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THE FOOTNOTE FROM DE THOU TO RANKE

ANTHONY GRAFTON

ABSTRACT

Footnotes seem to rank among the most colorless and uninteresting features of historical practice. In fact, however, footnoting practices have varied widely, over time and across space, between individuals and among national disciplinary communities. Little clarity has prevailed in the discussion of the purpose footnotes serve; even less attention has been devoted to the development they have undergone. This essay sketches the history of the footnote in the Western historical tradition. Drawing on classic work by A. D. Momigliano, H. Butterfield, and others, it shows that critical research into and argument about sources have long formed part of the historical tradition. Classical political historians could not insert much explicit reflection about the use of sources into their work without violating the rhetorical rules they accepted. But their histories, as the case of de Thou shows, often rested on careful critical work. And the many historians who did not provide instructive narratives of war and high politics, but rather, accounts of local history or religious institutions, discussed their sources, and sometimes quoted them extensively. These varied traditions were only integrated, however, by the invention of the footnote in its modern form, which made it possible to combine a high literary narrative with erudite investigations. The footnote in its modern form seems to have been devised in the seventeenth century, as part of an effort to counter skepticism about the possiblity of attaining knowledge about the past. It was used to great intellectual and literary effect in the eighteenth century, when individuals as different as Gibbon and Möser made the foundations of their texts into elaborate mosaics of erudite research and ironic reflection. Ranke did not invent, but dramatized, the historical footnote. He made the research that produced it as vital to the historian's culture and as central to the historian's achievement as the high style that had distinguished pragmatic exemplar history of the traditional kind. The historical footnote emerges not as a simple trademark guaranteeing quality nor as a uniform piece of scholarly technology, but rather as the product of long collective struggles and individual efforts to devise a visibly critical form of historical writing.

The longest footnote in historical literature occurs, as readers of Momigliano will remember, in a nineteenth-century work of antiquarian scholarship: volume iii, part 2, pages 157 to 322 of John Hodgson's *History of Northumberland* (1840).[1] The most numerologically elegant footnotes in modern scholarship adorn Don

1. F. Haverfield, *The Roman Occupation of Britain* (Oxford, 1924), 83; cf. A. D. Momigliano, "Gibbon's Contribution to Historical Method," *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome, 1955), 198.

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Cameron Allen's *Mysteriously Meant* (1970): exactly a thousand footnotes supply the rich documentation for his ten chapters on classical myths and their modern afterlives. The most ironic footnotes ever written run underneath the text of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*. "In his Meditations," says Gibbon the historian of Marcus Aurelius, "he thanks the gods, who had bestowed on him a wife, so faithful, so gentle, and of such a wonderful simplicity of manners." "The world," urbanely replies Gibbon the annotator, "has laughed at the credulity of Marcus; but Madame Dacier assures us (and we may credit a lady) that the husband will always be deceived, if the wife condescends to dissemble." Gibbon the historian crisply describes Sosius Falco as "a rash youth"; Gibbon the annotator informs the reader that "If we credit Capitolinus (which is rather difficult) Falco behaved with the most petulant indecency to Pertinax, on the day of his accession." Facts are provided and certainties undermined at one and the same time; the historian sets the table and the annotator whips off the tablecloth, sometimes overturning the dishes. Gibbon's footnotes amuse and bemuse—as does the fact that he originally meant them to be endnotes, and moved them only when Hume and others complained.[2] As these examples suggest, the footnote has led as active and varied a life as any of the other long-unstudied components of modern literary technology—for example, the semi-colon, that invention of Renaissance printers which sets the staccato modern sentence off from its flowing, traditional predecessor.[3]

The history of the footnote may well seem an apocalyptically trivial topic, one almost synonymous with the unpleasant and the peripheral. Like the toilet, the footnote enables one to deal with ugly tasks in private; like the toilet, it is tucked genteelly away—often, in recent years, not even at the bottom of the page but at the end of the book. Out of sight, and even out of mind, seems exactly where so banal a device belongs. In the modern world—as any good manual of dissertationese will explain—the historian has two complementary tasks: to examine all the sources relevant to the solution of a problem and to construct a new narrative or argument from them. The footnote proves that both tasks have been carried out. It identifies both the primary evidence that guarantees the story's novelty in substance and the secondary works that do not undermine its novelty in form and thesis.

American and English historians learn footnote technique in the purgatory of graduate school, more often by imitation than formal instruction. They apply it on a large scale in the frenetic weeks of writing seminar papers and later in the long months spent composing a dissertation. Thereafter they continue to produce footnotes as a sawmill produces sawdust, as a by-product, like databases or files of note cards, of the central black arts of humanistic scholarship.

2. See G. W. Bowersock, "The Art of the Footnote," *American Scholar* 53 (1983-1984), 54-62, and the remarkable older study by Jacob Bernays's brother Michael, "Zur Lehre von den Citaten und Noten," *Schriften zur Kritik und Litteraturgeschichte* 4 (Berlin, 1899), 302-322.

3. D. Karlin, review of M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, *London Review of Books* (7 January 1993), 15.

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The footnote's ubiquity makes it invisible. Like a sewer, the footnote is essential to civilized historical life; like a sewer, it seems a poor subject for civil conversation, and attracts attention, for the most part, when it malfunctions.

Yet the historian often needs to penetrate the dark and smelly places that civilized people shun. The exploration of toilets and sewers has proved endlessly rewarding to historians of population, city planning, and smells. The stages of their development distinguish the textures of modern from premodern social life far more vividly than the loftier periodizations found in political and intellectual histories. One who wishes to learn how a sixteenth-century French classroom differed most pungently from a modern one should not examine Petrus Ramus's popular textbooks, but ponder his biographer's statement that he bathed once a year, at the summer solstice.[4] Similarly, the study of those parts of history which lie beneath ground level may reveal unsuspected cracks and forgotten conduits in the both the modern practice and the *longue durée* of historical scholarship.

Manuals often suggest that footnote practices are transparent and universal. But even a brief trip through some of the many mansions of historical study reveals a staggering range of divergent practices. In Italy, for example, the footnote often operates as much by omission as by statement. The absence of a reference to a particular scholar or work amounts to a polemical statement, which the circle of interested parties will immediately recognize and decode. But that circle has, of course, only a limited circumference. The author thus makes one point to the small community of specialists who know the native idiom, another to the much larger one of historians and other readers who might pick up the odd copy of the *Rivista Storica Italiana* or—less improbably—*Quaderni storici*. Only those who have memorized the dots and dashes of citation code—a code which changes, naturally, by the hour—will read the lacunae as charged and argumentative. To outsiders the same notes will seem calm and informative. Many Italian historical texts with footnotes, in other words, tell not only the theoretically required two stories but three. They address not only the theoretically universal public of historians, the "community of the competent" in every nation, but a far smaller group, the coven of the well-informed.

In Germany, by contrast, omission seems less a matter of particular than of general statement. West German historians loved to condemn others for their failure to cite "the older German Literature." They themselves, however, regularly failed to cite more recent work—especially on German history—in languages other than German. In doing so they revealed not ignorance (perish the thought), but the conviction that they inhabited a Middle Kingdom of the historical mind and need not admit the barbarians outside—except in those few privileged cases where the barbarians had learned enough of the procedures and mysteries of German scholarship that they had become civilized themselves.

4. P. Sharratt, "Nicolaus Nancelius, *Petri Rami Vita*, edited with an English translation," *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 24 (1975), 238–239.

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The historical community so revealed coincided neatly, for all its divisions, with national borders. East German historians, by contrast, made their statements of centrality and allegiance more directly—above all, perhaps, by the presence of Marx and Engels, out of alphabetical order, at the start of their lists of citations. The history of the footnote in a united Germany remains, of course, to be written.

As these cases suggest, the footnote is as variable as any other complex scientific or technical practice. Like "precise quantitative measurement," "controlled experiment," and other guarantees that a given statement about the natural world is rigorous and valid, footnotes appear in enough forms to challenge any taxonomist's ingenuity. Each has an organic relation to the particular historical community in which it has been spawned—one at least as important as its relation to the supposedly international community of historians, that chimera imagined by Acton (who hoped to edit a *Cambridge Modern History* in which the nationalities of contributors could not be inferred from the method and substance of their articles). But each also has a relation to the European tradition of historical writing.

Though the footnote is supposedly a transparent device, its goals in historical practice have been neither clear nor uniform. A hundred years ago, most historians would have made a simple distinction: the text persuades, the notes prove.[5] As early as the seventeenth century, after all, some antiquaries entitled the documentary appendices of their works simply "Preuves"—"Proofs."[6] Nowadays, by contrast, many historians would claim that their narratives offer their most important proofs: proofs that take the form of statistical or hermeneutic analysis of evidence, only the sources of which are specified by notes. A good many—though hardly all—would admit, by the same token, that notes persuade as well as prove. No one can ever exhaust the range of sources relevant to an important problem—much less quote all of them in a note. In practice, moreover, every annotator rearranges materials to prove a point, interprets them in an individual way, and omits those that do not meet a necessarily personal standard of relevance. The very next person to pass through the same archival materials will probably line them up and sort them out quite differently. The note, accordingly, exists to persuade the reader that the historian has done an acceptable amount of work, enough to lie within the tolerances of the field, rather than to prove that every statement in the text rests on an unassailable mountain of attested facts. Like the diplomas on the doctor's wall, notes prove that the historian is a "good enough" practitioner to be consulted and recommended—but not that he or she can carry out any specific operation.

Still, the radical nature of the shift from providing a continuous narrative to producing a text that one has annotated oneself seems clear, even if the intentions of text and annotations have become a little blurred. Once the histo-

5. See, for example, C. V. Langlois and C. Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, transl. G. G. Berry [1898] (London, 1912), 305–306.

6. For example, A. Duchesne, *Preuves de l'histoire de la maison des Chasteigners* (Paris, 1633).

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rian writes with footnotes, historical narrative becomes a distinctively modern, double form. Traditional historians claimed universality; their examples of good and evil, prudent and imprudent action, offered their readers instruction valid in all times and places. Modern historians, by contrast, distance themselves from their own theses even as they try to back them up. The notes form a secondary story, which moves with but differs sharply from the primary one. In documenting the thought and research that underpin the narrative above them, they prove that it is a historically contingent product, dependent on the particular forms of research, opportunities, and states of particular questions that existed when the historian went to work. Like an engineer's diagram of a splendid building, the footnote reveals the occasionally primitive structures, the unavoidable weak points, and the hidden stresses that an elevation of the facade would conceal.

The appearance of footnotes – and such related devices as documentary and critical appendices – separates historical modernity from tradition. Thucydides and Joinville, Eusebius and Matthew Paris, did not identify their sources or reflect on their methods in texts parallel to their narratives – a fact that elicits cries of regret from hypocrites but also gives employment to squads of classicists and medievalists. In the last few centuries, by contrast, all histories – except those written to entertain the larger public of nonspecialists, and a few designed to provoke the small community of specialists – have taken some version of the standard double form. The presence of the footnotes is essential. They are the outward and visible signs of inward grace – the grace infused into history when it was transformed from an eloquent narrative created by manipulating earlier chronicles into a critical discipline based on systematic scrutiny of original evidence and formal arguments for the preferability of one source to another. Presumably the footnote's rise to high position took place when it became legitimate, after history and philology, its parents, finally married. The question, then, is simply to identify the church in which the marriage took place and the clergyman who officiated.

Or so, at least, I thought – until I began to examine modern studies of historiography and early modern historians in search of the precise point when history publicly doubled back on itself. Curiously, the harder I looked, the less secure my answers became. Most students of historiography, it turns out, have interested themselves in the explicit professions of their subjects, rather than their technical practices – especially those that were tacitly, rather than explicitly, transmitted and practiced. And even the study of the latter has been limited for the most part to the ways in which historians do research – as if the selection and presentation of one's data did not affect it in fundamental ways. The much-abused Langlois and Seignobos at least admitted that "It would be interesting to find out what are the earliest printed books furnished with notes in the modern fashion." But they confessed that "Bibliophiles whom we have consulted are unable to say, their attention never having been drawn to the point." And their own suggestion – that the practice began in annotated collections of historical

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documents—goes astray.[7] Annotation of documents—X writing commentary on Y—began in the ancient world and has flourished in every culture that possessed a formal, written canon.[8] Authors have at times offered formal commentaries on their own words, as Cicero did in *De legibus*. But systematic annotation of one's own text about the past is quite distinct from commentary of the normal kind. My purpose, in this necessarily speculative essay, is simple. I want to find out when, where, and why the historian adopted this distinctively modern form of narrative architecture—who first erected this curious arcade with its blank *piano nobile* and its open bottom floor that offers glimpses of so many alluring wares. My answers will necessarily be schematic and tentative, but I hope to show that the footnote has a longer pedigree than we have been accustomed to believe—and that the beast's origins shed a light of their own on its nature, functions, and problems.

We start with a primal scene: Ranke at work. Here he is in 1827, happily ensconced in the archives at Vienna:

> After three o'clock I go to the archive. Hammer is still working here (on Ottoman history); so is a Herr von Buchholtz, who wants to write a history of Ferdinand I. It's a complete Chancery; you find pens, penknives, scissors and so on ready prepared, and everyone has his own separate workplace. Usually it soon becomes rather dark, and it's a pleasant moment for me when the director cries "light." Then the servant brings two for everyone who's working there, I've already found remarkable things here.[9]

Here he is again in August 1829, this time in the libraries of Rome:

> The fresh, cool, quiet evenings and nights are very pleasant. The Corso is bustling until midnight. The cafes are open until 2:00 or 3:00 AM, and the theater often doesn't shut until 1:30. After that one takes one's supper. Not me, naturally. I hurry into bed; I'd like to make it to the Palazzo Barberini by seven the next morning. There I use a room that belongs to the librarian, where my MSS are piled up. . . . My scribe arrives soon after me, rustling in with a "Ben levato" at the door. The librarian's servant or his wife appears and offers me service with the usual formula, "occorre niente?" The librarian, named Razzi, is really good, and has greatly helped me and other Germans. A few steps away is the Albani library, where Winckelmann wrote his history of art. . . . And I visit two other libraries, with good progress. How quickly one studies the day away![10]

With these eloquent words Ranke evoked what became for many German scholars and many non-German admirers one of the great discoveries of early nineteenth-century history: *le goût de l'archive*, to borrow a brilliant oxymoron from Arlette Farge. For Ranke, despite the charm of his style and the profundity of his historical thought, won his status as the founder of a new historical school by the rhetorical appeal of his documentation.

Ranke's late biographical dictations dramatized his life as the story of a vocation as irresistible and unique as Bertrand Russell's call to philosophy.

7. Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, 299 and n. 1. They remark: "It was in collections of documents, and in critical dissertations, that the artifice of annotation was first employed; thence it penetrated, slowly, into historical works of other classes."

8. See, for example, J. B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary* (Princeton, 1991).

9. L. von Ranke, *Zur eigenen Lebensgeschichte*; *Sämmtliche Werke* 53/4, 3rd ed. (1890), 182.

10. *Ibid.*, 222.

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Teaching history in the gymnasium, Ranke fell in love with Walter Scott, whose works brought the past back to life for him as they had for many others. But the love affair was deeply troubled, since Scott proved as unreliable as he was charming. Comparison with "the historical tradition," as preserved by Commines and contemporary reports, proved that the Charles of Burgundy and Louis XI of Scott's *Quentin Durward* had never really lived. Ranke found the errors—which he took as deliberate—unforgivable. But he also found them inspiring: "in making the comparison I convinced myself that what is historically transmitted is even more beautiful, and in any case more interesting, than romantic fiction." So he set out to write his *Histories of the Romance and Germanic Peoples* from contemporary sources alone. Unfortunately, these too disagreed; hence he had to build his narrative by dismantling those of his predecessors, each of whom—even the German ones—proved unreliable on some points. Only close, comparative study could produce a critical history.[11]

The work that in fact appeared in 1824 did everything Ranke could have wanted. Ranke's still immature style, with its classicizing and Gallicizing turns of phrase, aroused objections. But the "method of research" and content found universal applause. Ranke's "purely critical" dissection of Guicciardini, Giovio, and Sleidanus inspired even warmer enthusiasm than his narrative. The novelistic love of detail and ability to evoke it that enliven his letters on libraries gave fire and ceremony to his discussion of critical research:

> When entering a great collection of antiquities gathered from many countries and from many ages, and placed next to one another in disorder, one could be overwhelmed by the genuine objects and the forgeries, the beautiful and the repulsive, the most brilliant things and the most dull. One could feel the same way looking at once at the manifold monuments of modern history; they speak to us with a thousand voices, display the most varied natures, and are clad in all colors. A few arrive with ceremony.[12]

The library and archives transform themselves into a gallery of three-dimensional antiquities, the sources to be interrogated into precious objects—and the historian into the man of taste, whose magic sense of what is genuine and false becomes the touchstone that marvelously reassembles the dusty jumble into coherent period rooms, chronologically ordered, labeled, and attested. Ranke himself underwent a similar metamorphosis, as a great writer and teacher emerged from the chrysalis of the gymnasium teacher. He found himself the possessor of a chair at Berlin, the recipient of special permission to use the archives, and the beneficiary of grants for travel to foreign archives and libraries.

In the next few years, Ranke's interest in historiography would wane as his interest in documents blazed up. What really mattered was not the modern historians but the sources they had or had not used. The exploration and exploitation of the primary sources of history—in the first instance the reports of

11. *Ibid.*, 61-62.

12. I quote the translation of R. Wines: L. von Ranke, *The Secret of World History* (New York, 1981), 74.

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Venetian ambassadors to their government, but in the end many sorts of public and private paper—became the guiding principle of Ranke's working life. From the later 1820s Ranke cocooned himself in the original materials of history. Regular travel, judicious exploitation of a post-revolutionary book market in which the papers of many Italian families were up for sale, systematic use of the forgotten (but probably willing) Bartlebys who preceded the xerox machine and the microfilm camera, the professional scribes, and continuous purchase of such important new editions as those contained in the *Monumenta Germaniae historica*, produced the mountain of books and manuscripts now preserved at Syracuse University. A photograph shows the old historian dwarfed, almost crushed, by the material embodiment of his erudition.[13]

Even more important than this rich germ plasm of erudition, of course, were the books spawned in it: the endless series of histories of medieval and early modern Europe (and much more), each attended by its systematic *Kritik* of the historians, its stately row of liveried documents, and its mass of footnotes providing not only references but whole passages from the sources. Ranke produced a new theory of history and wrote with a cosmopolitanism that would not be rivalled for a century, when Braudel matched—but did not go beyond—him. With these achievements I am not directly concerned.[14] But he also crafted a new practice, based on a new kind of research and made visible by a new form of documentation. Each serious work of history must now travel, like a tank, on indestructible documentary treads. Failure to live up to this ideal of discovery and presentation brought disaster to such adherents of traditional method (or the absence of method) as Froude—who gave his name, like Holland, to a recognizable disease.[15]

Ranke insisted that he had had no model in mind—not even the critical classical scholarship of the generation just before his own, the work of Wolf and Niebuhr—an assertion as interesting as Syme's insistence that the example of Namier had had no impact on him.[16] For almost a century his disciples would repeat like a mantra what Ranke himself had taught them to believe: "The proposition that before the beginning of the last century the study of history was not scientific may be sustained in spite of a few exceptions. . . . Erudition

13. For Ranke's practices see U. Tucci, "Ranke and the Venetian Document Market," in *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, ed. G. G. Iggers and J. Powell (Syracuse, 1990), 99–107; for an image of him in his library see the frontispiece, *ibid.* See also the remarkable catalogue by E. Muir, *The Leopold von Ranke Manuscript Collection of Syracuse University* (Syracuse, 1983).

14. See the masterly appreciation of F. Gilbert, *History: Politics or Culture?* (Princeton, 1990). For a more critical point of view, one which emphasizes the breadth and originality of eighteenth-century historiography (and brings out aspects of that tradition, like its interest in cultural and social history, which are not treated here), see P. Burke, "Ranke the Reactionary," in *Leopold von Ranke*, ed. Iggers and Powell, 36–44.

15. For "Froude's disease" see Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, 124–128.

16. Ranke, *Zur eigenen Lebensgeschichte*, 62; cf. L. Stone, *The Past and the Present* (London, 1987).

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has now been supplemented by scientific method, and we owe the change to Germany." So Bury ecumenically declared in his Cambridge inaugural address of 1902.

Doubts arose, to be sure, even in the later years of Ranke's exceptionally long life — especially as his appeal as a teacher began to fail. It became evident that he had unjustifiably accepted certain classes of documents — like the Venetian *relazioni* — as transparent windows on the past rather than colorful reconstructions of them undertaken by individuals who wrote within rigid conventions, had not heard or seen everything that they reported, and often wished to convince their own audience of something problematic. More seriously, it became evident that in his reliance on central archives and great families' papers, Ranke had accepted, without reflecting hard enough, a certain interpretation of history itself: one in which the story of nations and monarchies took precedence over that of peoples or cultures, which had initially won his interest in the past.[17]

Curiously, however, Ranke's claims to originality in method took far longer to be scrutinized than his claims to objectivity in results. It was only after the Second World War that scholars outside Germany systematically took up the investigation of the history of historical thought. Not trained in Germany, and far less inclined than their predecessors had been to accept a German account of *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, Momigliano and Butterfield did not accept what had seemed as obvious to Acton as to Ranke: that the application of minutely precise critical scrutiny to the full range of historical sources was part of the intellectual revolution set off in German universities by the louder revolution that began in the Paris streets and led to the forcible opening of some of Europe's once secret chanceries and archives. Ranke's own version they identified, rightly, as disciplinary history rather than the history of the discipline. Ranke told his story as he did to enhance the technical and emotional appeal of the sort of history he practiced. Like many other writers of manifestoes, he was far from isolated in his interests and methods; other German historians had already gone beyond him in the critical study of the sources.[18] What they had not done, however, was to put their methods into operation vividly and appealingly; and because he did so, he could plausibly pose as the creator of methods many of which he inherited.

In fact, the combination of narrative and reflection was an established feature of historiography well before the nineteenth century — or Ranke — dawned. Momigliano located the change, elegantly, in Gibbon, who combined the irony and broad viewpoint of the *philosophes* with the minute erudition of the antiquaries

17. See esp. H. Butterfield, *Man on His Past* [1955] (Boston, 1960); G. Benzoni, "Ranke's Favorite Source," *Leopold von Ranke*, ed. Iggers and Powell, 45-57.

18. This point is acknowledged, for example, in the erudite study of U. Muhlack, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Humanismus und in der Aufklärung: Die Vorgeschichte des Humanismus* (Munich, 1991), which insists, as its subtitle suggests, on the substantial novelty of historicism. In fact, similar admissions already appear in E. Fueter's *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie* (Munich and Berlin, 1911), 396-397, 480-482.

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that the *philosophes* so loved to ridicule. All those typically Gibbonian footnotes, so tantalizingly precise and yet so uninformative to the modern reader, to the erudite Maffei and Muratori, the reliable Mosheim and Tillemont, and the learned but overheated Lipsius, reveal the fusion taking place.[19] Butterfield, by contrast, laid great weight on the historical school of Göttingen, where Gatterer established a seminar and Heyne taught historical criticism of myths and historical traditions alike. Where critical history found an institutional basis in new forms of teaching and publication, like Göttingen's short-lived but chipper specialized historical journals, erudition and philosophy could form a more lasting union. No wonder that such set-pieces of Göttingen historical scholarship as Heyne's *Opuscula academica* and Eichhorn's *Einleitung ins Alte Testament* supported their historical theses on firm documentary footings.[20] More recent work, finally, has shown that both men had cast their nets accurately, but that neither drew up all the relevant sea beings to be found in the dark, salty depths of the historical tradition. Hume and Robertson in Britain, and Justus Möser in Osnabrück also combined elegance and erudition, sharp philosophical narrative, and (more or less) erudite reflection on sources. The historical narrative, in short, received the equivocal support of the footnote not in the age of Romanticism but in that of Reason—a fact which may help to explain the prevalence of irony over empathy beneath the text.[21]

A second consensus has also emerged—one which locates the source of this new concern with sources. From antiquity onwards, secular history concerned itself more with exemplary deeds and powerful speeches than with erudite problems of dating and interpretation. Occasional references to and quotations from documents interrupted, rather than supported, the text. But other forms of history, in which documents of various kinds played more prominent roles, grew up independently in the Hellenistic period and after. Consider, for example, the systematic accounts of religious institutions, practices, and beliefs which came to be known, in the Christian world, as ecclesiastical history. The first full-scale surviving specimen of this genre is perhaps the Letter of Aristeas, which has the disadvantage of being a forgery but the virtue of brevity and clarity. From the first, historians of this kind wrote as controversialists and believers: as Jews seeking to prove the Torah older than Homer or as Christians determined to prove the priority of a doctrine or an institution. The genre's ends determined its form: not the neat, classical prose of the political historians, but a mixture of technical arguments and supporting documents, the latter quoted verbatim in the text proper. Documents performed two functions, each vital: they supported the theses put forward by the author and they gave the reader a distinct, vivid sense of what it had meant to be a faithful Jew or a Christian in a distant and more difficult world. This genre—preserved by Bede and others in the

19. See above all Momigliano, "Gibbon's Contribution to Historical Method."

20. Butterfield, *Man on his Past*.

21. See especially the essays collected in *Aufklärung und Geschichte*, ed. H. E. Bödeker *et al.* (Göttingen, 1986).

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Middle Ages—flourished wildly in the early modern period. Valla gave it a characteristically individual turn in his *Declamation on the Donation of Constantine*. Protestants and Catholics practiced it on a grand scale in the Reformation. Protestants demolished Eusebius's apparent evidence for the early date of monasticism; Catholics used the art of the catacombs to refute the historical theses of Protestant iconoclasts. Vast compilations—the Magdeburg *Centuries* and Baronio's *Annales*—provoked symmetrically erudite refutations. In the seventeenth century, finally, the *bella diplomatica* waged within the Catholic Church by Bollandists and Dominicans spawned a whole range of modern technical disciplines, from palaeography to sphragistics. Ecclesiastical history, in other words, provided much of the substance and the model of learned research which the Enlightened historians fused with elegant narrative.[22] Whether they learned from the great editor and compiler, Muratori, or the historian of the early church, Mosheim, Gibbon & Co. revealed themselves as the incongruous disciples of the very holy fathers whom they loved to mock.

True, critical history was by no means confined to the world of Benedictines and Jesuits. Gibbon and his colleagues could also draw, for models of source-criticism, on secular debates that ran back to the Renaissance and before.[23] In Roman history, for example, the critics of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, whose twenty volumes of Mémoires formed the foundation of Gibbon's professional library, had long since subjected the reports on the foundation of Rome to a corrosive bath in historical skepticism. They drew, in doing so, on earlier treatments by Renaissance scholars—Johannes Temporarius, Philip Cluverius, Joseph Scaliger—who had shown in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that Roman accounts of the dates and details of the city's early history rested only on late reports. Since the Gauls had burned the city and its records, moreover, these must have been transmitted orally for some time—perhaps in the famous form of banquet songs—and no doubt changed in the course of transmission. H. J. Erasmus showed long ago that De Beaufort and Niebuhr had little to teach the humanists of the Renaissance and their baroque successors about historical criticism.[24]

More generally, writers on the credibility of historical testimony (*De fide historica*) like the German F. W. Bierling had long since addressed the wider problem of establishing rules for the criticism of sources. Long before Ranke had made archive-diving fashionable, Bierling had pointed out in a book festooned with footnotes that archives can mislead. He admitted that many of his contemporaries thought this impossible, but a careful analysis of their content proved his point. Archives consisted, he argued, chiefly of documents created by ambassadors and other public officials. But such men normally had to report

22. See A. D. Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley, 1990), chap. 6.

23. *Ibid.*, chap. 3. See also P. Fuchs, *Palatinatus illustratus* (Mannheim, 1963).

24. H. J. Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome in Historiography from Petrarch to Perizonius* (Assen, 1962).

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on deliberations to which they did not have direct access and the intentions of monarchs who did not speak frankly. Their reports, in short, contained "what the ambassador guesses to be true or considers to be memorable, not always what is true." A neat footnote drove the point home: Grotius, while serving as ambassador in the Swedish service, spent the whole day and much of the night writing theology, and satisfied Oxenstierna with the gossip he picked up in the streets ("des nouvelles du Pont-neuf en beau latin"). An archive constituted of such reports – and a narrative derived from them – might get the names and dates right but would hardly provide the inner history of events. No wonder that archives and narratives kept and compiled in good faith contradicted each other.[25] Bierling did not take this as reason to despair; but he, like the contemporary Dutch scholar Perizonius, argued coherently for a mitigated, rather than excessive, faith in historical research.[26] They, in turn, were only two of the best-known among the many writers who took part in the sophisticated debates of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on the reasons for historical Pyrrhonism and the conditions of historical credibility (*fides historica*).[27]

The ecclesiastical historians' and secular antiquaries' compilations of sources provided the raw materials that Enlightenment historians sawed, turned, and polished; their methodical criticism provided the model for the analytical, though not the narrative, procedures that Robertson and Möser used. However, the antiquaries did not provide anything like a full literary model for their secular successors. When they wrote about historical problems, for the most part, they produced not annotated narratives but unannotated arguments, in which the sources to be discussed and the alternate theses to be refuted were quoted and analyzed in the text proper. And even the occasional presence of footnotes or glosses did not stem from a clear separation between text and apparatus. One can read through most of the classics of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century erudition, from Mabillon's *De re diplomatica* to Muratori's *Annali d'Italia* to Leclerc's *Ars Critica*, without encountering a double narrative in the Gibbonian style.

Gibbon, who regularly confessed his debt to these traditions, made clear that he found in such works not a model but a foundation for his narrative. Of Muratori, for example, he wrote:

> His Antiquities, both in the vulgar and the Latin tongue, exhibit a curious picture of the laws and manners of the middle age; and a correct text is justified by a copious Appendix of authentic documents. His Annals are a faithful abstract of the twenty-eight folio volumes of original historians; and whatsoever faults may be noticed in this great

25. F. W. Bierling, *Commentatio de Pyrrhonismo historico* (Leipzig, 1724), cap. iv ("De fide monumentorum"), 225–249; see L. Gossman, *Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, 1968) and C. Borghero, *La certezza e la storia* (Milan, 1983). A segment of Bierling's work is now available, with facing German translation and notes, in *Theoretiker der deutschen Aufklärungshistorie*, ed. H. W. Blanke and D. Fleischer (Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt, 1990), I, 154–169.

26. On Perizonius see Erasmus, *Origins of Rome*, and T. J. Meijer, *Kritiek als Herwaardering* (Leiden, 1971).

27. M. Völkel, *"Pyrrhonismus historicus" und "fides historica"* (Frankfurt a. M., 1987).

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collection, our censure is disarmed by the remark, that it was undertaken and finished by a single man. Muratori will not aspire to the fame of historical genius: his modesty may be content with the solid, though humble, praise of an impartial critic and indefatigable compiler.[28]

The verdict was not idiosyncratic. The German translator of the *Annali* (1747) praised Muratori's systematic use of original sources, which gave his crowded work its genuine life. But he hoped that his version might gain preference over the original, precisely because he had tested Muratori's sources and added annotations. These identified the Catholic opponents Muratori had not wished to attack by name and modified, qualified, or enhanced his theses with new evidence from the sources. The translator had, in short, turned a deeply worthy but deeply traditional compilation into an up-to-date, critical piece of history—at the price of radical alterations in its form.[29]

The footnote, with its burden of explicit critical argument, was thus a novelty in some eighteenth-century contexts. Gradually, however, it became so popular as to provoke the ultimate flattery of parody. Pope equipped his mock-epic, the *Dunciad*, with a mock-commentary by scholars, notably Richard Bentley.[30] The German satirist Rabener went even further, producing a mock dissertation written entirely in footnotes, *Hinkmars von Repkow Noten ohne Text*. He made his author claim that notes, not the text, won an author lasting fame; hence he had written the former, and left it to others to produce the text he had annotated proleptically.[31] But the sources of the footnote's form and the origin of its popularity remain unclear.

The genealogy of modern history, in other words, falls into confusion at the crucial point when the formal and the substantive elements needed to produce a distinctively modern historical narrative were assembled in the historian's alembic. It clarifies neither the full origins of the notion that history should rest on continuous, critical examination of sources nor those of the conviction that the author's own commentary should reveal the stages of that process, the unfolding of the historian's, as well as History's, Reason. Fortunately, at this point we need not despair. To assemble an alternate genealogy that does more, though hardly full justice to the development of critical techniques, we can simply carry out two simple procedures. First, we can try to locate the point at which historical narrative began to rest on critical use of evidence; second, we can fix the later point at which formal presentation made that use of evidence explicit.

Disparate sources combine to offer a clear hint about the point at which history became self-consciously critical. Ranke himself, attacking the analysis of modern historiography, made clear that he had a Renaissance model (whose conclusions, to be sure, he did not entirely share): "Five years after Guicciar-

28. E. Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works*, ed. John, Lord Sheffield (London, 1814), III, 367.

29. L. von Muratori, *Geschichte von Italien*, pt. v (Leipzig, 1747), Preface.

30. P. W. Cosgrove, "Undermining the Text: Edward Gibbon, Alexander Pope, and the Anti-Authenticating Footnote," *Annotation and its Texts*, ed. S. Barney (New York, 1991), 130–151.

31. C. Wiedemann, "Polyhistors Glück und Ende: Von Daniel Georg Morhof zum jungen Lessing," *Festschrift Gottfried Weber* (Homburg v. d. H., 1967).

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dini's work first appeared, Jean Bodin in his *Method for the Study of History* remarked, 'It is admirable how the search for truth is carried on in this study. He is said to have drawn and transcribed letters, decrees, and treatises from the original sources. Hence we often find in his work the expressions "He spoke as follows" or if the precise words are lacking, "He spoke to this effect."'"[32] Ranke referred here to that enormous, slippery slag-heap of a book, Jean Bodin's *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (1566), of which Philip Sidney memorably wrote that "For the method of writing history Boden hath written at large; you may read him and gather out of many words some matter." This sprawling, difficult text set out to show the young jurist how to read all historians systematically, filing extracts in a vast notebook and assessing the events described in them by a system of marginal signs (CH, for example, stood for "consilium honestum," CTV for "consilium turpe utile"). Bodin taught not only moral philosophy and politics, the traditional subjects of history, but a form of comparative politics. After collecting all relevant information about kings and constitutions, he argued, the scholar would be able to see that each nation had a character chiefly determined by the climate of its original home (original climates had made southerners good magicians, Europeans good constitutionalists, Englishmen drunkards, and so on), though gradually modified by migrations and other factors. It would then become possible to devise the right constitution for each nation; thus historical scholarship might create healthy states.

Bodin insisted that one should compile one's data with considerable discrimination. Before choosing which historian to believe, the student of Bodin would test all of them for credibility. He would follow, for preference, those who wrote on the basis of political experience but were not connected with (and partisan about) the events. And he would lay special weight on their use of sources. Those who followed official documents and reproduced speeches verbatim, like Guicciardini, clearly deserved preference over those who simply followed a single chronicle source or expressed a major player's propaganda line.

Bodin presented readers terrified by the European religious wars of the mid and late sixteenth century and crushed by the rapid expansion of European scholarly writing with a massive program of social reconstruction through discriminating scholarship. His work combined humanist source criticism with the comparative political analysis of Machiavelli and his followers. Naturally, his book was often reprinted, widely assigned in universities, and heatedly discussed by readers. Despite its occasional lapses into quaintness, the *Methodus* established itself as a classic of intellectual boldness and Bodin himself as a brilliant iconoclast—one willing to challenge the traditional theological scheme that divided world history into four great empires and the traditional humanistic scheme that made human civilization begin with an age of gold and then deteriorate.

32. Ranke, *The Secret of World History*, 88 (translation somewhat revised). For the original, see Ranke, *Zur Kritik neuerer Geschichtschreiber*, 3d ed. (Leipzig, 1884), *19.

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Long before Ranke, Montaigne learned from Bodin to read his historians critically. A century after Montaigne, Mabillon gave the wisest of methodological counsels to the readers of his *Traité des études monastiques*, explaining why, in source criticism as in human life, "the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness": "Il faut voir si l'auteur qu'on lit est contemporain, s'il est copiste ou original; s'il est judicieux, ou s'il ne donne pas trop aux conjectures. Car toutes les autres choses étant pareilles, il faut préferer le sentiment d'un auteur contemporain à celuy d'un auteur qui seroit plus recent. Je dis toutes les autres choses étant pareilles. Car . . . il arrive mesme quelquefois, qu'un auteur qui ne sera pas contemporain aura écrit sur de bons et fideles memoires. . . ."[33] For those who wanted more detailed instruction, Mabillon recommended Bodin's *Methodus* as a standard treatment of the choice of sources. He knew that Bodin had in fact been taken in by the ancient historians forged, at the end of the fifteenth century, by Annius of Viterbo. But he also knew that Bodin had much to offer—including the argument he reformulated, that recent sources can deserve more credence than early ones.

By the middle years of the sixteenth century, in short, professional readers of history like Baudouin and Bodin had learned to reflect on the sources and methods of the writers they studied. Their works remained central to the culture of erudition, and continued to be epitomized and contested until well into the eighteenth century. Writers of history—especially the great humanist historians, who often shared Bodin's legal formation and sometimes had considerable access to historical actors and documents—came from the same world as these readers. Not surprisingly, their practices as researchers became increasingly systematic and self-critical; they tried to write the sort of history that they knew they should prefer to read.

Consider the case of Jacques-Auguste de Thou, the brilliant *parlementaire* Latinist who wrote what may be the longest historical narrative undertaken before Joe Gould's *Oral History of the World* (which, as Joseph Mitchell has shown, was in fact never written).[34] De Thou produced an admirable piece of Latin prose—so admirable that German visitors to Paris were astonished to find that its creator could only write Latin, not speak it as they did. But he did far more. From when he started compiling information—perhaps as early as 1572—de Thou set out to produce a history as accurate as it was eloquent. The task mattered deeply. Like Bodin, de Thou had watched the French polity fall apart in the Wars of Religion. Unlike Bodin, he continued to believe that Catholic France bore as much of the blame as the Protestants, or perhaps more. An honest, impartial narrative, he decided, would serve as a foundation for social and political peace. It would demonstrate the guilt of powerful Catholic malefactors, like the Guise, and the innocence and nobility of scholarly Protestants, like Joseph Scaliger. More to the point, it would prove that religious tolerance and austerity in public life could bring together what intolerance

33. J. Mabillon, *Traité des études monastiques* (Paris, 1691), 234.
34. J. Mitchell, *Up in the Old Hotel* (New York, 1992), 52–70, 623–716.

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and venality had put asunder. De Thou, like most Gallicans, had little formal ideology, but felt certain that the truth, fairly presented, would prove impossible to deny. He was wrong, of course; his book did not unite France, create tolerance, or eliminate the sale of office to incompetents. But it did win him a reputation for strenuous honesty and heroic independence, which lasted deep into the Enlightenment—when his Latin historical works received the exceptional compliment of entombment in seven volumes, each of which is too heavy to lift.

The historical de Thou was far more flexible than the marble hero that his panegyrists liked to sculpt. Kinser and Soman have shown, in complementary ways, that his massive, stately Latin books were in fact deeply unstable. De Thou's works perpetually changed shape and tone, not as a whole but in almost every detail. The author, for all his high position, had a raw youth's sensitivity to every blast of cold political or intellectual air; and many of these came his way. From Rome the mails brought both private assurance of several cardinals' good will, and public denunciations of his freedom of speech, his condemnations of immoral popes and praise of moral Protestants (one of whom he had described not as dying, but as "passing into a better life"). The Congregation of the Index threatened condemnation. From England, the unsinkable aircraft carrier of European Protestantism, the wind blew just as cold. James I took sharp exception to de Thou's treatment of his mother—especially since it seemed to depend on the earlier narrative by James's boyhood nemesis, George Buchanan, who had succeeded in making him swallow a great deal of Latin but had failed to force down more unpalatable lessons about the limits on royal power and the rights of subjects. Caught in the liberal's ever uncomfortable *via media*, de Thou temporized and trimmed, excising potentially offensive passages and changing verbs and adjectives that might offend. He gratefully accepted and drew on Camden's *Annals*, modifying his treatment of English history, and tried to placate the Roman censors. De Thou was no Bruno, willing to burn to preserve his right to say what he liked about life, the universe, and everything.[35]

Yet one should not exaggerate de Thou's willingness to compromise. He was not a modern academic, tenured and safe, writing for a public that could be numbered on the fingers of one hand, but a statesman exposed to everything from invective to assassination. Nonetheless he stuck to what he considered his most important guns. His changes did not alter the basic character of his text—which was indeed honored in 1609, five years after its first appearance, by being placed on the Index, and never won James's full approval. Like all other products of the age of print, de Thou's *Histories* were a social as well as an individual product, not a reproduction of the author's original manuscript (which remains in part unpublished). But de Thou's participation in a normal

35. See S. Kinser, *The Works of Jacques-Auguste de Thou* (The Hague, 1966); A. Soman, "The London Edition of de Thou's *History*: A Critique of Some Well-Documented Legends," *Renaissance Quarterly* 24 (1971), 1-12; A. Soman, *De Thou and the Index* (Geneva, 1972).

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system of challenge and response should hardly be held against him by those who inhabit a very different context. No martyr, he was also no traitor to his principles. Every edition of his book continued his fight against religious intolerance, arguing in the teeth of many higher authorities that forcible conversion could not produce good Catholics (or Christians of any sort).

De Thou retained confidence in his material, moreover, not only because it matched his prejudices but also because he had obtained it in a particular way. As soon as the first part of his book appeared in a tentative edition, de Thou sent copies of it across Latin Europe, to scholars everywhere from Prague to Edinburgh. He did so in the hope of confirming and supplementing the facts he had already assembled. Where he had left holes in his narrative or saw the prospect of new ones, he begged for help; where he had made mistakes, he asked for correction. Scholars of every party weighed in. Henry Savile sent a life of the great East European scholar Dudith, with whom he had lived for six months as a young man; Christophe Dupuy and Paolo Sarpi filled in the lives and works of Italian humanists that had remained inaccessible; and just about everyone forwarded corrections of details, ranging from names and dates to major points of interpretation. Joseph Scaliger, who had travelled in Scotland in the 1560s, redated the death of Rizzio and the birth of James VI. Charles de l'Escluse, who found de Thou's "beau present" so thrilling that he could not wait to have it bound before reading it, revised his underestimate of the scientific prowess of Rondelet. Camden forwarded not only corrections of topographical details but a draft of his *Annals*, avowedly based on state papers, as the solidest of all supports for de Thou's treatment of English history. Others suggested changes in everything from de Thou's account of the laws of the Holy Roman Empire to his discussion of the love lives of the Habsburg kings of Spain.[36]

The dossier, much of which survives in manuscript, is impressive in many ways. It shows that de Thou and his correspondents shared a belief in the authority of firsthand testimony. When de l'Escluse corrected de Thou on Rondelet, for example, he explained that he had worked with the man for more than two years, collecting specimens of marine life for him on the shore after storms and watching him dissect them; when he did the same about Habsburg hanky-panky, he argued that he had seen the little spiral stairway down which a Habsburg prince had fallen on the way to visit a young woman. And when de Thou refused to accept corrections, he did so on the same grounds. He could not accept James's version of the death of Darnley, for example, precisely because he had eyewitness reports that contradicted it. So far as possible, de Thou placed no obstacles except his Latin style between his evidence and his reader. When he received detailed lives of scholars from his friends, for example, he simply incorporated them, rather than summarizing them, into his text—thus making it a repository of firsthand evidence about the history of culture.

36. Much of the relevant correspondence is preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; here I use MS Dupuy 632, the materials in which were published in J.-A. de Thou, *Historiarum sui temporis libri cxxxviii*, 7 vols. (London, 1733), 7.

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In a contemporary history, firsthand testimony naturally predominated. But de Thou had other resources as well. He built his vast library, for example, as a public basis for his own and others' research.[37] And he used the state papers to which his official positions gave him access. Long before Ranke or Gibbon, critical history—the sort of history whose author agonized about a mistake of a few months in chronology, as well as about the ascription of motives and the identification of causes—had come into being. And de Thou was not the only writer of this kind: Camden, who relied on Cotton's great collections as well as eyewitness testimony, provides a remarkable parallel.

De Thou did not convince everyone that his enterprise made sense. The Catholic scholar Mark Welser wrote to refuse help, using terms that sound as strikingly modern as de Thou's own practice:

> As to the censure you request: your text will certainly enjoy a magnificent reputation with posterity. So far as the events are concerned, I shall not serve as your editor. It's far too hard for any human being to rid himself of passions and keep the truth always in his sights. Take the history of Charles V and Francis I—any Frenchman and German will tell it differently. And the one will never persuade the other of what he himself thinks is true and would guarantee at any price. The same is true for the rest—especially when you're concerned with counsels, with the rights of provinces, with the causes of wars, with the private lives of princes, and above all with the problem of religion. Truth lies at the bottom of the well; we drink water from the surface in its place, relying on the testimony of others to scoop it up.[38]

The indictment sounds plausible enough—as do the similar ones of Ranke. In fact, however, it was motivated by religious prejudice, not methodological sophistication. In private Welser railed against what he saw as de Thou's preference for the French over the Germans and for Protestants over Catholics. Most scholars who lacked an institutional impetus to attack de Thou, Catholic as well as Protestant, accepted de Thou's good faith and praised his objectivity. And the reason is simple enough. De Thou did not annotate his history—and he too railed, in untranslatable Latin, against Melchior Goldast, who festooned a pirate edition of the *Histories* with "political" glosses. But he made his correspondence—which reached across the learned Latin world—into a running collaborative commentary on his text. He repeatedly proved his earnest desire for authoritative information, his willingness to accept (polite) correction, and his unwillingness to suppress all inconvenient facts. Rather like the modern scholar who addresses the limited audience that really matters in a code that the larger public cannot break, de Thou provided the Republic of Letters with a critical commentary that proved the *fides* of his unannotated text. It was only natural, then, that when Carte and Buckley printed what remains the best edition of

37. See K. Garber, "Paris, die Hauptstadt des europäischen Späthumanismus: Jacques Auguste de Thou und das Cabinet Dupuy," *Res publica litteraria: Die Institutionen der Gelehrsamkeit in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. S. Neumeister and C. Wiedemann (Wiesbaden, 1987), I, 71–92; A. Coron, "'Ut prosint aliis'; Jacques Auguste de Thou et sa bibliothèque," *Histoire des bibliothèques françaises*, II: *Les bibliothèques sous l'Ancient Régime*, ed. C. Jolly (Paris, 1988), 101–125.

38. Welser to de Thou, 23 Oct. 1604, MS Dupuy 632, fol. 74 recto.

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the *Histories* in 1733, they added what survived of the correspondence. It amounted to the commentary with which de Thou had refused to encrust his eloquent prose.

What separates de Thou from Gibbon, in short, is not a self-consciously critical approach to research—both had that—but a self-consciously documentary approach to writing. This too, however, certainly did not originate with Gibbon, or in his day. Consider one of his most famous polemical writings—*A Vindication of Some Passages in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Chapters of the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1779). Mr. Davis of Balliol College had had the effrontery to attack not only Gibbon's text, but his footnotes—which amounted, in this context, to his honor:

> The remarkable mode of quotation which Mr. Gibbon adopts, must immediately strike every one who turns to his notes. He sometimes only mentions the author, perhaps the book; and often leaves the reader the toil of finding out, or rather guessing at the passage. The policy, however, is not without its design and use. By endeavouring to deprive us of the means of comparing him with the authorities he cites, he flattered himself, no doubt, that he might safely have recourse to *misrepresentation*.[39]

Elsewhere Davis referred to Gibbon's method "as a good artifice to escape detection."

Gibbon had no trouble replying to what he rightly called a "rude and illiberal" attack. He turned Davis's concern with petty details into an indication of social inferiority, inviting his opponent to call at his house "any afternoon when I am *not* at home." "My servant," he promised, "shall shew him my library, which he will find tolerably well furnished with the useful authors, ancient as well as modern, ecclesiastical as well as profane, who have *directly* supplied me with the materials of my History." But he also replied in technical detail. He examined and counted the 383 notes he had appended to chapters fifteen and sixteen, pointing out that they contained hundreds of precise citations. He insisted that when he had borrowed evidence from Tillemont and others, he had "explicitly acknowledged my obligation." And he showed that the vast majority of Davis's criticisms in fact rested on errors of Davis's own: he had failed to confirm Gibbon's references, for example, because he checked them in differently paginated editions, or did not know the whole texts from which they came. Gibbon even acknowledged the necessary incompleteness of all footnotes; all 383 of his own, he admitted, had not made fully explicit the grounds by which he used, "softened," and combined his sources. Only an expert reader—not a Davis—could actually work backwards from the citations and arguments to the thought and research that had produced them.

What matters here is not the reduction of a fool to rubble or the glory of Gibbon's prose, but the single point that the adversaries had in common. Both assumed—without arguing the point—that a serious work of history must have notes; that these must lead the reader to the original sources and represent

39. Quoted in Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works*, IV, 523.

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them accurately; that notes in fact provided the diagnostic test of a historian's critical expertise. The shared assumption reveals much about Gibbon's stance and method. Evidently, the footnote had become standard operating procedure, before the great English historians of the Enlightenment made it theirs, but after the point at which de Thou and others had begun to write the sort of history that nowadays obviously calls for documentation. That helps to explain why, for example, the Göttingen reviewer of volume III hailed Gibbon not as the inventor but as a skilled practitioner of historical criticism, one who had "drawn his information from the best sources, with good criticism, and explained them with sound reasoning"—a master of an existing craft.[40]

It seems reasonable, then, to look for the formal origin of the historical footnote in the seventeenth century. In fact, one of the grandest and most influential works of late seventeenth-century historiography not only has footnotes, but largely consists of them—and not just of footnotes, but of footnotes on footnotes, covering the vast folio pages with a sea of small print, on the very top of which float a few foamy lines of legible text. Pierre Bayle set out in 1690 to provide something new: a dictionary of all the mistakes in other works of reference, which he described as "a heap of the filth of the republic of letters." The public response was a vast, collective yawn. Accordingly, Bayle set out to produce something still grander: a historical dictionary of persons (and a few places) ancient, medieval, and modern, all of it supported by a vast apparatus of references and citations. The *Dictionary* appeared in 1696, was enlarged in 1702, and formed the favorite reading matter of just about every literate European for much of the next century.

It may seem odd to identify "l'illustre Bayle, qui apprend si bien à douter" as a founder of historical learning. Many readers have found the *Dictionary* a vast subversive engine, designed to undermine the Bible, Protestant orthodoxy, the very notion of exact knowledge. And certainly the man who saw history as "nothing but the crimes and misfortunes of the human race" did not share de Thou's—or Gibbon's—optimism. Bayle repeatedly exposed errors and contradictions: between the despised Moréri, his predecessor in the dictionary-making game, and the texts; between the texts themselves; between the texts and common sense. He insisted that massive falsification had interfered with the historical record at all times and places. All writers, pagans and Christians alike, distorted in order to condemn: "Men have always tried, and still try, to ridicule the doctrine and the person of their adversaries. To achieve this they invent thousands of stories ('Lacydes,' F)."[41] In the dour footnote D to his account of Giacomo Bonfadius—a historian whose enemies arranged his condemnation and execution for sodomy—Bayle ridiculed the Roman notion, put by Traiano Boccalini into the mouth of Apollo, that historians should and could tell the whole truth:

40. *GGA*, 18 October 1783, 1704.

41. Here and elsewhere, I use where possible the modern partial rendering by R. Popkin, with C. Brush (Indianapolis, 1965).

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Nothing is finer in theory than the ideas of the lawgiver of historians. He commands them not to dare to say anything that is false, and to dare to say everything that is true. But these are impractical laws, like those of the Decalogue, given the condition in which the human race finds itself. . . . In addition, let us observe a great difference between such similar laws. Only a perfect wisdom can live according to the Decalogue; and it would be a complete folly to achieve the laws of history. Eternal life is the fruit of obedience to the Decalogue; but temporal death is the almost inevitable consequence of obedience to the lawgiver of historians.

It is reasonable enough, then, that some have seen Bayle as the sworn enemy of the notion that history could ever recover solid facts.

Yet Bayle's readers could—and can—learn many lessons from him, some of which apparently contradict others. Bayle emphasized the rules of good scholarship as well as the defects of bad. And in doing so he stated, formally, rules of scholarly procedure—the very rules that Gibbon and Davis, a century later, took for granted. In his article on David, for example, Bayle writes that "The life of this great prince, published by the Abbé de Choisi, is a very good book and would have been much better if he had taken the trouble to set down in the margin the years of each action and the passages from the Bible or Josephus that furnished him his data. A reader is not pleased to be left ignorant about whether what he reads comes from a sacred source or a profane one." Citation, evidently, must be full and precise. So must the collection of testimonies. Bayle's footnotes buzz with the salacious twaddle of the Republic of Letters, with every pornographic interpretation of a biblical passage and every sexual anecdote about a philosopher or a scholar. We owe to him the preservation of Caspar Scioppius's description of the sparrow he watched, from his student lodgings at Ingolstadt, having intercourse twenty times and then dying—as well as Scioppius's reflection, "O happy sparrow." As passages like this attracted flak from orthodox batteries, Catholic and Calvinist, Bayle refused to take evasive action and deployed a powerful defense: "This is a historical dictionary, with commentary. 'Laïs' ought to have its place in it as well as 'Lucretia'. . . . It is necessary to bring to bear proofs, to examine them, confirm them, and clarify them. In a word, this is a work of compilation."[42] The claim to be a compiler, however, achieved more than a defense of the naughty bits of the footnotes. Bayle made compilation into a term of pride. More elegant writers, who refused to provide the evidence in full, had brought scholarship into discredit. Bayle's vast accumulation of passages from other texts, of exegesis, summary, and rebuttal, was a profound exercise in truth-seeking—the only one, indeed, that could allay the fears of readers rightly discouraged by the normal methods of uncritical scholarship: "And because many frauds are committed in the citations of authors, and those who honestly abridge a passage, do not always express the whole force of it, it is incredible how much judicious persons are grown distrustful." Historians of the normal kind distorted; but the "compiler," who necessarily preserved even what was distasteful, produced

42. Bayle, "Fourth Clarification," transl. Popkin, 440.

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as much truth as men could attain. Bayle, in short, filled his dictionary not only with random, entertaining facts, but also with crisp, explicit statements of the previously developed rules of antiquarian practice. At the touch of his philosopher's stone, the lead of practice was transmuted into the gold of precepts.

The final step was simple. Bayle stated clearly that the redoubled form as well as the supersaturated fact content of his work made it something radically new: a departure from the rules of genre. He had maintained "in this mass of all sorts of things a dual personality, that of historian and that of commentator." As the historian he recounted in the text his countless odd, ill-chosen stories of the lives and deaths, the views and bizarreries of thousands of individuals. "In his commentary," he told his readers, he had tried to "compare the arguments for and against something, with all the impartiality of a faithful reporter."[43] The double narrative of the modern historian—the narrative in which a text states the final results, while a commentary describes the journey necessary to reach them—was both devised and defended by Bayle. Pressed by a thousand enemies, Catholic and Protestant, enraged at the reign of error in a thousand books, and unsupported by any institution, Bayle had only the authority of his own work to rely on. The format he chose reinforced his criticisms of error as nothing else could have—and gave him, as it would Gibbon, endless space as well for subversive ironies.[44]

Bayle was not, of course, the only scholar of his day to use footnotes. J. F. Buddeus did the same in his remarkable *History of the Philosophy of the Hebrews*, published by the Halle Orphanage in 1702; so did Christian Thomasius, in the sharp treatise of 1712 in which he demolished the legend of the Witches' Sabbath. More generally, French and Italian Jansenists—as Momigliano showed long ago—anticipated Bayle's effort to provide a theoretical grounding for documentary research, and matched or exceeded the precision of his practices.[45] But all of them responded to the same pressures that he did (and none of them found so large an audience). Bayle, as Carlo Borghero has shown, was one of dozens of European scholars who found themselves forced in the course of the seventeenth century to confront Descartes's withering critique of historical knowledge. Descartes dismissed history and the humanities as a pastime no more informative or rigorous than travel (both showed only that human opinions and customs diverged endlessly). But he also supplied his opponents with weapons that could be used against him. In both his mathematical and his philosophical works, Descartes made clear that the formal qualities of mathematical arguments lent them the rigor and generality that humanistic ones lacked. Some defenders of historical knowledge, like Huet and Craig, applied this argument directly to their work. They tried to make their historical criticism

43. Bayle, "Clarifications," *ibid.*, 395.

44. For this analysis see the classic works of E. Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*, 2d ed. (Tübingen, 1932), 269–279; E. Haase, *Einführung in die Literatur des Refuge* (Berlin, 1956), 418–454.

45. A. Momigliano, "La formazione della storiografia moderna sull'impero romano," *Contributo*, 110–116.

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rigorous by casting it in the Cartesian (or Newtonian) form of rigorous chains of deductions.[46]

Bayle and his fellow footnoters, I would argue, responded to Descartes more cleverly and constructively. They took the methods that Bodin had recommended, and de Thou and others had practiced, as an adequate foundation for rigorous historical inquiry. They not only applied but stated the rules that verified or falsified historical propositions. And they created the double form of the double narrative, as one that would make explicit, just as the Cartesian *Regulae* did, that each argument offered followed rigorously from all the relevant evidence. Whatever his ultimate intentions, Bayle shored up the very historical discipline that many saw him as challenging. Gibbon and Möser, Robertson and Heyne, had only to unfold in narrative the structures that Bayle had erected on a small scale in each article, and critical history of the modern sort became possible.

Ranke had only one ingredient to add—but that was crucial. He dramatized the process of research and criticism, making the footnote and the critical appendix a source of pleasure rather than an occasion for apology. The scrupulous scholars of seventeenth-century Europe created many features of modern historical practice. But they rarely anticipated Ranke's glow of enthusiasm, his ability to make immersion in the dust of decaying records pulse with the excitements of discovery and interpretation. Leibniz, a habitué of archives and an industrial-strength publisher of sources, complained bitterly about the damage deciphering illegible manuscripts had done his eyes and showed little interest in the minutiae of the manuscripts whose contents he made accessible to a wide public.[47] Gibbon, for all his mastery of the note form, long remained ambivalent about the relation between scholarship and narrative. He retained a tendency to denigrate what he described as "the dusty parchments and barbarous style of the records of the middle age."[48] Ranke, however, made research and criticism glamorous and dramatic—the sort of thing that attracted young men to working in seminars, writing dissertations, and joining the profession which was taking shape.[49] One's footnotes really could now make one more famous than one's text. No wonder that so many bright young men chose problems of source criticism as the subjects for their well-annotated doctoral dissertations: content and form matched one another at last.[50]

46. Borghero, *La certezza e la storia*.

47. H. Eckert, *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz' Scriptores Rerum Brunsvicensium: Entstehung und historiographische Bedeutung* (Frankfurt a. M., 1971), brings out the contrast between the sophisticated principles of Leibniz's historical research and the sloppy teamwork by which they were imperfectly applied to the sources.

48. Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works*, III, 362.

49. For the development of professional history in Germany see W. Hardtwig, *Geschichtskultur und Wissenschaft* (Munich, 1990), 13-102.

50. See H. W. Blanke, "Aufklärungshistorie, Historismus, and historische Kritik. Eine Skizze," in *Von der Aufklärung zum Historismus: Zum Strukturwandel des historischen Denkens*, ed. H. W. Blanke and J. Rüsen (Paderborn, 1984), 167-186, with the comment by W. Weber, 188-189, and Blanke's reply, 189-190.

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In a brilliant passage, Gibbon dissects the five volumes of the *Origines Guelficae*: "The hands of the several workmen are apparent; the bold and original spirit of Leibnitz, the crude erudition and hasty conjectures of Eccard, the useful annotations of Gruber, and the critical disquisitions of Scheid."[51] One could say much the same – if one could write such sentences – of the footnote. A palimpsest, it reveals on examination research techniques framed in the Renaissance, critical rules first stated during the Scientific Revolution, the irony of Gibbon, and the empathy of Ranke.

Ranke's history of research practices and their exposition in historical writing is revealed to be more self-justification (and self-dramatization) than accurate description. That should not occasion surprise; in a Protestant culture virtue naturally associates itself with claims of novelty and reform. But the story also has a larger moral. Considered at this level of practice, rather than theory, the development of history looks gradual rather than staccato, more evolutionary than revolutionary. Part of the story is certainly recognizable. Historians picked up their techniques, then as now, in snatch-and-grab raids on the glittering shop-windows of other disciplines, and continued to employ these long after they had forgotten the theoretical reasons for doing so. They also managed to forget well-founded objections and qualifications; without oblivion, history could not continue to be written. But the crablike history of practice challenges the dramatic tale of seismic disciplinary changes traditionally proclaimed in prefaces and manifestoes and later retold in many histories of historiography. And no accumulation of footnotes will necessarily make it possible to bring the two stories together.[52]

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51. Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works*, III, 365.
52. Cf. J. Levine, *Doctor Woodward's Shield* (Berkeley, 1977).

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