



Renaissance



Renaissance

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The Renaissance (from French *Renaissance*, meaning "re-birth"; Italian: *Rinascimento*, from *re-* "again" and *nascere* "be born")^[1] was a cultural movement that spanned roughly the 14th to the 17th century, beginning in Italy in the Late Middle Ages and later spreading to the rest of Europe. The term is also used more loosely to refer to the historic era, but since the changes of the Renaissance were not uniform across Europe, this is a general use of the term.

As a cultural movement, it encompassed a rebellion of learning based on classical sources, the development of linear perspective in painting, and gradual but widespread educational reform. Traditionally, this intellectual transformation has resulted in the Renaissance being viewed as a bridge between the Middle Ages and the Modern era. Although the Renaissance saw revolutions in many intellectual pursuits, as well as social and political upheaval, it is perhaps best known for its artistic developments and the contributions of such polymaths as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, who inspired the term "Renaissance man".^{[2][3]}

There is a general, but not unchallenged, consensus that the Renaissance began in Tuscany in the 14th

century.^[4] Various theories have been proposed to account for its origins and characteristics, focusing on a variety of factors including the social and civic peculiarities of Florence at the time; its political structure; the patronage of its dominant family, the Medici;^[5] and the migration of Greek scholars and texts to Italy following the Fall of Constantinople at the hands of the Ottoman Turks.^{[6][7][8]}

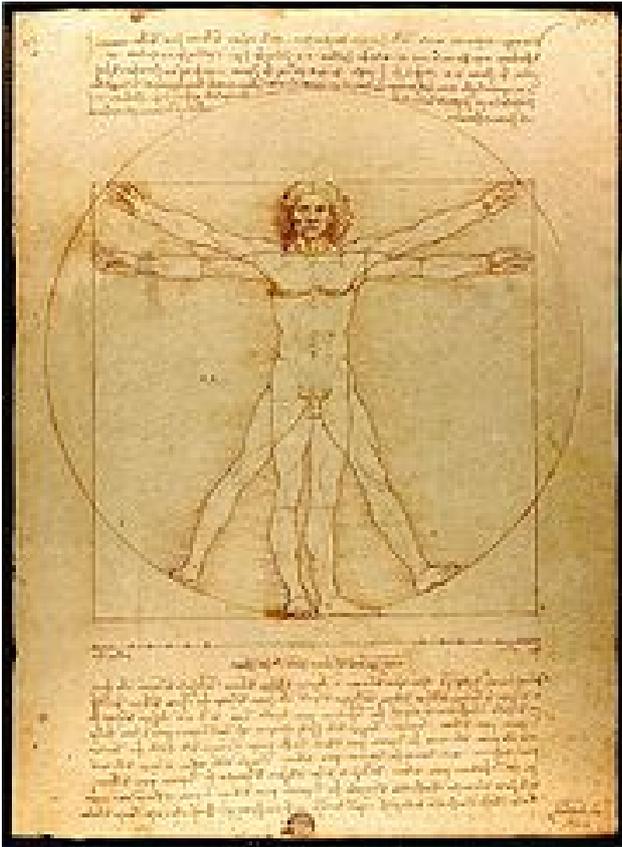
The Renaissance has a long and complex historiography, and there has been much debate among historians as to the usefulness of *Renaissance* as a term and as a historical delineation.^[9] Some have called into question whether the Renaissance was a cultural "advance" from the Middle Ages, instead seeing it as a period of pessimism and nostalgia for the classical age,^[10] while others have instead focused on the continuity between the two eras.^[11] Indeed, some have called for an end to the use of the term, which they see as a product of presentism – the use of history to validate and glorify modern ideals.^[12] The word *Renaissance* has also been used to describe other historical and cultural movements, such as the Carolingian Renaissance and the Renaissance of the 12th century.

Overview

The Renaissance was a cultural movement that profoundly affected European intellectual life in the early modern period. Beginning in Italy, and spreading to the rest of Europe by the 16th century, its influence affected literature, philosophy, art, politics, science, religion, and other aspects of intellectual enquiry. Renaissance scholars employed the humanist method in study, and searched for realism and human emotion in art.^[13]

Renaissance thinkers sought out learning from ancient texts, typically written in Latin or ancient Greek. Scholars scoured Europe's monastic searching for works of classical antiquity which had fallen into obscurity. In such texts they found a desire to improve and perfect their worldly knowledge; an entirely different sentiment to the transcendental spirituality stressed by medieval Christianity.^[13] They did not reject Christianity; quite the contrary, many of the Renaissance's greatest works were devoted to it, and the Church patronized many works of Renaissance art. However, a subtle shift took place in the way that intellectuals approached religion that was reflected in many other areas of cultural life.^[14]

Artists such as Masaccio strove to portray the human form realistically, developing techniques to render perspective and light more naturally. Political philosophers,



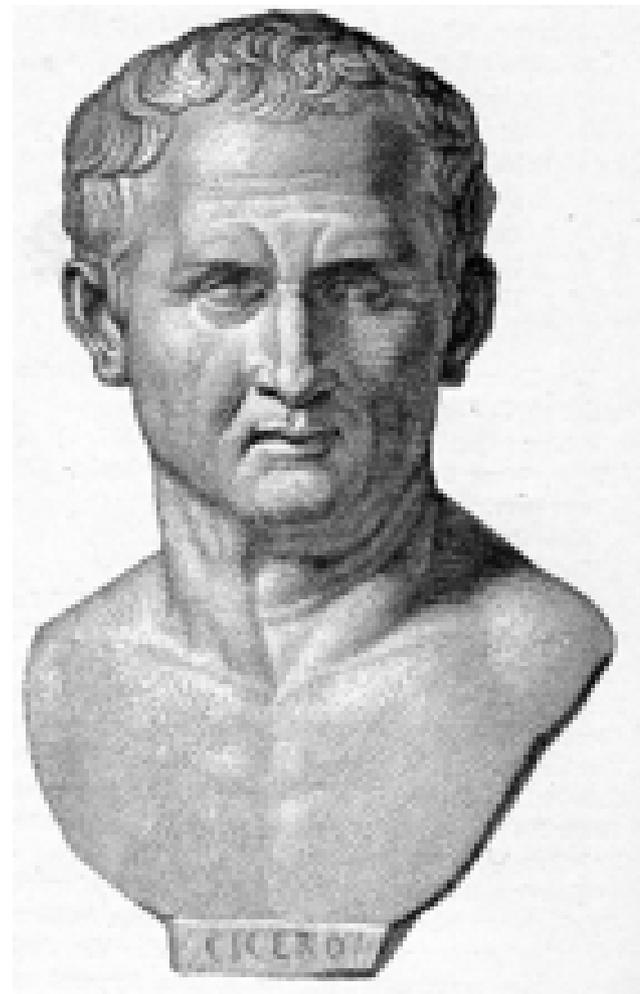
*Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man shows clearly the effect writers of antiquity had on Renaissance thinkers. Based on the specifications in Vitruvius's *De architectura*, da Vinci tried to draw the perfectly proportioned man.*

most famously Niccolò Machiavelli, sought to describe political life as it really was, and to improve government on the basis of reason. In addition to studying classical Latin and Greek, authors also began increasingly to use vernacular languages; combined with the invention of printing, this would allow many more people access to books, especially the Bible.^[15]

In all, the Renaissance could be viewed as an attempt by intellectuals to study and improve the secular and worldly, both through the revival of ideas from antiquity, and through novel approaches to thought. Some scholars, such as Rodney Stark,^[16] play down the Renaissance in favor of earlier innovation initially in Italian city states marrying responsive government, Christianity and the birth of capitalism. This analysis argues that, whereas the great European states (France and Spain) were absolutist monarchies, and others were under direct Church control, the independent city republics of Italy took over the principles of capitalism invented on monastic estates and set off a vast unprecedented commercial revolution which preceded and financed the Renaissance.

Origins

Most historians agree that the ideas that characterized the Renaissance had their origin in late 13th century Florence, in particular with the writings of Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) and Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), as well as the painting of Giotto di Bondone (1267–1337).^[17] Some writers date the Renaissance quite precisely; one proposed starting point is 1401, when the rival geniuses Lorenzo Ghiberti and Filippo Brunelleschi competed for the contract to build the bronze doors for the Baptistry of the Florence Cathedral (Ghiberti won, Brunelleschi was second).^[18] Others see more general competition between artists and polymaths such as Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, Donatello, and Masaccio for artistic commissions as sparking the creativity of the Renaissance. Yet it remains much debated why the Renaissance began in Italy, and why it began when it did. Accordingly, several theories have been put forward to explain its origins.



Cicero

Assimilation of Greek and Arabic knowledge

Further information: Latin translations of the 12th century, Greek scholars in the Renaissance, Islamic contributions to Medieval Europe, and Islamic Golden Age

The Renaissance was so called because it was a "rebirth" of certain classical ideas that had long been lost to Western Europe. It has been argued that the fuel for this rebirth was the rediscovery of ancient texts that had been forgotten by Western civilization, but were preserved in the Byzantine Empire, which was the Eastern Roman Empire, based in Constantinople and keeping alive Graeco-Roman traditions, the Islamic world, and some monastic libraries; and the translations of Greek and Arabic texts into Latin as well as original Latin texts".^[19]

Renaissance scholars such as Niccolò de' Niccoli and Poggio Bracciolini scoured the libraries of Europe in search of works by such classical authors as Plato, Cicero, Pliny the Elder and Vitruvius.^[5] Additionally, as the reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from Islamic Moors progressed, numerous Greek and Arabic works were captured from educational institutions such as the library at Córdoba, which claimed to have 400,000 books.^[20] The works of ancient Greek and Hellenistic writers (such as Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Ptolemy, and Plotinus) and Muslim scientists and philosophers (such as Geber, Abulcasis, Alhacen, Avicenna, Avempace, and Averroes), were reintroduced into the Western world, providing new intellectual material for European scholars.



Avicenna



A political map of the Italian Peninsula circa 1494

Greek and Arabic knowledge was not only assimilated from Spain, but also directly from the Greek and Arabic speaking world. The study of mathematics was flourishing in the Islamic world, and mathematical knowledge was brought back from the Middle East by crusaders in the 13th century.^[21] Leonardo of Pisa (c. 1170 – c. 1250), also known as Leonardo Pisano, Leonardo Bonacci, Leonardo Fibonacci, or, most commonly, simply Fibonacci, was an Italian mathematician, considered by some "the most talented mathematician of the Middle Ages". In his highly influential book *Liber Abaci* he demonstrated the efficiency of the Hindu-Arabic numerals and this led to their widespread adoption in late medieval and Renaissance commerce in north Italian states, and ultimately throughout Europe. Fibonacci's father was a trader in North Africa and his son studied there and throughout the middle east; going on to produce highly original mathematical work of his own.

The decline of the Byzantine Empire after 1204 – and its eventual fall in 1453 accompanied by the closure of its universities by the Ottoman Turks – led to a sharp increase in the exodus of Greek scholars to Italy and beyond. These scholars brought with them texts and knowledge of the classical Greek civilization which had been lost for centuries in the West^[22] and they transmitted the art of *exegesis*. The majority of the works of Greek Classical literature and Roman Law that survive to this

day did so through Byzantium.^{[7][8]} Italy had the oldest Universities in the West (Bologna is conventionally dated from 1088) and its focus on Roman law made a significant contribution to thinking about new kinds of statehood.

Social and political structures in Italy

The unique political structures of late Middle Ages Italy have led some to theorize that its unusual social climate allowed the emergence of a rare cultural efflorescence. Italy did not exist as a political entity in the early modern period. Instead, it was divided into smaller city states and territories: the Kingdom of Naples controlled the south, the Republic of Florence and the Papal States the center, the Genoese and the Milanese the north and west, and the Venetians the east. Fifteenth-century Italy was one of the most urbanised areas in Europe.^[23] Many of its cities stood among the ruins of ancient Roman buildings; it seems likely that the classical nature of the Renaissance was linked to its origin in the Roman Empire's heartlands.^[24]

Distinguished historian and political philosopher Quentin Skinner points out that Otto of Freising, a German bishop visiting north Italy during the 12th century noticed a widespread new form of political and social organisation, observing that Italy appeared to have exited from Feudalism so that its society was based on merchants and commerce. Linked to this was anti-monarchical thinking, represented in the famous early Renaissance fresco cycle Allegory of Good and Bad Government in Siena by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (painted 1338–1340) whose strong message is about the virtues of fairness, justice, republicanism and good administration. Holding both Church and Empire at bay these city republics were devoted to notions of liberty. Skinner reports that there were many defences of liberty such as Matteo Palmieri's (1406–1475) celebration of Florentine genius not only in art, sculpture and architecture but “the remarkable efflorescence of moral, social and political philosophy that occurred in Florence at the same time”.^[25]

Even cities and states beyond central Italy such as the Republic of Florence at this time were also notable for their merchant Republics, especially the Republic of Venice. Although in practice these were oligarchical, and bore little resemblance to a modern democracy, many scholars point out that they were at least responsive states, with forms of participation in governance and belief in liberty.^{[26][27][28]} The relative political freedom they afforded was conducive to academic and artistic advancement.^[29] Likewise, the position of Italian cities such as Venice as great trading centres made them intellectual crossroads. Merchants brought with them ideas from far corners of the globe, particularly the Levant. Venice was Europe's gateway to trade with the East, and a producer of fine glass, while Florence was a capital of

silk. The wealth such business brought to Italy meant that large public and private artistic projects could be commissioned and individuals had more leisure time for study.^[29]

Black Death

One theory that has been advanced is that the devastation caused by the Black Death in Florence (and elsewhere in Europe) resulted in a shift in the world view of people in 14th-century Italy. Italy was particularly badly hit by the plague, and it has been speculated that the familiarity with death that this brought thinkers to dwell more on their lives on Earth, rather than on spirituality and the afterlife.^[30] It has also been argued that the Black Death prompted a new wave of piety, manifested in the sponsorship of religious works of art.^[31] However, this does not fully explain why the Renaissance occurred specifically in Italy in the 14th century. The Black Death was a pandemic that affected all of Europe in the ways described, not only Italy. The Renaissance's emergence in Italy was most likely the result of the complex interaction of the above factors.^[9]



Lorenzo de' Medici, ruler of Florence and patron of arts

Cultural conditions in Florence

It has long been a matter of debate why the Renaissance began in Florence, and not elsewhere in Italy. Scholars have noted several features unique to Florentine cultural life which may have caused such a cultural movement. Many have emphasized the role played by the Medici family in patronizing and stimulating the arts. Lorenzo

de' Medici was the catalyst for an enormous amount of arts patronage, encouraging his countryman to commission works from Florence's leading artists, including Leonardo da Vinci, Sandro Botticelli, and Michelangelo Buonarroti.^[5]

The Renaissance was certainly already underway before Lorenzo came to power; indeed, before the Medici family itself achieved hegemony in Florentine society. Some historians have postulated that Florence was the birthplace of the Renaissance as a result of luck, i.e. because "Great Men" were born there by chance.^[32] Da Vinci, Botticelli and Michelangelo were all born in Tuscany. Arguing that such chance seems improbable, other historians have contended that these "Great Men" were only able to rise to prominence because of the prevailing cultural conditions at the time.^[33]

Characteristics

Humanism

Humanism was not a philosophy per se, but rather a method of learning. In contrast to the medieval scholastic mode, which focused on resolving contradictions between authors, humanists would study ancient texts in the original, and appraise them through a combination of reasoning and empirical evidence. Humanist education was based on the programme of 'Studia Humanitatis', that being the study of five humanities: poetry, grammar, history, moral philosophy and rhetoric. Although historians have sometimes struggled to define humanism precisely, most have settled on "a middle of the road definition... the movement to recover, interpret, and assimilate the language, literature, learning and values of ancient Greece and Rome".^[34] Above all, humanists asserted "the genius of man ... the unique and extraordinary ability of the human mind."^[35]

Humanist scholars shaped the intellectual landscape throughout the early modern period. Political philosophers such as Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas More revived the ideas of Greek and Roman thinkers, and applied them in critiques of contemporary government. Theologians, notably Erasmus and Martin Luther, challenged the Aristotelian status quo, introducing radical new ideas of justification and faith (*for more, see Religion below*).

Art

One of the distinguishing features of Renaissance art was its development of highly realistic linear perspective. Giotto di Bondone (1267–1337) is credited with first treating a painting as a window into space, but it was not until the demonstrations of architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) and the subsequent writings of Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) that perspective was formalized as



The Creation of Adam by Michelangelo.

an artistic technique.^[36] The development of perspective was part of a wider trend towards realism in the arts.^[37] To that end, painters also developed other techniques, studying light, shadow, and, famously in the case of Leonardo da Vinci, human anatomy. Underlying these changes in artistic method was a renewed desire to depict the beauty of nature, and to unravel the axioms of aesthetics, with the works of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael representing artistic pinnacles that were to be much imitated by other artists.^[38] Other notable artists include Sandro Botticelli, working for the Medici in Florence, Donatello another Florentine and Titian in Venice, among others.

Concurrently, in the Netherlands, a particularly vibrant artistic culture developed, the work of Hugo van der Goes and Jan van Eyck having particular influence on the development of painting in Italy, both technically with the introduction of oil paint and canvas, and stylistically in terms of naturalism in representation. (*for more, see Renaissance in the Netherlands*). Later, the work of Pieter Brueghel the Elder would inspire artists to depict themes of everyday life.^[39]

In architecture, Filippo Brunelleschi was foremost in studying the remains of ancient Classical buildings, and with rediscovered knowledge from the 1st-century writer Vitruvius and the flourishing discipline of mathematics, formulated the Renaissance style which emulated and improved on classical forms. Brunelleschi's major feat of engineering was the building of the dome of Florence Cathedral.^[40] The first building to demonstrate this is claimed to be the church of St. Andrew built by Alberti in Mantua. The outstanding architectural work of the High Renaissance was the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica, combining the skills of Bramante, Michelangelo, Raphael, Sangallo and Maderno.

The Roman orders types of columns are used: Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite. These can either be structural, supporting an arcade or architrave, or purely decorative, set against a wall in the form of pilasters. During the Renaissance, architects aimed to use columns, pilasters, and entablatures as an integrated system. One of the first buildings to use pilasters as an integrated system was in the Old Sacristy (1421–1440) by Filippo Brunelleschi.^[41]

Arches, semi-circular or (in the Mannerist style) segmental, are often used in arcades, supported on piers or columns with capitals. There may be a section of entablature between the capital and the springing of the arch. Alberti was one of the first to use the arch on a monumental. Renaissance vaults do not have ribs. They are semi-circular or segmental and on a square plan, unlike the Gothic vault which is frequently rectangular.

Science



Galileo Galilei. Portrait in crayon by Leoni

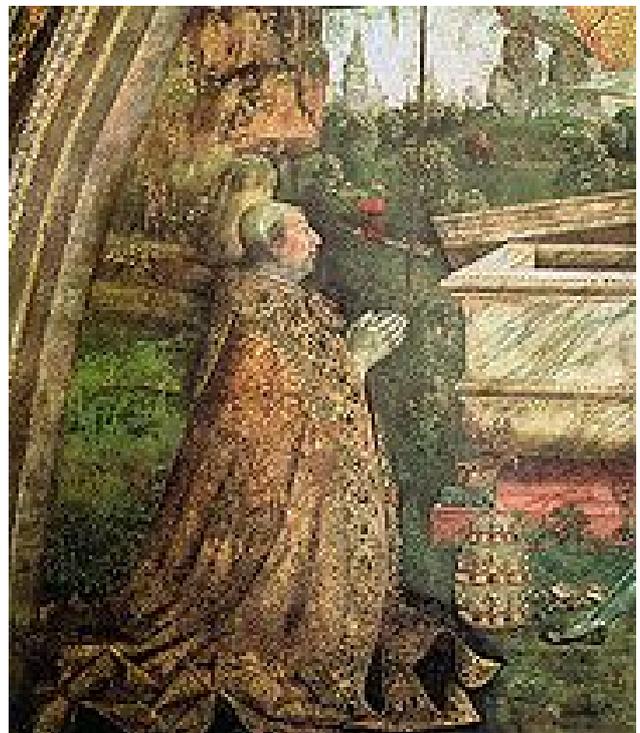
The upheavals occurring in the arts and humanities were mirrored by a dynamic period of change in the sciences. Some have seen this flurry of activity as a "scientific revolution", heralding the beginning of the modern age.^[42] Others have seen it merely as an acceleration of a continuous process stretching from the ancient world to the present day.^[43] Regardless, there is general agreement that the Renaissance saw significant changes in the way the universe was viewed and the methods with which philosophers sought to explain natural phenomena.^[44]

Science and art were very much intermingled in the early Renaissance, with artists such as Leonardo da Vinci making observational drawings of anatomy and nature. An exhaustive 2007 study by Fritjof Capra^[45] shows that Leonardo was a much greater scientist than previously thought, and not just an inventor. In science theory and

in conducting actual science practice, Leonardo was innovative. He set up controlled experiments in water flow, medical dissection, and systematic study of movement and aerodynamics; he devised principles of research method that for Capra classify him as "father of modern science". In Capra's detailed assessment of many surviving manuscripts Leonardo's science is more in tune with holistic non-mechanistic and non-reductive approaches to science which are becoming popular today. Perhaps the most significant development of the era was not a specific discovery, but rather a *process* for discovery, the scientific method.^[44] This revolutionary new way of learning about the world focused on empirical evidence, the importance of mathematics, and discarding the Aristotelian "final cause" in favor of a mechanical philosophy. Early and influential proponents of these ideas included Copernicus and Galileo. In his 1991 survey of these developments Charles Van Doren^[46] considers that the Copernican Revolution really is the Galilean Cartesian (Rene Descarte) revolution on account of the nature of the courage and depth of change their work brought about.

The new scientific method led to great contributions in the fields of astronomy, physics, biology, and anatomy. With the publication of Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica*, a new confidence was placed in the role of dissection, observation, and a mechanistic view of anatomy.^[44]

Religion



Alexander VI, a Borgia Pope infamous for his corruption

The new ideals of humanism, although more secular in some aspects, developed against an unquestioned

Christian backdrop, especially in the Northern Renaissance. Indeed, much (if not most) of the new art was commissioned by or in dedication to the Church.^[14] However, the Renaissance had a profound effect on contemporary theology, particularly in the way people perceived the relationship between man and God.^[14] Many of the period's foremost theologians were followers of the humanist method, including Erasmus, Zwingli, Thomas More, Martin Luther, and John Calvin.

The Renaissance began in times of religious turmoil. The late Middle Ages saw a period of political intrigue surrounding the Papacy, culminating in the Western Schism, in which three men simultaneously claimed to be true Bishop of Rome.^[47] While the schism was resolved by the Council of Constance (1414), the 15th century saw a resulting reform movement known as Conciliarism, which sought to limit the pope's power. Although the papacy eventually emerged supreme in ecclesiastical matters by the Fifth Council of the Lateran (1511), it was dogged by continued accusations of corruption, most famously in the person of Pope Alexander VI, who was accused variously of simony, nepotism and fathering four illegitimate children whilst Pope, whom he married off to gain more power.^[48]

Churchmen such as Erasmus and Luther proposed reform to the Church, often based on humanist textual criticism of the New Testament.^[14] Indeed, it was Luther who in October 1517 published the 95 Theses, challenging papal authority and criticizing its perceived corruption, particularly with regard to its sale of indulgences. The 95 Theses led to the Reformation, a break with the Roman Catholic Church that previously claimed hegemony in Western Europe. Humanism and the Renaissance therefore played a direct role in sparking the Reformation, as well as in many other contemporaneous religious debates and conflicts.

Renaissance self-awareness

By the 15th century, writers, artists and architects in Italy were well aware of the transformations that were taking place and were using phrases like *modi antichi* (in the antique manner) or *alle romana et alla antica* (in the manner of the Romans and the ancients) to describe their work. The term *la rinascita* first appeared, however, in its broad sense in Giorgio Vasari's *Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori Italiani* (The Lives of the Artists, 1550, revised 1568).^[49]^[50] Vasari divides the age into three phases: the first phase contains Cimabue, Giotto, and Arnolfo di Cambio; the second phase contains Masaccio, Brunelleschi, and Donatello; the third centers on Leonardo da Vinci and culminates with Michelangelo. It was not just the growing awareness of classical antiquity that drove this development, according to Vasari, but also the growing desire to study and imitate nature.^[51]

Spread

In the 15th century the Renaissance spread with great speed from its birthplace in Florence, first to the rest of Italy, and soon to the rest of Europe. The invention of the printing press allowed the rapid transmission of these new ideas. As it spread, its ideas diversified and changed, being adapted to local culture. In the 20th century, scholars began to break the Renaissance into regional and national movements.

Northern Renaissance



The Arnolfini Portrait, by Jan van Eyck, painted 1434

The Renaissance as it occurred in Northern Europe has been termed the "Northern Renaissance."

Hungary

The Renaissance style came directly from Italy during the Quattrocento to Hungary foremost in the Central European region. The development of the early Hungarian-Italian relationships was a reason of this infiltration, which weren't manifested only in dynastic connections, but in cultural, humanistic and commercial relations. This effect was getting stronger from the 1300s. The Italian architectural influence became stronger in the reign of Zsigmond on the basis of the church foundations of the Florentine Scolaries and the castle constructions of Pipo of Ozora. The relationship between the Hungarian and Italian Gothic was the second reason - the exaggerated breakthrough of the walls is

avoided, preferring the clean and light structures. The new Italian trend with the existing national traditions created a particular local Renaissance art. Accepting the Renaissance art was furthered by the continuously arriving humanist thoughts to the country. The many Hungarian young studying at Italian universities came closer to the Florentine humanist center so a direct connection with Florence had evolved. The growing number of Italian traders moving to Hungary, specially to Buda, helped this process. The new thoughts were carried by the humanist prelates, among them *Vitéz János*, the archbishop of Esztergom, one of the founders of the Hungarian humanism.^[52] After the marriage in 1476 of Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary, to Beatrice of Naples, Buda became the one of the most important artistic centres of the Renaissance north of the Alps.^[53] The most important humanists living in Matthias' court were Antonio Bonfini and the famous poet Janus Pannonius.^[53] Matthias Corvinus's library, the *Bibliotheca Corviniana*, was among Europe's greatest collections of secular historical chronicles and philosophic and scientific works in the fifteenth century.^[54] In 1489, Bartolomeo della Fonte of Florence wrote that Lorenzo de' Medici founded his own Greek-Latin library encouraged by the example of the Hungarian king. Corvinus's library is part of UNESCO World Heritage ^[55]. Other important figures of Hungarian Renaissance: *Bálint Balassi* (poet) , *Sebestyén Tinódi Lantos* (poet), *Bálint Bakfark* (composer and lutenist)

Poland

An early Italian humanist who came to Poland in the mid-15th century was *Filip Callimachus*. Many Italian artists came to Poland with *Bona Sforza* of Milano, when she married King *Zygmunt I* of Poland in 1518.^[56] This was supported by temporarily strengthened monarchies in both areas, as well as by newly-established universities.^[57]

Germany

In the second half of the 15th century, the spirit of the age spread to Germany and the Low Countries, where the development of the printing press (ca. 1450) and early Renaissance artists like the painters *Jan van Eyck* (1395-1441) and *Hieronymus Bosch* (1450-1516) and the composers *Johannes Ockeghem* (1410-1497), *Jacob Obrecht* (1457-1505) and *Josquin des Prez* (1455-1521), predated the influence from Italy. However, the gothic style and medieval scholastic philosophy remained exclusively until the 16th century. In these areas humanism became closely linked to the turmoil of the Protestant Reformation, and the art and writing of the German Renaissance frequently reflected this dispute.^[58]

France

In 1495 it arrived in France, imported by King *Charles VIII* after his invasion of Italy. A factor that promoted



Poznań City Hall rebuilt from the Gothic style by Giovanni Batista di Quadro (1550–1555)

the spread of secularism was the Church's inability to offer assistance against the Black Death. Francis I imported Italian art and artists, including *Leonardo Da Vinci*, and built ornate palaces at great expense. Writers such as *François Rabelais*, *Pierre de Ronsard*, *Joachim du Bellay* and *Michel de Montaigne*, painters such as *Jean Clouet* and musicians such as *Jean Mouton* also borrowed from the spirit of the Italian Renaissance.

In 1533 a 14 year old *Caterina de Medici*, (1519–1589) born in Florence to *Lorenzo II de' Medici* and *Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne* married *Henry*, second son of King *Francis I* and *Queen Claude*. Though she became famous and infamous for her role in France's religious wars she made a direct contribution in bringing arts, sciences and music (including the origins of ballet) to the French court from her native Florence.

England

In England, the Elizabethan era marked the beginning of the English Renaissance with the work of writers *William Shakespeare*, *Christopher Marlowe*, *John Milton*, and *Edmund Spenser*, as well as great artists, architects (such as *Inigo Jones*), and composers such as *Thomas Tallis*, *John Taverner*, and *William Byrd*.

Spain and Portugal

The Renaissance arrived in the Iberian peninsula through the Mediterranean possessions of the Aragonese Crown and the city of Valencia. Early Iberian Renaissance writers include Ausiàs March, Joanot Martorell, Fernando de Rojas, Juan del Encina, Garcilaso de la Vega, Gil Vicente and Bernardim Ribeiro. The late Renaissance in Spain saw writers such as Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Luis de Góngora and Tirso de Molina, artists such as El Greco and composers such as Tomás Luis de Victoria.

In Portugal writers such as Sá de Miranda and Luís de Camões and artists such as Nuno Gonçalves appeared.

Italy

While Renaissance ideas were moving north from Italy, there was a simultaneous southward spread of some areas of innovation, particularly in music.^[59] The music of the 15th century Burgundian School defined the beginning of the Renaissance in that art and the polyphony of the Netherlanders, as it moved with the musicians themselves into Italy, formed the core of what was the first true international style in music since the standardization of Gregorian Chant in the 9th century.^[59] The culmination of the Netherlandish school was in the music of the Italian composer, Palestrina. At the end of the 16th century Italy again became a center of musical innovation, with the development of the polychoral style of the Venetian School, which spread northward into Germany around 1600.

The paintings of the Italian Renaissance differed from those of the Northern Renaissance. Italian Renaissance artists were among the first to paint secular scenes, breaking away from the purely religious art of medieval painters. At first, Northern Renaissance artists remained focused on religious subjects, such as the contemporary religious upheaval portrayed by Albrecht Dürer. Later on, the works of Pieter Bruegel influenced artists to paint scenes of daily life rather than religious or classical themes. It was also during the northern Renaissance that Flemish brothers Hubert and Jan van Eyck perfected the oil painting technique, which enabled artists to produce strong colors on a hard surface that could survive for centuries.^[60] A distinctive feature of the Northern Renaissance was its use of the vernacular in place of Latin or Greek, which allowed greater freedom of expression. The spread of the technology of the printing press, also invented in the North, gave a major boost to the Renaissance, first in Northern Europe and then elsewhere.

Historiography

Conception

The term was first used retrospectively by the Italian artist and critic Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) in his book *The Lives of the Artists* (published 1550). In the book Vasari was attempting to define what he described as a break with the barbarities of gothic art: the arts had fallen into decay with the collapse of the Roman Empire and only the Tuscan artists, beginning with Cimabue (1240–1301) and Giotto (1267–1337) began to reverse this decline in the arts. According to Vasari, antique art was central to the rebirth of Italian art.^[61]

However, it was not until the nineteenth century that the French word *Renaissance* achieved popularity in describing the cultural movement that began in the late-13th century. The Renaissance was first defined by French historian Jules Michelet (1798–1874), in his 1855 work, *Histoire de France*. For Michelet, the Renaissance was more a development in science than in art and culture. He asserted that it spanned the period from Columbus to Copernicus to Galileo; that is, from the end of the 15th century to the middle of the seventeenth century.^[62] Moreover, Michelet distinguished between what he called, "the bizarre and monstrous" quality of the Middle Ages and the democratic values that he, as a vocal Republican, chose to see in its character.^[9] A French nationalist, Michelet also sought to claim the Renaissance as a French movement.^[9]

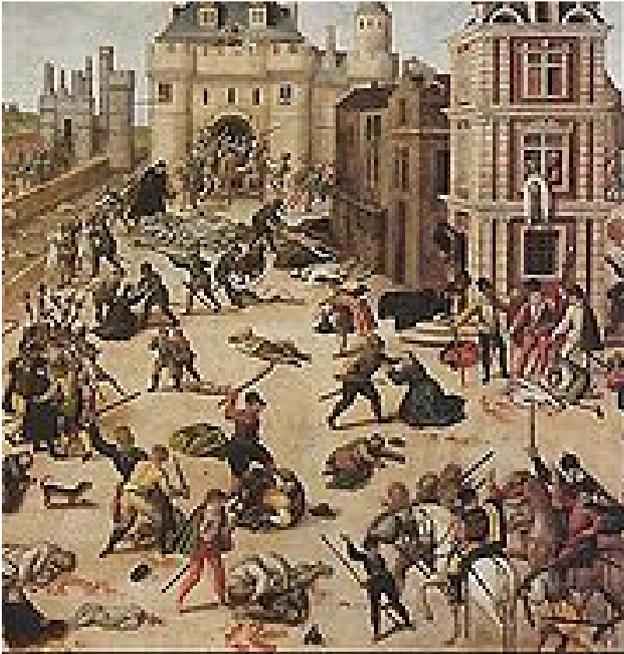
The Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) in his *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860), by contrast, defined the Renaissance as the period between Giotto and Michelangelo in Italy, that is, the 14th to mid-16th centuries. He saw in the Renaissance the emergence of the modern spirit of individuality, which had been stifled in the Middle Ages.^[63] His book was widely read and was influential in the development of the modern interpretation of the Italian Renaissance.^[64] However, Burckhardt has been accused of setting forth a linear Whiggish view of history in seeing the Renaissance as the origin of the modern world.^[11]

More recently, historians have been much less keen to define the Renaissance as a historical age, or even a coherent cultural movement. As Randolph Starn has put it,

Rather than a period with definitive beginnings and endings and consistent content in between, the Renaissance can be (and occasionally has been) seen as a movement of practices and ideas to which specific groups and identifiable persons variously responded in different times and places. It would be in this sense a network of diverse, sometimes converging, sometimes conflicting cultures, not a single, time-bound culture.^[11]

—Randolph Starn

For better or for worse?



Painting of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, an event in the French Wars of Religion, by François Dubois.

Much of the debate around the Renaissance has centered around whether the Renaissance truly was an "improvement" on the culture of the Middle Ages. Both Michelet and Burckhardt were keen to describe the progress made in the Renaissance towards the "modern age". Burckhardt likened the change to a veil being removed from man's eyes, allowing him to see clearly.^[32]

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness - that which was turned within as that which was turned without - lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues.^[65]

—Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*

On the other hand, many historians now point out that most of the negative social factors popularly associated with the "medieval" period – poverty, warfare, religious and political persecution, for example – seem to have worsened in this era which saw the rise of Machiavelli, the Wars of Religion, the corrupt Borgia Popes, and the intensified witch-hunts of the 16th century. Many people who lived during the Renaissance did not view it as the "golden age" imagined by certain 19th-century authors, but were concerned by these social maladies.^[66] Significantly, though, the artists, writers, and patrons involved in the cultural movements in question believed they were living in a new era that was a clean break from the Middle Ages.^[49] Some Marxist historians

prefer to describe the Renaissance in material terms, holding the view that the changes in art, literature, and philosophy were part of a general economic trend away from feudalism towards capitalism, resulting in a bourgeois class with leisure time to devote to the arts.^[67]

Johan Huizinga (1872–1945) acknowledged the existence of the Renaissance but questioned whether it was a positive change. In his book *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, he argued that the Renaissance was a period of decline from the High Middle Ages, destroying much that was important.^[10] The Latin language, for instance, had evolved greatly from the classical period and was still a living language used in the church and elsewhere. The Renaissance obsession with classical purity halted its further evolution and saw Latin revert to its classical form. Robert S. Lopez has contended that it was a period of deep economic recession.^[68] Meanwhile George Sarton and Lynn Thorndike have both argued that scientific progress was perhaps less original than has traditionally been supposed.^[69]

Historians have begun to consider the word *Renaissance* to be unnecessarily loaded, implying an unambiguously positive rebirth from the supposedly more primitive "Dark Ages" (Middle Ages). Many historians now prefer to use the term "Early Modern" for this period, a more neutral designation that highlights the period as a transitional one between the Middle Ages and the modern era.^[70]

Other Renaissances

The term *Renaissance* has also been used to define time periods outside of the 15th and 16th centuries. Charles H. Haskins (1870–1937), for example, made a case for a Renaissance of the 12th century.^[71] Other historians have argued for a Carolingian Renaissance in the 8th and 9th centuries, and still later for an Ottonian Renaissance in the 10th century.^[72] Other periods of cultural rebirth have also been termed "renaissances", such as the Bengal Renaissance or the Harlem Renaissance.

See also

- List of Renaissance topics
- List of Renaissance figures
- List of Renaissance structures
- Continuity thesis
- Gilded woodcarving
- Scientific Revolution
- Medical Renaissance

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