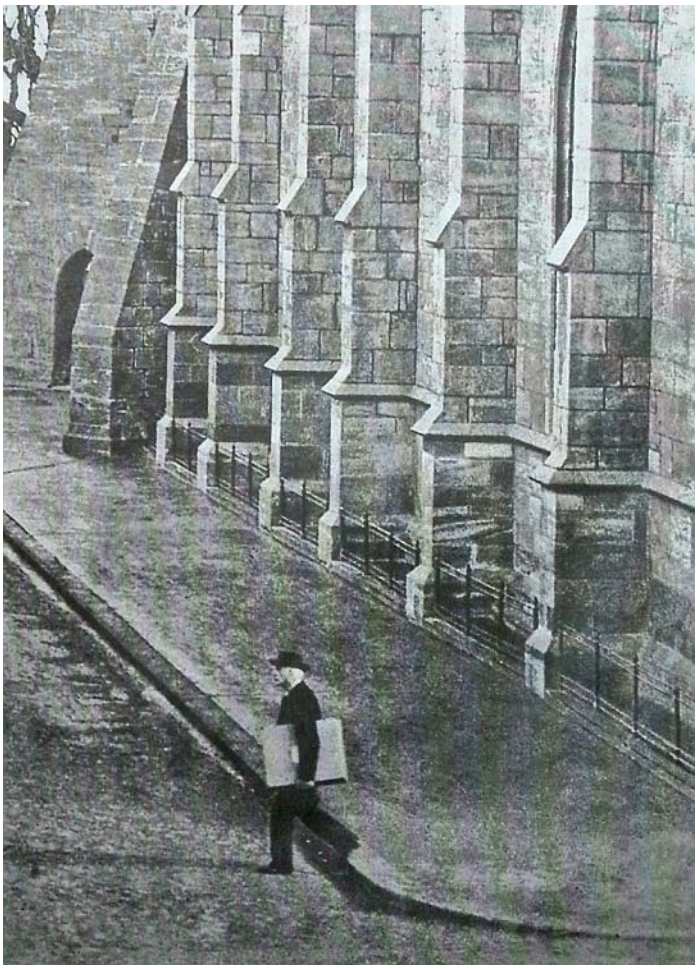
Burckhardt's *Renaissance*, 150 Years Later



The Development of the Individual

Prof. Martin McLaughlin
(Magdalen College, Oxford)

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BURCKHARDT AND ALBERTI: RESTORING THE ORIGINAL

One of the many problems facing modern scholars of Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72) is what we might call the work of restoration. Trying to establish what Alberti's real significance was is like restoring a work of art: we have to remove the accretions and misguided restorations that have taken place over the centuries in order to return to the original painting, sculpture or building. The most influential portrait of the artist in modern times was that provided by Jacob Burckhardt in his famous monograph, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, first published in 1860 (CR 85-7). This portrait was largely modelled on the humanist's Latin autobiography, the *Vita*. Alberti had been one of the first writers of the early modern period to write an autobiography, this brief work being composed around 1438 in the midst of one of the most creative periods of the author's life.[1] But the *Vita* lay unknown for three centuries, and when it was first published in 1751 it was regarded as a biography rather than autobiography since it was narrated in the third person (but Alberti had done so following the classical precedent of one of the few ancient autobiographical accounts to survive: Julius Caesar's third-person record of his own military campaigns). A century later, in the 1840s, two editions of the text were published in Italy, suggesting a growing interest in the work, and Burckhardt probably read one or both of

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[1] For the Latin edition of the text and an account of its early history, see Riccardo Fubini and Anna Menci Gallorini, 'L'autobiografia di Leon Battista Alberti. Studio e edizione', *Rinascimento*, 12 (1972), pp. 21-78, from hereon cited in-text as *Vita* (English translations of this text in what follows are my own). Recently some scholars have argued for the slightly later date of 1441 for the work: see Lucia Bertolini, 'Leon Battista Alberti', *Nuova Informazione Bibliografica*, 2 (aprile-giugno 2004), 245-87, ead., 'Alberti e le "humanae litterae"', in Massimo Bulgarelli, Arturo Calzona, Matteo Ceriana, Francesco Paolo Fiore (eds.), *Leon Battista Alberti e l'architettura* (Milan: Silvana, 2006), pp. 20-31 (pp. 25-7), and Luca Boschetto, 'Tra biografia e autobiografia: le prospettive e i problemi della ricerca intorno alla vita di L. B. Alberti', in *La vita e il mondo di Leon Battista Alberti. Atti dei convegni internazionali del Comitato Nazionale VI centenario della nascita di Leon Battista Alberti. Genova, 19-21 febbraio 2004*, 2 vols (Florence: Olschki, 2008), i, 85-116 (p. 93, n. 10).

these editions.[2] Despite the four centuries of obscurity, this short text went on to have a huge influence on historical thinking about the Italian Renaissance, thanks to the inflection given it by Burckhardt. The Swiss historian's summary omitted the work's more embittered and melancholic notes, highlighted the subject's positive physical and intellectual achievements, and turned him into the incarnation – a generation before Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo – of the 'Renaissance' or 'universal man'. The main objective of this article is to scrape away at Burckhardt's portrait of Alberti in order to reveal the original self-portrait underneath, and to determine what was added or removed in the 1860 volume.

The Swiss historian devoted two whole pages to Alberti's life at the start of his major chapter on 'The Development of the Individual'. Here he brilliantly summarized the *Vita* and, naturally for a summary, omitted many elements. However, some of these omissions concerned major themes in the original; he also made a few, but quite significant, additions. Since Burckhardt's time there have of course been broad critiques of his controversial theory of the rise of the individual and the notion of the universal man, as well as of other parts of his work.[3] In particular, recent scholars such as Anthony Grafton have pointed out a number of areas in which Burckhardt distorted Alberti's original self-portrait.[4] But as Grafton's critique is not exhaustive, and he still subscribes to some elements of the myth, such as the notion of Alberti's 'iron will', it is worthwhile comparing in more detail the two versions of the life, Alberti's and Burckhardt's.[5]

Grafton's main criticism is that Burckhardt's picture of what he called a 'Renaissance or universal man' tended to emphasize Leon Battista's practical talents and physical prowess rather more than his intellectual achievements, and to accentuate the positive, sunny aspects of his multi-talented personality, while eliding the darker, melancholic notes of the authentic source.[6] It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that scholars such as Cecil Grayson and Eugenio Garin began to restore the bitter, pessimistic side of Alberti's make-up, particularly the melancholic dimension that emerged from Latin works such as *Momus* and the *Intercenales* – a new manuscript containing twenty-five more of these sardonic Latin tales was discovered in the early

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[2] The Bonucci edition was published in Florence in 1843, the Galletti one in 1847. For details of the printed editions, see Fubini and Menci Gallorini, 'L'autobiografia di Leon Battista Alberti', pp. 60-2.

[3] For a summary of such critiques, see Peter Burke's 'Introduction' to Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 1-16 (esp. pp. 12-15).

[4] Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 2000), pp. 9-11, 14-8.

[5] Grafton calls Burckhardt's account not just 'influential' but also 'dazzling', 'deeply sympathetic', written 'with unforgettable brilliance and pathos' (p. 9), but despite his perceptive critique the American historian still seems influenced by it: the reference to Alberti's iron will is on p. 11, and will be discussed below.

[6] For Burckhardt's exaltation of Alberti's physical over his intellectual prowess, see Anthony Grafton, 'Leon Battista Alberti: the writer as reader', in his *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 53-92 (esp. pp. 53-5).

1960s.[7] These new findings, as Grafton puts it, 'revealed stress fractures cutting jaggedly across the smooth bright self that Burckhardt ascribed to Alberti. […] The glorious summer of Burckhardt's Alberti was haunted by the perpetual winter of this newer Alberti's discontent'.[8]

Turning to the two texts – Burckhardt's and Alberti's – in more detail, we can see that Burckhardt initially follows the order of elements in the *Vita* quite closely, and his portrait can be divided into six sections. He begins, like his source, with Alberti's physical versatility, his brilliance at riding, walking and speaking, as well as his achievements in music. A second section then discusses his education in law and literature, and mentions – though very briefly compared to the *Vita* – the fact that he fell ill through exhaustion, and decided to turn to physics and mathematics which made less call on his memory. After this we find a sequence on his interests in the arts and artisans, his paintings and 'camera obscura', and on his appreciation of all forms of beauty. This is followed by a fourth section which is a list of Alberti's writings (an obligatory element in classical biographies of writers), but Burckhardt includes some works not mentioned in the source because they were written after 1438, such as the treatise on architecture (1443-52). The final two parts of the portrait are devoted first to the powerful effect of nature on Alberti, and then to his prophetic gifts, and it is after this mention of his ability to foretell the future that the whole portrait ends with these words: 'It goes without saying that an iron will pervaded and sustained his whole personality; like all the great men of the Renaissance, he said "Men can do all things if they will"' (CR 87). We will return to this notion of the iron will later.

The more specific criticisms levelled at Burckhardt by Grafton are that the Swiss historian omits two major elements from his source: Alberti's frequent and sometimes violent difficulties with his family; and also his moments of depression and discouragement (though Grafton too occasionally overstates his case).[9] In short, apart from the brief mention of his exhaustion brought on by study, Burckhardt says nothing of the 'darker', more problematic, side of Alberti's existence as recounted in the *Vita*: nothing about his quarrels with his family, or about the letters on the page seeming to turn into scorpions, and so on, and it may be, as the

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[7] The manuscript containing many new *Intercenales* was published by Eugenio Garin: Leon Battista Alberti, *Intercenali inedite*, ed. by Eugenio Garin (Florence: Sansoni, 1965). For a nuanced view of both the 'sunny' and 'dark' sides of Alberti see also Garin's 'Il pensiero di Leon Battista Alberti: caratteri e contrasti', *Rinascimento*, 12 (1972), pp. 3-20; for Grayson's work, see now the collection of his articles in Cecil Grayson, *Studi su Leon Battista Alberti,* ed. by Paola Claut (Florence: Olschki, 1998).

[8] Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti*, p. 14.

[9] Statements such as the following seem to ascribe to him a condition of writer's block for which there appears to be no evidence: 'Alberti [...] portrayed himself as a depressive who was repeatedly paralyzed by grief or fear, unable to produce any creative work. A brilliant athlete and performer, he sometimes withdrew in misery from all contact with others and made vicious fun of others' aspirations' (Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti*, p. 17).

American historian suggests, that he deliberately left out the bulk of what he knew about the humanist.[10]

There is more to be said, however, about the details of these two areas of omission. Alberti's many difficulties with his relatives constitute one of the most insistent themes of the *Vita*, yet it is totally absent in Burckhardt. Thus he does not mention Alberti's first literary work, the comedy *Philodoxeos*, nor the context of its composition: it was written at the age of 20, says Alberti, in order to console himself after discovering how 'cruel and inhumane' his relatives were. Here at their first appearance Leon Battista describes the other Albertis as being neither 'pios' nor 'humanos' (*Vita* 69); later we learn of a violent plot organized against Battista in which his relatives incited his servants to attack him with a knife (*Vita* 71); and finally we are told that it was their lack of appreciation of the work he had written partly for them, *De familia*, that made the author initially want to burn it (*Vita* 71-2). None of these particulars about his antagonistic relatives appears in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. As for his health and depression, the undignified details of his mental breakdown are glossed over so we hear nothing about his limbs becoming debilitated, his strength draining away as he lost weight, or his being afflicted with 'dizziness and bowel pains, while bangs and long hissing noises resounded loudly in his ears' (*Vita* 69).

But there are also other omissions or distortions. Another major exclusion (one not mentioned by Grafton) is a lengthy section on his persecution by critics, whether within or outside the family. Thus there is no mention of the author burning many of his *Intercenales* 'lest he be accused of frivolity by his critics' (*Vita* 70), nor of the fact that he did not mind open criticism but resented those who slandered him behind his back (*Vita* 70-1). Similarly, the Swiss historian skips over one of the few negative qualities admitted to in the self-portrait, the subject's proneness to anger: 'However, he was of a nature that was quick to anger, and had a sharp temper, but immediately he would use his wisdom to suppress his rising indignation, and he would avoid argumentative and obstinate people on purpose because he could not help becoming somewhat heated and angry in their company' (*Vita* 72). Perhaps most important of all, he even omits two of the positive qualities insisted on both throughout the *Vita* and also in the rest of Alberti's oeuvre: his work ethic, always completing some project every day, and his cultivation of humour despite his rather taciturn nature and somewhat sad-faced ('subtristis') appearance (*Vita* 73). These two qualities are insisted on in almost every work the author wrote, even in the witty self-portraits disguised as eulogies of his dog (*Canis*) and the fly (*Musca*). Burckhardt does briefly allude to the *Canis* but it is simply listed as another example of the

[10] Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti*, pp. 15-16, 20.

virtuoso range of Alberti's literary works, whereas in fact there are two other contextual factors relating to the oration that he ignores. The first is that the mention of the eulogy in the autobiography occurs in one of the final paragraphs where the author recalls his love of all forms of beauty, especially those visible in nature, such as in birds and other animals. He wrote the oration for what he calls his most graceful ('lepidissimo') dog, so this context suggests that the work should be seen as a celebration of his love of nature and animals. But the *Canis* is also meant to be comic too, and the importance of the comic for Alberti is highlighted in the autobiography ('festivus' and 'iucundus' are key positive qualities that recur here and throughout his entire oeuvre) as well as in his most important non-technical Latin works, such as the *Intercenales* and *Momus*. Neither factor is brought out in Burckhardt's mention of the *Canis*.

There are also some small but significant textual manipulations which confirm that Burckhardt's repainting of the subject extends even to micro-textual details. In the famous passage about Alberti wanting to meet other artisans and quiz them to learn from their expertise, the historian says Alberti would cross-examine 'artists, scholars and artisans of all descriptions, down to the cobblers' (CR 103). The opening of the sentence with its reference to artists and scholars makes this sound more exalted company than it was in the original; in fact Alberti's text makes no mention of either artists or scholars, but rather 'artisans, architects, ship-builders, even shoemakers and tailors (*A fabris, ab architectis, a navicullariis, ab ipsis sutoribus atque sartoribus sciscitabatur*)' (*Vita* 72). Actually this is a deliberately surprising list for the time, since artisans, shipbuilders, cobblers and tailors epitomized the unlearned public that humanists such as Petrarch and Alberti's contemporaries despised and are explicitly mentioned by them in many of their invectives.[11] Whereas Alberti was out to surprise his humanist audience, Burckhardt's adjustment attenuates the shock, leaving only shoemakers in the list; and in any case shoemakers enjoyed a more positive image in artistic and philosophical traditions because of the famous anecdote about Apelles and the cobbler, and because of the fact that in Plato's dialogues Socrates often consults shoemakers and artisans or quotes their practices in his discussions. That Alberti was aware of this Socratic tradition is confirmed by the fact that the final sentences of this paragraph in the autobiography, which are not quoted by Burckhardt, show a clear attempt by the author to portray himself as a second Socrates: 'and he immediately communicated these same things [artisans' skills] to his eager fellow citizens. He pretended he

[11] For details of humanists invectives involving artisans ('fabri'), cobblers and tailors, see Martin McLaughlin, 'Literature and science in Leon Battista Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*', in Pierpaolo Antonello and Simon Gilson (eds.), *Science and Literature in Italian Culture: From Dante to Calvino. A Festschrift for Pat Boyde* (Oxford: Legenda, 2004), pp. 94-114 (esp. pp. 104-5).

was ignorant in many matters so that he could question the genius, character and expertise of other people' (*Vita* 72).

At the end of this section of the life, there is another statement by Alberti that would have shocked his humanist contemporaries and which is omitted by Burckhardt. The historian's sentence, 'And that which others created he welcomed joyfully, and held every human achievement which followed the laws of beauty for something almost divine' (CR 103), was present in the original but Burckhardt omitted the rest of the sentence, which continued: 'and he thought that in any discipline any account which expounded it was of such value that, he claimed, even bad writers were worthy of praise' (*Vita* 77). This openness to scientific rather than elegant writers was a major facet of Alberti's poetics, leading to his appreciation and imitation of writers such as Vitruvius, and it also constituted another element that set his kind of humanism apart from that of his contemporaries.

A more serious sleight of hand is visible in the penultimate section of Burckhardt's account. After mentioning Alberti's generous communication of his knowledge to all who were interested (from a section that comes just under halfway through the original account), Burckhardt inserts a sentence (in italics below) which he has made up entirely, in order to form a link with the next sentence which describes the effects of natural landscape on him (from the end of the *Vita*):

> And all that he had and knew he imparted, as rich natures always do, without the least reserve, giving away his chief discoveries for nothing. *But the deepest spring of his nature has yet to be spoken of – the sympathetic intensity with which he entered into the whole life around him.* At the sight of noble trees and waving corn-fields he shed tears; handsome and dignified old men he honoured as 'a delight of nature', and could never look at them enough. (CR 86-7)

The last sentence here with its authenticating device of the quotation and translation of Alberti's actual words ('delitias naturae', *Vita* 77) gives the impression of the historian sticking closely to his source. Perhaps Burckhardt did this deliberately here since the preceding sentence not only appears nowhere in the original, but actually has a decidedly nineteenth-century ring: sympathetic intensity especially with regard to nature was not a quality Alberti would have recognized, and indeed it is not his sentence. The first clause in the historian's final sentence – 'At the sight of noble trees and waving corn-fields he shed tears' – also crudely reduces a whole paragraph in the *Vita*, and distorts the reasons why such sights moved Alberti. In fact the original paragraph in the *Vita* was largely centred on how nature in all its manifestations constantly encouraged his work-ethic: in springtime the flowering hillsides would make him sad

and he would urge himself to produce some fruit from his labours; in autumn the sight of fields and orchards caused him to weep not out of a Romantic sense of nature's beauty but because nature's productivity seemed to reproach his own inertia (*Vita* 77).

There is one final but crucial point to make. The original *Vita* ended with paragraphs on the following elements: the subject's prophetic gifts; his Stoic overcoming of physical weaknesses; and his appreciation of nature which inspired him to work harder. Burckhardt moves Alberti's pre-penultimate section about his prophetic gifts so that it becomes the final piece of his mosaic, presumably in order to end the portrait on a particular note. After narrating his subject's many accurate prophecies, the Swiss historian adds another sentence of his own before ending with a quotation that does indeed come from the original: '*It need not be added that an iron will pervaded and sustained his whole personality; like all the great men of the Renaissance*, he said, "Men can do all things if they will"' (CR 87). But the italicized passage about the iron will that links the prophecies with the saying about men being able to do what they want is not in the original, and in fact conceals another whole paragraph that is all about Alberti's physical weaknesses and his attempts to overcome them. The suppressed passage tells how he was highly sensitive to pain, heat and cold, and how he would Stoically suffer all these things: he helped surgeons stitch a wound in his foot, he would use music to take his mind off fevers and sweats, and he would refuse to wear a hat despite the fact that his head was very sensitive to cold. At the end of the passage, Alberti tells us that 'through some flaw in nature' he could not stand even the sight of garlic or honey, but he forced himself to handle these foods in order to lessen his aversion to them, 'thus proving that men can do anything they want' (*Vita* 76-7). Alberti's paragraph on overcoming his dietary peculiarities was perhaps too banal a demonstration of the 'Men can do all things if they will' maxim for Burckhardt to use, so he links it instead to the mention of his prophetic powers and ability to read men's minds, a much stronger element. Just as at the beginning of the portrait Burckhardt omitted the details of Alberti's illnesses, so here he glides over other physical flaws and turns his subject's Stoicism into something more redolent of the nineteenth century. In this passage, as often in the *Vita*, Alberti is portraying himself as a Stoic philosopher rather than as a Schopenhauerian devotee of an 'iron will'.

Thus Burckhardt's Alberti is not quite the man portrayed in the autobiographical *Vita*: the version of the 'Renaissance man' we read about in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* was not someone obsessed with recognition by his family or critics, was never humiliated by his illness or physical sensitivities, never driven by a work ethic, and nor did he cultivate a sense of humour. The later historian does not see that Alberti subtly but importantly goes against the grain of contemporary humanism in his appreciation of artisans and scientific but inelegant

writers. His appreciation of nature certainly has an aesthetic side to it, as Burckhardt suggests, but it also has a powerful ethical dimension, one which continually encouraged Alberti to work harder and be constantly productive. As Grafton says, 'the search for lives lived as art, rather than a precise analysis of texts, dominated [Burckhardt's] research'.[12]

Burckhardt's portrait of Alberti is now regarded as even more 'artificial' than that of his source. In the half-century since the 1960s, scholars have been trying to integrate not just the two sides of our author, the wintry and the sunny, but the many sides of this truly multi-faceted writer. The pioneering philological work done by Cecil Grayson in establishing the definitive edition of the vernacular texts between 1960 and 1973 has allowed us to obtain a fuller picture of the author *in volgare* than Burckhardt had access to. Similarly the discovery of twenty-five new *Intercenales* in the 1960s has given scholars crucial insight into the sardonic side of Alberti's humour. In strictly biographical terms, the new archive research carried out by Luca Boschetto has provided crucial new evidence regarding Alberti's residence in Florence.[13] Naturally Burckhardt could not have know any of this, but he did know the *Vita*.

Of course, having scraped away Burckhardt's reconstructions and noted his suppressions, we would be wrong to think that we can now contemplate the authentic self-portrait, for we realize that Alberti's original *Vita* is as much a construct as Burckhardt's 1860 restoration. Like all of the humanist's works, it both looks back to and departs from classical models. Whereas ancient biographies, such as Suetonius's lives of the Caesars or Donatus's life of Virgil, would begin with the birth and early education of the subject, Alberti does not start from his birth, presumably because of its painful circumstances: although born into a famous family, the Albertis were in exile from Florence and Battista was born an illegitimate child. Instead of an opening section on his ancestors and birth, then, Alberti compensates by giving us a lengthy description of his highly versatile talents – when still an adolescent – in literature, the arts and in physical prowess. Yet this opening description of versatility is heavily indebted to a classical source, namely Livy's portrait of Cato the Elder, a constant presence in Alberti's other writings as an exemplar of the all-rounded citizen, and the source of the phrase 'versatile ingenium' that crops up in the *Vita* and many other works.[14] The autobiography is clearly

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[12] Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti*, p. 16.

[13] Luca Boschetto, *Leon Battista Alberti e Firenze. Biografia, storia, letteratura* (Florence: Olschki, 2000).

[14] 'In Cato there was so much strength of mind and genius that whatever background he had been born into, he would, it seems, have made his fortune. He possessed all the arts that relate to either public or private life; he was equally knowledgeable about both the town and the country; […] this man possessed a genius that was so versatile (*versatile ingenium*) in everything, that whatever he did you would think that he had been born for that skill only.' See Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, 39.40 (my translation). For just one instance out of many, of Cato as a model of versatility, see this passage from Book I of *De familia*: 'Catone, quel buono antiquo, non si vergognava, né gli pareva fatica insegnare al figliuolo, oltre alle lettere, notare, schermire, e simili tutte destrezze militari e civili, e stimava in sé officio de' padri insegnare a' figliuoli tutte le virtù qual fusse degno sapere a liberi uomini, né gli pareva giustamente

unfinished: it ends abruptly in the middle of a second list of his witty sayings, and it is not so much an account of Alberti's deeds as of his character and works. But despite its unfinished nature, it is a substantial composition, one in which its author invested considerable literary effort, and it has a clear shape: it starts with the author's versatility, then moves on to his education and major works, before providing an account of his character, a first list of his clever sayings, then a mention of his prophetic powers, a physical description, and a passage on his attitude to nature before the final list of witticisms. It thus conforms in many respects to the traditional shape of a biography, as it had been handed down from classical models and then revived in Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[15] In particular, a number of elements that had been standardized in the lives of Virgil are present: thus we have sections covering the subject's education, his writings, his critics, his patrons, his decision to burn his works, his physical features and his character traits (good and bad).

When compared with the most recent example of an autobiography, Petrarch's *Epistle to Posterity* (c. 1350, revised 1370), Alberti's *Vita* exhibits at least two major new features. The first is that it is totally secular in tone. Petrarch's self-portrait was largely indebted to an Augustinian model, with an early section on the subject's character structured round his susceptibility to the seven deadly sins. Like Petrarch before him, Alberti claims to be completely untainted by avarice but susceptible to anger, though he always tried to quell it (*Vita* 72). But these are the only two 'sins' mentioned by Leon Battista, and in any case no religious terminology is used here, no tone of 'vanitas vanitatum', as there had been in Petrarch's account. In fact, Alberti's autobiography is remarkable for its entirely secular aura: there is no mention of God, sin, religion or the afterlife. An autobiography such as this, so clearly modelled on ancient sources, and so non-Christian in content and tone, was, as the text's editors suggest, a highly unusual if not unique text for the time.[16]

The other new feature was Alberti's incorporation of a standard component from a 'new' text at the time, Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers*, which he read either in the original Greek, or more probably in the Latin translation of his friend Ambrogio Traversari, completed in 1433.[17] This component was the list, in most of the lives, of famous sayings uttered by each

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da chiamare libero alcuno in chi si disiderassi virtù alcuna' (in Leon Battista Alberti, *Opere volgari*, ed. by Cecil Grayson, 3 vols (Bari: Laterza, 1960-73), i, 55).

[15] See Martin McLaughlin, 'Biography and autobiography in the Italian Renaissance', in Peter France and William St Clair (eds.), *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (British Academy, London: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 37-65.

[16] Fubini and Menci Gallorini, 'L'autobiografia di Leon Battista Alberti', p. 47.

[17] First pointed out in Cecil Grayson, 'Il prosatore latino e volgare', in *Convegno internazionale indetto nel V centenario di Leon Battista Alberti (Roma-Mantova-Firenze, 25-29 aprile 1972)* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1974), pp. 273-86 (p. 273, n. 2); see also Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti*, pp. 23-5. For Traversari's work, see Marcello Gigante, 'Ambrogio Traversari interprete di Diogene Laerzio', in Gian Carlo Garfagnini (ed.), *Ambrogio Traversari nel V*

philosopher: in fact Alberti's *Vita* actually contains two separate sections devoted to 38 and 18 sayings respectively. Grafton has shown that especially Diogenes' first biography, that of Thales, was particularly influential since that life is not a chronological narrative but a series of anecdotes and a list of works and sayings: indeed he shows that some of Thales' sayings were actually recycled by Alberti as his own in his autobiography.[18] So Alberti's *Vita* is a portrait of the artist both as an author like Virgil, but also as a Stoic philosopher able to rise above the vicissitudes of life and to dispense wisdom in his memorable sayings.

Alberti's *Vita* may be as much a construct as Burckhardt's portrait is, but it is definitely a different construct. The Alberti put forward by the Swiss historian as a prime exemplar of the rise of the individual is a man of intensity and iron will, and thus of qualities which have little basis in fact, while his work ethic and humour have been underplayed and his weaknesses, paranoia and melancholies have been air-brushed out. Burckhardt's is a beautiful and dazzling portrait of Alberti, but his strong colours have suffused the nuanced, darker tones of the original.

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centenario della nascita (Florence: Olschki, 1988), pp. 367-459. For the extent of Alberti's knowledge of ancient Greek, see Lucia Bertolini, *Grecus sapor. Tramiti di presenze greche in Leon Battista Alberti* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1998).

[18] Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti*, pp. 24-5.