

BURCKHARDT AMONG BASEL, BERLIN AND ATHENS: THE GAME OF THE MIRROR

BURCKHARDT ENTRE A BASILEIA, BERLIM E ATENAS: O JOGO DOS ESPELHOS

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ABSTRACT: This article is divided in two parts: in the first one, the focus will be young Jacob Burckhardt's environment, his studies in Berlin under the supervision of Leopold von Ranke and some of his theoretic concerns around the Cultural History. The second part is to better understand how and why Burckhardt incorporated some of the main discussions of political theory from his own time, especially those of A. Tocqueville, J. Stuart Mill and Edmund Burke. We also aim to comprehend how the Swiss historian fashioned what I'm calling here: "the game of the mirror – from modernity to Ancient History", i.e., the author's reading of the Ancient World with a sort of disenchantment which came along with the process of modernization of Europe in the XIX's.

KEYWORDS: Jacob Burckhardt; Historiography; Theory of History.

RESUMO: Este artigo está dividido em duas partes: na primeira, o foco está no ambiente do jovem Jacob Burckhardt, seus estudos em Berlim, sob a supervisão de Leopold von Ranke, e algumas de suas preocupações teóricas em torno da História Cultural. Na segunda parte, pretende-se entender melhor como e por que Burckhardt incorporou algumas das principais discussões da teoria política de seu próprio tempo, especialmente as de A. Tocqueville, J. Stuart Mill e Edmund Burke. Intenta-se, igualmente, compreender como o historiador suíço formou o que se denomina: o jogo do espelho, ou seja, a leitura do autor do mundo antigo com uma espécie de desencanto, oriundo do processo de modernização da Europa durante o século XIX.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Jacob Burckhardt; Historiografia; Teoria da História.

Burckhardt and his time: from historicism to Basel and Cultural History

Burckhardt was born in Basel in a Protestant and bourgeois family. He pursued his Theology studies in Basel, but gave up this area quite quickly wishing to study History in 1839 in the city of Berlin. Although he had been a pupil of Leopold von Ranke and Johann Gustav Droysen, his major influences came from the classicist August Boeckh, Franz Kluger, an art historian from the Bohemian region, as well as the romantic author Gottfried Kinkel. The friendship with Kinkel ended with Kinkel's involvement as a revolutionary in the events of 1848 (MURRAY, 1999; RODRIGUES, 2013).

Very early, in its secondary studies, Burckhardt was in touch with the writings of Frenchmen like Guizot, Thierry and even Voltaire, whom he considered the founder of Cultural History. Furthermore, we could mention the influence of one of the most respected

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cultural historians of his youth, Heinrich Schreiber (HINDE, 2000), and the strong thematic inspiration of Wilhem Vischer. Burckhardt and Vischer shared strong interests in certain themes, such as: "the polis, *synoecism*, small states and federations" (CHRIST, 2000, p. 103). Ranke's influence on Burckhardt is difficult to measure. In any way, the Swiss historian distrusted the aristocratic pretensions and the attitude of support for the Prussian authoritarian state which was one of the characteristics of Ranke's history.

The period spent by Burckhardt at the University of Bonn (1841) – sensibly less Hegelian than the University of Berlin, seems to have been decisive for the development of his own ideas. When he wrote two essays, the first on Conrad von Hochstaden and the other on Charles Martel, Ranke's influence can be seen, but there was already an attempt to create a new form of narrative, which suggested a transition to another historiographical form. Thus, they may be considered either as atypical essays in the Rankean school or likewise a first attempt to approach Cultural History, especially if compared to the essay on the same theme written by another student of Ranke, Heinrich von Sybel. Sybel, as well as Droysen and G. G. Gervinus, became exponents of the traditional German trend of thought, which supported the ideas of a German *Machstaat* and the about a *Weltmachtspolitik* (HINDE, 2000, p. 175-185; GILBERT, 1986, p. 271).

Anyway, which where the main ideas of the German Historical School where Burckhardt spent such an important part of his studies? It is not a very easy task to clarify the remaining connections between historicism and Burckhardt, notably, how he remained distant from the core concerns of the German Historical School. Trying to better understand the shared interests as well as the differences between the Swiss historian and the mainstream of German historical thought, some of the main conceptions of the German Historiography of the XIX century will be outlined in the next paragraphs.

In the nineteenth century, countries like Germany, the Netherlands and France saw a flourishing and progressive development of, at least, three trends of 'how to make' history, i.e., Historicism, Cultural History and Romanticism. It would be appropriate to mention that the latter never accomplished a consistent epistemological basis, in contrast to Cultural History and, even more, Historicism, which gave rise to quite complex debates in the spectrum of the philosophy of history.

Historicism was at the very heart of Burckhardt's studies. It is well known, as we have already stated, that he developed his first major research under the supervision of Ranke in Berlin, moreover, that at a certain moment he cut off the influence of the German Scholl, denying an invitation to take an important position at University of Berlin. Then, Burckhardt left Germany, going back to his motherland. In fact, Burckhardt's academic career was developed in Switzerland, although his major interests were Italian Renaissance art, as well as studies tied up with Greco-Roman antiquity. During his academic life, he taught at the University of Basel and at the Zürich Polytechnic (MURRAY, 1999).

From Ranke to Droysen and W. Dilthey is by far a complex train of thought to debate here. Nevertheless, what follows is an effort to make a synthesis of the main conception of German historicism. Some Brazilian historians, such as Ciro Flamarion Cardoso and Francisco Falcon have been pointing out some of the fundamentals of these concepts. For Cardoso, there are three main philosophers who influenced historiography in Germany, namely: I. Kant, J.G. Herder and F. Hegel. Still according to Cardoso as far as Josep Fontana, the basis of German historical thinking was the constitution of a methodical trend, whose emphasis relied on a history with a strong stress on national issues.

Some historians attained themselves to the idea of a radical split between the subject and object of knowledge from Kant. So, the knowledge of the observer totally depends on his sensory information, unable to leave himself to reach the 'thing in itself'. The only raw material of knowledge is what is elaborated by us. In this sense, many German historians have come to believe that it is not possible to reconstitute the past. What one can do is to construct, in the historian's present, an image of the past according to the data obtained in archives. Whereas, from Herder, some historians thought that each nation has their own potentialities and becoming over time, and this is always in flux. What ought to be perceived is what is particular/singular in each age. Finally, Hegel, acting as a counterpoint to Kant, led historians to understand that the world is a projection of the spirit with no separation between it and the human being. The mind and the world were united in a dialectical relationship. The abstractions of human understanding which separate men from the world are deceitful. It should be mentioned that there was a strong nationalist element behind Hegel's thinking (CARDOSO, 2000, p. 133-48; FONTANA, 1998, p. 117-35).

The question is: how relevant were these philosophers in the scenario of the German Historical School? There is a presupposition which concerns a fundamental difference between natural phenomena and those of History, whose understanding requires a specific approach and methodology. Nature acts according to phenomena that do not have an awareness of purpose. History revolves around unique facts and human actions that cannot be duplicated, actions that depends on human volition and intention. The world is in constant flux, although within this world there are centers of stability - personalities, institutions, nations, epochs, each with their own internal structures and principles of development (IGGERS, 1968, p. 7, FALCON, 1997)

According to George Iggers as well as Fontana and Cardoso, the birth of the historicist approach relates to attempts, made by political theorists, to defend local rights and privileges against the invasion of a centralized state, e.g. the tensions between the bureaucratic state and certain places in Switzerland. In Germany, the conflict between national traditions and French ideas from the post-revolutionary European struggle of 1789 and the "Enlightenment age" was especially intense. In any way, the theoretical tradition of Germanic historiography has three key-points: 1) A conception of State; 2) A philosophy of value; 3) A theory of knowledge.

1) The state as an end and the German idea of *Machtstaat* conceives that the formation of the state occurred as a product of historical forces and gave rise to a vision of a past-centered approach to the politics and to idea of nation. The German Historical School's model was the *obligkeitsstasst* (authoritarian state), represented by the monarchy of the reformist Prussian era, which reunited elements of a bureaucratic and aristocratic tendencies, even as of a proprietary middle class that were the pillars of society.

2) *Antinormativität* is the rejection of thought in normative terms. Any historical entity has value, so, every individual, institution and action must be judged within the standards and historical situation from which it emerged, i.e. within its own values. Thus, political values and the state's own doctrine rests on an ethical conception. The State is the institutional embodiment of morality. In this way, international conflicts are not only conflicts of power, but of moral principles. Hegel's influence is clear here - the victory of war is the victory of moral energies.

3) Finally, we must mention the *Anti-Begrifflichkeit* or anti-conceptualism. The historians of this trend used to believe that conceptualization emptied the qualitative elements of History. History requires understanding (*Verstehen*), which is only possible if we place ourselves within the individual character of our research topic. The limitations of conceptualization can only be overcome by direct confrontation of the subject matter (rather than using abstractions) that one seeks to understand and by the contemplation (*Anschauung*) of its individuality – so, historical understanding requires intuition. Thereby, the rejection of abstract thought does not mean the negation of scientific rationality, but a kind of attempt to understand the logic that encompasses the "irrational aspects" of human life (IGGERS, 1968, p.7-10).

Historicists were definitely aware of the social changes brought about by the economic and social transformations of industrialization. History was, for them, the interrelationship between great powers which should be analyzed by means of political and diplomatic documents. Despite the rejection of ideas of progress, the historicists looked upon the future optimistically - while a *désenchantement* took over thinkers such as Burckhardt. All this theorization works with a very static concept of State, much less awareness of cultural diversities and with little space for comparative studies. This is in stark contrast to what Max Weber, Karl Marx, N.D. Fustel de Coulanges and even Burckhardt were thinking, for instance (IGGERS 1968, p. 3-15). Summing-up, we may claim that Burckhardt vaguely shared some ideas with the German School, namely: 1) the relevance of the State in his analysis is very clear, but very far from the Hegelian conceptions of the State as a moral entity; 2) the loose and widespread idea in the German thought that history requires understanding (*Verstehen*), and the sense that it ought to be made by an individual, whose own subjectivity was into account in the process of evaluating the past.

Even though it is very hard to trace Burckhardt's historical affiliations, he might have shared a few characteristics with the romanticists. Many historians associate the emergence of a romantic appraisal of history from political movements in the period after the Terror of the French Revolution. On one hand, moderate liberal forces increased their power in 1815 and, subsequently, much more in 1830; but, on the other hand, a conservative reaction, trying to maintain the *ancien régime* had arisen as well. Thus, in France, names like François Guizot, Augustin Thierry and Jules Michelet were looking for a sense of history in the

singularities of each time and in a sensitive, somehow flamboyant narrative which permeated historical speech (DOSSE 2013, p. 116-124).

A counter-enlightenment attitude, especially anti-nomological, can be seen in the writings of the romanticists. This stance was followed by the necessity to find a “new great past”. The rationalist position of the historians of the XVIII century and the notion of causality was under severe criticism. From now on, the romanticists were trying to forge another myth of European cultural tradition. So, like René Chateaubriand, they chosen the Middle Ages, i.e. they replaced classical civilization -, another one myth of European origins imagined in the XIX’s, as an attempt to create this brand new starting point of European tradition and culture. (MALATIAN, 2010, p. 103-131; CROSSLEY, 1993, p. 40; VLASSOPOULOS, 2007, p. 23-40).

To Fontana, the romantic point of view was a way to block the revolutionary and disruptive ideas from the last century (FONTANA, 1998). The most relevant matter to the romanticists was a positive evaluation of the subjectivisms attached to the idea that the subject of knowledge couldn’t be dissociated from the object studied. It was a sort of individualized methodology centered on the self, which looks to understand people, nation, religion and identity through hermeneutics. On the margins, History could turn itself into a literary genre, as we can see in the thrilled rhythm of the *French Revolution* by Thomas Carlyle (CARLYLE, 1883, p. 242-3). Some of these features can be seen in Burckhardt works, like care with the narrative, the appreciation of the singularity of the past and even a kind of nostalgia of a world that had been disappearing during his time. However, at the heart of his work, Burckhardt created a solid and specific approach to the past¹. Considering some of the ideas from the German School, as mentioned before, especially the relevance of the State, but moving quite far from a politic centered history, Burckhardt considered the recently developed field of Cultural History superior for understanding the complexities of the past.

The earliest influence on Burckhardt’s idea of Cultural History comes, surprisingly, from the Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire, especially concerning *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* and *Essai sur les moeurs et l’esprit des nation*, which became public in 1751 and 1756

¹ Even German historians within the historicist tendency who recognized the relevance of cultural life did so through the assumption that state politics determined the nature of cultural and social development. History was, as at term, a kind of *Staatswissenschaft* (HINDE 2000, p.167-169).

respectively. These works emphasized the narratives of prominent and military individuals but, represented a shift from a factual history to a concern for social and cultural phenomena. Voltaire's definition, in the introduction of his first book, points to an understanding of culture not as the high cultures of the arts, but as the history of society and civilization (HINDE, 2000, p. 167-9).

Romantic history can be defined as a *History of the Human Will* in opposition to the *History of Human Reason* proposed by the Enlightenment. From a romantic point of view, it was a question of seeking in past the experiences and the bases of the traditions of the present but, in such a way as, to compare them with the past realities that also had very positive and peculiar aspects, fleeing, therefore, from the evolutionist notion that prevailed in Enlightenment thought. In this way, ideas of romantic philosophers/historians impacted on Burckhardt's thoughts. From F. Schiller, emerges the notion that if facts were elements of analysis for scientists, thus, romantic historians would take them as objects of knowledge in the sense of its personal experiences. For J. Fichte, the present is the focus to which the lines of historical development converge. Each historical period has its own character and the task of the historian is to understand the period in which he lives (GILBERT, 1986, p. 273; RODRIGUES, 2013, p. 95-112).

Subsequently, we should mention that the main influence on Burckhardt's understanding of History was the philosopher A. Schopenhauer. This link can be seen in how Burckhardt rejected the cult of the event in History; in its view, Cultural History must deal with what is typical, constant and recurring. It does not matter whether the narrative of the sources is true or not. Even if something was forged, it has already become a genuine element of the conceptions and beliefs of an era. As Murray notes, "This principle of unconscious revelation through representation derives ultimately from Schopenhauer's conception of the world as representation; and it is one of the most powerful tools as historian's study of mentalities" (MURRAY, 1999, p. XXXII). In this way, it could be assumed that Cultural History is more concerned with the beliefs and attitudes represented in the sources than to the problem of verity in the sources' pronunciation. According to Murray and Jörn Rüsen, Burckhardt can be considered as one of the founders of the post-modern relativism view (MURRAY, 1999, p. XXXIII; RÜSEN, 1985, p. 235).

Once these general considerations are complete, we might question how Burckhardt developed his own appraisal of Cultural History? The next step is realizing in what way Burckhardt dialogued with the trends and the *ethos* of the Cultural History of the XIX century. A starting point that united almost all the cultural historians was the opposition to the traditional and state-centered history spread wide by the German Historical School.

What was most important to the cultural historians was to dwell on the internal conditions of society - intellectual, religious, institutional manifestations of popular and elite cultures and economic developments. The transformations in the social, cultural and economic spheres were the focus of the questions and distresses, in short, what can be called a modernization process of the European world. Rather than using an analytical and explanatory structure, they opted for narrative and description. Indeed, the explanation and interpretation for cultural historians depended on the subjectivity of the historian. Cultural History embraced a myriad of historiographical practices, such as: historical anthropology; History of Art and literature; History of ideas, of everyday life, Ethnology and a kind of racial science. Thus, gradually it fell into a sort of minutiae of morals and manners which made it a great success with the literate middle class, but had very little penetration in universities (HINDE, 2000, p. 167-173).

Despite many shared interests, the fact is that there were points of disagreement between them. For historians such as Gustav Klemm, Cultural History begins to resemble a racial history, in which there are two worlds, divided into active and passive races². Active races, such as the Germans, were considered culturally developed. For Wilhelm Wachsmuth, culture was related to noble, creative and rational activity. Directing his discourse towards the development of Cultural History, Eberhard Gothein wrote *Die Aufgaben der Kulturgeschichte* in 1889 and tried to show Cultural History within the development of the modern spirit. Contrary to the tendency of traditional political history, Cultural History made possible the integration and synthesis of manifold aspects of social life - religion, state, art, economy, etc. However, for Gothein, Cultural History was not the History of Civilization, but

² Burckhardt is concerned about racial questions in his oeuvre: *Judgments on History and Historians*. It must be underlined here that the opinions expressed by Burckhardt about Ancient History and the differences among cultures seems not only old-fashioned, but almost totally unacceptable nowadays. Cf. (BURCKHARDT, 1999, p. 1-10)

of ideas. In any case, Hinde emphasizes that Goethe's ideas remained in the shadows during the nineteenth century (HINDE, 2000, p. 174-5).

Burckhardt's appraisal of History is inevitably related to how the concept of culture had been developed. Based on Michael Bentley, there were, at least, two major understandings of culture. In the first, culture, and consequently Cultural History, was a kind of history of art and literature, considered as a key to understanding social perception (BENTLEY, 1997, *passim*). As Edmilson Rodrigues points out, Giorgio Vasari's work on the Renaissance artists was Burckhardt's greatest source of inspiration, as well as Voltaire in his historical studies and the idea of individuality in Michelet (RODRIGUES, 2013, p. 102-4). Another understanding of culture was as a concept that associated intellectual, aesthetic values with a perception of the great importance of the state. All of this was linked to the analysis of German thought in the development of the Bismarck Empire. It would be the reduction of *Kultur* to *Macht* (power). Thus, the notion of culture among the Germans established a strong dialogue between state and nation (BENTLEY, 1997, p. 415-21).

If on one hand it is quite clear that the History of Art was very important to Burckhardt, because he took the visual arts and the architecture as a special attribute of the human being -, a sort of elite or high culture, on the other, Burckhardt does not relegate the State and its power as a subsidiary or non-relevant variable. As we shall try to show forward, Burckhardt innovates profoundly in the way he comprehends the importance of the state in his own appraisal.

The historian Pedro Spinola Pereira Caldas once explained that two elements were crucial to Burckhardt. The first was the *Bildung*, a very important concern within German thought, which means self-cultivation and formation. The *Bildung* for Burckhardt is not only related to scientific research (which would have a specialized sense), it goes beyond it. The attribute that can define a cultured man, apart from his specialization, is that one can perceive the meaning of continuity. There are three branches of *Bildung*: a) a critique of specialization; b) the cultivation of a historical consciousness as a *continuum* of a European History; c) a verifiable trait in other cultures, such as the *sophrosyne*³, the core of Greek, and therefore European culture (CALDAS, 2010, p. 1-9).

³ It can be understood as temperance, moderation, self-control.

In fact, Burckhardt even regarded amateurism as part of his idea of History, since it could be appropriated individually for the basis of his own future. One who does not intend to be an amateur will lose the ability to construct a more general look at things (MURRAY, 1999, p. XXVII-XXXII). The nature of this experience is related to contemplation - *Anschauung*. Cultural History, according to Burckhardt, emphasizes the proportional importance of the facts, according to their condition of penetrating our spirit, of desiring participation in them, there is an element of empathy in the process of the creation of the historian, an aesthetic dimension of history (CALDAS, 2010, p.5-8).

Burckhardt's view of history can be seen from three principles, which are not laws: "the State, the religion, and the culture. [...] the first two, expressions of political and metaphysical needs, may claim authority over their particular people at any rate, and indeed over the world" (MURRAY, 1999, p. XXIII). Culture, however, ought to be considered differently, because it deals with everything that may have arisen spontaneously in the development of material life as well as the expression of moral and spiritual, and, does not produce forms of compulsory authority. "The formation of historical societies is based on a process of interaction between these three powers. Thus, history cannot be reduced to a single explanation such as the political, but results from the complex interplay of competing powers" (MURRAY, 1999, p. XXIII). In this way, there was an interdependency: culture is determined by State and religion; the State is determined by religion and culture; religion is determined by State and culture (CHRIST, 2000, p. 116).

This brand-new method of how to approach History was applied in two of Burckhardt's studies. The result was two oeuvres, in fact the masterpieces of the Swiss historian: *The Age of Constantine the Great (Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen - 1852)* and *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien - 1860)*. As Hinde argues, in many respects Burckhardt's interpretation had to deal with his confrontation with modernity, the crisis of its Contemporary world. One of Burckhardt's theoretical outputs was to cast off the vision of a linear, scientific and teleological history. Related to this was the question of seeing himself as a neutral reporter of the past, without considering your own involvement with the historical process -, we must emphasize the dialogue of Burckhardt with Fustel de Coulanges about this matter (HARTOG, 2001, p. 11). As such, we agree with H-G. Gadamer when he stress that Burckhardt was very concerned with

the problem that the continuity of the transmission of Western Culture is the very condition of its own existence. When this tradition begins to decline, there is the irruption of a new barbarism, the end of History -, understood as a universal historical unity (GADAMER, 1977, p. 260-7).

In short, crises and the continuity of cultures were, in Burckhardt's view, always key point to be considered. If in the time of Constantine, the key to understanding was the degree to which the success of Christianity was related to the developments of paganism itself, so, the society, politics, religion and cultural Roman institutions got into a sort of state of obsolescence (*Veraltung*), and paralysis (*Erstarrung*), in the Renaissance, the most relevant key was the individualism (HINDE 2000, p. 186-197). This discovery occurs when men create self-consciousness. Individualization is the driving force of the Renaissance because it is the discovery of oneself through the discovery of the world, thus, breaking-up with the mentality of the Medieval world. These are the metaphors of the reading of the Age of Constantine and of the Renaissance in Italy.

Mixing spheres: Burckhardt and political theory

Lionel Gossman opens a way to better understand how Burckhardt set up his ideas about politics and how they became applicable to his approach to ancient and modern History. According to Gossman, Prussian victory in the Franco-Prussian War, 1871, opened space for the foundation of the Second Germanic Empire. Thus, the first draft of what would be the lectures of *The History of the Greek Culture* became public in the years soon after the mentioned war, and its consequences disappointed Burckhardt profoundly (GOSSMAN, 2003, p. 47). As Eileen Ka-May Cheng points out, Burckhardt observed the growth of German nationalism with fear, itself seen as the antipode of the development of a cosmopolitan individualism, instead, he believed in a kind of local loyalty, such as the love of his city, Basel, which were fundamental for the preservation of the sense of diversity (CHENG, 2012, p. 94).

For some the central themes of the *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* appear to have had quite a lot to do with the issues Burckhardt believed were important to him as a citizen of Basel, a Swiss, and as an educated European in the second half of the nineteenth century: the relative merits of confederation of small states and of larger, centralized states; the relation of individual freedom and state power, and, in particular, of liberty and democracy; the effect on culture of unlimited power struggles among rival states and of the democratic resentment of elites with them; and

democracy as a breeding-ground of demagogy, chauvinism and war (GOSSMAN, 2003, p. 48).

Egon Flaig assertively argues that the great works of the nineteenth century, under the guise of academic writings, clearly advocated political agendas. Terms like liberal describes both Montesquieu and Hayek and end up losing their heuristic value (FLAIG, 2003, p. 7-8). Gossman adds that there were many debates about these political issues that went through the life of Switzerland and afterwards of Prussia. Historians of antiquity reflected upon this, Theodor Mommsen was accused of "idolize[ing] pure power," George Grote wrote a series of articles, later published in his *History of Greece*, in which he makes several conjectures between the Swiss case and the Greek case of the fifth century and Droysen came to describe Macedonia as a sort of Prussia of antiquity. Meanwhile, others, like Wilhelm Vischer, supported the forms of the small Greek states, as those which carry forward the culture (GOSSMAN, 2003, 48-50).

Some political issues are crucial to comprehend Burckhardt's historical approach, namely: freedom and authority; the nature of the State; and the relations between tradition and modernity. Richard Sigurdson has made a very important appraisal about Burckhardt's social and political thoughts and his concerns are broadly used in our own writing and organization of this part of the text.

The first point is about freedom. Burckhardt quite often thought that individuality is more important than other political and social purposes. The Swiss historian seems to have tied himself to some ideas taken from Alexis de Tocqueville and, sometimes, John Stuart Mill. However, in fact, Burckhardt seems inclined to accept that in the name of harmony, continuity and security, limiters of freedom could exist; and, in that sense, there are stronger dialogues with Edmund Burke.

An individual's creation of their own lifestyle and individuality depends on a cultural dynamism and an environment of freedom of choices and ideas. Burckhardt, contrary to this principle, says that exactly the opposite could happen, thus, freedom and equality, two pillars of democracy might be incompatible. Democratic institutions have put too much power in the hands of a majority that is obsessed with egalitarianisms that go beyond political equality. In this way, the quest for social equality, in a broader sense, is an element of the destruction of freedom. In this framework, the majority could become despotic, even

in relation to the minority of thinkers. The problem is that in democracy, increasingly, to maintain and strengthen equality, a centralized and bureaucratic State is built, and, ultimately, controls various activities in the human sphere. Thus, exceptional individuals are hampered by the 'state of masses' in the name of equality (SIGURDSON, 2004, p. 167-9).

Flaig realized that Burckhardt made some assumptions and judgments in History during the process of its writing, three of these are: 1) an almost "morbid" obsession about the forces that threatened the continuity of the European culture of his time; 2) his concerns for some moral dispositions that were basic conditions for the most important cultural developments and; 3) the "fact" that there was a strong and perilous tendency for democracy and material interests in nineteenth century Europe (FLAIG, 2003, p. 7-9).

To summarize, we should pose a question: how should one consider the negative relation between freedom and equality that Burckhardt conceived? Equality weakens freedom by highlighting the natural differences that exist in society and especially by suppressing the active energy of its more excellent members. It should be noted that Burckhardt's fear was about a kind of equality that could, somehow, extrapolate the legal set to the economic-social spheres (SIGURDSON, 2003, p. 169). This set of reflections show us how Burckhardt was preoccupied with the political movements of the Europe of his time, but this political standpoint overflowed and guided him through the age of polis, for instance. What is clear is the profound relationship between this set of ideas and Burckhardt's strategy for reading democratic Athens its History of Greek Culture [*Griechische Kulturgeschichte*].

The last subject here is the complex relation between: State, tradition and modernity. Benjamin Constant, an important thinker of the XIX century once said that there was a very clear distinction between modern freedom and the political freedom of antiquity. For Constant the problem is that the people should not govern directly, but through their elected representatives, in short: in the modern age the State provides security and protection to guarantee the individual in their highest potential; yet, in the ancient state the whole [one should say – the polis] encompasses the parts [the individuals]. For Burckhardt, it was not enough to have representatives to clarify the problem of democracy, it was, after all, the tyranny of the masses. Their leaders, the demagogues, must have the masses at their side. Political equality eliminated the effective possibility of representation. The discussions

about the events of the late fifth century in Athens gained importance during Burckhardt's time. So, he analyzed Greek democracy in contemporary terms, in the light of eighteenth and nineteenth century theories, in this way, even if there were no direct democracy, the representative form couldn't prevent the fury of the masses and the destruction of culture by means of an uprising (FLAIG, 2003, p. 10; GROSSMAN, 2003, p. 54-5).

Observe that Burckhardt acknowledged the achievements of the modern State, such as: equality before the law; the right to exploit property; a larger productivity of the land and the separation with the church. However, all this ended up leading to the dissolution of very positive elements in traditional societies, like as the disappearance of aristocratic habits, traditions and a break with the past, including customs that disappeared with the arisen of an unbridled capitalism and with the vanishing of smaller units of coexistence. Then, a huge population began to live in bad conditions, and the State wouldn't, or didn't want to help with these consequences. So, modernity showed its terrible claws: the modern state, industrialization and fast changes in the social contexture (SIGURDSON, 2004, p. 192).

Sigurdson rhetorically asked himself: "Is Burckhardt pointing to some problems that really exist, or are they the fruits of a poetic imagination, colored by much pessimism and nostalgia?" (SIGURDSON, 2004, p. 169). Flaig's answer is emphatic, since Burckhardt suffered with a paranoid fear of the masses. European culture suffered from a possible uprising of the masses and the decline of high culture due to massification. So, there was an unavoidable fate: once the masses had come to power in a democratic government, it would have descended into a form of dictatorship (FLAIG, 2003, p. 8-9).

Sigurdson clarifies that to Burckhardt the experience of modernity has changed the nature and status of human freedom. There is a modern, distinct way of understanding the relation of concepts between freedom and authority. Until the nineteenth century, freedom was considered a possible answer to all the problems in England, concomitant with the erosion of the authorities, the traditions and customs of the old regime. Thus, freedom was defined as the absence of State interference (negative freedom); the true freedom could be found in Ancient Athens or in the Renaissance Florence. Freedom for Burckhardt is not a form of license, but the opportunity to create within rules imposed by the people themselves. In fact, there are accepted limits, the inherited

traditions. Development based on existing tradition is the way in which the individual can develop himself into a morally decent being and change generational inheritances slowly. "For Burckhardt, again, the individual divorced from a cultural continuum is a barbarian, since life without the references of the traditions that guide, becomes spiritually poor and almost unbearable" (SIGURDSON, 2004, p. 171-3).

This kind of thinking approximates Burckhardt and Burke, since the latter considered, praise to tradition, the insistence on roots issues and prudence as a guide to political activity, very important behaviours. In this way, considering the results of the French Revolution in particular, Burke used to argue that the state is perverted when conformed according to rules of reason and rationality.

Trying to conclude this article, we can say that this approach leads us to think about the conflicts between social change and traditions. Traditions as discourse and practices, sometimes ritualized ones, teach, crystalize and aim for continuity of the present in the future. The *habitus*, as Pierre Bourdieu deeply analyzed, is part of this amalgam, this web of relationships and social representations that social groups reproduced, yet tended not to think about nor even rationally contend their structures (BOURDIEU, 2009).

Could a sort of discontinuity, a break between past, present, and the future be avoided by the contemplative action of the cultural historian, through an esthetic appraisal of history? And what does it really mean? Could the study of cultural manifestations be a way to heal oneself from the disharmony of the historical experience? If we remember one of the most notable works of Norbert Elias, about the history of W. A. Mozart, we will see that the very concerns of Elias were about a sort of discontinuity, namely: Mozart's position in an aristocratic society which did not only accept his songs. According to the sociologist, Mozart's achievements and failures arose in a context in which the dynamics between class-pattern conflicts were crucial to understanding the musician's life, perhaps comprehending him as a "bourgeois outsider" at the service of the nobles (ELIAS, 1994, p. 16).

Nonetheless, we must highlight that Burckhardt's relation with his subject is not separated from his own subjectivity. Possibly, we should not only claim Burckhardt's political speech is biased in this case, although it is correct to point it out; but we may also observe that it was part of the very core concept of a history which departs from his existential needs. Epistemologically speaking, it is not very far from the hermeneutic circle and the

invention of the historicist's philosophy of history, like W. Dilthey, and the reinvention of this episteme today, as shown by Jörn Rüsen (RÜSEN 2001). Looking to the past and to the approach made by Burckhardt in front of the mirror of its time, we should begin to think about our practice and methods, and ultimately about the epistemic condition of History nowadays.

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