Review of Eskildsen, K.R. (2022) Modern historiography in the making: the German sense of the past, 1700-1900
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Citation
Paul, H. J. (2023). Review of Eskildsen, K.R. (2022) Modern historiography in the making: the German sense of the past, 1700-1900. *History Of Humanities*, *8*(1), 156-159. doi:10.1086/724103

Version: Accepted Manuscript
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Downloaded from: https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3619252

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Published in *History of Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2023): 156-159
https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/724103

Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, *Modern Historiography in the Making: The German Sense of the Past, 1700-1900*. London: Bloomsbury, 2022, 186 pp., £85.00.

This is a book to which many have been looking forward. In the past decade, Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen has published a series of important articles on German historiography. Inspired by a "practice turn" in the history of science, these essays drew programmatic attention, not to historians' published work, but to research practices like traveling, reading, and note-taking. Drawing on these earlier articles, *Modern Historiography in the Making* explores how such a praxeological perspective may increase our understanding of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German historiography. Could it be that, at the level of practices, continuities between "Enlightenment" and "historicism" outweighed their differences?

A first thing to observe about the book is how much there is to enjoy in its pages. With a fine nose for revealing anecdotes, Eskildsen tells his readers about Christian Thomasius appearing in colorful clothes when teaching a class on French fashion in 1687 and about Christian Adolph Klotz, some eighty years later, using his collection of ancient erotic engraved gemstones to enrich the moral and aesthetic education of his students in Halle. With similar attention to detail, Eskildsen writes about Christoph August Heumann, who traveled to Holland to conduct in-person interviews with religious dissenters, and about Johann Christoph Gatterer, who demonstrated the crushing power of his diplomatics in challenging the attribution of a gravestone found in the Harz to King Henry the Fowler.

All these vignettes serve a purpose: they are meant to illustrate that such seemingly innocent historiographical practices as collecting sources, taking notes, and comparing scripts were part and parcel of a scholarly revolt against scholastic philosophy and confessional state building. In a manner reminiscent of Constantin Fasolt, Eskildsen argues that modern historical scholarship was a modernizing project driven by a secularizing agenda. It was not "objective," as historians around 1900 liked to say, but committed to "self-control, open-mindedness and empathy with others" (21). These, of course, were virtues that students learned to exercise for the sake of understanding the past. At the same time, these were political ideals, informed by a sense of the present being different from the past. Collecting sources and interpreting them contextually were practices premised on the modern idea that historical particularities are more "real" than universal philosophical schemes and timeless theological categories.

This results in what one might call a historiographical equivalent to Jonathan Israel's radical Enlightenment: a portrait of a vibrant intellectual tradition in which "radical writers," "radical thinkers," and "radical dissenters" are the real protagonists – the book even has a

section on “radical numismatics” – and their good cause of valuing cultures and individuals in all their historical particularity is constantly threatened by Lutheran orthodoxy and Wolffian philosophy.

This is, no doubt, a refreshing take on a subject matter that has long been interpreted through the prism of “historicism.” Eskildsen makes short shrift of the view that Rankean historiography was rooted in Romantic or Idealist philosophy. Similarly, he rejects the idea that Gatterer and his Göttingen School paved the way for *Historismus*. In Eskildsen’s account, Ranke does not appear as the inaugurator of a new paradigm, but as a late representative of a project that did not survive the professionalization of history and the expansion of German universities in the Wilhelmine era. (Although Eskildsen is not entirely clear about the latter point: his epilogue suggests that we can still align with this once revolutionary project.)

Refreshing as all this may be, can Eskildsen’s interpretation also be called convincing? *Modern Historiography in the Making* strikes me as a study that is full of promising threads, but tries to pull these threads a little too closely together. In my reading, the book has three themes: (1) historians’ *practices*, such as collecting sources and teaching students, (2) the *sites* where such activities took place, like the state archive, the lecture hall, and the study, and (3) the anti-philosophical and anti-theological *purposes* that these practices could serve. Eskildsen’s focus on moments of overlap between (1), (2), and (3) allows for a strong thesis. It enables him to argue that historians’ research and teaching practices all served the “radical” agenda described under (3). Yet the reader cannot help but wonder: How much variety or heterogeneity is sacrificed for the sake of this thesis?

This question prompts itself, first of all, in relation to Eskildsen’s case studies. Each of his chapters is devoted to a single site, and each of these sites is illustrated with a single case study. If this already raises issues of representativity – what does a sample of n=1 allow us to say about patterns and trends? – so does the observation that few of the historians discussed in the book were “conservatives” or “traditionalists.” Would Eskildsen’s thesis still hold up if he had selected Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz instead of Thomasius, or Johann Joachim Winckelmann instead of Klotz? And how different would the story have been if Georg Gottfried Gervinus or Heinrich von Treitschke had been featured as prominently as Ranke and Waitz?

Allowing for a little more leeway between (1), (2), and (3) would make it possible to recognize that practices like meticulous source research could be employed for purposes different from (3). Not only Ranke’s desk was piled with manuscript sources: Johannes Janssen, whose “ultramontanism” turned him into the archenemy of all national liberals in the profession, also surrounded himself with *Aktenstücke* (he even edited two volumes of them). Similarly, the staunch moral criticism of Friedrich Christoph Schlosser seems to fit (3) rather well, despite the fact that Schlosser visited few archives and was not exactly known for

painstaking research. In other words, while (1), (2), and (3) *could* reinforce each other, they did not *always* do so.

Pushing this point a little further, one might argue that a history of scholarly practices as advocated by Eskildsen would be well suited for broadening the range of actors and voices traditionally associated with German historical scholarship. Who were the people that visited archives and wrote in historical journals? They not only included Catholic apologists and Prussian conservatives, but also provincial archivists and *Gymnasium* teachers with time on their hands. What this suggests is that histories of (1) and (2) may take us far beyond the circle of Rankean professionals featured in Eskildsen's final chapters.

Interestingly, while this wider scope would create some problems for Eskildsen's thesis – it would increase the number of relevant counter-examples – it might also, at the same time, lend additional support to the idea of history replacing philosophy or theology as a source of authority. The fact that Janssen turned to history to challenge Ranke-style accounts of the Reformation as the source of German national identity illustrates the privileged status that historical reasoning acquired across political and confessional boundaries. Differentiating between (1), (2), and (3) would therefore not necessarily harm Eskildsen's thesis; it would be a way of testing and refining it against a more diverse range of evidence.

In short, Eskildsen's book is opening up important conversations. It contributes to a fresh rethinking of what historical scholarship in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German lands entailed, while offering good arguments for challenging the conventional view that real historical scholarship only started with Ranke.

Herman Paul