

# European renaissance

[Art & Culture](#), [Renaissance](#)



Empire and the Pope Renaissance is the name traditionally bestowed upon the remarkable outpouring of intellectual and artistic energy and talent that accompanied the transition of Europe from the middle ages to the modern epoch. The term is extended to politics and economics as well. The Renaissance was one of the most significant movements in European history, because it effected a change in man's attitude towards the problem of human existence. However, historians have long debated what is meant by the term 'Renaissance'.

For some it is a distinctive period, for others a momentous event and for a third group a definable movement of ideas and beliefs. Each choice has its problem and detractors. The Dutch historian Johan Hugging wrote. 'At the sound of the word 'Renaissance' the dreamer of past beauty sees purple and gold'. More exactly he or she sees in the minds eye Botulism's Birth of Venus, Michelangelo David, Leonardo Monomials, Erasmus, the Chateaux of the Loire and Faerie Queen, all rolled into one, into a composite picture of a golden age of creativity and culture.

Jacob Bureaucrat in his famous Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (1860) defined the period in terms of two concepts, individualism and modernity. He wrote, 'In the Middle Ages human consciousness ... Lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil... Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation - only through some general category. In Renaissance Italy, however, the veil first melted into thin air... An became a spiritual individual and recognized himself as such, Renaissance meant modernity. It began in Italy and at a later stage spread to the rest of Europe. Peter Burke comments that the grand edifice created <https://assignbuster.com/european-renaissance/>

by Bureaucrat and his contemporaries has not stood the test of time. It has been undermined by the researchers - the medievalists in particular. They argue that - in the first place the 'Renaissance men' were really rather medieval. They were more traditional in their behavior assumptions and ideals than we tend to think.

Two of the most famous books written in 16th century Italy, the 'Courtier' and the 'Prince', have turned out to be closer to the Middle Ages than they appear. Secondly, the medievalists have accumulated arguments to the effect that the Renaissance was not such a singular event as Bureaucrat and his contemporaries once thought and the term should really be used in the plural. There were famous 'Renaissances' in the Middle Ages, notably in the 12th Century and in the age of Charlemagne.

Can we therefore assume there was no Renaissance at all? Here Peter Burke comes to our rescue. He says, 'if we describe the Renaissance in purple and gold, as an isolated cultural miracle or as the sudden emergence of modernity, my own answer would be 'no'. If however, the word is used without prejudice to the achievements of the Middle Ages, or those of the world beyond Europe, to refer to a particular cluster of changes in western culture, then it may be regarded as an organizing concept which still has its uses.' J. M.

Thompson has very succinctly summed up what is meant by the Renaissance. 'Let the word be freedom. Freedom from the tyranny - none the less cramping because so easily borne - of the medieval world order. Freedom of thought from Aristotle as interpreted by Aquinas. Freedom in

history from the parochialism and credulity of the monastic chronicler. Freedom in art, from the illustrated manuscript and the stained glass window. Freedom of literature from the censorship of the Church. In politics freedom from feudalism: in religion from traditionalism.

With a new universe in the sky, a new world across the sea and a new learning on his study shelf, the 16th century student might well feel that the old age was passing away and that the dawn of a new age was at hand. '

**SOCIAL ROOTS** The Renaissance was actually not so much a particular movement as a concrete expression of changing mentalities in a new world. A movement implies a definite period of activity with a precise beginning and end. The Renaissance had neither. It is however generally assumed to have started with the activities of the first humanist Francesco Petrarch as he is commonly known.

The Renaissance flourished due to the patronage of the Popes, princes, cardinals and merchants. The 15th century Italy was rich enough to support an extravagant and self-indulgent merchant aristocracy. In the urban centre of Northern Italy which possessed a high degree of cultural self-consciousness as well as economic buoyancy, urban identity and pride was reflected in the construction of the churches and public buildings and through the emergence of universities as centre of learning.

As the Northern Italian urban society was based on individual property and private contract, the most important educated groups were those who dealt with commercial and industrial activities, i. e. , lawyers and notaries who had to attain mastery of Roman law and Latin (the language of the law courts)

and who were able to quote from the Classical and the Christian authors as well as had developed an interest in the language literature, institutes and customs of antiquity. Patriarch and Vacation are pointed out as the pioneers of the Renaissance, the precursors or pre-humanists were all either lawyers or notaries.

Religion still occupied an important place and the Pietas, Madonna's, Crucifixion and the innumerable saints portrayed in Renaissance art, show that the traditional faith of most artists remained Christianity. Renaissance society was essentially aristocratic. It offered economic, intellectual and political opportunities to only a small number. But it did not possess the usually universally accepted standard of nobility. The Commercial Revolution of the high Middle Ages and the social changes connected with it had already undermined the aristocracy of blood.

The Great Depression of the mid 14th century and the stagnation which followed, shook the financial security of the aristocracy of wealth. The aristocratic structure of the society during the Renaissance period persisted and was not submerged by the growth of the merchant class. The Renaissance witnessed as much penetration of the ideas and manners of the nobility into the ethos of the bourgeoisie as the other way round. Noble births were desired but it was the sophisticated merchants of Florence and Venice who helped to promote civility, and to widen the horizons of the aristocratic life.

Now for a soldier, statesman, priest or a merchant to be known as a gentleman, a knowledge of the ancient classics and an appreciation of art,

literature, music and of conversation were necessary. The Renaissance was the work of hundreds of gifted men living in scores of cities like Vaccine, Riming, Ferreira, Robin, Mantra and Pram. But it was the strongest in the four cities - Florence, Milan, Rome and Venice. Florence cradled the Renaissance and produced a remarkable number of gifted artists while Rome and Milan patronized these artists.

The Renaissance reached Venice late but stayed here longer. The Renaissance enriched artistic influence spread all over Europe. One of the reasons as to why the Renaissance was Italian in origin was the continuous reminder of her read past provided by the ruins of temples and villas especially in the city of Rome. From the 15th century a new appreciation of these classical ruins appeared and the Renaissance Popes ordered their preservation and encouraged their excavation. Pope and princes competed with each other in making collection of ancient objects.

The interest in Greek thought and literature, among those who discovered and collected ancient manuscripts, was also stimulated by contacts with the Byzantine Empire through Venetian and Genomes traders. The princes and republics of the Renaissance lived in dangerous and unsafe times but they desired fame, which could be expressed in something more concrete and permanent than war, such as buildings, arts, pageants and patronage. They all tried to immortalize their greatness by constructing buildings and encouraging painting and sculpture.

Leonardo da Vinci sought the patronage of Cesar Boring as well as Spoor, Raphael began his career in war ravaged Peruvian, Ladino's frescoes, Liberties

churches and Vitiation's influence in education, all brought fame to Mantra. Social circumstances were also very favorable to the artists and craftsman. There was a deep rooted tradition of early Christian Europe that buildings were a part of Christian life. So the wealthy ordered their parish churches and founded and patronized monasteries, nunneries and cathedrals. The Popes were the foremost in this field.

It was also a custom for the princes to adorn their palaces, and so provide an impetus to the crafts of metal work, jewelry, tapestries and frescoes. Since the competitive state system of the Renaissance Italy was obsessed not only with power and war but also with the furtherance of art, Venice and Florence, the two republics were jealous of their menus. Money and social energy was poured into art. In the competition of artists was added the competition for artists. Now merchant princes and despots were vying for the service of the great architects, sculptors, painters and scholars.

Many of the rulers of the smaller states cultivated a princely style of generosity to arts and magnificence in order to popularize their rule. The patrons spent their fortunes in ways that would benefit the community. The building of chapels and the commissioning of many public works of art were a result of a new conception of wealth spent for civil purposes. New modes of religious thought and feeling underlay new styles in architecture, sculpture and painting. With patronage becoming competitive, the arts became more costly.

Renaissance society was meant for rich men, rich cities and rich Popes. To maintain the expenses of the Renaissance art, culture and society, an active

and profitable commerce was essential. Venice, Florence, Milan and Rome were full of wealthy men who patronized the Renaissance achievements and nurtured genius. Among the Italians, the Florentine especially revered the wisdom, grace, philosophy and literature of the antiquity. By 1400 there were hundreds of merchants of Italy who could afford to patronize art when earlier it was only the prerogative of the aristocracy.

In Florence, Milan, Rome and Venice, the practice and patronage of art had become a civic virtue. Ferrara, Bologna and Urbino also had talents. Though the cities of the papal states were war-torn because the Pope was in Avignon, and both trade and population had declined there, yet artistic life did flourish in Perugia (Perugino's frescoes, Raphael's and Verrocchio's paintings). Constant fighting turned the Renaissance historians and political philosophies into supporters of tyranny, since it ensured peace and order, as in the case of Machiavelli.

Renaissance statecraft is typified by a single man - Nicola Machiavelli - who belonged to Florence. He was highly influenced by the constant warfare of those times and also by the fact that Florence continued to be a republic in spite of the ambitions of the Duke of Milan. By resisting him, the Florentine saved the liberty of both Florence and Italy. The outcome of the crisis made Florence the centre of new humanism, a new appreciation of political liberty and civic virtue and a new attitude towards man's place in society.

It was this attitude that ensured the independence of the major Italian states and consequently the vigor and diversity of Italian artistic and cultural development which characterized the Renaissance. Trade, high finance, a



large and a partially urbanize population, quickening industry and the absence of a deeply rooted, all-powerful political structure, all helped the future development of Renaissance Italy. Renaissance was a movement of cities where a rich urban class, free from the pressures of feudalism flourished. The Italian city-state formed a perfect domicile for the Renaissance art and literature.