Renaissance

European Society in the Age of the Renaissance
Beginnings of the Renaissance

- Indefinite beginning, preceded by greatly increased wealth in Mediterranean city-states
- Spice trade with Arabs brought riches to Northern Italian states
Sources of Wealth

• Genoa – spice trade, powerful navy
• Milan – ancient powerful city, enriched by Sforza family; patrons of the arts
• Florence – banking trade, enriched by Medici family; patrons of the arts
• Venice – powerful navy, wealthiest city in Italy; oligarchic republic; connection to W. Europe for Eastern trade
• Rome – seat of papacy, ruled by powerful patrician families; popes came from Rovere, Medici, Borgia families
Italian Politics

• Aristocracy: from Gk. “rule by the best”
• Duchy: area ruled by a duke
• Kingdom: area ruled by a king
• Oligarchy: from Gk. “rule of the few”
• Patrician: elite upper class member
• Popolo: “the people”
• Republic: from L. “res Publica”, the public thing; not a democracy
Wars

• Italian city-states were constantly at war with one another.
  – This includes the Papal States who fought to maintain and expand their territories
• Often wars were fought under duplicitous circumstances
  – Tradition of having embassies started to prevent future wars
• Balance of power sought
• Some Italian thinkers wrote to support their princes
  – Patron: supporter of causes
Machiavelli

- Wrote in post-Savonarola Florence
- *The Prince*
  - Most famous work
  - Described the need of the prince to “gain and maintain power”
  - “It is better to be feared than loved”
  - Tribute to Medici or Borgia?
- Read selection from Western Civilization Reader
• Move away from medieval scholasticism
• Rediscovery of ancient Greek and Latin texts
  – Petrarch and Boccaccio
• Opens door for study of liberal arts and humanities
Individualism

• In stark contrast to medieval thinking, emphasis on the power and ability of the individual emerges

• “Man is the measure of all things” - Pythagoras

• Art becomes a means of glorifying one’s self instead of a means to glorify God
Humanism

• Rooted in *humanitas*, the study of literature in order to be considered educated

• Sought to understand human nature and the uniqueness of man

• Differs from Secular Humanism in that it emphasizes that man is created in the image of God and is highly capable
Liberal Arts

- Grammar
- Rhetoric
- Dialectic
- Music
- Arithmetic
- Geometry
- Astronomy
Secularism

• Increasingly less concern with the next world, more with the current one
• Rising prosperity brought more comforts and decreased desire for comforts of heaven
• Even church leaders became more like wealthy aristocrats than holy men
Renaissance Art

- New status of the artist: “Artist as genius”
- Patrons wanted to flaunt wealth
- New aesthetic based in classical art, beauty of the human form and perfect proportions
Notable Artists

• Brunelleschi: dome of Florence cathedral
• Used new learning to craft enormous dome built without buttresses or external supports
Notable artists

• Ghiberti: cast door panels from single piece of bronze
• Used for Baptistry doors at Florence cathedral
• See detail →
Notable artists

• Leonardo da Vinci
  – True Renaissance man
  – Sculptor, poet, painter, architect, designer
  – Few finished works
Notable artists

- Michelangelo: thought of himself as sculptor
- Heavily contracted by Medicis, works found in Florence and Rome
- Also painted, designed some edifices
Notable artists

- Raphael: learned from Michelangelo and Leonardo
- Died young, highly popular artist in Rome
Status of the Artist

- How were artists regarded by their contemporaries?
- How did the Renaissance culture influence the perception of artists?
Education

• Leveling feature – gave greater access to those with knowledge

• Educated women were more desirable wives

• *The Book of the Courtier* - Castiglione
Printing

- Advent of printing press in Europe transformed scholarship
- Portability of written word
- Literacy rates rose with availability of new printed matter
Cultural Changes

- Mechanical clocks more closely regulated working hours
- Sign of prosperous city to have a clock
- Women begin working outside the home; lower class women’s status rose somewhat; upper class women’s status became more family-focused
Slave Trade

• Nature of European slavery
• From whence originated the term “slave”?
• Why did Genoa and Venice dominate the slave trade?
• Why were African slaves in demand?
Northern Renaissance

- Christian humanism
  - Erasmus of Rotterdam, *In Praise of Folly*
  - Thomas More, *Utopia*
  - Rabelais, *Gargantua*
  - Education key to human improvement – knowledge of classical languages key
Northern Renaissance Art

• Stronger Christian themes
  – Realistic scenes; use of oil based paints more widespread
  – More sympathetic to those of lesser fortune
Notable Artists

• Jan van Eyck
  – Flemish (from Flanders)
  – Note imagery and level of detail used
“New Monarchs”

• Renaissance political ideals shaped statecraft
  – Monarchs begin crafting powerful monarchies, stripping power away from landed nobility, sharing it with the rising middle class
  – Linked monarchy to idea of national identity
Politics - France

- Gradually strengthens under Charles VII and his progeny
  - New taxes (Gabelle, taille)
  - Pragmatic Sanction
    - Gave king authority to appoint bishops, keeping church revenues in France
  - Son Louis XI (the Spider King)
    - Expanded French territory at expense of neighbors
    - Scheming to enhance the power of the monarchy
  - Concordat of Bologna
    - Rescinded Pragmatic Sanction; but kept appointive power with French Monarch
Politics - England

• War of the Roses (Lancaster versus York);
  – Resolved with accession of Henry VII Tudor
  – Parliament circumvented the enhancement of royal power, or tried to do so

• Legal experts of lower landowning class become trusted advisors – Court of the Star Chamber

• What is a justice of the peace?
Compare
Politics - Spain

- A complex state: held together by dynastic ties; forged by marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella (Los Reyes Católicos)
- Castile and Leon, Aragon, Navarre, and Granada came together
- 1492 marked conclusion of Reconquista
  - What are the hermandades?
  - What was the threat of conversos?
    - Desire for Catholic Spain
    - Burgeoning nationalism
    - Advent of Spanish Inquisition
    - Conflation of race and religion
    - “Limpieza de sangre” and “Sangre azul”
Granada
La Política Exterior de los Reyes Católicos incluía un proyecto de alianzas selladas por los matrimonios de sus hijos.