

# Renaissance History Synopsis

## Medici Family and Fall of Constantinople

### Pre-1400s to 1450

Before the 1400s, it was the work of St Francis of Assisi that inspired the earliest form of the Renaissance. St. Francis' emphasis on natural beauty impacted several individuals in the centuries preceding the 1400s: Giotto the painter, Dante the poet, and Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio who were writers.

Also, it is estimated that in 1378 Halley's Comet appeared.

During that time before the 1400s, humanism came into being. This was a movement based on several ideas including human nature should be the main study subject, all theologies and philosophies have a unity that ties them together, and humans possess innate dignity.

Due to the Black Death in Europe, the loss of population actually led to an improved economy, which enabled the wealthy to invest in the arts. It also enabled the wealthy class to engage in secular study.

One of the first people of note that comes on the scene in the pre-1400s is Francesco Petrarch. Called the father of the Renaissance, he was an Italian humanist and poet that died in 1374.

After that to the end of the century is when Florence became a center of the Renaissance. Specifically in 1396, a teacher by the name of Manuel Chrysoloras was invited to teach Greek in Florence and he brought with him a copy of Ptolemy's "Geography."

In 1397, Giovanni de Medici founded the Medici Bank in Florence. This established the Medici family as a wealthy art-loving family for centuries after that. They were known for poisoning their enemies!

Many other artists came from or flocked to Florence including architect Filippo Brunelleschi, sculptor Donatello who went to Rome where they studied ancient architecture and sculpture. They brought this study back with them to Florence and used their knowledge in their works.

An artist named Masaccio, considered the founder of Renaissance painting, created naturalistic compositions utilizing rational elements. Artists that came after Masaccio continued with both incorporating anatomy and an aerial perspective.

Around 1403, Leonardo Bruni offered his “Panegyric” to Florence. He described the city has a place for freedom of speech, for self government, and where equality reigned. In addition, Lorenzo Ghiberti received a commission to paint the baptistry doors of San Giovanni.

Rome also flourished starting in the early 15th century after the Papacy of the Catholic Church returned to Rome upon uniting. Art was commissioned for the city.

Other notable artists in Europe were Jan van Eyck and Leon Battista Alberti among others.

### **The Fall of Constantinople**

In 1453, Constantinople which is in what is now modern Turkey, fell to the Ottoman Empire. This forced many Europeans to flee. Some went to Florence where they shared works of antiquity. They shared Greek manuscripts and documents which fostered the Renaissance.

### **Other notable events from 1400–1453:**

1426: Masaccio painted The Pisa Polyptych

May 30, 1431: Joan of Arc burned at the stake

1446: Christopher Columbus born

1452: Ghiberti finishes the gates of paradise

1455: The War of the roses

1457/8: King Henry VII of England born

1483: The Sistine Chapel opened

## Discussion Questions:

What is humanism?

How did the Black Death foster an environment for the Renaissance?

Who were the major artists of that time period and what did they create?

How did the defeat of Constantinople contribute to the Renaissance?

Find out about the battle in 1453 by the Ottoman Empire.

## Sources:

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<https://www.italian-renaissance-art.com/Renaissance-Timeline.html>

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