Tudor Historical Thought


Tudor Historical Thought is a revealing account of vital changes in intellectual orientation. Originally published in 1967, F.J. Levy's seminal work explores the factors – humanism, theology, antiquarianism, Machiavellianism – that brought about the changes in historical thinking from the time of Caxton to that of Bacon, Raleigh, and Camden.

Earlier, the study of the past was justified on utilitarian grounds, and the purpose of history writing was didactic. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, chroniclers exemplified the workings of Providence and taught personal morality; a hundred years later, however, the idea of teaching practical statecraft had been introduced. The Italian humanists emphasized the political aspects of man, and made the active citizen rather than the cloistered monk their ideal. That citizen needed guidance, and it was the duty of the historian to supply it. Questions of politics, which had been important for nearly half a century, suddenly were placed at the centre, and with that a new kind of history writing appeared in England.

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