

France, England, and Spain had consolidated their authority, and sovereign monarchical states began to emerge.

Above all, three salient movements of change brought the Middle Ages to an end. The first was the Renaissance, or cultural rebirth, which began in the mid-fourteenth century in the Italian city-states (see Chapter 2). The commercial prosperity of Florence, above all, but also of Venice and other independent city-states made possible this period of extraordinary accomplishment in literature and painting. The invention of printing began to transform one culture after another. Second, the exploration and colonization of the New World would ultimately help end the Mediterranean Sea's role as the center of European prosperity and would lead to Spain's emergence as a world power, along with England and the Netherlands (see Chapters 5 and 6). Colonization brought the establishment of European empires abroad; between 1500 and the late eighteenth century, more than 1.5 million Europeans crossed the ocean to live in the New World. Third, the Reformation (see Chapter 3), which began in the second decade of the sixteenth century, challenged the unity of the Roman Catholic Church and its dominance in much of Europe.

THE RENAISSANCE



In 1508, Pope Julius II summoned Michelangelo from Florence to the papal city of Rome. He commissioned the artist to paint frescoes (paintings on plaster) on the ceiling of the new Sistine Chapel, a ceremonial chapel next to the papal residence in the Vatican. With some reluctance (since he considered himself primarily a sculptor), Michelangelo agreed to undertake the project. He signed a contract that stipulated a payment of 3,000 ducats and began work that very day in May.

During the long, difficult years of intense creativity, Michelangelo often lay on his back, staring at the ceiling (still the best position from which to study his masterpiece), before climbing up the scaffolding to work. His frescoes, depicting Creation, Original Sin, the Flood, and the ancestors of Christ, are a triumph of religious painting. However, Pope Julius II, offended by the nude figures in the *Last Judgment* frescoes, ordered painters to cover the nudes with fig leaves. As a result, Michelangelo left Rome in disgust. He left behind what is arguably the most beautiful pictorial ensemble in Western painting.

Michelangelo's work represents the epitome of art during the Renaissance, a time of cultural rebirth. From about 1330 to 1530, the city-states of the Italian peninsula emerged as the intellectual and artistic centers of Europe. It was a period during which classical texts were rediscovered, thereby reviving the ideas, architecture, arts, and values of ancient Greece and Rome. By celebrating the beauty of nature and the dignity of mankind, Renaissance artists and scholars helped shape the intellectual and cultural history of the modern world. During the fifteenth century, Michelangelo, as well as Leonardo da Vinci and many other Renaissance sculptors and painters, enjoyed the patronage of wealthy families and produced some of the immortal works of the European experience. From about 1490 to 1530, Rome, too, was the center of a final period of artistic innovation, the High Renaissance, during which time the popes, including Julius II, commissioned paintings, sculptures, and churches.

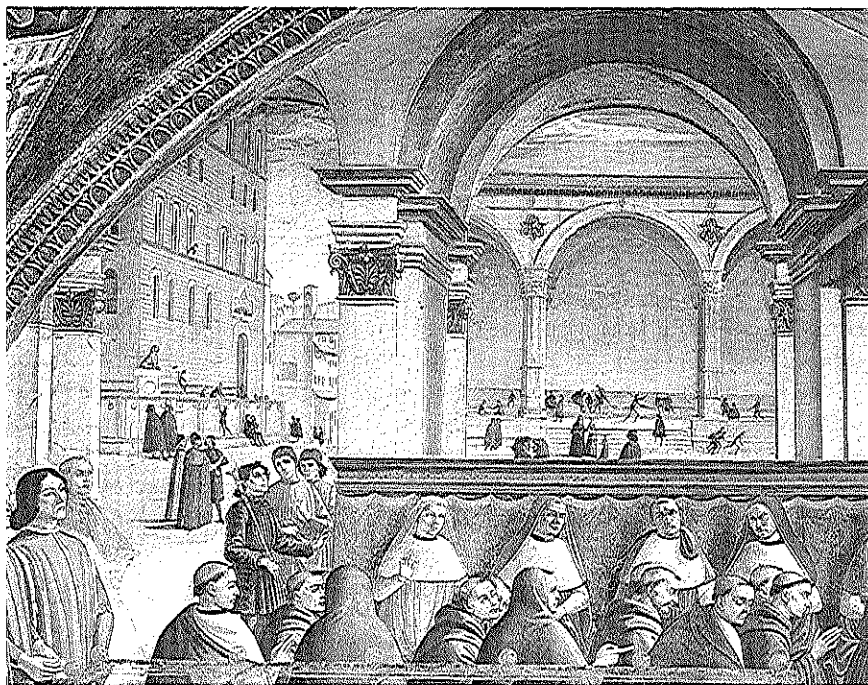
Yet, weakened by internal political turmoil, the Italian city-states were ravaged by foreign invaders beginning in 1494. Unable to resist French invasion and then Spanish domination, after 1530 the city-states were no

longer able to support artistic glories, and the Renaissance ended in a mood of discouragement, in striking contrast to the contagious optimism that had characterized its greatest moments.

THE CITY-STATES OF THE ITALIAN PENINSULA

The city-states were the fundamental political unit of the Italian peninsula, the most urbanized part of the Western world, even though the vast majority of the population of the Italian peninsula still lived in the countryside. In 1200, there were several hundred independent city-states on the Italian peninsula; gradually, however, that number was reduced, as many were absorbed as subject territories by more powerful city-states. A century later, at least twenty-three cities in the northern and central parts of the peninsula had populations of more than 20,000. It was within these city-states that the achievements of the Renaissance took place.

The city-states of Renaissance Italy were the most urbanized part of the Western world. Pictured here is the Loggia dei Lanzi, the principal gathering place in Florence. In the foreground, one can see priests and nuns praying while Florentine citizens go on about their day.



The economic prosperity and social dynamism of the city-states made the cultural achievements of the Renaissance possible. The city-states had become independent and prosperous because of the expansion of commerce during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Italian peninsula formed a natural point of exchange between East and West.

Intensively studied in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Roman law provided a framework for order and the development of political life within the Italian city-states. The Roman Empire had depended on a network of largely autonomous cities and towns, particularly in the plains of the northern part of the peninsula. These had been linked by a system of roads, unrivaled in Europe, all of which, as the saying goes, eventually led to Rome.

The people of the Italian peninsula had suffered the ravages of the Black Death and the other epidemics of the fourteenth century, but the ensuing economic recession, which led to declines in manufacturing and population in the central Italian region of Tuscany, did not affect much of the northern part of the peninsula, which still prospered. Drawing wool from England and Spain, Florence's textile industry employed about 30,000 workers. The finished Florentine cloth and woolen goods were then traded throughout the Mediterranean, and to Burgundy, Flanders, England, and as far as Asia. Agriculture thrived in the broad river valleys of Tuscany and Lombardy. The production of grains, vegetables, and wine, aided by the drainage of swamps and marshes and by irrigation, not only fed the urban population but also provided an agricultural surplus that could be invested in commerce and manufacturing. The proximity of Mediterranean trade routes bolstered international trade and small-scale manufacturing and brought prosperity to ambitious Italian merchants.

The development of banking during the early fourteenth century helped finance internal trade and international commerce. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Church's condemnation of usury no longer was taken to apply to banking, as long as the rates of interest were not considered excessive. Florence's gold florin became a standard currency in European trading centers. The bankers of that city, with agents in Avignon and many other cities throughout its trading network, were central to European commerce and monarchical and papal finances. Unlike traders elsewhere in Europe, Florentine merchants had broad experience with bills of exchange and deposit, which provided credit to purchasers. There were, however, risks to such loans. In the fifteenth century, the king of England forced Florentine merchants to loan him money, or face expulsion from the realm and lose all their assets there. But he defaulted on the loans after his invasion of France failed during the Hundred Years' War, and several major Florentine merchant companies went into bankruptcy.

Venice and Genoa were also major trading and banking cities, as well as centers of shipbuilding and insurance. Each city had long traded with the



This miniature depicts the Piazzetta of the Republic of Venice, with all the activity of a major Adriatic port.

East Indies and the Far East. Venice, in particular, had been a major center of trade and transcultural exchange between the Christian West and Muslim East since the eighth century. Venice linked sea routes with the long overland routes to Constantinople through the desolate mountains of the Balkans. Merchants hedged their bets on whether their shipments would fall victim to the sudden Mediterranean storms, to roving pirates, or to some other mishap on the overland route through Central Asia. The merchants carried fine woolens and linen from the Italian peninsula and northern Europe, as well as metals, to the East. They returned with cotton, silk, and, above all, spices, including pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and sugar, which arrived via Alexandria or Constantinople from the East Indies, luxury goods to awaken the palates of wealthy Europeans. Merchants from both East and West used towns in Crimea, a peninsula extending into the northern Black Sea, as intermediary points for trade from Muscovy, Persia, India, and China (see Map 2.1).

Merchant capitalism eroded the power of the nobility by expanding the ranks and influence of townsmen. The wealth and status of urban merchants—although nobles also engaged in trade—allowed them to

dominate the oligarchies that ruled the city-states. Prosperity increased the strong sense of municipal identity and pride; the Florentine political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli insisted, "I love my native city more than my own soul."

Social Structure

The social structure of the Italian city-states resembled that of other urban centers of trade and manufacturing in England, France, Flanders, and Holland. In the city-states, the *pòpolo grasso*, or "fat people," were the elite, including nobles, wealthy merchants, and manufacturers. The *mediòcri* were the middling sort, including smaller merchants and master artisans. The *pòpolo minuto*, or "little people," made up the bulk of the urban population. In cities, artisans and laborers were burdened by high taxes on consumption. Urban elites owned much of the richest land of the hinterland, which was worked by tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and agricultural laborers, as well as by peasant landowners. In the northern and central part of the Italian peninsula, most peasants were free to be miserably poor, while in the southern part many still owed obligations to their lords.

The "fat people" of the city-states comprised no more than 5 percent of the population. The great patricians assumed the status of princes of their cities, whether as dukes, cardinals, or, in the case of Rome, as the pope himself. Although social differences remained sharp in Italian city-states, as everywhere, commercial wealth made possible some degree of social mobility, above all in Florence, the wealthiest city. New families, enriched by commerce, rose into the ruling elite, although opportunities to do so declined noticeably by the end of the fifteenth century.

An elaborate and highly ritualized etiquette based upon mutual flattery maintained social distance. The wealthiest families became even richer despite the recession that extended throughout much of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; their prosperity made them even more eager not to be taken for anyone of more modest station. Thus, one of the powerful dukes of Milan insisted that his wife be called *Illustrissima* ("Illustrious One"). Flattery and subservience could be found in every greeting, and in every letter penned to a prince: "Nothing in the world pleases me more than your commands," and the ominous "I live only insofar as I am in your excellency's graces," which was sometimes true enough.

Urban patriarchs dominated their cities through power and patronage. They dispensed titles, privileges, and cash as they pleased. The duke of Ferrara affirmed his power by going door to door once a year to "beg" on behalf of the poor, an inversion of reality that served to define his authority and the subordination of everyone else. But princes and patriarchs also ruled through intimidation, occasionally eliminating enemies with astonishing cruelty.

The originality of the Italian city-states during the Renaissance lay not only in their remarkable artistic accomplishments but also in their precociously innovative forms of political structure. The organization of some of the city-states into constitutional republics was closely linked to the cultural achievements of the Renaissance. Nonetheless, there was nothing democratic about the city-states of Renaissance Italy, for the elites had brutally crushed the popular uprisings of artisans and shopkeepers that occurred in Siena and other towns during the fourteenth century.

Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century republics were constitutional oligarchies dominated by the most powerful families who filled the executive bodies, legislative or advisory councils, and special commissions that governed each city-state. The percentage of male citizens enjoying the right to vote ranged from about 2 percent in fifteenth-century Venice to 12 percent in fourteenth-century Bologna, the former percentage seeming most representative of the restricted nature of political rights in Renaissance Italy. Venice, Siena, Lucca, and Florence (at least until the waning days of domination by the powerful Medici family) were the most stable oligarchic republics of Renaissance Italy; Genoa, Bologna, and Perugia went back and forth between republican and despotic governments (see Map 2.2).

Some of the other city-states became outright hereditary despotisms (*signori*) run by a single family. Milan, a despotism under the control of the Visconti family, had grown prosperous from metallurgy and textile manufacturing. Francesco Sforza, a *condottieri* (mercenary of common origins), who had married the illegitimate daughter of the last Visconti duke in 1447, helped overthrow the republic less than three years later. Sforza imposed his family's rule with the support of Milanese nobles. The Sforza family thereafter skillfully played off rivalries between other powerful families, sometimes implementing their will with sheer force. The duke of Milan tolerated a council of 900 men drawn from the city's leading citizens, but he appointed magistrates and officials—and in general ruled—as he pleased. Likewise, princely families, such as the Este family of Ferrara and the Gonzaga family of Mantua, ran the smaller city-states.

By contrast, Venice, an energetic, prosperous Adriatic port city of lagoons and canals built on a number of small islands, remained in principle a republic. Its constitution offered a balance of political interests: the *doge*, an official elected for life by the Senate, served as an executive authority whose prerogatives were not that far from those of a monarch. The Great Council, consisting of about 2,500 enfranchised patricians, elected the Senate, which represented the nobility, an increasing number of whom were ennobled merchants living in elegantly decorated houses facing the canals. No one represented the poor, more than half the population of Venice.

Like the monarchies beyond the Alps, the Italian city-states developed small, efficient state bureaucracies, as the despots or oligarchs (a few men



MAP 2.2 CITY-STATES IN RENAISSANCE ITALY, 1494 The city-state was the fundamental political unit of the Italian peninsula; the number of city-states was reduced as many of them were absorbed by the more powerful city-states.

or families running the government) of each city improved the effectiveness of state administration. Thus, Florence and Venice had special committees responsible for foreign affairs and commerce. Many offices were sold or filled by members of the leading families linked by marriages. Personal relations between powerful families, for example, between the Medicis and the Sforza, facilitated diplomacy. The Medicis engaged financial specialists for the management of the fiscal policies of their city and their family, although the latter, to the detriment of Florence, almost



Portrait of Francesco Sforza, one of the elite *pòpolo grasso*.

always took precedence. ("Better a city ruined," said Cosimo de' Medici, "than lost.")

The *condottieri* were central to the political and military situation in Italy. A military ethos permeated the courts of the Italian princes. A young prince learned military exercises, including jousting (horseback combat with long lances that could occasionally be deadly), and he began to hunt, sometimes using falcons. Some dukes hired themselves and their private armies out to the highest bidders, such as powerful Italian princes, the king of France, or the Holy Roman emperor.

Renaissance princes and oligarchs surrounded themselves with an imposing retinue of attendants. The court of Urbino, not particularly wealthy compared to some of the others, employed a staff of 355 people. This number included 45 counts of the duchy, 17

noblemen of various pedigrees, 22 pages, 5 secretaries, 19 chamber grooms, 5 cooks, 19 waiters, 50 stable hands, and 125 servants and jacks-of-all-trades, including the *galoppini*, who galloped around on a variety of errands.

Florence, Milan, Venice, Naples, and the Papal States were as aggressive as France and the other monarchies beyond the Alps. They dominated their weaker neighbors through force, intimidation, and alliances, picking them off one by one, as in chess. When they were not battling each other, Florence and Venice combined to limit Milanese control to Lombardy, while establishing their own authority over their respective regions. Venice controlled territory from the Alps to the Po River. Genoa, bitterly divided between merchant factions and nobles living in the hills above the Mediterranean port, struggled to maintain its autonomy because it lay physically exposed to more powerful Milan, as well as to the kingdom of France.

The Papal States, which bordered Tuscany east of the Apennines and to their south, functioned like any other city-state. The pope, too, was a temporal, as well as a spiritual, prince. He was elected for life by cardinals, the highest bishops of the Church, who were, in turn, appointed by the pope. Like monarchs and urban oligarchs, popes had to contend with the ambitious nobles of the Papal States. They, too, conspired with and sought alliances against other city-states. The eternal city was only the peninsula's eighth largest city in the late fourteenth century, ruled by a beleaguered

papacy amid distant echoes of past glories. The city-states were increasingly freed from the authority and interference of the papacy. This began with the “Babylonian Captivity” (1309–1378), when the popes lived in Avignon under the direct influence of the king of France and, for a time, a rival pontiff claimed authority from Rome (see Chapter 3). The declining role of the papacy in temporal Italian affairs further aided the rise of Florence, Milan, and Venice.

Florence: Anatomy of a Renaissance City

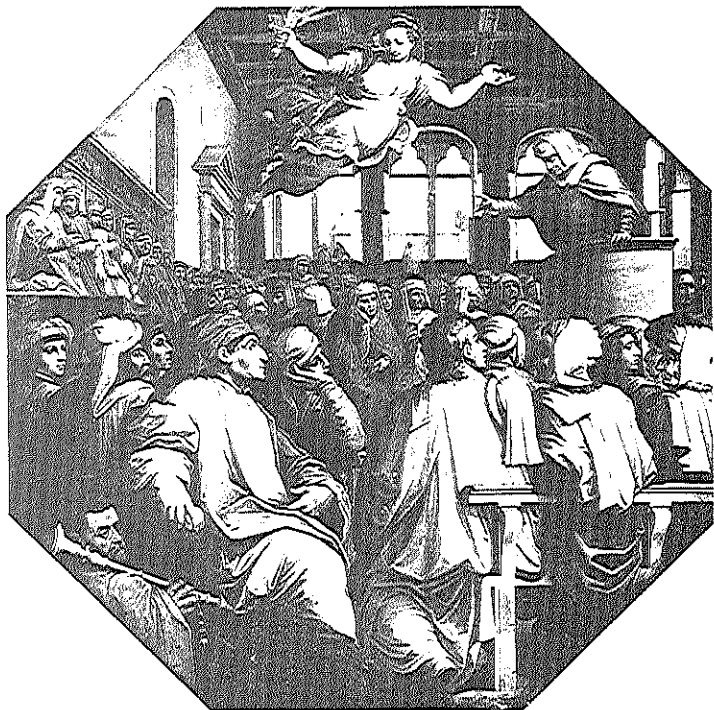
Florence was the cradle of the Italian Renaissance, fulfilling the prediction of the Tuscan poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) that a new civilization would arise on the Italian peninsula. Indeed, early in the Renaissance, the language of the region, Tuscan, emerged as the “courtly language” used by an increasing number of educated Italians beyond Tuscany.

The walled city dominated its rich hinterland of gentle hills and prosperous plains. The Arno River, which flows through Florence, was navigable from the Mediterranean port of Pisa except during the summer months. In 1406, Florence conquered Pisa, another center of textile production, once a worthy challenger of Genoa for maritime trade but now divided into quarreling factions. This window on the sea aided Florentine commerce, enabling the city to become a maritime power.

Several other factors contributed to Florence’s becoming the center of the revival of classical learning. Roman law and Latin had long been the foundation of training of Florentine ecclesiastics, lawyers, and notaries. Although the influence of the Church remained strong, the Medici rulers encouraged a cultural movement that had strong secular elements. Both Christian and secular traditions, then, infused Florentine civic life.

The combination of a dynamic craft tradition and an economy closely tied to the production of luxury goods made Florence receptive to artistic innovation. The city honored the accomplishments of its citizens—including cultural achievements. Lastly, Florence’s reputation as a relatively educated city helped attract talented newcomers from rural Tuscany and other regions. It had many schools, including a university, and boasted a rate of literacy unmatched in Europe. In the fifteenth century, at least 8,000 children in a population of 100,000 attended church and civic schools, as well as private academies. It was said that even laborers could recite Dante’s verses by heart.

The bell tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, the government building completed early in the fourteenth century, watched over the dynamic center of international banking, commerce, and the manufacture of cloth, woolens, silk, and jewelry. By the middle of the fourteenth century, Florence had become the fifth largest city in Europe. Before the plagues of the 1340s, about 100,000 people lived there. After falling by half, Florence’s population revived during the next half-century, equaling that of London and



A Florentine council in session.

Seville, but not Venice and Naples, each of which then had at least 100,000 inhabitants.

Wealthy merchants, the *grandi*, governed Florence with the support of merchants, lawyers, and craftsmen of more modest means. Organized into seven major guilds, the merchants and manufacturers, particularly the cloth merchants, kept the fourteen lesser guilds (whose members included artisans and shopkeepers) in a subordinate position. The guilds elected the nine members of government, the *Signoria*, which administered the city. The Signoria proposed laws and conducted foreign affairs. Its members led the processions through the narrow streets during the various religious holidays. Two assemblies, the Council of the People and the Council of the Commune, served as a legislature. Citizens wealthy enough to pay taxes elected the 600 to 700 members of these councils, which met as needed to approve the decisions of the Signoria.

During the fifteenth century, the business of government went on in the palaces of the wealthiest citizens of Florence. The elite feared that the poor would revolt as they had in 1378 in the uprising known as the Ciompi, or "the wooden shoes," so named because many of the laborers could only afford such footwear. Suffering from economic hardship and aided by disgruntled members of the lower guilds, the cloth workers had risen up in a

bloody insurrection in the hope of expanding the guild system already in power. The possibility of another uprising of the poor thereafter remained in the memory of the "fat people," causing them to keep the workers in a position of resentful subservience.

The renewal, then, of the Florentine elite with new families provided change within continuity, despite no small degree of political turbulence in the fifteenth century. The crowning cultural achievements of the Renaissance were not only rooted in Florence's prosperity but also in the relative social and political stability within that innovative city-state.

In 1434, Cosimo de' Medici (1389–1464) and his family seized control of Florentine political life. The family drew its great wealth from banking and the manufacture and commerce of textiles. Supported by a few patrician families, Cosimo banished prominent members of the most powerful rival clans. The Medici now controlled the offices of government. They manipulated the electoral process masterfully, using their wealth to curry support. Cosimo reflected the marketplace toughness of his family.

Florentine nobles generally accepted Medici rule because stability contributed to prosperity. Wealthy families continued to conspire against each other, even as Florence warred against Venice, but the powerful families remained staunchly patriotic, devoted to their city. Nonetheless, some Florentine nobles continued to oppose the Medici. In the Pazzi conspiracy of 1479, Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449–1492), Cosimo's grandson, survived an assassination attempt during Mass. Several hours later, four of the enemies of the Medici were hanging upside down from a government building, including the archbishop of Pisa. Lorenzo composed verses to be placed under their heads and commissioned Sandro Botticelli (c. 1445–1510) to paint them as they swung. Renaissance culture and the often violent political world of the city-states here converged.

The establishment of a Council of Seventy, which elected committees assigned responsibility for domestic and foreign affairs, helped the Medici tighten their grip on the reins of the Florentine republic. Lorenzo extended the family's banking interests and its influence with the pope in Rome. Among the many honors bestowed on the Medici family, Lorenzo considered the papal nomination of his thirteen-year-old son to the rank of Church cardinal "the greatest achievement of our house."

A DYNAMIC CULTURE

Economically and intellectually dynamic, Florence emerged as the center of the Renaissance. As Florence solidified its leading position on the Italian peninsula, its people rediscovered and celebrated classical learning. While glorifying antiquity, Renaissance poetry, prose, and painting emphasized the dignity of the individual, made in the image of God. It gradually moved concepts like beauty and virtue away from theological constraints.

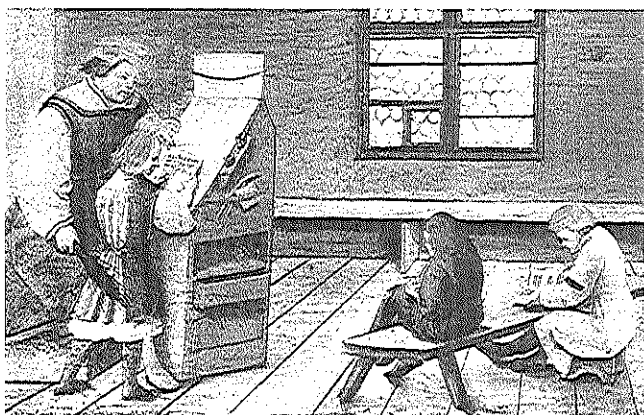
The Tuscan poet Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca, 1304–1374) was among the earliest and most influential of those who rediscovered and celebrated the classics of Latin antiquity. Petrarch, the son of a Florentine notary, learned Latin from a monk who inspired the boy to pursue his fascination with the classical world, which he came to view as a lost age. As a young man, Petrarch lived in Avignon, among an international community of lawyers and churchmen at the papal court during the “Avignon Papacy” (1309–1378), when the popes were subject to the influence of the kings of France. There he copied ancient works from manuscripts and books. Petrarch and his friends searched far and wide for more classical manuscripts. They uncovered the *Letters to Athens* of the Roman orator and moralist Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.), among other texts, stored in the cathedral of Verona. The study of Cicero led Petrarch to see in classical philosophy a guide to life based on experience.

Petrarch’s successors found and copied other classical manuscripts. Among them were classical literary commentaries, which provided humanists with a body of information about the authors in whom they were interested. Scholars brought works of classical Greek authors, including the playwright Sophocles, from Constantinople and from the libraries of Mount Athos, an important center of learning in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Knowledge of Greek texts (as well as certain Arabic and Hebrew texts) spread slowly through Italy after the arrival of Greek teachers from Constantinople.

The development of printing (see Chapter 1) permitted the diffusion of a variety of histories, treatises, biographies, autobiographies, and poems. Printing spread knowledge of classical texts and the development of textual criticism itself. Many Renaissance scholars considered Cicero to represent the model of the purest classical prose (although others considered him too long-winded), and by 1500 more than 200 editions of his works had been printed in Italy, including his influential *On Oratory* and his letters. Libraries were established in many of the Italian city-states, including Florence, Naples, and Venice, and provided scholars with common texts for study.

From Scholasticism to Humanism

The Romans had used the concept of *humanitas* to describe the combination of wisdom and virtue that they revered. The term came to refer to studies that were intellectually liberating, the seven liberal arts of antiquity: grammar, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy, and rhetoric (the art of expressive and persuasive speech or discourse). Medieval scholasticism was a system of thought in which clerics applied reason to philosophical and theological questions. Those teachers and students who shifted their



A humanist educator and his charges.

focus from the scholastic curriculum—law, medicine, and theology—to the curriculum of Latin grammar, rhetoric, and metaphysics became known as “humanists.” They considered the study of the “humanities” to be essential for educating a good citizen.

Renaissance humanists believed that they were reviving the glory of the classical age. They considered their era greater than any since the Roman Empire. They also believed the Italian peninsula, although divided by political units, dialects, and by the Apennine Mountains, shared a common, distinct culture.

Venerating classical civilization, the humanists turned their backs on medieval scholasticism, which they believed was composed of irrelevant theological debates and encouraged ascetic withdrawal from the world. Scholastics celebrated the authority of Church texts and revered the saint, the monk, and the knight. Petrarch rejected idle philosophic speculation or even knowledge that seemed irrelevant to mankind. He mocked scholastics, remarking that they can tell you “how many hairs there are in the lion’s mane . . . with how many arms the squid binds a shipwrecked sailor. . . . What is the use, I pray you, of knowing the nature of beasts, birds, fishes and serpents, and not knowing, or spurning the nature of man, to what end we are born, and from where and whither we pilgrimage.”

The humanists proclaimed the writers of antiquity to be heroes worthy of emulation. Although virtually all humanists accepted Christianity, and clerical religious culture persisted intact, humanism stood as an alternative approach to knowledge and culture. Humanists believed that a knowledge of the humanities could civilize mankind, teaching the “art of living.” Petrarch insisted that the study of classical poetry and rhetoric could infuse daily life with ethical values.

Unlike the scholastics, humanists believed that it was not enough to withdraw into philosophy. Petrarch rediscovered the classical ideal that the

philosopher, or humanist, was a wise man who could govern. Cicero had written that what made an individual great was not the gifts of good fortune, but the use to which he put them. The active life, including participation in public affairs, had formed part of his definition of true wisdom. From the literature of the Greek and Roman past, humanists looked for guides to public life in their own city-states. The first half of the fifteenth century is often referred to as the period of "civic humanism" because of the influence of humanists and artists on the city-states themselves. Like the classic writers of ancient Rome, Renaissance writers were concerned with wisdom, virtue, and morality within the context of the political community. Humanists wrote boastful histories of the city-states, philosophical essays, stirring orations, and flattering biographies, as well as poetry, eagerly imitating classical styles.

The Renaissance and Religion

While rediscovering classic texts and motifs, the Renaissance remained closely linked to religion. Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1321), an allegorical poem, provides the quintessential expression of medieval thought by its demonstration of the extraordinary power that both Latin classical learning and Christian theology exerted on educated thought and literature. In his voyage through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, Dante encounters historical figures suffering terrible agonies for their sins, waiting expectantly for admission into Heaven, or already reaping the benefits of having lived a good life. Renaissance humanists could reject medieval scholasticism without turning their backs on the Church. Indeed, they claimed that they were searching for the origins of Christianity in the classical world from which it had emerged.

Although not the first to do so, humanists took classic texts, which were pagan, and ascribed to them meanings prophetic of Christianity. For example, the *Aeneid*, the long epic written by Virgil (70–19 B.C.), had been commissioned by the Roman emperor Augustus in the hope that it would offer the most favorable image of himself and of the empire, that is, of Rome bringing peace and civilization to the world. The hero of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas, personifies the ideal qualities of a Roman citizen, wanting to fulfill his patriotic duties, seeking glory for the empire but never for himself. The humanists transformed Aeneas's journey into an allegory for the itinerary of the Christian soul, appropriating antiquity into theology by viewing it as a foreshadowing of the true religion.

The place of the Church in Italian life remained strong during the Renaissance, the relative decline in the papacy's temporal power notwithstanding. There was thus considerable continuity between the medieval period and the Renaissance in matters of religion. There were at least 264 bishops in Italy, as many as in the rest of the Christian world. In 1427, Florence had more than 1,400 clerics out of a population of 38,000 living in ecclesiastical

institutions. Religious festivals dotted the calendar. The colorful Venetian water processions of elaborately decorated gondolas, jousting, boat races, and the annual horse race (*palio*) sponsored by rival neighborhoods in Siena still bear witness to the playful but intense festivity of the Renaissance city-states, a festivity that gave ritualized religious expression to civic and political life.

The Renaissance Man and Woman

Renaissance literature and poetry, preoccupied with nature, beauty, and reason, placed the individual at the forefront of attention. Renaissance writers praised mankind as "heroic" and "divine," rational and prudent, rather than intrinsically unworthy by virtue of being stained by original sin, as Church theologians held. This, too, represented a revival of the classic vision of the moral greatness of the individual and his or her ability to discover truth and wisdom.

By this view, the lay person could interpret morality through the ancient texts themselves, without the assistance of the clergy. Once someone had learned to read Latin and Greek, neither ecclesiastical guidance nor formalized school settings were necessary for the accumulation of wisdom. Universities in general remained under the influence of the theological debates of scholasticism, although the universities of Florence, Bologna, and Padua gradually added humanist subjects to their curricula. Relatively few humanists emerged from the universities, which remained training grounds for jurists, doctors, and clerics.

"These studies are called liberal because they make man free," a humanist wrote; they are humane "because they perfect man . . . those studies by which we attain and practice virtue and wisdom; that education which calls forth, trains and develops those highest gifts of body and of mind, which ennoble man." The young Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) exclaimed, "O highest and most marvelous felicity of man! To him it is granted to have whatever he chooses, to be whatever he wills." Pico described the individual as an independent and autonomous being who could make his own moral choices and become, within the context of Christianity, "the molder and sculptor of himself."

The political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), too, found personal fulfillment in the study of the classics. He had been employed in the Florentine chancery, serving as a diplomat. Purged when the Medici overthrew the republic in 1512, he took up residence in the countryside. Machiavelli complained that his days consisted of mundane exchanges with rustics. But "when evening comes I return home and go into my study. On the threshold I strip off my muddy, sweaty, workday clothes, and put on the robes of court and palace, and in this graver dress I enter the antique courts of the ancients and am welcomed by them, and there again I taste the food that alone is mine, and for which I was born. And I make bold to speak to

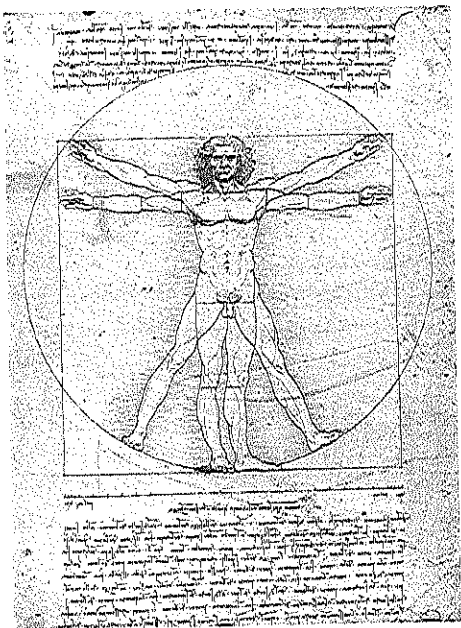
them and ask the motives of their actions, and they, in their humanity, reply to me. And for the space of four hours I forget the world, remember no vexation, fear poverty no more, tremble no more at death: I pass indeed into their world." Machiavelli evoked the exhilaration of the individual discovering the joys of antiquity.

The development of the autobiography in literature reflected the celebration of the individual, however much the genre was limited to public people and the image that they sought to present of themselves, revealing virtually nothing of private life. In the first half of the fifteenth century, the portrait and the self-portrait emerged as artistic genres; princes, oligarchs, courtiers, and other people of wealth joined Christ, the Virgin Mary, and popular saints as subjects of painting.

A growing sense of what it meant to be "civilized" arose in the Italian city-states and highlighted the place of the individual in society. The Italian patrician may have been cleaner and more perfumed than people elsewhere in Europe. Books on good conduct and manners emerged. The writer Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529) urged the person of taste to show that "whatever is said or done has been done without pains and virtually without thought" as if correct behavior had become part of his or her very being. Women, he contended, should obtain a "knowledge of letters, of music, of painting, and . . . how to dance and be festive."

Castiglione's *The Courtier* (1528) described the ideal courtier, or attendant at a court, as someone who had mastered the classics and several languages, and who could paint, sing, write poetry, advise and console his prince, as well as run, jump, swim, and wrestle. This idea of a "universal person," or "Renaissance man," had existed for some time, although, of course, not everyone had the leisure or resources to study so many subjects.

Although he was not a humanist and could not read Latin, Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)—painter, sculptor, scientist, architect, military engineer, inventor, and philosopher—became the epitome of the "Renaissance man." The illegitimate son of a notary from a Tuscan village, he was apprenticed to a Flo-



A drawing by Leonardo da Vinci that illustrates his understanding and appreciation of human anatomy.

rentine painter at the age of twelve. Following acceptance into the master's guild in Florence, he remained in the workshop of his master until moving in 1482 to Milan, where he enjoyed the patronage of the Sforza family. Taking the title "Painter and Engineer of the Duke of Milan," Leonardo taught students in his workshop and undertook scientific studies of human and animal anatomy. His drawings were the first modern scientific illustrations. Leonardo began compiling his prodigious notebooks, in which he jotted down his ideas, perceptions, and experiences. He also sculpted an equestrian monument, designed costumes for theatrical performances, worked as a military engineer, and decorated palaces. In 1500, Leonardo returned to Florence, then went back to Milan six years later, beckoned by the governor of Francis I, king of France. When the Milanese freed themselves from French hegemony, he went south to Rome, where Pope Leo X (pope 1513–1521) provided him with a salary. In 1516, the French king brought Leonardo to his château on the Loire River at Amboise, where he sketched court festivals, and served as something of a Renaissance jack-of-all-trades before his death in 1519.

If the Renaissance is often said to have "discovered" mankind in general, this meant, for the most part, men. The Church considered women to be sinful daughters of Eve. Legally, women remained subordinate to men; they could own property and make their wills, but they could not sell property without their husbands' permission. Both rich and poor families continued to value boys more than girls; poor families were far more likely to abandon female babies or to place them in the care of a distant wet nurse. Many families viewed girls as a liability because of the necessity of providing a dowry, however large or small, for their marriage. Some families of means sent daughters off into convents. Because of the strict gender division within the Church, women there could aspire not only to holiness and sainthood, but also to leadership in a world of women. Life in a convent left them free to study.

Some patricians, however, educated their girls as well as their boys in the humanities. These girls studied letters, orations, and poems with tutors. A small number of women went on to write because they could not enter learned professions. Isotta Nogarola (1418–1466), a fifteenth-century humanist from Verona, abandoned secular life for quiet religious contemplation and scholarship. In her discussion of the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden, she apologized for the weakness of women's nature, and she lamented that she fell short of "the whole and perfect virtue that men attain." Several women, however, managed to become publishers, book-sellers, and printers, including several nuns who set the type for works by Petrarch. The achievement of such status required literacy and family connections to the trade—for example, being the widow or daughter of a printer and thus having family links to a guild. It was rare for a female printer to sign her name to her work, and her status was viewed as provisional—until, for example, a male heir came of age.

Overall, the Renaissance did not bring about any significant loosening in the restrictions placed on women, and women's social and personal options may even have been reduced. In the Italian city-states, women had less of a role in public life than they had enjoyed in the courts of medieval Europe. They presided over social gatherings, but for the most part in a ritualized, decorative role. Although Renaissance authors idealized love and women, the role of women continued to be to serve their fathers, husbands, or, in some cases, their lovers. When the education of young women clashed with a father's plans for his daughter to marry, marriage won out without discussion. Men's feelings were the focus of considerable attention by Renaissance writers; women's feelings and opinions usually were assumed to be unimportant. To be sure, women in large, powerful families like the Sforza, Este, and Gonzaga exerted influence and were patrons to artists. Yet the subjects they commissioned artists and sculptors to portray were essentially the same as those of their male counterparts, and, in patriarchal households, their husbands made the decisions.

RENAISSANCE ART

When the German painter Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) visited Venice on one of his two trips to the northern Italian peninsula, he was surprised and delighted by the fact that artists there enjoyed considerably more status than in his native Nuremburg: "Here," he wrote, "I am a gentleman, at home a sponger."

The prestige and support given to the Renaissance artist created a nurturing environment for the remarkable artistic accomplishments that characterize that special period's place in history. Great works of Renaissance architecture, painting, and sculpture are still studied by specialists and appreciated by millions of people each year.

Architecture

Despite the Renaissance concept of the "ideal city" of architectural harmony, reflected in the first treatises on architecture, Florence, Siena, Perugia, and other Italian cities retained their medieval cores, which contained their markets and their public buildings, such as the town hall. But during the fifteenth century, the narrow streets and alleys of many Italian cities became interspersed with splendid buildings and dotted with works of art commissioned by wealthy families.

Florence underwent a building boom during the fifteenth century. Construction of its elegant residences stimulated the economy, providing employment to day laborers, skilled artisans—brick- and tilemakers, masons, roofers, carpenters, cabinetmakers, and joiners—and decorative artists, including goldsmiths, sculptors, and painters. Renaissance archi-

texture emphasized elegant simplicity, an expansion of the simple rustic fronts that had characterized medieval building. Renaissance architects combined plain white walls with colorful, intricate arches, doors, and window frames. In the fifteenth century, expensive palaces of monumental proportions with columns, arches, and magnificent stairways were considered sensible investments, because they could later be sold at a profit.

Like writers and painters, Renaissance architects looked to antiquity for models. Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) first applied theories of classical architecture to the Foundling Hospital in Florence, the earliest building constructed in Renaissance style. Fourteenth-century architects planned churches in the form of a circle, the shape they thought was in the image of God, with no beginning and no end. But they may also have drawn on Rome's Pantheon, a round classical temple. After going to the papal city to study the ruins of classical architecture, Brunelleschi solved daunting technical problems to construct the vast dome, or cupola, of that city's cathedral (Duomo). The magnificent structure, completed in 1413 after work lasting more than a century, reflects the architect's rejection of the northern Gothic architectural style, with its pointed arches, vaulting, and flying buttresses. Inspired by excavations of classical ruins and the rebuilding of Rome in the late fifteenth century, architects began to copy classical styles closely, adding ornate Corinthian columns and great sweeping arches.

Patronage and the Arts

Renaissance art could not have flourished without the patronage of wealthy, powerful families, though commissions by guilds and religious confraternities were not uncommon. Artists, as well as poets and musicians, were eager, like Leonardo, to be invited into a patrician's household, where there were few or no expenses, and time to work. Lesser artists painted coats of arms, tapestries, and even portraits of the prince's pets—dogs and falcons.

Some humanists not fortunate enough to be given the run of a powerful patrician's place found posts as state secretaries, because they could draft impressive official correspondence. They tutored the children of patrician families, and a few worked as papal courtiers. Such humanists penned orations, scrupulously imitating Cicero, for formal state receptions, clamorous festivals, and funerals. Pope Leo X, a Medici who composed and played music himself, brought to his court a number of distinguished artists, in addition to Leonardo da Vinci, and musicians, as well as humanists whom he employed as officials and envoys. At the same time, the genres of wit and satire developed and became part of the ribald and "sharp-tongued" life of the political and social world of the city-state. Her well-heeled friends winked and joined in the laughter when Isabella of Mantua dressed one of her dwarfs as a bishop to greet a visiting dignitary. The biting satires and lampoons of Pietro Aretino (1492–1556), who enjoyed in succession



Pope Leo X, here presented by Raphael with two cardinals, brought artists and musicians to his court.

the patronage of a banker, a cardinal, the duke of Mantua, the Medici of Florence, and a Venetian doge and nobleman, spared neither secular nor ecclesiastical leaders from mocking jokes and rhymes. Aretino attacked social climbers and the venality of offices in the city-states with particular venom. He spared the one person he referred to as divine—himself.

Because the classical texts suggested that the active life included playing a salutary role in one's community, humanist families of means believed that they should demonstrate wisdom by making good use of their riches. Commissioning works of art seemed to confirm moral leadership, and therefore the right to govern. Wealthy families also used art to reflect the image that they wished to give of themselves, for example, commissioning portraits to impress the family of a prospective spouse.

The Medici of Florence, the greatest of the secular patrons of the arts, commissioned buildings, paid for the elaborate decoration of chapels and altarpieces, and restored monasteries. Although wags suggested that he may have been more interested in the expensive bindings of the books he purchased than in their contents, Cosimo de' Medici collected manuscripts and even read some of them. The wealthy banker oversaw the construction of fine palaces and churches. Michelangelo (1475–1564), who designed the Medici tomb in the church of Saint Lorenzo in Florence, was but one sculptor who enjoyed the favor of the Medici.

The long economic recession of the fifteenth century may have actually contributed to the arts. Finding insufficient profits in commerce and manufacturing for their money, patrician families spent considerable sums on paintings and sculpture. This may, in turn, have accentuated the recession by turning productive capital away from economic investments. At the same time, so the argument goes, the recession offered families of means more time to devote to culture.



Masaccio's *Adoration of the Magi* (1426).

Patrons of the arts often specified not only the subject of the work they were commissioning but certain details as well, requiring, for example, that specific saints be depicted. The size of the work of art and its price were also specified, of course, including the cost of blue pigment or gold for paintings and bronze or marble for sculptures. Cherubs cost more. Although one of the dukes of Ferrara paid for his paintings by their size, increasingly patrons paid the artist for his time—and thus his skill—as well as for the materials he used. The contract for a work of art might specify whether it was to be completed by the artist himself, or if assistants from the master's workshop could be employed for certain parts. Patrons sometimes appeared on the canvas, as in the case of *The Adoration of the Magi* (1426) by Tommaso di Giovanni Masaccio (1401–1428), which includes portraits of the notary who commissioned the painting and his son. Conversely, patricians occasionally commissioned artists to humiliate their enemies, as when a painter in Verona was paid to sneak up to the walls of a rival palace and paint obscene pictures.

Renaissance Artists

Because of its basis in the craft tradition, in the medieval world painting was considered a “mechanical” art. This made the status of the artist ambiguous, because he sold his own works and lacked the humanist's education. Michelangelo's father tried to discourage his son from becoming a sculptor, an art that he identified with stone cutting. Michelangelo himself sometimes signed his paintings “Michelangelo, sculptor,” as if to differentiate himself from a mere painter. Yet, in his treatise on painting (1435), the humanist Leon Battista Alberti, irritated by contemporary insistence that painting was a “mechanical art,” insisted that the artist was no longer a craftsman but a practitioner of a “high art.”

Of the artists whose social origins are known, the majority had fathers who were urban shopkeepers or artisans, most often in the luxury trades.

Next in number—surprisingly—came the sons of nobles, perhaps reflecting the relative decline in noble fortunes during the Renaissance. Then came the children of merchants and educated professionals such as notaries, lawyers, and officials. A few painters, like Raphael (1483–1520), were sons of artists. Only a handful were the sons of peasants.

The contemporary association between craftsmen and painters was appropriate, because, like the former, artists entered a period of apprenticeship. Architects and composers lacked such formal training. The painters' guild of Venice required five years of apprenticeship, followed by two years of journeyman status, requirements similar to those by which silversmiths, shoemakers, cabinetmakers, and other craftsmen were trained. Some masters had sizable workshops, where apprentices trained and often lived together, sometimes working on the same paintings (which is one reason it is difficult to authenticate some canvases). Because women could neither become apprentices nor attend universities, there were no prominent female Renaissance artists until well into the sixteenth century.

Indeed, artists claimed that they deserved more esteem than a craftsman. Leonardo praised the painter, who sits "at his easel in front of his work, dressed as he pleases, and moves his light brush with the beautiful colors . . . often accompanied by musicians or readers of various beautiful works." The artist's quest for the humanist ideals of beauty and God helps explain the rise of some artists of the Renaissance period from practitioners of a "mechanical art," to the description of Michelangelo offered by a Portuguese painter: "In Italy, one does not care for the renown of great princes: it's a painter only that they call divine." Not all painters ascended to such heights, of course, but in general the status of the artist rose during the Renaissance. Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, and Titian (Tiziano Vecellio, c. 1490–1576) lived as gentlemen, the last knighted by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Some artists and writers were crowned with laurels—thus the designation of "poet laureate"—by their adoring city-states.

Painting and Sculpture

The rediscovery of antiquity, nature, and mankind transformed European painting. Renaissance artists reflected the influence of the neo-Platonists. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the neo-Platonists appropriated Plato's belief that eternal ideas—such as beauty, truth, and goodness—existed beyond the realm of everyday life. Humanists believed that the mind could transcend human nature and come to understand these eternal ideas. The artist could reproduce the beauty of the soul through imagination and, in doing so, reach out to God. To Dante, art was "the grandchild of God." For Michelangelo, beauty "lifts to heaven hearts that truly know."

Artists sought to achieve the representation of beauty in a realistic way by using the proportions created by God in the universe. It was the

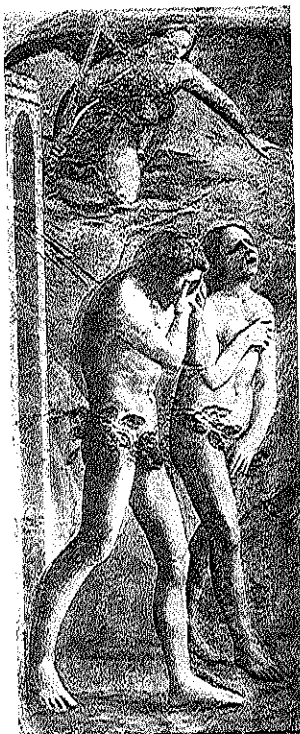
Stories of Saint John the Evangelist: Vision on the Island of Patmos, fresco by Giotto, Peruzzi Chapel in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence.



supreme compliment to say of a Renaissance painter that his work had surpassed nature in beauty. Leonardo put it this way: "Painting . . . compels the mind of the painter to transform itself into the mind of nature itself and to translate between nature and art." During the Renaissance, nature ceased to be mere background. Painters now faithfully depicted the beauty of mountains, rocks, and gardens for their own sake.

Objects of everyday life increasingly appeared in paintings, reflecting a greater preoccupation with realistic depiction. Take, for example, Raphael's painting of the pudgy Pope Leo X, staring off into space while fiddling with a magnifying glass with which he has been examining a book (see p. 64).

Beauty could be portrayed with extraordinary richness. The memorable figures of the frescoes of Giotto di Bondone (c. 1266–1337) in the chapels of Holy Cross Church in Florence, particularly their facial expressions, reflect humanity, deeply personal emotion, and naturalism, unseen since the classical age. The fame of Giotto, who is usually considered the first great painter of the Renaissance, spread rapidly throughout much of Italy, and his style greatly influenced his successors. Raphael, who admired and learned from Michelangelo, eight years his senior, wrote of trying to paint a beautiful woman, "I use as my guide a certain idea of the beautiful that I carry in my mind." Raphael's figures reflect a softness and inner beauty



Masaccio's *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden* (c. 1427).

that contrast with the powerful, stirring subjects of the tempestuous Michelangelo. Reflecting neo-Platonist influence, Titian early in the sixteenth century strove to bring the viewers of his paintings closer to the idea of the eternal form of female beauty that he sought to represent with his depictions of Venus.

The Greeks and Romans believed that the painter and sculptor understood and portrayed the soul when they reproduced the human face. Leonardo's famous *Mona Lisa* (1503–1507), with its mysterious, confident half-smile, is a compelling illustration of this undertaking. "Movements of the soul," wrote Alberti early in the fifteenth century, "are recognized in movements of the body." The artist had to be able to reveal the emotions and passions of the figures he depicted.

Renaissance artists used a large repertoire of stylized portrayals of emotion, the meanings of which were immediately recognized by virtually all viewers of their paintings. The Florentine Masaccio intended his extraordinary fresco *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden* (c. 1427) to represent the tortured souls, as well as bodies, of those biblical figures. Masaccio's Adam covers his eyes with his fingers in anguish in this truly gripping depiction of Adam and Eve's crushing grief as they leave the Garden of Eden. Although Renaissance artists generally avoided many of the routine associations of the medieval period (gold for piety, for example), certain colors were used for symbolic purposes. Violet was often a color of reverence, white that of charity, red of fire, and gray of earth. Clear colors, intense light, and ideal proportions were combined in representations of Christ. Deep coloring, more subtle and natural than the blues and golds of medieval painting, enriched the canvas.

Medieval and Byzantine artists typically painted rigid images on a flat space, thus their work often appeared two-dimensional and lifeless; linear forms were arranged in order of importance, accompanied by symbols easily identifiable to the viewer. The Renaissance development of perspective theory, in which parallel lines recede from the surface and seem to converge on the vanishing point, facilitated the realistic presentation of figures and movement. Renaissance artists believed that naturalism could only be achieved through the use of perspective. Masaccio first applied the mathematical laws of perspective to painting in his revolutionary *Trinity* (1425), which makes a two-dimensional surface seem to be three-dimensional. The mastery of light



Andrea Mantegna's *The Dead Christ* (c. 1506), an example of Renaissance treatment of perspective.

also contributed to innovative uses of space; for example, through the technique of foreshortening, artists proportionally contracted depth so as to give the viewer the illusion of projection or extension into space. In his realistic *The Dead Christ* (c. 1506), Andrea Mantegna (c. 1430–1506) utilized this technique, which had been pioneered by Masaccio. This shortcut allowed the artist to create the visual impression of a three-dimensional body on a flat surface. Florentine artists, in particular, used perspective to develop high relief and silhouette, presenting rounded figures on the canvas surface by effective use of tones and shades.

This mastery of perspective by the naturalist painter Masaccio and, above all, the sculptor Donatello (c. 1386–1466) helped Renaissance painters choose difficult, complicated themes and treat them with a more complex realism. Donatello utilized perspective to achieve dramatic action through gradations of relief. In *The Feast of Herod* (c. 1417), sculpted in bronze for the stone basin in the Siena Baptistery, Donatello captures the shocked reaction of the king and guests as John the Baptist's head is presented to Herod. In Leonardo's painting *The Last Supper* (c. 1495–1498), Christ's disciples crowd around the table. The viewer's eye is drawn along the lines of perspective of the ceiling to the central figure of Christ, whose image stands out because it is framed by a large window. Leonardo identifies Judas, the betrayer of Christ, not by leaving him without a halo nor by placing him alone on the other side of the table from Christ, but by painting him as the only figure in shadow.

To Leonardo, painting was the highest form of science, based on "what has passed through our senses." He believed that "the scientific and true principles of painting first determine" the components of painting: "darkness, light, color, body, figure, position, distance, nearness, motion, and rest." The work of Michelangelo reflects a mastery of mathematics, anatomy, and optics. Animals, birds, and inanimate objects also took on a lifelike quality based upon artists' discovery of proper proportions.

The quest for the natural representation of beauty led some artists to depict the human body in nude form, which some took to be a more natural and expressive form borrowed from classical paganism. Michelangelo believed that the depiction of the human body in sculpture was the ultimate expression of mankind as a divine creation, made in God's image. In his sculptures and paintings of the nude figure, the muscles and sinews of the body are infused with the emotions and passions of humanity.

Religious, public, and private life overlapped, as the people of Renaissance Italy sought religious meanings in everything they saw. Art with religious subjects also served a teaching function for the Church. In many patrician houses, a religious image could be found in every room. Devotional images, known as *ex votos*, were often erected in public spaces to fulfill a vow made to a saint in times of danger or illness. Patricians commissioned paintings with religious themes to realize similar vows. Moreover, the splendid tombs sculpted for patricians and popes may have reflected a preoccupation with glorifying the individual, but they nonetheless also emphasized eternal salvation.

Religious themes continued to dominate painting, accounting for perhaps nine of every ten paintings; the Virgin Mary was the most popular figure, followed by Christ and the saints (above all, Saint John the Baptist, the patron saint of Florence). The visualization of certain episodes in the life of Christ or of the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian were intended to stimulate piety and encourage morality. Thus, artists took on a role similar to preachers, whose orations evoked a powerful emotional response.

Classical symbolism abounded in Renaissance painting and influenced the depiction of religious themes, incorporating images drawn from pagan Rome. Artists used details about history or mythology that patrons insisted grace their canvases. Some of the classical gods stood as Renaissance symbols of moral or physical qualities. Michelangelo modeled his Christ in *The Last Judgment* (1536–1541) on a classical portrayal of the god Apollo.

Yet, along with scenes from classical mythology, paintings with secular themes increased in number, notably portraits of famous men or of wealthy patricians, but also of more ordinary people as well. Aretino, who criticized everything, found fault with the democratization of the portrait, despite the fact that he was the son of a shoemaker, insisting, "It is the disgrace of our age that it tolerates the portraits even of tailors and butchers."



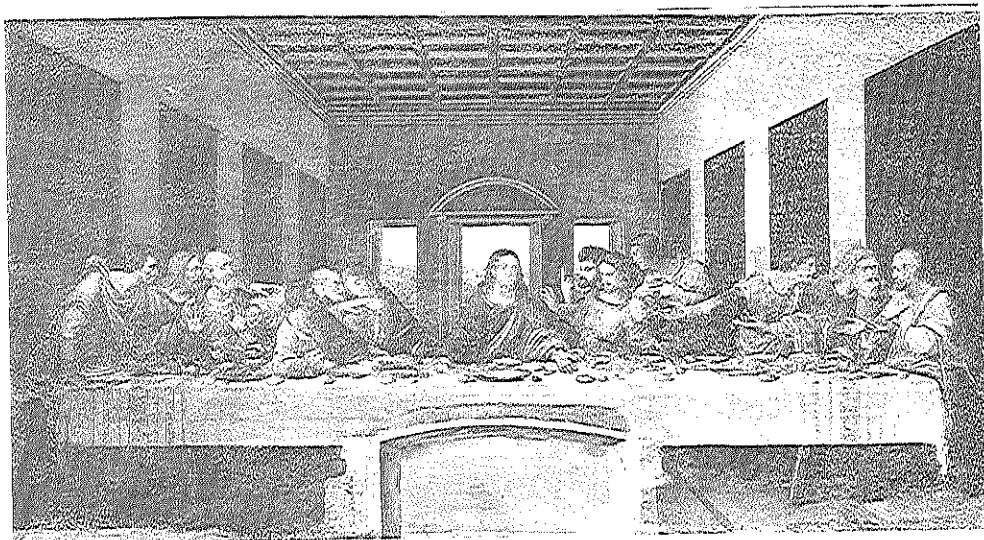
A section of Michelangelo's fresco, *The Creation of Man*, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the Vatican, showing God banishing Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

High Renaissance Style

During the period of the High Renaissance (1490–1530), the city-states of Italy lost much of their economic and political vitality, confronting French invasion and then Spanish domination. In the midst of economic decline as well as internecine political warfare, artists no longer enjoyed the lavish patronage of wealthy patrician families. Instead, the Church became their patron.

The papacy inspired the monumentalism of the High Renaissance. Besieged in the first two decades of the sixteenth century by denunciations of the sale of indulgences—the purchase of the remission of some punishment in Purgatory for one's sins or for those of some family member—the papacy sought to assert its authority and image (see Chapter 3). Papal commissions in Rome were one attempt to recover public confidence and made possible the artistic achievements of the High Renaissance. Following excavations beginning in the 1470s that heightened interest in the ancient Roman Empire, Raphael himself oversaw the reconstruction of Rome and personally supervised excavations of the Roman Forum. Influenced by and more dependent on the Church, the canvases of the painters of the High Renaissance became even larger as they became less concerned with rational order and more with achieving a powerful visual response in their viewers.

Some humanists now began to claim that the papacy was the heir to the glories of classical Rome. Popes took names that echoed the Roman Empire. Julius II (pope 1503–1513) ordered a medal struck that read



Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (c. 1495–1498).

“Julius Caesar Pont[ifex]. II,” a term that meant “high priest” in classical Rome. Wide boulevards and spaces were forged to accommodate waves of pilgrims descending upon the city.

Leonardo's *The Last Supper* is perhaps the first example of the style of the High Renaissance, or what is sometimes called the Grand Manner. Mannerism (a term from the Italian word for style), which particularly characterized the 1520s, is marked by heightened scale, exaggerated drama, and the submersion of detail to a total emotional effect. Donato Bramante (1444–1514), who constructed St. Peter's Basilica in Rome in the “grand manner” of the High Renaissance, designed its grand Byzantine dome, which was completed by Michelangelo and a successor.

Painters of the High Renaissance increasingly presented large, ambitious, complex, and sometimes even bizarre canvases. Mannerism's imaginative distortions and sense of restlessness offered an unsettling vision in tune with new uncertainties. Mannerism marked something of a reaction against the Renaissance ideal of attaining classical perfection. Thus, some painters ignored the rules of perspective; emotionalism, as well as mysticism and illusionism, won out over classicism. Toward the end of his career, Michelangelo's work reflected this influence. His majestic marble *Moses* (1515), sculpted for the tomb of Pope Julius II, has an immensely prominent head, with an exaggerated facial expression. It reflects Michelangelo's tragic vision of human limitations, including his own. Raphael and Titian presented human figures who seem almost empowered by divine attributes but who nonetheless retain their humanity.

THE END OF THE RENAISSANCE

Late in the fifteenth century, the Italian city-states entered a period of economic and political decline, making the peninsula more vulnerable to foreign invasion. Subsequently, some of the battles between Spain and France, Europe's two dominant powers, were fought on the Italian peninsula. The exploration and gradual colonization of the Americas, first by Spain, and the increase in trade and manufacturing in northwestern Europe, helped move economic and cultural vigor toward the Atlantic Ocean, to Spain and northwestern Europe, most notably, England, France, and the Dutch Netherlands, and to the New World (see Chapter 5).

Economic Decline

The economic decline of the northern Italian city-states during the second half of the fifteenth century undermined the material base of Renaissance prosperity, indeed the economic primacy of the Mediterranean region. The Italian city-states lost most of their trading routes with Asia. The Turks conquered Genoese trading posts in the Black Sea, the traditional merchant route to Asia, and in the Aegean Sea. Turkish domination reduced Genoa's once mighty commercial network to trade centered on the Aegean island of Chios. Of the Italian city-states, Venice alone continued to prosper. After the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, merchants in Venice concluded a deal with the Turks by which they received a monopoly on trade with the East, leaving the other city-states without access to their traditional Asian markets. Venice's economy soon diversified with small-scale manufacturing, however, particularly as the Turkish threat to its interests mounted in the eastern Mediterranean and Venetian galleys no longer could venture into the Black Sea.

Merchants of the Italian city-states sought alternatives. The Genoese established a trading post in the Muslim city of Málaga on the southern coast of Spain, although this made them dependent on local Muslim middlemen. Portuguese fleets began to monopolize the spice trade with India and beyond.

The Florentine silk and woolen industries, long prosperous, now faced stiff competition from French and Dutch producers and merchants in northwestern Europe. The dazzling prosperity of the great Italian merchant families ebbed. The economy of Europe—and even of world commerce itself—was changing. Portuguese, Spanish, English, and Dutch traders looked to the New World for new products and significant profits (see Chapter 1). The rapid growth of Portuguese and then Spanish trade accentuated the rise of the Atlantic economy. Competition from the larger sailing ships of England, Holland, and Portugal overwhelmed Florence and Genoa and then, more gradually, Venice.

As long as the Italian peninsula remained free from the intervention of France and Spain or other powers, the city-states could continue to prosper while fighting each other and casting wary glances toward the Ottoman Empire as it expanded its influence in the Mediterranean. But the city-states, divided by economic interests and with a long tradition of quarreling among themselves, became increasingly vulnerable to the expansion of French interests.

France had adhered to an alliance of Milan and Florence against Venice, signed in 1451. But the three city-states recognized the threat the aggressive French monarchy posed to the peninsula. Furthermore, following the capture of Constantinople in 1453, Turkish ships now appeared more frequently in the Adriatic Sea. It seemed imperative to end the struggles between the city-states. The Peace of Lodi (1454), signed by Florence, Milan, and Venice, established a new political order. Helping discourage Turkish or French aggrandizement, the treaty brought four decades of relative peace, which saw some of the crowning artistic glories of the Renaissance.

The establishment of this Italian League formalized this balance of power—it was already called that—between the strongest city-states. Whenever one or two of the states became aggressive—as when Venice and the Papal States attacked Ferrara—the others joined together to restore the status quo. Such wars were fought for the most part by mercenaries, imported and organized by *condottieri* paid for the task. For the moment, Milan's strong army served as a barricade against French invasion.

Perhaps accentuated by the ebbing of prosperity, political life within the city-states deteriorated. In Florence, the Medici despotism faced opposition from republicans. In the 1480s, Perugia had become a warring camp, torn between two rival families. In 1491, 130 members of one faction were executed on a main square and hanged from poles for all to see. Then, in repentance, the oligarchs erected thirty-five altars on that same square, and ordered priests to say Mass for three days in atonement. In a number of the city-states, some patrician families tried to outdo each other in their violence, crushing their opponents with brutality, then praying over the bodies. The leading Florentine families faithfully attended church, even as they undertook murders of vengeance in defense of family honor. Considerable tension, then, remained between two parallel codes of conduct, one religious, the other defined by family loyalties.

The Italian peninsula then became a battleground for the dynastic ambitions and rivalries of the French kings and the Holy Roman emperors, powerful rulers who could mobilize considerably larger armies than those of the city-states. The absorption of the wealthy and strategically important duchy of Burgundy into the Holy Roman Empire accentuated the struggle between the Habsburg dynasty and Charles VIII (ruled 1483–1498) of

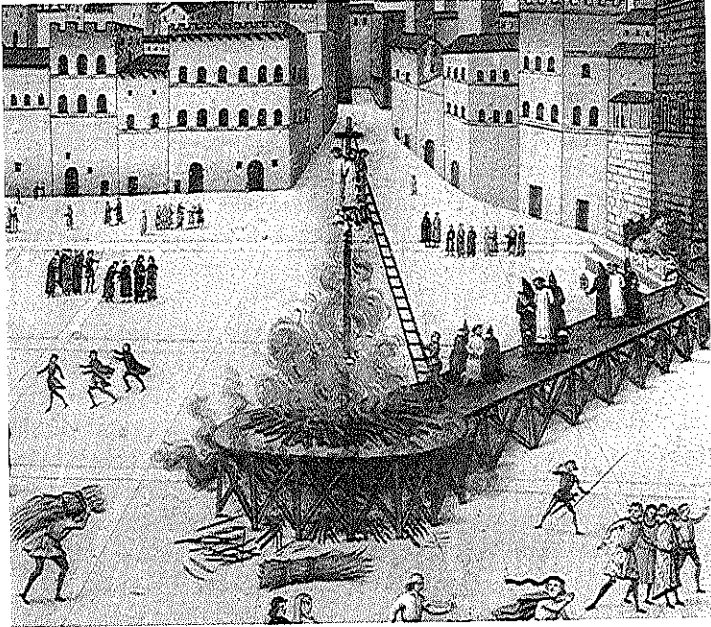
France. The latter decided to press his dubious claim to the throne of Naples, encouraged by the Sforza family of Milan, the enemy of Naples. In response, Naples allied with Florence and Pope Alexander VI (pope 1492–1503), himself a Florentine member of the Borgia family, against Milan.

In 1494, Charles VIII invaded the Italian peninsula with an army of 30,000 men. His French cavalry, Swiss mercenary infantry, and Scottish bowmen tore through northern Italy. In Florence, the Medici ruler handed over Pisa to France in exchange for leaving. This angered Florentine republicans. When the French army entered Florence, the Florentines drove the Medici from power (after sixty years of rule). The new Florentine government, establishing the Great Council as a legislative assembly, contributed to the city's artistic splendors by commissioning works of art that symbolized republican independence and ideals. Leonardo and Michelangelo painted scenes of Florentine military victories for the meeting hall of the Great Council. Seven years later, the city government commissioned Michelangelo's great statue *David*. Michelangelo's conscious imitation of a Donatello bust of the same name from early in the fifteenth century referred back to the republic's successful resistance to challenges at that time.

In the meantime, the army of Charles VIII moved toward Naples, devastating everything in its path. It marched into the city to cheers from Neapolitans who opposed the harsh taxes that had been levied by their rulers. But an anti-French coalition that included King Ferdinand of Aragon—whose dynastic territories included Sicily, Venice, and the Papal States—and the Holy Roman emperor rallied to defeat the French forces. Although the French army left the Italian peninsula, the city-states' troubles had only just begun.

In Florence, Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), a charismatic Dominican monk who had predicted the French invasion, opposed both the Medici in Florence and the papacy on the grounds that both were worldly and corrupt. He had welcomed Charles VIII of France as “an instrument in the hands of the Lord who has sent you to cure the ills of Italy,” including the sinfulness of the Florentines. With the Medici driven from power, Savonarola took virtual control of the Florentine republic. His denunciation of abuses within the Church led to his excommunication by Pope Alexander VI. Savonarola also incurred the enmity of patrician families by appealing for support to all ranks of Florentine society. With the pope's blessing, Savonarola's enemies first hanged and then burned him—the penalty for heresy—in 1498.

The next year, Louis XII (ruled 1498–1515), the new king of France, invaded the Italian peninsula, intent on making good his claim on the duchy of Milan. He did so with the support of the corrupt Pope Alexander VI, who wanted French assistance as he tried to solidify papal territorial claims, as well as to look after the extended interests of his children. To encourage the French king, the pope annulled Louis's marriage, so that he could marry his



Girolamo Savonarola being burned at the stake in Florence, sixteenth-century painting.

predecessor's widow, thereby keeping Brittany within his domains. When Julius II, who had been a bitter enemy of Alexander VI, became pope in 1503, he drove the powerful Borgia family from Rome. Then the dissolute pope set about trying to restore territorial holdings taken from the Papal States by Venice and its allies, constructing an alliance against the Venetians and becoming the last pope to lead his troops into the field of battle. That year the Spanish army defeated the French army and the Habsburgs absorbed the kingdom of Naples. Milan remained a fief of Louis XII until French forces were driven from the city in 1512, the same year that a Spanish army defeated the Florentines and the Medici overthrew the republic. Three years later, French troops overwhelmed Swiss mercenaries and recaptured Milan. After the intervention of Emperor Charles V in 1522 and French defeats, the Lombardy city became a Spanish possession in 1535.

Machiavelli

A mood of vulnerability and insecurity spread through the Italian peninsula as the city-states battled each other. Peasants, crushed by taxes and hunger, ever more deeply resented the rich. In turn, wealthy people were increasingly suspicious of the poor, viewing them as dangerous monsters

capable of threatening social order.

The devoted Florentine Niccolò Machiavelli was among those seeking to understand why the once proud and independent city-states of Italy now seemed virtually helpless before the invasion of foreign powers. Machiavelli's view of politics reflects his experience living in Florence during these tumultuous decades. The turmoil in Florence led him to write his *Histories* in 1494, which described the decline of



The pensive Niccolò Machiavelli.

the city-states. Influenced by his experience in government, Machiavelli, who had served as a Florentine diplomat at the court of the king of France and in Rome, believed himself to be a realist. He considered war a natural outlet for human aggression. But he also preferred the resolution of disputes by diplomacy. He believed that the absence of "civic virtue" accounted for the factionalism within and rivalries between the city-states. By civic virtue, Machiavelli meant the effective use of military force.

In 1512, the Medici overthrew the Florentine Republic, returning to power with the help of the papal army and that of Spain. Following the discovery of a plot, of which he was innocent, against the Medici patriarchs, Machiavelli was forced into exile on his country estate outside of the city. Florence had changed. A Medici supporter wrote one of the family heads: "Your forefathers, in maintaining their rule, employed skill rather than force; you must use force rather than skill."

A year later, Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* (1513). In it he reflected on the recent history of the Italian peninsula and offered a pessimistic assessment of human nature, marked by his belief that a strong leader—the prince—could arise out of strife. By making his subjects afraid of him, the prince could end political instability and bring about a moral regeneration that Machiavelli believed had characterized antiquity. Drawing on Cicero, he studied the cities of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire. Machiavelli can be considered the first political scientist, because his works reflect a systematic attempt to draw general, realistic conclusions from his understanding of the recent history of the Italian city-states. This preoccupation with the past in itself reveals the influence of the Renaissance.

Machiavelli put his faith in political leadership. Regardless of whether the form was monarchical or republican, he believed that the goal of government should be to bring stability to the city. A sense of civic responsibility

could only be reestablished through "good laws and institutions," but these, for Machiavelli, depended completely on military strength. He called on the Medici to drive away the new barbarians. Machiavelli's *The Art of War* (1521) expressed hope that the brutish mercenaries who had devastated the Italian peninsula would give way to soldier-citizens who would restore virtue. But for the Italian city-states, it was too late.

Machiavelli's invocation of "reasons of state" as sufficient justification for political action and as a political principle in itself, and his open admiration of ruthless rulers, would leave a chilling legacy, reflected by his belief that the "ends justify the means." While it is unlikely that Machiavelli had a sense of the state in the impersonal, modern sense of the term, he held that "good arms make good laws."

The Decline of the City-States

For much of the first thirty years of the sixteenth century, in Italy foreign armies fought against each other and against alliances formed by the city-states. The army of France in Italy reached 32,000 men by 1525, that of Spain 100,000 soldiers. Only Venice could resist the two great powers. In 1521, the first war broke out between Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (King Charles I of Spain) and King Francis I of France, who became the first Western ruler to ally with the Ottoman Turkish sultan. Charles V's armies decimated the French at Pavia, Italy, in 1525, carting the French king off to Madrid, where he remained until his family paid a ransom. In 1527, Charles V's mercenary army, angry over lack of pay, sacked Rome. By the Peace of Cambrai (1529), France gave up claims to Naples and Milan. But with the exception of Venice, the Italian city-states were now in one way or another dependent upon Charles V, the Holy Roman emperor, as the Spanish army repulsed new French invasions. In Rome, where Spanish merchants already had a significant presence, the pope increasingly depended on the Holy Roman emperor for defense against the Turks, as Charles added to his resources by taxing ecclesiastical revenues.

The long wars drained the city-states of financial resources and men, devastating some of the countryside. Nobles, whose political power had been diminished by the wealthy merchants of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, took advantage of the chaos to return to prominence in some cities. Patrician families struggled to maintain their authority against newcomers, including wealthy merchants who had married into poorer noble lines and who began to ape the styles of nobles. The Medici, after having once again been expelled by republicans, reconquered their city in 1530 after a siege of ten months. But in Florence, too, the Renaissance was over.

Artistic styles had already begun to reflect the loss of Renaissance self-confidence that accompanied the devastating impact of the French invasion. Botticelli seemed to abandon the serenity and cheerful optimism that characterized the Renaissance. To his painting *Mystical Nativity*, Botticelli added

an anxious inscription: "I Sandro painted this picture at the end of the year 1500 in the troubles of Italy." Botticelli thereafter became preoccupied with suffering and the Passion of Christ, reflecting the fact that the High Renaissance was more closely tied to ecclesiastical influence. The deteriorating political situation, combined with the expansion of Spanish influence after 1530, made it more difficult for artists to find patronage in the Italian city-states.

Soon in Italy only Venice, the city of Titian, remained a center of artistic life. Machiavelli, who died in 1527, the year Charles V's troops pillaged Rome, sensed that the humiliation of the Italian city-states by foreign armies brought to a close a truly unique period in not only the history of Italy but in Western civilization. Of the great figures of the High Renaissance, only Michelangelo and Titian lived past 1530.

Impulses Elsewhere

The cultural glories of the Renaissance ebbed even as different kinds of discoveries by Europeans opened up new possibilities for mankind. Columbus's transatlantic voyages were signs that the economic and cultural vitality of Europe was shifting away from the Mediterranean to Spain and, to a lesser extent, England. The economic interests of these states would increasingly be across the Atlantic Ocean. The mood of optimism associated with the Renaissance seemed to have moved to central and northern Europe as Italy lapsed into a considerably less happy period. Many humanists and artists began to emigrate north of the Alps to lands considered by most cultured Italians to have been barbarian only a century earlier. Now new universities in northern Europe beckoned them.

Other dramatic changes had already begun to occur across the Alps. Relentless calls for reform of the Catholic Church led to a schism within Christendom: the Reformation. In northern Europe, the Dutch monk and humanist Erasmus expressed the exhilaration many men of learning felt when he wrote, "The world is coming to its senses as if awakening out of a deep Sleep."

THE TWO REFORMATIONS



After paying a handsome sum to Pope Leo X in 1515, Albert of Hohenzollern received a papal dispensation (exemption from canon law) that enabled him to become archbishop of Mainz, a lucrative and prestigious ecclesiastical post. Otherwise, under canon law, the twenty-three-year-old Albert would have been ineligible due to his age (archbishops were supposed to be at least thirty years old) and because he already drew income from two other ecclesiastical posts. As part of his payment to the pope and in order to repay the large sum of money loaned to him by the Fugger banking family, the new archbishop authorized the sale of the St. Peter's indulgence, which would release a sinner from punishment for his sins. Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar who was in charge of the sale of papal indulgences in the archbishopric of Mainz, was commissioned to preach the indulgence. Half of the proceeds were to go to the papacy, and half to Albert and the Fuggers. In his tour of parishes, Tetzel emotionally depicted the wailing of dead parents in Purgatory, pleading with their children to put coins in the box so that they could be released from their suffering.

The sale of indulgences, particularly their commercial use to allow clergymen to obtain multiple posts, had drawn increasing criticism in some of the German states. Indeed, no other ecclesiastical financial abuse drew as much passionate opposition as did indulgences. More than this, the Roman papacy itself faced considerable opposition in the German states, as the pope had appointed foreigners to many key ecclesiastical posts and had attempted to force the German states to provide him with money for a war against the Turks. The young German monk Martin Luther was among those denouncing Tetzel, the sale of indulgences, and the role of the Roman papacy in the German states.

This opposition to the papacy created a schism that would tear Christendom apart beginning in the second decade of the sixteenth century. Orig-