



# Q&A

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## What area of research do you focus on and why?

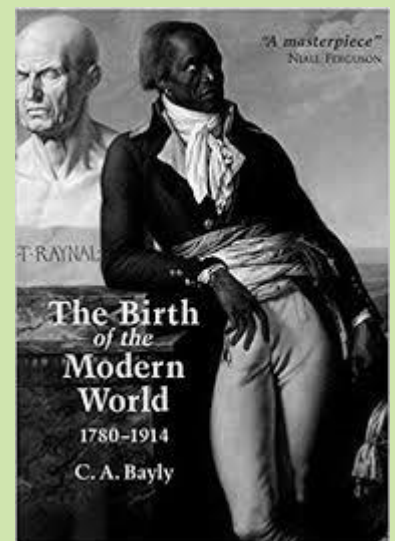
I would describe myself as a historian of politics and society in modern Europe. In terms of the time period I am working on, the period between 1850 and 1950 is my main focus. I find these 100 years particularly interesting because they saw the emergence of what we now call “modernity” and “global society” – not just in terms of the economy but also with regards to politics and culture.

The thing that interests me the most is the rise of the modern state during this period and how it changed people’s identities. Rather than being mere subjects of a monarch many people now claimed a much more active role as “citizens” of their states. This led to the rise of new ideas and movements that still shape our politics today. This is something that fascinates me, and I think understanding these developments also helps us to understand what’s going on today.

That said, I have always also had a keen interest in history beyond my own specialism. I enjoy reading about classical and medieval history a lot. I am always fascinated how old certain ideas and problems are that we usually see as absolutely “modern”.

## What book in your field should everyone read?

There are so many great books on my period that it’s very hard to pick one definitive reading. However, when asked I would always recommend Christopher A. Bayly’s *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*. It’s a masterful account of the manifold connections between Africa, America, Europe and Asia. It is fascinating to see how strongly connected societies were across the globe already 200 years ago. Globalisation and global society are not things that emerged in the last couple of years but can be traced back right to beginning of the modern period (and beyond). I think the book really helps to place current developments into a broader perspective.





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## **Which book inspired you to study History?**

I have always had an interest in the past and enjoyed History lessons at school. We had a great teacher who encouraged us to read widely, and I think that had the greatest impact on me. When I approached the German version of A-Levels, I remember that Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes* left a lasting impression on me. I still admire Hobsbawm's ability to write with the same authority about music as about high politics. Society is a diverse and complex thing and good historians try to capture the whole picture.

## **What book are you currently reading?**

I am actually reading two books at the moment. One is study on the Weimar constitution by a former judge at German Supreme Court, Udo di Fabio. It's fascinating to see how a trained lawyer looks at something that many historians of modern Germany have grappled with. The other book is David Goldblatt's *The Game of Our Lives*, a history of English Premier League. I like that this book tries to explain the rise of modern hyper-commercial football as a product of the social and cultural circumstances of the 1980s.

## **Which historian has had the greatest influence on you?**

When I was an undergraduate student, the influential German historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler's approach to writing the history of whole societies ("Gesellschaftsgeschichte") really had a huge impact on me. Wehler tried to capture everything that was going on at a specific time, including arts, culture, politics, economy, and science. I very much admire his ability to look at the bigger picture without neglecting the relevant details. This ability to "zoom" in and out is probably the best skill historians can develop.

## **What is the best museum you have ever been to?**

One of the most "fun" museums I have ever been to is the National Football Museum in Manchester. As a massive football fan, I really like the way the museum tells the history of the sport as a social and cultural phenomenon. It's also a bit strange to re-discover some events that I remember in some detail myself, like the 1990 World Cup, as parts of history in a museum exhibition.

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