

Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance, 2 vols. James Hankins. Rome Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura. Vol. 1, **Humanism**. 2003. 652 pp. €76.00. ISBN 88-8498-076-3. Vol. 2, **Platonism**. 2004. 538 pp. €60.00. ISBN 88-8498-167-0.

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This magnum opus on humanism and platonism in the Renaissance is divided, exactly as its title suggests, into two volumes, the first on humanism and the second on platonism, two subjects for which James Hankins, their author, is well known to Renaissance scholars. In many ways, the two volumes together comprise a portrait study of the development of humanism in Italy and the primary role played by its protagonist, Plato, in its early stages, unfolding, and maturation. The work was not, however, conceived as a whole, consisting as it does of reprints of a large body of writings, including essays, articles, and reviews related to these two interrelated and important subjects of Renaissance studies. This reader is pleased to note that, according to the brief author's preface (the only new contribution in these 1,183 pages, which are without a general introduction), these past publications have been revised and updated for both volumes.

Volume 1 is, essentially, a compilation of reprints of a wide variety of works that are fitted into four general sections: Leonardo Bruni's Texts and Their Reception, "Between East and West," Patrons of the Humanities, and Students of the Humanities. Nonetheless, the preponderant subject matter of volume 1 is Leonardo Bruni, to whom almost half the volume, including an article in the second section—reducing the second section to only two articles—is devoted. The third section is also somewhat emasculated by comparison with the vigor of the first, especially when taking into account that an article on Ptolemy's *Geography* in that section seems somewhat out of place. The last section is composed of a group of heterogeneous reviews of books and exhibitions, as well as articles that offer, collectively, a

broad overview of an agglomeration of topics raised by modern views of Renaissance humanism. In many ways, the reader has traveled a very long distance from the first article, which traces the life and works of Leonardo Bruni, to the last, which attempts to explain how certain scholars have viewed a selection of philosophical issues in looking back at the past.

Volume 2 possesses more of a focus: Plato. Also a compilation of reprints and also divided into four sections, it considers Plato in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the *Timaeus* in the Renaissance, the Platonic Academy, and Varieties of Platonism. In this volume, which opens with a reprint of Hankins's well-known encyclopedia biography of Plato in the Middle Ages and ends with an article about Castiglione's transformation of the concept of Platonic love into something that can be achieved outside ecclesiastical institutions, the reader follows a clear and lucid path. This sequence describes Plato and the reception of his ideas and works from the Western and Byzantine medieval worlds through the sixteenth century—including Galileo, who is discussed earlier on.

The greatest value of volume 1, to this reader, lies in the scholarly nature of the articles devoted to Leonardo Bruni, an intellectual who was not only scholar, translator, and commentator on ancient texts, but also politician, historian, diplomat, and poet. Compared to those of Ficino, Pico, and Erasmus, Bruni's ideas are less known to (and less understood by) students of the Renaissance, as are his connections with Petrarch and Coluccio Salutati, and the nature of his many original contributions to the emerging humanism of the Renaissance. The author's extensive works on many aspects of Bruni's life, career, and contemporaries are in themselves of great significance, because of the interest they have invited concerning the importance of Bruni as a focal point in the early fifteenth-century humanist movement. Because many of Hankins's publications appeared in a variety of volumes and journals not accessible to many scholars, and certainly not to many aspiring scholars, this close-knit group of studies forms a small "book" in itself. As such, it is indispensable to the study of this early Renaissance humanist and, especially, to the development of humanism in Florence. Hankins's discussion of little known works by Bruni, as well as the excerpted texts he provides, contribute to the invaluable quality of this group of studies not only for Bruni himself, but for the study of such important contemporaries of his as Coluccio Salutati, with whom he had a close friendship, Cosimo de' Medici, to whom he was devoted, and Manual Chrysoloras, from whose learning he so benefited as to change his career.

Of the many important reprints appearing in volume 2, perhaps the most interesting is the pair of articles devoted to Cosimo de' Medici and the "myth" of the Platonic Academy. Because they were not originally published together, or in the same journal, many scholars may have missed one or the other. Here Hankins at once deconstructs and constructs the early history of organized learning in Florence. His fresh examination, based on a plethora of contemporary documents far beyond the information provided by Arnaldo della Torre (who, in a hard-to-find volume published in 1902, *Storia dell'accademia platonica de Firenze*, proposes the history of a veritable academy devoted to the study, if not the worship, of Plato), suggests that no academy as such existed in Florence. Nor did one exist that was devoted uniquely to the study of Plato. No doubt, as he proposes, Ficino's teaching (on a variety of subjects in addition to Plato) took place in a number of sites where, as Ficino himself tells us in *De vita*, he also dispensed culinary, healing, and astrological advice especially tailored to the maladies and malaise of intellectuals.

While the virtues of these two compilations are impressive and many, and far beyond what can be said in a short review, I feel obligated to raise some issues that, in case of a fur-

ther reprinting of these works, might be of use.

First and foremost, while both volumes need introductions, this is especially true in the case of the first, whose texts are, in combination, almost unmanageable. This is, of course, not so critical for those of us who have greater familiarity with these works and their subjects as it is for those newer to the field, who may experience difficulty in balancing the topics. A second matter concerns the author's adaptation of his texts to book form. In the case of the reproduction of texts, most often these appear in the original Latin (or Greek) only; in some they appear in English only, while in yet others, both the original language and the translation are provided. In adapting articles to a book form, it would be productive, and make for much more lucid reading, to have a consistent practice on the reproduction of texts. This is especially true in the case of Leonardo Bruni, many of whose works have not been translated; otherwise, interest in such a book as this might be limited to experienced scholars who, however, already know Hankins's works. A similar imbalance occurs in the introductory paragraphs to the individual essays. Here a more effective adaptation might have eliminated the sudden changes in tone for the reader who, having completed the reading of an article replete with weighty concepts and detailed examinations of texts, is suddenly introduced to the subject at a very elementary level. A third suggestion would be to include a bibliography. As things stand, only some of the articles have updated footnotes, while a few are accompanied by their original bibliographies, which do not take into account more recent work. In short, with a little more attention to the adaptation of these previous publications to book form, accompanied by introductions and bibliographies, these volumes could have benefited enormously.

Nonetheless, they are timely and extremely useful. This pair of volumes is of fundamental importance for all those who study the humanism of the Italian Renaissance, as well as for those who study the history of its art and architecture.

