences both natural and human. One hopes historians of the late modern period will follow their colleagues in early modern history and recognize the excitement and the analytical purchase on offer in the history of human and social sciences. With books like Doing the Humanities in Nineteenth-Century Germany, this series continues to publish work that shows the way.