

## Introduction: Time and History

The modern conception of time and history was invented in the eighteenth century. In historical writing, in philosophy, politics, astronomy and geology, a new set of ideas for understanding human temporality emerged. The long time lines were discovered, in which there was a time before humans, before human civilization, and that the history of our civilization is only a fraction of the history of universe. Time also got a particular direction. Humans became historical beings; or, in other words, knowledge, culture and society were not seen as something pre-existing but rather created by human beings: evolving, resting on the experiences and actions of previous generations in a cumulative process leading to the development of knowledge, behaviour, and life conditions, or what is called the 'idea of progress.'

In Christian thinking, time was linear, had a beginning and an end, enclosed between Creation and the Last Judgement. According to one of the late defenders of biblical chronology, Johann Albrecht Bengel in the middle of the eighteenth century, the world was created in 3943 BC, at the beginning of autumn, more specifically on 10 October. Adam was created, accordingly, on the sixth day, 15 October. However, an increasing awareness emerged that there were some unavoidable circumstances contradicting this narrow biblical timescale and a history based on a Christian narrative. Historians and philosophers of the Enlightenment brought a growing effort to explain historical events not in terms of Providence, but by reason. A rationalist text-critical movement, begun in the seventeenth century by philosophers such as Hobbes and Spinoza, came increasingly to see biblical stories not as dictated words by God, but as a human creation that passed from generation to generation and had been distorted by time. Enlightenment philosophers like Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Voltaire tried to find the historical 'truth' through a critical examination of historical sources. Leopold von Ranke presented one of the most clear-cut examples of this new critical thinking that

won many followers in the nineteenth century and onwards. If you just study the sources critically, he believed, you could get at what really happened (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*). The strongest arguments against the Bible chronology, however, came not from historical criticism but from geological excavations. Geological time spans increased considerably during the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, as geological layers, fossils, and extinct animals revealed the history of the Earth and past epochs.

A belief grew that our own time stood on the shoulders of giants. People born later in history could gaze farther than previous generations. During the Enlightenment, the idea of progress became widely spread. Modern, empirical, experimental science and technological advancement led to a more positive, optimistic mood. Philosophers, in contrast to adherents of the myth of the Golden Age, argued that contemporary life had reached far beyond that of our ancestors. Knowledge was seen as cumulative, as Francis Bacon had proclaimed, each generation added to earlier acquired experiences. The world was headed towards a better future. Enlightenment optimism attains fully-fledged expression in Condorcet's grand tribute to human progress in a book published just a few years after the French Revolution, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1794). Humanity, he asserted, had step-by-step overcome the vagaries of natural forces, freeing itself from superstition, powerlessness, and fear, which both wizards and priests had imposed. Thanks to science, the way was now open for unlimited progress and spiritual freedom.

Historical writing of the twenty-first century rests on the achievements and conceptions of previous generations of historians all the way back to the eighteenth century. In our own time, this postmodern digital era, historical research faces particular challenges: the need to justify a historical perspective, new channels and conditions for distributing knowledge, and a changed academic climate. In this volume of *Sjuttonhundratal: Nordic Yearbook for Eighteenth-Century Studies* we have gathered new historical research that in various respects challenges the last decades of historical writing, and commence new directions for eighteenth-century studies. Grounded in meticulous empirical research, this volume's articles scrutinize eighteenth-century historical writing, transcultural awareness of the periphery, social mobility, logistics and urbanity, aesthetic taste and craftsmanship, conceptions on the immortality of the soul, transfer of knowledge, freedom of speech, and social control.

In the first article of this volume, ANNE ERIKSEN (Oslo) presents a widely read textbook on how to study history, the *Méthode pour étudier l'histoire* (1713) by Nicolas Lenglet Dufresnoy. Although Lenglet was politically controversial and in

many respects a ‘free thinker’, his *Méthode* owed its success not to some ‘intellectually breathtaking and methodologically groundbreaking novelty’, Eriksen argues. Rather, it was his down-to-earth, unoriginal compilation approach that gave Lenglet so many readers. By analysing the main motifs of the textbook, Eriksen is able to pinpoint and elucidate the actual meaning of various predominant ideas about history, such as the famous topos *Historia magistra vitae* (‘History as a Teacher in Life’). In the early eighteenth century, history was more than anything perceived as a ‘mirror of humanity’, not as a tool to bring about critical assessment or even change of contemporary society. Moreover, an implicit corollary of Eriksen’s article is that, to the historian of ideas, a mainstream textbook can sometimes be a far more valuable source than the works of many innovative thinkers taken together.

Time and history are clearly intertwined in the genre ‘literary history’. GUÐRÚN INGÓLFSDÓTTIR (Reykjavík) and ÞÓRUNN SIGURÐARDÓTTIR’s (Reykjavík) article about the *Apparatus ad historiam literariam Islandicam*, an Icelandic literary history from 1738, demonstrates that authors of literary histories stand on the shoulders of other literary historians. The author of the text in question, Jón Ólafsson, borrows from his predecessors and is influenced by other Icelandic intellectuals, but he also manages to construct his own narrative style based on a specific Icelandic oral tradition. Furthermore, he is the first known literary historian to include a chapter devoted to Icelandic female intellectuals and poets in a general literary history. Thus he reveals – what we today regard as common knowledge – that any literary history is a construction, reflecting the author’s subjective view of the world – and literature – rather than an objective narrative, depicting the inevitable and never-changing truth. In this way, Jón Ólafsson resembles later Enlightenment philosophers and their attempts to find the historical ‘truth’ through a personal and critical examination of the texts and their time.

SUMARLÆÐI R. ÍSLEIFSSON (Reykjavík) discusses external images of Iceland and Greenland in the second half of the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, particularly in terms of their perceived ‘otherness’. His interpretation is that these images were similar, despite significant geographical differences between the two lands themselves and the cultures of their inhabitants, that is images of islands outside the civilized world. This he sees as a part of borealism-orientalism or tropicity of the High North, and thus representing the self-images and social conditions of Europe itself rather than of these northern islands. The article thus constitutes a re-examination of the prevailing view since the nineteenth century of medieval and early modern Iceland as an important part of European civilization rather than being a peripheral territory.

JUHA-MATTI GRANQVIST (Helsinki) explores the mercantile activities of burghers in late eighteenth-century Helsinki and Sveaborg, the sea fortress outside this city. The erection of Sveaborg was a major military construction project for the Swedish State in this period. Before long, Sveaborg became an important economic, technological, social, and cultural centre on the northern coast of the Gulf of Finland. Construction of the fortress and the establishment of a large garrison there created novel possibilities for business amongst the burghers of Helsinki. However, tensions between the burghers' commercial activities and the army controlling trade in Sveaborg led to conflicts between civil and military society. During the second half of the century new forms of mercantile enterprises emerged, resulting in mutual agreements and the coexistence of civic and military activities. Granqvist shows how military society was organized and supplied in peacetime, and underlines the vitality of cooperation between the military and civil society. Furthermore, he underlines the significance of climate and weather conditions for the burghers' commerce in Helsinki, as well as for soldiers and their officers in Sveaborg, built upon islands and thus virtually inaccessible during times between open water and ice.

SAMPISA HATAKKA (Helsinki) examines another aspect of Sveaborg, namely how soldiers working on the construction site there were nourished during the period 1747–1752. Bread was vital to the military, and in Sveaborg the authorities organized a system in order to secure the storage and supply of food mostly in the form of grain, which was then used to bake bread on-site. Through the Sveaborg case study Hatakka shows the necessity of a supply system for the military, as much during times of peace as war. A major construction project such as Sveaborg required an equally effective system of supply in order to sustain the work. This necessitated a combined effort from the army, administration, burghers and peasants alike, who all participated in the supply system in their various ways: growing the grain, transporting, selling and buying it, or organizing the whole structure.

ANNE-SOPHIE MICHEL (Paris) focuses on the French sculptors recruited between 1732 and 1765 to decorate the Royal Palace in Stockholm. Tempted by attractive conditions and career opportunities, thirty sculptors left France, recruited, through social networks, by the superintendent of royal buildings. While in Stockholm, they created the palace embellishments in accordance with sketches by the Swedish architects. Besides the concrete result of this migration of craftsmanship – which can still be admired on the walls and in the halls of the Royal Palace – these sculptors came with artistic experience, knowledge, and taste that had an intellectual impact on Swedish culture. With this focus, the article is a ma-

major contribution to the understanding of eighteenth-century aesthetic diffusion and transfer of knowledge. Their technical experience and know-how were soon transferred to a new generation of Swedish craftsmen and artists, and the French aesthetic taste became diffused in eighteenth-century Sweden.

FRIEDEMANN STENGEL (Halle) examines the debate on the nature of the soul, a debate that engaged many philosophers and theologians of the era of Enlightenment. In this article, the Norwegian bishop, philosopher and naturalist Johan Ernst Gunnerus plays the leading role. By investigating his theological and philosophical works from a wider European perspective, Stengel unearths and contextualizes Gunnerus's philosophical position. One of the widely debated questions concerned the immortality of the soul, a central doctrine in Christian eschatology that was disputed and challenged during the Enlightenment. The article's main contributions to our knowledge of Gunnerus and the theological-philosophical debate on this matter are the positioning of Gunnerus in this interdisciplinary debate and the placing of his doctrine regarding the soul in a contemporaneous European context.

MERETHE ROOS (Halden & Oslo) examines two Scandinavian journals, namely Georg Adelsparre's *Läsning i blandade ämnen* (A Reader's Miscellany), which was published in Stockholm during 1797–1801, and the *Minerva*, issued by Christen Pram in Copenhagen from 1785 onwards. More specifically, Roos analyses how religious matters are portrayed in these explicitly Enlightenment-friendly periodicals, and the extent to which different legislation influenced their content as far as religion is concerned. By employing a comparative perspective, Roos finds more marked differences in the 'discursive climates' (textual cultures) in the two countries than has previously been acknowledged. During the period in question, the secularization process advanced more rapidly and with more profound results in Denmark than in Sweden, she argues.

In the final peer-reviewed article of this volume, TROND BJERKÅS (Trondheim) analyses bishops' visitations to dioceses throughout Norway, from the middle of the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. These visits were highly ceremonial and institutionalized, indeed imposed by law; a circumstance that might easily lead the modern historian to interpret them as instruments through which the central government controlled the local people. However, Bjerkås also sees them as something else: as opportunities for the populace to actually have an impact on the affairs of the Church in a way foreshadowing the representative assemblies that were established in Norway in the aftermath of the Constitution of 1814. The 'public forums' that used to be provided by the Church's Holy Days, with the trade and festivity that accompanied them, were however transformed and

stripped of their importance as new forms of formalized, representative participation gained a foothold around the mid-nineteenth century.

In addition to the articles, this volume contains two essays and a large number of reviews. Where are we heading? is the question Per Pippin Aspaas asks himself. In what direction is contemporary eighteenth-century research going, and what structural problems does it face? In his essay, he performs a grand survey of all scholarly journals edited by Societies for Eighteenth-Century Studies and uncovers some trends as well as critical challenges. We have also included a report from the Swedish eighteenth-century conference on everyday life, arranged by the Swedish Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. Finally, we present six newly-defended doctoral theses, along with 29 monographs and anthologies recently published in the Nordic countries and beyond. The history of the eighteenth century goes on.

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