

The Italian Renaissance and Popes of Avignon

before the Papacy had yet removed to Avignon, the Franciscan Jean de Montecorvino had established flourishing Christian missions in China, and in 1306 Pope Clement V. erected for him the see of Pekin. Numerous missions were also established in the Barbary States, in Northern Africa, as well as in Tunis.

If, then, the discovery of new worlds, the fall of Constantinople and the invention of printing were factors in the development of the Italian Renaissance, assuredly the mission work of the Papal Court of Avignon in its propagation of the gospel in distant countries contributed indirectly but incontestably to this great awakening of the human mind. Indeed, "humanism" may be said to have had birth at Avignon within the Pontifical Court, with him who has been justly designated "the first of Humanists"—the poet Petrarch.

As to the study of Greek in Italy, long before the dispersion of Greek scholars consequent on the fall of Constantinople in 1453, long, too, before the appointment of Manuel Chrysoloras to the chair of Greek at the Florence University in 1396, the monk Barlaam, a Greek scholar of great repute, a Calabrian by birth, who had passed his youth at Salonica and at Constantinople, where he became, thanks to his literary and scientific culture, a favorite of the Emperor Andronicus, was sent by the latter