

L E S S O N 2

The Italian Renaissance

THINKING FOCUS

*In what ways did view-
points about human
beings change during the
Renaissance?*

Key Terms

- Renaissance
- republic
- mercenary
- humanism
- realism

► *During the Renaissance, wealthy people began to eat from plates and to use knives and forks. During the Middle Ages, people did not use utensils, and ate from a common plate.*

It is wrong to rinse your mouth and spit out wine in public . . . to carry your toothpick either in your mouth, like a bird making its nest, or behind your ear.

Refrain as far as possible from making noises which grate upon the ear, such as grinding or sucking your teeth.

It is bad manners to clean your teeth with your napkin, and still worse to do it with your finger.

A man . . . will take care not to get his fingers so greasy as to dirty his napkin with them, because the sight of it would be unsavory to others.

Anyone whose legs are too thin, or exceptionally fat, or perhaps crooked, should not wear vivid or parti-colored [multi-colored] hose, in order not to attract attention to his defects.

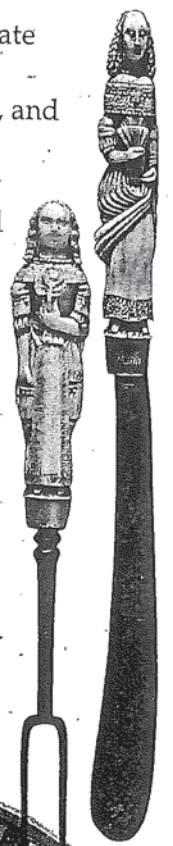
It is not polite to scratch yourself when you are seated at table. You should also take care, as far as you can, not to spit at mealtimes, but if you must spit, then do so in a decent manner.

Your conduct should not be governed by your own fancy, but in consideration of the feelings of those whose company you keep.

A man must . . . not be content to do things well, but must also aim to do them gracefully.

Giovanni della Casa, from
The Book of Manners, 1558

These are some of the social do's and don'ts of a new age as listed in an Italian manners book. A new way of living and thinking was taking hold in Europe as the Middle Ages died out. During this new age, called the Renaissance (*rehn ih SAHNS*), people began to focus on refinement, personal achievement, and learning.



The Birthplace of the Renaissance

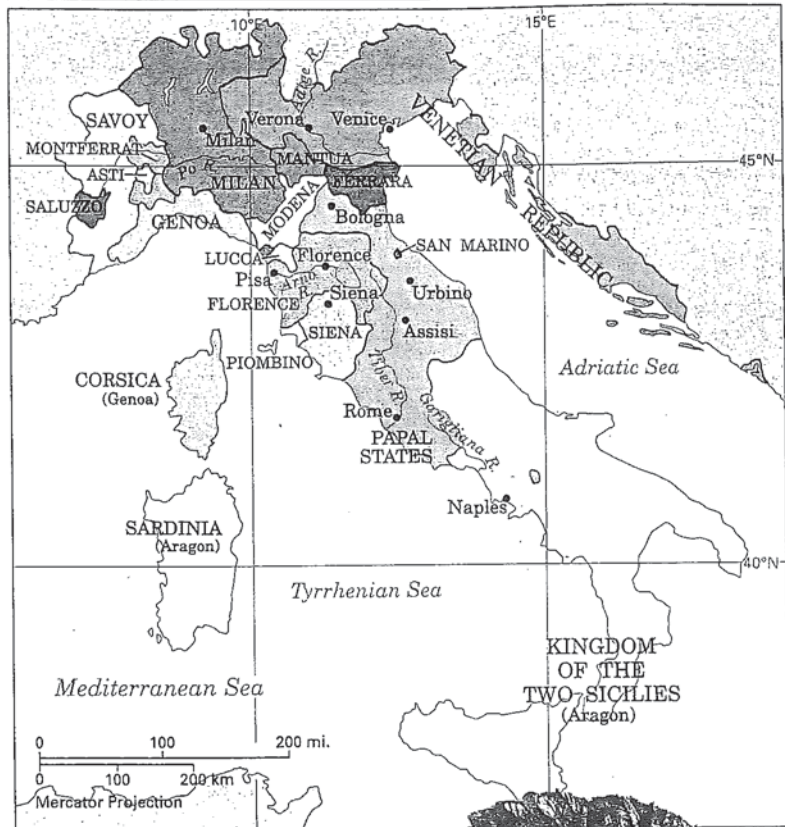
The word **Renaissance** comes from a Latin word that means rebirth or revival. The term is used to describe a renewed attention to ideas from classical Greek and Roman culture. This renewal occurred first in northern Italy and then spread through Europe between the 1300s and mid-1600s.

Italian City-States

During the late Middle Ages, the government of Italy was different from those of other countries in Europe. In France and England, for example, strong central governments were forming. However, at the beginning of the Italian Renaissance, Italy was made up of about 250 small states. Most of these states were ruled by cities and were called city-states. Some of the cities were small, but others, like Venice and Milan, had as many as 100,000 people. Look at the map on this page to see how Italy was divided at this time.

Each Italian city-state was independent. All had formed when townspeople began to free themselves from the control of feudal landlords in the 1100s. Italy, unlike England or France, did not have an effective central government. Many Italian city-states had a republican form of government. A **republic** is a government whose head of state is not a monarch. The various Italian city-states had a number of different forms of republican governments. Some were ruled by a tyrant, or absolute ruler, while others were ruled by wealthy families. The values of the Renaissance began to develop in the wealthy republic of Florence.

Italian City-States, 1454



The Ruling Class

Florence's ruling class was made up of about 800 of the city's wealthiest families. Members of these families were merchants and bankers who often led the major guilds. To maintain their control, members of the ruling families married into other ruling families.

These families lived in luxurious palaces that often took up an entire city block. They used their wealth to beautify their cities. To do this, they hired architects to design and build palaces. Inside these palaces, each family usually had an elaborate court of attendants. The court included family members and political advisers, as well as leading artists and scholars.



A The Italian city-states were often ruled by powerful families. This was especially true of Florence. This guild shield illustrates the trade that made Florence wealthy: wool.

The Power of the Medici Family

 Rulers of Florence	Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici (1360–1429) Cosimo (1389–1464) Piero (1416–1469) Lorenzo (1449–1492) Piero (1471–1503)	 King	Louis XIII of France (d.1643)
 Grand Duke of Tuscany	Cosimo I (1519–1574) Francesco I (1541–1587) Ferdinand I (1549–1601) Cosimo II (1590–1620)	 Queen	Catherine (1519–1589) m. Henry II of France Maria (1573–1642) m. Henry IV of France Elisabetta (d.1644) m. Philip IV of Spain Henrietta Maria (d.1669) m. Charles I of England
 Duke	Giuliano (1479–1516) Lorenzo (1492–1519) Alessandro (1510–1537)	 Pope	Giovanni (1475–1521) Giulio (1478–1534)
		 Cardinal	Ippolito (1511–1535) Ferdinand I (1549–1609)

▲ *The Medici family controlled Florence.*

■ *Why did the Renaissance begin in northern Italy?*

➤ *The figure in this painting is probably Cardinal Bessarion, who was seen by people of the Renaissance as a model humanist. The cardinal was honored for being devoted to both scholarship and public service.*

The ruling families often struggled among themselves for control

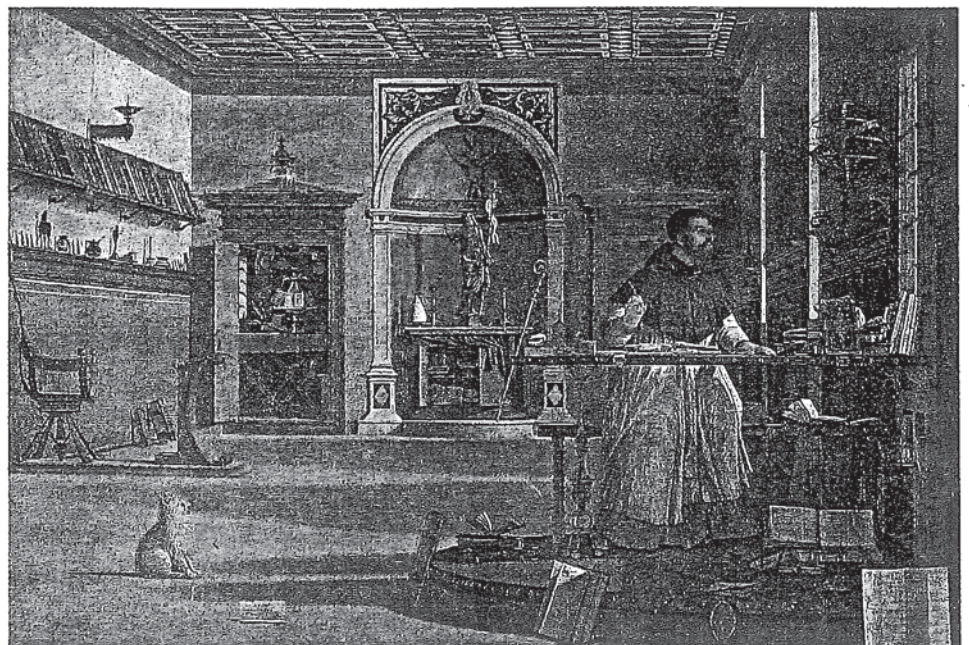
of their city. In the 1430s, the Medici family dominated the ruling class of Florence. The Medicis were a talented and ambitious family who controlled an international network of banks in Europe. The chart at left shows the extent of their power.

Rulers of different city-states also competed with each other for land and power. Frequently they fought to control international trade markets. To defend their city-states, the rulers gathered large troops of **mercenaries**, or paid soldiers. The thirst for power and wealth led to many murders, riots, feuds, and battles within and among city-states. ■

The Renaissance and Life

Life in the Italian city-states changed the way some residents viewed the world. Though very religious, these residents concentrated more on this life than on heaven or hell. In doing so, they hoped to understand people and their world better.

In particular, these Italian scholars turned to the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans as their guides. Many of these classics had been reintroduced into Western Europe by Europeans who came into contact with Byzantine and Arab scholars. European



scholars during the Middle Ages had also studied some of the classics. However, most of these scholars had used the classics only to deepen their religious faith.

Renaissance scholars, on the other hand, spent many hours learning Greek and Latin in order to understand the Greeks and Romans themselves. They wanted to recreate the spirit of classical arts, literature, and philosophy. Because these scholars studied the classics, or the humanities, they were called humanists. Their concern with the classics was called **humanism**.

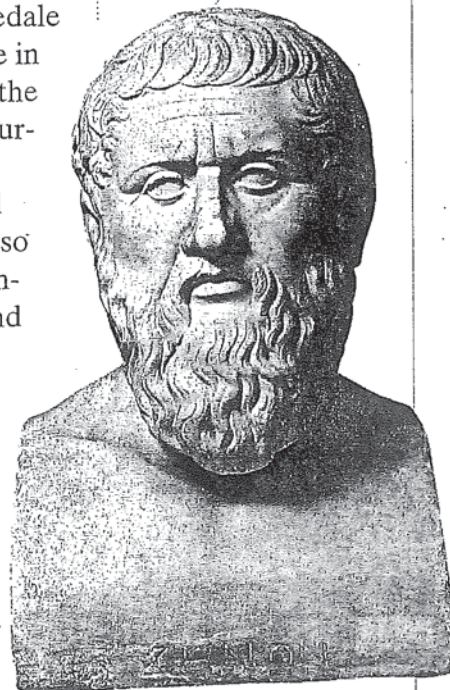
During the Middle Ages, many Christians saw themselves as sinful creatures struggling to get into heaven. But humanists did not see people as sinful. They thought people had dignity, worth, and the ability to achieve almost anything. Religion was important to humanists, but they stressed that life on earth was also meaningful.

Renaissance humanists focused on three ideas of the Greeks and Romans. The first was individual worth. The humanists were impressed by the ideas of Romans such as Virgil, and Greeks such as Socrates. These men felt that humans could improve themselves through study and reflection.

The second idea that impressed the humanists was a strong commitment to public service. They read how the Greek aristocrat Pericles had revitalized Athens with public buildings like the Acropolis. They learned how Cicero, a member of a wealthy Roman family, had fought bravely for the Republic of Rome. In a similar spirit, wealthy Italian families spent much of their money constructing public buildings like the Ospedale degli Innocenti, an orphanage in Florence. They also adopted the idea of public service to encourage the arts. As an example, these wealthy families helped to support artists and writers so that all the citizens of the community could enjoy artistic and literary works.

The third idea the humanists encouraged was the development of a variety of skills and talents. They thought people should be well-rounded in their knowledge. They admired individuals like Archimedes (*ahr kuh MEE deez*), who had been a scientist, a mathematician, and an inventor. Humanists saw no limits to what people could achieve. ■

▼ Renaissance humanists studied the works of ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato, whose bust is shown here.



■ What were the basic beliefs held by Renaissance humanists?

The Flowering of Arts and Learning

The new excitement about human potential spilled over into many areas of Renaissance life. It helped to stimulate great artistic and intellectual achievements across the European continent.

The Italian Leonardo da Vinci (*duh VEEN chih*) was one of the greatest figures of the Renaissance. As an artist, he is known

for the *Mona Lisa* and many other paintings. He was also one of the greatest scientific thinkers of his day. As you can see in A Closer Look at Leonardo's Notebook on pages 320 and 321, Leonardo was curious about how things worked. With his strong desire to learn and his many talents, Leonardo was the ideal Renaissance man.

Although the Byzantines continued to build domes during the Middle Ages, Western Europeans did not. Brunelleschi studied Roman architecture and used his knowledge of mathematics to design a dome similar to those built by the Romans. Note how the style of this church differs from that of the Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages, shown on page 283.

Renaissance Literature

Italian writers Francesco Petrarch (*PEE trahrk*) and Giovanni Boccaccio (*boh KAH chee oh*) were two of the first Renaissance humanists. Examining ancient Greek and Roman manuscripts during the 1300s, they discovered letters written by Roman politicians and books written by Greek philosophers. They adapted the clear and graceful style of these Roman and Greek writers. Both men agreed that writers should use an easily understood style.

Renaissance Architecture

Classical styles also influenced Renaissance architects. Florence architect Filippo Brunelleschi

(*broo nuh LEHS kee*) traveled to Rome to learn how the ancient Romans had constructed their buildings. There he carefully studied the ruins of temples and palaces. Brunelleschi decided to build a Roman-style dome on top of the Florence Cathedral, shown at left. Many Florentines were convinced that the building would collapse. But because he had studied Roman domes, Brunelleschi was able to design a building that has stood for over 500 years.

Brunelleschi had a good grasp of mathematics and was the first artist known to use linear perspective. Linear perspective is a system that painters and architects use to give a flat surface the feeling of space and depth. Examine the medieval and the Renaissance paintings on the next page, and compare the use of perspective.

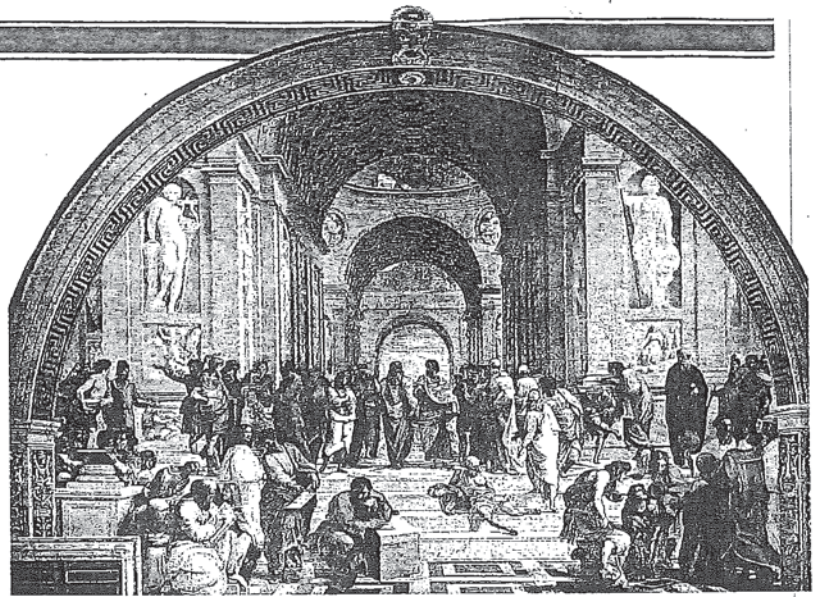
Renaissance Art

Greek and Roman styles also influenced many Renaissance artists. Like the ancient artists, Renaissance painters and sculptors wanted to show people and nature as they really were. Such **realism** is evident in sculptures such as the *Moses* by Michelangelo on page 308. Like many artists of the Renaissance, Michelangelo studied anatomy so that he could sculpt and draw the human figure realistically. Notice the roundness of muscle in Moses' arms and the natural pose of his body. In a block of stone Michelangelo captured the gentle strength and wisdom of an aging man.





Renaissance artists depicted subjects other than religious ones. They created realistic portraits,



battle scenes, and country and street scenes using a new technique of mixing paints with oil. Oil paints could be blended easily because they dried slowly. These paints allowed artists to add more subtle colors to their paintings. ■

▲ *Perspective gives a painting a sense of depth. Notice how the people in the painting from the Middle Ages, shown on the left, all appear to be in one place. In the Renaissance painting, shown on the right, some people appear close while others appear far away.*

Wealth and the Renaissance

Why did the Renaissance begin amongst the wealthy? Upper-class Italians had enough money to allow them to enjoy their leisure time. This leisure provided them with time to study the ideas of the ancient Greeks and Romans. These upper-class Italians were also highly literate and thus could easily learn about Renaissance ideas.

In addition, increased trade had brought wealthy Italians into contact with other peoples and

ideas. Trade had also provided them with money to spend on art.

Not everyone in the city-states felt the influence of the Renaissance. Scholars, painters, and art supporters realized that they were participating in something new and exciting. But life for the average worker remained much the same. Because they could neither read nor afford art, workers were more concerned with making a living than with learning about Renaissance ideas. ■

■ *How did Renaissance humanism lead to achievements in the arts and sciences?*

■ *How important was wealth in fostering the Renaissance?*

R E V I E W

- 1. FOCUS** In what ways did viewpoints about human beings change during the Renaissance?
- 2. CONNECT** How was the commercial class an example of the Renaissance belief in the importance of life on earth?
- 3. CULTURE** What values of the Renaissance were similar to the values of Greek and Roman societies?
- 4. CRITICAL THINKING** Why was realism important to Renaissance artists and writers?
- 5. WRITING ACTIVITY** Look at a piece of art shown in this chapter or in the chapter opener. Study the picture to see how it is typical of Renaissance art. Write your thoughts about the art.