HISTORY AND ITS OBJECTS

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ANTIQUARIANISM AND MATERIAL CULTURE SINCE 1500

PETER N. MILLER

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For Livia and Samuel, again
Quick now, here, now, always—

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Now, the question "To what question did So-and-So intend this proposition for an answer?" is an historical question, and therefore cannot be settled except by historical methods.

—R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*

Introduction

Why Historiography Matters

The question to which this book is an answer is: what is the history of thinking about how to study the past through things? The skeptic might ask another question: Is it important to know the history of what we do? Do medical doctors, for example, need to know the history of medicine in order to properly diagnose and treat their patients? Do computer scientists need to know the history of computing for their programs to work? Do astronomers need to know the history of astronomy in order to be better astronomers? We know that painters, architects, and composers have by tradition been schooled in the past of their practice. Some philosophers are, but not all. Robert Pippin has recently argued that between those who deny any role for history in tackling philosophical problems, and those who treat the history of philosophy as a closed canon of past problems, there is a middle course: engaging with the history as a way of "doing philosophy." For philosophers, there is the weight of the great ancestors pressing down, like atmospheric pressure: invisible, but of undeniable impact.[1]

What, then, of historians? Are they more like physicians or painters? I would argue that they are much closer to the philosophers. Both groups are, so to speak, born into existing research paradigms, inheriting questions and historiographies, sometimes insensibly, but usually with at least some notion of how the questions of the past have shaped their field. The partial awareness creates its own challenge because sometimes it is not the visible

but the submerged, or forgotten, parts of the history that matter. We see the trees, but it is not the forest that we miss so much as the roots.

That is very much the case, I would argue, with the history of the study of objects as historical evidence. The subject has hardly attracted much attention. But with the great swelling of interest in material culture in the past twenty-odd years, we can no longer proceed as if this approach to the past

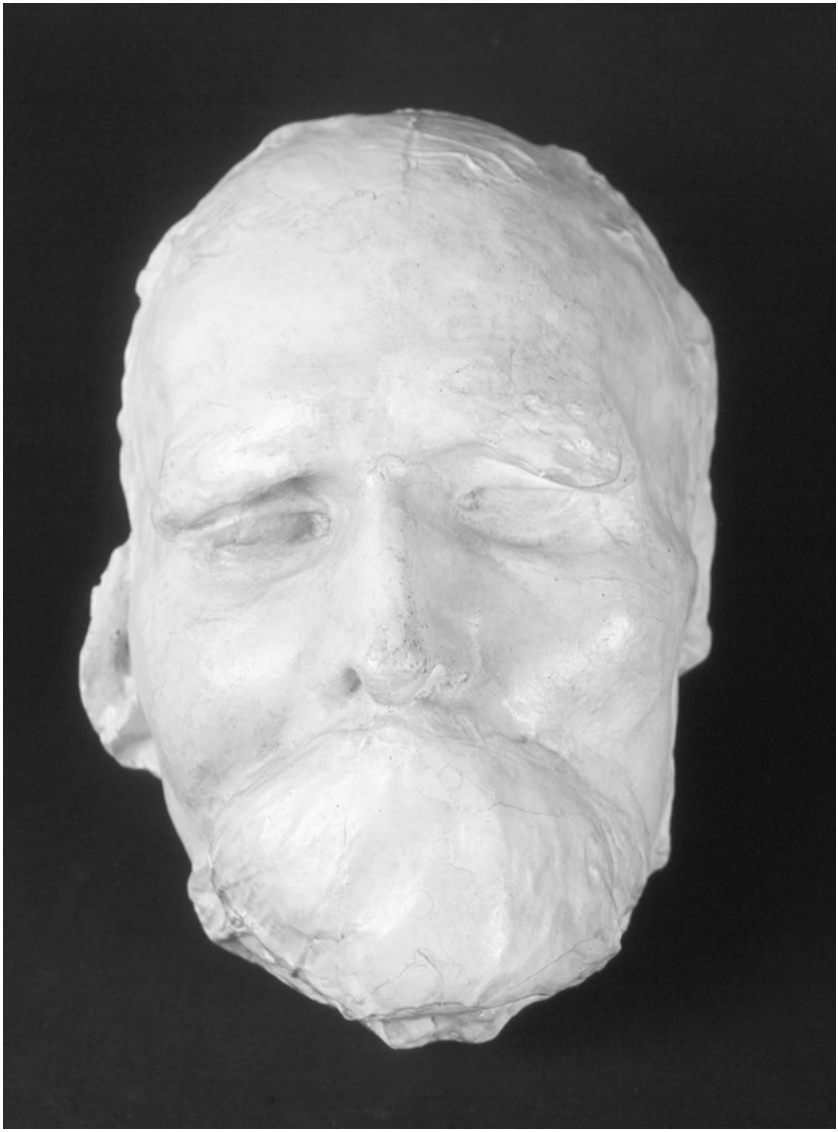

Figure 1 Friedrich Nietzsche's death mask, Nietzsche-Archiv, Weimar. Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek (www.klassik-stiftung.de)

has no history. We need now to map out the submerged history that bears and orients the visible practice. There is more depth to the use of objects as evidence than we might think, and a more sophisticated inventory of approaches and arguments on which to draw than we might imagine. We need to know the history of our questions in order to make sure that we are asking them in the best possible way, that is, in the formulation likely to elicit the most valuable answers. The history of disciplines as the history of questions, rather than answers, is not only better history, it is also history we can use.

Friedrich Nietzsche was a young professor of classics at the University of Basel when in the summer semester of 1871 he offered a lecture course on the history and meaning of classical philology. In the very first lecture he declared that "in Antiquity philology was in no way a science, but only a general passion for every kind of knowledge." What was this omnivorous passion? Turning to the question of ancient remains, he explained that the "next sign of the revival of antiquity is the sentimentality of ruins, especially Rome's, and in excavations this longing [*Sehnsucht*] was satisfied."[2]

I remember reading these words on a train going from Bern to Berlin. I had come from Rome, where I had stood before Hermanus Posthumus' astonishing reflection on the psychodynamics of the Renaissance encounter

Figure 2 Hermanus Posthumus, *Landscape with Roman Ruins* (1536). Collection of the Princes of Lichtenstein, Vaduz.

with Roman antiquities. Those small figures darting about the field of ruins drawing and measuring were engaged in an unequal battle with time. Small chance triumphs were wagered against unrecoverable loss. What might it have felt like to be those people?

In an instant a whole piece of the emotional landscape of scholarship suddenly became clear. The painting prepared me for Nietzsche. Posthumus had painted that longing. I also perceived how radical Nietzsche's challenge was. Scholars were in the habit of not allowing feelings like yearning to enter into their work. Nietzsche was unmasking the passion that expressed itself through outward denial of its existence. A year later, Nietzsche delivered a series of lectures on the subject of education for the Basel public that began to expose the extent of his critique of contemporary scholarly approaches.[3] This deepened and widened in the two *Untimely Meditations* on history (1874) and philology (1875, unfinished). By 1878, he had decided to devote himself fully to the way he thought the past should be put to work, but the product of his labor, *Human, All Too Human*, had no place in a philology department. In 1879 Nietzsche resigned his post.

Nietzsche's revelation of the 1870s was that the academic study of the past—the glory of the German university system—systematically obscured a basic truth: It is not normal to study history. Oh, yes, he would say, past-ness has always weighed on living people, but the professionalized, dispassionate treatment of facts, as if while wearing white coats and using instruments to hold them at arms' length, was something entirely novel. Where once the past was bound into a person's lived experience, it was now kept apart from it.

In "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life," which he later re-titled "We Historians," Nietzsche expressed his discomfort with the regime of facts. For the "painstaking micrologists" with their technical mastery had "reduced" historical phenomena to an intellectual experience, and in the process killed them off. Their motto, he mused, was *Fiat veritas pereat vita*—let there be truth and let life perish. On the other hand, those able to find in the past an easy interlocutor for present purposes could only do so at the cost of precision and detail (Darwin's lumping rather than splitting). Another group of past-lovers—Nietzsche called them "antiquarians"—rooted themselves in time and place through studying things. In the first instance, these were the objects the antiquary grew up with as a child: "The possession of ancestral furniture changes its meaning in such a soul; for the soul is rather possessed by the furniture." The domestic scale was, for the child, monumental. And so it was that in "the small and limited, the decayed . . . the preserving and revering soul of the antiquarian" made his home and "nest."

Later, as his scope expanded, "His city's history becomes for him his own biography. He understands its wall, its towered gate, its council ordinances and its popular festivals as an illustrated diary of his youth, and finds himself in all of these things—his strength, his energy, his joy, judgment, his folly and rudeness."

Antiquarians were already in bad odor when Nietzsche was writing this. But he grasped the intimate connection between their commitment to research and the kind of imagination he prized. His admiration is registered in that string of biographical markers. The antiquarian's ability to feel himself a part of the past was the product of long hours of research, not an alternative to it. And there was a human element to this that was admirable: "Empathy and a feeling for the future, a nose for almost obliterated traces, an instinctive capacity for reading accurately a past still concealed beneath many later layers, a quick understanding of palimpsests, indeed polypsests—these are his gifts and virtues." Perhaps a more beautiful description of the virtues of antiquaries has never been written.[4] Elsewhere, Nietzsche praises their commitment to truth.[5]

But Nietzsche also feared the allure, the seduction, of knowing many things. That same antiquarian habitus, turned on itself and disconnected from reverence for life led to "the wretched drama of a blind mania for collecting, a restless compiling together of everything that ever existed." He saw this as a peril in an educational system that venerated the accumulation of facts. "Are these still men, we ask ourselves, or perhaps only machines for thinking, writing, and speaking?" The lack of connection between the subject studied and the subject doing the studying—this seemed to Nietzsche the great mark of systemic failure:

> One of them, let us say, is busy with Democritus; but the question always comes to my lips: why Democritus? Why not Heraclitus or Philo or Bacon? Or Descartes? And so on. And then: Why a philosopher anyway? Why not a poet or orator? And why a Greek at all? Why not an Englishman or a Turk?. . . So it does not matter what they study, as long as they—who could never themselves make history—keep history nicely "objective."[6]

Historismus was a culture of facts but also a culture of the status quo because no one had questioned the commitment to "objectivity." Hence Nietzsche's head-shaking judgment that historical education led to "a kind of congenital grayness."[7]

Nietzsche's essay "We Philologists" went a step further. Not in the argument—classical philology's problems were the same as history's. But

as the years passed Nietzsche's sense of personal betrayal kept intensifying. "The philologist," he writes, "must first be a man. Only then will he be creative as a philologist." The love of facts had displaced education from its real purpose: making individuals.[8] Nietzsche lamented the soul-killing technical achievements of the contemporary historical and philological sciences with a different vision of research in mind. He saw scholarship not as the triumph of the technicians but as a way of nourishing the person. He signaled this hoped-for connection between erudition and sensibility with the word *Sehnsucht*.

Nietzsche was deeply attached to the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, and *Sehnsucht* was a central theme in his work, linked to the impossible yearning to return home. In his poem "Mnemosyne," Hölderlin pictures humans as forced to carry our memories, like pack animals, even as we yearn always to be released from our burden, to live as unbounded ("Und immer / Ins Ungebundene gehet eine Sehnsucht"). For Hölderlin, we manage to stay on the narrow path by looking neither forward nor back. Instead, we focus on the material world around us.

> . . . . on the ground
> Sunshine we see and the dry dust
> And, a native sight, the shadows of forests, and on roof-tops
> There blossoms smoke, near ancient crests
> Of the turrets, peaceable; for good indeed
> [. . .] are the signs of the day.[9]

It is as though Nietzsche took over Hölderlin's material "solution" for the soul's yearning for reconstruction—the poem's *nostos*, after all, is about the recapturing of past time—and applied it to the scholar's yearning to reconstruct the past. Hence the therapeutic role assigned to archaeology. In his essay on history, Nietzsche identified the yearning and the therapy with the objects of antiquarian study: "Small, humble, fragile, old-fashioned things are endowed with dignity and sanctity" by "his antiquarian spirit." We are halfway between Hölderlin and a later admirer of both Hölderlin and Nietzsche, Rainer Maria Rilke. In his *Duino Elegies* (1923) Rilke affirmed: "Perhaps we are *here*, in order to say: house, bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, fruit-tree, window—at most: column, tower."[10]

Sehnsucht as watchword means acknowledging the human in the scholarly. Later in the lecture course on classical philology, as Nietzsche put the last strokes to his portrait of the philologist, *Sehnsucht* returns to mark the individual's desire both to incorporate antiquity into a fully modern life and to imagine himself back into an earlier world.[11]

Sigmund Freud and Marcel Proust, Nietzsche's successors as psychologists of European culture (as he imagined his calling), both affirmed the emotional meaning of antiquities. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1938), Freud imagined the human mind as an archaeological site—he, too specifically refers to Rome—with layers upon layers of memories, all intact and all simultaneously present. Proust, in the first volume of *Remembrance of Things Past* (1915), likened the voracious and boundless curiosity of the lover for the beloved to that of the antiquary for "the deciphering of texts, the weighing of evidence, and the interpretation of old monuments."

That for Nietzsche, Freud, and Proust the threads of memory and passion twine around things may not surprise us. That they all refer to antiquities may. Now is the time to go back and rethink the relationship between *antiquarianism*, the term we habitually use to describe the historical scholarship that put things at the center, and *history*, understood somewhat awkwardly as both what happened in the past and the study of that past. The received view, whose monuments we might take to be the critique of "Erudition" in Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* (1750) and George Eliot's treatment of Edward Casaubon in *Middlemarch* (1871), sees the antiquarian as a myopic pedant and antiquarianism as an obsession with details of the deep past at the expense of the living present. Marc Bloch, our patron saint of history, makes just this point in his famous *Historian's Craft* (1943). He recounts that on his way back to France from the 6th International Congress of Historical Sciences held in Oslo in 1928, he and his traveling partner Henri Pirenne stopped off in Stockholm. Pirenne insisted they go off to see the town. "If I were an antiquarian," he said, "I would have eyes only for old stuff, but I am a historian. Therefore, I love life."[12]

Michael Shanks, a classical archaeologist who has looked to the antiquaries' practice as a model for working with objects, wants us instead to think of antiquarianism as the study of the past-in-the-present. And thus Pirenne and, to the extent that he was endorsing the view, Bloch have it backwards. The reason has to do with the subject of antiquarian research: things. Simply put, when we hold an artifact in our hands or walk a historical landscape, we have an immediate bodily experience of the past that affects us in a way that reading words cannot.

On March 28, 1859, Henry David Thoreau paddled along the Concord River thinking about the collection of arrowheads he planned to publish. He found them everywhere and found them enormously evocative. "Each one yields me a thought," he wrote. But the harvest they yielded was directly related to the nature of the objects and not some generalized sentimentality. With these man-made artifacts, Thoreau continued, "I come nearer to the maker of it than if I found his bones. His bones would not prove any wit that

wielded them, such as this work of his bones does. It is humanity inscribed on the face of the earth." These arrowheads were precise records of people. "At every step I see it, and I can easily supply the 'Tahatawan' or 'Mantatuket' that might have been written if he had had a clerk." They were, he concluded, "not fossil bones, but, as it were, fossil thoughts, forever reminding me of the mind that shaped them."[13]

With this, Thoreau knowingly took his place in a New World restaging of Posthumus' Roman reflection. "Time," Thoreau acknowledged, "will soon destroy the works of famous painters and sculptors." But these arrowheads, because they were so numerous and yet so culture-specific, "will balk his"—Time's—"efforts" and reward the patient seeker after the past.[14]

This encounter of thought and feeling, of a hard-headed hope, is what Thoreau's younger contemporary, Nietzsche, was pointing us toward with his one word: *Sehnsucht*. That electric moment connecting object with imagination can open as many doors in us as we possess—hence the inherent relationship between the study of things and the older German aspiration to *Bildung*, or the American liberal arts education.

Thucydides used *archaeology* to refer to the oldest legends, not only to physical remains from time out of mind. We cannot be sure of the line of transmission, but a generation later we find Plato putting the same word in the mouth of the sophist Hippias, who explained that it referred to "the genealogy of heroes and men, and in stories of the foundation of cities in olden times and, to put it briefly, in all sorts of antiquarian lore."[15]

Plato was especially attentive to the question of how to learn from these things. In a discussion about naming and necessity, Socrates pushed the philosopher Cratylus to acknowledge the disjunction between names and the things they named. Cratylus had wanted to insist on a kind of natural identity between the two, something we might think of as a sort of romantic philology—or plain old mysticism. Socrates worked hard to pry the names apart from the things. In so doing, however, he also made an argument for ways of knowing: "How real existence is to be studied or discovered is, I suspect, beyond you and me. But we may admit so much, that the knowledge of things is not to be derived from names. No, they must be studied and investigated in themselves."[16]

The Greeks were late-born compared to the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians. For two thousand years these peoples, with their pyramids, foundation deposits, and stamped bricks, had been thinking about the ways "things" and "the past" were connected. But where their attention was focused on the stakes we humans have in the desperate game of memory, Socrates shifted

the conversation. Things are no longer *aide-mémoires*, or tokens of longing; they are now containers of information. We can learn from the things themselves. This exchange does not figure in the charge sheet Nietzsche drew up against Socrates in *The Birth of Tragedy*, from that same decade as his reflections on history, but it could have.[17]

It is Marcus Terentius Varro, an ancient Roman contemporary of Cicero and lover of Roman cultural heritage, who brought together Thucydides and Plato, archaeology, and "learning from things." The Greek *archaiología* became the Latin *antiquitates*. It referred to subjects such as religion, law, government, and calendars sorted under four headings: people, places, things, and times. We only know of Varro's work from the long passages copied out by Augustine in his *City of God* in order to mock the pagan rituals he took so seriously.

From the Renaissance on, people who called themselves antiquarians (*antiquarii*) investigated the physical remains of antiquity and used them, alongside textual evidence, to understand it. As they did, they remade Varro's fourfold classification system into private, public, sacred, and military antiquities. William Stenhouse, a historian of classical scholarship, has noted that the work of antiquarians fell along a spectrum from gathering the remains of the past to researching its customs and institutions. Historians employed chronological ordering, while antiquaries organized their narratives around structures or systems—law, religion, sports, warfare, dining, and so on. Not for nothing did Arnaldo Momigliano, the historian of the ancient world whose work on antiquarianism kickstarted the renewal of interest that has marked the past decades, call sociology a form of "armed antiquarianism" and later in life seek answers from anthropology.

The practice of antiquaries began with collecting. From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, lists, catalogue entries, and short essays filled thicker and thicker folio volumes recording erudition's slow reconquest of the past. After amassing objects, they described them carefully and then compared them with other objects and with texts. Reconstruction—that was the aim of antiquarian scholarship. Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) had developed the metaphor of a shipwreck for the fall of the ancient world, with spars and flotsam standing for the fragments of antiquity that had survived into the present. The antiquaries tried to put it all back together again.

The shipwreck of antiquity was, of course, too vast for any one of them to put it back together on his own. Hence they made recourse by default to collaboration. Scholars developed their interpretations in conversation with each other. When they weren't physically proximate, they wrote letters. By the second half of the seventeenth century, the exchange of letters and man-

uscripts evolved into the first learned journals. The Republic of Antiquaries flourished within the ecosystem that was Europe's Republic of Letters.

Collecting, describing, comparing—all are deeply empirical practices. It is not surprising, then, that antiquarians corresponded with artisans and scientists in order to obtain the best instruments and latest experimental data; that they worked closely with merchants who could acquire novelties on their distant commercial circuits; and that they maintained good relations with farmers so as to hear of finds newly emerged from under the plow. Nor were human practices beyond the scope of their curiosity. Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637), the Provençal antiquary whom Momigliano called "that archetype of all antiquarians," documented state funeral rituals in France, collected information on the negotiating techniques of sub-Saharan African traders, and investigated the music of the Eastern Christians as performed in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.[18]

Momigliano argued that the antiquaries of Renaissance and early modern Europe, though maligned by later generations, had invented research. He might also have said that they stood at the beginning of the history of what we call "interdisciplinarity." While the historians of the ancient world essentially rewrote the surviving written sources, the antiquaries dug—in the ground, in archives, in collections—added what they found to the record of the past, and then tried to follow the resulting questions wherever they led. It was only toward the end of the eighteenth century that this research vocation and its related evidence-handling technologies were eventually taken over by historians. But once in possession of these tools, the historians no longer needed the antiquaries, whose untimely backward-looking led to their rapid fall in an age obsessed by the "Moderns." Meanwhile, the birth of archaeology as a discipline created another object-studying center of gravity.[19] The antiquary fell between these chairs. By 1963 Momigliano could argue that the antiquary had himself become a problem worth studying, "a figure, so near to my profession, so transparently sincere in his vocation, so understandable in his enthusiasms, and yet so deeply mysterious in his ultimate aims."[20]

The history of antiquarianism, in all its forms, is a very big story. It is a story that Momigliano lamented had not yet been told when he published his field-making "Ancient History and the Antiquarian" in 1950, and that is only now beginning to come into focus.[21] In this book, I am not trying to write that history of antiquarianism itself. Rather, I am attempting an outline history of how people have thought about studying objects as evidence. Solving for this *x* will, indeed, lead us to travel for a time along the same route that a history of antiquarianism might take, but our points of departure and arrival lie elsewhere.

More than twenty years ago, Francis Haskell published *History and Its Images*. It provided the historical content for the theoretical turn in art history that emphasized the documents and archives of the discipline itself: self-examination in the form of scholarship. It, too, contained parts of what a history of antiquarianism would have to encompass. *History and Its Objects* may serve a similar historiographical function for the current wave of material culture studies; at the very least it will illustrate the long and rich history of thinking about objects as evidence. It, too, has parts of what a full-scale history of antiquarianism would need to include. But rather than pursuing comprehensiveness, as did Haskell, I wanted to document some of the questions we have been posing to objects over time, and how those questions have changed.

Haskell had recourse to cultural history as the rubric under which the study of images fell. Momigliano was the first to call attention to the connection between antiquarianism and cultural history. This seemed to me one of his promising asides. But they meet in a vast and murky terrain, and he himself chose not to venture upon it. When I started thinking about the questions that became this book, I thought that terrain could be crossed on the high road: from Peiresc to Voltaire to Burckhardt and on to the present. But I soon learned that a straight road is not always a true road. There were so many things that could be called cultural history and so many side routes that promised much but wound up as dead ends. While trying to pick my path across the swamp I read very carefully in the oeuvre of Hans Schleier, Germany's leading expert on nineteenth-century cultural history. Schleier made me realize that there could only be a "baggy" history of cultural history, because its contents were so various. To make any sense of the legacy of the antiquary, I had to narrow the focus.[22]

This turned out to be more straightforward than I first thought. A history of thinking about how objects have worked as historical evidence ended up offering a direct route from antiquarianism to material culture. It explained the origins of the part of cultural history that worked with things. The other parts of cultural history, the ones that dealt with the "creative spirit" or "the high points of the human spirit," are not relevant to me here. Even Jacob Burckhardt, who was an art historian, did not really belong to the discussion about objects.

Haskell's and Momigliano's antiquarians were sometimes also philologists. Both texts and artifacts emerged from the same time and place and could be studied together comparatively. Philology, however, early on—by the seventeenth century—developed a defined set of practices and a scholarly literature, while antiquarianism didn't. Like some luxuriant tropical

vine, its tendrils extended from ancient Rome to Greece and the Orient as well as northern Europe and Africa. But self-conscious discussions of method were few. Philology talked a lot about itself. I therefore expected the nineteenth-century German debate between "thing philology" and "word philology" (*Sach- und Wort-Philologie*) to yield up an authentically nineteenth-century language of material culture that we could draw upon today. But in this I was disappointed. The debate was less a debate than the headline suggests, and the ground of agreement was much greater. However, those who now maintain that the "word philologists" followed the later Kant (or, better, Hamann and Herder) in seeing language as offering privileged access to the soul of a people are in effect identifying the "thing philologists," by contrast, as anti-romantic. We cannot simply think ourselves into the past because we think in words. We need things to help us.

This attempt to think through a cultural history of objects and their study led me to the present-day "material turn." But then I proceeded to find "material turns" at, well, every turn. There was the material turn in Rome in the 1430s and 1440s, when Poggio Bracciolini, Cyriac of Ancona, Flavio Biondo, and Leon Battista Alberti were making the revival of antiquity something real. Then there was the material turn in Rome in the 1560s and 1570s driven by Pirro Ligorio, Onufrio Panvinio, and Pedro Chacón. In the 1630s, along the Rome–Aix-en-Provence–Paris axis of the Peiresc correspondence, there was yet another burst of material intelligence. In Göttingen, in the 1760s, the material turn of Gatterer, Schlözer, and Heyne produced the new auxiliary sciences of history, *Statistik*, and archaeology. Then again in the 1830s and 1840s the scholarship in the German regional historical associations led to an expansion of the material corpus beyond the bounds of *antiquitates*, and cultural history was born. In the 1880s there was the decisive material turn driven by Karl Lamprecht, who worked on books, manuscripts, art, and economic life. It was decisive because it inspired the principals of the next material turn, in Hamburg and Strasbourg, Warburg and Bloch, who produced the *Mnemosyne Atlas* and the *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*. If all of these could legitimately be viewed as material turns and none of them figure in our standard histories of history, then two things follow. First, there was a more or less continuous engagement of history and historians with objects and the questions objects ask of us. And, second, we need a new history of history. This book is a step on that path: it is a history of all these material turns.[23]

Fritz Stern began *Einstein's German World* by recounting Raymond Aron's melancholic counterfactual, "This could have been Germany's century." That the twentieth could have been is due to the fact that the nineteenth actually

was. In the history of historical scholarship, of academic institutions, of learned publications, the German discourse of the nineteenth century had the kind of global dominance we now associate with universities in the United States.[24] Yes, we can find some of these arguments running in parallel in other places, such as France or England—and I have tried to point them out where possible.[25] Lionel Gossman, for instance, explicitly argued that earlier eighteenth-century French medieval scholars such as La Curne de Sainte-Palaye "anticipated" the Göttingen historians in their thinking about research, sources, and evidence.[26] But I would argue that only in Germany was there a sustained, century-long, intergenerational conversation at the highest level of conceptual self-consciousness about how to think about an object historically. Maybe another way to say "conceptual self-consciousness" is "unremitting tendency to self-examination and self-theorization." If this doesn't make for readable texts, it does make for a rich discursive field that stretches from the textbooks of the university professors to the journal articles by local historians to the multi-volume syntheses of provincial polymaths to the administrative memoranda of museum directors. All of these look back to the Renaissance for sources even as they point toward the issues of our own time and our own "material turn." If we want our work on the past to yield resources for living in our present, not just the pleasures of reconstruction, then this wide German debate will provide us with the most nourishment.

In the German century that actually was, museums began to emerge as knowledge institutions on a par with the university. In fact, it is precisely the people who turned to material evidence for history who were the proponents of museum-making. The first professor to lecture on archaeology began by working on a collection of ancient gems. The local historians who articulated the shape of a German cultural history based on things were also the first to propose regional museum collections. The most interesting of the mid-nineteenth-century multi-volume cultural histories was written by a provincial polymath who began his career as a porcelain curator, then became a librarian, built a personal collection of thousands of objects that he then used as the basis of his written history, and fantasized about recomposing his history as a museum exhibition. None of this, by the way, happened in Berlin. If the "nation" was a driving force on the periphery, where this was translated into institutionalized scholarly activity, the "state" was nowhere to be seen. Finally, the first cultural historical museum—in a small Bavarian town—was founded to produce a history of the German nation from things. It would not be going too far to say that the museum and material culture were born twins.

So, too, were material culture and medieval studies. For if the first objects studied historically were of venerated Roman and then Greek antiquity, by the seventeenth century antiquaries were turning their attention to period between antiquity and themselves. Giants of erudition of such standing that, like Brazilian footballers, they are known by only one name, viz. Peiresc, Mabillon, and Leibniz, changed the way a thousand years of European history were studied. Their work on medieval material evidence was then incorporated into the curriculum at Göttingen and made the subject of cultural historical investigation, first by amateurs and then by professional historians. The Middle Ages became a museum "discipline" at the same places where the idea of the nation defined a museum's collecting policy, such as the Germanisches Nationalmuseum. And from the 1870s, economic history in Germany focused intensively on the Middle Ages (Karl Lamprecht, Theodor von Inama-Sternegg). The next generation, which included Pirenne, Huizinga and later, Bloch, followed Lamprecht in treating medieval economic history as a form of cultural history.

We are called *Homo sapiens*. Once upon a time there were other species in the genus *Homo*. In East Africa there was *Homo rudolfensis*, in East Asia *Homo erectus*, in Europe *Homo neanderthalensis*, in Indonesia *Homo floresiensis* and in Siberia *Homo denisova*. But of all these different species, only one survived, so that it became possible to equate human beings with *Homo sapiens* and to forget that *sapiens* was just one species of human being.[27] Similarly, we have come to think that history is identical to the university-based discipline of history just because the other kind of historical scholarship—the object-studying antiquarianism—disappeared. Just as we're told that *Homo sapiens* may have hunted Neanderthals to extinction, university-based history in some quarters made the old antiquarianism its first target. In both cases, the species that disappeared was absorbed into the successor's gene pool.

Imagine the effect on our sense of human-ness were we to discover that the other species of humans had survived into our present. Imagine if we were to find that antiquarianism had survived into the present, and not in some marginal location, weakened form or genetic marker, but as a force to be reckoned with.

If histories of history have not found a way to include antiquarianism, the absence of histories of antiquarianism, lamented already by Arnaldo Momigliano in 1950, has not helped.[28] Momigliano was a historian of the ancient world and its later study. To the extent that this second focus put him in position to provide such an account, he argued that in the eighteenth century antiquaries and historians had selectively interbred—to the advantage of the

historians. For this reason, the genome of the university-based historian—to stay with the analogy—has a high proportion of antiquarian DNA. And then, Momigliano argued, in the nineteenth century the still-surviving antiquaries continued to evolve, branching into the distinct species of archaeologist, anthropologist, art historian, and, later, sociologist. By the turn of the twentieth century, history was not the only modern human science that contained a high proportion of antiquarian DNA: they all did.[29] Having found their way into the university as distinct disciplines, some of them continued to evolve beyond the genus of past-loving creatures altogether. But the ones the university-based scholars left for dead also kept evolving. They became museum curators, conservators, local folklorists, artists inspired by the past to create new visions, writers of historical fiction, re-enactors, and the large and late-born clan of public historians.

What does it mean for our story that university-based history is not the only kind of past-loving? While distinct species often compete for resources, sometimes the recognition of distinctiveness allows for collaboration instead. It might even yield an agenda for action. Take the relationship between curators and historians, for example, or between writers of historical fiction and historians. Each can bring something different and important to the understanding of the past. Over the course of the twentieth century, university history departments have gotten better at broadening the category of what counts as history. Think of the contributions of social history, women's history, history from below, history of everyday life, history of science, and environmental history, among others. But we haven't gotten any better at broadening the category of who counts as a historian. Why shouldn't a serious documentary filmmaker like Frederick Wiseman or a deeply evidence-based conceptual artist like Mark Dion be part of ongoing dialogue with university-based historians? The interest in "experiential learning" on the part of historians of science and archaeologists has shown how much university-based scholars can learn from past-loving artisans.

If curators are one of the other species of past-lovers, so are artists. The little figures clambering about the Roman ruins in the great painting by Hermanus Posthumus were drawing and sketching in order to draw and sketch better. The engagement of contemporary conceptual artists with material evidence and even the methodologies of producing it (for instance, archaeology) might lead us to encourage more interspecies communication, so to speak. Programs that link together the inquiries of artists and scholars could take advantage of their different but related kinds of material knowledge. We see this beginning to happen in some places.[30]

Objects conservation, which emerged from the practices of antiquaries—Peiresc, for instance, gave instruction about how to conserve the skin of a crocodile which had fallen into the sea en route from Alexandria to Marseille, and the antiquary John Milner launched a debate about the gothic in England which was continued by Ruskin half a century later—requires a scientist's knowledge of materials, a practitioner's knowledge of techniques, and a historian's knowledge of context. No wonder that conservation is now finding its way back into university curricula that are themselves trying to integrate textual and material knowledge.[31]

Unlike textual knowledge, materials often exceed the capacities of any one person or approach. Institutions with collections and institutions with learned practices could find more justification for the collaborations that are otherwise often difficult to organize. University museums are the likeliest to do this first; projects underway at Göttingen and Glasgow suggest that this great convergence—or should we say re-convergence?—is possible. Antiquarians like Peiresc were creatures of the *Kunst- und Wunderkammer*, and this same way of organizing knowledge was still animating the amateur historical associations of the nineteenth century all across Europe.

The university-based past-loving species may indeed face declining enrollments and thus grimmer prospects in future years. This much we may grant the prophets of doom. But if we look outside the university to the broader genus of the past-lovers, we see no diminution of the past's popularity. Historical fiction sells and sells and sells; Hilary Mantel has turned a sixteenth-century administrator into a star of stage and screen. At the most recent Venice Biennale, archaeology was one of the most powerful of the artistic languages on display. The most popular museums in the world are all historical: the British Museum, the Louvre, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Palace Museum in Beijing. And Venice, like Colonial Williamsburg, exists for us as an example of the past in the present that attracts more and more worshipers each year.

Scholarly practices developed by the antiquaries still drive the activities of many of the past-lovers. (It's in the DNA.) Collecting is registered in the ever greater importance of material culture and object-based learning, both inside and outside the university. Without description and the close-looking it memorializes, there would be no curatorial activity. Comparing may actually be fundamental to a globalized world fascinated by the encounter—sometimes shaken, sometimes stirred—between different genera of sources, questions, or bodies of knowledge. Reconstruction, whether of lost structures, such as the *Schloss* in Berlin, or of past practices, for example, by American Civil War re-enactors, looms large in

an ever fragmenting world. Because of that fragmentation and because of the explosion of at-our-fingertips knowledge, collaboration appeals to past-lovers more than before. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are nothing if not amped-up republics of letters. The digital revolution empowers each of these methods. But it also pushes us in the direction of the antiquaries' *style* of presentation: non-linear, focusing on the fragment, curatorial in approach, and aspiring always to the database. In all of this what has dropped out is the "piety," or reverence, that Nietzsche identified in the antiquaries' posture of reconstruction. Those who now reach into the antiquaries' toolkit, whether or not they know that's what it is, are doing so not out of any sentimentality but because it contains the tools they want.

The founding of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in 1852 as a platform for object-based historical research launched a full-throttle, decades-long debate in Germany about how historical subjects could be addressed in a museum setting where they could speak to scholars and to the general public. Perhaps the details of that debate, and its broader nineteenth-century context, could contribute to our own discussions about the future of museums in a twenty-first-century research environment.[32]

In the nineteenth century, the university-based gatekeepers of academic knowledge rejected this move as imperiling their carefully drawn boundaries, as did the museum-based connoisseurs who, in parallel, feared for their oases consecrated to higher things and better sorts of people. Aby Warburg's complaints about "border guards" in his 1912 lecture on the movement of Greek astrological imagery eastward to India and back to Renaissance Ferrara, not to mention the marginality of his own "Library for Cultural Sciences" in Hamburg, highlight the price of trespassing disciplinary or other conventions.[33] A century later, many of these issues are still live. Universities struggle with the tension between discipline-based departments and centers or institutes organized around themes or practices. Power still remains with the departments. Only on the fringes, where local context serves as a counterweight, can something as innovative as Stanford's Institute of Design (known as the "d.school") thrive. Its collaborative, experimental, problem-driven approach and its crossing the university and business worlds seems tailor-made to the new world Nietzsche advocated in his two "untimely meditations." Yet Stanford's d.school abandons the deep commitment to research characteristic of the antiquaries and does not even try much to speak to humanities departments, suggesting that the perfect Nietzschean hybrid remains to be found—or created.[34]

Momigliano identified the 1870s as one of the great turning points in the history of studying the ancient world. He singled out the publications of

E. B. Tylor, Johann Jakob Bachofen, Lewis Henry Morgan, and Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges.[35] We might want to add Nietzsche to that list. From our perspective, we can see that Nietzsche in the 1870s was groping toward an answer to the question of how to think about the meaningfulness of the past in an age of "deep history" (our term, not his). Along with Bachofen, who was also working in Basel at the time, Nietzsche was realizing that the advent of prehistory had to change how we thought about the past. Rousseau, in his *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), invoked the latest anthropological research to argue that previous thinking about the state of nature did not get far enough back in time and thus presented as natural what was just conventional (most pertinently the origin of property). Nietzsche and Bachofen now did the very same thing to Rousseau, saying that he didn't go back far enough to the foundation of things like morality and family. For Nietzsche, the breakthrough came in the work whose completion was responsible for "We Philologists" remaining incomplete.

In *Human, All Too Human* (1878) Nietzsche shows us what the discovery of prehistory could mean. He proclaimed that compared to the vastness of the past, philosophers and historians had generalized from "a very restricted stretch of time." He wished his readers "to imagine a human being eighty thousand years old." Everything important about human development "occurred during primeval times, long before those four thousand years with which we are more or less acquainted." Nietzsche called what could be done with this deep past not history but "historical philosophy." We might think of this as something akin to the philosophical histories of the Enlightenment, but with a still greater emphasis on the broad philosophical strokes and a commensurately diminished attention to historicity.[36]

One of the examples of this new approach is, precisely, the earliest attention to things. With hominids viewing mighty, invisible actors—let us call them gods—as causal agents, objects were worshipped for the indwelling divinity who needed to be propitiated: "the corporeal element provides the handle with which one can grasp the spiritual," as Nietzsche put it.[37] Thus a tool or a bauble or a garment or a place—anything that could play a causal role in the world—gained meaning by association with the invisible power causing all things. We might call this the "birth of aura": like the Big Bang, thousands of years later it is still shaping the horizon of our experience. Having come to the conclusion that the really big issues could not be treated philologically and that, by contrast, the issues philologists could treat were superficial, Nietzsche felt that there was only one course of action left to him: to abandon his essentially historical perspective for a philosophical one. Half a century later, this same idea, mediated by the philosopher and sociologist

Max Scheler, appears in Alfred Weber's *Cultural History as Cultural Sociology* (1935). Weber, the brother of the more famous Max and a professor at Heidelberg, argued that humans' self-awareness was a function of recognizing in the self the same kind of object-ness that they perceived all around them. Related to this was the unprecedented practice of tool-making, something that happened very early on. As with Nietzsche, accommodating prehistory meant generalizing, in this case toward sociology.[38]

But what is the conclusion that historians might draw from the same realization about how long our history really is? Daniel Lord Smail's *On Deep History and the Brain* (2007) and *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present* (2011, with Andrew Shryock) have suggested some answers to this question, but have not yet changed the way historians do business. If historians are only capable of working on the last four thousand of the seventy or eighty thousand years of *Homo sapiens*, then, effectively, all our work is antiquarian in the specific sense of being research-driven but basically de-contextualized, looking at a piece of the whole only. In the Hayden Planetarium in New York, the length of the universe in time corresponds to the length of a ramp visitors descend from the Big Bang "theater." Measured against this, the length of the history of *Homo sapiens* is the breadth of a single human hair (the ramp is four hundred feet long). And almost all the history historians do focuses on the last part of that hair's breadth. Compared to the forty-odd centuries of recorded history and the hundred centuries since the Neolithic Revolution, even the world wars of the twentieth century might be just a kind of "histoire événementielle," to use Braudel's slight. On the other hand, perhaps this discovery offers an opportunity to appreciate anew what antiquarianism does well—something Nietzsche was pointing to in his meditation on history. And, of course, the more students of the past reach for a way to access the deeper past with questions about humans and not just nature's history, the greater a role there will be for material culture among university-based students of the past.[39]

This book did not set out to be even a partial history of antiquarianism. It began life as a kind of dark binary star orbiting *Peiresc's Mediterranean World*. Where that project approached a single life as a vast cosmos, this one treats a vast theme in the form of an outline sketch. If that one adopted the style of antiquarianism to unmoor a set of received assumptions about antiquarianism, this one deploys one narrative in order to replace another one. For if Peiresc provided me with a way into the history of using—and thinking with—material evidence, I also realized that I needed an understanding of the longer, broader impact of antiquarianism to assess the shorter,

sharper impact of Peiresc's antiquarian practices. In that book, I suggested that taking antiquarianism more seriously would open up the possibility of a Copernican revolution in the history of historical research, in which the object-centered, research-oriented approach of the past-lovers would appear as typical, and the grand historical narrative of the sort we associate with the century from Gibbon to Burckhardt as the exception. This book provides that counter-history.

Having completed this two-sided project, I can now see that thinking about things is also the key to perceiving the ongoing relationships between the different species that constitute the genus of the past-lovers. Antiquaries and object-lovers like Peiresc have turned out to be more instructive than they seemed. But even more, the longing trapped in things helps connect the professional students of the past, of whatever species, with *Homo sapiens* writ large. All of us experience the power of the past in things, whether cleaning out the closets of deceased parents or cradling our grown children's mementos or experiencing the shock of connection to an impersonal past through the magic of the haptic. History with objects obliterates so many of the false walls that partition off our experience of living that it is hard not to feel, with Nietzsche, that getting this relationship right will help us, finally, make history work for life.