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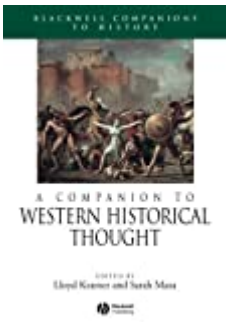

Lloyd Kramer, Sarah Maza, eds. *A Companion to Western Historical Thought.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006. xii + 520 pp. $39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4051-4961-7.

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A Useful Companion

When I teach our "Methods and Materials" class, a requirement for our history majors, the first day begins with a "Calvin and Hobbes" cartoon. In the first three panels, Calvin asserts that people do not understand what causes events to happen. Instead, history is the fiction we invent to convince ourselves that events are knowable and that life has meaning. Events are always reinterpreted when our values change and new versions of history are needed to accommodate contemporary prejudices. Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza have compiled an extremely useful work that reminds readers how historical thought has evolved and at the same time attempted to satisfy the needs of Western society.

Consisting of twenty-four chapters divided into four sections, the volume traces the role of historical thought in Western civilization. Part 1, "The Pre-Modern Origins of Western Historical Thought," consists of five chapters that address historical thought in ancient Israel, Greece, Rome, medieval Europe and the Renaissance, respectively. These early chapters discuss the problem of sources for the modern historian, as well as the role of history as chronicle or as moral example for the respective societies. The events and lives recounted in these early sources were important for displaying the qualities a given culture wished to extol. Discussions of methods and emphasis accompany the analysis of Greek and Roman historians (Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, Plutarch, Arrian, Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus) whose works are still, if only partially, in existence. Gabrielle M. Spiegel analyzes the structural and narrative characteristics of medieval historical thought to show how medieval histories evolved and laid the groundwork for Renaissance breakthroughs. Paula Findlen's chapter on Renaissance historical thought concludes part 1, but could easily be part of the next section. One of the basic arguments of her chapter is that many of the characteristics associated with Enlightenment historical thought had their origin in the Renaissance. Topics ranging from types of sources used to the role of women in history suggest that the modern process of developing a modern historiographical style began before the seventeenth century.

Part 2, "The Shaping of Modern Western Historical Thought," covers historical thinking from the Enlight-

enment to Marxism in five chapters. German historical writing plays a prominent role in this section. Johnson Kent Wright's chapter, "Historical Thought in the Era of the Enlightenment," looks at the development of new theories of historical thought that are informed by natural jurisprudence and extend beyond the European continent. For the first time, European historical thought begins to have a global scope and extends beyond national boundaries. Harold Mah's "German Historical Thought in the Age of Herder, Kant, and Hegel" examines historical thought in the German Enlightenment and the origins of historicism. Harry Liebersohn follows with "German Historical Writing from Ranke to Weber: The Primacy of Politics." The link between the rise of history as a discipline and the rise of nationalism is also the theme of Thomas Baker's "National History in the Age in Michelet, MacCauley, and Bancroft." Both chapters note the rise of history as a political tool to justify political and ideological positions. Walter Adamson's "Marxism and Historical Thought" is a sympathetic, judicious reading of Marx's evolving quest for a history that was both theoretically informed and empirically substantiated. Adamson also touches on Marx's twentieth-century legacy.

The chronological overview ends in part 3, "Patterns in Twentieth-Century Western Historical Thought." Georg Iggers's "The Professionalization of Historical Studies and the Guiding Assumptions of Modern Historical Thought" treats exactly what the title suggests. The remaining nine chapters in this section analyze various approaches to history, some of which find their origins well before the twentieth century, such as Peter Paret's chapter on the history of armed power. In the other chapters, David Bell examines micro- and macro-approaches to history, William Reddy discusses anthropology and history, Ken Alder evaluates the history of science, Susan Crane focuses on language, literary studies and history, Lynn Hunt investigates psychohistory, Carolyn Dean discusses gender and identity and Andrew Isenberg evaluates environmental history. The origins and methodological problems that accompanied these various approaches are covered and many relevant seminal works are examined. The authors provide social context to help explain why issues and approaches that were marginalized, if considered at all in the past, have begun to receive attention.

The five chapters that compose part 4, "Challenges to the Boundaries of Western Historical Thought" do not hang together as well as a unit. The first three chapters on the "New World History" by Jeremy Bentley, "Postcolonial History" by Prasenjit Duara, and "Multicultural History" by Donna Gabaccia are united by the attempts to generate a historical narrative that is not Eurocentric. The last two chapters, by James Murray and Robert Rosenstone, attempt to explore how historical study and knowledge has been affected by the introduction of computers and the internet and by visual media.

The quality of the contributions is uniformly strong. Complicated issues, thinkers and texts are handled deftly with lucid prose. The potential overlap in these categories is illustrated by references to influential works such as Natalie Zemon Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983), Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream* (1988) in more than one chapter. Because the chapters are synthetic in nature and make no claim or attempt to address every major work within the respective topics, readers may take issue with certain aspects of any given chapter. For example, it is hard to explain how a discussion of the primacy of politics in nineteenth-century German historical thought would not at least mention Heinrich von Treitschke, but Liebersohn does not. It is also hard to understand why, save for one passing mention, there is no discussion of Afrocentrism as a historiographical challenge to Eurocentrism. Certainly Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* and the controversy that it engendered illustrates the political and ideological framework that still informs historical writing.[1]

Criticisms like these, however, do not detract from what is a genuinely useful book. It is appropriate for upper-level undergraduate classes or introductory graduate classes on historiography, and an ideal addition to orals reading lists to help students see the forests despite the trees. Libraries that did not buy the $125.00 hardcover that appeared in 2002 should purchase the paperback edition.

Note

[1]. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, 3 vols. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987-1996). A good overview of the critical response can be found in *Black Athena Revisited*, ed. Mary Lefkowitz and Guy Rogers (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). The controversy surrounding the book is the topic of Jacques Berlinerblau's *Heresy in the University: The Black Athena Controversy and the Responsibilities of American Intellectuals* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999). Bernal's response is found in *Black Athena Writes Back: Martin Bernal Responds to his Critics*, ed. David Chioni (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

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