

International Conference, Hamburg 7- 9 November 2007

Gendering Historiography

The history of historiography is currently experiencing a remarkable revival. After years in a state of suspended animation, the history of historiography and the biographies of its protagonists are being rediscovered, and for good reason: Both historical genres are undergoing a long-overdue reorientation.

The study of national historiography has gained fresh impulses from the history of transfer or transnational historiography. National historiographies are now also being examined for their relationships to other national historiographies. In the EU project "Writing National Historiographies," for example, four teams are addressing questions of mutual influence, disassociation and the interpenetration of various national historiographies.

Biographical studies, too, have undergone methodological innovations in recent years. Inspired by conceptual reflections on the biographical method from neighboring disciplines (especially literary theory and sociology), several biographies of twentieth-century historians (including one woman) have been published in recent years (Werner Conze, Erich Marcks, Arthur Rosenberg, Gerhard Ritter, and Selma Stern). In the meantime, the biographical method, with its abandonment of holistic models of the subject and his/her life, has come to represent an equal form of historical analysis, whose legitimacy is no longer seriously challenged given its innovative research findings. The combination of historiographical and biographical approaches has proven especially fruitful in these works.

Both developments, however, leave significant questions virtually untouched: How have the field, its traditional canon, and the biographies of its representatives been structured by the category of *gender*? Which mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion underlie the construction of the academic discipline, its canon and the professional careers of its protagonists?

All major sub-disciplines of history – one thinks of classical social history, political history or economic history – have not merely undergone methodological innovations, but as a consequence of this renewal have also come to define their object of study differently. The history of historiography, however, which likes to portray itself as a theoretically ambitious sub-discipline, is still hacking away at the same old canonical subject: the writings of established historians. At most, more attention may be paid to outsiders or – as in the transnational perspective – to interactive processes. Unfamiliar texts, forgotten individuals, alternative forms of historical representation, or mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, however, go largely unnoticed. This is particularly true of the German historical landscape, for which there are historical reasons.

This fateful omission, like the male-connoted image of the historian and the gendered coding of historiography, is itself a product of history and can be traced back to the period around 1800 when the discipline emerged in Germany. As convincing studies of the professionalization of the historical profession have shown, it was precisely the early institutionalization of the field in Germany that led to the especially sharp lines between so-called academic and non-professional history and promoted the exclusion of women. This continues to influence the discipline and its personnel even today.

We believe it is about time that we took a closer look at the traditional historiographical canon, the dividing line between scholarly and non-scholarly historical writing, and the biographies of historians, with a focus on the category of gender.

A comparison with other countries quickly reveals that this is possible only on an *international* – and in some cases certainly also *transnational* – level. Initial studies have shown that in the nineteenth century in Europe and the United States, women were excluded from the production of (scholarly) historical writing and new constructions of masculinity were negotiated. At the same time, women also disappeared as a topic of historical reflection. These mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion did not proceed in a parallel manner in all countries, however. The borders were defined differently and their permeability varied. The analysis of these boundaries takes us deep inside the discussion of the very foundations of our discipline: What is historical truth and who defines the rules governing its validity?

Based on these reflections, “Gendering Historiography” seems to us a necessary project for the field. For that reason, an international conference to be held at the Aby-Warburg-Haus in Hamburg from 7-9 November 2007 will address the following three thematic areas:

First, the conference will inquire into the constructions of the (nationally) differing canons as well as the establishment of accepted narratives from the perspective of gender history. Second, we will examine the respective dividing lines between academic and non-academic history for their gender-segregating and gender-hierarchical mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Third, and finally, participants will look at the gender-coded profession of the historian and contrast it with alternative professional careers.

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