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Western(ish): Periods and Maps¹

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Medievalists—I am thinking of Bruno Dumézil in particular, the expert on “Barbarians”²—keep reminding students that “Britain” and “France” changed population, languages, religions and territories before the present day. To replace ingrained habits of thought that obscure continuities and discontinuities, we highlight the facts. For example, Dumézil points out that there is no continuity or self-explanatory logic to the political, language, territorial, or legal entities we study. We replace obsolete terms such as Anglo-Saxon, reveal the participation in slave trade by authors of the literary canon and teach about the return of cultural belongings. Below, I reflect on a few recent experiences along these lines.

Linear or Cyclical?

This essay will erase and redraw period lines and maps. However, purely for aesthetic pleasure, I would like to begin by drawing some new lines for others to erase. The obvious question is: when do the Middle Ages end? The period from 500–1520 is a series of proto-Renaissances, Carolingian, Ottonian, Gothic, each characterized by a return to Antique models and increased activity along the trade networks disseminating scientific and literary works, luxury objects and materials: gold, ivory, silk, fur, plants. The period from 1520–1600 is also—definitely!—a Renaissance. In other words, periods of wealth accumulation are cyclical. So, where is the epistemic break?

How about ca. 1550, when the *Romance of the Rose* is no longer printed or copied by hand, not even in modernized French? It will be edited in the first decades of the 1700s as a historical monument: a medieval text. In the 1400s–1500s Parisian workshops famous for the illuminated tradition of the *Rose* also launch the illuminated tradition of Petrarch’s *Trionfi*, a moralizing poem. In at least one case, the poem may have served as a coming-of-age gift in lieu of the more usual choice of a devotional manuscript, e.g. the tiny bejeweled book of hours from 1532 connected to François I, recently purchased by the Louvre (2018).³ Surprisingly, Paris, not Italy is the source of the illumination tradition of the *Trionfi*, one of the more popular texts of its time and also one of the more influential, because its serial form anticipates collections of sonnets.⁴

¹ I wish to thank the editor Christine Adams and Charles-Louis Morand-Métivier and the group that assembled under the leadership of Tracy Adams and Charles-Louis Morand-Métivier to discuss the work of Madi Williams, as well as the authors of this salon, for the insights I gained and for organizing the lovely discussion groups that brought us together. These meetings and correspondence were precious moments of intellectual exchange in years still marked by isolation due to the pandemic.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB9oYEusTM8>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JShZLAvDFok>

³ <https://www.louvre.fr/louvreplus/video-le-livre-d-heures-de-francois-ier>.

⁴ On the evolution of sonnet collections from that pattern, see Hassan Melehy, “Spenser and Du Bellay: Translation, Imitation, Ruin,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 40:4 (2003): 415–438.

Another candidate: Spring 1585, when tulips first bloomed in Paris. That is my favorite epistemic break because it combines the Ottomans, literature, politics, botany, bouquets, and science well ahead of the usual 1650 date that marks the end of alchemy and the beginning of science. That flourishing relied on diplomatic connections between Paris, Leiden, Vienna, and Constantinople. The resulting correspondence spans all of Europe and highlights the ambassadors' private activities as scientists and poets. The first tulips bloomed in Paris in two gardens: one, Antoine de Baïf's retreat in the suburbs, in his house in Saint-Germain-des-Près where the Palace Academy assembled. The Venetian ambassador mocks the king for wasting his time on it instead of the serious business of governance, to his mother's displeasure. De Baïf gave some bulbs to the Queen Mother in whose garden the first tulips also bloomed that spring.⁵ The tulips arrived in Paris thanks to Jean de Vulcob, former French envoy to Vienna, part of de Baïf's circle. In Vienna from 1570–76 Vulcob befriended Philip Sidney and the naturalist Carolus Clusius/Charles de l'Écluse. Their friendship continued through letters. Vulcob sent Clusius fritillaries native to his familial province, Berry and the Orléanais, in exchange for the Perso-Ottoman power flower, the tulip.⁶ That seems like an interesting Eurasian-Parisian period boundary.

My two remaining examples argue that human history is structurally cyclical, not linear. The focus on materials articulated by art historians in the last decades brings to mind an index of urban expansion: stone. Consider the creamy façades of Haussmannian buildings: they are made of stone from Saint-Leu. Its presence in Paris on a large scale is contemporary with each period of urban expansion, beginning with the earliest dated Roman monument in Paris showcased in the Musée de Cluny: the pillar of the shipmen, *pilier des nautes*, found during excavations under Notre Dame in 1710. Like Haussmann's buildings, it is "proof that corporate sponsorship is nothing new."⁷ The pillar's inscription names the sponsors, the shipping conglomerate, whence the name, *pilier des nautes*, and dedicates it to Jupiter whose statue (now lost) likely stood on top. The inscription (*Tib Caesare*) also dates it to the reign of Tiberius, 14–37 C.E. A monumental pedestal five meters high consisting of four blocks with representations of mythological figures, Gaul at the top, Roman below, it exemplifies a syncretic Gallo-Roman Paris.⁸

⁵ The queen has a number of gardens, the one by the Hôtel de la Reine whose building was just completed in 1684, later Hôtel de Soissons (today Bourse du commerce; only the majestic column survives), and the Tuileries, used earlier. For the latter, see P.-M. Bondonio, "Bernardo Carnesecchi jardinier de Marie de Médicis," *Revue du seizième siècle* 14 (1927): 389–392. According to Bondonio, Carnesecchi and his family appear in the accounts from 1565–1571, and he seems to be in charge of the Tuileries gardens planted around that later date, according to BnF ms fr 10399 (nouvelles acquisitions).

⁶ Clusius-Vulcob Correspondence, 1584–86. I gratefully thank Esther van Gelder and Florike Egmond for sharing a wealth of information including transcripts of the letters (now at <https://clusiuscorrespondence.huygens.knaw.nl>). See Florike Egmond, *The World of Carolus Clusius. Natural History in the Making* (New York: Routledge, 2010) on horticultural techniques, evolution of plant collecting, and dissemination of knowledge, including chapters on botany in France and Clusius and his correspondents. See also Nell Rivière-Platt's work on the French court, including a Masters' thesis at Université de Tours, *Autour du jardin du roi très chrétien Henri IV* (M1) and *Le jardin du Roi : alchimie et anatomie* (M2); and Esther van Gelder and Nicolas Robin, ed. *Flowers of passion and distinction: practice, expertise and identity in Clusius' world* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012).

⁷ For a summary discussion of literature and interpretation of the pillar, see Jean-Claude Béal, "Les 'nautes armés' de Lutèce : mythe ou réalité ?" *Revue archéologique* 40:2 (2005): 315–337. For the comment on corporate sponsorship see this introduction aimed at K-12: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2dvmnn>

⁸ Esus, Smertrios (war god), Tarpus Trigaranus (bull with three cranes), Cernunnos (bearded sitting god with deer antlers and gold torques). The pillar is contemporary with the prohibition of druidic assemblies and one interpretation sees it as a takeover of the old religion rather than its celebration.

It was found with similar altar-like blocks repurposed as building material during the late Empire on a pattern known from other great Roman urban centers in the North: Le Mans, Chalon-sur-Saône, Autun. They drastically shrank in sixth century and repurposed earlier public buildings as fortifications around the diminished urban area. The pillar's biography illustrates the city's metamorphoses: from pillar to fortifications to foundations to a long sleep. That time of slumber like *Belle-au-bois-dormant* during the interval between the sixth and the eighteenth century may be the very definition of early modern, the fallow time between Antiquity and the contemporary period. The last act starts in 1710, a transition into a treasured monument in a museum that happens precisely at the time when the *savants* were preparing critical editions of the *Romance of the Rose*.

The pillar is carved in limestone of Saint-Leu, soft and fine-grained. Saint-Leu quarries are North-East of Paris near Chantilly, just upstream on the Oise, facilitating transport; logically, quarries are always upstream of cities. Most Paris monuments are made of that particular stone between the first and the fourth century and possibly also later, although at that point the stone was likely reused. The stone is in use again starting in the fourteenth century, when the local Paris stone became insufficient. Unlike the limestone of Saint-Leu, Paris stone is harder, coarser, with larger fossils. The Saint-Leu limestone is a better material for heavily sculpted walls in the flamboyant style, e.g. Tour Saint-Jacques, dripping with carved details, or the parish church of the Louvre, the lace-like Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois. It was also used during the Renaissance, e.g. for the Pont-Neuf. The next wave is the neoclassical style starting with Louis XIV, 1650–1750: Louvre, Invalides, Place de la Concorde, Versailles. Harder and more resistant, Paris stone from Meudon, Sèvres, and Saint-Cloud was used for foundations in that period. Later, Saint-Leu limestone is used under Haussmann and during the Third Republic.

Its moniker *Pierre grasse* (greasy stone) designates the way it smashes/crumbles and clings as residue to tools. As it dries out after carving or sculpting, it crystallizes on the surface, like the wet fresco technique in interior wall painting. Surface crystallization helps to preserve it. It is, however, not durable in humid and freezing conditions. The heavily sculpted cornices of Gothic buildings function as an air-drying mechanism. A protective measure developed in the fourteenth century is the use of a layer of shist to insulate Saint-Leu limestone from the water-sponge sandstone.

The history of Saint-Leu stone and the *pilier des nautes* are vivid reminders that elements of capitalism and modernity are cyclically present from the first century to the 1800s and beyond. *À bas la périodisation!* Cycles of wealth, not linear progressions, are the true historical periods.

Rose, Tulip, Stone, Fever: my fourth and last example in this section also illustrates cyclical, rather than linear deployment of history and relates to the current epidemic. Covid is often compared to bubonic plague, especially Justinian and 1340s–60s, but there is a closer parallel: an epidemic of cough ca. 1414. It seemed to affect the population unequally. Adults and older people were gravely ill while bands of children and adolescents roamed the streets. Not many people died but life stopped in Paris for some eighteen months. Evoked by Paul Veyne in *Comment on écrit l'histoire*,⁹ the description of the cough epidemic appears in the *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris* (1414): “God willed that, by a bad corrupt air that descended on the world, more than a hundred thousand people in Paris lost sleep and the

⁹ Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire: Essai de l'épistémologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1971).

ability to eat and drink. This disease was associated with a cough so violent that there was no one left to sing the high mass. No one died, but everyone had a great difficulty recovering.”¹⁰ A great deal is to be learned from Veyne’s analysis of this example, a massive but now completely forgotten event. Covid certainly changed the way I now read Veyne’s pages or, in my primary sources, references to *fièvre tierce* and *quarte*, recurring fever, and other health-related concerns. Their casual tone and calm affect, shrugging-off, made in passing, previously indecipherable for me, now appear familiar: a coping mechanism. To sum up: it appears that urban growth and epidemics are cyclical events, but they are spaced so far apart on a scale of human life that only historiography enables us to make sense of some patterns that characterize them.

Western(ish)

In this section of the essay, I want to address another way we partition knowledge: through geographic designations. Like periodization, this partitioning has the effect of making some knowledge less accessible. Allow me to recount a personal anecdote. I was invited to provide an Eastern European section to a new history of the Middle Ages. Other contributors to the volume would present specific examples; my role was to provide an overview suitable for teaching. My first draft included a long explanation that highlighted the many religions (polytheism, cult of ancestors, cult of planets and seasons, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, each including numerous varieties, for instance Arian, Catholic, Orthodox) and language groups (Tatar, Mongolic, Finno-Ugric, Slavic, Hebrew, Romance, Greek), each with their own archival and literary tradition written in a panoply of alphabets (Runic, Uighur, Mongol, Arabic, Russian, Latin, Hebrew). Since there was no way to account for everything, my first draft offered a few salient examples illustrating three zones where expert scholars already summarized the field: Russia, Poland, and Prague. The resulting draft was too much and too little, too broad and too specific. My second draft included more Czech, Rus, Viking, Jewish, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Muslim examples arranged thematically; I removed the detailed Prague segment. That approach was flawed. My irritation with this project mounted as my third draft promised to be still more challenging: to write in broad terms only, leaving out the Vikings, accounts by Muslim merchants and travelers, Ottomans, Mamluks, and Russia. Western Europe now included Polish, Ukrainian, Czech, Hungarian and Catholic examples but excluded Russian Orthodox, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Mamluk history. That was a great deal more material than typical preexisting introductions to the field have, but still far less than they should have.

At this point in my desperate attempts to pour an ocean-full of water into a kids’ party balloon, I realized that our shared idea of medieval Western Europe unintentionally makes my task impossible. The idea of the West itself results in major gaps of knowledge: we neglect the history of Orthodox Christianity, Muslims, Mongols, polytheism. Historians of slavery invite us to think of Marco Polo (1270s) and Crimea as part of the slaving Western European Genoese empire, as Hannah Barker does in *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500*. We can connect these dots to the Genoese slaving empire in Italy in the late 1400s and the Renaissance it funded. Barker’s brilliant book and her essay on the legends about the beginning of the Plague in Caffa is a great example of this much-needed revision.¹¹

¹⁰ Cited by Veyne, *Comment on écrit l’histoire*, 27–29, at 28.

¹¹ Hannah Barker, “Laying the Corpses to Rest: Grain, Embargoes, and Yersinia Pestis in the Black Sea, 1346–1348,” BodoArXiv. May 2, 2020, doi:10.34055/osf.io/rqn8h.

I want to emphasize that the failures are my own—but that removing the Golden Horde, Orthodox Russia, Byzantine Greece, Ottomans and Mamluks, Roman Syria and the Caliphate, North Africa and Iberia from writing about Eastern Europe is ill-advised on principle. As Marie Favereau¹² brilliantly shows, the Jogailos, polytheistic rulers of Lithuania, correspond with the Mongols. The Horde ruled Crimea until the 1500s and was responsible for the split in the center of gravity, previously located in Kiev. By funding the rise of Russia, the Mongols unintentionally created two rival powers, Kiev and Moscow, with consequences we see to this day. For a while, Kiev was absorbed into the Polish-Lithuanian behemoth, but the resentment against that colonial erasure simmered and erupted in regular uprisings. The simmering conflict also contributed to the continuation of the slave trade: the racialization of centuries-old colonial resentment enabled centuries of slave raids.

The problem—or rather, the irreducible complexity—is that in addition to being polytheistic, Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim we are also French and Italian. The first Gothic building in Prague is the Franciscan foundation from the time of Clare of Assisi (1231). Angevin queens populate our historical record.

To begin the slow process of summarizing that history, I suggest we should first discard the idea of Eastern or Central Europe. It's like saying "Central New York." There is no Central New York. There is Manhattan, Brooklyn, and so on, and all are New York. People from New Jersey and Pennsylvania say they are from New York, for brevity's sake. I suspect that "Central Europe" is, similarly, something that only people who have no idea about it can imagine. If I could have my way the third draft would be nothing like the first two. It would start with the Mongols. I even have the perfect opening line: "Western Europe extends from Paris to Afghanistan."

Polytheism

Lithuania-Poland is a commonwealth, a political organism created by consecutive agreements from 1386-1569, colonized in 1795 but reestablished again from 1918-39. When it begins, the majority of the population belongs to a panoply of Baltic, Slavic, and Turkic polytheistic traditions that survive to our times, assimilated into monotheistic Christian, Muslim, or Jewish ritual. Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities develop, the latter one of the largest in Europe. Tatars, Mongols, Byzantines, and Ottomans shape this area. So do Rome, the Angevins, Italy, the Hanseatic Lige, as well as the spectacularly adaptable colonizing crusader orders that, after Reformation, convert and transform themselves into Prussia. These components of the commonwealth are in syncretic dialogue, transforming, moving, and interweaving with each other.

I am inspired by current work on Native traditions, for example, the recorded performance of the dance of the Macaws juxtaposed with precolonial Mayan monuments in a 2022 exhibit at the Met.¹³ We can recover polytheistic traditions in Europe by juxtaposing the material and written record with surviving traditions. Turkic around the Black Sea and along the Dniepr,

¹² Marie Favereau Dumenjou, *La Horde d'Or. Les héritiers de Gengis Khan* (Paris: Editions de la Flandronnière, 2014); *La Horde d'Or et le sultanat mamelouk. Naissance d'une alliance* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2018); *La Horde d'Or et l'islamisation des steppes eurasiatiques* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2018); the graphic novel *La Horde d'or - les héritiers de Gengis Khan* (Rouen: Petit à petit, 2020); and *The Horde: How the Mongols Changed the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021).

¹³ <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2022/gods-divinity-maya-art>

Kaszëbë in the North, Mazurÿ in the Lakes region, White, Black, Prairie, and numerous other groups have vibrant, continuous, living traditions upon which we can draw.

Global Book Lab

Working on the newly-funded Global Book Lab at Miami, a collaboration between the Libraries, Art Museum, and the Humanities Center, we redefined the book broadly as the material support for culture, history and memory. This enables us to include amulets, seals, tablets, and other supports for writing, visual representations, and symbols, as well as Native American archival documents, wampum, petroglyphs, *mazinibaganjiganan* (dental pictographs), ribbon work, and global collections of pottery, lusterware, coins, medals, and sculpture. The practical reason for the redefinition was to engage students in hands-on research in museum and library collections. But more importantly, it was a necessary redefinition that imposed itself when we included contemporary Native art.¹⁴

In this part of the essay, I reflect on the difference between script and other visual and material objects. Our redefinition erased the distinction between script and graphic signs that are not a form of writing: not everything is structured as a language. That was an important distinction we lost when we removed, as we needed to, the distinction between prehistory, i.e. material and visual art record and history, i.e. written sources. As I hope to show, this is a good trade-off, as long as we also take into account the conceptual complexities and differences articulated by specialists who work on systems of visual representation other than writing, for example, Andréas Stauder on pre-hieroglyphics.¹⁵

We are used to thinking of the invention of script ca. 3400 BC in Mesopotamia (proto-Elamite) and Egypt, later in China (1200 BC) and Mesoamerica (Maya, 800–500 BC). There remain a dozen undeciphered early scripts: I am following here the summary by Sylvia Ferrara and her team from the University of Bologna who work on them.¹⁶ Ferrara gave the example of two undeciphered scripts, Indus Valley (3200–3500 BC) and Rongorongo, or *kohau motu no rongorongo* (“lines written to read out loud”) script on Rapa Nui known as “Easter Island,” a script used by the settlers from 800–1200 CE, functional until the 1860s and reprised in the 1880s as ornament. Of the dozen still undeciphered scripts, a surprisingly large group of three plus one—the latter represented by a single object, the Phaistos disc—are situated in the Aegean, Crete and Cyprus: Cretan hieroglyphics, Cypro-Minoan, and Linear A. As Ferrara demonstrates, computers enable significant advances in understanding these three Mediterranean scripts. Ferrara’s list implies that there are four distinct beginning-of-era periods for writing: ca. 3200 BC (Indus, Mesopotamia, Egypt), ca. 1200 BC (China), ca. 800–500 BC (Mesoamerica), and ca. 800–1200 CE (approximate arrival of settlers at Rapa Nui). This complicates periodization because we have six starting points, not a timeline.

Even though I suggest we should redefine the book as the material support of memory and history that includes both graphic representations and writing systems, the differences between these two categories have hermeneutic value, as Andréas Stauder shows by juxtaposing and contrasting pre-hieroglyphic systems of graphic signs vs. writing in the tomb U-j at Abydos and other sites (3320–3150 BC). Stauder notes that a script is organized by grammar and morphology, reflecting the structure of a language: linear sentences, declensions, conjugations, tenses. Language-like organization does not help analyze pre-

¹⁴ <https://miamioh.edu/myaamia-center/>

¹⁵ See below.

¹⁶ Louvre, lecture series marking the bicentennial of Champollion’s deciphering of hieroglyphics: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVq3XlITy3M>

hieroglyphic systems. In other words, not all systems of signs work like a language. First, he notes that graphic signs at Abydos appear across a range of materials: petroglyphs, bone and ivory tags, seal impressions, pottery. Second, graphic signs are often associated in groups of two or three (e.g. giraffe, snake, mountain). They appear in these characteristic groupings across various sites. An interesting example is the representation of giraffes and snakes on a mountain: the role of the mountain in that tripartite scheme is played by the material support, the mountain itself.

Barbarian

Some empire-building habits seem both historically grounded and perversely, remarkably portable. Bruno Dumézil's work on the continuity and discontinuity of the concept of *barbarian* across time and space reveals a continuity of structure and discontinuity of content.¹⁷

Formalisms

History writing is almost always both trying to reexamine sources and rethink the scale and structural nature of our problem, e.g. *longue durée*, deep time, nonlinear, cyclical, or spiral thinking. Revisions, changing labels, thinking in *longue durée*, cyclical or deep time enrich history and remove the barriers to let our field grow. Like a multidimensional or material model that expands a linear draft, we need all the different ways to think about periodization: the simplicity of the line, cyclical complexity, flexibility, depth.

Allow me to return for a moment to the already-mentioned essay by Veyne (1971). The example I cited above—cough epidemic—serves Veyne to discuss different historical methodologies. Veyne asks: what constitutes a historical event? *Bourgeois de Paris'* diary description of the 1414 cough epidemic can be approached *via* different historical schools and types of expertise: Maussian *fait social total*; a medical history approach to cyclical summer endemics; the constant presence of epidemics and high mortality in the preindustrial world, along the lines of Pierre Goubert's historical demography and rural history; a glimpse of urban childhood, where we can analyze age-specific behavior and *emploi de temps*, young people roaming the city at dinner time, as in the work of Philippe Ariès; economics, where we can study the diarist's reference to "wine or mustard" as the two important products which are not furnished by the urban household or its connected farm; philology, where we discuss the children's dirty urban song refrain: "all the ladies' c*** are coughing," chanted as they were sent by adults on their evening errands; folklore and linguistics as in Van Gennepe's work; history of medicine: "corrupt air"; history of religion: the diarist's comment, "mass was not sung," is the mark of a major disruptive event; demography, population, and their contemporary numerical perceptions expressed by the diarist: "more than a hundred thousand"; *longue durée*, e.g. the cultural history of the belief in fate as formulated by the diarist: "God willed."

Veyne rehearses in quick succession common answers to the question: what is the subject of history? There are trends and epochs of historiography: biography, politics, ethnology, sociology, "natural history" (human geography). History is incomplete, arbitrary, unfinished, but we create an illusion of order: "event and difference," "scale": minimal/local, middle ground, macro; *longue durée* vs. fine-grained; local vs. global, their coherence and disjunctions; local differences and "different frequencies" of certain phenomena.

¹⁷ Read Bruno Dumézil, ed. *Les Barbares* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2020), and listen to any of the brilliant series of lectures by Dumézil on youtube, especially from the University of Geneva, 2017, "Les barbares: l'altérité nécessaire?" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB9oYEusTM8>.

Trans Historical

New structures help innovation, but content is equally important. A case in point: medievalists have thoroughly rewritten the history of sex and gender. Historian Leah De Vun draws on alchemy, theology, and medicine in broad, synthetic books on nonbinary gender models. Clovis Mailet in *Les genres fluides: de Jeanne d'Arc aux saintes trans* (Paris: Arkhē, 2020) compiles lists of medieval trans saints and nonbinary knights in Latin and Byzantine literature and archives, accessible to undergraduates in pocket-book form with unputdownable essays, including on Jeanne d'Arc, and tables: a long-needed resource.¹⁸ Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt in their open access state-of-the-field introduction to *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography*, linked below¹⁹ and our co-edited collection with Greta LaFleur and Masha Raskolnikov *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality Before the Modern*, including art historian Roland Betancourt on Byzantium, Emma Campbell on insular bestiaries, Robert Mills on late medieval visual tradition, Masha Raskolnikov on *Silence*, and Gabrielle M.W. Bychowski and Micah Goodrich on Middle English and disability studies show that trans people and nonbinary visual narratives shape and define the Middle Ages; other authors in the volume analyze early modern and contemporary narratives and documents that range from Korea to Constantinople and Europe to the Americas.²⁰

Judeo-French and Judeo-Provençal

Just as with nonbinary gender archive, the importance of recovering history erased by nation-making, genocide, or slavery cannot be overemphasized. Medievalists work across today's borders—e.g., we work on the French of England (Anglo-Norman). We argue for the primordial importance of languages and cultures not taught in typical medieval French classes—e.g., Judeo-French. To expand on this topic: everyone knows that the earliest substantial recorded cache of ca. one thousand French words survived because they are written in Hebrew characters in the commentaries Rashi (1040–1105) composed in Troyes in Champagne at the time of the first crusades, well before there was any sizeable literature in French written in the Latin alphabet. The early French words survive in Rashi's commentaries, which are even today part of a continuing tradition. Trained in the Rhine valley, Rashi laments the genocide perpetrated there in 1096/4856. At around the same time, Judeo-French is the language of a community that originates in Rouen (Rodom, expelled in 1306) and expands to Norwich (expelled in 1290). The Judeo-French community bridged the Channel and was, according to some historians, the reason why French continued to be spoken in England. Along with Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Provençal, and others, Judeo-French is taught at the Oxford Center for Hebrew and Jewish studies.

Judeo-French and European history at large continue to be revised. Among the new studies that completely revised our understanding of the field are, for instance, the study of

¹⁸ See also Mailet's full-book treatment, *La parenté hagiographique, d'après Jacques de Voragine et les manuscrits enluminés de la Légende dorée (1260-1490)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

¹⁹ Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Butt, eds., *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), https://assets.ctfassets.net/4wpr2um278k7/3Ji5NdziUcIcPESRGdEx3v/39deeb17baa6f8e6dd582568e5ff47e4/9789048540266_ToC_Intro_Appendix.pdf.

²⁰ See Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov and Anna Kłosowska, eds., *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality before the Modern* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021).

fragments. "European Genizah"²¹ is a term used to describe tens of thousands of Hebrew manuscript fragments from Hebrew manuscripts broken up by Christian Europeans, dispersed, and reused in the bindings of books. The term "genizah" is a metaphor that likens the process of the discovery and study of these fragments to the research on the Cairo Genizah—that is, a collection of some 400,000 fragments and documents in the storeroom/genizah of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat (Old Cairo) that offers us an unexpected glimpse of Jewish history from the 6th–19th century CE. In some ways, the Cairo Genizah is one of the largest extant premodern manuscript libraries in the world. Collaboration on finding and interpreting the "European Genizah" gained momentum in 2007 thanks to the project "'Books within Books': Hebrew Fragments in European Libraries" headed by Judith Olszowy-Schlanger and including collaborators from 14 countries. The "Books within Books" project already documented the existence of ten times as many Hebrew manuscripts in medieval Europe than we previously knew were extant.²² To give another example of a major discovery, in 1976, a large early twelfth century Romanesque building was discovered, part of the medieval Jewish quarter of Rouen, named *maison sublime* after one of the sixteen surviving Hebrew graffiti, citing the line from the Book of Kings: "may your house be sublime/elevated" (1 Kings 9:8). The edifice may have been three stories tall and the extant portion consists of generous volumes and arcades, including an entrance guarded by columns decorated with a small relief of a lion and a dragon.

Medievalists like to shift the kaleidoscope with which we view the past to show continuity or difference. We also combine disciplines in our *apprentissage*: paleographer, linguist, codicologist, art historian. Each subfield has a different periodization across ten centuries (500-1500 CE). The further you venture away from a narrow subfield or timeframe, the more unrelated the periodizations become: Hegira vs. C.E.; Abbasid, Ayyubid, Fatimid vs. Merovingian, Carolingian, etc. Crossovers are always productive—everyone knows that the interesting bits are at the edges of fields—but we must go further.

Perhaps the only undigested and insufficiently examined boundaries in the narratives about the Middle Ages—with consequences for our understanding of the period—lie not along the lines of periods or languages, which we continually reexamine, but alphabets: Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Mongolian, Ge'ez. Most experts have one or two. It seems to me that this will remain a boundary that prevents us as a field from making better sense of the medieval period, although we've done much to overcome that by collaborative work. I continue to feel that a synthetic understanding of the relations between the Angevins and Byzantium, for example, always hovers just slightly out of the frame of every book I read on either of these topics. The work of such organizations as French ILARA, *Institut des langues rares*, and Oxford's Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies is crucial.²³

Aotearoa Periodization

²¹ For a summary of studies on European Hebrew fragments since the early 1900s and a critique of the metaphor "European Genizah" see Simcha Emanuel, "The European Genizah: Its Character and the History of Its Study," *Materia giudaica*, no. 24 (2019), available in open access here:

<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/history/articles/european-genizah>

²² <http://www.hebrewmanuscript.com/>. See also Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages,

<https://www.ochjs.ac.uk/language-classes/oxford-school-of-rare-jewish-languages/#:~:text=Begun%20in%20October%202021%2C%20the.and%20For%20written%20by%20Jews.>

²³ <https://ilara.hypotheses.org/>

In 2022, some of the participants in this volume, including me, participated in a reading group discussing the works of two historians of South Polynesia, Chris Jones and Madi Williams.²⁴ Williams taught us about the ways space and time are organized in Polynesian history, with emphasis on three centers—Aotearoa (New Zealand), Rēkohu (Chatham Islands) and Rapa Nui (Easter Island)—as well as Hawai'i and Mā'ohi (Tahiti). These periodizations differ from the ones for the Eurasian and African maritime and land routes. Discussing the book with Williams helped us to concretely perceive the contours of disciplinary differences, to contrast linear vs. deep or cyclical time, and to appreciate the disjunction between European centuries vs. the epochs of Native navigation and colonization in Aotearoa and Polynesia. It would be useful to develop a language grounded in Native cultures to talk about global history in ways that hold space for each of the great maritime and land networks.

Proto-Renaissance: A Final Reflection

Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) believed that the cult of the individual spread from mercantile powerhouses of Italy in the 1290s to the North in the 1300–1400s. Jules Michelet (1789–1874) imagined French barbarians storming the civilized cities of Italy in the 1520s to capture "a spark that blew into a pillar of fire": the Arts of the French Renaissance. Recent art history and focus on global and material history complicate the story of proto-Renaissance.

For example, an exhibit at Louvre-Lens, *D'or et d'ivoire: Paris, Pise, Florence, Sienne, 1250-1320* (2015) demonstrated that the Renaissance is not a one-way street: Paris gave Pisa the language of emotional realism, adding aspects that we perceive as personal and individual to Pisan hieratic style that imitates Byzantine models. A century earlier, in the mid-to-late 1100s, the rise of the romance in the vernacular as well as Gothic realism in visual arts both explicitly cite Antique models. That earlier Renaissance now has a more nuanced origins story as well, as a result of an exhibit that focused on the role of the counts of Flanders and Champagne connected by dynastic ties to Byzantium, *Une Renaissance: L'art entre Flandre et Champagne, 1150-1250* (exhibit catalogue, Reunion des musées nationaux, 2013). The exhibit brought together some 160 objects to bear on our understanding of the circulation of Gothic realism between Saint-Denis, late antique models, and textile-rich cities of Flanders.

A landslide of revisions reimagines the Middle Ages as a proto-Renaissance in the sense of the start of global colonial, slavery, and extractive networks. This landslide results from the study of slavery and trade in luxury objects and materials, part of the material/global medieval turn. Most enslaved people in the Roman empire were concentrated in its wealthiest part, Italy. The Caliphate's slaving centers were Alexandria, Fustat-Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, Baghdad, and Umayyad Cordoba: a massive geographical shift of center of the slave trade, as Michael McCormick and more recently Alice Rio and Hannah Barker have shown.²⁵ According to McCormick, the Carolingian Renaissance (late 700s–800s) and its associated prosperity and cash flow was generated by the deportation of enslaved people from North-

²⁴ See among others Madi Williams, *Polynesia, 900-1600: An overview of the history of Aotearoa, Rēkohu, and Rapa Nui* (Canterbury, NZ: University of Canterbury Press, 2021); and Chris Jones and Madi Williams, "Pacific Perspectives: Why Study Europe's Middle Ages in Aotearoa New Zealand?," in *Making the Medieval Relevant: How Medieval Studies Contribute to Improving our Understanding of the Present*, ed. Chris Jones, Conor Kostick and Klaus Oschema (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 151–170, open access at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337681050_Pacific_Perspectives_Why_study_Europe's_Middle_Ages_in_Aotearoa_New_Zealand

²⁵ On slavery in the North during the early Middle Ages, especially the Carolingians and Ottonians, see Alice Rio, *Slavery After Rome, 500-1100* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) and for a general audience, Sandrine Victor, *Les Fils de Canaan. L'Esclavage au Moyen Age* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2019).

Eastern Europe to the Caliphate to fill the labor shortage caused by the Justinian plague of the 600s.²⁶ But slavery is also part of the later proto-Renaissances.

Like the Carolingian Renaissance, the Ottonian (936–1002) and Mosan (1100s) Renaissances are characterized not only by showy gold, enamel, and bronze sculptures citing Antique models, but also the intensification of slave trade. We are used to thinking that serfdom replaced slavery as the framework of indentured labor ca. 1000, but that was not entirely the case. Rapidly growing cities at the center of empire-scale trading networks—Pisa, Genoa, Venice—dominate the 1100s–1300s. Their wealth is connected to the deportation of enslaved people via the Black Sea and the Adriatic to the Caliphate, with an estimated 10% of enslaved people, mostly very young women, destined for Italian cities such as Genoa and Venice. Enslaved people formed as much as 4% of the urban population of these cities at some counts. The prominent presence of Eastern European enslaved people was noted by Petrarch in classically racist terms in the well-known passage of *Senilia* on Venice in the mid-1300s.²⁷ One remarkable revision is the work of Sarah Guérin who invites us to re-examine Louis IX’s 1270 crusade against the Hafsid ruler of Tunisia, Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Mustansir (1253-1276) as a proto-colonial strategy to wrench more control over the gold trade from the Hafsids.²⁸ Guérin connects the 1270 crusade to a gold coin, *écu d’or* Louis issued from 1263-1270 (so-called because of the shield, *écu*, with lilies of France that fills one side). Guérin sees the 1270 crusade as proto-colonial. And, historians of Atlantic, Red Sea and Indian Ocean slavery sometimes refer to medieval examples, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea as a formative example or precedent. Medievalists including Cord Whitaker also study the Middle Ages as the proto-Renaissance of the metaphors of blackness and concepts of race.²⁹ All signs point to the fact that soon we will automatically see the Middle Ages as the proto-Renaissance of global slavery and colonialism.

About the author:

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²⁶ Michael McCormick, “New Light on the ‘Dark Ages’: How the Slave Trade Fuelled the Carolingian Economy.” *Past and Present* 177 (2002): 17–54.

²⁷ See Susan Mosher Stuard, “Ancillary Evidence for the Decline of Medieval Slavery,” *Past and Present* 149 (1995): 3-28; Hannah Barker’s magnificent *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019) and the indispensable collaborative teaching website on global medieval slavery and captivity, including up-to-date bibliographies and a selection of newly translated class readings from Arabic: <https://medievalslavery.org/>, by Carolyn Arena, Hannah Barker, Patricia Blessing, Debra Blumenthal, Jelle Bruning, Catherine Cameron, Mark Cruse, Lúcio de Sousa, Matthew Delvaux, Richard Eaton, Chouki El Hamel, Janel Fontaine, Matthew Gordon, Toby Harper, Frances Hisgen, Kim Bok-rae, Zachary Kime, Paul Lane, Rena Lauer, Noel Lenski, Shaun Marmon, Aurelia Martín Casares, Stan Mirvis, Robert Michael Morrissey, Maria Olsen, Cody Osguthorpe, Pamela Patton, Craig Perry, Ben Raffield, Joshua Robinaugh, Henriette Rødland, Jennifer Rodriguez, Tatiana Seijas, Valentin Skald, Daniel Lord Smail, Michael Smith, Josephine van den Bent, John Verano, Kevin Wang, Rebecca Winer, Don Wyatt, and Angela Zhang.

²⁸ Sarah Guérin, “Exchange of Sacrifices: West Africa in the Medieval World of Goods, c. 1300,” *The Medieval Globe*, special issue on A World within Worlds? Reassessing the “Global Turn” in Medieval Art History, ed. Christina Normore, 3.2 (2017): 97–124. See also William Chester Jordan, *The Apple of His Eye: Converts from Islam in the Reign of Louis IX*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

²⁹ Cord Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

Museum, and the College. Author of *Queer Love in the Middle Ages* (Palgrave 2005), editor/translator of Madeleine de l'Aubespine's *Selected Poems* (U Chicago P 2007), she also edited several collected volumes and journal issues, including *Violence Against Women in Medieval Texts* (UP Florida, 1998, 2018). Her most recent collaborations include *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality before the Modern* (Cornell UP 2021) with Greta LaFleur and Masha Raskolnikov, and *Disturbing Times: Medieval Pasts, Reimagined Futures* (punctum 2020) with Catherine Karkov and Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei.

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