

ANNA MORPURGO DAVIES, 10 YEARS ON

**Role model: A linguists' historian of linguistics**

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Why was Anna Morpurgo such an exceptional **historian** of historical linguistics, of the nineteenth century in particular, arguably its most fruitful period? Because she was a first-rate **historical linguist** of her own time. Only someone like Anna could write *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics* (vol. 4 of Giulio Lepschy's *History of Linguistics*) and its companion piece, 'Language classification in the nineteenth century' (in vol. 13 of Thomas Sebeok's *Current Trends in Linguistics*). In her own words (in Keith Brown and Vivien Law's collection of autobiographical sketches, *Linguistics in Britain*): "At the time [19th century] the excitement must have been overpowering, and I began to understand what vibrant scholarship meant. At the same time I acquired a new understanding of what I thought I knew; I now saw how it had been reached, and that opened new vistas about certainties and above all uncertainties. In a way I was relearning my subject, making it mine in a way which I had not previously experienced. [...] Compared with other authors my one advantage was that I knew, and cared for, what nineteenth-century scholars were doing." Other than Anna, I'm not aware of many other historians of science, in our line of scholarship on the fringe of the hard sciences, who so intimately knew and passionately cared for the fields whose histories they were writing, poised to be taking things further than their constant interlocutors, the past giants and their cohorts, ordinary mortals like us. Other than Anna, I've been lucky to make the personal acquaintance of three of them: Willem Levelt (*A History of Psycholinguistics*), Paul Kiparsky (*Pāṇini as a Variationist, Some Theoretical Problems in Pāṇini's Grammar*, and other Pāṇinian writings), and, beyond my own narrow disciplinary compass, Ernst Mayr (*The Growth of Biological Thought: Diversity, Evolution, and Inheritance*). Come to think of it, most recently, the *Oxford History of Phonology* that Elan Dresher and Harry van der Hulst have assembled is a phonologists' history, too: Anna would have approved.

I treasure Anna's parting gift for me, Jan Baudouin de Courtenay's personal copy of Franz Bopp's *Über das Conjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache*, and miss the hours of gossiping about the foibles and quirks, not so much of the past masters as of the followers in their footsteps from the overlapping circles of our acquaintance.

FRANS PLANK