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What to the one, for instance, is “renaissance,” is to the other only a “revival” (p. 171). But as the writers themselves point out, “renaissance” is an elusive concept, and the fine line between survival and revival of a culture is difficult to determine. In a study where each contributor is dissecting a unique set of circumstances from the perspective of his own particular discipline there are bound to be differences. Rather than detract from the quality of the work, these merely serve to emphasize the complexity of the phenomenon that we call renaissance.

Two areas in which this study falls short of its intended goals, however, are that it is both inconsistent and incomplete in its coverage. One is surprised, for example, to learn from a casual comment that there were also Vandalic, Ostrogothic and Isidorian “renaissances” (p. 60), of which the Introduction gives no notice. The flourishing of the Northumbrian monasteries in the seventh and eighth centuries is treated as an early stage of the Anglo-Saxon Revival, even though it is acknowledged that the two movements were separated by an interval in which “attempts at cultural renewal were scattered and . . . soon dissipated” (p. 103). Moreover, since these revivals are treated as one, then why not do the same with the Carolingian and Ottonian? Instead, the Ottonian renaissance is dismissed on the grounds that it was too narrowly based, “unless perhaps we include in it the contemporary cultural activities of the monasteries” (p. 16). Since other renaissances which depended on monastic cultural activities are given thorough treatment, surely the Ottonian deserves similar consideration, even if it should, like the Palaeologan, turn out to be only a revival. Also, a broadly based study such as this can hardly be considered complete without the inclusion of classical culture’s revival under Islam, especially since this is acknowledged by one of the contributors (p. 137). It is hoped that a future edition would fill these lacunae.

For the renaissances it covers, however, this pioneering work is both informative and penetratingly analytical, and should prove a stimulating guide to further inquiry into these and other rebirths of culture.

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In eight chapters, Baron traces the history of the Secretum’s composition (its genesis, growth, and chronology) with the stated aim of defining the six-year period in the middle of Petrarch’s humanistic career when “his thinking differed from both the humanism of his youth and from the mature thought of his last two decades” (vii). The focus, as in Baron’s earlier studies on Petrarch,
is on chronology and historical certainty and the goal is to correct the "imperfections" of other scholars, in this case primarily Francisco Rico's conclusion that the Secretum was entirely rewritten in 1353.

Remigio Sabbadini, whose 1917 study on the gradual composition of the Secretum was disparaged by Baron in a 1963 article as having disappointing results (see From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni, 1968, pp. 53-54), now turns out to have pointed in the right direction after all. And Baron's earlier affirmations, based firmly on traditional dating—("There can be no doubt about when the original draft was composed. . . [We] may surely be more definite in our dating than the vague '1342-43' usually given for the Secretum and regard it as almost certain that the dialogue was composed between October, 1342 and March of the following year." [p. 52])—must now be doubted in light of Rico's redating of the Secretum's first draft to 1347.

Baron, who accepts Rico's redating but disagrees with his assertion that the final version of 1353 is a complete recasting, aims to reconstruct the text as it appeared in the 1340s and quite often his analyses of the Secretum's textual layers do lead to felicitous conclusions. But, just as often, the negative features, the intricacies of argument (see, for example, pp. 24-28), the use of positive terms when proof is tenuous, the sometimes logically baffling conclusions, and the tedious efforts to gain so little (as when the dating of sections of the Secretum could apply equally well to either 1347 or 1349), illustrate perhaps why Rico foregoes an attempt to deconstruct the Secretum into its stages of composition. In the end, the quarrel with Rico comes down to whether or not one wishes to call the final version of the Secretum a "rearrangement" (Baron's more convincing argument) or a "recasting."

Readers will judge for themselves the accuracy both of Baron's hypotheses regarding the dates of the Secretum's various sections (often convincing) and of his conclusion that "In all three books substantial additions and corrections were made in 1349 and 1353, but the discovery of these insertions does not change the fact that the bulk of the work consists of a largely untouched older draft" (p. 151), and will evaluate as well his criticism of those who deny to Petrarch a "schema evolutivo" or who see the Franciscus of the Secretum as a literary fiction rather than an autobiographical figure. Let me merely note in conclusion that this is a rich work, detailed in its analyses, that will appeal, however, primarily to a narrow audience—those interested in the Secretum's evolution from 1347 to 1353—rather than to the general student of Italian or Trecento studies.

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