

The Renaissance View of History

- I. Introduction
 - A. Quattrocento Period: 15th century
 - B. Renaissance: Revival of Classical art and literature (14-1600s)
 - C. Humanism
 - 1. people were considered first Quattrocento, then Humanist Historians
 - 2. coined in 1808 by F.J. Niethammer
- II. Renaissance
 - A. idea of 3 periods of History thus far
 - 1. Classical, "Dark Ages," & Renaissance
 - 2. self-named: their period would be great like the Classics
 - B. Began critically editing Classical Manuscripts
 - 1. recently rediscovered Plato & Greek dramatists
 - C. Rejected the Medieval Christian views of hx
 - 1. study of ancient literature should produce free and educated citizens, not priests and monks
 - D. Secular views led to Humanism
 - 1. cultural break caused a change in how History was viewed
- III. Humanism
 - A. in the 15th century they were a group of teachers "umanista" whose subject matter was considered "studia humanitatis"
 - B. artes liberales= "liberal arts"
 - 1. necessary for humans to be "truly free"
 - 2. grammar, rhetoric, History, literary studies, & moral philosophy
 - C. Focused on recovery of Greek language & lost Latin texts
 - D. Emphasis on sources more than the Medieval Historians
- IV. Quattrocento Historiography
 - A. write History dramatically, eloquently, and accurately
 - B. History is a choice form of literary expression
 - 1. technical accuracy & factual completeness
 - C. lessons in politics, ethics, and law unlearnable elsewhere
 - D. "So blinded by the glory of Rome that everything else was just an afterimage."
 - 1. distorted facts to make them fit needs of the time
 - 2. forced Roman examples to fit modern questions
 - E. Leonardo Bruni
 - 1. methods & lessons of antiquity have relevance to his own day
 - 2. could be used to improve Florentine life
 - F. Flavio Biondo
 - 1. interested more in facts and content than form
 - 2. dedicated life to retrieval & study of ancient manuscripts

V. Niccolò Machiavelli

- A. Utilitarian approach to Historical writing
 - 1. used hx as a storehouse of examples to supplement his political views
- B. One side of Renaissance beliefs:
 - 1. human nature is unchanging
 - 2. History repeats itself
 - a) makes political predictions possible
 - 3. the “Golden Age” could return if fellow men forgot follies and imitated the thoughts & actions of Ancient Romans
- C. Used History to answer political questions
 - 1. wrote *The Prince* (what they actually did, not just said they did) & *History of Florence...*
- D. Some Historians don't consider him an actual humanist
 - 1. he didn't receive the education of the time: evident bc he didn't know Greek

VI. Francesco Guicciardini

- A. Other side of Renaissance beliefs
 - 1. infinite variety & changeability of History
 - a) therefore skeptical of Historical generalization
 - 2. History teaches lessons -> not as obvious as Machiavelli made them
 - 3. History is complex and cannot explain human behavior
- B. Respected Ancient Rome -> didn't treat examples with as much trust as Machiavelli
- C. Respect for reliable sources
- D. Highly regarded for:
 - 1. ability to recreate actuality of occurrences more accurately than predecessors.
 - 2. ability to recognize and evaluate people's motives
 - 3. Writing *Florentine History*
 - a) lacked empty rhetoric of many Humanist Historians
 - b) analytical Histories
 - 4. Writing *History of Italy*
 - a) written in his lifetime about the years he was alive
 - b) documented sources & personal experience

Citations

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