

The Politics and Art of the Italian Renaissance

Outline

Introduction: What, When, Where, Why?

Concepts: Philosophical, Political, Artistic.

Renaissance? (Michelet)

Humanism; “Civic Humanism”;

Individualism: “Man is the Measure of All Things”

How did these ideas develop? Why?

Who first articulated them and how did they spread?

**Why did Scholasticism stress Aristotle and Humanism
Plato?**

The Origin and Spread of Humanism:

Importation of Greek manuscripts (Aristotle, Plato, etc.) from Byzantium and Southern Italy.

Sicilian, Giovanni Aurispa (1370-1459)

brought 200 Greek manuscripts from Constantinople.

Florentine Chancellor Coluccio Salutati

(1351-1402) invited Manuel Chrysoloras

(1350-1415) to teach Greek at University of Florence in 1397.

Re-discovery of Latin manuscripts (Cicero, Livy,

Pliny, etc) from various European

monasteries (St. Gall, Cluny, etc.) during

Avignon Captivity, by Poggio Bracciolini

(1380-1459) and Niccolò Niccoli (1364-1437),

among them, Vitruvius’ text

on Architecture, Cicero’s, and

Quintilian’s Orations on humanism, etc..

Universities of Bologna (1088) and Padua

(1222) become centers of study of Roman Law, history, and literature by 15th century.

What was Florence's Role in spread of "Civic Humanism"?

**Republic: Ordinances of Justice (Constitution), 1293;
Commerce; Wealth; Guilds; Golden Florin
Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Coluccio Salutati**

Rome, abandoned by Papacy for Avignon:

Cola di Rienzo (Caput Mundi)

Venice: Oligarchy; unconcerned until Invasion of Turks

Art in the Trecento:

Cimabue, ca. 1300: Madonna Enthroned

Giovanni Pisano, 1302-10: Pulpit, Pisa Cathedral

**Giotto, 1305-6: Arena Chapel, Padua; continuation of
work on Cathedral of Florence and Bell Tower.**

Duccio di Buoninsegno: 1311: Maesta`

Simone Martini, 1333: The Annunciation

Lorenzetti, 1339: Good and Bad Government, Siena

The Quattrocento:

Florence: The Medici

Ghiberti and Brunelleschi

**Alberti (Leon Battista) 1404-1472: Books on
Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, etc.**

**Massaccio: Perspective in Art: Brancacci Chapel
(1424-27); Crucifixion.**

**Donatello's David: first free standing sculpture since
ancient times-1433.**

**Platonic Academy of Florence (1440) founded by
Medici**

Humanistic Literature:

**Leonardo Bruni: 1370-1444: Chancellor of
Florence: 1410-11; 1427-44. Wrote History of
Florentine People (first modern historian);**

**Praised Florence as a bastion of Republican Liberty from its founding. (Civic Humanism)
Pico della Mirandola, “Oration on the Dignity of Man”: 1486 (the “manifesto” of humanism).
Marsilio Ficino, Platonic Theory, 1469-1474**

Major Artists:

**Fra Angelico; Mantegna;
Piero della Francesca;
Botticelli; Verrocchio;
Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci**

**Government of Florence becomes concentrated in hands of richest merchants and bankers;
Cosimo dei Medici becomes de facto ruler (1434-1464); Death of Cosimo in 1464, declared “Pater Patriae”; succeeded by Piero, then Lorenzo “The Magnificent”:1449-1492.
Establishes Laurentian Library free to the Public.
1495: Savonarola establishes democratic constitution in Florence. (Bonfire of the Vanities) Excommunicated by Alexander VI, burned at the stake, 1498.**

Rome:

Council of Constance:1414: Conciliarist Movement; election of Martin V (Colonna): 1417-1431: Heals Avignon Schism; Restores order to city; calls for Jubilee Year (1423) to celebrate glory of Imperial Rome, claiming that the Papacy was the rightful heir to City and Empire: “CaputMundi” (citing Donations of Pepin and Constantine)

1440: Lorenzo Valla declares “Donation of Constantine” a forgery.

Imported artists and architects from Florence to restore Basilicas, etc.

Greek Scholars, Bessarion and Plethou invited to the Great Ecumenical Council of Florence convened by Eugenius IV in 1439 to reunify Greek and Latin Churches (failed).

Fall of Constantinople to the Turks

(More than 50,000 thousand killed rather than accept Islam): 1453.

Nicholas V, Parentucelli (1447-1455):

Continued restoration of Rome, with decision to rebuild capitol of Church on Vatican Hill.

Established Vatican Library with more than 5000 volumes.

Leon Battista Alberti updated his thesis on Architecture with references to ruins of Imperial Rome, in support of Pope’s efforts.

Sixtus IV, Della Rovere (1471-1484):

Imported numerous Latin and Greek Manuscripts; appointed humanist Platina Prefect of the Vatican Library;

Invited artists from Florence and other centers of Renaissance to decorate the Sistine Chapel (Botticelli, Raphael, Michelangelo, etc.)

Conspired with the Pazzi to assassinate the Medici brothers in 1478: Lorenzo survived.

**Innocent VIII: G.B. Cibo (Cybo) (1484-1492);
Born in Genoa of Greek parents. Built
Belvedere Summer Palace above the Vatican
Hills. Engaged in nepotism by advancing
careers of two illegitimate children.
Moral decay of Papacy becomes extreme.**

**Alexander VI Borgia (Catalonian, Borja): 1492-
1503). Had many mistresses and illegitimate
children. Continued renovation of Vatican.**

1492: Columbus Discovers America

**1493: Alexander divides New World between
Spain and Portugal.**

Venice:

**Begins expansion into “terra firma”, including Verona
and Padua (Carrara) as a buffer against Milan (Visconti).
Wars with Ottoman Turks over control of Aegean and
Adriatic ports beginning in 1423, and temporarily ending
in treaty signed in 1479.**

**Scuole, or religious confraternities set up by different
guilds to support their favorite charities, encouraged
development of Venetian art and architecture, especially
that of Bellini family (1450s-to 16th Century), and Vittore
Carpaccio (Legend of St. Ursula series: 1490-98), among
others. Especially successful with introduction of oil
painting on canvas by Antonello Da Messina during a
visit to Venice in 1475.**

Aldus Manutius (Aldine Press): 1450-1515:

**Concentrated on distribution of Greek
manuscripts with simplified script; Use of
paper rather than vellum enabled
distribution of cheap copies to all who**

wanted them, including many public and private libraries.

Major works of art completed in Quattrocento:

**Botticelli's Birth of Venus and Primavera.
Michelangelo's Pieta` (Rome);
Leonardo Da Vinci's Last Supper (Milan).**

The Cinquecento:

Florence:

Savonarola's Republic continued but with "Gonfaloniere"(chief magistrate) Piero Soderini elected for life (1502), thereby re-introducing the monarchical principle absent from Florence for centuries.

Machiavelli elected second chancellor of Republic in 1498, at age 29, following the death of Savonarola Became "Secretary for War" and organized a "citizen's militia" in 1507.

The Holy League, directed by Pope Julius II and containing many battle-hardened Spanish troops, invaded Florence as ally of France. Machiavelli's untested forces flee before cannons at Prato.

Soderini flees into exile .

Machiavelli captured and tortured as enemy of the Medici, who had just been restored to power in Florence, thereby ending the Republic established by Savonarola. (1512) Upon his release, he went into exile (1513) at San Casciano and proceeded to write "The Prince" and "The Discourses", which became classics of the period (humanism plus realism).

The invasion of Italy by Spanish/German troops (HRE) in 1527 and the brutal Sack of Rome leaving thousands dead, etc., caused Machiavelli to despair of

ever seeing a unified Italy. He died that same year.

When Charles V (Habsburg) turned on Florence, Michelangelo helped fortify the walls of the city, but after ten months, plague and famine caused it to surrender in 1530. The Medici were restored to power as absolute rulers and the Ordinances of Justice (Constitution of Florence since 1293) were abolished.

Guicciardini, author of the most sophisticated History of Italy since Tacitus, helped restore the Medici, but was denied any role in government by them. His History revealed no ideology, humanist or republican, more like a classic tragedy outlining the fall of Princes.

Rome:

Originally, the papacy accepted the basic tenets of the Renaissance (neo-Platonism, humanism, free will, etc.) as not in conflict with religious principles. But when some popes became corrupt in their private lives (see above) and began to press for increased taxes, the use of indulgences to raise money for the restoration of Rome, plus all the extraordinary expenditures for the building of Palaces and the decoration of basilicas, etc., people began to object—strenuously! (Savonarola for one—against “pagan” humanism, secular literature and values) The circulation of printed copies of the Bible to people who had never been able to read it before, encouraged outrage in poorer areas of Europe against the wealth they saw being expended in Italy.

Martin Luther led the religious revolt by publishing his 95 theses on the door of the Cathedral of Wittenberg in 1517. In them he denied that one could purchase

**remission of sin through payment of money
(indulgences)**

The Sack of Rome in 1527 with thousands slaughtered by German troops committing numerous atrocities, in the name of Luther against the “Antichrist”, ended all hope of reconciliation.

Paul III established the Roman Inquisition in 1542 to distinguish the orthodox from the heretical, and in 1545 he called for the Council of Trent to define doctrine and build discipline among believers. The Council issued the Index of Prohibited Books in 1559 With severe penalties for those who violated these prohibitions. The Council sat on and off until 1563. The result was the end of the free-wheeling intellectual accomplishments of the Italian Renaissance.

Venice:

Venice’s experience of the Renaissance was radically different from that of Florence and Rome. First of all, it was an oligarchic Republic, not a Democratic one. Second, it’s commercial interests and exercises were concentrated in the East, not the West. This meant that the conflicts between France and Spain/HRE over the control of the wealth of Italy, from Milan to Florence, Rome, the Papal States and Naples/Sicily, were not its concern. The Sack of Rome in 1527 had little effect on Venice, even with regard to religion. When Rome created the Inquisition, Venice shrugged it off as an annoyance rather than a duty, and did little to implement its decrees.

By the turn of the century, Venice had begun to strengthen its defenses throughout the eastern Mediterranean, and when the Turks attacked Corfu in 1537, the Venetians managed to defeat them. This prevented the Turks from having a real

foothold from which to invade Europe. Finally, the Battle of Lepanto in the Gulf of Corinth in 1571, in which over 200 Christian vessels met with approximately 300 of the Turkish ships and soundly defeated them, managed to put a definitive stop to whatever expansionist plans the Turks may have had for the conquest of Europe. Venice did not fight this battle alone, however. By this time the major forces in Europe had become aware of the Turkish threat and had formed the Holy League with Genoa, the Papacy and Philip II of Spain. Don John of Austria (Philip II's half brother) provided the bulk of the war ships for this encounter (most of the Venetian navy were commercial vessels, not well equipped for heavy battle), and succeeded in out-maneuvering the Turkish fleet with great skill.

Once its commercial interests in the East had been preserved, however, Venice withdrew from the Holy League and in 1573 signed a separate Peace with the Turks, confirming its “mercantilist” privileges in the East. Philip II did not follow suite. In fact he bankrupted his own empire several times to sustain his colossal war effort to promote and preserve the religious ideals and stability of Western Christianity. In the end, however, the emphasis upon individual freedom and humanism, so important to the Renaissance, was gradually forgotten—lost until its truly secularist revival by the Enlightenment in the 18th century, following the victory of the combined forces of the HRE and the Polish and Lithuanian Armies over the Turks at the very outskirts of Vienna in 1683 (the third and final siege of Vienna by the Turks in their attempt to conquer Europe).

Despite all its efforts, however, Venice did not recover its position as one of the powerhouses of Western Europe—due mainly to the dramatic shift of commercial activity from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic following the discovery of the

Americas by Columbus. Genoese mariners supported the efforts of Spain to conquer these areas, and, in fact, one of them, Amerigo Vespucci, actually had his name assigned to the entire western hemisphere (North and South America) by the mapmaker, Waldseemuller. And Venice, as well as the rest of Italy, succumbed to the armies of Napoleon at the end of the 18th century, but with the leadership of Garibaldi and Savoy, became united for the first time as a single country in the history of the Italian peninsula, in 1871.

