

# A Divided Italy: Home of the Renaissance

The Renaissance is known today as a single cultural and intellectual movement. It actually began in Italy as the Italian Renaissance, however, and then spread to the rest of Europe, where it was called the northern Renaissance. The Italian Renaissance was started in the mid-1300s by a group of scholars called humanists. Led by the Italian poet Petrarch (pronounced PEE-trark; 1304–1374), they set out to revive the Greek-based culture of ancient Rome (an era known as the classical period). They called themselves "humanists" because they wanted to focus on human achievement, which was exemplified by the arts, science, philosophy, and literature of the classical period (see "Humanism sparks Renaissance" in Chapter 8). The humanists felt that Greek and Roman contributions to European culture had been lost during the "dark ages," the period after the fall of the West [Roman Empire](#) in the fourth and fifth centuries. Not content simply to look back to past accomplishments, the humanists used classical works as models to write philosophy and literature that reflected their own times. Moreover, they expressed a newfound hope in the future. They stressed the value of daily life and contended that the individual is capable of doing great things. The humanists' ideas were controversial, though, because they concentrated on secular (nonreligious) subjects,

which previously had not been approved by the powerful [Roman Catholic Church](#) (a Christian faith based in Rome, Italy).

Because of the dramatic social and political upheaval occurring throughout Europe at the time, society was eager for change. As a result, humanist ideals were embraced with enthusiasm. Feudalism was collapsing, the [Roman Catholic Church](#) was weakened, and the Holy [Roman Empire](#) could not maintain unity among the hundreds of European states that had emerged during the [Middle Ages](#). As old traditions disappeared, people began looking for different ways to express their experience of the world. Beginning in the fifteenth century and continuing into the seventeenth century in many parts of Europe, the Renaissance completely transformed all aspects of life—the economy, the arts, literature, philosophy, education, social customs, and political institutions. Humanist ideals strongly influenced the Protestant Reformation, a religious reform movement against the Roman Catholic Church that swept Europe in the sixteenth century. The Renaissance also led to discoveries about the natural world that formed the basis of modern science.

## **Renaissance spreads from Italy**

The history of Italy during the Renaissance is extremely complex. Like the other states in Europe, Italy was not unified under a single ruler. In fact, most people at the time had never

heard the term *Adela* (Italy), and the united nation of Italy was not created until 1861. In the fourteenth century the Italian peninsula was made up of independent city-states that consisted of main cities with several other cities, towns, and rural areas clustered around them. City-states in the north, with the exception of Venice, were part of the [Holy Roman Empire](#). The city-states were either republics or duchies. The republics were governed by oligarchies, a form of government in which power is exercised by a small group of people from prominent families. The duchies were ruled by noblemen called dukes who belonged to powerful families. Some city-states were subjected to intense rivalries among numerous families, while others had relative internal stability. All of the city-states had a merchant class that made huge profits from an extensive trade network based in Italy. The city-states had taken advantage of the fact that they were located between thriving ports around the [Adriatic Sea](#) and along the eastern end of the [Mediterranean Sea](#). Italians, therefore, dominated European trade, banking, and cloth manufacturing. Wealthy Italian noblemen and merchants became active patrons, or financial supporters, of the arts in order to glorify their own success. Although their motives for supporting artists were largely personal, they played a major role in promoting the Renaissance, both in Italy and elsewhere in Europe.

Innovations in painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, philosophy, and music flourished in all of the city-states,

especially in the north, which was the most prosperous part of Italy. As the Renaissance moved southward down the Italian peninsula and, beginning in the fifteenth century, northward into Europe, Italy increased in stature as the center of intellectual and artistic creation. Renaissance ideas were spread by Italian artists and scholars who visited other European states and, conversely, by artists and scholars who came to study in Italy and returned home with new concepts. The Italian Renaissance was also taken to other places by merchants and traders. Scholars often accompanied trade caravans and brought back classical texts. Renaissance ideas were even spread by warfare. When foreign soldiers came to Italy to fight in the numerous wars that took place throughout the Renaissance period, they took Italian culture home with them. Another important factor in the expansion of the Italian Renaissance: Rome was once again the home of the papacy, or the office of the pope, who is the supreme head of the Roman Catholic Church. The papacy was permanently returned to Rome after the [Great Schism](#), a period in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when there were popes in both Rome and Avignon, France (see "[Babylonian captivity](#) and the [Great Schism](#)" later in this chapter). Italy therefore held special significance for Roman Catholic Europeans, who made religious pilgrimages to the city. In addition, many popes actively supported the Renaissance.

The Italian Renaissance nevertheless had a dark side: Popes

and emperors, kings and queens, noblemen and noblewomen, merchants and traders drained the resources of their communities. They funded elaborate building projects, financed extravagant courts, and organized armies—all with the purpose of enhancing their personal glory. They engaged in bribery, deception, and murder to advance their own ambitions. They ruthlessly competed for better profits, greater trading advantages, more territory, and increased political power. In fact, Renaissance Italy has often been described as a boiling cauldron of greed and corruption.

## Italian Wars dominate Renaissance

The Italian Renaissance took place against a backdrop of almost constant warfare and political instability. The major event of the period was a series of conflicts called the Italian Wars (1494–1559), which initially resulted from a dispute between France and Spain over control of Italy. Then the wars escalated into an attempt by the Habsburgs (a royal family based in Austria) to expand their territory through their status as the family of Holy Roman emperors. For sixty-five years France and Spain formed complex and shifting alliances—at one time or another each side was supported by Roman Catholic popes, Holy Roman emperors, and leaders of various Italian states—in numerous wars that took place on Italian soil. Consequently, the Italian states had complicated and tumultuous individual histories.

The Italian Wars began when King [Charles VIII](#) of France (1470–1498; ruled 1493–98) invaded Italy in 1494. [Charles VIII](#) sent his armies into Italy because he claimed that both Naples and Sicily belonged to France. The French invasion was welcomed and even encouraged by some Italian political leaders, but for other Italians it signified the opening of a new and unhappy period in Italian history. The political turmoil and bloody warfare ended with Spain gaining control of Italy. Many scholars consider the termination of the Italian Wars in 1559 to be the conclusion of the Renaissance period.

## **First phase: The Angevin and Argonese dispute**

The dispute over whether France or Spain had the right to rule Naples and Sicily had been going on since the thirteenth century. In 1266 Charles I (Charles of Anjou; 1226–1285; ruled 1266–85), the youngest brother of King [Louis IX](#) of France (1214–1270; ruled 1226–70), took the thrones of the two kingdoms. The reign of Charles I and his family, the Anjous, was called the Angevin (pronounced AHN-jehvehn) dynasty. Charles I lost control of Sicily in 1306 at the end of a twenty-year conflict called the War of the [Sicilian Vespers](#) (see "War of the [Sicilian Vespers](#)" section later in this chapter). In the previous century Sicily was placed under the rule of the Spanish king, Peter of Aragon (Peter III; 1239–1285; ruled 1276–85), a member of a royal family in the Aragon region of

Spain. Peter and his successors were called the Argonese.

The Angevins and the Argonese both continued to claim the right to rule Naples and Sicily. In 1489 Charles VIII was offered the crown of Naples by Pope Innocent VIII (1432–1492; reigned 1484–92). This acquisition gave Charles VIII the opportunity to move into Italy. His plans to launch an invasion were later encouraged by such Italian leaders as Girolama Savonarola (see "Florence" section later in this chapter), who wanted the French to protect them from enemies in nearby states. The most persuasive appeal came from the duke of Milan, [Ludovico Sforza](#), a member of the powerful family that controlled politics in Milan (see "Milan" section later in this chapter). Sforza feared that an alliance between Florence and Naples would isolate Milan and leave it vulnerable to attack by Venice, which was expanding its empire in northern Italy. In September 1494 Charles VIII marched his army of eighteen thousand cavalry (soldiers mounted on horses) and twenty-two thousand infantry (soldiers on foot) across the Alps.

**French driven out of Italy** By the end of the year, the French had entered Rome. With the exception of a bloody battle fought at Rapallo, a seaport near Genoa in northwest Italy, the campaign was a success. The French were welcomed in Milan and in Ferrara, another city-state in northern Italy. Florence fell with no resistance, and, after parading his army through the city streets, Charles VIII went on to Siena and Rome in central

Italy. By the end of February 1495, Charles VIII had entered Naples and laid claim to what he called "my kingdom." At first he was welcomed into Naples, but his policies toward the Neapolitan nobility soon alienated them, and his soldiers' open contempt for the Italian people aroused intense hostility. Outside Naples, Pope [Alexander VI](#) (also known as Rodrigo Borgia; see "Rome and the [Papal States](#)" section later in this chapter) formed an alliance against the French called the Holy League. The members included the [Papal States](#) (territory under the direct rule of the pope in central Italy), the [Holy Roman Empire](#), Spain, Venice, and Milan. Milan had turned against the French and entered into an agreement with Charles VIII's enemies. In an attempt to confuse Charles VIII and his ambassador, [Philippe de Comines](#) (c. 1447–c. 1511), the Holy League announced that it had been formed to protect Italy against the Ottoman Turks, a vast kingdom founded by Muslims, followers of the Islam religion, located along the eastern border of Hungary (see "[Ottoman Empire](#)" in Chapter 1).

The French were not fooled, however, and in May 1495 Charles left Naples. Accompanied by half of his conquering army, he moved northward out of Italy. On the Taro River at Fornovo in northern Italy, the French fought an indecisive battle with an allied army commanded by Francesco Gonzaga, a member of the noble family that ruled the city-state of Mantua (see "Mantua" section later in this chapter). The

French continued their retreat from Italy, and by October they were back in France. The other part of the French army, which had remained in Naples, was driven out by a Neapolitan force that had been strengthened by Spanish troops. Historians credit the retreating French troops with taking Italian Renaissance ideas back to France with them.

## **Second phase: France versus the Habsburgs**

The rule of the House of Aragon was now restored in southern Italy. Although Charles VIII promised to return to Italy, he died in 1498, and his successors were left to carry on the next part of the long French involvement in Italian affairs. The second phase of the Italian Wars began during the reign of [Louis XII](#) of France (1462–1515; ruled 1498–1515), but the most intense conflict took place while his successor, Francis I (1494–1547; ruled 1515–47), was on the throne. At the beginning of his reign, Francis had concluded an alliance with England and Venice against the Holy League. His first military efforts were successful. In 1516, after a victory at Marignano (now Melegnano), a commune in the Lombardy province of northern Italy, Francis negotiated satisfactory peace terms with all of his opponents. The peace did not last long, however, and in 1522 the French were once again at war, this time against the Holy Roman Empire. The empire was now under the rule of emperors who came from the Habsburg family in Austria and Spain. The Habsburgs were trying to

expand their own territory into northern Italy (see "Empire shrinks" in Chapter 1).

The imperial forces—the emperor's army—were led by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (King Charles I of Spain; 1500–1558; king 1516–56, emperor 1519–56), who was descended from both the Spanish and the Austrian Habsburgs. Although Francis had tried to gain the support of King [Henry VIII](#) of England (1491–1547; ruled 1509–47) against Charles V, Henry instead signed an alliance with the emperor. At first the war went badly for the French, who were driven from their bases in Milan, Genoa, and elsewhere in northern Italy.

However, in October 1524, Francis crossed the Alps with a new army consisting of thirty thousand French, Italian, Swiss, and German soldiers. At that time Milan was weakened by the [Black Death](#), an epidemic, or widespread outbreak of disease, that had been sweeping Europe since the 1340s (see "[Black Death](#)" in Chapter 1). The city was speedily recaptured, and the victorious French army marched on Pavia, a strongly fortified town on the banks of the Ticino River, south of Milan. It was apparent later that the march on Pavia was a mistake, for it gave the imperial army, which was based at Lodi near Milan, an opportunity to reorganize and bring in additional troops from Germany. If Francis had marched first on Lodi, he might have destroyed the last imperial force in northern Italy. Expecting that Pavia could easily be taken by a massive assault, however, he was convinced that his army's superior

artillery (various types of weapons) would make the operation relatively simple.

**The Battle of Pavia** The French completely surrounded Pavia by the end of October 1524 and began a long artillery bombardment during the first week in November. This bombardment was followed by two costly infantry assaults that failed because of the skill and toughness of the Pavians. The governor, Antonio de Leyva, had not only strengthened the fortifications of the city, but had also organized all the able-bodied men into a well-trained militia (citizens' army). Combining the militia with his regular force of six thousand men, de Leyva had enough soldiers to withstand the French attacks. Francis's forces began a long siege on Pavia, believing that famine, disease, and the harsh winter weather would help them accomplish their goal. As the weeks passed, it appeared that Francis was correct. The winter was unusually severe, and the Pavians suffered not only from shortage of food but also from lack of fuel. Finally, it became necessary to demolish churches and houses within the city to provide wood for fires to keep the Italian soldiers of Pavia from freezing to death. The French, on the outside of the city, had an abundance of supplies, and their camp has been described as an immense market in which a pleasure fair was constantly going on.

**France defeated** While the siege continued, the emperor was

assisted by a Frenchman, Charles de Bourbon-Montpensier (pronounced buhr-BOHN mohnpahn-syay; 1490–1527), duke of Bourbon. The duke had lost favor with Francis, so he shifted his support to the Holy Roman Empire. He helped Charles V collect the money and organize the men necessary for the rebuilding of imperial forces. By the end of January the army, now consisting of more than twenty thousand soldiers, left Lodi to confront the French at Pavia. The imperial forces were commanded by the Spanish general Fernando de Ávalos (pronounced ABH-ahl-ohs; 1490–1525), the marquis of Pescara. (Marquis is a noble rank below duke.) The army reached the outskirts of Pavia early in February. Francis did not fear the sight of a new imperial army because he believed in his own strength and knew that defeat of Bourbon's men would leave France in control of the whole of Italy north of Rome.

The battle began on February 24 with an imperial attack, but the emperor's soldiers were swiftly thrown into confusion by the superior artillery fire of the French. Then Francis, in his eagerness to engage the enemy, led a disastrous charge. The French cavalry, pursuing a Spanish infantry force equipped with hand firearms, was suddenly met with a hail of bullets from the Spanish and was almost annihilated. Then an attack by soldiers inside the garrison (fortified building where soldiers stay) threw the French into complete disarray. The French withdrew from the field, leaving thousands of dead and

wounded. Francis was injured several times and finally taken prisoner toward the end of the battle. The Italian states were now at the mercy of Charles V. Charles V sent Francis to Madrid, Spain, where he was put in prison and required to sign the Treaty of Madrid in 1526.

**Italy comes under control of Spain** Under the terms of the treaty, Francis abandoned all French claims to Italy, gave up Burgundy (a region of France on the northern border of Italy), and renounced his rights to Flanders (a region in the [Low Countries](#)) and Artois (a region in northern France). He was permitted to return to France, but within a short time he broke the treaty, which he claimed he was forced to sign. He then organized the League of Cognac (1526), which was joined by England, the Papal States, Venice, and Florence. In 1527 Francis invaded Italy a second time, but once again he lost the war. He signed the Treaty of Cambrai (1529), which was the same as the Treaty of Madrid, except that Burgundy was returned to France. Francis abided by the terms of the Cambrai agreement until 1535, when the throne of Milan was left open by the death of the duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza (see "Milan" section later in this chapter). After yet another war (1542–44), Francis renounced his claims to Italy for the third time. He died in 1547. The French invaded Italy again (1556–57), but they were defeated by Charles's forces. With the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559), Italy came under the control of Spain until 1706. The Italian Wars reduced France to

a secondary position in European affairs.

## **The major city-states**

At the height of the Renaissance, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there were five main Italian city-states in three distinct geographic regions: Florence, Milan, and Venice in northern Italy; Rome and the Papal States in central Italy (Rome and the Papal States were considered a single state because they were under the control of the pope.); and the combined state of Naples and Sicily in southern Italy.

### **Florence**

Located along the Arno River in north central Italy, the city of Florence was a major center for Italian Renaissance culture. A hub of banking, commerce, and textile manufacturing, Florence was one of the five major Italian powers. In 1434, as the Renaissance was underway, Florentine politics was dominated by the Medici (pronounced MED-ee-chee) family, who were wealthy and influential bankers and merchants. By 1494 the Medicis had been expelled from Florence and the city came under the power of Girolama Savonarola (pronounced sah-voh-nah-RO-lah; 1452–1498), a Roman Catholic friar (member of a religious order) and preacher. After the death of Savonarola in 1498, the city was ruled by a group of wealthy men, each representing a powerful Florentine

family. In 1512 the Medicis returned as the *signori* (pronounced seen-YOR-ee; lords) of Florence, but they were expelled again in 1527. Florence experienced extreme turmoil during its last years as a republic before the Medici family made their final return, in 1530, and became dukes of Florence. By 1569 they were grand dukes of Tuscany, a region in north central Italy, with Florence as its capital. At that time Tuscany was divided into Arezzo, Florence, Grosseto, Livorno, Lucca, Massa-Carrara, Pisa, Pistoia, and Siena. Although Tuscany was under a republican government, the Medicis were the supreme rulers. They reigned for the next three hundred years.

The Medicis were active patrons of the arts, and for two centuries artistic and intellectual life flourished in Florence. The cultural revival funded by the Medicis attracted some of the greatest Italian artists of the time, including painters Michelangelo (1475–1564), [Leonardo da Vinci](#) (1452–1519), and Raphael (1483–1520) as well as sculptor Donatello (c. 1386–1466). Poets and scholars were also active in Florence, and a university, the Accademia della Crusca, was founded in 1582.

**Florence before the Medicis** Florence had been the site of settlements since prehistoric times. All of these early communities were destroyed by wars, but in the time of Roman leader [Julius Caesar](#) (100–44 b.c.), Florence was a

walled city under Roman rule. Even during that period Florence was an important commercial center, though it was subjected to numerous sieges and occupations by invaders. Despite these attacks, the city survived to become an important educational center for Roman Catholic bishops (officials in charge of church districts). In 1081 Matilda, countess of Tuscany (1046–1115; ruled 1055–1115), the leader of Florence, sided with the church in a disagreement between the pope and the king of France. Matilda's action earned Florence a reputation of being friendly to the Catholic Church. The city became a self-ruling commune (municipal corporation) in the twelfth century. In the thirteenth century Florence was split into two factions (opposing sides) in the conflict between Holy Roman emperors and Roman Catholic popes over control of Italy. The faction called the Guelphs (pronounced gwelfs) supported the pope, and the faction called the Ghibellines (pronounced GIB-eh-leens) backed the Holy Roman Emperor. By the end of the thirteenth century the Guelphs had secured power, but they then began fighting among themselves and split into factions called the Blacks and the Whites. The poet Dante (1265–1321), whose work later influenced Renaissance literature, was banished from Florence as a White Guelph in 1302. The growth of Florence was temporarily halted in 1348, when 60 percent of the city's population died in the Black Death. Florence became a city-state in the fifteenth century.

During the Renaissance, Florence was involved in conflicts with neighboring city-states over rights to trade routes. Having access to seaports, rivers, and roads was important to merchants and traders who needed to ship their goods to customers in distant places. Rulers of city-states, therefore, wanted to seize land that gave them better access to trade routes. At the start of the fifteenth century, Florence nearly fell to Gian Galeazzo Visconti of Milan (see "Milan" section later in this chapter). His unexpected and early death in 1402 gave the Florentine army a chance to reorganize their forces. In 1406 they succeeded in capturing Pisa, thus gaining a port on the Arno River that was only fifty miles off the coast of Italy. Since the Arno flows through the heart of Florence, it provided the region even greater potential for business and trade. Florence went to war again with Milan from 1409 until 1411 and again in 1421. From 1429 until 1433, Florence battled with the nearby republic of Lucca, an important silk-producing region. Milan eventually joined Lucca in this conflict, which almost destroyed Florence.

**Complex political system** Florence had a complex political system. By the first part of the thirteenth century, guilds were involved in the [city government](#). Similar to modern-day labor unions, guilds were associations formed by people involved in the same line of work. Florence had twenty-one major and minor guilds. Major guilds were divided into seven categories: wool manufacturers, silk manufacturers, bankers, physicians,

judges, apothecaries (similar to modern-day pharmacists), and furriers (people who sold, sewed, and treated fur clothes). Minor guilds were for shopkeepers and blacksmiths. Thousands of workers did not have a guild for their trade, however. Some were not allowed to be in a guild because they were too poor.

In 1283 members of guilds had formed an organization and made changes to the constitution (the document that specifies a state's laws) of Florence. The city-state was now a republic, and governing power was taken away from the noblemen (members of the upper social class) and given to the guildsmen. Noblemen were lords who had been granted large tracts of land called fiefs (pronounced feeefs) by a king under feudalism, a social and economic system that developed in Europe in the Early [Middle Ages](#) (see "Feudalism" in Chapter 1). The lords were given control of their fiefs in exchange for vowing loyalty to the king, and they passed their fiefs on to their sons, who in turn exercised absolute power. Even after the fall of feudalism and the rise of republicanism, noble families were able to gain political positions because of their prominence and wealth. However, according to the new constitution, noblemen were no longer allowed to run for political office.

Yet the guilds were soon exercising the same kind of control that had once been wielded by noblemen. Although members

of both major and minor guilds could be candidates for office, the major guilds held the most power. To be eligible for office, one had to pass the test of the *accoppiatori* the group that decided who was allowed to compete for political positions. Usually they chose only 10 to 15 percent of the guild members. The *accoppiatori*, then put the names of those who had been selected into a bag. Offices thus were not filled by voting but instead by random chance. Moreover, only a few people were actually involved in the government and there was also extensive corruption. Powerful families that were able to pay off the *accoppiatori* often ran Florentine politics.

**Florence under the Medicis** Florence's city council, the Signoria, was run by a complicated system. Certain members would serve longer terms than others, depending on which department they were involved in. The main purpose of the Signoria was to introduce legislation, or laws. If the legislation was passed by a two-thirds majority of the council, it would move to the legislative bodies. The legislative bodies were the Council of the People and the Council of the Commune. Each council consisted of around three hundred men. These councils could reject or accept the proposed legislation, but otherwise they had little power. When the Medicis took over Florentine politics for the first time, in 1434, the councils were replaced by the Council of One Hundred and the Council of Seventy. The government was changed a few more times, as the Medici family came in and out of power, with different

councils replacing the old ones. By the time the Medicis returned in 1530, the entire constitution had been withdrawn and Alessandro de' Medici (1510–1537; ruled 1531–37) was named "duke of the republic of Florence." The Signoria was replaced by the Magistrato Supremo (supreme magistrate), which shared power with the duke. The legislative bodies were replaced by the Council of Two Hundred and the Senate of Forty-Eight. Appointment to these councils was for life.

**Rise to power** In the early fourteenth century a number of powerful and influential families were all striving to gain control of Florence. The most prominent were the Medicis, who had gained wealth and social influence from banking, trade, and cloth manufacturing. The patrician, or male head, of the family was Cosimo de' Medici (called the Elder; 1389–1464). He first came to political prominence when he opposed the war with Milan and Lucca. The war was supported by the Albizzis (pronounced al-BEET-tsees), the dominant family in Florence at the time. The Albizzis and their allies exiled Cosimo and the other leaders of the Medici clan. In 1434 a new Signoria was chosen, and this group asked Cosimo de' Medici to return to the city. Cosimo's enemies were exiled and he was acknowledged as the leading citizen of Florence. The Albizzis plotted to overthrow the government, but the plan ultimately failed. The entire Albizzi family, along with their supporters, were exiled from the city. This event started the Medicis' three-hundred-year reign in Florence.

Cosimo de' Medici made sure that Florence was ruled with a steady hand. Having become wealthy through the cooperation of others, he knew that a government had to be made up of many different people. He established advisory councils and often asked for advice, kept taxes low, and respected the republican form of government. He served as Standard Bearer of Justice, the highest office at the time, for six months. The government councils often met at his palace, and in times of trouble he made huge personal loans to the city. He also gave money to other prominent Florentine citizens, thus making them obligated to him. The owner of a number of local textile mills, Medici was the largest employer of Florentine workers, and he seldom let council members forget that fact.

## **Medicis Support Renaissance**

Cosimo de' Medici was instrumental in promoting the arts in Florence, which became the center of the Italian Renaissance. Educated at a strict monastic (religious) school, Cosimo learned Arabic, French, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. As he grew into adulthood he found politics and business to be too simple. While he excelled in all of his endeavors, young Cosimo found that philosophy was the only subject that truly challenged him. He frequently attended meetings of humanist thinkers throughout Florence. He also developed a keen interest in art and architecture, both of which he felt were ideal ways to honor his family. He gave large amounts of money to

many artists and architects. He erected the Medici Palace in the heart of the city and funded the construction of many elaborate cathedrals and other buildings. Cosimo became known as the "father of the state."

Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo, called "Magnificent Lorenzo," carried on the Medici tradition of supporting the arts and learning in Florence. To the family collection of antiquities—classical medals, jewels, and vases—Lorenzo added expensive and celebrated pieces of his own. He also expanded the extensive Medici private library, with his acquisitions including a number of Greek manuscripts. Lorenzo supervised the reestablishment of the University of Pisa, involving himself in every aspect of the enterprise from the appointment of faculty to questions of student discipline. Turning his attention to architecture, he started modestly by contributing to the rebuilding of the convent of Le Murate in Florence in 1471 and continuing to fund his family's patronage of their neighborhood church of San Lorenzo. In 1474 he acquired a rural estate on a beautiful site at Poggio a Caiano near Pistoia; at that time he may already have begun planning the great villa, a model of the advanced Renaissance style that he started to construct a decade later with his architect Giuliano da Sangallo (c. 1445–1516). Lorenzo also started writing poetry at this time. He enjoyed discussions with the philosopher [Marsilio Ficino](#) (1433–1499), and he came to appreciate the friendship and learning of [Angelo Poliziano](#)

(1454–1494), one of the greatest philologists (a person who specializes in literary study or classical scholarship) of his day. Lorenzo had a genuine interest in intellectual activities, but he also assured that his reputation as a patron and practitioner of the arts consolidated his authority in Florence and beyond.

Medici knew that the only way to gain political power was through money. As a result, he took on a number of business partners. He would allow these partners to make their own decisions only if they had invested enough money in the business. Nevertheless, Medici demanded that he himself own at least 50 percent of any business so he could take control if it started to fail. The Medici family loaned money all across Europe and to the papacy. Even when dealing with the church, Cosimo insisted that he be given the same amount of control as in his other partnerships. The Medici family spread their influence even further by owning banks throughout Europe.

Cosimo's son Piero (1416–1469; ruled 1464–69) continued the Medici dynasty after the death of his father in 1464. Piero lacked Cosimo's political skills, and he often suffered from poor health. Yet he was an intelligent banker and a supporter of the arts. Like his father, he was a patron of artists and architects. His wife, Lucretia, was a respected Florentine poet. She helped Piero spread the family's wealth to talented artists, and together they had five well-educated children. Although

Piero reigned for only five years, he passed his legacy on to his more able son, Lorenzo.

**The Magnificent Lorenzo** Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492; ruled 1478–92) continued the patronage of the arts that was started by his father and grandfather. A complex and intelligent man known as "Magnificent Lorenzo," he became famous for his contributions to countless artists. Expanding the already spectacular Medici library, he periodically held poetry readings and stage performances. Like his grandfather, Lorenzo attempted to protect the financial interests of Florence. In 1471, when Pope [Paul II](#) (1417–1471; reigned 1464–71) was succeeded by Pope Sixtus IV (1414–1484; reigned 1471–84), Lorenzo met a worthy political enemy. The Papal States and Florence were both interested in the fertile alum (a vital metal use in dyeing cloth) mines located in Volterra, an area in the Pisa province. Lorenzo had invaded Volterra and gained control of the region. When Sixtus became pope, he vowed to destroy Lorenzo.

The Medici family had traditionally maintained friendly relations with the papacy, and for years they had served as the official bankers of the Roman Catholic Church. When Sixtus took the papal throne, however, relations between the church and the Medicis became tense. A rival Florentine banking family, the Pazzis, had replaced the Medicis as the papal bankers. The Pazzis began formulating a plot to assassinate

Lorenzo and his brother Giuliano. The pope blessed this plot, and on April 26, 1478, Giuliano was stabbed to death. An attempt was also made on Lorenzo's life, but he escaped with only a wounded shoulder. The Pazzis family failed to gain the support of the people, and the plotters were given the punishment of death. Some were hanged from the windows of the town hall and others were murdered by angry mobs.

Angered by the failure of the plot, Sixtus excommunicated, or expelled, Lorenzo from the church and invaded Tuscany, the region with Florence at its center. Milan joined the Papal States in the invasion, which lasted for two years. During this time, Florence suffered greatly. Lorenzo risked his own life by going on a secret mission to speak with the leader of Naples, Ferrante I (see "Naples and Sicily" section later in this chapter). Ferrante was an often cruel man, and many feared that he would kill Lorenzo. Instead, Lorenzo convinced Ferrante that war with Florence was not in the best interest of Naples. Sixtus was forced to agree to a peace with Florence.

**Fall, return, fall, return** After surviving the assassination plot and the subsequent war, Lorenzo de' Medici continued to be a dominant force in Florentine politics. He helped form the Council of the Seventy, the reformed legislative body, and became a lifetime member. Lorenzo also invested his own fortune in business and banking ventures in Florence, a move that made quite a bit of money for both the Medicis and the city. By the end of his life, however, risky financial moves had

cost the family a substantial portion of their wealth. Some of his personal loans had turned out to be unwise, and by 1492, the year of his death, a number of Medici banks had already closed.

In 1494 the French invaded Italy in the first phase of the Italian Wars (see "Italian Wars dominate Renaissance" section previously in this chapter) and the Medici family was forced to shut down its bank in Rome. Finally, the home bank in Florence also closed its doors. The Medicis managed to hold onto enough wealth to support themselves, and family members continued to hold prominent positions in the city. Lorenzo's second son, Giovanni (1475–1521), became a cardinal, a high-ranking church official, at the age of thirteen and was later named Pope [Leo X](#) (reigned 1513–21). Lorenzo was succeeded by his oldest son, Piero (1471–1503; ruled 1492–94), who turned out to be a terrible ruler. He was blamed for the loss of territory to the French, and in 1494 the Medicis were exiled from Florence.

After the exile of the Medici family, the pro-French council under Savonarola came to power. He set out to rid Florence of vice and corruption, which he claimed had been promoted by the Medicis, and promised to restore spiritual and moral values. During the Italian Wars, Savonarola supported the French invasion of Italy. He hoped that King Charles VIII of France would lead the way in establishing a democratic

government (rule by the will of the people). Savonarola also attacked the sinfulness of the court of Pope [Alexander VI](#) (also known as Rodrigo Borgia; see "Rome and the Papal States" section later in this chapter), who excommunicated him from the church for disobeying orders to stop preaching. The policies of Savonarola and his followers were not popular with the people of Florence, so they soon fell out of favor.

Savonarola and two disciples were arrested. After being subjected to torture, Savonarola confessed to being a false prophet (one who falsely claims to be able to foretell future events). He and the other two men were hanged in 1498.

In 1512 Lorenzo's youngest son, Giuliano de' Medici, duke of Nemours (1479–1516; duke 1515–16), returned to Florence. With the support of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519; ruled 1493–1519), he restored his family to power. The Medicis remained in Florence until 1527, when they left peaceably after the fall of Rome to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (see "German Fury" section later in this chapter). For two more years, Florence existed as a republic. In 1529 pro-Medici forces invaded Florence and once again took control. Three years later Florence became a duchy under Charles V, but it remained an important part of Italian commercial and cultural life. In 1537 Cosimo I de' Medici (1519–1574; ruled 1537–74), one of the most important members of the family, became duke of Florence. He devoted his life to the complicated maneuvering that was still an

integral part of city politics. Cosimo manipulated guilds whose members he controlled and brought in outsiders who owed him allegiance. Cosimo had considerable success. In 1557 Florence conquered Siena, fulfilling a longtime ambition of Florentine rulers to seize the city, and in 1569 Cosimo became the grand duke of Tuscany. Under his leadership, culture and arts once again thrived in Florence.

Cosimo was succeeded by his son Francesco (1541–1587; ruled 1574–87), who presided over the decline of the Medici family. He allowed the Spanish and Austrian branches of the Habsburg royal family to virtually control Florence while he pursued his interest in alchemy (a medieval science devoted to turning common metals into gold) and other nonpolitical activities. Nevertheless, the city remained a center of intellectual and artistic life throughout the Renaissance in Europe.

## **Milan**

At the time of the Italian Renaissance, Milan was a duchy that consisted of the capital city of Milan and other, less influential cities. Located in the far northern region of Italy, along the border of present-day Switzerland, Milan had been one of Italy's largest and wealthiest cities since the late Roman Empire. The city occupied a strategic position at the crossroads of major routes between the Italian peninsula and

northern Europe. Although Milan was surrounded by a fertile agricultural area, the economy was based mainly on commercial trade. The city was known for luxury goods, especially cloths such as silk, satin, and velvet. It was also a center for the production of weapons and armor. The other cities in the duchy of Milan also had commercial specialties, but none had reached the size or the success of the capital. Merchants in the area conducted active and sophisticated trading relationships with most of the European states and with kingdoms along the eastern coast of the [Mediterranean Sea](#).

Each town and region within the Milanese state had a strong sense of local patriotism. In rural areas, which were not yet touched by the cultural and political advances of the cities, feudalism continued to dominate throughout the Renaissance. In urban areas, the medieval tradition of communal republicanism, in which a group of community leaders formed a governing body, continued even after Milan came under the rule of a duke. The result was that each region had its own form of government. The nobles who controlled the countryside estates were often members of the dominant political groups of nearby cities, giving the nobles considerable influence. Like most Italian city-states, Milan therefore had a complicated political history that was dominated by a few powerful families. The foremost families were the Viscontis (pronounced vees-KOHN-tees), who

controlled Milan at the beginning of the Renaissance, and the Sforzas (pronounced SFORT-sahs), who held power during the remainder of the period. Both the Viscontis and the Sforzas were patrons of the arts.

One of the many challenges confronting the rulers of Milan was the ongoing turmoil caused by the Italian Wars, a series of conflicts in which France and Spain fought over control of Italy (see "Italian Wars dominate Renaissance" section previously in this chapter). King Charles VIII of France started the wars in 1494 when he invaded Italy and attempted to assert his claim to the throne of Naples, in southern Italy. To reach Naples, he had to march his forces through northern Italy, but he did not have enough support. Charles left after fighting a major battle in Milanese territory in 1495. Four years later, however, his successor, French king [Louis XII](#), returned to Italy and began the second phase of the Italian Wars. Louis easily captured Milan and declared himself the rightful ruler. From 1494 until 1559 Milan became a prize to be fought and bargained over by the kings of France, the Holy Roman emperors, and Spain. The emperors were members of the House of Habsburg, a royal family based in Austria that had expanded Habsburg rule to Spain. Spain and the Holy Roman Empire were therefore allies during the Italian Wars.

**Viscontis seize power** When the Renaissance began in the mid-1300s, the duchy of Milan was controlled by the Visconti

family. They came from the powerful Lombard family of Milan, which belonged to a political faction called the Ghibellines. The Ghibellines supported the Holy Roman emperor in a conflict between the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church over control of Italy. Supporters of the church were called Guelphs. The Viscontis had dominated political life in Milan since the twelfth century. They were given the title of viscount (pronounced VIE-count; a title of nobility), from which they took their name. The Viscontis moved in and out of power in Milan for 136 years.

In 1277 Ottone Visconti (c. 1207–1295; ruled 1262–95), the archbishop, or head church official, of Milan, was named lord of the city. He had overthrown the opposing Della Torre family, leaders of the popular party. Ottone wanted to maintain his family's claim to the lordship, so in 1287 he had his grandnephew, Matteo I Visconti (1250–1322; ruled 1310–22), elected as captain of the people. Matteo was exiled from Milan by the Della Torres from 1302 until 1310. With the assistance of German king and Holy Roman Emperor [Henry VII](#) (c. 1275–1313; king 1308–13; emperor 1312–13), Matteo returned to the city and was named imperial vicar (deputy of the emperor). He gained control over all Lombard cities, but he was forced to retire in 1322 by opposition from the Guelphs. Matteo I's son, Galeazzo I Visconti (c. 1277–1328; ruled 1322–28), was named lord of the city. Galeazzo continued the struggle against the popes and the Guelphs.

**Viscontis expand Milan** Galeazzo was followed by his own son, Azzo Visconti (1302–1339; ruled 1328–39), who unified the state, made peace with Pope [Clement V](#) (1260–1314; reigned 1304–14), and expanded Milanese territory. When Azzo died, his two uncles, Giovanni Visconti (1290–1354; ruled 1349–54) and Lucchino Visconti (1292–1349; ruled 1339–49), were named dukes of Milan. Lucchino ruled alone and conquered territory in Piedmont, Tuscany, and the Ticino canton (county) of Switzerland. The other Italian city-states became alarmed at the growing power of Milan and formed alliances against the Viscontis. When Lucchino died in 1349, Giovanni took over the government and continued his brother's policies, annexing the seaport republic of Genoa in 1353. Giovanni was also the archbishop of Milan and a friend of the humanist scholar Petrarch. Upon Giovanni's death in 1354, Milanese territory was divided among his three nephews, Matteo II Visconti (1319–1355), Galeazzo II Visconti (1321–1378), and Bernarbò Visconti (1323–1385). Matteo II died after being poisoned, probably by his brothers, who divided his possessions. Galeazzo II established a court at Pavia and became a patron of Petrarch. He also built a castle and founded the University of Pavia. Bernarbò jointly ruled Milan with Galeazzo II's son, Gian Galeazzo Visconti (1351–1402; ruled 1378–85). Bernarbò pursued his ambitions for more land and power. He was constantly at war with the pope, Venice, Florence, and Savoy (a region in southeastern France). Bernarbò finally was arrested by Gian Galeazzo, who had him

put in prison. Some scholars speculate that Gian Galeazzo had Bernarbò put to death in 1385.

**Gian Galeazzo promotes arts** As the sole heir of Visconti holdings, Gian Galeazzo became master of northern and central Italy in 1385. He was an ambitious man who wanted to rule the whole of Italy. He allied his family with France by marrying Isabella, the daughter of the French king, John II (1319–1364; ruled 1350–64). Gian Galeazzo's daughter by a second marriage, Valentina (1366–1408), married Louis, duc d'Orléans (1372–1407) in 1387. (Valentina became the grandmother of King Louis XII of France who, a century later, claimed he had a right to take over Milan in the Italian Wars; see "Sforzas establish reign" section later in this chapter.) During the first few years of his reign Gian Galeazzo brought political stability to the city-state, reforming and centralizing the government and promoting the arts and industry. He ordered construction to begin on the elaborate cathedral of Milan, a gigantic, multispired building that still stands today. Another magnificent building commissioned by Gian Galeazzo was the Certosa di Pavia, a richly ornamented monastery church in Pavia, which is considered one of the architectural masterpieces of the Renaissance.

Gian Galeazzo also focused on expanding his kingdom and conquered the Italian city-states of Bologna, Perugia, Pisa, Siena, and Verona. His main goal, however, was to overtake

the republic of Florence. To strengthen his position, in 1495 he purchased the title of duke of Milan from uncrowned Holy Roman Emperor Wenceslas (1361–1419), who was also king of Germany and Bohemia (now part of Czechoslovakia). In 1401 Gian Galeazzo defeated the forces of King Rupert of Germany (1352–1410; ruled 1400–10), who wanted to be Holy Roman Emperor. Rupert had invaded Italy and tried to return it to the empire. The following year, when Florence was about to fall to Visconti forces, Gian Galeazzo died of the plague. Gian Galeazzo's two sons, Giovanni Maria Visconti (1388–1412; ruled 1402–12) and Filippo Maria (1392–1447; ruled 1412–47), were unable to keep the expanded kingdom together. Giovanni Maria lost several Lombard cities and was finally assassinated. This problem reflected the general situation in Italy: States formed and broke alliances with one another on a regular basis. Warfare constantly broke out, usually under the leadership of generals with little or no loyalty to their leaders.

**Filippo Maria is last Visconti ruler** Filippo Maria was the last Visconti ruler of Milan. He died in 1447 without a legitimate heir (child born in a legal marriage). His only acknowledged child was a daughter, Bianca Maria (1425–1468), who had been born to his mistress (a woman who was not his wife), a Milanese noblewoman. Bianca Maria had been raised as a noblewoman and was recognized as Filippo's heir at an early age. While he was still alive, Filippo attempted to use her as a

bargaining tool, promising her hand in marriage to various political leaders. These attempts failed, however, and he was forced to arrange Bianca's marriage to the condottiere (pronounced kahndeh-TYER-ee; commander) of the Milan armies, Francesco I Sforza (1401–1466; ruled 1450–66).

Francesco I was the illegitimate son of Muzio Attendolo Sforza (1369–1424), a farmer in the Romagna region of northern Italy who became a noted condottiere and took the name Sforza (the Italian word for "forcer"). Muzio headed a band of skilled mercenaries, or hired soldiers, whom he led in battle for several Italian city-states, including Naples. He was killed while serving Queen Joanna II in her attempt to hold onto the throne of Naples (see "Naples and Sicily" section later in this chapter). Francesco I took over command of his father's mercenaries and soon gained prominence as one of the most powerful condottieri of the time.

After Filippo's death, the Visconti family castle was attacked by Milanese republicans (those who advocate representative government), who felt betrayed by him. They established the Ambrosian Republic in an attempt to return to the communal form of government, a tradition established in the Middle Ages that placed the city under the rule of representatives from the community. The government was not supported by the Milanese people, however, and the republic collapsed when the economy began to fail.

**Sforzas establish reign** In 1450 Francesco I Sforza took his powerful army—along with his connections to the Visconti family—into Milan and declared himself master of the republic. He was then named duke of Milan. Welcomed by most of the population and supported by the Medicis of Florence (see "Florence" section previously in this chapter), he set out to return Milan to its former glory. Francesco I thus began the eighty-five-year Sforza reign in Milan. During that time the Sforzas developed one of Europe's most effective governments and one of its earliest permanent armies. Using their extensive personal power, they ruled through force and skillful political maneuvering. Their methods were similar to those used by the Medicis in Florence, except that the Sforzas were warriors, whereas the Medicis were bankers. Although the Sforzas promoted their own interests, they did beautify Milan and, as generous patrons of the arts, they presided over the city's "golden era" during the Renaissance.

**Francesco I leaves legacy** After Francesco I Sforza took over as duke of Milan he expanded the government, built new and elaborate buildings, created a number of civil positions, and strengthened his army. He was not only an effective military leader but also a shrewd diplomat, or political negotiator. He promoted political stability by entering into alliances with the Medicis, the king of Naples, and the kings of France. The alliance with Florence brought Sforza the funding needed for his expensive projects. To secure political connections with

other states, Sforza married off family members. For instance, he assured friendly relations with France by arranging the marriage of his oldest son, Galeazzo Maria (1444–1476; ruled 1466–76), to Bona of Savoy, a member of the French royal family. Sforza's greatest diplomatic achievement, which he accomplished with the help of Cosimo de' Medici, was the Peace of Lodi in 1454. This important agreement was signed by all the major and most of the minor states of Italy. The Peace of Lodi ended a century of constant warfare and political sparring among the various states. The treaty provided a [balance of power](#) and lasted until 1494, when the French invaded Italy during the Italian Wars.

## Valuable Alliances

When Francesco I Sforza became duke of Milan he began the practice of establishing connections that would benefit his family. One of his sons, Ascanio Maria Sforza (1455–1505), became a cardinal, a high-ranking official, of the Roman Catholic Church and was instrumental in the election of Rodrigo Borgia as Pope Alexander VI. Francesco's illegitimate daughter, Caterina Sforza (c. 1463–1509), married Gerolamo Riario, lord of the cities of Imola and Forlì and a nephew of Pope Sixtus IV. When Gerolamo was murdered in 1488, Caterina ruled Imola and Forlì until she lost the cities to [Cesare Borgia](#) in 1499. She then married Giovanni de' Medici, duke of Florence, with whom she had a son, Giovanni della Bande

Nere. Giovanni became a well-known condottiere in the Italian Wars. Francesco's granddaughter, Bianca Maria Sforza, married Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I. His grandson, Gian Galeazzo, married Isabella, the granddaughter of King [Ferdinand I](#) of Spain.

When Francesco I died in 1466, Galeazzo Maria Sforza became duke of Milan. Galeazzo was well educated and actively supported the arts. Among the artists hired by Galeazzo was the Italian architect and painter [Donato Bramante](#) (1444–1514), who designed the Church of [Santa Maria](#) presso San Santino, which still stands today. Although Galeazzo financed the work of many Renaissance artists, he was a corrupt and cruel leader who had many enemies. In 1476 he was assassinated by republican rebels in a failed attempt to start an uprising. Galeazzo's wife, Bona of Savoy, acted as regent (one who rules in place of a minor) for their son Gian Galeazzo Sforza (1469–1494), who was next in line to become duke of Milan. In 1480, however, Galeazzo's younger brother, [Ludovico Sforza](#) (c. 1451–1508; ruled 1494–99), seized control of Milan and prevented Bona of Savoy from ruling in place of her son. Gian Galeazzo then became a virtual prisoner and Ludovico took over the role of duke, though he could not officially claim the title while Gian Galeazzo was still living.

**Ludovico is great Renaissance prince** Ludovico became

one of the wealthiest and most powerful princes of the Italian Renaissance. With his wife, Beatrice d'Este, whom he married in 1491, he presided over a splendid court that was renowned throughout Europe. Among the many artists, poets, and musicians who gathered in Milan were the painter [Leonardo da Vinci](#) and the architect [Donato Bramante](#). Noblemen and common people alike were proud of the grand spectacles hosted by Ludovico and Beatrice, yet scholars have pointed out that the citizens of Milan paid high taxes in order to fund these events. Soon Gian Galeazzo, the rightful duke of Milan, and his wife Isabella became resentful of the extravagant life enjoyed by Ludovico and Beatrice. Gian Galeazzo and Isabella left Milan to establish their own court at Pavia. Isabella then appealed to her grandfather, King [Ferdinand I](#) (1423–1494; ruled 1458–94) of Spain, for assistance in restoring the duchy of Milan to her husband. In 1492 Ferdinand ordered Ludovico to give the duchy to Isabella and Gian Galeazzo, but Ludovico refused to comply.

## **Beatrice d'Este**

Beatrice d'Este (1475–1497) was born into one of the most respected families in Europe. She and her sister, Isabella, split their time between Ferrara, Italy, where their father, Ercole d'Este I (1433–1505) was duke, and Naples, Italy, where their grandmother was a member of the royal court. When it came time for husbands to be chosen for the sisters, it appeared

that Beatrice would have the more influential marriage. In 1491, at the age of sixteen, she married Ludovico il Moro (the Moor), the acting duke of Milan, who had seized control from his nephew, Gian Galeazzo Sforza, the rightful heir to the title. Together Beatrice and Ludovico established a brilliant court in Milan, which attracted the greatest artists, poets, and scholars of the Renaissance. In 1494 Ludovico paid Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I a huge sum of money to declare Ludovico and his heirs dukes of Milan. Beatrice died in January 1497 while giving birth to their first child. Ludovico, who had never been known for his ability to save money, spent an extravagant amount on her burial. He burned thousands of candles in her honor and had her corpse wrapped in gold. Soon afterward he was driven from Milan. Ludovico was captured by the French in 1500. He died while imprisoned in a French castle in 1508.

When Gian Galeazzo died in 1494, Ludovico paid Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I an enormous amount of money to install him as the duke of Milan. Maximilian further sealed the connection with Milan by marrying Gian Galeazzo's sister, Bianca Maria. In an effort to prevent Spanish takeover of Milan, Ludovico then formed an alliance with Charles VIII of France, who wanted to seize the kingdom of Naples from Ferdinand. (Ferdinand died later in 1494.) Milan remained safe during Charles VIII's invasion, which started the Italian Wars in 1494 and threw the city-states into chaos. During the second phase

of the wars, however, in 1499, Milan was seized by King Louis XII of France, who said he had a right to the territory because he was a great-grandson of Gian Galeazzo Visconti. In 1500, with the aid of Swiss mercenaries, Ludovico tried to retake his land, but he was defeated in a battle at Novara. He was captured and taken to France, where he was put in prison. One time he disguised himself as a Swiss soldier and tried to escape, but he was recaptured. He died in prison in 1508.

**Francesco II ends Sforza reign** In 1512 the Swiss, as members of the Holy League alliance against France, stormed Milan and installed Ludovico's son, Massimiliano Sforza (1493–1530; ruled 1512–15) as duke of Milan. Although Massimiliano was duke, the Swiss actually controlled Milan until 1515, when they were defeated by the French at Marignano. After surrendering the city to the French king, Francis I, Massimiliano retired to France. Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I named Massimiliano's brother, Francesco II Sforza (1495–1535; ruled 1521–1525, 1529–1535), as the next duke of Milan. The city was still occupied by the French, but Francesco took over the duchy in 1521 after France was defeated by the army of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at Bicocca. Francesco lost his title four years later, however, when the Spanish imperial general Fernando de Ávalos, marquis of Pescara, accused him of plotting against Charles. The following year Francesco joined the League of Cognac, an alliance against the emperor that was formed by King Francis

I. Other members included England, the Papal States, Venice, and Florence. Soon thereafter Francesco was forced to surrender Milan when the emperor's troops invaded the city. After the Treaty of Cambrai in 1529 Francesco II became duke and ruled Milan until he died six years later. Francesco had no heirs, so for the next twenty-four years France and Spain fought over the right to control Milan. Spain finally emerged victorious after the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559), which awarded Italy to Spain and reduced France to a minor European power. Milan then became part of the Habsburg Empire, which was held by the Spanish crown until 1706. The duchy of Milan, under Spanish control until 1714, remained fairly prosperous.

## **Venice**

Venice was one of the most important cities of Renaissance Italy and perhaps the most beautiful. A prosperous sea empire and merchant republic, it was the only Italian city-state to remain independent while others were being invaded and occupied. Throughout the High Middle Ages (1100–1300), various factions struggled over control of the government, but the republic was stable during the Renaissance. By the thirteenth century Venice was the main trade link between Europe and Asia. Responding to threats by Muslim Turks in the East, Venice expanded its land empire by conquering cities in Italy. During the Renaissance, when Venice reached the height

of its power, life in the republic was relatively calm in comparison to the volatile situations in other Italian city-states. While Venice was the aggressor in numerous conflicts involving the city-states and European states, it seemed blessed by internal peace and commercial success. As the sixteenth century progressed, however, Venice lost much of its importance because trade became more concentrated in the [Atlantic Ocean](#). Despite this decline, Venice's commercial prosperity helped to support a great number of Renaissance artists. Venetians were constantly constructing new churches, thus providing employment for architects, builders, and artists.

## **Venice: A Floating City**

Venice, which is considered one of the most beautiful cities in the world, has a unique structure. Located in a lagoon, it sits on 118 small islands linked by about 150 canals that are crossed by 400 bridges. The canals are lined with hundreds of elaborate churches and palaces clustered around impressive squares. The main traffic thoroughfare is the [Grand Canal](#), which is shaped like a reversed "S." During the Renaissance, Venetians traveled about the city in gondolas, long narrow flat-bottomed boats with a high bow and stern. Gondolas were propelled with long poles by sailors called gondoliers. A distinctive feature of Venice, gondolas are now used primarily for tourists.

Wealthy traders made Venice a center of architecture and

culture in the High Middle Ages, but the city achieved the height of its glory during the Renaissance. Great architects like [Jacopo Sansovino](#) (1486–1570) and [Andrea Palladio](#) (1508–1580) helped create the illusion that churches and palaces were floating on water. (The buildings were constructed on piles, or long slender columns, anchored in the ground). Ablaze with color and light, the buildings were filled with art treasures. Venice was the home of the Venetian school of painting, whose members included Titian (c. 1488–1576), Tintoretto (c. 1518–1594), [Giovanni Bellini](#) (c. 1430–1516) and Veronese (1528–1588).

**Doge-led republic formed** Venice is situated on 118 islands in a lagoon, or shallow body of water, at the extreme northern end of the [Adriatic Sea](#). It was founded after the fall of the West Roman Empire and named for the Veneti, itinerant (traveling) fishermen and salt workers who lived in the region during ancient times. Settlement of the site of Venice began in a.d. 452, when inhabitants of Aquileia, Padua (Padova), and other northern Italian cities fled from Lombard invaders and occupied islands in the lagoon, between the mouths of the Po and Piave rivers. Although the islands were under the control of the [Byzantine Empire](#) (the eastern part of the former Roman Empire), the refugees started their own government. Headed by tribunes (officials who protect citizens against unlawful actions of magistrates) from each of twelve main islands, the government remained essentially independent until the

islands became part of the newly created Exarchate of Ravenna in 584. The center of political power then shifted to Rialto, one of the islands, in 641 when the Byzantine city of Oderzo, located on the mainland, fell to the Lombards.

In 697 Venice was organized as a republic headed by a doge (duke) who was to be elected by the people. The first doge, Orso, was put in office by anti-Byzantine military leaders in 727. He was followed by a series of Byzantine officials until about 751, when the Exarchate of Ravenna was dissolved. The political situation in Venice remained unstable for more than a century as noble families, pro-and anti-Byzantine groups, and Roman Catholic Church officials struggled for control of the government. Although the doge was supposed to be elected, the office was often held by members of family factions (opposing groups) who gained power through force or influence. Despite political unrest, Venetians were united against the threat of foreign invaders. They managed to fight off attacks by Saracens in 836 and the Hungarians in 900. In 991 Venice signed a commercial treaty with the Saracens (nomadic, or wandering, groups of people from the deserts between Syria and Arabia), establishing a European trade link in the East.

## **Government Assures Stability**

The republic of Venice was different from the other Italian city-states because it maintained its independence while the other

states were constantly being invaded and occupied. Venice was also relatively free of internal political strife. The main reason was its distinctive government, which was headed by an elected duke known as a doge. The doge was elected for life by the male members of the wealthiest Venetian families through an elaborate approval process that involved nine different committees. The purpose was to make sure that one family did not dominate the position generation after generation. Once elected, the doge became a person of great public importance, but his position was basically ceremonial. He was responsible for assuring that the government ran smoothly, but he had no real authority. The doge's power was limited because he had to consult with a series of state councils (groups representing cities in the republic of Venice) before making any policy decisions. Above the state councils was the Great Council. Comprised of all Venice's noblemen, the Great Council was in charge of electing officials, such as the doge, and making laws. Unlike other Italian states, Venice did not sell titles of nobility. After the seventeenth century, no new families were recognized as nobles of Venice. This policy meant that the Great Council was ruled by the members of about one hundred eighty families.

The doge was assisted by the ducal council, which was made up of six councilors and three chief judicial magistrates. The ducal council headed the meetings of the Great Council and the Venetian Senate. The Senate was responsible for making

laws, managing the financial affairs of the state, deciding what foreign policy would be, and electing ambassadors. By the fifteenth century, the Senate was comprised of one hundred twenty members, as well as an additional forty who served in the *Quarantia* (Forty). The *Quarantia* was like a court meant to prevent Senate members from abusing their power. It was headed by three *capi* from the Council of Ten, a group of ten men chosen from the wealthiest and most influential families in Venice.

The Council of Ten was created in 1310 after a group of nobles attempted to organize a revolution against the government. The original purpose of the council was to investigate the treasonable activity of these revolutionaries, as well as others who wished to overthrow the government. In time, the council began to deal with policy matters, such as state security. When the Senate did not have time to meet, or the issue was so important that the city could not wait for the three hundred men to decide what to do, the council would hold meetings. The Council of Ten had the same powers as the Great Council, and it could pass laws without the consent of the Senate. The three *capi* each took turns assisting the Senate for one month at a time. In the late 1400s the Council of Ten became an important part of Venetian government. The council used a frightening [secret police](#) force to acquire even more power, eventually reducing the doge to a mere figurehead (leader with no authority). By the seventeenth century the council was

viewed as a group of tyrannical rulers.

**Byzantine trade rights granted** Venetians soon became quite wealthy and began assembling one of the strongest navies in the world. Economic prosperity not only brought political stability but also created a merchant ruling class that limited the power of the doge. In 1032 people regained the right to elect the doge, but it was limited to residents of Rialto and a select group of nobles. During the eleventh century the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire were engaged in a struggle over control of European territories. Although [Pope Gregory VII](#) (c. 1020–1085; reigned 1073–85) wanted support from Venice, the doge refused to take sides in the conflict. Doges continued to maintain neutrality while safeguarding Venetian trade connections in the Adriatic.

During the mid-eleventh century Venice's commercial routes in the southern part of the Mediterranean Sea were threatened by Norman expansion under military leader [Robert Guiscard](#) (c. 1015–1085). Normans lived in the Normandy region of northwest France and were descendants of Scandinavian conquerors who invaded France in the ninth century. Guiscard had taken over Apulia and Calabria in southeast Italy, and in 1059 he was named duke of those regions by Pope Nicholas II (c. 980–1061; reigned 1059–61). In 1071 he drove Byzantine forces out of Italy, then captured part of Sicily from the Saracens. He went on to take Palermo, Salerno, and Rome. To

assure their freedom on the Mediterranean, the Venetians moved against the Normans. These actions benefited the [Byzantine Empire](#), which was also at risk of being invaded by the Normans. As a gesture of gratitude, in 1082 Byzantine Emperor [Alexius I](#) (1048–1118; ruled 1081–1118) gave Venice full trading rights, with no customs dues (fees paid for goods taken from one country to be sold in another), throughout the Byzantine Empire. This agreement began Venetian commercial activity in the East.

However, relations with the Byzantine Empire began to disintegrate because Venetian traders offended the Byzantines with their arrogance and aggressive business practices. Soon the Venetians and the Byzantines hated one another. Alexius therefore began to encourage the Italian republics of Genoa and Pisa to compete with Venice. Angered by this development, which would limit their access to Byzantine markets, the Venetians destroyed Genoan and Pisan trading facilities in Byzantium. In 1171 Alexius tried to keep order by arresting all Venetian residents in Constantinople and outlying territories and confiscating their goods. Although efforts were made to improve relations in 1187 and again in 1198, the Venetians remained bitter toward the Byzantines.

**Trade link between Europe and Asia** At the end of the eleventh century, the Roman Catholic Church, in league with

leaders of the European states, had launched the Crusades (1096–1291), a series of holy wars against Muslims in the [Middle East](#) (see "Crusades" in Chapter 1). The Christians wanted to retake the [Holy Land](#) (called Palestine at the time; the territory is now in parts of Israel, Jordan, and Egypt), which had been captured by the Muslims in the seventh century. The Europeans soon realized they could make huge profits from trade with new markets in the East. They set up kingdoms called Crusader States in conquered Muslim territory around the Mediterranean Sea, then gave trading privileges to merchants. In 1204 the Venetian doge, Enrico Dandolo (c. 1107–1205; ruled 1192–1205) led the Fourth Crusade (1202–04) and captured Constantinople. Venetian Crusaders later seized territory along the Ionian, Aegean, and Mediterranean Seas and claimed the island of Crete in the eastern Mediterranean.

Venice was now the main link for trade between Europe and Asia. Surpassing the other prosperous commercial city-states of Naples and Genoa in trade volume, Venice produced such items as glass, saddles, soap, textiles (cloth), books, metal work, and other luxury goods. From the East they brought back teas, spices, and silk, among other items. The republic was also a major shipbuilding center. The arsenal (building where military equipment is manufactured and stored), founded in 1104, came to be known as one of the wonders of the world at the time. Venetians celebrated their alliance with

the sea in an elaborate "marriage" ceremony between the doge and the Adriatic, which took place on a great gold-painted gondola called the *Bucentaur*. The Venetian spirit was exemplified by the merchant-traveler [Marco Polo](#) (c. 1254–c. 1324) who, in 1275, began a twenty-year visit in China.

## [Marco Polo](#)

In 1275 the Venetian merchant-traveler Marco Polo journeyed to China, where he stayed for nearly twenty years. As a favored guest of [Kublai Khan](#) (1215–1294), the Mongol emperor of China, Polo traveled throughout Asia, visiting places never before seen by a European. He later wrote a book about his experiences, stimulating European interest in trade with China. During the Renaissance, Polo's book was the main Western source of information about the East. (The work had various titles, including *The Book of Marvels*, *The Book of Marco Polo*, and *The Travels of Marco Polo*.)

**Venetian empire expanded** Venice continued to dominate European trade with the East during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, reaching the height of its power in the 1400s. In 1380 Venice defeated Genoa, a rival Italian port city, in the War of Chioggia (1379–80) at Chioggia, a small island at the southern end of the Lagoon of Venice. Venice was now known as the "queen of the Adriatic." Yet the Venetians faced a threat from the [Ottoman Empire](#), a vast kingdom ruled by Muslim Turks, which was overtaking the Byzantine Empire

(see "Ottoman Empire" in Chapter 1). From 1361 until 1387 Sultan (king) Murad I (c. 1326–1389; ruled c. 1360–89) expanded Ottoman territory in Europe with victories at the Byzantine cities of Edirne, Turkey; Serrai, Greece; Sofia, Bulgaria; Nis, Serbia; and Salonika, Greece. In 1371 Murad moved the capital of the Ottoman Empire to Edirne. He completed his conquest of southern Europe at the battle of Kosovo, a region in southern Serbia, in 1389.

For a time Venice tried to maintain friendly relations with the Turks in order to protect trade routes in the Byzantine Empire. Finally, in the 1420s Venice challenged Ottoman power in the [Aegean Sea](#), but the Ottomans took Salonika from the Venetians. The Venetians realized they could no longer utilize their sea routes in the empire. To make up for the loss in sea trade, they focused on acquiring secure routes on the mainland. In 1420 Venice took over Istria, a peninsula in present-day Slovenia and Croatia. In 1423 Doge Francesco Foscari (c. 1373–1457; ruled 1423–1457) initiated a series of wars against neighboring northern Italian city-states, particularly Milan. From 1426 until 1457, the cities of Verona, Vicenza, Padua, and Belluno were added to the Venetian empire. Venice established a strong army to help in these territorial acquisitions, and soon its land army was as mighty as its navy.

Venetian aggression caused resentment among the other

city-states. In 1454 Francesco I Sforza, the duke of Milan, with the help of Cosimo de' Medici, the duke of Florence, drafted the Peace of Lodi, a treaty designed to end the wars. On the basis of this agreement the Italian League was established the following year to provide a [balance of power](#) among Venice, Milan, Florence, Naples, and the Papal States. Despite signing the Peace of Lodi, Venice continued to push for territorial expansion. Its image was badly damaged when, in 1481, the city attempted to overtake Ferrara, a duchy ruled by the powerful Este family. The conflict over Ferrara ended in 1484, when Venice conquered the Polesine region and triggered even more intense opposition from the other Italian states.

**Venetian empire declines** The Venetian empire began to decline in the early 1500s. Venice's expansion in Italy was halted during the second phase of the Italian Wars, a conflict between France and Spain over control of Italy (see "Italian Wars dominate Renaissance" section previously in this chapter). In 1508 Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I formed the [League of Cambrai](#), which consisted of the Holy Roman Empire, the Papal States, Spain, and France. Mantua and Ferrara were also allowed to join because these city-states had lost possessions to Venice. The League claimed it was protecting Italy against an Ottoman invasion, but the actual goal was to take back territory Venice had conquered and divide it among the allies. Nevertheless, the four main Cambrai allies—Spain, France, the Papal States, and the Holy Roman

Empire—could not work together because each wanted to claim the territory for itself. Venice was defeated by the French in 1509 at Agnadello, an area east of Milan that France had given to Venice a few years earlier. As a result of this victory, Maximilian took Verona, Vicenza, and Padua. Ferdinand V of Spain regained Apulia and the port of Brindisi in southern Italy. Nevertheless, the Venetian republic was not completely destroyed, and the [League of Cambrai](#) collapsed in 1510.

In 1515 Venice joined its former enemy, France, in an alliance with England against the Holy League. The Holy League consisted of Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, the Papal States, and Milan. The Holy Roman Empire was closely identified with Spain. The empire was under the rule of the Habsburgs, a royal family with branches in Austria and Spain whose members had held the post of emperor since 1438. In addition, Spanish Habsburgs controlled Lombardy, and Austrian Habsburgs held the region to the north of Venice. The Habsburgs wanted to expand their territory in northern Italy. Consequently, Venice was doomed not only by allying itself with France but also by being hemmed in by the Habsburgs in the north. French king Francis I was finally defeated at the Battle of Pavia in 1526. Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (who was descended from both the Spanish and Austrian Habsburg lines) arrested Francis, sent him to Madrid, Spain, and required him to sign the Treaty of Madrid. Under the terms of the treaty Francis abandoned all French claims to Italy, gave up

Burgundy, and renounced his rights to Flanders (a region in the [Low Countries](#)) and Artois (a region in northern France). With Italy now in the hands of the Spanish, Venice's ambitions of taking over more territory came to an end.

**Status as sea power lost** Venice's sea empire was also declining. Venetian trade routes were still being threatened by Ottoman expansion in the eastern Mediterranean. Not only did Venice lose its ports in Albania and Greece in 1503, but it also gave up the Aegean islands north of Crete in 1540 and ceded control of Cyprus to the Ottomans in 1571. The Ottomans took over Crete itself in 1669. The Venetian sea empire collapsed completely when Venice lost the Peloponnese, a peninsula in Greece, to Turkey in 1715. In addition, Venice's trading monopoly was being challenged by Portugal, which had emerged as a sea power in Asia. In 1498 Portuguese navigator [Vasco da Gama](#) (c. 1460–1524) found an [Atlantic Ocean](#) route to Asia around the [Cape of Good Hope](#) at the tip of [South Africa](#). Another significant development was the discovery of America, in 1492, by Genoan navigator [Christopher Columbus](#) (1451–1506), who sailed on behalf of Spain. Columbus's voyages to America opened Atlantic routes to the New World (the European term for [North America](#) and [South America](#)). These routes were increasingly utilized by Spain, Portugal, France, England, and the Netherlands in the sixteenth century. The rise of the Dutch merchant city of Antwerp (in present-day Belgium) in the 1500s further disrupted Venetian trading

routes in northern Europe. Thus European sea commerce had shifted away from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, reducing Venice to the status of a minor trading state.

Although Venice was no longer the most powerful state in Italy, it remained politically stable and independent. The Venetians developed an effective diplomatic corps and maintained a strong fleet. In 1571 Venice briefly revived its standing as a sea power by helping Holy League commander [John of Austria](#) (1547–1578) defeat the Turkish fleet at the [battle of Lepanto](#). In this decisive naval engagement the Christians fought the Turks at the mouth of the Gulf of Patras, off the coast of Lepanto, Greece. The Christian victory prevented the Ottomans from gaining total control of the Mediterranean. In 1576 Venice was struck by an outbreak of the plague. The population of the republic was reduced from 180,000 to less than 150,000. After 1583 the old nobility, which had once controlled Venetian politics, lost its power to the Senate. The republic of Venice gave up its independence in 1797 at the end of the first phase of the [French Revolutionary Wars](#) (1792–1802; a series of conflicts between France and Austria), when it was dissolved and divided between Austria and France.

## **Mantua**

Mantua was another northern Italian city-state that made

important contributions to the Renaissance. Although not so great as Milan and Venice, Mantua became a center for artistic and intellectual life under the Gonzagas, the family that ruled the state for more than four centuries. The city also played a role in the political history of the Italian Renaissance.

**Gonzagas have long rule** The site of Mantua was originally part of Etruria, an ancient country in central Italy, and later became a Roman town. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it was a free commune. At the beginning of the fourteenth century the population had reached thirty thousand. In 1328 Luigi Gonzaga (1267–1360) seized control of the government and transformed the territory into a hereditary lordship, establishing Gonzaga rule that lasted for nearly four hundred years. In 1433 Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund (1368–1437; ruled 1433–37) made the Mantuan state a fief of his empire, which meant that the Gonzaga family was forced to pay homage (tribute) to the empire while they ruled the area.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Mantua struggled to remain independent from its larger neighbors, Milan and Venice, which were trying to take over Mantuan territory. The Gonzaga family achieved independence through well-timed alliances with one or the other of these two states. At this time Mantua also became involved in the Italian Wars, a struggle between Spain and France for control of Italy (see "Italian Wars dominate the Renaissance" section previously in this

chapter). Both Spain and France claimed they had a right to the throne of Naples. During this conflict the Gonzagas formed alliances that benefited Mantua. In 1494, during the first phase of the Italian Wars, King Charles VIII of France invaded northern Italy in a march to Naples. Although Charles VIII entered Naples, he did not have the support of the people and was forced to leave Italy. The following year Francesco Gonzaga (1466–1519), marquis of Mantua, sided with Spain and led allied forces against the retreating French at the battle of Fornovo in northern Italy.

Seeking to retain the independence of Mantua, however, Francesco later fought for the French against the Spanish during the second phase of the wars. King Francis I of France signed the Treaty of Cambrai in 1529, thus bringing the wars to a temporary halt. In 1530 Francesco's son, Federico Gonzaga (1500–1540), was appointed duke of Mantua by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who was also the king of Spain and a member of the House of Habsburg. Federico then established a close alliance with the Habsburgs, which remained in effect when the Italian Wars resumed again (1542–44 and 1556–57). Spain finally emerged victorious after the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559.

The Gonzagas continued to rule Mantua as a fief of the Holy Roman Empire until Vincenzo II, the last of the original Gonzaga line, died in 1627. Vincenzo's death led to the

decline of the duchy of Mantua. A war of succession, known as the Mantuan War (1627–30), then erupted over the question of who should rule the duchy. This dispute became part of the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), a series of conflicts fought mainly in Germany over many issues. France supported Carlo I (1580–1637), a representative of a French branch of the Gonzaga family, the Gonzaga-Nevers. Carlo succeeded in becoming duke, but not before his rival's forces sacked the city. Mantua never fully recovered from the destruction. In 1707 the last Gonzaga duke of Mantua, Ferdinando Carlo (1652–1708), was exiled by the Habsburgs for supporting King [Louis XIV](#) of France in the [War of the Spanish Succession](#) (1701–13). The duchy of Mantua, which had remained an imperial fief, then went to the Habsburgs.

**Mantua and the Renaissance** During the Renaissance, Mantua was the scene of important cultural developments. In 1423 the Gonzaga family invited the humanist Vittorino de Feltre (1378–1446) to establish a school of the humanities (which then included literature, philosophy, rhetoric, and ethics) for the education of their children and those of other notable families in the area. This school became the model for many of the later humanist schools. The Gonzagas were great art lovers, so they invited numerous painters to Mantua to help decorate their palaces. Antonio Pisanello (1395–1455) painted scenes from the English legend of [King Arthur](#); [Andrea Mantegna](#) (1431–1506) created numerous frescoes (wall

paintings) that are among the greatest works of fifteenth-century [Italian art](#); and Leonbattista Alberti (1404–1472) designed the new Basilica of Sant' Andrea and the church of San Sebastiano. In the sixteenth century Francesco Gonzaga and his wife, Isabella d'Este (1474–1539), established a famous court at Mantua, which attracted prominent Renaissance artists and literary figures. [Giulio Romano](#) (1499–1546) held the post of chief architect of Mantua under Duke Federico Gonzaga (1500–1540) and his brother Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga (1505–1563). Romano's works there include the Palazzo del Te on the outskirts of the city, the remodeled interior of the Cathedral of San Pietro, and the monastery church of San Benedetto in Polirone.

Mantua held a significant place in the Renaissance religious history as well. The younger sons of the Gonzaga family played an important role in church politics as bishops of Mantua and cardinals. Starting with Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga (1461–1483) a series of ten Gonzaga rulers held the post of cardinal. All of them combined the interests of their family with the policies of the church. During the sixteenth century, Protestantism, a religious reform movement rebelling against the Roman Catholic Church, was gaining momentum throughout Europe. It captured the imagination of merchants, peasants, nobles, and even church officials because of corrupt practices within the church. Benedetto Mantova (died 1541), a Mantuan scholar, wrote *Il Beneficio di Cristo* ("the

benefit of Christ's death"; published 1543), the most significant book on reform efforts in Italy. The Gonzagas' commitment to [Roman Catholicism](#), however, prevented Protestantism from becoming a major force in Mantua.

## Isabella d'Este

Isabella d'Este and her younger sister Beatrice were born into one of the most respected families in Europe. When they were children, the sisters split their time between Ferrara, Italy, where their father was duke, and Naples, Italy, where their grandmother was a member of the royal court. Both received an excellent classical education, but Isabella proved herself to be especially good with languages. By the time she was a teenager, she had mastered Greek and Latin grammar, could recite large sections of the works of the ancient poets Homer and Virgil from memory, and was knowledgeable about politics. She was also an accomplished lute player (a [stringed instrument](#) that is an ancestor to the modern guitar), a skillful dancer, and a flawless embroiderer.

Isabella was engaged to Francesco Gonzaga, who was marquis of Mantua from 1494 to 1519, for ten years before they were finally wed. As the marchioness (feminine form of the title marquis) of Mantua, Isabella became the very model of the accomplished Renaissance woman. She was expected to be intellectual, articulate, and politically aware. Gonzaga shared Isabella's passion for learning and culture, and their

royal court quickly became a great center of artistic and literary life. A number of talented artists and writers from throughout Italy were attracted to their court, mainly because of Isabella's library, which was one of the finest in Italy, and because she was a dedicated patron of the arts.

In 1509 Francesco was captured in a war against Venice, and Isabella was forced to rule in his place. She became such an able leader that Francesco was jealous of her success.

Francesco was not released from prison for several years, a fact he blamed on his wife. Their marriage suffered until his death in 1519. Isabella ruled for another six years in the place of her nineteen-year-old son, Federico, who felt he could not rule as well as his mother. Her diplomatic skills ensured Federico the title of duke from Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Her influence also won her younger son, Ercole, a place in the papacy as a cardinal. When Isabella died on January 13, 1539, she was honored as the "first lady of the world."

## **Rome and the Papal States**

The Italian Renaissance was supported by the popes in Rome, which was the base of the Roman Catholic Church and the Papal States. In ancient times Rome was the seat of the Roman Empire, and after the rise of Christianity in the sixth century it became the headquarters of the church.

Throughout history the city had therefore been the center of

the Western (non-Asian) world. At the beginning of the Renaissance, however, Rome had gone into decline and was not even one of Italy's greatest cities. For instance, during the third century more than a million people had lived in Rome, but in the early fifteenth century only one hundred thousand people resided there. Rome's economy was largely based on the city being the home of the papacy, which attracted thousands of pilgrims who made religious journeys to receive the blessing of the pope. The municipal, or city, government was frequently unstable, as wealthy families fought amongst themselves and with the popes for control. Rome's government also suffered from extensive corruption because the families often attempted to seize the papacy itself through bribes (payments in return for favors) and political blackmail (threat to expose an embarrassing or illegal act if payment is not made).

**Babylonian captivity and the Great Schism** The decline of the city of Rome began in 1307, when Pope Clement V moved the headquarters of the church to the Papal State of Avignon in his native country of France. The Italian scholar and poet Petrarch was alarmed at this development, and he wrote extensively about it, declaring Avignon to be the "Babylon of the West." He was referring to the story in the Old Testament (the first part of the Bible) about the Jews being captured by the Babylonians and held in Babylonia (an ancient country in Asia, located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers) for

seventy years. According to Petrarch, Catholics were being held captive in Avignon just as the Jews had been kept against their will in Babylonia. This situation resulted in ongoing conflicts between France and Italy. The papacy remained in Avignon until 1376—a period known as the Babylonian captivity because it also lasted seventy years—when Pope Gregory XI (1329–1378; reigned 1370–78) returned it to Rome. Gregory was horrified to discover deep corruption in the Italian church, however, and he made plans to return the papacy to Avignon. He died in 1378 before the move could be made. Mobs in Rome then forced the sacred college of cardinals (a committee of high-ranking church officials who elect the pope) to name [Urban VI](#) (c. 1318–1389; reigned 1378–89) as the next pope.

[Urban VI](#) was determined to end corrupt practices in the church, particularly among cardinals. Ranking just below the pope, cardinals were appointed by the pope himself and therefore had acquired considerable power and wealth. The French cardinals feared Urban's reform efforts, so they claimed that his election was invalid because pressure had been put on the sacred college by the mobs. In 1378 the French cardinals elected a new pope, Robert of Geneva (1342–1394), who had been a cardinal from the French-speaking city of Geneva, a city in southwestern Switzerland that was surrounded by French territory. He became [Clement VII](#) (reigned 1378–94), and the French cardinals returned to

Avignon with him. Clement was called an antipope because Urban was still the pope in Rome. Clement intended to establish Avignon as the center of the church once again. Urban refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new pope, so he excommunicated the French cardinals and Clement. Urban then appointed new cardinals to replace those who had been banished. For the next thirty-seven years, the rival camps in Rome and Avignon each elected new popes and hurled accusations of heresy (violation of church laws) at one another. This dispute is known as the Great Schism (also the Schism of the West). The Great Schism came to an end in 1417 when church officials met at the town of Constance in Switzerland and elected Pope [Martin V](#) (1368–1431; reigned 1417–31). They declared him to be the only rightful leader of the Roman Catholic faith.

## **The Papal States**

The Papal States (also known as the States of the Church or Pontifical States) were territory in Italy under the direct rule of the pope. The Papal States originated in the sixth century a.d., when popes became unofficial rulers of the city of Rome and the surrounding area. In 754 [Pepin the Short](#), king of the Franks, officially awarded this territory to Pope Stephen II. During the next seven hundred years papal holdings were increased by gifts to the church as well as the church's own purchases and conquests. For instance, Avignon, France, was

a Papal State that played an important part in the Babylonian captivity and the Great Schism in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. At the end of the Great Schism, Avignon was still under jurisdiction of the pope, but the people ruled themselves. At the height of the Renaissance, in the fifteenth century, the Papal States occupied most of central Italy and, in addition to Rome, comprised the cities of Bologna, Urbino, Rimini, and Assisi. At various times papal domains also included such duchies as Verona, Padua, and Ferrara in northern Italy. The Papal States were dissolved in 1870, when the king of Italy, [Victor Emmanuel II](#), annexed nearly all of the territory, including Rome, into the united nation of Italy. The area ruled by the pope was confined to the Vatican. In protest against the Italian occupation of Rome, popes were voluntary prisoners in the Vatican until 1929. At that time the Lateran Treaty recognized the [Holy See](#) (office of the pope) in [Vatican City](#) as an independent state.

## **Revival fuels Renaissance**

Pope Martin moved the papacy back to Rome, and church officials decided to return the city to its former glory. For the rest of the century popes focused their attention on revitalizing church buildings and promoting the arts. Martin planned an ambitious building program, which was later carried out by Pope [Nicholas V](#) (1397–1455; reigned 1447–55). During Nicholas's reign a new Vatican palace (the

residence of the pope) was built, remodeling was begun on [Saint Peter's](#) Church (also called [Saint Peter's](#) Basilica; the principal church in the Roman Catholic world), and preliminary plans for a Vatican Library were started. Pope Sixtus IV (1414–1484; reigned 1471–84) initiated the building of the [Sistine Chapel](#) in Saint Peter's Church. In 1506 Pope [Julius II](#) (1443–1513; reigned 1503–13) decided that Saint Peter's Church should be entirely rebuilt, a project that took eighty-four years to complete.

The revitalization of Rome helped spread the Italian Renaissance. One of the most important innovations was a new style of architecture. In the sixteenth century architects such as [Andrea Palladio](#) went to Rome and sketched ancient ruins, then adapted them to design buildings that featured the domes, columns, arches, and vaults used by the Romans. Throughout Italy—and eventually Europe—town halls, palaces, and villas were built according to the designs of Palladio and other architects.

The city of Rome was once again the center of culture and politics in Europe. As a result of these advances, the city survived a devastating attack by the army of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, in 1527 (see "German Fury" section previously in this chapter). In the second half of the sixteenth century, Rome became one of the fastest-growing cities in all of Europe because of the papacy's patronage, or support, of

artists. Talented and influential artists flocked to the city, seeing it as the center of the Italian Renaissance.

## **Saint Peter's Church Rebuilt**

In 1506 Pope [Julius II](#) decided that Saint Peter's Church should be entirely rebuilt. Spread over eighty-four years, the project involved five renowned architects—Donato Bramante, Raphael, Antonio da Sangallo, Michelangelo, and [Giacomo della Porta](#). Julius appointed Bramante to draft the design of the new church. Records show that Bramante originally planned the building in the shape of a symmetrical Greek cross topped by a great dome at the center. This design caused considerable controversy throughout the sixteenth century, however, since many people wanted the church to be built in the shape of a Latin cross. In 1547 Michelangelo completed the building up to the dome. Porta then altered the design (he may have used a model made by Michelangelo) and completed the dome in 1590. Finally, supporters of the Latin cross design won, and [Carlo Maderno](#) added a nave and facade (1607–14). But critics were not pleased with the results, since his additions obscured the dome from view.

## **Corruption in the papacy**

Although the church was promoting a cultural rebirth, corruption was still a problem. It reached a peak when Rodrigo

Borgia (pronounced BOHR-jeh; 1431–1503), an Italian cardinal, became Pope Alexander VI (reigned 1492–1503) in 1492. Borgia was the nephew of Pope Calixtus III (1455–1458; reigned 1455–58). Having been surrounded by [high church](#) officials for most of his life, Borgia rose quickly through the ranks. In June 1460, when he was still a young cardinal, Borgia received a letter from Pope [Pius II](#) (1405–1464; reigned 1458–64). The pope reprimanded the young man for his sexual activities with several married women. Despite his behavior, and the fact that many in the church were aware of it, Borgia managed to gather enough support to be elected pope.

Once Borgia became Alexander VI, he continued to indulge in his previous behavior. He held extravagant parties, dined on the finest foods, and used church funds to sponsor bullfights (sporting events in which men called matadors challenge bulls in an arena). Violence flourished in Rome during his reign. Gangsters ruled the streets, and reports indicate that Alexander had personal knowledge of more than 250 murders. He made little effort to improve Rome or the lives of its citizens, except for his four illegitimate children, who were all given careers and whose mother lived like a queen on church money.

The most ambitious and destructive of Alexander's children was [Cesare Borgia](#) (1476–1507), a vicious youth who was

made cardinal at the age of fourteen. Cesare murdered his older brother and the second husband of his sister, Lucrezia (1480–1519). Capitalizing on his father's influence and power, Cesare began to establish a vast state in central Italy. In 1498, during the Italian Wars, he formed an alliance with King Louis XII of France, who had invaded Italy to restore it to French control. Cesare married a French woman and received the title Duke of Valentinois. After establishing a French presence in the region, he continued to expand his state. His finances were severely limited, however, by the death of Alexander in 1503. The new pope, Julius II, was Alexander's bitter enemy. Julius had set his sights on expanding the Vatican's empire into the area of central Italy where Cesare had established his estate. Cesare's empire quickly fell apart and, in 1504, he was imprisoned in Spain. He died three years later.

Julius became notorious for his love of war, his seemingly endless energy, and the amount of respect he earned from those around him. Known as "Papa Terrible" because of his passion for battle, Julius attempted to expand papal holdings by conquering lands in central Italy. In 1505 he marched his forces through cities formerly controlled by Cesare Borgia. In November 1506 Julius forced the city of Bologna to surrender. Through negotiation and influence, he assembled a massive army to drive the French out of central Italy. While accomplishing all of these things, Julius still found time to commission timeless pieces of art from Michelangelo,

Bramante, and other painters. Julius died of a fever in 1513.

## The "German Fury"

During its long history Rome had frequently been attacked by invaders. In 1527 the city was invaded again, this time by the forces of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. The attack was the outcome of a complex situation involving the emperor's war with France over control of territory in Italy (see "Italian Wars dominate the Renaissance" section previously in this chapter). It also involved the religious reform movement started in 1516 by German priest [Martin Luther](#) (1483–1546), which was underway in Germany and eventually resulted in the Protestant Reformation. Luther had gained many followers, called Lutherans, and a large percentage of the population in the German states were Lutherans. They posed a threat to both the church and the Holy Roman Empire. The church was faced with the possibility that the Lutherans would break away and form a separate Christian faith. The empire would be further weakened by the spirit of the Lutheran movement, which supported the independence of the German states—a large portion of the empire in northern Europe. In 1521 the imperial diet (meeting of the supreme council of representatives of states in the Holy Roman Empire) was held at the German city of Worms to discuss these problems. The diet issued an official statement called the Edict of Worms, which outlawed Luther and his followers.

Charles signed the edict, but he was so preoccupied by the war against France that he failed to prevent the spread of Luther's doctrines. Charles had also been having problems with the popes, who felt that their power and independence were being threatened by Holy Roman Empire dominance in Italy. In 1525 Charles's forces defeated the French at Pavia, in Lombardy (a province in northern Italy), and captured Francis I, the king of France. The next year Francis signed the Treaty of Madrid, which forced him to give up French claims to land in Italy and transferred Burgundy (a region in present-day eastern France) to Charles V. The Holy Roman Emperor was certain that he now had total control of Italy.

When Francis was released from captivity, however, he renounced the Treaty of Madrid. He then organized the League of Cognac in opposition to the Holy Roman Empire. The Papal States, Venice, Milan, and Florence joined the league along with England, which was allied with France at the time. In retaliation, Charles sent an army, composed mostly of German Lutherans, into Italy. In 1527 Charles's army defeated the forces of the League

## [Lucrezia Borgia](#)

[Lucrezia Borgia](#) is considered one the most notorious figures in European history. According to legend, she engaged in numerous crimes and vices, such as conspiring in family plots to kill political enemies and having sexual relationships with

her father and brother. Although historians have found no basis for most of these stories, they are certain that Lucrezia's corrupt family used her as a tool to advance their political schemes.

Lucrezia was the illegitimate daughter of Rodrigo Borgia, who later became Pope Alexander VI. He took advantage of his position as head of the Roman Catholic Church to establish an empire in northern and central Italy. Lucrezia's brother, Cesare Borgia, capitalized on their father's influence to gain power for himself. When Alexander VI began his reign as pope in 1492, he formed an alliance with the Sforza family of Milan against the Aragon family of Naples. To secure the support of the Sforzas, he arranged for thirteen-year-old Lucrezia to marry Giovanni Sforza. Alexander VI then turned against the Sforzas and made an alliance with Naples. The Sforzas formed ties with French noblemen, who had acquired power in the region because of Cesare's alliance with [Louis XI](#), the king of France. Giovanni feared that the Borgias would kill him, so he fled from Rome, becoming an enemy of the Borgias. Alexander annulled (declared invalid) Lucrezia's marriage to Giovanni in 1497. Giovanni later charged that Lucrezia had sexual relations with Alexander. In an effort to strengthen ties with Naples, the Borgias arranged for Lucrezia to marry seventeen-year-old Alfonso, duke of Bisceglie and nephew of the king of Naples. In 1500 Alfonso was murdered by one of Cesare's servants as part of a plot to break off relations with Naples.

After Alfonso's death, Lucrezia moved away from Rome and was seen with a three-year-old boy named Giovanni (also called the *Infans Romanus*, or Roman Infant). A papal bull (official statement) recognized the child as the illegitimate son of Cesare; a second bull then declared that Alexander, not Cesare, was the father (some modern historians believe this was probably true). In 1501 Cesare arranged for Lucrezia to wed Alfonso I, duke of Este, in order to strengthen Borgia control of the Este region in northeastern Italy. After Alexander's death in 1503 Lucrezia no longer had any political usefulness. In 1505 Alfonso inherited the duchy of Ferrara in northern Italy, where Lucrezia established a court that attracted the foremost artists, writers, and scholars of the Italian Renaissance. She devoted her life to the court at Ferrara, which is regarded as her real contribution to history.

of Cognac, then marched on Rome in a siege that was called the "German Fury." The German soldiers ransacked the city and stormed the residence of Pope [Clement VII](#) (not to be confused with the Avignon antipope of the same name), who had supported the French. Although Charles claimed he had no involvement in the "German Fury," he managed to profit from the siege of Rome by taking land and money from the pope. He also retained control of Italy through the Treaty of Cambrai with France and the Peace of Barcelona with Clement (both signed in 1529).

# Naples and Sicily

To the south of the Papal States were the mountainous kingdoms of Naples and Sicily. The kingdom of Naples was a vast area with cities on both the Adriatic and Mediterranean Seas. The kingdom of Sicily was located to the southwest of Naples, on the island of Sicily in the Mediterranean. The two kingdoms were ruled jointly by the king or queen of Naples and Sicily. Both areas had poor soil and relied on their port cities to support the economy. At the beginning of the Renaissance, Naples was one of the greatest cities in Europe, since a majority of the ships sailing in the Mediterranean used its port. During the sixteenth century Naples would become one of the largest cities in all of Europe.

**War of the Sicilian Vespers** Both Naples and Sicily had troubled and turbulent political histories. Many of the problems were caused by the fact that the region was vulnerable to invasion from the sea: the kingdom of Naples occupied most of the Italian peninsula, which juts into the Adriatic and the Mediterranean, and Sicily sits in the Mediterranean. Both areas had been attacked repeatedly during the Middle Ages, first by Muslims (followers of the Islamic religion who lived in Asia) from the east and then by Normans (Scandinavian conquerors of Normandy, a region in present-day France) from the west. Stability briefly returned when Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1194–1250; ruled

1212–50) attempted to rule his northern empire, which was located north of the Alps, from his base in Sicily. After his death, Italy's ties with the Holy Roman Empire began to weaken. Charles I (Charles of Anjou), the youngest brother of King [Louis IX](#) of France, took over the thrones of Sicily and Naples in 1266. The reign of Charles and his family was known as the Angevin dynasty.

Charles was a cruel and dictatorial king. Unpopular with the local peasants, he was considered an illegitimate ruler because of his desire to place all of Italy under French control. Charles clung to power until a bloody uprising against the French erupted on Easter Day 1282. The uprising began when a French soldier sexually assaulted a young married woman on her way to vesper (evening worship) services at a church in the town of Palermo. A violent conflict broke out, and soon the area was engulfed by war. Charles's claim to the throne of Sicily was supported by the papacy, which supplied him with military forces. The revolutionaries in Sicily had the support of the kings of Aragon, a region in Spain. Sicily was placed under the rule of Peter III of Aragon (c. 1239–1285), whose successors were known as the Argonese. The conflict was known as the War of the Sicilian Vespers. When it ended in 1306 Charles retained control of Naples, while Peter's successors continued to rule Sicily.

The Angevin and the Argonese were rivals throughout the

fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. One of the Angevin rulers in Naples, Robert the Wise (1278–1343; ruled 1309–43), gave many hope that the family would be able to unite Italy. These hopes vanished when Robert's granddaughter, Joanna I (1326–1381; ruled 1343–81), ascended to the throne and triggered a complex string of events. At the age of five Joanna had been married to her cousin, seventeen-year old Andrew, prince of Hungary. As she grew into adulthood, Joanna became increasingly bored with her husband. By most accounts, Andrew was an unremarkable and unintelligent match for the spirited Joanna. She had numerous lovers, and one of them murdered Andrew in 1345. Now nineteen years old, Joanna was forced to go to Avignon, France, and prove to antipope Clement VII that she had no part in Andrew's murder. (These events took place during the so-called Babylonian captivity, when there were two popes—the traditional pope in Rome and an antipope in the Papal State of Avignon) Although Joanna was declared innocent, suspicion followed her back to Naples. (Some modern historians believe she actually did arrange for her husband to be killed.) Seeking revenge, Andrew's brother, King [Louis I](#) of Hungary (1326–1382; ruled 1342–82), mounted two unsuccessful invasions of Naples. Joanna made peace with Hungary in 1352.

Joanna married two more times after Andrew's death, but she had no children. She had adopted Charles of Durazzo (1345–1386), the grandson of Charles II (1248–1309; ruled 1285–

1309) of Naples. Joanna designated the child as the heir to the throne of Naples and later sent him to live with [Louis I](#) in Hungary. In 1380 the Italian pope, Urban VI, urged Charles, who was now thirty-five, to overthrow Joanna. Urban was displeased with Joanna's support of Clement VII, the antipope at Avignon. Joanna disinherited Charles, renouncing him as her heir, and named a Frenchman, Louis Duke of Anjou (1339–1384), as her successor to the throne. In 1381 Charles conquered Naples, captured Joanna, and put her in prison. He was then given the kingdom of Naples by Urban and crowned Charles III (ruled 1381–86). Upon Charles's orders Joanna was strangled with a silken cord, and her body was hung in the market place to show what would happen to anyone who supported the French.

The overthrow of Joanna marked the beginning of the Durazzo line. When Charles died, his son, Ladislas (also known as Lancelot), was named king of Naples. Although Ladislas (c. 1376–1414; ruled 1386–1414) was a minor (below the legal age to rule on his own), he successfully defended his throne against Louis of Anjou. As Ladislas grew older, he became a brilliant military leader. Capitalizing on the confusion caused by the Great Schism, he expanded his kingdom into central Italy. He seized the cities of Latium and Umbria, then in 1408 he took Rome before moving north to Florence. Fearing a takeover, Florence allied with the house of Angevin to stop Ladislas.

Finally, Naples and Florence agreed to peace terms with Ladislas in 1411. Three years later, after the death of Ladislas, Joanna II (1371–1435; ruled 1414–35) ascended the throne as the queen of Naples. Joanna was a corrupt woman with an appetite for power. In July 1421 she convinced her lover, [Alfonso V](#) (1396–1458), to support her in a campaign against the French in return for being named the heir to the throne. Alfonso, who was already king of Aragon and Sicily, battled with René Duke of Anjou (1409–1480), for nearly a decade. René, who had the support of Pope Eugenius IV (c. 1383–1447; reigned 1431–47), was finally defeated in 1442. Alfonso took the throne of Naples as Alfonso I (ruled 1442–58). For a brief time he was able to unite the three crowns of Aragon, Sicily, and Naples. This union provided a degree of stability that had been lacking in war-torn southern Italy and paved the way for new artistic achievements. Alfonso was a great promoter of the arts and scholarship. Known as Alfonso the Magnanimous, he founded a university at Catania and helped support a number of respected scholars such as [Lorenzo Valla](#) (1407–1457), who wrote philosophical studies and produced Latin translations of works by ancient writers Homer, Herodotus, and Thucydides.

After Alfonso's death, his illegitimate son Ferdinand I (1423–1494; ruled 1458–94) became king of Naples while Alfonso's brother, John I (1397–1479; ruled 1458–79), took over Aragon. Ferdinand was regarded by many as a cruel and

unforgiving man, a reputation that came mainly from enemy propaganda rather than his own behavior. Unlike his father, Ferdinand was not interested in promoting the arts, and he focused his attention on diplomatic strategy. He made several intelligent political moves, including lending his support to Florence, which was led by [Lorenzo de Medici](#) (see "Florence" section previously in this chapter). Ferdinand also married the daughter of the king of Hungary in order to strengthen political ties with that country.

When Ferdinand died in 1494 the throne was challenged by King Charles VIII of France, who invaded Italy. He started the Italian Wars, a conflict between France and Spain over control of Italy. Ferdinand's unpopular son, [Alfonso II](#) of Spain (1449–1496; ruled 1494–95), sent an army to northern Italy under his own son, Ferdinand II (1467–1496; ruled 1495–96), known as Ferrandino, to head off the French forces. Charles VIII easily avoided the Neapolitan army (as the forces of Naples were called) and continued his march to Naples. Alfonso abdicated, or abandoned, his throne in January 1495. For a year, Ferrandino unsuccessfully attempted to rally support in Naples. He fled in February as Charles entered the city. Only three months later, in May 1495, Charles left Naples and never returned. The remaining French forces were defeated by the Neapolitan armies in June 1496. Ferrandino, however, died in October of the same year and was succeeded by his uncle, Frederick (1452–1504; ruled 1496–

1501).

Despite Frederick's ruling abilities, his reign was ended by cooperation between King Louis XII of France, whose army invaded Italy around 1499, and Frederick's cousin, Ferdinand II of Spain (called the Catholic; 1452–1516). Ferdinand II (not to be confused with the Ferdinand II of Naples, called Ferrandino) was a member of the house of Aragon, and his alliance with France ended the unity [Alfonso V](#) had established in 1442. France and Spain divided the kingdom with the Treaty of Granada in 1500. In 1502, however, Spanish forces mounted an attack against the French forces, driving them completely out of Italy in 1503.

Spanish control of Naples lasted from 1504 until 1713. While there were a variety of leaders during this time, Naples had its most stable period under Spanish rule. Feudalism was completely destroyed as a result of Spanish rule. A new class of nobles who were loyal to the government emerged, and landowners no longer had the freedom to establish their own laws and customs. Although the monarchy ruled from Spain, the Council of Italy was established in 1558 and the king of Naples governed in conjunction with the Spanish king. The new class of nobles played an instrumental role in running the government. While political independence from Spain was impossible, the Spanish occupation did provide political stability in Naples.