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THEORY MEETS WORLD: ANGLO-FRENCH HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE AGE OF TRANSATLANTIC EXPLORATION

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EARLY modern transatlantic exploration propelled English and French writers to narrate new histories that incorporated the New World into the overarching framework of the creation-based universal history familiar from the era of the medieval chronicle. Displaying both change and continuity in relation to prior humanist scholarship, early modern historians faced a new obligation to include the Americas in their comprehensive chronologies and to locate its peoples and ancestries within a biblical master-narrative. While the medieval chronicle provided records of events and orations, the histories of the transatlantic exploration era exhibited a heightened effort to understand and explain human motivation and behavior, both universal and cultural. In particular, intellectuals such as Jean Bodin, Thomas Blundeville, and Francis Bacon heralded and exemplified a methodological reform that distinguished human history as a category of analysis distinct from providential and natural history. Other writers such as Jean de Léry and Sir Walter Raleigh, whose transatlantic travels shaped their perspectives, crafted narratives that affirmed providential intervention in history, yet even their work reflected a similar preoccupation with human causation. Although each group's cultural commitments produced differing methodologies and views of providence, both shared a desire to take inventory of the world around them beyond the format of the medieval chronicle. Further, these Anglo-French writers converged in a hope that their writings would contribute to a new understanding of causation and systems of human behavior within the familiar structure of a divinely ordained past.

As participants of a continental—and largely Italian-centered—dialogue reevaluating the appropriate methods and prospective uses of history, French and English writers such as Jean Bodin and Thomas Blundeville published guidelines for a post-chronicle style of historiography that emphasized inquiry into human causation. Bodin's *Method for*

the Easy Comprehension of History (1566) proposed a separation of human history from both the works of providence and the development of nature, while also addressing matters of source evaluation, arrangement of topics, and the different types of historians. In a much shorter treatment, Blundeville's *True Order of Wryting and Reading Hystories* (1574) delineated rules for showing change over time, human causation and effect, and avoiding fabricated orations in favor of precise narration. Composed of direct excerpts from Patrizzi's *Della historia* (1560) and an unpublished treatise written by Giacomo Concio, Blundeville's petite guidebook suggested that correct methodology is vital to constructing a historical narrative.¹

The cultural frameworks of both Bodin and Blundeville maintained intellectual ties with the continent's "republic of letters," and especially with Italy, where a similar transformation from the medieval chronicle to a new historiography continued to emerge. *Ars historica* (art of history) scholars such as Leonardi Bruni, Francesco Robortello, Thomas Campanella, and Francesco Patrizzi displayed a new sense of pride in critiquing classical histories and dictating methods for how histories might be better written.² These scholars, for whom history was a highly-developed art requiring substantial skills beyond the ability to merely chronicle events, embraced the rhetorical tradition of the ancients while rejecting its common use of forged speeches and exaggeration.³ This Italian group and their northern adherents, including Bodin, Blundeville, and (to a lesser degree) Francis Bacon, believed that good histories should inform intellectual curiosity, the search for virtue, rules for governance, and lessons for future wars.⁴ While some within this debate, such as Christophe Milieu, emphasized a new kind of cultural history, most Anglo-French historians specialized in government and military histories. The *ars historica* representatives concurred that although God created and ordered the world, humans largely shaped their own affairs in combination with natural causes; thus, these scholars considered the study of human motivations vital to effective historiography.⁵ Emerging late in this continent-centered dialogue, Francis Bacon's *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII* (1622) and his *Essays* (1625) exhibited similar

¹ Leonard F. Dean, *Tudor Theories of History Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: 1947), 5.

² Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 188–189.

³ Anthony Grafton, *What Was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 181, 188.

⁴ Donald R. Kelley, "Writing Cultural History in Early Modern Europe: Christophe Milieu and His Project," *Renaissance Quarterly* 52 (June 1999): 356.

⁵ Breisach, 188–189.

methods as those prescribed by Bodin and Blundeville. Bacon's focus on human rather than providential causation combined with his focus toward systems of government to form a history particularly representative of Bodin and Blundeville's methods.

Of all the guides to theory born of the *ars historica* discourse, Bodin's work proved unusual because of the boldness of its message.⁶ Without providing so much as a preliminary case for his thesis, Bodin commenced his *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History* by presenting one of the most memorable statements of the *ars historica* continental dialogue, in which he advocated a differentiation between human, natural, and divine histories:

Of history, that is, the true narration of things, there are three kinds: human, natural, and divine . . . One depicts the acts of man while leading his life in the midst of society. The second reveals causes hidden in nature and explains their development from earliest beginnings. The last records the strength and power of Almighty God . . . In accordance with these divisions arise history's three accepted manifestations—it is probable, inevitable, and holy—and the same number of virtues are associated with it, that is to say, prudence, knowledge, and faith.⁷

Regardless of the pious and scientific-philosophical overtones in his thesis, Bodin's purpose in writing this treatise was not to expound upon the three divisions, but rather to argue that there existed a vital distinction between human history and other histories in the first place. Many scholars had previously discussed this concept, but Bodin's straightforward articulation of these distinctions most clearly embodied the early modern break with the episteme of the medieval chronicles, in which divine, natural, and human histories had been inseparable. Centering his framework around human agency, Bodin stated, "Let us define somewhat narrowly the word 'history,' itself of wide import, by the activities of men only and, in the popular manner of speaking, by the truthful narration of deeds of long ago."⁸ According to Bodin, the historian's task was to examine human actions in relation to larger questions of causation, motivation, and the changing nature of man's will in relation to his environment.⁹

Extensive in topical scope, Bodin's work included various analyses of ancient historians and methods, as well as examinations of contemporary

⁶ Grafton, *What Was History?* 64.

⁷ Jean Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 15.

⁸ Bodin, 28.

⁹ George Huppert, "The Renaissance Background of Historicism," *History and Theory* 5, no. 1 (1966): 57–58.

historiography. Bodin diagnosed in past historiography a problematic overemphasis on orations and, more importantly, a disturbing underemphasis on the plans of historic figures. Signaling his interest in causation, Bodin argued that no history was complete without an adept interpretation of both the plans that preceded human action and the after-effects of such action. History included more than a record of events, and it was only complete when furnished with a carefully crafted interpretation and presentation determined by the historian's analysis and judgment. Beyond these often-missing requisites, Bodin also lamented the poor arrangement of chronicles and the confusion between human, divine, and natural histories.¹⁰

While the chronicle had traditionally implied that the historian acted primarily as an orator, Bodin advocated a methodological reformation that entailed increased accuracy in judging and explaining norms of human behavior. In a chapter titled, "The Choice of Historians," Bodin claimed that the prudent historian should distinguish fact from rhetorical fiction, especially when reading and writing biographical sketches:

Yet by no means can it happen that one and the same man fills the office of a good orator and that of a good historian. I cannot approve those histories which commemorate perpetually the praises and the virtues of a man, but do not mention his vices, since no one is of such great integrity and sagacity that he will not often err.¹¹

Not only did Bodin require that historical figures be analyzed according to the realities of human behavior as opposed to exaggerated praise, but he also advised that written sources be weighed against the lives of their authors. Because Bodin valued accuracy and analysis tempered by discretion towards sources, he warned against historical commentary on contemporary events, writing, "For those who permit histories of present-day affairs to circulate publicly, it is really difficult to write the truth, lest the report should injure the name of someone or damage his reputation."¹² Bodin's guidelines for the cautious construction of truthful history demanded that modern historians not only negotiate and even suppress their own prejudices, but that they also examine the ancient historians: "The cautious reader of history . . . will not form an opinion concerning the work until he has understood clearly the character and the talent of the historian."¹³

¹⁰ Bodin, 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹² *Ibid.*, 46.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 42.

In accordance with his pursuit of truth found by rigorous methods of examination and analysis, Bodin also exhibited a desire to take scientific inventory of the world. In his chapter, “Criteria By Which to Test the Origins of Peoples,” Bodin sought to refute pretentious claims of ancestry that traced a race’s history back to divinity, a practice that perhaps deserved “indulgence” by the “ancients” but was less tolerable among “modern people.”¹⁴ Bodin rejected such arrogance because it committed the historical fallacy of “[separating] this race altogether from association and friendship with others by assuming for them no other source about origins.” He instead deferred to the biblical narrative of the origins of peoples, which proclaimed a common racial bond for all humanity.¹⁵ Bodin also included another type of inventory of the world—the world of historians past and present. Titled, “The Order and Collection of Historians,” this list categorized famous historians under such headings as, “Writers of Universal History,” “Geographichistories,” “Historians of Pagan Superstitions,” “Historians of the Christian Religion,” “Historians of the Arab Sect,” “Historians of the Greeks,” and “Historians of international Biographies,” to name a few.¹⁶

Bodin’s concern for accuracy, analysis, and categorization also applied to his theories of causation. In a chapter titled, “Correct Evaluation,” Bodin attacked astrology as an illegitimate cause of human affairs, and he instead presented the climate as the source of differentiation among human skin colors and degrees of health. He attributed personality traits to health conditions such as the predominance of black or yellow bile. Eager to engage in rigorous inquiry that would not only explain the past but also produce guidelines for understanding future governance and activity, Bodin perhaps viewed his work as a global study of various continents and peoples in order to formulate reliable “laws of history” which would adequately inform the present.¹⁷

Continental critics and Cambridge scholars welcomed Bodin’s work, appreciating the controversial contributions it made towards the ongoing humanist debate about rhetoric, history, government, and classifications of human character and causation.¹⁸ So significant was Bodin’s emphasis on human—as opposed to divine—causation and his encyclopedic categorization of the historiographic enterprise that Anthony Grafton has recently argued that Bodin’s *Method* was “some-

¹⁴ Ibid., 334–335.

¹⁵ Ibid., 335.

¹⁶ Ibid., 365–388.

¹⁷ Huppert, 57.

¹⁸ Grafton, *What Was History?* 167.

thing like a Copernican revolution” in its impact on early modern scholarship.¹⁹

Despite making significant innovation in historical theory from both the classical and medieval historians, Bodin was nonetheless far from the pioneer of the *ars historica* treatises on theory. Bodin’s *Method* was a product not only of the continental debate but also of his French intellectual culture, and as such it remained within the framework laid by his French counterparts Francois Baudouin and Christophe Milieu. For instance, Milieu’s *Writing the History of the Universe of Things*, published some fifteen years before Bodin’s *Method*, had interpreted the past as a series of lessons by using the same sweeping inventorial approach that Bodin later deployed. Milieu did this while maintaining a worldview similar to Bodin’s, based on a providential ordering of the past—an epistemology that historian Donald R. Kelley adds was nonetheless “modified by Renaissance discovery and scholarship.”²⁰ Bodin’s *Method* paralleled the earlier works by Milieu and Baudouin and should be located, then, within both the French and wider continental *ars historica* context, from which Thomas Blundeville’s work also arose.

Published in London, Thomas Blundeville’s booklet of Italian history theory, *The True Order of Wryting and Reading Hystories* (1574), agreed in substance with Bodin’s philosophy.²¹ Because the booklet, originally a letter to the “Most Noble Erle of Leycefter,” was a translation of Patrizzi and Concio, two members of the *ars historica* debate, its origins in the Italian world of historiography are undisputed. This pamphlet argued that while the historian’s task included chronicling an event precisely as it happened, its culminating purpose lay in explaining an event’s cause, instruments, and circumstance. In Part One, Blundeville wrote:

Every deed that man doth, springeth either of some outward cause, as of force, or fortune (which properly ought not to be referred to man:) of else of some inward cause belonging to man: of which causes there be two, that is, reason and appetite. . .²²

The guide also noted that one’s personality could also “bring forth actions” and determine the course of events. But while humans remained the primary agents in history, inquiries into causation extended further

¹⁹ Ibid., 179.

²⁰ Kelley, 346.

²¹ Thomas Blundeville, *The True Order of Wryting and Reading Hystories* (Norwood, NJ: W. J. Johnson, 1979).

²² Blundeville’s short letter is now in booklet form but remains without pagination. I have translated the longer selections from Blundeville’s Middle English into a more decipherable form of contemporary English.

to include factors such as weather. The guide advised: “And the better knowledge of the opportunity of affaires: It shall be needful sometime to note the days according as they be either hot, or cold, clear, or cloudy, dry or moist, windy or snowy. . .” Ordinary circumstances, not divine intervention, irrevocably affected the course of history.

Like Bodin’s use of nature to explain discrepancies in human characteristics, Blundeville’s letter emphasized human history as distinct from both divine and natural; nonetheless, Blundeville found the three connected. While history’s prospective uses included acknowledging God’s providence, “whereby all things are governed and directed,” learning wisdom by the examples of the wise, and being stirred by example to follow good and flee evil, Blundeville recorded that even when noting the providence of God, there were ways to secondary means of knowing “what causes and by what means he overthroweth one kingdom and setteth up another.” In other words, recognizing God’s reign over history did not negate the ordinary task of gathering and sorting non-divine evidence for causation. According to Blundeville’s criteria, a properly written history would provide causal explanations as to why the same means could fail once but succeed later.

In a chapter titled, “Of the duty and office of historiographers, and what order and disposition in writing histories they ought to have,” Blundeville distinguished the *ars historica* philosophy from its medieval predecessors. Writing history took artistic skill and craftsmanship, but in no way did the *ars historica* adherents support the fabricated speeches of earlier chronicles. Blundeville summarized the *ars historica* views in the following manner:

And some do make of so much as much, as true Philosophers and Historiographers, whose office is to tell things as they were done without either augmenting or diminishing them, or swerving one iote from the truth. Whereby it appeareth that the historiographers ought not to feign any Orations nor any other thing, but truly to report every such speech, and deed, even as it was spoken, or done.

Like Bodin, Blundeville advocated a careful analysis of each source, one that included insight into its author’s life and work. In order to read sources accurately, one needed to know for “the ends and for what purpose they were written.” Blundeville also presented a differentiation between petty studies such as genealogies, pedigrees, and mindless knowledge of dates on the one hand and, on the other, worthwhile studies of history that employed the methods he mapped. History’s utility lay in its ability to impart wisdom, stir citizens to follow good and flee evil, and provide trustworthy lessons in governance and warfare.

Famously, Sir Francis Bacon's *History of the Reign of King Henry VII*, together with his fragmentary histories, deployed the theories that Bodin and Blundeville advocated by exchanging the study of providential intervention for the examination of human action. Like many scientists and philosophers of his day, Bacon accepted the reality of a God of history but defined him as one who gave humans an element of autonomy in carrying out their lives.²³ In *Henry VII*, God appears in Bacon's third person rhetorical orations, but is largely absent in his narrative discourse. In this text, men remain the primary agents of history, and it is their actions that Bacon sought to chronicle and interpret. Bacon's *Essays* (1625) also maintained the emphasis on causations of political formation and norms of civil government, often in the manner of Machiavelli's evaluations of Florentine history and social-scientific laws of human behavior and causation. Bodin had discredited the idea that human character was decaying throughout time; likewise, Bacon believed that human improvement increased as time progressed, and claimed that there existed "more knowledge in the world than there was in the ages before, whereby the wits of men (which are the shops wherein all actions are forged) are more furnished and improved."²⁴

History, according to Bacon—and just as the *ars historica* group concurred—could contribute to the accumulation of knowledge for one's philosophical instruction or a nation's benefit.²⁵ So confident was Bacon in the growth of human knowledge over time that he preferred probing recent historical events to the history of the ancients, whom he portrayed as "ignorant."²⁶ Bacon's sweeping evaluations of civic norms in English history reveal his preference for an analysis that would allow for more interpretive depth than the chronicle, while at the same time maintain its scientific-seeming genre of political narrative to which the continental historians of the time remained committed.

Meanwhile, writers who had traveled across the Atlantic inadvertently defied the circulating wisdom of the *ars historica* group in distinguishing between providential and human history. Jean de Léry's *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* (1578) interpreted the subjects of his investigation through his Calvinist understanding of the Bible. His religious framework guided him as he assigned motives and causation for the cultural practices of the New World's inhabitants. Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World* (1614), written after his early years of travel

²³ Breisach, 191.

²⁴ Sir Francis Bacon, *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII and Selected Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 211.

²⁵ Breisach, 192.

²⁶ Grafton, *What Was History?* 117.

and his recent imprisonment at the hand of James I, continued within the theological tradition of the Creation-based chronicles. Yet while Léry and Raleigh together contributed to a genre of history visibly embedded in theological suppositions, they nonetheless converged with the *ars historica* theorists. Both groups desired to take inventory of the expanding world, its peoples and their histories, while also describing causation and questioning the origins, cultures, and development of these peoples.

Léry's *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* has become a legendary representative of the travel accounts that were commonly written by early modern New World enthusiasts. Based on Léry's travels in 1556, its extensive descriptions neatly ordered New World warfare, marriage, religion, fish, animals, and plants into a topical catalogue. Comprised of twenty-two chapters and a "Colloquy in the Tupinamba and French Tongues," Léry omitted little that might interest his European readers. Léry's impulse to take inventory of the New World contributed to the organization of his final book; he categorized his observations and interpretations of human activity under such headings as, "The Ceremonies for Killing and Eating Prisoners," "Law and Civil Order among the Savages," and "Marriage, Consanguinity, and the Care of Children." This organization was reminiscent of Bodin's extensive listing of historians, and it reflected the impulse to construct meaning from otherwise chaotic and perplexing objects of analysis, such as the "Americans."

Scholar Frank Lestringant has noted that although Léry's work contained no extraordinarily new factual information on Brazil and that it was published among a plethora of other similarly descriptive accounts, it was nonetheless "unique because, thanks to the acuity of his reported sensations and his dramatic account, he was able to create an illusion of reality without equal among Renaissance voyagers."²⁷ Perhaps the real source of strength for Léry's "illusion of reality" was his ability to present the peoples of Brazil as fully human and to assign motives for their practices, motives consistent with his beliefs of human nature. Further, Léry compared the resulting "barbarian cruelties" of their passions to those practices that were commonplace in Europe and (according to Léry) advocated by Machiavelli.²⁸ In his attempt to explain the history of humans in the New World, Léry assigned revenge as a motive with which Europeans could relate. Léry normalized indigenous cannibalism by referencing past Christian atrocities in Italy, as well as a contemporary

²⁷ Frank Lestringant, "The Philosopher's Breviary: Jean de Léry in the Enlightenment" in *New World Encounters*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 129.

²⁸ Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America*, trans. Janet Whitley (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1990), 112.

example of French “butchery” during the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre of 1572.²⁹ Léry attributed motives to the Brazilians’ warfare, claiming that they fought not for land or gain but only for the passion of avenging the evils perpetrated upon them by their foes.³⁰ In his attempt to explain causation in a way that would connect the New World with Europeans’ familiar theories of human behavior, Léry implied that the “Americans” acted upon the same passions and provocations that troubled the history of France and indeed, much of Europe.

Léry’s interpretation of human causation in the New World proceeded from his cultural and theological commitments to Huguenot epistemology. Léry perceived God as the sovereign creator and ruler of the earth who “disposes of the whole as it pleases Him to do.”³¹ The God he presented to the indigenous peoples created man “excellent above all other creatures” and intervened in history to preserve his people who traveled from France to America.³² Léry incorporated the objects of his observation into a grand historical narrative based on the Huguenot teachings. Those that had not heard the word of Christ would nonetheless experience judgment at the Second Coming because God had revealed himself in nature so that all were without excuse, according to Romans 1:20.³³ Léry located the New World, within the biblical narrative of history, and he attributed agency to God both in acts of general providence, such as preservation during a boat voyage, and in acts of specific intervention, such as salvation.

The influence of the biblical framework on Léry’s interpretation of his experience in the New World is amply evident in his deployment of scriptural comparisons. In the advent of his travels, the idea of “the whole world” took on a new dimension for Léry as he sang Psalm 104, which praised God as creator of “all men” and “the whole world” to the very words that “had first been sung more than ten thousand moons ago (for that is their way of counting) by one of our great prophets.”³⁴ Not only could Léry compare the hospitality that he received from the “savages” with that which the apostle Paul had been given by the “barbarians” on the Isle of Malta, he could locate the land itself within the expanse described in Psalm 104.³⁵ Thus, when Léry wrote his travelogue, he found himself in a mediatory role between the New World and biblical history, in that his travels in the New World appeared synonym-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 135.

³² *Ibid.*, 146.

³³ *Ibid.*, 149–150.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

ous with biblical travels, the songs of the Old Testament proved equally applicable to his present sojourn in the New World, and the savages of the New World were comparable with the barbarians of the New Testament. As Léry developed this frame of thought, he deployed his biblical narrative framework to formulate an interpretation of the “Americans.”

It appears that Léry could not help but touch upon the question that intrigued explorers of the New World—namely, the historical origin of the indigenous peoples. Léry, like others donning the historian’s cap, worked by conjecture and deduction to determine from which of the sons of Noah had the peoples of the New World descended, “since it could not be proved by Holy Scriptures nor yet by secular history.”³⁶ Yet while Léry did not see the Bible’s primary role as a comprehensive historical annal, he nonetheless based his research on its explanation of the historic dispersion of nations:

It could have happened (I may be wrong in this) that the forebears and ancestors of our Americans, having been chased by the children of Israel from several regions of the land of Canaan, took ship and put themselves at the mercy of the sea, to be cast ashore in this land of America.³⁷

Léry is careful to note that his interpretation is not authoritative but merely informed conjecture (based, as it were, on secondary sources since the Holy Scriptures had not explicitly addressed this historical development). Léry’s biblical framework allowed him to not only interpret the providence that had preserved him on his journey but also to locate the “Americans” within a grand narrative timeline, from the Creation to the Last Judgment.

Another New World enthusiast, Sir Walter Raleigh, composed an unfinished *History of the World* that progressed from biblical narratives of the dispersion of nations to the days of Alexander and the Punic Wars. While Raleigh meant to complete a history that would include England’s political past, his work ends around 168 BC.³⁸ Raleigh’s career involved serving Queen Elizabeth I, conquering and plundering the Spanish at sea, and defending English claims to the New World. While the history he wrote centers on ancient times, Raleigh utilized his experiences at sea as an interpretive lens from which to view the wars of the more distant past. When he described Darius’s unsuccessful battle against Alexander,

³⁶ Ibid., 150.

³⁷ Ibid., 150–151.

³⁸ C. A. Patrides, introduction to *The History of the World*, by Walter Raleigh, ed. C. A. Patrides (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 24.

Raleigh compared contemporary accounts of England's skirmishes with Spain in "the Indies."³⁹ Raleigh compared tales that emerged from the Temple of Hammon to the "prettie tales" told by the Spaniards during their conquest of the West Indies.⁴⁰

Raleigh expressed an explicitly providential view of history by presenting time according to the same grand biblical narrative as Léry used. Whatever Raleigh's personal beliefs, his sense of history included a God whose purposes became evident as he intervened at various times from the Creation through the growth of nations that rose and fell according to God's designs.⁴¹ At the same time, Raleigh admitted that, beyond scriptural revelation, many of God's intentions in history were "secret," such as why "a maruailous shower of raine" overtook Alexander the Great's enemies in Egypt, when "it neuer raines there."⁴² Thus, while the Bible illuminated general principles of God's plans, providential history primarily belonged to God's secret will, and could only be discussed by conjecture.

While God remained an active agent in Raleigh's histories, Raleigh granted humans significant agency as well. Using the metaphor of a theater production, Raleigh portrayed God as the "Author of all our tragedies," the writer who gave parts for each to play.⁴³ He attributed motivations for war in ancient history to one's wealth and status, writing, ". . . the needie are always aduenturous, so plenty is wont to shunne peril."⁴⁴ Raleigh, while retaining much of the format of the medieval chronicle, nonetheless added significant innovations to the historical thought of his time through his analyses of causation.

Clearly, Raleigh and Léry took up different historical tasks. Raleigh transformed the creation-based chronicle by adding human motivation and comparisons to Spanish-English skirmishes in the New World. Some historians have speculated as to the authenticity of Raleigh's theological references, even so far as to imply his religious rhetoric merely reflected his culture and mode of historiography. Yet whatever his personal convictions, Raleigh deployed providential language throughout his work but especially in his preface. Léry described and categorized the activities of the "Americans" according to groupings that appeared logical to his European mind, incorporating them into an interpretive framework of scriptural master-narrative. For Léry in particular, divine, human, and

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁴¹ Patrides, introduction to Raleigh, 15.

⁴² Raleigh, 269.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 261.

natural histories were so interconnected that he believed New World rituals reflected not the personality of the “Americans” as shaped by nature alone, as Bodin had thought, but rather that nature itself acted as a historical text bearing witness to God. Léry connected the Old and New Worlds by his experience in both lands—an experience profoundly shaped by Huguenot ideas of history.

Inspired by their experiences in the New World, Raleigh and Léry inadvertently defied the continental theories of both Bodin and Blundeville, and composed histories that differed from the austerity of Bacon’s work. The two former travelers, who had seen the New World with their own eyes, resorted to references to God’s work in history as they sought to understand and explain what they saw. To them, history seemed a tangled web of divine, natural, and human agency, unlike the division Bodin advocated.

Yet Léry and Raleigh converged with Bodin, Blundeville, and Bacon in their interest in examining human motivation and culture. All authors found the descriptive methods of the medieval chronicle insufficient, and they instead desired to find underlying reasons for human actions in matters of war, religion, and government. Despite their differing views of the role of providence, both groups utilized the early modern framework of a biblical master narrative of the world’s history. Rather than acting as a barrier to intellectual progress, such a framework allowed early modern writers to make sense of universal human behavior and cultural contingency alike.⁴⁵

This early modern period of historiography, mixed as it was between continental intellectuals waxing eloquent about theory and former travelers incorporating their interpretations of the New World into their perceptions of the master-narrative of world history, served as a bridge between the medieval chronicle and Enlightenment-based historicism. Its emphasis on human causation propelled narratives to new interpretive heights that the chronicle had been unable to attain, and the exploration of the New World only increased such an emphasis when historians attempted to explain the motivations behind the strange-seeming practices of its inhabitants. The New World became part of this new historiography by becoming the object of inspiration, study, and reference to writers such as Raleigh and Léry. However, this period retained the theological foundation of the medieval chronicle: namely, the reality of a God who revealed himself in the Bible and whose purposes, while often unknowable, nonetheless shaped human history, albeit by secondary and appointed means. Thus, comprehensive historical truth

⁴⁵ See Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1992.

remained more or less elusive to human grasp, and conjecture had to be reflexively admitted, and fabricated orations discarded. Exhibiting both change and continuity with medieval scholarship, early modern historians constructed narratives that reflected their own judicial perspectives and employed their talents in organizing topics and presenting evidence, in a concerted effort to interpret human behavior on levels of universality and cultural contingency. Uninhibited by the limits of the medieval chronicle, early modern Anglo-French historiography altered the craft in scope, method, and function, leaving a lasting witness to its participants' intellectual achievements.

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