CHAPTER 4:
VERITAS FILIA TEMPORIS

Reading the minds of the people of the past may seem an impossible task. Yet this is exactly the sort of conjuring act the historian is asked to perform in any study of the effects of the information trade in early modern times. Fortunately, for the argument we have been advancing here, there is no need to read the minds of all readers; nor even a majority of them. We are only interested in the most attentive and vociferous of observers, those more or less close to the cultural elite, whose views were heard and heeded.¹ How many of these seventeenth-century observers worried that the newsletters appeared to be concocted from malicious gossip? How many worried that the newspapers just might be published at the bidding of powerful political interests with little inclination to tell the truth? And how many worried that histories of recent events might be based on faulty sources even when the writers endeavored to procure faithful accounts? Among those whose views have been recorded, our evidence suggests that few had any illusions about the reliability of political information imparted by the sources newly minted or voluminously increased during the course of the century.

Nor did the information specialists themselves offer much in the way of a defense. In admitting that "truth is by nature elusive and slippery," Agostino Mascaldi, the history theorist, could recommend nothing better to exculpate the inaccurate
historian than the injunction against throwing the first stone. But "omnis homo mendax," the phrase attributed to King David, was likely to offer readers little more in the way of consolation than the reminder that "those who are such harsh critics of historians' involuntary lies may well be astute trammelers of perfidy and deceit in their own lives." Mascardi had no answer about historians who deliberately distorted the truth. Yet, just when readers might have desired it most, from the earliest days of the Thirty Years War to the last days of the Turkish Wars at the end of the century, the possibility of gaining a realistic picture of the contemporary world seemed to be getting more and more remote.

The time has come to analyze the cultural consequences of this late seventeenth-century trend. And our inquiry now ascends from the ground level of the writing business to the airy realm of theory. For the time being we must leave behind the world of the writers, literary hacks and charlatans we have been describing to join the company of contemplators and philosophers. To this, the previous chapters will now seem to have been but an essential prelude. Now, the tale we have to tell reveals an unexpected dimension of some of the best-known trends in the intellectual history of the age. As often happens, these trends have an internal as well as an external history. And the series of events leading to the late seventeenth-century crisis from within the history of ideas itself has been told many times—most notably years ago by Paul Hazard in a groundbreaking work. The external history has yet to be written. Our concern here, in undertaking
a first attempt at providing this, will be to sort out, from amid the complex of causes that led to a skeptical outcome, just what may have been attributable to intellectual dynamics and what may be attributed to social, political and economic ones embodied in the system of gathering and peddling political information.

There is no need to exaggerate. To some of the readers, writers, thinkers and theorists of the age, the unreliability of information about their own time or about the past, however compounded by contemporary political and social circumstances, was nothing but a minor nuisance. To others it was a hint about the bad faith of the governments that influenced writers. To still others, and these are the ones whose views preoccupied the historiographical reformers of the last decades of the century, this same unreliability raised deeply troubling questions about human nature and existence. It provided social and political reasons for historical skepticism, quite apart from one's familiarity with Sextus Empiricus or the elite intellectual fashions of the moment. It placed everyday social and political reality in a new light, thus adding a more mundane element to the uneasy feeling induced by the new science and cosmology—the feeling, that is, of being borne along in uncontrollable currents whose exact configuration the best minds nonetheless seemed incapable of understanding. It added to the disquiet produced by confessional disputes, suggesting that truth might be beyond human capacity to grasp. This was no ordinary skepticism, of the sort that, for example, a casual listener might have evinced in hearing an improbable story. Pierre Bayle and Lorenzo Magalotti,
two of our main characters, were riven with doubt of a most
fundamental kind. Our object is to show why it extended to
journalism and historiography.

Not only in Italy, but throughout Europe in the late
seventeenth century, this discussion will show, existing methods
of ascertaining facts in political and military affairs both in
the present and in past times came under a new sort of scrutiny
as part of what some scholarship has regarded as no less than a
wide-ranging "crisis of conscience" at the threshold of the
Enlightenment. In conclusion, there will be time to devote some
attention to the sequel of these episodes. In fact, the crisis
was resolved at least in part by a corresponding movement for
methodological change, as well as by a reform of ideas about the
proper place for intellectual improvisation in the formation of
narrative, in order to make historical writing persuasive as well
as civically useful again. If the product of error and fraud was
skepticism, the product of skepticism was modern historiography.

History and Experience

To be sure, the elusiveness of political truth that
contributed to the late seventeenth-century crisis was no novelty
of the age. What passed for information about contemporary
events was already notoriously unreliable in the sixteenth
century when Ludovico Ariosto made that the subject of his
verse. And any exceptionally gullible person paying heed solely
to the newsletters could be sure of gaining a highly peculiar
view of the world around. Such a person, reading the best-accredited Roman newsletters of the year 1588, would have been wrongly convinced of the death of Henry of Navarre, the future king of France, and of Giovanni de' Medici, natural son of Grand Duke Cosimo I of Tuscany. The same person would have believed Anne de Joyeuse, the favorite of Henry III of France, was murdered by Henry I of Bourbon, Prince of Condé, whereas he actually died in battle. And he would have found information about a key event like the Spanish Armada was notoriously difficult to confirm. And if he took at face value affirmations like, "We have news from the court of His Highness that the Spanish and English armadas joined battle and the English one was ruined and destroyed," shortly followed by, "From an extraordinary courier arrived in France . . . there has been news that the Catholic armada landed safely in Scotland," he was liable to experience considerable disappointment later on. That the newsletters constantly alerted readers to the problem was small consolation. Variations on the dictions, "they say that . . . but others say. . . ." or "although some believe . . . nonetheless the last letters from Utrecht affirm, . . ." emphasizing the uncertainties, only made things worse.

And deliberate misinformation was a fully-recognized political strategy at least by the time that Machiavelli made it an explicit part of prudence during the small break in the Italian Wars that brought the return of the Medici to Florence. No one would ever forget his admiration for Pope Alexander VI and Ferdinand I of Spain as being the best liars of their time. From
his time onward, good appearances were to be cultivated by keeping in mind his famous phrase, "Everyone sees what you seem; few perceive what you are." And if Francesco Guicciardini, Machiavelli's contemporary, disagreed about recommending such policies, this was not because he believed they were little used or, when used, ineffective, but simply because true evil could not long be hidden.

Anyone who was scared away from the works of Machiavelli by the official denunciations of his unconventional morality could find his insights smuggled into any number of other works wrapped in the slightly more acceptable dress of Cornelius Tacitus. By 1574, they could refer to the scholarly edition of Tacitus prepared by Justus Lipsius ostensibly in order to bring the strategies and tactics of princely rulership to the attention of more readers. And what Lipsius purveyed to his Dutch readers in the way of political advice in his *Politicorum libri sex* in 1589, Guy de Pibrac purveyed to his French ones and Arnold Clapmar to his German ones. That such theories went to support causes as diverse as the Dutch revolt against Spain, the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and the adjustment of Habsburg relations with the German towns made no difference. The writers all agreed on justifying means by ends. If not explicitly, at least implicitly they all agreed with the extreme formulation of the Piedmontese writer Giovanni Botero who, exploring these Tacitist perspectives in his *Reason of State*, expressed the fewest reservations about insisting on the propriety of a policy of state secrecy and misinformation. He frankly admitted that
"dissembling is a big help." And he suggested that "two things are necessary" in deciding what to dissemble: "the first is to know one's own weakness; the second is to show one's greatness without ostentation." The only limits on such a policy were that it ought not to be pursued to the extent of damaging credibility; for "although it may go beyond the bounds of truth, it ought to be contained at least within those of likelihood." Scipione Ammirato, the Florentine political theorist and historian, provided a philosophical basis for what was becoming a more and more openly accepted counsel. In his treatise On Secrecy, he took as his point of departure the Aristotelian distinction between bodies of knowledge like logic, philosophy and metaphysics, where complete certainty could be attained, and others, like rhetoric, history and what concerned the world of sense and experience. In the latter areas, he explained, only probable truth was at stake. And indeed, even concerning the most basic problems of the observation of nature, he noted, such as the size of the sun, there had been many different opinions. So much more, then, he argued, might we expect to encounter doubtful matters in morality; and the many variations in national customs concerning a basic institution like matrimony bears this out. Let no one then be scandalized by the proposition that political policies might be acceptable or unacceptable according to the circumstances, or that policies could be unethical from the standpoint of the ordinary citizen but praiseworthy from the standpoint of the state. And given the difference between private and public morality, persons informed about such
policies, he suggested, ought to learn from the example of
nature, which left the ears wide open to receive sounds but
placed a lid on the mouth. Secrecy was not just good counsel; it
was natural.

Practices of secrecy and dissimulation made for a
historiography that often appeared to be caught between guarded
enlightenment and hypocritical encomium. But what distinguished
the Renaissance critics of faulty information from their
seventeenth-century counterparts were the conclusions they drew
from their observations.14 Pietro Bizzarri and Benedetto
Varchi's critiques of Paolo Giovio, Giovanni Battista Leoni's
critique of Guicciardini, and Gianmichele Bruto's critique of
Florentine historiography were never any more damaging, at least
from a methodological standpoint, than were Cesare Baronio's
attacks on the Magdeburg Centuriators or Isaac Casaubon's
critique of Cesare Baronio: namely, that historians distort the
truth due to their own interests and those of their employers—
quite apart from whether or not they had mastered the evidence.15
And Leoni set the tone for all the rest when he complained that
"the truth, which is the only soul and animator of history," was
in Guicciardini's work "corrupted and defaced by passion and
artifice," because the author had wished to be "a very loyal
citizen of his country rather than a good historian."16 When
Bruto chimed in, "as the history [i.e., historiography of
Florence] comes closer to our own times, you will find it full of
perpetual praise for the Medici and full of calumnies, libels,
villainies and brazen lies concerning the whole city,"17 neither
he nor any of the others suggested that historical knowledge as such might be impossible. The only observer to hint in that direction was Cornelius Agrippa, the German scholar from Nettesheim who made Italy his home. But even he was more of a "fundamentalist anti-intellectual" than an authentic Pyrrhonist. After repeating the common complaints about the defects of second-hand information and the vices of malicious distortion, he concluded that the light of truth, dimmed in human nature by original sin, might shine again when all the disciplines had been reformed according to the teachings of the occult sciences.  

The most famous historical skeptic of the late sixteenth century was Francesco Patrizi, a Neoplatonist philosopher and professor at the University of Padua. According to him, bad historians and faulty works of history existed in part because of unreliable sources. And unreliable sources existed, he had one of the characters in his dialogue suggest, because the persons most likely to possess the most accurate inside information about events were ministers informed about the secret counsels of a prince. Yet ministers who received such counsels were precisely those most likely to transmit them in a modified form. Given the pressure of reputation, both on the side of the prince and on that of the minister, manipulation of the truth was almost inevitable. And even when there was no outright manipulation, the documentary or verbal accounts of a particular event were subject to an endless process of substitutions and omissions caused by the defective or selective memories of those involved. The most reliable such accounts were likely to be by eyewitnesses.
who maintained a neutral position regarding what was going on. But those who maintained such a position usually did so because they simply did not understand. Therefore they were likely to miss important details that helped explain the interests and the actions in play. Furthermore, general narratives were more likely to be truthful than specific ones. Yet the more general an account became the less useful it was likely to be. And when, in the absence of necessary evidence about specific episodes, historians sought to add details and causal hypotheses to their excessively general accounts, in doing so they risked sacrificing truth on the altar of didacticism.

In spite of all these difficulties, Patrizi himself, appearing in person in his dialogue, concluded that history per se was safe. Historical research was capable of attaining a sufficient degree of certitude for the discipline to be classed among the sciences rather than among the arts of rhetoric, where Aristotle had put it. Whatever might be its actual record of achievements, its object was the attainment of true knowledge by the faithful exposition of things, unlike poetry, whose object was the attainment of probable knowledge by way of plausible representations. It shared with philosophy a concern for understanding the effects of the forces in the earthly sphere, and although it did not accompany philosophy in the search for the higher causes of those forces, it did seek to elucidate the human causes of events. And as such it was an essential handmaid to philosophy, showing what could be done by what had been done
before, teaching what, in Patrizi's words, "may make life happy and eternal."\textsuperscript{21}

Melchior Cano, a Spanish theologian writing around the same time, came to similar conclusions. In his inquiry about whether historical accounts could be relied upon in forming theological arguments, he concluded that they might, to the extent that they satisfied one of three conditions. And the most trustworthy of all were of course those that were regarded as authoritative by ecclesiastical officials. But accounts did not have to be revered as scripture for them to be granted a high degree of probability "and sometimes even certainty."\textsuperscript{22} They could also, and this was the second condition, be written by writers known for probity and veracity—such writers as might be expected to tell the truth in any circumstances. Finally, they could be written with sufficient attention to the correct evaluation of testimony. And in offering their results, they could distinguish proven fact from conjecture.

Some apparently unrelated intellectual breakthroughs in this time actually served to reinforce the notion that the historian might be in a particularly favorable position to discover the facts.\textsuperscript{23} For towards the end of the sixteenth century few members of the ideal audience we have been hypothesizing here were entirely unaware of the new fact-finding procedures being tried at least in the study of nature. And the cadaver-scrutinizing followers of Vesalius were not the only ones whose new focus on empirical investigation appeared to bring their research down from the lofty heights of philosophical speculation. Nor were the
methodological implications of their work later recognized only by Francis Bacon, whose words are most familiar. "The mind is fond of starting off to generalities," he proclaimed; "that it may avoid labor. But the true method of discovering the truth constructs its axioms from the senses and particulars." And he proposed a program of natural history designed to apply the method of experience and observation systematically by collections of particulars.

Likewise the tomb-scouring emulators of Onofrio Panvinio seemed intent on bringing the study of history down to the level of everyday experience. And as the study of the past, not only in theory but also in practice, moved away from the arts of rhetoric and towards the arts of scholarship, natural philosophy and scholarship seemed to intersect. Not only because descriptions of natural objects by Ulisse Aldrovandi and others bore at least some resemblance to antiquarian researches, with appropriate citations to the ancient and modern authorities. No encyclopedic collection worthy of the name could afford to be without its coins, medals, inscriptions and architectural fragments—"tamquam tabula naufragii," Bacon called them, "like the planks of a shipwreck." Even before the narrative historians began to incorporate the results of antiquarian research into their work, the new opportunities for empirical verification seemed to reinforce the notion that the study of the past was a science of verifiable truth.

These intellectual breakthroughs encouraged at least one theorist, the early seventeenth-century Calabrian philosopher
Tommaso Campanella, to attribute a new importance to historiography. Going beyond Bacon's formulation, not only all cognition, he claimed, but all motion in the universe was grounded in individual sensual perception by discrete subjects. All bodies reacted to sense perception by directing desire and effecting change. Human beings attained knowledge of the universe by organizing sense perceptions into descriptions of experience. "The senses, then, our own and others', are in a certain measure narrators and witnesses for the soul, which is the inventor, builder and master of the sciences." And history being the true description of experience, in both the natural and the civic worlds, as Castelvetro had noted in his commentary on Aristotle's poetics nearly a century before, its objects were more real than those of mathematics, which dealt in figments of the imagination. Campanella thus made historiography one of the five parts, along with grammar, dialectic, rhetoric and poetry, of his comprehensive Philosophae rationalis. And "although history precedes and is the base of doctrine," he explained, "nonetheless to place the base under this edifice and adapt it to the latter is the work of a wise architect; therefore I place history before logic and grammar and I consider it to be the first part of every philosophy." To civil or "moral" history belonged the task of unlocking the truths of the civic world in the fields of ethics, politics and economics; to natural history belonged that of unlocking the truths of the natural world. He proposed to direct further progress by ambitious new projects, anticipating Francis Bacon's, for a universal civil history and a
new universal natural history along the lines laid down, yet imperfectly fulfilled (so he said) by Pliny.

Alessandro Tassoni, the Modenese poet and historian, agreed with Campanella, his contemporary, at least regarding the notion of history as a science of truth. Ranging in his Thoughts over a host of problems in contemporary arts and sciences, from the self-propulsion of shrimp to the causes of gout in humans and capons, he looked provocatively to Sextus Empiricus for a definition of history. It was, he agreed, "the true narration of things done in the past." But he ignored Sextus’ claim that historians could not confirm their knowledge because they were unable to use empirical methods to trace events with anything like the same assurance whereby doctors diagnosed diseases or musicians perceived dissonance. Historical truth, Tassoni insisted, could indeed be discovered; and the proper method was by attending precisely to sense experience. For "the objects of the senses are real and certain," and sense provided the material for knowledge. But the path from sense to knowledge was not a simple one. Indeed, "the intellect does not speculate without images; and images do not detach themselves from or present themselves to the intellect without the imagination, which draws them out of the senses." In contrast to the objects of the senses, "those of the intellect are fantastic and imaginary, because the intellect works only on what is furnished by the imagination." Errors in history and in any other writing came from the excessive intervention of the imagination in the process of writing or reading. Persons of lively intellect, he argued,
could not prevent their minds from straying off into fantasies, more or less related to the words before them, faster than eye or hand could follow. The eye or hand, in the meantime, being physically detached from the imagination, could easily take these fantasies for something other than what they were, and draw upon them, generating errors. Thus, "before we finish writing or reading the first word," he pointed out, "the imagination presents the letters of the second and confuses them together or causes the first to be left out or transposed." However, the errors thus generated were not serious enough to invalidate the process of gaining and communicating knowledge. As long as the imagination was grounded in sense, it could never deceive the mind entirely. If it did, and the imagination delivered fantasies that had no connection to the reality of the senses, this condition we call insanity.

The discussions about new foundations and new methodologies that helped redefine historiography as a science of truth rather than as an art of rhetoric raised an exciting new possibility: that modern historians might at least be the equals, if not the superiors, of the ancient historians. If historians were to be judged on the criterion of veracity, which the new methods seemed to suggest might be attainable by attending more precisely to experience, rather than on the criterion of eloquence, still the undisputed preserve of the Ancients, then the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns might be settled in favor of the latter. And so it was in the mind of Secondo Lancellotti, who touted modern achievements in science, technology, commerce and
engineering in response to the "today-haters" who put the Ancients on a pedestal in all fields. According to his perspective, the tall tales told by some modern historians ought to be regarded as the exception, not the rule. "Every writer," he claimed, "especially of history, has either erred somewhat or failed to give total satisfaction." And anyone who doubted this could refer to his treatise on the great mistakes and improbabilities of ancient historiography—100 in all, including Valerius Maximus' preposterous story about Zaleucus' self-mutilation, Diodorus Siculus' report about Xerxes drying up the rivers, and Plutarch's account of Marc Antony's eloquent speech before his would-be assassins. The Moderns who erred were at least in good company; and now, as ever, some acted in good faith: "not all historians are adulators, nor is sincerity entirely dead." Moreover, only the moderns had given such attention to the histories of countries not their own—from Famiano Strada on the Low Countries to Enrico Caterina Davila on France.

Honest Dissembling

While Campanella, Tassoni and Lancellotti contemplated the prospects for a future ordered by science and scholarly inquiry, still other readers, writers, thinkers and theorists in this period worried that a severe deterioration of conditions in the political and social realms could threaten any methodological advances that had been made. The revolts and rebellions of the
1640s were still a long way off. But pressing concerns seemed to impinge upon the half of the peninsula that, nominally ruled by Spain, shared in the debacle of the Spanish empire. And dangerous forebodings seemed to beckon in the other half of the peninsula, where city industries and civic institutions that had been a chief strength in the Renaissance were now becoming a chief weakness in the Post-Renaissance. All over the peninsula, economic disasters led to biological disasters just when the Thirty Years War required the consolidation of precious resources. The plague of 1630 raged through Lombardy, the Venetian republic, Tuscany and the Este states, cutting down populations by as much as forty percent. The exigencies of state governments in a time of rising costs, fiscal drain, increasing discontent and heightened dynastic competition widened the gap between what was promised and what could be accomplished, between words and the things spoken of, between representations of power and effects of power on an international as well as on a local scale. A reevaluation, more incisive and profound than any in Machiavelli's time, came about, of the relation between the ideal and the real both in public and private life.

Torquato Accetto, a Neapolitan lawyer inspired by a society he viewed as being increasingly polarized between powerful and powerless, between rich and poor, between the custodians of truth and their beneficiaries, suggested that where political and social reality could never measure up to the ideals, then "dissembling" was not only an "honest" practice among both the great and the humble, it was also a duty. Indeed, from his
vantage point as a servant in the powerful Carafa household within the politically troubled and financially addled Kingdom of Naples, it seemed to him that "dissembling cures all ills." The very art of civilized life itself, he argued, calls for fleeing ugliness by taking refuge in formalized patterns of behavior and aesthetic embellishment of the interior and exterior environments in which people lived. Dissembling saved reputations; it protected the feelings of loved ones. There could be no evil in this. Nor could there be any evil in using lies, subterfuges and hypocrisy to escape impossible demands and obligations self-imposed and imposed by others. "Dress may be changed occasionally to suit the season of fortune, not with the intention of doing but rather of avoiding harm; and this is the only reason to tolerate dissembling, which thereby is not fraud."

Much less should anyone be scandalized at the use of deception by the powerful. As the positive counterpart to the negative policy of secrecy expounded by all the political theorists, deception was the essential accompaniment of the exercise of power. "Crowns of gold have no brightness that at some time does not need your shadows," he said, rhetorically addressing his subject, "and scepters not carried by your hand are often susceptible to vacillation. Flashing swords, if they do not use any of your cloud, shine in vain. Prudence, with all its virtue, possesses nothing better than you." In the midst of this general game of fictions and counter-fictions, the only certain knowledge a person might have was of himself. Beyond that, the truths of
life will be revealed only on the last day, "when reckoning will be made and there will be no art of making black seem white." 42

Perhaps the most extreme formulation of the same view came by way of the Spain of Philip IV. "Deceit rules the roost," noted the famous priest Baldassarre Gracián in a treatise published just three years before Accetto's and later admired by none other than Arnold Schopenhauer. "And things are judged by their jackets and many things are other than they seem." 43 In the midst of this general game of fictions and counter-fictions, the individual had little choice but to play along. Human life, Gracián explained, involved constant warfare against the malice of others, and called for constant shifts in strategy. "Sagacity now rises to higher flights on seeing its artifice foreseen, and tries to deceive by truth itself, changes its game in order to change its deceit, and cheats by not cheating, and founds deception on the greatest candor." 44 No wonder historical works could be confusing.

Among the first to suspect that deception was a condition of politics and not an optional strategy, as Machiavelli and his disciples had maintained, was Traiano Boccalini. To reach this conclusion he did not have to look too far. Apart from his scholarly commitment to the writings of Tacitus, he served as a concistorial lawyer in Rome and governor of several of the subject cities of the Papal State in the time of Paul V. So he was as well aware of the perils of provincial administration by a distant central government as he was of the dangers of serving a prince whose mental imbalance and fiscal irresponsibility made
him ill-equipped for leadership in a newly-polarized Europe. And in his *Reports from Parnassus*, he reflected upon the ironies of the age. All of politics, he concluded, was an elaborate game of deception: "The courts of princes are nothing but costume shops," he suggested, "where everything on sale is fake, made for the service of falsehood." And the behavior of princes toward their subjects was an extension of the same practices. Unwilling or unable to win hearts by policies tending to the public good, they sought vainly to prevent discord by keeping their populations uninformed.

To show modern policies in action, Boccalini imagines that Tacitus, the master of deceitful "reason of state," has been invited to apply his insights to the government of the island of Lesbos. No sooner does Tacitus arrive than he puts his own precepts into practice, subtly insinuating discord between the people and the nobility in order to weaken both. Using "very secret techniques," he then incites the people to take up arms against the nobles. And after publicly offering himself as a mediator, he exercises this role in such a way as to let the ill feelings smolder. He then gains the support of the people for recruiting a foreign militia to save them from the nobles. At the same time, he cements the loyalty of the militia to himself by allowing it to commit atrocities against both sides. After causing false accusations of treachery to circulate against the nobility, he confiscates the property of some of the most powerful and gives it to the accusers; and he sends others to squander their resources in expensive missions far from Lesbos.
Finally he builds a huge fort under the pretext of foreign invasion but actually arms it against his own subjects and throws dissenters into its dungeons. But since the people of Lesbos retain, during all this time (unlike the inhabitants of so many contemporary polities in Italy, Boccalini wishes to imply), some vestiges of their ancient freedom, they eventually chase him off the island.

Among the same rulers who sought to conceal their own misdeeds, fear of historical truth ran rampant, Boccalini believed. And to illustrate this, he imagines, in another passage of the Reports, that Tacitus has been brought up before Apollo, the judge of Parnassus, on charges of having exposed the secrets of political behavior to the gaze of everyone. Boccalini conveys this concept by means of an extended metaphor referring to the disenchanted analyses of the Roman emperors (and, by extension, all politics) in the Annals and Histories. Tacitus, he says, has been creating a special type of eyeglasses allowing the wearer not only to see the actions of princes more clearly but also to see through all the artifices used to disguise the real nature of power. And what is worse, the distribution of the eyeglasses has extended far beyond the restricted circle of political adepts, ministers and princes themselves, to all and sundry. It was well known, the indictment claims, that princes often commit evil actions in order to maintain their authority and represent such actions in the false light of the public good in order to maintain their reputations. With the new eyeglasses, not only might these reputations be
destroyed; but the people, learning the rules of politics, might discover how to wield power for themselves. Then even good princes might be encouraged to give up the problems, frustrations and perplexities of rule. And monarchy would be no more. In the event, Apollo acquits Tacitus, on the condition that the new eyeglasses will be distributed only on a limited scale. Censorship and dissembling win the day.

Some readers, writers, thinkers and theorists were less interested in the cultural significance of fraud than in the possible utility of it. And while Paolo Sarpi, advisor to Venice, encouraged governments to hire historians and propagandists to carry their messages to present and future generations, Virgilio Malvezzi, political theorist and advisor to the grand duke of Tuscany, encouraged the spreading of falsehood. When all political acts were shrouded in secrecy, he argued, curiosity might lead to the revelation of things that could be damaging to the state. Let the prince select the most damaging truth, transform it into a flattering or at least innocuous lie, and allow this to leak out. By placing false rumors in circulation, the government could satisfy curiosity and protect itself from excessive openness at the same time. And in case anyone had any doubts about such a policy, Malvezzi suggested, all they had to do was to consult the example of Scipio, the ancient Roman hero who made people believe that a message he had received from Syphax, the Numidian general, had been an invitation to go into Africa, whereas it had actually been a threat. He thus distracted the multitudes while avoiding
a possible cause of unnecessary preoccupation within the army. No modern ruler could avoid pursuing policies of this sort.

With political actors spinning ever more complex webs of deception and dissembling, the possibility of arriving at the bedrock of conviction about politics appeared ever more remote. And among the early seventeenth-century figures who worried about the consequences of this on historiography was Agostino Mascardi, writing in Rome in the 1630s. Picking up where Patrizi left off, he observed that historians often rely on official correspondence or diplomatic documents. Yet the most important information in military and diplomatic affairs, in order to avoid discovery, was communicated by word of mouth, not by writing. Moreover, interested parties jealously protected the documentary sources; and to guard against espionage they often used deliberately convoluted or cryptic language even when they did not resort to cypher. Now, supposing the historian succeeded in acquiring such material and understanding what it said, this still did not guarantee full comprehension of events. Ministers were often mistaken about what went on; and even when they were not, they often modified their reports to correspond to their own interests. Princes, on the other hand, routinely deceived their ministers whenever this suited their purposes. "Princes proceed in their affairs with such secrecy that penetrating to the heart of them is harder than interpreting the words of the Sphynx." He concluded by reminding readers that, according to the intellectual categories that had held fast at least up to the time of Patrizi, history did not belong to the exact sciences at
all, but only to the probable ones. Fact could hardly be separated from opinion; so there was no use demanding of scholarship more than it could deliver. "The credit one gives to histories is human credit, that is, always joined to doubt," he reminded readers. "Those who require infallible certainty based on incontrovertible proof are asking the impossible." The best that could be expected was that history, far more than any philosophically derived science of civility, could teach practical political prudence by providing a repertoire of relevant historical examples.

In discussing the present state of historiography, even Mascardi dropped his dispassionate façade. The number of unreliable historical works being produced he found to be a cause of grave concern. "Anyone who knows how to register credits and debits in a ledger book indiscriminately and temerariously takes up history writing." Nevertheless, the writing of history, he pointed out, was not merely a leisure time activity. It required "very long study" and the perfection, through experience, of "a mature and perfect judgment," not to mention specific techniques for gathering evidence concerning political behavior. No one, he said, would be so foolish as to commission a sculpture from a cobbler or a suit of clothes from a baker. Yet something of the kind was happening in historiography. As a result of current fashion, "an entire population of writers has arisen, who are filling the world with paper and putting printers to work."

Among the many causes that tipped the scales in the later seventeenth century toward a more radical historical skepticism
than Mascardi and his contemporaries were earlier able to muster, the spread of misinformation and falsehood certainly played an important role. A few specimens of untruth circulating among a relatively restricted audience was one thing. The commercialization of error and its spread to a broad audience raised some serious questions. Professional writers hired themselves out to governments to provide the necessary accounts of recent historical events: Raffaelle Della Torre to Naples, Luca Assarino to Rome, Genoa and Venice; Mascardi himself to Genoa; Pietro Gazzotti to Genoa and Modena; Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato to France, Capriata to Genoa, France and Spain; Vittorio Siri and Giovanni Birago Avogadro to Florence; Giovanni Francesco Fossati to Venice and Spain; and a host of others to all the major governments of the time. We have already met them and criticized some of their productions. By the time political authorities began to use newspapers as vehicles for official notification about events, information had already become a major commodity of governments. Newspaper entrepreneurs in Milan and Piedmont agreed to print the local papers in the official government printing offices; and those in Piedmont accepted government pensions. And here and everywhere else they accepted government-planted stories when asked and covered political affairs at home and abroad as favorably as possible to local interests. No one could ignore the possible effects of such practices on historical credibility. "Those who are too accustomed to lies," commented the anonymous author of a work on Venice, "will never believe or heed the truth."
The newly-invented or newly voluminous sources of political information promised far more than they could ever deliver. They promised to bring reflection upon everyday experience out of the murky realm of oral tradition and myth and into the clear and bright realm of published print. For the first time, printed information seemed to fix the unfixable, to render permanent the ephemeral, to put a hard finish on the ragged edge of early modern time. It seemed to hasten closure of the itinerary of a rumor, to dam the fluid boundaries between various versions of reality and myth within the rigid terms of a single conclusion. News in printed form no longer seemed to be, like the manuscript traditions, in a dialogue with the world outside, part of a context of writings and rewritings, but seemed to propose itself as something in a state of completion. Hard copy seemed to promise hard fact. That, at least, was the expectation; that was the ideal; and that was the intended impression.

How wrong these expectations could be was proven by the result. What the spread of political misinformation in more massive quantities powerfully underscored was the considerable degree of uncertainty at which individuals as well as governments had been accustomed to operating—and would continue to operate. The medium of print not only diffused the truth in many cases; it also put casual misinformation into a deceptively permanent form. The results could be supremely unsettling. Seeing a lie in print was not the same as hearing it from a neighbor or seeing it in a manuscript newsletter. A lie in print was an invitation to join the community of the deceived. Moreover, the rich variety of
versions and variants in anonymous accounts of an event that was the aspect whereby pre-print political information most resembled rumor and myth went from being a creative tool to being an annoying impediment to comprehension in the world of print. And printed news permitted the comparison of accounts in a way never possible before. Accounts of the same event were in easily enough available abundance to be present at the same time in the same place. The inaccuracies were easy to detect even when the writers themselves did not continuously direct attention to them.

Open party conflict gave a particularly powerful impetus to the proliferation of divergent accounts. And Italy and France, with their frequent rebellions and wars, were by no means the only places where such divergences occurred. Consider the case of England, where a whole generation of readers and writers was reared in the Civil War. This, according to Thomas Fuller, a Church historian writing at the end of the 1650s, could only lead to a fatally damaged historiography, as was proven by the result. All one had to do was to compare historians who wrote before the struggle, when "there was a general right understanding betwixt all of the nation," to their later counterparts, who "are seldom apprehended truly or candidly, save of such of their own persuasion, while others do not . . . understand them aright." And if Thomas Hobbes, a historian in his own right, agreed with this view, Samuel Butler extended it to all historiography. Modern historians, he insisted, far outdid those of classical antiquity only in their partiality, since the Ancients, at least, recorded divergent opinions dispassionately by placing them in
the mouths of historical characters in the form of staged speeches; whereas the moderns passed off their own tendentious interpretations as facts.  

More and more writers began to adopt, as an opening gambit for presenting their productions, the new notion that the public had been duped—rather than the Guicciardinian concept that a given subject was intrinsically important. Capriata offered his work as containing "more truth" than contemporary Venetian accounts of the years 1634–44. And when authors entitled their works *True Relation*, *Faithful History* and the like, this was not simply in deference to a literary topos, but rather in reference to a mark whereby they claimed to distinguish themselves from the myriad of accounts which, as they explained in their prefaces, did not live up to these standards. With ostensible sincerity, Luca Assarino claimed that "seeing not only the variations but also the manifest contradictions in accounts of the same event, with too much damage to posterity, has persuaded me to enter the fray." And this claim was no more extravagant than that of Bisaccioni, who recommended his account of the Neapolitan revolution as a "foreign" work, i.e. not Neapolitan, and therefore more likely to be "dispassionate." So when Birago Avogadro introduced his suggestively-entitled *Mercurio veridico* by noting that his work was more reliable than Vittorio Siri's, he could scarcely expect more credit than his adversary. Siri's work bore an engraving by G. Le Brun depicting Mercury, the god of eloquence, at the entrance to a cave on a hill with people bringing him gifts, while Truth lies naked on the ground, with the motto, "hoc tantum
ditior in antro," or, Mercury gains more by sheer verbal chicanery than Truth does by veracity. No one who read these histories would have dared to disagree.

That they protested too much for their own good was confirmed by the papal lawyer Francesco De Rossi at mid-century, who declared that historical works were no longer acceptable as proof in legal disputes among the Roman families or among the Italian states. For no one, he believed, should confuse works of modern history with works of canonical devotion, whose historical accounts were confirmed by revelation and tradition. Nor should they confuse them with the ancient compendium of law in the Corpus Juris Civilis, whose historical accounts were confirmed by generations of legal practice. After all, he argued, modern histories are only private writings, not officially guaranteed by any authoritative body or method. Generally, they consist only of the opinions of the writers—and not often of writers of the best kind. They could scarcely be regarded as superior to the opinions of jurisconsults, which are not regarded as authoritative. And since they are often at a considerable distance from eyewitness accounts, they could scarcely claim more veracity than public documents, which are not necessarily believed without proof. Indeed, more than any other documents, histories contain falsehoods that are difficult to separate from the truth.
Historiography was not the only field to experience a new wave of skepticism toward the end of the century. There were also science and philosophy. And the questioning of methods and approaches that went on in science and philosophy had powerful collateral effects on the way readers, writers, thinkers and theorists in this period viewed contemporary accounts of the past. For one thing, the new experimental and experiential science became in some ways the victim of its own success. Even Galileo's erstwhile enemies, the Jesuits, began to abandon Aristotelianism for a more eclectic and experience-oriented intellectual system by this time. Yet excessive confidence in observation and experiment, the same confidence that earlier had been an inspiration for the theorists of historiography as a science, began to give way to diminished enthusiasm for the empirical attitudes of the Galileian and Baconian schools.

And in order to see a promising new field like microscopy as an example of the new caution about observation, there is no need to belittle its remarkable contributions to the developing sciences of embryology, subtle anatomy and botany, nor to inflate disagreements between Robert Hooke in England, Jan Swammerdam and Antoni van Leeuwenhoek in Holland and Marcello Malpighi in Bologna into skeptical sparring matches. Seized upon in the second half of the seventeenth century among enthusiasts throughout Europe as the tool that would force nature to reveal its innermost parts, just as the outermost ones were coming into view in telescopic astronomy, the new field gradually began to
give away to disillusionment and doubt. The closer the observer appeared to get to the tiny structures that were the object of his researches, the more those tiny structures appeared to reveal aspects that could only be half seen or not at all. Imperfections in glassmaking and lens polishing combined with entoptical irregularities to create appearances of the most unbiological sorts. And even when the observations were correct, verbal description seemed as inadequate as graphic representation to convey what the researcher claimed to have seen. Leeuwenhoek himself cautioned against the multitude of fallacious viewings that were pouring in even to a respected organ like the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society—"for it doth happen that people looking through a Magnifying-glass, do say now I see this and then that, and when I give them better instructions, they saw themselves mistaken in their opinion." He was able to unmask fraudulent researchers who loaded their instruments with devices to produce special effects. But he was unable to dispel the skepticism surrounding his own supposed observation of the microscopic man-shaped beings—the so-called animalicula—forming the active agents in human sperm. And explanations of even the most accurate observations of the invisible structure of things seemed to provide the researcher with only a larger, closer-up version of the same inscrutable appearances, without arriving at truths about the purposes of those structures or how they functioned.

To be sure, many practitioners in fields of natural knowledge, probably including the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph,
were not too bothered about the lack of an agreed-upon explanatory scheme. Nor did they worry that, in the absence of such a scheme, new observations, even of the most unexceptionable sort, might seem to dangle in a chaos of divergent interpretations. They experienced no sense of disorientation, knowing that the utter discrediting of long-standing philosophical and epistemological traditions—the Aristotelian, the Galenic, the Platonic—with no comfortable substitute in sight, left practitioners with nothing to depend upon for theoretical support. To them, if many of the problems with which the new science began to concern itself—the generation of life, the organization of matter—were simply not susceptible to the kinds of empirical verification permitted by available techniques, this was exclusively a matter for the epistemologists.  

However, some protagonists in the changes we have been analyzing began to believe that no research program could proceed without a new cognitive structure to put in the place of the now discredited traditions. In this context, they found new meaning in Galileo's reliance on geometry and mathematics. They paid renewed attention to his famous dictum in the Letter to Christina that the book of the world was written in mathematical language; they now saw this as proceeding from a conviction that mathematical laws were prior to sensory experience and capable in some cases of arriving at a greater degree of certitude than unaided observation. Then they set out to establish reason and logic as the essential bases of knowledge, implicitly relegating
historiography, a mainly experiential science, to the realm of pure opinion. No one yet noticed that empiricism and deductive laws could be combined to form a powerful historiographical method, first theorized by Hermann Conring in Germany and later, in a different context, by Giambattista Vico.  

To be sure, these intellectual trends did not proceed in the same way in every part of Europe. They were more pronounced in Italy and France than in Holland and England, although the latter is likely to be by far the more familiar context to most readers of these pages. And the different ways in which the trends were worked out did not depend solely on episodes in the realm of ideas. In England, for instance, the Restoration reinforcement of the gentlemanly ethos, an ethos that valued the common sense and good judgment of privileged persons, is reputed to have induced Robert Boyle to believe that the light of reason itself, without the aid of structures or paradigms, might provide an antidote to the uncertainty of the evidence. Thus, English empiricism may well have kept its tenacious hold for reasons as much concerned with the history of social and political life as with the history of ideas. And a complete social history of skepticism would account for how such causes contributed to linking the spread of political information with the spread of disbelief in all its different settings.

Here we focus on the Kingdom of Naples, which provided an unusually revealing set of examples of how circumstances could combine to generate a movement for refining processes of verification in the natural sciences but not in historiography.
What follows is a rather in-depth exploration of this context, since it is the least known. The cultural elite, including such figures as Tommaso Cornelio, Francesco D'Andrea, Domenico Aulisio, Gregorio Caloprese, and Gian Vincenzo Gravina, drawn mainly from professional groups excluded from political power and well known to modern scholars of Giambattista Vico, quarreled with a local power elite composed of members and clients of the landed aristocracy. They objected to the way this power elite had connived with the Spanish crown over the years to build private wealth at the expense of the Kingdom by buying up alienated lands and revenues, creating a fiscal crisis of vast proportions.

In Naples, hopes for reform were to some extent inspired among the cultural elite by the Masaniello revolt, which had briefly put the government of the whole city into the hands of the citizens. And the elite's determination was galvanized by the subsequent wave of repression in the midst of plagues and epidemics that served only to demonstrate the inadequacies of the system. In this scenario some traditional structures were more vulnerable than others. And among the most vulnerable of all were the medical and educational establishments. This is where reform and renewal appeared most likely to produce solutions to the most pressing problems. And this is where the cultural elite took the initiative to launch their assault. In various impromptu cultural associations, such as the Investiganti academy and later that of the Medina Celi, they sought to build a solid common intellectual ground, one that took advantage of the
methodological advances of the century. The solution they eventually hit upon, drawing from a Neapolitan tradition dating back to Bernardino Telesio and Giordano Bruno, was a radical investigative technique involving sense data rationally interpreted with reference to a sound philosophical basis and a skeptical attitude not only with regard to traditional ideas but also to modern ones. Their movement for methodological renewal, which formed the context for Vico's thought, as we shall see in the Conclusion, spread rapidly to intellectual groups throughout the peninsula.

Let us now embark upon a survey of these important but now half-forgotten thinkers. And the first on our list is the Neapolitan physician and naturalist Lionardo Di Capua. Like the others, he had a practical, we might say, social aim in mind. His purpose, in his most important work, was to undermine the cultural qualifications of the government-backed medical establishment once and for all, while showing the new investigative technique in action. He accordingly attacked pure empiricism and demonstrated how the experiential world could be examined by reference to a far more accurate map than the traditional approaches offered. He conceived of reality as fitting into a mechanical model whose existence could be intuited but not proved. Concentrating particularly on the natural world, he followed Robert Boyle in hypothesizing the existence of corpuscular principles in matter, undetectable all except for the evidence from their action in the physical properties they imparted to objects. And he insisted that such presuppositions,
beyond the realm of sensory perception, were essential to important scientific tasks like curing disease and maintaining public health. Writing about the errors of late seventeenth-century medical practice and updating an ancient quarrel between the elite physicians and the low-class barber surgeons, he excoriated the so-called "empirics," who medicated simply on the basis of the success of a few medicines. He praised the Dutch physicians for their use of experimentation, but he insisted that sense experience could be deceiving and must be accompanied by a complete theory. And such a theory, he believed, must be based on solid erudition in all the ancient and modern authors and a thorough argument about how the materials of the body functioned together.

Gian Vincenzo Gravina, a Neapolitan lawyer and virtuoso residing in Rome, examined the essential conditions of truth and belief about the same time as his distinguished contemporary John Locke. But he entirely repudiated the sort of cautious empiricism in which Locke appeared to place such confidence. The ability to distinguish truth from falsehood and to judge the nature and essence of things, in other words, those mental functions that constituted true wisdom, Gravina claimed, could never depend on information originating outside the subject. In fact, he suggested, information arising from outside the subject could never transmit anything but the bare and distorted traces of things, refracted and modified by the senses and the imagination before reaching the conscious mind. Indeed, even if sensory perception could be trusted, the interference of
mental images, of all sorts and from all origins, might entirely impede the distinguishing of truth from falsehood. True and familiar things cannot communicate their entire properties to us, he argued, because as their images combine with other images, the mind is drawn from one to another in more and more confused fashion. The imagination thus occupied by many objects at once cannot collect its forces to concentrate on one alone. Contrary to Tassoni, he asserted that the closer things are to our senses, the more the mind is distracted by the variety of images and unable to analyze any of them properly. What was necessary was a mental discipline and a method for ordering all such images according to their value for acquiring cognition. And at least one example of such a mental discipline he found in the reading and writing of poetry. Far more than factual prose accounts, he believed, poetry was capable of mastering the passions and collecting them around truth-like images, if not around the truth itself. And most of the time, that was the closest anyone could get to effective communication.

Gregorio Caloprese, Gravina's uncle and another prominent member of the Neapolitan intellectual elite, showed how a precise science of cognition invalidated a good part of the historical writing of his time. Historians attempting to give greater credit to their own powers of political analysis usually preferred to attribute the actions of princes, for good or ill, to deliberate policies of intrigue and deception. However, he pointed out, the human will is inconstant and subject to many conflicting influences. It is scarcely able to sustain any
particular policy for a long time with constant calculation. And even if a prince were able to muster all his energies for such a policy, there was little likelihood that the historian could penetrate to the inner reaches of his soul where motivation lies.

To many of these thinkers, as Giambattista Vico recalled much later in his *Autobiography*, Descartes answered the appeal for a philosophy that might offer epistemological justification for the predominance of reason over sensory perception. And starting in Naples, the ideas of Descartes along with the commentaries and critiques by Antoine Arnauld and Nicholas Malebranche began spreading throughout Italy in the second half of the century. However, in borrowing Descartes' ideas, these thinkers also borrowed Descartes' anti-historical bias. They had no use for a science grounded in defective methods and oriented toward pursuing information about affairs of no enduring moral significance. If certainty was to be obtained via methodical doubt and the systematic unveiling of truths beginning with those already present in the mind, historical knowledge would have to be relegated to the realm of fable.

Typical of the trend was the Sicilian philosopher Michelangelo Fardella, who shared some of the same experiences as the Neapolitans and knew Malebranche personally from a sojourn in France. For him, methodological introspection for attaining clear and distinct ideas seemed to offer a kind of rigor lacking in any haphazard program for the collection of miscellaneous facts of the sort undertaken by the Accademia del Cimento and the last holdouts of the Galileian school. "The main result of this
new method," he maintained, "is to render the mind attentive and recollected in itself, using its reason, detached from all other things not belonging to its nature—a most potent technique for finding the Truth."84 From this discipline the mind learned first of all to concentrate only on problems and concerns that were within its capacity and to avoid vainly trying to understand matters extraneous to itself and to its being. For instance, it might intuit the existence of God by contemplating the idea of perfection. But it could never intuit his nature or actions. Secondly, it learned to avoid relying on the knowledge of others, particularly the traditional authorities. Those things that could be comprehended only by individual meditation it would seek by using insight and reason, turning off the senses and thinking by itself.85

Following the same line of reasoning at least in his theoretical work, Paolo Mattia Doria, a Genoese political philosopher who spent most of his career in Naples, conceived of a new system of civil society without reference to any historical examples at all. While giving due credit to Machiavelli for having founded political science, he broke with the Machiavellian tradition, most recently reformulated by Virgilio Malvezzi, of defining political prudence in terms of what had been done in the past. The time had come to start anew, he argued; and that meant recognizing how people had been drawn away from their civic nature by faulty and erroneous sensory experience.86 As soon as infants left the womb, he contended, they became enveloped in the world of sense. Yet the images brought into their minds by
sensory impressions concerned only things and events in their immediate surroundings. From these they could never learn the principles of civil society. As they grew up and began to read histories, they might learn to imitate actions; but they would never attain true civic knowledge. "These pictures, which represent only the things that have been done, and narrate only the most immediate reasons for things, without providing any sort of science or principles, may excite the heart to love the virtue of states but do not teach how to form and maintain and restore them." Moreover, for discovering these latter principles, he insisted, no Machiavelli-style compilation of historical examples would suffice—particularly as such examples could be formulated only according to unreliable historiographical methods.

Instead, Doria proposed to deduce the principles of civil society from the philosophy of human nature. Here he found much less help from Descartes, who eschewed the classic moralists and their concerns with civic duty only to retreat to a solitary position of non-involvement in the human comedy. All human conduct, Doria argued, proceeds from the use or abuse of the four principles of love of truth, love of glory, love of self and love of pleasure. Any of these principles could be exaggerated to produce a vice. And any number of individuals with such vices could be joined to produce a defective society. But defective societies were not inevitable. And contrary to Bernard de Mandeville, whose complete theory was yet to emerge, society, in Doria's view, did not have to consist of a balance of vices.
to which Doria, Gravina, Caloprese and the others belonged—endeavor to attain self knowledge and achieve a balance of the four principles within themselves. Next, let them bring clear and distinct ideas about these principles to the knowledge of others. Then all individuals will share a new level of social harmony, and skepticism about politics will disappear.  

However, the sheet-anchor of reason and introspection provided by Descartes was not for everyone. And in England, those who failed to be sustained by the sheet-anchor of empiricism offered in response to Descartes by a defiant tradition proceeding from Robert Boyle to John Locke found themselves in dangerous waters indeed. And John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, spoke for all those with no sufficient answer to the apparent impossibility of gaining secure knowledge about the world, by harking back to the skeptical traditions of Agrippa von Nettesheim at the beginning of the century:

I'd be a dog, a monkey or a bear
Or any thing but that vain animal
Who is so proud of being rational.
The senses are too gross, and he'll contrive
A sixth, to contradict the other five.
And before certain instinct, will prefer
Reason, which fifty times for one does err.  

And at least according to Gilbert Burnet, his biographer, the Earl believed in absolutely nothing.
While Rochester doubted everything, the Florentine diplomat and virtuoso Lorenzo Magalotti agreed with the *cogito* principle affirmed by Descartes. But he followed Malebranche in returning to St. Augustine for a psychological theory. No thinking substance, Magalotti reasoned, could be so complex as to will and not will at the same time, to divide itself, as he said, into "Ego" and "Io," and to operate instantaneously. Clearly, the correct analysis was that the corrupt human will was in conflict with the original purity of human nature. And Descartes' theory of animals as machines, derived from clear and distinct ideas concerning the nature of the mental substance, was no less improbable than the vortex-filled cosmos he derived from the properties of matter in motion; and neither was any more persuasive than the accepted views he claimed to sweep away by systematic doubt. For Magalotti, all this was yet another proof that the Moderns had vastly exaggerated their superiority over the Ancients. "I still wonder whether they come any closer to the truth than someone who starts at the number one and keeps counting to infinity." For Magalotti, the absence of certainty about the world around, about contemporary and past affairs, about the nature of the elements, the organization of the cosmos and the cures for the simplest ailments was not just a reminder about the weakness of human reason. In such circumstances, he concluded, the safest harbor for the troubled soul was in the truths of faith. He took contemporary historiography as an example. Harking back to arguments made previously by Patrizi and
developed by Mascardi and so many others, he noted the damage done to the truth by passions and interests. Even the most scrupulous and insightful historian, recounting things he did himself, might have to deceive and dissemble in order to save his own skin. Supposing he wished to tell the truth about events in his immediate vicinity, he was likely to encounter some of the most serious problems of verification. He could not rely on the news. "I think you know how difficult it is to discover the truth about a solitary battle that is no more than four leagues away from the court in which one writes." And within the courtly environment where he did his writing, all his influence and all his acquaintances among the powerful might not suffice to help him discover the truth about a conspiracy going on before his very eyes. The actors themselves were often uncertain about their reasons for making decisions. "I had the fortune," he explained, "to be admitted to the secret dealing about a peace treaty, and a war, in our century, whose real reasons are perhaps . . . unknown even to this day to those involved and likely to remain so forever." One could scarcely hope for particularly accurate accounts of such events, even by the protagonists. "Therefore," he concluded, "we must consider, there can be no human history," either of the past or of the present, "that is not false in many circumstances."

All this uncertainty about historical reality was a buttress to faith for Magalotti; not an incitement to skepticism. Because of it, the research of Spinoza and Richard Simon showing the absence of references to biblical events in civic histories was
no longer any cause for alarm. Magalotti's reasoning went like this: existing civic histories were obviously full of falsehoods; so divinely inspired history could scarcely avoid conflicting with them. Indeed, because of this very conflict, ecclesiastical history might be true. "This [conflict] may not be a proof of the divinity [of these accounts]; but it is at least an indication of the possibility of their divinity." With no better information, belief, he said, echoing Pascal, was the best bet. And there was no need to resort to the rational arguments for faith suggested by Vitus Erbermann, Johann Musaeus and so many others.\textsuperscript{96}

Magalotti was not alone. His Rotterdam-based contemporary Pierre Bayle also turned skepticism about a system of political communication dominated by the passions and the interests into part of a much broader questioning of the usual sources of knowledge.\textsuperscript{97} Concentrating his attention on the wars of words between late seventeenth-century Catholics and Protestants, he wondered if the truth about any event described by one or the other side could ever really be known. And when the errors of historical works were compounded by reliance on reports and documents spread about by newspaper writers seeking fast gain by sensationalism and flattery, the unreliability of the result was enough to lead the serious reader to distraction. There is no greater mischief," he remarked, than that which can be exercised upon historical monuments.\textsuperscript{98} Consequently, he supposed, many of his contemporaries had stopped believing history at all. "And their conclusion begins with the newspapers, and extends to the
whole range of civil historians, who compile their rhapsodies out of nothing but these miserable sources. The only mistake of the true skeptics, he believed, was in taking the lack of proof about the existence of worldly things as a cause for atheism rather than an incitement to fall back upon fideism. The truths of faith are probably not, he argued, susceptible to rational understanding at all.

The same line of reasoning led to one of the strangest episodes in all of late seventeenth-century intellectual history. For in the work of the French Jesuit Jean Hardouin, skepticism about the authenticity of historical documents did not stop at skepticism about the various available accounts of the past. It could provoke doubt about the very existence of the past. Using the methods of the historians against the historians themselves, Hardouin set out to prove that all the texts known from the ancient world except works by Cicero, Virgil, Horace and Pliny the Elder were actually forged by a fourteenth century scholar named Severus Archontius and his collaborators. Such was the only possible conjecture he could imagine on the basis of what he regarded as faulty and incomplete literary evidence mainly from the middle ages, which appeared to contradict the non-literary evidence from archaeology and epigraphy. Favorite medieval texts were subject to similar criticism; and according to him, the Divine Comedy was written in the fifteenth century by a Wycliffite heretic. And what went for secular texts applied similarly to religious ones. The Church Fathers, including Augustine, Bernard and Thomas Aquinas, Hardouin argued, were to
be rejected as apocryphal compilations of heretical doctrines. All the poor believer could do in such circumstances was to repose his faith in Church traditions as interpreted by the Roman authorities and in the truths contained in the Latin Vulgate—especially since, according to Hardouin, the Hebrew bible was a forgery.

The New Historiography

However, the very techniques of criticism employed by Bayle, and to less effect by Hardouin, signalled to others a way out of the tunnel of Pyrrhonism. And while the Cartesians questioned the certainty of sense experience and the fideists sought to replace it with faith, a new breed of historians sought to combat skepticism by directing attention to historiographical methodology itself. To be sure, they did not have to start from scratch. Far beyond the influences that the critics condemned, the traditions of literary and historical scholarship formed in the time of Pietro Vettori and Joseph Scaliger and earlier had continued into the time of Jean Mabillon and his Italian disciple, Benedetto Bacchini. And their efforts to refine and develop previous traditions brought about what has been termed nothing less than a methodological "revolution."

The new methodologists agreed that history, like any empirical science, was only as good as its fact-finding procedures. And a distinction could be drawn between reasonable and unreasonable doubt. Mabillon himself set out the rules for distinguishing
reliable from unreliable testimonies. He discarded Melchior Cano's primitive and question-begging criteria of the "probity," "veracity," or "authoritativeness" of the witness. Instead, he proposed the more reliable criteria of proximity to the event in question and agreement with other testimonies. He showed how the study of the physical characteristics of documents and the script used in drawing them up could be employed in distinguishing, classifying, authenticating and dating them. Indeed, his and his contemporaries' systematic efforts to form a history of scripts by comparing known dated examples to other undated ones brought about what has been termed a "Galileian revolution" in the science of diplomatics. Jean Le Clerc conveniently summarized the whole science of textual and historical criticism and the associated discipline of hermeneutics in a comprehensive manual, the *Ars critica*. And he concluded that anyone who, after following all the correct procedures, still routinely doubted the truth of all histories must be "a madman."\(^{104}\)

Meanwhile, the new historians brought their methods to bear on some of the most ambitious projects yet conceived for recovering the records of the past. And even the achievements of Gottfried Willem Leibniz in Germany and, in England, of Thomas Hearne, Henry Dodwell and the collaborators on the augmented edition of Camden's *Brittania*, paled in comparison with the tasks taken on in the quiet of the cloisters by a few regular priests and monks.\(^{105}\) The first such projects were mainly intended to prevent historical skepticism from eroding the foundations of ecclesiastical authority. Such was the inspiration for the
Jesuit fathers known as the Bollandists in Antwerp, as they went about assembling the fundamental *Acta Sanctorum* of their order. By the time the Benedictines of St. Maur, including Mabillon and Bernard de Montfaucon, got around to assembling their own *Acta Sanctorum*, the purpose had shifted to that of providing a reliable historical account for anyone studying the Benedictine order. Mabillon's disciple Benedetto Bacchini in turn transmitted the modern science of history to Ludovico Antonio Muratori.

And Muratori, applying the new methods to the history of Italy, produced the most ambitious project of them all. The twenty-eight volumes of the *Rerum italicarum scriptores* contained up-to-date editions of the main documentary sources of each area of the peninsula, from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Including documents ranging from Landolfo Sagax' ninth-century compilation from chronicles by Eutropius and Paulus Diaconus and containing late Roman and Gothic history up to Charlemagne's partition of his empire, to Poggio Bracciolini's fifteenth-century history of Florence and Benvenuto di San Giorgio's early sixteenth-century discourse on the marquises of Monferrato, the collection situated the lives of each place in a real past that could be viewed from multiple perspectives. It provided the raw material for the next generation of historical narratives, for which a good part of the scholarly footwork had already been done—the identification of sources, the comparison and evaluation of manuscripts.
Without ever having pursued Vico's intricate philosophical arguments, Muratori, Jean Mabillon, the Maurists and their admirers implicitly agreed with the proposition that the past was truly verifiable because it had been made by men. And this was one reason why the collection and critical edition and publication of original documents was such an important part of their endeavors. Just as their method books insisted on testing the authenticity of testimony by the agreement of many witnesses, the authenticity of the past itself might be tested by an overwhelming array of verified texts. And the antidote to the skeptic's denial of the past was to place the past before him in such overwhelming profusion that he could not deny its reality without evident contradiction. Muratori's vast *Rerum italicarum scriptores* was not only a compilation of documents in editions that are still consulted today; it was a compilation of witnesses to the existence of a past that each could confirm by actions as well as words.

For Bacchini, the modern science of historiography was not just a science of diplomatics and textual criticism. By joining diplomatics with the craft of narrative history, he believed, the historian might be free for the first time to balance properly documented historical conclusions with creative hypotheses. To produce good writing, there was no need to resort to the tools of the novelist or the ruses of the rhetorician—contrary to so many seventeenth-century examples, particularly including those who wrote at the behest of powerful employers, from Maiolino Bisaccioni to Pier Giovanni Capriata to Vittorio Siri. With the
sources for historical ideas fully exposed to the view of the reader, the task of filling in the interstices by learned suppositions could hardly be called dishonest. Let the historian inform the reader exactly when a conclusion was a proven fact and when an educated guess. And when he made an educated guess, let him make it responsibly, not merely for effect. "Poets create realistic things, historians produce them," he argued; "the former employ them by choice, the latter by necessity."¹⁰⁷ For this reason, in his history of the monastery of S. Benedetto Polirone in Mantua, he corroborated both his true and his realistic conclusions, his facts and his educated guesses, by an appendix of documents nearly as long as the text itself.

Still, documents could deceive even the responsible researcher. And a major methodological breakthrough of the late seventeenth-century historians was to bring the study of antiquities—i.e., the non-literary remains of ancient civilizations, including coins, inscriptions, pottery, iconography and the like—back out of the realm of erudite curiosity and into the realm of historiography, where they had been in the time of Flavio Biondo and Poliziano. Indeed, so deep was the skepticism into which late seventeenth-century scholars had been thrown by the contemporary abuse of documents for purposes of political interest and personal advancement, that they began to regard non-literary remains as nearly indispensable for discovering the truth—in spite of the formidable problems of interpretation. Even Montfaucon was eventually persuaded that the mastery of texts had to be supplemented by mastery of visual
evidence, and he began publishing a corpus of it. In Italy, Francesco Bianchini proposed an entire universal history in which literary evidence would be systematically corroborated by other sorts—refuting Hardouin's claim that the two were incompatible. For "every historian agrees that the most difficult and important problem is to make his account authoritative by the signs of validity that distinguish true narrations from the fables of the romance writers." And for Bianchini, those signs of validity, the very "figures of the facts," could be found in the archaeological record. The result would "perfectly fit the tastes of our age," not only because most people, at the end of the Baroque century, were more accustomed to a figurative mode of presentation than to a strictly logocentric one—as the reception of Claude-François Menestrier's history of the medallions of the reign of Louis XIV had recently demonstrated. Moreover, it might help cure the skepticism that plagued modern intellectual life. Accordingly, covering the period from the ancient Egyptians to the Greeks in the time of Lycurgus, he accompanied his text by a judicious selection of images and inscriptions from vases, coins and architectural remains.

By shielding themselves from the skeptics, the new historical methodologists also shielded themselves from the area of historiography that most closely affected readers—namely, the history of modern and recent times. A method that privileged the study of vases, coins and archaeological remains could scarcely be expected to be of much use for periods when such objects were not the main records of the past. Even the new methods of
textual criticism and emendation could offer little guidance where the most authoritative testimony to an event might just as well be transmitted by word of mouth and hearsay as by a written document.

However, in the field of recent history, the real cause of the malaise was not faulty sources; nor was it faulty methods. The real cause, as Bacchini began to suspect, lay in the social relations of historians—as he put it, "the excessive desire of the learned of Italy to get ahead." Those very writers who would otherwise be the most capable of discovering the truth, he argued, depended for their livelihoods upon satisfying powerful patrons and finding customers for their works. Attracted by the hope of great rewards, they made their writings conform to a flattering view, even contradicting their most emphatic statements in subsequent publications according to which way the winds of favor blew. It was no wonder that the more attentive readers had begun to adopt "a certain attitude of skepticism."

His view summed up the course of reflection on the communication of political reality over the previous century. In his opinion, no amount of scholarly innovation was likely to have much effect until independent cultural bodies could be instituted so as to ensure that at least sometimes truth would be placed before any material advantage. Clearly the seventeenth-century academies would not do, as most of them were sold out in one way or another to powerful patrons. The same went for the universities of the time, whose political attachments made them unreliable arbiters of intellectual taste. Exactly what Bacchini had in mind, he
does not say; and we are left to wonder whether any of the institutions in modern-day experience would have precisely fit the bill.
NOTES

1 Examples: Girolamo Brusoni, *Delle historie d'Italia*, 1625-78 (Turin: Zappata, 1680), p. 710; Gregorio Leti, *Dialoghi politici, ovvero, la politica che usano in questo tempo i principi e repubbliche italiane per conservare i loro stati e signorie (Geneva: Chouet, 1666)*, 1: 255. Many others below.


6 *Orlando furioso* 32: 32.
Enrico Stumpo, ed., *La gazzetta de l'anno 1588* (Florence: Giunti, 1988), where the passages in question, including those following are at pp. 4, 22, 23, 37 (quote), 84 (quote) and 97 (quote).

Il principe, ed. Luigi Russo (Florence: Le Monnier, 1931), chap. 18, parag. 6.

Ricordi politici e civili (Bari: Laterza, 1933), no. 44.


*Della ragion di stato*, pp. 422-3

*Della segretezza* (Venice: Giunti, 1598), p. 26. Aristotle’s distinction, not quite so clear as Ammirato makes it out to be, is of course in *Metaphysics*, 1:1.


Cornelius Agrippa, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium* (1526) ed. Catherine M. Dunn (Northridge, CA: California State University, 1974).

Popkin's comment about him is in *The History of Skepticism*, p. 24.


Patrizi, *Della Historia*, p. 28v. In addition, p. 25v.

Patrizi, *Della Historia*, p. 22r.

L'autorità della storia profana, Albano Biondi, ed. (Turin: Giappichelli, 1973), p. 38. The treatise, originally entitled *De humanae historiae auctoritate*, was published posthumously as part of Cano's *De locis theologicis*.
(Salamanca: Matthias Gastius, 1563)


24 *Novum organum*, I: 20.

25 *Novum organum*, I: 50, 1, 102.


This is the argument of an entire work: Del senso delle cose e della magia, testo inedito italiano con le varianti dei codici e delle due edizioni latine, ed. Antonio Bruers (Bari: Laterza, 1925).


Philosophae rationalis, in Tutte le opere, p. 1225.


Pensieri, 6: 5, p. 576.


37. *Farfalloni degli antichi historici* (Venice: 1677, posth.).

38. L'Hoggidi, 2: 207.


*Della dissimulazione onesta*, ch. 21, 22 (quote).


The Art of Worldly Wisdom, no. 13.


Ragguagli di Parnaso, vol. 1, ed. Giuseppe Rua (Bari: Laterza, 1910), Century 1, no. 29, p. 91.


Sarpi's recommendations are in *Scritti giurisdizionalistici*, ed. Giovanni Gambarin (Bari: Laterza, 1958), pp. 213-220. Malvezzi's are in *Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito. Al Serenissimo Duca Ferdinando II granduca di Toscana*
(Venice: Ginami, 1622), discourse 28.


52 Mascardi, *Dell'arte istorica*, 1st treatise, chap. 2, pp. 34-5.


54 A preliminary bibliography for this literature is Sergio Bertelli, *Ribelli, libertini ed ortodossi nella storiografia barocca* (Florence: Sansoni, 1973), chap. 8.


60 Dell’Historie, vol. 2 (Genoa: Farroni, 1649), Al lettore.


64 Il mercurio; ovvero, historia de’ correnti tempi, vol. 6 (Casale: Del Monte, 1655), frontispiece.

65 ASV, Arm. 36, vol. 23 (Circa 1654) c. 158.


Galileo's debate about this with Cesare Cremonini is examined in Luigi Olivieri, Certezze e gerarchia del sapere (Padua: Antenore, 1983), p. 136.


The intellectual content of the debates related below is explored, in somewhat convoluted fashion, in Michele Rak, La fine dei grammatici (Rome: Bulzoni, 1973), passim. In addition, there is Raffaele Ajello, "Cartesianismo e cultura oltremontana al tempo dell'Istoria civile," in R. Ajello, ed., Pietro Giannone e il suo tempo, 2 vols. (Naples: Jovene, 1980), 1: 181; Maurizio Torrini, Tommaso Cornelio e la ricostruzione della scienza (Naples:


77On these aspects of Di Capua's work there is Michele Rak, "Una teoria dell'incertezza," Filologia e letteratura 15 (1969): 233-97. The following discussion is based on Parere divisato in otto ragionamenti, ne' quali particularmente narrandosi l'origine, e il progresso della medicina, chiaramente l'incertezza della stessa si manifesta (Naples: Bulifon, 1681), pp. 151ff. A considerable portion of Di Capua's text is devoted to discrediting the ancient authorities.

78Di Capua, Parere, Ragionamento 2.

79Discorso sopra l'Endimione (1692), in Scritti critici e teorici, ed. Amedeo

Delle antiche favole, in Scritti critici e teorici, pp. 44-8. The passage is analyzed in more detail in Rak, La fine dei grammatici, p. 268.

On Caloprese, there is Silvio Suppa, L'Accademia di Medinacoeli fra tradizione e nuova scienza civile, (Naples: Istituto italiano per gli studi storici, 1971). Passages from his Lettura sopra la concione di Marfisa a Carlo Magno contenuta nel Furioso al canto 38 (Naples: Bulifon, 1691), esp. p. 64, are transcribed and analyzed in Rak, La fine dei grammatici, p. 154.


A helpful antidote to much writing about Descartes' position is M. Glouberman, Descartes: The Probable and the Certain (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B. V., 1986). An attempt, not entirely satisfactory, to synthesize the various elements in the Italian case is Claudio Manzoni, I cartesiani italiani (1660-1760) (Udine: Editrice "La nuova base", 1984), revising and updating the previous work of L. Berthè de Besaucèle, Les cartésiens d'Italie (Paris: Picard, 1920). Probably the first explicit précis of Descartes' position published in Italy was Matteo Giorgi's Saggio della nuova dottrina di Renato Des-Cartes. Lettera all'Ill.mo Sig. Tommaso Fransone (Genoa: 1694).

His letter to Matteo Giorgi was published in the literary journal Galleria di Minerva, 3 (1697): 43. The only monograph so far is Donatella Lauria,
Agostinismo e cartesianesimo in Michelangelo Fardella (Catania: N. Giannotta, 1974); some of his writings have been collected in Michelangelo Fardella, Pensieri scientifici e Lettera antiscolastica, ed. Salvatore Femiano, preface by Eugenio Garin (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1986).

Galleria di Minerva, 3 (1697), pp. 43-44.

Paolo Mattia Doria, La vita civile, distinta in tre parti, aggiuntovi un trattato della educazione del principe 2. ed. dall'autore ricorretta, ed accresciuta (Augusta: appresso D. Hopper, 1710), p. 24: "Certà cosa è, che l'anima nel nostro nascere viene interamente nella materia sepolta; permodochè le pure sensazioni, che ella sente nel comparire in questo immenso teatro del mondo sensibile, sono le immagini delle cose esteriori, delle quali tutta ella si volge con la volontà, non dal razioncinio guidato, non essendo ancora capace; ond'è che le prime potenze, che l'anima esercita sono l'immaginazione, e la volontà; potenze certamente nell'anima, ma potenze, che solamente esercitano la loro facoltà nelle immagini, che da' corpi esteriori all'anima si suggeriscono. Egli è ben vero, però, che se ella a noi in un si grande disvantaggio cagiona, quanto è quello di immergere la nostra anima prima ne' sensi, e nelle immagini, che nelle conoscenze pure; in ricompensa, ella ci somministra il modo di sprigionarsi da quelle, e di squarciare con la riflessione quel velo, che nell'ignoranza ci tiene miseramente inviluppati. Per prova di ciò vegghiamo, che ella pone in tutte le umane menti quasi un ordinato progresso di geometria in quei razioncini medesimi, che gli uomini ne' loro consueti discorsi tentano di fare, e ne' quali, se l'ordine dalla natura prescritto ben seguir sapessero, potrebbero la conoscenza di quel vero, che hanno in loro stessi, perfettamente ischiarire." Concerning Doria, the growing bibliography includes Vittorio Conti, Paolo Mattia Doria: dalla...

87 *La vita civile,* p. 15.
88 *La vita civile,* p. 49.
89 "A Satyr Against Reason and Mankind," lines 5-11.
92 *Lettere familiari,* 1: letter 22.
94 *Lettere familiari,* 2: letter 5.
Lettere familiari, 1: letter 10, p. 156. The following quotes are from this and the previous page.


Critique générale de l'histoire du Calvinisme, p. 13.


Concerning the earlier period, Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger*, vol. 1. The


L'Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures (15 vols, 1719-24). On this work and the problem of interpretation of visual evidence in general, there is now the work of Francis Haskell, History and its Images. Art and the Interpretation of the Past (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), especially chap. 5.

La Istoria Universale provata con monumenti e figurata con simboli degli antichi (Rome: Antonio de' Rossi, 1697), p. 31: "Ogni professsor d'istoria confessa, che il punto più difficile, e più importante sia quello di rendere autorevole la relazione con i segni di verità che distinguono le narrazioni vere dalle favole de' romanzieri."

La Istoria Universale, p. 10: "Le figure dei fatti, ricavate da monumenti d'antichità oggidi conservate, mi sono sembrate simboli insieme e pruove dell'istoria... accomodati al genio della età nostra."