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The Functions of Humanism

The present volume is comprised of fourteen articles investigating various aspects of the function of humanism, spanning from the *Quattrocento* to late humanism in the seventeenth century. As Gerrit Walther explains in his preface, the research group and ensuing conference on which it is based, were consciously concerned with the historical impact of humanism rather than the elusive question of its essence. Given the lack of a clear humanist doctrine to be defined and translated into action, Walther suggests provocatively that, considered historically, humanism was the sum total of its functions. The first fact confronting modern scholarship is humanism's remarkable success, which is more difficult to explain than may at first seem the case. The so-called Middle Ages, denigrated by countless humanists, left an intellectual, communicational, and linguistic system that seems to have possessed all the components humanists claimed to have invented. One possible answer to this paradox, Walther contends, is that humanist success lay in the simplification of medieval systems. The balance sheet of the research group would suggest the following: that humanists created a new, commonly shared, lay international and interstate value and communication system, which increased the radius of elite dealings; that in this system, culture became an autonomous value; that the system created a European globalization; and that, put crassly, the great function of humanism was to bring humanists closer to positions of power and cultural dominance. This point of view raises a series of questions about the expedient aspects of humanism. Since it seemed worthwhile to so many patrons to invest in humanism, what could humanists do that others could not? What impact did they have on various professional practices? Were these functions new, or rather a more convincing performance of traditional

ones? Did these functions vary with time? The latter point implies the question of humanism's autonomy: Did these multifarious functions not cause it to stop being humanism? Was it still humanism once it had assumed various forms and functions across Europe? One need not agree with Walther's provocative assertion that humanism was the sum total of its functions to recognize the fecundity of this perspective, and the great potential of a collaborative study of humanism aiming at a scrutiny and contextualization of the various functions it played in early modern Europe. Nor, to state the obvious, need one adhere to functionalism to accept that the complex phenomenon termed humanism did indeed fulfill various functions, both intentional and unintentional. And even though questions as to the function, social role, and political and intellectual impact of humanism have been asked before, this perspective is well worth reexamining. A further potential benefit of such research, focusing on the functions played by humanism and humanists in early modern society, is to extend our view to include "minor figures" who may not figure largely, if at all, in traditional accounts of Renaissance humanism. In other words, such a view of Renaissance humanism may shed light on those of its practitioners who did not achieve "immortality" but are interesting for the historian because they offer at times a more typical example for the functioning of a given cultural system and commodity *in situ* and are in many cases more typical, if less inspiring, than their more familiar, loftier contemporaries. Last but not least, the varied fields of Renaissance scholarship represented in this volume promise at first glance a rich and innovative consideration of an array of humanist functions. The contributions to this volume command respect for their scholarship, but unfortunately, with some notable exceptions, most of them did not seize the

fine opportunity. Walther's challenging perspective on Renaissance humanism should have resulted in a more innovative, exciting volume.

The first article, by Johannes Helmrath, treats the function of rhetoric in European humanism. Seeing in Renaissance rhetoric essentially a Renaissance *of* rhetoric, which is itself intrinsically functional, Helmrath begins by analyzing different levels of oratorical function (*actio*, *applicatio*, and *servitus*—the services offered by humanists as an oratorically competent elite), and stresses the function of oratory as a means of legitimation and demonstration of status. The article continues by positing the convincing argument that Renaissance scholarship dealing with rhetoric has paid ample attention to Renaissance rhetorical theory but not enough to actual oratorical practices. Focusing on political rhetoric, the article offers, in outline, a research project on Renaissance parliamentary rhetoric.

Gerlinde Huber-Rebenich's "Neue Funktionen der Dichtung im Humanismus?" probes into newly acquired (or newly centralized) functions of Neo-Latin poetry in the Holy Roman Empire. Acknowledging the uses of Latin poetry in the Middle Ages and their function, Huber-Rebenich makes the argument that the Neo-Latin humanist poetry of the empire filled functions hitherto marginal: the self-demarcation and portrayal of humanists as a distinct cultural elite; the establishment and maintenance of an international network of contacts; and the expression of national pride and patriotism. Here, expectedly, the author dwells on Conrad Celtis and Ulrich von Hutten, but also on the later example of Nicodemus Frischlin (1547-90). To this is added a consideration of this poetry's function in influencing public opinion, and finally a consideration of the pedagogical function of Neo-Latin poetry. Despite the article's merits, given that most of the functions discussed here were fulfilled in vernacular poetry and prose, the question arises as to the compatibility of the humanist corpus to the question at hand—especially since many of the same authors wrote such vernacular texts. Secondly, a survey of lesser-known, lesser-celebrated champions of Neo-Latin poetry and patriotism than Celtis and Hutten might have yielded less predictable results, as well as offering instructive context to explain the cultural function of Celtis's and Hutten's poetically expressed ideas among their less original followers and readers, as opposed to a description of Celtis's and Hutten's fiery postulates.

Elisabeth Stein's interesting contribution on humanists as philologists looks at Francesco Petrarca and Poggio Bracciolini as manuscript hunters and collectors, based on their extensive correspondence, thus offering both an outline of the manuscript activities (especially Poggio's) as well as a sketch of the social context within which this activity was pursued. Following Poggio's epistles relating his famous discovery of Quintilian's entire *Institutio Oratoria* (ca. 95) and the fact that they were copied out many times by contemporaries, points in Stein's view to the central role manuscript hunting played in Poggio's career and public image—in spite of his long tenure as chancellor of the papal curia and, toward the end of his life, of Florence. Poggio and his fellow manuscript hunters were also acutely aware of the financial value of their discoveries. Ancient manuscripts and their professional copies were a lucrative form of commerce for both humanist dealers as well as their patrons. Stein also dwells on the way humanists saw philological expertise, used in the service of restoration of antique texts, as the mark of a select cadre of elitist experts.

Klaus Bergdolt's essay traces the rejection of the natural sciences by earlier humanists (especially Petrarca), and an early humanist conception of medieval proponents of *scientiae naturales* such as Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon as representatives of barbarism and vanity. For Coluccio Salutati and later Enea Silvio Piccolomini, medicine represented an odious form of hubris against divinely ordained nature and God's wielding of the plague as harsh form of chastisement. Medicine, in particular, which had remained robustly Aristotelian, came early under humanist attack. This stance changed gradually, and by 1500 we find an ever-growing appreciation of the natural sciences and medicine, coinciding ironically with a Petrarca-Renaissance among humanists, and ever-growing stylistic humanism among scientists. This is a more subtle and nuanced view of the role of the Renaissance in both impeding and fostering the development of natural science after the fourteenth century. By the time Andreas Vesalius and Nicholas Copernicus composed their works, natural science had long completed its integration into a humanistically validated body of respectable knowledge. While highly interesting, however, the causal explanation for this epochal shift in humanist understanding of the validity of natural science is not clear. Is this a shift in humanist sensitivities and interest, or an independent, "extra-humanistic" development? Did Petrarca, Salu-

tati, Leonardo Bruni, and Piccolomini deter several generations of learned Italians from studying natural phenomena? And were later humanists conducive to the dissemination of interest in natural sciences? While the recording and discussion of the opinions of prominent humanists on this matter is in itself instructive, it does not, in my opinion, tell us enough about the function of humanism in this respect.

The following three articles, by Dieter Mertens, Gábor Almási, and Harriet Rudolph, offer three different perspectives on the function of humanism within Renaissance courts, first and foremost that of the Habsburgs. Mertens's article on court patronage, while dealing mostly with the "usual suspects" Celtis and Hutten, offers an interesting consideration of their function within the network of courtly patronage, and considers the utility and price of this symbiosis from both the point of view of the humanists offering their commodity in exchange for courtly favor, and that of their Habsburg patrons. This is one of the articles in the present volume in which questions of function and utility are dealt with systematically, so that Mertens offers an interesting perspective on otherwise well-known humanist *personae*.

Gábor Almási, who discusses humanist self-representation and career patterns at court, outlines the tension encapsulated in the person and function of the humanist courtier: the favored diplomat and confidante on the one hand, and the scholar desirous of *otium cum dignitate* wherein he can dedicate himself to the muses. This is accomplished by outlining the humanist-courtly careers of Johannes Sambucus (János Zsámboky) (1531-84) and Andreas Dudith (1533-89), who was, until his marriage (and excommunication), also a high-ranking prelate. The article opens with a short discussion of Baldassare Castiglione and the ideal courtier, raising, but unfortunately not pursuing the important point of courtly *dissimulatio* in the age of confessionalism and Nicodemism. Dudith's stormy career, the author argues, is a fine example of the difficulty facing humanist courtiers in balancing their two *personae*, and of currying favor with courtly patrons while maintaining a certain distance.

A third facet of humanism and Habsburg patronage is dealt with in Harriet Rudolph's essay on humanist elements in later-sixteenth-century Habsburg pageantry. This article looks at two types of courtly pageants, imperial processions and tourna-

ments, celebrated by the Habsburgs during the second half of the sixteenth century. The question at the heart of this inquiry is what role humanism played in this Renaissance pageantry (*Festkultur*), and it is approached through three prisms: prominent forms of articulation, such as entry processions and the at times carnivalesque tournament pageantry; the performers; and the forms of publication. While acknowledging the significant medieval continuities in Habsburg pageantry, Rudolph identifies important new elements celebrating the Habsburg grandees in terms of Greco-Roman antiquity and mythology. Reports, some in the vernacular, together with the graphic symbolism of the triumphal arches and classical scenery, assume a broader German-reading public that would appreciate the symbolism.

Harald Müller considers the uses and disadvantages of cloistered humanist learning. While the propaedeutic utility of humanist learning was never seriously called into question, Müller notes, its intrinsic value was. Monastic libraries are usually conceived of as gateways for humanist knowledge into the cloister. Did they benefit the monks, or primarily visiting scholars? Müller's careful balance sheet suggests a very limited scope and resonance for humanist learning within monasteries, despite its usefulness in acquiring eloquence at the pulpit and occasional references to humanist learning as enhancing the dignity of the order. Its practitioners constantly needed to legitimize their endeavors and were more likely to find fellow humanists outside the confines of the monastery, thus leading them away mentally from the communal ethos of their way of life.

In their contribution, Manfred Rudersdorf and Thomas Töpfer examine the complex relations of the University of Wittenberg and the Ernestine court, and the nexus of Reformation and university reforms in Wittenberg—which means mostly a consideration of Philipp Melanchthon's reforms and Saxon humanism in the age of confessionalization. While the article raises some interesting points, its concentration on Melanchthon's university reforms and lengthy account of the course of events clouds the discussion of the function of humanism. Important questions about the possible significance of university reforms for elementary schooling are raised programmatically but not really discussed.

A highly interesting study of the functions of humanism within a Catholic Counter-Reformation context, and an instructive consideration of the uses

of humanism and their limits within a confessional context, are offered by Peter Wolf's comparative essay on Bohemia and Bavaria. The two examples are confessionally diverse, but both offer instructive cases of confessional territories where Catholicism was contested, and therefore stood in need of reflective self-assertion during both pre-Reformation (Hussite) times and the sixteenth-century Catholic Reform. Apart from the obvious significance of the Jesuits and their complex reception of humanist culture, the Bavarian example, as Wolf points out, demonstrates the important role of education, including its humanist elements, in the duchy's efforts to develop an improved cadre of Catholic priests. The Council of Trent and the relative paucity of distinct humanist decrees raise the question of whether humanism was a cultural code reserved for "sunny days" and less suitable for direct confrontation with heretics. It was nonetheless, Wolf contends, a central piece in the Catholic Church's long-term reform. Underlining the Tridentine efforts at reform was the humanistically informed *methodus*, and the methodological recognition of the humanist postulate *ad fontes* to better understand Scripture. Despite the affinities of the Jesuit educational program and humanism, there are, as Wolf points out, considerable divergences between Jesuit aims and humanist ideals, especially the Jesuit postulate of obedience and the explicitly practical objectives of their instruction, as opposed to the forging of a humanistic man in humanist ideal, if not always in practice. Wolf also stresses the Jesuit educational role in the confessionalization process and forging of social discipline and the modern state apparatus in the Catholic territories.

In an essay on Roman papal and cardinal tombs in the period of Catholic Reform, Arne Karsten traces the development of such funeral monuments in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from adornments of the recumbent figures of the deceased pontiffs, enshrined with figures representing virtues, to a seated and sometimes standing representation, crowned with reliefs depicting the papal *res gestae*. Later Counter-Reformation monuments tend toward a more simplified, depersonalized depiction of the popes and cardinals, as stereotypical responsible sovereigns rather than great individuals. The later monuments are also phrased in a visual terminology further detached from humanist allegories and learned allusions and meant to be accessible to a broader public. The discussion is itself interesting and accessible to readers who are not particularly well informed on the subject, but on the

whole sheds little light on the question of the utility and function of Renaissance humanism in the papal curia during the *Quattrocento* and Catholic Reformation.

With Raingard Esser's essay on urban humanists in seventeenth-century city histories, we move to the Low Countries, and chronologically to a period beyond the pale of traditional Renaissance scholarship, but which has rightly attracted the growing attention of scholars in more recent years as "late humanism" (*Späthumanismus*). Esser deals here with city descriptions composed in the Low Countries during the seventeenth century, and the role allotted in them to humanist learning in depicting (and glorifying) the given cities. With three Protestant instances (Isacius Pontanus, Philip von Zesen, Olfert Dapper) and two Catholics (Jean-Baptiste Gramaye, Remerus Valerius) this is an interesting consideration of the genre, and the consideration of works on both sides of the confessional divide suggests a more porous divide, at least as far as this kind of learning is concerned, as men of learning from the Protestant North and Catholic South saw themselves as members of the same republic of letters. This notwithstanding, neither the discussion nor the question of whether prominent humanists of the past were mentioned within the chorographies offers a significant insight into the function of late humanists' in the confessionally divided Low Countries.

Anton Schindling's essay probes humanist attitudes towards war and militarism. Owing to contradictory views on the merit of military exploits in the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian traditions (neither of which were monolithic, either), as well as medieval attitudes, as Schindling points out, humanists were confronted by a complex and ambivalent inheritance. Humanist reliance on ancient writings offered the prospect of a secularized view of warfare, (in)famously crystallized in Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1513). The greater part of the article is dedicated to Erasmus's Christian pacifism, Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), and the difficulty of legitimizing the Spanish wars of conquest in America, concluding with the afterlife of Erasmian pacifism in Mennonite congregations and aspects of late Spanish scholastic debate on legitimate war. To the best of my understanding, this article, despite its erudition, is not a reconsideration of its central topic from the standpoint of the function and utility of Renaissance humanism.

The last article in the volume, Caspar Hirschi's study of the functions of humanist nationalism, offers perhaps the most systematic and rewarding consideration of functions of humanism in the collection. Hirschi's starting point is Jacob Burckhardt's understanding of the function of (Italian) humanism, and he argues for a renewed scholarly debate on them, despite the rejection of many of Burckhardt's claims. Otherwise, he warns, modern humanism studies, despite their considerable achievements in the field of *Quellenforschung*, will be unable to satisfactorily explain the phenomenal success of humanism and its significance as a historical phenomenon. This assertion is followed by a consideration of functionalist approaches in the study of nationalism. Hirschi warns against the false assumption—for modern as well as earlier times—of a single cohesive function of nationalism; it functioned to weld certain parts of a given society together, but also to exclude other parts, as well as the extra-national foreigner. For its humanist apologists, nationalism functioned to allow them to cope with sociopolitical dynamics from which they were otherwise excluded. They could thus pose themselves as worthy defenders of the “nation's” honor against foreign competition—in a new view of history as a competition between nations rather than as a Christian commonwealth. The Habsburgs utilized this function of humanism to some extent as a demand for German national pride (and Habsburg supremacy) stemming from a broader circle and not from their own chancellery. This humanist plea for national greatness had an unintentional impact on

the territorial princes after the Reformation, in stressing the need to reach confessional compromise as a voucher for “German liberty.” Hirschi concludes his essay with a consideration of humanist nationalism in the age of confessional divide. The dominance of Lutherans in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century national discourse only served to enfeeble it and make it “Lutheran” rather than “German.” The nationalization of the German aristocracy, in contrast to France or Spain, was of the lower aristocracy, while the higher echelons were still embedded in a broader European network of values and alliances, with their courts influenced first by Italian and then by French models. Hirschi concludes that “without the enduring nationalization of the secondary elite in the old Empire, one cannot understand the Protestant German ‘cultural nationalism’ of the nineteenth century” (p. 395).

Thomas Maissen concludes the volume with an antipodal afterword, in which he contests the function-centric view propounded by Walther in the preface. In sum, he argues that function does not define humanism—it cannot be defined as the sum total of its functions. The present volume, as the summaries make patently clear, is a rich and varied collection of scholarship on various aspects of Renaissance humanism. And yet, *pace* Maissen, and despite some fine exceptions mentioned above, its shortcoming is manifested not in succumbing to the pitfalls of functionalism, but in not taking humanism's functions seriously enough.

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