PART THREE

A WIDER RENAISSANCE?
INTRODUCTION: A WIDER RENAISSANCE?

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The ‘Italocentric’ Renaissance: Burckhardt, Huizinga and Panofsky

Since the publication of Jacob Buckhardt’s *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* in 1860, historians have been exercised by the question of how best to approach the problem of the Renaissance in Italy, and—by implication—the question of how to conceive of the relationship between Italian culture and that of the rest of Europe.1 For almost 150 years, the troublesome problem of distinguishing between the ‘Middle Ages’ and the ‘Renaissance’ has been connected not merely with issues of cultural rebirth in the arts, but also with notions of cultural centres and peripheries.

For Burckhardt, there was no doubt that the Renaissance was a fundamentally Italian phenomenon. The ‘first born among the sons of modern Europe,’ Italy was—in Burckhardt’s view—the cradle of the Renaissance, the home of a unique revival of Antiquity which stood in start contrast to the persistently ‘medieval’ outlook which prevailed beyond the Alps.2 Having begun in Italy, the Renaissance later spread gradually across Europe.

Burckhardt justified his assertion of the distinctively ‘Italian’ quality of the Renaissance not merely by pointing to a widespread enthusiasm for classical art and literature, but by stressing that this enthusiasm was itself inextricably bound up with what he believed to be the characteristics fostered by the states of the peninsular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.3 It was, indeed, ‘one of the chief propositions’

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3 For recent perspectives on Burckhardt’s changing relationship with Romanticism and anti-Romanticism, and its influence on his attitude towards the Renaissance, see, for example, Lionel Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas* (Chicago, 2000), 210–410, esp. 392–3; John R. Hinde, *Jacob Burckhardt and the Crisis of Modernity* (Montreal, 2000). For the role of Romanticism in shaping