

B.G. Niebuhr's Romantic Imagination
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Barthold G. Niebuhr's life, which spanned 1776 to 1831, corresponded almost exactly to the first generation of German Romanticism. To posterity, N was the founder of the source-critical historiography. But just how insulated was his historical practice from larger philosophical and aesthetic systems developing around him? True, N vocally eschewed the influence of any philosophy on his history (Lieber *Reminiscences of Niebuhr*, 1835), yet earlier in his life he had been so impressed by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* that he proclaimed his desire to use it as the foundation (*Grundsätze*) for his own history.

This question has (so far as I know) been posed only once previously, in a 1935 Leipzig dissertation, published as *Niebuhr und die Romantik* (Renker). R argues that N was, on the whole, unimpressed by Romantic poetry, ambivalent towards post-Kantian, Romantic metaphysics, and largely avoided the movement altogether. This claim over simplifies Romanticism. A recent article identifies Romanticism's "opposition to the modern. . . world" and its "conviction that in modern . . . reality something precious has been lost. . ." as its unifying trait (Sayre and Löwy 2005). This broader definition lets us see that N did not wholly divorce himself from the Romantics.

This paper will explore one example: N's lecture on the Gracchi, delivered in 1829 at Bonn. Faced with notoriously poor sources, N applied his knowledge of the 19th century Italian socio-political system, gained while ambassador to the Papal States in 1818/19, to the Gracchi. He explicitly compared the two time periods at his lecture's beginning and set the brothers' struggle as one between Italy's traditional, peasant society and a new, modern one: urban and capitalistic.

N's account of the Gracchi influenced future accounts and shares many similarities with even current accounts of mid/late Republican Italy. Ironically, these narratives ultimately derive not from N's scientific, source-critical method but rather from his much less noticed Romantic imagination.

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