

example, Sujit Sivasundaram, in an essay that ranks among the best in this fine collection, takes the island of Ceylon as the spatial boundary of his analysis and explicitly pushes the wider imperial geography aside. This spatial demarcation enables him to present a compelling history of competing highland and lowland epistemologies on the island itself, as it gradually fell under imperial sway. When such bold, structuring, spatial choices are made, it becomes particularly evident how historical geography can push history of science in new and compelling directions. Readers will find that such choices are made in some, but not all, contributions.

Despite its broader title the collection is largely devoted to geographies of science in the British Isles and rather little is done by way of placing the British case in a wider historiographical and geographical context. On the positive side this leaves ample scope for future comparative studies and for scholars with the knowledge and linguistic skills required for analysing developments in the sciences in other local settings. The many historians who are currently engaged in this endeavour will find this highly recommended volume of original essays a virtual goldmine of inspiration when framing future research questions and agendas.

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IAN HESKETH, *The Science of History in Victorian Britain: Making the Past Speak*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011. Pp. xii + 229. ISBN 978-1-84893-126-8. £60.00 (hardback). doi:10.1017/S000708741200026X

Hesketh's book focuses on a group of British historians who promoted a new definition of history between 1860 and 1890. The debate over history was triggered by the huge and short-lived success of Henry Thomas Buckle. In his *History of Civilization in England* (1857–1861) and in his public lectures, Buckle relied on Auguste Comte's positive philosophy and claimed that history was a science similar to the physical sciences. Human actions as well as natural phenomena were governed by general laws, which the new tool of statistics would reveal. Leaving aside Buckle's more subtle approach to the past, including the use of imagination and intuition, contemporaries were shocked by the moral and metaphysical implications of his theory. If human actions were governed by laws, no room was left for free will or for Providence. Critical reactions to Buckle were numerous, and his reputation soon faded.

Some historians argued against Buckle that history could never be a science. The past was subject to individual motivations and therefore unpredictable. It called for another kind of knowledge, more similar to art. Such knowledge could be best formulated in biographies and in historical narratives based on facts but written like novels. This was the opinion of Charles Kingsley, Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge from 1860, and of James Anthony Froude, who claimed to follow Carlyle's model in his *History of England from the Death of Cardinal Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada* (12 vols., 1856–1870).

Another group of scholars, led by William Stubbs, John Robert Seeley, Edward Augustus Freeman and Lord Acton (John Emerich Edward Dalberg), opposed a different definition of science to Buckle's conception. History should indeed become a science, but rather than Comte's faulty positivism, its model was Leopold von Ranke's inductive science of facts. Ian Hesketh has chosen to study the work and career of these historians in terms of 'boundary work' (p. 86). Focusing on their methodological statements, mostly expressed in public lectures, correspondences, book reviews and periodical articles, he analyses how the promotion of a new definition of history was also an attempt at monopolizing professional authority and excluding rivals from within by defining them as 'amateurs', or 'pseudo-historians'.

Stubbs, Seeley, Freeman and Acton shared a common definition of objectivity. The historian's task was to discover facts, and let these facts from the past speak by themselves. This definition implied some specific professional skills in order to deal with archives and primary sources. It also

led to a specific ethos for the historian, who had to refrain from introducing his own subjectivity in his narrative, and should avoid stylistic effects in order to please a wider audience. History was indeed an austere activity, intended for an audience of peers and students.

Such a conception was most clearly expressed in a negative form, when bad history and bad historians, such as Buckle and Froude, were condemned. But its positive content was less obvious. Hesketh's study is particularly interesting when it deals with slight divergences among the promoters of scientific history and with aporias in their conceptions. The ideal of a 'history from nowhere', from which the historian's subjectivity would be absent, led to quite different interpretations. The liberal Catholic Lord Acton, for example, believed that moral judgements were not subjective. When historical 'facts' spoke for themselves, they demonstrated the universality of Christian morality. Seeley thought that 'objective' history gave lessons for the present and could help and justify political decision-making. His *Expansion of England* (1883) reads as a plea for imperialism. Similarly the ideal of a science intended only for peers was often distorted. Publishers pressed their authors to write more profitable books for a wider audience. Macmillan persuaded Freeman to write an *Old English History for Children* (1869), while convincing him to publish his more specialized *History of the Norman Conquest* (1867) with Oxford Clarendon Press.

Hesketh's book, however, is less convincing in describing the 'burgeoning historical community' (p. 35) which was formed under the banner of scientific history. The extent of such a community, the kind of relations bonding its members, and its institutional foundation remain largely unknown. Hesketh studies the creation of the *English Historical Review* in 1886 and its methodological agenda. But he does not give a group description of its contributors. The *Cambridge Modern History* (1902–1912), for which the University Press syndics commissioned Lord Acton in 1896, is precisely analysed in its methodological specificities, but without a general picture of its authors. What we see mostly are a few individuals, often related by friendship or family bonds, sharing a common militant definition of history, acting in order to promote their science and their own career, and often succeeding in gaining academic positions at Oxford and Cambridge.

Despite individual achievements, the conclusion of the book is about failure. And, precisely, one explanation for this failure could be that the promoters of scientific history did not succeed in creating a historical community. After their death, the new generation did not share their militant views. Many young historians underlined the inconsistencies between methodological standpoints and actual historical works, and came back to a more moderate position about history as a science and as an art. At the beginning of the twentieth century, George Macaulay Trevelyan was becoming the new face of the historical profession in England. While basing his studies on thorough archival research, he wrote in a style similar to that of his great-uncle, Thomas Babington Macaulay, and intended his books for a general audience.

Another limitation of Hesketh's study lies on this last point. The agenda of the promoters of a more artistic or literary version of history is not as precisely analysed as the opposite standpoint. The influence of another model, based on empathy and psychology, partly imported from France (borrowed from Michelet, Renan, Taine etc.) rather than Germany, is only suggested. Of the controversies over the nature of historical knowledge between 1860 and 1890 in Britain, Hesketh fully depicts only one side.

Still, this book deserves much credit for making light of little-known and complex debates, and for demonstrating how great a variety of methodological standpoints is hidden behind the 'Whig' political label under which most of the historians it studies have usually been grouped.

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