



ch's devotion to the
him to commission this
ne of Virgil's poetry. It was
artini, who (like Petrarch)
non. It is an allegorical
etic creations: the hero
e farmer and shepherd
Virgil's lesser-known works.
century scholar Servius,
gil. He is shown drawing
ative trance. The two
ne country that nourished
rival the glories of
encapsulate and express

w, Petrarch (the name
m) redefined that con-
as not the pagan past
m direct communion
p him from trying to
a to you long ago," he
Homer (dead for over
e fact that we lack a
est, 1350–1453

the classics. The values that he and his followers began to espouse would give rise to a new intellectual and artistic movement in Italy, a movement strongly critical of the present and admiring of a past that had disappeared with the western Roman Empire and the end of Italy's greatness. We know this movement as "the Renaissance," from the French word for "rebirth" that was applied to it in the eighteenth century and popularized in the nineteenth, when the term "medieval" was also invented. It has since become shorthand for the epoch following the Middle Ages—but it was really part of the same era.

Renaissance Classicism

Talking about "the Renaissance," then, is a way of talking about some significant changes in education and artistic outlook that transformed the culture of northern Italy from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries and that eventually influenced the rest of Europe in important ways. The term has often been taken literally, as though the cultural accomplishments of antiquity had ceased to be appreciated and needed to be "reborn." Yet we have been tracing the enduring influence of classical civilization for many chapters, and we have constantly noted the reverence accorded to the heritage of antiquity, not to mention the persistence of Roman law and Roman institutions.

That said, one can certainly find traits that make the concept of "renaissance" newly meaningful in this era. For example, there was a significant quantitative difference between the ancient texts available to scholars in the first thousand years after Rome's fragmentation and those that became accessible in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The discovery of "new" works by Livy, Tacitus, and Lucretius expanded the canon considerably, supplementing the well-studied works of Virgil, Ovid, and Cicero.

More important was the expanded access to ancient Greek literature in western Europe. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as we have seen in Chapters 8 and 9, Greek scientific and philosophical works became available to western Europeans thanks to increased contact with Islam, via Latin translations of Arabic translations of the original Greek. Yet no Greek poems or plays were yet available in Latin translations, and neither were the major dialogues of Plato. Moreover, only a handful of western Europeans could read the language of classical Greece. But as the Mongols and, after them, the Ottoman Turks put increasing pressure on the shrinking borders of Byzantium

Realizing Devotion



these two pairs
the Flemish
Rogier van der
(FAN-der-V
c. 1400–1464)

some of the most compelling cha-
tics of late medieval art, particu-
trend toward realistic representa-
holy figures and sacred stories.
left (image A), the artist depicts
as the evangelist Luke, regarded in
sketches the Virgin nursing the in-
sus in a town house overlooking a
city. On the right (image B), van de-
den imagines the entombment
dead Christ by his followers, includ-
Virgin (left), Mary Magdalene (kn-
and the disciple John (right). H



A. Saint Luke