

Renaissance



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Renaissance Introduction: The word renaissance comes from French and means rebirth. Renaissance heralds the transition from the period of darkness since the demise of the Roman Empire. Advances in the arts and learning are the characteristics of the renaissance, which stemmed from the revival of a thirst for knowledge of Greek and Roman civilizations.

The Renaissance:

The Renaissance is the period of European cultural history that is traditionally accepted as the period that marks the transition from the medieval times to the modern world, with the reawakening in literature, philosophy, art, politics, science, religion, and other similar aspects of intellectual enquiry. The Renaissance is generally accepted to have begun in the fourteenth century in the small and prosperous states of Italy namely, Florence, Sienna and Venice (1).

Some historians have questioned both the starting date and the starting place of the Renaissance, crediting the period under the Carolingian rulers Charlemagne and Louis the Pious starting from 800 AD. Such a contention comes from the perspective that if a reawakening in culture and intellectual from the dark period of European history is the criterion for the renaissance, the renaissance started in 800 AD, under the Carolingian rulers. Such a claim is associated with the achievements of the Carolingian rulers. These rulers brought peace and security throughout most of Western Europe, which was in turmoil since the demise of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, when Alaric sacked Rome in 401 AD. There was deliberate effort on the part of these rulers to bring back some of the lost cultural and economic greatness lost with the Roman Empire. Charlemagne utilized the assistance of the intellectual Alcuin to set up a school system. Working with Benedict of

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Aniane, Louis the Pious made Benedictine monasticism a force of progress and civilization in Western Europe. The consequence of this combine of political and intellectual power was rise in culture and learning not experienced since the Roman Empire. However, the counter argument is that these changes were essentially within the clergy and lacked a wide range of social movements as evinced by the renaissance that started in Italy. (2).

There is also some support for the view of Charles Homer Haskins in his book *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* that Europe starting from in the eleventh century. This period saw a vibrant, expanding, and tolerant society that offers comparison to the renaissance in the fourteenth century in Italy.

(2). However this contention is not accepted as the vibrancy and expansion in society pertained more to the stability of the period and the Crusades. The Crusades did start a search for understanding of other civilizations, but in essence most of the intellectual activity pertained to a search for this in other lands. (1).

The collapse of the Roman Empire brought darkness to Europe. The grandiose temples and senate of Rome lay in shambles reflecting the state of Europe called the Dark Age, or the Early Middle Ages, which started in the fifth century and extended till the eleventh, century giving way to the middle ages. The transition from these Dark Ages is essentially marked first by the Carolingian era in the ninth century and the period of vibrancy in the eleventh century. This marks the transition, but the real emergence to light came in the fourteenth century and the renaissance. Acquisition of classical Greek and Arab works through the Arabs and Byzantines, their translation, and the existence of wealthy patrons paved the way for the renaissance. Advances in philosophy, art, science and religion mark this period in time.

Humanism in philosophy caused the change in learning from settling contradiction between authors to the study of ancient texts and testing their veracity. Advance in art in is one of the main characteristics of the renaissance with a renewed vigor for beauty and aesthetics in the artistic creations of this period. It was during the renaissance that the scientific method or the process for discovery came into being, with the emphasis on empirical evidence. In religion, the impact of renaissance was in theology and the relationship between man and God. A significant feature of the renaissance was not just in the various fields of human activity that it covered, but in its spread to all parts of Western Europe. The greatest gift of the renaissance was the printing press. (1).

Conclusion:

The transition from the dark and medieval period was slow and progressive. Two periods of enlightenment occurred before the final transition to light in the fourteenth century in Italy. This transition was to spread to all of Europe and was the final step in overcoming the darkness that fell on Western Europe with the demise of the Roman Empire in the fifth century.

Works Cited

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