



King, Margaret L. A Short History of the Renaissance in Europe

Janice Liedl

Volume 41, Number 1, Winter 2018

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086051ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v41i1.29543>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Liedl, J. (2018). Review of [King, Margaret L. A Short History of the Renaissance in Europe]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 41(1), 211–213. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v41i1.29543>

of the origin of religion denies [that people] naturally seek God; instead, God is introduced only after the primary political problem of ordering our lives together has been solved” (144). This one is easy, and certainly can be argued. But then Harding who, earlier in the book had dropped Jean-Yves Lacoste into the discussion out of nowhere, comes back to him eighty pages later and concludes that “Machiavelli’s discussion of the entire [Pazzi] conspiracy can be taken as a historical critique of liturgy” (174). I find this reading to be an act of over-interpretation. This example is a direct result of the many disjunctions in this book, and of the methodological problem I mentioned earlier. But other, largely stylistic problems also exist. Harding too often writes, “Obviously, there is more to say...” Or, “I will say more later.” He also uses many colloquialisms, for example, “So...” or “off of.” This tongue-in-cheek style distracts the reader from an otherwise intelligent and creative discussion. Regardless, the book is worthy of one’s time, even as several moments warrant a healthy skepticism.

JOSEPH KHOURY

St Francis Xavier University

King, Margaret L.

A Short History of the Renaissance in Europe.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. Pp. xxvii, 424 + 14 maps, 10 ill., 92 fig., 13 graphs, 10 tables. ISBN 978-1-4875-9308-7 (paperback) \$62.95.

If you are teaching an introductory course on the Renaissance, you will find this third and substantially revised edition of Margaret King’s beautifully written survey an excellent prospect for adoption as a core course text. In eleven expansive chapters, *A Short History of the Renaissance in Europe* unfolds a narrative of historical change grounded in the cultural transformation of early modern Europe as it began in Italy. Equally conversant regarding the cultural and social foundations of this era, this volume is interdisciplinary in execution and appeal. As befits a history that King sees as situated in the studios and studies of the communes and city-states, this volume is a work of art. Thoughtful and well-explained maps, graphs, and figures lend substance to an elegant history that will also appeal to readers outside the classroom. Excerpts from primary sources and artfully explained reproductions of sculptures, paintings,

and buildings give visible form to the Renaissance values at the centre of King's account. In one volume, *A Short History of the Renaissance in Europe* offers an extraordinary range of insights into the lives of Europeans from the thirteenth through the seventeenth century along with an acknowledgement of the many peoples whose lives were changed by these Renaissance developments.

The text opens with a deep dive into Italy's long centuries leading from the founding of Rome to the dawn of the Renaissance. King's extended opening performs a vital service in revealing the appeal of antiquity and the influence of developments over the intervening medieval era in shaping Italy's societies, economies, and politics. From there, the familiar narrative of republican competition embodied in Florence and Venice underpins the intellectual flowering of Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch as exponents of the age. Chapters 3 and 4 treat the rise of humanism as a literary and philosophical tradition and the arts as a visual expression of many of the same ideas. Here, King's encyclopedic knowledge of Italian culture helps her to link intellectual, technical, and cultural elements to the works that embodied them and which are featured in illustrations and excerpts or explained in graphs and short essays.

Having well-explored the essential elements of Renaissance thought and expression, *A Short History of the Renaissance in Europe* shifts in the next chapters to consider in turn the social, religious, political, and military experiences of Renaissance Italy. Chapter 5's dual focus on the home and the piazza permits King to show how class, gender, and ethnicity interacted in the cities and city-states of the peninsula. She turns next to the essential questions of how spiritual and institutional experiences of faith shaped and were shaped by both broad European and specifically Italian traditions. Brief lives of a cavalcade of noteworthy women such as Catherine of Siena and Angela Merici illustrate how Renaissance religion was expressed in convents, households, and courts. Chapter 7 is grounded in the rise of despotism before exploring how internal and international conflicts stressed the political contexts of the time—an interpretation brought vividly to life when King assesses the Italian Wars as a turning point not only for the peninsula but for all of Europe.

In the final chapters, King develops the story of the Renaissance in a wider context, moving first across Europe and then to the world. Chapter 8 opens with deep dives into the works and worlds of Machiavelli and Castiglione where King explains their works' contents, contexts, and influences, and sets the stage for major political and cultural developments across the Italian

peninsula. From there, the text is well-situated to approach questions of the two Reformations as a part of the Renaissance story. The familiar trio of Erasmus, More, and Vives illustrates the way in which the revival of antiquity infused the reformers' aims at moral reformation. King then explores how civic and courtly culture outside of Italy employed and expanded upon Renaissance inspirations before putting the Renaissance in a global context, in Chapter 11's examination of exploration, conquest, and trade.

This new edition of *A Short History of the Renaissance in Europe* represents a long tradition of scholarly excellence thoughtfully updated for current needs, with elegant prose complemented by a wealth of images and excerpts that bring the Renaissance to life for readers. However, there is some room for improvement: the suggested readings provided for each chapter were occasionally disappointing. Titles that were listed predominantly came from the 1980s and 1990s. Highlighting more scholarship published in the last fifteen years would have been helpful to guide readers on their next steps in exploring the Renaissance as it is currently studied. However, since the body of King's text shows her wide understanding of recent scholarly developments, it is a small complaint. This work deserves consideration as a succinct and smart overview of the subject.

JANICE LIEDL

Laurentian University

La Popelinière, Lancelot Voisin de.

***L'Histoire de France*. Tome II 1558–1560.**

Édition critique par Jean-Claude Laborie, Benoist Pierre et Pierre-Jean Souriac sous la direction de Denise Turrel.

Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, 555. Genève : Droz, 2016. 531 p. ISBN 978-2-600-01940-8 (relié) 107.96 €.

Ce deuxième volume de l'édition de *L'Histoire de France* de La Popelinière (1541–1608) fait suite à celui qui était paru chez le même éditeur en 2011. Ce volume ne comprend donc, en dehors d'une brève rectification d'une erreur qui date du XIX^e siècle (le prénom de l'auteur est Lancelot et non Henri) et d'un index des noms de personnes citées par La Popelinière, que le texte (la graphie