

Midterm Assignment 5: Using a Primary Source

Written records provide us with useful information about historical events, everyday life, and the beliefs of different peoples. Historians use two types of written records: primary sources and secondary sources.

Primary sources are first-hand accounts based on the experiences of people who were involved in an event. Eyewitness accounts, government documents, treaties, and letters are primary sources.

Secondary sources are second-hand accounts based on the writings or evidence of others. Textbooks and encyclopaedias are secondary sources.

Some primary sources are written for a particular reason so the writer might not tell a completely objective story. Therefore, sources have to be judged carefully. The following excerpt is taken from *Petrarca and the Art of Poetry* by Leonardo Bruni, written in 1436 CE.

Procedure

- 1). Read the excerpt from Leonardo Bruni's *Petrarca and the Art of Poetry* found below.
- 2). Complete all associated questions (see page 4). Use *Google Docs* to write down answers to all the questions. Submit and share the assignment by deadline with the classroom teacher (rdelaine@lcbi.sk.ca). Ensure you give the teacher full editing privileges.

Note: you must also hand-in your paper assignment because one task (see #2) requires you to highlight a piece of text. So do not lose or discard your paper handout. If you do, you will lose marks.

Some context for understanding Leonardo Bruni, Petrarch and Cicero

Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444 CE) was an Italian humanist scholar and historian. He also served as a civil servant for both the pope and the city of Florence. He is considered to be one of the first of the "modern" historians because he was one of the first writers to critically examine and use primary sources to construct his own narratives (secondary sources). He played a prominent role in helping humanism grow by publishing Italian-language biographies of Dante, Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio (all prominent medieval writers who followed the style of the famed Roman writer and orator, Cicero).

Petrarch (1304-1374 CE), also known as Francesco Petrarca, was an Italian poet and scholar. He was regarded as the greatest scholar of his age. His love and popularization of Classical writers like Virgil and Cicero helped inspire the Renaissance (a period of

cultural rebirth that led to the Reformation, Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment). In addition to loving literature, he also had a deep religious faith, a love of virtue, and an unusual gift for observation. Petrarch was an enthusiastic supporter of the idea of reviving the Roman Republic. Petrarch's was adamant that the past—especially Rome's Republican past—could help nurture a better present. Petrarch's work reminded people of their value whereas the majority of other medieval thinkers tended to regard humankind as something broken and unworthy of celebration. The humanist attitudes of the Italian 15th century leading to the Renaissance would not have been possible without his work.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) was a Roman politician, lawyer, scholar and writer who championed the cause of liberty in the final days of the Roman Republic. He is most remembered for his skill as a speaker and his courage to speak truth to power. Cicero was no ordinary lawyer. He made a point of practicing special techniques to make himself a more effective speaker, e.g. playing with meter, syllables, emotion. Petrarch imitated Cicero's style as a speaker and writer. He worked and wrote during the civil war period leading up to the eventual rise of Julius Caesar, Rome's first emperor. Cicero made a name for himself primarily as a lawyer

Petrarch and the Art of Poetry by Leonardo Bruni

The Latin language, in all its perfection and greatness, flourished best in the time of the great Roman poet and speaker Cicero. The greatest flowering of culture took place while the Roman Republic was at its strongest. Cicero was the Republic's greatest cultural figure and writer; it can be said that the health of the Latin language went hand in hand with the condition of the Roman Republic.

With the rise of the emperors the liberty of the Roman people was lost. Not only was liberty lost but also the cultural growth that accompanied the Republican era of Cicero. Even the best of the emperors, like Caesar Augustus, was a murderer. The worst of the emperors like Caligula and Nero butchered their own people for pleasure. Eventually, there weren't any emperors who were even of Roman blood (they had killed one another off). No one of excellence remained. Why am I talking about this? I am simply demonstrating that the city of Rome was destroyed by the emperors, who were tyrants, and the arts—writing, sculpture, philosophy, art—also fell into ruin. After the fall of Rome which came about after successive invasions by the Goths, Vandals and Lombards. These barbarians and foreign peoples almost

completely destroyed what culture and writing survived the emperors. The writings of those who came after the fall of Rome was not refined but coarse and crude.

Eventually, after two-hundred and four years, the Lombards were pushed out of Italy. Italian peoples recovered ancient centers of trade and culture like Tuscany and Florence. Italian cities began to revive culturally and economically. Gradually men of letters began to re-emerge attempting again to write in the Roman style. The revival was slow but, little by little, Roman culture came to recover its previous vigor—a vigor not seen since the time of the Republic and Cicero.

The talented Francesco Petrarch was the first of the Italians who recognized and restored to light the ancient elegance of style which was lost and dead, and although in him it was not perfect, nevertheless by himself he saw and opened the way to this perfection, by recovering the works of Cicero, by enjoying them, by understanding them, and by adapting himself as much as he could, and he learned the way to that most elegant and perfect fluency in Latin. Petrarch showed the way to those who came after him. Thus, devoted to these studies and manifesting his talent even as a youth, Petrarch was much honoured and renowned, and was even asked by the pope to act as secretary to the papal court. Petrarch was a humble man who sought truth for its own sake and not for public honour; nonetheless, in order to avoid insulting the pope he accepted the office and became a secular cleric. The honours of Petrarch were such that no man of his age was more highly esteemed than he, not only beyond the Alps but in Italy herself.

In conclusion, so great was his fame and the honour accorded him by all cities and states and by all the people throughout Italy, that it seemed an incredible and wonderful thing. Not only was he sought after and revered by the populace and the middle class, but he was provided with lavish pensions by the highest and greatest princes and lords. He spent some time with Messer Gianglaeazzo Visconti, who begged him most graciously to deign to remain with him; and he was greatly honoured likewise by the lords of Padua. So great was his reputation and the reverence in which he was held by these lords that oftentimes they argued at length with him to persuade him to take precedence in entering or leaving a place, and to take the place of honour. So honoured and rewarded in this life, Petrarch lived until the very end of his days.

Complete the following tasks related to the text you just read:

Note: your answer must be a minimum of 50 words in length for *all* four of the following tasks. Also, if you use an external source for information you must cite the URL or book you drew information from. Talk to your teacher about how to include this information in your answers if you do not know how.

1. Distinguish what information is being given. Using a combination of your intuition and the source material, answer the following the question:

- Why did Bruni believe Rome's greatest cultural achievements only came while it was still a Republic?
- Why would cultural achievements go into decline during the Roman Empire period?

2. Distinguish between fact and opinion. A fact is something that has actually happened; it can be proven or observed. An opinion is a judgement that reflects a person's belief.

- Identify *one* of Bruni's ideas that appears to you to be more *opinion* than *fact*. Use a highlighter and underline this idea right on your worksheet.
- Then, in paragraph form, explain exactly what makes you believe Bruni's idea is an opinion as opposed to fact.

3. Evaluate the reliability of the source.

- Making direct reference to the source identify and explain two reasons why Bruni regarded Petrarch so highly.

4. Use the source to draw conclusions about a historical development.

- What generalizations about Petrarch's importance can you make from the source?