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### Bartlett, Kenneth R., and Gillian C. Bartlett. *The Renaissance in Italy: A History*

Jonathan Locke Hart

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## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

**Bartlett, Kenneth R., and Gillian C. Bartlett.**

***The Renaissance in Italy: A History.***

Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2019. Pp. xiv, 398 + ill. ISBN 978-1-62466-818-0 (paperback) US\$26.

Kenneth R. Bartlett and Gillian C. Bartlett have produced an original and elegant history of the Renaissance in Italy by concentrating on significant figures and city states from the time of Petrarch to that of Pope Sixtus V. The structure of the book is clear and illuminating. The five parts and twenty-two chapters are informative and allow some depth; they are focused and not the usual survey.

The book shows breadth and depth, its sub-sections expressing highlights. “Part I: Dawn of Humanism” has chapters on Petrarch and humanism and on Leonardo Bruni and civic humanism. Chapter 1 discusses the letters of Cicero, paganism, the invention of the individual, and humanism. Chapter 2 examines Giovanni Boccaccio, Coluccio Salutati, and Leonardi Bruni and his *History of Florence*.

“Part II: Florence: The Humanist Republic” includes five further chapters. Chapter 3 looks at the rise of the Medici in Florence and their struggle for power; at the Albizzi oligarchy, civic humanism, republican liberty, Cosimo de’Medici, *il Vecchio*, Cosimo as a patron of the arts, Neoplatonism, and Cosimo, *Pater Patriae*. Chapter 4 explores the Medici dynasty, including Lorenzo de’Medici, the Pazzi conspiracy, and Lorenzo’s retreat and death. In chapter 5, the Bartletts analyze, among other topics, the rise of Savonarola and the expulsion of Piero de’Medici. Chapter 6 provides an analysis of Savonarola in power, the Council of Five Hundred, Florence as a New Jerusalem, and the fall, arrest, trial, and execution of Savonarola. In chapter 7, the authors discuss Niccolò Machiavelli and his time, including a discussion of Piero Soderini and Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and *The Discourses on Livy*.

“Part III: Princes, Patronage, and Power” begins with chapter 8, which focuses on Milan, and especially on Petrarch, Giangaleazzo Visconti, Gian Maria Visconti, and Filippo Maria Visconti. Chapter 9 also concentrates on Milan, including the rule of Francesco Sforza, the Peace of Lodi, Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Lodovico *il Moro*, and Leonardo da Vinci. In chapter 10, the Bartletts examine Mantua and the era of the Gonzaga, including Mantegna, Isabella

d'Este, Federigo II, Guilio Romano, and court culture. Chapter 11 discusses Ferrara and the Este; besides an examination of Tasso and the epic, the Bartletts consider Lionello, Bosco, Ercole I, and Ercole II. Examining Urbino and the Montefeltro, the authors look specifically at Federigo da Montefeltro and his *Studiolo*, Baldassare Castiglione and *The Book of the Courtier*, and Urbino after Guidobaldo.

"Part IV: The Renaissance at the Edges" begins with chapter 13 on Venice, focusing on the republic in the Middle Ages, the Crusades, and Doge Francesco Foscari. Venice in the Age of Palladio is the focus of chapter 14, which explores Doge Leonardo Loredan, the League of Cambrai, Andrea Palladio, architects, and architecture. Chapter 15 is about Naples and includes examinations of the Angevins and Joanna I, while chapter 16 looks at Naples in terms of Alfonso the Magnanimous, humanism and humanists at his court, and Ferdinando I.

"Part V: Rome in the Renaissance" begins with a discussion of the economy, population, urban landscape, schism, and Cola di Rienzo in chapter 17, and looks at Rome in terms of Eugene IV, Paul II, Nicholas V, Sixtus IV, the church, and the secular realm in chapter 18; chapter 19 explores Alexander VI and the Borgia papacy and Julius II. The Medici popes, including Leo X and Clement VII, and the sack of Rome in 1527 are topics discussed in chapter 20. The matter of Rome continues in chapter 21, which examines Rome and the Counter-Reformation—Paul III, the Council of Trent, Julius III, Paul IV, and Ignazio Danti (mathematics and geography). Chapter 22 reaches the end of the Renaissance in the contexts of Felice Peretti and of the city planning, support of learning, and legacy of Sixtus V. The authors also provide an Introduction and a Conclusion that are clear and effective in framing the volume.

The Introduction speaks about the "almost mythical place" of Renaissance Italy in the imagination (xiii). In shaping the term for the period, the present makes use of the past, as in Giorgio Vasari's employment of "Rinascita" or Rebirth in *Lives of the Artists* (1550) and Jules Michelet's use of "renaissance" in *History of France* (1855), but the mythos of the Renaissance as the birth of modernity was cemented by Jacob Burckhardt in *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) (xiii). Although the Bartletts wonder why the Italian Renaissance, an elite movement that produced, supported, and appreciated genius, has its staying power, they also place these individuals in their economic and social contexts through concentrating on people and moments (xiii–xiv). Other

people agreed with and fostered Bruni and Isabella d'Este, enabling him to be a voice of republican liberty in Florence and her to be "la prima donna del mundo" (xiv).

Petrarch's self-knowledge, self-creation, or self-fashioning and focus on the human are, for the Bartletts, keys to humanism and the Italian Renaissance: "What the life and work of Petrarch was defining was a new way of interpreting the human condition" (15; see also 1, 14). Machiavelli, who died weeks after the sack of Rome in 1527, became known for his writings mainly after his death (105). Leonardo's notebooks combined writing and drawings, and many these notebooks survived because Leonardo left them to his aristocratic apprentice, Francesco Melzi (133). Castiglione, a noble who was a diplomat in Urbino and Mantua and wrote about culture and decline in *The Book of the Courtier*, became Leo's papal nuncio to Spain and died at fifty of the plague in 1529 (176–80). Palladio's architecture defined the Venice of his time (219). Rather than focus on the received opinion of the time, of the tyranny of the Borgias and of Alexander VI (whose bulls were important in the wake of Columbus's landfall in the Western Atlantic), the Bartletts note his role as a patron of art and building (294).

In their Conclusion, the authors stress the complexity of the Italian Renaissance: its energy, invention, loss, and melancholy; its influence on us and on our institutions, and on creativity, self-creation, linear perspective, voyages, anatomy, the sonnet, art, architecture, styles, and knowledge. Humanism lived then and lives now; what is human and what is humanity are questions still: "The Renaissance past is not prologue; rather, it still operates" (364). The Bartletts have brought us a history in which the past is still present, the Italian Renaissance still important and attractive. It moves us as we move.

JONATHAN LOCKE HART

Shandong University

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