Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment

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PART II

NEW APPROACHES TO MEDIEVAL STUDIES
The scholars of the seventeenth century did a great deal to refine the techniques of historical investigation. As catalogues began to appear describing the great European collections of manuscripts and rare books, Mabillon and Du Cange provided the means by which historians could evaluate the authenticity of the documents on which increasingly they based their accounts; Ezechiel Spanheim, Jacob Spon, and Charles Patin showed how numismatics was relevant to the work of the historian; Jean Chapelain, pursuing an idea already mooted by Fauchet, suggested that works of fiction might be used by the historian interested in certain types of information. While many scholars were preoccupied with the question of authenticity, Spinoza and Bayle insisted on the matter of truth. The fact that an historical account is well authenticated, they argued, does not guarantee that what it says is true. Increasingly in the eighteenth century, scholars learned to be concerned not only with establishing the material soundness of their sources but with critically evaluating their content in accordance with the criteria suggested by Bayle and codified by a number of professional historians, such as the Dutchman Perizonius and the German Bierling, a friend of Leibniz.

1 The progress of diplomatics is described succinctly in Ludwig Traube, Vorlesungen und Abhandlungen zur Palaeographie und Handschriftenkunde (Munich, 1909); cf. also Harry Bresslau, Handbuch der Urkundenlehre (2d ed.; Leipzig, 1912), notably 1:25-28 on Mabillon, and David Douglas, English Scholars (London, 1939). At the end of the century Le Clerc judged palaeography the most significant single contribution to historical studies. Without it, "historias fictitias pro veris suscipimus, et sic fabulis honorem soli veritati debitum tribuimus." (Ars critica [Amsterdam, 1697], 1:18.)


3 Fauchet, Œuvres (Paris, 1610), p. 591v. Jean Chapelain, De la lecture des vieux romans, written circa 1646, published 1728, in Continuation des Mémoires de littérature et d'histoire de M. Salengre, 6:281-342, and again in 1870, by A. Feillet. "Lancelot," wrote Chapelain, "n'est point Tite-Live, par ce que les actions qui y sont racontées sont éloignées de toute vérité. Si toutefois il ne lui est pas comparable par la vérité de l'histoire, n'étant composé que d'événements fabuleux, j'oserai dire qu'il lui pourrait être comparé par la vérité des mœurs et des coutumes dont l'un et l'autre fournissent des images parfaites: l'un des temps dont il a écrit, l'autre de ceux où il a écrit." (Feillet ed., p. 12.)

4 J. Perizonius, Oratio de fide historiarum contra Pyrrhonismum historicum (Lugd. Bat., 1702); F. W. Bierling, De judicio historico (Rinthelii, 1703), De
The aims of historical scholarship also began to change. Where it had once been almost entirely subordinate to religious and legal debate or to literary and political education in the humanist spirit, history came to be valued less as a record of objective events—the deposit, as it were, of human willing and acting—than for what it told of the historical agent, man himself. To Enlighteners, history was above all a means of freeing men (not necessarily all men, but at least those who had sufficient intelligence) from superstition, from routine and, as far as possible, from the brute force of circumstance by revealing them to themselves as responsible agents, creators of themselves, of their institutions, of their societies, and of all existing or possible explanations of the universe. The very act of self-recognition, it was hoped, would free men to make themselves and their society consciously and deliberately rather than obscurely and in ignorance, to shape a destiny rather than to suffer one. It was not expected that man could arrive at absolute freedom. His own nature, the nature of social living, and the nature of the universe imposed limitations on his freedom, and for this very reason recognition of his own physical and psychical structure and of the laws of nature and society was a condition of freedom. It was important therefore to distinguish the real from the

Pyrhonomismo historico (Rinthelii, 1707). In the De judicio, which owes much to Leibniz and to Locke, Bierling distinguishes knowledge of rational relations (scientia, based on ratio), knowledge of God (fides cordis, based on revelatio divina), and empirical knowledge, including historical knowledge (fides intellectus, based on revelatio humana). The latter has not the certainty of scientia, but it need not be rejected on that account. The key to achieving the greatest possible degree of certainty in this area resides, in Bierling’s view, in techniques of investigation. The De judicio set forth accordingly four principles that should guide historical research: (1) It should be established which historians are generally reliable and which are not [sec. x]; (2) All historical sources should be exploited once their authenticity has been ascertained, whether they be written or monumental [secs. x, xxv]; (3) Contemporary testimonies should be compared critically [sec. x]; and (4) Sachkritik or rational criteria should be applied [secs. xxix, xxx]. The De Pyrrhonismo outlined five principles of criticism: (1) No historian should be accepted as in all respects trustworthy; (2) The historian’s biography and the probable bent of his prejudices should be established; (3) Improbable fables and legends are not more likely because they are common; (4) Contemporary accounts of causes and motives must be critically examined; and (5) Where different accounts are contradictory, it is prudent to accept only those points which cannot be disavowed by any of the conflicting parties. (De Pyrrhonismo, ch. 5.) Bierling was no timid conservative. Leibniz apparently felt he had gone too far. (Cf. Gerhard’s ed. of Leibniz’s Gesammelte Schriften [Berlin, 1890], 7:486; also L. Davillé, Leibniz historien [Paris, 1909], p. 242.) Both Perizonius and Bierling were known in France, partly through Bayle. In 1724, at the height of the Pouilly-Sallier controversy at the Académie des Inscriptions, Bierling’s two treatises were reissued.
mythical, so that man might understand where he stood and what he could do. The natural scientists had achieved a great deal, but the historical realm remained to be as thoroughly purged of myths, monsters, and magic as the natural one had been.

Sainte-Palaye came into early contact with all the main currents of contemporary historiography, and he was alive not only to the latest methods of documentary criticism but to the internal criticism of Bayle and to the new orientation of historical studies in general. Bayle, as we saw earlier, had been something of a hero in the Dijon of President Bouhier. He was also a great favorite of Denys-François Secousse, Sainte-Palaye’s mentor in matters of criticism and scholarship. The correspondence of the two men shows the older impressing on the younger some of the main lessons of the new history. Diodorus Siculus—he tells Sainte-Palaye—is a better historian than Quintus Curtius. He is “très sensé et très judicieux . . . honnête homme et . . . Philosophe . . . Il est exact dans les faits qu’il rapporte, et il a eu soin de marquer les auteurs qu’il a suivis et qui sont ceux qui méritent le plus de créance. Il rapporte dans les choses importantes les différences qu’il trouve entre les historiens et il s’attache toujours à ce qu’il y a de plus vraisemblable.” An enthusiastic appraisal of Dionysius of Halicarnassus throws clear light on Secousse’s ideal; “Je ne puis vous exprimer combien j’en suis content,” he writes to Sainte-Palaye. “Tel est l'historien que je cherche depuis longtemps. Un homme qui a approfondi la matière qu’il veut traiter, exact, judicieux, qui rapporte les différentes opinions . . . il se détermine pour des raisons solides; à la vérité il est très sec et je n’ai pas aperçu la moindre apparence de pensée. Cette simplicité n’est pas du goust de tout le monde. L’abbé Lenglet a dit de lui: Historien exact mais ennuyeux. Je ne pense pas comme lui. L’histoire est la science des faits, l’exactitude et la discussion sont les devoirs de l'historien. L’ornement n’est qu’un accessoire qui souvent accable le principal, ce qui me paroist un grand defaut.”

On his election to the Académie des Inscriptions in 1724, Sainte-Palaye was thrown into even closer contact with the modern movement in historical scholarship. Indeed, his election came at a time when a crucial battle for the new history was being waged at the Academy.

5 Bréquigny 66, fol. 91, 20.8.1722. 6 Ibid., fols. 95–100, 16.11.1722.
In a provocative paper on the *Incetitude de l'histoire des quatre premiers siècles de Rome*, read in December 1722, Lévesque de Pouilly questioned the validity of the very canons of classical history. The legends which fill most histories of distant periods have brought discredit on history as a whole, he declared. "Il seroit donc utile de porter le flambeau d'une sévère critique dans toutes les annales des peuples, pour y démêler ce qu'elles renferment de douteux ou de faux." Lévesque emphasized that his aim was not to attack history at the roots, but only to apply to certain areas hitherto considered sacrosanct the legitimate criteria which must govern any honest inquiry: "Est-ce combattre tous les faits historiques que d'attaquer quelques fables? N'est-ce pas au contraire servir la vérité, que de la dégager de ce qui pourroit nous la rendre suspecte?" Lévesque's concern for accuracy, however, led him to reject the testimony of canonical authorities like Livy, Cicero, Varro, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

Conservative scholars at the Academy, alarmed at the implications of their colleague's criticism, rose to the defense of the classical historians. Their spokesman was the Abbé Sallier. Sallier's first reply is disappointing, but in his second paper he exploited Lévesque's methods of criticism to attack Lévesque's own position. By the end of 1724 the two men had come to some agreement on principles, for on December 22 of that year Sallier read a paper on Lévesque's behalf, in which the methods of historical criticism were outlined. "Reconnoissons," Lévesque urged, "que dans l'histoire le faux est mêlé avec le vrai, mais qu'il est des marques auxquelles on peut les distinguer . . ." The methods laid down were those which had already been fully elaborated by Bayle, Le Clerc, and Bierling. In a third *Discours sur la certitude des quatre pre-

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7 *MAI* 6:14.

8 The substance of Lévesque's argument was that (1) the authors in question could not know personally and at first hand the events of which they wrote; (2) they contradict each other; (3) they attribute to the Romans the same sort of legendary history that is found among other peoples; and (4) they themselves admit the uncertainty of their accounts.

9 Sallier expresses only indignation: "Je ne pense pas qu'on ose porter ce jugement d'un Écrivain qui . . ." etc. (*MAI* 6:30).

10 He criticizes Lévesque's claim that the Romans borrowed their early history from the Greeks by attacking the reliability of Plutarch, on whom Lévesque rested much of his argument. (*MAI* 6:50.)

11 *MAI* 6:71-72. The *Registres de l'Académie des Inscriptions* for 1724, p. 597, record that the paper was read by Sallier.
miers siècles de Rome (April 10, 1725) Sallier closed the discussion by accepting the validity of Lévesque’s method and his right to apply it to all provinces of history, even if he still rejected Lévesque’s conclusions.

The high point of the whole controversy was Fréret’s Réflexions sur l’étude des anciennes histoires et sur le degré de certitude de leurs preuves, which was read to the Academy on April 17, 1724, just three months before Sainte-Palaye’s election, and which set forth the principles that were to become the basis of all future historical investigation at the Académie des Inscriptions. The scholars recognized the importance of Fréret’s Réflexions, and indeed of the whole controversy, by placing all the papers relating to it together under the heading “Fondements de l’Histoire” in a single volume of the Academy’s Mémoires, even though the contributions were made over a period of three years.

Even before Sainte-Palaye’s election, Secousse had written him a full account of the Pouilly-Sallier controversy. His own sympathies lay unequivocally with Pouilly. “Il a sur l’estude de l’histoire des idées justes,” he noted, ‘qu’il seroit fort à souhaitter que les savants qui travaillent dans ce genre voulussent imiter.” 12 He himself began subjecting his favorite historian, Plutarch, to the kind of searching investigation he had commended in Pouilly, and in this he was joined by Sainte-Palaye who, immediately after his first paper—a surprisingly uncritical Vie d’Agathocle, tyran de Syracuse 13—appears to have decided to place himself in the position of a disciple and to be guided by his friend and mentor. 14

The results of this collaboration were a paper on Plutarch’s Life of Romulus and a comparison of Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Alfred Maury, the historian of the Académie des Inscriptions, judged the paper on Plutarch harshly, mainly on the grounds that in his grave discussion of chronological errors and inconsistencies in the Life of Romulus, the young academician completely bypassed the essential question of the veracity of the entire Romu-

12 Bréquignon 66, fols. 95-100.
14 At the start of his first paper on Plutarch, read to the Academy on February 8, 1726, Sainte-Palaye explicitly associated himself with Secousse: “Je satisfais avec plaisir aux engagements que m’a fait prendre un confrère, qui a des droits trop légitimes sur mes études . . . J’entrerai dans la même carrière avec lui . . .” (Registres [1726], p. 169.)
He concluded—quite mistakenly, as we know—that Sainte-Palaye had been little touched by the ideas of Lévesque or by Fréret's critical principles. Sainte-Palaye was not, indeed, as audacious as his older colleagues—we should remember that skepticism about the authenticity of the Romulus story might well be taken to imply skepticism about the authenticity of the Bible stories—but he did observe that "entre plusieurs traditions différentes sur un même fait, il [Plutarch] ne manque presque jamais de se déterminer pour la plus fabuleuse." Nor was Sainte-Palaye afraid to extend his criticism to Livy. "Ce que nous disons ici de Plutarque," he stated, "convient également à Tite-Live, car il lui est entièrement conforme sur tous ces faits; et l'on connaît assez d'ailleurs quelle est sa crédulité et son goût pour tout ce qui s'appelle merveilleux."

The following year, on January 4, 1727, Sainte-Palaye, now settled in Paris, read the Academy another paper on classical historiography, *Observations sur quelques chapitres du deuxième livre de la première Décade de Tite-Live*. This second paper exposed his limitations more glaringly. His comparison of Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, which shows clear marks of Secousse's influence, concluded—as we might expect—in favor of the latter. But the paper reveals a temptation which Sainte-Palaye did not always resist, even in later life. Instead of doing away with the very idea of authority, Sainte-Palaye, like Secousse and Bouhier, seems to have been tempted rather to distinguish between good and bad historians and to grant a kind of authority to those historians whose general reliability had been established.

Another serious limitation in Secousse's teaching was his vision of history, which appears to have stopped at the accumulation and critical evaluation of facts. "J'ai reconnu," Secousse wrote his young friend, "que s'il y a quelque genre de Sciences dans lequel je puisse réussir ce sera dans l'histoire, et que mon goust et mon inclination me portent à la compilation des faits." 17

In the field of medieval studies, to which the two scholars turned a few years later, a good deal of work of this kind still required to be done. But Sainte-Palaye tried to go beyond the mere accumulation of facts. His association with the literary salons of the day had

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16 *MAI* 6:123.
opened his mind to a larger view of history. The Academy itself had tried hard to put its house in order and to adapt to a new style of scholarship. The eighteenth-century editors of the Academy’s *Mémoires* are constantly criticizing irrelevant erudition, arguments based on unproven assumptions, and poor arrangement of material. Their purpose was to improve scholarship and to make it more attractive by getting rid of mere erudition and by integrating it into a wider framework of reflection about man and society. Charles Le Beau, one of the Academy’s secretaries, defined the object of its endeavors as “l’histoire de l’esprit humain et des divers systèmes qu’il a enfantés.”

As Sainte-Palaye turned to the Middle Ages, it was such an aim as this that he had in mind.

A great deal of work on the Middle Ages was done by the scholars and amateurs of the *Grand Siècle*. Much of this work, however, was fragmentary and frequently it was drily legalistic. Many of those who studied the Middle Ages were not aware of a gulf between their own time and the time with which they were concerned in their work. They stood, as it were, in the immediate presence of the past, and they lacked the historical sense, the sense of difference, which characterizes the modern historian. The rise of absolutism did produce, however, a number of writers in whom the sense of the passing of an epoch was acute. Usually these writers were associated with the world that absolutism was leaving behind. The most lively and sympathetic studies of the Middle Ages in the seventeenth century were thus frequently connected with movements of opposition to the court and to absolutism. In contrast to the Jesuit Claude Menestrier, who in his *Traité des tournois* of 1669 had nothing but scorn for medieval carrousels, decked his knights out in classical garb, and had them watched over by the

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18 Their comments are to be found in B. N. Nouv. Acq. Fr. 6196. The Academy was thus following the general tendency of the age to break down professional barriers, trade secrets, special languages, and all the trappings of untested and traditional authority. The new attitude had been formulated clearly by Fontenelle when he wrote: “J’ai voulu traiter la philosophie d’une manière qui ne fût point philosophique.” (*Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, ed. Shackleton [Oxford, 1955], p. 53.)

19 *Registres*, for December 3, 1768.


21 “Ces inventions étoient bonnes en un temps où les gens étoient moitié bestes” (p. 79).
divinities of Greece and Rome, André Favyn in his *Théâtre d'honneur* (1620) expressed with some eloquence the disquiet of important elements of the nobility in the time of Richelieu and Mazarin at the decline of an earlier feudal ethos and at the diminishing political influence of the nobility in general. Favyn stressed the Germanic origins of the Franks, their prowess in battle, their fine stature, beside which the Romans appeared as "nains et pygmées," and though he did not go into detail on the status of the conquered populations of Gaul, he announced provocatively that "de toute Antiquité les charges principales tant de Paix que de Guerre, de Justice et des Armes, estoient tenues en France par les Nobles seulement, sans que les Roturiers y fussent appellez." Noble sympathies also inspired Favyn's successor, Vulson de la Colombière. The latter's eloquent plea on behalf of the Middle Ages in his *Théâtre d'honneur et de chevalerie* is at the same time an apology for the nobility. Vulson also appealed to the nobility to maintain its old traditions and not to give in to the pleasures of courtly life. The medieval nobles, he admonished, "ne noyoient pas leur ardeur dans les excès de la débauche; ils ne laissoient point croupir leurs courages dans les ordures des voluptez ... Quelle manie possède aujourd'hui les plus honnests gens ... que l'oysiveté semble estre leur plus noble occupation." To the young nobility of France he held up the example of Bayard, the perfect knight and the flower of chivalry.

Throughout the period of absolutism a section of the nobility maintained a serious interest in the Middle Ages. Some time before 1675 Le Laboureur, commissioned by a group of high noblemen,

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24 Le *vray Théâtre d'honneur et de chevalerie ou le miroir héroïque de la noblesse* (Paris, 1648), Epître à Monseigneur le Cardinal de Mazarin. If the King will read his book—Vulson declares—"il y remarquera que les moindres divertissements des anciens Nobles n'estoient jamais sans sueur, non plus que sans laurier et sans victoire; qu'ils ne combatoient jamais que pour le bon droit, et que la protection des veuves, des orphelins et des veureux oppressoires estoient leurs plus glorieux emplois, après le service de leurs Souverains; Il connoistra qu'ils estoient honnestes, modestes et respectueux en leurs amours, généreux et clémens envers leurs ennemis, fidèles et religieux en leurs promesses, protecteurs des foibles, et remplis de piété, de franchise, de libéralité, de civilité, de force et de hardiesse ..." *Ibid.*, 'Préface, servant d'Avertissement à la Noblesse.'

wrote his *Histoire de la pairie de France*, where he tried to explain how the nobility—which at the time of the conquest of Gaul by the Franks had been on a par with the King—was gradually ousted from its position, and how the original division of powers among equals was replaced by a complex feudal hierarchy. Le Laboureur's plans for reform may have been somewhat chimerical; nonetheless he pointed a way to future constitutional scholars. The private *Académie du Luxembourg*, which was meeting about 1692, did not aim at a return to the status quo of 1,000 years earlier, but it hoped to find guidance for the reorganization of the state by studying the history of government and institutions in France. A program was drawn up to conduct research into the origins of the monarchy, of the parlements, of the offices of the Crown, into the course of the administration of justice, and into the rise of the communes and of the *noblesse de robe*. Fénélon's *Projet d'étude de l'histoire de France* and his *Examen de conscience sur les devoirs de la Royauté* are aspects of the same tendency on the part of the nobility to examine the evolution of the existing form of government.

In robe circles, too, there was considerable interest in the Middle Ages. The robe was understandably less sympathetic toward the chivalric ethos and toward feudalism than the nobility; nevertheless, it was not pleased with absolutism as it had been realized under Louis XIV, and it looked back with regret to an earlier age of hope and promise, usually the sixteenth century. Its decline under absolutism had been, if anything, more marked than that of the nobility; there was, therefore—as indeed we have already seen in an earlier chapter—not only considerable sympathy in robe circles for the literature and art of the sixteenth century, but considerable curiosity about the social and political history of France from the Middle Ages onward. While Le Laboureur and Fénélon investigated the history of the nobility and restated its political claims in the early eighteenth century, the men of the robe also looked into the past to explain the present and to plan for the future. The

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29 Le Laboureur's *Pairie* was published in 1740; in 1721 Ramsay published a popularization of Fénélon's political ideas in his *Essai philosophique sur le gouvernement civil*. 
great constitutional debates of the sixteenth century had produced several writers (Seyssel, Pasquier, Loyseau, La Roche Flavin) who had championed the cause of the robe against the apologists of the King (Bodin) and of the nobility (Hotman), and it is significant that their arguments and historical analyses were revived in 1732, when the struggle between Fleury and the parlements was at its height, in a pamphlet entitled Mémoire touchant l'origine et l'autorité du Parlement de France, appelé Judicium Francorum. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the magistracy was deeply involved in the investigation of medieval history.

As in the nobility and in the magistracy, there were important currents in the Church which were out of sympathy with the world of the court and of absolutism. We have already had occasion to mention several eighteenth-century churchmen, friends of Sainte-Palaye, who looked back for inspiration to the early medieval Church. They were by no means isolated cases. Bossuet himself had marked Augustinian leanings. The respected and celebrated Abbé Fleury, who was called by the Regent in 1715 to be tutor to the young Louis XV, and who was, incidentally, linked to the robe by family connections and by early training, was likewise moved by strong Augustinian sympathies. In his widely read and frequently republished Discours sur l'histoire ecclésiastique, he argued that from a Christian point of view the Middle Ages cannot be summarily dismissed: "Les siècles que l'on compte ordinairement pour les plus obscurs et les plus barbares ne l'étoient pas autant qu'on le croit et n'ont été dépourvus ni de science ni de vertu." Developing a characteristic Augustinian theme, Fleury held that the Middle Ages had been thrown into disrepute by men who "ayant plus de littérature que de religion et de bon sens, ne s'arrêtont qu'à l'écorce, et ne pouvoient rien goûter que les écrivains de l'ancienne Rome et de l'ancienne Grèce." The criterion of good taste and politeness was not the only one, he concluded: "Qu'importe après tout que l'on parle et que l'on écrive mal, pourvu que l'on croie bien et que l'on vive bien? Dieu ne regarde que le cœur: la grossièreté du langage et la rusticité des moeurs ne sont rien à son égard."

31 Discours sur l'histoire ecclésiastique (nouvelle édition; Nîmes, 1785), 3ème discours, pp. 139-41.
Favyn, Vulson, and Fleury were not concerned with legal precedents or objects of mere antiquarian curiosity. Rather, they looked in the Middle Ages for an attitude, a mentality, a set of values, a whole way of life, which they felt was increasingly alien to the way of life they observed around them. Nevertheless, they wrote from the perspective of the past, and they did not consider that this perspective should be transcended. The eighteenth-century medievalists, on the other hand, were almost all touched by Enlightenment. They had class prejudices and class interests, but they believed their goal was to rise above them and, in studying particular historical societies, to consider the nature and the laws of human society in general. Their vantage point was not to be that of any particular time or society; it was to be that of enlightened humanity, emancipated from all unexamined beliefs and "prejudices."

Significantly, those who, at the Académie des Inscriptions and elsewhere, put forward the case for the study of the Middle Ages, used the language and the arguments of the early Enlighteners; indeed, many of the earliest medievalists were identifiably also Modernes, and they wrote of the past not from the point of view of some standard in the past—be it that of the nobility, that of the robe, or that of the Christian community—but from the point of view of an enlightened and sophisticated society, a strange amalgam of aristocracy and bourgeoisie, which felt its modernity and no longer identified itself completely with any age or social group in the past.

The first leader of the medievalists at the Académie des Inscriptions was Camille Falconet. Falconet was not the first to emphasize the amount of spade work that had to be done before any synthetic account of medieval history could be attempted. In a paper read to the Academy at the end of 1724, Foncemagne, announcing that he had decided to turn all his energies to the study of the history of the monarchy, had suggested that such an ambitious project

\[32\] Thus, for instance, it seems fairly clear that Fleury's position is in one important respect opposed to that of the Enlighteners, however much it may have been touched by Enlightenment in other respects. He speaks for the traditional Christian community against those who had set themselves outside it and above it; cf. Bernhard Groethuysen, *Die Entstehung der bürgerlichen Welt- und Lebensanschauung in Frankreich.*
might well be beyond the powers of a single individual. But it was in Falconet’s paper *Sur nos premiers traducteurs français avec un Essay de bibliothèque français* (read on January 28, 1727) that the call to arms was clearly sounded.

First, Falconet put forward a plea, in terms that reveal his attachment to the movement of the *Modernes*, for the study of the history and antiquities of France as a subject worthy of the attention of the most eminent scholars. “Envisagés le champ que fournit votre seule Patrie,” he told the assembled Academicians, “vous le trouverez encore assez vaste pour y exercer tous vos talens et y déployer toutes vos connaissances.”

There was no reason why the study of classical antiquity should be preferred to that of the national past. “L’autorité des Anciens fraperoit-elle plus que la raison même? Pourquoi nous mépriser et ne pas faire de nous le même cas, que faisoient d’eux-mêmes les Grecs et les Romains. Des Savans de Nations qui se reconnoissent inférieures à la Nation française, ont pensé plus noblement de leur pays.”

The failure of French scholars to study their own history as something worthy of respect in itself has led to a great deal of ignorance and confusion about the national past. “Les Auteurs qui se sont piqués de Belles-Lettres ont tiré quasi tous nos mots des Langues Savantes: Messieurs de Port-Royal sont tombés dans cette erreur, après Perion, Tripaut et beaucoup d’autres: le Père Thomassin qui a suivi Guichart, est allé bien plus loin en rapportant tout à l’hébreu . . . Mr Ménage, qui a voulu un talent particulier pour l’Étymologie a un peu ramené les esprits de l’opinion où l’on estoit que notre langue devoit tout aux langues savantes: mais malgré cela je dirai hardiment que Mr Ménage, homme d’une littérature très étendue qui avoit lu beaucoup d’Italien et d’Es-

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35 Falconet’s paper was reported in abstract in the ‘partie historique’ of the *Mémoires* (*MAI* 7:292-300). Sainte-Palaye preserved a copy of the complete paper (Bréquigny 61, fol. 10-33), and it is from this that we quote.
pagnol, aussi bien que de Grec et de Latin, n'avait pas encore assez lu de notre vieux français.” Without solid erudition nothing of substance can be achieved by scholars and historians, and that is why “une bonne partie de ceux qui ont travaillé à nos Antiquités n'ont pas eu le succès que d'ailleurs méritait leur zèle, par le défaut de cette érudition qui doit faire la base de toutes les études.” But the Academy, the repository of French erudition, is capable of doing what isolated individuals living almost two centuries earlier failed to do. “Les vrais, les solides fondements des édifices à bâtir que je vous propose,” Falconet declared, “se trouvent dans cette Académie ou ne sont nulle part.”

The works of scholarship which Falconet proposed to the Academy were a Glossary of Old French “qu'il faut regarder comme la clé nécessaire pour s'ouvrir le chemin à la composition des deux autres ouvrages,” a Geographical Dictionary, and a Bibliography of all the works of literature, learning, or science, written in French. These undertakings were so vast that Falconet believed they could be tackled only if the Academicians were willing to collaborate on them, and he suggested that they should be apportioned out among the members of the Academy.

In addition to these fundamental instruments of research which were intended to prepare the ground for future historians, there were a host of other aspects of medieval history which the scholars of the seventeenth century had barely touched on, and to which the members of the Academy could also contribute. Falconet suggested the following:

1. Histories of the weights and measures in use in the various provinces of medieval France.
2. Accounts of monuments, inscriptions, and buildings of all kinds—civil and ecclesiastical—and of the weapons and tools in use throughout the medieval period.
3. Histories of French literature, of the troubadours who stood at its origins (this was a widely held view), and of the theatre in France from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century.
4. Histories of the coinage.
5. Histories of the introduction and spread of Christianity in Gaul.
6. Histories of the arts and sciences and of their progress up to the eighteenth century.
Both within the Academy and without, Falconet found willing followers. In numerous papers the monuments of the French Middle Ages were discussed and interpreted. Montfaucon, the great Benedictine scholar and an honorary member of the Academy, was encouraged to go ahead with his *Monuments de la monarchie française*, the project for which he had published in 1725. Sainte-Palaye worked on the troubadours, Barbazan and later Le Grand d’Aussy on the fabliaux. Beauchamps and the Frères Parfaict published between 1735 and 1749 extensive and detailed accounts of the history of the drama in France,36 the Academy set prize dissertations on the establishment of religion in Gaul and on the state and progress of the arts and sciences in the reigns of the French kings from Charlemagne onward,37 while to catalogue the works which appeared on laws, customs, and usages would be a major bibliographical undertaking. The *Antiquités françaises* on which Sainte-Palaye and Secousse collaborated can certainly be considered a contribution to this part of Falconet’s program.

Of the major works, the *Bibliothèque française* appeared in 1772–73 in the form Falconet had suggested—that is, a new and up-to-date edition of La Croix du Maine and du Verdier. The editor of the new *Bibliothèque*, Rigoley de Juvigny, while recalling the pioneer work done by Bernard de La Monnoye in the field of bibliography, admitted that he had got the idea of taking the project up again himself from Falconet’s paper. Others who had also been moved by the paper came to the help of the new editor. Foncemagne secured La Monnoye’s manuscript for the Académie Française and made it available to him. Sainte-Palaye and Bréquigny also assisted.38 The *Dictionnaire géographique* was undertaken by


37 In 1707 Anquetil thought it worthwhile to go through the essays submitted for these prizes, in order to obtain a general picture of the state of the arts and sciences in the Middle Ages, which he communicated to the new ‘Classe des sciences morales et politiques’ of the *Institut*. (Mémoires de l’Institut, Classe des sciences morales et politiques, 4:35.)

Falconet himself in collaboration with Sainte-Palaye, while the Glossary, the cornerstone of the whole edifice, as Falconet recognized, was entrusted to Sainte-Palaye.

Had Sainte-Palaye's work been confined to the Glossary, the Geographical Dictionary, the History of the Troubadours, and the Dictionary of French Antiquities, his contribution would have been notable enough. He was engaged in many other historical projects, however, and at the Academy he endeavored to integrate these into the pattern sketched by Falconet. After 1727 his papers were exclusively concerned with medieval subjects—insti tutions, manners, literature, historical sources, and materials.

The influence of Falconet's paper has not been exaggerated. As late as December, 1789, it was still remembered by Mercier de Saint-Léger who, in a letter published in the Journal des Savants for October, 1791, recalled it and deplored that its provisions had even then hardly been carried out.

Sainte-Palaye can be considered Falconet's chief executive, and then his successor. At the Académie des Inscriptions he tried to build up a body of younger scholars who would carry on the work he and his friends had begun under Falconet. Falconet's vision of the Académie des Inscriptions inspired his own remarkable Plan de travail pour l'Académie des Belles-Lettres. In this plan he complains that too many academicians are still gleaning after the giants of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholarship. As a result their contributions to learning are often unconnected and slight. Sainte-

39 The Dictionnaire géographique (the manuscript is in Bréquigny 144, 145) was conceived like the earlier dictionaries of classical geography of Ortelio and Cluverius as a guide to the interpretation of texts; cf. Roberto Amalgia, 'Le origini della geografia storica,' Rivista geografica italiana, 1915, 22:141-47. By 1737 Falconet was already putting it together, according to a letter from La Bastie to Mazaugues of 16.4.1737. ('Les Provençalistes du XVIIIe siècle,' p. 192.) Sainte-Palaye, on his side, brought back material for the dictionary from Italy. (Sainte-Palaye to Falconet, 6.7.1749, B.N. Fichier Charavay, carton 102, no. 205.) Moreover, many entries in the manuscript are in his hand, most of the sources used for it are obviously drawn from his reading, while he himself marked all the passages relevant to the dictionary in his own copies of manuscripts with a marginal G. Bréquigny also assisted, and most of the manuscript is, in fact, in his hand. D'Expilly's Dictionnaire géographique, historique et politique des Gaules (Paris, 1762-70), may owe something to the work initiated by Falconet. But neither Falconet's dictionary, nor d'Expilly's made use of more than generally available printed sources. As yet there is no sign of archival or archaeological research on the spot.

Palaye proposed that the Academy should devote more of its energies to the study of the national past, where an immense amount of essential work still remained to be done. Some members were already engaged in this task, but if it were not for their own enthusiasm, the contempt with which modern and medieval studies were regarded by part of the company would have long since driven them to abandon their work: "Nos vieilles Chroniques, nos anciens Poëtes n'ont pas encore acquis auprès d'un certain ordre d'Érudits la considération que donne l'avantage d'être au monde depuis trois mille ans. Cependant si l'on voulait estimer les choses par leur difficulté ou par leur utilité, l'étude des monumens qui concernent notre nation devroit avoir le pas sur toutes les autres, et il me semble qu'il n'en est point de plus digne d'une Académie établie en France."

The voice of the Enlightenment is clearly audible here. Humanist scholarship must yield to historical scholarship, Sainte-Palaye is arguing, and the isolated labors of individuals must find their significance in a larger historical vision.

Sainte-Palaye's aim—like his master's—was to transform the Académie des Inscriptions into a national institution which would undertake important collective works of scholarship, and which would be at the same time a forum for the exchange of ideas and information among scholars. "Je voudrois que l'Academie s'occupe bien plus à faire de vrais ouvrages qu'à composer de petites dissertations," he remarked in his Plan d'Études, "et que chaque membre attaché à un plan d'études suivi se proposast un but et rendist compte à la Compagnie du progres de son travail, de ses découvertes et de ses difficultés. La matière alors ne manqueroit pas, et l'on remédieroit à un autre défaut de cet établissment ... Il consiste en ce que, dans les travaux de l'Academie, il n'y a point d'ensemble ... chaque pièce, chaque mémoire est une partie isolée qui ne concourt point à la formation d'un tout ... De là il arrive que chaque Académicien suivant une route à part, sans se proposer aucun but, ils ne se rencontrent jamais pour s'aider les uns les autres, pour se guider mutuellement." To expedite the work of scholarship, Sainte-Palaye suggested the division of the Academy into classes on the model of the Académie des Sciences, a proposal which was put into effect after the Revolution.

41 Bréquigny 62, fol. 203. 42 Ibid.
Sainte-Palaye's own notion of history reveals that he was familiar with the ideas of the philosophes, and that he had thought a good deal about the relation of scholarship to history-writing proper. In a note among his papers he declares that one of the objects of the historian is to study institutions, which can be thought of as the expression of man's endeavor at all times and in all climates and conditions to overcome his weakness as an individual through social action. This is the origin of language, of societies, of the arts and sciences, "qui . . . se perfectionnent et se diversifient à l'infini, parce que la somme des besoins augmentent avec les moyens de les satisfaire, chaque moyen devient à la fois la source de nouveaux besoins et de nouveaux moyens." The dialectic of progress outlined here was common coin among the Enlighteners of the first half of the eighteenth century. Similarly, it is an Enlightened view of scholarship that Sainte-Palaye professed in his Discours de réception before the Académie Française in 1758. The aim of scholarship, he declared, is not to amass isolated, or merely chronologically related, facts. Man, himself, in his many historical manifestations, is the subject of the historian's investigation: "L'histoire d'un peuple consiste moins dans le récit de ce qu'il a fait que dans la peinture de ce qu'il a été." Nevertheless, in practice, Sainte-Palaye was more interested in particular peoples than in man in general, and he devoted much more of his attention to establishing particular facts about French history than to drawing general lessons. Compared with the scholars of the seventeenth century, he had been "emancipated" by Enlightenment from narrow loyalties, as had most of his colleagues. But this emancipation was limited. Sainte-Palaye never questioned fundamentally the social order of which he was part and whose evolution and variations he described with loving care. This underlying conservatism may well have affected the whole of his work. On the one hand, it encouraged him to examine the history of his own society concretely, with a real curiosity for its particular manifestations, but, on the other hand, it may have prevented him from realizing that history of the French nation which was his ultimate goal. Like most of his contemporaries Sainte-Palaye saw

43 Moreau 1722, fol. 297.
44 Discours prononcés à l'Académie Française le lundi 26 juin MDCCCLVIII à la réception de M. de La Curne de Sainte-Palaye (Paris: Brunet, 1758), in B.N. MS Clérambault 1076, fols. 203-11, at fol. 205.
his society as an association of traditionally separate elements; there is no evidence that he had any conception of the nation as a single unified whole or of the dynamic relations among the elements in it. Doubtless his failure to arrive at such a conception was largely determined by the historical conditions of his age. There were not many in Sainte-Palaye's time who would have been willing to class themselves with the despised peuple, and it is hard to imagine what was meant concretely by those who, in the heat of enthusiasm, invoked la nation and appealed to "tous les Français." Only the most advanced philosophes, perhaps, were able to transcend imaginatively the social order of the ancien régime and to formulate the goal of a truly unified nation. Sainte-Palaye may well have been too attached to the existing order to think of the nation in any other categories than those provided by that order. Whatever the explanation of it, Sainte-Palaye's limited view of the nation may well have been one of the factors which caused him to confine himself to fairly narrowly defined historical problems and prevented him from achieving a major work of synthesis.

If the underlying conservatism of the aristocracy kept its historians from realizing that truly national history which their advanced theories set before them as a goal, its thorough penetration by contemporary thought and its complete transformation by contemporary modes of life made it incapable of understanding or sympathizing deeply with the civilization of the Middle Ages. Its attitude to the Middle Ages was very often tinged with irony. The final memoir of Sainte-Palaye's Mémoires sur l'ancienne chevalerie, in which he offered some criticism of chivalry, was not, as Cheruel believed, an external concession to Enlightenment. On the contrary, the eighteenth-century aristocracy, which, as we have frequently suggested, can in no sense be identified with the ancient blood nobility, was itself in large measure "bourgeois" and enlightened. It tended, therefore, to view the Middle Ages with a certain degree of detachment and disdain. Despite his immense material contribution to the study of Old French and Provençal literature, Sainte-Palaye himself remained largely insensitive to this literature. He ferreted out the manuscripts, read them, classified them, and did not love them. The limited success of aristocratic medievalism in the eighteenth century throws an interesting light on the fact that a deeper understanding of the Middle Ages was
achieved only some considerable time after the Revolution and the end of the ancien régime.

With these limitations in mind, we can now turn to the individual works through which Sainte-Palaye made his contribution to medieval studies.