CHAPTER 11

The Italian Renaissance and Beyond: The Politics of Culture, 1350 - 1550

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. The Cradle of the Renaissance: The Italian City-States

Renaissance Italy was distinguished by the large number and political autonomy of its thriving city-states, the development of which can be divided into two distinct phases: the republicanism phase of the eleventh century and the principality phase of the fourteenth century.

A. The Renaissance Republics: Florence and Venice

In contrast to the majority of the Italian city-states, Florence and Venice held steadfastly to the traditions of republicanism under the *patriciate* system of political and artistic influence by a few great families.

1. Florence Under the Medici

The amazingly wealthy banker Cosimo de' Medici emerged as the greatest of the Renaissance patrons. Seizing Florentine political power in 1434, Cosimo enforced a long period of unprecedented peace in which the arts could flourish. Always at the center of Florence's political affairs, Cosimo nevertheless rarely held formal office and shrewdly preferred to leverage influence behind the scenes.

2. Venice, the Cosmopolitan Republic

Venice, the first European power to control colonies abroad, conquered a number of ports along the Greek coast. The resulting influx of exotic goods transformed Venice into a giant in the economics of the region and cosmopolitan in its social scope. Defined primarily by its social stability, the Venetian city-state became (and still is) the longest surviving republic in history at roughly five hundred years of independent affluence.

B. Princes and Courtiers

The ideals of the Renaissance, though created within the republican city-states, soon spread to the principalities ruled by one man (the prince). Patronage in the principalities was largely confined to the prince and close members of the court. Most Renaissance princes came form local aristocratic families, but some were former soldiers who conquered a city and assumed political control. The overall concern of these rulers was to establish dynasties in which their political power could be handed down to their progeny.

1. The Ideal Prince, the Ideal Princess

Federico II da Montefeltro, the Duke of Urbino (1422-1482), emerges as the authors' best pick for ideal prince. A paternalistic ruler who showed genuine
concern for his subjects, Federico's military prowess and love of learning granted the mountainous duchy of Urbino a cultural importance far greater than its size warranted. A woman of exceptional education and connection, Isabella d'Este Marchioness of Mantua (1474-1539) rose to sole power after the death of her husband. A savvy politician and diplomat, she established fashions that were copied throughout Europe.

2. The Ideal Courtier

A courtier was a man or woman who lived in or regularly visited the palace of a prince. Ideal qualities for aspirants to the court were outlined in Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), including refined manners, artistic knowledge, education and an air of nonchalance and ease.

3. The Papal Prince

The Renaissance popes, in addition to being the head of the Church, were also the ruling princes of the Papal State that included the city of Rome. The removal of the Holy See to Avignon, France during the Great Schism of 1305-1418 left the Papal state virtually bankrupt and the city of Rome in ruins. After 1418, a succession of Roman popes engaged in squabbles with neighboring city-states as the reputation of the papacy fell.

C. The Contradictions of the Patriarchal Family

Much of what happened in Renaissance Italy was a result of the departure of societal practice from the accepted theories of how families interacted. Although the age-old theory of husband/father rule held firm in the literature of the times, the reality of family life often departed from this premise. Widespread disease and death made the family a tenuous unit. Death came from disease, misadventure, and the wide gap between the ages of husbands and wives. Regardless of the patriarchal theory of family, the patriarchs were often absent or dead.

II. The Influence of Ancient Cultures

A. Petrarch and the Illustrious Ancients

A breakthrough philosophy of the Renaissance was forwarded by Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), known in English as Petrarch. He posited that the ancients, long admired as founts of eternal wisdom and invention, were mere men much like himself. This was a radical idea at the time and found a wide audience in Renaissance Italy. Petrarch's famous written dialogues with the long-dead Roman orator Cicero underscored how the years can change perceptions of our ancestors. His new critical approach to history led Petrarch to study persuasion and rhetoric and embrace them as devices to motivate people towards moralistic behavior.
B. The Humanists: The Latin Point of View

Following in Petrarch's footsteps were the humanists: linguistic champions who sought to revive the ancient usage of Latin that had been diluted by the Church, law courts, and universities over time. The humanists created a solid niche for themselves in the landscape of the Renaissance as teachers, bureaucrats, historians and diplomats. Humanists held wide opinions on any given subject; it was their use of the language and ability to draw upon ancient knowledge that was revolutionary. Hallmarks of this movement were intellectual curiosity, diversification across a wide spectrum of study, and a rejection of specialization.

C. Understanding Nature: Moving Beyond the Science of the Ancients

As a natural progression of the humanist movement, intellectuals began revisiting the ancient texts regarding the sciences and questioning what was found within. Astronomy and anatomy made great progress during this time. Printing and cheap paper, however, was the breakthrough scientific feat that changed the intellectual landscape of the world forever.

III. Antiquity and Nature in the Arts

A. Sculpture, Architecture, and Painting: The Natural and the Ideal

Following the ideas of the humanists, Renaissance artists strived to gather and adapt the art of the ancients for their own use. With few models to build upon, artists of the period were forced to invent as much as imitate. The Renaissance style of art that evolved in Florence was based upon the new ideas of linear perspective, the use of illusion via light and line to create a recreation of three dimensions on a flat surface. Sculpture evolved into a more realistic form, striving to create idealized versions of the human form and common myths. Common everyday themes made their way into the arts in a movement called naturalism.

B. Music of the Emotions

The Renaissance-humanist approach to music was problematic: no one alive had ever heard ancient Greek music. An important innovation was the madrigal, a song in which the music closely followed a poetic lyric to accentuate the shades of textual meaning. Happy text suggested a higher pitch on the musical scale while negative emotions prompted lower pitches. Agitation or fear suggested an increase in rhythm that would imitate the beating heart. Opera, with its unprecedented ability to create emotions in the listener, was a result of this direction in musical study.

IV. The Early Modern European State System

A. Monarchies: The Foundation of the State System

The early modern European state system was the consequence of five developments. First was the establishment of standing armies by the emerging
monarchies. The need to keep these armies modern and strong led to the second development, systematic taxation. Enforcing these taxes by elimination of the traditional exemptions enjoyed by regional assemblies and parliaments was the third development. The fourth development was a general attempt in all emerging monarchies to suppress or constrain the existing aristocracies and the Church. The exchange of formal ambassadors between the emerging monarchies constituted the fifth development.

1. France: Consolidating Power and Cultivating Renaissance Values

   Free from the burdens of the Hundred Years' War with England, a succession of French kings created and maintained a new professional army, successfully resisted papal interference in state affairs, and began a tradition of heavy taxation through the taille.

2. Spain: Unification by Marriage

   In the early fifteenth century, the Iberian Peninsula was a myriad of cultures and peoples. Numerous kingdoms with contrasting laws struggled against each other for dominance. Political unification came with the marriage of Isabella (future Queen of Castile) to Ferdinand (future King of Aragon). Although theirs was an arranged marriage designed to solidify an allegiance between the two regions, Isabella and Ferdinand managed to combine their realms into the Kingdom of Spain.

3. The Holy Roman Empire: The Costs of Decentralization

   Members of the Hapsburg family had been elected to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire since the mid-1400s. Unlike other monarchies based on inherited rule, the Holy Roman Emperor was selected by seven electors who were influential members of the aristocracy. Factional, dissent-ridden, and disorganized, the Empire could not hold a candle to the centralized monarchies of Europe or even the Italian city-states.

4. England: From Civil War to Stability Under the Tudors

   Defeat in the Hundred Years' War returned thousands of mercenaries back into England where an unfit royal family split into two factions that formed the basis for the English War of the Roses. Decades of bloodshed produced Richard III, whose cruel and scandalous rule was opposed by Henry Tudor. Tudor was supported by many of the English nobles who collectively defeated Richard in battle. Henry Tudor became Henry VII in 1485. Although a backward country, England slowly prospered under a succession of the Tudor family including Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.

5. Political Thought: Considering the End Result

   Political theorist and humanist Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) worked as a diplomat and military official but had been exiled from Florence for his role in a plot against the Medici family. While exiled, Machiavelli wrote his treatise
The Prince (1513) which encouraged rulers to understand the underlying principles of power, especially the need to know when morality is needed and when an immoral decision is in order to protect the interests of the state.

V. Conclusion: The Politics of Culture

The Renaissance began simply as a struggle of the Latin peoples to imitate and absorb the ancient writings and art that constituted their history. Study of the ancients produced a yearning to remodel society on those found ancient structures while criticizing and questioning all that seemed established forever. Most importantly was the application of humanist thought to Christianity, a move that would ultimately cause a fundamental split in the way the west beheld the Creator.

TIMELINE

Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.

- Conquest of Granada; expulsion of the Jews from Spain; voyage of Christopher Columbus
- Rule of Cosimo de’ Medici in Florence
- Galileo Galilei, astronomer
- Pontificate of Julius II
- Filippo Brunelleschi, Florentine sculptor and architect
- Nicholaus Copernicus, humanist and cosmological theorist
- Leonardo da Vinci, Florentine painter and inventor
- Unification of Spain

1377-1446
1434-1464
1452-1519
1473-1543
1479
1492
1503-1513
1564-1642
TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.

Renaissance
Republicanism
Humanists
Philology
Rhetoric
Civic humanism
Linear perspective
Opera
Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges
Medicean Age
Doge
Courtier
Francesco Petrarca
Nicolaus Copernicus
Michelangelo
Lorenzo Ghiberti
Fillipo Brunelleschi
Leonardo da Vinci
Taille
Francis I
Isabella and Ferdinand
Niccolò Machiavelli
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in this chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

Castile
Naples
Aragon
Vienna
Milan
Paris

Pickup map from Kishlansky Study guide, page 107
MAKING CONNECTIONS

The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter.

1. What was the political culture of Renaissance Italy? What defined the economy of the Renaissance cities? Define the social structure.
2. Define humanism. What were the humanists’ most important achievements?
3. Discuss the artistic achievement of the Renaissance in the areas of architecture, sculpture, and painting.
4. What five developments resulted in the rise of the early modern European state system?
5. Describe Niccolo Machiavelli’s contribution to political thought. How are his ideas representative of the politics of the Renaissance?

DOCUMENT QUESTIONS

1. In “Cosimo de’ Medici’s Reputation,” Vespasiano describes Cosimo’s role as patron. What are Cosimo’s motivations for his actions? What does he hope to achieve? What does this tell us about the values of Florentine society?

2. Compare the description of another leader found in “Francesco Guicciardini on the character of Lodovico Sforza” to Vespasiano’s description of Cosimo. Do the two authors seem to value the same traits in leadership?

PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER

1. How did the peculiar social, political, and economic status of the Italian city-states foster the environment that led to the cultural genius of the Renaissance?

2. Was the Italian Renaissance new, or did it simply restate what was already present in Western civilization? Consider both the political and cultural orientation of the Italian city-states.
SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

1. The great Renaissance patron of the arts in Florence was
   
   A. Marsilio Ficino.
   B. Cosimo de’Medici.
   C. Andrea Gritti.
   D. Federico da Montefeltro.

2. Florence and Venice were alike in many respects, except Venice
   
   A. retained republican institutions.
   B. patronized the arts.
   C. engaged in international trade.
   D. conquered some Greek ports.

3. Which term is correctly matched with its description?
   
   A. Doge – self-governing city-state
   B. Vendetta – great property-owning families
   C. Commune – ruler of Venice
   D. Courtier – person who lived with or visited the palace of a prince

4. Why is Lorenzo Valla considered an important Renaissance figure?
   
   A. He wrote long poems imitating Cicero.
   B. He founded a neo-Platonic academy.
   C. He applied philological techniques to discover a forged document.
   D. He patronized the arts in Urbino.

5. Which artist is correctly matched with his work?
   
   A. Ghiberti – Doors of the Florence Baptistery
   B. Donatello – Last Supper
   C. Leonardo da Vinci – David
D. Brunelleschi – The Tribute Money

6. Which term is correctly matched with its description?

A. Linear perspective – painting on wet plaster
B. Relief – type of stance
C. Fresco – projection of sculpted figures from the background
D. Chiaroscuro – dramatic use of light and dark

7. Which Renaissance figure is correctly matched with his/her talent?

A. Claudio Monteverdi – composed operas
B. Sofonisba Anguissola – engaged in trade and finance
C. Jacques Coeur – studied anatomy
D. Andreas Vesalius – wrote history

8. Which statement about Ferdinand and Isabella is not true?

A. They arranged for their children to marry into other royal families.
B. They built up an effective bureaucracy.
C. They collected the taille.
D. They forced Muslims and Jews to convert or leave Spain.

9. Henry VII of England

A. was known as the Duke of York before his coronation.
B. called Parliament frequently.
C. used the Court of Star Chamber against rebellious nobles.
D. fought expensive foreign wars.

10. Which statement about Machiavelli is not true?
A. He believed a prince might have to act immorally to protect his state.
B. He preferred despotism rather than republican government.
C. He thought a capable leader could find opportunities to control events before they took control of him.
D. He wanted to find the dynamics behind political events.