

THE RENAISSANCE: THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE

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- ❖ Learning and the Arts began to flourish during the Renaissance.
- ❖ Crusaders returned to Europe with a newfound understanding of the world.
- ❖ The invention of the printing press encouraged literacy and helped to spread new ideas.
- ❖ Wealthy families and the church had amassed enough wealth to become patrons.
- ❖ The development of financial techniques such as bookkeeping and credit allowed merchants to prosper.



About 1450, European scholars became more interested in studying the world around them. Their art became more true to life. They began to explore new lands. The new age in Europe was eventually called “the Renaissance.” Renaissance is a French word that means “rebirth.” Historians consider the Renaissance to be the beginning of modern history.

The Renaissance began in northern Italy and then spread through Europe. Italian cities such as Naples, Genoa, and Venice became centers of trade between Europe and the Middle East. Arab scholars preserved the writings of the ancient Greeks in their libraries. When the Italian cities traded with the Arabs, ideas were exchanged along with goods. These ideas, preserved from the ancient past, served as the basis of the Renaissance. When the Byzantine empire fell to Muslim Turks in 1453, many Christian scholars left Greece for Italy.



The ceiling of the Sistine chapel painted by Michaelangelo.

The Renaissance was much more than simply studying the work of ancient scholars. It influenced painting, sculpture, and architecture. Paintings

became more realistic and focused less often on religious topics. Rich families became patrons and commissioned great art. Artists advanced the Renaissance style of showing nature and depicting the feelings of people. In Britain, there was a flowering in literature and drama that included the plays of William Shakespeare.

Renaissance Art

The Renaissance patrons wanted art that showed joy in human beauty and life's pleasures. Renaissance art is more lifelike than in the art of the Middle Ages. Renaissance artists studied perspective, or the differences in the way things look when they are close to something or far away. The artists painted in a way that showed these differences. As a result, their paintings seem to have depth.

Leonardo da Vinci was born in 1452 in the village of Vinci. His name means Leonardo of Vinci. Leonardo began his career working for a master painter in Florence. By 1478, Leonardo left his master and set up his own workshop. People have been trying to guess the secret behind the smile of his Mona Lisa ever since he painted it around 1505. His Last Supper shows clearly the different feelings of Jesus and his followers.

Leonardo's fame grew—but not just for his painting. Leonardo was truly a “Renaissance Man,” skilled in many fields. He was a scientist and an inventor as well as an artist. He made notes and drawings of everything he saw. Leonardo invented clever machines, and even designed imitation wings that he hoped would let a person fly like a bird.

Michelangelo Buonarroti of Florence was one of the greatest artists of all time. Like Leonardo, Michelangelo was a “Renaissance Man” of many talents. He was a sculptor, a painter, and an architect. When Michelangelo carved a statue of Moses, he included veins and muscles in the arms and legs.

Michelangelo was a devout Christian, and the church was his greatest patron. He designed the dome of St. Peter's church in Rome. Nearby, Michelangelo's paintings cover the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the building where new popes have been selected for more than five hundred years. Michelangelo's painting illustrates the Book of Genesis, with scenes that span from the Creation to the Flood. The project was very difficult. Working alone, Michelangelo had to lie on his back atop high scaffolding while he painted the vast ceiling.

THE MEDICIS

In the 15th century, the leading families of Florence decided they needed a strong person in charge to lead them against the growing threat of rival cities. They chose Cosimo de Medici, a wealthy banker, to take control of the government. Cosimo maintained the appearance of republican government, but he appointed his relatives and people he could control to important positions. When Cosimo died in 1464, his son and grandson continued his policies. The Medici maintained control by exiling people who disagreed with them and encouraging other Italian cities to form alliances with Florence.

The best known of the Medicis was Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo, who was known as "Lorenzo the Magnificent." Lorenzo was not only a shrewd banker and clever politician; he was also a scholar and a poet. Under Lorenzo's leadership, Florence became one of the most beautiful and prosperous cities in Italy, as well as a center of the Renaissance.

The Medicis became great patrons of the arts. With their wealth they provided financial support for many Renaissance artists. Without this support, art would probably not have progressed as it did during the Renaissance.

HUMANISM

Many Renaissance scholars looked to the past for inspiration. They studied the classics – the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans. In the works of the classics they found a spirit similar to theirs that valued innovation in this world rather than looking forward to the next world after death.

A person who studied the classics was called a humanist. Humanists recreated classical styles in art, literature, and architecture. Humanists believed that by studying the classics, they could understand people and the world better. One humanist wrote, “To each species of creature has been allotted a peculiar and instinctive gift. To horses galloping, to birds flying, comes naturally. To man only is given the desire to learn.”

The humanists emphasized the importance of human values instead of religious beliefs. Renaissance humanists were often devout Christians, but their promotion of secular, or non-religious, values often put them at odds with the church.

Today we refer to the study of literature, philosophy and art as the humanities. The civilizations of Greece and Rome ended long ago, but they continue to influence us today.

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City-states in Italy

During the Middle Ages, much of Italy was controlled by the Holy Roman Empire. As the emperors and popes fought for control, both were weakened. Several Italian cities formed states that were independent of both the empire and the church. *Venice and Florence* were two centers of power and wealth that became the cradle of the Renaissance.

Venice was founded in the fifth century by people fleeing from Attila the Hun. They settled on a group of islands on the northeastern edge of the Italian peninsula. Shipbuilding was the primary industry in Venice. During the Crusades, Venetian ships provided transportation to the Holy Land, and benefitted greatly from the overseas trade. By the 13th century, Venice was the most prosperous city in Europe.

The city became rich by collecting taxes on all merchandise brought into its harbor. Venice built huge warships that protected the valuable cargo of its merchant ships from pirate raids. With the vast wealth from trade, many of the leading families of Venice vied with one another to build the finest palaces or support the work of the greatest artists.

Florence, the “city of flowers,” was located in the hill country of north-central Italy. It prospered because of the wool industry. Sheep were raised in the rock hill country of central Italy, and Florence was a center of wool processing. During most of the Renaissance, wealthy merchants dominated Florence.

The merchants competed with one another by building grand palaces for themselves. The merchants were patrons of the arts. Patron comes from the Latin word for father. They hired artists to fill their homes with beautiful paintings and sculptures. Patrons bought rare books and paid scholars to teach their children. The money and encouragement of patrons together with that of the church, made the masterpieces of Renaissance art.

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Niccolo Machiavelli

Niccolo Machiavelli was one of the most influential writers of the Renaissance. He believed Italy could not be united unless its leader was ruthless. In 1513, he wrote *The Prince* as a way to impress the Medicis that he understood the characteristics a leader must possess in order to get and keep their power. He advised rulers to be

kind only of it suited their purposes. *Otherwise, he warned, it is better to be feared than loved.*

“You must know there are two methods of fighting, the one by law, the other by force; the first method is of men, the second of beasts; but because the first is frequently not sufficient, one must have recourse to the second. Therefore it is necessary for a prince to understand how to use the methods of the beast and the man . . . A prince . . . ought to choose the fox and the lion; because the lion cannot defend himself against traps and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves. Therefore, it is necessary to be a fox to discover the traps and a lion to terrify the wolves. Those who rely simply on the lion do not understand this.”

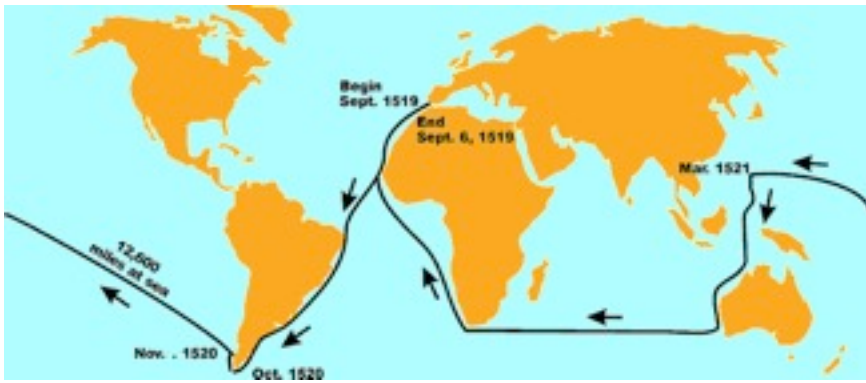
-- Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1513)

Ferdinand Magellan

Aristotle first theorized that the earth was round. Columbus died believing he proved Aristotle correct, but the real confirmation came in the expedition of Ferdinand Magellan, the captain of the first ship to sail completely around the world.

Magellan was a Portuguese sailor who explored Asia. While he was in Asia, Magellan picked up an Asian boy he called Enrique, who he brought back to Portugal. Magellan asked the King of Portugal to finance an expedition around the world. When the king rejected him, Magellan disowned his allegiance to Portugal and offered his services to Spain.

Magellan left Spain in 1519 with five ships. It took more than fourteen months to find the southern opening to the Pacific Ocean. He found it in the frigid, stormy waters now known as the Strait of Magellan. What Magellan did not count on was the immensity of the Pacific, a body of water larger than all of the land on earth. Magellan expected Asia to be a few hundred miles past beyond the coast of South America. Instead, the expedition traveled 12,600 miles before reaching land.



The starving sailors arrived the island of Guam after more than six months at sea, and then moved on to the Philippines. While in the Philippines, Magellan discovered that his servant, Enrique, could understand the native language. Magellan realized that Enrique was

the first person to have traveled completely around the world.

Magellan had survived eighteen months at sea, but he was killed in battle in the Philippines. A local warrior persuaded Magellan to defeat his rival in battle. Most of Magellan's men considered the battle both pointless and dangerous, so they refused to participate. Magellan was hit with a poison arrow in the battle and died.

One of Magellan's five ships did make it back to Spain, only twelve days less than three years after their journey started. Only one ship and eighteen sailors remained of the 265 men accompanied Magellan.