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978-0-521-43624-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism

Edited by Jill Kraye

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From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, humanism played a key role in European culture. Beginning as a movement based on the recovery, interpretation and imitation of ancient Greek and Roman texts and the archaeological study of the physical remains of antiquity, humanism turned into a dynamic cultural programme, influencing almost every facet of Renaissance intellectual life. The fourteen original essays in this volume deal with all aspects of the movement, from language learning to the development of science, from the effect of humanism on biblical study to its influence on art, from its Italian origins to its manifestations in the literature of More, Sidney and Shakespeare. Overall, *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* provides a comprehensive introduction to a major movement in the culture of early modern Europe.

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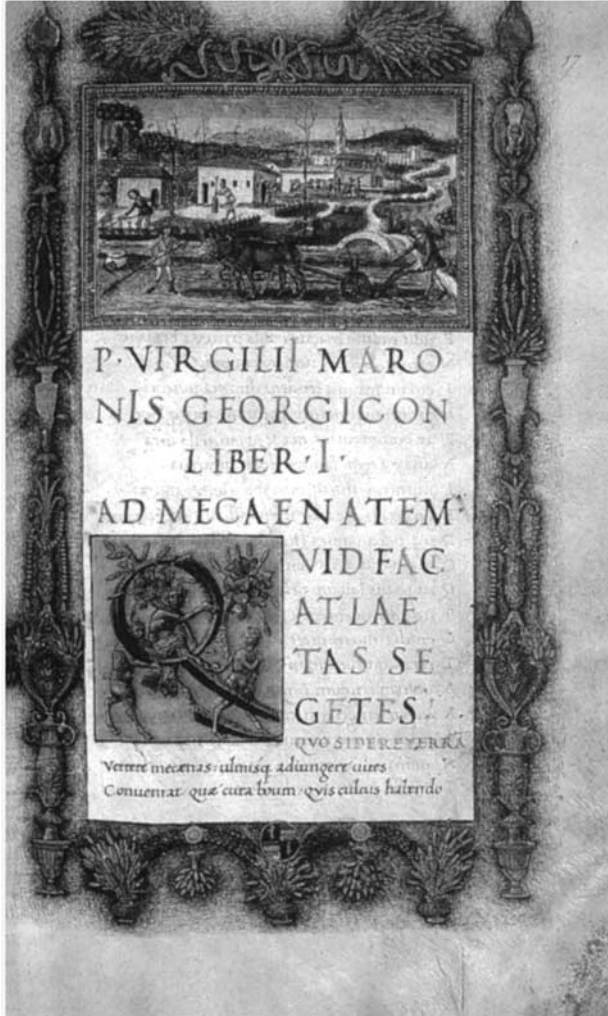
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CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>List of contributors</i>	xii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>Maps</i>	xvii
1 The origins of humanism	1
NICHOLAS MANN	
2 Classical scholarship	20
MICHAEL D. REEVE	
3 Humanism in script and print in the fifteenth century	47
MARTIN DAVIES	
4 The humanist reform of Latin and Latin teaching	63
KRISTIAN JENSEN	
5 Humanist rhetoric and dialectic	82
PETER MACK	
6 Humanists and the Bible	100
ALASTAIR HAMILTON	
7 Humanism and the origins of modern political thought	118
JAMES HANKINS	
8 Philologists and philosophers	142
JILL KRAYE	
9 Artists and humanists	161
CHARLES HOPE and ELIZABETH MCGRATH	

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-43624-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism

Edited by Jill Kraye

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

10	Vernacular humanism in the sixteenth century WARREN BOUTCHER	189
11	The new science and the traditions of humanism ANTHONY GRAFTON	203
12	Humanism and Italian literature M. L. MCLAUGHLIN	224
13	Humanism and English literature in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries CLARE CARROLL	246
14	Humanism and seventeenth-century English literature JOSEPH LOEWENSTEIN	269
	<i>A guide to further reading in English</i>	294
	<i>Biographical index</i>	303

ILLUSTRATIONS

- The beginning of Book I of Virgil's *Georgics*, MS *frontispiece*
London, British Library, King's 24, f. 17^r. By permission
of the British Library.
- 3.1. Formal humanistic script: the beginning of Book II of
Giannozzo Manetti's *De dignitate et excellentia hominis*,
copied by the Florentine scribe Gherardo del Ciriagio in 1455.
MS London, British Library, Harl. 2593, f. 25^r. (Reproduced
by permission of the British Library.) *page 50*
- 3.2. Roman type: the *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder, printed
in 1472 at Venice by Nicholas Jenson. This is a copy printed
on vellum and illuminated by hand. British Library, C.2.d.8,
f. 4^r. (Reproduced by permission of the British Library.) 56
- 9.1. Tempio Malatestiano, Rimini; designed by Leon Battista
Alberti. (Photo: Istituto centrale per il catalogo e la
documentazione, Rome.) 163
- 9.2. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Brutus, Scaevola and Camillus*. Sala
dei Gigli, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. (Photo: Alinari.) 172
- 9.3. Albrecht Dürer, *Nemesis*, engraving of 1501–2. (Photo:
Warburg Institute.) 174
- 9.4. Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*. Uffizi, Florence. (Photo: Alinari.) 176
- 9.5. Conrad Celtis (or Hartmann Schedel after Celtis), Scheme for a
woodcut illustration to the *Libri amorum* (Nuremberg, 1502):
MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 434, f. 70^r. 180
- 9.6. Albrecht Dürer, *Philosophy*, from Celtis's *Libri amorum*
(Nuremberg, 1502). 181
- 9.7. Medal of Erasmus by Quentin Massys (1519), with Terminus
on the reverse. (Reproduced by permission of the Victoria
and Albert Museum, London.) 183
- 9.8. The suicide of Brutus, illustrating 'Virtue overwhelmed by
Fortune', from Andrea Alciati, *Emblemata* (Paris, 1542), p. 96. 184

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-43624-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism

Edited by Jill Kraye

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

List of contributors

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Edited by Jill Kraye

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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PREFACE

For many years now, Renaissance humanism has been a topic of widespread interest to students and scholars in a variety of fields. Numerous publications in this area, however, are written with an audience of specialists in mind. It is often assumed that readers have a solid knowledge of both ancient and Renaissance culture and that they can comfortably handle Latin and Greek; furthermore, a large number of essential monographs and articles are written in foreign languages. Access to the most up-to-date and thorough studies has therefore been denied to those who lack the requisite background and linguistic skills, even though they have the desire to learn about this subject. One of the aims of the present volume is to help remedy this situation by providing accessible treatments for an English-speaking readership of some of the major issues in Renaissance humanism. In pursuit of this goal, all quotations from classical and foreign languages have been translated, and an attempt has been made to present even the most challenging material in a manner which can be readily grasped by students and non-specialists.

A further aim in producing this book is to counter the view that Renaissance humanism was a narrowly philological enterprise, concerned only with the technicalities of classical scholarship and with a definable curriculum consisting of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy. These subjects are discussed at length in the volume; but equal stress is laid on the role of humanism as a broad intellectual and cultural movement, which contributed to, or at any rate engaged with, disciplines such as biblical studies, political thought, art, science and all branches of philosophy. In addition, instead of locating humanism solely within the period from the beginning of the fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth, as is customary, considerable attention has been devoted to its medieval antecedents and, in particular, to its survival into the seventeenth century and beyond. A final objective is to highlight the complex interaction between the Latin-based and vernacular cultures of the Renaissance,

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

documenting in detail the impact which humanism had on literature, with particular attention paid to Italy and England.

In order to make the volume as useful as possible to students perhaps encountering Renaissance humanism for the first time, a guide to further reading has been provided which includes only material either written in or translated into English. Those readers who want to pursue subjects in greater depth will find more detailed bibliography, including works in foreign languages, in the notes to individual chapters. One potential difficulty in a book such as this, which covers several centuries and ranges over many countries, is that the cast of characters is so large that it can become unmanageable. To alleviate this problem in the least obtrusive way, a biographical index, giving dates and brief identifications of the figures mentioned in the volume, has been provided instead of the chronological table usually found in the Cambridge Companions to Literature.

The secret of making a good movie, according to some directors, is all down to the casting. Certainly, I feel that my most valuable contribution as editor of this volume is having brought together a superb team of scholars from both sides of the Atlantic; all experts in their own fields, they have been willing to make their expertise available to a wide audience. My own editorial, not to say scholarly, endeavours have benefited beyond measure from daily access to the library of the Warburg Institute, an extraordinary intellectual resource for the study of Renaissance humanism, as for all aspects of the survival and transmission of ancient learning and culture to the modern world. Together with its august neighbour, the British Library, it constitutes an ideal centre for anyone working in this field.

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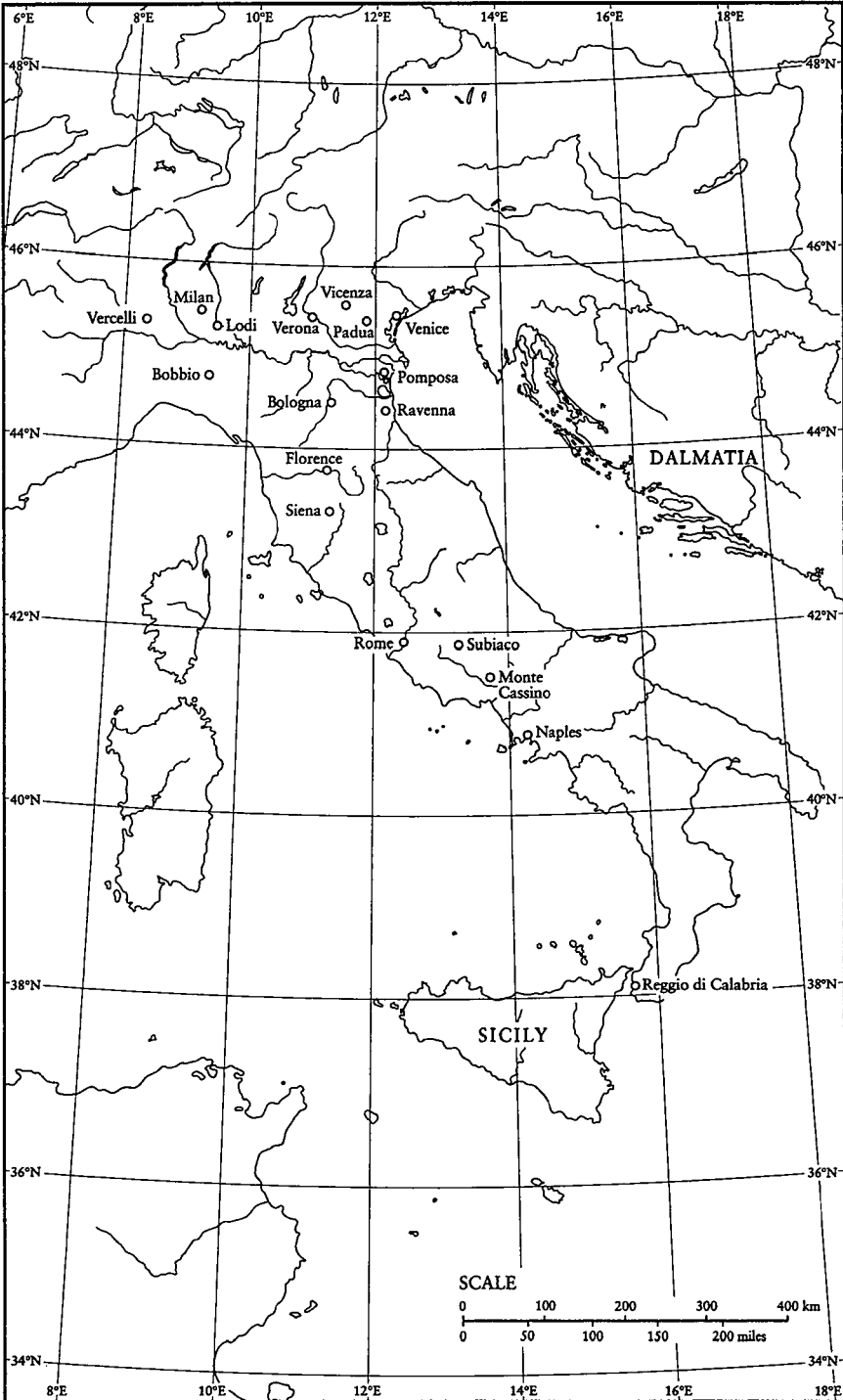
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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Map 1 Western Europe to Byzantium: centres of medieval and early Renaissance classical scholarship



Map 2 Italy: centres of medieval and early Renaissance classical scholarship