

**Renaissance:** a French word coined by Jules Michelet (1798-1874) in 1855 for the title of the seventh volume of his seventeen-volume *Histoire de France* (1833-62) to describe the revival of classical antiquity and the scientific and geographic discoveries that occurred in sixteenth-century France. The German historian Georg Voigt (1827-91) in his *Die Wiederbelebung des classischen Alterthums* (1859) and the Swiss scholar Jakob Burckhardt (1818-97) in his *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) emphasized Italy as the center of humanistic culture. Burckhardt's work, envisioned as part of a larger survey of cultural history, claimed that the Renaissance was a distinct period, the beginning of the modern age in Western civilization when men rejected the superstitions and myths of medieval Catholicism and freed themselves from oppressive feudal and ecclesiastical institutions. Renewed contact with the great cultural achievements of antiquity unleashed creative genius that resulted in outstanding works of literature and art. Under the editorship of Ludwig Geiger (1848-1919) beginning in 1877 the book was repeatedly revised (third to twelfth editions) with the insertion of new material so that it became a comprehensive history textbook. Burckhardt and his disciples attempted to subsume political, social, economic, and religious history under the theme of the rebirth of ancient culture and its consequences. The nineteenth-century historians who shaped the field of Renaissance studies were often anti-clerical or secular in their outlook and they presented a static portrait of the Renaissance.

At the center of Renaissance culture were the *studia humanitatis*. For the scholar Paul Oskar Kristeller (1905-99), the Renaissance was a cultural movement based on an educational program that studied the grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome. It taught one to write and speak effectively in the style of the classical authors. Scholars such as Eugenio Garin (1909-2004) claimed that the study of ancient texts resulted in a new (or revived) understanding of the positive value and dignity of human experience, with a rejection of medieval attitudes and intellectual structures. Artists and architects were also influenced by ancient models and ideas of human nature.

The scholarship of the past century has traced stages in the development of Renaissance humanism. Literary humanism under the leadership of Francesco Petrararch (1304-74), Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75), and Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) sought to recover the corpus of ancient literature and to imitate its style, privileging the classical rhetoric of Cicero. The Florentine officials Lino Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406) and Leonardo Bruni (c. 1370-1444) put their rhetorical skills at the service of the Florentine republic and called upon their fellow citizens to defend its liberty and independence – the civic humanism coined by Hans Baron (1900-88). Attention then shifted to the classics of Greek antiquity, with Manuel Chrysoloras (c. 1353-1415) providing instruction and Bruni and Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439) translating Greek works. In the hope of obtaining military aid against the Turks once the Greek and Latin churches were reunited, the Byzantine emperor John VIII came to Italy with a large retinue. It included the Neo-Platonist lay scholar George Gemistos Plethon (c. 1355-1450) and prominent Greek clerics, most notably John Basil Bessarion (1403-72) who eventually stayed in Italy where he promoted Greek studies. The religio-philosophic humanism of the Florentine Academy was propagated by Marsilio Ficino (1433-99) who translated into Latin the works of Plato and his disciples and tried to synthesize Neo-Platonism with Christianity. The Italian prince Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94) joined him in this effort. The Academy attracted northern scholars (Johannes Reuchlin [1455-1522], Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples [c. 1455-1536], and John

Colet [1466/7-1519]) who returned to their homelands inspired by its message and methods. In the early sixteenth century came the stage of courtly humanism associated with the names of Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529), Thomas More (1478-1535), and Guillaume Budé (1467-1540). It sought to place in princely courts the cultured civil servant who would advise his ruler on the proper course of action. It was when Italian humanism was in its religio-philosophic and courtly stages that it proved most attractive to pious northern scholars who had court connections. The leading northern humanist was Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1467-1536) who synthesized all aspects of humanism in his work. In traditional periodization schemes, the Renaissance is followed by the Reformation and the relationship between them is much debated by scholars.

Among the revisions to our understanding of the Renaissance is the centrality of Christianity to humanist culture. Among the chief recent exponents of this view are Charles Trinkaus (1911-99), John W. O'Malley (b. 1927), and Alison Knowles Frazier who note that almost all of the major humanist writers, whether clerics or laymen, were believing Christians who, while burdened with moral failings, nonetheless wrote works on religious and moral themes: letters, sermons, dialogues, poems, treatises, and lives of saints. They treated such themes as: the compatibility of the study of pagan literature with Christian beliefs and practices (Petrarch, Boccaccio, Salutati, and Bruni), of pagan philosophy with Christianity (a positive assessment by Bessarion, Ficino, Pico, and Lefèvre; a negative one by Lorenzo Valla [1407-57] and Budé), an introspective examination of their personal spiritual states (Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Antonio degli Agli [c. 1400-77]), free will and fate/predestination (Salutati, Valla, and Erasmus), the value of vowed religious life (Petrarch, Salutati, Valla, and Erasmus), the sacraments (Valla, Cristoforo Landino [1425-98], Donato Acciaiuoli [1429-78], and Erasmus), translations and annotations of the Bible (Giannozzo Manetti [1396-1459], Valla, Erasmus, and Lefèvre), translations and editions of the church fathers (Traversari, Erasmus, and Juan Luis Vives [1492-1540]), and lives of saints (Alberti, Bessarion, Marcantonio Flaminio [1498-1550], Manetti, Traversari, and Valla). The Church was a major patron of Renaissance art and literature, with the Jesuits propagating this culture in their schools. The popes hired leading architects like Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72) to redesign the churches of Rome and Donato Bramante (1444-1514) the Basilica of St. Peter and Belvedere complex. The Sistine Chapel was decorated by such artists as Sandro Filipepi [Botticelli] (1445-1510, side wall panels), Michelangelo Buonarroti Simoni (1475-1565, the ceiling and *Last Judgment*), and Raffaello Sanzio (1483-1520, the tapestries). The sermons preached in it were often delivered by noted humanists in the classical style of epideictic oratory.

The privileged position given to the Renaissance in traditional periodization of Western civilization has come under attack. The medievalists led by Charles Homer Haskins (1870-1937) claimed that the beginnings of the modern period are to be found in the intellectual innovations of the twelfth century carried out by such scholars as Peter Abelard (1079-c. 1144), Peter Lombard (c. 1095-1160), and Franciscus Gratian (d. before 1159). Social historians of the *Annales* school pointed to the persistence of traditional attitudes and practices among the population at large and dismissed the Renaissance as a cultural movement among a small elite. Historians of women found that far from developing themselves as individuals, women experienced a retrenchment in their social and political positions. Other historians have noted that soon following the Renaissance Europe underwent a re-feudalization and confessionalization

that ended individual freedoms and that the age of discovery became one of imposing European culture on its colonies. It was not until the Enlightenment that challenged the hegemony of organized Christianity and the advent of the agricultural and industrial revolutions of the eighteenth century that the modern age emerged. The term early modern has become the category attached to the period between the Middle Ages and the modern era. Renaissance has been reduced to tag to describe a certain cultural movement in Europe during that period. Similarly the terms late medieval is used as a lens to describe the persistence of medieval patterns of thought and action, while Reformation describes the shifts in theology and polity within traditional Christianity.

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