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## Table of Contents

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Letter from the President	3
Extremist Candidates and Electoral Viability <i>By Matthew Clark</i>	4
Exploring Neuroplasticity Through Ancient Literature: Measuring the Human Capacity for Change <i>By Alex Delano</i>	16
Regency and Respectability: Exploring the Extent of Female Political Power in the Mongol Empire <i>By Donald E. Glander</i>	30
“A Dutch man of Warr... brought not any thing but 20. And odd Negroes”: Privateering and Slavery in Jamestown <i>By Lily Haywood</i>	39
Imperial Connections to the Vestal Virgins and their Symbolic, Sacred Power in Art and Architecture <i>By Kelsey Keith</i>	49
Dizzy from Success, or Starvation? A Study of Two Famines in Ukraine and Kazakhstan <i>By Connor O'Brien</i>	58
Meet Our Staff	73

## Letter From the President

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Dear *Columns* readers,

As the aroma of Spring swirls in the air, and the tease of Summer tantalizes, the spirit of invigoration engulfs us and fills each and everyone one of us with an omnipotent hope for the warm, sunny days to come. This spirit that comes each and every year encourages us to try something new and to step outside our comfort zone, like the fifteen students who submitted their research to *Columns*. One may mistake my tone for facetious, but sharing personal work at any level is an act of courage that deserves to be applauded. And for our authors who braved scrutiny and a public presentation, even more rejoicing is in order. In a sense, this journal has always been a tool for rejoicing, celebrating undergraduate students, interdisciplinary research, professors, the University of Mary Washington, and the curious nature that dwells on campus and is cultivated within its students.

This issue contains articles with the power to transport, from the Roman Forum, the polls, 17th-century America, and even inside the human brain. Thanks to our continued support from departments at the University of Mary Washington, this trip will not cost you a dime. Though, we cannot guarantee that you will not get lost in the fascinating research of our talented authors.

We at *Columns* would like to take a moment to thank those who have contributed to the *Columns Journal* this semester. First, we thank our club members for all the hard work they have done to put this issue together, it has been a privilege to serve alongside them. Please read their bios to learn more about the amazing village behind what you are reading. Second, thanks must be given to the professors who advised these papers and all the students who submitted, they make our work possible. Third, we would like to thank Dr. Betsy Lewis, Head of Undergraduate Research, for her support and interest in our club. Finally, we would like to thank you, the reader, for without your cultivated eye, this journal would be a mire pile of paper and ink. We hope you enjoy the research as much as we do and We look forward to seeing you next semester as a returning reader or author. Now, go forth and stop to smell the roses and the research.

With gratitude, appreciation, and warm regards,



Laura E. Connors  
President of *Columns*

# Matthew Clark

## Extremist Candidates and Electoral Viability

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For PSCI 333: American Public Opinion

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### *Abstract*

The purpose of this research is to understand who American voters see as more electable: moderates or extremists. There is much debate over this issue and many Americans believe moderates to be much more electable. This claim is largely untrue. This literature review summarizes the work of behavioral and institutional scholars regarding the success of extremist candidates. Behavioral literature argues that extreme candidates will lead to more voters turnout out at the polls; while institutional literature says that the median voter wants a more moderate candidate. This review concludes that behavioral literature is currently the more relevant line of thought, as the United States moves towards an age of increasingly extremist candidates, and is complimented by the increasing popularity of Ranked Choice Voting.

**Keywords:** Ranked Choice Voting, Behavioral, Institutional, Extreme, Moderate

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### Introduction

Literature on the success, or lack thereof, of extremist candidates revolves around two main types of literature: institutional literature and behavioral literature. Institutional literature revolves around the theories of the wishes of the median voter. Institutional literature states that moderate candidates are better political candidates because they have the ability to appeal to the most people. Behavioral literature takes the opposite approach: polarizing and extreme candidates will excite the parties' base, leading to greater turnout. Some scholars believe that exciting candidates will turn out voters in the general election. This may be true among the more extreme voters in a party (there will be increased turnout for specific candidates among those on the far left or far right). However, in a general election, there is substantial evidence that among potential voters for a candidate, moderate candidates maximize supporters.

There is a significant breadth of literature that suggests that voters largely disregard a candidate's individual ideology and the voters themselves are not sure of their own ideology.<sup>1</sup> The authors argue that societal trends and media outlets may influence the promotion of moderate candidates. They argue that this promotion is a leading reason why moderate candidates have significant success. This theory is at odds with other sects of literature that

proclaims that moderates do much better than extremists in general election contests because voters care about candidates' ideology.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars find that the ideology of voters matters specifically when referring to the ideology of a congressional district and their tolerance, or lack thereof, of extreme competitors. While there is still debate about how much a candidate's extremist ideology matters to voters within a congressional district, the end result of the elections are the same: extremist candidates in the U.S. House elections, U.S. Senate midterms, and the 2020 Presidential Primary Elections underperform.

A review of several general elections from the 20th and 21st centuries highlights that candidates who are perceived as extreme by their constituents performed significantly worse until 2012. For the last decade, however, extreme candidates have been garnering more support among the general electorate.<sup>3</sup> While moderates still have a hold over the general electorate of Congressional and Senate voters, societal discontent, voters' decreasing use of ideology, and new voting methods suggest that extreme candidates will be wildly more successful than in decades past.<sup>4</sup>

Behavioral literature suggests that while moderate candidates may have a slight advantage in general elections, this long-held median voter theorem that so many political scientists have emphasized may be decreasing in importance. While voters may

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Hall and Daniel Thompson, "Who Punishes Extremist Nominees? Candidate Ideology and Turning Out the Base in U.S. Elections," in *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 1, (February 2015): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Hall and Thompson, "Who Punishes Extremist Nominees?" 1.

<sup>3</sup> Jeanne Clelland, "Ranked Choice Voting and the Center Squeeze in the Alaska 2022 Special Election: How Might Other Voting Methods Compare?" in *Computers and Society* (February 2023) <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2303.00108>; Jamie

Carson and Ryan D. Williamson "Candidate Ideology and Electoral success in Congressional Elections," *Public Choice* 178, no. 1-2, 180, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-017-0492-2>.

<sup>4</sup> Clelland, "Ranked Choice Voting"; Gilles Serra, "The Electoral Strategies of a Populist Candidate: Does Charisma Discourage Experience and Encourage Extremism?" in *Journal of Theoretical Politics* (2018), 31; Stephen Utych, "A Voter-Centric Explanation of the Success of Ideological Candidates in the U.S. House," in *ResearchGate*, April 2019, 1 and 3.

support moderate candidates because they believe they will have a stronger chance to win than an ideologue, moderates enjoy a much smaller advantage than decades past.<sup>5</sup>

These two areas of literature compete and are made even more complicated by extreme candidates' primary success. Primary voters are primarily those who support extreme candidates.<sup>6</sup> Nielsen finds the pattern of primary extremism to be significantly prevalent among Republicans, but not Democrats. Authors such as Carson and Williamson believe it to be common among both parties.<sup>7</sup> As a result, there are many primary winners who won their primary but may not perform as strongly in a general election because of an ideological mis-match between the primary electorate and the general election electorate.

The first section of this literature review will focus on research that emphasizes the importance of strong moderates in winning elections in the U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and the 2020 Presidential Election. The next sections will focus on behavioral literature and increasing primary and general election support for extreme candidates, support for extreme candidates in the future, and what tactics extreme candidates use to appeal to moderate candidates. Finally, after the presentation of evidence, I will theorize which type of literature is more compelling and more relevant to modern American politics.

### U.S. House Elections

In the U.S. House Races, there is significant evidence that a candidate that positions themselves as more extreme than their direct competitors will receive a much

lower vote share than the moderate candidates. Throughout their conduction of a new study of U.S. election data between 1992 and 2012, Carson and Williamson agree with the premise that general election candidates who do not match their district ideologically will garner less support and that candidates who are more extreme in general will not perform as well as the more moderate candidates.<sup>8</sup> Carson and Williamson believe that voter ideology is a much more important predictor of election outcomes than do many scholars.<sup>9</sup> However, voter ideology is not extreme, it is moderate. Although more extreme candidates are more likely to lose, researchers provide data that show that this trend may be decreasing or stopping. Since 2008, the success of extreme candidates in elections has been steadily increasing, and since 2010, the failure of extreme candidates has been declining.<sup>10</sup> Even though this trend is decreasing, extreme candidates are still a weaker set of candidates in the U.S. House Elections.

In some congressional districts, the voters have more extreme views. The view that candidate ideology is paid attention to by voters, especially in the U.S. House elections, contrasts with theories on the result of media framing. Scholars find that the manner in which extreme candidates are referred to in newspapers and other media may limit their electoral success, even if many voters are as extreme politically as some of the candidates running (Hall and Thompson 2018).<sup>11</sup> Despite ideological debate surrounding everyday voters, scholars hypothesize that the media picks and chooses which candidates they want to elevate. These candidates tend to be far

<sup>5</sup> Utych, "A Voter-Centric Explanation," 1.

<sup>6</sup> Lindsay Neilson and Neil Visalvanich. "Primaries and Candidates: Examining the Influence of Primary Electorates on Candidate Ideology." in *Political Science Research and Methods* 5, no. 2 (2017): 398.

<sup>7</sup> Carson and Williamson, "Candidate Ideology," 184.

<sup>8</sup> Carson and Williamson, "Candidate Ideology," 180.

<sup>9</sup> Carson and Williamson, "Candidate Ideology," 176.

<sup>10</sup> Carson and Williamson, "Candidate Ideology," 180.

<sup>11</sup> Hall and Thompson, "Who Punishes Extremist Nominees?" 510.

more moderate than extreme due to the media's relative moderacy, which, in turn, has a substantial effect on everyday voters. Whichever candidates the media supports is likely to have a substantial impact on the voters' decisions. The electoral evidence of the success of moderate candidates versus the success of extreme candidates is sound.<sup>12</sup> While both of these theories can be true simultaneously, these theories emphasize different variables: voter ideology versus societal trends and media framing that contribute to the moderacy of political candidates.

In recent decades, primary elections have become much more important, especially in Congressional elections. Many establishment and tea-party Republicans have had anti-establishment candidates run against them in primaries in hopes of changing the nature of the Republican party.<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon happens on the opposite side of the political spectrum as well. Progressive challengers running against moderate establishment Democrats in primary elections have increased in recent years. If a primary challenger succeeds in their ability to unseat the incumbent, this is a bad sign for their chances in the general election. Current U.S. House Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez ran against a long-serving moderate Democrat in 2018, beat the moderate incumbent, then went on to win the general election. On the Republican side, Harriet Hageman, an extreme Republican, ran against Representative Liz Cheney in Wyoming's

at-large Congressional District and won. Nominating extreme candidates substantially decreases the vote share of the party in that Congressional election.<sup>14</sup> However, as seen in New York City and Wyoming, safe districts are likely to nominate more extreme candidates. Even if these candidates do not get as much as the vote share, they will likely win. It is difficult for candidates to successfully tailor their rhetoric to two different audiences, the primary and the general electorate. For example, Mehmet Oz, an extreme Republican candidate lost his general election to quasi-progressive John Fetterman. It is challenging for candidates to be successful in both elections, since primary and general election electorates are very different, especially if the election is in a contested district.<sup>15</sup> Substantial research in institutional literature was done by reviewing general-election races and outcomes between 1980-2010. The methodology states that in a primary election between a moderate candidate and an extremist who have roughly equal chances of winning the party nomination, the party who nominated the extremist candidate will experience a 9-13% decrease in vote share, decreasing the chances that that party wins the election by 35-54%.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, when members of Congress vote in accordance with the extreme of their party, they are electorally penalized in the next election between 1-3% points.<sup>17</sup>

Hall's conclusion that extreme candidates will suffer major losses and

<sup>12</sup> Hall and Thompson, "Who Punishes Extremist Nominees?" 510.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Hall, "What Happens When Extremists Win Primaries?" in *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 1 (February 2015): 20.

<sup>14</sup> Hall, "What Happens When Extremists Win Primaries?" 1.

<sup>15</sup> James Adams and Samuel Merrill, "Candidate and Party Strategies in Two-Stage Elections Beginning

with a Primary" in *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (April 2008): 4.

<sup>16</sup> Hall, "What Happens When Extremists Win Primaries?" 1.

<sup>17</sup> David Broockman and Joshua L. Kalla, "Candidate Ideology and Vote Choice in the 2020 US Presidential Election," in *American Politics Research* 52, no. 2 (March 2024): 1.

likely lose the general election is explained by the evidence that extreme candidates or candidates who do not match the electorate of the Congressional District they are running to represent (often extreme candidates) are much more likely to lose. While generalizations can be made based on quantitative methods, the district a candidate is running in matters.<sup>18</sup> States that all candidates in a primary are on one side of the median voter of the district - providing more evidence for the hypothesis that a congressional district ideology matters within the party because each district has its own ideology.<sup>19</sup> The research done on the 1980-2010 elections adds quantitative measurements to other researchers' hypotheses. However, because both research on the comparative success of moderate and extreme candidates in the U.S. House Elections are largely from the later part of the 20th century and the earlier parts of the 21st century, these statistics may not be completely true today, as the electability of extreme candidates (provided Carson and Williamson's graph continued its trend) has likely increased since 2012, a trend that will be described when analyzing behavioral literature.

### **U.S. Senate**

In midterm Senate elections, the presence of a moderate or centrist candidate boosts turnout, and two extreme candidates deflate turnout.<sup>20</sup> There is a firm belief among a sect of researchers that concludes that the success of a candidate has to do with their ideology, and as a result of a candidate's ideology, voters will either feel

alienated, indifferent, or want to abstain from the election.<sup>21</sup>

If there is at least one moderate candidate in a midterm Senate election, voters will be much more keen to participate because they feel like their interests are being kept in mind. Not only will a centrist candidate boost turnout, it will likely result in the centrist candidate winning.<sup>22</sup> Within research in the U.S. Senate races, there is a clear and unequivocal slant towards institutional literature rather than behavioral literature. Turnout increases when candidates are more moderate, and moderate candidates will likely win if more people turn out to vote. If extreme candidates were competing against each other in a Senate midterm election, there is no real chance that one candidate would have an advantage because not many voters on either side of the political spectrum would feel represented. There is evidence to suggest that voters simply prefer more moderate senators than representatives due to partisan gerrymandering in House Races and the lack of partisan gerrymandering in Senate Races. Representative John Tanner claimed that this was the case in 2004.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, journalist Joe Achenbach said that "few senators are as ideologically extreme as the representatives."<sup>24</sup> The reasons that we associate more extreme candidates with House Races, at least in the present day, may be because districts are drawn to represent extremists views. Senate districts are simply all of the voters in a state, so we do not see this same effect.

### **Presidential Elections**

<sup>18</sup> Hall, "What Happens When Extremists Win Primaries?" 18.

<sup>19</sup> Hall, "What Happens When Extremists Win Primaries?" 19 and 35.

<sup>20</sup> Dennis L. Plane and Joseph Gershtenson, "Candidates' Ideological Locations, Abstention, and Turnout in U.S. Midterm Senate Elections," in *Political Behavior* 26, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 1 and 87.

<sup>21</sup> Plane and Gershtenson, "Candidates' Ideological Locations," 70-71.

<sup>22</sup> Plane and Gershtenson, "Candidates' Ideological Locations," 89.

<sup>23</sup> Eric Uslander, "Is the Senate More Civil than the House?" July 16, 1999, 3 and 20.

<sup>24</sup> Uslander, "Is the Senate More Civil than the House?" 2.

Recent U.S. primary Presidential Election data finds the same pattern that is seen throughout the U.S. Senate and U.S. House Races holds: moderate candidates have an advantage over extremist candidates in elections. In the 2020 Presidential Primaries this was certainly the case - moderate Democrats were seen as more favorable candidates by Republicans. This is further evidence in favor of the median voter theorem. According to Broockman and Kalla, about two percent of Republicans would have voted for Donald Trump had the Democratic nominee been a progressive, supported Biden. In this study, Senator Bernie Sanders or Senator Elizabeth Warren were the progressive candidates.<sup>25</sup> As the researchers mention, given the close nature of the election in several states that could have determined the final electoral college outcome, these two percent of Republicans were very significant in swing states that could have easily handed the election to Trump.<sup>26</sup> The fact that the Democratic 2020 primary candidates had a strong and very possibly statistically significant effect on the final election result is more evidence that voters do understand candidates' ideology, a contrast to some scholars such as Hall and Thompson.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from the 2020 Democratic Primary that may very well have decided the general election, it is clear from the 2020 Presidential Election that moderates had an advantage over extremists in the primary and general election. Out-Partisans can be swayed by the other side and vote for a moderate candidate over an extremist. Biden won the nomination because some Republicans preferred Biden over more

extreme Democrats; and Biden won the election because many preferred a moderate Democrat over an extremist.

### **Institutional Literature**

Throughout an examination of the U.S. House, U.S. Senate midterms, and the Presidential Election, scholars find that moderate candidates do better in federal elections. There is conflicting literature about to what degree the ideology of candidates matter, but the majority of scholars believe that voters are in tune to the ideology of candidates - and make their voting decisions based on this factor.<sup>28</sup> In general, extreme candidates largely underperform moderate candidates in elections to a fairly high degree. Plane and Gershtenson's<sup>29</sup> research on how extreme candidates affect turnout in midterm Senate elections convey that voters feel alienated towards the candidates if they are both extreme. Moderate candidates will facilitate turnout.<sup>30</sup> In the 2020 Presidential Primary, moderate Democrats proved to sway some strong partisan voters, disproving the hypothesis that strong partisans will always vote for their party's nominee. Had a progressive Democrat such as Senators Warren or Sanders been the 2020 Democratic Presidential nominee, around two percent of Republicans would have voted for Trump placing the result of the election in jeopardy.<sup>31</sup>

### **Behavioral Literature: U.S. House Races**

Although historically, moderates have been seen as the more electable candidates, there is a new trend of research that states that while moderates may still have a small advantage over partisan ideologues, far more ideologues have been

<sup>25</sup> David Broockman and Joshua L. Kalla, "Candidate Ideology," 88.

<sup>26</sup> Broockman and Kalla, "Candidate Ideology," 95.

<sup>27</sup> Hall and Thompson, "Who Punishes Extremist Nominees?"

<sup>28</sup> Carson and Williamson, "Candidate Ideology," 182; Hall, "What Happens When Extremists Win

Primaries?"; Hall and Thompson, "Who Punishes Extremist Nominees?"

<sup>29</sup> Plane and Gershtenson, "Candidates' Ideological Locations," 81-83.

<sup>30</sup> Plane and Gershtenson, "Candidates' Ideological Locations," 81.

<sup>31</sup> Broockman and Kalla, "Candidate Ideology," 95.

elected to the U.S. House of Representatives since 2012.<sup>32</sup> There are many social and societal reasons for this trend, and it will be fascinating to see if it continues into the 2030s.

Researchers such as Utych (2019)<sup>33</sup> believe that the ways voters make decisions about what candidates to support have changed since 2012, at least among the U.S. House elections. Voters care about different priorities and look for different signals when choosing a candidate to support. This resulted in stronger support for extreme candidates. American voters stopped being ideological, and started caring more about pure partisanship.<sup>34</sup>

The difference between ideology and partisanship is often misunderstood. Ideology is the cognition that people make to determine what their beliefs are. Campbell et al. (1960) define partisanship as the “psychological attachment to a political party.”<sup>35</sup> Converse finds that few Americans have ideology.<sup>36</sup> Converse’s study was done many decades ago, however. So, his findings that only 20% of Americans have ideology have rapidly declined, as evidenced from Utych’s research. Some voters care far less about where a candidate lies on the scale from moderate to extreme and only cares that the candidate is in the same partisan camp as the voter.<sup>37</sup> While this attitude is common among voters, many in the base may feel drawn towards more moderate candidates if they feel as if there is a benefit that comes from voting for

moderate candidates. That is all to say, Utych<sup>38</sup> says that voters do not care very much about specific ideological positions (how moderate or extreme a candidate is) does not represent all voters. Since general elections typically do not feature two candidates of the same party, the researchers were able to test whether candidates preferred a moderate or an ideologue of their own party. Democrats preferred the ideological candidate while Republicans ranked their ideological and moderate candidate equally.<sup>39</sup>

### The Reasons for Extremism

Equally important regarding the increased success of extremist candidates is how, and in what environment extremist candidates thrive. Extremist candidates thrive when they are charismatic and when there is a popular discourse against the current political or social environment.<sup>40</sup> If a candidate is charismatic, aligns themselves with the working-class and against immigrants, that candidate may do very well, depending on the political environment. Serra states that foreign leaders such as Hugo Chavez, the former President of Venezuela, were able to garner support across a lot of individuals on the political spectrum because of tailored rhetoric that emphasized key points.

Furthermore, while Trump arguably did not attract a diverse audience, his message of being a man of the working people (albeit false in every quantitative sense) did resonate with voters.<sup>41</sup> The reason

<sup>32</sup> Utych, “A Voter-Centric Explanation,” 1; Carson and Williamson, “Candidate Ideology,” 180.

<sup>33</sup> Utych, “A Voter-Centric Explanation,” 3.

<sup>34</sup> Utych, “A Voter-Centric Explanation,” 5.

<sup>35</sup> Leonie Huddy and Alexa Bankert, “Political Partisanship as a Social Identity,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 2017, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Donald Kinder and Nathan Kalmoe, “Neither Liberal nor Conservative Ideological Innocence in the American Public,” (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 11.

<sup>37</sup> Utych, “A Voter-Centric Explanation,” 5.

<sup>38</sup> Utych, “A Voter-Centric Explanation,” 5-6.

<sup>39</sup> Utych, “A Voter-Centric Explanation,” 22.

<sup>40</sup> Gilles Serra, “Does Charisma Discourage Experience and Encourage Extremism?: The Electoral Strategies of a Populist Candidate,” in *Journal of Theoretical Politics* (2017): 9.

<sup>41</sup> Gilles Serra. “The Electoral Strategies of a Populist Candidate,” *CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIÓN Y DOCENCIA ECONÓMICAS* (2017): 26, 31, and 33.

the U.S. is seeing extremism amongst our political candidates is because of social discontent. Among Republicans, that social discontent largely stems from anger towards Latin American immigrants and the presence of Muslims within the United States.<sup>42</sup> Contrary to this, extreme candidates on the left side of the political spectrum are largely the result of frustration with the treatment of blue-collar workers. In fact, such blue-collar workers are not only upset at the Democratic politicians, they are mad at the legislation the Democrats put forth.

Mason, in *Uncivil Disagreement* describes town hall meetings where the Affordable Care Act, Obama's signature policy success, was debated. Mason describes the intense rhetoric and actions that objectors to the Affordable Care Act displayed. According to accounts, the police had to forcibly remove protesters because they were a physical hazard to members of Congress.<sup>43</sup> This behavior and sentiment is not necessarily directed at the specific policy. In fact, working-class Republicans, would, generally speaking benefit tremendously from the passage of the Affordable Care Act. More than five years later, Donald Trump ran for president. Scholars claim that many supporters of Trump were able to put policy aside and support Trump's candidacy because of the feeling that Trump gave his supporters. This feeling, of course, is anger. A pollster even stated this exact concept. Patrick Murray stated that "Trump has gotten voters who are

so angry that they are willing to put their own ideological concerns aside..."<sup>44</sup> This undefinable anger likely contributes to the effect that Serra analyzed when describing right wing anger.<sup>45</sup> One of the main drivers of this undefinable anger is anger at Latin-American Immigrants. The fact that these people were also angry at healthcare initiatives was likely a combination of a false perception that this healthcare would unjustly go to undocumented immigrants, and a political faction latching onto the main policy objection of the time.

A large reason why extremism among voters is increasing is because of citizens' increased ability to place themselves into exactly the environment of which they want to be. In the 2020s, social media has been a place where extremist views thrive because of one's unique ability to communicate and view posts and information only people who agree with. Youngblood (2020)<sup>46</sup> specifies social media is one of the most significant distributors of extremist ideology.

### **The Center-Squeeze Effect**

The citizens of Alaska switched to ranked choice voting in November of 2020. All elections in the state of Alaska are now conducted with a ranked-choice voting method.<sup>47</sup> Because ranked choice voting became prominent in Alaska, voters' calculus and the meaning behind a vote changed. In 2022, Democrat Mary Peltola won the at-large Congressional seat for the state of Alaska. In this election, there were three candidates: one moderate Republican,

<sup>42</sup> Gilles Serra, "The Electoral Strategies of a Populist Candidate," *CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIÓN Y DOCENCIA ECONÓMICAS* (2017): 31.

<sup>43</sup> Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Disagreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

<sup>44</sup> Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Disagreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

<sup>45</sup> Gilles Serra. "The Electoral Strategies of a Populist Candidate." 31.

<sup>46</sup> Mason Youngblood, "Extremist Ideology as a Complex Contagion: The Spread of Far-Right Radicalization in the United States between 2005 and 2017," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 7, no. 1 (July 31, 2020): 1.

<sup>47</sup> Angela Sbano, "How Should Alaskans Choose?: The Debate Over Ranked Choice Voting," *Alaska Law Review*, vol. 37, no. 2, 295.

one extreme Republican, and one Democrat. The centrist of the group, Mark Begich, was eliminated in the first round of voting, causing Palin (the extreme Republican) and Peltola (the Democrat) to advance to the instant runoff, where Peltola won. If this election was not conducted using ranked-choice voting, Begich would have likely won.<sup>48</sup> In other words, if the centrist candidate was running against one of the extremes (Peltola or Palin), projections show that Begich would have won, propagating the median voter theory.<sup>49</sup> In this instance, we can consider Peltola to be an extreme candidate, given that she is a Democrat in a red state, and was certainly not predicted to win. Because ranked-choice voting is becoming increasingly common in the United States, there is reason to believe that more extreme candidates will start to win general elections because of The Center-Squeeze Effect, provided ranked-choice voting becomes more popular.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

Institutional literature and behavioral literature are directly opposed to each other. The validity of each theory arguably depends on the time period in which elections and political attitudes are studied. Historically, institutional theories are backed by more election statistics. Elections between 1950 and 2012 demonstrate that moderate candidates have a decisive electoral advantage over extremist candidates. There are competing theories over whether or not this advantage is due to genuine political ideology or due to societal trends such as media trends that normalize moderate candidates and not extremist candidates, thus influencing votes. Most of the literature highlighted in this review subscribes to the theory that voters themselves have legitimate political opinions.

Research on the ideological or partisan difference between primary and general election voters is also debated. Nielson and Visalvanich state that primary voters typically prefer more extreme candidates, likely because primary voters are more politically engaged than the average voter and therefore have stronger opinions. There is, however, significant disagreement over whether Republicans and Democrats are equally amenable to ideological or extreme candidates. Utych states that Democrats actually support an ideological candidate far more than Republicans do, (Republicans support both moderates and extremists in equal measure), but Nielson and Visalvanich state that Republicans prefer extreme candidates to a higher degree than Democrats. The conclusions that can be drawn from this review are fairly simple: moderate candidates had a strong advantage before 2012, and they arguably still have an advantage. However, since 2012, moderate candidates are performing worse, and extremist candidates are performing better. This is likely due to increased political polarization and social discontent that has been exacerbated by Trump and similar extreme candidates.

While moderates may have a slight advantage over extreme candidates in general, there is reason to believe that this pattern will quickly change. The American electorate is truly becoming more partisan because the American electorate is frequently paying attention to partisanship, rather than ideology. In the 21st century, ranked choice voting has been increasing in popularity. Ranked choice voting allows voters to rank the candidates based on who they want to win, instead of just voting for one candidate. Research shows that ranked-choice voting is a strong deterrent to the success of centrist or moderate candidates. Because voters are afraid of the other side

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<sup>48</sup> Clelland, "Ranked Choice Voting," 1.

<sup>49</sup> Clelland, "Ranked Choice Voting," 5-6.

winning, voters tend to vote in a more partisan fashion when they vote in ranked-choice voting elections. This is called the Center-Squeeze effect and it is a large reason why extreme candidates may start winning at higher rates across the country, if ranked choice voting starts to be implemented in more geographic areas. It is found, however, that it is difficult to measure whether primary candidates who run in ranked choice voting elections are more extreme or less extreme than other primaries and compared with elections that do not use ranked choice voting. The reasons for this center around the fact that primary, RCV candidates are typically not well known, and there are far too many candidates in RCV primaries to be able to differentiate based on extremism or lack thereof. It is unclear whether RCV primaries are present in institutional or behavioral effects.

Is institutional literature or behavioral literature more believable, and which literature may predict the future of American elections? The case for the dominance of behavioral literature is sound; partisanship is increasing. However, the 2020 Presidential election shows that members of the opposite party can be swayed by moderate members of the opposing party, not extreme members of the opposing party. Two percent of Republicans who would have supported Trump, supported Biden. These same Republicans would not have supported Senators Warren or Sanders, the more progressive candidates. This is evidence that moderate candidates are possibly having overwhelming success in the modern-day. After all, the American electorate nominated Joe Biden over many more progressive options in 2020.

Hall and Thompson make a valid point: society at large and the media has propagated the normalcy of extreme candidates and the taboo of extreme

candidates. This trend appears to be dissipating. There is no sign of extreme candidates losing their footing. Carson and Williamson (2018) lay out clearly that extreme candidates keep increasing in popularity, likely due to or contributed by social discontent, as laid out by Serra (2018). As this social discontent keeps growing, all sides of the political spectrum will likely react in response, also becoming more extreme. Furthermore, the possible future prevalence of ranked-choice voting has a strong effect on elections – the candidates who are elected become more extreme, as seen in Alaska’s at-large Congressional Race. (While Mary Peltola is not an extreme Democrat, she is far different than the type of candidates Alaskans typically elect). Which literature is more believable and relevant in 2024? Behavioral literature is more relevant in 2024 because behavioral literature is generally much newer than institutional literature. Furthermore, The Center-Squeeze Effect suggests that voters do prefer more extremist candidates, but their preferences are not always reflected in their vote choice. While extreme candidates do not have an advantage yet, they likely will within the coming decades.

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# Alex Delano

## Exploring Neuroplasticity Through Ancient Literature: Measuring the Human Capacity for Change

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For HONR 492: Honor Thesis

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### *Abstract*

This paper analyzes ancient literature to show that humans have always been attempting to understand the brain's ability to change, a concept known in neuroscience as neuroplasticity. The characters of the Epic of Gilgamesh, the oldest remaining literary work, echo concepts of neurogenesis, the creation of new neurons, throughout a lifetime. The character of Enkidu mimics the progression of the brain through childhood to early adulthood as we acquire language. The character Gilgamesh matures as the brain does from adolescence to late adulthood, pruning unused connections to strengthen emotional regulation through fear-extinction. In merging the disciplines of neuroscience and classics, one can gain a better understanding of the brain, and ultimately the self. Neuroplasticity is our past and our future.

**Keywords:** Neuroplasticity, Epic of Gilgamesh, Neuroscience, Neurogenesis, Language Acquisition

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### Introduction

The understanding of the self is a communal and continuous process that spans from the earliest evidence of human existence to modern day humanities and sciences. When looking at the first surviving literary work, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, we find parallels to a recently developed field in neuroscience, neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to adapt in response to internal changes, like damage to an area of the brain, or to external stimuli like our environment. The search for an understanding of the malleability of the brain can be better understood if we look at the history of the examination of the brain and of the self from a macroscopic perspective, starting with the first piece of literature, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

### A Brief History of Ancient Literature and Neuroscience

The oldest remaining literary work is the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a Mesopotamian poem written nearly 4,000 years ago.<sup>1</sup> Considering the age of the work, the characters of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* are not as distant from us. The intentions of the creation of this epic are currently unknown, but its importance and understanding of human nature have not dwindled since its creation. Since the epic was written in cuneiform on twelve clay tablets, the story we have today is fragmentary, but its literary structure, character types, and overarching message pioneered a new form of literature, the epic cycle. The epic cycle of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was continued by the Greeks in the Homeric epics, hymns, and tragedies. Characters of Greek literature, but especially those from tragedy, had literary importance

as well as societal importance just as Gilgamesh and Enkidu did<sup>2</sup>. The performance of tragedies was not only a performance of the mythic history of Athens and the other city-states of Greece, but a form of collective processing of the trauma the Persian and Peloponnesian wars inflicted. The successor to epics, hymns, tragedies, and comedies is the philosophical works of Greeks like Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates who continued the ideas posited by Greek literature to give credence to their theories. Aristotle had the largest connection with ancient literary works as his work *Poetics* was the first analysis of the purpose and importance of poetry. In *Poetics* he defined the concept of catharsis, the purging of negative emotions through viewing a tragedy<sup>3</sup>. Betrayal, loss, and death permeated Greek tragedy and the minds of Athenians just as it did the minds of the ancient Sumerians.

The study of psychology arose from philosophy and an argument still unsettled: why and how do we do what we do? In search of an answer, branches of psychology grew as we continued to find the best way to understand ourselves. The first achievements in the field that would grow to be psychology was done by German scientist Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-1894) who measured neural impulses and the structure of sense organs.<sup>4</sup> The discovery of neural impulses by Helmholtz built a foundation in the empirical study of the brain that would later be continued. Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), the first person to be called a psychologist, ushered in a new movement of measuring the mind experimentally through introspection.<sup>5</sup> His

<sup>1</sup> John Carey, *A Little History of Poetry*, (Yale University Press, 2020) 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Louise Pryke, "Gilgamesh: Warrior and Hero," in *Gilgamesh* 1st ed. (Routledge, 2019) 67-87.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. S.H. Butcher (Macmillian, 2008) 8-10.

<sup>4</sup> D.B. Baker and H. Sperry, "History of Psychology: Physiology and Psychophysics," in *Psychology* (DEF Publishers, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> L. T. Benjamin, *A Brief History of Modern Psychology*, (Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

method of introspection asked people to examine their conscious experiences with objective criteria, like their emotional reaction to a stimulus. Wundt and his student Edward Titchener (1867-1927), pioneered a branch of psychology later named Structuralism that focused on the structures of the brain, using stimulus-reaction based experiments which differed from previous theories of the brain which examined it globally.<sup>6</sup> In response to Structuralism, Functionalism was spearheaded by William James (1842-1910). Functionalism looked at how the brain adapts to its environment as a collective unit, not just as separate parts. In James' book *The Principles of Psychology*, he was the first person to use the term "plastic" to describe the abilities of the brain:

"[Plasticity], then, in the wide sense of the word, means the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once... Organic matter, especially nervous tissue, seems endowed with a very extraordinary degree of plasticity of this sort..."<sup>7</sup> This plasticity, as described by James, was further explored as the branches of biological psychology, cognitive psychology, and neuroscience made advancements in understanding the functioning and anatomy of the brain.

The development of the field of neuroscience can be attributed to the discoveries of Santiago Ramon y Cajal who expanded on the measurements of neural impulses done by Hermann von Helmholtz.

Our brain communicates electro-chemically through cells called neurons which were discovered by Santiago Ramon y Cajal (1852-1934), the father of neuroscience. Neurons are cells within the nervous system whose communication is responsible for cognitive processes, sensory perception, and motor movements.<sup>8</sup> Previously, the belief was that brains were developed at birth, but work done by Margret Kennard and Joseph Altman found that the brain could grow and fix itself through adolescence into adulthood.<sup>9</sup> Later work done by Peter Eriksson and Fred Gage in 1997 was then able to find evidence of newborn neurons in adult brains, strengthening the findings of Margret Kennard and Joseph Altman. Neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to change itself, combines several branches of psychology and neuroscience to understand how and why these changes occur.<sup>10</sup> As the field of cognitive psychology and neuroscience continues to development, further research is needed to better understand neuroplasticity and its impact on cognition.

Neuroplasticity is a broad term; it encompasses any activity in the brain that adapts due to external or internal changes.<sup>11</sup> Within neuroplasticity there are several subsets based on which areas of the brain are affected and why this plasticity occurs. Neurogenesis is the proliferation of new neurons, often neural progenitor cells (NPC), throughout our life as our brain adapts to internal changes or our

<sup>6</sup> Baker and Sperry, "History of Psychology: Scientific Psychology Comes to the United States," in *Psychology* (DEF Publishers, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, (Henry Holt and Company, 1890): 115-116.

<sup>8</sup> Pedro J. Andres-Barquin, "Santiago Ramón y Cajal and the Spanish School of Neurology," *Lancet Neurology* 1, no. 7 (2002): 445-52.

<sup>9</sup> Maureen Dennis, "Margaret Kennard (1899–1975): Not a 'Principle' of Brain Plasticity but a Founding

Mother of Developmental Neuropsychology," *Cortex* 46, no. 8 (2010): 1043-1059; Jason S. Snyder and Michael R. Drew, "Functional Neurogenesis Over the Years," *Behavioral Brain Research* 328, (2020): 4.

<sup>10</sup> Gerd Kempermann et al., "More Hippocampal Neurons in Adult Mice Living in an Enriched Environment," *Nature* 368 (1997): 493-495.

<sup>11</sup> M. Puderbaugh and P.D. Emmady, "Neuroplasticity," in *StatPearls*, (StatPearls Publishing, 2023).

environment.<sup>12</sup> Cognitive processes like memory storage, emotional maturation, and language acquisition are all facilitated by neurogenesis in specific areas of the brain but most especially the hippocampus, an area of the brain dedicated to learning, memory, and emotion.<sup>13</sup> These processes have always occurred, but not until recently have researchers been aware and had the technology to study them. We have been trying to explain and understand our ability to change ourselves since literature was invented, through the golden ages of philosophy, and into the growth and development of psychology. The human capacity for change has been a question unanswered for as long as humanity itself, and the research being done in neuroplasticity brings us closer than we have ever been. The character development of Enkidu and Gilgamesh in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the epic cycle itself mimics the development of the brain in its multiple stages of life as it undergoes neurogenesis. An analysis of change in ancient literature can contextualize the recent developments in the field of neuroplasticity.

#### **Neuroplasticity and *The Epic of Gilgamesh***

The concept of lifelong change is ever present in literature beginning with the first documented story, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. At the center of the epic is a question of limits. The two heroes, Enkidu and Gilgamesh, wished to be as powerful as the gods by pushing themselves to their mortal capacity to reach the threshold of greatness. The story of Gilgamesh and Enkidu was not cautionary, it was instructive. The evolution of Enkidu

demonstrated the long-term benefits of stress adaptation. Gilgamesh's journey to gain wisdom can help us as we try to understand how to maintain cognitive function during aging. The evolution of writing and the creation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* mimics our acquisition of language in childhood. We can learn how plasticity was conceptualized in antiquity not only through the characters of the epic, but from the existence of the epic itself.

Enkidu was formed out of clay, as every mortal is, by the goddess Aruru and made strong by the god of war Ninurta.<sup>14</sup> He was thrown into the wild as an infant with only animals to raise him, even though he was created with the intention of being an equal to the demi-god king of Uruk, Gilgamesh. Enkidu knew nothing of his immense ability. He received no parenting nor nurturing, but his biological drive to survive led him to adapt through perseverance. As an adult Enkidu was found by a hunter and "tamed" by having sex with the temple prostitute, Shamhat. When Shamhat saw Enkidu, she described him as "the child of nature, the savage man from the midst of the wild"<sup>15</sup>. Enkidu was no longer more animal than man, but more man than animal. "Enkidu was weakened, could not run as before, but now he had *reason* and wide understanding..."<sup>16</sup> The specificity of the words "reason" and "understanding" imply a development that is entirely cognitive as his physical development is differentiated within this sentence. His ability to change cognitively and emotionally because of environmental change is a direct parallel to the adaptations

<sup>12</sup> Bing Yao et al., "Epigenetic Mechanisms in Neurogenesis," *Nature Reviews. Neuroscience* 17, no. 9 (2016): 537-49.

<sup>13</sup> S. N. Haber, "Corticostriatal Circuitry," *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 18, no. 1 (2016): 7-21.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew George, trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian*, Second edition, Penguin Classics (Penguin Books, 2020), 101-4.

<sup>15</sup> George, 178-9.

<sup>16</sup> George, 201-2, 59-63, and 90-1.

our brain makes through a lifetime through neuroplasticity, especially neurogenesis.

Gilgamesh at the beginning of the epic is an abusive dictator of the city of Uruk who has no empathy for his citizens. He is the demi-god son of the goddess who is relegated to the life of a mortal. A mortal king, but still a mortal. Gilgamesh's story revolves around understanding. On a remaining tablet from the Standard Babylonian version, an inscription describing Gilgamesh reads, *Sha naqba imuru*, "He who Sees the Unknown" or "He who Saw the Deep..."<sup>17</sup> The intelligence of Gilgamesh is unchallenged, but his wisdom is severely lacking. His mother was Ninsun, the goddess of wisdom who may have given him the genetic predisposition to wisdom, but wisdom must be earned. There is no doubt that this is the central theme of Gilgamesh's development through the epic. The proem, the opening lines, says "He who saw the Deep, the country's foundation, (who) knew..., was wide in all matter! (Gilgamesh, who) saw the Deep, the countries foundations... (He)... everywhere and (learnt) of everything the sum of wisdom. He saw what was secret, discovered what was hidden..."<sup>18</sup> Within the first lines we are told that by the end of his journey Gilgamesh will achieve a task not meant for mortals, reach the ends of the Deep, and reach the precipice of immortality. In his journey to achieve wisdom he clearly mimics the trajectory of cognitive refinement that is now attributed to neurogenesis. Experience is what tamed Gilgamesh just as it did Enkidu.

As a nightwatchman, Enkidu heard of the ruthless and abusive tyrant of Uruk and decided to put an end to his reign. The two equals of strength met and fought, but

ultimately chose to band together, sealing their companionship with a kiss. The first trial the duo faced was the King of the Forest of Cedar, Humbaba. The senior council of Uruk spoke to Gilgamesh and Enkidu trying to dissuade them from fighting a beast they do not need to, "You are young, Gilgamesh, borne along by emotion, all that you talk of you don't understand..."<sup>19</sup> Gilgamesh and Enkidu brushed off the advice of the elders and trekked to the Forest of Cedar and killed Humbaba. Acting on hubris, Gilgamesh and Enkidu decided to face the Wild Bull of Heaven, a sacred beast of the gods. Their act of violence must be punished by the gods, Enkidu is punished by death and Gilgamesh is punished by the loss of his companion and lover.

Gilgamesh mourns Enkidu in the same way he did anything, violently. He held the body of Enkidu until the maggots fell from his corpse.<sup>20</sup> Faced with the death of his equal, Gilgamesh suddenly realizes the inevitability of his death and ventures to find the only man who has been known to escape death, Uta-Napishti saying "I am afraid of death, so I wander the wild..."<sup>21</sup> During his journey to Uta-Napishti, Gilgamesh's sense of self is inverted. Previously described as a wild bull himself, by the end of the epic he is described as a hunter of wild bulls.<sup>22</sup> Just as Enkidu, his cognitive development is marked by his differentiation from previous animalistic qualities. After reaching Uta-Napishti, he is given a plant that will grant him immortality. Before Gilgamesh can eat the plant, a snake appears and steals the plant from him. Immortality slips through his fingers like sand in an hourglass, yet Gilgamesh still achieved immortality

<sup>17</sup> Louise M. Pryke, "Wisdom and Civilisation," in *Gilgamesh*, 1st ed., (Routledge, 2019): 1.

<sup>18</sup> George, *The Epic of Gylgamesh*, 1-6.

<sup>19</sup> George, 89-90.

<sup>20</sup> George, 60.

<sup>21</sup> George, 5.

<sup>22</sup> George, 13.

through establishing a legacy. He built an impenetrable wall around Uruk that would outlast him and generations after him. The fruits of his mind will continue even once his brain is nothing but worm food.

Enkidu grew from a wild man who knew nothing to an equal and trusted advisor of a demi-god king. Gilgamesh grew from an ego driven dictator to a humbled and wise leader of his people. Enkidu and Gilgamesh's evolution is psychological. The study of the brain did not become empirical until the 1800's, but it was still being examined through characters like Enkidu and Gilgamesh. The consistent description of characters as being formed or returned to clay at birth and death is significant as it shows that we have interpreted the body and mind as fluid for as long as we could verbalize it. While we now use the term "plastic", in antiquity being described as clay or formed from clay is equivalent. Even the term "plastic" comes from the Greek word *πλαστικός* (*plastikós*) which means to be molded or formed.<sup>23</sup> Neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to change itself, has been a central theme in literature since our earliest record.

### Enkidu and Epigenetics

Our brains are optimized for adaptation. It depends on experience to organize neural circuitry to maintain function and stability. Neuroplasticity is constant during our lifetime and plays a part in ensuring our survival through moderating our emotional responses.<sup>24</sup> The processes

that contribute to neuroplasticity rely on the creation of new neurons through neurogenesis. Neurons formed past adolescence are referred to as adult-born neurons and could be the key to developmental neuroplasticity. These neurons lack inhibition which increases their ability to communicate.<sup>25</sup> We can track the number of adult-born neurons through doublecortin (DCX), a protein released by adult-born neurons during neurogenesis.<sup>26</sup> Many studies have found that the highest concentration of DCX is in the hippocampus and striatum.<sup>27</sup> The dorsal striatum is composed of the putamen and caudate nucleus which are important for learning, language, cognition, reward, and muscle movement.<sup>28</sup> Each location that adult-born neurons are found in helps us to understand the refinement of cognitive processes and motor control seen in adulthood.

When we are stressed over an exam, making an important phone call, or when a mythic beast is barreling towards us at inhuman speeds, we have hippocampal neurogenesis to thank for our stress response. When we experience stress, a hormone called cortisol is released by our adrenal glands at the command of our hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, the maintainer of homeostasis.<sup>29</sup> In situations of chronic stress, increased cortisol levels are detrimental to hippocampal neurogenesis as cortisol directly targets and decreases neural progenitor cells (NPC), a type of stem cell

<sup>23</sup> George Henry Liddell and Scott, Robert, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, (Clarendon Press, 1940).

<sup>24</sup> Cyril Herry et al., "Neuronal Circuits of Fear Extinction," *European Journal of Neuroscience* 31 (2010): 599-612.

<sup>25</sup> C. Anacker and René Hen, "Adult Hippocampal Neurogenesis and Cognitive Flexibility linking memory and mood," *Nature Reviews, Neuroscience* 18, no. 6 (2017): 335-346.

<sup>26</sup> A. Ernst, et al., "Neurogenesis in the Striatum of the Adult Human Brain," *Cell* 156, no.5 (2014): 1072-1083.

<sup>27</sup> Anacker and Hen, "Adult Hippocampal Neurogenesis and Cognitive Flexibility," 335-346.

<sup>28</sup> S. N. Haber, "Corticostriatal Circuitry," 7-21.

<sup>29</sup> Nathan K. Evanson and James P. Herman, "Role of Paraventricular Nucleus Glutamate Signaling in Regulation of HPA Axis Stress Responses," *Interdisciplinary Information Sciences* 12, no. 2 (2015): 253-260.

that generates adult-born neurons. Acute stress also releases cortisol, but when this stress is viewed as controllable (physical exercise, learning, or engaging in a novel environment) NPC increases.<sup>30</sup> Levels of glucocorticoids, hormones like cortisol that are involved in our stress response, are normalized by hippocampal neurogenesis and lead to a maturation of our stress response.

While epigenetics, hormones, and neuroplasticity were not understood in ancient Mesopotamia, the trajectory of Enkidu follows the biological process of adaptation through the first half of the epic. When Enkidu was fighting for his spot at the watering hole as a young man-beast, learning how to eat cooked food when introduced to civilization, and standing toe to toe with the Bull of Heaven and Humbaba, we can assume his stress response was being mediated by hippocampal neurogenesis. As a young man-beast, Enkidu was repeatedly exposed to novel environments, learning how to adapt and how to fight. This series of acute stress during early childhood and adolescence resulted in proliferation of NPC, maturing his stress response which benefited him greatly as he fought mythic beasts. Before and during their battle with Humbaba, Gilgamesh consults Enkidu for advice, showing that Enkidu is endowed with experience that even his equal does not have. The constant optimization of neural functions to maintain emotional stability through different developmental stages is clearly seen in the actions of Enkidu throughout the epic.

<sup>30</sup> Yao et al., “Epigenetic Mechanisms in Neurogenesis,” 537–49.

<sup>31</sup> Kempermann et al., “More Hippocampal Neurons in Adult Mice Living in an Enriched Environment,” 493–495.

<sup>32</sup> Danka A. Kozareva et al., “Born this Way: Hippocampal Neurogenesis Across the Lifespan,”

### **Aging & Neurogenesis: The Wisdom of Gilgamesh**

The hero’s journey is a story of resilience in the face of insurmountable odds. In every journey there is a point of no return where the character must decide to push past their mortal threshold and earn their rank as a hero. This trajectory is not entirely fictional, it’s a metaphorical parallel for the emotional and cognitive growth we develop over a lifetime. The greatest evidence for this analogy comes from the evolution of our brain cells through our lives. Adult born neurons change the activity of granule cells, a type of neuron primarily found in the hippocampus.<sup>31</sup> Granule cells’ alteration results in improvements in memory and mood regulation. Memory storage increases in adulthood in part due to hippocampal adult-born neurons inhibiting granule cells which in turn weaken the connections of information that are rarely accessed. This increases the capacity and lowers the interference between novel and established memories.<sup>32</sup> When mature granule cells are inhibited by newborn neurons, fear memories that were previously encoded are “erased” and assist with the encoding of new safe association.<sup>33</sup> This process is called fear-extinction and is partly responsible for the emotional refinement that we see during aging. Actions like fear-extinction are part of a greater process of cognitive flexibility.

At the beginning of the epic, Gilgamesh is a tyrannical ruler who has established his superiority not only through his divine inheritance but his tendency for violence. The citizens of Uruk describe him as “a mighty wild bull, head raised!”<sup>34</sup> After

*Aging Cell* 18, no. 5 (2019); Anacker and Hen, “Adult hippocampal Neurogenesis and Cognitive Flexibility,” 335-346.

<sup>33</sup> Cyril Herry et al., “Neuronal Circuits of Fear Extinction,” 599-612.

<sup>34</sup> George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 30.

the death of Enkidu and his sudden realization of the limitations of his mortality, he left Uruk in search of immortality. While traveling, a woman named Shiduri spotted him and said, “For sure this man is a hunter of wild bulls...”<sup>35</sup> Instead of a man driven by animalistic impulse to fight to survive, he learns the importance in long term strategy, employing this in his journey to the Deep. During the duration of his quest for immortality he inverts his sense of self as he reaches the Deep, a land no mortal has reached before. This achievement re-encoded his previous fears of ineptitude with a concise vision of how to establish his legacy as a ruler. Gilgamesh’s emotionally turbulent nature undergoes a transformation parallel to the process of fear-extinction. Epics following the *Epic of Gilgamesh* continue this trend of fear-extinction as a form of character development especially in ancient Greek literature. The importance of fear-extinction was not understood on a neurological level, but on an emotional and thematic level, it was ever present in the development of influential ancient heroes.

Understanding the maintenance of hippocampal circuitry is paramount to our understanding of mechanisms that are affected by neurodegeneration.<sup>36</sup> In a study examining autopsied healthy hippocampi from people aged 14 to 79 years old, evidence of neurogenesis was found in all ages.<sup>37</sup> Adult born neurons and mature granule cells were found in consistent numbers throughout each sample. The presence of these cells is believed to contribute not only to cognitive function, but

to emotional resilience. Recent studies have shown us just how extensively aerobic exercise and novel environments positively affect the hippocampus and its potential to induce neurogenesis.<sup>38,39</sup> The formation of neurons in the dentate gyrus, a sub-area in the hippocampus, has been found to increase by 15% in mice when repeatedly exposed to enriching environments<sup>40</sup>. These new neurons formed in the hippocampus have been correlated with decrease of cognitive decline like that we see in neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer’s. The development of neurodegenerative diseases is still largely a mystery, but when looking at ancient literature we may be able to understand why modern methods of maintaining cognitive function are successful.

Literature evolved from practical informational writing, which signals to us that as the first story, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, is informative to its audience. This implies that there was some level of understanding that mental and physical perseverance affected capability. To reach the Deep, Gilgamesh had to undertake not only physically demanding tasks but endure the grief of losing Enkidu while in an unfamiliar environment. This combination of physical and emotional trials is continued with heroes of epic like Achilles, Odysseus, Hercules, and Aeneas. Researchers are just now finding connections with aerobic exercise and novel environments and cognitive enhancement which is parallel to the trials of heroes. The association between age and wisdom is common in most ancient stories and surviving to old age was a signifier of

<sup>35</sup> George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Orly Lazarov and Carolyn Hollands, “Hippocampal Neurogenesis: Learning to Remember,” *Progress in Neurobiology* (2016): 1-18.

<sup>37</sup> Maura Boldrini et al., “Human Hippocampal Neurogenesis Persists throughout Aging,” *Cell Stem Cell* 22, no. 4 (2018): 589-599.

<sup>38</sup> Henriette van Praag et al., “Running Increases Cell Proliferation and Neurogenesis in the Adult Mouse

Dentate Gyrus,” *Nature Neuroscience* 2, no. 3 (1999): 266–70.

<sup>39</sup> A. Maass et al., “Vascular Hippocampal Plasticity after Aerobic Exercise in Older Adults,” *Molecular Psychiatry* 20, no. 5 (2015): 585–93.

<sup>40</sup> Kempermann et al., “More Hippocampal Neurons in Adult Mice Living in an Enriched Environment,” 493-495.

perseverance, experience, and some form of intelligence. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the council of elders told Gilgamesh he was acting out of immaturity by going to the Cedar Forest to hunt Humbaba.<sup>41</sup> It is only when Gilgamesh faced the immortal man, Uta-Napishti, that he realized his immaturity and resigned himself to a life of true rulership of Uruk. Men of old age bookending Gilgamesh's journey to the end of the known world further underlines Gilgamesh's cognitive refinement. Examination of culturally significant heroes from ancient literature can give us wisdom of how to treat cognitive decline as a result of aging.

### **Cyclical Relationship of the Development of Language and Language Acquisition**

Storytelling was the precursor to literature, a practice that predated the written word by centuries and was crucial to community and ritual.<sup>42</sup> Before we had an alphabet, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey*, and many more foundational stories to humanity were performed orally to the community.<sup>43</sup> To remember the hundreds of lines, people would dedicate their lives to the recitation of these stories. As far back as we can trace, repetition has been established as the most effective way to learn a language. Ancient literature was not only a documentation of culture and what its people held close, but it was the result of communal learning and adaptation. Epic not only contained themes of learning parallel to modern understanding of learning acquisition, but the existence of the literature itself resulted in the

development of written language. Ancient epic, language acquisition, and repetition are inseparable, and neuroplasticity can tell us why.

Language is foremost a tool of communication whether that is intrapersonal or interpersonal. Tokens, usually clay shapes that represented an economic unit for trade, were the precursor to writing and archeologists have dated them to around 8000-3000 BCE.<sup>44</sup> Accountants of ancient Elam (modern day Iran) in around 3200 BCE created a form of receipts representing the number of tokens owed, bringing writing into its infancy.<sup>45</sup> This established the earliest writing system, Mesopotamian cuneiform, which was the language the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was written in. A majority of the first cuneiform tablets are receipts, which is why the existence and meaning of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* signals the development of written language as not only a form of personal expression but emotional connection within a community. Analysis of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is key to understanding the evolution of language and neuronal acquisition of language.

How language works in the brain is still not fully understood, especially how language is acquired. What we do know is the temporal lobe is important for audition, the frontal lobe is important for assigning meaning to words, and language processes mainly occur in the left-hemisphere.<sup>46</sup> At birth we are a sponge for any language(s) we are exposed to, but as we age picking up a second language becomes increasingly difficult. Many other types of learning become easier as we age, which is why

<sup>41</sup> George, *The Epic of Gylgamesh*, 272-300.

<sup>42</sup> Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge University Press, 1987): 57-59.

<sup>43</sup> J.M. Foley, "'Reading' Homer through Oral Tradition," *College Literature* 34, no. 2 (2007):1-28.

<sup>44</sup> D. Schmandt-Besserat, *How Writing Came About*, (University of Texas Press, 1996).

<sup>45</sup> D. Schmandt-Besserat, "The Evolution of Writing," (International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Science, 2014).

<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Bates et al., "Plasticity, Localization, and Language Development," in *The Changing Nervous System*, (Oxford University Press, 1999): 2-3.

language acquisition is such a mystery.<sup>47</sup> There has yet to be a definitive answer as to why, but some researchers attribute it to our neural circuitry<sup>48</sup>. Our brain loves patterns. When we are born our brain picks up and builds neural networks that are based on the patterns, specifically phonemes, of the first language(s) we are exposed to. Phonemes are the smallest sound that makes words distinguishable. Brain imaging studies that monitor the electrical frequencies of the brain have found that in adults, brain activation is far more efficient when listening to our native language than our non-native language<sup>49</sup>. Our brain's love of our native language is not only a result of neurobiological functions, but exposure within our community. How the brain develops language is dependent on what communities we are exposed to, altering our neural networks through neuroplastic mechanisms like neurogenesis.

Studies have found that the development of language in children follows the same path regardless of region and language<sup>50</sup>. The first step in language development is understanding phonemes, the basic unit of speech used to differentiate words from each other. The ability for infants to tell the difference between phonemes is unparalleled to that of adults. Adults have been found to be less successful in differentiating the phonemes of a native and non-native language compared to

infants<sup>51</sup>. These findings show us just how plastic our brain is to language during development and why a study of these neural mechanisms is necessary to understand why this occurs. Next, the acquisition of single words begins to grow slowly with most of these words being labels like mother, father, or ball, and a lower proportion being verbs like go, run, or eat<sup>52</sup>. From 18 to 24 months children enter the two-word stage in which they combine the single words they have just learned to begin to communicate with more specificity with phrases like "want toy". During the two-word stage, children's speech patterns begin to resemble the specific syntactical patterns of their native language and mimic the sentence patterns of fluent speakers. The next stage, telegraphic speech, advances from two-word phrases to add contextual words while still missing a full grammatical understanding of speaking with phrases like "Alex want food". Once a child reaches 2 to 3 years old, they begin to use extended sentences using spatial descriptors, pronouns, and begin to grasp inflections. The last stage of language development is from 4 to 5 years old where they begin to use sentences with eight or more words, can describe a sequence of events, and can create pretend stories.<sup>53</sup> Language development is a semi-uniform practice that is mediated by the brain's ability to adapt.

<sup>47</sup> Ehsan Shokri-Kojori et al., "Estimates of Brain Age for Gray Matter and White Matter in Younger and Older Adults: Insights into Human Intelligence," *Brain Research* 1763 (2021).

<sup>48</sup> Patricia K. Kuhl, "Brain Mechanisms in Early Language Acquisition," *Neuron* 67, no. 5 (2010): 713–27.

<sup>49</sup> Parker Jones et al., "Where, When, and Why Brain Activation Differs for Bilinguals and Monolinguals during Picture Naming and Reading Aloud," *Cerebral Cortex* 22, no. 4 (2012): 892–902.

<sup>50</sup> Karin Stromswold, "The cognitive neuroscience of language acquisition," *The New Cognitive Neurosciences*, MIT Press (2000): 909.

<sup>51</sup> Janet F. Werker and Richard C. Tees, "Cross-Language Speech Perception: Evidence for Perceptual Reorganization During the First Year of Life," *Infant Behavior & Development* 25, no. 1 (2002): 121–33.

<sup>52</sup> Karin Stromswold, "The Cognitive Neuroscience of Language Acquisition," *The New Cognitive Neurosciences* (2000): 910.

<sup>53</sup> "Age-Appropriate Speech and Language Milestones", Stanford Medicine Children's Health, accessed March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025, <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=age-appropriate-speech-and-language-milestones-90-P02170>.

These stages of language acquisition are mimicked in our development of writing,

The development of language acquisition from basic sound differentiation to complex stories is directly comparable to the historical development of written language that originated in the Mediterranean region. The precursor to writing was logograms, symbols typically to represent names that are based on the sound of the name. For example, a man named Hunter may be represented by a bow and arrow or a spear.<sup>54</sup> Just as logograms typically represented people, clay tokens arose as a method to represent debt owed. The shapes of each token were representative of a commercial good; an ovoid shape represented a jar of oil and three cones represented three baskets of grain.<sup>55</sup> There was a direct correlation between the token to units of good owed. As cities grew, there needed to be a better way to keep track of the growing number of tokens. Clay tablets were then used with markings that symbolized each token, still utilizing a one-to-one unit conversion of symbol to token to goods owed. These were called pictographs and are first documented around 3100 BCE. In 3000 BCE these pictographs evolved into phonetic signs, no longer representing an object but the sounds of speech.<sup>56</sup> Other forms of pictographs are found in ancient cultures at the same time periods, but Sumerian had the ability to become as complex as it did due to the language being

primarily monosyllabic.<sup>57</sup> The Sumerian syllabary, a collection of around 400 symbols that represented syllables, resulted in a multitude of syllabic texts documenting the mythical past of kings, religious rites, and even mathematical knowledge.<sup>58</sup> Language up until then was largely informative until the arrival of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a 12-tablet story of a mythical king and the first documented written story.

Both language and writing evolved from simple phonetic sounds to basic descriptors of objects and names, to short informative blurbs, to robust complex fictional and non-fictional stories. The main question neuroscientists have of language's role in the brain is what areas of the brain play a role and what relationship these areas have with each other. Measures of neural connectivity during language processing tasks have shown that language is a complex and interconnected process involving implicit and explicit processes of learning.<sup>59</sup> Once again this mirrors the development of written language as it evolved to not only represent individual expression but facilitate community communication. The relationship between the history of written language and the acquisition of language is cyclical, each informing the other resulting in an evolution of communication and cognition. Just as looking at the character developments of Gilgamesh and Enkidu can give us perspective on where modern studies on neuroplasticity can go, examining the

<sup>54</sup> Schmandt-Besserat, "The Evolution of Writing."

<sup>55</sup> Massimo Maiocchi et al., "Writing in Early Mesopotamia: The Historical Interplay of Technology, Cognition, and Environment," in *Beyond the Meme*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

<sup>56</sup> John S. Newberry, "The Prehistory of the Alphabet," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 45, (Harvard University, 1934): 105-156.

<sup>57</sup> Carl S. Ehrlich, "Sumerian Literature," in *From an Antique Land*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> CDLI contributors, "Home," Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, 2025, <https://cdli.earth>.

<sup>59</sup> Steven L. Bressler and Vinod Menon, "Large-Scale Brain Networks in Cognition: Emerging Methods and Principles," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 14, no. 6 (2010): 277-90; Frédéric Isel and Michèle Kail, "Neuroplasticity, Network Connectivity and Language Processing across the Lifespan," *Brain and Cognition* 134, (2019): 67-70.

origin of writing can help us contextualize recent discoveries in language acquisition.

### Conclusion

To understand the brain we must understand ourselves, and that is a venture that requires a multitude of perspectives and methods of examination. Analysis of ancient literature can help us to view modern advances in neuroscience from a new perspective. Previous interdisciplinary analysis between sciences and literature has resulted in breakthroughs such as geneticist's ability to read DNA which was derived from a line from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and a linguist named George Kingsley Zipf.<sup>60</sup> Classical literature has also given us medical knowledge such as the first descriptions of neurological conditions like decerebrate rigidity which were found in Homer's *Iliad* or the first case of senile dementia in the Hippocratic Corpus (570-495 BCE) which later is described by the Islamic Golden Age physician Avicenna.<sup>61</sup> Character developments of heroes like Enkidu and Gilgamesh mimic neurological processes that we are just beginning to understand and may give insight on how to contextualize processes like fear-extinction or hippocampal neurogenesis. The fact that written language has developed in a similar progression to our acquisition of language in childhood lends credibility to a cyclical relationship between the two. When attempting to understand complex problems, confining your thinking to one discipline can become reductive, especially concerning something as malleable and adaptable as the brain. In searching for answers to modern

neuroscience problems, antiquity may hold the answers.

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<sup>60</sup> Sam Kean, *The Violinist's Thumb: And Other Lost Tales of Love, War, and Genius, as Written by our Genetic Code* (Back Bay Books, 2013): 72-77.

<sup>61</sup> Saeed Kayhanian and Robert J. Machado, "Head Injuries in Homer's *Iliad*," *World Neurosurgery* 143, (2020): 33–37; Gustavo C. Román and Nawab

Qizilbash, "Historical Evolution of the Concept of Dementia: A Systematic Review from 2000 BC to AD 2000," in *Evidence-based Dementia Practice*, (Blackwell Science Ltd., 2003), 197–227; Arman Zargaran et al., "Avicenna (980–1037 AD)," *Journal of Neurology* 259, no. 2 (2012): 389–90.

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## Regency and Respectability: Exploring the Extent of Female Political Power in the Mongol Empire

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For HIST 338: Mongols to Ottomans

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### *Abstract*

Established in 1206 after Temüjin, now named Chinggis Khan (“great Khan”) unified the disparate steppe tribes, the Mongol Empire was a powerful political entity that controlled much of Eurasia well into the mid-thirteenth century. Despite their conqueror being male, as well as the fact that men were the primary drivers of militaristic imperial expansion, women played crucial roles in the economy and politics of the empire. This essay explores how three Mongol imperial women exercised their political will, some more successful than others, and how the actions of these three women help illustrate the extent and limitations of Mongol female political ability.

**Keywords:** Mongol, Mongol Empire, Women in Politics

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Casual observers of history probably do not immediately think of women and women's history as being a core component to the study of the Mongol Empire, which lasted 1206-1260.<sup>1</sup> After all, its founder, Chinggis Khan was male, and the techniques through which he founded his empire – war and conquest – are traditionally masculine domains. However, several anthropologists, namely Robin Fox and Jack Goody, have noted that oftentimes, pre-industrial, nomadic societies which are nomadic tend to show “stronger matrilineal tendencies, [affording] women greater control over property, and therefore, power.”<sup>2</sup> This tendency, while somewhat oversimplified, generally holds true for our analysis of Mongol gender norms. Because men were often fighting on various campaigns, women in Mongol society were responsible for managing every other aspect of life – not just the standard homemaker tasks but also commercial influence and political power – and for imperial women, politics.

As such, Mongol royal women fulfilled unique political roles within Mongol power structures. Various institutions, social systems, and traditions of Mongol society were expansive enough to allow for – and even encourage – female political consciousness, while at the same time, other factors limited female political ability such that direct political actions were typically less feasible and more optically damaging than indirect strategies to subtly

influence politics from the side. The scope of Mongol female political power is perfectly illustrated by the actions and strategies of three highly influential Mongol royal women, all of whom in some way contributed to the irrevocable alteration of Mongol khanate succession. These women were Töregene, wife of Ögodei Khan and regent of the empire from 1241-1246; Oghul Qaimish, wife of Güyük Khan, and regent from 1248-1251; and Sorqoqtani, wife of Tolui, and, though not a queen regent, the mastermind behind a coup which toppled the ruling Ögodeid house and replaced it with her own house.

Mongol succession rules were far from simple; the Mongols, having never run an empire before, awkwardly applied their chieftain and property inheritance customs to the succession needs of empire. Unlike European-style monarchies, which tended to operate under the system of primogeniture, any male relative of the previous Great Khan, whether he be eldest son, youngest son, brother, nephew, or uncle, could be eligible for rule of the vast empire. Therefore, after the death of the previous Khan, an assembly known as the *quriltai* was held, always in Mongolia, wherein the members of the royal family and select consort clans could lobby for and select their next leader from the Chinggis Khan, founder of the empire, was well aware of this complicated process, and therefore selected his choice for successor before his death: his

<sup>1</sup> This analysis will focus on the unified Mongol Empire, which arguably began in 1206 when Temüjin was named “Chinggis Khan,” meaning “Great Khan,” and ended roughly around 1260, after the death of Möngke Khan when the realm was plunged into civil war and the unified empire was split up into multiple successor Khanates. George Lane, *Genghis Khan and Mongol Rule* (Greenwood Press, 2004), xxviii-xxix

<sup>2</sup> Michael Hope, “Women in the Social, Political and Economic History of the Mongol Empire,” *English*

*Historical Review* 136, no. 581 (2021): 988, 990, footnote 4, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ceab167>. Hope notes that while Mongol scholars have traditionally pulled from these anthropological perspectives in tandem with primary sources, namely, the Secret History, he warns against the “over-reliance on the anthropological model.” There are many complexities and nuances in both Mongol and other Eurasian steppe societies which call for us to “look more closely at other environmental, political, and social factors” which shaped the gender groupings of Mongol society.

third son, Ögodei. In addition to granting Ögodei title of Great Khan, Chinggis designated his three remaining sons various sub-khanates, with the understanding that they could enjoy semi-autonomy, so long as they remained loyal to their supreme khan.<sup>3</sup> As such, Chinggis' sons Jochi, the eldest, Chaghatai, the second eldest, and Tolui, the youngest, were each granted their own territories and titles to rule themselves.<sup>4</sup>

The first royal woman that we will analyze is Töregene Khatun, who ruled as queen regent of the Mongol Empire from 1241 – 1246, in the time between the reign of her husband, Ögodei, and her son, Güyük. Töregene Khatun was a wife of Ögodei, but crucially, she was not his favorite, nor his chief wife. 'Ala-ad-Din 'Ata-Malik Juvaini, a Persian historian and bureaucrat under the service of the Ilkhanate, explains in his work *The History of the World Conqueror*, just how Töregene was able to rise to power. When Ögodei died in 1241, the precedent for a widowed wife of the previous Khan to assume regency had yet to be established. In fact, were it not for the fact that he was currently engaged in a military campaign, it

is likely that Güyük, eldest son of the deceased Khan, would have been appointed regent. "Therefore," wrote Juvaini, "in accordance with precedent, the dispatch of orders and the assembling of [the *quriltai*] [were to take] place at the door of the *ordu*, or palace of [Ögodei's] wife, Möge Khatun."<sup>5</sup> Möge Khatun herself was a powerful figure - she was first the wife of Chinggis Khan, and after his death, remarried to Ögodei, his son, who "loved her more than his other wives -- so much so that they were jealous of her."<sup>6</sup> But Töregene was "shrewder and more sagacious than Möge Khatun," which Juvaini credits as the reason that Töregene was able to drum up support from the other members of the royal family for her own ascendancy as queen regent.<sup>7</sup>

Even after acquiring regency, Töregene's rule was far from peaceful. Her many controversial administrative decisions, alongside political maneuvering to place her son Güyük in line as the next Great Khan meant she faced endless dissent and resistance. Güyük was not the favored

<sup>3</sup> *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Igor de Rachewiltz (Koninklijke Brill NV, 2006), lines 254-56. Chinggis' decision was in part due to a feud between his eldest sons Jochi and Chagatai. Although Chinggis himself never doubted it, Jochi's birthright was unclear, prompting Chagatai to advocate against his father selecting a "bastard" to succeed him. Angry at Chagatai's outburst, but also aware of the possible de-legitimizing factor were these rumors true, Chinggis passed over both sons and selected Ögodei as his successor. Tolui, the youngest son seemed unbothered by his lack of opportunity, instead vowing full loyalty to his brother.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy May, "Commercial Queens: Mongolian Khatuns and the Silk Road," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Third Series*, 26, no 1/2 (2016): 91, doi: 10.1017/S13 56186315000590. Tolui also served as the regent after his father's death and before the *quriltai* which placed his brother, Ögodei on the throne (1227-1229).

<sup>5</sup> 'Ala-ad-Din 'Ata-Malik Juvaini, *The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. John Andrew Boyle, 239-240.

<sup>6</sup> Rashid al-Din, *Jami 'u' t-tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles, A History of the Mongols Part One* trans. W.M. Thackston (Harvard University Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations), (1998): 77. It should be noted that Möge Khan bore no children either to Chinggis nor his son. She was also "preferred by other influential members of the royal family," according to de Nicola - he's probably talking about Chaghatai.

<sup>7</sup> Juvaini, *History of the World Conqueror*, trans. Boyle, 240; Bruno de Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran: The Khatuns, 1206-1335* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 69. Although Juvaini does not focus on it, de Nicola suggests that Töregene used her status as the mother of Ögodei's eldest son to advocate that she become regent. Möge Khatun, meanwhile, bore no sons - neither to Chinggis Khan nor to Ögodei.

candidate of the deceased Ögodei.<sup>8</sup> Soon after her ascension, Töregene was met with resistant administrative officials who refused her authority, requiring her to deploy “diplomatic and political skills” in order to bring them back under her heel.<sup>9</sup> Another political crisis came in the form of Temüge, brother of Chinggis Khan, who, immediately after Töregene’s ascension, attempted to overthrow the queen with an army of his own. Töregene once again displayed expert political maneuvering skills, sending out an army and several emissaries, one of whom was Temüge’s own son, Orutai, who worked at Töregene’s court. Through her emissaries, “Töregene appealed to family unity, [reminding] Temüge of her status as a Chinggisid daughter-in-law.”<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, Temüge withdrew and yielded to Töregene as queen, and soon after, Güyük arrived, back from his warring in the Kievan-Rus, “the final blow to Temüge’s hopes” of taking the Khanate for himself.<sup>11</sup>

Töregene’s taxation policy was another cause for chaos, for Töregene was a traditionalist, favoring aggressive taxation levied on the conquered sedentary population. Ögodei, meanwhile, had been

sympathetic towards the progressivist faction, and therefore promoted land reform, construction projects, and “perhaps most importantly, [a] [regularized] tax system to end the practice of extraordinary and irregular levies” on the populus.<sup>12</sup> As such, much of Töregene’s administration was marked by her replacements of key administrators in the realm. Many of these officials also faced the threat of execution; several escaped and found refuge with other royals.<sup>13</sup> Others were not so lucky, like Körgüz, former magistrate of West Asia, whose execution was overseen by Töregene (though was technically carried out by the Chaghataids).<sup>14</sup>

Despite her many controversies, it ought to be noted that Töregene was ultimately successful in her goals as a regent: to nominate her son, Güyük as the next Great Khan. In fact, her aforementioned tax policy should be viewed within this context. Mongol society was already one in which “rulers were expected to lavish wealth upon relatives, retainers, subordinates, and subjects” in general, so Töregene was required to fulfill these basic expectations in addition to the extra expense

<sup>8</sup> Anne Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire*, (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 166.

<sup>9</sup> De Nicola, *The Khatuns*, 69, summarizing Fakhr al-Din Banakati, *Tarikh-i Banakati* (see footnote 26). No translation was given, I am relying upon de Nicola’s summary.

<sup>10</sup> Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire*, 181.

<sup>11</sup> Broadbridge, 181. Here there is discrepancy among the sources. Rashid al-Din credits Töregene’s political ability first and foremost in the de-escalation of Temüge’s attempted coup d’état. Juvaini, meanwhile, credits the diplomatic skill of Mengli Oghul, another emissary that Töregene sent out; Broadbridge argues it was multiple factors: “the combination of Töregene’s ideas, Melik’s diplomatic ability, and the presence of Temüge’s son,” which alongside Güyük’s return caused Temüge to withdraw his forces.

<sup>12</sup> For further reading see Broadbridge, page 173.

<sup>13</sup> Of the persecuted officials, there were chiefly three. Mas’ud Beg, governor of Central Asia fled to Batu’s domains; Mahmud Yalavach, who governed North China and Chinqai, the “imperial minister” sought refuge with Köten, a son of Ögodei and either a stepson or full son of Töregene; the sources are unclear. Köten continually refused Töregene’s orders to surrender these two. For further reading see Hodong Kim, “A Reappraisal of Güyüg Khan,” in *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. Reuen Amitai and Michal Biran (Brill Leiden, 2005), 326-27.

<sup>14</sup> According to Anne Broadbridge, Körgüz had a “minor altercation” with one of the Chaghataids. By aligning the Mongol state against Körgüz but allowing the Chaghatai faction to kill him for other reasons, Töregene reinforced the Ögodei/Chaghatai alliance; a smart move, especially as tensions were rising with the Jochid branch. For further reading see Broadbridge, 174 and de Nicola, 69.

aimed at lobbying key families and individuals to support her bid for Güyük's candidacy.<sup>15</sup> In 1246, as was custom, the *quriltai* convened in the Mongol's homeland by the river Kerülen. In addition to Güyük, two other candidates made bids for the throne, but thanks to Töregene's years of lobbying and maneuvering, Güyük ultimately ascended to the throne, though only after refusing the nomination several times as tradition dictated.<sup>16</sup>

Even though Töregene did succeed in achieving her goal, the limitations of Mongol female political power were also evident in her time. These limitations, and the repercussions for violating them, were illustrated in the fate of a woman named Fatima, who had served as Töregene's chief advisor.<sup>17</sup> Fatima herself was widely unpopular, so much so that she was even executed after Töregene's reign concluded. The sources remember Fatima about as kindly as they remember Töregene, which is to say, not well at all. Whereas scholar Bruno de Nicola argues that ill treatment in the sources towards both of these women came not from any real opposition towards women ruling as a concept, but rather from antagonism directed against the policies of the two, but Broadbridge argues the opposite. She points to some of the more personal attacks directed at Fatima and Töregene: their characters described as "vengeful, hateful," with the idea that these women were motivated not by difference in

ideas about policy, but by the grudges they held, or the accusation that Fatima was a "procurer of prostitutes," a remark that is nothing short of misogynistic and which, as Broadbridge pointedly states, "reads like slander."<sup>18</sup>

Ironically, after taking power, much of the actions in Güyük's short reign were to reverse the unpopular decisions of his mother. This included the re-appointments of the many amirs whom she had fired and also included the targeting of the individual widely blamed for these decisions: Fatima. Actually, there were two other executions carried out by the Güyük regime which occurred before Fatima's. First, the execution of Temüge, brother of Chinggis Khan, who had previously attempted to seize governmental power after Ögodei's death. Here, there was some justification for an execution, although the event itself was kept relatively secret. The second victim was Al-Atlan, the youngest daughter of Chinggis Khan. Al-Atlan was present at Ögodei's death and was accused of poisoning the Great Khan - though in all likelihood, he died from alcohol overdose. Al-Atlan's execution, too, was kept secret.<sup>19</sup>

So we have two executions of other members of the royal family, both of whom were thought to be treasonous to the Güyük regime. But the third execution - Fatima's - was not secret; it was "prominent, public, and very ugly."<sup>20</sup> Köten, Güyük's brother (or half-brother), who had been increasingly

<sup>15</sup> Broadbridge, 177.

<sup>16</sup> These other candidates were Köten, Güyük's brother, Shiremün, Güyük's nephew and Ögodei's pick for the throne. See Broadbridge, 182-85.

<sup>17</sup> The decision to name a woman such a title was "unprecedented," according to de Nicola, and it highlights a rather common trend of women captured by the invading Mongol armies, placed in close proximity to an individual of power, and then using exploiting interpersonal relationships and other connections to rise to similar positions of power. Usually, this was accomplished by marriage - such as

in the case of Töregene herself, as well as the other women in this study, those being Oghul Qaimish and Sorqoqtani. Fatima, though, proved that "inter-female relationships, without any apparent intervention by a male member of the family" was another viable, yet much less common means of achieving political power and social mobility. See de Nicola, 70-71.

<sup>18</sup> de Nicola, 71; Broadbridge, 176.

<sup>19</sup> Broadbridge, 171, 186-88.

<sup>20</sup> Broadbridge, 191.

at odds with Töregene, and was even a contender for the throne at one point, died suddenly. On his deathbed, Köten sent a letter to Güyük accusing Fatima of witchcraft, claiming that she had cursed him.<sup>21</sup> Despite his mother's pleas against and refusals to comply, Güyük seized Fatima, and subjected her to intense humiliation and torture, whereby a confession to witchcraft was extracted, after which she was thrown into a river and drowned.<sup>22</sup>

Though Töregene's legacy was mixed, it is undeniable that her story stands as a testament to the existence of female power and influence in Mongol society, even though her reign was marred by constant resistance and criticism to her rule and the eventual execution of her favorite advisor. Töregene accomplished her main goal, the elevation of her son Güyük as Great Khan, a move which contrasted with the *yasa* (legal will) of Ögodei and therefore altered the course of succession in the empire. The next significant illustrations of both the power and limitations of female political leadership in Mongol society come from the period directly after Töregene's son's rule, in the stories of Oghul Qaimish and Sorqoqtani.

Güyük's reign was short-lived; he ruled less than two years before he, like his father, perished on a drinking binge, and the empire was once more plunged into a severe succession crisis. Upon hearing of Güyük's

death, Batu Khan, patriarch of the Jochid appanage, and now senior prince of the Chinggisids, gave his blessing to Oghul Qaimish, wife of Güyük, to serve in the interim period as the regent before the next Khan was to be selected.<sup>23</sup> Also in his message of condolence, Batu called for a *quriltai* to be held, not in the traditional location of the Mongolian heartland, but at Ala-Qamaq, in Central Asia, close to Batu's own khanate. Batu reasoned that his health prevented him from traveling long distances, which may have been true, but in actuality this location change had deeper political implications.

Sorqoqtani was the wife of Tolui, fourth son of Chinggis Khan and his wife Börte. When Tolui died in 1233, Sorqoqtani inherited her husband's territories and *ordu*, as well as the ability to tax those regions, conduct trade in the region, and accrue wealth. Sorqoqtani also managed to avoid the Mongol's custom of levirate marriage, even resisting a direct order from Ögodei to marry Güyük, arguing that she wanted to be able to dedicate herself to the task of raising her sons.<sup>24</sup> In doing so, Sorqoqtani was able to keep her political and financial autonomy, which in turn benefited her "long-term political strategy" of ousting the Ögodeids in favor of her own line, the Toluids.<sup>25</sup>

Even as far back as to during Töregene's regency, Sorqoqtani had worked towards this goal, "[keeping] a low profile and... [cultivating] the goodwill of the

<sup>21</sup> May, *Commercial Queens*, 93.

<sup>22</sup> This was an unusual method of execution for Mongols; Mongols believed water was sacred, and ought not be polluted. Drowning seems to have been reserved only for killing witches. For further reading, see Broadbridge, 192 and May, 93-94.

<sup>23</sup> Rashid al-Din, trans. Thackson 395: "Oghul Qaimish will continue to administer the affairs of the realm, as before, in consultation with Chinqai and the ministers, and let her neglect nothing." Sorqoqtani, widow of Tolui and matriarch of the Toluid House likewise sent her condolences in the form of clothing.

<sup>24</sup> de Nicola, 73. While de Nicola argues Sorqoqtani's ability to refuse the Khan was only possible due to the aforementioned wealth and power she had acquired, I believe that the reasoning she gave Ögodei perfectly showcases Sorqoqtani's ability to navigate social and political spaces effectively as a woman. Sorqoqtani was keenly aware of the scope of female political power in her society: in calling upon her desire for motherhood, Sorqoqtani was able to resist one form of gender oppression (levirate marriage), while conforming to gendered expectations and not openly challenging the system.

<sup>25</sup> de Nicola, 73.

nobles through gifts and benevolence.”<sup>26</sup> Sorqoqtani, up until the open coup that placed her son, Möngke, on the throne maintained good relationships with both the House of Ögodei and the House of Jochi, even while privately scheming with Batu. Güyük and Batu were known rivals - indeed, this is much of the reason why Ögodei never considered Güyük a good successor candidate, so in 1247 when Güyük began to make moves to attack Batu in the west, Sorqoqtani tipped off the Jochid prince so that he might be prepared. Güyük died before this campaign could get off the ground, but Batu remained indebted and thankful to Sorqoqtani’s warning.<sup>27</sup> By the time Batu had declared the *quriltai* at Ala-Qamaq, he and Sorqoqtani were well on their way in planning a coup which would oust Ögodei’s line.

The Toluid/Jochid alliance, forged by Sorqoqtani and Batu, backed Möngke, one of the sons of Sorqoqtani, as candidate for the next Great Khan. While the Toluids and Jochids, as well as other relevant parties came to the assembly, many of the House of Ögodei failed to attend. Oghul Qaimish almost certainly did not herself attend, instead sending her sons, who either only stayed briefly, or sent representatives in lieu of going themselves.<sup>28</sup> As such, Möngke was nominated with little resistance; arguments against his succession, coming from Oghul Qaimish’s representatives, were quickly silenced, a task made easy considering the Ögodeids appeared not to offer any alternative candidate.<sup>29</sup> The *quriltai* at Ala-Qamaq concluded with the nomination of Möngke, and a second *quriltai* was called to take place in

Mongolia, as tradition dictated, although it was clear to most that this meeting would not be a true *quriltai*, but rather, a coronation.

Oghul Qaimish now found herself in a tricky situation, playing defense rather than offense. Her grip on power was already fractured, for now her sons had set up separate courts, challenging her power. Thus, Oghul Qaimish opted to delay her attendance at the *quriltai*. Oghul Qaimish and the Ögodeids in general held to the belief that it was Chinggis Khan’s will that the khanate remain in the line of Ögodei, and the queen made her opinions known when Möngke sent numerous envoys to attempt to convince her and her house to come to the *quriltai*.<sup>30</sup> It seems likely that neither Oghul Qaimish nor her sons believed a *quriltai* could be held in their absence, still arrogantly believing that the power and legitimacy of the Mongolian Empire lay in their hands.<sup>31</sup> They were wrong. Eventually, Möngke grew impatient and sent soldiers to the realm of Oghul Qaimish to forcibly escort her and her sons to the *quriltai*. There, she was accused of treason, publicly humiliated, and executed. Just like Fatima, she was accused of witchcraft and killed in the same manner, being tied up into a sack and thrown into a river.<sup>32</sup>

As the stories of these women illustrate, unlike many other pre-industrial societies across history, women in the Mongol Empire were allowed a greater extent of female involvement in society, as well as in politics. Various institutions and systems allowed women to obtain power and influence politics and even obtain direct political control. As a result, female

<sup>26</sup> de Nicola, 73.

<sup>27</sup> de Nicola, 72-73.

<sup>28</sup> There is discrepancy among sources. Broadbridge 203-204 provides useful commentary analyzing the differing perspectives of Rashid al-Din, Juvaini, and the Syrian Christian writer Bar Hebraeus. Even if

Oghul Qaimish and her sons attended in person, it does not appear that they stayed for long.

<sup>29</sup> Broadbridge, 207.

<sup>30</sup> de Nicola, 7, quoting Oghul Qaimish.

<sup>31</sup> May, 98.

<sup>32</sup> May, 97-98.

political consciousness did exist. With that being said, it was significantly more difficult for women to obtain political legitimacy while occupying a direct position of power, and the likelihood of facing hostility while in such a role was greatly increased. For that reason, indirect political power, obtained via careful management of a network of alliances built upon marital and other interpersonal relationships to which Mongol women had access, remained a safer option for female political involvement. In addition, it was expected that, were a woman to be politically involved, she ought to be competent. Mongol society was unforgiving to women who could not keep up with the political machinations of their peers.

We can see these trends with the study of the three women in this discussion. All three women - Töregene, Oghul Qaimish, and Sorqoqtani - were in some way politically involved in the power dynamics of the post-Chinggis Khan Mongol Empire. Töregene and Oghul Qaimish held direct or “official” power as regents, while Sorqoqtani, though never holding an official role in the empire (aside from assuming command of Tolui’s appanage), utilized the various resources and social networks she had in order to successfully orchestrate a coup and arrange for her descendants to seize the throne. While Töregene and especially Oghul Qaimish dealt with resistance and criticism during their reigns as a byproduct of their direct engagement style, Sorqoqtani remained well-liked by all parties until the coup was in motion, and she is remembered very well in the source material. Finally, the political competence - whether real or perceived- of these female powerbrokers, and the consequences of incompetence may be seen in the case of Oghul Qaimish compared to Töregene. While neither

woman is remembered well in the sources—indeed, both are painted as corrupt. Most contemporaries acknowledged, at least, that Töregene was “shrewd” and “of a very masterful nature,” whereas no similar comments could be said of Oghul Qaimish due to her extreme ineptitude.<sup>33</sup>

The punishments for breaking these expected standards varied depending upon the number broken and the context. Sorqoqtani broke no overt rules, and was successful in her aims, so no criticism or hostility was levied at her. Töregene was successful in her goal of lobbying for Güyük to take the throne, and the fact that she was far from incompetent meant that, while faced with friction during her regency, and remembered poorly in the sources, Töregene fared decently well. Oghul Qaimish, of course, fared the least well. Not only did she fail at her goals—if indeed she had any clear ones – her actions caused her to face a brutal execution. Indeed, the accusation of witchcraft and the humiliating procedures which accompanied it seemed to loom above as a weapon to use against women who stepped too much out of line. Fatima’s execution is especially interesting considering she was not a royal; Fatima appears to have absorbed much of the blame directed in general at the Töregene administration, though Töregene was certainly not immune either. Fatima therefore fulfilled the role of a sacrificial lamb; Güyük certainly would not have ordered the murder of his mother, but by executing another powerful woman in her place, the same signal was put across. Of course, Oghul Qaimish had no sacrificial lamb, nor did she have any sympathizers with the new Khans; thus, Oghul Qaimish herself faced the full brunt of the punishment.

These cases illustrate several lessons about the roles of women in Mongol society.

<sup>33</sup> Juvaini, trans. Boyle, 19.

The indirect political power practiced by Sorqoqtani was clearly preferable to the direct forms of political power practiced by the likes of Töregene and Oghul Qaimish when they served as queen regents. Much of this was luck of the draw. Truly, Sorqoqtani's ultimate weapon lay in the fact that she was not a regent. Whereas all of Töregene's, and especially Oghul Qaimish's actions were constantly under public scrutiny, Sorqoqtani, never a regent, could work along the sidelines, build up alliances, pull strings and whisper nothings, waiting for her opportune moment to strike. Even Töregene, who was far more competent and intelligent than Oghul Qaimish, did not escape the heavy criticism and ridicule levied her way during her regency in ways that Sorqoqtani did not. Arguably, source bias favoring the Toluids played a role here. Much of our primary source material for these topics comes from individuals like Rashid al-Din (another Persian chronicler) and Juvaini who worked for dynasties descendent from the Toluid line. But these writers were also, as Timothy May points out, "men from cultures hostile to powerful women."<sup>34</sup> Sorqoqtani was aided here too, in that her indirect style of influencing politics appealed to that rigid viewpoint of women. Sorqoqtani very purposely portrayed herself to appeal to these rigid aspects of femininity in her commitment to raising her children and studying the *yasa* of Chinggis Khan. In this respect, Sorqoqtani truly mastered the art of political maneuvering, able to portray herself as such an innocent, unassuming woman while silently plotting a coup which would change the world.

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<sup>34</sup> May, 99.

## Lily Haywood

### “A Dutch man of Warr... brought not any thing but 20. And odd Negroes”: Privateering and Slavery in Jamestown

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For HIST 471F6: Atlantic Piracy

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#### *Abstract*

The history of the First Arrivals of Africans to the Virginia Colony is integral to the study of Tidewater, Virginia history. As a maritime community, piracy and privateering have been important facets of the communities of Hampton for centuries. In researching the First Arrivals, there is no research directly linking the institutionalization of slavery in British North America to the English privateers that first brought Africans to Virginia’s shores. In combining historic accounts with modern literature of both privateering and slavery, this article illustrates a clear connection between piracy and the First Arrivals. There is a direct link between privateering and the institution of slavery in the Virginia Colony.

**Keywords:** Piracy, Privateering, Slavery, Colonial America

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1619 was an eventful year for Jamestown. 1619 saw the creation of the first representative legislative government in the United States, the first employment strike in the New World, and the arrival of “20. and odd Negroes” to Virginia’s shores, marking the beginnings of slavery in England’s North American colonies.<sup>1</sup> Among these firsts, the origins of slavery are strikingly familiar. Privateering had been used in the Atlantic for centuries to facilitate state-sanctioned piracy, stealing cargoes and other loot for crown use. Privateers played a critical role in the transportation of Africans to Virginia, as institutionalized slavery would not have existed as early as it did in the English North American colonies if privateering was not involved.

In a letter written from John Rolfe, Secretary of the Colony of Virginia, to Sir Edwin Sandys, Treasurer of the Virginia Company of London, Rolfe described the arrival of two different privateering vessels, both landing at the mouth of the James River where it opens to the Chesapeake Bay. The Chesapeake Bay was the only navigable entryway to the Virginia Colony, as it provided access to “large and pleasant navigable rivers,” as noted by John Smith ten years earlier.<sup>2</sup> In August of 1619, a “Dutch man of Warr...” piloted by “Capt[ain] Jope...” and first mate “Mr. Marmaduke an Englishman” landed at Point Comfort in Hampton, Virginia, 40 miles south of Jamestown Island.<sup>3</sup> The *White Lion*, as the first vessel was known, sailed up the James River to Jamestown Island. A second ship, the *Treasurer*, landed in Point Comfort

a few days later, though that crew was chased out by the tribe residing in Kecoughtan before contact was made with the colonists at Jamestown.<sup>4</sup> A few weeks prior to their arrival in the Virginia Colony, the two ships had attacked the Portuguese slave ship *São João Baptista* (or *San Juan Bautista*) that had departed from the Kingdom of Ndongo, now Angola, en route to Vera Cruz, Mexico.<sup>5</sup> Despite the foreign letters of marque, both ships were piloted by English captains, so the logical choice for these privateers was to head to English colonies in North America. The ships were separated before they arrived in Virginia, which explains the difference in arrival times and why their arrivals transpired so differently.<sup>6</sup>

Provided by the detailed record keeping of the Virginia Company of London, including an extensive compilation of letters, establishing documents, and other relevant pieces to the founding of Jamestown Colony, Rolfe’s letters were frequent and routine to update the company’s stakeholders on the issues occurring in the colony. The frequency of the letters led to mundane content; in fact, before mentioning that privateers had arrived in Virginia, Rolfe described a storm, likely a hurricane, in Newport News that affected trade and travel, the departure of several of the Virginia colonists up to Newfoundland, Canada to aid in fisheries, and a vague conflict with the Patowomeck that had been settled.<sup>7</sup> These occurrences were written in the same tone, suggesting that privateering was commonplace in the

<sup>1</sup> John Rolfe to Edwin Sandys, January 1620, in *The Records of the Virginian Company of London*, ed. Susan M. Kingsbury. (Govt. Print. Off., 1906-1935). <https://www.loc.gov/item/06035006/>.

<sup>2</sup> John Smith, *A Map of Virginia with a Description of the Country, the Commodities, People, Government, and Religion*, (Oxford, UK: Joseph Barnes, 1612).

<sup>3</sup> John Rolfe, *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*.

<sup>4</sup> Rolfe, *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*.

<sup>5</sup> Beth Austin, *1619: Virginia’s First Africans* (Hampton History Museum, December 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Rolfe, *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Rolfe, 3.

early 17th century and that privateering within Virginia's plentiful waters was to be expected. Despite not meeting the captain of the *Treasurer* directly, Rolfe stated that he complained that if the Kecoughtan could defeat the English then the English would have no chance against the Spanish.<sup>8</sup> Rolfe spent more time dwelling on fears that the Spanish would be able to attack Jamestown Fort if the colonists weren't careful than the arrival of the *White Lion* and the *Treasurer*, further emphasizing how entrenched privateering was in society at the time.<sup>9</sup>

John Rolfe and other stakeholders in Virginia's future had every right to be afraid of Spain and Spanish privateers. It is essential to be mindful that Spain dominated the Atlantic trade routes in the 16th and 17th centuries, pillaging their South American and Caribbean colonies by exporting colonial governmental structures and Africans that were enslaved on cash crop plantations.<sup>10</sup> The Spanish had discovered the Caribbean and had attempted to colonize it since 1492, and Portugal, a long-standing ally of Spain, had been in Brazil since the 1500s; both nations held a strong presence in the Western Hemisphere by the 17th century.<sup>11</sup> The Pope had issued a Papal Bull endorsing Iberian colonization of the New World and the use of slavery in those colonies.<sup>12</sup> Portugal had a strong influence in Western Africa, specifically near Ndongo, and had preyed upon political instability in the region to begin capturing and enslaving Africans to work on plantations in the East Indies.<sup>13</sup> Anywhere from 75,000 to 90,000

enslaved Africans had already been brought to Spanish America by 1600.<sup>14</sup> France had even attempted and somewhat succeeded at colonizing modern-day Florida before being chased out and attacked by the Spanish.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, England had only had failed colonies. Twice had they attempted to colonize the barrier islands of North Carolina, and twice Roanoke had dissipated.<sup>16</sup> All of the goals England had set for Roanoke—making a profit, spreading Anglicanism to the Secotan tribe, and establishing itself as a global power alongside Spain and Portugal—had fallen short, therefore prohibiting England from keeping a stable hold in the region. That was why Jamestown was so important, and why it became the first permanent English settlement in North America. Jamestown was settled by the Virginia Company of London, a private equity firm, as opposed to being a royal colony. Despite not finding success through the state in Roanoke, England was now finding equal footing in colonizing the New World over a century after Spain's first arrival.

Furthermore, England and Spain had long been involved in conflicts with one another. For decades, England had been afraid of Spain because of its influence in the Netherlands.<sup>17</sup> In 1567, Spain invaded the Netherlands violently, conquering Dutch lands and trade routes, and Queen Regnant Elizabeth I was terrified that England would be next.<sup>18</sup> Philip II of Spain intended to invade England, especially after Mary Queen of Scots was executed, as she was

<sup>8</sup> Rolfe, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Rolfe, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Jane Landers, *Africans in the Spanish Colonies*, *Historical Archaeology* 30, no. 1 (1997): 84–103, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25616520>

<sup>11</sup> Lyle N. McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World: 1492-1700*, 1st ed. (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 74-75.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander VI, *Inter Caetera* [Among Other Works], (St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, 1493).

<sup>13</sup> Austin, *1619: Virginia's First Africans*, 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> Landers, *Africans in the Spanish Colonies*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> James Horn, *A Kingdom Strange: The Brief and Tragic History of the Lost Colony of Roanoke*. (Basic Books, 2011), 12-14.

<sup>16</sup> Horn, 186.

<sup>17</sup> Horn, 57.

<sup>18</sup> Clayton Roberts, David Roberts, et al., *A History of England*, 6th ed., vol. 1 (Pearson Education, 2013), 177.

England's last Catholic Queen.<sup>19</sup> Spain was forced to invade England by water as it is an island, which meant that the Spanish Armada would have to contest with the English Navy. The Spanish Armada was made up of heavy warships, while the English Navy had easily maneuverable ships. The English Channel was too narrow for those heavy boats to operate at their full capacity, allowing England to easily defeat Spain. The Spanish did not have the resources to rebuild the Armada, empowering England to build the world's most powerful navy.<sup>20</sup> The Battle of the Armada, combined with English support of Dutch rebels in the Netherlands, led to the collapse of Spain's hold in the country by 1581.<sup>21</sup> When the Thirty Years War began in 1618, England once again had renewed interest in defeating Spain, and Elizabeth began to employ the use of privateers to attack Spanish shipping.<sup>22</sup>

Privateers are a specific type of pirates. Their motives and attacks are state-sanctioned, or at least legal, due to their "letter of marque". Letters of marque are issued by a regnant, not necessarily of the country of origin for the privateers, but are in the very least amiable. Privateers utilize the letters of marque as a pass to act as pirates for the country that provided the letter of marque both during and outside of wartime. Elizabeth I was often accused of being a pirate queen due to the amount of privateers she authorized under the English crown, even going as far as to refer to Sir Francis Drake as "her" pirate.<sup>23</sup> This is

reflected in the resources he had provided to him by state sponsorship. In 1579, Drake seized a Spanish ship off of the coast of Acapulco, Mexico and the Spanish detainee Don Francisco da Zarate described his ship thusly:

His vessel is a galleon of nearly four hundred tons, and is a perfect sailer. She is manned with a hundred men, all of service, and of an age for warfare, and all are as practised therein as old soldiers from Italy could be. Each one takes particular pains to keep his arquebuses [long-barreled Spanish firearm] clean.<sup>24</sup>

Drake was provided all of this via Elizabeth's permission, and "[Drake] showed [da Zarate] the commissions that [Drake] had received from [Elizabeth I] and carried."<sup>25</sup> da Zarate observed that the personnel on board seemed to be guarding Drake as opposed to guarding him, undoubtedly emphasizing Elizabeth's preference for Drake.

Elizabeth also extended this courtesy to one of her favorite privateers, Sir Walter Raleigh, who used her support in the attempts to establish Roanoke.<sup>26</sup> His effort ended up backfiring, as he was imprisoned and beheaded for treason by James I after Elizabeth had died, as he was staunchly anti-privateering and absolved the need for crown-sanctioned privateering after establishing peace with Spain in 1604.<sup>27</sup> When faced with unemployment from the state, those privateers turned to full-blown piracy. James believed this to be a poor

<sup>19</sup> No other Catholics since Mary Queen of Scots have had a credible claim to the throne despite James VI and I being her son.

<sup>20</sup> Clayton Roberts, David Roberts, and Bisson, *A History of England*, 177.

<sup>21</sup> Horn, *A Kingdom Strange*, 57.

<sup>22</sup> Linda Heywood and John Thornton, "In Search of the 1619 African Arrivals: Enslavement and Middle Passage," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 127, no. 3 (2019): 200–11.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Lehr, *Pirates: A New History, from Vikings to Somali Raiders*, 1st ed. (Yale University Press, 2019), 85.

<sup>24</sup> Don Francisco da Zarate, April 4, 1579, in *They Saw It Happen: An Anthology of Eye-Witness' Accounts of Events in British History 1485-1688*, ed. C. R. N. Routh (Basil Blackwell, 1960), 89.

<sup>25</sup> Zarate, 89.

<sup>26</sup> Horn, *A Kingdom Strange*, 64.

<sup>27</sup> Horn, 200.

reflection on England, issuing a proclamation against piracy in 1609, which indeed was an abysmal end to Elizabethan privateering.<sup>28</sup> This explains why the captains of the *White Lion* and the *Treasurer* had to look abroad for their letters of marque. England was no longer widely sponsoring privateering. Instead, Captain Jope turned to William of Orange, *princeps* of the Netherlands and future King William III of England, while the *Treasurer's* marque came from the Duke of Savoy in Italy.<sup>29</sup> Both the Dutch and Savoyards were more displeased with Spain than friends of England at the time, though the Duke of Savoy had acquiesced to Spain's control over the New World by 1620.<sup>30</sup> Because James I was so displeased with privateering, the newly instated Governor of Virginia George Yeardley demanded to see Captain Jope's letter of marque and was interrogated on the validity of the letter.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, the *Treasurer's* captain knew that his letter of marque had lapsed due to Savoy and Spain's reconciliation and that Governor Yeardley was not as forgiving of privateers as former Governor Samuel Argall who was directly involved in privateering, which might be why he avoided sailing up to Jamestown.<sup>32</sup> Rolfe's letter to Sandys provides insight into the privateers' arrival but not much into their impact afterward. That letter is the only English record that survives of either vessel. The *White Lion* and the *Treasurer* both somewhat escape the historic record after this encounter into a sea of other privateers.

<sup>28</sup> Hayley Cotter, "Robbers of the Sea Piracy in Proclamations and Pamphlets, 1558-1675," *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 10 (March, 2021): 95.

<sup>29</sup> Heywood and Thornton, *In Search of the 1619 African Arrivals*, 204.

<sup>30</sup> Mark G. Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740*, 1st ed. (Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, 2015), 76.

<sup>31</sup> Ric Murphy, *Arrival of the First Africans in Virginia* (The History Press, 2020), 81.

While James I had outlawed privateering and piracy, he knew what his colonies had to offer was incredibly valuable on a global scale. By 1612, John Rolfe had begun to grow the *Nicotiana tabacum* strain of tobacco he brought from the Caribbean, which was preferred highly over the *Nicotiana rustica* that grew wild in Virginia.<sup>33</sup> The English had experience with *Nicotiana rustica*, first smoking the ground leaves in 1585, following the example of the Indigenous peoples of Coastal North Carolina and Virginia, who utilized it for religious purposes.<sup>34</sup> *Nicotiana rustica* is a known hallucinogen, and Thomas Heriot described the Indigenous use of the herb as such. He described his and the other Englishmen's experience as pleasant:

We ourselves, during the time we were there used to sucke it after their manner, as also since our return, and have found many rare and wonderfull experiments of the virtues thereof: of which the relation would require a volume by it selfe: the use of it by so many of later, men and women of great calling, as else, and some learned Physicians also, is of sufficient witness.<sup>35</sup>

The upper class enjoyed the side effects that *Nicotiana rustica* brought but detested the flavor. One report even described it as, "poore and weake, and of a biting tast."<sup>36</sup> When Rolfe began to grow a better-tasting strain, it became England's most valuable export from its colonies by far. The value

<sup>32</sup> Murphy, 83.

<sup>33</sup> Charles E. Hatch, Jr., *The First Seventeen Years: Virginia 1607-1624*, 10th ed. (1957; repr.) (The University of Virginia Press, 1991), 17.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Heriot, *The Discovery of Tobacco in a Briefe and True Report of the New-Found Land of Virginia* (G. Bishop, R. Newberie, and R. Barker, 1600).

<sup>35</sup> Heriot.

<sup>36</sup> William Strachey quoted by Charles E. Hatch, Jr., *The First Seventeen Years*, 17.

was recognized worldwide; other nations attempted to establish their own tobacco-growing colonies but were squashed by the Spanish and Portuguese.<sup>37</sup> England held a monopoly on the tobacco trade, putting a target on their back for anyone, especially the Spanish, to attack the plantations surrounding Jamestown.<sup>38</sup>

As highlighted previously, Spain and Portugal utilized institutionalized race-based slavery to support their plantation economies in the Caribbean and Central America to such an extent that almost 100,000 enslaved Africans were brought to the Spanish colonies alone by 1600. England had their hands in the slave trade via privateering in the 16th century but did not bring any enslaved Africans into English territory, instead opting to sell their “cargo” to the Spanish as somewhat of a ransom.<sup>39</sup> Upon the founding of Jamestown, indentured servitude was implemented to uphold the social class and provide low-paid labor.<sup>40</sup> England already had a system of indentured servitude, so the Virginia Company of London just applied that system to Jamestown; typically, the contracts would stipulate that an individual would provide labor for a certain amount of years, and in exchange, the individual was granted their freedom and possibly own a piece of land.<sup>41</sup> This system persisted through the introduction of enslaved Africans.

Historians have often claimed that the Africans that arrived at Point Comfort would have been treated as indentured servants as there was no existing system for slavery in Jamestown at the time. Not only were the English already familiar with slavery, but the term “indentured” implies that a contract was agreed upon by two or more parties, whereas the Africans that were brought to the Americas were captured and forced into labor.<sup>42</sup> This does not mean that indentured servitude disappeared in August of 1619 when the enslaved Africans arrived. Quite the opposite was true. Without the arrival of the “20. and odd Negroes” aboard those two privateering ships, British North American slavery most likely would not have existed as early as 1619.<sup>43</sup>

The English did not have their own established trade networks in Africa to import enslaved peoples until King Charles II granted a charter in 1663.<sup>44</sup> Indentured servants were expensive, but without regular conveyance of Africans to Virginia, the Virginia Company of London and high-ranking colonists relied on those contracted workers for daily tasks. In a 1624 muster, or primitive census, Black and white servants are listed as working together within the households of the upper class.<sup>45</sup> White indentured servants outnumber enslaved Africans by about five to one, or 17.3%.<sup>46</sup> Enslaved Africans and European indentured servants often worked together, especially in

<sup>37</sup> Kris Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Global Piracy on the High Seas, 1500-1750*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2015), 61.

<sup>38</sup> Jamie L. H. Goodall, *Pirates of the Chesapeake Bay* (Arcadia Publishing, 2020).

<sup>39</sup> Heywood and Thornton, *In Search of the 1619 African Arrivals*, 202.

<sup>40</sup> Catherine Carmody, “Indentured Service and the Roots of Slavery,” *Cobblestone* 15, no. 4, 36.

<sup>41</sup> James Nicholas Tolj, “The Foundation of Unfreedom: Regulation of Indentured Servitude in Seventeenth Century Virginia” (master’s thesis, The College of William and Mary, 2019), 11.

<sup>42</sup> Austin, “1619: Virginia’s First Africans,” 18.

<sup>43</sup> John Rolfe, “XCIV. John Rolfe. A Letter to Edwin Sandys,” 3.

<sup>44</sup> The Crown of England, *A Charter granted to the Company of Royall Adventurers of England Trading into Africa*, Charles Stuart II, King of England. London, England: King Charles II of England, 1663.

<sup>45</sup> *1624/25 Muster*. Main database accessed via Virtual Jamestown. <https://www.virtualjamestown.org/Muster/introduction.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Irene W. D. Hecht, “The Virginia Muster of 1624/5 as a Source for Demographic History,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (January 1973): 65–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1923703>.

agricultural settings, though their lives and societal roles looked very different. Indentured servants worked to earn their freedom, while the enslaved often did not, and indentured servants often had the opportunity to climb in social status, while the enslaved, particularly Africans, would never be able to hold the same social standing as non-Black inhabitants of Virginia even if they were freed.

It is unknown where exactly those original *Mbundu* people that the *White Lion* and the *Treasurer* stole from the *São João Baptista* ended up. In that same 1624 muster, one of the Africans confirmed to be on that original voyage of the *Treasurer* appears as part of Captain William Pierce's household in James City proper.<sup>47</sup> Her name was Angela. Beyond that muster, she barely exists in documents and is reflected less so in material culture excavated at the Pierce site on Jamestown Island.<sup>48</sup> Even though it was incredibly common for captured and enslaved Africans to be denied bringing their personal belongings with them on the ships and, naturally, the New World, this lack of material culture that Angela would have interacted with in her day-to-day life is incredibly unique. At least eleven of those original Africans brought by the privateers in 1619 were sent to Flowerdew Hundred Plantation in Prince George County, about fifty miles upriver from Jamestown.<sup>49</sup> Scattered across the four archaeological excavations completed on Flowerdew

Hundred's grounds, artifacts have surfaced indicating a large African presence on the plantation as early as the 1620s.<sup>50</sup> Considering that those artifacts have been dated so early and England did not have an institutionalized method of bringing Africans to their colonies until decades later, it is reasonable to posit that the Africans present in the 1620s material culture record would have been brought to Flowerdew Hundred from the cargo of the *White Lion* and the *Treasurer*.<sup>51</sup>

It is worth noting that enslaved Africans had been in North America before the arrival of the privateers at Jamestown. In 1526 and 1565, the Spanish went to Florida. The first trip was to survey the land, and the second was to establish a colony at St. Augustine.<sup>52</sup> Despite that arrival predating the 1619 arrival at Jamestown, that first was not as monumental. For one, the Spanish had long since practiced slavery in their colonies, so having enslaved Africans on voyages and expeditions would have been expected. This does not contribute to the history of the origins of English slavery. In addition, there is a richer narrative surrounding Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, the first free Black community in North America.<sup>53</sup> While those stories and experiences deserve to be explored, the name of the settlement and its origins in Spanish America further emphasizes that it has little to offer on the origins of

<sup>47</sup> 1624/25 Muster.

<sup>48</sup> "The Angela Site," Historic Jamestowne (2024), <https://historicjamestowne.org/archaeology/angela-site/>.

<sup>49</sup> "Flowerdew Hundred," Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2025), <https://www.daacs.org/plantations/flowerdew-hundred/#background>.

<sup>50</sup> "Flowerdew Hundred Exhibit Showcases Scholarly Wealth, Potential of Historical Virginia Site," *UVA Today* (University of Virginia, January 3, 2013), [https://news.virginia.edu/content/flowerdew-](https://news.virginia.edu/content/flowerdew-hundred-exhibit-showcases-scholarly-wealth-potential-historical-virginia-site)

[hundred-exhibit-showcases-scholarly-wealth-potential-historical-virginia-site](https://news.virginia.edu/content/flowerdew-hundred-exhibit-showcases-scholarly-wealth-potential-historical-virginia-site).

<sup>51</sup> The first baby born enslaved in England's colonies was at Flowerdew Hundred in late 1624/early 1625.

<sup>52</sup> Paul M. Pressly, *A Southern Underground Railroad: Black Georgians and the Promise of Spanish Florida and Indian Country* (The University of Georgia Press, 2024), 2.

<sup>53</sup> Jane Landers, "Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose: A Free Black Town in Spanish Colonial Florida," *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 1 (February 1990): 9–30, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/95.1.9>.

institutionalized slavery in English North American colonies.

Unlike the societal expectations of the body politic in the 16th and 17th centuries, crews aboard privateering vessels were often inclusive of race. Pirates are often considered to exhibit the characteristics of a subculture or what some might consider their culture in its own right, so it would make sense that they made a point of defying class norms, including racist ideology. Pirates were often referred to as “banditti [pluralization of bandit] of all nations,” not only referring to pirates’ generally being a nuisance for all global powers but also that crews were often made up of people from all places.<sup>54</sup> Although Black and white sailors had nearly equal opportunities in the workforce, this did not mean that they were viewed in the same cultural and social standing. If Black crew members were convicted of piracy, they were more than likely sold into slavery as opposed to being hanged like the rest of the crew.<sup>55</sup> Piracy was a very lucrative career choice for people who had skills in maritime activities, i.e. retired sailors, dock workers, etc. to make money in communities that they otherwise would have been impoverished. The intersection of enslavement and skilled mariners can be exemplified by Thomas Jones and Thomas Wansley. Thomas Jones was convicted of piracy in 1824 and, though enslaved, gained access to the skills of a mariner via Joseph Gatreau, the man who enslaved him.<sup>56</sup> Thomas Wansley was also convicted and executed for piracy, but he worked in tandem with Charles Gibbs, a

notorious pirate.<sup>57</sup> Wansley was from Delaware, a community deeply entrenched in maritime affairs, and Gibbs was the son of a privateer and former officer in the Navy in the War of 1812.<sup>58</sup> Their backgrounds allowed them to become some of the most well-known pirates not just of their time, but outside scholarly literature.<sup>59</sup> While these are both examples of antebellum-era Black pirates, there have been Black pirates for centuries. If any of the enslaved Africans aboard either the *White Lion* or *Treasurer* had knowledge of or skills in a maritime field, it is possible that they abandoned Jamestown in favor of becoming privateers themselves. There are gaps and discrepancies in the 1624/25 muster, as the amount of Africans present in the Virginia colony at the time of the muster and the number of Africans brought by the two privateering ships in 1619 do not match, therefore this could be a viable explanation as to why there is an inconsistency in the reporting.

Privateering had a long and complex history long before Jamestown was established and continued in waves after. Likewise, slavery in Virginia and other English North American colonies only grew after that initial arrival in 1619.

The Africans arriving on Virginia’s shores in 1619 did not know they would be making history, and the privateers who brought them did not think they were unique. Both groups were symptomatic of larger cultural and sociopolitical affairs. Enslavement and privateering were almost synonymous for Spanish and Portuguese

<sup>54</sup> Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Beacon Press, 2004), 53.

<sup>55</sup> Rediker, 53.

<sup>56</sup> Matthew Taylor Raffety, “A Woman Is to Blame: Gender and Literature of Antebellum Pirate Confessions,” in *The Golden Age of Piracy: The Rise, Fall, and Enduring Popularity of Pirates*, ed. David Head (The University of Georgia Press, 2018), 205–19.

<sup>57</sup> Raffety, 205–219.

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Gibbs, *Dead Men Tell No Tales: The Lives and Legends of the Pirate Charles Gibbs* (of South Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>59</sup> Alexander Hamilton’s sons were the lawyers representing the United States at Wansley and Gibbs’ trial.

colonies in the 16th and 17th centuries. In North American English colonies, privateers were almost guaranteed, while slavery was not expected. There was no infrastructure in place for enslaved Africans in Jamestown because the English colonists had not expected them to arrive so soon, let alone at all.

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## Kelsey Keith

### Imperial Connections to the Vestal Virgins and their Symbolic, Sacred Power in Art and Architecture.

University of Mary Washington

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For ARTH 311: Roman Art

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#### *Abstract*

The Vestal Virgins (*virgines Vestales*) were central to Roman religious and political life. Charged with tending to the sacred fire of the goddess Vesta, these girls were a symbol of Rome's stability and continuity. As priestesses of Vesta, their role evolved post-republic and into imperial rule, becoming closely aligned with the emperor's authority. The architectural and artistic remnants of the Vestals, such as the Temple of Vesta, the *Atrium Vestae*, and imperial coinage, attest to their relationship with the imperial family and reflect both the priestesses' revered status and their strategic appropriation by imperial families, especially in connection to elite women. Through an analysis of these spaces, this study examines the cult of Vesta's symbolic function in reinforcing the moral authority of the imperial family in Rome.

**Keywords:** Vestal Virgins, Roman Imperialism, Women, Personification, Architectural Remnants, Portrait Busts, Imperial Power

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At the heart of Roman religion blazed a perennial fire whose sacred flame was tended to by a select few high priestesses: the Vestal Virgins (*virgines Vestales*). This fire (*ignis Vestae*), representative of the goddess Vesta, was singular in its importance to Rome. The cult of Vesta played a central role in Roman religious and political spheres as worship of the goddess was deeply intertwined with civic life and rituals. Alongside the fire, the acolytes of Vesta embodied the symbolic integrity and continuity of the *res publica* from the time of the republic into the late empire.<sup>1</sup> Their sacred connection to the welfare of the state was manipulated during this transition under the reign of Augustus and later imperial rulers. Vesta and her cult provided an ideal symbolic association for imperial families to align with, as they personified Roman integrity. It was in the emperor's interest to embody this integrity in his reign. The Vestals' enduring significance in imperial Roman politics and religion is vividly reflected in the architectural and sculptural remnants of their time. The residence of the Vestal's, their adjacent temple, and multiple representational sculptures and friezes collectively contribute to revealing the revered status held by these priestesses, and, ultimately, their role in imperial affairs. These remains offer invaluable insights into the expectations placed upon the Vestals as

guardians of Roman integrity, and reveal later imperial connections to, and appropriations of, the symbolic power inherent to Vesta and her cult.

Evaluating the history of the priestesses and their principal deity, Vesta, offers foundational knowledge regarding their significance to Roman religion and later imperial connections to the cult. As a goddess, Vesta was “the original divine virgin” whose image was almost never illustrated in physical form but instead represented as a domestic flame.<sup>2</sup> Virginity, in Roman society, was a celebrated expression of holiness associated with a state of “physical intactness,” purity, and unity.<sup>3</sup> The aniconism related to Vesta's worship was considered symbolic of her virgin purity, while her presence, on the other hand, was indicated by the flame.<sup>4</sup> While it was rare, Vesta did make appearances in figural form through religiously significant sculpture as will be identified later on. Worshiped as the goddess of the hearth and the life-giving fire within every Roman home, Vesta and her acolytes were deemed indispensable to the preservation and prosperity of the Roman state. They served not only as religious figures, but as embodiments of domestic stability and civic welfare. Therefore, the order of priestesses dedicated to Vesta emerged as one of the foremost cults in Roman religion, revered for their sacred

<sup>1</sup> Inge Kroppenber, “Law, Religion, and Constitution of the Vestal Virgins,” *Law and Literature* 22, no. 3 (2010): 419, <https://doi.org/10.1525/lal.2010.22.3.418>. *Res publica*: the state, republic, or commonwealth.  
<sup>2</sup> Jean-Joseph Goux, “Vesta, or the Place of Being,” *Representations*, no. 1 (February 1983): 94.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/3043761>.

<sup>3</sup> Kroppenber, “Law, Religion, and Constitution,” 419.

<sup>4</sup> Kroppenber, “Law, Religion, and Constitution,” 419.

duty to ensure the enduring strength and longevity of the state.<sup>5</sup>

The selection process for Vestal Virgins involved choosing six young girls between the ages of six and ten from a pool of twenty candidates. This selection, known as *captio* or "capture," was conducted by the early kings and later the *pontifex maximus*, underscoring the ritualistic importance of the Vestals' role in Roman society.<sup>6</sup> Eligible candidates were required to have both parents alive, possess physical and mental integrity, and be daughters of free-born residents of Rome.<sup>7</sup> Upon selection, these girls were removed from their familial homes and brought to the *Atrium Vestae*, where their careers as moral guardians over Rome began within the boundaries of the Forum. As explored by Joanne Elizabeth Thompson in her dissertation, "Images of Vesta and the Vestal Virgins in Roman State Religion and Imperial Policy of the First and Second Centuries A.D.," the association between the *pontifex maximus* and the Vestals held particular significance in the imperial period. As the emperor assumed the role of chief priest, imperial patronage of the Vestals was elevated under the reign of Augustus. He looked to parallel his new rule as both *princeps* and *pontifex maximus* with the integrity of the state as embodied by the Vestals.<sup>8</sup> The priestesses of Vesta were part of the *collegium pontificium*, of which the

emperor was the leader. This order was of the highest priestly rank and connected the priestesses to the emperor directly. The Augustan principate was critical in establishing the traditional imagery of the Vestals in Roman relief sculpture.<sup>9</sup>

Acknowledging this, imperial connections to the order of the Vestals is irrevocably part of their appearances in art as well as the remains of their built environment and their duties to the state.

The architectural remains of the Temple of Vesta (*Aedes Vesta*), the House of the Vestals (*Atrium Vestae*), and the Regia in the *Area Vestae* serve as the earliest tangible evidence of the Cult of Vesta in the Roman Forum<sup>10</sup> Initial constructions of the Regia and the *Aedes Vesta*'s have been dated back as early as the sixth century BCE with the *Atrium Vestae* built toward the end of the 3rd century alongside a newer version of the temple, as had been destroyed by a fire in 241 BCE.<sup>11</sup> Each building's close proximity to the Palace of the Emperors, paired with centuries of redevelopment under imperial authority, reveals how intertwined imperial powers and the Vestal priestesses were.

Originally a round wooden hut with a thatched straw roof, the *Aedes Vesta* (Figs. 2-3) is recognized in Roman myth as having first been constructed by Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome, in the Forum

<sup>5</sup> Joanne Elizabeth Thompson, "Images of Vesta and the Vestal Virgins in Roman State Religion and Imperial Policy of the First and Second Centuries A.D.," (PhD diss., Yale University, 2005), 1 and 61.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, "Images of Vesta," 30.

<sup>7</sup> Kroppenber, "Law, Religion, and Constitution of the Vestal Virgins," 423.

<sup>8</sup> Thompson, "Images of Vesta," 16.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, "Images of Vesta," 16.

<sup>10</sup> Thompson, "Images of Vesta," 27. The Regia was the early Palace of the Kings and later the office to the *pontifex maximus*; the building is significant but will not be further explored outside of this necessary context.

<sup>11</sup> Molly Lindner, "Portraits of the Vestal Virgins, Priestesses of Ancient Rome," (University of Michigan Press, 2015), 13.

Romanum.<sup>12</sup> The 'temple' of Vesta was, strictly speaking, a small structure created to be a 'house' for the deity.<sup>13</sup> Having been destroyed and reconstructed multiple times, it was first rebuilt as a marble *tholus* (circular building) during the reign of Augustus and continuously redone by emperors that succeeded him.<sup>14</sup> Nestled in the northeast corner of the *Area Vestae*, the temple served as a repository of sacred objects; including the Palladium, a guardian statue of Athena brought from Troy by Aeneas.<sup>15</sup> Crucial to the temple's essence, however, was the eternal flame of Vesta, meticulously tended to by the Vestal Virgins. Two Vestals would protect and care for the flame with the threat of public flogging looming if they let it burn out.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the existence of the cult of Vesta, the temple and its constituents symbolized the *fatale pignus*, "the fate of [the] city—its identity and continued existence."<sup>17</sup> The Vestals were guardians of this continuation, and it was imperative that they maintained the sacred objects and the fire within the temple as part of their religious duties.<sup>18</sup>

Noting the temple's religious importance to Rome, Augustus's new role as *Pontifex Maximus* deeply impacted its

symbolic perception through his decision to move the traditional home of the *Pontifex Maximus*. Originally, the *Pontifex Maximus* would be housed in the *Domus Publica*, a structure belonging to the House of the Vestals throughout the Republic.<sup>19</sup> However, as he took power, he changed it to his own residence on the Palatine hill. Here, he dedicated a temple to Vesta in a public part of his residence in 12 BCE.<sup>20</sup> The Sorrento base (*Fig. 2*), covered in Augustan relief sculpture, commemorates this dedication, showing the Vestals – and Vesta herself – presiding over a sacrifice alongside Augustus.<sup>21</sup> The argument that Livia, the wife of Augustus, is positioned next to the Goddess is supported by scholars Johanna Thompson and Molly Linder. Although this remains uncertain, it undeniably highlights the intensified relationship between the Vestals and the imperial family. As the imperial regime matured, the ethos of the priestesses' status as the longest and most revered religious order in Rome was utilized to symbolically enhance the integrity of the imperial family – especially in connection to imperial women. While the *Aedes Vesta* remained the primary space of worship to the goddess, welcoming Vesta into the emperor's residence cast her and her

<sup>12</sup> Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome*, vol. 1, *A History* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22. See *Fig. 1* for temple plan.

<sup>13</sup> Beard, North, and Price, "Religions of Rome Vol 1," 23.

<sup>14</sup> John Henry Middleton, "The Temple and Atrium of Vesta and the Regia," *Archaeologia* 49, no. 2, (January 1, 1886), 396. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261340900006366>.

<sup>15</sup> Middleton, "XV.—The Temple and Atrium of Vesta and the Regia", 393. According to legend,

Aeneas, fleeing the burning city of Troy, carried with him to Lavinium the sacred fire of Vesta, along with the penates, the guardian spirits of the penus, or store chamber, and the palladium, the small wooden image of Athena also equated with guardianship.

<sup>16</sup> Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, "Images of Vesta," 19.

<sup>18</sup> Thompson, "Images of Vesta," 9.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, "Images of Vesta," 26.

<sup>20</sup> Thompson, "Images of Vesta," 75.

<sup>21</sup> Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 84.

priestesses as symbols reflective of the emperor's guardianship over Rome.<sup>22</sup>

The *Aedes Vesta*'s last reconstruction was done under Emperor Septimius Severus by his wife Julia Domna.<sup>23</sup> Continuing the precedent set by Augustus nearly two hundred years prior, Julia Domna's reconstruction offers modern scholarship insights into the temple's appearance with the complete structure's details known primarily through images featured on coins dedicated to the reconstruction. One particular coin, the Aureus of Caracalla (214 CE) (*Fig. 3*) depicts on its reverse side the emperor sacrificing before the *Aedes Vesta* alongside two Vestal Virgins.<sup>24</sup> This specific coin expressly demonstrates the emperor's choice to emphasize his connection to the cult of Vesta and their ritual practices—enhancing his moral authority through close association with the goddess and her acolytes. The coin shows the Temple's round structure and reveals the Vestals religious distinction and significance to the imperial family. This patronage and its evidence on Roman coinage speaks to the importance of maintaining the Cult of Vesta as part of creating a strong resonance between the Vestals' power and the emperor as Rome's benevolent unifiers.

Particularly significant in regards to this last reconstruction is the patronage of Julia Domna herself, as the Vestals held a

clear connection to the empress and other imperial women by the time of Augustus. In becoming emperor, Augustus granted his empress Lydia, and subsequently all latter imperial women, the same social privileges as the Vestals.<sup>25</sup> Relationships were encouraged between the Vestals and the women of the imperial family by the ruling emperor as the priestesses took on a role in shaping the status of and protecting elite women.<sup>26</sup> The Vestals' power and influence were already revered in Rome and used as a precedent for imperial women to imitate even though they held more claim to elite authority through their connection to the emperor. Empresses had a history of calling upon the Vestals for aid, whether this be to receive sanctuary in times of disaster or to seek their guardianship should they be in need of support.<sup>27</sup> Their closeness led to a symbiotic relationship that allowed the Vestals to seek the influence and patronage of imperial women. In turn, these elite women could associate with the Vestals as moral guardians—ultimately attesting to imperial connections to, and appropriations of, the symbolic power inherent in Vesta and her cult.

The imperial *Atrium Vestae*, home to the order of Vestals, was an exceptional, two-storied building built from the ashes of the older Republic Atrium that had burned in 64 CE.<sup>28</sup> Situated between the *Via Sacra*

<sup>22</sup> Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 84.

<sup>23</sup> Thompson, "Images of Vesta," 23 and 358.

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, "Images of Vesta," 23 and 358.

<sup>25</sup> Vestals were allowed to attend the games in the arena, write their own will, buy and sell property, testify in court, and more. These privileges were extended to Imperial women. Find more in Robin Wildfang, *Rome's Vestal Virgins: A Study of Rome's*

*Vestal Priestesses in the Late Republic and Early Empire*, (Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 28.

<sup>27</sup> For anecdotal examples of this, see Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 28-30.

<sup>28</sup> Middleton, "XV.—The Temple and Atrium of Vesta and the Regia," 408.

and the *Via Nova*, the building stood no more than a few yards from the *Aedes Vesta*.<sup>29</sup> Having been altered and reconstructed on multiple occasions, much like the temple, phases of the Atrium's development can be credited to various emperors.<sup>30</sup> The Atrium also served as a repository for documents of utmost importance, such as the emperor's will.<sup>31</sup> Outside their pious duties, The Vestal's guardianship over the will of the emperor found within the Atrium demonstrates both their significance as a trusted religious order and their connection to imperial affairs.

Inside the Atrium, one would find a diverse array of spaces, including reception rooms, storerooms, individual apartments for each Vestal, and a peristyle courtyard at its center.<sup>32</sup> The colonnaded courtyard of the Atrium most notably served as a gallery for the display of statuary, encompassing both images of the Vestals themselves (*Fig. 4*) and portraits of the imperial family. Displaying honorific statuary of the imperial household as well as the Priestesses own images communicated an express relation between the two powers.

In evaluating the statues' placement, appearance, and their pedestals, it is evident that they were intended to honor the *Virgines Vestales Maxima*, or the Chief

Vestals, for their role as guardians and sacred beings. The Atrium was not singularly used as a residence. In fact, it was a place of business where the Vestals met with clients and individuals who sought their assistance.<sup>33</sup> Honorific statues of the Vestals found in the Atrium and the dedicatory marble bases that once accompanied them speak to the relations between the cult of Vesta and those who sought out its order. The inscribed bases of each statue preserve testimonies of the Chief Vestal's virtues and the gratefulness of her clients in what was a relatively public display.<sup>34</sup> The Vestal's statue would have been visible to anyone standing in the forecourt of the *Atrium Vestae*, and their proximity to the portrait statues of imperial women such as Julia Domna and Faustina the Younger connected the cult visually to the imperial household for all who observed the space.<sup>35</sup>

As with the aforementioned reconstruction of the temple, aligning the portraits of the Vestals with those of the empresses proved advantageous for both powers. Honorific statues needed the emperor's approval to be showcased in the forum.<sup>36</sup> In some ways, it would have been considered customary to have displays of imperial portraiture as a sign of loyalty to

<sup>29</sup> Middleton, "XV.—The Temple and Atrium of Vesta and the Regia," 408.

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, "Images of Vesta," 22. Domitian re-oriented the axis of the building, Trajan enlarged it eastward and included a peristyle court, it is here that most of the statues were found.

<sup>31</sup> Molly Lindner, "The Vestal Virgins and Their Imperial Patrons: Sculptures and Inscriptions from the Atrium Vestae in the Roman Forum," (PhD., Diss. The University of Michigan, 1996), 161.

<sup>32</sup> Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 64.

<sup>34</sup> Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 71.

<sup>35</sup> Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 73. The portraits of the imperial women were simply the heads of the statues, yet the amount of headless statues in the courtyard implies that they may have belonged to one of them. They have not yet been given a match, but locationally they were still found in the Atrium and near to the Vestal statues.

<sup>36</sup> Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 26.

the royal family.<sup>37</sup> However, the ongoing display of royal women alongside the Vestals in the Atrium across several imperial generations illustrates the enduring support for a mutually beneficial relationship between the Vestals and the imperial family supported by the emperor, who personally gained public favor through association.

The statues of the Vestals themselves made considerable references to portraits of the empresses. Official relief sculptures from the time of Augustus were rather uniform and distinguishable only through context and the standard iconography of a Vestal, but the *palla*, a garment that covered the priestesses heads, likely required artists to draw on more contemporary sources of sculptural representation for specific detailing, such as images of the empresses.<sup>38</sup> For example, one particular sculpture found in the Atrium, considered the highest in quality of all those that still survive by Linder exhibits a strong resemblance to the Atrium's portrait of Faustina the Younger in terms of her face shape, eyes, hair style, and expression.<sup>39</sup> Imperial women were known to emulate the Vestals in their images, having referenced the intricate Vestal headdresses that identified them in their portraits. This can be found in the bust Matilda the Elder (*Fig. 5*) when compared to a Chief Vestal statue (*Fig. 6*).<sup>40</sup>

The statuary of the Atrium easily exhibits one of the strongest ties between the Vestals and the imperial families. It is worth noting that several images of emperors' were displayed as well, namely portraits of Augustus, Tiberius, Marcus Aurelius, and Caracalla were identified in the home of the Vestals.<sup>41</sup> Images of the Vestals also, of course, clearly served to revere the order and their great duty to Rome, as evident by the inscriptions on the pedestals and the craftsmanship of the statues. Integrating these portraits into the Atrium made a poignant statement aligning the role of the Priestesses with that of the imperial family.

In essence, the cult of Vesta played a central role in Roman religious and political spheres, and the architectural history of the *Aedes Vestae* and the *Atrium Vestae* serve as evidence of their significance to Rome and the imperial family. Honorific statues and reliefs within the Atrium and outside of it, as seen on the Sorrento base relief, underscore their close association with the imperial household from the moment Rome transitioned out of the republic. With the Vestals' status as moral guardians over Roman integrity, imperial families secured the usage of their symbolic power and maintained the order across generations, relating to them as embodiments of Roman stability. By including them on official imperial monuments, coinage, and even in

<sup>37</sup> Lindner, "The Vestal Virgins and their Imperial Patrons," 162.

<sup>38</sup> Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 70.

<sup>39</sup> See Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 168.

<sup>40</sup> Lindner, *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins*, 168.

<sup>41</sup> Middleton, "'XV.—The Temple and Atrium of Vesta and the Regia," 410. The following are the chief among the sculpture found: two busts of Diana,

statuette of Aesculapius, seated statuette of Cybele on a throne with lions at its sides, statuette of Venus and heads of Bacchus, Cupid, and other deities, several portrait busts, namely Augustus, Tiberius, Marcus Aurelius, Caracalla, Julia Domna, and other late empresses, and two heads and many fragments of the statues of Vestals.

their personal homes, as seen by Augustus, the Vestals had a clear power needed by the elite, revered in Roman religion and respected by the people.

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### Figures

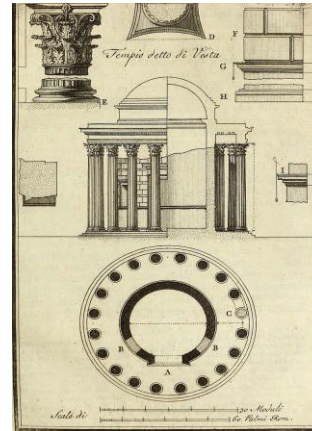


Fig. 1: 1805 Illustration of the plan for the Temple of Vesta. (Illustration by Giuseppe Antonio Guattani, *Roma descritta ed illustrata* (Nella Stamperia Pagliarini, 1805), 148.)



Fig 2: The Sorrento relief of Vesta and Vestal Virgins sacrificing. (Altar, Rear side, April 22, 1965, acetate photo Museo Correale, Sorrento, German Archaeological Institute, Copyright DAI, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>, <https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6340746?fl=20&q=65.1252&resultIndex=1>.)



Fig. 3: Aureus coin depicting the bust of Emperor Caracalla (front) and the Temple of Vesta (reverse). From Rome, Italy, 214 C.E. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C\\_1867-0101-770](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1867-0101-770).



Fig. 4: Contemporary image of the *Atrium Vestae* and the statues of the Vestals that align it. (Photograph by Carole Raddato, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en>, cropped.)

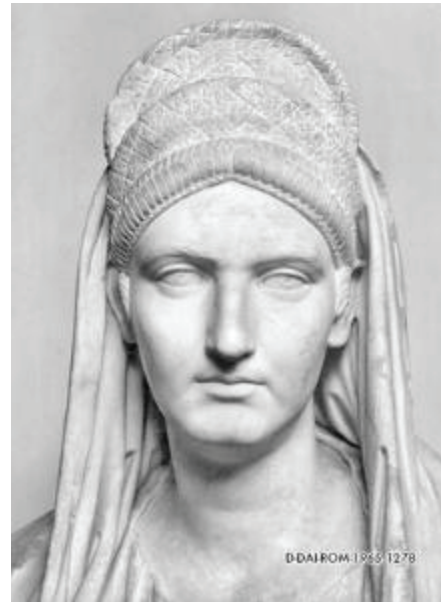


Fig. 5: Bust of Matidia the Elder. (*Portrait bust of Matidia*, 220s C.E., marble sculpture, 72 cm. Museo National Archaeological Museum of Naples, Naples, Italy. Image by German Archaeological Institute, Copyright DAI, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>, <https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6340746?fl=20&q=65.1252&resultIndex=1>.)



Fig. 6: Statue of a Chief Vestal Virgin, detail of headdress. (Photograph by Rabax63, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.)

## Connor O'Brien

### Dizzy from Success, or Starvation?

### A Study of Two Famines in Ukraine and Kazakhstan

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Advised by Dr. Nabil Al-Tikriti

For HIST 471: Problems in Genocide Studies

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#### *Abstract*

Comparing and contrasting the historical “public memory” of these events in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, will illuminate uncomfortable yet important truths about the politicization of genocide. Namely, that Stalin’s deliberate famine was a form of genocide. Furthermore, the Soviet famines and other crimes against humanity are considered genocide by historians when the designation serves a political or nationalizing end. Culture, politics, and the response of the survivors have an invisible effect on genocide outside the legal definition. Genocide can be a cultural force to either unite the victims, in Ukraine’s case, or get lost in the folds of history, in the case of Kazakhstan.

**Keywords:** Ukraine, Russia, Genocide, Holodomor

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Genocide is somewhat like Schrödinger's cat in that a genocide can only be defined as a genocide under observation. For every letter of this paper—, “not every word, but every letter,”<sup>1</sup>—about 133 people died in Ukraine during the famine caused by Soviet collectivization between 1930 and 1933. In Kazakhstan, about fifty people died per letter during the famine caused by similar Soviet policies. These famines, roughly parallel in the historical record in both time period and root cause, are remembered radically differently by the countries and survivors that came after them. According to scholar R.J. Rummel in *Death by Government*, “[p]robably almost 62 million people [...] have been murdered by the [...] Soviet Union.”<sup>2</sup> The number of these deaths directly attributed to the Ukraine and Kazakh collectivization famines is hard to pinpoint with total accuracy. The nature of famines makes enumerating a death toll practically impossible because those who die in a famine “starve to death, get ill[,] or die from sheer exhaustion.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, they die in silence. Stalin, the architect of the policies of collectivization that resulted in famine, pursued a policy of propagandized war against his own people. Collectivization was a Soviet agricultural policy wherein the state effectively owned all the food harvested by the peasant class, and only the state had the right to choose when and where to distribute it. In other words, it was socialized agriculture. The merits and demerits of socialized agriculture are not worth debating here because collectivization under Stalin was used as a

tool to bludgeon the peasantry. In this case, the peasant does not refer to the stereotypical image of a sinewy, dirty, downtrodden man wearing only a potato sack. Instead, a peasant can generally be considered a farmer who works the land, sometimes owning property and other times not. However, in the case of the Kazakhs, a peasant is synonymous with a nomad with a herd of animals ranging in size from substantial to massive. Two cases—the case of the Ukrainians and the case of the Kazakhs—illustrate the differing reactions to the bludgeoning of the peasantry and the resulting famines that killed millions. Comparing and contrasting the historical “public memory”<sup>4</sup> of these events in Ukraine and Kazakhstan will illuminate uncomfortable yet important truths about the politicization of genocide.<sup>5</sup> Namely, that Stalin's deliberate famine was a form of genocide. Furthermore, the Soviet famines and other crimes against humanity are considered genocide by historians when the designation serves a political or nationalizing end. Culture, politics, and the response of the survivors have an invisible effect on genocide outside the legal definition. Genocide can be a cultural force to either unite the victims—in Ukraine's case—or get lost in the folds of history, in the case of Kazakhstan.

Ukraine's national roots are buried deep in her black soil. It is necessary to unearth these roots to better understand the Holodomor (the Ukrainian name for the famine of 1930-1933) and its politicization after the fall of the Soviet Union. Ukraine possesses a unique language, a specialty in

<sup>1</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 1.

<sup>2</sup> R. J. Rummel, *Death by Government* (Transactions Publishers, 1994), 79.

<sup>3</sup> Hugo Slim, *Killing Civilians: Method, Madness, and Mortality in War* (Columbia University Press, 2008), 98.

<sup>4</sup> James Richter, “Famine, Memory, and Politics in the Post-Soviet Space: Contrasting Echoes of Collectivization in Ukraine and Kazakhstan” *Nationalities Papers* 48, no. 3 (2020): 477.

<sup>5</sup> Richter, 477.

agriculture, and a national myth of collective suffering under the colonizing boot of the Russians. These ideals tied Ukraine together long before the famine of 1930-1933 and fostered a sense of “Ukrainianness.”<sup>6</sup> After the famine, Ukraine had a strong foundation of nationalism, allowing them to build a national identity separate from their Soviet overlords.

Kazakhstan (a part of the Soviet state known as Turkestan) struggled to plant deep roots. The Kazakh people of the early 20th century were nomadic pastoralists who satisfied their needs by living off the land and maintaining a strong connection with their tribe and local leaders. This pastoralism, though it did not plant roots, had a long history. It was more than a tradition, being the “way of life in the steppe for more than four millennia.”<sup>7</sup> The migrations were seasonal, with large *auls*—groups “consisting of up to five families [who] trekked through the steppe with their herds”<sup>8</sup>—settling when the weather got cold and grazing in the summer. It’s difficult to find primary sources for the Kazakh Famine of 1931-1933 because the constant movement and primarily oral history records made writing anything down an exercise in futility.<sup>9</sup> Even the scholarly literature (in English) is just starting to come into its own.<sup>10</sup> The lack of written sources and little connection with the greater globalizing world left the Kazakh people vulnerable to a strong state entering and imposing its will on the land. It’s important to note that the

nomadic peoples of Central Asia knew very well what they were missing out on. There had been “considerable interaction” between Russia and the nomads of the steppe.<sup>11</sup> The Kazakh and the rest of the nomadic peoples didn’t ‘civilize’ because they had no desire to, not because they “did not care to ‘bear the heavy yoke of agricultural work,’”<sup>12</sup> but because their culture was decentralized, insular, and pastoral. The Kazakh people inhabited a harsh, massive, and isolated environment, and their culture adapted to fit those circumstances. Scholar Sarah Cameron summarizes the roots of the issue as follows: “[The famine was the result of] Moscow’s radical attempt to transform a group of Muslim, Turkic-speaking nomads known as ‘Kazakhs,’ and a particular territory, Soviet Kazakhstan, into a modern, Soviet nation.”<sup>13</sup> Before the famine, the Kazakh people had a decentralized and radically different way of life. Consequently, almost seventy-five years later, after the end of Soviet rule, the Kazakh people struggled to form a cohesive identity. In the end “one of the most heinous crimes of the Stalinist regime” has gone largely unpunished.<sup>14</sup>

Nationalism is defined as “the doctrine that persons of a distinctive culture should constitute an independent state.”<sup>15</sup> The seeds of Ukrainian nationalism were planted in the early 19th century, germinating with Taras Shevchenko’s *Kobzar* in 1840. *Kobzar* was a collection of poems written in Ukrainian that

<sup>6</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine* (Signal, McClelland & Stewart, 2017), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan* (Cornell University Press, 2018), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads: Power and Famine in Kazakhstan*, trans. Cynthia Klohr (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 14.

<sup>9</sup> Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Kindler and Cameron are the first major works focusing on the Kazakh famine as far as I can tell.

Ukraine’s invasion by Russia in the 2020s had led to much scholarly reflection on the Holodomor, and by proxy, most articles and books at least touch on the Kazakh famine, though few go any further than a mention or footnote.

<sup>11</sup> Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads*, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads*, 18.

<sup>13</sup> Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> John A. Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism*, 3rd ed. (Ukrainian Academic Press, 1990), 1.

“combin[ed] romantic nationalism and an idealized picture of the countryside with anger at social injustice [...]”<sup>16</sup> Most importantly for the Ukrainian nationalist movement, *Kobzar* “positively identified the ignominy of serfdom with the ignominy of Russification.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, Ukraine’s national identity was firmly uprooted against Russia. Rising against their exploitative Russian overlords became a core aspect of Ukrainian nationalist mythology. Despite being sent to a prison camp for his effort, the message behind Schevchenko’s words maintained its initial fiery energy. From its onus in 1840, Ukrainian nationalism developed along its distinctly anti-Russification track. As in Russian, the Ukrainian language used Cyrillic characters. However, after the Soviet rule, a grammatical and linguistic effort was made “to keep the languages from becoming too close [to Russian].”<sup>18</sup> The urban/rural divide was slanted heavily in favor of the rural peasantry. Ukrainian national doctrine emphasized their connection with the land, idealizing the humble farmer. Peasants made up the vast majority of Ukraine, so it follows that their national myth cast the peasant as the protagonist. The antagonist was any bad actor taking advantage of the humble peasants and their hard-earned harvest. In Ukraine’s case, these bad actors were played by the urban worker, the Russian overlords, and the Jewish merchants.<sup>19</sup> Ukrainian nationalism was, therefore, essentially a

story of class struggle. The only way to free the nation was to liberate the peasants: “[f]reedom for the peasants was, in effect, freedom for Ukrainians.”<sup>20</sup>

In practice, though, the Ukrainian nation’s identity struggled. Due to “tsarist centralizing and standardizing measures from the eighteenth century...,”<sup>21</sup> Russians and Ukrainians were closely knit together by common laws and practices. If nationalism primarily differentiates distinct cultures from one another, many didn’t know or care to learn if they differed from their (often literal) Russian neighbors. Ukraine’s bloody independence movement struggled between 1917 and 1920 because no one could discern between “who were the ‘colonizers’ and who the ‘colonized.’”<sup>22</sup> The herald of this independence movement, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, indicates its character. Hrushevsky was a historian, a member of the ‘intelligentsia’ that Stalin himself called “an entirely new intelligentsia which by its very roots is bound up with the working class and the peasantry.”<sup>23</sup> Hrushevsky was an intellectual, specifically, a historian. Hrushevsky is the author of the ten-volume *History of the Ukraine-Rus*, lauded by modern scholars as “[Hrushevsky’s] masterpiece, a fully realized, scholarly, integrated [...] history of the Ukrainian people...”<sup>24</sup> The key to the success of Hrushevsky’s history was his detachment from Russia. To Hrushevsky, Russia was a reversal of the narrative. Instead of Ukraine

<sup>16</sup> Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 29.

<sup>18</sup> Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Anatol Lieven, *Ukraine & Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry* (United States Institute of Peace Press, 1999), 27.

<sup>22</sup> Lieven, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Stalin, and M. R. Werner. *Stalin’s Kampf; Joseph Stalin’s Credo* (Howell, Soskin and company, 1940), 216.

<sup>24</sup> Charles J. Halperin, review of *History of Ukraine-Rus’. Volume One. From Prehistory to the Eleventh Century*” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* by Mykhailo Hrushevsky, trans. Marta Skorupsky, eds. Andrzej Poppe, Frank E. Sysyn, and Uliana M. Pasicznyk *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 195. The whole series is massive and unfinished, only reaching the 17th century before Hrushevsky died shortly after the famine ended.

being merely an offshoot of Russia that obeyed her motherland, Russia only took advantage of Ukraine because Russia “relied on Ukraine’s sugar, grain, and coal.”<sup>25</sup> This attitude catapulted Hrushevsky to the peak of Ukrainian historiography, made him “the most distinguished figure in the country,”<sup>26</sup> and opened the door to the world of Ukrainian politics. Hrushevsky was no stranger to independence movements. In 1899, he was a co-founder of the National Democratic Party, a populist left-wing political party that quickly gained prominence in Galicia, a swath of territory that stretched across West Ukraine and Southeast Poland. In the West, far from Russian influence, the Ukrainian independence movement “struggled much less.”<sup>27</sup> In 1917, when a revolution against the Bolshevik government broke out across Ukraine, Hrushevsky was the clear choice to head the Central Rada. The Central Rada was the government apparatus of Ukrainian independence, declaring independence on November 20th, 1917.<sup>28</sup> During a celebration called “the holiday of liberty,”<sup>29</sup> Hrushevsky spoke to a massive crowd of Ukrainian nationalist supporters. He took this opportunity to fan the flames of independence in his own name. His biography describes it as follows:

“...he asked the crowds to swear before the symbols of the nation never to abandon these ideals. With outstretched arms the assembly cried: ‘We swear! We swear!’

Amidst further cheers and patriotic songs Hrushevsky was lifted over the shoulders of the crowd to the balcony above. More speeches, more song, and further acclaim followed.”<sup>30</sup>

The “bearded and bespectacled”<sup>31</sup> historian was now at the forefront of Ukraine’s first independent government, the Central Rada. However, this governance wouldn’t last long. Lenin and the new Bolshevik government couldn’t tolerate an independent state in their backyard that didn’t recognize their legitimacy.<sup>32</sup> Communist ideology left the perfect justification for war because “Marx and Engels define their proletariat as ‘the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc. within present society’.”<sup>33</sup> This liquidation was slow and violent, as it was a war “between the regime and peasants and nomads... [and the conflicts] had been particularly brutal because of the intensifying role of national and religious factors.”<sup>34</sup> Ukrainian nationalism had come up against a much larger, older enemy. A new state like Ukraine had no chance against a much larger, more centralized Russian state right at her doorstep.

On the eve of the Bolshevik revolution, the Kazakh nation was just beginning to take shape. A small nucleus of Kazakh intelligentsia, educated in high-quality Russian schools, pushed for “national self-determination, modernization,

<sup>25</sup> Applebaum, 2017. 19.

<sup>26</sup> Conquest, 1986. 34.

<sup>27</sup> Applebaum, 2017. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Conquest, 1986. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Prymak, *Mykhailo Hrushevsky: The Politics of National Culture* (University of Toronto Press, 1987), 128. Hrushevsky was a fascinating character. His story parallels that of independent Ukraine, and his *History of Ukraine-Rus* is probably very worth reading. The context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine would probably make a great

paper out of analyzing the history through that lens. Unfortunately, each copy is about 120\$ USD, so I wasn’t able to read any of it for the purposes of this paper.

<sup>30</sup> Prymak, 1987. 128-129.

<sup>31</sup> Applebaum, 2017, 12.

<sup>32</sup> Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Conquest, 31.

<sup>34</sup> Halyna Hryn, *Hunger by Design: The Great Ukrainian Famine and Its Soviet Context* (Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University, 2008), 5.

and the reform of traditional practices.”<sup>35</sup> Tribal leaders pushed against this, arguing Kazakh nomadism was “the heart of their identity.”<sup>36</sup> The intelligentsia seemed to think nomads and states could coexist, or at least they could compromise. A political identity began to take shape under a unique ‘Kazakhness’ that served as the foundation for a new nation. The parallels between Ukraine and Kazakhstan are clear. Both possessed a unique culture, identity, and an elite group of intelligentsia that pushed for the creation of a state separate from their Russian oppressors. In 1916, conflicts between Kazakh nomads and Russian peasant colonizers—who had been sent into the area since the early 1900s by the government with the hopes of “civiliz[ing]”<sup>37</sup> the Kazakhs—boiled over. The land was under more stress for the simple reason that more people were living on the steppe. The colonization had been somewhat successful, at least in population demographics, because “over the course of twenty years... [the population] increased by over two million, with three-quarters of these new arrivals Slavic settlers.”<sup>38</sup> Droughts, poverty, and the “endless conflicts between [Russian] peasants and nomads”<sup>39</sup> were the result of immense stress on the land and the indigenous people. In the wake of the revolt, a new autonomous Kazakh government, the Alash Orda, was eventually formed at the end of 1917. Again, the parallels between Ukraine and Kazakhstan are striking. There is a critical difference between Kazakhstan’s birth and Ukraine’s. Ukraine had a roughly eighty-year head start. The national feeling that pushed Ukraine towards independence was much stronger. The sense of ‘Ukrainianness’ therefore, was much more potent and hard to

ignore. Kazakhstan didn’t have a worse or incorrect approach to statehood; the state just didn’t have as much time to solidify. Through the 1920s, Soviet nationalism would invade and replace Ukrainian nationalism. For Kazakhstan, there was scarcely any nationalism to override. Not only did the nomads of Kazakhstan not see themselves as a nation, but Lenin and his comrades continually faced truths that Kazakhstan’s people lived in a way that was totally incongruous with nationhood altogether.

By the late 1920s, as Ukraine was making peace with her Soviet overlords, an underground nationalist movement was brewing. Mykhailo Hrushevsky, by now, had returned to Ukraine. Hrushevsky wanted to ignite an independence movement and a “Ukrainian cultural revival,”<sup>40</sup> believing he “could not miss this moment, so pregnant with possibilities for Ukraine.”<sup>41</sup> After several years in exile, Hrushevsky wanted to try again because the Ukraine he returned to was an entirely different country above and below the surface. Ukraine planted new Soviet roots of bureaucracy and central authority that had sunk deep in the soil, slowly choking out Ukrainian nationalism by stealing its most valuable asset: the peasantry. A process of ‘Russainizing’ was underway, that is, the erasure of Ukrainian identity becoming replaced with a Russian one. The Soviet regime left no room for decentralized, independent nations under Soviet rule. Either a state was part of the Soviet whole, or it was not. To be outside the Soviet club was essentially a death sentence for the settled, agricultural peasantry. Forced to choose between this binary, many peasants chose to bow down to their Soviet overlords to survive. The

<sup>35</sup> Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads*, 20.

<sup>36</sup> Kindler, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Kindler, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, 40.

<sup>39</sup> Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 72.

<sup>41</sup> Applebaum, 72.

Russianization process was also “intensely anti-Ukrainian,”<sup>42</sup> which initially led to more rebellion and peasant resentment. It wasn’t until the Bolsheviks accepted that “Ukraine nationality and language was indeed a major factor; and [...] a regime which ignored this [...] was doomed to be considered by the [peasants] as a mere imposition”<sup>43</sup> that they were truly able to win over Ukraine. Ukraine’s culture and language was begrudgingly accepted as a “political necessity,”<sup>44</sup> and over time Ukrainian nationality was folded into a greater Soviet ideal of a collective, monolithic state. The process of grain collectivization began slowly, “depending on persuasion and the free consent of the peasantry.”<sup>45</sup> Most importantly, in the 1920s, collectivization was optional. Collective agriculture was a new, exciting idea orchestrated by the Soviets, who believed the idea was one peasants would easily subscribe to. However, that’s not to say that the Soviet government wasn’t willing to use force when they deemed it necessary. The stakes were too high and time was too short to rely on a slow, peaceful transition. Food for the new regime was a priority, so there was much riding on Ukraine and her grain: “the success of the socialist transformations of the agrarian sector of the economy relied on the position that [the peasants] would take [...]”<sup>46</sup> However, Ukraine wasn’t wholly taken advantage of because a significant effort began to raise literacy and promote Marxist thought in the Ukrainian language. The hope was that “[Ukrainians] would come to feel like an integral part of the USSR.”<sup>47</sup> Schools taught in Ukrainian, and overall, children

taught at the time the 1920s as an era “of real enlightenment.”<sup>48</sup> The overarching idea was that a mutual give and take between ‘the Ukraine’ and Moscow would facilitate close ties between Ukrainians and Russians until there ceased to be any difference between the two. Lenin still did not trust Ukrainian nationalism, but he had hoped for a largely peaceful transition from Ukraine as an independent state to a Soviet satellite state, indistinguishable from the rest of the USSR. The strategy had mixed results, with some buying into the Soviet collective and others holding steadfast to an independent Ukraine. In hindsight, Ukraine in the 1920s was an era of decision-making for each and every peasant, politico, and kulak. While Hrushevsky and his nationalist allies were gaining popularity, a new generation of Ukrainians was growing up, and they were a generation “far more likely to be devoted to Stalin than to any abstract idea of the Ukrainian nation.”<sup>49</sup> It’s difficult to know exactly what Lenin was thinking, as scholars agree “he was merely uncertain of the best way forward.”<sup>50</sup> However, Stalin would not be so kind or trusting of Ukrainian nationalism, and he eventually attempted to crush Ukraine and extract her grain by force. To do this, Stalin re-implemented collectivization, only this time it was not optional. Peasants were forced to either hand over their grain or die. Soon, it would become clear that millions of peasants would die whether they chose to or not.

Like Ukraine’s fledgling Central Rada, Kazakhstan’s Alash Orda would not last, and Kazakh independence was short-lived. In March of 1920, Kazakhstan submitted to Soviet rule.<sup>51</sup> The iron of

<sup>42</sup> Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 35.

<sup>43</sup> Conquest, 39.

<sup>44</sup> Conquest, 61.

<sup>45</sup> Conquest, 59.

<sup>46</sup> Oksana Zhukova, “‘Forward to the Bright Future of Socialism!’: The Role of Images and Symbols in

Promoting Collectivization in Soviet Ukraine,” *SHS Web of Conferences* 63 (2019): 10003.

<sup>47</sup> Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 75.

<sup>48</sup> Applebaum, *Red Famine*, 76.

<sup>49</sup> Applebaum, 78.

<sup>50</sup> Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 59.

<sup>51</sup> Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads*, 21.

Kazakh nationhood was still hot and, therefore, much easier to mold in the Soviet image (at least on paper). The difficulties of enforcing the administration in the Kazakh steppe were manifold. Throughout the 1920s, the Soviets struggled to implement basic policies. When “[Soviet] documents could not be translated into Kazakh, the most rational solution for *aul* leaders was simply to gather, acknowledge, and then ignore them.”<sup>52</sup> Friction between the Soviet state and the nomadic pastoralists was heating up. Nomadic living, like sedentary living, is all about adaptation. Nomads are “as alert and responsive as they can be to the possibilities and constraints of their lives.”<sup>53</sup> The Kazakh nomads clearly saw Communism as a constraint, and either weren’t aware of or didn’t care about the possibilities offered by the Soviets. Nationalism is based on “a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.”<sup>54</sup> The closest thing Kazakhstan had to a ‘national unit’ was the *aul*, which guarded its own interest before the interest of an amorphous and intangible state. The Soviet government even struggled to take advantage of the Kazakhs because “[w]herever Communists appeared not to serve the interests of the *aul* elite, they were at best simply ignored and sometimes expelled from the community.”<sup>55</sup> The few Kazakhs who joined the Communist party were likely only using it to settle personal scores against other party members that belonged to rival tribes.<sup>56</sup> Filipp Goloshchekin, the leader of the Kazakh Communist Party organization, began implementing a “new program of

Sovietizing the *Aul*.”<sup>57</sup> At the same time, many previous members of the Alash Orda in Kazakhstan now held positions in the Communist government and were purged from the party by being arrested or deported. The last dregs of Kazakh nationalism were expelled, and the first steps toward collectivization were taken. Any ethnic Kazakh left was only allowed to remain in their position by “leav[ing] no room for doubt about [one’s] loyalty to Stalin’s squad of leaders.”<sup>58</sup> With the pieces in place, Stalin, now the head of the Soviet government, began implementing his radical new policy of forced agricultural collectivization. Stalin had even bigger plans for the Kazakhs, though. As Sarah Cameron, one of the preeminent scholars on the Kazakh famine, puts it: “[t]he transformation proposed for Kazakhstan was to be one of the most dramatic: the settlement of the Kazakhs.”<sup>59</sup>

At the start of 1930, Stalin controlled all major aspects of the Soviet government. Stalin was in the process of consolidating power, and “[f]orced collectivization confirmed Stalin’s tyranny.”<sup>60</sup> The only way to survive as a member of the Communist Party in Ukraine was to go along with Stalin’s policy of extermination. The birth of Stalin’s famines is confusing and unclear. Clearly, Stalin wanted to eliminate the peasantry or at least force a rebirth into a new Soviet peasantry. From his own writings on the state of Soviet Russia in 1936:

“Can it be said that our present-day peasantry, the Soviet peasantry, taken in the mass resembles [Capitalist] peasantry? No, this

<sup>52</sup> Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads*, 26.

<sup>53</sup> Philip Carl Salzman, *When Nomads Settle: Processes of Sedentarization as Adaptation and Response* (Praeger, 1980), 173.

<sup>54</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Blackwell, 1983), 4.

<sup>55</sup> Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads*, 30.

<sup>56</sup> Kindler, 57.

<sup>57</sup> Kindler, 64.

<sup>58</sup> Kindler, 66.

<sup>59</sup> Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, 97.

<sup>60</sup> Donald Rayfield, *Stalin and his Hangmen: The Tyrant and Those Who Killed for Him* (Random House, 2005), 201.

cannot be said. There is no longer such a peasantry in our country. Our Soviet peasantry is an entirely new peasantry. In our country there are no longer any landlords and kulaks, merchants and usurers to exploit the peasants.”<sup>61</sup>

The peasantry he’s referring to has indeed been entirely transformed, but there is no mention of the brutal tactics and sky-high grain requisitions necessary to recreate the peasants in Stalin’s image. Cannibalism was rampant.<sup>62</sup> The scale of human suffering is beyond comprehensible, a fact that Stalin was banking on. Furthermore, he writes, praising the system of collectivization that caused millions to starve to death:

“Our Soviet peasantry, the overwhelming majority, is a collective farm peasantry, *i.e.*, it bases its work and wealth, not on individual labor and on backward technical equipment, but on collective labor and up-to-date technical equipment.”<sup>63</sup>

To create his new class of Soviet peasantry, Stalin starved out the old one. Famine as a force of nature is inevitable when there is insufficient food due to crop failure, fire, or infestation—no one is to blame. Famine is a natural byproduct of societies that rely on the fickle game of agriculture. Famine as policy is an entirely different beast. Famine policy—as in, a famine brought on or allowed to continue by the hand of authority—is “driven either by intent or by neglect.”<sup>64</sup> In Stalin’s case, he was adept at both. For a dictator like Stalin, a famine can be very useful. The historiography of famine shows that famine can be used to mold or

subdue rebellious or uncooperative populations. Man-made famine seems to go against the natural order. Famines are typically categorized alongside disease and natural disasters and are beyond the reach of mortal hands; they are the cost of human reliance on agriculture and livestock. Once a famine is set in motion, it can be aided and abetted, but eliminating famines altogether is futile. That is actually not the case. The truth is quite the opposite because in many cases, “the fate of a famine-prone population is often entirely within human hands.”<sup>65</sup> The Ukraine and Kazakh famines are a prime example of this. In these famines, “[A]rtificial or natural, famine can be controlled and directed, and the firmer grip the state or other central authority has on the levers of food production and distribution, the easier it is to control and sustain said famine. Famine can be a useful tool of war or social upheaval, when “authorities explicitly intend to starve civilian populations, into either submission or oblivion.”<sup>66</sup> Stalin hoped for the latter and settled for the former. Timothy Snyder describes the famine as “a world of death” entirely different from the Ukraine that existed before.<sup>67</sup> Any child growing up during or after the Holodomor were “Soviet citizens but not Ukrainians.”<sup>68</sup> Stalin’s reformation through famine had been successful. Though there are few firsthand accounts of the Kazakh famine, similar social upheavals and tragic stories played out in Kazakhstan.<sup>69</sup> Neither country was the same after the famine. The difference between Ukraine and Kazakhstan is that Ukraine was better positioned to remember

<sup>61</sup> Stalin, *Stalin’s Kampf*, 215.

<sup>62</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (Basic Books, 2010), 38, 49.

<sup>63</sup> Stalin, 215-216.

<sup>64</sup> Slim, *Killing Civilians*, 103.

<sup>65</sup> David Marcus, “Famine Crimes in International Law,” *The American Journal of International Law* 97, no. 2 (2003): 245.

<sup>66</sup> Slim, *Killing Civilians*, 103.

<sup>67</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> Snyder, 54.

<sup>69</sup> Kindler, *Stalin’s Nomads*, 226-227.

life before the famine, but Kazakhstan was not so fortunate.

Forced collectivization was supposed to create a communist utopia. Stalin wanted to introduce a new socialist era under the 'Five-Year Plan' by building infrastructure, industrializing, and expanding as a greater power faster than any country had in history. Industrialization was a key piece of Stalin's Five-Year Plan for the Soviet Union, and a key piece of industrialization was having enough food to feed the industrial workers. Ukraine was and remains the proverbial breadbasket of the world, and any opposition to her could affect food markets worldwide.<sup>70</sup> This became even more true in the 1930s. Stalin wanted to plunder that breadbasket for his grandiose plans of a new agricultural utopia. In his infamous monograph 'Dizzy with Success,' Stalin gloats about a "radical turn of the countryside towards socialism."<sup>71</sup>

Stalin also boasts of the peasants' victory in the "fight against the kulaks."<sup>72</sup> This victory, Stalin says, "could not but facilitate the development of the collective farm movement."<sup>73</sup> Here, in this remark, Stalin cleverly rewrites history. Nobody foresaw that the kulak would be entirely decimated as a class, not even Stalin himself.<sup>74</sup> The kulak escapes definition, even to those who created that image in the first place. What can be certain is that the strata of people that fit that definition were

hit hardest by the famines. The deportation and "dekulakization" of Ukraine was a "campaign to 'liquidate the kulaks as a class' at the beginning of the 1930s."<sup>75</sup> It was a fantasy, packaged and sold to the poor of Ukraine and Kazakhstan to give the poor and unfortunate a common enemy. At the height of the famine, most people were too focused on trying to survive to rally against a common enemy. However, propaganda like the image below gave the Soviet government an additional veneer of legitimacy for their mass deportations and excessive use of violence.<sup>76</sup>



Figure 1. Ivanov, Mirzoyants. "Долой кулаки из колхоза [Doloy kulaki iz kolkhoza / Down with kulaks in kolkhozes]." (Source: LSE Library's archive, Coll Misc 0660/2/13. 1930).

Stalin praises the people for "taking into account the diversity of conditions in the various regions of the U.S.S.R." and the "voluntary principle" as "one of the most

worth noting that there was a similar campaign against the wealthy nomads in Kazakhstan, but they went by different names and were more so upheld by the tribal structure, they were called "bii" (Kindler, *Stalin's Nomads*, 15.) and were, like the kulaks, a state construct that was only used as a tool to give the disgruntled an enemy to rail against.<sup>76</sup> This image is a fascinating example of history being rewritten. I'm no art major, so I can't pinpoint exactly how the art twists the 'kulak' into a villainous, gluttonous bastard. I can say that more art like this belongs in museums, because propaganda played as much of a role in this genocide (and every genocide) and so deserves to be studied.

<sup>70</sup> Kibrom A. Abay et al., "The Russia-Ukraine war: Implications for global and regional food security and potential policy responses," *Global Food Security* 36, (2023): 100675; Joseph Stalin, *Works*. (Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1952), vol. 12, 197.

<sup>71</sup> Stalin, *Works*, vol. 12, 197.

<sup>72</sup> Stalin, 200.

<sup>73</sup> Stalin, 200.

<sup>74</sup> M. Lewin, "Who Was the Soviet Kulak?" *Soviet Studies* 18, no. 2 (1966): 211.

<sup>75</sup> Andrei Suslov, "'Лучше Перегнать, Чем Недогнать': 'Dekulakization' as a Facet of Stalin's Social Revolution (The Case of Perm Region)," *The Russian Review* (Stanford) 78, no. 3 (2019): 371. It's

important prerequisites for a sound collective farm movement.”<sup>77</sup> Stalin then goes on to criticize “certain areas of Turkestan [and Kazakhstan], where conditions for the immediate organization of collective farms are even less favorable”<sup>78</sup> and how, through various methods, the opposition has tried to “overtake and outstrip”<sup>79</sup> the area. Stalin rails against those in the party who fail to find a happy medium and push the peasants too far, saying:

“One might think that the grain problem has already been solved in the collective farms, that it is already a past stage, that the principal task at the present moment is not the solution of the grain problem, but the solution of the problem of livestock and poultry-breeding. Who, we may ask, benefits from this blockheaded ‘work’ of lumping together different forms of the collective-farm movement? Who benefits from this running too far ahead, which is stupid and harmful to our cause?”<sup>80</sup>

Stalin acknowledges that some are going too far, too fast with the collectivizing. This leaves enough room for Stalin to admit fault while not taking full responsibility for anything besides being too good at his job. There’s also the mention of livestock, which was always in chronic short supply at the time. Although he’s referring to the livestock across the whole of the USSR, Kazakhstan was still causing serious problems for Stalin at the time, and this section of the monograph was likely part of justifying the disastrous handling of the collectivization of Kazakhstan. On the other hand, Stalin also cautions against going too slowly, overflowing with sarcasm:

“I say nothing of those ‘revolutionaries’—save the mark!—who *begin* the work of organi[z]ing artels by removing the bells from the churches. Just imagine, removing the church bells—how r-r-revolutionary!”<sup>81</sup>

Overall, Stalin is deftly able to walk the line, criticizing everyone but himself and the peasants. Anyone who doesn’t think exactly as he does—or who does not do exactly as he would do—is ‘dizzy with success.’ Namely, they are so overwhelmed by Stalin’s successes that they’ve lost their way and must be herded back to the proper doctrine. Stalin dated his monograph March 2, 1930. A little under three years later, Stalin would write in his report titled “The Results of The First Five-Year Plan” the following:

“[the peasants] have forgotten about the differentiation of the peasants into kulaks and poor peasants, about the exploitation of the poor peasants by the kulaks, about the ruin which every year caused hundreds of thousands and millions of poor peasants to become destitute.”<sup>82</sup>

Stalin’s policies of forced collectivization and dekulakization, enacted in one form or another in both Ukraine and Kazakhstan, would kill in total anywhere from 4.1 million to upwards of 5.4 million people outright.<sup>83</sup> That’s not to mention those who fled or were deported. Due to the policies Stalin praised in his work, Ukraine and Kazakhstan collectively lost millions of people, including many of their most intelligent and economically stable. There was also a “huge decline in agricultural

<sup>77</sup> Stalin, *Works*, vol. 12, 200.

<sup>78</sup> Stalin, 201.

<sup>79</sup> Stalin, 201.

<sup>80</sup> Stalin, 204.

<sup>81</sup> Stalin, 204.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Works* (Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1955), vol. 13, 201.

<sup>83</sup> Richter, “Famine, Memory, and Politics in the Post-Soviet Space,” 476.

production” across the board.<sup>84</sup> These effects of famine are harder to measure accurately, especially when there are so few sources (in the case of Kazakhstan). However, the Soviet famines are undeniably still responsible for suffering, pain, and guilt in both countries today. The only difference is how each country expresses that pain.

After the fall of the USSR, Soviet nationalism faded, and the long-dormant Ukrainian nationalist movement revived. Robert Conquest’s *The Harvest of Sorrow* catapulted the famine into the historical discussion in an impossible way to ignore. The book, written by a former Communist disillusioned with the ideology, came at a perfect time for Ukraine to redefine itself under a new national identity. The long-dormant nationalism of less than a century before reawakened with the death of the USSR in 1991. By the early 2000s, President Viktor Yushchenko was able to “enshrine”<sup>85</sup> the Holodomor and pass “an official declaration recognizing the Holodomor as a genocide against the Ukrainian people.”<sup>86</sup> In this way, the Holodomor was a unifying force for Ukrainians to rally around. The victims’ collective suffering imparted to the survivors, who saw the suffering in 1931-33 as the suffering of Ukraine at the hands of Russia. In 2017, almost 90 percent<sup>87</sup> of people living in Ukraine saw themselves as Ukrainians. Nearly 80 percent believed the Holodomor to be a genocide against Ukraine<sup>88</sup>, and the number has likely risen since then.

Several books written on the Holodomor and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine have led to an even more anti-

Russian re-evaluation of the Russo-Ukrainian relationship. Conversely, Kazakhstan does not speak of the famine with nearly the same confidence or gravity. There is no official name for the famine outside of calling it ‘the Kazakh famine of 1932-1933,’ and many Kazakhs consider it a failure of policy rather than a deliberate genocide.<sup>89</sup> There were some positive aspects of the Soviet rule in Kazakhstan, specifically that scholars have noted, for example:

“The established [collective farms] gradually gained a considerable social function in many places, because they provided livelihood and fulfilled social and cultural functions: building schools, libraries, securing the sale of goods and transportation even in very remote areas.”<sup>90</sup>

This legacy leaves Kazakhstan more indebted to its Russian neighbors, possibly contributing to the lack of deliberate accusations of genocide. The political elite of Kazakhstan also benefited from placating Moscow,<sup>91</sup> because much of the government held over through the transition from Soviet to independence. Kazakhstan had a very bare-bones state apparatus and weak infrastructure before Soviet rule. The transition from nomadic to settled society in Kazakhstan has occurred for less than a hundred years. To go from nomadic pastoralism to a settled society is “a turning point in [the] history of each culture because it brings socio-economic and cultural development.”<sup>92</sup> This already challenging transition was made no easier by the famine, which killed or pushed out the few in

<sup>84</sup> Kokaisl, P. “Soviet Collectivisation and Its Specific Focus on Central Asia.” *AGRIS On-Line Papers in Economics and Informatics* 5, no. 4 (2013): 129.

<sup>85</sup> Richter, “Famine, Memory, and Politics in the Post-Soviet Space,” 481.

<sup>86</sup> Richter, 482.

<sup>87</sup> Richter, 482.

<sup>88</sup> Richter, 482.

<sup>89</sup> Richter, 483.

<sup>90</sup> Kokaisl, “Soviet Collectivisation,” 129-30.

<sup>91</sup> Richter, “Famine, Memory, and Politics in the Post-Soviet Space,” 483.

<sup>92</sup> Kolaisl, “Soviet Collectivisation,” 122.

Kazakhstan who had the tools to run a nation in the modern sense of the word. Virtually every society on earth had to undergo this change at some point, and to do it in such a short period has put immense stress on both the people and the land. Therefore, the Kazakh government relies on an example set by the Soviet predecessors for many government functions. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, there is a severe lack of scholarship covering the full breadth of the Kazakh famine, and the ‘public memory’ of the event is spotty, to say the least. It is often remembered at most as “an ‘inhumane social experiment’”<sup>93</sup> while carefully skirting the word genocide or anything that might upset Moscow. Kazakhstan’s population is both “aging and declining,”<sup>94</sup> with the thin slice of the middle class having “little memory of the Soviet period.”<sup>95</sup>

The man who coined the term genocide, Rafal Lemkin, called the famines “classic example[s]”<sup>96</sup> of genocide. These genocides are remembered so differently by the victims because victimhood is not a universal experience. It reflects the victim, and this logic applies to nations and individuals. Individual Kazakhs may hold the Soviets responsible for genocide, and individual Ukrainians may believe Russia was not at fault for the Holodomor. The important thing is that the collective can reflect and understand its own past. Ukraine, because of its firm nationalist and centralized roots, has been able to do this. Because of a decentralized, pastoral, and

individual way of life, Kazakhstan has not. History cannot rewrite itself, but it can and should be constantly re-examined. As a survivor of the Holodomor put it to the U.S. Government: “We need to study this to understand this in order to grasp the whole complexity of this unusual phenomenon in order to stop it somehow for the future, because it may happen anywhere anytime, if we do not understand.”<sup>97</sup> It is time for Kazakhstan to understand its history. Ukraine is experiencing the consequences of its history. Both countries require a re-examination of their history. That cannot happen without more research and translation.

Most importantly, there has to be a drive to understand these silent genocides. If they have a reason, one only opens the box containing Schrödinger’s cat—that reason, whether it is personal or dedicated to the dead, nationalistic or individualist, must be pursued. Dead or alive, the history of the Holodomor and Kazakh famines demands to be seen.

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<sup>93</sup> Richter, “Famine, Memory, and Politics in the Post-Soviet Space,” 483.

<sup>94</sup> Richter, 484.

<sup>95</sup> Richter, 484. There are a few statues and monuments, but overall there is little advocacy or even feeling in terms of this famine. The contrast between the memorials for the Holodomor and the total lack thereof for the Kazakh famine is striking. I wonder how a visit to each country would expand on this point, because in-person interviews would be

invaluable as a thermometer of the public temperature in relation to these events.

<sup>96</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 53.

<sup>97</sup> Comm. on the Ukrainian Famine, *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine, 1932-1933: First Interim Report of Meetings and Hearings of and before the Commission on the Ukraine Famine*, H.R. Rep. 2965-99 (1987) (Accessed in HaithiTrust).

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## Meet Our Staff

### *Operational Board*

**Laura E. Connors** is a junior double majoring in History and International Affairs with a minor in Applied Statistics and a member of the UMW Honors Program. She is thrilled to be serving her first term as President alongside such an amazing team. Outside of Columns, Laura is an intern for the International Center for Terrorism Studies at the Potomac Institute, Secretary of the Undeniably Adjacent, and volunteers with the Old Dominion Humane Society in Fredericksburg.

**Makayla Bowman** is a junior Anthropology & Historic Preservation double major and Museum Studies minor in the UMW Honors Program. Makayla serves as the Vice President of Columns and Treasurer of the Humanities & Social Sciences Society, as well as works as an Office Aide in the Department of Historic Preservation. As much as holding the Vice Presidential office scares her sometimes, she absolutely adores working with the members of Columns! When she's not interning at local Fredericksburg museums, Makayla enjoys reading, embroidery, and watching movies. Makayla has a current Duolingo Spanish Streak of 687 days, and counting! She hopes to travel the world while her legs still work, and her favorite type of cheese is mozzarella.

**Orion van Rooy** is a junior majoring in History and minoring in German. His studies are a reflection of his growing up in Austria and his avid interest in the history of Nazi Germany. Columns gave him a wonderful experience getting published for the first time and is now serving as the current Treasurer. When he's not doing schoolwork he enjoys staring at maps on grand strategy games.

**Zoë Mueller** is a junior International Affairs major pursuing a Middle East Studies minor. Zoë serves as the Outreach coordinator for Columns. On campus, she is a member of the dance company for UMW in addition to serving as a student alumni ambassador and an Honors student coordinator. Outside of UMW she works as a research associate for the Washington Center for Yemeni Studies. She looks forward to the future of Columns and the work she gets to help publish!

**Nicholas Macklin** is a senior Cultural Anthropology major. Nick serves as Treasurer of Columns and member of the Mortar Board Honors Society. He was also editor and co-author of an anthology series for FailSafe-Era—an organization that works within the community to reduce recidivism—and hosted/curated a podcast called Stories from the Otherside. He is deeply passionate about understanding the relationship between individuals, social structures, and how meaning is constructed and developed through cultural phenomena. Although he was relatively new to campus when he initially joined Columns, he has enjoyed working with the members of Columns and getting the chance to present his research from the first issue of the third volume at our symposium!

### ***Editorial Board***

**Azza Chaudry** is a senior Anthropology and Psychology major. Outside of being the Citation Czar for *Columns*, she is secretary of the Humanities and Social Sciences Society. When she is not in the HCC with her friends, she is in her apartment trying to get attention from her roommate's cat Cleo. In her free time, she enjoys painting and watching romcoms.

**Anissa Molnar** is a junior double majoring in International Affairs and Religious Studies, with a minor in History. She had her research on Islamic messianism published in the Fall 2024 issue of *Columns*. Anissa also serves as President of Botany Club and Vice President of Pi Sigma Alpha Honor Society. Her pastimes include talking too much and sending her friends unsolicited games of chess.

**Chloe McCann** is a freshman majoring in English and minoring in journalism. Her interests include investigative journalism and newspaper writing. Besides being a *Columns* editor, she is a part of the IMPACT program and loves volunteering. When she's not doing homework, she likes hanging out with friends, reading, and listening to music.

**Asunta Ross** is a junior English major who loves to procrastinate. If she manages to be productive, you can find her reading, drawing, or trying out a new baking recipe.

**Emma Sanford** is a senior Linguistics major. Her research interests include Asian American sociocultural linguistics, raciolinguistics, and LGBTQIA linguistics. In addition to being a *Columns* editor, she serves as the president of the Performing Arts Company, dances and choreographs for the Performing Arts Company, is a Peer Mentor, and works for the Office of Student Activities and Engagement. When she's not dancing, choreographing, or hanging out in SAE, she's probably talking about linguistics or trying to learn a new language.

**Anna Schwan** is a Freshman English Major with an interest in women's literature. If she isn't found working on her own writings, she can be found procrastinating through various methods of arts and crafts.

