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Towards professional history in Belgium and France: 'l'école de la méthode' and 'l'école de la citoyenneté'^{*}

Geneviève Warland

In the late nineteenth century, Gabriel Monod, a leading historian of France's Third Republic, reasserted the prophecy made by his predecessor Augustin Thierry in the 1820's: that history would give its imprint to the nineteenth century as philosophy did to the eighteenth.¹ However, the concept of history in Monod's mind was not exactly the same as in Thierry's. For in France, as in Belgium and in other European countries, the scientific credo had pervaded the historical field in the half-century between their proclamations. History became a science, an academic discipline with its own objects and methods.

History was strictly distinguished from literature and philosophy. The ideal figures of historical writing were no longer Michelet or Taine, but Ranke and Mommsen, whose erudite books were representative of the new German *Geschichtswissenschaft*. History turned into erudition: 'the nineteenth century [illustrates] the building *ne varietur* and the generalization of the historical method',² as Charles-Victor Langlois, another French leader of the reforming trend, affirmed.

From that time on, the keywords of history were science and method. It became the domain almost exclusively of professionals, as Belgian historian Karl Hanquet explained:

Until 1870, history belonged to everyone; now it belongs to the historians. This new idea, which only brings history to the level of the other sciences by imposing an apprenticeship, means progress. Imported from Germany, the concept crossed the French borders as

^{*} Thanks to Jessica Zimbalatti for some assistance with the language. Translations of quotations are mine.

¹ G. Monod, 'Du progrès des études historiques en France depuis le XVI^e siècle', *Revue historique* 1 (1876) 5-38. On the ideological background of this review, see C.-O. Carbonell, 'La naissance de la Revue Historique. Une revue de combat (1876-1885)' *Revue Historique* 255 (1976) 332-351.

² C.-V. Langlois, *Manuel de bibliographie historique*, vol. 2: *Histoire et organisation des études historiques* (Paris 1904) 344.

well as ours; (...) [it is expressed] through a specific method, the same everywhere; a single ideal of truth, the same for all!³

The promoters of the new history gave great value to it being objective and impartial. However, they did not ignore the social or national role of history. 'Historical teaching, (...), will be highly scientific, civil and moral', proclaimed Georges Pagès in 1906.⁴ Belgian and French historians underpinned their idea of history's pedagogical role as a rational historical science oriented towards the search for truth by changing the way it was taught at university.

Answering the question of what made a *good* historian at the end of the nineteenth century in Belgium and France calls first of all for a rough description of the professionalisation of history in both countries. Second, using accounts⁵ given by the historians who played a major role in the organisation of the study of history and in the definition of its professional standards in their respective countries, I will define what appears to be the main requirements for becoming a *good* historian, which had become equivalent to being a *professional* one. By the way, we will meet four major figures of the *new* historian: respectively the *homo methodicus*, the *homo doctus*, the *homo academicus* and the *homo propagator*.

History as an academically taught and researched field: university's achievements in 1880 to 1900

Until 1880-90, history was taught at the *Facultés de lettres* in Belgium and France as part of a literary programme that gave pride of place to classical studies, philosophy, literature and philology.

³ K. Hanquet, 'Les sciences historiques' in : *Le mouvement scientifique en Belgique. 1830-1905* (Brussels, vol. 2, 1907) 305.

⁴ G. Pagès, 'L'enseignement de l'histoire au lycée', *Revue de synthèse historique*, 13, 107-110, quoted in E. Héry, *Un siècle de leçons d'histoire. L'histoire enseignée en lycée de 1870 à 1970* (Rennes 1999) 79.

⁵ These accounts include programmatic writings, which designed historians' ideals and principles, assessment reports and concrete historical works.

Through the advice and initiative of professors, the situation gradually changed after 1870.⁶ Belgian and French historians scrutinized the organization of German universities⁷, paying particular attention to the way the historical discipline had gained its authority there. With the financial support of their government, Godefroid Kurth (1847-1916) and Paul Fredericq (1850-1920), the leaders of history's metamorphosis in Belgium, travelled to Germany, the former in 1874⁸ and the latter in 1881.⁹ Ernest Lavisse (1842-1922) spent two years there (1872-74) supported by a grant from the French Ministry of Education, not only to learn about the German academic system but also to complete his thesis on the March of Brandenburg.

In the first years of the 1880s, analogous reasons led several other historians to go to Germany. These included Gabriel Monod (1844-1912) and Charles Seignobos (1854-1942)¹⁰, major innovators, with Lavisse and Charles-Victor Langlois (1863-1929), of French historical education. The

⁶ For a general survey of the professionalization of history in France, see P. den Boer, *Geschiedenis als beroep. De professionalisering van de geschiedbeoefening in Frankrijk (1818-1914)* (Nijmegen 1987). See also G. Noiriel, 'Naissance du métier d'historien', *Genèses* 1 (1990) 58-85. For Belgium, there is no such general survey. See J. Tollebeek, 'De machinerie van de geschiedenis. De uitbouw van een historische infrastructuur in Nederland en België' in: J. Tollebeek., *De ijkmeesters. Opstellen over de Geschiedschrijving in Nederland en België* (Amsterdam 1994) 17-35 and P. Gérin, 'la condition de l'historien et l'histoire nationale en Belgique à la fin du 19^e et au début du 20^e siècle en Belgique', *Storia della storiografia* 11 (1987) 64-103. Still informative, H. Pirenne, 'Belgique' in: *Histoire et historiens depuis 50 ans. Méthodes, organisation et résultats du travail historique de 1876 à 1926. Recueil publié à l'occasion du cinquantième de la Revue historique* (Paris 1927) 51-71.

⁷ During the period 1881-1920, the French journal of the reformist movement published 97 articles on the education in Germany, and 57 related to Great Britain (Héry, *Un siècle de leçons d'histoire*, 30).

⁸ G. Kurth, 'De l'enseignement de l'histoire en Allemagne', *Revue de l'instruction publique* 19 (1875) 88-100.

⁹ P. Fredericq, 'De l'enseignement supérieur de l'histoire en Allemagne', *Revue de l'instruction publique* 25 (1882) 18-73 and 79-92. Republished in P. Fredericq, *L'enseignement supérieur de l'histoire. Notes et impressions de voyage. Allemagne-France-Ecosse-Angleterre-Hollande-Belgique* (Gand and Paris 1899) 1-52.

¹⁰ C. Seignobos, 'L'enseignement de l'histoire dans les universités allemandes', *Revue internationale de l'enseignement* 1 (1881) 563-600.

same is true for Henri Pirenne (1862-1935), the best known historian from the leading Belgian 'trio' that included him, Kurth and Fredericq. They encouraged their own students¹¹ to spend a year abroad with a grant or by taking a job as a teaching assistant (*lecteur*)¹², primarily at the universities of Berlin and Leipzig.¹³

Many reports on this German experience were published in reviews on education in Belgium's *Revue de l'instruction publique* and France's *Revue internationale de l'enseignement*, read by teachers, professors, scholars and civil servants. The reports not only informed readers about the German academic system; more pragmatically, they put pressure on government ministers and public administration bodies to carry out the transformations historians believed Belgian and French universities needed.¹⁴

The major innovation of history as an academic discipline was the introduction of practical exercises in addition to lectures. Striving for the reconstitution of a single Parisian university prioritizing higher learning¹⁵, Lavissee, Monod and Seignobos adopted closed lectures or *cours fermés* (for students only) besides the open lectures or *cours ouverts*, which were attended by the Parisian upper classes too. The curriculum of the *cours fermés* included historians' practical exercises. The *Livrets de l'étudiant de l'Université de Paris* in the 1890's mention the *practical exercises (exercices d'enseignement)* accompanying Lavissee's lectures in modern history. Seignobos's teaching in

¹¹ For example, Guillaume des Marez, Pirenne's closest disciple (B. Lyon, 'Guillaume Des Marez and Henri Pirenne: A Remarkable Report', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 77 (1999) 1051-1078). On the importance of specialisation in a foreign university, see Fredericq, *L'enseignement supérieur de l'histoire*, 203. and Pirenne, 'Belgique' 54.

¹² See K. Middell, 'Das Institut für Kultur- und Universalgeschichte bei der Universität Leipzig und seine Beziehungen zu Frankreich bis zum Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges' in: M. Espagne and M. Middell ed., *Von der Elbe bis an die Seine. Kulturtransfer zwischen Sachsen und Frankreich im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig 1999) 379-408.

¹³ On some of these reports concerning the University of Leipzig, see M. Espagne, 'Die Universität Leipzig als deutsch-französische Ausbildungsstätte' in: Espagne and Middell ed., *Von der Elbe bis an die Seine*, 353-378.

¹⁴ For an overview of the reformist trends in France, see G. Weisz, *The Emergence of Modern Universities in France, 1863-1914* (Princeton 1983).

¹⁵ The law of 1896 reintroduced the universities in France, which were suppressed by Napoleon in favour of Faculties and *Grandes Écoles*.

pédagogie des sciences historiques was accompanied by its own set of *exercices*, as was Langlois's in *sciences auxiliaires*.¹⁶

These French historians were convinced that such specific historical training was not the prerogative of the *École Pratique des Hautes Etudes* (founded by Duruy in 1868 on the German model), and of the *École des Chartes* (founded in 1834), which was primarily devoted to the training of public archivists and librarians.

Some decrees and laws paved the way to a specialised education a. o. in history. With the introduction of the *Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures (DES)* in 1894, research work (the thesis) was introduced as an independent degree.¹⁷ Its completion was a condition for applying to the *concours d'agrégation*, which had to be passed to allow the candidate to teach in secondary schools or institutes of higher education. The moves were hailed by Lavissee:

That all our teachers in history and geography are able to contribute to the progress of the science is our aim: so it is important to initiate them into scientific research methods and writing during their study. Moreover, a history teacher, even if he never writes a book, needs to know how history is made, and his critical sense needs to have been stimulated by critical exercises. Anyone who was never been trained to search for and demonstrate historical truth doesn't know what it means.¹⁸

The introduction of the *DES*, of which Lavissee was the most active supporter, gave birth to an 'army of critical historians', to use the metaphor of Louis Halphen (1880-1950), who was one of them.¹⁹

In Belgium, historians' efforts to have history recognized as a truly scientific research field was not linked, as with French republican historians, to the reorganisation of the whole educational system. Belgium was doted with four universities, two public (Ghent and Liège) and two private (the catholic university of Louvain and the free university of Brussels). At the centre of historians' concerns was the introduction of professional historical

¹⁶ These programs can be consulted on microfilms at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (www.bnf.fr).

¹⁷ See among others Den Boer, *Geschiedenis als beroep*, 273.

¹⁸ E. Lavissee, 'Le concours d'agrégation d'histoire et de géographie en 1892', *Revue universitaire* 2 (1892) 389.

¹⁹ L. Halphen, *L'histoire en France depuis cent ans* (Paris 1914) 160.

training²⁰, which did not interfere as much with secondary school pedagogical considerations as it did in France.²¹

The three above-mentioned historians - Kurth, Fredericq and Pirenne - were at the heart of the movement. Kurth introduced *cours pratiques* in Belgium²², and Fredericq and Pirenne, who both attended his private lessons at Liege, imitated him in Ghent. The universities of Louvain and Brussels saw similar innovations due respectively to Alfred Cauchie (1860-1922) in church history²³, and to Léon Vanderkindere (1842-1906) who, after a stay in Germany, introduced the critical methods I will explore below in his institutional and social history teaching.²⁴ These innovations were called the 'practical teaching of history' ('l'enseignement pratique de l'histoire').²⁵

New regulations in the 1890s introduced a master degree for historians. Its curriculum included the composition of a thesis, *cours pratiques* under the name *exercices*, and courses in historical criticism.²⁶ The Belgian

²⁰ See Tollebeek, 'De Machinerie van de geschiedenis', 17-35.

²¹ See among others E. Lavissee, *Questions d'enseignement national* (Paris 1885) accessible on www.gallica.bnf.fr and *À propos de nos écoles* (Paris 1895), C.-V. Langlois, *Questions d'histoire et d'enseignement* (Paris 1902) and Seignobos, 'L'enseignement de l'histoire comme instrument d'éducation politique' (Conférences du Musée pédagogique, 1907) in: Seignobos., *Études de politique et d'histoire* (Paris 1934) 109-132. As for Belgium, the most concerned by history's teaching at the secondary school in our sample is Fredericq. See, for instance, 'De l'enseignement de l'histoire dans les athénées belges', *Revue de l'instruction publique* (1883).

²² He proclaimed: 'ce qui a le plus frappé mon attention pendant mon séjour en Allemagne, c'est un fait général: l'existence d'un cours pratique à côté de chaque cours théorique' (Kurth, 'De l'enseignement de l'histoire en Allemagne', 88).

²³ A. Cauchie, 'Un demi-siècle d'enseignement historique à l'Université de Louvain, in: *Mélanges d'histoire offerts à Charles Moeller à l'occasion de son jubilé de 50 années de professorat à l'université de Louvain*, vol. 1 (Louvain 1913) IX-XXXVI.

²⁴ L. Vanderkindere, 'Notice sur l'origine des magistrats communaux et sur l'organisation de la marque dans nos contrées au Moyen Age', *Bulletins de l'Académie royale de Belgique* 38 (1874) 3-47.

²⁵ Fredericq, *L'enseignement supérieur de l'histoire*, 197.

²⁶ P. Fredericq, 'L'origine et les développements des cours pratiques d'histoire dans l'enseignement supérieur en Belgique' in: *À Godefroid Kurth, professeur à l'université de Liège, à l'occasion du XXV^e anniversaire de la fondation de son cours pratique d'histoire* (Liège

historians, like the French republican historians, praised the German origin of the teaching form.²⁷ Like their French colleagues,²⁸ the Belgians' goal was to reach the scientific standards of the German historical school. Pirenne wrote *ex post*:

(. . .) the practical work, namely the work on the documents, should be the very first stage of their apprenticeship. Such work accounts for the indisputable superiority of the German school at that time. It was essential to borrow its methods.²⁹

Belgian and French historians' argumentation and their respective legal achievements leading to the recognition of a dedicated historical education and degree³⁰ put forward a key concept: methodology, which was learned through the practical exercises. Henceforth, the apprenticeship of an historian was an academic matter. The *sociétés savantes* in the middle of the historical research . in the first part of the century were relegated from then on because of their lack of professionalism.³¹

However, scientifically trained historians did not dislike being members of scholarly societies endowed among others with the power to establish sources.³² By publishing through such societies, they could increase their academic standing and perception as scientific thinkers. New

1899) 25. See also Gérin, 'La condition de l'historien et l'histoire nationale en Belgique', 71.

²⁷ Halphen, *L'histoire en France depuis cent ans*, 115. References to that matter are frequent by Langlois, Lavissee, Monod and Seignobos.

²⁸ See, for example, E. Lavissee, 'Universités allemandes et universités françaises', *Revue des deux mondes* 3 (1884) 623-656 (reprinted in his above mentioned book, *Questions d'enseignement national*, 211-264).

²⁹ H. Pirenne, 'Notice sur Godefroid Kurth', *Annuaire de l'Académie royale de Belgique* 90 (1924) 206-207.

³⁰ Fredericq, 'L'origine et les développements des cours pratiques de l'histoire', 25.

³¹ See, for example, Hanquet, 'Sciences historiques', 314. He refers to the 'useful work' of the *sociétés savantes*, while criticizing their lack of method.

³² After having praised the vitality of history teaching in higher education, Monod remembers the utility of the *sociétés savantes*: '[elles] contribuent puissamment aussi à entretenir cette vie, à grouper les efforts, à encourager les recherches, à favoriser les publications historiques' (G. Monod, 'Les études historiques en France', *Revue internationale de l'enseignement* 19 (1889) 590). In the same direction, see Pirenne, 'Belgique', 68.

societies dominated by professional historians arose: the Belgian *Société pour le progrès des études philologiques et historiques* (1873), with Fredericq as secretary³³, Kurth as co-founder and Pirenne and other academic historians as members; the French *Société historique* (1882), created by Monod; the *Société d'histoire contemporaine* (1890); the *Société d'histoire moderne* (1901); and more. However, for our purposes, it is important to note that even if *sociétés savantes* were still an important part of historical activity and sociability in the second half of the nineteenth century, they no longer represented the necessary path for professional historians. This role had been taken over by the university.

‘L’école de la méthode’³⁴: the formation of the *homo methodicus*

The core of the historian’s concern in the late nineteenth century was that history is made up of documents³⁵, especially the ones stored in states’ archives, be the archives central, regional or local. While using such records was a way to legitimise history as a science, it is worth noting that Langlois, Seignobos and other such historians did not believe that facts could be directly extracted from them.³⁶ On the contrary, they believed the documents were the past’s traces³⁷ and representations of reality³⁸, which

³³ See *Mélanges Paul Fredericq. Hommage de la Société pour le progrès des études philologiques et historiques. 10 juillet 1904* (Brussels 1904)

³⁴ C. Seignobos, ‘L’enseignement de l’histoire dans les facultés. Lettre à M. Lavissee, secrétaire général de la Société d’enseignement supérieur’, *Revue internationale de l’enseignement* 8 (1884) 104. In three contributions under this title (*RIE* 6 (1883) 1076-1088; 8 (1884) 35-60 and 97-111), Seignobos delineates the ideal courses’ program in history at the university.

³⁵ ‘Car rien ne supplée aux documents: pas de documents, pas d’histoire’ (C.-V. Langlois and C. Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques* (Paris 1992 [1898], 29).

³⁶ ‘Tout le monde commence à concevoir l’histoire comme la représentation pure et simple du passé tel que les documents conservés, correctement interprétés, la font voir’ (Langlois, *Manuel de bibliographie*, 578).

³⁷ See, in particular, C. Seignobos, *La méthode historique appliquée aux sciences sociales* (Paris 1901) 17.

³⁸ ‘En histoire, on ne voit rien de réel que du papier écrit, - et quelquefois des monuments ou des produits de fabrication’ (Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 178-179).

needed to be deconstructed.³⁹ Hence, documentary evidence was only an instrument, as explained most clearly in Seignobos's *La méthode historique appliquée aux sciences sociales* (Paris 1901).⁴⁰

Langlois and Seignobos's *Introduction aux études historiques* (Paris 1898), which has long been the reference book for Belgian and French history students⁴¹, is the best guide for describing the principles of the historical method as a general concept. Indeed, the handbook scrupulously details all the principles and operations scientific work requires: from the search for and analysis of documents to the construction of history as factual knowledge to its exposition in a well-written form. I will explore some of these principles and operations here.

After the bibliographical and heuristic stages and the determination of documents' reliability with the help of history's auxiliary sciences (epigraphy, palaeography, diplomatic and philology⁴²), the first historian's activity is to be, as Monod declared to his students at the ENS in 1888:

[an] historical critic: text's critic and fact's critic. (...). [criticism] presupposes a passionate love for truth. (...). [It] gets the intellect accustomed to distinguish the degrees of certainty; [the historical critic is] taught to doubt and to confess ignorance. (...). Finally, it is only through detailed criticism that we are able to reach the documents' spirit and time's spirit.⁴³

To Langlois and Seignobos's minds, getting the critical sense is the very fundament of the historian's training:

The analysis and critical questioning having become instinctive, we have gained for ever a methodically analytical way of thinking, distrustful and disrespectful, often called by a term which sounds

³⁹ Seignobos, *La méthode historique*, 4-5.

⁴⁰ A. Prost, 'Seignobos revisité', *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire* 43 (1994) 100-118: 108.

⁴¹ J. Tollebeek, *Fredericq & Zonen. Een antropologie van de moderne geschiedwetenschap* (Amsterdam 2008) 47-48.

⁴² Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 49.

⁴³ Monod, 'La pédagogie historique à l'Ecole normale supérieure en 1888', *Revue internationale de l'enseignement* 53 (1907) 199-207: 202.

mystical: “the critical sense”, which is only the unconscious habit of the critic.⁴⁴

Such a critical sense is not to be brought to bear only on sources or primary documents but also on the reliability of secondary literature.⁴⁵ As in Monod’s previous quotation, the critical method is connected to the search for truth – the guiding principle of the scientific credo of these historians.

According to Langlois and Seignobos, the real historian’s work begins with text interpretation (hermeneutics) and continues with the definition of the problematic, with asking questions about how to assemble the facts⁴⁶, and, finally, with writing. The last two operations are the most demanding ones. First, the historian has to classify the facts chronologically, geographically or logically, by sub-topic. He has to differentiate between the description of collective or general facts (habits) and the narration of individual or particular ones (events).⁴⁷ Second, bringing the past back to life depends on two faculties: the imagination⁴⁸ and analogical reasoning with the present time.⁴⁹ Last but not least, it is not easy to settle on the rules dictating how one puts together the facts in a coherent text.⁵⁰ In terms of this point, Langlois and Seignobos actually distanced themselves from their original scientist assumption – ‘l’histoire n’est que la mise en oeuvre des documents’⁵¹ – to embrace a more relativist conception⁵², recognizing the legitimate role of the historian as the author of his text.⁵³

This short presentation of the historical method as a general concept shows how important the historian’s choices and decisions are in the process of making history. The student learned to be active while reading

⁴⁴ Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 158.

⁴⁵ See for a short presentation of that point, Seignobos, ‘L’enseignement de l’histoire’, 104.

⁴⁶ On the ‘questionnaire’, see Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 175. And also Seignobos, *La méthode historique*, 123., where he stresses its *a priori* character.

⁴⁷ Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 192.

⁴⁸ On the role of the imagination, see: Seignobos, *La méthode historique*, 188.

⁴⁹ See Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 186-187.

⁵⁰ Langlois, *Manuel de bibliographie*, 581-582.

⁵¹ Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 253.

⁵² Seignobos, *La méthode historique*, 3.

⁵³ See, for instance, Seignobos’s plea for a ‘histoire explicative’ in his *Préface* to his *Histoire politique de l’Europe contemporaine* (Paris 1897). See also Pirenne, ‘Notice sur Godefroid Kurth’, 238.

texts; analysing, discussing and interpreting them under the professor's supervision. 'Knowing what science is means that we have tried to practice it,'⁵⁴ as Seignobos explained. His vision refers to the model of the apprenticeship in small classes, *ateliers de travail scientifique*⁵⁵ where the professor is a 'craftsman' and the student an 'apprentice', to quote Lavissee.⁵⁶ At the same time, the students were educated to be adults, thinking rationally and independently. Lavissee liked to insist on that matter:

(...) to let penetrate in all Faculties (...) the university's spirit, which is equivalent to the scientific spirit; to abolish the student's passivity, only listening to the lectures and reading handbooks, who learns in order to recite the course content at the exam; to make the student capable of using a method, to discover a fact, a notion, an idea. This young man (...) must be invited, stimulated, compelled to create himself, getting along the way an independence of thought.⁵⁷

The mastery of the method built up to the composition of a thesis, which was the student's truly personal work and the confirmation of his research ability. As a monographic study on one place, one topic or one person, the thesis represented a metamorphosis in the writing of historical books. The deep research it required was embodied in the footnotes, giving references to sources or justifying the interpretation of documents or of facts. The thesis's status was strengthened by it being published in scholarly collections: the *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes*,⁵⁸ the *Mémoires de*

⁵⁴ Seignobos, 'L'enseignement de l'histoire', 97.

⁵⁵ E. Lavissee, 'L'enseignement supérieur des lettres et de l'histoire', *Revue internationale de l'enseignement* 26 (1893) 464-466: 465.

⁵⁶ E. Lavissee, 'Education professionnelle, éducation scientifique. Discours de rentrée à la Sorbonne, 4 novembre 1886', *Revue internationale de l'enseignement*. Reprinted in E. Lavissee, *Études et étudiants* (Paris 1890) 139-140. Compare with Fredericq: 'C'est un laboratoire où le professeur travaille au grand jour sous les yeux de ses élèves et les associe à ses recherches' (id., 'Discours' in: *À Godefroid Kurth*, 301).

⁵⁷ E. Lavissee, 'Souvenir d'une éducation manquée' in: E. Lavissee, A. Croiset, C. Seignobos, P. Malabert, G. Lanson and J. Hadamard, *L'éducation à la démocratie. Leçons professées à l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales* (Paris 1903) 31.

⁵⁸ See Halphen, *L'histoire en France*, 115. Nearly ironically, he mentions the fact that many titles of these series use the term 'critical'. In 1905 the series included 145 volumes (Langlois, *Manuel de bibliographie*, 391).

l'Académie royale de Belgique, the *Bibliothèque de la Faculté de philosophie et lettres de l'Université de Liège*, and so on.

To give some examples of the monographs composed by students of the founding fathers of historical science in Belgium and in France, we can mention *Le diplôme d'Arnulf le vieux, comte de Flandre, pour l'abbaye de Saint-Pierre de Gand* of Guillaume Des Marez (1870-1931), Pirenne's disciple and chief archivist of the city of Brussels, or *La législation civile de la Révolution française 1789-1804 - Essai d'histoire sociale* by Philippe Sagnac (1868-1954), who studied at the Sorbonne with Lavis and Alphonse Aulard.⁵⁹ Research abilities and erudition were regarded as the most important elements in being a good historian. Nevertheless, historians, especially the French ones⁶⁰, were not reluctant to demonstrate their qualities as writers, as Monod stressed:

Instead of considering erudition and literature as being hostile sisters, we see them as necessary allies; one cannot agree that someone is a good historian without being an erudite man and a critical thinker, nor that the erudite man can ignore art and style.⁶¹

In Langlois and Seignobos's handbook, stylistic considerations do not permit historians to neglect the main characteristics of scientific writing – clarity, concision and objectivity.⁶² They explain that '(...) history doesn't aim at charming, nor at giving life's recipes, nor at touching, but merely at knowing'⁶³. Sobriety is the new leitmotiv: '(...) due to the huge complexity of the phenomena he tries to account for, the historian is not allowed to write badly. On the contrary he must *always* write well without any overemphasis.'⁶⁴

Studying history is also a school of enforced modesty, as historian's books are subject to revision. Historians are not morally allowed to work

⁵⁹ See A. Gérard, 'Sagnac' in: C. Amalvi ed., *Dictionnaire biographique des historiens français et francophones. De Grégoire de Tours à Georges Duby* (Paris 2004) 281.

⁶⁰ In an essentialist way, French historians opposed French style's elegance and clarity and German clumsiness (see, for instance, Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 250). As for the comparison between Belgium and France: Fredericq, *L'enseignement supérieur de l'histoire*, 52.

⁶¹ Monod, 'Les études historiques en France', 598.

⁶² Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 242.

⁶³ Ibidem, 244.

⁶⁴ Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 250.

for their personal glory, but for the progress of human science, the handbook insists:

The real scholars don't claim to give their books a form *ne varietur* nor that they will be read by the posterity; they don't aspire to personal immortality: they are glad if their research results, rectified or modified by later research, are integrated to the body of knowledge which constitute the scientific world heritage.⁶⁵

Finally, according to Langlois and Seignobos, a clear distinction must be made between an erudite man's work and a historian's work, despite the fact both works are complementary.⁶⁶ Of course, history students had to learn both skills, but they were free to embrace one career or the other depending on their character⁶⁷, some individuals being more willing to do the patient work of editing sources and others to teach and write books. Some historians combined the two attitudes; others not. Unlike Lavis and Seignobos, the trio of major Belgian historians never abandoned the critical editions of documents⁶⁸ and other erudite works like bibliographies⁶⁹; nor did Langlois, Monod.⁷⁰

The new standards promoted the historical discipline to the status of a 'hard science' ('science difficile')⁷¹, and this status was further increased by

⁶⁵ Ibidem, 244. Pirenne was not less concerned with the construed and provisional character of history – 'making history. It is a constraint impossible to escape' (H. Pirenne, 'Une polémique historique en Allemagne', *Revue historique* 64 (1897) 50).

⁶⁶ 'Il faut bien qu'un commerce intime soit établi entre le monde des historiens et celui des érudits, puisque les travaux de ceux-ci n'ont de raison d'être que par rapport à ceux-là. (...). Si les rôles d'érudit et d'historien peuvent être cumulés, il n'est pas illégitime de les séparer; et que peut-être cette séparation est, en principe, désirable, comme elle est souvent, en pratique, imposée' (Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 103-104).

⁶⁷ Ibidem, 107.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, H. Pirenne and G. Espinas, *Recueil de documents relatifs à l'histoire de l'industrie drapière en Flandre*, 4 vol. (Bruxelles 1906-1924) and P. Fredericq, *Corpus documentarum inquisitionis haereticae praeunitatis neerlandicae* mentioned below.

⁶⁹ See, for instance, Pirenne's *Bibliographie de l'histoire de Belgique*, many times reedited, the last editions with the help of his disciples because of the huge amount of references.

⁷⁰ See Monod's *Bibliographie de l'histoire de France* (1888) or *Les sources de l'histoire mérovingienne* (1872-1885).

⁷¹ Halphen, *L'histoire en France*, 169.

specialisation within the field of history. The time of the universal historian was over: being professional meant to opt for a particular field, defined not only chronologically but also geographically and topically.

Specialisation: the historian as an expert (*homo doctus*) and as a member of the academic community (*homo academicus*)

The professional historian was, from the late nineteenth century, a civil servant, a *historien fonctionnaire* appointed by the State while nonetheless maintaining his research and teaching autonomy. Through the century as a whole, a diversification of the professions in the field of history happened: it saw growing numbers of archivists, librarians, museum curators, teachers, teaching assistants, and the top career for ambitious and talented historians - university professors. Due to Lavissee's influence⁷² the number of history chairs at the Sorbonne increased drastically, from three in 1865 to eight in 1899 up to sixteen in 1910.⁷³ Chairs for new domains were created: *Histoire de la Révolution française* (1883), *Histoire moderne et contemporaine* (1884), *Histoire économique et sociale* (1904), *Méthode historique* (1907), to mention a few.

In Belgium, the history departments at the universities did not develop in the same way as in France.⁷⁴ Yet the establishment of an *École historique belge*, based on the application of the new method and a growing number of scholarly trained historians, is marked by the simultaneous emergence of distinctive research centres, like that of Louvain for church history under Cauchie, or that of Ghent with the dominance of figures like Pirenne with his studies of the birth of cities and commerce during the middle ages, or of Fredericq with his research on the history of the Inquisition in the Low Countries.

This specialisation in history is marked by the publication of

⁷² Elected at the *Académie française* in 1892, Lavissee held concurrently many key positions: professor at the Sorbonne, director of the *ENS*, general secretary of the *Société pour l'étude des questions d'enseignement supérieur*, member of the permanent section of the *Conseil supérieur de l'instruction publique*. He was close to Albert Dumont and Alphonse Liard, succeeding head of higher school department at the ministry of education, and to politicians such as Emile Bourgeois and Raymond Poincaré.

⁷³ Den Boer, *Geschiedenis als beroep*, 256.

⁷⁴ In France, there were 71 history chairs at the end of the nineteenth century, in Belgium about 20.

collective historical works, renewing the tradition of the erudition of the Bollandists or of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historia*, the most famous collection of edited sources. One of the best examples of this in our sample is the *Corpus documentarum inquisitionis haereticae praeavitatis neerlandicae* (5 vol., 1889-1902) Fredericq edited with his students, the final result of their *exercices pratiques*.⁷⁵ Describing Fredericq's eagerness for teamwork – each volume of the *Corpus* was signed by 'Paul Fredericq en zijne leerlingen' –, Pirenne compared his editing enterprise with his students to an industrial production firm.⁷⁶ Similarly to Fredericq, Langlois, who studied at the *École des Chartes*, praised the cooperative working mode in history as no more than rational.⁷⁷

On the level of historical synthesis, Lavissee's *Histoire de France illustrée depuis les origines à la Révolution* (18 vol., 1900-11) and *Histoire de France contemporaine depuis la Révolution jusqu'à la paix de 1919* (9 vol., 1920-22) best illustrates the collaboration resulting from specialisation in history. To mention only the historians we encounter in this article, the third volume of the *Histoire de France* on *Saint Louis, Philippe Le Bel et les derniers capétiens* (1226-1328) was written by the medievalist Langlois and the fifth, seventh and eighth volumes of *Histoire de France contemporaine*, covering the period from 1848 to 1914, were written by Seignobos. All the contributors, who were mostly Lavissee's disciples, followed the plan given to them by the *maître* for dealing with political and diplomatic history but also with economics, society, arts, literature, science and religion. Bearing the mark of the new principles and methods of the *École méthodique*, the plan allows few comments on historical matters and evolutions.⁷⁸

Educated at the university, the historian became a member of a community of peers. The ties developed at the university tended to be durable, whatever the historians' careers ultimately were. Besides students' associations like the *Association générale des étudiants de Paris* that worked to

⁷⁵ Fredericq's *cours pratiques* were held in Dutch and published as part of the series *Werken van der praktischen leergang van vaderlandsche geschiedenis* (10 vol., 1886-1906). They include an historical introduction, sources edition and comments.

⁷⁶ H. Pirenne, 'Notice sur Paul Fredericq', *Annuaire de l'Académie royale de Belgique* 90 (1924) 311-352, 334.

⁷⁷ Langlois, *Manuel de bibliographie historique*, 579.

⁷⁸ For an overview of this series including 27 volumes, see Den Boer, *Geschiedenis als beroep*, 427. See also P. Nora, 'L'Histoire de France de Lavissee. Pietas erga patriam', in P. Nora ed., *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris 1997 [1984]), vol. 1, 851-902.

maintain such ties, there were commemorative events helping them endure, which were also an occasion to celebrate history's progress as a discipline. Professors' jubilees – the *Manifestation Pirenne* in 1912 or the *Jubilé d'Ernest Lavisse* in 1913 – brought together scholars (sometimes from abroad, depending on professor's fame), academicians, politicians, high-ranking civil servants – representatives of society's elite. Such events were covered by newspapers and immortalized through publications.⁷⁹ Being a member of the new historians' community required one to take part in rituals celebrating the 'big family'.⁸⁰

Such a community, endowed with a corporate identity, was composed of the nation's various professionally educated historians (teachers, archivists, librarians, teaching assistants, and university professors). They all shared the same epistemological code based on the rules defined through a common method, like documentary evidence, sufficiency, objectivity, analogical reasoning and clarity of style. In many respects, they shared the same ethical code as pertained to their practice of history as a science – assiduity, discipline, modesty and moderation.⁸¹ They were also attached to history's social role, as we will see below.

Langlois and Seignobos's *Introduction* proclaims that '(...) the main merit of history is to be a means for intellectual culture'.⁸² The statement meant two things. First, through the historical method, students learned to be critical and free in their judgments. And second, by showing a great number of societies and a variety of social forms, a study of history enabled students to understand past evolutions and to accept transformations, protecting them from having either a 'reactionary' or a 'revolutionary' spirit.⁸³ Through their historical education, students learned how to make history in a scientific manner, and also, if indirectly, how to act properly socially and even politically.

⁷⁹ In Pirenne's case, see *Manifestation en l'honneur de M. le professeur Henri Pirenne, Bruxelles, 12 mai 1912* (Mons 1912). In Lavisse's case, see *Jubilé de M. Ernest Lavisse, février 1913 : 50^e anniversaire de son entrée à l'Ecole normale* (Paris, s.d.).

⁸⁰ See Tollebeek, *Fredericq & Zonen*, 173.

⁸¹ As viewed by Monod, the study of history brings two advantages: on a moral level, it teaches 'modesty and moderation in our judgments'; on a philosophical level, such a study is par excellence an emancipating one for human spirit (Monod, 'La pédagogie historique', 203).

⁸² Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 257.

⁸³ Monod, 'La pédagogie historique', 203.

For many historians working at the universities, archives and libraries, the history community was international. Looking at historical reviews provides a lot of evidence of history's international character. Due to the work of its foreign contributors, the French journal *Revue historique* gave an insight into the state of historical research in many countries, among them Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Great Britain. For the same reason, *Le moyen âge* received a special mention in Monod's report on historical sciences: '(...) [it] gives a comprehensive report on articles on the middle age published in reviews all over the world.'⁸⁴ As for Belgium, the *Archives belges*, founded by Kurth in 1899, follows publications concerning the history of Belgium, nationally and internationally; there is also the *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, launched by Cauchie in 1900, which was a model of scientific work and of internationality.⁸⁵

Book's references are another way of shedding light on this international open-mindedness. Langlois and Seignobos's *Introduction* is a good example of a work based on international references: Bernheim's *Lehrbuch des historischen Methode* (Leipzig 1894), de Smedt's *Principes de la critique historique* (Liège 1883), several works of German erudition and even references to Lamprecht's ways of considering history as a logical development of collective matters are all cited. All through his life, Pirenne promoted the comparison between historical matters in several countries as the condition of truly scientific work.⁸⁶

Following the path of specialisation, historians established contacts with scholars in similar fields in other countries. Notable in these terms is the relationship between Fredericq, the American Henry Charles Lea and the German Joseph Hansen, chief archivist of the city of Cologne; all three specialised in the history of the Inquisition.⁸⁷ Pirenne, the champion of internationalism in the historical field, understood himself to be a bridge

⁸⁴ Monod, 'Les études historiques en France', 596-597.

⁸⁵ See J. Tollebeek, 'New periodicals for new ideas. On the birth of the *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 95.2 (2000) 391-429, accessible on www.rhe.eu.com (accessed 0801-2010).

⁸⁶ H. Pirenne, *De la Méthode comparative en histoire. Discours d'ouverture du cinquième Congrès international des sciences historiques* (Brussels 1923).

⁸⁷ See J. Tollebeek, *Writing the Inquisition in Europe and America. The correspondence between Henry Charles Lea and Paul Fredericq (1888-1908)* (Brussels 2004).

between French and German historians⁸⁸, taking part in the congresses of the German historians⁸⁹ and contributing to leading European historical reviews. As Monod mentioned with pride in 1897 in his report on the historical sciences in France, first published in the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, '(...) our historians, who like to limit themselves to the history of France, are still more interested in the history of other countries and are willing to work more and more abroad in libraries and archives.'⁹⁰ He followed by quoting a long list of French books dealing with German, Italian or Russian history.⁹¹

At the end of the nineteenth century, the *good* historian, an expert in his field, knew several languages⁹², read the important scientific historical reviews from other countries, followed the publications on his topic nationally and internationally, and published abroad. From 1900 on, he took part in international historical congresses.⁹³ He contributed to cooperative efforts among (at least) European historians.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ See among others the three review articles on German theories about the origins of medieval cities in the *Revue historique*: Pirenne, 'L'origine des constitutions urbaines au moyen âge', *Revue historique* 53 (1893) 52-83; 57 (1895) 57-98 and 293-327. Pirenne underlines the fact he wants to speak about theories '(...) presque inconnues en France' (1893) 53.

⁸⁹ See G. Warland, 'Rezeption und Wahrnehmung der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft bei belgischen „Epigonen“: Paul Fredericq (1850-1920), Godefroid Kurth (1847-1916) und Henri Pirenne (1862-1935)' in: M. Beyen, G. Draye, H. Roland ed., *Deutschlandbilder in Belgien, 1830-1940* (Münster 2009) 199-239.

⁹⁰ Monod, 'Les études historiques en France', 599.

⁹¹ Ibidem, 599.

⁹² It was the case of all the historians I refer to. For them, it was a requisite for working as an historian to know not only older languages in order to read the records, but also the modern ones for being able to read foreign scientific literature.

⁹³ See K. D. Erdmann, *Towards a Global Community of Historians. The International Historical Congresses and the International Committee of Historical Sciences, 1898-2000*, A. Nothnagle trans. (New York and Oxford 2005).

⁹⁴ See, for instance, Langlois's observations on the first meeting of the Académies' international association: Langlois, 'L'Association internationale des Académies', *Revue de Paris* 4 (1901) 123-135.

Communication: the historian as an intellectual (*homo propagator*)

Contrary to the forceful judgement of the *Annales*, historical science as formulated and practised by the *école méthodique* was not intended to be only an erudite practice detached from contemporary concerns.⁹⁵ The importance of style in historical writing, as mentioned above, is one sign of the *école méthodique* historian's will to diffuse historical knowledge in society. The professional historian could not let the door to the book market and general review system be open only to non-professionals. As Halphen pointed out, his fellow historians wanted to prevent '(...) the break between the readership and true history (...).'⁹⁶ Scholarly histories, mostly emanating from the universities, became the central source of high-brow popular works. In this way, the historical method was used as a 'weapon of the historian of present time against the ignorance and the mistakes of a journalist who hadn't learnt the method.'⁹⁷

The ideal of the academic historian promoted by the Belgian and French founding fathers of the historical discipline in their respective countries fulfilled three functions: 'the scholar, the professor and the intellectual.'⁹⁸ Even if two historians from our sample, Lavissee and Seignobos⁹⁹, soon abandoned erudite work in favour of the popularization of scientific history through schoolbooks¹⁰⁰ while pursuing their obsession with pedagogy, others fulfilled all three duties during their careers. First, they researched devotedly; second, they lectured and took responsibility for their universities' administrative duties; third, they gave talks to broader audiences, not only composed of educated people in artistic and literary circles but also of workers in popular universities like the *Extension*

⁹⁵ See, for example, C. Charle, 'L'historien entre science et politique: Charles Seignobos' in: C. Charle, *Paris fin de siècle. Culture et politique* (Paris 1998) 125.

⁹⁶ Halphen, *L'histoire en France*, 172.

⁹⁷ Charle, 'L'historien entre science et politique', 146.

⁹⁸ See O. Dumoulin, *Le rôle social de l'historien. De la chaire au prétoire* (Paris 2003).

⁹⁹ 'une histoire de professeur, non de chercheur' (Prost, 'Seignobos revisité', 116).

¹⁰⁰ On Lavissee's *Histoire de France* for the primary school, see P. Nora, 'Lavissee, instituteur national. Le « petit Lavissee », évangile de la République' in: *Les lieux de mémoire*, 239-275 and S. Citron, *Le mythe national. L'histoire de France revisitée* (Paris 2008) 17. Seignobos dealt with the secondary school: *Histoire de la civilisation*, 2 vol. (Paris 1885-1886) and *Cours d'histoire Charles Seignobos*, 3 vol. (Paris, s. d.).

universitaire or the *Musée pédagogique*. They also wrote articles for general reviews (*Revue de Paris*, *Revue des deux mondes*, etc.).

Grand historical narratives or narrower studies were the principal means by which historians fulfilled their duties as intellectuals. Such books combined sound scholarship with an effort to communicate with society. As far as the grand historical narrative is concerned, we have already mentioned Lavissee's *Histoire de France*. We must now also name Pirenne's *Histoire de Belgique* (7 vol., 1900-1932), which was a bestseller.¹⁰¹ The second, more focussed type of study, compiled a lot of works on one topic or on one person, and often constituted a *lieu de mémoire* either for the French Third Republic or for Belgium, as with Camille Jullian's *Vercingétorix* (1900), Aulard's *Histoire politique de la Révolution française* (1903) or Fredericq's *Marnix de Saint Aldegonde* (1881). Such compilations were not limited to books on national history, as seen in Seignobos's *Histoire politique de l'Europe contemporaine* (1897) or Kurth's *Sainte Clothilde* (1897) and *L'Eglise aux tournants de l'histoire* (1900).¹⁰²

The effort to engage with society was not only made by left-wing intellectuals like Seignobos and Monod, who were *dreyfusards*, pacifists and internationalists.¹⁰³ Lavissee was a more moderate republican, and more nationalist; Fredericq and Pirenne were convinced liberals; and Kurth a fervent Catholic. Their engagements as historians (to distinguish from their civic personas) were not primarily a matter of politics, but were made because of ethical and philosophical concerns, so that they could equip society with a truly historical perspective and help citizens form their choices rationally. They were more or less all driven by the 'obsession of diffusing the 'historical Enlightenment' for the sake of citizen's education.'¹⁰⁴ History must '(...) inspire sympathy for the efforts done to increase justice, equality, welfare, liberty'¹⁰⁵ and diffuse a moderate patriotism, far different from merely feeling hate for other nations¹⁰⁶, proclaimed Monod. This progressive and universalistic aim for history as a

¹⁰¹ On this success, see B. Lyon, *Henri Pirenne. An Intellectual Biography* (Ghent 1971).

¹⁰² This book is the result of Kurth's teaching at the *Extension universitaire féminine* in Anvers (1897-98).

¹⁰³ They belonged to the founders of the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (1901) and championed the cause of a liberal progressive democracy.

¹⁰⁴ Charle, 'L'historien entre science et politique', 147.

¹⁰⁵ Monod, 'La pédagogie historique', 206.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, 203.

discipline was shared by liberal or catholic Belgian historians, in their historical discourse¹⁰⁷ as well as in their social engagement.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

For the Belgian and French historians I refer to, founding fathers in their own countries of the research university on the German model, the new *good* historian at the end of the nineteenth century was endowed with at least four abilities. Above all, he was trained as an *homo methodicus*, and then was educated and socialized as an *homo academicus*. As an *homo doctus*, he specialized in a historical field, producing original and well documented books and taking part in historians' networks, both national and international. For all that, he didn't turn his back on broader society, but rather was concerned with the diffusion of historical knowledge: he worked as an *homo propagator* promoting progressive values, inherited from his reflections on the course of history. Such fundamental values illustrating their optimistic faith in human progress stood above the historian's republican, liberal or catholic ideology.

In short, being educated as a *good* historian at the end of the nineteenth century had a great deal to do with the ideal figure of a multitasking scholar, who linked his ethical choices to his epistemological decisions. Hence, scientific knowledge, and especially historical knowledge, had to be a reference for society at large. History was not only a 'hard science'; being a historian also imposed demanding social duties.

¹⁰⁷ See notably Pirenne's *Histoire de Belgique*.

¹⁰⁸ Fredericq was very active in the liberal wing of the Flemish Movement, struggling a. o. to include Flemish into the Belgian education system. He was president of the local *Willemsfonds* and editor in chief of the liberal magazine *Het Volksbelang*. Very concerned by the social inequities, Kurth was a promoter of the Christian democracy in Liège, writing for the local journal, *Le bien du peuple*.