

Why did the Renaissance begin in Italy?



Italy had become a crossroads for travel
more cities than other nations in Europe
ruled by aristocratic “merchant princes”
arts supported by the wealthy
in the presence of antiquity



City-States in Renaissance Italy



5 major Italian states:
Rome
Venice
Milan
Florence
the Kingdom of Naples



many Italian cities were trade centers



Trade in Renaissance

Florence: the center of the Italian Renaissance



Florentine gold coin (the *florin*) was the standard coinage throughout Europe
the city guild members planned and voted on city issues



(remember: guild members included textile workers, bankers, masons, builders, sculptors, lawyers)

members of the guilds were wealthy and held positions in government

the Ponte Vecchio [left], constructed in 1299, the home of the Florentine guilds

contributed to the construction of grand cathedrals

a competition developed between the rich merchants to see who could commission the grandest buildings

Society in Renaissance Italy

wealthy business people became the cities' leading citizens

wanted to use their wealth to enjoy the pleasures of life

employed artists to decorate their beautiful homes
profit-makers indulged in philanthropy

stratification of society now based on wealth as well as title

Baldassare Castiglione:
The Book of the Courtier



PLATE XXXV. CATHERINE DE' MEDICI AND HER FAMILY, 1564
Shottlesbrooke Park. By kind permission of Miss Oswald-Saunders