

English summaries

Historical Discourse and Narratives Structures Aspects of History Writing in Herodotus

P. PAYEN

The article proposes to analyse the fictional aspects in history writing. Indeed, history doesn't borrow from fiction its compositional techniques only; the discursive strategy which consists in narrating a story is in fact part of historical knowledge as such. A study of Cambysis's biography in Herodotus (II,1-III,66) leads us to grant a very specific function to Book II dealing with Egypt—nearly always considered as some sort of useless overgrowth—and to the “secondary remarks” concerning the Greek world (III,38, 39-60). Setting the Egyptian civilization as a foil enables Herodotus to establish a parallel between expansionist ideas and folly and he includes the Greeks in a plot itself critical of helleno-centric ideology. Our methodological approach owes as much to Ricœur's hermeneutics, as to H. R. Jauss's esthetics of reception and to the various streaks of narratology (narrative syntax and “mise en abîme”), with a view to showing that, once replaced in its “Erwarthunshorizonte”, the form of the historical narrative makes full sense.

Knowledge and the Monarch: The Treatise on the Nations of the Porphyrogenite Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII

B. BEAUD

De Administrando Imperio, an ethnographic and diplomatic treatise written by the Emperor Constantine VII, attests to the articulation in 10th century Byzantium of cultural and political practices at the highest level of government. A rereading of the text brings to light not so much what is usually considered to be an encyclopedic collection of material as an erudite compilation that draws on narrative and historiographic sources as well as administrative archives. The text combines scholarly rhetoric with the use of official language characteristic of Byzantine diplomacy. This two-fold tradition is accompanied by a two-fold cultural and political qualification of the emperor himself. De Administrando Imperio in effect illustrates the sovereign's mystery and knowledge of imperial discourse and tradition, in accordance with the model of the scholarly prince that was developed at that time. In that sense it guarantees Constantine VII's personal and dynastic legitimacy.

Jean Renart's Tournament at Saint-Trond: A Conjunction between History and Literature

J. W. BALDWIN

By juxtaposing historical sources (Gislebert de Mons and the Histoire de Guillaume

le Maréchal) with imaginative literature (Chrétien de Troyes and Jean Renart), this study poses four questions concerning the conduct of tournaments in northern France at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: (1) How Knights fought, in groups or singly? (2) Why they fought, for boot or glory? (3) Were women present? (4) What was the influence of churchmen? It concludes that answers to these questions may be found in the tensions created by the interaction between historical and literary texts.

The Protest Rhetoric of the Parlement of Rouen, 1753-1763

M. LEVINGER

During the last four decades of the Ancien Régime, the “rigidly conservative” magistrates of the French parlements enthusiastically proclaimed ideas which anticipated those of the Revolution. Through close readings of remonstrances by the Parlement of Rouen between 1753 and 1763, this essay explores the paradoxical link between traditional concepts of the French constitution and revolutionary political theory. It pays special attention to rhetorical devices such as parallelism, repetition, and ambiguous pronoun usage, which allowed the parlementaires subtly to shift the terms of political debate without explicitly challenging royal authority. The parlements’ protests undermined the legitimacy of the French monarchy by exposing ambiguities in the theory of absolutism and by implying that the “nation” was a unified entity independent of the king. Their rhetoric helped make imaginable the transfer of unitary sovereignty from king to nation.

Public Services and Neoliberalism

P. CHAMBAT

While the adoption of neoliberal positions by the French right may seem like an ideological and conjunctural phenomenon, discourse that is critical of public intervention contributes to and accentuates the legitimation crisis being undergone by public services. By defining itself ever more narrowly as providing services to the public, this sector comes up against the market model of economics and politics. What is at stake is not so much the simple elimination of public services as the redistribution of the public vs. the private share in the provision of services. Business is referred to as the mainspring of modernization, especially when it comes to personnel. But it can also lead to an alteration of the principles defining public services as they affect beneficiaries.

The Gay History

D. S. MILO

Yet another attempt to historically reconcile science and art—though in this case from an experimental standpoint. Concerning science, I adopt a heuristic disrespect for the object, even a laboratory-inflicted violence; concerning art, estrangement, i.e. making the familiar unfamiliar; concerning both, a playful and yet serious view of intellectual activity. Let us assume that experimentalism exists in history. Thus quantitative history and comparativism, while by definition experimental practices, are only fully experimental if we do not obstinately seek to generate them through their object (the pitfall of reconstitution). The present manifesto indicates three other paths less travelled: counterfactuals, absence as fact, and methodological anachronism. Throughout, the gay historian obeys my motto: “commit yourself and you’ll see!”

Orders in the Archive

A. OPHIR

History as the totality of that which really happened constitutes the domain of the (always absent) signified; the Archive as the totality of all traces history has left behind is the domain of the signifier. Historical discourse interprets Archive's signs in order to represent things of the past (now absent signifieds) within various narrational frameworks. The distinctions between history's three domains is elaborated into an anarchist view of historical discourse in which any historical interpretation may go. This view is then rejected with the help of Foucault's alternative notion of the archive. Instead of looking back for lost signifieds one reconstructs orders of signifiers which historical reality itself has produced and imprinted in its archives. Without abandoning the basic semiotic distinctions it is now possible to account for serious historical discourse that seeks the truth and examines narratives on the basis of how well they fit the evidence established by orders in the archive.

Economic Development and Human Height in France, XIXth-XXth Centuries

M. A. VAN MEERTEN

The first section of this paper deals with the historical French debate on the factors explaining variations in human height. Villermé stated already in 1829 the existence of a close relationship between height of conscripts and material well-being. His thesis is now generally accepted by scholars in medicine and anthropology. Based on this idea a mathematical model is developed in the second section, in which variations in median height of french conscripts over the periode 1835-1913 are predicted with great accuracy by a lagged series of per capita income. Finally the precision of the model enables an estimation of median height of french conscripts for the period 1914-1986, a period for which no annual height series were available, but for which per capita income figures exist. Confronted with earlier estimates the results of the model prove to be very precise for a period of more than half a century.