The Growth of City-States

How Italy Became the Birthplace of the Renaissance
This is a late fifteenth-century map showing the city of Florence.
Renaissance - A French word meaning “rebirth” that referred to the revival of contemporary arts and letters that took place in the cities of northern Italy in the 1300s. In addition, scholars became interested in ancient Greek and Roman culture.
Notes:

The Growth of Italian City-States:

What was the Renaissance?:
  • Renaissance is a French word meaning “rebirth”
  • It refers to the revival of ancient knowledge in arts and learning
  • It is the period when scholars became interested in ancient Greek and Roman culture.

Why did the Renaissance start in Italy?
  • Italian scholars began to be interested in ancient writings
  • Trade with the East brought new ideas to Italy, then Europe.
Italian cities remained independent from feudal monarchs and lords and became city-states. Popes and the Holy Roman Emperors had been fighting wars for control in northern Italy unsuccessfully for so long that they exhausted their own funds and lost soldiers, thereby draining their own strength.
The Holy Roman Empire was named after the Roman Empire and was considered its continuation. This is based on a medieval concept and does not mean that the Empire's territory included the city of Rome. In 1512, the name was officially changed to the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.
City-states - Cities in Italy like Florence, Siena, Venice, and others that ruled their surrounding region. Each city-state carved out strong trade ties with Byzantine and Muslim merchants.
Milan: Artisans in Milan specialized in metal goods and armor.

Filippo Negroli
Helmet made for Emperor Charles V
Milan, 1533

Burgonet
Milan, ca. 1540-45
Florence's business specialty was a thriving cloth industry. Later, it became THE most important European banking and insurance center.
Venice:

Venice’s trade specialty was their huge network of warehouses and markets for trade with Asia (after all, Venice is on the Adriatic Sea).
Notes: Italian City-States:

Why were Italian city-states so rich and powerful?
• They had strong ties with Byzantine and Muslim merchants.
• Each city-state specialized in one commercial activity:
  ➢ Milan: metal goods and armor
  ➢ Florence: banking and textiles
  ➢ Venice: the importation of Asian goods
• European monarchs and nobles sought loans from merchants.
City-states were run by guild members who were selected by the citizens. They made decisions about security, trade, foreign policy, and city planning.

**Guild** - an association of merchants and artisans formed to maintain standards and protect mutual interests (like fair wages and prices).
A guild is an association of craftspeople who have banded together for the mutual protection of their professional interests. Guilds were often very important in local economies, maintaining product quality and industry standards. There could be, however, a negative side: guilds often sought to establish monopolies, which could allow them to control local governments, giving guild leaders an often inordinate amount of power that could be abused.
In all Italian city-states, leading merchant families vied for control of the city government. Sometimes the guild members were like puppets of these rich, powerful families. Selection of civic leaders was often shrouded in intrigue and death. Exile and assassination became a regular part of Italian politics.
The Borgia family was a group of talented men and women whose spectacular rise in Renaissance Italy aroused much envy and hatred in Italy.

Lucretia was the illegitimate daughter of Rodrigo Borgia. Her first marriage, at the age of 13, was to Giovanni Sforza, but it was annulled.
She was then married to Alfonso of Aragon. This husband was murdered by Cesare, her brother. Her third and last marriage was to the Duke of Ferra. These marriages were to form alliances with other rich Italian families. Lucretia’s father, Rodrigo, became Pope Alexander VI.
Lucretia Borgia was famous for throwing elaborate parties, at the end of which she would use her poison ring to kill her enemies. Some enemies of the family were the Medicis, Sforzas, Savonarolas and rulers outside the Italian Peninsula.

"Don't blame yourself, Lucrezia - Our society was just not ready for the Vindaloo curry."
Florence was the most influential of all Italian city-states. Florentine merchants used profits from the wool trade to purchase luxury items like silk, linen, spices, ivory, and porcelain, which were then sold across Europe for high profits.
Some Florentine merchants sold insurance to sea traders to protect their overseas investments. Many Florentine merchants used their profits to begin banks. Banking became the most profitable of Florentine businesses because of the low costs involved, and because the Florentine coin, the florin, became the most respected currency in Europe. It was the standard against which all other currency was weighed: “72 grains of gold”. 
Notes: The Growth of Italian City-States:

How did Florence become the most influential city-state?

- It maintained a thriving industry in the wool and silk trade.
- It purchased luxury items from the East and sold them for a large profit.
- The Florentine florin became the standard monetary unit, equal to “72 grains of gold”.
- Florentine bankers sold insurance to sea traders to protect their overseas investments.
- Merchants created numerous banks that made loans or exchanged currencies.
The most famous and richest Florentine merchant family was the Medici. They first grew wealthy buying and selling cloth and other goods. Eventually, they rose to prominence through banking, becoming the chief bankers for the pope.

Giovanni de Medici, founder of the Medici bank
Often, peace or war was determined by the will of one of the Medici; both Venice and Naples suffered military defeats after Cosimo Medici denied them loans from the Medici bank.
The Medici ruled Florence from behind the scenes for three generations, starting with Cosimo de Medici in 1434. During the 30 years he reigned, Cosimo had great sway over the council. The Medicis’ shrewd political tactics helped them maintain control, even against other wealthy families. When Cosimo died, his son Piero and later his grandson Lorenzo would fill the same role as unnamed RULER of the city-state.
Medici Chapel
Lorenzo Medici
1449 -1492

Lorenzo was an energetic and talented man. He was known as “Lorenzo the Magnificent.” He was the ideal of the well educated, cultured “Renaissance Man.” Lorenzo was a scholar, poet, composer, banker, philanthropist, patron of many arts, and a politician who was proud of Florence’s republican government.
Lorenzo gave money to the Church and threw lavish festivals to which the whole city, rich and poor alike, were invited.

*Lorenzo il Magnifico Admiring Michelangelo's Faun - a posthumous painting by Ottavio Vannini*
Each Medici leader encouraged the development of the arts, becoming important patrons of painters, sculptors (such as Michelangelo), architects, and scholars.

Patron: A person who gives financial or other support to a person, organization, cause, or activity.

Patronage: The support or encouragement of a patron.
Chief in that stellar group was Lorenzo the Magnificent, head of the famous banking family, the Medici, and unofficial head of the government of Florence. He was also an enthusiastic patron of scholars, artists, architects and musicians. When Michelangelo was a boy, Lorenzo recognized his genius, took him under his wings and supported him financially for four years, as a student of an art school set up by Lorenzo. Upon Lorenzo’s death, the art school was disbanded.
Two of Michelangelo’s work produced in Lorenzo’s art school: *Madonna of the Stairs* and *Battle of the Centaurs*
Tomb of Lorenzo de Medici

Sagrestia Nuova, San Lorenzo, Florence
By Michelangelo
Tomb of Lorenzo de Medici (detail)
Under the patronage of powerful families like the Medici, the Renaissance became a time of renewed interest in the scholarship, art, and architecture of classical Greece and Rome, and a revival of public life with republican governments.
Adoration of the Magi, by Botticelli, another artist supported by the Medicis. In this painting are portrayals of members of the Medici family.
Notes:

Growth of Italian City-States:

Who were the Medicis?
• The Medici family promoted trade, banking, the arts, scholarship, and civic pride.
• They became the unofficial rulers of Florence for three generations
• They displayed their wealth by becoming patrons to artists who created works with classical themes.