



**Themes, Trends and Topics:**  
**A Review of Oxford Journals' Past & Present**  
**2007-2012**  
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## Introduction

‘Widely acknowledged to be the liveliest and most stimulating historical journal in the English-speaking world,’<sup>1</sup> *Past and Present* has emerged from the productive left-wing literary activism of the fifties to become one of the most highly ranked British history journals and a flagship publication of Oxford Journals. This investigation will look at *Past and Present* today, based on a review of the journal over the last five years. Starting with a brief overview before moving from the publishers, to the editors, to the authors, and then finally the content of the articles, the investigation hopes to illustrate the number of individuals and groups who are the journal, and how they contribute to how historical knowledge is formed and distributed. As Lyndal Roper, the journal’s co-editor remarked on the sixtieth anniversary of the journal, the publishing industry has undergone a radical transformation in the last two decades.<sup>2</sup> Academic knowledge increasingly is no longer imparted and received in the format material monographs, but instead through the media of journals published and accessed online. The form of knowledge marks the knowledge itself, how it is used and by whom.<sup>3</sup> *Past and Present* is one of the leading historical journals in the world and, published by Oxford Journals, part of one of the most profitable academic publishing enterprises in the world. These two facts should be the context in which the information below is read – that looking at *Past and Present* you see near to the heart of early twentieth-first-century knowledge, what it is and who produces it.

The data used for this review was drawn from analysing the journal over the five year period between 2007 and 2012. The articles were examined for information on the authors who contribute to the journal and the themes, topics and approaches that forms the content of their writing. The journal and publishers’ websites provided additional data on the editors of the articles and editorial procedures. Where information was absent I tried to contact the editorial team. However, I received no responses. As well as these sources, a number of articles have been published in the journal over the last sixty years on the subject of its origins, its aims, and its hopes for the future. Taken together, they will sketch a picture of the publication of historical research in the twenty-first century, and lead to some of the central debates on this topic.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.oxfordjournals.org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/our\\_journals/past/about.html](http://www.oxfordjournals.org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/our_journals/past/about.html)

<sup>2</sup> Roper, L and Wickham, C., ‘*Past and Present* after Fifty Years’ *Past and Present* (2002) 176 1.

<sup>3</sup> Bazerman, C., *Shaping Written Knowledge: the Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science* (University of Wisconsin, 1988).

## The Journal

In the simplest terms, *Past and Present* is an academic history journal that publishes four issues and one additional supplement every year. Issues usually contain between six and eight articles, occasionally alongside reviews, debates, prizes and obituaries. Supplements are more varied in form and length than standard issues, including between thirteen and twenty articles on the same theme, often announced by opening and closing sections. Articles are between eight- and ten-thousand words long, and can be on a topic from any part of the world within the last two-thousand years.

### *Past and Present* – Journal Composition 2007-2012

	Number	Pages	Percentage
Articles	206	5706	94%
Reviews	3	56	1%
Debates	2(6 articles)	95	3%
Obituaries	2	8	
Prizes	1	1	
Preface/Afterword	3	14	
Supplement Index	5	76	1%
Jubilee	1	2	
Total	220	5958	100%

### Supplements – 2007-2012

**2007 - Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages: an Exploration of Historical Themes**

**2008 – Religion and Superstition**

**2009 – Relics and Remains**

**2010 – Post-War Reconstruction in Europe**

**2011 – Ritual and Violence: Natalie Zemon Davies and Early Modern France**

	Articles	Pages	Percentage
Supplement	75	1718	34%
Total Journal	220	5911	100%

Special supplements, launched in 2006, were established to publish proceedings of *Past and Present* conferences, symposia and other collections. They can be sold as a book and are free for subscribers.

## Historic Identity

*Past and Present* was established in 1952 by a group of Communist historians who had the ideological aim of creating an academic journal that could be appreciated and valued by both specialists and enthusiasts. The young British historians had the more practical aim of establishing a forum for a dialogue of sorts between those Communists and non-Communists who were prepared to argue constructively with each other. Initially a very small, independent enterprise, *Past and Present* in its early years relied heavily on contributions from Communists and other left-wing intellectuals living in Europe who the editors were connected to through their network of dissident contacts.

In their reflection on the origins of the journal in 1983 Eric Hobsbawm and Christopher Hill remember the journal as a middle way, one which could be walked by Communists and non-Communists, and one which navigated through the extremes of ‘scientific reductionism and historical irrationalism’.

By 2002, when then editors Lyndal Roper and Chris Wickham marked another anniversary by re-stating the identity and ambitions of the journal, again the journal was presented as a middle way, this time between postmodernism and positivism – a belief in the specificity of the past should be combined with an awareness of history’s implications for the present.<sup>4</sup> The Communist heritage of the journal was also acknowledged, but transformed into principles of independence, accessibility, internationalism and youthful innovation, while the aim of the first editors to bring Communists and non-Communist together, had become open-mindedness and the ethical duty to criticise and debate. These aims are also published on the *Past and Present* page of the Oxford Journals’ website.

It can be said that the tradition of the journal lives on in some respects. The frequent self-references through jubilees, prizes and obituaries of former editors and famous collaborators and the continued association with its celebrated co-founder and current president, the non-conforming Marxist Eric Hobsbawm indicate a wish to allow a sense of its own past to influence the journal. The publishers, editors and contributors are likely to feel they are participating in a wider purpose or process which may guide their actions. More concretely, some of the stated aims of the journal are translated into stylistic guidelines for prospective contributors. Authors are advised to ensure their article is ‘fully accessible and interesting to specialists and non-specialists’; to ‘make clear what is of interest’ be it a change in the debate or the contribution of new evidence; to ‘assume little linguistic knowledge’ and

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<sup>4</sup> Roper, L and Wickham, C., ‘*Past and Present* after Fifty Years’.

limit their use of jargon. Contributors are informed that ‘constructive debates on controversial subjects are promoted’.<sup>5</sup>

### **Publishers and Ranking**

*Past and Present* has been published by Oxford Journals since 2007. In relocating to the Oxford Journals, *Past and Present* joined the largest university press in the world and one which boasts that over one quarter of its journals are in top tens of ranking lists with over three quarters in lists of top fifties.<sup>6</sup> In the field of history Oxford Journals has four other publications in the top twenty of the Red Jasper journal ranking list: the *Journal of American History* (2), the *History Workshop Journal* (10), the *English Historical Review* (14) and the *Journal of Social History* (15). *Past and Present*’s own ranking position is as the sixth highest ranking journal of its class according to the list published by Red Jasper in 2010. According to ISI Web of Knowledge it has a ranking of 25, with an article influence score of 0.339, an impact factor of 0.253 and a five year impact factor of 0.384. These figures are drawn from the Social Science Edition of the Thompson and Reuters 2010 Journal Citation Report.

The decision to leave the Cambridge University Press and move publishers after thirty years was explained by Roper and Smith as the choice to bring together to the many branches of the *Past and Present* franchise and a response to the changing imperatives of electronic publishing.<sup>7</sup> In their article on the problematic relationships between authors, editors, publishers and institutions, Cass Miller and Julianna Harris point to this period as one of critical change for journals, as the institutions they depend for sales undergo reform and cut-backs, and have to compete in league tables for undergraduate intakes, and as ever more researchers are pressurised to publish in the most highly-ranked journals to gain new positions and to maintain their existing jobs.<sup>8</sup> An explanation for the change in publishers which draws on Miller and Harris’ evidence is that being in the prestigious club that struggling libraries “ring-fence” from slashed budgets is of paramount importance, important enough perhaps to override romantic reasons to remain with their long-term partner the Cambridge University Press. Alternatively, *Past and Present*’s change of publishers is

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.oxfordjournals.org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/our\\_journals/past/for\\_authors/index.html](http://www.oxfordjournals.org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/our_journals/past/for_authors/index.html)

<sup>6</sup> [http://global.oup.com/about/oup\\_history/?cc=gb](http://global.oup.com/about/oup_history/?cc=gb)

<sup>7</sup> Roper, L and Wickham, C., ‘*Past and Present* after Fifty Years’.

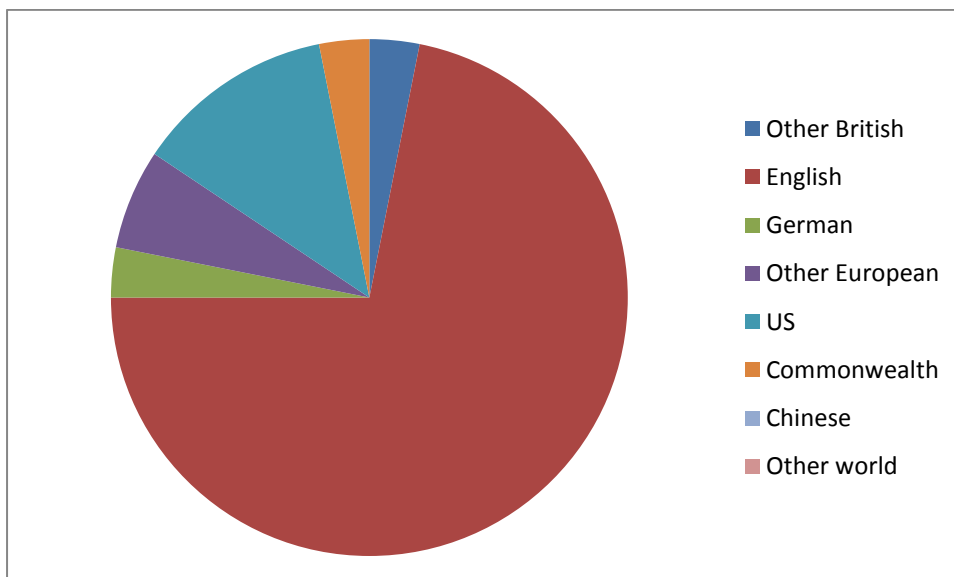
<sup>8</sup> Miller, C. and Harris, J., ‘Scholarly journal publication: conflicting agendas for scholars, publishers, and institutions’ *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* (January 2004), p. 82.

indicative of a more general shift of locus of historical research from Cambridge to Oxford, as is the changing composition of the editorial board, from a high number of Cambridge graduates in the fifties to a predominantly Oxford affair (as we will see below).

### The Editors

Editorial Board is composed of forty historians. These can be divided into the editors, the sub-editors, the *Past and Present* Society presidency and the Board of Editors. The two current editors are Lyndal Roper, the Australian-born Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, specialising in early-modern history, and Oxford alumnus Steve Smith of the European Institute in Florence, who specialises in the Russian and Chinese revolutions. Smith replaced fellow Oxford historian Chris Wickham during the five years under analysis in 2009. Wickham, as a Marxist historian represented a tangible link with *Past and Present's* origins at the heart of the editorial process, but remnants remain: the president of the *Past and Present* Society is veteran historian Eric Hobsbawm who was one of the original Communist Party members who established the journal. The two vice presidents are also distinguished British scholars, Joan Thirsk – ninety year-old retired Oxford socio-economic historian – and J. H. Elliot – hispanist and former Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford.

### National Background of Editorial Board



### Percentage of Editorial Board who have studied or taught at Oxford

Total Editors	Number	Percentage
32	17	53%



The figures above display the national and institutional backgrounds of the editorial board, revealing the 72% of the editorial team are English and that over half have either attended or taught at Oxford. It is worth noting that the president and figurehead of the *Past and Present* society, Eric Hobsbawm, has no direct association with Oxford University. In fact, since leaving Cambridge in 1955, he has created an identity for himself as an academic outsider. Of the editorial team, 43% are women and 57% men.

The website provides some information on editorial procedures. Prospective authors are told that a decision on whether their article will be accepted will arrive between four or six months after submission, and that there will be up to another two year wait for the article to be published if it is selected. Contributions can be submitted online. There is no need for authors to remove their names as according to the website “we do not review blind.”<sup>9</sup> It is a condition that articles be vetted by a native speaker of English although in exceptional circumstances the journal would be prepared to print something in another major European language. I did not find any evidence of such an event in recent decades. From a survey of the published articles it appears that members of the editorial board regularly publish articles in *Past and Present* – nineteen times over the five years. It is possible that there further links between members of the editorial board and the authors of the articles. For example, board member Gadi Algazi teaches at the university of Tel Aviv, the only the non-European or North American university to contribute more than one article (five articles in total).

Believing the choice of the editors not to “review blind” to be unusual in such a prominent publication, I asked to editors to justify their strategy when I emailed them. I also enquired after the rejection rate of articles. However I received no reply to my questions. I have been told that it is unusual for editors not to respond. It is possible that the editors’ controversial procedure not to “review blind” and their failure to answer an email that includes questions on this procedure are related. Finally, my data revealed that a number of the editorial board contributed articles to the journal.

In their article on the antagonistic aims and motivations among authors, editors, publishers and institutions, Miller and Harris present a highly sympathetic picture of editors, as over-worked and essentially altruistic individuals struggling under enormous and often conflicting pressures to meet commercial imperatives while satisfying academic aims, all the while balancing their teaching and research obligations to their host universities. While the scope of my own investigation could not demonstrate that the editorial role in a high ranking

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.oxfordjournals.org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/our\\_journals/past/for\\_authors/index.html](http://www.oxfordjournals.org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/our_journals/past/for_authors/index.html)



and well-established journal like *Past and Present* was the same as that in the generalised finding of the Miller and Harris article, in my opinion their work should at the least nuance and humanise critical interpretations of certain pools of data, for example on institutional background of editorial staff and contributors and the diversity of article content.<sup>10</sup>

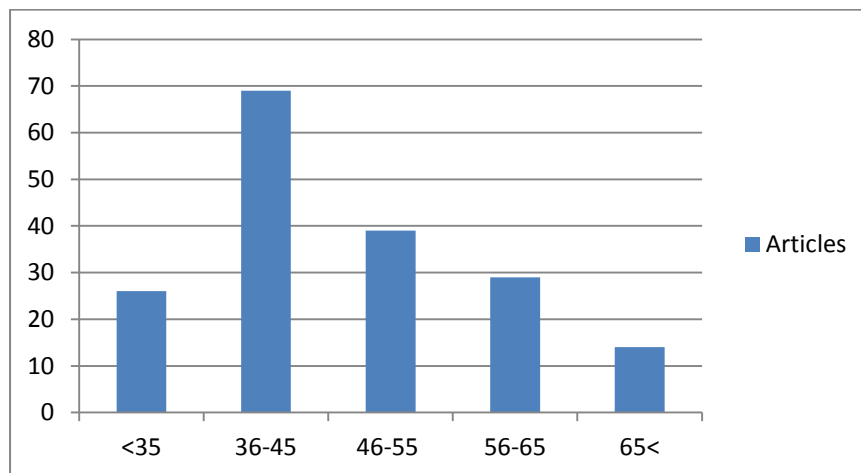
## Authors

The next body of data that was examined in this investigation was that relating to the authors. I looked at the age of the authors, their national background, their institutional background, their gender.

## Age

For the age of the author, the age relates to either the age of the author as stated on their website, or an estimated age based on their age of completing their bachelor's degree and their appearance in their photograph. Those without dated record of the academic career or a photograph were recorded as age "unknown". The percentage in the Appendix refers to age of the authors whose age is known.

Age of Authors -Number of Articles per Age Group



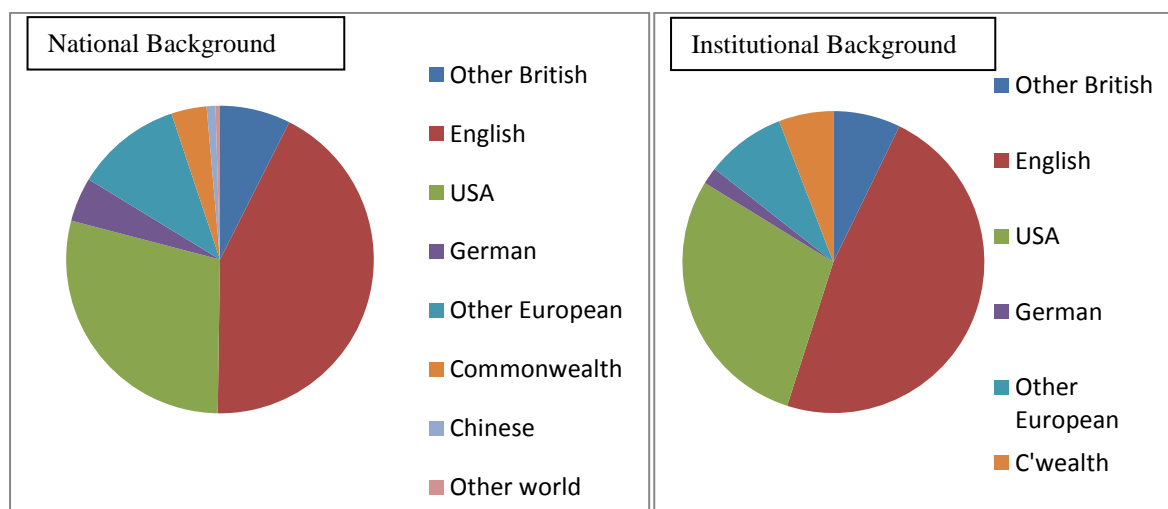
## Nationality

The first set of data relating to the background of the authors is based on the nationality of the author not on their place of study. The choice to record nationality was made due to desire to observe as much as possible what diversity there was that exists in the background of the

<sup>10</sup> Miller, C. and Harris, J., 'Scholarly journal publication', p. 79.

contributors. The categories for authors were orientated specially to note the loci of production in the Anglophone world, as I anticipated a large number of contributors from these regions. The Anglophone world was divided into “England”, “the other countries of the British Isles”, “the USA” and “the Commonwealth”, a category of nations with strong historical or linguistic ties to Britain or America. The Commonwealth includes the countries of the British Commonwealth like Canada, Australia, India and Nigeria, and those deemed to have a special connection such as Israel and Hong Kong. In addition to the information on the national backgrounds of the authors, data on the institutional backgrounds of the authors was also retained. Data on the institutional background was contrasted with that on nationality to nuance findings of who was writing with where they were writing. Information on the place of education and teaching was kept and used to observe even closer the articles written by non-British and American authors to see the proportion who had taught or been educated in either Britain or the United States, while the proportion of articles written by British and Irish who had taught or been educated at either Oxford or Cambridge and the proportion of articles written by authors who had taught or been educated at either Oxford, Cambridge, Yale, Harvard and Princeton was also processed (for these tables see Appendix 2).

**National and Institutional Backgrounds of Authors**



The data shows that most articles were written by English authors (43%). 79% of articles were written by authors from either the British Isles or the United States though the introduction of figures on the institutional background reveal that at least a quarter of non-UK or US nationals were working at UK or US universities at the time of writing their articles.



In total 84% of articles were written by authors working for UK or US universities while 11% of articles were written by authors who at no point in their careers had attended a British or American university. 42% of articles were written by authors who had attended either Oxford, Cambridge, Yale, Harvard or Princeton.

### Gender

The statistics reveal a considerable number of articles written by male authors compared to female authors. Overall, 75% of articles are written by men. Given that half of all articles are contributed by historians over forty-eight years old, it is possible that this finding is not so much representative of institutional sexism within the journal, rather that shadows cast by sexual discrimination in the past are slow to recede.

To test this possibility, the sex of the authors in the two younger categories was analysed. This examination indeed showed that as the age of the authors decreased the gender imbalance decreased. This evidence supported the impression that the inequality of male and female authors corresponds to the availability of professional historians produced by each generation although an alternative hypothesis would be that sexism remains and the decline in female contributions as women get older reflects the difficulties faced by older women maintaining their high status in professions across society.

#### Gender of Authors under 45 Years Old

	Male	Female
36-45	45 65%	24 35%
<35	15 58%	11 42%
Average % Total Articles	75%	25%

### Age and Nationality

Despite initial hints otherwise, (see First Version) contrasting data on the nationality of authors with that on the age authors revealed there to be little difference in nationality between articles written by authors above and below the age of 45. There was no difference

in the educational backgrounds of those above and those below the age of 45 in terms of the percentage of authors who had attended Oxford, Cambridge, Yale, Harvard or Princeton. (See Appendix 2)

## Themes

The themes addressed by the articles I grouped into seven categories. These were:

1. Multicultural history (history of globalisation)
2. Violence in history
3. Religious history
4. Cultural history
5. Interdisciplinary history
6. History of Ideas
7. Political Geography

These categories were formed from identifying up to three of the most prominent topics or approaches in each article. These topics or approaches were then arranged to create the larger thematic categories. Topics and approaches could be categorised under more than one theme and, naturally, articles could contain a range of topics and approaches. Therefore articles could straddle categories. For example, the article: ‘Qajar Shahs in Imperial Germany’ by David Motadel was classified by the topics ‘Political Culture’ ‘Cultural Interaction’ and ‘Islam’. As all of these topics fall under different thematic categories, this article was listed as an article where ‘Cultural History’, ‘Multiculturalism’ and ‘Religion’ were discussed<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand Michael Goebel’s ‘*Gauchos, Gringos and Gallegos: the Assimilation of Italian and Spanish Migrants in the Making of Modern Uruguay*’ contained the topics/approaches ‘Cultural Interaction’, ‘Migration’ and ‘Empire’ which resulted in only one score for the ‘Multiculturalism’ category despite the presence of three topics grouped under that category, and one score for ‘Political Geography’ as ‘Migration’ appears in this category as well<sup>12</sup>. The figures indicate the number of times a theme, topic or approach appeared in the journal over the five years. The percentages refer to the percentage of all articles that contained the given theme, topic or approach. (For all tables on themes see Appendix 3)

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<sup>11</sup> Motadel, D., ‘Qajar Shahs in Imperial Germany’ *Past and Present* (2011) 213 1.

<sup>12</sup>Goebel, M., ‘*Gauchos, Gringos and Gallegos: the Assimilation of Italian and Spanish Migrants in the Making of Modern Uruguay*’ *Past and Present* (2010) 208 1.

**Themes of *Past and Present* – by category**

	Globalisation/ Multiculturalism	Violence	Religion	Cultural History	Interdisciplinary Studies	History of Ideas	Political Geography
Articles	56	59	55	122	32	77	81
% Total Articles	26%	27%	26%	57%	15%	36%	38%

The data on topics and approaches (see Appendix 3) illustrates that there are a number of topics and approaches that appear frequently in the journal, though certain topics and approaches, such as “War”, “the Reformation”, “Socio-Economic History” and “Political Violence” benefited from the subjects selected for the supplement which may have distorted their prevalence. Overall, “Political Culture” was the most frequent topic featuring one in five articles.

With the exception of the categories of “Cultural History”(which illustrates a broad cultural history consensus that underlies the journal) and “Interdisciplinary History” which was less frequent, all the other themes were fairly equally represented among the total articles. Perhaps more illuminating are the divisions within categories of themes. For example, looking at the ways that multicultural history or the history of globalisation are being addressed, it is apparent that while the topic of empire was explored in 12% of articles and encounters between cultures were explored in 12% of articles, a postcolonial approach was used infrequently, and decolonisation was considered similarly rarely. Equally, the data shows that in *Past and Present*, when articles contain an interdisciplinary approach, in three fifths of all instances it is anthropology that is combined with history. Looking at the category of religion, the Reformation is the most popular subject being addressed twice as often as any other religious topic. The Reformation dominates representations of Christian religion especially. Discounting the Reformation, Islam is discussed more often than Catholicism appearing a topic in 5% of articles compared to 3% (see Appendix 3).

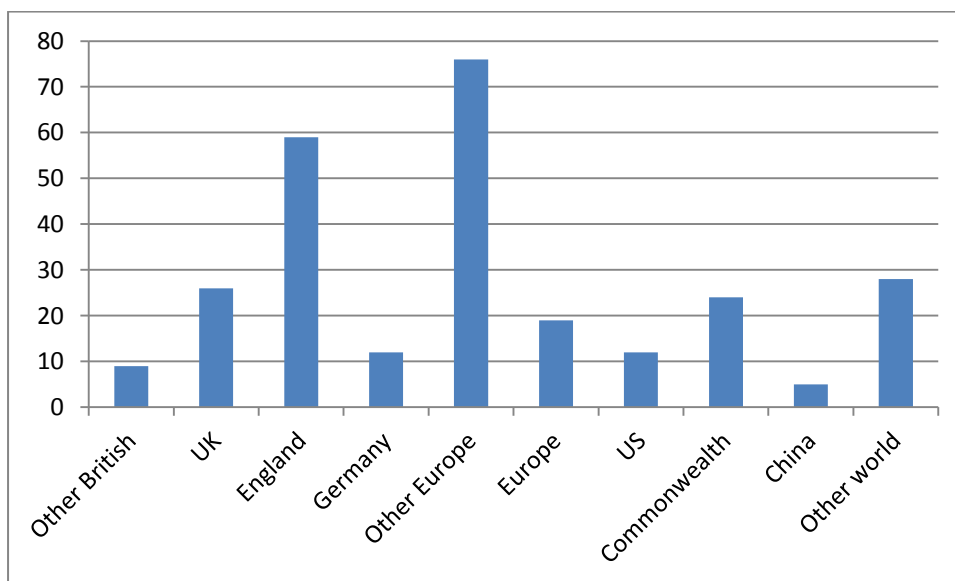
**Geographical Distribution of Themes**

Having examined the types of themes covered by *Past and Present* I then explored the geographical distribution of the subjects in the articles. I chose to record every time a geographical location was addressed in an article to develop the fullest picture of the places that had been written about. Again, this meant the articles could contain multiple locations

and therefore percentages correspond to the proportion of total articles in which the geographical location is discussed.

The two tables beneath display the geographical spread of the articles. In the first table a distinction is made between those articles written about the British Isles which focus exclusively on England, on non-English regions and those which discuss the British Isles as a complete entity. Similarly in recording articles written about Continental Europe, a distinction is made between those on Germany, those on other countries of Europe excluding Germany, and those which take the continent as a whole as the unit of analysis. In the second graph, all entries with a focus on Europe are combined in the first column, thus counting both Britain and Germany as European.

**Geographical Distribution of Subjects of Articles (1)**



As the graph demonstrates, the geographical region most discussed in the journal is that of continental Europe excluding Germany. The seventy-six articles in which this regions features corresponds to 35% of all articles. Of the units of analysis that relate to nation states, England is the most popular location featuring in fifty-nine articles (27%). This becomes ninety-one articles or 42% when combining data for England with that of the rest of the British Isles.



**Geographical Distribution of Subjects of Articles (2)**

	European (including UK)	US	Other world
Articles	181	12	57
% Total Articles	84%	6%	27%

The second table demonstrates that the USA compared to Europe does not feature highly in the pages of the journal, despite the high percentage of articles written by Americans (29%). European subjects dominate the journal articles appearing in 84% of all articles. This table gives evidence of the level of overlap between the geographical regions: 17% of articles involve some kind of joint or shared discussion of locations. This evidence could be viewed from the perspective that this 17% represents the authors trying to present their research in a wider more global context. Alternatively, it could be indicative of editors’ reticence to publish non-European articles that not have some relationship with European history.

One possible explanation for the potentially surprising incongruence between the editors’ recruitment of US authors yet the absence of American themes is that Oxford Journals’ other flagship historical publication is the *Journal of American History*. Therefore maybe it is a strategic decision to prevent inter-publication repetition and competition. This question was posed to the editors. However, they issued no response.

**Article Themes – by Geographical Distribution**

I chose to explore in more detail the results of the data for articles written about non-European or US locations: “the Commonwealth”, “China” and “Other World”. I was interested in examining whether some topics, approaches or themes were more prevalent in articles that dealt with non-European or US subjects. I hoped from this to make some tentative statements about the type of world and world history *Past and Present* was presenting to its readers, and to which its authors were contributing. The table beneath displays which themes are addressed by articles written on the non-European world and to what extent, contrasting these percentages to the data for the entire sample.

**Themes of *Past and Present* - articles with non-European subjects**

	Globalisation/ Multiculturalism	Violence	Religion	Cultural History	Interdisciplinary Studies	History of Ideas	Political Geography

Articles	35	6	18	22	10	17	17
% non-European Articles	66%	11%	34%	42%	19%	32%	32%
Topic % of Total Articles	26%	27%	26%	57%	15%	36%	38%

For certain themes the contrast is marked. For the category of “Violence in History” there is a difference of 16% less, between articles written about non-European subjects and the average. The theme of globalisation and multiculturalism is over-represented in non-European articles by 40%; the subject of religion is addressed in non-European articles 8% more than in average articles; and “History of Ideas” is under-represented in non-European articles by 4% compared to the average. Another clear difference which evades my thematisation but is apparent in the break-down of topics and approaches is that politics, be it political culture, political violence or state-formation is discussed 8% less in non-European history than on average.

Taking these findings together, it can be said that in *Past and Present* articles on non-European subjects are less frequent and that when they are included they tend to be less philosophical and less political, but more religiously-orientated and have greater emphasis placed on the global interconnection of history. In addition, nationalism has a larger place in non-European history than on average and anthropology is a more popular approach. See Appendix 3.

### Themes by Age of Author

Just as I looked to see if there was a difference in geographical background and sex of historian depending on the age of author (encouraged by early hints – see First Version), so did I investigate if the parts of the world written about changed according to the age of the author. I analysed the geographical distribution of subjects in articles written by those under 45 years old.

The following table shows that while there were slightly fewer (10%) articles by under 35 year old authors about English history and slightly more on Commonwealth history by authors of the same youngest age category which correlates with the lower number of English under 35 year old authors and higher representation of Commonwealth scholars in



this age group, overall other results did not suggest a marked shift towards a greater diversity of locations and articles among younger authors.

#### Geographical Distribution of Subjects of Articles for those under 45 years old

		Other Britain	UK	England	Germany	Other Europe	Europe	USA	Commonwealth	China	Other world
36-45	Articles	4	8	20	6	32	9	1	12	3	10
	% 36-45	4%	8%	19%	6%	30%	9%	1%	11%	3%	10%
<35	Articles	1	4	6	1	6	4	3	6	1	4
	% <35	3%	11%	17%	3%	17%	11%	8%	17%	3%	11%
Total Articles	Articles	9	26	59	12	76	19	12	24	5	28
	% Total Articles	4%	12%	27%	6%	35%	9%	6%	11%	2%	13%

#### Supplements

From the five years I was studying, four special supplements were available to analyse at the time of compiling the data. Special supplements were first published as part of the *Past and Present* journal in 2006 as an institutionalised way to ‘publish proceedings of *Past and Present* conferences, symposia and other collections.’<sup>13</sup> They are sold in book form and incur no extra charge for *Past and Present* subscribers. As one of the major innovations to take place within the journal in recent years and in the absence of any detailed statement of aims for the supplement on the website or in the journal itself I asked the question: “how long the idea had been discussed before its eventual launch, why it was launched when it was, and what specific aims and ambitions there were for the supplement in relation to those of the journal as a whole?”. Receiving no response to my question I considered two possible motivations for this innovation. Firstly, the supplement could represent the publishers or editors trying to keep abreast of fashionable formats in academic publishing and ways of making the journal as profitable as possible. On the other hand, it is likely that the supplement was launched with academic aims of the journal in mind. These are as stated:

- A **wide range** of scholarly articles on subjects from **all parts of the world**.
- A mixture of articles, reviews and debates.

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.oxfordjournals.org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/our\\_journals/past/supplement.html](http://www.oxfordjournals.org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/our_journals/past/supplement.html)

- Challenging works by **young** historians and internationally regarded scholars.<sup>14</sup>

I decided to examine whether supplements were meeting some of these stated aims: namely to ensure young historians have a prominent place in the journal; that a wide variety of articles were published; on subjects from all round the world. I did this, firstly, by comparing the age of contributors to supplements with the average for all articles published over the five years. Next I compared the ratio of men to women authors in the supplement to that of the journal as a whole. I examined the places in the world where the supplement authors were from, as one mark of variety of perspective on history, and compared the national backgrounds with results for all articles' authors. Finally, I analysed the supplements to determine which places in the world were included in the articles to see if the range was more diverse and less Eurocentric than the data for the journal as a whole.

My findings were as follows. Whereas the gender imbalance for the journal as a whole was 75% male and 25% female, this decreased somewhat in the article supplement where 30% of articles were written by women. The number of articles written by authors in the age bracket 36-45 decreased slightly from 39% to 35% and the number of articles written by authors below 35 fell from 15% across the journal to 4% in the supplements. The percentage of articles in the supplement written by authors who had attended either Oxford, Cambridge, Yale, Harvard or Princeton also fell from 44% to 37%. With regards the national background of the supplement articles' authors, overall, there was little difference between nationalities of supplement articles authors compared with the journal average, though there was an increase of articles written by English authors in the supplement by 10%. Conversely, while there was little change in the geographical spread of the themes, this can be said with the exception of the location of England which was covered 7% less extensively in the supplement compared to the journal as a whole. (See Appendix 4).

Therefore, it can be said that if it is the aim of the supplement it the stated goals of the promotion of youth, the investigation of a wide variety of themes from a wide variety of perspectives, more than is done in the journal as a whole, then the supplement appears to be unsuccessful. Having said that, there are other stated aims in addition to those which I had singled out for closer scrutiny. For example, the website commits the journal to publish work by young historians but also internationally regarded scholars. The supplement which invited historians to discuss the work and legacy of Natalie Zemon Davies, which included an

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.oxfordjournals.org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/our\\_journals/past/about.html](http://www.oxfordjournals.org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/our_journals/past/about.html)

introduction by the celebrated Canadian historian, enhanced the journal's relationship and association with a historian who was described in 2010 upon being awarded the Holberg International Memorial Prize as "one of the most creative historians writing today" and one "who has inspired a generation of younger historians".<sup>15</sup> Moreover, according to the foreword for the commemorative two-hundredth issue in 2002 the editors believe that they already meet the goals of youthfulness, diversity and variety.<sup>16</sup> Where they have reflected upon the output of the journal in their jubilee issues there themes have been those of continuing the traditions of the journal rather than outdoing or surpassing them. Therefore, it could be that the supplement was launched with other, maybe commercial or procedural ambitions in mind.

## Trends

*Past and Present*, as a high ranking journal with global distribution, is a part of the process of the creation, presentation, circulation and reception of knowledge. As a journal about history, as it claims, the history of the world for the last two thousand years, *Past and Present* creates, presents, circulates knowledge which narrates a story of the passing of time which orientates the receiver in the world around them.<sup>17</sup> To explore the impression of the world that the editors choices and procedures produce, I cross-analysed two groups of data. I have already described my findings when I investigated the themes published in the journal by geographical region. I also re-analysed the data I had on the geographical distribution of articles subjects by plotting them according to historical period under discussion.

In the five years covered by this investigation, the editors of *Past and Present* devote half of the journal (57%) to topics that pre-date 1800, and of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century articles half again are pre-1945 (25%) and the rest post-Second World War. I focused the articles on pre-1800 subjects to examine whether the region of study changed as the topic became more recent, and which regions were associated with which periods of history, and vice versa. I chose the three earliest periods – antiquity (<600AD), the middle ages (600-1485), and the early-modern period (1485-1800) – for this part of the investigation thinking that this data would reveal a stronger connection between period and region, firstly, because the number and diversity of regions addressed in earlier history is much less, therefore article topics would be more concentrated in certain areas leading to a clearer

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/books/story/2010/03/16/davis-scholar-university-toronto-holberg-prize-history-norway.html?ref=rss>

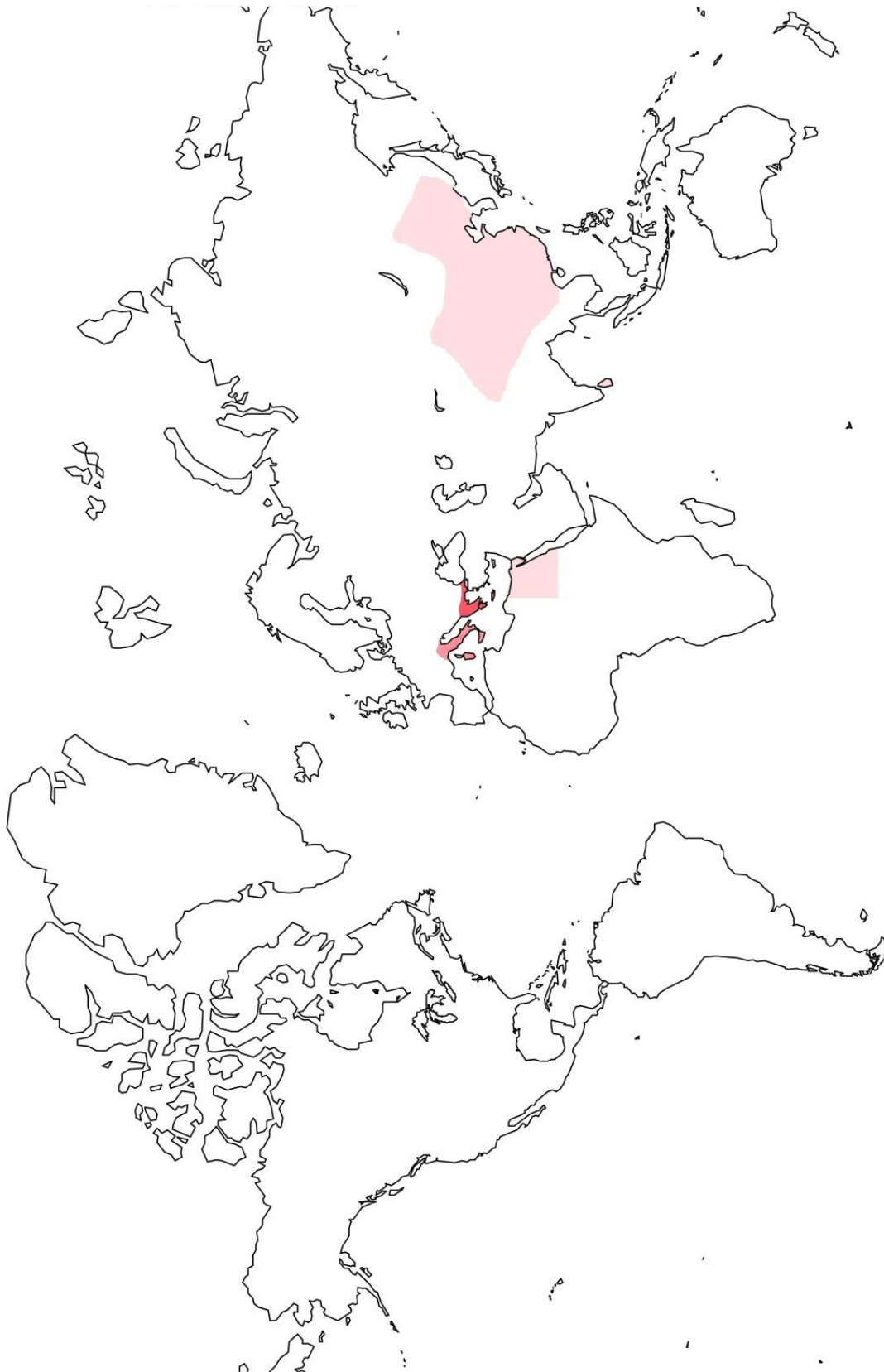
<sup>16</sup> Roper, L and Wickham, C., 'Past and Present after Fifty Years'.



impression. Secondly, my opinion is that people's interaction with the past takes place less, in day to day life and in popular culture, with those periods before 1800 compared to those after, and therefore the impact of impressions of the past, created, presented, circulated by historical journals would have a greater cultural impact in the case of older history.

Below there are three maps of the world. The first represents the image of the antique world transmitted over the five years between 2007 and 2012 by the articles in *Past and Present*. Below that is the medieval world and below that, that of the early-modern period. The darker the colour of the shaded region, the greater the numerical emphasis given to the history of that country in the journal in that time period. Refer to Appendix 5 for a statistical breakdown of articles per region by period.

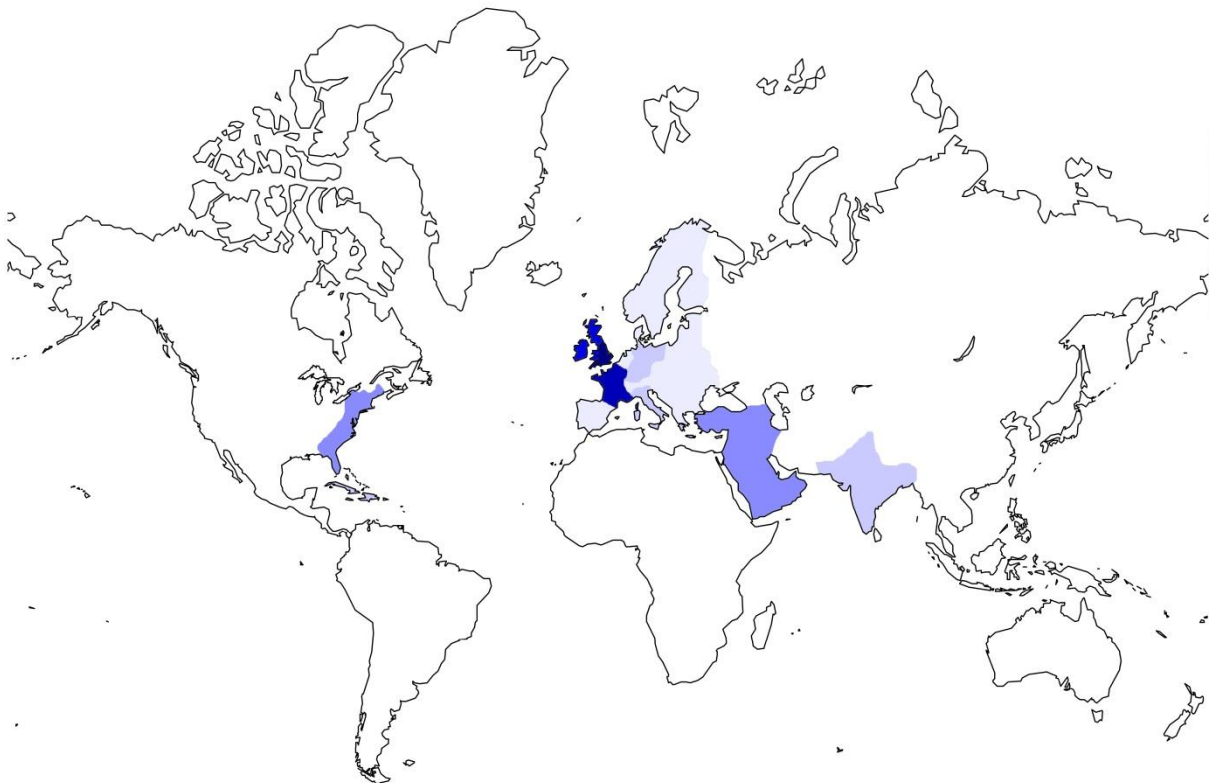
## The Antique World



## The Medieval World



## The Early-Modern World



The three maps can be understood in two different ways. Firstly, they aim to symbolise how the journal gives an impression of the three periods as having existed in the depicted regions of the world at the depicted intensity. My visual representation is a metaphor for a picture of these time periods that the editorial choices and those of the authors create in the imagination of the reader. Equally, an association is formed between regions and time periods. For example, Greek (as well as Roman) history dominates representations of ancient history, but becomes a statistically insignificant character as the narrative unfolds. In the middle ages and early modern period, Europe commands the attention of the journal and readers, before it is dispersed across the globe. The European history as discussed in *Past and Present* is the necessary step pre-figuring the modern world and the inclusion of other actors and storylines from the other parts of the world.

My comparison of data relating to theme and geographical location of article subjects adds to a picture of what impression is created. The themes, topics and approaches changing as the data show that they do according to the change in historic location affects how the history of these different countries is received, and how they are pieced together. The non-European world is less political, more religious and is perceived more frequently from an anthropological perspective.

## Conclusions

This investigation has reviewed one of the most influential history journals produced by one of the most prosperous publishing firms in the world over a five year period between 2007 and 2012. The investigation has resulted in the finding that half of the editorial team were educated or have taught at Oxford University and that half of the contributors were educated or have taught at either Oxford, Cambridge, Yale, Harvard or Princeton. British and American scholars account for 88% of the editorial team and 85% of authors. Across the journal as a whole, there are three times more male writers than female, though in the youngest age category of authors, those below thirty-five, 58% of articles were written by men. A comparison with other journals suggests many of these demographic figures are typical. In terms of gender *Past and Present* had slightly more female authors than *World Politics*, the same number as *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* and slightly less than *History and Theory*. In all the journals there was a predominance of UK and US scholars, with varying degrees of European participation. *Past and Present* was unusual in two respects. In the one case where comparison was possible – with the *Journal of*



*Interdisciplinary History* – comparison showed the age of *Past and Presents* authors to be relatively younger. No other journal seemed to be so dominated by one institution as *Past and Present* is by Oxford University.

With regard to content of *Past and Present*, the British Isles are the most featured subject of the articles, appearing in 42% of articles. Overall, 84% of articles discuss European history. The journal covers a wide range of themes, topics and approaches. The topics and approaches used vary according to the geographical location of the article subject. The history of the non-European world is described more often through the subjects of religion, cultural interaction and nationalism than locations on average with less emphasis being placed on war and politics. There is also a relationship between the period studied and the geographic location of the article subject. The less recent the historical period the fewer places studied. This creates an impression of the world getting bigger throughout history. The changing emphasis of geographical regions as the period changes creates a narrative of historical change and also influences impressions of geographical regions. An attempt at visualising these narratives is presented on the series of maps above.

These results relate largely to the openness of *Past and Present* and to its relationship with a global context. From the results on the national and institutional backgrounds of the authors, it appears that there is an English-speaking academic community which is inaccessible for the majority of non-Anglophone country authors, especially those who have not studied or taught in British or American universities. However, even within this community there are clear centres of power, namely the United States and England and certain universities within these countries. It also would seem that the predominance of English authors reflects *Past and Present's* editors' ability to draw on their nation's authors at the expense seeking wider contribution from overseas, though when overseas authors are sought they tended to come from the United States. An explanation that is suggested by these findings is that the editors of *Past and Present* consider their overseas contributors in different ways. Whereas American scholarship is considered an essential partner and sometimes leader of debates in fields that interest British scholars, Europeans and authors from other parts of the world are valued for their outside perspective and their introduction of the exotic.

Considering the findings on *Past and Present's* content – on the geographical distribution of article themes and periods – in the light of questions on openness can offer further insights into the relationship of the journal with a global context. Focusing especially





on the evidence that non-European regions of the world are commonly discussed in the context of European history, and that *Past and Present* publishes articles on non-European history which approach their subject as more religious, more nationalistic and more anthropological and less violent, less philosophical and less political (i.e. than European history) leads to the supposition that the journals' editors and authors are unwilling to engage in history that is unconnected from that of the journal and its readership. This explanation corresponds to accepted notions of personal identification in literary theory and would render criticisms of 'western biases' or 'western domination' are inappropriate.

These conclusions position *Past and Present* in a global context. Future research would first of all have to establish how global this context is, looking at its distribution and citation, comparing it to journals from the non-English speaking world. Returning to the under-explored insights of Cass Miller and Julianna Harris, closer scrutiny of the circumstances of editorial selection and decision-making would humanise these findings, provide greater institutional and commercial context and enable important evaluations of design and necessity.



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