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# SHAPING THE PAST: THE FOUNDING OF HISTORY AS AN AESTHETICO-LOGICAL SCIENCE IN THE GERMAN ENLIGHTENMENT

#### Abstract

In this paper, I intend to study for the first time the role of demonstrations and fictions as key elements for the scientization of history in the early German Enlightenment. First, I analyze the debate about the role of demonstrative knowledge in the historical narration, with special regard to Thomasius and Heumann. Next, I explore the relationship between the knowledge of historical facts and the epistemology of sensibility, with special regard to Chladenius and the Baumgarten brothers. My conclusion is that history as a science arises out of a concurrence of logical and aesthetic features.

Keywords: Thomasiu, Baumgarten, Theory of History, Aesthetics, Fictionality

### I. Introduction

The process of scientization of history is still to date a crucial topic in the investigation of the modern age. While many scholars refer to the famous debate between Buckle and Droysen in the second half of the nineteenth century, which has often been simplistically regarded as the opposition between positivism and historicism, the attempt to claim some form of scientificity for history dates back much further. As is asserted by Dreitzel, the widening of the medieval *trivium* through the introduction of the *studia humanitatis*, among them poetry and history, as well as the establishment of the first "lectio historica" at the University of Mainz (1504), fostered the acquisition of a new status for this discipline.

A crucial step in this process was taken by Johann Jakob Beurer (1537-1605), who declared in his *Synopsis historiarum et methodus nova* (1594): "Historia est omnis vel divinitus patefacta, vel per sensus quoquo modo hausta et mente comprehensa singularum rerum cognitio". <sup>4</sup> History

thus consists in a specific kind of knowledge, that is, the knowledge of singular things, either divinely revealed or drawn through the senses and grasped by one's mind. The relationship between sensuous cognition and singular things had already been clearly stated by Aristotle, for example in his *Posterior Analytics*: "Sense-perception must be concerned with particulars, whereas knowledge depends upon recognition of the universal". 5 Mentioning Aristotle at the beginning of his *Synopsis*, Beurer agrees that any cognition, apart from anticipations and axioms, stems from the sensuous experience of individuals. Yet, the knowledge of individuals does not allow for any scientific knowledge in the Aristotelian tradition. In his Metaphysics, Aristotle wrote: "When we come to the concrete thing, e.g., this circle - which is a particular individual, either sensible or intelligible [...] of these individuals there is no definition" (1036a). Similarly, he declared in his *De Anima*: "Actual sensation is of particulars, whereas knowledge is of universals" (417b). While knowledge or science (episteme) concerns universals, history thus concerns individuals in their sensuous dimension.6

To be sure, our intellect too can venture into the reign of individuals, as asserted by the Aristotelian Gerardus Vossius (1577-1649), at least in order to abstract universal knowledge. Beurer himself had attempted to claim the universalizability of the material of *historiae* into axioms, postulates, etc., on the basis of the model of the Euclidean geometry. However, all this does not lead to the conclusion that history is a science in the sense of a demonstrative body of knowledge. Rather, history provides material for induction and for the elucidation of universal knowledge. To use the words of the Calvinist philosopher Bartholomaeus Keckermann (1572-1609):

History is an explanation of singular things or of individuals, undertaken for the purpose of understanding and confirming universals more clearly [...]. From this it follows first of all that history is not a discipline, and therefore neither is it science, prudence, or art, since every discipline concerns general and universal things or precepts, and therefore genera and species.<sup>9</sup>

Such a conclusion does not come as a surprise if we consider the standpoint of the late German Aristotelianism, which takes as a basic assumption the identity between ontological necessity and epistemic certainty: this is to say that only the states of affairs which are enduring and not changeable, hence universal and abstract, can be legitimately known with certainty; by contrast, contingent things can be known just with a

certain degree of probability.<sup>10</sup> Drawing a distinction between apparently contingent and actually contingent states of affairs, the logician Joachim Jungius (1587-1657) goes into further detail in his *Logica Hamburgensis* (1638). If the natural states of affairs are not liable to scientific, hence demonstrative, knowledge – he claims – it is because the human cognitive power is too limited to know all their causes; conversely, human actions cannot be the subject of science because of the free will as well as of possible immediate interventions on the part of God.<sup>11</sup> Hence, it is an ontological rather than an epistemological reason that prevents one from the scientific knowledge of human deeds.

Despite the progressive opening of Aristotelianism to the possibility of a scientization of the knowledge of human actions, for example in the field of ethics and politics, 12 the repercussions for the scientific status of history will find a significant development only in the early eighteenth century, when the discussion will move from an ontological to an epistemological plane. The present paper intends to focus on a central element of this process of scientization, 13 that is, the admission of demonstrative knowledge in history in the early German Enlightenment – a topic on which appropriate research is still lacking. In parallel, my aim is to show that such a dimension does not run against the emphasis on the "sensuous individual", which was, as mentioned above, a distinctive mark of the knowledge conveyed by historical narrations. As a matter of fact, in the mid-Enlightenment context the sensuous knowledge of the individual becomes the subject of a new branch of philosophy, namely aesthetics. 14 Precisely the new aesthetic discourse about sensibility makes it possible to think of the role of aisthesis and fictions in historical narrations, without thereby jeopardizing the scientific status of the historical discipline. The thesis I want to defend is that the scientificity of history emerges from a fruitful interaction between these two developments, the logical-demonstrative and the aesthetic.

# **II. Demonstrations in History**

In his *Introductio ad Philosophiam Aulicam* (1688), Christian Thomasius (1655-1728) argues that it is impossible to discuss history as a science.<sup>15</sup> According to Thomasius, science does not concern substances and necessary beings as in the Aristotelian tradition, but only accidents and contingent beings; the reason is that we can be certain only of what we know by our own sensuous experience, hence accidents and contingent

beings.<sup>16</sup> Thomasius thus relates demonstrations and science to sensory perceptions (as well as to the rational truths obtained through an "inductio scientiva" stemming from a few individuals), while the knowledge of substance and universal can only be probable.<sup>17</sup>

History must be framed in this picture. Since most of the things existing in this world last more than human life, very few things can be subject to our own senses. Therefore, it is necessary to assume that we derive knowledge about the origin of many things from the testimony of others; this process is commonly called history. 18 From these premises, Thomasius feels entitled to oppose history, based on probable historical faith, to demonstrative knowledge: "Cum enim fides historica tota, quanta est, in verisimilitudine fundetur [...] demonstratio vero sit veritatum certarum, cuilibet evidens erit, fidem historicam sub demonstrationem non cadere". 19 The origin of things is therefore not an "object of demonstration", but only of a dialectical syllogism, that is, of an argument whose premises are only likely, and not certain as the science would require.<sup>20</sup> Unlike Jungius, Thomasius thus seems to reject the scientific status of history not for the contingency of the events it deals with, but for the way we know those events, which basically depends on the testimony of others rather than on one's own senses.

Precisely this new epistemological thrust, however, seems to be decisive in order to grant a scientific status to history. Working on this dimension, Johannes Eisenhart (1643-1707), to whom Thomasius takes exception, had already outlined in his *De fide historica commentarius* (1679) something like a "science exploring and investigating the historical faith".<sup>21</sup> In this case, the possibility of demonstrations in history no longer depends on the event, but on those reporting it. Eisenhart thus rehabilitates the ancient *locus ab auctoritate* as a central concept of the historical investigation.<sup>22</sup>

An important development of this discussion can be found in Christian August Heumann (1681-1764), the author of *De fide historica*, *oder Von der Glaubwürdigkeit in dieser Historie* (1715).<sup>23</sup> The problem discussed by Heumann in this dissertation precisely concerns the possibility to determine whether history only rests on uncertain knowledge or whether there can also be historical demonstrations. While acknowledging the significance of Eisenhart's work, Heumann is convinced that his argument on human authority is not sufficient, positively mentioning Thomasius's "rational objections" against this writing. Yet, Heumann cannot agree with Thomasius that there are no demonstrations in history. In fact, Heumann

argues, we know many facts with such a strong conviction that it is impossible to call them into question.

In order to make his point, Heumann suggests introducing a new distinction between two kinds of demonstrations: absolute demonstrations and hypothetical demonstrations. An absolute demonstration is a demonstration that proves that something either must necessarily exist or must have a certain quality, for example that there is God (*demonstratio a priori*), that virtues make humans happy (*demonstratio a posteriori*), that "socialitas" is not "primum principium justi" (*demonstratio indirecta*). By contrast, hypothetical demonstrations are not intended to demonstrate that something necessarily exists or has a certain quality; rather, they point to the fact that I can demonstrate in a fully certain way that something existed and it had this quality.

It is therefore not an absolute necessity that Luther was a professor in Wittenberg: it was not an absolute necessity, but *post factum*, after the fact, one can clearly prove that it was impossible that what happened could not have happened. To get to this conclusion, Heumann must grant value to testimony. In fact, while Thomasius asserted that history cannot have demonstrations because most events do not fall under our senses, Heumann equates the credibility of our sensuous perception to the testimony about the same event of many people from different places and times, following an axiom included in the Latin edition of the *Logique de Port Royal*:

Res gestae de quibus sensus facile possunt judicare, si confirmentur testimoniis multorum hominum, diversarum aetatum, diversarum nationum, diversa consilia prosequentium, si de illis loquantur tanquam a se visis, neque suspicio fit eos conspiravisse ad mendacium stabilendum, non minus constanter credi debent, quam si visae fuissent a nobis propriis oculis.<sup>24</sup>

To elucidate the concept of hypothetical demonstrations, Heumann takes the example of his own baptism. Such a thesis ("I was baptized in my childhood") is historical; its subject does not have any absolutely necessary connection with the predicate, so that it cannot be proved through an absolute demonstration. However, it is possible to demonstrate it in a hypothetical way. For there are people who claim they had been his godfathers, and who can even show him the relevant document they all signed along with his father. Further, there are hundreds of people, who

are not friends to one another and who do not have anything to gain from lying, who state they were in town on the day of his baptism, and had partly witnessed the event, partly heard about it. Finally, if he had not been baptized, it would have been such a rare case that people would have remembered it. Given all these premises, the conclusion is that it is necessarily untrue that Heumann did go unbaptized. Therefore, he knows with certainty and demonstratively that he was baptized.

As was already patent with Eisenhart, the possibility of demonstrations in history takes a clearly epistemological turn. Precisely by connecting the problem of demonstrations with the way in which we can know an event, the scientific status of history begins to be recognized.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, the epistemology of testimony becomes essential, as we will see, insofar as it aims to determine whether or not the witnesses at issue are trustworthy. On this theme, Christian Wolff (1679-1754) elaborates a theory serving as the basis for the following development of the doctrine. As is known, Wolff distinguishes the concept of *cognitio historica* from that of *historia*: the former is the lowest degree of knowledge in a three-item list also comprising philosophical and mathematical knowledge. In short, while philosophical knowledge is based on causal knowledge and mathematical knowledge on quantitative knowledge, historical knowledge rests on the attention both to something we perceive by the external senses and to the internal states of things we know through our mind.<sup>26</sup> Since cognitio historica is here a general mode of knowledge and not the specific kind of knowledge we acquire through a historical narration, cognitio historica can have the same object as philosophical and mathematical knowledge. In this sense, we can know the same phenomenon in three different ways: we can know that the water flows in the riverbed (historical knowledge); we can know that this happens because of the slope of the riverbed and of the pressure exerted by the water lying above on the water lying below (philosophical knowledge); and we can know the quantity of the different elements involved (mathematical knowledge).<sup>27</sup>

On another level, Wolff distinguishes historical books and dogmatic books, the former dealing with *singularia* and the latter dealing with *universalia*. A *historia* in the strict sense is a narration of human events. In case we just intend to read *historia*, Wolff argues, we only need attention and concentration. Yet, our interest might not be simply to know *historiae*, but rather to judge the truth of such writings. In this case, attention is no longer sufficient; rather, it is necessary to observe the rules of faith,<sup>28</sup> through which we can analyze the authority of the narrator. For example, in

case the narrated things turn out to be false or contradictory, they are totally impossible; if they contrast with the usual inclinations of humans, they should be considered as morally impossible; if they collide with preceding or subsequent occurrences, they are hypothetically impossible.<sup>29</sup> Precisely the kind of intellectual investigation required by Wolff seems to prompt advancements in the philosophy of history of the age. For while Wolff does not speak about historical demonstrations, one of his most significant followers, Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766), takes a step in this direction, by clearly admitting the possibility of demonstrations (*Beweise*) in the historical discipline (*Historie*): "Indess ist es gewiss, dass es auch in der Historie solche Beweise geben könne, daran man mit keinem Scheine der Wahrheit zweifeln kann".<sup>30</sup>

It was Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten (1706-1757), a Lutheran theologian influenced by Wolff, that provided more details about the theoretical background of this admission. In his preface to the German edition of the *Universal History* (1744), he points out the frequent confusion between the historical knowledge of the essential parts of sciences and the knowledge and insight into history. By alerting his readers not to take *cognitio historiae* for *cognitio historica*, Baumgarten explicitly claims that the former can be as rational and accurate as the knowledge of universal truths.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the painstaking proof of the grounds and different levels of probability and certainty, the discovery of the nexus of several events and their mutual influence, as well as the correct judgment about them "require, engage, and sharpen the human reflection to the same extent as any other science".<sup>32</sup> The possibility of rational knowledge in history here finds a clear-cut confirmation.

# **III. Fictions in History**

As is known, the word "history" is etymologically related to the Indo-European root \*weid, to see. It seems that history, at least in the beginning, was in some way connected to the act of gathering information through autopsy or by actual perception, in other words, by means of aisthesis. Accordingly, Thomasius, as we have seen, claims that there could be demonstrations in history if it were possible to just rely on the knowledge of the senses. In this way, the lack of certainty attributed to history is due to the lack of aisthesis and the appeal to testimonial reports. More information about this issue is provided by Johann Martin Chladenius

(1710-1759) in his *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft* (1752), where the scientific status of history is already stated in the title. In the preface of this work, Chladenius complains about the little space typically devoted to the historical books in the volumes of logic of his time and calls for more attention.<sup>33</sup> As a matter of fact, such increased attention should focus in particular on an epistemology of *aisthesis*.

Indeed, Chladenius pinpoints that the aisthesis on which historical and empirical knowledge in general hinges depends on perspective. To be sure, events do not need any observer to exist.<sup>34</sup> However, when one wants to study the knowledge of events and the narration stemming from it, the observer, that is, the one who feels something as present, becomes as paramount as the thing itself.<sup>35</sup> For it is undeniable that the bodies assume a different configuration depending on how the observer relates to them, e.g. on how close he is, on how attentive he is, etc.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the fixed stars would be suns for a close observer, while they are just small celestial lights for us on Earth.<sup>37</sup> As is evident, the theory of the viewpoint is strictly linked with the sense of sight.<sup>38</sup> Along with sight and its condition, e.g. its sharpness, the viewpoint also involves the other senses of the historian (including his being healthy or sick, for instance),<sup>39</sup> as well as his social condition. In fact, the social condition can modify the historian's perception, in particular the perception concerning the moral beings, which take shape, unlike most concrete objects, only in the eyes of the beholder.40

The historical knowledge, in this sense, is influenced both by the nature and the psycho-physiological condition of the gaze and by the standpoint of the historian within his community. The perspective dimension, astronomically indebted to Copernicus and metaphysically to Leibniz, is placed at the core of the historical explanation.<sup>41</sup> While Lucian of Samosata (ca. 125-after 180) affirmed in his *How to write history* that the mind of a historian must be "like a mirror, clear, gleaming-bright, accurately centered, displaying the shape of things just as he receives them, free from distortion, false coloring, and misrepresentation",<sup>42</sup> now that mirror is no longer a univocal tool, but can have different models, positions, and sizes.<sup>43</sup> In the light of the theory of the viewpoint, the connection between historical cognition and sensibility thus seems to be less one-sided than Thomasius had expected.<sup>44</sup>

Yet, there is something more. In fact, Chladenius argues, the historian actively modifies the data of his perception in order to remember them and share them with others through his narration in a process called

"transformation of history" (Verwandelung der Geschichte). 45 It is thus important to understand the internal grammar of this transformation, in order to correctly appraise the productive role of the observer in his own stories. First of all, Chladenius remarks, many things are represented at the same time in our sensation, which cannot be expressed at the same time in a story. Although I see the face of a person all at once, I have to describe it one part after the other. 46 Further, in the sensation everything is perfectly determined as for length, size, breadth, number, color, etc. All this is not only difficult to describe, but also extremely long, so that the description of a short visit could take a few hours to read. Consequently, the observer has necessarily to leave out a series of individual circumstances by merely omitting certain aspects and, more surreptitiously, by employing general terms, so as to avoid listing all the determinations of the individuals. or by replacing specific facts (e.g. the exact amount of a person's richness) with general notes (e.g. this person is rich).<sup>47</sup> Moreover, it often happens that the historian mixes up some internal characteristics of the things he describes with the affects provoked by these characteristics, since the narration does not express the event itself but its representation retained in memory.<sup>48</sup>

Ambiguity increases even more when the historian makes reference to ideas such as beauty, on which there is no agreement.<sup>49</sup> Also, historians use concepts like "large"; "big"; "high", which tend to enlarge or shrink certain details,<sup>50</sup> in relation to the goal of the historical narration: for the attention is directed to very different aspects if we write a thorough record, a joke, or a personal story.<sup>51</sup> In writing their experience, the eyewitnesses therefore give shape to an image which is necessarily different from their sensuous perception, insofar as it entails "constructive" features, that is, features linked with the act of witnessing and narrating a testimony rather than with the event. Hence, the metaphor of the mind of the historian as a mirror not only undergoes a process of multiplication, but also acquires specific indexes of distortion, which are inherent in the genesis of narration and cannot be removed in the name of objectivity.

If constructive aspects are crucial for eyewitnesses, they are also seminal for historians who did not witness the event being narrated. This issue was highlighted by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762), Siegmund Baumgarten's younger brother as well as the founder of philosophical aesthetics. In the first volume of his *Aesthetica* (2 voll., 1750-1758), Baumgarten claims: "That which we have not perceived with the same number of ideas with which we think it, and which nevertheless

must be known sensitively, we must invent by an act of fiction. Hence, we define as fictions in a broad sense the perceptions formed by the combination and separation of phantastic images (*phantasmata*)". From this point of view, any sensuous idea which does not hinge on an immediately acquired sensation, hence on experience in the strictest sense, <sup>52</sup> is a fiction. Insofar as the historian does not usually experience directly, i.e. through his senses, the events narrated, the *aisthesis* whereby he works is not sensation, but fiction, hence a blend of perceptions of the imagination. <sup>53</sup> Our representations of e.g. the Second Punic War, no matter how accurate they are, are thus technically fictions.

How is it possible, though, to piece together fictions and demonstrations in history? A hint is offered by Baumgarten himself. For the employment of the term *fictio*, Baumgarten rushes to remark, does not imply that such representations are not endowed with truth. To this end, Baumgarten introduces the phrase of "fictiones strictissime verae", 54 including all the past things which I did not experience directly, but which are narrated according to the standards of historical credibility (fides historica).55 These standards include first of all the requirement that the fictions be verisimilar. According to Baumgarten verisimilitude falls into the domain of aesthetic truth, of which it represents the main element.<sup>56</sup> In his search for verisimilitude, the historian must therefore adhere to the principles of aesthetic truth.<sup>57</sup> Such a truth requires first of all the possibility of the subjects,<sup>58</sup> and secondly their connection with their grounds and consequences in the eye of the analogue of reason, i.e. of sensibility.<sup>59</sup> Not by chance, Baumgarten exemplifies the requirement of the aesthetic truth with the episode of Coriolanus narrated by a historian such as Livy, who accounts for the ground of the single occurrences so that they can be easily grasped in their link by the analogue of reason.<sup>60</sup>

That such a nexus of occurrences is crucial for history was already stated by Alexander's brother Siegmund in the discussion of the so-called internal verisimilitude, which, along with the principle of non-contradiction, constitutes the internal ground of reliability of a *historia*. The reference of the verisimilitude of *historiae* to aesthetic truth, however, allows for a broader understanding of the doctrine, insofar as it makes it possible to unearth the proximity of history with the poetic domain. Alexander Baumgarten uses the term "verisimilitudo interna" in reference with the heterocosmic fictions, in particular with those fictions that are not based on existing myths and legends, and that can therefore be made credible only by virtue of the coherence of the internal structure. This can

well be the case of the "beautiful and rational novels", which, according to Meier, "are so verisimilar that sometimes it would be difficult for a philosopher to provide a sufficient ground of why he did not want to consider them as a true story".<sup>64</sup> Aesthetic truth thus seems to provide a common principle for that internal verisimilitude which will be at the basis of both history and novel theory in the Late Enlightenment.<sup>65</sup>

Precisely this commonality, though, makes it necessary to add another constraint in order to distinguish the fictional activity of the historian from that of a poet or a novelist. As we have seen, Alexander Baumgarten remarks that in constructing their fictions, the historian must stay true to fides historica<sup>66</sup> and is not entitled to insert beings from another universe or to take advantage of popular credulity in his narration.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, his brother Siegmund asserts that, along with internal verisimilitude, historical fictions must comply with external verisimilitude, which includes an epistemology of the testimony, or, with the term used by Alexander Baumgarten, a "martyrocritique", provided that one can apply to the historian what can be said of the witness.<sup>68</sup> Insofar as the testimony relies on faith, that is, on the assent given to a testimony, 69 it is necessary to investigate if witnesses are worthy of trust, 70 in particular with regard to their dexterity and sincerity, hence to their inclination to report truth,<sup>71</sup> in order to check the degree of probability of the evidence provided.<sup>72</sup> The preliminary criterion is undoubtedly that of rejecting one's assent to the things that run against experience and reason, and are therefore in themselves unlikely or unbelievable.<sup>73</sup>

The concurrence of internal credibility and the higher or lower probability of the testimony determines in Alexander Baumgarten "historical certainty, probability, and improbability". The Baumgarten thus does not hesitate to admit of the possibility of something like "historical certainty", which had remained outside of Wolff's conception. The thesis is even clearer in the second part of his *Aesthetica* (1758). While his brother Siegmund took issue with the textbooks of logic that guiltily overlooked such a relevant subject as historical certainty under the pretext that it rested on evidence irreducible to mathematical certainty, Alexander claims: "Philosophers have a [kind of] solidity and mathematicians have another one, but historians, orators, poets have one too, albeit of a different kind".

Precisely the acknowledgement of this epistemic peculiarity allows for the admission of possible demonstrations in history. In fact, while the knowledge of history is grounded on the sensuous representations of memory and imagination, the role of reason and demonstrations avoids the arbitrariness of fictions on the basis of the body of evidence accepted at a certain moment in a certain context. Fictions are consequently entitled to hand down sound, albeit not objective, knowledge, insofar as the rational assessment of the sources rules out all the elements which historical fictions are not allowed to include.<sup>78</sup>

In this way, the old adagio opposing fiction and truth, poignantly summarised by the Swiss scientist Theodor Zwinger (1533-1588) in the statement: "Fictio Veritati est contraria. Si fingat, peccat in Historiam: si non fingat, peccat in Poësin" ("Fiction is opposite to truth. He who invents violates the writing of history; he who does not, violates poetic art"), must be profoundly revised. <sup>79</sup> In fact, fictions now become necessary to historians precisely to the extent that they intend to narrate accurately: to put it bluntly, *res fictae* are here the epistemic premise for the knowledge of *res factae* rather than their opposite. <sup>80</sup> It is in this convergence between epistemology of *aisthesis* and epistemology of testimony that history claims its scientific status in the German mid-eighteenth century.

#### **NOTES**

- On the scientization of history in the eighteenth century, there is a wide range of literature, see at least A. Kraus, Vernunft und Geschichte. Die Bedeutung der deutschen Akademien für die Entwicklung der Geschichtswissenschaft im späten 18. Jahrhundert, Freiburg/Basel/Wien, 1963; H. Dreitzel, "Die Entwicklung der Historie zur Wissenschaft", Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung 8/3 (1981), pp. 257-284; W. Hardtwig, "Die Verwissenschaftlichung der Geschichtsschreibung und die Ästhetisierung der Darstellung", in R. Koselleck, H. Lutz and J. Rüsen (eds.), Formen der Geschichtsschreibung, München, 1982, pp. 147-191; P.H. Reill, "Die Geschichtswissenschaft um die Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts", in R. Vierhaus (ed.), Wissenschaften im Zeitalter der Aufklärung, Göttingen, 1985, pp. 163-193; K. Jarausch, "The Institutionalization of History in Eighteenth-Century Germany", in H.E. Bödeker, G.G. Iggers, J.B. Knudsen, and P.H. Reill (eds.), Aufklärung und Geschichte: Studien zur deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert, Göttingen, 1986, pp. 25-48; H.W. Blanke and D. Fleischer, "Artikulation bürgerlichen Emanzipationsstrebens und der Verwissenschaftlichungsprozeß der Historie. Grundzüge der deutschen Aufklärungshistorie und die Aufklärungshistorik", in H.W. Blanke and D. Fleischer (eds.), Theoretiker der deutschen Aufklärungshistorie, vol. 1, Die theoretische Begründung der Geschichte als Fachwissenschaft, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1990, pp. 19-102; the various articles included in W. Küttler, J. Rüsen, E. Schulin (eds.), Geschichtsdiskurs, vol. II, Die Anfänge des modernen historischen Denkens, Frankfurt am Main, 1994; D. Fulda, Wissenschaft aus Kunst. Die Entstehung der modernen deutschen Geschichtsschreibung 1760-1860, Berlin-New York, 1996. See also in general F. Wagner, Die Anfänge der modernen Geschichtswissenschaft im 17. Jahrhundert, München 1979; N. Hammerstein, Jus und Historie. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des historischen Denkens an deutschen Universitäten im späten 17. und im 18. Jahrhundert, Göttingen, 1972; P.H. Reill, The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism, Berkeley/Los Angeles/ London, 1975; G.G. Iggers, "The University of Göttingen (1760-1800) and the Transformation of Historical Scholarship", Storia della storiografia 2 (1982), pp. 11-37; U. Muhlack, Geschichtswissenschaft im Humanismus und in der Aufklärung. Die Vorgeschichte des Historismus, München 1991; F.C. Beiser, The German Historicist Tradition, New York, 2011, especially the Introduction and the first three chapters.
- J.G. Droysen, "Die Erhebung der Geschichte zum Range einer Wissenschaft" [a review of H.T. Buckle's History of Civilization in England], Historische Zeitschrift, 9, 1863, pp. 1-22.
- Dreitzel, "Die Entdeckung der Historie zur Wissenschaft", p. 261.

- <sup>4</sup> J.J. Beurer, *Synopsis historiarum et methodus nova*, Hanoviae, 1594, p. 1. For a comment on this, see A. Seifert, *Cognitio historica. Die Geschichte als Namengeberin der frühneuzeitlichen Empirie*, Berlin, 1976, p. 94.
- <sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Posterior analytics*, 87b37-9.
- This includes both the immediate perception of the concrete individual and the knowledge of human facts and events, see Dreitzel, "Die Entdeckung der Historie zur Wissenschaft", p. 263. On history as empirical knowledge, see in general Seifert, *Cognitio historica*.
- G.J. Vossius, Ars historica sive de historiae et historices natura historiaeque scribendae praeceptis commentatio, Lugduni Batavorum, 1623, p. 19: "Si intellectus non intelligit singularia, quomodo ab iis abstrahit universalia?"
- As J. Jungius wrote in his *Logica Hamburgensis* (1637), ed. by R.W. Meyer, Hamburg, 1957, pp. 2; 29: "Scientia proprie dicta est habitus mentis, quo cognoscimus ea, quae ex primis principiis per demonstrationem deducuntur".
- B. Keckermann, *De natura et proprietatibus historiae Commentarius*, Hanovia, 1621, p. 8. Those who entertain the idea that history is an art are under the fire of peripatetical criticism, see Vossius, *Ars historica*, p. 17: "At eidem Maccio assentire non possumus, cum historiam putat ad artem posse referri. Nec enim historia universalium est, nec proprie dici potest poiein. Quare haec sententia homine Peripatetico, qualem se Maccius profitetur, plane est indigna".
- Dreitzel, "Die Entdeckung der Historie", pp. 262-263.
- Jungius, Logica Hamburgensis, pp. 20ff.
- For a survey, see Dreitzel, "Die Entdeckung der Historie", pp. 264-265.
- Among the indispensable prerequisites for "scientific history", the need for a homogeneous, omnipresent and pervasive time has often been mentioned. In the light of this "new time", the juxtaposition of the history of individual peoples as in the ancient historia universa was replaced with a single secularized time continuum. Koselleck famously traced this transformation back to the so-called Sattelzeit (1750-1850), with the transition from the concrete singular "das Geschichte" (event; incident) to the plural "die Geschichte(n)" up to the collective singular "die Geschichte". History (die Geschichte) thus becomes the complex of human actions and their knowledge rather than a mere record of exemplary facts. See R. Koselleck, Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historic Time (1979), New York, 2004, pp. 32-34. In my paper, the point will not so much be "scientific history" as the scientization of the historical discipline, and will thus concern only the epistemological side. The period analyzed, in which the discussion on the epistemic presuppositions of history as a discipline begins to emerge, is immediately preceding the Sattelzeit, hence the early Enlightenment.
- On the relationship between history and aesthetics in their link with the individual, see A. Baeumler, *Das Irrationalitätsproblem in der Ästhetik und*

Logik des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur Kritik der Urteilskraft (1923), Darmstadt, 1967, in particular p. 15. In an attempt to point out the commonalities between history and aesthetics in this period, Karl Friedrich Flögel considered these two sciences as two parts of special logic, one dealing with the rules of common historical knowledge and the other with the rules of beautiful knowledge, see K.F. Flögel, Einleitung in die Erfindungskunst, Breßlau/Leipzig, 1760, § 194.

- 15 Ch. Thomasius, *Introductio ad philosophiam aulicam*, Lipsiae, 1688, p. 155.
- 16 Ibidem, p. 160: "Ego contra Philosophorum infimus dico, Accidentium esse scientiam, non Substantiae, quoniam hactenus demonstravi, Accidentia incurrere in sensus, at formas substantiales ignorari ab homine".
- 17 Ch. Thomasius, *Einleitung zu der Vernunfft-Lehre*, Halle, 1691, pp. 235-236.
- Thomasius, *Introductio ad philosophiam aulicam*, p. 155. For a similar thesis in Leibniz, see W. Conze, *Leibniz als Historiker*, Berlin, 1951, p. 55.
- <sup>19</sup> Thomasius, *Introductio ad philosophiam aulicam*, p. 155.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibidem.
- J. Eisenhart, *De fide historica commentarius*, Helmstadii, 1702<sup>2</sup>, pp. 6-7.
- See Seifert, Cognitio historica, p. 152. Seifert writes: "Während sich aber die scholastischen Dialektikkommentare zumeist damit begnügten, wie die probabilitas im allgemeinen, so auch die auctoritas im besonderen negativ gegen die Gewißheit von Wissenschaft und Offenbarung abzuheben, beginnt nun mit Melchior Cano der Versuch, jene Ungewißenheit der dialektischen Prämissen (des probabile per se) aus einem vorgeschalteten Argument zu berechnen und dadurch von den niederen Graden des Zustimmens abzusetzen, für die Tradition mit suspicio und aestimatio nicht mehr als Nomenklaturen besessen hatte" (pp. 156-157). It is evident that what is scientific is not Historie, but Historik, see ibidem, p. 151. In this sense, scientificity does not depend on regularity and consequentiality in history, but on the way of analyzing witnesses and sources.
- <sup>23</sup> Ch.A. Heumann, "De fide historica, oder Von der Glaubwürdigkeit in dieser Historie", *Acta philosophorum* 1 (1715), 3. Stück, 381-462, in particular pp. 384-390, which I will comment.
- Logica sive Ars cogitandi (e tertia apud Gallos editione recognita et aucta in Latinum versa), Londini, 1682, p. 279.
- In this sense, the problem of historical method, already highlighted by Thomasius through the distinction between probable and improbable stories, becomes essential, see Ch. Thomasius, *Höchstnöthige Cautelen Welche ein Studiosus* [...] zu beobachten hat, Halle im Magdeb[urgischen], 1713, p. 97.
- Ch. Wolff, "Discursus praeliminaris de philosophia in genere", in Ch. Wolff, Philosophia rationalis sive Logica, Francofurti et Lipsiae, 1728, §§ 3; 21; see also G.B. Bilfinger, De triplici rerum cognitione, historica, philosophica, et mathematica, lenae 1722, § 13.

- Wolff, "Discursus praeliminaris", §§ 6; 7; 14. Both for Wolff and for Bilfinger, the collaboration between the three different ways of knowledge is paramount. On the one hand, the knowledge we obtain through experience is the basis for any knowledge; on the other hand, the collaboration between the two forms of rational knowledge, the philosophical and the mathematical, makes sure that the philosopher is stimulated to perfect his own knowledge through quantitative measurements and that the mathematician is pushed to relate his calculations with *scire per causas*, see in particular Bilfinger, *De triplici*, §§ 11 and 48ff. It must be noted that *cognitio historica* in Wolffianism is no longer primarily defined as knowledge of singular things, but as a *modus cognoscendi*. On the contrary, singular things, as we will see, will be entitled to become the subject of rational analysis, provided that the rational analysis concerns the knowability of their contingent happening.
- Wolff, Philosophia rationalis, § 803; §§ 613ff.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, § 804.
- J.Ch. Gottsched, Erste Gründe der gesamten Weltweisheit. Erster, Theoretischer Theil, Leipzig, 1733, § 113; on Gottsched, see Michael Ermarth, "Hermeneutics and History. The Fork in Hermes' Path through the 18th Century", in Bödeker, Iggers, Knudsen, and Reill (eds.), Aufklärung und Geschichte, pp. 193-221, here pp. 198-201.
- See S.J. Baumgarten, "Vorrede", in *Uebersetzung der Algemeinen Welthistorie. Erster Theil*, Halle, 1744, p. 36.
- 32 Ibidem. Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten thus takes exception not only to the skepticism coming from France, which spread a systematic suspicion towards historical studies, but also to the diffidence towards history descending from the Wolffian assumptions. See M. Schloemann, Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten. Theologie und Geschichte in der Theologie des Übergangs zum Neuprotestantismus, Göttingen, 1974, pp. 140-143. Schloemann deals in detail with Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten's attempt to overcome the neglect of history on the part of the Wolffian system, without blatantly breaking with the principles of Wolffian philosophy, see pp. 135-156. On his relationship with skepticism, see also M. Völkel, "Pyrrhonismus historicus" und "fides historica". Die Entwicklung der deutschen Methodologie unter dem Gesichtspunkt der historischen Skepsis, Frankfurt am Main, 1987, pp. 229-253.
- J.M. Chladenius, Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft, Leipzig, 1752, "Vorrede".
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, ch. 5, § 1.
- 35 Ibidem.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, ch. 5, § 2.
- 37 Ibidem.
- <sup>38</sup> See *ibidem*, ch. 5, § 3.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, ch. 5, §§ 3-4.

- 40 *Ibidem*, ch. 5, § 13.
- See J. Nieraad, Standpunktbewußtsein und Weltzusammenhang. Das Bild vom lebendigen Spiegel bei Leibniz und seine Bedeutung für das Alterswerk Goethes, Wiesbaden, 1970, pp. 77ff.
- Lucian, How to write history, 50.
- <sup>43</sup> Chladenius, Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft, ch. 6, § 1.
- Historical knowledge is therefore strictly linked with a theory of sensuous cognition, see Ch. Friedrich, Sprache und Geschichte. Untersuchungen zur Hermeneutik von Johann Martin Chladenius, Meisenheim am Glan, 1978, p. 215.
- Chladenius, *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft*, ch. 6, § 1: "Wenn die wahre Beschaffenheit der Geschichte, oder vielmehr der Erzehlungen recht einsehen will, so ist nicht genug, daß wir wissen, wie die Begebenheiten denen Zuschauern auf verschiedene Weise, gleichsam als in Spiegeln von verschiedener Gattung und Stellung vorgstellet werden [...]; sondern wir müssen auch noch eine andere Handlung der Seele, welche vor der Erzehlung vorhergeht, bemercken, welche wir die *Verwandelung der Geschichte* nennen wollen; weil die Begebenheit niemahls *vollkommen so*, wie sie empfunden worden, erzehlet wird, sondern vielmehr *nach* einem gewissen Bilde, welches aus der Empfindung und deren Vorstellung durchs Gedächtniß herausgezogen wird. Denn wir erzehlen die Sachen nicht in der Empfindung, und währender Vorstellung, sondern nach derselben: und richten uns also nach dem Bilde, welches durch die Empfindung in unsere Seele ist eingepräget worden".
- 46 *Ibidem*, ch. 6, § 2.
- 47 *Ibidem*, ch. 6, §§ 3-4; 7.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, ch. 6, § 5.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, ch. 6, § 6.
- 50 Ibidem.
- 51 Ibidem, ch. 6, § 9. Chladenius records other aspects of the transformation which I omit for space reasons.
- A.G. Baumgarten, Acroasis logica, Halle, 1761, § 163; see also Baumgarten, Aesthetica, § 482. According to Baumgarten experience in a broader sense includes the collection of cognitions in which some elements of sensation are involved. See P. Pimpinella, "Experientia/Erfahrung in Wolff e Baumgarten", in M. Veneziani (ed.), Experientia, Firenze, 2002, pp. 367-397; A. Nannini, "Aesthetica experimentalis. Baumgarten and the Aesthetic Dimension of Experience", in K. de Boer; T. Prunea (eds.), The Experiential Turn in Eighteenth-Century German Philosophy, London, 2021, pp. 55-78.
- A.G. Baumgarten, Aesthetica, Traiecti cis viadrum, 1750, § 505. According to Baumgarten, the term "sensitivum" does not refer to the perceptions of the senses alone, but also to the perceptions of the other lower powers of the mind (imagination, memory, taste, wit, etc.). The representations of past

events are fictions, insofar as they grasp the individual, unlike the abstract notions of the intellect, but not by direct experience, unlike the perceptions of the senses. For his part, Chladenius explicitly rejected the term 'fiction' (*Erdichtung*), insofar as fiction is for him connected with lies and falsehood, see Chladenius, *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft*, ch. 6, § 36.

Baumgarten, Aesthetica, § 506. In the wide set of fictions in a broad sense, the most strictly true fictions and the fictions which include some elements of possibility are called historical fictions in the strictest sense: "Historical fictions in the broadest sense embrace the knowledge of this universe of those who think in a beautiful way, without their having directly derived it from experience. They, as strictly true fictions, propose, at least to those who have no experience of them, strictly real events in this universe, or they propose such things that, provided that all events and their circumstances are known to us through the senses in this universe, could have taken place or could take place: and these are, even if thought by poets, strictly historical fictions" (§ 509). When the latter are used by historians, it is clear that the element of possibility must be used with caution, in particular to bridge the gaps in the sources with suitable conjectures (see for instance the case of Coriolanus, in which Livy inserts the speech of Coriolanus' mother, in order to account for his emotion, § 438) and must not be abused (for example, the storms in Virgil are historical fictions but are not appropriate to the historian, because they are possible, but without any evidence).

The "fictiones strictissime verae" also include the things temporarily present but spatially outside the scope of my sensations, which I however know through my sensibility; and the future things which I anticipate, as a tower in the mind of an architect, see Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, § 506.

Baumgarten, Aesthetica, § 483. The aesthetic truth is a potiori defined as verisimilitude, which can be thought of as truth to the analogue of reason. I have already developed this argument in A. Nannini, "In the Wake of Clio. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten on History", Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte, 93\1 (2019), pp. 1-41, here pp. 32-35.

Verisimilitude in the strictest sense or historical verisimilitude is one of the two kinds of aesthetic verisimilitude. In this case, even the perception of falsehood in a broader sense is banished. The other kind of aesthetic verisimilitude is the heterocosmic verisimilitude, see Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, § 530.

Baumgarten, Aesthetica, § 431; A.G. Baumgarten, "Kollegium über die Ästhetik", in B. Poppe, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. Seine Bedeutung und Stellung in der Leibniz-Wolffischen Philosophie und seine Beziehungen zu Kant, Borna-Leipzig, 1907, § 431. Such a possibility entails the compliance with the non-contradiction principle, see Baumgarten, Aesthetica, § 431; also, it includes both natural and moral hypothetical possibility, see

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- Baumgarten, Aesthetica, §§ 432-436; Baumgarten, "Kollegium über die Ästhetik", §§ 433-435.
- <sup>59</sup> Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, § 437. The reference to the principle of reason and of consequence is clear, see also Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, § 426.
- Baumgarten, Aesthetica, §§ 437-438.
- S.J. Baumgarten, "Vorrede", pp. 9-10. The internal verisimilitude of an occurrence therefore increases if it is possible to show its nexus with the following occurrence, see p. 18. On the contrary, external reasons rest on the reliability and the number of witnesses, see p. 11.
- The proximity of poetics and history in the eighteenth century was highlighted by Koselleck, see Koselleck, Futures Past, p. 204.
- See Nannini, "In the Wake of Clio", pp. 33-34, note 232.
- <sup>64</sup> G.Fr. Meier, *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften*, vol. I, Halle im Magdeburgischen, 1748, § 106.
- <sup>65</sup> See Scharloth, "Evidenz und Wahrscheinlichkeit", pp. 264ff.
- 66 Chladenius also remarks the role of impartiality for witnesses. The fact is that impartiality does not rest on the impossible overcoming of the limited perspective of the historian, but on the attempt to adhere as fairly as possible to evidence. See Chladenius, Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft, ch. 6, § 34: "Unpartheyisch erzehlen kan daher nichts anders heissen, als die Sache erzehlen, ohne daß man das geringste darin vorsetzlich verdrehet oder verdunckelt: oder sie nach seinem besten Wissen und Gewissen erzehlen: so wie hingegen eine partheyische Erzehlung nichts anders als eine Verdrehung der Geschichte ist". To quote Baumgarten's colleague in Frankfurt on the Oder Simonetti: "Ein Geist den die Vorurtheile des Ansehns, der Gewinsucht, des Volks, des Landes, der Lebensart, der vermeinten Religion plagen, kann unmöglich die Wahrheit schreiben", see Ch.E. Simonetti, Der Character des Geschichtsschreibers, Göttingen, 1746, p. 25. For the concept of impartiality in this period, see K. Murphy, A. Traninger (eds.), The Emergence of Impartiality, Leiden, 2014.
- <sup>67</sup> Baumgarten, Aesthetica, § 584.
- <sup>68</sup> Baumgarten, Acroasis logica, § 430.
- Baumgarten, Acroasis logica, § 357. If the assent given to testimony rests on sufficient grounds, faith is called rational, see A.G. Baumgarten (praeses); G.Ch.W. Bütow (auctor), Dissertatio inauguralis de fidei in philosophia utilitate, Francofurti ad Viadrum, 1750, § 4. For a comment, see C. Schwaiger, "Philosophie und Glaube bei Christian Wolff und Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten", Aufklärung 23 (2011), pp. 213-228.
- <sup>70</sup> Baumgarten, Acroais logica, § 363.
- Baumgarten, *Acroasis logica*, § 361: "Dexteritas testis est sufficientia virium eius ad proponendum eius, quod testator, veritatem, eiusque propensio ad testandum, quae testanda novit, est sinceritas".

- Baumgarten, *Acroasis logica*, § 362. The highest certainty is given by a testimony which is recognized as divine, see § 371.
- <sup>73</sup> Baumgarten, *Acroasis logica*, § 380. This means that one should not accept by faith what is in contradiction with experience or reason.
- Baumgarten, Acroasis logica, § 381. Taking up Wolff's distinction between necessitas absoluta and necessitas hypothetica, Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten distinguished the internal and the external necessity, so as to grant a form of certainty to the knowledge of history too (in this case, as external necessity), S.J. Baumgarten, "Vorrede", p. 19; see on this Schloemann, Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten, pp. 148-150.
- In his Deutsche Logik, Wolff does not use the term "certainty" in this context, see Ch. Wolff, Vernünfftige Gedancken von den Kräfften des menschlichen Verstandes, Halle, 1713, ch. 7, §§ 5ff. Even if he introduces the term "certainty" in the Logica latina, this is still linked with a subjective sphere (Wolff, Philosophia rationalis, § 614); see Schloemann, Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten, p. 144, note 220. I developed this aspect in A. Nannini, "In the Wake of Clio", pp. 10-11.
- S.J. Baumgarten, "Vorrede", p. 19. See already F.W. Bierling (praeses); G. Patje (respondens), Dissertatio de pyrrhonismo historico, Rinthelii, 1707,
   4. On the rules to determine on a case-by-case basis the degree of certainty in history according to S.J. Baumgarten, see Schloemann, Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten, pp. 146ff.
- A.G. Baumgarten, Aestheticorum pars altera, Francofurti cis Viadrum, 1758, § 842.
- <sup>78</sup> See Koselleck, *Futures Past*, pp. 111-112. Given that historians are not obliged to narrate a certain event in a single way, there may be potentially infinite sound fictions of the same historical event.
- 79 Th. Zwinger, Theatrum humanae vitae, vol. 6, Basileae, 1586, p. 1581. As is well known, the claim that historical cognition might rely on fictions runs against the established assumption that fictions have to do with poetry. To quote the great medieval etymologist Isidore of Seville: "Histories are true matters that happened" (Historiae sunt res verae quae factae sunt) (Etymologiae, 1.44/5); on the contrary "Poets have named 'fables' from 'speaking' (fando), since they are not things that happened (res factae) but only fictions by speaking (loquendo fictae) (Etymologiae 1.40.1). The opposition between history and poetry goes back to the ninth chapter of Aristotle's *Poetics*: "The difference between the historian and the poet is not between using verse or prose; Herodotus' work could be versified and would be just as much a kind of history in verse as in prose. No, the difference is this: that the one relates actual events, the other the kinds of things that might occur" (1451b). Hence, history, in its privileged relation to res singulares is different not only from the episteme of science, but also from poetry, insofar as the latter deals with universals (although not in the

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same way as science). Compared to history, poetry is thus more philosophical for Aristotle; see Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, 7.17a38-b1; *Metaphysica*, 1.2.982a24-5. As Koselleck pointed out, this assumption gave rise to two traditions in the West, one of which stayed true to Aristotle's teaching, the other one advocating the superiority of history to poetry because of poetry's mendacity, see Koselleck, *Futures Past*, pp. 205-206. For the relationship between poetry and history in the Western tradition, see K. Heitmann, "Das Verhältnis von Dichtung und Geschichts[s]chreibung in älterer Theorie", *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 52 (1970), pp. 244-279.

<sup>80</sup> Koselleck spoke about the relationship of *res factae* and *res fictae* in Koselleck, *Futures Past*, pp. 205ff.

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