

Why did the Renaissance begin in Italy?



Italy had become a crossroads for travel
more cities than other nations in Europe
ruled by aristocratic “merchant princes”
arts supported by the wealthy
in the presence of antiquity



City-States in Renaissance Italy



5 major Italian states:
Rome
Venice
Milan
Florence
the Kingdom of Naples



many Italian cities were trade centers



Trade in Renaissance

Florence: the center of the Italian Renaissance



Florentine gold coin (the *florin*) was the standard coinage throughout Europe
the city guild members planned and voted on city issues



(remember: guild members included textile workers, bankers, masons, builders, sculptors, lawyers)

members of the guilds were wealthy and held positions in government

the Ponte Vecchio [left], constructed in 1299, the home of the Florentine guilds

contributed to the construction of grand cathedrals

a competition developed between the rich merchants to see who could commission the grandest buildings

Society in Renaissance Italy

wealthy business people became the cities' leading citizens

wanted to use their wealth to enjoy the pleasures of life

employed artists to decorate their beautiful homes
profit-makers indulged in philanthropy

stratification of society now based on wealth as well as title

Baldassare Castiglione:
The Book of the Courtier



PLATE XXXV. CATHERINE DE' MEDICI AND HER FAMILY, 1564
Shettlesbrooke Park. By kind permission of Miss Oswald-Smith



Humanism

Middle Ages:
art and learning centered on the church/religion

by the 14th century:
people became more interested in thinking about themselves and what they were capable of doing

Humanist educators sought to create an educated citizenry who could:

 speak and write with eloquence and clarity
 engage in the civic life of their communities
 persuade others to virtuous and prudent actions



this was to be accomplished through the study of the *studia humanitatis*, today known as the humanities: grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy

this became known as **humanism**

Humanist Literature and Art



Petrarch (1304-1374)

known as the “Father of Humanism”
Italian poet who studied the works of Roman writers and modeled some of his own writings on their works

his best known work is a collection of love sonnets to Laura, a married woman with whom he’d become infatuated

“Breeze, blowing that blonde curling hair, stirring it, and being softly stirred in turn, scattering that sweet gold about, then gathering it, in a lovely knot of curls again...”



in art of the Middle Ages, saints in paintings wore halos and were larger in scale than ordinary or less important figures

Renaissance art incorporated humanist ideals
ordinary people were the same size as saints
saints began to look more like ordinary people

The central figures of the Madonna and child in this Middle Ages painting are larger than others to help viewers understand that they are the most important figures in the painting.

The holy family of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus are joined here by shepherds and an angel in the center playing a lute. The landscape around them is earthly rather than heavenly.

