

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Bauer, Stefan, and Simon Ditchfield, eds. *A Renaissance Reclaimed: Jacob Burckhardt's Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy Reconsidered*

Goran Stanivukovic

Volume 46, numéro 2, printemps 2023

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1109455ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v46i2.42307>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Stanivukovic, G. (2023). Compte rendu de [Bauer, Stefan, and Simon Ditchfield, eds. *A Renaissance Reclaimed: Jacob Burckhardt's Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy Reconsidered*]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 46(2), 199–201. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v46i2.42307>

© Goran Stanivukovic, 2024



Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Bauer, Stefan, and Simon Ditchfield, eds.

A Renaissance Reclaimed: Jacob Burckhardt's Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy Reconsidered.

Proceedings of the British Academy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 312. ISBN 9780197267325 (hardcover) £70.

“With what spirit should we approach today a work first published in 1860 [...] by a Swiss scholar educated in Berlin and under the influence of European Romanticism?” (177), asks Joan-Pau Rubiès in his probing essay in this excellent and much-needed collection about the contexts that shaped Jacob Burckhardt’s *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. The opportunity to take up Rubiès’s question directly is real, and this long overdue collection attests to that which its title states: it reassesses the Swiss scholar and writer to reclaim his big ideas about the nascent modern individualism and the nascent modern state as the two main pillars of the Renaissance civilization in Italy. All together, these well-researched essays explore new ways of understanding the diverse background of ideas and the cultural milieu that created them as a way of re-establishing the place of this famous book in the present moment.

The book ranges between obvious topics and some new perspectives. There is an attempt to engage with the Renaissance from the neo-cosmopolitan perspective (Rubiès) and in relation to the historiography, especially writing about the New World (Giuseppe Marcocci) at the time of Burckhardt’s writing. These two essays are welcomed interventions into his ideas, but they bring their own challenges for future scholarship. To remove oneself from the idea that the civilization of the Renaissance privileges the Eurocentric vision of the past means not ignoring other parts of the world—for example, South East Asia and South America—which started to emerge at the same time as part of the colonial project of the European Renaissance civilization. One of Burckhardt’s contemporaries claimed that the modernity of his European vision of the Renaissance was in fact “supranational” (47), reaching “global ‘horizons’” (47), but such a claim requires serious scrutiny from the perspective of an increasingly more global understanding and use of those notions, and it requires a new reassessment in a new endeavour for reclamation. In Mikkel Mangold’s brilliant essay about re-editing Burckhardt, we learn about an opportunity

Burckhardt himself seemed to have let pass, which was to include women as artwork in his book about men and their artwork, as he seems to have intended.

An assessment of Burckhardt as a cultural historian is provided in a comprehensive essay by Martin A. Ruehl. Robert Black explores in detail the notion of the state as a work of art, explaining the philosophical, political, and ethical basis of this complex notion. Virginia Cox examines literature (it included epistolary writing as well as philosophy and history) as the foundation of his writing about the individual. Wietse de Boer, who also writes about the Burckhardtian idea of the individual, expands upon the “paradox” (121) that the Renaissance individual is “the most influential and the most criticised idea” (121) of the *The Civilization*, a book otherwise focused on modernity. How the revival and reception of Roman antiquity in Italy shaped the intellectual foundation of this book is examined by Barbara von Reibnitz. The notion that the Renaissance idea of the self, influenced by antiquity and by real life, is anything but coherent and universal remains unquestioned. The social life of festivals as the fabric of life integrated in Burckhardt’s work is the subject of an excellent essay by Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly. The role of antiquity is reviewed and reinterpreted in relation to the significations of the concepts of “revival,” “rebirth,” and “spiritual movement” (149) in the essay by Barbara von Reibnitz in which she explains the centrality of these meanings of Burckhardt’s relativizing claim about the role of Roman antiquity over the period of the imperial Roman era and “late Antiquity” (152) in the conception of the Renaissance. In another essay on antiquity, William Stenhouse surveys different attitudes to humanism as they shaped Burckhardt’s use of it from different written sources.

The last two essays in this valuable collection examine the moral and religious concerns that Burckhardt considered in his book. Nicholas Terpstra writes about how Burckhardt negotiated religion and religious institutions. He also reminds us that the readership that “counted most” (243) to Burckhardt was “the broader audience” (243), something the university audience should remember when it voices its reservation about his views. Terpstra provides a crisp and clear summary of how generations of scholars writing about religion contrast and correlate with the Swiss scholar’s ideas in that regard. Historiography is the subject to which many essays return, and so does the last one, in which Stefan Bauer examines the relationship of religion with respect to the writing about the Reformation and the Renaissance. The essay offers a cogent overview of the intellectual context of the main ideas developed in Burckhardt’s other books. In

his afterword, Peter Burke summarizes the main impact of Burckhardt's work, reflecting on his use of the terms "essay" and *Individualismus* (278) from the elaborate "repertoire" (278) of terminology in his book.

This major collection of essays sheds a new and critical light on the intellectual background of one of the most familiar books about the Renaissance. The essays implicitly remind us that the Renaissance in this great book is an intellectual and cultural construction of the nineteenth century and of the afterlife of German philosophical idealism. This volume reveals so much about Burckhardt's method and interest to justify why modern scholars have had their reservations about his work. The essays encourage us to consider that the emerging new research of cross-national and cross-linguistic areas of the past, and of different forms of identity, bring to the fore a more expansive notion of the civilization of the Renaissance both in the European sphere and in the global world of the past.

GORAN STANIVUKOVIC

Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v46i2.42307>