

Renaissance

The School of Athens by [Raphael](#). This Renaissance painting shows an imaginary scene from Ancient Greece, with Greek philosophers, writers, artists, and mathematicians. Raphael used the faces of people from his own time. [Leonardo da Vinci](#) was his model for [Plato](#), the philosopher with the white beard in the center.

The Renaissance is a period in European history that followed the [Middle Ages](#) and ended in the [17th century](#). "Renaissance" is a [French](#) word for "cultural rebirth." During this period, there was a "rebirth" of [classical learning](#). People started relearning the teachings of scholars from [Ancient Greece](#), [Rome](#), and other [ancient](#) societies. The Renaissance is often said to be the start of the "[modern age](#)"

During the Renaissance, there were many advances in [art](#), [literature](#), the [sciences](#), [mathematics](#), and [culture](#). Many famous [artists](#), [writers](#), [philosophers](#), and [scientists](#) lived during this period. A person who is clever at a great number of things is sometimes called a "[Renaissance man](#)". The most famous Renaissance man is [Leonardo da Vinci](#), who was a [painter](#), a scientist, a [musician](#) and a philosopher.

The Renaissance started in [Italy](#), but soon spread across the whole of Europe. In Italy, the period is divided into three parts:

- the [Early Renaissance](#)
- the [High Renaissance](#)
- the [Late Renaissance Archived](#) 2016-04-20 at the [Wayback Machine](#) ^[1] (*also called the Mannerist period*)

Following the *Mannerist* period was the [Baroque](#) period, which also spread across Europe starting around 1600. Outside Italy, it can be hard to tell where the *Renaissance* period ends and the *Baroque* begins.

Causes of the Renaissance

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Printers at work in 1520

Reading and Printing

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In the Middle Ages, most artistic, [legal](#), and historical production took place in and around books. [Monasteries](#), [churches](#), [universities](#), and people who could afford them produced and owned books. Books were produced entirely by hand, which is why they were called manuscripts; [illuminated manuscripts](#) include hand-colored, drawn, and gilded pictures.

Most books at that time were written in [Latin](#), [Greek](#), and Roman, which was used in the [Catholic Church](#). Only [priests](#) and well-educated people read Latin then. People were forbidden by [law](#) from translating the [Bible](#) into [Italian](#), [English](#), [German](#), French, or other "local" [languages](#).

Around 1440 the first printed books were made in Europe. The [printing press](#) made it possible to print copies of large books like the [Bible](#) and sell them cheaply. It took 300 calf skins or 100 pig skins to print the Bible. [Printers](#) soon began to print everything that they thought was interesting: Ancient Greek and Roman [writings](#), [poetry](#), and [plays](#); stories about the lives of the [saints](#); [mathematics textbooks](#); [medical](#) textbooks; Christian [stories](#); [erotic stories](#); books about animals and [monsters](#); [maps](#) of the world; and [advice](#) to [princes](#) about how to rule their people.

Before the invention of the printing press, [knowledge](#) had belonged to priests, monasteries and universities. Suddenly many thousands of people, even [merchants](#), could learn far more than they ever could before.

The mixture of architecture in Rome. At the back is the huge wall of the ancient gladiator arena, the [Colosseum](#). Near it is a church tower from about 1100 in the [Middle Ages](#). The white front of the church of St. Francesca is from the 1600s. The columns and broken walls are all from Ancient Roman buildings. The circular building to the left is now a church but was an ancient temple.

Ancient Roman things

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From about 400 B.C. to about 400 AD, Europe experienced a [Golden Age](#). In Ancient Greece and Rome, there were many philosophers, writers, [painters](#), [sculptors](#), [architects](#) and [mathematicians](#). Things were beautiful, well-organized and well-run.

However, by the year 1400, the [city](#) of [Rome](#) was in [ruins](#). Inside the broken [walls](#) that had been smashed in 410 AD were the remains of huge [temples](#), [sports arenas](#), [public baths](#), [apartment](#) blocks and [palaces](#). Nearly all of them were half-buried and ruined, so they could not be used. Many were pulled down to use as building [stone](#).

Among the ruins of this once-great city, the people of Rome lived in [cottages](#). They still went to church in the huge churches ([basilicas](#)) built by the first Christian [Emperor](#), [Constantine the Great](#), in the [4th century](#). They still held market day in the Ancient Roman [market place](#) of *Campo dei Fiori* ("Field of Flowers").

In 1402, [Filippo Brunelleschi](#) and a teenage [Donatello](#) came to Rome. They were probably the world's first [archaeologists](#). They were fascinated by everything that they saw. They measured ancient ruined buildings, drew things, and dug around for weeks looking for bits of broken [statues](#) and painted [pottery](#) that they could put back together. By the time they went back home to [Florence](#), they knew more about Ancient Roman [architecture](#) and [sculpture](#) than anyone had known for about a thousand years.

Brunelleschi became a very famous [architect](#) and Donatello became a very famous [sculptor](#).

Cash and politics

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The city of Florence. Apart from the dome at San Lorenzo's in the centre of the picture, this view has not changed very much since the 1400s.

The *Renaissance* really began in the city of [Florence](#). In those days, Italy was not one single [country](#). It was made of many little [states](#), all governed in different ways. These states were constantly making [alliances](#) and fighting with each other.

Rome was [politically](#) powerful, because Rome had the [Pope](#), the person in control of the [Roman Catholic Church](#). Because of his very great importance as a spiritual [leader](#), most people and most cities did not want to argue with any pope. After a pope died, a new pope was elected. Everyone who was rich and powerful hoped a member of their family would be chosen. It was always a good idea to have several young men in the family trained as [priests](#), just in case. It also helped to be good friends with other rich families. One way to do this was to have lots of daughters and get them to marry rich powerful men from different cities. This was the way that politics worked.

There were other powerful cities in Italy too. [Venice](#) had a large and powerful [navy](#). [Milan](#) controlled [trade](#) with [Northern Europe](#) and was very rich. [Genoa](#) was also very rich, because it controlled trade with [France](#) and [Spain](#). Florence, where many people say the Renaissance started, was another important city.

Florence's strength did not come from a strong [army](#), a strong [fortress](#), or control over trade. It came from [banking](#). The [Medicis](#) were an important banking family. They helped to make Florence a powerful city and the centre of Renaissance learning.

List of important events of the Renaissance

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In art

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The Birth of Venus by Sandro [Botticelli](#)

The rebuilding of [St. Peter's Basilica](#) began in the Renaissance.

[Leonardo da Vinci](#)'s study of the human head

See the main article: [Renaissance art](#)

- 1401: Lorenzo [Ghiberti](#) wins a competition to create the Florence [Baptistry Doors](#). Over the next 21 years, he creates two famous [bronze](#) doors with [relief](#) sculptures showing religious scenes.
- 1420s: [Masaccio](#) and Masolino paint the [Brancacci Chapel](#) in Florence.
- 1440s: [Donatello](#) makes the statue of [Gattamelata on Horseback](#) in [Padua](#).
- 1470s: [Botticelli](#) paints the [Birth of Venus](#) in Florence.
- 1490s: [Leonardo da Vinci](#) paints [The Last Supper](#) and the [Mona Lisa](#) in [Milan](#).
- 1508-1512: [Michelangelo](#) paints the [Sistine Chapel Ceiling](#) in Rome.

In architecture

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See the main article: [Renaissance architecture](#)

- 1420: Workers begin to build [The Dome of Florence Cathedral](#), using [Brunelleschi](#)'s design.
- 1420s: [Brunelleschi](#) designs the church of [Church of San Lorenzo](#) in Florence.
- 1444: [Michelozzo](#) designs the [Medici-Riccardi Palace](#) for [Cosimo de' Medici](#).
- 1471: [Alberti](#) designs the [Church of Sant' Andrea](#) in [Mantua](#).
- 1506: Work begins on the new [St. Peter's Basilica](#) in [Rome](#).
- 1550: [Palladio](#) designs the [Villa Rotunda](#) near [Vicenza](#).

In science and technology

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- Early 1300s: The first [guns](#) are made.
- 1455: [Johannes Gutenberg](#) uses the printing press he invented to create the [first printed book](#) in Europe.
- Late 1400s: The [quadrant](#) was developed to help [sailors find their way](#) at sea.
- 1480s: [Leonardo da Vinci](#) studies human [anatomy](#).
- 1550s: [Peter Henlein](#) of [Nuremberg](#) makes the first [watches](#).
- 1608: [Hans Lippershey](#) of [Holland](#) makes the first [telescope](#).
- 1618, [William Harvey](#) discovered that the [heart](#) pumps [blood](#).

In thinking

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(See illustration above: Raphael's "School of Athens")

- Early 1300s: [Petrarch](#) publishes writings based on the works of [St. Augustine](#) and other classical writers.

- Mid 1400s: The [Humanist](#) Academy is created to discuss ancient writings and modern ideas. The Medici family [supports the academy financially](#).
- 1511: Desiderius [Erasmus](#) publishes *In Praise of Folly*, which [satirizes](#) the traditions of the [Catholic Church](#).
- 1532: [Machiavelli](#) publishes *The Prince* by [Machiavelli](#), which says that people who wish to have political power often do wicked things to get it.

A Gutenberg printed Bible

Dante painted by Domenico di Michelino, 1465

A map of the world by Abraham Ortelius, 1570

In religion

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- 1382: [John Wycliffe](#) first translates the [Bible](#) from Latin into English. This begins a movement to translate the Bible into many other European languages.
- 1454-1455: [Johannes Gutenberg](#) prints his famous [Bible](#). The [mass production](#) of Bibles begins.
- 1517: On the door of Wittenberg Castle, [Martin Luther](#) posts [The Ninety-Five Theses](#) (his ideas about problems in the Church). This is an important event in the [Reformation](#).
- 1534: [Henry VIII](#) splits the [Church of England](#) from the Roman Catholic Church
- 1545: [Pope Paul III](#) calls the [Council of Trent](#) so that Catholic leaders can meet and discuss the problems that the Reformation has caused for to the Catholic Church. This is the beginning of the [Counter Reformation](#).
- 1559: [John Calvin](#) starts the Geneva Theological Academy to teach people new (Reformation) ideas about Christian faith.

In writing

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- Early 1300s: [Dante Alighieri](#) writes *The Divine Comedy* in Italy.
- 1348: [Giovanni Boccaccio](#), an Italian, starts writing a collection of stories called *The Decameron*.
- 1477: [William Caxton](#) publishes *The Canterbury Tales*, which was written in the 1300s by [Geoffrey Chaucer](#). This is the first important book written in the English language.
- 1532 and 1534: [Francois Rabelais](#) writes *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua* in France.
- 1550: [Giorgio Vasari](#), an Italian, publishes "Lives of the Great Architects, Painters and Sculptors of Italy".
- 1590-1612: [William Shakespeare](#) writes his 37 plays in England.

- 1605 and 1616: [Miguel de Cervantes](#) publishes the tale of *[Don Quixote, Man of La Mancha](#)* in Spain.

In exploration

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- 1487-1488: [Bartholomeu Dias](#) sails down the [coast](#) of [Africa](#) to the [Cape of Good Hope](#).
- 1492: [Christopher Columbus](#) sails from Spain across the [Atlantic Ocean](#) to the [West Indies](#).
- 1497-1499: [Vasco da Gama](#) sails from Portugal to India by going around Africa.
- 1519-1522: [Ferdinand Magellan](#) leads an expedition to [sail around the world](#). The expedition is completed under the command of [Juan Sebastian del Cano](#).
- 1577-1580: Sir [Francis Drake](#) completes the second voyage around the world.

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- [List of Renaissance artists](#)
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