

Cecilia Hewlett, Peter Howard

## Teaching the Renaissance in Melbourne and Prato – Monash University

### Introduction

Monash University has an established international reputation for Renaissance Studies. This reputation was forged by renowned teacher and scholar, Bill Kent, who inspired generations of Australian researchers. Today the University is home to a thriving Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (CMRS) that draws on the expertise of academic and research staff from the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies and from across the university. The Centre's membership is made up of 6 academic staff based in the Department of History, a further 10 associate members from other areas of the university and 24 honours and postgraduate student associates. The group promotes research and provides specialist training and support for honours and postgraduate students. The heart of the CMRS is a weekly seminar that alternates between formal research presentations and discussion of prescribed readings. It also plays host to local and international visitors. Associated language training, reading and translation groups provide an opportunity for students to develop their technical skills.

While Renaissance Studies at Monash traditionally centres on the Italian Renaissance, it now embraces the Mediterranean basin more broadly, as well as northern Europe and Britain, and encompasses a broad chronological span from roughly 1250 to 1750. The long temporal focus enables renaissance studies at Monash to bridge the periodization boundaries that often exist between medieval and early modern studies.

Monash offers a range of units in Medieval and Renaissance history beginning with first year general units on Medieval and Renaissance History, which attract an average of 230 students annually. Second and third year numbers are also healthy with over 400 students spread across 6 offerings, including '*Angels and Demons: Rome, Papacy, the World*', '*Renaissance Italy*' and '*Witches and Depravity in the Medieval and Early Modern World*'. There are also a number of specialist fourth year subjects offered as pathways to higher degree research that address subjects such as the reading of Renaissance letters and an examination of the devotional practices in Medieval and Renaissance Europe.

The context for research at masters and doctoral level, while always strong at Monash, is set to benefit from a number of initiatives. Apart from the joint supervision opportunities proffered by the Prato Consortium for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (see below), from 2012 there will be a more systematic coursework programme within the CMRS for the development of requisite skills occasioned by the advent of a new structure for higher degree research, the Monash University Institute for Graduate Research.

### A contemporary approach to Renaissance Studies

The pedagogy underpinning Renaissance Studies at Monash University has been notable for its innovation – in 2012 the CMRS Director, Peter Howard, was presented with the Vice-Chancellor's Teaching Excellence Award and univer-

sity medal. All courses, from first year to post-graduate, are currently taught in “research and discovery” mode, and employ techniques of peer learning and instruction. One of Monash’s key offshore units (*The Renaissance in Florence*), exemplifies field-work-based learning and represents the ideal nexus between teaching and research. The research expertise of staff, as well as honours and postgraduates, is incorporated into the learning so as to infect undergraduates with the excitement and passion that pervades the field of Renaissance studies. As an offshore unit, *The Renaissance in Florence* in particular makes the most of the possibilities proffered by the blending of traditional sources with digital media: e-tablets, digital resource library (articles, book chapters, documents), and of course, the city of Florence itself as the ‘core primary text’. Problem/research-based field work has involved setting up research teams (balancing the mix of abilities and prior knowledge) which pursue on-site problem-solving investigations in the relevant parts of the city, drawing on the reading and other data available through students’ e-tablets. This process is further stimulated by participation in a variety of workshops led by Monash postgraduates and experts from the Prato Consortium for Medieval and Renaissance Studies.

### Monash University Prato Centre

Over the past decade, the Monash Prato Centre has been an important resource for Renaissance Studies at Monash. The Centre was established in 2001 to provide the University with a European base for international teaching and research collaborations. Monash is the only Australian university with a permanent site in Europe. Two undergraduate units are taught through the Centre, *The Renaissance in Florence* and *Dante’s Medieval World*. Both courses take extensive advantage of the Centre’s proximity to Florence and other sites of interest. A research week is an integral part of the course structure,

involving a focus on research methods and an introduction to the Archivio di Stato di Prato. The Prato Centre is home to a specialist research library, established in 2010 and named after the Centre’s founding director, Bill Kent. The Bill Kent Library is now part of the IRIS consortium of libraries; its founding collection was drawn from the libraries of Niccolai and Ruth Rubinstein.

### Prato Consortium of Medieval and Renaissance Studies

The Monash University Prato Centre is home to a consortium of universities that was established in 2009 to pool expertise and skills to enhance teaching and research in the field. Member universities include: University of Warwick, University of Toronto, The Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, University of London (Queen Mary College), University of Edinburgh, University of Durham and the State University of Arizona. The State Archive of Prato is also a founding member. The Centre of Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Monash is ‘the hub’ of the Consortium, and is convened by its Director.

The Consortium co-ordinates a number of courses on-site in Prato, including an intensive fourth and fifth level unit *Text and Community in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*. In February 2012, this unit was hosted at Monash Prato by the University of Edinburgh, and in December 2012 by Monash University. This unit focuses on close reading of a range of texts from the period and draws on the resources of the Archivio di Stato di Prato. *Text and Community* is offered at least once annually and is open to students from all consortium members.

The Consortium is currently developing a multi-year research program, which will:

- further research cooperation by developing a common umbrella project
- further cooperation with respect to graduate research training

- promote joint graduate supervisions across member institutions
- coordinate participation in conferences under PCMRS sponsorship, 2013-2018 (Leeds, Kalamazoo, RSA etc.)

More information on Renaissance Studies activities at Monash University can be found at:

<http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/medieval-renaissance-centre/>

### Authors

Cecilia Hewlett, Director, Monash University Centre at Prato.

Peter Howard, Director, CMRS and Convenor, PCMRS.

### Title

Cecilia Hewlett, Peter Howard, *Teaching the Renaissance in Melbourne and Prato – Monash University*, in: *Teaching the Renaissance III*, ed. by Angela Dreßen and Susanne Gramatzki, in: *kunsttexte.de*, Nr. 4, 2012 (3 pages), [www.kunsttexte.de](http://www.kunsttexte.de)