

(to be discussed later), more and more Greek-speaking intellectuals fled to Italy, bringing their books and their knowledge with them.

Thanks to these developments, some Italian intellectuals had access to more classical texts and they also used these texts in new ways. For centuries, Christian scholars had worked to bring ancient writings and values into line with their own beliefs (Chapter 6). By contrast, the new reading methods pioneered by Petrarch and others fostered an awareness of the conceptual gap that separated the contemporary world from that of antiquity. This awakened a determination to recapture ancient worldviews and value systems. In the second half of the fifteenth century, classical models would also contribute to the strikingly distinctive artistic style that is most strongly associated with the Renaissance (something we will address in Chapter 12).

Another distinguishing feature of this new perspective on the classical past was the way that it became overtly materialistic and commercialized. The competition among and within Italian city-states fostered a culture that used the symbols and artifacts of ancient Rome as pawns in an endless power game. Meanwhile, the relative weakness of the Church contributed to the growth of claims to power based on classical models—even by Italian bishops and Church-sponsored universities. When the papacy was eventually restored to Rome, it too had to compete in this Renaissance arena by patronizing the artists and intellectuals who espoused these aesthetic and political ideals.

Renaissance Humanism

The most basic feature of this new intellectual and political agenda is summarized in the term *humanism*. This was a program of study that aimed to replace the scholastic emphasis on logic and theology—central to the curriculum of universities like Paris and Oxford—with the study of ancient literature, rhetoric, history, and ethics. The goal of a humanist education was the understanding of human experience through the lenses of the classical past, in the service of man's individual potential in the present. By contrast, a scholastic education filtered human experience through the teachings of scripture and the Church fathers, with the salvation of humankind as the ultimate goal.

Some intellectuals also believed that the university curriculum concentrated too much on abstract speculation rather than the achievement of virtue and ethical conduct. Petrarch felt that the true Christian thinker must cultivate literary eloquence and so inspire others to do good through the pursuit of beauty and truth. According

to him, the best models of eloquence were to be found in the classics of Latin literature, which were also filled with ethical wisdom. Petrarch dedicated himself, therefore, to rediscovering such texts and to writing his own poems and moral treatises in a Latin style modeled on that of classical authors.

Humanists therefore preferred ancient writings to those of more recent authors, including their own contemporaries. And although some early humanists wrote in Italian dialects as well as Latin, most regarded vernacular literature as a lesser diversion for the uneducated; serious scholarship and poetry could be written only in Latin (or Greek). Proper Latin, moreover, had to be the classical Latin of Cicero and Virgil, not the evolving language of their own day, which they derided as a barbarous departure from “correct” standards of Latin style.

But ironically, their determination to revive this older language eventually helped to kill the lively Latin that had continued to flourish in Europe. By insisting on outmoded standards of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, they turned Latin into a fossilized discourse that ceased to have any relevance to real life. They thus contributed, unwittingly, to the ultimate triumph of the various European vernaculars they despised.

Because humanism was an educational program designed to produce able public men, it largely excluded women because women were largely excluded from Italian political life. Here again is a paradox: as more and more Italian city-states fell into the hands of autocratic rulers, the humanist educational curriculum lost its immediate connection to the republican ideals of ancient Rome. Nevertheless, humanists never lost their conviction that the study of the “humanities” (as the humanist curriculum came to be known) was the best way to produce leaders.

Why Italy?

These new attitudes toward education and the antique models were fostered in northern Italy for historically specific reasons. After the Black Death, this region was the most densely populated part of Europe; other urban areas, notably northeastern France and Flanders, had been decimated by the Great Famine as well as the plague. Northern Italy also differed from the rest of urbanized Europe because aristocratic families customarily lived in cities and consequently became more fully involved in public affairs than their counterparts north of the Alps. Moreover, many town-dwelling aristocrats were engaged in banking or mercantile enterprises, while many rich mercantile families

imitated the manners of the aristocracy. The Florentine ruling family, the Medici, originally made their fortune in banking and commerce.

These factors help to explain the emergence of the humanist ideals described above. Newly wealthy families were not content to have their sons learn only the skills necessary to becoming successful businessmen; they sought teachers who would impart the knowledge and finesse that would enable them to cut a figure in society, mix with their noble neighbors, and speak with authority on public affairs. Consequently, Italy produced and attracted a large number of independent intellectuals who were not affiliated with monasteries, cathedral schools, or universities—many of whom served as schoolmasters for wealthy young men while acting as cultural consultants and secretaries for their families. These intellectuals advertised their learning by producing political and ethical treatises and works of literature that would attract the attention of patrons or reflect well on the patrons they already had. As a result, Italian schools and private tutors turned out the best-educated laymen in all of Europe, men who also constituted a new generation of wealthy, knowledgeable patrons ready to invest in the cultivation of new ideas and new forms of artistic expression.

A second reason why late-medieval Italy was the birthplace of the Renaissance movement has to do with its vexed political situation. Unlike France and England, or the kingdoms of Spain, Scandinavia, and central Europe, Italy had no unifying political institutions. Italians therefore looked to the classical past for their time of glory, dreaming of a day when Rome would be, again, the center of the world. They boasted that ancient Roman monuments were omnipresent in their landscape and that classical Latin literature referred to cities and sites they recognized as their own.

Italians were also intent on reappropriating their classical heritage because they were seeking to establish an independent cultural identity that could counter the intellectual and political supremacy of France. The removal of the papacy to Avignon (Chapter 10) had heightened antagonism between the city-states of Italy and the burgeoning kingdom beyond the Alps. This also explains the Italians' rejection of the scholasticism taught in northern Europe's universities and their embrace of models that could create an artistic alternative to the dominant French school of Gothic architecture.

Finally, this Italian Renaissance could not have occurred without the underpinning of Italian wealth gained through the commercial ventures described in Chapter 10. This wealth meant that talented men seeking employment and patronage were more likely to stay at home, fueling the artistic and intellectual competition

that arose from the intensification of urban pride and the concentration of individual and family wealth in urban areas. Cities themselves became primary patrons of art and learning in this era.

The Renaissance of Civic Ideals

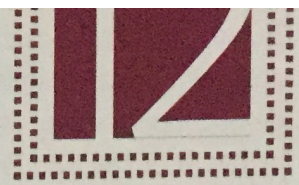
For the intellectuals of Florence, in particular, the goal of classical education was civic enrichment. Humanists such as Leonardo Bruni (c. 1370–1444) and Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) valued eloquence and classical literature, but they also taught that man's nature should be cultivated for service to the state—ideally a city-state after the Florentine model. Ambition and the quest for glory are noble impulses, but they ought to be encouraged and channeled toward these ends. They also argued that the history of human progress is inseparable from the human dominion of the earth and its resources.

Many of the humanists' civic ideals are expressed in Alberti's treatise *On the Family* (1443), in which the nuclear family is presented as the fundamental unit of the city-state and, as such, is to be governed in such a way as to further the state's political and economic goals. He therefore consigned women—who, in reality, governed the household—to childbearing, child rearing, and subservience to men even within this domestic realm. He asserted, furthermore, that women should play no role whatsoever in the public sphere. Although such dismissals of women's abilities were fiercely resisted by actual women, the humanism of the Renaissance was characterized by a pervasive denigration of women.

The Emergence of Textual Criticism

The humanists' project was aided by a number of Byzantine scholars who emigrated to Italy in the first half of the fifteenth century and who gave instruction in the ancient form of their own native language. Wealthy, well-connected Florentines also increasingly aspired to acquire Greek literary masterpieces for themselves, which often involved journeys back to Constantinople. In 1423, one adventurous bibliophile managed to bring back 238 manuscript books, among them rare works of Sophocles, Euripides, and Thucydides. These were quickly paraphrased in Latin and made accessible to western Europeans for the first time.

This influx of new classical texts spurred a new interest in textual criticism. A pioneer in this activity was



Innovation and Exploration, 1453–1533

OBJECTIVES

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What if exact copies of an idea could circulate quickly, all over the world? What if the same could be done for the latest news, the oldest beliefs, the most beautiful poems, the most exciting—and deadly—discoveries? It would be doing for knowledge what the invention of coinage did for wealth: making it portable, easier to use and disseminate. Indeed, it's no accident that the man who developed such a technology, Johannes Gutenberg of Mainz (c. 1398–1468), was the son of a goldsmith who minted coins for the bishop of that German city. Both technologies were based on the same principle and used the same basic tools. Coins are metal disks stamped with identical words and images, impressed on them with a reusable matrix. The pages of the first printed books were stamped with ink spread on rows of movable type (lead or cast-iron letter forms and punctuation marks) slotted into frames to form lines of words. Once a set of pages was ready, a press could make hundreds of copies in a matter of hours, many hundreds of times faster than the same page could be copied by hand. Afterward, the type could be reused.

A major stimulus for this invention was the more widespread availability of paper. Parchment, northern Europe's chief writing material since the advent of the codex (see Chapter 6), was extremely expensive to manufacture and required special training on the part of those who used it—one reason why writing remained a specialized skill for much of the Middle Ages, while the ability to read was common. Paper, made from rags turned into pulp by mills, was both cheaper and far easier to use; accordingly, books became cheaper and written communication easier. Growing demand for books, in turn, led to experimentation with different methods of book production—and so to Gutenberg's breakthrough. By 1455, his workshop had printed multiple copies of the Latin Bible, of which forty-eight complete or partial volumes survive today. Although printing never entirely replaced traditional modes of publication via manuscript, it revolutionized the spread of information.

The printing press played a crucial role in many of the developments we study in this chapter. The artistic and intellectual experiments of the Italian Renaissance were rapidly exported to other parts of Europe; specifications for new weapons would be printed on the same presses that churned out humanist literature. News of Columbus's first voyage would spread via the same media as critiques of European imperialism. Printing not only increased the amount and rapidity of publication, it also made it more difficult for those in power to censor dissenting opinions.

But at the same time, the printing press also became an indispensable tool of power, making it possible for rulers to govern growing empires and increasingly centralized states. The "reconquest" of Spain and the extension of Spanish imperialism to the New World were both facilitated by the circulation of printed propaganda. The widespread availability of reading materials even helped to standardize national languages, by enabling governments to promote one official printed dialect over others. Hence the "king's English," the variety of the language spoken around London, was imposed as the only acceptable literary and bureaucratic language throughout the English realm. For these reasons, among others, many historians consider the advent of print to be both the defining event and the driving engine of modernity, and it coincided with another essentially modern development: the discovery of a "New World."

RENAISSANCE IDEALS— AND REALITIES

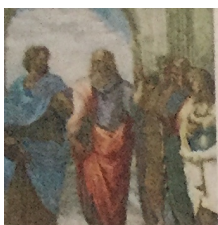
The intellectual and artistic movement that had begun in Italy during the fourteenth century (Chapter 11) was characterized by an intense interest in the classics

and by a new type of curriculum: humanism. These Renaissance ideals—and the realities that undergirded them—were extended through the medium of the printing press. By the time the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople was complete, just a year before Gutenberg's Bible, hundreds of refugees from the eastern Roman Empire had been propelled into Italy. Many carried with them precious manuscripts of Greek texts: the epics of Homer, the works of Athenian dramatists, the dialogues of Plato. Prior to the invention of print, such manuscripts could be owned and studied by only a very few, very privileged men. Now printers in Venice and other European cities rushed to produce cheap editions, as well as Greek grammars and glossaries that could facilitate reading them.

In Florence, an informal "Platonic Academy" was convened. There, the work of intellectuals like Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) was fostered by the patronage of the wealthy Cosimo de' Medici. Based on his reading of Plato, Ficino's philosophy moved away from the focus on civic life that had been such a feature of earlier humanist thought. He taught instead that the individual should look to free the immortal soul from its "always miserable" mortal body: a Platonic ideal compatible with much late-medieval piety. Ficino's great achievement was his translation of Plato's works into Latin. His disciple Pico also rejected the everyday world of public affairs, arguing that man (but not woman) can aspire to union with God through the exercise of his unique talents.

The Politics of Italy and the Philosophy of Machiavelli

Not all Florentines were galvanized by Platonic ideals, though. Indeed, the most influential philosopher of this era was a thoroughgoing realist who spent more time studying Roman history: Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). Machiavelli's political writings reflect the unstable political situation of his home city as well as his wider aspirations for a unified Italy. We have observed that Italy had been in political disarray for centuries, a situation exacerbated by the "Babylonian Captivity" of the papacy and the controversies raging after its return to Rome (see Chapters 10 and 11). Now Italy was becoming the arena in which bloody international struggles were being played out. The monarchs of France and Spain both had imperial ambitions, and both claimed to be the rightful champions of the papacy. Both sent



Competing Viewpoints

Printing, Patriotism, and the Past

The printing press helped to create new communities of readers by standardizing national languages and even promoting patriotism. And while it enabled authors of new works to reach larger audiences, it also allowed printers to popularize older writings that had previously circulated in manuscript. The two sources presented here exemplify two aspects of this trend. The first is the preface to a version of the legend of King Arthur, which was originally written by an English soldier, Sir Thomas Malory, who completed it in 1470. It was printed for the first time in 1485, and it quickly became a best seller. The author of this preface was also the printer, William Caxton of London, who specialized in publishing books that glorified England's history and heritage. The second excerpt is from the concluding chapter of Machiavelli's treatise *The Prince*. Like the book itself, these remarks were originally addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici, head of Florence's most powerful family. But when *The Prince* was printed in 1532, five years after Machiavelli's death, the author's passionate denunciation of foreign "barbarians" and his lament for Italy's lost glory would have resonated with a wider Italian-speaking public.

William Caxton's preface to Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* ("The Death of Arthur"), 1485

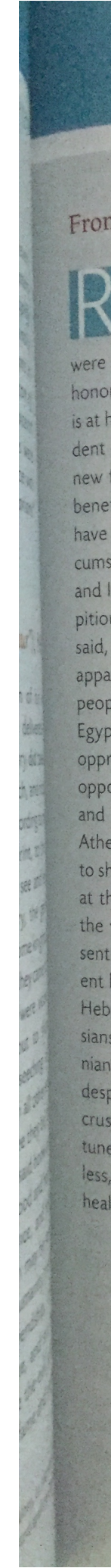
After I had accomplished and finished diverse histories, both of contemplation and of other historical and worldly acts of great conquerors and princes, . . . many noble and diverse gentlemen of this realm of England came and demanded why I had not made and imprinted the noble history of the Holy Grail, and of the most renowned Christian king and worthy, King Arthur, which ought most to be remembered among us Englishmen before all other Christian kings. . . . The said noble gentlemen instantly required me to imprint the history of the said noble king and conqueror King Arthur, and of his knights, with the history of the Holy Grail . . . considering that he was a man born within this realm, and king and emperor of the same: and that there be, in French, diverse and many noble volumes of his acts, and also of his knights. To whom I answered that diverse men hold opinion that there was no such Arthur, and that all such books as have been made of him be feigned and fables, because some chronicles make of him no mention. . . . Where to they answered, and one in

special said, that in him that should say or think that there was never such a king called Arthur might well be accounted great folly and blindness. . . . For in all places, Christian and heathen, he is reputed and taken for one of the Nine Worthies, and the first of the three Christian men. And also, he is more spoken of beyond the sea, and there are more books made of his noble acts than there be in England, as well in Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and Greek, as in French. . . . Wherefore it is a marvel why he is no more renowned in his own country. . . .

Then all these things aforesaid alleged, I could not well deny but that there was such a noble king named Arthur, reputed one of the Nine Worthies, and first and chief of the Christian men. And many noble volumes be made of him and of his noble knights in French, which I have seen and read beyond the sea, which be not had in our maternal tongue. . . . Wherefore, among all such [manuscript] books as have late been drawn out briefly into English I have . . . undertaken to imprint a book of the noble histories of the said King

Arthur, and of certain of his knights, after a copy unto me delivered—which copy Sir Thomas Malory did take out of certain books of French, and reduced it into English. And I, according to my copy, have done set it in print, to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days, by which they came to honor, and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke; humbly beseeching all noble lords and ladies (with all other estates of what estate or degree they be) that shall see and read in this said book and work, that they take the good and honest acts to their remembrance, and follow the same. . . . For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin. Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown.

Source: Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur* (London: 1485), (text and spelling slightly modernized).



From the conclusion of Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* (completed 1513, printed 1533)

Relecting on the matters set forth above and considering within myself where the times were propitious in Italy at present to honor a new prince and whether there is at hand the matter suitable for a prudent and virtuous leader to mold in a new form, giving honor to himself and benefit to the citizens of the country, I have arrived at the opinion that all circumstances now favor such a prince, and I cannot think of a time more propitious for him than the present. If, as I said, it was necessary in order to make apparent the virtue of Moses, that the people of Israel should be enslaved in Egypt, and that the Persians should be oppressed by the Medes to provide an opportunity to illustrate the greatness and the spirit of Cyrus, and that the Athenians should be scattered in order to show the excellence of Theseus, thus at the present time, in order to reveal the valor of an Italian spirit, it was essential that Italy should fall to her present low estate, more enslaved than the Hebrews, more servile than the Persians, more disunited than the Athenians, leaderless and lawless, beaten, despoiled, lacerated, overrun and crushed under every kind of misfortune. . . . So Italy now, left almost lifeless, awaits the coming of one who will heal her wounds, putting an end to the

sacking and looting in Lombardy and the spoliation and extortions in the Realm of Naples and Tuscany, and cleanse her sores that have been so long festering. Behold how she prays God to send her someone to redeem her from the cruelty and insolence of the barbarians. See how she is ready and willing to follow any banner so long as there be someone to take it up. Nor has she at present any hope of finding her redeemer save only in your illustrious house [the Medici] which has been so highly exalted both by its own merits and by fortune and which has been favored by God and the church, of which it is now ruler. . . .

This opportunity, therefore, should not be allowed to pass, and Italy, after such a long wait, must be allowed to behold her redeemer. I cannot describe the joy with which he will be received in all these provinces which have suffered so much from the foreign deluge, nor with what thirst for vengeance, nor with what firm devotion, what solemn delight, what tears! What gates could be closed to him, what people could deny him obedience, what envy could withstand him, what Italian could withhold allegiance from him? THIS BARBARIAN OCCUPATION STINKS IN THE NOSTRILS OF ALL OF US. Let your illustrious house then take up this

cause with the spirit and the hope with which one undertakes a truly just enterprise. . . .

Source: Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. and trans. Thomas G. Bergin (Arlington Heights, IL: 1947), pp. 75–76, 78.

Questions for Analysis

1. What do these two sources reveal about the relationship between patriotism and the awareness of a nation's past? Why do you think that Caxton looks back to a legendary medieval king, whereas Machiavelli's references are all to ancient examples? What do both excerpts reveal about the value placed on history in the popular imagination?
2. How does Caxton describe the process of printing a book? What larger conclusions can we draw from this about the market for printed books in general?
3. Why might Machiavelli's treatise have been made available in a printed version, nearly twenty years after its original appearance in manuscript? How might his new audience have responded to its message?

invading armies into the peninsula while they competed for the allegiance of the various city-states, which were torn by internal dissension.

In 1498, Machiavelli became a prominent official in the government of a new Florentine republic, set up when a French invasion had led to the expulsion of the ruling Medici family. His duties largely involved diplomatic missions to other city-states. While in Rome, he became fascinated with the attempt of Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alexander VI, to create his own principality in central Italy. He noted Cesare's ruthlessness and his complete subordination of personal ethics to political

ends. He remembered this example in 1512, when the Medici returned to overthrow the Florentine republic and Machiavelli was imprisoned, tortured, and exiled. He now devoted his energies to the articulation of a political philosophy suited to the times and to the family that had ousted him.

On the surface, Machiavelli's two great works of political analysis appear to contradict each other. In his *Discourses on Livy*, which drew on the works of that Roman historian (see Chapter 5), he praised the ancient Roman Republic as a model for his own time. There is little doubt that Machiavelli was a committed believer in the free city-

state as the ideal form of human government. But Machiavelli also wrote *The Prince*, "a handbook for tyrants" in the eyes of his critics, and he dedicated this work to Lorenzo, son of Piero de' Medici, his old enemy.

Because *The Prince* has been so much more widely read than *Discourses*, it has often been interpreted as an endorsement of power for its own sake. Machiavelli's real position was quite different. In the political chaos of early-sixteenth-century Italy, he saw the likes of Cesare Borgia as the only hope for making Italy fit, eventually, for independence. Machiavelli never ceased to hope that his contemporaries would rise up, expel the French and Spanish occupying forces, and restore ancient traditions of liberty and equality. He regarded a period of despotism as a necessary step toward that end.

Yet Machiavelli continues to be a controversial figure. Some modern scholars represent him as amoral, interested solely in power. Others see him as an Italian patriot. Still others see him as a realist influenced by Saint Augustine (see Chapter 6), who understood that a ruler's good intentions do not guarantee good policies or results. Machiavelli argued that "the necessity of preserving the state will often compel a prince to take actions which are opposed to loyalty, charity, humanity, and religion." As we shall see in later chapters, many subsequent political philosophers would go even further: arguing that the preservation of the



THE STATES OF ITALY, c. 1494. This map shows the divisions of Italy on the eve of the French invasion in 1494. Contemporary observers often described Italy as being divided among five great powers: Milan, Venice, Florence, the Papal States, and the united Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily. ■ Which of these powers would have been most capable of expanding their territories? ■ Which neighboring states would have been most threatened by such attempts at expansion? ■ Why would Florence and the Papal States so often find themselves in conflict with each other?

state does indeed warrant the exercise of absolute power (see Chapters 14 and 15).

The Ideal of the Courtier

Machiavelli's political theories were informed by years of diplomatic service, and so was his engaging literary style. Indeed, he never abandoned his interest in the literary arts of the court and continued to write poems, plays, and adaptations of classical comedies. In this he resembled another poet-courtier, Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533), who undertook diplomatic missions for the Duke of Ferrara and some of Rome's most powerful prelates. His lengthy verse narrative, *Orlando Furioso* ("The Madness of Roland"), was a comic retelling of the heroic exploits celebrated in the French *Song of Roland* (see Chapter 8)—but without the heroism. Although very different in form and tone from *The Prince*, it shared that work's skepticism of chivalric ideals. Instead, it sought to charm an audience that worshiped pleasure and beauty.

Thus a new Renaissance ideal was born, one that promoted the arts of pleasing the powerful princes who employed clever men like Machiavelli and Ariosto: the ideal of the courtier. This ideal was embodied by their contemporary, the diplomat and nobleman Baldassare Castiglione (kah-stee-lee-OH-nay, 1478–1529), who wrote a manual for those who wished to acquire these skills. If *The Prince* was a forerunner of modern self-help books, *The Book of the Courtier* was an early handbook of etiquette; and both stand in sharp contrast to the treatises on public virtue composed in the previous century, which taught the sober virtues of strenuous service on behalf of the city-state. Instead, Castiglione taught how to attain the elegant and seemingly effortless skills necessary for personal advancement.

Castiglione articulated and popularized the set of talents still associated with the "Renaissance man": accomplished, witty, cultured, and stylish. But in many ways, this new ideal actually represents a rejection of the older ideals associated with the rebirth of classical education for public men. Castiglione even rejected the misogyny of the humanists by stressing the ways in which ladies could rise to influence and prominence. Widely read throughout Europe, his *Courtier* set the standard for polite behavior until the early twentieth century.

The Dilemma of the Artist

Without question, the most enduring legacy of the Italian Renaissance has been the contributions of its artists. We

have already noted (Chapter 11) the creative and economic opportunities afforded by painting on canvas or wood, which freed artists from having to work on site and on commission: such paintings are portable and can be displayed in different settings and reach different markets. We also saw that the use of oil paints, pioneered in Flanders, further revolutionized painting styles. To these benefits, the artists of Italy added an important technical ingredient: mastery of a vanishing (one-point) perspective that gave painting an illusion of three-dimensional space. They also experimented with effects of light and shade, and studied intently the anatomy and proportions of the human body. These techniques also influenced sculptors.

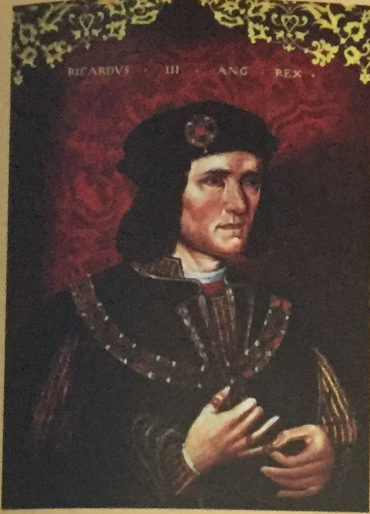
Behind all of the beautiful artworks created in this era—which led to the glorification of the artist as a new type of hero—lie the harsh political and economic realities within which these artists worked. Increasing private wealth and the growth of lay patronage opened up new markets and created a huge demand for buildings and objects that could increase the prestige of ambitious men. Portraiture was a direct result of this trend, since princes and merchants alike sought to glorify themselves and their families, and to compete with their neighbors and rivals.



THE IMPACT OF PERSPECTIVE. Masaccio's painting *The Trinity with the Virgin* illustrates the startling sense of depth made possible by observing the rules of one-point perspective.

Past and Present

The Reputation of Richard III



England's king Richard III (r. 1483–1485) has been a byword for villainy since the time of his death, when Sir Thomas More and other propagandists working for his successor, Henry VII, alleged that his physically deformed body was matched by the depravity of his actions. For centuries, historians have debated the truth of these claims. Was Richard really a hunchback—and a murderer, too? In 2012, the stunning discovery of Richard's body (under a parking lot near the medieval battlefield where he died) confirmed that he had indeed suffered from severe scoliosis. The other claim has yet to be proven.

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Before the turn of the sixteenth century, northern rulers were also less committed to patronizing artists and intellectuals than were the city-states and princes of Italy. In Italy, as we have seen, such patronage was an important arena for competition between political rivals. In northern Europe, however, political units were larger and political rivals were fewer. It was therefore less necessary to use art for political purposes—a major exception being the independent duchy of Burgundy, which surpassed even the French court in its magnificence. A statue erected in a central square of Florence would be seen by all the city's residents and visitors. In Paris, such a statue would be seen by only a tiny minority of the French king's subjects. But as royal courts became showcases for royal power, kings needed to impress townspeople, courtiers, and guests—and they consequently

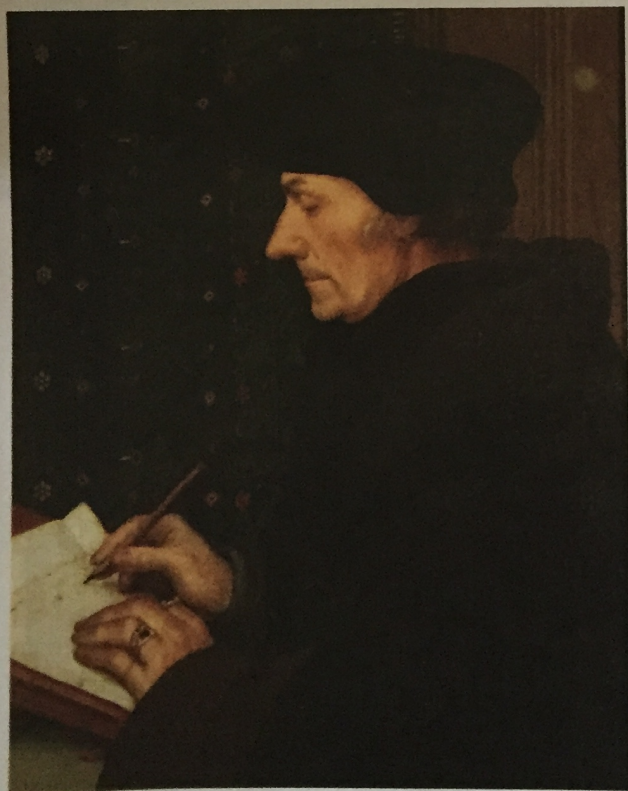
relied more on artists and intellectuals to advertise their wealth and taste.

Christian Humanism and the Career of Erasmus

In general, then, the Renaissance movement of northern Europe differed from that of Italy because it grafted certain Italian ideals onto preexisting traditions, rather than sweeping away older forms of knowledge. This can be seen very clearly in the case of the intellectual development known as Christian humanism. Although Christian humanists shared the Italian humanists' scorn for scholasticism's limitations, northern humanists were more committed to

seeking ethical guidance from biblical and religious precepts, as well as from Cicero or Virgil. Like their Italian counterparts, they embraced the wisdom of antiquity, but the antiquity they favored was Christian as well as classical—the antiquity of the New Testament and the early Church. Similarly, northern artists were inspired by the accomplishments of Italian masters and copied their techniques, but they depicted classical subjects less frequently and almost never portrayed completely nude human figures.

Any discussion of Christian humanism must begin with the career of Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1469–1536). The illegitimate son of a priest, Erasmus was born near Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Forced into a monastery against his will when he was a teenager, the young Erasmus found little formal instruction there—but plenty of freedom to read what he liked. He devoured all the classics he could get his hands on, alongside the writings of the church fathers (see Chapter 6). When he was about thirty years old, he obtained permission to leave the monastery and enroll in the University of Paris, where he completed the requirements for a bachelor's degree in theology.



ERASMUS BY HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER. This is generally regarded as the most evocative portrait of the preeminent Christian humanist.

But Erasmus subsequently rebelled against what he considered the arid learning of Parisian academe. Nor did he ever serve actively as a priest. Instead, he made his living from teaching and writing. Ever on the lookout for new patrons, he traveled often to England, stayed for three years in Italy, and resided in several different cities in Germany and the Low Countries before settling finally, toward the end of his life, in Basel (Switzerland). By means of a voluminous correspondence with learned friends, Erasmus became the leader of a humanist coterie.

As a Latin prose stylist, Erasmus was unequaled since the days of Cicero. Extraordinarily eloquent and witty, he reveled in tailoring his mode of discourse to fit his subject, creating dazzling verbal effects and coining puns that took on added meaning if the reader knew Greek as well as Latin. Above all, Erasmus excelled in the deft use of irony, poking fun at everything, including himself. But although Erasmus's urbane Latin style and humor earned him a wide audience on those grounds alone, he intended everything he wrote to promote what he called the "philosophy of Christ." Accordingly, he offered his contemporaries three different kinds of writings: clever satires in which people could recognize their own foibles, serious moral treatises meant to offer guidance toward proper Christian behavior, and scholarly editions of basic Christian texts.

In the first category belong the works of Erasmus that are still widely read today: *The Praise of Folly* (1509), in which he ridiculed pedantry and dogmatism, ignorance and gullibility—even within the Church; and the *Colloquies* (1518), in which he held up contemporary religious practices for examination, couching a serious message in a playful tone. In these books, Erasmus let fictional characters do the talking so his own views on any given topic can only be determined by inference. But in his second mode, Erasmus spoke clearly in his own voice. In the *Handbook of the Christian Knight* (1503), he used the popular language of chivalry as a means to encourage a life of inward piety; in the *Complaint of Peace* (1517), he argued movingly for Christian pacifism. Erasmus's pacifism was one of his most deeply held values, and he returned to it again and again in his published works.

But Erasmus considered textual scholarship his greatest achievement. Revering the authority of the earliest church fathers, he brought out reliable printed editions of works by Saints Augustine, Jerome, and Ambrose (see Chapter 6). He also used his extraordinary command of Latin and Greek to produce a more accurate edition of the New Testament. Erasmus became convinced that nothing was more imperative than divesting the Christian scriptures of myriad errors in transcription and translation that had piled up over the

course of preceding centuries. He therefore spent ten years comparing all the early Greek biblical manuscripts he could find in order to establish an authoritative text. When it finally appeared in 1516, Erasmus's Greek New Testament, published together with explanatory notes and his own new Latin translation, became one of the most important scholarly landmarks of all time.

The Influence of Erasmus

One of Erasmus's closest friends was the Englishman Sir Thomas More (1478–1535). In later life, following a successful career as a lawyer and politician, More was appointed lord chancellor of England in 1529. He was not long in this position, however, before he opposed King Henry VIII's plan to establish a national church under royal control that would deny the supremacy of the pope; see Chapter 13. Much earlier, however, in 1516, More published his most famous book, *Utopia* ("No Place").

Purporting to describe an ideal community on an imaginary island, *Utopia* is really an Erasmian critique of its own time: disparities between poverty and wealth, heresy, and war's senseless slaughter. In contrast to Europeans, the inhabitants of the fictional Utopia hold all their goods in common, work only six hours a day (so that all may have leisure for intellectual pursuits), and practice the virtues of moderation, fortitude, and justice.

Erasmus and More head a long list of energetic and eloquent northern humanists who made signal contributions to the collective enterprise of revolutionizing the study of early Christianity, and their achievements had a direct influence on Protestant reformers—as we shall see in the next chapter. Yet very few of them were willing to join Luther and other Protestant leaders in rejecting the fundamental principles on which the power of the Roman Church was based. Most tried to remain within its fold while espousing an ideal of inward piety and scholarly inquiry. But as the leaders of the Church grew less and less tolerant, even mild criticism came to seem like heresy. Erasmus himself died early enough to escape persecution, but several of his followers did not.

The Literature of the Northern Renaissance

Although Christian humanism would be severely challenged by the Reformation, the artistic Renaissance in the

north would flourish. Poets in France and England vied with one another to adapt the elegant lyric forms pioneered by Petrarch (Chapter 11) and popularized by many subsequent poets, including Michelangelo. The sonnet was particularly influential and would become one of the verse forms embraced by William Shakespeare (1554–1616; see chapter 14). Another English poet, Edmund Spenser (c. 1552–1599), drew on the literary innovation of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*; his *Faerie Queene* is a similarly long chivalric romance that revels in sensuous imagery. Meanwhile, the more satirical side of Renaissance humanism was embraced by the French writer François Rabelais (RAH-beh-lay, c. 1494–1553).

Like Erasmus, whom he greatly admired, Rabelais began his career in the Church; but he soon left the cloister to study medicine. A practicing physician, Rabelais interspersed his professional activities with literary endeavors, the most enduring of which are the twin books *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, a series of "chronicles" describing the lives and times of giants whose fabulous size and gross appetites serve as vehicles for much lusty humor. Also like Erasmus, Rabelais satirized religious hypocrisy, scholasticism, superstition, and bigotry. But unlike Erasmus, who wrote in a highly cultivated classical Latin style, Rabelais chose to address a different audience by writing in extremely crude French and by glorifying every human appetite as natural and healthy.

Northern Architecture and Art

Although many architects in northern Europe continued to build in the flamboyant Gothic style of the later Middle Ages, the classical values of Italian architects can be seen in some of the splendid new castles constructed in France's Loire valley—*châteaux* too elegant to be defensible—and in the royal palace (now museum) of the Louvre in Paris, which replaced an old twelfth-century fortress. The influence of Renaissance ideals are also visible in the work of the German artist Albrecht Dürer (DIRR-er, 1471–1528). Dürer was the first northerner to master the techniques of proportion and perspective, and he shared with contemporary Italians a fascination with nature and the human body. He also took advantage of the printing press to circulate his work to a wide audience, making his delicate pencil drawings into engravings that could be mass produced.

But Dürer never really embraced classical subjects, drawing inspiration instead from more-traditional Christian legends and from the Christian humanism of