



THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
RENAISSANCE HUMANISM

EDITED BY
JILL KRAYE

Warburg Institute

The beginning of Book I of Virgil's *Georgics*: MS London, British Library, King's 24, f. 17'.
The script is attributed to the famous Paduan calligrapher Bartolomeo Sanvito, who may also have been responsible for the illuminations. The manuscript was made c. 1490 for the apostolic protonotary Lodovico Agnelli, later to become archbishop of Cosenza.

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, VIC 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 1996
Reprinted 1997, 1998, 2001

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data applied for

The Cambridge companion to Renaissance humanism / edited by Jill Kraye.

p. cm. – (Cambridge companions to literature)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 43038 0 (hardback). – ISBN 0 521 43624 9 (paperback)

1. Humanism. 2. Renaissance. I. Kraye, Jill. II. Series.

CB361.C26 1996

001.3'094'09024-DC20 95-9469 CIP

ISBN 0 521 43038 0 hardback

ISBN 0 521 43624 9 paperback

M/914077

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I

The origins of humanism

NICHOLAS MANN

Any account of the past is necessarily coloured by the preconceptions, the aspirations and, above all, the knowledge or ignorance of the scholar who produces it. The terms and concepts that historians use to order and explain the objects of their inquiry are neither fixed nor value-free, but are evolving and often highly subjective elements in that process of revealing the past that gradually leads us to a better understanding of it. Labels such as Dark Ages or Renaissance, which are affixed to whole periods of European history, while they are convenient for the purposes of historiographical exposition, may tell only part of the truth about those segments of the past that they purport to characterize. The more we learn about the period following the decline of Rome, the less dark and uncultured it appears; the more we inquire into what was reborn in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the more we become aware of vital continuities with the past.

The history of humanism exemplifies both those continuities and a sense of renewal. The term itself owes its origin to the Latin *humanitas*, used by Cicero and others in classical times to betoken the kind of cultural values that one would derive from what used to be called a liberal education: the *studia humanitatis* constituted the study of what we might now think of as 'arts' subjects – language, literature, history and moral philosophy in particular. Even if Cicero was not widely read in the Middle Ages, he and his terminology were well known to certain fourteenth-century scholars (notably Petrarch, who regarded him as his favourite author); by the following century, the *studia humanitatis* were firmly enshrined in the university curriculum. The term *umanista* was used, in fifteenth-century Italian academic jargon, to describe a teacher or student of classical literature and the arts associated with it, including that of rhetoric. The English equivalent 'humanist' makes its appearance in the late sixteenth century with a very similar meaning. Only in the nineteenth century, however, and probably for the first time in Germany in 1809, is the attribute transformed into a substantive: humanism, standing for devotion to the



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

literatures of ancient Greece and Rome, and the humane values that may be derived from them. The concept to which this volume is dedicated is thus a relatively new one, even if, as this first chapter will attempt to show, the activity to which it relates has a long and honourable pedigree, and was being practised for centuries before anyone thought of giving it a name.¹

For the purposes of the present discussion, a working definition of humanism is clearly necessary, notwithstanding the misgivings expressed above about the value of historiographical labels. But it is precisely because it was originally an activity and not a concept that we can with confidence advance a description that will justify devoting an entire volume to it. Humanism is that concern with the legacy of antiquity – and in particular, but not exclusively, with its literary legacy – which characterizes the work of scholars from at least the ninth century onwards. It involves above all the rediscovery and study of ancient Greek and Roman texts, the restoration and interpretation of them and the assimilation of the ideas and values that they contain. It ranges from an archaeological interest in the remains of the past to a highly focused philological attention to the details of all manner of written records – from inscriptions to epic poems – but comes to pervade, as we shall see, almost all areas of post-medieval culture, including theology, philosophy, political thought, jurisprudence, medicine, mathematics and the creative arts. Grounded in what we would now think of as learned research, it rapidly found expression in teaching. And in this way it was to become the embodiment of, and vehicle for, that very classical tradition that is the most fundamental aspect of the continuity of European cultural and intellectual history. This chapter will endeavour to trace the main features of that continuity from its apparent beginnings in the ninth century to the end of the fourteenth century – a period in which scholarly interest was focused largely, but by no means exclusively, on Roman culture and Latin literature.

That these beginnings were only apparent, and that they themselves rested upon the uncharted scholarly efforts of an earlier age, themselves no doubt relying on still earlier attempts to keep the spirit of Rome and its texts alive, may be demonstrated by a minute but symptomatic instance of the survival of a classical text, *De chorographia* of the first-century geographer Pomponius Mela. We know that Petrarch acquired a copy of this rare work at Avignon in the mid-1330s, and although we do not possess his manuscript, a number of those derived from it preserved his annotations to the text and transmitted the results of his erudite labours to later scholars. The copy from which Petrarch was working was almost certainly a twelfth-century one, and at all events clearly descended from a ninth-century manuscript

made at Auxerre and annotated by the Carolingian teacher Heiric. He in turn owed his knowledge of *De chorographia* to a sixth-century miscellany of texts assembled by Rusticius Helpidius Domnulus at Ravenna, which had since late antiquity been an important cultural centre. In this case – and it is not unique – we can therefore trace a direct line of textual descent from Rome to the Renaissance, a line constructed by scholarly activity of a kind characteristic of humanism.

Heiric's activity at Auxerre is exemplary of what is known as the Carolingian Renaissance, a surge of scholarship that took place in the eighth and ninth centuries in which many features of later humanistic practice can be observed. Auxerre was but one of the great monastic centres where during Charlemagne's reign the production of books flourished and important libraries were formed; others include Tours, Fleury and Ferrières in France, Fulda, Hersfeld, Corvey, Reichenau and St Gall in Germanic areas, Bobbio and Pomposa in northern Italy. Heiric was an influential scholar and teacher, to whom we owe the transmission of a number of classical texts besides that of Pomponius Mela, and notably fragments of Petronius. He was a pupil of Lupus of Ferrières, who was the greatest scholar of the ninth century and in effect the first classical philologist. Not only did he build up a substantial library, but he made every effort to acquire further manuscripts of texts that he already possessed, so that by comparing them he could correct and augment his own copies. More than a dozen surviving manuscripts, including works by Cicero, Valerius Maximus and Aulus Gellius, are annotated in Heiric's hand and bear witness to his philological skills. Five or six centuries on, manuscripts such as these were to provide the Italian humanists with the primary material for their recovery of the classics.

A quite different aspect of the Carolingian period, but one which also to some extent foreshadows the revival of learning that was to come later in Italy, was the need generated by a centralized regime for educated administrators outside the narrow sphere of the monasteries. Charlemagne's solution was to summon the head of the greatest school in Europe at York to advise him on educational matters in 782. Alcuin brought with him from England an effective pedagogical method, based on the reading of classical texts, and a significant consequence of his advice was the imperial edict establishing schools not only in monasteries but also for the secular clergy attached to the cathedrals. These schools, whose aim was perhaps no greater than to guarantee the spread of basic literacy, none the less helped to create a literate class outside the monasteries and, in generating an increasing need for books, widened the circle of readers for the texts that they contained.²

Even if with the decline of Charlemagne's empire the flourishing literary culture that had accompanied it at its height did not survive, the pattern which it had established for the spread of education to cities was to be of the greatest significance. Major monasteries continued to be centres of scholarship and book-production, and to promote interest in classical literature. The outstanding example is the Benedictine mother-house of Monte Cassino, to whose activity, especially in the eleventh century under Abbot Desiderius, we owe some magnificent manuscripts and the survival of a number of key texts. But the future was with the courts, the cathedral schools and the cities. During the twelfth century, classical literature underwent a new revival, this time labelled as the twelfth-century Renaissance; at the courts and in the cathedral schools (some of them destined to become universities) of southern Italy and Sicily, of Spain, of Bologna and Montpellier, of northern France and Norman England, scholars turned their knowledge of the classics not only to literary ends but also to more practical and above all secular ones. In addition to men of letters and philosophers, society needed lawyers, doctors and civil servants, and for them the study of the writings of antiquity assumed the role of professional training. The range of texts available had not only expanded considerably in the field of literature, grammar and rhetoric, but now included Latin translations of Greek scientific and philosophical texts: medical treatises, Euclid, Ptolemy and some works of Aristotle.

It is a measure of the degree to which twelfth-century French culture was permeated by classical material that even vernacular literature came to bear its traces. In the last decades of the century three romances – the *Roman de Thèbes*, *Eneas* and the *Roman de Troie* – and many shorter texts were directly based upon material reaching back to antiquity. The growth in production during the same period of *florilegia*, anthologies of excerpts from classical authors, confirms the impression that their writings, or parts of them at least, were reaching an increasingly wide, though not always scholarly, audience.³

One of the outstanding scholars of the age, John of Salisbury, may stand as an illustration of the embryonic state of humanism. He had been educated at Chartres and Paris in the early twelfth century and certainly possessed an impressive, if somewhat patchy, knowledge of Latin literature (some of it no doubt derived from *florilegia* rather than the original texts); he praised eloquence and defended liberal studies in his *Metalogicon*; he was skilled at deploying his knowledge of examples drawn from ancient history to illustrate the moral judgements that he brought to bear on contemporary problems. Yet he shows no signs of an awareness of the ancient problem of the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy, nor of

a deeper understanding of the works from which his examples were derived: they served as ornamentation to his argument rather than as a fundamental part of the thinking behind it. He was an excellent Latin stylist, but as a result of being a grammarian rather than a philologist. In short, he was typical of the best kind of medieval classicist: broadly familiar with, but still only an armchair traveller in, the terrain that the humanists were later to explore in depth and make their own.⁴

The factors that prevented the kind of classical reading that was done by a John of Salisbury from developing into fully-fledged *studia humanitatis* were endemic in a society, such as that of northern France, in which the Church and its needs dominated. Canon law (the body of ecclesiastical rules imposed by authority in matters of faith, morals and discipline) and the new logic of Aristotle were the mainstay of the education of clerics, and within the confines of scholastic theology, pagan literature could hardly come into its own. Indeed, scholasticism was later to be regarded by some as the very antithesis of humanism, though such a view greatly oversimplifies the issues. In contrast to the largely agrarian and feudal society of countries north of the Alps, however, a quite different and predominantly urban civilization had developed in Italy. In the city-states of the north in particular, the needs of civic administration and commerce were to prove stronger than those of the Church; educated laymen, lawyers and civil servants in particular emerged as the new literate class.

Whereas in France the study of classical texts – which was to continue well into the fourteenth century – tended to remain rooted in grammar as a tool for understanding and sometimes imitating Roman writers, in Italy it developed along different lines and particularly in the direction of rhetoric as a skill for contemporary life. The study of what in classical times had been the art of public speaking had by the twelfth century in Italy become the *ars dictaminis*, the art of letter-writing; those who practised it, the *dictatores*, applied their knowledge to the needs of their patrons and the legal profession. They were not initially classical scholars in any profound sense, but rhetoricians who drew upon ancient models to achieve eloquence in the writing of letters and speeches; yet they held positions of influence as teachers, secretaries or chancellors to rulers and communes, and were consequently involved in, and influential upon, affairs of state. We can see in *dictamen* one of the roots of humanism, reaching deep into the past: the letter, thanks above all to Petrarch, was to become one of the most favoured and versatile literary genres of the Renaissance, encompassing private and political discourse, scholarly and philosophical enquiry, and all manner of literary enterprises.

Another main root of humanism which may be observed in thirteenth-century Italy, closely entwined with, and sometimes inseparable from, the activities of the *dictatores*, was the study of Roman law in its philological and practical aspects. Indeed, as early as the ninth century there are traces of notaries at the royal palace at Pavia applying the *Corpus iuris civilis* (the sixth-century codification of Roman law compiled at the behest of the Emperor Justinian) to contemporary situations, anticipating by some 400 years the figure of the legally trained civil servant as the typical learned layman who was to play such an important part in civic life. In the rapidly developing independent communes of the north, the role of lawyers in economic and political affairs was crucial. From at least the twelfth century onwards, and notably at the University of Bologna, there had been a revival in legal education. The glossing and interpretation of the great texts of Roman law, the *Code* and the *Digest*, with a view to applying them to current legal problems, combined with an awareness of historical origins no doubt reinforced by the presence of many physical remains of antiquity, helped to give a sense that the civilization of the past was still alive, and this in turn led to curiosity about that civilization.⁵

The lawyers who studied legal texts and adapted the precepts of Roman law to the needs of a fundamentally different society thus also became interested in other aspects of their classical heritage, and in particular in history and moral philosophy; they even resorted to the recreational writing of Latin verse. Lovato Lovati is the earliest figure who exemplifies these tendencies. Lovato gathered around him in Padua a group of like-minded men whose scholarly activities justify one in regarding that city as one of the earliest centres of proto-humanism. A notary and subsequently a judge, he was familiar with a remarkable range of classical texts, many of them extremely rare at the time, including Seneca's tragedies and lyric poets such as Catullus, Tibullus and Propertius. He almost certainly encountered some of them at the Benedictine Abbey of Pomposa and in the Chapter Library of Verona, both of them renowned as repositories of the writings of antiquity. He was also a skilled interpreter of epigraphs and showed a passionate antiquarian concern for Padua's past when in 1283-4 he identified an early Christian sarcophagus that had been dug up during building works as containing the remains of the mythical Trojan founder of the city, Antenor. It is significant of the cultural climate that it was agreed to incorporate this supposedly glorious relic of the city's ancient past into a monument of supposedly classical style bearing a Latin inscription composed by Lovato himself.

Yet however revealing this episode may be, it does not do justice to his scholarship. Lovato's real achievements, or such as survive today, were his

Latin verse epistles, bearing the traces of his reading of the classical poets, and a remarkable short commentary on Seneca's tragedies, the fruit of his own careful reading of the texts and in effect the first brief treatise on classical metrics. In these works we perceive in embryonic form three of the features that were to mark the later development of humanism: an appetite for classical texts; a philological concern to correct them and ascertain their meaning; and a desire to imitate them. These features mark, to a greater or lesser degree, a number of other minor figures in Lovato's Paduan circle, above all his nephew Rolando da Piazzola and Geremia da Montagnone, compiler of one of the most successful of medieval *florilegia*, the *Compendium moralium notabilium* ('Anthology of Noteworthy Examples of Virtuous Behaviour'), or *Epitoma sapientie* ('Epitome of Wisdom') in the 1505 edition, containing a vast range of carefully identified excerpts from classical and medieval authors.⁶

The most significant of Lovato's pupils, and the key figure in this scholarly revival, was the lawyer, politician and patriot Albertino Mussato, who came to be known, as diplomat and man of letters, far beyond the bounds of his native city. He too was widely read, and his reading bore fruit in his Latin verse, much of it in a polemical vein; he wrote a defence of poetry and a history, *De gestis Henrici VII Cesaris* ('The Deeds of Emperor Henry VII'), modelled on Livy. Above all, he was noted for his verse tragedy *Ecerinis*. It was not just that this was the first play to have been composed in classical metre since antiquity, in imitation of Seneca; it was also a work with a powerful political message, telling of the fall of the tyrant of Padua Ezzelino da Romano and warning against the dangers of domination by the ruler of Verona, Cangrande della Scala. In recognition of this work of poetry and patriotism, Mussato was crowned with laurels in 1315 by his grateful compatriots. For the Florentine humanist and chancellor Coluccio Salutati, writing eighty years later, this coronation was no doubt one of the reasons why he placed Mussato among the forebears of Petrarch in his survey of the restorers of learning.⁷

Recent research has rescued from oblivion a number of other minor figures in and around Padua in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. They were generally lawyers by training, and their enthusiasm for classical culture was shown by their interest in links with antiquity (such as an epigram by Benvenuto dei Campesani of Vicenza celebrating the return to Verona of her long-lost son Catullus) and by their emulation of classical letter-writing or historiography. Verona itself, no doubt in part because of its remarkable Chapter Library, can be seen as another cradle of humanistic activity. Giovanni Mansionario, for example, drew upon manuscripts that he found there to compile, between 1306 and 1320, a *Historia imperialis*,

which shows a distinct ability to compare and evaluate historical sources critically. He also devoted a study to showing that the Pliny who was well known in the Middle Ages as the author of the *Natural History* was not the same as the Pliny who wrote a collection of letters, but that there had been two men of that name in antiquity. Also at Verona, Cangrande's chancellor Benzo d'Alessandria composed a vast historical encyclopedia, the *Cronica* (1313-20), based on a very wide range of classical texts, many of which he had himself unearthed during his travels. The search for texts, like the critical acumen shown by Mansionario, are clear signs of the progress that scholarship was making.

Such progress appears, in Padua, Vicenza and Verona at least, to amount almost to the development of a common literary and aesthetic ideal: the rediscovery of classical texts and through them the assertion of links, sometimes mythical, with Roman civilization; and the restoration of classical genres and styles of writing. Elsewhere in Italy, the evidence for some kind of classical revival is much more tenuous, seeming often to depend on isolated individuals. One such was Giovanni del Virgilio, appointed to teach Latin poetry at the University of Bologna in 1321, who appears to have limited himself to Virgil and Ovid, but whose Latin poems addressed to Mussato and Dante included one of the earliest eclogues in Virgilian mode. There were in addition in Florence a number of scholars active in the revival and imitation of classical literature, including Francesco da Barberino and Geri d'Arezzo, who is placed on a par with Mussato by Coluccio Salutati;⁸ but there was at this period no sign of a concerted interest in the culture of antiquity.

There are two other centres of learning in the fourteenth century, however, which deserve particular mention in the context of the present discussion. The first is the Angevin court of Naples, one of the earliest places in Italy to witness a revival of Greek, to which we shall return in the final part of this chapter. The other, closely in contact with the Angevin court, most especially during the reign of King Robert I (1309-1343), is the papal curia at Avignon. For the first three-quarters of the fourteenth century, the so-called 'Babylonian captivity' of the popes there - the result of pressure exerted by the powerful kings of France - meant that it became the diplomatic and cultural centre of the western world. The papal library gradually acquired an important collection of classical texts; the curia, as a focal point of patronage, attracted scholars and men of letters from all over Europe, providing employment for cultivated lawyers and *dictatores*. Perhaps the single most illustrious intellectual figure to emerge from the Avignonese milieu was Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca), often considered to be

the father of humanism and certainly the outstanding scholar and creative writer of his generation.⁹ It is in his activities and in his writings that we perceive the fulfilment of all the various scholarly tendencies that we have so far observed; yet it is also clear that without the preparation of the terrain that we have witnessed his achievements would not have been possible.

His father, a Florentine notary, was exiled from his native city a few months after Dante in 1302 - both men were conservatives who fell victim to a shift of power in favour of the radicals - and sought employment at the papal curia. Not surprisingly, he wanted his son to have a legal education, sending him to Bologna for six years when he was sixteen. But by Petrarch's own account his father's intentions were foiled, for from an early age he developed a passion for the classical authors, reading everything that he could lay his hands on, and in particular the works of Cicero and Virgil. From the former he was to learn that mastery of rhetoric and style which was to raise him above the level of the *dictatores*, and from the latter a love of poetry that was to shape his whole literary life. In his early legal and rhetorical training we see the reflection of the Paduan notaries of Lovato's day; like them too, Petrarch was to remain in the secular world and to serve political patrons as politician and diplomat.

He spent the first half of his life in or around Avignon, principally in Vaucluse a few miles away. He thus had access not only to patronage and to the cultural and intellectual milieu of the curia, but also to books: those in the papal library and those brought to Avignon by others. However much he came to resent the business of the curia and the iniquities of the papal city as time went by, it was in a sense an ideal centre in which to conduct his first philological enterprises and from which to travel in search of others.

It was doubtless at Avignon that he supervised the preparation of a Virgil manuscript for his father around 1325, and certainly there that, a dozen years later, he had a frontispiece added to it by the Siennese artist Simone Martini. It was also at Avignon, aided by manuscripts found there or brought there, that he was able to piece together and restore the text of Livy's *History of Rome*, combining an incomplete thirteenth-century copy of the third decade with a copy of the first, much of which he transcribed in his own hand, and finally a copy of the fourth decade brought to Avignon from Chartres by Landolfo Colonna. By about 1330 he had succeeded in assembling the most complete text of Livy then known and was able to recognize what the shape of the original must have been. But in addition he was able considerably to improve the text, collating that of each of the decades with other manuscripts. His notes and corrections to the third decade are particularly valuable, since they record the variants of a manuscript which was probably also provided by Landolfo Colonna, but is now

lost, and which descended from a quite different branch of the tradition. Although there is no real evidence of critical reflection on Petrarch's part as to the relative merits of the various sources that he was comparing, there can be no doubt as to either his philological zeal and acumen or his enthusiasm for classical literature.¹⁰

This enthusiasm is reflected in his search for new texts, first manifested in a journey to the north in 1333, when he found a manuscript of Cicero's forgotten *Pro Archia* in Liège, and one of Propertius in Paris, stemming from the thirteenth-century scholar Richard of Fournival. Both these texts he studied assiduously and transmitted to posterity with his annotations and emendations, as he did also with *De chorographia* of Pomponius Mela (mentioned above); one clear benefit of Petrarch's humanism is his particular contribution to the tradition of classical texts which he had himself inherited from earlier generations of scholars. Much subsequent scholarship would have been impossible without his intervention, and it is indeed probable that we owe the very survival of certain texts to his discoveries and his labours.

He was of course not alone in his enthusiasm, and the history of the restoration of Livy probably owes as large a debt to Landolfo Colonna as it does to Petrarch; yet the active search for manuscripts of classical texts clearly points to the development of what was to become a major humanist activity of subsequent generations of scholars, starting with Petrarch's friend and disciple Giovanni Boccaccio. Its most immediate consequence was that Petrarch's personal library grew rapidly. We know from a list that he made of his favourite books in the late 1330s that by then it already contained a high proportion of classical texts (including fourteen by Cicero); by the time of his death it had become the largest collection of Roman literature in private hands and included a number of works which Petrarch had himself discovered.¹¹

Although this precious library was dispersed, many books from it have survived – perhaps most significantly the Virgil mentioned above, now in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, and Petrarch's copy of Livy, in the Harleian collection of the British Library.¹² It is in the margins of such manuscripts as these that we see Petrarch's dialogue with ancient authors at close quarters: his annotations to Virgil's poems and to Servius' commentary upon them reveal a close eye for points of prosody and history, and a dense network of cross-references to the writings of other classical authors. As a result of his remarkably wide knowledge of them, he was frequently able to correct Servius' interpretations and even (in a later letter) to prove that Virgil's account of the love of Dido and Aeneas was historically incorrect, since she lived some 300 years after Aeneas' death.¹³ Petrarch's

notes and emendations to Livy's text bear witness to his concern to get not only the words but also the facts right. His close familiarity with every detail of it furnished him with a remarkable knowledge of Roman history, which he deployed to correct other writings, such as St Jerome's translation of the chronicle of Eusebius. To such sources he added his personal observations upon the monuments of Rome, visited in 1337, and even the study of coins. The quality of his historical scholarship was such as to enable him to identify certain buildings (such as the Septizonium, the ruins of which were part of the monastery of San Gregorio al Celio) and to point out that the comic poet Terence (Terentius Afer) had traditionally been confused with a different Terence (Terentius Culleo). His brief biography of Terence became attached to the majority of later humanist manuscripts of the comedies. He was even called in to act as expert consultant to the Emperor Charles IV in 1361 and was able to demonstrate, by reference to historical, stylistic and linguistic features, that a document claimed by Rudolf IV Habsburg to be a privilege granted by Julius Caesar and Nero, justifying his claim that Austria was an independent sovereign state within the Empire, was a forgery.¹⁴ Scholarship was thus put to the service of the state.

On the other hand, Petrarch did not get everything right. He failed to observe many details of the monuments he visited in Rome, ascribing, for instance, the Ponte Sant'Angelo to Trajan, despite the name of Hadrian clearly inscribed upon it; he, like Lovato, believed that the tomb of a freedman named T. Livius discovered in Padua in the early fourteenth century was that of the great Livy himself. In this instance we may perceive an element of political naïvety on Petrarch's part: the wish to re-establish the continuity with ancient Rome proved stronger than the critical sense which might have revealed the error. To this same naïvety may be attributed his unquestioning admiration and support for Cola di Rienzo, a Roman notary with pronounced antiquarian tastes who attempted to restore the ancient republic. Cola was involved in a series of popular uprisings in Rome in the 1340s, which culminated in his nomination first as rector and then as tribune of the city, and finally his knighthood in a ceremony which included ritual bathing in the font of Constantine and, on 15 July 1347, his solemn coronation as 'Tribunus Augustus' on the Capitoline Hill. Petrarch was apparently dazzled by Cola's passion for, and exploitation of, all that he himself held dear: the Roman ideal as refracted through inscriptions, monuments, coins and Livy's history.¹⁵ No matter that the ideal was flawed, or indeed that Cola's revolution burned out almost as quickly as it had flared up, causing severe embarrassment to the pope and indeed to Petrarch himself. The restoration of the ancient world in its capital city, then sadly neglected in the absence of the papacy, was a goal to which he was

even prepared to sacrifice the most prestigious of his own literary projects, the writing of an epic poem, *Africa*, celebrating the Roman virtues of Scipio Africanus.

It was probably this project which earned Petrarch his laurels in a ceremony, which – if we are to believe all that he tells us about it – also had strong connotations of classical revival: after a searching oral examination by King Robert in Naples, he was crowned with laurels on the Capitoline by a Roman senator on Easter Sunday 1341 and made a speech, based on a Virgilian text, in which he dwelt at length upon the importance of the poetic art.¹⁶ Both in the ceremony and the defence of poetry, there was very likely some conscious echoing of Mussato's example; Petrarch was also aware that in ancient times both emperors and poets had been honoured by coronation. At all events, the renewal of an interest in poetry, and indeed in writing Latin verse in good classical style, is a typical humanist concern. In the case both of his *Africa*, conceived in imitation of the *Aeneid*, and of his *Bucolicum carmen* ('Eclogues'), strongly influenced by Virgil's *Eclogues*, not only the fact of writing such classicizing works, but also the intimate details of the way in which he sought to imitate his models without copying them too closely, are characteristic of the peculiarly Petrarchan blend of the intensive scholarly study of antiquity and the rewriting of that antiquity in new and substantially original form.

Petrarch is best known today for his vernacular poetry and above all for the great cycle of sonnets, the *Canzoniere*, in which he celebrates his love for a fictitious lady named Laura.¹⁷ Even there, the influence of the Roman poets is evident. But it is obviously his Latin works that most clearly establish his reputation as a humanist. The precise historical foundations for the epic poem already mentioned were laid in his *De viris illustribus* ('On Famous Men'), which drew in particular on Livy and Suetonius, and contained the lives of important Roman figures, especially those, which he frequently reworked and expanded as his own knowledge grew, of Scipio Africanus and Julius Caesar. *Rerum memorandarum libri* ('Memorable Matters'), on the other hand, in response to the *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX* of Valerius Maximus, provided numerous examples of the Christian virtues drawn from Roman history.

Petrarch's letters deserve special attention. He must have been collecting them, as he wrote them, from early adulthood onwards; but in 1345 he was inspired, by finding a manuscript of Cicero's *Ad Atticum*, his letters to his friend Atticus, in the Chapter Library of Verona, to begin to shape them into a collection, the *Rerum familiarium libri* ('Letters between Friends'), which he continued to reorder and to refine until the late 1350s. What he then published (although he continued to revise it until 1366) was in effect

the first humanist *epistolario* (letter collection), owing its form and its conception to Cicero – and a great deal of its contents to Petrarch's admiration for the Roman statesman – and to his careful cultivation of the image of himself that his letters projected. Certain of them, and in particular ones addressed to Boccaccio, deal specifically with the topic of *imitatio* which was to become crucial to the next generation of humanists. Petrarch describes the impact of classical literature on him and his profound acquaintance with it. He sets out his views on the legitimacy of drawing material from the great writers of the past, but at the same time on the need to do so in a way which is neither servile nor too visible: the writer may follow in another man's tracks, but not exactly in his footsteps. The resemblance to be achieved is not that of portrait to sitter, but of a son to his father: *similitudo non identitas*. The image is borrowed from Seneca; it is symptomatic of Petrarch that even in theoretical discussion he never moves far from the practice. Indeed, he goes so far as to discuss precise practical examples of passages in his *Bucolicum carmen* where he had detected verses that echoed too closely for his taste their Virgilian, Ovidian or Horatian models, and which he changed to good effect.¹⁸ Some of these statements have a self-satisfied ring and are not so much the matter of everyday letter-writing as the substance of polemical and even didactic treatises addressed to those whose interests were closest to his own. Of all Petrarch's generation, Boccaccio was probably the man who most closely shared his passion for seeking out manuscripts of rare classical works and writing in imitation of them. He too wrote a work of partly classical history, as well as an immensely influential handbook on the pagan gods; he was also Petrarch's accomplice, as we shall shortly see, in the first significant attempts to revive the study of Greek.

The concern which we have observed with both the form and the content of the writings of antiquity is reflected in the most idiosyncratic and somehow medieval way in the major treatise of Petrarch's maturity, *De remediis utriusque fortune* ('On the Remedies for Both Kinds of Fortune') of 1366. This moral encyclopedia, providing remedies for the undesirable effects of good fortune and consolation for the blows of ill fortune, is modelled upon Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* and takes the form of a series of dialogues between a Stoically-minded Reason and the four emotions (condemned by the Stoics): Joy and Hope, Sorrow and Fear. It contains an enormous amount of explicitly classical material: more than 500 examples drawn from antiquity and a great deal of implicit quotation of Roman writers. It might be seen as the peak of Petrarch's literary achievement, and yet it is a work without synthesis. There is no systematic moral-philosophical thread running through it other than a conventional

Christian scorn for worldly goods, and consolation for adversity in the tradition of Boethius. The classical material therefore loses its sting; the Stoic echoes of Cicero and Seneca disappear in a mass of material reinforcing more orthodox views. What Petrarch does not achieve here, in what was to be internationally his most popular work for at least two centuries, is any kind of philosophical renewal which might lead us to regard him as the founder of the deeper vein of humanism that goes beyond the mere reading and using of texts.¹⁹

The only work in which he explicitly addresses a philosophical topic is his polemical *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* ('On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others'). Written in 1367, it was a rejoinder to four Aristotelians who had said that Petrarch was a good but uneducated man. He first berates the learned ignorance of his accusers, and thereby the doctrines of scholastic philosophy, which may teach you the truth, but cannot induce you to love it. He then defends the cause of the kind of learning, the *studia humanitatis*, to which he had devoted his life, claiming that the study of literature, and in particular classical literature, makes a man good. He thus reunites the causes of rhetoric and moral philosophy. His most powerful example is of course Cicero, whom he portrays as a proto-Christian. With *De ignorantia* we come full circle: to the writer who first inspired him and who provided him throughout his career not merely with texts to study but with a literary and ethical model for his own life and works.²⁰

We may in the end judge that Petrarch was not entirely an innovator, but that he depended upon the efforts of earlier generations to prepare the ground for the kind of scholarship at which he excelled, and that he was therefore part of a continuing tradition. We should none the less recognize the immense impetus that he gave to that tradition by the extraordinary breadth of his learning, by his real sense of the historical distance that divided his age from that of Rome, by the much improved Latin and the influential writings that he bequeathed to posterity and by the new prestige that he attached to his role as scholar. That imitation of the classics which he both preached and practised, and which was embodied in his coronation with laurels *all'antica* in 1341, was responsible for giving Renaissance humanism its first real impulse – and its good name.

There is one essential component of the growth of humanism which has so far escaped our attention, and that is the revival of the study of Greek. A significant portion of Greek scientific writings, and in particular much of the work of Aristotle, had been translated into Arabic and had found its way to the Latin west via north Africa and Spain, where many translations into

Latin were made between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. But the Greek language itself was virtually unknown in Italy (and indeed in the rest of Europe) in the early fourteenth century, even though it continued to be spoken, in a vernacular form, in Sicily and the southernmost parts of the peninsula, and despite regular trade contacts between Venice and Byzantium. There was consequently no tradition, such as the one that we have witnessed for Latin literature, of continuous study.²¹

There are fragmentary pieces of evidence suggesting that in Padua towards the middle of the century certain teachers and lawyers possessed Greek manuscripts and even understood them; there are likewise signs that during the reign of King Robert I, the Angevin court of Naples was a centre for the translation into Latin of Greek texts contained in manuscripts in the royal library amassed by Charles I of Anjou (who conquered the Kingdom of Sicily in 1268) and his successors. At one point Robert had no fewer than three translators working for him, including a Calabrian, Niccolò da Reggio, to whom we owe versions of various of Galen's medical writings. It was, however, another native of Calabria, a Basilian monk by the name of Barlaam, who had spent some time in Constantinople but had transferred his allegiance to the Latin Church and moved to King Robert's court, who was the first man to make any significant impact on the humanists whom we have so far discussed.

It appears that he was sent on a diplomatic mission to the papal curia at Avignon by King Robert in 1342 and spent some time teaching Greek there that summer. Petrarch, with characteristic enthusiasm for all things classical, took private lessons with him for some months until Barlaam departed to take up a bishopric in Calabria for which his new pupil had recommended him. This brief episode cannot be said to have made an enormous impression on Petrarch, since when early in 1354 he received a manuscript of Homer as a gift from Nicholas Sygeros, a Byzantine envoy to Avignon (whom he had met in Verona in 1348), he found that he could not read it. This did not prevent him from asking Sygeros to send him works of Hesiod and Euripides, nor did it inhibit his search for other copies of Homer. We know that he inspected, but rejected, one in Padua towards the end of 1358, and that at much the same time he made the acquaintance there of another Calabrian and pupil of Barlaam, an apparently most unpleasant man by the name of Leonzio Pilato.²²

The following March Boccaccio paid a visit to Petrarch in Milan, during which they discussed Petrarch's *Bucolicum carmen* and some of the questions of *imitatio* which were to give rise to the letter mentioned earlier. They also spoke of Pilato, and as a result Boccaccio persuaded him, when he stopped at Florence on a mission to Avignon, to stay there and teach Greek

with a stipend from the Florentine authorities. The year 1360 thus marks the first known official teaching of Greek in an Italian city. Although it is not clear how long Pilato stayed in Florence, his time there left tangible traces in the form of translations of some of Homer and about 400 lines of Euripides' *Hecuba*, commissioned by Boccaccio, and of some of Plutarch's *Lives*, done at the request of Coluccio Salutati.

Pilato's subsequent activity is ill-documented, but he certainly stayed with Petrarch in Venice for about three months in 1363, and they were joined by Boccaccio for part of the time. That summer, he decided to return to Constantinople, inveighing against Italy and the Italians; it was not long, however, before he was inveighing against Constantinople and its inhabitants and planning to return to Italy. He died in a shipwreck on his way back in 1365. That spring, Petrarch had made enquiries of Boccaccio about a particular passage in the Homer translation; towards the end of the following year he finally received his copy of the complete *Odyssey* and *Iliad* in Latin and had fair copies of them made by his amanuensis Giovanni Malpaghini two years later.

These contacts, deriving from the Angevin court, were at best hesitant beginnings in the history of the recovery of Greek. Pilato's translations were literal to a fault and taxed Salutati severely when he tried to put parts of Homer into better Latin. So did another text that he tried to improve a few years later: a plodding half-Greek version of Plutarch's treatise on anger made in Avignon by the archbishop of Thebes, Simon Atumano, in 1373.²³ It was in fact only later, and direct from Byzantium, that the first real scholars came, initially as envoys in the context of increasing diplomatic activity between Constantinople and the west in the face of the growing threat of Turkish domination over the Greek empire. Thirty-seven years after Pilato's false start, a Byzantine diplomat called Manuel Chrysoloras came to Florence on business and instituted there a regular series of lectures on Greek which were to last for several years.

It was a feature of his teaching that the old style of word-by-word rendition which had so bedevilled the literary translations of Pilato and Atumano (and which may have owed something to a desire for accuracy thought appropriate to scientific texts) was to be abandoned in favour of versions which had literary merit in Latin. In pursuit of the better understanding of Greek, Chrysoloras also composed a grammar book, the *Erotemata* ('Questions'), which was to be the first of its kind to be printed in the late fifteenth century and which clearly enjoyed a considerable success not only among Chrysoloras's pupils, but also among such later leading humanists as Erasmus.

It is thus 1397 which has to be seen as a key date in the history of

humanism and even of European culture. Chrysoloras numbered among his pupils some of the most outstanding scholars of the new generation, notably Leonardo Bruni and Guarino of Verona. With them, and the advent of the fifteenth century, Greek regained its status as part of the *studia humanitatis*, and humanism may be said to have entered a new phase.

NOTES

- 1 Two rather different approaches to the historiographical problems surrounding the terms 'humanism' and 'Renaissance' are to be found in W. K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Cambridge MA, 1948) and P. Burke, *The Renaissance* (London, 1964); see also Burke's chapter, 'The spread of Italian humanism', in A. Goodman and A. Mackay, eds., *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe* (London, 1990), pp. 1-22; C. Trinkaus, *The Scope of Renaissance Humanism* (Ann Arbor MI, 1983); and M. McLaughlin, 'Humanist concepts of Renaissance and Middle Ages', *Renaissance Studies*, 2 (1988), 131-42. On the terms 'humanism' and 'humanist', see P. O. Kristeller, 'Humanism', in C. B. Schmitt, Q. Skinner and E. Kessler, eds., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 113-37.
- 2 There is an excellent brief account of the scholarship of the Carolingian period in L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, third edition (Oxford, 1991), ch. 3; see also Trinkaus, *Scope*, pp. 4-6.
- 3 On the twelfth-century Renaissance, see C. H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge MA, 1927); M. de Gandillac and E. Jeuneau, eds., *Entretiens sur la renaissance du 12^e siècle* (Paris, 1968); C. Brooke, *The Twelfth Century Renaissance* (London, 1969); R. L. Benson and G. Constable, eds., *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1982), esp. pp. 1-33. On the Old French romans d'antiquité, see A. Fourrier, *L'Humanisme médiéval dans les littératures romanes du XII^e au XIV^e siècle* (Paris, 1964).
- 4 See Gandillac, *Entretiens*, pp. 53-83; Brooke, *Twelfth Century Renaissance*, pp. 53-74.
- 5 On the role of *dictatores* and lawyers in this context, see R. Weiss, *The Dawn of Humanism in Italy* (London, 1947), pp. 3-5; P. O. Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Renaissance* (Stanford, 1964), pp. 147-65; Kristeller, 'Humanism', pp. 127-30; Trinkaus, *Scope*, pp. 9-11; R. G. Witt, 'Medieval Italian culture and the origins of humanism as a stylistic ideal', in A. Rabil, ed., *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1988), I, pp. 29-70; J. E. Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism* (Princeton, 1968), ch. 6.
- 6 On the Paduan and other early humanists, see, in addition to the works mentioned in the previous note, R. Weiss, *Il primo secolo dell'umanesimo* (Rome, 1949), esp. ch. 1, and his *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, second edition (Oxford, 1988), pp. 16-29; N. G. Siraisi, *Arts and Sciences at Padua: The Studium of Padua before 1350* (Toronto, 1973),

- pp. 42-55; the chapters by G. Billanovich, R. Avesani and L. Gargan in *Storia della cultura veneta*, 6 vols. (Vicenza, 1976-86), II, pp. 19-170.
- 7 In a letter of 1 August 1395 to Bartolomeo Oliari; see Coluccio Salutati, *Epistolario*, ed. F. Novati, 4 vols. (Rome, 1891-1911), III, p. 84: 'the first cultivator of eloquence was your compatriot Mussato of Padua'. On Mussato, see M. T. Dazzi, *Il Mussato preumanista 1261-1329: l'ambiente e l'opera* (Vicenza, 1964).
 - 8 In the letter quoted in the previous note, immediately after the mention of Mussato, Salutati, *Epistolario*, III, p. 84, says: 'there was also Geri d'Arezzo, the greatest imitator of the orator Pliny the Younger'.
 - 9 The standard short biography of Petrarch is E. H. Wilkins, *Life of Petrarch* (Chicago, 1961); see also M. Bishop, *Petrarch and His World* (Bloomington, 1963); for an introductory study which pays some attention to his humanism and has a bibliography of texts and studies, see N. Mann, *Petrarch* (Oxford, 1984). See also Trinkaus, *Scope*, pp. 6-7, 11-15.
 - 10 See the account of Petrarch's philological work in Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, pp. 128-34.
 - 11 On Petrarch's favourite books at Vacluse, see P. de Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l'humanisme*, second edition, 2 vols. (Paris, 1907), II, pp. 293-6; on the subsequent history of his library, see M. Pastore Stocchi, 'La biblioteca del Petrarca', in *Storia della cultura veneta*, II, pp. 536-65.
 - 12 Both manuscripts are available in facsimile: MS Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, S.P. 10.27, in Petrarch, *Vergilianus codex*, ed. G. Galbiati (Milan, 1930); MS London, British Library, Harley 2493, in Giuseppe Billanovich, *La tradizione del testo di Livio e le origini dell'umanesimo*, 2 vols. (Padua, 1981), II: *Il Livio del Petrarca e del Valla*.
 - 13 Petrarch, *Seniles* IV.5, in his *Opera* (Basel, 1554), p. 872; English translation in Petrarch, *Letters of Old Age. Rerum senilium libri I-XVIII*, trans. A. S. Bernardo, S. Levin and R. A. Bernardo, 2 vols. (Baltimore, 1992), I, pp. 139-51, at 147.
 - 14 Petrarch, *Seniles* XVI.5, in his *Opera*, pp. 1,055-8; translated in Petrarch, *Letters of Old Age*, II, pp. 621-5.
 - 15 On Petrarch's knowledge of Rome, and his relations with Cola di Rienzo, see Weiss, *Renaissance Discovery*, pp. 32-42.
 - 16 See E. H. Wilkins, *The Making of the Canzoniere and Other Petrarchan Studies* (Rome, 1951), pp. 9-69; the speech that he made on that occasion is translated by Wilkins in his *Studies in the Life and Works of Petrarch* (Cambridge MA, 1955), pp. 300-13.
 - 17 For a good parallel text edition of the *Canzoniere*, see Petrarch, *Lyric Poems*, ed. and trans. R. M. Durling (Cambridge MA, 1976).
 - 18 See Petrarch, *Le familiari*, ed. V. Rossi, 4 vols. (Florence, 1933-42); and in English translation: Petrarch, *Letters on Familiar Matters. Rerum familiarium libri*, trans. A. S. Bernardo, 3 vols. (Albany NY, 1975; Baltimore, 1982-5). The letters particularly concerning the question of imitation are *Familiars* I.8; XXII.2; and XXIII.19.
 - 19 *De remediis utriusque fortune* was Petrarch's most popular work and is preserved in hundreds of manuscripts. It was first printed in 1474 and may be consulted in Petrarch, *Opera*, or in English translation: Petrarch, *Remedies for*

- Fortune Fair and Foul. A Modern English Translation of De remediis utriusque fortune*, trans. C. H. Rawski, 5 vols. (Bloomington, 1991). For a brief account of Stoic attitudes expressed in it, see N. Mann, 'Petrarch's role as moralist in fifteenth-century France', in A. H. T. Levi, ed., *Humanism in France at the End of the Middle Ages and in the Early Renaissance* (Manchester, 1970), pp. 6-15.
- 20 Petrarch, *De ignorantia*, in his *Opere latine*, ed. A. Buffano, 2 vols. (Turin, 1975), II, pp. 1,025-151; English translation in E. Cassirer, P. O. Kristeller and J. H. Randall, Jr., trans., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago, 1948), pp. 49-133.
 - 21 On the revival of Greek, see Weiss, *The Dawn*, pp. 19-20; Kristeller, 'The medieval antecedents', in his *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford, 1964), pp. 157-9, and his 'Renaissance humanism and classical antiquity', in Rabil, *Renaissance Humanism*, I, pp. 5-16, at 10-14; Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, pp. 146-9; G. Di Stefano, *La Découverte de Plutarque en occident* (Turin, 1968), especially ch. 1.
 - 22 On relations between Petrarch, Barlaam and Pilato, see Wilkins, *Life of Petrarch*, pp. 33-4, 162-4, 169, 190-2, 200; and N. G. Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy: Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance* (London, 1992), pp. 2-7.
 - 23 On this translation, see Di Stefano, *Découverte*, chs. 2-3.