

PHI·LOL·O·GY

1. The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities

[JAMES TURNER]

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PHILOLOGY





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THE FORGOTTEN ORIGINS OF THE MODERN HUMANITIES

James Turner

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FOR MY DOKTORKINDER WITH THANKS FOR ALL THEY TAUGHT ME



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PROLOGUE



In his *Adages* (1500) the great humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam quipped, “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog one big thing.”¹ Might the two animals know the same stuff? Could the hedgehog’s one contain the fox’s many? The book you are reading began in my growing curiosity about whether humanistic scholarship in the West is ultimately many or one.* I have more to say about how I got curious, but first a few words are in order about what our fox and hedgehog comprehend.

Studia humanitatis—humanistic studies—in one guise or another have for many centuries dwelled at the heart of Western learning.² In British, Irish, and North American universities today, the ‘humanities’ make up a central strand of teaching and research. But their present forms are a modern novelty. The many humanistic disciplines that today’s fox knows date only from the nineteenth century. Trace their several origins, and (as the hedgehog realized) the trail usually leads back to one big, old thing: philology—the multifaceted study of texts, languages, and the phenomenon of language itself.

Philology has fallen on hard times in the English-speaking world (much less so in continental Europe). Many college-educated Americans no longer recognize the word.³ Those who do often think it means no more than scrutiny of ancient Greek or Roman texts by a nit-picking classicist, while British readers may take it as referring only to technical research in languages and language families. Professors of literature use the term to belittle a simpleminded approach to their subject, mercifully discarded long ago. Indeed, for most of the twentieth century, philology was put down, kicked around, abused, and snickered at, as the archetype of crabbed, dry-as-dust, barren, and by and large pointless academic knowledge. Did I mention mind-numbingly boring? Whenever philology shows its face these days in North America or the British Isles—not often, outside of classics departments or linguistics faculties—it comes coated with the dust of the library and totters along with arthritic creakiness. One would not be startled to see its gaunt torso clad in a frock coat.

It used to be chic, dashing, and much ampler in girth. Philology reigned as king of the sciences, the pride of the first great modern universities—those that grew up in Germany in the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries. Philology inspired the most advanced humanistic studies in the United States and the United Kingdom in the decades before 1850 and sent its generative currents through the intellectual life of Europe and America. It meant far more than the study of old texts. *Philology* referred to *all* studies of language, of specific languages, and (to be sure) of texts. Its explorations ranged from the religion of ancient Israel through the lays of medieval troubadours to the tongues of American Indians—and rampant theorizing about the origin of language itself.

The word *philology* in the nineteenth century covered three distinct modes of research: (1) textual philology (including classical and biblical studies, ‘oriental’ literatures such as those in Sanskrit and Arabic, and medieval and modern European writings); (2) theories of the origin

and nature of language; and (3) comparative study of the structures and historical evolution of languages and of language families. This last inquiry had stunning result: the recovery of a vanished, previously unsuspected language, parent of most tongues of Europe, northern India and the Iranian plateau.*

These three wide zones of philological scholarship, diverse in subject, shared likeness in method. All three deployed a mode of research that set them apart from the other great nineteenth-century model of knowledge, Newtonian natural science. All philologists believed *history* to be the key to unlocking the different mysteries they sought to solve. Only by understanding the historical origins of texts, of different languages, or of language itself could a scholar adequately explain the object of study. Moreover, all breeds of philologist understood historical research as *comparative* in nature. Only by placing a classical text or the grammar of Sanskrit into multiple comparative contexts could a scholar adequately understand either—by comparing the classical text with other manuscripts and with historical evidence surrounding them; by comparing Sanskrit grammar with similar Indo-European grammars (as well as, at least tacitly, dissimilar grammars of other language families). Furthermore, philologists understood history not only as comparative but also as *genealogical*. They aspired to find historical origins in a very specific sense of the term: to uncover lines of descent leading from an ancestral form through intermediate forms to a contemporary one. Later in this book we shall see how *historicism*, with its insistence on *comparison* and *genealogy*, replicated itself in the DNA of the modern humanities.

Equipped with these powerful tools of investigation, philology animated sundry types of knowledge across the academic countryside. Until the natural sciences usurped its throne in the last third of the nineteenth century, philology supplied probably the most influential model of learning.⁴ The immense resonance of philology as a paradigm of knowledge is much less well known today than the parallel influence of natural science, because science won and philology lost. Victors often erase the footprints of the defeated. Ask any modern student of ancient Carthage.

I stumbled on some buried ruins by accident, over thirty years ago. In the early 1980s, I set out to write a life of Charles Eliot Norton. Norton was the most prolific begetter of the humanities at the time when modern American higher education was taking off, the decade after 1870. It made sense to start research for a biography with my subject's parents. The mother, Catharine Eliot Norton, left behind only scraps of correspondence. The father, Andrews Norton, a Bible scholar, supplied a lot more posthumous debris. The trove included notes for his Harvard University lectures on biblical criticism. In perusing these, I learned that a 'conventionalist' theory of language (more about this in [chapter 1](#)) undergirded the elder Norton's understanding of the Bible and theology. He even believed that other philosophies of language threatened religious faith. In the 1830s, Andrews Norton got into public argument with his sometime student Ralph Waldo Emerson over the latter's heterodox religion. In plowing through the printed and private records of their row, I discovered that Emerson's ideas about language frightened and angered Norton as much as his religious doctrines: Emerson's linguistic heresy, Norton insisted, underlay his religious infidelity.

In the spring of 1985 the history department of the University of Michigan invited me to deliver what we in the trade call a job talk. I took the opportunity to decipher further the Norton-Emerson rhubarb by poking around in other American writings about language in the

period. I found myself trying to convince my Ann Arbor listeners that a peculiarly American style of linguistic theorizing, now largely forgotten, flourished in Norton's day and might help to explain thinkers as influential as the philosopher Charles Peirce and the anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan. I got the job, at least. A few years later an acquaintance in Paris found these musings curious enough to publish in a journal there.⁵ The ball was rolling.

But Andrews Norton still mattered to me mostly for shaping his son. As biblical critic Andrews made the Gospels his specialty. To explain such ancient texts, he taught, one had to set them in historical context. Their interpreter needed to know the idioms of the first-century Greek in which the Gospels were written; literary forms then current; the mind-set of Jews of the era and of their Roman rulers; customs governing relations between the sexes and family life; religious practices; economic activities; legal codes; diet—the welter of details that enabled a modern reader to decode the texts as their writers intended. To amass this expertise, the critic had to bring to bear on the Gospels other texts of the era: these cast light on not only linguistic and literary problems but more broadly the culture, specific to its time and place, that formed the Gospels' authors. They could no more escape it than a medieval peasant could escape his culture or Madame de Maintenon hers. And every text of the era revealed *something* about the culture it came from; and so the Gospels helped the scholar understand other contemporary texts, just as these other texts cast light on the Gospels. Each text might provide a snippet of information that made something clearer in the others. By tacking back and forth between the books of central concern (here the Gospels) and texts surrounding them, the critic re-created, as best he could, the lost world that produced these texts. He thus made the original meaning of the Gospels clearer to a modern reader. Andrews was, in short, a textual philologist.

Like father, like son. Charles Norton first made his scholarly mark by translating Dante—a task requiring philological skills like those he knew from his father's works. Later in life, he edited seventeenth-century English poetry, another act of philology. But the younger Norton never limited himself to studying texts. He became best known, in fact, as a historian of art—the first professor of that subject in the United States. He also wrote about classical archaeology—and founded the Archaeological Institute of America, which became the major professional group for that new academic discipline. As I tracked his career of innovation in the humanities, it dawned on me that Charles Norton treated Greek temples, medieval cathedrals, and Renaissance paintings all as 'texts.' He put these physical relics of past worlds into their historical contexts, comparing them with other 'texts' of their times (literal and metaphorical) in order to recover their meanings to the people who made them. He then in turn used, for instance, the Parthenon or the cathedral of Siena to throw light on the long-dead cultures that produced these buildings. This man—who more than any other individual became 'founding father' of the modern humanities in the United States—applied the same historicizing, comparative, genealogical philological methods whether he studied poems, buildings, or pictures.⁶ And I doubted that Norton was *sui generis*.

He was not. Historical scholarship is a small world. Colleagues elsewhere knew I was working on Norton. When organizing conferences, they sometimes solicited papers from me on related topics. So, while writing Norton's biography, I had the chance to test my hunches about the kinship of philology and the modern humanities. Samples excavated from other archives gradually turned my guess into a working hypothesis. When Norton breathed his last

in 1999 (for the second time, poor man), I set out to learn how far the fingers of philology extended into modern humanistic learning. By then I did not feel nearly as lonely as in 1988. More and more explorers were detecting traces of philology in various fields of scholarship.

Still, we are only beginning to recover how language study in its heyday formed the skeleton of modern erudition and gave us many disciplines that today make up the humanities and even social sciences. Historians have excavated philology's role in the origins of anthropology, of classics (as distinct from mere teaching of Greek and Latin), of comparative study of religions, of literary scholarship, indeed of certain kinds of legal research. We have also become increasingly aware that two other learned activities, related in topics, method, and attitude, went alongside philology for most of its long history: rhetoric (the art of expressive speaking or writing) and antiquarianism (the study of physical and other relics of the past). Their traces, too, appear in scholarship today.

Yet, despite many fine monographs, no one to date has ventured an overview of the whole process: the birth of the modern humanities in the English-speaking world from the womb of philology. ("English-speaking" is explained in the "Conventions" section.) This book tells that story.

I am far from its ideal narrator. Innocent of Sanskrit, barely acquainted with ancient Greek and Hebrew, feeble in Latin, I am bound to get tangled in vines, to trip over roots while exploring the dense forests of philology—as any specialist will happily point out. My excuse for undertaking the expedition is simple: no one else has. Technical frailties may even prove strengths. Specialized arguments agitating different branches of philology do not distract me. Products of specific philologies interest me less than their digestion by workers in other domains (sometimes as ignorant of the original field as I). I am oriented to the general intellectual history of the last two or three centuries, not to any philological subfield. I am apt, then, to ask questions about broad influence, maybe to see the forest more clearly because my hyperopic vision blurs nearby trees. But I hardly need add that I stand on the shoulders of scholarly forerunners, since the reference notes scream of dependence—though I have also had to hack my own way through little-explored thickets.

Because philology's legacy survives in ways we build knowledge today, the excavation of the philological past becomes an effort at once of historical reconstruction and present-day self-understanding. When we see where our modes of knowing came from, we grasp better their strengths and weaknesses, their acuities and blind spots. I hope that a broad view of the philological heritage will help us to detect these things more easily, to locate ourselves more securely on the map of knowledge, and thereby to improve our future investigations.

The benefits for humanists of knowing our own past hardly need stating. We live with conflicted minds. On one hand, disciplinary walls divide humanistic fields from each other. Historians of the twentieth century rarely read the journal *Twentieth-Century Literature*, and it has been a long time since I saw a colleague in art history scanning the book reviews in the *American Historical Review*. On the other hand, praise of interdisciplinary research is the Hallelujah Chorus of the university these days, and humanistic scholars from different disciplines do collaborate on occasion—sometimes as individuals, sometimes in cross-disciplinary programs like American Studies. The *American Historical Review*, in fact, does from time to time review books about art history, and literature departments house quite a few professors whose books I, a historian, routinely read as 'intellectual history.' The

situation is curious. We would understand it better if we knew how it arose. When do 'literature' diverge from 'history,' and in what ways? What genuine differences in methods came to separate 'history' from 'art history,' and how much do the two disciplines still overlap? If we humanists grasped more fully how we came to be what we are today, we would better see when and how we can fruitfully work together, as well as what we gain and what we lose by staying apart.

Perhaps less expectedly, social scientists, too, might learn something about themselves from the history of humanistic scholarship. Reflection on it could clarify where they stand in relation to other fields of knowledge. All scholars (historians included) tend to get caught up in internal self-understandings of our disciplines. We all enrich our conceptions of our work by getting out of our skins.

Take political science as an example. It conventionally splits into two broad wings: political theorists and their more empirically inclined colleagues who study such things as comparative politics, politics in different national contexts, international relations. (Some political scientists wear both hats, but the hats still differ.) The first big branch, political theory, comes out of the Western philosophical tradition. For many centuries (going back to Plato) philosophy stood as the self-conscious opposite of philology and its cousin rhetoric—a standoff that ended only in the eighteenth century, if then. (More about this confrontation will come.) Political theory still carries tendencies honed by philosophy's persistent denigration of the mere 'opinion' that philology and rhetoric were alleged to offer. These include a leaning toward seeking general rules or principles and a bias toward prescription rather than description alone. It remains a historical enigma why political theorists are regarded as closer to the humanities than their empirically minded colleagues. As to the latter: among the means that empirical political scientists apply in their subfields, one of the most favored is the comparative method—sometimes historical, sometimes not. The use of comparison to highlight similarities and differences in objects of study is very ancient and perhaps universal. But the most numerous, obstinate, thoroughgoing practitioners of the comparative method in the West have been philologists—from antiquity right into the modern period when political science formed as a discipline. When political scientists and other social scientists began to make use of the comparative method in the late nineteenth century, they were borrowing from philology: a lineage now masked by the quantitative data commonly compared.

Anthropology, like political science, is a house divided—and infested with philology. As political science has a theoretical and an empirical side, so anthropology has a cultural and a physical side. The line between them is not always clear. Biological anthropologists, working with bones and DNA, plainly inhabit the physical section. Cultural anthropologists just as obviously do not. Linguistic anthropologists focus on an aspect of human cultures, language, that has a physical basis. Archaeologists in anthropology departments, like their peers in classics departments, work with material remains but strive to draw from them cultural meaning. Cultural anthropology teeters very close to the humanities in its methods; and thanks to historians like Thomas Trautmann and John Burrow, scholars by now recognize its roots in philology. In contrast, archaeologists and linguistic anthropologists today 'look' more like scientists than humanists. Yet, as we shall learn, they, too, ultimately derive from the philological tradition and lines of study associated with it, especially during the period

between the Renaissance and 1800.

In short, the bins into which we today sort academic knowledge—at least in the ‘humanities’ and ‘social sciences,’ if those labels have coherent meaning—produce unfortunate outcomes. Our categories require ripping apart modes of knowledge and methods of acquiring it that were once connected. Self-awareness about these matters will allow all of us and our universities to see more clearly what our disciplines mean, where they tie into each other, and how we can most effectively cooperate with each other, and how we can most sensibly and usefully organize knowledge. These are things students, professors, deans, and provosts need to know.

They are also things citizens need to know. Higher education may be perpetually in crisis, but today pressures on it in America and Europe are exceptionally relentless. Some are financial, as state support ebbs and tuition costs surge. Some are economic, as demands rise for colleges and universities to focus on ‘practical’ fields like science, technology, or business. Some are curricular, as course offerings grow more diffuse and student learning more dubious. Higher education needs reconstruction—from the general-education component, to the structure of specialized programs, to the layout of graduate training, to the configuring of knowledge itself beyond the present disciplinary setup. But rebuilding can only proceed intelligently if we understand how knowledge has evolved over time. Otherwise we will miss important pieces of the puzzle latent in the structure of knowledge today, as well as pieces now so much taken for granted that we overlook them.

We lack much of this needed historical understanding. The history of natural science is a mature field. The history of the social sciences is a toddler, the history of the humanities an infant. Look in any well-stocked library; you will find lots of historical monographs on specific aspects of individual disciplines all across the map of knowledge. You will find many broad historical surveys of natural science as a whole. You will find a few such books about the social sciences collectively. You will find no general history of the humanities written in English—the sort of work that would show how different humanistic fields of study grew over time, in changing relationship to each other and to other areas of knowledge.

To clearly see connections and disjunctions requires a wide vista of the development of humanistic learning. This book tries to offer one to readers living amid the educational and research institutions of the English-speaking world. To ensure breadth of view, the first four chapters are devoted to the formative ‘prehistory’ of nineteenth-century philology and its partners rhetoric and antiquarianism, from ancient Greeks to the end of the eighteenth century. But ‘the humanities’ as we know them came into existence only in the nineteenth century; and so the book reaches focus *after* 1800 on the English-speaking lands ringing the north Atlantic. Philology in the nineteenth century pervaded the intellectual life of every country in Europe and the Americas and in Europe’s settler colonies elsewhere. But I pay closest attention to England, Scotland, and the United States. (Ireland gets less heed than it might deserve, and Canada barely any, because relevant secondary literature and archives are sparse.) One reason for this focus is personal: my career as historian has centered on the English-speaking north Atlantic. There I can most easily detect connections among different fields of knowledge crucial to this story. But common language and, to some extent, shared history and mutual prejudices linked English-speaking scholars across the Atlantic. They looked more like a quarrelsome clan, with a single family history, than like distantly related

tribes.

They shared much with counterparts in France or Chile but also pursued philology and its offshoots in distinctive British and American ways. One revealing instance: many German philologists absorbed the philosophical hermeneutics (theory of interpretation) sketched by Friedrich Schleiermacher. These philosophical concerns stood out in August Boeckh's *Encyclopaedie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften (Encyclopedia and Methods of Philological Scholarship)*,* posthumously published in 1877. By then, every American and British classicist knew Boeckh's pathbreaking *Staatshaushaltung der Athener* (1817), translated into English as *The Public Economy of Athens* as early as 1828. Yet his *Encyclopaedie und Methodologie* went untranslated and, as far as I can tell, unread by English-speaking philologists—even those who had, as students in Germany, attended the lectures that made up the book!⁷ Far more empirically minded than their German colleagues, they left Schleiermacher's theorizing to the theologians.

Still, Anglophone philologists borrowed heavily from foreign work. German universities housed the masters of philological research from the late eighteenth to the start of the twentieth century; English-speaking scholars leaned heavily on German writings and personal contacts, at least from the 1830s, when ability to read German grew more common. German philologists appear often in the following pages, both as background to and as direct influences on English-speaking scholarship. To a lesser extent, so do savants from France and other non-English-speaking lands. But their roles, even when seemingly ever-present (as in the early chapters), are always ancillary to the story of philology and its offspring in the Anglophone north Atlantic.

A further clarification: this book does not concern humanistic *higher education* but rather the humanities as *fields of academic knowledge*. They could inhabit freestanding research institutions as well as colleges and universities—or even live outside any institution. The appearance of a subject in university teaching does testify to a discipline's acknowledged existence, and I cite such evidence from time to time. But knowledgeable observers on both sides of the Atlantic recognized anthropology as a scholarly discipline well before 1860, even though university courses and faculty appointments in the subject appeared only some twenty years later (save one course offered in Toronto in 1857). Discussions of higher education merely subserve the real topic of this book: the emergence of the humanities as academic disciplines.

Readers who did not specialize in history as undergraduates may find helpful an explanation of chronological labels used, fuzzily, by historians of the West, including me. 'Antiquity' means the period before around the seventh century CE. 'Late antiquity' (a category imported into English from German-language scholarship in 1971) runs from about the fourth century to the end of antiquity. The 'Middle Ages' begin when antiquity ends around 700 CE, and stop with or just before the Protestant Reformation, shortly after 1500. After that, it's all 'modern'—except that modern history, like antiquity, is divided in two. The 'early modern' period ends with the eighteenth century (classically with the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789); 'modern' *pur sang* goes from then to now.

One word commonly used in the following pages may also need clearing up: the verb *publish*. A work is *published* when made *public*. With reference to ancient Rome, publication might simply mean that an author gathered acquaintances at home to hear him read a new

composition. In the era of manuscripts, a work is also said to be published when made available to be copied for wider circulation: the standard medieval method of publication. But an author might also circulate copies of a manuscript within a small group, intending to keep the work semiprivate. Pretty much the same situation persisted after 1450 when printing made copying books easier. A printed work is not published when it comes off the press, but when it goes on sale or otherwise becomes available for public distribution. A famous example is the Complutensian Polyglot Bible, discussed in [chapter 2](#): the printers had it ready by 1514, but its publication waited for the pope's OK in 1522. In the nineteenth century, scholarly authors with enough money often had a draft work printed to send around for comment; we do the same now, without needing as much money thanks to laser printers and e-mail attachments. In neither case is the work 'published'; in both, the author gives it to selected readers. Perhaps the best-known case of unpublished circulation in American literary history is *The Education of Henry Adams*, privately printed in 1907, not published until Adams's death in 1918, but in between rather widely read. 'Publication' is not always clear-cut.

Translations into English are my own unless otherwise indicated in the reference notes. Italicized words in quotations were emphasized in the original unless otherwise noted. Double quotation marks signal material quoted from another work. Single quotation marks are 'scare quotes,' indicating a term or phrase I have singled out because it needs emphasis, interpretation, or qualification.

Sources appear in endnotes, where author's surname and year of publication lead to the list of works cited. Some endnotes also provide supplementary information for specialists. The footnotes contain explanations or asides that I think might interest all readers. More specialized elaboration of comments in footnotes and sources for them sometimes appear in the endnote for the paragraph.

To avoid blinding readers in a hailstorm of personal names, I have deployed a small number of representative figures, sometimes repeatedly.

No reader can feel more keenly than I how much the following pages omit, compress, and simplify. Squeezing inflicted sharpest pangs in the early chapters, where centuries cram into paragraphs. To take but one instance, I barely hint at the rich, tortured relations between Christian biblical philologists and their Jewish counterparts. A book could be written about what Christian scholars learned about their Old Testament from just one medieval rabbi, the famed Talmudic and biblical commentator called Rashi.* In fact, the book *has* been written. Other fascinating swathes of scholarship do not even get a bare hint. You will find no discussion of musicology, of Turkic philology, or of many other flourishing, if smallish, humanistic disciplines. Folklore studies could easily have filled a space between anthropology and literature. Such neglect appeared to me mandatory, however painful. I skim lightly over oceans of erudition because plumbing the depths—or merely dipping down a fathom or two—would stretch this book from a few hundred pages to a few hundred volumes. I offer a *tour d'horizon*, not an encyclopedia.

Some readers may wish for explanations of other choices I have made, in matters including gender-neutral language, dates, geographic names, and the like. These can be found in the section titled "Conventions" immediately following this preface. The rest of you should dive right into the story.

* ~~Non-European civilizations have their own vigorous traditions of humanistic scholarship~~ for instance, Confucian erudition in China. These figure in this book only when they affected the Western tradition, such as the impact of the Sanskrit learning of India described in [chapter 4](#).

* This long-lost language is now called Proto-Indo-European.

* You may also see it spelled as Böckh. But, like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's, Boeckh's name is more commonly rendered (in German as well as English) with an *e* instead of the umlaut; that is how it appears in this book.

* Rashi is the conventional acronym for Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040– 1105), formed in the same way as (to mention an individual better known to most readers) the nickname Rambam for Maimonides: *Rabbi Moshe ben-Maimon*.

CONVENTIONS



It has in recent years become a convention in works by professional historians to lay out, at least in reference notes, one's agreements and disagreements with other historians. I resist the trend. Experts will see where I stand in relation to others. Nonexperts will not care. Besides, in a book of this breadth, marking every specialist quarrel would make the endnotes explode.

The gender-neutral language expected in scholarly works usually goes missing in this one. Absence stems not from churlishness but from an effort to reflect historical reality. Until the late nineteenth century, the learned people I discuss were almost all male. This situation may now appear disgraceful, but to call the generic philologist of 1500 or 1850 'him or her' merely veils the disgrace.

Chronological clarity is essential, yet too many dates fog the windshield. Mostly, I keep time by giving year of publication when mentioning a book. In the earlier chapters, which cover long stretches of time, birth and death years also appear in parentheses for individuals who loom large, as well as for less prominently featured persons whose place in time may otherwise be unclear.

I translate titles of books in foreign languages unless I believe their approximate meaning is obvious to readers. Thus Leone Modena's *I riti degli Ebrei* gets 'Englished' as *The Rites of the Hebrews*, whereas Johannes Buxtorf's *Synagoga judaica* appears only in Latin.

CE (Common Era) and BCE (before the Common Era) replace the venerable AD (anno Domini, year of the Lord) and BC (before Christ). The older usages imply that everyone recognizes Jesus as Lord or at least as the central figure in history. Even Christians who wish this were true know it is not. The adoption of Christian time reckoning as the international standard has made it truly 'common,' no longer distinctively Christian. And 'Common Era' is no recent product of political correctness. It appeared in the title of the great astronomer Johannes Kepler's *Eclogae chronicae* (1615), while the first volume of Ludovico Muratori's *Annali d'Italia* (1744) began, as its title page proclaimed, "Dall'Anno primo dell'Era volgare"—from the first year of the common era. Both as an amateur astronomer and as a teen philosopher-historian standing on the shoulders of giants like Muratori, I happily follow their lead.¹

Much recent historical writing about philology focuses on its political penumbra: its place in the genealogy of anti-Semitism, for example, or its role in imperial knowledge systems. I generally avoid such issues. This is not because they do not matter—they matter greatly—but because I have almost nothing to add to what others have already said. Moreover, in my view, such factors usually affected the uses or the topics of philology rather than its methods. (Usually, not always.) These latter, structural matters—'internal' to scholarship—shaped the modern humanistic disciplines and so get my attention.

No universally agreed label exists for those books of the Bible originally written in Hebrew (a few passages in Aramaic). Tanakh or, less commonly, Miqra denotes the version

used in Jewish worship.* Christians call their equivalent the ‘Old Testament’ (a collection differing somewhat for different Christian groups). ‘Hebrew Bible,’ a modern coinage, often appears in academic writing as a neutral, generic substitute. Because most biblical philologists who appear in this book started from a Christian point of view, I most often use the term *Old Testament*—as they did. On occasions where *Old Testament* is inapt, I have preferred *Hebrew Bible*. ‘Bible’ refers generically to sacred writings honored by all varieties of Christians and Jews without regard to the specific books in the collection.

Some geographic names need elucidation. From 1707 Scotland and England united as ‘Great Britain’ (the kingdom of England having long, long before absorbed Wales). People sometimes called this new entity the United Kingdom, and at times I do the same. From 1801 until the early twentieth century, this kingdom also integrated the formerly separate kingdom of Ireland (already governed by Great Britain); and ‘United Kingdom’ became official. (It still is, though now the United Kingdom of Great Britain and *Northern* Ireland.) So from 1801 until about 1920 United Kingdom supplies a label for the entire ‘British Isles.’² This last term understandably makes Irish people wince when used as shorthand for Britain, Ireland, and the smaller islands of the region. But more recent, neutral labels—Britain and Ireland; the North Atlantic Archipelago—have their own problems. I stick with British Isles but use it sparingly and only when United Kingdom does not apply. Flouting geographic precision, I use North America to mean the United States and Canada and their colonial antecedents, although Mexico inhabits the same continent. Canada did not exist as an entity until the 1840 Act of Union created the United Province of Canada and did not begin to resemble its modern form until the years following confederation in 1867. Likewise, ‘Italy’ acquired political meaning only in 1861, ‘Germany’ in 1871. These realities do not stop me from using ‘Canada,’ ‘Italy,’ and ‘Germany’ to mean the respective regions regardless of their political status at the time.

My references to the ‘English-speaking’ north Atlantic countries may rattle speakers of Scots, Tiwa, Irish, French, or other languages spoken as mother tongues in North America and (gulp) the British Isles. I use the term *English-speaking* in a sense specific to my subject. Almost all *scholarship* between the later eighteenth and early twentieth centuries in these lands appeared in English. (Before then, Latin provided a medium for erudition—and still does for classicists afterward.) The English-speaking world of *this* book spoke English in *this* sense.

* *Tanakh* is an acronym derived from the Hebrew initials of its three parts: Torah (‘the law’), Nebi’im (‘the prophets’), and Kethubim (‘the writings’). Christians know these as (a) the Pentateuch, (b) the Prophets and historical books, and (c) the poetic and wisdom books. *Miqra* means ‘what is recited.’

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FROM THE FIRST PHILOLOGISTS TO 1800

Language and its products enthrall human beings. Our enduring love affair with words should not surprise. After all, the expanding capacity of *Homo sapiens* to use language in ever more intricate ways partly powered our evolution, gave us an edge over other animals, and deepened the interdependence basic to humanity. The earliest schools, in Mesopotamia, taught not augury, astrology, or the art of war but how to handle written language. When systematic erudition emerged in ancient civilizations, it often made language its subject. In *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (121 CE), the Han dynasty scholar Xu Shen invented the strategy of indexing Chinese characters by the root elements they shared, still basic to Chinese dictionaries. But already, some four centuries earlier, in present-day Pakistan, Pāṇini had composed his dauntingly terse grammar, the *Ashtadhyayi*; in it he set out rules covering Sanskrit syntax, morphology, and semantics—arguably the fountainhead of the science of linguistics. Here we can merely nod toward the boundless steppes of philology lying beyond the confines of Western civilization.

This book's more provincial story begins in the Mediterranean basin, with Greek speakers who lived in Pāṇini's era. Some of these Hellenes invented the language-centered instruction that supplied the basis of European schooling for many centuries to come—and in some senses still does. Others of them devised methods for meticulous inquiry into questions more or less related to such education—that is, into problems posed by language. Where did words come from? How do they function together? How does the Greek tongue specifically work? How ought one to interpret *texts*, wherein written words weave intricate nets of meaning (English *text* and *textile* share the same Latin root, meaning something woven.) How could one keep texts under control when their numbers multiplied vastly? In doing all these things, these teachers and these scholars together midwived the fraternal twins born of language: the practical art of rhetoric and the erudite science of philology (the latter then including grammar, other sorts of linguistic theorizing, and the multisided study of texts).

Neither child enjoyed an untroubled life. When the Roman Empire gobbled up the Hellenic world, it absorbed Greek rhetoric and philology. Learned Romans took great interest in both, honed them, complicated them. But the empire split in two, and its western half soon collapsed into chaotic centuries poisonous to any form of learning. The shards of the western empire eventually re-formed as Latin Christendom (the immediate ancestor of 'Europe'). But its erudite elite had things on its mind other than philology. Not until nearly a thousand years after the disintegration of the western Roman Empire did a shift in intellectual climate—conventionally called the Renaissance—revive philology and rhetoric.

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