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Edward W. Said, Renaissance Orientalism, and Imaginative Geographies of a Classical Mediterranean

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Abstract

Since the publication of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*, scholars have recalibrated how they understand discourses of power, formulations of knowledge, and Western constructions of cultural difference. While some premodernists have willingly engaged with Said's work, there remains within Italian Renaissance studies some reluctance to do so because of the misconception that *Orientalism* argued for East-West dichotomies that only operated under the larger structures of Western colonialism and imperialism. This essay conducts a close reading of crucial argumentative and methodological sections of *Orientalism* alongside the writings of two 15th-century humanists, Cyriac of Ancona and Biondo Flavio, to illustrate that Said argued for Orientalism as a transhistorical discourse of power and knowledge production by and for the West that tells us far more about the West's view of the Orient than about the Orient itself.

This reading is broken down in three parts to explicate more fully Said's larger arguments and their implications for Renaissance studies and our scholarly engagement with humanism: how Said defined Orientalism; Said's concept of imaginative geography; the differences Said outlined between latent and manifest Orientalism, and what their differences tell us about the causal relationship between Orientalism and Western desires for military action in the Orient. This essay's central argument is that scholars must engage with *Orientalism*, even if they disagree with the book's premises, if they are to best understand to what extent Renaissance humanists' conceptualizations of the Orient fit within the long trajectory of Orientalism.

Introduction

On 20 July 2003, a few months before his death from leukemia, Edward W. Said decried in *The Los Angeles Times* what he called America's "Blind Imperial Arrogance" after its invasion of Iraq the previous March. In explaining how visions of empire worked, Said reminded the reader:

The key element was imperial perspective, that way of looking at a distant foreign reality by subordinating it in one's gaze, constructing its history from one's own point of view, seeing its people as subjects whose fate can be decided by what distant administrators think is best for them. From such willful perspectives ideas develop, including the theory that imperialism is a benign and necessary thing.¹

Moreover, Said continued, this gaze served to bolster the beliefs and values of the society wishing to carry out such a conquest. All denounce imperialism, so the argument goes, but never one's own empire: "Every empire, however, tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate."²

While he was writing specifically about American intervention in the Middle East, this was no modern phenomenon for Said. Rather, it reflected "a long-standing view—the Orientalist view—that denies Arabs their right to national self-determination because they are considered incapable of logic, unable to tell the truth and fundamentally murderous."³ While Said is rightly seen as a critic of modern imperialism in its myriad forms, from the publication of *Orientalism* until his death, Said developed the argument that the West constructed a vision of the Orient for itself over millennia. This Orient that the West remade through discursive, textual, and rhetorical exercises in authority-making is the same Orient that threatened Greece, that Rome subdued, that Islam conquered, that threatened modern empires through insurgency and resistance to Western benevolence, and that needed to be combated lest it destroy the West.

My goal in this essay is to examine the ways in which Said's *Orientalism* can be useful for understanding Italian Renaissance humanists and their visions of the Ottoman Empire, Islam, and the Orient. By humanists and humanism, I mean most immediately in their prevailing sense as is common in early

1 Said 2003.

2 Said 2003.

3 Said 2003.

modern Italian studies.⁴ Beyond this, though, it is important to think of Renaissance humanism alongside Said's own grapplings with Western humanism that both aided and abetted imperialism but that should be a driver in the emancipation of all peoples.⁵ Said recognized that Western humanism did not work toward the universalist humanity it purported.⁶ In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), for example, Said quoted from Sartre's preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, wherein Sartre explained that "There is nothing more consistent than a racist humanism, since the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters."⁷

Placing Italian Renaissance humanists' discourse on the East alongside their desire to renew antiquity, especially its political culture, suggests a Renaissance Orientalism that reflects Said's discussion of longstanding Western attempts to deal with, understand, and even potentially control the East. This functioned in part to bolster their desire to create a purportedly universal literary and political humanism that in reality functioned to entrench their own sense of cultural superiority.⁸ Central to this, therefore, is recog-

4 In essence, I'll follow Paul Oskar Kristeller's quite loose definition of Renaissance humanism as "the general tendency of the age to attach the greatest importance to classical studies, and to consider classical antiquity as the common standard and model by which to guide all cultural activities" (1979, 87–88).

5 McCarthy 2010, 20–26. Said's humanism was grounded in his training in comparative literature and his interest in philology. The works with arguably the greatest influence on Said's thinking were Giambattista Vico's *New Science*, Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (for which Said wrote the introduction for the fiftieth anniversary edition), and Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia*; cf. Vico 2020; Auerbach 2003; Adorno 2005. On Said's humanism more generally, see Said 2004. See Radakrishnan 2007 for a close but often critical assessment of Said as both a humanist and deep critic of humanism.

Bashir Abu-Manneh takes up this tension in Said's thought regarding humanism and its political implications in his introduction to *After Said* (Abu-Manneh 2018). These essays, including those that heavily critique Said's oeuvre, compel us to reconsider the ramifications of Said's thought in the 21st century. While a number of these essays are highly critical of Said—such as Vivek Chibber's typically unsympathetic reading of Said's influence—it is nevertheless crucial to engage with even Said's most vociferous skeptics and detractors as a check on mimicking him (or any other thinker, for that matter) too closely or uncritically.

6 For an important reappraisal of Italian Renaissance intellectual culture in its historical context, see Celenza 2018. Likewise, Celenza (2006) explores the interconnections of humanism, neo-Latin and the role of the philological tradition—with which Said directly engages—in the development of Renaissance historiography. Celenza (2006, 2) explains that "a central preoccupation of scholars became the manner in which culture expressed itself through language," a reference to the entanglements of philology, humanism, and discourses of power. In the footnote to this passage, Celenza explains that "[i]n the elevation of philology to a secular religion, perhaps no figure from the nineteenth century was more important than Ernest Renan" (Celenza 2006, 160–61 n. 7) and cites Said (1994, 132–48), which is from Chapter Two, Part II: "Silvestre de Sacy and Ernest Renan: *Rational Anthropology and Philological Laboratory*."

7 Said 1993, 197; cf. Fanon 2004.

8 On political humanism grounded in virtue in Renaissance Italy, see Hankins 2019.

nizing first, that many Italians, humanists especially, believed that they were the heirs of antiquity, which compelled them to see antiquarianism and the *studia humanitatis* as projects in renewing ancient virtue and liberty; second, that humanist discourse surrounding alterity and preoccupations with the Ottoman Empire as culturally inferior yet militarily formidable operated in tandem with discourses of empire and European hegemony, even if the latter was never realized in the Renaissance.

In this essay, I focus on two figures: Cyriac of Ancona (1391–1452), merchant and diplomat who traveled throughout the Ottoman Empire collecting antiquities and recording inscriptions; and Biondo Flavio (1392–1463), humanist and papal secretary from Forlì whose writings focus on calls for war against the Ottomans, Roman history and antiquities, and Italian geography. Cyriac and Biondo illustrate the varied ways they and their contemporaries were preoccupied with interstitial and ambiguous spaces, created boundaries of separation, and allowed for the continued ossification of difference between East and West. I first address the fact that *Orientalism*'s numerous detractors among scholars of Renaissance Italy wrongly dismiss the book despite its currency in early modern studies beyond Italy. I will then turn to close readings of *Orientalism* alongside Cyriac's and Biondo's writings. I'll first explore how Said defined Orientalism; second, I will examine Said's concept of imaginative geography; third, I will unpack latent and manifest Orientalism, and what their differences tell us about the causal relationship between Orientalism and Western desires for military action in the East.

Before proceeding, a couple caveats are in order. First, I will limit myself to geography and how landscapes and ruins centered in Cyriac's and Biondo's thought about what divided East from West. This is both an arbitrary and necessary choice. It is the product of my larger research on Cyriac's and Biondo's views of landscapes and ruins. But I have limited myself to geography, landscapes, and ruins because this already quite lengthy essay would quickly become book-length were I to explore every facet or manifestation of Orientalism in the Renaissance. Besides, Cyriac and Biondo are different enough writers to remind us of Orientalism's diversity across genres. Cyriac was a diarist, sketch artist, poet, epigrapher, and catalogue of antiquities. But he was not a scholar; he was an autodidact who was often mocked for his

lack of training and philological skill.⁹ By contrast, Biondo was a highly trained historian and geographer who wrote voluminous texts in highly stylized, if somewhat baroque, Latin prose. Cyriac and Biondo were also acquainted with one another and were well connected to the political machinations of various popes, kings, and emperors—a reminder of the blurred lines between literary, scholarly, and political writings, which Said saw as an integral part of Orientalism. Throughout, we should bear in mind that Said detected numerous undercurrents of Orientalist discourse—such as decay, exoticism, gender, and sexuality—across an eclectic array of sources. Such a plurality operated in the early modern period as well. In a recent essay, for example, I argued that Catholic pilgrims and missionaries to the Levant blamed Eastern Christian heterodoxy on cultural proximity to Islam, which these travelers saw as grounded in moral decay, gluttony, cupidity, sexual license, and vanity.¹⁰ Some of these themes will appear here. Moreover, the reader should bear in mind that imaginative geography—much like these other nuanced ways of seeing the East, etc.—flows out of Orientalist discourse that it functions alongside and within to constantly recreate. My goal, then, is to be suggestive rather than conclusive or exhaustive. Because of Said's vision of Orientalism as a transhistorical process of authority-making, any study of a historically specific Orientalism begins in some respects *in media res* and remains inherently incomplete and limited in scope. That said, by exploring how two authors viewed the Orient through their descriptions of geography, landscapes, antiquities, barbarism, and ancient empire in quite different generic media, I hope this essay opens the door to more dynamic debates on Said's *Orientalism* in Italian Renaissance and premodern studies more generally.

The second caveat: this essay is not a demand for universal, uncritical acceptance of *Orientalism*.¹¹ In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said himself

9 In a 1438 letter to Florentine chancellor Leonardo Bruni, the Florentine humanist Poggio Bracciolini ridiculed Cyriac's knowledge of Greek and Latin: "In fact I laughed at first quite a bit that such a frivolous, tasteless and capricious man had stuck together so absurdly a pile of verbosity that neither the writer nor his reader could understand what he wrote, unless they wanted to guess: a lot of Greek mixed with Latin, words improperly used, bad Latin, awkward constructions, no sense, so that really they seem to be the unintelligible responses of Apollo or the words of the Sphinx, which no one but the Sibyl could understand" (Cyriac of Ancona 2015, 225–27).

10 Clines 2020.

11 Likewise, as Bill Ashcroft and Hussein Kadhim explain in their introduction to a collection of essays on Said (Ashcroft and Kadhim 2002), "we intend this collection to draw away from the myth of origins, the myth of Said's place at the beginning of post-colonial theory, for a more critical, searching, and, in the end, more

warned us against strict adherence to theorists. He believed, rightly, that such mimicry inevitably leads to divorcing the text “from the circumstances, the events, the physical senses that made it possible and render it intelligible as the result of human work.”¹² Scholars should desire to—I would even say must—debate *Orientalism*’s merits and how applicable its actual arguments are for early modern studies. As Bashir Abu-Manneh’s recent collection of sometimes highly critical essays reminds us, we can disagree on whether Said was correct. But we must first meet Said on his own terms.¹³

My goal in this essay, then, is twofold. First and foremost, this essay’s basic argument is that we must focus on what Said’s actual arguments were in *Orientalism* before we can proceed to endorse or dismantle them. While some premodernists have begun to take Said’s work more seriously, scholarship on Renaissance Italy, on humanism in particular, continues to ignore or actively reject *Orientalism* because of the ubiquitous misconception that Said argued that Orientalism is a discourse that only operates under East–West dichotomies that were established in the wake of Western colonialism and imperialism. This essay unpacks at length Said’s argument that Orientalism is a discourse of power and knowledge production by and for the West that tells us far more about the West’s view of the Orient than about the Orient itself.¹⁴ To this end, we must engage with the actual arguments of *Orientalism*, even if some disagree with them, if we are to best understand to what extent Renaissance humanists’ conceptualizations of the Orient fit within the long trajectory of Orientalism.

productive view of the value of his work to the various branches of post-colonial studies. ... This volume demonstrates the controversy surrounding his work as well as the different directions in which his work can be taken, the ways in which it can focus critical thinking about colonialism and power relations” (ix). For other critical engagements with Said, admittedly mostly positive, see Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 2001 and Bové 2000.

¹² Said 1983, 4.

¹³ Abu-Manneh 2018.

¹⁴ Said elaborated upon these points at length throughout *Orientalism*. In *Covering Islam* (1981, 154), Said provided a succinct explication of the relationship between knowledge and power in terms of interpretation: “All knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgment and interpretation. This is not to say that facts or data are nonexistent, but that facts get their importance from what is made of them in interpretation.” This final chapter of *Covering Islam* on the whole is essential reading for unpacking Orientalism as a field of knowledge and interpretation.

Second, it is essential to recognize the place of Renaissance humanism in the intellectual genealogy of Western humanism from antiquity onward that eventually worked in the service of the discourse of modern-day colonialism and imperialism.¹⁵ I know that this will cause accusations of anachronism, decontextualization, or positivist teleology. However, as Jeffrey Cohen has argued, such an “exclusionary model of temporality denies the possibility that traumas, exclusions, violences enacted centuries ago might still linger in contemporary identity formations; it also closes off the possibility that this past could be multiple and valuable enough to contain (and be contained within) alternative presents and futures.”¹⁶ I am not advocating for a decontextualization or a direct causal line from antiquity to the present. Nor should we retroactively condemn humanists for later events they could not have foreseen. But to study the past solely as the past rather than as a building block of later historical developments limits it to fetishized antiquarianism. Besides, by engaging with these sources in this way, I hope to enrich our understanding of them, not diminish their aesthetic value.¹⁷

My second objective—what we might call a postcolonial reading of Renaissance humanism—will remain ancillary to the first goal of repositioning Said as a crucial thinker for understanding the Renaissance.¹⁸ But these goals work in tandem. We should, I think, see Cyriac, Biondo, writers to whom I will refer, and many others beyond the scope of this essay as windows into the ways in which the world that Said posited over forty years ago has a much longer

15 I use the term genealogy specifically in the way in which Said saw Orientalism as a transhistorical process grounded in ever-contingent yet ever-evolving power relations from antiquity to the present. In particular, these discourses of power, language, and truth built upon one another over time and were continually reaffirmed by the existence of previous discourses of power, language, and truth. By this definition, I believe we can speak of Orientalism as a genealogy of knowledge. Said built on this concept from Foucault, a major influence on his work, who elaborated further via the concept of power/knowledge from Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*. See Foucault 1980; Nietzsche 2007. Cf. also Spanos 2009, especially 70–110.

16 Cohen 2000, 3.

17 This was Said's goal, despite criticisms that he was anti-Western in *Orientalism*. He made this point in *Culture and Imperialism*: “The novels and other books I consider here I analyze because first of all I find them estimable and admirable works of art and learning, in which I and many other readers take pleasure and from which we derive profit. Second, the challenge is to connect them not only with that pleasure and profit but also with the imperial process of which they were manifestly and unconcealedly a part; rather than condemning or ignoring their participation in what was an unquestioned reality in their societies, I suggest that what we learn about this hitherto ignored aspect actually and truly enhances our reading and understanding of them” (Said 1993, xiv).

18 Chakrabarty 2000; Cohen 2000; Holsinger 2002; Kabir and Williams 2005; Raman 2011.

history than scholars of Renaissance Italy have been willing to acknowledge. In turn, if we are to succeed in what Ariella Aïsha Azoulay calls unlearning imperialism by building potential histories, we must continue to consider the role that Western humanism, Renaissance humanism included, has played in the construction of cultural difference and hierarchies of power.¹⁹

Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* in Early Modern Historiography

Recent work on Renaissance humanism and its connections to the Eastern Mediterranean has moved our scholarly knowledge beyond previous generations of insularity. That said, the continued rejection of Said's *Orientalism* limits this important progress. In some cases, scholars have ignored Said completely.²⁰ Others have relegated him to a footnote.²¹ More often, scholars deliberately mention Said, only to reject him. Nancy Bisaha explained in *Creating East and West* (2004) that “[w]here Said focuses on colonialism as a key component in the formation of the West–East discourse, the bulk of humanist rhetoric on the Turks and Islam shows a highly developed sense of Europe as the cultural superior to the East—precisely at a time when Europe was fighting for its survival”; moreover, “just as it fails to address more open-minded views of a large number of Orientalists, it does not help explain expressions

¹⁹ Azoulay 2019.

²⁰ Soykut 2001, an insightful exploration of Italian preoccupations with the Ottoman Turks, makes no mention of Said or *Orientalism*. In his seminal article on Renaissance crusader rhetoric, James Hankins (1995) does not cite Said.

²¹ In *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, James Hankins (2000, 131) places Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* at the end of a footnote, noting that very little has been done regarding mythmaking “within the field of textual criticism and the study of humanism,” but makes no mention of how Orientalism or the entanglement of empire-making and culture-creation could have impacted civic humanism.

One potential exception to this is Moudarres 2019, especially chapters one, three, and four, on Dante, Ariosto, and Tasso, respectively. Like Hankins, Moudarres refers to *Orientalism* at the end of a footnote in chapter two, on *Inferno* 28. While Moudarres relegates Said to a footnote here, *The Enemy in Renaissance Epic* argues that the construction of the enemy, Muslims in three of four chapters, is grounded in a long-standing concept of cosmopolitanism informed by ancient stoicism. Such a notion, Moudarres argues, always positions the enemy within what Said called “Western geographical, historical, and above all, moral apprehension” (Said 1994, 69). This passage comes from the very pages of *Orientalism* that Moudarres cites (Said 1994, 69–70), so I am curious to what extent Said informed Moudarres's readings of hostility and the enemy in Renaissance epic.

of relativism among a handful of humanists.”²² In *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought* (2008), Margaret Meserve argued that, “detecting an Orientalist discourse in the early Renaissance is more problematic, for the very basic reason that there was no one Oriental ‘other’ in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.”²³ In the introduction to *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye* (2011), James Harper accused scholars of having “carelessly categorized as ‘Orientalist’” early modern depictions of Islam, given that *Orientalism*’s evidentiary base is from the modern period.²⁴ Sean Roberts posited in *Printing a Mediterranean World* (2013) that the lack of a stable understanding of the Orient in Renaissance geography renders Said’s concept of Orientalism unhelpful.²⁵ In *The World beyond Europe in the Romance Epics of Boiardo and Ariosto* (2013), Jo Ann Cavallo claimed that her “study is outside the scope of Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism in its stricter sense since the two poems under consideration are not products of colonial-minded imperialist systems.”²⁶ Finally, in *The Venetian Discovery of America* (2018), Elizabeth Horodowich argued that Venetians failed to develop a firm concept of alterity regarding the New World, “as Edward Said’s canonical reading of European colonialism would suggest they should have.”²⁷

In essence, scholars of Renaissance Italy acknowledge Said’s impact on how we perceive notions of difference in the modern world. Yet, they ulti-

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- 22 Bisaha 2004, 6. Bisaha (2001) makes a similar claim regarding the inutility of Said when discussing Petrarch’s view of Islam.
- 23 Meserve 2008, 10–11. See Trivellato 2010, 141–45, for a close comparison and critique of Bisaha 2004 and Meserve 2008.
- 24 Harper 2011, 1–2. In a previous piece (Harper 2005, 172), Harper explained that although “it is true that some aspects of the European curiosity about the Turks fit the traditional models of exoticism or Orientalism, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europeans were by no means assured of their dominance of the world. On the contrary, this period was defined by the anxiety of being colonized by a powerful enemy Other.”
- 25 Roberts 2013, 148.
- 26 Cavallo 2013, 17. Cavallo’s turn of phrase regarding “colonial-minded imperialist systems” reminded one of the blind reviewers of this essay—and me once it was pointed out—of German scholarly Orientalism, which reached its apotheosis with German unification and movement toward imperialist and colonial endeavors in Europe and Africa, all of which, quite controversially, Said omitted in *Orientalism*. Cf. Jenkins 2004; Woköck 2009; Germana 2010. For his part, Said believed that such criticisms were unwarranted: “Other observations, like my exclusion of German Orientalism, which no one has given any reason for me to have included, have frankly struck me as superficial, and there seems no point in responding to them” (Said 1985, 1).
- 27 Horodowich 2018, 215.

mately decide that *Orientalism* is not relevant to the Italian Renaissance because they see the book as a close critical analysis of modern imperialism.

However, I believe this is a flawed interpretation not just of when Said argued *Orientalism* began or what *Orientalism* is, but of the very goals of *Orientalism* itself. Within his own lifetime, Said was no stranger to criticism of *Orientalism*'s scope and core arguments, to say nothing of accusations that he was anti-Western. In "East Isn't East," an edited form of the Afterword to the 1994 Vintage reprinting of *Orientalism* that appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1995, Said himself found odd critiques of *Orientalism* as a work that pinpoints exactly what the Orient is, when *Orientalism* began, and how it related to Western imperialism—the very critiques scholars of the Renaissance have made: "One scarcely knows what to make of these caricatural permutations of a book that to its author and in its arguments is explicitly anti-essentialist, radically skeptical about all categorical designations such as 'Orient' and 'Occident', and painstakingly careful about not 'defending' or even discussing the Orient and Islam."²⁸

This was not the first time that Said attempted to explain that *Orientalism* is not one thing, stable, or a modern phenomenon. In "*Orientalism* Reconsidered," Said defined *Orientalism* as follows:

first, the changing historical and cultural relationship between Europe and Asia, a relationship with a 4,000-year-old history; second, the scientific discipline in the West according to which, beginning in the early nineteenth century, one specialized in the study of various Oriental cultures and traditions; and third, the ideological suppositions, images, and fantasies about a region of the world called the Orient. The common denominator among these three aspects of *Orientalism* is the line separating Occident from Orient, and this, I have argued, is less a fact of nature than it is a fact of human production, which I have called imaginative geography.²⁹

In sum, Said underscored the historically constructed and contingent nature of *Orientalism*. He emphasized the dangers of trying to be too specific—or, to borrow Cavallo's term, too "strict"—with *Orientalism*. *Orientalist* constructions are often negative, sometimes positive, but always constructions.³⁰

28 Said 1995, 3.

29 Said 1985, 2.

30 This is in fact the crux of the argument of Said's *Culture and Imperialism*. It is elaborated upon at length in Bhabha 1994 as well, especially concepts like hybridity and ambivalence.

This plurality of Orientalism has not been completely lost on premodernists. Kathleen Biddick, for example, engaged with Said in her essay on 20th-century Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk's *New Life*, a novelistic reinterpretation of Dante's *Vita Nuova*. On one hand, Biddick argued that Said's incomplete discussion of temporality and historiography often "paradoxically produces the Middle Ages as a medievalism, that is, a fantastic origin that sets in motion a progressive history."³¹ On the other hand, Biddick contended that medievalists have failed to see how Said's "own complicated and changing relations to Orientalist critique and exile offer an invitation to medievalists to come out of disciplinary exile and to engage complex temporalities of postcolonial histories."³² In response, scholars such as Megan Moore and George Demacopoulos have performed postcolonial readings of East–West contacts in the Middle Ages, engaging specifically with writers such as Said, Homi Bhabha, and others.³³

In early modern studies, there are numerous works published since 1995 that see *Orientalism* as a useful heuristic text for understanding the period.³⁴ In *Things of Darkness* (1995), Kim F. Hall described the Song of Songs in the English Renaissance as "a guide for articulating the European's sense of what Edward Said has called Orientalism," because "The Song gives biblical authority for the political reality Said outlines, and provides for the reading of cultural difference through gender."³⁵ Following Hall, Daniel Vitkus maintained that "orientalist discourse described by Edward Said was not 'born' with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798: it began to emerge in an era when the European relationship to the Orient was not yet one of colonial dominance—when, in fact, that relationship was one of anxiety and awe on the part of the Europeans."³⁶ This has allowed Ania Loomba to suggest that Said's

31 Biddick 2000, 36.

32 Biddick 2000, 46.

33 Moore 2014; Demacopoulos 2019.

34 This literature is extensive; here are select works: Blanks and Frassetto 1999; Longino 2002; MacDonald 2002; Vitkus 2003; McLannet 2006; Andrea 2007; MacLean 2007; Ganim 2008; McCabe 2008; Dew 2009; Smith 2009; Johanyak and Lim 2010; Kalmar 2012; Salama 2013; Ingram 2015; Dimmock 2017.

35 Hall 1995, 110. Hall also argued that Blackness "is invariably accompanied by a vocabulary similar to what Edward Said terms the representative figures or tropes of orientalist discourse" (138).

36 Vitkus 1999, 209–10. Vitkus referred to the often cited but clearly misunderstood passage from *Orientalism*, which Vitkus mentions on 227 n. 3: "Quite literally, the [French] occupation [of Egypt in 1798] gave birth to the entire modern experience of the Orient as interpreted from within the universe of discourse founded

insights have sharpened our focus on how “Europe’s self-definition as the most superior civilization of the world depended in part upon the construction of an ‘Orient’ different from itself, as an irrational, backward, lazy, sensuous, and deviant region.”³⁷ This longstanding process of creating the Orient over time, Mariana D. Birnbaum argued, renders it “safe to claim that the prejudices expressed in the works of antiquity informed the writings of Renaissance humanists,” and that “this—secondhand—humanist vision of the East created an image of the Orient that survived and flourished, without much change, well into our own times.”³⁸

More recently, Marcus Keller and Javier Irigoyen-García’s *The Dialectics of Orientalism in Early Modern Europe* (2017) presents *Orientalism* as a vehicle for understanding the plurality of cultural difference. Keller and Irigoyen-García suggested that “Said’s most fervent critics must contend, one way or another, with his main thesis that Western discourse about the Orient has been more than anything else about the formulation of an Occident, no less imaginary.” This is an important point, as this volume aims to rectify the longstanding historiographical reality that “early modernists first ignored, and then treated with scant, often disapproving attention” Said’s work.³⁹ True, Said did give little attention to the early modern period. But rather than see this as a reason to reject Said, the volume presents *Orientalism* “as an opportunity to think along the lines of its major propositions and develop them to make them productive for the understanding of early modern Orientalism in all its complexity.”⁴⁰

After discussing works that have engaged with Said only to reject him, some of which I have mentioned above, Keller and Irigoyen-García argued that “early modern Orientalism not only exists but is also a historically distinct

by Napoleon in Egypt ...’ (87).” Said clearly meant the *modern* experience with the Orient, not the birth of Orientalism. Such an improper reading leads to the incorrect assumption that (1) there was no discourse of the Orient before Napoleon and (2) that such discourses necessitated actual European superiority in the form of military dominance, settler-colonialism, and economic exploitation in the form of modern imperialism, capitalism, or neoliberalism. Urs App (2010) partly agrees with Vitkus, placing the origins of Orientalism before Napoleon, but only in the 18th century.

37 Loomba 2002, 9.

38 Birnbaum 2006, 380.

39 Keller and Irigoyen-García 2017, 1.

40 Keller and Irigoyen-García 2017, 2.

chapter that is characterized by rhetorical multiplicity and a dialectic quality.”⁴¹ In turn:

In this dynamic, neither the West nor the East remain stable constructs as they relate, directly or indirectly, to the third term that is developed through their opposition. Dialectics aptly signifies the openness of early modern Orientalism as a thought process and mode of representation, as well as the fluidity of key terms such as “we,” “Turks,” or “Mohammedanism,” to quote examples just in English. For the conceptualization of early modern Orientalism, furthermore, dialectics has the advantage that it expresses a practice that is more complex than simple allegorization.⁴²

Dialectics of Orientalism not only argues that Orientalism existed in the early modern period, but that it exists *beyond* the early modern period: it varied widely, was not uniform, and was not simply about clear-cut dichotomies between East and West. It served to formulate the Western Self through contingent, ambiguous, even contradictory constructions of the Oriental Other.

This gets at the crux of *Orientalism*’s central arguments. Orientalism operates as a discourse that allows the West to deal with its centuries-long obsession with the Orient, including ultimate control of it. But we must reject at all costs the view that Orientalism is a synecdoche for imperialism, that Western imperialism was inevitable, or that there is a totalized “The West” that constructs a totalized “The East.” While these have often been common misconceptions among readers of Said, *Orientalism* was never meant to be an objective study of modern imperialism. It is a polemical book.⁴³ It cuts across a number of disciplines at will with little to say about historiography—one of my frequent frustrations with the book.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, readers often approach

41 Keller and Irigoyen-García 2017, 4–5.

42 Keller and Irigoyen-García 2017, 6.

43 If this wasn’t clear in the book itself, Said made this explicit in the 1994 Afterword: “Yet among American and British academics of a decidedly rigorous and unyielding stripe, *Orientalism*, and indeed all of my other work, has come in for disapproving attacks because of its ‘residual’ humanism, its theoretical inconsistencies, its insufficient, perhaps even sentimental, treatment of agency. I am glad that it has! *Orientalism* is a partisan book, not a theoretical machine” (Said 1994, 339).

44 That said, I do not agree that the book is ahistorical. Ahistoricity and transhistoricity are very different concepts. Said stressed the importance of historical context, even if this was not always made explicit in *Orientalism*. In *Culture and Imperialism*, he explained, “I do not believe that authors are mechanically determined by ideology, class, or economic history, but authors are, I also believe, very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure.

Orientalism from a disciplinary perspective, if at all, or they read it in a rather piecemeal fashion. In turn, premodernists often reject it out of hand. Doing so, however, misses the point of *Orientalism* as constructed, fluid, and dialectical. This has compelled other scholars to recognize the implications of Said's work for premodern studies that Keller and Irigoyen-García had outlined. Amber-reen Dadabhoy and Nedda Mehdizadeh, for example, have organized a seminar at the 2021 meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America dedicated to Said's *Orientalism*.⁴⁵ And much of this turn has occurred in scholarship on premodern race, gender, and sexuality, such as the work of Hall and Loomba (mentioned above), Jyotsna Singh's *Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory* (2020),⁴⁶ and Abdulhamit Arvas's recent essays on homoerotics, *Orientalism*, and racialism in depictions of eunuchs.⁴⁷

At this point, I want to turn to Said's *Orientalism*. I'll explore the book's goals in tandem with close readings of Cyriac and Biondo to underscore what I think a manifestation of Renaissance *Orientalism* might look like. There are three aspects of Said's work that I want to unpack over the remainder of the essay via Cyriac and Biondo: Said's definitions of *Orientalism*, his concept of imaginative geography, and differences he saw between latent and manifest *Orientalism*. I want to reiterate that this should also be treated as a critical entry into *Orientalism*'s actual arguments, rather than an uncritical approval of them. Likewise, my focus on geography is as incomplete as it is suggestive, a manifestation of *Orientalism* rather than its cause or its main defining characteristic.

Culture and the aesthetic forms it contains derive from historical experience, which in effect is one of the main subjects of this book. As I discovered in writing *Orientalism*, you cannot grasp historical experience by lists or catalogues, and no matter how much you provide by way of coverage, some books, articles, authors, and ideas are going to be left out" (Said 1993, xxii). Likewise, in the 1994 Afterword to *Orientalism*, Said explained that "The central point in all this is, however, as Vico taught us, that human history is made by human beings. Since the struggle for control over territory is a part of that history, so too is the struggle over historical and social meaning" (Said 1994, 331).

45 Shakespeare Association of America 2020.

46 Singh 2020, 94–99.

47 Arvas 2019 and 2020. Cf. Boone 2014.

Said's *Orientalism* and Renaissance Orientalism

Misconceptions regarding what constitutes Orientalism, I must admit, are understandable. Said's enumeration of Orientalism's various facets can easily lead one to think that it is a modern phenomenon, especially given his overwhelming focus on the period after Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. But a close reading of Said's definitions of Orientalism illustrates that this is not the case. First:

I shall be calling *Orientalism* a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.⁴⁸

The emphasis on colonialism might suggest that at Orientalism's core with causal affect is the West's invasion, possession, and domination of the modern Orient. Yet, what comes across as well is Orientalism's looseness. The further one reads into *Orientalism*, modern conquest, colonization, and imperialism become not only less important, but never actually necessary. In fact, even in the above passage, colonialism is qualified by *even*. This looseness continues in a second facet of Orientalism, defined as:

a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on. *This* Orientalism can accommodate Aeschylus, say, and Victor Hugo, Dante and Karl Marx.⁴⁹

48 Said 1994, 1–2. In this essay, I use the 1994 Vintage reprint that includes Said's new Afterword, with its reflections on *Orientalism* 15 years after its first publication.

49 Said 1994, 2–3.

The Greek tragedian Aeschylus and the Florentine poet Dante Alighieri are important indicators that Said never argued for Orientalism as a modern phenomenon. Whether it's Aeschylus's application of Greek *hubris* to Xerxes in *Persians* or Dante's placement of Averroes in Limbo and Muhammad with the other sowers of discord in *Inferno* 28, both transmuted their own values onto an imagined Orient to depict it as what is not Occident: Persia's failure and Xerxes's defeat at Salamis do not reflect Persianness, but bad-Greekness;⁵⁰ Averroes is not condemned to torture (though he is not saved either) because of his transmission of Aristotle to Christian Europe, and Muhammad is treated as a schismatic foil to a salvific Christ.⁵¹

In fairness to Said's critics, his exemplars for his larger points are almost exclusively modern; when he does discuss premodernity, he does so eclectically and in broad strokes—this personally disheartens me. But Said admitted that studying Orientalism in its historical totality would have meant “there would be virtually no limit to the material I would have to deal with”; but because such a project “did not suit my descriptive and political interests,” he opted to stick to the modern period.⁵² Yet, this should not prevent us from recognizing the larger implications of *Orientalism*. While recent scholarship on the Mediterranean has problematized Braudel's vision of transhistorical unity, that has not been resoundingly rejected.⁵³ Instead, scholars emphasize both individual historical epochs and variations while still tackling the region's overarching structures. In this sense, Said argued for an Orientalism that has contributed to the *longue durée* production of the Orient in Western discourse. This allows for an understanding of how Renaissance Italians viewed the Orient, grappled with Ottoman power, and understood their relationship with the East. Such a historically specific yet structurally broad vision of Orientalism reflects Francesca Trivellato's explanation that Said “leaves the door open

50 Greek views of the Other as not just different but inversions of Greekness have long been central to the study of alterity in ancient Greek studies. See Hengel 1980; Long 1986; Hartog 1988; Hall 1989; Cartledge 1993; Georges 1994; Dench 1995; Hall 1997; Miller 1997; Champion 2000; Malkin 2001; Harrison 2002; Champion 2004.

51 *Inferno* 4.144; Muhammad is mentioned in *Inferno* 28 among the sowers of discord, reflecting the prevailing medieval belief that Islam was a schismatic, deviated form of true religion rather than wholly independent faith. See Cisneros 2001 and Stone 2006 for more on Dante and Islam.

52 Said 1994, 16.

53 Braudel 1972; Horden and Purcell 2000; Grove and Rackham 2001; Harris 2004; Horden and Purcell 2006; Fusaro et al. 2010; Ruiz et al. 2010; Horden and Kinoshita 2014; Catlos and Kinoshita 2017.

to turning the Orientalist discourse into a metahistorical category of Western thought, with its infancy in classical Greece, its adolescence in the times of Dante and humanism, and its maturity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”⁵⁴

For example, in Cyriac of Ancona’s description of Cyzicus, a city on the Anatolian coast of the Sea of Marmara, he believed that it lay in ruins because of Ottoman destruction.⁵⁵ In Cyriac’s first visit, in 1431, his biographer, Francesco Scalamonti, explained that, “on the score both of the respect due to antiquity and of the good reputation of the Sultan himself, lest all trace of the building be lost to posterity, he persuaded [the Sultan’s governor] Canuza Bey to forbid any further destruction of the still-standing walls, columns, and architraves of this spectacular monument. Canuza Bey had the learning to appreciate this argument and readily promised to do what Cyriac advised.”⁵⁶ Much as Dante praised Averroes for his intellectual gifts to the West, Cyriac too presented both the Sultan and Canuza Bey as virtuous Muslims who transcend their barbarity by valuing the temple. But note, however, that it is only because Cyriac persuaded Canuza Bey to act. The educated Italian antiquarian instructs the Barbarous Turk in matters of antiquities, and their preservation is the result of Cyriac’s intervention; while the Turk might be teachable, it is only through Western instruction that he values Western artifacts—his humanity remains contingent upon his ability to engage in Western humanism.

Confirming for Cyriac that Ottomans only defend antiquities because of Western intervention was his return to Cyzicus in 1444:

But alas! How unsightly a structure we returned to, compared to the one we inspected fourteen years ago! For then we saw thirty-one surviving columns standing erect, whereas now I find that [only] twenty-nine columns remain, some shorn of their architraves. And the famous walls, almost all of which were [then] intact, now in great part lie ruined and dashed to the ground, evidently by the barbarians. On the other hand, those exceptional, glorious marble figures of the

54 Trivellato 2010, 134.

55 For more on Cyriac and the Temple of Cyzicus, see Ashmole 1956.

56 Cyriac of Ancona 2015, 76–79: “Cui Kyriacus, cum ex eiusdem templi ruinis pleraque elaborata marmorea apud Montaneam, maritimum Prusiae civitatis emporium, ad nova in urbe aedificia instruenda deducta videsset, ne tantae aedis vestigium psteris penitus aboleri videretur, persausit ne deinceps permitteret ut aliquid ex parietibus, columnis et epistiliis extantibus tanti nostram ad diem spectaculi dirrueretur, cum ob venerandae antiquitatis pudorem tum et sui magnique Theucrorum principis honorem. Quae cum vir ille doctus intellexisset dignissima verba, id se lubens facturum promisit.”

gods on the [temple's] outstanding, wondrous façade, remain unharmed in their nearly pristine glory, thanks to the protection of almighty Jove himself and the patronage of his exalted majesty.⁵⁷

In his diary, Cyriac wrote that “But when I had seen the city everywhere in ruins and had recognized that, day by day, it had been utterly ruined by the barbarians, I grieved; and I felt that human princes must also be made aware of those who are inflicting devastation on the human race. And I exclaimed ‘O divine Caesar Augustus, restorer of the cities of Asia!’”⁵⁸ Cyriac’s declaration that barbarians caused the ruin of Cyzicus alongside the note that God alone had protected them and the call for “human princes” to defend the “human race” illustrates his belief that the Orient would ultimately revert to inhumanity and destroy ancient monuments.

Part of the problem for Cyriac is that he had “learned” more about the Ottomans. Whereas he previously saw them as potentially civilizable through instruction, he soon came to see them as indelibly Other. In a letter written 22 May 1444, Cyriac described the exoticism and gluttonous cupidity of Sultan Murad II’s court. Cyriac witnessed a lavish feast that, while probably no more opulent than what might have taken place in Rome, was the antithesis of civilized Roman decorum. It was attended by “a great throng of magnificently exotic courtiers and the king, seated on carpets strewn in the usual manner, with his leading men and distinguished princes, and beside his son Çelebi, in the splendid manner of exotic royalty.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, “servants brought to the king and his barbarian [courtiers] luxurious dishes of food in polished vessels [set] on this side and that; soon, though, cups drained and

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- 57 Cyriac of Ancona 2003, 72–75: “Sed heu! quantum ab illo deformem revisimus, quod antea bis septem iam annis exactis perspeximus; nam tunc XXX et unam columnas erectas vidimus extare, nunc vero unam de XXX manere et partim epistilii destitutas cognovi. Sed et quae integrae fere omnes inclitae parietes extabant, nunc a barbaris magna quidem ex parte diminutae soloque collapsae videntur. Sed enim insigni suo et mirabili in frontispicio eximia deum et praeclarissima illa de marmore simulacra Jove ipso optimo protectore suaeque eximiae celsitudinis patrocinio inlaesa tutantur et intacta suo fere prisco splendore manent.”
- 58 Cyriac of Ancona 2003, 76–77: “At cum civitatem undique collapsam aspexissem, et in dies a barbaris omni ex parte pessundatum iri cognovissem, indolui; et humani generis calamitatem inferentes ab humanis quoque principibus animadvertendum duxi, et ō civitatum Asiae restitutorem divum Augustum Caesarem exclamavi.”
- 59 Cyriac of Ancona 2003, 34–35: “... amplissimae aulae regia patente porta, ingenti splendore et apparatu frequentissima hinc inde suorum barbarica spectatione praestante regeque, stratis de more tapetis, primis cum et eximiis principibus suis iuxtaque Cialaby filio, splendore regio et barbarico more sedente.”

food devoured, the throng left the hall.”⁶⁰ In the English translation, *barbarica* and *barbarico* are translated as exotic and barbarian, respectively. While the two might not necessarily seem interchangeable to the modern ear, *barbarus* and its derivations can mean foreign, exotic, even outlandish and extravagant, in addition to barbarian/barbaric; the word would have possessed all these meanings to Cyriac’s reader, his friend Andreolo Giustiniani. In essence, one would have imagined a raucous, uncivilized court gorging itself on lavish meals and barrels of wine—reflective of longstanding depictions of Eastern exoticism and moral turpitude.⁶¹ Such debauchery reflects perhaps not what Cyriac witnessed, but the anxieties about a timeless Oriental despotic opulence and barbarous depravity that would have had currency with a European audience. By depicting the Ottoman sultan and his courtiers—men who were believed to be driven by the ultimate desire to destroy the West—as a luxurious, exotic, barbaric, devouring “throng” (*multitudine*), they become decidedly and timelessly what was not Europe.⁶²

Cyriac’s reflections here echo Said’s point that the Orient was “an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West.”⁶³ Said stressed that “Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a ‘real’ Orient.”⁶⁴ In this sense, Cyriac’s depiction of antiquities destroyed by capricious barbarians reflects that Orientalism is “historically and materially defined”; it is presented in a vocabulary that would have resonated with Cyriac’s audience, both in terms of what they valued—ancient ruins—and what they feared, namely Ottoman encroachments.⁶⁵

60 Cyriac of Ancona 2003, 34–37: “Et denique ministri delicata fercula regi barbarisque suis ex politis hinc inde vasis detulere, mox vero, libatis poculus epulisve obesis, multitudines ex aula concessere.”

61 Cyriac of Ancona 2003, 37. This letter’s tone also confirms that Cyriac was not one of Murad’s mythic entourage of Western scholars. See Babinger 1962, 321–23; Raby 1980, 242–46.

62 Said 1994, 1–2.

63 Said 1994, 5. Said elaborated on modern Western media and its creation of Islam as a unified cultural bloc in his 1981 book, *Covering Islam*.

64 Said 1994, 5.

65 Said 1994, 3.

Such a vocabulary also pervades the writings of Biondo Flavio.⁶⁶ Biondo investigated the state of ruins and how at the root of their deterioration was barbarism, decadence, ineptitude, laziness, and greed—all of which existed in Italy and in the Orient, a reminder of Orientalism's dialectical, fluid quality—that needed to be overcome. This is most apparent in the dedicatory letter to Pope Pius II in *Roma Triumphans*, an encyclopedic work on ancient Rome's myriad social and political institutions that Biondo hoped would serve as a model for his contemporaries. It also underscores his belief that decadence needed to be purged from Rome itself before victories over the Ottomans could take place.

This dialectic between Ottoman barbarism and European moral failures is especially important to bear in mind given that *Roma Triumphans* was written amid Pius's failed attempts to organize a crusade in Mantua in 1459.⁶⁷ Pius ultimately failed not because of a collective lack of concern for the rise of the Ottomans. European princes saw its import, but they couldn't be bothered for mostly self-serving reasons.⁶⁸ Pius's failure to launch a crusade did not stop the pontiff from pursuing further military ventures or depicting the Ottomans as the descendants of ancient Scythians. It also didn't stop him from penning his peculiar *Epistola ad Mahometem II*, which implored the sultan to convert to Christianity based on the erroneous belief that Mehmed had been Christian as well as the widespread, incorrect, and deeply Orientalist view of Islam as a schismatic offshoot of Nestorianism.⁶⁹

Nor did Mantua's failure prevent Biondo from stressing unity against the Ottomans. *Roma Triumphans* presents Rome's greatness as the product of its various peoples' love for Rome. It argues that Rome's institutions should serve as a model for the restoration of Roman culture, including the defeat of barbarians. In essence, Biondo outlined what Renaissance Rome would look like once it was restored to its ancient glory, and triumphs—celebratory parades held in Rome after victories—could again be conducted through

66 See Mazzocco and Laureys 2016 for a recent study of Biondo and his intellectual milieu; Biondo knew Cyriac and praised him in his *Italia Illustrata* for his investigations of monuments. Biondo 2005, 260–61.

67 Marcellino (2014) makes a similar point regarding Biondo's predilection for focusing on ruins and the Ottomans in tandem.

68 White 2014, 144.

69 White 2014, 147.

Rome's ancient core.⁷⁰ As Biondo explained to Pius in the dedication, ancient Rome—the city, the empire, the idea—should be an exemplar in the war against the Ottomans:

Confidently trusting in this, I shall not fear to publish a work that in my opinion will be of benefit to many at this time. In it the mighty peoples of Italy, France, Spain and Germany whom you have roused to join in the great and glorious expedition that you are preparing against the Turks, cruel and tyrannical oppressors of Greece, Constantinople and the Moesias, will learn of deeds performed in early times in other places in similarly difficult circumstances, so that imitation of the prowess of the ancients is itself another factor likely to stimulate all noble spirits eagerly to undertake the enterprise. You, meanwhile, while you read again and again of the triumphs of the ancient city of Rome, will anticipate the splendid triumph that our God in his goodness and piety will give you, Pius, first of all for the destruction and annihilation of the Turks' power and the liberation of Europe, after that the liberation of Jerusalem and the Holy Land adjoining it, a triumph that shortly, I confidently predict, must be held with the utmost praise and glory of all.⁷¹

The work—which modernized and Christianized triumphal processions through Rome's ancient urban core, now the core of a new Renaissance capital of a universal church—functioned to emphasize Western European unity against the Ottomans.

Such unity under Pius in the name of defeating the Ottomans that matched Biondo's rhetoric never emerged—in fact, Pius died in 1464 in Ancona as he waited in futility for troops and a Venetian armada to materialize. Nevertheless, *Roma Triumphans* entangled interests in Roman ruins, the humanist appropriation and revival of ancient cultural models, and anxieties concerning Ottoman ascendancy. Italian humanists' own works that coincided with preoccupations with Islam, the Ottomans, crusade, and so

70 On the Roman triumph in antiquity, see Beard 2009; Östenberg 2010; Östenberg et al. 2016. On Biondo's *Roma Triumphans* and its historiographical legacy, which is far beyond the scope of this essay, see Muecke 2011; Muecke 2012; Marcellino 2014; Mazzocco 2017; Muecke and Campanelli 2017. On the triumph's legacy in later periods, within Italy and beyond, see Baldwin 1990; Miller 2001.

71 Biondo 2016, 2–5: “Qua fretus confidentia non verebor facere editionem multis hoc tempore, ut mea fert opinio, profuturam. Exciti enim a te ingentes Italiae, Galliarum, Hispaniarum et Germaniae populi in magnam praeclaramque expeditionem quam paras in Turchos, Graeciam, Constantinopolim, Moesiasque dura et crudeli tyrannide prementes, nonnulla in ipso opera edocebuntur, aliquando alias simili in rerum difficultate gesta, ut ipsa priscorum virtutis imitatio generosi quibusque animi sit ad rem capessendam stimulos additura. Tuque inerea, dum pirscae urbis Romae triumphos lectitabis, clarissimum, quem Pio tibi optimus pientissimusque Deus noster ex deletis inanitis Turchorum opibus, ex libertataque primum omnium Europa post Hierosolima et terra illi adiacente sancta datarus est, triumphum expectabis brevi, ut auguror et confido, com summo aplausu, summa omnium gloria ducendum.”

on—Petrarch’s references to Muslims as dogs trampling on the grave of Christ in *De vita solitaria* or his depiction of Sophonisba as an exotic temptress in his *Africa*; the participation of learned Greeks at the Council of Florence, called to complement a war against the Ottomans; Pope Pius II tracing the genealogy of the Ottomans, organizing wars, and trying to convert Sultan Mehmed; Ariosto’s and Tasso’s militarism and Islamophobia read against the political changes in Cinquecento Italy; the spate of encomia produced in the wake of the victory at Lepanto—all operate within the framework of seeing Islam as the cultural antithesis of Renaissance Italy. But, and this is what is most important, they are all built upon centuries of Western engagement with the East. Ancient and in some cases medieval models were chosen because, as Said argued, they were a part of the constant remaking of the Orient in Western historical consciousness since antiquity.

Regardless of whether one agrees with Said’s assessment here, this notion of Orientalism as both transcendent and historically specific is important to bear in mind when we remember that he did not argue for Orientalism as “representative and expressive of some nefarious ‘Western’ imperialist plot to hold down the ‘Oriental’ world.”⁷² Rather Orientalism is:

a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but as a whole series of “interests” which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world[.]⁷³

There are two points to emphasize. First, the stress Said placed on myriad texts points to one of the central ways Orientalism operated. Because humanists worked in numerous genres—poetry, epigraphy, epistolary, history, panegyric, to name just a few—their ideas were disseminated beyond learned circles; individuals thus created, incorporated, manipulated, and consumed “knowledge” of the Orient that worked in tandem with calls to restore antiqui-

⁷² Said 1994, 12.

⁷³ Said 1994, 12.

ty.⁷⁴ Second is Said's expression, all too frequently overlooked, "in some cases." Orientalism can work in tandem with desires for political control, as Pius and Biondo's calls for military intervention attest. But their failures by no means deny an Orientalist gaze; it can be as simple as Cyriac blaming the state of ancient statuary on "barbarians."

Likewise, the incorporation of knowledge need not be only about painting the Orient as either inferior or a threat to Europe that needs to be handled. Venice, for example, did not see itself as descended from Rome—they believed themselves to be descended from Trojans. Venice also put its commercial interests above all else, even if they did frequently promise to contribute to military expeditions.⁷⁵ Likewise, Lisa Jardine's discussion of Oriental goods that predominantly Venetian merchants brought to Europe or Deborah Howard's investigation of Eastern architecture in Venice reflect not antithetical, irreconcilable difference but rather Western desires to possess objects from the East.⁷⁶ Howard even calls this "architectural orientalism," with the caveat that Venice's view of the Orient was "a more receptive and respectful mentality than is revealed in most 'orientalist' discourses."⁷⁷ But even here, we see a Eurocentric creation of knowledge about the Orient via the consumption of its commodities and reification of its architectural motifs. The Renaissance Orient thus paradoxically destroys antiquities yet provides desirous novelties; it threatens the very existence of the West yet is the source of its riches; it must be destroyed yet remains a distant object of fascination and awe.

Such complexity and contradiction might appear as ambivalence or lack of a stable view of the East. However, that very ambivalence is for Said central to Orientalism as:

a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colo-

74 Ross 2016.

75 It should be noted that the Romans also believed themselves to be the descendants of Trojans. Venice's claim to Trojan roots was rooted in separating itself from Rome by forging an equally ancient lineage: Brown 1997; cf. Kallendorf 1999.

76 Jardine 1996; Howard 2000.

77 Howard 2000, 2–3.

nial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with ideas about what “we” do and what “they” cannot do or understand as “we” do).⁷⁸

Orientalism is therefore a Eurocentric fetishization of the Orient. It is a centuries-long discursive system of knowledge making in and for the West. This could operate via the wars that Biondo and Pius desired, but it also manifested itself in conspicuous consumption, Cyriac’s collocation of epigraphs across Greece via recordings and drawings, and Pius’s flawed belief that war could be avoided should Mehmed convert. All of this builds off previous Western discourses and creates new, historically defined modes of constructing the Orient as it was “experienced” in the Renaissance.

Thus, Orientalism is not the result of the successful conquest of land and concomitant imposition of settler-colonialism; it is an epistemological and ontological discourse of Othering that can be used to justify conquest, but only *in some cases*. So, for example, driving Eugenius IV’s 1443–4 Varna Crusade, for which Cyriac was a major advocate, was perceived Ottoman despotism in the Balkans. There is an implied Eurocentric view of the Ottomans as Other, as a powerful, tyrannical force, as usurpers to be reckoned with, resisted, fought, and defeated.⁷⁹ The war’s failure—like the failures of the Congress of Mantua or Cyriac’s and Biondo’s campaigns to rally support for Eugenius’s and Pius’s wars—has little bearing on whether the rhetoric surrounding it was Orientalist.

Renaissance Orientalism was thus a more complex discursive landscape regarding the representation of the Oriental Other: Venetian ogee windows and altanas are as much evidence of Renaissance Orientalism as are Francesco Filelfo’s inflated and mostly invented claims to possess unique knowledge of Ottoman geopolitics, culture, language, and military aims to earn himself patronage among Renaissance princes.⁸⁰ For this reason, when discussing geography as well as the exoticism, decadence, decay, moral depravity, despotism, etc., that writers described, we must bear in mind Said’s “principal methodological devices for studying authority” in *Orientalism*:

78 Said 1994, 12.

79 Tuleja 1949.

80 Meserve 2010.

strategic location, which is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about, and *strategic formation*, which is a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large.⁸¹

Strategy, a somewhat slippery term, is how Said aimed to “identify the problem every writer on the Orient has faced: how to get hold of it, how to approach it, how not to be defeated or overwhelmed by its sublimity, its scope, its awful dimensions.”⁸² Everyone who writes about the Orient “assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies. Additionally, each work on the Orient affiliates itself with other works, with audiences, with institutions, with the Orient itself.”⁸³

Said saw Orientalism, then, as centuries of engagements with and constructions of the East—positively, negatively, ambivalently—but always constructions. It is, as Said explained, the product of an “ensemble of relationships” between texts, audiences, and the Orient itself across genres, time, and space.⁸⁴ In the Renaissance—and for humanists who went to great lengths to establish themselves and their contemporaries as both the heirs of the ancients and as authorities on the Orient—this meant constructing an Orient that spoke to their anxieties, concerns, fascinations, fears, interests, and values. And this built upon previous strategies of fashioning authority regarding the Orient. It is only by understanding Orientalism as a *longue durée* discourse that we can approach how humanists like Cyriac and Biondo, as well as others, came to build their own framework for understanding the Orient. One facet of the Orient, to which I'll now turn, is geography and how lands that were once a part of the ancient oikumene were lost to Oriental barbarism.

81 Said 1994, 20.

82 Said 1994, 20.

83 Said 1994, 20.

84 Said 1994, 20.

Imaginative Geography and Humanist Visions of a Classical Mediterranean

In the second part of the first chapter of *Orientalism*, “Imaginative Geography and Its Representations: *Orientalizing the Oriental*,” Said wrote that, “Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma.”⁸⁵ This traumatic confrontation stamped the minds of Europeans, convincing some that a total defeat of Islam was their only recourse toward the full subjugation of the Orient. The rise of the Ottomans—what Said called “the Ottoman peril”—presented itself as a constant danger to European civilization and the continuation of centuries of the Orient serving as the West’s ultimate enemy. This had a longstanding presence in the medieval consciousness as well, as seen in the belief in a totalized, essentialized “Saracen.”⁸⁶ Likewise, early modern preoccupations with turning Turk, Muslim piracy, renegadism, and coerced conversion suggest that Islam was a major epistemological if not existential threat.⁸⁷ Orientalism, then, is not constitutive because it is always negative or because it is embedded in modern imperialism, but because it operates to construct the Orient according to how Europeans believe it existed. Sometimes this is positively, for example, the Orient as a marketplace of exotic goods; in other cases, it is as a land to be feared and thus destroyed before it destroys the West. *Orientalism* is instructive for understanding Italian Renaissance humanism, as the Orient possessed antiquities, historic cities, and other sites tied to Western understandings of its own cultural patrimony that predates Islam.

While traveling around the Ottoman Aegean in 1443, for example, Cyriac went to great lengths to map ancient sites given his desire to accurately record antiquities because of their currency in the minds of many of his contemporaries. Illuminating this are Nicaea and Chalcedon, two cities important not just for their antiquity and their monuments, but because of the early ecumenical councils held there. Moreover, having a Turkish guide lead him through thick forests and rough terrain in order to see to Nicaea and Chalce-

85 Said 1994, 59.

86 Heng 2018, 110–80.

87 Rostagno 1983; Benzoni 1985; Solá Castaño and Peña 1996; Scaraffia 2002; Vitkus 2003; Formica 2012; Variale 2014.

don intimates that these important Christian and Roman sites evoke ancient greatness lost to the Orient. At Nicaea, he noted “Greek inscriptions on the gate of Tiberius Claudius Germanicus and on the tower of Trajan, and he inspected other ancient monuments of the same quality as well as the great basilica where the celebrated ecumenical Council of Nicaea had met.”⁸⁸ Moving on from Nicaea, “[t]hen he pressed on day and night through forests and difficult country till he arrived at the ancient ruined Bithynian city of Chalcedon, destroyed by age, which is today known as Scutari, a trading port just opposite Byzantium.”⁸⁹

On one hand, we mustn’t forget that driving Cyriac’s desire to reconstruct historical sites was the collective belief among humanists and their patrons that the ancient Greek and Roman world was their cultural patrimony. On the other hand, Cyriac visited these cities soon after the short-lived union struck between the Western and Eastern Churches at the Council of Florence in 1439, where delegates discussed the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon, both of which had been accepted by the Western and Eastern Churches. Because of the eponymous councils, these two cities played a fundamental role in the development of the Christian Church, perceived to be under attack by Ottoman advances. In turn, Cyriac was cognizant of how they were integral to Christendom, Eugenius’s desires to advance papal supremacy, as well as the humanist revival and appropriation of ancient culture—in this case ancient and paleochristian Greece.

Moreover, the Council of Florence was supposed to lead to Western military efforts to rescue the Byzantine Empire. Cyriac’s descriptions of these Greek spaces coincided with the influx of Greek scholars in Italy: figures such as Georgios Gemistos Plethon and Basilios Bessarion, both of whom participated in the Council of Florence, reintroduced Plato and Greek learning more generally into Western Europe. A large-scale military coalition did not materialize and clerics in Greece rejected the Council of Florence. Yet, we see an entanglement of antiquarianism and humanist interests in Greek learning,

88 Cyriac of Ancona 2015, 80–81: “et cum ad ipsam paulo extra iter Nycaeam civitatem venisset, eam ad lacus Bythiniae ripas turritis cocto de latere moenibus sitan invenit, et ad portam TI. CLAVDI GERMANICI, ad turrim vero Traiani epigrammata Graeca comperuit, et talia per urbem egregia veterum monumenta conspexit, et magnam oecumenicae illius celleberimae synodi basilicam.”

89 Cyriac of Ancona 2015, 80–81: “Exinde die noctuque iter adcellerans per silvas et difficilia loca, ad Calcedoniam Bythiniae deletam vetustate maritimam urbem, vicinum Bizantii emporium quod hodie Scutorion dicitur ...”

religious concerns, and anxieties about Ottoman encroachments on Christian lands. And Cyriac's discussion of these cities reflects a larger concern regarding what these spaces represented (ancient Mediterranean cultural unity guided by Greece and Rome), what threatened them (Christian schism and the Ottomans/Islam), and what was necessary to restore them (contemporary Christian unity under papal authority).⁹⁰

Continuing on his journey along the Ionian coast of Anatolia, Cyriac went deeper into ancient history when he noted not only what he saw, but who was from these cities:

Next he came to the long-ruined city of Aeolian Cyme, the birthplace of Hesiod, which, as he learned, the local inhabitants call Chrysopolis; but finding nothing worth recording there, he proceeded to the ancient Ionian city of Smyrna, famous for its connection with the illustrious name of Homer; and indeed he found there on an ancient stone an inscription indicating that Homer was born there. Other evidences (*vestigia*) he saw of the antiquity of Smyrna were its splendid harbor and a very tall spiral column.⁹¹

While antiquities in Cyme and Smyrna were few and far between, the direct mention of Homer and Hesiod allowed Cyriac to mark them as historically and culturally Greek and therefore Western spaces. More important for Cyriac is that Hesiod and especially Homer were the founders of the Western epic tradition and were therefore the font of Western culture. An Orientalist consciousness, which Cyriac seems to be expressing here, “meant and means being aware, however dimly, that one belongs to a power with definite interests in the Orient, and more important, that one belongs to a part of the earth with a definite history of involvement in the Orient almost since the time of Homer.”⁹² In turn, everyone who writes about “the Orient (and this is true even of Homer) assumes some Oriental precedent ... each work on the Orient affiliates itself with other works, with audiences, with institutions, with the Orient

90 On the Council of Florence, the influx of Greek scholars, and potential war against the Ottomans, see Geanakoplos 1955; Gill 1961; Schmidt 1961; Monfasani 2002; Monfasani 2016.

91 Cyriac of Ancona 2015, 82–83: “Exinde se ad Aeoliam Cumem, antiquissimam Hesiodi patriam et longi temporis labe collapsam civitatem, adierat. Hodie et ab incolis Chrysopolim vocitatam audierat; et cum ibi nil notatione dignum vidisset, Ioniam venit et Smyrnas antiquam eiusdem regionis urbem et Homeri praeclari nominis insignem vidit. Homeri patriam fuisse significabat, ubi pleraque suae vetustatis vestigia, portum insignem, et cocleam altissimam columnam inspexit.”

92 Said 1994, 11.

itself.”⁹³ By linking these towns to their most famous sons—who just so happen to be the founders of Western literature—Cyriac designated them as Western spaces because they birthed Hesiod and Homer, who for many humanists stood at the beginning of Western cultural ascendancy.

The result is that Cyriac used the ecumenical councils and Homer’s and Hesiod’s hometowns to delineate what constitutes an Occident and an Orient despite geopolitical realities. Boundaries, no matter how real they might appear to their viewers, are constructed. As Palmira Brummett has illustrated, European mapping of trans-imperial spaces in the Eastern Mediterranean and desires to reclaim formerly Greek and Roman or Christian territory meant confronting the reality of Ottoman encroachment in the Balkans and elsewhere.⁹⁴ This historical employment of a moving border between West and East reflects what Said described as a “universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ which is ‘theirs.’”⁹⁵ But such demarcations are often wholly indiscriminate. More important, imaginative geographies remain arbitrary because they do not “require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for ‘us’ to set up these boundaries in our own minds; ‘they’ become ‘they’ accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from ‘ours.’”⁹⁶

The Ottomans obviously had no misapprehensions regarding who controlled Nicaea, Chalcedon, Cyme, and Smyrna. But this hardly mattered to Cyriac and other Renaissance humanists. With the revival of interest in ancient geographers like Pliny, Strabo, and Ptolemy, Renaissance humanists turned their attention to a classicizing geographic understanding of the provinces that once comprised the ancient oikumene.⁹⁷ Cyriac, for example, demarcated Cyzicus as a Western space because it was Pliny:

who in the passage where he recalls the more famous indigenous structures of the world, expressing the opinion that this work was exceptional, says in the begin-

93 Said 1994, 20.

94 Brummett 2015. See also Brummett’s contribution, as well as those of others’, in Fuchs and Weisbourd 2015.

95 Said 1994, 54.

96 Said 1994, 54.

97 James Hankins (1992, 13–14) explains that “the Geography of the Alexandrian scientist Claudius Ptolemaeus (fl. A.D. 127–48) became in the early fifteenth century a focal point for that rich network of cultural movements we refer to as the Renaissance.” Cf. Roberts 2013, 15–44; Brotton 2014.

ning, “The temple at Cyzicus also survives, in which the builder inserted a golden thread in all the joints of the polished stone,” and so forth. We saw the width and hollowing out where the thread had been placed; and after examining and carefully measuring numerous other noteworthy details of the same remarkable temple we undertook to have it described as well as possible and to have a drawing made of it.⁹⁸

Cyriac’s desire to draw and record every detail of this temple based on measurements outlined in Pliny is an act of historic preservation, a mapping of the temple as it once appeared. In this sense, it reflects a contemporary desire among humanists and antiquarians to study and reconstruct sites as fully as possible as exemplars of cultural and moral rectitude. That said, such reconstructions also mark this out as historically Western space, as it reflects what Said called a mythical discourse of what is perceived as Western.⁹⁹ Cyriac emphasized that Pliny aimed to record all “famous indigenous structures of the world,” suggesting to the reader that this temple was native to the land and predated Islam and the Ottomans, which had wrought its destruction. The entanglement of Pliny’s vision for local monuments, Cyriac’s antiquarianism, and the notion of Cyzicus as Western despite it being in Ottoman territory points to a way of seeing what constituted West and East outside of geopolitical reality.

Such an entanglement is crucial when we consider that the Greeks had—at some point in a distant past—subdued the Anatolian coast, civilized it, and built temples and cities that demarcated it as Western space. This subjugation of a primordial Orient—as evidenced by the invention of Western literature, the temple, Pliny’s description of it, and Cyriac’s desire to preserve it as accurately as possible—“speaks through and by virtue of the European imagination, which is depicted as victorious over Asia,” as Said expounded; yet at

98 Cyriac 2003, 72–73: “At Plinius deinde, ille *Naturalis Historiae* conditor diligentissimus, ea in parta qua ingenua et nobiliora mundi opera commemorat, quom hoc praecipuum existimasset opus, in principio inquit: ‘Durat et Cyzico delubrum, in quo filum aureum commissuris omnibus politi lapidis subiecit artifex’, et reliqua. Cuiusce vero positi fili latitudinem et concavitatem vidimus, et eam ipsam atque alia pleraque eiusdem eximiae aedis insignia diligenter inspecta metitiaque hisce quoad licuerat describendum atque stilo defingendum curavimus.”

99 Said 1994, 32: “Mythic language is discourse, that is, it cannot be anything but systematic; one does not really make discourse at will, or statements in it, without first belonging—in some cases unconsciously, but at any rate involuntarily—to the ideology and the institutions that guarantee its existence. These latter are always the institutions of an advanced society dealing with a less advanced society, a strong culture encountering a weak one. The principal feature of mythic discourse is that it conceals its own origins as well as those of what it describes.”

the same time, this Orient presents itself via “the lament that in some glorious past Asia fared better, was itself victorious over Europe.”¹⁰⁰ Such a concept—that the East had been subdued, has subdued, but can, should, and will be subdued again—allows us to think of imaginative geography, like all aspects of Orientalism, as fluid and contingent. In turn, Cyriac reconstructed historical sites found in Muslim lands both to link his world to its Greek and Roman predecessors and to confront the reality of Ottoman power.

Such a vision of an Orient makes little sense unless the West provides a space for itself in its imaginative geography. We must remember, though, that this process is one of a positive unconscious, wherein “one does not really make discourse at will, or statements in it, without first belonging—in some cases unconsciously, but at any rate involuntarily—to the ideology and the institutions that guarantee its existence.”¹⁰¹ Such a dialectic brings us to Rome’s Forum. In 1433, Cyriac outlined to Sigismund of Luxembourg, the emperor-elect who had entered Italy to be crowned by Pope Eugenius IV, “many cogent arguments as to the deeds to be done only by an emperor of his sovereign authority, dignity, and worth, particularly with regard to a crusade to repel the barbarians.”¹⁰² Cyriac then gave to Sigismund a coin of the emperor Trajan as a reminder of Trajan’s conquests, leadership, and magnanimity. As Cyriac would later report on his travels, Trajan was honored throughout the Roman Empire for his benevolence and restoration of cities, such as an epigraph that lauded Trajan’s port built near Ostia outside Rome¹⁰³ or an inscription on the base of a statue located in the Church of John the Baptist on Mykonos that celebrated Trajan’s military victories in Parthia, Germany, and Dacia.¹⁰⁴

Cyriac’s lessons for Sigismund regarding imperial authority and the geography of Western *imperium* continued. Cyriac was “troubled by the terrible

¹⁰⁰ Said 1994, 56.

¹⁰¹ Said 1994, 321. I should note that this is not something that Said elaborated upon, but nevertheless is crucial for understanding how Western discourses of the Orient were actualized in the West itself.

¹⁰² Cyriac of Ancona 2015, 90–91: “a quo perhumane susceptus, multa et praedigna sibi Kiriacus de rebus gestis maiestati, honori dignitatie suae congruentibus et dignis in barbaros expeditionibus applicavit.”

¹⁰³ Cyriac of Ancona 2003, 187.

¹⁰⁴ Cyriac 2003, 151.

destruction and inspired by the divine presence of the Latins.”¹⁰⁵ And this conflict of emotions, oscillating between shame and pride, compelled Cyriac to explain to Sigismund the deeper meaning of antiquity as the pair strolled through the Roman Forum:

I was sure you would be deeply shocked by the way the marble of these huge and elegant buildings throughout the city, these fine statues and columns, which the ancients erected so nobly at such cost, and with such craftsmanship and architectural skill, and these important historical inscriptions are continually burned up into lime by the present inhabitants of the city in so lazy, barbarous, and indecent a fashion, that there will very soon be nothing left of them for posterity to see.... What a crime! And O, you shades of the famous tribe of Romulus, “look upon these things and direct your righteous will to remedy these evils!” For these are the shining witnesses the ancients left behind them and they possess particular power to fire the minds of noble men to the greatest deeds and to the pursuit of undying glory.¹⁰⁶

There would have been a number of monuments to observe: The Colosseum, myriad temples, and so on. But given their mutual interest in Trajan, it would be hard to imagine Cyriac and Sigismund not discussing Trajan’s column—with its twisted scenes of victory over the barbarians of Dacia, the very land then succumbing to Ottoman advances—in light of their conversation regarding Cyriac’s desire that Sigismund lead a war against the Ottomans when he gave him the coin of Trajan.

Likewise, Cyriac’s conversations with Sigismund entangle ancient conceptions of *imperium*, anxieties about barbarism, and Renaissance Mediterranean geopolitics. First, the quotation within Cyriac’s declaration to Sigismund—“look upon these things and direct your righteous will to remedy these evils!”—is from a crucial moment in Book 4 of Vergil’s *Aeneid*. In this scene,

105 Cyriac of Ancona 2015, 92–93: “Praeterea dum tanto cum principe Kiriacus ingentes vetustatum reliquias undique per urbem disiectas aspexisset, ut gravi lacessitus iniuria, talibus denique dictus, Latinorum afflatus numine, principem excitat ...”

106 Cyriac of Ancona 2015, 92–93: “Equidem non parum putabam caesarei principis animum lacessere, quod qui nunc vitam agunt Romana inter moenia homines, marmorea ingentia atque ornatissima undique per urbem aedificia, statuas insignes, et columnas tantis olim sumptibus, tanta maiestate, tantaque fabrorum architectorumve arte conspicuas et nobilia in his magnarum epigrammata rerum, ita ignave, turpiter et obscene in dies ad albam tenuemque convertunt cinerem, ut eorum nullam brevi tempore speciem vestigiumve posteris apparebit. Proh scelus! et o, vos inclytæ Romulae gentis manes, *apsicite haec meritumque malis avertite numen*. Nam et ea praeclara sunt veterum monumenta, virorumque nobilis praesertim animos ad res maximas gerendas et ad gloriae et immortalitatis stadium vehementer accendunt.”

Aeneas flees Carthage to found Rome, and in turn Dido condemns him and his descendants to endless warfare with her descendants, an allusion to the Punic Wars. Given that Rome's victory in the Punic Wars led to its eventual Mediterranean hegemony, its inclusion here points to the belief that Sigismund, as emperor, inherited the right to not only the Forum—which he must restore—but to the lands that Rome once conquered, including the Balkans, North Africa, the Levant, and Egypt. Cyriac re-mapped Forum sites like Trajan's column as the *locus classicus* of empire to beseech Sigismund to fulfill his imperial duties to unite Christendom as well as to reclaim lands lost to Islam. While this is not his only goal, Cyriac used historical understandings of Roman spaces as rhetorical tools to implore his contemporaries to grapple with the challenges they faced in the East. Cyriac used the Roman Forum, Trajan, and Vergil to declare to Sigismund the need to restore ruins. Moreover, barbarism—its roots located firmly in the Orient—was a direct challenge even in Rome itself that needed to be combated by all who see themselves as shades of Romulus.

Cyriac's imagined spaces—the Roman Forum reborn as a Renaissance capital; Trajan's conquered Dacia on the cusp of falling to the Ottomans—are two strands of a geographical consciousness: first, Sigismund's right to inherit Rome and its empire; second, the realization that that hegemony had been replaced by barbarism, decay, decadence, destruction of antiquities, and exoticism. Cyriac's entanglement of restoring ancient ruins with fighting the Ottomans is therefore epistemological kin to Biondo's *Roma Triumphans*, Pius II's preoccupation with the Ottomans, or Europeans' fascination with Leo Africanus and his knowledge of the Orient, which of course he, and later Giovanni Battista Ramusio, tailored to suit their interests.¹⁰⁷ My discussion of the Roman Forum goes beyond Said's own arguments. But such dialectics of power, empire, and barbarism as moral decay remind us that Orientalism operates to illuminate what is valued in the West. As Said explained, the Orient remains “repetitious pseudo-incarnations of some great original (Christ, Europe, the West) they were supposed to have been imitating.”¹⁰⁸ The Roman Forum was perhaps not an Orientalist space *per se*; but Cyriac presented it as a space in which preoccupations with the Orient could be mapped out.

¹⁰⁷ Davis 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Said 1994, 62.

Cyriac's representations of Roman wars in the East in the Forum reflect that the Orient is not "an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe."¹⁰⁹ While not in the Orient as far as Cyriac and his contemporaries would have perceived it, or as Said would have, these ruins present images of a classical Orient in defeat, but one that stood on the precipice of defeating the West because of its own moral failures. This is a reminder that the Orient is a place "made" in Western discourse. The physical fabric of antiquity, whether in the West or in the East, thus became representative of European anxieties about Oriental decadence, barbarism, and decay that could penetrate into Europe itself. Cyriac was not alone of course, as Said reminded us:

The European imagination was nourished extensively from this repertoire: between the Middle Ages and the eighteenth century such major authors as Ariosto, Milton, Marlowe, Tasso, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and the authors of the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Poema del Cid* drew on the Orient's riches for their productions, in ways that sharpened the outlines of imagery, ideas, and figures populating it. In addition, a great deal of what was considered learned Orientalist scholarship in Europe pressed ideological myths into service, even as knowledge seemed genuinely to be advancing.¹¹⁰

In this way, the Orient functioned as a mirror for European anxieties. Orientalism as "a system of moral and epistemological rigor" compelled Europeans not only to grapple with the Orient as its Other, but to fight against what, in *De bello turcico*, Erasmus saw as "Turkish" vices within Christians themselves.¹¹¹ In this sense, Orientalism exacts an epistemological and ontological assault on the Orient, on Orientalists (i.e., Europeans studying and presenting an Orient), and on those consuming Orientalist views. The Orient becomes a place defined solely in Western terms. Cyriac, Erasmus, Pius II, Biondo, etc., become preoccupied with the Orient not just as *over there*, but *here*, as the epistemological and ontological inversion of what here should be. And figures like Sigismund and Pius see humanists as conduits for unpacking differences between East and West in poly-positional, polyvalent, and fluid terms.

¹⁰⁹ Said 1994, 63.

¹¹⁰ Said 1994, 63.

¹¹¹ Said 1994, 67.

To illustrate how this played out further in the Roman Forum, let's briefly turn to Biondo's *Roma Instaurata*, an examination on the state of Roman ruins. One such cluster of monuments that elucidate Biondo's understanding of the historical geography of the Orient is the Colosseum, Temple of Peace, and Arch of Titus. Biondo explained in *Roma Instaurata* that the Emperor Vespasian built these monuments in celebration of the Sack of Jerusalem in 70 CE, vividly depicted on the vault of Titus's arch. Further, "all the edifices of the church, and of the monastery of Santa Maria Nova and all the other ruins around the Colosseum were a part of the Temple of Peace."¹¹² This is reflected in Biondo's description of Vespasian and Titus's triumph as well. In *Roma Triumphans*, Biondo explained that the most impressive part of this procession was the parading of golden objects, including a table and candelabra, taken from the Temple of Solomon.¹¹³ By depicting the Colosseum, Temple of Peace, and Arch of Titus as one large complex built to celebrate Rome's triumph over the Jews, Biondo presented them as monuments to Rome's conquests in the East, which lay in Muslim hands in the 15th century. These spoils, now lost but preserved in relief on the Arch of Titus, become physical reminders of the Orient that Rome had once conquered, lost, and should strive to regain. A Renaissance Orient—Jerusalem, controlled by ancient Jews and now by Muslims—gets invented; Biondo positioned ancient Rome as the site of triumph over a subjugated Orient; and the readers—above all Eugenius, the work's dedicatee—envisioned Rome's imperial legacy through an Orientalist lens.

Orientalist imaginative geography, then, works to establish the confines of East and West according to Western understandings of what physical spaces

112 Biondo 1531, 261: "Et pacis templum nunc diruptum Vespasiani opus via olim sacra: deinde notissimus Tius Filii arcus, in quo candelabra & alia gentis spolia in triumphum ducta cernuntur: amphitheatro nunc Colosseo propinqua esse videmus: ut nullatenus sit dubitandum, quin omnia vel sanctae Mariae novae monasterii & ecclesiae aedificia: vel maximae apud illam extantes ruinae in Colosseum vergentes dicti pacis templi & aliorum Vespasiani ac Titi aedificiorum partes fuerint, quandoque Suetonius quando scribit Titus aedificasse amphitheatrum, addit que partier thermas illi propinquas extruxerit: quas credimus fuisse ubi nunc sunt ruinae a sanctae Mariae novae monasterio in Colosseum, ut diximus, vergentes."

This church is the modern-day Santa Francesca Romana; the monks of the church were its custodians in Biondo's lifetime. It should be noted that these structures did not possess architectural unity in antiquity and were not built together or even by the same emperors.

113 Biondo 1531, 211: "Erat autem per singula pegmata captae civitatis dux ita ut captus fuerat, ordinatus, multae autem naves sequebantur: spolia vero alia passim ferebantur. Eminebant autem eorum quae apud Hierosolymam in templo reperta sunt, mensa aurea poderis talenti magni, & candelabrum similiter auro factum, sed opere commutato ab usus nostri consuetudine."

represent; whether the West is in direct control of a geographic space is not necessarily what defines a space as West or East. Imaginative geography renders the Other “and its designated representatives [as] creatures of Western geographical, historical, and above all, moral apprehension.”¹¹⁴ Imaginative geography is a constitutive intellectual mapping of Western anxieties onto a foreign, uninterpretable space. Likewise, if considered dialectically, this includes reinterpreting spaces in Europe as well as how Eastern commodities are used within the West.

But we must always remember that this process is for Western consumption alone. Imaginative geography, grounded in a Western lexicon of space and alterity, means that “we need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate.”¹¹⁵ For much of history, Said argued, imaginative geography was a means of mapping a wide array of discursive modes of viewing differences between East and West; it flowed from Western perceptions of authority over the East long before modern imperialism. However, without sinking into teleology, the movement toward imperialism has its roots in Orientalist discourse, as views of the Orient often get reframed in the language of, even if not in the actuation of, conquest and empire.

Latent and Manifest Orientalism in Italian Renaissance Humanism

As I have illustrated thus far, Renaissance Orientalism could reflect, among other things, humanist engagement with the ruins of classical antiquity, preoccupations with the rise of the Ottomans, and inventing boundaries between East and West based on ancient geography. Connected to this are two distinct but intertwined elements of Orientalism:

The distinction I am making is really between an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity, which I shall call *latent* Orientalism, and the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociol-

¹¹⁴ Said 1994, 69.

¹¹⁵ Said 1994, 71–72.

ogy, and so forth, which I shall call *manifest* Orientalism. Whatever change occurs in knowledge of the Orient is found almost exclusively in manifest Orientalism; the unanimity, stability, and durability of latent Orientalism are more or less constant.¹¹⁶

Said believed that driving Orientalism are experiences that “were part of a much wider European or Western relationship with the Orient, but what seems to have influenced Orientalism most was a fairly constant sense of confrontation felt by Westerners dealing with the East.”¹¹⁷ Essentially, what “appears in Orientalism, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire.”¹¹⁸ I want to emphasize here Said’s caveat *later*. This suggests that the unconscious positivity about what constitutes the Orient (latent Orientalism) precedes not only manifest Orientalism but also modern imperialism.

To understand this progression, we must consider the discursive power of latent Orientalism, for Orientalism’s “objective discoveries ... are and always have been conditioned by the fact that its truths, like any truths delivered by language, are embodied in language, and what is the truth of language.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, borrowing from Nietzsche on the production of truth as “a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms,”¹²⁰ Said reminded us that “so far as it existed in the West’s awareness, the Orient was a word which later accrued to it a wide field of meanings, associations, and connotations, and that these did not necessarily refer to the real Orient but to the field surrounding the word.”¹²¹ Rather than a demystification of the Orient, in other words, the West constructs a vision of Orient for itself grounded in the Foucauldian notion of truth regimes:¹²²

¹¹⁶ Said 1994, 206.

¹¹⁷ Said 1994, 201.

¹¹⁸ Said 1994, 202–3.

¹¹⁹ Said 1994, 203.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Said 1994, 203. Cf. Nietzsche (1976, 46–47) for the original text.

¹²¹ Said 1994, 203.

¹²² Foucault first discussed the concept of truth regime in an interview in 1976, which was later published in English; see Foucault 2000. For an overview of the concept of truth regime from this interview onward, see Weir 2008.

Orientalism is not only a positive doctrine about the Orient that exists at any one time in the West; it is also an influential academic tradition (when one refers to an academic specialist who is called an Orientalist), as well as an area of concern defined by travelers, commercial enterprises, governments, military expeditions, readers of novels and accounts of exotic adventure, natural historians, and pilgrims to whom the Orient is a specific kind of knowledge about specific places, peoples, and civilizations. For the Orient idioms became frequent, and these idioms took firm hold in European discourse. Beneath the idioms there was a layer of doctrine about the Orient; this doctrine was fashioned out of the experiences of many Europeans, all of them converging upon such essential aspects of the Orient as the Oriental character, Oriental despotism, Oriental sensuality, and the like.¹²³

It was only in the 19th century, Said argued, that we see “the distillation of essential ideas about the Orient—its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness—into a separate and unchallenged coherence” that could be used to justify the empires built by European powers.¹²⁴ In fact, very early on in *Orientalism*, Said explained: “To say simply that Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact. Men have always divided the world up into regions having either real or imagined distinction from each other. The absolute demarcation between East and West, which Balfour and Cromer accept with such complacency, had been years, even centuries, in the making.”¹²⁵ Thus, long before the modern period, and long before the Renaissance, Europeans “saw the Orient as a locale requiring Western attention, reconstruction, even redemption. The Orient existed as a place isolated from the mainstream of European progress in the sciences, arts, and commerce.”¹²⁶ But we must not conflate Orientalism with imperialism or settler-colonialism. Doing so not only misrepresents Orientalism and mistakenly renders it a modern phenomenon; it ignores how the perceived historicity of Orientalism was seen as an anchor for justifying later European empires.

Despite this, early modernists rejecting Said have continued to distort Orientalism and misconstrue differences between latent and manifest Orientalism. In turn, they have also incorrectly presented Orientalism, imperial-

¹²³ Said 1994, 203.

¹²⁴ Said 1994, 205.

¹²⁵ Said 1994, 39.

¹²⁶ Said 1994, 206.

ism, and colonialism as interchangeable or absolutely coterminous despite important historical, epistemological, and ontological differences. As recently as 2019, Noel Malcolm claimed in *Useful Enemies* that engagement with Said among early modernists

is unfortunate, as Said's thesis is hardly applicable to the early modern period at all. The subject matter of his book belonged almost entirely to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when Western powers such as Britain and France did "govern over" large parts of the Orient. But even if one were to accept his argument that Western Oriental scholarship was essentially an instrument of imperial power at that time, it is very difficult to see how this could be applied to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when no major territory in "the East" was under Western European rule, and the Ottomans themselves were the imperial power in a large part of Europe.¹²⁷

Such readings of *Orientalism* ignore Said's central tenets, such as the fact that "the very designation of something as Oriental involved an already pronounced evaluative judgment, and in the case of the peoples inhabiting the decayed Ottoman Empire, an implicit program of action."¹²⁸ Moreover, the proliferation of various contradictory and paradoxical views of the Orient hinged on "the almost total absence in contemporary Western culture of the Orient as a genuinely felt and experienced force."¹²⁹ The ensuing need to construct the Orient led to a "substitution and displacement" that "places on the Orientalist himself a certain pressure to reduce the Orient in his work, even after he has devoted a good deal of time to elucidating and exposing it."¹³⁰ This desire to render the Orient intelligible and digestible becomes an important aspect of Orientalism independent of its relationship to modern European military conquest.

For example, in a December 1443 letter to Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini, the papal legate to Hungary, Cyriac lauded him as "O angelic, most reverend sir,

127 Malcolm 2019, 415. In her review of *Useful Enemies*, Meserve (2020) claimed that "Said framed European views of Islam as one among many instruments of empire, a discursive net of scholarship used to keep the Orient down" to make the point that early modern Orientalism did not exist because "Ottoman political culture occasioned nervous astonishment and intimidation—even fear—but few dreams of empire."

128 Said 1994, 207.

129 Said 1994, 208.

130 Said 1994, 209.

true Julian that you are, most worthy Caesar.”¹³¹ While a contentious figure in the Renaissance due to his role in ending the Roman Republic, Julius Caesar was often praised and seen as a model for imperial restoration both before and after Cyriac and Biondo. Moreover, as Thomas Dandeleet has argued, admiration of Caesar in the Italian Renaissance was eventually taken up by later European powers; again, resisting teleology, we would be remiss to ignore the importance of this rhetoric in later European imperialism.¹³² Matching the centrality of Caesar is Cyriac’s presentation of the Orient as a timeless threat to Rome’s frontier. When praising the Hungarian king Ladislas and his efforts against the Ottomans, Cyriac explained to Cesarini that in antiquity the Sibylline books had revealed that only a king could subdue the Parthians. And given that “it is well known and altogether clear that the Turks and Achaemenids take their origins from the Parthians,” Ladislas was to fulfill the prophecies of antiquity.¹³³

Continuing his celebration of the ongoing fight against the Ottomans, he told Cesarini that praise should also be heaped on the Voivode of Transylvania, John Hunyadi. Because of John’s zeal in fighting Murad, “he has so subdued the long-ingrained arrogance of a cruel and dangerous foe of our nurturing faith, that the name of that savage prince Murad Bey, which, only a short while ago was spoken in fear by Christians, is today seen and held to be [the name of one who] turned back in abject flights, and on the brink of annihilation.”¹³⁴ Cyriac praised Cesarini as a latter-day Julius Caesar and Hunyadi and Ladislas as men of faith with the ability to annihilate once-indefatigable enemies. And he likened Murad to a Parthian tyrant. This conflation of Roman history and contemporary geopolitics allows Cyriac to shift from presenting an unchanging Orient to one in need of subjugation because it posed an immediate threat to the West. This causal relationship between latent Orientalism, manifest Orientalism, and military action underscores that Orientalism is not the consequence of imperialism, but rather is its potential catalyst.

¹³¹ Cyriac of Ancona 2003, 8–9: “angelice et vere Iuliane atque Caesaree verendissime vir.”

¹³² Dandeleet 2014.

¹³³ Cyriac of Ancona 2003, 10–11: “numquam nisi a rege Parthos subiici posse. Teucrorum namque genus et Achaemenidium origem a Parthis duxisse notum satis est καὶ ἐκφανέστατον πάντη.”

¹³⁴ Cyriac of Ancona 2003, 10–11: “tam saevi perniciosique almae religionis nostrae hostis inveteratam diu audaciam ita depresserat, ut quod paulo antea Murath Beg truculentissimi principis nomen undique Christicolis formidandum memorabatur, hodie tergiversatum, fugax, deiectum, peneque extinctum videatur habebaturque.”

Central to Cyriac's justification of the Varna campaign was not only pushing the Ottomans out of Europe and Asia, but conquering more land: "May we see not only Moesia, Greece, Macedonia, Epirus, and Illyria freed and restored by them through your agency, but may we also see, in good fortune and happiness, our upright and holy dominion and the practice of our bountiful religion spread notably beyond [those regions], throughout Asia and Libya and into Ethiopia, Africa and the Indies."¹³⁵

Such notions of restitution to the holy dominion (*religiosum imperium*) followed by new conquests capture how Said believed that the historical mapping of an Orient onto the consciousness of Westerners could serve to justify later conquest:

Geography was essentially the material underpinning for knowledge about the Orient. All the latent and unchanging characteristics of the Orient stood upon, were rooted in, its geography. Thus on the one hand the geographical Orient nourished its inhabitants, guaranteed their characteristics, and defined their specificity; on the other hand, the geographical Orient solicited the West's attention, even as—by one of those paradoxes revealed so frequently by organized knowledge—East was East and West was West.¹³⁶

It is the Orientalists themselves—from Homer and Vergil to Cyriac and Biondo to Kipling and Flaubert—"whose cumulative vision had shaped a quintessential Orient; the doctrinal—or doxological—manifestation of such an Orient is what I have been calling here latent Orientalism."¹³⁷ It is only after that work is performed, Said argued, that an Orientalist justification of empire can take place: "So far as anyone wishing to make a statement of any consequence about the Orient was concerned, latent Orientalism supplied him with an enunciative capacity that could be used, or rather mobilized, and turned into sensible discourse for the concrete occasion at hand," that is to say, manifest Orientalism and eventually empire.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Cyriac of Ancona 2003, 14–15: "non modo ab his Moesiam, Graeciam, Macedoniam, Epyrum Illyriumque liberam per vos atque restitutam {videre}, quin et extra per Asiam atque Libyam nostrum ipsum pium et religiosum imperium nostraeque almae religionis cultum super et Aethiopas atque Garamantas et Indos proferre insigniter fauste atque felicissime videamus."

¹³⁶ Said 1994, 216.

¹³⁷ Said 1994, 221.

¹³⁸ Said 1994, 221–22.

Such a moment for Biondo was the fall of Constantinople in May 1453.¹³⁹ In the following August, Biondo penned a letter urging Alfonso the Magnanimous, the king of Aragon and Naples, to take up arms, retake Constantinople, conquer Jerusalem, and destroy Islam. Biondo praised Alfonso as a most wise prince and explained to him that the Ottomans could be defeated through virtue, bravery, and valor.¹⁴⁰ In the letter, Biondo enumerated all of the lands of Europe—and he is very specific in separating Europe from Asia¹⁴¹—that the Ottomans have conquered: Thrace, Macedonia, Greece, Epirus, Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Wallachia, Pannonia, and Hungary.¹⁴² Moreover, Biondo implored Alfonso to act, as he believed that the Ottomans had failed to win the goodwill of these conquered peoples, who would rally around Alfonso as their liberator.¹⁴³ Biondo's belief that locals would resist the Ottomans should a Western power arrive is, again, presenting this as Western space. In this sense, history and geography function not solely as road maps for how to conduct the war, but to rationalize this war as benign and necessary because it aimed to liberate oppressed peoples:

Most Serene king, if we wish to understand the nature and condition of this war that we are proposing, we must consider how to conduct it against such an enemy, whose powerful ancestors augmented their dominion more by weakness and cowardice than by the unique and most cherished virtue and supremacy found in the Christian world. To a great extent, [their conquests] have obscured the glory won since the beginning of the world by our Roman, Italian, Greek, French, Spanish, German ancestors, and the rest of the chief peoples of Europe. In truth, the rest of the world knows that Europe, by its virtue and power, easily conquered them, as ancient histories make it known.¹⁴⁴

139 Biondo was not alone in this regard, as treatises such as Timothy of Verona's *Ad excitandum omnes principes contra Theucram* and Niccolo Sagundino's *De Turcarum origine* attest. Cf. Harper 2005, 166–67.

140 Biondo 1927, 38: "Intelligere te credo ex praedictis, sapientissime regum, Celesitudini tuae bellum proponi suscipiendum cum ea gente barbara, quae, dum aliena impietate et perfidia simulque desidia vires aduaxit suas, traditam nobis per omnes generationes maiorum ab ipso orbe condito nostrorum gloriam labefactavit. Nunc imminens impendensque, si nos quoque negligentes erimus, maximum calamitatis periculum et simul propositam in promptu sitam ac certam victoriae spem ostendam."

141 Biondo 1927, 38: "Diximus supra Ottomanum Baysetum Maumetti bey, praesentis Magni Turchi hostis nostri, avum ab Asia Minor Ciliciaque regnis paternis profectum alique cepisse in Europa, quibus Murathus filius multa addiderit."

142 Biondo 1927, 38–42.

143 Biondo 1927, 42.

144 Biondo 1927, 32–33: "Si belli eius quod a nobis proponitur genus conditionemque intelligere volumus, considerandum est, serenissime rex, illud gerendum esse cum hoste, cuius maiores aliena magis ignavia atque socordia quam propria virtute et potentia in orbis christiani intima penetrantes suum adauxerint

Justification for war, then, is grounded in the belief that the West had to combat an illegitimate Oriental usurpation of Western lands. His application of such a concept here puts ancient history in the service of Renaissance visions of East and West. Contemporary geopolitics are put in dialogue with Biondo's intellectual interests in ancient geography, allowing Biondo to depict Europeans as justified in trying to take back from Ottoman usurpers what was rightfully theirs. Moreover, the notion that all the peoples of Europe were unified against the Ottomans is crucial here; the Ottoman Orient, rather than remaining an underlying presence in the Renaissance consciousness, becomes a problem that needs to be handled. Ultimately, Alfonso did not share Biondo's fear of the Ottomans to such an extent that would compel him to act—and as we saw with Pius's efforts at Mantua, neither would most of Alfonso's peers. Nevertheless, Biondo entangled his perception of the will of Christians in the Balkans and the purported historicity of Western military superiority to address his geopolitical concerns and promote his belligerency toward the Ottomans.

As I mentioned previously, this is the central goal of Biondo's *Roma Triumphans*. In Book X, Biondo recounted the nature of the triumph, that is, the victorious procession that moved through Rome. But Biondo did not describe the ancient city; following Petrarch, he cited numerous contemporary Christian edifices that were, in his day, positioned among ancient monuments.¹⁴⁵ As Frances Muecke rightly explained, “the aim of Biondo's description is to give the reader the impression of seeing an ancient triumph go through the streets of *present-day* Rome.” His goal was to provide a road map for triumphs that would celebrate eventual victories over the Ottomans, not re-create empty facsimiles of ancient triumphs.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, as seen in his letter to Alfonso, he did not believe he was calling for the liberation of lost lands. At the end of Book X of *Roma Triumphans*, after describing the nature of the triumph at length, Biondo tallied not territories alone, but the men who came from them, especially popes and cardinals. This intimates that, like Cyriac's discussion of Homer and Hesiod, the Ottomans controlled not just lands but peoples waiting to be freed. Of the dozens of popes and cardinals listed, many came

potentatum; adeo ut gloriam obscuraverint a maioribus nostris Romanis Italis Graecis Gallis Hispanis Germanis ceterisque Europae primoribus populis a condito orbe nobis quaesitam.”

¹⁴⁵ Summit 2000.

¹⁴⁶ Muecke 2011, 278.

from “Africa, Asia, and part of Europe now oppressed by the barbarians,” a reminder that underpinning Biondo’s geographic understanding of the Orient was ancient Roman hegemony and ecclesiastical universalism that Islam had purportedly shattered but that should be renewed under the aegis of a unified Western Christendom.¹⁴⁷ One other undercurrent here is that Orientalism’s unconscious positivity remains more or less intact: while the cupidity, exoticism, sexual license, and debauchery of the Orient remain subtextual, Biondo’s audience would have been well aware of them as the key features of the Orient that stood as the opposite of the West.

Latent Orientalism, then, informed contemporary understandings of the Ottoman world, Islam, and the historical geography of the ancient Mediterranean. This led to a desire to “re-conquer” lands lost to the Orient. It was only later that we can conclude that Orientalist “discoveries of Westerners about the manifest and modern Orient acquired a pressing urgency as Western territorial acquisition in the Orient increased.”¹⁴⁸ Cyriac’s and Biondo’s calls for the restoration of ruins and the militant defense of Roman lands lost to the Orient reflect Said’s argument that Orientalism was both a latent, timeless discourse of Othering as well as a manifest attempt of dealing with the East. In the Renaissance, this process remained inchoate, as the power balance remained firmly in the Ottomans’ favor. It would take centuries before this rhetoric would lead to Western dominance. As Said argued, “at no time did the convergence between latent Orientalist doctrine and manifest Orientalist experience occur more dramatically than when, as a result of World War I, Asiatic Turkey was being surveyed by Britain and France for its dismemberment. There, laid out on an operating table for surgery, was the Sick Man of Europe, revealed in all his weakness, characteristics, and topographical outline.”¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the intellectual toolkit necessary to envision, carry out, and justify Europe’s dismemberment of the moribund Ottoman state operated in the Renaissance. To ignore the historical longevity of Orientalist discourse, Said would argue, would be to misunderstand how its purported historical legitimacy

¹⁴⁷ Biondo 1531, 217: “Turbam vero Cardinalium episcoporumque et aliorum in republica ecclesiastica praestantissimorum, quam Asia, Aphrica, et pars Europae a barbaris nunc oppressa habuit, infinitum fuerit recensere.”

¹⁴⁸ Said 1994, 223.

¹⁴⁹ Said 1994, 223.

was employed in the service of that later dismemberment, colonization, and exploitation carried out by Western empires.

Conclusion: Renaissance Orientalism and the Future of Humanism

I'd like to conclude with two brief examples that I believe echo much of what we have seen in Cyriac of Ancona's and Biondo Flavio's visions of the Orient. They show that Renaissance preoccupations with the Ottomans, Islam, Oriental barbarism, ruins, geography, and ancient imperial landscapes are reminders that Orientalism long predated Napoleon. On 5 April 1536, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain, arrived in Rome to carry out the type of triumph as explicated in Biondo's *Roma Triumphans*. Charles was fresh off his conquest of Tunis the previous June. While also branded as a crusade against Islam, the victory was celebrated as a latter-day Roman conquest of Carthage, whose ruins lay outside Tunis; Charles—a Renaissance amalgam of Caesar and Scipio Africanus—arrived at the Porta San Sebastiano, the southern gate of the city leading out onto the ancient Appian Way. From Porta San Sebastiano, he moved past the Circus Maximus and Septizodium before turning northeast. He headed toward the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine, pausing to turn northwest beneath the Arch of Titus, which depicted Romans marching with the spoils of the Temple of Solomon. Charles next processed down the Via Sacra, the main road of the Roman Forum, skirted around the northern side of the Capitoline Hill, passed before the Column of Trajan, and marched down Via del Pellegrino toward the Vatican to be received by Pope Paul III.¹⁵⁰

The significance of all this would have been lost on no one. Not only did a Renaissance Catholic Caesar conquer a Muslim stronghold in the name of the faith, but he returned in triumph to Rome, whose ruins served as the architectural stage for the celebration of Roman Catholicism's defeat of its barbarian enemies. Moreover, this triumph showcased Rome's ruins as ideologically charged monuments to the very civilization that Charles defended by conquering Tunis. Charles V's 1536 triumph was Cyriac's and Biondo's Orientalism, and latent Orientalism more broadly, made manifest: unity under the

150 Karmon 2011, 229; Taylor et al. 2017, 275; DiFuria 2018, 105–7.

aegis of the Emperor and Pope and the defeat of an Eastern barbarian enemy; and once all of that was done, the victors would triumph in Rome amid its ancient monuments. It was an orchestration of the power of Christendom over the Orient.

The second example comes about 35 years later. On 7 October 1571, the fleet of the Holy League, led by John of Austria and the Roman nobleman Marcantonio Colonna, defeated the Ottomans at Lepanto off the coast of modern-day Greece; Lepanto is not too far from Augustus's 31 BCE victory over Mark Antony and Cleopatra at Actium, leading to the Roman conquest of Egypt and full supremacy of the Mediterranean. This geographical reality was not overlooked in the encomia that followed, such as Agostino Fortunio's *On the Actian Victory over the Depraved Fleet of the Turks*.¹⁵¹ Most famous was Juan Latino's *Song of John of Austria*, which said of John that "no commander has ever fought more capably, not Hector, Roman Caesar, Greek Achilles, not even Augustus as the humiliated Cleopatra fled him in her ships at the Battle of Actium."¹⁵² Later, Juan Latino mixed his classical references to claim that "So Philip's new Scipio will wreak havoc on the Turks, just as they say Augustus seized warships at Actium and led them in triumph in Rome."¹⁵³ By likening Lepanto to both the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium and to Scipio's victory over Carthage, Lepanto's encomiasts turned it from a struggle for supremacy of the 16th-century Mediterranean into a continuation of Rome and its descendants' struggles with their Oriental enemies: Carthaginians, Parthians, Egyptians, Jews, Turks. Lepanto's occurrence near the site of Actium only further legitimates this view. And on 11 December, Marcantonio Colonna carried out a triumph in Rome identical to the course of Charles V's 1536 triumph, ideologically linking the two as evidence of Christian and Roman victory over the barbarous East. And paraded through Rome as trophies in the procession were Ottoman captives (fig. 1).

Triumphs were commonplace in the Renaissance, such as Biondo's would-be hero Alfonso's triumphal entry into Naples.¹⁵⁴ What matters in these

¹⁵¹ Wright et al. 2014, 66–69.

¹⁵² Wright et al. 2014, 290–91: "Hector, Romanus Caesar, tum Graecus Achilles, / felix sic nullus pugnavit, ad Actia bella / Augustum fugiens sordet Cleopatra carinis."

¹⁵³ Wright et al. 2014, 304–5: "Scipio sic Turcas poterit terrere Philippi / alter ut Actiacas bello rapuisse carinas, Augustus fertur Romamque tulisse triumphum."

¹⁵⁴ Zaho 2004; for Alfonso's triumph, see 46–64.



Figure 1
 Francesco Tramezzino, *The Entry of Marcantonio Colonna and the Christian Army in Rome after Victory at the Battle of Lepanto, December 11, 1571* (1571). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number 47.105.10; Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1947 (image in the public domain). Turkish captives can be seen in the center-left of the image, third row from the bottom, labeled as *Turchi*.

two instances, however, is that without the longstanding discursive power of Orientalism, Said would have argued, neither Charles's nor Colonna's triumph could have possessed the ideological charge that they did. They both reflect how an imaginative geography of the Mediterranean and historical visions of Western superiority over a morally depraved Orient remained central to Renaissance visions of empire. This fed into how latent Orientalism was eventually made manifest and employed to justify war, conquest, and economic exploitation in later centuries.

These two events were not major turning points in the power balance of the Mediterranean—that would take nearly three more centuries, a reminder that these victories were hardly evidence of modern imperialism. That said, many contemporaries hoped they would lead to the defeat of the Ottomans. Visions of empire and subjugation of a historically different and indelibly iniquitous East clearly operated in the West before Napoleon. And, of course, feeding these notions was a centuries-old discourse about the East as antithetically different from and inferior to the West. And this discourse would eventually work to justify war, conquest, and economic exploitation. Rather than positioning Orientalism as the product of European empires built only

since Napoleon, Said's *Orientalism* argues that Orientalism was a *precondition* for Western imperialism.

Some scholars have long held the incorrect belief that *Orientalism* argued that Orientalist discourse was inextricably linked to modern imperialism and colonization. However, as I've shown, this is a misrepresentation of *Orientalism*'s key arguments. Humanist rhetoric surrounding ancient ruins, geography, war, and the borders of Western civilization all point to a discourse of knowledge on what constitutes West and East. If scholars choose to challenge, nuance, or disagree with Said's arguments, such interventions would be welcomed, as it is important that we engage critically with thinkers as eclectic and controversial as Said. But rejecting *Orientalism* for arguments Said never made ignores his argument that Orientalism is a transhistorical process and inadvertently turns our attention away from potential insights into the mentalities of those who have looked East. And it presents Renaissance humanism as hermetically sealed off from larger discourses of cultural difference, power, and empire that existed in the early modern period and that became the intellectual foundation of modern imperialism. This, I think, does a major disservice to these authors and their texts.

Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* forces us to ask incisive questions about more than just Western views of the Orient in the Age of Imperialism. I have limited my focus to *Orientalism*'s implications for the relationship between Renaissance humanists' visions of the Orient, understandings of geography, and calls for war and conquest. But Said's larger exploration of moral decay, exoticism, gender, senescence, sexuality, and so on across a wide assortment of genres, texts, time, and space is an important intervention regarding how we understand discourses of power and Western formulations of knowledge of the Orient. Said's arguments in *Orientalism* as well as in works such as *Covering Islam* and *Culture and Imperialism* should compel us to think more broadly about how cultural difference has long been made, perceived, described, and ensconced in social and political institutions in the West. This is crucial for scholars of the Italian Renaissance, both those working on humanism and otherwise; while we should continue to study our textual corpus on its own terms, I believe we do it and ourselves a disservice by disconnecting it from the darker side of the history of humanism in the West.¹⁵⁵ We should grapple

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Mignolo 2003.

with Said's *Orientalism* if we hope to better understand the long history of how conspicuous consumption, diplomacy, trade, and cross-cultural interaction operated alongside Western anxieties about difference, desires to spread Christianity, and visions of conquest and empire. Lastly, as humanists ourselves, we should take note of Said's definition of humanism "as a usable praxis for intellectuals and academics who want to know what they are doing, what they are committed to as scholars, and who also want to connect these principles to the world in which they live as citizens."¹⁵⁶ For, if we ignore the myriad ways in which the foreign interests of premodern Europe operated as later justifications for its overseas empires, we might inadvertently fail to live up to Said's call to take full stock of the past in order that we build a truly democratic and emancipatory universal humanism in the present.

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¹⁵⁶ Said 2004, 6.

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