

Methodological guidelines

Before submitting an article to *Orbis Idearum. European Journal of the History of Ideas*, please very carefully read these instructions. A large number of submissions are desk-rejected by the editorial board or rejected by the reviewers during the peer review process because they “do not belong to the history of ideas.” This disciplinary focus of the journal is an important initial evaluation criterion, something which is reflected by the name of the journal itself. As the reviewers often observe, the papers that are rejected are often interesting and well written, but they have nothing to do with the discipline. When considering submitting a manuscript to the journal, you should be convinced that it clearly falls within the mission and methods of the “history of ideas.”

Our journal publishes contributions to the disciplinary area SH6_14 (history of ideas, intellectual history, history of economic thought), following the classification provided by the European Research Council (ERC). According to the Scopus classification, the journal also covers “religious studies,” as many of the published articles are contributions to “the history of religious ideas.” Mind that this is still history of ideas. We do not publish contributions to pure theology, or contributions based on surveys about the religious beliefs of the inhabitants of a given region.

Before submitting your manuscript, please consider the following five questions in order to determine if your contribution fits into the journal’s mission.

First. Have you ever heard of Arthur Lovejoy, Quentin Skinner, Mark Bevir, John Dunn, Daniel Roche, or Jacques Le Goff – just to mention a few of the more influential names in the history of ideas? If these names are unknown to you, you are probably not a professional historian of ideas. It is not strictly necessary to be working in the field, however, it is important that you be familiar with the methods and theoretical approaches of the field. Again, your work needs to belong to SH6_14.

Second. Is the idea you are writing about your own idea or someone else’s? In other disciplines, if the idea is your own, it is a good thing. In the history of ideas, the author of the article is never the inventor the idea being analyzed. The historian of ideas traces the history of an idea (a term, a concept, a theory) that already exists in documents of the past. If the idea is new (and perhaps requires a neologism to be expressed), it means it has no history (at least of relevance for the field). Therefore, the research does not belong to the history of ideas. In this field, research is original not when the idea is new, but when the history of that idea has never been written.

Third. Does your bibliography of your article include only recent sources (articles, books, documents)? This is also a very good thing in other disciplines, because it testifies to the research being current. In the context of the history of ideas, however, it is generally a warning sign. Since history is about the past and not the present, it means that primary sources are missing. Secondary sources can (and indeed must) also be recent, because, only if we know recent works, we can be sure that our research is original. However, the primary sources are generally old, if not ancient. The lack of either primary or secondary sources is most likely a sign that your research is not historical in character.

Fourth. Is the fundamental thesis of your article analytic-descriptive or axio-normative in character? In other words, are you telling your readers how reality *is* or how it *ought to be*? If you offer us a reflection on the evils of the world and tell us that the world would be a better place if there were no corruption, violence, or discrimination, you are saying something very interesting and important, but it is not history of ideas. The historian of ideas – as well as the historian tout court – reconstructs, interprets, and describes “facts” as they actually happened. For an historian of ideas, a “fact” is the presence of a term-and-concept in a document – regardless of whether we like that idea, if we think it is true or false, right or wrong. Your own personal evaluation of that idea can be added at the end of the article, in the conclusions, but it should not be the main argument of research in the history of ideas. If you cannot help telling the reader what is “the moral of the story,” instead of letting them draw their own conclusions, do it at the end of the article or in footnotes.

Fifth. Does the narration in your manuscript move from a date in the past to another date closer to our time (or to the present)? If this is not the case, this is another alarm bell. Historiography cannot be reduced to chronology, true, but it nonetheless presupposes a chronology. If your article does not develop chronologically over a well-defined period of time, it is most likely not history of ideas.