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Images in History

Towards an (audio)visual historiography

EDITORS:

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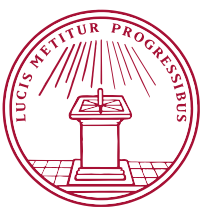

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ABSTRACT

The outcome of an international symposium taking place on 27–28 April 2017 at the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities in Stockholm, this anthology can be read from either end. At one end, a number of essays addressing the question of how pictorial, especially photographic, representations can and have been understood either as historical artefacts or as sources of knowledge about the past. In a nutshell, images in history. Turn the book over again and continue reading. At the other end, an equal number of contributions – texts as well as images – that approach the same question from the reverse angle: how pictorial, especially photographic, representations can themselves be used to convey a new and different understanding of the past. In another nutshell, history in images. Taken together, the two parts of the volume are intended, each from its own perspective, to prepare the ground for a new historical (sub)discipline, viz. (audio)visual historiography.

Keywords: (Audio)visual, film, history, images, methodology, photography

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Peter Aronsson & Birgitta Svensson

Introduction: Images in history

Throughout the history of historiography runs a series of concerns. Many stem from the gap between an idea of an independent reality of historical events needing exploration with legitimate methods, and its mediation and adaption. Others stem from the challenges of how to avoid being overwhelmed by the multitude of facts and to be able to select findings of importance to the unfolding of history itself and relevance to the age of narration and mediation. A constant fear prevails that history is slipping away and we are not given a true or vivid enough representation to meet these concerns. We can follow the debates over centuries[1] which might lead us to conclude that there are no answers to be given on these levels of inquiry, but we would rather state that there is a demanding need for reinvigorated investigation due to changes in history. Among these are the expansion of societal uses and mediations of histories parallel to the exploration of these by a widening array of academic disciplines. In an academic world of successive turns, we will here observe them as responses to fundamental historical changes. The possibilities for transmedial narration have exploded in recent decades as has the concurrent existence of historical facts and narratives. To paraphrase Krustjov: history seems to be far too important to be dealt with by historians only. Obviously, there are urgent issues to be answered on how a wider array of media is being mobilized in the making of history and historiography.

The outcome of an international symposium which took place on 27–28 April 2017 at the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities in Stockholm, this anthology can be read from either end. Turn the book over, and you will find a number of contributions – texts as well as images – addressing the question of how pictorial, especially photographic, representations can be used to convey a new and different understanding of the past. In a nutshell, *history in images*. Continue reading, and you will discover an equal number of essays that approach the same question from the reverse angle: how pictorial, especially photographic, representations

can and have been understood either as historical artefacts or as sources of knowledge about the past. In another nutshell, *images in history*.

In contrast to the reverse side of the anthology, this part is organized chronologically, as often dictated by the historical perspective.

In the first contribution, the eminent historian Carlo Ginzburg unfolds a densely associative argument where the numbered paragraphs – a stylistic signature, from the very first, of the Italian historian's work[2] – come to resemble so many Chinese boxes: departing from the scholarship of the British connoisseur Philip Pouncey, his essay deftly moves on to Pouncey's role model Roberto Longhi, then to Longhi's polemic against the philosopher Benedetto Croce, then to Croce's own debate with fellow philosopher Giovanni Gentile, then to … Drawing on, among many other sources, the evidence provided by Longhi's private copy of Croce's *Aesthetics*, Ginzburg reveals the art critic's vivid and, at first sight, extravagant language to be "rooted, more often than not, in a long tradition which went back to local erudites and ultimately to the artists themselves" (and here, the author almost seems to echo his own account, in *The cheese and the worms*, of the deep historical roots of the miller Menocchio's seemingly exceptional world-view). Along the way, he also takes the opportunity to return, if only from an oblique angle, to long-standing preoccupations such as the mutual intertwinement of words and images, the cognitive dimension of literary style, and the possibility – *malgré tout* – of translation.

Close on Ginzburg's heels, the contribution of artist Maria Lantz – on the pioneering "criminologician" Alphonse Bertillon and his method of identifying criminal suspects with the help of so-called *bertillonages* – can almost be read as a brief addendum to the Italian historian's classic essay on 'Clues'. But how on earth did the daughter of the city physician of Stockholm, a girl of solidly bourgeois upbringing, end up on one of Bertillon's index cards?

Like Lantz's impressionistic sketch, the next two contributions both deal with Swedish cases. In 'Displaying science: Photography, ethnography and national history', curator and art historian Louise Wolthers delves into the case of the 1929 International Photography Exhibition at the *Kunsthalle* in Gothenburg. Against the background of a general discussion of the relation between photography and historiography, the essay presents us with another set of Chinese boxes: an installation photograph from the exhibition leads to a portrait by photographer Borg Mesch – which, in its turn, leads to another portrait of the same subject, a Sami woman named Maria Huuva, a portrait that was never exhibited but instead discarded by Mesch. Along the way, Wolthers demonstrates how the gazes of the historian, the ethnographer,