

## **Out of the Middle Ages**

In the feudal structure of the Middle Ages, the nobles who lived in the country provided the king with protection in exchange for land. Peasants worked the land for the nobles, for which they received protection and their own small parcels of land. These rural peasants worked from sunup to sundown, but even the nobles had few creature comforts. In feudal cities, where there was a small middle-class population, life was a little easier and individuals had the freedom to pursue whatever trade or industry they liked. In the late Middle Ages, when the threat of invasion from barbarians had lessened, people left the country for towns and cities so they could engage in more profitable pursuits.

## **The Plague Begins**

Life in the city was soon to change drastically. During the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance (1350-1450) the bubonic plague, also called the "Black Death," devastated one half of the population of Europe. The plague, which was almost always fatal, spread most rapidly in cities, where people were in close contact with each other. The only way to avoid the disease was to leave the city for the country. This solution was, unfortunately, available only to those wealthy enough to make the trip.

### **The Plague's Effect on the Economy**

The population decrease caused by the plague led to an economic depression. Merchants and tradespeople had fewer people to whom they could sell their wares. Products therefore accumulated, and the merchants and traders suffered a loss in income. Economic hardship spread throughout the community as those who dealt with the merchants--bankers, suppliers, and shippers--also lost revenue.

As incidence of the plague decreased in the late fifteenth century, populations swelled, creating a new demand for goods and services. A new middle class began to emerge as bankers, merchants, and tradespeople once again had a market for their goods and services.

## **The New Middle Class**

As the fortunes of merchants, bankers, and tradespeople improved, they had more than enough money to meet their basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. They began to desire larger, more luxurious homes, fine art for these residences, sumptuous clothing to show off their wealth in public, and exotic delicacies to eat. These desires of the middle class stimulated the economy.

The middle-class population also had leisure time to spend on education and entertainment. In fact, education was essential for many middle-class professions. Bankers and accountants needed to understand arithmetic. Those trading with other countries needed a knowledge of foreign currencies and languages. Reading was essential for anyone who needed to understand a contract. In their leisure time, middle-class men and women enjoyed such pastimes as reading for pleasure, learning to play musical instruments, and studying a variety of topics unrelated to their businesses.

## **The Resurgence of the City**

Many Italian coastal cities became centers for trade and commerce, and for the wealth and education that ensued. One of the cities that exemplified these new trends was Florence. Unlike several other important cities of Italy that had noble families as their most prominent citizens (Mantua and Ferrara, for example), the leading citizens of Florence, the Medici family, made their wealth as business people. In all respects the Medicis had the appearance of nobility. They lived in beautiful homes, employed great artists, and engaged in intellectual pursuits for both business and pleasure.

Tools developed in the Middle Ages for exploration continued to be used during the Renaissance. One of these was the astrolabe, a portable device used by sailors to help them find their way. By measuring the distance of the sun and stars above the horizon, the astrolabe helped determine latitude, an important tool in navigation. Another tool, the magnetic compass, which had been invented in the twelfth century, was improved upon during the Renaissance.

Maps, too, became more reliable as Portuguese map makers, called cartographers, incorporated information provided by travelers and explorers into their work. Shipbuilding also improved during the Renaissance, as large ships called galleons became common. These ships were powered by sail rather than by men using oars.

## **The Beginning of Trade**

Although navigation was still an imprecise science, sailors were able to go farther than they had before. This was important because as the economy of the Renaissance continued to improve, there were ever-increasing demands for imported goods and new places to export local products.

(For traders, sailing proved to be a better option than traveling by land, as the network of roads that crisscrossed Europe was poor, and the few good roads that did exist were frequented by thieves.)

The Renaissance sailor first took to the seas to supply Europeans with the many Asian spices they demanded. Peppercorns, nutmeg, mace, and cinnamon all came from lands to the east. Also from the East came precious gems and fine silk, a fabric especially sought after for women's clothing. These trading voyages were often paid for by investors.

### **Renaissance Explorers**

Some men were drawn to the seas out of a curiosity to discover more about the world. One such man was Prince Henry of Portugal, known as Prince Henry the Navigator. With the help of mathematicians, astronomers, cartographers, and other navigators, Prince Henry sent expeditions to explore the west coast of Africa. These explorations led to trade for gold and ivory and, soon after, slaves. Later, Portuguese sailors discovered the route around the southern tip of Africa that would take them to India entirely by sea.

### **Trade in the New World**

In 1492, a trip to the East, made by sailing westward around the world, brought Columbus to the New World--lands known today as the Americas. Columbus had originally set out to find an all-water route to the East Indies; when he spotted the Americas, he believed he had reached his intended destination. It was ten years before Europeans realized that he had found a new land.

These new continents offered riches other than spices, in the form of gold and silver. Spaniard Hernando Cortez discovered an abundance of gold among the Aztecs in what is now known as Mexico. Stories of more gold to be found led him and other Spanish explorers to conquer most of Mexico and Latin America.

The discovery of silver led to the beginning of silver mining in Mexico and South America. Other finds in the New World introduced Europeans to corn, tomatoes, tobacco, and chocolate.

When Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1445, he forever changed the lives of people in Europe and, eventually, all over the world. Previously, bookmaking entailed copying all the words and illustrations by hand. Often the copying had been done onto parchment, animal skin that had been scraped until it was clean, smooth, and thin. The labor that went into creating them made each book very expensive. Because Gutenberg's press could produce books quickly and with relatively little effort, bookmaking became much less expensive, allowing more people to buy reading material.

### **The Demand for Books Grows**

In the Middle Ages, books had been costly and education rare; only the clergy had been regular readers and owners of books. Most books had been written in Latin, considered the language of scholarship. In the Renaissance, the educated middle classes, who could now afford books, demanded works in their own languages. Furthermore, readers wanted a greater variety of books. Almanacs, travel books, chivalry romances, and poetry were all published at this time. Simultaneously, a means of printing music was also invented, making music available at a reasonable cost. As the demand for books grew, the book trade began to flourish throughout Europe, and industries related to it, such as papermaking, thrived as well. The result of all of this was a more literate populace and a stronger economy.

### **Humanism Emerges**

Books also helped to spread awareness of a new philosophy that emerged when Renaissance scholars known as humanists returned to the works of ancient writers. Previously, during the Middle Ages, scholars had been guided by the teachings of the church, and people had concerned themselves with actions leading to heavenly rewards. The writings of ancient, pagan Greece and Rome, called the "classics," had been greatly ignored. To study the classics, humanists learned to read Greek and ancient Latin, and they sought out manuscripts that had lain undisturbed for nearly 2,000 years.

The humanists rediscovered writings on scientific matters, government, rhetoric, philosophy, and art. They were influenced by the knowledge of these ancient civilizations and by the emphasis placed on man, his intellect, and his life on Earth.

### **The Humanist Philosophy**

The new interest in secular life led to beliefs about education and society that came from Greece and Rome. The secular, humanist idea held that the church should not rule civic matters, but should guide only spiritual matters. The church disdained the accumulation of wealth and worldly goods, supported a strong but limited education, and believed that moral

and ethical behavior was dictated by scripture. Humanists, however, believed that wealth enabled them to do fine, noble deeds, that good citizens needed a good, well-rounded education (such as that advocated by the Greeks and Romans), and that moral and ethical issues were related more to secular society than to spiritual concerns.

### **Rebirth of Classical Studies**

The rebirth of classical studies contributed to the development of all forms of art during the Renaissance. Literature was probably the first to show signs of classical influence. The Italian poet Petrarch (1304-1374) delighted in studying the works of Cicero and Virgil, two great writers of the Roman age, and he modeled some of his own writings on their works. Although he often wrote in Latin, attempting to imitate Cicero's style, Petrarch is most renowned for his poetry in Italian. As one of the first humanists, and as a writer held in high esteem in his own time, he influenced the spread of humanism--first among his admirers, and later throughout the European world.

### **Spiritual Matters**

During the Renaissance, a churchman named Martin Luther changed Christianity. On October 31, 1517, he went to his church in the town of Wittenburg, Germany, and posted a list of things that worried him about the church. His list included the church's practice of selling indulgences, a means by which people could pay the church to reduce the amount of time their souls must spend in purgatory instead of atoning for their sins via contrition. Luther also requested that, when appropriate, Mass be said in the native language instead of in Latin so that the church's teachings would be more accessible to the people. This request for reform ignited the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation. Many other Christians agreed that the church needed to change, and several new Christian religions were established during this time. The old church became known as Roman Catholic, and new Christian sects were known by their leaders--among them Lutherans (Luther) and Calvinists (John Calvin).

The recovery of ancient manuscripts showed the humanists how the Greeks and Romans employed mathematics to give structure to their art. The relationship between these two studies is most evident in architecture, where numerical ratios were used in building design.

A ratio is nothing more than a relationship between two quantities. For example, a building that is 100 feet wide and 50 feet tall has a ratio between its width and its height of 2:1 ( $100:50 = 2:1$ ).

### **Proportions in Architecture**

One of the most interesting proportions used by Renaissance artists, the golden mean, had also been used by the ancient Greeks in art and architecture. Often found in nature in the shape of a leaf or the spiral of a shell, the golden mean is thought to add harmonious composition to buildings and other structures.

The humanists also used the writings of Vitruvius, a Roman architect, to guide them in their architectural designs. Vitruvius extolled the virtues of proportion and symmetry in architecture, and he explained how the human body represented the beauty of proportion in nature.

Renaissance architects, especially those in Italy, also went to the ruins of ancient buildings to measure them and learn how proportion and symmetry were applied in real structures. The result of these studies was a new philosophy of beauty in building. Gothic spires and decorations imitating movement towards heaven were replaced by elegant symmetry demonstrating the intellect of man.

### **Architecture**

In constructing churches, Renaissance architects no longer used the shape of a cross as a basis for their structures. Instead, they based them on the circle. Believing that ancient mathematicians equated circles with geometric perfection, architects used the circle to represent the perfection of God.

In constructing their homes, wealthy people of the Renaissance often adopted a Roman style, building the four sides of their homes around a courtyard. Simple, symmetrical decorations--imitations of classical ones--were applied to the façades of buildings, and some structures also featured columns reminiscent of ancient temples.

### **Painting**

Paintings of the Renaissance demonstrate the application of humanistic ideals learned from the ancients. In works from the Middle Ages, saints and Biblical figures are arranged in unnatural, geometric groups, and backgrounds are nothing more than washes of gold. The Renaissance painter depicted the human figure as realistically as possible, often with backgrounds of the natural world. Science had taught the artist how to show linear perspective--that is, how to represent objects in relative sizes so that smaller objects appear to be farther from the viewer than larger objects. Careful use of light and shadow (called "chiaroscuro") made figures appear full and real. Renaissance painters not only portrayed objects with more realism than earlier artists did, they often filled their canvases with more objects, all carefully and accurately depicted.

## **Music**

Since the Middle Ages, music theorists had been studying proportions, a subject that the Greek mathematician Pythagoras had written about when discussing music. The theorists explained how to make different pitches (sounds) on stringed instruments by lengthening or shortening the strings by different proportions. For example, if a musician were to divide a string in half (the proportion of 2:1), he would create a new tone that is an octave above the original tone. Renaissance musicians carried on this idea in their own music.

Renaissance composers also incorporated the classics into their craft. By studying Greek drama, they discovered the art of making their music reflect the lyrics in their songs--making music sound happy for words of joy and sorrowful for words of grief. When they learned that ancient Greek drama (which featured music) brought the audience to tears with its sad music, Renaissance composers tried to re-create that theatrical experience. They didn't succeed, but their efforts resulted in the birth of opera.

The Renaissance was a rebirth that occurred throughout most of Europe. However, the changes that we associate with the Renaissance first occurred in the Italian city of Florence and continued to be more pervasive there than anywhere else. The city's economy and its writers, painters, architects, and philosophers all made Florence a model of Renaissance culture.

Fifteenth-century Florence was an exciting place to be. In 1425 the city had a population of 60,000 and was a self-governed, independent city-state. Twelve artist guilds that regulated the trades were the basis of Florence's commercial success. Members of the guilds, who were wealthy and held positions in government, were some of Florence's most influential people in society and politics. Because of its strong economy and a political philosophy that was dedicated to the welfare of the city, Florence thrived.

The most powerful guilds were those that represented textile workers. Much of Florence's wealth was dependent on the manufacture or trade of cloth, primarily wool. Wool of superior quality was often purchased unfinished and untreated from England and Iberia. Florentine textile workers then cleaned, carded, spun, dyed, and wove the wool into cloth of excellent quality. They sold the finished material in Italy, northern European cities, and even in eastern countries. Other textile experts purchased inferior cloth from northern cities and refinished it to create a superior product.

Because Florence was not a port city like Venice, sea trade was not a primary source of its income. Banking, however, was. Many families of Florence, beginning in the thirteenth century, were successful bankers. The Florentine gold coin known as the florin was of such reliable purity that it was the standard coinage throughout Europe. Florentine bankers were known throughout Europe as well, for they established banking houses in other important cities such as London, Geneva, and Bruges (Belgium).

The Palazzo Vecchio, constructed in 1299, was the home of the Florentine guilds. Then, as well as today, it functioned as the seat of municipal government and the heart of Florentine culture. It was here that the city's 5,000 guild members, who had the power of the vote, gathered to discuss and determine city issues. In addition to textile workers and bankers, the guild members included masons and builders, sculptors, lawyers, and solicitors.

## **Florentine Life**

The humanist movement was strong in Florence. Cosimo de Medici, Florence's wealthiest and most influential citizen, studied the works of ancient authors and collected manuscripts of classical writings. His delight in discussing humanist issues led him to organize the Plato Academy, where intellectuals would gather to discuss ideas concerning the classics. The academy continued even after Cosimo's death.

The Florentines enjoyed many pleasurable diversions from business and intellectual life. Lorenzo de Medici, Cosimo's grandson who was known as "The Magnificent," influenced the types of entertainment held and often sponsored the activities. Mystery plays, based on the theme of the Passion (the sufferings of Jesus), were regularly staged for the enjoyment and edification of the citizens. To celebrate the feast day of Saint John, Florence's patron saint, Florentines held

a horse race that ran throughout the city. And festivals held during the season before Lent--called Carnival--were grand productions, especially in the late fifteenth century.

### **Savonarola and Spiritual Concerns**

Although the humanist movement in Florence was very strong, Florentines were also concerned about their spiritual lives. Thus, amidst their prosperity, a preacher named Savonarola was able to change the thinking of many citizens. Savonarola was concerned about what he considered abuses by the church and about people's excessive interest in material goods. He preached against the accumulation of worldly possessions and called for a "bonfire of the vanities" in which people were to burn "immoral" paintings, cosmetics, and such entertainment-related items as musical instruments and playing cards.

Savonarola was successful in convincing many Florentines to return to a more spiritual way of life. However, his condemnation of church abuses of wealth led to his downfall. The Pope restricted Savonarola from preaching; when he continued to do so, he was excommunicated. Soon after, Florentines turned against him for what they saw as his role in an unfavorable political climate. He was publicly executed in 1498.

### **Florentine Art and Architecture**

Florence, like many cities of the Renaissance, had been built over many years and so was home to numerous churches, public buildings, and houses constructed with Romanesque or Gothic architecture. Therefore, when a revival of classical styles became popular, new edifices in the classical style were built alongside or added to buildings of older styles.

The concept of the dome first emerged during the Renaissance in the form of an architectural marvel that tops the Santa Maria del Fiore, the cathedral of Florence. The construction of the dome marks the beginning of Renaissance architecture; the cathedral and its dome together represent early Renaissance style--one that blends old and new designs. Arnolfo di Cambio began the building in a Gothic style in 1294. In 1418, architect Filippo Brunelleschi received a commission to build the dome. He traveled to Rome with the sculptor Donatello to study architecture; there, the two artists investigated various Roman ruins to learn about the design and proportion of buildings, as well as the construction of arches and columns. Although Brunelleschi never duplicated classical features, he borrowed ideas from the ancient ruins and incorporated them into the design of his dome.

### **Art Outside and Inside**

Many Florentine structures that outwardly exemplify architecture from earlier times also house interiors, paintings, and sculptures typical of the Renaissance. An example is the church of Santa Croce. On the outside, Santa Croce is an example of Gothic architecture, but the chapel inside is Renaissance in design, due to Brunelleschi's careful use of proportions.

The interior of the church of Santa Croce houses important works of Renaissance art. These include the tomb of Florentine chancellor and humanist Leonardo Bruni, created by Bernardo Rossellino, and two works by Donatello: The Annunciation and his wooden Crucifix. The Bardi Chapel, named for a family of wealthy Florentine bankers, is decorated with frescoes by Giotto that tell stories of Saint Francis. Giotto's works are an important bridge from the late Middle Ages to the Renaissance, particularly because his characters express emotion.

At the cathedral of San Marco, the upper floor contains monks' cells decorated with Fra Angelico frescoes. Angelico's representation of the Annunciation--perhaps his best known work--is located at the top of the staircase. In it, the Virgin Mary and the angel are in an arcade, a popular Renaissance architectural structure that features a series of arches supported by columns. The tops--or capitals--that crown the columns of the arcade are classical in design. Angelico used linear perspective and a vanishing point to achieve the realistic appearance of the space.

### **Michelangelo and Botticelli**

Several of the greatest artists of the age studied or worked in Florence, including Michelangelo and Botticelli. Michelangelo began to study painting in Florence with Ghirlandaio and later learned sculpture under the patronage of Lorenzo the Magnificent. It was for the Florence cathedral that Michelangelo created his famous sculpture of David. The Renaissance aesthetic is apparent in the careful and accurate depiction of the human body and its representation as a nude.

The painter Botticelli was a friend of both Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, and the principal painter of the Medici family. His works represent Renaissance style in his use of classical subject matter and in the effect of motion that he achieves. It was for the home of a Medici that he created his two most famous works: Primavera and The Birth of Venus. In both works Botticelli uses figures from antiquity, such as the goddess Venus and the three Graces. He balances his figures in nearly symmetrical groupings, yet never loses a feeling of motion and lightness.

Renaissance style in art, exemplified in works from Florentine artists, flourished largely because of the patronage, or financial support, of wealthy citizens and the church. By purchasing numerous works of art, Renaissance men and women provided a livelihood for many painters, sculptors, and architects. It was also the Renaissance humanist desire to imitate and revive the beauty of ancient Greece, and to have that beauty surround them in their daily lives, that produced the wealth of superb art that is one of the hallmarks of Renaissance culture.

### **General Summary**

The Italian Renaissance followed on the heels of the Middle Ages, and was spawned by the birth of the philosophy of humanism, which emphasized the importance of individual achievement in a wide range of fields. The early humanists, such as writer Francesco Petrarca, studied the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans for inspiration and ideology, mixing the philosophies of Plato and other ancient thinkers with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Under the influence of the humanists, literature and the arts climbed to new levels of importance.

Though it eventually spread through Europe, the Renaissance began in the great city-states of Italy. Italian merchants and political officials supported and commissioned the great artists of the day, thus the products of the Renaissance grew up inside their walls. The most powerful city-states were Florence, The Papal States (centered in Rome), Venice, and Milan. Each of these states grew up with its own distinctive character, very much due to the different forms of government that presided over each. Florence, considered the birthplace of the Renaissance, grew powerful as a wool-trading post, and remained powerful throughout the Renaissance due to the leadership of the Medici family, who maintained the city's financial strength and were intelligent and generous patrons of the arts. The Pope, who had the responsibility of running the Catholic Church as well, ruled Rome. As the power of the northern city-states grew, the Papacy increasingly became the seat of an international politician rather than a spiritual leader, and many pontiffs fell prey to the vices of corruption and nepotism that often accompanied a position of such power. Nevertheless, Rome, the victim of a decline that had destroyed the ancient city during the Middle Ages, flourished once again under papal leadership during the Renaissance. Venice and Milan also grew wealthy and powerful, playing large roles in Italian politics and attracting many artists and writers to their gilded streets. Venice was ruled by oligarchy in the hands of its Great Council of noble families, and Milan by a strong monarchy that produced a line of powerful dukes.

Perhaps the most prominent feature of the Renaissance was the furthering of the arts, and the advancement of new techniques and styles. During the early Renaissance, painters such as Giotto, and sculptors such as Ghiberti experimented with techniques to better portray perspective. Their methods were rapidly perfected and built upon by other artists of the early Renaissance such as Botticelli and Donatello. However, the apex of artistic talent and production came later, during what is known as the High Renaissance, in the form of Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michaelangelo, who remain the best known artists of the Renaissance. The Renaissance also saw the invention of printing in Europe and the rise of literature as an important aspect in everyday life. The Italian writers Boccaccio, Pico, and Niccolo Machiavelli were able to distribute their works much more easily and cheaply because of the rise of the printed book.

Alas, the Italian Renaissance could not last forever, and beginning in 1494 with the French invasion of Italian land Italy was plagued by the presence of foreign powers vying for pieces of the Italian peninsula. Finally, in 1527, foreign occupation climaxed with the sack of Rome and the Renaissance collapsed under the domination of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. The economic restrictions placed on the Italian states by Charles V, combined with the censorship the Catholic Church undertook in response to the rising Reformation movement ensured that the spirit of the Renaissance was crushed, and Italy ceased to be the cradle of artistic, intellectual, and economic prosperity.

### **Context**

The Middle Ages, which lasted from the fall of Rome in the late fifth century until the fourteenth century, are (somewhat exaggeratedly and incorrectly) often referred to as the "Dark Ages," due to the relative lack of intellectual and economic progress made during this long period. The Middle Ages were presided over by the Catholic Church, which preached the denial of worldly pleasures and the subjugation of self-expression. During the Middle Ages, European society was defined by the system of feudalism, under which societal classes were hierarchically divided based on their position in the prevailing agrarian economy. This system produced a large number of scattered, self-sufficient feudal units throughout Europe, made up of a lord and his subservient vassals. These feudal lords were constantly in battle during the early middle ages, their armies of peasants facing off to win land for their lords.

However, during the later Middle Ages, this situation changed greatly. The power of the Church declined as monarchies rose up to consolidate feudal manors into powerful city-states and nation-states that often opposed the Church in matters of tax collection and legal jurisdiction. Along with the rise of monarchies came the rise of the money economy. As monarchs brought peace to feudal society, feudal lords concentrated less upon defending their lands and more upon accruing large quantities of cash, with which they improved their style of living and dabbled in the growing market economy. The practice of serfdom declined and former serfs soon became tenant farmers and even landowners rather than subservient slave-like

laborers. As the trade of agricultural and manufactured goods grew in importance, cities also became more important. Strategically located and wealthy cities became populous and modern, and some cities even boasted factories.

Largely because of the simultaneous and related decline of the singular importance of traditional values and the rise of the market economy, the cities of Italy gave birth to the Renaissance. The famous Renaissance historian Jacob Burckhardt argues in his essay, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, that the Renaissance was, as an historical event, the transition from medieval times, during which the focus of all life had been religion, to modern times, in which that focus expanded to include learning, rationality, and realism. Whereas in the Middle Ages, religious salvation had occupied the position of utmost importance, during the Renaissance, humanism, stressing the need for individuals to reach their potential in this world, rose up to accompany and rival the goal of salvation. During the Renaissance, changes also occurred in the political and economic structure of Italy that foreshadowed larger transformations for all of Europe. The Renaissance saw the rise of strong central governments and an increasingly urban economy, based on commerce rather than agriculture.

The results of the Italian Renaissance were far reaching both in temporal and geographical terms. Though the spirit of the Renaissance in Italy was crushed in the mid-sixteenth century, the ideas and ideals of Renaissance thinkers maintained their vibrancy, traveling over the alps to northern Europe where, following Italy's lead, learning, writing, and the arts experienced a great revival in support and importance. The works of art and literature produced in Italy between 1350 and 1550 had a profound impact on the development of Europe during the next centuries, and continue to be considered some of the greatest contributions to society ever produced. The sheer volume of work produced ensures the period a prominent place in history books and museums, but the volume is far surpassed by the talent and splendor with which the artists and writers, funded by generous leaders, created their masterpieces.

Perhaps the greatest immediate impact of the Renaissance was the Reformation, which began in 1517. Although the arguments of the Protestant reformers had been elucidated centuries before, the Reformation could not have happened had the Italian Renaissance not created the climate of passion and intellectualism throughout Europe necessary to allow the challenging of age old values. The Renaissance had seen the behavior of popes come to increasingly parallel the behavior of princes, as they attempted to compete with the gilded city-states around them. The papacy had fallen into corruption on more than one occasion, and the sale of indulgences, essentially pardons for sins, in order to finance the construction of a new St. Peter's basilica, pushed the reformers over the edge and into protest. The Church suffered similarly at the hands of the humanist attack, which through the study of ancient history and documents, had proven many claims made by the Church to be false. The result was a movement that shook the foundations of all of Europe and created a split in Christianity that remains a potent source of conflict even today.

### **Italy in the Mid-Fourteenth Century: The Rise of Humanism (mid 14th century)**

#### **Summary**

The cities of Italy prospered during the late Middle Ages, serving as trading posts connecting Europe to the Byzantine Empire and the Moslem world via the Mediterranean Sea. Commerce enriched and empowered regions in which the feudal system had not taken a strong hold, especially in northern Italy. The most prosperous of these cities--Florence, Venice, and Milan--became powerful city-states, ruling the regions surrounding them. Further south, the Papal States, centered in Rome, gradually grew to rival the wealth of the northern cities, and as the seat of the papacy, exerted a tremendous influence over Italian life and politics. Along with a few other minor centers of wealth and power, including Urbino, Mantua, and Ferrara, these four regions became the cradle of the Renaissance, beginning in the fourteenth century to undergo political, economic, and artistic changes.

The beginning of the Renaissance in the mid-fourteenth century was marked by a turn from medieval life and values dominated by the Church toward the philosophical principles of humanism. The Italian people, especially the educated middle class, became interested in individual achievement and emphasized life in this world, as opposed to preparation for life in the next world, which was stressed by religion. They believed strongly in the potential for individual accomplishment in the arts, literature, politics, and personal life. Individuals began to be encouraged to excel in a wide range of fields and showcase their talents. Renaissance thinkers decried medieval life as primitive and backwards, and looked further back in history, to the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans, for inspiration.

One of the earliest and most prominent humanist writers was Francesco Petrarch, often known as the founder of humanism. Many historians cite April 6, 1341, the date on which Petrarch was crowned Poet Laureate upon the Capitol in Rome, as the true beginning of the Renaissance. Petrarch believed that true eloquence and ethical wisdom had been lost during the Middle Ages, and could only be found by looking to the writings of the ancients, especially Virgil and Cicero. Petrarch wrote extensively, producing poetry, biographies of historical figures, and wrote scores of letters, many of which were eventually published and widely read. One of his most popular letters, "The Ascent of Mount Vertoux," describes his journey to the summit of a mountain, but more importantly, it is an allegory comparing the hardships of the climb to the struggle to attain true Christian virtue.

## **Commentary**

Geography, more than anything else, gave Italy an advantage over northern Europe in regard to potential for amassing wealth and breaking free from the feudal system. Jutting into the Mediterranean Sea, and strategically located between the majority of Europe and the Byzantine Empire, Italian cities had almost no choice but to participate in international trade and the market economy, and to integrate the activities of commerce into daily life. In this way, Italy became exposed to the large-scale flow of both goods and ideas much earlier than most other regions in Europe. Thus, during the later years of the Middle Ages, northern Italy flourished economically and intellectually. Further, because Italy's maintained its market economy while the rest of Europe developed a self-contained barter economy of feudal territories spawned by agrarian life, feudalism did not take hold in northern Italy as it did elsewhere in Europe. In both society and mind, it can be argued, northern Italy was more sophisticated and freer than the rest of Europe.

The history and ideas of the ancient Greeks and Romans, cast into shadow throughout Europe in medieval times, had perhaps remained closer to the surface of contemporary thought in Italy than elsewhere, due to the geographical location of the Italian city-states, which had been built basically on top of the ruins of the Roman Empire. However, this geographical proximity should not be overstated. Even in the city of Rome, the buildings of the empire had fallen into ruin, and many were covered by centuries of waste and overgrowth. It seems unlikely, but even the citizens of Rome who lived in the shadow of the Coliseum and the Pantheon had little sense and less reverence for the history around them during the Middle Ages. The Greek influence on the cities of northern Italy was maintained by the trade with the Byzantine Empire, which had as its byproduct the flow of ideas and history. The Greek influence grew throughout the late fourteenth century and into the fifteenth, as the Ottoman Turks increasingly threatened Constantinople, the center of the Byzantine Empire, which finally fell in 1453. This constant pressure forced many Greeks into refuge in northern Italy, which benefited greatly from the treasures and knowledge of ancient Greece that these refugee/immigrants they brought with them. Many Italian and Greek contemporaries commented that it seemed Constantinople had not fallen at all, but simply been transplanted to Florence.

The influence of the revival of interest in Greek and Roman history is undeniable, and contributed greatly to the spirit of the times. Petrarch's writings demonstrate that while the intellectual focus of the time was evolving and changing to reflect this influence, the primary aspect of medieval life, the Church, remained powerful, and religion continued to exert an extraordinary power over the thoughts and actions of individuals. Petrarch and many other Renaissance intellectuals thus often described feelings of being torn between two sides of their personalities. Petrarch, like many Renaissance intellectuals, was comfortable in the seclusion of pious monastery life, but he also loved to travel. He believed in the Christian ideal of self-denial, but also enjoyed the pleasures of the world. He advocated study and learning, but feared that the accumulation of worldly knowledge might prevent him from achieving salvation. This was a common dilemma for Renaissance thinkers, as the principles of humanism rose up to rival the doctrines of the Church.

## **Florence and the Medici (1397-1495)**

### **Summary**

Florence is often named as the birthplace of the Renaissance. The early writers and artists of the period sprung from this city in the northern hills of Italy. As a center for the European wool trade, the political power of the city rested primarily in the hands of the wealthy merchants who dominated the industry. These merchants built enormous gilded mansions in the city, villas in the country, and contributed to the construction of grand cathedrals, spawning the physical rebirth of the city. A spirit of competition developed between the rich merchants, who often competed with each other to see who could commission the grandest buildings and the finest works of art. Competition augmented the fervor with which the city entered into the Renaissance.

The Medici family, which controlled Florence throughout much of the Renaissance, played a large part in the patronage of the arts and the political development of the city. In 1397, Giovanni de Medici, the banker to the Papal Court, established headquarters in Florence. As a wealthy and influential citizen, Giovanni had virtually no choice but to participate in public life, holding almost every political office in Florence at some point. Giovanni died in 1429, leaving behind a legacy of patronage for the arts, an immense fortune, and a son, Cosimo de Medici, who was educated in the principles of humanism. Cosimo de Medici took over the family banking business at the age of forty. A successful businessman, Cosimo built up his father's fortune and established business connections all over Europe.

By 1434, Cosimo de Medici had consolidated power for himself and his family in Florence, all the while maintaining the appearance of democratic government. Cosimo clung to his position as a private citizen, but it was clear to all that he ruled the city of Florence from behind the scenes. Though Cosimo maintained his power through the actions of a manipulative schemer, other aspects of his life were nothing if not admirable. He generously supported the arts, commissioning the building of great cathedrals, and commissioning the best artists of the age to decorate them. He demonstrated great support for education, establishing the Platonic Academy for the study of ancient works. It is estimated that before his death in 1464, Cosimo spent approximately 600,000 gold florins supporting architecture, scholarly learning, and other arts. When



one considers that the unprecedented fortune left to Cosimo by his father totaled only 180,000 florins, this amount is clearly extraordinary.

From Cosimo's death in 1464, his son Piero ruled for five years, and then was succeeded by Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo de Medici, known as 'Il Magnifico.' Lorenzo lived more elegantly than had Cosimo, and enjoyed the spotlight of power immensely. Under his control, the Florentine economy expanded significantly and the lower class enjoyed a greater level of comfort and protection than it had before. During the period of Lorenzo's rule, from 1469 to 1492, Florence became undeniably the most important city-state in Italy and the most beautiful city in all of Europe. The arts flourished, and commerce increased, but Lorenzo let the family business decline, and the Medici were forced to flee Florence two years after his death.

The popular uprising which ousted the Medici family was spawned by a fanatical priest, Girolamo Savonarola. Savonarola had attracted a following since 1491, when he began preaching against the worldliness and paganism of the Renaissance. He called for a return to simple faith. After the Medici were ousted in 1494, Savonarola assumed power, drafting a new draconian constitution, and attempting to revive the medieval spirit. He had burned many books and paintings he considered immoral. In 1495, Savonarola called for the deposal of Pope Alexander VI. By this time very little support remained in Florence for the renegade priest, and he was declared a heretic and burned at the stake. Though the Medici returned, Florence would never return to its former position of preeminence.

### **Commentary**

To carry out the construction of the great architectural works of the times, rich merchants hired the most talented artists and paid them well to do their most inspired work. In constant efforts to maintain their position of power, merchants attempted to marry into nobility, and sometimes more importantly, gain public favor and recognition. To this end, merchants became great patrons of the arts. However, the grand artistic endeavors of the wealthy merchants did not always serve to impress the public. Masses of lower middle-class and lower-class citizens worked long hours at unpleasant tasks in the shadow of the wealthy merchants, known in Florence as "fat people." The lower classes knew there was little chance of their status improving, and watched with resentment as the city around them filled with exhibitions of the wealth of the upper-classes. As a result, class struggle was a major aspect of Florentine life, often escalating into violent conflict.

Many recent historians have argued that while the Medici were no doubt influential in the Florentine renaissance their role is often exaggerated by historians who have studied the period. William Roscoe, a historian writing near the turn of the nineteenth century, paints a picture of the Medici as virtually responsible for the entire Renaissance. This type of glorification of the family's power and influence has won for the Medici the great adulation of some, and later, the profound contempt of others, who view their legacy as one of tyrannical central government by a special interest group. However, current historians most often view the ruling family as enlightened patrons who encouraged an existing trend, playing a smaller role in the Renaissance than is often assumed.

The Medici played an ambiguous role in the history of Florence. Despite the appearance of democracy and republican government, the Medici were, in effect, the rulers of the city by heredity. Though the family undertook great measures to preserve its power, the Medici remained private citizens. In fact, Cosimo would often reject those who begged him for favors claiming he could do nothing to help them, being only a private citizen. However, this tongue-in-cheek rejection vastly belied the truth of the situation. The Medici were second only to the Papacy in power during the Renaissance, and likely contributed more to the spirit of the times than that body. Florence was known as the center of the Renaissance, attracting thinkers and artists to the city through the reputation of its benevolent rulers and producing thinkers and artists from the schools sponsored by the Medici and others.

Florence prospered during the Renaissance because of its lines of communication to the world around it. In the late Middle Ages, the city became important as a crossroads for wool traders. Giovanni and Cosimo de Medici used banking to make Florence a crossroads for finance. With these connections established, Florence became a crossroads for ideas. The city was opened up to the ideals and philosophies of distant lands, and absorbed these into the writing and art it produced; that art then flowed freely outward to the rest of Italy and the European continent. The Medici maintained the stability of these connections through financial and political means. The connection they established with the Papacy was particularly beneficial to both Florence and Rome. The two cities, which might have otherwise been rivals, mutually developed under the spirit of cooperation during the Renaissance: Rome provided a destination for many Florentine artists and writers, and Florence benefited from the management of the papal purse.

### **Rome: Papal Control and Early Resurrection (1400-1484)**

#### **Summary**

At the start of the fifteenth century, Rome seemed to be at the end of a long decline. The skyline was littered with the ruins of once spectacular structures. Wild animals ran free through the overgrowth dominating the center of the city. The city that had dominated the entire world centuries earlier was a shadow of its former self. In the first century, Rome had a population of about one million. At the start of the fifteenth century the city held perhaps 25,000. Rome was not a great center of

commerce, and the papacy, which had long sustained the city through its riches and international influence, had moved from Rome to Avignon during the fourteenth century.

In 1420, the papacy returned to Rome under Pope Martin V. During the coming centuries the papacy would rebuild the city, and the Papal States, centered in Rome, would assume a position of great importance in Italian affairs. The papacy closely supervised the Renaissance evolution of Rome, maintaining its economic power, and thus control of the city, through the sale of church offices and taxation of the Papal States. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, papal holdings experienced periodic spurts of support for political independence from church control. But the papal grip was tight, and the destiny of city and church remained inextricably intertwined.

After the return of the papacy, the first step in resurrecting Rome was the ascension of Pope Nicholas V in 1447. As a monk in Tuscany, Nicholas V had been helped financially by the Florentine banker Cosimo de Medici, who had lent him money without asking for collateral. As a result, Nicholas appointed Cosimo Papal banker. Financed by the Medici family, Nicholas set about founding the Vatican library. He collected influential works of the ancient scholars from all corners of the continent. When Constantinople fell in 1453, Nicholas V purchased many of the vast number of Greek volumes left ownerless. He instilled the value of learning at the Vatican, spurring the beginning of intellectualism in Rome. In his eight short years as pope, Nicholas V achieved miracles of destruction and reconstruction in Rome, beginning the changes that would transform Rome into a Renaissance city capable of contending with the splendor of the North.

The Papacy continued to be a force for change in Rome. However, as Rome became wealthier and more powerful corruption in the Papacy grew. The pattern continued throughout the fifteenth century. With the election of Pope Sixtus IV in 1471, the Papacy began a plunge toward moral degradation while Rome itself ascended to the greatest splendor it had achieved since Roman times. Under Sixtus IV, nepotism reached new and corrupt heights. Sixtus' 'nephews' (the papal nephew was a long-standing way of referring to the pope's illegitimate children) were granted influential posts and huge salaries. Sixtus IV even entered into a conspiracy to have the powerful Medici family assassinated when he thought they were getting in one of his nephew's way. This model for papal rule was followed throughout the Renaissance, undermining papal moral authority, but allowing the Papacy to grow politically and economically strong. Yet at the same time, Pope Sixtus IV took great strides to redesign and rebuild Rome, widening the streets and destroying the crumbling ruins. He commissioned the construction of the famed Sistine Chapel and summoned many great Renaissance artists from other Italian states. As Rome was gradually transformed and infused with wealth, artists flocked to the city seeking Roman gold. In receiving it, they redecorated and rebuilt almost all of Rome.

### **Commentary**

The Middle Ages had not been kind to the city of Rome. As the darkness of medieval times had obscured the glory and intellectualism of the Roman Empire, it had also descended physically on the former center of the empire. Citizens of Rome felt little attachment to their historical roots, and thus saw no reason to expend a great deal of energy preserving the city. The glorious buildings of Rome thus began their long decline, at the mercy of looters and thieves. Without the protection of the citizens, the buildings began to crumble and many became less and less visible as dirt and waste built up around them. The fourteenth century schism in the Catholic Church, which caused the Papacy to move its headquarters to Avignon, was the final crushing blow for Rome, which suffered from the removal of wealth and power and became a city of poverty and sadness. The Romans of the fourteenth century had forgotten the glory of centuries past and saw no hope of ascending to new heights in the present. They watched as the northern cities began to flourish during the late Middle Ages due to the rise of commerce, and many emigrated in the hope of bettering their position in life.

Finally, in 1420, the first glimmer of hope appeared for Rome to catch up to its northern rivals. The Papacy returned to Rome and brought with it the wealth and prestige Rome needed to ascend once again to great heights. The pope came to power in a situation far different from that of any other monarch. The papacy was responsible not only for the international Catholic Church, whose components were inextricably bound to politics all over Europe, but also headed the government of the turbulent Papal States in Italy. This was often cause for conflicts of interest that the pope had to address in such a manner as to accommodate the needs of as many of his constituents as possible. Further, the pope had to make these frequent tough decisions without the backing of a royal family, a strong support system upon which every other monarch in Europe depended. Having no official direct heirs, the pope often turned to Papal nephews, who, while claimed to be the children of his brothers and sisters, were more often the illegitimate children of the pope himself. During the Renaissance, the importance of the nephew (nephew) as an aid and confidant grew greatly, and the Papal nephew was often the recipient of the pope's good will, receiving influential positions and large salaries. While nepotism was common practice among the Renaissance popes, most popes did little harm by it. Others, however, like Sixtus IV, substantially weakened the moral authority of the Papacy and turned many of his advisors and cardinals against him.

Perhaps even more important than the return of the Papacy to Rome was the connection established with Florence by appointing Cosimo de Medici Papal banker. If Florence benefited from its role in the handling of Roman gold, Rome benefited even more from the infusion of Florentine ideas, and eventually immigrants. In this way, Rome rode the tide of the Renaissance that had grown strong in Florence, absorbing the principles of humanism and the new intellectualism

flowing from the north along the pipeline of communications established for financial purposes. By the latter fifteenth century Rome could finally be said to have become a peer of the northern city-states, and its power showed no sign of fading.

## **Rome: The Depths of Corruption and the Rise of the Golden Age**

### **Summary**

The already corrupt Papacy reached perhaps its ultimate depths during the reign of Rodrigo Borgia, who was elected to the papacy in 1492 after the death of the generally unnoteworthy Innocent VIII, and who assumed the name Pope Alexander VI. Borgia, a Spaniard, had been at the center of Vatican affairs for 30 years as a Cardinal. When he became pope, myth and legend quickly rose up around his family. Alexander VI had four acknowledged children, three males and one female. Alexander VI was himself known as a corrupt pope bent on his family's political and material success, to an even greater extent than Sixtus IV had been. It was no secret that Alexander VI's oldest son Cesare, was a murderer, and had killed many of his political opponents. Lucrezia Borgia, Alexander VI's daughter, was married three times in the pope's efforts to create beneficial alliances. Under Alexander VI, the Papacy continued to grow politically and economically strong, but the means by which it grew were much questioned throughout Italy.

Alexander VI died in 1503, and was succeeded by Pope Julius II. Under Julius II, both the city of Rome and the Papacy entered a Golden Age. Julius II continued the consolidation of power in the Papal States, encouraged the devotion to learning and writing in Rome begun by Pope Nicholas V, and, foremost, continued the process of rebuilding Rome physically. The most prominent project among many was the rebuilding of St. Peter's basilica, one of the most sacred buildings in Christianity. The creation of a new St. Peter's, and indeed a new Rome, taxed the city. Ancient structures were demolished to make room and building materials for the new buildings of the city.

Artists flocked to Rome during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to study the ruins and contribute to the new structures of Rome, striving to connect the new with the style of the ancient. Many took architectural ideas gleaned from the study of ancient Rome to the cities of the North, and Florence, Milan, and Venice soon showed the signs of Roman influence. Rome received its final push to renaissance glory from Pope Leo X, second son of Lorenzo de Medici. He came to the papal throne in 1513, following Julius II. He was at ease in social situations, a skilled diplomat, demonstrated great skill as an administrator, and was an intelligent and beneficent patron of the arts. He encouraged scholarly learning, and supported the theatre, an art form considered to be of ambiguous morality until that time. Most prominently, he supported the visual arts of painting and sculpture. He is well known for his patronage of Raphael, whose paintings played a large role in the redecoration of the Vatican. Under Leo X, the ruins of Rome began to be more effectively preserved, and metaphorically, so did the morality of the Papacy. When he died in 1521, Rome's Golden Age effectively ended, and the Renaissance as a whole began to fade.

### **Commentary**

Rodrigo Borgia, later Alexander VI, has assumed the role of the archetypical Renaissance pope. Historians cite his exploits as pontiff as representative of the nepotism and corruption that plagued the Papacy throughout the Renaissance period. Certainly, the effect Alexander had upon Italy and upon the popular view of the Papacy cannot be denied. Even in his own time, the Borgia family took on legendary status in Italy as cruel and manipulative monsters. Many saw the rise of Rodrigo Borgia to the papal throne as a sign of impending demise for the Catholic Church. However, both Italy and the Catholic Church survived Alexander VI's reign, and perhaps even learned some valuable lessons, for Julius II and Pope Leo X reversed the slide of the Papacy and ushered in the Golden Age of Rome, during which both the city and its rulers were admired and respected, reversing the trend under which the Papacy had slipped into moral degradation while the physical city itself rose to new heights.

The main project Pope Julius II undertook was the destruction and rebuilding of St. Peter's basilica, the oldest and most sacred building in all of Christianity, containing the tomb of St. Peter and of many past popes. Many questioned and opposed the wisdom of the project, but Julius II insisted that the building was in desperate need of repair and should be replaced with a structure more worthy of the glory of its purpose. Once he began the planning and destruction, he proceeded with zeal, never second-guessing his decision. The destruction and rebuilding of St. Peter's soon became known throughout Italy as a symbol of the descent and resurrection of Rome.

The rebuilding of Rome was undertaken at great cost, especially to the memoirs of the past. Since the fall of Rome, popes and princes had treated Rome as a vast quarry from which to extract treasure and building materials. The Coliseum is the greatest monument to this destructive habit. For centuries, Romans hacked away at the colossal structure, harvesting material for foundations and marble inlay, and destroying one of the greatest architectural creations of human history. Even so, the Coliseum remains the largest structure in Rome. Many other buildings suffered a similar fate, and were severely damaged, if not completely destroyed, before the spirit of antiquarianism that was revived during Pope Leo X's reign saved many of the remains of ancient Rome. Among Romans the passion for antiquarianism was not an intellectual exercise as it

was elsewhere, but rather a reaffirmation of their lost status of glory. Romans began to grasp the details of their real, rather than legendary, past.

Pope Leo X oversaw the Golden Age, the rise of humanism and antiquarianism to its Renaissance apex. He was perhaps the closest thing to the enlightened princes of the northern Italian states that the Papacy saw during the Renaissance, a fact not surprising in light of his Medici lineage. He proved a gifted administrator and a thoughtful and generous patron of the arts. He inherited the staunch project of rebuilding St. Peter's basilica, which he undertook determinedly in the name of the Church. Incidentally, this greatest of Renaissance Popes also made the decision that turned out to be one of the Church's greatest blunders. In an effort to finance the tremendous undertaking of St. Peter's Basilica, Leo X authorized the sale of indulgences to finance construction. Indulgences were basically pardons for sin. Their sale was the final act in a long string of offenses triggering the Protestant Reformation, a movement which created a schism in Christianity so large that it dominated history for centuries, and whose effects have played and still play varied, nuanced, and fundamental roles in the modern world.

## **Venice and Milan (1300-1499)**

### **Summary**

Situated on the Adriatic Sea, Venice traded with the Byzantine Empire and the Moslem world extensively. During the late thirteenth century, Venice was the most prosperous city in all of Europe. At the peak of its power and wealth, it had 36,000 sailors operating 3,300 ships, dominating Mediterranean commerce. During this time, Venice's leading families vied with each other to build the grandest palaces and support the work of the greatest and most talented artists. The city was governed by the Great Council, which was made up of members of the most influential families in Venice. The Great Council appointed all public officials and elected a Senate of 200 to 300 individuals. The Senate then chose the Council of Ten, a secretive group which held the utmost power in the administration of the city. One member of the great council was elected 'doge,' or duke, the ceremonial head of the city.

The Venetian doge ruled for life under a system of constitutional monarchy. The Doge of Venice ruled in great splendor, and laws were passed in his name, but his power was severely limited by the Great Council, and most notably, the Council of Ten. In 1423, Francesco Fosari became doge. He ruled with excessive grandeur and exercised far greater power than had past doges, aggressively pursuing a policy of western expansion. Many in the Great Council thought he had usurped too great a degree of power. To torment and control the doge, the Council of Ten falsely accused his son, Jacopo, of treason, and began a long process during which Jacopo was exiled, readmitted, tortured, and exiled again, all the while refusing to allow the doge to resign. Finally, when the Council of Ten was satisfied that its message had gotten across, they forced Fosari to resign, affirming its power over the monarch.

Throughout the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Venice was assailed at sea by the Ottoman Turks and on land by the so-called Holy League against Venice, which sought to knock Venice from its pedestal of arrogance. The city survived the onslaught, however, by relying on its strength in sea trade.

Milan, the most northern of the major Italian city-states, came to dominate the Po River valley. The city's strategic location along trade lines and as a gateway to Italy from the north necessitated a strong military state. Due to the need for strong leadership, Milan became a strong monarchy under a succession of powerful dukes. The Visconti family ruled as dukes almost continuously from 1317 to 1447, maintaining the stability of the volatile region through military might. At the height of their power they controlled nearly all of northernmost Italy. In 1447 the last Visconti died, and the Milanese attempted to install a republic. The republic proved unable to protect the city's military interests, and in 1450, Francesco Sforza, a professional soldier, seized control of the government. His family would rule Milan for years to come. The most well known of his descendents, Ludovico Sforza, played the part of the archetypical Italian Renaissance prince, surrounding himself with intrigue and corruption. Though Ludovico was not the rightful duke of Milan and was known to use coercion and manipulation to achieve his political goals, for a time the city of Milan flourished in his care. Under Ludovico, known as 'Il Moro,' Milan was extraordinarily wealthy and its citizens participated in a splendid and excessive social culture. Artists such as Leonardo da Vinci were attracted to the glamour and wealth of Milan and flocked to the city in search of commissions.

In the late 15th century, in an effort to reduce the troublesome power of his in-laws and enemies, the royal family of Naples, Ludovico promised King Charles VIII of France free passage through Milan and into Naples. The French invasion of 1494 failed, but in 1499 another French expedition moved into Italy led by the new king, Louis XII. The French turned on Ludovico and took Milan, moving from there into many other areas of Italy. The glory of the Milanese court collapsed under French control, and the artists who had flocked to the city now fled to new locations.

## **Commentary**

The Venetians were very much resigned to hierarchy in their government and society. In 1315, the Venetian Golden Book of the Nobility listed the names of the most influential families in the city, allowing them membership in the Great Council and disenfranchising all others. During the entire two centuries of the Renaissance, the list of families changed on only a few occasions, and only after great hesitation and deliberation. In other words, the Venetian society was very stable. Even so, the lower classes had less to complain about in the wealthy city than they did in many other areas. The Venetian nobility differed from that of the majority of Europe in that they were often not excessively wealthy, but rather hard working businessmen of varying degrees of success. Thus, the hierarchy of Venice was less oppressive to the lower classes than that in other areas.

The Venetian nobility had a strong commitment to oligarchy and were very wary of those who wished to usurp power from the Great Council. In fact, the Council of Ten, while often working for corrupt and self-serving purposes, frequently worked to destroy the ambition of political climbers and would-be usurpers of power. In its maintenance of power, the Council of Ten held monarchy at bay. Though hierarchy was essential to the Venetian way of life, the nobility strongly believed that among their ranks there should be equality and democracy, and, as a group, acted quickly to knock down any member of their class who appeared to feel differently. The destruction of Doge Francesco Fosari assured that the Doge of Venice would never again attempt to assume monarchical power. In the case of Fosari, the Council of Ten acted firmly to reestablish oligarchy, which would last to the end of the Renaissance.

Venice, as a city primarily concerned with commerce and finance, never became a producer of artistic and literary talent; instead, it imported. Artists were attracted to the Venice's wealth, and many immigrated to the city during the Renaissance, including, most prominently, the writer Pietro Aretino and the painter Titian.

Stability was the most important value of Milanese government. Due to Milan's location along trade lines and as the gateway to Northern Italy, Milan's existence as a powerful city-state was precarious and subject to challenge at all times if not maintained authoritatively. The Visconti family asserted Milan's strength throughout the fourteenth and early fifteenth century by defending the region and expanding into other areas, allowing it to flourish economically as a trading post. When the Milanese experimented briefly with a republican system of government between 1447 and 1450 they found that it did not provide the stability necessitated by Milan's military concerns, and many welcomed the government takeover by Francesco Sforza, a soldier by trade. However, Francesco's descendents proved unable to maintain the stability and security of the city-state.

Ludovico Sforza presided over a wealthy and powerful Milan, a circumstances that enticed him to enter into corrupt dealings with the goal of increasing his own wealth and power. In one such deal, he allowed French forces to enter Italy by way of Milan, a decision that would eventually be considered by his fellow Italian heads of state as equivalent to surrendering all of Italy. Not only did Ludovico's actions lead to the takeover of Milan by the overpowering French forces, but the French invasion also began a period during which Italy was never free from the imposition of foreign forces. Eventually, these forces would combine to engineer the sack of Rome, the event marking the waning of the Italian Renaissance.

## **Art in the Early Renaissance (1330-1450)**

### **Summary**

In keeping with the spirit of humanism, artists of the early Renaissance strove to portray lifelike human forms with correct proportions and realistic clothing and expressions. Artists developed new techniques to give paintings a more three-dimensional, life-like quality, and commonly studied human and animal anatomy in efforts to better understand their subjects.

The first important painter of the Renaissance was Giotto di Bondone. Giotto painted during the turn of the fourteenth century, breaking away from the Gothic and Byzantine artistic traditions. He deeply studied nature in an effort to infuse his paintings with reality, an effort most notable in his especially realistic facial expressions. In 1334, Giotto was appointed chief architect in Florence, where he remained until his death in 1337. Giotto's innovations made in the portrayal of perspective were improved upon by a later painter, Tommaso Guidi, known as Masaccio (Messy Tom) because of his disheveled appearance. Masaccio is credited with mastering perspective, and was the first Renaissance artist to paint models in the nude, often using light and shadow to define the shape of his models rather than clear lines. Masaccio's best known work is a scene from the Bible called The Tribute Money. Furthering the accomplishments of his predecessors, Sandro Botticelli emerges as a dominant artist during the early Renaissance. One of a circle of artists and scholars sponsored by the Medici in Florence, Botticelli's most famous work, The Birth of Venus, shows the goddess rising from the sea on a conch shell. During the late fifteenth century Botticelli became a follower of the Girolamo Savonarola, and burned many of his paintings with pagan themes.

The Merchants and city officials whose patronage supported the Renaissance artists were frequently more interested in architecture than they were in painting. Therefore, as the city-states of Italy began to develop great wealth during the early fifteenth century, architects and sculptors rose to fame and power. In 1401, Florence held a competition to choose the artist to design and sculpt a pair of bronze doors for the Baptistery, a church honoring St. Paul the Baptist. The winner of the contest, Lorenzo Ghiberti, spent 28 years completing the doors, which, decorated with scenes from the Bible, remain one of the greatest treasures of the Renaissance. Ghiberti developed the techniques of three-dimensional sculpture, and greatly influenced all Italian sculpture of the Renaissance.

The loser of the contest, Filippo Brunelleschi, traveled to Rome, where he studied Roman ruins and developed mathematical formulas to be used in architecture. In 1417 he again competed against Ghiberti for the right to design the dome of the cathedral of Florence. He won the competition. The dome he designed, combining the modern trends in architecture and the style of ancient Rome, still dominates the Florentine skyline, and is considered one of the great architectural masterpieces of all time. In terms of sculpture, the acknowledged master of the early Renaissance was Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, better known as Donatello. Donatello studied under both Ghiberti and Brunelleschi, and went on to create several masterpieces for Cosimo de Medici in Florence. His most important work is the David, which depicts the Hebrew king in the classical style of a Greek god, and was the first freestanding nude figure sculpted since the Roman era. Donatello went on to create the first bronze statue of the Renaissance, showing an incredibly realistic soldier on horseback.

### **Commentary**

During the Renaissance, artists benefited from the patronage of rich merchants and rulers, and were well known during their own times, unlike the anonymous artists who had produced works in guilds during the middle ages. Great fame and influence was conferred upon the great artists of the day, and they were celebrated wherever they traveled. This fame convinced many artists that they deserved special privileges and consideration, which they were often granted.

The artists of the early Renaissance were both liberated by the patronage of the wealthy and constricted in their choice of subject matter. Despite the changes wrought by humanism, the Italian population remained, more than anything else, highly religious. Wealthy patrons most often commissioned works of art that were in some way related to the Catholic Church, to which the wealthy often donated grand cathedrals. Altarpieces and religious murals were common among the works created during the early Renaissance, and artists were often confined to the Bible in choosing their own subject matter.

Nevertheless, artists experienced great freedom to develop new techniques and work with new materials, as can be seen by the groundbreaking work of Giotto and Ghiberti.

Botticelli's experience was indicative of the tension all Renaissance artists felt between traditional values, represented by the Church, and the progressive (and simultaneously antiquarian) nature of Renaissance art. Botticelli was fascinated by the ideology of Neoplatonism, which sought to blend the teachings and traditions of Plato with the teachings of Christianity. Art historians claim that *The Birth of Venus* is a clear example of applied Neoplatonism. It has been described as "an allegory of the innocence and truth of the human soul naked to the winds of passion and about to be clothed in the robe of reason." Like Botticelli, the artistic community often attempted to align its ideals of learning, reason, and self-expression with religious dogma. Yet as can be seen in the example of Botticelli, the alignment was not easy: the two ways of thought often seemed antithetical and irreconcilable. The constant desire to conform to the doctrines of the Church, along with the persistence of religious themes in Renaissance art, is a testament to the continuing importance of the Church in Renaissance culture.

Despite the similarities to medieval art surrounding subject matter, there can be no doubt that that Renaissance artists broke the static mold of medieval art. What is most remarkable about the art of the Renaissance is the constant evolution of techniques and materials, with each generation of artists building upon the accomplishments of the last. While technique, style, and materials stayed relatively constant throughout much of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance was a period of rapid change and development. Giotto was the first Renaissance artist to dabble in the techniques of perspective. His methods and ideas changed the face of art significantly, but no sooner had they been studied and absorbed by the artistic community than Masaccio and others built upon and improved the techniques. Similarly, Ghiberti and Brunelleschi pushed each other through competition to new artistic heights. Donatello studied under each of the older masters and incorporated the developments they contributed to the art form with his own talents and ideas, producing the most admired works of the era. This rapid evolution and the continuing advance of artistic techniques and talent was one of the primary characteristics of the Renaissance.

### **Art in the High Renaissance (1450-1550)**

#### **Summary**

The artists of the High Renaissance, which is loosely defined as the period from 1450 to 1550, built upon the foundation laid by their predecessors. The best-known artists of the Italian Renaissance grew famous during the High Renaissance. Wealthy patrons continued to enthusiastically support these artists as they traveled around Italy in search of commissions to create their masterpieces.

## **Leonardo Da Vinci**

Perhaps the most influential figure of the entire Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci epitomized the renaissance ideal. He was a talented painter and sculptor. His interest in science was boundless and his work in that field unprecedented. In 1482, Lorenzo de Medici purchased a lyre which Leonardo had fashioned in the shape of a horse's skull, intending to send it to Ludovico Sforza of Milan. Leonardo asked to personally deliver the gift, and when he did, Sforza persuaded him to remain in Milan, where he painted his famous mural *The Last Supper* on the wall of a monastery. Leonardo remained in Milan seventeen years, returning to Florence in 1499 when the French invaded Milan. In Florence, he became chief military engineer, a position he held until 1513, when he went to Rome in search of a commission from the pope. Pope Leo X preferred the work of the painter Raphael, however, and Leonardo moved on, becoming court painter to Francis I of France, where he remained until his death in 1519. In addition to *The Last Supper*, Leonardo's best known work is the *Mona Lisa*, the most famous portrait ever painted. Many of da Vinci's greatest ideas remained just that, and he recorded his plans for future inventions and his notes on life around him in notebooks that have given historians insight into the true extent of his genius.

## **Michaelangelo Buonarroti**

Michaelangelo Buonarroti enrolled in the school for sculptors established by Lorenzo de Medici in Florence, when he was only thirteen, and soon attracted the attention of Lorenzo himself. Michaelangelo lived for a while in the Medici palace as a member of the family, absorbing the principles of humanism and Neoplatonism that freely flourished there. Later, Michaelangelo, inspired by the belief that he had a divine calling, traveled to Rome, where, at age 23, he carved the *Pieta*, a bust of the Virgin Mary, bringing him instant fame. When he returned to Florence in 1501, he was commissioned to sculpt the Hebrew King David, just as Donatello had. Michaelangelo's *David* became the symbol of Florence's prospering artists, and remains there today. In 1508, Michaelangelo began his work decorating the walls and ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The project was arduous and time-consuming, and when he finished he had painted over 300 human figures. The painting of the ceiling has assumed legendary status and is considered one of the great artistic undertakings of all time.

## **Raphael**

Raphael, born Raffaello Santi, was the leading painter of the Renaissance. In 1508, Pope Julius II summoned him to Rome to decorate the papal apartments in the Vatican. The most widely known of the series of murals and frescoes he painted is the *School of Athens*, which depicts an imaginary assembly of famous philosophers. Raphael maintained the favor of the Julius II and his successor Leo X, and thus painted for papal commissions all his life. He was widely renowned as the greatest painter of his age, and considered so important by his contemporaries that when he died at the premature age of 37 he was buried in the Pantheon.

## **Titian**

The most prominent Venetian artist of the Renaissance, Titian was born Tiziana Vecellio, in the Italian Alps. Early in life he moved to Venice to study art. Titian distinguished himself through the use of bright colors and new techniques that imbued those colors with greater subtlety and depth. Between 1518 and 1532 he served as court painter in Ferrara, Mantua, and Urbino. In 1532, he became the official painter to the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, in which role he dabbled mainly in portraiture.

## **Commentary**

If the artists of the early Renaissance had introduced and worked to perfect the techniques and style of Renaissance art, it was the artists of the High Renaissance who mastered these techniques, creating the most intricate and beautiful works of the entire period. Earning even greater fame than their predecessors, the artists of the High Renaissance were able to pick and choose their commissions, often wandering from city to city in search of favorable projects. Meanwhile, wealthy patrons competed fiercely to support these famed artists and take credit as the financiers of the masterpieces they created. Leonardo da Vinci took full advantage of this freedom, traveling to many locales during his career, leaving every place he visited awed by his presence. Leonardo has been hailed as one of the greatest geniuses in all of history, praised both for his artistic talent and his brilliant mind. Da Vinci always carried notebooks with him, which he filled with notes, sketches, and diagrams. His notebooks, recently published, contain ideas for such inventions as the scaling ladder, rotating bridge, submarine, armored vehicle, and helicopter, none of which were built until decades or centuries later. Leonardo keenly observed the natural world around him, seeking to find out how things worked in order to draw more accurately. He deduced that the rings in a cross-section of a tree delineate age, developed a theory on the origin of the earth, and dissected and diagramed the organs of the human body. Leonardo, perhaps more than any other Renaissance figure, demonstrated the spirit of humanism, excelling in a wide variety of fields and continually seeking to better himself through knowledge. In fact, the case of Leonardo da Vinci supports the argument that the humanist values of learning, rationality, and reality rose to truly rival and in some cases overshadow the importance of Church doctrines.

However, during the High Renaissance, the Church maintained control over the psyche of the Italian people, and more tangibly, the arts. The Roman Golden Age under Julius II and Leo X provided constant work for the artists of the High

Renaissance, and in fact, the Papacy built up enormous debts in part to finance the commissioning of great artists. Raphael did a great majority of his life's work inside the papal apartments, and Michaelangelo consistently claimed that he had a divine mandate to create art, preferring the Church to all other patrons. Both of these artists played a large part in the rebuilding of Rome, and Michaelangelo, specifically, was heavily involved in the design and construction of the new St. Peter's basilica. Therefore, the art of the High Renaissance remained highly religious in theme, though the extreme humanism exhibited by Leonardo gained strength, portending the further schism between art and the Church, and intellectualism and the Church, which would reach a head in the coming centuries.

## **The Rise of Printing: Literature in the Renaissance (1350-1550)**

### **Summary**

The spirit of the Renaissance was expressed in literature as well as art. The poetry of Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374) powerfully expressed the principles of humanism extremely early in the budding Renaissance. Many scholars, in fact, date the beginning of the Renaissance to Petrarch's anointment as Poet Laureate. Giovanni Boccaccio stood at an almost similar stature as Petrarch. A Florentine, Boccaccio is most noted for writing the Decameron, a series of 100 stories set in Florence during the Black Death that struck the city in 1348. Boccaccio explores, in these stories, the traditions and viewpoints of various social classes, greatly based on actual observation and study.

Just as art and architecture flourished in the Renaissance, so too did literature. And similarly, just as art and architecture benefited from new techniques, literature experienced a massive boon from technology. In 1454, Johann Gutenberg published the Gutenberg Bible, the first book printed by a machine using moveable type. The moveable-type printing press vastly changed the nature of book publishing, simultaneously increasing printing volume and decreasing prices. The process of printing spread throughout Europe, and was used extensively in Italy, where the humanist writers of the Renaissance had long sought a way to more easily express their ideas to the public. During the Renaissance, writers produced a greater volume of work than ever before, and with the lower prices and increased numbers of texts, these works reached an audience of unprecedented size. Literature became a part of the lives of the larger public, not just the few elite able to afford books, as had been the case before the advent of the printing press.

Many Renaissance writers studied the works of the ancient Romans and Greeks, coming to new, modern conclusions based upon their studies. One such writer was Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. In 1484, Pico, as he was known, became a member of Florence's Platonic Academy. There he studied and tried to reconcile the teachings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In 1486, he published a collection of 900 philosophical treatises, in which his conclusions often differed from those of the Roman Catholic Church. Pico's best known work, the "Oration on the Dignity of Man," describes his belief, contrary to church dogma, that people have free will and are able to make decisions affecting their destinies. Not surprisingly, the Church declared Pico a heretic; he was only saved from demise by the intervention of Lorenzo de Medici.

Niccolo Machiavelli rose to even greater literary prominence, and a prominence with a legacy more durable than Pico's. A Florentine statesman, Machiavelli rose to prominence during the Florentine Republic under Savonarola in 1498. After the Medici regained power in 1512, Machiavelli retired from government (involuntarily), moved to his estate outside Florence, and began to write. Convinced from his experiences in government that Italy could survive only if unified under a strong leader, in 1513, Machiavelli published *The Prince*, the best known piece of writing of the Renaissance period. Perhaps also intended as a means to curry favor with the Medici leader of the moment, *The Prince* was intended as a guidebook for the eventual leader of all of Italy and as a reference for rulers everywhere. In its pages, Machiavelli argued that it was better for a leader to be feared than loved, and advocated that a "prince" should do anything necessary to maintain his power and achieve his goals.

### **Commentary**

The Renaissance focus on learning and the invention of printing in Europe fed each other. The search for more accessible, cheaper books led to the invention and proliferation of the printing press, which, in turn, led to the wide institutionalization of literature as an essential aspect of Renaissance life. In the eleventh century, the Chinese had developed a system of movable type that a printer could use and reuse. It is uncertain whether Gutenberg and his colleagues knew of this process or not. In any case, the final result was the same--books no longer had to be produced by the long and arduous process of transcription. With the printing press, books could be produced quickly and in mass quantity. Before long, printing presses had been constructed and were widely in use throughout Europe, bringing the price of books down and allowing more and more authors to be published and read. The invention of the printing press was a major step toward bringing the Renaissance, long the province of the wealthy alone, to the middle classes. In turn, as literacy rose, the middle class became involved in the intellectual discourse of the times, and opportunities for middle class contributions to the canon of literature, while still fairly slim, grew. The power of literature to encompass many classes was demonstrated by the Decameron, in which Boccaccio explores the habits and morality of the various classes of Florence.



As in the realm of art, writers felt a great tension between progressive humanism and Church doctrine, a tension that sometimes grew to the point of conflict. Pico was not the only writer of the times to be declared a heretic, as many wrestled with the fact that the factual findings of science and the philosophical conclusions of humanism did not correspond with the teachings of the Church. This undercurrent of dissent can be seen in many works throughout the Renaissance but is perhaps demonstrated in its clearest and most blatant form in Pico's "Oration on the Dignity of Man." Pico believed that man had free will and could make decisions, and that the study of philosophy prepared man to recognize the truth and make better decisions. He also believed that each individual could commune directly with God, and that the priesthood had falsely claimed this singular power. Pico's ideas, along with the arguments of others, became central to Protestant thought during the Reformation.

Pico's experience demonstrates the continuing power of the Church over expression during the Renaissance. However, it also demonstrates the current of power which rose to rival this continuing power, in the form of Lorenzo de Medici, whose intervention saved Pico from exile and perhaps even death. Lorenzo was the consummate politician and patron of the arts, a wealthy power player considered to be one of the most influential men in the world. His intervention on behalf of Pico shows that due to his place in the Renaissance world, which centered on the rise of commerce and the simultaneous rise in arts and literature, he was capable of influencing the most powerful and rigid institution in the world, the Catholic Church. This says much about the changing balance of power in the Renaissance.

Niccolo Machiavelli's writing, while it did not earn him condemnation as a heretic, was nonetheless novel and controversial. The Prince clearly hammers home the concept that a ruler must be strong and awe-inspiring in order to be successful. It argued for the consolidation of power by any means possible. European rulers have, for centuries, consulted The Prince as a handbook, and it is often said to have had more influence on modern politics than any other work. With the publication of his book Machiavelli's fame and infamy grew to such extents that his own name became a term: ruthless, calculating antagonists of literature and drama quickly became known as Machiavellian villains.

## **Women in the Renaissance**

### **Summary**

The women of the Renaissance, like women of the Middle Ages, were denied all political rights and considered legally subject to their husbands. Women of all classes were expected to perform, first and foremost, the duties of housewife. Peasant women worked in the field alongside their husbands and ran the home. The wives of middle class shop owners and merchants often helped run their husbands' businesses as well. Even women of the highest class, though attended by servants, most often engaged in the tasks of the household, sewing, cooking, and entertaining, among others. Women who did not marry were not permitted to live independently. Instead, they lived in the households of their male relatives or, more often, joined a convent.

A few wealthy women of the time were able to break the mold of subjugation to achieve at the least fame, if not independence. Lucrezia Borgia, the daughter of Pope Alexander VI, was one such woman. As pope, Alexander VI attempted to use Lucrezia as a pawn in his game of political power. To further his political ambitions he arranged her marriage to Giovanni Sforza of Milan when she was thirteen, in 1493. Four years later, when he no longer needed Milan's political support to as great a degree, he annulled the marriage after spreading false charges of Sforza's impotence. Alexander VI then married Lucrezia to the illegitimate son of the King of Naples. The Borgia legend stipulates that Cesare Borgia, Lucrezia's older brother, murdered Lucrezia's son produced by this marriage. In 1502, at the age of 22, Lucrezia was again divorced and remarried, this time to the duke of Ferrara, Alfonso d'Este. She remained in Ferrara until her death in 1519, where she became a devoted wife and mother, an influence in Ferrara politics and social life, and a noted patron of the arts.

Lucrezia's sister-in-law, Isabella d'Este, was perhaps the strongest, most intelligent woman of the Renaissance period. She mastered Greek and Latin and memorized the works of the ancient scholars. She frequently gave public performances, in which she demonstrated her skill at singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments. In 1490 she was married to Francesco Gonzaga, the duke of Mantua, and the pair shared a happy and loving relationship. Isabella exerted a great amount of influence over the Mantua court, and it was due in great part to her presence that Mantua became known as a major center of wit, elegance, and artistic genius. After her husband, the duke, was captured in battle, she ruled Mantua herself. She also influenced the economic development of the region, encouraging the development of the textile and clothing industry that became the cornerstone of the Mantua economy. As a patron of the arts, Isabella collected many paintings, sculptures, manuscripts, and musical instruments, and encouraged Mantuans to support the arts.

### **Commentary**

The theme of the life of a Renaissance woman was subjugation. A woman was controlled by her parents throughout her childhood, and then handed directly into the hands of a husband, whom she most likely had not chosen herself, and who

would exercise control over her until her death or his. Women who did not marry for whatever reason were likewise granted no independence of thought and action, living under subjugation in the home of a male relative or in a convent, where a woman could become a nun, the only career accessible to the gender. Women were frequently discouraged from participating in the arts and sciences, and thus the world will never know the full literary and artistic potential of an age in which the spirit of expression was perhaps the defining characteristic.

Only women of the highest class were given the chance to distinguish themselves, and this only rarely. For the most part, the wives of powerful men were relegated to the tasks of sewing, cooking, and entertaining. In history, women provide no more than a backdrop to the political and social story of the Renaissance. For example, one can find very little written about the women of the Medici line, though there must have been women if the line were to continue. Thus, one concludes that even access to the most powerful men in the world did not necessarily allow a woman to distinguish and express herself. The case of Lucrezia Borgia is interesting in that it seemed to her contemporaries that she was one of the most liberated and empowered women in all of Italy. Certainly, her mobility, from place to place and husband to husband, was more than any Renaissance woman could hope for. The details of her marriages garnered for her the common perception as both a powerful and devious woman. However, upon historical review, it becomes quite clear that Lucrezia was not in control of her life so much as she was a pawn in Alexander VI's master plan for the success and wealth of the Borgia family. It is most likely that she resisted the pattern of marriage and annulment which her father forced upon her during her early life, despite the advantages of mobility and influence it bestowed upon her. In fact, history shows that Lucrezia only truly exercised power after she had entered into a happy marriage with Alfonso d'Este, who allowed her to participate to a great extent in the politics and society of Ferrara. Thus Lucrezia Borgia's life may be looked on as demonstrative of the situation of women in the Renaissance, in that even the illusion of power which surrounded her in her early years was created by a man, her father, who controlled her life, and the small measure of actual power which she was eventually granted grew out of her traditional position as a devoted wife and mother.

Isabella d'Este differed from Lucrezia Borgia in that she broke down the barriers to power and influence by virtue of her own independent spirit, strength, and talent. One is led to believe by accounts of her character that she needed the approval of no man to live in the style that she chose. Isabella was remarkable in that she was one of few women who expressed themselves in the arts to any extent, and, even more so, in that she in effect became the first female head of an Italian city state after her husband was captured in war. Isabella gladly assumed the role of devoted wife, but did not allow that role to restrict the realm in which she held influence, proving herself capable in many fields. Isabella stands out as one of the only strong female representatives of the spirit of humanism.

## **The Waning of the Renaissance (1499-1550)**

### **Summary**

As French forces began to prey on the Italian states in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, Rome became the focus of Italy's collective defense, and the pope the architect of that defense. Milan had fallen, and the northern states were under pressure, but they could survive as long as Rome remained strong. Pope Leo X did an admirable job in this role. A gifted administrator, he effectively maintained stability in Rome, the central Italian state. However, his successor, Pope Clement VII, while a decent and moral pope, was a failure as a politician. To make things worse, during his reign international conditions became increasingly complex and threatening. When Clement VI ascended to the Papal throne in 1523 there was, in Europe, for the first time in centuries, a great emperor. Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, was heir to Spain, Burgundy, the Netherlands, Austria, and Naples, as well as a claimant to Milan by imperial right. Meanwhile, France's Francois I insisted on ruling Milan and Naples himself. England's Henry VIII left Italy alone, content to sit back and leave Italy to be destroyed by these powers. In Florence, the Medici were losing their hold on the city.

Spanish and French armies fought on Italian soil, debating claims to pieces of Italian territory and demanding that the Pope declare for one side or the other. Pope Clement VII proved himself incapable of making a steadfast decision, changing his mind sometimes on less than an hour's notice. After one particularly sudden and ill-advised change, Charles V ranted, "I will come into Italy and revenge myself on the fool of a pope."

The 'imperial' army of some 22,000 Spaniards, Italians, and Germans, assembled in Lombardy during the winter of 1526 to 1527. The army was not truly controlled by any single leader, but after defeating the French in a major set battle, they demanded payment, a little of which they received from Spain, some of which they took from the broken Milanese, who had been subjugated to Imperial-Spanish rule. Much of the demanded payment went unmet. The army, angry and hungry, moved south. Spain, meanwhile, was negotiating with the Pope over payment of a ransom the Imperial army had demanded from Rome. Clement VII, a disastrous negotiator and decision-maker, refused to pay the ransom, and the talks went nowhere. On May 5, 1527, the army arrived at the walls of Rome, starving and still unpaid. The Pope denied a final request for the ransom, since he believed that the small Roman professional force of 5,000, aided by volunteers, could fend off the starving army due to the Romans' advantage in artillery. At midnight, the Roman citizens were summoned to arms and the army of mercenaries began its attack. By one p.m., thirteen hours later, the mercenaries held the city.

The settlement of Bologna in 1530 placed most of Italy in Spanish hands. Venice, Florence, and the Papal States retained their independence, but were compelled to cooperate with the Spanish to their great inconvenience in order to survive. Under high taxes and tight restrictions, the Italian economy crumbled and intellectual and artistic production declined. The power of the Church declined under the pressure of the Protestant Reformation, which had begun in 1517. That power suffered still further when Henry VIII broke with Rome in 1532 over his desire for a divorce from Catherine of Aragon. The Church reacted drastically in Italy, censoring writing and art and reaffirming the doctrines of Catholicism more rigidly than they had during the Renaissance period. Gradually, the spirit of the Renaissance was sapped and replaced with a more somber outlook. Though much of the change wrought by the Italian Renaissance proved irreversible and spread to other parts of Europe (the Northern Renaissance), by 1550, the rate of change had slowed to a stop in Italy.

### **Commentary**

Fellow Florentine Francesco Vettori wrote of Pope Clement VII, "if one considers the lives of previous popes, one may truly say that, for more than a hundred years, no better man than Clement VII sat upon the throne." Pope Clement VII followed a line of pontiffs who had brought the Papacy to moral degradation with corruption and manipulation. He epitomized what the leader of the Church should be--conscientious, loyal, discreet, devout, and morally upstanding. However, these qualities did little to help him in his role as politician. Such a ruler would have been dangerous at the center of Italian affairs in any time, but the particular situation in which Clement VII found himself upon ascending to the throne accentuated his flaws as a negotiator and decision-maker.

For years the Papacy had been the seat not only of the leader of the Church, but also of shrewd, if not always ethical politicians. Though Pope Sixtus IV and Pope Alexander VI had lived lives of corruption and excess unbefitting a leader of the moral responsibility they held, they, and Rome along with them, had prospered. Leo X had similarly been a talented bargainer and administrator, proving that such skills could exist without the moral transgressions of his predecessors. The Renaissance Papacy was characterized by popes who had devoted themselves more to their role as political leader than that of spiritual figure. This is the real irony of the 1527 fall of Rome, and in truth, all of Italy: at a time that, above all else, demanded a pope who could be an international statesman, it had Clement VII, whose qualities were more suited to the neglected role of spiritual leader, and his political power and knowledge limited to Italy alone.

The sack of Rome was, in effect, an accident, ordered by no political leader or general. The imperial forces, supposedly under the control of the French renegade, the Duke of Bourbon, were in reality under no direct control. Rather, the army acted independently, roaming the Italian countryside and, starving and unpaid, setting their sights on the conquest of Rome for reasons of revenge and anger more than as the military extension of a political aim. Nevertheless, the sack of the city took the wind from the sails of the Italian city-states, who were soon resigned to imperial subjugation. The new situation crushed the city-states economy and spirit. In addition, Italy's prime geographical location within the Mediterranean lost some of its importance; after the discovery of America in 1492 the importance of trade routed through Italy steadily declined, leaving the Italian city-states weak and especially vulnerable to the economic restrictions placed upon them by the Spanish. By 1550, the once great trading cities of Florence, Venice, and others, were on the decline, sapped of their wealth by the combined lack of trade combined and the taxes and restrictions of the Spaniards.

Perhaps the greatest finishing blow dealt the Renaissance was the Counter-Reformation initiative pursued by the Church in response to the Protestant movement begun by a German monk, Martin Luther, in 1517. The Counter-Reformation involved a conservative Church backlash. In particular, the Church extended censorship to protect itself against further criticism, thereby stifling any literary and artistic ambitions that still prevailed after the middle of the fifteenth century. Resistance to these measures was weak and sporadic. Authoritarianism triumphed, and a somber pessimism descended upon the once joyous Italian states. Even the style of dress changed to reflect Spanish dominance. The black cap, doublet, hose, and shoes that became the fashion in Italy of the mid-sixteenth century, seemed in their contrast to the bright colors of the Renaissance, the vestments of mourning for the glory and liberty of the Italian Renaissance, now dead.

## You will be tested on this information Monday, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>

### NOTECARD ASSIGNMENT:

**Directions:** You are required to create notecards for the following items. Notecards should be 3X5, **blue** and written in blue or black ink (**do not type**). Please include only one term/person per notecard. Notecards should briefly, but thoroughly, identify and state the significance of the term/person. Additionally, you are to always include the title of an author's or artist's influential written or visual work(s) – any time an artist's or author's work is included it **must be highlighted**. Please number each notecard as it is numbered below. This assignment will be collected on the first day of school.

#### TERMS

1. **Antiquity**
2. **Civic Humanism** –
3. **Chiaroscuro** -
4. **Feudalism** -
5. **Humanism** -
6. **Mannerism** -
7. **Neoplatonism** -
8. **Papal Nephew** -
9. **Secularism**
10. **Vernacular** -

#### PEOPLE

11. **Boccaccio** -
12. **Lucrezia Borgia** -
13. **Botticelli** -
14. **Brunelleschi** -
15. **Baldassare Castiglione** –
16. **Cellini** –
17. **Miguel Cervantes** -
18. **Charles V** -
19. **Desiderius Erasmus** -
20. **Isabella d'Este** -
21. **Leonardo da Vinci** -
22. **Dante** -
23. **Donatello** -
24. **Albrecht Durer** -
25. **Francesco Fosari** -
26. **Ghiberti** -
27. **Giotto** -
28. **Johann Gutenberg** -
29. **Hans Holbein (The Younger)** -
30. **Niccolo Machiavelli** -
31. **Masaccio** -
32. **Cosimo de Medici** -
33. **Lorenzo de Medici** -
34. **Michaelangelo** -
35. **Michel Montaigne** -
36. **Thomas More** –
37. **Pico Mirandola** -
38. **Francesco Petrarch** -
39. **Pope Alexander VI** -
40. **Pope Clement VII** -
41. **Pope Julius II** -
42. **Pope Leo X** -
43. **Pope Nicholas V** -
44. **Pope Sixtus IV** -

- 45. Francois Rabelais -
- 46. Raphael -
- 47. Girolamo Savonarola -
- 48. Ludovico Sforza -
- 49. Titian -
- 50. Lorenzo Valla -
- 51. Giorgio Vasari -