Jill Kraye, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xviii, 320.

This new addition to the Cambridge Companions to Literature series consists of 14 essays by British and American specialists in the field. One of the major aims of the collection, as the editor, Jill Kraye, makes clear in her introduction, is to provide an English-speaking readership with accessible discussions of some of the major issues of Renaissance humanism.

The book achieves this aim admirably. Both the editor and the authors have clearly gone to great trouble to ensure that no prior knowledge on the part of the reader is assumed. No technical term goes unexplained ("Canon Law" is explained on p. 5), no Latin phrase or book title is left untranslated. Particularly helpful in this respect is Nicholas Mann's essay on the origins of humanism, which covers the ground from the Carolingians to the mid-fourteenth century, concisely but thoroughly.

Yet although this book is aimed at the non-specialist, and the authors have in consequence striven for concision and clarity, the chances are that there are very few readers who will not find something new in this collection, or will not be grateful to the authors at some point for their condescension. For a second major aim outlined by the editor is to counter the view that Renaissance humanism was concerned solely with the details of the reconstruction, editing, imitation and teaching of classical Latin and Greek texts (p. xv). These aspects are very thoroughly dealt with in essays by Michael Reeve, Martin Davies, Kristian Jensen, and Peter Mack, but the net is spread much wider. Alistair Hamilton and James Hankins discuss the contribution of humanism to the development of biblical studies and political thought respectively, Martin McLaughlin its impact on Italian vernacular literature. Charles Hope and Elizabeth McGrath explore the connection between humanism and the other central phenomenon of the Renaissance, the dynamic change in the visual arts. Kraye's own contribution makes clear the different approaches to classical philosophy adopted by humanists, with their philological concerns, and the professional philosophers, who still valued the works of medieval scholasticism.

Moreover, a concentration solely on the customary period from the beginning of the fourteenth century until the end of the sixteenth is also avoided. Anthony Grafton examines the belief that humanism died at the end of the sixteenth century in the face of the new science. Separate contributions from Clare Carroll and Joseph Loewenstein cover humanism and English literature from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries.

A book like this which aims to give an overview, especially one composed of the contributions of 14 different specialists, is bound to have its omissions. The present reviewer would certainly have liked to have seen rather more on the Byzantine background to the rediscovery of classical Greek literature in Italy. After all, reading, appreciating, and imitating the writings of antiquity, and occasionally producing scholars who were by all intents and purposes humanists, was something which the Byzantines had been doing for hundreds of years. The outstanding Byzantine humanist

of the fifteenth century was the Platonist George Gemistus Plethon, sadly not mentioned in any of the essays. It is true that Plethon's own impact on Italian humanism was limited. His stay in Florence in 1438-1439 was brief, and since he was unable to speak or write Latin his exposition of Plato's philosophy had much less impact than that of Bessarion or Marsilio Ficino. Yet his teaching at Mistra in the Peloponnese had an indirect influence on the development of Platonic studies in Italy. Several of his pupils were later to be found in Bessarion's Academy in Rome, including, of course, Bessarion himself. The sometimes acrimonious debate conducted there on the relative merits of Plato and Aristotle ultimately resulted in Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem Platonis*, a work which went a long way to making the study of Plato both accessible and acceptable.

The omission of a more detailed examination of the Byzantine background and the role of the Greek *émigrés*, however, in no way detracts from the overall value of this book. One of its great strengths is that it is much more than just an introduction to the topic, its format making it easy to use for reference as well. A bibliography of works in English on each of the areas covered is provided at the end, while each of the essays has its own more detailed endnotes, which also cite books in other languages. There is a biographical index which includes the dates and a description of the individuals mentioned in the text. Given the thematic division of the book, a subject index does not seem to have been necessary, although cross-references to the Latin alternative names of some of the Renaissance humanists in the biographical index might have been helpful: Biondo, for example, may not be automatically connected by the newcomer to the subject with the Biondus sometimes referred to in older works. Nevertheless, the index gives a unity to the book, allowing a particular individual to be traced across several of the essays.

Available in paperback and hardcover, this is undoubtedly a book to be bought. Above all it is to be recommended to students of literature, art history and history who will not fail to find in it a valuable introduction to the subject and helpful suggestions for further reading.

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