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Christopher Carlsmith. *A Renaissance Education: Schooling in Bergamo and the Venetian Republic, 1500-1650.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. xvii + 435 pp. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8020-9254-0.

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Christopher Carlsmithâs *A Renaissance Education* is an extensively researched, well-penned, and invaluable addition to the history of education. In it, Carlsmith examines the early modern Venetian-Italian educational network of Bergamo as a means of underscoring common, scholarly trends throughout much of the region, such as ever-expanding venues for schools, including residential academies, seminaries, and municipal and catechism schools, to name but a few. Utilizing pedagogical treatises, charters, depositions, and building and funding reports, as well as last testaments and assorted legal documents, Carlsmithâs overarching impetus lies in illustrating the increasing and variegated intellectual opportunities available to residents of the Venetian Republic during the late fifteenth through the seventeenth century. As a result, *A Renaissance Education* belies local traditional views that Bergamoâs inhabitants were largely ignorant until the modern era.

More broadly, *A Renaissance Education* contributes to the growing number of micro-histories of education in early modern Italy that call into question the long-accepted notion that humanist ideals alone influenced pedagogy during the period. It also undermines leading revisionist positions that humanism altered little the methodology of medieval scholars or that it was only implemented by princes to mollify the populace.[1] Rather, Carlsmith shows how much of the curriculum and ideals of humanism, coupled with the Roman Catholic Churchâs reform program implemented by the Council of Trent (1545-63), helped to peek interest and spur funding in education during the early modern period. The very existence of divergent types of schooling and cooperation among disparate organizations, Carlsmith contends, ârequires us to reconsider outdated stereotypes about who taught what to whom and whyâ (p. 291).

Divided thematically with chapters apportioned according to the financial support and management of schools, Carlsmith commences his study with a detailed summary of civic mentalities and actions regarding education in Bergamo. He shows how, prior to the arrival of humanist pedagogy in the late fifteenth century, in which educators relied heavily on the teaching theories of the ancients regarding the necessity of public lectures, recitation, and debate to help mold an industrious, thoughtful, and civic-minded society, the city of Bergamo only indirectly supported public education through such measures as low rent and tax exemptions for teachers. During the early 1480s to the 1520s, though, communal support for education was high. Council members sought to establish public lectures as well as found an academy for

local boys from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, due to humanist philosophies regarding the moral benefits of a well-educated populace. In addition, the city courted well-known masters from outside of Bergamo, enticing them with salaries and benefices coupled with tax exemption. Toward the mid-sixteenth century, however, communal support declined due to a series of economic hardships, and the academy closed.

Despite the starts and stops that would pepper every attempt by the scholastic network in Bergamo, education remained a priority among many segments of society. Confraternities–groups of laymen and women working under a shared religious and often sociopolitical program–specifically that of the confraternity Misericordia Maggiore, supplemented the training of Bergamoâs youth in joint, communal, and independent ventures. For instance, confraternities often employed humanist philosophy redolent in treatises for the commune academy and regularly hired teachers previously employed by the academy. Although administered by the laity, these efforts increasingly focused on morality and the training of clerics for local churches. The former goal was all but universal in Catholic Italy during and after the Council of Trent, and the churchâs catechism regimen supplanted the humanist approach of teaching the classics as a path to proper comportment and civility.

The emphasis on training for a career specifically in the church was something novel in Bergamo, according to Carlsmith, and heralded the beginning of true class distinction in schools there–the clericalization and aristocratization of education. Whereas all locals were previously taught together, the confraternity system became much more elitist. The pious lay brothers awarded scholarships based on the training and suitability of candidates for the priesthood while seeking to isolate these select few from society in boarding schools. For a number of socioeconomic reasons, the confraternitiesâ role as financiers waxed and waned. Yet, when these charitable orders faltered, the church promoted basic education for the laity as well as specialized seminaries for theologians-in-training. Not only did these three types of educational institutions–communal, confraternal, and ecclesiastical–serve as the most prominent in Bergamo and the large Venetian society of the period, but the latter two also comprise the lionâs share of the remainder of the monograph.

The second chapter reiterates and expands on confraternitiesâ heightened role in Bergamoâs educational network, in the wake of diminished civic funding. Here Carlsmith narrates the Misericordia Maggioreâs expansion and subsequent decline from a day school to a college at the University of Padua, as well as an independent seminary. The third and fourth chapters, while similarly elaborating on the summary found in the first chapter, provide much new information regarding church pedagogy in Bergamo. Carlsmith shows how the church, fearing the spread of heresy due to the Protestant Reformation, redoubled efforts to educate the laity in the basic tenets of the faith in informal day schools, known as Schools of Christian Doctrine, that were administered by the laity and clerics and met weekly. In content, religious instruction was the primary goal of these schools, and they became an addition to preexisting religious and secular learning institutions in the Venetian Republic. Yet increased literacy and numeracy among the laity in toto was an attending result of the schools. And, recognizing the civil as well as spiritual benefits of a more learned society in curbing poverty and moral depravity, the Somaschan and Jesuit religious orders flocked to Bergamo. Despite the benefits engendered by the presence of these groups, local politics determined the orderâs acceptance or dismissal. In Bergamo, the Somaschans, with their ties to Venice rather than Milan, Spain, and the pontificate, like the Jesuits, were welcomed and established a number of orphanages and homes for reformed prostitutes. As a result, they enhanced the educational network in Bergamo by initially providing elementary education while delivering vocational training. Within a century of their presence, though, the Somaschans too began catering to a more elitist clientele. Their previous renown as founders of charitable institutions was transferred to infamy as the Somaschans undertook the management of fledgling academies of the middle and upper classes, with little success.

The last two chapters of the monograph contribute a substantial amount of new information not summarized in the earlier chapters. Chapter 5 discusses private boarding academies. Here Carlsmith considers the short-lived Caspi Academy (1547-57) and its equally brief, anonymous successor (ca. 1559-69). As in each of the other schools mentioned, with the exception of the Schools of Christian Doctrine, a humanist curriculum was coupled with Tridentine catechism. Unlike the other schools, the Caspi Academy was never intended to aid the poor or a cross-section of society; it was the primary school for the elite of Bergamo, conceived of and fully funded by the parents of its charges. A survey of expenditures for the academy indicates that it did not suffer from economic hardships, and there is little indication as to why either

school closed so abruptly. More than merely providing anecdotal evidence, the significance of this chapter is in its illumination of yet another establishment in the educational network of Bergamo, further indicating the importance of learning to the populace.

The concluding chapter analyzes Bergamo in relation to its contemporary Venetian cities. In it, Carlsmith illustrates that each cityâs educational network was sustained by certain localisms; yet, more pertinently, he focuses on the similarities. The linear, though often-overlapping, trajectory of education that moved from early humanist philosophies to humanist pedagogy and civic involvement to confraternity and later church financing was common during the period between 1500 and the 1650s. Frequent too was the quick succession of founding and closing schools, indicating the perceived importance of education but little long-term planning to sustain it. Perhaps most significantly, this final chapter emphasizes the movement toward clericalization and aristocratization in each of the cities. Influenced by humanist ideals by the close of the fifteenth century and espousing public education, Carlsmith charts the educational tendencies in Catholic Italy in the Counter-Reformation to eventually gravitate toward elites who would presumably serve the church..

The virtues of *A Renaissance Education* are manifold. My minor critiques are in response to the somewhat redundancy of the first two chapters, especially, and the superfluous inclusion of the Jesuit order in a history it little affected. Despite these caveats, Carlsmithâs erudition and lucid prose are to be praised, and his contribution to readersâ understanding of the role of confraternities in the history of education is especially noteworthy, as is his explanation of Counter-Reformation educational programs in general. Refreshing too is Carlsmithâs willingness to serve as an intermediary in the present, historiographical debate regarding the influence of humanism on the early modern Italian cityscape. Such careful, nonpartisan scholarly work deserves a broad readership.

Note

[1]. For a discussion of the significance of humanism in early modern Italy, see Paul Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). For a counterargument, see Robert Black, *Education and Society in Florentine Tuscany: Teachers, Pupils, and Schools, c. 1250-1450* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

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