

Histeria!

2025



Front Cover:

A bit of rhubarb to purge his excess bile, 2026

Acrylic and oil stick on canvas, 350 x 400 mm

Mara Szekeley

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Histeria! 2025 Edition consists of essays submitted to Waipapa Taumata Rau

The University of Auckland during the 2025 academic year.

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Publication date: September 2026.

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Editorial Preface

In 1961 the eminent British historian of Russian history, E. H. Carr, gave a series of lectures at Cambridge University entitled “What is History?” These lectures were in part a response to the provocative comment of a fellow historian, A. J. P. Taylor, who, on being questioned as to his methodology, quipped “*those who can, do but those who can’t, pontificate... Like Goering with culture, I reach for my revolver when offered philosophies of history.*”¹ Carr disagreed and immediately embarked on a project that remains of great relevance today - what is it that historians actually do? Thus, prompting the question - for whom do we write? And by implication, what practical application has the study of history? Such questions are particularly prevalent as the humanities are increasingly sidelined as a “luxury” irrelevant to the “real” business of the world or, as one contributor to this journal strikingly put it, the study of history was seen as a “nice hobby” but not a “nice career.”² How we respond – how we defend our discipline - is what prompts the theme for this year’s journal where we, like Carr, answer to the value of a study of history.

Yet, one need only to look at the numbers of students – including many from outside the Faculty of Arts - who choose to enrol in history courses to see that the study of history has not lost its wide general appeal. This could have something to do with the problematic civic and political choices facing democracies today. Or perhaps it is simply a recognition that learning about human nature is a valuable asset for adapting to a rapidly changing world. But whatever it amounts to the relevance of the study of history as a practical concept is by no means a new notion. A belief in the applicable lessons of history can be found in the earliest attempts at understanding the past.³ Thucydides wrote that his account of the Peloponnesian War was meant as an ὀφ’ ἐλπία (“an aid”) to the reader to interpret their own time more wisely.⁴ While, two millennia later, Machiavelli based his advice to princes on a strong belief that a study of the past was the best means

¹ *The Spectator*, 29 December 1961, p. 956.

² Thank you to Mia for providing this insight

³ derived from the verb ‘ἵστορεῖν’ which in ancient Greek means to enquire and to narrate one’s findings Liddell and Scott’s *Greek–English Lexicon*, Oxford, abbr. ed., 1974.

⁴ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Max Warner, Penguin Books, 1954, pp. 47-49.

to teach key elements of statecraft.⁵ For, as Hegel acknowledged, when “traversing the past” we are concerned with the present.⁶ Similarly Carr saw the past as intelligible to us only in terms of the present when he argued we can only fully understand the present in the light of the past.⁷ To those outside the faculty such reasoning may appear counterintuitive to a discipline which is dedicated to making sense of what has gone before us, yet it only takes a moment’s reflection to realise that while what we study is fixed, the places we study it from, and the questions we ask of it, are constantly moving. Indeed, to seek to ignore present concerns, which alone give significance to the past would not only be impossible but make for very dry narratives.

This is something which cannot be levelled against the contributors to this year’s edition of *Histeria!* Many of the authors of the essays included herein have actively chosen to engage with what is happening in our world today - ethically, socially and geopolitically. In looking at these essays Carr’s assertion that history is a process of interaction between the historian and their sources - an “unending dialogue” between the present and the past - rings true. Reading this year’s contributions reminds us that while the history we tell is an imperfectly glimpsed moment in time, it is our interpretation of the past. And in being “ours” it represents finding our own place in the world or, as two of our contributors put it, an effort to make sense of our own humanity.⁸ In this sense the study of history has an enormous amount of value for each of us. Only in a world seemingly bent on marginalising the humanities, it is not enough to individually engage with academic scholarship. We need to defend who and what we are writing for. We need to show that the study of history has a real world practicality and relevance beyond academia.

It is up to us as a discipline to make a conscious effort to convince those who have sidelined the humanities that the practical wisdom imparted by a study of history is fundamental to how we live today. How do we do this? One way is to demonstrate that our ability to be sceptical, to question and analyse from different angles can make a valid

⁵ Skinner, Q., *Machiavelli : a very short introduction*, Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2019.

⁶ Hegel, G. W. F. *The philosophy of right: The philosophy of history*. Vol. 46. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1952, pp. 155-7, 190 : “we have in traversing the past, however extensive its periods, only to do with what is present.”

⁷ Carr, E. H., *What is history?* London: Macmillan, 1961.

⁸ Thank you to Fleur and Ben for providing this insight

contribution to the society in which we live, but I believe we should go further. For to buy into the idea that our discipline's intrinsic worth should be measured only by its practical value is to give up that very humanity that makes up the study of history and which is so imperative to our collective wellbeing. I believe the essays contained herein both collectively and individually serve as a convincing argument that in a world which counts success more and more by its ability to be instantly capitalised, the study of history still has an important contribution to make. For what is a historian's job if not to trace what we have passed through by actively selecting, preserving and interpreting what remains so we might tell stories which provide us with a sense of who we are and the conditions and systems that structure our worlds?⁹

This is not to imply that by looking to the past we might better understand what is to come. The study of history's worth lies in its constant reiteration of the fragility of our collective humanity and how important it is to protect it. This is its intrinsic value. And while this year's essays may not provide answers to the many tangled and complex issues we currently face in our world, they do offer a powerful reminder of that value. Or as one contributor so eloquently put it, *Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua* – I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past.¹⁰ It is this value we need to impress upon those who seek to denigrate our discipline and it is up to you, gentle reader, to make it happen.

Catriona McCallum

⁹ Thank you to Hao, Star, Nathan and Conor for these insights.

¹⁰ I am indebted to Anna for this quote.

*Ko te manu e kai ana i te miro, nōna te ngahere,
ko te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga, nōna te ao.*

*The bird that feeds on the miro berry is the ruler of the forest,
but the bird that feeds on knowledge will inherit the world.*

Above is a well-known whakataukī that speaks to the power of knowledge and learning. It emphasises the importance of feasting on the knowledge of our world, as this enables us to take ownership of our inheritance: the physical world, the memory of our communities, and our values that guide us forward. One of the most important forms of knowledge that enables our ownership over our collective inheritance is history.

Beyond the grander stakes of the world we belong to, smaller communities also derive great value from learning from the past. This is the goal of *Histeria!*, a journal created by members of our History community at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland, for the benefit of our current and future members seeking inspiration and a model for successful history writing. Therefore, we have selected the following essays for their ability to model the very best in engagement with sources, ideas, beliefs, and the connection between past and present. Each essay is not only incredibly well-written, grounded in rigorous analysis of sources, and effectively structured, but also tells us something more profound about its topic. All of the essays presented here are in their original form, with the only changes being formatting to ensure consistency through the journal. As this year's issue focuses on what history is, we have chosen works that we feel best represent its depth and breadth. Most notably, we have included pieces by students of Ancient History to show that history does not fall neatly into the bureaucratic boundaries of subject areas. Furthermore, we have opted to order the essays not by class stage, period, or even geography. Instead, the pieces are ordered to show how historians from all times and places are in conversation with one another. Whether they discuss the American Civil Rights Movement, the colonisation of Aotearoa, Herakles, the *School Journal*, Andean khipu, or sources on Ancient Rome, these pieces address the same fundamental problems. They deal with understanding the past through sources, working

through generations of conversations, and constructing arguments for how we ought to think about and remember times past.

Benjamin Mander begins our journal with a piece reflecting on the nature of history. His essay highlights several issues with traditional ways of thinking about history by responding to John Tosh's recommendations for historians. The quest to create an objective account of the past is complicated by the inherent subjectivity of the author, the sources, and the historian. Additionally, Mander discusses the necessity of historical works to engage with the present, pointing to deeply important historical issues such as the legacies of colonisation. Benjamin's essay can make a strong opening statement for the journal, as it invites readers to think through major historical issues such as subjectivity and memory.

Moving forward with the idea that our present colours our past is **Charles Swain**, who argues that the labels we give the past often reveal more about ourselves than the periods we study. Through analysing different ideas of what defined the American 1960s, Charles suggests that it is time to adjust our view again to one that, in his view, better represents the period and is useful for today. The essay shows us that all narratives we project backwards on the past come from our own ideas of right and wrong, which explains why the dominant narrative on the 1960s presented it as split by a 'good' half and 'bad' half. Taking this into account, Charles argues that we should view the period not as a time when everything got worse, but as one defined by liberation and the evolution of the ideals of American freedom.

Debates around naming are, of course, nothing new; as **Nathan Hopkins** shows, similar to the American 1960s, the naming of conflicts in Aotearoa New Zealand in the late nineteenth century is hotly contested. This essay is a well-written exploration of the impact of how we think about the past. Nathan argues quite convincingly that these conflicts should, as a whole, be named the New Zealand Land Wars Ngā Pakanga Whenua o Aotearoa. For Nathan, this name is not only accurate to the core issue of the wars—land—but also useful for our current-day commemoration of the conflicts. The essay reminds us that debates between historians have far-reaching ramifications for how we interact with our past and, therefore, our present and future.

The shatter zone of colonisation muddies the waters of historical research. As Nathan shows, our understanding of the past is coloured through the language we use to discuss it, sometimes quite literally in the spoken language. **Hao Chen**'s essay explores the impact of translation and the recording of indigenous knowledge during the colonisation of Hawai'i. It shows how alternate versions of historical texts can carry different meanings stemming from language, form, and context. Yet, it also shows how these different forms can still have value. Oral forms hold significant cultural and spiritual value, while historical written records provide a frozen-in-time archive. When put together, Hao's sources tell a story of historical endurance in the face of colonial oppression. Hao's essay is relevant and important to us today, as we are in the middle of a long process of understanding the ongoing impacts of colonisation on indigenous peoples globally. Understanding the role of indigenous knowledge in our archives and in living communities helps us better understand the significance of the sources we work with.

As the first few essays established, history is inherently political. Sources like the translated *Kumulipo* are created in the context of contact between cultures, and debates over naming historical events are fought for contemporary goals. **Stephanie Austin** adds to this theme through exploring the complex question of complicity among the German public during the Nazi period. As Stephanie argues, this is not merely a historical debate, but one of monumental political significance. Moving away from scholarship that has moralised the period, trying to paint the German public as 'good' or 'bad', Stephanie instead argues that we must situate questions of complicity in the historical context, rather than judgement. This essay is important because it shows that people are complex and that authoritarian parties ultimately gain power through support from ordinary people.

In a similar vein, **Fleur Buckrell** grapples with the power of historical propaganda posters not only to sway the public of their own time but also to serve as a key historical source for us now. Fleur's essay uses an analysis of a primary source to deliver an effective and provocative argument about the nature of the Nazi Party's rise. As Fleur argues, it can be tempting for us today to distance ourselves in whatever way possible from the population that enabled the rise of Nazi Germany; however, it is more important to truly understand their motivations. The German people were not caught up

in radical emotions but instead acted in what they believed was in their best interest. Fleur's work reminds us that our own feelings of discomfort with the actions of those in the past can sometimes cloud our judgment and lead us to search for justifications for why we would never do such a thing. Instead, Fleur argues, we must understand the 'fears and aspirations of the moment'. Doing so will help us understand why people continue to support extremist ideologies to this day, and perhaps arm us now with the knowledge to combat them.

Understanding how and why people believe what they believe is a key aim for historians. Beyond propaganda posters, schooling is another crucial way that collectives form beliefs about the past. In her essay on the role of the *New Zealand School Journal* in generating imperial and settler identity in the early 1900s, **Anna Munro** argues that educational tools defined the views of entire generations. Her essay investigates the ways the Journal presented Māori culture and history to Pākehā students in the early 1900s, and how these representations came to define the narrative. Anna's essay stresses that our ideas about the past and about each other in the present are historically contingent and could have been entirely different had the School Journal been different.

As with the *School Journal*, cultural ideas about New Zealand and Māori history have also been shaped by commemorative events. One of these events, the 1963 commemoration of the Battle of Rangiriri, is analysed by **Star Jackson** through the event's souvenir programme. This source analysis is a stylish exploration of memory and the importance of history. It argues that past commemorations, or, as Star argues, celebrations of British victories in the New Zealand Land Wars, enacted 'cultural blindness', which constructed narratives that downplay colonisation and violence in New Zealand history. The piece reflects on the impact of the ways we remember specific past events—in this case, the battle of Rangiriri—on our view of contemporary issues. Jackson's comparisons of the 1963 and 2013 commemorations trace how the 'who' of memory can affect the 'how' and 'what'.

Next, we turn to **Emma de Fleuriot de la Coliniere**, whose essay highlights the importance of historiographical debates for our present. In this case, she covers the concept of the dual state in Nazi Germany, arguing that the autocracy functioned with two faces, one seemingly upholding pre-existing legitimate structures such as the law,

and one carrying out ideological violence. Through defending this idea against opposing models, Emma uncovers a pressing parable for us today: we must look past the processes used by regimes and look into what they are doing and how. Her essay ends with a warning: ‘when exceptions take precedence, autocracy and authoritarianism, or dictatorship follow’. In an age when democracies, globally and locally, are eroding and exceptions are used to mask increasing state encroachment on freedoms, Emma’s essay reminds us that the consequences can be grave. While debates over the relationship between politics and the law in the past may seem to be largely irrelevant to us living almost a century later, Emma shows us that these questions grow ever more relevant to us as we grapple with not only the legacy of past atrocities, but also those ongoing in our present, and potentially incoming in the future.

Not all historical topics that concern the relevance of the past to the present are so depressing. In fact, some can be encouraging and inspiring, and useful in addressing contemporary issues. This is what **Maya Zolotar**’s essay on some of the main issues in trans medieval historiography does. Through a survey of key works in the field, Maya presents several key findings: gender non-conformity is much older than most think; the meaning of gender changes across time and place; our stereotypes about the past are not entirely true; and history is always political. In addition to being an exemplar of a historiographical essay, Maya’s essay is thought-provoking and serves as a lesson for us today. The work of historians to lift marginalised voices from the past and present them to us today can be a powerful tool for winning rights and recognition, showing the world that ‘We have always been here’.

Myths of all sorts are important to us all. Earlier essays showed us how some of our contemporary myths were created and spread over time. **George Stafford**’s essay does the same legwork, only projected back a couple of thousand years. George explores the Herakles myth and its use to legitimise a range of regimes and polis throughout time and space in ancient Greece. His essay reminds us of the power of myths and narratives about the past, even in the past itself. Like the myths we deal with today, the myth of Herakles is malleable, changing with the need to legitimise current action. All forms of historians deal with myths, be they on the nature of colonisation, or the question of complicity in Nazi Germany, and George shows us that these historical myths work in the

same way that literal religious myths in the ancient world worked: they bend and change to serve the goals of their tellers.

As George and Star's essays showed us, myths come from texts. Be they posters, brochures, orations, or books, historical texts tell us not only about what happened, but also communicate much about who wrote them. To this end, **Connor Noble**'s essay shows us that each type of text, in his case, Andean staff code and khipus, biblical references in various texts, and language across Japanese literary works, has a genre, and these genres communicate the power dynamics of the societies that create them. This essay reminds us that the sources we use as a glimpse into the past are, of course, products of the people who made them. Connor's use of contextualising information shows us the importance of not just looking at the sources themselves, but also at who made them.

We now know that texts are subjective and will often carry through underlying power structures, but even individual words can do the same. **Ivy-Maria Kelsey** discusses just this in her essay comparing and contrasting the uses of the term 'reform' in the Carolingian and Gregorian periods. Their essay takes us through both periods and highlights how what looks to be the same process can be drastically different in form and consequence. Ivy's essay is a model for historiographical essays as she masterfully charts the waters of an historical debate and, in doing so, uncovers the complexity of the past. Their essay also serves as a warning to historians to ensure they understand the baggage of the terms they use and engage with, as even a single word like reform can mean vastly different things to different people, at different times, and in different spaces.

A more recent development in history is a growing focus on transcending national boundaries and viewing history from a global perspective. **Kavan Faoagali** takes this perspective to an all-time favourite historical topic: the French Revolution. More specifically, Kavan argues that the French Revolution had a profound impact on global politics, reshaping political thought, social order, and imperial relations around the world. To demonstrate this, Kavan draws upon the works of four historians, each of whom analysed how ideas and orders were turned on their head following the calamity in France. Several examples from around the world, including but certainly not limited to the Americas, the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, and the Mediterranean, illustrate the

profound changes in politics and thinking after the Revolution. To Kavan, the French Revolution's true legacy lies in the varied ways that it disrupted existing orders and redefined what was possible all around the world.

Mia Jönsson rounds out this year's edition with a question that plagues every historian, from the professor to the student, to the curator, to the hobbyist: Can a source we know is not accurate still be useful? To Mia, the answer is a resounding 'yes'! Mia's essay explores how ancient sources, in this case, the work of the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, can provide useful, even if flawed, accounts of the past. Despite his use of literary devices, exaggeration, factual twisting, and inconsistencies with other sources, Mia argues that his work can still be of utmost value to historians today. Instead of looking to Ammianus for a one-hundred-per-cent accurate reflection of what happened, Mia argues that we can find value in reading Ammianus to understand how these events were perceived by those who wrote them. This argument is important to historians of all types, as it helps us to unlock new meaning from our sources through asking new questions. It also strikes at the core question of the field: can we truly know the past? If not, then what is history for?

Altogether, this year's essays help to answer that question. They show us that despite the unknowable nature of the past, there is still value in the effort to uncover and understand it. Many of the essays directly engaged with the relevance of the past to the present, convincing us that our ideas of the nature of Nazi Germany, the names we give wars and decades, the existence of gender non-conformity in the past, or the definition of the term 'reform' are key to understanding our present-day predicaments. All of us are defined by our histories, our whakapapa. Therefore, the work of historians, such as this collection of students, continues to be important to define ourselves.

Alexandru Cotos

History 300 – Thinking History

Benjamin Mander

Personal Statement:

Benjamin Mander (He/Him) is currently in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Laws (Honours) and Bachelor of Arts conjoint degree, majoring in History. He particularly enjoys studying areas where those fields overlap, and the theoretical basis for historical research. When not studying, Benjamin enjoys music and reading.

Nominated and taught by Professor Malcom Campbell.

Does History Have a Purpose? Analysing John Tosh's Model of Historical Awareness

In The Pursuit of History John Tosh argues that 'historical awareness' consists of the interplay of respect for 'the autonomy of the past', attempts to reconstruct the past in 'all its strangeness', and application of historical 'insights to the present'. (p. 9). If we were to take his statement as a guide to good history writing, would the model represent best historical practice or an impossible ideal?

John Tosh's attempt to create a model that explains 'historical awareness' is admirable, but falls short of completely revolutionising the study of history, as it is too narrow and undefined in its direction. His three-step process is a good way of reminding academic historians of the key goals of history, as it allows them to create histories untainted by the potential bias from what Tosh calls 'social memory'. However, it is of little use for historians who intend to influence the public by engaging with their social memory. Each of its three steps has its strengths and weaknesses, demonstrating that Tosh's model, in some circumstances, is a relatively nebulous ideal that historians should strive to achieve. In others, it is a mostly irrelevant consideration.

Tosh's three-step model states that achieving historical awareness "means respecting the autonomy of the past, and attempting to reconstruct it in all its strangeness before applying its insights to the present".¹ To put this another way, historians should: (1) sever any connections or values they may have in the present and adopt an objective perspective before approaching the past, then (2) build up an understanding of the past solely from the evidence we have available, then (3) compare this past to the present and seek any insight it can give, now that the past is understood on its own terms. In this way, it is a model that focuses on applying the past to the present in a careful manner.

Tosh's first step, that historians should separate their understanding of the past from the present, is a good target, but it can be almost impossible to achieve in practice. Tosh

¹ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of History*, London, 2021, p.11.

essentially asks that historians be objective in their analysis of the past, which is much more difficult than a simple change in mindset. This is a problem that has been dealt with differently by historians over the years. Cultural history, for example, attempted to remove the bias from the present by engaging with the most alien aspects of historical cultures that they could find.² Robert Darnton stated that historians can better achieve objectivity if they attempt to describe something completely alien, so they cannot relate to it.³ This creates a mental distance that might prevent the historian's bias and anachronism from seeping in.⁴ In his own work, he attempted to understand French culture through the starting point of the story of a cat massacre.⁵ While this technique may succeed in certain circumstances, it cannot always be relied upon as the best way for historians to gain a sense of objectivity in the past. Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist who inspired Darnton to engage with history in this manner, shows the limitations in his work on Balinese cockfighting. Despite ultimately using a similar technique to Darnton, Geertz does not manage to achieve anywhere near the level of objectivity Tosh suggests is required in history. Geertz engages in his description of cockfighting with such confidence that it flattens Balinese culture to a caricature of itself, exemplified by his sweeping statements like "the Balinese live in spurts".⁶ Despite the methodological steps Geertz took, removing the bias from history is largely a mental exercise, one which Geertz apparently failed. If historians do not apply the correct mindset, they cannot achieve anything close to an objective analysis of the past.

However, it is not enough to simply adopt a mindset and try not to let the present influence historians' perceptions of the past. There are inherent structural biases and limitations in the way history is practised that make it impossible to engage with history completely objectively. This is largely a post-structuralist idea, that whatever is being interpreted will inevitably be tainted by the interpreter and their frame of reference.⁷ While this is true for individual historians' interactions with sources, it is also true for the structure of Western history as a whole, which has been the focus of postcolonial historians such as

² Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre And Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, New York, 1984, p.6.

³ *ibid.*, p.78.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.4.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.78.

⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York, 1973, p.445.

⁷ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 65, 1, 1990, p.60.

Dipesh Chakrabarty. He pointed out that Western historical practices, which are largely positivist, do not have room for ways of understanding history that fall outside those bounds.⁸ Similarly, Bain Attwood has argued that the sources that postcolonial history attempts to incorporate into its historical narrative are often so deeply integrated into present-day political struggles that divorcing the past from the present would undermine the inclusion of these sources in the first place.⁹ In this way, the very structures of historical practice can prevent Tosh's vision of the past from being understood untainted by the present.

Tosh's second step, to bring the past alive on its own terms, touches on one of the most contentious issues historians have dealt with: how can historians determine the truth of the past? This raises questions about the nature of sources and how they can be interpreted in relation to their text and context. Tosh's model, perhaps intentionally, does not offer a precise method of building an image of the past; it merely tells historians to do so. This leaves a gap that individual historians need to fill however they see fit. To use cultural historians as an example again, they attempted to create this image of the past by fleshing out the understanding of cultural and societal structures at the time.¹⁰ Approaching the problem in this way significantly broadens the scope of potential sources, as almost anything can be used to understand cultural attitudes and sentiments.¹¹

Emotional history experienced a similar shift over time, as early attempts at emotionology limited themselves to texts that specifically mentioned emotional standards at the time.¹² This concept was later expanded by historians such as Barbara Rosenwein, who pioneered the study of emotional communities, which enabled the examination of emotions in texts that did not specifically intend to describe emotional norms.¹³

However, there is no consensus as to how truth can be ascertained from texts. Poststructuralist historians such as Gabrielle Spiegel argue that the approach of cultural and emotional historians flattens the relationship between text and context.¹⁴ By treating

⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Minority histories, subaltern pasts', *Postcolonial Studies*, 1, 1, 1998, p.18.

⁹ Attwood, Bain, 'Aboriginal history, minority histories and historical wounds: the postcolonial condition, historical knowledge and the public life of history in Australia', *Postcolonial Studies*, 14, 2, 2011, p.184.

¹⁰ Darnton, p.6.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Barbara H. Rosenwein, *emotional communities in the early middle ages*, Ithaca, NY., 2006, pp.7.

¹³ *ibid.*, pp.23-24.

¹⁴ Spiegel, p.71.

everything as a text, they open themselves up to the risk of ignoring the societal structures that feed into and produce texts.¹⁵ Nevertheless, no matter which method historians use to ascertain the fundamental truth of the past, it will fit into Tosh's model as the precise mechanics are not his focus. The model just requires that a clear and objective understanding of the past be achieved in some way.

Unfortunately, there can be limitations in achieving this full image of the past that Tosh's model seems to strive for. The study of history works in an almost paradoxical way in that it seems the more effort is put into understanding it, the less possible it becomes to create objective overarching narratives. History is filled with plurality, and there remains much that can never be known because of the limitations of sources. This is particularly illustrated by Elizabeth Clark's work on early Christian women, where she determined that, despite the considerable number of sources written about the lives of early Christian female saints, these sources are fundamentally tainted by their male authors and their intent to create allegories out of real lives.¹⁶ This does not mean they cannot be used to further our historical understanding, just that their usefulness lies in understanding the perceptions of Early Christian men rather than the lives of Early Christian women.¹⁷ As a result, Tosh's goal to reconstruct a full image of the past is fundamentally impossible to ever fully realise. However, this does not significantly limit the application of his model. His focus is on creating an objective representation of the past, ensuring that any insights gained from history have a legitimate basis.¹⁸ While Clark could not establish much about the actual lives of Early Christian women, of more importance to Tosh's model is the fact that she acknowledged the sources' limitations and did not attempt to create an objective history of an area they could not. Tosh's model can still function regardless of how fruitful attempts to bring history to life are, as anything can be used so long as it remains objective, or as close to objective as is physically possible.

The final aspect of Tosh's model for historical awareness engages one of the core issues of history: its purpose. The question of history's purpose is far from settled, and

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.77.

¹⁶ Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the "Linguistic Turn"', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 6, 3, 1998, p.430.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Tosh, p.19.

there remain many distinct interpretations of its value to the present. At one end of the spectrum of answers is the belief that history has no purpose other than the intrinsic value of knowledge. At the other end is the belief that the study of history can directly be used to inform knowledge of the future. Ultimately, this is an unanswerable and largely subjective question that remains for each historian to consider for themselves. Regardless, Tosh's model is based on the latter view and presumes that history can be relied upon for insight into the present and future. His model is therefore a method of determining what this insight may be, based on the idea that any insight should flow naturally from an accurate and unbiased analysis of the past.¹⁹ Notably, the present should only be considered once the past is brought to life on its own terms. However, this is not the only view of how to gather insights for the present from the past.

Public history represents a challenge to Tosh's strict process in extracting insights from the past. This field is the study of how the public interacts with history.²⁰ As such, it involves creating histories and finding insight from them to be understood by the public, who exist in the present. However, in its engagement with the public, it possibly goes beyond what Tosh's suggested process of passively absorbing insight from an unbiased history. Huw Halstead argues that public historians need to appreciate how the public understands the importance and content of history so that they can communicate history in a way that people will accept.²¹ In this way, Halstead sees public history as something that should seek directly to address common understandings of history in the present. In doing so, he is doing what Tosh's model advises against by letting the present colour the interpretation of history. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing. Tosh's model helps gain a general understanding of the process of historical awareness, but it cannot account for every situation. The model fits academic history well, but public history has different goals and does not need to apply the same rigour in removing the taint of the present from the study of the past.

Another example of how Tosh's strict approach to gathering insights for the present from history is not required in all circumstances is the representation of history in films.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Huw Halstead, 'Everyday Public History', *History*, 107, 375, 2022, p.236.

²¹ *ibid.*, p.247.

Certain historians have argued that historical films, despite being fictional representations of the past, can be valuable tools for public history.²² Rebecca Weeks discussed how the introduction of completely fictional characters into real historical settings can heighten the audience's understanding of history, provided they capture the 'historical spirit'.²³ Historical characters can also be used in film, but fully fictional characters can allow the writers more freedom to engage with themes and the past.²⁴ This can bring the past alive for the public in its essence and character, even if it does not represent strict historical fact. Facts are not the only form of truth, and if films can capture what it felt like for those living in history, they can communicate an equally valuable truth about the past. The importance of films and other fictional works towards the public's understanding of history demonstrates that Tosh's model may be too protective of what insights can and should be derived from history. While this may be necessary in some more academic circumstances, the example of historical films shows that communicating history based on a loose feeling for the past can be just as effective for communicating broad concepts to the public.

Tosh's three-step model for achieving historical awareness has not solved historical theory. It is useful for framing the historian's general goal, but does not specify exactly how this can be achieved, nor does it prescribe how to approach situations where a less precise approach can suffice. He suggests that historians should prevent their understanding of the present from influencing their interpretation of the past, which is a valiant endeavour. However, as cultural and postcolonial histories demonstrate, this is effectively impossible as any work will be tainted by the inherent qualities of the author and the historical framework in which they approach it. Additionally, his instruction to understand the strangeness of the past in its own terms is not a methodology, instead a vague direction that historians should consider the core idea that the goal of history is to bring the truth of the past alive. Tosh's final piece of advice, that insights for the present should only flow from a full understanding of the past, is useful for many academic contexts. However, in more public-oriented contexts, such academic rigour is not required, and Tosh's model does not need to apply. As a result, Tosh's model for 'historical awareness' is useful as a way of

²² Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*, Cambridge, Mass., 1995, p.77.

²³ Rebecca Weeks, *History by HBO: Televising the American Past*, Lexington, Kent., 2022, p.98.

²⁴ *ibid.*

centring historians in the important concepts of history, but it does not guarantee success, describe how success could be achieved, or apply to all circumstances.

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History 341 – Making Sense of the Sixties: The USA 1954-1974.

Charles Swain

Personal Statement:

I am an undergraduate student completing a BA in History and Politics and International Relations. I have always possessed a deep love of history and am particularly interested in the study of armed conflicts and ethno-political violence. I am drawn to the stories of resistance to oppression and violence deeply moving, and to understanding how historical context continues to shape modern conflicts.

Nominated and taught by Associate Professor Jennifer Frost.

Beyond Declension: Reinterpreting the Sixties

Early histories interpreted the 1960s as a decade of decline, beginning with the early "good" sixties and devolving into the late "bad" sixties. Why or why not is this "declension" interpretation an accurate way to understand the sixties?

I. Introduction

The 'Sixties' is best understood as a period that began in the 1950s and extended into the mid 1970s, an era historians have often divided this period into two moral halves: an early "good Sixties," characterised by idealism, unity, and reform, subsequently followed by the "bad Sixties," known as a period of decay, violence, and disillusionment. This prevailing view of the 'Sixties,' known as the "declension narrative," remains as one of the key problems in how Americans remember the era – whether it marked a democratic awakening or a descent into chaos hinging on contemporary political views. Early historians such as Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, portrayed the New Left's collapse as the endpoint of a failed utopian experiment, reinforcing this narrative.¹ By contrast later scholars including Jeremy Varon, Michael Foley, and John McMillian resist such moral binaries, urging historians to treat the Sixties as a living dialogue rather than a closed episode.² This shift from declension to continuity forms the interpretive foundation of this essay.

This essay argues that the "declension" narrative tells us more about the anxieties of the 1970s than about the 1960s themselves. Emerging amid post-Vietnam disillusionment and conservative backlash, it obscures the fact that the Sixties represented not a moral collapse but a transformation of American democracy. While it is true that liberal faith in government fractured under the pressures of war and urban unrest, identity politics and movements for civil rights, feminism, and gay liberation redefined political participation and expanded the democratic experiment of the early "good Sixties."

¹ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, "The Failure and Success of the New Radicalism," in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, Princeton, 1989, pp. 212-214.

² Jeremy Varon, Michael S. Foley, and John McMillian, "Time Is An Ocean: The Past and Future of the Sixties," *The Sixties*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2008), pp. 1-7.

Conversely, the “bad Sixties,” far from signifying decay, embodied the decade’s enduring struggle to make American democracy more inclusive.

The essay proceeds in five parts. It begins by examining the “good Sixties” of liberal faith and optimism, when civil-rights activism and the reforms of the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies embodied confidence in government-led progress. The second section then traces how the Vietnam War, and racial unrest undermined this consensus, transforming liberal idealism into moral critique. The third re-evaluates 1968, the so-called turning point of the “good Sixties,” as both a time of crisis and the culmination of the decade’s democratic ideals. The fourth section explores how the “bad Sixties” radicalism and identity politics extended rather than concluded the democratic progress of the Sixties. Finally, the fifth section revisits the “declension” debate through the lens of memory and historiography, arguing that the Sixties’ legacy lies not in decline but in the ongoing expansion of American democracy.

II. The “Good Sixties” (1954-1964)

Many contemporaries remember the early 1960s as a moral high point; it was an era of hope and progress before anti-war movements and riots supposedly brought it crashing down. This image of a “good Sixties” rested on the liberal reform culture that emerged and developed in the postwar era. Writers, early feminists, and civil rights activists of the 1950s voiced their discontent with America’s rigid social order and moral complacency. Alice Echols notes that the fifties were “not exactly a time of cultural and political quiescence,” but rather a period which “mark[ed] the beginning of meaningful dissent” with civil rights movements, rock ‘n’ roll, and the Beats began to erode the consensus culture that the 1960s would later overturn.³ Echols’ challenge to the myth of 1950s conformity complements Alan Brinkley’s account of figures like Allard Lowenstein, showing how cultural dissent and liberal reform emerged in tandem rather than opposition. Together they reveal the porous boundary between the late 1950s and the early 1960s – the seedbed of later transformation.

³ Alice Echols, “The Ike Age: Rethinking the 1950s,” in Echols, *Shaky Ground: The ‘60s Its Aftershocks*, New York, 2002, pp. 51-60.

The Civil Rights Movement mobilised the moral convictions of the Sixties and turned them into democratic practice. Martin Luther King Jr.'s insistence that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" turned Christian morals into a vehicle for equality.⁴ Sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and mass marches exposed the gap between national ideals and racial realities, forcing civil rights issues into the political mainstream. John F. Kennedy's "New Frontier" embodied this renewed civic confidence. His 1961 Inaugural Address where he directed Americans to "ask not what your country can do for you" but "ask what you can do for your country" encapsulated the early-Sixties faith and optimism that public virtue and government action could advance freedom both at home and abroad.⁵

While Kennedy grew a sense of early sixties confidence, Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" represented this optimism at its peak. At the University of Michigan, 1964, Johnson promised that "The Great Society...demands an end to poverty and racial injustice," expanding liberal reform from civil rights to poverty, education, and healthcare. Historian Alan Brinkley notes that figures like Allard Lowenstein sought to "walk a line between the cautious centrism of the 1950s and the searing radicalism of the 1960s," striving to reconcile liberal idealism with Cold War pragmatism.⁶ However, this era of optimism was still affected by contradictions. The same Johnson administration that pursued racial justice also deepened military commitments in Vietnam; the same trust in expertise that produced the War on Poverty also generated bureaucratic detachment. By 1964 liberal consensus appeared triumphant, but its assumption that progress flowed from Washington and that moral authority resided in institutions would soon be tested.

The "good Sixties" were therefore both hopeful and fragile. Their reliance on institutional morality created the conditions for later disillusionment. When those

⁴ Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail." *Atlantic Monthly*, 74, 83, 2018, p. 1.

⁵ Paul F. Boller and Ronald Story, "President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, 1961" in, *A more perfect Union; documents in U.S. history*, Boston, 1996, p. 224.

⁶ Alan Brinkley, "Allard Lowenstein and the Ordeal of Liberalism," in Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and its Discontents*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 247.

institutions faltered, many perceived decline. However, what looked like collapse was in fact the exposure of contradictions already embedded within the liberal ideal itself.

III. Fracturing the Consensus (1964-1968)

By the mid-1960s, the faith in reform liberalism was beginning to erode. The expansion of the Vietnam War, deepening racial division, and generational unrest exposed the fault lines that had always existed alongside the liberal faith in progress. What some would later read as the onset of national decline was, in fact, the point at which the limits of institutional idealism became impossible to ignore.

Charles E. Neu calls Vietnam an “unfinished war” that “lingers in the national memory.”⁷ For many Americans, the conflict shattered the moral self-image that had sustained the liberal consensus. Journalistic coverage of atrocities such as My Lai undermined the Cold War “war story” that had cast the United States as a global liberator. Neu observes that what began as “an adventurous expedition had turned into an exhausting, indecisive war of attrition.”⁸ The same faith in governance, and optimism that had produced The Great Society now appeared delusional. The gap between the government's rhetoric and the grim reality in Southeast Asia now became what journalist dubbed the “credibility gap,” a symbol of broader disillusionment.

The antiwar movement, far from representing social decay, revealed how moral protest could re-energise democratic participation. Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield note that “the antiwar movement was at once a product of history and a process that made history.”⁹ Students, clergy, and veterans joined demonstrations that transformed opposition to policy into an assertion of civic responsibility. Rather than nihilism, these movements embodied a belief that democracy demanded dissent. They challenged the liberal assumption that loyalty required submission, insisting instead that patriotism and democracy lay in holding the state accountable to its own ideals. Where Neu emphasises moral exhaustion and the loss of national confidence, DeBenedetti and

⁷ Charles E. Neu, “The Vietnam War and the Transformation of America,” in Neu, ed., *After Vietnam: Legacies of a Lost War*, Baltimore, 2000, p. 2.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 17

⁹ Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, “The Antiwar Movement and American Society,” in Robert D. McMahon, ed., *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War*, Boston, 2003, p. 495.

Chatfield locate renewal in the same turmoil. They illustrate how interpretations of the 1960s diverge depending on whether one views dissent as breakdown or rebirth.

Race relations followed a similar trajectory. The passage of the Civil Rights Act 1964 and the Voting Rights Act 1965 appeared to complete the moral project of the early decade, however, continuing segregation, urban poverty, and police violence revealed the fragility of those victories. The emergence of Black Power and subsequent uprisings in Watts and Detroit were read by many white liberals as signs of regression from pacifism to militancy. Nonetheless, for activists like Stokely Carmichael, Black Power represented not rejection of American democracy but its radical extension to include autonomy and self-definition. The rhetoric of empowerment that unnerved liberal observers would later echo through feminism, gay liberation, and ethnic rights movements.

Isserman and Kazin capture this tension when they note that “nothing was accomplished by the New Left in its short life, everything was different afterward.”¹⁰ Their observation encapsulates the transitional quality Neu describes but reframes it positively – suggesting that transformation, not failure, defined the decade’s legacy. The upheavals of the mid-Sixties marked the migration of idealism from state institutions to citizen movements. As the Vietnam War and racial violence eroded public trust, young Americans redirected the moral energy of the “good Sixties” toward the politics of participation, conscience, and identity. The collapse of liberal optimism was thus less of an ending than a transformation, it was an inflection point in which the struggle for justice shifted from the halls of power to the streets and campuses of a restless American democracy.

IV. Collapse or Culmination? 1968

No single year shaped the memory of the Sixties more than 1968. To many observers it seemed the moment when reform gave way to revolt: assassinations of activist leaders, urban riots, campus occupations, and the quagmire of Vietnam seemed to confirm that the decades optimism had devolved into chaos and violence. In popular recollection, 1968 marked the transition from the “good Sixties” of hope to the “bad Sixties” of

¹⁰ Isserman and Kazin, p. 214.

disillusionment. This image, however, compresses a far more complex reality: far from representing collapse, 1968 exposed rather than created the tensions that had long been transforming American political culture.

Estelle B. Freedman's memoir "Coming of Age at Barnard, 1968" encapsulates the mood of disillusionment and awakening that defined the year. As a student activist she recalls the police "bust" of Columbia University occupiers left her disillusioned with institutions like Columbia University and the *New York Times*.¹¹ Disillusionment with authority, however, did not extinguish her sense of moral purpose. Freedman describes encountering feminism and political community through the same upheavals that seemed to symbolise collapse. By refusing to frame 1968 as either "good" or "bad," she portrays it as a moment of continuity and complexity, a catalyst that "forced moderates...to question institutional complicity."¹² In doing so Freedman personalises what historians such as Isserman and Kazin or Neu treat in structural terms, revealing how the Sixties' broader crises of authority were experienced as opportunities for self-discovery and new forms of solidarity

Across the country, similar patterns unfolded with identity politics taking centre stage. Students denounced the war and demanded representation; African-American, Latino, and Native American activists pressed for autonomy; and women began to pursue their own liberation. Each protest or movement was a critique of authority as well as an affirmation of democratic participation. The chaos of 1968 was thus not the antithesis of the "good Sixties" but its most intense expression. If the early decade had trusted institutions to deliver justice and progress, the upheavals of 1968 proved that the people themselves must embody those ideals.

V. Liberation and Continuity (1968-73)

In the aftermath of 1968, many concluded that the idealism of the early decade had given way to narcissism and fragmentation. Yet the proliferation of liberation movements

¹¹ Estelle B. Freedman, "Coming of Age at Barnard, 1968," *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture*, 1, 2 (2008), p. 216.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 220.

following that year demonstrated not the collapse but the continuation of democratic idealism in new forms. As veterans of civil-rights and antiwar activism turned their focus to gender, sexuality, and identity, they extended the Sixties' central promise – that politics must be participatory and personal.

Across feminism, gay liberation, and racial or ethnic pride movements, activists leaned on the tactics of direct action and brought them into the realm of private life. Consciousness-raising groups, women's health collectives, and gay-liberation fronts reframed citizenship itself as an act of self-definition, arguing that true democracy requires autonomy over one's body and identity. John D'Emilio argues that gay activism both echoed and contributed to civil-rights activism in a term he calls the "gay echo."¹³ D'Emilio's emphasis on continuity directly challenges the declension framework outlined by Isserman and Kazin, who positioned such movements as the epilogue to an era of lost idealism. The shared tactics of direct protest, picketing federal agencies, and building their own alternative institutions were as vital to sexual politics as they were to racial politics.¹⁴ To D'Emilio placing gay activism and liberation at the end of the "good Sixties" "imprisons" them in a narrative of decline" that is associated with the "bad Sixties."¹⁵ Recentring these movements reveals that the late Sixties diversified rather than devolved.

The slogan "the personal is political" captured this reorientating. Instead of turning away from moral idealism, activists reimagined democracy as a practice of everyday life – shaping family, sexuality, work, and culture. Feminists challenged hierarchies both in the workplace and within liberal movements like the SDS; Black Power and Chicano movements framed cultural pride as collective empowerment. What looked to critics as fragmentation was simply the decentralisation of democracy. Authority no longer resided in Washington or university presidents but in individuals acting within their own communities. The moral conscience that once animated civil-rights marches now energised struggles over gender and identity.

¹³ Ibid, p. 215.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 214.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 211.

Cultural politics reinforced this shift. Popular music, underground press, and visual satire made dissent part of mass culture. The *Anti-Antiwar Cartoons* of the late 1960s reveal how defenders of the status quo caricatured and derided protest as childish or irresponsible. Karl Hubenthal's "*Viet-Conga Line*" (1967), for instance, depicted peace demonstrators dancing in absurd mimicry of the enemy.¹⁶ The cartoon's mockery of protestors visually enacts the very moral polarisation that scholars such as Varon and McMillian later identified in public memory - where dissent became caricatured as chaos. Such images helped construct the myth of the "bad Sixties," transforming liberation into evidence of decadence. Yet the very need for such mockery shows how threatening plural democracy had become to traditional authority. The contest over the decade's meaning began not in retrospect but in real time, as conservatives and radicals fought to define freedom itself.

By the early 1970s, many of these movements achieved institutional footholds – university women's studies programmes, local anti-discrimination ordinances, and environmental legislation. The Sixties did not end; they evolved into the everyday activism of the 1970s. What critics read as moral exhaustion was in fact the normalisation of dissent, the embedding of participatory ideals within civic and cultural life. The late Sixties thus fulfilled rather than betrayed the democratic experiment begun at mid-decade.

VI. Reconsidering the Declension Narrative

By the mid-1970s the decade had already entered its afterlife in American memory. Commentators across the political spectrum transformed the Sixties into moral allegory: for some, a story of lost innocence; for others, a blueprint for liberation. The persistence of the "declension narrative" owes much to this struggle over remembrance. As Varon, Foley, and McMillian observe, "the Sixties are an exceptional laboratory for understanding."¹⁷ They argue that the Sixties are not a fixed sequence of events but a continuing argument about democracy, freedom, and moral responsibility.¹⁸ Varon et

¹⁶ Karl Hubenthal, "VIET-CONGA LINE," San Francisco Examiner, 1967

¹⁷ Varon et Al., p. 6.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 2.

Al.'s notion of echoes Echols's claim that the 1950s contained the seeds of dissent and transformation, bridging the early and later Sixties as parts of one ongoing experiment in democracy.

The simplification of era into a "rise-and-fall" tale provided emotional closure for a society unsettled by the Vietnam War and social change. Casting the decade as a tragic decline allowed Americans to mourn lost unity while avoiding confrontation with the inequalities and exclusions that unity had concealed. Yet, as later historians remind us, nostalgia and backlash both distort the period's meaning. The real continuity of the Sixties lies in its habit of self-critique, the belief that democracy must remain perpetually unfinished. The movement's failures and excesses were part of that process not evidence of its demise.

To study the "long Sixties" is therefore to study the evolving language of American democracy itself. The decade endures not as a moral cautionary tale but as a living question: how far can participation, conscience, and equality extend in a society still divided by power?

VII. Conclusion

The 1960s were not a tale of rise and fall but a process of renewal through conflict. The optimism of early liberalism fractured under the pressures of war and racial division, yet its democratic impulse endured in new forms of activism and personal liberation. Movements for gender, sexual, and racial equality persisted throughout the late 1960s and into the 1970s challenging the declension narrative that portrayed this period as the "bad Sixties." The persistence of the *declension* narrative reflects the longing for moral certainty that the decade unsettled, not the reality of its history. What the Sixties ultimately revealed was that democracy itself is never complete and that dissent and reinvention are the enduring conditions of American freedom.

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History 107 – Titiro Whakamuri: Histories of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Nathan Hopkins

Personal Statement:

Tēnā koe readers. It is a real privilege to be included in this edition of Histeria! I am a 2022 Bachelor of Commerce graduate who returned for a Bachelor of Arts in 2025, majoring in history and geography. I plan on entering the education sector post-study to share my ever-growing passion for Aotearoa New Zealand history with future students. With this essay, I hope to offer a robust contribution to the conversation of how we should respectfully challenge, acknowledge, and engage with the complex and multifaceted realities of our past.

Nominated by Dr. Rowan Light and supported by their tutor, Lucy Buchanan.

Land Was the Cause: Why We Must Remember the Nineteenth Century Conflicts as ‘The New Zealand Land Wars — Ngā Pakanga Whenua o Aotearoa’

“The cause of this war is land only.”¹

– Wī Tako Ngātata, 10 April 1860.

Historians have used a variety of names to describe the wars in Aotearoa New Zealand between 1843 and 1872. Over the past four decades, the term ‘New Zealand Wars’ has been embedded in New Zealand’s vernacular, standing largely uncontested. It is incomplete. Instead, the ‘New Zealand Land Wars — Ngā Pakanga Whenua o Aotearoa’ is what we must call them. In suggesting a revised term, it is important to examine the reasons behind the use of other terms by historians. Incorporating ‘Land’ into the term acknowledges Māori te tino rangatiratanga and the physical whenua they owned as one and the same. The struggle for one is the struggle for the other. The case for including ‘Land’ is found in the context of the Northern, Taranaki, and Waikato Wars. Each time a claim to the land was made, by either Māori or Crown, an assertion of sovereignty was implied. It is important that a name the public engages with is able to provide specificity and a cultural context to matters of historical consequence. We must endeavour to remember the cause.

Keith Sinclair uses the term ‘Maori Wars’ in an uncritical manner.² Reasons against its use are plentiful. It is an outdated and problematic term that follows the British war nomenclature of identifying the enemy, holding them responsible for the violence, and implying British victory and superiority.³ Sinclair applies ‘Maori Wars’ to the Taranaki and

¹ “Papers Relative to the Native Insurrection,” *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1861, E-03, pp. 35-36.

² Danny Keenan, *Wars Without End Ngā Pakanga Whenua o Mua: New Zealand’s Land Wars – A Māori Perspective*, rev. ed., Auckland, 2021, p. 28.

³ Vincent O’Malley, *The New Zealand Wars | Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa*, Wellington, 2019, p. 28; James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*, Auckland, 2015, p. 312; Keenan, *Wars Without End*, pp. 27-28.

Waikato Wars in the 1860s, highlighting the rise of Māori nationalism through the Kotahitanga and Kīngitanga movements as critical components to understanding the wars.⁴ Although Sinclair recognises ‘sovereignty’ as a distinct matter within the Kīngitanga movement, he acknowledges it is impossible to overstate the primacy of ‘land’. Land was placed under the mana of the Kīngi and it was ultimately the issue of land being withheld that angered settlers and Governors, not the Kīngitanga itself.⁵ It was land purchase policies from 1840—1858 and the demands of impatient settlers dismissive of Māori customs that created the conditions for the formation of the Kīngitanga and, subsequently, Sinclair’s ‘Maori Wars’.⁶ James Belich followed the example of James Cowan’s use of the ‘New Zealand Wars’ in the 1920s to create a connection to the wider New Zealand story, embedding the term in New Zealand historian and public vernacular from the mid-1980s.⁷

Belich and Vincent O’Malley share the most compelling argument for the term ‘New Zealand Wars’. They argue that identifying a single cause of the wars ignores the complexity of the political and cultural climate, and the multitude of contributing factors.⁸ They avoid a mono-causal explanation for the wars, identifying the issues of sovereignty and land ownership as two distinct causes with a greater emphasis on sovereignty. O’Malley highlights the discrepancies between Te Tiriti o Waitangi and The Treaty of Waitangi as the leading cause of the unravelling of Māori-Crown relations. Throughout the wars, many wondered “whose version of the agreement ... was going to prevail?”⁹ It was a contest of assertions over who had the right to control. As Sinclair did, O’Malley and Belich assume a distinction between the issue of ‘sovereignty’ and the issue of ‘land’, in their preference for the ‘New Zealand Wars’. Yet, in their most robust justifications for the term ‘New Zealand Wars’, Belich and O’Malley cannot avoid extensive references to land. In Danny Keenan’s view, land was the root cause of war in New Zealand, with his preferred term ‘Land Wars’ establishing ‘Land’ as a foundation in the context of the wars. The ‘New Zealand Wars’ fails to identify any issue.¹⁰ The term lacks specificity and by not

⁴ Keith Sinclair, *The Origins of the Maori Wars*, 2nd ed, Auckland, 1961; repr. 1980, p. 61.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 75.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.6; p. 44.

⁷ Keenan, *Wars Without End*, p. 27; Belich, *The New Zealand Wars*, p. 11.

⁸ O’Malley, *Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa*, pp. 22-23; Belich, *New Zealand Wars*, p. 79.

⁹ O’Malley, *Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa*, p. 26.

¹⁰ Keenan, *Wars Without End*, p. 10.

incorporating ‘Land’ into the name for fear of acknowledging a single cause, inadvertently dismisses ‘Land’ as all-encompassing in the Northern, Taranaki, and Waikato Wars. Te tino rangatiratanga extended beyond the legalistic understanding of ‘sovereignty’ and is a cultural concept not apart from the physical land. Land and sovereignty, or more accurately land and tino rangatiratanga, are one and the same.¹¹ ‘Ngā Pakanga Whenua o Aotearoa’ incorporates this understanding.

Of the wars fought in the New Zealand Land Wars, the Northern War provides the most convincing argument for the term ‘New Zealand Wars’ when considering ‘sovereignty’ and ‘land’ with a traditionally Pākehā understanding. The felling of the Union Jack flagstaff in Kororāreka on four separate occasions was a direct assault on “a potent symbol of British power and authority.”¹² However, to Māori, the flagstaff also represented a pou rāhui – a marker of ownership.¹³ Each time the flagstaff was reinstated, to the understanding of Northern Māori, the Crown was reasserting its claim to ‘Land’.

“It is in this we have been wronged, we have been cajoled to sell our produce and our Land, and the Europeans now taunt us with these things.”¹⁴

– Hone Heke to Governor Robert Fitzroy expressing his dismay at the lack of adherence to Te Tiriti on 21 May 1845.

Competition for land underpinned the violence. Heke’s anger with the dismissal of Te Tiriti and the disregard of customary land ownership by land surveyors is a compelling reason why we must acknowledge the ‘New Zealand Land Wars’.¹⁵ As with the Northern War, settlers faced increasing frustrations as their appetite for land was met with what they felt were outdated and pointless ‘native practices’ in the days leading up to the Taranaki and Waikato Wars.¹⁶ Governor Gore Browne, eager to acquire unused land for settlers limited to a strip of the New Plymouth coastline, engaged Taranaki Māori in the north.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 11.

¹² O’Malley, *Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa*, pp. 44-45.

¹³ Vincent O’Malley, *Voices from the New Zealand Wars | He Reo Nō Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa*, Wellington, 2021, p. 16.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁵ Keenan, *Wars Without End*, pp. 131-132.

¹⁶ Frank Glen, ‘Religious factors in the Taranaki Conflict,’ in John Crawford and Ian McGibbon, eds, *Tutu te Peuhu – New Perspectives on the New Zealand Wars*, Wellington, p. 125.

Land was offered for sale by Te Teira and Governor Browne accepted on the condition the title was not disputed. Wiremu Kingi would not allow the sale to proceed as no one person could decide on the sale of Māori land. Despite this dispute, Governor Browne proceeded.¹⁷ Kingi was angered by the acceptance of an illegitimate offer that ignored the tikanga of land sales.

“These lands will not be given by us into the Governor’s and your hands, lest we resemble the sea-birds which perch upon a rock, when the tide flows the rock is covered by the sea, and the birds take flight, for they have no resting place.”¹⁸

– Wiremu Kingi to Governor Gore Browne on 11 February 1859.

For Māori, loss of land was more than the loss of the physical space; it was an existential crisis.¹⁹ Fearful of his people becoming sea-birds with no perch to rest upon, Kingi had elderly and unarmed wahine Māori remove surveyor’s pegs in protest, later building Te Kōhia pā on contested land in Waitara. It was the violent response of the Crown to the claim of ‘Land’ by Kingi that triggered the Taranaki War on 17 March 1860.²⁰ The need for more land was behind the invasion of Waikato in July 1863. Conquering Waikato and dismantling the Kīngitanga was presented to the Executive Council as the only way to adequately secure Taranaki land and ensure Auckland’s security. Lands confiscated would be occupied by military forces and sold for profit to make it so the invasion was fiscally viable.²¹ The centrality of ‘Land’ to the wars must be acknowledged.

The rationale behind the use of the ‘New Zealand Wars’ is that the term generates a political memory of a series of conflicts critical to the story of New Zealand, without employing a mono-causal explanation. Remembrance is always reflected by the “political and cultural needs of society.”²² Belich’s and O’Malley’s use of the ‘New Zealand Wars’ has succeeded in generating a public understanding that New Zealand has its own history,

¹⁷ Vincent O’Malley, *The Invasion of Waikato | Te Riri Ki Tainui*, Wellington, 2024, p. 35.

¹⁸ O’Malley, *Voices from the New Zealand Wars*, p. 106.

¹⁹ Sinclair, *Maori Wars*, p. 45.

²⁰ O’Malley, *The Invasion of Waikato*, p. 37; p. 39.

²¹ O’Malley, *Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa*, p.104; O’Malley, *The Invasion of Waikato*, p. 62.

²² Rowan Light, *ANZAC Nations: The Legacy of Gallipoli in New Zealand and Australia 1965-2015*, Dunedin, 2022, p. 182.

and there is depth to it. What the term fails to do is incorporate a collective memory, and the understanding of the concept of ‘Land’ from Māori who were, and are, in opposition to the Crown’s use of The Treaty over Te Tiriti. Use of the ‘New Zealand Wars’ excludes a uniquely te ao Māori perspective from New Zealand’s dominant political memory. When we exclude indigenous memory and understanding, controversial commemorations like Tuia 250 emerge, and the ‘public’ understanding remains Pākehā-constructed and incomplete.²³ The ‘New Zealand Land Wars’ remedies this omission by allowing for a refined public understanding. Naming and renaming is part of the process of remembering, and how we understand the world around us.²⁴ We must direct the public towards a more complete understanding of what the wars of the nineteenth century were caused by and fought for. The name of a war matters. It may tell us why there was a war, where it was fought, and by whom.²⁵ The ‘New Zealand Wars’ tells us that there were wars in New Zealand and, by extension, ‘Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa’ informs us Māori were involved. This is embedded in the dominant political memory of New Zealand. The ‘where’ and the ‘whom’ are clear, but not the ‘why’. This is reason enough for the adoption of the ‘New Zealand Land Wars — Ngā Pakanga Whenua o Aotearoa’ term to become a serious and public conversation.

Pākehā historians Sinclair, Belich, and O’Malley have framed the wars in nineteenth century New Zealand as a contest for sovereignty and land. Even in uses of terms that omit ‘Land’ for fear of a mono-causal explanation, the importance of land is not understated. Keenan, a Māori historian, incorporates a te ao Māori understanding of ‘Land’ into his use of the ‘Land Wars’. The case for the inclusion of ‘Land’ in the term for what we call the conflicts from 1843—1872 is made in the context of the Northern, Taranaki, and Waikato Wars. Examining letters from Hone Heke and Wiremu Kingi addressed to Governors further strengthens the need for a more Māori-inclusive understanding of the wars. If a name like the ‘New Zealand Land Wars — Ngā Pakanga Whenua o Aotearoa’

²³ Joanna Kidman, ‘Captain Cook, Tuia 250 and the Making of Public Memory,’ in Joanna Kidman and Vincent O’Malley, eds, *Fragments of a Contested Past: Remembrance, Denial and New Zealand History*, Wellington, 2022, pp. 40-41.

²⁴ Rowan Light, *Why Memory Matters: Remembered Histories’ and the Politics of the Shared Past*, Wellington, pp. 35-36; pp. 55-56.

²⁵ O’Malley, *Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa*, p. 28.

challenges the dominant political memory, let it be to direct the public towards a deeper understanding of the all-encompassing cause of New Zealand's violent colonial past: the Māori struggle for 'Land'.

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History 104 – Pacific History: An Introduction.

Hao Chen

Personal Statement:

I am Hao Chen, an international student from China currently studying for a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Auckland, majoring in History and Anthropology. My academic interests centre on history, power relations, and the ways knowledge is produced, translated, and interpreted across cultures. In my essay on the Kumulipo, I examine two different translations of the same Indigenous text and consider how each version mediates understandings of Hawaiian civilisation, authority, and cultural memory. Coming from a country with its own history of colonial encroachment and foreign imperialism, I am also interested in how historical interpretation can be shaped by uneven relations of power. Beyond history and anthropology, I am interested in art, gender, and approaching historical questions through an anthropological lens.

Nominated by Dr. Marcia Leenen-Young and supported by their tutor, Allyssa Verner-Pula.

The Kumulipo in Translation: Preservation and Mediation in the Colonial Archive*

Introduction

The *Kumulipo* is a Hawaiian creation chant which begins with the emergence of the world from *pō* (the primordial darkness) into *āo* (the world of light). For centuries it existed as a dynamic oral tradition that affirmed genealogy, cosmology, and political authority. Its transition into written form transformed it from a living performance into a fixed text. Among these written versions, Martha Warren Beckwith's *The Kumulipo: A Hawaiian Creation Chant* (1951) is the most influential English edition. This essay examines Beckwith's translation as a historical source that embodies the transformation from oral tradition to textual archive, analysing how this process affected the reliability, authority, and interpretive scope of the chant.

By comparing Beckwith's version with Queen Lili'uokalani's earlier translation from 1897, the essay evaluates the strengths and limitations of each as historical evidence and explores how translation has shaped both the preservation and the distortion of Indigenous cosmology. Drawing on Valeri's theory of ritual repetition (1985), Smith's analysis of colonial research (2012), and Wolfe's concept of the logic of elimination (2006), the essay argues that Beckwith's translation reveals both the endurance and the redefinition of Hawaiian epistemology under colonial mediation. Using source criticism and the two-source method, it further suggests that reading the two translations together allows for a fuller reconstruction of the historical significance of the *Kumulipo* and demonstrates how Indigenous knowledge can persist through textualisation even as writing transforms its meaning.

Historical Background and Authorship

The *Kumulipo* was composed in pre-contact Hawai'i at a time when religion, knowledge, and governance were closely intertwined. Originally it was not a fixed text but a

* Please note that this essay follows APA 7th Referencing Style.

ritual performance. The earliest known recital celebrated the birth of Lonoikamakahiki, an ancestor of Kamehameha I, and affirmed the sacred genealogy (*mo'okū'auhau*) of Hawaiian kingship. In this world, authorship was collective. Priests (*kahuna*) and chanters served as historians and guardians of divine order, maintaining the chant through memory and ritual repetition. Formulaic openings such as “‘O ke au i...” (“At the time when...”) structured the poem into sequential waves of creation and enabled performers to renew authority through sound and breath.

Valeri (1985) explains that repetition in Hawaiian ritual renewed authority through enactment rather than decree. The *Kumulipo* thus functioned as both a theological text and a political constitution, affirming that the authority of the *ali'i* descended from divine ancestry. Kame'elehiwa (1992) describes this worldview as a “genealogy of time,” in which moral duty arises from ancestral continuity and the land (*'āina*) belongs to the same sacred network as the people.

The reliability of the *Kumulipo* as a source therefore rests on its continuity of performance. Unlike written records, oral traditions adapt to circumstance while preserving core meaning. The chant's formulaic phrasing and rhythmic patterns acted as mnemonic anchors, ensuring that essential knowledge was retained even when details evolved. For historians, this adaptability demands careful contextual reading. Each recitation embodied both continuity and interpretation, making the *Kumulipo* a “living archive” rather than a static record.

During the nineteenth century the oral tradition that sustained the *Kumulipo* came under pressure. Missionary schools promoted English literacy and suppressed Hawaiian religious performance. The move to writing preserved chants that might otherwise have disappeared, yet it froze them within new interpretive frameworks. This shift paved the way for two landmark translations: Queen Lili'uokalani's version of 1897 and Beckwith's academic edition of 1951.

Queen Lili‘uokalani’s 1897 Translation: Context and Purpose

Queen Lili‘uokalani, the last monarch of the Hawaiian Kingdom, completed her translation of the *Kumulipo* while in exile following the overthrow of her government in 1893. Published in 1897, the translation served as cultural preservation and political statement. Silva (2004) argues that Lili‘uokalani’s work was an act of resistance that demonstrated to Western audiences that Hawaiians possessed a theology and literature of equal depth to those of Europe. Her translation was informed by traditional authority rather than academic detachment. As a high-ranking *ali‘i*, she rendered the voice of her own ancestors.

Lili‘uokalani’s version retains the chant’s rhythm and devotional tone. In her dedication she writes that it is “to my people, that they may know the depth of their ancestry,” framing the text as a living covenant between people, land, and gods. Her lexical choices highlight spiritual intent. For example, whereas Beckwith later wrote, “The coral insect was born in the sea,” the Queen translated the line as “Born was the coral, the first-born of creation.” The difference shows her emphasis on genealogy and sacred continuity rather than biological order.

As a historical source, Lili‘uokalani’s translation occupies a liminal position between oral testimony and written resistance. It preserves elements of chant performance whilst adopting the language of the coloniser. Her translation illuminates Hawaiian intellectual life under colonial pressure and shows how writing could be repurposed to sustain sovereignty through cultural memory. It also provides modern historians with an Indigenous perspective on meaning and intention, enabling a more balanced reading of later academic editions.

Beckwith’s 1951 Translation: Purpose, Content, and Historical Role

Martha Warren Beckwith (1871–1959) was an American folklorist who specialised in comparative mythology and taught at Vassar College. Her 1951 volume emerged from mid-twentieth-century anthropology, which aimed to classify Indigenous cosmologies through textual analysis and comparison. Beckwith approached the *Kumulipo* as a mythological text

rather than a sacred ritual. In her introduction she described it as “a Polynesian cosmogony comparable to Genesis” and divided its structure into “epochs” of creation.

Her translation of the opening lines illustrates her analytical approach:

“At the time when the earth became hot,
At the time when the heavens turned about,
At the time when the sun was darkened.” (Beckwith, 1951, p. 55)

In contrast, Lili‘uokalani’s earlier version offers a more poetic and intentional voice:

“At the time when the earth was molten,
At the time when the heavens turned and changed,
At the time when the sun was darkened to cause light to appear.” (Lili‘uokalani, 1897/1978, p. 1)

Beckwith’s phrasing reads as observational and secular, whereas Lili‘uokalani’s evokes divine process. Beckwith shortened recurring lines, standardised spelling, and added extensive notes comparing Hawaiian creation narratives with Greek and Biblical ones. These choices transformed the text’s genre from sacred genealogy to anthropological folklore. Smith (2012) describes this as the “colonisation of voice,” whereby Indigenous narratives become objects of study. Wolfe’s (2006) “logic of elimination” helps explain how such scholarship absorbs Indigenous difference into a universal narrative of human development.

Despite its limitations, Beckwith’s edition holds major historical value. It preserved the complete Hawaiian text and bilingual format at a time when the language was being suppressed. The clarity of her edition enabled later scholars to verify vocabulary and structure. Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua (2013) notes that the Hawaiian renaissance of the 1970s drew on works such as Beckwith’s to revitalise language and chant. Her translation therefore stands as an ambivalent artefact, a colonial product that nonetheless safeguarded knowledge for future renewal. Beckwith’s influence also extended to the developing field of Pacific historiography. By treating oral traditions as valid textual evidence, she helped legitimise Indigenous sources within Western academic study. Yet her framing, grounded in early structural anthropology, prioritised taxonomy over meaning. Historians today read her

version critically, recognising both its empirical usefulness and its embedded assumptions about civilisation and progress.

Corroboration and the Two-Source Perspective

A key practice of historical method is corroboration, whereby the reliability of a document increases when it aligns with an independent account. The two English translations of the *Kumulipo* provide an ideal case. Beckwith's academic version and Lili'uokalani's royal translation record the same chant from different positions of power and intent. Read together, they facilitate a balanced application of the two-source method.

Beckwith's translation is characterised by linguistic precision and systematic organisation, while Lili'uokalani's preserves tone and ritual rhythm. Where Beckwith abstracts the chant for analysis, Lili'uokalani restores sacred emotional resonance. Their shared themes—the movement from *pō* to *āo*, the continuity of genealogy, and the unity of people and land—confirm a stable narrative foundation. Their differences highlight interpretive filters rather than factual errors. Used together, they illuminate both the endurance and the transformation of Hawaiian thought over time and across media.

From a source-critical perspective, these translations also demonstrate the tension between preservation and mediation. Writing preserves memory but fixes performance. Oral tradition carries emotional and communal meaning but risks disappearance. By comparing both forms, historians can reconstruct dimensions of tone, ceremony, and audience, turning potential contradiction into insight about historical continuity.

Historical Value and Limitations

Beckwith's 1951 translation remains a cornerstone of Pacific historiography. It provides a verifiable text for cross-disciplinary research and allows Hawaiian cosmology to be studied in academic settings. The opening sections, in which creation emerges from darkness, convey an Indigenous philosophy of cyclical time and legitimacy rooted in ancestry. The edition's documentation and glossary make it an invaluable linguistic and structural record.

Yet the very process that preserved the *Kumulipo* also transformed it. Detached from its oral context, Beckwith's version recast sacred history as folklore. Smith (2012) warns that textualisation often silences the collective voice that originally sustained knowledge. Neither Beckwith's nor Lili'uokalani's translations reproduce the full power of performance, since both are mediated texts. Hawaiian concepts such as *mana* (spiritual power) and *pono* (balance) cannot be precisely conveyed in English. Translation narrows meaning even as it transmits knowledge.

Nevertheless, the historian's task is to navigate these transformations rather than dismiss them. Each translation embodies a stage in the transmission of memory and provides insight into the shifting power relations of knowledge production. By analysing how the chant was reshaped to fit textual and political contexts, historians can trace broader patterns of cultural adaptation in the Pacific. The *Kumulipo* therefore provides both data and method—a record of Indigenous cosmology and a case study in the survival of meaning through mediation. More broadly, it demonstrates the methodological importance of engaging Indigenous voices as co-authors of history rather than passive informants, a principle increasingly central to decolonising Pacific historiography.

Conclusion

The *Kumulipo* stands at the intersection of oral and written traditions. Beckwith's 1951 translation ensured preservation and provided a stable text for scholarly study, while embedding the chant within academic frameworks that obscured ritual purpose. Lili'uokalani's 1897 translation, produced in exile, maintained rhythm and intent and affirmed Hawaiian sovereignty through cultural memory. Although they arose from distinct moments and purposes, both record the same continuum of remembrance.

Taken together, the two translations are complementary. Beckwith provides textual evidence; Lili'uokalani restores spiritual context. Their comparison enables historians to corroborate meaning and structure using the two-source method. Through this process, the *Kumulipo* emerges as both creation chant and historical document, revealing the endurance of Hawaiian thought under colonial transformation.

The journey from chant to text reflects a broader Pacific narrative: Indigenous knowledge surviving within systems that sought to contain it. The coexistence of these two forms of expression shows how they together enable a deeper understanding of the past. The *Kumulipo* thus stands not only as a sacred account of beginnings but also as a model for how oral heritage can enter written history without losing its intellectual integrity. For Pacific historians, it remains a reminder that historical reconstruction must include both the record and the rhythm of the voice.

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History 317 – Nazi Germany and its Legacies.

Stephanie Austin

Personal Statement:

Kia ora! I am a fifth-year student at the University of Auckland, studying a Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Arts, majoring in History and Politics and International Relations. I was initially drawn to study history because of my passion for the humanities and language. I loved history throughout high school, so continuing to study it at university felt like a natural progression! I am particularly interested in the histories of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. I also enjoy exploring how individual stories can offer insight into wider historical developments.

Nominated and taught by Professor Maartje Abbenhuis.

How does the historian Mary Fulbrook complicate the historiography around the complicity of ordinary Germans in Nazi Germany?

The violence perpetuated by Nazi-dominated Europe is an ‘unavoidable legacy of life under Nazi rule’.¹ Much scholarly attention has been devoted to how ordinary Germans contributed to or enabled this violence. This essay argues that the historian Mary Fulbrook complicates historiography around the complicity of ordinary Germans in Nazi Germany by situating their actions within the context of the Nazi regime. Fulbrook fundamentally reframes the question of complicity, shifting the historiographical focus away from moralistic understandings of complicity as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Instead, she positions the individual behaviours and attitudes of ordinary Germans within the structural violence of the Nazi regime. By analysing radical social transformation within Nazi society, Fulbrook challenges narratives of ‘passive bystanding’. Her work presents a nuanced understanding of complicity, foregrounding the actions of ordinary Germans within the constraints and influences of the Third Reich.

The extent to which ordinary Germans were complicit in the Nazi regime, and how that complicity should be understood, is a fundamental question in the historiography of Nazi Germany. The incomprehensibility of the Holocaust has generated extensive scholarship seeking to attribute responsibility and blame to explain and make sense of its scale and brutality. Early analyses of complicity adopted a ‘top-down’ lens, focused on the culpability of Nazi leadership and the coercive imposition of hierarchical social structures.² This scholarship constructed a monolithic image of Nazi society, portraying all Germans as having an immoral, ‘perpetrator’ mentality.³ Historiography has since moved away from ‘perpetrator history’ to consider the culpability of ordinary Germans. As Fulbrook aptly states, ‘understanding bystander society is more than an

¹ Mary Fulbrook, ‘Introduction: Bystanders and Collective Violence’, in *Bystander Society: Conformity and Complicity in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust*, New York, 2023, p.24.

² Konrad H. Jarausch, ‘The conundrum of complicity: German professionals and the Final Solution’ in Alan E. Steinweis, Robert D. Rachlin, eds, *The Law in Nazi Germany: Ideology, Opportunity and the Perversion of Justice*, Vermont, 2013, p.16.

³ Fulbrook, p.8.

academic or historical exercise. This is not simply past history.’⁴ Examinations of the complicity of ordinary Germans in Nazi Germany are formative in the national histories of countless communities and crucial to understanding how millions were mobilised in the violence of the Nazi regime.⁵ Fulbrook’s work is significant in focusing on the humanity of ordinary Germans, assessing the nuanced choices involved in their varying degrees of complicity.⁶

Fulbrook complicates the historiography surrounding the complicity of ordinary Germans by extending examinations of complicity beyond the broader structures and events that influenced Nazi Germany to include examinations of individual behaviours and attitudes. Historiographical scholarship has focused on the role that class, leadership, and generation played in fostering complicity and support for Nazi violence.⁷ In his work on the role of German professionals in the Holocaust, Konrad H. Jarausch argued that the remnant impacts of World War I and the Great Depression caused Nazism to hold particular appeal for the ‘war youth generation.’⁸ He saw prior prejudices against Jews, motivated by Jewish overrepresentation and success in tertiary institutions, as key factors that caused professionals to consent to and support Nazi ideology.⁹ Other scholars, such as Ian Kershaw, have positioned Hitler’s ‘charismatic authority’ and the notion of ‘working towards the *Führer*’ as explanations for complicity.¹⁰ Fulbrook acknowledges that these analyses of processes are crucial in providing an overview of the structural composition of Nazi Germany. However, she argues that to extend examinations of national character and traditions of antisemitism, it is necessary to look beyond a broad overview to the individual choices and behaviours of ‘ordinary Germans’ under the Nazi regime.

Therefore, a fundamental way that Fulbrook complicates the historiography around the complicity of ordinary Germans is by contextualising ‘bystanding’ within the

⁴ *ibid.*, p.24.

⁵ Prof Maartje Abbenhuis, “Lecture 9: The Holocaust in History,” University of Auckland, 14th May 2025.

⁶ Fulbrook, p.6.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.18.

⁸ Jarausch, p.18.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.23.

¹⁰ Ian Kershaw, *The “Hitler Myth”: Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, Oxford, 2001, p.197

social and political realities of Nazi Germany. Her analysis recognises that complicity is socially constructed and focuses on the development and shifts of ‘bystanding’ over time, considering the broader societal changes that influence complicity.¹¹ Fulbrook’s approach builds on the work of scholars such as Thomas Kuehne and Geoff Eley. Kuehne argued that morality is a ‘social fact’, dependent on human agency and differing contexts.¹² Similarly, Eley referred to Nazi ideology as ‘embedded and embodied in social practices’ as much as it was reflected in people’s thoughts, behaviours, and relationships.¹³ Kuehne asserted that Nazi German society formed its own understanding of morality, intrinsically connected with race and belonging, and restricting traditional morality to the *volksgemeinschaft*.¹⁴ Although Kuehne recognised that ‘Nazi morality’ was not universally adopted by ordinary Germans, he argued that ‘bystanders had choices’; by not intervening or questioning the ‘perpetrators’ inhuman morality’, even the silent majority were ‘complicit in evil’.¹⁵ The tendency to consider ordinary Germans’ actions, or lack of action, in ‘moral terms’ is a prominent theme within the historiography on complicity. However, modern, moral condemnations of complicity do not assist examinations on how and why the Nazi regime was able to perpetuate widespread violence.

Another way in which Fulbrook extends understandings of complicity is by recognising the constraints imposed on ordinary Germans in Nazi society. She argues that the Nazi regime itself was violent, and ‘bystanding’ must be understood in light of that violence. As Fulbrook states, ‘such discussion of bystander responses presupposes a wider context in which personal actions... are effective. This was not the case in the Third Reich.’¹⁶ Ordinary Germans in Nazi Germany faced ‘wide, systemic and structural violence’, perpetrated by both society and the regime itself.¹⁷ Fulbrook’s argument is a critical complication of existing historiography. By acknowledging the structural barriers that ordinary Germans faced, Fulbrook shifts the historiographical focus away from a

¹¹ Fulbrook, p.18.

¹² Thomas Kuehne, ‘Nazi morality’, in Shelley Baranowski, Armin Nolzen, Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, eds, *A Companion to Nazi Germany*, Hoboken, 2018, p.216.

¹³ Geoff Eley, ‘Chapter Four: Missionaries of the Volksgemeinschaft’ in *Nazism as Fascism: Violence, Ideology and the Ground of Consent in Germany 1930-1945*, London, 2013, p.100.

¹⁴ Kuehne, p.216.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.224.

¹⁶ Fulbrook, p.24.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.5.

moral judgement of ‘bystanding’ to consider the wider social realities that constrained action under Nazi rule.

Fulbrook complicates the wider social realities of Nazi Germany by extending analyses to the radicalisation of everyday life within Nazi society. She suggests that under Nazi rule, citizens began to ‘internalise new views’ and adopted conformist behaviours which over time, became ‘unthinking habits.’¹⁸ This analysis stands in stark contrast with Detlev Peukert’s assertion that there was ‘no break in tradition whatever in 1933’ when the Nazis came to power.¹⁹ Peukert argued that the Nazi manufactured ideal of the *Volksgemeinschaft* lacked substance, provoking widespread retreat into ‘non-political privacy.’²⁰ He believed that Nazi rule relied on withdrawal and passive consent rather than fundamental societal transformation.²¹ Eley contradicts this assertion, arguing that ‘the ordinary elements of daily living... made it impossible to separate completely from society.’²²

Fulbrook further challenges Peukert’s argument by showing that from 1933, German society did not remain static but was reshaped by a rapid escalation of exclusionary norms and social segregation.²³ She argues that ordinary Germans were not passive actors. Instead, their actions and attitudes facilitated an ‘active process of social segregation’ that allowed the classification, stigmatisation, and separation of Nazi racial targets.²⁴ In both private and public spheres, civilians ‘readjusted their self-perceptions and conceptions of others along racial lines and adapted their behaviours accordingly.’²⁵ Therefore, the exclusion of racial and community ‘others’ within the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* was achieved not only through the imposition of state policies and ideologies, but also through the informal actions of ordinary people.²⁶ Incremental social changes culminated in atrocity, paving the way for ordinary Germans’ increasing

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.17.

¹⁹ Detlev Peukert, ‘Chapter 10: Public show and private perceptions’, in *Inside Nazi Germany: conformity, opposition and racism in everyday life*, London, 1987, p.188.

²⁰ Peukert., p.196.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Eley, p.92.

²³ Fulbrook, p.7.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.21.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.8.

involvement in the racial persecution and perpetration that followed.²⁷ Fulbrook's analysis provides a more nuanced understanding of complicity. She shows that the acquiescence of ordinary Germans was manufactured not only through top-down coercion, but also through the increasingly radicalising behaviours of society itself.

Fulbrook's analysis of the transformation of Nazi Germany is supported by her use of auto-biographical accounts of social interactions under Nazi rule. She uses personal accounts to show how 'neutral' Germans were, in fact, fundamental in redefining belonging and exclusion within the *volksgemeinschaft*.²⁸ These accounts illustrate the nuanced and complex ways social relations, sense of identity, community and relationships transformed during the 'pre-war' years.²⁹ Fulbrook argues that, initially, Nazi brutality and widespread societal pressure caused limited consent. Over time, repeated performance of those coerced behaviours by the 'muddled middle' transformed into active complicity.³⁰ Fulbrook draws on previous historiography about the motivation of antisemitic prejudices, asserting that antisemitism was used to justify the actions of ordinary Germans who had, in fact, supported the Nazi regime for a myriad of other reasons.³¹ This is a significant complication of existing historiography, representing an essential shift towards giving weight to personal experiences of complicity and coercion under the Nazi regime.

Overall, Mary Fulbrook presents a compelling complication of the historiography around the complicity of ordinary Germans in Nazi Germany. Her analysis extends existing historiography, situating 'bystanding' within the social and political realities of the Third Reich. Fulbrook complicates understandings of complicity by recognising the constraints imposed on ordinary Germans in Nazi Germany and the incremental radicalising of everyday life within Nazi society. Her analysis is a fundamental contribution to the historiography around complicity. By contextualising complicity, Fulbrook's account reflects the role that social practices, and understandings of belonging and exclusion played in securing complicity for the Nazi regime. Fulbrook's work is a

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.13.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.12.

³⁰ Fulbrook., p.20.

³¹ *ibid.*

powerful addition to this body of historiography, moving beyond retrospective, moralistic judgments to recognise the humanity of ordinary Germans in Nazi Germany.

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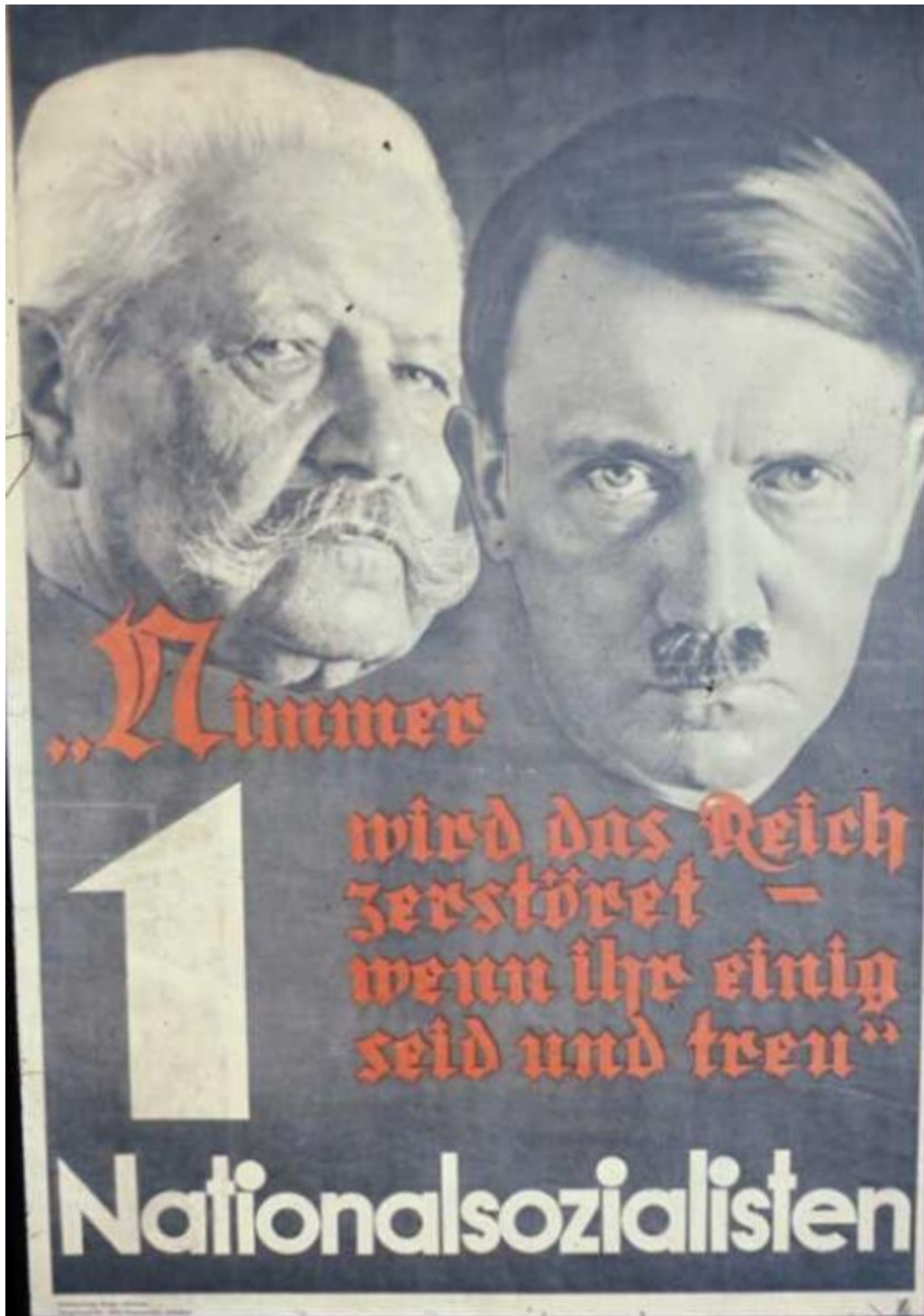
History 317 – Nazi Germany and its Legacies.

Fleur Buckrell

Personal Statement:

My name is Fleur, I am a fourth year Law and Global Studies student, majoring in Global Politics and Human Rights. As much as I can, I use every opportunity to take history papers. What I have come to understand throughout my degree is that to make sense of the history, we should try to understand it through its humanity. This helps us do justice to the people whose past we seek to interpret, by producing more accurate accounts of their experiences and understandings of the world.

Nominated and taught by Professor Maartje Abbenhuis.



"The Reich will never be destroyed if you are united and loyal."

NSAP, *Reichstag Election Poster*, March 1933, Calvin University German Propaganda Archive, <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/posters2.htm>

Electing the Nazis: a Rational Decision?

What does your chosen poster reveal about the history of Nazi Germany in the period 1933-1939?

An erroneous conception about the history of Nazi Germany is that the Party rose to power because of the ‘ill-informed’ masses who elected them.¹ As David Welch highlights, this position errs by implying that the decision to vote for the NSDAP was irrational. Welch and other historians have aimed to show that Nazi propaganda has been over-credited for seducing millions of ‘unknowing’ Germans to vote for the Party in free elections. This scholarship is important because it undermines notions about the Party’s success in converting the masses, by focusing instead on how propaganda appealed to existing popular sentiments. While these appeals aimed to incite ‘wild’ emotion rather than thoughtful nuance², this should not lead us to the conclusion that rationality ceased where emotion prevailed. “Nationalist ecstasy” as Catherine Epstein terms it,³ did not make the German population blindly submit against their logical self-interests. My selected poster touches on these considerations by revealing why many Germans across various social stratas genuinely believed in the promise of the Nazi Party. This is important, for it reveals how the Nazi’s triumph in early 1933 did not signal the German population’s eroding intellect but, rather, underscored the potency of ideas like the *Volksgemeinschaft* and the Führer myth, in a time where civil insecurity had long predominated people's lives.

Hitler’s mission of building a ‘people’s community’ or a *Volksgemeinschaft* was highly attractive to vast numbers of voters. It was constantly reinforced and sold to the German people as a unifying ideology, binding Germans together in one community of struggle. Moreover, as the regime developed, so too did the *Volksgemeinschaft*’s practical focus. As Mark Roseman highlights, in 1933 the concept meant dissolving class divisions, surmounting the threat of Bolshevism, and “finding common purpose to overcome the

¹ Welch, D. (2002). *The Third Reich: Politics and propaganda*. Psychology Press. p 8.

² Epstein, C. A. (2014). *Nazi Germany: Confronting the myths*. John Wiley & Sons. p 28.

³ Ibid, p 28.

ravages of the depression”.⁴ To that end, the Nazi’s mobilised the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft* as an ‘othering’ technique. It was used to propagate the message that Germany’s collective strength and unity had been undermined by the doings of groups fundamentally ‘ungerman’. While my selected poster does not expressly single out the ‘other’, it does impliedly convey these ideas. The tacit meaning of the words “The Reich will never be destroyed if you are united and loyal” is that it is precisely these groups *outside* the *Volksgemeinschaft* who are endangering it.⁵ This was a persuasive message taking into account the Reichstag fire that took place only a week prior to the March 1933 election. This event was immediately sold by the Nazis as an effort of communist revolt, thus requiring loyalty by and unity of the German people to the Party. Arguably, then, the decision to vote for the NSDAP was rationally justified by the ‘us’ within the *Volksgemeinschaft* given this contextually apt fear of the ‘other’. It should be added that ‘Volksgemeinschaft’ was originally a benign term that existed well before the NSDAP mobilised it. As Welch aptly put it, “Propaganda is as much about confirming as it is about converting public opinion”⁶ – in this context, Nazi propaganda only *confirmed* stereotypes about the ‘other’ by calling for unity in the face of communist threat.

There is strong explanatory force in the idea that many Germans in 1933 voted for the NSDAP as an alternative to a failing system. It should be acknowledged that many were simply drawn to the dynamism of the Nazi movement and saw genuine value in National Socialism. That said, fervent belief in the Party ideology alone could not have produced the NSDAP’s electoral success. Indeed, these two ideas go hand in hand; we cannot discuss why Nazism was appealing to so many people without also discussing the need for change in a system that had failed them. It was fundamental to the Nazi’s success that the decade preceding their rise to power was marked by near constant socio-economic instability. As Welch highlights, national incomes had plunged by 40% over the years of 1930 to 1933, and well over one-third of the population was unemployed by the time of the March

⁴ Pendas, D. O., Roseman, M., & Wetzell, R. F. (2017). ‘Racial Discourse, Nazi Violence, and the Limits of the Racial State Model’, in *Beyond the racial state: Rethinking Nazi Germany*. Cambridge University Press. p 45.

⁵ NSAP, *Reichstag Election Poster*, March 1933, Calvin University German Propaganda Archive, <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/posters2.htm>.

⁶ Welch, D. (2002). *The Third Reich: Politics and propaganda*. Psychology Press. p 9.

election.⁷ Since the Weimar Republic had failed time and again to offer tenable solutions to these crises, the NSDAP was well situated to propagate their ideas. As Shelley Baranowski put it, it also hardly hurt the Nazi's that they had not served in government prior to 1933 and thus bore no responsibility for the previous system's failures.⁸

It is evident in this context how the poster's words would have resonated with German voters given their continued experiences of struggle that saw no apparent end. What the poster then does is offer a sense of security to the German people — albeit a conditional one, effectively veiled under a threat. Its words can be reversed to say that 'The Reich *will* be destroyed *unless* you are united and loyal'. In this way, it appeals to fears of the system while providing an immediate antidote to that fear. When considered in light of the Reichstag fire which was quite literally a symbol of the Reich burning down, it can be understood how these words would hold such force. They are not exaggerated nor do they bear complete falsehood. They plainly speak to the catastrophes of the time by making it seem as though it is the Nazis and the Nazis alone who can guarantee the Reich's preservation. Ultimately, then, we cannot cast judgment onto the German people for entrusting the NSDAP with that task since no viable alternatives seemed to be doing the same.

I have discussed how the poster's words hold considerable power in appealing to German voters. What has yet been explained is that the imagery itself, presenting Germany's two leaders, is perhaps the most evocative aspect of the poster as a whole.⁹ Jeremy Noakes emphasises that the single most important feature of the Nazi state was Hitler's exceptional status, which involved his mission to save Germany, unite its people and thereby restore it to greatness.¹⁰ Linked to this was the Fuhrer myth that Hitler had sacrificed himself to the collective in a classic tale of martyrdom suffering. In this way, Hitler symbology was incredibly powerful and was stylised through constant propaganda

⁷ Welch, D. (2004). 'Nazi propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft: Constructing a people's community', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39, 2, 213-238. p 227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009404042129>.

⁸ Baranowski, S., Nolzen, A., & Szejnmann, C. W. (2018). The collapse of the Weimar parliamentary system. In *A companion to Nazi Germany*. John Wiley & Sons. p 72.

⁹ NSAP, *Reichstag Election Poster*, March 1933, Calvin University German Propaganda Archive, <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/posters2.htm>.

¹⁰ Caplan, J., & Noakes, J. (2019). 'Hitler and the Nazi state: leadership, hierarchy and power', in *Nazi Germany: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press. p 73.

as a “relatively fixed symbol of hope for change.”¹¹ Hitler iconography (as being synonymous with this very notion of hope) was vital to the NSDAP’s electoral success in March 1933.

It is equally significant in this poster that President Hindenburg appears alongside of Hitler. Indeed, while many were persuaded by the Fuhrer myth, the NSDAP needed buy-in from the large remainder of the population who doubted the radical character. This poster effectively soothes any doubts by presenting a united front of leadership, with Hindenburg’s presence implying his direct endorsement of Hitler himself. In reality, this was not the case. Hindenburg was decidedly reluctant to appoint Hitler as chancellor. As Epstein argues, a large reason he even secured the role was because of luck – though this reality is far from what the image conveys.¹² The image speaks to how Nazi propaganda would appeal to tradition as a means for radical advancement. It evokes familiarity as the aged president is placed slightly behind to represent the past, with the Fuhrer placed in front, spurring hope for a future that would surely be characterised by change.¹³ This then responds to the audience’s concerns of Nazi radicalism, as Hindenburg (a generally respected figure) casts a balance between what is known and what is to come. These paradoxical themes of familiarity and change portrayed together should lead to the conclusion that voting for the NSDAP was not irrational, and *could not* be irrational when the highest leader of the land at the time had directly endorsed such an act — or so the poster implies.

It is appealing to look for ways to justify why people voted for the Nazis knowing what we know in hindsight. It certainly feels more palatable to distance ourselves from those who voted for the Nazi Party by imposing onto them moral sentiments of blame or, alternatively, to downplay the attractiveness of Nazism at the time by contending that German voters were swept along by the excitement of the movement and did not know what they were doing. What is less digestible is that the Nazi’s, as I have tried to explain, genuinely did seem like a good option for many. While radical, they were not *exceptional*,

¹¹ Fleischer, A., & Kaempfer, F. (1990). ‘The political poster in the Third Reich’, in *The nazification of art: Art, design, music, architecture and film in the Third Reich*. p 188.

¹² Epstein, C. A. (2014). *Nazi Germany: Confronting the myths*. John Wiley & Sons. p 40.

¹³ NSAP, *Reichstag Election Poster*, March 1933, Calvin University German Propaganda Archive, <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/posters2.htm>.

just as the people who voted for them were not. This can and should be understood when viewing the poster from the lens of someone standing in Germany in 1933. In only a few words, it effectively captures the fears and aspirations of the moment, all while promoting itself as both the remedy to that fear and the only means to realising those aspirations. Thus, it cannot be said that the German voters suspended their rational judgment by choosing the NSDAP, when this poster plainly reveals how this act was more logical than not.

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History 700 – Settlers & Empire.

Anna Munro

Personal Statement:

Anna Munro is a secondary school teacher and postgraduate History student whose interest and research is driven by a passion for exploring the lives, experiences, and stories of people throughout history. Her research focuses on the interpretation of historical evidence and political texts to deepen our understanding of the people, ideas, and institutions that have shaped the past. Alongside her postgraduate research, Anna is a passionate educator. She is committed to making history engaging and accessible, encouraging her students to think critically about the past, inspiring the next generation to appreciate its significance and relevance. Her work reflects a strong belief that history is not simply about events, but about the people, experiences, and perspectives that shape the world we live in today.

Nominated and taught by Dr. Felicity Barnes.

Reading Between the Lines: Representations of Māori in Early School Journal Publications

“Jack was a little boy who lived with his father and mother in a tiny cottage at the foot of a high mountain. Nobody else lived near, so these three— Jack, his shepherd father, and his pretty mother— had all the mountainside to themselves, which was a good big thing to have.”¹

So begins the first instalment of Maoriland Fairy Tales, published in the School Journal in 1907. Jack’s mother would thereafter leave them, and consequently, the stories in his world vanish with her. One night, a fairy appears and carries Jack away to ‘Long-Ago Land’. It is here that a talking moa tells Jack stories about New Zealand’s past, about Māui, about Māori chiefs, and about a world that existed before his own. The moa, an extinct bird, becomes the channel through which Māori knowledge and memory are mediated. For Jack, these stories are both wondrous and safely contained, belonging to a time that can no longer speak back. This narrative is more than a children’s fantasy, it is a method of colonial storytelling. The three figures, Jack, the fairy, and the moa, all symbolically map the relationships that shaped New Zealand’s early educational imagination. Jack, the Pākehā child, represents the settler subject whom the colonial state sought to mould. He is innocent, curious, and ready to inherit the land. The fairy, a familiar figure of British folklore, embodies the imperial fantasy of moral and cultural guidance. The moa, extinct and voiceless, serves as the mediator of Māori story, allowing Māori culture to be represented without agency or reciprocity.² Through this layered narration, Māori knowledge is displaced from the living present and shifted to a mythical, ahistorical ‘Long-Ago Land,’ where it can be admired but not engaged with. Both Pākehā and Māori children read these tales. Yet, for Māori students, the stories offered a version

¹ *School Journal*, 1907/2/1: ‘Maoriland Fairy Tales, I. Jack, the Fairy, and the Moa.’

² Vivien Van Rij, ‘The Changing Face of Literacy in New Zealand’s School Journal: Part One, 1907 to 1938: From Imperialism to Romanticism and Security’, *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 52, 2, 2017, p.239.

of their own culture filtered through Pākehā imagination, framing their heritage as historical and symbolic rather than contemporary.

The appearance of ‘Maoriland Fairy Tales’ in The New Zealand School Journal was no accident. Established in 1907 under the direction of George Hogben, the then Inspector-General of Schools, the School Journal was conceived as a state publication that would supply reading material for New Zealand’s newly standardised curriculum. Intended to educate, entertain, and morally instruct, it became one of the most widely circulated texts in the country, reaching almost every primary classroom. In this nature, the Journal’s mission extended beyond literacy. It aimed to produce a unified national consciousness grounded in loyalty to the British Empire, faith in progress, and pride in settler achievement. In doing so, it became a powerful instrument of cultural formation, what Carol Mutch calls the “hidden curriculum.”³ The Journal is a text that taught children not only how to read, but also how to belong.

Between 1907 and 1927, the early School Journal presented New Zealand as both a colonial periphery and an extension of Britain’s moral and civilising mission. Children encountered stories of imperial explorers, noble soldiers, and loyal subjects, alongside poems and articles that celebrated the King, the flag, and Empire Day. Within this narrative framework, Māori were granted a limited and carefully managed visibility. They appeared in simplified retellings of traditional legends, in biographical sketches of ‘loyal’ Māori figures, and in accounts of colonial encounters that cast them as either noble or naive. Such representations situated Māori culture within the temporal logic of ‘before.’ Before civilisation, before progress, before modernity. The Journal therefore constructed a nation in which Pākehā occupied the present and future, while Māori were confined to the mythologised past.

This research asks, how did the School Journal function as an imperial educational tool, and what were the consequences of this tool for Māori? In addressing this question, it examines the Journal not merely as a pedagogical resource but as a

³ Carol Mutch, Rosemary Bingham, Lynette Kingsbury, and Maria Perreau, ‘Political Indoctrination through Myth Building: The New Zealand School Journal at the Time of World War 1’, *Curriculum Matters*, 14, 14, 2018, p.105.

mechanism through which the state articulated and normalised a settler-colonial worldview.⁴ Its pages reveal the interplay between education, empire, and national identity at a formative moment in New Zealand's history. The early School Journal, therefore, served as an instrument of cultural formation, teaching children to see New Zealand through imperial eyes. Through selective inclusion, moral instruction, and visual and textual displacement, it constructed a settler-colonial narrative in which Māori were confined to a distant, mythologised past and Pākehā identity was aligned with civilisation, progress, and modernity. By mediating Māori presence through extinction (the moa), fantasy (the fairy), and pedagogy (the Journal itself), it rendered colonial power both natural and benevolent. In entering 'Long-Ago Land,' New Zealand's schoolchildren were also entering the imagined landscape of the colonial nation, one in which the empire's moral order was taught as truth, and its hierarchies quietly inscribed as history.

Empire in the Classroom

Before the establishment of the School Journal in 1907, education in New Zealand was shaped by imperial models that linked literacy, morality, and citizenship. Far from being a uniquely local innovation, the Journal emerged from a broader pedagogical movement that aimed to produce morally disciplined, literate, and civically responsible children through a standardised curriculum, widely circulated texts, and shared educational practices across the empire. As Tony Ballantyne proposes, the imperial network is best understood as a web connecting the metropole and colonies, as well as the colonies with one another.⁵ This metaphor highlights the relational nature of empire, in which ideas, like educational practices, and ideologies circulated between local, national, and imperial contexts. Within this web, the School Journal can be understood as part of a global "paper empire", a material object that carried imperial authority, opinion, and pedagogy, while circulating through the broader networks of print that shaped educational culture across colonies.⁶ In this way, the imperial network influenced

⁴ *ibid.*, pp.120-121.

⁵ Tony Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand's Colonial Past*, Vancouver, British Columbia UBC Press, 2014, pp.28-29.

⁶ Antoinette M. Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr, *Ten Books That Shaped the British Empire: Creating an Imperial Commons*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2014, p.2.

curriculum, teaching methods, and moral instruction in New Zealand, laying the foundations for the *School Journal* and its role in forming the moral and civic consciousness of young readers. In this trans-imperial context, progressive educational ideas, such as those advanced by John Dewey (1859–1952), gained influence across America, Britain, and Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷ Dewey advocated for a child-centred approach to teaching, where students were not passive recipients of knowledge like in the traditional classroom, but instead active participants in their learning.⁸ In consequence, through his framework, lessons on and about morals were inseparable from intellectual development. This meant the classroom fostered both ethical discernment and civic responsibility.

In a traditional sense, New Zealand was still culturally bound to Britain and the Empire. Twentieth-century schools did not work to rapidly remove the traditional, British-style classroom where the teacher was the holder of knowledge, and the students were static, receiving said knowledge through techniques such as rote learning or lecture. Change in the classroom would be slow and systemic. Therefore, a convergence of global and local educational ideas shaped the 1904 revision of the primary school curriculum, led by the progressive Inspector-General George Hogben.⁹ Hogben himself later visited schools across the Empire to directly explore educational theory in practice, seeking to adapt pedagogical innovations for New Zealand and provide practical guidance on implementing progressive teaching methods.¹⁰ The 1904 revision, therefore, sought to standardise literacy and moral instruction across New Zealand, emphasising discipline, moral character, and obedience as foundational virtues for young citizens.¹¹ Importantly, while these progressive teaching methods encouraged active learning, the classroom remained bounded by imperial priorities. Children could explore ideas, but always through frameworks that reinforced loyalty, hierarchy, and moral duty. In this sense, the *Journal* exemplifies how global pedagogical innovations could be adapted to serve local

⁷ Van Rij, pp.235-236.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*, p.237.

¹⁰ Helen May, *I Am Five and I Go to School: Early Years Schooling in New Zealand, 1900-2010*, Dunedin, Otago University Press, 2011, p.37.

¹¹ Van Rij, p.237.

colonial aims: students were positioned as morally disciplined subjects of empire, even as they practised autonomy in reading, discussion, and problem-solving. The tension between apparent freedom and structured ideology underscores the subtle power of education as a tool of cultural formation in New Zealand's early twentieth-century schools.

The first issue of the School Journal was published on the 9th of May 1907 and encompassed a broad range of subjects, with particular emphasis on geography, civics, and history. The journal would be published monthly in line with the New Zealand school year. In the first year, this period was from May to November, but in 1908, it was extended to include February as well.¹² Structurally, the publication was divided into three parts corresponding to class levels and was distributed free of charge to all pupils attending state schools. For more than three decades, it remained the Department of Education's sole in-house publication.¹³ The establishment of the New Zealand School Journal marked a deliberate effort by colonial educators to create a uniquely national, yet profoundly imperial, instrument of instruction. As Gregory O'Brien notes, "looking at the early years of the journal is like peering back to that distant point in time when a group of educationalists decided the children of the Dominion would do well to have their own form of literacy education."¹⁴ The Journal's erection was therefore a response to the traditional British textbooks in classrooms that failed to reflect the local environment and experience of New Zealand children.¹⁵ Yet, while the Journal was envisioned as a distinctly New Zealand publication, its content and tone remained rooted in imperial ideology. "In its initial form," O'Brien further observes, "the School Journal resembled a traditional English reader, and much of the content was culled from imported literary sources."¹⁶

¹² Mutch, pp.103-104.

¹³ Maria Perreau, and Lynette Kingsbury, 'The Anzac Iliad: Early New Zealand School Journals and the Development of the Citizen-Child in the New Dominion', *Citizenship, Social and Economic Education*, 16, 3, 2017, pp.157-158.

¹⁴ Gregory O'Brien, *A Nest of Singing Birds: 100 Years of the New Zealand School Journal*, Learning Media, 2007, p.13.

¹⁵ New Zealand Learning Media, *A Guide to the School Journal*, Wellington, Learning Media, 1994, p.3.

¹⁶ O'Brien, p.12.

The reach of this publication made it one of the most influential tools of cultural formation in early twentieth-century New Zealand. Jenkins calculated in 1939 that the School Journal accounted for “as much as one-eighth of the whole primary school course,” its stories, poems, and articles providing “the basis of a considerable part of the child’s education.”¹⁷ The Journal’s contents were, in effect, “more or less official communications to the children of New Zealand,” articulating state-sanctioned values and conceptions of citizenship.¹⁸ Within this framework, the moral and social ideals of the Empire were transmitted through everyday reading exercises, shaping what young readers understood as New Zealand-ness while affirming British cultural superiority. The early issues promoted virtues of hard work, patriotism, and racial hierarchy, concepts that reinforced the myth of New Zealand as a loyal, civilised outpost of the British world. As O’Brien writes a century later, the Journal “has functioned as a beacon over the one hundred years of its life so far... broadcasting a message that made generations of young New Zealanders aware of a coastline-and a country-that was, and still is, changing shape.”¹⁹ In the formative decades, that ‘changing shape’ reflected a Pākehā project of cultural definition, one in which literacy education became a mechanism for aligning national identity with imperial modernity.

Constructing Empire

The School Journal did more than provide reading material for New Zealand’s children, it offered a textual blueprint of what the British Empire was and how young New Zealanders fitted into it. Across its early issues, the Journal’s pages were saturated with moral and visual narratives that celebrated British civilisation, progress, and loyalty to the Crown. Articles on Empire Day, stories of exploration, and biographies of ‘Great Men’ such as Fredrick Edward Maning, William Colenso, and Sir George Grey taught children to read character through the lens of duty, courage, and obedience.²⁰ Particular

¹⁷ David Ross Jenkins, *Social Attitudes in the New Zealand School Journal*, Wellington, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1939, p.3.

¹⁸ New Zealand Learning Media, p.4.

¹⁹ O’Brien, p.11.

²⁰ *School Journal*, 1911/3/8: ‘Men of New Zealand. V. Our First Printer.’

School Journal, 1911/3/9: ‘Men of New Zealand. VI. Fredrick Edward Maning.’

School Journal, 1911/3/10: ‘Men of New Zealand. VII. Sir George Grey – Empire Builder.’

attention is placed on Captain James Cook, who is described as tender, humane, wise, and courageous multiple times across all three parts of the journal.²¹ The Crown is also referenced with admiration. In the early years of the journal, there was particular praise for Queen Victoria, who is depicted as a motherly figure to young New Zealand, described as kind, generous, loving, and forgiving.²² The Journal, like other textual worlds, used themes of family to make its pages feel friendly and relatable to children. By presenting lessons in this way, it guided young readers toward the behaviours and values expected of adults, shaping ideas about loyalty, social hierarchy, and empire.²³ As Miller observes, “from 1907-1940 the ‘team’ to which the readers of the Journal were deemed to belong was British, it was Imperial, and the ‘captain’ of that team was the reigning British monarch.”²⁴ This framing positions young New Zealanders not as peripheral subjects, nor New Zealanders in their own right, but as loyal participants in a global moral community united by service to the Crown.

Of all the School Journal issues published annually, those appearing in May, the month in which Empire Day was celebrated, were the most explicitly imperial in tone. The 1908 May issue, for example, opens with a sequence of texts that collectively construct a vision of imperial identity and duty. It begins with the patriotic poem ‘The Nation Builder’, followed by an eleven-page historical article on Empire Day itself. Subsequent pieces trace the history of ‘The New Zealand Ensign’ and ‘New Zealand’s First Flag’, before concluding with a message addressed ‘To the Children’ from the Earl of Meath, founder of Empire Day.²⁵ The letter opens,

“May you realise more and more fully as you grow older your great indebtedness to the British Empire a majestic community of free nations, freely governing themselves, owing its being to vast sacrifice, enterprise, and valour on the part of your fathers and predecessors, bound together by one King, one Flag, and one Navy, comprising more

²¹ Van Rij, p.238.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Anna Louise Gilderdal, ‘Social Print: Shaping Community and Identity through Youth Correspondence Pages, New Zealand, 1886-1920’ MA Thesis, Auckland University, Auckland, 2016, p.28.

²⁴ Stuart R Miller, ‘Identifying with Empire: The N.Z School Journal from 1907 to 1940’, MA Thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North, 2013, p.13.

²⁵ *School Journal*, 1908/3/4.

than a fifth part of the human race, and occupying more than a fifth part of the earth's surface — a federation the like of which the world has never known before.”²⁶

The Earl of Meath’s message showcases the moral and political purpose of the *School Journal*. His call for children to recognise their “indebtedness to the British Empire” and to unite under “one King, one Flag, and one Navy” framed imperial loyalty as both a moral duty and a source of pride. This kind of language encouraged young readers to see themselves as part of one large, powerful community that shared values of courage, sacrifice, and service. Furthermore, visual imagery reinforced these textual messages. The early *Journals* frequently featured portraits of British monarchs, imperial explorers, and military figures framed by patriotic symbols such as, flags, crowns, and Union Jacks. Such illustrations worked as pedagogical tools, instructing children to associate Britishness with virtue and authority. The May 1908 issue, therefore, reveals how literacy and emotion worked together in the classroom to nurture attachment to the British world and to reproduce the moral order of empire.

The moral tone of the *Journal* intensified during and after the First World War, when sacrifice and duty became central to the construction of the imperial child. The *School Journal*, therefore, did not portray the war as a catalyst for emerging national unique ‘New Zealand’ identity, rather, it reinforced a sense of patriotism firmly grounded in traditional imperial ideals.²⁷ Wartime issues celebrated the heroic acts of Anzac soldiers and framed participation in the war effort as both a moral obligation and a compulsory action of those in the Empire. Perreau and Kingsbury note that this fusion of moral education and citizenship training reflected the wider pedagogical aim of forming subjects of empire whose value lay in self-discipline and service. Across the early years of the journal, “war is presented as a regular feature of history. It appeared that all nations went to war.”²⁸ Students were taught about key imperial conflicts such as the Hundred Years’ War, the Crimean War, and the South African War. Within these narratives, brave and fearless leaders, including Richard the Lionheart are featured.²⁹ During the war,

²⁶ *School Journal*, 1908/3/4: ‘Empire Day Message’.

²⁷ Miller, p.33.

²⁸ Perreau, Kingsbury, p.164.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.165.

poems such as ‘How did you die?’ emphasised that duty to the Empire demanded personal sacrifice, urging readers to value not the fact of death itself but the manner in which one faced it. The final lines state “It isn’t the fact you’re dead that counts, But only – How did you die?”³⁰ Such messages reinforced the idea that New Zealanders were, above all, subjects of the British Empire. They were taught to measure their worth through loyalty, courage, and devotion to imperial ideals rather than through any emerging sense of national distinctiveness.

Through this fusion of textual, visual, and moral instruction, the *School Journal* naturalised British superiority and encoded it within the routines of New Zealand’s schooling system. Each issue participated in what Ballantyne describes as the ‘imperial web.’ This concept is important when considering the role of education and print, as it links local classrooms to a wider moral geography of empire. The *Journal* thus functioned as a site where Empire was not only represented but reproduced, a space in which New Zealand’s children were taught to imagine themselves as both colonial subjects and moral inheritors of civilisation.

Representations of Māori in the Journal

While the *Journal* taught imperial loyalty to children, it simultaneously shaped ideas about Māori identity, relegating Māori culture to the past and reinforcing settler centrality. As McGeorge observes, “the *Journal* helped give generations of white New Zealanders a comfortable, coherent account of themselves, their place in the world, and their Māori fellow citizens.”³¹ In this context, Pākehā students found a history that solidified their history as legitimate, in contrast, Māori agency was removed. Māori were represented not as contemporaries or co-authors of New Zealand’s story, but as symbolic figures who affirmed settler virtue and belonging. For Māori, education was an assimilation project. The information they learnt at school, as reflected in the *Journal*, was contrary to their cultural norms. Māori presence was largely confined to retellings of legends and moral tales written by Pākehā authors, translating living cultural narratives

³⁰ *School Journal*, 1915/3/9: ‘How did you die?’

³¹ Colin McGeorge, ‘Race, Empire, and the Māori in the New Zealand Primary School Curriculum’, in J. A. Mangan, *The Imperial Curriculum: Racial Images and Education in the British Colonial Experience*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.78.

into safe, depoliticised myths of a long-gone past. Miller writes that “one of the Journal's functions was to reinforce a uniquely Māori identity into that of an *indigenous Briton*.”³² Notably, Māori students comprised a significant proportion of the readers in classrooms. Therefore, as they engaged with the Journal, they encountered representations that framed their culture as historical rather than living, and their identity as something to be examined rather than experienced.³³ The result was the assimilation of cultural norms to those of the dominant ‘indigenous Britons’, as Miller asserts. In this way, the School Journal’s imperial lens had lasting consequences for Māori, confining their culture to the symbolic and historical past while shaping generations of Pākehā children’s understanding of Māori as, at best, peripheral, and at worst, distorted and harmed by colonial myths.

The Journal’s depiction of Māori culture reflected the broader trends of Maoriland literature, the dominant literary style in New Zealand from the late nineteenth century until the 1920s. As Jane Stafford and Mark Williams argue, “the literature of the colonial period rationalises, justifies, and extends this process of conquest, displacement, and appropriation.”³⁴ Maoriland texts drew heavily on European literary conventions such as Romanticism, adventure narratives, and moral fables to structure a representation of New Zealand.³⁵ Māori were frequently depicted as a dying or historic race, relegated away from contemporary importance and reimagined as decorative markers of place rather than contemporary social actors. In this way, Maoriland literature acknowledged Māori presence while simultaneously stripping it of agency and contemporary relevance.³⁶ Broader settler ideologies about national identity and the role of Indigenous culture underpinned this dynamic. As a literary movement, Maoriland sought to create a distinctive New Zealand style and foster a sense of national consciousness. It did so through a paradox. While acknowledging that New Zealand is ‘a land of Māori,’ the texts positioned the country as a land of settlers who had claimed the land and now felt secure

³² Miller, p.82.

³³ May, pp.41-42.

³⁴ Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature 1872–1914*, Wellington, Victoria University Press, 2006, pp.10-11.

³⁵ Stafford, Williams, p.11.

³⁶ *ibid*.

enough in their identity to borrow freely from the culture they had dominated.³⁷ In this way, Miller's 'Indigenous Britons' become the norm that the country is to be modelled from. Placing the Journal in this context is essential in reconstructing the textual world it operated in. Like broader texts of the same era, the Journal, therefore, also constructed a sense of national identity in line with the settler colonialism of the Maoriland genre.

Locally marked literature, therefore, involved the selective appropriation of Māori cultural elements like stories, customs, and symbols, by which Pākehā authors could represent the nation while simultaneously occupying the landscape after rendering the land culturally and historically 'available.'³⁸ In this context, modernity and national identity required what Eric Hobsbawm calls the "invention of traditions."³⁹ These invented traditions are made not as compensation for loss, but as an act of self-definition. Stafford and Williams take this idea further, asserting that "in settler societies, traditions they invent are habitually appropriated from those they dispossessed. Thus further ghosting their presence."⁴⁰

In the School Journal, these strategies were concretely realised in texts like the Maoriland Fairy Tales, which translated Māori culture into narratives that reinforced settler centrality while erasing Indigenous agency. By embedding Māori motifs within moral, historical, and fantastical stories, the Journal reproduced the literary and ideological frameworks of Maoriland. Māori were acknowledged, yet confined to the past, allowing Pākehā children to see themselves as the primary actors in New Zealand's evolving national and imperial story. Such a framework allows for a systematic investigation of Māori representation within the Journal, encompassing both textual and visual forms.

When Māori appeared in the early School Journal, they were often represented through stereotypes familiar to Pākehā settlers. One common depiction was the 'noble savage', poetic and brave, yet ultimately portrayed as needing to be tamed or assimilated

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.12.

³⁸ Jane Stafford, 'Going Native: How the New Zealand Settler Became Indigenous', *Journal of New Zealand literature*, 23, 1, 2005, pp.162-163.

³⁹ Eric, Hobsbawm, Terrance Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1984, p.14.

⁴⁰ Stafford, Williams, p.20.

into settler society. At the heart of each text is the choice of language authors used to discuss Māori, which consistently framed them in limited and controlled ways. This is particularly evident in biased historical accounts, comparisons with other marginalised communities, and myth-making.

Māori were frequently depicted through what has been described as the ‘colonial sublime’, a Romantic framework that exoticised indigenous peoples as either noble or savage.⁴¹ Filtered through a distinctly Pākehā, imperialist lens, Māori were positioned in both lenses as inferior, portrayed as primitive, childlike, and inseparable from nature. One of the first Journals included an article on Captain James Cook that showcased this hierarchy, referring to Māori in a varying range of terms. It began “the Maoris,” shifted to “the natives,” then to “blacks,” and finally “murderers,” according to their perceived threat to Captain Cook.⁴² In this way, language was weaponised to shape the reader’s perception, downplaying the deaths of Māori and instead positioning Māori as the antagonist of the settler colonial story.⁴³ Furthermore, in comparing Māori to African Americans in Southern America, the Journal notes that “the Good Maori sits as high as a good Pakeha and the bad Pakeha sinks as low as the bad Maori.”⁴⁴ The syntax and structure of the sentence reinforce a racial hierarchy, implying that Pākehā are naturally good while Māori are inherently inferior unless exceptional.⁴⁵

Such depictions reveal a pattern in the School Journal, Māori were never portrayed on their own terms but in contrast to Pākehā virtue. When not framed as antagonists in colonial progress, they were reimagined as its most loyal supporters. In 1910, the Journal praised Māori for welcoming the Prince and Princess of England, even making space for a tangi to honour Queen Victoria. “The Maori behaved impressively, with enthusiasm, and with ceremony ... In numbers of unity in racial brotherhood of unanimity of loyalty to the Empire and Royal House.”⁴⁶ The patronising language frames Māori both as ideal subjects who are loyal, ceremonial, and exemplary but also as an

⁴¹ Van Rij, p.239.

⁴² *School Journal*, 1907/1/1: ‘Captain Cook.’

⁴³ Van Rij, p.239.

⁴⁴ *School Journal*, 1909/3/3: ‘The United States Today.’

⁴⁵ Van Rij, p.240.

⁴⁶ *School Journal*, 1910/3/6: ‘King Geroge V.’

other. In addressing ‘The Maori’, the Journal places them on the periphery of the settler narrative. In this way, Māori are neatly fitted into the settler conception of virtue and excellence when their culture serves a function that adheres to the colonial narrative.

Although visual elements are present throughout the Journal, the adoption of graphic masthead designs further showcases the way Māori culture was selected to further the uniqueness not of an inclusive nation state, but the uniqueness of Pākehā settlers in New Zealand.⁴⁷ Figure 1 showcases an example of this dichotomy. A kōwhaiwhai border surrounds the ‘lesson’ of a small Pākehā child. The lesson is flanked by two large ferns and taught by a kiwi in a graduation cap. The illustrator of this piece is unnamed however, their employment of distinctive ‘New Zealand’ artefacts is part of a wider trend seen across many other editions of the Journal. Māori presence here, like other examples, does not dictate the lesson, it merely adds dimension to a traditional European scene.⁴⁸ Māori culture signalled “uniqueness of place while simultaneously maintaining visual links to familiar British origins”.⁴⁹ In this way, Māori visual motifs were employed less to represent living culture and more to frame Pākehā authority and identity, reinforcing the settler-centric narrative that underpinned the Journal’s educational and imperial mission.

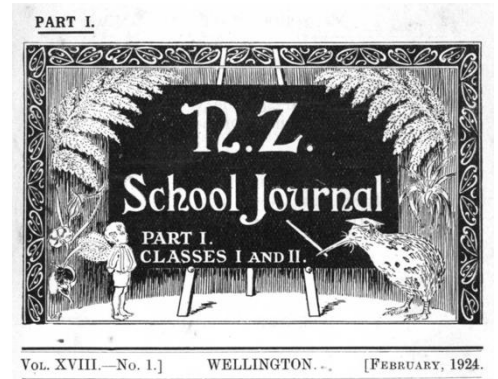


Figure 1- School Journal (1924/1/1)

Beyond the language of representation, the School Journal also participated in the active construction of colonial myth, shaping how history itself was imagined and remembered. The School Journal played a central role in entrenching the myth of the Moriori within New Zealand’s public memory. In numerous texts, the Indigenous people of Rēkohu (the Chatham Islands) were depicted as an inferior culture that was dominated by Māori.⁵⁰ As Michael King observes, for decades, the version of Moriori history presented in the Journal, repeated in classrooms and reinforced by teachers, became the

⁴⁷ Helen Moore, ‘Imag-Ining Ourselves: Illustration and Identity in the New Zealand School Journal’, *History of Education Review*, 37, 2, 2008, p.71.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.72.

⁵⁰ Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, Auckland, Penguin Books, 2003, p.57.

dominant account within the national imagination.⁵¹ The myth gave rise to the argument that it was fair that the British settled in New Zealand and displaced Māori, as this was something Māori had also done to the Moriori. A fact, blatantly incorrect and yet wielded as a colonial justification for decades.⁵² Through its continual circulation and repetition, the Journal not only disseminated but also legitimised this fabricated narrative, profoundly influencing how the people of the Chatham Islands were understood.⁵³ It was not until 2021 that the Crown released an official apology to Moriori as part of their Tribunal Settlement Claim. This apology acknowledged the significant harm that the “derogatory stories” of the Journal had caused to the mana and Kaupapa of the Moriori.⁵⁴ The persistence of these distortions across at least three generations, and arguably into the present, demonstrates the Journal’s enduring power in shaping colonial knowledge.

Conclusion

The early New Zealand School Journal functioned as more than a tool of literacy in New Zealand schools, it was a carefully orchestrated instrument of imperial pedagogy. Across its pages, Pākehā children were taught to see themselves as morally upright, loyal subjects of the British Empire, while Māori were largely relegated to the symbolic past, their culture selectively appropriated, aestheticised, or mythologised. Through textual and visual strategies from Maoriland Fairy Tales to historical articles, poems, and illustrations, the Journal reinforced a settler-colonial worldview in which Māori agency and contemporary presence were erased or subordinated. The circulation of colonial myths, such as the Moriori narrative, exemplified how falsehoods could be institutionalised through education, shaping generations of readers’ understanding of history and culture. Importantly, Māori children themselves also encountered the Journal, yet its contents rarely offered them opportunities to see their histories, identities, or voices represented authentically. Instead, the text positioned them as peripheral observers to a narrative dominated by settler and imperial ideals, normalising hierarchies of power and authority. Just as Jack in Maoriland Fairy Tales receives Māori knowledge through

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ O’Brien, p.15.

⁵⁴ Waitangi Tribunal, *Mori Mori Claims Settlement Act 2021*, No 49, 2021.

the extinct, voiceless moa, New Zealand schoolchildren encountered Indigenous culture mediated and controlled by Pākehā authors, admired, but not engaged with.

The School Journal, therefore, exemplifies the dual impact of imperial educational tools. While fostering Pākehā loyalty to the Empire, it framed Māori as historical, symbolic, or decorative figures rather than active participants in the nation. This approach underscores the lasting influence of early twentieth-century pedagogy on national consciousness, revealing how seemingly neutral texts could transmit ideology, centre settler narratives, and marginalise Māori voices, knowledge, and agency.

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References to the particular issues and texts of the School Journals are given in line with other scholarship of the same context.

The format is - *School Journal*, Year/Part/Number: 'Title'

- Part 1 Journals were for Classes 1/2 (5-6 year-olds)
- Part 2 Journals were for Classes 3/4 (7-8 year-olds)
- Part 3 Journals were for Classes 5/6 (9-10+ year-olds)

School Journal, 1907/1/1: 'Captain Cook.'

School Journal, 1907/2/1: 'Maoriland Fairy Tales, I. Jack, the Fairy, and the Moa.'

School Journal, 1908/3/4: 'The Nation Builders.'

School Journal, 1908/3/4: 'Empire Day.'

School Journal, 1908/3/4: 'The New Zealand Ensign.'

School Journal, 1908/3/4: 'New Zealand's First Flag.'

School Journal, 1908/3/4: 'Empire Day Message.'

School Journal, 1909/3/3: 'The United States Today.'

School Journal, 1910/3/6: 'King George V.'

School Journal, 1911/3/8: 'Men of New Zealand. V. Our First Printer.'

School Journal, 1911/3/9: 'Men of New Zealand. VI. Fredrick Edward Maning.'

School Journal, 1911/3/10: 'Men of New Zealand. VII. Sir George Grey – Empire Builder.'

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History 252 – New Zealand Cultural History.

Star Jackson

Personal Statement:

Star Jackson is a Bachelor of Arts student majoring in History and Philosophy. Since high school, she has had an enduring interest in New Zealand History, and Art History, which has informed the visual analysis of her piece “A Commemoration, a Celebration, or a Circus?: The Battle of Rangiriri Centenary and Cultural Blindness in the 1960s.” In the 2025/2026 Summer, Star completed a Summer Research project on the History of the Auckland Public Library, which is published on the Auckland History Initiative website.

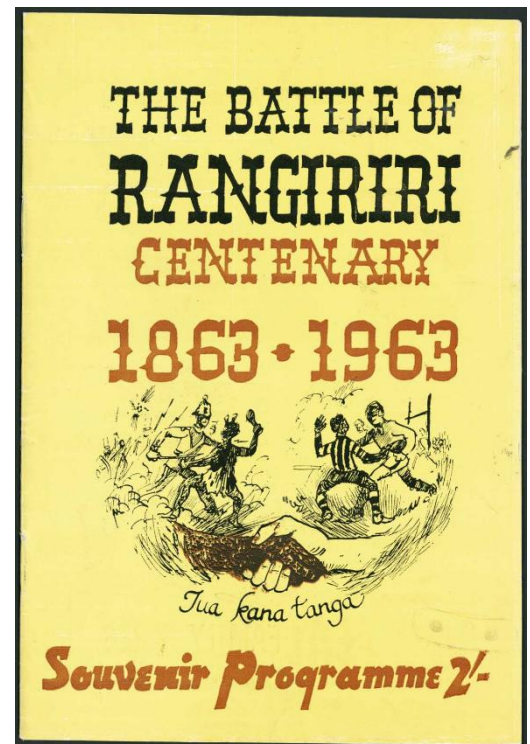
Nominated and taught by Dr. Rowan Light.

A Commemoration, a Celebration, or a Circus?: The Battle of Rangiriri Centenary and Cultural Blindness in the 1960s

When significant anniversaries of the battles fought in the New Zealand Wars come around, the question arises of how one should go about remembering them. Do we remember with regret? With solidarity and mutual respect? With celebration? Rowan Light says, "...memory is not so much about *what* we remember of the past but *how*."¹ Reflecting on the 1963 centenary souvenir programme for the Battle of Rangiriri provides a clear example of the cultural blindness held by many at the time around remembering Rangiriri and the illusion of harmony between Māori and Pākehā.

Rangiriri was one of the decisive battles in the Waikato War. The British invaded Rangiriri on the 20th of November 1863. The original historical account was that Māori surrendered to the British through the use of a white flag, although this was later said to be Māori wishing to halt the fighting to discuss terms. Many Māori men were taken as prisoners, which was seen as duplicitous by the British.²

The Battle of Rangiriri souvenir centenary programme cover image has a bold, western style font reminiscent of the romanticised 'cowboys and Indians' iconography in



¹ Rowan Light, *Why Memory Matters: 'Remembered Histories' and the politics of the shared past* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2023), 19.

² Vincent O'Malley, *The New Zealand Wars / Ngā Pakanga O Aotearoa* (Wellington, Bridget Williams Books, 2019), 111-115.

the USA. There seems to be a suggestion of this relationship between Māori and Pākehā: between indigenous people and the white coloniser. It's as if the designers were trying to ignore the bloodshed and hostility by making it look like a movie poster. 'Tua kana tanga' translates roughly to 'brotherhood'; 'tuakana' means older sibling, so this might imply a kind of superior relationship of Pākehā over Māori. This is further emphasised in the illustrations, where Pākehā seem to be placed in the dominant position both in the battle and the rugby match. It seems like a subtle reminder of the British victory of Rangiriri.

Themes of 'racial harmony' and 'resolved conflict' are the dominant narratives portrayed on the cover image through the handshake and the juxtaposition of the fighting on the left and the friendly rugby game on the right. Moving from images of battle to game, the conflict appears resolved and peace achieved. A message in the 1963 programme from the Governor General, Sir Bernard Fergusson reads, "We are rejoicing in the knowledge that the two races concerned now live harmoniously together, and indeed have fought shoulder to shoulder in two wars in a common cause."³

The question remains: was this camaraderie really felt on both sides? Another message in the programme from King Koroti (the Māori King at the time) similarly suggests this relationship is free from strife, where the difficult past is behind them. Most of the message concerns the present and future "...peace, happiness and prosperity..." in New Zealand, only briefly mentioning the battle and the '...honour and mutual respect.' Māori and Pākehā felt when fighting.⁴ Once again, we see a sanitising of the truth, steering attitudes away from the ugly side of war.

However, an article from *Press* revealed that most Waikato Māori were opposed to the centenary celebrations, so King Koroti's message was not an accurate portrayal of the opinions held by all Māori. One Waikato Māori was quoted in 1963 as saying: "Why should we celebrate an event which ended with many of our old people being killed and their land confiscated?"⁵ To understand why this Waikato Māori interpreted it as a

³ *The Battle of Rangiriri: centenary 1863-1963: souvenir programme* (Rangiriri: N.Z.: s.n, 1963), 6.

⁴ *The Battle of Rangiriri: centenary 1863-1963: souvenir programme*, 7.

⁵ New Zealand Press Association, "King Koroki Commends Battle Anniversary Plans," *Press*, October 8, 1963, 20.

celebration, one only needs to look at some of the planned events in the centenary programme: a Māori versus Pākehā tug-of-war, raft racing, and a social and dance at Rangiriri Hall in the evening.⁶ These kinds of frivolous events seem to undermine the seriousness and dignity of what should be a respectful commemoration. A ‘celebration’ feels dishonouring, inappropriate and like a re-writing of history. Harry Dansey, a Māori journalist, in 1963 mentioned that a Waikato kaumatua was concerned that the centenary would turn into a “‘circus’, using that word with a terse English adjective.”⁷

Additional Māori disapproval of the centenary further demonstrates its inaccurate portrayal of racial harmony at the time. The centenary planning committee was forced to drop a mock re-enactment of the battle after confrontation from Waikato Māori because it was “...still a source of great pain and bitterness for them.”⁸ The lack of Pākehā sensitivity around the seriousness of the Battle of Rangiriri is clear here. A mock reenactment would be appropriate for something like a rugby match, but not when one is marking the centenary of a battle that destroyed the lives of hundreds of people.

This belief in racial harmony and mutual respect – what I’m calling the ‘cultural blindness’ of the time – can partly be explained by the historical view of the New Zealand Wars before the 1960s. James Cowan’s 1922 ‘History of The New Zealand Wars’ became the prevailing history for decades thereafter.⁹ As years go by, there is greater reliance on histories and secondary sources rather than first-hand accounts of the wars. Cowan’s narrative held a lot of weight in the contemporary understanding of the wars and their effects on race relations. He pushed the idea that Māori and Pākehā were ‘one people’.¹⁰ According to Chris Hilliard, “In Cowan's schema, the wars fostered mutual respect: Māori and Pākehā came to admire each other's tenacity and chivalry, as enemies or as allies.”¹¹ As mentioned, this is reflected in the centenary programme

⁶ *The Battle of Rangiriri: centenary 1863-1963: souvenir programme*, 8-9.

⁷ Harry Dansey, "Reflections on Battle Centenaries," *Te Ao Hou*, September 1964, 35.

⁸ Vincent O'Malley, "'Recording the Incident with a Monument': The Waikato War in Historical Memory," *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, 19 (2015): 89.

⁹ Vincent O'Malley, *The Great War for New Zealand: Waikato 1800–2000* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2015), 12.

¹⁰ Chris Hilliard, "James Cowan and the Frontiers of New Zealand History," *New Zealand of History* 31, no. 2 (1997): 224.

¹¹ Hilliard, 224-225.

through the imagery and illustrations, which ignore the bloodshed of Rangiriri. Still, it's hard to imagine Māori feeling respectful of a coloniser's tenacity and chivalry when they were being taken as prisoners after seeking negotiation by raising the white flag. Vincent O'Malley said in 2015, "From the perspective of many Pākehā, it was easier just to forget the Waikato war had ever happened." This aligns with these representations of Rangiriri; it seemed as if they wanted to sweep the violence and snatching of land under the carpet.

Looking ahead to 2013, the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Rangiriri, the immense differences between how the remembrance was conducted are plainly obvious. It was very much a commemoration and not a celebration. "'I shed a few tears for my lost ancestors,' [Raglan man Huti Waitere] said as more than one thousand people stood together...to remember one of the bloodiest battles in Waikato history."¹² This recognition of the Battle of Rangiriri as a day to commemorate, not celebrate, is apparent. While I'm not saying the 1963 centenary was completely devoid of respect and dignity, there was a notable absence in 2013 of anything that could be described as a 'circus'.

¹² Teresa Hattan, "Waikato battle remembered at Rangiriri," Stuff, November 21, 2013, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/waikato-times/news/9421174/Waikato-battle-remembered-at-Rangiriri>.

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History 217 – Nazi Germany and its Legacies.

Emma de Fleuriot de la Coliniere

Personal Statement:

Kia Ora. My name is Emma, and I am honoured to be part of the 2025 edition of Histeria! I am currently pursuing a Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Arts conjoint degree, with a major in history. Studying both fields has taught me how deeply connected they really are - law does not exist in a vacuum, but is shaped by, and helps shape, the historical moments in which it operates. My piece on Ernst Fraenkel's dual state theory reflects this: how legal systems can be manipulated to enable authoritarianism while appearing lawful. Understanding this history shows how fragile the rule of law can be, and what we might learn from it to build a better future.

Nominated by Professor Maartje Abbenhuis and supported by their tutor, Dr. Branka Bogdan.

After the collapse of the Weimar Republic in 1933, Ernst Fraenkel's *The Dual State* (1941) examined Nazi Germany's paradoxical governance. The regime consisted of a normative state (*normenstaat*) that maintained legal formalities and a prerogative state (*maßnahmenstaat*) that imposed ideological violence.¹ While scholars like Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen conceptualise Nazi rule as chaotic polyocracy, Fraenkel stressed its intentional duality – a regime exploiting legality to conceal dictatorship.² This essay argues that Fraenkel's model remains essential for both uncovering how the regime manipulated law to consolidate power and exposing institutional complicity in facilitating terror. It will first examine the dual state's origins during the Nazi 'legal revolution' (1933-1934), then explore its operation through bureaucratic normalcy and arbitrary violence, and lastly evaluate its enduring relevance as a cautionary tale against authoritarian legalism.

The shift from Weimar democracy to Hitler's dictatorship resulted not from a popular revolution, but from legal manipulation and compromise by political elites. Adolf Hitler's appointment as Chancellor on 30 January 1933 was not a *machtergreifung* ('seizure of power') but a strategic concession by President Paul von Hindenburg, who sought to preserve conservative control by limiting his cabinet's presence to just two Nazi ministers.³ However, this approach backfired catastrophically. The Reichstag Fire of 27 February 1933 – attributed to the Communist narrative – handed the regime its pretext.⁴ Under the guise of an emergency, Hitler enacted the Decree for the Protection of People and State, curtailing civil liberties and authorising mass arrests of communists, socialists and other political opponents.⁵ This event signalled the onset of state-sanctioned political persecution. With dissent suppressed, the regime consolidated its hold through the Enabling Act of 23 March 1933, effectively dismantling constitutional rule by intimidation, bribery and political coercion.⁶ Freed from the Reichstag and the constitution, Hitler's cabinet could now govern by fiat, granting Hitler dictatorial powers. The Nazis expedited their takeover of power through *Gleichschaltung*, a process aligning all institutions with Nazi ideology, quickly bringing civil society, the press, trade unions, and state authorities

¹ Ernst Fraenkel, *The dual state: a contribution to the theory of dictatorship*, Oxford, 2017, p.3.

² *ibid.*, p.13.

³ Maartje Abbenhuis, 'Lecture 3 Topic', HISTORY 217, University of Auckland 2025.

⁴ Fraenkel, p.4.

⁵ Abbenhuis, Lecture 3.

⁶ Fraenkel, p.4.

under party control.⁷ For example, the press, radio, and cultural institutions were tightly censored, ensuring that only Nazi-approved messages were disseminated to the public.⁸ Furthermore, education and youth organisations were overhauled to indoctrinate the future generation.⁹ These measures were also reinforced by legal means; as Stackhouse argues, the regime's early decrees formed a new legal code that blurred the boundary between legality and terror.¹⁰ In particular, on 14 July 1933, the Law Against the Establishment of Parties was passed, officially making Germany a one-party state.¹¹ Fraenkel noted that Weimar's legal framework was retained, but emptied of substance, forming a dual system: one tier operated through established procedures, the other by ideological decree and violence.¹² This approach neutralised conservative elites and ordinary Germans clinging to an illusion of continuity. By publicly embracing Prussian tradition during the 1933 Day of Potsdam, the regime reassured traditionalists, even while secret decrees empowered the Sturmabteilung (SA) and the Schutzstaffel (SS) to operate outside the law.¹³ Martin Broszat demonstrates how this very duality allowed Hitler to systematically 'alter law and justice in case after case.'¹⁴ Ultimately, the regime's paradox used legality to dismantle legality itself.

Although the Nazi regime maintained the appearance of legal order through what Fraenkel called the normative state, it was the rise of the prerogative state – a parallel sphere of unchecked power – that truly defined its rule.¹⁵ The normative state referred to the continued operation of traditional bureaucratic and judicial systems in domains considered apolitical. This realm upheld commercial law, contract enforcement, and administrative routine, giving the impression of legal normalcy for the average German. Civil courts remained in operation, local governments managed paperwork, and state officials retained their jobs – provided they were racially 'acceptable' and politically obedient.¹⁶ This

⁷ Jane, Caplan, *Hitler and the Nazi state: leadership, hierarchy, and power*, United Kingdom, 2008, pp.112-113.

⁸ Abbenhuis, Lecture 3.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ J. Ryan Stackhouse, *Enemies of the People: Hitler's Critics and the Gestapo*, Cambridge, 2021, pp.3.

¹¹ Abbenhuis, Lecture 3.

¹² Fraenkel, p.14.

¹³ Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State*, Oxford, 1981, pp.373.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 372.

¹⁵ Fraenkel, p.41.

¹⁶ Richard, J. Evans, *The Third Reich in power, 1933-1939*, New York, 2005, p.75.

stability lent the regime legitimacy at home and abroad. However, the absence of a functioning parliament after July 1933 and the growing reliance on emergency decrees foreshadowed the impending collapse of legal autonomy.

Operating above this was the prerogative state, where arbitrary executive authority reigned, dismantling legal safeguards. This parallel system, key to Fraenkel's dual state theory, was built on a single premise: any matter could be reclassified as 'political' and thus exempted from legal scrutiny.¹⁷ The Reichstag Fire Decree, acting as its foundational instrument, allowed the imprisonment of thousands without trial, who were sent to camps like Dachau.¹⁸ Here, the Gestapo acted beyond judicial review, wielding indefinite detention of political opponents and persecuted groups through *schutzhaft*, 'protective custody' – often meaning death.¹⁹ As Stackhouse demonstrates, this marked the Gestapo's shift from an emergency tool to a permanent force of terror – its authority empowered by decrees overriding the normative state.²⁰ Under Heinrich Himmler's leadership, the SS evolved into key enforcers of the prerogative state, running 'racial courts' that judged individuals by their adherence to Nazi ideology rather than legal guilt.²¹ The creation of special courts aimed to target political opposition. The *Volksgerichtshof* (People's Court) from 1937 to 1944 exemplified this shift, hearing over 14,000 cases and handing down over 5,000 death sentences.²² Charges of asocial conduct or racial treason often led to detention without evidence.²³ Legal protections were illusory – acquitted individuals could be rearrested and placed in concentration camps.²⁴ Fraenkel's concept of the dual state is evident here, as the judiciary, once expected to uphold justice, becomes progressively complicit. Under the Weimar Republic, the majority of judges were already sympathetic to conservative nationalism, and laws like the 1933 Restoration of the Professional Civil Service completed the expulsion of remaining Jewish and socialist voices.²⁵ In Prussia

¹⁷ Fraenkel, p.37.

¹⁸ Jessurun d'Oliveria, H, 'A legal View of Iconoclasm. New Ideologies and Overturning Existing Legal Orders: Legal Iconoclasm in Germany', *European Review*, 30, 1, 2022, p.12.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Stackhouse, p.3.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² d'Oliveria, p.11.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.12.

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp.10-11.

alone, 643 Jewish judges were ousted.²⁶ By 1934, officials like Justice Minister Franz Gürtner helped eliminate legal accountability, approving laws that retroactively justified the extrajudicial killings of Kristallnacht.²⁷ Like many conservatives, Gürtner believed these concessions would preserve legal order. However, instead, they facilitated its destruction.²⁸ By the late 1930s, Himmler's SS had transformed policing into a method of racial purification, and the Gestapo stopped reporting camp deaths to prosecutors.²⁹ Stackhouse and Broszat show that the aspiration for a lawful Nazi state was quickly discarded. Per Fraenkel's terms, the dual states were competitive.³⁰ The prerogative state did not simply coexist with the normative state – it had parasitised it. Nazi Germany became a fractured system in which the rule of law was weaponised against the innocent, while true power remained with those who recognised no law at all.

Fraenkel's theory of the dual state provides vital insight into how Nazi Germany maintained an illusion of legality as it methodically eroded the rule of law. Its historical significance lies in three main areas: explaining the Nazi regime's distinctive structure of terror, exposing systems of public complicity, and establishing a framework that remains relevant for analysing authoritarianism today. For those living under Nazi rule, the dual state was no abstract theory, but a frightening reality. Many Germans, particularly professionals, civil servants and business owners, depended on the ongoing functioning of the normative state for economic stability and a sense of normalcy.³¹ By maintaining ordinary legal procedures in civil and commercial affairs, the regime was able to secure the cooperation of conservative elites who may have otherwise opposed lawlessness. Simultaneously, the prerogative state functioned unchecked, persecuting political dissidents, Jewish populations and 'other' enemies without judicial oversight.³² This hypocrisy was strategic: with regular legal processes still functioning, most Germans could overlook, or justify, the regime's escalating atrocities.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Broszat, pp.333-334.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Fraenkel, p.46.

³¹ Caplan, pp.20-21.

³² Stackhouse, p.3.

Writing in exile during 1941, Fraenkel sought to reveal how the Nazis had so effectively suppressed opposition.³³ His work was timely and necessary, as many external observers, including certain foreign governments, continued to underestimate the regime's radicalism, believing that Germany's longstanding legal and bureaucratic institutions would mitigate Hitler's extremism. Fraenkel's critique shattered this dangerous illusion. In revealing how the Nazis exploited legality to entrench their authoritarian rule, he provided a crucial warning to democracies about the vulnerabilities of constitutional systems. Furthermore, historians have built on Fraenkel's theory to explain Nazi authority. Historian Ian Kershaw's *Working Towards the Führer* similarly demonstrates how the prerogative state incentivised local persecution initiatives.³⁴ Both theories reveal the regime's dependence on social complicity: Fraenkel's legal duality enabled it, while Mommsen's 'weak dictator' thesis explains its chaotic radicalisation.³⁵ Combined, they outline how Nazi Germany could be both systematically oppressive and administratively incoherent. Hans Mommsen's concept of 'cumulative radicalisation' further echoes the dual state's logic, illustrating how mid-level bureaucrats intensified violence through collective actions, not direct orders.³⁶ The dual state model likewise clarifies what Michael Burleigh termed 'invisible radicalisation' – the bureaucratic machinery that silently institutionalised terror.³⁷

The theory's contemporary relevance retains exceptional weight, extending beyond Nazi Germany. As recent scholarship cautions, longstanding authoritarian tendencies, such as ethnic nationalism, disdain for democratic institutions, and legal iconoclasm, are resurfacing across Europe today.³⁸ Fraenkel showed how democracies collapse due to the distortion of the law, rather than destruction. The dual state illustrates how parallel courts, emergency powers, or selective enforcement facilitate systemic abuse. In conclusion, by forcing Hindenburg into political deadlock, Hitler capitalised on the government's fragile state to strengthen his own position and expand Nazi influence. Fraenkel's dual state framework shows how the Nazi regime manipulated legal continuity

³³ Abbenhuis, Lecture 3.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ Abbenhuis, Lecture 3.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ d'Oliveria, p.22.

to mask oppression, upholding a mask of legitimacy (*normenstaat*) while enabling ideological terror (*maßnahmenstaat*). This blueprint endures: today, many regimes worldwide undermine democracy through ‘lawful’ strategies, such as weaponised security laws or politicised judiciaries. While democratic appearances remain, actual authority rests with prerogative power. Fraenkel’s reminder stands: when exceptions take precedence, autocracy and authoritarianism, or dictatorship follow.

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History 736 – Medieval Women & Gender.

Maya Zolotar

Personal Statement:

Kia ora! My name is Maya Zolotar and I am an international student from the United States who completed a BA (Honours) in history in 2025.

Although I consider my main historical focus to be the latter half of the 20th century and the Cold War, in taking HIST736, I came to find medieval history beautifully complex and deeply interesting. I also have a long-standing fascination with the history of gender, and how understandings of a concept that is often taken for-granted have varied widely across time and space.

Nominated and taught by Professor Kim Phillips.

Considerations in Medieval Trans Historiography

The study of gender is not new. Although trans historiography is a new development, based on modern understandings of gender and gender-nonconformity, the complexities of gender have been studied for a long time. Even medieval scholars studied it as they abstracted gender and sex in ways we would not recognize today,¹ examined sex difference through the lens of alchemy,² and established cross-dressing as a literary trope.³ However, while gender has always been studied, the language and methods that scholars use have changed, as understandings of gender can mirror contemporary societal attitudes. Just as gender understandings have varied from the Middle Ages to today, histories of gender-nonconformity have changed their language and approaches. Terms such as ‘transvestite’ have aged out, as newer histories of gender-nonconformity examine their subject matter through the language and ideas of the trans community today. Just like any other topic of historical inquiry, there are certain issues at stake when one writes medieval trans histories. Gender and gender-nonconformity as topics are politically-charged, complex, and varied, and their historians risk misrepresentation, anachronism, or insufficiency. These issues are at once ones with which scholars of medieval trans history must grapple, and ones that many good historians understand and address. This essay examines some, but not all, of the issues at stake in writing medieval trans history, and also how historians’ navigations of these challenges have enhanced the discipline.

In many respects, the telling of history is inherently political, whether it aims to be or not. A well-known proponent of this idea is Joan Scott, renowned for her ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’—a text that also outlines how gender is a political topic.⁴ If, then, both history and gender are political, one can easily recognize that trans histories are deeply intertwined with political concerns—and this idea has only become

¹ Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 6.

² Leah DeVun, ‘The Jesus Hermaphrodite: Science and Sex Difference in Premodern Europe’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 69, 2, 2008, p. 199.

³ John Anson, ‘The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif’, *Viator*, 5, 1, 1974, p. 10.

⁴ Joan W. Scott, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, *The American Historical Review*, 91, 5, 1986, p. 1069.

more relevant since Scott's publication of 'Gender: A Useful Category' in 1986. Henningsen in 2019 that Eleanor Rykener—one of the most well-known figures in medieval trans history—refused to allow her gender identity to be erased, a struggle repeated by modern trans people as the first Trump administration attempted to ignore and erase trans identities.⁵ In 2022, Bychowski pointed to the rise of the Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist (TERF) movement and its tendency to make feminist spaces, even scholarly ones, hostile to studying histories of gender-nonconformity.⁶ And, in 2025, trans issues are more politically relevant than ever. Writing trans histories today thus requires critical attention towards the subject matter's politics, and the way gender-nonconforming identities are represented. Many trans and gender-nonconforming people today, especially trans historians, can relate their experiences to those of the trans and gender-nonconforming people of the past. One example of this phenomenon is that of St. Wilgefortis—who Skoda identifies as a symbol for non-binary people of both the past and present.⁷ Medieval trans histories are about 'mixing the modern and the medieval together and showing the persistence of a queer thread which runs all the way through', Gutt explains, also referencing the reason many trans scholars have for studying histories of gender: the idea that 'We Have Always Been Here'.⁸ Scholars of trans history and trans historians must also deal with issues of public and institutional reactions to their politically controversial subject matter. Many scholars of trans histories have undergone challenges finding the funding for their research or getting institutional respect,⁹ and Bychowski recounts her experience with harassment as a trans scholar of trans history in the public eye.¹⁰ Thus, those wishing to write medieval trans histories must take into account the inherently political nature of their subject material—and what that means for both them

⁵ Kadin Henningsen, "'Calling [herself] Eleanor": Gender Labor and Becoming a Woman in the Rykener Case', *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality*, 55, 1, 2019, p. 265.

⁶ Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski in Anna Kłosowska, Gabrielle M.W. Bychowski, Micah Goodrich, Blake Gutt, and Clovis Maillet, 'Medieval Trans Studies', *The Multicultural Middle Ages Podcast*, 25 April 2022. Podcast, MP3 audio. <https://www.multiculturalmiddleages.com/listen/episode/c15afadd/medieval-trans-studies>.

⁷ Hannah Skoda, 'St Wilgefortis and Her/Their Beard: The Devotions of Unhappy Wives and Non-binary People', *History Workshop Journal*, 93, 2023, p. 66.

⁸ Blake Gutt in Kłosowska et al.

⁹ Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski in Kłosowska et al.

¹⁰ Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski in Kłosowska et al.

and their audiences. For many, trans histories' political nature is not a weakness: it can be used to send an empowering message to trans and gender-nonconforming people today.

With trans issues' current political relevance comes a perception that trans issues are new, or that gender-nonconformity has no place in the past. And, even from those who recognize gender's complex and constructed nature, there exists the concern that today's historians will push modern understandings of gender onto the people of the past. After all, it is the primary goal of most historians to attempt to understand the past on its own terms. Many gender scholars are very aware of this concern. Lochrie points to several recent works of trans history—DeVun's *The Shape of Sex*, Spencer-Hall and Gutt's *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography*, and LaFleur, Raskolnikov, and Kłosowska's *Trans Historical*—as evidence of an active effort within the field 'to counter the presentism of our understanding of trans and nonbinary genders'¹¹ and many scholars actively work to avoid anachronism by grounding their research in medieval sources.¹² Then, while being aware of the risks of anachronism should continue to be common practice within the history discipline, there are many indications today that scholars of medieval trans history are cognizant of and careful to avoid these pitfalls. In fact, while one may think scholars of today are perhaps more prone to anachronism due to their aim of seeing past gender-nonconforming figures through the lens of modern trans ideas, the reverse is even more probable—current scholars' more open-minded attitude towards gender diversity is an asset that past generations of historians did not have. For example, the recent rush of trans-informed scholarship on Eleanor Rykener has allowed historians to better understand her as a trans woman, rather than how the most well-known prior account referred to her merely as a 'cross-dressing prostitute.'¹³ With knowledge of trans concepts such as the 'framework of gender labor',¹⁴ scholars can understand Rykener on a much deeper level. Ultimately, as Scott recognizes, understanding gender as a constructed, fluid, societally-dependent concept is what is needed to study it.¹⁵ Thus, where modern trans-

¹¹ Karma Lochrie, 'Nonbinary and Trans Premodernities', *Exemplaria*, 34, 4, 2022, p. 363.

¹² Lochrie, p. 365.

¹³ This account is found online at 'Internet Medieval Sourcebook: The Questioning of Eleanor Rykener (also known as John), A Cross-Dressing Prostitute, 1395', Internet History Sourcebooks Project, 2025, accessed 5 June 2025, <https://origin.web.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1395rykener.asp>.

¹⁴ Henningsen, p. 250.

¹⁵ Scott, p. 1074.

inclusive views of gender are more open-minded than most coming from the 20th century, and see gender as a malleable construct, they are more authentic to the study of gender as a whole, providing a better lens for understanding the past. In addition, because many current scholars of trans histories are trans themselves, their gender experiences give them an arguable advantage in understanding historical gender-nonconforming figures. With personal experience to relate to the people of the past, and above all, the ability to ‘interrogate and overcome cissexist methodological assumptions and biases’,¹⁶ it is once again notable that trans historians can enhance the study of gender history, rather than hurt it with anachronism. Presentism is always a concern to be aware of, but while it is an issue relevant to medieval trans histories, it is one of which many scholars are aware and careful, and an example of present understandings being beneficial, rather than detrimental, to the discipline.

Another issue at stake in representing complex gender histories is that of representing gender itself. The nature of gender’s complexity is an issue with which scholars of medieval trans histories must grapple. Numerous historians that have tackled the question of gender have understood it differently; gender is a term with an ever-changing definition. These varying conceptions of gender can help to explain multifaceted historical gender identities, or they can just as easily cause deep disconnect—between scholars and their audiences, the past, or even other scholars. In ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, Scott made the case for her definition of gender, ultimately outlining that other definitions were too narrow and therefore unsatisfactory. Scott discusses gender as both a social phenomenon loosely based on binary sex, and a ‘primary way of signifying relationships of power.’¹⁷ The multifaceted nature of Scott’s definition means that to truly represent gender, one must understand its social binary component, and its role in the dynamics of power. In other words, one must understand gender in multiple ways at the same time. When historians study gender-nonconformity, then, they must engage with definitions. As they explain trans stories, they must also, to an extent, explain gender itself. In telling trans histories, Wingard asserts, scholars must

¹⁶ Tess Wingard, ‘The Trans Middle Ages: Incorporating Transgender and Intersex Studies into the History of Medieval Sexuality’, *English Historical Review*, 138, 593, 2023, p. 943.

¹⁷ Scott, p. 1067.

historicize the underpinnings of gender roles present in each case studied.¹⁸ Previously, scholars have focused more on case studies of individuals such as Rykener, or society-wide phenomena such as Anson's discussion of cross-dressing as a medieval literary motif,¹⁹ to ground their studies. The trend in more recent research, however, is a much wider and structurally-focused approach.²⁰ A structural trend is promising, as it seeks to explore more thoroughly the concepts underpinning trans histories. Although the sheer complexity and contextuality of gender is still a force for historians to reckon with, the doors opened by structural analyses are very useful in the long-term.

Any historiographical examination would be incomplete without looking into the consequences of source availability. In the case of the Middle Ages' gender history, the kinds of theoretical approaches to gender that came out of medieval universities were largely all written by educated men. Because of this, the theoretical approaches for which historians have evidence are the product of 'masculine power structures'.²¹ And, where these discussions existed, presenting their findings was subject to certain rules and norms that could have impeded authentic expression of medieval mentalities.²² In other words, the examples of medieval gender thinking that historians can access are likely representative of only a small portion of the medieval population. When it comes to case studies, as well, the data that today's historians can study is skewed. Since most records of gender-nonconformity tend to only come from specific sources, historians are only able to tell the stories of those who were researched or punished. Bennett and McSheffrey, for example, have researched women who cross-dressed in medieval London, but since their sources are mostly limited to police records, their findings present a pattern skewed towards those who cross-dressed only for sexual purposes—and of that category, only those who received legal attention.²³ One of the more detailed case studies in trans history, that of Eleanor Rykener, was only researched because she was interviewed by police. Many others with life experiences similar to Rykener may have existed, but historians do not know of

¹⁸ Wingard, p. 944.

¹⁹ Found in John Anson, 'The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif', *Viator*, 5, 1, 1974, pp. 1-32.

²⁰ Wingard, p. 941.

²¹ Cadden, p. 168.

²² Cadden, p. 105.

²³ Judith M. Bennett and Shannon McSheffrey, 'Early, Erotic, and Alien: Women Dressed as Men in Late Medieval London', *History Workshop Journal*, 77, 1, 2014, p. 3.

them if they were never arrested. A skewing of sources towards legal ones, and an overrepresentation of cisgender educated men in Middle Ages gender discussions likely leads to an underrepresentation of gender-nonconformity cases, and understandings of gender that may not be representative of whole populations. Thus, when studying medieval trans histories, scholars must be aware of the possibility that gender-nonconformity was more common or less punishable than their sources lead them to believe. Many historians, are, however, cognizant of the limitations of their sources as, especially for medievalists, source scarcity is no new issue.

Scholars tend to study both examples of gender-nonconforming historical figures, and indications of medieval understandings of gender. Ultimately, because of these two parallel lines of research, historians must reconcile the differences between the history of trans ideas in the Middle Ages, and the experiences that trans people underwent. There exists a persistent problem wherein some people who are not medievalists—and even some who are—tend to stereotype the era as one that was inherently oppressive, when, arguably, many medieval concepts of gender were progressive by today's standards. Foucault, in Cadden's view, for example, saw medieval Christian attitudes towards gender and sexuality standing in opposition to the more liberal Greek ones. Cadden refutes this with reference to several medieval medical texts.²⁴ DeVun also thoroughly examines the mystical and sometimes divine²⁵ role that the idea of the hermaphrodite played in some strands of medieval thought,²⁶ and Skoda points to contemporary portrayals of St. Wilgefortis as allowed to be plainly non-binary, 'point[ing] to a society in which the expansiveness of gendered identities was acknowledged and encompassed'.²⁷ That being said, the ideas that medieval society perpetuated surrounding gender diversity do not necessarily align with the lives of gender-nonconforming individuals. While the idea of a woman dressing as a man was often considered noble in medieval literature, and present as a common trope, historians also point to limitations. The idea was lauded in theory, but

²⁴ Cadden, p. 8.

²⁵ DeVun examines this concept in Leah DeVun, 'The Jesus Hermaphrodite: Science and Sex Difference in Premodern Europe', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 69, 2, 2008, pp. 193-218.

²⁶ Leah DeVun, 'Hermaphrodites', in Margaret Schaus, ed, *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: an Encyclopedia*, Routledge, New York, 2006, p. 363.

²⁷ Skoda, p. 66.

often only because it upheld power structures equating maleness with goodness,²⁸ and real gender-nonconforming people still faced significant backlash if they challenged these structures.²⁹ ‘Medieval benevolence toward female cross-dressers was clearer in fiction than action’, write Bennett and McSheffrey,³⁰ Whittington points to the violence that permeated medieval gender-nonconforming lives,³¹ and parallel to their study of *ideas* of the hermaphrodite, DeVun also highlights the role of social control over the body that affected many medieval intersex individuals’ medical experiences.³² Then, as much as historians look to prove wrong ideas of medieval repression and forced conformity, they must remain aware that as much as medieval sources provide representations of open-minded views of gender, the often unpleasant and violent lived realities of gender-nonconforming people must also be acknowledged. It is entirely possible that many gender-nonconforming individuals lived lives influenced by the openness of theory and not the violence of enforced conformity. The aforementioned issues of source access lead to a record that paints the gender-nonconforming experience in a perhaps undeserved negative light,³³ but in order to tell trans histories well, scholars must be—and often are—conscious of the parallel but very different histories of trans lives and trans ideas.

Several of the aforementioned at-stake issues connect back to a central theme of variety. The Middle Ages were not a monolithic period; there existed a wide variety of ideas surrounding gender and nonconformity and a plethora of experiences existed within that. As Joan Scott has said, gender is contextual,³⁴ and as such, what gender was, how it was experienced, and how it was expressed varied between time and place. ‘Medieval conceptions of gender came less in the form of a specific ideology than in the form of a smorgasbord of concrete details’,³⁵ writes Cadden. Hotchkiss remarks that the most striking

²⁸ Vern Bullough, ‘Cross Dressing and Gender Role Change in the Later Middle Ages’, in Vern Bullough and James A. Brundage, eds, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1996, p. 225.

²⁹ Valerie R. Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1996, p. 128.

³⁰ Bennett and McSheffrey, p. 6.

³¹ Karl Whittington, ‘Medieval’, in Special Issue, ‘Postposttranssexual: Key Concepts for a Twenty-First-Century Transgender Studies’, *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1, 1-2, 2014, p. 125.

³² Leah DeVun, ‘Erecting Sex: Hermaphrodites and the Medieval Science of Surgery’, *Osiris*, 30, 1, 2015, p. 34.

³³ Lochrie, pp. 367-8.

³⁴ Scott, p. 1074.

³⁵ Cadden, p. 226.

component of medieval views of gender was the inconsistency revealed within,³⁶ and Whittington comments that ‘any characterization of a single gender politics of medieval Europe would necessarily be reductive’.³⁷ Any historian telling medieval trans histories, must, therefore, be consistently aware of the plurality of perspectives, opinions, and experiences. This variety is also the very strength of the study of history. Being able to historicize gender, to acknowledge the ways in which it shifted to its context, is an important capability. This is equally true when representing gender for political purposes: if gender is so varied, if gender is understood as a construction of the society it lives within, then the binary logic that defines many dominant modern understandings of gender, that serves as the primary opposition to trans and non-binary people today, is flawed.

Studying gender is complicated, but also very important. History is nearly always political, but trans histories are especially political today as they have a responsibility to be more than just a history. In a political climate that is increasingly hostile to trans people, the need to tell trans histories increases as many trans and gender-nonconforming people seek to reaffirm their identities in the face of erasure. Using modern conceptions of gender to examine past gender-nonconforming individuals helps to send the message: ‘We have always been here.’ Undoubtedly, such an approach to history comes with risks. Much of the practice of history is dependent on the idea of understanding the past on its own terms, a tricky proposition when it comes to applying modern ideas of gender. In addition, gender’s complexity adds challenges to trans histories, as do source scarcity and skew. And, where there are political ramifications to both showing the ways the Middle Ages could be surprisingly progressive in some of its gender ideas, and examining the repression and violence that some gender-nonconforming people underwent, establishing the balance between each example is important. The task of the historian is vast, difficult, and necessary—and yet, many people are up to the task. Numerous scholars today work hard, despite institutional and political disapproval, to tell the stories of medieval gender diversity and medieval trans experiences, and the wealth of useful publications on this topic indicate that they do it very well.

³⁶ Hotchkiss, p. 125.

³⁷ Whittington, p. 125.

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Ancient History 750 – Sources and Approaches for the Ancient World.

George Stafford

Personal Statement:

Kia ora, my name is George Stafford (he/him), and I am currently completing a Master of Arts in Classical Studies and Ancient History at the University of Auckland. My research focuses primarily on the ancient Greek world, particularly the central Greek region of Boiotia, approached through the perspectives of local and regional history. I am especially interested in the ways communities and states were shaped by networks, connections, mobility, and landscape over the *longue durée*, and in moving beyond traditional historical narratives centred on major cities and political institutions. My current research examines a proposed Boiotian micro-region and the interconnected local systems that developed around its principal settlement, Hyettos, contributing to the general academic shift away from conventional accounts of Boiotian history centred on its dominant poleis and federal institutions.

Nominated and taught by Professor Jeremy Armstrong.

Imperial Herakles in Ancient Sparta and Macedonia¹

Herakles was, in the words of Emma Stafford, “the quintessential Greek hero.”² Herakles travelled further and performed more deeds than any other mythological Greek figure, and was thus an extremely adaptable figure.³ This is perhaps why the Heraclid tradition and the hero’s associated virtues have been adopted and appropriated by such a diverse number of ancient Greek and non-Greek communities throughout the ancient world.⁴ The flexibility afforded by the deeds and range of virtues associated with Herakles, which transformed as the groups that appropriated the hero grew into ever more ‘civilised’ communities, ensured that the mythical figure endured as a powerful point of reference for the Greek world throughout ancient history.

Two communities in particular, the *poleis* of ancient Sparta and their neighbours to the far north in the Kingdom of Macedonia, utilised their status as Heraclidae to further their own hegemonic designs during the Classical and Hellenic periods, evidently to great success.⁵ For Sparta, Herakles served as an ancestral guarantor of divine right and conquest.⁶ Through the myth of the “Return of the Heracleidae,” the Dorian invasion was recast as ancestral restoration, transforming expansion into the fulfilment of divine destiny.⁷ The Macedonian kings, by contrast, universalised this lineage. The Argeads, epitomised by Alexander the Great, made Herakles the theological and ancestral cornerstone of empire, with his labours repurposed as metaphors for world conquest and

¹ Please note that this essay uses Chicago referencing style.

² Emma Stafford, *Herakles* (Routledge, 2012), xxv.

³ Stafford, *Herakles*, xxv.

⁴ Lee E. Patterson, “Heracles as Ancestor,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Heracles*, ed. Daniel Ogden (Oxford University Press, 2021), 421; Stafford, *Herakles*, 185-94.

⁵ For an overview of Spartan and Macedonian monarchical claims of ancestry to Heracles, see Ellen G. Millender, “Kingship: The History, Power, and Prerogatives of the Spartans’ Divine Dyarchy,” in *A Companion To Sparta: Vol II*, ed. Anton Powell (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), and Eoghan Maloney, “Neither Agamemnon nor Theristes, Achilles nor Margites: The Heraclid Kings of Ancient Macedon,” *Antichthon* 49 (2015): 50-72.

⁶ Particularly during their oppression of the Peloponnese region, colonisation of the Aegean and Peloponnesian War, see Irad Malkin, *Myth and territory in the Spartan Mediterranean* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 67-113; Stafford, *Herakles*, 170.

⁷ Patterson, “Heracles,” 421; Millender, “Kingship,” 453; Stafford, 139-142.

his image deployed across coinage and cult.⁸

The aim of this essay is to briefly explore how Herakles' myth was politicised by Sparta and Macedon to legitimise their monarchical and imperialist claims. I argue that the hero's enduring power lay in his inherently flexible nature; mortal yet divine, local yet worldly, brutish yet civilising. This flexibility allowed each polity to independently articulate and justify hegemony in terms of both ancestry and destiny.

The Figure of Heracles

The figure of Heracles has undergone numerous iterations throughout ancient Greek history, with each version adding new associations and traits to this malleable character. However, several of these associated traits have proven more useful for political exploitation in the aims of securing imperial or monarchical hegemony. The earliest iterations of Herakles in Archaic Greece characterise a rather simple hero, as a monster-fighting strongman who cleared the primordial landscape of supernatural beings, thereby providing a safe space for civilisation to emerge from the chaos of the wilderness.⁹ Apollodoros and Diodoros inform us that the hero was known earliest as Alkeides, "son of Alkaïos," or simply Alkaïos (Strong), providing a clear indication of how the Archaic Greeks primarily perceived Herakles.¹⁰

The hero's lengthy tradition as a traveller made the next shift in characterisation a simple one, as the growing communities of the Archaic Greek world began their first forays into overseas colonisation. With Herakles' quasi-Olympian stature and pre-Trojan past serving as a perfect ancestor for new, youthful colonies to integrate themselves within the evolving networks of connections that comprised the geographically expanding Hellenic horizon, Herakles took on the role of *ktistes*, or founder, where his boundless wanderings

⁸ Stafford, *Herakles*, 142; Maloney, "Heraclid Kings," 57; Patterson, "Heracles," 424; Djurslev, Christine Thue, "Heracles, Macedon, and Alexander the Great," in *The Oxford Handbook of Heracles*, ed. Daniel Ogden (Oxford University Press, 2021), 436.

⁹ Stafford, *Herakles*, 23; Irad Malkin, *A Small Greek World: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 120.

¹⁰ Stafford, *Herakles*, 9; Pindar, *Fragments* SM, fr. 291; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*. 4.10.1.

are given a more colonising role.¹¹ During the same period, Herakles' image was further adapted to become an *exemplum virtutis*, as earlier, more brutish traits were played down in favour of a more intellectualised characterisation.¹² Herakles thus became associated with *aretê*, and was depicted in late Archaic art as the ideal athlete and a paragon of piety, while Athenian tragedians developed the romantic aspects of his character.¹³

By the fifth century BCE, Herakles had evolved from a parochial strongman into a pan-Mediterranean symbol of order, endurance, and divine legitimacy and a hero equally at home in myth, cult, and politics. His capacity to embody both the violence of conquest and the piety of civilisation made him an inexhaustible resource for states seeking to rationalise power. The depth of Herakles' character, centred around a few key, definable traits such as his role as a travelling, colonising warrior, combined with his quasi-Olympian, pre-Trojan War pedigree, made him an extremely malleable and desirable ancestor for ancient Greek communities looking to justify their own expansionist enterprises. It was this ideological versatility that allowed Sparta and, later, Macedon to transform the hero into the divine ancestor and emblem of empire.

The Spartan Herakles

Among the many Greek communities that traced their lineage to the "Return of the Heracleidae," none wielded the claim more effectively than Sparta, whose appropriation of the myth underpinned its emergence as the dominant power of the early Archaic Peloponnese, and, following victory over Athens in the Peloponnesian War, as "liberator of all Hellas."¹⁴ The Spartans claimed descent from Herakles through the two sons of Aristodemus, the great-great-grandson of the hero.¹⁵ Eurysthenes and Prokles laid the foundation for the Spartans' unique dyarchy under the Agiad and Eurypontid royal houses, with the mythical recreation of Spartan divine ancestry providing a sense of

¹¹ Malkin, *Small Greek World*, 120; Antonio Ignacio Molina Marín, "Heracles and the Mastery of Geographical Space," in *The Oxford Handbook of Heracles*, ed. Daniel Ogden (Oxford University Press, 2021), 410.

¹² Stafford, *Herakles*, 121; Patterson, "Heracles," 419.

¹³ Stafford, *Herakles*, 122, 125, 129, 136.

¹⁴ See the Corinthian Speech contained in Thucydides where the delegate refers to the Spartan's claims as τῆς ἀρετῆς ὡς ἐλευθερῶν τὴν Ἑλλάδα φέρεται. Thuc. 1.69.2.

¹⁵ Stafford, *Herakles*, 138-139; Millinder, "Kingship," 453; Malkin, *Myth and territory*, 15; Herodotus. 6.52.

divine sanction while also explaining the historical superiority enjoyed by the Agiad dynasty within Spartan internal politics.¹⁶ As noted by Emma Stafford, the overarching theme of ‘return’ contained within this specific piece of Heraclid mythology “implies a right of possession” for those returning from exile.¹⁷ For Sparta, it seems as though this “right of possession” and Heraclid inheritance was expanded to its furthest possible interpretation, as it provided not only the basis of Spartan notions of piety, martial courage, and orderliness codified in the laws of Lykourgos, but also internally justified their hegemonic claims over the wider Peloponnese.¹⁸ As exemplified in the propagandist works of the Spartan poet Tyrtaeus, published sometime during the Second Messanian War of c.650 BCE, the Spartan appropriation of the Return Story provided the basis of Spartan claims of dominion over Messenia.¹⁹ In his poetry, Tyrtaeus calls upon all Spartans of all walks of life to draw upon their Heraclid greatness during the conflict to assert their inherent dominance over the land.²⁰ It was through the subtle weaving and appropriation of the Heraclid image and myth that Sparta justified not only the monarchical hegemony of its royal dynasties over their own subjects, but also Spartan hegemonic aspirations over their fellow Dorian brethren.

This notion of an inherited right to rule was extended even further by the Spartan state during the Peloponnesian War. As shown in Thucydides’ account of a meeting between Lacedaemonian allies, the Spartans justified their conflict with Athens as a “liberator,” freeing the Greeks from Athenian oppression.²¹ This propagandist account clearly invokes another aspect of Heraklid mythology, separate from ‘the return’ narrative, specifically the mythical liberation of Prometheus by Heracles, matching the figure’s evolution as a martial defender of Greek civilisation in the face of existential threat, traits coopted by Sparta in their appropriation of the Heraclid myth.²² However, Spartan territorial expansion during the Archaic and Classical periods was not limited to the mainland, and the appropriation of Herakles proved just as fruitful in

¹⁶ See Millinder, “Kingship,” 453, 456.

¹⁷ Stafford, *Herakles*, 139.

¹⁸ Michael A. Flower, “Spartan Religion,” in *A Companion to Sparta Vol II*, ed. Anton Powell (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 429; Patterson, “Heracles,” 419; Plutarch, *Lives, Lycurgus*. 5.

¹⁹ Patterson, “Heracles,” 421.

²⁰ Tyrtaeus. *Fragments* West, frg. 11, 19; Patterson, “Heracles,” 421; Malkin *Myth and territory*, 22-23, 35.

²¹ Thuc. 1.69.2.

²² Apollodorus, *The Library*. 2.5.11.

supporting Spartan overseas colonial expansion due to his characterisation as a travelling *ktistes*. Around 509BCE, inspired by second-hand oracular revelation, Dorieus of Sparta sought to found a Spartan colony in the area of Eryx, in Western Sicily, land supposedly won by Herakles during his travels in Sicily with the cattle of Geryon.²³ The colony was ultimately rather disastrously unsuccessful, with our ancient sources recording the group's destruction at the hands of a collective of Carthaginians, Phoenicians and Egestans.²⁴ However, the attempt revealed another aspect of Herakles' flexibility that made him especially powerful in the context of colonisation, as due to Herakles' far-reaching travels, the Greeks had no issue with inserting him into the genealogies of various non-Greeks as required.²⁵ For example, Irad Malkin demonstrates this with the case of the Phoenician deity Melqart in Dorieus' Sicilian episode. The flexibility of Herakles as a political and religious symbol persisted long after Sparta's decline. During the reign of Areus I (309–265 BCE), the first Spartan coinage was struck, and significantly, it bore the image of a lion-skin-clad Herakles on one side, with his club flanked by two six-pointed stars, symbols of the Dioskouroi, on the reverse.²⁶ This

²³ Patterson, "Heracles," 424-425; Malkin, *Small Greek World*, 123.

²⁴ Hdt. 5.39; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*. 3.16.5.

²⁵ Malkin, *Small Greek World*, 121.

²⁶ Stafford, *Herakles*, 141; Manolis Pagkalos, "The Coinage of Areus I Revisited" *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 20, no. 2 (2015): 147; Paul Cartledge and Antony Spawforth, *Hellenistic and Roman Sparta: A Tale of Two Cities* (Routledge, 1992), 25.



Fig. 1. Silver obol of King Areus I featuring a bearded head of Herakles adorned with a lion's skin on the obverse, and a club with two six-pointed stars on the reverse.²⁷

choice of imagery was far from incidental. As Manolis Pagkalos has argued, Areus deliberately elevated Herakles above the Dioskouroi to consolidate monarchical power, as the Dioskouroi, closely tied to the dual kingship, represented the old order that Areus sought to supplant.²⁸ Herakles, by contrast, had by this time become associated with Alexander the Great, whose empire had made the hero the emblem of universal kingship.²⁹ By aligning himself with Herakles rather than with the twin gods, Areus simultaneously evoked Sparta's ancestral divinity and the broader Hellenistic model of singular monarchy.³⁰ The Spartan Herakles thus evolved once more, from ancestor of dual kings to legitimiser of individual rule, bridging local tradition and global iconography.

Across the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods, then, the Heraclid myth served as a living instrument of Spartan ideology. It justified kingship, sanctified warfare, legitimised colonisation, and later adapted to monarchic self-promotion. Through Herakles, Sparta articulated an enduring theology of power by framing conquest as inheritance and empire as the restoration of divine order. In transforming a hero into a

²⁷ Pagkalos, "Coinage of Areus," 154.

²⁸ Pagkalos, "Coinage of Areus," 146, 147, 152.

²⁹ Pagkalos, "Coinage of Areus," 152; Djurselv, "Heracles, Macedon," 443.

³⁰ Stafford, *Herakles*, 141; Pagkalos, "Coinage of Areus," 146, 147, 152; Cartledge and Spawforth, *Hellenistic and Roman Sparta*, 32.

symbol of eternal return, the Spartans gave their politics the shape of myth, ensuring that their myth would endure as a lasting political force.

The Macedonian Herakles

Like the Spartans of the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic Periods, the Argead dynasty, which presided over the ancient Kingdom of Macedon, similarly constructed an ancestral link to the Heraclidae, starting around the 5th Century BCE.³¹ As recounted by Herodotus, Alexander I, who reigned c.498-454 BCE, was once barred from competing in the Olympic Games on the grounds of his barbarian heritage.³² To persuade the Greeks of his Hellenic ancestry, Alexander recounts a genealogy that links his family to Herakles through Temenos, who was expelled from Argos alongside his brothers before becoming the first ruler of Macedon.³³ The earliest use of Herakles by Macedon was to exploit the ‘everyman’ status of this travelling hero to strengthen their claims as being part of the wider Greek ἔθνος, while also providing the Macedonian populace with a wider sense of identity within the Greek world.³⁴ Unlike the previously discussed Spartans, Macedon was actively minting currency during this period, and Alexander I further politicised his link to Herakles through coinage, producing a type featuring an embossed lion’s head and paw.³⁵ As such, alongside performing a similar role in legitimising the divine rite to rule for the Macedonian Argead elite and promoting the familiar traits of strength, valour and *aretê*, Heraclid ancestry proved to be a particularly powerful mechanism for the early Macedonian kings to justify their Greek heritage, especially in moments where it could be used to great effect when called into question, such as the period of Phillip II’s initial expansion into the southern Greek territories.³⁶

³¹ Moloney, “Heraclid Kings,” 57; Djurselv, “Heracles, Macedon,” 436; Stafford, *Herakles*, 142.

³² Hdt. 5.22

³³ Hdt. 5.22, 8.137-139.

³⁴ Elias Koulakiotis, “The Hellenizing Impact on Ancient Macedonia: Conceptualizing Origin and Authority,” In *The History of the Argeads: New Perspectives*, ed. Sabine Müller, Tim Howe, Hugh Bowden and Robert Rollinger (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), 209; Moloney, “Heraclid Kings,” 58.

³⁵ Stafford, *Herakles*, 142.

³⁶ Stafford, *Herakles*, 143; Moloney, “Heraclid Kings,” 62-63.

While the Macedonian kings who followed Alexander I would increasingly strengthen their own individual ties alongside those of the state to Herakles and his associated traits through coinage, and the cultic worship of the hero as Herakles *Patroos*, it was Alexander III, “the Great,” who made the most systematic political exploitation of Herakles.³⁷

Fig. 2. Tetradrachm from ‘Amphipolis’ mint c.336-323 BCE depicting Herakles/Alexander III wearing a lion’s skin. A seated Zeus on a throne holding a sceptre



and accompanied by an eagle features on the reverse.³⁸

Alexander the Great’s propagandistic use of the figure of Herakles pushed the flexibility the hero afforded to the limits, as he appropriated almost every aspect, to the point of becoming synonymous with the god in symbolic imagery. For his imperial designs, the ‘everyman’ Herakles was used inexhaustibly by Alexander to justify not only Macedonian hegemony but also his own image as a semi-divine ‘bastard’ destined to conquer and tame the barbaric far East in the name of Greek civilisation.³⁹ As Arrian’s account details, at every point of his campaign to the Eastern fringes of the known Greek world, Alexander made a conscious effort to perpetuate his link to the Herakleidai and the

³⁷ Stafford, *Herakles*, 143; Koulakiotis, “Hellenizing Impact,” 207; Paul Christensen and Sarah C. Murray, “Macedonian Religion,” in *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia*, ed. Joseph Roisman and Ian Worthington (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 430-431.

³⁸ Dahmen Karsten, *The Legend of Alexander on Greek and Roman Coins* (Routledge, 2007), 108, 109.

³⁹ Stafford, *Herakles*, 143-144; Andrea F. Gatzke “Heracles, Alexander, and Hellenistic Coinage” *Acta Classica* 64 (2021): 100.

divine traits and destiny thus bestowed upon him. At crucial points in their journey, Alexander made conspicuous efforts to sacrifice to Herakles, and even went to the extent of successfully laying siege to the famous Rock of Aornos in modern Pakistan, due to the tradition that Herakles had failed to do so on his own journeys.⁴⁰ During his campaigns, the flexibility of Herakles, as for the colonial Spartans, paid dividends in bringing complacency to conquered populations, as the hero, and by proxy Alexander, was easily assimilated into the mythical genealogies of many eastern religious systems through his similarity to deities such as the previously mentioned Melqart in Tyre, Verethruga in Parthia and Rostam in Iran.⁴¹ Alongside providing Alexander and the Macedonians with a localised justification for imperial dominance over the Greek world, Alexander's use of Herakles' ability to assimilate with local Eastern religious structures provided the ruler with the cultural soft power needed to reinforce the gains won by the Herculean effort of his army.

As mentioned in the previous discussion of the coinage of Areus I, the Spartan monarch was very much emulating Alexander the Great's political propagandising of Herakles through coinage for both personal and stately gains. Using motifs such as the beardless Herakles and the appropriation of the hero's lion-like traits and appearance, Alexander blended the symbolic representations of ruler and god, making the imagery of the two synonymous.⁴² The coinage of the beardless Herakles/Alexander was particularly used to pay mercenary forces in the service of the Macedonian army, alongside the troops themselves, and found themselves distributed throughout the Eastern world on the army's conquest, as such, the use of Herakles image on Macedonian coinage proved to be one of the most effective way of reinforcing and justifying Alexander's 'divine' imperial hegemony.⁴³

Finally, perhaps the most obvious effort to forge a concrete link between himself and Herakles was the naming of his son by Barsine after the quintessential Greek hero. As Emma Stafford notes, straightforward theonomy was rarely seen during this period,

⁴⁰ For sacrifices, Arrian, *Anabasis*, 1.4.5, 1.11.7. For Aornos, Arr. *Anab.*

⁴¹ Andrea F. Gatzke "Heracles, Alexander, and Hellenistic Coinage" *Acta Classica* 64 (2021): 107; See Alexander's sacrifice to Melqart in Tyre, Arr. *Anab.* 2.15.7.

⁴² Karseten, *Legend of Alexander the Great*, 39-41; Gatzke, "Hellenistic Coinage," 98, 103.

⁴³ Gatzke, "Hellenistic Coinage," 103-104; Stafford, *Herakles*, 145.

and this act surely encapsulated the logic of Alexander's propaganda. Through name, image, and cult, he positioned himself as both the descendant and reincarnation of Herakles, the hero's mortal embodiment fulfilling a divine mandate for world conquest.⁴⁴

Conclusions

Herakles' afterlife in Greek political imagination demonstrates how a malleable myth can be transformed into hard, imperial and monarchical power. From the Archaic through the Hellenistic ages, boundless Mediterranean communities reinterpreted the hero to fit changing needs, but none did so more consequentially than Sparta and Macedonia. For Sparta, the Heraclid genealogy and the "Return of the Heracleidae" reclassified conquest as restitution. Kingship appeared not as innovation but inheritance; campaigns in Messenia and leadership in the Peloponnesian War could be narrated as a sacred duty. In poetry, ritual, and selective coin imagery, Herakles underwrote an ideology of order, piety, and endurance with ancestral right naturalised as political rule. Macedon extended that template from regional restoration to universal empire. The Argeads transformed descent from Herakles into a public theology of kingship, authenticating Macedon's Hellenic identity and its claim to lead the Greek world. Alexander the Great then pushed the paradigm to its limit with sacrifices at Heracleian sites, the siege of places tied to the hero's legend, and a coinage program that fused the ruler's portrait with the lion-skin hero, turning myth into a portable manifesto. Because Herakles readily assimilated with Near-Eastern deities, the same imagery also functioned as cultural soft power across Asia, smoothing the absorption of new subjects into a Heracleian, and therefore legitimate, order.

Across both polities, the logic is consistent. Herakles' inherent flexibility as 'everyman' and "quintessential Greek, mortal and divine, civiliser and conqueror, offered a language in which genealogy became policy, cult became propaganda, and geography became destiny. Sparta's "Herakles of return" and Macedon's "Herakles of empire" are two parallel processes, as myth was engineered to lend authority a sense of ancestry and expansion an air of inevitability. In that sense, the most enduring labour of Herakles was

⁴⁴ Djurslev, "Heracles, Macedon," 444; Stafford, *Herakles*, 145.

neither monstrous nor martial, but political, with his most enduring labour being that of legitimising rule.

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History 711 – Texts & Contexts.

Connor Noble

Personal Statement:

I have been drawn to history since primary school and grew up watching and reading historical movies and books. At University I completed a BA (Hons) in Ancient History and undertook several History courses over the years, gaining knowledge from a broad array of topics, from Greek Classical Tragedy to Irish History. Including in movies and books, I have mainly become interested in the ways we practice, write, and in the case of this essay, read history. I wrote this research essay in HISTORY711 Texts and Contexts, in which my approach to historical texts fundamentally changed and, with the guidance of Professor Jonathan Scott, I learnt how to relate texts to the cultural circumstances that produced and sustained them.

Nominated and taught by Professor Jonathan Scott.

How do different genres of texts and their relationships communicate the cultural hierarchies of texts within particular societies?

Texts, as expressions of cultural values, information, and relationships, communicate a number of hierarchies about their different roles and functions in particular societies. Different genres of texts communicate their cultural hierarchies in particular societies through the contexts of their production and reception. These cultural hierarchies can be gained from a text by examining how they express themselves, relate to each other, and fit within the socio-political contexts they were produced from. To show this, this essay will firstly examine how texts communicate their cultural hierarchies through the relationships between different kinds of texts in their employment of forms, symbols, and language, including looking at Andean staff code and khipus, biblical references in various texts, language across Japanese literary works, and the evolution of texts. Then, this essay will examine how a text's mode of transmission, whether visual, oral, or written, can communicate hierarchies between different genres of text. Lastly, it will examine how texts express their cultural hierarchies through the context of the canons they are a part of and how these shape texts' relationships with each other. Because cultural hierarchies of texts are also reflective of socio-political hierarchies within societies, this essay will also comment on how these are simultaneously communicated.

Section 1 – Symbols, Forms, and Language

Texts express cultural hierarchies in the symbols they employ to communicate information, which can be varied and complex. An active example of this is Andean staff, or *vara*, code. Staff code uses different sequences of carvings to communicate the relationships of different staff holders to each other as leaders of the community with legal authority.¹ The code employs three carved shapes, or graphemes, which, when

¹ Frank Salomon, 'How an Andean "Writing Without Words" Works', *Current Anthropology*, 42, 1, 2001, pp.3-6.

carved into the staffs in deliberated patterns, each communicate an element of the authority and relationship between the staff holders.² For example, a *peana* marking, shaped like a chapel, highlights a staff holder's spatial jurisdiction, between villages and rural space.³ This reveals a system of communication which uses its symbols to communicate hierarchies between staffs and staff holders, that is between texts and members of the community. Frank Salomon has emphasized the contextually determined nature of this system, the carvings do not represent a series of relationships that can be communicated verbally but determined in relation to each other as the only method of expressing the hierarchies between staff holders.⁴ Additionally, these hierarchies cannot be put into a highest to lowest order but are also contextually determined; specific signs refer authority in certain circumstances, such as a rural community meeting.⁵ Here, then, a non-linear sociopolitical hierarchy is communicated by the staffs and their signs. Staffs, as a specific genre of text, demonstrate a textual structure that's sole purpose is to communicate a complex cultural hierarchy between texts, which, in turn, reflect the relationships between staff holders and the community.

Remaining in the Andean context, the use of knotted string, or khipus, as a format of information storage, can communicate textual hierarchies through their relationship with other genres. One theory for the function of khipus is that they carry a resemblance to machine code, the sign represented by the cord is portrayed by its crafting along multiple binary decisions, such as being spun leftward or rightward.⁶ This approach was highlighted by recognizing other binarisms in Andean societies, such as the structuring of village 'halves'.⁷ Compared to staff code, khipus present a more complex challenge for scholars trying to decode them, a task made difficult as it is no longer a living practice.⁸ Considering the possibilities of the relationship between staff code and khipus as signifiers reveals that the context provided by multiple staffs or multiple cords is required to be able to 'read' them, leading Salomon to suggest the two formats may have evolved

² *ibid.*, pp.6-7.

³ *ibid.*, pp.8-9.

⁴ *ibid.*, pp.8-10.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.12.

⁶ Frank Salomon, *The Cord Keepers: Khipus and Cultural Life in a Peruvian Village*, Durham, 2004, p.15.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.15.

⁸ Salomon, 'Writing Without Words' p.1.

from a “common set of signifying habits.”⁹ This reveals that the communication of khipus requires a relationship with other texts. Additionally, the survival of khipu as a medium through the introduction of colonial writing practices highlights its specific functions and relationship to other forms of textual communication. With the introduction of the alphabet and European writing by the Spanish, khipu writing did not disappear but continued to be used logistically to the advantage of indigenous groups, including “in the form of independent accounting” relating to forced labor taxes.¹⁰ The khipu system, then, remained a culturally important form of text, particularly in indigenous Andean hierarchies. We can see a complex hierarchy of functionality here between both textual formats.

Reference to religious scripture in the context of European political texts communicates the high regard and status of biblical texts. For example, John Morrill’s analysis of Oliver Cromwell’s letters and speeches show Cromwell’s clear adoration of the bible. A number of letters Cromwell wrote to his family and friends regularly quote scripture, including one 800-word letter alone that references thirteen quotations from different books of the bible.¹¹ There are multiple versions of these biblical texts, including the Geneva, King James, and Coverdale Version of the Psalms, all of which Cromwell is engaging with, Morrill highlighting that he knew much of it by heart, a result of “relentless and repeated rereading”.¹² A few things are communicated here, not least of all Cromwell’s personal high-ranking of religious text, but also that there are multiple versions of these religious texts. A better idea of how these different texts were hierarchized might be visible by examining how often Cromwell quotes from each one. Beyond his personal beliefs, the cultural high standing of biblical texts is evident by the context of the prayer meetings, in which biblical texts were used, in memory or physically, to find scriptural solutions to their issues at hand.¹³ Cromwell’s speeches, recorded for us in written form by scribes, are similarly filled with biblical quotations and

⁹ Salomon, *The Cord Keepers*, pp.106-107.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.268.

¹¹ John Morrill, ‘How Oliver Cromwell Thought’, in John Marrow and Jonathan Scott, eds, *Liberty, Authority, Formality: Political Ideas and Culture, 1600-1900: Essays in Honour of Colin Davis*, Charlottesville, 2008, p.75.

¹² *ibid.*, p.76.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.73.

references.¹⁴ Morrill describes these as a “biblical launching pad”, allowing for Cromwell to defend his position and describe his responsibilities.¹⁵ The use of biblical allusion is clear, then, in Cromwell’s texts and communicate the significance of biblical texts for Cromwell and English society as he lead it.

The contexts of a texts production, particularly the use of language can also communicate cultural hierarchies of texts. For example, in the Japanese context of Heian literary society, written Japanese was a newly emerging language that had previously only been spoken, causing the prose to suffer from a lack of gestural context that accompanies speaking.¹⁶ This highlights the effect of language on the presentation of a text and, like for the Andean texts, the necessity for contextual elements to understand how a text fits into a cultural hierarchy. Additionally, while Classical Chinese was understood and used as the language of politics and the imperial court, Japanese was written by women as well as men and a literary tradition in Japanese was largely established by female writers, such as Murasaki Shikibu, who left behind much of our historical knowledge of the period.¹⁷ Following this gendered construction of language, poetic texts became an “expression of sexual relations”, becoming a part of how a “cultured man” learnt to express control over emotions.¹⁸ This reveals a gendered relationship between languages and that a text’s choice of language in this context is suggestive of genre. Language can be used to communicate a hierarchy of texts according to social role. H. Richard Okada describes the gendered lines language communicated in the Heian period, while Chinese was the official, dominant language of discourse, engaging in everyday, or personal matters through diaries required entering a mode of writing “acknowledged explicitly as women’s writing, where they were far from being dominant in scriptive terms”.¹⁹ The language of a text then reflects the cultural hierarchies between different genres of texts.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp.79-80.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.80.

¹⁶ Richard Bowring, *Murasaki Shikibu: The Tale of Genji*, Cambridge, 2004, pp.12-13.

¹⁷ Bowring, pp.11-12.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp.13-14.

¹⁹ H. Richard Okada, *Figures of Resistance: Language, Poetry, and Narrating in The Tale of Genji and Other Mid-Heian Texts*, Durham, 1991, p.161.

The reception of texts over time highlights the continually changing nature of our textual hierarchies, this is best presented through the case of commentaries. As noted, different contextual elements are important to more fully reading a text, a task made difficult as we move further away from these contexts historically, leading to the need for textual commentaries.²⁰ Bowring highlights the growth in commentaries during the Japanese medieval period, as part of the aristocracy attempting to hold on to the past to maintain an authority over literary culture.²¹ Later, during the Tokugawa period, it was the merchant class using commentaries as a way to gain control over important historical literary works, now helped by larger development in block printing.²² The relationship between original texts and commentaries is that the latter can communicate an authority over the former, highlighting the changing hierarchies between social classes through control over the understanding of an original text. In the context of Chinese civil examinations, there is a similar relationship between texts and their commentaries changing cultural hierarchies of texts. For students studying for the exam a number of different study guides to the canon of texts required were available, including model essays.²³ Kai-wing Chow has shown that these guides changed how students read these classic texts and responded in their essays, with their authors often leading new theories on the texts.²⁴ Again, this shows a control of texts by their continually updating commentaries. As texts then, commentaries reflect a hierarchy and cultural value over these original texts.

Section 2 – Methods of Transmission

Texts and the contexts of their reception communicate the relationships between different modes of textual transmission, such as orality and writing. Looking at early medieval Europe, written scriptural practices should be placed in the context of non-written communication, especially in a society where most people were illiterate and

²⁰ Bowring, pp.84-85.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp.84-85.

²² *ibid.*, pp.86-87.

²³ Kai-wing Chow, 'Writing for Success: Printing, Examinations, and Intellectual Change in Late Ming China', *Late Imperial China*, 17, 1, 1996, p.136.

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp.144-146.

received textual information orally.²⁵ Matthew Innes describes early medieval written texts as ‘soft’, meaning that, because the transmission of information from religious texts was being read aloud to the public, the audience’s reception of the text became an important determinant of its content.²⁶ This highlights the importance of reception in the determination of a text’s value, which is more immediately malleable when shared orally. Innes looks at the example of the monk Notker’s biography of Charlemagne, the *Gesta Karoli*, as a written recording of oral traditions, noting the ability to find traces of ‘social memory’ in the interaction here between literacy and orality.²⁷ In a world dominated by the oral transmission of texts, the *Gesta Karoli* reflects the dynamics between the two genres, for example by not portraying a chronological development but engaging with historical schemes, such as using the fall of Rome to barbarian invasions to compare Charlemagne’s defeat of the ‘barbarian’ Avars.²⁸ These connections present in Notker’s written text show an engagement with different elements of textual expression and suggest the hierarchies in medieval society between oral and written texts at different levels of society.

This relationship between the transmission of texts also reflects preferences of textual transmission by the elites of early medieval societies. Celia M. Chazelle’s discussion of Pope Gregory I’s letters to Bishop Serenus of Marseilles reflect the relationship of religious imagery with writing and orality. The letters suggest Gregory’s view of the function of religious imagery, in particular images depicting the deeds of holy figures, to communicate religious stories alongside their oral recitation, visualizing these narratives.²⁹ Imagery and oral communication, then, share the same textual information, only expressed in different forms. One thing this relationship reveals is the hierarchy between the literate clergy and the illiterate church goers, given that, from Gregory’s view, these images helped to teach the illiterate the religious scripture they could not gain

²⁵ Matthew Innes, ‘Memory, Orality and Literacy in early Medieval Society’, *Past and Present*, 158, 1998, pp.4-5.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.14.

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp.5-6.

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp.32-33.

²⁹ Celia M. Chazelle, ‘Pictures, books and the illiterate: Pope Gregory I’s Letters to Serenus of Marseilles’, *Word and Image*, 6, 2, 1990, pp.140-143.

access to through reading.³⁰ The cultural hierarchy between images, orality, and writing is provided by the background to Gregory's ideas, mainly *De Doctrina Chirstiana*, in which Augustine recognizes that artistic representations still functioned as 'signs', only that they were inferior to the written or spoken word.³¹ We see here a clear hierarchy set by Augustine between different mediums for the portrayal of religious texts. While it was expected of the clergy to read and be familiar with the forms and meanings of religious texts, for the illiterate, the viewing of the images was less important than being encouraged to behave according to Christian values.³² This demonstrates a reflection of imagery's lower status as a form for communicating texts as valued by the religious elite.

The relationship between texts and memory also reflects hierarchies between written and oral texts. Innes describes social memory as the shared ideas of a culture about the past and, regarding its transmission, that it is transmitted more through orality than written practices, as a part of socialization and the context of medieval Europe being a primarily oral culture.³³ However, oral texts are more open to reinterpretation, if not erasure, according to changing contexts unless cued by visual or written texts.³⁴ Memorial value at the social level, then, is largely assigned to orally transmitted texts. This, however, is open to frequent change according to context. Mary Carruthers describes medieval Europe as a 'memorial culture' in comparison to our modern 'documentary' one, in which a strong memory is highly valued for maintain a moral and intellectual character.³⁵ In the context of a memorial culture, physical methods of textual recording such as books do not equate exactly to a written text but act more as a mnemonic, a device for guiding the memory in the recollection of the text.³⁶ For Carruthers, the social status of memory is independent of orality or literacy, rather, these things express an engagement with memory.³⁷ This reveals the cultural value placed on the storage of knowledge and texts in memory. Additionally, we can see that the ways a

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.141.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.146.

³² *ibid.*, pp.149-150.

³³ Innes, p.5.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.34.

³⁵ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge, 2008, p.9.

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp.1, 9-10.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.12.

text engages with memory can be reflective of medieval cultural hierarchies between texts.

Cultural hierarchies of particular texts can change according to different valuations of genres of textual transmission between different societies. In the attempt to translate a Buddhist text, Donald S. Lopez Jr found that alongside the text also existed the various oral commentaries provided by the teachings of the lamas.³⁸ Lopez describes the transmission of the text as a “participation in origin”, as the valued element is not understanding the text completely but the act of teacher passing on the text to student, tracing back to the words of the Buddha.³⁹ From the Buddhist perspective, greater value is placed on the oral transmission of the text than the text itself. There is also the perspective of the outsider and imposed cultural hierarchies of texts. Early Buddhist studies in the west, like the work of L. Austine Waddell, highlight an attempt to control the interpretation of Buddhist ideas and texts by separating the Tibetan form from ‘original Buddhism’.⁴⁰ Western approaches value physical texts and artefacts as sources of authority in the interpretation of Buddhism, mainly, as Lopez points out, because “Buddhism as a cultural object could be controlled from Europe”.⁴¹ Here a stark contrast can be seen between western and Buddhist hierarchies. While in the Buddhist context, the value is placed on the act of transmitting the text, almost always orally, from the western outsider position, the text itself is a solid and complete conception of Buddhist beliefs. From this Western interpretation, the texts, and the Buddhism they reflect may be more easily controlled. Buddhist texts, then, communicate cultural hierarchies of texts through multiple modes of transmission. We can also begin to see how different societies canonize texts.

³⁸ Donald S. Lopez Jr, *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, Chicago, 1995, pp.280-281.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.279.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.262.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp.279, 283.

Section 3 – Canons

Canonical texts are representative of a society's cultural attitudes towards certain genres and reveal how a text's communication is largely dependent on its reception. Canons are series of texts that are held in esteem and are often given a form of authority due to their perceived cultural values for a society.⁴² The cultural hierarchy of the texts can be expressed, then, through the context of their position within these canonical hierarchies. According to antifoundational approaches to canons, the value given to these texts is a product of "the processes and institutions that give the texts value," and that, through this, texts are continually reproduced according to the changing values of a group or society.⁴³ The value of the text itself is less important in this process than what it reflects about the values of a particular society. The reception of the text is then the important part of the communication of these cultural hierarchies. A product of this antifoundational approach is that it is forgotten the initial values of the text are still a part of this process.⁴⁴ Michael Emmerich suggests that canonical texts are not just 'reproduced' but 'replaced', through their re-readings and adaptations in different contexts.⁴⁵ Emmerich reveals that the text is still important in the canonization process, only the text also begins to change.⁴⁶ Different texts' place in the canon communicates their relationship to cultural hierarchies of texts and that their continual reinterpretation keep it an active part of this receptive process.

Canons of text also represent the relationships between different genres, highlighting the ways in which texts interacted with and expressed these hierarchies. Cultural canons also include hierarchies of genres, such as in Chinese and Japanese contexts. Haruo Shirane comments on the connection between Chinese and Japanese genre hierarchies in the late Heian/early medieval period as they largely follow the same model, with texts from the Buddhist and Confucian canons at the top, followed by

⁴² Haruo Shirane, 'Introduction: Issues in Canon Formation', in Haruo Shirane and Tomi Suzuki, eds, *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature*, Stanford, 2000, p.2.

⁴³ *ibid.*, pp.2-3.

⁴⁴ Michael Emmerich, *The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonisation, and World Literature*, New York, 2013, pp.43-44.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.44.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.44.

Chinese, and then Japanese literary texts.⁴⁷ The reception of different kinds of texts fell along these lines. This also indicates a hierarchy between Chinese and Japanese cultures, similarly, seen in the employment of language. Shirane points out the role of cultural identity in these genre hierarchies, referencing the eighteenth-century inversion of this hierarchy which gave prominence to Japanese texts during the mid-Meiji focus on national works.⁴⁸ We can see in the context of production, texts could be created in relation to these genre hierarchies. For example, Shirane highlights how the Tale of Genji, as a piece of Japanese literature, elevated its status by implementing structures from history writing, a genre higher than poetry and prose in this ranking.⁴⁹ The text then communicates prevalent cultural hierarchies of genre through the author's engagement with them in the creation of the text, as a marker of literary status. We can see the expression of cultural hierarchies from a text in the context of both production and reception in this case.

Continuing in the Japanese context, the relationship between two works of the historical genre communicates the various purposes of different texts. The first Japanese historical texts, Kojiki and Nihon Shoki, can be considered canonical texts as they were both created at the behest of the Imperial house in the interest of representing its authority and the cultural values it wanted to project.⁵⁰ Both of these texts communicate this canonical status in different ways. For example, Kojiki describes the origins of the gods, linking them to the birth of Japan, presenting an image of Japan's divine origins.⁵¹ On the other hand, Nihon Shoki, which describes the development of Japan as a civilization in East Asia, builds from Chinese historical writing to relate their own history to a wider framework.⁵² These examples highlight these historical texts as providing a canonical foundation and communicating it through their construction. The different functions of these two historical texts also expresses their place in the construction of Japanese cultural hierarchies of texts. Kojiki creates a framework for history writing by using an

⁴⁷ Shirane, p.4.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp.4-5.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.5.

⁵⁰ John S. Brownlee, *Political Thought in Japanese Historical Writing: from Kojiki (712) to Tokushi Yoron (1712)*, Waterloo, 1991, pp.11, 21.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp.11-13.

⁵² *ibid.*, p.25.

origin tale in relation to Emperors while *Nihon Shoki* conveys an Imperial image of Japan as a rising power in relation to its neighbours.⁵³ Here we have two different genres/forms of historical text, an origin tale and a national history. As two different genres, the texts, when considered in relation to each other, create a picture of Japan as the Imperial house would have it, reflecting a cultural hierarchy that is constructed and put out to convey a certain image, giving the texts an authority over narratives.

Textual canons also express the changing value of different texts at different times through their use to both build and react against authority. Movements like nationalism in Europe and their spreading effects around the world, including Japan, express themselves through shifting textual canons.⁵⁴ For example, Japanese folk texts became prominent during and after the Meiji period in attempts to build a literary canon “thought to embody the essence of the Japanese people from ancient times”, this followed a similar folk movement in Germany.⁵⁵ These examples highlight the creation and use of a literary canon as a time-specific cultural hierarchy of texts. Additionally, we can see how texts use their cultural status to react against authority. The Tale of Genji, for example, uses the plot of the emperor falling in love with a “woman of unsuitable rank” as a way to reflect on and communicate criticism of the Fujiwara establishment that surrounded the Emperor.⁵⁶ As discussed, the Tale of Genji borrowed elements from historical writing as genre with higher cultural status, not only to elevate its own status, however, but to legitimize its fictional world and reflect reality.⁵⁷ It is visible here that the text uses this legitimization to further suggest parallels to the Fujiwara establishment and subversively criticize it. Texts, then, through an engagement with canons and genre hierarchies, can communicate perceived cultural and political hierarchies by their reaction against them.

⁵³ *ibid.*, pp.18, 21-22.

⁵⁴ Shirane, pp.14-16.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp.16-17.

⁵⁶ Bowring, pp.18-19.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.21.

Conclusion

To conclude, different genres of text communicate their place in cultural hierarchies through the contexts of their production and reception. Through the symbols, forms, and language they employ, texts communicate complex political hierarchies between each other, as in the case of Andean staff code; relationships with other information systems dependent on functionality, exemplified by the khipus; the high cultural status and influence over politics of religious texts; the cultural hierarchies of texts associated with language; relationships with other texts over time, such as commentaries to highlight the changing nature of these hierarchies. The relationships between different modes of transmission highlight a close relationship between written and oral texts; hierarchies related to the transmission of religious texts, where writing and orality have primacy over imagery; the central place of memory in the relationship between orality and literacy; and how different societies value these differently. Lastly, texts express their place in cultural hierarchies through their continual reproduction or replacement in canons; how they fit within specific and changing genre hierarchies; through their construction as authoritative texts as part of emerging societies; and their use in canons to build or react against political or literary establishments. Important to all of this and the communication of textual hierarchies are the contexts in which texts are created, effecting what they say and reflect, and the contexts in which they are read, changing how they are perceived and valued.

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History 243 – Body and Blood: Religious Cultures and Conflicts c.50-1650.

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Personal Statement:

I am currently studying a Bachelor of Laws, having previously completed studies toward a conjoint degree in History, Comparative Literature, and Social Sciences. My academic interests focus on the intersection of power, historiography, and historical accuracy - specifically how power dynamics shape both past events and the lenses through which they are recorded. I actively apply these critical frameworks to my legal studies. Outside of academics, I am an artist and also spend my free time reading or listening to history, crime, and fantasy

Nominated by Professor Kim Phillips and supported by their tutor, Ian Fookes.

Compare and contrast the ideas of Christian reform that prevailed in the Carolingian and Gregorian periods

The meaning of the word “reform” was a contested landscape in medieval Christendom; the rhetoric of reform - renewal, purification, and return to ancient tradition - was a persistent theme. Yet reform could mean very different things depending on who defined it and for what purpose. In the Carolingian period of the late eighth and early ninth centuries, reform was conceived as *correctio*: a comprehensive program of moral, liturgical, and educational correction directed by the emperor and enforced through royal officials. In the eleventh century, the Gregorian reform, associated most closely with Pope Gregory VII, emphasised the purification of the clergy, the eradication of simony and lay investiture, and the assertion of papal supremacy over secular rulers. Both movements claimed continuity with ancient norms, yet each created new institutional realities and transformed the relationship between church and society.

This essay argues that while Carolingian and Gregorian reforms shared a common vocabulary of correction and revival, they diverged in leadership, scope, and political-theological vision. Carolingian reform was ruler-driven, integrative, and administrative, embedding religion within the empire. Gregorian reform was papal-driven, conflictual, and exclusionary, redefining the balance between papacy and monarchy. This essay compares these thematically; first examining moral and clerical reform; then authority and power; then political-theological visions and lay dimensions; before concluding with the historiographical debate on continuity and innovation.

The historiography of reform reflects tension between continuity and change. Carolingian reform has often been celebrated as the “Carolingian Renaissance,” a top-down cultural and religious revival under Charlemagne. Rosamond McKitterick emphasises the foundational role of education, literacy, and law in forging the European cultural identity grounded in Christianity and texts.¹ However, more recent work stresses contingency and diversity. Carine van Rhijn and colleagues argue that “Carolingian reform” was never a monolithic, consistent program but a patchwork of initiatives that

¹ Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity*, Cambridge, 2008, p. 32.

varied significantly in local reinterpretation and application, often divergent from royal ideals.² On Gregory VII, Augustin Fliche and H. E. J. Cowdrey portrayed him as a moral reformer, motivated by zeal to cleanse the clergy of corruption, particularly through enforcing celibacy and abolishing simony.³

Walter Ullmann, however, stressed the constitutional implications, arguing that Gregorian reform marked the “translation of theocratic principles into government” and laid the foundations of papal monarchy.⁴ Norman Cantor went further, calling it a “world revolution,” one of the pivotal transformations in Western history.⁵ Uta-Renate Blumenthal situates the reform in the context of the Investiture Controversy. At the same time, R. I. Moore highlights its exclusionary and repressive legacy, linking it to the emergence of a “persecuting society.” Maureen Miller stresses a longer-term perspective: reforms progressively professionalised clerical culture across centuries, separating it from lay society.⁶ Monastic renewal is central to understanding both programs. Benedictine regularisation under Carolingian influence, and the later Cluniac movement’s emphases on liturgical splendour, moral rigour, and institutional independence from lay patrons, created the spiritual and institutional matrix from which papal reformers drew.⁷ Cluniac ideals of liturgical purity and clerical autonomy were not merely ecclesiastical fashions. Still, they provided model practices and a network of reform-minded houses that helped supply personnel and legitimacy for the Gregorian agenda.⁸ Together, these perspectives frame the comparison below. Both reform programs claimed to restore ancient norms, but their enforcement in new contexts produced innovations that reshaped medieval Christendom.

2 Carine van Rhijn, Arthur Westwell, and Ingrid Rembold, eds, *Rethinking the Carolingian Reforms*, Manchester, 2023, pp. 1–15.

3 H. E. J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII, 1073–1085*, Oxford, 1998, pp. 44–6.

4 Walter Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages*, London, 1955, p. 239.

5 Norman F. Cantor, *Medieval History: The Life and Death of a Civilization*, New York, 1963, p. 190.; Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century*, Philadelphia, 1988, pp. 73–6.

6 Maureen C. Miller, ‘Reform, Clerical Culture, and Politics’, in John H. Arnold, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, Oxford, 2014, pp. 305–6.

7 Admonitio Generalis (789), in Paul Edward Dutton, ed., *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader*, Toronto, 2004, p. 96.

⁸ Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy*, pp. 20–35.

Carolingian reform placed moral correction at the centre of Christian rulership. The *Admonitio Generalis* of 789 ordered bishops to supervise priests, ensure correct preaching, and establish schools, “so that all may serve God in true faith.”⁸ Priests were instructed to teach the

Creed and the Lord’s Prayer in the vernacular so that the laity could participate more fully in Christian life.⁹ The *General Capitulary for the Missi* of 802 reinforced this moral programme. Charlemagne required subjects to swear loyalty that encompassed political fidelity and moral life, binding them “to live wholly in the holy service of God.”¹⁰ Justice, morality, and political order were presented as inseparable. Education was at the heart of this vision. Charlemagne invited Alcuin of York to lead the palace school, and capitularies mandated schools in every bishopric and monastery.¹¹ Literacy was given a soteriological charge: the ability of priests to read Scripture and correct texts was framed as a pastoral necessity because an illiterate priest could endanger his flock’s access to the sacraments and salvation.¹² Script reform (Caroline minuscule) and corrected biblical texts exemplified this drive for uniformity. McKitterick argues that this emphasis on correct texts made writing and literacy central to Christian identity.¹³ Van Rhijn, however, stresses local diversity: parish priests often relied on older handbooks or improvised teaching, demonstrating that royal ideals were mediated in practice.¹⁴

Gregorian reform focused more narrowly on clerical morality. Gregory VII’s letter to Bishop Otto of Constance (December 1074) condemned clerical concubinage as a “foul plague of carnal contagion,” ordering rigorous enforcement of celibacy.¹⁵ Reform councils in 1074 and 1075 renewed decrees against simony and clerical marriage, even though they provoked resistance, particularly in Germany. Gregory was willing to alienate allies rather than compromise moral standards. The *Dictatus Papae* (March 1075) situated these moral claims within a broader assertion of papal prerogative. It

8 *Admonitio Generalis* (789), in Paul Edward Dutton, ed., *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader*, Toronto, 2004, p. 96.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

10 ‘General Capitulary for the Missi (802)’, in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, p. 70.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

12 McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp.58–60.

13 McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 58.

14 Van Rhijn, *Rethinking the Carolingian Reforms*, p. 22.

15 Gregory VII, ‘Letter to Otto of Constance (Dec. 1074)’, in Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050–1300*, Englewood Cliffs, 1964, p. 48.

declared that only the pope could depose bishops, that the Roman Church had never stumbled, and even that the pope could depose emperors.¹⁶ Here, moral reform was bound up with the authority of the papacy. For Cowdrey, Gregory's uncompromising stance reflects his moral passion; for Blumenthal, it illustrates political risk, since enforcing clerical celibacy alienated crucial support in the German church.¹⁷ Both Carolingian and Gregorian reforms placed moral discipline at the core of Christian society. Yet they diverged in scope and emphasis. Carolingian reform was integrative, extending to clergy and laity alike, embedding moral correction within imperial governance. Gregorian reform was exclusionary, focused on the clergy, and aimed at separating them from lay society. The Carolingian model sought to broaden Christian participation through education; the Gregorian model sought to narrow and purify clerical identity. Maureen Miller's long-term perspective is helpful here: the movement from Carolingian literacy requirements to eleventh-century clerical professionalisation represents not an abrupt rupture but an extended process of institutional differentiation.¹⁸

Carolingian reform fused secular and ecclesiastical authority. The *Capitulary for the Missi* instructed officials to protect churches, widows, orphans, and pilgrims, portraying the emperor as protector of the vulnerable.¹⁹ Subjects' oaths bound them to both moral living and political loyalty. The *missi dominici* - one bishop and one lay noble, symbolised the cooperation of church and state in enforcing royal correction.²⁰ Ullmann described the Carolingian polity as a "church monarchy," where secular and ecclesiastical authority were united under the emperor.²¹ Van Rhijn, however, stresses the pragmatic dimension: capitularies were not uniformly enforced, and their reach depended on local negotiation.²² Nevertheless, the ideological message was clear: the emperor was God's correction agent. Gregorian reform inverted this model. The *Dictatus Papae* asserted papal supremacy, declaring that the pope alone could enact laws, depose bishops,

16 *Dictatus Papae* (1075), in Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State*, p. 49.

17 Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII*, p. 89; Blumenthal, *Investiture Controversy*, p. 85.

18 Miller, 'Reform, Clerical Culture, and Politics', pp.310–11.

19 General Capitulary for the Missi, in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, p. 74.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 76

21 Ullmann, *Growth of Papal Government*, p. 242.

22 Van Rhijn, *Rethinking the Carolingian Reforms*, p. 30.

and even depose emperors.²³ Gregory's letter to King Solomon of Hungary (1074) claimed Hungary as a papal fief, warning that kingship was held from St Peter rather than from other monarchs.²⁴ The decrees against lay investiture (1078, 1080) prohibited secular rulers from conferring ecclesiastical office under penalty of excommunication.²⁵ The Investiture Controversy with Henry IV made these claims concrete. When Henry tried to appoint bishops, Gregory excommunicated him in 1076, releasing his subjects from obedience. German princes revolted, forcing Henry to seek absolution at Canossa in 1077, where he famously stood barefoot in the snow for three days before Gregory granted absolution. The Canossa moment is political theatre and a symbolic reversal: the emperor's public penance under papal authority embodied Gregory's claim that spiritual sanction could suspend temporal legitimacy.²⁶ Though Henry later recovered, Canossa symbolised papal authority over kings. Blumenthal calls it the defining moment of the Controversy; Ullmann interprets it as the revolutionary inversion of political hierarchy.²⁷ Carolingian reform integrated the church into royal authority, legitimising monarchy as guardian of Christendom.

Gregorian reform sought to liberate the church from royal control and elevate papal authority over kingship. The Carolingian emperor embodied unity; the Gregorian pope asserted supremacy.

Carolingian reform articulated a vision of a Christian commonwealth, uniting ruler, clergy, and laity in one body under God. The *Capitulary for the Missi* forbade violence against churches and the weak, presenting the emperor as protector of the sacred and justice.²⁸ The theological basis was unity: one empire, faith, and ruler under God. McKitterick sees this as foundational to European identity.²⁹ Van Rhijn stresses its fragility, since local adaptation often challenged central ideals.³⁰ The consequences were extensive: corrected biblical texts, expanded schools, standardised liturgy, and missionary campaigns, including Charlemagne's brutal conquest of the Saxons. The *Capitulatio de*

23 Dictatus Papae, in Tierney, *Crisis of Church and State*, p. 50.

24 Gregory VII, 'Letter to Solomon of Hungary (1074)', in Tierney, *Crisis of Church and State*, p. 51.

25 'Decrees against Lay Investiture (1078, 1080)', in Tierney, *Crisis of Church and State*, p. 52.

26 Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy*, pp. 112–14.

27 Ullmann, *Growth of Papal Government*, p. 245.

28 'General Capitulary for the Missi', in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, p. 77.

29 McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 145.

30 Van Rhijn, *Rethinking the Carolingian Reforms*, p. 44.

partibus Saxoniae prescribed death for those refusing baptism.³¹ Coercion and correction were inseparable: salvation and political consolidation were interwoven. Gregorian reform articulated a new political theology: the papacy as monarch of Christendom. The decrees against investiture declared that no cleric could accept office from lay hands, and rulers who attempted investiture would be excommunicated.³² Ullmann saw this as the birth of the papal monarchy. Moore argues that its exclusionary logic fostered persecution: once papal authority was supreme, those outside its boundaries - Jews, heretics, unchaste clergy - were increasingly marginalised.³³ The theological claim was fundamental: kings ruled not by divine right alone but under papal sanction. Canossa embodied this, demonstrating that a king's legitimacy could be suspended until papal absolution. This was a revolutionary reordering of political theology. Both reform programs implemented coercion, though in different registers. Carolingian correction frequently relied on military force and the imposition of royal law (as in Saxony) to secure outward conformity; Gregorian reform relied on canonical censures, excommunication, and the revocation of political legitimacy to compel obedience. One used physical coercion to transform local practices; the other used spiritual-legal coercion to reshape political structures. Yet both measures were instruments for enforcing an authoritative vision of Christian order.³⁴

Carolingian reform consistently addressed the laity: sermons, schooling, catechisms, and liturgy sought to involve all Christians in discipline.³⁵ Gregorian reform concentrated on the clergy, emphasising separation from the laity. Maureen Miller argues that this professionalisation of clerical culture created sharper boundaries between sacred and secular: crucially, she sees this process as gradual rather than immediate, a continuity from Carolingian educational aims to later clerical professionalisation.³⁶ Moore adds that these boundaries enabled coercion, as deviation from papal norms became grounds for exclusion.³⁷ Thus, Carolingian reform integrated laity into Christian life, while Gregorian

31 'Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae (782)', in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, p. 61.

32 'Decrees against Lay Investiture', in Tierney, *Crisis of Church and State*, p. 52.

33 R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, Oxford, 2007, pp. 35–7.

34 'Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae (782)', in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, p.61; Gregory VII, 'Decrees against Lay Investiture', in Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State*, p.52.

35 Admonitio Generalis, in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, p. 98.

36 Miller, 'Reform, Clerical Culture, and Politics', p. 310.

37 Moore, *Persecuting Society*, p. 42.

reform defined clerical identity against laity. Both sought unity, but their strategies reshaped society in different ways.

A persistent debate is whether these reforms were conservative restorations or revolutionary innovations. Gregory VII claimed he was restoring ancient canon law against clerical marriage, simony, and lay investiture.³⁸ Carolingian reform likewise invoked patristic teaching. Yet as Brian Tierney noted, applying old norms in new contexts produced radical change: “reformers were traditionalists in intent, innovators in effect.”³⁹ Reformers invoked precedent and authority while the political and social context of enforcement transformed those precedents into novel institutional practices - an imperial Christian commonwealth in the ninth century and a papal monarchy in the eleventh.⁴⁰ Historians remain divided. Fliche emphasised Gregory’s continuity; Ullmann his theocratic innovation; Cantor his revolutionary importance.⁴¹ McKitterick presents Carolingian reform as a coherent renaissance; Van Rhijn as a collection of local negotiations.⁴² The balanced view is that reform rhetoric and traditional sources legitimised projects that, in practice, produced institutional innovation. The processes of education, monastic renewal, bureaucratic consolidation, and juridical assertion combined to make reform both conservative in legitimating language and transformative in consequences.⁴³

Carolingian and Gregorian reforms illustrate the diversity of medieval “reform.” Both sought moral renewal, invoked ancient authority, and claimed to restore purity. Yet their ideas diverged. Carolingian reform, directed by Charlemagne, aimed to integrate clergy and laity in moral correction and education, embedding religion in imperial rule. Gregorian reform, led by Gregory VII, sought to purify the clergy, abolish lay investiture, and exalt the papacy over kings. Both were conservative in rhetoric but revolutionary in consequence. Carolingian reforms laid cultural and administrative foundations for a Christian empire; Gregorian reforms redefined political theology, elevating papal authority. Together, they reveal that reform in medieval Europe was never merely about

38 Gregory VII, ‘Dictatus Papae’, in Tierney, *Crisis of Church and State*, p. 49.

39 Gregory VII, ‘Dictatus Papae’, in Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State*, p.49.

40 Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050–1300*, Englewood Cliffs, 1964, p.47.

41 Cantor, *Medieval History*, p. 190; Ullmann, *Growth of Papal Government*, p. 239.

42 McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 54; Van Rhijn, *Rethinking the Carolingian Reforms*, p. 28.

43 Cantor, *Medieval History*, p.190; Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government*, p.239.

recovering the past—it was about remaking the present and shaping the future of Christendom.

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History 103 – Global History.

Kavan Faoagali

Personal Statement:

My name is Kavan Faoagali and I was born and raised in Manurewa, South Auckland and I am now in my second year of my Bachelor of Arts. Having developed a passion for History in college, it made sense to make it one of my majors, paired alongside Politics and International Relations. There isn't much else I enjoy more than consuming historical knowledge and learning about how our world came to be through the actions and thoughts of those that came before us, and how we can apply that knowledge to leave it in a better state for those who will come after us. To quote the Chinese philosopher Confucius, "Study the past if you would define the future".

Nominated by Dr. Joseph Zizek and supported by their tutor, Rose Thomas.

The French Revolution as a Global Event: Assessing Its Transformative Impact through the Perspectives of Bayly, Hunt, Collier, and Zeuske

Based on your selection of the works below, to what extent (and why) should we regard the French Revolution as transformative of diverse societies and peoples? Why, in your view, do these scholars offer such diverse explanations?

Introduction

The French Revolution is widely seen as a pivotal event in the history of modern politics. Historians argue that its significance extended beyond France, shaping societies across the globe. To explore this complexity, the essay analyses four historians: C.A. Bayly, Lynn Hunt, Ian Collier, and Michael Zeuske. Each scholar examines different mechanisms of revolutionary influence—structural, ideological, cultural, and colonial. Their arguments reveal that the Revolution's global legacy lay not in uniform outcomes, but in the diverse ways it reshaped political thought, social order, and imperial relations across the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Global Structures and Revolutionary Surges

Bayly argues that the French Revolution should be seen not as a self-contained national event, but as part of a wider global crisis of legitimacy, empire, and ideology. He positions it as the second of three major “revolutionary surges” between 1776 and the 1820s, bracketed by the American Revolution and the Iberian-Asian uprisings triggered by Napoleon’s invasion of Spain and Portugal.¹ These upheavals, he contends, were interconnected, forcing societies across continents to confront new questions about representation, race, and rights.²

¹ C.A. Bayly, “The ‘Revolutionary Age’ in the Wider World, c. 1790–1830,” in Richard Bessel, Nicholas Guyatt, and Jane Rendall, eds, *War, Empire and Slavery, 1770–1830* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2010), p. 22.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.

Bayly places particular emphasis on how revolutionary ideas were reshaped by local conditions. In Latin America, uprisings brought together “local elites, indigenous people and slaves” in struggles against both social and racial disabilities.³ In Asia, where empires were already under fiscal pressure and administrative strain, revolutionary ideas interacted with existing crises, sometimes reinforcing rather than dismantling hierarchies. In French Mauritius, for example, Creoles cited Rousseau not to promote liberty but to defend slavery. In contrast, Haiti produced what Bayly calls a “true social, political and ideological revolution” representing the most complete realisation of the French Revolution’s emancipatory potential—driven not by European elites, but by enslaved people overturning colonial and racial hierarchies.⁴

The Philippines provides a more complex case. There, Creoles and mestizos drew on both American republicanism and long standing local grievances, such as racism and monopolistic trade, to develop a radical tradition. Reforms by the Cadiz Cortes briefly opened space for inclusion, but their reversal provoked unrest. Bayly argues that in such contexts, revolutionary ideas “took root because they made sense of deep conflicts” already present in colonial society.⁵

Ultimately, Bayly’s structural approach prioritises global conjunctures and systemic ruptures over ideological transmission. He sees revolutionary discourse as one force among many—intersecting with empire, communication networks, and local agency—to create a “truly transnational” revolutionary age.⁶

Ideological Adaptation and Revolutionary Action

Lynn Hunt contends that the French Revolution should be viewed as a globally significant event because it catalysed widespread reinterpretations of sovereignty, rights, and revolution. Rejecting the “internalist” focus of earlier French historiography, she instead asserts that “hardly anyone or any country was exempt from the impact of French revolutionary ideas and wars.”⁷ The Revolution, Hunt argues, set off reactions across

³ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

⁶ Ibid., p. 30.

⁷ Lynn Hunt, “The French Revolution in Global Context,” in David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds, *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2010, p. 20.

Europe, the Americas, and the colonies—though its reception depended on local social and political tensions.

Hunt places special emphasis on the Haitian Revolution, which she calls the most radical and transformative response to the events of 1789. Free people of colour in Saint-Domingue demanded equal rights, and in 1791, enslaved people initiated an insurrection that led to the French abolition of slavery in 1794. “The insurrection... rocked the world of slave-holding all over the Americas,” she writes, underscoring its regional effects.⁸ Unlike the more cautious reception in Europe, Saint-Domingue’s revolutionary movement translated French ideals into a radical anti-colonial and abolitionist struggle.

Yet Hunt stresses that revolutionary influence wasn’t simply a matter of ideological diffusion. Instead, she views ideas such as human rights and independence as “claims that grew out of actions and produced other actions in their wake.”⁹ These ideas were dynamically interpreted according to local contexts. Her analysis highlights how revolutionary discourse could mobilise diverse actors—from enslaved Haitians to Indian rulers—because it addressed real grievances and political aspirations.

Hunt’s approach thus complements Bayly’s by focusing less on global structural forces and more on ideological adaptability. In her account, the French Revolution’s global significance lies in its capacity to provoke action and inspire redefinition—not because it exported a consistent model, but because it opened new political horizons.

Revolutionary Encounters in the Mediterranean

Ian Collier expands the geography of the French Revolution by arguing that its most ambitious political experiment played out not in the Atlantic world but in the Mediterranean. He opens with an account of Mohamed Dyghis, a Muslim merchant from North Africa, who wrote to a revolutionary representative in 1795 proclaiming his belief in shared humanity: “No matter where I first drew breath, or the religion in which I was born, we are brothers.”¹⁰ This illustrates how revolutionary ideals resonated beyond

⁸ Ibid., pp. 21–22.

⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁰ Ian Collier, “The Revolutionary Mediterranean,” in Peter McPhee, ed., *A Companion to the French Revolution*, Oxford, 2012, p. 419.

Europe, adapted by people whose experiences were shaped by different religious, cultural, and political traditions.

Coller argues that the Mediterranean has been overlooked in histories of the Revolution, calling it “the great unasked question of the Revolution.”¹¹ He points to events across the region, including liberty trees planted by sailors, revolutionary festivals celebrated in port cities, and republican slogans shouted in the streets of Algiers and Istanbul.¹² In his view, the French Revolution travelled through ports, markets, and diplomatic networks as much as through books and declarations.

The French expedition to Egypt (1798–1801) becomes central in Coller’s account. Rather than seeing it purely as French imperialism, he argues that it helped reveal “a nascent party of independence” within Egypt.¹³ Some Egyptians, including Muslims and Copts, drew on their own indigenous leaders such as Murad Bey, rather than the conventional European Enlightenment thinkers.¹⁴ This suggests that revolutionary influence in the Mediterranean emerged through negotiation, resistance, and reinterpretation—not passive reception.

Coller’s analysis challenges the idea that the French Revolution exported a single ideological model. Instead, he shows that its ideals were reshaped through cross-cultural encounters and local political struggles. In doing so, he highlights the Mediterranean as a space of revolutionary possibility, complexity, and transformation.

Race, Fear, and Repression in Spanish America

Michael Zeuske offers a distinct perspective on the global significance of the French Revolution by foregrounding fear as a primary mode of reception in Spanish America. Unlike historians who emphasise ideological transmission or cultural encounter, Zeuske focuses on how revolutionary discourse was shaped by racial hierarchies and elite anxieties. He argues that the Haitian Revolution, rather than the French Revolution itself, exerted the most profound influence on the region. Creole elites viewed the events in Saint-

¹¹ Ibid., p. 420.

¹² Ibid., pp. 426–427.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 430–431.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Domingue not as a model of liberty but as a warning, responding with what Zeuske describes as "miedo a la revolución"—a fear that similar uprisings might occur at home.¹⁵ Instead of embracing revolutionary ideals, Creole elites strategically adopted Enlightenment rhetoric to protect their own dominance. Zeuske uses the 1795 Gracias al Sacar decree—which allowed pardos to purchase legal whiteness—as an example of how colonial authorities attempted to stabilise racial boundaries while appearing to reform them.¹⁶ Drawing on Alexander von Humboldt, he shows that many elites envisioned “a white republic,” in which slavery would be preserved and people of colour excluded from citizenship.¹⁷

Zeuske identifies the 1797 conspiracy of Manuel Gual and José María España as an exceptional case where revolutionary ideas were taken up in genuinely radical form. It involved pardos, proposed the abolition of slavery, and drew inspiration from French republicanism.¹⁸ He describes it as “the most radical conspiracy organized in the Spanish Atlantic before the period of independence.”¹⁹ Yet it was quickly and violently repressed. In most cases, Zeuske contends, revolutionary language was selectively adopted by elites and violently repressed when claimed by enslaved people, free people of colour, or radical conspirators.²⁰ Zeuske demonstrates how fear, race, and repression shaped the reception of revolutionary ideas in colonial settings.

Conclusion

The French Revolution was globally transformative, but not in any singular or uniform way. As the works of Bayly, Hunt, Collier, and Zeuske show, its ideas were interpreted through local structures, cultural frameworks, and political anxieties. While in some contexts it sparked radical change, in others it provoked fear or strategic appropriation. These scholars offer diverse explanations because they focus on different mechanisms—whether structural, ideological, or colonial—by which revolution travelled

¹⁵ Michael Zeuske, “The French Revolution in Spanish America,” in Alan Forrest and Matthias Middell, eds, *The Routledge Companion to the French Revolution in World History*, New York, 2016, p. 78.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 81.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 78–82.

and was reshaped. Their analyses collectively suggest that the French Revolution's true global legacy lies in the varied ways it disrupted existing orders and redefined political possibility.

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Ancient History 355 – The Later Roman Empire.

Mia Jönsson

Personal Statement:

I am a postgraduate student completing my BA (Honours) in Ancient History, focusing on the social history of Roman navies and naval warfare in the Middle Republic. I currently work as an editor and writer for the history website OnThisDay.com, and spend my free time reading fantasy novels. After completing my Honours I plan on continuing postgrad study in the Masters program at UoA.

Nominated and taught by Associate Professor Lisa Bailey.

Ammianus Marcellinus: A Different Kind of Valuable¹

Explain the value to a historian of the account of the siege of Amida, and events leading up to it, which is provided by Ammianus Marcellinus. What do we need to be aware of and cautious about when using Ammianus' account as an historical source? Make specific reference to the sections of Ammianus which were set as the reading for the workshop, and to the required secondary readings in Talis.

Born around 320-30 CE, Ammianus Marcellinus is a household name for historians of the later Roman Empire. Opting to write in Latin even though he describes himself as Greek, Ammianus' historical accounts of the fourth century are some of the most important narrative sources from this period. Though his first 13 books are lost, books 14-31—now known as the *Res Gestae*—cover the period between 353 and 378. As a historian and eyewitness, Ammianus provides one of the most detailed and reliable accounts of the Roman-Persian conflict,² giving invaluable insight into military campaigns and political events within the imperial court. In books 18 and 19, Ammianus writes about the siege of Amida, significant for its military and political details and how Ammianus presents these events through his personal lens. While his account of this siege offers valuable insight into the realities of warfare, historians must still approach his work with caution due to its literary construction, dramatisation, and potential selective presentation of information. Like all ancient texts, the value of Ammianus Marcellinus' account of the siege of Amida should be considered in conjunction with other forms of historical evidence, such as literary sources and material archaeology. Therefore, it is not the intention of this essay to argue that Ammianus is a wholly reliable source on his own but rather to demonstrate the value of his narrative for ancient historians while highlighting the precautions needed to take when using his work as a historical source.

¹ Please note that this essay uses Chicago style referencing.

²Timothy D. Barnes. *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality*. (Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 2.

Military Value

Ammianus offers military historians a rare, firsthand account of the siege of Amida and the events leading up to it. His writing is rich in graphic imagery and technical details, akin to renowned writers of epics such as Homer and Virgil, often describing his visual surroundings in great detail, along with sensory stimulants like smell and sound, which make Ammianus stand out against other ancient historians. Modern scholars acknowledge this difference, understanding he was more interested in telling a story-like history of campaigns rather than individual battles.³ Though his methods are unique, these details that might have otherwise been missed are a valuable source for historians. His vivid descriptions of artillery, siege towers, and hand-to-hand combat give insight into the mechanics of ancient warfare. For instance, in book 19.5-7, Ammianus includes a plethora of technical details, documenting the use of ballistae capable of piercing two men at once, the deployment of Roman *scorpiones* to destroy Persian siege towers, and a psychological tactic of discharging empty engines to warn off advancing troops.⁴ While these passages offer a sense of how powerful the scale and violence of these conflicts were, Kimberly Kagan argues, “Ammianus' face of battle-style narrative technique limits the abilities of military historians to investigate the battles of Strasbourg and Amida.”⁵ Her critique highlights a key issue: Ammianus' focus risks dramatising the chaos of war rather than conveying tactical coherence. With this being a consistent theme for Ammianus, military historians should exercise caution when using his work as a source, as he tends to focus on details of the battle that made a personal impression on him.⁶

While some caution should be applied to Ammianus' evident biases, that is not to say that taking a personal and literary descriptive approach to writing on the siege of Amida hinders him; in fact, it can sometimes prove very useful. His descriptive language leaves

³ J. E. Lendon. ‘The Face of Convention: Battle and Siege Description in Ammianus Marcellinus.’ In *Ammianus Marcellinus From Soldier to Author*, ed. Michael Hanaghan and David Woods (Brill, 2022), 247-8.

⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus. *The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378)* Trans. Walter Hamilton. Penguin, 1986, p. 169-73.

⁵ Kimberly Kagan. *The Eye of Command*. (University of Michigan Press, 2006), 29.

⁶ Kagan, *The Eye of Command*, 50.

little confusion about where the events he writes about occur. Book 18.9 sees Ammianus situating Amida's geography in a way that is easily accessible, taking time to mention notable landmarks and sites.⁷ Unlike ancient historians who often focus on grand strategy or moral lessons, Ammianus pays attention to warfare's logistics and operational side,⁸ providing unique details of practical military concerns crucial for understanding how ancient wars were conducted—not just remembered or glorified. References to officers' ranks and personas, bridges and supplies, and geographical descriptions demonstrate Ammianus' understanding of how military campaigns work behind the scenes of the battlefield.⁹ These insights are just as valuable to military historians as tactical ones, and his position as a *protector* only adds to his credibility in this area of knowledge.

Political Value

While presenting a vivid record of events on the eastern frontier, Ammianus also constructs a narrative embedded in the broader context of the Roman-Persian conflict and internal Roman politics. His critiques on Constantius II provide valuable insights to political historians, as Ammianus frames the siege of Amida as a failure of central command more than local. The Roman forces were ill-prepared for the siege; Alan J. Ross remarks, “Constantius’ preparations at Amida fail to prevent the city’s fall to the Persians, and therefore may be read as a criticism of the emperor.”¹⁰ Considering Ammianus’ description of Constantius’ court scene being ‘fit for the brothel or the stage,’¹¹ focusing the blame on him for the defeat at Amida may be a plausible causality. However, it is also important to note that historians should be aware of influences on Ammianus’ portrayal of Constantius and his military policies. This characterisation of Constantius is shaped by Ammianus’ bias towards General Ursicinus and loyalty to Julian, whom he admires throughout the *Res Gestae*.¹² Moreover, Ammianus does not

⁷ Ammianus, p. 160.

⁸ Frank Trombley. ‘Ammianus Marcellinus and Fourth-Century Warfare, A *protector*’s approach to historical narrative.’ In *The Late Roman World and Its Historian: Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus*, ed. Jan Willem Drijvers and David Hunt (Routledge, 1999), 16.

⁹ Trombley, ‘Ammianus Marcellinus and Fourth-Century Warfare,’ 24.

¹⁰ Alan J. Ross. ‘Constantius and the Sieges of Amida and Nisibis: Ammianus’ Relationship with Julian’s “Panegyrics,”’ *Acta Classica* 57 (2014): 146.

¹¹ Ammianus, 18.5 (p. 151).

¹² Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality*, 16.

merely recount imperial inaction; he subtly contrasts the chaos at the centre of power with the bravery of local commanders like Ursicinus, whom he depicts as a tragic figure caught between duty and scapegoating for the imperial court. Trombley reinforces this idea that Ammianus ‘rehabilitates’ Ursicinus’ reputation, reducing negative speech towards his supposed failure to defend Amida down to ‘rumours.’¹³ Regardless of Ammianus’ personal bias, this narrative is valuable not only in the events he describes but also in what it potentially reveals about the political culture of a late Roman Empire struggling with internal fragmentation and military overstretch. Ammianus’ political perspective complicates his reliability, but it may corroborate with parallel sources that suggest Amida was not a significant loss for Constantius,¹⁴ possibly providing a sinister reasoning for why Constantius was not overly concerned with Amida’s defeat.

Adjacent to court politics, Ammianus’ emphasis on Roman resilience constructs a powerful image of courage that carries significant political weight. Rome is no stranger to political propaganda, and despite their defeat at Amida, Ammianus depicts the siege as a heroic tragedy—dignified and brave in the face of Persian forces. His descriptions are intensely visual and emotionally charged, with bodies pressed so tightly that ‘there was no room for them to fall’ and a soldier in front of Ammianus ‘whose head had been split into two equal halves... stood there like a stump.’¹⁵ These grotesque images serve to horrify as well as to underscore the cost of Roman courage. Ammianus also conveys his and his fellow soldier’s mental state not as cold, fearless heroes but as men who ‘were terrified by the blood and the pale faces of the dying’¹⁶ but continued to fight in a losing battle. From that moment on, Ammianus and the soldiers ‘longed for a way of ending our lives with glory.’¹⁷ This realistic portrayal of their fear but unwavering support constructs an image of a Rome that does not crumble and, in the end, strives for glory for themselves and Rome. Furthermore, while this is, as Kagan puts it, a ‘moral cliché,’¹⁸ this realistic depiction is valuable Roman propaganda, alluding to their strength in war comparable to that of soldiers in Homer’s *Iliad*.

¹³ Trombley, ‘Ammianus Marcellinus and Fourth-Century Warfare,’ 21.

¹⁴ Ross, ‘Constantius and the Sieges of Amida and Nisibis,’ 138.

¹⁵ Ammianus, 18.8 (p. 159).

¹⁶ Ammianus, 19.2 (p. 166).

¹⁷ Ammianus, 19.2 (p. 165).

¹⁸ Kagan, *The Eye of Command*, 35.

Cultural and Religious Value

Beyond military tactics and politics, Ammianus provides valuable—albeit limited and personal—insights into the fourth century's religious, ritual, and cultural life. Although there is little mention of these aspects, what Ammianus chooses to include still holds some value for a historian of this matter.

For instance, the absence of theological reflection despite his proximity to a Christian empire reflects his own 'pagan' views without explicitly mentioning his beliefs. Barnes assesses Ammianus as a man of 'broad-minded piety who accepted the doctrines of no specific religion,'¹⁹ which should be considered a valuable position to have as a historian, as he does not centre his ideology around one religious agenda compared to other notable Christian historians. Providing a neutral standpoint allows Ammianus to portray different cultures with nuance, reflecting his personal worldview rather than a state view.

In book 19.1, Ammianus explains the funeral procession of King Grumbate's son. First, a truce is made between the warring parties to allow the mourning of the young man 'who was greatly loved for his noble qualities.'²⁰ Even this temporary suspension of violence reveals how honouring the dead was a shared human experience, which speaks volumes to ancient attitudes towards death. A seven-day funeral takes place with feasting, singing, dancing, and women who 'beat their breasts in sorrow' which Ammianus likens to worshippers of Venus who commemorate the death of Adonis. Once the body had been burnt, his ashes and bones were collected into an urn to be taken home and buried.²¹ This rare description of a Sasanian royal funeral reflects how grief, ritual and kingship were intertwined in Persian society. As an outsider, Ammianus' account is careful and respectful, and his analogy to Venus and Adonis suggests that this ritual evoked a sense of sacred meaning in Ammianus. Further, his constant references to Roman and Greek mythologies present the idea that despite growing Christianity, these mythologies are still

¹⁹ Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality*, 80.

²⁰ Ammianus, p.164.

²¹ Ammianus, p.164.

prevalent in Roman society,²² giving valuable insight to historians concerning the coexistence between ‘paganism’ and orthodox new age religions.

Conclusion: Narrative Techniques, Credibility, and Self-Presence

Ammianus’ account of the events leading up to the siege of Amida and the siege itself draws heavily on epic narrative techniques from authors such as Homer and Virgil. While he does align his work with these literary models, he simultaneously works to demythologise the events he records, making his dramatisation of events still a valuable source for historians. Ammianus uses the technique of *teichoscopia* to build suspense and frame the Persian arrival with grandeur: ‘at the first gleam of dawn the landscape as far as the eye could reach was a-glitter with arms,’²³ this lush description from the narrative of a defender is similar to how Virgil narrates the sack of Troy through Aeneas’ eyes as a defender. However, Neil W. Bernstein notes, “while the epic motifs are frequent, aspects of the combat have also been demythologised.”²⁴ Rather than glorifying battle and heroism, Ammianus often presents a realistic depiction of death and emotion: for example, the death of Grumbates’ son is not attributed to divine fate or martial virtue, which is a prevalent theme in epics, but to the impersonal machines of siege warfare. Similarly, in book 19.4, a plague breaks out within Amida, and though Ammianus references Homer’s plague on the Achaeans sent by Apollo,²⁵ he does not portray divine intervention as the reason for the plague at Amida. Ammianus instead demythologises this motif, providing three possible scientific reasons for the outbreak: exes heat, pollution caused by overcrowding of corpses, and stagnant water.²⁶ These choices reinforce his efforts to blend epic stylisation with verifiable observation, lending valuable knowledge to historians.

Though Ammianus’ literary flair provides in-depth detail and a unique perspective, his reliability is still complicated. These descriptions may obscure chronology, inflate the significance of certain events to heighten the drama, or, as

²² Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality*, 168.

²³ Ammianus, 19.1 (p. 163).

²⁴ Neil Warren Bernstein. ‘The Siege of Amida and Epic Tradition: Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* 19.1-9,’ *Mnemosyne* (2019): 999.

²⁵ Ammianus, p. 168.

²⁶ Ammianus, p. 168.

previously mentioned, focus on what Ammianus found impactful to himself rather than the whole picture.²⁷ For example, caution should be exercised when treating his narrative as straightforward. Ammianus does his best to boost his credibility, often providing detailed context of how he came to obtain or overhear important information. For instance, in book 18.6, he explains how he came upon a crying child in the middle of a road and took him back to the city, whereupon leaving, he overheard how his general, Ursicinus, fled the city.²⁸ This long-winded contextual ‘evidence’ aims to build his credibility and narrative. His presence in the text remains a strategy, as he consciously presents himself as ‘a cautious... timid historian’ who refrains from exaggerating events.²⁹ This rhetorical technique implies honesty and self-restraint, and while this is an obvious credibility tactic, it is worth noting that he does not attempt to situate himself as the hero of his narrative—which deserves some credit. In fact, he describes exactly how he managed to flee the siege of Amida by ‘[hiding] in an obscure corner of the town’³⁰ and escaped during the night. With this story, he does not conflate himself to heroic status, and his dual position allows Ammianus to claim authority through personal experience while distancing himself from direct embellishment. Therefore, his self-presence, like his epic framing, must be read as both a historical tool and literary device for historians to acknowledge the value of his credibility.

The military, political, and cultural/religious value of Ammianus’ account of Amida is substantial in various ways. However, it is crucial to recognise his bias, narrative choice, and literary devices. While these elements complicate Ammianus’ reliability, with some historians believing his usefulness lies in operations and not military,³¹ his vivid and emotionally charged account of this campaign serves both as a valuable historical record and as a work of literature for its uniqueness in blurring the line between history and epic. Ammianus’ history is inherently important for understanding not just the events themselves but how they were perceived by a Roman historian with a personal stake in the narrative.

²⁷ Bernstein, ‘The Siege of Amida and Epic Tradition,’ 996.

²⁸ Ammianus, p. 153.

²⁹ Ammianus, p. 156.

³⁰ Ammianus, 19.8 (p. 174).

³¹ Kagan, *The Eye of Command*, 28.

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