



A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present

By Rens Bod

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Many histories of science have been written, but *A New History of the Humanities* offers the first overarching history of the humanities from Antiquity to the present. There are already historical studies of musicology, logic, art history, linguistics, and historiography, but this volume gathers these, and many other humanities disciplines, into a single coherent account.

Its central theme is the way in which scholars throughout the ages and in virtually all civilizations have sought to identify patterns in texts, art, music, languages, literature, and the past. What rules can we apply if we wish to determine whether a tale about the past is trustworthy? By what criteria are we to distinguish consonant from dissonant musical intervals? What rules jointly describe all possible grammatical sentences in a language? How can modern digital methods enhance pattern-seeking in the humanities? Rens Bod contends that the hallowed opposition between the sciences (mathematical, experimental, dominated by universal laws) and the humanities (allegedly concerned with unique events and hermeneutic methods) is a mistake born of a myopic failure to appreciate the pattern-seeking that lies at the heart of this inquiry.

A New History of the Humanities amounts to a persuasive plea to give Panini, Valla, Bopp, and countless other often overlooked intellectual giants their rightful place next to the likes of Galileo, Newton, and Einstein.

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Editorial Review

Review

"An extraordinarily ambitious undertaking... What Bod has written is not just a "new" history. It is the first ever history of its kind." -- Noel Malcolm, *The Times Literary Supplement*

"Bod's book is designed as an opening salvo in a grand project to develop the history of the humanities as a subfield on par with (and potentially in close alliance with) the history of science, with a view to building a history of knowledge-making more generally ... Bod's energetic initiatives are a fine example of the shifting categories of research" --*American Historical Review*

"Too often humanities scholars believe that they are moving toward science when they use empirical methods, Bod reflected. They are wrong: humanities scholars using empirical methods are returning to their own historical roots in the *studia humanitatis* of the 15th century, when the empirical approach was first invented." --Michael Shermer, *Scientific American*

"The *telos* of his book is not just to write a story, but to make a case for the humanities as a discipline of progress" - Seth Lehrer, "Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies"

"Bod's work did create a big sensation not only in the academic scene but also in the public and major newspapers in the Netherlands, England, and more generally Western Europe. Not only did he accomplish something that has not been done before, namely, a written history of the humanities, but he also takes a perspective to this enterprise that redefines the role of the humanities especially in relation to the natural sciences." - Oliver Glanz, *Seminary Studies*

"Bod convincingly shows that since antiquity there have existed lines of humanistic investigation that have pursued the search for general laws governing the functioning of language, of texts or of history, very similar to the natural sciences." - Andrea Bonaccorsi, *Il Sole 24 Ore*

"Bod takes the humanities back to their rightful place in the family tree of sciences." -Frederik Stjernfelt, *Weekendavisen*, Copenhagen [translated]

"Bod's effort has become a reason for debate and interdisciplinary encounters among different scholars who

agree that the 'disunity' of the sciences, which is commonplace in the post-positivist epistemological era, does not necessarily mean disunity of culture." - Alessandro Pagnini, *Domenica24* [translated]

"The current handwringing and doomsaying in academia concerning the study of humanities and its support, especially in the United States, makes Rens Bod's book not only an interesting read, but also timely and ambitious." - Dustin Mengelkoch, *Renaissance Quarterly*

"In case anyone reading this review is not yet impressed, the author takes care, under each heading, to discuss developments not just in Europe but also (when appropriate) in India, China, and the civilization of Islam. The result is undeniably impressive -- and hugely informative." - John Henry, *Isis*

About the Author

Rens Bod is a professor at the Institute for Logic, Language and Computation at the University of Amsterdam. He has published extensively on linguistics and the history of the humanities.

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