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After Baron, Back to Burckhardt?

Oren J. Margolis*

> It is in association with the increased attention now paid to sociological factors that the core of the Burckhardtian conception of the Renaissance can carry full conviction for the reader of today. In this metamorphosis, Burckhardt's view proves equal and may still, eventually, prove superior to the competing views about the nature of the transition to the modern age.[1]

Hans Baron wrote these words in 1960, in a review article in *Renaissance News* to mark the centenary of Jacob Burckhardt's *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*. That book has recently passed its hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary. Meanwhile, it is the premise of this volume that the time has come to get beyond the trademark thesis of a book not even sixty years old — that is, Hans Baron's "civic humanism" thesis made most famous by *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance.* This short opening chapter takes up the invitation to get beyond Baron together with the incitement, quoted above, offered by Baron himself to go back to Burckhardt. The "sociological factors" that Baron invoked as necessary for providing a more rounded picture of the Renaissance are as important as ever, particularly to the study of the Renaissance humanism to which Baron was dedicated. Burckhardt, however, was more sensitive to them than

* Note on editions: At the time of writing, the new edition of Jacob Burckhardt's *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, part of the 29-volume series *Jacob Burckhardt Werke* (Munich and Basel, 2000–), has not yet appeared. As this will become the standard point of reference on publication, I have decided to cite from the most convenient existing edition, the 1900 Phaidon edition (as *Die Kultur*, here abbreviated as *Renaissance*) readily available online. Insofar as the main text is concerned, all English-language editions are the same, featuring the S. J. C. Middlemore translation. Where I find this translation unobjectionable, I have cited the 1990 Penguin edition, which is also readily available, and which contains the introduction by P. Burke cited below. In other places, either because of dissatisfaction with Middlemore's wording or in order to highlight particular aspects of Burckhardt's original, I have given my own translations from the German text, providing the original in the footnotes.

[1] Baron, 'Burckhardt's *Civilization*', 222.

he is generally regarded to have been. By returning to Burckhardt with fresh eyes, new conceptions of the politics of humanism that take us beyond civic humanism can be built on the foundations he laid. Rather than being simply an ironic, essentially backwards-looking intellectual game — made appropriate, perhaps, by Hayden White's designation of Burckhardt as the historian of irony — by its end this paper should highlight one possible way forward, namely in relation to the study of humanism and diplomacy.[2]

Like the Renaissance studies its subject spawned, the field of Burckhardt studies is also active, prolific and dynamic. But rarely has Burckhardt's treatment of humanism received much serious attention from subsequent scholars of it. Burckhardt famously gave little importance to the revival of Antiquity for spawning the Renaissance and modernity, or at least much less than he did to that "new living thing in history," to "the state as a calculated, deliberate creation, as a work of art," which phenomenon he used as the framing device for his entire book.[3] For this, Burckhardt's handling of humanism has been labelled "conventional" — by Peter Burke, for example.[4] My remit then, to find in Burckhardt the foundation for a post-Baron socio-political study of humanism, might appear distinctly unpromising.

Yet it is not entirely clear how conventional Burckhardt's handling of humanism, in its entirety, is. To be sure, it bore a relation to contemporary approaches: as Christopher Celenza has shown in his discussion of nineteenth-century approaches to Latin humanism, Burckhardt, though a conscientious objector to "the seemingly empiricist, politically oriented" Rankean history practiced by his greatest contemporaries, nevertheless retained many of its prejudices, which included those in favour of literature written in the native tongue, rather than in a learned language that ostensibly inhibited the development of national literature and culture.[5] The revival of Antiquity

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[2] White, *Metahistory*, 230–264.

[3] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 2: "ein neues Lebendiges in die Geschichte: der Staat als berechnete, bewußte Schöpfung, als Kunstwerk."

[4] Burke, introduction to Burckhardt, *Civilization*, 8; but cf. Baron, "Burckhardt's *Civilization*," 220, who notes how Burckhardt "parted with the classicist interpretation that the revival of ancient literature was the *cause* of the Renaissance."

[5] Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*, 1–15, esp. 11–13.

"coloured" culture "in multifarious ways," but takes second billing in the conquest of the Western world to "the Italian *Volksgeist*."[6] Of course, the style of the treatment differs little from that Burckhardt gives the Renaissance in general: this humanism — an "ahistorical construction," according to David Rundle, presented in "a description of a movement without movement over time" — is no outlier in a work compared by its author to a picture.[7] Burckhardt was also unwilling to give the Italian Renaissance revival of Antiquity much credit for uniqueness, apart from the humanists' dubious honour of being uniquely unpleasant to each other.[8] Increasingly uncomfortable with the implications of using the word *Renaissance* as a byword for the period of transition from medieval to modern, as a lecturer Burckhardt argued instead that "a peculiarity of higher cultures" was "their capacity for renaissances," explaining that "either one and the same or a later people partially assumes a bygone culture into its own by a kind of hereditary right or by right of admiration."[9] Humanism itself, to Burckhardt, was trendy, "a fashion."[10] Thus the fad for Greek and Latin names — "better and more respectable than the present practice of taking them, especially the female names, from novels," but nevertheless comparable — is treated alongside the rise of classicizing Latin composition.[11] For the same reason the emphasis in Burckhardt's work was placed on more imitative products such as, in a list Baron offered, "neo-Latin poetry and the new Latin oratory and epistolography," rather than on

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[6] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 98: "allein wie das Bisherige so ist auch das Folgende doch von der Einwirkung der antiken Welt mannigfach gefärbt […] nicht sie allein, sondern ihn enges Bündnis mit dem neben ihr vorhandenen italienischen Volksgeist die abendländische Welt bezwungen hat."

[7] Rundle, "The Revival of Antiquity," 4; Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 1. For the *Renaissance* as "a self-conscious construction meant to be seen as a picture might be," see Holly, "Past Looking," 385.

[8] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 153.

[9] Burckhardt, *Aesthetik*, 187: "Eine Eigenthümlichkeit höherer Culturen: *ihre Fähigkeit zu Renaissancen*. Entweder ein und dasselbe oder ein später gekommenes Volk nimmt mit einer Art von Erbrecht oder mit dem Recht der Bewunderung eine vergangene Cultur theilweise zu der seinigen an."

[10] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 139: "Denn für viele war das Altertum überhaupt nur eine Mode."

[11] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 140: "noch immer viel schöner und achtungswerter als die heute beliebte von (zumal weiblichen) Namen, die aus Romanen stammen;" Middlemore's translation, 164.

"Latin treatises, dialogues, and works of historiography," which Burckhardt judged boring unless understood as the largely rhetorical efforts undertaken to mediate the cultural gulf that separated the present from Antiquity.[12] This was the view that earned Burckhardt the criticism of Baron. And it is precisely the study of that second class of works that is characteristic of Baronian and most post-Baronian scholarship.

Rather than simply conventional, then, Burckhardt's vision of humanism might appear grievously limited. His dismissal of the work of Leonardo Bruni, for example, as "insipid and conventional" looks (at best) overly aesthetic and (at worst) foolish in the light of scholarship by Baron and others that has given Bruni's writing a place at the heart of political culture and events.[13] And yet the fact that, in a book he likened to a picture (*Bild*) and in which the essential fact of society is the state as a work of art (*Kunstwerk*), he uses an artistic metaphor (*färben*, to color) to describe its impact should be a clue as to the significance he actually afforded it.[14]

What follows is not an extended comparison between Baron and Burckhardt, nor an attempt to resurrect Burckhardt wholesale: in this way, it follows in the spirit of the Swiss historian himself, who cautioned that his "essay" was unavoidably the outcome of "subjective judgment and feeling," and that even his chosen material could "in other hands […] result also in considerably different conclusions."[15] Riccardo Fubini echoed this warning when, while recommending Burckhardt's "historical vision […] in all its depth," he claimed of this "reconstruction of the Renaissance" that "precious little could today be immediately taken up."[16] These words are generally sound; even

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[12] Baron, "Burckhardt's *Civilization*," 221; Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 135.

[13] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 135: "abgeblaßt und konventionell;" Middlemore's translation, 160. The main point of reference for Baron is *The Crisis*; the most important new study of Bruni is Ianziti, *Writing History*.

[14] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 1–2.

[15] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 1: "so muß sich das subjektive Urteilen und Empfinden jeden Augenblick beim Darsteller wie beim Leser einmischen […] unter den Händen eines andern nicht nur eine ganz andere Benützung und Behandlung ehrfahren, sondern auch zu wesentlich verschiedenen Schlüssen Anlaß geben."

[16] Fubini, "Considerazioni," 105: "che cosa è ancor valido oggi della ricostruzione rinascimentale di Burckhardt? […] ben poco del libro potrebbe oggi essere immediatamente ripreso […] Proprio dal punto di vista di una più moderna e circostanziata indagine la visione storica di Burckhardt appare, non già contradetta, ma anzi capace di essere […] sperimentalmente confermata in tutta la sua profondità."

though, perhaps surprisingly, some of that precious little may be found in Burckhardt's approach to humanism — largely untouched after a hundred and fifty years. This article will thus answer the question posed in its title only partly in the affirmative. Still, it will show how Burckhardt's apparently modest vision of this movement may, on closer consideration, contain something less so: the still-worthy foundations for the socio-culturally aware study of the politics of Renaissance humanism.

Burckhardt's understanding of humanism was not entirely derived and then downsized from the Hegelian-Rankean, national-essentialist outlook of his peers. To put his treatment of humanism in proper perspective, then, one should start at what might seem an unlikely place: at the remarks he made to another great German-speaking historian of Italy, Ludwig von Pastor. During a 1895 meeting with the author of the *Geschichte der Päpste*, who had come to Basel to speak with the older man, Burckhardt claimed in response to Pastor's questioning that he had been inspired to write *Die Cultur der Renaissance* by his first encounter, while visiting Rome in 1847, with the *Vite* of Vespasiano da Bisticci.[17] The response surprised Pastor, who was expecting to hear about Burckhardt's long-standing interest in Italian art, or some similar answer more immediately befitting the author of *Der Cicerone*. And yet Vespasiano, the Quattrocento Florentine book-dealer who turned biographer late in life and recorded the deeds of the illustrious statesmen and scholars he knew personally or through business, seems to have been another of Burckhardt's long-time companions: it was thirteen years from that first reading of Vespasiano to the appearance of the *Renaissance* in 1860; and it was another thirty-five years until the conversation with Pastor. In his chapter on "The Revival of Antiquity" (*Die Wiedererweckung des Altertums*), Burckhardt explicitly recommends Vespasiano to his readers:

> For further information as to the learned citizens of Florence at this period the reader must all the more be referred to Vespasiano, who knew them all personally, because the tone and atmosphere in which he writes and the terms and conditions on which he mixed in their society are of even

[17] See introduction by Myron P. Gilmore to Vespasiano, *The Vespasiano Memoirs*, xi.

> more importance than the facts which he records. Even in a translation, and still more in the brief indications to which we are here compelled to limit ourselves, this chief merit of his book is lost. Without being a great writer, *he was thoroughly familiar with the subject he wrote on* [my italics] and had a deep sense of its intellectual significance.[18]

The Middlemore translation quoted here, in which form Anglophone readers have encountered Burckhardt since 1878, is misleading: "*er kennt das ganze Treiben*" does not refer to an unspecified and abstract "subject" of Vespasiano's writing, but more precisely to all the "activity" or "goings-on" in the world of learned Florence, a world with which Vespasiano was deeply familiar. Although Burckhardt also acknowledges Vespasiano's appreciation of the "intellectual significance" of these goings-on, it is the intellectual significance of a humanism defined by activity. As the most important dealer and producer of humanist manuscript books in Florence, Italy and even Europe, Vespasiano was a nodal figure perfectly placed to capture the wide array of activities by people who were "either distinguished scholars or else distinguished dilettanti (*große Dilettanten*) who maintained the scholars," and created and then moved in a world in which these activities were either coloured by humanism or expressed in its code: "it was in them that humanism first showed itself practically as an indispensable element in daily life."[19]

A culture so colored is exactly what is found in the account Burckhardt gives, mainly in the form of anecdotes meant to be less typical than illustrative, of Italian humanism in the mid-Quattrocento; the source of many of these anecdotes is Vespasiano. Burckhardt's accounts of the creation of the great library of the Badia Fiesolana by Cosimo de' Medici is naturally borrowed from the work of Vespasiano, who was responsible for putting it together. The story of how Niccolò Niccoli convinced the young Piero de' Pazzi to give up

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[18] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 121: "Für die übrigen gelehrten Bürger von Florenz in dieser Zeit muß schon deshalb auf Vespasiano (der sie alle kannte) verwiesen werden, weil der Ton, die Atmosphäre, in welcher er schreibt, die Voraussetzungen, unter welchen er mit jenen Leuten umgeht, noch wichtiger erscheinen als die einzelnen Leistungen selbst. Schon in einer Übersetzung, geschweige denn in den kurzen Andeutungen, auf welcher wir hier beschränkt sind, müßte dieser beste Wert seines Buches verlorengehen. Er ist kein großer Autor, aber er kennt das ganze Treiben und hat ein tiefes Gefühl, von dessen geistiger Bedeutung." Middlemore's translation, 145.

[19] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 120; Middlemore's translation, 143.

his perpetual search for a good time and turn to the studia humanitatis is poached from Vespasiano almost verbatim.[20] So too is the portrait provided of one of Vespasiano's greatest patrons, Federico da Montefeltro, duke of Urbino:

> He spent much, but with good purpose, on the people he needed [Middlemore: *the scholars whose services he used*]. There was no talk of a court of poets [Middlemore: *no trace of the official poet*] at Urbino; the lord himself was the most learned […] As a theologian, for example, he compared Thomas and Scotus, and was also familiar with the Church Fathers of the East and West, the former in Latin translations […] he knew thoroughly not only the *Ethics* and *Politics* of Aristotle, but also the *Physics* and some other works. The rest of his reading lay chiefly among the ancient historians, all of whom he possessed; these, and not the poets, "he was always reading and having read to him."[21]

This passage is condensed from Vespasiano's lengthy description of Federico's cultural and scholarly attainments; the closing quotation is copied directly.[22] Burckhardt's account of the daily reading sessions of Alfonso V "the Magnanimous" of Aragon, king of Naples, with the humanist Panormita, is likewise a composite, put together from different parts of Vespasiano's life of the monarch:

> Panormita instructed the king and his court in Livy every day, even in the camp during military campaigns […] For [Alfonso] was deeply religious and, in addition to Livy and

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[20] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 120–121; Vespasiano, *Le vite*, 2:310–311.

[21] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 126: "Er gab viel aus, aber zweckmäßig, an die Leute, die er brauchte. Von einem Poetenhof war in Urbino keine Rede; der Herr selber war der Gelehrteste […] Als Theologe z. B. verglich er Thomas und Scotus und kannte auch die alten Kirchenväter des Orients und Okzidents, erstere in lateinischen Übersetzungen […] von Aristoteles kannte er nicht nur Ethik und Politik genau, sondern auch die Physik und mehrere andere Schriften. In seiner sonstigen Lektüre wogen die sämtlichen antiken Historiker, die er besaß, beträchtlich vor; diese und nicht die Poeten "las er immer wieder und ließ sie sich vorlesen.' My translation diverges in many places from Middlemore, 150.

[22] Vespasiano, *Le vite*, 1:379–399, esp. 382: "Volle avere piena notitia […] delle istorie, le quali aveva lette tutte et spesso le leggeva, et faceva leggere Livio, Salustio, Quinto Curtio, Giustino, Comentari di Cesare," etc.

> Seneca, had the Bible read to him, which he knew almost by heart.[23]
>
> He was literate, and took great pleasure in the sacred writings, and especially the Bible, which he had almost entirely to memory […] He greatly loved learned men, as is said, and every day he was at Naples he had Messer Antonio Panormita read the Decades of Livy, to which readings came many lords, and Panormita read to them. He also made him read from Holy Scripture, and from works of Seneca and of philosophy […] In the March [of Ancona] with his armies, each day he had Panormita give a reading from Livy, to which all the lords there with him came.[24]

The reliance on Vespasiano can also explain one of the quirks in Burckhardt's presentation: the apparently oversized role given to Giannozzo Manetti, the humanist, diplomat and, above all, Vespasiano's intellectual mentor.[25] Manetti's fame, according to Burckhardt, was won through his talent and the "*Wonderwirkungen*" he produced as an orator — something earned in the same instrumental, indexical capacity in which other orators, who peddled their "enormous mass of antiquarian rubbish," also served.[26]

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[23] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 125: "[Panormita] mußte ihm und seinem Hofe täglich den Livius erklären, auch während der Feldzüge im Lager […] Denn er war völlig religiös und ließ sich außer Livius und Seneca auch die Bibel vortragen, die er beinah auswendig wußte." The claim made in the Middlemore translation, 149, that the king nearly memorized the Bible "after fourteen perusals" comes from neither Burckhardt nor Vespasiano, but from Panormita, *De dictis et factis*, 41: "Biblia quater et decies cum glossis et commentariis perlegisset. Proinde illa memoria ita tenere, ut non solum res, sed et verba etiam ipsa pluribus locis sine scripto redderet;" see note in Vespasiano, *Le vite*, 1:84.

[24] Vespasiano, *Le vite*, 1:84: "Egli fu literato, et molto si dilettò della Scrittura Sancta, et maxime dela Bibia, che l'aveva quasi tutta a mente;" 1:98: "Amava assai i litterati, come è detto, et sempre, mentre che istava a Napoli, ogni dì si faceva legere a meser Antonio Panormita le Deche di Livio, alle quali letioni andavano molti signori, legevale il Panormita. Facevasi legere altre letioni della Sancta Scrittura, et d'opere di Seneca, et di filosofia;" 1:99: "Sendo nella Marca con gli exerciti […] ogni dì si legeva una lettione de Livio per lo Panormita, et andavanvi tutti quegli signori aveva seco."

[25] See Rundle, "The Revival of Antiquity," 4, for criticism of this inflated importance.

[26] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 133: "eine wüste Masse von Worten und Sachen aus dem Altertum;" Middlemore's translation, 157.

Burckhardt's encounter with Vespasiano da Bisticci likely deserves credit for the historian's openness to the social, distinguishing function of humanism in the Quattrocento: that was the role, after all, it played in Vespasiano's Lives. At the same time, however, Burckhardt's attachment to the biographer in the first place can probably be explained by the aptness of the work and its genre to Burckhardt's primary interest. To be sure, Vespasiano is not the only source upon whom Burckhardt relies to the point of parroting language; and he gives no direct guidance for the later fifteenth, let alone the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.[27] Yet the biographer who presented the age through which he had lived as one of remarkable individuals was a natural fit in the work of the historian for whom the spirit of the age was closely linked to individualism. We have already remarked upon Burckhardt's characterization of Vespasiano's theme as *das ganze Treiben* of (especially Florentine) cultural and intellectual life, thus highlighting its social character. Burckhardt uses the same word in describing the humanist cultural environment supported by the "monster" (*Scheusal*) Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta at Rimini, calling "*ein sonderbares Treiben*" what Middlemore tamely dilutes to the "life and manners" that "must have been a singular spectacle."[28] This passage is intended to highlight both the prince's social role as a propagator of Antiquity and the "interdependence" of tyrant and scholar each reliant on "personality" (*Persönlichkeit*) and "talent" — examples of the modern individuality fostered by despotism that, according to Burckhardt, developed in the Renaissance.[29] This thesis is invoked again immediately before Burckhardt's presentation of the despotic or princely culture-heroes, and is explicitly at work. For example, in the description of Federico da Montefeltro's court culture mentioned above, the catalogue of the duke's reading material, condensed from the account of the man who built his library and thus knew it better than anyone

[27] For the example of Burckhardt's reliance on Leon Battista Alberti's autobiography, and also his distortions of it, see McLaughlin, "The Development of the Individual," 1–8, and Grafton, *Leon*, 9–11, 14–18.

[28] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 127; Middlemore's translation, 151.

[29] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 123: "Die innere Zusammenhörigkeit des Gewaltherrschers mit dem ebenfalls auf seine Persönlichkeit, auf sein Talent angewiesenen Philologen." Burckhardt often uses *Persönlichkeit* interchangeably with *Individualismus*, e.g. 76: "Ausgang der 13. Jahrhunderts aber beginnt Italien von Persönlichkeiten zu wimmeln; der Bann, welcher auf dem Individualismus gelegen, ist hier völlig gebrochen."

else, is part of a portrayal of Federico as the dynamic centre of his culture. King Alfonso is portrayed in much the same way as well; as is the quasi-prince Lorenzo de' Medici, who "surrounded himself" with "a famous band of scholars" dedicated to Platonic philosophy, and whose "sacred refuge" given to Italian poetry is called the most powerful "of all the rays of light that shone forth from Lorenzo's person (*Persönlichkeit*)."[30]

Burckhardt's holistic impulse can distract readers from some of his more understated insights: he allows his interpretation of humanism to be resolved in his Renaissance individualism thesis. Moreover, important as it has been treated in the reception of Burckhardt, the development of individualism is nevertheless itself a symptom of (and response to) greater things at work in the period, particularly of the unique political situation of Italy in the late Middle Ages that Burckhardt details to open the book and brings up at regular intervals, in which the essential illegitimacy of government and the need for innovation it requires spurs a range of political and cultural developments onward — developments that lead to modernity. In this process, the revival of Antiquity could have a role to play, but no more than that. Although, as we have noted, Burckhardt paints a historical tableau, he generally gives it a hint of movement. Burckhardt is often at pains to demonstrate the medieval and Renaissance pathways by which an incipient modernity traveled: modern individualism (via despotism), modern rulership (Emperor Frederick II and Ezzelino da Romano in particular; illegitimate, self-justifying rule in general), and even modern journalism (Aretino).[31] Five of his six chapters close in open-ended ways, sometimes even with pregnant quotations. Not so Chapter Three on the revival of Antiquity. Instead, this chapter ends with the fall of the humanists; and while Burckhardt makes clear that he does not mean the immediate fall of humanism (it was "at a time when one did not entirely want to do without their teaching and knowledge"), he leaves the humanists themselves as "the most striking examples and victims of an unbridled subjectivity."[32] While they are exemplary of the period on account of the individualism they embody, the

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[30] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 122: "Die berühmte Reunion von Gelehrten, welche sich um Lorenzo sammelte;" 123: "eine geweihte Stätte italienischer Poesie war und daß von allen Lichtstrahlen, in die Lorenzos Persönlichkeit auseinanderging, gerade dieser der mächtigste heißen darf."

[31] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 77, 2, 95.

[32] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 152: "zu einer Zeit, da man ihre Lehre und ihr Wissen noch durchaus nicht völlig entbehren wollte;" 155; Middlemore's translation, 179.

humanists, "those who acted as mediators between revered Antiquity and the present," have no future beyond the era of transition, the Renaissance; and, as far as their continuing influence goes, the chapter ends with the academies they created eventually transforming themselves into opera societies.[33]

The coherence of Burckhardt's vision, its picture-like quality, indeed makes it hard to extract particular elements to weigh and examine in semi-isolation. But his famous introductory passage, reminding us of the unavoidably subjective nature of his essay (and indeed of all historical writing, a major bone of contention between Burckhardt and the "scientists" of his age — and of later ages like Baron), is a tacit invitation from the author to do just that.[34] Thus we need not accept that the humanist movement as mediated by Vespasiano and as highlighted by Burckhardt resolve itself in an individualism in which even the Swiss historian later claimed no longer to believe.[35] But nor need a movement which, as Burckhardt presents it, shapes and characterizes rather than creates be seen as a dead end.[36] We should seek out those elements in Burckhardt's presentation of humanism that stand apart from those traditionally highlighted; and we certainly must not undervalue his insights into a cultural code that came to colour or even distinguish life and activity amongst an Italian political, social and cultural elite.

Hans Baron, who approved of Burckhardt's vision of a Renaissance that brought modernity into the light, but not of the role that Burckhardt gave humanism within it, considered his treatment of the revival of Antiquity a missed opportunity. But far from a Burckhardt that hides from sociological factors, by training our sights we see him reaching out, and with his concern for the cultural fashions that distinguish society and the practices they foster, even to Bourdieu. These observations should help us answer the question

[33] Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 112: "welche das hochverehrte Altertum mit der Gegenwart vermittelten;" Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 159.

[34] For Baron's "scientism," see Gundersheimer, "Hans Baron's Renaissance Humanism," 143.

[35] See Kaegi, "Transformation of the Spirit," 264.

[36] Note the sequence Burckhardt employs, *Renaissance*, 113: "Die aktiven Träger derselben werden wichtige Personen, weil sie wissen, was die Alten gewußt haben, weil sie zu schreiben suchen wie die Alten schrieben, weil sie zu denken und bald auch zu empfinden beginnen, wie die Alten dachten und empfanden."

posed at the beginning, whether there was any use in going back to Burckhardt in order to get beyond Baron. Therefore, and as the civic humanism thesis is as much about politics as it is about culture, to conclude I shall give some space to indicating how such a Burckhardian outlook may lead to useful reassessment of humanism's political impact in one particular area tightly bound up in ideas of Renaissance, but traditionally kept at arms' length from humanist studies: the development of diplomacy and diplomatic practice.

In his review of Baron's *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, enthusiastic above all for the challenge that the work posed to the interpretations of humanist culture traditionally attributed to Burckhardt, the diplomatic historian Garrett Mattingly claimed that "anyone interested in the Western tradition, or in the relationship between political institutions and cultural change, will have to cope with this important book."[37] Mattingly's classic work, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, had appeared in the same year — 1955 — as Baron's, and he thanked Baron in the acknowledgments. And yet in his chapter called "The Renaissance Environment," Mattingly invoked the cultural output of Renaissance Italy — humanism and art, in short — as though the relationship between its development and spread and that of "diplomacy in the modern style" was purely coincidental.[38] Rather, in *conventionally* Burckhardtian style, Mattingly claimed that the rise of the latter was due to the unique political power vacuum in Italy that emerged from conflict between pope and emperor, in which insecure rulers dependent upon "unhabitual obedience" and ever "alert, uneasy, self-conscious," fought under "jungle law" to secure power: once only a few powers had organized all political space between them, and were "obliged by the resulting pressures to a continuous awareness of each other," Italy, in "relative isolation" from the rest of Europe, developed "the new style of diplomacy […] as one functional adaptation of the new type of self-conscious, uninhibited, power-seeking competitive organism." This "new style" is the institution of the regular diplomacy of resident ambassadors, the development and spread of which was the real subject of Mattingly's work. Mattingly made only one real concession in the direction of Baron: "the faith of the merchants and the politicos in the efficacy of diplomatic and forensic persuasion as an auxiliary to or substitute for military force was probably heightened by the reviving interest in classical literature"; while the "public rhetoric" of humanists was "a form of psychological warfare."

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[37] Review in *Political Science Quarterly*, 315.

[38] Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 55–63.

Mattingly was right to highlight the contemporaneous development and spread of humanism and diplomacy; but the new histories of the Renaissance can hardly leave their relationship appearing so coincidental. Essential to understanding the development of diplomacy is understanding the Italian and European networks of communication upon which it was built, and the archiving practices upon which it quickly came to rely. Historians would therefore do well to investigate, for instance, whether the humanist culture of communication and networking fostered by elites and those closely associated with them created the conditions for the development of regular diplomacy; and also whether the humanist practice of preserving and even publishing personal correspondence might have provided the impulse to the archival novelty of the mass preservation of material (regular diplomatic correspondence) that contained not records of decisions or documents of legal value, but narrative, news, and gossip. Already some work has been done in this general direction, namely by Paola Sverzellati, whose research on the epistolary collection of the Sforza diplomat Nicodemo Tranchedini and particularly on his letter exchange with the humanist Francesco Filelfo has resulted in observations not only on how cultural networks enabled the transmission of political information, but on the overlap of personnel facilitating "private" and diplomatic correspondence and on the growing difference between the archive and the *epistolario* in the face of the humanist's rise in authorial status.[39] Did, we might ask, the mass collection of the unaltered letter develop partly alongside and then further in response to the proliferation of edited correspondence? Meanwhile, by shifting focus away from the institutionally precocious and ultimately trend-setting example of the Sforza state to historiographically peripheral Genoa, where Jacopo Bracelli presided over a chancery and concomitant diplomatic culture with a premium on humanist style, the tendency to enforce separation from the beginning between what are eventually two forms of Renaissance epistolary practice may be undermined.[40] The study of the diplomatic letter-keeping practices of non-State actors without possible recourse to the official archive — for example, that found in the Latin *epistolario* of the Florentine Donato Acciaiuoli, whose correspondence regarding the partisan political projects of his Pazzi in-laws sits seamlessly alongside letters of purely "humanistic" import — must likewise

[39] E.g., in Sverzellati, 'Il carteggio di Nicodemo', esp. 441, 448–449, 462–463, 467.

[40] The Latinity of Bracelli's Genoese chancery was addressed by Rundle, 'Divided'; my own contribution to this research so far is 'Cipriano de' Mari's Lucianic Speech', 219–235.

be an essential component of a full understanding of what historians of diplomacy, following Francesco Senatore, now call a *mondo di carta*.[41] Here, in these approaches, both taken and foreseen, to the link between politics (broadly conceived) and humanism, it is the interpretation of humanism latent in Burckhardt — that is, that of a movement that colours elite society, becoming indispensable to it — that comes to the fore.

It might seem that going "back to Burckhardt" is something of a misnomer for the suggestion I have ended by articulating. After all, diplomatic history — indeed, *histoire événementielle* in general — was precisely what Burckhardt was *not* writing, and the related history of diplomacy got hardly a look either.[42] More seriously, beneath the anecdotes and excurses on particular schools, circles and literary modes, the interpretation of humanism that I have drawn here from *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* is minimalist in what might seem the extreme, too widely applicable to be useful. This proposal, however, is an example of how the apparent downgrading of humanism in Burckhardt's hands is in itself a challenge: a challenge, above all, to see the study of humanism not just as the study of texts and ideas, but as the study of practices — political, cultural, social and diplomatic. Once the challenge is taken up, new interpretations can take root, and new questions can be asked and answered. Over one hundred and fifty years after this challenge was first extended, and nearly sixty years since Baron offered an alternative, there may still be much to gain from accepting it.

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[41] Donato Acciaiuoli's *epistolario*: Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. VIII 1390; see Senatore, "*Uno mundo de carta*".

[42] Except in relation to the importance of public oratory during embassies, and a reflection in the section on foreign policy on the frankness found in diplomatic communication: "An Derbheiten und Naivitäten fehlte es im diplomatischen Verkehr auch nicht;" Burckhardt, *Renaissance*, 50, 130.

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