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Historical Studies in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Case of Hartwig Floto

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Abstract

History was a key discipline in what the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey called the 'human sciences' (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Focusing on the German lands, this chapter surveys what the study of history looked like in the decades prior to the publication of Dilthey's *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* (Introduction to the Human Sciences, 1883). It does so, somewhat unconventionally, by zooming in on Hartwig Floto (1825-1881), a largely forgotten pupil of the famous Leopold von Ranke. Apart from the fact that this biographical angle adds color and flavor to an otherwise too abstract story, Floto's life and work lend themselves well for discussion of both familiar and not-yet-familiar themes in the history of the humanities: Ranke's historical exercises, historians' middle-class backgrounds, research institutions like the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, but also historians' personae as typically described in terms of virtues and vices. This chapter therefore aims to do two things at once: it offers an accessible introduction to nineteenth-century German historical studies, and it also seeks to showcase both older and newer lines of research in the history of the humanities.

Keywords: historical studies, historiography, German historical scholarship, Hartwig Floto, Leopold von Ranke, Georg Waitz, Heinrich von Sybel, Jacob Burckhardt

Introduction

In December 1855, the Berlin historian Leopold von Ranke sent a letter of recommendation for one of his former students, Hartwig Floto, to the University of Basel. Another former student of his, Jacob Burckhardt, had taught there for a couple of years, but moved on to a chair in Zurich. Was the thirty-year-old Floto, the author of a historical monograph on Emperor

Henry IV, a good match for the job? According to Ranke, Floto was a man with 'lively zeal for historical studies' and 'excellent capacities'. Pairing broad historical knowledge with solid methodical techniques, Floto was likely to be a stimulating role model for students. Although Ranke confessed that 'I cannot judge his teaching talent', he added that 'everything I have heard' testified positively to Floto's teaching qualities (Ranke 1949: 369).

Although Ranke's letter was instrumental in getting Floto appointed to the chair in Basel, its prose was not as glowing as on other occasions. Compared to the enthusiastic letter that Ranke wrote for Wilhelm Wattenbach, just a year before, it described Floto's suitability in rather generic terms. Clearly, this tells us something about the job applicant. As Ranke had confided to a Basel university administrator, just a few weeks earlier, Floto had a 'lively spirit' and could boast a 'broad education', but was not as thorough a researcher as, for instance, Ernst Dümmler (a man who grew to become a leading figure in the German historical discipline). What Ranke's letter tacitly conveys, therefore, is that Floto, though diligent and talented, belonged to a different league than Burckhardt, Wattenbach, or Dümmler. He was, indeed, a more average talent than some other students of Ranke's – which is one reason, though not the only one, why Floto has become an almost forgotten historian.

Precisely his lack of remarkability, however, makes Floto an appropriate figure for the purposes of this chapter. The goal in the pages that follow is a broad survey of historical studies in nineteenth-century Germany, explored through the prism of Floto's biography. On the one hand, this allows consideration of some familiar themes: Ranke's historical exercises in Berlin, which Floto attended in 1846-7, the middle-class background of most 'professional' historians, and the growing importance of research institutions like the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. On the other hand, the case of Floto makes it possible to highlight some newer insights, related to historiographical virtues and vices as well as to the relation between 'professional' audiences and non-academic readers. Also, whereas biographies of famous scholars like Ranke sometimes suggest a course of life in which hard work at early age is rewarded with honor and fame at later stages, the case of Floto shows how differently a historian's career could develop under less fortunate circumstances.

On a broader canvas, the case of Floto therefore makes it possible to showcase some of the research being done in the history of the humanities – a small but flourishing field of inquiry that can be regarded as part of the history of the human sciences, even if it is not strongly represented in this handbook (cf. Paul 2022). One might argue that the discipline of

history, especially in its nineteenth-century German incarnation, deserves coverage in a volume like this because so many of the human sciences originate in what Wilhelm Dilthey famously called the *Geisteswissenschaften*: a cluster of disciplines to which the field of history was central (Smith 2007: 128). Along these lines, this chapter will describe in some detail the look of German historical studies in the decades prior to the publication of Dilthey's *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* (Introduction to the Human Sciences, 1883). (Rudolf Makkreel, in his chapter to this volume, discusses Dilthey's own contributions.) Most importantly, however, the case of Floto will be used to illustrate what kind of questions historians of the humanities are currently addressing, what kinds of concepts they are employing, and how a biographical perspective enables us to see how abstract issues of methodology and professionalization played out in the life of an ordinary, not very successful historian.

Social and educational background

Friedrich Wilhelm Theodor Hartwig Floto (sometimes also spelled as Flotho) was born in 1825 in Arendsee, a municipality in the German Altmark region, where his father, a high-ranking government official, was responsible for administering the royal lands. When the boy was seven years old, the family moved to Oschersleben, a town just north of Halberstadt. Floto attended the Stephaneum gymnasium in Halberstadt before being admitted to Schulpforta, the famous boarding school near Naumberg, where Karl Rudolf Fickert and Karl Steinhart were among his teachers. Judging by the fact that Floto recited a self-written poem on the occasion of the school's third centenary, his performance as a student must not have been bad (Kirchner 1843: vii).

With this social and educational background, Floto was fairly typical for historians of his generation. Most of them – 69 percent of the cohort that entered the professoriate in the 1850s – came from upper-middle-class families, with fathers being employed as professor, gymnasium teacher, pastor, or middle to high-ranking civil servant. Confessionally, the Protestant Floto also belonged to the mainstream: no less than 75 percent of his cohort had a Protestant background (Weber 1984: 72-73, 84-85). Only his education at Schulpforta, the elite school also attended by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Ranke, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, and Friedrich Nietzsche, gave Floto a small advantage over his peers. With its traditional emphasis on classical studies and character development, this neo-humanist school prepared him well for academic study in Berlin, where Floto enrolled in October 1844.

As customary at a time when specialized study did not yet exist, Floto attended courses by professors as diverse as the geographer Carl Ritter, the philosophers Georg Andreas Gabler and Leopold George, the theologian Johann Karl Wilhelm Vatke, and the *Staatswissenschaftler* (scholar of the sciences of state) Wilhelm von Dönniges. However, as Floto would state in the Latin *vita* attached to his dissertation, the teacher who influenced him most was Ranke, 'who in public and private teaching opened me the way to a correct understanding of history' (Floto 1847: 66). Given Ranke's central role in the nineteenth-century German historical profession, it is worth looking in some detail at how Floto experienced his study with him.

Ranke's historical exercises

Beginning with Ranke, who by the end of the century came to be known as the 'founding father' of modern historical scholarship, is not entirely without risk. Such a start is in danger of reproducing some of the historiographical myths that historians around 1900 spun around the Berlin historian – his allegedly 'scientific' approach to history, for example – while ignoring Ranke's indebtedness to earlier generations of scholars. It is especially noteworthy that Ranke's critical distance from predecessors like Johann Christopher Gatterer, August Ludwig von Schlözer, and Arnold Heeren has often been overstated. In addition, beginning with Ranke's historical exercises might obscure the fact that his research and teaching habits were not unique but part of a broader transformation of early nineteenth-century German intellectual life (Toews 2004). However, this being said, it cannot be doubted that one of key factors responsible for Ranke becoming the best-known German historian of his time was his successful imitation of the philological seminar, such as the seminar offered in Berlin by the classical scholar August Böckh. In weekly gatherings, Ranke had some of his most talented students familiarize themselves with primary sources with the aim of developing their critical reading skills (Berg 1968: 51-56). Writing in 1856, Floto still remembered how different this teaching format had been from what he had been used to:

> [T]he method of the famous historian surprised me. What we were offered was not a well-delineated course, no well-argued lectures. Ranke *had us read*. Soon we were interpreting the *Germania* [by Tacitus]; soon we were reading two chroniclers who covered one and the same subject – or he shared with us the three *relazioni* [reports] issued by Charles V on the day of his conquest of Tunis, alerting us to the

> contradictions between them . . . . In one word: he showed us from what documents alone an authentic history could be created and taught us how to read these documents. This was all he did (Floto 1856a: 12).

The first thing to notice about this passage is that it depicts Ranke as a man fascinated by primary sources – *relazioni* and other unpublished material in particular. Although Ranke was, of course, not the first historian to recognize the importance of unpublished sources, he provoked both admiration and criticism for emphasizing the importance of unpublished source material to a greater degree than had been customary (Eskildsen 2008, 2019). Secondly, Floto emphasizes how critically the Berlin historian treated this material: attentive to inconsistencies and eager to distinguish between reliable and unreliable testimonies. Although this was not exactly representative of how Ranke was perceived around mid-century – at the time, he was better known for his aversion to moralizing history than for his advocacy of critical methods – Floto's portrayal of Ranke resembled that of Georg Waitz, who turned Ranke into an epitome of 'criticism', 'precision', and 'penetration' (Paul 2019a).

Thirdly, Floto's memories of Ranke's exercises reveal a distinctive feature of this Rankean school. Judging by such different figures as Waitz and Heinrich von Sybel, Ranke's students were not united in their understanding of the historian's task. They shared, however, the experience of having sat at Ranke's feet in the historiographical equivalent to the philological seminar that would soon become a site of high symbolic value. In the 1840s and 1850s, many of Ranke's former students started similar exercises at other German universities, convinced that such *Übungen* (exercises), lovingly compared to scientific laboratories, were an effective means for socializing students into a critical historical ethos (Eskildsen 2015). Floto would do the same: soon after his appointment in Basel in 1856, he would start offering one-hour 'historical exercises'.

Partly because of the exclusivity of these *Übungen* – typically held in the professor's home, in the sanctuary of his private study – the exercises quickly acquired a prestigious aura. Former students expressed their gratitude for having participated in them by organizing festivities on anniversary occasions, with speeches, music, and presents for the man who had initiated them into the historian's craft (Schnicke 2015a). Emphasizing the exclusivity of the bonds created through shared study, many students conceived of themselves as a 'family' headed by a 'father' (with Ranke, the 'father of modern historical scholarship', serving as

patriarch *par excellence*). Although Floto did not literally call himself a son of father Ranke, it is significant that he shared his memories of Ranke's exercises in his inaugural address, thereby presenting himself to his Swiss colleagues and students as a representative of Rankean historiography. Tellingly, Floto also dedicated his dissertation and his first book to Ranke, as a sign of what he called his *pietas* (loyalty) to the master.

The priority of teaching

Ranke's historical exercises have often been interpreted as a decisive step towards more specialized, research-oriented education than was provided in lecture series of the kind that Floto also attended during his student years in Berlin. It is important to keep in mind, however, that *Übungen* never replaced *Vorlesungen* (lectures) (Lingelbach 2006). Ranke himself, for one, was convinced that teaching broad survey courses was as important a task for historians as initiating talented students into the secrets of source criticism. Also, not all the young men who attended exercises eventually became historians. In 1866, the ancient historian Alfred von Gutschmid reported that eight of the nine students in his exercises were philologists (Liepmann 1916: 368). More importantly, by mid-century, few historians thought of themselves primarily as researchers. Emerging out of an academic tradition in which history classes mostly served propaedeutic purposes, history professors resembled *Gymnasium* teachers in that they were first and foremost educators of the youth. As Hans-Jürgen Pandel (1993: 348) puts it: 'Their self-understanding was shaped after the model of the "teacher" more than after the model of the "researcher."' As we shall see below, it was only near the end of the century, when large-scale research projects gave an impetus to specialized archival research, that historians would come to grant research a more prominent place in their understanding of the professor's vocation.

Floto's career reflects this priority given to teaching over research in at least two ways. First, like most other historians of his generation, Floto spent some years teaching in non-academic settings before landing an academic teaching position. After finishing his studies with Ranke in 1847, he taught for a while at the knight academy in Liegnitz (nowadays Legnica), a school for sons of the Silesian aristocracy and landed gentry, where Floto proved himself a 'promising young teacher' (Bethusy 1849: 9). Soon, however, political tensions between Prussia and Austria interfered with teaching. Drafted for military service in November 1850, Floto was added to the Emperor Alexander Guard Grenadiers in Berlin.

Interestingly, the young historian managed to make a virtue out of necessity: he produced a textbook for aspiring infantry officers, published in 1853 with a laudatory preface by Colonel Gustav von Griesheim (Floto 1853). After this military interlude, Floto returned to teaching, this time as a private family tutor in Berlin (the kind of job that had been common among eighteenth-century historians, but, as Blanke [1989: 357] points out, had become more exceptional by the 1850s). So when Ranke, in the letter with which this chapter began, stated that Floto was reported to have strong didactic skills, he apparently assumed that teaching experience at the *Gymnasium* level was relevant to a university career.

One reason why the University of Basel agreed with this assumption was that its (only) professor of history was also expected to teach the three upper classes of the city's humanistic *Gymnasium*. Accordingly, 'a teacher who has a stimulating effect on the youth' matched their job profile better than a historian who devoted his time to specialized research (Roth 1935: 58). Arguably, then, the reason that not Dümmler but Floto got the chair was the expectation that the latter would be best able to win 'the fondness of the Swiss youth'. Interestingly, even assessments of Floto's research were focused on the author's didactic potential. Judging by his articles, wrote Jacob Burckhardt to the mayor of Basel, Floto would not be 'a bad teacher' for the local youth. Likewise, the Basel university officials highlighted his 'inspiring teaching talent, vivid spirit, youthful enthusiasm, and broad education'. Speaking about Floto's research on Emperor Henry IV, they showed themselves especially pleased by the historian's 'fresh manner of expression' (Roth 1935: 60). The *Basler Zeitung* maintained this tone even in reporting about Floto's inaugural address in May 1856. Devoting not a single word to his research, the newspaper observed that the 'newly appointed teacher of history' had displayed a heartening talent for teaching: 'Any observer competent to judge . . . has been able to see that Floto is the right man to motivate the youth for historical education and study' (quoted in N. N. 1856a).

Teachers of the nation

Students, however, were not the only audience that German historians at the time sought to reach. Neither was their teaching limited to *Vorlesungen* and *Übungen*. Since the eighteenth century, historians had taken pride in educating the nation. In writing for educated fellow countrymen, they had tried to be 'teachers of Germany' (*praeceptores Germaniae*) or public intellectuals who helped their readers understand themselves in the mirror of history.

Because of the political dimension of this popular history writing, scholars have often highlighted the extent to which historians were 'builders of the nation' (Lenhard-Schramm 2014), even if they limited themselves to writing history books, without participating in, for instance, the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848-9 (as did Johann Gustav Droysen, Sybel, and Waitz). It is important to keep in mind, however, that not all historians who tried to be teachers of the nation were as fervently patriotic as Droysen, Sybel, Heinrich von Treitschke, and other members of the so-called Prussian Historical School, or as narrowly focused on the history of Germany's political fate as Treitschke in his *Deutsche Geschichte im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (German History in the Nineteenth Century, 5 vols., 1879-94). Friedrich Christoph Schlosser, for example, wrote his *Weltgeschichte für das deutsche Volk* (World History for the German People, 19 vols., 1844-57) primarily from a moral point of view, even though his anti-elitist identification with the German 'people' also had an unmistakable political subtext.

The extent to which Floto aimed to be a teacher of the nation is apparent from his 1850s work on Henry IV, the eleventh-century German ruler whom Pope Gregory VII famously forced to seek absolution for his excommunication in Canossa. In order to reach a wide readership, Floto pre-published lengthy excerpts of his two-volume monograph, *Kaiser Heinrich der Vierte und sein Zeitalter* (Emperor Henry IV and His Age, 1855-6), in cultural magazines such as the *Deutsches Museum*. The book itself was reviewed in more than a dozen periodicals, most of which were cultural monthlies and review journals targeted at a broad spectrum of readers. Although some reviewers offered quasi-professional commentary by pointing out factual mistakes or argumentative flaws, most reviews focused on the readability of Floto's book, arguing that it was eminently suited for a general public because of its attractive writing style. Indeed, if reviewers agreed on one thing, it was that Floto knew how to write. According to the *Schwäbischer Merkur*, even readers 'who are not used to attending seriously to an old German emperor' would enjoy *Kaiser Heinrich der Vierte* (N. N. 1855). Another reviewer even found the book so 'plain, fresh, and clear' that it could stand comparison with 'the best German, English, and French historical works from recent times' (N. N. 1856b – a judgment that Floto's publisher did not fail to use as a blurb in advertisements for the book).

Echoing these judgments, other readers came to similar conclusions. The diplomat and biographer Karl August Varnhagen von Ense noted in his diary that he found Floto's style reminiscent of Ranke's. The Austrian novelist, playwright, and poet Ferdinand von Saar found

himself so impressed with the book that he planned to dedicate the second part of his dramatic poem, *Kaiser Heinrich IV.* (Emperor Henry IV), to Floto. Even the Bavarian King Maximilian II, who was an avid history reader, responded favorably to Floto's debut, judging by his attempt to get the author appointed to a history chair in Erlangen (where things worked out differently, though: the chair went to Karl Hegel, another student of Ranke's).

Floto's aim of reaching readers beyond the circle of his colleagues is also apparent from the content of his book, especially from his perhaps surprising habit of emphasizing, time and again, the superiority of 'modern' thought over superstitious religious ideas of the kind held by Gregory VII and other eleventh-century clergy. Drawing on stereotypical contrasts between science and religion that circulated widely in nineteenth-century Europe (Ungureanu 2019), Floto presented pre-Copernican geo-centrism as a vivid illustration of 'the ignorance and barbarism of the Middle Ages'. In even less flattering terms, he described the doctrine of Eucharistic transubstantiation as the 'biggest and most ridiculous aberration of the human spirit' that has ever occurred, to which he added that the continuous prevalence of this idea sadly shows that 'we clever Europeans . . . in many respects do not stand much higher than the fetish worshippers at the southern border of the Sahara' (Floto 1855: 117, 163). Clearly, Floto did not hesitate to adopt a stance and tell his readers, not merely 'how things actually had been' (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*, in Ranke's famous expression), but also, in the words of another great historian, Benedetto Croce, 'what is living and what is dead' in Europe's medieval past.

This, of course, gave reviewers ample grounds for accusing Floto of 'partiality'. Even commentators who shared the author's 'historical-political views' doubted whether it was appropriate to articulate these views in a historical monograph. As the *Heidelberger Jahrbücher der Literatur* put it: '[The historian should] keep the pages of history writing as clean as possible and not spatter them with his potential exuberance of patriotic gall and disgruntlement' (N. N. 1856c: 121). Likewise, despite Floto's style being widely praised, several reviewers found his 'unpolished' prose, his 'striving for popularity', or his penchant for rhetorical effect incompatible with serious historical scholarship. One reviewer grumbled that the book seemed to be written for Berlin salon audiences (a verdict that was actually not wide of the mark, given that Floto had attended such salons when teaching in Berlin). Or as a British reviewer concluded: 'Indeed his style altogether savours too much of the newspaper, and is disfigured by frequent instances of vulgarity' (N. N. 1858a).

Professionalization

It is possible to interpret these criticisms as evidence of the 'professionalization' of German historical studies? The answer depends on what the term is understood to mean. There is a rich tradition of equating professionalization with the development of a discipline-specific scholarly infrastructure, complete with university chairs, specialized journals, and professional conferences (see, e.g., Porciani and Raphael 2010). This is clearly not what Floto's critics worried about, nor something to which Floto himself actively contributed. Tellingly, he never published an article in Sybel's *Historische Zeitschrift*. Professionalization becomes a more relevant concept, however, if it denotes the rise of specialized training such as offered in historical exercises and the codification of historical methods in textbooks like Ernst Bernheim's *Lehrbuch der historischen Methode* (Manual of Historical Method, 1889) (Torstendahl 2014). Both the growing demand for methodological reflection, known in German as *Historik*, and the spread of Ranke-style exercises showed that historians began to place increasingly higher demands on research. By mid-century, it was no longer plausible to say, as Arnold Heeren had done, that source criticism 'is a beautiful and necessary thing' as long as it remains an auxiliary science, subordinate to historical writing. Also, at a time when archival repositories made rapidly expanding amounts of source material accessible to researchers, the Rankean dictum that historians write on the basis of primary sources made it increasingly difficult to cover large topics within the covers of a single book. Historical research was therefore professionalizing in the sense that scholars increasingly expected each other to write in a degree of detail that effectively excluded general readers, thereby creating a demand for specialized journals like the *Historische Zeitschrift* (Jørgensen 2012).

For historians who still primarily saw themselves as teachers, the rise of specialized *Forschung* (research) did not imply that middle-class ideals of *Bildung* (self-cultivation) became obsolete. Throughout the nineteenth century, German historians continued to write for non-professional audiences in the form of newspaper articles, essays for cultural monthlies, and popular books. Just as the emergence of journals as platforms for scholarly communication did not lead to the disappearance of books, so the advances of specialized research did not alienate historians from the educated middle classes that had been their primary audience. As Martin Nissen (2009: 317-9) argues, it is more accurate to say that

professionalization increasingly required historians to *negotiate* the demands of their profession and the demands of a wider public sphere.

Although this resulted in some scholars turning their back on popular history writing, many others continued at least occasionally to reach out to non-professional readers. One reason for doing so was that historical scholarship and *Wissenschaft* more generally enjoyed high prestige among the German educated middle classes. 'Knowing your history' was part and parcel of what it meant to be an educated citizen (Mommsen 1998). Also, in an era of cultural and political nationalism, historians could serve as experts on national identity – a public role that turned historians like Sybel into 'political professors' (scholars eager to use their broad knowledge of the past to help the nation understand its present situation and guide it firmly towards an imagined future) (Muhlack 2001). Against this double background, it makes sense to say that until at least the 1880s, 'professional history remained, by and large, popular in the sense that the works by professionals were widely celebrated and professional historians saw themselves as national pedagogues' (Berger, Melman, and Lorenz 2012: 8). However, as illustrated by the reviews that Floto's book elicited, historians trying to reconcile the demands of *Forschung* and *Bildung* could not expect to gain approval from all sides. In an age of professionalization, scholars reaching out to general readers could be seen as insufficiently living up to scholarly standards. They ran a risk of being perceived, at least by those most committed to *Wissenschaftlichkeit* (a scientific attitude), as 'outsiders' instead of 'insiders' – as happened most famously to Treitschke, the Prussian historian who reached more readers than any of his colleagues but found himself fiercely attacked for violating the research standards of an emerging historical profession (Gerhards 2013).

Confessional and political fault lines

German historians disagreed not only over the relation between *Bildung* and *Forschung*; they were also divided along political and confessional lines. Although virtually all historians were, in one way or another, committed to the German national cause, in a country known as 'a nation of provincials' (Applegate 1990), this nationalism took on different forms. For many German citizens, regional and confessional identifications were at least as strong as national ones. Among historians, this diversity resulted in two loosely defined schools, geographically located in the northern and southern German lands, respectively. While the first was

committed to a 'little' Germany led by Protestant Prussia, the second dreamt of a 'big' Germany with a hegemonic role for Catholic Austria (Brechenmacher 1996).

Insofar as scholars of German historiography have focused their attention on the Protestant north – on places like Berlin and Göttingen, where Ranke, Waitz, and others pushed the limits of historical criticism – they have repeated a pattern already visible by the mid-nineteenth century. To the annoyance of their colleagues in Bavaria, Prussian historians made few attempts to hide their sense of professional superiority. Waitz, for instance, openly declared that 'north German historians are more learned [and] more objective' than their colleagues in the south – a verdict that an angry critic subsequently denounced as 'slander'. Likewise, when Sybel, Prussian to the bone, was appointed to a chair in Munich, where he launched a periodical from which 'ultramontane' contributors were explicitly excluded, Bavarians agitated against what they perceived as Sybel's 'historical sect'. Although later generations, weary of the confessional polemics of Otto von Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, would adopt more reconciling stances, by the 1850s, the political divide between north and south, reinforced by a confessional divide between Protestantism and Catholicism, was still strong enough to challenge the serene idea of a single historical profession in which scholars of different persuasions could participate on equal footing (Paul 2018: 708-9).

As a proud Lutheran Prussian, Floto did not fail to contribute to these tensions. As we saw above, his book on Henry IV, written for an audience of 'we Protestants' (Floto 1855: 163), did not eschew anti-Catholic polemics. On the contrary, the author's dislike of clerical celibacy was such that he saw no harm in digressing from historical analysis to praise Martin Luther for allowing priests to marry. Among other things, this provoked a 27-page rebuttal in the *Historisch-politische Blätter für das katholische Deutschland*, a Catholic periodical that accused Floto of abusing the past for present religious-political purposes ('The poor Salian Henry IV is raised from his grave to make hocus pocus for the party goals of Professor Hartwig Floto': N. N. 1858b: 453). Instead of trying to refute such charges, Floto self-confidently affirmed his religious-political views by stating that he was not at all ashamed of ascribing to Goethe's maxim: 'We scarcely know what we owe to Luther' (Floto 1856b: vi)

Unsurprisingly, Floto's anti-Catholicism became most virulent during the *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s. This is especially apparent from a speech delivered in 1877 at the unveiling of the so-called Canossa Pillar in the Harz mountains near Goslar. Marking the eighth centenary of Henry IV's trek to Canossa, this fifteen-meter-high monument was decorated with a portrait

of Bismarck, the staunchly anti-Catholic chancellor, who just a few months earlier had uttered the famous words, 'Don't worry; we are not going to Canossa, neither spiritually nor physically.' Unlike Waitz, who showed himself increasingly critical of such political appropriations of the medieval past, Floto used the occasion to pull out all the stops. According to a newspaper report, he charged the Jesuits with plotting a war against 'Protestant Prussia', while aiming for a re-Catholicization of the world that would effectively undo the Protestant Reformation (Dormaier 1990: 238). Although Floto was hardly politically active, at moments like this, he resembled the figure of the 'political professor' mentioned above.

Virtues and vices

All of this – Floto's upper-middle-class background, his Rankean training, his popular history writing, and his political anti-Catholicism – translated into the persona of the historian as portrayed in Floto's inaugural address, *Ueber historische Kritik* (On Historical Criticism). Older scholarly literature has treated this inaugural as a methodological contribution to 'historicism', with the term *Historismus* serving as shorthand for historians who tried to study the past as objectively as possible through consistent application of critical methods (Rüsen 1993). Arguing along these lines, Jörn Rüsen has cited Floto as stating that criticism lies at the heart of historical studies, and students of Rüsen have treated Floto's inaugural as evidence of critical methods becoming a means for realizing scholarly objectivity (e.g., Blanke 1991: 259). Although the term 'historicism' continues to be used here and there, the habit of interpreting German historical studies in these terms is not as strong anymore as it was thirty or forty years ago. Whereas a previous generation emphasized the methodological assumptions shared among nineteenth-century historians – among other things with the aim of showing that there were other historical methodologies than those advocated by social scientists in the 1970s and 1980s – recent scholarship has come to recognize the diversity of the field that included Floto among its members. This diversity was not limited to political convictions or religious affiliations, but also manifested itself in disagreement over what 'professionalization' meant or what *Wissenschaftlichkeit* required (Middell 2010: 159).

This is neatly illustrated by the virtues (*Tugenden*) that Floto associated in his inaugural with the persona of the historian. On the one hand, he reproduced a set of well-known, almost stereotypical ideas about the virtues that a good historian should possess. Few colleagues

would have disputed Floto's claim that historians ought to be driven by a 'sincere desire only to investigate the truth'. Few would have challenged Floto's argument that scholars should be sufficiently 'reasonable' and 'honest' to check the accuracy of their interpretations. Likewise, Floto's comparison of the historian to a judge was as conventional as the implication of this image: historians should never be 'indolent' or 'partial' and guard themselves especially against 'ecclesial or political party considerations'. Even when portraying the historian as a scholar excelling in criticism, Floto felt that he was stating the obvious: 'There has never been a historian who has not, in one way or another, exercised criticism' (Floto 1856a: 14, 16, 15, 21, 17, 7).

Yet, on the other hand, the virtues that Floto advocated were not without implications: they corresponded to a distinct scholarly persona. For him, virtues of criticism distinguished the 'real historian' from the 'popular' one. Moreover, despite the fact that 'criticism' was the watchword of historians such as Dümmler, who focused their attention on minutiae of source criticism, Floto dissociated himself from them by arguing that criticism encompasses more than determining the reliability of primary source material. *Kritik* includes both 'dissecting' and 'creating', that is, both analysis and synthetic vision (seeing the past appear 'before one's eyes', as he put it in typically Rankean terms) (Floto 1856a: 17, 9). For this reason, Floto highlighted the need for historians to familiarize themselves with 'human nature' by participating actively in societal life. Over against the proverbial armchair scholar, he held up the example, not of Ranke, but of Edward Gibbon, whom Floto, the former infantry officer, assumed to have learned more from his year in the South Hampshire militia than he could ever have learned from reading another twenty folios (Floto 1856a: 18). Floto, in other words, depicted the critical historian as a figure in between the popular history writer, on the one hand, and the philological critic, on the other.

Moreover, for Floto, the virtues of the critical historian were colored by confessional allegiance. Drawing on the liberal Protestant view that Luther's Reformation had been a fight for freedom of conscience, Floto argued that Protestants were in a privileged position to exercise historical criticism, because they had 'least reason to conceal the truth' (Floto 1856a: 19). This was a thinly veiled way of saying that Catholics, to the extent that they were obliged to obey the church, could not be impartial or objective – especially not in studying an age like Henry IV's, in which the church had been so powerful. Similar views were articulated by Waitz, who argued that Catholics could enter the historical profession only by exchanging the

Catholic vice of prejudice for the Protestant virtue of objectivity, and by later scholars such as Max Lenz, who as late as 1902, in response to the appointment of a Catholic historian in Freiburg, repeated that only 'the spirit of the Reformation' allowed 'the will to objectivity' to flourish (Lenz 1902: 30). Clearly, then, Floto's historiographical virtues were charged with religious and political meaning.

Arguably, this is one of the reasons that virtues and vices are as of late increasingly receiving scholarly attention (Creyghton et al. 2016; Paul 2016). Among other things, the prism of virtues and vices allows historians of historiography to situate Floto and his colleagues in what Manfred Hettling and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (2000: 9) call Germany's 'middle class universe of values'. It draws attention to overlap and interplay between qualities associated with a good historian, on the one hand, and those cultivated by middle class citizens, on the other. Historians, after all, were not the only ones who valued virtues like 'industriousness' (*Fleiß*) and 'loyalty' (*Treue*). In addition, Floto's portrait of the historian as a 'man of the world' resonated with masculine identities cherished among politicians and more broadly in the public sphere (Schnicke 2015b). All this suggests that the qualities regarded as characteristic of good historians were more than merely 'epistemic virtues'. In a society where virtues were central to moral, political, and religious discourse alike, no historian could speak about virtues without invoking connotations that reached beyond the realm of knowledge production (Paul 2019b).

A broken career

When Floto delivered his inaugural, in May 1856, it looked like his career was developing successfully. He had been appointed to a chair at age thirty, six years below the average age at which historians entered the professoriate (Blanke 1989: 359). In addition to his regular teaching, which mostly consisted of survey courses on early modern European history, he engaged with broader local audiences in public lectures on Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Published in 1858, the lectures were received warmly by Robert Prutz, the poet and professor of literature in Halle, who spoke highly of Floto's 'thoroughness' and 'critical sharpness' (P[rutz] 1860: 663). His fame even spread abroad, judging by Floto being elected as corresponding member of a Dutch literary society.

But then misfortunate struck. In May 1857, the rising young scholar was hit by a stroke that left him half paralyzed and unable to speak, due to what a local physiologist diagnosed as

cerebral softening. Initially, Floto's prospects did not look bright. Writing to a friend, the classical scholar Johann Jakob Bachofen reported that while bodily recovery was conceivable, 'though not likely', 'mentally he will never recover'. Against all odds, however, Floto sufficiently recovered, at least in his own perception, to resume his work. Confidently, he announced new lectures on the Dutch Revolt, the French Revolution, the Reformation, and even 'The Beginnings of Roman History, Critically Treated'. Local authorities, however, noted more reservedly that Floto's hope of recovery was 'not supported by judgments of doctors'. This reservation turned out to be justified. After some difficult years, Floto had to retire (Roth 1935: 69, 79-80).

For the unfortunate historian, this marked the beginning of a wandering existence, marked by personal and professional difficulties that this chapter will not attempt to trace in any detail. A future biographer may want to examine how Floto tried to resume his teaching career at a girl's school in Berlin, while also making a vain attempt to get back into research by working on a prize contest on the history of the Hanseatic League. Likewise, this future biographer may want to investigate what happened to Floto in Göttingen, where the partly recovered historian was fortunate enough to get an honorary teaching position, yet managed to ruin his prospects by running up debts that became the talk of the town. (What didn't help either was that Floto, not known for his expertise in other areas than eleventh-century history, offered a lecture course on ancient Egypt at a university where Heinrich Brugsch, the famous Egyptologist, already taught an intensive, source-based course on Egyptian monuments. Known as a stronghold of historical criticism, the Georg August University was used to more research-oriented teaching than Floto seemed to realize.)

Source editing projects

Despite all of these failures, Floto eventually landed in a project that is relevant to this chapter, as it allows discussion of the emergence of research institutions – 'big humanities' projects, as they are sometimes called – that played no small role in the transformation of nineteenth-century historical studies (Saxer 2010). Such projects included the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, founded in 1819 with the aim of publishing sources pertaining to Germany's medieval past. Initially a small, private initiative, the Monumenta developed into a publishing enterprise that employed lots of recently graduated historians as research assistants, especially after Waitz took over leadership from Georg Heinrich Pertz in 1875. In the

meantime, other source editing projects had been launched, such as the *Deutsche Reichstagsakten* (German Reichstag Records), which had started under auspices of the Bavarian Academy of Science in 1857, and the *Hansisches Urkundenbuch* (Hanseatic Book of Records), for which the Hanseatic Historical Association had been sending out researchers to archives across Europe (Paul 2017). These projects were important not only because they made a wealth of source material available in print, but also because they offered employment to young historians, while socializing them into an ethos of philologically oriented research (Saxer 2014: 146-55). Notably, between the 1870s and the 1890s, the percentage of historians employed in a source editing project prior to completion of their *Habilitationsschrift* (the second dissertation required in German academia) doubled from 16 to 32. In that same period, the percentage of historians who wrote their second dissertation while teaching at a *Gymnasium* dropped from 20 to 3 (Weber 1984: 122). This implies that young historians were increasingly trained in research, at the cost of gaining teaching experience.

Although it was argued above that Floto embodied the priority given to teaching over research that was common in his generation, this priority had begun to change, even for Floto himself, after his retirement from Basel. Arguably, the job market was one contributing factor: job opportunities for researchers were less scarce than those for academic teachers. Indeed, the demand for scholars able to devote themselves for years to research in far-away archives was such that Sybel, the director of the Prussian state archive in Berlin, was able to offer Floto a way out of his professional cul-de-sac. In 1878, he announced that the retired Basel professor would start working on a research project that was expected to result in a three-volume *Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens in Preussen bis 1525: Nach den Acten vornehmlich des Königsberger Archivs* (History of the Teutonic Order in Prussia until 1525: Based on Records Mainly from the Königsberg Archive) (Sybel 1878: ix). Although funding was not immediately available, two years later, Sybel managed to get Floto awarded a six-year stipend for research in Königsberg. Delivered from his financial struggles, the 55-year-old historian relocated to the East Prussian city and started working on the rich collections of the Teutonic Order. Yet he did not live to complete the project: Floto unexpectedly died in 1881.

Despite this tragic course of events, Floto's move to Königsberg testified to the growing importance of source editing projects. Armed with government funding, such research institutions allowed figures like Sybel to hire staff, edit book series, and thereby shape their

field to a greater extent than they could ever have done in university positions. Projects like the *Acta Borussica*, on the history of Prussia, even developed into little academic kingdoms, ruled by men powerful enough to make or break careers (Neugebauer 2000). Work in such hierarchical settings did not fail to leave its marks on young researchers. As critics pointed out, historians used to spending years on medieval charters ran a risk of becoming *Urkundionen* – Burckhardt's term for scholars who are so absorbed in minutiae of source criticism that they 'consider themselves superior to everyone if they have found out that Emperor Conrad II went to the toilet at Goslar on May 7, 1030'. Other critics feared that the quasi-industrial organization of source editing projects would turn historians into 'factory workers', used to obeying orders instead of thinking for themselves (Paul 2013). Thus, whereas editing projects, on the one hand, expanded historians' job opportunities, while strengthening the profession's research orientation, there was also, on the other hand, a chorus of voices that wondered to what extent the industry, perseverance, and sense of duty cultivated in such contexts could rank as virtues, especially if they were practiced to the point of turning historians into narrow specialists unable to teach broad survey courses or to write a book like Floto's *Kaiser Heinrich der Vierte*.

Conclusion

So what does the case of Floto tell us about nineteenth-century historical studies? His life and work illustrate at least six important features of German historical scholarship around the mid-century. (1) His example shows, first of all, to what extent historians were teachers, in the sense that transmission of historical knowledge, to students as well as to audiences outside of the classroom, was what they regarded as their primary task. (2) As demonstrated by the reception of Floto's book on Henry IV, this priority of teaching shaped readers' expectations of historical monographs. Argumentative clarity and an attractive style of writing were valued more highly than critical study of source material, even though it would not take long for these criteria to change. If these findings already suggest that mid-nineteenth-century historians should be situated firmly in their social contexts – they were middle class citizens first, academics only in the second place – the polemics in which Floto engaged also reveal (3) how frequently historians drew on broadly shared stereotypes of North and South, Protestant and Catholic, or middle class and working class. Political and religious fault lines of the kind that would become central to Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* left their mark on the historical profession,

to the point of Protestants denying their Catholic colleagues the very ability to be 'objective'. (4) Even if this virtue of objectivity was a relative late-comer (Daston 2014), it is significant that virtues (*Tugenden*) was historians' preferred idiom for talking about the qualities needed for historical inquiry, even if alternative vocabularies, such as language of 'methods', gradually gained in importance. More than anyone else, Ranke was perceived as embodying this virtue of objectivity, although he had initially, around mid-century, been better known for his aversion to moralizing history writing. (5) Floto's memories of his study with Ranke point to one of the most important factors that brought Rankean historiography to prominence: historical exercises that familiarized students with primary source material, while sharpening their critical gaze. Finally, (6) the source editing project to which Floto devoted the last years of his life illustrates the growing significance of 'big humanities' projects in historical scholarship. If, in the course of the nineteenth century, the priority of teaching over research was gradually reversed, this was not in the last place due to projects that socialized ever-larger numbers of young historians into an ethos of meticulous source criticism.

There were other developments in German historical studies that we see less clearly mirrored in Floto's life and work. Although he gave some virulently anti-Catholic speeches in the 1870s, Floto was not a 'political professor' of the kind that Droysen or Sybel was. Still, even if Floto was not active in the political arena, his commitment to the nineteenth-century project of anchoring national identity in a rose-colored past (Berger and Conrad 2015) was obvious, especially in his monograph on Henry IV. Secondly, Floto's career reveals only little about local and regional historical associations of the kind that emerged almost everywhere in the nineteenth century (organizations that offer yet another example of scholars and 'friends of history' occupying one and the same social space [Clemens 2004]). Although Floto joined at least two associations – the Historical Society in Basel and the Society for German Cultural History – he does not seem to have been an active participant. Something similar applies to the archival institutions that became increasingly important players in German historical studies (Müller 2019). Likewise, Floto did not live to see the methodological battles prompted by Karl Lamprecht's forays into social psychology – resulting in a type of history that was much more responsive to the emerging social sciences than traditional political history – or to witness the growing international reputation of German historiography (e.g., Lingelbach 2002).

Finally, the case of Floto hardly touches on a theme that has recently developed into a subject of research: historians' memory cultures, including their habit of honoring deceased scholars with often lengthy obituaries (Tollebeek 2015). In nineteenth-century Germany, social conventions required historians to commemorate especially their former teachers in public, as a sign of gratitude for the education they had received. Floto, however, did not live long enough to write an obituary for Ranke (who died five years after his student, at the advanced age of 90). Also, because his teaching in Basel had been too short to yield any doctoral dissertations, Floto did not have any Swiss students to erect a 'literary monument' to him. Indeed, it seems as if his passing went largely unnoticed by the profession to which he had belonged. Fourteen years after Floto's death, his name was, painfully, still listed among the corresponding members of the Society of Dutch Literature in Leiden. If few historians of his generation had been more fortunate at the beginning of their careers than Floto, few historians' lives eventually ended as lonely as his.

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