as late ancient Christianity, as a subdiscipline of a new, theoretically informed intellectual history" (156). And yet these questions of audience remain: will this book find a readership among historians in other subfields? Among theorists more generally? Or among those scholars of early Christianity who are already engaged with theory? For scholars whose work—in any subdiscipline—has been engaged with theory, there is much in Clark's first seven chapters that will seem already familiar. The real contribution Clark makes comes in the eighth and final chapter—a chapter that could be read with profit by both nontheoretically inclined patristics scholars as well as historians and theorists in other subfields—for it is here that Clark demonstrates (only too briefly, to my mind) the real possibilities for reinvigorating the study of premodern texts by attending to the theoretical insights and strategies of a new intellectual history. Above all, Clark's work will be important for all graduate students (and advanced undergraduates) in the field of patristics (and early Christianity more generally): as I found with the students to whom I assigned *History, Theory, Text* this past spring, Clark's work promises to enliven and reinvigorate the study of premodern texts.

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Conversion or Adhesion? Historians between the Social Sciences and the Linguistic Turn

History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn is an admirably erudite and spirited book that places the historian's trade under the scrutiny of postmodern critical theory. Central to Prof. Clark's argument is that postmodern literary theory holds especial promise for historians of "premodernity" due to its appropriateness for the task at hand. This is due, in the first instance, to the centrality of ("high literary") texts to the field and, secondly, the status of said texts as products of "premodernity." Drawing on arguments deployed by Peter Novick and others,[1] Prof. Clark dismisses with ease the truth-claims of positivist history, often associated with Leopold von Ranke's historicist approach ("wie es eigentlich gewesen"—"the way it actually happened"), which in its crudest and arguably caricaturized form has long been abandoned by mainstream academic historians.[2]

Indeed this opening salvo against historians' quest for objectivity represents but a feint, the reigning paradigm of interdisciplinary history inspired

1. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Behind Novick and company lies Hayden White's pioneering analysis of historiographical tropes. For their reception in the American historical profession, see Richard T. Vann, "Turning Linguistic: History and Theory and *History and Theory*, 1960–1975," in *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. Frank R. Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 40–69; and Richard T. Vann, Nancy Partner, Ewa Domanska, and F. R. Ankersmit, "Hayden White: Twenty-Five Years On," *History and Theory* 37 (1998): 143–93.
2. Leopold von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. and intro. Georg G. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke (Indianopolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973). For a careful account of the modern reception of von Ranke's work and method, see Georg G. Iggers, "The Image of Ranke in American and German Historical Thought," *History and Theory* 2 (1962): 17–24; Dorothy Ross, "On the Misunderstanding of Ranke and the Origins of the Historical Profession in America," *Syracuse Scholar* 9 (1988): 31–41.

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by the social sciences being the target that is more firmly in her sights. Prof. Clark argues that sociocultural historical approaches, even as they reject positivist history, retain a false illusion that a true or knowable past can be accessed through applying proper methodological tools. *Annales,* microhistory, Geertzian "thick description," and Marxist "history from below," all of which presuppose that the historians' task is to uncover and understand a substratum of *realia* through critical analysis, are described in turn and found wanting, their Achilles' heels being traced to unwarranted epistemological assumptions, a low level of internal coherence between premise and application and, above all, a failure to recognize fully the textuality of the bulk of the evidence relied upon by historians of "premodernity."

In preference to these approaches, Prof. Clark turns to the works of scholars such as Michel de Certeau, Roger Chartier, Gabrielle Spiegel, and Dominick La Capra.[3] Invoking their *auctoritas* in a manner reminiscent of a compiler of *florilegia patrum,* she urges historians to consider taking up the challenge of a "new intellectual history."[4] Such an approach, for which the book as a whole advocates, requires the decentering of the reigning historical paradigm of applying socioanthropological models to the study of the past and replacing it with an approach that relies on postmodern theory to illuminate the textuality of historical representations.

This review essay seeks to explore potential implications of this call by posing several open-ended questions.[5] First, are we to accept this "new intellectual history" as the only appropriate (as opposed to just a preferred) discursive mode for scholars of "textually oriented" historical fields such as late antique Christianity? Remarks on page 159 suggest a measure of complementarity: "I claim . . . that Christian writings from late antiquity should be read first and foremost as literary productions before they are read as sources of social data. Joining theoretical to social-scientific and theological-philological analyses will enrich the field." How can the latter be implemented? While most scholars regard the interrogation of texts through various critical methods and "contextualization" as essential first steps to any meaningful historical interpretation, they do not necessarily regard the application of postmodern literary theory in the same manner.[6]

Along the same lines, how might a historian move intellectually and narratively from a postmodern reading of a historical "text" to the writing of

3. See various numbers of *History and Theory* for the debate regarding the application of postmodern theory to historical research.
4. As proposed in Dominick La Capra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); see also Martin Jay, "Should Intellectual History Take a Linguistic Turn? Reflections on the Habermas-Gadamer Debate," in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives,* ed. D. La Capra and Steven L. Kaplan (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), 86–110.
5. See John H. Zammito, "Are We Being Theoretical Yet? The New Historicism, the New Philosophy of History, and 'Practicing Historians,'" *Journal of Modern History* 65 (1993): 783–814.
6. See Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Students of Greco-Roman historiography have long examined these questions; see. A. J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography: Four Studies* (London: Croom Helm, 1988); this material is summarized well in David S. Potter, *Literary Texts and the Roman Historian* (London: Routledge, 1999).

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a social or cultural history that uses that same text as evidence or authority? Should he or she strive to carry out both functions or observe some division of labor? If so, how? Generally, it would be salutary to investigate further the nature of operative interfaces that might serve to connect a poststructuralist or postmodern reading of texts and the brand of modern historical scholarship that is framed by sociocultural (as well as theological or philological) questions. This question is left intriguingly unaddressed, even as Prof. Clark cites with approval Chartier's critique of Robert Darnton's classic study of "cat massacres" on the grounds that it creates new problems "by destroying the 'textuality' of texts that relate the symbolic practices being analyzed." She suggests reasonably that "it is rather the 'massacre's' function in the text that needs to be unpacked" (154), and yet one nevertheless wonders whether a historian might be entitled to go from speaking about the function of events in texts to discussing the so-called historical events themselves.[7]

In her book, *The Origenist Controversy*, Prof. Clark makes fine, revealing use of theories derived from the social sciences, particularly social network theories, when examining the social construction of Christian ascetic groups in late antiquity. She does so by positing the existence of "real" social networks—as opposed to Derridean "textual networks"—as part of her successful explanatory scheme.[8] Other scholars in the field of late antique studies have now been applying social network theories to the analysis of epistolary collections and other works in order to explore questions of self-representation and group-formation.[9] Should we read in *HTTHLT* a call for a moratorium on a seemingly fruitful scholarly approach that Prof. Clark's own work has done so much to propagate?[10]

An underlying thrust of the book is to persuade historians of "premodernity" to give up on trying to retain the "ancient community" as a primary object of historical inquiry. Prof. Clark proposes, with others, that historians who do so rely erroneously upon ideas of social performance, such as speech-acts or communications theory, rooted in a model of face-to-face speech (255) with which their sources, being mostly texts, indeed "high literary texts" that travel across the centuries and that are read in different times, places, and circumstances than that of the original author, have little or no affinity. In contrast, postmodern literary theory is custom-made and therefore far more appropriate for the analysis of just such texts.

Does appropriateness here stand as a cipher for a diluted truth-claim in favor of a textualist approach? Further, clearly not all, or even the majority, of late antique Christian texts can be classified as "high texts." For students

7. See, for example, Geoff Eley, "Is all the World a Text? From Social History to the History of Society Two Decades Later," in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, ed. Terence J. McDonald (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).
8. Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).
9. See, for example, Raymond Van Dam, *Kingdom of Snow: Roman Rule and Greek Culture in Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); and Sigrid Mratschek, *Der Briefwechsel des Paulinus von Nola: Kommunikation und soziale Kontakte zwischen christlichen Intellektuallen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2002).
10. See Theresa Urbainczyk's *Theodoret of of Cyrrhus: The Bishop and the Holy Man* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002) on the Syrian bishop's rhetorical invocations of social networks; this represents a thoughtful and suggestive way to bridge the two approaches.

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of late antique sermons that were indeed first performed before a public and thereafter edited and circulated as texts (and often "re-performed"), the two (that is, speech- vs. text-based) approaches may not always be mutually exclusive of each other. Even the manner in which some late antique Christian writings functioned as "high texts" may appear as a characteristic that is much more relevant to later late antiquity and subsequent periods than to late antiquity per se. The canonization of patristic texts characteristically took place centuries after the death of the original author as communities either altered the texts and/or read them creatively in accordance with their own local needs and understandings. As historians of late antiquity are mostly, or even solely, interested in the history of late antique communities, they are therefore also invested in trying, as best they can, to learn about, inter alia, the historical audiences of late antique sermons.[11] How can this presumably legitimate interest be accommodated and made commensurable with the application of postmodern literary theories that proceed from the assumption that all literary works are texts first and foremost?

Prof. Clark has long spoken strongly in favor of embracing the linguistic turn in the study of late ancient Christianity.[12] She has, however, found that her historian colleagues in the United States make for rather reluctant converts. This reticence no doubt has multiple causes that range from individual intellectual disposition and formation, the self-definition of history as an academic discipline saddled between the humanities and the social sciences, and the importance that many historians ascribe to their current grab bag of tricks that is also known as the "historical method." The question may be considered on several levels. The first is epistemological and therefore foundational. Prof. Clark's book has examined and shown wanting the intellectual and theoretical assumptions that many historians make in order to tie history to *realia* in the past. And yet surely the embrace of the linguistic turn does not guarantee more epistemological groundedness since that very idea is suspect from the standpoint of postmodern theory. In which case, on what bases and according to which criteria should postmodern theory be considered a "better," or even the ultimate or only, set of tools for "premodern" historians? A main criticism given in *HTTHLT* of Geertzian "thick description" and Quentin Skinner's "contextualization" is the arbitrariness that characterizes how scholars taking such approaches identify relevant contexts to give meaning to what is being studied. Such a degree of arbitrariness, it is proposed, places the anthropologist and historian in the role of the creator or inventor of representations (149). But by deciding to construct their scholarly enterprise solely upon a corpus of highly filtered classical or patristic texts, new intellectual historians may also expose themselves to a charge of arbitrariness

11. William E. Klingshirn's "dialectical" analysis of the putative audiences of Caesarius's sermons, in *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), has long struck me as particularly fruitful.
12. See Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999). For an appreciation of Prof. Clark's role in shaping the conceptualization of the field of late antique studies, see "Rereading Late Antique Christianity," 33 (2003) [a special issue in the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*], with introduction by Annabel Wharton, 383–85.

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on the same order if not of the same kind that Geertzians and microhistorians are justly accused of demonstrating in their selection of elucidatory contexts.

The call to embrace the linguistic turn should also be considered in respect to its likely social implications, and not just in reference to the academic profession. Many contemporary historians regard themselves as being besieged on all sides. Leaving aside the uneasy cohabitation of cultural studies and history within many academic institutions, there are also the blurry lines between academic and nonacademic history to consider. Many professional historians do not believe that they have the luxury (or need) to give up all claims to truth or at least the truthful representation of the past for fear of ceding ground to Holocaust-deniers, self-indulgent Hollywood film producers and the like. Some also justly worry that the abandonment of narrative that accompanies recent historiographical shifts has now allowed a plethora of writers who are not professional historians to meet the public's demand for narrative history and historical biography. The recent emphasis on "Public History" is in the main an attempt to reclaim that lost ground, and this enterprise is based upon an assessment that, while historians as a professional group have now given up on narrative as a legitimate intellectual exercise, the public as a whole wants and needs it.[13] For socially conscious historians it may indeed be the path of virtue to embrace "the lesser evil" by catering to such a demand rather than to ignore it and thereby allow so-called bad histories to prosper and engulf the broader cultural discourse. More sophisticated historians might write narratives of discourse, but these cannot be expected to compete well in the marketplace with works of historical synthesis, including well-spun traditional narratives.

With this in mind, what practical consequences would entail should historians of late ancient Christianity and of premodernity more generally take up Prof. Clark's call? Would they soon be conceding so much discursive ground to other exponents who have either fewer intellectual scruples or simply a more robust belief that a quasi-objectivist past can be accessed through careful historical work? Many such quasihistorical works that are of great popular appeal but just as poorly received by scholars come to mind. Would this sort of development not in the long run contribute either to the further marginalization of academic history or, at any rate, give rise to multiple, audience-specific expositions, whereby academic historians share discussions of the "textuality" of their evidence amongst themselves and at the same time create traditional or improvised narratives—the modern version of the *sermo humilis,* to which they ascribe little or no truth-value, for their undergraduate students and the general public? If this should happen, are we not heading back to the hierarchical reading scheme prevalent in late antiquity and the Middle Ages?[14] And at what cost?

13. On the approach of "Public History," see David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); and David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); also *Public Historian,* official journal of the [U.S.] National Council on Public History.
14. One of the most comprehensive expositions of this hierarchical interpretive-reading scheme remains Henri de Lubac, *L'Exégèse medieval: Les quatre sens de l'Ecriture,* 2 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1959, 1961).

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Historians' reticence in embracing the linguistic turn may also have to do with the fact that it is at times couched in terms of a "Nockian" conversion involving stark, exclusive choices. If the New that is Good in this conversion is represented by postmodern literary theory, the Old that is Bad is not only objectivist history but also the current paradigm of interdisciplinarity. The latter will either have to be abandoned or greatly modified. Seen in this light, contemporary historians' reluctance to embrace the linguistic turn wholesale occasions little surprise: they are being asked to convert within an intellectual framework that concedes no more truth-value to poststructuralism than to eclectic interdisciplinarity. So why should they?

Another operative factor may be the perceived need to exchange the universality of the discipline of history from one based on the sense that everything is fair game in the investigation of the past—however knowable or unknowable—to one based on the universality of texts and questions of textuality. There is in this respect the potential of turning historians of premodernity especially into specialists of postmodern textual reading, a technical field of expertise perhaps not unlike how the fields of numismatics, epigraphy, and papyrology are often regarded by others: essential but nevertheless ancillary to the universal discipline of history.[15] Phrased differently, if historians are happy to transform themselves into literary critics and the discipline of history into the art of explicating "textuality," are they also voluntarily reducing the scope of historical enquiry and placing history on the same footing as these technical fields? Such a reading seems at least to be partially justified by what Prof. Clark says on page 159: "In positioning late ancient Christian studies as a form of intellectual history, I by no means wish to discount the indispensable assistance that archeology, numismatics, epigraphy, and other fields that attend to material culture have contributed to our understanding of past peoples and places; the enormous and learned scholarship in these fields speak for their importance. My focus, however, in keeping with the themes of this book, is more precise: issues of recent theory that pertain to *texts*." So just as coins and inscriptions require experts to explicate their meaning, so do texts. A further question that arises from this last point is whether a broader definition of "texts" ought to be granted so as to be able to consider visual material, images on coins, inscriptional pronouncements as also essentially "textual" in that they represent highly metaphorical as well as readable ideological works in much the same way as "high literary texts."

Finally, as historians are indirectly being asked to give up the authority that they used to claim as the faithful interpreters of the past, what forms of professional authority might they fall back upon? Aside from the practical but intellectually unsound strategy of simply muddling through, they are left with two main choices as I see it: either the authority of the textual critic or the authority of the artist or author. Prof. Clark proposes that it is to the former that historians should turn; as fellow scholars we can readily under-

15. Both numismatic and epigraphic material are now commonly construed by knowing scholars as representing "ideological statements"; see, for example, Kenneth W. Harl, *Civic Coins and Civic Politics in the Roman East, 180–275 A.D.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and Edmund Thomas and Christian Witschel, "Constructing Reconstruction: Claim and Reality of Roman Building Inscriptions for the Latin West," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 60 (1992): 135–77.

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stand and respect her preferred choice. But, for the sake of argument, why should it not be the latter? Such has been the choice made, for instance, by some noted historians in their recent works.[16] Indeed why should not historians aim to appropriate the authority of the artist or author instead of that of the critic or exegete by admitting that he or she *is* an inventor of the past? Or, if they truly position themselves within the process of historical inquiry, they might write more in the middle voice rather than in either a passive or active one.[17] If most basic truth-claims are now ruled out of court in historical discourse on account of postmodern textual reading, why should the stance of a literary critic be regarded as more appropriate for a historian than that of an artist or author?[18] To answer this question, a metahistorical analysis of the various pertinent academic cultures would be needed and, for this and other reasons, Prof. Clark's forthcoming book on the origins of patristic scholarship in the United States will serve as yet another valuable contribution to this rich and meaningful conversation.

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Return of the Text, or the End of Late Ancient Christianity?

Readers of Elizabeth Clark's books who like to linger over their jacket art can do so again with *History, Theory, Text.* "Cluny" by Paul Shakespear is a lopsided diptych in hues of leaf and tile, thick with textural and geometric shapes that promise and refuse to resolve themselves into human faces or letters of the alphabet. Apt cover for a book that falls open somewhat unevenly between the post- and premodern, and that would incite rather than dictate new ways of reading old authors and texts. The epigraph in place of a half title, attributed to Jacques Rancière, is less riddlesome: "There is history," it reminds us, "precisely because no primeval legislator put words in harmony with things." Precisely. Because there is no divine or natural language, there is history / theory / text.

An introduction and seven densely argued, generously documented chapters later, the co-articulation of those terms becomes still more precise. There is a *history* already in the making, of our making too if we choose it: one that will be conversant with the main kinds of recent theory, that will orient itself primarily on *texts,* and that will take "late ancient Christianity" for its subject matter. Such a specialized early Christian history will in turn form part of "the new *intellectual* history . . . that has risen to prominence in the late twentieth century" (159) and is associated with the work of such writers as Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Roger Chartier, and, especially in North America, Dominick LaCapra.

16. For experimental historical writings that take on the form of the modernist novel-travelogue, see Simon Schama, *Dead Uncertainties: Unwarranted Speculations* (New York: Knopf, 1992); Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Knopf, 1992); and Keith Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods: Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Roman World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999).
17. Hayden White, "Writing in the Middle Voice," *Stanford Literary Review* 9 (1992): 179–87.
18. In brief, modern historians would then essentially be following in the footsteps of ancient practitioners of *historia;* see Nancy F. Partner, "Historicity in an Age of Reality-Fictions," in Ankersmit and Kellner, ed., *New Philosophy of History,* 21–39.

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