

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910495868703321
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Titolo	A usable past : essays in European cultural history / / William J. Bouwsma
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Berkeley, CA : , : University of California Press, , [1990] ©1990
ISBN	1-282-75861-6 9786612758614 0-520-91014-1 0-585-14768-X
Edizione	[1st ed.]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (457 p.)
Disciplina	901
Soggetti	History - Philosophy Europe Civilization
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and index.
Nota di contenuto	Front matter -- Contents -- Acknowledgments -- Introduction -- I. Polarities of Western Culture -- II. The Durable Renaissance -- III. History and Historians -- IV. Essays in Applied History -- V. Coda -- Index
Sommario/riassunto	The essays assembled here represent forty years of reflection about the European cultural past by an eminent historian. The volume concentrates on the Renaissance and Reformation, while providing a lens through which to view problems of perennial interest. A Usable Past is a book of unusual scope, touching on such topics as political thought and historiography, metaphysical and practical conceptions of order, the relevance of Renaissance humanism to Protestant thought, the secularization of European culture, the contributions of particular professional groups to European civilization, and the teaching of history. The essays in A Usable Past are unified by a set of common concerns. William Bouwsma has always resisted the pretensions to science that have shaped much recent historical scholarship and made the work of historians increasingly specialized and inaccessible to lay readers. Following Friedrich Nietzsche, he argues that since history is a

kind of public utility, historical research should contribute to the self-understanding of society.
