

**Robert Black**

**Studies in  
Renaissance Humanism  
and Politics**

**Florence and Arezzo**

Robert Black

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Studies in Renaissance Humanism  
and Politics

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Florence and Arezzo



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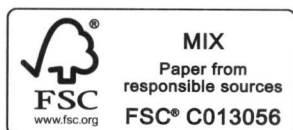
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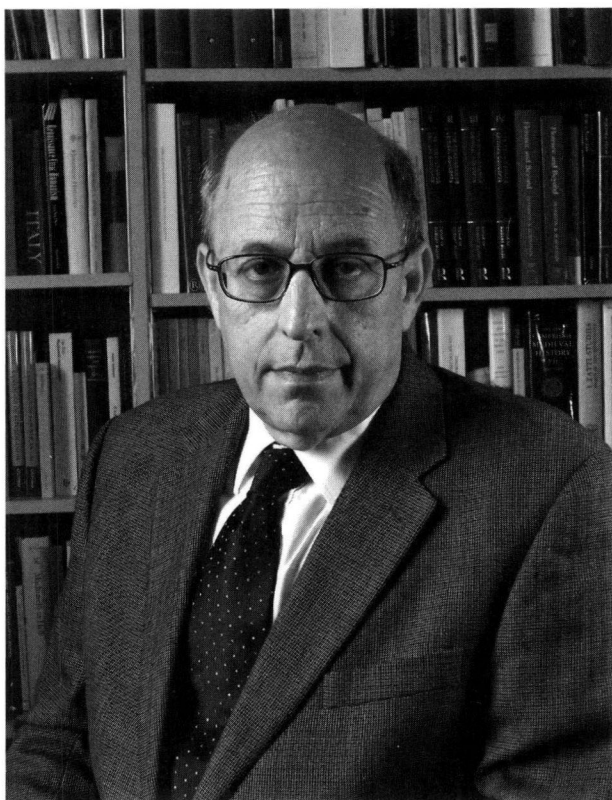
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Studies in Renaissance Humanism  
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Robert Black

To Cleo, Adam, Max and John

## PREFACE

The fifteen articles republished here for the Variorum Collected Studies Series represent several directions that my research has taken since my doctoral thesis (1974) on the Aretine humanist and lawyer, Benedetto Accolti (1415–1464), who served as first chancellor of Florence during the last six years of his life. Like his predecessors in the chancery, Leonardo Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini, Accolti was a humanist historian, and so, in ‘The new laws of history’ (article I), I followed my work on early humanist historiography with a study of later developments in the theory and practice of humanist history. With his dialogue on the ancients and moderns, Accolti entered the debate on the respective merits of the middle ages and the Renaissance; my own developing complementary interest in the idea of the Renaissance led to ‘The Donation of Constantine: a new source for the concept of the Renaissance?’ (II). ‘Benedetto Accolti: a portrait’ (IV) updated my work on Accolti in the twenty years since the publication of my biography, *Benedetto Accolti and the Florentine Renaissance* (Cambridge 1985).

For the past twenty-five years, my principal research activity has been with Italian medieval and Renaissance education. This interest arose indirectly through my work on Accolti. While searching for material on him and his family in the Aretine state archives, I came across a series of documents regarding the University of Arezzo in the fifteenth century – a period in which, according to the standard histories of medieval and Renaissance universities, there was no recorded university in that city. This discovery led to the publication of *Studio e scuola in Arezzo durante il medioevo e il rinascimento* (Arezzo 1996), the documentary register of the University of Arezzo from its foundation in the earlier thirteenth century to 1530. Included in this volume were the archival documents regarding pre-university education in Arezzo, and so my interests broadened to Italian elementary and secondary education, eventually resulting in two further books, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge 2001) and *Education and Society in Florentine Tuscany* (Leiden 2007). There were a number of preliminary articles published in the field of educational history, but I decided not to include any of these publications in this Variorum collection, since they had been extensively reworked in these two volumes. One article with an educational scope did not, however, undergo subsequent revision, and so has been republished here: ‘Boccaccio, reader of the *Appendix Vergiliana*: the Miscellanea Laurenziana and fourteenth-



century schoolbooks' (III). 'The origins of humanism' (V) had a more indirect connection with my work on education. In investigating the changing interest in the Latin classics at the school level as revealed by the production of Italian manuscript schoolbooks, I noticed a pattern that appeared to have important ramifications for the origins of the classical revival in thirteenth-century Italy. The preliminary results of this research included a working handlist of Italian manuscripts of the Latin classics before the thirteenth century, which is republished here too.

The Florentine chancery provided the link between Accolti and Machiavelli. My doctoral supervisor, Nicolai Rubinstein, was convinced that the chancery lay outside the real seat of political power in Florence, occupied in his view by an oligarchic ruling group. It is certainly true that a foreigner such as Accolti was not directly involved in Florentine politics, and similarly I found in 'Florentine political traditions and Machiavelli's election to the chancery' (VI) that Machiavelli, a later Florentine chancellor, entered the chancery not only because of his anti-Savonarolan sentiments (as Rubinstein, following Ridolfi, had suggested in his famous article, 'The beginnings of Niccolò Machiavelli's career in the Florentine chancery', *Italian Studies* 11 [1956], pp. 72–91) but also because of the political detachment of his branch of the Machiavelli family. I continued my work on Machiavelli's chancery career (1498–1512) in 'Machiavelli, servant of the Florentine Republic' (VII), arguing that Machiavelli largely conformed to conventional patterns of political, cultural, bureaucratic and diplomatic activity in the chancery. In 'New light on Machiavelli's education' (VIII) I combined my interests in the chancery and in education, demonstrating that Machiavelli's first steps in formal learning followed the normal pattern of humanist formation that had become fashionable among the Florentine upper classes in the later fifteenth century.

Accolti's native city of Arezzo was central to my research interests from the outset. The legacy of Piero della Francesca's close connection with the Aretine elite was the fresco cycle depicting the legend of the true cross in Arezzo's church of S. Francesco; in 'The uses and abuses of iconology' (IX) I suggested that archival documents provided a sounder basis for art historical research than iconographic speculation. Accolti emigrated from Arezzo to Florence, and relations between centre and periphery in the Florentine territorial state provided the theme for my four studies of Arezzo, the Medici and Florence (X–XIII); focusing on patronage, I found that Cosimo de' Medici had only a limited concern with Arezzo, where the leading Florentine patron had been his fellow oligarch Luca Pitti; Medici interest in Arezzo developed only during the abortive Florentine revolution of 1466, when Arezzo loyally supported Cosimo's son and successor, Piero. Arezzo came under the virtually complete control of Piero's son, Lorenzo, only to fall out with the revived anti-Medicean

republic after 1494, culminating in the famous rebellion of 1502. Arezzo had to wait for the pontificate of Leo X to regain the political status that it had enjoyed under the later fifteenth-century Medici.

The Florentine chancery provided a gateway into the field of political thought. Florentine chancellors such as Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni helped to articulate the ideology of Florentine republicanism, moving beyond mere apologetics into deeper political reflection. In 'The political thought of the Florentine chancellors' (XIV) I examined how two Florentine chancellors in particular – Salutati and his late fifteenth-century successor Bartolomeo Scala – handled the problem of the relative merits of monarchical and republican government. In 'Republicanism' (XV) the same debate's scope was widened beyond Florence and Italy to include Northern European political thinkers, who were found to be remarkably sympathetic to Italian-style republican government.

In the articles republished in this collection, I have greatly benefited from the help of other scholars. In particular, I should like to mention Lorenz Bönninger, Virginia Brown, Frank Dabell, Jonathan Davies, Albinia de la Mare, Teresa De Robertis, Daniela De Rosa, Paul Gehl, Ernst Gombrich, George Holmes, Joseph IJsewyn, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Gabriella Pomaro, Michael Reeve, Nicolai Rubinstein and Quentin Skinner. I am grateful to John Monfasani for suggesting this publication in the Variorum series. In spite of her onerous family and scholarly commitments, my wife, Jane Black, has always been generous with her expert assistance and advice. I have gratefully received financial support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the British Academy, the Harvard University Center for Renaissance Studies at I Tatti, the Leverhulme Trust, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the University of Leeds. I dedicate this book to my four grandchildren, Cleo and Max Carpenter, and Adam and John Ellis.

ROBERT BLACK

*Wallingford*  
*August 2010*

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

*The articles in this volume, as in all others in the Variorum Collected Studies Series, have not been given a new, continuous pagination. In order to avoid confusion, and to facilitate their use where these same studies have been referred to elsewhere, the original pagination has been maintained wherever possible, but articles IV, V and IX have had to be reset with new pagination.*

*Each article has been given a Roman number in order of appearance, as listed in the Contents. This number is repeated on each page and is quoted in the index entries.*

# The new laws of history

It is generally recognized that the early Italian humanists had little interest in the theory of historical writing and that before the very end of the fifteenth century there were no substantial theoretical works by humanists on historiography.<sup>1</sup> What the early humanists did produce were a series of letters, prefaces, orations, invectives and short extracts in which the aims, style, value, and to some extent, method of history were briefly or incidentally discussed. The most important of these texts were Salutati's letter to Juan Fernandez de Heredia on the utility of history, dating from 1392;<sup>2</sup> four pages from George of Trebizond's *Rhetoricorum libri quinque* of 1433 or 1434, which explained the mechanics of writing history;<sup>3</sup> a letter by

<sup>1</sup> The most important recent work on the theory and philosophy of history in the Renaissance is Girolamo Cotroneo, *I trattatisti dell' "Ars historica"* (Naples, 1971); another general treatment is R. Landfester, *Historia magistra vitae: Untersuchungen zur humanistischen Geschichtstheorie des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts* (Geneva, 1972). E. Kessler, *Theoretiker humanistischer Geschichtsschreibung* (Munich, 1971), publishes facsimile editions of Italian sixteenth-century treatises on history, together with an extensive introduction, outlines of the texts, bibliographies and indices. A useful bibliography is A. Witschi-Bernz, *Bibliography of Works in the Philosophy of History, 1500-1800*, published as *Beiheft 12 of History and Theory* (Middletown, Conn., 1972), which also contains a brief discussion of 'Main trends in historical-method literature: sixteenth to eighteenth centuries', 51ff. The first substantial general treatment was E. Maffei, *I trattatisti dell' arte storica dal Rinascimento fino al secolo XVII* (Naples, 1897). Other general studies are F. von Bezold, 'Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der historischen Methodik', in his *Aus Mittelalter und Renaissance. Kulturgeschichtliche Studien* (Munich and Berlin, 1918), 362-83; G. Spini, 'I trattatisti dell'arte storica nella Controriforma Italiana', *Quaderni di Belfagor*, 1 (1948), 109-36 (an abridged translation was made by E. Cochrane (ed.), *The Late Italian Renaissance 1525-1630* (London, 1970), 91-133); J. L. Brown, *The Methodus ad faciem historiarum cognitionem* (Washington, DC, 1939), 46-119, 162-94; B. Reynolds, 'Shifting currents of historical criticism', *J. Hist. Idea*, 14 (1953), 471-92; J. H. Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the Sixteenth-Century Revolution in the Methodology of Law and History* (New York, 1963), 83-154; F. Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini* (Princeton, NJ, 1965), 203-26, 332-5.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. F. Novati, *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati* (Rome, 1891-1911), IV, 289-302. See Cotroneo, 29ff; E. Kessler, *Das Problem des frühen Humanismus. Seine philosophische Bedeutung bei Coluccio Salutati* (Munich, 1968), 152-6; A. Luttrell, 'Salutati's letter to Juan Fernández de Heredia', *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 13 (1970), 235-43.

Salutati does not discuss historical method or the idea of truth in history in his letter to Heredia, but in a later letter to the Genoese historian Giorgio Stella of 1405 he distinguishes between the certain knowledge which is the result of rational and philosophical argument or sense perception, and historical knowledge which at best can aspire to verisimilitude or probability: 'hec quidem hystorica talia sunt quod nil prorsus certitudinis habeant; sufficit quod saltem verisimilitudo non desit, quae media est fabulose fictionis et certissime veritatis. si res esset in ratione constituta, possem ab essentialibus diffinitione, divisione vel nomine probationem assumere; possem etiam ab externis; sed affirmare de preteritis quod sic fuit, cum res non possit percipi sensibus, quia non est, nec ostendi testibus, cum non sint; non difficile solum, non laboriosum et longum sed impossibile mortali cuipiam prorsus est; ut ex his, postquam historiandi laborem et diligentiam assumpsisti, possis aspicere nunquam tibi verisimile relinquendum, nunquam affirmandum aliquid, sed auctoritati referentium tribuendum' (*Epistolario*, IV, 125). This text confirms the findings of my previous studies of earlier humanist theory and practice of history, namely, that for the early humanists, historical truth meant probability or verisimilitude: see R. Black, 'Benedetto Accolti and the beginnings of humanist historiography', *English Hist.*, 96 (1981), 36-58; Benedetto Accolti and the Florentine Renaissance (Cambridge, 1985), 298-317.

Petrarch did not devote a particular work to historiographical theory, but for his ideas of history's purpose and utility, which were similar to those expressed by Salutati in his letter to Heredia, see E. Kessler, 'Geschichtsdenken und Geschichtsschreibung bei Francesco Petrarca', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 51 (1969), Petrarca und die Geschichte (Munich, 1978), and 'Petrarch's contribution to Renaissance historiography', *Res publica litterarum*, 1 (1978), 129-49.

<sup>3</sup> George of Trebizond, *Rhetoricorum libri quinque* (Venice, 1523), fols 82v-84r. See Cotroneo, 39ff; J. Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* (Leiden, 1976), 285-6; Black, 'B.A. and the beginnings', 36-8, 53-7; Gilbert, 207, 210.

The following abbreviations have been used in this article: *Engl Hist* = *The English Historical Review*; *Hist Theory* = *History and Theory*; *Bibl Hum R* = *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance*.

Lapo da Castiglionchio the Younger directed to Flavio Biondo in 1437, in which the eloquence, utility and method of history were discussed;<sup>4</sup> another letter by Guarino Veronese to Tobia del Borgo in 1446, emphasizing history's value, eloquence and especially its impartiality;<sup>5</sup> Valla's preface to his history of Ferdinand of Aragon, written in 1445 or 1446, in which history was argued to be superior to poetry or philosophy;<sup>6</sup> the invectives exchanged between Valla and Bartolomeo Fazio in 1447 in which certain theoretical concepts such as propriety, dignity, plausibility and truth were discussed;<sup>7</sup> a short treatise on history by Pomponio Leto first published in 1471 and slightly revised for republication in 1490;<sup>8</sup> and the oration in praise of history by Bartolomeo della Fonte, dating from 1482, in which to a discourse on the value of history there was added perhaps the 'first brief history of historical writing'.<sup>9</sup>

The study of history was one of the basic subjects constituting the *studia humanitatis*, and the early humanists were particularly prolific historians; it may seem curious, therefore, that they had so little time for historiographical theory. Felix Gilbert has suggested that 'the probable reason for the paucity of theoretical treatises on history by the humanists is that there is no special work or systematic treatment of the theory and methods of history in classical literature'.<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps true that the early humanists lacked

4 Ed. M. Miglio, 'Una lettera di Lapo da Castiglionchio il giovane a Flavio Biondo', *Humanistica lovaniensis*, 23 (1974), 1-30 (reprinted in Miglio's *Storiografia pontifica del Quattrocento* (Bologna, 1975), 33-59, 189-201. See Black, 'B.A. and the beginnings', 37-8, 41-2, 44, 52-8; F. P. Luiso, 'Studi su l'epistolario e le traduzioni di Lapo da Castiglionchio Juniore', *Studi italiani di filologia classica*, 7 (1899), 245-6; R. Fubini, 'Flavio Biondo', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, x, 543.

5 Guarino Veronese, *Epistolario*, ed. R. Sabbadini (Venice, 1915-19), II, 458-65. See Cotroneo, 63ff; Black, 'B.A. and the beginnings', 37, 44, 52-7; Gilbert, 210, 216, 224.

6 Lorenzo Valla, *De laude historiae*, in *Gesta Ferdinandi Regis Aragonum*, ed. O. Besomi (Padua, 1973), 3-8. See *ibid.* xxv-xxvi; F. Gaeta, *Lorenzo Valla. Filologia e storia dell'umanesimo italiano* (Naples, 1955), 169-92; Cotroneo, 49ff; Black, *B.A. and the F. Ren.*, 313; L. G. Janik, 'Lorenzo Valla: the primacy of rhetoric and the de-moralization of history', *Hist Theory*, 12 (1973), 395.

7 B. Fazio, *Invective in Laurentium Vallam*, ed. E. I. Rao (Naples, 1978) and Lorenzo Valla, *Antidotum in Facium*, ed. M. Regoliosi (Padua, 1981). See R. Valentini, 'Le invettive di Bartolomeo Fazio contro Lorenzo Valla', *Rendiconti della R. Accademia dei Lincei, classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, ser. 5, 15 (1906), 493-550; Janik, 389-404.

8 I am extremely grateful to Professor J. IJsewijn for referring me to this text and for providing me with transcriptions and the following descriptions of the versions of the text:

POMPONI LAETI PRAELECTIONES DE HISTORIA

Codices manu scripti hi textum integrum exhibent:

(a) Paginae IV (folia II) manuscriptae, quae praemittuntur editioni Sallusti, 'Venetiis per Baptistam de Tortis/M.CCCCXXI, die. XXIII decembris' (Hain 14211) in: *Inc. Vatic. II 111, olim 1795* (see V. Zabughin, *G. Pomponio Leto* (Rome, 1909), II, 141).

(b) Pagellae manuscriptae XIV, quae praemittuntur editioni Sallusti. Qui liber 'impressus Romae per M. Eucharium/Silber alias Franck. Anno Salutis M./CCCCXC Tertia Nonas Aprilis/ Sedente Innocentio. VIII. Pon. Max./ Anno eius Sexto' (Hain 14217) in: *Inc. Vatic., Stamp. Ross. 441*.

(c) Additamentum manuscriptum ultimum in libro *Pierpont Morgan Library, Acc. 51414*, qui Sallusti opera adnotata continet atque varia additamenta manuscripta.

(d) Cod.Vatic.Lat. 3333 (continet Lucium Florum a Pomponio Laeto exscriptum et adnotatum), payraceus ex libris Fulvi Ursini, exhibet in summo paginae primae margine supra textum excerptum breve 'de historia'.

9 On this text, of which there is no complete printed edition, see C. Trinkaus, 'A humanist's image of humanism: the inaugural orations of Bartolommeo della Fonte', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 7 (1960), 99-105. See Cotroneo, 74ff; Gilbert, 207-8, 216.

10 *Ibid.* 205.



classical models for theoretical works on history, although it is not quite correct to say that there was no 'special work' on historiography in classical literature; Lucian of Samosata's treatise in Greek on the writing of history<sup>11</sup> was used extensively by at least one early humanist theoretician on history, Guarino Veronese,<sup>12</sup> and could therefore have provided the necessary model. The reason the early humanists did not make substantial contributions to the theory of history was that Cicero had clearly stated that the practising historian needed no special theoretical guidance and that an elaborate theory of history was unnecessary. The renowned passages on history in book two of *De oratore*, which were quoted and paraphrased by every humanist theoretician on history, occurred in the context of a general discussion 'on the proper sphere' of the orator: 'what business shall we assign to him', says Antonius, 'and what function would we suggest that he has been appointed to discharge'. One such field of rhetorical activity is panegyric, which needs no special rules because 'not everything . . . needs to be reduced to theory and rule; using those same sources whence are derived all rules of speaking, it will be possible to prepare a panegyric'. Similarly, the writing of official dispatches, 'to be communicated from a general at a meeting of the Senate, or conveyed from the Senate to a general', although a form of oratory, 'need not be fitted out with peculiar rules'. Likewise, history is the responsibility of the orator, and yet it has no particular rules: 'Nowhere do I find this art supplied with any independent precepts', says Antonius, 'for its rules lie open to view'.<sup>13</sup> According to Cicero, the rules of history were obvious, and therefore the early humanists devoted little more space to historiographical theory than the one paragraph in which Cicero discussed the laws of history in *De oratore*.

Beginning in the very last year of the fifteenth century, however, a series of substantial treatises and discussions on the theory of history began to

11 *De historia conscribenda*. Cotroneo (11) points out that 'l'antichità classica non aveva mai dato, all'infuori del ricordato trattatello di Luciano (che era del resto uno scritto satirico su certe forme culturali del suo tempo), o del saggio su Tucidide di Dionigi d'Alicarnasso, una compiuta teoria della storia'.

12 See Black, 'B.A. and the beginnings', 37, 44. Cf. E. Mattioli, *Luciano e l'umanesimo* (Naples, 1980), esp. 50-3; R. Förster, 'Lucian in der Renaissance', *Archiv für Literaturgeschichte*, 14 (1886), 337-63, esp. 347 and 357 n. 7.

13 *De oratore*, II.x.41: Sequitur igitur . . . quid ei negotii demus, cuique eum muneri velimus esse praepositum. *Ibid.* II.xi.44-5: Sed non omnia, quaecumque loquimur, mihi videntur ad artem et ad praecepta esse revocanda. Ex eis enim fontibus, unde omnia praecepta dicendi sumuntur, licebit etiam laudationem ornare, neque illa elementa desiderare, quae ut nemo tradat, quis est, qui nesciat, quae sint in homine laudanda? *Ibid.* II.xii.49: si quod saepe summis viris accedit mandata sint exponenda, aut in senatu ab imperatore, aut ad imperatorem, aut ad regem, aut ad populum aliquem a senatu, num quia genere orationis in eiusmodi causis accuratiore est utendum, idcirco pars etiam haec causarum numeranda videtur, aut propriis praeceptis instruenda. *Ibid.* II.xii.50: Ergo item, inquit, illa, quae saepe disertae agenda sunt, et quae ego paulo ante cum eloquentiam laudarem dixi oratoris esse, neque habent suum locum ullum in divisione partium, neque certum praeceptorum genus, et agenda sunt non minus disertae, quam quae in lite dicuntur, oburgatio, cohortatio, consolatio: quorum nihil est, quod non summa dicendi ornamenta desideret; sed ex artificio res istae praecepta non quaerunt. *Ibid.* II.xii.51: Age vero, inquit Antonius, qualis oratoris, et quanti hominis in dicendo, putas esse, historiam scribere? *Ibid.* II.xv.62: Videtisne, quantum munus sit oratoris historia? Haud scio, an flumine orationis et varietate maximum. Neque tamen eam reperio usquam separatim instructam rhetorum praeceptis: sita sunt enim ante oculos. Translations adapted from Loeb Library Edition, translators E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1942).