

# History and Historians in the Age of AI

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## ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence and its tools have sparked numerous debates within the Humanities. In this study, I aim to explore how AI tools contribute to History, while also introducing new responsibilities for historians. I also intend to analyse how AI, in conjunction with digitization, may help address the challenges of the zeitgeist, even as it pushes historians toward specific subfields. On the one hand, AI tools enable historians to work with diverse datasets and analyse large volumes of material—from digitized archives to textual data derived from oral history studies. Additionally, AI-based language tools allow historians to engage with sources in multiple languages, offering a level of accessibility previously unattainable. In an increasingly polarized and fragmented world, where scholars face challenges such as visa restrictions, AI and digitization ease many practical difficulties. On the other hand, these advancements place a new kind of burden on historians: the need to remain vigilant about the potential transformation of the discipline. Most notably, as AI tools introduce algorithmic interpretation and rely on “big data,” they risk amplifying existing biases, subjectivities, or overgeneralizations within historical sources. Therefore, I argue that scholars must adopt a new critical approach to ensure human oversight remains central to historical scholarship. In this study, I aim to discuss the advantages and drawbacks of AI in the discipline of history, ultimately suggesting that AI will not herald the downfall of the Humanities or its scholars. However, it will undoubtedly require the development of new methodologies and approaches to navigate its impact effectively.

**Keywords:** AI, Humanities, History, Digitization

## INTRODUCTION

The 21st century, through first digitization and later AI, brought, and has the potential to further bring one of the most outstanding historiographical shifts in the discipline of History. Since its modern foundations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, historiographical traditions have experienced several paradigmatic changes, transforming the focal questions, content, and sources of the discipline. However, all these shifts did not change the central position of the historian in history writing. Now, while the content and methodology are changing with new technologies, the position of the historian is also prone to change, indicating a dramatic transformation both in historiography and history as a profession. This study aims to shed light on this transformation from a critical perspective. In other words, it puts forward not only the opportunities that internet technologies and AI have the potential to contribute to History but also risks that are necessary to consider in order not to distort historical

research. These risks are not peculiar, but they constitute an important example for the disciplines in broader Humanities framework, which have been in transformation with rise of AI.

### **OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS OF AI IN THE DISCIPLINE OF HISTORY**

The change in historical research started before AI came to the forefront in academia. As the technology developed, the methodology of discipline transformed. Yet, specifically in the 1990s and 2000s, the internet and digitization became a real breakthrough as some of the archival materials, from documents to photographs, could be accessible to many. Internet technologies and digitization created a transition from scarcity to abundance (Rosenzweig, 2003). Reaching sources online eased the task of historians and created opportunities to write histories moving beyond national frameworks. Furthermore, the Internet brought about scholarly collaborative networks that would have been impossible otherwise. Surely, neither the internet nor digitization became a panacea for the problems of the historical scholarship. For example, most of the digital archives are from the Global North, prioritizing the political and academic tendencies of these rich and developed countries (Milligan, 2022). In a way, they continue to serve the West-centric narratives.

AI has carried these debates to a next level while creating many opportunities for the historians. Since the emergence of modern – and scientific – history, ability to read in different languages had become one of the most important traits of historians. Therefore, current translation tools and AI have assisted historians to break language barriers. This has not only helped to move beyond national(ist) frameworks but also given the possibility to challenge the dominance of Anglophonic epistemology. The issue of language in history, however, is a broader problematic that AI contributes to solution. One of the most difficult tasks of a historian has been reading handwritten documents. Recently, Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) tools have aimed to succeed in transcribing such materials. For example, *Transkribus* not only transliterate manuscripts but also guesses the unknown signs/letters/words in the text through application of neural network model (Muehlberger et al., 2019). This signifies that the HTR tools both read and understand the text. They are important for digitization projects turning manuscripts into searchable documents. Furthermore, they may play an important role in the restoration of files. However, they need further improvements as their performance varies according to language, alphabet, style, manuscript condition and orthography (Romein et al., 2025). For instance, all the tools of HTR perform better with Latin manuscripts, in other words, they are biased towards the Latin alphabet, because they have largely been trained with Latin datasets (Romein et al., 2025). Obviously, they need more effort by the experts to function well on non-Western texts, as in the recent period historians have increasingly criticized west-centric narratives.

Not only HTR but also other AI-based tools have created “abundance” of historical data/archives for historians. This has also paved the way for increasing tendency in historical scholarship to work with the “Big Data.” Big data has the potential to display patterns in history and show relations

through text mining tools, connecting qualitative and quantitative methods (Muleka, 2024). In this way, huge projects turn into feasible goals such as showing centuries of trends in trade, climate, and demography.

A significant project exemplifying the uses of Big Data in close connection with AI is *Time Machine: Invigorating European History with the Big Data of the Past* (Time Machine, n.d.). In this project, first the archives are digitized through robotic scanning and AI transcription, such as the abovementioned *Transkribus*. Then the digital documents are subjected to text mining, finding specific keywords and making connections. All these findings, eventually, turn into 3 or 4D simulations, which allow an experience of “time travel”. This example shows that AI tools have an ability to portray history of the world in the *longue durée*.

Ability to work with the Big Data, in addition to the *longue durée* approaches, supports specific kinds of historiography. It enables the historians to study transnational and global history, which are important to move beyond limited national narratives and to constitute an entangled or comparative understanding of the world. On the other hand, it also poses a risk of datafication of History, which may be restricted to statistics and/or codes yet actually necessitate a rigorous critical and interpretative approach (Spina, 2025). A “third way” has lately been suggested by the scholars who have emphasized “quantitative narrative analysis”, which quantifies the events without losing the event itself or the related people in the narrative, saving historical scholarship from being restricted to numbers or codes (Franzosi, 2017).

While Big Data initiatives have the risk of restraining History to numbers and codes, narratives that are framed by the generative AI have the potential to create history with algorithms and their biases. It is correct that AI tools have impacted on historical research in a way to democratize the discipline as they made the sources more accessible. However, it also poses a risk of searching, learning, and writing history with the information that—solely—AI provides, reflecting its training data and algorithmic biases.

Historians have recently made several studies in order to show this problematic side of generative AI, regarding both research and teaching. For the latter, a valuable study shows that student essays, which were instructed to be completed by AI on specific issues regarding the different global regions such as Africa, Caribbean and the Middle East, clearly reflected West-centric repetitions and biases (Rice, 2025). For research, on the other hand, De Ninno and Lacriola (2025) studied Italian fascism on ChatGPT. They conclude that ChatGPT repeats the established assumptions that underestimate the power and firmness of Italian version of fascism, which is incorrect when studied through diligent historical methodology (De Ninno and Lacriola, 2025). Since generative AI tools like ChatGPT lack access to non-digitized materials and rely solely on online data, they can distort reality, omit crucial details, and over-prioritize the most frequently repeated information, which mostly emphasize the toughness of German Nazism in comparison to Italian fascism. These kinds of examples can be multiplied. In the worst-case scenario, the generative AI tools can contribute to the spread of pseudo-history if not used with awareness and critical methodology. This also can be seen in the sources that generative AI tools provide. For instance,

they are asked for academic references on a specific subject, but they retrieve sources that are not mentioned by the publisher, or that are really outdated, or just hallucinated (Leme Lopes, 2023).

These examples challenge the findings of Microsoft research, which emphasized that historians are the second group considered “most at risk” after translators because of AI (Fore, 2026). Although it is a reality that most of the jobs will be deeply affected by AI, the emphases of this study show that historians are not people that just compile and narrate data. On the contrary, if history promises a moderate level of truth, historians have a responsibility in both research and teaching. On the one hand, they should be aware of all these algorithms in their own research processes. On the other hand, they should make the students aware of them. Otherwise, the contributions of the last decades, which have criticized, for example, Eurocentrism or Anglo-centrism in knowledge production, will be again at risk, downgrading the rest of the world, which was a general tendency long before the rise of internet technologies.

## CONCLUSION

This paper argued that AI has a major potential to transform historiography while also posing some risks to History discipline. First, it emphasized the importance of AI tools, for instance, to create archives, to transcribe manuscripts, and even understand the text through neural network models. AI allows historians to work with Big Data. In this way, it constitutes a positive methodological framework for global and transnational history with *longue durée* approaches. However, AI does not “democratize” History just through the formation of open access, digital data because, simply, democracy cannot be restricted to numbers. A democratic history requires hearing the voices of the people, nations, and regions that history has long overlooked. This seems the most obvious risk of generative AI as this study aimed to exemplify, since it reflects algorithmic biases of the most repetitive information on the digital world. Therefore, this study concludes that the job of historian is not at risk as assumed but should definitely be restructured to utilize new technology with a critical understanding of its shortcomings.

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