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The History of Historiography as a Form of Disciplinary Self-Reflection

In Memoriam: Georg G. Iggers (1926–2017)

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the theoretical and methodological conceptions of Georg G. Iggers (1926–2017) in the context of his work on the history of historiography. In addition to the autobiography written by Wilma and George Iggers, the present study focuses on the main subjects of his research: the emergence and development of German historical scholarship (*Geschichtswissenschaft*) from Leopold Ranke to the present, the role of the Enlightenment in the constitution of “scientific historiography,” different forms of New History in the twentieth century, the relationship between Marxism and historiography, and the challenge to historical writing posed by postmodernism and globalization. Moreover, special attention is given to Iggers’ ideas as one of the foremost engaged public intellectuals.

Keywords: Georg G. Iggers; History of historiography; German historiography; Enlightenment; New History; Marxism; postmodernism; globalization; public intellectual

The dynamic and exceptionally powerful development of historiography in the twentieth century was marked not only by the appearance of new directions of historical thinking, but also by the (re)emergence of certain historical disciplines. It seems that this was also the case with the history of historiography—after the fundamental works of Eduard Fueter and G. P. Gooch published on the eve of the First World War, which established this sub-discipline of historical studies, it ceased to attract the interest of historians in the following decades.¹ The situation only changed in the last third of the twentieth century, when a critical evaluation of historiography and its heritage began as a part of a wider re-examination of the theoretical and methodological assumptions within historical studies. Numerous historiographical works by the American historian Georg G. Iggers played a vital role in this process of research-

1 Eduard Fueter: *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie*, München 1911; G. P. Gooch: *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, New York 1913.

ing the history of modern historiography, its epistemic possibilities, the character of historical knowledge, and its function in modern societies. Originally published in English and/or German and then translated into several Middle Eastern and Asian languages (Turkish, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and Korean) in addition to European languages, his works had a profound influence on the major trends in contemporary historical thought. For decades, Iggers enjoyed the reputation of a leading authority on the history of historiography, and his scholarly work received global recognition in the “ecumene of historians.”

Iggers’ life journey began in Hamburg, where he was born on 7 December 1926 as Georg Gerson Iggersheimer to a Jewish merchant family that belonged culturally to the German *Mittelstand* but preserved its religious identity. Having spent his childhood in Germany, he immigrated with his family to the United States in autumn 1938. Evading a *pogrom* carried out by Nazi authorities, his family found refuge in Richmond, Virginia. After his family name was shortened and americanized to make his socialization in this new environment easier, young Georg continued his education, studying philosophy, French and Spanish at the University of Richmond. He took only one history course, attending Samuel Chiles Mitchell’s lectures on Europe in the nineteenth century. It is worth mentioning that Mitchell exercised a strong influence on Iggers, not so much as a historian but through his lifelong struggle against racial inequality.² During his graduate studies at the University of Chicago, Iggers met Arnold Bergstraesser, a political scientist, who was forced to leave his chair at the University of Heidelberg and emigrate to the United States. The cooperation with Bergstraesser resulted in Iggers’ enduring interest in the history of ideas (*Ideengeschichte*) and, more generally, in the legacy of European intellectual history.³ At less than 20 years of age, he earned his master’s degree, with a thesis on the relationship between Heinrich Heine and the supporters of the social doctrine of Saint-Simon. The following year (1945/46), Iggers studied philosophy and sociology at the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at the New School for Social Research in New York. This institution, where many émigré scholars from enslaved Europe (mostly Germany, Italy, Spain and France) lectured, embodied the highest achievements of European scholarship and culture for Iggers; the time he spent there was, in his opinion, “the most valuable” time of his entire student career.⁴ Such an appraisal is quite understandable considering that Iggers, along with other courses at the New School, also attended lectures by the leading protestant theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, as well as Erich Fromm, a respected sociologist and psychoanalyst of the

2 Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times. Facing the Challenges of the 20th Century as Scholars and Citizens*, New York/Oxford 2006, pp. 40f.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 50–52.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

time.⁵ Upon his return to Chicago, Iggers continued his studies, devoting himself to the research of European intellectual history—he directed the focus of his interest to the cultural, political and social history of France and Germany during the age of revolution (1789–1848/49). Supervised by prominent historian Louis Gottschalk, Iggers defended his doctoral dissertation on the “Saint-Simonian Critique of Modern Civilization” in 1951 before a doctoral committee that also included Arnold Bergstraesser and theologian James Luther Adams. It was published as a book entitled *The Cult of Authority. Political Philosophy of the Saint-Simonians: a Chapter of the Intellectual History of Totalitarianism* a few years later.⁶ Iggers was attracted to the political ideas of French utopian socialists, not because of his own leanings towards socialism but, quite the contrary, because he recognized the roots of twentieth century totalitarian systems in their doctrine. In spite of the fact that Gottschalk was one of the rare historians to show an interest in the theory of history at that time,⁷ Iggers was much more influenced by Bergstraesser and Adams with their lectures about German philosophy, literature and protestant theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁸

Deeply interested not only in current Anglo-American, French and German historiography but also in philosophical and sociological scholarship, Iggers drastically redirected his research by the end of the 1950s to the theory of historical studies and the history of historiography. This turn from the history of political ideas to the theoretical and methodological issues of historical scholarship is testified by his article on the idea of progress in recent philosophies of history.⁹ In this sense, Iggers’ stay in Europe (1960–1962) was an important turning point toward reaching intellectual maturity. Owing to fellowships from the American Philosophical Society and the Guggenheim Foundation, Iggers had the opportunity to visit France, Great Britain and West Germany, and to meet some of the most significant philosophical, sociological and historical thinkers of that time. Bearing in mind that Iggers was then still “a totally unknown historian at a totally unknown Black college,” the cordiality with which he was greeted by the “great names” of English and French scholarship is a testimony to their intellectual openness and curiosity.¹⁰ Sharing a belief in the necessity of upholding human rights and liberties in an age increasingly characterized by the intensifying

5 Ibid., pp. 54f.

6 Georg G. Iggers: *The Cult of Authority. Political Philosophy of the Saint-Simonians: a Chapter of the Intellectual History of Totalitarianism*, The Hague 1958.

7 See Louis Gottschalk: *Understanding of History. A Primer of Historical Method*, New York 1950.

8 Franz Fillafer: Franz Fillafer im Gespräch mit Georg Iggers, in: *Sozial.Geschichte. Zeitschrift für historische Analyse des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* 19:1 (2004), pp. 84–99, here p. 93.

9 Georg G. Iggers: *The Idea of Progress in Recent Philosophies of History*, in: *The Journal of Modern History* 30:3 (1958), pp. 215–226.

10 Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, p. 90.

conflict between two ideologically opposed superpowers, Iggers was in contact with philosophers Isaiah Berlin and Karl Popper as well as historians Herbert Butterfield and Geoffrey Barraclough. Butterfield's works on the Whig interpretation of history and the role of Göttingen School of History would become of "critical importance" for Iggers' future research on the history of historiography. In Paris, he attended seminars by Fernand Braudel, the most prominent representative of the *Annales School*, discussing his ideas with him and one of his closest associates, Robert Mandrou.¹¹

During his stay in West Germany, Iggers made the acquaintance of archconservative historian Gerhard Ritter, the "Nestor of West German Historiography" after the Second World War.¹² Establishing contacts with the Max Planck Institute for History in Göttingen, West Germany, which he would maintain over the following decades, Iggers began to cooperate in the early 1970s with the new Bielefeld School of Social History, which was critical of the traditions of German historiography. Iggers developed a fruitful lifelong cooperation with some of its leading proponents, including Jürgen Kocka and Jörn Rüsen. Iggers' stay in Göttingen in 1961, coincided with the trial of Nazi criminal Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem and the publication of Fritz Fischer's ground-breaking study of Germany's aims in the First World War. Both events marked a turning point in the manner in which the Holocaust and the responsibility for starting both World Wars were dealt with not only in the German historiography, but also in German collective memory, leading to a re-examination of modern German history in the years that followed.¹³

In addition to his close relationship with historians in West Germany during the Cold War years, Iggers also made contact with colleagues from the other side of the Iron Curtain, primarily those in East Germany and later in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. As "the first non-Communist American historian," he visited East Germany in 1966 and began to cooperate with leading representatives of East German historiography, maintaining friendly relations with some of them, such as Hans Schleier and Werner Berthold, for decades. In spite of the fact that the majority of East German historians who maintained an orthodox Marxist stance opposed a "bourgeois interpretation of history," Iggers had the opportunity to exchange ideas with Fritz Klein, a non-dogmatic Marxist historian who drew the same conclusions about the causes of the First World War as Fritz Fischer, Walter Markov, one of the leading Marxist historians of the French Revolution and Jürgen Kuczynski, the most

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 89f.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

13 Compare Chris Lorenz: *Der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg und die deutsche Geschichtsschreibung nach 1945*, in: Friso Wielenga (ed.): *60 Jahre Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Deutschland und die Niederlande—Historiographie und Forschungsperspektiven*, Münster 2006, pp. 159–171; Norbert Frei: *Vergangenheitspolitik: die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit*, München 1996.

renowned East German historian.¹⁴ Iggers' contact with historians in the socialist world was not limited to East Germany, but included close professional ties with colleagues in Poland and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Among others, he met Jerzy Topolski, the most influential Polish specialist in the theory of history as well as Russian historian Aaron Gurevich, certainly one of the most important medievalist of the second half of the twentieth century (although they only met after the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s).¹⁵ From the 1980s onwards, Iggers began an intellectual exchange on a global level, giving lectures at universities in China, Japan and South Korea. The fact that Iggers' home in Buffalo, New York, was for many years a meeting point for historians from all around the world (from America and Europe to India and China) confirms his lifelong commitment to dialogue among different (historiographical) cultures.

It should also be noted that Iggers worked on the institutionalization of the theory of history and the history of historiography as sub-disciplines of historical studies. With French historian Charles-Olivier Carbonell and Rumanian historian Lucian Boia, he established the International Commission on the History of Historiography at the International Congress of Historical Sciences held in Bucharest in 1980. As a part of the International Committee of Historical Sciences, the Commission began to publish its specialized journal *Storia della Storiografia* in 1982 which became the leading forum for this sub-discipline of historical studies. Iggers was not only a member of its editorial board for many years, but also the president of the Commission on the History of Historiography (1995–2000).¹⁶

In addition to his work on the history of historiography, one of the distinctive features of Iggers' extremely rich biography is his exemplary dedication to social activism, primarily as part of the movement against racial segregation in the American South during the 1950s and 1960s, and later his opposition to the Vietnam War. The fact that Iggers was the first white man to become a member of a Black fraternity confirms that he was in many ways an extraordinary person whose activities transcended the usual *habitus* of university professors. Finally, Iggers spent most of his fruitful academic career as a Professor of Intellectual History at Canisius College in Buffalo (New York), where he taught from 1965 until his retirement in 1991. Iggers was married to Germanist Wilma Abeles, a Jewish émigré from former Czechoslovakia. Their personal experiences in the "Age of Extremes" as well as their mutual commitment to the values of freedom and human rights was presented in their jointly written autobiography *Zwei Seiten der Geschichte. Lebensbericht aus unruhigen Zeiten* (Two Lives in Uncertain Times. Facing the Challenges of the 20th Century as Scholars and Citizens). Trans-

14 Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, pp. 143–156.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 189f.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 142 and p. 190.

lated into English, Czech, Spanish and Chinese, it testifies not only to their lives in uncertain times, but acts as an invigorating documentary on intellectual history from a transnational and transatlantic perspective.¹⁷ Georg G. Iggers died on 26 November 2017 at his home in Buffalo, just a few days before his ninety-first birthday; he was survived by his wife and three sons.

Considering the respect Iggers enjoyed within the global community of historians, it seems surprising that he neither gained the usual historical education nor became a historian in the usual sense of the word: He dealt with source critique and the establishment of the historical record only as a doctoral student in Chicago, and very rarely did any archival research during his subsequent scholarly career.¹⁸ Across his lifelong scholarly work, Iggers was interested in various subjects—the development and structure of modern German historiography (*Geschichtswissenschaft*) from Leopold Ranke to the present, the role of the Enlightenment in the constitution of “scientific historiography,” different forms of New History (which developed as an effort to transcend, at the theoretical and methodological level, the traditional paradigm of the historical discipline from the middle of the twentieth century onwards), the relationship between Marxism and historiography, and the challenge posed by postmodernism and globalization to historical writing.

While conducting research on the “decline of the idea of progress in the nineteenth century,” as well as the reception of Ranke’s work within the American historiography, Iggers was attracted by historicism, a distinctive German understanding of history and historical scholarship that characterized German historiography from the early nineteenth century until the 1960s.¹⁹ As a theoretical concept, German historicism “from Ranke and Droysen to Meinecke, rejected the idea of progress as schematic and emphasized the uniqueness or individuality of every epoch” while also being “based on a powerful optimism regarding history that saw in every period *moral energies* (Ranke) and *moral forces* (Droysen) at work, and saw the European world of the nineteenth century as the climax of historical development.”²⁰ Iggers published his critique of the

17 Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Zwei Seiten der Geschichte. Lebensbericht aus unruhigen Zeiten*, Göttingen 2002. Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times. Facing the Challenges of the 20th Century as Scholars and Citizens*, New York/Oxford 2006.

18 Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, p. 57.

19 See Iggers’ early papers devoted to this subject Georg G. Iggers: *The Image of Ranke in American and German Historical Thought*, in: *History and Theory* 2:1 (1962), pp. 17–40; Georg G. Iggers: *German Historical Thought and the Idea of Natural Law*, in: *Cahiers d’histoire mondiale* 8 (1964), pp. 565–575; Georg G. Iggers: *The Idea of Progress: A Critical Reassessment*, in: *The American Historical Review* 71:1 (1965), pp. 1–17; Georg G. Iggers: *The Decline of the Classical National Tradition of German Historiography*, in: *History and Theory* 6:3 (1967), pp. 382–412.

20 Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, p. 97.

main theoretical premises of modern German historiography under the title *German Conception of History. The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (1968), dedicating the book to James Luther Adams.²¹ With a strong interest in the political and ideological consequences of historicism, Iggers accepted a critical interpretation of modern German history in the form of a “special German path” into modernity (*der deutsche Sonderweg*).²² Like many authors who wrote after the Second World War (among them Helmuth Plessner, Fritz Stern, Ernst Fraenkel, Hans Rosenberg, Kurt Sontheimer, Hans-Ulrich Wehler), Iggers believed that the modernization of German society during the nineteenth century was not accompanied by a democratization of the political order. Quite the contrary, after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, a political reaction came in the form of a rejection of the Enlightenment, natural law and political liberalism. antidemocratic and antirationalistic thought was thus an outstanding feature not only of the *Weltanschauung* of German scholars, including historians analyzed by Iggers in his book, but also German political culture as a whole.²³ Having shown that an ethical conception of the state that embodies moral values had had a pivotal role in the understanding of German historians, he tried to show in his book “that the ultra-nationalistic ideology of German historicism with its emphasis on political power outlined a road which did not predetermine the rise of the Nazis, but did make it more acceptable for many Germans.”²⁴

Considering the book’s main thesis, the reception of this unconventional history of modern German historiography was much broader in West Germany. Iggers’ critical re-examination of historicism’s latent ideological background was a methodological novelty in the scholarship on the history of historical writing at that time. Challenging previously unquestionable assumptions about the German historiography and analyzing its ideological anti-liberalism, the book (whose publication coincided with the “paradigm shift” within German historiography) demonstrated the sharpest critique of the German historiographical tradition and “prepared an excellent funeral for historicism.”²⁵ Since historicism was discredited by its anti-liberal ideology as well as its identification with the aims of the German “power state” (*Machtstaat*), it was replaced at the beginning of the 1970s with the “history as a social science,” whose proponents

- 21 Georg G. Iggers: *The German Conception of History. The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*, Middletown CT 1968.
- 22 Compare Jürgen Kocka: *German History before Hitler: The Debate about the German Sonderweg*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 23:1 (1988), pp. 3–16.
- 23 Franz Fillafer: *Franz Fillafer im Gespräch mit Georg Iggers*, pp. 89f.
- 24 Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, p. 97.
- 25 Georg G. Iggers: *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft. Eine Kritik der traditionellen Geschichtsauffassung*, Munich 1971. See Franz L. Fillafer: *Geschichte als Aufklärung. In Memoriam Georg G. Iggers (1926–2017)*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 44:4 (2018), pp. 643–659, quotation on 646.

were a new generation of historians, with the newly founded University of Bielefeld as their institutional centre.²⁶ Highly praised by the Bielefeld school,²⁷ Iggers' critique of German historiography also provoked disputes and rejections. Having found Iggers' conclusions as well as his entire method totally unacceptable, the future doyen of West German historiography Thomas Nipperdey exposed Iggers' work to severe criticism. His main objection referred to the method with which Iggers engaged in his research: first and foremost, Nipperdey argued that it was impossible to write the history of any scholarly discipline, including historiography, from the standpoint of its ideological premises while neglecting its scholarly results. Accepting Nipperdey's viewpoint that the history of historiography (*Wissenschaftsgeschichte*) could not be written solely as a history of ideology (*Ideologieggeschichte*), Iggers emphasized that he was interested in "the ideological element in German historical scholarship in so far as this ideological element seriously narrowed and distorted scholarship."²⁸ Focusing on the close ties between German historiography and conservative ideology, Iggers showed that much of German historical writing had an ideological purpose. He therefore continued to insist that the works of historians "could not be separated from their specific political opinions."²⁹

Sharing the conviction that the development of modern historiography and its professionalization (i. e. the constitution of this particular academic discipline, which first emerged in Prussia, was an integral part of "global process of modernization"³⁰), Iggers devoted his attention to Leopold Ranke in the following years. In collaboration with Konrad von Moltke, he edited Ranke's theoretical writings under the title *Leopold von Ranke. The Theory and Practice of History* (1973),³¹ convincingly testifying to Ranke's idealistic understanding of both history and the state as a central point

- 26 For the new paradigm of West German historiography, which had constituted itself in the early 1970s, see Wolfgang J. Mommsen: *Die Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus*, Düsseldorf 1972; Hans-Ulrich Wehler: *Geschichte als historische Sozialwissenschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1973; Lutz Raphael: *Bielefeld School of History*, in: *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Amsterdam 2015, pp. 553–558.
- 27 Compare the comprehensive review by Jörn Rüsen: *Georg G. Iggers: Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft. Eine Kritik der traditionellen Geschichtsauffassung*, in: *Philosophische Rundschau* 20:3/4 (1974), pp. 269–286.
- 28 Correspondance between Georg G. Iggers and Thomas Nipperdey: *University at Buffalo, University Archives, Iggers (Georg G.) Papers*.
- 29 Georg G. Iggers/Albert Müller: ... oder wir entwickeln uns weiter: ein Gespräch zwischen Georg G. Iggers und Albert Müller, in: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 13:3 (2002), pp. 135–144, here pp. 135f.
- 30 Compare Polat Safi: *An Interview with Prof. Georg G. Iggers: Every history can only present a partial reconstruction of the past*, in: *Kilavuz* 52 (2014), pp. 36–49, here p. 38.
- 31 *Leopold von Ranke (ed.): The Theory and Practice of History* (edited with an introduction by Georg G. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke/new translations by Wilma A. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke), Indianapolis 1973.

within the historical being. In addition, the editors wanted to show that it was false to exclusively consider Ranke as a traditionalist historian focused on the establishment of individual facts without any inclination to theoretical reflections—a picture that still dominates many histories of historical writing.³² Iggers devoted a volume to the founder of modern historiography in which some of the most characteristic features of Ranke's historical thought were analyzed.³³

In the middle of 1970s, Iggers directed his interest towards two issues—historical thought in the Age of Enlightenment, particularly in the German lands “but placing the German Enlightenment in the broader context of the European Enlightenment,”³⁴ as well as the main currents in contemporary historical writings. Iggers presented the results of his examination of the Enlightenment historiography and its relevance for the former emergence of “scientific historiography” in several articles and an edited volume entitled *Aufklärung und Geschichte. Studien zur deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert* (Enlightenment and History. Studies in German Eighteenth-Century Historiography, 1986).³⁵ The result of a workshop held at the Max Planck Institute for History in Göttingen in 1981, the edited volume emphasized the importance of the Enlightenment in the development of modern historiography. In this sense, it is typical of Iggers' judgement that historiography in the Age of Enlightenment—with its broad approach including cultural and social history, history of everyday life as well as “universal” and world history—had considerable advantages for the “scientific historiography” to come. With their focus on politics, the state and the nation, German historians in the nineteenth century were, according to Iggers, “much more provincial and one-sided than a good deal of historiography of the eighteenth century and of historical writing in Western Europe and America in nineteenth century.”³⁶

From the middle of the 1970s onwards, Iggers remained occupied with different directions in contemporary historical thought. Several the books resulted from these efforts, including *New Directions in European Historiography* (1975),³⁷ *International Handbook of Historical Studies. Contemporary Research and Theory* (1979), *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert. Ein kritischer Überblick im internationalen Zusammenhang* (1993) and an edited volume of theoretical papers by West German

32 Compare Iggers' Foreword and Introduction to the second edition of *The Theory and Practice of History*: Leopold von Ranke, London 2011, pp. ix–lii.

33 Georg G. Iggers/James M. Powell (eds.): *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, Syracuse 1990.

34 Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, p. 138.

35 Hans Erich Bödeker et al. (ed.): *Aufklärung und Geschichte. Studien zur deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 1986.

36 Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, p. 138.

37 Georg G. Iggers: *New Directions in European Historiography* (with a Contribution by Norman Baker), Middletown 1975.

historians entitled *The Social History of Politics: Critical Perspectives in West German Historical Writing Since 1945* (1986).³⁸ In *New Directions in European Historiography*, Iggers departs from “the crisis of the conventional conception of ‘scientific’ history” to analyze four lines of thought characteristic of European historiography in the 1960s and 1970s—the French *Annales* school, West German Bielefeld school, Marxist historiography (especially in Poland and its ties with French *annalistes*) and Marxist historiography in Great Britain (with a contribution by Norman Baker). Highly appraised in professional circles, the book was soon translated into German, Italian, Danish, Greek, Japanese and Korean, bringing Iggers recognition as the leading historian of historiography.³⁹ At the same time, he edited (together with Harold T. Parker) the *International Handbook of Historical Studies. Contemporary Research and Theory*—the first of its kind to move beyond Western Europe and the United States to include chapters about historical writing in Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia.⁴⁰ Finally, conversation Iggers had with Leszek Kołakowski in 1990 stimulated the emergence of the book *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert. Ein kritischer Überblick im internationalen Zusammenhang* (1993, 1996).⁴¹ Dividing it into two segments, Iggers re-examined the legacy of “classical historicism” as well as the various forms of New History which had replaced it as a paradigm of historical studies from a critical standpoint. He paid special attention to the challenges historical writing faced in the last third of the twentieth century, analyzing in particular the widespread denial of the possibility of objectivity within historical knowledge. Iggers concluded his “critical overview in an international context” with a warning about the “persistence of nationalisms” and their influence on the research and writing of history. He also emphasized the rise of global and world history (immediately encouraged by the all-encompassing process of globalization) as the most significant feature of historiography at the beginning of the new millennium. Translated into numerous languages, Iggers’ *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert* has acquired global renown as one of the major surveys of modern historical thought; it is probably his most-read work.⁴²

38 Georg G. Iggers (ed.): *The Social History of Politics: Critical Perspectives in West German Historical Writing Since 1945*, London/New York 1986.

39 Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, p. 138. Compare Leonard Krieger: Georg G. Iggers: *New Directions in European Historiography*, in: *The American Historical Review* 81:4 (1976), p. 851.

40 Georg G. Iggers/Harold T. Parker (eds.): *International Handbook of Historical Studies. Contemporary Research and Theory*, Westport 1979.

41 Georg G. Iggers: *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert. Ein kritischer Überblick im internationalen Zusammenhang*, Göttingen 1993.

42 Except two English translations (*Historiography in the Twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*, Hanover/London 1997, 2005) and new expanded German edition (*Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert. Ein kritischer Überblick im internationalen Zusammenhang*, Göttingen 2007) the book was also translated in various

Unlike many left-wing intellectuals of European origin, Iggers was not a Marxist nor did he accept a Marxist interpretation of history. He deemed it “speculative and schematic” and that its economic determinism neglected other conditions of social development, first and foremost the role of culture:

Even before I knew of cultural Marxism, I held that cultural factors played an important role in the shaping of societies. I also felt that the definitions of class, even by so-called Western Marxists like Lukács and E. P. Thompson, were too simplistic and neglected the impact of religion and ethnicity as well as of traditional conceptions of status, gender, and morality in society. And, of course, the Leninist formulation of Marxism with its authoritarian and terroristic aspects was totally abhorrent to me.⁴³

Iggers’ very critical attitude towards Marxism and its effort to determine the “objective laws of human history” did not however keep him from accepting the positive aspects of the Marxist theory of society. First and foremost, Marxist critiques of existing economic, social and cultural relations within capitalist and bourgeois society emphasized alternative perspectives as well as the possibility of establishing more humane social relationships. Iggers considered these two concepts in particular—a humanistic critique of modern society and the demand for the emancipation of human beings from the ‘alienation’ inherent to capitalist society—to be Marx’s most valuable theoretical contributions.⁴⁴

Since Karl Marx authored the most encompassing analysis of the capitalist economy and the bourgeois society resulting from it, Iggers’ considered him the most important thinker of the nineteenth century. Marxism, with its critique of the exploitation inherent to capitalism and the creation of possibilities for social change, represented for Iggers (similar to many left-wing intellectuals), “an important intellectual tradition that is still alive and useful in contemporary society.”⁴⁵ Differentiating between dogmatic Marxist ideology, the obligatory scholarly method in the former USSR and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe after the Second World War, on the one hand, and the humanistic motives of Marx’s thought expressed in his critique of capitalist society, on the other hand, Iggers emphasized strong and fruitful influence of Marxism on the historiography in Western Europe.

European languages (including Icelandic and Serbian) as well as Turkish, Japanese, Chinese and Korean.

43 Compare Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, p. 124.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

45 Yongmei Gong: *Historians Should not only Bend over Old Books: an Interview with Professor Georg G. Iggers*, in: *Historiografias* 5 (2013), pp. 94–106, here p. 102.

Prominent champions of historical writing such as the British Marxist historians (Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton, Edward P. Thompson, Georges Rudé) and French historians of the French Revolution (from Albert Mathiez and Georges Lefebvre to Albert Soboul and Michel Vovelle) were directly influenced by a non-dogmatic reading of Marx's work. Marxism had also contributed to the theoretical constitution of major directions in contemporary historical thought such as New Cultural History, gender history and microhistory. Finally, unlike most Western historians, Iggers took not only the limitations of Marxist historiography in Eastern Europe into consideration, but also its valuable (and often neglected) achievements, emphasizing, first and foremost, the results of the historiography inspired by a non-dogmatic understanding of Marxism among prominent historians in Poland, Hungary and East Germany.

Due to his familiarity with the East German historiography, Iggers edited a volume in the late 1980s, authored mostly by the younger generation of East German historians who practiced a kind of social history based on Marxist theoretical grounds. It was published in English (and in German too) only after the fall of communism under the title *Marxist Historiography in Transformation. East German Social History in the 1980s*.⁴⁶ In this critical appraisal of East German historiography, Iggers pointed out its limitations as well as its important methodological achievements, such as the merging of social history with economic history and ethnology.⁴⁷ However, the methodological innovation of the historians represented in the book (Jürgen Kuczynski, Hartmut Zwahr, Helga Schulz and Jan Peters, among others) was an exception to the *mainstream* of East German historiography, which remained confined to prescribed schemes of dogmatic Marxism. Besides a negative review by West German historian Alexander Fischer, who was (unpleasantly) "surprised that 'North American historians' are still able to see anything worthy in a historiography that was itself identified a long time ago as one of the main defenders of totalitarian system,"⁴⁸ the volume was for the most part well received in academic circles as an important contribution to the history of historiography in East Germany.⁴⁹

46 Georg G. Iggers (ed.): *Marxist Historiography in Transformation. East German Social History in the 1980s*, New York 1991. Compare the German edition Georg G. Iggers (ed.): *Ein anderer historischer Blick. Beispiele ostdeutscher Sozialgeschichte*, Frankfurt am Main 1991.

47 Compare Georg G. Iggers/Albert Müller: ... oder wir entwickeln uns weiter: ein Gespräch zwischen Georg G. Iggers und Albert Müller, p. 140.

48 Alexander Fischer: Georg G. Iggers (ed.): *Marxist Historiography in Transformation. East German Social History in the 1980s*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 260:1 (1995), p. 131.

49 Compare Eve Rosenhaft: Georg G. Iggers (ed.): *Marxist Historiography in Transformation. East German Social History in the 1980s*, in: *Labour History Review* 62:1 (1997), p. 75. The legacy of Marxist historiography in the former East Germany is dealt with by Stefan Berger: *GDR Historiography after the End of the GDR: Debates, Renewals, and the Ques-*

Iggers also edited *Marxismus und Geschichtswissenschaft heute* (1996), which was devoted to the legacy of Marxism in the contemporary historiography,⁵⁰ as well as a special thematic issue (with Konrad Jarausch, Matthias Middell and Martin Sabrow) of *Historische Zeitschrift* on *Die DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft als Forschungsproblem* (1998).⁵¹ Fischer's general rejection of the entirety of the East German historiography as pure ideology gave impetus to a critical appraisal of historical writing in the former German Democratic Republic. Trying "to spark understanding of the deeper contradictions of East German historical studies on the basis of new sources and innovative approaches,"⁵² this comprehensive volume analyzed four important series of questions concerning the conception of scholarship on the historiography in the East Germany, the development of East German historiography, its "linguistic styles and forms of communication," and the peculiarities of its research subjects and methodological approaches. Finally, in the recently published *Marxist Historiographies. A Global Perspective* (2016)—edited with Q. Edward Wang, an American historian—Iggers tried to show, depending on their specific political and cultural context, the different ways Marxism influenced the historiography and its legacy in contemporary historical thought.⁵³ In response to the fall of the communism in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990/91, Marxism was discredited as a theoretical approach in the last three decades while, simultaneously, the Marxist theory of class and class struggle was no longer appropriate as a model for the interpretation of historical development. In this sense, the book presents a kind of recapitulation of Marxism's contribution to the historiography, the focus of which was not limited to European historiographies, but has a global approach.

In the early 1990s, Iggers became deeply interested in the implications of postmodern thought on historical writing as well as the overcoming of Eurocentric perspective in the history of historiography by means of some kind of transnational and global approach. Iggers devoted several polemical articles examining the particularities of the postmodern conception of history, in which the denial of the possibility of objective historical knowledge played a central role.⁵⁴ In his attempt to demonstrate

tion of What Remains?, in: Nick Hodgin/Caroline Pearce: *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989*, New York 2011, pp. 266–285.

50 Georg G. Iggers (ed.): *Marxismus und Geschichtswissenschaft heute*, Velten 1996.

51 Georg G. Iggers et al. (ed.): *Die DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft als Forschungsproblem*, München 1998.

52 Georg G. Iggers/Konrad H. Jarausch: Vorwort, in: Georg G. Iggers et al. (ed.): *Die DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft als Forschungsproblem*, pp. vii–viii.

53 Q. Edward Wang/Georg G. Iggers (eds.): *Marxist Historiographies. A Global Perspective*, London 2016.

54 See Iggers' articles devoted to this subject: *Zur 'Linguistischen Wende' im Geschichtsdanken und in der Geschichtsschreibung*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 21:4 (1995), pp. 557–570; *Historiography and the Challenge of Postmodernism*, in: Bo Stråth/Nina Witoszek

the insubstantiality of the postmodern critique of historical writing, Iggers directed his attention—along with thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida, philosophers who laid the groundwork for poststructuralist and postmodern thought—to Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit, the most prominent proponents of the postmodern theory of history. Denying the possibility of history as a scholarly discipline and pointing out its epistemological limitations, resulting from the fact that historians are not able to access the past directly but only narratives about it, White and Ankersmit (along with many other authors) emphasized the literary character of historiography, understanding it as “verbal fictions” without any reference to truth and objectivity. As a form of literature, historical narratives could not be judged from a scholarly perspective—only from an aesthetic one. Both thinkers thus refute the objectivity of historical narratives, not only because of the fictitious elements they contain, but primarily because their purpose was to legitimate power relationships and specific ideological goals in the societies in which they act.⁵⁵

Iggers took a moderate line between the radical denial of the possibility of objective historical knowledge and the ‘noble dream’ of value-free and completely objective historical knowledge. Although he did not contest the links between historiography and literature, he underlined that historiography was able to establish objective knowledge of the past despite its narrative form. Accepting certain elements of fiction in historical narratives, Iggers drew the line between relatively objective scholarly historiography and, more or less fictitious, literary narratives. He thus considered White’s identification of historiography as literature to be completely unacceptable. Similarly, Iggers argued that—even if it was true that the experience of cultures in the past could not be understood in its entirety—it is nonetheless possible to approach it through scholarly methods. Accepting the idea that history was not a hard science and that it was impossible to separate value-based personal convictions (*Weltanschauungen*), interests, political goals from scholarly rationality in research, Iggers believed that it was even more important for historiography to cultivate the awareness of its own ideological basis in order to check its conceptions in reality. Only in this way, Iggers argued, was it “possible, even partially, to transcend its ideological limitations.”⁵⁶ In

(eds.): *The Postmodern Challenge: Perspectives East and West*, Amsterdam 1999, pp. 281–301; *Geschichtstheorie zwischen postmoderner Philosophie und geschichtswissenschaftlicher Praxis*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26:2 (2000), pp. 335–346; *Historiographie zwischen Forschung und Dichtung. Gedanken über Hayden Whites Behandlung der Historiographie*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27:2 (2001), pp. 327–340.

55 On Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit, see Herman Paul: *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination*, Cambridge 2011; Callum G. Brown: *Postmodernism for Historians*, London 2005.

56 Franz Fillafer im Gespräch mit Georg Iggers, p. 97.

this sense, it is his belief that “perhaps it would be more honest to admit that no history can escape the limitations of ideological perspective, but that every perspective, because it is a perspective, also raises new questions which permit new insights into historical reality.”⁵⁷ Finally, considering that the “pluralism of research strategies” was a distinctive characteristic of contemporary historiography, Iggers emphasized that they were not “creations of poetical imagination” (as was argued by proponents of the postmodern conception of history) and insisted that “they should be conducted by standards of rational inquiry allowing re-examination of their validity.”⁵⁸ Although he did not dispute the existence of fictitious and/or ideological elements in historical narratives, Iggers (similarly to Jörn Rüsen) believed that historiography, following the principles of methodological rationalism, met the standards of scholarly discourse and provided a relatively reliable, verifiable and objective knowledge of past.⁵⁹ In other words, with its truthfulness, historiography presents a distinctive form of knowledge that is different from rival discourses about the past. Hence, in spite of its inherent epistemic limitations, Iggers drew a clear line between “scientific historiography” and other historical narratives.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Iggers’ scholarly interest was drawn to the influence of processes of political, economic and cultural globalization on historical thinking, which resulted in a further volume, edited with Q. Edward Wang, *Turning Points in Historiography. A Cross Cultural Perspective* (2002).⁶⁰ The leitmotif of the volume is the conviction that the approach that prevailed (and still prevails) in the research on the history of historiography, limited regularly to the development of (Western) European historical thought, was completely insufficient. Quite the contrary, it is also necessary to include non-European traditions of historical writing in the research on the history of historiography. *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (2008)⁶¹ is one result of this effort to overcome the usual eurocentrism. Co-authored with Q. Edward Wang and Indian historian Supriya Mukherjee, this volume is characterized by a unique approach to the history of historiography in so far as it situates the development of modern historical thinking in a global context. According to Stefan Berger, one of the leading specialists in the history of historiography, it is “the

57 Georg G. Iggers: Comments on F. R. Ankersmit’s Paper, *Historicism: An Attempt at Synthesis*, in: *History and Theory* 34:3 (1995), pp. 162–167, here p. 167.

58 Georg G. Iggers: *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert. Ein kritischer Überblick im internationalen Zusammenhang*, Göttingen 2007, p. 144.

59 Compare Jörn Rüsen: *Evidence and Meaning. A Theory of Historical Studies*, New York/Oxford 2013.

60 Q. Edward Wang/Georg G. Iggers: *Turning Points in Historiography. A Cross Cultural Perspective*, New York 2002.

61 Georg G. Iggers/Q. Edward Wang/Supriya Mukherjee: *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, London 2008.

first attempt to provide a global synthesis of the history of historiography from the late eighteenth century to the present.”⁶² In addition to its global approach, which encompasses the development of historical thought in Europe, the Islamic Middle East, India, China, and Japan, the distinctive feature of this outstanding synthesis is its focus on the process of modernization. The authors attempted not only to present the making and development of scholarly historiography as part of the process of modernization, but also to point out that it was resisted by powerful indigenous traditions of historical writing in non-European cultures. The authors paid special attention to the interrelatedness of historiography and modern ideologies, particularly nationalism, which substantially influenced the physiognomy of modern historiography at a global level. The revised German edition was published under the title *Geschichtskulturen. Weltgeschichte der Historiografie von 1750 bis heute* (2013).⁶³

Insight into the main subjects of Iggers’ scholarly work (emphasized in a lapidary manner) reveals the distinctive methodology that characterizes his research on modern historiography and makes him different among older as well as contemporary historians of historiography.⁶⁴ In his own words, his approach to the study of historiography can mostly be compared to the relationship between literary critics and literature: “I am interested in fundamental theoretical assumptions of historical works and their transposition in the historiography. I begin always with asking a question and with a concept which is always changing during my examination of that subject matter.”⁶⁵ Since writing of history for Iggers was “inseparable from the political and intellectual context in which it is pursued,”⁶⁶ the focus in his approach to the history of historiography was on establishing the scholarly paradigms (understood as the leading theoretical and methodological concepts), the institutional frameworks of historical research, and last but not the least, the analysis of the cultural, social and political contexts in which historiography constitutes itself and performs its primarily cultural function. Iggers’ methodological approach can therefore not be reduced to traditional history of ideas, but represents a kind of intellectual history that analyzes and evaluates certain historiographical concepts within the broadest social *milieu*.⁶⁷ Except for the social

62 Stefan Berger: *A Global History of Modern Historiography*. By Georg G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang with the assistance of Supriya Mukherjee, in: *German History* 27:1 (2009), pp. 174–176, here 174.

63 Georg G. Iggers/Q. Edward Wang/Supriya Mukherjee: *Geschichtskulturen. Weltgeschichte der Historiografie von 1750 bis heute*, Göttingen 2013. It was followed by a new English edition in 2016.

64 On different approaches to the history of historiography, see Horst Walter Blanke: *Towards a New Theory-Based History of Historiography*, in: Peter Koslowski (ed.): *The Discovery of Historicity in German Idealism and Historism*, Berlin 2005, pp. 223–267.

65 Franz Fillafer im Gespräch mit Georg Iggers, p. 85.

66 Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, p. 122.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

conditions of the production of historical knowledge, he pays particular attention to the relationship between historiography and other social sciences and humanities, its social function and the influence of various ideologies on the research and writing of history. The significance of Iggers' approach can only truly be understood when taking into account both the widespread scepticism regarding the possibility of objective historical knowledge and the—more or less visible but constant—attempts to transform historiography into *ancilla politicae*, a suitable tool for the legitimization of political goals. The history of historiography (alongside the theory of history) as a distinctive form of disciplinary self-reflection therefore represents the necessary precondition for the theoretical and methodological advancement of historical scholarship. This is made possible by strengthening its rational core and the awareness of its possibilities, functions and inherent limitations in contemporary societies. The scholarly work of the late Professor Iggers should be appraised exactly in this sense—in view of the fact that his peculiar approach to the history of historiography a new impetus to the theoretical and methodological development of the discipline.

Iggers understood historiography and its history as an ongoing dialogue between different epochs and cultures. As a second-generation émigré historian in the United States,⁶⁸ Iggers played an intermediary role between different historiographical traditions—American, European and the historical cultures of the Far East. Especially important was Iggers' role in the “transatlantic historiographical dialogue” established after the end of the Second World War, which, according to Hans-Ulrich Wehler, heavily influenced the postwar generation of West German historians.⁶⁹ As a leading researcher of the history of modern historiography, Iggers managed to demonstrate that the dialogue between different historiographical traditions was not only possible but also necessary.

Finally, it would be quite appropriate to ask oneself which set of values Iggers was committed to, not only as a historian of historiography, but also as an engaged intellectual.⁷⁰ The answer to this question can be summarized in several basic ideas. First, he shared a belief in the possibility of the continuous progress of humanity grounded in human reason. In contrast to the critique of Enlightenment coming from the left

68 On the first generation of émigré historians who fled Nazi Germany and found refuge in the USA, see Hartmut Lehman/James J. Sheehan (eds.): *An Interrupted Past. German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933*, Washington DC/Cambridge 1991; Axel Fair-Schulz/Mario Kessler (eds.): *German Scholars in Exile. New Studies in Intellectual History*, Lanham 2011.

69 Andreas Daum: *German Historiography in Transatlantic Perspective: Interview with Hans-Ulrich Wehler*, in: *GHI Bulletin* 26 (2000), at: www.ghi-dc.org/publication/bulletin-26-spring-2000 (accessed on 29 October 2021).

70 See Stefan Berger: *Historical Writing and Civic Engagement*, in: Stefan Berger (ed.): *The Engaged Historian. Perspectives on the Intersections of Politics, Activism and the Historical Profession*, New York/Oxford 2019, pp. 17f.

in the second half of the twentieth century (Horkheimer, Adorno, Foucault) or the understanding of the Enlightenment project as purely the mastery over the world and human beings through science and technology, Iggers believed in its emancipatory potentials. Therefore, the “dialectic of the Enlightenment”—Horkheimer and Adorno—that insisted on arguing that the Enlightenment contained within itself the elements of its own self-destruction, was alien to Iggers. Quite the opposite, the leitmotif in his understanding of the Enlightenment was the fact that its humanistic potential should not be abandoned because (or in spite) of its internal contradictions. Deeply rooted in the Enlightenment conception of human progress (although it is neither linear nor guaranteed), Iggers was convinced of the idea of human freedom and equality, finding the essence of the Enlightenment in the “emancipation of the human being from tyranny, ignorance, and misfortune.” In spite of the large-scale violence and mass destruction of the “short twentieth century,” Iggers still shared a moderate optimism arguing that “limited advances are possible in many fields.”⁷¹ From this standpoint, he appraised international relations in the contemporary world as well as its future perspectives. Upset about the direction of political development in the United States after the 9/11 attacks in 2001, Iggers believed that contemporary global terrorism and its hostility to the United States and Western European countries should be contextualized within the end of the unipolar world and the rising dominance of globalised capitalism. At the same time, he critically appraised the existing political order of the United States as undemocratic and dominated by the interests of big business and various pressure groups.⁷² In the age of growing suspicion towards modernity (conceived as yet another *grand narrative*), Georg G. Iggers consistently insisted on the fundamental values of the Enlightenment—freedom, equality and human rights. Firmly attached to these values, Iggers, through his social activism, confirmed the need for a struggle for a fairer and more humane society. Considering that human rights and liberties were not given forever, but always endangered by new forms of manipulation and subjugation, this was the *credo* Professor Iggers followed, as a historian and engaged intellectual, until the very end of his long and fruitful life.

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71 Franz Fillafer im Gespräch mit Georg Iggers, p. 92. Compare Wilma A. Iggers/Georg G. Iggers: *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, pp. 203f.

72 Franz Fillafer im Gespräch mit Georg Iggers, p. 87.