TEMPLA DOMVM EXPOSITIS: VICOS FORA MOENIA PONTES:
VIRGINEAM TRIVII QVOD REPARARIS AQVAM.
PRISCA LICET NAVTIS STATVAS DARE COMMODA PORTVS:
ET VATICANVM CINGERE SIXTE IVGVM:
PLVS TAMEN VRBS DEBET: NAM QVAE SQVALORE LATEBAT:
CERNITVR IN CELEBRI BIBLIOTHECA LOCO.

CHAPTER THREE

Human Dignity and Humanist Studies: the Career of Humanism

(c. 1350–c. 1530)

JUST three years before the Black Death struck, Petrarch wrote a letter to a man long dead: the Roman philosopher and statesman Marcus Tullius Cicero. Petrarch had sought out manuscripts of Cicero's letters and read them closely—so closely that he seemed to hear their author's still-living voice: "Your letters I sought for long and diligently; and finally, where I least expected it, I found them. At once I read them, over and over, with the utmost eagerness. And as I read I seemed to hear your bodily voice ..."

After this greeting, Petrarch rebukes Cicero: why had he meddled in politics in his final years, when he might have continued safely in his country retreat, dedicated to the study and translation of Greek philosophy? For Cicero had stood up to the brutal regime that took over in Rome after the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C.E., and was himself murdered by its agents the following year. "What will-o'-the-wisp tempted you away, with a delusive hope of glory; involved you, in your declining years, in the wars of younger men; and, after exposing you to every form of misfortune, hurled you down to a death that it was unseemly for a philosopher to die?" His rebuke delivered, Petrarch wishes Cicero "farewell forever," and closes: "Written in the land of the living; on the right bank of the Adige, in Verona, a city of ... Italy; on the 16th of June, and in the year of that God whom you never knew the 1345th."

This extraordinary document, one of several that Petrarch wrote to ancient figures, reveals the attitude of the Renaissance intellectuals to the Greek and Roman past. They knew it intimately. Petrarch knew not only who Cicero was, but what Cicero thought. On the other hand, for Renaissance thinkers the past is distant—almost unreachable. One barrier was the advent of Christianity, to which Petrarch alludes in the letter above—the God whom Europeans worshiped in the age of the Renaissance most of the ancients "never knew." Other changes included the loss of Roman political institutions, the arrival of half-civilized Germanic peoples, and the emergence of commerce as the source of wealth and power. Renaissance thinkers were so close to the past they wished to relive it; so distant, that they believed that their own age was entirely new. They revered the ancients, but they were modern: the civilization they created was a wholly new creation.

Just as the Italian cities emerged from the ruins of Roman cities, and were both like and unlike their ancient predecessors, so also Renaissance thinkers were grounded in ancient civilization, yet built a novel and unprecedented civilization. It is their encounter with that ancient tradition, and their reformulation of it, that constitutes what historians call the Renaissance, or "rebirth" of the classical spirit. Much of what these thinkers created falls

(opposite) Melozzo da Forli, *Sixtus IV Appointing Platina*, 1474–77. Fresco, now transferred to canvas, 12 ft 1 in x 10 ft 4 in (3.7 x 3.15 m). Pinacoteca, Vatican, Rome.

In an architectural setting governed by classical themes, the pope appoints his humanist secretary Bartolomeo Sacchi, known as Platina (1421–1481) to the post of Vatican librarian. This image shows the confluence of the classical and Christian, and the learned and powerful, so characteristic of the Renaissance.

under the heading of "humanism," the most dynamic intellectual movement of the age.

Renaissance humanists recovered the words and the thoughts of the classical world. Armed with this new store of knowledge and with a masterful command of language, they reformulated the insights of Christian scholars to give a new account of the nature of the human being, human society, and the arts and sciences of civilization. The humanists were the sons of wealthy and powerful men, and of middle-level merchants and notaries; and some of them were women. They wrote letters, speeches, treatises, dialogues, plays, poems, and histories; they were philosophers, theologians, bureaucrats, and mathematicians. In a later era, humanism as an intellectual movement would lose its energy and give way to a broader array of intellectual leaders—religious reformers, scientists, and litterateurs of various types. Yet between 1350 and 1530, the Italian humanists put into circulation a wealth of ideas that linked their present with the classical past and opened up the main lines of intellectual inquiry for centuries to come.

This chapter describes the humanist endeavor to revive the work of classical antiquity, and the development of the curricular program of "studies of humanity" to train future generations. It considers central themes behind the humanist project, including the "dignity of man" and the introduction of the values of "civic humanism." The chapter presents the special case of female humanism, and explores the relationship of humanism to philosophical studies and philological scholarship. It ends with an analysis of the "sociology of humanism," placing the humanists in their social contexts.

THE RECOVERY OF CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

From 1414 to 1418, church leaders meeting at Constance (Konstanz, modern Germany) declared that the authority of a council was superior to that of the pope. Among those participating was the papal secretary Poggio Bracciolini (1381–1459). In their leisure hours, Poggio and his friends scoured the monastic libraries in the area. They were on the hunt for ancient texts: works of ancient authors already well studied by educated men, but also ancient works not yet known to have survived the fall of Rome. Joyfully, they found two of Cicero's speeches previously not known to them, and the complete text, previously available only in fragmentary form, of the *Institutio oratoria* ("Rudiments of Oratory") by the Roman scholar Quintilian (c. 35–c. 100 C.E.). Scornfully, they noted the condition in which these manuscripts were found—damp, dirty, riddled by wormholes, held "like captives" or abandoned in a heap in a closet or at the foot of a flight of stairs.

Just as Petrarch felt he heard the voice of Cicero through his letters, Poggio encountered an ancient Roman when he read, or even handled, Quintilian's rhetorical handbook. The Roman past was revived as generations of humanists located, studied, and commented upon—in all, "discovered"—these ancient works.

Roman Works

Most of the Roman works known to the modern world were already in circulation during the Middle Ages. Their survival was due to the labor of trained monks who transcribed texts from the ancient papyrus scrolls to the parchment or paper leaves of leather-covered books. Most of the works of Seneca, Cicero, and Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.), among others, were known to authors and philosophers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and served as the texts by

Libraries: A Growth Industry

Library	Holdings
Petrarch (1340–1374)	a few hundred volumes (then the largest in Europe)
Library of Cardinal Bessarion (c. 1395–1472; donated to Venice in 1468)	800–900 volumes, of which more than 600 in Greek
Library of Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary (r. 1458–1490)	More than 500 volumes
Library of humanist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) at his death	1100 volumes
Library of Hartmann Schedel, German humanist (1440–1514)	370 mss. and 600 printed books
Vatican Library	
1443 (at death of Pope Eugenius IV)	340 mss. (of which two were Greek)
1455 (at death of Pope Nicholas V)	1160 mss. (of which 353 Greek)
1484 (at death of Pope Sixtus IV)	3600 mss.

which new generations acquired Latin. The "discovery" of "new" texts, therefore, important as such episodes were, was not so important as the "discovery" of familiar texts. The humanists of the early Italian Renaissance "discovered" new texts and old ones as well, therefore, by reading and commenting upon them with a new understanding and critical spirit.

Of the ancient Latin authors, the philosopher Seneca was the first to influence the early humanists. It was Cicero, however, who had the most powerful impact on humanism—perhaps because he was a humanist himself, the author of speeches, the interpreter of Greek philosophy, a guide to rhetorical style, a moral philosopher who wrote on friendship, on public and private responsibilities, and on old age. The historian Livy (later, also Tacitus, c. 55–120 C.E.) and the poet Virgil were read and reread, and Quintilian, "recovered" by Poggio, was a guide to rhetorical style. The Latin church fathers also deeply influenced the humanists, especially Augustine, author of the deeply personal *Confessions*, and Jerome (c. 342–420 C.E.), translator of the Bible and master of the form of the letter.

From the concentrated reading of this literature, Renaissance humanists established the standard for prose style that prevailed for several centuries. The works of Cicero, above all, were a benchmark for proper style—until, by the end of the fifteenth century, a highly imitative and prissy Ciceronianism aroused a wave of resisters, including the pivotal northern humanist, Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466–1536; see Chapter 9). In the early years of the humanist movement, however, Ciceronian standards served a creative function, encouraging authors to break from the workaday vocabulary and sentence forms that had characterized late medieval Latin composition. In brief, the corpus of Latin literature served as a model of literary form, an office it would continue to perform well into the eighteenth century.

Those same works, of course, were also a trove of information about antiquity. Initially,

it was a somewhat indigestible trove, since knowledge of the classical world was so scanty, and many works were read without context, and without the assistance of those handbooks and encyclopedias with which a modern reader attempts to understand an ancient text. But the early humanists read thoroughly and often, recording words, places, sayings, and names in their notebooks, thus building up a familiarity with the world of Rome. Just as in the early Christian centuries, Roman buildings, objects, and ideas were revised to suit a different worldview. The medieval gloss which things Roman had acquired was stripped away, and the humanists came to see Rome whole.

Greek Works

More difficult was the recovery of the Greek tradition. In antiquity, most educated Romans knew Greek; and so the knowledge of Greek life and values traveled with Greek literature and its translations into the Roman world, including all parts of the Western Empire. At the end of the Roman era, however, knowledge of Greek virtually disappeared in Latin Christendom. It continued only at the peripheries where medieval Christians conversed with the Jewish and Islamic scholars of non-Christian Spain, or with Greek scholars in Byzantium or the south of Italy. In these other two medieval civilizations, those of Islam and Byzantium, Greek studies proceeded briskly throughout the medieval era. The first translations into Latin of ancient Greek works, sometimes by way of Arabic or Hebrew, reached the European heartland in the twelfth century. Aristotle's works, nearly entire, arrived by the thirteenth. The humanists, with their superior command of both Greek and Latin, would later retranslate these.

Latin was familiar, both because it was the language of church liturgy and learned conversation, and because many of the European languages had descended from Latin and preserved much of its vocabulary. In contrast, Greek was unfamiliar as well as inherently difficult. Petrarch and Boccaccio, although aware of the importance of Greek works, never themselves learned how to read the language. They found a southern Italian who could translate Homer (c. 8th century B.C.E.) for them; but his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were over-literal and inadequate. In the very next generation, however, the serious study of Greek in the Latin West took off. The Byzantine statesman and scholar Manuel Chrysoloras (c. 1353–1415) came to Italy, seeking support for that embattled empire as the Turks steadily advanced. While resident in Florence between 1397 and 1400, Chrysoloras began to teach the early humanists Greek. In 1415, he prepared a Greek grammar for the teaching of ancient Greek to Latin-speakers, though this was not printed until 1480.

Greek literacy gave humanism an intellectual range far beyond what the recovery of the Latin tradition had provided—if for no other reason than that the Greek written tradition was much vaster. Many more works by Greek than by Latin authors have survived, as can be easily checked in any university library by examining the shelves of the Loeb Classical Library: the Greek titles in their green binding dominate the shelves, dwarfing the Latin titles in red. Beyond mere expanse, the Greek tradition is rich in subjects in which the Latin tradition is weak: philosophy, mathematics, and science. In addition, the *Parallel Lives* of Greek and Roman figures by the second-century author, historian, and biographer Plutarch (c. 46–c. 120 C.E.) greatly supplemented Livy as a guide to the history of Rome. It would inspire many literary works for centuries to come, including some of the major plays of the English author William Shakespeare (1564–1616; see Chapter 10).

Although this first generation had to master Greek from native speakers such as the

Byzantine scholar Chrysoloras, by the early 1400s, a later generation of Italian-born Hellenists were able to teach Greek to their compatriots. Notable among these early Hellenists were two men of modest background who were able to journey to Constantinople to study Greek language and literature at its source. Guarino Guarini of Verona (Guarino Veronese, 1374–1460) followed Chrysoloras back to Constantinople in 1403, and remained there for five years, his education paid for by a Venetian nobleman. He then returned to northern Italy, eventually establishing a famous school at Ferrara in 1429, where he trained a generation of students in Latin and Greek studies before his death. Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481) also journeyed to Constantinople in 1420. There he stayed for seven years, studying with the son of Chrysoloras, whose daughter he also married. Returning to Italy, where he was recognized as the peninsula's leading Hellenist, he established himself as a humanist author and critic especially at Milan, whose cultural scene he dominated for more than forty years. After the generation of Chrysoloras, several other Greek men of letters lived and worked in Italy, and produced scholarly translations especially of scientific and philosophical texts. Italian Hellenists received a new trove of texts on the death of the Byzantine-born cardinal of the Roman church John Bessarion (1403–1472), who left his library of more than 800 books to Venice, where they became the core of the collection now in the Biblioteca Marciana (the "Library of Saint Mark," patron saint of that city).

CIVIC HUMANISM

In much the same way, humanists discovered anew the importance of the city for human existence, and redefined the intellectual life as a civic endeavor. Humanism had its roots in city life; and humanists thought about and wrote about the lives of people in cities. Humanism had its origin, as we have seen (see Chapter 2), not in the age of the Renaissance in which it reached its peak, but in the age of the *popolo*, of the emergent republics. The earliest humanists were laymen employed by city-states to record important decisions, write offical letters, negotiate with neighbors, and design the proclamations of war or peace. It was

the literary adventures of these early humanists, nurtured in a vibrant new urban context, that paved the way for Petrarch and Boccaccio, and the full-blown Renaissance humanism of their successors. Renaissance humanists, in turn, celebrated the *vita civile*, "civil life," and its values. They were in fact "civic humanists," as historian Hans Baron has named the phenomenon. Humanism reached its fruition, he argued, when the early humanist movement became integrated with the republican spirit of the Italian city-states.

Proposing New Values: Poggio and Valla

Humanism, then, was both *lay* and *urban*, even though some humanists were actually clerics, and some preferred the countryside (for example, Petrarch). Given this context, it is not surprising that many humanists challenged the notion dominant throughout the Middle Ages that the "contemplative" life—the life of religious seclusion, perhaps in a monastery—was superior to the active life of merchants, artisans, and statesmen. Although Petrarch, in the fourteenth century, still praised the religious life in his *De vita solitaria* ("On the Solitary Life"), he himself was an engaged observer of both city-state and imperial politics, and wrote a book on governance for the despot of Padua. In the next generation, the chancellor of Florence, Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), also favored the religious, or contemplative, life in his *De religione et fuga saeculi* ("On Religion and the Flight from the World"). In 1398, however, seventeen years later, he offered the contrary argument in a long letter to his friend and counterpart, the chancellor of Bologna, Peregrino Zambeccari. Zambeccari was thinking of becoming a monk, to escape the memory of an unfortunate love affair. Salutati discouraged him: "Do not believe, my Peregrino, that to flee the crowd, to avoid the sight of attractive objects, to shut oneself in a cloister or to go off to a hermitage is the way of perfection." Instead, he should pursue worthy tasks in the world: "If you provide for and serve and strive for your family and your sons, your relatives and your friends, and your state ... you cannot fail to raise your heart to heavenly things and please God."

As the value of civic life, and the possibility of leading a virtuous life while in the world became widely accepted in humanist culture, some humanists turned still more boldly against the religious values of an earlier era. Poggio Bracciolini's carefully crafted dialogue *De avaritia* ("On Avarice") presents two speakers condemning greed, and in between them, one who defends it. Far from being the soul-destroying root of evil that clerics had imagined it to be, argues this speaker, greed is the dynamic force that urges men to produce, to build, and to overcome the narrow circumstances of their lives. In fact, the avaricious are essential to society, he argues: without them, "Every splendor, every refinement, every ornament would be lacking. No one would build churches or colonnades; all artistic activity would cease, and confusion would result in our lives and in public affairs if everyone were satisfied with only enough for himself." What are cities or states "if not the workshops of avarice?" This advocate of avarice is not the victor in this dialogue, but neither is he the loser. In presenting vividly the case for capitalist acquisition and competition, Poggio (another chancellor of Florence) displays an outlook that, centuries later, would come into its own.

In his dialogue *De voluptate* ("On Pleasure"), the humanist Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457) similarly proposes values that significantly challenge those accepted by the medieval church. Here the speakers belong to two ancient philosophical schools: STOICISM, which like Christianity required of its adherents self-discipline and self-denial, and Epicureanism, a byword in premodern times for scandalous self-indulgence, which encouraged its followers

to enjoy the moderate pleasures of life without fear of death or retribution. In this dialogue, a Christianized Epicureanism clearly prevails: Valla appears to be informing the followers of a church whose key theme was the rejection of pleasure, that pleasure was in fact the true good.

Only the boldest humanists confronted Christian assumptions as squarely as did Poggio and Valla. Like them, however, most Renaissance humanists preferred RHETORIC, the art of persuasive prose and speech-making, as being more useful for the civic life than its rival discipline, DIALECTIC. Dialectic, or the method of logical argumentation, was the intellectual discipline essential to scholastic philosophers, whose creative contributions peaked in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The great medieval *summae*—the compendiums of theology and philosophy that expounded the Christian view of the cosmos—were grounded in the dialectical method. The technical and theoretical genre of the *summa* was rejected by the humanists in favor of brief works—letters, dialogues, treatises, orations—in which they could present their ideas in a challenging and engaging way. If dialectic was the necessary skill for philosophers in a university setting, rhetoric was the necessary skill for bureaucrats and amateurs in an urban setting where ideas circulated not merely among trained intellectuals, but between them and the active, important men who led the city.

Praising the City: Bruni

Civic humanism, therefore, was characterized by a lay outlook, a preference for the active over the contemplative life, and for secular over Christian values, as well as by a preference for the accessible, persuasive prose learned from the rhetorician over the technical, systematic prose of the philosopher in an ivory tower. Civic humanists also wrote explicitly about cities: they described them, and they wrote their histories. One such was Leonardo Bruni (c. 1370–1444), another chancellor of Florence, who occupied that position from 1427, after Salutati but before Poggio. Bruni's *Laudatio Florentinae urbis* ("Panegyric to the City of Florence") is a rhetorical oration that epitomizes the civic humanist project. It celebrates the city of Florence for its productive and creative achievements—its architecture, its setting, its people, and its governance. It is a city bursting with beautiful buildings, beautiful even in the side streets and courtyards: "just as blood is spread throughout the entire body, so fine architecture and decoration are diffused throughout the whole city."

Amid these exquisite buildings live the free and productive citizens of Florence. They derive their excellence, Bruni continues, from their heritage: they are descended from ancient Romans, and specifically from the ancient Romans of the free republican, not imperial era, whose qualities as free men transfer to their descendants. Bruni took up the theme of Florence's Roman past again in his *Historiarium Florentini populi* ("History of the Florentine Republic"), a full-scale work on this subject on which the author labored for nearly thirty years.

The Florentine state, moreover, is the most splendid and just of all cities. It is generous to strangers and refugees, and generously assists other cities threatened by oppression. Its own citizens have fought bravely for the city's freedom. At home, its public institutions and laws are dedicated to justice and freedom. Under its admirable and coordinated system of councils and magistrates, the city "has been governed with such diligence and competence that one could not find better discipline even in a household ruled by a solicitous father." In Florence, justice is available to all, and not just to the wealthy: "There is no place on

Bernardo Rossellino, Monument to Leonardo Bruni, Santa Croce, Florence.

Although he had requested merely a simple stone slab for his burial, the great humanist and chancellor of the Florentine republic here lies in state as he did at his funeral in 1444. He holds his book, *The History of the Florentine People*, wears a laurel crown, and lies on a bier set in an elaborate architectural frame recalling a Roman triumphal arch.

earth where there is greater justice open equally to everyone," Bruni asserts. "Nowhere else does freedom grow so vigorously, and nowhere else are rich and poor alike treated with such equality."

The historian Hans Baron identified this work as a defense of the republican liberty of Florence, written in response to the imperialist aggression of the duke of Milan, Giangaleazzo Visconti (1351–1402). Bruni's stylized and stylish oration, however, cannot be taken at face value. But neither is it to be discarded as a merely rhetorical work. Certainly he exaggerates the perfections of the city, and overstates the extent to which Florence provides its citizens with unstinting care and balanced justice. The city's archive holds many documents, written at about the same time as Bruni's *Laudatio,* which reveal the anguish of the poor or the oppressed as they petition for a hearing, for tax relief, or for assistance.

Nevertheless, Bruni's inflated vision of Florence is not all wrong. Florentine urbanism was perhaps the most developed in Europe, a flawless matching of public design, private architecture, and the city's mission. Among the citizens of Florence, although they included both the dizzyingly rich and the desperately poor, were a large fraction who were prosperously engaged in commerce and manufacture, providing for their families and sustaining the costs of an autonomous republic. The political and judicial machinery of fifteenth-century Florence would appear flawed to an American of the twenty-first century. But in the context of the fifteenth century, where arbitrary power was the norm on feudal estates and in royal and despotic courts, it was admirably fair and open.

Outside of Florence, too, humanists employed their pens to celebrate their cities and their cities' rulers. In Venice, where both humanist expression and political life were carefully controlled, patrician humanists (men born to the ruling noble class) celebrated the city's harmony—or, to use their term, its "unanimity." All social classes worked together selflessly, each serving in its way the greater goal of maintaining a city seen as flawless and ideal—"la Serenissima." Venice promoted the writing of its own history, too, and by the end of the fifteenth century had instituted as a permanent post the position of "public historiographer." Each state historian, predictably, wrote about Venice's seamless history, its enduringly peaceful dedication to justice.

From the Venetian case, it is clear that the civic humanist project can descend to propaganda. When Antonio Beccadelli (called Panormita; 1394–1471) wrote in praise of King Alfonso the Magnanimous of Naples (r. 1442–1458), or when Giovanni Simonetta celebrated the deeds of Francesco Sforza, we see not so much a humanist inspired by the genuine dynamism of his city as a hireling celebrating his master—in very nearly the same language. We have passed from humanism to the culture of the court (see Chapter 7).

WOMEN AND HUMANISM

The humanists were mostly male; for them ideas were a part of civic life, and civic life was imbued with thought. For those few women, however, who acquired the training to engage in humanist studies, the situation was different. They were not free to engage in public life. Not only could they not serve in any public offices or official positions in commercial organizations, they could not even freely walk about their neighborhood. Women of the middle and upper classes were understood to be under men's care—that of their father or his male kin, or of their husband and his. Their place was at home. (Women of the lower social strata,

in contrast, did venture abroad in the course of their work; but they, like their male counterparts, did not acquire humanist educations.)

Early Female Humanists

The first women known to be involved in humanist pursuits belonged to the minor nobility associated with the courts and cities of northern Italy. These were women who had the leisure and the wealth to study, and who were protected by their status from the criticism that an ordinary woman might have encountered. Even before the turn of the fifteenth century, the Paduan noblewoman Maddalena degli Scrovegni (1356–1429) was known to be learned in Latin literature, and to engage in highbrow conversation with the literati who frequented her father's house. The male humanist Antonio Loschi, later an apologist for the Visconti rulers of Milan, knew the family and celebrated her learning and her chastity. In the 1430s, the noblewoman Costanza Varano (1428–1447) was sufficiently gifted in Latin that she could deliver orations. She would die before she reached twenty, a wife of three years.

Costanza Varano was perhaps encouraged in her intellectual pursuits by her grandmother Battista Montefeltro Malatesta (1383–1450), the daughter of the lords of Urbino, who married into the Malatesta family which commanded Rimini, although this branch of the family ruled the small city of Pesaro. Battista was known as a composer of verses, and even vied in composing them with her father-in-law at court—an activity typical for the noblewomen of this milieu. She apparently became aware of humanism as a literary movement, and hoped to become part of it. She learned Latin sufficient to deliver an oration in 1433 when Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund passed through Urbino (to which she had retired after her husband was expelled from Pesaro). She is best known, however, as the recipient of a letter from Leonardo Bruni, the male humanist chancellor of Florence, who wrote in response to her letter of inquiry to advise Battista on the progress of her studies.

Bruni's letter *De studiis et literis* ("On Literary Study"), written in 1424, is the first major statement we have in modern times on the issue of women and education. In a misogynist age that greatly limited women's opportunities, it is remarkable for the assumption that a woman's natural ability was sufficient for advanced humanist studies. It is also remarkable for the assumption that a woman would not wish to pursue humanist studies as merely an occupation for idle hours. He advises Battista on the various fields of study. By all means, she should study the best ancient authors, both secular and sacred, and the disciplines of grammar, moral philosophy, poetry, and history (and not bother with arithmetic, geometry, and astrology, disciplines the humanists did not value). The one humanist discipline that it would be futile for her pursue, according to Bruni, is rhetoric: it would be a waste of time for her to study its intricacies, since she is a woman "who never sees the forum" (that is, the open area in ancient Rome where orators delivered their speeches). Bruni's advice is ironic, since one of the first activities of the early humanists was to compose speeches in classical style. The role of orator was not—except in a few cases, some noted here—open to women.

Later Female Humanists: Nogarola, Cereta, Fedele

Forty years later, the humanistically trained scholar Lauro Quirini of Venice (c. 1420–c. 1475/1479), then studying philosophy at the University of Padua, addressed to Isotta Nogarola (1418–1466) a letter reminiscent of Bruni's to Battista Montefeltro. A noblewoman from Verona, Nogarola had already won a considerable reputation for her classical learning and her

■ VOICES
WOMEN AND HUMANISM IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

IN fifteenth-century Italy, women entered the mainstream of culture. They did so by learning Latin and participating in the program of humanist studies. Humanism, in effect, was the gateway to women's full participation in intellectual life. In the sixteenth century, with the availability of print technology and the increasing use of the vernacular, many more Italian women engaged in cultural discourse, their way having been prepared by a few predecessors in the humanist era. Represented here are the three most prominent women humanists of the fifteenth century: Isotta Nogarola of Verona (c. 1418–1466); Laura Cereta of Brescia (1469–1499); and Cassandra Fedele of Venice (1465–1558).

Nogarola engaged a prominent Venetian nobleman, Ludovico Foscarini (1409–1480) in a debate on the relative sinfulness of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3) when, bidden by the serpent, Eve ate the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and when afterward, bidden by Eve, Adam, too, ate of its fruit. Nogarola argued that Adam was more guilty than Eve because Eve, a woman, was inferior to Adam in strength of character. Foscarini responded that Eve was more guilty than Adam because she lured him into sin, and thus brought sin—in Christian theology, Original Sin—on the whole human race. Here Nogarola pursues the defense of Eve—and thus of womankind.

> *Moreover, the woman did not eat from the forbidden tree because she believed she would become like God, but rather because she was weak and inclined to pleasure. . . . Thus the woman, but only because she had been first deceived by the serpent's evil persuasion, did indulge in the delights of paradise; but she would have harmed only herself and in no way endangered human posterity if the consent of the first-born man had not been offered. Therefore Eve was no danger to posterity but only to herself; but the man Adam spread the infection of sin to himself and to all future generations.*
>
> (M.L. King & D. Robin, trs & ed, *Isotta Nogarola: Letters, Dialogues, and Orations.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003)

In this letter, Laura Cereta lambasts women who waste themselves in amusements and do not engage in the studies that will permit them to develop an autonomous self. Here she urges women to seek an education:

> *For an education is neither bequeathed to us as a legacy, nor does some fate or other give it to us as a gift. Virtue is something that we ourselves acquire; nor can those women who become dull-witted through laziness and the sludge of low pleasures ascend to the understanding of difficult things. But for those women who believe that study, hard work, and vigilance will bring them sure praise, the road to attaining knowledge is broad.*
>
> (D. Robin, trs & ed, *Laura Cereta: Collected letters.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997, p.82)

In her pathbreaking speech before the doge and Senate of Venice, Cassandra Fedele defends the liberal arts, and concludes by urging women to pursue knowledge even if they have no access to public careers.

> *But enough on the utility of literature since it produces not only an outcome that is rich, precious, and sublime but also provides one with advantages that are extremely pleasurable, fruitful, and lasting—benefits that I myself have enjoyed. And when I meditate on the idea of marching forth in life with the lowly and execrable weapons of the little woman—the needle and the distaff—even if the study of literature offers women no rewards or honors, I believe women must nonetheless pursue and embrace such studies alone for the pleasure and enjoyment they contain.*
>
> (D. Robin, trs & ed, *Cassandra Fedele: Letters and Orations.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000, p.162)

Latin letters and orations. Now, having decided to remain unmarried (she lived with her mother in her brother's household), she was eager to pursue an advanced curriculum: a university-level program in philosophy. Quirini unhesitatingly plunges in, advising her to read deeply in the most rigorous authors, in both Latin and Greek. Here there is no concern about her overstepping her limits. Quirini's only caution is that Nogarola should avoid the narrower scholastic philosophers. He encourages her, however, to read the ancient philosophers, in Latin translation if not in the original Greek. The curriculum that Quirini urges upon Nogarola is a difficult one for even the most advanced students, and he does not doubt that she can pursue it: "Give your whole heart, then ... to philosophy alone, for I want you to be not semi-learned, but to have knowledge of all the good arts [i.e., humanistic studies] ... as well as the science of human and divine things [i.e., philosophy and theology]." Implicit in his letter is the assumption that women, as much as men, can read and understand the most complex ideas.

Despite Quirini's open-mindedness, the issue of the different natures of male and female had not yet vanished. A few years after he wrote, Nogarola engaged the Venetian humanist and statesman Ludovico Foscarini (1409–1480) in a discussion of the relative guilt of Adam and Eve for their expulsion from the Garden of Eden and subsequent punishment. In the biblical account in Genesis, Eve, prompted by the evil serpent (the Devil), persuades Adam to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which God has specifically forbidden. Both had eaten; but Eve was seen as especially guilty, because she succumbed to the demon's persuasion, and then persuaded Adam to break God's law. As a punishment, both were expelled from paradise. In addition, Adam, or "man," was condemned to work for his survival; and Eve, or "woman," was condemned to bear children in pain, and to be subject to men's will.

In the dialogue Nogarola wrote recording Foscarini's arguments and her own, Foscarini uses biblical, legal, and theological texts to defend the traditional view of Eve's guilt. Nogarola, however, uses the same kinds of sources to prove that Eve, although guilty of tempting Adam, was by nature weaker than he; she could not, therefore, be considered responsible for her actions. In attempting to lift from Eve's shoulders the great burden of condemnation for the Fall of Man from grace, Nogarola concedes the weakness of female nature. Still, her *Dialogue* of 1451 is one of the early defenses of women by a woman, and thus a landmark in the history of feminist thought.

Far bolder in her defense of women, and especially of women who wrote, was Laura Cereta (1469–1499). She came from a prominent, but not noble, Brescian family. Widowed young, Cereta could devote her full attention to humanist studies, which she found as ennobling and freeing for women as for men. She demonstrated her abilities by giving orations and writing letters; the latter were widely circulated, and thus really a public genre rather than personal correspondence. These activities aroused active criticism from men, and even more from women. In response, Cereta defended women's ability to acquire learning, and celebrated the benefit of education to women. She also encouraged other women to follow the hard and long road to knowledge: "For an education is neither bequeathed to us as a legacy, nor does some fate or other give it to us as a gift. Virtue is something that we ourselves acquire ... But for those women who believe that study, hard work, and vigilance will bring them sure praise, the road to attaining knowledge is broad."

The figures of Isotta Nogarola and Laura Cereta helped to break the monopoly that high noblewomen had held over female humanism. Nogarola was both wealthy and noble, but not from a bourgeois family active in urban affairs. Cereta's family was more modest still.

A third great woman humanist of the Italian fifteenth century, Cassandra Fedele (1465–1558), came from a middle-class intellectual Venetian family with a history of service in the state bureaucracy.

Like her predecessors, before her marriage and during her widowhood Fedele wrote in the familiar humanist genres of letters and orations. Although much of her work is conventional, her oration in praise of the liberal arts, delivered before the doge and the Venetian senate, is astonishing. Here a woman speaks out in support of the full humanist program. How extraordinary it must have been to the audience of that day, where a woman virtually never appeared, to observe a woman speak on these matters, when so few women learned Latin and acquired the advanced knowledge of the classics necessary to give a humanist oration. Only at the end does Fedele cease to be the neutral and genderless celebrant of the liberal arts. Here she comments on why a woman might devote herself to study: "And when I meditate on the idea of marching forth in life with the lowly and execrable weapons of the little woman—the needle and the distaff—even if the study of literature offers women no rewards or honors, I believe women must nonetheless pursue and embrace such studies alone for the pleasure and enjoyment they contain ..."

Fedele lived to the extraordinary old age of ninety-three. During that span of years, Olimpia Morata (1526/27–1555), the daughter of a humanist adviser to the duke of Ferrara, lived and died. Thoroughly trained by her father at a very early age, Morata had already published works in Latin and Greek when, in 1549 or 1550, she married a German student, a Lutheran convert, for whom Italy was no longer safe (see Chapters 8 and 9). She returned with him to the German lands, and died as a result of an illness, perhaps tuberculosis, that she acquired during the siege of Schweinfurt, a minor incident in the religious wars that now engulfed Europe. Her works, including a vast number of thoughtful letters, were published posthumously (it was now the age of print) by a learned man and family friend. With Morata, the linked chain of Italian women humanists ends.

The phenomenon of female humanism in the Italian Renaissance is limited—barely a dozen women could properly be identified as humanists, and some of these have left scant written record, or none at all. Yet it is exceedingly important. With the exception of Christine de Pisan (c. 1364–1430), a Frenchwoman of Italian origin who wrote in the first decades of the fifteenth century, the Italian woman humanists are among the first authors of any age or gender to make explicit and public the issues of female capacity for education, and women's full participation in the human condition. Their ideas spread during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, translated and transformed in the works of both male authorities and female poets, then much in fashion. Through these vehicles they would reach the modern age, and continue to flow in the mainstream of feminist thought.

Nevertheless, the unavoidable focus of the women humanists upon the issue of being women detached them from the mainstream of humanist thought in the Italian Renaissance, which would have its next important development in conjunction with new developments in philosophy and scholarly method.

HUMANISM, PHILOSOPHY, AND SCHOLARSHIP

Renaissance humanism was not a philosophy. It rejected order and consistency, qualities central to most philosophical systems, and certainly to the ancient and medieval

philosophies of which humanism had knowledge. Its written products tend to be occasional works, written at the behest of a patron, or in response to the stimulus of an interesting event or encounter, or in the whim of a moment. Nevertheless, the humanist program had philosophical implications, which are worthy of review. Moreover, humanists opened up new approaches, especially in their confrontation with Greek texts, that had profound consequences both for the pursuit of philosophical understanding and for the development of scholarly procedures in the analysis and publication of texts.

Philosophy: Aristotle and Plato

Some central humanist concepts had philosophical implications. Most important, the humanist interest in the nature of the human person, and in his social and historical setting, pointed philosophical discussion in a new direction. In the medieval university, in contrast, philosophers had been almost entirely concerned with God and the cosmos. Related to the refocused concern upon the individual was a shift in the preference for pure thought—the *vita contemplativa* ("contemplative life") of the monk or mystic—to a preference for useful action—the *vita activa* ("active," or "civil life") of the citizen. The medieval ideal was of a hermit or sage, whose contact with the divine realm brought salvation to others. The humanist ideal was of a man of affairs, who combined intellectual with practical insights, and could therefore bring his knowledge of deep matters to bear upon the life of the community. If action was more important than thought, then will was more important than knowledge—an idea that conflicted with basic philosophical assumptions. The emphasis on will was also reflected in language, as the humanists valued persuasion over logical demonstration: the incitement to action over mere knowledge.

Although these preferences did not amount to a philosophy, the humanist attention to texts had monumental consequences for philosophy. Critical was the recovery of Greek, which the first major humanists—Boccaccio, Petrarch—knew was essential, and which the generation immediately following accomplished. Some attempted the translation of individual lives of Plutarch, or other brief, narrative works. The Florentine chancellor Leonardo Bruni took on a more serious task: he retranslated works of Aristotle (then available in thirteenth-century translations used by the mendicant-run schools of theology) directly from the Greek. The Aristotelian works he chose to study were those of moral and political philosophy: the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, and the pseudo-Aristotelian *Economics*. He left aside Aristotle's works on physics, metaphysics, and logic, which speculated about the nature of the cosmos, and provided the tools for scholastic disputation.

The next generation, in the mid-fifteenth century, saw the more momentous translation of Plato. Except for a few isolated works, Plato had not previously been translated into Latin, with the consequence that Platonic concepts were little-known in the West. The injection of Platonic ideas to a philosophical consensus that was essentially Aristotelian was pivotal—stimulating as well as threatening. The incorporation of Aristotelian thought with Christian assumptions was the great achievement of the medieval scholastic philosophers. (The major scholastic figures labored, it should be remembered, from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, and thus did not wholly precede but rather overlapped with early humanist endeavors.) Now Platonic thought would be integrated with Christianity, but in a less stable framework, where Platonic concepts might also challenge Christian as well as Aristotelian assumptions.

Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), the son of the physician to Cosimo de' Medici of Florence, is the key figure in the inauguration of Platonic studies. He was groomed from childhood to understand the philosophical texts related to the study of medicine, but in 1462 Cosimo provided the scholar with a house and a source of income to support him in the epochal task of preparing a full and definitive translation of Plato's works. This he completed within a few years; the second edition, published in Venice in 1491, became the standard Latin version for many years.

The translation of the Platonic corpus might have been achievement enough. But Ficino was heart and soul, day and night a Platonist. He hosted gatherings of learned men of the age (all of whom were hailed as "philosophers" in Ficino's circle), who discussed the Platonic issues of love, rhetoric, and republicanism. In 1474 he published his *Platonic Theology*, which proved to the world at large the harmony of Platonic and Christian understandings. He extended his speculations to include magic (not yet distinguished from science) and astrology (not yet distinguished from astronomy), and the late antique NEOPLATONIC theorists, who blended Plato in turn with Aristotle and various later philosophical schools.

Other Schools

The rapid absorption of Plato, therefore, involved an openness to and interest in other greater or lesser, more or less exotic schools of thought. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's interests and influences extended even further than Ficino's. Pico studied medieval Arabic and Jewish, including kabbalistic, thought, as well as "Chaldean" (Zoroastrian and Babylonian) and HERMETIC (mystical late antique Neoplatonist) traditions, which he blended with the Christian, Aristotelian, and Platonic traditions. Pico was an extreme eclectic for whom all philosophical and religious traditions were true, and all reflected "One Truth."

Pico was unique. Among his contemporaries and successors, though, were many more scholars whose knowledge of Greek permitted them to explore a broad array of ideas not previously accessible. They studied Plato and the Neoplatonists, both pagan and Christian, including the works of the mythical Hermes Trismegistus (the "thrice-great Hermes," a combination of the Egyptian Thoth, the god of wisdom, and the Greek Hermes) which contained many occult elements and probably derived from late Neoplatonic writings. Beyond these, they studied ancient and medieval Arabic works of astronomy and astrology, and magic. At a time when certain forms of magic were associated with witchcraft and considered demonic (see Chapter 11), other forms, called "white" or "high magic," were considered benign. Alchemy, the ancestor of the scientific discipline of chemistry, was one aspect of late Renaissance magic.

While some thinkers were attracted to the occult and magical dimensions of the ancient tradition, others pursued its more strictly scientific, logical, and mathematical elements. The renewed Renaissance reading of Aristotle could lead to conclusions dramatically different from those of the thirteenth-century scholastics. At Padua, university professor Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525), for instance, employed Aristotle to inquire into the principle of the immortality of the soul (promoted by Ficinian Platonism, only recently declared Christian dogma). Pomponazzi argued that since the mind (or soul) required the senses, and thus the body, to formulate its ideas, it could not be shown to outlive the body. Immortality could not, therefore, be demonstrated in philosophy—although it must, he conceded, be embraced by faith. On the basis of their close study of Greek texts, other philosophers began to lay the

foundations of the scientific investigations that came to fruition from the 1540s in the movement called the Scientific Revolution (see Chapter 11). It was in his examination of the works of Aristarchus of Samos (c. 310–230 B.C.E.), for instance, that the Polish priest Nicholas Copernicus (1473–1543) encountered the notion of a universe centered about the sun.

Printing

Expert Hellenists also devoted themselves to the critical study of ancient texts as part of the process of publishing them via the new technology of print, which had reached Italy in the 1470s. Although the Greek texts offered the greater challenge, Latin texts, too, received critical study in preparation for print. In addition to native Italian humanists engaged in this task were many emigré scholars from the Byzantine Empire, who had fled when the Turks conquered Constantinople in 1453. These scholars prepared the texts for print by supplying emendations of words that had been mistakenly altered in the inexact process of copying the manuscript by hand, or suggesting how fragmentary statements could have been completed. After the type was set, they proofed the printed text and constructed the book. Over the two generations before and after 1500 Renaissance editors developed the main features of published books today, including pagination and indices (though these appeared in some cases in manuscripts before the arrival of print), footnoting and cross-references (see also Chapter 9).

Among the great printshops of this transitional age was that of Aldo Manuzio (Aldus Manutius, 1449–1515). Born in Rome, Aldo received a basic humanist education and moved to Venice, where he established his printing shop in 1493. By 1500, it was the most important press in Europe. It was Aldo's ambition to print all of the Latin and Greek texts in clean, accurate, and portable versions, smaller than the standard full-sheet folio editions. By 1515, he had published 130 editions, of which the most important were Greek texts, including a complete edition in five volumes of the works of Aristotle. There were Latin classics, too, and a few contemporary religious and literary works, including the life of the fourteenth-century saint Catherine of Siena (see Chapter 6) and the *Adages* (or "Proverbs") of Desiderius Erasmus (see Chapter 9). Aldo was a major employer of Greek emigré scholars, for whom Venice was a favored refuge, as well as traveling humanists. His household, where many of his assistants boarded with him, was a vital intellectual community whose importance reached far beyond Venice itself.

Textual Scholarship

The close examination of texts had purposes larger than their preparation for print. It raised significant intellectual issues. When, for instance, the Venetian humanist Ermolao Barbaro the Younger (1453/54–1492) addressed the Roman encyclopedist Pliny's works in his *Castigationes plinianae* (the "Castigations," or editorial questioning and correction of Pliny), his concerns rose well above the proper spelling of words or naming of flora and fauna. He was in fact on a quest for the author's meaning or intention, something that is very difficult to obtain in literary works, but nonetheless of supreme importance especially in works that convey information, and not just authorial opinions.

Humanist historians, too, interrogated a larger body of source materials than had medieval chroniclers. They energetically pursued historical issues such as explanations of city origins and party identifications. The preeminent example of this kind of scholar is Lorenzo Valla, whose *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio* ("The

Treatise on the Donation of Constantine"), one of the most important literary works of the Italian Renaissance, is a model of historical criticism. In it Valla exposes as a forgery a document which purported to record the gift by the emperor Constantine to Pope Sylvester I of the central Italian lands which came to be known as the Papal States, territories under the secular control of the pope. The document became incorporated into the corpus of canon or church law in the Middle Ages. It had actually originated centuries later, as Valla shows, pointing to linguistic errors, anachronisms, misreadings of the historical record, and the improbable behaviors of key figures. At that time, it was useful to the papacy, isolated and vulnerable, to secure its status by inventing an explanation for the foundation of the church's territorial dominion. Valla's exposure of this forgery embodies the critical spirit of Renaissance thought.

Leon Battista Alberti, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1435. Bronze plaque, 7 x 5 3/8 in (2.01 x 13.6 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Alberti has here modeled himself in profile, an act at once of self-assertion and self-reflection befitting a humanist and leading participant in the exploration of the human condition (see also Chapter 4).

The same critical spirit that he brought to the so-called "Donation of Constantine," Valla also brought to his other scholarly and philosophical works. Valla's use of Epicureanism in his *De Voluptate* (On Pleasure) as a contrast to Stoic concepts of virtue has already been noted. It is inspired by a critical spirit that aims to probe and question the comfortable assumptions of the age. The same spirit animates his *Adnotationes novi testamenti* ("Notes on the New Testament"), which is a study of the Latin Vulgate text, a fourth-century translation from the Greek by the saint and scholar Jerome. Using the methods of textual criticism, supported by a thorough knowledge of both Greek and Hebrew, Valla demonstrates that many of Jerome's translations, which had been used and extended by the church over a thousand years to support certain kinds of practice and doctrine, had no basis in the original text. Valla's arguments were later of great interest to the reformers Erasmus and Luther (see Chapter 9).

For some historians, it is the critical spirit that humanist scholars brought to historical, literary, religious, and scientific texts that is the movement's most lasting contribution. Whereas many humanist works are now read only by specialists, their ideas have entered into the mainstream of Western thought, though in a form altered and extended by later thinkers. The critical outlook and scholarly method in which humanist scholars were innovators remains valid and alive to this day.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF HUMANISM

The preceding pages have sketched a profile of humanism as the defining intellectual movement of the Renaissance, showing that humanists addressed many social, political, and even economic issues that concerned their contemporaries. The question remains just how humanism related to the society of the Renaissance. This final section considers the

occupations filled by humanists, the social backgrounds from which they came, and the social settings in which they gathered to exchange ideas.

Humanists most often held one of three positions: they were secretaries, teachers, or amateurs. The medieval or Renaissance secretary was not a mere clerk or receptionist, but someone who had the special confidence of a superior (a prince, a prelate, or a magistrate), and was responsible for records and correspondence and thus, often, for the rhetorical definition of policy. The origins of humanism, as has been seen, lie in the activity of the secretaries of north Italian city-states in the age of the commune and popular republic. In the Renaissance proper, humanists were often employed as the secretaries of city-states and principalities and in the many offices under the papal CURIA, or court. It has already been noted that among the major humanists are the sequence of the chancellors, or first secretaries, of Florence: Coluccio Salutati, Leonardo Bruni, and Poggio Bracciolini. The Hellenist Francesco Filelfo served as secretary to Visconti and Sforza rulers of Milan, while Lorenzo Valla and Giovanni Pontano (1422–1503) served King Alfonso I of Naples, "the Magnificent." The need for humanistically trained, trustworthy secretaries was so great that Venice created a special social category for the families who regularly performed this function, and a publicly funded school for training their offspring.

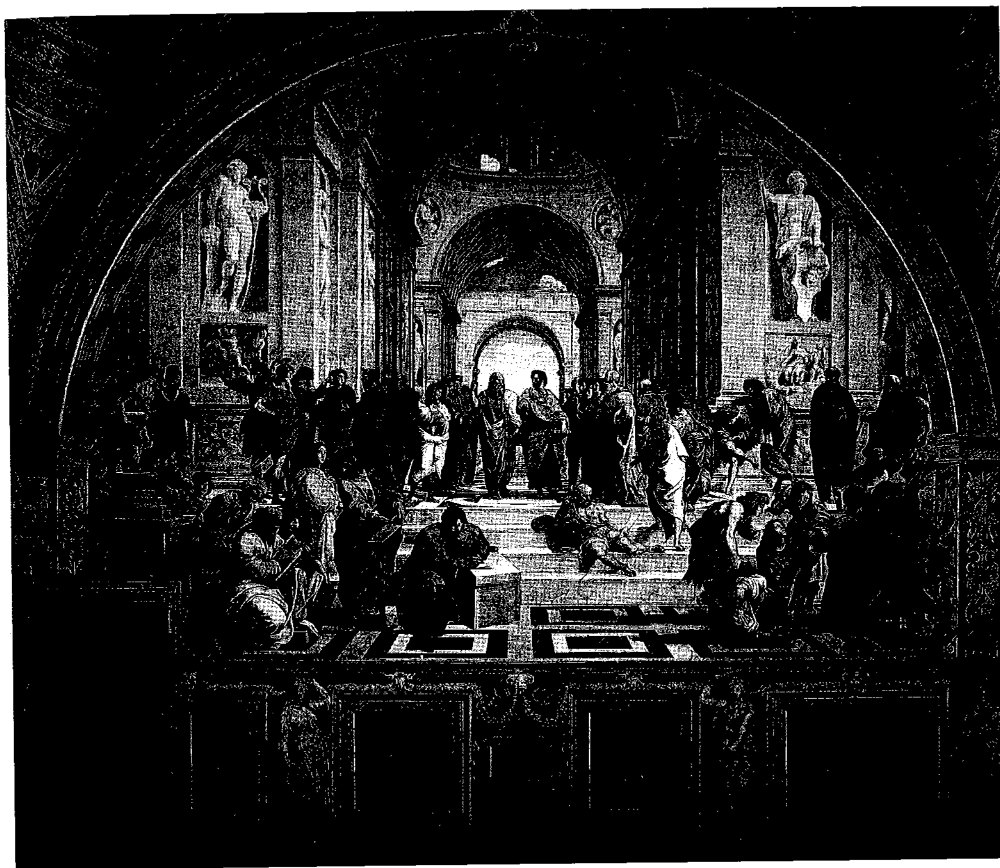
The Venetians understood well the relation between education and occupational skills. Once the skills of the humanist came to be prized, it was necessary to train experts who could reproduce those skills by educating each new generation. Pier Paolo Vergerio, Vittorino da Feltre, and Guarino Veronese (1370/4–1460) all performed this task for princely employers. Many more served in public and private schools and as personal tutors in the houses of the wealthy. The associations that young men made at humanist schools often led to lifelong friendships. They reached across the social spectrum, from burgher to prince, and invigorated the society of humanists.

Humanist amateurs include all those for whom humanist studies were a joy and commitment, but whose primary occupation was not as a secretary or teacher of humanist skills. There were two main categories of amateurs: clerics, whose primary occupation was as a priest or monk, or, more commonly, bishop of the church; and wealthy men, whose primary occupation was to engage in commerce or in public service, as a magistrate, ambassador, general, or prince.

That some humanists received wages for their intellectual work whereas others were complete amateurs already points to the complex sociology of the humanist cohort. Some humanists were the sons of notaries or physicians. Solidly of the middle class, they could hope to find employment as secretaries or teachers. Others were the sons of wealthy merchants, or of the Venetian nobility, or of princes. They were more likely to pursue their humanist studies—and many did—as amateurs, while playing a prominent social role.

Clerical humanists in the lower ranks were more likely to be children of the middle classes. Those holding the titles of bishop or archbishop, or abbot or head of a religious order or patriarch, or even cardinal or pope, were likely to come from the higher social strata. There are exceptions even within the papacy: Pope Nicholas V (Tommaso Parentucelli, 1397–1455), humanist scholar and founder of the Vatican library, was the son of a struggling physician; but his predecessor, Pope Eugene IV (Gabriele Condulmier, 1388–1447), also a humanist and patron of humanists, came from a noble Venetian clan.

The women humanists, like the clerics, might be daughters of humbler men, as were



Raphael, *The School of Athens*, 1509–11 (after restoration). Fresco. Vatican, Rome.

Raphael celebrates the philosophers of all eras and regions in this depiction of a gathering of the wise. Among them are the Athenian philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; the ancient sages Pythagoras and Zoroaster; Diogenes the Cynic, and the mathematicians Euclid and Ptolemy. Plato stands at the center, his hand pointing to the heavens as the source of truth; his pupil Aristotle is next to him, reaching out his hand as he considers the moral truths of mankind.

Fedele, a secretary's daughter; Cereta, a merchant's daughter; and Morata, a teacher's daughter. Or they might be daughters of noblemen, as was Nogarola. Humanists might come from some lower burgher status than those mentioned here; but not one appears to have come from the peasantry. Humanism is a phenomenon of Italy's urban civilization.

Where did these humanists exchange their ideas? Not, for the most part, in the ivory tower seclusion of the universities, which housed the scholastic philosophers. Nor even, very often, in the monasteries—although in Italy, both university and monastery were often part of the urban fabric. There were, however, important circles of humanist intellectuals employed by the pope and, to a lesser extent, by cardinals and bishops. These were often visited by a humanist diplomat or emissary, who stayed for dinner or for a few days. Humanists also gathered in the courts of the CONDOTTIERE princes of northern Italy—Urbino, Ferrara, Mantua—and of the grand figures of the duke of Milan and king of Naples.

In Florence, the chancery was the center of humanist exchange; and also, in the days of Ficino and the Medici, in villa retreats outside the walls, or in the urban palaces. In Venice, a large number of humanist amateurs among the nobility held humanist gatherings, which the humbler secretaries and physician or clerical amateurs might attend. These, like the Florentine palace and villa retreats, were the model for the academies and salons that would form in the sixteenth century. They brought not only humanists together, but with them

artists and musicians, poets and playwrights. The humanist movement, however important it was as a source of ideas, was just as important as a spur to other forms of literary and artistic creation.

CONCLUSION

Humanism was the preeminent intellectual movement of the era. It informed and enlivened all other areas of culture, including the arts and sciences, and even such diverse phenomena as theater and civic processions and the design of weapons and fortifications. It also transformed the way ideas were communicated, introduced principles of scholarly method, and created the school curriculum that would prevail in the West into the nineteenth century.

Like the cities in which it flourished, humanism was ancient in origin. It derived from and was constantly sustained by the legacy of classical literature, primarily Latin, but also Greek. Classical thought lay behind its commitment to the human realm (without discarding the divine), to the active life of the citizen (while still revering the secluded life of the sage or contemplative), and to the force of the will (while still valuing the fruits of the intellect).

Yet Renaissance humanism, while it was part of the "rebirth" that was the Renaissance, was not just about the recovery of the past. It was about innovation, grounded in the past. Perhaps no illustration of this complex relationship is more powerful than the image of Niccolò Machiavelli (see Chapter 8), politician, statesman, and boundlessly original author, a child of humanism though not himself a humanist, who each evening engaged with the ancients—much as Petrarch corresponded with Cicero. Exchanging his sordid country clothes for the robes of the courtier, he retired to his study:

> And in this graver dress I enter the antique courts of the ancients where ... I taste the food that alone is mine, for which I was born. And there I make bold and speak to them and ask the motives of their actions. And they, in their humanity, reply to me. And for the space of four hours I forget the world, remember no vexation, fear poverty no more, tremble no more at death: I am wholly absorbed in them.

(From J.R Hale, *Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy.* London: English University Presses, 1961, p. 112)

Machiavelli lived in the past, one might say. But that past was not dead; rather, it bounded into the present to live and bear fruit once again in the hands of this man of the Renaissance.

THE RENAISSANCE IN EUROPE

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