CHAPTER 12

The Renaissance in Italy and Northern Europe, 1350–1550

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. A New Climate of Cultural Expression
   A. The Spirit of Humanism
      1. The new spirit of humanism celebrated human potential rather than religion, signaling a period of rebirth, or Renaissance, especially of ancient learning.
      2. Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch, b. 1304) wrote poems and revived the style of the ancient Roman Cicero.
      3. Byzantine scholars fled the Ottomans, bringing new interest in the past; for example, Emmanuel Chrysoloras made Florence a new center of Greek learning.
      4. Patrons of humanists such as Lorenzo de’ Medici collected manuscripts and books and employed scholars to instruct their children and to converse with visitors.
   B. From Artisan to Artist
      1. In the early fourteenth century, Giotto was viewed as an artisan with exceptional talent.
      2. Religious and secular patrons hired artisan painters, sculptors, and architects to create devotional objects whose beauty was meant to remind viewers what they should believe or do.
      3. Artisans signed contracts with their patrons, which specified what images would be included, what pigment colors would be used, and when the project would be completed.
      4. By the end of the fifteenth century, skilled painters, sculptors, and architects went from being artisans limited by the patron’s directions to artists who were more independent, although temperamental, geniuses.
   C. Perspectives and Techniques
      1. By studying the art and architecture of ancient Rome, Filippo Brunelleschi developed perspectives and techniques that inspired Renaissance artists such as Masaccio and Bellini.
         a) One painting technique was linear perspective, the illusion of three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface by drawing lines converging on one vanishing point.
         b) Brunelleschi made architectural wonders such as the heavy octagonal dome on Florence’s cathedral (1436).
      2. Another spectacular genius was Leonardo da Vinci; in addition to painting, military engineering, and scholarship, he illegally dissected cadavers to depict human forms with detailed accuracy.
   D. The Pleasure of Things
      1. Cultural creativity applied to domestic architecture and spaces transformed the sparsely furnished Medieval home into furniture-filled Renaissance dwellings decorated with paintings, frescoes, and luxury goods.
2. Almost everyone could wear ornate, complex, and expensive clothes, to the annoyance of elites who passed sumptuary laws, prohibiting middle and low social status people from wearing rich fabrics and accessories.

II. The Northern European Renaissance
A. Northern European Art
1. The style of northern European art in Flanders developed differently than it did in Italy.
2. Italians used tempera, pigments mixed with egg yolks, on fresh wall plaster or wooden boards; Flemish painters, such as Jan van Eyck, used pigments mixed with linseed oil on a linen canvas, using techniques they derived from miniature manuscript illuminations.
3. To convey depth and perspective, Italian painters used linear perspective; the Flemish used gradations in color and the optical effect of painted light.
4. Italians used an architectural frame within the painting to separate the viewers from the subject, while Flemish painters placed their subjects in a setting that seemed to include the viewer.
5. Italian painting had a monumental, spare quality; paintings of Flanders looked cluttered and busy, with too many objects, which showed their obsession with the minutia of life. Although these objects also had symbolic meaning.

B. Northern Humanists
1. Northern humanists placed Christianity in history by doing patristics, textual analysis that questioned the accuracy of the translations of scripture and the writings of early church thinkers from Greek into Latin.
2. Erasmus found the Vulgate Bible contained errors in translation, and so published a corrected Greek version with an updated Latin translation and extensive notes (in 1516 and 1522), all without the authorization of the church, which feared that allowing laymen and women to read the Bible for themselves would lead to disorder and rebellion.
3. Jewish scholars also participated in the humanist study of texts, incorporating humanist principles into the study of Judaism and the Hebrew Bible.

C. Printing, a New Medium
1. The printing press made it possible to reproduce many identical copies of a work quickly for distribution.
2. In the 1440s, Gutenberg invented movable type, although the Chinese had developed a printing process centuries before.
3. The affordability of paper and the speed of printing on it brought about a revolution of ideas and beliefs in the sixteenth century.

III. The Cities of Renaissance Italy
A. The Medici of Florence
1. In Florence, the wealthy patrons Cosimo de’ Medici, banker to the pope, and his grandson Lorenzo “the Magnificent” gained power by granting business and political favors to less wealthy clients, who then voted according to their patron’s interests.
2. After Lorenzo’s death in 1492, the friar Girolamo Savonarola gained power in 1494. A small faction of families conspired with the papacy to try him for heresy and burned him at the stake in 1498, returning the Medici to power in 1512.

B. Maritime Republics
1. By the end of the fourteenth century, small hereditary groups of merchant families ruled the republics of Venice and Genoa.
2. Venice and Genoa competed economically and militarily for commercial dominance over sea trade in the Aegean Islands and the Black Sea.
3. After fighting sea battles in 1258, 1298, and 1350, Venice won the War of Chioggia in 1380 and emerged as the stronger power.
4. “The Most Serene Republic” of Venice, next to the shimmering sea, featured one hundred jewel-like tiny islands connected by bridges where one moved about either on foot or by gondola. Oligarchic rulers welcomed humanists and prostitutes.

C. Autocrats and Humanists
1. Humanists worked for autocrats, including former condottieri, soldiers acting as a police force and militia, who seized control as lords of cities.
2. The Medici family arrested and tortured Niccolò Machiavelli, who published *The Prince* (1532) in exile as an attempt to win back favor.
3. After the Visconti family died out, Francesco Sforza declared himself duke of Milan in 1450. His son Ludovico hired Leonardo da Vinci, who spent nearly two decades there, where he made a statue of Francesco and painted the fresco of the Last Supper in the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazia.

D. The Papal States and the Church
1. The Papal States suffered from corruption and the ambitions of neighbors until Julius II in 1509.
2. Pope Alexander VI made his son Cesare Borgia a cardinal in 1493 and let him conquer three principal regions in the Papal States: Emilia, Romagna, and Umbria.
3. The energetic Julius II not only funded Michelangelo’s ceiling in the Sistine Chapel, he also led his own troops to win back lands lost to Venice during the Avignon papacy.

IV. Renaissance Ideals in Transition, 1400–1550
A. The Court of Francis I
1. As a youth, French king Francis I was preoccupied with waging war, but while attempting unsuccessfully to conquer Italy, he became impressed with the culture of the Italian Renaissance.
2. He invited the finest painters, poets, musicians, and scholars to his court in Fontainebleau, including Leonardo da Vinci and Benvenuto Cellini.
3. Francis also took interest in the Christian humanists and their reform-minded critiques of the church.

B. England Before Its Renaissance
2. England was stricken by the Wars of the Roses (1455–1485) until the defeat of Richard III of York at Bosworth Field by the founder of the Tudor dynasty, Henry VII.

C. The Holy Roman Empire and Eastern Europe
1. The Holy Roman Empire and powers in eastern Europe transformed themselves.
2. The Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV (r. 1347–1378) issued a Golden Bull in 1356 for seven permanent electors to choose emperors, which added political stability but bred resentment.
3. The merchant Hanseatic League traded in the Baltic region, but a lack of centralization among its branches led to the decline of its hundred-odd cities.
4. Poland-Lithuania defeated the military order of Teutonic Knights, while Basil II (r. 1425–1462) and his son Ivan III transformed Moscow into the strongest power in the east.