2. The Importance of the History of Philology, or the Unprecedented Impact of the Study of Texts

Published by

Zuidervaart, Huib and Ton van Kalmthout.
The Practice of Philology in the Nineteenth-Century Netherlands.
Amsterdam University Press, 2015.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/66452.

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2. The Importance of the History of Philology, or the Unprecedented Impact of the Study of Texts

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Abstract
This chapter sketches the history of European philological practice from antiquity to the early twentieth century. It provides a background against which Dutch nineteenth-century philology may be understood and put into a historical context. The guiding questions of this chapter are: what were the methods used by philologists in different periods, what did they find with these methods, and what was the societal impact of their results? It turns out that philological insights and discoveries have had an unprecedented and lasting impact on society. Philology was at the birth of the Reformation and the Enlightenment and it triggered romanticism and cultural nationalism. As such, the history of philology deserves to be studied in all its details, and across all periods and regions.

For a specialized book on the history of philology it is appropriate and ironic at the same time to ask why we need books on the history of philology. The usual and satisfactory answer to this kind of question is that the historiography of a scholarly discipline has an intrinsic value and should therefore be studied in its own right. Yet the history of philology has an exceptional – if not to say unique – position in the history of learning. There has hardly been any discipline with a greater cultural and societal impact than philology. This may sound paradoxical as today philology has become a marginal if not an extinct discipline. Those who know about it, usually know it as a branch of scholarship from the past. Yet for many centuries, philology was the most influential field of learning. It was thanks to philological analysis that Lorenzo Valla was able to rebut the document Donatio Constantini showing that the Pope's claim to worldly power was based on fiction. And philological studies founded the basis for biblical criticism from Erasmus to Spinoza that led to the early Enlightenment. And it was again philology that developed precise genealogical methods for text reconstruction that were

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taken over by evolutionary biologists and geneticists. Moreover, it was the
discipline of philology that boosted cultural nationalism in the nineteenth
century by the creation of a canon of national texts.

To understand and appreciate this long-lasting influence of philology,
we need to study its history in all its details, across periods and regions. It
comes as a surprise, therefore, that such a detailed investigation has hardly
been carried out for the history of Dutch philology, the more since the
Netherlands produced some of the most influential philologists. The papers
in this book thus provide a timely and urgent contribution to the history
of learning in the nineteenth-century Netherland. But to understand how
the impact of philology came about, we need to go back to the origins of
the discipline and discuss its development and major insights through
the ages. The goal of this chapter is to provide a historical background of
philological practice against which developments in the nineteenth-century
Netherlands may be understood.¹

The origins of philology

Western philology stands in a long tradition that started with the Alexan-
drians in the third century BC. It was with the establishment of the library
of Alexandria that hundreds of thousands of manuscripts² from all parts
of the Hellenistic world had been brought together. This resulted in an
empirical world of texts without equal. But it also led to one of the greatest
problems in the history of learning: among the often hundreds of copies
of the same text, no two were alike. In some cases the differences were
modest and had come about because of copying errors, but the discrepancies
could also be substantial, consisting of whole sentences that appeared to
be deliberate changes, additions or omissions. And there were also texts

¹ This chapter is partly based on my book *A New History of the Humanities*. In that book I
approach the history of the humanities by searching for principles used and patterns found
by humanities scholars. For the current chapter I have employed a similar way of working. My
guiding questions are: what were the methods used by philologists through the ages, what were
the patterns found and/or the discoveries made, and what was their societal impact? My chapter
differs from other histories of philology in that I explicitly focus on the practice of philology and
its results, which seems particularly adequate for the theme of this volume. For an overview of
other approaches to the history of philology, see Gurd, *Philology and its Histories*. See also Most,
‘Quellenforschung’.

² According to most estimates the Alexandrian library grew from around 200,000 manuscripts
in the third century BCE to over 700,000 manuscripts in 50 BCE. See Canfora, *The Vanished
Library*. 
that had only survived in the form of incomplete fragments. How could the original text – the archetype – be deduced from all this material?

The first person to systematically tackle this problem was Zenodotus of Ephesus (c. 333-c. 260 BCE), who was also the first librarian of the Alexandrian library. Zenodotus compiled a dictionary using typically Homeric words, with which he hoped to be able to formulate the ‘perfect’ text from the many corrupt remnants of manuscripts. Unfortunately there was no theory underlying Zenodotus’s attempt and his criteria appear to have been based on aesthetic preferences and guesswork.

His successors, Aristophanes of Byzantium (c. 257-180 BCE) and Aristarchus of Samothrace (c. 216-c. 144 BCE) tried to provide such a theory so as to keep philology as free as possible from subjective elements. The problem of corrupted words represented one of the biggest challenges. How could an unknown word form be identified as an archaic word or an error? Aristophanes approached this problem on the basis of a concept of analogy. If he could establish that an unknown word was formed and conjugated or declined in the same way as a known word, he believed that he could reconstruct the original form with a certain degree of reliability. Aristophanes defined five criteria that word forms had to comply with among themselves in order to be described as ‘analogous’. The word forms had to correspond in regard to gender, case, ending, number of syllables and stress (or sound). Historical philology actually started with Aristophanes.

Already with Alexandrian philology we see a combination of the study of texts, language and the past, which would become a characterizing feature of early modern and modern philology. Also during the European Middle Ages we find attempts to reconstruct the original text, especially the Bible, but the methods used were based mostly on authority rather than criticism. For example, Roger Bacon devised principles for the Vulgate reconstruction. According to Bacon the old Latin manuscripts of the church fathers were the first authority. It was only if these old Latin manuscripts did not correspond with each other that it was necessary to refer to the original texts. Secular philological text reconstruction was most brilliantly carried out by Lupus of Ferrières (c. 805-862), who was working in Fulda under Rabanus Maurus (‘the teacher of Germany’). Using his contacts all over Europe he had manuscripts sent from Tours, York, Rome and elsewhere. Lupus was not the only manuscript hunter in ninth-century Europe, but what made him

3 Nickau, Untersuchungen.
4 For an in-depth study on Aristophanes, see Callanan, Die Sprachbeschreibung.
5 Graipey, Lupus of Ferrieres.
unique for his time was that he had manuscripts sent to him that his library already contained. Like the Alexandrian analogists before him, Lupus wanted to reconstruct the putative original text from surviving copies. In so doing he tried to mark the corruptions and variations in the manuscripts as accurately as possible. He annotated textual lacunae using spaces (rather than risk erroneous emendations). However, his own critical contributions are so modest that some people consider the use of the term philology to be inappropriate in describing Lupus’s activities. Yet compared with the carelessness of most other ‘classical’ philologists, with the Christianization of the names of all classical authors by Hadoard in his Collectaneum as the nadir, Lupus’s text analysis is a model of meticulousness.

During the whole of the Middle Ages there was a significant interest in the classics. But nobody did more to revive the ideals of Rome in a Christian community than Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374). The large-scale reconstruction of linguistic, literary and historiographical activities of the past started with Petrarch and became the model for later humanists. Petrarch’s greatest philological fame is founded on his reconstruction of Livy’s historical works, which was a widespread success, vulgarized in Italian and in French. Petrarch brought together different fragments from European libraries and was able to make one coherent whole of books 1-10 and 21-40 (books 41-45 were not discovered until the sixteenth century and the others are still missing without trace). He corrected, annotated and supplemented copies of Livy’s work on a monumental scale. Petrarch was not the first person to try this, but he was by far the best in over a thousand years. He copied out some parts of Livy’s text himself when visiting libraries. This activity instantly points up one of the most important features that identified ‘humanistic philology’: the humanists were manuscript hunters and were convinced that they made real discoveries in the world around them, which they saw as one of the texts, classical and otherwise. However, their discoveries were often no more than separate or even inconsistent observations that needed considerable inventiveness before they could be fused into a coherent whole. This humanistic attitude produced a new model – the philologist’s task was to bring historical Antiquity back to life by reconstructing its texts, which were waiting in medieval vaults to be unveiled.

7 On Petrarch’s reconstruction of Livy, see Billanovich, Tradizione e fortuna di Livio tra Medioevo e Umanesimo. See also Gilmore, ‘The Renaissance Conception of the Lessons of History’, pp. 76-80.
Philology's first major impacts

Petrarch's philological criticism and manuscript hunting was taken over by Boccaccio and Poggio Bracciolini. But it was Lorenzo Valla (1406-1457) who showed that philology could be used not only to reconstruct texts but to criticize and systematically debunk forgeries. In 1440, in his essay De falso credita Valla demonstrated that the document Donatio Constantini (‘the donation of Constantine’) was a fake.8 In this document it was stated that the Roman emperor Constantine the Great (280-337) had given the Western Roman Empire to Pope Sylvester I out of gratitude for Constantine's miraculous recovery from leprosy. The document Donatio Constantini thus represented the most important justification for the church's worldly power. During the Middle Ages the document was widely regarded as authentic, although there had been doubts now and then. It was during the fifteenth century that humanists began to realize that the Donatio could not possibly be genuine. Nicholas of Cusa had already concluded that the document had to have been apocryphal in 1433,9 but it was Valla who subjected the text to a strict critical method and identified it as a fake by using a combination of linguistic, historical and logical arguments.

Valla's refutation was accepted almost immediately by Pope Pius II, the humanist Enea Piccolomini, who recorded it in a tract (1453). Yet nothing changed in regard to the legitimation of the papal state. After Pius's death Valla's work was largely ignored. And when, during the Reformation, Martin Luther used Valla's repudiation as an argument for reforming the church, De falso credita was put on the list of prohibited works. But a few decades later the church historian and cardinal Cesare Baronio admitted in his Annales Ecclesiastici (1588-1607) that the Donatio was a forgery, and this slowly settled the matter. Valla's rebuttal was too well crafted to be contradicted. It also represented the first philological discovery with a 'world-changing' impact: it formed one of the arguments for church reformation.

Brilliant as it was, Valla’s method underlying his criticism remained implicit: he did not describe his philological principles. The first (early modern) philologist who actually worked out his method to some extent was Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494). It resulted in an attempt to arrive at a proper methodology for philology that integrated linguistic, historical and textual knowledge. In his Miscellanea in 1489, Poliziano described a way of

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8 De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione, edited by Setz. See also Zinkeisen, 'The Donation of Constantine as Applied by the Roman Church', pp. 625-632.
9 About Cusa, De concordantia catholica, see Sigmund The Catholic Concordance, pp. 216-222.
working that enabled an accurate comparison and evaluation of sources.\textsuperscript{10} Poliziano realized that a group of completely consistent sources could still be a problem. Assume that we have four sources – A, B, C and D – which all agree on one point, and that B, C and D are entirely dependent on A for their information.\textsuperscript{11} Should B, C and D nevertheless be included as extra evidence of the authenticity of A? According to Poliziano they should not: if derived sources were mutually consistent, they should be identified and eliminated.\textsuperscript{12} Sources should be ranked genealogically so that their dependence in regard to an older source becomes clear. One anomalous manuscript can refute dozens of consistent manuscripts purely on the basis of its position in the genealogical ranking. The general preference for an older source existed long before Poliziano. Older manuscripts were more reliable than new ones because there were fewer transmission stages between the old source and the author. Poliziano's method, however, consisted of more than establishing the oldest possible source. It also involved determining the complete genealogy of sources. Once this genealogy had been set down, a start could be made on eliminating derived sources. Poliziano's principle is therefore known as the \textit{eliminatio codicum descriptorum}.\textsuperscript{13} This principle was further developed in the nineteenth century by Karl Lachmann to become one of the cornerstones of modern philology (see below).

Poliziano's method was an immense success. Erasmus combined Poliziano's \textit{eliminatio} principle and Valla's textual criticism in his extremely influential edition of the New Testament. This work was based on research over many years into the oldest source of the Greek New Testament – which Erasmus brought back from all over Europe – after which he began to construct the best possible translation. Erasmus' translation resulted in a number of significant changes in the New Testament as compared to the existing Latin version.\textsuperscript{14} In particular it concerned leaving out a passage known as the \textit{comma Johanneum}, which mentioned the Holy Trinity – one of the main doctrines of the church.\textsuperscript{15} This led to such a major controversy that Erasmus promised he would put the words back if they could be found in another Greek manuscript of the New Testament. Such a manuscript promptly appeared, but Erasmus rightly condemned it as a forgery. That said, Erasmus put the \textit{comma Johanneum} back in the third and later editions.

\textsuperscript{10} Poliziano, \textit{Miscellanea}.
\textsuperscript{11} This example comes (with slight modification) from Grafton, \textit{Defenders of the Text}, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{12} Poliziano, \textit{Miscellanea}, I, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{13} Maas, \textit{Textkritik}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{15} Metzger, \textit{Der Text des Neuen Testaments}, pp. 100–102.
Moreover, Erasmus’s editorial approach was not always consistent. For example, he sometimes amended the Greek text of the Bible – which he printed in parallel with the Latin translation – to accord with St Jerome’s Vulgate, which was precisely what he claimed to be improving.

Apart from this editorial transgression, however, Erasmus adhered faithfully to Valla’s standpoint that the Bible, like any other work, should be treated as a text, together with Poliziano’s principle that the oldest manuscript should be used. Yet it emerged that Erasmus, because he stood by the original (Greek) text of the New Testament, in this case departed from Poliziano’s principle. After all, the oldest recoverable source could be a translation of the original text, in which case a source that might be not quite as old but was written in the original language would have to be preferred. This was indeed established by Erasmus with regard to a Greek manuscript of the New Testament that was less old than a Latin translation, but because it was in the original language it ultimately proved more reliable than the older Latin version. It should be pointed out here, however, that Erasmus thought his Greek manuscript was much older than it actually was. Despite considerable initial resistance, it was thanks to Erasmus that it was slowly but surely accepted that texts should be studied in their original language rather than in the form of a translation. Erasmus’s approach meant that Poliziano’s theory was not so much rebutted as transformed into a better one.

The heyday of early modern philology: towards a new world view

Humanistic philological attainments were whipped up to new heights in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609), who can be considered as one of the greatest philologists of the early modern age. Thanks in part to the teachings of his father, J.C. Scaliger, his knowledge of Latin was many times greater than that of his predecessors. This emerged early on when he was able to create something comprehensible from the surviving text *Astronomica* by Marcus Manilius (first century CE), which had become so corrupted that large parts were completely unintelligible. Scaliger turned Manilius into a readable author where others had failed (first edition 1579). Scaliger was the first to treat an author as an organic entity by considering the author’s intellectual background in addition to

17 For an in-depth biography of Scaliger and his works, see Grafton, Joseph Scaliger.
the text itself. His fame spread rapidly and he was asked to succeed Justus Lipsius at Leiden University. After initial hesitation and several rounds of negotiations, things got too hot for Scaliger as a Huguenot in France and he accepted a position as a Leiden university professor without any teaching commitments. He was in charge of outstanding scholars, among them the prodigy Hugo de Groot, or Grotius, (1583-1645).

However, Scaliger’s many reconstructions were nothing more than limbering up for his higher objective, for which he had collected manuscripts in Syrian, Aramaic, Arabic, Hebrew, Ethiopian and other languages. It was the reconstruction of the complete history of the ancient world on the basis of a precise scientific chronology, and to achieve it by using a single philological-historical principle – the oldest source principle, where Scaliger also considered the background of the author. It was the job of the philologist to reconstruct these oldest sources, in the process of which forgeries could be unmasked like the texts of Manetho and Berossus which were fabricated by Annius of Viterbo. Once they had been restored as accurately as possible, authentic historical sources could be used to record a total history from the beginning of time to the present. Scaliger applied the principle in an exemplary fashion during the remaining 24 years of his life, primarily in his Thesaurus temporum of 1606. In this work he collected, restored and ordered virtually every surviving historical fragment. Scaliger reconstructed a few extremely important historical texts, among them Manetho’s history of the earliest Egyptian dynasties. Using the information from these sources, particularly about the duration of the different dynasties, Scaliger was able to date the beginning of the first Egyptian dynasty to 5285 BCE. To his dismay this date was nearly 1,300 years before the generally accepted day of Creation, which according to biblical chronology had to be around 4000 BCE. However, Scaliger did not draw the ultimate conclusion from his discovery, which would have meant that either the Bible or his own method was incorrect. In order to ‘save the phenomena’, Scaliger introduced a new concept of time – the tempus prolepticon – a time before time. He placed every event that occurred before the Creation, such as the early Egyptian kings, in this proleptic time. Scaliger’s solution may come across as artificial, but for a Protestant in around 1600 it was inconceivable to cast doubt on the Bible. Yet at the same time Scaliger was too consistent to give

19 Grafton, Defenders of the Text, pp.76-103.
20 Scaliger, Thesaurus temporum.
21 Scaliger, ibidem, p. 278.
up on his philological method just like that. He preferred to introduce an imaginary era rather than abandon the oldest source principle.

Scaliger’s chronological dating of the earliest Egyptian dynasties, which is currently thought to be largely correct, was barely accepted in his own time. Even his immediate followers Ubbo Emmius and Nicolaus Mulerius did not go along with Scaliger in his dating, simply because it flatly contradicted the Bible. The meticulous Gerardus Vossius (1577-1649) thought he could solve the problem by assuming that the Egyptian dynasties were not successive but simultaneous (and occurred in different places).22 However, apart from an analogy with Babylonian history, he had no evidence whatsoever to support his position. Vossius’s proposal almost appeared to be a return to the principle of biblical coherence, according to which every historical fact had to be brought into line with Christian biblical teaching. Others, the theologian Jacob Revius for instance, argued that everyone was wrong, referring to the usual biblical fragments, whereas in 1654 the Irish Archbishop James Ussher again determined that the creation of everything had taken place on Sunday 23 October 4004 BCE.23

Within a year, though, all hell broke loose. In 1655, the French theologian Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676) asserted that people had lived before the creation of Adam and Eve – the so-called pre-Adamites.24 For the time being his claims appeared to have been created out of thin air. For example, La Peyrère contended that the Egyptian kings had ruled for millions of years. However, Isaac Vossius (1618-1689), the son of Gerardus, provided philological and historical underpinning. Rather than contending that people had lived before the Creation, he showed in De vera aetate mundi (1659) that the earth had to be at least 1440 years older than had been hitherto assumed.25 Isaac substantiated his argument with additional evidence from geographical studies and Chinese and Ethiopian texts. His work became widely known in scholarly European circles and it had a profound effect on radical biblical criticism in the second half of the seventeenth century.

Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) elevated biblical criticism to a secular political philosophy. In his Tractatus theologico-politicus, which was published anonymously in 1670, he argued with a passion not previously displayed that books of the Bible were texts written by people that had grown historically

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22 Grafton, Defenders of the Text.
24 The pre-Adamite hypothesis had a long history before it was made famous by La Peyrère – see Popkin, Isaac La Peyrère, pp. 26-41.
25 Vossius, Dissertatio de vera aetate mundi, See also Jorink & Van Miert (eds.), Isaac Vossius.
and were transmitted in a specific time. The biblical criticism that Spinoza employed for his purposes was based on the historically underpinned textual criticism of his illustrious philological predecessors. In Spinoza’s hands the destructive power of philology led to an eruption – no text was absolute. He took the results of philologists and historians and extrapolated them to the ultimate implication, and then demanded the right to the free use of reason, without interference from theologians, with democracy emerging as the preferred form of government. Spinoza was able to use the historical-philological paradigm for a new, secular world view, which represented the de facto beginning of the Enlightenment.

In this context, Scaliger’s philological discovery that world history conflicted with biblical chronology had far-reaching implications. What he had found stood at the beginning of a chain of sweeping changes that resulted in a world view in which the Bible was no longer taken to be a serious historical source and freedom of thought was necessary for the welfare of citizens and the state. These were the ideas that the eighteenth-century ‘rationalist’ Enlightenment thinkers would use to create a furore. However, right at the beginning of this long chain were the humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, of whom Valla was the first relevant scholar and Scaliger was the greatest – a sceptical view of everything, including the Bible, and the precision, the consistency and the empirical approach together with sound theoretical underpinning. This method influenced all scholarly activities, not just philology and biblical criticism. Although we must not forget that many humanistic philologists had the sole goal of letting Antiquity live again, it also led to a critical selection of surviving sources, when the most critical exponents, for example Valla, Poliziano, Erasmus and Scaliger, cast doubt on every text.

The spread of critical philology

After Scaliger, Isaac Casaubon (1559-1614) was seen as the most learned man of his time. He was a Huguenot and a loyal friend of Scaliger, and in 1610, he fled to England after the murder of Henry IV of France. As well as many

26 Spinoza, Theologico-Political Treatise.
28 Israel, Radical Enlightenment.
29 According to Jorink, Het Boeck der Natuere, p. 429, there is a line running from Scaliger via Saumaise and Isaac Vossius to Spinoza.
30 Pattison, Isaac Casaubon.
editions of the works of Greek and Roman writers, Casaubon was able to thoroughly date, and in doing so to reject, a number of texts in the Corpus Hermeticum. This Corpus, which was attributed to one Hermes Trismegistus, was one of the most studied works in the Renaissance and was alleged to have a biblical age.\textsuperscript{31} It became widely known as a result of the Latin translation by Marsilio Ficino in 1471. Ficino observed agreements between the philosophy in the Corpus and Plato’s dialogues, from which he believed that he could conclude that Hermes Trismegistus had lived before Plato and was even a contemporary of Moses. This generated enormous interest in the so-called Hermetic philosophy during the Renaissance. In 1614, however, Casaubon – using purely linguistic grounds – was able to date the Corpus’s philosophical texts to between 200 and 300 CE.\textsuperscript{32} It followed from this that the Corpus contained no philosophical originality and was largely eclectic. This exposé of Hermetic ideas on the basis of textual criticism so captured the imagination that philology attained an unprecedentedly high status. Many exponents of the New Sciences – from Kepler to Newton – would study both nature and texts.

Philology in Germany was given a tremendous impetus by the foundation of the Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften in 1700.\textsuperscript{33} One of the most important representatives was Johann Matthias Gesner (1691-1761),\textsuperscript{34} because of his different vision of the classics – sometimes referred to as the ‘new humanism’ – which was taught with great energy at the University of Gottingen and then elsewhere.\textsuperscript{35} According to Gesner the old humanism had tried to create a verbal imitation of the classics and a continuation of the Latin literature of Antiquity. Around 1650, this goal was deemed to be unfeasible and was gradually abandoned. The new objective that Gesner had in mind was no longer a matter of imitating Greek and Latin style, but of mastering its substance. The classics served to form the mind and cultivate taste, and through this to create a new literature instead of reconstructing and imitating the old one. Gesner’s vision attracted a great deal of attention. It became a guiding principle for Winckelmann and Lessing.

The Neapolitan Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) is sometimes referred to as the last humanist philologist, but he also had one foot in the new age.\textsuperscript{36}
The concept of culture as a ‘systematic whole’ has been attributed to Vico. He introduced a new scholarly discipline that was meant to shed light on the developments relating to all human existence in *Scienza Nuova* in 1725. According to Vico the Cartesian assumption that nature would be more accessible than human affairs was fundamentally wrong. Vico argued that because God created nature, only He could really know it, whereas men could know about what they created, to wit their own civilization. The *factum* (‘that which man creates’) is the *verum* (‘the truth’). In other words, people have a better understanding of what they themselves have made (*factum*) than what confronts them (nature created by God). Human history was inherently understandable because all people experience hope, fears, desire etc., while they would always remain outsiders when it came to nature. In his anti-cartesianism, Vico contended that the proper study of man was and had to be the human past, literature and language. Here Vico laid the foundations of the philology as an integrated area of learning that would be built on by Wilhelm Dilthey and others. Yet it was to take almost a century before the implications of Vico’s ideas would fully register, initially in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) and then among nineteenth-century historians and philologists.

**Philology as Geisteswissenschaft**

Nineteenth-century philology underwent a major transformation: from being a purely classical discipline it was converted into a national one. These changes did not appear out of the blue. During the course of the eighteenth century the response to the glorification of the classics became progressively more critical. The aspiration to create nation states moreover resulted in a growing interest in national history. Starting with the French Revolution, the past was made more accessible. Monastery archives were nationalized and museum collections became public. A nation’s interest in its own past was matched by a growing appetite for popular literature and folklore. Johann Gottfried Herder was a pioneer in this field. Herder could be seen as the successor of Vico, but he could equally well be considered as coming from the modern age. For example, Herder was the source of the notion of a nation (‘Volk’) that can grow and die, and also the concept of

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national spirit. Herder was moreover a spiritual father of the nationalism that was to play an overpowering role in the nineteenth century.³⁹

Historiography, as well as the other humanistic disciplines – from art history to musicology – underwent a real ‘philologization’: the precise and critical use of sources was to become the cornerstone of the humanities. The first major historian-philologist who followed the line of Vico and Herder and who, in flagrant opposition to earlier humanist scholars, wanted to treat all historical periods as having equal status was Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886). After a career as a grammar school teacher, he joined the University of Berlin, following the success of his first great work, _Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514_, published in 1824.⁴⁰

In this work, Ranke used an arsenal of written texts, including memoires, diaries, national archives, and diplomatic sources. He subjected them all to the strict methodical principles of philology. Ranke’s work led to the creation of a new type of history, which became known as historicism. This movement did not seek to make pronouncements about the past but merely to show _wie es eigentlich gewesen_ (‘how it really was’).⁴¹ Ranke combined humanistic philology with a narrative historiography in order to achieve this. His students were dispatched to the many recently opened state and church archives, where they had to apply in-depth philological source criticism.⁴² Both the content of the source and the external facets, such as the form and the carrier, were subjected to a critical analysis. The use of this philological method was intended to guarantee the objectivity of the historian, so that Ranke’s goal – establishing facts – was achieved.⁴³

Ranke’s influence was immense, but despite the official scholarly objectivity, many nineteenth-century Rankeans started to dance to a nationalist tune. After his illustrious standard work on Rome,⁴⁴ for example, Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903) went into politics and became a fervent supporter of Bismarck’s pursuit of national unification. Others used historiography to provide foundations for a specific national identity. Robert Fruin (1823-1899), the first holder of the chair of national history at Leiden University, was a prominent example. Although he was a self-declared Rankean – his inaugural lecture was entitled _The impartiality of the historiographer_ – he gave a biased and over-simplified picture of the seventeenth-century diplomat

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³⁹ Leerssen, _National Thought in Europe_.
⁴⁰ Von Ranke, _History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations_.
⁴¹ Andreas, _Von Ranke, Fürsten und Völker_, p. 4.
⁴³ Krieger, _Ranke: The Meaning of History_.
⁴⁴ Mommsen, _Römische Geschichte_.


Lieuwe van Aitzema, whom he declared to be a secret catholic intriguer. 45 Yet it is to the credit of Ranke’s disciples, in particular Georg Waitz, Heinrich von Sybel and especially Johann Gustav Droysen, that Ranke’s ideas became institutionalized in nineteenth-century Germany, Europe and the US.

Ranke’s historiography reinforced the search for an ever more precise method for deriving the original source from extant copies. The role of Karl Lachmann (1793-1851) was crucial here. He contributed more than any other to an overarching text reconstruction theory that integrated the methods of his illustrious precursors, and which is currently known as the *stemmatic theory* or *stemmatology*. 46 In this method a family tree (a *stemma*) of surviving texts is built that can be used to reconstruct the original text. Some elements of the stemmatic theory had already been in use for centuries, such as the concept of an archetype of a text and the genealogical method (employed by Poliziano). Lachmann put these separate elements into one systematic whole. First of all he divided the philological method into three separate phases:

1. *Recensio*. In this stage the philologist collects all surviving versions of a text, inventories the *variants* (‘differences’) and determines the genealogical relationship between the surviving texts – a *stemma codicum*, a sort of family tree. This phase is executed as mechanically as possible in order to keep it separate from the interpretation of the text.

2. *Examinatio*. After the ‘primitive’ text has been established by the *stemma*, the philologist has to decide whether or not it is authentic.

3. *Emendatio*. If the primitive text is judged not to be authentic, the philologist has to emend it in order to reconstruct the lost archetype from the oldest surviving accurate version.

Lachmann did not completely formalize any of these phases. The well-informed guess of the philologist remained an inherent part of text reconstruction. Once the family tree of the *stemma* of text variants had been put together, though, Lachmann showed that a number of very precise rules could be applied to it. The concept of the *stemma* is therefore one of the showpieces of stemmatic philology. The first published genealogical tree for a classical text is attributed to Carl Zumpt, but it was Lachmann who spelled out which rules applied to a *stemma* and how they could be used in his editions of Lucretius (1850) and the New Testament (1842-1850).

46 For the fundamentals of Lachmann’s theory, see Lachmann, *Kleinere Schriften zur deutschen Filologie*. 
Lachmannian reconstruction takes place on the grounds of logical inference based on the differences between and agreements in the genealogical relationship between texts. Contrary to Poliziano’s approach, Lachmann’s method was worked out in sufficient detail in order to go through its life as a ‘theory’. It turned out, though, to be an enormous task to manually build up a *stemma* for a substantial text in which all differences and agreements in all versions have to be compared, let alone going on to deduce emendations. It is moreover possible that very little can be emended, and it can even be the case that no genealogical tree can be developed. Usually, though, if there are several versions of a text, they can be organized in a genealogical relationship using Lachmann’s method. The stemmatic approach was therefore a giant step forward compared with earlier philological techniques.

**The Lachmannian school and its influence**

Lachmann’s philology came as a bombshell. It resulted in his reconstruction of Lucretius, which remains unequalled to this day, and also to a revised version of the New Testament that represented a rejection of Erasmus’s *textus receptus*, which had served as the standard for centuries. Lachmann’s greatest influence, however, was exerted on the reconstruction of medieval literature, including the poems of Walter von der Vogelweide, the *Hildebrandslied* and the *Nibelungenlied*.47 Humanistic scholars had ignored the medieval lyric and epic and did not discover or rediscover them until some time in the eighteenth century. For example, the *Nibelungenlied* (‘The song of the Nibelungs’) was lost at the end of the sixteenth century but was unearthed again in 1755.48 Before long there were no fewer than 34 manuscripts in circulation, none of which agreed with the others (and which often consisted of fragments). The versions could be put into a *stemma* and reconstructed thanks to Lachmann’s method.49 The scope of this discovery and reconstruction is virtually impossible to overestimate.50 The *Nibelungenlied* was declared to be the national German epic and (despite criticism) elevated to the same level as Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Passages from the *Nibelungenlied* appeared all the time on posters and during speeches. *Nibelungentreue* (‘Nibelung loyalty’), in which mutual fidelity

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47 Hertz, Karl Lachmann: Eine Biografie, pp. 100-119.
48 Raffel, Das Nibelungenlied.
49 Lachmann, Der Nibelunge Noth und die Klage nach der ältesten Überlieferung.
50 Härd, Das Nibelungenepos.
between vassals was on a higher plane than family loyalty or one’s own life, became the cornerstone of German wartime propaganda, with the later national socialism as the nadir.

Yet it is hard to blame Lachmann for this nationalist exploitation of philology. He himself was a largely independent philologist. This emerged all the more when he applied his method, which was considered to be of use primarily for old literature, to contemporary authors too. It had been assumed for a long time that text reconstruction was unnecessary for works that the author himself had had printed. However, after the death of an author a text could soon deteriorate if it was reprinted a number of times. New misprints appeared with every edition. Lachmann showed how stemmatic philology could be useful for texts from the recent past. For example, he was responsible for a painstaking edition of the work of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781).

Under Lachmann, philology was applied to all periods and his method represented the standard for text reconstruction in Europe and beyond. In the Netherlands Lachmann’s method was applied by Jacob Muller for the reconstruction of the thirteenth-century beast epic *Van den vos Reinaerde* (1884). Lachmann’s method also had a following outside philology. Historians like Georg Waitz (1813-1886) were pupils of both Ranke and Lachmann and continued to develop the philologization of historiography.

All this success meant that the shortcomings of Lachmann’s stemmatology might almost be overlooked. His method was based on a number of assumptions that were not always valid, such as the supposition that every version is derived from exactly one direct ancestor and that a copyist only made new mistakes without correcting the errors of predecessors. Lachmann’s theory proved to be flexible enough, though, to be corrected in regard to these assumptions. A more serious problem was that the fundamental concept of an ‘error’ was not defined with precision. For instance, are differences in word order errors or not? It was not until the twentieth century that a start was made on formalizing Lachmann’s method down to the smallest detail. An important step was taken by Walter Greg, who gave an unambiguous method in *The Calculus of Variants: An Essay on Textual Criticism* (1927) for constructing a *stemma* on the basis of variants – although the definitive explanation of Lachmann’s method is usually attributed to Paul Maas’s *Textkritik* (1960). More recent versions

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51 On misprints, see Mathijsen, *Naar de letter*, p. 22.
of neo-Lachmannian philology have tried to completely ‘mechanize’ the assembly of a *stemma*. This involves building a *stemma* in two steps rather than one. First of all a type of deep structure is set up in the form of a chain, after which the final *stemma* is deduced in a second stage.\(^{53}\) Meanwhile this process has been defined so precisely that it is both reproducible and implementable by using a computer program that automatically works out a *stemma* from a number of entered variants.\(^{54}\) In consequence, stemmatic philology appears to be the only humanities discipline to have become a ‘normal science’. While the job of stemmatic philology has not yet been finished, the contours have been so clearly defined that the main activity in the field is problem solving.

**Conclusion: philology as a conglomerate of disciplines**

For centuries the concept of philology as textual criticism was dominant. Yet from the early modern era onwards, philology developed branches into historiography, literary history, numismatics, epigraphy, palaeography and more. During the course of the eighteenth century these branches could count on burgeoning interest, for example from Gesner and Vico (and in the nineteenth century from Lachmann’s contemporary August Böckh). ‘Philology’ was no longer taken to mean only textual criticism but the complete study of language, literature and culture in their historical context. It is precisely this notion of philology that became dominant in the nineteenth century, as we see in Dutch philology too. However, with the continuing specialization in academia, these fields developed into disciplines in their own right in the course of the twentieth century. The notion of philology as a covering field became an umbrella-term while stemmatic philology degraded to a useful but no more than an auxiliary discipline. What came out of this process were the many separate disciplines of the *Geisteswissenschaften* that only in some remote past had been united under the ‘Queen of Learning’ with its manifold and unprecedented impact.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{53}\) For some recent developments in stemmatic philology, see Van Reenen et al., *Studies in Stemmatology* and idem, *Studies in Stemmatology II*.

\(^{54}\) For example, Salemans, *Building Stemma’s*.

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