

2

Virtues of History: Exercises, Seminars, and the Emergence of the German Historical Discipline, 1830–1900

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Character and Discipline

Students who during the 1860s wanted the best and most scholarly history education in the world knew where to go: a modern three story townhouse, built in neoclassical style, on Bahnhofstraße 8, just outside the old city gates of Göttingen.¹ Here the medievalist Georg Waitz lived, and once or twice a week, in the evening from six and eight, housed a small reading group or, as such classes were called at the time, exercises [*Übungen*].² The group, consisting of about a dozen students, would sit

¹ Bärbel Schwager, *Das Göttinger Auditoriengebäude von 1862/65: Ein Beitrag zur Universitätarchitektur im 19. Jahrhundert und zur Hannoverschen Variante des Rundbogenstils* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), 310–1. Some of the arguments in this article have previously been presented in German in Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, 'Private Übungen und verkörpertes Wissen: Zur Unterrichtspraxis der Geschichtswissenschaft im neunzehnten Jahrhundert', in Martin Kintzinger and Sita Steckel, (eds.), *Akademische Wissenskulturen. Praktiken des Lehrens und Forschens vom Mittelalter bis zur Moderne, Schriften der Gesellschaft für Universitäts- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (Bern, 2015), 143–61. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

² Hartmut Boockmann, 'Geschichtsunterricht und Geschichtsstudium in Göttingen', in Hartmut Boockmann and Hermann Wellenreuter (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft in Göttingen: Eine Vorlesungsreihe*, (Göttingen 1987), 161–85, esp. 175–8. For descriptions of Waitz and his teaching style by his former students, see Ferdinand Frensdorff, 'Georg Waitz', in Freiherr von Rochus Liliencron et al. (eds.), *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 40 (Leipzig, 1896), 602–29, Gabriel Monod, 'Georges Waitz', *Revue historique* 11/31 (1886), 383–90, Hermann Grauert, 'Georg Waitz', *Historisches Jahrbuch. Im Auftrage der Görres-Gesellschaft*, 8 (München, 1887), 48–100, Ludwig Wieland, 'Georg Waitz', *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, 33 (1886), 1–15, and Dietrich Schäfer, *Mein Leben* (Berlin, 1926), 75–7. For his own description of his teaching practices, see Georg Waitz, *Die historischen Übungen zu Göttingen: Glückwunschschreiben an Leopold von Ranke zum Tage der Feier seines fünfzigjährigen Doctorjubiläums. 20. Februar 1867* (Göttingen, 1867).

together around a large round table by the couch in his study. Normally one student would present a paper and afterwards Waitz and the other students commented. Waitz was not the most inspiring lecturer and even his devoted disciples admitted that he lacked ‘pedagogical talent’ and ‘the Socratic gift’ for seeing and unlocking the inner potential of each student.³ But the few students who were allowed to enter the study nonetheless considered the exercises a life-changing experience. As the French historian Gabriel Monod later explained:

One left these lessons not just better instructed, not just with clearer ideas and a better ordered mind, but also with love and respect for truth and scholarship, with understanding for the price that they cost and with resolution to work for them. One sensed that Mr. Waitz put his entire soul into this informal and direct teaching, that he wanted to accomplish a moral as well as an intellectual work, that he wanted to form men as well as scholars, that he gave the best of himself.⁴

Waitz and his students often described the exercises in Göttingen as a direct continuation of Leopold Ranke’s famous exercises on the Medieval Saxon Kings and Emperors, which he offered at the University of Berlin during the 1830s. Ranke’s exercises were themselves indebted to an older Enlightenment tradition of history education. According to this tradition, the primary purpose of history education was not to teach history, understood as a well-established body of knowledge about the past, but rather to prepare students to investigate the past. This demanded that the students acquired methodological skills, but also that they changed personally and morally.⁵ This acquirement of skills and moral character was tested and exercised by doing scholarly work. Thus, the students in Waitz’s exercises should not just read historiographical works or listen to lectures, but also write independent research papers and engage in reciprocal scholarly critique. The most important outcome, however, was not the papers themselves, but the personal transformation that the process of research and critique resulted in. The exercises, as Monod reported, aimed at forming ‘men as well as scholars’.⁶

³ For example, Weiland, ‘Georg Waitz’, (cit. n. 2), 12–13.

⁴ Monod, ‘Georges Waitz’, (cit. n. 2), 383–4.

⁵ Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, ‘Christian Thomasius, Invisible Philosophers, and Education for Enlightenment’, *Intellectual History Review* 18/3 (2008), 319–36 and ‘Inventing the Archive: Testimony and Virtue in Modern Historiography’, *History of Human Sciences* 26/4 (2013), 8–26. Also, on eighteenth-century philological exercises, William Clark, ‘On the Dialectical Origins of the Research Seminar’, *History of Science* 27 (1989), 111–54; Carlos Spoerhase and Mark-Georg Dehrmann, ‘Die Idee der Universität: Friedrich August Wolf und die Praxis des Seminars’, *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* 5/1 (2011), 105–17.

⁶ For a discussion of the moral significance of epistemic virtues for Monod and Waitz, see also Herman Paul, ‘The Virtues of a Good Historian in Early Imperial Germany: Georg

Institutionalizing the Disciplines

In some important ways, Waitz was behind his time. During the second half of the nineteenth century, German higher education changed dramatically. An increasing number of students entered university, raising from about twelve thousand students in 1859/60 to about sixty thousand in 1914, and, in response, professors institutionalized and standardized instruction.⁷ One important aspect of this transformation was the introduction of new textbooks on the methods, practices, and techniques of research.⁸ Thus, German professors standardized and formalized older oral and tacit educational traditions, such as those of Waitz's 'informal and direct teaching', and made these available in print to a much larger student audience. Equally important was the proliferation of institutionalized seminars, where students had access to source editions, journals, supervision, and exercises, and sometimes also had their own workspace. Such seminars were already introduced at German universities during the eighteenth century, and had then primarily served the education of clergymen and secondary school teachers in philology. During the second half of nineteenth century, they were introduced in all disciplines and at all German universities.⁹ The main purpose of these seminars remained vocational training, but they increasingly also focused upon research methodology.¹⁰ When Ranke's former student Heinrich von Sybel established a historical

Waitz Consted Example', *Modern Intellectual History* 15/3 (2018), 681–709, and Camille Creyghton, Pieter Huistra, Sarah Keymeulen, and Herman Paul, 'Virtue language in historical scholarship: the cases of Georg Waitz, Gabriel Monod, and Henri Pirenne', *History of European Ideas* 42/7 (2016), 924–36. Also, on the significance of moral and epistemic virtues in late nineteenth-century humanistic scholarship, Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, 'Scholarship as a Way of Life: Character and Virtue in the Age of Big Humanities', *History of the Humanities* 1/2 (2016), 387–97.

⁷ Konrad H. Jarausch, *Deutsche Studenten, 1800–1970* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), 129.

⁸ On the natural sciences, David Kaiser, (ed.), *Pedagogy and the Practice of Science: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁹ For an overview, Konrad H. Jarausch, 'Universität und Hochschule', in Christa Berg (ed.) *Handbuch der deutschen Bildungsgeschichte*, vol 4: 1870–1918. Von Reichsgründung bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs, (Munich, 1991), 313–45, Bernhard vom Brocke, 'Wege aus der Krise: Universitätseminar, Akademiekommission oder Forschungsinstitut. Formen der Institutionalisierung in den Geistes und Naturwissenschaften 1810-1900-1995', in Christoph König and Eberhard Lämmert (eds.), *Konkurrenten in der Fakultät. Kultur, Wissen und Universität um 1900*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 191–218, and 'Die Entstehung der deutschen Forschungsuniversität ihre Blüte und Krise um 1900', in Rainer Christoph Schwinges (eds.), *Humboldt International: Der Export des deutschen Universitätsmodells*, (Basel, 2001), 367–401. Also, Gert Schubring, 'Kabinett – Seminar – Institut: Raum und Rahmen des forschenden Lernens', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 23/3 (2000), 269–85.

¹⁰ Also, Kathryn M. Olesko, 'Commentary. On Institutes, Investigations, and Scientific Training', in William Coleman and Frederic L. Holmes (eds.), *The Investigative Enterprise. Experimental Physiology in Nineteenth-Century Medicine*, (Berkeley, 1988), 295–332.

seminar in Munich in 1857, he even divided it in two sections. The first section offered 'education in methodological research and critique', while the second section delivered 'preparation of future gymnasium teachers'.¹¹

When late nineteenth-century scholars celebrated German universities as the source of modern research education, they normally had these institutionalized seminars in mind. German universities published detailed descriptions of the seminars, their organization, architecture, the sources and books in the libraries, and the format of the exercises. Foreign scholars travelled to Germany to investigate the institution. In the historical discipline, one influential example is the travel notes of the Belgian historian Paul Fredericq. In 1881, Fredericq visited several German universities – Berlin, Halle, Leipzig, and Göttingen – to observe modern historical education. Fredericq published his travel notes in *Revue de l'instruction publique en Belge* in 1882 and later in a collected volume, together with similar observations from Holland, Belgium, Britain and France.¹² These notes were also translated into English and published in Herbert Baxter Adams' *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*. Another example is the Danish historian Kristian Erslev, who in 1885 visited the exercises of several Berlin professors to document their teaching style and later inquired about the teaching style at other German seminars.¹³ Many scholars around the world also described their seminars as copies of German seminars. In 1883, for example, G. Stanley Hall collected and published several detailed descriptions of American historical seminars, many of which mentioned German inspirations.¹⁴

¹¹ H. Günter, 'Das historische Seminar', in Karl Alexander von Müller (ed.), *Die wissenschaftlichen Anstalten der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität zu München*, (Munich, 1926), 193–9, 194. Also, Volker Dotterweich, *Heinrich von Sybel. Geschichtswissenschaft in politischer Absicht (1817–1861)* (Göttingen, 1978), 255–88.

¹² Paul Fredericq, *L'Enseignement supérieur de l'histoire. Notes et impressions de voyage* (Gent: J. Vuylsteke, 1899). On Fredericq and his notebooks, also Jo Tollebeek, 'A Stormy Family. Paul Fredericq and the Formation of an Academic Historical Community in the Nineteenth Century', *Storia della Storiografia* 53 (2008), 59–73 and *Fredericq & Zonen. Een antropologie van de moderne geschiedwetenschap* (Amsterdam, 2008).

¹³ MS. Kristian Erslev, *Tyske Universitetsstudier, Breve*, 19, Diverse, Ny kgl. Samling, 4604, 4, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen,

¹⁴ G. Stanley Hall, *Methods of Teaching History* (Boston, 1883). Also, for an international overview, Frank Hadler, Gabriele Lingelbach and Matthias Middell, (ed.) *Historische Institute im internationalen Vergleich*, (Leipzig, 2001) and, on the introduction of historical seminars in the US, Gabriele Lingelbach, *Klio macht Karriere: Die Institutionalisierung der Geschichtswissenschaft in Frankreich und den USA in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 2003), Bonnie G. Smith, 'Gender and the Practices of Scientific History. The Seminar and Archival Research in the Nineteenth Century', *The American Historical Review* 100/4 (1995), 1150–76, and Anthony T. Grafton, 'In Clio's American Atelier', in Charles Camic, Neil Gross und Michèle Lamont (eds.), *Social Knowledge in the Making*, (Chicago, 2011), 89–117.

When late nineteenth-century historians celebrated the modern German university, they did not refer to Wilhelm von Humboldt, the establishment of the University of Berlin in 1810 or the ideas of German idealism. The ‘Humboldt University’, as Sylvia Paletschek and others have documented, is a construction of the twentieth century.¹⁵ They instead referred to the gradual institutionalization of history education, which started during the 1830s and especially increased from 1870s and onwards.

Not everyone, however, agreed that the institutionalized seminars were the best way to secure the unity of teaching and research. Ranke never taught in a seminar and the University of Berlin was one of the last major German universities to introduce a historical seminar. Waitz detested and resisted the development and, according to one colleague, remained ‘marvelously unchanged’. He loudly complained about the many new graduates and compared German universities to ‘dissertation factories’.¹⁶ History professors, he admonished, now had ‘the task to warn, yes to scare away, rather than to attract, those who want to dedicate themselves to the study of history’.¹⁷ In the institutionalized seminars, he complained, one could learn ‘method, but not the spirit and art of history writing’.¹⁸ For students, who cherished the coming of a more egalitarian and meritocratic age, Waitz was hardly the man of the day. One critical observer, for example, barked at ‘the sacrosanct solemnity of Waitz’s room’ and the cultish seclusion and uniformity of his disciples. ‘Waitz’, he claimed, ‘was worshipped by his students, untouchable to the highest degree, already his surroundings [*Dunstkreis*] hallowed, his word an oracle, which one spread with a secretive whisper’.¹⁹

Despite Ranke’s and Waitz’s opposition to the institutionalized seminars, even the advocates of institutionalization emphasized the importance of tradition from Ranke as well as the central role of Waitz within the Ranke school. The disagreement between Ranke, Waitz, and their contemporaries was primarily about the methods of instruction and not

¹⁵ Sylvia Paletschek, ‘Verbreitete sich ein “Humboldtsches Modell” an den deutschen Universitäten im 19. Jahrhundert’, in Rainer Christoph Schwinges (ed.), *Humboldt International: Der Export des deutschen Universitätsmodells*, (Basel, 2001), 75–104, and ‘Die Erfindung der Humboldtschen Universität: Die Konstruktion der deutschen Universitätsidee in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts’, *Historische Anthropologie* 10 (2002), 183–205.

¹⁶ Georg von Below and K. Vogel, ‘Briefe von K. W. Nitzsch an W. Schrader (1868–80)’, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 10 (1912), 49–110, 59.

¹⁷ Waitz, *Die historischen Übungen*, (cit. n. 2), 7. See also Georg Waitz, *Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann: Gedächtnisrede gehalten in der Aula der Universität Kiel am 13. Mai 1885* (Kiel, 1885), 5, and Fredericq, *L’Enseignement supérieur* (cit. n. 12), 46.

¹⁸ Waitz, *Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann* (cit. n. 17), 5.

¹⁹ Julius von Pflugk-Harrtung, ‘Heinrich von Sybel’, *Westermanns illustrierte deutsche Monatshefte*, 64 (1888), 331–46, 341.

about the goals of instruction. Becoming a historian, all agreed, meant becoming a special kind of person, with certain virtues, and thereby joining a 'family' of scholars. This personal transformation was not only important for the internal coherence of the discipline, and for establishing trust and credibility among professional historians, but also for the historian's relationship to the past. To many nineteenth century historians, the epistemic virtues of the Ranke school offered a road into the past. The private exercises that Ranke and Waitz offered in Berlin and Göttingen had open this road and thereby set an example for the later seminars.

Epistemic Virtues as a Road to the Past

When nineteenth-century historians celebrated Ranke as the founder of the historical discipline, they seldom referred to his first published monograph, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker* of 1824, or the introductory remark that the historian should write: 'How it really was' [*wie es eigentlich gewesen*]. They instead, as mentioned, pointed to his teaching practices in Berlin and especially his exercises on the history of the Saxon Kings and Emperors, which started with an 1834 prize completion on the Saxon King Henry I. Ranke arranged for the publication of his student's papers in *Jahrbücher des Deutschen Reichs unter dem Sächsischen Hause*, which appeared over a period of three years from 1837 to 1840. In his introduction to the first issue, written by Georg Waitz, Ranke emphasized that the *Jahrbücher* should be considered as the product of an educational experiment. All students, he argued, should be divided in two major groups, which needed different kinds of education. The largest group consisted of those who studied for personal edification or for vocational training and only needed to attend lectures. For a smaller group of students, who felt an 'inner calling' to research, lectures were not enough. These students needed 'a closer introduction to actual academic matters' and 'guidance to individual activity'. The training for independent academic work, Ranke admitted, had 'for a fairly long time' been offered in seminars and exercises. But, in Ranke's personal experience, students tended to work too independently. Even if they discovered something new, they ended up with 'dispersed papers',²⁰ which were not suitable for publication. Ranke therefore coordinated their efforts and focused upon one century of German history, after Henry I became King of East Francia

²⁰ Leopold Ranke, (ed.), *Jahrbücher des Deutschen Reichs unter dem Sächsischen Hause*, 1/1 (Berlin, 1837), vii and ix.

(or Germany) in 919, which conventionally was given as the foundation of the Saxon house and, thus, of the Holy Roman Empire.

Waitz did not enroll his students in collaborative research, as Ranke had done with the *Jahrbücher*, but his intention was still that the exercises should result in publishable scholarly works. Many of the papers appeared as articles in *Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte*, which Waitz edited, and in other scholarly journals. Some were published as monographs.²¹ Both in style and content the works of Waitz' students reminded of the *Jahrbücher*. They primarily concerned political and legal history and usually followed a chronological order, some noting the year in the margins and with bold print. They constantly referred to their sources in the text as well as in numerous critical footnotes. Several works also contained excurses and appendixes with printed sources and further critical discussions. A couple of works, which were defended as doctoral dissertations, even carried the programmatic subtitle 'critically investigated' [*kritisch untersucht*].²²

The primary purpose of these writings was not to make the past come alive, but rather to show command of the methods and morals of the Ranke school. This command especially came to expression in the students' dealings with the chroniclers, scribes, and historians of the Middle Ages. The past was an alien and strange place to which one did not have immediate access, but only could approach through careful studies of the sources. Without knowledge about the written sources and their authors, there could be no knowledge about the past. This insight into the mediated nature of our historical knowledge also justified the need for professional historians and modern 'critical' historical scholarship. As the Berlin historian, Johann Gustav Droysen in 1868 described the merit of the 'critical school' in modern German historiography:

Maybe the greatest merit of the critical school in our science [*Wissenschaft*] . . . is having gained acceptance for the insight that the foundation of our studies is the examination of the 'sources', from which we create. Hereby the relationship of history [*Historie*] to the pasts [*Vergangenheiten*] has been brought to the scientific decisive point . . . that the pasts no longer lie immediately before us, but only in a mediated way, that we cannot "objectively" construct the pasts from the "sources", but only an interpretation [*Auffassung*], a view [*Anschauung*], and a counter image [*Gegenbild*] of [these pasts], that the so acquired interpretations and views are all, what it is possible for us to know

²¹ Waitz, *Die historischen Übungen zu Göttingen* (cit. n. 2), 8.

²² Wilhelm Junghans, *Die Geschichte der fränkischen Könige Childerich und Chlodevech, kritisch untersucht* (Göttingen, 1857) and Rudolf Usinger, *Die dänischen Annalen und Chroniken des Mittelalters, kritisch untersucht* (Hannover, 1861).

about the past, that therefore ‘history’ [*die Geschichte*] is not there externally or realistically, but only thus mediated, thus researched, and thus known.²³

Historians Past and Present

Waitz’s students could be quite judgmental in their discussions of past chroniclers, scribes, and historians. If the past was only available in a mediated way through the sources, the sources themselves had survived. Reading these sources, often in manuscript form, the students had immediate access to the authors. They treated the Medieval writers as if they were contemporaries and closely scrutinized their vices and virtues. They also used these moral insights to interpret the texts and determine their credibility. This method of determining the credibility of a historical account had Ancient roots, but acquired new importance within the Ranke school. When Ranke published *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker* in 1824, he added an appendix, *Zur Kritik neuerer Geschichtsschreiber*, which discussed the sources. The appendix contained no new archival discoveries, but instead a thorough reexamination of well-known printed sources. Ranke carefully described the personal history of each writer and investigated if and how their personal interests and loyalties colored their accounts. He openly condemned writers who did not live up to standards of modern history writing and especially those who wrote in the rhetorical style of the Ancients. Waitz’s students followed similar critical procedure. In their judgment of past chroniclers, scribes, and historians, they almost seem to have worked with shared catalogue of epistemic virtues and vices.

One example is Hermann Hildebrand’s dissertation on the twelfth century chronicle of Henry of Livonia. The dissertation was defended in Dorpat, but had first been presented in Waitz’s exercises in Göttingen and Waitz considered it as a product of his school. Hildebrand not only attempted to understand Henry’s background and motivations to write, but also included a chapter on his ‘credibility’ [*Glaubwürdigkeit*].²⁴ Henry, Hildebrand argued, based the account of the events of his time upon personal experiences as well as those of contemporary eyewitnesses. To know his credibility, it was therefore only necessary to determine his ‘carefulness’ [*Sorgfalt*], ‘exactness’ [*Genauigkeit*] and ‘love of truth’ [*Wahrheitsliebe*].²⁵ Hildebrand afterwards listed several qualities in Henry’s account, which were connected to these virtues. Most importantly, while Henry’s

²³ Johann Gustav Droysen, *Grundriss der Historik* (Leipzig, 1868), 79–80.

²⁴ Herman Hildebrand, *Die Chronik Heinrichs von Lettland. Ein Beitrag zu Livlands Historiographie und Geschichte* (Berlin, 1865), 46.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

viewpoint colored his account, this ‘viewpoint had in itself no influence upon the transmission of the facts’.²⁶ He had never invented ‘actual untruths’ about his enemies or positive stories about his friends.²⁷ A much harsher judgment can be found in Karl Wittich’s treatment of Richer of Reims. If Henry of Livonia embodied certain virtues, Richer exemplified vices:

every page testifies to his carelessness [*Leichtsinn*], his vanity [*Eitelkeit*], alongside this a remarkable addiction [*Sucht*] to pragmaticizing, in his own way to decorate the content of his dry, often fragmented and abstruse, sources, then further a nearly laughable liking for the outer form, often imitated from the Ancients. How in love of this [form], the truth is even intentionally sacrificed, how he instead of telling what has happened – if according to his opinion – himself wants to invent and to interest: thus, we may indeed just consider his work as a kind of historical novel [*Geschichtsroman*].²⁸

Virtues Past and Present

Waitz did not lecture his students on the virtues and vices of history writing. He instead taught them to appreciate virtues, such as carefulness, exactness, and love of truth, and to detest vices, such as carelessness, vanity, and love of form, through his personal example and especially through his engagement with their papers. Several students emphasized that they could not have written these papers without Waitz’s help. The monographs were often dedicated to Waitz, for example ‘in grateful veneration’ or to the ‘highly venerated teacher’.²⁹ Others contained longer, remarkably similar, praises of Waitz, which normally thanked him for his ‘supportive participation’ [*fördernde Theilnahme*], acknowledged their profound debts, and ensured their unending loyalty.³⁰

When Waitz’s former students described the educational experience in Göttingen, they also often emphasized the parallels between the methods

²⁶ Ibid, 47.

²⁷ Ibid, 47.

²⁸ Karl Wittich, ‘Richer über die Herzoge Giselbert von Lothringen und Heinrich von Sachsen’, *Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte* 3 (1863), 105–41, 108.

²⁹ For example, Junghans, *Die Geschichte der fränkischen Könige* (cit. n. 22), Carl Simonis, *Versuch einer Geschichte des Alarich Königs der Westgothen* (Göttingen, 1858), Eduard Winkelmann, *Geschichte Kaiser Friedrich des Zweiten und seiner Reiche, 1212–35* (Berlin, 1863).

³⁰ For example, August Kluckhohn, *Geschichte des Gottesfriedens* (Leipzig, 1857), iv., Usinger, *Die dänischen Annalen*, 6, August von Druffel, *Kaiser Heinrich IV. und seine Söhne* (Regensburg, 1862), unpag., Theodor Knochenhauer, *Geschichte Thüringens in der karolingischen und sächsischen Zeit* (Gotha, 1863), ix–x., Hildebrand, *Die Chronik Heinrich von Lettland* (cit. n. 24), unpag, and Arnold Busson, *Die Doppelwahl des Jahres 1257 und das römische Königthum Alfons X. von Castilien* (Münster, 1866), vi.

of instruction and the virtues of inquiry. Monod remembered how Waitz listened attentively to the presentation and then started pulling out small pieces of paper, one after another, filled with microscopic hand-written notes, from the pocket of his vest, and 'examined every point of the paper with meticulous rigor, combined with a larger respect for the thought and work of another'.³¹ Thus, his teaching style exhibited the carefulness and restraint necessary for proper historical research. The training should prevent students from extending their judgment too far, or beyond the sources, and teach them academic humility. Ludwig Weiland, who also studied in Göttingen during the 1860s, similarly claimed that Waitz

influenced his pupils, as the example of the faithful father influences his sons. The confident calm and cool objectivity, with which he handled and treated every question, retained the pupils, to themselves unknowingly, from preferring their conjectures to findings created from the sources [and] drove the conviction into them that there is a boundary to our knowledge.³²

Thus, according to the students, Waitz's way of teaching exemplified virtues of history writing. The students learned how to regiment themselves and their writings not just by mirroring themselves in writers of past, and discussing their conclusions about these writers with their fellow students, but also by following the example of Waitz as a teacher. The process of mutual identification and emphatic understanding, between professor, students and past writers, should transform the character of the students and thereby turn them into historians.

Institutionalized Exercises

During the second half of the nineteenth century, as mentioned, practical exercises were increasingly offered in institutionalized seminars. The first historical seminar had been founded in 1832 in Königsberg and similar institutions were opening fast at other German universities.³³ Even at the

³¹ Monod, 'Georges Waitz' (cit. n. 2), 383.

³² Weiland, 'Georg Waitz' (cit. n. 2), 12–3.

³³ Hans-Jürgen Pandel, 'Von der Teegesellschaft zum Forschungsinstitut. Die historischen Seminare vom Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ende des Kaiserreichs', in Horst Walter Blanke (ed.), *Transformationen des Historismus: Wissenschaftsorganisation und Bildungspolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, (Hartmut Spenner, 1994), 1–31, and 'Die Entwicklung der historischen Seminare in Deutschland', in Werner Freitag (ed.), *Halle und die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft um 1900*, (Halle, 2002), 25–36. Also, Hermann Heimpel, 'Über Organisationsformen historischer Forschung in Deutschland', *Historische Zeitschrift* 189/1 (1959), 139–222, esp. 140–50, Paul Egon Hübinger, *Das historische Seminar der rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Bonn* (Bonn, 1963), and Markus Huttner, 'Historische Gesellschaften und die Entstehung historischer Seminare – zu den Anfängen institutionalisierter Geschichtsstudien an den deutschen Universitäten des 19. Jahrhunderts',

forefront of historical research and within the 'critical school', scholars embraced the seminar institution, as the example of Sybel's Munich seminar shows. At Ranke's University of Berlin, Droysen in 1860 complained that the university lacked a seminar and therefore was falling behind other universities.³⁴ In 1882, one of Ranke's former students, Julius Weizsäcker again proposed a Berlin seminar and reported to the ministry that: 'The reason that that such wishes for the historical sciences only appear so late is not that there is no pressing need or that there has not been [a pressing need] for a long time.'³⁵ The new seminars sometimes received considerable financial and institutional support. One extreme example is the historical seminar in Leipzig. The seminar occupied the entire third floor of a university building. The director, Carl von Noorden, had a study and each student had a desk with a lockable drawer and gas lighting. The students could also consult a well-stocked working library with atlases and encyclopedias as well as geographical, paleographical, and epigraphical materials.

The institutionalized seminars were not as exclusive as Ranke's and Waitz's exercises. They were not just intended for a small group of future researchers, but should also accommodate the growing number of students at German universities. For example, when the Berlin seminar finally opened in January 1885, Weizsäcker accepted no less than 42 new students.³⁶ The students in the seminars were often in the beginning of their studies and had not received any philological or historical training beforehand. Professors could not expect them to seek out unknown medieval manuscripts in foreign archives before writing their papers. One brochure for new students in Noorden's Leipzig seminar, probably from the early 1880s, declared that the practical exercises 'at our university primarily are taught so that they are understandable by themselves for those who have no other qualifications than a gymnasium degree'.³⁷ The brochure further recommended students to attend courses that would be helpful in their future work. Those who wanted to become teachers in German secondary schools should not give 'excessive attention' to auxiliary sciences and did not have to attend many exercises. They should,

in Frank Hadler, Gabriele Lingelbach and Matthias Middell (eds.), *Historische Institute im internationalen Vergleich*, (Leipzig, 2001), 39–83.

³⁴ Ibid, esp. 39–43.

³⁵ Max Lenz, *Geschichte der Königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin*, 3, Wissenschaftlichen Anstalten (Halle, 1910), 255.

³⁶ Ibid, 255–7.

³⁷ *Historisches Seminar an der Universität Leipzig. Ratschläge für das Studium der mittleren und neueren Geschichte* (N.p, n.d.). Copy in Kristian Erslev, Breve, 19, Tryksager, Ny kgl. Samling, 4604, 4, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen.

according to the brochure, 'apart from schooling in the principal historical methods, acquire certain and broad historical knowledge'.³⁸

In the seminars, German professors therefore also had to rethink their teaching practices. One interesting example is Wilhelm Arndt's exercises in Leipzig. As a student in Göttingen, Arndt participated in Waitz's exercises. In 1861, he defended his dissertation on Medieval history and, as several others of Waitz's former students, went to work at the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. At the 25th anniversary of Waitz's exercises, Arndt dedicated his *Kleine Denkmäler aus der Marovingerzeit* to his old teacher and sentimentally described his time in Göttingen as 'a sunshine, which still throws its warming rays into my life'.³⁹ However, when Arndt in 1876 became extraordinary professor of historical auxiliary sciences in Leipzig, he did not continue Waitz's style of teaching. He instead taught in Noorden's historical seminar and there developed a new kind of practical exercises. Unlike Ranke and Waitz, Arndt did not expect that the students prepared beforehand, but instead at the start of each session presented a question, which they could answer solely with the printed source-editions in the seminar library.⁴⁰ He changed the theme and question every week and tried to convey an overview of Medieval history. The students also were not supposed to write or to present papers during the semester, but only to participate in the discussions in class. Noorden's exercises in Leipzig seem to have resembled Arndt's. Like Arndt, Noorden did not expect his students to write independent papers, but instead asked all students the same questions and based the exercises upon printed sources in the seminar library.⁴¹ Another example is Weizsäcker's seminar in Berlin. When Kristian Erslev in 1885 visited the newly established seminar, he noted that Weizsäcker based his exercises upon exemplary quotes from sources, which he handed out to students in hectograph-copies at the beginning of class. Instead of having the students work through the material themselves, he asked questions directly to the around forty persons in the room and only demanded 'a couple of words as answer'.⁴²

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Wilhelm Arndt, (ed.), *Kleine Denkmäler aus der Merovingerzeit* (Hannover, 1874), v.

⁴⁰ [George Burton Adams], 'Historical Seminar Methods at Leipzig', *The Nation*, 1265, 26, September 1889, 252 and Fredericq, *L'Enseignement* (cit. n. 12), 28.

⁴¹ Wilhelm Maurenbrecher, 'Lebensbild C. v. Noordens', Wilhelm Maurenbrecher (ed.), *Historische Vorträge von Carl von Noorden*, (Leipzig, 1884), 1–52, about the exercises, 38–40.

⁴² MS. Kristian Erslev, Tyske Universitetsstudier, Breve, 19, Diverse, Ny kgl. Samling, 4604, 4, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen. Erslev's travel journal includes two hectograph copies from Weizsäcker's exercises on June 24th and July 1st 1885.

Virtues and Seminars

In 1913, the Austrian historian Wilhelm Erben published the first overview history of the research seminar.⁴³ In this paper, Erben also outlined an account of the emergence of the modern research university, which still is repeated today and even has gained new influence, after the limited importance of Wilhelm von Humboldt for nineteenth-century German universities has become clear. According to this account, the research university was not the product of the German idealism, but rather of a process of increasing institutionalization. The theological and philological seminars, which were introduced long before 1810 at the Enlightenment reform-universities of Halle and Göttingen, as well as early scholarly societies transformed into the research seminars of the nineteenth century. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, these again transformed into research institutes. Institutionalization lessened the importance of individuals and guaranteed continuity and predictability, and thereby secured disciplinary conformity and scholarly progress. However, Erben was also very familiar with the other tradition of private exercises. He was a former student of Theodor von Sickel, who himself was a renowned expert on Medieval diplomatics and a close friend of Georg Waitz. Later Erben published the correspondence between Sickel and Waitz. In his 1913 paper, he also recognized the particular importance of Ranke and Waitz for the historical discipline and noted Waitz' opposition to the institutionalized seminars. At the very end of the paper, Erben cautioned his readers not to forget the benefits of the older tradition. While the seminars secured 'the constant movement of the machine', the success of modern German scholarship also depended upon 'voluntary working-community of teachers and students'.⁴⁴

The 'voluntary working-community of teachers and students', may have played an important role in the process of disciplinary formation for several reasons. Personal bonds established trust within the discipline and guaranteed adherence to shared epistemic virtues. The increasing importance of archival research within the historical discipline may have made such virtues especially important.⁴⁵ For historical research, as argued in this paper, they may also have served another epistemological function. While historians emphasized that the past was strange and alien place,

⁴³ Wilhelm Erben, 'Die Entstehung der Universitäts-Seminare', *Internationale Monatschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* 7 (1913), 1247–64, 1335–48.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1324.

⁴⁵ Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, 'Leopold Ranke's Archival Turn: Location and Evidence in Modern Historiography', *Modern Intellectual History* 5/3 (2008), 425–53, and 'Inventing the Archive' (cit. n. 5).

they attempted to reach the past through a moral examination of the writers of the past. The working-community between teachers and students also became a working-community between the historian and the past. This approach to the past remained important throughout the nineteenth century and was imported into the seminars and textbooks of the late nineteenth century. Maybe therefore, late nineteenth historians described the rise of the Ranke school and the rise of the historical seminars as interconnected developments. Unlike Waitz, they were convinced that the methods and morals of the Ranke school survived within the institutionalized framework of the seminars. Wilhelm Arndt's students in Leipzig, for example, emphasized the unbroken continuity from Berlin and Göttingen and described Arndt as the 'principal heir of Waitz'.⁴⁶ Shortly after Ranke's death in 1886, one of his former students, the Munich professor Wilhelm von Giesebrecht, even declared that while Ranke 'never spoke of a seminar himself' his exercises had nonetheless 'become the seminar for all those seminars, which we now have at our universities'.⁴⁷ Similar remarks can be found in the works of foreign observers, such as Paul Fredericq and Kristian Erslev.⁴⁸ Thus, at least according to these nineteenth-century historians, the progress of historical scholarship depended not only upon institutionalization, but also upon the continuation of the teaching tradition of Ranke and Waitz within the institutionalized seminars. The historical discipline was not only an institutional, but also a moral community.

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⁴⁶ Heinrich Geffcken, 'Arndt, Wilhelm', in Freiherr von Rochus Liliencron et al. (eds.), *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 46 (Leipzig, 1902), 39–41.

⁴⁷ Wilhem von Giesebrecht, *Gedächtnissrede auf Leopold von Ranke* (Munich, 1887), 11.

⁴⁸ Fredericq, *L'Enseignement supérieur* (cit. n. 12), 42, and Kristian Erslev, 'Ranke og Waitz', *Politiken*, 28. May 1886, unpag.