

## **CHRISTIANITY IN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS: TEXTUAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES**

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### **Abstract**

The present study focus on the presence of Ancient History contents in the Brazilian history teaching manuals. We will inquire particularly the permanences and changes in the configuration of historical forms on the history of Christianity in order to highlight that the historical memory builded by such narratives perform a significant political-cultural role, one moment as legitimizing instrument of the current social order, within which the past is 'domesticated' to satisfy the interests and objectives of the present, the next as a producer of a historical sense in accordance with political and religious institutions of the present. Finally, we will discuss the role of classical studies in the curricular proposals of History in the 21st century, its advances and setbacks.

### **Keywords**

Ancient History; teaching programs; curricular proposals; history teaching manuals.

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## **Resumo**

O presente estudo ocupa-se da presença de conteúdos de História Antiga em manuais de ensino de História brasileiros. Indagaremos, particularmente, as permanências e as mudanças na configuração de formas históricas sobre a história do cristianismo com a finalidade de destacar que a memória histórica fabricada por tais narrativas exerce um papel político-cultural significativo, ora como instrumento legitimador da ordem social vigente, no interior da qual o passado é 'domesticado' para satisfazer a interesses e objetivos do presente, ora como produtor de um sentido ao passado em consonância com as instituições políticas e religiosas contemporâneas. Por fim, discutiremos o papel dos estudos clássicos nas propostas curriculares de História no século XXI, seus avanços e percalços.

## **Palavras-chave**

História Antiga; programas de ensino; propostas curriculares; manuais de ensino de história.

## Christianity in History Textbooks: Textual and Ideological Continuities and Discontinuities

The specialized literature on the history of education tells us that it befell to the Jesuits the responsibility for the systematization of Brazilian education. In other words, it befell to the Jesuits, as part of the Portuguese 'civilizational' project, the task of establishing a literate and systematic educational program, during the period Dermerval Saviani (*apud* Ruckstadter 2010) called 'pedagogia brasílica' (*brasilic pedagogy*). Therefore, the legacy of the Jesuits in Brazil's Colonial Period goes beyond the missions – which, to some extent, underlined the colonial-civilizational project of the Portuguese – and extends to education. For in schools students received humanistic training aimed at an eventual enrolment in the universities of Évora and Coimbra.

It is possible to identify the production of history textbooks from this period, among which we find the *Epítome Cronológico, Genealógico e Histórico*, written by the missionary Jesuit António Maria Bonucci (1651-1728) and published in 1706 so it could be employed in Bahia's Colégio Jesuítico da Bahia at the close of the XVII century. (See Ruckstadter, 2010). This is a manual no longer directed exclusively at catechesis, but covering also topic in sacred and profane history which were part of the Colégio's Humanities curriculum:

In his compendium Bonucci unites Sacred History – with emphasis on the history of biblical prophets, Jesus in particular, and of the Catholic Church – and Profane History, from the ancient to the modern kingdoms. The history of monarchies is, in general, presented from the point of view royal lineages, so as to legitimize the construction of nations. (Ruckstadter, 2010: 6-7).

Notice that the presence of topics in Ancient History fulfilled a purpose: to endorse the history of Christianity as a history of salvation, in such a way that the historical narrative acquires a linear, causal and teleological aspect, committed to the emergence and consolidation of Christianity in its role in the political configuration *from the ancient up to the modern kingdoms*.

For example, Bonucci, after narrating in his Chapter 1 the creation of the world by God in six days, presents, in Chapter 2, a chronology of human history, dividing it in six 'ages', namely: The First Age, from Adam to the Flood; The Second Age, from the end of the Flood to the exodus; The Third Age, from the exodus to the fourth year of Solomon's kingdom; The Fourth Age, from Solomon's fifth year to the second year of the Jerusalem's Temple construction; The Fifth Age, from the end of Jewish captivity and

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the beginning of the Persian Monarchy to the coming of the Messiah or incarnation of God's son; The Sixth Age, from the first coming of Christ to the second coming, when he returns to pass judgment upon the living and the dead (Bonucci, 1706: 03).

This is a historical narrative that intends to be universal and, more than that, to reconcile past and present, insofar as the past, on this view, grounds and justifies the formative processes of European National States.

In other words, the emphasis on biblical prophets and both ancient and modern kingdoms, in the context of a factual, linear and progressive narrative, contributed to the legitimize the culture and politics of the National States, inscribing them in a causal-explanatory chain culminating in the present.

But the fact that the Jesuits taught history topics in their schools during the XVII and XVIII centuries does not imply that this knowledge was recognized as a normal "school subject" in the way we understand this notion today. For those topics were not integrated in an organized set of theories (a curriculum), nor were they endowed with specific pedagogical procedures and aims suitable to the subject in question. Moreover, during the period in question, history topic did not proceed from an established scientific discipline (Chervel, 1990).

History, as a scientific discipline, would become established only in the XIX century. Fonseca 2003 makes it clear that history, as taught in Jesuitical schools, played a merely instrumental role, with aims external to itself.

With the Suppression of the Company of Jesus from the Portuguese Empire in 1759, and the consequent criticism of the educational models influenced by Jesuit Priests, new educational directives were introduced during the Marquês de Pombal's administration (1750-1777). Those new directives were based of reformist policies influenced by 'encyclopédism' (Romanelli, 1997) and had, following the ideas of French *encyclopédistes*, the ambition of liberating teaching from the 'narrowness' and 'obscurantism' that the Jesuits had supposedly conferred upon it.

However, such initiatives did not result in any meaningful reform of Brazil's education system, since, in effect, the Jesuits continued teaching based on the same methodologies. Many of the teachers that came to replace them retained their methods and handbooks, which means that the approach to historical topics, founded on the conciliation of Sacred

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and Profane History, did not suffer meaningful changes. This remained so even after the inauguration of the Imperial Colégio Pedro II (ICPII), which marks both the implementation of secondary public instruction in Brazil and the appearance of 'History' as a mandatory curricular discipline, required for the obtaining of the degree of 'Bacharel em Letras' (*undergraduate degree in letters*) (Farias Junior; Guimarães, 2020).

Behind the public educational policies that defined the teaching programs, i.e., the topics to be covered at each school stage, there were men of letters, most of them connected to the conservative party and the IHGB, who had studies in Europe, mostly in France, and who brought to eighteenth century's Brazil not just French and English textbooks, some of them translated for use in secondary schools, but also the serialist educational project, in which the disciplines and their contents were distributed along eight years according to their level of complexity. With the educational reform of 1841, those eight years would become seven.

From 1838 until the middle 1870's, Ancient History topics were predominantly integrated to the Universal History compendiums, which were, in turn, linked with Sacred History, with a focus on the canonical books which were conceived as 'historical truth' in opposition to the rest of ancient literature.

Those handbooks perpetuated the that the past presented itself in a finished form in which biblical narratives occupied a unique place and were beyond doubts, revisions or reinterpretations. They belong to the sphere of what is 'certain' about the past. For example, in the preface to the *Compêndio de História Universal* (*universal history compendium*), by Justiniano José da Rocha (1860), we read:

For us, fortunate Catholics, [...] we have in our holy books, those faith teaches us were written under the inspiration of eternal truth, infallible guides, if we know how to follow them. But history, from o Christian point of view, as it ought to be studies, is yet to be written: classical history, which we have adopted in every education book of every civilized nation, **does not start from similar principles**; it abstracts from revelation and merely gathers, with the effort of criticism, the most plausible things that have been written by profane authors. We should not innovate; but it behooves us to follow on the same track. So much the better, as far as Ancient History is concerned: Titus Livius and Tacitus, Herodotus and Thucydides, **even in their errors**, have their styles, their broad views and their knowledge of the human hart as compensation. (Rocha, 1860: 18, boldface added)

Shortly after, Justiniano informs us that the study of universal history will be divided in three periods:

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1. **Ancient History**, from the first days of creation to the final division of the Roman Empire between the three sons of Theodosius (395) 2. **Medieval History**, extending until the ruin of the Oriental Empire and the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks (1453); 3. **Modern History**, extending from then to our days (Rocha, 1860: 18-9, boldface added)

To understand these excerpts, we need to take into account that the public policies that came into place between the educational reforms of Couto Ferraz (1854) and Leôncio de Carvalho (1878), contributed to maintain and strengthen the conciliations between Sacred and Civilian History.

And this because, from the Leôncio de Carvalho's reform (1878) on, conservative catholic groups (called *saquerema*) lost terrain to liberal groups, which then, as Carvalho 2003 tells us, started to disseminate positivistic proposals, marked by the ideas of progress and evolution. Then, starting with the educational reform of 1878, religious education became optional and the so-called 'acatólicos' (*non-catholics*) became free to teach, untangling themselves from catholic theology.

To me, the Couto Ferraz's Reform (1854) is a landmark in the field of curricular policies. The reasons are three First of all, it was an effort by the federal government to establish a uniform national standard for secondary education. Secondly, for the vigilance and control over schools, teachers and didactic literature that was put in place by organs and public offices created specifically for this purpose – such as the *Inspetoria geral da Instrução Primária e Secundária do Município da Corte* (General Inspectorate of Primary and Secondary Instruction of the Court's Municipality), IGIPSC. Thirdly, for its defense of religious Christian education, both at the elementary and secondary levels. All the posterior educational reforms, namely those of 1856, 1858, 1862 and 1877 featured fixed religious disciplines, such as *História Sagrada e Doutrina Cristã* (Sacred History and Christian Doctrine), *Instrução Religiosa* (Religious Instruction) ou *Ensino de Religião* (Religious Teachings), usually allocated to the first year of secondary courses. (See Farias Junior, 2020: 46-7).

At the more advanced school stages, the proposal to teach French History became consolidated and was based on Victor Duruy textbook of 1865. In this book, after Sacred History, comes Universal History, divided and Ancient History, Medieval History and Modern History. After this incursion into Universal History the student then migrated to the study of *Historia Pátria* (Fatherland's History),

As we have already noted, in connection with passages from da Rocha's *História Universal*, there is a tendency, in the compendiums produced around this time, to conceive of Ancient History not only as the study of the origins of modern civilization, but also as the study of the origins of the world, man and Christianity – since sacred and profane or civilian history were integrated (Bittencourt, 2008). For example, in the compendium *História Universal resumida para uso das escolas dos Estados Unidos da América do Norte* (1869), translated by the *desembargador* (appeals court judge) Lourenço José Ribeiro (1869), Pedro Parley says:

More or less six thousand years ago, God, after having created the universe, the sky with its stars, the earth with its plants and animals, forged, in His own resemblance, man, the king of creation. Adam e Eva are the progenitors of any man existing today. (Parley, 1869: 12).

We may observe that Parley sticks to the Christian tradition of seeing the Universe's creation as having taken place at approximately 6.000 BCE, following calculations based on the creation's week and the ages of the main Old Testament's characters. Moreover, that is no doubt that Parley is addressing a Christian public:

Abraham, son of Thare, was the founder of the Judaic nation. He was born two hundred years after the Flood and was from Chaldea, which is located in the meridional part of the Assyrian Empire. *The citizens of Chaldea were idolaters and worshipped the sun, the moon and the stars. Abraham, however, worshipped the true God, the very same one we worship today [...]* God ordered them to leave their land and go west towards Canaan. (Parley, 1869: 22-3, boldface added)

A similar historical perspective is present in Victor Duruy's *Compêndio de Historia Universal* ("Universal History Compendium"), which was translated into Portuguese by the canon Francisco Bernardino de Souza (1865), who taught at Imperial Colégio Pedro II:

All the peoples will retain a vague memory, a distant echo of the last convulsions that shook this land [...]. **However, none of these ancient tales have the simplicity and imposing grandiosity of the Genesis, the first holy book of Jews and Christians.** "God, says Moses, whose narration we summarize here, successively created light, the heavens, land, plants, the sun, fishes, birds and all the animals; and then he created man (4138 a.C.). Man, however, disobeyed at Eden and such disobedience condemns him to labor and pain. (Duruy, 1865: 01-2)

These excerpts reveal the main motivation of those authors in approaching the study of Antiquity: the identification of the 'origins' of their historical world. According to Martins, the intent was to forge, at the literary level, a historical continuity between creation, Moses' activities as King-prophet, the formation of the great empires, the triumph of

Christianity and its impact in the cultural formation of modern states, with its emphasis on the continuation of the faith in the Christian God (2008: 198). This continuity would ground monarchic political projects, such as the Brazilian Empire, in Christian theology, and would help disseminate the idea that we share a common past, producer of values and social principles that are indispensable to the process of social identification.

In the passage just quoted, Duruy employs the Genesis plot in his line of reason, what can also be said of Pedro Parley and Justiniano José da Rocha. We can see that, to these authors, the unity of human history has a double aspect: a remote common origin of the universe and of man (creation), and a common destiny in salvation/redemption. This approach is linked to the providentialist conception of history, since the beginning and the end are known, even though what comes in between and is experienced by different communities is open to multiple historical consequences, what would justify the multiplicity of human experience. (Fillafer, 2017: 05).

In this sense, these manuals of ancient history do not differ from those of the XVII and XVIII centuries employed by the Jesuits during the colonial period. They are all Christocentrics and even if the new ones have taken a step away from a strict biblical plot and incorporated other form of literature, they still see ancient history as a means of educating good Christians. In other words, they teach an “old morality” seen through a judaico-christian lens. For clearly the school’s narratives disqualified non-christian religious experiences. Consider, for instance, the following passage:

Roman politics was selfish, self-interest being its real spring. Like the Greeks, Persians, Egyptians and other ancient nations, the Romans had some understanding of virtue and sometimes displayed noble and generous qualities. But just all those other nations, they lacked **true morality**, the one Jesus Christ taught us through this simple maxim: “Do unto others as you wish they do unto you”! Roman, just as all the others, was deprived of that **true religion**, according to which all power based on injustice is short-lived. As splendid as it was, the Roman Empire was far from attaining **true glory**. Its splendor acquired through theft and its great renown could fool a genteel; but for Christians they had and have little value, for they take this magnificence as false and ungrounded. (Parley, 1869: 240, boldface added).

In this passage, Parley outlines the moral superiority of Christian culture by means of a chain of oppositions in which customs, values and social principles are seen in a dichotomic manner, i.e., as binary games of true/false, right/wrong, useful/useless, primitive/civilized (Farias

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Junior; Guimarães, 2020: 62). Such a perspective remains, to some extent, in the XIX century's approach to ancient history. For example, teachers would consider Christianity as "religion" and other religious experiences as "myths". This line of reasoning, founded on the idea of moral superiority, reinforced and promoted forms of intolerance and oppression of which, to some extent, we are victims today.

Moreover, such a dichotomous outlook<sup>2</sup> (right/wrong; true/false; good guy/bad guy) in history textbooks exerts a pedagogical function as it presents patterns of morality and excellence by which human actions are supposed to be judged (Barth, 1998: 194). In this sense, these authors were demarcating, in their school narratives, the cultural frontiers that separate Christians from non-Christians. They did that by acknowledging, maintaining and validating a distinction between "us" and the "other". And as we already noted, this reinforces the Christocentric tone of such narratives. (Farias Junior; Guimarães, 2020: 62).

Broadly speaking, the constitution of a kind of moral grammar that permeates XVIII century's history schoolbooks takes place when the teachers/authors of the compendiums address Roman Emperors sympathetic or unsympathetic towards the Christian movement during the Empire. (Farias Junior; Guimarães, 2020: 65). Consider the following passage:

Nevertheless, **submersed in depravity**, Tiberius sees his life consumed by **vile decrepitude**. He wishes to return to Rome. During the trip, he faints and Caligula, his legitimate adoptive son, eager for power, seizes the opportunity and suffocates him. Caligula (37) is a **dangerous madman endowed with absolute power in a deeply depraved society!** (Rocha 1860: 162)

Duruy writes:

The Empire has once again a single master; but the shy and suspicious **Constantius allowed himself to be ruled by women, eunuchs and adulators**. Devoted to religious questions brought forth by Arianism, but **without having a certain and healthy faith** [...] he was led to Pola, in Istria, and decapitated [...] Then, ( he was conducted to Pola, in Istria and decapitated [...] Then, (**Julian**), seeing himself without opposition, *abjured the Christian faith*, which earned him the nickname of apostate [...] **Harsh with himself** he copied the simplicity and even the cynicism of a strict stoic, being also sometimes **harsh unto others**. The court he created in Caledonia for prosecuting corrupt public officials was accused of having passed unjust sentences [...] (Duruy, 1865: 175-6)

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that many of the translators of the history textbooks were religious (either faithful Catholics or clerics); moreover, the ICPII, like many provincial high schools, had religious teachers in significant numbers.

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Those passages explicitly disqualify the non-roman emperors, or those who did not follow the Nicene orthodox creed. So, while those emperors get bad reviews due to their distance failure to adhere to Nicene Christianity, Constantinus and Theodosius get good reviews, since they are presented, within the narrative, as protectors of Christian communities and guardians of Christian principles and values. This can be seen in the following passage:

Constantinus [...] son of Helen, who is counted among the saints be religion and who had retired to Jerusalem, where he found the true cross [...] should have had against himself the hatred of the pagans and much as Galerius' ambition [...] Lord of the Empire, by the special grace of good, Constantine erects the religions of the crucified over the ruins of paganism. (Rocha, 1860: 180-1).

The appreciation of Constantine and Theodosius biographical writings, as opposed to other roman emperors is evident. The history of Christianity associates the first with the adoption of pro-christian policies and the second with official institution of Nicene Christianity in the Empire. Those two event are constantly explored in the Christian literature.

However, from the pedagogical point of view, in registering biographical aspects of roman emperors, Rocha and Duruy, allow to get a glimpse into the expected conduct from Christian leaders as opposed to pagan ones. They engage in an evident effort to characterize the attitudes of those they thought to be bad leaders. We can see the serious implications theses narratives carry to the political scene of the Brazilian Empire.

We should also notice that Duruy does not consider the Aryanism professes by Constatius II, but only mentions it briefly just to disqualify it: *without quite having a correct and living faith*. The Nicene current, supported by emperor Constantine, corroborated by Theodosius and professes by the Catholic Church and further denominations is, to this day, adopted and Christianity's prototype. This fact clouds the fact that other Christian currents circulated through the Roman Empire.

In the following passages we may note the way Christianity establishes itself within the Roman Empire, i.e., how school textbooks describes and understands the consolidation and official implementation of Christianity, as well as its relations to roman projects of power:

It was Constantine Magnus the first emperor to become a Christian. [...] **It is said** that one day, riding his horse ahead of his army against Maxencius, he saw in the heavens a cross in which those words were written: "With this standard you shall win". This is the **vision** that is supposed to have convinced the emperor of the truth of the Christian religion and in virtue of which he decided to adopt it as

the official religion of the State. From that moment on, the victory of Christianity over paganism was secured. In the face of the cross, the mythologies of Greece and Rome disappeared, the idols of the empire of the world shall fall and be smashed by the force of the *Gospel's truth*. (Parley, 1869: 246, our boldface)

Before discussing this passage, let's compare it to a passage extracted from the didactic collection *Conexões da História*, (History Connections) 2010 editions:

Constantine was the son of one of Diocletian's' Caesars and made a bid for the Imperial succession. **It is said** that on the even of a battle he saw in the sky the first two letters of the name 'Christ', in Greek, interwoven with a cross together with an inscription saying "with this sign you shall win". He then is supposed to have ordered the symbol to be put on every soldier's shield. Constantine won the battle against his adversary. [doc. 23] (Alves; Oliveira, 2010: 147)

The expression 'doc. 23' refers the student, the reader of the textbook, to a historical source, namely a painting by Pieter Lastmann, dated 1613, depicting the battle between Constantine and Maxenius for the Royal throne. Thus it is clear that the authors aimed simply to illustrate/endorse the vision Constantine had had, together with the process of Christianity's acceptance in the Roman Empire.

We mention these passages to highlight their similar approaches and linguistic styles. Let us not forget that one dates from the XIX century and the other from the XXI! Some questions naturally arise: What do the authors mean by "It is said"? Which conception of History and its teaching would allow such a construction? Clearly the authors are not very anxious to make the sources upon which this version is based explicit, let alone to question them in terms of authorship, audience and politico-cultural context of composition.

In this way we miss an excellent opportunity to demonstrate to the students (preferably young people) the way in which historical knowledge is built up and its subjective character. The science of History is a science of interpretation, not a science of reality. Moreover, it seems that the suppression of this constructional path of historical knowledge has a purpose.

Both passages relate the success of the Christian movement in the Roman Empire to a "vision" or "revelation", which corroborates the idea of divine intervention in historical processes. This approach also reminds us of the providentialist conception of Universal History and of the integration between sacred and civilian histories. There are traces of these things in *Conexões da História*. The use, by history school textbooks,

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of supernatural causes in the explanation of the *miraculous victory of Christianity in the IV century* is something that strikes us as remarkable. (Cuchet, 2012: 41).

In both cases, the textbook narrative is centered around an unforeseen and miraculous event – *Constantine (...) had seen in the heavens a cross and in it those words were written: "With this standard you shall win"* and take that a starting point of the confirmation of the so-called *triumph of Christianity* (Duruy, 1865: 169; Parley, 1869: 255). So we conclude that the order of events is not dissociated of 'divine interventions'.

Parley, for example, admits the Divine Providence is at work in historical processes (1869: 242), which do not exclude miraculous feats and political changes guided by the divine being itself. From this perspective, we understand that the victory of Christianity follows a kind of unexpected historical accident, which would be incomprehensible if the direct intervention of God were not taken into account. This is so even when this perspective remains implicit

In other words, such a conception of the past gave meaning to a history that aspired to be universal, since, by means of examples and anecdote, the reader would gather certain general rules of *atemporal validity* (Rüsen, 2001: 52). Those rules were based on biblical values and moral principles and were taken to be useful to present day ordinary life.

In this sense, historical narrative would not just tell about the past but also, based on the past, would state rules and judgments relevant to the present and the future. It is with eyes set on the past, that one would seek to acquire wisdom about one's own time and the times to come. This at times remains in today's teaching of history as in the idea of the "exemplarity" of the past (Koselleck 2006: 60) or in the idea of the past as a source of lessons to be learnt about the present. To my mind, this way of seeing the past as "exemplary", so common in school books and classes today makes the central objective of the discipline, i.e., the development of historical thinking, much harder to achieve.

Speaking more broadly, we conclude that XVII historical narratives at the school level situated the Imperial present in a continuum with the biblical canon and its models of virtue. There is, therefore, the intention of establishing a connection between the imperial present and moral and religious values from the past and to see this as the foundations of our understanding of political and historical constitution of Brazil's Empire.

Given what we've just said it is evident that the selection of topics in school's compendiums is neither neutral nor arbitrary. On the contrary, a fabricated historical memory plays a significant role in legitimizing the social *status quo*, within which the past is domesticated in order to serve present day interests (Guimarães 2006).

From 1870 on, the idea of conciliating sacred and civilian histories, predominant up to that point, became hard to sustain. This was due, on the one hand, to advances in the field of archeology, especially in connection with near-east and Neolithic societies and, on the other, to the strengthening of positivism and evolution theory in human sciences. Those developments had a huge impact in the production of historical narratives about antiquity for schools.

Throughout the XIX century, ancient archeological artifacts, which use to gather dust at private curiosities cabinets, started to be exposed in European Museums, which allowed a deeper understanding of the political-cultural dynamics of near-east societies and Egypt, beyond the imagine of the East already propagated by Greek literature, whose main exponent is Herodotus.

There are records of several expeditions to the middle east, in particular to Egypt in northern Africa, which resulted in the publication of a series of archeological studies, such as *Description de L'Egypte ou Recueil des observations et des recherches* (1809), published by order of Napoleon Bonaparte, in four volumes, and base on artifacts and registers collects during the incursions of the French Army in Egypt (1798-1799).

In 1823, appears *Vorstudien zur Weltgeschichte*, by Ferdinand Albrecht Wolter, a work very much dedicated to the presentation/description of material culture and which reported on the culture on politics of Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Persians, peoples of Anatolians, Egyptians, Jews, Phoenicians and Carthaginians.

One should also notice the importance of the decipherment of hieroglyphic writing in 1822, by Champollion; of Old Persian, in 1846, by Rawlison and of Acadian, in 1857. Those linguistic studies, together with the observation of material culture cataloged by several textbooks about Antiquity, one could read the primary sources and present the audience with an up-to-date historical narrative; one which as also more consistent from the point of view of inter-discursive relationships.

Such 'discoveries' were essential to promote the re-writing of Ancient History in the XIX century and, more importantly, to raise doubts about *Heródoto*, Unifesp, Guarulhos, v.6, n.1 - 2021.1. p. 152-176.

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the then dominant conception of History. Apparently, until 1870 there were no school narratives in Brazil that questioned or relativized biblical authority. From 1870 on, however, with the publication of the studies mentioned above, it became increasingly difficult to reconcile sacred and profane histories, one centered on the bible, the other based on other sources.

For example, throughout the XIX's century, archeologist found tales of a flood in Assyrian texts that were part of a collection of poems entitled *The Epic tale of Gilgamesh*. These texts went much earlier than the Israelite tradition: they were created by Sumerians and renewed by Acadians and Assyrians.

The old testament tales, which stated to be written by the mid VII century a.C. (Finkelstein; Silberman (2003); Liverani, 2016), were probably influenced by these older tales, since the canonical books borrow not only metaphors, argumentative structures, imagery – in short literary *topoi* already present in the near-east narrative – but also well know plots shared by such societies. Thus, it was no longer possible, at least in the field of History, to conceive of the biblical texts in isolation, dissociated from the near-east cultures that predated the Israelites.

In other words, the decoding of these ancient languages and, by extension, the discovery of a series of discursive practices related to the biblical narratives, resulted, at least in the eyes of many historians, in the definitive loss of the foundational status of biblical texts vis-à-vis human history. The Ancient History of Israel ceased to have a unique place and started to be placed by European History compendiums at the same level of the other ancient societies.

In many latter XVII's century textbooks one already feels that the ancient history of Israel ceased to occupy the first chapters and is pushed back, given the anteriority of human experiences classified as 'Pre-history'. Pre-historical studies of Egypt and Mesopotamia became popular in Europe from the mid XIX century. This can be observed, for instance, in *Noções Summarias de Historia Universal* (Elementary Notions of Universal History) written by João Maria da Gama Berquó, substitute teaches of History and Geography at the *Ginásio Nacional* (National Gymnasium), which is how the ICPII became know during the first brazilian Republican period:

PRELIMINARIES I. Preliminary Notions; II. Origin of Man according to the Bible; III. Human Races. PRE-HISOTORY. I. Antiquity of Man; Vestiges of quaternary Man; II. Division of pre-historical times; III. Paleolithic Age; IV

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Neolithic Age; V. Bronze Age; VI. Iron Age. ANCIENT HISTORY OF THE EAST. I. Egypt; II. Babylon and Assyria; III. Palestine; I. Israelites; II. Main event in the history of Israel; III. Social organization, religion, literature and arts; IV. Phoenicia. I. Phoenicians; II. Main events in the history of Phoenicia; II. Social organization, religion, literature and arts; V. I. Media a Persia; II. Main events in the history of Meds and Persian; III. Social organization, religion, literature and arts. Greek history [...]; History of Rome (Berquó 1894: I)

We can notice in this summary the juxtaposition of the origin of man “according to the bible” and pre-historical topics, as well as dislocation of the ancient history of Israel, that ceases to occupy first-place in the list of contents.

Pre-history is also an European invention: in England the term was popularized by John Lubbock’s *Prehistoric Times* (1865), in which it becomes clearer that human history is not circumscribed to the biblical chronological time-table, more specifically to that of the Book of Genesis, which is both a cosmogony and a narrative of the origin of mankind. As already notice, if we take the Book of Genesis literally, the Earth would have been created between 6.000 and 4.000 a.C. approximately.

In France, starting in 1844 with the works of Jaques Bouches Perthes – which were based on the discovery of human and animal fossils such as the Neanderthal fossil – new insights about the deep past arose. The key work here is, of course, Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1865), a work that offered a theory – evolution theory – that reconciled natural and human histories.

It is important to notice that this historiography impacted the French compendiums of universal history, which in turn influenced works on Ancient History in XVIII’s century Brazil, since brazilian middle schools employed textbooks translated from the French (most of them) and from the English (a minority of them).

And in the wake of these discoveries, the first decade of the XX century was characterized by the development of the basic principles of radiometric dating by Carbon 14 or Uranium. This resulted in what David Christian calls “radiometric revolution”, indispensable to the fields of Paleontology, Geology, Archeology and, most of all, History. (2010: 18). With this method, the dates found in biblical narratives revealed themselves as inadequate to the understanding of the complexity of past political-cultural experiences.

Thus, archeological findings about ancient eastern societies (Sumerian, Acadian, Babylonian, Hittite, Assyrian, Egyptian, Persian), such as *The Heródoto*, Unifesp, Guarulhos, v.6, n.1 – 2021.1. p. 152-176.

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*Epic Poem of Gilgamesh, Enuma Elish*, the Egyptian cosmogonic myths of Heliopolis and Memphis, the Persian Masdism, among others, threw new lights on the 'origins' of Universal History, which started the question the unique and original status formerly attributed to the Old Testament.

During the first half of the XX century, with the establishment of the Brazilian Republic, the writings on Ancient History in middle school compendiums start to follow two tendencies. On the one hand, we have the religious hermeneutic current, already present in XIX century's compendiums, which is characterized by the cosmology of the Book of Genesis and by the idea of Divine Providence as the reason for the 'triumph' of Christianity and its relevance for the establish social order, above all in connection with morality. Such textbooks were adopted mainly by religious private schools of the First Republic. But in contrast to XIX century textbooks, these narratives incorporated archeological findings and the new trends in Ancient History writings, as long as the approaches did not contradict the authority of Biblical texts. This can be observed in the *Compêndio de História Universal* (Universal History Compendium), written by the priest Raphael Maria Galanti:

Ancient History can be subdivided in sacred and profane: the former narrates the facts related to the People of God; the latter those pertaining to Gentiles [...] In sacred history there is no place for a similar division, since what it narrates is given by faith and also because, even considering Holy Scripture as just one history book among other, its authority can be proved beyond doubt. In effect it is proved 1) by the referred things, which consequently, are easily transmitted from father to son; 2) by the character of Moses, which conjoins all the attributed of a true historian, namely science and truthfulness. For it is impossible to refuse to endow with truthfulness a man who was chose by God himself to free and guide his people and who, during all his life, gave the most brilliant example of gravitas, rectitude and sanctity [...] Moreover, the same events, with little alterations, introduced by the state of confusion in which men found themselves after the mixing of the languages, can be seen to be described by all peoples and, in the present age, are admirably confirmed by the Assyrian findings. Modern science itself, especially geology, fits so well with the story of Moses, that the great Ampère could say: either Moses possessed a scientific culture equal to ours, or he was inspired. (1907: 3-4).

Since this is a work written by a clergyman, the alliance to the conciliatory line between sacred and profane was to be expected. What we wish to emphasize, however, are the efforts to maintain the legitimacy and primacy of biblical narratives in the face of the inconvenience posed by the historiographic renewal, as already mentioned. For example, Galanti stresses that Holy Scripture cannot be conceived as *an ordinary*



*history book*, i.e., that it cannot be equated with other ‘stories’; and that Moses is not just an ancient figure but is rather someone who *conjoins all the attributes of the true historian, namely, science and truthfulness*. That is to say, he followed the protocols required by a science of History, as established by the rationalist project of illuminism, since Moses was in tune with *modern science* for, he [...] *possessed a scientific culture equal to ours, or was inspired*.

On the other hand, we have the secular or scientific current, guided by positivism and Darwinian evolution, which admits, for instance, that the humanity is the product of a biological and social process of development going back to Pre-history. In the prologue to *Noções de História Universal – resumos das lições professadas na Escola Normal* (Notions of Universal History – summary of the lessons given at the Normal School) of 1920, written by Leôncio Correa, director of Colégio Pedro II and professor of Universal History at the Escola Normal (present day Instituto de Educação do Rio de Janeiro) and co-authored with Joaquim Osório Duque-Estrada, professor of General History of Brazil at Colégio Pedro II, we can read:

Science asserts only that the Earth is a planet like the others, belonging to the solar system, and that, having been an incandescent globe spinning in space, took perhaps millions of years to solidify its external crust and to cool down to the point where human and animal life became possible in its surface. It asserts also that human existence goes back more than two hundred thousand years, and that man appeared and lived side by side with many other species now disappeared. (Correa; Duque-Estrada, 1920: 12 *apud* Tavares, 2012: 55).

Even though public education showed some preference for the secular or scientific trend, we can notice that both continued side by side in middle schools. Moreover, when we consider that 96.46% of schools were private and covered 88.94% of the public, we conclude that the conciliation between sacred and profane histories did not suffer significant changes in Brazil (Tavares, 2012: 56).

This is a heritage from XVII and XVIII century History compendiums that is hard to overcome. French textbooks also continued to be translated and employed during the First Republic. For Tavares, this was due to “the precarious access to ancient sources manifested by most Brazilian authors of middle school works” (2012: 51-2). Therefore, French compendiums were the main basis for the elaboration of Brazilian compendiums of Universal History.

The authors that were influenced by positivism and evolution, such as Correa e Duque-Estrada (1920), stay committed to the idea of a 'science of the past' which allows the observation of a set of 'truths' or universal 'laws'. They thought of theses as indispensable to the understanding of the civilizational process and its 'stages' as well as to the construction of a republican national identity. Hence the emphasis on the history of the Roman Republic that we find in many compendiums. That republic was seen as a political, military and juridical model for the Brazilian republic.

In spite of the strength of the religious current that we notice above, we observe a strengthening of Civilian History from 1870 on. This was mainly due to the influence of positivism and evolution theory, which brought a new interpretation to the so-called universal history. In this new interpretation Greece and Rome played a pivotal role, since ancient documents start to be seen from the point of view of European nationalistic experiences, which is committed to the 'genetic explanation of western civilization' (Morales; Silva, 2020: 128). This attitude contributed to the forging of the notion of 'western cultural identity'.

We may notice, for example, that concomitantly to the use of the term 'Universal History' to refer to history textbooks, we also find the employment of 'History of Civilization'. This signals an important change in the process of attributing sense to the past. José de Sá Benevides, who had a bachelor degree in social and juridical sciences and was a professor at Escola Normal Secundária of São Paulo's capital, wrote a *Historia da Civilização* (History of Civilization). In this work he says: *On the one hand, the idea of a universal history is presently deprecated and abolished and, on the other, we acknowledge the present tendency in teaching of turning the of history of battler and dates into a History of Civilization* (1912: 04).

This is an approach to history that expressly wishes not only to separate itself from the older one, but also to present itself as epistemologically superior, insofar as it attempts to free itself mainly from the providentialist perspective of universal history, with its conciliatory proposal. In this way, instead of the Holy Scriptures, it is Greek and Roman 'civilizations' that become the paradigm for the present. In the word of Benevides,

Of all the ancient civilizations [...] the roman one is evidently the most important [...] none other displays more point of contact with our modern western civilizations [...] one may say that western Europe, and above all the neo-latin nations, are just are just a transformation of Imperial roman society. (1912: 73)

In history still plays to role of *Historia Magistra Vitae*: it is a bearer of good examples for the present. However, one can observe that on the view exemplified by theses school narratives, the past doesn't only have lessons to teach to the present: it also reveals its political-cultural origins. The figures and its deed change, but the purpose of history teaching remains: the exemplary nature of the past, now together with the perception that we are direct heirs of genuinely western political cultural practices, coming from Greece and Rome.

Within this approach, Eastern Antiquity, constituted by the study of *Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Hebrews, Iranians, Arians of India and Chinese* (Benevides, 1912: 241), would function as a kind of vestibule to the birth of the civilizational aspects of the West, the model of which is Rome. For *the greeks built the city, it is true, the likes of which Asia had never seen; but they never manage to rise to the conception of a strong and unite state, as they Romans did.* (Benevides, 1912: 55).

Even to this day, the idea that democracy, cities, freedom, the law, republics, among other humans experiences, were not "invented" by Greeks and Romans but was rather the result of cultural experiences they shared with their neighbors, specially with near-east societies, is unpleasant to many researchers with more ethnocentric tendencies.

Another criticism that can be raised against history textbook directed at schools has to do with the segmented or categorized way in which Antiquity is presented to the students. So-called 'civilizations' are studied in an isolated form and following a linear time line that aims at the exaltation not only of Greece and its cultural paradigms, but also of Rome and its political experiences.

Generally speaking, the euocentric way of attributing meaning to the past resulted in what Guarinello called a 'relay race' (2003: 52) of Ancient History. The historical narratives were organized in such a way as to show how eastern civilizations introduced important innovations which were then actualized and improved by the West. It was presumably in this way that the ancient world progressed, while the east fell behind and became immobile. This point of view made possible for Marxism to think of the East under the gaze of an 'Asian mode of production' and for conservative liberal thinkers to put it under the heading of 'eastern despotism'. (Morales; Silva 2020: 141).

As for the history of Christianity, in *História da Civilização* Christian movements are integrated with roman politics to the extent that they profited from the pro-christian attitude of Constantine and start to *Heródoto*, Unifesp, Guarulhos, v.6, n.1 – 2021.1. p. 152-176.

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cooperate with the imperial power, becoming part of the political-cultural history of Rome (Benevides, 1912: 67). This contrasts with earlier approaches which conceived of Christianity from the point of view of Christian literature and in a teleological perspective.

During the Vargas Era, one notices a strengthening of the secular or scientific tendency and, until the mid 80's, Ancient History topics in History textbooks follow one another in a factual, descriptive, biographical, descriptive, stage-oriented way, centered around political and military events distant from the everyday issues of students. Generally speaking, Classical Antiquity was studied as something to be emulated (great men and their deeds) or linked to our civilizational origins. This situation intensified during the military dictatorship, when the ideological control of manuals for the old 2º. Grau tightened (Second Grade) (Silva, 2001: 08).

With the return of democracy, the production of texts of Ancient History for elementary schools starts to be insistently questioned by Academia and different theoretical and new methodological frameworks (new cultural history, social history) contributed to bring different topics, sources, and languages into the teaching of Ancient History.

The 80's and 90's witnessed a new wave in the studies of Antiquity in Brazil. Unhappy with school narratives of Antiquity, historians such as Pedro Paulo A. Funari (2004), Gilvan Ventura da Silva (2001), Norberto Luis Guarinello (2003), Ana Teresa Marques Gonçalves (2001), Gláydson José da Silva (2011) and Semíramis Corsi Silva (2010), among others, manifested themselves in several journals against the limitations, simplifications or generalizations present in textbooks.

Generally speaking, they worried about the discrepancy between the academic historical literature and the school narratives. The latter wished to convey 'historical truths', lacked specialists among its authors, made frequent generalizations and reductions, such as treating political-cultural experiences of Athens and Sparta as models to understand Ancient Greece, or treating the Roman Empire as a homogeneous political-administrative unity the centre of which was Rome. The authors and editor and school textbooks also persisted in talking about the 'origins' of the contemporary world, which would justify the study of the past: origin of man, of cities, of institutions, of religions, etc. They also displayed a lack of activities involving historical sources (iconographic, cartographic, epistolary readings, etc.). Activities anchored in memorization/reproduction of school narratives predominated. The titles

in the bibliographies rarely seemed integrated with the narrative. One hardly felt there was a script for the use of written and audiovisual sources indicated by the textbooks, which perpetuates the use of sources as mere illustration. Finally, those authors assert that the textbooks did not demonstrate the simultaneity of political-cultural experiences in Antiquity. On this last question, observe that Ancient History:

[...] is presented to the general public in the form of a chronological succession, as if the torch of History, in the relay race which is the progress of humanity, had been progressively passed from the East to the West. As if history progressively effaced itself from the East to light up again in the West, as the focus of civilization changed. (Guarinello, 2003: 52)

In this passage, the historian stresses the ideological implications underlining this discursive configuration. In the first place, when history is taught in this way it gives the false impression that Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman societies succeeded one another; that is to say, that after Mesopotamia came the Egyptians and, after them, the Greeks and, finally, the Romans. They forget that these societies actually evolved simultaneously. This perspective, that strangely is still present today in school textbooks, goes back to the compendiums of the early XX century, as can be noticed in the following:

The March of civilization: It was near the first rivers that the first civilizations arose: The Egyptians on the margins of the Nile, Assyrians and Babylonians in the upper Tigris and Euphrates, the Hindus along the Ganges. From the East civilization passed into Greece, and from Greece to Rome. From Rome it spread across all Europe to finally reach the New World and Oceania. One can see that it went from East to West following the apparent march of the sun. (F.T.D., 1923: 9-10).

Even though the impact of the above criticisms has resulted in some advances, some of them incorporated in the PNLD<sup>3</sup>, and even though editors and textbooks authors have been urged to rethink the organization/selection of historical topics, the historiographical perspectives and educational perspectives, the history of the several forms of Christianity is seldom confronted, in spite of its relevance to the Brazilian political and religious culture.

We wish to call attention to the efforts of two recent studies, namely: Nascimento's dissertation, *Cristianismos na Antiguidade e livros didáticos* (2018) and the Study by Farias Junior e Moura, entitled: *História dos*

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<sup>3</sup> The PNLD is a Federal program, initiated in the 1980's which, since 1997, buys and distributes textbooks to middle school students, though not for those of elementary schools.

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*cristianismos nos livros didáticos* (2020). Both emphasize the discrepancy between academic historical research and historical school narratives. School textbooks:

[...] make it impossible to think Christian religious experiences from the point of view of the political-cultural circumstances of the production of Christian speeches, which contributes to corroborate reductionist or simplifying perspectives that perpetuate a history of Christianity merely situated in history only, not in dialogue with it. For from the point of view of theses teaching materials, Christians constitute a separated world, as if they were going against the current of the cultural environment in which they emerged. (Farias Junior; Moura, 2020: 108)

Some critics would say that our analytical purpose is doomed to failure, since textbooks would not be able to include different currents, movements and historical events, as if it were a big data storage. However, if we consider that the study of History in middle schools is committed to the widening of our perspective on the present, with the aim of creating critical citizens, engaged and active citizens in their different fields of political-cultural experience, the study of Christianity become, we must agree, a central subject.

As André Chevitarese reminds us in his lectures, any historical who wishes to have a minimal understanding of human actions and behaviors in the contemporary world must read the Bible and understand its reception, bearing in mind the influence of Christian religious discourse in the history of Brazil. In this way one can reflect on the modes of action and thought that affect us. If the teaching of History does not allow us to understand the historical nature of religious experiences that are present in our political-cultural environment and to consider that multi-perspectival nature of human experiences across time, what is it good for?

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