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*Scientia temporum & rerum: History or Antiquarianism? The Collection of Examples in
Georg Calixtus' De studio historiarum oratio (1629)*

Christian Thorsten Callisen

Abstract

This paper explores an early modern application of the Stoic principle of *similitudo temporum* to the study of history. In so doing, it highlights the tension between historiography and antiquarianism, suggesting that the collection of remains – whether material or immaterial – was understood in at least some early modern circles as an integral part of the historiographic process. It also emphasises the evolving meaning of “history” during this time, drawing attention to the perceived novelty of such antiquarian approaches to the study of the past, and briefly exploring subtle differences between the example at hand and the work and activities of better-known figures such as Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc and Justus Lipsius. As such, this paper makes a contribution to our evolving understanding of early modern scholarship, and draws attention to the variegated approaches of its practitioners to contemporary issues.

Introduction

From “sayings, deeds, and plans . . . considered in relation to the account of days long past[,] . . . not only are present-day affairs readily interpreted but also future events are inferred.”¹ With these words, Jean Bodin eloquently summarised the Stoic principle of *similitudo temporum* for his sixteenth-century audience. Not only does history teach us about our past, Bodin told his readers, it teaches us also about our future. This reflectivity of different historical periods and the cyclical nature of history were pervasive themes in historical and political scholarship during the early modern period. The use of historical examples to instruct princes was commonplace in humanist treatises,² and the antiquarian – the collector of physical artefacts – and the rise of the *Wunderkammer* followed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This paper seeks to explore the tension between these two different modes of collection – examples of events and deeds, on the one hand, and physical artefacts,

¹ Jean Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945; reprinted New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1969), 9.

² See, e.g., Machiavelli's *Prince* or Justus Lipsius' 1605 *Monita et exempla politica*, the latter of which is discussed further below.

on the other – by exploring an example of the former in an early seventeenth-century speech on the study of history. It argues that the collection, rather than simple recounting, of immaterial artefacts, such as accounts of events or deeds, was understood by at least some early modern scholars as an integral component not only of the historiographic process, but also of the intellectual grounding required to develop one's knowledge of the world around them. In this manner, this paper suggests that the collection of immaterial artefacts might be understood as synonymous with the collection of material remains, as items of tangible experience that might broaden the collector's knowledge and appreciation of natural and divine wonders.

On 29 December 1629,³ Georg Calixtus delivered a speech on the study of history (hereafter, *De historiae*) to mark the end of his first term as pro-rector of the University of Helmstedt (*Academia Julia*) in Brunswick.⁴ Calixtus had been professor of theology at the university since 1614, and would remain there until his death in 1586, serving three more times as pro-rector, being invested with the abbacy of Königsutter in 1635, and promoted to *professor primarius* in 1636. He played a major role in shaping Helmstedt as “an oasis of humanist sensibilities in a neoscholastic age,”⁵ and has been charged as largely responsible for the Syncretistic Controversy, a theological quarrel that became the preoccupation of many German Lutheran theologians in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁶ He was, by all accounts, an extraordinary individual, and certainly a controversial figure.⁷ His interest for

³ Hannover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek / Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS XXIII, 563, fol. 1^r.

⁴ Georg Calixtus, “De studio historiarum oratio: 1629,” in Calixtus, *Werke in Auswahl*, vol. 1, *Einleitung in die Theologie*, ed. Inge Mager (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 419–33. On this speech, see also Christian T. Callisen, “Georg Calixtus and the Humanist Tradition,” (MA thesis, Queensland University of Technology, 2010), chap. 5.

⁵ Thomas A. Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 79.

⁶ Paul Tschackert, “Syncretism, Syncretistic Controversies,” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, *Son of Man—Tremellius*, ed. Samuel M. Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953), 218–23.

⁷ The standard studies are Christoph Böttigheimer, *Zwischen Polemik und Irenik: Die Theologie der einen Kirche bei Georg Calixt* (Münster: Lit, 1996); Peter Engel, *Die eine Wahrheit in der gespaltenen Christenheit: Untersuchungen zur Theologie Georg Calixts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976); Ernst L. T. Henke, *Georg Calixtus und seine Zeit*, 2 vols (Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1853–60); Mager, *Georg Calixts theologische Ethik und ihre Nachwirkungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969); Andreas Merkt, *Das patristische Prinzip: Eine Studie zur theologischen Bedeutung der Kirchenväter* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Hermann Schüssler, *Georg Calixt, Theologie und Kirchenpolitik: Eine Studie zur Ökumenizität des Luthertums*

our purposes, however, lies in the privileged position he gave to the study of history in all his work.⁸ In particular, it lies in the method by which he believed his students could make the best use of history in their day-to-day lives – as Bodin suggested, as a predictor of future events.

Scientia temporum & rerum

If a knowledge of great things and ranks of men completes the soul and ought to be aspired to in and of itself – even if it is able to be of import elsewhere and may offer many advantages – why can we not have the same feeling concerning a knowledge of times and hence of events?

Calixtus, “De studio historiarum,” 423.⁹

In early modern collections of examples that sought to instruct princes and kings, authors tended to focus on the narration of, as Calixtus puts it, “great things and ranks of men.” Machiavelli, for example, illustrated his arguments with copious examples from antiquity of individuals who displayed the qualities he saw as desirable in a leader. As he noted, “a prudent man must always follow in the footsteps of great men and imitate those who have been outstanding.”¹⁰ Similarly, Justus Lipsius noted in his *Monita et exempla politica* that “other people’s lives and deeds are a mirror and an image in which you can see yourself and on which you can model yourself in style.”¹¹ In his exhortation to his students to learn from

(Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1961); Johannes Wallmann, *Der Theologiebegriff bei Johann Gerhard und Georg Calixt* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1961).

⁸ Andreas Merkt, *Das patristische Prinzip*, 86–95; Schüssler, *Georg Calixt*, 35–39. See further Callisen, “Georg Calixtus,” 52–59.

⁹ “Quod si magnitudinum et numerorum scientia per se epetenda est et animum perficit, etiamsi et ipsa alio referri possit et complures utilitates praebeat, quidni similiter de scientia temporum et rerum, quae temporibus includuntur, sentiendum?”

¹⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull, new edition, reissued with revisions (London: Penguin, 2003), 19.

¹¹ “Iusti Lipsi monita et exempla politica: Libri duo qui Virtutes et vitia Principum spectant / Justus Lipsius’ Political Admonitions and Examples: Two Books which concern the Virtues and Vices of Princes,” in Marijke Janssens, “Collecting Historical Examples for the Prince: Justus Lipsius’ *Monita et exempla politica* (1605): Edition, Translation, Commentary and Introductory Study of an Early Modern Mirror-for-Princes” (PhD diss., Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2009), 235.

history, however, Calixtus implores his listener to consider “times and events” in the same vein – why should one focus only on specific details and people when one might draw lessons from entire historical ages? This paper will now explore this collection of examples, considering how a knowledge of times and events sits with other modes of acquiring knowledge in the early modern period, such as collecting examples of individual deeds for political instruction, or examples of physical artefacts such as antiquities, inscriptions, and seeds for broadening one’s knowledge of both human history and nature.

One critical aspect of Calixtus’ collection of examples in *De historiae* is his mode of presenting them to his auditors. His entire discussion of these examples is centred on the premise of *similitudo temporum*, to the point where he asserts that every century has a corresponding time period in which similar events occurred, or will occur. Not only can we be certain that “that which befell others before us can also happen to us – and without doubt will happen – if we find ourselves in a similar place and circumstance,”¹² but Calixtus finds that for every century before Christ, similar circumstances, and therefore similar events, can be found in the corresponding century after Christ. For example, he states that his own time, during the seventeenth century AD at the beginning of the Thirty Years War, corresponds to the oppression of the Egyptians after Joseph’s death in the seventeenth century before Christ.¹³ With this underlying principle, Calixtus can also assert that, in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, there will be events that correspond with the lives of Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham respectively. Indeed, attached to editions of *De historiae* printed during his lifetime, there is a “Tabula complectens collationem seculorum ante et post natum Christum,” which sets out the events of the first to the seventeenth centuries AD and BC side-by-side, with blank spaces for the events of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries AD.¹⁴ Calixtus thus makes explicit that history serves not only to teach us about our past and to guide our present, but also to shape our future.

¹² Calixtus, “De studio historiarum,” 423: “Quod contigit aliis ante nos, id quoque nobis pari loco et conditione constitutis evenire potest et procul dubio eveniet.”

¹³ Calixtus, “De studio historiarum,” 427–28.

¹⁴ Calixtus, *Oratio panegyrica, quam habuit anno MDCXXIIX. mense Martio, cum fasces magistratus academici deponeret: De studio historiarum, & inprimis de seculi ante & post natum Christum inter se conferendis* ([Helmstedt?], [1629?]); *Oratio panegyrica, quam habuit anno MDCXXXIIX. mense Martio, cum fasces magistratus academici deponeret: De studio historiarum, & inprimis de seculi ante & post natum Christum inter se conferendis* ([Helmstedt?], [1638?]). It appears this table was also printed separately in at least one other edition. Calixtus, *Tabula complectens collationem seculorum ante et post natum Christum* ([Helmstedt?], [1650?]), <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:gbv:3:1-24356> (accessed March 9, 2011).

The examples that Calixtus chose to illustrate this tend to focus on events concerned with the rise and fall of nations. In particular, *De historiae* shows a strong interest in wars that marked turning points in the progress of empires, or reigns that did the same. From these, Calixtus suggests, we can learn not only the connections between times long past, but also how these are linked to contemporary events.¹⁵ Ultimately, this knowledge can be used to guide our actions in everyday life, whether that be public or private, civil or military.¹⁶ In justifying these uses of history, Calixtus trod the well-worn path of the humanists by turning to classical precedent, noting Dionysius' observation that history is "the source of prudence and wisdom,"¹⁷ and Cicero's characterisation of history as "the witness of time, the light of truth, the life of memory, the mistress of life, and the messenger of antiquity."¹⁸ This suggests that Calixtus saw his collection of times and events in the same light as collections made by other scholars – whether of people and things, or of physical artefacts. Lipsius, for example, drew on the Ciceronian maxim of *magistra vita* in justifying his own choice and use of examples, although in his case, as in Machiavelli's *Prince*, these examples were individuals, rather than sweeping ages or events.¹⁹

It is interesting to note that although Calixtus offered many examples in *De historiae*, at no point did he advise his audience on how best to interpret and apply them. This is in contrast to many contemporaneous publications, which specifically outlined how their authors felt their contents should be used, either in prefaces or in the bodies of the publications themselves.²⁰ Instead, Calixtus simply introduced the uses of history, underpinned by the aforementioned classical topoi, and then proceeded to present his examples, with no further discussion. Ultimately, his speech was about presenting a method by which his audience might better remember these examples – how they could actually apply them was a subject for another day. This paper will now briefly discuss some of Calixtus' examples, a selection of which can be found in Table 1.

¹⁵ Calixtus, "De studio historiarum," 423: ". . . quomodo aetates, quae praeterierunt, et inter sese et cum hac nostra, in qua modo degimus, connectantur."

¹⁶ Calixtus, "De studio historiarum," 424.

¹⁷ Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 1.1, quoted in Calixtus, "De studio historiarum," 423. I note that Calixtus took this quote slightly out of context, as Dionysius actually wrote that *truth* is the source of prudence and wisdom, and that *history* contains truth.

¹⁸ Cicero *De oratore* 2.9.36, quoted in Calixtus, "De studio historiarum," 423.

¹⁹ Janssens, "Collecting Historical Examples," 694–95.

²⁰ See, e.g., Bodin, *Method*; "Iusti Lipsi monita."

Age (BC)	Corresponding Events		Age (AD)
C15th	Exodus from Egypt, leadership of Joshua.	Reign of Frederick III, who reigned longer than all Caesars excepting Augustus.	C15th
C13th	Test of the divine will by Gideon laying out the fleece.	Appearance of mendicant monks, who attempted to coax more money out of the hands of the poor.	C13th
C12th	Troy captured and overthrown by the Greeks.	Jerusalem captured by Godfrey of Bouillon.	C12th
C8th	Deportation of Israelites by Shalmaneser the Assyrian.	Transport of people out of Saxony by Charlemagne.	C8th
C4th	Age of great philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Euclid.	Age of great fathers of the church, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius, Hilary, Ambrose.	C4th

Table 1: Examples of times and events, from *De historiae*.

As already noted, the bulk of examples that Calixtus chose to include in *De historiae* concern events related to the rise and fall of nations. Although he continued to use individuals to illustrate his examples, they were intended only to remind the hearers of his speech, or the readers of the “Tabula complectens,” of the circumstances in which these people lived. For example, the fourth century was characterised, for Calixtus, by intellectual greatness – by a swathe of wise philosophers in ancient Greece, and a corresponding proliferation of doctors of the Christian church in late antiquity. Similarly, when Gideon tested God by demanding proofs from Him in the thirteenth century before Christ, little did he know that circumstances in the thirteenth century after Christ would result in a similar situation, when the mendicant monks demanded proofs from the poor (people who, of course, are made in the image of God). Calixtus presented these individuals not as examples in themselves, but as reminders that might prompt his audience to think about the circumstances that produced them. After all, as Calixtus pointed out early in the piece, events (including the development of great minds) are forged by particular conditions: “that which befell others before us can also happen to us . . . if we find ourselves in a similar place and circumstance.” This is why one finds similar

events in corresponding centuries – these centuries dictate particular circumstances that ensure *similitudo temporum*. By being attentive to your circumstances, Calixtus was telling his auditors, you can anticipate what is coming next, and respond appropriately.

In this manner, then, later humanists such as Calixtus and Lipsius, and earlier humanists such as Machiavelli, collected immaterial artefacts – historical accounts – and presented them to their audiences as examples from which they might learn. These were not simply tools that could be used to increase one's knowledge of the world; rather, they offered a specific means by which one could fashion one's own interaction with the world, and a way by which one could anticipate the events that might lie ahead. Of course the question remains as to how this differed to the use of material artefacts, such as those collected by the typical antiquarian. This paper will now briefly consider the collection of examples by an antiquarian at this time, before turning to an exploration of the tensions between these different modes of collection.

At the same time as Calixtus was delivering his speech in the Holy Roman German Empire, Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc was busy cultivating an incredibly diverse and geographically-dispersed correspondence network from his base in Provence, “something of a cultural backwater” compared to great centres of learning such as London and Paris.²¹ Peiresc utilised this network not only to maintain his engagement with the scholarly world of the republic of letters, but also to build his personal collection of physical artefacts. These included both man-made pieces such as coins, telescopes, and books, and natural items including seeds, plants, fruit, and even live animals, one of which was an Egyptian crocodile twelve feet in length.²² The collection and exchange of such examples was intended to increase one's knowledge not of the examples *per se*, but to do so in general, by providing an insight into the world that one occupied, from whence these examples came.²³ In this manner, one could function more effectively in his or her day-to-day engagement with this world. The collection of physical artefacts – material examples – was therefore above all a practical exercise, just as the collection of immaterial examples was for individuals like Georg Calixtus and Justus Lipsius. In the worlds of both the historian and the antiquarian, remains were collected for pedagogical purposes. This study will now turn to a discussion of the tensions

²¹ Kenneth Austin and Wendy Anderson, “Faith, Friendship and Learning: Intercultural Communication in the Republic of Letters,” *Language and Intercultural Communication* 10, no. 1 (2010): 20-21.

²² Austin and Anderson, “Faith, Friendship and Learning,” 22–23.

²³ See Jan C. Westerhoff, “A World of Signs: Baroque Pansemioticism, the *Polyhistor* and the Early Modern *Wunderkammer*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 4 (2001): 633–50.

posed by these competing interests – the collection of physical artefacts, on the one hand, and immaterial remains, on the other.

History or Antiquarianism?

According to Arnaldo Momigliano's classical treatment of the issue, the sixteenth-century antiquarian was, above all, "a lover, collector and student of ancient traditions and remains."²⁴ From the fifteenth through to the eighteenth centuries, public, private, sacred, and military artefacts were the domain of the antiquarian.²⁵ However, as notions of history evolved, so too did the relationship between history and antiquarianism. Momigliano suggests that, during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the boundary between historian and antiquarian became all but indistinguishable.²⁶ This blurring of boundaries is evinced by exhortations for historians to use not only written records to craft their accounts, but also physical records such as inscriptions, paintings, or ruins. Gerard Vossius, for example, was a passionate proponent of such practices.²⁷ Despite this, he seemingly found it either too difficult, or not important enough, to utilise these sources in his own writing. As Nicholas Wickenden observes, Vossius

could write, for example, about the technique of Greek pottery without, apparently, ever having tried to authenticate or even supplement the statements of the authors he was transcribing by an examination of the actual remains of Greek vases.²⁸

In the work of Vossius and that of his contemporaries, we see a tension between the exhortation to utilise physical artefacts in one's historical endeavours, and the "traditional" mode of relaying information garnered either from textual sources or one's experiences.²⁹ One might also observe that this tension was exacerbated by evolving notions of history and of the

²⁴ Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13, no. 3/4 (1950): 290.

²⁵ Momigliano, "Ancient History," 289, 311.

²⁶ Momigliano, "Ancient History," 293.

²⁷ Nicholas Wickenden, *G. J. Vossius and the Humanist Concept of History* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1993), 89.

²⁸ Wickenden, *G. J. Vossius*, 89–90.

²⁹ See also Anthony Grafton, *What was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Momigliano, "Ancient History," 292.

historian's role at this time. As Gary Ianziti has argued, the very idea of what history was changed fundamentally with the work of humanists such as Flavio Biondo and Leonardo Bruni in fifteenth-century Italy.³⁰ As well as arguing that one ought to utilise as many sources as possible in one's work, they evinced a growing interest in history as *the past*, whereas previous historians had worked, by and large, to chronicle events within their own experience or of recent memory. With Bodin in the sixteenth century, and Calixtus in the seventeenth, one sees this interest realigned once again; history now included not only the past, but also the future.

When considering the tension between historiography and antiquarianism, it may prove fruitful to reflect on the activities and goals of the practitioners of these disciplines. Momigliano's classic distinction between historians, who "produce those facts which serve to illustrate or explain a certain situation" and antiquaries, who "collect all the items that are connected with a certain subject, whether they help to solve a problem or not,"³¹ is quite difficult to apply to Calixtus' speech. Certainly, Calixtus is speaking to his audience about the study of history, not its practice, but in doing so, he quite openly "collects all the items that are connected with a certain subject." Whilst his items are rather more ephemeral than an Attic pottery sherd or an Egyptian inscription, they are nevertheless arranged "in such a way that they could communicate with one another, thus making their hidden interrelations visible."³² By combining the Stoic principle of *similitudo temporum* with the collection and arrangement practices of his antiquarian contemporaries, Calixtus was able to make clear the mirrored nature of history, and to show relationships between temporal periods that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Conclusion

Georg Calixtus, by setting out to present his students with a method by which they might easily remember the key facts in history, found himself crossing the boundary between historiography and antiquarianism. The study of history was, for him and his contemporaries, the ultimate education, which would allow one to conduct oneself appropriately in all spheres of life, whether public, private, civil, or military. These spheres had traditionally been

³⁰ Gary Ianziti, "Humanism's New Science: The History of the Future," *I Tatti Studies* 4 (1991): 59–88.

³¹ Momigliano, "Ancient History," 286.

³² Westerhoff, "World of Signs," 645.

informed by the examples of “great things and ranks of men” in the work of historians, and more recently by material artefacts from the natural and manmade worlds in the work of antiquarians. For Calixtus, “a knowledge of times and hence of events” ought to be able to serve a similar purpose to other historical and antiquarian examples, and he set out to illustrate this by collecting and arranging immaterial artefacts that might remind one of the relationships between discrete temporal periods in our past, present, and future. This collection of immaterial remains was as important as the collection of material objects, and served a similar objective by allowing one to engage with, and learn about, the world around them.

When one considers Calixtus’ approach in light of the work of contemporaries such as Gerard Vossius, a blurring of the lines between historian and antiquarian becomes apparent. This obscurity was apparent not only in the practice of history and antiquarianism, as Arnaldo Momigliano observed over sixty years ago, but also in the use of these two disciplines. Research over the last few decades has made us much more aware of the risks inherent in applying modern notions of disciplinarity to the practices of early modern scholars,³³ and this brief foray into Calixtus’ speech on the study of history confirms that we must not be too rash when distinguishing between the practice of one discipline and that of another—for Calixtus, as for Bodin more than half a century earlier, all knowledge was intertwined, and scholarly practices could therefore not be categorised as belonging to one subject or another. Perhaps one ought not to ask whether Calixtus was practicing historiography or antiquarianism in his collection of immaterial remains, but simply accept that he was collecting them for practical purposes.

³³ See, e.g., Callisen, “Georg Calixtus,” esp. 3–4, and references there cited.