

New Trials for the Church

During the 1200s A.D., the power of the Roman Catholic Church piqued. The papacy was recognized as the spiritual head of all European Christians. (Christians living in the old Byzantine Empire in Eastern Europe did not tend to recognize the pope and his authority, however.)

But, beginning in the 1300s, with the strengthening of the monarchy in places like France, England, and the Germanies, challenges to the Church and the power of the papacy came frequently. The Church faced several defeats over a long century of turmoil and division.

The struggle between the Catholic papacy and secular kings began during the years of Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303). He and the king of France, Philip IV (known as Philip the Fair), came to blows. When Philip attempted to tax the clergy in France, Boniface resounded, announcing that clergy in any state were not to pay taxes to a secular ruler without permission from the Church.

When Philip ignored and challenged the Pope's authority by banning exports of money and valuable goods from France to Italy, Boniface came down hard, excommunicating Philip from the sacraments in an attempt to keep him in line and extend papal authority over all secular rulers.

Philip IV responded by dispatching soldiers to Rome, taking Boniface prisoner and bringing him back to France to stand trial. Since Boniface was an old man, the shock of imprisonment and challenge took its toll, causing his death in 1303.

With the death of the pope, King Philip moved swiftly to replace him. By 1305, he forced the college of cardinals (Catholic clergymen who select new popes) to elect a Frenchman to the papacy named Clement V (1305–1314). Once Clement was installed as pope, he ordered the removal of the papacy from Rome to French soil, settling himself and his papal office in the city of Avignon. This new papal city was not located in France directly, but rather in the Holy Roman Empire along the east bank of the Rhone River. Although not in France, Avignon was just across the river from the territory ruled by King Philip, and easily controlled by him.

For roughly the next 75 years, the papacy was

centered in French-controlled Avignon, not in Rome. Historians refer to this era as the Babylonian Captivity, the period when the papacy existed outside of its traditional home in Rome. During the reign of most of the popes of this period, the papacy supported French interests.

With the papacy centered outside of Rome, many critics questioned the popes who ruled from Avignon. Their first loyalty appeared to be to France and its monarchy. By 1377, Pope Gregory XI, aware of the decline of the papacy's reputation, returned to Rome, where he died the next year.

When the college of cardinals met to select a new pope (most of the cardinals were French) the citizens of Rome forced them to elect an Italian pope named Urban VI (1378–1389). Five months later, a group of French cardinals refused to recognize Urban and elected another pope, a Frenchman named Clement VII, who returned the papacy back to Avignon. With two ruling popes, a Great Schism—or division—developed.

Christians in Europe divided their loyalty between the two popes. France, Spain, Scotland, and southern Italy gave support to Clement. England, Scandinavia, the Germanies, and most of Italy recognized Urban.

The Great Schism caused many Christians to doubt papal authority and led to great confusion. It was not until 1417 that a church council, the Council of Constance, rejected the split papacy and elected Pope Martin V as the only legitimate pope. By this time, however, the prestige of the Church had been greatly compromised, never again to regain the power it wielded during the High Middle Ages.

Review and Write

1. What was the basis for the struggle between Pope Boniface VIII and the French king, Philip IV?
2. What damage to the Church was caused by the Great Schism?

The Early Renaissance

The 1300s were marked by the recurring Black Death plagues, inflation and economic depression, and pesky wars which made life in later medieval Europe a challenge. The Church experienced serious challenges from secular rulers resulting in the Babylonian Captivity and the Great Schism.

Monarchy survived the century, mainly because most Europeans of the period believed kings to be the best means of governing. Yet many kings and queens functioned badly, were constantly challenged, murdered their own family rivals, and rarely stirred patriotic confidence in the people.

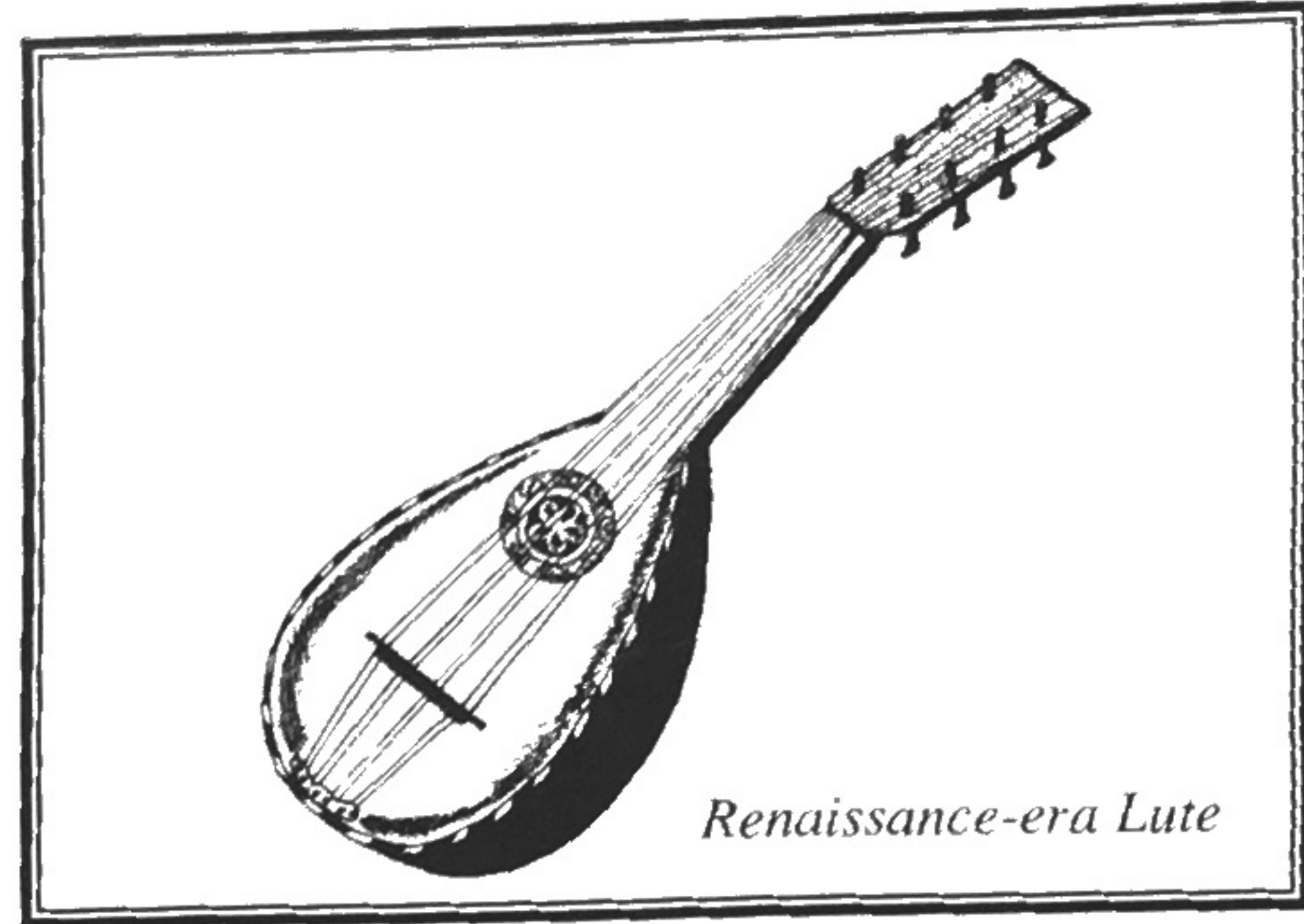
By the end of the 14th century, many people across Europe had grown pessimistic about their future and the future of their political state. There was an air of hopelessness about the new century.

However, by the end of the 1400s, Europe had experienced great change. The recurring economic downturns were leveled out, new domestic industries were created—especially in the areas of textiles and armaments, new trade routes were established, and a New World in the Americas lay ahead, yet to be tapped for its wealth and potential.

As for Christianity, Rome was once again the center of the religious world of Europe. Kings, queens, and princes gained the upper hand over the often divisive nobility. Even learning had changed as Europeans became increasingly curious about the world. The arts were changing as new styles of painting, sculpture, and architecture were introduced.

Above all, however, there was a new sense of optimism about the future. People from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean to the Baltic saw their futures filled with possibilities. There was an excitement about what was going to happen next in Europe, although no one really knew what to expect. Those who thought much about these exciting times wrote about a “new age” dawning across the continent. Some writers used the word *renaissance*, a *rebirth*, to describe their own times. They put behind them the *dark age* of plagues, wars, and inflation.

By 1500, the new optimism of Europe developed into a new way of looking at the past, the present, and the future. The medieval world, with its superstitions, its limited scholarship, its religious values, was a thing of the past. The next world—



Renaissance-era Lute

historians refer to it as the beginning of our modern world—was destined to be different from anything which had come before it. It was to be a world dominated by kings and queens ruling over powerful nation-states, robust, international economies, broader intellectual and moral values, and secular ideals.

How all this came about is hard to determine. In some respects, Europe just shook off its immediate past and moved ahead. We can see today more clearly why these changes occurred.

The new economics was generated by Northern Europeans in great trading and merchandising centers in Paris, London, Bruges, Bremen, Lubeck, and the Hague. The new art was created largely by Italians, and later fanned out to nearly all corners of Europe, creating a new European civilization.

Review and Write

1. From your reading of this sheet, make a list of the changes which came to Europe during the 1400s. Why might such changes cause Europeans to become more hopeful about their world?
2. List some of the problems Europe faced during the 1300s.

The Italian City-States

For over two centuries, from the early 1300s to the early 1500s, the city-states of Italy directed Europe, creating new forms and styles of painting, sculpture, architecture, and decorative arts. They created a new ideal male image: the gentleman. This image took the place of the chivalrous knight, the male symbol of the Middle Ages.

Even Italian schools were different. While nearly all medieval schools and universities were church schools and cathedral-based universities, the new Italian center of education emphasized a broader education, independent of the Church. The concept of a *liberal education* developed, one free to explore subjects frowned on in Church schools (or simply considered too trivial for serious study.)

Such schools were attended not only by Italian students. Thousands of pupils from dozens of European countries streamed into the city-states to receive a Renaissance education.

How did Italy come to be such a leader and source of change in Europe by the 14th century?

One reason was that Italy had always been out of the mainstream of medieval culture, thought, and politics. It had never been truly medieval. Italy had never had a strong monarchy, did not rely on the vassal-serf model of feudalism, and medieval thought—scholasticism—had never taken deep root there. Thus making the change from the Middle Ages to a new era of progress and rebirth was a natural one for Italy.

The Italian city-states had the power and money to assume cultural leadership in 14th-century Europe. Such cities as Milan, Venice, Florence, and Rome had dominated life in Italy for generations.

Without a powerful, unifying Italian monarch, such cities came to dominate the economy, culture, and politics of vast regions, without many serious rivals—except for one another.

As city-states, political power was not centered in a landed nobility as in most other European countries of the period, but rather in an urban ruling class. Wealthy bankers, merchants, and traders (the *popolo grosso*, or “fat people”) were found at the top of the economic and social ladder. Under them were the *popolo minuto*, the “little people”: small business owners, artisans, craftsmen, and other urbanites.

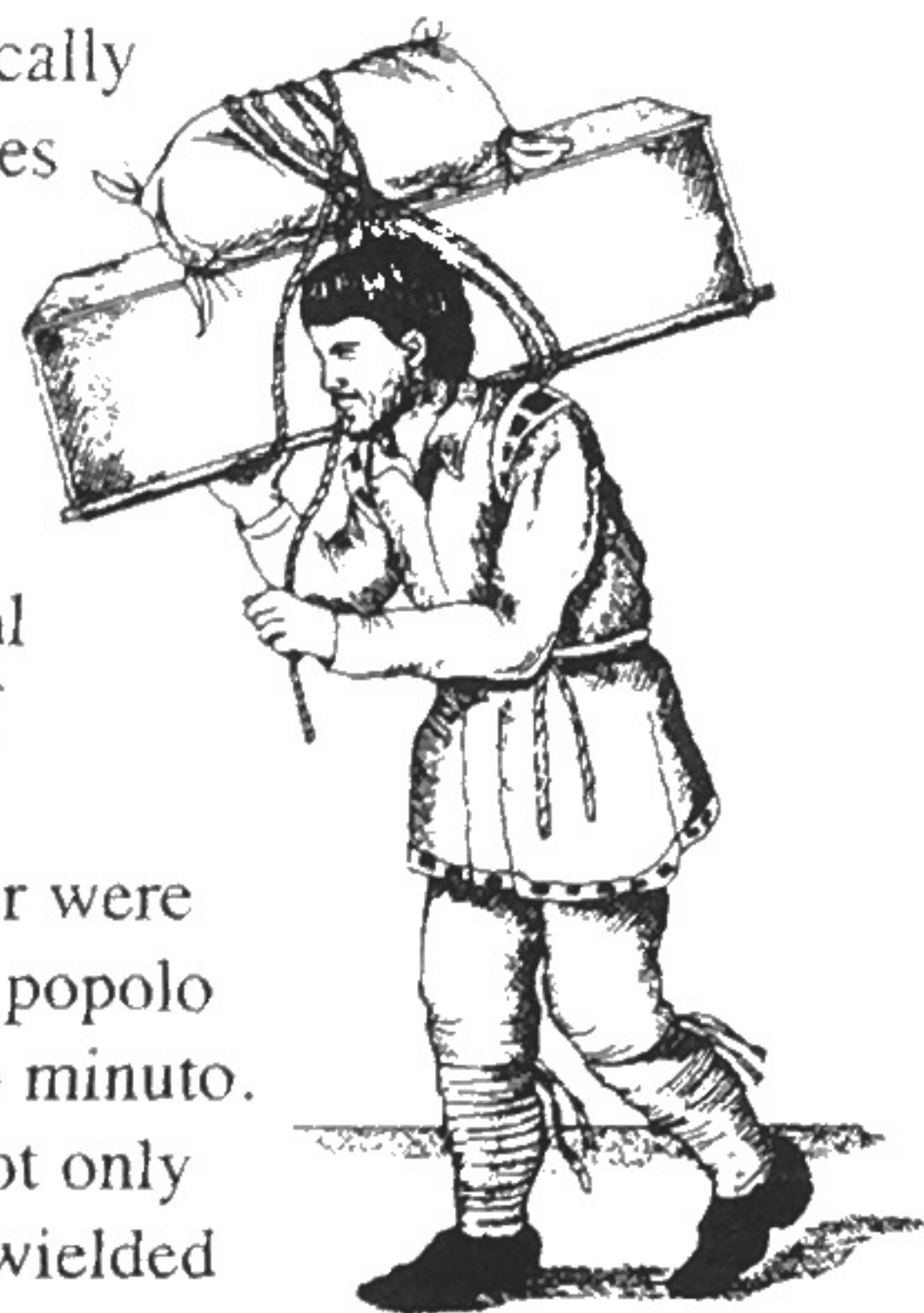
Below them, typically living outside the cities in rural landscapes, were the peasants. They worked the land, farmed, raised sheep, had no political power, and no way of getting it.

Quarrels for power were common between the *popolo grosso* and the *popolo minuto*.

Such city-states not only ruled themselves but wielded great economic influence. The northern Italian cities were leaders in international trade.

In the northern city of Venice, on the northern shores of the Adriatic Sea, nearly the entire population was involved in some way with Oriental trade. Venetian traders served as the European source for such rare and prized trade goods as spices, silks, teak wood, and exotic fruits. Even if one was not a merchant of Venice, he or she worked as a banker, sailor, dock worker (called a *stevedore*), manufacturer, shipper, and was connected with trade.

The city of Florence, located along the Arno River in northern Italy, was a center for European banking and manufacturing. Great textile mills were located in Florence. Nearly one out of every three Florentines was involved in the woolens industry—from raising sheep to selling cloth to foreign buyers.



A *stevedore*

Review and Write

1. From your reading, list the reasons why the Italian city-states took the position of leadership in moving Europe out of the Middle Ages and into a new era.
2. How important was trade to the economy of Renaissance Venice? Give examples.

Life in Renaissance Florence

The High and Later Middle Ages witnessed great strides in urbanization. Where city life in the Early Middle Ages almost ceased completely, the centuries to follow brought about a remarkable rebirth of town and city dwelling.

By the 1400s, some European urban centers were home to hundreds of thousands of citizens. The city of Paris boasted a population of a quarter million. In northern Italy, the city-state of Milan held 200,000. Its neighbor to the south, Florence, had a citizenry of 100,000. City life in the Renaissance served as a model for the new era.

One leading city was Florence. During the Renaissance, Florence embodied the soul of the period, rising to prominence as a source of great art produced largely under the patronage or financial support of one ruling family: the Medici [MEH dee chee]. Members of this important Italian family greatly influenced the Renaissance in Italy and France from the 1400s to the 1700s.

The Medici supported the arts of Florence with money and influence. Through them, Florence became the creative center of the Renaissance. They also gave support to the new liberal education of the period. Experts estimate that the Medici family spent the modern equivalent of hundreds of millions of dollars on the arts and sciences during a single 50-year period.

The wealthy Medici family came to power in Florence in 1434. It controlled the city's politics through an oligarchy—government by a small group of powerful leaders. One influential banker, Cosimo de Medici (1389–1464) led his family in controlling daily Florentine life. Throughout most of the 1400s, Cosimo and his grandson, Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449–1492), controlled Florence, its economy, its politics, and its art.

In 1444, Cosimo ordered the construction of a magnificent building, the first of such Medici family palaces. Although the Medici were not true royalty, Cosimo considered himself a duke. The title was

eventually accepted by the people of Florence. This palace, the Palazzo Medici, was the first of the Renaissance palaces, and it served as a model for many others.

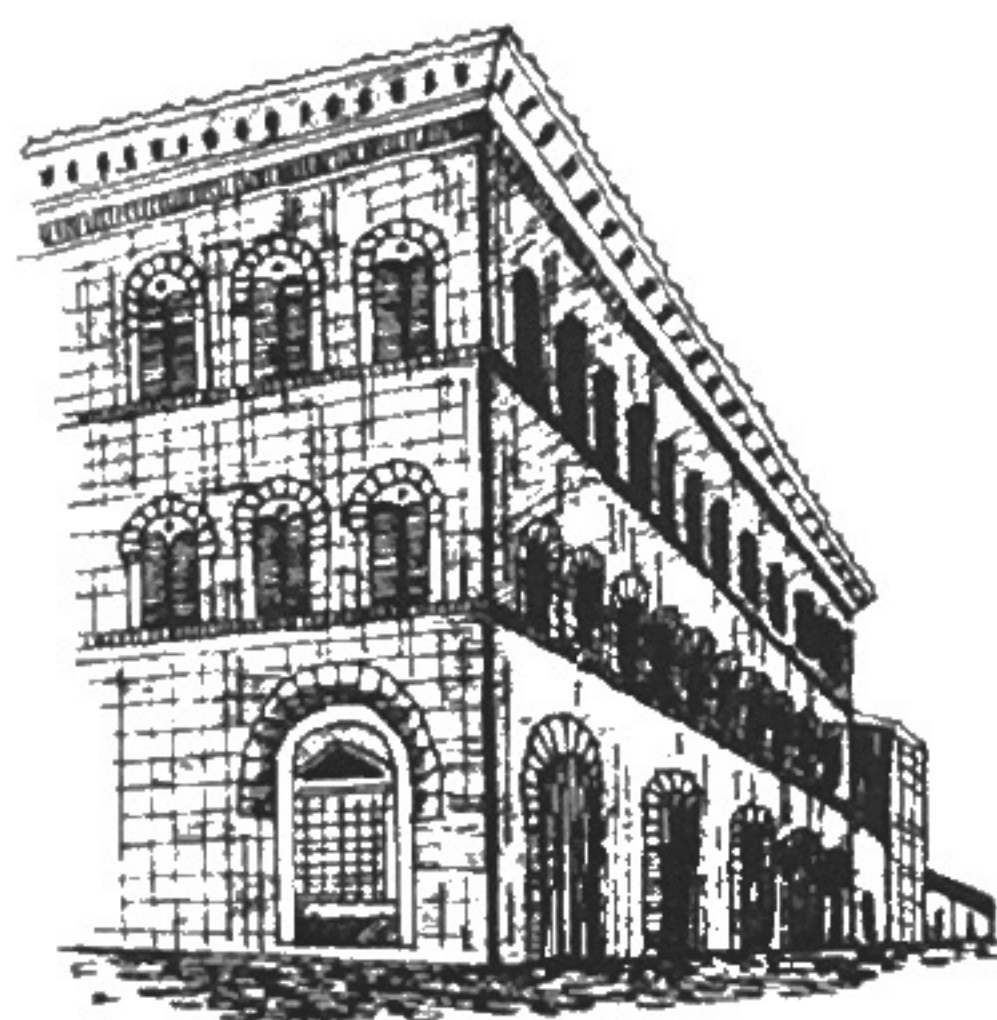
Cosimo ordered the building of the first public library in Europe since the days of the Roman Empire. In time, he and his family spent millions of dollars on rare manuscripts and books for this civic project. Cosimo sent agents to the East to locate manuscripts.

One scholar hunted for and purchased 200 ancient Greek documents. Approximately 80 of them were previously unknown in Europe.

The artists supported by the Medici make up a who's who of Renaissance painters, sculptors, and architects. Donatello, Filippino Lippi, Masaccio, Verrocchio, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, DaVinci, and Michelangelo all produced great works of art under the generous patronage of the Medici.

Such influence created a new world in Florence. Craftsmen produced lavish items of personal use from fine furniture to elaborate pottery. Yet not everyone enjoyed the wealth of the city. Many were poor, barely making a living combing and carding wool for the lucrative textile trade. These common workers, known as *ciompi*, sometimes revolted against their harsh living conditions, as they did several times in the late 1300s.

Florence became a city of such consumption and conspicuous wealth that critics rose up and condemned it. A 15th-century Dominican friar named Girolamo Savonarola convinced many Florentines that wealth was the work of the devil. His preaching brought converts. The result was the burning of many works of Florentine art in what were known as Bonfires of the Vanities.



Palazzo Medici begun in 1444

Review and Write

Describe the influence the Medici family had on Renaissance Florence.

The Birth of Humanism

The Renaissance Italians busied themselves with creating a new set of values for their world. New social ideals were created, further separating the men and women of the 14th and 15th centuries from their medieval roots.

Unlike during the Middle Ages, the special status brought on by an aristocratic or noble birth came to mean little in Renaissance Italy. Old knightly virtues of chivalry, loyalty, and personal honor, for many, became meaningless.

The Renaissance world defined itself differently. Although there was always a marked division of labor and social significance—an upper, middle, and lower class—there were opportunities for more people than ever before.

Competition kept everyone on their toes. Getting an education now meant more than just developing one's mind. It stood for getting ahead. Poor peasants might rise in class status and, by the use of their talents, become famous painters like Leonardo Da Vinci, who was born illegitimate.

The new values of the Renaissance included upward mobility, self-reliance, imagination, creativity, adaptability and forethought. Such qualities allowed one to reach the top of the social heap.

Many of these qualities were combined in the Renaissance concept *virtu*, from the Latin word *vir*. *Virtu* should not be confused with our common word *virtue*. Instead, it means well-rounded, complete, having many skills and abilities.

Men and women of the Renaissance valued individualism. No longer tied to a noble lord, working anonymously on someone else's property, now a man looked after himself first, and his family and friends second. His loyalty to king, baron, or pope came in a distant third. Suddenly, Renaissance men and women began to put great emphasis on their own existence, their own wants and needs.

This emphasis on individualism developed into a philosophy called Humanism. This ideology caused many to look to sources other than religious texts, including the Bible, for education and inspiration.

During the Middle Ages, education and study centered around the Scriptures and the writings of



Christian theologians. Medieval scholars paid little attention to the classical literature of the ancient Greeks or even the Romans. But by the 1300s, Italian thinkers and philosophers paid great attention to these ancient sources of knowledge and insight.

One of the early Italian Humanists was a writer and scholar named Francesco Petrarca, or Petrarch (1304–1374). Today Petrarch is considered the father of Humanism. He spent much of his life collecting Roman manuscripts and was a great admirer of the Roman orator, Cicero.

Such Humanists as Petrarch and those who followed him helped restore the study of classical Greek and Latin and changed the prevailing theory about education. During the Middle Ages, the Church dominated teaching. The nobility even created its own teaching program for knights, instructing them on how to fight and behave in court.

Few other educational systems existed in the medieval world. But the Humanists of Renaissance Italy created a new educational model. In their schools, they taught students to be complete human beings: to be able to read and write Latin and Greek, to develop good manners and codes of politeness, to be skilled fighters, to build up their bodies, and to be well groomed.

The purpose of this system of study was to create strong individuals who could think for themselves. In doing so, such individuals came to believe in the ancient Greek maxim: *Man is the measure of all things*. Each person, individually, determines his or her own values, morals, and interests.

The Prince and The Courtier

The Renaissance inspired the creation of new ideals and political thought. The knight was out; the gentleman was in. The noble lord, led by religious conviction, was a creature of the past. Government would now be led by discerning men and women who would use their conscience as their guide.

Two important books, published just four years apart during the late Renaissance, set down the new standards of the day. The author of *The Courtier* was Baldassare Castiglione [CAST ig leon] (1478–1529). The other book was known as *The Prince*, and was written by Niccolò Machiavelli [MAH kyah VEL lee] (1469–1527). *The Courtier* was published in 1528 and *The Prince* in 1532. Both had been written several years before they were made public.

These two books set the standard for the modern man of Italian society politics. They present a new creature to the world, one quite different from the medieval chivalrous knight or the Christian noble lord. Yet both books present two ideals which appear, at least on the surface, to be quite different from one another.

Castiglione's *The Courtier* presents a picture of the ideal Renaissance man. While not necessarily born an aristocrat, Castiglione assumed he would be because typically only the upper class could spend time developing this ideal. Castiglione writes of his ideal man:

I would wish the Courtier endowed by nature not only with talent and with beauty of countenance [the face] and person, but with that certain grace we call an 'air,' which shall make him at first sight pleasing and lovable to all who see him.

Among the other virtues Castiglione required of his courtier were modesty, humanity, competition, and fierceness. His skills were to include wrestling, horsemanship, swimming, jumping, running, dancing, and throwing stones. He needed to speak several languages, play a musical instrument, and write with flowing handwriting. Conversation was to come easily and he was to be

a good joke teller.

If Castiglione's courtier image was of one who played fair and decently, then Machiavelli's prince lived by another set of rules altogether.

In his book, Machiavelli articulates how a ruler—he patterned his prince after Lorenzo (the Magnificent) de Medici—is to conduct business and diplomacy.

Machiavelli's model prince is wise and virtuous. But he is also cunning, devious, practical, a realist. He is to be self-interested. He may use any means to achieve his ends, no matter who is hurt in the process. In battle, the prince is ruthless and doesn't worry about gaining a reputation for cruelty.

Machiavelli describes The Prince as one who:

...must imitate the fox and the lion, for the lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves. One must therefore be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten wolves.

The Prince and *The Courtier* were important books in their time, addressing the new ideals of the Renaissance. In fact, the Emperor Charles V kept only three books by his bedside—the two by Castiglione and Machiavelli and the Bible.



Niccolò Machiavelli

Review and Write

1. Do you think it was possible for a Renaissance man to follow the advice of both Castiglione and Machiavelli at the same time? Explain in 50 words or so.
2. What impact did *The Courtier* and *The Prince* have on Italian politics and society?