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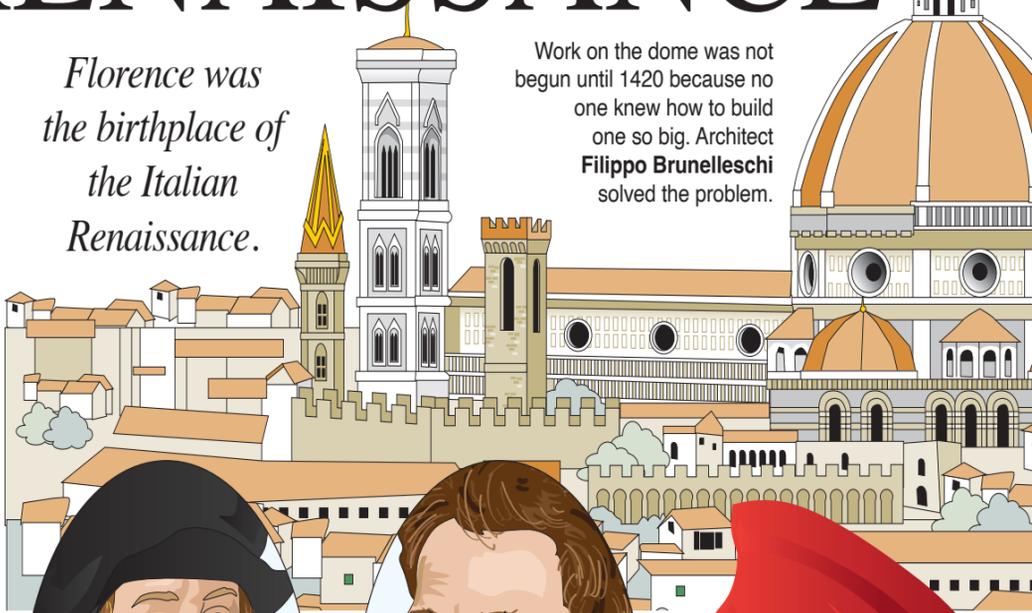
The dome of the **Santa Maria del Fiore** dominates the skyline of Florence. Begun in 1296, this cathedral kept eight generations of artists and craftsmen working.

# ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

In Italy, the 14th century marked the end of the Dark Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance. Scholars, scientists, leaders, writers, artists and inventors of the day turned away from the recent past and began to think in new ways. These people looked to the art and culture of ancient Greece and Rome for inspiration and created a movement that celebrated humanity and learning.

*Florence was the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance.*

Work on the dome was not begun until 1420 because no one knew how to build one so big. Architect **Filippo Brunelleschi** solved the problem.



### The Middle Ages

After the fall of the Roman Empire came a time we call the **Middle Ages**, also known as the **Medieval Period**. This period began in the fifth century and lasted through the 13th century. During this time, Europe often experienced wars, famines and deadly diseases. Medieval people were almost entirely focused on basic survival and religion. Because life was so difficult, the people lost much of the world's past knowledge and culture. The Renaissance would usher in new ways of thinking about life and spirituality. It represented a rebirth of art, science and learning.

### Rebirth

The word **renaissance** is French for "rebirth" or "revival." It is derived from the Latin word *rinascere*. "Renaissance" has been used to describe a number of cultural revivals, but it is usually identified with Italy and the 14th through 16th centuries.

### Humanism

The Italian Renaissance began over 600 years ago (in the early 1300s) and lasted for about 200 years. Trade had brought great wealth to Italy, and the political environment of Europe became more stable. Scholars studied Greek and Roman antiquities, seeking to revive the wisdom and beauty found in classical writing and art. They became interested in the study of humanity and started to question the world around them. The idea that mankind was beautiful and that society was good was called **humanism**. Renaissance painters and sculptors reflected these concepts by painting in a realistic manner that tried to bring man closer to God through beauty. By the late 1400s, Renaissance thinking had spread throughout most of Europe.



**Leonardo da Vinci**  
1452-1519

**Michelangelo**  
1475-1564

**Cosimo Medici**  
1389-1464

### Great art and artists

You have probably heard of the artists **Leonardo da Vinci**, **Michelangelo**, **Raphael**, **Donatello** and **Sandro Botticelli**, as their names have gone down in history as some of the most gifted and well-trained artists of Renaissance in Italy.

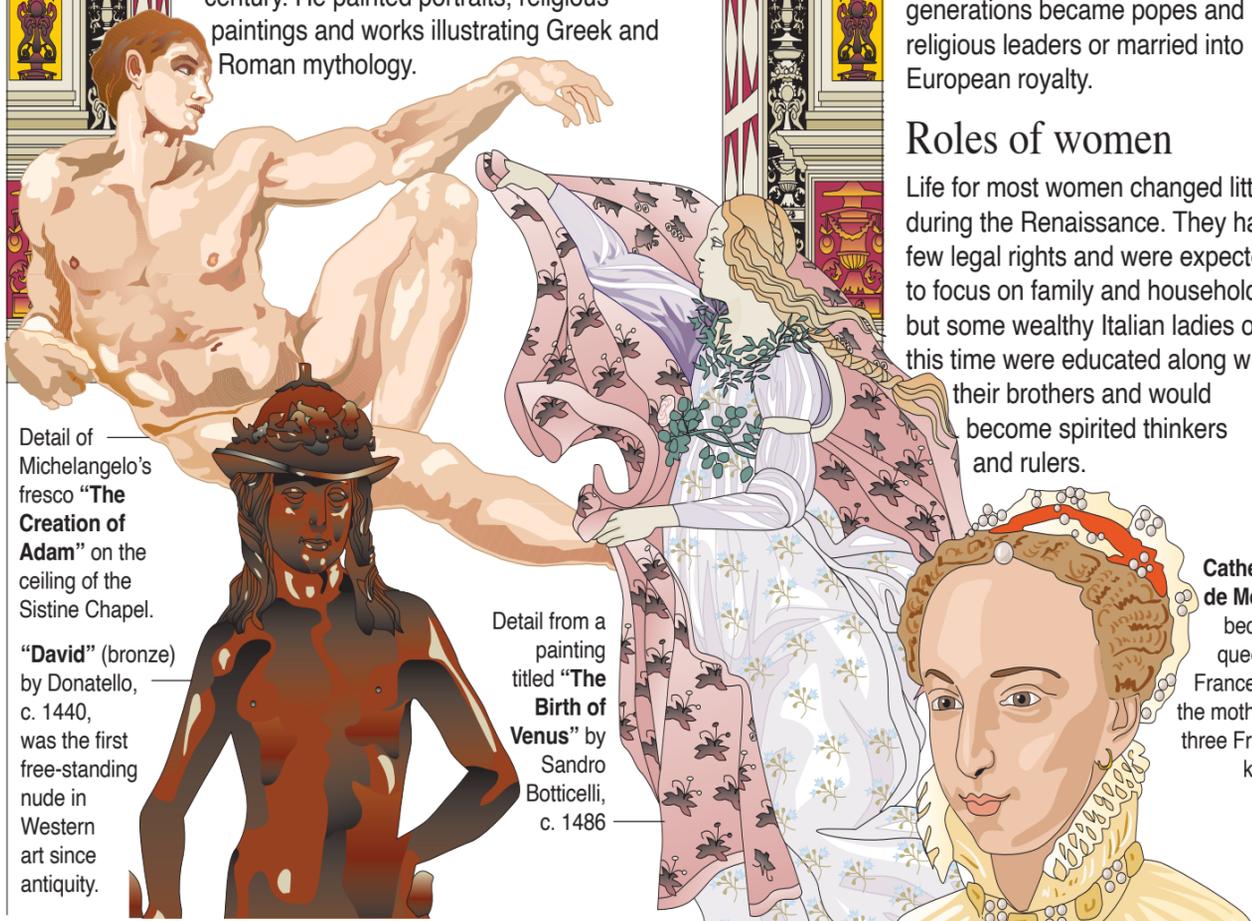
Leonardo was a great painter, but he was also an inventor, scientist and musician. Michelangelo could turn a block of marble into amazing sculptures, and his paintings were just as incredible. Raphael was a painter known for his love of harmony and beauty. Donatello loved sculpting statues that told stories. Botticelli's paintings were rediscovered and appreciated late in the 19th century. He painted portraits, religious paintings and works illustrating Greek and Roman mythology.

### The Medici family

During the Renaissance, Italy was divided into several city-states ruled by aristocratic and merchant families. In the 15th century, the most powerful family in Florence was the **Medicis**. Cosimo Medici inherited a vast fortune and established a political dynasty that would influence history for hundreds of years. Cosimo was a banker and crafty politician but also a great patron of the arts and science. Later generations became popes and religious leaders or married into European royalty.

### Roles of women

Life for most women changed little during the Renaissance. They had few legal rights and were expected to focus on family and household, but some wealthy Italian ladies of this time were educated along with their brothers and would become spirited thinkers and rulers.



Detail of Michelangelo's fresco "**The Creation of Adam**" on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

"**David**" (bronze) by Donatello, c. 1440, was the first free-standing nude in Western art since antiquity.

Detail from a painting titled "**The Birth of Venus**" by Sandro Botticelli, c. 1486

**Catherine de Medici** became queen of France and the mother of three French kings.

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; <https://en.wikipedia.org>; <https://www.britannica.com>; <http://www.history.com>; [www.italian-renaissance-art.com](http://www.italian-renaissance-art.com); <http://www.kidsdiscover.com>; <http://www.kidspast.com>

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