

Renaissance: Rediscovery of Antiquity or Turning Point in the Reception of Antiquity

The Renaissance defined itself as a rebirth of Antiquity and has until today been frequently described by scholars in this way.

Looking more closely at the actual transformation processes in the Renaissance, one can see that not Antiquity as such is discovered but a kind of Antiquity different to the one known to the Middle Ages. Many Humanists, among which Petrarca may be named as a prime example, have criticised the excrescences of 14th century Late Scholasticism. To justify their own new position, they referred back to the classical authors of Rome, putting aside the time in between. Primarily because of this the impression arose that the entire time which had elapsed between Antiquity and the Renaissance had been nothing but a process of decay of the arts and sciences.

A closer analysis of the transformation processes that took place in the 14th century, as attempted in this paper, will show that the Renaissance should above all be understood as the result of a change of reception strategies, namely a re-evaluation of Hellenistic and Roman philosophy, a shift that was connected with abandoning the Aristotelian tradition molded by Neo-Platonism.