

# Acknowledgments: A History of Academic Gratitude\*

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Extravagant acknowledgments in literary and academic books are frequently circulated and discussed in the mass media and on social media due to their entertainment value. The examples of collaborators and ghostwriters who fail to make it into the acknowledgments are also employed to discuss different interpretations of good scholarly practice and honest writing.<sup>1</sup> But it is not only the mass media that are interested in acknowledgments — scholars themselves seem particularly invested in them. Nevertheless, academic acknowledgments have yet to be systematically studied within the humanities and the historical disciplines, even though they constitute a paratext that is often carefully read by peers not only as a source of entertainment but in order to form an impression of the author.<sup>2</sup> Through acknowledgments, readers assess which academic schools authors align

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1 See Julika Griem, “Wissenschaftskommunikation. Zum Beispiel Maja Göpel,” in: *Merkur* 76 (2022), no. 12, 17–31.

2 For initial considerations on this topic,

see Emily Callaci, “On Acknowledgments,” in *American Historical Review* 125 (2020): 126–131. Julia Wesian, *Danksagungen in Dissertationen. Zur Genese einer*

*Textsorte*, (Frankfurt a. M., 2015). Eyal Ben-Ari, “On Acknowledgments in Ethnographies,” in: *Journal of Anthropological Research* 43 (1987): 63–84.

**3** Steffen Martus and Carlos Spoerhase, *Geistesarbeit. Eine Praxeologie der Geisteswissenschaften*, (Berlin, 2022); on offprints in particular, see 425–481; Paul Nolte, *Lebens Werk. Thomas Nipperdeys Deutsche Geschichte—Biographie eines Buches*, (Munich, 2018), 134f.; Anna Echterhölter, *Schattengefächte. Genealogische Praktiken in Nachrufen auf Naturwissenschaftler (1710–1860)*, (Göttingen, 2012). Thomas Etzemüller, ed., *Der Auftritt. Performanz in der Wissenschaft*, (Bielefeld, 2019).

themselves with, what kind of support they acknowledge and who they thank for it, which personal views and matters they reveal, and to what extent they comply with disciplinary conventions. Conversely, those composing acknowledgments are well aware of their peers' scrutinizing gaze. Beyond a mere gesture, then, acknowledgments provide their authors with an opportunity to present themselves to their colleagues as both scholars and as (private) individuals.

This is what makes academic acknowledgments apt historical sources for the history of science, social history, and cultural history. Their analysis can provide glimpses into networks, hierarchies, forms of (in)visibility, and strategic interests within a given field. Acknowledgments tell us something about the working atmosphere and culture of debate in a university department, as well as shedding light on the self-staging and self-image of those giving thanks. As an aspect of the academic culture of gratitude – which includes award ceremonies, commemorative publications, the distribution of complimentary copies or offprints to colleagues, and obituaries for deceased academic mentors – written and published acknowledgments constitute a learned practice that varies by time and culture.<sup>3</sup> Hence, a diachronic, longitudinal analysis of academic acknowledgments can provide insights into both the way scholars see themselves and the self-conception of a particular academic system.

This is the starting point for the questions posed in this essay. How and to whom have scholars in German-speaking academia given thanks in their studies since the early modern period? When and why did this change? How might we typologize and periodize acknowledgments? To answer these questions, I have analyzed around three hundred academic expressions of thanks that have appeared in books in the humanities, predominantly the discipline of history, from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century. I make no claim that these are statistically representative. Rather, this corpus of sources serves as an aid to exploration. I will argue that we can identify three ideal types of scholarly acknowledgments since the early modern period: the servile, rhetorically elaborate

statement of thanks of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the concise, self-effacing acknowledgments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the detailed, subjectivizing variant of the twentieth-first century. I pay particular attention to the emergence of this third genre since the 1990s, which, I argue, is closely connected to changes in the contemporary academic system.

### I. “To My Most Gracious Lord”: Panegyrics and Statements of Thanks in the Early Modern Period

A characteristic case of expressing gratitude in the early modern period is the four-page dedication, statement of thanks, and extolment composed in 1688 and first published in 1689 by writer and historian Henrich Anshelm von Zigler und Kliphausen. This statement was addressed to the “Most Serene Prince and Lord, Lord Johann Georg, Hereditary Prince of the Electorate, . . . My Most Gracious Lord. Most Serene and Great Prince!” After referring to himself several times as the prince’s “slave” and “servant,” the author concludes his thanks as follows:

And thus, YOU will not disdain this small offering, which Your servant humbly presents to You:

For great princes have often been satisfied with nothing more than water,  
 Drawn by a faithful hand. Indeed, even my heart,  
 Which lies at Your feet even more than this writing,  
 Ignites this offering like a faithful candle,  
 That, to the best of its ability, wishes, like others, to die and burn for Your welfare in humble submission.  
 If but a spark of Your favor falls to me,  
 I shall humbly call myself your loyal servant until the grave

Your Electoral Highness

Leipzig, August 16, 1688.

Your most faithfully obedient and humbly devoted servant,  
 H.A.v.Z.u.K.<sup>4</sup>

4 Herrn Henrich Anshelm von Zigler und Kliphausen, *Asiatische Banise oder blutiges doch muthiges Pegu/In Historischer und mit dem Mantel einer Helden- und Liebes-Geschicht bedeckten Warheit beruhende. Diesem füget sich bey eine aus dem Italiänischen übersetzte Theatralische Handlung/benennet: Der tapffere Heraclius*, Leipzig/bey Thomas Fritsch, 1700.

This poetic expression of thanks was a reflection of the early modern scholarly system. It also formed part of a tradition of panegy-

<sup>5</sup> See Remigius Bunia and Till Dembeck, "Dank sagen, rhetorisch und idiomatisch. Zur Entstehung der Floskel 'Danke!,'" in Natalie Binczek et al., eds., *Dank sagen. Politik, Semantik und Poetik der Verbindlichkeit*, (Munich, 2013), 39–65; Alf Lüdtke and Reiner Prass, eds., *Gelehrtenleben. Wissenschaftspraxis in der Neuzeit*, (Cologne, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Johann Martin Chladni, *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft*, (Leipzig, 1752), 3b–4a.

ric in highly unequal societies dating back to antiquity and early Christianity. During the early modern period, scholars were dependent on sovereigns' favor. Rulers such as Albrecht VI founded their own universities and, as patrons, financed the work of scholars and the publication of their writings. The latter could neither reciprocate in material terms nor match their benefactors' status by thanking them. What they could do was provide them with an elaborate paean of praise, in which they humbled themselves and expressed the degree of their gratitude through ornate detail and rhetoric. These panegyrics in the dedications and prefaces of novels and scholarly studies prompted contemporary reflections on whether this was pure convention and fulfilment of duty or an expression of sincere gratitude.<sup>5</sup>

In 1752, in the exhaustive foreword to his *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft* ("General Historiography") Johann Martin Chladenius (Chladni), who rose to prominence due to his concept of the "viewpoint" (*Sehepunkt*), wrote:

In accordance with an ancient custom, scholars are wont to dedicate their works to men of a higher sphere. Some have sought to show their reverence and devotion through this means; others have believed that, out of gratitude, they could not omit such an act; others again have endeavored to pave the way to the favor of powerful patrons; while yet others have wished to dedicate their work to those who assured them that they might count upon securing a gracious reception from their illustrious patron as the first fruit of their diligent toil and labor.<sup>6</sup>

I will have more to say later about the various functions of thanksgiving alluded to in this quote and the idea of "sincere" and "honest" gratitude — as opposed to functional and calculating articulations of thanks. The assumption that genuine gratitude is expressed through the originality and rhetoric of acknowledgments is still found today. It should be noted, however, that the detailed praise typical of the early modern period largely vanished from scholarly works when the estates-based order was transformed into liberal, bourgeois society, which produced its own formulas of gratitude.

## II. "Of ourselves we are silent": Acknowledgments from the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century

As early as the sixteenth century, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam called for scholars to withdraw from their social entanglements into the solitary writing room. This, he believed, would enable them to pursue their scholarly activities unimpeded by secular or religious authorities and undisturbed by their social environment.<sup>7</sup> This idealized desocialization of the (male) scholar who devotes himself solely to scholarship was consonant with the demands subsequently made by Francis Bacon and Immanuel Kant, which profoundly shaped scholars' self-image in the following centuries. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, published in 1781, opens by quoting Bacon's statement "de nobis ipsis silemus" (of ourselves we are silent).<sup>8</sup> "Of ourselves we are silent" subsequently became the credo of Enlightenment scholarship, which rejected the idea of deriving the authority and persuasiveness of a text from God or a particular ruler and, instead, exalted reason and argument. The idealized spatial isolation of individual scholars went hand in hand with their withdrawal as a subject from their work. Only the author's name now pointed to the mind from which the text had sprung. Exemplifying this tradition, in the preface to his *History of England* of 1870, Leopold von Ranke, one of the founding fathers of modern German historiography, expressed his wish to "erase my self, as it were, and let only the things speak, the mighty forces appear."<sup>9</sup>

In the early twentieth century, it was Max Weber who brought this dictum up to date in his famous text "Science as a Vocation":

In the field of science [*Wissenschaft*] only he who is devoted solely to the work at hand has 'personality.' . . . In the field of science . . . the man who makes himself the impresario of the subject to which he should be devoted, and steps upon the stage and seeks to legitimate himself through 'experience,' . . . such a man is no 'personality.'"<sup>10</sup>

In one of his early lectures, Martin Heidegger claimed that statements such as "Aristotle was born, worked, and died" conveyed all

<sup>7</sup> See Gadi Algazi, "'Geistesabwesenheit'. Gelehrte zuhause um 1500," in: Lüdtke and Prass, *Gelehrtenleben*, 215–234.

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Text der Ausgabe 1781 mit Beifügung sämtlicher Abweichungen der Ausgabe 1787*, ed. Karl Kehrbach, 2nd improved edn., (Leipzig, c. 1878), citation preceding p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *Englische Geschichte vornehmlich im siebzehnten Jahrhundert*, vol. 2 (*Sämtliche Werke*, vol. XV), (Leipzig. 1870), 103.

<sup>10</sup> See Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, (New York, 1946), 129–156, here 137.

**11** Quoted in Jürgen Kaube, "Die Alliierten—schlimmer als Hitler?" in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 3, 2015 (on Heidegger's *Black Notebooks*).

**12** Quoted in Christoph Cornelißen, *Gerhard Ritter. Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert*, (Düsseldorf, 2001), 21.

**13** Ben-Ari, "On Acknowledgments in Ethnographies" (note 2).

**14** On the history of this metaphor, see Robert King Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants. A Shandean postscript*, (Chicago, 1993) (first published 1965).

one really needed to know about an author's biography.<sup>11</sup> Gerhard Ritter, one of the most influential West German historians of the post-1945 period, responded to a request for an interview in 1965 as follows: "The personal is unimportant, the academic work alone is important. So I would ask you to disregard my person."<sup>12</sup>

There were only three accepted exceptions to the author's self-imposed withdrawal. The first was occasional thanks to an archivist, often mentioned by name, as representative of all the archivists who had supported the writer in their research. Drawing on Eyal Ben-Ari's interpretation of anthropological acknowledgments, it can be assumed that these explicit thanks to archivists serve a dual function for historians.<sup>13</sup> By thanking them, they settle a debt, as they have, in fact, received material support in the archive. In addition, thanking archivists and mentioning them by name signals to colleagues in the discipline of history, which attaches great importance to empirical archival research, that the author shares this consensus, has carried out laborious archival research, and, with the help of "indigenous" locals, has unearthed the treasures (sources) they were looking for. The brief expression of gratitude to one's academic teachers, meanwhile, dovetailed with well-established conventions. In a broader sense, the same went for expressions of gratitude to scholars and pioneers on whose findings one's own work built. Far from jeopardizing the authority of the arguments presented, such expressions of gratitude conveyed the scholar's modesty and humility vis-à-vis the achievements of others. This is articulated pithily in an aphorism that, though coined by Isaac Newton, was expressed in a similar way in much earlier writings: "If I have seen further [than others], it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."<sup>14</sup>

The requisite dedication to one's research and the privileging of modesty had a direct effect on articulations of thanks. In marked contrast to the pages-long panegyrics of the early modern period, scholarly works from the nineteenth century onwards either featured no acknowledgments at all or only very brief ones. Often, they contained just a short dedication. Although this dedication could also function as an expression of gratitude, it was not a direct counter-gift to a specifically named person for a particular

act relating to the text's creation. Instead, it was an unexpected, vague, sometimes enigmatic acknowledgment of proximity to an individual or political conviction.<sup>15</sup>

As far as I have been able to ascertain, the only nineteenth-century acknowledgment by a German-speaking female historian is as brief as that of her male colleagues and is addressed to her academic teachers. In her 1892 dissertation, Ricarda Huch stated: "I will always recall with keen gratitude the rich inspiration I received from my highly esteemed teachers, Professors v. Wyss and Meyer v. Knonau."<sup>16</sup>

This convention of self-effacement prevailed in historiographical works until the final third of the twentieth century and is still occasionally found today. There were as yet few differences in the thanks expressed by male and female historians. Both genders receded into the background when expressing their scholarly gratitude, presenting themselves as largely detached from social relationships, as dedicated to the matter at hand, and as students of their academic teachers.

We can discern a slight easing of this convention of self-restraint over the course of the twentieth century. In addition to parents, archivists, and academic teachers, thanks were increasingly expressed to publishers of academic book series, academic students, and, later, collaborators and colleagues, for substantive suggestions and proofreading, for technical support in the compiling of indexes, or for producing tables and graphics. In addition, some authors thanked their former (history) teachers for getting them interested in the subject and their secretaries for typing the manuscript.<sup>17</sup> Expressions of thanks to wives and husbands also became more frequent, both as life companions and as collaborators on book projects.<sup>18</sup> In line with this, Hans Rothfels dedicated the 1949 German edition of *The German Opposition to Hitler* to his wife, "who not only shared the burden of the 'translation' to a great extent, but also very substantially that of the external and internal experiences of a decade that had to be undergone, as well as the conflicts that had to be endured, before this book could be written. It belongs to her in more than one sense."<sup>19</sup> Conversely, women historians

**15** On the relationship between dedication and expressing thanks, see Yvonne Schütze and Betina Hollstein, "Für C'—Widmungen in der Soziologie," in Günter Burkart and Jürgen Wolf, eds., *Lebenszeit. Erkundungen zur Soziologie der Generationen*, (Opladen, 2002), 437–455, here 439f.

**16** Ricarda Huch, *Die Neutralität der Eidgenossenschaft. Besonders der Orte Zürich und Bern während des spanischen Erbfolgekrieges*, (Zurich, 1892), 287.

**17** Martus and Sporerhase, *Geistesarbeit* (note 3), 90. Cf. David Kuchenbuch, "Zum Diktieren in den Geisteswissenschaften 1800–1989," in: *Merkur* 75, no. 10 (2021): 27–40.

**18** Maximilian Herberger, "Die Frau im Vorwort," in: *Rechtshistorisches Journal* no. 6 (1987): 233–239.

**19** Hans Rothfels, *Die deutsche Opposition gegen Hitler. Eine Würdigung*, (Krefeld, 1949), 12.



**20** Ute Frevert, *Krankheit als politisches Problem 1770–1880. Soziale Unterschichten in Preußen zwischen medizinischer Polizei und staatlicher Sozialversicherung*, (Göttingen, 1984), 9; Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, *Der Staat als Maschine. Zur politischen Metaphorik des absoluten Fürstenstaats*, (Berlin, 1986), 3.

**21** Gerhard Ritter, "Vorwort," in Walther Holtzmann and Gerhard Ritter, eds., *Die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Bibliographie des historischen Schrifttums deutscher Autoren 1939–1945*, (Marburg/Lahn, 1951), 3–7, here 7.

**22** Max Ebert, ed., *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte. Unter Mitwirkung zahlreicher Fachgelehrter*, vol. 1: *Aal—Beschneidung*, (Berlin, 1924), IV.

**23** Gerhard Ritter, *Friedrich der Große. Ein historisches Profil*, (Leipzig, 1936), n.p.

**24** Cornelißen, *Gerhard Ritter* (note 12), 274.

thanked their husbands for their dedicated interest in their work, for reading it critically, or for their cooking skills.<sup>20</sup> This expansion of gratitude, however, did nothing to diminish hierarchies. On the contrary, an individual's status continued to be clearly marked by academic titles, additional designations such as "student" and, generally, through the fact that a person was named, in contrast to those who were not.<sup>21</sup>

Here and there, we find expressions of thanks that refer, usually implicitly, to contemporary events. One example is Max Ebert's foreword to his *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte* ("Encyclopedia of Pre-history"), composed at the University of Königsberg in 1924. After World War I, research in the humanities came under pressure to prove its practical relevance. Humanities scholars now styled themselves as fighters, and Ebert, too, informed his readers of the self-sacrificing toil of those involved in the encyclopedia he was editing:

During the preparatory work, we mourned the death of five collaborators . . . Before his death, Prof. Montelius submitted one of the two articles entrusted to him. . . . Prof Rzehak worked on the first part of his manuscript between two serious operations, the second of which cost him his life, with the utmost sense of duty, sending it in from his deathbed. We will honor the memory of this brave man!<sup>22</sup>

It is hard to imagine a more dramatic description of the ideal of the scholar devoted to the matter at hand. Even on his deathbed, there is no room for privacy, only the desire to complete the promised article.

At times, the century's political caesuras found reflection in passages of thanks and dedications. In 1936, the aforementioned Gerhard Ritter (born in 1888), dedicated his biography of Frederick the Great "to the invisible community of those who sustain the true frontline spirit in the realm of German scholarship."<sup>23</sup> According to Ritter's biographer, Christoph Cornelißen, he thus inscribed himself into the fraternity of frontline World War I veterans, a group to which he felt he belonged, while subtly expressing criticism of the National Socialists.<sup>24</sup>



For a brief period in the early 1950s, prefaces also included references to the Second World War and to the postwar period, as well as thanks to those who had helped prepare the manuscript under difficult circumstances or had saved it from destruction. Such thanks were expressed, for example, by Walter Markov,<sup>25</sup> one of the GDR's most influential historians, and by the contemporary historian Hans Rothfels, who had emigrated to the United States via the United Kingdom during the Nazi era and later returned to West Germany. In 1953, the latter prefaced the second edition of his document collection *Bismarck und der Staat* (*Bismarck and the State*), first published in 1925, with a dedication to the president and fellows of St John's College, Oxford, out of gratitude for the support he had received there as a guest during the first year of the war, in 1939–1940.<sup>26</sup> Historian Hans Rosenberg, who fled to the United States in 1935 and also later returned to West Germany, added an expression of thanks to the new, 1974 edition of his account of the Great Depression of 1857–1859, which he had omitted when it was first published in 1934 in order to avoid placing those mentioned at risk during the Nazi era.<sup>27</sup> In 1954, rather than the “invisible community” of frontline veterans, Gerhard Ritter dedicated the first volume of *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk* (published in English as *The Sword and the Scepter*) to his “valiant wife,” “whose courageous support was the greatest of all human assistance during the most terrible months of my life.”<sup>28</sup> Overall, however, such references to the contemporary context remained the exception.

The Enlightenment, then, gave rise to an ideal of scholarship that demanded that scholars show extraordinary dedication to their research and tremendous personal restraint within their written work, resulting in the disappearance of acknowledgments from their publications or at least their reduction to just a few lines. The power of this convention is apparent in its transcendence of political and gender boundaries: few differences are evident between the words of thanks composed by female and male historians or between academics in East and West Germany. Thus Gisela Bock's brief thanks to her academic teachers and referees in her 1974 dissertation<sup>29</sup> differ little from Ricarda Huch's words of gratitude

**25** Walter Markov, *Grundzüge der Balkan-diplomatie. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Abhängigkeitsverhältnisse*, (Leipzig, 1999) (the original manuscript was completed in 1946–1947), 1.

**26** Hans Rothfels, *Bismarck und der Staat. Ausgewählte Dokumente*, 2nd ed., (Stuttgart, 1953), n.p. [XIII, page not numbered].

**27** Hans Rosenberg, *Die Weltwirtschaftskrise 1857–1859. Mit einem Vorbericht*, 2nd ed., (Göttingen, 1974), V.

**28** Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk. Das Problem des “Militarismus” in Deutschland*, vol. 1, (Munich, 1954), 12.

**29** Gisela Bock, *Thomas Campanella. Politisches Interesse und philosophische Spekulation*, (Tübingen, 1974), V.

**30** For acknowledgments that appeared in the GDR, see, for example, Irmgard Höß, *Georg Spalatin. Ein Leben in den Entscheidungen der Reformation*, (Jena, 1951), Vlf.; Horst Drechsler, *Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft*, (Berlin, 1966), 22; Karl Czok, *August der Starke und Kursachsen*, (Leipzig, 1987), 7. For acknowledgments in West Germany, see, for example, Reinhart Koselleck, *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution. Allgemeines Landrecht, Verwaltung und soziale Bewegung von 1791 bis 1848*, (Stuttgart, 1967), 7; Lutz Niethammer, *Entnazifizierung in Bayern. Säuberung und Rehabilitierung unter amerikanischer Besatzung*, (Frankfurt a.M., 1972), 9f.; Ute Daniel, *Arbeiterfrauen in der Kriegsgesellschaft. Beruf, Familie und Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg*, (Göttingen, 1989), 9.

**31** Jürgen Kaube, "Ich sag mal, also ist's wichtig," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 9, 2008.

**32** Rainer Moritz, "Schafft die Danksagung ab! Über eine neuerdings seltsam florierende Textsorte," *Die Welt*, April 10, 2021.

some 80 years earlier. Nor were they much different from the acknowledgments penned by her counterparts in the GDR or the FRG between the 1960s and 1980s, though in the 1980s such texts tended to be longer than in the 1960s. Historians in both East and West Germany thanked academic institutions and funding bodies at home and abroad, while also mentioning research trips conducted in various countries. Beyond this, however, the readers of forewords and acknowledgments learned virtually nothing about the authors' private lives. Without knowledge of the individuals and institutions identified, it is difficult to tell from acknowledgments in which German state they were published; the configuration and length, as well as the limited circle of persons mentioned, were more or less the same.<sup>30</sup>

This long-dominant ideal of sober academic self-presentation still has echoes in the present day. Nowadays, however, it mainly comes in the guise of criticism directed at colleagues who violate the precepts of restraint and modesty. In 2008 Jürgen Kaube, the editor of the humanities section of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, one of the leading German newspapers, put it like this: "In the forewords of books, one often finds detailed accounts of how they came into being and a list of every single person to whom thanks are due, from superiors to wives and sometimes even cats, not for intellectual contributions, but for general forms of interpersonal support."<sup>31</sup> Kaube suggested that the next likely step would be for historians to start addressing their readers using the informal pronoun "Du," rather than formal "Sie." In view of such potential scenarios, in 2017 the literary critic Rainer Moritz called for an end to acknowledgments in the conservative German newspaper *Die Welt*.<sup>32</sup> This critique, however, was not sparked by the kind of acknowledgments discussed above, but by a new form of acknowledgments, which is probably the most common variant found today.

### III. Subjectivization, Deconventionalization, and Individualization: Acknowledgments since the 1990s

During the 1980s, acknowledgments in historical studies gradually started to become more elaborate. In formal terms, this trend

and the rise of a new culture of thanks are most apparent in the fact that, starting in the 1990s, many books started to include a special section explicitly designated as “acknowledgments” in the table of contents. Until the turn of the millennium, such paratexts had usually appeared in a book’s preface or, more rarely, in an afterword. Initially, these acknowledgments resembled older thanking practices in prefaces, both in terms of length and the selection of persons mentioned. The triad of funding institutions, academic teachers, and close friends or family was retained. Gradually, however, two shifts became apparent: a growing number of people and institutions were thanked, and acknowledgments became the setting for subjective statements of all kinds.

In more recent acknowledgments, the number of institutions thanked for financial and organizational support has grown significantly. The number of colleagues receiving thanks for suggestions, substantive exchange, proofreading, and technical support has increased even more. At the same time, the boundaries between profession and personal life have become more permeable as historians and social scientists have shared more details about the latter.<sup>33</sup> In this new context, acknowledgments have been used to thank one’s soccer team, coffee-drinking partners, a kidney donor, and ever more friends and family members. The illumination of the personal sphere even extends to pets. A dog named Obelix mentioned in the acknowledgments of a particular book became a minor internet celebrity.<sup>34</sup> Another scholar dedicated an entire paragraph to her cat — possibly in deliberate reference to literary role models:

My final word of thanks goes to my cat, or to be more precise, my ex-cat. She left me at just the right moment to allow me to complete this study. During my first serious attempt to bring the dissertation to a positive conclusion . . . , the cat never failed to lie down on my desk just where I wanted to write or read, and always convinced me, with her purring and need for petting, that there are far more important things in life than writing a dissertation. Now she’s welcome to come back.<sup>35</sup>

Thanking one’s cat may seem odd at first glance. But on closer inspection it is consonant with the findings of recent studies in

**33** Betina Hollstein and Yvonne Schütze, “Selbstdarstellungen in der Wissenschaft am Beispiel von Danksagungen in der Soziologie,” in Sonja Häder and Heinz-Elmar Tenorth, eds., *Der Bildungsgang des Subjekts. Bildungstheoretische Analysen*, (Weinheim, 2004), 153–181.

**34** Marietta von Süsskind-Schwendi, *Die prae- und perinatale Entwicklung der Hundekralle*, (Berlin, 2005), 293; Thomas Hoeren, “Mein Dank gilt meinem Hund,” *duz Magazin*, no. 4/2011, 60–61.

**35** Christa Haveschild, *Zur Interpretation russischer Nominalgruppen. Anaphorische Bezüge und thematische Strukturen im Satz und im Text*, (Munich, 1985), IX. There is a long tradition in literature of addressing the relationships between writers and (domestic) animals. See E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr. Nebst fragmentarischer Biographie des Kapellmeisters Johannes Kreisler in zufälligen Makulaturblättern*, (Berlin, 1820).

family history. Family concepts and human-animal relationships have changed, and in some fields, they have expanded to such an extent that pets are now integrated into the family as companions, with whom many feel a strong emotional bond. As a result, some people leave money for the upkeep of their pets in their will, in so far as this is legally possible. Furthermore, they are thanked much like humans in academic studies, even though, unlike their human counterparts, they cannot read them. Overall, then, this specific form of expressing gratitude is not a public counter-gift perceptible to the addressee but amounts to the construction of a scholarly and simultaneously private *persona*.

The example of the “ex-cat” highlights the gradual shift, beginning in the 1990s, in conventions governing who should or should not be mentioned in acknowledgments. While certain precepts determining who must be acknowledged (academic teachers, funding institutions, and close family) have persisted, the circle of those who could be mentioned, and the spectrum of the sayable, has expanded across the board. This process, which I will refer to as deconventionalization, has meant that, in principle, any individual or pet could be mentioned. This has not only resulted in ever longer acknowledgments, but has also engendered new problems and uncertainties, such as the most frequently expressed concern in acknowledgments: the fear of leaving someone out. One common response to this newfound uncertainty has been to thank helpful colleagues vaguely and without mentioning their names, or to offer blanket, prophylactic thanks to those who might have been overlooked.

One acknowledgment typical of this development, though unusually elaborate, can be found in a dissertation on medialized war experiences published in 2021. The author states at the outset: “This book could not have been written without the support of a whole legion of people and institutions. . . . Should the sometimes . . . somewhat absent-minded author have forgotten one of the many individuals who have contributed to this book project . . . , he sincerely apologizes, and reassures them that they can be certain of his gratitude.” In a characteristic turn of phrase

featuring the metaphor of travel, he then erases the distinction between colleagues and friends, stating: “Some companions along the way . . . have become close friends,” before proceeding to thank well over two hundred individuals by name across several pages.<sup>36</sup>

Since the 1990s, not only have a greater number of people been thanked but acknowledgments have also become a setting in which scholars comment on the politics of the academy and make socio-political statements, as well as all kinds of personal remarks. One prominent author, for example, admitted to harboring a little vanity, describing his character and life as an “audacious mélange of personality and experience.”<sup>37</sup> On rare occasions, authors reveal conflicts within academia, as in the following example: “At this point, I would like to thank [name mentioned] for his open and honest hostility. However, I am still disgruntled that he railed against my project and its funding in the Bundestag without my knowledge.”<sup>38</sup> Another researcher noted: “In addition to all these supporters, I would also like to thank two highly critical colleagues who, following my presentations, described my approach as ‘too complicated’ and the project as ‘overambitious.’ This was a tremendous source of motivation.”<sup>39</sup>

Overall, however, such biting remarks are rare in acknowledgments; courtesy towards colleagues and family typically prevails. At the same time, thankers sometimes address precarious working conditions, legal disputes resulting from their research, their sexual orientation or their wife’s beauty. In one case, an author concluded his acknowledgments with a marriage proposal to his partner, while other scholars reported on the birth and growing up of their offspring or, in the case of older writers, their grandchildren. This is merely to give a rough idea of the spectrum of personal remarks. In the cases mentioned so far, I have not even considered hidden and subtle messages that may be decipherable only to a select group of readers.<sup>40</sup> Finally, editors and, in certain countries, universities may influence acknowledgments. In conversation, editors assured me that the range of people mentioned, subjective statements, and curiosities would sometimes be greater still if not for their moderating influence on the authors. On the

**36** Jan Schmidt, *Nach dem Krieg ist vor dem Krieg. Medialisierte Erfahrungen des Ersten Weltkriegs und Nachkriegsdiskurse in Japan 1914–1919*, (Frankfurt a.M., 2021), 461–467.

**37** Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, *Verfassung und Verfassungsvertrag. Konstitutionelle Entwicklungsstufen in den USA und der EU*, (Berlin, 2009), 6.

**38** Monika Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum. Kaffeekonsum in beiden deutschen Staaten*, (Berlin, 2015), X.

**39** Daniela Hettstedt, *Die internationale Stadt Tanger. Infrastrukturen des geteilten Kolonialismus, 1840–1956*, (Berlin, 2022), VI.

**40** Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants* (note 14), VI.

**41** Lena Greiner, "Streit um Dissertation. Niederländischer Doktorand darf Gott nicht danken," *Spiegel Online*, March 3, 2014.

**42** See for example Georg Franck, *Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit. Ein Entwurf*, (Munich, 1998), 7f.; Benjamin Brendel, *Konvergente Konstruktionen. Eine Globalgeschichte des Staudammbaus*, (Frankfurt a.M., 2019), 455.

other hand, editors can ensure that funding institutions and scholarship providers are acknowledged and the names of those thanked are spelled correctly. The desire to talk about professional and personal predicaments is strong. In the Netherlands, universities have gone so far as to issue guidelines setting out who may and may not be thanked for contributing to a study; God, for instance, is not among them.<sup>41</sup>

Contrasting with the Enlightenment scholarly ideal in the starkest possible way, writers sometimes confide in the reader that, due to a new love, the birth of a child, or the death of a family member, they had come to realize that completing a manuscript is not always the greatest source of fulfilment. Rather than finishing articles on their deathbed, some of those expressing gratitude today reveal that they have grasped, in the delivery room, that there are more important things than an academic publication. To be sure, scholars still portray themselves as dedicated to their work; but they also want to come across as family-oriented individuals embedded in society and as people with opinions, worldly wisdom, and personal circumstances. Anyone interested in the difficulties of reconciling work and family life in the twenty-first century will find many examples here. Scholars, it seems, are people who torment their families with their scholarly preoccupations on holiday, at dinner, and on weekends, but are otherwise absent; they are then plagued by feelings of guilt.

Equally revealing are the narratives and metaphors that authors use to describe and explain the genesis of a study. At times, key concepts in the academic text or — in the case of older authors — personal life experiences are included in the acknowledgments and used to structure them.<sup>42</sup> The acknowledgments prefacing dissertations make widespread use of the narrative, borrowed from the bourgeois *Bildungsroman*, of overcoming a long and arduous journey replete with detours, highs and lows, light and shadow. Authors began their journey as young adults and met many a helpful companion as they pursued their research; these they come to value and sometimes even love, ultimately completing

their odyssey as holders of a doctoral degree with a finished book and sometimes a family as well.<sup>43</sup>

At this point, it would be easy to continue with anecdotes about the author's favorite drink or their partner's pet name, and even the equation of scholarly and sexual potency. It would also be easy to dismiss such extravagant acknowledgments and first-person narratives as unnecessary self-dramatization and self-promotion. But I prefer not to join this chorus of critics and instead to ask: Why has this new, third type of acknowledgments emerged since the 1990s, and what does this tell us about recent changes in the humanities and the discipline of history? Four aspects seem crucial to me.

#### **IV. The factors driving the new acknowledgment culture: Democratization, Competitive Principle, Popularization of Knowledge, and Internationalization**

*Thesis 1: The democratization of academic disciplines has sparked changes in the articulation of thanks.* The most common explanation for the shift in thanking practices is that processes of societal liberalization beginning in the 1960s have triggered the democratization and deconventionalization of academia. Most importantly, research results ceased to be viewed as products of an individual author working in their study or an expression of originality. Instead, in line with Thomas Kuhn-style theories of science that also emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, they came to be understood as the outcome of collaborative project work. As a result, in their acknowledgments numerous researchers recognized that for them scholarly work is a collaborative process and a shared experience.<sup>44</sup> To the extent that they underscored the cooperative nature of research, they began to name people who helped them complete their work and, more generally, to reveal the contexts in which their studies emerged.

According to a more critical reading, however, this enumeration of supporters in acknowledgments was not voluntary but due to pressure from collaborators, who had previously remained invisible

**43** A characteristic example of the use of the journey metaphor and the interweaving of acknowledgments with academic text is provided by Florian Greiner, *Wege nach Europa. Deutungen eines imaginierten Kontinents in deutschen, britischen und amerikanischen Printmedien, 1914–1945*, (Göttingen, 2014), 515.

**44** See for example Daniel Maul, *Menschenrechte, Sozialpolitik und Dekolonisation. Die Internationale Arbeitsorganisation (IAO) 1940–1970*, (Essen, 2007), 11.



**45** For such an exception, see Michael Wildt, *Zerborstene Zeit. Deutsche Geschichte 1918–1945*, (Munich, 2022), 23.

**46** Kim Christian Priemel, *Flick. Eine Konzerngeschichte vom Kaiserreich bis zur Bundesrepublik*, (Göttingen, 2007), 13.

**47** Stephan Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer. Deutscher Adel und Nationalsozialismus*, (Frankfurt a.M., 2004), n.p. [10, page not numbered].

**48** Jan Eckel, *Hans Rothfels. Eine intellektuelle Biographie im 20. Jahrhundert*, (Göttingen, 2005), 478; Karl Schlögel, *Das sowjetische Jahrhundert. Archäologie einer untergegangenen Welt*, (Munich, 2017), 848.

**49** Margit Szöllösi-Janze, "Archäologie des Wettbewerbs. Konkurrenz in und zwischen Universitäten in (West-)Deutschland seit den 1980er Jahren," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 69 (2021): 241–276; Ariane Leendertz, "Die Macht des Wettbewerbs. Die Max-Planck-Gesellschaft und die Ökonomisierung der Wissenschaft seit den 1990er Jahren," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 70 (2022): 235–271.

and who, according to today's standards of good scientific practice, should perhaps even have been listed as co-authors. It is also worth considering whether the early phase of using a personal computer, when thanks were extended to those who had introduced (mostly older) beginners to word processing or footnote management, gave younger and more tech-savvy staff leverage in advocating for their demands. The student-teacher relationship could easily be reversed, especially when it came to computer use. In this struggle for recognition and visibility, the explicit expression of thanks may have represented a compromise. Further evidence pointing to a trade-off of this kind comes from the fact that gratitude continues to be expressed predominantly to those higher or at the same level in the professional hierarchy — but only rarely to those new to the field, though they often provide their senior colleagues with fresh impetus.<sup>45</sup> To be included in acknowledgments, one must not only earn the thanks but also be deemed worthy of it. Older conventions often shine through in the order in which thanks are expressed. Acknowledgments prefacing dissertations typically begin by naming the professors who reviewed them, followed, with some variability, by colleagues, archivists, and funders, and concluding with individuals from the author's personal sphere, usually close family members.<sup>46</sup> The new academic convention of mentioning those who provided help in the acknowledgments is encapsulated in the term "debt of gratitude."<sup>47</sup> This is dutifully and/or joyfully settled by naming the relevant individuals and institutions.<sup>48</sup>

*Thesis 2: The expansion of the university and the increase in competition created new uncertainties and changed the way thanks are given.* In recent, persuasive studies, Margit Szöllösi-Janze and Ariane Leendertz have analyzed the expansion, since the 1970s, of the German university landscape and the Max Planck Institutes in order to highlight how increasingly scarce resources have been distributed according to the competitive principle.<sup>49</sup> Both developments — expansion and heightened competition — have had an impact on the articulation of thanks in acknowledgments. Expansion meant that it could no longer be assumed that everyone

knew everyone else within the historical disciplines. Acknowledgments thus offered newly minted PhDs, in particular, the opportunity to position themselves for their readers institutionally and within disciplinary schools. At the same time, such texts became a tool for building one's professional network, as manifested in the acknowledgments. The increased competition, meanwhile, seemed to make it necessary for the author to impress not only through their scholarly work, but also by highlighting the networks in which they were involved, by referring to colleagues who had taken the time to discuss a project, and to institutions that had funded their research. The people and institutions mentioned thus functioned as guarantors of the quality of a study even as they were formulaically absolved of any remaining errors. This logic made it prudent to rather list one person too many in the acknowledgments rather than one too few — though this could easily lead to a degree of overreach: those named were rarely asked if they wished to be mentioned.

**50** René Breiwe, *Diversitätsreflexive Bildung und die deutschen Schulgesetze. Eine kritische Analyse*, (Wiesbaden, 2020), VII.

On occasion, the strategic use of acknowledgments is addressed explicitly. Authors often reassure their readers and, above all, those they are thanking, that their words are sincerely meant rather than strategically motivated. The following provides an uncompromising example: “Hence, the question arises as to how I would like to present myself through my acknowledgments and dedication. The answer I came up with was that one attribute was especially fitting: grateful. In this sense, the following words may be read as a genuine expression of my gratitude — no more, but also no less.”<sup>50</sup>

The uncertainty accompanying acknowledgments' expanded functions and deconventionalization, may also be connected to changing working conditions at universities. It may be that the increase in fixed-term (rather than tenured) positions and the resulting uncertainty of career prospects are bringing back the early modern practice of extolling one's ruler, albeit in twenty-first-century guise. Instead of the rhetorically elaborate statement of thanks to a single ruler and benefactor, this takes the form of offerings, that is, polite thanks to as many people as possible who may have an

51 Ulrich Bröckling,  
*Das unternehmerische  
Selbst. Soziologie einer  
Subjektivierungsform*,  
(Frankfurt a.M., 2007).

influence on one's academic career or research at some point in the future. The increasing scope of acknowledgments might, therefore, be interpreted as a strategy for coping with contingency in an unpredictable, complex working environment in which academics have to prove themselves as entrepreneurial experts.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, those who served as reviewers of the PhD or other types of theses and colleagues who provided assistance expect to be thanked, though they rarely express this explicitly. Foundations and funding institutions are also increasingly keen to be mentioned in the publications of the researchers they support. Ever more often, naming the funding institution, including printing their logo, is an explicit precondition for a printing subsidy. Such mentions usually appear not only in the acknowledgments, but on the imprint page as well. A mere mention in lengthy stretches of text between numerous other acknowledgments no longer seems to be a sufficient counter-gift for funding institutions; they seek a more prominent, distinct place in the publication. Thus it matters *where* a person or institution is mentioned, whether they are front and center or sandwiched between many others somewhere in the middle of a paragraph.

However this may be, a debate is already being conducted in the Anglo-American academic world as to whether, in assessing a scholar's significance and influence within their field, attention should be paid not only to how often their peers cite their work and how much external funding they have secured but also to how often they are mentioned in acknowledgments. Some argue that such analysis of acknowledgments offers little insight, contending that these mentions merely reflect professional hierarchies, with the directors of large research institutions logically mentioned more often than other academics. Others disagree, suggesting that the systematic analysis of acknowledgments may shine a spotlight on individuals who have less of an impact on the discipline through their own publications, but who contribute more collegially by providing intellectual stimulation or who help improve publications by proving meticulous feedback. Regardless of which position one favors, this debate demonstrates

how easy it is to perceive mentions in acknowledgments as strategic in nature.<sup>52</sup>

In light of this, it is worth examining instances of the *absence* of acknowledgments over the last three decades. Unlike in the past, the decision not to include a special acknowledgments section in one's book, or to keep it brief, must now be interpreted as a conscious decision — either as a rejection of the new culture of acknowledgment or as a staging of one's sovereignty and independence within the field. Thus in 2000, when acknowledgments were becoming increasingly elaborate, the legal scholar Friedrich-Christian Schroeder argued that he had no wish to receive thanks for fulfilling his professional duties, such as supervising and correcting qualifying theses. From an external perspective, he maintained, such thanks create the impression that carrying out these tasks is no longer a self-evident part of the profession but is instead an extra service worthy of special recognition. The contrary view, which associates gratitude with polite manners and defends it as a counter-gift for the particularly competent execution of duties, underscores the growing acceptance of the new culture of acknowledgments.<sup>53</sup> By the same token, those who omit acknowledgments in order to assert their independence are suggesting that those who express no thanks to anyone are dependent on no one's favor or beneficence.<sup>54</sup>

In recent years, the changes in the academic system outlined above and the associated valorization of acknowledgments have even led to the emergence of specialized guides offering doctoral candidates, and increasingly undergraduate and graduate students as well, help in writing their acknowledgments. In addition, many universities now provide their own guidelines and templates. A typical example of such offerings is the "Mentorium" website, which advertises its services as follows: "Compared to writing the rest of your thesis, the acknowledgments are a true luxury problem. Finally, you can bid farewell to jargon and academic phrasing and reflect on this milestone in your scholarly career in your own words."<sup>55</sup> This is followed by a few general thoughts on acknowledgments and a grid of people one might thank, together with the reasons for doing so.

**52** For an introduction to this discussion, see Katherine W. McCain, "Beyond Garfield's Citation Index. An Assessment of Some Issues in Building a Personal Name Acknowledgments Index," *Scientometrics* 114 (2018): 605–631; Nadine Desrochers, Adèle Paul-Hus, and Jen Pecoskie, "Five Decades of Gratitude. A Meta-Synthesis of Acknowledgments Research," *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 68 (2017): 2821–2833.

**53** Friedrich-Christian Schroeder, "Herzlichen Dank, Herr Professor!", *JuristenZeitung* 55 (2000): 353; Horst Sandler, "Undank als Lohn der Welt?" *JuristenZeitung* 55 (2000): 614; Wilfried Küper, "Dank-Kaskaden," *JuristenZeitung* 55 (2000): 614.

**54** For a case of self-staging in this sense, see David van Reybrouck, *Revolusi. Indonesien und die Entstehung der modernen Welt. Aus dem Niederländischen von Andreas Ecke*, (Berlin, 2022), 643.

**55** "Danksagung Dissertation. Vorlagen zum Download," URL: <<https://www.mentorium.de/danksagung-dissertation/>>.

56 “Danksagung Dissertation” (note 55).

57 Adolph von Knigge, *Ueber den Umgang mit Menschen*, vol. 1, (Hannover, 1788), 263.

58 Georg Simmel, “Dankbarkeit. Ein soziologischer Versuch,” *Der Morgen. Wochenschrift für deutsche Kultur* 1 (1907), 593–598.

59 See Ralph Jessen, “‘Wir alle spielen Theater’. Selbstinszenierungen und feine Unterschiede im universitären Milieu seit den 1990er Jahren,” lecture, January 25, 2022, URL: <[https://lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/koelner\\_vortraege\\_jessen](https://lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/koelner_vortraege_jessen)>; Peter Schöttler, “Die autobiographische Versuchung,” in Lüdtker and Prass, *Gelehrtenleben* (note 5), 131–140.

Finally, the website offers sample templates, thus underlining the standardization of the genre.<sup>56</sup> These guides are only new in the sense that they specialize in academic acknowledgments. In his popular and widely read book *On Human Relations* (1788), Freiherr Adolph von Knigge already declared gratitude one of the most sacred of virtues and offered his audience advice on how to conduct themselves towards those who had done them a kindness.<sup>57</sup> The demand for such assistance suggests that the act of expressing thanks was, and is still, not necessarily perceived as a “luxury problem” but involves a delicate balancing act within interpersonal relations — one for which, as the sociologist Georg Simmel put it, no clear, written norms exist.<sup>58</sup> This, in turn, increased the desire for guidance. In the act of articulating thanks, the last thing one wants to do is make a misstep or embarrass oneself.

*Thesis 3: Self-presentation and the popularization of knowledge have become more important in academia.*<sup>59</sup> In autobiographies and interviews, in shorter articles on their career paths and on social media, scholars are revealing ever more personal details about themselves and commenting on a wide range of topics. At the same time, publishers and television networks are presenting “their” authors to the public as scholarly personalities through photographic and filmic portraits. Through this increased (self-)staging, both academics and publishers are catering to the mass media’s desire for individual experts who serve as recognizable and credible communicators of knowledge.

In academics’ new self-portrayals, the boundaries between the professional and the personal are dissolving, though there was no strict separation even in the past. From this perspective, when it comes to acknowledgments, it is understandable when book authors thank their kindergarten teachers, their regular drinking buddies or cycling friends, for example, and that in other countries, far more often than in Germany, they openly express their religious faith. And since, nowadays, information about an author’s personal life can often be gleaned elsewhere, it is not necessary to conceal such aspects in books; nor is it surprising that researchers mention this information in acknowledgments, that, in the 2010s

and early 2020s, publishers promote their authors by reaching out to their followers on social media platforms such as Twitter (now X) or that authors thank these social media followers in their printed works. An ever-greater number of academics regard references to their own personality as giving them a competitive advantage within the economy of attention, prompting them to provide insights into their personal lives, which in turn finds reflection in their acknowledgments. At the same time, a new academic convention is emerging, namely the self-presentation of the individual whose creativity spans both the private and professional spheres.

*Thesis 4: The changing practice of acknowledgments in Germany reflects the increasing interdisciplinarity and internationalization of academia.*

The first, forced, wave of the internationalization of German academia occurred as early as the 1930s and 1940s, when scholars fled Nazi persecution. After World War II, institutions such as the German Historical Institutes and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) actively promoted international networking, while collaborative research projects and graduate centers propelled interdisciplinary exchange. Researchers' growing involvement in interdisciplinary project groups and research centers, as well as more frequent stays abroad, initially led simply to an increase in mentions of supporting and funding institutions and scholarship providers in acknowledgments.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, as my own bookshelf, which is dominated by works on international history as well as family and property history published in the UK and US, reveals, even in the Anglo-American world, until the 1960s, acknowledgments were far shorter than they are today and were usually expressed in the foreword.<sup>61</sup> Much earlier than in the two German states, however, a separate acknowledgments section, as we know it today, emerged in the 1970s, and this soon became both detailed and personal. In the acknowledgments appearing in his standard work *Crabgrass Frontier*, published in 1985, Kenneth T. Jackson, for example, addressed the accidental death of his son a few weeks before the completion of the manuscript and thanked everyone who had helped him and his wife to resume their daily routines.<sup>62</sup> Such a private statement was unusual even

<sup>60</sup> For (early) examples in which the DFG, the German Historical Institutes, the DAAD or foreign institutions are thanked for supporting research abroad, see for the Federal Republic of Germany Imanuel Geiss, *Panafrikanismus. Zur Geschichte der Dekolonisation*, (Frankfurt a.M., 1968), 7; Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, *Nationalismus und Demokratie. Zur Geschichte der Bourgeoisie im Frankreich der Restauration*, (Frankfurt a.M., 1974), 8. For the GDR, see Helmuth Stoecker, *Deutschland und China im 19. Jahrhundert. Das Eindringen des deutschen Kapitalismus*, (Berlin, 1958), 7.

<sup>61</sup> A transitional case is G.H. Jansen's 1966 book, which begins with the "Introduction and Acknowledgment" as a separate chapter: Gerrit H. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, (London, 1966), 11f.

<sup>62</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier. The Suburbanization of the United States*, (New York, 1985), ix.

for US-American acknowledgments; in the two German states it was simply inexpressible.

Against the background of this development in the Anglo-American academic world, it can be assumed that two closely interlinked processes have contributed to changing acknowledgment practices in German-speaking academia. First, the spread of English as the global academic language, the increasing mobility of academics, and the translation of English-language works into German led authors in Germany to move away from the model of sober, self-effacing acknowledgments and to adopt elements of the detailed, personal variant. This appropriation of what was initially a culturally different form of published acknowledgment must in turn be seen as part of a broader process of transfer in which German research policy and academia turned away, at least in part, from the ideal of the *Reformuniversität* or “reform university” (which emerged in the 1960s and promoted interdisciplinarity and the democratization of academia), aligning themselves far more closely with elite universities in the United States and the United Kingdom. This new alignment was reflected in new competitive funding mechanisms (such as *Exzellenzinitiativen* or excellence initiatives) and in the introduction of academic “rituals” modelled on the Ivy League universities or the investment of existing rituals (such as graduation ceremonies or alumni meetings) with new significance. This orientation towards elite Anglo-American universities ultimately facilitated the transfer of Anglo-American academic acknowledgment practices to the German scholarly landscape, as a small but personal element of academic communication and self-presentation. In their acknowledgments, then, authors no longer mentioned just their scholarship providers, but highlighted the (elite) institutions where they had conducted research or presented their work.

## V. Conclusion and Outlook

From a historical perspective, we can discern three ideal types of academic acknowledgments: the deferential paean of praise and



rhetorically sophisticated statement of thanks of the early modern period; the self-effacing acknowledgments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and the in-depth, subjectivizing variant of the twenty-first century. These types each had their own apogees, yet chronologically they not only followed one another, but existed side by side as well. Generally speaking, it seems reasonable to describe developments over the past thirty years as a process of pluralization and deconventionalization. This finding is consistent with observations on the self-presentation of academics in sociology and in other settings, as well as with the shift in gender relations and the internationalization of the humanities.<sup>63</sup> In a number of ways, sociology and history have become more diverse, and this is mirrored in acknowledgments. At the same time, the sites of narrative self-presentation have shifted. While the academic résumé has been reduced from an autobiographical story previously formulated in the main text to a bullet-pointed and standardized CV,<sup>64</sup> the narrative elements in acknowledgments have increased.

However – and here I conclude by highlighting potential future research foci – a different picture will likely emerge if one examines who is mentioned in academic acknowledgments not through the lens of cultural history, but instead – incorporating additional sources – takes a more socio-historical approach to who in fact speaks in such texts. Who has the opportunity to express their thanks publicly in such texts in the first place? An article in the journal of the German Association of University Professors and Lecturers (Deutscher Hochschulverband or DHV) entitled “Classism in Academia” suggests that the section of society that appears in academic acknowledgments is increasingly narrow and homogeneous.<sup>65</sup> According to the German National Association for Student Affairs (Deutsches Studentenwerk), students whose parents have no academic qualifications, often referred to as “working-class children” (*Arbeiterkinder*), continue to be underrepresented within the student body. In Germany’s *Leistungsgesellschaft* (“merit-based society” or “meritocracy”), family background still plays a major role in individuals’ educational success. This, too, is reflected in

<sup>63</sup> Hollstein and Schütze, “Selbstdarstellungen in der Wissenschaft” (note 33); Etzemüller, *Auftritt* (note 3).

<sup>64</sup> Julian Hamann and Wolfgang Kaltenbrunner, “Biographical Representation, from Narrative to List. The Evolution of Curricula Vitae in the Humanities, 1950 to 2010,” *Research Evaluation* 31 (2022): 438–451.

<sup>65</sup> Tanja Gabriele Baudson and Riccardo Altieri, “Klassismus in Academia. Wer kommt an die Spitze?,” *Forschung & Lehre*, January 13, 2022.

<sup>66</sup> See Julia Reuter et al., eds., *Vom Arbeiterkind zur Professur. Sozialer Aufstieg in der Wissenschaft. Auto-biographische Notizen und soziobiographische Analysen*, (Bielefeld, 2020); Christina Möller, *Herkunft zählt (fast) immer. Soziale Ungleichheit unter Universitätsprofessorinnen und -professoren*, (Weinheim, 2015).

<sup>67</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Die feinen Unterschiede. Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft*, 27th edn., (Frankfurt a.M., 2020); Andreas Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten. Zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, (Berlin, 2017).

acknowledgments. Again and again, doctoral students thank their parents not only for general human support, but also for specific contributions to the completion of a manuscript — for example as proofreaders or as (co-)organizers and funders of research trips. Among doctoral and postdoctoral students, as well as professors, the proportion of “working-class children” decreases even further as one moves up the hierarchy of academic qualifications.<sup>66</sup>

It is only a slight overstatement to say that in present-day academic acknowledgments the daughters and sons of academics thank their academic teachers and their university-educated parents. This social narrowing coincides with a period in which friends and family have become much more visible in acknowledgments and may offer further insight into why this genre has diversified so substantially since the 1980s and 1990s. To paraphrase Pierre Bourdieu and Andreas Reckwitz, subtle markers — within acknowledgments formulated with as much originality as possible — may play a significant role in generating distinction within a peer group that is once again becoming more homogeneous.<sup>67</sup>

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