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Parliamentary History: an oblique glance

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Quite how deeply the tradition of parliamentary history runs in Britain has found a rewarding witness in this number of a journal which has, since 1982, proved pre-eminent in continuing and enhancing that tradition.[1] It testifies to a strand of historical enquiry which, over at least two hundred years, has not merely thrown light on a central feature of anglophone, especially English, experience but has almost mystically entered the heart of an English past and fed arteries some distance from the story of parliament itself. Why this should have been so comments on the peculiarities of an English narrative: an origin-myth taking minds back to the Anglo-Saxon homesteads, feudal relationships and the Witanagemot; to Magna Carta and the reforms of Henry II; to Simon de Montfort and his 'parliament'; to the Reformation and the burgeoning of a *soi-disant* freedom; to the glories of the most beautiful combination ever framed in an eighteenth-century constitution that had no text but inserted itself silently between the lines of Common Law; to the emergence of a parliamentary regime that seemingly brought 'the people' to the centre of governance. It lacked only the genius of Bishop Stubbs to lend the story analysis and benediction and launch through the next three generations the trajectory of parliamentary history that would become the inspiration or drudgery for every schoolchild and undergraduate. To study parliamentary history was to

[1] The author is very grateful to this number's impresario, Professor David Hayton, for his invitation to contribute an afterward on parliamentary history as an historiographical form. The research for this essay has had to be conducted against the background of closed libraries during the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Online sources therefore form the bulk of the references through necessity rather than choice.

study *real* history, fit for grown-ups; it occupied what Geoffrey Elton once called 'the front page of the historical newspaper'[2] All else - social trivia, cultural flimflam, the obscure intangibles associated with 'mental aspects'[3] - could reasonably shift to page three. The British parliament had, over the thousand years of its *imaginaire*, given rise to a narrative whose telling had become not merely an educational necessity but a spiritual requirement. Reciting its story turned into a moral imperative and a script for national identity. It was meet and right so to do.

This liturgy, familiar to the generation of Stubbs and Freeman, began, with Maitland, its transition during the 'age of modernism' into a form of forensics: a project of truth-telling through analysis of primary sources and a conviction that the facts of the matter could always be resolved through disembodied scholarship that floated above preconception and 'bias'.[4] And although that programme involved all kinds of social formations and institutions, the place of parliament remained central to its narratives in a tradition stretching from Pollard and Namier through to Elton and his many pupils. Narrative form lent direction and teleology; it required no apology. ('The plan I have adopted is to give a continuous sketch, Session by Session …'[5]) Parliamentary history also encompassed female scholars making their way for the first time in an overwhelmingly male academic world by sharing their persuasions.[6] As a list of historians, the contributors to this tradition comprise some of the most distinguished products of British academia. A sociological typology of them would fail, but two groups seem clearly discernible. There were those who, whatever their familial

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2 G. R. Elton, *Political History: principles and practice* (London, 1970), 4.

3 The delightful category comes from Sir Robert Ensor's *England 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1936).

4 I have charted this development in Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English historiography in the age of modernism, 1870-1970* (Cambridge, 2005).

5 John Raven, *The Parliamentary History of England from the Passing of the Reform Bill of 1832* (London, 1885)

6 See Bentley, op.cit., 121-2. One thinks especially, in the context of parliamentary history, of Maud Clarke (1892-1935) and Lucy Sutherland (1903-1980).

background, carved out careers in the 'golden triangle' of Oxford, Cambridge and London. Albert Pollard's University College in London provided not only his own attribution but also that of his pupil, J. E. Neale. Oxford became the enduring environment for a cohort of medievalists born before or during the Second World War: the late James Campbell (1935), John Maddicott (1943) and Michael Prestwich (1943) though only the last had an impeccable Oxford background in parents who were also dons.[7] A more itinerant fourth from a previous generation appeared in W.A. 'Billy' Pantin, who was 'posh' (Westminster School and Christ Church, Oxford) and turned predominantly to architectural history but spent some time, like so many of his generation, in the Tout-and-Tait hothouse at Manchester.[8] Cambridge sported from that earlier generation not only Pollard (1869-1948) but also George Prothero (1848-1922) and, looking forward, the medievalist Edward Miller (1915-2000) as well as Geoffrey Elton (1921-1994). [9] But a second collection had their academic careers (and often their genealogy) dominated by provincial experience. Neale himself came from Liverpool while a near contemporary, J.S. Roskell (1913), spent his childhood near Rochdale; he spent his academic career at Nottingham and Manchester. Both Bill Speck (Bradford, 1938) and Harry Dickinson (Gateshead 1939) – well known figures to all who study eighteenth-century parliamentary history – prosecuted their careers likewise in the north of England in Newcastle, Hull, Leeds and Edinburgh.[10] In a later generation, our own David Hayton (1949) and John Beckett (1950) made Belfast and Nottingham their stamping grounds. Even the prolific Clyve Jones (1944), umbilically attached to the History of Parliament in London,

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7 James Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London 1986), esp. 155-90; *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000). J.R. Maddicott. *The Origins of the English Parliament* (see note 16). Michael Prestwich, *Liberties and Identities in the Medieval British Isles* (Woodbridge, 2008).

8 W.A. Pantin. *Medieval Westminster* (London, 1952)

9 G.W. Prothero *The Life of Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester with special reference to the parliamentary history of his time* (London, 1877)); E Miller, *The Origins of Parliament* (London, 1960, 1978). Stubbs read the proofs of *Simon de Montfort* and presumably agreed that that the Statute of Merton (1236) was 'the first statute passed by the king and Parliament together.' (63).

10 W.A. Speck, *Stability and Strife: England 1714-1760* (London, 1977); H.T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 1994); 'George III and Parliament', *P[arliamentary] H[istory]*, 30:3 (2011), 395-413.

left behind a childhood in Castleford and his university education in Lancaster and Sheffield, just as the present writer (Rotherham, 1948) spent most of an academic career in Sheffield and St Andrews.

The point may merit making on two grounds: one predictable and trivial, one less so and suggestive. First, when this provincial generation became hegemonic in the field, it may have showed some signs of resenting and combating elements of a discerned elitism, an inner circle of supercilious knowingness, suspected in closeted Oxbridge colleges, a mood that found its target most spectacularly in Jonathan Clark (1951) – he of Peterhouse and All Souls - to whom we shall return. Second, one might have expected that academic trajectories furthered in English provinces or in Scotland or Northern Ireland would have stimulated a parliamentary history reflecting that experience, with a concentration on the place of peripheries in parliamentary attention. Some of that did take place; one had papers and articles on (say) parliamentary representation in Wales or in English northern boroughs or in nineteenth century Dublin. To a greater extent it did not. One of the interesting aspects of British historiography in general, as Alex Middleton pointed out when reviewing a handbook on political history, concerns the relative neglect bestowed on John Pocock's appeal to a wide-lens reading of the British islands and peripheries; instead British academia has tended to prosecute business-as-usual in contradistinction to European experience where the tension between 'centres' (variously defined at various periods) and their provinces forms a major characteristic of its warp and weft.[11]

It is not the only facet of British parliamentary history that does not readily export. One could be forgiven for believing that this distinctively British story took little root at all in

[11] See Alex Middleton, 'The State of Modern British Political History?', *PH*, 38:2 (2019), 278-85 at 284.

continental Europe or North America. Yet its echoes pervade all those narratives, not least because commentators thought that the British example, worked out before theirs, must offer some sort of model to follow, or in the North American case improve, even when their own societies and theories of representation differed markedly from those current in Westminster. One German scholar, impressed by Stubbs as much as Gneist, thought it important to warn German readers, those innocent of Stubbs's *Constitutional History* (1873-8), or Rymer's earlier *Foedera* (1816-30) or Gneist's *Englische Verfassungsgeschichte* (1882), that their innocence stood them in danger 'schon oft erörteten Fragen vorzulegen', of often asking the wrong questions about English parliamentary arrangements.[12] Five years earlier, the Russian polymath, Kovalevsky, had likewise thought it necessary to draw attention to the English constitution and its historians, this a quarter of a century before developments in his own country and its new Duma prompted him to ask, what is Parliament?', in a more urgent mood[13] When, again, a Swedish historian sought to investigate the bicameral system in his own country during its long life between 1867 and 1970, he decided that an epigraph from Sir Kenneth Wheare would best encapsulate his argument.[14] Or go south to Italy where one might reasonably expect a greater weight of French model and exemplar than a British. Yet, although the *Charte* issued by Louis XVIII in 1814 undoubtedly proved an inspiration to the architects of an Italian parliament, the modelling for its senate leant never the less on the British House of Lords for some of its guidance.[15] Of course all this attention, whatever its source, came at a price. European observers wanted to make British developments sound in some sense European, for reasons we shall need to discuss. But the most recent of British scholars writing at length about the origins of the English parliament worries about precisely

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12 Ludwig Riess, *Geschichte des Wahlrechts englischen Parlament* (Leipzig, 1885), unpag. *Vorwort.*

13 Maxim Kovalevsky, *The English Constitution and its Parliament* (Moscow, 1880); Kovalevsky, *What is Parliament?* (St Petersburg, 1906).

14 Nils Stjernsqvist, *Tvåkammar Tiden: Sveriges riksdag 1867-1970* (Stockholm, 1996), 9.

15 Vittorio Frosini, 'L'Italie – le Bicaméralisme Important: du Sénat du Royaume au Sénat de la République,' *P[arliaments], E[states] and R[epresentation]*, 14:2 (1994), 127-31.

that, the tendency 'to regard [the English parliament's] emergence as a local variation on a pan-European theme,' rather than seeing British experience as one 'qualitatively different from its continental analogues.' English parliamentary history should be viewed, for all its attraction elsewhere, as a form of 'exceptionalism'.[16]

Nor did that sense of peculiarity end with beginnings. It penetrated the narrative that had seemed so seminal to nineteenth-century historians and it continued into modernist analysis. At the very least it appeared in the assumption, voiced by Geoffrey Elton, that '[t]he central position of Parliament in all English history is virtually axiomatic,' a possible truth but not a necessary one.[17] It appeared in its method, an eyes-down investigation of procedure as much as significance, drawing from Elton a familiar complaint that 'the chief purpose of parliamentary meetings' which he took to be 'the making of laws' had been 'neglected by historians' who needed to understand – this was the 1970s – that 'there is a really sizeable programme of parliamentary studies waiting to be undertaken.'[18] True, the comment says much about the tendencies of Eltonian England and its intellectual parameters, as well as the nature of parliamentary history. It captures, all the same, an important element in anglophone history of parliament in pointing to a certain verticality of method: looking down into workings and practice rather than out into a wider world and scholarly context. That craning of the neck, essential in the 1970s, painful by the 1980s, had become a cause of sympathy and nursing thereafter among those who had learned to raise their head. There were not many of them in this deeply-drilled field. The thought prosecuted here is different: that, as well as looking down, one can look askance. This oblique glance hopes to do so by bringing into focus matters not always parliamentary and allowing the eye

16 J. R. Maddicott, *The Origins of the English Parliament, 924 -1327* (Oxford, 2010), 377, 450.
17 G.R. Elton, 'Studying the History of Parliament', in Elton, *Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1974), vol 2, 3-12 at 3.
18 Ibid., 9, 11.

to traverse both time and space. Time, because something happened to the wider parliamentary history at some point in the 1980s and 1990s and made an impact on how the subject tends now to be studied. Space, because British scholars and the English language can no longer claim hegemony over an entire historiographical environment.

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Language matters. One wishes it didn't. How helpful it would be to all historians if the experience of different nations that has its mediation in languages other than English could become immediately available with its nuances and idioms already encased and transparent. Instead we face a world of walls, tunnelled through by some, gazed at hopelessly by more. Damage had already entered the context of parliamentary history, through the transcendence of an English model at Westminster, long before anglophone scholars had learned to worry about their ignorance of other languages. They did not worry much.[19] So dominant had their own lingua franca become, for all the nationalism and identity-making of Europe in the nineteenth century, that it seemed otiose to fret. Everybody knew English (apparently); if not they could learn it (presumably); if they could not learn it, they could pay to have their writing translated (soothingly). London and Washington were good places to be because no one needed French or German or Italian or Spanish to fathom the House of Commons or Congress. The more arcane pronouncements emanating from Paris or Berlin or Copenhagen

[19] I am perfectly aware – indeed it goes without saying - that many scholars whose first language is English go to great lengths to accommodate other languages in their work. I am thinking here in general terms about a limited field which itself displays significant exceptions such as Michael Metcalf's history of the Swedish *Riksdag*.

about ‘method’ or, even worse, ‘theory’, need not delay an investigation into the relationship between Commons and Lords or the House and the Senate. (One relishes the anecdote, better for being apocryphal, that a former editor of a major English historical journal, one of a parliamentary cast of mind, refused to print during his tenure of office any article, or review any book, that purported to be about theory: a story concerning English peculiarity as much as parliamentary tradition.)[20] Ignoring language as an obstacle to understanding, as well as a vehicle for it, carried two forms of danger. It persuaded the anglophonic that they shared a history because they partly shared a language. Cliché is inevitable and we can concede at once that George Bernard Shaw exaggerated for the gallery in seeing Britain and the United States as two countries separated by a common language; but he also spoke a truth. All too easily historians of parliament and congress can imagine themselves part of a joint endeavour. In turning to Europe, moreover, the problem becomes still more marked because blurredness about language conceals essential difference. One might almost say that European historians have invented a parliamentary narrative in contradistinction to British experience in part because their languages have helped them to frame one.

Take, first, the case of American congressional histories. They reflect on a bicameral structure as do the British variants; they claim democratic credentials as do, within limits set by an hereditary element, the British accounts; they take seriously the ideas of franchise, representation, and communication with the people. They differ, none the less, in major characteristics because what they seek to describe and analyse derives from an entirely contrasting lineage. The presence of a textual constitution – one that claims sovereignty over all its referents – immediately sets apart the experience of the United States not only from the British past but also from some European parallels, at least in the nineteenth century, despite

[20] Private knowledge.

Hermann von Holst's confidence that he could write American history better precisely because he was a foreigner.[21] In those latter territories, constitutions acted throughout the age of romanticism and nationalism as categories of aspiration, an objective to be promoted and secured as part of a drive to establish the scaffolding for a new form of polity. But in the new United States the Constitution functioned as an eventually agreed point of origin: the nation did not look for a constitution because it already had one, albeit contested and insufficiently robust to present a Civil War. And that constitution dwelt heavily on the separation of powers, congealing into print the checks and balances that Britain also espoused but sought to preserve by precedent and statute. In the United States, moreover, one wing of that separation, the judiciary, came to wield a force denied in the *alta mater* because the Supreme Court attracted to itself a manifest political clout that would ultimately make it the plaything of political ideology. It also gave American history its italics: *Dred Scott versus Sandford* (1857); *Brown versus Board of Education* (1954); *Roe versus Wade* (1973). The most powerful collective memories of the political process, apart from its complete breakdown at moments of war and impeachment, attach to constitutional shifts and presidential spectaculars more than to the operation of the legislature. When a lawyer - especially a lawyer - looked back on the intrusion of Congress into the Reconstruction settlement after 1865, overriding Johnson's veto and imposing military rule over the South, his outrage did not rest on the result but on the intrusion. The episode provided 'an illustration of the dire consequences that must ensue when the system of checks and balances erected by the Framers gives way to one of uncontrolled supremacy in the legislative department.'[22]

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[21] See the Preface to volume one of Hermann von Holst, T*he Constitutional and Political History of the United States* (8 vols., Chicago, 1881-92).

[22] Bernard Schwartz, *The Reins of Power: a constitutional history of the United States* (New York, 1963), 109-11.

This background of calibration in the political process has strongly conditioned the way in which congressional histories have emerged, especially in their dwelling on feats of oratory. Naturally those performances appear also in the representative politics of other nations: parliaments are places of speech; some speeches stay in the mind and heart of developing identities. Those of a Canning, a Gladstone, the sniffing lacerations of Disraeli, enter not only in the parliamentary record but the histories of Britain's House of Commons. But because the function of Congress within the wider arrangements of the United States occupied a different role, so did its histories evolve a distinctive *timbre*. The language of House-and-Hill may have voiced some carry-overs with Commons and Lords; but the operation of the latter turned on the thing that Elton would most stress, the making of laws; those chambers provided a place of work – dull, repetitive, plodding effort of revision and amendments, a building resonating with Readings of Bills, committee dronings, the interminable texts of Statutory Instruments, the crawl towards Royal Assent. Congress did similar things but, in the pages of its histories, it *functioned* as theatre. So when Joseph West Moore, writing in 1895, allowed his mind to return to Independence Hall in Philadelphia and those inspirational years after 1778, his vision turned pictorial with a vibrancy it would be hard to replicate in English histories, notwithstanding Macaulay's more roseate pages:

> The delegates sat with their hats on, after the manner of the British Parliament. They were usually richly attired, and some of them were exceedingly gorgeous in embroided satin coats and small-clothes, and ruffled shirts adored with precious stones.

Nor would an English writer tend to think of a delegate among them of Madison's stature as 'a chubby, rosy-faced, sweet-tempered young Virginian' or insert a section entitled 'What a Witty Representative said about a Congressman's Life at this Period.'[23]

More sober moments could emerge in famous oratorical 'episodes', for this is a *genre* with a strikingly episodic feel. Daniel Webster's speech in the House on how the Constitution must be understood occupied six hours of 26 January 1830 and its importance as a constitutional statement meant that historians thought it necessary to reproduce it *in extenso*, with page after page of summary, interpolation and quotation. Or an episode might not be oratorical at all. The thrashing on the floor of the Senate administered to Charles Sumner by Preston S. Brooks (22 May 1856) enlivens congressional history and biography as one might expect and solidifies a sense of congressional history as an arena populated by affectingly human participants on a stage rather than the bearers of a particular party banner.[24] Of course studies exist of the legislative work of Congress, particularly in the postwar period when historical accounts relied on empirical analyses. One unexciting volume emerged from a consideration of 90 statutes to announce that 20% of them owed their origin to the President, 40% to Congress and 30% to their joint inspiration. 'These figures do not support the thesis that Congress is unimportant in the formulation of major legislation.'[25] Another, more passionate, account began from the conviction that American historians had neglected Congress and proceeded to congratulate it in resisting the enemy now obvious in the Cold War and its values with nods not only to Hitler and Mussolini but also to friends across the sea. ('There is no danger here of the "cabinet tyranny" of the which the British sometimes

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23 J. West Moore, *The American Congress: a history of national legislation and political events, 1774-1895* (NY, 1895), 75, 84, 310. For the history of the senate, see Robert C. Byrd and Mary Sharon Hall, *The Senate, 1789 to 1989* (Washington, 1988).

24 See Brooks D. Simpson, "Hit Him Again": the caning of Charles Sumner', in Paul Finkelman (ed,), *Congress and the Crisis of the 1850s* (Athens, OH, 2012), 203-21.

25 Lawrence H. Chamberlain, *The President, Congress and Legislation* (NY, 1946), 453-4.

complain.[26]). For all that, the *timbre* of American histories remains mostly distinctive. Their flesh-and-bloodiness, their celebration of spectacle and immediacy, takes the mind to a different place from those caught in other styles of representative history.

Subtleties in the linguistic shifts that confuse differences in anglophone experience of parliamentary history appear much less subtle when one turns to the European past and its presentation in historical texts. One glaring example throws considerable light on that difficulty and helps explain why parliamentary narratives in Europe often embrace a story that makes sense in some languages but does not readily translate either linguistically or conceptually. Pull from the shelf any respectable dictionary of the English language and look up the entry for 'parliament'. There should be a sophisticated entry for the noun and its etymology within an English context; there may appear, too, a distinction between that notion and the one represented by a *parlement* in pre-revolutionary France. A recondite text may also have an obsolete verb: 'to parliament' (ie. to 'parley'). Harder to locate will be a noun 'parliamentarism'. It is yet more unlikely that even the most through lexicographer will find a verb 'to parliamentarise' or its accompanying noun indicating a process of 'parliamentarisation'. No European national will encounter such difficulty. For *parlementisme* and more especially *Parlamentarismus* litter their parliamentary histories; and both form elements in the tracking of an asserted process known as *Parlamentarisierung*, the coming-about of parliaments and the establishment of parliamentary mores. Usage differs with author and location. One Italian enthusiasm invents a parallel verb to 'constitutionalize' before re-describing European parliamentary history in a tension 'costituzionalizzazione - parlamentarizzazione.'[27] Sometimes these terms merely express the formation of a moral

[26] George B. Galloway, *History of the House of Representatives* (NY, 1961), 237.

[27] See Anna Gianna Manca and Luigi Lacchè (eds.), Parlamento e Costituzione nei sistemi costituzionale europei ottocenteschi (Bologna and Berlin, 2003), 7.

predilection or inspiration. Parliaments are good things; everybody should have one. When, facing a lightening horizon among the rubble of 1945, the French observer, Félix Ponteil, remarked that '[l]e parlementarism représente la solution du présent et de l'avenir', he meant only to commend a democratic future over a tyrannical and occupied past, not to endorse a pan-European process.[28] More recently, when a Colombian historian recommended historians to take seriously the working of 'parliamentarism' as a foil against the *caudillos*, he proposed merely to indicate a category of research and not an evolutionary narrative.[29]

Indeed, France and the Iberian peninsula proved in general less susceptible to the grander vision, perhaps because the development of their own 'parliamentary' systems offered a more complex time-line than had, for example, the German or Italian. Borrego's commissioned two-volume history of the Spanish *cortes* (1885) had a strong empirical and comparative flavour. He examined in particular European 'cuerpos politicos deliberantes' established after 1848 but had prepared the ground by studying British and French experience before then and had gone on to consider parliamentary formations in Prussia, Belgium, Portugal, the Netherlands and elsewhere.[30] Internally, too, the concentration of parliamentary historians in Spain in the period of liberation and proto-democratization turned often to its most famous episode in the Cortes de Cádiz which had held out the hope of constraining the monarchy through the constitution of 1812 – 'la grande obra' – modelled on the French revolutionary constitution of 1791.[31] Across the Pyrenees, French intellectual life developed a form of *parlementisme* in its weak, descriptive sense but, again, a powerful undertow of post –

[28] Félix Ponteil, *La monarchie parlementaire, 1815-1848* (Paris, 1949), 5.

[29] Eduardo Posada-Carbó, 'Congresses versus Caudillos: the untold history of democracy in Latin America, with special emphasis on New Granada (Colombia), 1830-60. A new research agenda.', *PER*, 37:2 (2012), 119-29..

[30] D. Andrés Borrego, *Historia de las Cortes de España durente el siglo XIX* (2 vols., Madrid, 1885), vol 1, 7.

[31] Federico Suárez, *Las Cortes de Cádiz* (Madrid, 1982), 114-7. Cf. a contemporary account in Edward Blaquiere, *Historical Review of the Spanish Revolution* (London, 1822).

Enlightenment scholarship in the studies and annals of Buchez and Guizot resisted too metaphysical a view.[32] The palm for insouciance, however, must surely go to a man who spent his working days in the middle of it all, *deputé* Eugène Spuler, one who, in constructing his parliamentary history of the Second Republic, did not understand, in the manner of M. Jourdain, that he was writing parliamentary history at all but couldn't think what else to call it:

> Il n'y a ici que de la politique intérieure, et de la politique faite dans l'enceinte ou autour des assemblées républicaines: c'est en ce sens que ce résumé d'histoire est appelé parlementaire, et véritablement il n'y avait pas d'autre nom à lui donner.[33]

Whatever the demands of nineteenth century *parlementisme*, M. Spuler had clearly failed to master them.

Contrast the situation in the German lands where a grand narrative of liberation (1813), failed but pregnant democratization (1848), agglomeration of the German lands and peoples (1864-66), and the proclamation of the Second Reich (1871) became the central thread of historical construction.. We are thrust at once into the world not only of *Parlamentarismus* but of dangerous and non-historical nouns ending in -ization.; and we are enjoined to see the development of parliaments as one facet of these processes and in particular 'das Verhältnis von Parlamentarisierung und Demokratisierung der Gesellschaft', between the developmental process of becoming-parliamentary and the social process of incipient democracy.[34] Other

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[32] Philippe-Joseph-Benjamin Buchez et al, *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution Française* (40 vols., Paris, 1834-8); François Guizot, *Histoire parlementaire de France* (5 vols., Paris, 1863-4).

[33] Eugène Spuler, *Histoire parlementaire de la Seconde République* (Paris, 1891), vii.

[34] Dieter Langewiesche, 'Politikstile im Kaiserreich: zum Wandel von Politik und Öffentlichkeit im Zeitalter des "politischen Massenmarktes"', in Lothar Gall (ed.), *Regierung, Parlament und Öffentlichkeit im Zeitalter Bismarcks: Politikstile im Wandel* (Paderborn, 2003), 16.

misleading terms then enter the mix. Writing in 1933 (not a moment to celebrate German democracy) the social historian, Hans Rosenberg, looked back to the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848 as one acting as a cynosure for democratic hopefuls. The entire German nation, he said, entered the political arena at that moment, represented by all its 'Stämme, Klassen und Stände'.[35] Now his *Klassen* we can deal with unproblematically, though it is worth noting marginally that Marxist historians of parliaments and representation – one thinks of Scandinavian critics such Edvard Bull Sr[36]. and the influential Halvdan Koht[37] -resisted the narratives of *Parlamentarisierung* precisely because they replaced class struggle with a softer version of social relations informed by bourgeois values.[38] *Stamm* feels more awkward: weaker than 'race', stronger than 'family', coming closest in this context, perhaps, to the English term 'stock', a blurredness for social historians to ponder. But for parliamentary historians the heaving bog of interpretation inhabits most sinkingly the concept of the *Stand*. Faced with this term, anglophone historians may look hopelessly at the dictionary: 'station', 'status, 'class', 'rank'? In the connotation related to representative assemblies and their history, the term may come better into English as 'order' or 'estate', hinting less at a horizontal social stratum than at groups, corporations and social coteries – the term is normally pluralized as *Stände* - who held traditional positions and privileges deriving from their feudal, landed or urban rights. This linguistic shift has importance because the concept has become inserted into modern narratives as an element in the master-narrative of *Parlamentarismus* not only in the German case but among Belgian, East European, Scandinavian and Russian scholars as they try to answer the question, why did parliaments

35 Quoted in Armin Burkhardt, *Parlament und seine Sprache* (Tübingen, 2011), 2.

36 Edvard Bull Sr (1881-1932). See Edvard Bull and continuators, *Det norske folks liv og historie gjennem tidene* (Oslo, 1930-34)

37 Halvdan Koht (1873-1965). *Driving Forces in History* (Cambridge, MA, 1964).

38 For the Scandinavian perspective, see Marja Jalava, 'National, International, or Transnational: works and networks of the early Nordic historians of society', in Pertti Haapala, Marja Jalava and Simon Larsson (eds.), *Making Nordic Historiography: connections, tensions and methodology, 1850-1970* (New York and Oxford, 2017), 101-28.

emerge in the West? For all the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, their response took the form of envisaging a process of transformation from a polity dependent on the relevant *Stände* to one in which the powers, prerogative and privileges of that caste had to be shared and dispersed throughout society. Everyone knows that pre-representative polities vested power in a sovereign of some kind, plus dependent notables. Everyone knows that modern representative regimes may have retained those sovereigns but have consistently made incursions into the power of traditional notables. A strong temptation exists to make the transition causal. Reduced to caricature, these many strands of argument rested on the notion that the power of the *Stände* and its inevitable attenuation provided a *social* explanation for parliamentary origins.

This confected story lies behind John Maddicott's complaint about a pan-European process into which British experience ought to be made to fit.[39] He did not exaggerate. Introducing, in 1974, a study sponsored by the *Kommission für Geschichte des Parlamentarimus und der deutschen politischen Parteien*, Gerhard A. Ritter wrote about 'The Developmental Problems of German Parliamentarism'; he rehearsed there a nineteenth-century enthusiasm for connecting parliaments with the fate of the *Stände* and went on to assert that in England, and only in England, did one see a full transition from *Ständewesen* to *Parlamentarismus*, as opposed to Poland, Sweden and Hungary where the strength of the *Stände* continued to retard the development of a parliamentary system.[40] Or consider a volume of essays over a decade later which cheerfully recorded the origins of *Parlamentarismus*, which 'auf die

[39] See note 16.

[40] 'Entwicklungsprobleme des deutschen Parlamentarismus', in Ritter (ed.), *Gesellschaft, Parlament und Regierung: zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus in Deutschland* (Düsseldorf, 1974), 11-54 at 15-16. This Ritter is not to be confused with the more famous nationalist historian, Gerhard Ritter without the 'A' (1888-1967).

Institutiononen des englischen Feudalstaates zurückgehen.'[41] As for the pan-European insistence, a similar processual image emerges from a Belgian perspective a decade later, commenting on the transition from 'despotism' to a parliamentary and representative system, an 'évolution…dans la plupart de pays de l'Europe occidentale.'[42] Readers of *Parliamentary History*, familiar as they are with the whig interpretation of political history, may detect in this assumed model the teleology that they have learned to reject. Note, however, that the line of tendency takes one to a different destination in the European vision. For the founders of a whig understanding of the English past, the discerned progress concerned a journey towards liberty, or more accurately towards liberties, plural, enshrined in law. Travelling from *Stände* to *Parlamentarismus*, on the other hand, takes one not to freedom but to *participation*; and where that participation seems less than evident then it becomes important to find ways of reimagining it – a process heightened by later developments, as we shall see shortly.

If these shaped temporalities played a conspicuous role in framing parliamentary history, so, too, did another 'deep structure' relating to the management of space. Until the appearance of Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish assemblies, the various challenges set by distances, which were in any case not insuperable, did not impinge greatly on the history of the English parliament. This was manifestly not the case in larger land-masses where the development of representative institutions also walked hand-in-hand with burgeoning national identities. The case hardly needs emphasis in thinking about the United States where issues relating to states-rights and legislatures, compounded by an expanding frontier southwards and westwards, has always stood at the centre of much historical analysis.

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41 Peter Blickle et al, *Von der Ständeversammlung zum demokratischen Parlament: die Geschichte der Volksvertretung in Baden-Württemberg* (Stuttgart, 1982), 13.

42 Els Wittem 'Le parlement belge de fonctionnaires 1830-1848', *PER*, 4:2 (1984), 157-67 at 157.

American historiography and the threat or promise of federalism remain inseparable. Europe requires a different perspective since its experience after 1815 did not pose federalism as a formal requirement yet often displayed serious friction in negotiating the unspoken realities of administering large spaces with their own patchworks of representative assemblies. Even in an 'old' nation such as France, one early constituted as a state, those frictions appeared regularly in trying to manage from Paris the provincial problems emerging from *la France profonde*. Historians of regional assemblies have of necessity pursued those sometimes fractious contacts and divergencies whether thinking about Provence and the south-east or Basse-Navarre and the south-west or even about the north, closer to the centre of power. Marie-Laure Legay's re-thinking of representation in eighteenth-century Flanders, Artois and le Cambrésis, one in which she demonstrates that provincial representatives at Paris accomplished more than might be imagined in formal constitutional terms, may stand for others.[43] The German lands provide contrast. For there the growing power of Prussia through the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century invited constant competition between its own *Abgeordnetenhaus* and the local and regional assemblies elsewhere.[44] Seeking the origins of a more generalized *Parlamentarismus*, historians have significantly shifted the attention to the south and south-west, to Baden, Württemberg, Bavaria, Hessen-Darmstadt.[45] Indeed, one detailed analysis of assemblies in the south west disputes the familiar narrative of continuities between *ständisch* assemblies and nineteenth century parliaments whilst claiming that some local assemblies, such as those in Stuttgart and

[43] Marie-Laure Legay, 'Apparence et réalité du pouvoir de représentation des provinces à Paris. L'exemple des États provinciaux du Nord au XVIIIème siècle', *PER*, 19:1 (1999), 119-40.
[44] Ritter, op,.cit, 39-40.
[45] Hans-Christof Kraus, 'Grunzüge des Palamentarismus von 1848', *PER*, 30:1 (2010), 57-79.

Karlruhe, acted as predecessors, quite as much as Prussian institutions, of the Frankfurt Parliament itself in 1848.[46]

Needless to say, France and the German lands held no monopoly of provincial tensions throughout Europe. Italy, not an obvious case of federalism, had to reckon with Sicily where its parliament entered into conflict with the viceroyalty there through the eighteenth century and helped promote the conditions for a new constitution in 1812.[47] Spain, meanwhile, had its own 'Sicily' in the Basque Country whose 'foral' *juntas* (those deriving their authority from traditional *fueros*) considered themselves a form of parliament until they were swept away by liberal regimes in the move towards national centralization.[48] Nor did the problems remain at the periphery. Deep-historical tensions between the *cortes* of Castille and the assemblies of other regions in Spain – Catalonia, Aragon and especially Galicia - obstructed the emergence of a parliamentary tradition. But the instance par excellence of spatial difficulty in the history of parliamentary institutions surely belongs to the Habsburg lands after the fall of the Holy Roman Empire. Some of their outliers produced few problems; those parts of the German south-west still under Habsburg control had a comparatively easy time under Maria Theresa's reform but came under greater control after their extirpation.[49] Closer to home, the triangle of Vienna, Prague and Budapest gave rise to invincible difficulty. The Austrian *Reichsrat* supposedly received members from Bohemia and

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[46] See Peter Blickle et al., op.cit., 14-16. The discontinuity thesis is also prosecuted in Eberhard Weiss, 'Kontinuität und Diskontinuität zwischen der Ständen des 18. Jahrhunderts und den frühkonstitutionellen parlamenten Aufgrund der Verfassungen von 1818/1819 in Bayern und Württemberg', *PER*, 4:1 (1984), 51-65.

[47] See Concetta Spoto, 'A History of Conflict: viceroyalty and the Sicilian parliament between the eighteenth and nineteenth century', *PER*, 8:2 (1988), 175-9.

[48] Their story is well-recounted by Joseba Agirreazkuenaga, 'The abolition of the representative assemblies in the Basque provinces during the rise of the liberal revolution (1789-1876)', *PER*, 14:2 (1994), 109-25. For general histories see Demetrio Ramos Pérez, *Historia de las Cortes tradicionales de España* (Burgos, 1944), requiring caution (written by a Falangist); and Jaume Sobrequés et al., *El Parlament de Catalunya* (Barcelona, 1987). For the local origins of the Portuguese *cortes*, see Maria Helena Da Cruz Coelho and Joaquim Romero Magalhães, *O Poder Concelhio* (Coimbra, 1986).

[49] See Franz Quartal, 'Die habsburgischen Landstände in Sudwestdeutschland', in Blickle et al., op.cit, 79-92.

Hungary. But the Magyar element feared Slav nationalism almost as much as they feared German centralism and boycotted the assembly until the *Ausgleich* or 'Compromise' of 1867 bought them off with assurances. Those assurance, however, dismayed the Bohemians who had been sending 54 members to the *Reichsrat* and who saw a perilous future in Hungarian separatism. They in turn boycotted the assembly.[50] Wherever one looks, from Oslo to Barcelona, the trials of representing large spaces and identities bedevilled parliamentary growth and rendered its history polysemic.

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All these deep-structures in time and space comment on the emergence and maturing of parliamentary history as a form. So where did it go? If one spends a few minutes rummaging through the recent Contents pages of (say) the *American Historical Review*, the *English Historical Review*, *Historische Zeitschrift*, or the *Revue historique*, to mention only four of the more established professional journals published since 1859, how many research articles does the eye light upon that focus on parliamentary history? Some assiduity will be called for in order to find a single one.[51] And yet, in the first half of the 1980s the future appeared

[50] Lothar A. Höbelt, 'The Great Landowners' Curia and the Reichrat elections during the formative years of Austrian constitutionalism, 1867-73', *PER*, 5:2 (1985), 175-83.

[51] Britain's *Historical Journal* has sometimes proved an exception and at the time of writing a long review article on parliamentary history by Miles Taylor is in train.

bright for the subject. When *Parliamentary History* made its appearance in 1982, Eveline Cruickshanks' prefatory manifesto contended that the new periodical would respond 'to growing interest and current controversies in parliamentary history on both sides of the Atlantic.'[52] In the previous year, a second periodical had entered the field, this one thinking more of the European scene and commenting that it would encourage the study of 'the development of representative institutions in a wide and comparative way'.[53] Together, these dedicated journals offer a clue to the historiography of parliaments and representative institutions over the last 40 years. Even at their inception, however, a cloud hovered. Already the appearance of Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* in 1980, itself a few years after Hayden White's re-thinking of narrative forms in his *Metahistory*, suggested a change of mood among wider historiographical currents.[54] Far more dislocating was the appearance in 1989 of a collection of essays on the 'new' cultural history which attracted considerable attention and admiration.[55] The cloud remained unremarked. Meanwhile, as with all historical periodicals, a transitory enthusiasm could look like a promise of longevity. (There is a law in such matters: historical periodicals come into being to celebrate a birth or condole over approaching death.) And, as with all publications, we do well to think about their relation to the historiographical environment as a whole. We need, still more urgently, to think about their lack of one.

These specialist journals began as they meant to continue in accordance with their divergent traditions. For *Parliamentary History* that meant further forensic pieces drilling into aspects of, mostly English, political experience. For *Parliaments, Estates and*

52 Unpaginated preface to the first issue (1982).
53 *PER*, 1:1 (1981), 'Aims and Scope'.
54 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: the cosmos of a sixteenth-century miller* (London, 1980); Hayden White, *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973).
55 Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, CA, 1989).

Representation, it involved recalling the role of the International Commission for the Study of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions since the Belgian, Émile Lousse and, later, Italian Antonio Marongiu had set out its direction since 1936.[56] The wider remit of *PER*, with its inclusion of material relating to representation as an idea, a commitment to comparative perspectives and annual conferences in various parts of Europe to generate papers for printing in the journal, gave it an immediate trajectory. Both projects soon showed, however, some signs of instability. For *PH* a destabilizing element presented itself in its least favourite iconoclast, Jonathan Clark, whose attempts to unravel the political and parliamentary history of the Hanoverian period, and write most unfilially about its historians, had already produced consternation. An attack-number sought to put him in his place when, in 1988, four scholars ostensibly chosen for their width of view provided critical reviews of Clark's work and one – the normally peaceable Harry Dickinson – contrived to reduce it and its author to rubble.[57] But Clark, as Alberta's Philip Lawson had argued in the previous number, was symptomatic more than causal of a change of mood in Hanoverian studies reflected in the writing of Linda Colley and John Brewer as much as Clark, one that would prompt 'revisions about the role of Westminster'.[58] Perhaps a more powerful prompting came from changes 'on the ground' as Western political and social structures underwent change. The removal of Margaret Thatcher and her style of parliamentary rhetoric, the power of social movements and trade unions, the historiographical mood of the previous twenty years in stimulating the rise of 'history from below' may have undermined some certainties over the place of parliament in historical consciousness.

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56 Émile Lousse, *La société d'ancien régime: organisation et représentation corporative* (Paris, 1943); Antonio Marongiu, *Il Parlamento in Italia nel medio evo e nell'età moderna* (Milan, 1962).

57 'Symposium: Revolution and Revisionism', *PH*, 7:2 (1988), 328-38. Three of the team chosen – Kevin Sharp, Mark Kishlansky, Lois Schwoerer - found something favourable to add to their critiques. The fourth, H.T. Dickinson, did not (335-8). Kishlansky did concede, for example, that 'Clark-bashing ha[d] already become a popular blood sport.' (331).

58 Philip Lawson, 'Hanoverian Studies', *PH*, 7:1 (1988), 130-38, 130.

If currents of that kind made themselves felt in Britain, they did so *a fortiori* in Europe as the tyranny of the Soviet bloc and its puppet assemblies, confronted by democratic forces first in Poland and then throughout the whole of central and eastern Europe raised questions about a purely executive understanding of popular representation. As early as 1986, the Swiss historian, Peter Blickle, had asserted, a little obscurely, that 'Parliamentarism … is the comparative of communalism.' But his thrust was not at all obscure. Parliamentary historiography needed to come to terms with 'certain forms of everyday life', the rights and obligations that found their being in the self-regulated life of peasant and artisan.[59] Forms of everyday life had, indeed, already begun their journey to the Wall in Berlin and 1989 became an inspiration for everyone but reactionaries and communists. A true German past needed to re-acquire its 'social aspects' if it wanted authenticity[60] Was it accidental that , in the quieter waters of Westminster, the first article on the place of women in parliamentary history, from the pen of the redoubtable Pat Thane and approving of a raft of books 'putting women firmly in their just place,' appeared in the same year?[61] No speculation seems necessary in recalling Heinz Schilling's pointing to the revival of 'the political' at precisely that time. He may have been writing about The Netherlands, but from his desk in Giessen he could hardly have failed to see 'the political' all around him.[62]

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59 Peter Blickle, 'Communalism, Parliamentarism, Republicanism', *PER*, 6:1 (19086)

60 Günther Grünthal, Hartwigt Brandt and Laus Erich Pollmann, 'Social Aspects of German Constitutionalism: Prussia, Württemberg and the *Nordeutscher Bund* in the mid-nineteenth century', *PER*, 9:1 (1989) 65-69.

61 Pat Thane, 'Women, Sex and Politics, 1860-1918', *PH*, 8:1 (1989), 153-5. It should be stressed that German and Austrian scholarship took the subject much further as in Ina Hochreuther, *Frauen in Parlament: Südwestdeutsche Abgeordnete seit 1919* (Stuttgart, 1992); and Gabriella Hauch, *Vom Frauenstandpunkt aus: Frauen im Parlament, 1919-1933* (Vienna, 1995). For an example of statistical analysis in the same field, see Lena Wängerud's Gothenburg dissertation, *Politikens Andra Sida:om kvinnorepresentation i Sveriges Riksdag* (Gothenburg, 1998).

62 Heinz Schilling, Politik und Gesellschaft: die Renaissance des historischen Interesses am Politischen', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen Betreffende de Geschiedenis*, 104 (1989), 56-65. Significantly, from the point of view of present concerns, he did not mention parliament as a constituent of the political.

Releasing into freedom so many nations – not least the Russian – produced a different geography of parliamentary history after 1989, one that encompassed Roumania, Poland, the former East Germany and the Baltic states. It also, for different reasons, brought Sweden and especially Finland into play. New recruits from these lands brought with them not only a different nationality but a contrasting sociology. Professionally, many of them were not historians at all but social scientists: they reflected the methodologies familiar to political science and sociology in making models and matrices the centre of their thinking. Finding the narratives of empirical history too sloppy, they imposed typologies on various versions of political representation; they invigilated cameralism and its forms; they drew in political thought from. Carl Schmitt - not a friend of parliaments[63] – to Max Weber as an explanatory dimension. Back in 1986 and in Soviet Warsaw, Kazimierz Orzechowski, showed the way with his typology of assemblies in Europe, pulling the mind back to an important pioneer of such thought who is now receiving a welcome revival. Half a century earlier, Otto Hintze (1861-1940) had injected comparative and structural analysis into such histories and had written, 'l'unique essai d'une typologie'. But off went Orzechowski into more radical channels with his talk of 'vertical' versus 'horizontal' assemblies, territories large versus small, divided versus undivided, unified or non-unified.[64] Fast forward thirty years to Finland and we find 'a four-dimensional ideal type of parliament, comprising a cluster of concepts held together by parliament itself as a political concept.' Better still, a collaborative project brought together the probing minds of Sofia, Bilbao, Bielefeld, Helsingki and Oxford (!), all engaged on 'comparative diachronic analyses of parliamentary experiences and the uses of the vocabulary of parliamentarism in political organization.'[65] This inflated discourse

63 See, however, Schmitt's early work, *Das geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus* (3rd ed., Berlin, 1961).

64 Kazimierz Orzechowski, 'Les systems des assemblées d'état: origins, evolution, typologie',*PER*, 6:2 (1986), 105-111.

65 See Pasi Thalainen, Cornelia Ilie, Karl Palonen, *Parliament and Parliamentarism : a comparative history of a European concept* (New York and Oxford, 2016), 6, 19. For another piece of Scandinavian model-

may have sent music to grant-funding agencies but it does it actually get us very far? The distinguished Harvard historian of medieval Spain, Thomas Bisson, thought not. His rebuttal has all the silent slip of a stiletto: 'the typologists of medieval assemblies, better sociologists than historians, have yet to notice that …..'[66]

The year of Bisson's review, 2001, saw much deployment of the crystal ball. Where, in this new millennium, was parliamentary history heading? Did it have a role at all? Valerie Cromwell saw threats from the Web, from the introduction of mass media, from the globalization of economies. She could find little optimism in advising the Commission about its future work; it 'should surely now consider the perceived decline in the importance or perhaps relevance of representative assemblies …'[67] She had a point, though possibly not the right one. Undoubtedly global change had taken place and shifts in the relationship between governments and parliaments had been persuasively noted by Adolf Birke some years before.[68] But what had subverted parliamentary history through the 1990s was not technology but the decade's favourite word. Any library catalogue containing material from the 1990s will leave a reader unable to evade the lesson that everything in the world is the product of 'culture'. Try placing side by side the number of works in those years and after containing the phrase 'political history' in their title and compare the overwhelming number that bear the phrase 'political culture'. The lesson carried its own threat to historians in the West. Become 'cultural' or die.

building, see Torbjörn Bergman and Kaate Strøm (eds.), *The Madisonian Turn: political parties and parliamentary democracy in Nordic Europe* (Ann Arbor, 2011).

66 See Bisson's masterly review of the International Commission's activities in 'The problem of medieval representation: a review of work published by the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions, 1936-2000, *PER*, 21:1 (2001), 1-14 at 11.

67 Valerie Cromwell. 'Parliaments and the Future', *PER*, 21:1 (2001), 239-49.

68 Adolf M. Birke, *Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Munich, 1997, reprinted Berlin, 2018), 78ff.

The British preferred whistling – it is part of *le calme anglais* – to keep up their courage in the face of alien attack. Shortly before the death of Sir Geoffrey Elton , an impressively funded project reflected all of Elton's understanding of the purpose of parliamentary history: to discover 'the object to which legislation was directed and …how Parliament created statute law.' Doing that would be enough, apparently, to teach this 'old dog' some 'new tricks'.[69] Or again consider a move in 1995 to think about the British empire across the Atlantic and widen the lens of parliamentary history, chasing 'a shared language of constitutionalism across the *imperium*'; this supposedly might open 'a new chapter in parliamentary history, the subject, and *Parliamentary History*, the journal.'[70] In the United States, another shot at revitalization wanted to focus on 'actions' in Congress rather than rhetoric and discover a new 'world of politics'.[71] *Parliamentary History* did indeed do its bit by moving towards thematization of its contributions from 1995 in a commendable effort to enhance coherence and dodge the scatter-gun. Yet all these things – each admirable in its own terms – held little promise of holding off the assault from postmodern epistemology and methodology, the linguistic turn, the obsession with 'communication' within 'the public sphere', the edginess of second wave feminism, the drive towards studying the history of minorities in society more than majorities in parliament.

European historiography took these radical proposals more seriously. The early modern English project mentioned above may stand in contrast to one from the Netherlands in 2009. Based in Nijmegen, its title, 'Representation and Governance in the Netherlands' contained nothing to challenge conventional patterns, though its proposed range, from the thirteenth

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[69] See the report on a project ''Towards a History of Parliamentary Legislation 1660-1800' in *PER*, 13:3 (1994), 312-21. Quotations at 313 and 321.

[70] Philip Lawson, 'Onward and Westward: expanding parliamentary history over the Atlantic', *PER*, 14:1, 1-4 at 4.

[71] See David R. Mayhew, *America's Congress: actions in the public sphere* (New Haven, 2000), xi.

century to the twentieth, argued a certain width of vision. But its opening salvo, an explicit appeal to the 'new type of political history', promised to knock down walls, thus 'opening up materials for analysing both the culture of governance and the practice of politics.' It would reconsider the relations between citizen and government, certainly, but the repeated objective (in case you missed it), was 'the culture of governance'[72] A few years earlier, a review in a Scandinavian journal of a collaborative study of the eighteenth-century *Riksdag* captured an entire environment. Its contentions reverberate less than its language:

> The contributors' approach 'political culture' with methods ranging from the sociology of literature, through contextual readings of the history of ideas, to anthropological studies of social interactions, and the formal study of the working of political institutions. Together they demonstrate the advantages of avoiding functional interpretations of the political as simply an arena for contestation of the 'resources of power' and instead interpreting [sic] it as constituting a rich repertoire of shared, yet contradictory, ideas and practices.[73]

From beyond the grave, Geoffrey Elton can be heard growling, what is that supposed to *mean*? Yet there it all is: a self-infolding linguistic canopy in which the 'new' history of parliaments and representative assemblies must of necessity become enclosed because it encloses everything else. Two heavyweight volumes entitled *Politische Kulturen in Europa* begin with Lynn Hunt – their first footnote reference – and go on to proclaim an

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[72] Ida Nijenhuis et al., 'Representation and Governance in the Netherlands, 1250-1983: materials for a comprehensive history of politics', *PER*, 29:1 (2009), 2-15. See also an output from the Nijmegen group in Erie Tanja, *Goede Politiek: de parlementaire cultuur van de tweede camer, 1866-1940* (Amsterdam, 2011).

[73] Erik Thomson, review of Marie-Christine Skuncke and Henrika Tandefelt (eds.), *Riksdag, Kaffehus och Predikstol: Frihetstidens politisken kultur, 1766-1772*, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 30:1 (2005), 99-102 at 99.

enlightenment in which political historians' narratives with their 'classical stress on people and events can *and must* be reformulated', a slightly chilling prospect for some of us.[74]

The two millennial decades have created forms of political history which the pioneers of parliamentary history, those celebrated in this number of the house journal, would have found distant and baffling. This had its inevitable side: historiographical *genres* mutate alongside the societies and intelligentsias in which they are imbricated. Leaving nostalgia aside, however, it also has had a regrettable aspect. 'Cultural history', so captivating to those, often not trained historians, who broadcast its virtues, takes as its point the provision of contextual description in order to deepen understanding of historical happenings. Lost in the process can be the style of explanation practised by scholars whose upbringing and education placed them in a British tradition of scholarship and analysis.[75] Illustration and description, be they never so thick, do not perform the same function as explanation. Those among us who are persuaded of the requirement to explain may hope that their insistence will suffice to save parliamentary history in the future. It probably won't. Parliamentary history can re-describe itself as the study of *Kommunikationsprozeß*.[76] It can re-situate itself as one element in a 'public sphere'. It can endlessly parrot 'political culture'. It can go 'global'. But it is unlikely to survive in the forms once taken as axiomatic. It has been good, all the same, to return to those forms and salute their achievements for they remain a source of enthusiasm for some of the most careful and attentive historians working yesterday and today. Peering down into parliamentary workings, its cogs and wheels, they demonstrate how and why the

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74 Stefan Haas, 'Die kommunikationstheoretische Wende und die Geschichtswissenschaft', in Andreas Schulz and Andreas Wirsching (eds.), *Politische Kulturen in Europa: das Parlament als Kommunikationsraum* (Düsseldorf, 2012), 29-43 at 30 (emphasis added).

75 I drew attention to this loss in a review of John Arnold et al (eds.), *History After Hobsbawm: writing the past for the twenty-first century* (Oxford, 2018). See *English Historical Review*, 134 (2019), 1374-6.

76 Symbolic of that persuasion was a conference on 'Das Parlament als Kommunikationsraum', held in Berlin in 2010. It grew out of 'die Debatte um die neue Kulturgeschichte' earlier in the decade. Cf. Thomas Mergel, *Palamentarische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik: politische Kommunikation, symbolische Politik und Öffentlichkeit im Reichstag* (Düsseldorf, 2002).

origins and mechanisms of representative institutions became a fulcrum for historical scholarship and why a specialist concern of this kind should persist, whatever is going on over the fence. Glancing obliquely cannot provide penetration into the field's subsoil. Yet maybe a few lateral glimpses may have helped reveal undulations, crags and thickets in the wider landscape within which that field now needs to find its location.