1

The Age of Rediscovery: Early Renaissance

In his *History of Italian Literature*, the eighteenth-century Italian scholar Girolamo Tiraboschi drew parallels in three consecutive chapters between what he called 'the discovery of books (*Scoprimento di libri*)', 'the discovery of Antiquity (*Scoprimento d'Antichità*)' and the 'discovery of America (*Scoprimento dell'America*)'. This 'Columbus paradigm', as we might call it, had considerable appeal to later generations. In the nineteenth century, Jules Michelet and Jacob Burckhardt extended the idea to include what they both called the 'discovery of the world and of man'.

These larger claims will be left on one side until chapter 5. Here we are concerned with the first phase of the Italian Renaissance, from about 1300 to about 1490. This was the age of the discovery of what would be taken for granted in later phases of the movement, the culture of the ancient Romans and to a lesser extent of the Greeks. It was also an age of reform, following these classical models.

It is impossible for individuals and groups to break completely with the culture in which they have been brought up. The central paradox of all cultural reform is that the reformers come from the culture they want to change. The discoverers remained medieval in most respects. Hence it is useless to draw a sharp line between one period called the 'Middle Ages' and another

called the 'Renaissance'. The early Renaissance culture described in this chapter coexisted with that of late medieval Europe.

Among the most distinctive features of that culture were Gothic art, chivalry and scholastic philosophy. All three features could be found in most parts of Europe. The cultural unification of Europe, the 'Europeanization of Europe' as it has been called, had begun long before the Renaissance. The process was already perceptible in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[35]

The so-called 'Gothic' style, for instance, was an international language of art.[36] Despite local variations such as the use of brick in Danish churches or the contrast between the French emphasis on height in cathedrals and the English on length, the Gothic style was recognizable from Portugal to Poland. 'Chivalry' – in other words, the values of the late medieval nobility, focused on the art of fighting on horseback – was another international phenomenon. Romances of chivalry, recounting the noble deeds of heroes such as Roland and Lancelot at the courts of the Emperor Charlemagne and King Arthur were avidly read – or heard – in most European countries. What we now call 'scholastic' philosophy and theology, the writings of Thomas Aquinas for example, developed in the lecture-rooms or 'schools' of medieval universities in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These studies appealed to a smaller group, but once again an international one. Since Latin was spoken as well as written in the universities, and masters of arts had 'the right of teaching anywhere' (*ius ubique docendi*) from Coimbra to Cracow, academic culture was truly pan-European.

Gothic, chivalry and scholasticism all centred on France. Gothic architecture was invented there in the early twelfth century. The university of Paris was the centre of the teaching of scholastic philosophy. The most famous romances of chivalry were composed in France. Indeed, in other countries, such as England or northern Italy, the romances were often sung or written in French. We might then speak of the high Middle Ages as a time of French cultural hegemony.

All three forms of medieval culture survived into the fifteenth and even the seventeenth century. Scholastic philosophy continued to dominate the arts course in most European universities. Romances of chivalry continued to find enthusiastic

readers. Gothic churches continued to be built. What changed in the course of the Renaissance was that Gothic, chivalry and scholasticism no longer monopolized their respective domains but instead competed and interacted with alternative styles and values derived from the ancient world. It was especially in Italy that these 'new' styles and values emerged. Why?

In Italy, the French models of Gothic, chivalry and scholasticism had penetrated less deeply than in some other parts of Europe. Scholasticism came late to Italy, where universities such as Bologna and Padua concentrated on law, arts and medicine, not on theology. The Italian cities, many of them autonomous from the eleventh century onwards, produced an alternative culture, lay rather than clerical and civilian rather than military.

When was the Renaissance?

Historians do not agree when or even where to begin their narratives of the Renaissance. Florence, Rome, Avignon, Padua and Naples have all been presented as the 'cradle' of the movement. Most stories start in Italy, but at different moments and with different individuals. A common choice is the age of the poet-scholar Francesco Petrarcha (anglicized as 'Petrarch') in the 1330s or 1340s. However, some historians of art begin a generation earlier with Giotto. Giotto's fame was based on his creation of a new style of pictorial narrative, and this new style was partly based on the classical sculpture he had seen at Pisa. He was mentioned with respect by humanists and his work was an inspiration to later generations of Renaissance artists.

If we choose Giotto, however, it is difficult to omit his contemporary Dante. The two men and some of their followers were responsible for an extraordinary 'outburst of creativity' in Florence just after the year 1300.[37] Today, we tend to think of Dante as medieval, but in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence he was closely associated with Petrarch. If the rediscovery of antiquity is to be the criterion for choosing a starting date, we should not forget that Dante's generation was also that of the Paduan writer Albertino Mussato, who wrote drama and history modelled on the classics. In the case of educa-

tion, too, at least in Italy, it has been argued that the years around 1300 mark a turning-point.[38]

Whatever date is chosen for the beginning of the Renaissance, it is always possible to make a case for going back still further. In the history of painting, for example, we might start in the thirteenth century with Cimabue, or in sculpture with Giovanni and Nicolo Pisano, whose work was inspired at least on occasion by ancient Roman models.[39] Some intellectual historians also stress the importance of changes in the thirteenth century, notably the reception of Aristotle in the West, by Thomas Aquinas and others.

Petrarch and his followers tried to distance themselves from the Aristotelians. In a little book with the Socratic title *On his own ignorance* ('and that of many others'), Petrarch criticized the academic philosophers of his day, 'the crazy and clamorous sect of schoolmen' (*scholastici*), for their exclusive devotion to Aristotle. In the perspective of the long-term, on the other hand, it is difficult to discern any sharp break between Aquinas's interest in Aristotle and Petrarch's enthusiasm for classical writers. Like the humanists later, scholastic philosophers such as William of Conches declared that 'the dignity of our mind is its capacity to know all things.'[40]

Other historians draw attention to parallels between the interests of twelfth-century men of letters such as the Englishman John of Salisbury and their fifteenth-century successors. John was familiar with some of the classics, including Cicero and Seneca, Plato's *Timaeus* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. He accommodated these texts to his culture (consciously or unconsciously) by giving them a moral or religious interpretation, claiming, for example, that Plato knew the doctrine of the Trinity and that the adventures of Aeneas were allegories of the progress of the soul through life. However, some fifteenth-century scholars would offer similar interpretations, as we shall see.

Whether we prefer to speak of 'Renaissance', 'Pre-Renaissance', or simply of preconditions for the Renaissance, the point to emphasize is the survival of the classical tradition. Some ancient Roman writers, the poets Horace and Virgil for example, continued to be read and imitated throughout the Middle Ages.[41] The tradition of Roman law remained vigorous in some regions, such as Italy and the south of France. In the

Italian city-republics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as in ancient Rome, the study of rhetoric, in other words the art of persuasion in speeches and letters, was a necessary preparation for careers in law and politics. Civic virtues and good government were debated with reference to classical writers such as Cicero and Sallust. The unusually urban and secular culture of these republics had obvious affinities with that of antiquity, making classical literature and philosophy unusually relevant to their citizens.[42]

The classical tradition also continued in the visual arts. Pre-Gothic art and architecture is known today as 'Romanesque' precisely because of its debt to that of the Romans. The remains of classical buildings survived in a number of European cities and continued to evoke wonder. Verona had its Roman ampitheatre, Nîmes its Roman temple, Segovia its Roman aqueduct and so on. In Rome itself, there was the temple of the Pantheon, the Colosseum, the Arch of Titus, Trajan's Column and much more. Classical survivals assisted classical revivals. In the age of Charlemagne, the Pantheon inspired the imperial chapel at Aachen. In the twelfth century, it inspired the Baptistery in Florence.

The rediscovery of the classical tradition by the West was assisted by encounters with what have been called its 'sibling' cultures, the Byzantine and Arab world. For example, Byzantine scholars were familiar with a number of ancient Greek authors who were completely unknown in the West. They edited and commented on these texts in the way Renaissance humanists were to do in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[43] The Arabs too played an important role in transmitting Greek tradition, especially from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries. The famous schools of Athens and Alexandria moved to Baghdad. Muslim scholars wrote commentaries on Plato and Aristotle. The philosopher Ibn Sina (known in the West as Avicenna) was a Neoplatonist, while Ibn Rushd (Averroes) was an Aristotelian. A number of ancient writers, including Aristotle, Ptolemy, Hippocrates and Galen, were translated into Latin in the Middle Ages from the Arabic translations of the original Greek.

Petrarch and his Circle

This particular history of the European Renaissance effectively begins with Petrarch, thanks to the breadth of his interests and achievements, as poet, scholar and philosopher; to his enthusiasm for Roman culture; and to his influence on the generations which followed him, not only in Italy but in much of Europe as well. With hindsight, we might say that Petrarch was the first 'humanist', a term which will be discussed below (p. 29).

Petrarch thought of himself primarily as a poet, a second Virgil. The recognition – for himself and for poetry – which he craved, and which he apparently succeeded in obtaining, was to be crowned with laurels on the Capitol in Rome in 1341. The coronation followed a classical precedent recently revived (Albertino Mussato had been crowned in Padua in 1315, and a proposal had been made to crown Dante). Petrarch was important both as an epic and as a lyric poet. His epic poem *Africa* was an account of the life of the Roman general Scipio Africanus, written in Latin and modelled on classical epics by Virgil and Statius. In the vernacular, Petrarch wrote a sequence of lyrics. The bitter-sweet poems of this 'song-book' (*Canzoniere*) present the poet as a lonely and pensive lover (*solo e pensoso*), stressing his torments, his sighs, his 'bitter tears' (*amare lagrime*), and the beauty and cruelty of his mistress.

Petrarch was also a moralist, of the stoic persuasion. His Italian poem the *Triumphs* deals with the successive triumphs of Love, Death and finally of Fame, all described in terms of the processions which celebrated the victories of ancient Roman generals and emperors. His 'Remedies' for both good and bad fortune was written in the form of a dialogue between 'Reason' and four other allegorical figures, 'Joy', 'Hope', 'Pain' and 'Anxiety'. Petrarch the scholar was not far removed from Petrarch the moralist. His *Illustrious Men* was a collection of thirty-four biographies of ancient Romans and figures from the Bible whose example readers were supposed to imitate. In similar fashion he advised the ruler of Padua on the choice of illustrious men to be painted in a hall in his palace. One of his own heroes was Cicero. He owned Cicero's philosophical works, discovered a number of his letters, and wrote his own letters in a similar style.

Petrarch was also concerned with classical antiquity for its own sake. He was interested in Homer and tried unsuccessfully to learn Greek. However, his great enthusiasm was for ancient Rome. The sight of the ruins of Rome made a great impression on him. He collected ancient coins. His passion for personal contact with the ancient Romans is revealed by the fact that he wrote to letters to Cicero and Seneca. He collected and transcribed manuscripts of ancient writers, notably Cicero and Livy. Even in his handwriting Petrarch imitated the ancients, abandoning the Gothic style.

Throughout Petrarch's work runs a new and intense concern for the individual self. The portrait of Laura which he commissioned from Simone Martini has been described as the first known portrait in the modern sense of the likeness of an individual. Petrarch wrote not only biographies but an autobiography, the 'Secretum', a dialogue between 'Franciscus' and 'Augustinus' in which the author of the *Confessions*, one of his favourite books, represents the author's conscience. His epic *Africa* is a kind of biography, while his lyrics, as has often been noted, are written in the first person and almost exclusively concerned with the lover's feelings. His personal letters were carefully revised so that others might read them.

Petrarch believed that the last few centuries, which we call the Middle Ages, were an age of darkness, in contrast to classical antiquity, which had been an age of light. In his poem *Africa* he expressed the hope that 'When the darkness breaks the generations to come may manage to find their way back to the clear splendour of the ancient past.' Following Petrarch, many scholars wrote of their own time as one of light after darkness, awakening after sleep, return to life after death, restoration or rebirth. It would be a mistake not to take these metaphors seriously, since they gave meaning to the experience of the writers and helped them locate themselves in space and time. However, it would be an even greater mistake to take the phrases literally, and so to dismiss medieval culture.

Petrarch himself, for example, was in many ways a medieval figure. His meditations on fortune were traditional. So was his enthusiasm for St Augustine. St Bernard was another of his models. So was Dante. The poems of the *Canzoniere* form a narrative like those of Dante's *Vita Nuova*, with Petrarch's

beloved Laura in the place of Beatrice. It is impossible to contrast a 'modern' Petrarch with a 'medieval' Dante. If he disliked Gothic handwriting, Petrarch admired some Gothic architecture, including Cologne cathedral, which he called 'an uncommonly beautiful temple'.

Petrarch had the gift of inspiring others to share his enthusiasm. His circle included the painter Simone Martini, the physician-astronomer Giovanni Dondi (with whom he exchanged sonnets), the Dominican friar Giovanni Colonna (with whom he viewed the ruins of Rome), the Augustinian friar Dionigi di Borgo San Sepolcro (who gave him a copy of the *Confessions* of St Augustine), the political leader Cola di Rienzo (who tried to restore the Roman republic) and Giovanni Boccaccio.

Like Petrarch, Boccaccio combined the roles of scholar and writer in the vernacular. He participated in the search for manuscripts of ancient authors, and in 1355 he found the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius in the monastery of Monte Cassino. He wrote a treatise on the *Genealogy of the Gods*. As a biographer, Boccaccio did for women what Petrarch had done for men. His *Famous Women* included 106 biographies from Eve to Queen Joanna of Naples, via Semiramis, Juno, Venus, Helen, Artemisia, Portia and Lucretia. The collection of short stories for which Boccaccio is remembered today, the *Decameron*, was only a small part of a varied achievement.

Like Petrarch, Boccaccio may be described as medieval in many respects. He too drew inspiration from the Italian rhetorical tradition, and gave public lectures on Dante. It was only gradually that he abandoned the idea that Dante rather than Petrarch was the reviver of poetry.[44] In similar fashion Petrarch's friend and admirer Giovanni Dondi combined an interest in classical writers such as Pliny and Vitruvius (the author of the only treatise on architecture to survive from ancient times) with the traditional culture of the scholastic philosophers. These more or less unconscious continuities were indeed important, but so too was the sense of change which can be found in the writings of Petrarch and his circle. The idea of renovation or reform, which has been used earlier in an ecclesiastical context, was now applied to the secular world. Petrarch was the first to use such terms in literary context, while Cola di Rienzo applied them to

politics. He went so far as to date his letters 'Year One' of the restored Roman republic.

Similar phrases were used to describe changes in painting, notably in the case of the Florentine Giotto di Bondone, whose monumental style impressed contemporaries as well as posterity. He was praised by Dante, by Petrarch (as a 'prince' of painters) and by Boccaccio, who claimed in the *Decameron* that Giotto had 'brought back to light' (*ritornata in luce*) an art which had been 'buried for many centuries'. Boccaccio described Giotto's achievement, as the ancient Roman writer Pliny had described the achievement of Greek artists, in terms of *trompe l'oeil*, writing that people were 'deceived by the things he made, believing real that which was painted' (*credendo esser vero che era dipinto*).

It has sometimes been argued that the trauma of the Black Death in 1348–9, when the plague killed about a third of the population of Europe, led to a return to tradition. However, this counter-trend should not be exaggerated, and in any case it did not last. The movement of innovation gathered force in the next generation.[45]

The Second Generation

Cultural change is often linked to the emergence of a particular generation, a group with common experiences. In this case, a group who had been familiar with Petrarch from their youth turned out to be willing and able to take his ideas further. By the 1430s, the distance from the first generation seemed so great that a minor humanist, Sicco Polenton, could comment in a somewhat patronizing manner on Petrarch's Latin in his history of literature: 'He is not at present appreciated by those who are so fastidious that they do not commend anything that is not absolutely perfect. But they should remember Cicero's words in the *Brutus*, that nothing can be discovered already perfect.'

Florence and Tuscany

In Florence, Petrarch's work was continued by Coluccio Salutati, who had studied rhetoric at Bologna in order to be a

notary and became interested in textual criticism.[46] Salutati was a great admirer of the heroes of the Roman republic, from Lucretia to Brutus. He was an enthusiast for the stoics, despite his ambivalence about their emphasis on detachment ('apathy') and his criticism of their insistence on superhuman virtue. He believed that literature (*studia litterarum*) and eloquence had revived in the last generations thanks to Mussato, Dante and Petrarch. In his enthusiasm for Petrarch he went so far as to claim on one occasion that his idol surpassed Cicero in prose and Virgil in verse. Around 1360, Salutati joined a group which met to discuss the work of Petrarch and Boccaccio. In the course of his years in Florence, Salutati gradually made himself the centre of an intellectual circle which included Leonardo Bruni (who arrived in the city in the 1390s), and Poggio Bracciolini, who described the master in a letter to his friend, the patrician Niccolo Niccoli, as 'our father Coluccio'.[47]

Salutati was chancellor of the Florentine republic for more than thirty years, 1375–1406. The chancery, an office concerned with the dispatch, receipt and filing of letters, was a place in which humanists had an opportunity to put their ideas into practice, since letters in classical Latin were becoming a way for a government to impress its rivals. Pope Pius II, himself a distinguished man of letters, noted that the Florentines chose chancellors for 'rhetorical skill and knowledge of the humanities'. Salutati's successors in office included Bruni, who served from 1427 to 1444, and Poggio, who returned to Florence towards the end of his life.[48]

Poggio's correspondence with his friend Niccoli about their 'thirst for books' makes a vivid case-study of this generation's enthusiasm for things Roman. To begin with, there is the handwriting. These friends invented the so-called 'italic' script in the early 1420s, modelling it on manuscripts which they believed to be Roman (cf. figure 2). The content of their letters expresses a similar enthusiasm for antiquity. Poggio complains that Niccolo has kept his Lucretius for ten years: 'I want to read Lucretius but I am deprived of his presence.' He gives the latest news of a sighting of a manuscript of Tacitus in Germany or a manuscript of Livy in Denmark. He describes how he 'sweated for several hours' in the September heat, trying to read Roman inscriptions. He tells of showing the sculptor Donatello his collection of

Roman heads and writes with pride that 'Donatello saw them and praised them greatly.' He responds to the news of the recent discovery of manuscripts of some of Cicero's works: 'Nothing annoys me more than the fact that I cannot be on the spot to enjoy them with you.'

Cicero was indeed a hero to this generation, the exemplar of elegant Latin and the model of a man of letters involved in the active life of republican politics. Bruni's *Dialogues* were modelled on Cicero's. His letters echo Cicero's. He wrote a biography of Cicero. Again, Poggio transcribed Cicero, echoed Cicero, and visited Tusculum, the setting of one of Cicero's most famous dialogues, where he was happy to discover 'a villa which must have been Cicero's'.

Poggio himself found manuscripts of eight speeches of Cicero. He also discovered the *Institutes* of Quintilian and, in a Swiss monastic library, a manuscript of the *Ten Books on Architecture* by Vitruvius. In the last case, if not others, the term 'discovery' needs to be placed in inverted commas. The work of Vitruvius had been known not only to Petrarch and his disciple Dondi, as we have seen, but also to medieval scholars. Vitruvius was discovered in the Renaissance in the sense that it was only then that his work began to affect the practice of architecture.[49]

The rediscovery of Greek culture was also proceeding at this time. Salutati brought a Greek teacher to Florence, Manuel Chrysoloras, who stayed for about five years and taught both the language and the art of rhetoric to Bruni and others (Salutati himself began the course but discovered that he was too old to learn). Poggio wrote to Niccoli that he 'burns' to study Greek, not least 'to escape those horrid translations', though it apparently took him many years to master the language. Ignoring the interest already shown in Avignon and Rome, Bruni claimed proudly that 'the knowledge of Greek literature, which had disappeared from Italy seven hundred years ago, has been recalled and brought back (*revocata est atque reducta*) by our city', so that it became possible to see the great philosophers and orators 'not through a glass darkly but face to face'.

What has a better claim to be considered as new was Bruni's theory and practice of translation, a term (*translatio*) which he was the first to use in this sense rather than its traditional meaning of 'transfer'. Bruni concentrated on the meaning rather

than the words, attempting to avoid anachronism and to imitate the different styles of individual authors. In his translation of Aristotle's *Politics*, for example, he used the term *magistratus* of magistrates where his medieval predecessors had written *principatus*, projecting their own monarchical system of government on to ancient Greece. Bruni also translated Demosthenes, Plato and Plutarch. Plutarch, a moralist unknown in the West until the 1390s, was, like Plato, to have a pervasive influence on Renaissance culture, as we shall see. Thanks to Chrysoloras, Bruni discovered the great history of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides, as well as the encomium of Athens by a late classical rhetorician, Aelius Aristides, which served as a model for his own encomium of Florence, the *Laudatio florentinae urbis*.

Bruni and Poggio were not only chancellors of Florence but official historians of the republic, presenting past as well as present policies in a favourable light. The story they told emphasized Florentine liberty, comparing it to that of republican Rome and Athens. In their form too, these histories followed Greek and Roman models such as Thucydides and Livy, notably in the speeches they put into the mouths of their protagonists as a way of explaining their actions. The humanist interest in analysis, in explaining events, is reminiscent of the leading ancient historians but contrasts with the medieval chronicle, which focused on narrative and vivid description.

In retrospect, the interests and achievements of this group of Florentines, like those of Petrarch, have been described as 'humanist'. The term is an appropriate one, given their interest in what Cicero had called the *studia humanitatis*. As Salutati put it, 'Since it is the characteristic of man to be taught and the learned are more human than the unlearned, the ancients appropriately referred to learning as *humanitas*.' Five subjects were generally considered to form part of the 'humanities': ethics, poetry, history, rhetoric and grammar. The emphasis on ethics is obvious enough, the power to tell the difference between right and wrong being what distinguished humans from animals. Poetry and history were considered to be forms of applied ethics, offering good examples for students to follow and bad ones for them to avoid. It is probably less clear to a modern reader why rhetoric or grammar should have been considered 'humane'. The point was that they were arts of language, and that it was

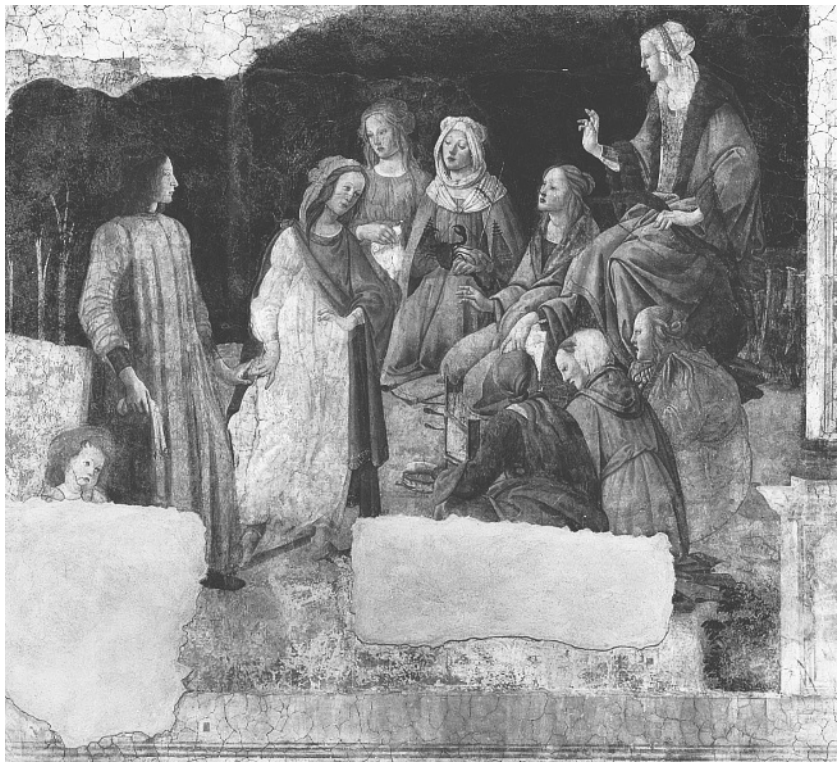

Figure 1 Sandro Botticelli, *Seven Liberal Arts*, Musée du Louvre (Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Louvre, Paris). Rhetoric (recognizable by her open hand) is presiding.

language which allowed humans to tell right from wrong. The point was fundamental for the treatises on 'the dignity of man', in which humanists, like some of the Fathers of the Church, sang the praises of humanity. There was a significant omission from the intellectual package of the 'humanities': logic. Emphasis shifted from the closed fist of the logician, using force to knock down the opponent, to the open hand of the rhetorician, who preferred persuasion (figure 1).

It went almost without saying that the languages to be cultivated were classical Latin and Greek, and that the texts to be studied were those of the ancient Greeks and Romans (including early Christian writers). For the humanists, the way forward was to go back, to follow the example of the best writers and thinkers

in a culture which they considered superior to their own. Hence the effort which from Petrarch onwards they invested in searching for early manuscripts of classical texts, emending the errors of copyists (a process now known as 'textual criticism') and interpreting the meaning of obscure passages. In their self-justifications, the humanists placed great stress on the idea of the 'human condition' (*conditio humana*). As a set of cultural practices, on the other hand, humanism was dominated by philology rather than by philosophy, by the criticism of texts rather than the criticism of society.

Some modern historians describe Bruni and his colleagues as 'civic humanists', stressing their concern with the active rather than the contemplative life and their identification with the Florentine republic. Bruni, for example, declared that 'Dante is of greater worth than Petrarch in the active and civic life,' and praised Cicero for combining philosophy with an active political career. Leon Battista Alberti wrote a dialogue on the family in the vernacular, in which he discussed civic values. The place of humanism in public life was recognized and celebrated in the grand funerals of Coluccio Salutati (1406) and Leonardo Bruni (1444). A few scholars take the political interpretation of cultural change still further. It has been argued that the 'crisis of 1402', when the duke of Milan, Giangaleazzo Visconti, died suddenly in the middle of his campaign to conquer Florence, led to the early Renaissance by making humanists and artists more conscious of the values Florence stood for, such as liberty, and its similarities to ancient Rome and Athens.[50] The idea is an attractive one, which might lead an English reader to wonder whether the 'crisis of 1588' and the failure of the Spanish Armada had similar consequences for the age of Shakespeare. However, in the Florentine case, as in that of other Italian cities, civic patriotism together with praise for the active life of civic responsibility (*vita civile*) is well documented from the fourteenth century if not before. Salutati, Bruni and his colleagues simply gave the civic tradition more of a classical colouring.[51]

This classicism was controversial, as an early fifteenth-century debate shows. The Florentine friar Giovanni Dominici attacked Salutati for encouraging the study of pagan authors. According to Dominici, the study of 'philosophy' of 'worldly literature' (*seculares litterae*) was of no use for salvation. On the contrary,

it was an impediment. He also denounced what he called the 'lies' of rhetoric. Another participant in the debate called Virgil a 'liar'. His assumption seems to have been that Virgil's account of the flight of Aeneas from Troy must either be true history or a pack of lies. There was no place in his mental world for the modern idea of 'fiction'.

Salutati replied with a defence of poetry against its 'detractors' which is equally remote from modern assumptions, since it depended (as in the case of John of Salisbury, p. 21), on an allegorical interpretation of classical myths like the labours of Hercules. The skin or shell might be pagan, but the inner meaning was a moral or christian one. Salutati argued that 'The *studia humanitatis* and the *studia divinitatis* are linked so closely that true and complete knowledge of the one cannot be had without the other.'[52]

The problem of the compatibility or incompatibility between classical and Christian wisdom would remain a major preoccupation of humanists as long as the Renaissance lasted, just as it had been a preoccupation for the Fathers of the Church, who belonged to two cultures, classical and Christian, and tried with more or less difficulty to harmonize the two. Clement of Alexandria, for instance, described Plato as the Greek Moses. Lactantius emphasized the compatibility of Plato and Cicero with Christianity. Jerome expressed the fear that he was more of a Ciceronian than a Christian.

The humanists often appealed to the Fathers in their defence. Salutati argued against Dominici that the Fathers had quoted pagan writers. Around the time of this controversy, Bruni translated into Latin and dedicated to Salutati a treatise of Basil the Great, archbishop of Caesarea, advising young men how to study the classics. Basil argued for a selective appropriation of pagan antiquity, following the example of bees, who 'neither approach all flowers equally, nor try to carry away those they choose entire, but take only what is suitable for their work and leave the rest untouched'.

Appropriately enough, Basil's very example was a traditional one which had been developed at some length by Seneca (in a moral context rather than a religious one). Maintaining the argument but changing the metaphor, Jerome claimed that Christians could use the classics as the Israelites had used their

pagan prisoners, shaving their heads and paring their nails. In his treatise *On Christian Doctrine* (Book 2, chapter 40), Augustine referred to the 'spoils of the Egyptians', interpreting the biblical description of the people of Israel appropriating the treasure of the Egyptians before their exodus to refer to classical culture. Petrarch cited this passage in defence of the study of the classics in the treatise *On his own Ignorance*, writing that 'Augustine filled his pockets and his lap with the gold and silver of the Egyptians.'

The Fathers offered more than simply an arsenal of arguments against detractors of the ancients. To the humanists they looked like comrades, separated by a thousand years but similar in spirit. After all, Lactantius and Augustine were at one time teachers of rhetoric. No wonder then that Poggio studied Jerome and Augustine, that Nicolo Niccoli owned about fifty manuscripts of the Greek Fathers, or that the monk Ambrogio Traversari, a member of Bruni's circle, was said to have known Jerome's letters by heart.

People like Dominici who did not admire antiquity were often described by the humanists as 'barbarians', in the same class as the Goths and other peoples who had invaded and destroyed the Roman empire. Thus Bruni congratulated Poggio for liberating Quintilian from 'the dungeons of the barbarians', in other words, from the monks who owned the manuscript without appreciating its importance. Bruni also referred to British 'barbarism', by which he meant the philosophy of schoolmen such as John Duns Scotus. The idea of the 'schoolmen' was another invention of the humanists, who saw unity where medieval philosophers themselves had seen difference and conflict. In similar fashion, the humanists coined the terms 'dark ages' or 'Middle Ages' (*medium aevum*) to describe the period before the revival or 'renaissance' of the classical world which they were promoting. They were defining themselves against a Middle Ages which in a sense they had invented for the purpose. This sense of distance from medieval culture, however exaggerated, was an important feature of the group's mentality.[53]

The Visual Arts

Connections between humanism and the crafts may be illustrated by the reception of Vitruvius. As we have seen, Poggio had discovered a manuscript of this ancient Roman treatise on architecture in 1414. The treatise was at once a eulogy of architecture as a science based on mathematics, and an explanation of the way in which to construct temples, theatres and other buildings, the choice of site, the problems of acoustics and so on. To interpret a text of this kind called for a combination of the philological skills of the humanists with the technical skills of builders (who were coming to be known, thanks to Vitruvius, as 'architects'). Their practical knowledge was all the more necessary because the manuscripts of Vitruvius lacked illustrations.

Florence

In the workshop as well as the study, a revival of antiquity, faintly perceptible in the fourteenth century, was becoming more visible in Florence in the early years of the fifteenth. As in the case of literature and learning, we find a small group of creative individuals who knew one another well, in this case a circle centred on the architect Filippo Brunelleschi and including the humanist Leonbattista Alberti, the sculptors Donatello and Ghiberti, and the painter Masaccio.

The contrast between the Gothic tradition and the buildings designed by Brunelleschi – the Foundling Hospital (Ospedale degli Innocenti), the Pazzi Chapel, and the churches of San Lorenzo and Santo Spirito – now leaps to the eye. Semicircular arches replace pointed ones, windows and doors have flat instead of arched tops, spaces are left empty rather than filled with decoration. Churches resemble classical temples – or the early Christian churches which followed the model of temples. Simplicity and purity are the keynotes of the architecture of Brunelleschi and his followers, perhaps in reaction against the luxuriant detail of late Gothic.

In his own day, Brunelleschi was admired more as an 'inventor' (as his epitaph describes him) than as an artist. He was viewed by his friend, the humanist Alberti, not as the creator of

a new style but as a brilliant technician who had solved the problem of designing the dome of the cathedral of Florence, one of the largest masonry domes ever constructed, 'so ample', in Alberti's words, 'as to cover the whole Tuscan people with its shadow'. All the same, there is evidence of increasing interest in architecture 'in the ancient manner (*alla antica*)'. The phrase was used in Brunelleschi's own time to refer to flat-topped doors and windows, but it widened its meaning in a life of the architect written in the next generation, in which the anonymous author noted how Brunelleschi studied the remains of Roman architecture and learned to distinguish the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian styles.

Brunelleschi was also inspired by buildings of the twelfth century (notably the Florentine Baptistery) and even by works of the fourteenth century. He seems to have thought the Baptistery was ancient Roman, just as Poggio thought that the writing of the scribes of Charlemagne's time was ancient Roman.[54] In any case, Brunelleschi was concerned with principles rather than rules in the strict sense, in other words, with the spirit rather than the letter of antiquity. In similar fashion, Alberti saw the principles of classical architecture in a Gothic structure such as Florence cathedral. He too followed medieval as well as classical models in the buildings he designed. In short, the situation was a fluid one in which Gothic and classical were not yet viewed as alternative or antithetical styles.[55]

In the prologue to his famous treatise on painting, Alberti addressed Brunelleschi and spoke of 'our close friend Donato the sculptor'. According to the fifteenth-century biography of Brunelleschi, Donatello was with him in Rome, digging in the ruins with such assiduity that they were nicknamed 'treasure hunters' (*quelli del tesoro*). Donatello's interest in ancient Roman sculpture is evident in his portrait busts, reliefs, in his David (the first nude figure since antiquity) and in the famous equestrian statue of the professional soldier 'Gattamelata', still visible in Padua. Like Brunelleschi's dome, Donatello's statue was a successful solution to a technical problem, that of supporting the weight of both horse and rider on the four bronze legs.

In painting, Masaccio, despite his tragically early death, was the equivalent of his friends Brunelleschi and Donatello. His

fresco of the Trinity showed that he had learned the rules of perspective, while the monumental style of his *Tribute Money* is reminiscent of Giotto. Later in the century the Florentine humanist Cristoforo Landino described his style as 'pure without ornament (*puro senza ornato*)', a phrase which might have been used of Brunelleschi and which parallels the concern for pure Latin expressed by Leonardo Bruni and his circle. Masaccio was also praised by Landino for his skilful 'imitation of reality' (*imitazione del vero*).

Landino's eulogy of Masaccio is a reminder of the links between humanism and the visual arts or crafts in Florence at this time. Brunelleschi's circle of friends included Niccoli, Poggio and Traversari, as well as Alberti, who claimed that some of the artists of his time were equals of the ancients and drew on Cicero's treatises on behaviour and rhetoric in order to discuss decorum, grace and variety in painting the architecture.[56] Long despised by intellectuals because they required manual labour, the crafts, or some of them, were rising in status at this time.

The 'civic humanism' discussed earlier has its parallel in the arts. Public patronage (by the guilds, for example) was important in early fifteenth-century Florence, while art gave expression to civic patriotism. Donatello's St George, his David and his Judith have all been read in this way as symbols of Florence, while the dragon, Goliath and Holofernes symbolize the enemies of the Florentine republic. The most famous works of the early fifteenth century were public buildings like the Foundling Hospital or paintings in public spaces like Masaccio's *Tribute Money* in the church of the Carmine, visible to everyone.[57]

Civic values and themes were much less visible in later fifteenth-century Florence during the sixty years of Medici rule, 1434–94. Where Leonardo Bruni and his friends had praised the active life, the new generation of Florentine scholars in the circle of Cosimo de'Medici and his grandson Lorenzo the Magnificent stressed contemplation and the study of esoteric wisdom. Their favourite philosopher was Plato, in whose honour they founded an 'academy' or discussion group in the 1460s.

Three late fifteenth-century humanists who lived in Florence may be taken to illustrate this trend: Cristoforo Landino, Marsilio Ficino and Angelo Poliziano. Landino, whose praise of

Masaccio was quoted above, is best known for his commentaries on Dante and Virgil. He presented Virgil as a Platonist whose poetry was full of 'mysteries' and 'the deepest secrets of philosophy'. Landino's pupil Marsilio Ficino called himself a 'platonic philosopher' and Plato a theologian, a Greek-speaking Moses.[58] He believed that an 'ancient theology' (*prisca theologia*), a set of secret teachings which anticipated Christian doctrines, could be found in the writings of Pythagoras, Plato and the ancient Egyptian sage Thoth, otherwise known as Hermes Trismegistus.[59] Ficino also claimed that poets (Orpheus, for example) were prophets, who went into ecstasy and were inspired by God to utter truths 'which afterwards, when their fury has lessened, they do not well understand themselves'.

Another member of Ficino's circle in Florence was Giovanni Pico, lord of Mirandola (a town near Modena). He too was interested in occult knowledge, shared by the initiated but hidden from the people. Where Landino offered an allegorical interpretation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Pico claimed that Homer's *Odyssey* had a hidden philosophical meaning. Today, he is best-known for his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, the most eloquent of the Italian humanist treatises on the subject, blending the Bible with Plato to produce a creation myth in which God tells Adam that he is free 'to fashion yourself into whatever shape you prefer'. Pico's intellectual ambition is revealed by the 900 theses which he proposed to defend in public debate in Rome in 1486, and which drew not only on Greek and Roman but also on Jewish and what he believed to be Egyptian and Persian traditions, all of which he claimed could be reconciled with one another once their mysteries were understood.[60]

As for Poliziano, he was equally remarkable as a poet, in Latin and Italian, and as a scholar, with a remarkable gift for textual criticism. His *Miscellanea* (1489), a collection of studies on classical literature, are virtuoso pieces of philology, whether they focus on texts (and their corruptions in the course of transmission) or their historical contexts.[61] Where Bruni had been concerned to tell his fellow-citizens about Greek and Roman culture because he believed classical examples to be relevant to his day, Poliziano pursued scholarship for its own sake and wrote essentially for fellow-scholars.

In short, the Florentine 'Neoplatonic' movement, as scholars

now call it, was concerned with esoteric knowledge for small groups of initiates. These developments coincided with a shift from public to private art. In contrast to the early part of the century, the most famous works were private commissions such as the Palazzo Medici or Botticelli's *Primavera*, a painting which was visible only to a few and – given its references to classical literature and philosophy – intelligible to even fewer.[62]

Rome, Naples and Milan

The first stage in the reception of the Renaissance was the spread of Florentine innovations to other parts of Italy. The reception was assisted by the 'cultural policies' of Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici, who made efforts to place Florentine artists at the courts of Rome, Naples, Mantua, Ferrara and elsewhere.[63] However, it is important to avoid an exclusively 'Florentinocentric' interpretation of the movement which denies innovation to the inhabitants of other regions.

For example, the leading humanists of the early fifteenth century included the Venetian patrician Francesco Barbaro; Pietro Paolo Vergerio, who came from Capodistria, in the extreme north-east of Italy; and Antonio Loschi, who came from Vicenza. For all three men their Florentine years in the circle of Salutati and Bruni were important, but they were already humanists in their interest before they visited Florence. The discovery of ancient manuscripts was not a monopoly of Tuscan scholars. In Lodi, near Milan, for instance, the local bishop discovered Cicero's writings on rhetoric. The Sicilian humanist Giovanni Aurispa brought about 200 manuscripts from Constantinople to Italy in 1420. We should therefore look in turn to Rome, Naples, Milan, the small courts of the north such as Ferrara and Mantua, and finally at Venice.

For a few years at least, in the middle of the fifteenth century, Rome was a more important centre of humanism than Florence.[64] Two humanists became popes in the mid-fifteenth century, Nicholas V and Pius II. Nicholas commissioned a series of translations of Greek classics into Latin, asking Poggio, who had learned Greek at last, to translate Xenophon, and the Roman humanist Lorenzo Valla to translate Thucydides. Nicholas also planned the rebuilding of Rome, and it was to him

that Alberti presented his treatise on architecture. The papal chancery was a much larger enterprise than the chancery of the Florentine republic and offered employment to a group of distinguished humanists, allowing scholars from different parts of Italy to meet. Bruni had worked there between 1405 and 1415. Poggio, who also worked in the chancery, spent most of his life in Rome (hence he wrote so many letters to his friend Niccoli in Florence).

So did the scholar Flavio Biondo, from Forlì, whose work in papal service allowed him sufficient leisure to write a number of books. In one of them, *Rome Restored*, Biondo described and evoked the buildings of the ancient city, its temples, theatres, baths, gates, obelisks and so on. In the sequel, *Italy Illustrated*, he extended the approach to the whole of Italy, divided into its fourteen ancient regions. *Italy Illustrated*, completed in 1453, was an exemplary study of what was known as 'chorography', a study of local history, including local worthies, but paying particular attention to material culture, to churches, squares, bridges and so on.[65]

Only one leading humanist was born and educated in Rome: Lorenzo Valla, who also taught at the university there, where his pupils included Pomponio Leto, later a lecturer at the same institution (figure 2). Valla might be described as the enfant terrible of humanism, notorious for his mordancy even in that age of sharp scholarly tongues. He offended philosophers for criticizing Aristotle and the jargon of the schoolmen (to which he preferred ordinary language), lawyers for having dared reject the authority of Bartolus (a fourteenth-century Italian jurist) and rhetoricians (including Poggio) for preferring Quintilian to Cicero. Valla's hypersensitivity to language made him, like Petrarch, an effective textual critic of Livy. In the preface to his Latin grammar, the 'Elegances' (*Elegantiae*), Valla claimed that good Latin flourished along with the Roman empire and also declined along with it as a result of the barbarian invasions. 'Not only has no one spoken Latin correctly for many centuries, but no one has even understood it properly when reading it . . . as if, after the fall of the Roman Empire, it was not fitting for the Roman language to be spoken or to be understood.'

It was his awareness of the changes in Latin over the centuries

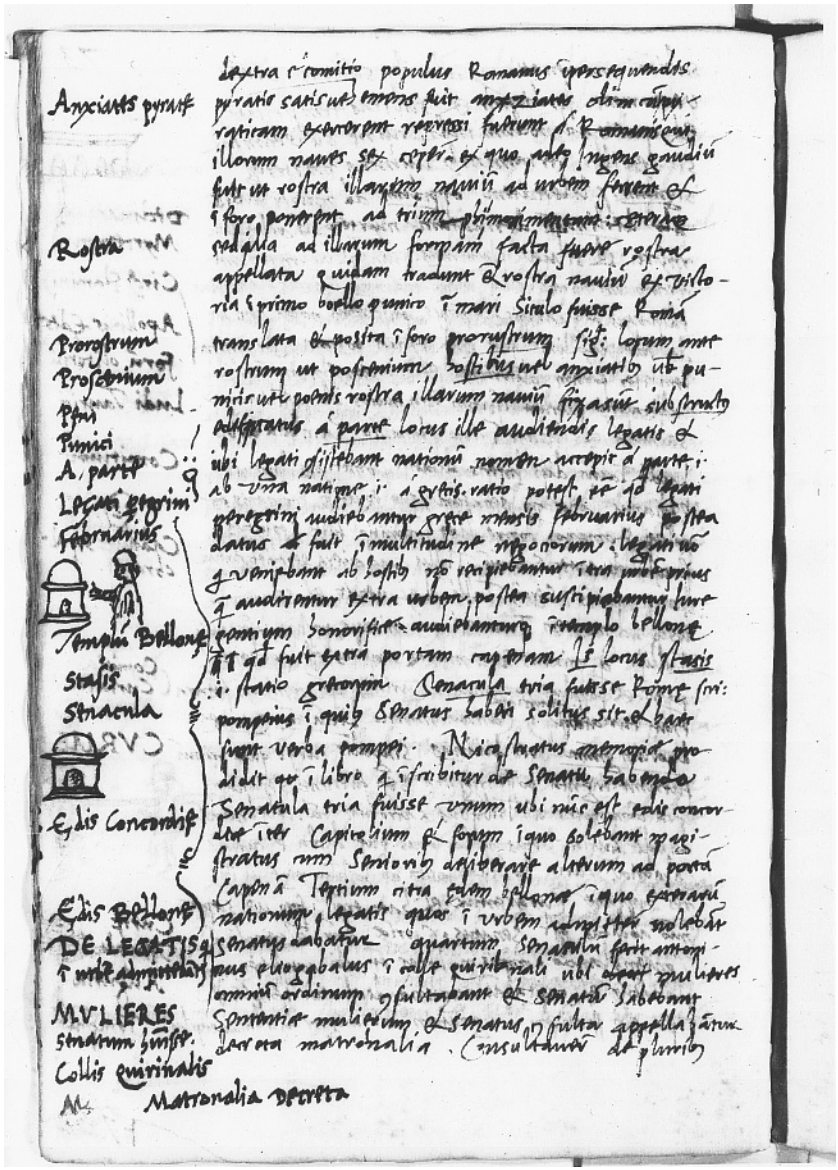

Figure 2 Sketch of teacher in the margin of a notebook of a pupil of Pomponio Leto (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana).

that allowed Valla to see that the famous 'Donation of Constantine', a document according to which the emperor, following his conversion to Christianity, bestowed on the pope the lands later known as the states of the Church, was a forgery written centuries after Constantine's death. Valla was also aware that the ancient Roman legal texts had been corrupted in the course of their transmission over the centuries and offered suggestions for their emendation, claiming that the lawyers of his day did not understand ancient Roman institutions. The constructive side of Valla's philology may be seen in his *Annotations on the New Testament*, dedicated to Pope Nicholas V, in which he clarified the meaning of certain passages thanks to his knowledge of Greek.[66]

Several of Valla's important works were not written in Rome but in Naples, when he was at the court of Alfonso of Aragon in the 1430s and 1440s, employed as a royal secretary. Alfonso was interested in classical antiquity. He had Livy's history of Rome read to him and he collected Roman coins (an ivory box containing the coins of Augustus used to accompany the king on his travels). Alfonso invited to his court a group of talented humanists who competed with one another for his attention. The Sicilian Antonio Beccadelli, for instance, was given 1,000 ducats for compiling a collection of anecdotes (on the model of Xenophon's anecdotes of Socrates), which presented Alfonso as a perfect prince. The Ligurian Bartolomeo Fazio was appointed court historian and wrote a life of the king, as well as a collection of the biographies of the illustrious men of his time. It is interesting to see who qualified as illustrious. Side by side with princes and soldiers we find humanists such as Leonardo Bruni and artists such as Donatello.

Milan was another important centre of humanism in the fifteenth century. Antonio Loschi, for example, chancellor of Milan, wrote against Florence and was the object of invectives by Salutati and Bruni. Piero Candido Decembrio wrote an encomium of Milan in the manner of – and in reply to – Bruni's encomium of Florence. The chancery of Milan under the Visconti and Sforza was a centre of humanist culture. In a letter of 1488, the humanist Jacopo Antiquario recorded finding 'a number of the young clerks neglecting their prince's business, and lost in the study of a book', Poliziano's *Miscellanea*.

The arts too were reformed. For example, the Florentine architect Antonio Avellino, known as 'Filarete', the Greek for 'lover of virtue', arrived in Milan in 1451 and designed the Ospedale Maggiore, a building which – like Brunelleschi's Foundling Hospital in Florence – symbolized a break with the past. Filarete praised Brunelleschi for reviving 'the ancient style of building' and urged his colleagues to abandon what he called 'the modern style' (in other words, Gothic), which the barbarians had introduced to Italy. 'The man who follows the ancient practice in architecture,' he wrote, 'does exactly the same thing as a man of letters who strives to reproduce the classical style of Cicero and Virgil.' Filarete, like his successor Leonardo da Vinci, who arrived in Milan in the 1480s, illustrates the importance of a diaspora of Florentine artists in spreading the classical style throughout Italy. The Colleoni chapel in Bergamo, on the other hand, designed in the 1470s by a Lombard artist, Giovanni Antonio Amadeo, illustrates the importance of local ecotypes. The chapel is classical in many of its details, inspired by Filarete and also, perhaps, by the antiquarian researches of north Italian humanists. However, it could scarcely be more different from the Florentine plain style, every available space being filled with putti, medallions with Roman emperor's heads, and other classical decorative formulae such as acanthus leaves, garlands, urns, and trophies of ancient armour and weapons.[67]

Ferrara, Mantua, Venice

Some of the examples cited in the last section suggest that the new forms of art and literature appealed to princes and republics alike by associating their regimes with the prestige of ancient Rome. All the same, some rulers seem to have been interested in these things at least in part for their own sake, their enthusiasm for antiquity having been kindled when they were still young.

The importance of humanist schools is most obvious in two small courts, Ferrara and Mantua. Guarino of Verona, who had studied in Constantinople, was invited to establish a school at Ferrara in 1429, primarily for the Este family, rulers of the city. Guarino tried to train character as well as intellect with the help of Cicero's moral treatise *De officiis* and of Plutarch. One of his former pupils, Vittorino da Feltre, had already been invited to

Mantua by the ruling family of the Gonzaga in 1423. Vittorino, who taught there for over twenty years, was concerned, like Guarino, with the behaviour as well as knowledge. He too used Plutarch in class. He encouraged his pupils to play games and he tried to make the process of learning as enjoyable as possible. A former student remembered that Vittorino 'gave his pupils a great deal of practice in declamation, pleading imaginary causes in public as if before the people or the senate'.

Thanks to Guarino and Vittorino, the next generation of princes were well acquainted with humanism: Leonello and Borso d'Este in Ferrara, Ludovico Gonzaga in Mantua, and Vittorino's ex-pupil Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino. If their education did not affect the political behaviour of these princes, at least it affected their attitude to the arts. Leonello, for example, wrote poems and collected manuscripts of the classics. Ludovico Gonzaga commissioned Alberti to design a church in Mantua, and invited Andrea Mantegna to be his court painter.

As for Federico of Urbino, he was a professional soldier who tried to combine arms with letters. To symbolize the combination, a portrait of Federigo shows him in armour reading a book. His library of manuscripts was famous in its day. An impression of the breadth of his intellectual interests may be derived from the frieze of figures of illustrious men he commissioned for his study. There were twenty-eight figures, of whom ten were ancients (Plato and Aristotle, Cicero and Seneca, Homer and Virgil, as might have been expected, but also Euclid, Hippocrates, Ptolemy and Solon, representing mathematics, medicine, cosmology and law). Four of the illustrious men were Fathers of the Church, while the moderns included Dante, Petrarch and the duke's old teacher, Vittorino da Feltre. Also among the moderns were the scholastic philosophers Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, a vivid reminder that the contempt for the schoolmen expressed by Petrarch, Bruni and Valla was not universal among humanists.

A familiar figure at these small courts was Pisanello, who worked for Ludovico Gonzaga and Leonello d'Este, as well as Alfonso of Aragon. Pisanello was famous in humanist circles. An epigram by a humanist from Urbino compared him to the ancient Greek sculptors Phidias and Praxiteles. Pisanello's most striking innovation was his series of medals, following the model

of ancient Roman coins. Like a coin, the medal was 'struck' by using a mould. What was new was the idea of using the medium to produce personalized images which the owner could present to friends, relatives or clients. There was normally a profile portrait on one side and a symbolic image or device on the other, together with an inscription which allowed the device to be decoded by the viewer.

Pisanello offers a remarkable example of what linguists call 'code-switching', since he alternated between Renaissance and Gothic styles according to the patron and the occasion. A room he frescoed at Mantua in the 1440s illustrated the adventures of knights at the court of King Arthur and may have been furnished with a Round Table. The continuing enthusiasm for chivalry at Italian courts is also revealed by the practice of jousting, by the commissioning of manuscripts of romances of chivalry, and by the names of a number of fifteenth-century princes and princesses such as Galeazzo (Galahad), Isotta (Iseult), Leonello (Lionel) and so on. This enthusiasm coexisted with the passion of some of the same princes for manuscripts of Plutarch, for Roman coins, or for the paintings of Piero or Mantegna.[68]

For more than forty years, Andrea Mantegna was court painter to the Gonzagas in Mantua. His work is impressive for its mastery of perspective and for its monumental qualities, but Mantegna also stands out for his combination of artistic with humanist interests. He was a friend of scholars and shared their enthusiasm for Roman antiquities. This enthusiasm is apparent in his work, above all in the series of nine large canvases known as the *Triumphs of Caesar*. His concern for the precise details of the armour and weapons of Roman soldiers illustrates Mantegna's awareness of anachronism and his careful study of ancient coins and of sculpture such as the reliefs on Trajan's Column in Rome.[69]

Venice has been left to the last because the republic, famous for its stability, was relatively slow to accept change. The Venetian patricians Francesco Barbaro, Ermolao Barbaro the elder and Leonardo Giustinian were all ex-pupils of Guarino of Verona and their humanist interests continued into adult life. Francesco, for instance, combined the active life of diplomacy and public office with book-hunting and writing a treatise on marriage. However, it was only in the later fifteenth century that

Venetians began to make a significant contribution to the *studia humanitatis*. Ermolao Barbaro the younger, for example, was a friend of Poliziano and, like him, a leading textual critic. At the university of Padua he lectured on Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*, returning to the original Greek (as Leonardo Bruni had done in his translations a generation earlier), and attempting to establish what Aristotle had meant by stripping the text of layers of commentary by medieval and Arab philosophers.[70]

In the visual arts too the Venetians resisted the new style for a time, whether from conservatism or because of the alternatives available in that cosmopolitan city. It was in the 1470s that the Bellini brothers, for instance, Gentile and Giovanni, developed their distinctive pictorial style. In the case of Gentile, one of the marks of that style was an interest in the Middle East, encouraged by a visit to Istanbul to paint a portrait of the sultan. It may not be coincidence that at about the time of Bellini's return to Venice, craftsmen began to make use of the decorative formulae known as 'arabesques'. It was from Venice and probably from Spain as well that these formulae spread to other parts of Europe.[71]

It was also in the late fifteenth century that a cluster of buildings *all' antica* (including the church of Santa Maria Formosa), were erected in the city, designed by Mauro Coducci, and all the more impressive because of the dazzling white of the Istrian stone. Some of the churches, such as San Giovanni Grisostomo, followed Byzantine plans. It has therefore been argued that architecture in Venice, which had long had close links with Constantinople, was going through a Byzantine revival, rejecting not only the Gothic style but also the Florentine alternative.[72]

Both cities and courts have been singled out by different historians as environments favourable to the new trends in art and humanism. To decide which milieu was the more favourable is less useful than emphasizing the complementarity of their functions. The inhabitants of city-republics found it easier to identify themselves with republican Romans. Craft-industrial cities, especially Florence, were centres for training artists and establishing what might be called a tradition of innovation. Courts on the other hand were environments to which, if the ruler was interested, gifted people could be attracted from different places.[73]

In the fifteenth century, if not later, courts seem to have offered a more favourable environment than cities for women interested in learning and the arts. It is true that in Florence Alessandra Scala, daughter of the humanist Bartolomeo, was able to study classical literature, like her Venetian equivalent Costanza Barbaro, daughter of the humanist Francesco. Another Venetian, Cassandra Fedele, gave public orations before the doge and the university of Padua. In Verona, the noblewoman Isotta Nogarola had humanist interests. However, these women did not find it easy to be accepted by male humanists.[74]

In courts, on the other hand, women could play roles other than wives and mothers and it mattered less whether male humanists accepted them or not. Cecilia Gonzaga, daughter of Ludovico, the ruler of Mantua, was educated by Vittorino da Feltre and commissioned a medal from Pisanello. Battista de Montefeltro (Federico's aunt), for whom Bruni wrote *De studiis*, came from the ruling family of Urbino. She wrote books and made a Latin speech when the emperor visited the court. Still better-known are the cultural interests of Isabella d'Este (see below, pp. 79–80). Similar opportunities were offered in the courts of other parts of Europe, to be discussed in the following chapter.