What is Social History Now?

Paul Cartledge

I have at the outset two confessions, or at any rate statements, to make. First, I am not myself a social historian, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I would not so label myself. Second, I am an ancient historian, specifically a historian of ancient Greece, and therefore belong to a happy breed not exactly notorious for its devotion to critically reflexive historiography. There are, however, exceptions; indeed, as one of them, the late Sir Moses Finley, was fond of saying, there are always exceptions.¹

Finley was in a sense an exile, to England from the McCarthyite US; and it is almost a commonplace to observe that many of the greatest historians of Greece and Rome – Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius and so on – were themselves also political exiles.² There seems to be some significant causal connection, in other words, between exile and the writing of history, and more particularly the writing of reflexive as well as merely reflective history and historiography. Finley’s own practice of historiography, anyhow, was certainly influenced directly by that of another British-domiciled exile historian of the ancient world, Arnaldo Momigliano, a victim of fascist Italy’s racial laws. This is how Finley began a 1968 essay on Momigliano, in characteristically polemical style:

It is, I believe, a safe prediction that Professor Momigliano will never write a book entitled ‘What is History?’

The implication of that remark, presumably, was that Momigliano should never want to write a book so titled. In any case, the implied reference to E.H. Carr’s Trevelyan lectures and published book was clear enough.³
Carr was my starting point for obvious contingently contextual reasons. I continued with Finley not only because he was an ancient historian but also because he did more than any other ancient historian during the period covered by this commemorative lecture series to integrate his (and my) special field with that of history in general. For Finley, ancient history was, first and foremost, history and historiography; only secondarily was it ancient; and it just so happened, as it were, that he specialized in the history and historiography of the ancient, that is Graeco-Roman, world, and more particularly the world of the Greeks. I try to see things that way too.

I

So what is or should be social history now? I pass quickly over the pronouncement of a former British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, who opined that there was not and never had been any such thing as 'society'. Even to label her a methodological individualist would be to give her too much credit. I leave on one side, too, the equally dubious, if formally cautiously expressed, remark of G.M. Trevelyan in the preface to his English Social History, to the effect that social history was history with the politics left out. This would be a curious enough statement in any context, but it is utterly absurd in the case of ancient Greece, where politics and the political prevailed to such an extent that what we call the 'constitution' of an ancient Greek city could be referred to without strain as its very 'life' and 'soul'. This is not a thought that would spring unbidden to many lips now when talking about the British constitution, perhaps. Only slightly better, conversely, is Trevelyan's too generously permissive equation of the scope of social history with 'the daily life of the inhabitants of the land in past ages'.

I turn instead to a witness who is every bit as distinguished and provocative as Finley, and yet another sort of exile, Eric Hobsbawm. But his testimony is not altogether encouraging, by any means. In a 1972 paper rather ominously entitled 'From Social History to the History of Society', he noted: 'A survey of social history in the past seems to show that the best practitioners have always felt uncomfortable with the term itself.' He went on to advocate the shift that his title described, away from history of individual or discrete social phenomena to history of whole societies as integrated wholes. The mutations in the title of the journal originally founded in 1929 by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch as Annales d'histoire économique et sociale seem to bear out both this sense of unease with the term 'social history' and the move away from it: by 1972 it was called Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations; now it has become Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales - social sciences, no longer social history. A similar straining to escape from the supposedly too subjective implications of a humane discipline into the comfortably objective realm of science transpires in the latest supplement to the International Journal of Social History, entitled New Methods for Social History. This collection includes essays with titles such as 'Narrative as Data: Linguistic and Statistical Tools for the Quantitative Study of Historical Events' and 'The Logic of Qualitative Comparative Analysis', which to me carry more than just a whiff of the oxymoronic.

I turn next to Adrian Wilson's 1994 collection, Rethinking Social History. The sting of course was in the tale. One of its contributors, Keith Wrightson, observed, again somewhat discouragingly, that none of the more radical hopes of the 1960s (embodied also in Hobsbawm's piece of the early 1970s) had been realized. Instead of all historical writing becoming more sociological, more like a social science, if not actually a(nother) social science, what had in fact happened was that social history had turned into yet another specialized branch of history. The result of this balkanization, as Wrightson saw it, was an ever-decreasing impact of 'social' history on other branches or specialisms, the dominant instances of which remained high political history and economic history. That observation was endorsed by one reviewer of the collection, Sir Keith Thomas, who added a fascinating parenthesis, printed as such, which I quote in full (Times Literary Supplement (TLS) 14 October 1994):

(Curiously, it was the fear of just this kind of compartmentalization which led E.P. Thompson and the present writer, quite independently of each other, to decline to support the initial formation in the 1970s of the Social History Society. As we saw it, social history was not a branch of history, like postal history or furniture history; it was a way of doing any kind of history.)

Perhaps. However, surely it was a trifle naive of him to suppose that such a 'way' of doing any kind of history could be proposed or practised without any kind of explicit and coherent theoretical structure or support? As soon as one tries to turn history into something consciously reflexive, with a methodology as well as merely a method, it seems to me that one must go that extra theoretical mile.

However that may be, the once more than merely notional empire of social history is unquestionably striking back against its latterday would-be dismantlers or occupiers. As I was compiling this chapter, for instance,
the issue of the TLS for 21 September 2001 fell into my hands. Among the books advertised therein was a volume jointly written by Peter Burke and by Asa Briggs, entitled *A Social History of the Media*. According to the enthusiastic puff provided by Anthony Smith, ‘the work has the virtue of being almost an encyclopaedia’. Almost, perhaps, but yet this monograph is as nothing beside the true or at any rate *soli-disant* encyclopaedia reviewed near the beginning of the same TLS issue: Peter Stearns’s *Encyclopedia of European Social History from 1350–2000*, published in six volumes and 3150 pages.

Stearns very properly treat readers to a definition of social history, which he gives as ‘changes and continuities in the experience of ordinary people’. However, as was crisply observed by the distinguished American reviewer, Stearns’s encyclopaedic construction amounts in practice to an all-embracing sort of history of all kinds of people, a construction favoured by the fact (as Rabb sees it) that social history, however defined, is ‘much more amorphous, much less of a discipline’ than, say philosophy; and, he continues, although ‘the contributors may all regard themselves as social historians, ... it is often difficult to see what they have in common, let alone how they fit together, even within Stearns’s very broad conception of the field’.

So there it is — or some of it. At one pole, there are self-confessed social historians with their own journals — such as the *Journal of Social History*, the *International Review of Social History, Continuity and Change: A Journal of Social Structure, Law and Demography in Past Societies*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, and *Social History* (all UK); *Histoire Sociale/Social History* (Canada) — and now, for some of them, their own *Encyclopedia*. At the other pole, there are historians *tout court*, who believe there should be histories of whole societies or social groups (societal history?, sociological history?), or microhistory(ies) of one kind or another of social phenomena of various sorts, but not necessarily social history as such. In between fall those who believe that social history is a, but no more than a, way of doing any (other) kind of history. What is the way forward — insofar, that is, as progress may be considered a legitimate goal or ambition in historiography?

I propose to operate for most of the remainder of this chapter via the selective case-study approach, taking as my illustrations three recent or very recent examples of historical practice and/or historiographical theory: two American, one British, two more or less explicitly methodological in theory, the third crucially methodological in practice. None of these, perhaps, would qualify automatically as social history without further qualification. They are chosen rather because they illustrate the limit conditions that any candidate for that in principle honorific title should in my view properly meet. But first a brief look at the temporal dimension — for here, perhaps, a crack may possibly be opened up between the social historian, on the one hand, and the historical anthropologist, at least, on the other, if not also the historical sociologist.

II

Without time there is no history, but what sort of time is the time of history, and more specifically of social history? One particular distinction seems to me particularly relevant. This is not the distinction between cyclical and linear time, endlessly discussed both as an aspect of cultural or ethnographic history and as a technical problem of historiographical chronology. Nor is it the distinction between historical and mythical time — that is, the discovery both of the pastness of the past in the Renaissance (if not already in antiquity) and of the finiteness of reasonably accurate human memory, going no further back than three generations, or the generation of the grandfathers of one’s own contemporary adult informants. I mean rather the issue of periodic rhythm and change over time.

It has very recently been asserted by Tom Gallant, a historian-archaeologist of ancient Greece turned historian-ethnographer of modern Greece, that ‘social history marches to a different chronological drummer — different, that is, from ‘its sister disciplines of political and economic history [which] lend themselves to sequential narrative analysis’. As is often done in this connection, Gallant resorts for analogical illumination to the medium of photography, both moving and still: whereas the time of political and economic history is that of the sequential narrative frames of a movie, the time of social history is as he sees it ‘more like a series of snapshots’. Those of you who are fans of W.G. Sebald’s novels may well recall the blurred black-and-white images with which his texts are tantalizingly punctuated: surely there can be no more accurate means of recalling how it actually was (von Ranke’s *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*)? And yet the suspicion lingers that the photos he includes not only might not be representative images but might actually be fakes.

Apart from that difficulty with the photographic analogy, one might well question, I think, Gallant’s bracketing of economic with political history here, since long-run economic cycles are just as much processes as the demographic, familial and other social processes that he wishes to distinguish from them. But — though he does not actually cite him —
what Gallant's language inescapably calls to my mind is rather the "Annales" Fernand Braudel's famous, if famously controversial, distinction of the long, the medium-term and the short 'durée' – respectively (and somewhat artificially and crudely), the durations of social, economic and political phenomena (or in the case of the latter, as he presented them, mere epiphenomena).

This tripartite temporal model has been found widely helpful in some of the best recent historiographical practice, especially when dealing with pre-industrial, peasant societies, in which fundamental technical change in the basic agricultural toolkit and so man's impact on the environment (and vice versa) can indeed appear glacially slow and almost imperceptibly small at any one moment in time. However, as I shall hope to show in the course of discussing my three examples, the model is extremely unhelpful if it leads one to suppose that social history can be history only of the longue durée, and that the social historian or anyone else who professes any variety of social history or historiography must necessarily think in terms of millennia or at least centuries rather than decades or even years.

III

First, let us consider a seriously theoretical and explicitly methodological work by a classicist turned historical sociologist, W.G. Runciman. So serious is it, indeed, that it is called a 'treatise', A Treatise on Social Theory, and it occupies no fewer than three volumes, a total of 1170 pages in all. It has cogently been described by an acute critic as 'one of the most exotic — even flamboyant — intellectual projects of recent years.' For our purposes, it is the first two volumes that are of greatest direct relevance to the issues before us, though the six-page preface of the third and final volume does most helpfully summarize not only the contents but also the driving explanatory ambition of the project as a whole. Volume I is methodological. At length, Runciman opens by distinguishing what he labels 'reportage', 'explanation', 'description' and 'evaluation'. The third volume, subtitled Applied Social Theory, is actually in a way less exciting than it might sound, as the method is applied only to the — admittedly complex and important — case of twenty-century English society. Sandwiched between the first and the last volumes comes a second volume of what is labelled Substantive Social Theory.

Those who associate sociology irredeemably with esoteric jargon will have their worst fears — or hopes — confirmed by what Runciman self-consciously calls 'the one neologism in the whole treatise' (vol. III, p. xiii, n. 1), namely 'systacts': A word of impeccable Hellenic ancestry, as befits the classically trained author, this is coined to designate the 'clusters of roles' assumed by historical actors similarly located in a three-dimensional social space whose axes correspond to the three forms of power: the economic (hence, mode of production), the ideological (hence, mode of persuasion), and the political (hence, mode of coercion).

'The need for it', Runciman continues, 'arises because no existing sociological term, least of all "class", is at the same time specific in assigning the designated roles an ordinal ranking relative to other such clusters and neutral between the dimensions in which they are ranked.' Maybe so. Yet, notwithstanding the implication of Runciman's classically honed rhetoric, the terms 'power', 'mode of production', 'ideological' and even 'political' are all of them just as contestable as that of 'class', which term alone he places within scare quotes. One suspects that the author's allegiance to Weber in opposition to Marx may be making itself felt here either subconsciously or at least a little surreptitiously.

The same contestability applies, alas, to his distinction of 'reportage' and 'description', the main virtue of which, it seems to me, is that the terminology and intended reference are both made self-consciously explicit. But do they advance understanding, let alone explanation, of significant human social phenomena of the past? Further questions are prompted by Runciman's infrastructure of terminological classification. Do we agree that societies are to be defined as so many networks of power, that is, as sets of roles whose incumbents are competitors for access to, or control of, the means of production, persuasion and coercion rather than, say, as sets of competing classes, or statuses? Are we persuaded by the overarching argument which all his individual arguments are made to subserve, namely 'the idea that social evolution is analogous but not reducible to natural selection'? It is this grand narrative that fuels Runciman's ambition to formulate a comprehensive theory of society accounting for both the sources of diversity and the constraints on it which determine its evolution (by which is meant a succession of major social changes brought about as the unpredictable, cumulative consequence of minor mutations of practice). The proof is in the eating — and that, for us, means above all in Volume II, Substantive Social Theory.

This is a very rich pudding indeed. I pull out, in the space available, just a single plum, a significantly but by no means entirely ancient Greek one. On Runciman's initial catalysis of power into three dimensions with
respectively eight, eight and seven variants, there should be in principle and could well have been in practice some 450 possible ‘types’ of society to categorize and evaluate. In Runciman’s own actual practice, there are but a mere dozen or so – a severe Procrusteanism that leads to some unfortunate ‘lumping’: for conspicuous instance, the tyranny of Peisistratus in sixth-century BCE Athens (which by our modern standards was a fairly mild, even progressive dictatorship) is lumped together with the regimes of (among others) Asoka, the Carolingian empire, Henry the Navigator, and the Tudor monarchy, all alike being categorized and classified as ‘patrimonial states’. From that one would never have guessed, probably, that the Peisistratid regime had given way, or even – on some modern accounts – given rise, and by not so very many subsequent steps either, to the world’s first proto-democracy, of the distinctly ancient Greek, direct variety, of course.28

IV

By the first word of its subtitle, ‘war’, my second illustration, Manus Midlarsky’s The Evolution of Inequality: War, State Survival, and Democracy in Comparative Perspective (1999), announces a departure from the preoccupations of Runciman. Runciman had of course mentioned war, but had dismissed it as a relevant causal variable from his evolutionary schema on the grounds that the outcome of wars ‘is so often a matter of chance’. This was an odd decision in terms of Runciman’s own version of his evolutionary schema, since he understands social evolution as being dependent on social selection by competition, and war is nothing if not competitive. Besides, this exclusion of ‘accidents of fortune’ leaves a gap to be filled, one that is especially glaring to the eyes of a historian of ancient Greece.29 Hence my attraction, initially, to the very recent work of Midlarsky. A further initial attraction was that it has the grand ambition to explain or at least illuminate nothing less than (to quote from the blurb) ‘the ultimate genesis of democracy’ by way of analyses of: various forms of political violence including war and revolution; the origins and dissolution of states; and the sources of cooperation between states. Some agenda.

It is therefore the more disappointing to have to report that the author’s practice falls a long way short of my hopes, at least where I am in any position to judge professionally the results. The latter in important cases seem to me either banal or demonstrably based on empirically false foundations. As an illustration of banality, I cite Midlarsky’s finding of a probability of covariation between an increasing tendency to military violence in Eastern Europe and the threat to democracy there. He accounts for that finding by the greater likelihood of ‘political intervention by military personnel accustomed to autocratic methods of resolving political disputes’ (p. 221).30 Suppose, however, one were to apply that assumed theorem to ancient Greece, and suppose one were to have in mind when so doing the model of military-political evolution sketched by the greatest historical sociologist of antiquity, that ‘giant thinker’ (as Marx accurately called him) Aristotle. According to him, political intervention by military personnel had had precisely the opposite effect of that identified by Midlarsky. It had generated the earliest form of democracy in Greece, that is, hoplite or heavy-armed infantry democracy in which preponderant political power had rested with the wealthier stratum of citizens who had formed the city’s principal fighting arm, the hoplite militia. In other words, elementary comparativism would have revealed to Midlarsky that it is the nature of the army, and especially of its command structure, and the nature of the warfare practised, and the contingent context within which the political and the military factors interact, that count – those are the crucial variables in influencing or determining the political implications of military involvement in specific social situations.

I would not, however, want to end my brief discussion of The Evolution of Inequality on an entirely sour and disillusioned note. The long chapter entitled ‘Decline and Fall of Empires and States’, which manages to encompass Byzantium, China, the Maya, Israel, Judah, the Ammonites and ancient Egypt as well as ancient Rome, and the pages specifically on the rise of democracy at Athens in a chapter entitled ‘Sources of Democracy’ (pp. 186–9), represent an intelligent combination of reading in the best modern historical and archaeological scholarship with the application of modest middle-range theorization of the most crucial variables, namely, population density, land distribution and ideas about political entitlement (which, however, Midlarsky perhaps rather rashly and ethnocentrically calls ‘rights’).

V

Midlarsky dedicated his book in part to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust. My third and final illustration, I suppose the one that might most conventionally be called ‘social history now’, concerns precisely the causation and motivation of that catastrophe. It is the debate between two American historians, Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen, over the behaviour of some supposedly ‘ordinary’ Germans
and more particularly those composing Reserve Police Battalion 101 in Poland in 1942. Both Browning and Goldhagen agree that those involved were in some sense ‘willing’ executioners, but they disagree, radically, as to why they acted as such and how they were motivated so to act.

This dispute is, I think, a modern classic of social historiography for at least five reasons. First, because here are Stuhr’s so-called ‘ordinary’ people at work and at issue — with a vengeance; for, although one might well want in other contexts to question how ‘ordinary’ are people who choose to serve as policemen, the authoritarian nature of the Nazi state, empire and culture seems to me sufficient to justify the claim that there was nothing manifestly extraordinary in this type of social conformity. Second, the dispute exemplifies one form of social history, microhistory, which is concerned to use the experience of ordinary individuals or groups of individuals as a way into understanding broader social mentalities, relationships and processes. Third, it examines German anti-semitism and the role that played in the Holocaust via one particular case history that is judged, plausibly, to have more than merely individual, or local, reference and significance. Fourth, it is also methodologically important, as a study of causation and explanation in history: why did these particular ‘ordinary’ Germans behave as they individually and collectively did? Fifth, it has already aroused great historiographical interest, not least from the eloquent protagonists, precisely as a case study or test case in historical interpretation.

The arguments on both sides have been exceptionally well-rehearsed, and those of Goldhagen have sometimes found adherents in what might have been considered more neutrally to be unlikely quarters. Briefly, Goldhagen argues that what made the difference to the behaviour of this and the other thirty-seven such Battalions at work, only one-third of whose members were party members and only one-thirtieth in the SS, was a form of anti-semitism that he classifies as ‘eliminational’; this cultural attitude, he contends, had become so deeply ingrained over the generations that by the time of the Nazi supremacy it was a fact of ordinary German nature. This is a form of national-social — or perhaps natural-social — history, I suppose. Browning, in sharp contrast, finds that Goldhagen’s heno-causal, all-purpose pseudo-explanation explains too much, and therefore nothing. It elides above all, he believes, the situational factors conspiring to manipulate the behaviour of these particular Germans in the specific circumstances of their operation in occupied Poland in 1942 — behaviour that was not in any case universal and uniform: between 10 and 20 per cent of Battalion members availed themselves of the opportunity not to become executioners.

The balance of authoritative weight of interpretation in this dispute seems to me, an obvious outsider, to tilt very firmly in favour of the Browning version and against that of Goldhagen. I would add only that my main reason for choosing this final illustration of social history, apart from its intrinsic methodological and cultural significance, both then and now, is that I agree with Ludmilla Jordanova on the necessity for historians to engage in and with what has been called, with some imprecision admittedly, ‘public’ history.

VI

I conclude with some tentative overall answers to the question posed by my title. We should, I believe, resist all hegemonic disciplinary claims: claims such as that social history is the ‘key’ sort of history, or even is history, full stop. The bubble of social history, in those claimed senses, has surely (been) burst since the 1960s and 1970s and is unlikely to be inflated again. But can we do without the category ‘social history’ altogether, on the grounds that the term is either confusing or vacuous or both? Or on the seemingly more sophisticated and reflexive grounds that, since social categories and concepts are constructed, all history — and the only proper history — is the history of ideas?

Equally surely, we cannot. Pan-representationalism, as I have heard the latter approach described, is as vicious as pan-social-realist historiography. Explicit and reflexive conceptualization, on the other hand, as practised pre-eminently by Runciman, is the reverse of vicious. The term ‘social history’ may require prior definition, or even stipulation, but that is both possible and, arguably, necessary. For, as Richard Evans has recently reaffirmed, we continue to need social history as a kind of history or sub-species of history, specifically as a history of class, of oppression and exploitation, or — if class, oppression and exploitation are found analytically or morally objectionable terms — at all events of poverty.

The poor, Jesus allegedly said, we have always with us. For Aristotle, unquestionably the greatest sociological thinker of antiquity, it was the polar antithesis of rich and poor (citizens) that best explained what he took to be the most important facet of human existence, namely politics and the political within the framework of the Greek polis — a framework that includes what we today would classify as society and the social. Surely Jesus and Aristotle cannot both be wrong? Of course, I must at once add, the ancient Greek polis was but a limited range of expression of human social coexistence or solidarity. Likewise, ‘class’ in ancient Greece cannot mean what it might or should in any contemporary
Western, post-industrial society, for example. But it is hard, at any rate, to deny that these remain real issues, historiographically as well as historically speaking. I rest my case.

Notes and references


3. Finley, Use and Abuse, p. 75; the prediction was technically correct. Carr, however, was not cited by name here – or indeed anywhere else in Finley’s voluminous writings as far as I know, despite the fact that Finley, who had been at Jesus College, Cambridge, since 1955, must have at least known of Carr and very likely attended the Trevelyan lectures in 1961. His silence was presumably therefore a measure of his disagreement – and probably also disrespect. Finley was never a Marxist, being at best or most an anti-anti-Marxist, let alone a communist. Carr’s Marxist style of historiography, coupled with what must have appeared to be his sacrificing at the altar of the Soviet monolith, would have been found rebarbative by Finley.

4. I would add that, since Carr seems to have had no formal training as a historian, I suspect his reading as a classics undergraduate at Trinity College, Cambridge, of Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius and Tacitus (all cited, briefly, in E.H. Carr, What is History? (1961; 2nd edn ed. R.W. Davies, 1986; reprinted with new Afterword by R.J. Evans)) (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) may have been more influential on his historiographical outlook than he might have cared to admit. See especially the fascinating anecdote mentioned by R.J. Evans, new ‘Introduction’ to Carr, What is History?, p. xi, about Herodotus’ attitude to the Persian War being shaped by his personal experience of the Peloponnesian War (cf. ibid., p. 7); also ibid., p. xviii: a private letter emphasizing that the function of the historian is to explain; with Carr What is History?, p. 81, quoting Herodotus’ Preface (contrast the view of G. Hawthorn, Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) that ‘cumulative and convergent certainty, not just about the workings of the world, but also about its particular contents, which we take to mark knowledge, will always elude the social sciences’, which Hawthorn takes to include history; therefore, understanding not explanation must in his view be the best we can hope for). Carr’s belief in historical ‘regularities’ (Evans in What is History?, pp. xii, xviii) could have come ultimately from Thucydides 1.22.4; likewise, Carr’s contempt for history of the masses until at earliest the mid-nineteenth century (R.J. Evans, In Defence of History (London: Granta, 1997, 2001 with new Afterword), pp. 164-5; cf. below, note 31) would have been shared by his classical forerunners.


7. I mention, but shall not discuss, the congruent opinion, expressed recently by the classically inspired literary critic Roberto Calasso, Literature and the Gods (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 173, in specific relation to the rise of totalitarian regimes, that ‘the very notion of society has appropriated an unprecedented power, one previously the preserve of religion’. The ‘daily life’ genre runs the risk of being merely antiquarian; but that it need not be so is shown by, for example, R. Garland, Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998).
8. Quotation from E.J. Hobsbawm, 'From Social History to the History of Society' (1972), reprinted in his On History (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), chapter 6, at p. 99. The desired goal, as he phrases it, should be 'the formulation of the nature and structure of societies and the mechanisms of their historic transformations or stabilizations' (ibid., p. 109).


L.J. Griffin & M. van der Linden 'Introduction'
L. Isaac, L. Christiansen, J. Miller & T. Nickel 'Temporally recursive regression and social historical inquiry: an example of cross-movement militancy spillover'
H.J. McInerney 'Using event history analysis in historical research: with illustrations from a study of the passage of women's protective legislation'
G. Deane, E.M. Beck & S.E. Tolnay 'Incorporating space into social histories: how spatial processes operate and how we observe them'
R. Franzosi 'Narrative as data: linguistic and statistical tools for the quantitative study of historical events'
C.G. Rivington 'The logic of qualitative comparative analysis'
C. Wetherell 'Historical social network analysis'
L.J. Griffin & R.R. Kostal 'Historical inference and event-structure analysis'.

Phraseology within the articles can be as verbally rebarbative and methodologically dubious as the articles' titles; for example, McInerney's 'The level of over-time aggregation in event history data ... ideally should be determined by the nature of the research question or by the time frame in which the event of interest occurs' (p. 35).


12. I suppose the reductio ad absurdum of the parceling or compartmentalization of History was the monthly magazine History Today's 'What is [social, and so on] History Today?' series of articles, edited as a book under that title by Juliet Gardiner, What is History Today? (London: Macmillan, 1988); see Evans, In Defence of History, pp. 170, 351. The contribution on social history, coincidentally by an ancient historian, was predictably jejune.


15. That may be an accurate and fair judgement in this particular case. But on the day I delivered the original oral version of this chapter an obituary notice appeared in the London Times for Peter Laslett, which began by labelling him 'the social historian' – principally, one assumes, because of Laslett's distinguished work in the areas of demography and family history. (However, his early career, almost as distinguished, had been in the history of political thought – or 'politics, philosophy and society', as the essay collections he co-edited were entitled. He was a founder with J.G.A. Pocock of the 'Cambridge School' discussed by Annabel Brett, this volume.) Moreover, the Social History Society referred to by Sir Keith Thomas still flourishes, so one member of the audience at the Institute of Historical Research informed us. I add that King Alfred's College, Winchester, offers an MA in Social History (information courtesy of its Director, Dr C.M. Haydon).

16. See below, note 32.

17. Finley, 'Progress in Historiography'.

18. P. Abrams, Historical Sociology (London: Open Books, 1982) contended in a proto-postmodernist way that history and sociology were divided, not by logic, but only by rhetoric; history for Abrams was not just a factual presentation of the past but the social reconstruction of the past. A conventional rejoinder by Frank Parkin pointed out that 'social theory is to history as the philosophy of science is to science' (Times Literary Supplement, 23 July 1982, p. 801).


22. D.P. Herige, Oral Historiography (New York and Lagos: Longman, 1982); M. Herrfeld, The Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village (Princeinton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); and cf. P. Burke, Varieties of Cultural History (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), chapter 3 ('History as Social Memory' (originally 1989)); his thesis in brief is that 'all of us have access to the past (like the present) only via the categories and schemata – or as Durkheim would say, the collective representations' – of our own culture' (ibid., pp. 45-6).


25. A small illustration: E. Le Roy Ladurie, Le Territoire de l'Historien (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), pp. 169-86 ('Événement et longue durée dans l'histoire sociale: l'exemple chouan') (English translation, 1979); cf. Burke, The French Historical Revolution, pp. 61-4. A typical, conservative criticism of this type of history is that, as it is concerned with structures rather than events, it cannot easily convey a sense of change over time, let alone explain it, without connecting with the established narratives of political or economic history.

London Review of Books, 6 July 1989, p. 6, reviewing Vol. II. But the entire work is overlooked, remarkably, by Jordanova in History in Practice, an otherwise excellent primer, and even by Evans in In Defence of History.

27. 'The need for precision in terminology is no less acute where the subject under discussion is an individual action than where it is an institution or practice' (vol. I, p. 20) nicely captures this constant preoccupation.


31. As Evans, In Defence of History, p. 182, notes, advocates of social history such as Starns 'claim that social history is the only approach that combines intellectual excitement with scholarly solidity'. Conversely, E.H. Carr 'clearly thought the history of ordinary people was not worth studying until they became organized in political movements and so contributed to the making of the modern world' (my emphasis) – a view powerfully rebutted by Evans himself (ibid., pp. 164–5).


35. Jordanova, History in Practice, chapter 6; cf. the two concluding sentences of the personal 'Postscript': 'History in Practice has attempted to bring some of the key issues of historical practice to a wide audience. In this respect it is a modest contribution to public history' (p. 207).

36. Perhaps the same will be said in due course for what seems to be the current contender for the Most Universal Form of History crown – cultural history (about which see Mifflin's contribution to this volume). See, for example, Burke, Varieties of Cultural History: though perhaps even he would not have anticipated D.M. Friedman, A Mind of Its Own. A Cultural History of the Penis (New York: The Free Press, 2001).

37. Evans, In Defence of History, chapter 6, 'Society and the Individual', with the bibliographical discussion at pp. 361–2, is an exemplary rejoinder.


39. Cartledge, 'La Politica'.

40. However, to call it a 'dead end', as does W.G. Runciman, 'Doomed to Extinction: The Polis as an Evolutionary Dead-End', in O. Murray and S. Price (eds) The Greek City from Homer to Alexander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 347–67, is a bit too strong; for a dead-end, the ancient Greek city had and indeed retains an awful lot of vitality, as an imagined eu-topia (place of well-faring) as well as an ou-topia (no-place); Cartledge, Democratic Politics Ancient and Modern'. Runciman's earlier essay, 'Origins of States: The Case of Archaic Greece', Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 24 (1982), pp. 351–77, is more successful.

41. This is notwithstanding the best efforts of G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World. From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests (London: Duckworth, 1981) to find a definition of 'class' that would capture both ancient and modern situations and conditions with equal validity and explanatory force.