



## *A Concise History of History*

This short history of history is an ideal introduction for those studying or teaching the subject as part of courses on the historian's craft, historical theory and method, and historiography. Spanning the earliest known forms of historical writing in the ancient Near East right through to the present and covering developments in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, it also touches on the latest topics and debates in the field, such as 'Big History', 'Deep History' and the impact of the electronic age. It features timelines listing major dynasties or regimes throughout the world alongside historiographical developments; guides to key thinkers and seminal historical works; further reading; a glossary of terms; and sample questions to promote further debate at the end of each chapter. This is a truly global account of the process of progressive intercultural contact that led to the hegemony of Western historiographical methods.

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Daniel Woolf  
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# A Concise History of History

Global Historiography from Antiquity  
to the Present

DANIEL WOOLF  
*Queen's University, Ontario*



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*In memory of Georg G. Iggers (1926–2017) and  
Hayden White (1928–2018)*

... *History may be servitude,*  
*History may be freedom ...*  
T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding' (1942)  
Four Quartets

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## *Preface and Conventions*

This book is a revised and abridged version of my 2011 work entitled *A Global History of History (GHH)*. That book aspired to a coverage of the history of historical thought and writing – and historical representation in non-alphabetic and oral forms – that was, if not encyclopedically comprehensive, at least global in intent. It was quite lengthy, and pitched at the graduate student/academic market. It appeared at nearly the same time as *The Oxford History of Historical Writing* (2011–12), a multivolume series under my general editorship, devoted to the same subject and similarly global in reach. Neither of these titles was especially suited to undergraduates in need of a more concise survey of the history of history – hence the present volume.

In the preface to *GHH* I wrote the following, which still serves adequately to explain the general aim in writing such a book:

Many years of teaching courses on historiography, and the prescription of several different textbooks for the students in those courses, convinced me that a further work was needed . . . There are several books covering very long time spans, and one or two with a global reach, but none in English, of which I am aware, that do both. A conviction that students ought to be exposed to the ‘historical cultures’ of other civilizations than their own has thus informed my choice of subject; a strong sense that there is a story to be told about the development of historical thought, historical writing and the modern historical discipline, and that it relates directly to some of the larger movements of world history (in particular the global engagement of different peoples and cultures over several millennia), provides the ‘plot’, if a work on historiography can be said to have a plot.

My overall perspective has not changed in the intervening time, though naturally my thinking about particular historians/historical thinkers and about the connections between historical cultures has, necessarily, evolved with further reading, especially of works that had not appeared by mid-2010 when *GHH* went to press (for example Frederick C. Beiser’s comprehensive study of the origins and development of

German historicism, Dipesh Chakrabarty's intellectual biography of Indian historian Jadunath Sarkar, and several recent works on global history), or of which I was previously unaware. The process of abridgement has also been useful to me (though often quite challenging) in considering what aspects and examples to keep and which to jettison, and in revising or refining certain points made in the longer work. While the abridgement remains global in scope, it is by design less comprehensive than the former book, and some historical traditions discussed at some length in *GHH* have had to be left aside altogether, or mentioned only in passing. My hope is that those readers who have their curiosity whetted by this *Concise History* might be inclined to consult its bigger, older sibling for further detail.

However, this is not simply an abridgement. I have also taken the opportunity in the current book, which is about 60 per cent the length of *GHH*, to rearrange the contents of most chapters and to reorganize the whole. Thus, while a great many passages appear here verbatim and unchanged from the former work, there are many sections that have been rewritten in part or whole, and in particular the periods covered by particular chapters have been changed. The opening chapter on antiquity is the least changed, though shorter, but from that point on chapters from the earlier book have been combined, shrunk extensively, and, in several cases, rewritten with different periodization in mind. Thus the two early modern chapters of *GHH* have become one; the chapter on the eighteenth century now extends through the Revolutionary and Romantic periods up to the first decades of the nineteenth century; and the two *GHH* chapters on the nineteenth century have here become a single one extending from the second third of the century to the end of the Second World War. Most significantly, I have very heavily revised the last two chapters and added material on recent and prospective future developments in the field that a few readers of *GHH* felt had been given shorter shrift than I intended (though even here many sentences from the former book are repeated verbatim). This re-periodization has been intellectually helpful insofar as it has exposed some continuities and transitions that did not appear as clearly in the previous book, the chapter divisions of which were a little more conventional.

In the interest of remaining concise and accessible, I have also abandoned, with some regret, a few features of the former book that were well received, such as its specialized 'subject boxes' (sidebars on particular topics mentioned in passing in the main text), the extensive

offset ‘text boxes’ containing examples of historical writing (especially many from non-European cultures), and the illustrations, which are a ‘nice-to-have’ rather than a necessity. I have, however, retained the ‘timeline’ feature of each chapter (reduced and rearranged to reflect the reorganization of chapters), though here retitled ‘Milestones’. These list significant dates of developments or particular works in the history of historical writing. I have added, as an aid to readers, a selective glossary of terms that will likely be unfamiliar to many readers. Finally, I have been somewhat selective in providing birth or death dates within the text, especially in Chapters 6 and 7 where a great many persons mentioned are still living. Many of those mentioned principally as authors of secondary works in historiography do not have their vital dates included, a space-saving choice that does not reflect my gratitude for what I have gleaned from their work.

The very lengthy Further Reading section at the conclusion of *GHH* has been reduced into a few suggestions (linked to specific chapter sections) which here appear at the end of each chapter, and there are no footnotes or endnotes. In most instances where direct quotation is used, the book or author quoted is listed in the relevant further reading section, without specific page reference. The precise citation of many of these quotations can be found more precisely in *GHH*; for some others, I shall beg the reader’s indulgence given that they are taken from reasonably accessible works. (Quotations from the ‘primary’ sources of the book, past great historians or historical thinkers, are generally given parenthetical edition and page references immediately following the extract.) I have not listed works in languages other than English unless, as some do, they include essays or chapters in English. A much fuller bibliography (though obviously without works published in the past eight years) can be found in *GHH*. Works listed once in a further reading section are not listed again in that chapter even if relevant to subsequent sections; they are, however, re-itemized in later chapters if relevant.

As the hope is that the book may be useful in a classroom setting, I have added, for the benefit of instructors, something *not* contained in *GHH*, namely a series of questions for class discussion or essay assignment. Historiography is not an easy subject to teach, even by specialists, and I hope that these questions will ignite conversations even if they by no means exhaust all topics that ought to be or might be discussed.

## Diacritics and Transliteration

Even more than in *GHH*, again in the interest of making the book more ‘reader-friendly’, I have adopted a ‘minimal-diacritical’ approach to the transliteration of titles and names. Thus the dots, bars and underlined characters that featured in *GHH* (for languages such as Arabic) have disappeared, doubtless to the discomfort of my Islamicist or Arabist friends, though the characters ‘(‘ayn) and ’ (hamza) remain in certain instances. With familiar proper or family names that are frequently used in English (such as ‘Muhammad’, in Arabic), diacritics have been dispensed with altogether. Japanese words and names have lost their macrons. All foreign words are rendered in the Latin alphabet. Most historical works are cited exclusively by an English translation of their actual title, in some instances with the original title also included and transliterated – this permits me, for instance, to refer to Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah* by its familiar name and, on occasion, to give the reader a sense of the original title. For Latin-alphabet languages (e.g. French, Spanish, Turkish) I have retained conventional accents, most of which will be familiar to even monoglot English-language readers.

Chinese names and words remain as in *GHH* rendered according to the pinyin system, which has supplanted the older Wade-Giles system as the standard protocol for transliteration: thus Mao Zedong not Mao Tse-tung. Certain exceptions to this rule apply for historians with established Western names, such as Confucius, whose Chinese name was either Kong Qiu or Kong Zi (Master Kong). The names of Chinese historians publishing in Western languages, and the titles of books originally issued in those languages, follow the actual spelling of the author or title, whether Wade-Giles or pinyin.

Chinese, Korean and Japanese names appear with the family name first, followed *without a comma* by the given name. This is a well-known and common practice for Chinese and Korean, but in the case of Japanese, Western journalistic practice has tended to invert the name order according to North American usage, a practice that I have not followed: thus a reference to Kume Kunitake denotes a historian whose family name is Kume. Occasional exceptions, mainly historians whose names appear Western-style on their English-language publications, are indexed *with* commas to avoid confusion; a few Japanese historians (Motoori Norinaga and Hayashi Razan for instance) are by convention referred to by their given names, e.g. Norinaga.

## Dates

A multitude of calendars have been used by various peoples in the course of the past five thousand years. Full compliance with the non-Eurocentric principles of this book would suggest that dates be recorded as the authors being described recorded them, for instance using the Hijri year of the Muslim calendar. However, this would be far more confusing than helpful. The compromise often used of Common Era (CE) or Before the Common Era (BCE) seems to me simply to replicate the conventional Western calendar under a different name. I have therefore, as in *GHH*, stuck with BC and AD.

Vital dates (where known) for most historians (and many who were not historians but nonetheless figure in the narrative) are provided in the main text. In some cases alternative dates are used either because of lack of agreement in scholarship as to a single date, or in some instances because the date itself is tied to a particular chronological scheme which itself is ambiguous. In the final chapters, certain vital dates have, sadly, had to be revised owing to the deaths of individuals still living when the first book went to press. Certain abbreviations for dates have been used:

b. = born, in the case of historians still living as of mid-2018.

c. = *circa*, approximate year where no firm year is known or agreed upon.

cent. = century or centuries.

d. = died, used where there is a firm death year (or approximate, in which case noted as 'd. c.').

est. = established, for instance, a journal or historical society.

fl. = *floruit*, that is 'flourished', generally used in relation to authors for whom birth and death dates are entirely unknown or highly obscure; indicates active period.

r. = reigned. When a monarch is noted, his or her regnal years, not years of birth and death, are noted in parentheses.

## *Acknowledgements*

It is my pleasure to repeat here the acknowledgements I made in the *Global History of History* and to add a few more individuals who have either joined me on various historiographical projects going back to the early 1990s (when I first ventured outside my home turf of early modern England) or sharpened my thinking on particular issues. I thank in this respect Guido Abbattista, Michael Aung-Thwin, Donald Baker, Michael Bentley, Stefan Berger, Jeremy Black, the late Ernst Breisach, Adam Budd, Peter Burke, the late John Burrow, Fernando Cervantes, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Eileen Ka-May Cheng, Youssef Choueiri, William Connell, Antoon De Baets, Ewa Domańska, Richard Evans, Sarah Foot, Grant Hardy, Bruce Janacek, Donald R. Kelley, Newton Key, Tarif Khalidi, Ann Kumar, the late Joseph M. Levine, Fritz Levy, Chris Lorenz, Juan Maiguashca, Stuart Macintyre, Allan Megill, Matthias Middell, Mark Salber Phillips, J. G. A. Pocock, Attila Pók, José Rabasa, Anthony Reid, Chase Robinson, Jörn Rüsen, Dominic Sachsenmaier, Masayuki Sato, Zachary Sayre Schiffman, Axel Schneider, Baki Tezcan, Romila Thapar, Edoardo Tortarolo, Aviezer Tucker, Markus Völkel, Peer Vries and Q. Edward Wang. Many others have provided encouragement or assistance, such as my long-suffering team in the Principal's Office at Queen's University, who have tolerated with good grace my occasional absences for half-days or summertime weeks of writing. I will not mention them all, given the length of this list, but they, too, have my deepest appreciation.

Michael Watson at Cambridge University Press provided the impetus for *GHH* over a decade ago and more recently suggested this abridgement as a way of updating the original book and bringing it to a wider audience; I am grateful, too, for the press's anonymous readers for helpful feedback on the initial proposal and the penultimate text. Ian McIver supervised the publication process with a firm hand. Rose Bell, who copy-edited *GHH* in 2010, undertook the present book also. I am again grateful for her



meticulous attention to detail and helpful suggestions. Among my past doctoral students, I thank Dr Matthew Neufeld, Dr Sarah Brand, and Dr Jane Wong Yeang-Chui. Other graduate students assisted in other ways with the original book (including summarizing for me books in languages which I do not read), in particular (at the University of Alberta 2002–9) Tanya Henderson, Carolyn Salomons, Tony Maan and Nina Paulovicova. The experience of teaching historiography to many students at varying levels has added immeasurably to my sense of what I liked in other textbooks and what I did not, which was not always the same as what the students liked. Current Queen's University graduate students David White, Kimberley Bell, Virginia Vandenberg, Megan Kirby and Johanna Strong have provided excellent intellectual stimulation during my extended tour of duty in senior administration. Ian Hesketh, my former research associate at Queen's, and now at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, remains a close associate and fellow enthusiast for matters historiographical; apart from providing a few apposite references here and there (such as the passage from H. T. Buckle that opens Chapter 7), it is he who convinced me that in the present work I needed to pay more attention to 'Big History'. Attendance at a conference on historiography, philosophy and method at McMaster University in June 2018 organized by Sandra Lapointe occasioned some late rethinking of certain passages in Chapters 5 and 6, and I am grateful to attendees, especially Martin Kusch, Catarina Dutilh Novaes, Lydia Patton, Christopher Green and Michael Beaney for their papers and discussions.

My three adult children, Sarah, Samuel and David have always done a convincing job of feigning interest in historiography; in David's case, the interest must have been genuine since he spent a month providing a reading and extensive marking-up of *GHH* with a view to its abridgement. While I have not followed all his suggestions, this exercise proved invaluable in suggesting to me ways in which the original might be reduced and simplified without compromising its global reach. Both my late parents, Margaret and Cyril Woolf, took an interest in my work and this, regrettably, will be the first book I have produced that I shall not have the opportunity to share with them. Lastly, my wife, Julie Anne Gordon-Woolf, remains my greatest friend, life partner, supporter and affectionate critic.

On a final, and sad, note, two historiographers a generation my senior, who provided both role models and occasional criticism, have both died very recently. Hayden White, with whom I engaged at a few

international conferences over the past fifteen years, did not especially like my approach to the history of history, which is far removed from his, but ours was a respectful disagreement. While we did not know each other well, his works have been a significant influence on my own over the years. The late Georg Iggers, a historiographer of a very different bent who attended most of the same conferences, was a friend and close ally for twenty-five years in my conviction that historiography needed to be globalized; he was a frequent commentator on and supportive critic of my work. I dedicate the book in appreciation of these two late giants of historiography.