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Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought

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Contents

Note on Nomenclature *vii*
List of Figures *viii*

Introduction *1*

1 The Rise and Fall of the Trojan Turks *22*

2 Barbarians at the Gates *65*

3 In Search of the Classical Turks *117*

4 Translations of Empire *155*

5 Wise Men in the East *203*

Epilogue *238*

Appendix: The Caspian Gates *249*

Abbreviations *257*

Notes *259*

Acknowledgments *343*

Index *347*

CHAPTER 2

Barbarians at the Gates

One reason the notion of the Trojan Turks may have seemed implausible to most fifteenth-century authors is the fact that it completely contradicted the most widespread contemporary assumption about the Ottoman foe: that of their extreme barbarity. Western observers certainly recognized other qualities in the Turks that were cause for amazement and concern: their military skill and strategic cunning; the ease with which they exploited and frequently flouted diplomatic conventions; the sultan's brilliant leadership and the remarkable obedience of his subjects; and, not least, the seductive dangers of their faith. But even as they expressed interest in and alarm at the formidable efficiency of Turkish military, political, and religious culture, European authors voiced their strongest concern over a much more basic element of the Turkish character as they saw it: an inborn ferocity which seemed to propel the Turks to acts of barbarous cruelty and violence unprecedented in human memory. Such savagery also placed them firmly outside the family of historically civilized nations, Trojan or otherwise.

The Turks' reputation for brutality grew together with their conquests in the Balkans and Mediterranean in the first half of the fifteenth century. After the fall of Constantinople, references to their savagery became a commonplace in European literature. The siege and sack of Constantinople were undoubtedly traumatic events. Eyewitness reports nonetheless exaggerated the extent of the atrocities the Turks committed, describing the Ottoman capture as a relentless melée of rape, pillage, and murder.[1] Over time the prurient details lost none of their appeal; later accounts, some written decades after the city's fall, still brim with tales of children, virgins, matrons, monks, and nuns defiled, slaughtered, or led into slavery, churches and holy relics profaned, and streets flowing with Christian blood.[2] Later Ottoman conquests gave rise to similarly lurid tales: in eastern Europe and the Mediterranean alike, it was said, the Turks tortured and murdered innocent Christians and compelled survivors to repudiate their faith. Western observ-

ers concluded that the ferocity with which the Turks pursued their conquests was more than just brutal strategic expedience: an irrational and immutable hatred of all things Christian and civilized seemed to lie at the heart of their character and direct their every move.[3]

This method of characterizing the enemy was by no means new. A long tradition of Christian rhetoric, dating back at least to the First Crusade, had aimed at dehumanizing the Muslim foe; for centuries the "Saracens" were portrayed as both monstrously cruel and driven by all-consuming hatred of Christians and their faith.[4] A fifteenth-century innovation was the portrayal of the Turks as enemies of Western secular culture as well as the Christian religion. As Nancy Bisaha has shown, some Italian humanists dwelled with particular gloom on the fact that the Turks threatened to destroy not only the Greek empire and people but also the last surviving traces of ancient Greek learning.[5] Even before the capture of Constantinople, Leonardo Bruni had lamented that Greeks under Turkish rule were forgetting their ancient language.[6] After the city's fall, some European observers mourned the loss of Greek books in the catastrophe just as keenly as the loss of Greek lives. Lauro Quirini claimed that the Turks had destroyed 120,000 volumes during the sack; now, he said, they threatened to destroy the Greek language itself.[7] Aeneas Sylvius worried less about the living language and more about potential losses to scholarship: by destroying the Greek books of Constantinople—many perhaps as yet unknown to Western scholars—the Turks were bringing about a new dark age, a second death for Homer and Plato.[8] Marsilio Ficino too condemned the Turks for trampling not only the Christian faith but also the rule of law and the liberal arts.[9]

Humanists were horrified by Turkish violence against Greek books, learning, and culture, largely because these were things they themselves held dear. But they never lost sight of—or their taste for—the older, more traditional charges that could be leveled against a Muslim foe. In exhortatory letters to princes or harangues to the general public, even in their private correspondence and learned dialogues and treatises, humanists described the Turks not only as enemies of culture and learning but also as a potent threat to European political and military security and, even more traditionally, as idolatrous infidels thirsting for Christian blood. Taken as a whole, these multifarious charges produced a terrible picture: every aspect of the Turks' character and culture was irredeemably base. Not only heretical, violent, and cruel, they were also lustful, proud, crude, unlettered, and ignorant—despicable in every respect.

Such a universal condemnation of the enemy may well reflect, as Robert Schwoebel once argued, a wider sense of pessimism in fifteenth-century Europe, a morbid interest in the monstrous and sensational.[10] In the case of the humanists, however, it seems just as likely that the motivation for attacking the Turks on so many fronts was rhetorical. By exploring every avenue of defamation and so amplifying their verbal assaults on the Turkish enemy, the humanists hoped to reinforce arguments for the advantageousness (*utilitas*) of a new crusade. The Turks, they argued, posed a threat to European security in all its aspects: political, religious, moral, and cultural. At the same time, it was an affront to the honor of European princes that so vile an enemy should have conquered so much Christian territory.[11]

Humanists invariably turned to this last point in their crusade appeals, emphasizing the contrast between the lofty splendors of Christian civilization and the baseness of the enemy who attacked it. Bessarion mourned the loss of Constantinople for precisely these reasons: "A city which only recently was blessed with such an emperor, so many distinguished men, so many famous and ancient families, and such an abundance of resources—the capital of all Greece, the splendor and glory of the East, the nursery of the most noble learning, the repository of all that is good—has been captured, stripped, plundered, and pillaged by the most inhuman barbarians, the most savage enemies of the Christian faith, the most ferocious wild beasts."[12]

Lauro Quirini expressed similar thoughts: the fall of such an ancient, noble, and wealthy imperial city was certainly to be lamented.[13] What made it intolerable was the fact that the city had fallen into the hands of such unworthy attackers: "a barbarous race, an uncivilized race, living without set customs or laws, careless, wandering, arbitrary, full of treachery and tricks."[14] Francesco Filelfo phrased the antithesis in even starker terms: "The more humble the men who inflict it, the more humiliating is the indignity—if, indeed, the Turks should be called men and not some sort of completely unrestrained and savage beasts, since they have nothing of humanity in themselves beyond a human form, and that deformed and depraved on account of the disgusting filthiness of their shameful habits."[15]

A further layer of criticism which the humanists added to this line of attack—and another involving an issue close to their own intellectual interests—drew on arguments from history. In crusade letters and appeals, humanists claimed that the Turks were as bad as, sometimes far worse than, any previous enemies civilization had ever known. The ancient Assyrians

had at least taken some pity on captive Israel, allowing the nation to survive in Babylonian exile, but the Turks had scattered the Byzantine Greeks and destroyed their nation forever.[16] The Persians under Xerxes and Darius, despite their epic designs on world domination, had hoped to annex the city-states of ancient Greece, not obliterate them. The Romans, too, had invaded Greece, but they had shown respect for Greek learning and letters—indeed, had eagerly embraced Greek culture for themselves.[17] In more recent times, the Goths, even as they subjected Rome to fearful trials, did not desecrate churches or shrines, as the Turks seemed ready to do.[18]

Some humanists went beyond historical comparisons like these and tried to reconstruct the ancient and medieval history of the Turks themselves, aiming to prove both that the Turks were more savage than any previous enemies of civilization and that they had always been so—from their genesis in a barbarous part of the world through a long history of uncivilized activity. Humanist historians maintained that the Turks were originally Scythians, inhabitants of the vast territory which, according to ancient geographers, stretched north and east of the Black Sea to the very limits of the known world and which had been known in antiquity, as well as in more recent times, as home to an array of wild and unsavory peoples—nomadic raiders, bandits, even cannibals. Humanists also asserted that the Turks had made their way south into Asia Minor in a violent invasion through the Caucasus Mountains, another area notorious throughout history for producing barbarian invaders hostile to civilization.

The barbarism which classical geographical and ethnographical literature associated with Scythia and the Caucasus—and, more generally, with the colder regions of northern Europe and Asia—was invoked by humanists not only to describe the condition of the original Turks but also to make a polemical point about their contemporary descendants: the harshness of their native land was forever ingrained in their character. In the oration Aeneas Sylvius delivered at the Diet of Frankfurt, convened in September 1454 by Frederick III to discuss a German response to the fall of Constantinople, Aeneas roundly condemned the Turks as barbarians from a barbarous land: "They are a nation of Scythians, originating in the heart of Barbary, having their home beyond the Black Sea towards the northern ocean . . . an unclean and disgusting race, fornicators indulging in every kind of depravity . . . They set out from the Caspian Mountains [that is, the Caucasus] and took themselves by a long path into Asia; and there they have remained ever since."[19]

No matter how many centuries had elapsed since they invaded Asia and, later, Greece, their occupation of these milder climes had done nothing to soften their essential savagery. Their diet was still monstrously unclean (including the meat of horses, bison, and vultures), they were slaves to lust, and—worst of all—they despised literature and the arts. "Despite the fact that they have lived so long under sunnier skies and in gentler territory, and seem a little more civilized, nevertheless they still retain about them some flavor of their primitive crudity; they have not washed the barbarian completely away."[20]

Francesco Filelfo, too, maintained that the Turks had carried their uncivilized habits with them from Scythia into the civilized world. As early as 1444, he condemned the Turks as "a race of people who, having abandoned their homeland and ancestral hovels among the vast and frightful crags of the Caucasus, where day and night they polluted themselves with every kind of shameful filthiness, have raged long and hard, using every kind of mockery and insult, in almost every part of the world, against the name of Christ."[21]

Humanists even introduced this kind of geographical denigration into their poetry. In a prophetic poem composed just after the fall of Constantinople, Publio Gregorio Tifernate imagined that the Turks who would soon overrun Italy were a barbarian race, a "great evil" spreading down from the frozen North.[22] Nicola Loschi, in a poem addressed to Aeneas Sylvius, lamented that a "Caspian race" should threaten the West and in particular that Christian authority should be challenged by Mehmed II, a lowly "Scythian boy."[23] In 1472, the poet Antonio Cornazzano decried the Turks as descendants of "Caucasian tigers" who had emerged from their mountain lairs to ravage the lands of the Greeks.[24] In describing the fall of Negroponte to the Turks in 1470, Paolo Marsi pictured a monstrous horde descending across the frozen plains of Scythia and down through the Caucasus, driven by ravenous greed for fertile southern soil. Marsi praised those Venetian husbands who killed their womenfolk rather than consigning them to slavery under a "Caucasian" mistress.[25]

Many of the negative comments Renaissance humanists made about the Scythian or Caucasian character of the Turks can be identified as commonplaces deriving from either classical ethnographical writing about Scythia and its inhabitants, or—as the verse by Tifernate suggests—a parallel Judeo-Christian tradition that associated northern, nomadic races with apocalyptic disaster.[26] But some historians relied on more than the general and long-

standing reputation of Scythia as a breeding ground for barbarians when they proposed it as the homeland of the Ottoman Turks. They invoked the authority of classical and medieval texts which explicitly referred—or appeared to refer—to Turkic peoples living or campaigning in the region. This made it possible for them to construct a chronological account of the movements and activities of Turks through the centuries. The information these scholars collected was frequently wrong—either derived from corrupt texts or, more usually, simply irrelevant to the history of the Ottoman dynasty. On the other hand, despite the difficulty of some of the texts they used (and the obscurity of almost all of the historical events they investigated), the humanists were not entirely the victims of their sources. They were not above manipulating the material they found in order to make negative polemical points about the contemporary Ottoman Turks. In several cases it can be shown that they knowingly did so. Still, an examination of their researches can provide some basic and perhaps unexpected insights into their historiographical methods, including their knowledge of medieval history, their attitudes to medieval source material, and their ability to interpret it.

This chapter and the next one examine how humanist historians developed and amplified their theory of a Scythian ancestry for the Turks as well as the larger questions their researches raised. At first glance we seem to confront a group of scholars who typify the central values and concerns of Renaissance humanism—interested in recovering facts from ancient texts, in searching for classical antecedents to contemporary issues, in reviving an ancient literary genre (in this case, ethnography) and its attendant vocabulary, and in applying the fruits of their labors to modern policy debates. In all this they seem to depart from the medieval preoccupation with the divine as the motivating force behind human history, with religion as the key criterion for determining whether a foreign people were friends or foes.

And yet, despite the fact that the humanists uncovered much new historical and ethnographical source material in their researches, I still question whether their approach was in fact all that new. What exactly did the humanists mean by calling the Turks “Scythians” and constructing a barbarian past for them? How faithfully did they revive classical concepts of barbarism? Just as their theories about Turkish origins derived from a mixture of ancient literary commonplaces and medieval historical sources, those theories were shaped, in a larger sense, by an equally complicated combination of classical and Christian notions of barbarity itself, and of the role barbarians had to play in world history.

Scythian Commonplaces

The reputation of Scythia as a harsh country, home to tough and sometimes savage peoples, was established early on in both the classical and the biblical tradition. The fifth-century B.C. Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places* describes the cold, damp climate of the regions north of the Black Sea and its ill effects on the people who dwelled there.[27] Herodotus, in a famous ethnographic essay, also remarks on Scythia's difficult climate and the habits of the people who endured it.[28] The winters, he wrote, lasted eight months, gripping the country in intolerable cold. The ground froze solid and snow fell constantly, while the short, cold summers were racked by violent storms. The treeless plains were drained by enormous rivers, a terrain which allowed the Scythians to breed horses but little else; as a result, most of them were nomadic, wandering from place to place in their wagons, and knew nothing of agriculture. There were no towns. North and east of the plains stretched empty deserts, thick forests, and impassable mountains. Here dwelled strange nations like the Hyperboreans, the Amazons, the Issedones, who worshipped their ancestors' skulls and ate parts of their bodies, and the Androphagi, "the most savage of men, [who] have no notion of either law or justice. They are herdsmen without fixed dwellings; their dress is Scythian, their language peculiar to themselves, and they . . . eat human flesh."[29]

All the Scythian tribes were notoriously fierce in war: they fought on horseback, using bows and arrows, drank the blood of their slain enemies, wore their scalps on their belts, used their skulls as drinking cups, and were known to take captives for use in human sacrifice.[30] They had invaded Asia once, descending through the Caucasus in pursuit of the Cimmerians (the previous rulers of Scythia, whom they had conquered and expelled), after which they subjected Media to a harsh occupation. Herodotus recounts: "During the twenty-eight years of Scythian supremacy in Asia, violence and neglect of law led to absolute chaos. Apart from tribute arbitrarily imposed and forcibly exacted, they behaved like mere robbers, riding up and down the country and seizing people's property."[31]

Herodotus reports much of this information—sensational as it may seem—in a fairly neutral tone. The historian did not consider the Scythians, despite their rough habits, morally outrageous or a threat to civilization; he found them interesting, and in some respects admirably virtuous. In fact, from Herodotus on, there developed a long tradition of eulogizing the primi-

tive simplicity of the Scythians. Many classical authors portrayed them as noble savages, morally pure (even if violent) when compared to the soft and corrupt civilizations of the Mediterranean world.[32]

The Scythians and their neighbors nevertheless earned their fair share of calumny in antiquity. The traumatic impression made by the Cimmerian and Scythian invasions of Media in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., for instance, left powerful echoes in the prophetic books of the Old Testament. Jeremiah describes the future enemies of Israel as horse-riding warriors from the north. In Ezekiel, they are personified in the figure of Gog from the land of Magog, leader of a terrifying horde which will descend on Israel in the last days, "from the uttermost parts of the north."[33]

Some Greek and Roman authors also expressed alarm at the ferocity of the Scythians, and especially at those uncivilized habits which Herodotus described with such detachment. The Scythians' penchant for cannibalism and human sacrifice and their taste for raw or half-cooked meat held a special fascination, but it was their nomadic life that most disconcerted ancient authors. Because they would not settle in any one place and showed no interest in agriculture, urban life, or organized government, the Scythian nomads seemed to threaten the very foundations of classical civilization.[34] In the *Politics,* Aristotle classified the various ways a nation could earn its living. He put pastoral nomadism firmly at the bottom end of the scale, below agriculture, hunting and gathering, and even piratical raiding, though this last practice was also frequently attributed to the Scythians.[35]

Roman authors transferred many of these stereotypes to the European barbarians they encountered in the course of their conquests in Gaul, Germany, and Britain. Cicero established the *immanitas* of the unstable and violent northern barbarian as a commonplace in Roman oratory.[36] Nor was the Roman stereotype limited to northern Europeans. Distant Scythia was still regarded as the quintessential land of harshness and barbarity.[37] Imperial campaigns brought news of enemies beyond the Danube and in the Caucasus, such as the Alans and Getes, who were described in traditional terms. The Romans also assigned their archrivals the Parthians a Scythian ancestry.[38] The peoples of the Caucasus, the mountainous barrier separating the Scythian north from the civilized south, were considered particularly savage: in the first century A.D., a legend developed that Alexander the Great himself had tried to contain them in the course of his conquests in Asia. The wild tribes behind Alexander's "Caspian Gates" featured in Roman poetry, geography, and historical writing and enjoyed a long afterlife in medi-

eval Christian apocalypse and romance. The legend also had a profound, if mostly indirect, impact on Renaissance ideas about the origins of the Turks.

Some Roman authors still found qualities to admire in the northern barbarians, often inverting familiar ideas regarding their rugged poverty and simplicity for moralizing or ironic effect. The self-deprecating respect Tacitus expressed for the hardy Germans, in whose virtuous society he saw the mirror image of corrupt imperial Rome, can also be detected in some descriptions of Scythia.[39] In the *Georgics,* Virgil painted a cozy picture of Scythian life, the hardy shepherds spending wintry nights wrapped in furs, drinking beer, and tossing logs on the fire.[40] Cicero and Horace, as well as the Greek geographer Strabo, composed similar eulogies of Scythian simplicity.[41] Trogus (author of a *Philippic History* which survives only in the third-century A.D. abbreviation of Justin) found the Scythians a magnificent race, whose valor in war had produced an impressive record of conquest and whose simple, nomadic lifestyle left them blissfully ignorant of the vices associated with property and wealth.[42] To illustrate his point, Trogus lists familiar Scythian characteristics, now offered as tokens of their abstemious virtue: for instance, their ignorance of agriculture, codified law, architecture, coinage, even woven clothing—for the Scythians wear only furs.[43] In all, he concludes, the Scythian way of life constitutes a model of moderation and restraint which the rest of the world would do well to observe: "It seems amazing that nature should bestow on the Scythians what the Greeks have been unable to achieve with all the protracted teachings of their sages . . . and that a refined morality should suffer by comparison with that of uncultured barbarians. So much more has ignorance of vice benefited the Scythians than knowledge of virtue has the Greeks."[44]

The philosophical and literary tradition of praising barbarians gave way once and for all—understandably enough—at the start of the barbarian invasions. In the fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus demonstrated the unsavory character of the Huns by reciting a list of topics taken directly from Trogus but without his charitable interpretation. For Ammianus, the harsh climate, primitive diet, precarious nomadic existence, and political anarchy which characterized Hunnish life were causes for scorn and fear, not admiration:

> The nation of the Huns . . . live by the frozen ocean beyond the Maeotic marshes, and exceed every standard of savagery . . . Their diet is so crude they have no need of fire or savory food, but eat the roots of wild plants and

> the half-cooked flesh of any sort of animal . . . They do not live in houses . . . but wander over mountains and through frozen forests . . . They obey no kingly authority but are content to follow the disorderly leadership of various powerful men . . . No one among them plows or ever even touches a plow handle; for they all live without fixed abodes and wander about without homes or laws or any stable source of nourishment . . . a wild race of men, tied to no particular place, burning with savage greed for plunder.[45]

Fifteenth-century humanists revived many of these ethnographical commonplaces to describe the Ottoman Turks—usually, it should be stressed, adopting the negative interpretation of Ammianus and only rarely taking Trogus's more positive view. One example of the latter approach is Coluccio Salutati's letter on the Ottoman Turks, written in 1397, in which he praises the Turks for their simplicity of life and strict military discipline. Trained from boyhood in the arts of war, Salutati says, the Turks spend their days hunting and exercising in the field. They live happily on dry bread or game or, when necessary, the roots of plants; they endure extreme cold or heat or foul weather without complaint and sleep on the bare earth. In short, what other men find intolerable, they not only endure but enjoy.[46] Did Salutati sincerely admire the Turks? In this case, as with the ancient sources, context is everything. Salutati recites this list of Turkish virtues to the margrave of Moravia in order to encourage him and other northern European princes to resolve the present schism in the Church and thereby restore their Christian subjects to their own inherent virtue. Doing so will have the useful side effect of preparing them to withstand a possible Turkish attack. "We Christians," he says by way of contrast, "are mired in debauchery and sloth; we aim at only indulgence and gluttony."[47] Standards are slipping, morals are weak, and, worst of all, without a legitimate pope, the health of Christendom itself is in danger. "Shall we wait until this dispute escalates (alas!) into war? Or until the Turks in their boldness . . . attack Christians and throw them into turmoil? It will be too late to seek reconciliation then."[48] Salutati presents the harsh discipline and endurance of the barbarian Turks as a provocative moral example to the people of Europe: if *they* can achieve such a virtuous life, surely we can too.

As the Turkish threat grew more serious, however, especially after the fall of Constantinople, few humanists followed Salutati in praising the habits of the Turks for rhetorical purposes, no matter how worthy the cause.[49] Emphasis shifted to the danger they posed. As a result, ancient truisms regarding the negative aspects of barbarian behavior were revived. Aeneas Sylvius

was clearly following the tradition established by Ammianus when he recounted the hideous diet and uncouth practices of the Turks through the ages. Other Renaissance writers attributed typically Scythian habits specifically to the Ottomans of their own day. Lauro Quirini lamented that Constantinople had fallen to "a barbarous, uncivilized race, living without set customs or laws, careless, wandering, arbitrary, full of treachery and tricks."[50] Filelfo too condemned the contemporary Ottomans as "a restless and wandering people."[51] Niccolò Sagundino composed perhaps the most elaborate pastiche of ancient ethnographical commonplaces in the account of Turkish origins he wrote for Aeneas Sylvius in 1456. Sagundino presents the Turks as the direct descendants of the original Scythians, in a passage that may well owe a debt to Ammianus: "The Turkish nation traces its origins back more than six hundred years, to the Scythians who lived across Don, on the Asian side, with no settled home, no cities, no fixed or permanent abodes; they wandered here and there over the broad plains and seem to have flowed out from there like a stream from a fountain." Moreover, the habits of the contemporary Ottomans are still obviously Scythian: "To this we can add the similarity of their customs, the appearance of their bodies and their costume, their method of riding and shooting arrows, a certain military discipline that is common to their nation, and that which can prove the matter beyond doubt to anyone, the similarity of their very language and manner of speaking." Last, their political institutions (such as they were) retained the anarchic flavor of their Scythian forebears: "At first, these Turks followed no single prince; but different groups of them, as if in factions, obeyed different leaders and various authorities. It was from this nation, about a hundred and fifty years ago, that a man called Ottoman . . . began to maraud about and plunder where he could."[52]

Sagundino had spent a year in Turkish captivity after the fall of Thessalonica in 1430, so he had more reason than most to describe the Turks as harsh and barbaric. On the other hand, he had recently accompanied a Venetian legation to Mehmed II, intended to secure Venetian trading privileges in the wake of the fall of Constantinople. It is curious that Sagundino's 1456 description of Turkish culture—or rather the lack of it—gives no hint of the cosmopolitan court and urban society he would have encountered on his mission just two years before. Rather, his account reveals his debts to the topoi of classical ethnographic description.

Scythian history was a topic which ancient writers discussed less frequently. The subject tended to be raised in the context of positive appraisals of the

country rather than negative ones. Although Herodotus described the Scythian occupation of Media as chaotic, he admired the way the nation later resisted the invading Persians.[53] Trogus, too, thought the Scythian record in war was impressive: not only did they repel Darius, Cyrus, and Alexander; earlier in their history they also invaded Media three times, made war on Egypt, and exacted tribute from all of Asia for some 1500 years until the establishment of the Assyrian Empire. Later they gave rise to the formidable kingdoms of the Bactrians, Parthians, and Amazons.[54]

As with the stock collection of Scythian habits and traits, the course of Scythian history came to be interpreted in wholly negative terms once the Hun invasions began in the fourth century A.D. Some later historians reviewed the same events Herodotus and Trogus described, but now as evidence of the Scythians' ferocious rapacity, not their empire-building skills. Many more identified new and far more sinister aspects to the Scythian past, drawing on traditions from both Christian apocalyptic literature and the romantic legends then beginning to circulate regarding Alexander the Great's adventures at the edges of the earth. All influenced the way Renaissance humanists described the "Scythian" origins of the Turks—far more than the original classical sources did.

When the Huns swept through the Holy Land in 395, coming south from the Pontic steppe through the Caucasus, Jerome identified them as the descendants of those ancient Scythian raiders Herodotus had described, who invaded Media by the same route and demanded tribute from Egypt and Ethiopia. They were also, he added, completely inhuman. They slaughtered children and the aged and spared no one in their path: "Pray Jesus keep such beasts outside the Roman world."[55] Other Christian authors of Jerome's time also identified the barbarian invaders as offspring of the ancient Scythians, but most concentrated on more notorious and fantastic aspects of their lineage, as they saw it, above all by identifying them as the descendants of Gog and Magog, the fearsome northerners of Ezekiel and Revelations. Josephus, writing in the late first century A.D., had first drawn a direct connection between Magog and the ancient Scythians, but the idea lay fallow until fourth- and fifth-century theologians began to promulgate it widely. In doing so, they often attached an eschatological significance to the Huns' appearance: the barbarians threatened to usher in the apocalypse, if they had not already done so.

The story that Alexander the Great built gates in the Caucasus to restrain the Scythian tribes, another idea first mentioned by Josephus, likewise took

on new life at the time of the Hun invasions, as a vivid illustration of how longstanding and serious a threat the northern barbarians had posed to the Western world.[56] In his letter describing the invasion of the Holy Land, Jerome explicitly identified the Huns as the Caucasian tribes whom Alexander had excluded: "Behold, suddenly . . . great swarms of Huns, flying this way and that on their swift horses, filling the whole world with terror and death, have erupted from among the monstrous tribes of Massagetes around the frozen Don, where the gates of Alexander confine wild peoples within the crags of the Caucasus."[57]

From the fourth to the seventh century, Latin and Greek historians and geographers identified a whole series of contemporary barbarians with the monstrous tribes behind Alexander's Caucasian gates. In the seventh century, the apocalyptic strains in the legend came to the fore as a group of Syriac Christian authors (among them the author of the hugely influential *Revelationes,* known to us as ps.-Methodius) began to suggest that the barbarians still swarming behind the gates included in their number Gog and Magog themselves, who might yet break through the barrier and precipitate the end of the world. And just as other attributes of the Huns—and ultimately of the Scythians—were applied to later barbarians in the Middle Ages, so too the notion that these later invaders could actually be Gog and Magog and could trace their origins back to an eruption from Alexander's gates in the Caucasus became a commonplace of medieval historiography: Alans, Goths, Khazars, Magyars, and Mongols were all identified in turn with both Gog and Magog and the tribes Alexander had excluded.

The regularity with which medieval authors assigned each new wave of barbarian invaders the same identity, place of origin, and early history was to a certain extent justified by historical events: these migrants *were* for the most part nomadic peoples, and they did launch their incursions into Europe from north of the Black Sea, the ancient Scythian heartland. But the phenomenon also reflects a more basic assumption on the part of medieval historians; to them, Scythia seemed a region almost immune to historical change or progress. Over the course of the centuries the steppes had poured out ("like a stream from a fountain," as Sagundino puts it) an inexhaustible torrent of the *same* barbarians, a single nation untouched by the passage of time. Even as the new barbarian kingdoms of Europe developed elaborate histories for their own forebears, it was assumed that the Scythians, or their later incarnations, had little real history of their own. The most that might be mentioned was their descent from or identity with Gog and Magog and the record of later destruction they caused.

In the twelfth century, for instance, the universal chronicler Sigebert of Gembloux set out to recount the history of the world. In all of recorded time, he writes, there have been only nine principal nations: first of all the Romans and Persians, and then the newer arrivals: Franks, Vandals, English, Lombards, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and Huns. All other nations can be included in one of the nine major groups. Sigebert includes the peoples of Scythia—including the Turks—under the rubric "Huns." They are a people so barbarous they would scarcely be worth mentioning were it not for the fact that they had dared to attack Roman territory.[58] This is the only aspect of Hunnish history worthy of notice, and the only thing that justifies mentioning their later descendants. All of them, Sigebert concludes, should be identified with Jeremiah's northern scourge: "In addition to these [Huns] there were other nations who attacked the Roman Empire, such as the Gepids, Alans, Turks, and Bulgars, and many others who all came out of the northern zone. The prophet was, perhaps, speaking of them when he said, *Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land.*"[59]

These various medieval images of Scythians—as perennial invaders, as enemies of Alexander and the imperial civilization he embodied, as inhuman monsters outside the realm of Christian history—were also invoked by fifteenth-century humanists when describing the origins of the Ottoman Turks. In his *Decades* of Roman history, completed in the early 1440s, Flavio Biondo referred directly to Jerome's letter in order to identify the Turks as the tribes behind Alexander's gates: "The Turks themselves were Scythians, from among those whom Alexander of Macedon shut up in the Hyperborean Mountains by means of iron gates, as other authors relate, and which the blessed Jerome confirms."[60]

Biondo's account was immediately and widely influential, repeated by, among others, the papal historian Platina and the universal chroniclers Jacopo Filippo Foresti of Bergamo and Hartmann Schedel of Nuremberg.[61]

Aeneas Sylvius revived a different topic, the historical progression of Scythian empires, which he derived from the histories of Diodorus Siculus and Trogus. In his geographical treatise the *Asia* (c. 1460–1462), Aeneas includes an expanded, updated genealogy of the Scythian peoples, drawing on classical historians like Diodorus and Trogus and extending to later nations like the Huns and Turks. He starts with a survey of the nations who inhabited Scythia in antiquity. Here, at least, he is willing to reproduce descriptions of peoples both mild and barbarous.[62] When he turns to the question of what the Scythians have achieved in recent history, however, he abandons the ancient topos of Scythian virtue, offering an interpretation far

closer to the dark pessimism Jerome and Sigebert expressed when considering the record of the northern barbarians.

Aeneas begins this Scythian excursus by quoting from Diodorus Siculus; significantly, he reproduces only those details that present the Scythians in a poor light.[63] They were an insignificant race to begin with, possibly descended from a certain Scythes, son of a monster who was half woman, half viper. They conquered much of Asia and gave rise to formidable nations like the Sacae, Massagetes, Arimaspians, and Sarmatians, as well as (here he begins to follow Trogus) the Parthians and Bactrians. They defeated Darius, Cyrus, and Alexander, made war on Egypt, and extracted tribute from Asia for 1500 years.[64] At this point Aeneas takes exception to his source. In enumerating the Scythians' many successes in war, Trogus asserts—as evidence of their rugged independence—that "they heard of Roman arms but did not experience them."[65] Aeneas cannot agree: this is no more than a pretty phrase. Trogus must have got it from a Greek source, and Greeks are known to exaggerate. In fact, Aeneas says, both the Greeks and the Romans often encountered and defeated Scythians in battle. Alexander, Pompey, and Claudius won victories against them, and both Rome and Constantinople saw innumerable Scythian triumphs celebrated in their streets.[66] If Rome never conquered Scythia itself, this was only because it was an unpleasant land where there was nothing worth capturing. "Who would take up arms and risk death, knowing the victory will be empty?"[67] The Scythians were no more invincible than brute elephants or bulls, who can be tamed by a superior intellect.

The subtext here is obvious: as Aeneas laid preparations for his crusade against the Ottomans, he refused to accept that the "Scythian" enemy could have an illustrious record in war. Rather, his whole account of their history aims to prove how easy it will be to overcome their modern descendants. Aeneas concludes his appraisal of ancient Scythian history with some faint praise: "Nonetheless, I admit that many Scythians have done great deeds; for those who live in a barren country do find it easy to migrate, and many are drawn by the prospect of better land."[68] He then proceeds to the history of the Huns and, finally, the Turks themselves.

Francesco Filelfo also used—but at the same time reacted against—information on the Scythians from Trogus. In his crusade letters, he sometimes claimed that the Turks were not actually Scythians themselves but the fugitive slaves of that barbarian race—in other words, the lowest of the low.[69] This seems to be a veiled borrowing from Trogus, who, in his

account of the origins of the Parthians, asserts that the etymology of their name shows they were originally exiles or fugitives from Scythia.[70] It is not clear whether Filelfo, in transferring this story of origin to the Turks, meant to identify them as Parthians. He certainly did not reproduce the *spirit* of Trogus's remark—namely, that it was a cause for wonder and admiration that such an obscure nation could have grown so powerful.[71] Filelfo stresses exactly the opposite: it is shameful and embarrassing that such a lowly power should now threaten the civilized world: "What a disaster, what miserable fortune, that things should have sunk to so low a level that the ignoble and uncouth horde of Turks, descended from the lowliest, starving shepherds and the fugitive slaves of the Scythians, should now lord it far and wide over Christian peoples and kings, and with every day increase their power to such an extent that they now lie scarcely sixty miles from Italy!"[72]

Filelfo's identification of the Turks as fugitive slaves was not repeated by later historians of the Turks, as far as I know. Aeneas's borrowings from Trogus, on the other hand, like Biondo's citation of Jerome, enjoyed widespread acceptance. The chronicler Foresti repeated Aeneas's résumé of Scythian history more or less completely at the start of his *Supplementum chronicorum,* first printed in 1483.[73] Foresti also set it within a biblical framework. His work begins with a geographical survey of the countries of the world, followed by an account of Creation and early Old Testament history. After the destruction of the Tower of Babel, he proceeds directly to the history of the Scythians, whose kingdom, he says, sprang into life at this very early moment in human history.[74] The progenitor of the nation was Magog; their numbers included the Amazons, the Scythians who repelled Darius, the Bactrians, the Parthians, and Attila and his Huns. To this list of Scythian nations, taken from Aeneas Sylvius, Foresti adds the Lombards, Hungarians, Goths, Catalans (whom Foresti says are descended from Alans) and finally the Turks.[75] Despite this long pedigree, Foresti says, the Scythians are still a breed apart from civilized nations. Their country, though ancient, has always been barbarous, "and for this reason is not counted among the four principal kingdoms."[76] The reference is to the scheme of world empires set out in the Book of Daniel (2:31–45 and 7:1–27), which Foresti probably derived from one of his regular sources, the slightly earlier chronicle of Werner Rolewinck.[77] In four thousand years of history, Foresti concludes, the habits of the Scythians—including the Turks—have remained the same: "All the Scythian nations carry bows while riding and feed upon, not the fruits of the

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Figure 6. The Turks break through the Caspian Gates. Johannes Adelphus, *Turkisch Chronica* (Strassburg, 1512), sig. A6r. By permission of Houghton Library, Harvard University, OTT 150.10*F

plough, but the meat of beasts which they hunt . . . They are a barbarous race, and respect no rule of law or justice."[78]

Later in his chronicle, Foresti also repeats Biondo's identification of the Turks as the wild tribes behind Alexander's gates. And so we see gathered in a single fifteenth-century historical work the entire range of medieval topoi regarding the barbarous Scythians—primitive habits, formidable military record, conflict with Alexander, exclusion from Christian history—now invoked to explain the origins and early history of the Ottoman Turks.

Foresti's chronicle cannot, perhaps, be considered an example of strictly humanist historiography; nevertheless, he derived most of his information on the Turks from Aeneas Sylvius and Biondo. The debt of these two indisputably humanist authors to the medieval tradition is more surprising. This is especially so since, on the surface at least, their comparisons between the Turks and the peoples of ancient Scythia seem to indicate a departure from the polemical attacks on the infidel characteristic of medieval chronicles and crusade rhetoric, toward a more classically inspired form of ethnographical description. Indeed, much of the information reported by Sagundino and Aeneas Sylvius—both their historical accounts of the kingdoms of Scythia and the more general commonplaces regarding Scythian behavior—can be traced back to classical sources. Yet the interpretation these humanists applied to that information and the spirit in which they presented it were largely shaped by later medieval traditions of confronting apparently apocalyptic forces of destruction, from the legendary Gog and Magog to the Huns and Mongols of more recent and bloody experience.

Bastards and Pretenders

It may seem from the preceding examples that humanist historians identified the Turks with the ancient Scythians, as well as with later northern barbarians, purely on the basis of analogy. In other words, they equated, and thus identified, these latest foes of Christendom with previous generations of nomadic invaders the world had known, particularly those whom the pious Alexander was meant to have restrained behind the Caspian Gates of the Caucasus. The reputation of Scythia and the Caucasus as nurseries of barbarian invaders certainly rendered them likely places for a troublesome new nation like the Turks to have originated. But there was more to it than that. The identification was especially attractive to the humanists because they had at hand a number of Byzantine and Latin historical sources that actually mention Turkic peoples (as *Tourkoi* or *Turci*) inhabiting Scythia and the Caucasus in the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries A.D. On occasion, some of these texts even relate that these "Turks" emerged through the Caspian Gates—referring here to a real mountain pass in the Caucasus—to invade or plunder territory to the south.

The humanists did not discover these references to Turks in the Caucasus in ancient texts. The information had been preserved and transmitted in medieval Latin universal chronicles and was accessible to earlier historians.

William of Tyre, for example, writing in the twelfth century, located the ancestors of the Seljuk Turks in the "Hyperborean" regions of northern Asia, while two centuries later, Andrea Dandolo claimed that the original Seljuks dwelled on the farther slopes of the "Caspian Mountain." Coluccio Salutati suggested much the same of the Ottomans—that they had "come down from Mount Caucasus." These authors may simply have wanted to associate the Turks with the wild tribes Alexander met during his legendary exploits in the Caucasus and the lands of Asia beyond it; but it seems just as likely that they knew of the historical references to Turks preserved in earlier chronicles and other texts.

Fifteenth-century humanist scholars also knew and relied on these earlier texts when they argued for a Scythian origin for the Ottoman Turks. They tended to cite their sources more explicitly and extensively than medieval chroniclers did. For a scholarly community of book-hunters, citation served as an advertisement of knowledge and expertise, of course, though the practice also hints at a certain deference to medieval authority that is perhaps less expected. For us, the humanists' editorial practices make it far easier to identify not only which sources they used but also how they manipulated them to their own ends.

Francesco Filelfo was probably the fifteenth century's most prolific advocate of a new crusade against the Turks.[79] In the course of a long and eventful career, he wrote dozens of letters to both friends and European princes urging a campaign to turn back the Ottoman tide; he also composed several crusade orations. He had personal reasons for taking an interest in the Turkish threat: in his youth, he served for seven years as secretary to the Venetian *bailo* at Constantinople. There he studied Greek with John Chrysoloras and married his daughter, Theodora; it was from her, he later declared, that he acquired true fluency in the Greek language. He also learned a great deal about the political crisis gripping the Byzantine East; on one memorable occasion he encountered the Ottoman enemy at first hand, when he accompanied a Venetian legation to the court of Murad II. When Filelfo returned home to Italy in 1427, he was not only one of the few Italian humanists who could read, write, and speak Greek like a native but also one of very few who had traveled in Turkish lands and seen the Ottoman threat for himself.

Filelfo's interest in the Turkish problem and his desire for Western action to defend the Greek East were unquestionably sincere. He did not shrink, however, from exploiting his personal knowledge of the problem and ex-

pressing concern for its resolution in a manner calculated to reflect well on himself and advance his own career. His precarious personal circumstances frequently compelled him to do so.[80] His crusade letters were crafted as pieces of advice and encouragement, but also as advertisements of his readiness to serve a new patron as a scholar, ambassador, or adviser on Turkish affairs.[81] He used them as opportunities to display his own eloquence, erudition, and expertise.

Filelfo's self-serving approach to the problem of the Turkish threat has so disconcerted modern scholars that few, if any, have recognized how well informed on the subject of Turkish history he really was.[82] In addition to his own experience of the Eastern political situation, he had access to and was able to read a variety of Greek historical sources. He also drew on a surprisingly wide range of Western medieval chronicles and histories.

In November 1444, Filelfo addressed a letter to King Wladyslaw III of Poland and Hungary just days before the king was to lead his forces into doomed battle against the Ottomans at the Black Sea port of Varna. The letter, an exhortation to victory over the Turks, offers a good example of Filelfo's rhetorical technique: a combination of overblown flattery of the warrior king and denigration of the Turkish enemy as lowly in origin, with a long history of shameful behavior.

Filelfo starts by congratulating the king on the great victory he is about to achieve over the Turks, a barbarous and inhuman race.[83] He laments that the irresponsible Western powers have allowed such savages to rise so far above their station. All will be well now, however, because Wladyslaw has come forward to take up the banner of Christ: "The Lord has chosen you alone of all Christian princes, to raise up, support and safeguard his prostrate people, to turn back, put to flight, cast down, overcome and destroy his most foul enemies—a restless and wandering people—and in doing so, to earn for yourself an immortal, splendid reputation, to be admired by all the world for generations to come."[84] Wladyslaw is like a new star in the sky, rising triumphant over the East. He will defeat the Turks, cross the Hellespont, and march not only to the Holy Land but all the way to India. He will be a new Alexander, but even greater than Alexander, for he will lead Christian armies in triumph and spread the Christian faith through Asia. His victory is certain, Filelfo concludes, because the enemy he goes out to face is nothing more than an unruly rabble: "Who is that you must fight? Surely it is not the French or the English or the mighty and unconquered Italians? Indeed, it is the Turks, shepherds and fugitives, who undertake everything, not by the rules of war, but instead by treachery and brigandage."[85]

Such a base people must be treated carefully, nevertheless, for they are capable of great mischief, as their early history shows. At the start of the letter, Filelfo traces the original Turks back to the Caucasus, where, he says, they had long dwelled in "hovels among the vast and frightful crags."[86] Here he goes on to explain that for a long time (presumably, he means throughout classical antiquity) the Turks remained a nation of little consequence, to whom no one paid much attention. But suddenly, in the time of Justinian, they swooped out of the Caucasus and captured the city of Bosporos in the Crimea in a surprise attack, under the leadership of one Bochamos, their bandit chief.[87]

Filelfo here refers to a very early event in the history of Western Türk relations with the Byzantine Empire: in A.D. 576, only a decade after they sent their first embassy to Constantinople, the Western Türks sent a raiding party, led by a captain known by the name or title of "Bokhan," to sack the Byzantine outpost of Bosporos on the northern Black Sea coast. This did not occur in the reign of Justinian (the date Filelfo gives) but slightly later, in the reign of Justin II.[88] The mistake is not Filelfo's but derives from his source, the late tenth-century Byzantine lexicon known as the *Suda*, a copy of which he had purchased during his stay in Constantinople.[89]

The *Suda* contains two entries which mention "Bochanos" the Turk, both of them extremely terse:

> *Bosporos:* a city on the Hellespont, which Bochanos the Turk sacked in the time of Justinian.

> *Bochanos:* a royal title, being the leader of the Turks, who sacked Bosporos in the time of Justinian.[90]

It is in fact only in another source, the sixth-century Byzantine historian Menander Protector, that any really informative details of the event are preserved.[91] Filelfo almost certainly did not know the text of Menander, so it is intriguing to see how far he develops the rather sparse information he had. The *Suda* entries say nothing about sudden surprise raids (Filelfo's *clandestinis latrociniis*), nor do they portray Bokhan as a leader of bandits (*duce latronum*); both are Filelfo's embellishments, intended to present these early Turks in as poor a light as possible.

In the oration he delivered on behalf of his patron Francesco Sforza at the Congress of Mantua in 1459, Filelfo returned to the subject of the Scythian origins of the Turks, emphasizing again their baseness and the dishonor their present success had brought to Christendom. He repeated the story of their

capture of Bosporos, this time in order to demonstrate the Turks' innate and bloodthirsty greed for Christian territory, and again he added extra details to emphasize their treachery and cunning. The Turks took the Crimean city with sudden violence (*repentina vi*), while Bokhan—a figure about whom modern Turkologists know practically nothing—was a "most wicked warlord and brigand" whom the delegates at Mantua were apparently meant to recognize as a familiar villain.[92]

As a historical anecdote with which to blacken the name of the modern-day Turks, Filelfo's Bokhan story was fairly lame. No other fifteenth-century humanist seems to have repeated the tale. Despite Filelfo's best efforts to embroider the story, it was probably simply too obscure to mean much of anything either to readers of his letter to Wladyslaw or to his audience at Mantua. Filelfo's next claim, however—that the Turks soon embarked on a second expedition out of their lair in the Caucasus, this time south into Persia and into permanent contact with the civilized world—was to enjoy much wider acceptance among fifteenth-century historians.

Soon after their early display of force in the Crimea, Filelfo told Wladyslaw, the Turks went on the offensive again: "And scarcely had they withdrawn within their craggy Caucasian redoubt, when they emerged again during the reign of Heraclius, this time into Persia."[93] In his oration at Mantua in 1459, he further embellished the story, asking his audience: "Who on earth is unaware that the Turks are the fugitive slaves of the Scythians, the same shepherds who burst out of the confines of that vast and forbidding Mount Caucasus . . . and descended into Persia and Media for the purpose of pillaging; settling in no particular place except wastelands and bristling lairs in the forests?"[94]

Here, too, Filelfo refers to actual historical events, although in terms so vague it is impossible to tell precisely where he derives his information from. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt as to what, in general terms, he is talking about: during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641), the Turkic Khazars, sometime vassals of the Western Türks, emerged as a political and military power in the area north of the Caucasus; in 626 they entered into an alliance with Byzantium which led them into direct conflict with the armies of Sassanian Persia.

The ninth-century Byzantine historian Theophanes Confessor (c. 755–818) provides by far the most extensive account in a Western language of the Khazars and their activities in the southern Caucasus in the seventh century.[95] It is unclear whether Filelfo read the text of Theophanes'

Chronographia in Greek. He may have relied on the ninth-century Latin translation of the text prepared by the papal librarian and sometime antipope Anastasius, or else used one of several later Latin chronicles which took information from Anastasius. (Anastasius's translation was a direct or indirect source for Sigebert of Gembloux, Otto of Freising, Vincent of Beauvais, and Martin of Troppau, among numerous other medieval authorities.)[96] But Theophanes is certainly the ultimate source for the anecdote he reports. The Byzantine chronicler preserves a good deal of information on these events: seven references in total to the Khazar "Turks" and their services to Byzantium in the Caucasus. Almost every Renaissance historian who maintained that the Ottoman Turks were Scythians from the Caucasus based his claims to some extent on one or more of these references—although they were almost always taken out of context and presented in a way that obscured the fact that these early "Turks" were actually accorded a very positive role in Byzantine historiography.

A brief survey of Theophanes' information on the Khazar Turks, together with an account of the historical events to which they refer, can illuminate how Filelfo and later historians made use of it.[97] In his chronicle, Theophanes usually refers to the Khazars as *Tourkoi* because the Khazars had originally been vassals of the Western Türks.[98] The first two of his seven entries on the Khazar "Turks" describe the formation of their initial alliance with Heraclius in 626–627; the remaining five cover various events of the second Arab-Khazar war in the eighth century.

Heraclius concluded his alliance with the Khazars at a moment of crisis for the Byzantine Empire. After a series of losses to Persia under the rule of Chosroes II, culminating in the capture of large parts of eastern Anatolia in 613, Jerusalem in 614, and Egypt in 619, Heraclius reorganized the Byzantine army, ejected the Persians from Anatolia, and in 623 invaded Persia itself.[99] In 626 he was campaigning in Lazica in the south Caucasus. Seeking support for a new campaign to the east, he contacted and concluded an alliance with the Khazars, who had just raided Persia themselves in 625–626.[100] The Khazars joined the emperor on a successful campaign against Chosroes in late 626; the next year, however, they declined to accompany him on his final push into Persia, where he destroyed the Sassanian army at Nineveh in December 627.[101] In 628, Chosroes was deposed and Persia ceased to present any serious threat. Byzantium regained territories in Armenia, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt.[102] By the 640s, Persia had fallen to the Arabs, who soon emerged as the major threat to Byzantium's eastern fron-

tier. Their ascent to power ensured that the Byzantines continued to rely on the Khazars, who engaged the Arabs in two extended wars (642–652 and 722–737) which effectively prevented the latter from crossing north through the Caucasus and attacking Byzantine territory on the Black Sea coast.

In the *Chronographia,* Theophanes recounts the circumstances surrounding the Byzantine-Khazar alliance of 626 as part of the general buildup to Heraclius's final triumph over Persia. At first the Khazar "Turks" appear a fairly unruly and violent people:

> 1. [A.D. 624/625][103] The third part [of the army], [Heraclius] took himself and advanced to Lazica. During his stay there he invited the eastern Turks, who are called Khazars, to become his allies . . . Now the Khazars broke through the Caspian Gates and invaded Persia, that is the land of Adraigan, under their commander Ziebel who was second in rank after the Khagan. And in all the lands they traversed they made the Persians captive and burned their towns and villages.[104]

It is very likely that this passage was the source for Filelfo's statement in his letter to King Wladyslaw that the Turks invaded Persia during the reign of Heraclius—and furthermore, that they did so "for the purpose of pillaging," a detail added in his oration at the Congress of Mantua. But if Filelfo took his information on the early Turks directly from Theophanes or Anastasius's translation, then he must have purposefully ignored the rest of the story, which the *Chronographia* preserves. Immediately after the passage quoted above, Theophanes goes on to stress both the value of the Khazars' support for Byzantium and the sincerity with which it was offered:

> The emperor, too, set out from Lazica and joined them. When Ziebel saw him, he rushed to meet him, kissed his neck, and did obeisance to him . . . And the entire army of the Turks fell flat on the ground and, stretched out on their faces, reverenced the emperor with an honor that is unknown among alien nations. Likewise, their commanders climbed on rocks and fell flat in the same manner . . . After picking 40,000 brave men, Ziebel gave them to the emperor as allies, while he himself returned to his own land. Taking these men along, the emperor advanced on Chosroes.[105]

The characterization of the Turkic Khazars is here entirely favorable: they are honorable, devoted to Heraclius, and generous in their support of him. This contrasts nicely with Theophanes' account of the desperate but comical

tyrant Chosroes, who relied on an army of slaves and foreigners and kept the corpse of a disgraced general preserved in salt so he could abuse it when the impulse struck. Chosroes is the chief villain throughout this particular period of Byzantine history, and Theophanes is so pleased to report Heraclius's final victory over him in the following year that the sudden desertion of his Khazar allies is reported with hardly a note of disapproval:

> 2. [625/626]: In this year the emperor Heraclius, by invading Persia together with the Turks starting in the month of September—an unexpected move, since it was winter—threw Chosroes into a state of distraction when the news had reached him. But the Turks, in view of the winter and the constant attacks of the Persians, could not bear to toil together with the emperor and started, little by little, to slip away until all of them had left and returned home.[106]

Despite this setback, Heraclius rallied his troops and destroyed the Persian army. There is no suggestion that the Khazars were at all perfidious; instead, they appear merely weak-willed and rather easily discouraged.

Theophanes has little to say about Khazar activities in the Caucasus for about a hundred years after this incident. Then, under the years 728–732, he notes three further occasions when the Khazars stormed out of their mountain strongholds to attack their southern neighbors:

> 3. [727/728] In this year the son of the Chagan, that is the ruler of Khazaria, invaded Media and Armenia. In Armenia he encountered the Arab general Garachos, whom he slew together with his army. After devastating the lands of the Armenians and the Medes and causing great fear to the Arabs, he returned home.[107]
>
> 4. [728/729] In this year [the Arab general] Masalmas invaded the land of the Turks. He joined battle with them, and there were many casualties on both sides. Seized by cowardice, Masalmas took to flight and returned through the mountains of Khazaria.[108]
>
> 5. [730/731] In this year Masalmas invaded Turkey. He reached the Caspian Gates and withdrew in fear.[109]

All three notices refer to historical events which can be confirmed from other sources.[110] So favorable is Theophanes' appraisal of the Turks, however, that he omits to mention how, before, between, and after these three Khazar successes, the Arabs inflicted a series of heavy blows, destroying armies, capturing towns, and finally, in 737, defeating the Khazars so conclu-

sively that their khagan was forced to convert (although only temporarily) to Islam.[111] Theophanes prefers to report good news, and it is Khazar victories and Arab defeats which fall under this rubric. The two final notices on the Khazars in Theophanes' *Chronographia* report similarly good results:

> 6. [762/763] In the same year the Turks went out of the Caspian Gates, killed many people in Armenia [then an Arab province], took many captives, and returned home.[112]
>
> 7. [763/764] In this year the Turks went forth again to the Caspian Gates and to Iberia. They fought the Arabs and there were many casualties on both sides.[113]

Throughout this part of the *Chronographia,* Theophanes presents the Khazar Turks in an almost heroic light. He emphasizes their ferocity in battle and the fear they struck in Persian and Arab hearts, but even so, there is little in the original text to support Filelfo's contention that the early Turks were scarcely human, a barbarian rabble. Theophanes also makes it clear that the Turks who emerged from the Caucasus to fight first Persians and then Arabs represented a state with whom Byzantium maintained formal relations, a fact which Filelfo ignores in his repeated claims that they were fugitive slaves, driven to invade Persia by their desire for plunder and slaughter. Of course, there is no way to be sure that Filelfo knew the text of Theophanes in its entirety. His source for the Khazar invasion of Persia in 627 could well have been a later Latin chronicle which excerpted only the few details which Filelfo himself repeats.[114]

Flavio Biondo, on the other hand, was undoubtedly familiar with the whole text of Theophanes, in the translation of Anastasius Bibliothecarius. It is one of the main sources he used in compiling his enormous survey of late antique and medieval Italian history, the *Decades.*[115] Biondo began work on the *Decades* in the late 1430s; a draft may have been complete by 1442, but the work was not published until about 1444.[116] In his account of the emergence of the Turks, Biondo, like Filelfo, reproduces information from Theophanes-Anastasius regarding the Khazars, and he too presents this material in such a way that these ancient Turks appear as violent and lawless barbarians. He omits any mention of the helpful role they played in Byzantine foreign policy and instead associates their appearance with a period of difficult times for both the empire and Italy.

Unlike Filelfo, Biondo does not draw an explicit connection between the ancient Turks he discusses in the *Decades* and the contemporary Ottoman

Turks. There is nevertheless political significance to his remarks. They come close to the start of Biondo's second *Decade,* in the midst of a discussion of the papal crisis of 755, when the Lombard Aistulf besieged Rome, sending Pope Stephen II in flight to Pepin, king of the Franks.[117] Biondo clearly considered this papal crisis an important turning point in Italian history, with significant implications for the peninsula's future.[118] The pope's flight should have been a matter of grave concern to the Byzantine emperor Constantine V, Biondo argues, an opportunity for him to reassert imperial authority in Italy. Instead, the hapless Constantine neglected his responsibilities to the Italians and allowed both Lombards and Franks to exercise power unchecked. At the same moment, Constantine saw new troubles erupt on his eastern frontier:

> While Rome and Italy were agitated and distressed by such great losses and dangers, Emperor Constantine took no steps to alleviate the problem, although this was a change in fortunes which was hardly of advantage to himself. And afterwards this emperor had a second such change of luck, because it was at this time that the Turks first invaded Asia, molesting the Alans, then the Colchians and Armenians, and thereafter the peoples of Asia Minor and finally the Persians and Saracens, seizing land and slaughtering great numbers of people whom they found there or who dared to gather [in opposition].[119]

Once again we see Theophanes' tale of Khazar heroism recast as an example of Turkish violence and greed.

We should not, perhaps, read too much into the fact that Biondo here associates the growing divide between papal and imperial authority in Italy with the first appearance of the Turks in the East. He himself makes no further comment on the significance of these two events taking place one after the other, beyond presenting them as examples of Constantine's (and, by extension, the empire's) ill fortune in these years. But Biondo did firmly believe that the rift that developed in the eighth century between imperial Constantinople and papal Rome marked the final collapse of the ancient empire.[120] Elsewhere in his writings, he expressly asserts a connection between the decline of ancient Rome and the inability of modern Italians to beat back the Turkish threat. In both the preface and the conclusion to his antiquarian treatise, *Roma triumphans,* which he completed while attending the Congress of Mantua in 1459 as a papal secretary,[121] Biondo called on Aeneas Sylvius, as Pius II, to lead a revival of ancient Roman institutions,

mores, and values. In doing so, he argued, Italy would regain the strength it had enjoyed under Roman rule and thus be in a position at last to triumph over the Turks.[122] Furthermore, later in the *Decades,* in his account of Urban II's sermon launching the First Crusade, the words he puts in the pope's mouth describe the new expedition against the Saracens and Turks as a campaign not so much for the recovery of Jerusalem as for the restoration of the territories and prestige of the ancient Roman Empire.[123]

Whether or not Biondo intended to treat the emergence of the Turks in eighth-century Asia as an event of direct historical significance for the political fortunes of contemporary Italy remains unclear. Still, there can be no question that his reference to the Khazar invasion as an example of the empire's increasing woes directly contradicts his source, Theophanes-Anastasius, who interpreted Khazar interventions in the Caucasus and Persia as positive contributions to Byzantine policy in the East. This is the only point in the *Decades* where Biondo repeats information from the *Chronographia* on the Khazars, although he had access to the complete text of Anastasius's translation and repeated much else from it in this part of his history.[124] It seems it was not only the violence that Theophanes attributes to the Turks here but also repeated references to the Turks coming through the Caspian Gates that caught Biondo's eye, for immediately after recounting their eighth-century invasion of Asia Minor, he concludes with the statement (examined above) that these Turks were in fact identical to the wild Scythian tribes Alexander the Great had enclosed behind the Caspian Gates in antiquity.[125] Biondo seems to have been the first Renaissance historian expressly to identify the Ottoman Turks with Alexander's tribes.

The Renaissance idea that the Ottoman Turks originated in Scythia and the Caucasus was both inspired by a widespread romantic tradition—that unclean races were enclosed behind Alexander's legendary Caspian Gates—and firmly based on Byzantine historical sources recording real "Turks" breaking through the real Caspian Gates on raids undertaken on behalf of the eastern empire. Filelfo, while citing historical information about the Turks from the *Suda* and (at whatever degree of remove) from Theophanes, seems also to invoke the legendary tradition implicitly in his crusade exhortations. He lays particular stress on the moment of the Turks' emergence from the Caucasus, dwells on their unclean and inhuman behavior, and on one occasion describes their initial invasion as a release from mountainous imprisonment.[126] Biondo simply makes explicit the identification with Alexander's enclosed tribes.

Later historians were often reluctant to follow Biondo in repeating such a fantastic claim. No matter how closely the story fit their own prejudices regarding the character and intentions of the Ottomans, it may have seemed inappropriate to include it in historical works meant at least to appear sober and factual. Platina, for instance, used most of Biondo's entry on the travails of Constantine and Pope Stephen in his *Lives of the Popes* but tried to historicize the deed Alexander was supposed to have performed: "Some writers say that the Turks were Scythians, in particular those whom Alexander, king of Macedon, shut up in the Hyperborean [mountains] by means of iron bolts—by which they mean, metaphorically, that he had isolated this unconquerable race in that corner of the world as if in a prison."[127]

Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini also constructed a Scythian history for the Turks, using many of the same devices Filelfo and Biondo employed. Aeneas, too, refers to the emergence of the Khazar "Turks" from the Caucasus, quoting information from the Theophanes tradition out of context and to negative effect. He also portrays these Turks as primitive and disgusting savages, hinting at their association with Alexander's unclean tribes while carefully disguising the legendary and apocalyptic nature of the source he cites to support his claim.

Aeneas was by far the most prominent and vocal advocate for a crusade against the Turks in the fifteenth century.[128] His writings in support of a campaign against the Ottomans were enormously influential, enjoying widespread circulation for decades after his death. While Filelfo probably composed more words on the subject in his dozens of crusade letters, more of Aeneas's letters were copied and distributed independently in manuscript; he also delivered more orations at important public events, where they were heard by prominent leaders and—just as significantly—soon found their way into print.[129] As a result, Aeneas's ideas about the origins of the Turks, which he introduced into almost every one of his crusade appeals, were quickly accepted as historiographical orthodoxy, repeated by historians and orators well into the sixteenth century.

Given the central role Aeneas was to play in the campaign for a new crusade in the decade after Constantinople's fall, it is surprising that his interest in the Turkish threat developed only late in life. The disaster at Varna, in 1444, may have stimulated his concern. Coming only a year after he quit the Council of Basel for Frederick III's imperial service, the destruction of the Hungarian and Burgundian army and the death of its prominent leaders, including Wladyslaw of Poland and Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini, may have confirmed him in his recently adopted conviction that only the emperor

could free Europe from internal dissensions and overcome the enemies who threatened it from without.[130]

It was not until the 1450s, however, when the Ottoman threat grew far graver (and Aeneas began his rapid advance through the clerical hierarchy),[131] that he started to pronounce regularly and at length on Turkish affairs. He made the topic a central theme of an oration delivered after Frederick's imperial coronation in Rome in March 1452: here he outlined the need for a new crusade, presented Frederick as the best candidate to lead it, and called on Pope Nicholas V to lend his support. After the fall of Constantinople, his impassioned letters to Pope Nicholas and Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, written days after news of the catastrophe reached him in Austria, convey his real and personal distress over the crisis. The same sense of urgency also pervades his speeches on behalf of the emperor at the Diets of Frankfurt and Regensburg in 1454 and Wiener Neustadt in 1455, and before Pope Calixtus III in Rome later that same year—compounded, perhaps, by his growing realization that Frederick had no real interest in resolving the Turkish problem after all.

Above all, after his election to the papacy in 1458, when he declared that a new crusade was to be his most important priority, the Turkish question dominates his writings: these include open letters to various Christian leaders as well as private diplomatic correspondence; his orations at the Congress of Mantua in 1459; extended passages in the geographical treatises, *Europa* and *Asia,* which he wrote in 1458 and 1460–1462, respectively (and which were intended at least in part to support the crusade project); scattered comments in his autobiographical *Commentaries;* and the bull "Ezechielis prophetae," with which he formally launched the crusade in 1463.

In these compositions, Aeneas took the commonplaces of humanist crusade rhetoric to new heights, drawing on political arguments, historical examples, and emotive rhetorical appeals. He lamented the extent and frequency of Turkish victories, the atrocities they visited on the innocent and weak, the territories and treasure that had been lost. He called for concord between the Church and the princes of Europe, reproached them for neglecting their Christian neighbors in the East and betraying the crusading traditions of their ancestors, and urged prompt action to reverse the Turkish tide. To these principal arguments he added figures from a seemingly limitless stock of persuasive ornamentation: examples of classical and biblical heroes for contemporary princes to emulate; references to barbarian wars

fought by ancient emperors and crusader kings; disquisitions on the spiritual benefits of crusading; examples of the Turkish contempt for European literature and arts; breathless accounts of their insults against the Eastern Church and the Holy Land and the threat they posed to European security; exhortations regarding the glory to be won by fighting and dying for Christ.

While this mixture of pragmatic and idealistic arguments may seem incongruous or inconsistent to a modern reader, it came perfectly naturally to Aeneas, as did his protean attempts to make the crusade seem a compelling endeavor to the wide variety of audiences he addressed, whether chivalry-minded Burgundian knights, humanist cardinals nostalgic for the glories of Greece, or German and Italian princes jealous of their dignity and keen to promote their own interests. He strove to excite concern and secure commitment wherever he could find it; embracing the rhetorical principle of *amplificatio,* he could leave no argument untried. To this end, his rhetoric could shift even on the question of the actual goal of the crusade—and consequently on the very identity of the enemy. Aeneas usually argued for a crusade directed against the Ottomans, with the aim of liberating Constantinople, relieving Hungary, and reclaiming the Aegean, but he could redirect attention when it suited his purposes to the "Saracens" (that is, the Mamluks of Egypt) then ruling the Holy Land and to the old crusading ideal of recapturing Jerusalem. At times he inveighed, even more vaguely, against infidels in general—an undifferentiated mass of enemies including Turks in eastern Europe and Asia Minor, Mamluks in the Holy Land and Egypt, Moors in North Africa and Spain, even pagan Tartars in southern Russia and remote, primitive tribes along the furthest reaches of the Baltic Sea and in northern Scandinavia. These godless hordes surrounded Europe on all sides. Christians everywhere must strike out from the tiny corner to which they had been confined or else be overwhelmed.

In his earliest crusade oration, delivered after Frederick's coronation in Rome in 1452, Aeneas made little effort to distinguish the Ottomans, their history and character, from other Muslim nations. He described Turkish aggression as part of a universal assault on Christendom by somewhat disingenuously conflating recent Ottoman victories in Greece with the longstanding Muslim occupation of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Frederick had three reasons for wanting to lead a crusade, Aeneas began: pity for the oppressed, his own advantage, and the honor of the cause.[132] He felt pity for the Holy Land, where the holy places lay in the hands of "filthy, unclean, horrible Saracens."[133] But the plight of Greece, "mother of letters, inventor of laws,

cultivator of ethics, and teacher of all the good arts," and her people was equally moving.[134] Indeed, wherever Frederick looked, he could see infidels pressing against Christendom: Hungary, Poland, Spain, and the Mediterranean islands all suffered. This was the result of negligence on the part of generations of selfish Christian princes, Aeneas concluded, in somewhat portentous terms.[135] But Frederick was a different sort of prince. He knew that both advantage and glory would come to him by undertaking a new crusade, and he longed to strike out as soon as he could. The aims of this crusade would be as universal as the host of enemies who Aeneas imagined had provoked it: Frederick would first liberate Hungary and Greece, then free the Holy Land from Muslim domination, and finally wipe Islam itself from the face of the earth.[136]

In defining the Ottoman threat as part of a larger Muslim attack on Christendom in this early oration, Aeneas also presents the Turks as a nation very like, if not identical with, the other Islamic empires of the East. In the lament with which he begins the speech, he deplores the fact that the Turks have conquered the Greeks, descendants of the hardy citizens of ancient Athens, Sparta, and Thebes, later led by the great Alexander. This mighty race was now subject to the Turks, by contrast a shamefully "effeminate" people.[137] But Frederick knew that they, like the other Eastern peoples, would put up no real resistance to a new crusade. For the Turks, "Assyrians," and Egyptians were all weak and unmanly nations, with no talent or taste for war. Who could fear the stocky little Turks in their turbans, or the Egyptians in their flowing trousers?[138] Certainly not the brave warriors of Europe, who had never been defeated by an Asiatic army—except in those rare cases when they had been completely outnumbered.[139] The forces of Christendom were far superior; for one thing, they were constantly proving themselves in battle against one another (here, another passing swipe at Europe's lamentable lack of unity). They stood ready to fight, and win, worthier battles abroad.[140]

The Turkish capture of Constantinople in the next year proved Aeneas lamentably wrong on this point. After the events of May 1453, the idea of the Ottomans as a soft, easily conquered Asiatic race from whom Europe had nothing to fear was a conceit he no longer tried to sustain. In the letters he wrote that year and in his later orations, he abandoned this particular line of attack, replacing it with a new account of the Turks' character which stressed their primitive origins, their violent early history, and the great danger they posed to contemporary Europe.

On 12 July 1453, apparently just after hearing news of Constantinople's fall, Aeneas composed a consolatory letter to Pope Nicholas V.[141] At first, echoing the themes of his oration of the previous year, he lamented that the city had fallen into the hands of effeminate Turks and blamed the Western powers for allowing such a catastrophe to occur.[142] But he changed his tone very quickly, now emphasizing the brutal, perhaps irresistible force of the Turkish attack on the city, cataloguing the atrocities they had committed during the siege, mourning their destruction of Greek books, and comparing them unfavorably to the Goths.[143] Within a fortnight, in a letter to Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, Aeneas had converted completely to this new, harsher view of the Turkish character, asserting without reservation that they were ferocious northern barbarians. In this letter he imagined the Turkish rampage through the city in the most grisly detail. The Turks he described here were not soft, effeminate, or marked by any other stereotypically Asiatic characteristics. Indeed, Aeneas argued, they were not to be identified with any nation of Asia at all: "For those who are now called Turks are not Persians, nor are they Trojans, as certain others think. They are a race of Scythians, come from the depths of a barbarous land, who are said to have made their original home beyond the Black Sea and Pirrichean Mountains, towards the northern Ocean, as Aethicus the philosopher says."[144]

This was the first time Aeneas referred to the Scythian origins of the Turks. He would repeat the claim, usually citing the authority of the mysterious "Aethicus" alongside later, additional authorities, at least nine times in subsequent works: in a letter to Johannes Troster written in July 1454; in orations at the Diets of Frankfurt in September 1454 and Wiener Neustadt in January 1455 and before Calixtus III at Rome in March 1455; in his autobiographical *Commentaries;* in his geographical treatise *Europa,* written about 1458; in his oration at the Congress of Mantua in 1459; and in two separate passages in his *Asia*.[145] The letter to Nicholas of Cusa also marks the first time Aeneas argued against the idea that the Turks had come from Troy, raising the possibility of their Trojan origins only to reject it. He would repeat the *anasceua* in most of his later compositions, always as a prelude to his own account of their Scythian past. The connection is significant. Although the identification of the Turks as *Teucri* or avenging Trojans was well established in European imaginative literature well before the fall of Constantinople, Aeneas never expressed any doubts about it before his remarks in his letter to Nicholas of Cusa. In fact, in an oration delivered early in his career, at the Council of Basel in 1436, he came very close to suggesting that Turkish ag-

gression against Europe was indeed intended as a campaign of revenge for the loss of Troy.[146] And in his private correspondence in the 1440s as well as the official letters he drafted for Frederick III at the time, he used the form *Teucri* to refer to the Turks—perhaps following a stylistic practice of the imperial chancery dating back to at least 1412.[147]

Now, in 1453, he began to argue against the idea that the ancestors of the Turks had anything to do with the Trojans. His objection to it seems closely linked to his newly acquired conviction that the contemporary Turks were dangerous barbarians: any theory associating them with a nation of classical antiquity now became unacceptable. It is interesting to note, in this context, that Aeneas never tried to argue against the idea of the Trojan Turks on the grounds that it was *historically* improbable. He rejected the notion because it contradicted what he believed to be true of their character: the Trojans had been a literate and cultured nation.[148] What could they—or, for that matter, the ancient and illustrious Persians—have to do with the Turks? In short, Aeneas assumed what he was ostensibly trying to prove: the Turks were innately barbarous.[149]

The account of the Scythian origins of the ancient Turks which Aeneas developed to support his campaign against their modern descendants was very similar to the versions Biondo and Filelfo had put forward only a few years earlier.[150] His sources were different from theirs but derived from the same literary and historiographical traditions, which placed earlier generations of *Turci* in Scythia and the Caucasus. Furthermore, like Filelfo and Biondo, Aeneas often manipulated the information he found in his sources in order both to enhance the credibility of his account and to make his portrayal of the original Turks—and so, by extension, their Ottoman descendants—especially damning.

In his letter to Nicholas of Cusa, Aeneas explains that the Turks could not possibly be either Trojans or Persians, since according to "Aethicus the philosopher" their original homeland lay "beyond the Black Sea and Pirrichean Mountains, towards the northern Ocean." He then quotes a passage from Aethicus describing the habits and character of the original Turks, who were "a shameful and unknown nation, promiscuous in every sort of lewdness, lovers of debauchery, who ate anything disgusting and had no knowledge of wine, grain, or salt. They kept no religious holiday except in the month of August, when they sent a tribute of alluvial gold to Augustus Caesar; they were not compelled to do this but did so of their own accord when they saw that other territories were offering tribute." Nor had the Turks come very far

from such ignoble beginnings: "And there is still a little flavor of their origins about them, even though, having lived in Asia a long time, they have shed some of their original baseness and made themselves a little civilized; for they still shun wine and eat the meat of horses and bison. They are steeped in lust, care little for the study of letters and are incredibly haughty and proud."[151]

Aeneas prized Aethicus as an authority on the Turks. He must have owned a copy of his geographical treatise, entitled *Cosmographia,* or else copied out the full text of the description of the Turks it contains, for when he repeated information from the work in later years, he sometimes added or substituted various details from the text. At the Diet of Frankfurt, for instance, he said the Turks lived on the meat not only of horses and bison but also of vultures.[152] In his treatises *Asia* and *Europa,* he added further information on the exotic geography of their homeland: they lived near the "Taracuntan islands"—apparently lying in a distant bay of the Black Sea or Northern Ocean—and the mountains known as the *ubera aquilonis* or "breasts of the north." In the geographical works he also changed the list of unclean foods they ate, now including the flesh of beasts of burden, wolves, vultures, and (*quod magis horreas*) the corpses of stillborn human infants.[153] One can see why Aethicus's account appealed to Aeneas. It traced the Turks to a distant part of Scythia far removed from the lands of classical civilization, attributed to them primitive and disgusting habits, and, perhaps most valuable of all, fixed them in such conditions at a relatively early moment in history, during the reign of Augustus.[154]

This last point is especially important. Although Aeneas was most concerned with establishing the primitive character and habits of the original Turks—and demonstrating the survival of these traits among their descendants—it was important, too, that his description be historically credible. In the geographical works, he repeated Aethicus's curious story about the alluvial gold offered by the Turks as tribute to Augustus—not only, one presumes, because it portrayed them as childishly awed by Roman civilization. In the later works he glossed the story with a sentence borrowed from Trogus's account of the ancient Scythians ("They heard of the power of Rome rather than had direct experience of it") in order to highlight the antiquity of the information he had discovered regarding the primeval Turks.[155] Filelfo had traced the history of the Turks back as far as Justinian, and Biondo to the age of Jerome. Aeneas would go one better, developing a history for the Turks as ancient as the empire itself.

On what authority did Aeneas base this claim? The *Cosmographia* purports to be a translation of and commentary on an ancient geographical work by a Greek philosopher, "Aethicus."[156] It is even written in the third person, as if the Latin translator were merely reporting on the contents of the earlier Greek text. Some manuscripts name this supposed commentator as "Hieronymus Presbyter," a figure sometimes identified by later medieval authors as St. Jerome, so adding another layer of apparent authenticity.

In fact there never was a Greek geographer called Aethicus, nor did Jerome play any part in the text's composition. The *Cosmographia* was composed in Latin; modern scholars have proposed dates for the work ranging between the fourth and eighth centuries A.D. and various places of composition—all in northern Europe—ranging from Ireland to Dalmatia. It now seems most likely that it was composed in the mid-eighth century, probably at a Carolingian court school or monastery.[157] Aeneas could not have known just how complex and uncertain the text's pedigree was, but even so, he can hardly have believed that this was a genuine work of classical geography. The *Cosmographia* consists of a haphazard collection of legends, geographical curiosities, reports on monstrous races, and details of the impending terrors of the apocalypse, derived primarily from the Bible, the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, and the recently translated *Revelations* of ps.-Methodius, all rehashed in a syntax and vocabulary so bizarre as to render the text almost unintelligible.[158]

Aeneas cleaned up the section of Aethicus's text that he cited in his letter to Nicholas of Cusa, not only classicizing the grammar, syntax, and orthography but also editing out some of the more outrageous aspects of early Turkish culture detailed in the medieval work. The original passage in the *Cosmographia* offers a rather less credible portrait of the Turks than the one Aeneas offers. Here is the original:

> Other texts pass over the Turks in silence. For the poets and philosophers never make any mention of them, but Aethicus, in addition to the affairs of other peoples, says much. He says they inhabit islands, or the mainland, of a gulf of the Black Sea, enclosed by the Birrichean mountains and the islands of Taraconta, facing the "breasts of the north"—a nation shameful and uncivilized, monstrous, idolatrous, promiscuous in every kind of lewdness and debauchery, truculent (from which epithet they derive their name [that is, *Turci*]), born of the seed of Gog and Magog. Everything they eat is abominable, even stillborn human infants, as well as the flesh of children, horses

> and bears, vultures, ravens and kites, owls and bison, dogs and apes. They are hideous in appearance, never wash in water, have no knowledge of wine, use no salt, and have never eaten grain . . . Locked up with their wicked offspring behind the Caspian Gates, this nation will make great devastation in the time of the Antichrist. In appearance they are black as soot, with hair like a raven's and very strong teeth. They possess a multitude of camels, the kind bred in Bactria, a number of extremely swift mules . . . and massive dogs so much stronger than any other breed that they can kill lions, leopards, and bears.[159]

It is easy to see why Aeneas excluded so much of this account. Aethicus's use of dubious etymology (equating *Turci* with *truculenti*) and references to the Turks' descent from Gog and Magog and their imprisonment behind the Caspian Gates (as well as their black skin and peculiarly strong teeth) could hardly support Aeneas's claim to have discovered plausible historical grounds for identifying the modern Turks as Scythians—and to have established at the same time a credible, ancient alternative to the legend of their Trojan origins. In this regard, the most significant aspect of Aethicus's description of the Turks omitted by Aeneas occurs immediately after the passage just quoted:

> Alexander the Great of Macedon could neither capture nor defeat this nation; he sent his army against them on numerous occasions but could not overcome them. Mindful of this . . . he is said to have declared: ". . . Alas, may these demons of hell, this phalanx of enemies, never hear or catch sight of the wider world, fertile and flowing with honey as it is, or of its wealth and famous kingdoms, all its goods and treasures and the glory and beauty of its people! Else they will swarm over the whole face of the earth and snatch it all up like a piece of bread and gorge themselves on it. O North, mother of dragons and nurse of scorpions, snake pit and pool of demons, it would be better for there to be an impenetrable barrier against you, like the gates of hell, than for you to spawn such a race."[160]

Aethicus here preserves one of the earliest Latin accounts of the legend of Alexander's gates in the Caucasus in its apocalyptic form.[161] Since Aeneas's whole point in citing Aethicus was to demonstrate the inherent barbarity of the Turks by invoking the authority of an ancient and reliable-sounding historical account of their Scythian origins, it is not surprising that he edited his source so that its fantastic character was disguised.

Although Aethicus's information on the Turks amounts to little more than a retelling of the ps.-Methodian legend of Alexander's gates, the text does nonetheless explicitly mention "Turks" as a race Alexander encountered in his journey beyond the Caucasus.[162] This is almost certainly a reference to the Turkic Khazars.[163] In the eighth century, when Aethicus most likely wrote, the Khazars were the dominant ethnic group in the Caucasus and the steppes north of the Black Sea; they were routinely called "Turks" in Byzantine literature; most important, they very likely provided the inspiration for the Syriac ps.-Methodius's apocalyptic description of the unclean nations behind Alexander's gates, which was clearly Aethicus's source for the story told here. The only problem with this putative debt is that, to the best of my knowledge, no extant version of the ps.-Methodian legend, either in the original Syriac or in any Greek or Latin translation, actually identifies the unclean races as "Turks," even though the Khazar Turks clearly provided the inspiration for the story. But Aethicus's work is a very early Latin witness to the ps.-Methodian tradition and may preserve a version, otherwise lost, in which the identity of the unclean races as "Turks" was made clear.[164]

In the oration Aeneas delivered at the Diet of Frankfurt in 1454, he offered another piece of evidence to support his claim that the Turks were Scythian in origin. The chronicler Otto of Freising, Aeneas said, preserved a report that the Turks had emerged from their home in Scythia during the reign of Pepin, king of the Franks. They came south out of the "Caspian Mountains" (the Caucasus) and took themselves into Asia, "and there they have remained ever since."[165] As he did with the information from Aethicus, Aeneas repeated this story in later compositions, changing details, sometimes crediting Otto and sometimes not. In his geographical treatises, for instance, he reported that the Turks had come out of the Caspian *Gates,* not the Caspian Mountains, and added that afterward they engaged in a battle with the Avars in which many lives on both sides were lost.[166]

The passage Aeneas cites from Otto's *Chronica* derives, via several intervening Latin chronicles, from Theophanes' final entry on the Khazar raids through the Caspian Gates in the eighth century (entry 7 from the *Chronographia* as numbered above).[167] This is one of the entries that Biondo, working directly from Anastasius's translation, also used for his account of the emergence of the Turks from the Caucasus. Like Biondo, Aeneas gives no hint of the original, positive interpretation of the incident as told by Theophanes. In Aeneas's case, however, this was not an editorial decision of his

own making: Otto himself preserves only this entry in his *Chronicle,* where it appears in isolation from any other information on contemporary events in the Byzantine East.

Otto copied his note on the Khazar "Turci" from an earlier Bavarian chronicler, Frutolf of Michelsberg, who in turn took it from an Italian, Landulphus Sagax, a chronicler who relied directly on Anastasius's translation of Theophanes.[168] In his *Historia Romana* (written in the 1020s), Landulphus divided up the text of Anastasius, distributing excerpts among information from other sources, but he still preserved all seven of Theophanes' reports on the Khazars.[169] About eighty years later, Frutolf incorporated parts of the *Historia Romana* into his own historical compendium but included only the last of Theophanes' references to the Khazars.[170] Writing for a German audience, Frutolf probably imagined that events in the distant Caucasus would be of little interest to his readers—unlike the Italians Anastasius and Landulphus Sagax, who wrote for an audience more interested in news of the Greeks and their foreign relations. More important, perhaps, is the fact that the original entry in Theophanes described (correctly) the Khazars encountering *Arabs* in battle, while the reference in Frutolf is to a conflict between Khazars and *Avars.* This slip goes back as far as Anastasius, who either misread Theophanes' *Arabōn* ("Arabs") as *Abarōn* ("Avars") or emended it to the latter reading.[171] Landulphus reproduced the incorrect reading,[172] as did Frutolf after him.

It is strange that Anastasius should have changed the Turks' enemies from Arabs into Avars—to an Italian author of the ninth century, the Arabs were a familiar enough nation. Moreover, Anastasius translates Theophanes' narrative word for word, and at this point in the story the Arabs are seldom far from center stage. It is easier to understand why the wrong reading made sense to the German Frutolf. The Avars, who occupied lands around the Middle Danube in the sixth century and in the eighth century had engaged in bitter struggles with Charlemagne's Franks, were still remembered in eleventh-century Germany. It seems likely that Frutolf selected only this passage from Theophanes on the Khazar "Turks" precisely because it seemed to associate them with a people who were once close neighbors of, and so might be of interest to, his Bavarian readers.

While this incorrect detail assured the anecdote's inclusion in the chronicles of Frutolf and Otto, still, important information was lost. The Turks appeared no longer as Byzantium's allies against the Arabs, Christendom's greatest foes, but instead as the opponents of a tribe more usually associated

with eastern Europe—participants, as it were, in a local Scythian dispute.[173] This was precisely how Aeneas interpreted the story when he repeated it in his *Europa;* here, he explained that the Avars whom Otto described in conflict with the Turks were none other than the Hungarians—thus suggesting that Hungary, universally regarded as the *antemurale Christianitatis* by fifteenth-century crusade propagandists, had been defending Europe from the Turks for over six centuries![174] After this battle with the Avar-Hungarians in the eighth century, Aeneas concluded, the Turks retreated back into the Caucasus and then moved south to invade Asia. To describe how these events unfolded, he turned to a third and final source, the treatise on the origins of the Turks written for him in 1456 by the humanist scholar and diplomat Niccolò Sagundino.

Sagundino, a Greek émigré who spent most of his life working in the Venetian civil service, first in colonial administrations in the Aegean and later as an ambassador to the Italian courts, was personally familiar with the Turkish situation.[175] Born in 1402 in the Venetian colony of Negroponte, he was working in Thessalonica, another Venetian possession, when the city was captured by the Turks in 1430. He and his family were held prisoner for a year. Once freed, he returned to Negroponte and continued to serve Venetian interests; he worked as an interpreter at the Council of Florence-Ferrara in 1438–1439 and was then appointed apostolic secretary by the Venetian Pope Eugenius IV. After Eugenius's death in 1447 he again returned to Negroponte and Venetian service. In 1453 he joined the Venetian legation sent to negotiate trading privileges with Mehmed II after the capture of Constantinople. He then returned to Italy and continued to travel on missions between Venice, Rome, Naples, and the East until his death in 1464.

In the spring of 1456, Sagundino was in Naples at the same time as Aeneas Sylvius, who as bishop of Siena had traveled to the Aragonese court to try to resolve a dispute between the citizens of his episcopal see and King Alfonso.[176] Aeneas stayed in the city for four months. It was during this time, and apparently at his request, that Sagundino composed his treatise on the origins and early history of the Turks.[177] The text enjoyed considerable popularity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, being printed once in the 1470s (in Poland) and copied in numerous manuscripts.[178] In 1503 the owner of one such copy, Marino Sanudo, tried to interest Aldus Manutius in printing the text, although no Aldine edition ever appeared.[179] The text eventually found its way into several sixteenth-century compilation vol-

umes on Turkish history, where later historians praised Sagundino for his erudition and elegant style.[180] The information which Aeneas Sylvius quoted in his own works, to which the discussion here is limited, became even more widely known.

The character and quality of Sagundino's treatise have never really been properly assessed. Babinger expressed high regard for the text, identifying it as the first European attempt at a survey of Ottoman history—a judgment that most later students of Renaissance literature on the Turks have accepted.[181] Although it probably is the first self-contained work on Ottoman history produced in the Latin West, Sagundino's treatise offers very little information on the Ottomans' origins and the careers of the early emirs that Filelfo, for instance, had not already presented in his letters to Wladyslaw III (1444) and King Charles VII of France (1451). On certain points Sagundino's account is actually less accurate than Filelfo's. Babinger's prejudice against Filelfo ran deep, however, and he seems to have resisted crediting him with any original or accurate research into Turkish history.

Pertusi, too, saw great value in the treatise, detecting in it evidence of both Sagundino's firsthand knowledge of Turkish affairs and important borrowings from the Byzantine historian Laonicus Chalcocondyles.[182] Chalcocondyles's history of the Ottoman Empire, written in Greek, certainly did contain more information on early Turkish history than was yet known in the Latin West, but recent scholarship has shown that he completed his work at least thirty years after Sagundino, who cannot be credited with introducing his findings to Europe.[183] Moreover, there is very little in Sagundino's short, somewhat vague, and entirely polemical account to compare with Chalcocondyles's more thorough researches. Schwoebel, finally, recognized the tendentious nature of Sagundino's work, but he still saw it (or rather, Aeneas's commissioning of it) as evidence of a new and healthy interest among the humanists after 1453 in obtaining reliable information about the Turks—an approach reminiscent, Schwoebel argued, of the investigations into barbarian ethnography made by classical historians like Herodotus.[184]

In fact, Sagundino's treatise reproduces an entirely conventional humanist view of the barbarian origins of the Turks, which owes more to well-worn clichés about the habits of earlier Scythian peoples than to his own direct observation or historical research. Furthermore, Sagundino did not compose his history completely independently. His account of Turkish origins

closely resembles Aeneas's own earlier comments on the subject. We know Sagundino wrote his treatise at Aeneas's request. It seems he also wrote precisely what the bishop of Siena wanted to read.

Sagundino starts with an account of the Turks' primitive origins. He describes the rootless, lawless existence they led in the Scythian plains around the River Don, their primitive habits, and their resemblance to the modern-day inhabitants of the area, the Tartars. He cites no source for these descriptions, which probably derive from the ethnographic accounts of Herodotus or Ammianus Marcellinus (who specifically located the homeland of the Huns "around the Don" and described their nomadic life, exceptional horsemanship, and ignorance of law) rather than from direct observation of the modern Turks.

For his account of the earliest events in Turkish history, Sagundino probably relied on the accounts in Theophanes (or one of his later Byzantine or Latin followers) describing the Khazar Turks' emergence from Scythia through the Caucasus in the seventh and eighth centuries. Once again he cites no specific source. According to Sagundino, the Turks were still living in Scythia "more than six hundred years ago"—a vague figure which, if we take it at all literally (*ab sexcentis annis* could also simply mean a very long time ago), produces a date sometime before A.D. 856—within a century or two of Theophanes' notices on the Khazars. At this time, he says, the Turks left Scythia: "They migrated first through Pontus and Cappadocia, and then slipped gradually into the other neighboring regions [of Asia Minor]."[185] Sagundino does not mention the Caspian Gates or the Caucasus specifically, but the route he maps out for the Turks' expansion, from the Don to the Black Sea coastal region of Pontus and Cappadocia to its south, assumes a passage through just this territory. It was a common assumption among Byzantine historians (as it was, increasingly, among Western authors) that all Turkish peoples descended from the Khazars whom Theophanes described. (In Chapter 3, we will see how the eleventh-century chronicler Skylitzes, writing relatively accurately about the very recent arrival of the Seljuks from central Asia, was still convinced that their original homeland lay on the northern slopes of the Caucasus.) The influence of Theophanes' account was simply too strong to allow a Greek author to imagine that there could have been any other, later Turks who originated elsewhere.[186]

Sagundino's account of how the Turks spent the next five centuries after they "slipped gradually" out of Pontus and Cappadocia is remarkably vague, punctuated by few details regarding dates or places but emphasizing instead

their treachery and avarice. The Turks achieved their conquests by stealth, Sagundino says, raiding and robbing their neighbors of vast amounts of territory:

> At first, these Turks tried to increase their strength in small groups in the manner of thieves, by undertaking some secret raids. And thereafter, as happens, a multitude of men of this same sort came together and, having taken possession of certain mountains and mountain passes which were conveniently located for launching raids, they so grew in strength and confidence that now they did not fear to compete openly and with equivalent force of arms with their neighbors over the possession of land. Finally, in the ensuing time, whether by the negligence of the Greeks with whom they were in contention, or by a certain destined inevitability and the variety of human fortunes, or by the authorization of the gods who had decided to bestow dominion on another people, their power grew so quickly (as all agree) that they conquered and brought under their sway not only Pontus and Cappadocia, but also Galatia, Bithynia, Pamphylia, Pisidia, both Phrygias, Cilicia, Caria, and all the territory known as Asia Minor, up to the shores of the Ionian Sea and the coast of the Greek [Aegean] Sea. Nor did they follow any one prince, but different groups of them, as if in factions, obeyed different leaders and various authorities. It was from this nation, about a hundred and fifty years ago, that a certain Ottoman . . . began to maraud about and plunder where he could.[187]

Sagundino goes on to recount the careers of Osman and his successors, still emphasizing their humble origins and treacherous methods of conquest. The lack of detail in his account of pre-Ottoman Turkey can be attributed partly to his misinterpretation of the real chronology of events. The ninth-century "Turks" of Scythia whom he mentions first are almost certainly the Khazars. But the Khazars never did intrude into Asia Minor itself, much less conquer Pontus and Cappadocia. Since Sagundino maintains that they did, however, he then has to account for what happened in the centuries between their arrival and the eventual occupation of all of Asia Minor by Turkish tribes—a process which, historically, began only after the Seljuk invasions in the eleventh century, and which was quite unrelated to the much earlier activities of the Khazars.

In Sagundino's mistaken view, the Turks had maintained a continuous presence in Asia Minor for over six hundred years. Because no historical source or tradition exists which might shed light on their activities in the

area (no Turks were actually there), Sagundino must invent a history for them. Little wonder that he describes their conquest as slow and gradual, achieved by means so subtle and devious as to be almost imperceptible. Starting as bandits, occupying desolate places which no one else wanted, they managed to gather men and resources to support ever more ambitious campaigns of acquisition. Sagundino is at a loss to explain exactly how they achieved control of the entire region: divine will must have decreed it, or else that favorite humanist device, the "variety of fortune," made it so, or else the Greeks by their negligence allowed it. The Turks themselves certainly did not deserve such a prize.

The final state of events Sagundino describes—and which he implies was the culmination of these centuries of territorial conquest—saw various Turkish tribes, including the Ottomans, in control of various parts of Anatolia ("as if in factions"). But far from marking the high point of Turkish political achievement, the rather disordered patchwork of beyliks and emirates to which Sagundino refers was, historically, a step backward from a much more impressive political structure which Sagundino does not mention at all. The partitioning of Anatolia among a collection of Turkish "factions" came about only after the defeat of the Rum Seljuks by the Mongols in the 1240s. And this brings us to the real puzzle in Sagundino's account: his failure to mention the Seljuk Turkish Empire.

Sagundino skips over a long and important period of Turkish history—information which would have been familiar to any educated Greek. He neglects to mention the initial movement of the Seljuks out of central Asia and through Persia, their conquest of Baghdad and absorption of the Abbasid caliphate, or the catastrophic defeat they inflicted on the Byzantine army at Manzikert in 1071; nor does he acknowledge the subsequent century and a half when the sultanate of Rum encompassed almost all of formerly Byzantine Anatolia. These events were widely discussed in Byzantine histories of the period, recounted as essential background information to explain the disaster at Manzikert and the subsequent arrival of the Frankish crusaders.[188] But Sagundino passes over these events in order to dwell instead on the state of political anarchy in Asia Minor after the collapse of the sultanate of Rum and immediately before the rise of the Ottomans. His silence on these matters seems a deliberate misrepresentation of the facts: by passing over the Seljuks in silence, he can portray the Turks as a people who had remained until quite recent times in the deepest political obscurity. From their nomadic origins in the wilds of Scythia to their stealthy annexation of the

whole of Anatolia, they had continued as an illegitimate, lawless, leaderless mob, who in their habits, appearance, and language had hardly progressed from their barbarian origins. At the conclusion of the treatise, he drives the point home with the familiar rhetorical truism that the rise of such lowly barbarians was an affront to the dignity of civilized nations:

> And so, reverend father, I have written this little work, which I confess is inelegant and slight and hardly worthy of you . . . From it one may easily grasp how swiftly, and in how quick a sequence of events that despicable and barbarous race, led by Osman, grew up from obscure and nomadic origins; to what end they have finally arrived; how many and how great their achievements; what lands they now hold and occupy; what peoples they rule over (unworthily and shamefully), whom they now threaten, and where they boldly plan to go next.[189]

Sagundino composed his treatise at Aeneas's request. Aeneas had already written several letters and orations making similar points about the barbarous origins of the Turks, their rapacious excursions out of the Caucasus, and their eighth-century occupation of Asia Minor. In his 1454 oration at Frankfurt, for instance, Aeneas claimed that after the Turks invaded Asia through the Caspian Gates in the time of Pepin (as he learned from Otto of Freising), "they have remained there ever since."[190] In his 1455 oration to Calixtus III, he even made a passing reference to the manner in which they had achieved their occupation ("In the time of King Pepin they migrated into Asia and *little by little* made that province subject to their rule"), which seems to anticipate Sagundino's more extensive account of their gradual (*sensim*) annexation.[191]

One wonders whether Sagundino knew much at all about the origins of the Turks before Aeneas asked him to produce an essay on the topic. He may have been prompted (or perhaps shrewdly decided) to produce a historical brief that perfectly agreed with Aeneas's own views on the subject. In his other works, Sagundino expresses little concern for the question of Turkish origins or history. The rest of his oeuvre—translations of ancient and patristic Greek texts, dialogues and essays on philosophical, theological, and rhetorical topics, and urbane *epistolae familiares* addressed to his wide circle of friends—reflects his interest in literary and philosophical issues rather than politics or history.[192] Some of these compositions do touch on Turkish affairs, but in a very different way from the approach he took in his treatise for Aeneas. In January 1454, for instance, shortly after returning from his mis-

sion to Mehmed II, Sagundino delivered a report on the current state of the Turkish empire to Alfonso of Aragon, in which he made no reference whatever to the Turks' barbarian origins.[193] Instead he presented a dramatic account of the fall of Constantinople (probably derived from one or more earlier eyewitness reports, since it repeats most of the standard catalogue of atrocities) and a fascinating sketch of the sultan's mercurial character, his emulation of Alexander the Great and interest in Roman and Greek history, his ill will toward Christendom, his sadism and sexual perversions, and his elaborate schemes for the conquest of Italy.[194] This portrait is executed with a great deal of imagination and rhetorical flair, and there are several stirring set speeches. The overall impression is of a classic Oriental despot, cruel but cultivated. Sagundino makes no attempt to establish the historical antecedents to Ottoman expansion or the national character of the conquerors; there is no mention of a Scythian pedigree. The Mehmed he portrays here is a barbarian, to be sure, but a very different sort of barbarian: Asiatic, decadent, despotic, and cruel, not northern, primitive, or unclean.

Other works of Sagundino's which may indicate an interest in Turkish affairs include two translations: one of Demosthenes' First Olynthiac oration, in which the orator warns the citizens of Athens to beware Philip of Macedon's aggression from the East,[195] and the other of a spurious ancient Greek oracle on the destruction of the Hexamilion wall guarding the isthmus of Corinth. Sagundino prefaces this with an essay on the history of the wall, from its construction as a defense against the Persians in the fifth century B.C. to its renewal by Justinian against the Goths and its recent destruction by the Ottomans, remarking on the similarities between these various waves of "barbarian" invasion.[196]

These little-known works by Sagundino reflect a common humanist view of the Ottoman threat, in which the Turks are likened, by analogy alone, to earlier "barbarian" invaders (Persians, Macedonians, Goths). Sagundino's approach in these texts suggests that his modern reputation as an expert on Turkish history and culture has been somewhat exaggerated. The treatise he wrote for Aeneas was his only attempt to survey the Ottoman past, and it was based more on classical literary models and contemporary rhetorical clichés than historical fact and corresponds closely to his patron's own ideas on the subject.

Other humanist scholars in the late 1450s and early 1460s produced accounts of early Turkish history based on, or at least heavily influenced by, Aeneas's writings on the subject. As mentioned above, Nicola Loschi dedicated a poem to the pope in which he called the Turks a "Caspian" race and

Mehmed II a "Scythian boy."[197] In another poem, also composed to celebrate Aeneas's crusade, Bartolomeo Pagello neatly summarized the whole humanist narrative of Ottoman origins, from Scythian beginnings to marauding through Asia, crossing the Hellespont, and capturing Constantinople. Remarkably, he squeezed all this into just eight economical lines.[198] Several poems in the collection of *Epaenetica* written for Aeneas during his papacy also repeat these motifs.[199] Yet another set of verses, describing his efforts to launch a crusade and sometimes paired with the poetic version of the spurious letter addressed to him by "Morbisanus," has been ascribed to Aeneas himself, a questionable attribution.[200] The author of the poem, in an apostrophe directed to God, describes the pope's efforts against the Turks; he also recasts Aeneas's familiar historical arguments against their Trojan ancestry in verse.[201] Another poem, written in the same vein and also attributed to Aeneas—but likewise more apt to have been composed by someone seeking to celebrate his dedication to the crusading cause—rehearses his account of the Turks' emergence from Scythia into Asia.[202] Humanist scholars writing to Aeneas about the Turks may have decided it was simply prudent to echo his own ideas about their historical origins. Ludovico Carbone, for example, in his wedding oration for Zarabinus Turchus, showered the groom with praise and remarked in particular on the Trojan origins of his supposedly Turkish ancestors. Significantly, Carbone acknowledged that on a previous occasion, in an oration before the pope, he had rejected the idea that the Turks could be Trojan; but, he explained, he had done so only to please the pontiff (*utque pontifici blandiri voluerim*) and had since changed his mind.[203]

After his election to the papacy, Aeneas compiled little new information on the origins and early history of the Turks. In his crusade appeals and geographical works, even in a description of his own papal coronation, he essentially reproduced his earlier account, still relying on the information he had found in Aethicus, Otto of Freising, and Sagundino.[204]

In the oration with which he opened the Congress of Mantua in 1459, for example, Aeneas rehearsed the origins of the Turks in order to show how their violent force had accelerated the spread of Islam: "A great many Christians remained in Asia up to the time of Pepin, king of the Franks . . . At that time the Turks came out of Scythia and occupied Cappadocia, Pontus, Bithynia, the Troas, Cilicia and all of Asia Minor, and having grown powerful thanks to our negligence, not only drove true Christians out of Asia, but crossed the Hellespont in boats and invaded Macedonia, Thrace, Attica."[205]

The date, "in the time of Pepin," comes from Otto, while the list of prov-

inces conquered is derived from Sagundino. Aeneas also seems to have accepted the larger ideas implicit in Sagundino's vague and misleading account of how the Turks conquered Asia. He, too, makes the Turks seem a far older enemy than they actually were, suggesting that they began their assaults on Christendom in the eighth century and continued them, without interruption, for six hundred years, culminating in their occupation of European territory in the mid-fourteenth century. He likewise follows Sagundino in refusing to give the Turks ("who thanks to our negligence amassed their power") real credit for these achievements.

In his geographical treatises, *Europa* and *Asia,* Aeneas repeats his account of Turkish origins a further three times. As befits the more discursive and descriptive style of these works, he quotes all three of his authorities on early Turkish history—Aethicus, Otto, and Sagundino—at greater length than he had done in any previous composition, giving particular emphasis (in emulation of his main classical model for the works, Strabo's *Geographia*) to the information from Aethicus and Sagundino on Turkish habits, mores, and culture. In *Europa,* he mentions the Turks in an early chapter devoted to the countries of eastern Europe. After describing the topography and peoples of Hungary, Transylvania, and Thrace, he rehearses the Turks' eighth-century emergence from Scythia and conquest of Asia, then describes their more recent activities in the countries under consideration, especially their capture of Constantinople (included here as the capital of Thrace) and their unsuccessful attack on Belgrade in 1456.[206]

In *Asia,* Aeneas repeats his account of Turkish history twice more. He does so first in an early chapter on the peoples of Asiatic Scythia, ancient and modern, where he sets Aethicus's description of the primitive Turks' unclean diet and Sagundino's account of their lawless brigandage alongside descriptions of ancient barbarians like the Massagetes and Amazons as well as more recent invaders, including Huns, Goths, and Lombards.[207] At the conclusion of the treatise he repeats the story again, this time in an account of the geography and history of Asia Minor. The description of Asia Minor actually takes up more than two thirds of the whole treatise as it survives—Aeneas clearly considered it the most important of the areas of the continent he had yet surveyed.[208] It is significant, then, that he concludes both the description of the province and this section of the work itself with yet another rehearsal of the origins and early history of the Turks. Once again he stresses their barbarous origins, arguing particularly vehemently against the possibility of their Trojan ancestry, and the lawlessness with which they had pur-

sued their conquests since the time of Pepin. He then carries the story of the Ottoman emirs forward to the reign of Mehmed II, before ending with a long lament for the Christian relics and classical monuments of Asia which have been lost to the terrible onslaught of the Turks.[209]

To construct a Scythian past for the Turks, Aeneas Sylvius, Filelfo, Biondo, and Sagundino relied on a common set of texts and methods. All four differ from most of their humanist contemporaries in that when they set out to represent the Turks as barbarous enemies of civilization, they did so by presenting what seemed a true, historical account of the Turks' origins, identifying their genetic forebears rather than simply likening them by analogy to notorious barbarian invaders of ages past. In order to substantiate their historical accounts, they quoted references to *Turci* from various medieval sources: the *Suda;* Theophanes' *Chronographia,* whether in the original Greek or in Anastasius's translation; Otto of Freising's world chronicle; and the apocalyptic *Cosmographia* of Aethicus. They pieced these together to form a coherent (or at least coherent-seeming) sequence of events in Turkish history, from primitive origins in Scythia, to invasion by way of the Caucasus in the seventh, eighth, or ninth century, to the subtle and treacherous occupation of Asia Minor and the emergence of Osman (himself a subtle and treacherous figure) in the early fourteenth century.

That these scholars knew of and were willing to refer to these medieval sources at all may seem remarkable, given the prejudice that fifteenth-century humanists are often assumed to have held against "barbaric" post-classical texts. The assumption is not without merit: Aeneas himself once famously denounced medieval chroniclers as "ignorant," their work "a clobber of nonsense and lies, without attraction in form, in style, or in serious reflection," and advised the young student to steer clear of their worthless tales.[210] The prudent scholar should stick to the more reliable authorities of antiquity. Indeed, the way Aeneas and his fellow humanists manipulated the material they found in their unlikely sources suggests that even though they were happy to extract and repeat their references to early *Turci,* they were not entirely comfortable with the way medieval authors presented this information.

For the humanists, good history writing had to be authoritative, elegant, and plausible all at the same time. For political reasons, humanists writing after 1453 also wanted to show the Turks in as poor a light as possible. The operations they performed on their source material reveal that they

pursued all four objectives simultaneously. Aeneas edited the fantastic text of Aethicus so that it read like an ancient geographical authority, toning down—but not completely—the outlandish details of the original text. Likewise, he and Filelfo described the Turks' emergence through the Caspian Gates in the eighth century in a way that hinted at an association with the legendary unclean tribes enclosed behind Alexander's prophylactic gates, but did not make the fabulous identification explicit (although Biondo, an exceptional case, did precisely that). Filelfo and Sagundino revived ancient commonplaces regarding the primitive diet and nomadic customs of Scythian barbarians and applied them to the medieval Turks as though they wrote on the strength of direct evidence concerning the Turks, when they almost certainly possessed no such thing. Biondo and Filelfo extracted information from Theophanes on military maneuvers by the Khazar Turks in the Caucasus while obscuring the positive context in which that information appeared in Byzantine historiography. Filelfo, Sagundino, and Aeneas all made it clear that the Turks, after their eighth-century emergence into Asia, could claim no subsequent political or cultural achievements of note; all pointedly ignored the existence of either the Great Seljuks or the Seljuks of Rum. The four authors focused most of their attention on the earliest appearances of Turks in the historical records they found—in keeping with prevailing preferences for ancient over more recent history, but also in order to attribute to the Turks the longest possible history of violent, anti-Christian behavior. But they passed over in silence the question of the Turks' more recent and impressive political history, and thus were able to argue that even the contemporary Turks were a backward, uncivilized, and illegitimate race.