

Define the term
renaissance



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The term Renaissance literally means to be born again, which is the reason why it is referred to as a rebirth. The word rebirth regarding the Renaissance can mean two different things: one refers to the rediscovery of ancient classics and its applications in art and science, and another could simply mean the revitalization of European culture. Thus, when someone talks about the Renaissance, it could mean any of the two. Also, the word renaissance has been used to describe other periods of cultural rebirth as well, such as the Carolingian Renaissance. The Carolingian Renaissance, which takes the former meaning of the word renaissance, describes a time period of academic and cultural awakening starting from the eighth to the ninth century, in which there was a boost in literature and the arts, similar to the Italian Renaissance. However, different was that in the Carolingian Renaissance, the changes from the cultural revival were completely limited to the clergy, and thus did not have wide-ranging and long-lasting social movements, which may be why historians argue whether this was really a renaissance. The Italian Renaissance was a cultural movement that began in Florence, Italy and later spread throughout the countries of Europe from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries; this time period is seen as a bridge between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era. This time period meant a change in various areas: a shift of monetary power from the nobles to plain citizens, a newfound interest in learning, the advancement of linear perspective in art, and an eventual widespread educational reform.

Trade began to come back to life in medieval Europe, supporting the growth of cities, which started in Italy. Some of the Italian city-states became main centers for banking, commerce and industry. With the growth of such cities,

Italy slowly became the most highly urbanized area in Europe in the fourteenth century. Due to feudalism being established in Italy, it was easy for the growing cities to expand by subduing nobles and annexing their lands in the countryside. In Italy, the unique nobles moved to the urban areas and took up city life to an extent that was not customary elsewhere. In these towns therefore, the people that held power were not the aristocracy due to their having land, but the possessors of urban wealth, such as bankers and merchants. [i] This newly focused concentration of wealth and power led to a new configuration of social classes, which resulted in wide-ranging effects across Europe. [i] Since the nobility borrowed money to do unproductive things, they often defaulted on their loans, leading to a part of their property being transferred to the bankers and merchants. [i] Thus, by the end of the fifteenth century, most of the wealth of the nobility was transferred away to the new, commercial class, which in turn narrowed the huge gap between the nobles and normal citizens. [i] For example, there was the Medici family who owned the largest bank in Europe in the 15th century. They officially remained simple citizens, but through their bank, they were able to bring Florence under their power and become the wealthiest family in Europe at one time. Also, there was the issue of sea trade; Northern Italian cities were flourishing due to trade with the rest of Europe: Genoa was a seaport for goods from France and Spain, with Milan and Turin as centers for trade on land and on the trade routes not only did goods protected by commercial interest come, but also artists, scientists and philosophers.

The Renaissance led to the development of education due to scholars looking for refuge in Western Europe after the fall of Constantinople. With them, they brought knowledge and documents to Italian citizens, who sought after Latin classics and the Greek language, fueling the Renaissance. However, even before the fall of Constantinople, there was an influx of Greek scholars to Italy, which welcomed scholars in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This cultural exchange began in 1396 when the chancellor of Florence invited a Byzantine scholar to lecture at the University of Florence. During the Renaissance, Latin scholars started focusing entirely on Greek and Arabic works of science, philosophy, and mathematics; scholars of this time were mostly interested in recovering Latin and Greek literary and historical texts. Also, another factor that made this spread of education and written texts possible was the emergence of the Gutenberg printing press, which was the most important invention from the Renaissance time period because before the invention of the printing press, people had to copy the books by hand, which had the result of increasing the price of books. However, after this, many copies could be made easily, spreading the ideas of the Renaissance throughout Europe. Like the printing press, even though there were intellectual and commercial revolutions during the Renaissance, including social and political turmoil, these were all overshadowed by developments in art.