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THEME: CLASSICS OF THE HUMANITIES, I; FROM THE ENLIGHTENMENT TO THE DIGITAL AGE

The Forgotten Curriculum of the Humanities

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ABSTRACT

This themed issue brings together introductions to some of the important texts that shaped the modern humanities. We argue that these texts are foundational for the humanities, and yet they are rarely read. Our collection starts in the predisciplinary realm of the Enlightenment, moves on to the increasing specialization and professionalization of the nineteenth century, and follows with early twentieth-century texts that aimed to overcome academic compartmentalization. The collection ends with the introduction of new digital methods in the decades after World War II.

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas S. Kuhn compared the modern scientist to "the typical character of Orwell's *1984*, the victim of the history rewritten by the powers that be."[1] The practice of science education, he argued, created this Orwellian situation. Science students encountered the history of science through textbooks that were designed to confirm contemporary beliefs and deliver a common disciplinary framework. They did not engage with Copernicus's *De revolutionibus* or Darwin's *The Origin of Species* firsthand. In science education there was "no equivalent for the art museum or the library of classics,"[2] and this, Kuhn claimed, distinguished the scientific community from all other branches of knowledge making. However, the situation is no less Orwellian within the humanities. Students in the humanities do visit art museums and plow through libraries of classics and are here confronted with canonical works of art and literature, but these are comparable to insect and stone collections

1. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 197.
2. Ibid.

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of entomologists and geologists. They are some of the stuff that scholars in the humanities study. Students may also be encouraged to read philosophical and theoretical inspirations, say Michel Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* or Edward Saids's *Orientalism*. However, they are much less likely to read texts that introduced the particular research practices of their discipline and even less likely to encounter such texts from other humanities disciplines. As in the sciences, these texts are seldom studied in the original or in their original context, but they are nonetheless foundational for how humanities scholars work and describe the human world.

Even historical humanities disciplines often have an oddly ahistorical relationship to their past. Students in the humanities may be asked to read Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or be shown sculptures from the Vatican Museum, but they will probably not encounter Friedrich Schlegel's reading of Shakespeare or Johann Joachim Winckelmann's comparative studies of the Vatican collection. Almost all historians have heard that their discipline started with Leopold von Ranke and his demand to show "What actually happened" (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*), but only a few have read Ranke's *Geschichten der romanischen and germanischen Völker*, where the sentence appeared. Prehistoric archaeologists are aware that Christian Jürgensen Thomsen in 1836 introduced the three-age system, dividing prehistory between the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages, but Thomsen's work never has been published in a critical edition, and the only English translation appeared in 1848. In this Theme, we have published the first English translation of Karl Lachmann's famous introduction to Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, although the text first appeared in 1850 and has been celebrated by philologists ever since. Scholars in digital humanities may celebrate Roberto Busa's use of punch cards for his Aquinas edition as an early beginning of their work, but Busa's description of his work is not available online.

In fact, the foundational texts of the presumably ahistorical sciences are today more accessible than the foundational texts of modern humanities scholarship. Kuhn became a historian of science in the late 1940s and early 1950s by teaching classes on James Bryant Conant's *Harvard Case Histories in Experimental Science*, which included selections of historically significant science texts, starting with Robert Boyle's *New Experiments Physico-Mechanicall*. Many science texts have also been republished and translated into various modern languages. If students are not forced to read them in class, they can find them in university libraries or buy cheap copies in university bookshops. Copernicus's *De revolutionibus* and Darwin's *The Origin of Species* are as easily available in Shanghai and Bogotá as in Krakow and Cambridge. Nothing similar exists for the history of humanities. Some of the texts presented in this volume, admittedly, are still widely available. Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* remains a standard reference in comparative literature departments; Aby Warburg has experienced a recent revival, and his works have been translated and republished; and Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* never went out of print. However, these works are seldom presented

as contributions to an interconnected history of the humanities, as in Conant's *Case Histories* and similar source collections and book series in the history of science.

We consider this situation problematic. For those critical of scholarly traditions that enthroned European works of literature and art, such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or the Vatican Museum's Belvedere Torso, as highpoints of human culture, it's helpful to know how scholars established these hierarchies. Drawing attention to these works and introducing them together in the same volume can, we hope, encourage reflection on the contemporary standards of scholarship and help develop a new understanding of the humanities and their place in the modern world. It may also create new awareness of the many different worlds within the humanities. Kuhn once described how the study of a foundational text in the summer of 1947 transformed his view of science. At the time, he was finishing his PhD in physics at Harvard, and Conant encouraged him to explore the history of the discipline. It was then that it happened to him. As Kuhn recounted: "I was sitting at my desk with the text of Aristotle's *Physics* open in front of me. . . . Looking up, I gazed abstractedly out the window of my room—the visual image is one I still retain. Suddenly the fragments in my head sorted themselves out in a new way, and fell into place together. My jaw dropped, for all at once Aristotle seemed a very good physicist indeed, but of a sort I'd never dreamed possible."[3] We hope that some of our readers may enjoy similar experiences with texts introduced here.

CODIFIED PRACTICES

In this Theme, we have collected introductions to some of the important texts that shaped the modern European humanities, from the middle of eighteenth to the middle of the twentieth century. We start in the prediscipliniary realm of the Enlightenment, when scholars and amateurs alike combined textual as well material evidence, literary imagination, philosophical speculation, and meticulous empirical studies in order to make sense of the human world. We move on to the increasing specialization and professionalization of nineteenth century, especially in the German-speaking parts of Europe, and the gradual emergence of modern humanities disciplines. This is followed by early twentieth-century texts that aimed to overcome academic compartmentalization and offer new comparative perspectives, across disciplinary divisions as well as across space and time. The issue ends with the introduction of new digital methods, merging traditional philology with modern technology, in Europe and the United States in the decades after World War II.

3. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Road since Structure: Philosophical Essays, 1970–1993, with an Autobiographical Interview* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 16. Also, George A. Reisch, "Aristotle in the Cold War: On the Origins of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*," in *Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions at Fifty: Reflections on a Science Classic*, ed. Robert J. Richards and Lorraine Daston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 12–30.

We have not looked for texts that offered philosophical definitions of the humanities or theorical inspiration to humanities scholars. We have instead sought out texts that introduced new research practices within the humanities, reveal "humanities-in-the-making," and show how scholars came to know what they claimed to know.[4] The published texts may be less than accurate in their descriptions of research practices. When publishing their results, scholars seldom present the messiness of the research process. They suppress their doubts, hide their mistakes and failures, ignore disagreements with colleagues and competitors, and conceal their reliance upon the help of friends, assistants and spouses. The published texts, however, presented *codified practice* and delivered examples that others imitated. Even if they are no longer read today, as is the case with most of the foundational texts of humanities scholarship, they once influenced scholars and students.

In a seminal work in modern science studies, Simon Schaffer and Steven Shapin show how Robert Boyle's printed accounts of his pneumatic experiments were highly selective. They argue, however, that Boyle's "literary technology" was no less important for the success of his arguments than the "material technology" of his air-pump. Through his writings, Boyle convinced his readers about the soundness of the experimental approach and invited them to participate as "virtual witnesses."[5] Scholars in the humanities used similar "literary technologies" and with similar results. In his writings from the 1820s and 1830s, Ranke convinced his readers about the centrality of philological methods and archival research for the historical discipline. The published descriptions of his archival work established the archive as a primary venue for the production of historical knowledge, exactly because they were selective and delivered a clear model for others to follow.[6]

The codification of practices in print was also important for the development of the modern disciplines. During the nineteenth century, European scholars increasingly insisted that they did not need a unifying theory of knowledge to justify their work. The borders and boundaries of the modern disciplinary landscape were pragmatic and reflected an academic division of labor. Each discipline possessed its own methods and research practices that distinguished it from other disciplines. Texts that described these methods and practices in an exemplary manner were therefore central to the disciplinary identity. Ranke's writings defined the historical discipline as grounded in philological methods and archival research. Thomsen's 1836 description of the Museum of

4. On the concept of "science-in-the-making," see Steven Shapin, "Why the Public Ought to Understand Science-In-The-Making," *Public Understanding of Science* 1, no. 1 (1992): 27–30.

5. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), esp. 25–26 and 60–65.

6. Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, "Leopold Ranke's Archival Turn: Location and Evidence in Modern Historiography," *Modern Intellectual History* 5, no. 3 (2008): 425–53.

Nordic Antiquities in Copenhagen similarly helped establish archaeology as a discipline for the comparative study of the material objects and demarcated archaeologists not only from historians but also from methodologically eclectic antiquarians. Scholars also increasingly wrote texts that would carve out space for new disciplines or consolidate established disciplines. Even if these attempts were unsuccessful, as Immanuel Wolf's 1822 proposal for a new discipline for the study of Judaism, they confirmed that modern scholarship should be divided into branches.

Finally, the codification of practices in print supported the standardization and institutionalization of research and research education. Following Kuhn, historians of science have in recent decades shown the importance of new practical science textbooks, especially from the second half of the nineteenth century, when the number of students at European universities increased dramatically.[7] The textbooks not only codified research practices but also supported the vocational training of students in new educational institutions, such as the teaching laboratory. A similar development happened within the humanities. Like in the sciences, humanities scholars produced textbooks and handbooks, such as Henry Sweet's 1878 *Handbook of Phonetics*, and established venues for vocational training, most important the many large institutionalized seminars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[8]

THE SELECTION

When we started this project, it was far from self-evident which texts should be included. It was not even clear how we should define the humanities. Until the late nineteenth century, European universities did not have faculties of humanities, and the word was not commonly used. Renaissance humanists had talked about the *studia humanitatis* and associated these with specific disciplines—grammar, rhetoric, poetics, history, and moral philosophy—that not only described the human world but also transformed students into better human beings. However, already by the middle of the eighteenth century, many scholars had rejected the idea of *studia humanitatis* as both too narrow and too self-important. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars did not consider the disciplines of the *studia humanitatis* as a unit or as fundamentally different from other

7. See, e.g., Michael Gordin, "Beilstein Unbound: The Pedagogical Unraveling of the Man and His Handbuch," and Kathryn M. Olesko, "The Foundation of a Canon: Kohlrausch's Practical Physics," both in *Pedagogy and the Practice of Science. Historical and Contemporary Perspectices*, ed. David Kaiser (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 11–39 and 323–56, respectively.

8. Bernhard vom Brocke, "Wege aus der Krise. Universitätsseminar, Akademiekommission oder Forschungsinstitut. Formen der Institutionalisierung in den Geistes- und Naturwissenschaften 1810–1900–1995," in *Konkurrenten in der Fakultät. Kultur, Wissen und Universität um 1900*, ed. Christoph König and Eberhard Lämmert (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1999), 191–218; and Gert Schubring, "Kabinett – Seminar – Institut: Raum und Rahmen des forschenden Lernens," *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 23, no. 3 (2000): 269–85.

disciplines in the faculty of philosophy.[9] When the humanities reemerged in the late nineteenth century, this was the result of institutional reforms and changed priorities within European universities.

The most important institutional change was the division of the faculty of philosophy and the establishment of new independent faculties for the natural and social sciences. As the sciences began to separate from the faculty, some scholars attempted to define the remains in opposition to their former peers. If the sciences offered general laws and casual explanations, the humanities dealt only with particular occurrences and interpretation. The sciences were nomothetic, while the humanities were idiographic. Such definitions of the humanities remain common today. However, as several scholars have pointed out, much of what scholars actually do in both the humanities and the sciences defies these definitions.[10] The modern faculties, like the modern disciplines, institutionalized a pragmatic division of labor among specialists rather than a theory of knowledge. Definitions of the humanities therefore also differ from university to university and from country to country and especially the boundaries between the humanities and the social sciences remain negotiable. At some universities, the departments of history can be found within the faculty of humanities and at others within the faculty of social sciences. In the United States communication is normally considered a social science but in Europe often a part of the humanities. The German word *Geisteswissenschaften* (disciplines of mind) initially referred to both the humanities and the social sciences but demarcated these from the natural sciences.[11] Later the word acquired a narrower meaning and today a German *Fakultät für Geisteswissenschaften,* like a North

9. On definitions of the humanities, see Rens Bod, Julia Kursell, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Westesteijn, "A New Field: History of Humanities," *History of Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1–8. On the moral ideal of *studia humanitatis* and the modern humanities, see Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, "Commentary: Scholarship as a Way of Life—Character and Virtue in the Age of Big Humanities," *History of Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2016): 387–97.

10. See Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7–8; John Pickstone, "Toward a History of Western Knowledge: Sketching Together the Histories of the Humanities and the Natural Sciences," in *The Making of the Humanities*, vol 3, *The Modern Humanities*, ed. Rens Bod, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 667–85; Rens Bod and Julia Kursell, "The History of Humanities and the History of Science," *Isis* 106, no. 2 (2015): 337–40; and Fabian Krämer, "The Two Cultures Revisited: The Sciences and the Humanities in a *Longue Durée* Perspective," *History of Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2018): 5–14.

11. For a recent discussion, see Julian Hamann, "Boundary Work between Two Cultures: Demarcating the Modern Geisteswissenschaften," *History of Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2018): 27–38. Apart from *Geisteswissenschaften*, German scholars also introduced the expression "the humanistic disciplines" (*die humanistischen Fächer*), which the Göttingen professor Wilhelm Lexis claimed in 1893 "usually subsume the philosophical and historical-philological sciences" (*Die Deutschen Universitäten*, vol. 1 [Berlin: Ascher, 1893], 421).

American faculty of humanities, will not have, say, a department of sociology. In the francophone world, on the contrary, *les sciences humaines* refers not only to history, linguistics, and philosophy but also to sociology, psychology, and anthropology, and these are often placed together with other humanities disciplines in a *faculté des lettres et sciences humaines.* At the same time, there is the notion of *humanités* in French, which, like *humaniora* in the Netherlands and Scandinavia, earlier referred to the study of classical antiquity but now largely coincides with the English *humanities* and the German *Geisteswissenschaften,* and at some universities is institutionalized as a *faculté des humanités*.

The texts introduced in this Theme are not intended to fit a coherent definition but rather to show the diversity and plurality of research practices within the humanities, during the centuries when the modern disciplinary landscape emerged. Some of the texts, such as those by Marcel Mauss and Christian Jürgensen Thomsen, represent traditions that many modern anglophone readers may not consider as parts of humanities but that are included in other parts of the world. Some texts, such as Josephine Miles's early works on digital humanities, have never before been recognized as foundational texts in history of humanities. Our approach to making the selection has been to ask historians of humanities to identify texts that they consider especially important and that could be assigned for an overview course on the history of the modern humanities. We have remained open to alternative suggestions, even if these might not have been the texts that we would have selected ourselves. The project therefore has many parents. The idea was first presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the History of the Humanities at Johns Hopkins University in 2016, where we received many interesting suggestions as well as crucial input to the project design. The following year, we organized several workshops at Roskilde University and the University of Amsterdam, where the authors presented their first drafts and discussed these with one another as well as with other participants. Finally, during the spring of 2019, students at Roskilde University read most of the introductions and texts and offered important critique and valuable insights.

This Theme should be considered just a part of a larger and ongoing project to make the sources of the history of humanities available. We have therefore created a homepage that links to electronic editions of the texts presented in this issue.[12] We aim to include more texts that could be considered as foundational in the history of humanities on this page later and invite readers to propose other Themes with introductions to texts. We are under no illusion that the texts presented are the only texts worthy of discussion. No single volume could cover all of the modern humanities. Many other texts could be

12. See "Classics" on http://www.historyofhumanities.org/resources/.

regarded as foundational, and the current selection certainly has its lacunae. We could have included uncomfortable texts—for example, those that more explicitly contributed to the racist and colonial discourse of the period—that have been erased from the canonical histories of the modern disciplines. We could have included more texts from marginalized groups or from non-European traditions of scholarship. We could have given more attention to applied humanities disciplines or extended the time limit further into twentieth century. Hopefully, future Themes will cover these topics better. However, despite these limitations, we believe that the pragmatic and descriptive approach and the focus on research practices, instead of philosophies or theories, will widen our understanding of the humanities and humanities scholarship.

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