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## HUMANISM IN ITALY

HUMANISM enjoys a very high prestige among modern intellectual currents; it is connected with a great number of basic philosophical ideas, and is usually considered as having had its source in Italy. What actually was Italian humanism?

Humanism is best defined as the rise of classical scholarship, of the *studia humanitatis* (a term used in the general sense of literary education by ancient Roman authors like Cicero and taken up by Italian scholars of the late fourteenth century), during the Renaissance. There had been several revivals of classical studies during the Middle Ages—notably by scholars of Charlemagne's court—and then especially in the twelfth century, when the works of ancient Latin writers served as models for contemporary authors. These "Protorenaissances," as they are generally called, did not, however, survive very long, nor did they penetrate so deeply into the consciousness of the time as did the Renaissance humanism of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The humanism of the twelfth century, i.e., the grammatical and classical studies which formed part of the curriculum of French cathedral schools, was overshadowed and replaced by scholastic philosophy and theology and by the study of Roman and canon law (which had originally been part of twelfth-century humanism) in the universities of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and it is hardly admissible to call scholastic philosophers, such as Thomas Aquinas, humanists, simply because they were indebted in their work to Greek philosophy. It was in Italy that classical studies started to blossom again about 1300, and finally witnessed their lasting revival in the fifteenth century. Prior to the thirteenth century, Italy had been lagging behind in the cultural development of Europe. In classical studies, it had little that could match the highlights of twelfth-century French humanism. Yet Italy had a tangible and persistent tradition that connected her Middle Ages with ancient Rome, mainly in the practice and study of Roman law and of grammar and rhetoric—which were not limited to clerics, but were also widespread among laymen. Furthermore, the geographical position of Italy exposed her to the Greek tradition of Byzantium.

Italian humanism was largely rooted in the field of Italian classical tradition proper—in grammar and rhetoric, in epistolography and oratory. The study of these subjects, the so-called *ars dictaminis*, had begun at Montecassino or Bologna about 1100 and had spread from there to other regions, reaching a new climax in Capua at the time of the Emperor Frederick II (1215–50). It was then continued by the rising humanism of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Here

the path from the medieval tradition into Renaissance humanism is most evident. Yet the early Italian humanists were eager to apply classical standards in their grammar, rhetoric, and oratory. Thus the art of letter-writing and of oratory underwent a slow but considerable change in the course of the fourteenth century. The style of Cicero and of other classical authors became more influential than before (as could be seen in the letters of Geri of Arezzo shortly after 1300), although neither the characteristics of technical medieval Latin nor those of twelfth-century Italian and French rhetorical tradition disappeared. Even as late as about 1400, a humanist like Coluccio Salutati combined, in his numerous letters, stylistic elements of medieval chanceries, twelfth-century French epistolography, and the letters of Cicero.

It was most important that the Italian humanists, from the fourteenth century onwards, attained a notable influence in elementary and university education, where they soon held the professorships of grammar, rhetoric, and poetry. Thus, during the first half of the century, the *studia humanitatis*, the "humanities," became a well-defined cycle of scholarly disciplines that included the study of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy, i.e., a broad spectrum of secular learning independent of—but not necessarily irreconcilable with—other scholarly disciplines of the university curriculum, such as theology, metaphysics, natural philosophy, medicine, and mathematics. It was among the scholars of Italian universities that the word *umanista* (in the vernacular, whence it was taken over into Latin as *humanista*) was first applied to the professors and students of rhetoric. The earliest examples that have so far come to light appear, however, as late as the end of the fifteenth century (Campana). Soon afterwards the word was also applied to the students of classical learning. (The abstract noun "humanism" is of even later origin; it was first used by German scholars of the early nineteenth century.)

Characteristic of the Renaissance humanists was a familiarity with classical Latin and Greek (later also with Hebrew) language and literature, from which they derived their stylistic ideals; there was also a certain degree of philological and historical criticism related to their widespread contempt for medieval culture, and showing a serious concern with moral problems. They were convinced that they were living in an age of a rebirth of learning and literature.

According to the traditional opinion (Voigt and others), Italian humanism started with Petrarch. However, recent studies (Weiss, 1969; Kristeller, *Eight . . . Philosophers . . .*) have ventured to include the so-called pre-humanists, i.e., the Paduan circle with Albertino Mussato, Geri of Arezzo, and others, in the discussion of early humanism. As far as its terminal



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time limit is concerned, many modern students of Italy tend to restrict the period of humanism to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, reserving the Renaissance to the sixteenth, and thus distinguishing humanism and Renaissance as two different intellectual movements. Other modern scholars are inclined to restrict Italian humanism to the first half of the fifteenth century. If, however, the definition of humanism as the revival of classical scholarship during the Renaissance is accepted, Italian humanism survived far into the sixteenth century, although it passed its peak around 1500. After the middle of the sixteenth century, scholars became increasingly aware that they had not only matched but in most fields surpassed the example of the ancients, and that progress was no longer dependent on an imitation of classical models, but on their own originality. The seventeenth century saw the beginning of a new period in philosophy and science, as humanist traditions gave way to more modern conceptions. The revivals of classical thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were limited to literature, the visual arts, moral philosophy, and education, but did not involve science, where the ancients could no longer be considered as masters.

The basis for the spread of the knowledge of ancient Roman literature was the discovery and diffusion by the humanists of manuscripts of classical authors (Sabbadini). Many Roman authors, like Vergil, Ovid, and Seneca, were well-known and widely read during the Middle Ages, while others, such as Lucretius, Tacitus, and Manilius, although extant in a few but neglected medieval manuscripts, had to be rediscovered by the humanists. Of others, like Cicero, a number of works were widely diffused during the Middle Ages, while the rest were relatively unknown. In the case of Cicero, for example, his *Brutus*, his letters, and many orations were rediscovered, and the humanists became familiar with certain trends in his thought that had been little known before. One of the foremost achievements of the Italian humanists in the field of classical scholarship was that they not only rediscovered forgotten ancient Latin literature, but also did extensive work first as copyists, editors, and later as printers (e.g., Aldus Manutius in Venice) of Roman classics, thus ensuring their wide diffusion. This activity was combined with an effort to perfect the techniques of textual criticism and of historical interpretation by an intense study of classical Latin spelling, grammar, rhetoric, history, mythology, epigraphy, archeology, and similar subjects. In this way, the humanists soon far surpassed the medieval knowledge of ancient Rome and of classical literature.

516 Italian humanism reached its maturity during the fifteenth century with the study of Greek. There was

still at this time some knowledge of Greek in parts of Calabria and the Salentino (Terra d'Otranto), where a Greek population, clergy, and liturgy had survived the Norman occupation and lingered on until the sixteenth century. But the medieval Byzantine remnants in southern Italy were too meager to give a decisive impulse to the Renaissance revival of Greek learning—despite the fact that it was from a Calabrian monk, Barlaam (who had probably been partly educated in Constantinople), that Petrarch acquired some very elementary knowledge of Greek. There had been some sporadic knowledge of Greek in the early Middle Ages and some translating from the Greek in the West, mainly of Aristotle, since the twelfth century. The translators had acquired their knowledge of the Greek language and literature either in the East or in southern Italy. Their translations were mainly a word-by-word rendering of the Greek text into Latin without a firm understanding of grammar and syntax. In typical scholastic fashion they showed little genuine interest in literary style. Efforts to teach Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic at the universities were mostly futile. The decisive impetus to Greek studies came with the first arrival of Greek scholars (like Manuel Chrysoloras), with the participants (e.g., Bessarion) of the Ecumenical Council of Florence (1438–39), and then with the Greek scholars who fled to Italy after the downfall of the Byzantine Empire (1453).

At this time and even after the Turkish occupation, many Italians such as Aurispa, Tortelli, Filelfo, Ciriaco of Ancona, and others went to Constantinople and Greece (which remained partly under Venetian domination for a long time to come) to study Greek language and literature, and to acquire manuscripts of the classical authors. After 1450, there was a rapid increase in exact Latin translations of classical Greek literature (which had been studied almost uninterruptedly in the Byzantine East during the preceding centuries, but was relatively unknown in the West) such as the works of Homer, Plato, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Isocrates, and others. Furthermore, the humanists provided new and better versions of the earlier translations. This marked the beginning of Greek philology in the West, and it entailed a growing interest, not only in Greek and Byzantine philosophy and theology, but also in Greek grammar, rhetoric, mythology, and history.

Greek scholars in the West were to a great extent responsible for the preservation of classical texts that might otherwise have been lost after the occupation of the Byzantine East by the Turks. Many Greek manuscripts were brought to Italy, copied there, and later issued in printed editions. A considerable part of the literary production of the humanists consists of letters.

As chancellors or secretaries to popes, princes, and republics, it was their official duty to draft letters and manifestos furthering the interests of their employers, and the Florentine state letters are especially interesting sources for the history of political thought and propaganda. The greater part of this correspondence is still unpublished. They are mostly preserved in the registers of the chanceries and in the widely diffused humanistic letter collections, which served mainly literary and stylistic purposes as examples for other writers. The transmission of such letters was very similar to the transmission of medieval letters (some manuscripts even contain collections of medieval and humanistic letters together). Beside such official correspondence, the humanists wrote many private letters of literary significance, but in many cases it is difficult to draw a distinction between private and official letters. Some of the private letters grew into short treatises or essays of scholarly or literary content.

The humanists also drafted numerous speeches (or orations), of which a great number have been preserved. Most of them were inspired by specific occasions, such as weddings, funerals, university ceremonies, visits of princes, etc., and the rhetorical elements are dominant. Examples of political and forensic speeches are rarer. The individualistic and propagandistic aspects of humanistic literature also became evident in the many invectives the humanists used to defame either their rivals, or the political opponents of princes and republics in whose service they stood. They are part of the rhetorical tradition and their content should not be taken too seriously, as the humanists themselves often considered them to be merely pieces of literary exercise rather than of personal engagement. The same is true of the numerous eulogies of princes and communes, arts and sciences. Humanist prose literature, besides imitating classical models, also borrowed from the vernacular literature. Thus the *novella* became popular among the humanists who translated such short stories into Latin and also composed original pieces. Even more popular were collections of anecdotes and of facetious stories.

To the humanists, poetry was an art that, to a great extent, could be taught and learned. It consisted mainly of the study of poetics and verse-making and of the interpretation and imitation of ancient poets. The coronation of poets—which began at Padua with the honoring of Albertino Mussato in 1314 and is best known from Petrarch's coronation by the Roman Senate in 1341—was little more than an academic degree granted less for pieces of original poetry than for versatility in verse-making, composition, and interpretation of ancient poetical works (Kristeller). As the art of verse-making was less developed in Italy than

in France before the second half of the thirteenth century, the Paduan group of pre-humanists, Albertino Mussato, Lovato Lovati, Geremia of Montagnone, and Rolando of Piazzola (all of them professional lawyers) may have been stimulated by French examples. Nevertheless, humanist Latin drama played an important role in the rise of vernacular dramatic literature during the sixteenth century. Latin eclogues, satires, and pastoral poems exerted a strong influence on vernacular lyrical poetry.

Examples of the more demanding kinds of classical poems, such as odes, were less frequent among humanists because of their metrical difficulties. Epic poems were widespread, including verse translations of Homer, as well as Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Many of them, beginning with Petrarch's *Africa*, deal with subjects of ancient history and ancient mythology. Others are epic versions of biblical and theological subjects, such as the life of Christ and the lives of the saints. Still others are didactic poems on natural history, astrology, and other arts and sciences. This kind of epic poetry was in no way an invention of the humanists. It was widespread during the Middle Ages, and the humanists mainly improved the style and the meter by imitating classical examples more closely than medieval authors had done. The largest part of humanist poetry, however, consisted of elegies and epigrams. Elegies composed after the models of Ovid, Tibullus, and Propertius are among the best specimens of poetry that the humanists have left. Although to a great extent conventional in their contents, the elegies of Poliziano, Pontano, and others sometimes show a poetical perfection and a beauty of imagery that is rare in other kinds of humanistic poetry.

In the long run, Italian humanists showed no aversion to the vernacular in principle (Kristeller, in *Renaissance Thought* II, 119ff., 130ff.; Migliorini; Dionisotti). They certainly preferred Latin during the fourteenth century and also later in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when they wished to give their works a wide diffusion among an international audience of scholars and educated people. The vernacular (*Volgare*), however, was used for works and especially letters that were intended for an Italian public, and the more so if the recipients were poorly educated and not able to read or understand Latin. The state letters of the Florentine chancery, which was dominated by humanist chancellors like Salutati, Bruni, and Poggio, may serve as an example to demonstrate this. As they were addressed to recipients with different educational backgrounds, one may expect that the humanist chancellors took this into consideration when choosing the language in which their respective letters were written. But Salutati used the vernacular in only a few

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instances, the bulk of his state letters being in Latin regardless of their recipients. Under Bruni and later the situation underwent a complete change. An ever increasing part of the letters (up to one half and more), especially those addressed to uneducated condottieri and statesmen like Francesco Sforza, were now written in *Volgare*, while those addressed to communes were written either in Latin or in the vernacular—with no obvious reasons for the choice in many cases except, perhaps, that it was easier to express one's thoughts more frankly and directly in the vernacular than in rhetorical Latin. On the whole, the development of vernacular literature in the fifteenth century was not seriously hampered by the humanists, and some of them even had a considerable share in this development.

The contribution of the Italian humanists to the reform of handwriting is still evident today. During the thirteenth century, Gothic script, characterized by compression, angularity, and the fusion of letters, had prevailed almost everywhere in Europe. Its characteristics had not become as extreme in Italy as elsewhere. In Bologna especially a more rounded type was used. The early humanists, such as Petrarch and Salutati, preferred manuscripts in a clear, legible writing, in *littera antiqua*, which was the script of the ninth to the twelfth centuries, the Caroline minuscule. Petrarch, Boccaccio, and others, in their personal handwriting, tried to avoid the extremes of Gothic script. The decisive initiative towards a more radical reform of book script was undertaken by Salutati when around 1400 he started imitating the earlier Caroline minuscule. His initiative was soon taken up by his pupil Poggio, the actual inventor of humanistic book minuscule. The result was an imitation of Caroline minuscule.

The most common form of humanistic cursive was invented by Niccolò Niccoli about two decades later. Further research is necessary regarding the genesis of humanistic cursive and the diffusion of humanistic script in general—research which should take into account the material preserved in archives. Both kinds of humanistic script, the book hand invented by Poggio and the cursive of Niccoli, were preferred by the Medici and by the early Italian printers (Niccoli's cursive developed into the italic type of Aldus Manutius) and eventually developed into the present-day antiqua and italic types. Handwriting and print are thus a living heritage of the human striving for clarity through calligraphy.

A moral aspect is clearly evident in humanistic historiography. The humanists shared the belief that one of the most important tasks of historical writing was to teach moral lessons by means of examples from many classical and medieval authors. Great person-

alities of the past were to be presented to the reader as models worthy of imitation. This basic intention gave rise to an extensive biographical literature dealing with the lives of famous ancient and contemporary personalities, princes, saints, scholars, poets, artists, and other distinguished citizens. The underlying belief was that human nature was basically the same at all times and that it was therefore possible to study the ancients as models of human conduct, to learn from their mistakes, and to imitate their achievements. Humanist historians thus lacked all understanding of the genetic and evolutionary aspects of history. Their opinion that history teaches by example is basically the same (even if presented in a more secularized form) as that held by many medieval historians. Compared with medieval historiography, humanist historical writing, however, lost its universal aspects. History was no longer embedded in the divine plan of salvation; it centered around limited and well-defined subjects—cities or states. Little thought was given to the theory of history, except that some humanists took over the cyclical theory of history from ancient authors, i.e., the conception that the historical process is characterized by endless repetition, always leading back to its starting point.

The limitation of historical writing to circumscribed subjects, such as principalities and city-states, eventually brought about a closer contact between history and politics, although the beginnings of this development, in Florence and Milan for example, are to be found in the preceding medieval centuries. The humanist device of placing the founding dates of important Italian cities in Roman times is also a continuation of medieval myths. A great amount of humanist historiography was connected with the professional activities of their authors as chancellors and secretaries to princes and cities for which they had acted as official historians. Their style is often highly rhetorical, the contents impaired by errors, eulogy, and deliberate bias and by the introduction of fictitious speeches. On the other hand, the humanists (as did medieval authors before them) used original documents from the archives, and their philological approach resulted in some historical criticism, especially as far as ancient history was concerned. On the whole, however, their contribution to the development of historical writing was limited, their works often vague, superficial and sometimes even inferior to medieval historiography, if we take modern historical criteria of concreteness and objectivity. Real progress in historiography began with Francesco Guicciardini.

The diffusion of Italian humanism from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries took place mainly through personal contact and, later on, through the

press. Hundreds of students from north of the Alps attended Italian universities, where they became acquainted with the *studia humanitatis* while studying law or medicine, these being subjects for which Italian universities were famous. During this period the humanistic movement and the Renaissance civilization secured Italy a position of cultural predominance that it had never possessed during the Middle Ages and was never to possess again.

Italians, on the other hand, visited the regions north of the Alps, mainly in the retinue of the Papal Curia or of cardinals, secular princes, and princesses, and as participants of the church councils. Many of them entered, at least temporarily, the service of foreign princes. Others went abroad to teach or study at French, German, and English universities, while native scholars who had studied the humanistic disciplines in Italy received professorships of grammar and rhetoric, and thus introduced the *studia humanitatis* into universities like Basel, Erfurt, Louvain, Vienna, Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge. Not only the classical authors, but also works of Italian humanists became part of the curriculum and thus became well-known. The contacts were further intensified by widespread correspondence and a diffusion of manuscripts and books between Italian humanists and their counterparts in countries abroad. In this way, entire libraries consisting of manuscripts and books of Italian origin were brought together, such as the libraries of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, in England, and of King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary. Humanism in other European countries reached its climax at the end of the fifteenth and during the sixteenth century, when Italian humanism was already in decline.

Humanism is often believed to have been a predominantly philosophical movement, but the prerequisite for an understanding of humanistic phenomena seems to be the common background that all humanists shared, namely the literary and scholarly ideal of the study of classical antiquity. Asserting that humanism was primarily a literary movement does not, however, imply that it lacked philosophical implications. The humanists undoubtedly exerted an indirect influence on philosophical thought in general through their methodological and philological contributions. But most of them showed little interest in logic (except Valla, Agricola, and a few others), metaphysics, or natural philosophy; their preoccupation with questions of moral and political philosophy was more personal than systematic, their foremost aim being the education and moral perfection of man—the combination of eloquence and wisdom, of intellectual and practical abilities. In this sense humanists like Guarino of Verona and Vittorino da Feltre became very successful teach-

ers in the fifteenth century. Most of the humanists' philosophical writing (in the proper sense) was either derived from classical sources (which thus became better known) or served educational, literary, and even rhetorical purposes, where stylistic elegance was often more important than philosophical depth or logical accuracy. Treatises like those of Salutati, Bruni, Poggio, Valla, Filelfo, and others served limited purposes and appear rather void of coherence and substance if compared with works of ancient or scholastic philosophers.

In many cases, the humanists were more eager to discuss several opinions on a given philosophical, moral, or political issue than to betray their personal convictions. It has justly been pointed out that even Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and his *Principe*, with their apparently irreconcilable differences of political attitudes, must still be viewed as part of the humanistic tradition (Gilbert). Most of the subjects were conventional, including such topics as happiness and the supreme good, the power of fortune in relation to human reason, the educational value of classical authors, the comparison between republican and monarchical governments and between elective and hereditary monarchy (on this point humanists like Salutati could simultaneously arrive at entirely opposite conclusions), the question of nobility (the humanists usually appeared to prefer nobility by merit to nobility by birth), the advantages of the active or the contemplative life, of married rather than single life (and vice versa), of laymen over clerics or monks, and the merits of certain arts and sciences. Concerning all of these subjects the humanists expressed so many different views—the same author often arriving at completely contrasting conclusions—that it is hardly permissible to regard any of the pertinent opinions as characteristic of Italian humanism in general or even of an individual humanist. On the whole there were no specific philosophical doctrines characteristic of the humanist movement, but rather numerous philosophical ideas expressed by individual humanists.

Furthermore, there were many philosophers and scientists in this period whose basic education was undoubtedly humanist, but whose works were influenced by other traditions and ideas and thus cannot be satisfactorily explained by their humanistic starting point alone. The negative attitude of many humanists towards scholasticism ought to be seen against the background of the emphasis they placed on rhetorical, literary, and moral subjects. In a way it was thus a continuation of the medieval battle of the arts. Medieval philosophy of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was based mainly on Aristotle and some Neo-Platonic sources. The humanists effectively enlarged this basis by making accessible the works of Plato,

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Plotinus, Diogenes Laërtius, Lucretius and the Epicureans, Epictetus and the Stoics, the Sceptics, and many others. These new sources consequently brought a new stream of ideas into Western philosophy. The overriding authority of Aristotle was no longer generally recognized, but the humanists even contributed to the better understanding of Aristotle himself by replacing the insufficient medieval translations with new ones that showed a better understanding of the Greek text, and also by making accessible the Greek commentators of Aristotle that now replaced the medieval Arabic and Latin commentaries. The Stoics had a considerable influence on Renaissance scholars. Besides, Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Francesco Patrizi became adherents of Plato; Lorenzo Valla was a follower of Epicurus. In this way, a great variety of philosophical schools developed as a result of humanistic studies. The further history of these schools should, however, be separated from the cultural contribution of humanism, insofar as they included many studies, such as metaphysics and cosmology, that were alien to the humanist tradition. Strictly speaking, the Platonists, the later Aristotelians, and the natural philosophers of the sixteenth century do not fall into the mainstream of the humanist movement.

On the other hand, the contents of humanistic writing were not limited to moral and philosophical thought, for we also find a great variety of attitudes towards Christian religion among the humanists. There was certainly much talk about the pagan gods and heroes within the framework of allegory and astrology, but hardly any of the Italian humanists seriously intended to revive ancient pagan cults. Humanism was neither Christian nor anti-Christian. The philological and literary orientation of the movement simply gave rise to different religious attitudes expressed by individual humanists, extending from piety and devotion to pantheism, skepticism, indifference, agnosticism, and even atheism, although many of the characteristic views were cloaked in rhetorical fashion or in allegories, and do not betray the innermost conviction of their authors. Accusations of secret or overt atheism often resulted from literary feuds among humanists and should not be taken too seriously.

Modern scholars, and some politicians, have added complications by applying aprioristic conceptions—Christian, liberal, or atheist—in their evaluation of humanism. For example, there has been a widespread tendency among Anglo-Saxon and German Protestant historians to regard not only Erasmus (because he did not become a partisan of Luther) but even more the Italian humanists as pagan, irreligious, and immoral. But not even the most skeptical humanists undertook a general critique of Christianity, as was

done by eighteenth century philosophers. Those humanists—from Petrarch and the Florentine Augustinians to Ambrogio Traversari, Erasmus, and Thomas More—who took a genuine interest in theology, showed an approach to this subject similar to that of others condemning scholastic theology, i.e., the application of logic and dialectics to theology, and advocating the return to the original sources of Christian doctrine, the Bible, and the Church Fathers (especially Saint Augustine). Their intention was to harmonize humanist learning with the essentials of Christian religion based on these sources. To this end, Italian humanists like Valla and Manetti applied their newly developed method of textual criticism to the study of the Bible and the Latin Church Fathers, later to be followed by Erasmus and others. They translated the Greek Fathers, such as Basil, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, and others. Furthermore, they applied textual and historical criticism to the study of church history; Valla's attack on the Donation of Constantine serving as a famous example.

Thus the humanists had their share in the rise of Protestant and Catholic church reforms during the sixteenth century, in which personalities with a humanist background, such as Melancthon, Calvin, many Italian heretics, and Jesuits played an important role, while many others preferred an attitude of religious toleration and reconciliation that soon came under attack from the Protestant as well as from the Catholic side. But there were other humanists who emphasized certain elements of natural religion and theology without directly interfering with specific doctrines of the Church. Still other humanists were adherents (in their theology) of the medieval doctrines of realism and nominalism. Yet it seems hardly admissible to derive humanism from medieval religious schools (like Thomism) or from the medieval tradition, as it seems equally mistaken to divide humanism and Reformation into two different periods. Generally speaking, one can say that the humanists north of the Alps—especially in Germany and England, and partly also in Spain—were more deeply concerned with theology and religion than were the Italian humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, among whom secular elements prevailed. These humanists supported the further growth of nonreligious interests and attitudes in contrast to the religious ideas of Italian humanists like Petrarch and the Augustinians a century earlier.

Humanism provided the cultural soil and classical background for the growth of science or natural philosophy, by making available new or better texts and translations of pertinent classical authors. Of course scientific progress was not primarily dependent on

humanistic studies. To some degree, the importance attributed to certain classical authors was an obstacle rather than a contributing factor to scientific research. On the other hand, the "medieval" Parisian and Paduan Aristotelians of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had, to a certain extent, paved the way for modern science, and even Galileo was still under the influence of the Paduan school.

Progress in science during the fifteenth century was not spectacular; the real turning point did not occur before the sixteenth and advanced most rapidly in the seventeenth century. The knowledge of Greek and Arabic authors sometimes helped to overcome erroneous conceptions of the Middle Ages (as the medieval tradition could help to overcome errors diffused by ancient scientific literature). Knowledge of Greek and Arabic science served mainly as a point of departure for independent mathematical reasoning and empirical observation. Thus, for example, Nicolaus Copernicus, who had acquired humanist learning in Italy, came to his revolutionary views concerning the nature of the solar system by analyzing, mainly by theoretic reasoning, the different cosmologies of the ancient "mathematicians" (i.e., astronomers) and by replacing the Ptolemaic system with a heliocentric system that he defended as Pythagorean. On the other hand, the occult tradition with its precedents in late antiquity (e.g., astrology) or in Arabic scientific writing (e.g., in alchemy and magic) found a fertile soil in Renaissance society. It was a serious obstacle to scientific progress and was not finally overcome before the seventeenth century. The rapid increase in scientific knowledge and technology in the following centuries was mainly due to the close cooperation, and even identity, of scholars, craftsmen, and artisans characteristic of Western civilization of this period. Many of the newly discovered ancient scientific conceptions had to be singled out and appropriated, and the natural philosophy of the Aristotelians had to be successfully attacked by Galileo before the final breakthrough of physical science occurred in the seventeenth century.

Here the Platonist tradition with its mathematical conception of the universe and its notion of cosmic harmony was especially strong, but not always in a positive way, because of the preference given to number symbolism and astrology. While Kepler's relationship with Platonism is beyond dispute, Galileo's adherence to it is a controversial matter—although it is generally admitted that his claim for the certainty of mathematical knowledge is Platonic, while other essential experimental aspects of his thought are not. It was Galileo who took a decisive step forward by applying mathematical and experimental methods to the solution of problems of physics.

Renaissance medicine was still influenced by Aristotelians like Galen and Avicenna, but freed itself, through observation and experiment in anatomy and surgery, from outdated medical theories. The humanists' main contribution lay in the fact that they translated into Latin several writings of Hippocrates and Galen that had not been translated in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In biology, progress was made within the Aristotelian tradition during the sixteenth century. In geography, the humanists for the first time translated two most valuable Greek sources, Strabo and Ptolemy.

In the field of art, humanist learning profoundly influenced Renaissance architecture and the iconography and the style of Renaissance painting. Little was known of ancient music, but ancient musical theories were used as a justification of new developments in Renaissance music that lay outside the proper realm of humanist scholarship. The reading of the relevant passages in Plato's *Timaeus* may have influenced Marsilio Ficino, an enthusiastic amateur in music and author of several treatises on musical theory.

In law, the traditions of the canonists and legists developed at Bologna and other universities continued through the Renaissance period. Their method was dialectical and systematic; the authorities collected in the *Decretum Gratiani*, the *Decretals*, and the *Corpus iuris civilis* were quoted and harmonized with little regard to their historical development. This legal tradition, often referred to as *mos Italicus*, as it was most widely spread at the Italian universities, now came under the attack of the humanists. The new method which they propagated, and which did not reach its full development before the sixteenth century, became known under the name of *mos Gallicus*. The method of dialectical reconciliation of legal authorities, "harmony from dissonance" (Kuttner), without regard for their historical background, was replaced by a philological and historical interpretation of Roman law. This tendency, although it weakened the actual influence of Roman law on legal practice, resulted in a deeper though still limited historical understanding of it. But on the whole, the medieval traditions of the canon and civil lawyers and the notaries with their glosses, commentaries, formularies, questions, and opinions remained very strong throughout the entire period of Italian humanism. Many of those lawyers who had a humanistic education did not abandon the traditional legal method, as can be clearly seen in Florence and elsewhere.

From the sociological point of view, humanism was not restricted to any one class. Yet, on the whole, as one might expect in the surroundings of Italian urban civilization, the bourgeois element prevailed. Many humanists were of humble origin and yet worked their



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way up to become members of the upper classes (as was also true of other scholars) and part of the *noblesse de robe*. Many of them collected large incomes as lawyers, secretaries, notaries, and chancellors. Others, like Niccolò Niccoli in Florence, were born as members of the oligarchy and later squandered their rich inheritance by investing their money, as dead capital, in large libraries. Generally speaking, the picture of the poor humanist scholar living on his idealism and on the favor of princes sprang from a generalization of some individual occurrences, and can be considered as largely mythical—although there were instances of (at least temporary) poverty and dire need.

Social considerations may serve better to explain certain elements of Italian humanism, such as the propagandistic-rhetorical attitude of the "republican" circle around Salutati and Bruni in Florence, or certain phenomena of Italian humanism at the courts of Italian princes, but there is no general sociological criterion that can explain the great variety of Italian humanists. As teachers the humanists were often successfully engaged in educating the children of princes and of the urban patriciate, many of whom became convinced that their social status required a humanist education. But the diffusion and the depth of such education should not be exaggerated. The reading public of the humanists consisted of fellow scholars, students, a minority of educated businessmen, and some learned princes and noblemen. It was not until the sixteenth century that an increasing number of people of the middle class became interested in humanistic literature.

In Florence, where a republican form of government had been preserved during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, humanists like Salutati, Bruni, Palmieri, Alberti, Niccoli, and Poggio—many of them as chancellors to the republic—became especially involved in the *vita activa* (the active life of city politics), and championed the ideal of man taking a responsible part in public affairs.

An individualist outlook prevailed in this regard also, and different humanists held different views. While the Florentines praised the ideal of active life, others favored a life of contemplation. While the Florentine humanists subordinated their lives to the interests of the republic, others emphasized the uniqueness of the individual and the resulting strife for personal honor and glory. Since the Florentine humanists had worked their way up to become members of the upper class of society, or belonged to that class by birth, they naturally supported the policy of the ruling oligarchy and its struggle for communal independence, the more so as many of them had been born outside Florence (such as Bruni in Arezzo, whose loyalty to Florence was never beyond doubt) and had to overcome, by

pronounced and increasing support of the Florentine cause, the natural suspicion of the native patriciate. Salutati, chancellor from 1375 to 1406, still propagated the ideology of Guelphism, i.e., communal liberty and cooperation with the papacy and France, at a time when the ideology had long lost its political foundations (adding, however, reminiscences of classical political thought). Bruni, however developed the ideal of republican liberty, which was originally an old Guelph concept but which now received a fresh inspiration from the study of Republican Rome. Ideas like these were spread during the struggle between Florence and Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan (died 1402), but their rhetorical and propagandistic purposes were too evident, and they apparently had little influence on the political conceptions of the governing oligarchy, as the unpublished minutes of the consultations of the Signoria show. Bruni did not even apply the political ideas of his literary works in his official correspondence, and on the whole Florentine politics in the fifteenth century was little affected by humanistic ideologies.

The realistic attitude that we observe in the policy of the commune was largely due to a political experience that went back to the thirteenth century. Classical models played a certain, but not a decisive role in overcoming the medieval outlook and in strengthening the determination to preserve communal liberty. This largely coincided with the political interests of the ruling oligarchy and showed little regard for the "liberty" of other communes such as Pisa and Arezzo. Appeals for popular government did not result in the participation of a larger section of the city's population in the government of Florence. Florentine "civic" humanism, though it sometimes strengthened "republican" tendencies, was to some extent a literary fashion, and its actual impact on Florentine politics is proved, by a mass of unpublished material, to have been rather weak. Salutati, for example, expressly stated that he did not take most of his rhetorical outbursts against "tyrannical" Milan too seriously; he and others rather considered themselves to be part of the entire humanistic movement with its mainly literary and scholarly interests. Besides, there was a great variety of humanistic writing in Florence, much of it unaffected by the political issues of the Salutati-Bruni circle.

The defense of monarchy was taken up by other humanists under Milanese rule, such as Antonio Loschi and Pier Candido Decembrio, and it became a literary fashion with some humanists. The question of whether Caesar was to be preferred to Scipio and Brutus was an interesting subject for comparing the relative merits of monarchical and republican government. Political theory had long been a part of moral philosophy, and the humanists' interests in this field has to be viewed

in this light. Beside "republicanism," there was a strong component of monarchical thought in humanistic political theory. This is especially true of the sixteenth century, but even Salutati toyed with similar ideas when he wrote two treatises on hereditary and elective monarchy proving simultaneously the advantages of each of them over the other respectively. Italian humanism as a whole, because of its literary and philological starting point, was politically neutral; it could serve the purposes of "despotic" rulers as well as those of "republican" communes. Even in Florence, where humanists continued to defend the republican form of government during the fifteenth century, champions of "republicanism" like Bruni later acquiesced with the increasing manipulation of republican government by the Medici.

In most of the subjects discussed here, Italian humanism changed the intellectual climate, gradually overcame medieval traditions, and paved the way for the future. It survived the Protestant and Catholic Reformations of the sixteenth century. In philosophy and science, both subjects that have held key positions in the evolution of the modern mind, humanism was superseded, during the seventeenth century, by new developments started by Descartes and Galileo, but at least partly prepared by Renaissance humanism. In other fields, such as literature, arts, and education, humanistic ideas survived or were revived during the following centuries. Thus the contribution of Italian humanism to the development of Western civilization is an important one. Humanistic ideas have proved to be of great educational value in the formation of civilized and responsible personalities, and they are still a counterweight against anti-intellectual tendencies today.

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PETER HERDE

[See also Classicism in Literature; Cosmology; Myth; Periodization; Platonism; Renaissance Humanism; Renaissance Literature; Universal Man; *Virtù*.]

## ICONOGRAPHY

THE WORD iconography comes from the Greek word *εικονογραφία*; in modern usage iconography is a description and/or interpretation of the content of works of art and therefore its history belongs to the history of human ideas. We propose, however, to distinguish between what one could call "the intended (or implied)

iconography" and "interpretative iconography." By the first we understand the attitude of the artist, the patron, or the contemporary observer toward the function and the meaning of visual symbols and images. Sometimes it was formulated in writing in documents like contracts (for example, "Contract for Painting an Altarpiece of the Coronation of the Virgin for Dominus Jean de Montagnac by Enguerrand Quarton," 1453); in programs (known for several late-baroque ceiling paintings); in iconographical treatises (for example, Joannes Molanus, *De picturis et imaginibus sacris*, 1570); in utterances of the artists (for example, Giorgio Vasari's *Ragionamenti*, written 1567, published 1588), or of the patrons (for example, Abbot Suger's *De consecratione ecclesiae S. Dionysii*). Sometimes we can reconstruct it only by historical methods, by adducing philosophical, theological, or literary ideas contemporary with or current at the time. By "interpretative iconography" may be understood precisely that branch of historical study of art which aims at the identification and description of representations, and at the interpretation of the content of the works of art (this last function now preferably called "iconology"). Whereas "interpretative iconography" is a historical discipline of the study of art, the "intended or implied iconography" is an element of the general outlook and aesthetic attitude of the period. The degree of consciousness in approaching the problem of content in art varied at different times and places.

In order to outline the changing relations of images and ideas, we shall in the present article discuss first the development of "intended iconography," i.e., the attitude toward images and visual symbols as manifested in art and art literature in western Europe; the formation of what may be called "systems of iconography": the medieval religious system, the Renaissance, and baroque humanistic system; the dissolution of systems around 1800, and finally, the new developments in the last hundred and fifty years. In the second part of the article we shall be discussing the development of "interpretative iconography," i.e., of art historical studies concerning problems of iconography, with a special stress on recent developments in that field.

### I

I. The origins of art are closely connected with religion and myth. The works of art of early civilizations were religious symbols, idols, expressions of fears and desires. An interpretation of meaning connected with these works of art is however uncertain due to a lack of reliable records. It is often impossible to say to what extent an idol or a religious symbol was considered as a representation of some divine