

Introduction to

Peter Miller (Bard Graduate Center, New York)

‘Writing the History of Antiquarianism before Momigliano’

Comment: Peter Burke (Emmanuel College, Cambridge)

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Brief introduction to the paper by the author:

This paper was written as an introductory chapter for a collection of essays I am co-editing on antiquarianism in early modern Europe and China (see Miller and François Louis, eds., [Introduction](#) to *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Europe and China, 1500-1800*). Given the varied uses of the term “antiquarian” by historians of European scholarship, and its even more complex uses by historians of China—there *is* a historiography of antiquarianism in a Chinese context, but it has not been adequately studied—there was a need for some kind of statement. Upon deeper reflection, however, this need seemed best met by a presentation that went some way towards tracing a history of antiquarian scholarship—Momigliano’s great essay of 1950 has stood for decades as just such an ersatz, though as I made clear in *Momigliano and Antiquarianism* (2007) this was not his intent. But there was also a need for a conceptual analysis of the “antiquarian operation” since this does not exist either.

In fact, the two lines of historical narrative and conceptual analysis converge in the very intelligent but long-forgotten work of K.B. Starck (1880). Exploring and interrogating his interpretation seemed to me—and seems so still—eminently worthwhile. It raises also, an additional issue, broached in the paper’s concluding section: namely, the relationship of the modern historian and interpreter of antiquarianism to the practice studied. What, in short, is the *ongoing* relationship of antiquarianism to the cultural sciences c. 1880? Pushed further, the question leads us towards pondering an even broader challenge: if there is a living history of the antiquarian practice on into the twentieth century—albeit under the guise of other approaches and disciplines—then what dare we say about the overall shape of historical scholarship from the Renaissance to the present?

Short biography:

Peter N. Miller is widely regarded as a rising star in Intellectual History in the United States. He is the world’s leading authority on Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, perhaps

the most important antiquarian and cultural patron of seventeenth-century France. He also publishes widely on philosophical and methodological issues in the history of historiography and cultural history. He is a regular reviewer in the *New Republic*. Miller is currently Dean and Chair of Academic Programs at the Bard Graduate Center in New York City. His courses at BGC currently include The Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean and Foundations of Material Culture. Miller received his BA and MA degrees from Harvard College and his PhD from the University of Cambridge (supervisor Quentin Skinner). Subsequently he was a junior research fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge, Mellon Instructor at the University of Chicago and an assistant professor at the University of Maryland. He became a professor at the Bard Graduate Center in 2001. He is a past Fellow of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; John Simon Guggenheim Foundation; Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin; and the National Endowment for the Humanities, among others.

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