



Journal of Interdisciplinary History

A journal review

2006-2010

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Introduction

Inspired by a series in the Times Literary Supplement called ‘New Ways in History’, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* was founded in 1969. Its history since then has showed remarkable continuities: the same editors and the same publisher. Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb founded the journal forty years ago and have edited it ever since. They created *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* to ‘employ the methods and insights of other disciplines in the study of past times and to bring a historical perspective to those other disciplines’.¹ The journal wishes to renew the historical discipline, illuminate the history of the often neglected majority of mankind that did not wield power, and present these insights in a manner understandable for the broader audience. Apart from expressing these wishes, the editor of their website claims that the journal has fulfilled its ambitions since its inception.

Based on the various rankings available for this topic, the journal seems to be a success. On the website of the journal The Thomson Reuters’s 2010 Journal Citation Report Social Science Edition impact factor of 0.400 (without self cites) for 2010 is mentioned.² In the document you can also find that the journal has a five-year impact factor of 0.337 and an immediacy factor 0.182. During the period 2006-2010 the Impact factor varied considerably as you can see in figure 1. These figures award *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* the eleventh place in Reuter Thomson’s ranking of 2010 in the category history.³ In its Essential Science Indicators for the period January 2000-April 2010 Thomson Reuters is a bit less enthusiastic about the journal: it notes an impact factor of 0.208 and a the five year impact factor of 0.271. On the Red Jasper list of 2010 Interdisciplinary History is ranked eleventh among History journals as well. The European Science Foundation Interdisciplinary History does not rank journals but categorizes them. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* was categorized as, ‘INT1’, the highest possible score, in 2007 and 2011.⁴

The sales figures of the journal align with its good reputation. This year the journal has about 330.000 combo-subscriptions (print and digital) in the US and Canada.⁵ MIT Press has always published *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. MIT Press publishes around 30

¹ <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/page/about/more/jih> (MIT Press) accessed on 01/04/2012, 22.30.

² <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/page/about/more/jih> (MIT Press) accessed on 01/04/2012, 22.30.
Thomson Reuters, 2010 Journal Citation Report Social Science Edition, ISI Web of Knowledge, Web of Science.

³ Thomson Reuters, 2010 Journal Citation Report Social Science Edition, ISI Web of Knowledge, Web of Science.

⁴ <https://www2.esf.org/asp/ERIH/Foreword/search.asp>, ‘Interdisciplinary History’ (European Science Foundation). Accessed on 21/03/2012, 15.39.

⁵ <https://ulrichsweb.serialssolutions.com>, ‘Journal of Interdisciplinary History’, accessed on 02/04/2021, 19.40.

journals and 200 books per year and is affiliated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.⁶

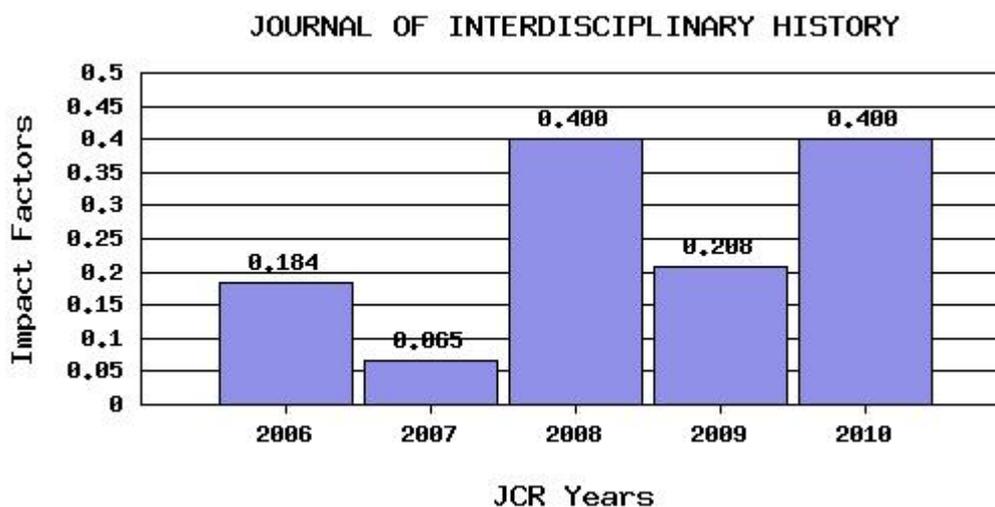


Fig 1: Impact Factor Trend Graph: *JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY HISTORY* from Thomson Reuters, 2010 Journal Citation Report Social Science Edition, ISI Web of Knowledge, Web of Science.

In this review *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* will be the object of study. The journal behind the impressive statistics of Thomson Reuters and others will be analyzed in detail. What kind of journal is *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*? Can the journal live up to its goals? What does it mean to be an interdisciplinary history journal? To what extent does it function as an interdisciplinary ‘bridge’?

To answer the questions a number of lines of inquiry are followed. In the first section of the institutional side of the journal is looked into. The editorial procedures and board are described and the structure of the journal is defined. In the second section the content of the journal is addressed by studying the last six complete years of the journal (2006-2011). By means of a simple statistic exercise an overall picture is given of the authors and the articles of the journal. Aspects that are discussed are: gender, age, country of employment, disciplinary background of authors, themes of articles, geography of articles, and time period. In the appendix a review of a discussion about biography and interdisciplinary research is included.

Lastly, some remarks on the methodology. The quantitative part of the review uses data based on a survey of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (2006-2011). In the construction of the data sometimes choices had to be made which significantly influenced the

⁶ <http://mitpress.mit.edu/mitpress/history/default.asp> (MIT Press), accessed on 02/04/2021, 19.55.

outcomes. When assigning the period of the articles the century on which the article focuses most was chosen. A similar procedure was used to categorize the geographic setting of articles: the region that is most relevant to article was attached to it. Articles that do not deal with a specific period or region, such as purely methodological articles, are respectively marked as 'no period' and 'no region'. The categories of the themes of the articles were borrowed from the section of the journals website in which is described what areas the journal covers.⁷ The categories were assigned on the basis of the abstracts of the articles. Often, more than one category was applicable, in which case a choice was made based on the rule of thumb that the area of the object of study is most important. When the abstract did not offer enough information, parts of the article were read. The label 'cultural history' was assigned to articles which dealt with art and representation, for example the article on the 'styling' of King Louis IX by Jennifer R. Davis.⁸ Articles were designated as 'political history' if they dealt with the political process, politicians and law. The article about the pensions of Afro-American Civil War veterans by Larry M. Logue and Peter Blanck is example of an articles categorized as 'political history'.⁹ The category 'social history' is imposed on articles that deal with the societal position of groups and social life. Articles on family history are also included in this category, except when they are concerned with family size and composition. Patrick J. Ryan's article on the changing perception of childhood in history is an example of 'social history'.¹⁰ 'Demographic history' in this context refers to articles that go into population growth, public health, and population composition, for example the article by Anne E.C. McCant on population dynamics during the crisis of the seventeenth century.¹¹ The label 'economic history' was assigned to articles on economic growth, economic conditions The article on the commercial development of Brabant in the eighteenth century and rise of 'respectability' as a social-economic good by Johan Poukens and Nele Provoost is an example of articles regarded as economic history.¹² The categories of the disciplinary background were based on the divisions commonly accepted in the academic

⁷ <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/page/about/more/jih> (MIT Press) accessed on 01/04/2012, 22.30.

⁸ Jennifer R. Davis, 'The Problem of King Louis IX of France: Biography, Sanctity, and Kingship', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 41 (2010) issue 2, 209-225.

⁹ Larry M. Logue and Peter Blanck, "'Benefit of the Doubt': African-American Civil War Veterans and Pensions", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 38 (2008) issue 3, 377-399.

¹⁰ Patrick J. Ryan, 'How New Is the "New" Social Study of Childhood? The Myth of a Paradigm Shift', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 38 (2008) issue 4, 553-576.

¹¹ Anne E.C. McCant, 'Historical Demography and the Crisis of the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 40 (2009) issue 2, 195-214.

¹² Johan Poukens and Nele Provoost, 'Respectability, Middle-Class Material Culture, and Economic Crisis: The Case of Lier in Brabant, 1690-1770', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 42 (2011) issue 2, 159-184.



world. The categories were applied on the basis of the following information found on the personal pages of the authors at the website of their university: the disciplines the authors received their PhD in, their publications, and the title of their appointment. I will give two examples to illustrate this method. Melissa Willard-Foster, author of an article on the Allied occupation of Japan and Germany, holds a PhD in political science and is a research fellow in the International Security Program of Harvard University.¹³ This information results in assigning the category ‘political science’. Gregory Hanlon, who wrote an article about the counterreformation in Italy, is a professor at the History Department of Dalhousie University (Canada) and has only published on early modern Italy and France. Therefore his discipline is history.¹⁴ Determining the age of authors was sometimes complicated because some scholars do not share their age in cyberspace. If a picture or graduation age was available a ‘guesstimate’ was made. Authors whose age was not retraceable at all are marked as ‘unknown’. The book reviews have not been studied systematically and are not included in the data because there are too many of them. This is certainly a pity because about half of journal consists of short book reviews but the time available for writing this assignment was limited. Besides, an analyses of the journal based only on the larger articles can provide interesting insights, as we will see in the following pages.

Structure

In this section the structural features of the journal are addressed. The editors are described first. As mentioned in the introduction Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb edit the journal. Rotberg is specialized in African History, former-president of the World Peace Foundation and former-director of the Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government Program on Intrastate Conflict, Conflict Prevention, and Conflict Resolution, professor of political science and history at MIT, Vice President of Tufts University, and President of Lafayette College. Rabb is a professor at Princeton University and an expert on the Early Modern Period. He also taught at Stanford, Northwestern, Johns Hopkins, and the State University of New York at Binghamton.¹⁵ Professor in US industrial history and immigration history at Tufts University, Reed Ueda is the only associate editor. The board

¹³ Melissa Willard-Foster, ‘Planning Peace and Forcing the Surrender. Deterrence in the Allied Occupations of Germany and Japan’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 40 (2009) issue 1, 33-56.

¹⁴ Gregory Hanlon, ‘The Facts of Life in Rural Counter-Reformation Tuscany’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 40 (2009) issue 1, 1-33.

¹⁵ <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/page/about/more/jih> (MIT Journals) accessed on 01/04/2012, 22.30.



of editors consists of twenty-one people. Three of them are female and one works at a university which is not based in the United States (U.S.). Harvard and Berkeley (University of California) are represented more prominently by respectively three and two editors; the rest of the board is geographically spread throughout the US. The board members are important historians with an interdisciplinary orientation, but not grand names that ring a bell for every history student. The members of the editorial board are older than fifty and fulfil senior academic positions. Rotberg and Rabb are supported in running the journal by managing editor Ed Freedman.

The structure of issues of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* shows a historiographical orientation. Usually an issue contains 160 pages and includes around fifty contributions. The first two or three articles are research articles. The average length of an article of this type is twenty-five pages. The average amount of words of the articles was not systematically counted for the purpose of this review, but a sample-test shows that articles typically number around 8,000 words. This type of articles is the result of some new research, but tends to have a strong ‘embedding’ in the historiography, most visible by the large number of references. Often a large book review, with the average length of nineteen pages, on a historiographical trend, triggered by a new publication, is included. Half of an issue consists of research articles and literature reviews; the rest is filled with book reviews. These are 600 words long and take up little over one page. Generally, book reviews take up half of an issue. The number and nature of the research articles, together with the large literature reviews and the number of book reviews in its issues give the journal a historiographical character. Compared to other journals, for instance *Past and Present*¹⁶, the journal devotes little space to research articles and much to reviews. Issues of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* do not include editors’ notes or a discussion section, except for special issues.

The Journal of Interdisciplinary History is a peer-reviewed journal. If an article is accepted by the editors, a double-blind peer-review procedure is applied. The writers of book reviews are all academic professionals and work on invitation. The rejection-rate for articles is between 70% and 80%. The managing editor, Ed Freedman, states that the main reason for rejection is that ‘we don’t accept narrative history of any kind (be it literary, intellectual,

¹⁶ This statement is based on the analysis of *Past and Present* of Phil Heaton.



religious, cultural, etc.) or history that strikes as too arcane or specialized to have any appeal to our readership'.¹⁷

Special issues have a special position within the journal's publishing record. Between 2006 and 2011 *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* published four special issues, of which one was a double. For every special issue one of the editors wrote a preface of about ten pages in which the theme is justified and the authors are introduced. In the special double-issue on opera (Winter 2006) Rabb also wrote an article in which he describes a how historians and musicologists failed to work together and presents six 'cases' to further substantiate why this interdisciplinary research is necessary. The editors are more active in organizing special issues than normal issues. The special double-issue on opera was preceded by a conference in 2004 at Princeton. The journal did not just publish the proceedings of conference but actually initiated the conference. Rabb does not state it literally, but this is implied by the statement 'the Journal was at last able to breach the barrier in a conference held at Princeton University'.¹⁸ Rabb also provided the introduction for the special issue on 'the crisis of the seventeenth century' (Autumn 2009). He writes that the various authors met, discussed, and adapted their contribution to each other's to promote the coherence of the issue.¹⁹

¹⁷ Email correspondence with Ed Freedman (28/03/2012).

¹⁸ Theodore K. Rabb, 'Opera, Musicology, and History', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 36 (2006) issue 3, 321-330, 323.

¹⁹ Theodore K. Rabb, "Introduction: the persistence of the 'Crisis'", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 40 (2009) issue 2, 145-150.

Content

In this section of the review the statistical data is presented and interpreted. First the statistics on the authors are discussed followed by the figures on the articles. The last part of the section goes into possible trends in the journal.

As with most of science, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* is male dominated: in the period 2006-2011 73% of the authors are men and only 27% are women. Data on the age of the authors allows us to be more specific: old males (Fig 2). Out of the 107 authors whose age was retraceable fifty-nine are older than fifty. This is perhaps an unlikely result for a journal which aims for methodological innovation, something associated with younger scholars. However, this supposition is not based on scientific research, and it is equally possible that older scholars can innovate.

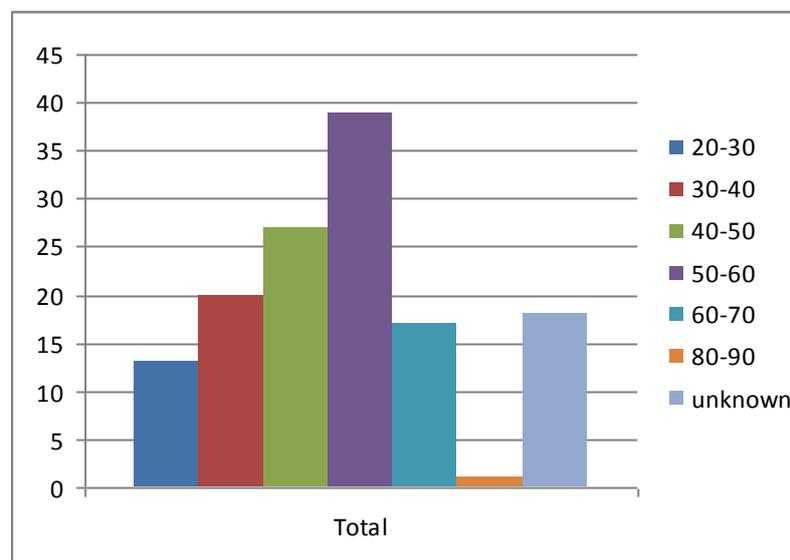


Fig 2: age of authors who write for *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (N=135)

Research on the question ‘in what countries do contributors of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* work?’ shows that the more than half (53%) of the authors work in USA (Fig. 3). To be clear, in this context ‘work in’ means in what country does the university reside that employs the author. Although the authors are concentrated in the USA, when we observe at what university the authors work, a different image emerges. The authors seem rather spread-out: the 187 authors ‘present’ in the data are employed by 83 different universities. Only Harvard, Melbourne, Berkeley, Princeton are large ‘suppliers’ of authors with respectively nine, seven, and five authors who published in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. In this context the influence of the editors is apparent: Rotberg

works at Harvard and used to work at Berkeley, and Rabb works at Princeton. The University of Melbourne (Australia) should be left out because all of its authors contributed to the same article. This type of over-representation is a broader problem in the data at the basis of figure 3. Belgium, Portugal and Spain are also overrepresented in figure 3. Belgium and Turkey are overrepresented for the same reason as Australia. Spain is overrepresented because the special issue of summer 2011 on Geographical Information Systems (GIS), was largely delivered by Spanish scholars. Apart from the issue of summer 2011 not a single Spanish scholar published in the journal. The UK fulfils its usual role as ‘second best’ in science in term of its supply of authors. Seven authors are employed by universities in the Netherlands. This makes this country the largest non-Anglo-Saxon employer of authors. In the Netherlands the authors are concentrated: four at Utrecht, two at Nijmegen, and one at the Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau (SCP).

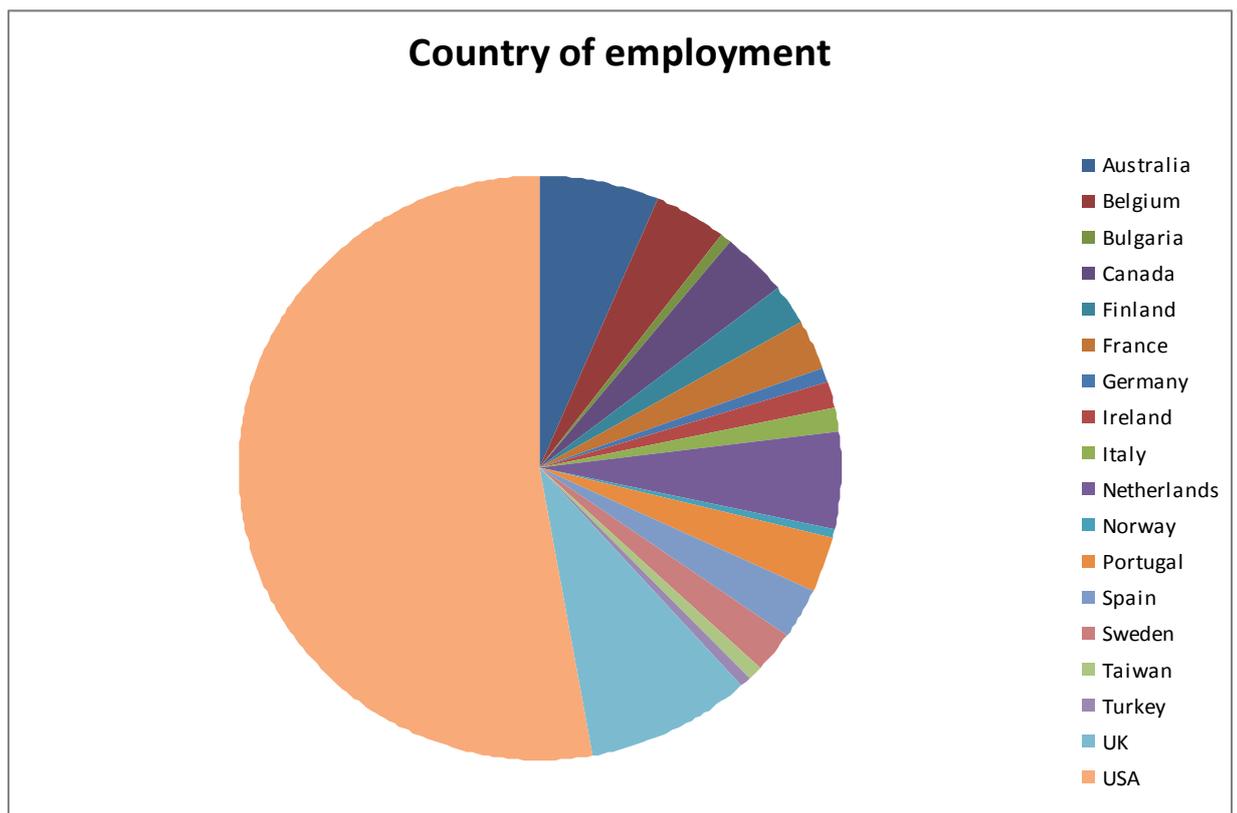


Fig. 3: country of employment of authors for *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (N=137)

The data on the gender, age, and employers of authors for *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* suggests that there is a possible relationship between the editorial board of a journal and the authors of a journal. Strong similarities exist between the data on these factors for



these two groups: both are imbalanced concerning gender balance, both are older than fifty, and both are mainly employed by American universities. The most likely explanation for this observation is that the editors are recruited from the ranks of the authors. People who are evolved with the journal are requested to join the editorial board and perhaps editors and members of editorial board recruit authors. Since authors send in their articles to the journal the ‘recruiting’ probably happens in subtle way. The previously mentioned relationship of the editors and the number of authors from their universities is an aspect of this process. The editors of the journal, who are also academics, are part of the same networks as the authors. In this way a journal entrenches sooner or later. Or you could say that a particular ‘journal culture’ takes shape over time. It would be incorrect, however, to describe this culture as exclusive because in the period 2006-2011 only two of the 138 authors, apart from the editors and their prefaces, have written two articles. No author has written more than two articles. This number could of course be higher if the book reviews were also incorporated in the analysis.

Because the aim of the editors of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* is to ‘employ the methods and insights of other disciplines in the study of past times’ it is interesting to find out how interdisciplinary the authors of the journal are. This topic is approached by marking each author with a certain discipline. This approach has two drawbacks. Firstly, many authors have an interdisciplinary background and by assigning one discipline to them you lose this nuance and also when you mark these authors there are no clear-cut criteria to base your mark on. Many authors do, however, have a clear scientific background. Also, looking at what discipline they received their PhD in, their publications, and the title of their appointment can say enough to prioritize the disciplines in which an author is active. Secondly, the background of an author does not indicate how interdisciplinary the journal is: only the content of the articles can do this. All articles contain a degree of interdisciplinarity, however, this is difficult to quantify. The disciplinary background of the authors is easier to measure and can give a limited indication whether the journal is a platform for authors from different disciplines.

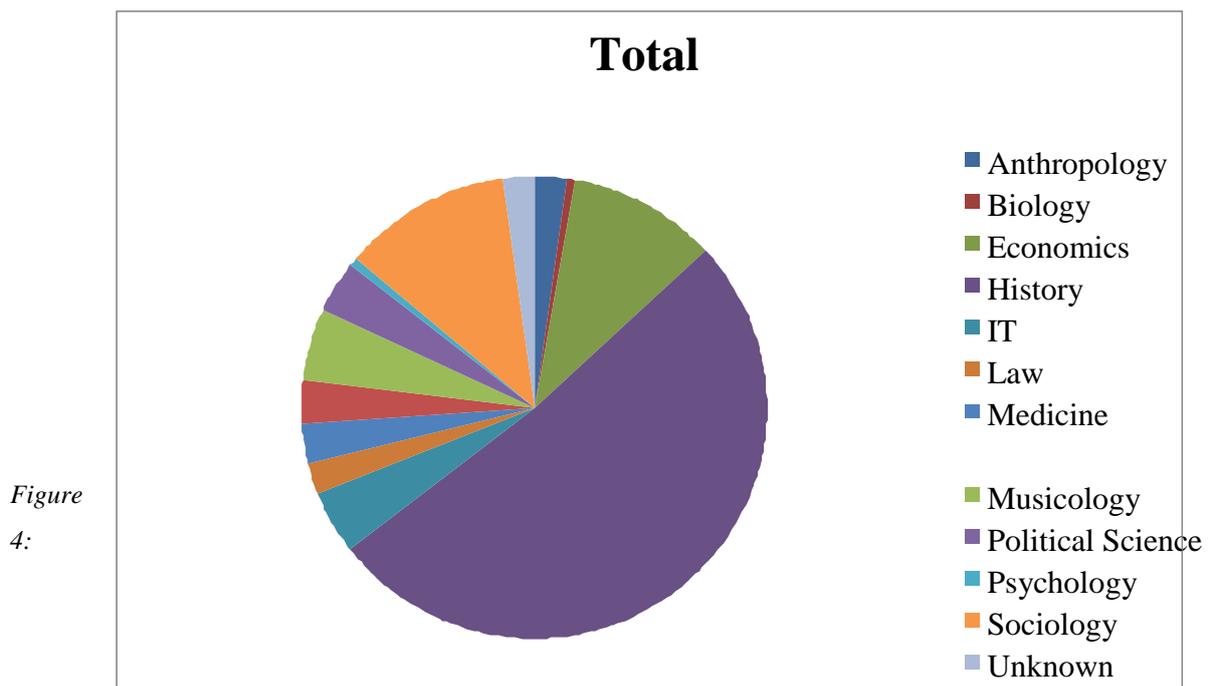


Figure
4:

Number of authors who published in The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 2006-2011 per discipline.

The data presented in figure 4 supports the idea that *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* is a platform for authors from different disciplines. Just over half of the authors, 68 out of 133, have a background in history. The most frequently counted disciplines are sociology and economics, with respectively sixteen and fourteen counts. This result was expected because these two disciplines are very important to social and economic history. The half and half split between historians and non-historians is arguably the best evidence in support of the idea that the journal is a bridge between disciplines. Historians and scholars from other disciplines are studying the past together.

After looking into the authors for *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, we can have a look at what type of articles the authors have produced. To start off with the themes of the articles (presented in figure 5). Somewhat unexpectedly cultural or political history is the theme of more than half, 55 out of 107, of the articles. Interdisciplinary history is associated with interaction with the social sciences such as sociology and economics. Consequently you would expect that social, economic, and demographic history would be practiced most in a journal on interdisciplinary history. This expectation, prejudice maybe, proved untrue. At *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* interdisciplinarity is not defined as social scientific when it comes to choosing topics. The traditional theme of history, the study of politics, is an important subject for a journal looking to renew the study of history. This implies that if the

journal is innovative is not so much in its choice of theme but rather in its choice of methodology or approach to cultural history, for example.

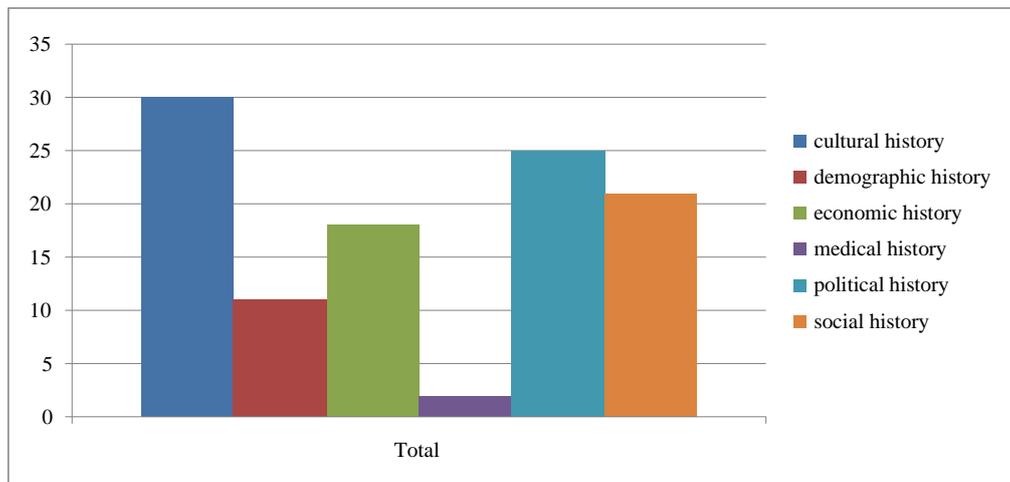


Fig. 5: number of articles per theme published in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2006-2011

Another possible reaction to this data is to critique the data itself because the special issues are included. All articles in the double issue on opera were tagged as ‘cultural history’ and the articles in the special issue on biography were split between ‘cultural history’ and ‘political history’. This could be seen as ‘poison’ to the data. However, the articles in special issue on GIS were marked as ‘economic history’ and the articles in the issue on crisis were marked evenly. Still, on methodological grounds this could be proposed. A possibility is ‘to clean’ the data by isolating the data based on special issues. This would mean that there are only three articles left with the theme ‘cultural history’, eleven with the theme ‘economic history’, and seventeen with the theme ‘political history’. The bars of demographic, social, and medical history would be unchanged and thus relatively higher. The assumption underlying this change would be that special issues are not part of the journal, or at least a less important part. However, special issues are a means to profile a journal. The editors Rabb, Rotberg, and Ueda are closely involved in the coming-about of the special issues and therefore arguably more important than articles of normal issues when you aim to define the journal. Another objection to including data derived from special issues could be that special issues are ‘incidents’ in the long history of journal. However, when the journal publishes one special issue per year you cannot regard them as incidents, especially when you consider that the journal appears only four times a year.



Despite all the doubt expressed above it is useful to note that in theme issues the focus is indeed more on cultural and political history compared to normal issues. There are clues that suggest that this difference is related to the editors. First clue is that the theme issues correspond with the research interests of the editors. In the special double issue on opera Rabb wrote an article, next to the usual preface. This was probably not difficult for him since he is a cultural historian of the early modern period. The special issue on biography, winter 2010, shows a similar connection: Rotberg is a biographer himself. The same counts for the summer issue of 2010: this issue was on immigration and state formation and associate editor Ueda is specialized in immigration. The issues on crisis and GIS do not fit this pattern. The fact that in the issues to which one of the editors related, authors from their university write an article for the issue constitutes the second clue. The influence of the editors on the special issues seems to have three forms: the editors decide on the topic of the theme issues, they get together the authors and they direct the articles to their scholarly aim.

An interesting result of the quantitative research is that the data on the geography of articles contrasts sharply with the data on the geography of the authors (figure 5 and figure 3). Europe is by far the region on which most articles in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* are written: 54 out of 109. Europe is followed by the USA, the country which 24 articles deal with. Twelve articles have been marked as 'British Isles'. Only eighteen articles deal with subjects in the non-Western World. Based on these numbers it is safe to conclude that the journal is Western-centric. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* is not exception in this respect and this review is not the place to reflect on that matter. More relevant for this review is that within the Western World a strange imbalance is in place. Where most authors work in the USA, they study topics in Europe. It is a somewhat contradictory situation that, in the context of the journal, it seems that Americans study Europe. Again, it must be said that the special issues are a decisive factor. The articles in the double special issue on opera, the special issue on the crisis of the seventeenth century, and the special issue on GIS are tagged as 'Europe'. If the special issues would be left out, which has not been done on the basis of earlier mentioned considerations, the imbalance between Europe and the USA would be less large, however, it would not disappear.

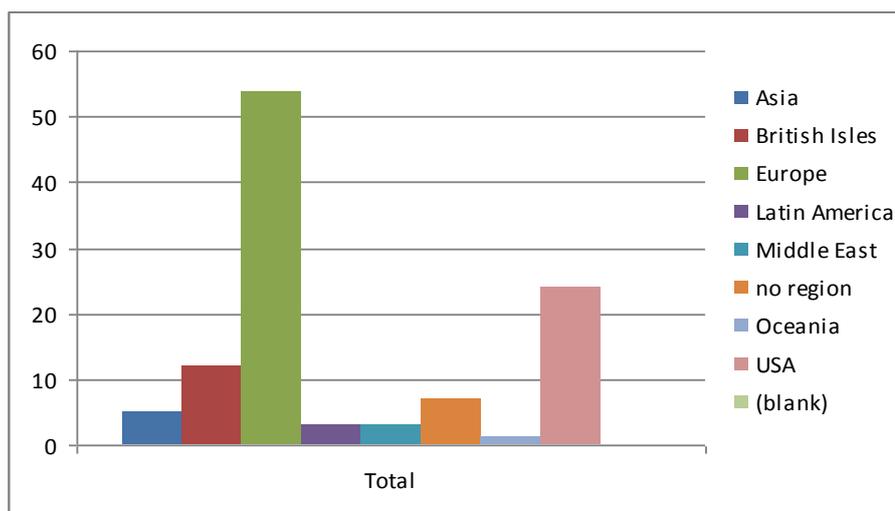


Fig. 5: number of articles per region in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2006-2011

The numbers on the periods enforce the contradictory element of this situation (figure 6). Just over half the articles, 56 out of 107, are on nineteenth and twentieth century topics. American history in this timeframe offers plenty of subjects to study. 38 out of 107 articles are on the Early Modern period (early Modern, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th together). If the journal was oriented toward Antiquity, Middle Ages, or the Early-Modern period that could explain the focus on Europe, but this not the case. It is possible that most Western historians study Europe and that this circumstance in combination with the American nature of the journal causes the imbalance between author’s geography and the geography of the subjects.

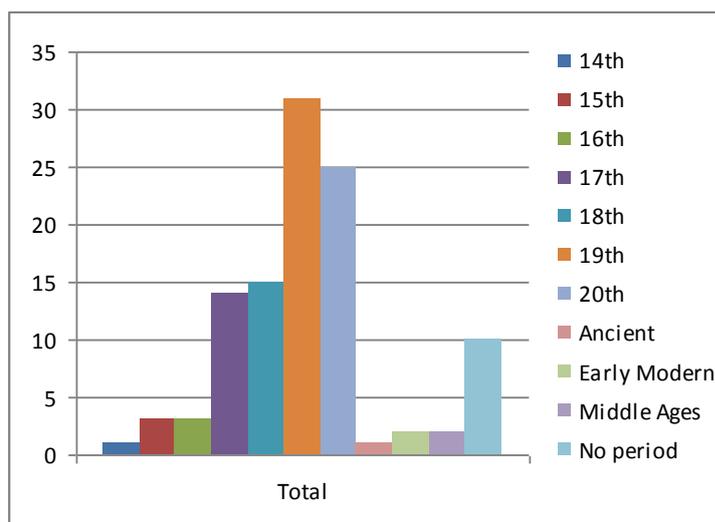


Fig. 6: the number of articles per period region in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2006-2011

More detailed research into the topics of the articles published in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* from the period 2006-2011 resulted in the conclusion that there are no long-term trends recognizable in the journal. No long enduring discussions which set the tone took place in the journal. The small number of self citations, only three, reported the 2010 Journal Citation Report Social Science Edition by Thomson Reuters supports this idea.²⁰ Perhaps this has to do with the structure of journal. The editors do not express their views on the development of the field, except in the prefaces of special issues. Neither is there a platform in the journal for reader commentaries or discussion. This said, there are some topics which feature more frequently in the journal than others. Family and immigration are important topics in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*.

In 2006 and 2007 four articles were published on the study of family history from an economic perspective. These articles are similar to the extent that in these articles the behavior of families in the past, such as reproduction and economic choices, is analyzed by using economic models. Farley Grubb writes about how poor German immigrant families employed different strategies to pay for their journey. He nuances and explains the ideas that exist about Germans selling their children into servitude to pay for their crossing in the eighteenth century.²¹ In the same issue an article about the downsizing of families in eighteenth-century New England by Maria Gloria is included.²² The autumn issue of 2007 was also for a large share devoted to family history. In this issue Howard Bodenhorn published an article about the situation of children from single parent households in urban American South in nineteenth century.²³ Martin Dribe, Christer Lundh, and Paul Nystedt write in this issue about how nineteenth-century Swedish families dealt with widowhood.²⁴

Immigration is another topic which receives a lot of attention. Throughout the whole six-year period which was studied articles about immigration featured in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. These articles taken together do not show a development which justifies the use of the term 'trend'; they merely deal with related subjects. The articles can be divided into two subcategories: articles on the economic situation of immigrants in the USA

²⁰ Thomson Reuters, 2010 Journal Citation Report Social Science Edition, ISI Web of Knowledge, Web of Science.

²¹ Farley Grubb, 'Babes in Bondage? Debt Shifting by German Immigrants in Early America', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 37 (2006) issue 1, 1-34

²² Gloria L. Main, 'Rocking the Cradle: Downsizing the New England Family', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 37 (2006) issue 1, 35-58.

²³ Howard Bodenhorn, 'Single Parenthood and Childhood Outcomes in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Urban South', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 38 (2007) issue 1, 33-64.

²⁴ Martin Dribe, Christer Lundh, and Paul Nystedt, 'Widowhood Strategies in Preindustrial Society', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 38 (2007) issue 2, 207-232.

and articles about government policy on immigration. The earlier mentioned article by Grubb fits in the first category of immigration. Another article that touches on immigration is about the living standards of Chinese immigrants in USA by Scott Carson.²⁵ The migration of southern whites to the Midwest, especially how difficult life in their new environment was for this group, is the subject of Alexander Trent's article.²⁶ In the spring issue of 2007 an article by Peter Tammes on the position of Jewish immigrants in the Netherlands during World War II was published. He looks at the motives of the immigrants and compares them to Dutch Jews.²⁷ Oyangen Knut, in his 2009 article, approaches immigrant assimilation in an original way, that is, by exploring the importance of food as a part of the immigrant experience.²⁸ The last article which fits in this category was written by Robert Mitchell and assesses new theories about the development of settlement in the Midwest in the nineteenth century.²⁹

The other category of articles concerning immigration deals with government policy on immigration. These articles were published in 2008 and in the special issue of summer 2010 on international immigration and state formation. Robbie Totten's article about the connection between the national security of the USA and immigration laws in the eighteenth century is the 2008 publication on topic.³⁰ The rest of them were all part of the special issue. Associate editor Euda introduces the issue by observing a gap in the study of international immigration: the varying effects of nation states on international migration are neglected by historians, sociologists, and political scientist. In this spirit David Cook-Martin and David Fitzgerald in their article compare immigration policies of multiple countries. They discover that autocratic regimes have a more open immigration policy than democratic regimes because the elite can dictate their Universalist views and resist pressure from interest groups. Philip Wolgin and Irene Bloemraad research the US immigration policy that is concerned with spouses of US military personnel. After World War II this policy allowed Asian

²⁵ Scott Alan Carson, 'The Biological Living Conditions of Nineteenth-Century Chinese Males in America', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (2006) vol. 37, issue 2, 201-217.

²⁶ Alexander J. Trent, 'Defining the Diaspora: Appalachians in the Great Migration', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 37 (2006), issue 2, 219-247

²⁷ Peter Tammes, 'Jewish Immigrants in the Netherlands during the Nazi Occupation', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 37 (2007) issue 4, 543-562.

²⁸ Oyangen Knut, 'The Gastrodynamics of Displacement: Place-Making and Gustatory Identity in the Immigrants', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 39 (2009) issue 3, 323-348.

²⁹ Robert E. Mitchell, 'Antebellum Farm-Settlement Patterns: A Three-Level Approach to Assessing the Effects of Soils', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 41 (2011) issue 3, 393-420.

³⁰ Robbie Totten, 'National Security and U.S. Immigration Policy, 1776-1790', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 39 (2008) issue 1, 37-64.

immigrants to circumvent the restrictive policy the US had towards Asian countries. In his article Rogers Brubaker gives a theoretical summary of the role of the state as a beacon of immigrant's group identity. He argues that despite globalization the nation-state is still the most influential framework for group identity. Riva Kastoryano also emphasizes the importance of the state for human rights and political representation in her article. In Yasemin Nohuglu Soysal and Simona Szakcs's article focuses on the attempts to use schooling as a means to promote civic integration of immigrants in France. They conclude that the essence of the presentation of the French identity has remained unchanged since the country was faced with immigration.³¹

The other topic that appears relatively often in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* apart from the special issues are population growth, public health, the plague and crime. It is undesirable to address all these in more detail, but it is interesting to note that these topics are all somewhat general. The journal hardly contains articles that try to find singular explanations. In this sense *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* assumes elements of the social sciences with which it interacts.

Conclusion

The past forty years of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* have been a success: it's ranking and sales figures are high. The editors, Rotberg and Rabb, seem to be successful in their ambitions to renew the historical discipline, illuminate the history of the often neglected majority of mankind that did not wield power, and present these insights in a manner understandable for the broader audience. In this review the larger articles of the journal's issues from the period 2006-2011 have been studied in order to find out: what kind of journal

³¹ Reed Ueda, 'Introduction: State Development and International Migration', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 41 (2010) issue 1, 1-6.



The Journal of Interdisciplinary History is, why it is so successful and what it means to be interdisciplinary.

In the above several characteristics of the journal have been observed. The most important is the idea that the journal has a deeply rooted culture which the editors created in the past forty years that they ran the journal. The editors are the first who judge a received article. If they think the article has potential, the article is subjected to a peer-review procedure. About 20%-30% of the submitted articles meet those standards and are placed. The main reason why articles are rejected is that they are too specific or have a narrative form. Issues of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* include two or three research articles, a large literature review, and about twenty short book reviews which are written on invitation. The journal does not include editor's notes or commentaries, except in special issues. In the special issues the journal employs different procedures: the issue is the result of a conference or a cooperative project initiated by the editors. The editors are supported by an experienced editorial boards which is dominated by older white American men and which work at a variety of American universities. The authors who publish in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* are similar to the members of the editorial board: mainly older men from a wide-array of American universities. The most important difference between the authors and the members of the editorial board is that almost half of the authors have a non-historic scientific background. Authors from a large number of disciplines publish in the journal; economics and sociology are the most important disciplines (other than history) from which the journal draws authors. The editors actively promote scholars from authors other disciplines to publish in their journal. In the design and introduction of the special issues this aspiration is most clearly visible: the editors choose a theme that in their mind advances the science of history by opening a new avenue of research and they 'scout' the authors to realize this ambition. The editors exploit their own network when scouting for authors given the fact that the universities of Rabb and Rotberg, respectively Princeton and Harvard, are more prominently present in the journal's 'author pool' than other universities.

The mark of the editors is equally visible when you research the articles published in the journal. The data on the themes of the articles indicates that political history and cultural history are the most important themes featured in the journal. This emphasis is the largely the result of the themes of the special issues, something the editors decide on. Consequently, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* is not focused on social-economic history, but rather on the traditional fields of history. Another remarkable outcome of research into the article is the



geographical contradiction: authors are from the US, but they overwhelmingly study European subjects. The editors also work in the USA and research European topics and the theme issues make the journal more European. Most articles in the journal go into nineteenth- and twentieth-century subjects. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* between 2006 and 2011 does not contain long lasting discussions or polemics. The low number of self citations statistically indicates the absence of debates in the journal. The four articles which study family behaviour with the use of economic models do somewhat resemble a scientific trend.

The concept of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* can explain its success. The editors only accept articles which meet their standards. The most important requirement is that in the articles methods from other disciplines must be used to study history. Consequentially, the articles are original, although their conclusions are not always renewing. This originality can partially explain why the journal is doing so well. The journal offers interesting reading by publishing articles that introduce new historical evidence created by new methods. Also, the journal addresses topics and themes which interest many historians. The journal does not isolate itself by specializing in certain method or topic: a variety of topics in the fields of political, social, cultural, and demographic history approached by various methods are included. The editors make an effort to keep the journal innovative and promote new ways of studying history, for example by publishing a double special issue on opera to stimulate interaction between musicology and history. The possible relevance of an historical perspective for other disciplines is not something the journal goes into. Interdisciplinary in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* means ‘importing’ methods from other disciplines to study the past.

Although the journal is doing well, the journal can improve in certain respects. Apart from using methods from other disciplines, interdisciplinary history is defined as not-narrative. It is not obvious why a narrative form contradicts interdisciplinary research. This is a symptom of a larger problem. The journal hardly contains any discussion or reflections on trends set in by articles from the journal. The journal is not very cohesive: the articles do not respond to each other and consequentially do not stimulate each other through debate to reach a higher level. To a certain extent this is the flipside of the successful design of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. The varied nature of the journal simply does not stimulate discussion. The journal publishes an interesting article on a certain topic and that’s that. The lack of discussion and reflection makes the journal a bit dull. The editors should change their format; perhaps a commentaries section could be included, in order to stimulate debate. This



would be a good change because debate is an essential aspect of science. If *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* could demonstrate the ability and willingness to improve in this regard the journal is likely to be successful in the years to come.

Appendix

In this part of the review an important discussion from *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* will be looked at more closely. The discussion on biography, historiography, and social sciences from the special issue on biography is selected for this purpose for two reasons. Firstly, this is one of the few issues in which authors interact with each other. As stated in the review the journal contains little discussion or debate. Secondly, the selected discussion goes into the essence of the journal: its interdisciplinary ambitions. Many historians are skeptical about biographies, but ever more so about the possibility of a positive influence of social sciences on this long-practiced genre. This discussion can illuminate the role the editors see for the journal.

Editor Robert I. Rotberg opens the special issue on biography by stating that biography and history are interdependent. Biography builds on history and supports history. History could not understand the human experience without having insight into the individual that made history. Rotberg writes: ‘structural and cultural variables are important, but individuals pull the levers of structure and act within or against cultural norms...the hands of individuals are everywhere usually visible but equally often buried beneath the detritus of economic, social, or climatic consideration.’³² Based on the above, Rotberg, biographer of Cecil Rhodes, seems to be the traditional historian who emphasizes the virtue of ‘good old fashioned’ historical research. The presuppositions of choice and rational action allow the biographer to uncover the reasons for actions of individuals in the past. However, Rotberg pleads for ‘the employment of a full range of interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary investigatory methods’ to reconstruct the circumstances in which historical actors took their decisions.³³ He wants to know the economic, political, and psychological factors that had an impact on the historical actor. Furthermore, in order to write a good biography every aspect, which can cross the limits of historical discipline, of the object of study must be examined. Aspects of someone’s life such as health and psyche are vital to understanding that person.

In the same issue Medievalist Micheal Prestwich warns against ‘using anachronistic concepts to make judgments about figures from the past’.³⁴ He wrote a biography about Edward I and in the discussion following the book various psychological analyses opposed

³² Robert I. Rotberg, ‘Biography and Historiography: Mutual Evidentiary and Interdisciplinary Considerations’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 40, issue 3, 305-324, 305.

³³ Rotberg, ‘Biography and Historiography’, 306.

³⁴ Michael Prestwich, ‘Medieval Biography’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (2010) vol. 40, issue 3, 325-243, 334.

each other. The problem was that there is not enough source material available to diagnose Edward I. He thinks that instead of disposing of narrative, history should return to it, mainly because narrative leads to success in the multiple other Medieval biographies. He does not claim that research into structural processes is inferior to the narrative approach. On the contrary, history has much to learn from social scientific approaches. However, according to Prestwich, biography has little to learn from that type of research simply because the evidence base is too small.³⁵

Rotberg does not recognize this problem because he perceives other disciplines as ‘help sciences’, just as paleography already is for history. The evidence that other disciplines create will be regarded just as evidence with different origins. Each piece of evidence will still be assessed by the historian. The ‘help sciences’ are a useful tool to get one’s facts straight but do not alter the practice of the historian. The findings will function as one bit of evidence which is part of a wide array of material at the hands of the historian. The change he is willing to make is to let go of the narrative form, which is apparently irreconcilable with interdisciplinary research. The fact that narrative articles are banned from *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* concurs with this view.

This small review of the discussion about the virtue of interdisciplinary biography has generated an interesting finding, which could have relevance for the entire review. Apparently, interdisciplinary research means using the methods of other disciplines as new ‘help sciences’ and presenting research in a non-narrative manner. Historians can essentially do the same thing as they did before; they do not have to start using models for example. Also, the social sciences do not have to alter their practice according to this definition: it is one-way traffic to history. This definition of interdisciplinary history is limited: new methods from other disciplines are used to create new evidence for the historian to use in his judgment, however, for the most part, history will remain the same. Also, the definition is less ambitious than the ‘mission statement’ on the website of the journal: ‘[to] employ the methods and insights of other disciplines in the study of past times and to bring a historical perspective to those other disciplines’.³⁶ As mentioned before, only the methods of other disciplines are employed to create new evidence and present the findings in a non-narrative form. To what extent this definition of interdisciplinary history is typical for *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* cannot be determined on the basis of this single discussion.

³⁵ Prestwich, ‘Medieval Biography’, 345.

³⁶ <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/page/about/more/jih> (MIT Press) accessed on 01/04/2012, 22.30.