Introduction

Interdisciplinary projects are perilous endeavors. Despite all the lip service paid to inter- and trans-disciplinarity as the future of academic research, the traditional nineteenth-century intellectual division of labor in the human sciences remains largely intact today, and continues to be reinforced by archaic institutional barriers, the hyper-specialized nature of postgraduate training, discipline-specific jargon, and, perhaps above all, the incentive structure of the academic job market. Furthermore, since research questions and lines of inquiry deemed interesting by one disciplinary community often fail to translate to even closely related fields, such projects run a perpetual risk of falling between the cracks, condemning them to a fate far worse than skepticism or criticism: deafening silence.[1]

Consider the relationship between cultural anthropology and medieval history, two fields with broadly convergent agendas that remain institutionally and intellectually isolated from one another.[2] Although, at first glance, medievalists and anthropologists may not seem to have much in common—the former traditionally focused on long-dead (mostly) Christian Europeans, while the latter on (mostly) living, non-Western, non-Christian peoples—what they do share is an interest in human lifeways and social worlds peripheral to Western modernity. In other words, both disciplines are broadly engaged in what Micheal Uebel has termed *heterology*: "the differences, projections, doubleness, and ambivalence attending past and present constructions of otherness."[3] So notwithstanding the occasional moments of fruitful cross-disciplinary borrowing over the past half-century (mostly flowing from anthropology to medieval history), the fact is that very few members in either field see much purpose in staying abreast of the theoretical and methodological developments in the other.[4]

This book hopes to address this unfortunate state of affairs by demonstrating the tremendous potential of more robust engagement between medieval history, anthropological theory, and archaeological practice. The essays in this volume seek to bridge geographical, temporal, and disciplinary gaps that have expunged the Middle Ages from the history of anthropology, discouraged many medieval archaeologists from embracing social theory, and kept the study of medieval material culture subservient to the "tyranny" of the historical record.[5] While keeping the aforementioned pitfalls of interdisciplinarity in mind, there is great promise in creating a new framework for the study of Europe's Middle Ages that builds upon and integrates current trends in anthropological, historical, and archaeological approaches to the past. Even if this book fails to fully deliver on such an ambitious goal, at the very least it should demonstrate why investigating the complex relationship between the (medieval) past and present necessitates such a relentlessly transdisciplinary perspective.

The following investigation will unfold in a decidedly nonlinear fashion, as navigating tricky terrain across multiple disciplines, places, and times requires frequent shifts between the medieval, early modern, and contemporary worlds, as well as trekking from the heart of Europe to distant lands in colonial Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Folding space-time in this unorthodox manner not only allows us to tackle an eclectic array of problems and themes, but—more importantly—reveals the subtle and profound connections among them. The seven chapters of this book take us on a whirlwind tour from daily life on fortified settlements in the post-Roman world to the Nazi occupation of East-Central Europe, from the late medieval travels of William of Rubruck to the writings of nineteenth-century colonial administrators in Africa and Asia, and from the Christianization of the early medieval Eastern Alps to recent debates over what it means to be authentically Slovenian. All the while we will consider the broader theoretical implications for sociocultural constructions of history, temporality, and technology.

This topical diversity requires from the outset a clear articulation of the underlying thematic unity. First and foremost, this is a book about the power of the past; specifically, how historical and archaeological narratives shape, and are shaped by, present-day political, cultural, intellectual, and economic agendas. Moreover, since processes of identity formation furnish the past with its ideological potency, we will also trace the sociopolitical dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in both the medieval and modern eras. Therefore, a second overarching theme is the intrinsic human desire to belong to community (real or "imagined"), as well as the resultant urges to exoticize and primitivize the other. Such psychosocial drives are at the heart of the colonialist, imperialist, and nationalist ideologies traced throughout these chapters. Finally, since all investigations of the relationship between past and

present are premised upon certain assumptions about temporality and technology, interrogating these two concepts will allow us to better appreciate how group identities are reinforced through historical narrative, as well as how material objects allow the past to persist into the present.

Outline of the Book

Part 1. Anthropology, History, and the Middle Ages

This anthropology of the Western historical imagination is divided in two parts. The first comprises an extended argument for what I will call an *anthropology of historicity*: a project that explores the relationship between past and present by integrating recent insights in anthropology, history, and archaeology. The potential of this new interdisciplinary approach will be illustrated by an analysis of Europe's Middle Ages as history, myth, and mirror to modernity. The first three chapters collectively demonstrate what an anthropological perspective—in the fullest sense—can contribute to the study of the Middle Ages, as well as why anthropologists can no longer afford to ignore the medieval past.

Chapter 1 offers a manifesto for this anthropology of historicity, laying out its main goals, key elements, and guiding questions, as well as situating it in the broader ongoing dialogue between anthropologists and historians. It begins by outlining what distinguishes this project from previous efforts to bridge "history" and "culture": first, it embraces a "principle of symmetry," a concept borrowed from the history of science in which successes and failures in scientific work are examined through the same analytical lens.[6] For an anthropology of historicity, this means making no a priori distinctions when investigating different representations of the past. Whether a particular narrative is deemed scholarly, popular, pseudo-historical, nationalist, mythical, and so on, each can be critically analyzed for the deeper cultural logics that they reflect and reinforce. Secondly, an anthropology of historicity seeks not only to situate individual histories, historians, or historical schools within their cultural context, but also to interrogate the epistemological tenets underlying Western historical thinking writ large. Third, this approach is not content to merely study how the past is narrativized, but also grapples with the more challenging task of developing new methods for studying the past itself.

Chapter 2 shows why Europe's Middle Ages provide an ideal case study for an anthropology of historicity. Although the medieval past is often regarded as irrelevant for (or even antithetical to) the modern world, it constitutes nothing less than the foundational myth of modernity. This chapter outlines how the medieval has been imagined and reimagined over the

past five centuries, tracing its ever-shifting place in the Western historical imagination. From the Renaissance to the nineteenth century to the present day, the medieval has continually provided a mirror for modernity, allowing various political and intellectual projects to amplify their cultural and historical achievements. The chapter goes on to expose the manifold ideological interconnections between medievalism and colonialism by detailing how concepts like barbarism, feudalism, and crusading were simultaneously consigned to Western pasts and/or non-Western presents. It concludes by arguing that postcolonial attempts to dispel the myth that "primitive" peoples reside at an anterior stage of human history have only reinforced the temporal logic of modernity, thereby widening—not closing—the epistemological chasm between modern and premodern worlds.

Chapter 3 further develops this analysis of the medieval in the Western historical imagination, but shifts focus from explicitly political contexts (e.g. colonialism and nationalism) to more intellectual and academic ones. Specifically, it considers why the Middle Ages are not only missing from contemporary anthropology's disciplinary agenda, but have been systematically expunged from its intellectual genealogy. A close reading of histories of early anthropological thought highlights the widespread scholarly consensus that Europe's medieval past represented the antithesis of modern anthropological values of tolerance, curiosity, and objectivity. However, this widespread assumption has been challenged by a growing body of literature within medieval studies that reveals how this era produced ethnographic works of a quality comparable (or even superior) to antiquity and early modernity. Finally, it is argued that reintegrating the medieval into the discipline's intellectual history not only provides a more complete account of early ethnological thought, but dovetails with ongoing efforts to transform the epistemic space of a single, dominant Western anthropology into the multiple, contested, and fluid spaces of "world" anthropologies.

Part 2. Identity, Power, and the Medieval Past in the Eastern Alpine Region

Having considered what an anthropology of historicity might contribute to cross-disciplinary dialogues, the second part of the book presents a detailed regional case study to demonstrate this project's potential for exploring the complex relationship between the (medieval) past and present. Chapters 4 through 7 examine how the Middle Ages have been appropriated by various political agendas in the Eastern Alpine region (what is today Slovenia, southern Austria, and northeast Italy), and also seek to develop new approaches to the past that might prove more resistant to sinister manipulation. Each chapter begins with a brief historical synopsis that is then thoroughly analyzed and deconstructed. The narratives outlined in these opening sections are not meant to provide comprehensive accounts of the current scholarship

or even reflect the author's own viewpoint. Rather, their purpose is to encapsulate the various "traditional" interpretations of the enigmatic transition between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages in this region, thereby revealing how scholars working with nearly identical datasets are able to fashion divergent, even contradictory narratives—producing something like a *Rashomon* effect on the early medieval past.[7] It is important to point out that these chapters (particularly 4 and 5) will be less concerned with evaluating the *validity* of individual narratives than understanding how sociopolitical contexts shape the perception and interpretation of textual and material data.

Chapter 4 details how German and Austrian historians used the medieval past to justify their imperial fascination with, and expansion into, East Central Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Middle Ages played a surprisingly important role in advancing the themes of *Volk* and *Raum* that dominated Germanophone social science during this era. From the triumphalist overtones of the *Drang nach Osten* to *Völkisch* fantasies surrounding the medieval peasant, the politically-useful conceit that the Eastern Alps had always been an authentically Germanic region required a very specific reading of the early medieval past. We will see how Slovene-speaking communities in this region were subject to a "colonial gaze" that portrayed them as lacking any meaningful historical or cultural achievements. Finally, a close reading of historical, archaeological, and toponymical scholarship during the National Socialist era reveals striking parallels with colonial ideologies employed by European powers in overseas contexts.

Chapter 5 begins by sketching the traditional Slovenian ethno-nationalist interpretation of the early Middle Ages, which played a critical role in fashioning a shared past for their nascent imagined community. Using John Coakley's tripartite division of ethno-nationalist mythologies as a guiding framework, this chapter traces how the Middle Ages have been indispensable to the formulation and maintenance of Slovenian identity, from their assumed ethnogenesis in the Migration Period to the "golden age" of early medieval Carantania, followed by their prolonged collective suffering under a Germanic yoke. The chapter concludes by considering how the rise of the "Venetic Theory"—which locates the origins of the Slovenian people not in Slavic migrations of the post-Roman period, but rather in a more ancient Iron Age culture—reflects rapidly shifting sociopolitical conditions over the past two decades that have reshaped what it means to be "authentically" Slovenian. Although mainstream scholars regard the Venetic Theory as blatantly pseudo-archaeological, its surprising popularity among the Slovenian public (and diasporic communities in North America and Australia) suggests that it powerfully resonates with deep, primordial aspects of their historical imaginations, as a simultaneous rejection and internalization of longstanding German colonial stereotypes against Slavic peoples.

Having detailed how easily modern political agendas can appropriate the medieval past for their own purposes, Chapters 6 and 7 confront the more challenging task of developing an alternative approach to the Middle Ages that might prove more resistant to such manipulation. Chapter 6 examines the concept of ethnicity, which has proven particularly susceptible to political abuse. Ironically, while the ethnicity paradigm has been dominant in medieval history and archaeology for decades, current subjectivist understandings of this concept in the social science literature make it exceedingly difficult to recover (either historically or archaeologically) from the premodern past. Therefore, this chapter calls for investigating other manifestations of group identity that were equally (or even more) important during this period, such as the "community of practice," in which groups of craftspeople shared a body of knowledge, skilled practices, resources, and a sense of "Us-ness." Although this expression of identity generally lies outside the purview of ancient written sources, it is potentially recoverable through archaeological methods because such technological choices often leave behind discernable traces in the material record. An examination of shifts in coarse-ware pottery production from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages in the Eastern Alps demonstrates the potential of this approach for studying identities beyond ethnicity.

Chapter 7 adds another component of this new approach to the study of the medieval past by revisiting two (unexpectedly) interrelated concepts: time and Christianization. The rise of Christianity across Europe and the Mediterranean in the first millennium CE has been traditionally explained in two ways: either through the intrinsic appeal of the Christian message or as a byproduct of *realpolitik* decisions having very little to do with religious belief. While both of these explanatory frameworks have some merit, neither provides a satisfactory mechanism for the rapid dissemination of Christianity throughout Roman, Celtic, Germanic, and Slavic "pagan" societies. This chapter builds upon recent innovative scholarship that attributes early Christianity's success to its willingness to borrow and assimilate existing religious beliefs and practices into its own theological framework. Convincing people that the new faith would allow them to retain much of their existing cosmological *doxa* and ritual *habitus* was essential to the conversion of whole communities, but this meant that Christianity did not replace paganism as much as merge with it, creating an entirely new and distinct religion. Interestingly, recent archaeological research has provided a glimpse into how this process unfolded across the Eastern Alps, where Christian appropriation of pagan objects, sacred places, and entire landscapes has left important traces in the material record. The chapter concludes by considering what this new syncretic approach to Christianization reveals about the limitations of traditional conceptions of temporality and history, and proposes a non-spatialized

time that offers a more sophisticated understanding of the complex relation-
ship between the past and present.

Notes

1. Immanuel Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms* (Philadelphia, 2001); Jerry A. Jacobs and Scott Frickel, "Interdisciplinarity: A Critical Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009); Frédéric Darbellay, "Rethinking Inter- and Transdisciplinarity: Undisciplined Knowledge and the Emergence of a New Thought Style," *Futures* 65 (2015).

2. Here I refer specifically to sociocultural anthropology and medieval European history, as opposed to the broader field of medieval studies.

3. Michael Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformation: On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2005), 252. The term "heterology" was coined by Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis, 1986).

4. Tellingly, most examples of anthropologists interested specifically in medieval Europe are now decades old: A.L. Kroeber, "On the Principle of Order in Civilization as Exemplified by Changes of Fashion," *American Anthropologist* 21 (1919); A.L. Kroeber, *An Anthropologist Looks at History* (Berkeley, 1963); Alan Macfarlane, "The Origins of English Individualism: Some Surprises," *Theory and Society* 6 (1978); Talal Asad, "Notes on Body Pain and Truth in Medieval Christian Ritual," *Economy and Society* 12 (1983); Talal Asad, "Medieval Heresy: An Anthropological View," *Social History* 11 (1986); Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge, UK, 1983); Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford, 1985). More recent exceptions include David Graeber, "The Anthropology of Globalization (with Notes on Neomedievalism, and the End of the Chinese Model of the Nation-State)," *American Anthropologist* 104 (2002); Leigh Symonds, "Death as a Window to Life: Anthropological Approaches to Early Medieval Mortuary Ritual," *Reviews in Anthropology* 38 (2009); Michael W. Scott, "The Matter of Makira: Colonialism, Competition, and the Production of Gendered Peoples in Contemporary Solomon Islands and Medieval Britain," *History and Anthropology* 23 (2012). Medieval historians who have incorporated anthropological perspectives into their work include Mayke de Jong, "The Foreign Past. Medieval Historians and Cultural Anthropology," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 109 (1996); Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, NJ, 2001); Aron I. Akovlevich Gurevich and Jana Howlett, *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1992); William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, 1990); Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, ca. 500–700* (Cambridge; New York, 2001); Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1994); and Julia M. H. Smith, *Europe after Rome: A New Cultural History 500–1000* (Oxford; New York, 2005).

5. See John Moreland, "Archaeology and Texts: Subservience or Enlightenment," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2006); Timothy Champion, "Medieval Archaeology and the Tyranny of the Historical Record," in *From the Baltic to the Black Sea: Studies in Medieval Archaeology*, ed. D. Austin and L. Alcock (London, 1990); and David Austin, "The 'Proper Study' of Medieval Archaeology," in Austin and Alcock, *From the Baltic to the Black Sea*.

6. For the origins of this "symmetrical" approach in the history of science, see David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (London, 1976); this concept was also used, with a slightly different meaning, by Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA, 1993).

7. This term is borrowed from Akira Kurosawa's classic 1950 film *Rashomon*, which tells the story of a murder from four distinct, frequently contradictory perspectives. It should also be noted that this term has been applied to ethnographic fieldwork by Karl G. Heider, "The Rashomon Effect: When Ethnographers Disagree," *American Anthropologist* 90 (1988).