

THE RENAISSANCE AND THE AGE OF EXPLORATION

AP® European History Unit 1



THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE



The Renaissance (or “rebirth”) was inspired by a revival of interest in classical texts from ancient Greece and Rome and a shift toward a more secular and individualistic way of thinking. Renaissance education was defined by **humanism**, which emphasized the study of classical history and literature as the foundation for education. Increased trade and advancements in banking and bookkeeping created wealth and new commercial elites, such as the Medici, became patrons of the great Renaissance artists.

Francesco Petrarca, known as **Petrarch**, was a fourteenth-century Italian poet who developed an interest in classical text from ancient Rome. He journeyed through Italy in search of lost classical texts and was able to recover many of the writings of the ancient Roman philosopher Cicero. Petrarch is known as the “Father of Humanism” for his role in reviving scholarly interest in classical studies.

THE NORTHERN RENAISSANCE

Following the invention of the printing press, interest in humanistic studies spread to Northern Europe. Northern Renaissance writers, such as Erasmus and Thomas More, began producing their own printed works inspired by classical authors. Northern Renaissance writers were heavily influenced by **Christian humanism**, producing works that were more focused on Christian principles and social reform than Italian Renaissance authors, who were more individualistic and secular in their approach.



Erasmus of Rotterdam, a Dutch humanist scholar, was one of the best-known proponents of Christian humanism. In his *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus used the Gospels to criticize some Catholic practices, such as the wealth of the bishops. In this way, Erasmus used a classical text in order to advocate for social reform.

NEW MONARCHIES

During the Middle Ages, monarchs were not very powerful and often had to defer to the power of the Church and the nobility. In the fifteenth century, monarchs in England, France, and Spain began to centralize power by collecting taxes directly and exercising more influence on the religious life of their subjects. These **new monarchs** set the stage for absolute monarchies that ruled much of Europe two centuries later.



The marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella unified the Christian kingdoms of Aragon and Castile in Spain. In 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella completed the Spanish Reconquista when they conquered Granada, the last Muslim kingdom in Spain. They financed the war partly through a “crusade tax,” which brought more money into the royal treasury. After conquering Granada, the “Catholic monarchs” proclaimed that all of their subjects would be Catholic and that Muslims and Jews would be expelled from the country if they refused to convert.

RENAISSANCE ART



Renaissance art imitated ancient art by focusing on naturalistic portrayals of human subjects. These paintings emphasized balance, bright colors, and linear perspective, which gave the art a three-dimensional appearance. This painting is Raphael's famous *The School of Athens*, and it depicts the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle in the center of a congregation of philosophers from classical antiquity.

THE AGE OF EXPLORATION

In the fifteenth century, new navigational technologies made it possible for Europeans to sail beyond the Mediterranean Sea and the coastline of Europe. After the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, European monarchs desired to find an all water trade route to Asia. The Portuguese sought to sail east around Africa, while Ferdinand and Isabella financed Christopher Columbus' voyage to find a westerly route to the Indies. Upon discovering the New World, Europeans conquered native populations using new weapons technologies, such as firearms.

The **Columbian Exchange** is the most important legacy of the Age of Exploration. The voyages of Columbus began a permanent exchange of people, goods, food, animals, ideas, and diseases between the Old and New Worlds. A lack of immunity to European diseases had a devastating effect on native populations, which in turn fueled the growth of the African **slave trade**.



With the money from centralized tax collection, the new monarchs financed voyages of exploration.

CAUSATION

The voyages of exploration generated wealth, which empowered the new monarchs.

TIMELINE:

1341

Petrarch is crowned as poet laureate in Rome in recognition for writing *Africa*, an epic poem about the Roman general Scipio Africanus.

1450

A vernacular German poem is printed on Johannes Gutenberg's printing press.

1453

The Byzantine capital of Constantinople falls to the Ottoman Turks, impacting trade routes and leading Greek scholars to flee to Italy with classical texts.

1492

The Kingdom of Granada falls to Spanish forces, completing the Spanish Reconquista. In the same year, Ferdinand and Isabella expelled Muslims and Jews from their kingdom and commissioned Columbus' first voyage.

1511

The Praise of Folly, Erasmus' popular satirical essay, is printed for the first time.