

Historiography in the Middle Ages and Renaissance

HST 300
Fall 2009
Professor Lavender

Readings:

- Procopius, *The Secret History* (550 CE)
- Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* (325)
- Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God* (413-26)
- Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah* (1377)
- Niccolo Machiavelli, *The History of Florence* (1525)
- Jean Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History* (1566)

Middle Ages Historiography

- What are the Middle Ages?
 - Between the Classical and the Renaissance
 - Dates: from fall of Western Roman Empire (5th century) to beginning of Early Modern Period (16th century)
 - Sometimes referred to as Medieval period or "The Dark Ages"

Middle Ages Historiography

- Very telling to understand what various historians think mark the END of the Middle Ages
 - 1453 Turkish capture of Constantinople
 - 1453 End of Hundred Years' War (Anglo-French)
 - 1455 Invention of moveable type printing press by Johann Gutenberg
 - 1485 Battle of Bosworth (fall of Richard III & rise of Tudors in England)
 - 1492 *Reconquista* (fall of Muslim Spain)
 - 1492 Columbus's first voyage
 - 1517 Luther's 95 Theses and start of Protestant Reformation
 - 1571 Battle of Lepanto (stopping Ottoman expansion in Mediterranean)

Middle Ages Historiography

- What identifies the intellectual world of the Middle Ages?
- Knowledge held in the hands of the Church (because there was ONE church then, headed by the Pope)
 - Time of mass illiteracy
 - And also orthodoxy – from Greek *orthos* ("true" or "straight") + *doxa* (opinion or teaching)
 - historiography was mostly the province of the Church, taking the form of theological writings

History in the Middle Ages

- The Western Roman Empire disintegrated in the 5th century AD
 - traditions of classical education and literary culture, of which historiography was part, were disrupted and attenuated.
- Literacy became one of the professional skills of the clergy,
 - and clergy carried on the task of preserving and expanding a learned, religious culture.
- Many monasteries kept chronicles or annals,
 - often the anonymous work of generations of monks,
 - which simply recorded whatever the author knew of events, year by year, without any attempt at artistic or intellectual elaboration
- The concern with separating fact from fiction and legend often disappeared in medieval historiography.

Middle Ages and Classical Tradition

- The work of Classical and Early Christian historians, however, were preserved in monastic libraries
- and even inspired some early medieval writers to emulate them
 - Bede the Venerable, an English monk, wrote *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (731)
 - a medieval version of Eusebius
 - integration of secular and ecclesiastical history
 - » natural and supernatural events,
 - » in a forceful and intelligent narrative.

1. The Early Christians

- Herodotus, Thucydides, and Tacitus were all “pagans”
 - and their works were almost entirely secular
 - focused almost exclusively on the role of war in the state.
- Pagans who wondered about human destiny or morality would look to philosophy, not history, to answer these questions.
- With the conversion in the 4th century of Emperor Constantine the Great,
 - Christianity attained legal status
 - and increasing influence in the Roman Empire
- This introduced new subjects and approaches to history.

Procopius of Caesarea (ca. 500 – ca. 565)

- *The Secret History* (550 CE)
- Account of his deep disappointment in Byzantine Emperor Justinian and his wife, Theodora
 - As not truly Christian (and this makes it a great place to start on Middle Ages historiography)
- But also, focused on the private world of the leaders as source of their actions.

Procopius of Caesarea (ca. 500 – ca. 565)

- *The Secret History* also includes “magical” accounts:
- “...some of those who have been with Justinian at the palace late at night, men who were pure of spirit, have thought they saw a strange demoniac form taking his place. One man said that the Emperor suddenly rose from his throne and walked about, and indeed he was never wont to remain sitting for long, and immediately Justinian's head vanished, while the rest of his body seemed to ebb and flow; whereat the beholder stood aghast and fearful, wondering if his eyes were deceiving him. But presently he perceived the vanished head filling out and joining the body again as strangely as it had left it.”

Eusebius of Caesarea (~275 – 339)

- ca. 324: an ecclesiastical history: *Church History (Historia Ecclesiastica)*
 - the growth of the church from its origins,
 - through generations of persecution and martyrdom,
 - to the triumphs of his own day.

Eusebius of Caesarea (~275 – 339)

- A radically new kind of history
 - ignored the traditional classical restrictions of subject and style.
 - Eusebius described religious life,
 - books, and ideas,
 - and people of no political importance;
 - included documentary evidence
 - in fact, many early church texts survive only because they are quoted in Eusebius
 - and considered the major questions of human existence
 - thought in the Classical tradition to be the province of philosophy

Height of Western Middle Ages

- In the 5th century
 - Augustine of Hippo (known by Christians as St. Augustine, patron saint of brewers, printers, theologians, sore eyes)
 - *City of God* (413-26)
- history of the interaction of Christian and secular history.

Aurelius Augustinus, Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

- Historian and philosopher of the Roman Catholic church, but also claimed by Protestants as one of the theological fountainheads of Reformation teaching on salvation and grace.
 - African by birth
 - a Bishop in the Early African Church
 - Roman by education,
 - Milanese by baptism
- His *Confessions* is often called the first Western autobiography.

Augustine

- born in 354 in Tagaste, a provincial Roman city in North Africa.
- raised and educated in Carthage.
 - mother, Monica (Saint Monica), was a devout Catholic
 - father, Patricius, was a pagan
 - but Augustine followed controversial “cult” Manichaean religion
 - although he later turned away from it; *City of God* is written AGAINST it.

Augustine

- Augustine’s education and early career was in philosophy and rhetoric, the art of persuasion and public speaking.
- He taught in Tagaste and Carthage,
- but later went to Rome, the capital
 - met the prefect of the City of Rome, Symmachus
 - He appointed him professor of rhetoric for the imperial court at Milan.
 - THE most visible academic appointment in the Latin world
 - but stressful and busy
 - in *Confessions*, laments that as he went to give a huge lecture to the emperor, he passed a drunken beggar who “had a less careworn existence than he.”

Augustine

- in Milan, also, he came under pressure to convert to Catholicism
 - from his mother, Monica
 - but more importantly from the bishop of Milan, Ambrose
 - Ambrose was a master of rhetoric like Augustine
 - but older and more experienced.
 - Augustine is shaped by Ambrose’s sermons, and other studies, and then moves away from Manichaeism

Augustine

- BUT, instead of becoming Catholic like Ambrose and Monica,
 - he converted to a pagan Neoplatonic approach to truth
 - Neoplatonists believed human perfection and happiness were attainable in THIS world, not only heaven
 - Perfection and happiness could be achieved through philosophical contemplation.

Augustine

- In Milan, Augustine's mother arranged a society marriage for him
 - so he abandoned his concubine of ten years (who was also the mother of his son)
 - but also had to wait for two years for his fiancé to come of age
 - so he had a two-year affair with a third woman
- his famous prayer: "Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet" [*da mihi castitatem et continentiam, sed noli modo*].

Augustine's Conversion

- detailed in his *Confessions*
- Summer of 386
 - read an account of the life of Saint Anthony of the Desert which greatly inspired him
- Augustine underwent a profound personal crisis
 - and decided to convert to Christianity,
 - abandon his career in rhetoric,
 - quit his teaching position in Milan,
 - give up any ideas of marriage (much to the horror of his mother),
 - and devote himself entirely to serving God and the practices of priesthood, which included celibacy.

Augustine in Africa

- Baptized in Milan in 387, then left for Africa
 - his mother and son both died that year
 - Augustine was without family
- Became a priest in Hippo (now Algeria)
 - Preached
 - killed in 430 during the siege of Hippo by the Vandals.

City of God

- Not only a theological tract;
- Also overtly political and historical,
 - suggesting ways that current Christian rulers should think of their states
 - and ways that humans remember and think about the events of the past.
- FOR EXAMPLE:

Augustine on Original sin

- Augustine stressed the presence of original sin
 - And in this differed with Eastern Orthodox theologians
- What is the political use of original sin?
 - All non-Christians are thus "pre-Christians" awaiting conversion

Augustine on Just War

- Advocated the use of force against breakaway, nonorthodox groups, asking "Why ... should not the Church use force in compelling her lost sons to return, if the lost sons compelled others to their destruction?"

Augustine on time and memory

- God exists outside of time in the "eternal present"
 - time only exists within the created universe.
- Augustine writes of walking up a flight of stairs and entering the vast fields of memory
 - so memory is a place/thing with actual dimensions
 - that survives the death of the rememberer

Augustine's Legacy

- Augustine's thought will have tremendous influence over later thinkers
 - such as the idealists (Kant, Hegel, Marx)
- His chief argument:
 - the State of the Classical tradition is replaced by the Church
 - and the relationships between men or among nations become that between man and God.

But this was the West

- In stark contrast, historiography in the East moved forward as a continuation of the Classical traditions.
 - separating fact from fiction and documentation remained important
 - Largely the work of Muslim scholars
 - Important to remember the continuity of Muslim philosophy, science, and history
 - Did not experience the interruption of the West

Medieval Islamic historians

- Medieval Islamic historians
 - such as al-Tabari and al-Masudi
 - wrote histories of great scope,
 - often employing sophisticated methods to separate fact from fable.
- By far the greatest medieval Arabic historian was Ibn Khaldun

Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406)

- Created an early version of sociological history
 - Wished to account for the rise and decline of cities and civilizations.
 - Approach was essentially cyclical
 - But also document based
 - A continuation and sophistication of Tacitus and the Classical tradition.

Khaldun's prehistory

- Arab historian born in Tunis.
- Received a classical Arabic education
 - studying the Qur'an and Arabic linguistics,
 - the basis for an understanding of the Qur'an and of Islamic law.
 - The mystic, mathematician and philosopher Al-Abili introduced him to mathematics, logic and philosophy
- At the age of 17, Ibn Khaldun lost both his parents
 - to an epidemic of the plague which hit Tunis.

Khaldun's career

- Following family tradition, Ibn Khaldun strove for a political career.
 - Context of constantly changing political situation in contemporary North Africa,
 - required a high degree of skill,
 - developing alliances and dropping them appropriately,
 - to avoid being sucked under by the demise of rulers who at times held power only briefly.
- Ibn Khaldun's autobiography reads like an adventure story
 - he spends time in prison, gains the highest offices, and enters exile.

Khaldun's career

- He held various offices under the rulers of Tunis and Morocco
 - Served (1363) as ambassador of the Moorish king of Granada to Peter the Cruel of Castile.
- In 1382 he sailed to Cairo,
 - spent most of the rest of his life as a teacher and lecturer in Cairo
- Many times chosen as grand *Maliki cadi* (judge) of Cairo
- Made the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1387.

Khaldun's Reputation

- Ibn Khaldun is generally considered the greatest of the Arab historical thinkers.
- His great work, the *Kitab al-Ibar* [universal history]
 - he attempts to treat history as a science and
 - outlines a philosophy of history,
 - setting forth principles of sociology and political economy.
- He wrote an autobiography, completed in 1394, but expanded a few months before he died.

Khaldun's Works

- Histories mostly written during his time in North Africa and Spain.
 - at 19, wrote his first book, a commentary on the theology of ar-Razi
 - followed with works on Sufism and logic.
- But most of his works were Historical studies

al-Muqaddimah

- al-Muqaddimah (full translated title: "Book of Evidence, Record of Beginnings and Events from the Days of the Arabs, Persians and Berbers and their Powerful Contemporaries")
 - originally conceived as a history of the Berbers.
 - later the focus was widened
 - included extensive discussion of its methodology
 - and represents a so-called "universal history".

al-Muqaddimah

- Divided into seven books:
 - first, the Muqaddimah, can be considered a separate work.
 - Books two to five cover the history of mankind up to the time of Ibn Khaldun.
 - Books six and seven cover the history of the Berber peoples and of the Maghreb

al-Muqaddimah

- Ibn Khaldun conceived:
 - both a central social conflict
 - ("town" versus "desert")
 - as well as a theory (using the concept of a "generation") of the necessary loss of power of city conquerors coming from the desert.

al-Muqaddimah

- Based around Khaldun's central concept of "social cohesion."
 - cohesion arises spontaneously in tribes and other small kinship groups;
 - can be intensified and enlarged by a religious ideology.
- Ibn Khaldun's analysis looks at how this cohesion carries groups to power
 - but contains within itself the seeds of the group's downfall
 - psychological,
 - sociological,
 - economic,
 - political
 - to be replaced by a new group, dynasty or empire with stronger (or younger and more vigorous) cohesion.

Khaldun's concept of historical cycles

- When a society becomes a great civilization and the dominant culture in its region, its high point is followed by a period of decay.
- The next cohesive group that conquers the diminished civilization is, by comparison, barbarians.
- Once the barbarians solidify their control over the conquered society, however,
 - they become attracted to its more refined aspects,
 - such as literacy and arts, and
 - either assimilate into or
 - appropriate such cultural practices.
 - Then, eventually, the former barbarians will be conquered by a new set of barbarians,
 - who will repeat the process.

Renaissance Historiography

- What is the Renaissance? What is "reborn"?
- 14th to the 17th century
 - Starts in Florence in the Late Middle Ages
 - later spreads to the rest of Europe

Renaissance Historiography

- Resurgence of learning based on classical sources
- Intensified study of Greek and Roman literature
- and the renewal of rhetorical education that characterized intellectual life in 15th-century Italy
 - had an effect on historical study
 - encouraged a secular and realistic approach to political history,
 - both ancient and modern.

Re-Birth of Classical History

- Leonardo Bruni of Florence (15th century)
 - rediscovered the works of Tacitus
 - used them to write a history Republican and imperial Rome
 - to argue that his native Florence was the heir to the Roman tradition
- Niccolò Machiavelli (16th century)
 - wrote works/histories that described political history as taking place in a world bounded by human laws and human ambitions (not by God or the Church)
- Separation of ecclesiastical from secular materials of history evident wherever Renaissance learning had influence in Europe.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527)

- Florentine political philosopher, musician, poet, historian, and romantic comedic playwright.
- Machiavelli was also a key figure in realist political theory,
 - crucial to European statecraft during the Renaissance.
 - (and today: *Realpolitik* draws from *The Prince*)

Machiavelli's prehistory

- Born in Florence,
 - second son of Bernardo di Niccolò Machiavelli and his wife Bartolommea di Stefano Nelli.
- His father was a lawyer of some repute
 - and belonged to an impoverished branch of an influential old Florentine family.

Machiavelli's Career

- Machiavelli served the Republic of Florence as a diplomat
 - after the expulsion of the Medici in 1494,
- Travelled to European courts in France, Germany, and other Italian city-states on diplomatic missions.
 - Experience led to *The Prince* (most famous work)
 - "The ends justify the means."
 - Description of Florence in the age of the Medici and the Borgias
 - as well as Louis XII of France (the occupier-king who committed the five capital errors in statecraft summarized in *The Prince* and as a result was expelled from Italy)

Machiavelli's Career

- BUT Pope Julius II restored the Medici to power in 1512
 - Machiavelli was imprisoned, tortured, and accused of plotting against Medici rule.
- Pope Leo X became pontiff in 1513 (also a Medici family)
 - freed Machiavelli and sent him into exile.
 - but he was later allowed to return to Florence out of the public eye.
- M. died there in 1527, buried in an unmarked grave.

Machiavelli's historiographical Contributions

- Politics are not the province of god's will, but of human action
- Effective leaders are not necessarily moral leaders
 - in fact, statecraft often requires abandoning Christian morality
- Secularization of history
 - as the explicit study of human actions
 - the absence of god is not paganism; it is reality.
- The explicit contemporary use of history
 - Mach.'s goal of uniting Italy under a strong central leader is the reason for his historical studies.

Jean Bodin (1530-1596)

- French jurist,
- Member of the Parliament of Paris and
- Professor of Law in Toulouse.
 - Considered by many to be the father of political science (because of his theory on sovereignty)
- Most famous work:
 - *Six Livres de la République (Six Bookes of the Commonweale)* (1576)

Jean Bodin (1530-1596)

- During the last half of the 16th cent., France experiencing severe disorders
 - caused by religious disagreements between Roman Catholics and Huguenots.
- Dismayed by this chaos,
 - Bodin believed that a restoration of order could only be accomplished by
 - religious toleration and
 - the establishment of a fully sovereign monarch.
- Bodin advocated a transition from the feudal state to the modern nation-state
 - and drew from history to argue for this:
 - pre-feudal societies like Rome had been nation-states.
 - and an absolutely sovereign monarch was necessary for a well-ordered state

Jean Bodin (1530-1596)

- *Six Livres de la République*
 - described the sovereign as a ruler beyond human law
 - and subject only to the divine or natural law.
 - "Sovereignty is a Republic's absolute and perpetual power."
- Climate shapes a people's character
 - so those not blessed with the Mediterranean climate just have to work harder at having successful states.

Next Time:

- Historiography in the Enlightenment (Vico, Gibbon, von Ranke, Kant)