

The Return of Greek Studies to the Latin West in Renaissance Italy

By Marianne Pade

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The Renaissance (14th-17th cent.) was a period of Italian cultural leadership in Europe, a period when cultural forms and ideas developed in Italy came to exert decisive influence on the rest of Europe. This was to a large extent due to the intellectual movement we know call Renaissance humanism, and an integral part of this movement was a new interest in Greek studies. The humanists were interested in authors who had not hitherto been studied in the Latin West, and there was a veritable boom in Latin translations from the Greek. One of the 'new' genres that garnered interest was Greek historiography: for the first time since Antiquity writers such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon and Polybius were studied in the West. Moreover, new works of Greek political thinking were translated, notably Plato's *The Republic*.

In my paper I shall discuss the impact of this encounter with works such as Plato's *Republic*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*, and Herodotus' *Histories*. For the first time in many centuries, it became possible in the Latin West to gain an impression of political life in fifth-century Athens, or of Sparta's well-regulated society, a cultural encounter that inevitably came to influence humanist political thinking. We even see that Athenian democracy was looked upon by some as a model, although democracy had been described as one of the deviant constitutional forms in the Aristotelian tradition.

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