1 Introduction

History, God, and Me

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The nineteenth century has often been described as an era of heightened historical self-consciousness – the first century to be aware of itself as a century, an era when historiography becomes a best-selling and professionalized genre, a time when being 'of the period' becomes a compelling issue of public discussion.[1] It was also a century when measuring, regulating, and calculating time itself arises as an enthralling problem for science, for technology, and for lived experience. Railway timetables, a demand for punctuality, and the display of clocks and watches all enter public life with an unparalleled insistence.[2] *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873) is thus a paradigmatic novel 'of the period': a plot that depends on travelling to time, with a twist dependent on the International Date Line and the precision of a chiming clock. Against these increasingly precise regulations of the moment, however, the 'abyss of time' that is geological history, and man's evolution within it (as the new biology argued), formed a lasting challenge to the theological certainties of the past.[3] *How to see oneself in*

[1] See from a large bibliography, Adelene Buckland and Sadiah Qureshi (eds.), *Time Travelers: Victorian Encounters with Time and History* (University of Chicago Press, 2020); Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Peter J. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and Their Past* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1989); J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge University Press, 1981); Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time, 1870–1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[2] Peter Galison, *Einstein's Clocks, Poincaré's Maps: Empires of Time* (London: W. W. Norton, 2003); Ian R. Bartky, *Selling the True Time: Nineteenth-Century Timekeeping in America* (Stanford University Press, 2000); Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and the Modern Temporal Order*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (University of Chicago Press, 1996); more generally, François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); François Hartog, *Chronos: L'Occident aux prises avec le temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 2020).

[3] Clive Gamble, *Making Deep History: Zeal, Perseverance and the Time Revolution of 1859* (Oxford University Press, 2021); Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (University of Chicago Press, 2005); James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

time became the iconic cultural question, epistemological anxiety, and social demand of the nineteenth century – the medium for its sense of its own modernity.

This historically self-conscious era characterized itself as an 'age of progress' and was obsessed with how to recognize modernity. Yet at the same time, the ideal of a classical education, with its fascination with the past of Greek and Roman antiquity, flourished – and was, of course, also questioned – as a guide to morals and to political and social endeavour.[4] For the modern child, a proper classical education was necessary (at least for the elite or aspirational modern child). This was enacted to the degree that the exasperated Kaiser Wilhelm II eventually spoke out in favour of his national school system educating little Germans rather than 'little Greeks and Romans' (although his speech had little immediate impact on policy).[5] It is similarly iconic that Eliza Lynn Linton's trend-setting essay, *The Girl of the Period*, starts its attack on the feminist liberalism she decried in modern society with the declaration: 'The Girl of the Period is a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face, as the first articles of her personal religion.'[6] The attack on women's make-up as falsehood and vanity is a familiar commonplace of misogynist rhetoric back to antiquity. But the second phrase, 'the first articles of her personal religion', should not be read as merely a cliché. When many families still institutionalized family prayers as a morning ritual, and when 'personal religion' could be a sign of an intense spiritual journey (a personal engagement with a personal god was the aim of many a religious call to faith), Linton is knowingly mocking the trivial materialism of the girls she despises by setting their daily routine in contrast with religious normativity, a different liturgy of the self. Religion and classics, the past of the Bible and the past of Greco-Roman antiquity, the mainstays of education across Europe, together provided authoritative foundations for nineteenth-century historical self-awareness and historical argument: starting points, ideals, normative horizons. Because of this, and because of the interventions of new discoveries and understandings about the past, classics and the Bible

[4] Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities and Society in England, 1830–1960* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Simon Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction and the Proclamation of Modernity* (Princeton University Press, 2011); Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).

[5] James C. Albisetti, *Secondary School Reform in Imperial Germany* (Princeton University Press, 1983), 3.

[6] Elizabeth Lynn Linton, *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays*, 2 vols. (London, 1883), vol. I, 3. Nancy Fix Anderson, *Women Against Women in Victorian England: A Life of Eliza Lynn Linton* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), sets what has become the usual tone for discussion of Linton's gender politics.

together also became a privileged site of contestation, both cultural and scholarly. For all the Victorian pride in progress, in technology, in travel – the *newness* of modernity – it was a critical engagement with the *past* that most challenged how Victorians understood the world and their place in it. The anxiety of progress was fuelled and shaped by the shock of the old.

The central claim of this book, consequently, is that these self-definitional modern encounters with the past can only be properly understood through the nineteenth century's passionate exploration of the interaction between religion and historicity, between the theological and the classical, between the Bible and classical antiquity.

Such encounters with the past were partly a matter of coming face to face with the books and material remnants of antiquity. The new discovery of ancient biblical manuscripts threatened the very status of the church and its beliefs.[7] It became clear, for example, that the ending of the Gospel of Mark, time-honoured in liturgy as in reading, was an interpolation. Critical history undermined the hagiography of saints' lives in the name of 'myth' or even in the name of 'pious fraud'. What, then, was the textual foundation on which the church had been built? By contrast, the uncovering of the cities of Nineveh and Troy by archaeologists was taken as startling, material proof of the truth of the Bible or Homer.[8] Against the scholars who found multiple layers of composition in biblical and Homeric texts, incriminating signs of inauthenticity, stood the walls of Troy, the mask of Agamemnon, the very stones where Jesus stood: the real of history. At the grandest scale, the geology of Lyell and the fossils of the deep past redefined the age of the earth, and the span of man's history on it, against the chronology developed by years of ecclesiastical analysis. The attempt of some few Christians to argue that God placed fossils on the earth as a challenge to faith were laughed out of court by serious scientists – Edmund Gosse's memory of the humiliation of his father, a distinguished biologist as well as a passionate fundamentalist Christian, humiliated for publishing such an argument, is especially poignant (and a telling sign of the times).[9] Darwin's evolution

[7] See Simon Goldhill, '*Ad Fontes*' in Buckland and Qureshi (eds.), *Time Travelers*, 67–85.

[8] David Gange and Michael Ledger Lomas (eds.), *Cities of God: Archaeology and the Bible in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); Frederick N. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Shawn Malley, *From Archaeology to Spectacle in Victorian Britain: The Case of Assyria 1845–1854* (Farnham: Routledge, 2012); Simon Goldhill, *The Buried Life of Things: How Objects Made History in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[9] Edmund W. Gosse, *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments* (London: Heinemann, 1907), on which see Ann Thwaite, *Edmund Gosse: a Literary Landscape, 1849–1928* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1984).

declared that there were an 'infinite number of generations' of humans – in contrast to the Bible's genealogical certainties, sure in its numbers of years: the deep past was dizzying because of its unsettling of the ground on which so much had previously been constructed.[10]

There is no doubt that the shock of the old is a defining characteristic of the nineteenth century, which has lasting implications for our contemporary culture. This book sets out to demonstrate thus how religion's past, set against the privileged classical past, became a key battleground of this cultural ferment of modernity's self-understanding.

In order to approach what is a vast terrain, we have chosen six major and interrelated arenas, each of which is treated by a pair of especially commissioned essays. The first pair, under the heading *Antiquity's Modernity*, considers a grounding set of ideas for the volume as a whole: how the study of classical antiquity became intertwined with religious history. In a chapter that also acts as a broad introduction to the book's central concerns, Simon Goldhill considers how genealogy provides an essential model for thinking about the past in the nineteenth century – a model which establishes the past as an explanatory and authoritative origin. Thus the early church tells us still how to worship and how theology should function now; Greek culture is where Western civilization has come from, and now longs to return to its ideals. To explore, then, how the pasts of antiquity and the Bible are to be interrelated, the chapter considers nineteenth-century strategies of translation and appropriation between the biblical and the classical, from Arnold's Hebraism and Hellenism, through Gladstone's description of Homer as a precursor of Christianity, to the actual practices of turning the Bible into Greek verse. This chapter thus looks directly at how the pasts of the Bible and of classical antiquity are mobilized together as a matrix of self-understanding in nineteenth-century culture. Suzanne Marchand focuses down more closely on to the historiography of the period and looks at how the father of history, Herodotus, from the fifth century BCE, becomes in the hands of nineteenth-century historiographers a sign and symptom of changing historical values. Through the middle of the nineteenth century (with roots going further back into the Enlightenment) Herodotus was understood by Christian scholars not as tracing the clash of Eastern and Western civilization – we have long learned to place critical question marks around the oversimplifications and Orientalism of such a summary, commonplace though it still is! – but rather as acting as a 'historian of the Hebrew people without knowing it',

[10] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (London: John Murray, 1859), 207.

providing crucial evidence of the biblical past, embodying the authority of a classical master. As archaeologists and other historians struggled to show the truth (or falsehood) of the biblical narrative according to new historiographical principles, Herodotus ceased to function as such an authority – indeed as modern historiography developed its critical methodology, Herodotus became more 'the father of lies' (already an ancient denigration), an unreliable historian who was inadequately critical, and thus not authoritative, especially for sacred history. Herodotus becomes in Marchand's hands a telling test case for how ancient Greek historiography is intertwined with religious ideology and is likewise subject to shifting ideological constructions of historical authority.

The second section, entitled *Making the Past Visible*, moves from a focus on writing to a focus on material culture and how Victorian artistic production made a spectacle of the past. The visual arts were fundamental in the formation of the imaginary, the circulation of images of the past instrumental in society's thinking about historicity. Kate Nichols turns our attention to the Manchester Jubilee Exhibition of art in 1887 which was seen by a staggering 4.7 million people – truly a cultural *event*. The exhibition set out to capture national art, as befitted the Jubilee's agenda – 'essentially English' one reviewer boasted. The many reviews and more private comments on the exhibition's works reveal a preoccupation with history, also informed by the Jubilee's celebration of achievement over time. But, as Nichols argues, this sense of history was dominated by the double lens of classical antiquity and the biblical past, both conceived as 'living histories' – that is, as genealogies inhabited by the viewers. Significantly, these pasts were thus not in conflict with the modernity proclaimed in the exhibition's display of new technology and scientific advances. In the art works themselves, an Orientalism distinguished the representation of the Holy Land as a frame for religious art, along with a classicism – columns, robes, bodies – which made a picture like Edwin Long's marvellous *Diana or Christ?*, our front cover, particularly telling (Figure 4.11). The picture dramatizes a choice between pagan religion and the new religion of Christianity, a scene set in Ephesus, a city between Greece and the East. It suggests that the decision to take up Christianity was made painful by the lure and power of classical culture, and it captures the moment of the hard division of the ways (hence the question mark of the title). The picture spoke intently to the passionate Victorian discourse of religious doubt, focalized as so often on the young and virginally pure woman. Yet the picture itself is fully classicizing in its aesthetics and allows its viewers to celebrate their appreciation of classical art and its

understanding. It is as if the painting allows us to answer the question of its title with a 'both', rather than simply choosing one. Caroline Vout's chapter in turn looks more specifically at sculpture, which is so often the handmaiden of art history, but which is certainly a flourishing mode of production in the nineteenth century both for private houses and for church interiors and other public buildings. She notes how often biblical subjects and classical subjects are juxtaposed – many of her examples are statues of females – and how hard it is for sculptures of biblical figures not to echo the form of classical models. But she also saliently argues that the biblical sculptures inhabit time differently from their classical exempla – and sees the two modes '*in conversation*' with one another. This intriguing and productive notion of conversation allows Vout to describe how the sculptures of biblical figures do not merely mimic classical form, but become carefully invested with a power to preach (to the converted?) and to work against the sexuality of the classical figures, goddesses of love, victims of rape and metamorphosis. According to Vout's argument, the statue's embodiment thus becomes for the Christian viewer a matter of self-recognition – it becomes a performance of understanding and inhabiting time as a sinner, a struggler, a repentant. Here we have another version of the question mark of Long's title, now phrased as 'Venus or Mary?'. Indeed, both Nichols and Vout in their respective essays show how Victorian aesthetics, in their public display of classical antiquity and the biblical past, become a site for the exploration of a relation between past and present. This is a historicist mode of viewing or looking that dramatizes the question of inhabiting time. *Seeing the past, now*, was the promise of this art: giving material expression to what the past can mean for the present.

The third section of this volume, *Materiality and Spectacle*, picks up from the exhibition of Manchester and the various sites of display explored by Vout, and looks at two different forms of material spectacle, namely the theatre – in the shape of the Oberammergau Passion Play – and the building of religious architecture – in the shape of the American Episcopal Church in Rome. In these two chapters we move from England to Bavaria and to Italy, and away from the particular institution of the gallery or specific sites for the display of art. The Oberammergau Passion Play, notes Robert Priest, had become 'an international sensation' by the nineteenth century, and hundreds of thousands of tourists flocked to the site each tenth year for its performance. As with the Manchester Jubilee Exhibition, the sheer size of the audience makes it an event of significance. But in this case, not only were many of the spectators foreign elites who

could afford the time and cost of travel, but also the rarity of the performances – their place in time and as a sign of a long tradition across time – meant that stories about the Passion Play and the experiences of its audiences disseminated across Europe, and helped create an idea of European theatrical history. In the nineteenth century, however, Priest argues, theatregoers increasingly began to see the play not simply as a sign of Christian religiosity or German V*olkskultur*, but rather as an event to be understood through the classical model of the Great Dionysia, the ancient Athenian festival of drama. Priest shows how German writers tried to turn what was a Catholic occasion into an expression of connection between German culture and the privileged past of classical Athens. Readers of Nietzsche will see the thrust of such arguments immediately. The Philhellenic gaze metamorphoses a local, German, Catholic, Christian event into a sign of a national genealogy with roots in ancient Greece and its ceremonials – a move made easier by their German education as 'little Greeks'. The value of culture – always a fantasy of the imagination – is being formed between competing pasts. G. A. Bremner takes us to an even more striking spectacle of cultural aggression. The Church of St Paul's Within-the-Walls was built on the Via Nazionale between 1872 and 1876, to a design by the celebrated English Gothic-revival architect, George Street. It was built for the American Episcopalian community led by a staunchly anti-Catholic agitator, Robert Nevin. Bremner shows with a delightful richness how this gesture against the might of papal Rome took shape in response to the post-conquest Rome of 1870, and specifically how values of liberal, Bible-oriented Protestantism were projected through architecture as much as through agitation or dogma. Rome – in the imagination of this argument, as explored by Bremner – is the home of 'Caesars and Popes'. The history of Rome is summed up in a catchphrase that aims to link the tyranny of ancient imperial rule with the autocracy of the infallible Pope (in contrast, of course, with the constitutional freedom of Protestant Britain and America). Rome – the very word, as much as the place – becomes invested with a religious *and* classical past that is the epitome of negativity, and St Paul himself is suborned to this ideological skirmish. Arguments over history and the present, historicity and theology, church and antiquity – as Bremner concludes – took on architectural form, a spectacle of bricks raised against the sky and against the enemy.

The volume's fourth section is called *Travelling the World*, and it picks up from Priest's account of the tourists at Oberammergau and Bremner's narrative of an American in Rome, to study how important travel was for the Victorian experience of the world and the understanding of its history.

Dorothy Figueira and Brian Murray specifically take up the implications of the catchphrase 'Caesars and Popes' to investigate how Protestant travellers went to Rome and viewed it through the lens of their Protestant ideology, barely tempered by their classical training. Where Bremner focuses on the act of church-building as a statement, Figueira and Murray concentrate on the visitors to churches, and how their verbalized responses trace their contrasting reactions specifically to apostolic history. While Catholic apologetics emphasized the apostolic succession as a demonstration of papal authority, Protestants wished to make their claim over the history of the church too. Yet seduced also by the music and aesthetic spectacle of Catholic ritual, Protestant engagement with Rome became far more complicated and indeed often far more confused than the simple opposition of Protestants to the Papal See might lead one to expect. Between hostility, temptation, and conversion, a swathe of emotional aggressions and lures are activated in this process of *seeing history*. In particular, Frederick Douglass, a black American and former slave, whose committed Protestantism was laced with a distaste for the nationalism with which such religious feeling was often complicit, provides an example of just how intensely Rome's ceremonials could evoke deeply conflicted feelings of repulsion and attraction – and thus of self-reflection. For Douglass, seeing himself seeing Rome was a troublesome moment of implication and self-assertion. If Douglass' complex response to the expectations formed by generations of white tourists was overdetermined by his own life's experience, Michael Ledger-Lomas' account of the HMS *Bacchante* (wonderful name!) presents us with two more travellers burdened by history – Prince Albert and Prince George, the future King George V. The princes travelled as part of a programme of royal tours designed to foster a unified empire loyal to the crown. To project this ideal of a unified kingdom, Ledger-Lomas demonstrates, a policy of conscious support for what would now be called religious diversity was developed and enacted. The Queen was to be seen as a friend to all her subjects. The expanse of space crossed by the royal travellers also involved a journey of the imaginary through time, as the history of religions became increasingly on display to the tourist's gaze – for all that this history was packaged, stage-managed, and manipulated by authorities and commentators. Indeed, the royal visits became news, and not least through the publication of memoirs of the trips by the princes' advisors like John Dalton, or the vastly more authoritative Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, Dean of St Paul's and great liberal churchman. Royal visits thus became 'a technology of rule'. But it was a technology of rule that depended on the dissemination of a historical perspective of the world and its religions, which was embedded in the

accounts of the places visited and the princes' reflections on them. Where once pilgrims travelled to experience the religious awe invested in a topography by the narratives of passion associated with the places, and the theology that explicated their passion, now religious sites were acknowledged and experienced through the lens of a modern geographical and historical comprehension of religion – a nineteenth-century self-placement in time through nineteenth-century epistemological systems.

The fifth section of our book bears the title *Manuscripts, Morality, and Metaphysics*. The guiding principle of this section is not (merely) the contingency of alliteration, but an intellectual matrix that is specific to Victorian writing on history and religion. The three trajectories interlink: manuscripts are the basic source of scholarship, the authoritative texts of the past to which philology, the 'queen of the sciences' in this era, gives a special privilege.[11] Critical history depends on textual criticism which is the centre of philology.[12] Discovering manuscripts is the treasure-hunting of this world. Yet in a way which twenty-first-century scholarship is likely to find less immediately palatable, nineteenth-century historiography is all too ready to turn towards morality, especially where religious history is concerned (which for some Christian authors, of course, committed to Providence as a force, is the only possible history). But this morality in the hands of the great liberal thinkers also moves towards metaphysics. F. D. Maurice is a grand example of this move upwards towards metaphysics. Maurice, liberal thinker and theologian, wrote *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy*, which, as Jocelyn Betts describes, became a guidebook for his many followers. It combines an idiosyncratic view of the Hebrew Bible with an unconventional reading of early Greek philosophy in order to promote a wide blueprint for the family, the nation, and the church, that goes to the heart of Maurice's religious message, his sense of the place of Anglicanism in the world. For Maurice, it proved inevitable that a comprehensive view of modern society had to be formed through a creative combination of Hebraism and Hellenism, theological morality, and metaphysical reflection. The recognition that philosophy always speaks in Greek puts a question to Christianity, to which Maurice responds with a characteristic hybridity and tolerance that none the less leads to an Anglican supersessionist answer.

[11] Paul Michael Kurtz, 'The Philological Apparatus: Science, Text and Nation in the Nineteenth Century', *Critical Inquiry* 47 (2021): 747–76.

[12] Goldhill, '*Ad Fontes*'; James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton University Press, 2014), and with a national focus, Dirk van Hulle and Joep Leerssen (eds.), *Editing the Nation's Memory: Textual Scholarship and Nation Building in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Leiden: Brill: 2015).

Alison Knight and Scott Mandelbrote turn to another and quite different contributor to theology, M. R. James, who is probably best known today for his ghost stories. James' lifework, however, was on manuscripts and especially the manuscripts of the biblical apocrypha, and in particular Greek texts from the earliest centuries of Christianity, which are no longer in the canon. On the one hand, James is thus an archetypal figure of the critical philological scholarship we have been discussing: he analysed how texts that were once part of the religious life of a community, had been excluded by later generations of scholars, and thus he set not just the practice of reading but also the status of scripture – the word of God – in an intricate historical frame. On the other hand, as Knight and Mandelbrote carefully articulate, stories were key to James' practice. He told his ghost stories, worked on stories, and also saw stories as a way of bringing life to ancient evidence. He also told his *own* story, and repeatedly reflected on how all such stories could fire an audience's imagination – formed their imaginary, as we might say, or stimulated their own passion to know. James also wrote – in a way that looks back to the chapters by Vout and Nichols – how statues in a church could prompt stories, stories that led to morals. For both Maurice and James, living with and through the texts of antiquity was integral to their engagement with modern living.

Our sixth and final section, *Intellectual Superstars: The Limits of Religion*, aptly ends with a return to the home key, as Matthew Arnold and other celebrated arbiters of cultural value who appeared in the opening chapters now reappear, and here reveal how they dealt with their own sense of belonging in religion, or in the rejection of it. Laura McCormick Kilbride takes on two of Matthew Arnold's less well-known texts, which she sets in animated conversation with each other. *Literature and Dogma* (1873) outlines Arnold's approach to reading the Bible; from 1872 onwards, he published increasingly detailed versions of a child's version of Isaiah. By putting his theory and practice together, Kilbride examines how Arnold's typological readings hover between secular and religious criticism, constructing a place for Isaiah in world history. Brian Young's discussion of two close friends, Connop Thirlwall and George Grote, proceeds to dramatize the tensions in Arnold's thinking. Grote, who was the most celebrated and influential historian of ancient Greece, redefined the politics of antiquity and its consequent impact on modern political thought. He was also a proclaimed atheist: history, for him, was a secular project. Connop Thirlwall, also a passionate Hellenist (a historian and a philologist), had an oblique relation to Anglican norms – he gave up his fellowship at Cambridge over the issue of compulsory attendance at Chapel – but nonetheless became a bishop in Wales, although