

## Historein

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History and Semiotics



### Historein: Asking Questions

*Historein Historein*

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*Historein*: gerund form of the ancient Greek verb *ιστορέω-ω*: a. to inquire into, or about a thing, b. to give an account of what one has learnt, record.

Lidell & Scott, Greek-English Lexicon, vol. I (A-K), p. 842

## *Historein: Asking Questions*

Good questions may lead to good stories. And in our case the question is: "why a journal" and more so "why this particular journal?" During the

mid-1980s—the period when most of the members of this editorial group entered higher education, driven mostly by a general interest in humanities—the often pressing question was "why history?" How and why does one ask questions about the past? What is the relation between these questions and the present? How can these questions and answers be communicated? What determines the communication between history and contemporary politics? How can the relationship between the practice of historical scholarship and social action be defined? If history—time and our understanding of it—is always becoming, how do we make, study, write and teach it?

*Historein* was conceived as an intervention in that sphere of historical scholarship where scholars and educators study/speak/write/teach about all these questions that—we believe—may lead to good (hi-)stories. *Historein* seeks to provide a space for reflection on the ways in which historians position themselves within historiographical traditions, methodologies and sociopolitical conditions. As editors of *Historein*, we often reflect on this project as we try to trace the connection between this publication and the first stages of our collaborative work. The first stages can be traced to 1991 when as a group of graduate students we became involved in an ambitious research project at the University of Athens. That project explored the history of historical education, teaching and writing and involved archival research in the history of historical scholarship in modern Greece from the time of the founding the first national university in Athens in 1837. This initial project constituted the starting point for further studies that concerned theoretical and methodological issues related to the practice of historical scholarship and the

production of historiographical discourse. Moreover, it developed in the general intellectual environment of the early 1990s, a period which encouraged the elaboration of questions concerning the methodology and theoretical foundations of historiographical practice. Studying history at the graduate level during the early 1990s, one felt the need to elaborate (literally "work out") the practices of methodological criticism and theoretical self-reflection.

In Greece, the particular character of the early 1990s intellectual environment can be better understood in the context of the development of historical studies as a field after 1974, a date that marked the end of the seven year military dictatorship and a longer period of post-civil war coercive state politics. The period after 1974 was marked by intense activity in the fields of the social sciences and the humanities. For a large number of young intellectuals there was an urgent need to re-write and re-claim historiography, since the experience of political and cultural absolutism had already galvanised the relation between politics and historiographical research. New historiographical approaches were launched; economic and social history were developed as the principles of political theory; economics was introduced into historiography; the overall number of published historical monographs and collective volumes increased; and attention was drawn to the study of periods and themes of the Greek history that had not been previously researched: the constitution, organisation and development of the modern Greek state and culture in the 19th century; the interwar period in the 20th century; and the period of German occupation and resistance during WWII.

In the period after the late 1970s many books written in languages other than Greek—often books that had been written by Greek scholars in exile during the period of the military dictatorship—were translated into Greek. As new themes were added to the historiographical agenda, new methodologies were also employed in order to suggest alternative 'readings' of modern Greek history. Emphasis was put on the study of the role of social collectivities as historical agents and economic and social approaches to Greek history were developed. These orientations were manifested in the publication of three major historical journals in Athens, *Mnemon*, *Ta Historica*, and, later, *Histor*. These journals and the historians involved in their publication encouraged original historical research and sought to define and formulate the characteristics and criteria of professional historical scholarship in contemporary Greece. These developments continued during the 1980s when the foundation of new research centers and the multiplication of university departments of history encouraged rigorous archival research. Historical documentation became the focal point of historical scholarship in this period.

By the beginning of the 1990s the time had come to develop new thematic orientations and to address more rigorously methodological and theoretical issues that concerned the practice and the conceptual grounding of professional history and historical scholarship in general. Those of us who entered the field in that period thought of our historiographical vision as a continuation of the tradition that had started in the late 1970s, even though we differentiated ourselves in some main respects.

First, the organic integration of theoretical explorations and historical research became a priority. While the methodological exchanges between history and the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s had enriched our understanding of historical phenomena, historians in the 1990s have recognised the need to transform historiography from a space of theoretical application into a space of theoretical production. In this respect, the deepening of critical exchanges between the fields of history, literary studies and anthropology has led to the development of the subfields of intellectual and cultural history and has introduced new themes onto the agenda of historical research.

Another characteristic that marks *Historein* and critical contemporary historiography in general is the distinctive turn towards the study of international as well as comparative topics. This turn is marked by a shift in the definition of international perspective from a notion that refers mostly to the differences between center and peripheries (or major and minor geo-political and cultural entities) to a notion that describes explorations of historical phenomena that are transnational by definition and whose study cannot be achieved solely from within the perspectives of national historiographies. In this regard, *Historein* invites articles that address the particularities that mark transnational historiographical perspectives and bring into the foreground the hierarchical assumptions that often underlie comparative approaches.

***Developing tools of communication.  
Translating between  
historiographical languages.***

Why did seven years of collaborative work lead to the publication of this journal? And furthermore, why another journal in a

period when a proliferating number of scholarly periodicals of various kinds and subjects is added to the social sciences and humanities' communication networks? *Historein* was initially conceived as a means of communication between its editors and their colleagues internationally. The issue of communication is of particular importance for us at this very moment. The *Cultural and Intellectual History Society* (CIHIS), initially constituted as a highly homogeneous group of commonly

situated graduate students, soon embarked on a "changing places project" as the change of both physical and intellectual locations led to the enrichment and enlargement of both individual and collective projects. Our intellectual and physical dispersion as a group led to the diversification of our theoretical and methodological perspectives that stemmed out of different intellectual and cultural traditions and contexts and were formed in the context of—and through our interaction with—differential interpretative communities. While working internationally and still working collaboratively during the last seven years, the members of this editorial group have shared the experience of an increased awareness of the procedures that define the construction of the canon in the social sciences, especially with regard to the establishment of concepts produced within metropolitan—European and North American—academic contexts. As a result, the challenge presented by continuous processes of conceptual translation, intellectual hybridisation and working through analytical (in)compatibility has greatly defined the objectives of this project: to develop tools of multi-lateral communication within and across academic disciplines and scholarly settings.

*Historein* is introduced as a means of development of this kind of communication and offers a forum for provocative dialogue over issues related to historical research, writing, teaching and representation. From this perspective we are interested in the exploration of methods and methodologies that concern the diffusion of historical knowledge as well as historical education. We thus invite contributions that treat different issues related to critical pedagogy and education. We are particularly interested in articles that discuss critically old and new ways and uses of educational media and suggest innovative ways of reconceptualising the teaching of history with respect to contemporary changes in cultural aesthetics and representation.

***Confronted with Complexity.  
Towards Critical  
Interdisciplinarity.***

The perspective of *Historein* is both historical and interdisciplinary. History is our own point of entry into contemporary theoretical and

methodological debates in the social sciences. Thinking, analysing, narrating and theorising the past is for us a vastly complex process that requires intellectual interaction within a broad field of problematics. *Historein* is thus situated within a scholarly "free" trade zone that encourages the interaction between history, philosophy, social anthropology, sociology, gender and labor studies, epistemology, literary and cultural studies. Our main aim is to promote the study of themes and phenomena that cannot be approached solely from within one discipline. We seek to

provoke dialogue over major methodological and theoretical concerns shared by different disciplines in the fields of social sciences and the humanities.

### *Beyond the State of Emergency in historiography.*

We feel that *Historein* makes its appearance in a post-crisis period in the social sciences and

humanities. It is often argued nowadays that a general "crisis" has afflicted the disciplines over the last two decades. The "crisis" was allegedly related to the questioning that many well-established orthodoxies, hegemonic conceptualisations and interpretative strategies underwent under the impact of poststructuralism, deconstruction, feminist and postcolonial studies. Holding the contention that scholarship is always-already developing under conditions of "crisis", *Historein* takes a position beyond the state-of-emergency-discourse.

One of the main objectives of this periodical publication is to voice the need—faced by historians on the eve of the 21st century—to integrate the challenges and critiques of the past two decades in the actual practice of historical research, writing and teaching. *Historein* strongly supports approaches that tend to erase the distance between theory and research by making self-reflection a vital element of historical scholarship at all levels and stages. At the centre of our interest stand questions concerning the production of knowledge about the past, the historicity of interpretative and argumentative strategies, and the politics of disciplinarity. Within this framework, *Historein* also aims at the enrichment of the evolving debates around class, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion and generation, and the impact respective conceptualisations have had on the establishment of collective formations and subjectivities. We seek to promote scholarly dialogue over the construction and function of social institutions and practices and the ideological and political discourses which sustain them. We invite articles that present research and offer substantiated argumentation around issues that concern the histories of, e.g., community, self, body, otherness, movement, the private and public, and elite and popular culture. Contextual approaches and case-studies are welcomed, while emphasis is put on the national, transnational and global structures and dynamics that have defined and determined these phenomena in the modern era.

### *Local Research, Global Concerns*

The field of modern Greek studies has been the initial area of specialisation for most of the editors. This particular interest, which staged our first academic involvement, has made us aware of the limits, boundaries and arbitrariness that often mark dominant

"paradigms" and "area-studies". *Historein* takes as a point of departure the critique of such boundaries and, thus, does not restrict itself to a specific field of studies. Rather, it encourages the study of transnational phenomena and the hybridisation of nuclear paradigms and historiographical traditions. We wish to draw attention to the study of phenomena that exceed the boundaries of "area-studies" and have for this reason often been ignored by historical research. We invite contributions that present transnationally-minded approaches to case-studies and local history. To facilitate communication, *Historein* is published primarily in English, although other languages are not excluded. It is our contention that multi-lingual publication facilitates the dialogue over an increased variety of subjects and issues of a transnational character and constructs bridges over different academic traditions. With its intervention in different intellectual and cultural contexts, *Historein* aims at playing the role of translator between different 'languages' of historical scholarship.

*Historein* is an annual publication. Apart from scholarly articles, it also contains a review section referring mostly to recently published works. As it is our intention to create a vibrant forum for critical insights and exchanges, we invite contributions that include reviews, commentaries and review articles that promote crucial dialogue and take positions within contemporary debates in the fields of history and the humanities. *Historein* also includes an information section devoted to the presentation of scholarly activities, notices and announcements of current and upcoming events and conferences that concern modern Greek studies and take place in Greece.

Finally, *Historein* includes a debate section that addresses a general theme and invites responses to the views presented by the contributors. The first debate is on "European Studies: the concept, the field, the content". In this first issue Giorgos Kokkinos and Vassilis Pasmazoglou offer two different insights into the formation of European Studies as an autonomous field of studies. The second volume of *Historein* gladly welcomes responses related to this issue.

### *In the way of Introduction*

The articles published in the first volume of *Historein* cover a wide range of topics and represent different contemporary methodological approaches to history. This multiplicity reflects in a sense the fluidity and vibrancy that characterise the field of critical historiography today.

In "History and Semiotics" Luisa Passerini suggests an understanding of history as a communicative process and offers a stimulating framework of historiographical analysis by underlining the fact that historians need to study further representations

and subjectivity in order to assume their role on the cultural scene of the present. The view that historiography has to be understood as a communicative process is provocative since it may have more general repercussions concerning a broad range of research methodologies, writing strategies and teaching methods.

Wolfgang Weber's article constitutes a compelling approach to the history of representations of the body in the context of Nazi politics in interwar Austria. His analysis combines the study of representations with that of politics and cultural practices. Through the study of the ideological premises of both politics and gymnastics, Weber explores the gaps and ruptures in the post-WWII collective memory of Nazism in Austria. His study of Austrian body culture during the interwar period offers a fresh insight in the vivid dialogue over issues of collaboration, resistance, memory and oblivion of Nazism in Europe.

The next four articles address in diverse ways issues related to the phenomenon of nationalism in the Central and Southeastern European contexts. In his article "The formation of early Hellenic nationalism and the special symbolic and material interests of the new radical republican intelligentsia (ca. 1790-1830)", Socrates Petmezas shifts the analysis of nationalism away from traditional historicist as well as strictly economic approaches. His position that nationalism gave coherence to the self-image of a broad range of social groups that managed gradually to identify in diverse and often conflictual ways with the image of the Hellenic nation brings him in dialogue with some of the most stimulating contemporary approaches to nationalism in the field of social sciences. In a similar vein, Haris Exertzoglou conducts a particular analysis of nationalist ideology by focusing on the ways in which non-Greek-speaking Greek subjects were represented by nationalist discourse during the 19th century. In his article "Shifting boundaries: language, community and the 'non-Greek-speaking Greeks'", he combines historical research and a committed engagement with conceptual analysis of the terms employed in historical interpretation and understanding.

"The construction of Czech national history" by Miroslav Hroch and Jitka Malečková and the discussion of "National History: Construct or/and reality" offer a particular cartography of contemporary historical scholarship on nationalism in Europe and reflect some of the recent orientations of research in the field of Central and Eastern European studies.

An interesting insight in the history of science in Greece is offered by Theodore Kritikos in his article "Science and religion in Greece at the end of the nineteenth century". Through discursive analysis and interpretation, Kritikos argues that the



debate between Greek scientists and the Orthodox Church at the end of the nineteenth century was not concerned primarily with the content of scientific theories. The relationship between science and religion was not formed around disagreements on the definition of truth, but rather by the conflict between adversarial claims of who has the legitimate authority to define truth as such in society.

Henriette Benveniste in her article "Ésquisse d'une histoire de la responsabilité dans les récits juifs de persécution" explores the notion of responsibility, a notion well-situated within the Jewish tradition since the middle ages. She studies religious texts of the middle ages and analyses the narratives of disaster and responsibility as well as the role that these played in the articulation of Jewishness in the context of religious Jewish communities. She argues that the study of historical continuity of these narratives through the centuries can help us situate historically the post-WWII Jewish understandings of the Holocaust as the latter are related to long-term "memories" of what the author calls a "genealogical responsibility."

Finally, Michael Mitterauer addresses the question "Warum feiern wir Geschichte" and stresses the connection between religious rituals and cultural practices related to public celebrations of history and anniversaries. We would risk generalising his provocative question in order to include a broader range of cultural enactments of history and their role in the contemporary cultural scene. If historical scholarship is one of the ways in which history is culturally enacted in the present, what is the role that historians could play in the contemporary cultural scene? As a means of cultural enactment of history, *Historein* wishes to open yet another space for the semiotisation of history as a communicative process and for further reflection on the act of historicising.

The Editorial Committee