

David Rundle, ed. *Humanism in Fifteenth-Century Europe*.

Medium Ævum Monographs 30. Oxford: The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2012. xvii + 398 pp. \$70. ISBN: 978-0-907570-23-3.

This important book seeks to dispel the myth that humanism and humanists were unique to the Italian Peninsula during the fifteenth century. The book is arranged geographically, with chapters on different countries by both established and new scholars. The approaches vary from innovative ways to trace humanist

interests among Europeans to more-standard descriptions of Neo-Latin writers and their works in a specific geographical area. A useful appendix of some sixty short biographical entries of humanists concludes the book. This study offers valuable correctives to common assumptions about the spread and prevalence of humanism in Europe before the Reformation and thus should be on hand for all scholars of premodern Europe.

The book was inspired to complement the online publication of the fourth edition of Roberto Weiss's classic *Humanism in England during the Fifteenth Century*, also edited by David Rundle ([http://mediumaevum.modhist.ox.ac.uk/monographs\\_weiss.shtml](http://mediumaevum.modhist.ox.ac.uk/monographs_weiss.shtml)). As Rundle notes in his introduction to that volume, Weiss's book remains the standard general survey of the topic, despite showing the signs of being published over seventy years ago. In *Humanism in Fifteenth-Century Europe*, the contributors seek to push the historiographical discussion beyond nationalistic historiographies and dated conceptions of humanism as restrained to a particular set of philosophical ideals or as existing at the expense of Scholastic or religious ideas. Although the book's geographical arrangement prevents sustained transnational comparisons, by bringing together so many fine surveys under one cover the book provides a welcome entry point into studies on different places and lays a foundation for future comparative studies.

Collectively the chapters present a range of approaches to identifying Renaissance humanism, tracing its spread, and understanding its influence. For England, Daniel Wakelin offers a particularly intriguing chapter in which he explores sources traditionally divorced from humanist studies for traces of widespread humanist interests among fifteenth-century Englishmen. The exploration involves a broad definition of Renaissance humanism and a willingness to infer based upon fragmentary evidence. Also noteworthy are Jeremy Lawrance's arguments about Castile, where Lawrance contends that humanist displays of erudition were crucial in the process of "courtization," that is, the transition from a more fragmented society centered on powerful armed knights to one focused on winning the favor of the king at court. The chapter demonstrates the power and prestige to be gained through erudite humanist displays, regardless of an audience's deep comprehension of the classical content referred to in humanist speeches, poems, and other works.

As historians continue to study humanists across Europe, they should remember the conclusions in the essays by David Rundle and John Monfasani. Rundle points to the ways that humanists established connections across the Alps, including their use of new fonts, and some motivations behind their cultivation of far-flung contacts. The evidence for humanism, thus, is wide, while the motivations for contacts went beyond simply establishing learned exchanges. John Monfasani ends his chapter with long lists of over 200 Greek émigrés who served as teachers, copyists, and/or translators in the Latin West during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries — even as he rightly points out that simply being Greek and learned did not make a person a humanist (many Greeks, in fact, were more interested in Scholastic philosophy than humanist rhetoric). As Paul Oskar Kristeller rightly

pointed out decades ago, Renaissance humanism was a major cultural player in fifteenth-century Europe, but there were other cultural phenomena as well.

As inclusive as this book is, two absences are worthy of comment. First, a section on Burgundy and the Low Countries — which appeared in the original conference — would be a welcome addition, particularly given the political and economic importance of those areas during the fifteenth century. Second, the biographical appendixes are very well done for the figures included, but some people are left out — Giannozzo Manetti, for example, cultivated ties in Spain, but does not appear, and Carlo Marsuppini declined a knighthood from the emperor Frederick III. Could these appendixes be expanded, using a work such as Mario Cosenza's *Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary of the Italian Humanists*, and posted online to enhance their exposure? The book under review here lays a solid foundation on which such questions can be asked as future studies continue to explore the trans-European world of humanists and humanism during the fifteenth century.

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