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Renaissances

The Renaissance in Italy continues to exercise a powerful hold on scholarly inquiry and on the popular imagination, and the essays in this volume seek to provide an introduction to the richly varied materials and phenomena as well as the different methodologies through which the period – here considered as extending from the turn of the fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth – is studied today both in the English-speaking world and in Italy. No single discipline has been privileged in either the choice or placement of essays in the volume; its objective is to provide a series of tools with which any one of the matters addressed (some of which would not have occurred to earlier generations of scholars as being relevant to the period as they conceived it) might be further contextualized. In a volume that includes essays on science and medicine, technologies, artists' workshops, and economies, the absence of a chapter dedicated to a subject as fundamental to the Italian Renaissance as humanism might seem incongruous but for the fact that humanists and their questions are central to all but a few of the essays here. Humanism was never considered an autonomous field during the period in which its practices were first developed, and treating it as an organic dimension of the culture of the Italian Renaissance demonstrates the significant ways in which the energies driving that culture were effectively bilingual and interdisciplinary.[1] Similarly, the important issues raised by gender studies inform a number of the contributions here but are not addressed in a separate

[1] See the *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, Kraye (1996), for an excellent introduction to humanism considered in its broader European development.

essay.[2] Each of the chapters of this *Companion* provides a select, but by no means exhaustive, survey of the principal questions, genres, and practices evoked in their titles. Every effort has been made to provide a relevant and up-to-date bibliography, primarily in English and Italian, and especially with regard to matters necessarily touched upon only briefly.

To be sure, Jacob Burckhardt would barely recognize today the Renaissance that he has been variously praised and castigated for having "invented" in his influential study *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* [The Civilization of Italy in the Renaissance], published in Basel in 1860. Burckhardt's Renaissance was largely an intellectual and political phenomenon, a burst of energy the likes of which the world had not seen since the twilight of the classical world, the standard-bearer of a cultural history that identified in fourteenth- through sixteenth-century Italy the harbinger of modernity.[3] This sense of an inevitable historical trajectory has proved to be one of the more controversial elements of Burckhardt's project, linked as it was to a golden age that emerged from a "backward" period called the Middle Ages and followed by a similarly "retrograde" era defined as the Counter-Reformation. Anglo-American historiography of the last several decades has grown increasingly suspicious and dismissive of such value-laden periodization, and Burckhardt's Renaissance has thus been endlessly "contested," "decentered," "reframed," and even "hopelessly shattered" in scholarly debates and conferences, monographs, and collections of essays that have aimed to redefine for our own era the parameters, content, and significance of these distant centuries.[4] But as unsatisfied as so many are with the very idea of the Renaissance, it stubbornly refuses to go away, and efforts to supplant the term with the apparently less loaded but clearly more indeterminate "early modern" have failed to dislodge its place in scholarly and institutional practices, and in popular representations of it.[5]

[2] See Cox/Ferrari (2012) 7–29 for a discussion of the relatively slow assimilation of gender within Italian studies in general, and Italian academic culture in particular; and see 33–100 for a provocative series of essays and responses to them relevant to the period of the Renaissance.

[3] Woolfson (2005) 9–26 provides a balanced account of Burckhardt's argument, its sources, merits, and limitations.

[4] See, respectively, Caferro (2011); Burke (2005); Farago (1995) 1–20; and Ruggiero (2002) 3.

[5] See Findlen/Gowens (1998); Starn (2007); and Bowd (2010) 1–9. For general studies of the period, see Ruggiero (2002); Reinhardt (2004); MacKenney (2005); Brotton (2006); Crouzet-Pavan (2007); Gardini (2010); and Goody (2010).

Burckhardt would be surprised both by his alleged paternity of the Renaissance and by the rancor that his particular interpretation of the period has provoked. Many of the canonical figures of Italian Renaissance culture – Leon Battista Alberti, Flavio Biondo, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Giorgio Vasari – had already articulated from within the period in which they lived and worked a sense that something new, or newly possible, was afoot. And among Burckhardt's predecessors and contemporaries – Friedrich Otto Mencke, Étienne-Jean Delécluze, William Roscoe, Jules Michelet, Georg Voigt, and John Addington Symonds – a number of Renaissances emerged that differed in many ways from the one articulated in the *Kultur*.[6] Too often unacknowledged in critiques of Burckhardt is his avoidance of dogmatism, and the fact that he himself left the door wide open to interpreting the material that drives his narrative in an entirely different light. And it is also worth noting that the *Kultur* was not a runaway success from the very beginning. Only in the late 1920s, when the work was finally out of copyright, did it begin to exert the influence against which so much recent scholarship has sought to distance itself.[7]

To a great extent history is made by historians, not by those who live through the events that come to define the patterns which later emerge in accounts of them. To recognize the mediated character of historical knowledge is not, of course, to deny that there is such a thing as concrete historical data or that certain singular events are experienced by their subjects as epochal, but rather to see that even the most apparently unambiguous game-changer is subject to widely divergent views of it, both in its immediate wake and longer term, and depending on one's own position in relation to it. This is as much the case concerning the collapse of Soviet-bloc communism in the late 1980s or the events of September 11, 2001 as it is with the conjunction of a series of milestones in the mid fourteenth century in Italy, the moment Italian historiography has traditionally associated with the beginning of the Renaissance: Petrarch's engagement with Roman antiquity in the early 1340s; the Black Death that wiped out a third of the population of Italy (and elsewhere in Europe) beginning in 1348, and Giovanni Boccaccio's

[6] For the best survey of these various Renaissances, see Gardini (2010) 21–80. On Roscoe, see Fletcher (2012); for Symonds' seven-volume *Renaissance in Italy* (1875–86), the first systematic effort in English to deal with the period, see Quondam (2003).

[7] See Milner (2005) 15–16; and Starn (2007). On the reception of the Italian Renaissance in the twentieth century, see the essays in the volume edited by Grieco *et al.* (2002).

Decameron (1349–52), the great Italian vernacular prose testament to that pandemic's devastation; and the appearance in Italy in precisely these years of gunpowder-based weapons that would forever change the future course of armed conflict. If caution and a sensitivity to multiple points of view are requirements for understanding even recent history that has played itself out within a world familiar to us, so much more necessary then is a healthy sense of the difficulty of connecting the dots of earlier periods whose social, political, and cultural coordinates were so vastly different from our own. What will always be true of historical analysis is its contingency: the material and conceptual conditions that determine our understanding of the past shape that past no less than earlier and differing factors influenced previous historical narratives.[8]

Timelines are useful for seeing the frequently surprising juxtaposition of historical events, but it is crucial to bear in mind that history is not equivalent to linear chronology, and the boundaries between what have come to be defined as historical periods are, in fact, extraordinarily malleable. Filippo Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti, paragons of Italian Renaissance architectural style, greatly admired the medieval Romanesque aesthetic; and Dante Alighieri, the first Italian to write a substantial verse work in his mother-tongue, *La commedia* [The Divine Comedy] – a poem that resists classification in its employment of classical, medieval, and proto-Renaissance literary conventions in a wide variety of linguistic registers – also composed a theoretical treatise, *De vulgari eloquentia* [On Vernacular Eloquence], in a Latin yet untouched by the philological revolution that would define fifteenth-century humanism but which nevertheless proposed ideas about language that anticipated in a number of respects the "linguistic turn" of contemporary post-structural criticism.[9]

The Middle Ages – a nearly thousand-year period following the collapse of the Roman empire, whose heterogeneous cultures were geographically dispersed throughout Europe – is perhaps the most knotty legacy of Renaissance boundary-setting, a designation associated with the emergence of humanism in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and particularly with the figure of Petrarch, who sought to

[8] For a fascinating discussion of how such issues are addressed by a widely diverse group of art historians working on the Italian Renaissance today, see Elkins/Williams (2008), consisting of pre-circulated essays, the transcribed exchanges of a subsequent full-day seminar at the University of Cork, and a series of follow-up assessment papers.

[9] See Cestaro (2003); and Ascoli (2008) 130–74.

forge a direct link to the ancient Roman world by effectively erasing all that had occurred in the intervening millennium.[10] In spite of his undisputed importance for the recuperation of ancient Latin literature and the corresponding renewal of the Latin language, Petrarch is something of a tabula rasa in terms of defining Renaissance values: did he achieve a brilliant synthesis of "pagan" Latin culture and early Christianity; or was his sense of the normative character of ancient Roman culture and history too "easily displaced by the perspective of eternity"?[11] The Latin address that Petrarch gave on the Capitoline Hill in Rome in April 1341 on the occasion of his crowning as Poet Laureate would not seem to support either view in its lofty, apparently secular, sense of the classical scholar and the poet in direct communion with Roman antiquity, an ambitious effort at cultural re-enactment and self-promotion.[12] But such a utopic and ahistorical operation was fraught with contradictions, not least of which was Petrarch's considerable investment in his own vernacular poetry, and by much of his subsequent reflection on the priority of ethics over the veneration of the past.[13] Petrarch's peculiar sense of history would seem to encompass only the golden age of imperial Rome, relegating late antiquity and practically the entire successive medieval period to a sort of limbo outside of the history that mattered. Here there was little room for Dante, whose *Commedia* does not correspond to the limited definition of poetry as the representation through "subtle figures" of "things that have really come to pass" that Petrarch offered in his coronation address.[14] Nor is there any space for recognition of earlier moments of renewal – "Renaissances" in the ninth, tenth, and twelfth centuries nurtured by courts in northern and southern Europe as well as by the University of Paris – that provided a significant amount of the raw material upon which the later Italian Renaissance would draw (roughly three-quarters of the manuscripts "discovered" or "rediscovered" by humanists in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, for instance, were copied in Carolingian *scriptoria* in the ninth century),[15]

[10] See Witt (2000) 281–87.
[11] See, respectively, Lee (2012); and Witt (2000) 291.
[12] On Petrarch's oration, the *Collatio laureationis*, as a template for Renaissance poetic invention, see Petrina (2010); for a general introduction to the text, see Looney (2009) 131–40.
[13] Witt (2000) 239–60. [14] Petrarca (1955) 306.
[15] See Witt (2012) 29 n. 52, and in general for a comprehensive survey of European intellectual life between the Carolingian era and the late thirteenth century.

or against which it would position itself (most notably the tradition of Scholastic philosophy, stemming from the work of St. Thomas Aquinas).

Considerably more sensitive to the potential for cultural renewal through recognizing and exploiting historical continuities was Petrarch's friend and slightly younger contemporary Boccaccio. His *Genealogia deorum gentilium* [The Genealogy of the Pagan Gods, 1360–74] is among the most remarkable texts of the early Italian Renaissance given the huge arc of its subject matter, extending well beyond its ostensible purpose of cataloguing the mythology of the ancient world in 728 entries of varying length and complexity, and in its generous embrace of the possibilities inherent in cultural exchange.[16] Rather than Petrarch's exclusive privileging of the Latin literature of ancient Rome, Boccaccio is keenly aware in the *Genealogia* of Roman culture's enormous debt to Greece, and of Greece's ties to both the larger Medietteranean world and an even more remote archaic past. Though Boccaccio's knowledge of Greek was limited, the *Genealogia* was the first humanist text to take ancient Greek language and literature seriously – there are forty-five passages from Homer cited in Greek besides hundreds of others in translation or paraphrased from a wide variety of sources – and the range and depth of its learning provided access to a wealth of ancient literature that had remained largely inaccessible to Western European readers since the end of the Roman empire.[17] But in addition to the massive appropriation of classical culture in the *Genealogia*, Boccaccio also incorporated Greek and Arabic natural philosophy as well as Tuscan vernacular poetry in the service of a "holistic vision of culture that nonetheless reflects historical difference . . . a divergent model [from that of Petrarch] for overcoming the historical isolation of the modern world."[18] The amassing of information here anticipates the development of extra-monastic libraries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Petrarch had tried, unsuccessfully to bequeath his books to the city of Venice in order to create a library open to scholars), and it reflects an analogous and growing interest in the "collection, creation, and celebration of objects" that redefined

[16] For the first of three volumes of the very first English translation of the entire text together with the original Latin, with an introduction by the translator, Jon Solomon, see Boccaccio (2011).
[17] See Solomon in *ibid*. xiii–xv.
[18] Lummus (2012) 103, and in general on the significance of the *Genealogia* as an innovative account of the generation of culture.

in Renaissance Italy what it meant to "possess the past."[19] Among the most striking novelties in Boccaccio's text is its employment of perspective, a long historical view meant to establish the web of relationships that unite diverse cultures across vast spatial and temporal limits, an approach that Boccaccio would have had long acquaintance with in other media: through the technical revolution in painting initiated by Giotto and his followers in central and northern Italy; and in the carefully planned perspectival geometries of the public spaces of Florence.[20]

Perspective was also a key element in one of the most significant insights of subsequent Italian Renaissance intellectual culture: that language itself has a history. In *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante attempted to articulate an idea of the historicity of the Italian vernacular over against the prevailing medieval understanding of an immutable Latin, but more than a century would pass before Lorenzo Valla applied a method that led to a radical rethinking of the nature of all languages. In *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio* [On the Donation of Constantine, 1440], Valla showed how the Latin employed in the document long used by the Church to justify its temporal authority did not date to the fourth century CE – when the Emperor Constantine was believed to have ceded the Western empire to the papacy – but from a period almost five hundred years later. Others had earlier questioned the authenticity of the Donation, but with his extensive knowledge of the culture and language of late antique Rome Valla was the first to expose the document's lexical and stylistic anachronisms and accordingly demonstrate through the incipient tools of philology that it was indeed a forgery. While the church was predictably slow to address Valla's withering critique, the careful philological analysis employed in it opened up yet another way of thinking about history and provided a template for the reconstruction and editing of ancient texts perfected by Angelo Poliziano and other humanists later in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, work that took on increasing urgency with the rapid spread of the printed book and an ever-increasing interest in ancient authors such as Vitruvius and

[19] Findlen (1998) 86, and in general on Renaissance collecting. On libraries, see Connors/Dressen (2010).
[20] See, respectively, Edgerton (1991); and Trachtenberg (1997).

Lucretius, whose works had survived only in poorly copied or badly preserved manuscripts.[21]

In addition to its impact on the transmission of classical literature, humanist philology had a decisive influence on the editing of the Bible and the texts of the Latin and Greek church fathers. As with Valla's treatise, this renewed corpus of Christian literature raised troubling questions about the contemporary shape and direction of the church just at the moment that the papacy was beginning to reassert its primacy in Italy again, following its fourteenth-century sojourn in Avignon, the schism that erupted at the end of that period and lasted until 1417, and local Roman political infighting that only allowed for the definitive return of the pope to the Eternal City in 1443. The papal curia was filled with humanists from that point forward – Alberti and Valla among them – but the great paradox of their presence there was that even as they assisted in the creation of a monumental papal culture fashioned after the image of imperial Rome they contributed to the refinement of philological tools that would lead in the early sixteenth century to the great war of words that became the Reformation.[22] The failed effort at an internal reform of the Church in Italy is one of the least studied elements of Italian Renaissance history in Anglo-American scholarship of the period (several of the most influential Italian historians of the last century either began or defined their careers working on Italian reform: Benedetto Croce, Federico Chabod, Delio Cantimori, and Luigi Firpo), but it is crucial for understanding the tightening of cultural and political controls that led to the Council of Trent (1545–63) and its aftermath, and for the blossoming of Italian vernacular culture and its transmission abroad.[23]

The process of education in Renaissance Italy – crucial to the advancement of humanist learning, but also for the acquisition of professional skills in an expanding range of fields – can only be partially situated within the context of formal academic institutions in the period. While the innovations of humanist practices exercised a radical reform within the context of the elementary schools – Latin-based for

[21] See Valla (2007) for a concise introduction to and translations of both Valla's text and the forgery; Black (1995) on Valla's importance for the development of a specifically Renaissance idea of history; and Grafton (1977) on Poliziano's philological work. Passannante (2011) 8 on Lucretius provides a brilliant account of what it means "for a text, a poem, a philosophy to be reborn."

[22] See Celenza (2010b).

[23] See Wyatt (2005) 84–98.

the university-bound, and vernacular *abbaco* [abacus] schools with a more pragmatic focus – they had a less permanent effect on the structure of the universities of the period.[24] The recovery of and insistence upon classicizing Latin, a thorough and lasting achievement of the humanists, together with the recovery of important ancient texts on education, meant that elementary classroom materials had to be re-examined and new ones devised.[25]

The progress of humanism meant that local political leaders felt the need for a Latin-educated citizenry and these initiatives multiplied in the later sixteenth century, where they were joined by an entirely new form of school, those of Christian Doctrine, aimed not at Latin but at broader literacy.[26] The case of the universities, however, was different because of institutional inertia and professional conservatism. The medieval universities – in Italy and elsewhere in Europe – persisted in their traditional disciplinary pursuits, and the newer institutions founded by territorial princes tended to follow suit.[27] Some humanists were employed as university professors in the the fifteenth century, but if their presence in the lecture hall was limited the impact of humanist philology on a great number of the texts used throughout the university curriculum was more important.[28] Law and medicine, together with related scientific disciplines, were the most significant fields taught in Italian universities of the Renaissance – the former strongly marked by medieval scholastic analysis, and the latter by their medieval Aristotelian inheritance – while theology, so important in northern European universities, was a late and not particularly important entry in the curricular mix.[29] Though universities were not crucial to the development of the Renaissance they were certainly important to its diffusion,

[24] For the best concise survey of schools, see Black (2004); for more comprehensive studies, see Grendler (1989) and Black (2001); and for studies of schools in different regions, see Gehl (1993); Vecce (2006); Black (2007); and Carlsmith (2010)

[25] See Kallendorf (2002) and (2013); Percival (2004); and Gehl (2008). See Richardson, "Publication," Chapter 7 in this volume, 173, for a primer intended for learners outside the school system.

[26] See Carlsmith (2010) 145–69; on the question of literacy in Renaissance Italy, see Burke (1987).

[27] See Grendler (2002); Terlizzo (2010); and Rundle/Petrina (2013) on Italian universities in the period.

[28] See Grendler (2002) 510. In this volume, see Campanelli, "Languages," Chapter 6, 145–46; and Perillo, "Philosophy," Chapter 12, 266–70.

[29] On the law curriculum, see Grendler (2002) 430–73. On medicine, see Wear *et al.* (1985); and Park/Penutto, "Science and Medicine," Chapter 17 in this volume, 366, 368–73.

and northern European students who came to study in Italy were among the Italian university system's most significant legacy.[30] Much of the innovative intellectual foment of the period occurred in other forums, allowing not only for the exploration of topics and practices outside of the purview of schools and universities, but also permitting the active participation of women.[31]

One of the most problematic issues in confronting the period of the Renaissance in Italy is the question of Italy itself. After the gradual disintegration of the ancient Roman empire, Italy would not again be unified as a political entity until 1870, and the geographical area of the Italian peninsula and its islands in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries was fragmented into a great number of states of varying sizes, the entire area convulsed by foreign invasions beginning in 1494 and lasting though 1559. A recent map representing each of the administrative units mentioned in the treaty known as the Lega Italica in 1455 (an alliance of almost all of the recognized Italian political actors active at that time) provides a striking picture of the situation: though five political authorities commanded the greater part of the territory – the Kingdom of Naples (including the Kingdom of Sicily), under Spanish rule after 1442; the Duchy of Milan; the Republics of Venice and Florence; and the Papal States – the remaining states scattered throughout Italy numbered over 115 (some of them obviously quite small), a figure that does not include several others such as Rimini and the Republic of Genoa, not party to the agreement.[32] Works from the period such as Flavio Biondo's *Italia illustrata* [Italy Expounded, 1474] and Leandro Alberti's *Descrittione di tutta Italia* [Description of All of Italy, 1551] proposed accounts of Italian unity based on geography (Alberti was the first to situate Sicily and Sardegna in Italy; and Ignazio Danti supervised the painting of the frescoed maps of the territory painted in the Vatican Gallery of Maps in 1580–83), while the *Historia d'Italia* [History of Italy, 1561] by Francesco Guicciardini paints a pessimistic picture of the peninsula between 1492 and 1534,

[30] See Woolfson (1998) and (2013).
[31] See below in this chapter, 14 n. 43; Grafton/Jardine (1986); Stevenson (2005) 141–76; Sanson (2011); and Shemek, "Verse", Chapter 8 in this volume, 185–86, 200.
[32] See the map in Somaini (2012) facing 112, and 51–60 for his discussion of it. For a general history of Italy in this period, including a significant examination of the middle and lower social classes, see the introduction and essays in Najemy (2004); and for more detailed considerations of the Italian states, see Gamberini/Lazzarini (2012).