4-13-2023

End of Ages: The End of the Middle Ages and the Problem of Periodization

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B.A. History and Philosophy, Saint Louis University, 2019

A Thesis Submitted to The Graduate School of the University of Missouri – St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in History

May
2023

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Introduction

Ancient, Medieval, and Modern. When thinking about the past, these words will invariably come to mind, a kind of innate structure that overlays history. They provide a neat and tidy framework to make sense of the past; anything you might want to talk about or think about in history can be neatly sorted into its proper period without much conscious thought. The reason is of course that this construct of periodization is deeply ingrained in Western scholarship; its roots go back centuries and is commonly understood as the tripartite scheme of history. Even as it seems so obvious or even natural, it is blatantly unnatural, an order imposed to make sense of the chaos of history. Even the system itself has ambiguities; how often do we think about what divides these periods, the dates that define the end of one and the beginning of another. When it comes to the Ancient World, the date is usually fixed at 476 AD with the end of the Western Roman Empire. However, the Middle Ages are much squishier, often a vague answer of "sometime between the mid fifteenth century and the year 1500" is the best you can get. This work will set about examining the dates that have been given over the years for the end of the Middle Ages as a kind of window into the uses and abuses of how we as historians choose to divide the past.

Schemes of periodization go back for as long as there has been a concerted effort to record the past, whether it be the ancient Sumerian King List or the division of Egyptian history into distinct Dynasties. It's a natural desire to want to impose a sense of structure on history; to better explain it, interpret it, and make sense of it. Without having some means of contextualizing and dividing it, any attempt to study the past will

quickly devolve into incoherence. If every historian had to explain the entire history of the world from Mesopotamia on just to speak to a basic aspect of the Industrial Revolution or the Thirty Years War, we would never be able to talk about anything in an understandable way. The divisions of history into distinct periods will no doubt remain to effectively divide the field into manageable areas of study rather than an unmanageable tangle of trends, events, and ideas. But that we need to use periodization in our study does not mean that they should go unexamined, or that we should neglect to discover how, when, and why the schemes of periodization we use were created.

As an example, let us look at the humble King's List as an exemplar *par excellence* of the uses and abuses of periodization. At first blush categorizing a history of a kingdom according to its rulers seems natural and uncontroversial, but there are unstated implications within such a framework. First and foremost, it serves a propagandistic purpose; the King or ruler is the central figure of history, their reigns define epochs just as they define the life and well-being of their subjects, and it places the office as a kind of immemorial institution. In effect, so long as there has been history there has been a king and the implication of such a list is that there will always be. Not coincidentally, many kings' lists stretch back to a mythological past in which the gods or demigods ruled as kings before the current mortal rulers.[1] It also has a useful product of smoothing over "incongruities" in the lineage of kings, a neat list of ruler followed by

[1] John Dillery, "The First Egyptian Narrative History: Manetho and Greek Historiography" *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Bd. 127 (1999), 93

ruler can easily obscure the political or social issues underlying those reigns and keep any breakdown of authority safely sequestered to specific events that are the exception rather than the rule. However, that a period structure is created with a certain purpose in mind does not mean that it cannot be reused or reframed by later historians to suit their own goals and advance their own narrative power. For example, the Ptolemaic Egyptian Priest Manetho wrote the famous *Aegyptiaca*, a kind of merger of traditional Egyptian History with the current trend of Greek histories. Manetho's King's List has long been one of the more authoritative lists of Egyptian Pharaohs, however he was never just a passive transferer of the old narratives, rather he reshaped them to suit the purposes of the native Egyptian priesthood. Since the beginning of foreign rule in Egypt under the Persians, the place of the Priesthood began to increase in its role as intermediaries between the new rulers and their Egyptian subjects.[2] In the few remaining narratives from the mostly lost *Aegyptiaca*, scholars have pointed out there is a clear narrative reversal in his version of events.[3] In his accounts the old Pharaohs play a less decisive role, no longer able to "see the gods" as they once did and vainly seek to regain it.[4] Instead, it is the priesthood that takes a more prominent role as intermediaries between the people and the gods, reflecting their growing position and importance within Persian and Hellenic Egyptian society.[5] Finally, Manetho's own narrative would be co-opted yet again by Jewish and later Christian Historians who

[2] Diller, "The First Egyptian Narrative History," 107
[3] Diller, "The First Egyptian Narrative History," 105-107
[4] Diller, "The First Egyptian Narrative History," 107-108
[5] Diller, "The First Egyptian Narrative History," 108-109

sought to use his own modified narrative to support their own biblical historical claims, particularly justifying the historicity of the events of the Book of Exodus, which would in turn be handed down to the earliest Egyptologists as a structure of Egyptian History.[6] This small digression should demonstrate all schemes of periodization carry baggage inherent in them, and that they can be used and re-used to serve different purposes and carry on their narratives through the ages. With this in mind, we must examine the origins and creation of the tripartite scheme of history in Europe and see what narratives lie buried within.

The earliest notions of structuring history in Western Europe can trace themselves back to the Ancient Greek poet Hesiod and his *Works and Days*. Hesiod is one of the foundational figures in ancient Greek culture, traditionally reckoned as a contemporary of Homer and even today dated to the Archaic Period before the rise of Classical Greek society. His works are a unique window into the world of Archaic Greece and the changes that would eventually lead to the classical period. In *Works and Days* Hesiod lays out what would become known as the Ages of Man, a semi-mythical scheme of understanding the history of Mankind according to five distinct Ages. The first is the Age of Gold, marking the reign of Kronos over the world in which men were like gods, dwelling among the immortals of Mount Olympus and upon their deaths became guardian spirits of mankind.[7] With the reign of Zeus the second Age, the Age of Silver began with a more childlike and impious race of long lived men, who were ultimately

[6] Diller, "The First Egyptian Narrative History," 93
[7] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, Translated by Gregory Nagy, (The Center for Hellenic Studies: March 2, 2021), lines 109-126 https://chs.harvard.edu/primary-source/hesiod-works-and-days-sb/.

struck down by Zeus for their pride and impiety.[8] From there mankind begins a slow and steady descent from Bronze to Iron, marked only by a small resurfacing of virtue in the heroic age of the Trojan War.[9] The last Age of Iron is the present age and the most lamentable one, might and strength reign above all things and the world is full of wickedness, and Hesiod believes that the coming generations will only grow worse and more terrible as humanity further declines.[10] Hesiod would remain influential throughout the Greco-Roman world, and the notion of a past Golden Age would be a staple of later Western literature and thought. By the time of the Romans, the Latin poet Ovid would reformulate the Ages in his *Metamorphoses* into four Ages emphasizing a continual decline of humanity. It wouldn't be until the advent of Christianity that this narrative would be turned on its head by St. Augustine of Hippo.

St. Augustine was a Christian Theologian and Bishop of Hippo Regius in the Late Roman Empire. As one of the most important of the Latin Church Fathers much of his thought was and has remained influential. Augustine had many intellectual interests, and among them time and history feature prominently in his writings. In a later chapter of his *Confessions*, Augustine lays out a theory of time in which he argues that our perception of time is a kind of tension within the mind as the events we predict will happen are replaced by our perception of the present and eventually stored within our memories as they pass.[11]

[8] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 127-142
[9] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 143- 173
[10] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 174-189
[11] Aurelius Augustine, *Confessions*, Translated by Maria Boulding, O.S.B. (New York: Random House, 1997), 266-270

In the realm of history, Augustine's larger program was an attempt to reconcile the history of the world with the Christian Faith; particularly he desired to reframe the history of mankind as a story of Christian salvation. This tendency found its ultimate expression in *The City of God Against the Pagans*, one of his most famous works. In it he lays out a vision of the history of the world as a struggle between two great cities: the City of Men, the worldly powers that were born of the betrayal of the devil and his fallen angels and the murderous mark of men like Cain and Romulus with the blood of their fellow wicked men and the men of God on their hand, and the Divine City that all Christians are citizens of and which has begun its entrance into the world through the Church and will come into being fully with the Second Coming and the end of days. This is very much a theory of history in service to Christian Theology, one in which the Church of which he was a leader plays a central role as the steward of the people of God until the Second Coming. However, the most influential development of his schemes of history would come not from his most famous work, but another, lesser-known work, his writings *On Genesis*.

On Genesis was written between the years 388 and 389, dating to Augustine's return to North Africa after his conversion to Christianity. The primary goal of the work is to dispute the views of the Manicheans on the book of Genesis. Augustine states that the Manichees often use misinterpretations of the early chapters of Genesis to mislead Christians and to cause them to doubt their faith. However, amid these general scriptural arguments, Augustine provides an early account of his understanding of the history of the world when he provides his understanding of the deeper meaning of the

seven days of creation in Genesis. In chapters twenty-three, twenty-four, and twenty-five, Augustine provides two interpretations of the meaning of the seven days of creation, including arguing that they reflect a symbolic path of a person towards God, a reflection of a good and just life.[12] In chapter 23, Augustine lays out the seven days of creation as being analogous to seven ages of history.

It is here that Augustine takes the notion of Ages presented in Hesiod and begins to both Christianize the old idea and reverse its trajectory; according to Augustine, the history of the world is divided into seven ages, six of which have occurred or are occurring, and one which is yet to begin. The basic structure of each age follows a pattern of cataclysm or "evening" which ends one age or day, and begins the next. The length of each age is based upon its place in the "life" of the history of the world. Augustine explicitly compares his ages to the stages of life from infancy to old age, with the specific lengths being based upon the number of biblical generations from Adam to Christ and the events that occur within them symbolically compared to the creation of the day in question. The final age, the sixth age, is the present age of history that began with the preaching of Christ; it is the old age of history; however, it sees the birth of a new man which is more spiritual than that which came before. This age is one in which for Augustine the old rituals have been cast down and a new rule has been put in its place; it is the age of Christ and His Church. The evening of this age will be the second coming of Christ and the last judgement, which will usher in the final and seventh age.

[12] Aurelius Augustine, *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees*, Translated by Roland J. Teske, S.J. (Washington: Catholic University of America, Washington D. C., 1991), 89-90

The seventh age is an age of rest and union with God, and which, unlike all the other ages, will have no end.[13]

Augustine very readily takes the framing which had been provided by Hesiod but reverses its vision, from a cyclical narrative of eternal decline from previous heights to a slow progressive narrative beginning with the fall of Adam and ending with the ultimate triumph of the second coming. Like his other narratives it is a triumphalist Christian narrative, the shift into the present age is marked by the coming of Christ and the institution of the Church which marks a new spiritual age for mankind. In many of his works Augustine makes explicit the distinct change that has occurred with the beginning of the Christian age and the end of the previous days of paganism, using the imagery of light and darkness. The previous ages are ages of darkness because they exist before Christ and were therefore with few exceptions ignorant of God, however the sixth age as the age of Christ is an age of light in which all can come to know God. Augustine's framing would long outlast him; through to modernity his schemes of ages of light and darkness would remain a common scheme for organizing chronicles of world history in the Latin West where his influence was felt the strongest.[14] And it was from the foundations laid by Augustine that the Italian Humanists of the fourteenth and fifteenth century would construct the tripartite scheme of history.

[13] Aurelius Augustine, *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees*, 83-88. The sixth age, unlike the prior five ages, has no determined length according to generations and knowledge of its end cannot be determined according to Augustine. He explains this by pointing to the model of the stages of life, unlike all other stages old age has no pre-determined end, it only ends in death which can come at any point, much like how the Second Coming will occur without warning.

[14] Theodore E. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'," *Speculum*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (April, 1942), 238

The story of how we came to the notion of modernity begins with the famous Italian poet of the thirteenth century, Petrarch. Petrarch, as one of the earliest and foremost of the humanist tradition in Italy, had a very specific view of history, that centered on Rome, as goes his famous line "What else, then, is all history, if not the praise of Rome."[15] Much of Petrarch's vision of history is interwoven with a sense of melancholy at the state of Italy and Rome. He was deeply cognizant of the fact that Rome had once been great but not only had it lost that former greatness it had even lost its memory of it; the modern Romans he met knew nothing of their imperial past. The fixation of Petrarch and his successors was a notion of renovation, that Italy once was great and if only it could come to remember its true history it could restore itself to its true glory, and to that end Petrarch began to reconsider the structures of history handed down to him. [16]

Like most of the scholars of his day, Petrarch had inherited the schemes of Ages from Augustine, and Petrarch used the ages of light and darkness in a conventional way in some of his own writings, for example he laments that the greatest luminaries of Rome, like Cicero, had the misfortune of being born before the light of Christ entered the world.[17] However, over time, Petrarch began to change as his adoration of old Rome grew along with his distaste for his own world and that of the "barbarous" peoples outside Italy's influence. Whereas Medieval historians had emphasized the continuity between the Roman Empire of antiquity with later empires, such as the Byzantine or the

[15] Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'," 237
[16] Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'," 227
[17] Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'," 227

Holy Roman Empire, as a kind of translation of imperial power, Petrarch saw a complete break with the past.[18] From there he took the old imagery and once again an idea was flipped on its head. The age of light was no longer that of Christ, but it was the light of Ancient Rome, and the darkness came with Rome's decline and fall, an age in which Petrarch languished.[19] In effect Petrarch began a break with the tradition which preceded him, one that would finally be refined by the later humanists.

The task of finalizing the notion of the tripartite scheme would finish by Leonardo Bruni and Flavio Biondo. Both men, as we shall see in a later chapter, were deeply immersed in the same project of renovation that so captivated Petrarch, and they would institute the final changes needed. For these later humanists, a change had begun to occur in the fifteenth century; whereas in the days of Petrarch it was believed that the renovation was only partially completed, by their age it was fully completed due to the efforts of Petrarch and his contemporary humanists.[20] For them, the fifteenth century represented the dawning of a new age in which light was returning and the darkness of what would come to be called the Dark Ages or Middle Ages was coming to an end. Their movement for renovation was at the forefront of this dramatic change in the history of Italy and of the world itself.[21] By the time of Biondo the period from the fall of the Empire to his present day was categorized as the age between this new

[18] Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'," 235-238
[19] Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'," 237 Petrarch is never entirely clear on exactly when the darkness begins, he ends some of his work on Roman history with the reign of Titus, but it could be any point where he felt that Rome became ruled by barbarian emperors rather than by Romans.
[20] C. C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence: The De Militia of Leonardo Bruni*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 200-201
[21] Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'," 240-241

modern age and the splendor of Rome, a neat division of history into ancient splendor followed by medieval decline leading into modern renovation, or *Renovatio*.

As with the previous examples, one can see that these schemes of periodization did not come from nothing, they have origins in the ideas and desires of the individuals who created and built upon them over the centuries; they have baggage which they carry down to us, baggage which has persisted in the minds of those who have been taught them. For example, in Edward Gibbon's famous *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, completed in 1789, the narrative was so firmly established that he was able to turn the old Augustinian historiography on its head. He blamed Christianity for the ensuing Dark Ages claiming it sapped the Roman Empire of its civic virtues and allowed its collapse.[22] It's only really been within the last century that the prejudiced notion of the Middle Ages as being a "Dark Age" of little worth or value has begun to pass out of the popular consciousness.[23] Prejudices held by Italian humanists centuries ago were clearly transmitted across time to be bought almost full cloth by both scholars and laymen well into our own time and may very well still be held by some outside the community of professional Historians. The power of these structures of periodization to unduly influence the way we view the past should give us pause. If we do not take the time to understand the baggage and implications buried within the schemes and dates that we use to divide the past, we risk passing on similar prejudices and incorrect conclusions unnecessarily. This baggage is what will be examined going forward,

[22] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (New York: Harper & Brothers: Project Guttenberg 2008).
[23] Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'," 226-227

particularly focusing on the dates at which this Medieval Period was said to end, a matter of some dispute.

The fifteenth century Italian humanists had a conception of when the Middle Ages ended, it ended with their own lifetimes which marked the dawn of the new Modern Age. This was a perfectly serviceable dating scheme for their own works; the Middle Ages were simply the time between "then" and now, but it is much less useful for later scholars. No one can deny the absurdity of trying to argue that the whole axis of European and world history hinges upon the lives of a few Florentine writers and politicians who only held a minute amount of influence in their small city state. Though their scheme persisted, it would become necessary to find a "proper" dividing line between the Middle Ages and Modernity, and over the years there have been an enumerable number of dates provided.

This work will examine a selection of the more prominent dates that have been given for the End of the Middle Ages. The first chapter will focus on one of the most cited dates, the Siege of Constantinople and the fall of the Byzantine Empire. From there the second chapter will move to a specific regional date, the Battle of Bosworth Field as an end to the Middle Ages in England. The final two chapters will examine the end of the Middle Ages as understood in Art and Military History respectively, reflecting less "concrete" divisions. In each case we will examine the background of these dates, what they are and the historical context of the events they center on, and the most interesting question: why? Why were these dates construed as an end of the Middle Ages, and what baggage do they carry for those who use them. Through this

examination, we will come to better understand the potential abuses of Periodization and the dangers that we as scholars and teachers of history need to be aware of to accurately represent the past.

1453: The Fall of Constantinople

The Fall of Constantinople in 1453 was one of the most dramatic events of the Fifteenth Century; it's little wonder that it became one of the default dates for the end of the Middle Ages in Europe. It saw the end of the last vestige of the Roman Empire and signaled the rise of Ottoman power in the East. However, the story of how it became the quintessential date has less to do with the political impact of the time, which was underwhelming, than with the political and social narrative that was built around it. In fact, the notion that Constantinople had a clear role in the dawn of modernity has much more to do with how it was used by polemicists and writers to build a growing notion of a common European Identity than anything about the event itself.

The standard narrative can be found in many sources, but here the focus will be on the early twentieth century popular works as representative of the popular understanding of the Fall of Constantinople. In Robinson Souttar's 1907 *Brief History of Medieval People*, a popular history of the Middle Ages, we find that he clearly places its end with the siege of Constantinople in 1453, stating from the outset it will mark the end of the history of Medieval Peoples.[24] What is interesting is the narrative that he uses to describe that fall. Understandably he portrays it as a tragic failure, but he does not lay this at the hands of the Byzantines or even those people fighting the siege, rather he lays the blame squarely on Europe as a whole. The true failure was of the

[24] Robinson Souttar, *A Short History of Mediaeval Peoples: From the Dawn of the Christian Era to the Fall of Constantinople*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), iii, 655-661

Western Christian kingdoms to give the aid and support to Constantinople in its hour of need and thereby allowed the ascendency of the Ottoman Turk. They should have been there and as a result were unable to defend Europe from the threat from the East. This narrative persisted even in works that do not explicitly place Constantinople as the defining end of the Middle Ages. The noted Belgian historian Henri Pirenne, in his *A History of Europe* from 1937 does not outright place the fall as the end of the Middle Ages, although it is his last area of focus before discussing the Renaissance and Reformation, which gives it an unstated significance. The narrative of tragic failure remains, although in his estimation it was an inevitable rather than preventable one.[25] More interestingly Thompson and Johnson's 1937 account, which outright disputes the significance of the Fall in the dawn of the Renaissance, still maintains an almost judgmental tone towards the failure of European powers to stop the Ottoman Advance at Constantinople.[26] Even as the event itself becomes less significant in these accounts, elements of a common narrative persist.

The question is why would this seem the obvious way to portray the siege, as a failure of Europe to defend itself? In fact, western rulers and powers had been aiding Constantinople for years, whether through loans of money, or, in the case of Venice and Genoa, providing men and ships for the city's defense. But more broadly why does it seem natural that the Kingdoms of Western Europe should be going out to protect

[25] Henri Pirenne, *A History of Europe from the Invasions to the XVI Century*, Translated by Bernard Mill, (New York: University Books, 1955), 493-498

[26]Edgar Nathaniel Johnson and James Westfall Thompson, *An Introduction to Medieval Europe: 300-1500*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1937), 944-949

Constantinople? Much of Western Europe at the time of siege had their own internal and external problems and disputes, and there were historical antipathies between the Eastern and Western Churches going back centuries. Yet the narrative is why did these mostly uninterested powers not do the "natural" thing to defend their brothers in Eastern Europe? To understand how this narrative developed, we need to understand the Fall of Constantinople, both as it was in fact as well as how it came to be imagined in the years following.

Constantinople had been dying long before the final blow was struck; it had been dying already at the dawn of the fourteenth century and had faced near death many times before. However, it had always weathered these small deaths and managed to rebuild itself, whether it be the rise of the Arab empires in the seventh century, the wars with the Bulgars, and even the disastrous sacking by Crusaders in 1204. That the old city would fall was not unforeseen, perhaps even expected, but it was by no means inevitable; Constantinople and her emperors had weathered many storms and the struggles of 1453 might have been no different.

To understand why Constantinople was significant, one needs to understand the Byzantine Empire. The Empire's origins stretch back all the way to the Late Roman Empire. Following the great political crisis of the third century, the Emperor Diocletian restored a semblance of order within the Empire and set about reorganizing its governance to deal more effectively with the threats it faced. Diocletian's reforms impacted many aspects of the Empire, but the most important of his reforms was

dividing the Empire in half between the Eastern and Western Empires.[27] Each half would have two emperors, one senior and one junior, forming a Tetrarchy. Diocletian's hope was that having multiple emperors would allow the Empire to deal with the multitude of threats it faced, rather than being centered on one emperor who could only be in one place at a time.[28] While the Tetrarchy itself would not last, its first cohort would collapse into infighting within Diocletian's own lifetime, the division between the Eastern and Western Empires would remain constant going forward. The center of power in the West would shift to wherever imperial power was strongest until the eventual collapse of the Western Empire in 476, however the Eastern Empire, which persisted long after the West fell, had its capital at the newly built city of Constantinople on the Bosporus.

The Byzantine Empire is the term scholars have used to refer to the Eastern Empire following the Collapse of the Western Empire. It refers to the settlement of Byzantium, a Hellenistic town on the Bosporus which predated Constantinople.[29] The city would remain the heart of the Empire for most of its near millennia-long existence. Over the centuries the Byzantine Empire would slowly fade from its position of power, going from the preeminent power in the Eastern Mediterranean to a shrinking regional power. Starting in the seventh century, the Empire faced numerous threats which began to cut into Byzantine territory; Arab and later Turkic states began to press into the Empire's territories in the Near East and Anatolia, Slavic groups began invading the

[27] Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 13-14
[28] Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society,* 15
[29] Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society,* 36-39

European territories from the North, and Norman raiders from the West took control of the Byzantine holdings in Italy.[30] By the thirteenth century, Byzantium was under constant threat and was politically unstable, a situation which would culminate in the disaster that was the Fourth Crusade.

The Fourth Crusade, called in 1202, was supposed to be a military expedition to Egypt, with the goal of defeating the powerful Muslim Sultan of Egypt and thereby paving the way for an eventual reconquest of the Holy Land.[31] However, due to a number of factors, the crusaders eventually found themselves supporting the claim of the recently deposed Emperor Isaac II and his son, installing them as co-emperors in exchange for a large payment and promises to recognize the authority of the Pope.[32] This ended in disaster, as the Byzantine treasury and tax base was insufficient to pay back the debt, the co-emperors were overthrown, and a new emperor refused to continue the payments. The end result was the sacking of the city in 1204 and the establishment of the Latin Empire.[33] This did not kill the Byzantine Empire as it might have seemed at the time; various territories of the Empire maintained their independence from the Latins and eventually were able to retake Constantinople under the leadership of the Palaeologus Dynasty, which would hold power until the fall in 1453.[34] Though the Latin Empire would be comparatively short lived, the trauma of the sacking would leave a deep anger in the minds of the Greeks towards the Latin West,

[30] Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society,* 588-611
[31] Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society,* 662-663
[32] Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society,* 664-665
[33] Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society,* 666
[34] Constance Head, *Imperial Twilight: The Palaiologos Dynasty and the Decline of Byzantium*, (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977), 1-4

who they blamed for the sacking and near destruction of their empire, a conflict that would define the last decades of the Empire.

By end of the fourteenth century, things were becoming dire for the Empire. Byzantium had long since ceased to be a contiguous empire; its power was limited to a few small, isolated enclaves, notably the cities of Constantinople and Thessalonica, along with some patches of territory on the Greek mainland and the Aegean Islands.[35] Constantinople itself was deeply impoverished; the days of imperial splendor had long since passed, portions of the great imperial palace of Blachernae were in disuse and disrepair, and most of the city's great cathedrals other than the Hagia Sophia were dilapidated and crumbling due to years of neglect.[36] The Imperial Treasury was constantly dry due to the diminished tax base and the dues on various loans.[37] The greatest threat to the Empire was the newly dominant Ottoman Turks who had come to dominate most of Anatolia and the Southern Balkans and would remain a constant threat.[38]

The Ottomans had originated as one of the Turkish groups which formed various emirates in Anatolia; by the turn of the 15th century, they were seemingly on the verge of total conquest having established their own dominant sultanate across the region. The Byzantine Empire even faced a similar situation to that of 1453. After a period as an

[35] Jonathan Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 24-27
[36] Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, 29-30
[37] Head, *Imperial Twilight*, 86-87. As an example: in 1369, while on a mission to try to unify the Eastern and Western Churches, the Emperor John V Was captured by his creditors and held in the city for some time until his son managed to negotiate his release and provide the funds for passage back to Constantinople.
[38] Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, 3-7

Ottoman vassal, the Byzantines faced a deadly threat; the new Sultan, Bayezid I, wished to centralize his domains under his own control. [39] Bayezid found reason to besiege and blockade Constantinople, a siege which would last approximately 8 years, forcing Emperor Manuel II to go abroad in search of support in the West.[40]

Fortunately for Manuel and his city, events beyond their control conspired to free them from this dire threat, in the form of an even greater one. In 1402, the great conqueror Timur, after having already established his power in Persia and the Middle East, turned his sights to Anatolia and the territories of Sultan Bayezid in response to Bayezid's own attacks on the other Turkish Emirs of Anatolia.[41] This act forced Bayezid to lift his siege to deal with the Timurid threat, which resulted in his spectacular defeat at the battle of Ankara, and his imprisonment by Timur.[42] A breakdown in Ottoman power followed, first because Timur set about liberating the various Ottoman vassals of the region in order to weaken the sultanate, and at the same time Bayezid's death left a power vacuum as his various sons competed for the throne.[43] In the resulting political chaos Manuel was able to reassert his independence and secured the Empire for the remainder of his reign. For the first decades of the fifteenth century, the Byzantines set about trying to restore and reinforce themselves, reclaiming lost territory and rebuilding

[39] Head, *Imperial Twilight*, 106
[40] Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, 10-13
[41] Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, 20
[42] Head, *Imperial Twilight*, 112
[43] Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, 79-80 Ottoman succession disputes were often particularly damaging due to the nature of Ottoman succession. Traditionally each son had an equal claim to their father's titles and domains, this meant that when there was a question of succession, as when Bayezid died, the result was a complete breakdown as each took control of their own bases of power hoping to be the one who successfully took control of the whole state.

defensive structures like the Hexamilion Walls near Corinth.[44] They also set about trying to play the various sons of Bayezid against each other, hoping to weaken the Ottomans and gain favorable concessions. However, by the mid-fifteenth century all their plans had fallen apart, much of their reclaimed territory was lost, and their machinations in the Ottoman disputes resulted in establishing Mehmed I as the dominant Sultan and placing themselves into a similarly threatened situation as the one they faced under Bayezid. It was in this moment of deep existential crisis that Byzantine society would begin to fray at the seams due to the growing divide over the question of the Church Union.

The Churches of the Latin West and the Greek East had been in a state of schism for centuries by the 1450s. The usual date for the beginning of the Great Schism is 1054, following a mutual excommunication between the Patriarch of Constantinople and Papal Legates sent to the city because of growing differences between the two churches. The reasons for this divide were many and diverse, ranging from differences in practices and traditions, to the major dispute over the filioque added to the Nicene Creed.[45] The excommunications began a process of growing antipathy between the East and the West which ended in the great Sacking of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade; fully severing relations between the two churches and leaving many in the Greek East hostile and unwilling to brook an attempt to mend relations with their Western neighbors. By the fifteenth century these divisions had solidified further despite

[44] Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, 77-78
[45] Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society,* 689-691

numerous attempts by both sides to affect a reconciliation. However, wider political events had begun to push the Byzantine Emperors to begin seriously considering the question of a true Church Union between the East and the West. As the Empire's fortunes continued to decline in the face of rising Ottoman power, it became increasingly apparent that aid from the Latin West would become a necessity for Byzantine independence, and as such the Paleologos Emperors began to reach out to their estranged Christian brothers to the West, which in turn heightened the divisions within the Byzantine Empire.

In 1439, John VIII, Manuel's son, reached out to the West to seek out a Church Union in what became known as the Council of Florence, a deeply controversial move in Byzantine circles. By the 1430's there was a great division between those who supported the Union and those who rejected the idea completely, both for religious as well as political reasons. The supporters of the Union, for the most part, approved of it because they saw it as the only means of saving the struggling empire as the Pope had promised to organize a Crusade among the various Catholic powers against the Ottomans which could potentially ensure Byzantine independence.[46] Among the Pro-Unionists there were also those who tended so support Latin intellectual trends of the period, such as George Scholaros, a Byzantine priest and eventual Patriarch who admired Western theology and scholarship.[47] They saw the Scholastic methods in use in the Universities of the West as a means of combatting what they perceived to be the

[46] Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society,* 794-796
[47] Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, 128

rampant superstitions of the Eastern church, most famously in the form of the great Hesychasm Controversy of the 14th century.[48]

Meanwhile, the Anti-Unionists of the Empire strongly opposed any attempt at unity with the West, religious or otherwise. The betrayal of the Fourth Crusade still lingered in the minds of many in the Empire as a reason to distrust the West. There were also the deep religious divides; for many Byzantines to accept the Latins and even potentially accept the authority of the Pope, was in defiance of their own religious principles leading many to believe that such a union was virtually impossible to accept. Even John's father, Manuel, believed such a union would be disastrous and cautioned John to merely engage with the West but never attempt a full union.[49] There were also the apparent political realities to consider. The Ottomans had in the space of a few decades gone from near destruction to fully restored to the power they wielded in the 1390's. The Ottomans in all their power were close at hand, while the Latin West and its possible aid was distant. Despite years of diplomatic overtures, the Latin Kingdoms seemed to show little interest in the situation of Byzantium beyond some small donations and shows of sympathy. Who was to say that a full Church Union would be able to rouse an uncaring West to aid? For these Anti-Unionists, the dream of a potential crusade seemed just that, a pipe dream that would never materialize, so there was no point in giving away such wide-reaching concessions to the West for nothing. At the end of the day, the pragmatic solution was just to accept that Ottoman hegemony

[48] Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, 64-65
[49] Head, *Imperial Twilight*, 131-133

was an inevitability, better to not needlessly antagonize the Sultan and try to find the best means of living under Ottoman control. Even if they might lose their political autonomy, that would be preferable to losing their religious autonomy and traditions to the Pope.[50]

In the realm of politics, most of these debates would turn out to be short-lived. John pursued his Church Union and managed to arrange an agreement at Florence, although it would be almost immediately rejected by the wider Orthodox world, and his subjects and even his own brother opposed it. The Pope was true to his word and managed to successfully organize a crusade to come to the aid of Byzantium; unfortunately, it ended in the disastrous Battle of Varna, dooming the attempt, and deterring any further Western Crusades against the Ottomans, and John would die seeing nothing gained for his efforts.[51] In 1451, a new Sultan, Mehmet, came to the throne and set about the final effort to take the city and Byzantine territory. War finally broke out and all the preparations and works of the Byzantines came to naught; their few gains were quickly retaken, the Hexamilion Walls and the Peloponnese fell in a matter of days, and the city itself was quickly besieged. Even with some minor support from the Venetians and the Genoese, the Fall of Constantinople was almost assured. After a month and half, on April 29, 1453, Pentecost Sunday, the walls of the city were breached, and Constantinople fell to the Ottoman army.[52]

[50] Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, 127-130
[51] Head, *Imperial Twilight*, 142
[52] Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, 204-206

The squabbles of Constantinople on its deathbed may seem unimportant in the grand scheme of things; nothing more than the last gasps and breaths of a dying state, but that's not the whole story. The arguments made both among the various factions of Byzantium as well as among their erstwhile Latin allies, would last far beyond the fall of the city itself. They would color the discussions that would follow among the various accounts and histories of the fall of the city, most notably on the looming questions - how and why could these events have happened, and what were there implications for the larger Christian world? From this point we will examine the historical accounts of the fall from various Christian sources and how they portrayed and explained the fall to their audiences. This will provide an understanding of how they built the modern image of the fall as an epoch-defining event in the modern consciousness. While there are, no doubt, non-Christian accounts from the Ottomans with their own interpretations of the fall, it's through these Christian sources that the Western historiographical tradition developed and will therefore be the focus of this chapter.

The Earliest sources of the fall come from a diverse group of peoples most of whom had either been witnesses to the Siege of Constantinople or else were relying upon eyewitness testimony of the events. These early accounts agree on a general chronology of events leading up to the siege and the eventual taking of the city. It began with the more aggressive policies of Mehmet II, against the advice of his father's advisor and erstwhile ally of the Byzantines, Halil Pasha. After a series of attempts at diplomatic maneuvering on both sides, Mehmet set about building a series of fortifications near the city in preparation for a siege. Mehmet brought large bombard canons meant to finally

break the walls, however they proved to be, for the most part, ineffective in creating a break in the city's defenses. During the final assault on May 29th, the breakdown came when Giovanni Giustiniani, a Genoese commander on the walls, was injured and fled. This caused a panic which in turn resulted in breakdown of the defense allowing the Ottoman forces to enter the city.[53] This fact is unsurprising given they were all reporting on recent and famous events about which their audiences were already aware and of which most of the authors had been witnesses. What is exceptional about all these accounts is a dramatic thematic harmony which they all share, which is best demonstrated through an analysis of a few of these early accounts.

The account of Nicolo Barbaro, a Venetian soldier and participant in the siege, is one of the earliest eyewitness accounts we have of the siege, probably recorded shortly after the siege as his testimony of what happened.[54] His account mostly serves as a defense of the Venetian contingent in the siege, making detailed lists of important Venetians who died or who escaped, and providing an explanation of how it was that the valiant Venetians could have failed in their goal; his answer being divine providence. For Barbaro, the city fell because God had turned against the emperor and the city, which can be clearly seen through a prophecy that Barbaro attributes to Constantine the

[53] Nicolo Barbaro, *Diary of the Siege of Constantinople*, Translated by J. R. Jones, (New York: Exposition Press, 1969), 5-6, 65-66, Although the accounts are incredibly similar there exists an occasional discrepancy, notably Barbaro's account of the siege claims that Giustiniani was not actually badly injured and that was merely an excuse to try to escape, however the fact that Giustiniani died days after the siege from wounds and can largely be attributed to the Venetian Barbaro's prejudice against the Genoise Giustiniani.

[54] Barbaro, *Diary of the Siege of Constantinople*, 5-6, we can be certain his account was at least made public if not completed shortly after the siege as it is known that the Genoese were forced to make a defense of their actions during the siege-based on Barbaro's accusations against Giustiniani.

Great, and at least three separate signs he witnessed during the siege which pointed to a providential judgement.[55] This view would hardly be unique as the common belief was that God was the God of battles and had a hand in the outcome of all battles and wars. As we shall see, Barbaro's account lacks some important thematic elements shared by others; though they would share a similar view that the Fall of Constantinople was a divinely ordained catastrophe, they would use it to make a greater claim about what that meant for their audiences.

The remainder of the sources can largely be divided into two groups based on their authors. On the one hand you have what can be called the Latin sources, accounts written by westerners who either were witnesses to the siege or were compiling the accounts of what happened for a western audience; the second group can be called the Greek sources, written by Greek authors in Greek on the siege. It is important to note that these sources are often chronologically later than accounts like that of Barbaro or Teldaldi, another eyewitness account probably transcribed in the aftermath of the siege.[56] As a result, these accounts are much more developed and attempt to provide more explanation of what happened and why it happened. They often agree with Barbaro that the city fell because of divine intervention, but notably they want to explain why it was that God so disfavored the Byzantines that He would ordain their utter destruction at the hands of Mehmet. To provide that explanation they all, to some extent or another, draw upon the Church Union debate that was raging in

[55] Barbaro, *Diary of the Siege of Constantinople*, 56, 61-62
[56] J R Melville Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1972), vii

Constantinople before and during the siege. The account of Leonard of Chios is a typical example of how this was used.

Though Leonard of Chios was a Greek author, he was very much of the Latin camp, as the Latin Archbishop of Mytilene who was a witness to the siege and writing his account for the Pope.[57] As can be imagined, Leonard was of the Pro-Union and Pro-Latin faction in the Church Union debate, and this becomes apparent in a reading of his account. He states that he came to Constantinople to enforce the Church Union and bring the Greeks into line with the Latin Church, an effort that he found near impossible due to the stubborn refusal of the Greeks to see reason or admit that the Latins might know more than the Greeks.[58] While he has all manner of negative things to say about the Byzantine Greeks, he finds a specific reason for their eventual fall to the Ottomans in their actions at the Council of Florence; their deceptiveness during the council. Leonard effectively accuses them of having lied before God by going to the council and swearing to a Church Union with the full intention of breaking said union the moment it was advantageous to them. In his mind, not only did they have the gall to lie in a full church council but have only compounded their lying ways by claiming that it was the Church Union itself which brought down God's wrath and not their actions.[59] He then points to several claimed prophetic discoveries which prove that the Latins were in the right against the Greeks.[60]

[57] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 11
[58] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts* 12
[59] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 13-14
[60] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts* 13-14

As can be seen, Leonard took the already existing narrative and began to subtly twist it to fit his own purposes; no longer are the prophetic signs and God's will neutral events, but they are given a specific reason, God's displeasure with the Greeks. Why does Leonard make this development in the narrative? The answer is to suit and support the basic purpose of his account, written to Pope Nicholas. Leonard's desire, as he states at the end of the work, is to motivate a counterattack at the Pope's order against the Turks and to therefore restore Christian control of Constantinople.[61] Emphasizing the fall because of the Greeks' particular failings helps to contextualize the tragedy in a beneficial way. It allows Leonard to emphasize the terribleness of what befell the Greeks as a motivator for a counterattack from the west, but at the same time does not turn those same atrocities into a potential obstacle to invasion. The westerners needn't fear the power of the Turks who overcame Constantinople, because their success was simply a result of God's anger at the Greeks, but because He favors the West, they would certainly be successful in their campaigns. Whether that was reflective of the military realities of the time is unimportant; this argument forms the rhetorical backbone of his account and the foundation of the narrative that would find its fullest expression in the account of Doukas.

Doukas's *Byzantine History* is one of the latest of the primary accounts of the siege, but it was notable in its influence, mostly due to its quality as a narrative. It is one of the longest accounts of the end of the Byzantine Empire, providing context to the siege, and providing very evocative characterizations of the figures at play in the events.

[61] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 41

These qualities have made his one of the more relied upon accounts of the siege, and it is from him that we gain insight into such things as the infighting between those who supported the Church Union and those who opposed it in Constantinople. Doukas develops the larger narrative of the previous sources in two major ways, first by viscerally expanding upon the sinful and evil ways of the people of Constantinople which could justify such a punishment upon them, and second to better define the Turk as an abominable and vicious enemy in the form of the Sultan Mehmet.

Doukas, while an evocative writer, is not a writer lacking in bias, as can be seen in his discussions of the fight over the Church Union. He clearly supports the Union and denigrates those who oppose it, resulting effectively in a character assassination of the people of Constantinople. Doukas characterizes most of the population as treacherous, arrogant, small-minded, and destructive in their pig-headed opposition to the Union; in his mind the sheer degree of their stubbornness overrides any potential sympathy for their views, which he ascribes less to religious disagreements and more to a visceral hatred towards the Latins and their ways. Given the history of the city and its interactions with Westerners, this might not be an unreasonable position, but Doukas will not allow for such an interpretation. He wants to show that this goes beyond just reasonable distrust into the realm of absurdity, and to demonstrate this he points to numerous examples of their excess in judgement and fear towards anything Latin. One prominent example he points to is their treatment of the Hagia Sophia, the greatest church of the city. Doukas claims that in the immediate aftermath of the Union and during the siege, many Greeks refused to even enter the church because in the liturgies

the Pope was commemorated and therefore saw the church as profaned, treating it as though it was a pagan temple rather than a church.[62] Of course, as he points out, this did not stop them from hypocritically seeking refuge in the same church they forswore when the Turks breached the walls, a further demonstration of their fickle character.[63]

Doukas's ire is particularly focused on the priests and prelates of the city who he believed were only encouraging the people's worst behavior. For example, he relates the story of a woman who was concerned because she had received the Eucharist from a Greek priest who celebrated the liturgy in the Greek style but accepted the Union. Because she opposed the Union, she eventually found a priest who claimed that it was a great sin to have received the Eucharist from the Uniate priest, so she must make penance for it.[64] Such events were particularly egregious to Doukas because of how he viewed the agreements of the Council of Florence. In his mind they had sworn to accept the Union, or at least their superiors had, and so were bound by it. To oppose the union so viscerally could be seen as nothing other than breaking their oaths, and not just oaths to men but oaths they had sworn to God in good faith with their Latin brothers.[65] Such acts could only bring down God's righteous anger, so far as Doukas is concerned. Of course, Doukas is not hard-hearted towards the suffering of the people following the Turkish victory; he was a witness to the suffering and is quick to point to the horrors that followed, but it was still, in his mind, justified as a righteous punishment. One may

[62] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 76,79, 81
[63] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 97-98
[64] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 79-80
[65] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 76

weep for their suffering but still understand that the ultimate reason was their sinful and stubborn ways. But if Doukas wants to portray this as a story of divine retribution, we also need to talk about Doukas's instrument of divine retribution, the figure of Mehmet II.

If there is a villain in Doukas's account, it is almost certainly the figure of Mehmet. Even as Doukas sees him as an inflictor of divine punishment, he still has almost nothing good to say about him. Doukas can speak well of the Turk; he compliments Mehmet's father Murad as a just and good ruler, and even compliments the blatantly corrupt Halil Pasha, if for no other reason than he was friendly to the Greeks on account of their bribes.[66] Mehmet, on the other hand, is portrayed as a monster, and Doukas says as much, at one point he even calls him an "antichrist before antichrist."[67] Mehmet is a bloodthirsty man who would stop at nothing if it gained him power, and is universally duplicitous in his actions, manipulating others and lying to get what he wants. One of his earliest actions in Doukas's account involves him murdering his stepbrother, only a few years old at most, because he might have a more legitimate claim to the throne than him.[68] While such acts weren't that uncommon in the Ottoman succession, or even in the succession of any kingdom in the Near East or in Europe, Doukas wants to use this as one of many signs of his wanton cruelty. Even Mehmet's few kind actions are not allowed to be his own; for example, he is initially very magnanimous towards his neighbors and even seems to benefit them, but this is

[66] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 59-63
[67] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 61
[68] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 60

ascribed only to his own weak political position, a façade he is required to put on until he is strong enough to shed the mask and show his true purpose. For these early years it is effectively only the intervention of Halil Pasha that the city survived and only then because Mehmet didn't yet have the prestige or power to execute him as he wanted.[69] Finally, with the fall of the city proper, Doukas is happy to emphasize the cruelties of Mehmet's sacking of the city, the riches plundered for his own benefit, the people killed or enslaved, and his various double dealings, promising safety to some only to renege his own promises when it so benefited him.[70] The picture Doukas paints is of a kind of sociopathic figure whose only delight is cruelty and personal enrichment; of course, how terrible a figure he was within the context of the rulers of his day is questionable from a more objective standpoint, even many Byzantine Emperors had been duplicitous and bloodthirsty in the past, particularly when his life is read through less hostile sources.[71] The point is that Doukas very successfully created a particular image of a vicious threatening tyrant; one without morals or scruples, one which could be used as a warning and threat to others, a tool to bring others together in opposition to such a terror, and that is exactly what latter narratives would do but with a much larger scope.

The transition is best displayed through the Chronicle of George Sphrantzes, one of the eyewitness accounts of the last days of Byzantium, which is unique in the fact

[69] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 61-63
[70] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 98-107
[71] Jones, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts*, 42-55, Laonicus Chalocondylas' *Turkish History* is a good counterexample to this trend, while he doesn't attempt to hide any of Mehmet's worse traits, he is quite apt to call him monstrous and terrible for what he did to Constantinople and the Greeks, he doesn't go so far as portray him as a monster or scourge of God as other authors did, rather he depicts him as a cunning and able ruler doing his best to solidify control over his empire against both internal and external threats at a time when the Ottoman state had only just recovered from a Civil War.

that it has two authors. The first account, referred to as the *Chronicum Minus*, was written by Sphrantzes, probably in his last days, as a reminiscence of his time in the Court of Constantinople. Meanwhile the second portion, the *Chronicum Maius*, is agreed by scholars to be the work of a noted forger, Makarios, in the mid-sixteenth century. It expands the work into a larger history of the house of Palaeologus and the Late Byzantine Empire, including an expanded account of the Fall.[72] Sphrantzes provides little of the mythic story that was being constructed by other authors; like any Greek witness he despairs at the fall but it is in very personal terms, at the start of his account he laments that it would have been better had he never been born, and ends his account bitter over his own suffering in a monastery with the hope that it may serve to act as penance for his many sins.[73] Makarios, on the other hand based much of his work on the later accounts, particularly that of Leonard of Chios, and repeats much of their characterization of Mehmet and the Ottoman Turks as monstrous scourges upon the Christians of the Empire, although with much less emphasis upon the Ecclesiastical questions between the Latin and Greek Churches. This shows how the growing mythic narrative had become the dominant narrative in the century after the Fall of Constantinople.

The narrative of Constantinople's fall would take its final form in the hands of Aeneas Piccolomini, the man who would become Pope Pius II. Pius lived a long and

[72] George Sphrantzes, *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire*, Translated by Marios Philippides, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 6-10, based in the biographical context provided by the translator Philippides
[73] Sphrantzes, *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire*, 21, 94-95

interesting life even before his career in the Church, but it was his work in the years before and during his papacy which relate to Constantinople.[74] As a cardinal, Aeneas was deeply disturbed by the Fall of Constantinople and immediately set about trying to drum up support for a Latin Crusade against the Turks to reclaim it, much like other authors of the time like Leonard of Chios.[75] Upon his election as Pope he took measures to try to build up a crusade with the intent to lead it himself, a project that ultimately ended with his death of old age before he could try to set out eastward.[76] It was in this context that Aeneas wrote the work *Europe* while still a cardinal, a work that would solidify the place of Constantinople in the broader narrative of "European History."

Europe is a straightforward work, a chronical of recent events during the reign of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III, ostensibly as a continuation of prior works which catalogued the reigns of previous emperors.[77] Rather than a straight historical account of his reign, Aeneas chose to make a geographical history of the various regions of Europe, providing accounts on the background and current events of each specific region.[78] While the idea of a general history was not in itself unusual, the idea of a

[74] Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, *Europe*, Translated by Robert Brown, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), Introduction, Pius remains one of the more colorful characters of fifteenth century Europe, going from the life of a secular scholar and poet known for his more risqué works, to a dedicated career in the church. Even in ecclesiastical matters he was known for his changeability, having gone from an early supporter of the Conciliar movement against the power of the Papacy to switching to the pro-papal camp and working to prevent any future attempts to organize an independent church council in the future. Much of our knowledge comes through his autobiography, *The Commentaries*, a unique work for the time.
[75] Piccolomini, *Europe*, Introduction
[76] Piccolomini, *Europe*, Introduction
[77] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 16-17
[78] Piccolomini, *Europe*, It should be noted that not all regional accounts in his work are equal; Aeneas wrote what he knew and cared about, so some regions only receive a chapter of coverage at most, meanwhile his home of Italy receives a detailed treatment, with a full 18 chapters out of 65 dedicated to covering major cities and regions of Italy.

"European History" was novel for the time. The geographical category of Europe as one of the three great continents alongside Asia and Africa dates back to classical antiquity, but that one could speak of a common history of Europe wasn't common; you could have a history of the Church, but it was Universal and stretched across geographical lines, there were histories of peoples but there was no single "European People" to speak of, and there were histories of empire but empires never matched neatly onto Europe, even Rome straddled all three of the classical continents. Aeneas's *Europe* was trying to build a sense that there was a kind of common thread across this diverse region such that you could speak of it in general, a land of many different peoples and regions but with a common identity and a unity, a unity that was defined, for Aeneas, by a contrast with the external world and external threats, and it is in that context that Constantinople would come to the fore.

The single largest section of *Europe* outside of the Italian Chapters is a detailed account of the Fall of Constantinople, ostensibly just an expansion of the regional chapter on Greece and the Byzantine Empire.[79] His account is fairly standard and aligns with other Latin sources; Mehmet is portrayed as an oath breaker interested only in the glory and spoils of victory, and the story of the battle follows the same path as usual up to the tragic injury of Giustiniani which broke the defense and allowed for the Turkish victory.[80] It also contains the usual references to the butchery of the Turks upon taking the city.[81] However what is most interesting in his account is who he chiefly assigns

[79] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 68-71
[80] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 93-97
[81] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 98-99

blame for the failure. Like the other Latin accounts he maintains a dim view of the Greeks themselves; according to Aeneas only two solitary Greeks maintained the defense after Giustiniani fled and he heaps scorn upon the foolish citizens who had tried to hide their riches and flee in the chaos when they could have used it to aid the city during the siege.[82] However, the chief responsible party for Aeneas are the Latins, who he claims failed to provide adequate aid to Constantinople in its hour of need, a result of their petty squabbles and feuding which prevented them from forming a united front.[83] This is a unique position, most of the other sources are happy enough to blame God's wrath or the Greeks for their own failure, but instead he turns to a condemnation of his own people. However, this change makes perfect sense by looking at the larger narrative Piccolomini constructed around the siege.

This larger narrative begins with a history of the Turks, in which Piccolomini goes to extreme lengths to denigrate and inspire revulsion towards them. He refutes any claim that they are descendants of a civilized people; they are nothing but bloodthirsty barbarians who have used warfare and butcher to build kingdoms for themselves.[84] The Ottomans specifically are portrayed as the worst of the bunch, founded by a man of no worth who assembled a great army that would attack any who stood in his way, even his own fellow Turks.[85] The Turks here are portrayed less as a people with unique

[82] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 97, 99
[83] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 94
[84] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 73-74
[85] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 74

desires and interests, and more as a force of conquest, not unlike the other Latin accounts.

However, Piccolomini provides a narrative to that common element, and places the Fall of Constantinople within the context of the failed crusade of Varna, a military invasion by the Hungarians and some Latin allies into Ottoman territory over the conquest of Serbia.[86] The specific details of the crusade are not as important as the narrative he constructs around the events. For Aeneas, the Christian forces were successful initially because they were fighting as one, making a united front against the Ottomans and managing to take important victories against the enemy. But more than that he argues that the Ottomans were deeply afraid of Europe forming a united league against them which they could not defeat.[87] It was only in the aftermath of an ill-advised truce that the tide began to turn as the Christians divided against themselves and fell to ruin.[88] The failure of the crusade and the siege was less a failure in military matters than a moral and societal failure, a failure to unite as a Christian and European force against a common enemy.

The Battle of Belgrade acts as a summation of the themes built in the stories of Varna and Constantinople. In this final chapter, Piccolomini portrays Mehmet's larger goals as clearly megalomaniacal; he does not intend to stop at Constantinople, his goals are to take Hungary and from there the whole of Latin Christendom.[89] However, unlike

[86] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 80-81
[87] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 82
[88] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 84-89
[89] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 102

at Constantinople or Varna, a united European force is able to repel the Turks and end the attempted conquest, however unsettlingly even in this moment of triumph the Christian leaders already divide themselves over the glory of victory.[90] The point Piccolomini makes is clear, the Turks are a unified and singular menace, not just to the East but to the whole of Europe, and it is only one unified Europe organized in a crusade that can hope to defeat this threat, and the constant infighting among the Christians of Europe only serves to aid the Turk in their goals. The failure of Europe to take this threat seriously is, in his mind, perilous and so he sought in his own lifetime such a crusade and it was in service to that goal that, at least in part, this book and a notion of common European identity was created by Piccolomini.

At the end of it all, Piccolomini and all the other authors never got all that they wanted from their various writings. There never would be a grand crusade to liberate the Christian East, Constantinople would remain in Ottoman hands, and as Europe changed politically and religiously even the idea of a grand united crusade seemed more remote of an idea than ever. Piccolomini as Pope Pius would die trying to organize his hoped-for crusade. However, the stories and narratives Pius and others constructed would persist well into the Modern Age, and it is from the works of Pius and his ilk that men like Souttar would build their own narratives.

By examining the Fall of Constantinople, we see how a historical narrative can be built, even if it only imperfectly matches the actual events it describes, narratives that have the power to persist long after the people who made them have died and their

[90] Piccolomini, *Europe*, 102-103

own purposes have long since passed. It seems natural that Constantinople would take a place as the turning of an era. The notion of a changing age from Middle Ages to modernity was coming into being in the Centuries after the narrative had been constructed, and what better epoch defining event in an age of growing European power and hegemony, then the first great Tragedy of Europe.

1485: The Battle of Bosworth Field

"All this divided York and Lancaster,
Divided in their dire division,
O, now, let Richmond and Elizabeth,
The true succeeders of each royal house,
By God's fair ordinance conjoin together!
And let their heirs, God, if thy will be so.
Enrich the time to come with smooth-faced peace,
With smiling plenty and fair prosperous days!"
- *Richard III, William Shakespeare*

The story of the Battle of Bosworth field that has persisted in the popular consciousness is one of triumph, of good defeating evil. It is a personal drama between two very different men. On the one side is Richard III, the King of England, a scheming vile man, the Medieval equivalent of a pantomime villain. He schemed against his brothers, was willing to do anything and everything to get power, even kill all those who would dare get in his way. This would include his own young nephews. Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, fit a heroic mold returning from unjust exile abroad to Wales and led a rebel force to take the throne from the tyrant Richard. On August 22, 1485, in a field near the small town of Bosworth Market, the Ricardian and Henrician armies met. Though outnumbered, Henry's forces miraculously carried the day and Richard III was killed in battle. With that blow, the House of Plantagenet came to an end, and Henry secured his place as Henry VII, King of England. Finally, through marriage, he was able to bring together the two strands of English nobility into one new House of Tudor that would bring about a new era of peace and prosperity for England. That is the story that is often told, and while there is an element of truth to it, it obscures a more complicated reality.

The battle of Bosworth Field as the unique end to the Middle Ages has had a long-standing prestige in English historiography. Even today the notion that this specific time and place marked a unique turning point in English history has persisted; modern scholarship such as Historian Richard Britnell's work on this period of time, while not endorsing the grandiose view of the battle, still frames this period with the question, "The Closing of the Middle Ages?", reflecting this prevalent view. Older histories are much less vague in their sentiments and clearly place Bosworth field as the transitional moment from Middle Ages to Modernity. One Encyclopedia of World History from the 1950's outright ends its section on "Late Medieval England" with the battle and the ascension of Henry Tudor to the throne.[91] This date of 1485 has clearly been a longstanding date of note in English History, but the obvious question is why has this been the case? To answer it one must understand what happened that day and the stories and narratives that were constructed around it.

The events that would lead to the Battle of Bosworth Field stretch back to 1399 and the political breakdown which resulted in the War of the Roses. In that year, Parliament passed articles of deposition against the King, Richard II, accusing him of misrule, unjust taxation, and tyranny, and therefore deeming him unfit to rule. In the aftermath, Henry Bolingbroke was proclaimed king with the assent of Parliament based on his promise to restore good government and the traditional laws of England.[92] However, Henry IV came to the throne on a shaky foundation. His legitimacy was weak

[91] William L. Langer ed., *An Encyclopedia of World History: Ancient Medieval, and Modern, Chronologically Arranged*, (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1956), 271-272
[92] David Grummitt. 2013. *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 4

by any standard. His initial attempts to claim the primacy of his ancestor Edmund Crouchback as the primary heir of Henry III to bolster himself came to naught, and his remaining connections were superseded by others. As a result, Henry IV and his successors could only base their rule upon a commitment to good governance and the popular support of the nobility and commons in Parliament.[93] This left his security, and that of the newly established Lancastrian line, subject to the winds and changeability of the mood of their supporters, and utterly reliant on the small circle of supporters which made up their own household.[94] For Henry IV this resulted in a wildly unpopular reign due to perceived financial mismanagement and failures in the war against France. Consequently, he faced attempted revolts against his reign, constant questions of his legitimacy, and continued use of royal resources to maintain the loyalty of his household, which only angered Parliament further as examples of misspending.[95]

Things began to stabilize during the reign of his son Henry V, a much more popular and competent leader. Already a well-known military commander from campaigns, he had also spent the last years of his father's reign cultivating allies among the Lancastrian circles. He restored faith in the monarchy by setting royal finances in order and pursuing a policy of restoring law and order across England.[96] However his real claim to fame was in redoubling English efforts in the war against France, famously leading English troops to victory in the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. In quick order he

[93] Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*, 4-5
[94] Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*, 6
[95] Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*, 6-8
[96] Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*, 9-10

managed to take control of Normandy, established a strong alliance with the Duke of Burgundy, and even made a claim on the Throne of France itself. His monumental successes brought him and the House of Lancaster a new degree of popularity and support, with Parliament granting him new sources of revenue to further his ambitions in France. However, success only served to paper over the deeper issues of the Lancastrian regime. Like his father he was dependent upon the household nobles of the Lancastrian Circle and much of his military gains served to benefit them as opposed to nobility more broadly. He also began to lax on his commitment to good governance as France became his sole focus, extracting money from every means available and doing nothing to alleviate the financial crisis his father had left him.[97] Although his success as a ruler managed to stabilize the regime, the cracks in its foundation remained to be inherited by his successor.

Henry VI came to the throne as a child, and therefore left the royal administration in a state of gridlock as power remained in the hands of the nobility with no single leader able to take charge until the King reached maturity. Problems began to pile up, the Burgundians betrayed England and broke the necessary alliance to keep the war going, and in spite of being crowned King of France in Paris, Henry's forces were being beaten back and the military gains of his father's reign were being overturned.[98] It is generally agreed that Henry VI failed to live up to the image and expectations of what a Medieval monarch was expected to be; he was uninterested in maintaining the war in

[97] Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*, 11-12
[98] Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*, 13-15

France, and relied extensively upon the royal household that his father and grandfather had built up over the previous decades. In many ways he was perceived as a weak king, but the loyalty his father had accrued helped him to maintain power.

Things began to shift in the 1440's as a new generation of nobles came to the fore. Henry's weakness, both real and perceived, contributed to a growing crisis in the government. Various nobles were able to act unrestrained by the King, especially those of his household who were accused by contemporaries of misusing their influence over Henry to their advantage. At the same time his perceived weakness left him unable to raise the funds necessary to deal with the growing financial crisis he inherited from his predecessors which was only made worse by the sheer cost of maintaining the gains made in France, pushing England increasingly towards a military and financial crisis.[99]

The War of the Roses has its origins in the infighting between Henry VI and the Duke of York, another figure with descent from Edward III. In 1450, a great political agitation resulted in the execution and murder of perceived traitors who were leading the King against the common good of the nation, particularly members of his household. This resulted in unrest as angry mobs began to form demanding justice against traitors. The political turmoil eventual led Henry to become more divorced from politics, leaving London and setting up a wandering court which moved across the country.[100] In this new context, the Duke of York, at this time one of the largest landowners in England,

[99] Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*, 16. It is important to understand that within the Late Medieval notion of kingship in England, being seen as active was critical. It wasn't so much important that a king be making *good* decisions so long as he was making decisions and was seen to be doing things, because that was what effectively allowed the government to function. By refusing to take action, in the minds of his subjects Henry VI was failing in his duty as king.
[100] Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*, 24-27

began to press for more power, especially against his political rival the Duke of Somerset. He particularly took advantage of the popular upswelling against traitors by making himself out to be a leader of reform and better administration of the government. In the early years of the decade, his plans seemed to backfire as his popular rhetoric held little sway with the nobles or the King. After an attempted armed outing of Somerset failed, it left him politically humiliated, and it seemed that he would fade from view.[101]

In 1453, however, Henry VI was incapacitated by mental illness, leaving the realm in the hands of the Royal Council. York was able to take advantage of the situation and take power, ousting Somerset and being proclaimed Lord Protector, ruling in Henry's stead. Under his rule the situation began to fragment even further; noble rivalries began to escalate into violence and infighting, and York was accused of partiality in his governance, and when the King recovered in 1455, York was removed from power once again. Henry and York, seeing no further means of compromise, began to arrange their options to overturn the influence and power of the other. When York led his own forces against those of the King at the Battle of Saint Albans, the War of the Roses began in earnest.[102] For the next five years York attempted to enforce his protectorate over Henry who would repeatedly attempt to secure his own independence. Eventually York would die in battle and be replaced by his son Edward who would pursue the throne outright against the claims of Henry.

[101] Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*, 28, 31-34
[102] Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*, 35, 43

By 1471, Edward's reign as king seemed to have been secured. Returning from exile in France with allies from Burgundy, Edward managed to rout the Lancastrian armies. Henry was imprisoned and died shortly thereafter, while his son and heir was killed in battle, destroying the direct Lancastrian line. This left the line of York as the most legitimate heirs in the succession from Edward III. As king, Edward IV was supported by his two younger brothers George, Duke of Clarence, and Richard, Duke of Gloucester. George had initially betrayed Edward in support of Henry before reconciling with Edward and the Lancastrians; meanwhile Richard had fled with Edward into temporary exile and fought with Edward throughout the campaign against Henry.[103] From the very beginning Richard and George were at each other's throats, fighting over lands, titles, and even wives. The situation became so severe that by 1474, portents of doom were being perceived across England, most notably sightings of a headless rider, and international opinion was that a civil war was imminent.[104] However, after a failed uprising against Edward, George was executed, the situation stabilized, and with Edward having a clear heir it seemed that the infighting had come to an end.

Edward's death in 1483 came as a shock, and the initially stable regime began to unravel. It was agreed his son, Edward V, would succeed him and his coronation was even scheduled, however he was still a child and so the question of a regency was on everyone's mind. Of primary concern among the higher nobility was the influence of the Woodvilles, the family of Edward V's mother. Edward IV had married his wife in secret

[103] Richard Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages? England, 1471-1529*, (Malden: Blackwell publishers, 1997), 7-8
[104] Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?*, 9-10

and the marriage was looked down upon due to the Woodvilles being of lower status. There was some concern about the Woodvilles gaining influence over Edward and increasing their power at the expense of other nobles. Notably, Richard himself had become their enemy, and so he took swift action to ensure that he would maintain power into the future. He took possession of the young king and had himself proclaimed Lord Protector. He then had members of the Woodville family arrested and charged with treason, before arguing that Edward V was in fact illegitimate as his parents' wedding had violated canon law.[105] His supporters compelled those nobles in London who had been planning to attend the Coronation of Edward V to instead offer the throne to Richard, which he accepted becoming Richard III while Edward V and his brother were confined to the Tower of London, never to be seen again. Within the span of three months Richard had gone from being the King's youngest brother, far from any chance in the succession, to King of England.[106]

As to the character of Richard, based on what is known about his life, he comes across as a deeply conflicted figure. His negative qualities were often on display. He was ambitious and power hungry; from his youth he had a penchant for trying to claim lands and wealth for himself. His infighting with his brother over lands very nearly caused a civil war on his return from exile. He also was unhesitant in making a grab for power upon the death of Edward IV, sidelining his nephew and taking the throne for himself. Although we cannot know with absolute certainty as to whether he was in fact

[105] P. W. Hammond and Anne F. Sutton, *Richard III: the Road to Bosworth Field*, (London: Constable, 1985), 153
[106] Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?*, 12

responsible for the deaths of his nephews, based on the trend of prior monarchs it would be a reasonable and natural conclusion, so natural that it was presumed by his enemies at the time.[107] However he also had several redeeming qualities as a leader and as a person. He seemed very interested in government reform.[108] He famously called together his Justices to confer with them on the implementation of his law. He also tried to reform the system of loans taken by the King from his nobles.[109] He was also a man of notable piety with an interest in supporting the arts.[110] Richard was a complex figure and one not easily definable in simplistic terms. He was not an outright villain, but he was not a saint. And unfortunately, his actions to take the throne had created further instabilities which would shake the Yorkist regime to its core.

In his usurpations, Richard had divided the Yorkist supporters, many of whom still supported Edward V. As was tradition since the fall of Richard II, the King's base of power was his household, many of whom were still loyal to the memory or Edward IV and rebelled against Richard for having overthrown Edward's son. The rebellion also demonstrated Richard's dependence upon his supporters in the North as opposed to the broader Yorkist coalition that had supported his brother. However, the situation was not unsalvageable, his predecessors had also had to deal with unrest and uncertainty and managed to rebuild a broader coalition. Had Richard been allowed more time, it is conceivable he could have rebuilt his legitimacy as a ruler.[111] Unfortunately, due to the

[107] Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?*, 13
[108] Hammond and Sutton, *Richard III*, 179-181
[109] Hammond and Sutton, *Richard III*, 182-184
[110] Hammond and Sutton, *Richard III*, 189-196
[111] Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?*, 13-14

influence forces beyond his control, and the actions of one man, he would never live to have that chance.

Henry Tudor was the last remaining hope for the Lancastrian succession following the death of the main line in Henry VI. His claim to the throne was a tenuous one. His father had no claim, being of Welsh descent, meanwhile, through his mother he was of the Lancastrian lineage, although from a line that had been prohibited from the succession during the reign of Henry IV.[112] Due to their Lancastrian sympathies, Henry and his uncle Jasper were exiled to the continent for 14 years following the victory of Edward IV, and any chance that he would succeed to the throne seemed increasingly unlikely until the death of Edward IV and Richard III's usurpation of the throne. Richard's actions had severely broken the alliance which formed the foundation of York rule, and as he began to rely more heavily on his supporters in the North of England, those nobles who had been loyal to the memory of Edward IV and his sons began to look for a new claimant and saw an opportunity in the form of Henry. His mother had been pushing his claim among the dissidents as an alternative to Richard, paving the way for a potential usurpation by Henry. She also made agreements with the Woodvilles, long enemies of Richard, to arrange Henry's marriage to Elizabeth of York, the daughter of Edward IV, to help bolster his claim.[113] In 1485, as Richard was working to solidify his position in England, Henry had sworn an oath to take the throne and marry Elizabeth, and, backed

[112] Chris Skidmore, *The Rise of the Tudors: The Family that Changed English History*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 22 John Beaufort, Henry's Maternal Grandfather, had been born to John of Gaunt and his wife before their marriage, and though he was declared a legitimate heir by acts of Parliament, both he and his heirs were denied a place in the succession to the throne.
[113] Skidmore, *The Rise of the Tudors*, 138-139

by the Woodvilles and Charles VIII of France, he set forth to England. Arriving at the traditional Lancastrian stronghold of Wales, he led his forces towards the Midlands, where he would meet the forces Richard had raised to subdue him near the town of Market Bosworth in Leicestershire.[114]

The famous battle occurred in a field somewhere near the town, although its exact location is subject to debate. That Richard had the clear advantage in forces is undisputed, but certain factors contributed to his ultimate failure. The Duke of Northumberland failed to provide support to Richard in his ill-fated charge, a move which led some chroniclers to accuse him of betrayal. Most famously the shift in the tide was a result of the House of Stanley, who had brought their own independent force to the battle, ultimately deciding to throw in their lot against Richard in support of Henry, giving Henry an advantage. Whatever the reason, the events of the battle are easily established. Richard, seeing an opening to Henry, led a charge hoping to end Henry once and for all; instead, he found himself killed by Stanley, his forces routed and fleeing in defeat. Richard was dead, and Henry had, against all odds, emerged victorious with nothing in the path of his claim to the Throne of England.[115]

Looking at the plain events of those years, the pretty and popular image of Bosworth loses a bit of its shine. Rather than an epic struggle of good versus evil, instead we see a fight between two would-be usurpers and opportunists taking risks for power. Though the story may not live up to the facts, it is not difficult to see that the

[114] Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?*, 14-15
[115] P. A. J. Pollard, *Late Medieval England 1399-1509*, (Edinburgh Gate, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 346-348

Battle of Bosworth Field was important. With Richard's death, the Dynasty of the Plantagenets came to an end, and a new Dynasty, that of the Tudors, took its place. It was a significant political event, but a significant event is not the same thing as the end of an era. The overthrow of Richard II was a deeply significant event that had repercussions lasting decades, and yet few would mark 1399 as the year the Middle Ages ended. The repeated struggles for power between Richard of York and Henry VI were important; the overthrow and execution of Henry VI were important, even the usurpation by Richard III was significant, but no one ascribes them the status of the end of an era. In its context, there is little that materially distinguished the events of that day in 1485 from any other events of the past 85 years. In retrospect we might say that the Tudors would remain in power and England would change dramatically under their rule, but that was far from a given in that moment. Bosworth shows much more continuity with the past than change, and the years after would maintain that sense of continuity. England would still be seen abroad as famous for its instabilities, and the notions of governance and kingship which defined it during this period would remain intact.[116] If the changes are not so stark as is popularly imagined, why do we have this vision of the consequences of Bosworth Field? Where do they come from? Understanding these events requires answering both the questions of not just how it happened, but why it was a story that Henry and those who came after him, deemed a necessary one to preserve the stability of England.

[116] Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?*, 8, 34, 43

The primary problem faced by Henry at the outset of his reign was one of legitimacy. From a military standpoint he had achieved a triumph over his enemies. Richard was dead and the Yorkist forces were scattered. As had been the case in previous battles in the civil strife, Henry's victory was widely interpreted as a sign of God's favor and support for his right to rule England as King. This semi-divine right was for many enough to justify his rule, which he explicitly claimed through right of conquest. Henry was crowned on the 30th of October 1485, though claiming his reign began the day before Bosworth to charge his enemies with treason, and have his kingship recognized by Parliament.[117]

However, though Henry could feel assured that his claim to the throne was secured by divine right, the reality of the situation was that the question of legitimate succession to the Throne of England was one that was deeply unsettled and confused. Understanding Medieval English governance is difficult insofar as there was no firm foundation upon which it was built; much of English governance was based on traditions and the individual relations between the various people and institutions which comprised it.[118] The most ancient and revered of those institutions was the King, however despite this the question of the passage and inheritance of the kingship was unresolved. On its surface, the question seems straightforward; the King is whoever the legitimate heir of the previous King was, and his successor would be his legitimate heir, and so on and so forth. Unfortunately, the overthrowals and dynastic infighting of the

[117] Pollard, *Late Medieval England*, 353
[118] Pickthorn, *Early Tudor Government*, 1-2

past decades had proven that the question of who a legitimate heir would be was somewhat ambiguous, especially when contested through arms.

The ultimate question was who or what had the authority to declare or recognize the current King, especially at a time in which no one could agree as to who the last "legitimate" monarch had even been. The highest potential arbitrators were Parliament or the Papacy, and neither seemed particularly adept or even capable of setting hard and fast rules about succession that anyone would be obligated to follow. As an example, during the outset of the conflicts between the Duke of York and Henry VI, York attempted to appeal to Parliament to support his claim to the throne; their response was to claim that as servants of the King the question of succession was above their heads without the King's approval, and so Henry had the question passed to the Royal judges who claimed they had no authority and left the issues to the Attorneys General who in turn claimed that the question was too high for them to adequately decide. The question was batted about repeatedly until Henry and York came to a compromise.[119] Ultimately the agreed upon standard was that the question of kingship was best left for God, which saved anyone from having to agree to a hard rule but at the same time left a deep sense of ambiguity, especially in the wake of repeated overthrowals and killings of kings.[120]

Henry could claim to be a legitimate heir from the Lancastrian line, though that claim was very tenuous, especially when there was still a male heir from the line of the

[119] Kenneth, Pickthorn, *Early Tudor Government: Henry VII,* (New York: Octogon Books, 1967), 2-4
[120] Pickthorn, *Early Tudor Government*, 4-5

Duke of York, Edward, the Earl of Warwick. Although technically prohibited from the succession via Bill of Attainder against his father, his claim was legitimate enough that at least one rebellion in 1487 propped up a young pretender claiming to be the Earl to rally the people against Henry.[121] At the same time his prospective wife, Elizabeth, as the daughter of Edward IV, had an even stronger claim than he did as the female heir to the Yorkist line with none of the legal complications that Warwick faced. Her claim was so strong that there was a popular, though incorrect belief among many of Henry's own supporters that part of his oath to marry her included a promise to place her on the throne.[122] In fact, Henry deliberately delayed his marriage until after his coronation to ensure that no one would interpret him as ruling through Elizabeth's right to the throne as opposed to his own as well as keeping him out of the complicated question of the most legitimate heir of the Yorkist faction.[123] As a result, Henry would keep his own dynastic claim vague beyond being a Lancastrian, drawing more on his divinely ordained victory at Bosworth. [124]

On the international stage, Henry's position as legitimate king was even worse, mostly due to the widely held perception of most of Europe that the English Throne was incredibly unstable after having watched the previous decades of civil strife. Notably he had been so reliant on the aid of the French that they viewed him as king, "By the Grace of Charles VIII of France."[125] Meanwhile Henry's policies to aid the Duchy of Brittany

[121] Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?*, 16-17
[122] Pollard, *Late Medieval England*, 353
[123] Pollard, *Late Medieval England*, 353-354
[124] Pickthorn, *Early Tudor Government*, 5
[125] Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?*, 15

against France repeatedly propelled England into the ongoing struggles between the French House of Valois and the German Habsburgs.[126] The result of this was that anyone looking to press a claim against him could turn to his various international opponents for aid in their endeavor, notably a young pretender claiming to be a son of Edward IV named Perkin Warbeck. Warbeck managed to gain international support for uprisings no less than three separate times, which not only threatened Henry's rule but also publicly embarrassed him as he had repeatedly attempted to discredit the pretender and was simply ignored by the other powers.[127] Henry suffered from the well-acknowledged fact that his throne rested entirely upon military victory gained through foreign support, meaning any opponent wishing to destabilize England could just attempt to repeat what Charles VIII had done with Henry.

Internally the situation remained unstable; from the outset he faced attempted risings and revolts against his rule, initially from Northern England, a former stronghold of Richard III, as well as from other potential rivals. The young Earl of Warwick's continued existence produced so many issues that Henry was forced to have him executed. He also faced continued opposition from the de la Pole's, relatives of Edward IV who coordinated the efforts against Henry both at home and abroad.[128] Though

[126] Pollard, *Late Medieval England*, 355-359, The English involvement in Brittany had gone back long before Henry had even been king. Multiple kings had supported the Duchy of Brittany, then independent of the Kingdom of France. Henry became involved in a scheme with Maximilian of the House of Habsburg, then ruling Burgundy in his son's name, to arrange a marriage with the Duchess of Brittany so that Burgundy and Brittany could ally with England against the French, a scheme which eventually collapsed and saw Brittany absorbed into France and Henry periodically attempting and failing to press his own claims in France.
[127] Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?*, 34-35
[128] Pollard, *Late Medieval England*, 353-355

Henry could claim some security through his victory and military might, in a real sense his throne was constantly threatened in those early years.

Henry's ability to deal with these threats to his legitimacy was at least partially hobbled due to his own views on the nature of kingship. The question of how succession was supposed to work was ambiguous for the reasons stated above; no hard and fast rules, and neither Parliament, nor Pope, nor any other potential authority seemed willing or able to make a hard ruling on the question. However, Henry himself was disinclined to allow such a definitive settlement of succession even if those bodies had been willing to decide. Because his own claim to be a legitimate heir to the throne was already so tenuous, any hard and fast rule on succession might just as easily invalidate his own claim as it might support it, something that he was all too aware of. But more than that, any attempt to allow any outside body to define limits of the monarchy went against his very notion of what it meant to be king. Although it has been said that Henry was often more reliant on Parliament than some of his predecessors, he was a Lancastrian, and the Lancastrians had maintained the pretense of a strong monarchy. The King was always a sacred figure in England; it was a common belief that the King had the power to miraculously cure certain diseases simply by laying on of hands, and the Lancastrians had increased this through instituting an anointing ceremony using a phial allegedly handed down from the Blessed Virgin herself for the purpose. To Henry, the kingship was a fundamentally divine institution, and the hands of men had nothing to do with it.[129] Therefore, allowing Parliament or any other authority to set rules of the

[129] Pickthorn, *Early Tudor Government*, 8-9

succession might imply that such a body was what granted him his power; receiving the support of these bodies was of course useful, but they could never rule above him. So long as the kingship was out of human hands, his power was unquestionable, but it left his claim ambiguous. Therefore, he would search for all means to support his claim to the throne, and it was from this search that the Tudor myth of Bosworth Field was born.

Royal mythmaking was nothing new in England, or in Europe more broadly. Building mythic connections and stories for your lineage and house was a good way of building up legitimacy and prestige, whether that be exaggerations of heroic past deeds or connecting them with famous and mythologized figures like Charlemagne or Merovech in the case of France. Such mythmaking was even common within the War of the Roses. Before Henry VII, the Yorkists had gone to a lot of effort in trying to build up their own legitimacy through the creation of a semi-mythical lineage to justify their usurpation of Henry VI. Nothing was stronger in the minds of the people of the day than an ancient and unbroken lineage; a royal family could claim its power at least in part because of the perceived antiquity and pedigree of their lineage, and the Yorkists worked very hard to develop such a lineage.[130] For example, the idea of a distinct family of the House Plantagenet as we imagine today was constructed by the Duke of York, who gave himself the last name after Geoffrey *Plante Genest*, the father of Henry II, in order to bolster his claim to the throne.[131] Edward IV's chroniclers spent much time and

[130] Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?*, 49

[131] John S. Plant, "The Tardy Adoption of the Plantagenet Surname," *Nomina*, Vol. 30 (2007): 57, 73-74. The history of the development of the name Plantagenet is complicated and took place over multiple centuries. For simplicities sake, it's important to know that it seems to refer to a broom sprout and was a nickname of Geoffrey. Richard adopted the name both as a means of political legitimacy as well as to

reams of paper trying to build up a genealogy of his family stretching all the way back to Adam with deeper British roots, both to build up his own pedigree as well as hurt the reputation of the consequently much less legitimate Lancastrian branch, justifying their fall as the natural end of a usurper's lineage.[132] Had Richard III triumphed at Bosworth and the House of York remained in power, that might have been the story passed down to us. However, Henry would craft his own Tudor Myth, a story that should seem somewhat familiar to the story we began with.

The story goes like this. After the death of Edward III, he was succeeded by his grandson, Richard II, a mad and wicked king who endangered the realm and its people through his tyrannical and murderous actions. Henry IV managed a successful revolt against Richard and established himself as king, beginning an era of good rule and general success for England. His son Henry V was one of the greatest of England's Kings, succeeding in France and seemingly ensuring his son would rule as King of both France and England. His son Henry, though a good man and quite possibly a saint, was a weaker man than his father and unfit to rule and maintain his father's conquest. He was beset by forces within his realm seeking power, none greater than the Duke of York, whose sons eventually succeed in overthrowing and killing the tragic, pious Henry. Edward IV reigned as king until his death, but the throne is usurped by his vile and treacherous brother Richard III. Richard ruled as king in fact, but was a tyrant in title, a man despised

emphasize his own personal vitality as a ruler as his virility as a means of dealing with questions of the legitimacy of his own sons.

[132] Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?*, 49-50

by God Himself.[133] No depravity was so low that he would not use it to further his ends; he murdered his own nephews for power and even seemed willing to marry his own niece Elizabeth to cement his power. His short reign of misrule's only positive was that it was blessedly short. Young Henry Tudor, forced into exile by the Yorkists, returned and valiantly faced the so-called King Richard at Bosworth Field, and with God's aid won the day and cut Richard down. By the Grace of God, Henry VII became king, and he immediately set about bringing an end to the discord between the two houses. Henry, the heir of the Lancastrians married Edward IV's daughter Elizabeth of York, thereby uniting the Red rose of Lancaster and the White rose of York into a single flower, the new House of Tudor, which would establish a new era of peace and prosperity for England.

This obviously is a very slanted depiction of the events of the fifteenth century and possesses a questionable degree of accuracy at best. It characterizes Henry's opponents as monstrous, and it often ignores certain problematic facts, like Henry VI's mental problems, which were at least partially because Henry VII had been attempting to build up a cause for his predecessor's sainthood.[134] However, the story ultimately served its purpose. It helped Henry to build up his legitimacy, it allowed the Nobility to rally around a single house without having to constantly pick a side between competing claimants, and at the end of the day it was a story that everyone in the Kingdom could

[133] Francis Bacon, *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII and Selected Works,* Edited by Brian Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5

[134] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the AltarsL Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 164-165

agree to as the way that they wanted things to be.[135] This might provide a good explanation for why the myth got started, but how then did it go from a story concocted by Henry to the popular image of the period and the Battle of Bosworth Field? The answer can be found in the early histories and the developing popular culture of Tudor England.

Initial accounts of Richard's demise at Bosworth were neutral or even supportive of Richard, as Henry had yet to fully establish control in England. In the accounts of the battle from the records of the City Council of York, Richard is described as the true King, "slane thrugh grete treason of the duc of Northfolk and many other that turned ayenst hyme"[136] However, York and its council were supporters of Richard, so it is not entirely surprising that they should express sadness at his death. One of the earliest and most comprehensive accounts of the battle comes from the second continuation of the *Crownland Chronicles*. The Crownland Abbey had maintained a chronicle of both its own history and that of its abbey dating back to King Penda of Mercia; in the mid-15th century there had been attempts to update the chronicles with more recent information.[137] After Henry's victory at Bosworth, a new chronicler decided to recount the events of 1459-1486, in effect rewriting the efforts of prior chroniclers. The authorship of the work is questionable; we know that at least some of it is the work of later writers and editors. The original author, based on the text, seems to have been someone highly involved in the political affairs of the period; the most common

[135] Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?*, 50-52
[136] Hammond and Sutton, *Richard III*, 223
[137] Alison Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians 1483-1535,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 74-75

attribution is John Russell, a bishop, and former Chancellor of Richard III, possibly attempting to ingratiate himself with the new regime.[138] It also contained potentially seditious material which may have resulted in it being suppressed. In any case, it was most probably used as a source by later Tudor authors who sought to tell the story of the rise of the House of Tudor and build up its myth.

The first proper Tudor Account was that of John Rous, initially a Yorkist propagandist; with the rise of Henry VII he switched sides and began building up the Tudor Myth to curry favor. Though a witness to events he is well known for providing a one-sided account of Richard's life and the battle itself.[139] Rous's account maintains much of the basic structure of the Tudor Myth. Richard is depicted as a monster; although there is some reference to him doing good works, the major emphasis is upon his vile character. He schemes against his brother and nephews, has his nephews killed and steals the royal treasure for himself and his confidants. He is portrayed as a deformed and weak man, who ultimately receives his just deserts from Henry at the battle, vainly screaming of treason before facing death. It ends with Henry triumphant and marrying Elizabeth. He even manages to include a reference to Henry VI's body being found incorruptible, which would help support Henry's efforts to have him canonized.[140] Because of his proximity to the events, and his faithful repetition of the Tudor line, his work would be perceived as an accurate representation of these events and help build a foundation for works to come.

[138] Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians*, 93-96
[139] Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians*,104-107
[140] Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians*, 118-124

The second major account of Bosworth Field comes in the history written by Polydore Vergil, the noted Italian humanist and scholar, at the request of Henry VII himself. Having spent much of his working life in England and being one of its foremost scholars, it made a great degree of sense that he be given the job.[141] Vergil was not a mere propagandist for the Tudors, that much can be said; on the one hand he was a prominent scholar who placed a lot of emphasis on the usage of sources and even criticized some prior histories for their sloppiness. On the other hand, by the turn of the sixteenth century when Vergil was writing, Henry's position was much more stable and so no longer needed a fully propagandistic account. That does not mean that Vergil was free of biases; he was still very much telling the story that Henry wanted, one extoling the new Tudor era and portraying the Yorkist period as a mere fumble on the path to greater glory.[142] Much of his work explicitly or implicitly drew on the prior Tudor sources; even as he criticized them it is apparent that he made use of them, and therefore would follow the standard Tudor narrative. However, his more thorough scholarly work helped to support the growing Tudor myth and would be used as another base for further historical accounts. But it would take a truly popular work to bring the story fully into the public consciousness.

The final major source comes from the great writer and scholar Thomas More and his *History of King Richard III*. While More never managed to complete the book and what we have never arrives at Bosworth Field, it is important insofar as it solidified the

[141] Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians*, 125-126
[142] Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians*, 126-128

popular image of Richard III that would go on to define the meaning of Bosworth Field. Unlike its predecessors, More's history was a piece of literature, never claiming to be a perfectly accurate account of events; it is a literary work with literary designs and intentions.[143] As a result his account sometimes has only tenuous connections to the reality of the situation and he even outright mocks the methods of contemporary historians by pointing to shortfalls in their methods and sources.[144] But, most importantly, in his attempt to tell a story about royal tyranny, More transforms Richard from merely an evil and wicked king, into a pantomime villain more at home in theatrical production than on the Throne of England. For More to make this almost comedic tale work everything Richard does becomes exaggerated; for example, Richard goes from accusing an enemy of witchcraft as in the sources, to outright claiming that his enemy used magic to cause his arm to be deformed although everyone at court knows for a fact that his arm had always been that way.[145]

It was More's success, not as an historian but as a writer, that would ensure his work would last beyond its contemporaries, because it is well written and full of interesting and complex ideas couched in comedy and satire. Even though it would never be finished, it would be popular enough to inspire later authors, the most famous of whom was William Shakespeare, who used More as a primary source of information for his own play *Richard III*, which remains one of his most famous and popular plays to this day. The play itself very neatly repeats the Tudor myth, all the way up to the union

[143] Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians*, 155
[144] Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians,* 154-58
[145] Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians,* 167-169

of the roses. It is because of this that the popular image of Bosworth field became the popular image, and it would outlast the people who created it. Roger Bacon, writing in the reign of the Stuart King James I, repeats the basic outline of the myth wholesale, even as the Tudor House that had created it ceased to be.[146]

What then can we say about 1485 and the Battle of Bosworth Field? It was clearly an important event that can be used to mark a moment of change in English history; using it as a dividing line to an extent is perfectly reasonable. The battle clearly marked a moment when one ruling house lost power and a new one came to take its place and would continue to rule for more than a century. However, to claim that it was the day the Middle Ages ended in England would be absurd; all the contextual information rejects that notion. There was a change in dynasty, but functionally things remained as they had been for the past 85 years, and that the new Tudor Dynasty would persist was an open question. To make Bosworth a complete change hides the true uncertainty and precarity of Henry VII and England in the days and years after. The story of Bosworth Field reflects one of the uncomfortable dangers of placing such hard dates to reflect changing periods; they allow us to easily fall into narratives that obscure the reality of the past in a way that can harm our understanding of it. Dates like these are clearly a necessity in the process of organizing history, but we need make sure they do not define our understanding of it.

[146] Bacon, *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII*, 5-22

Art History

To explain the division of Medieval and Modern in Art History one must begin with Vasari's *Lives*. Giorgio Vasari's *Lives*, originally published in 1550 and expanded in 1568, is one of the earliest and most influential works of Art History. While not all Art Historians label him the father of the discipline as a whole, he is acknowledged as the progenitor of the "Artist's Biography" as a concept, of which his *Lives* is considered to be the first example.[147] Vasari was himself a painter and architect involved in the circles of Italian artists of the sixteenth century, most notably associating with Michelangelo, who would be one of the subjects of his *Lives*. It is in the work of Vasari that we see the first clear division of the history of art into distinct periods, something that can be readily seen in his Preface to the work proper.

Vasari's Preface lays out a broad overview of the history of art from antiquity through the life of his first subject, Cimabue, who lived in the late thirteenth century. Vasari traces the antique origins of art to either the Ancient Chaldeans or to the Ethiopians, who in turn brought their artistic skills to the Egyptians who then imparted this knowledge to the Greeks.[148] Vasari claims that it was among the Greeks that the arts were taken to their highest form in all areas, whether it be sculpture, painting, or architecture and this mantle was in turn taken up by the Romans who were exceedingly

[147] Udo Kultermann, *The History of Art History*, (United States: Abaris Books, 1993), 11
[148] Georgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, Translated by Gaston Du C. De Vere, (London: Macmillan and Co.; Project Guttenberg, May 5, 2008) 1:xxxvii-xxxix https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/author/9769

devoted to the craftsmanship and quality of artistic endeavors.[149] It is with the dawn of the Roman Empire that Vasari traces a slow but perceptible decline in the arts as the quality of craftsmanship becomes worse, pointing to various buildings constructed through the Empire and noting their increasing inferiority when compared to the preceding structures. Specifically, he points to examples like Constantine's Triumphal Arch in Rome, where "plundered" medallions from earlier times are used to adorn it which are of much higher quality than the contemporary reliefs, and traces a similar decline in the building of churches in Rome following Constantine's reign.[150] He attributes this growing decline to three factors. The first was the incursion of barbarians into the Empire, who despoiled and destroyed the arts and who were, in his mind, uniformly vulgar and brutish. The second was the exceeding zeal of the Christian Church in destroying the artistic patrimony of prior generations in their quest to rid the world of pagan superstitions. Finally, there were the thefts and raids of what remained by the Greeks and Muslims.[151] The whole of the history of art from the end of the Roman Empire in the West to at least the eleventh century is rated as utterly worthless artistically, with only the occasional glimmer of good art in the midst of darkness.[152] It is only in the 14th century with the advent of the painter Giotto that art begins to re-emerge. [153]

[149] Vasari, *Lives*, 1:xxxix-xli, it should be noted that Vasari also tries to give an Italian origin for the arts by claiming an origin with the Etruscans, placing Italy and its artists at the center of art both in the distant past and in the present day.
[150] Vasari, *Lives*, 1:xlv-xlviii
[151] Vasari, *Lives*, 1:xlviii-li
[152] Vasari, *Lives*, 1:li-lvii
[153] Vasari, *Lives*, 2:83-85

In his later prefaces, Vasari provides his own unique structure of three ages to define the history of art after Antiquity. The first age corresponds to a "Medieval Period" up to Giotto and his contemporaries and is of little value. The second age can be considered a kind of Renaissance; Vasari sometimes uses the term rebirth to describe the art which, though generally still imperfect, can be seen to improve through the work of some luminaires until the advent of the third age of art. It is in this time through Giotto's rediscovery of the ancient arts of perspective in painting that the older, cruder arts of the later Greeks were finally surpassed, and art could begin its rise.[154] The third age, corresponding to Modernity, was begun by Leonardo Da Vinci, who inaugurated the trend of perfectly imitating nature in art in his own sublime works.[155] For Vasari the Modern Age of art reached its apogee in the figure of his personal friend Michelangelo, who not only surpassed all moderns in his brilliance but even surpassed the Ancients, marking the ascent of art to its highest and most glorious form.[156]

Vasari's scheme of periodizing art history is unique compared to other dates and times provided for the end of the Middle Ages because he does not provide a distinct date and the fact that he is clearly drawing on an Ancient/Medieval/Modern scheme of periodization to structure his *Lives*. In the first case Vasari seems to invoke a narrative of progress over time. The end of the Middle Ages begins with Giotto, but the advent of modernity and the true end of Medieval art only comes with Leonardo's work, which can be taken as the beginning of Modern Art in his schema. As to his use of the tripartite

[154] Vasari, *Lives*, 2:82-28
[155] Vasari, *Lives*, 4:83
[156] Vasari, *Lives*, 4:85-86

view of history, it is less surprising as he had received a humanist education along with his artistic studies and would therefore have been aware of the concepts built by men like Biondo and Bruni of a progression from Ancient splendor to Medieval decline, followed by a Modern rebirth. In this way he created a specific narrative about the direction and purpose of Art in the world, a narrative that would last long after his own death. But a question remains: why did he build the narrative that he did and what purpose did it serve?

In his own words, he claims that his work is primarily one of preservation and recognition. Vasari laments that it is often the fate of great men who were honored and revered to begin to dissipate within the minds of men over time, as they are slowly forgotten and their greatness fades to nothingness, creating a kind of second death.[157] His goal then is to preserve these artists from such an ignoble fate and preserve their memory for future generations. But that is not precisely what he does; he does not just record the lives of these artists, he tries to weave a narrative through their stories, a narrative of rising glory over time culminating in his own day. Therefore, it is pertinent to ask what other reasons he might have for wanting to preserve these lives in the way that he did, and the answer has to do with why it is the lives of artists were so often forgotten and the changing role of the artist in Vasari's own lifetime.

For much of European history, artists as a group were not afforded a great deal of respect. Coming down from Antiquity, artists were commonly viewed as little more than craftsmen, not unlike a carpenter or stonemason, applauded for their works but

[157] Vasari, *Lives*, 1:xxiv

little valued as individuals.[158] In the case of Plato, the artists was even denigrated as particularly unworthy of respect.[159] Through to the Middle Ages, with few exceptions, the artist maintained this low position in society at large.[160] By the sixteenth century, the position of the artist was beginning to change as notable artists began to increase in professional and social stature, a process which had been more than a century in development, and it had become common among the humanist scholars to debate which artists were to be considered the proper heirs of the great artists of prior generations like the noted Giotto.[161] Vasari was both a trained artist and an active participant in the development of the artist as a figure of respect in society, notably being one of the main instigators of the founding of a Florentine academy of artists sponsored by the Duke Cosimo I de' Medici.[162] With this context in mind, his choice of narrative begins to make greater sense as part of his larger work of promoting himself and his field. The narrative he inherited of Medieval decline and a Modern rebirth served as a useful way of justifying the growing prestige of the artist. It was explainable that artists of the past were looked down upon by high society because they were lesser craftsmen compared with the artists of his day and of the Ancient World. Meanwhile, Vasari's contemporaries were elevating art to higher levels than could have been imagined even a century before, with Michelangelo surpassing the ancient masters of the craft. Therefore, art and artist should be supported and sponsored by the powerful

[158] Kultermann, *The History of Art History*, 1
[159] Kultermann, *The History of Art History*, 2
[160] Kultermann, *The History of Art History*, 1-4
[161] Kultermann, *The History of Art History*, 5-8
[162] Donald Preziosi, ed. *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15

of his day because of their truly exceptional abilities and to ensure that, unlike in the days of Constantine, there would be no decline in the quality of art. It provided a very neat explanation for his position in Florentine society as an artist, and one not coincidentally included among the biographies of other leading artists in his work.[163]

Vasari's reasoning and logic for his work is straightforward, but why is it significant? Vasari's *Lives* was immensely influential in the years following its publication. Up until at least the seventeenth century, much of art historical scholarship was a reaction to Vasari; most maintained his structure but inserted their personal favorite artists in place of Vasari's choices. Even today scholars remark upon his importance in developing a clear theory of the History of Art being defined by periods of development and decline along a kind of cyclical model.[164] By the 17th century, trends in art history moved against Vasari with the dominance of the French Academy and its more critical methods of judging pieces of art according to objective standards, notably when the art critic Fréart de Chambray questioned Vasari's competence outright.[165] However, for much of the history of the discipline, questions of "periodization" seem to have fallen to the back as more pressing questions on style and form developed over the centuries. Even into more recent history, as art historians have begun to question the notion of an objective standard of art, the narrative Vasari spun remains, and there is no better example of this than in the writing of Ernst Gombrich.

[163] Vasari, *Lives*, 10:169-171
[164] Kultermann, *The History of Art History*, 13
[165] Kultermann, *The History of Art History*, 22-23

Gombrich was a noted art historian and director of the Warburg Institute in London.[166] Gombrich's work was well-regarded at the time and still respected, notably for his embrace of new ideas and attempt to break down unnecessary divisions within Art History between proper art and vulgar art.[167] He was also notable for his attempt to communicate the ideas of art and art history to a broader audience through the use of plain language in his writing.[168] One of his most famous works is a general history of art, *The Story of Art*, in which he provides a complete history of art from prehistory to the present founded on his own theories about art. From such an iconoclastic thinker, we should expect a clear break with narratives such as Vasari's, with their implications of objective standards of high art. In many ways, he does break with those narratives, but what is interesting are the ways in which it does not break with them, even as he acknowledges the imperfections of that narrative.

In his introduction, Gombrich lays out a straightforward argument that there is not and cannot be an objective standard for what makes something worthy as art. That a person may find one piece to be superior to another does not mean that there are not admirable qualities in the lesser ranked one, and in fact judging art according to such objective standards can serve to stifle creative developments according to Gombrich.[169] Effectively, Gombrich believes that art should be understood both for what it is to us and what it meant to the people who created it and that we shouldn't allow pre-existing

[166] Kultermann, *The History of Art History*, 225
[167] Kultermann, *The History of Art History*, 226
[168] Kultermann, *The History of Art History*, 226
[169] Ernst H Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, (Greenwich: Phaidon Publishers, 1964), 5-12

notions to define our view of art.[170] It is from this perspective that Gombrich comes to criticize elements of the story of Vasari. For example, he moves away from the Italian-centric perspective of Vasari and some older art historians, pointing to the striking developments that were occurring in the 13th century Gothic movement in France and Germany, even explaining that in terms of architecture, Italy was ignorant of the new trends developed in other regions of Europe.[171] It should be noted that Gombrich was not the first to make this claim, the English art historian John Ruskin, in his *The Stones of Venice* of 1853, championed the gothic as superior to the renaissance which only served to shackle artistic creativity.[172] Gombrich provides a more measured view of the issue. Medieval art is treated as its own unique kind of art with its own ideas and trends rather than an unfortunate break between the Ancient and Modern artists. When he speaks of Giotto, he acknowledges that other histories would have begun a new chapter to speak of him such is his perceived impact on the history of art, while Gombrich chooses to present him in the context of his time.[173] However, it is often in small ways that even as Gombrich criticizes objective developments in art, he still falls into the narrative handed down to him. For example, when talking about developments in Gothic statuary and carving, he almost casually assigns the development of draped cloth in statues to the "regaining" of a lost Roman Art, when it could just as plausibly have been a native development of the same technique.[174] Similarly when discussing an English illuminated

[170] Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 18
[171] Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 142-143
[172] John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, New York: National Library Association: Project Guttenberg, December 27, 2009) 3:Chapter 2, section 28
[173] Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 144
[174] Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 138

manuscript's depiction of Christ in the Temple from the fourteenth century, he speaks of the artist "evidently" not having heard of the new method of Giotto, as though all artists would inevitably gravitate to the new styles. Ultimately, Gombrich still adheres to a traditional notion of Modern rediscovery of "realistic art" in the Renaissance, even calling his chapter on that period "The Conquest of Reality." He still identifies Leonardo as the first of the great masters who set in motion the high Renaissance leading into Modernity.[175] Even in criticism the old story reveals itself.

None of this is meant to criticize Gombrich or his methods, it should make a point of the persistence of the narrative built by Vasari and those early art historians of the sixteenth century. Vasari remains a noted influence in the field; an Oxford anthology of Art Historians, *The of Art History*, provides an excerpt from Vasari's *Lives* as its first example text.[176] Even as the field has advanced, the power of this simple and convincing narrative which he constructed remains embedded in the way that art is spoken of and talked about. It speaks powerfully to the hold that these kinds of narratives have on scholars and students long after the assumptions upon which they were based have lost favor and new ideas have come to take their place.

[175] Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 161, 212
[176] Preziosi, ed. *The Art of Art History*, 22

Military History

In Military History there are several potential arguments for when the transition from Medieval to Modern occurred. A traditional date ties advances in military technology, specifically gunpowder, to the much-vaunted Siege of Constantinople. The usual arguments center around the great bombard guns that Mehmet had ordered to fire on the walls of Constantinople. The usual narrative is that the walls of Constantinople, regarded as some of the strongest walls from the Ancient World through the Middle Ages, were a force that had been unbeatable up until the advent of gunpowder. With Constantinople's fall to the Ottomans, the age of old Medieval warfare ended and a new age of cannons and gunpowder took its place.[177] While this idea is compelling, and was even a popular reading in the years that followed, it's not entirely accurate.[178] While the great bombards were significant, it isn't true to say that they broke the walls of Constantinople; in point of fact only one section of the wall actually fell, a part of the already crumbling St. Romanides Gate, a break which was very quickly repaired with earthworks.[179] The siege was notably won in a very traditional way, with a commanding general being hit by an arrow and the defenders breaking ranks. It also downplays other important strategic feats of the Ottomans, such as Mehmet moving an entire fleet overland into the Black Sea to force the defenders to

[177] Cathal Nolan, *The Allure of Battle: a History of how Wars have been Won and Lost*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 49
[178] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 49
[179] Jonathan Harris, *The End of Byzantium*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 204-206

thin themselves defending the sea walls. Looking beyond Constantinople, finding a clear moment when Gunpowder changed the landscape of military affairs is very difficult. Siege guns were already in use as early as the fourteenth century during the Hundred Years War, notably at the battle of Crecy a full century before the bombards of Constantinople, and it wouldn't be until the end of the fifteenth century that would see the advent of modern fortifications that were the hallmark of the age of cannon and gunpowder. The importance of artillery and guns in military history cannot be overstated, and there were in the years after the siege a general shift in military fortification to deal with the threat of canons.[180] However, those shifts were incredibly gradual, occurring over a century and a half at least. For the sake of understanding a transition from Medieval to Modern, it is just as useful to look at an ongoing change in military theory, a development that was directly tied to one of the authors of the idea of the Middle Ages, Leonardo Bruni.

Bruni, as both a scholar and political leader of 15th century Florence, had a wide variety of interests extending beyond just historical study; he also had a keen interest in military theory, which he tied to his own vision of history and the glorious past of Italy in the days of Rome. Among his many notable works is a treatise on military affairs, *De Militia*, specifically focusing on the concept of knighthood as it applied to a republic. Originally published in 1420, the genesis of this work was the result of two quite different issues converging, that of the military situation of the Italian City-States during the early fifteenth century and the intellectual movements in which Bruni participated.

[180] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 51-52

Over the course of the fourteenth century there had been a marked shift in the military situation in Italy. In prior years much of the fighting forces of the Italian cities had been local militias, composed primarily of citizens which had become increasingly ineffective. As a result, by the fifteenth century much of Italian military affairs were being conducted by captains hired by various cities for their defense and to prosecute wars on their behalf, the so-called *condottiere,* and their mercenary companies.[181] Bruni's own Florence had come to rely heavily on mercenary forces, particularly after the Ciompi revolts in which the lower orders of Florentine society rose up and overthrew the government for a period of three years.[182] In its aftermath, the leaders of the city ordered the disarming of the common people and the general notion of a common enlisted militia became extremely unpopular to the point of being almost seditious, with fears of another Ciompi lingering in the minds of many.[183] Even Bruni, although supporting old republican traditions, was skeptical of the militia due to the memories of the Ciompi.[184]

At the same time as the militia remained unpopular, the presence of these mercenary armies was even more unpopular first and foremost because many of these mercenaries were foreigners. Many were veterans of the Hundred Years War between France and England looking for opportunities in Italy.[185] There was, especially in Bruni's day, a strong feeling of opposition towards the "barbarous" peoples across the Alps

[181] C. C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence: The De Militia of Leonardo Bruni*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 53-56
[182] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 197
[183] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 193-194
[184] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 214
[185] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 189

running roughshod across Italy, with at least one Italian *condottiere* presenting himself as a liberator pushing back against foreign powers.[186] At the same time on a political level there were concerns as to the loyalty of the mercenaries.[187] It wasn't out of the question for a company to change sides, or, when the situation became dire, to just leave the city with no defense even after having made hefty demands for their services.[188] For many Italian elites the question of the *condottiere* was an uncomfortable issue; on the one hand almost all took a low view of their use in military matters, but on the other hand their place was essential in the current order of things and to publicly criticize them would effectively mean criticizing the city which was easily read as treasonous.[189]

At the same time, there was an ongoing scholarly and cultural revival among the elites of Florence and Italy more broadly, one instituted by Petrarch. One of the important concepts which Petrarch had advocated for in his writing and thinking was the notion of *Renovatio Italiae*, the attempt to restore Italian society to its former heights.[190] These ideas, which would themselves play a not insubstantial role in the development of the tripartite scheme of history into Ancient, Medieval, and Modern, were an obsession from the days of Petrarch in the fourteenth century all the way to Bruni and his successors in the fifteenth. The basic notion was that in the days of

[186] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 190-192
[187] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle,* 59
[188] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 6-7
[189] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 204-205. in at least one case a personal critic of the *condottiere* system, one Stefano Porcari, was forced to give a contorted speech attempting to use classical sources to justify Florence's use of mercenaries as perfectly in line with the republican tradition.
[190] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 185-186

classical antiquity and the heights of Roman power, Italy was at its apogee in all fields, whether that be artistic, intellectual, or even military. The fall of Rome and the dominance of foreign "barbarians" from across the Alps had led to a precipitous decline in the fortunes and position of Italy. For Petrarch and his contemporaries, their purpose was to help institute a *Renovatio* of Italy such that it could be restored to that once great height. While Petrarch's primary interests were cultural, he worked to reinvigorate the study of classical Latin and lamented the lack of knowledge of Greek in his own time, they also extended to the issues of war.[191] For these men there was a hope that the martial spirit of the Romans, who had conquered the whole of the known world, might still be present within the Italian people of their day and therefore they felt that a return to the martial traditions of Rome might in turn result in the renovation of the Italian military.[192] They looked to the traditional militia of the Roman Republic as a model for potential military success, a model which was clearly at odds with the reality of mercenary-dominated Italy. It was amid this conflict between Idea and Reality that Bruni would publish his own work on military affairs.

Bruni's argument in *De Militia* focuses primarily on trying to thread the needle between the Roman models of military services that he and his fellow Italian humanists so idolized, and the political realities of the time in which he lived, one in which the militias were stained in the eyes of the ruling class due to the Ciompi. It was a part of his broader purpose in continuing the *Renovatio* begun with Petrarch, particularly in

[191] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 201
[192] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 185-186

advancing his hopes that it could result in a general revival of all Italy's former strengths, military strength included.[193] In order to bring about the changes necessary to rebuild the strong martial character of the Italian people, Bruni believed it would be necessary to move away from the system of mercenaries to at least some kind of state-run army, as the Romans had, even if not yet a full militia. To do this, Bruni focused on the concept of the citizen-knight, as it had existed in the Florentine Republic.

The citizen-knight was meant to be the leading force of the public militia of the Republic, however by Bruni's day they had entered into a state of low esteem in the eyes of most Florentines.[194] Over the preceding centuries the office had been handed out as favors and rewards without any regard to military competency; this had become endemic to such an extent that they were often looked down on as people more interested in pomp than military affairs, a situation which had been only somewhat rectified by Bruni's term in government.[195] Bruni makes them a prime area for reform that could positively influence Florentine society, both militarily and socially, and without addressing the more controversial question of the civil militias. He accomplished this by completely reinventing the concept of the knight to fit his own republican Roman values.

Primarily, his goal was to disconnect the origin of knighthood away from the chivalric traditions of France and Germany, and back to the Ancient Roman office of the Equites, the hereditary cavalry of the old Roman Republic. This was part of a general

[193] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 200-201
[194] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence* 206
[195] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 206-209

trend of Bruni's thought which denigrated the works of the "barbarous" peoples across the Alps and placed their traditions and influence as the primary reason for the decline in Italy since the fall of Rome.[196] More than anything, as a scholar and literati he had personally long despised the growing influence of German and French chivalric romances and the way in which Italians were growing to idolize foreign heroes like Charlemagne and the virtues of fighting enemies of the faith rather than providing examples of civic patriotism and classical heroes of antiquity.[197] Bruni wanted to redefine knighthood in order to place it in accord with his antique vision of the body politic. The ideas of chivalry and its lionizing of devotion to Lord, Church, and Lady-Love should be washed away according to Bruni; the oaths a knight swore should be to his city, and his guiding principle should be love not for a person but the all-encompassing love one felt for the republic they served.[198] His hope was that such a class could act as a new guiding force within the republic that could both replace the hated *condottiere* and help resurrect his vision of a renewed Italy restored to the glories of Antiquity.

While Bruni's book may have only had a limited effect in achieving his goals during his lifetime, the shift in thinking on warfare that his work represented would have a lasting impact as his work would inform later Italian humanists who were beginning to transform the very idea of how wars should be fought and won, particularly in the development of the notion of the decisive battle.

[196] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 210
[197] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 211
[198] Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 211

Medieval warfare in Europe was of a specific character when compared to other periods. The social and political situation of much of Western Europe at this time meant that there was little centralization in military matters, the number of forces that could be gathered at a given time were necessarily limited and valuable.[199] As a result, military leaders, as a rule, tried to avoid open battle on the field, as it was a risky gamble that was often unlikely to pay off. Even a victory could potentially cost an unconscionable number of soldiers that could not easily be replaced.[200] Instead, the wise Medieval general favored sieges, because there was less risk to soldiers, and the brutal *Chevauchée* raids, because they could sap an enemy's will and resources without open combat.[201] It was a brutal method of warfare, but it worked well for the situation at hand, however, it was also, in the eyes of the rising Renaissance humanists, an inefficient and inelegant way of waging war compared to the days of Antiquity.

In the minds of Bruni and his successors, the wars of Greece and Rome were fought between larger field armies and decided in great pitch battles between them. The notion that these battles were not just significant but the most important aspect of war has roots dating long before these scholars, dating back at least to Herodotus and his account of the decisiveness of Marathon in the Persian War.[202] Hannibal was often perceived as the pinnacle of military might in the Ancient World precisely because of his ability to win incredible victories on the field of battle against much larger opponents.[203]

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[199] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 31
[200] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 30-31
[201] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 33
[202] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 19-20
[203] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 21-22

The reality of Ancient Warfare was often at odds with this view, for example in the case of Rome's wars with Hannibal, Rome defeated Hannibal not because of having superior generalship and winning similar battles, but because of its ability to marshal its resources against its foes such that it held the advantage and could recover from the defeats Hannibal delivered.[204] That unfortunate reality would not stand in the way of men like Bruni and his successors, most notably Machiavelli, from using this view as a model for their own understanding of war.

We have seen that Bruni and his contemporaries were deeply interested in the notion of a *Renovatio* and were perfectly willing to apply that principle to military affairs as one of the fields that had to be renovated to bring back the glories of Antiquity. They already deeply despised the present military situation and the *condottiere* that exemplified it, and they were willing to draw upon history and the new tripartite scheme of periodization they were developing as a foundation for their vision of change, as can be seen in Bruni's attempt to "Romanize" knighthood and degrade the prior forms as depreciated versions of a Roman original in service to his political goals. And so, these Renaissance military theorists would create a new argument that there had been a great breach between the warfare of Antiquity and the warfare of the Middle Ages, reflecting a decline in military skill and virtue, a deficiency which could be corrected by following their vision of war and society in Italy.

[204] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 23 The failure to understand the lesson of Hannibal remained a theme in Western military history and theory, as a late World War II German generals were holding him up as an example of how to win wars despite his failure to win his own wars.

Reading ancient sources uncritically, Renaissance humanists like Machiavelli saw the past as defined by pitched battles and great generalship; Machiavelli himself saw the greatest strength of a prince in displays of military glory on the field of battle.[205] This ancient and good way of fighting was contrasted with the lesser form of warfare of the Middle Ages, one defined by its plodding sieges and raids which could take years and often were indecisive. Coincidentally, or perhaps not so coincidentally, the greatest errors of the Medieval past were exemplified in the ever-hated *condottiere*, who often were reluctant to go into pitched battles unless absolutely necessary.[206] It is clear that Machiavelli, not unlike Bruni, was interested in using the past as a vehicle to push his own goals in the present, trying to sort the aspects of society he disapproved of as elements of Medieval decline while portraying the changes he wanted to see as elements of renewal and restoration of the past, even if that past was merely imagined. This structure of argument would be used to some success by Machiavelli to attempt to institute change during his period of influence in the Florentine Republic following the expulsion of the Medici; notably he carried on the ideals championed by Bruni and attempted to rebuild a civic minded militia that would finally end the reign of the *condottiere*, justifying it once again upon this notion of restoring the glories of the past lost to Medieval decline.

Machiavelli's ambitions, not unlike those of Bruni, bore little fruit in the world of actual politics; his visions of a republican militia restoring the Ancient Roman traditions

[205] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 60
[206] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 61

of grand scale warfare were dashed with the restoration of the Medici to power and his own exile, leaving most of his military ideals by the wayside in the years following.[207] However, this narrative that Machiavelli, Bruni, and the other Italian humanists had constructed would develop into a theory that Military Historian Cathal Nolan refers to as the theory of decisive battle, developed from this backward-looking idealization of Ancient Warfare.[208] It argues that wars are decided in specific grand battles between competing forces, and that what ultimately matters is the great general who leads his troops to a stunning victory.[209] It would be carried on by the humanists of the day until it eventually became the dominant view of the Enlightenment thinkers as representing a more rational kind of warfare, one that could be understood as a mental game between competing generals decided by wits and reason rather than simple attrition. In their estimation they carried on the prejudices of Bruni against the "Middle Ages" as a period of little military interest, defined as it was by such inconclusive methods and with little grand generalship to speak off outside of a few standout events like the Battle of Tours, and maintained it as a period of break in the "grand martial tradition of the West" which they traced back to the glories of Greece and Rome. This theory and its historical implications have remained wildly influential in military circles; famously the German military through the World Wars was obsessed with taking the notion of decisive battle to its highest form, attempting to win entire wars with a great decisive battle, an

[207] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 64
[208] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 27-28
[209] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 12-13

obsession that ultimately led to their military downfall in both cases.[210] It's only been more recently that military historians have moved away from the study of grand battles and the whole notion of the decisive battle has come into question and the supposed stagnation of Medieval warfare has been for the most part overturned, however the idea of decisive battle remains powerful in military circles.[211]

Bruni and his contemporaries had a vision of "renovating" their world and restoring something of the glories of the past, predicated upon a notion of decline through what we now call the Middle Ages. Rather than merely reporting on the differences in ages, their goals were to accomplish discernable political change in their own society, most notably bringing about an end to the hated *condottiere* which they felt had sapped and weakened the military spirit of the people of Italy. Whether it be through trying to classicize Medieval knighthood or resurrect a civil militia, they were willing to use the scholarly tools and constructs they had available to support their ends, whether those ideas corresponded to history or not. And although these narratives were crafted for a specific time and place, they carried weight as they were used and re-used by later scholars and eventually generals who would use them to frame and understand their own campaigns, to the point that they searched vainly for a decisive battle like those they fantasized had existed in Antiquity which would become a recurring problem in Western Military History as seen in the example of the World Wars. Military History did indeed change during the fifteenth century; while it would be

[210] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 362, 488
[211] Nolan, *The Allure of Battle, 577-582*

correct to say that it changed with the advent of the cannon and its growing influence on the battlefield, it also marked the beginning of a longstanding notion of the way battles had been fought according to an idea of Medieval decline and Modern recapturing of ancient ideals.

Conclusion

The dates presented here provide an important lesson about the nature of periodization and the ways in which we periodize, whether it be Constantinople or Bosworth Field, the life of Giotto or the campaigns against the *condottiere*. These dates do not come from nothing, or just a simple observation of the past. They exist, much like the narrative structures they serve to reinforce, for specific reasons related to the times in which they were built. They carry a kind of weight down through the centuries even as the initial circumstances and ideas they were based in have changed radically.

In some cases, these narratives were very deliberate constructs built upon significant historical events, such as in the case of Constantinople and Bosworth Field. The Fall of Constantinople was certainly a significant event in history, the history of Greece and Turkey especially, but as has been shown, its effect at the time was quite limited. Rather, the event served an important rhetorical purpose to those wishing to push a more aggressive military policy against the Turks on the part of the great powers of Western Europe. In the process it became an intellectual justification for the growth and development of the nascent idea of Europe as a cohesive entity and the inherent conflicts between the West and a dangerous and barbaric East, a vision which was the product more of frenzied thinkers than of the reality of fifteenth century Europe.

Bosworth Field is an even clearer example of the same phenomenon, taking what was an important but not world changing battle and adding world-historic significance to it. At its core, Bosworth field was a regime change, one dynastic claimant was killed and replaced by his competitor, an event that did change England, but one

very much not out of place in the context of the last century. There was nothing in that moment that would suggest that the fighting would be over or that the new Tudor Dynasty would last into the future. However, through the work of propogandist it became nothing less than a battle between good and evil, in which God ordained the triumph of the righteous and decided the ultimate destiny of England. This vision would be carried on long after the dynasty that built it faded away.

In the examples of Art and Military History, we see how an already existent narrative can be used and abused by historical actors to support their goals. In both cases we see how the historical structure of a dark "middle" age between the glory of Rome and the Renaissance of modernity created in fifteenth century Italy, were deliberately used by men like Vasari and Bruni. In the case of Vasari, it was a useful tool to both provide a structure and history to his own artistic field which had previously lacked it, as well as a means of elevating the artist from mere tradesmen to a kind of transcendent figure deserving of respect and admiration by society and elite patrons. For Bruni and his successors, it served as a method to critique the perceived failures of their own society by using the past as a model for reform. If they could only recapture the spark of military genius that had made Rome great perhaps their own Florence could rise to such lofty heights, an attractive dream regardless of its relation to reality.

The dates provided in this paper are not the only "ends of the Middle Ages." There are certainly countless others which depend on national histories or how individual scholars have defined the distinctions between what is "Medieval" vs. Renaissance. There is a long history of using technology to mark the end of the Middle

Ages; famously Sir Francis Bacon argued that the development of Printing, Gunpowder, and the Compass marked a great change in the world, and the advent of Guttenberg's printing press in the 1450's has been a common date. Historians with a broader scope sometimes place the advent of modernity with the rise of industrialization and urbanization in the 19th century when human life radically changed. Sometimes it can be as simple as using 1500 because it provides a neat and round number for the purposes of teaching. However, some dates carry more weight than others

One particularly standout date is the year 1492, marking the discovery of the New World by Columbus. While not always acting as the dividing line of Medieval and Modern, it often plays an important role. At least one recent textbook does not place 1492 as the single epoch defining event, but it does place it as the summit of the "Age of Discovery" which marks the end of the Renaissance and the beginning of Modernity as it shattered old ideas of the world.[212] However, it has some issues in the European context; specifically, it is questionable to say that it radically changed things in the moment, it would only be in retrospect that its significance would become more apparent. As a moment it was epoch shaping, but it is better read in the light of world history rather than simply European history. 1492 was when the two disconnected hemispheres of the globe were united, and in turn led to important trends in history going forward. It could provide a date to a different scheme of periodizing, one

[212]Donald Kagan, Steven Ozmet Frank M. Turner, *The Western Heritage Since 1300*, tenth ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall), 305-307, 311

centering on a global history, not so completely on Europe, but for the sake of this work it is acknowledged as a competent but imperfect date to end the Middle Ages.

We as scholars have, for the most part, moved away from the assumptions these dates are based upon; we understand the difference between the stories our sources want to tell and the realities of the past as we have come to understand them. However, by reproducing these we also reproduce the implications and narratives upon which they were based. In some cases, this can seem fairly innocuous. At worst, someone who imbibes Vasari's narrative uncritically might end up overvaluing Renaissance artists. However, those innocent presumptions can influence our interpretations of the past; suddenly we begin to unfairly judge Medieval Art as lesser because we presume it must be as a backsliding from Roman glory. Gombrich, a good and critical scholar, still fell into that trap in his own work to the point that he would still sometimes attribute advances in art as "obviously" the result of rediscovering the past, as though there couldn't be originality in Medieval Art. If such noted scholars are capable of falling into that trap, the dangers to the average student or consumer of historical information are just as fraught.

As scholars we may be able to recognize that these narratives are imperfect, and even overcome these biases, but the real concern is how these narratives persevere in the minds of the public. Popular works use these dates and constructs without understanding that baggage, and even scholars of good repute, like in the case of Gombrich, can carry on bits of the prejudices from years past even as they critique them. This can be especially dangerous in situations like in the case of Constantinople,

as there are real risks in propagating ideas of an embattled West constantly at threat by the “barbarous hordes of the Orient.” Knowledge, and the ways in which that knowledge is structured has a kind of power to it that needs to be reckoned with, and in the case of history that power is in the ways in which we structure and periodize it that often goes unseen. We need to be aware of the influence of these structures if we hope to accurately represent the past, both to ourselves and to the wider world.

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