Leopold von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*. London, New York: Routledge, 2011. Edition and Introduction by Georg G. Iggers. lii + 158 pags.

Is it possible to talk of "classic authors" in the world of historians? And if so, what are the classics for? When the Swiss historian, Eduard Fueter, published his well-known *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie* in 1911, which was the first great overview of modern European history of historiography, contemporary historians had no doubt about how to respond to these questions. Since the writing of history had for centuries been viewed as a combination of political reflection, memory, a repository of moral learning, scholarly work, and literary genre, with the inclusion of new topics and methods in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was no doubt about what the classics were supposed to vindicate. Furthermore, such a claim was to be seen as a need to historicize historical writings. Thucydides, Tacitus, Guicciardini, Voltaire or Ranke could be regarded as the milestones in a history of historiography, reflecting just how historical writing had gone from being an artistic work based upon politics to a scientific discipline with much broader foundations.

However, in recent decades it would no longer be possible to endorse this claim in such a convincing manner since the explosion of historical paradigms over the past sixty years has rendered obsolete any linear conception or narrow view of the genre of the history of historiography. With respect to Leopold Ranke (the subject of this review) one author has even written that his interest in political history and events "seems rather like a (historiographical) counterrevolution".[1] It is true that there is no internal thread (internal to historiography itself) linking up the Humanists of the Renaissance (not to mention the ancient and medieval authors) with contemporary historians. The historiography of the twentieth century owes quite a considerable amount to the social thinkers of the nineteenth century, and the ways of evoking and using the past have been so varied, and are so different from what might be defined as the Greek-Latin-Renaissance genre of historiography that it is no longer possible to overlook the manifold political and cultural factors that lead societies to recreate their past in the most varied ways one can imagine (memories, philosophical and religious ideas, identities, cultural market, etc.). Yet, the fact that historiography was a complex genre does not mean that it had to renounce the idea of being considered a field with a recognizable methodology, a form of scientific ethics and a multiplicity of intellectual assumptions over the past two hundred years, thus enabling it to be increasingly effective in its analysis of past and present phenomena. In these circumstances, the existence of classics in historiography should be played down. However, by no means do they disappear, although the notion of what they actually represent is certainly worthy of patient discussion.

There is no specialist quite like Professor Georg G. Iggers to defend the aforesaid balance between interest in certain classics and the study of current historiographical trends – with their inclination towards global processes. After recently

[1] Peter Burke, "Historia de los acontecimientos y renacimiento de la narración," (1991) in Peter Burke (ed.), *Formas de hacer historia* (Madrid: Alianza, 1993, p. 287). In more recent texts, however, it is possible to observe that the author explains this idea, e.g. see Maria Lúcia G. Pallares-Burke, *The New History. Confessions and Conversation*s (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002, p. 142).

publishing books like his *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross Cultural Perspective* (2002) – co-edited with Q. Edward Wang – and *Global History of Modern Historiography* (2008) – with Q. Edward Wang and Supriya Mukherjee – Professor Iggers retrieves his studies on German historiography and turns back once again to look at the work of Leopold Ranke (Leopold *von* Ranke after 1863, when he was raised to nobility). And as in prior works, in the present volume Professor Iggers emphasizes the importance Ranke gave to theoretical aspects and general overviews when formulating his concept of political history - a view that, in one way or another, has had tremendous influence in Germany and in Western historiography.

The ability Professor Iggers displays to combine different viewpoints on the studies of historiography is hardly surprising. Emeritus Professor of the State University of New York, and just as competent at publishing in German as in English because of his origins and his concern with German culture (he was born in Hamburg in 1926, migrating shortly afterwards to the US, where ten years later he obtained dual US and German citizenship), Iggers is probably the foremost specialist in the field of history of historiography today. There is no need to describe his career – a glance at his work in the German edition of *Wikipedia, die freie Enzyklopädie* will suffice – from which his work stands out as co-editor of the journal *Storia della Storiografía*, from 1991 onward, resulting in an interesting reorientation of this publication. Instead, it is worth highlighting the importance of Professor Iggers as a specialist in the history of German historiography, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, and of its situation in the context of Western historiography. In this respect, he has merely followed in the footsteps of those generations of historians who, like him, began their academic career after the Second World War and were struck by the newly emerging approaches to writing social and economic history – in Professor Iggers's case, his efforts targeted European intellectual history, forging his own fruitful path, which is so typical of US historiography. The aim of these authors was to confirm – and in Iggers's case to study why the so-called *Historismus*, or the German conception of history, as one of Iggers's foremost works was entitled, continued its traditional influence among historians in the still recent Federal Republic of Germany, until its collapse under the "new history" in the nineteen sixties and seventies.

The present anthology of texts has its precedent in another catalogue published by Professor Iggers in 1973, along with the multi-faceted intellectual Konrad von Moltke (a specialist in environmental matters, professor of history, etc., who died in 2005), who was in charge of the translation and revision of certain texts for Bobbs-Merrill Co. (Indianapolis). Its release coincided with a period when the new history was spreading in the US and the edition was largely ignored or did not have the expected impact (moreover Bobbs-Merrill was soon to go out of business). The new compilation is a newly updated version that is easier to use, with new texts and translations into English by Wilma A. Iggers, who had already done the most important translations for the earlier edition. As in the 1973 edition, its aim was "to correct the image of Ranke as a narrow, fact-oriented historian hostile to theory, and to present elements of his writings that reflect important aspects of nineteenth-century historical thought" (p. xiii). The anthology assembles practically all the theoretical reflections and explicit references to the idea of universal history (*Weltgeschichte*) written by Ranke and which were scattered over pieces in journals, introductions to his most important works, and posthumous books and further editions. The texts are accompanied by an updated general introduction, examining Ranke's theoretical ideas, and the way they were

applied – in addition to reflections on the impact of his work in his own time and during the twentieth century. The book also has an updated bibliographical note on the most relevant primary and secondary sources in both English and German (pp. xlvi-lii).

With the need for this compilation thus justified since, as the author says, in the English-speaking world Ranke has passed from "the reverence", which the nineteenth-century authors devoted to him, to a profound "indifference" in the twentieth century (pp. xi-xii), the present book published by Routledge is an illuminating approach for any reader in English. It offers the close reader a useful tool to approach the idealist foundations of nineteenth-century German historiography, become acquainted with the origins of modern historiography, or even to understand why some authors have considered Ranke a classic.

In the Spanish language, for example, there is nothing similar to the present volume. Ranke's work was scarcely known in Spain and Latin-America before the nineteen forties and fifties.[2] Part of it was translated by the exiled intellectuals after the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), in Mexico (Eugenio Ímaz, Wenceslao Roces, etc.), especially by the mythical publishing house Fondo de Cultura Económica – which, in 1942, also released the translation of the well-known *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* by George P. Gooch, with a chapter on Ranke and another on his disciples. Nevertheless, those editions, which include reliable translations and even a foreword by Gooch himself, were by no means critical editions comparable to those published in English or German. Those intellectuals were not professional historians and they never intended to contextualize the work of Ranke in the historical writings of his own era; nor did they attempt to compare it to the new trends of the twentieth century, or to study its reception. It is however worth pointing out that it was a Spanish historian, Professor Juan José Carreras Ares (who died in 2006, but resided in the Federal Republic of Germany between 1954 and 1965 and took part in the circle of historians run by Werner Conze at the University of Heidelberg), who was the author that did most to make the work of Ranke known in Spain. Carreras was a Marxist historian who was deeply convinced of the importance of the paradigm of socio-economic history for historians of his generation. Perhaps for this reason, in his writings and classes at the University of Zaragoza, where he worked from 1969 till his death, he defended a conclusion quite similar to that of Professor Iggers: Ranke was the first expert in modern European history to consider that primary sources have to be submitted to rigorous criticism. To reach this conclusion the German historian defended a range of idealist arguments on the relationships between the particular facts, the idea of universal history and the idea of God, which he made explicit at various times.[3]

[2] One of the few reliable pieces of news available on nineteenth-century knowledge on Ranke in Spain is a translation of *Die Ösmanen und die Spanishe Monarchie im 16 und 17 Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg, 1827), edited by Gerónimo Eraso in Madrid in 1857, from an edition in English published in Philadelphia in 1845. An author so well acquainted with European and American historiography, such as Rafael Altamira, will ignore that edition and only come to know Ranke in an indirect way through the French historian Charles Seignobos, referring to Ranke as the "historian who started the historical seminars". See *La enseñanza de la historia* (1895) (edited by Rafael Asín Vergara. Madrid: Akal, 1997, pp. 96-97).

[3] See for example Juan José Carreras, "El Historicismo alemán" (1981) (re-ed. in *Razón de Historia. Estudios de Historiografía*. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias, Marcial Pons, 2000, pp. 39-58). Without a thorough analysis we can add that in 1984 Professor Dalmacio Negro Pavón would edit, also in Spanish, "On the Epochs of Modern History" (*Sobre las época de la historia moderna* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1984), preceded by an interesting introduction.

The book forming the subject of this review is in four sections, each of which is prefaced by a brief comment by Professor Iggers. The first one deals with "The Idealistic Theory of Historiography"; the second consists of excerpts from texts on "The Idealistic Theory of the State"; the third consists of the prefaces of Ranke's five major works; and the fourth, of a selection from Books I and II of *The History of the Popes* (1834-36), a publication that gave Ranke an international reputation, and for which E. Fowler's translation of the 1901 edition is preferred, since it "reflects the quality of Ranke's speech more closely than a new translation would" (p. 106). All in all, Professor Iggers extracts fifteen texts from a selection of Ranke's posthumous publications and gathers them together in this volume with an appropriate title. Through such works, it is possible to observe a conception of history and politics which enabled Ranke to portray a picture of the history of Modern Europe that has become a classic. In short, the anthology offers a view of Ranke that is not strange to theoretical reflection, and very far removed from the "positivist" image we are used to seeing.

The theme dominating the first six texts (Part One) is the need to specify the task of the historian, his craft, separating it from the so-called philosophy of history, and to seek a metaphysical foundation to give sense to the writing of history. The source from which Ranke draws his main assumptions is the German idealistic intellectual culture which, as is well-known, understood historical facts, historical figures and institutions as the incarnation of ideas or "spiritual forces" whose main reference was the idea of God himself. Not in vain, in the first of the texts (a letter to his brother Heinrich, written in 1820), Ranke asserts "In all of history God dwells, lives, can be recognized" (p. 4).

However, unlike his compatriot Georg W. F. Hegel, who defended the viewpoint of "universal philosophical history", in "On the Relations of History and Philosophy" (circa 1830-40), Ranke will talk of the existence of "two opposed ways of acquiring knowledge of human affairs" (p. 5), where only the first might be considered authentic i.e. the "history" – that is, the writing of history – and the "philosophy". To better understand the novelty of this reflection, it is essential to remember that elsewhere in Europe hardly any other historian of his time (possibly owing to the close relationship between liberalism, historiography, memory, and politics) had dared to offer an in-depth reflection on the relationships and differences between historiography and philosophy of history such as the one undertaken by Ranke. For Ranke, both history and philosophy were sciences in the sense of the German word *Wissenschaften*, that is, disciplines or collective scholarly activities in the broader sense.[4] In fact, as Ranke explains in another text from the nineteen thirties ("On the Character of Historical Science"), history bears a certain affinity with philosophy: it shares, for example, its scientific nature, as it is capable of "collecting, finding and penetrating"; however, historiography goes beyond science (*Wissenschaft*): it is furthermore an art for it is obliged to "recreate" reality (p. 6). Years later this requirement would be regarded by Johann Gustav Droysen, in his *Grundrisse der Historik*, as the rationale of the "historical method", under the concept of "understanding" (*Verstehen*).

In the aforementioned text, Ranke even sets out a list of requirements for historiographical practice (pp. 12-13) that might be considered one of the earliest reflections on the ethic and scope of historical research ever written – with the obvious

[4] On this concept, see for example Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins. The German Academic Community* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, pp. 102-3).

exception of the traditional Humanist genre of treatises on "*ars historica*", which still continued to be written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is likewise of great importance to underline how Ranke also disassociates it from the traditional concept of history understood as annals or chronicles, which confined itself to "noting down everything, occasionally merely collecting and registering data" (p. 17), and was not concerned with questions such as "for what purpose all these things happen, why these men existed and lived (…) (so that) even the inner connection is distorted" (p. 18).

Nevertheless, as discussed above, the differences between philosophy and the work of the historian form the theoretical aspect that will demand most of Ranke's attention. History would represent the only means of grasping the multiplicity of the historical world. The philosophy of history, on the other hand, would be confined to ideas and their development, under the premise that "reason rules the world" (p.18), which had led "to focusing on just a few peoples in world history" (p. 5), with Ranke asserting that this was done through "speculation". The method of the historian was therefore the opposite and went from the particular, from the observation of "individual life", to the general (p. 6). Furthermore, in Ranke's first lecture to King Maximilian II of Bavaria, entitled "On the Epochs of Modern History" (1854), Ranke questions the idea of a continuous linear progression defended by certain philosophers, the supposition that "all mankind develops from a given original state to a positive goal" (p. 20). According to Ranke, the only premise history is able to demonstrate, owing to the range of facts examined, is the existence of epochs in universal history, which "sometimes go their separate ways and at other times are closely related", where it is possible to observe "dominant tendencies" (p. 21); epochs which are significant in themselves provided that "every age is next to God" (p. 22). Because of their nature remaining outside the preconceived categories of philosophy, these "dominant tendencies" could not be considered "concepts" in the true sense of the word: they could only be described (p. 22).

Another fundamental aspect of nineteenth-century historiography, the political use of images recreating the past, or history as an instrument of political rhetoric, is also the object of Ranke's painstaking attention. The political use of history was a procedure dating back to the Renaissance Humanists, who were already capable of recovering Cicero's dictum, "*historia magistra vitae*". However, it is at this point that Ranke will establish a new boundary. In his well-known preface to *Histories of the Latin and Germanic Peoples* (1824) (text number 10), he includes the famous quotation where he declares himself outside the "office of judging the past", or "instructing men for the benefit of future ages" and agrees to "show (the past) as it actually was" (p. 86). The text is easier to understand if one observes the title of the book it belongs to, *Histories of the Latin and Germanic Peoples*, in which the word "Histories" conjures up the desire of sixteenth-century Humanists to narrate "histories", to recount events and military feats (e.g. the famous work by Paolo Giovio, *Historiarum sui temporis*, published in Florence in 1550 and 1552). However, unlike these authors, Ranke will cut all bonds with rhetoric, a genre or "Ars" which Humanists did consider to be a high achievement in their own times, since recovering the ancient rhetoricians had enabled them to raise historiography to the level of a major genre.

In his own epoch, this break with rhetoric, or "lack of warmth" that Ranke applied to historiography, was considered a limitation historians could not afford. As specialists point out, not even his own disciples followed the master in this method.

They did indeed take part in politics and tinged their work with a noticeable hint of their affiliations and political opinions.[5] However, such a detachment in Ranke was not really a refusal to reflect on the state and its relationships with history. As he was to write in "A Dialogue on Politics" (1836), following in the footsteps of the so-called historical school of law, "The mastery of politics must be based on history" (p. 63).

The second part of the present anthology, "The Idealistic Theory of the State", is precisely clear proof of the aforesaid. Conceiving the state only through its historical lineaments, that is, not in an isolated, individual or abstract sense, led Ranke, as the text "The Great Powers" (1833) shows, to stress the importance of the system of "great powers" that unfolded during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and by extension the idea of universal history (*Weltgeschichte*), which in practice proved to be synonymous with the history of Europe. In fact, as can be observed in the prefaces to his major works, Ranke only showed an interest in specific states insofar as they stood for "the European balance of power" in their interrelations, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or their presumed lack of it in more recent times. As Ranke writes in the Preface to his *History of England* (1859), "When (…) an author undertakes to conjure up the past life of a foreign nation (…), he will not think of writing its national history (…), he will direct his attention to those epochs which have had the most effectual influence on the development of mankind (…), (particularly) the epoch of those religious and political wars that filled the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (pp. 96-97). *The History of Popes*, for instance, which according to Gooch already demonstrated Ranke's concern with individual realities in its very title (i.e. "the Popes"), [6] is yet again clear evidence of his inclination for the European system of states as a crucial aspect of the *Weltgeschichte*: "For what is there in the present day that can make the history of the Papal power of importance to us?" inquires Ranke at the end of the preface to this work: because "in them (Popes throughout the ages) we see a portion of general history" (p. 92). On the other hand, in the preface to his *Universal History* (1881), which Ranke publishes at the age of eighty, he insists that "nations can be regarded in no other connection than that of their mutual actions and reactions brought about by their successive appearance" (p. 103). In fact, as he will defend in his inaugural address delivered in Latin, upon being raised as an "*Ordinarius*" at the University of Berlin in 1836 (in this anthology, under the title of "On the Relation of and Distinction between History and Politics"), politics is a science and an art different from historiography; and there can be no confusion between them since, whereas history is "by its nature universal", politics "always exists in relation to a given state" (p. 81).

The aforementioned concept of "European balance of power" was of great importance, in Ranke's opinion, because it had played the role of safeguarding the freedom of Europe and eschewing the despotism of a single state; a balance which was seriously endangered precisely by Napoleon, when "the universal monarchy, which hitherto had been merely a remote danger, was almost realized" (p. 50). Even the American and French Revolutions are considered by Ranke as an indirect effect of that balance of power (pp. 46-48). But notwithstanding his conservative ideology, namely as

[5] See for example Juan José Carreras, "La *Historia de Roma* de Mommsen," in *Razón de Historia*, 15; and Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History. The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983, p. 117).

[6] George P. Gooch, *Historia e historiadores en el siglo XIX* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1977, p. 93).

the enemy of revolutions and universal constitutional principles (albeit of the Ancien Regime as well), and perhaps because of his isolation from philosophy, Ranke by no means had a pessimistic opinion of his own era. He regarded the "European order" or "balance of power" to have achieved its heyday during the contemporary period (p. 51); he even saw "national principle" as a historical trend which had breathed "new life" into modern states (p. 52); and "democratic ideas", despite their rejection of the French revolution, were considered in Tocqueville's sense (without citing the French author, however) as an "irresistible" trend, a general movement that would spread across France and eventually all over Europe (p. 51).

But aspects of the Rankean concept of state and politics do not end at this point. In the second set of texts devoted to politics ("A Dialogue on Politics", see above), which recreates a conversation between two characters (Friedrich, who stands for Ranke's opinions, and Carl, who serves as the devil's advocate), we can find the reference to an idea without which understanding Ranke's coherent view of the system of states – even the optimism mentioned above – would be difficult to explain: the crucial element of the state is not power. That is merely an instrument. Politics represents, above all, "spiritual forces and tendencies", "tendencies of a spiritual nature" (pp. 57, 66). In this text Ranke stresses the individual nature of states, the fact that if formal aspects can be common to all states, namely "a constitution stipulating a limitation of personal powers and the definition of class relationships" (p. 61), the content of states cannot be but individual and unique. In what way does Ranke combine this uniqueness of states with his concern with his interest in European order? Basically calling for universal history and the idea of God, which are themes pervading Ranke's general reflexions.

This answer takes us back to the point of departure in this review and helps us answer the question posed at the beginning: from an epistemological standpoint, Ranke can be regarded as one of the most interesting classics of modern historiography because, apart from insisting on the need to be rigorous with sources, he is deeply aware that inquiring into the past requires solving the extant contradiction between the variation of events and the possibility of a logic that might explain them. This is a classic matter that philosophers and certain historians have attempted to respond to since the eighteenth century. And as this anthology clearly shows, Leopold Ranke, through the idealist culture of his epoch, also attempted to find his own answer.

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