

# History of Western Art and Civilization

**Collection Editor:**

Beth Harris



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**C O N N E X I O N S**

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# Italy<sup>1</sup>

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**Figure 1:** Italy<sup>2</sup> Map of Italy<sup>3</sup>

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After the fall of the Roman Empire, the peninsula of Italy was not again politically unified until the nineteenth century. The region emerged from the so-called Dark Ages as an unorganized group of city states. Historically the most important of these were Venice (wealthy because of its trade with the Middle East) and Milan (an important manufacturing center) in the North, Florence (Section) (a center of commerce and manufacturing) and the Papal States in the center, and Naples and Sicily in the South. There were also many smaller and less important city states, such as Mantua, Genoa, and Verona.

During the high Middle Ages, ca. 1000-1450, the Italian region was economically and culturally the most advanced in Europe. Its wealth was based on trade with the Near East bringing spices, silk, and other desired Eastern commodities into Europe; manufacture, especially of finished cloth (Florence) and armaments (Milan), and banking. Italy's wealth attracted the attention of foreigners, and for several centuries there was a contest between the papacy and the Holy Roman (German) Empire to control the region, but neither side succeeded.

It is in the city states, Florence chief among them, that Italian art, architecture, letters, and engineering flourished as never before, but in the long run these states were too small to be viable in a world increasingly dominated by the new, larger, nations states.

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m11960/1.2/>>.

<sup>2</sup><http://cnx.org/content/m11960/latest/italy.gif>

<sup>3</sup>[http://cnx.org/content/m11960/latest/italy\\_map.bmp](http://cnx.org/content/m11960/latest/italy_map.bmp)

As the city states emerged independent from both Pope and Emperor, at the end of the Middle Ages, their never ending wars and intrigues against each other opened the door to other foreign intervention. Italy now became the victim of the ambitions of the new nation states of France and Spain. Sicily and Naples came under the rule of Spain and remained there until the nineteenth century, while Milan and Florence fell under the influence of France. Perhaps the most symbolic event was the sack of Rome by the troops of the Emperor, Charles V, in 1527. Moreover, with the voyages of Columbus and Vasco da Gama (partially financed by Italian capital) the economic center of Europe shifted away from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic coast. The new economic powers were, first, Portugal and Spain, and then France, the Netherlands, and England. Beginning in the sixteenth century, then, Italy began to slip with respect to Northern Europe, and by the end of the seventeenth century it had become a region of secondary economic and cultural importance.

During the Middle Ages the papal monarchy had claimed to be a supraregal political power (a claim the Popes did not give up until recently): the Pope claimed political primacy over counts, dukes, kings, and even the emperor. This struggle ended disastrously when the papacy was captured by the French king and moved to Avignon, where it remained from 1302 to 1378. From that date until 1417 there were, in fact, two popes, one in Rome and one in Avignon, and for a brief period, 1409-1415, there were three! With a single pope now again established in Rome, the papacy entered a period of unparalleled venality. The Renaissance popes were, it seemed at times, more interested in their pet projects in art and architecture or the careers of their relatives than in the well being of the Catholic Church. Reform was slow in coming. The occasion of the start of the Protestant Reformation, in 1517, was the selling of indulgences to raise money for the building of the cathedral of St. Peter in Rome.

There was, in Italy, a crisis of confidence in the sixteenth century. Many sought law, order, and security; republics fell, princes became more powerful; authority and titles were stressed (even if the latter had to be made up). The papal court became more Italian, and the Popes themselves gathered more and more power onto themselves, taking it away from the cardinals and bishops. At the same time the Church girded its loins for the battle against the Protestants. In 1540 Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus, an order which owed obedience to the Pope; intermittently, from 1545 to 1563, the Council of Trent met and made a number of important pronouncements on the issues that separated the Protestants from the Catholic church. By the end of the sixteenth century the church was regaining territories that it had lost to Protestants.

The intellectual climate at this time was rather more restricted than it had been in earlier centuries. Orthodoxy was enforced; heterodoxies were combated. Giordano Bruno<sup>4</sup>, an apostate monk who espoused the Copernican system (Section ) and the infinitude of worlds (and inhabitants) was burned at the stake in 1600. It was in this climate that Galileo argued for the Copernican theory.

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<sup>4</sup>"Giordano Bruno (1548-1600)" <<http://cnx.org/content/m11935/latest/>>



# Florence and Tuscany<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 1:** Florence

Tuscany is located in the western part of the boot of Italy (Section ), north of Rome and south of Genoa. It is bounded by the Apennines to the North and East and by the Mediterranean on the West. Its land area is about 9,000 square miles. Its major cities are Florence, Pisa, Siena, Lucca, Arezzo, and Pistoia. Its major river is the Arno, on which Florence and Pisa are located.

It was the home land of the Etruscans, which was annexed by Rome in 351 BC. After the fall of the Roman empire, the region, which became known as Tuscany (Toscana in Italian) came under the rule of a succession of rulers (Herulians, Ostrogoths, etc.) and emerged as a political entity with its own rulers. By the twelfth century the Tuscan cities were gradually gaining their independence as republics and forcing the nobility to live in the cities. By the high Middle Ages the cities of Pisa, Siena, Arezzo, Pistoia, Lucca, and especially Florence had become wealthy because of textile manufacture, trade, banking, and agriculture. Gradually Florence came to overshadow and conquer all other cities in the region.

After several experiments with representative government, Florence was ruled by an oligarchy of wealthy aristocrats, among whom the Medici (Section ) family became dominant in the fifteenth century. Under the patronage of these wealthy families the arts and literature flourished as nowhere else in Europe. Florence was the city of such writers as Dante, Petrarch, and Macchiavelli, and artists and engineers such as Boticelli, Brunelleschi (who built the magnificent dome on the church of St. Mary of the Flowers), Alberti, Leonardo Da Vinci, and Michelangelo. Because of its dominance in literature, the Florentine language became the literary language of the Italian region and is the language of Italy today. Lorenzo de' Medici, who ruled Florence in the late fifteenth century was perhaps the greatest patron of the arts in the history of the West.

But times changed. After Lorenzo the friar **Savonarola** ruled Florence, and the Medici were exiled.

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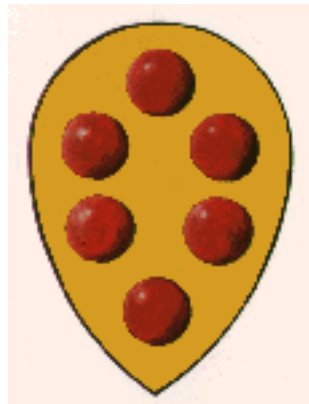
<sup>5</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m11936/1.3/>>.

With the shift of commerce away from the Mediterranean and toward the Atlantic, after 1492, the economy of Tuscany went into a slow decline. In 1530 the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V conquered Florence and reestablished the Medici family in power. They were now dukes of Florence, and within a few decades Cosimo de Medici was made Grand Duke of Tuscany. Cosimo aggressively pursued a policy of economic revival, building the great harbor at Livorno because the harbor of Pisa had silted up.

Galileo was born under the rule of Cosimo in 1564. It was during this period that the Medici court increasingly firmly established its hold over the city. The court came to dominate all aspects of civic life, and for the Galilei family the route to success lay through the patronage structure in which the Court was central. In the seventeenth century Florence and Tuscany increasingly faded into obscurity and did not revive until the nineteenth century. It is today a major cultural center and attracts millions of tourists each year.

# The Medici Family<sup>6</sup>

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**Figure 1:** The Medici Coat of Arms

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The Medici family of Florence can be traced back to the end of the 12th century. It was part of the **patrician class**, not the nobility, and through much of its history the family was seen as the friends of the common people. Through banking and commerce, the family acquired great wealth in the 13th century, and political influence came along with this wealth. At the end of that century, a member of the family served as gonfaliere, or standard bearer (high ceremonial office) of Florence. In the 14th century the family's wealth and political influence increased until the gonfaliere Salvestro de' Medici led the common people in the revolt of the ciompi (small artisanate). Although Salvestro became the de facto dictator of the city, his brutal regime led to his downfall and he was banished in 1382. The family's fortune then fell until it was restored by Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici (1360-1429)<sup>7</sup>, who made the Medici the wealthiest family in Italy, perhaps Europe. The family's political influence again increased, and Giovanni was gonfaliere in 1421.

Giovanni's son, Cosimo (1389-1464), Cosimo il Vecchio (the old or first Cosimo), is considered the real founder of the political fortunes of the family. In a political struggle with another powerful family, the Albizzi, Cosimo initially lost and was banished, but because of the support of the people he was soon recalled, in 1434, and the Albizzi were banished in turn. Although he himself occupied no office, Cosimo ruled the city as uncrowned king for the rest of his life. Under his rule Florence prospered.

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<sup>6</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m11975/1.2/>>.

<sup>7</sup>[http://cnx.org/content/m11975/latest/Medici\\_fam.gif](http://cnx.org/content/m11975/latest/Medici_fam.gif)



**Figure 2:** Cosimo il Vecchio

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Cosimo spent a considerably part of his huge wealth on charitable acts, live simply, and cultivated literature and the arts. He amassed the largest library in Europe, brought in many Greek sources, including the works of Plato, from Constantinople, founded the Platonic Academy and patronized Marsilio Ficino, who later issued the first Latin edition of the collected works of Plato. The artists supported by Cosimo included Ghiberti, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Alberti, Fra Angelico, and Ucello. During his rule and that of his sons and grandson, Florence became the cultural center of Europe and the cradle of the new Humanism. Cosimo's son Piero (1416-1469) ruled for just a few years but continued his father's policies while enjoying the support of the populace.

Piero's sons, Lorenzo (1449-1492) and Giuliano (1453-1478) ruled as tyrants, and in an attack in 1478 Giuliano was killed and Lorenzo wounded. If the family fortunes dwindled somewhat and Florence was not quite as prosperous as before, under Lorenzo, known as the Magnificent, the city surpassed even the cultural achievements of the earlier period. This was the high point of the Florentine Renaissance: Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Boticelli, Michelangelo, etc. But Lorenzo's tyrannical style of governing and hedonistic lifestyle eroded the goodwill of the Florentine people. His son Piero (1472-1503) ruled for just two years. In 1494, after accepting humiliating peace conditions from the French (who had invaded Tuscany), he was driven out of the city and died in exile. For some time, Florence was now torn by strife and anarchy and, of course, the rule of Savonarola<sup>8</sup>.

Upon the defeat of the French armies in Italy by the Spanish, the Spanish forced Florence to invite the Medici back. Piero's younger brother Giuliano (1479-1516) reigned from 1512 to 1516, and became a prince; he was followed by Lorenzo (1492-1519), son of Piero, who was named Duke of Urbino by Pope Leo X (himself a Medici, son of Lorenzo the Magnificent); and upon Lorenzo's death, Giulio (1478-1534), the illegitimate son of Lorenzo the Magnificent's brother Giuliano, became rule of the city but abdicated in 1523 in favor of his own illegitimate son, Alessandro (1510-1537), to become Pope Clement VII. Alessandro became hereditary Duke of Florence.

If the rulers since Lorenzo the Magnificent had been weak and ineffective, this changed when Cosimo I (1519-1574) ascended the throne in 1537 at the age of 18. Cosimo was a descendant not of Cosimo il Vecchio but from Cosimo's brother. He quickly consolidated his power, and under his rule Tuscany was transformed into an absolutist nation state. Although politically ruthless, Cosimo was highly cultured and promoted letters and arts as well as the Tuscan economy and navy. He founded the Accademia della Crusca, a body charged with the promotion of the Tuscan language (which has become the standard Italian of today), the Accademia del Disegno (Academy of Design), renewed the university of Pisa, and conquered Siena and Lucca.

<sup>8</sup><http://cnx.org/content/m11975/latest/#savon>



**Figure 3:** Cosimo I

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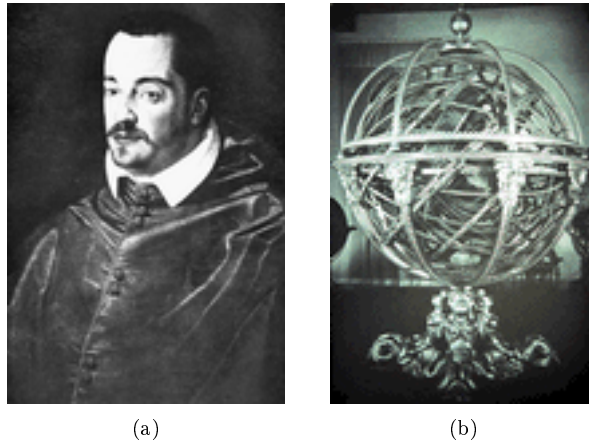
In 1569 Cosimo was named Grand Duke of Tuscany. He set the style for the new absolute rule by concentrating the administration of Florence in a new office building, the Uffizi (where he also began a small museum for art works; the entire Uffizi is now a museum), and moving his residence across the river to the Pitti Palace, bought in 1549 and enlarged and remodeled several times by Cosimo and his descendants. He built a private corridor between the Pitti Palace and the Palazzo Vecchio in the city, where the government met. Vincenzo Galilei<sup>9</sup> moved his family, including the ten-year old Galileo, from Pisa to Florence in the year of Cosimo's death.

Cosimo's son, Francesco I (1541-1587) was an ineffectual ruler under whom Tuscany languished. His younger brother, Ferdinand (1549-1609), who had been made a cardinal at the age of fifteen, became Grand Duke upon Francesco's death in 1587. Ferdinand II was a capable administrator under whom Tuscany flourished again.

Ferdinand was an admirer of Tomasso Campanella and tried to protect him as best he could. He was interested in scientific matters, and had a great **armillary sphere** constructed by Antonio Santucci, his cosmographer.

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<sup>9</sup>"Vincenzo Galileo" <<http://cnx.org/content/m11934/latest/>>



**Figure 4:** (a) Ferdinand I (b) Armillary Sphere of Santucci

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Ferdinand appointed Galileo to the professorship of mathematics at the university of Pisa in 1588. In the year of his accession, Ferdinand married Christina of Lorraine (1565-1637), who was the grand daughter of Catherine de' Medici, Queen of France. Christina was well-disposed to Galileo and as a favor in return for some services rendered by Galileo when he was still in Padua found a position for his brother in law Benedetto Landucci. It was to Christina that Galileo later wrote his letter on science and scripture, "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina of Lorraine."

Ferdinand and Christina had four sons and four daughters. The eldest son, Cosimo II, ascended the throne upon his father's death in 1609. Galileo had tutored Cosimo in mathematics during some summers, and therefore the young Grand Duke knew him well and admired him enough to offer him a court position in 1610, after Galileo had dedicated *Sidereus Nuncius* to him and his family. After a bout of fever, in 1615, Cosimo's health deteriorated, and he died in 1620.



**Figure 5:** Christina of Lorraine

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**Figure 6:** Cosimo II

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Cosimo's son, Ferdinand II (1610-1670) was just ten years old when he became Grand Duke, and until

his majority the government was carried on by the two Grand Duchesses, Cosimo's mother Christina of Lorraine, and Cosimo's wife, Maria Magdalena of Austria, the sister of the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II.

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**Figure 7:** Ferdinand II

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During the outbreak of the plague, in 1630, Ferdinand distinguished himself, but he was not a strong ruler and was unable to protect Galileo from the Inquisition<sup>10</sup> in 1633. In 1657, together with his brother Leopold, Ferdinand established the Accademia del Cimento, or Academy of Experiment, a forerunner of more permanent scientific academies, such as the Royal Society of London (1665) and the Royal French Academy of Sciences (1666). The Accademia del Cimento stopped functioning in 1667.

The Florentine and Tuscan economy had been slowly stagnating since the end of the sixteenth century. Under Ferdinand II, his son, Cosimo III (1642-1723), and his grandson, Gian-Gastone (1671-1737), the city country slipped into insignificance. Cosimo III's rule was one of incompetence and religious intolerance. Gian-Gastone's rule was too short to repair the damage. In 1735, an arrangement was made between Austria, France, England, and the Netherlands that a swap should be made with Lorraine going to France and Tuscany to Austria in return. In 1737 Austrian troops occupied Tuscany. One of Gian Gastone's last acts was to erect a memorial to Galileo in the church of Santa Croce and to inter Galileo remains there. During the transference, several parts of Galileo's skeleton were taken as relics by various people. One of Galileo's fingers is now housed in the Museum of History of Science in Florence.

Gian-Gastone had no male heir, and the House of Medici died with him.

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<sup>10</sup>"The Inquisition" <<http://cnx.org/content/m11944/latest/>>





**Figure 8:** Maria (Marie), Queen of France

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The Medici family dominated Florentine politics for two and a half centuries and presided over a cultural achievement that is equalled only by Athens in the golden age. The family also got its genes mixed with those of most royal families in Europe. Medici women included Catherine (1519-1589) who married Henry II, King of France and ruled the country after her husband's death; Maria (1573-1642) married Henry IV, King of France. Maria's daughters became queens of Spain and England. Cosimo II's wife, Maria Magdalena, was the sister of Ferdinand II, Holy Roman Emperor.

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