

Module 5, Discussion 1: The Unusual Beginnings of the Renaissance

Main Topic

The documentary Medici: The Godfathers of the Renaissance described how much of the beginnings of the Renaissance are attributable to the rise of the Medici family in Florence. Cosimo de' Medici, the son of a scheming merchant, rose to incredible power in the 15th century not just in Florence of Italy, but in all of Europe. By securing the papacy through large financial investments and careful political maneuvers, a path of opportunity was created for the Medici to obtain considerable influence and power.

Art and architecture were financed largely to gain the appreciation of the populace. Giving people new delights and unseen marvels helped to build political power and new alignments. For example, by choosing to construct a dome for the 100 years long unfinished Cathedral of Santa Maria Del Fiore with the talents and abilities of the classically-learned Brunelleschi, the Medici set the stage for a glorious victory or colossal failure. However, upon success, the completion of the cathedral instantly replaced long-standing failures and upsets with one immediate moment of triumph, which was designed to be credited to the Medici. Even though the majority of smaller, individual works of art were commissioned by the wealthy, architectural and others were readily accessible to the general populace. As more money found its way into Florence through the business dealings of the Medici, increasing amounts of funds were spent on arts of all kinds.

Societies function only because each one is a collection of widely accepted ideals, and when a person or group strays too far from what is regarded as acceptable, excommunications and/or punishments will occur. Of the many things that can be found when comparing Southern Europe's Medieval society compared to its Renaissance society, mobilizing a populace for political gains seems to have had much to do with this transitional period in history, and is what stuck with me the most after watching this documentary.

Re: Mod5 Disc 1 (by Thomas McCloskey)

Without the Medici influence and money, the art of the Renaissance time period may not have exploded into the way of life it did.

It's a little depressing to me that something as significant as the Renaissance, which represented so much cultural and artistic growth, has these kinds of reasons for occurring. It always sounded like something that happened spontaneously because human beings are so neat.

Brunelleschi was a prolific architect and engineer of the renaissance. Many of his works were very elaborate and innovative.

Imagine what kind of amazing things he might have invented if he wasn't spending so much time building a giant 37,000 ton dome.

Re: RE: The Unusual Beginnings of the Renaissance (by Linda Larsen)

Wow, Linda, thanks for sharing. At first I thought you might have posted your original topic as a reply by accident. But I see now that you have your own thread going that's a little older than this one (and much longer, too!).

The only thing I disagree with in your post is when you said, "The Medici family, who were avid humanists, besides helping with building projects, helped artists and gifted people in other ways." I believe the Medici were simply figuring out ways to obtain more wealth and power, and giving people what they wanted helped them do this. Also, it is mentioned in our textbook that, during the Renaissance,

Northern Europe took a more humanistic approach to things, while Southern Europe indulged in the arts and became more secular.

There was little that I saw in the documentary that suggested the Medici did anything for the good of others without first making sure that the gesture benefited themselves in many ways. While a lot of positive development occurred during the Renaissance in that part of Europe, it wasn't really intended to do this more than it was to do other things.