



HAL
open science

**Recreation in the Renaissance: Attitudes. Towards
Leisure and Pastimes in European Culture, c.1425-1675,
by Alessandro ARCANGELI (Basingstoke:Palgrave
MacMillan, 2003)**

Ginette Vagenheim

► **To cite this version:**

Ginette Vagenheim. Recreation in the Renaissance: Attitudes. Towards Leisure and Pastimes in European Culture, c.1425-1675, by Alessandro ARCANGELI (Basingstoke:Palgrave MacMillan, 2003). The English Historical Review, 2008, vol. 123, no 500, p. 186. hal-01841206

HAL Id: hal-01841206

<https://hal.science/hal-01841206>

Submitted on 18 Sep 2018

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

924
500th issue

THE ENGLISH HISTORICAL REVIEW



VOLUME CXXIII NO. 500 FEBRUARY 2008

Edited by

G. W. Bernard & Martin Conway

Assistant Editor

Anne Borg



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

ISSN 0013-8266

so decisively challenged by Kristeller. In defining humanism as a discipline (the so-called *studia humanitatis*) rather than as a philosophy, Kristeller showed that, for him, empirical evidence was paramount: his early studies of Ficino's scholastic background, the first steps in his catalogue of humanist manuscripts and his philological analysis of contemporary terminology led to the conviction that the humanists were 'no philosophers at all' but rather teachers or students of the humanities (defined in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a group of five subjects: grammar, rhetoric, poetry, morals and history).

How did Kristeller do it, completing not only *Iter italicum* but thousands of pages of ground-breaking studies and editions of unpublished and unknown texts? Kristeller was endowed with a remarkably positive personality. One result was that many of today's most distinguished Renaissance scholars (several of whom contributed to this book) were his pupils or acolytes. Kristeller's positive outlook embraced his own self-image. When I last met him at his New York flat in 1995, aged 90, the conversation turned to several of his pupils or assistants, who, I observed, had a special talent for manuscript research. He immediately replied, 'Some people think I have a talent for manuscripts too'. To the end, Kristeller retained the enthusiastic faith of an explorer: there was a limitless world of learning, mainly in the form of unstudied and unpublished manuscripts and texts, waiting to be discovered.

ROBERT BLACK
University of Leeds

doi:10.1093/ehr/cem426

Recreation in the Renaissance: Attitudes Towards Leisure and Pastimes in European Culture, c.1425-1675, by Alessandro Arcangeli (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; pp. 188. N.p.).

The overall thesis of Arcangeli's book is that during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a distinctive leisure culture emerged in Europe which had obvious connections with earlier and later developments, but was nonetheless distinguishable from both. In his introduction the author offers a survey of the study of the idea of play as a significant factor in human affairs. He starts from the landmark anthropological enquiry into the topic of play, Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1933), which discerned a 'play element' in fields as diverse as law, war, poetry, and art. He then discusses a number of theorists who have developed Huizinga's work: Robert Callois' enlargement of Huizinga's notion of play (through the categories of competition, chance, mimesis and vertigo), which offered an ambitious sociological approach to human behaviour; Jacques Hermann's philosophical critique of the relation between play and culture as stated by both Huizinga and Callois as well as by the linguist Émile Benvéniste; and finally the sociological theories of Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (*Quest for Excitement*), which introduced the important distinction between leisure activities and the broader notion of spare time. Reviewing the scholarship that has appeared subsequent to the important 1980 conference at Tours on the subject (*Les Jeux à la Renaissance*), Arcangeli concludes with the work of Peter Burke (*The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe*, 1995). Burke argued against the orthodox historiographical position that the historical emergence of leisure was linked to the fundamental economic changes brought about by industrial capitalism and showed that between the twelfth and

seventeenth centuries at least the upper strata of the population placed increasingly higher value on the full spectrum of leisure activities.

This review of the scholarship complete, most of the rest of the book is devoted to the further development of Burke's thesis as it applies to various aspects of human activity. Arcangeli notes that, even though the chronology of each phenomenon involved in this elaboration is difficult to establish, there is nonetheless a significant synchronicity in different fields that cannot and should not be ignored. Thus, for example, he instances the attention paid to the world of leisure by physicians, who were confronted by the crisis of the humoral theory against the *auctoritas* of antiquity; by moralists; by jurists; and by humanists who, by the mid-sixteenth century, advanced an ideal of education that included a significant role for play. Arcangeli devotes many pages to a discussion of the development of specific 'play' vocabularies in these areas of life and to the increase of visual representations of these activities. In his conclusion, without pretending to cover the field of social history in the final pages of a book dedicated to the cultural side of the subject, Arcangeli remarks that we cannot avoid considering social constraints such as religious obligations and other kinds of pressures implicit in the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Retaining Huizinga's generalising definition of a period in which the European nobility defined their individual and collective identity through a series of leisure activities, Arcangeli, with an impressive mastery of both classical tradition and current historical research, argues convincingly that the Renaissance was indeed the scene of the 'invention of leisure'.

GINETTE VAGENHEIM
Université de Rouen

doi:10.1093/ehr/cem391

Philippe de Commines, by Joël Blanchard (Paris: Fayard, 2006; pp. 584. Eur 28).

Among modern scholars, no one has done more over the last two decades than Joël Blanchard to renew our understanding of the man whom Sainte-Beuve called 'the first truly modern writer', for Commines' *Memoirs* enjoy the distinction of scarcely ever having been out of print either in their original French or in translation in all the principal European languages since their first appearance in 1524 down to the present. Blanchard himself has contributed to this remarkable publishing phenomenon by an edition (2001) and a translation into modern French (2004). The fashion Commines set for statesmen or politicians seeking to justify their role in the events in which they took part, or simply to describe what they observed, continues at depressingly full throttle in our own day. But perhaps Blanchard's most significant contribution has been to re-examine the documentary history for Commines' career, especially as a diplomat implementing French policy towards various Italian states, while also casting light on the tangled story of his personal finances and business dealings. These latter were often inextricably mixed up with his public role. Some of this newly-discovered correspondence of Commines with Milanese, Florentine and Mantuan contacts was meticulously edited in 1993, while a full critical edition of the 81 surviving autograph letters now known appeared in 2001. Important interpretative articles and a major synthesis, *Commines l'Européen: L'invention du politique* (1996; rev. ante, cxv [2000], 954), which inevitably anticipate many themes in the current biography, have supported this editorial labour.