Fig. 7.1 Florence Cathedral. Begun 1296 on original plan by Arnolfo di Cambio; redesigned 1357 and 1366 by Francesco Talenti, Andrea Orcagna, and Neri di Fioravanti; dome 1420–1436 by Filippo Brunelleschi; height at bronze ball atop lantern, 350'. Baptistery, late 11th–early 12th century. Campanile ca. 1334–1350 by Giotto, Andrea Pisano, and Francesco Talenti. Essentially a 200-year-long construction project, Florence Cathedral was a source of extraordinary civic pride. It underscored Florence's place as the center of European Renaissance culture.
Florence, Italy, was the center of a more than 150-year-long cultural revival in Europe that we have come to call the Renaissance. It lasted from the time of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century (see chapter 6) until the early years of the sixteenth century. The word Renaissance, from the Italian rinascita [ree-nah-she-TAH], “rebirth,” became widely used in the nineteenth century as historians began to assert that the beliefs and values of the medieval world were transformed in Italy, and in Florence particularly. Where the Middle Ages had been an age of faith, in which the salvation of the soul was an individual’s chief preoccupation, the Renaissance was an age of intellectual exploration, in which the humanist strove to understand in ever more precise and scientific terms the nature of humanity and its relationship to the natural world.

This chapter traces the rise of the humanist Renaissance city-state as a center of culture in Italy in the fifteenth century, concentrating on Florence, Rome, and Venice (Map 7.1). In Florence the Medici [MED-uh-chee] family, whose wealth derived from their considerable banking interests, did much to position the city as a model that others felt compelled to imitate. In Rome, the wealth at the disposal of the papacy, and the willingness of the Church to bestow that wealth in the form of commissions to artists and architects in an effort to restore that city to the greatness it enjoyed over a thousand years earlier at the height of the Roman Empire, essentially guaranteed its rebirth as a new and vital center of culture. And the citizenry of Venice, where goods from Northern Europe flowed into the Mediterranean, and goods from the Mediterranean and points east flowed into Europe, thought of themselves as the most cosmopolitan and the most democratic people in the world. In this environment of enlightened leadership, the arts flourished.

The State as a Work of Art: Florence and the Medici

The most preeminent Italian city-state in the fifteenth century was Florence. It was so thoughtfully and carefully constructed by the ruling Medici family that later scholars would come to view it as a work of art in its own right. The Medici were the most powerful family in Florentine affairs from 1418, when they became banker to the papacy, until 1494, when irate citizens removed them from power. A family of bankers with offices in Pisa, Rome, Bologna, Naples, Venice, Avignon, Lyon, Geneva, Basel, Cologne, Antwerp, Bruges, and London during the fifteenth century, the Medici never ruled Florence outright, but managed its affairs from behind the scenes.

No event better exemplifies the nature of the Italian Renaissance and anticipates the character of Florence under the Medici than a competition held in 1401 to choose a designer for a pair of bronze doors for the north entrance to the city’s baptistery [Fig. 7.1], a building standing in front of the cathedral and used for the Christian rite of baptism.

By the thirteenth century, a legend had developed that the baptistery stood on the site of a Roman temple to Mars, subsequently rededicated to Saint John the Baptist. The octagonal building was thus the principal civic monument connecting Florence to its Roman roots, and it stood at the very heart of the city, in front of the cathedral, which was still under construction in 1401. The original doors, at the south entrance, had been designed before the advent of the Black Death, and had fallen into disrepair. The Cloth Merchants’ Guild, or “Arte della Lana,” which was in charge of the Opera del Duomo—literally, the “Works of the Cathedral”—was determined to create a new set of doors for the north entrance.

In many ways it is remarkable that the competition to find the best design for the baptistery doors could even take place. As much as four-fifths of the city-state’s population had died in the Black Death of 1348, and the plague had returned, though less severely, in 1363, 1374, 1383, and 1390. Finally, in the summer of 1400, it came again, this time killing 12,000 Florentines, about one-fifth of the population. Perhaps the guild hoped that a facelift for the baptistery might appease an evidently wrathful God. Furthermore, civic pride and patriotism were also at stake. Milan, the powerful city-state to the north, had laid siege to Florence, blocking trade to and from the seaport at Pisa and creating the prospect of famine. The fate of the Florentine Republic seemed to be in the balance.
So the competition was not merely about artistic talent. The general feeling was that if God looked with favor on the enterprise, the winner’s work might well be the city’s salvation. In fact, during the summer of 1402, as the competition was concluding, the duke of Milan died in his encampment outside the walls of Florence. The siege was over, and Florence was spared. If the Cloth Merchants Guild could not take credit for these events, no one could deny the coincidence.

Thirty-four judges—artists, sculptors, and prominent citizens, including a Medici—chose the winner from among the seven entrants. Each artist was asked to create a bronze relief panel depicting the Hebrew Bible’s story of the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22) in a 21 by -inch quatrefoil (a four-leaf clover shape set on a diamond). All but two designs were eliminated, both by little-known 24-year-old goldsmiths: Filippo Brunelleschi [broo-nel-ESS-kee] (1377–1446) and Lorenzo Ghiberti [ghee-BEH-REE-tee] (1378–1455).

The Sacrifice of Isaac is the story of how God tested the faith of the patriarch Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac, his only son. Abraham took Isaac into the wilderness to perform the deed but at the last moment, an angel stopped him, implying that God was convinced of Abraham’s faith and would be satisfied with the sacrifice of a ram instead. Brunelleschi and Ghiberti both depicted the same aspect of the story, the moment when the angel intervenes. Brunelleschi placed Isaac in the center of the panel and the other figures, whose number and type were probably prescribed by the judges, all around (Fig. 7.2). The opposition between Abraham and the Angel, as the Angel grabs Abraham’s arm to stop him from plunging his knife into his son’s breast, is highly dramatic and realistic, an effect achieved by the figures’ jagged movements. Ghiberti, in contrast, set the sacrifice to one side of the panel (Fig. 7.3). He replaced a sense of physical strain with graceful rhythms, so that Isaac and Abraham are unified by the bowed curves of their bodies, Isaac’s nude body turning on
expect in the shallow space available in a relief sculpture, both sought to create a sense of a deep, receding space, enhancing the appearance of reality.

As humanists, Ghiberti and Brunelleschi valued the artistic models of antiquity and looked to classical sculpture for inspiration. Notice Ghiberti’s nude Isaac posed in classical contrapposto (see Fig. 2.29), and Brunelleschi’s servant at the lower left of the relief, a direct quotation of an ancient Roman bronze known as the *Thorn Puller*. Finally, the artworks they created captured human beings in the midst of a crisis of faith with which every viewer might identify. In all this, their competition looks forward to the art that defines the Italian Renaissance itself.

The *Gates of Paradise*

Ghiberti worked on the north-side doors for the next 22 years, designing 28 panels in four vertical rows illustrating the New Testament (originally the subject had been the Hebrew Bible, but the guild changed the program). Immediately upon their completion in 1424, the Cloth Merchants’ Guild commissioned a second set of doors from Ghiberti for the east side of the baptistery. These would take him another 27 years. Known as the *Gates of Paradise* because they open onto the *paradiso*, Italian for the area between a baptistery and its axis to face Abraham. The angel in the upper right corner is represented in a more dynamic manner than in Brunelleschi’s panel. This heavenly visitor seems to have rushed in from deep space. The effect is achieved by foreshortening, a technique used to suggest that forms are sharply receding. In addition, the strong diagonal of the landscape, which extends from beneath the sacrificial altar and rises up into a large rocky outcrop behind the other figures, creates a more vivid sense of real space than Brunelleschi’s scene.

Despite the artistic differences in the two works, the contest might have been decided by economics. Brunelleschi cast each of his figures separately and then assembled them on the background. Ghiberti cast separately just the body of Isaac, which required only two-thirds of the bronze used by his rival. The process also resulted in a more unified panel, and this may have given Ghiberti the edge. Disappointed, Brunelleschi left Florence for Rome and gave up sculpture forever. Their competition highlights the growing emphasis on individual achievement in the young Italian Renaissance: The work of the individual craftsperson was replacing the collective efforts of the guild or workshop in decorating public space. The judges valued the originality of Brunelleschi’s and Ghiberti’s conceptions. Rather than placing their figures on a shallow platform, as one might
and the entrance to its cathedral, these doors depict scenes from the Hebrew Bible in ten square panels. The borders surrounding them contain other biblical figures, as well as a self-portrait (Fig. 7.4). The artist’s head is slightly bowed, perhaps in humility, but perhaps, situated as it is just above the average viewer’s head, so that he might look out upon his audience. The proud image functions as both a signature and a bold assertion of Ghiberti’s own worth as an artist and individual.

Each of the panels in the east doors depicts one or more events from the same story. For instance, the first panel, at the upper left of the doors (Fig. 7.5), contains four episodes from the book of Genesis: the Creation of Adam, at the bottom left; the Creation of Eve, in the center; the Temptation, in the distance behind the Creation of Adam; and the Expulsion, at the bottom right. This portrayal of sequential events in the same frame harkens back to medieval art. But if the content of the space is episodic, the landscape is coherent and realistic, stretching in a single continuity from the foreground into the far distance. The figures themselves hark back to classical Greek and Roman sculpture. Adam, in the lower left-hand corner, resembles the recumbent god from the east pediment of the Parthenon (see Fig. 2.33), and Eve, in the right-hand corner, is a Venus of recognizably Hellenistic origin (see Fig. 2.40).

Ghiberti meant to follow the lead of the ancients in creating realistic figures in realistic space. As he wrote in his memoirs: “I strove to observe with all the scale and proportion, and to endeavor to imitate Nature . . . on the planes one sees the figures which are near appear larger, and those that are far off smaller, as reality shows.” Not only do the figures farther off appear smaller, they also decrease in their projection from the panel, so that the most remote ones are in very shallow relief, hardly raised above the gilded bronze surface.

Whereas medieval artists regarded the natural world as an imperfect reflection of the divine, and hardly worth attention, Renaissance artists understood the physical universe as an expression of the divine and thus worth copying in the greatest detail. To understand nature was, in some sense, to understand God. Ghiberti’s panel embodies this growing desire in the Renaissance to reflect nature as accurately as possible. It is a major motivation for the development of perspective in painting and drawing.

The work had political significance as well. The only panel to represent a single event in its space is the Meeting of Solomon and Sheba (Fig. 7.6). Here, the carefully realized symmetry of the architecture, with Solomon and Sheba framed in the middle.
of its space, was probably designed to represent the reunification of the eastern Orthodox and western Catholic branches of the Church. Solomon was traditionally associated with the Western Church, while the figure of Sheba, queen of the Arabian state of Sheba, was meant to symbolize the Eastern. In 1438, Cosimo de' Medici had financed a Council of Churches that had convened in Florence, and, for a time, it had seemed possible, even likely, that reunification might become a reality. This would have restored symmetry and balance to a divided church just as Ghiberti had achieved balance and symmetry in his art. But above all, especially in the context of the other nine panels, all of which possess multiple events with multiple focal points, this composition’s focus on a single event reflects the very image of the unity sought by the Church.

Florence Cathedral
Construction of the Duomo (Fig. 7.1), as Florence Cathedral is known, began in 1296 under the auspices of the Opera del Duomo, which was controlled by the Cloth Merchants’ Guild. The cathedral was planned as the most beautiful and grandest in all of Tuscany. It was not consecrated until 140 years later, and even then, was hardly finished. Over the years, its design and construction became a group activity as an ever-changing panel of architects prepared model after model of the church and its details were submitted to the Opera and either accepted or rejected.

Brunelleschi’s Dome
During visits to Rome, Brunelleschi had carefully measured the proportions of ancient buildings, including the Colosseum, the Pantheon, the remains of the Baths of Caracalla, and the Domus Aurea (Golden Palace) of Nero. Using these studies, Brunelleschi produced the winning design for the dome of Florence Cathedral (Fig. 7.7). The design guaranteed his reputation as one of the geniuses of Renaissance Florence, even in his own day.

Brunelleschi’s design for the dome solved a number of technical problems. For one thing it eliminated the need for the temporary wooden scaffolding normally used to support the dome vaulting as it was raised. Though critics disagreed, Brunelleschi argued that a skeleton of eight large ribs, visible on the outside of the dome, alternating with eight pairs of thinner ribs beneath the roof, all tied together by only nine sets of horizontal ties, would be able to support themselves as the dome took form. The thinner ribs would lie between two shells—the outer roof and the interior ceiling—again creating a dome much lighter in weight than a solid structure (Fig. 7.8). Scaffolding would be cantilevered out from the base of the drum and moved up, horizontal band by horizontal band, as the dome rose up. Additional support could be achieved through the use of lightweight bricks set in an interlocking herringbone pattern.
Brunelleschi completed the dome in 1436. In yet another competition, he then designed a lantern (a windowed turret at the top of a dome and visible in Fig. 7.7) to cover the oculus (hole) and thus put the finishing touch on the dome. Made of over 20 tons of stone—Brunelleschi designed a special hoist to raise the stone to the top of the dome—construction had barely begun when Brunelleschi died in 1446.

“Songs of Angels”: Music for Church and State For the consecration of Florence Cathedral, rededicated as Santa Maria del Fiore [FYOR-eh] (Saint Mary of the Flower) on March 25, 1436, Brunelleschi constructed a 1,000-foot walkway, 6 feet high and decorated with flowers and herbs, on which to guide celebrated guests into the cathedral proper. These included Pope Eugenius IV and his entourage of seven cardinals, thirty-seven bishops, and nine Florentine officials (including Cosimo de’ Medici), all of whom were observed by the gathered throng. Inside, the guests heard a new musical work, picking up the floral theme of the city that had built it.

The melody derives from a chant traditionally used for the dedication of new churches, Terribilis est locus iste [teh-REE-bee-lis EH-st LOH-kus EE-steh] (“Awesome Is This Place”).

Dufay’s motet also reflects the ideal proportions of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, which, according to 1 Kings, was laid out in the proportions 6:4:2:3, with 6 being the length of the building, 4 the length of the nave, 2 the width, and 3 the height. Florence Cathedral followed these same proportions, and Dufay mirrors them in his composition by repeating the cantus firmus four times, successively based on 6, 4, 2, and 3 units per breve [brev] (equivalent to two whole notes in modern notation). Hearing the entire work, one witness wrote, “it seemed as though the symphonies and songs of the angels and divine paradise had been set forth from Heaven to whisper in our ears an unbelievable celestial sweetness.” It is not surprising, given this reaction, that Dufay was regarded as the greatest composer of the fifteenth century. It is even less surprising that the Florentines selected him to celebrate the consecration of their new cathedral and its dome by creating an original work. In performing this service, he announced the preeminence of both the cathedral and the city that had built it.

Scientific Perspective and Naturalistic Representation

No aspect of the Renaissance better embodies the spirit of invention evidenced by both Brunelleschi’s dome and Dufay’s music than scientific, or linear, perspective, which allowed artists to translate three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional surface, thereby satisfying the age’s increasing taste for naturalistic representations of the physical world. It was the basis of what would later come to be called disegno [bwn see-zen-yoh], literally “good design” or “drawing,” but the term refers more to the intellectual conception of the work than to literal drawing. Giorgio Vasari [JOR-joh vuh-SAHHR-eel] (1511–1574), whose Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Architects, and Sculptors is one of our most important sources of information about Italian Renaissance art in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, defined it as follows: “Design (disegno) is the imitation of the most beautiful things of nature in all figures whether painted or chiseled, and this requires a hand and genius to transfer everything which the eye sees, exactly and correctly, whether it be in drawings, on paper panel, or other surface, both in relief and sculpture.” It distinguished, in his mind, the art of Florence above all others.

Brunelleschi, Alberti, and the Invention of Scientific Perspective

It was Brunelleschi who first mastered the art of scientific perspective sometime in the first decade of the fifteenth century. The ancient Greeks and Romans had at least partially understood its principles, but their methods had been lost. Brunelleschi almost certainly turned to them for the authority, at least, to “reinvent” it. His investigation of optics in Arab science also contributed to his understanding, particularly Alhazen’s [al-HAHR-zen] Perspectiva [PUR-sehk-TEE-vah] (ca. 1000 CE), which integrated the classical works of Euclid, Ptolemy, and Galen. Their understanding of the principles of geometry, and the sense of balance and proportion that geometry inspired, affected every aspect of Brunelleschi’s architectural work.

But it was geometry’s revelation of the rules of perspective that most fascinated Brunelleschi. As he surveyed the Roman ruins, plotting three-dimensional architectural forms on flat paper, he mastered its finer points. Back in Florence, he would demonstrate the principles of perspective in his own architectural work. Brunelleschi’s findings were codified in 1435 by the architect Leon Battista Alberti [all-BAYR-tee]
(1404–1474) in his treatise *On Painting*. Painting, Alberti says, is an intellectual pursuit, dedicated to replicating nature as accurately as possible. A painting’s composition should be based on the orderly arrangement of parts, which relies on rendering space in one-point perspective. He provides step-by-step instructions for the creation of such space, and diagrams it as well (Fig. 7.9). The basic principles of the system are these: (1) All parallel lines in a visual field appear to converge at a single vanishing point on the horizon (think of train tracks merging in the distance); (2) These parallel lines are realized on the picture plane—the two-dimensional surface of the panel or canvas, conceived as a window through which the viewer perceives the three-dimensional world—as diagonal lines called orthogonals; (3) Forms diminish in scale as they approach the vanishing point along these orthogonals; and (4) The vanishing point is directly opposite the eye of the beholder, who stands at the vantage point, thus, metaphorically at least, placing the individual (both painter and viewer) at the center of the visual field.

**Perspective and Naturalism in Painting: Masaccio**

Although Alberti dedicated *On Painting* first and foremost to Brunelleschi, he also singled out several other Florentine artists. One of these was Masaccio, whose masterpiece of naturalistic representation is *The Tribute Money* (Fig. 7.10). Commissioned by a member of the Brancacci [bran-KAH-chee] family in the 1420s as part of a program to decorate the family’s chapel in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine [KAR-mee-neh] in Florence, it illustrates an event in the Gospel of Matthew (17:24–27). Christ responds to the demand of a Roman tax collector for money by telling Saint Peter to catch a fish in the Sea of Galilee, where he will find, in its mouth, the required amount. This moment occurs in the center of the painting. Behind the central group, to the left, Saint Peter finds the money, and to the right he pays the tax. The vanishing point of the painting is behind the head of Christ, where the orthogonals of the architecture on the right converge. In fact, the function of the architecture appears to be to lead the viewer’s eyes to Christ, identifying him as the most important figure in the work.

Another device, known as atmospheric perspective, also gives the painting the feeling of naturalism. This system depends on the observation that the haze in the atmosphere makes distant elements appear less distinct and bluish in color, even as the sky becomes paler as it approaches the horizon. As
a result, the house and trees on the distant hills in this fresco are loosely sketched, as if we see them through a hazy filter of air. The diminishing size of the barren trees at the left also underscores the fact that, in a perspectival rendering of space, far-off figures seem smaller (as does the diminished size of Saint Peter at the edge of the sea).

Perhaps the greatest source of naturalism in the scene comes from the figures themselves, who provide a good imitation of life through their dynamic gestures and poses, their individuality, and their emotional engagement in the events. Here the human figure is fully alive and active. This is especially evident in the contrapposto pose of the Roman tax collector, whom we see both with his back to us in the central group of figures and at the far right, where Saint Peter is paying him. Christ, too, throws all of his weight to his right foot. This is a naturalistic device that Masaccio borrowed from antiquity. Indeed, the blond head of Saint John is almost surely a copy of a Roman bust.

The Classical Tradition in Freestanding Sculpture: Donatello

Masaccio probably learned about the classical disposition of the body’s weight from Donatello [doh-nah-TELL-oh], who had accompanied Brunelleschi to Rome years before. Many of Donatello’s own works seem to have been inspired by antique Roman sculpture.

Although it dates from nearly 15 years after Masaccio’s Tribute Money, Donatello’s David (Fig. 7.11), which celebrates this Hebrew Bible hero’s victory over the giant Goliath, indicates how completely the sculptor had absorbed classical tradition. The first life-size freestanding male nude sculpted since antiquity, it is revolutionary in other ways as well. The contrapposto pose is quite feminine, especially the positioning of the back of the hand against the hip. The young adolescent’s self-absorbed gaze accentuates his self-delight. The figure’s eroticism is amplified by the way David’s left foot plays with the mustache on Goliath’s severed head.

It is difficult to imagine that such a slight, adolescent figure could have slain a giant. It is as if Donatello portrayed David as an unconvincing hero in order to underscore the ability of virtue, in whatever form, to overcome tyranny. And so this soft, elegant, and refined young man might represent the virtue of the Florentine republic as a whole and the city’s persistent resistance to domination. In fact, when in 1469 the statue stood in the courtyard of the Medici palace, it bore the following inscription: “The victor is whoever defends the fatherland. All-powerful God crushes the angry enemy. Behold a boy overcame the great tyrant. Conquer, O citizens.” The Medici thus secularized the religious image even as they implicitly affirmed their right to rule as granted by an all-powerful God whose might they shared.

The Medici Family and Humanism

The Medici family had been prominent in Florentine civic politics since the early fourteenth century. The family had amassed a fortune by skill in trade—especially the banker’s trade in money—and became strong supporters of many of the city’s smaller guilds. But their power was only fully cemented by Cosimo de’ Medici (Continuity & Change, chapter 6).
Cosimo inherited great wealth from his father and secured the family's hold on the political fortunes of the city. Without upsetting the appearance of republican government, he mastered the art of behind-the-scenes power by controlling appointments to chief offices. But he also exerted considerable influence through his patronage of the arts. His father had headed the drive to rebuild the church of San Lorenzo, which stood over the site of an early Christian basilica dedicated in 393. San Lorenzo thus represented the entire Christian history of Florence, and after his father's death, Cosimo himself paid to complete its construction and decorate it. In return, it was agreed that no family crest other than the Medici's would appear in the church. Cosimo also rebuilt the old monastery of San Marco for the Dominican Order, adding a library, cloister, chapter room, bell tower, and altarpiece. In effect, Cosimo had made the entire religious history of Florence the family's own.

Marsilio Ficino and Neoplatonism Humanist that he was, Cosimo was particularly impressed by one scholar, the young priest Marsilio Ficino [fee-CHEE-noh] (1433–1499). Beginning in about 1453, Cosimo supported Ficino in his translations and interpretations of the works of Plato and later philosophers of Platonic thought. As described in chapter 2, Platonic thought distinguished between a sphere of being that is eternal and unchanging and the world in which we actually live, in which nothing is fixed forever. Following Plato's lead, Ficino argued that human reason belonged to the eternal dimension, as human achievement in mathematics and moral philosophy demonstrated, and that through human reason we can commune with the eternal sphere of being.

Ficino coined the term Platonic love to describe the ideal spiritual (never physical) relationship between two people, based on Plato's insistence on striving for and seeking out the good, the true, and the beautiful. The source of Ficino's thought is his study of the writings of Plotinus [ploh-TIE-nus] (ca. 205–270 CE), a Greek scholar of Platonic thought who had studied Indian philosophy (both Hinduism and Buddhism) and who believed in the existence of an ineffable and transcendent One, from which emanated the rest of the universe as a series of lesser beings. For Plotinus, human perfection (and, therefore, absolute happiness) was attainable in this world through philosophical meditation. This Neoplatonist [nee-oh-PLAY-uh-nist] philosophy (a modern usage) recast Platonic thought in contemporary terms. It appealed immensely to Cosimo. He could see everywhere in the great art and literature of antiquity the good, the true, and the beautiful he sought, and so he surrounded himself with art and literature, both contemporary and classical, and lavished them upon his city.

Domestic Architecture for Merchant Princes In 1444, Cosimo commissioned for the family a new palazzo [pah-LAH-tsoh] (“palace”) that would redefine domestic architecture in the Renaissance. He first rejected a plan by Brunelleschi, considering it too grand, and built instead a palace designed by Michelozzo di Bartolommeo [mee-koo-LO-tso bar-toh-loh-MAY-oh] (1396–1472), now known as the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi [ree-CAR-dee] (Fig. 7.12). He filled it with the art of the day (including Donatello’s David, Fig. 7.11). The bottom story is 20 feet high and made of rough-cut stone meant to imitate the walls of ancient Roman ruins. It housed the family’s commercial interests, including their bank. The outside of the second story, which housed the living quarters, is cut into smooth stones, with visible joints between them. The outside of the third story, reserved for servants, is entirely smooth, thus giving the facade the appearance of decreasing mass and even airiness.

The Palazzo Medici became the standard for townhouses of wealthy Florentine merchants. Two years later, Leon Battista Alberti, author of On Painting and a close friend and adviser to Cosimo, designed a home for the Florentine patrician Giovanni Rucellai [roo-chel-LIE] that brought the more or less subtle classical references of Michelozzo’s design for
Lorenzo the Magnificent: “... I find a relaxation in learning.”

After Cosimo’s death in 1464, his son Piero [pee-YER-oh] (1416–1469) followed in his father’s footsteps, championing the arts, supporting the Platonic Academy, and otherwise working to make Florence the cultural center of Europe. But when Piero died only five years after his father, his 20-year-old son Lorenzo (1449–1492) assumed responsibility for leading the family and the city. So great and varied were his accomplishments that in his own time he was known as il Magnifico—“the Magnificent.”

As a young man, Lorenzo had been tutored by Ficino, and among his favorite pastimes was spending the evening talking with Ficino and other friends. “When my mind is disturbed with the tumults of public business,” he wrote Ficino in 1480, “and my ears are stunned with the clamors of turbulent citizens, how would it be possible for me to support such contentions unless I found a relaxation in learning?” In support of learning, he rebuilt the University of Pisa and continued to support the study of Greek philosophy and literature in Florence at the Platonic Academy.

Lorenzo’s own circle of acquaintances included many of the greatest minds of the day. Delighted by a copy of an ancient Greek or Roman faun’s head made by an unknown adolescent named Michelangelo Buonarroti [mee-kuh-LAN-juh-loh bwoh-nah-ROT-tee], Lorenzo invited the sculptor to live in the Medici palace, and the young man was soon a regular in the philosophical discussions that occupied Lorenzo for so many evenings. Besides Ficino, other frequent guests included the painter Botticelli, the composer Heinrich Isaac, and the philosopher Pico della Mirandola [PEE-koh DEL-lah mee-RAHN-doh-lah].

Sandro Botticelli: Humanist Painter

It seems very likely that these discussions inspired Sandro Botticelli to paint his Primavera [pree-mah-VAIR-ah] (Spring) on commission from Lorenzo (Fig. 7.14). In Botticelli’s Primavera the nymph stands in the center, depicted as Venus, goddess of Love, surrounded by other mythological characters, who appear to move through the garden setting from right to left. To the humanists in Lorenzo’s court, Venus was an allegorical figure who represented the highest moral qualities. According to Ficino, she was the very embodiment of “Humanitas . . . her Soul and mind are Love and Charity, her eyes Dignity and Magnanimity, the hands Liberality and Magnificence, the feet Comeliness and Modesty. The whole, then, is Temperance and Honesty, Charm and Splendor.” On the far right of the embodiment of the humanities, Zephyrus [ZEF-uh-rus], god of the west wind, attempts to capture Chloris [KLOR-us], the nymph of spring, in his cold, blue grasp. But Flora, goddess of
flowers, who stands beside the nymph, ignores the west wind’s threat, and distributes blossoms across the path. To the left of Venus, the three Graces, daughters of Zeus and personifications of beauty, engage in a dance that recalls a specific one created for three people by Lorenzo in the 1460s. Lorenzo called the dance “Venus” and described it as based on the movement of two figures around a third one:

First they do a slow side-step, and then together they move with two pairs of forward steps, beginning with the left foot; then the middle dancer turns round and across with two reprises, one on the foot sideways and the other on the right foot, also across; and during the time that the middle dancer is carrying out these reprises the other two go forward with two triplet steps and then give half a turn on the right foot in such a way as to face each other.

Finally, to the left, Mercury, messenger of the gods, holds up his staff as if to brush away the remnants of a straying cloud. Over the whole scene and positioned just above the head of Venus, Cupid reigns.

*Primavera* captures the spirit of the Medici court. It celebrates love, not only in a Neoplatonic sense, as a spiritual, humanist endeavor, but also in a more direct, physical way. For Lorenzo hardly shied from physical pleasure. A prolific poet himself, his most famous poem, the 1490 “Song of Bacchus,” deliberately invites the kind of carefree behavior we associate with carnivals, lavish festivities that Lorenzo regularly sponsored, complete with floats, processions through mythological settings, dance, and song (Reading 7.1):

**Reading 7.1** Song of Bacchus, or “Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne” from *Lorenzo de’ Medici: Selected Poems and Prose*

> How lovely is youth in its allure, Which ever swiftly flies away! Let all who want to, now be gay: About tomorrow no one’s sure.

> Here are Bacchus, Ariadne, For one another all afire: Because time flies and plays us false, They always yield to their desire. These nymphs of theirs and other folk Are merry every single day. Let all who want to, now be gay: About tomorrow no one’s sure.

> Those who love these pretty nymphs Are little satyrs, free of cares, Who in the grotoes and the glades Have laid for them a hundred snares. By Bacchus warmed and now aroused They skip and dance the time away. Let all who want to, now be gay: About tomorrow no one’s sure.
In fact, it seems likely that Botticelli’s painting decorated Lorenzo’s wedding chamber. Clearly, a lighthearted spirit of play tempered Lorenzo’s thirst for knowledge. As Machiavelli would later say of him: “If one examines the light and serious side of his life, one sees in him two different persons joined in an almost impossible conjunction.”

Heinrich Isaac: Humanist Composer Lorenzo’s love of music equaled his love of painting and poetry. Music was an important part of Florentine life, so much so that in 1433 the Opera del Duomo commissioned a series of eight reliefs from Luca della Robbia [DEL-lah ROE-bee-ah] celebrating music. The reliefs were to be displayed in a gallery above the north door of the sacristy (Fig. 7.15). They were conceived to illustrate Psalm 150, which calls for worshipers to praise God “with sound of the trumpet . . . with psaltery and harp . . . with timbrels and dance . . . with stringed instruments and organs . . . upon the high-sounding cymbals.” Luca’s youthful figures are the very embodiment of the joy and harmony that made music such an ideal manifestation of the humanist spirit.

Lorenzo’s household employed its own private music master, and in 1475 Lorenzo appointed the Flemish composer Heinrich Isaac (1450–1517) to the position. Isaac oversaw the Medici’s five household organs, taught music to Lorenzo’s sons, served as organist and choirmaster at Florence Cathedral, and, before he knew it, found himself collaborating with Lorenzo writing songs for popular festivals.

The scores for many of the songs produced by this collaboration survive. They are examples of a musical form known as the frottola [FROT-toh-lah], from the Italian for “nonsense” or “fib,” and are extremely lighthearted. These frottole [FROT-toh-leh] offer evidence of a strongly Italian movement away from the complex polyphony and counterpoint of church music in favor of simple harmonies and dancelike rhythms. Most frottole consist of three musical parts, with the melody in the highest register. The melodic line is generally taken by a soprano voice, accompanied in the two lower parts by either a lute and viol, two viols, other instruments, or two other voices.

From Lorenzo’s point of view, such songs, sung in his native Italian, not Greek or Latin, demonstrated once and for all that Italian was the most harmonious and beautiful of languages when set to music. This sentiment would have lasting impact, especially on the development in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the musical form known as opera.

Pico della Mirandola: Humanity “at the . . . center of the world . . . .” Cultural life in Lorenzo’s court was grounded on moral philosophy. The young humanist philosopher, Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), shared Lorenzo’s deep interest in the search for divine truth. By age 23, in 1486, Pico had compiled a volume of some 900 theological and philosophical theses, 13 of which Pope Innocent VIII (papacy 1484–1492) considered heretical. When Pico refused to recant the 13, Innocent condemned all 900.

Pico’s thinking was based on wide reading in Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, and Greek, and he believed that all intellectual endeavors shared the same purpose—to reveal divine truth. Pico proposed defending his work, in public debate in Rome, against any scholar who might dare to confront him, but the pope banned the debate and even imprisoned him for a brief time in France, where he had fled. Lorenzo offered Pico protection in Florence, defying the pontiff in a daring assertion of secular versus papal authority. As a result, Pico became an important contributor to Lorenzo’s humanist court.

In his 1486 Oration on the Dignity of Man—the introduction to his proposed debate and one of the great manifestos of humanism—Pico argued that humanity was part of the “great chain of being” that stretches from God to angels, humans, animals, plants, minerals, and the most primal matter. This idea can be traced to the idea of the Good developed by Plato in Book 7 of the Republic, an idea of perfection to which all creation tends. Plotinus’ brand of Neoplatonic thought took it a step further in proposing that the material world, including humanity, is but the shadowy reflection of
the celestial, a condition that the pursuit of knowledge allows humanity, if it chooses, to at least begin to overcome. According to Pico, humanity finds itself in a middle position in the great chain of being—not by natural law but by the exercise of its own free will. Humans, then, are not fixed in the middle position. They are, in fact, pure potential, able to make of themselves what they wish. Humanity, it follows, is God’s greatest miracle: “There is nothing to be seen more wonderful than man,” Pico wrote. In his Oration, he has God explain to Adam that he has placed him “at the very center of the world” and given him the gift of pure potential to shape himself (Reading 7.2):

Reading 7.2 from Pico della Mirandola, Oration on the Dignity of Man (1486)

We have given you, Oh Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor any endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same may have and possess through your own judgment and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which we have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody we have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. . . . You may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; or you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine.

For Pico, the role of the philosopher in this anthropocentric (“human-centered”) world is as “a creature of heaven and not of earth.” This is because “unmindful of the body, withdrawn into the inner chambers of mind,” the philosopher is part of “some higher divinity, clothed with human flesh.” It is imperative, therefore, in Pico’s view, for individuals to seek out virtue and knowledge, even while knowing their capability of choosing a path of vice and ignorance. Pico argues that humanity is completely free to exercise its free will. And this gift of free will makes humans “the most fortunate of living things.”

Such thinking reflects what may be the most important transformation wrought by Renaissance thinkers on medieval ideas. Art, literature, and philosophy, as the free expression of the individual’s creative power, can, if they aim high enough, express not only the whole of earthly creation but the whole of the divine. The human being is a parvus mundus [PAHR-wus MOON-dus], a “small universe.”

Beyond Florence: The Ducal Courts and the Arts

Pico’s message of individual free will and of humanity’s ability to choose a path of virtue and knowledge inspired Lorenzo’s court and the courts of other Italian city-states as well. These leaders were almost all nobility, not merchants like the Medici (who it must be said had transformed themselves into nobility in all but name), and each court reflected the values of its respective duke—and, very often, his wife. But if they were not about to adopt the republican form of government of Florence, they all shared the humanistic values that were so thoroughly developed there.

The Montefeltro Court in Urbino and Castiglione

One of the most prominent of these city-states was Urbino, some 70 miles east of Florence across the Apennines (see Map 17.1), where the military strategist and learned duke Federigo da Montefeltro [mohn-tay-FEL-troh] (1422–1482) ruled. Federigo surrounded himself with humanists, scholars, poets, and artists, from whom he learned and from whom he commissioned works to embellish Urbino. He financed these expenditures through his talents as a condottiero [cohn-doht-TYER-oh], a mercenary soldier who was a valuable and highly paid ally to whoever could afford both him and his army. His court was also a magnet for young men who wanted to learn the principles of noble behavior.

Castiglione’s Book of the Courtier One of the most important books of the age, written between 1513 and 1518, recalled conversations, probably imaginary, that took place in 1507 among a group of aristocrats at the Urbino court of Guidobaldo da Montefeltro (1472–1508), the son of Federigo. The Book of the Courtier by Baldassare Castiglione [kah-still-YOH-neh] (1478–1529) takes the form of a dialogue in which the eloquent courtiers at Urbino compete with each other to describe the perfect courtier—the man (or woman) whose education and deportment is best fashioned to serve the prince. It was not published until 1528, but by 1600 it had been translated into five languages and reprinted in 57 editions.

The Book of the Courtier is, in essence, a nostalgic recreation of Castiglione’s nine years (1504–1512) in the Urbino court, which he labeled “the very abode of joyfulness.” It takes place on four successive evenings in the spring of 1507. The dialogue is in the form of a dialectic, as the viewpoints of some speakers are challenged and ridiculed by others. The first two books debate the qualities of an ideal gentleman. The goal is to be a completely well-rounded person, l’uomo universale. Above all, a courtier must be an
accomplished soldier (like Federigo), not only mastering the martial arts but demonstrating absolute bravery and total loyalty in war. His liberal education must include Latin and Greek, other modern languages such as French and Spanish (necessary for diplomacy), and study of the great Italian poets and writers, such as Petrarch and Boccaccio, so that he might imitate their skill in his own verse and prose, both in Latin and in the vernacular. The courtier must also be able to draw, appreciate the arts, and excel in dance and music (though one must avoid the wind instruments since they deform the face). Above all, the courtier must demonstrate a certain grazia [GRAH-see-ah] (“gracefulness”) (Reading 7.3a):

**READING 7.3a from Baldassare Castiglione, The Courtier, Book 1 (1513–1518; published 1528)**

I wish then, that this Courtier of ours should be nobly born and of gentle race; . . . for noble birth is like a bright lamp that manifests and makes visible good and evil deeds, and kindles and stimulates to virtue both by fear of shame and by hope of praise. . . .

Besides this noble birth, then, I would have the Courtier favored in this regard also, and endowed by nature not only with talent and beauty of person and feature, but with a certain grace and (as we say) air that shall make him at first sight pleasing and agreeable to all who see him; and I would have this an ornament that should dispose and unite all his actions, and in his outward aspect give promise of whatever is worthy the society and favor of every great lord.

Grazia must be tempered by gravitas [GRAH-vee-tahs] (“dignity”) in all things. This balanced character trait is obtained, Castiglione explains in The Book of the Courtier, by means of “one universal rule”:

Flee as much as possible . . . affectation; and, perhaps to coin a word . . . make use in all things of a certain sprezzatura, which conceals art and presents everything said and done as something brought about without laboriousness and almost without giving it any thought.

**Sprezzatura** [spray-tsah-TOOR-ah] means, literally, “undervaluing” or “setting a small price” on something. For the courtier it means simply doing difficult things as if effortlessly and with an attitude of nonchalance. The ideal gentleman, in other words, is a construction of absolute artifice, a work of art in his own right who cuts una bella figura [OO-nah BEL-lah fee-GOOR-ah], “a fine figure,” that all will seek to emulate.

Ultimately, Castiglione suggests, a state led by such perfect gentlemen would itself reflect their perfection, and thus the state does not create great individuals so much as great individuals create the perfect state, in the kind of exercise of free will that Pico discussed.

Much of what we know about what was accepted as the proper behavior of ladies of the court derives from Castiglione’s Book of the Courtier since, as part of its concern with the conduct of the aristocratic gentleman, it details the gentleman’s expectations of his lady. It was generally agreed, for instance, by the conversationalists at the Urbino court that a courtier’s lady should profit from most of the rules that serve the courtier. Thus, her accomplishments should demonstrate the casual effortlessness of sprezzatura. In one of the book’s conversations, for instance, Giuliano de’ Medici addresses a gathering of ladies and gentlemen, intent on pointing out what the lady needs beyond the accomplishments of her husband (Reading 7.3b):

**READING 7.3b from Baldassare Castiglione, The Courtier, Book 3**

[The court lady] must have not only the good sense to discern the quality of him with whom she is speaking, but knowledge of many things, in order to entertain him graciously; and in her talk she should know how to choose those things that are adapted to the quality of him with whom she is speaking, and should be cautious lest occasionally, without intending it, she utter words that may offend him. . . . Let her not stupidly pretend to know that which she does not know, but modestly seek to do herself credit in that which she does know. . . . I wish this Lady to have knowledge of letters, music, painting, and to know how to dance and make merry; accompanying the other precepts that have been taught the Courtier with discreet modesty and with the giving of a good impression of herself. And thus, in her talk, her laughter, her play, her jesting, in short, in everything, she will be very graceful, and will entertain appropriately, and with witticisms and pleasantry befitting her, everyone who shall come before her. . . .

Whereas, for Castiglione, the courtier must strive to exemplify the perfectly well-rounded l’uomo universale, the court lady must use her breeding and education to further the perfection of the home.

**Laura Cereta: Renaissance Feminist** Many fifteenth-century women strove for a level of education beyond the mere “knowledge of letters, music, painting” called for by Castiglione. One of the most interesting is Laura Cereta
Cereta's argument parallels Pico della Mirandola's in the Oration on the Dignity of Man. Women, like men, can choose to exercise their free will in the pursuit of learning. If Adam could choose to fashion himself in whatever form he might prefer, so could Eve.

The Sforza Court in Milan and Leonardo da Vinci

The Sforza family's control over the court of Milan was somewhat less legitimate than most other ducal city-states in Italy. Francesco Sforza (1401–1466) became ruler of Milan by marrying the illegitimate daughter, but sole heir, of the duke of Milan. His own illegitimate son, Ludovico (1451–1508), called il Moro, “the Moor,” because of his dark complexion, wrested control of the city from the family of Francesco’s legitimate brother and proclaimed himself duke of Milan in 1494. Both Francesco and Ludovico understood the tenuousness of their claims to rule, and they actively sought to win the support of the people through the arts. They welcomed artists from throughout central Italy to their city and embraced humanism.

The most important of these artists was Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), who first arrived in Milan in 1482 as the emissary of Lorenzo de’ Medici to present a silver lyre, perhaps made by Leonardo himself, to Ludovico Sforza. Ludovico was embroiled in military matters, and Leonardo pronounced himself a military engineer, capable of constructing great “machines of war,” including designs for a catapult and covered vehicles that resemble modern-day armored cars.

Leonardo’s restless imagination, in fact, led him to the study of almost everything: natural phenomena like wind, storms, and the movement of water; anatomy and physiology; physics and mechanics; music; mathematics; plants and animals; geology; and astronomy, to say nothing of painting and drawing. Leonardo was a humanist, and as such was deeply swayed by Neoplatonic thought. He saw connections among all spheres of existence and wrote of them:

If man has in himself bones, the supports and armature for the flesh, the world has the rocks, the supports of the earth; if man has in himself the lake of blood, in which the lungs increase and decrease in breathing, the body of the earth has its oceanic sea, which likewise increases and decreases every six hours with the breathing of the world; if from the said lake veins arise, which proceed to ramify throughout the human body, the oceanic sea fills the body of the earth with infinite veins of water.

Thus, the miracle of the fetus in the womb, which Leonardo depicts in a famous anatomical study from his notebooks (Fig. 7.16), is analogous in his mind to the mysteries that lie deep within the body of earth. “I came to the entrance of a great cavern,” he writes in one note. “There immediately arose in me two feelings—fear and desire—fear of the menacing, dark cavity, and desire to see if there was anything miraculous within.” Leonardo’s fascination with the human body—an
image, for him, of both attraction and repulsion—led him to produce this and his other precisely drawn dissections of the human body in 1510–1512, probably working under the direction of a young professor of anatomy.

Leonardo was already known for his skill as a portrait painter when he arrived in Milan, and his fascination with revealing the human personality in portraiture is nowhere more evident than in his Mona Lisa (Fig. 7.17). Leonardo fuses his subject with the landscape behind her by means of light. He called this technique sfumato [sfoo-MAH-toh] (“smokiness”). Its hazy effects, which create a half-waking, dreamlike quality reminiscent of dusk, could only be achieved by building up color with many layers of transparent oil paint—a process called glazing. But it is the mysterious personality of Leonardo’s sitter that most occupies the viewer’s imagination. For generations, viewers have asked, Who is this woman? What is she thinking about? What is her relation to the artist? Leonardo presents us with a particular personality, whose half-smile suggests that he has captured her in a particular, if enigmatic, mood. And the painting’s hazy light reinforces the mystery of her personality. Apparently, whatever he captured in her look he could not give up. The Mona Lisa occupied Leonardo for years, and it followed him to Rome and then to France in 1513, where King Louis XII offered him the Château [shah-TOH] of Cloux [kloo] near Amboise [ahm-BWAHZ] as a residence. Leonardo died there on May 2, 1519.

In 1495, Ludovico commissioned Leonardo to paint a monumental fresco of the Last Supper for the north wall of the refectory of the Dominican monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie [GRATZ-ee-ay] (Fig. 7.18). The intent was that at every meal the monks would contemplate Christ’s last meal in a wall-sized painting. The Last Supper illusionistically extends the refectory walls in perfect one-point perspective, carrying the present of architectural space into the past of the painting’s space.
The moment Leonardo chose to depict is just after Christ has announced to the apostles that one of them will betray him. Each apostle reacts in his characteristic way. Saint Peter grabs a knife in anger, while Judas turns away and Saint John appears to faint. The vanishing point of the painting is directly behind Christ’s head, focusing the viewer’s attention and establishing Christ as the most important figure in the work. He extends his arms, forming a perfect equilateral triangle at the center of the painting, an image of balance and a symbolic reference to the Trinity. What is unique about this painting of an otherwise completely traditional subject for a refectory is its psychological realism. We see this in the sense of agitated doubt and confusion among the apostles, their intertwined bodies twisting and turning as if drawn toward the self-contained and peaceful image of Christ. The apostles, even Judas, are revealed in all their humanity, while Christ is composed in his compassion for them.

In 1499, the French, under Charles VIII, deposed Ludovico and imprisoned him in France, where he died in 1508. Leonardo abandoned Milan, eventually returning to Florence in about 1503. Both of Ludovico’s sons would briefly rule as duke of Milan in the early sixteenth century, but both were soon deposed and the male line of the Sforza family died out.

From Florence to Rome: The High Renaissance

When Brunelleschi arrived in Rome in 1402, shortly after the competition for the baptistery doors in Florence, the city must have seemed a pitiful place. Its population had shrunk from around 1 million in 100 CE to around 20,000. It was located in a relatively tiny enclave across the Tiber from the Vatican and Saint Peter’s Basilica and was surrounded by the ruins of a once great city. Even 150 years later, in the sixteenth century, the city occupied only a small fraction of the territory enclosed by its third-century CE walls (see Fig. 7.19). The ancient Colosseum was now in the countryside, the Forum a pasture for goats and cattle. The ancient aqueducts that had once brought fresh water to the city had collapsed. The popes had even abandoned the city when, in 1309, under pressure from the king of France, who sought to assert secular authority over the clergy, they left Italy and established Avignon [ah-veen-YOHN] as the seat of the Church. When Rome finally reestablished itself as the titular seat of the Church in 1378, succeeding popes rarely chose to visit the city, let alone live in it. The city held little appeal, except perhaps for the ruins themselves, and, as we have already seen, it was to the ruins of Rome that Brunelleschi was most attracted.
CHAPTER 7  THE RENAISSANCE

After 1420, when Pope Martin V (papacy 1417–1431) brought the papacy back to Rome for good, it became something of a papal duty to restore the city to its former greatness. Because as many as 100,000 visitors might swarm into Rome during religious holidays, it was important that they be “moved by its extraordinary sights,” as one pope put it, and thus find their “belief continually confirmed and daily corroborated by great buildings . . . seemingly made by the hand of God.” In other words, the popes were charged with the sacred duty of becoming great patrons of the arts and architecture of Rome.

By and large, Rome imported its artists from Florence. In 1481, Botticelli and a group of his fellow Florentine painters arrived to decorate the walls of the Vatican’s Sistine Chapel. When Pope Julius II (papacy 1503–1513) began a massive campaign to rebuild Saint Peter’s Basilica and the Vatican, he commanded Michelangelo to leave Florence for Rome in 1505 and commissioned major paintings and monuments from the then 30-year-old artist. In 1508, Michelangelo was followed by Raphael (Raffaello Santi or Sanzio, 1483–1520), a young painter from Urbino who had arrived in Florence in 1505. Julius set him the task of decorating the papal apartments. Rome must have seemed something of a Florentine place. In November 1494, the domination of Florence by the Medici family had come to an end. But when the Medici returned to power in Florence in 1512, they did so under the sway of two great Medici popes: Leo X (papacy 1513–1521), who was Lorenzo the Magnificent’s son, Giovanni de’ Medici; and Clement VII (papacy 1523–1534), who was Lorenzo’s nephew, Giulio de’ Medici. Whether in the church or the republic, Rome or Florence, the males of this patrician family were the dominant force in the Renaissance political world.

Bramante and the New Saint Peter’s Basilica

Shortly after he was elected pope in 1503, Julius II made what may have been the most important commission of the day. He asked the architect Donato Bramante (brah-MAHN-teh) (1444–1514) to renovate the Vatican Palace and serve as chief architect of a plan to replace Saint Peter’s Basilica with a new church. The pope’s chosen architect, Bramante, had worked with Leonardo da Vinci in Milan, and Julius was deeply impressed by Leonardo’s understanding of the writings of the ancient Roman architectural historian Vitruvius. For Vitruvius, the circle and square were the ideal shapes. Not only did these perfect shapes originate from the ideal human figure, they also mirrored the symmetry of the body and the proportional coherence of all its parts. (Vitruvius’ enumeration of human proportions is usually taken to recount the lost Canon of the fifth century BCE Greek
sculptor Polyclitus; see Fig. 2.29). The ratio of these proportions was the figurative equivalent of Pythagoras’ music of the spheres, the theory that each planet produced a musical sound, fixed mathematically by its velocity and distance from earth, which harmonized with those produced by other planets and was audible but not recognized on earth. Thus, according to Vitruvius, if the human head is one-eighth the total height of an idealized figure, then the human body itself fits into the ideal musical interval of the octave, the interval that gives the impression of duplicating the original note at a higher or lower pitch. In his Vitruvian Man, Leonardo illustrated how the ideal human figure generates both the circle and the square (Fig. 7.20).

In Rome, Bramante applied these ideas of geometrical perfection to one of his earliest commissions, a small free-standing circular chapel in the courtyard of a Spanish church in Rome, San Pietro in Montorio, directly over what was revered as the site of Saint Peter’s martyrdom. Because of its small size and the fact that it was modeled on a classical temple that was excavated in Rome during the reign of Sixtus IV, this structure is known as the Tempietto [tem-PYET-toh] (Little Temple) (Fig. 7.21). The 16 exterior columns are Doric—in fact, their shafts are original ancient Roman granite columns—and the frieze above them is decorated with objects of the Christian liturgy in sculptural relief. The diameter of the shafts defines the entire plan. Each shaft is spaced four diameters from the next, and the colonnade they form is two diameters from the circular walls. In its classical reference, its incorporation of original classical Roman columns into its architectural scheme, and, above all, in the proportional coherence of its parts, the Tempietto is the very embodiment of Italian humanist architecture in the High Renaissance.
The task of replacing Old Saint Peter’s was a much larger project and Bramante’s most important one. Old Saint Peter’s was a basilica, a type of ancient Roman building with a long central nave, double side aisles set off by colonnades (see Fig. 4.6), an apse in the wall opposite the main door, and a transept near the apse so that large numbers of visitors could approach the shrine to Saint Peter. In his plan for a new Saint Peter’s (Fig. 7.22a), Bramante adopted the Vitruvian square, as illustrated in Leonardo’s drawing, placing inside it a Greek cross (a cross in which the upright and transverse shafts are of equal length and intersect at their middles) topped by a central dome purposely reminiscent of the giant dome of the Pantheon (see Fig. 3.18). The resultant central plan is essentially a circle inscribed within a square. In Renaissance thinking, the central plan and dome symbolized the perfection of God. Construction began in 1506.

Julius II financed the project through the sale of indulgences, dispensations granted by the Church to shorten an individual’s stay in purgatory. This was the place where, in Catholic belief, individuals temporarily reside after death as punishment for their sins. Those wanting to enter heaven faster than they otherwise might could shorten their stay in purgatory by purchasing an indulgence. The Church had been selling these documents since the twelfth century, and Julius’s building campaign intensified the practice. (In protest against the sale of indulgences, Martin Luther would launch the Protestant Reformation in Germany in 1517; see chapter 8.)

The New Saint Peter’s would be a very expensive project, but there were also very many sinners willing to help pay for it. With the deaths of both pope and architect, in 1513 and 1514 respectively, the project came to a temporary halt. Its final plan would be developed in 1546 by Michelangelo (Fig. 7.22b).

Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel

After the fall of the Medici in 1494, a young Michelangelo, not yet twenty years old, had left Florence for Rome. There must have seemed little prospect for him in Florence, where a Dominican friar, Girolamo Savonarola [jee-ROH-lah-sah-vah-NAH-ruh] (1452–1498), abbot of the monastery of San Marco, wielded tremendous political influence. Savonarola appealed, first and foremost, to a moralistic faction of the populace that saw, in the behavior of the city’s upper classes, and in their humanistic attraction to classical Greek and Roman culture, clear evidence of moral decadence. Savonarola railed against the Florentine nobility—the Medici in particular—going so far as to organize troops of children to collect the city’s “vanities”—everything from cosmetics to books and paintings—and burn them in giant bonfires. Finally, in June 1497, an angry Pope Alexander VI excommunicated him for his antipapal preachings and for disobeying his directives for the administration of the monastery of San Marco. Savonarola was commanded not to preach, an order he chose to ignore. On May 28, 1498, he was forcibly removed from San Marco, tortured as a heretic along with two fellow friars, hanged until nearly dead, and then burned at the stake. His ashes were subsequently thrown into the Arno River. Florence felt itself freed from tyranny.

With the fall of Savonarola, the Signoria, Florence’s governing body, quickly moved to assert the republic’s survival in visual terms. It moved Donatello’s David (see Fig. 7.11) from the Medici palace to the Palazzo della Signoria, where the governing body met to conduct business. It also asked Michelangelo to return to Florence in 1501 to work on a huge cracked block of marble that all other sculptors had abandoned in dismay. It was to be another freestanding statue of the biblical hero David, but colossal in scale. Michelangelo rose to the challenge.

The completed figure (Fig. 7.23), over 17 feet high—even higher on its pedestal—intentionally references Donatello’s boyish predecessor but then challenges it. Michelangelo represents David before, not after, his triumph, sublimely confident, ready to take on whatever challenge faces him, just as the republic itself felt ready to take on all comers. The nudity of the figure and the contrapposto stance are directly indebted to the Medici celebration of all things ancient Greek. Its sense of self-contained, even heroic individualism captures perfectly the humanist spirit. Michelangelo’s triumph over the complexity of the stone transformed it into an artwork that his contemporaries lauded for its almost unparalleled beauty. It was an achievement that Michelangelo
would soon equal, in another medium, in his work on the Sistine Chapel ceiling at the Vatican, in Rome.

The fate of the David underscores the political and moral turbulence of the times. Each night, as workers installed the statue in the Piazza della Signoria, supporters of the exiled Medici hurled stones at it, understanding, correctly, that the statue was a symbol of the city’s will to stand up to any and all tyrannical rule, including that of the Medici themselves. Another group of citizens soon objected to the statue’s nudity, and before it was even installed in place, a skirt of copper leaves was prepared to spare the general public any possible offense. The skirt is long gone, but it symbolizes the conflicts of the era, even as the sculpture itself can be thought of as truly inaugurating the High Renaissance.

But it is Michelangelo’s work on the Sistine Chapel in Rome that remains one of the era’s crowning achievements. Just as the construction of the New Saint Peter’s was about to get under way, Julius II commissioned Michelangelo to design his tomb. It would be a three-storied monument, over 23 feet wide and 35 feet high, and it represents Michelangelo’s first foray into architecture. For the next 40 years, Michelangelo would work sporadically on the tomb, but from the beginning he was continually interrupted, most notably in 1506 when Julius himself commanded the artist to paint the 45- by 128-foot ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, named after Sixtus IV, Julius’s uncle, who had commissioned its construction in 1473. Ever since its completion, the chapel has served as the meeting place of the conclave of cardinals during the election of new popes. Michelangelo at first refused Julius’s commission, but by 1508 he reconsidered, signed the contract, and began the task.

Julius first proposed filling the spandrels between the windows with paintings of the twelve apostles and then decorating the ceiling proper with ornamental designs. But when Michelangelo objected to the limitations of this plan, the pope freed him to paint whatever he liked, and Michelangelo undertook for himself a far more ambitious task—nine scenes from Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Bible, on the ceiling proper surrounded by prophets, Sibyls, the ancestors of Christ, and other scenes (Figs. 7.24, 7.25). Thus, the ceiling would narrate events before the coming of the law of Moses, and would complement the narrative cycles on the walls below.

Fig. 7.23 Michelangelo, David. 1501–1504. Marble, height 17′3″. Accademia, Florence. The David was originally conceived to be placed high on the facade of Florence Cathedral. It was probably situated in the Piazza della Signoria because it could not be lifted into place.
Figs. 7.24 and Fig. 7.25 Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel ceiling and plan of its narrative program, Vatican, Rome. 1508–1512. Fresco, 45’ × 128’. The intense and vibrant colors of the ceiling were revealed after a thorough cleaning, completed in 1990. Centuries of smoke and grime were removed by a process that involved the application of a solvent, containing both a fungicide and an antibacterial agent, mixed with a cellulose gel that would not drip from the ceiling. This mixture was applied in small sections with a bristle brush, allowed to dry for three minutes, and then removed with sponge and water. Until the cleaning, no one for centuries had fully appreciated Michelangelo’s daring, even sensual, sense of color.
Throughout the ceiling Michelangelo includes the della Rovere heraldic symbols of oak (rovere) and acorn to symbolize the pope’s patronage, usually in the hands of ignudi [ee-NYOO-dee], nude youths who sit at the four corners of alternate central panels. These same panels are framed by bronze shields that underscore the patron’s military prowess. The whole is contained in an entirely illusionistic architecture that appears to open at each end to the sky outside. Only the spandrels over the windows and the pendentives (concave triangular sections that form a transition between a rectilinear and a dome shape) at each corner are real.

The nine central panels tell the story, in three panels each, of Creation, Adam and Eve, and Noah. The series begins over the chapel altar with the Separation of Light from Darkness, a moment associated with the eternal struggle between good and evil, truth and falsehood. In fact, this pairing of opposites characterizes the entire program. At the center of the ceiling is the Creation of Eve. Life and death, good and evil, the heavenly and the earthly, the spiritual and the material, pivot around this central scene. Everything between here and the altar represents Creation before the knowledge of good and evil was introduced to the world by the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden, a scene represented, together with the Expulsion, in the panel just to the right. From here to the panel over the door to the chapel we witness the early history of fallen humankind, for viewers entering the chapel look up to see directly above them the Drunkenness of Noah, an image symbolic of their own frailty. They see the goodness and truth of God’s creation only at the greatest remove from them, far away at the chapel’s other end.

The tension between the spiritual and the material worlds is nowhere better represented on the ceiling than in the Creation of Adam (Fig. 7.26). Adam is earthbound. He seems lethargic, passive, barely interested, while a much more animated God flies through the skies carrying behind him a bulging red drapery that suggests both the womb and the brain, creativity and reason. Under his arm is a young woman, who may be Eve, who prefigures the Virgin, while God’s left hand touches the shoulder of an infant, who may symbolize the future Christ. The implication of the scene is that in just one moment, God’s finger will touch Adam’s and infuse him with not just energy but soul, not just life but the future of humankind.

To paint the ceiling, Michelangelo had to construct a scaffold that moved down the chapel from the entrance to the altar. Thus, the first frescoes painted were the Noah group, and the last, the Creation. He painted the ceiling standing, not lying down, his eyes focused on the work above him. As the work progressed, it appears that he grew more comfortable, for his style became increasingly energetic and bold. This is especially apparent in his depiction of the ignudi, Sibyls [SIB-ulz], and prophets, which he presented with increasing skill in more poses exhibiting greater physical movement as he progressed down the ceiling from entrance to altar.
Michelangelo worked on the ceiling from May 1508 until 1512. His accomplishment becomes even clearer when we compare the final painting to the preparatory studies. In a drawing of one of the later figures painted, the Libyan Sibyl (Fig. 7.27), the figure’s hands are balanced evenly, at the same level, but by the time he painted her (Fig. 7.28), the left hand had dropped below the right to emphasize her downward turn, emphasizing the fact that she is bringing knowledge down to the viewer. The artist has paid special attention to the left foot, seeing the need to splay the four smaller toes backward. And finally, his model in the drawing was apparently male. In his reworking of the face at the lower left of the drawing, he softens the figure’s cheekbones and fills out her lips. In the final painting, he reduces the model’s prominent brow, hides the musculature of the model’s back, and exaggerates the buttocks and hips, feminizing the original masculine sketch. As graceful as it is powerful and majestic, the Libyan Sibyl is a virtuoso display of technical mastery.

The Stanza della Segnatura

The young painter Raphael arrived in Rome as Michelangelo was beginning work on the Sistine ceiling and quickly secured a commission from Julius II to paint the pope’s private rooms in the Vatican Palace. The first of these rooms was the so-called Stanza della Segnatura [STAHN-zah DEL-lah Sayn-yah-TOOR-ah], Room of the Signature, where subsequent popes signed official documents, but which Julius used as a library. Julius had determined the subjects. On each of the four walls Raphael was to paint one of the four major areas of humanist learning: Law and Justice, to be represented by the Cardinal Virtues; the Arts, to be represented by Mount Parnassus; Theology, to be represented by the Disputà [lees-poo-TAH], or Dispute over the Sacrament; and Philosophy, to be represented by the School of Athens (see Focus, pages 212–213). In an apparent attempt to balance classical paganism and Christian faith, a gesture completely in keeping with
Julius’ humanist philosophy, two of these scenes—Mount Parnassus and the School of Athens—had classical themes, the other two Christian.

The Medici Popes

Pope Julius II died in 1513, not long after Michelangelo had completed the Sistine Chapel ceiling and Raphael the Stanza della Segnatura. He was succeeded by Leo X, born Giovanni de’ Medici, son of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Leo’s papacy began a nearly 21-year period of dominance from Rome by the Medici popes, which ended with the death of Clement VII in 1534. The patronage of these Medici popes had a significant effect on art.

Leo X and Raphael

After his work in the Stanza, Leo was quick to hire Raphael for other commissions. When Bramante died in 1514, Leo appointed the young painter as papal architect, though Raphael had never worked on any substantial building project. It was not long before Leo asked Raphael to paint his portrait.

Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de’ Medici and Luigi de’ Rossi (Fig. 7.29), painted in 1517, suggests a new direction in Raphael’s art. The lighting is more somber than in the vibrantly lit paintings of the Stanza della Segnatura. Architectural detail is barely visible as the figures are silhouetted, seated against an intensely black ground. Although posed as a group, the three figures look in different directions, each preoccupied with his own concerns. It is as if they have just heard something familiar but ominous in the distance, something that has given them all pause. There is, furthermore, a much greater emphasis on the material reality of the scene. One can almost feel the slight stubble of Leo’s beard, and the beards of the two cardinals are similarly palpable. The velvet of Leo’s ermine-trimmed robe contrasts dramatically with the silk of the cardinals’ cloaks. And the brass knob on the pope’s chair reflects the rest of the room like a mirror, including a brightly lit window that stands in total opposition to the darkness of the rest of the scene. All in all, the painting creates a sense of drama, as if we are witness to an important historical moment.

In fact, in 1517, the papacy faced some very real problems. To the north, in Germany, Martin Luther had published his Ninety-Five Theses, attacking the practice of papal indulgences and calling into question the authority of the pope (see chapter 8). Back in Florence, where the Medici had resumed power in 1512, the family maintained control largely through its connections to Rome, and its control was constantly threatened. Despite these difficulties, as Leo tried to rule the Church in Rome and Florence from the stanze of the Vatican, he continued his patronage of the arts unabated. He commissioned Raphael to decorate more rooms in the papal apartments and to develop a series of cartoons (full-scale drawings used to transfer a design onto another surface) for tapestries to cover the lower walls of the Sistine Chapel. Leo also celebrated his papacy with a series of commissions at San Lorenzo, the neighborhood church in Florence that had served as the Medici family mausoleum for nearly 100 years. He hired Michelangelo to design a new funerary chapel there, the so-called New Sacristy, for recently deceased members of the family.

Clement VII and the Laurentian Library

When Leo X died in 1521, he was briefly succeeded by a Dutch cardinal who deplored the artistic patronage of the Medici popes as both extravagant and inappropriate. He died only a year into his reign, and when Giulio de’ Medici succeeded him as Clement VII (papacy 1523–1534), artists and humanists reacted enthusiastically. As cardinal, he had commissioned major works from Raphael and others, and he had worked closely with Leo on Michelangelo’s New Sacristy at San Lorenzo in Florence. But Clement was never able to sustain the scale of patronage in Rome that his uncle had managed. This failure resulted in part from the Sack of Rome by the German mercenary troops of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1527. During this crisis, many of the artists’ workshops in the city were destroyed, and many artists abandoned the city altogether.
Focus

Raphael’s *School of Athens*

The *School of Athens*, also known as *Philosophy*, is generally acknowledged as the most important of Raphael’s four paintings for the Stanza della Segnatura of the Vatican Palace in Rome. Its classicism is clearly indicated in several ways: by its illusionistic architectural setting, based on ancient Roman baths; by its emphatic one-point perspective, which directs viewer attention to the two central figures, Plato and Aristotle, fathers of philosophy; and by its subject matter, the philosophical foundation of the Renaissance humanistic enterprise. All of the figures here—the Platonists on the left, the Aristotelians on the right, though not all have been identified—were regarded by Renaissance humanists as embodying the ideal of continual pursuit of learning and truth. The clarity, balance, and symmetry that distinguish this Raphael composition became a touchstone for painters in centuries to come.

The gestures of the central figures indicate heavenly and earthly duality. Plato points toward the heavens, the realm of ideal forms that so informs his work, while Aristotle stretches out his hand palm down toward the earth, from where, in his view, all knowledge originates in empirical observation. Other philosophers spread out across the room, those ranked on Plato’s side beneath a niche containing a statue of Apollo, the god of reason, music, and philosophical enlightenment. But for Raphael and many other humanists, Plato and Aristotle were more alike than dissimilar. They believed that the greatest difference between the two was more a matter of style than substance. Plato’s poetic images and Aristotle’s rational analysis were actually arguing for the same things but from different directions. The painting is, after all, entitled *School of Athens*, not *Schools of Athens*. This unified humanist philosophical tradition is mirrored, then, in the balanced clarity of the painting’s composition.

**Plato** (ca. 428–348 BCE) resembles a self-portrait of Leonardo da Vinci. He points upward to the realm of ideas. (Note the resemblance of this gesture to that of Doubting Thomas in Leonardo’s *Last Supper*, Fig. 7.18.) He carries the *Timaeus*, the dialogue on the origin of the universe in which he argued that the circle is the image of cosmic perfection.

**Apollo**, holding a lyre, is god of reason, patron of music, and symbol of philosophical enlightenment.

**Epicurus** (341–270 BCE) reads a text and wears a crown of grape leaves, symbolic of his philosophy that happiness could be attained through the pursuit of pleasures of the mind and body.

**Pythagoras** (ca. 580–500 BCE), the Greek mathematician, illustrates the theory of proportions to interested students—among them, wearing a turban, the Arabic scholar, *Averroës* (1126–1198).
Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) debates with Socrates (ca. 470–399 BCE), who makes his points by enumerating them on his fingers.

Heraclitus (ca. 535–475 BCE), the brooding Greek philosopher who despaired at human folly, wears stonecutter's boots and is actually a portrait of Michelangelo.

Diogenes the Cynic (ca. 412–323 BCE), who roamed the streets of Athens looking for an honest man, hated worldly possessions, and lived in a barrel.

Euclid (3rd century BCE), whose Elements remained the standard geometry text down to modern times, is actually a portrait of Bramante.

Ptolemy, the second-century astronomer and philosopher, holds a terrestrial globe, while Zoroaster (ca. 628–551 BCE) faces him holding a celestial globe. Both turn toward a young man who looks directly out at us. This is a self-portrait of Raphael.

Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, is the traditional patron of those devoted to the pursuit of truth and artistic beauty.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) carries his Nicomachean Ethics and gestures outward toward the earthly world of the viewer, emphasizing his belief in empiricism—that we can only understand the universe through the careful study and examination of the natural world.
Michelangelo once described this project as "a certain stair that comes back to my mind as in a dream," and its cascading waterfall effect, filling the space of the vestibule as no other stair had done before, certainly suggests that Michelangelo was becoming increasingly interested in exploring realms of the imagination beyond the humanist vision of a rational world governed by structural logic.

Josquin des Prez and the Sistine Chapel Choir

The inventiveness that marks the patronage of Isabella d’Este and the Medici popes and cardinals as well as the work of Raphael, Leonardo, and Michelangelo was a quality shared by Renaissance musicians, especially in the virtuosity of their performances. Such originality was the hallmark of the Sistine Chapel Choir, founded in 1473 by Sixtus IV. It performed only on occasions when the pope was present and typically consisted of between 16 and 24 male singers. The choir’s repertory was limited to the polyphonic forms common to the liturgy: motets, masses, and psalm settings. These were arranged in four parts (voices), for boy sopranos, male altos, tenors, and basses. The choir usually sang without instrumental accompaniment, a cappella, “in the manner of the chapel,” an unusual practice at the time, since most chapel choirs relied on at least organ accompaniment.

Composers from all over Europe were attracted to the Sistine Chapel Choir. Between 1489 and 1495, one of the principal members of the choir was the Franco-Flemish composer Josquin des Prez [JOSS-kin day PRAY] (ca. 1450–1521). Afterward, beginning in about 1503, he served as musical director of the chapel at the court of Ferrara. During his lifetime, he wrote some 18 masses, almost 100 motets (see chapter 6 and the discussion of Guillaume Dufay earlier in this chapter), and some 70 songs, including three Italian frottole.

Josquin’s last mass, the Pange lingua [PAN-geh LIN-gwah] ("Sing, my tongue"), written some time after 1513, is structured by means of paraphrase. In paraphrase structure, all voices elaborate on an existing melody. One voice introduces a musical idea that is subsequently repeated with some variation in sequence by each of the other voices throughout the entire work or section of a work, so that all the parts are rhythmically and melodically balanced. This creates the richly polyphonic texture of the whole. This contrasts with cantus firmus, which, as we saw in chapter 5, is the plainchant (monophonic), “fixed melody” on which the composition is based. The source of Josquin’s melody in Pange lingua is a very well-known plainchant hymn written in the sixth century by Venantius Fortunatus [wen-AN-see-us for-too-NAH-tus] (ca. 530–609), one of the earliest medieval poets and composers. Josquin transforms the original into a completely new composition, even as he leaves the melody entirely recognizable.

The opening Kyrie (Fig. 7.31) (CD-Track 7.2) is based on the opening of the Fortunatus plainchant. In a technique known as point of imitation, this musical theme is taken up by all the voices of Josquin’s polyphonic composition in succession so that all four voices weave round one
another in imitation. This kind of innovative play upon a more or less standard theme is testimony to Josquin’s ingenuity and humanist individualism. And it brings a level of expressiveness to the liturgy that far exceeds the more or less unemotional character of the plainchant. Largely because of this expressiveness, his compositions were among the first polyphonic works to be widely performed long after the death of their composer.

Niccolò Machiavelli and the Perfect Prince

If Josquin des Prez represents the inventiveness of the Renaissance individual to remake musical tradition, the political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) represents the individual’s capacity to ignore tradition altogether and follow the dictates of pragmatic self-interest. Machiavelli’s treatise The Prince (1513) is part of a long tradition of literature giving advice to rulers that stretches back to the Middle Ages. But Machiavelli’s revolutionary political pragmatism sets the work apart. Humanist education had been founded on the principle that it alone prepared people for a life of virtuous action. Machiavelli’s Prince challenged that assumption.

Machiavelli had served the Florentine city-state for years, assuming the post of second chancellor of the Republic in 1498. He had studied the behavior of ancient Roman rulers and citizens at great length, and he admired particularly their willingness to act in defense of their country. On the other hand, he disdained the squabbling and feuding that marked Italian internal relations in his own day. Assessing the situation in the Italian politics of his day, he concluded that only the strongest, most ruthless leader could impose order on the Italian people.

From Machiavelli’s point of view, the chief virtue any leader should display is that of ethical pragmatism. For the statesman’s first duty, he believed, was to preserve his country and its institutions, regardless of the means he used. Thus, a prince’s chief preoccupation, and his primary duty, says Machiavelli, is to wage war (Reading 7.5a):

**READING 7.5a from Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter 14 (1513)**

A prince . . . should have no care or thought but for war, and for the regulations and training it requires, and should apply himself exclusively to this as his peculiar province; for war is the sole art looked for in one who rules and is of such efficacy that it not merely maintains those who are born Princes, but often enables men to rise to that eminence from a private station; while, on the other hand, we often see that when Princes devote themselves rather to pleasure than to arms, they lose their dominions.

His attention turned to war, the prince must be willing to sacrifice moral right for practical gain, for “the manner in which we live, and that in which we ought to live, are things so wide asunder, that he who quits the one to betake himself to the other is more likely to destroy than to save himself.” Therefore, “it is essential . . . for a Prince who desires to maintain his position, to have learned how to be other than good.” Goodness, from Machiavelli’s point of view, is a relative quality anyway. A prince, he says, “need never hesitate . . . to incur the reproach of those vices without which his authority can hardly be preserved; for if he well consider the whole matter, he will find that there may be a line of conduct having the appearance of virtue, to follow which would be his ruin, and that there may be another course having the appearance of vice, by following which his safety and well-being are secured.” The well-being of the prince, in other words, is of the utmost importance because upon it rests the well-being of the state.

Fig. 7.31 Score for the opening bars of Josquin des Prez’s Pange Lingua Mass. 16th century. The four voices of the mass are represented here, each one indicated by the decorative capital at the beginning of the line.
Machiavelli further argues that the prince, once engaged in war, has three alternatives for controlling a state once he has conquered it: He can devastate it, live in it, or allow it to keep its own laws. Machiavelli recommends the first of these choices, especially if the prince defeats a republic (Reading 7.5b):

**READING 7.5b from Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter 5 (1513)**

In republics there is a stronger vitality, a fiercer hatred, a keener thirst for revenge. The memory of their former freedom will not let them rest; so that the safest course is either to destroy them, or to go and live in them.

This is probably a warning directed at the absentee Medici popes, far away in Rome and not tending to business in Florence, for Machiavelli originally planned to dedicate the book to Giuliano de’ Medici, by then Pope Leo X. (He eventually dedicated it to Lorenzo de’ Medici, then Duke of Florence, hoping to secure political favor.) Its lessons, drawn from Roman history, were intended as a guide to aid Italy in rebuffing the French invasions.

Finally, according to Machiavelli, the prince should be feared, not loved, for “Men are less careful how they offend him who makes himself loved than him who makes himself feared.” This is because “love is held by the tie of obligation, which, because men are a sorry breed, is broken on every whisper of private interest; but fear is bound by the apprehension of punishment which never relaxes.”

From Machiavelli’s point of view, humans are “fickle,” “dishonest,” “simple,” and, as he says here, all in all a “sorry breed.” The state must be governed, therefore, by a morality different than that governing the individual. Such moral and ethical pragmatism was wholly at odds with the teachings of the Church. In 1512, Pope Julius II’s troops overran the Florentine republic, restored the Medici to power in Florence, and dismissed Machiavelli from his post as second chancellor. Machiavelli was then (wrongfully) accused of involvement in a plot to overthrow the new heads of state, imprisoned, tortured, and finally exiled permanently to a country home in the hills above Florence. It is here, beginning in 1513, that he wrote The Prince.

Although widely circulated, The Prince was too much at odds with the norms of Christian morality to be well received in the sixteenth century. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was more often condemned than praised, particularly because it appeared to be a defense of absolute monarchy. Today we value The Prince as a pioneering text in political science. As an essay on political power, it provides a rationalization for political expediency and duplicity that society has all too often witnessed in modern political history.

The High Renaissance in Venice

In a mid-fifteenth-century painting by Vittore Carpaccio [vee-TOR-eh car-PAH-choh] (1450–1525) of Saint Mark’s lion (Fig. 7.32), symbol of the Venetian Republic, the lion stands with its front paws on land and its rear paws on the sea, symbolizing the importance of both elements to the city. In the sixth or seventh century, invading Lombards from the north had forced the local populations of the Po river delta to flee to the swampy lagoon islands that would later become the city of Venice. Ever since, trade had been the lifeblood of Venice.

Not only did the city possess the natural fortification of being surrounded on all sides by water, but, as a larger city-state, it also controlled the entire floodplain north of the Po.
River, including the cities of Padua and Verona and extending eastward nearly to Milan (Map 7.2). This larger territory was called Terraferma (from the Latin terra firma, “firm ground”), to distinguish it from the watery canals and islands of the city proper. From Terraferma, the Venetians established trade routes across the Alps to the north, and eastward across Asia Minor, Persia, and the Caucasus. As one Venetian historian put it in a thirteenth-century history of the city: “Merchandise passes through this noble city as water flows through fountains.” By the fifteenth century, the city had become a center of fashion. In 1423 the doge observed, “Now we have invested in our silk industry a capital of 10 million ducats [roughly $39 million today] and we make 2 million [roughly $7.8 million] annually in export trade; 16,000 weavers live in our city.” These weavers produced satins, velvets, and brocades that were in demand across the continent. On this tide of merchandise flowed even greater wealth. As a result, the city became a great naval power and a preeminent center of shipbuilding, able to protect and contribute to its maritime resources as no other European city (except possibly Genoa) could even imagine.

Venice considered itself blessed by Saint Mark, whose relics resided in the cathedral of Saint Mark’s. Protected by its patron saint, the city could prosper in peace. “Peace unto you, Mark my evangelist,” reads the Latin inscription in the book the lion holds with its right paw in Carpaccio’s painting. Behind the lion, visible across the lagoon, is the Piazza San Marco (Saint Mark’s Square), with its tall campanile, or bell tower, the domes of Saint Mark’s, and the Palace of the Doge [doh], the Venetian Republic’s leader, whom they elected for life. In almost every other Italian city, church and state were physically separated, but in Venice the political and religious centers of the city stood side by side. Peace, prosperity, and unity of purpose were the city’s greatest assets—and the citizens of Venice believed, above all, in those principles.

Venetian Architecture

During the Renaissance, an elaborate, sensuous style of architecture would develop in Venice, influenced by the elaborate Gothic style of the facades of buildings such as the Doge’s Palace, which was begun in 1340 (Fig. 7.33). There is no hint, in this building, of any need to create a defensible space to protect the state. Two stories of open arcades, rising in pointed arches and topped by open quatrefoils, provide covered walkways around the outside, as if to invite the citizenry into its halls. The diamond pattern of the stonework in the upper stories creates a sense of lightness to what might otherwise seem a massive facade. And the colors of the ornament and stone—white and pink—seem calculated to reflect light...
Verona marble used in the detailing was oiled and varnished with white lead and oil to make it shine like marble. The red ordered that the stone carved for the tracery work be painted other moderate-sized Venetian palazzi. Originally, Contarini use as a sign of the stability of the city's culture. long probably because the citizens regarded their continued palazzi and civic architecture retained Gothic elements for so the Doge's Palace, is distinctly Gothic in character. Venetian Gold.”) Although built in the Renaissance, the house, like abbreviation of the Contarini family. (Ca’ is a Venetian abbreviation of casa, “house,” and Ca’ d’Oro means “House of Gold.”) Although built in the Renaissance, the house, like the Doge’s Palace, is distinctly Gothic in character. Venetian palazzi and civic architecture retained Gothic elements for so long probably because the citizens regarded their continued use as a sign of the stability of the city’s culture.

The asymmetry of the Ca’ d'Oro facade, with its three distinct loggias, or arcades, is characteristic of the design of other moderate-sized Venetian palazzi. Originally, Contarini ordered that the stone carved for the tracery work be painted with white lead and oil to make it shine like marble. The red Verona marble used in the detailing was oiled and varnished to bring out its deepest and richest hues. The balls atop the facade's parapet, the rosettes at the bottom of the arches, the leaves on the capitals at the corners, the architectural moldings, window finials, and the roundels over the windows and the portico arches, were all gilded—giving the house its name. Finally, the backgrounds of the capitals, and other details, were painted with very expensive ultramarine blue, made of ground lapis lazuli, an imported semiprecious stone.

The Contarini finished the Ca’ d’Oro just seven years before Cosimo de’ Medici began the Medici Palace in Florence (see Fig. 7.12), but nothing could be more distant in feeling and taste. Contarini’s palace, with its airy traceries and ornamentation, is light and refined; Cosimo’s palace, with its monumental facade, is massive—a wall of stone. One opens to the canal; the other turns inward away from the street. The Ca’ d’Oro is an ostentatious celebration of personal wealth and social status; the Medici palace projects state authority and power.

**Masters of the Venetian High Renaissance: Giorgione and Titian**

The two great masters of painting in the Venetian High Renaissance were Giorgione da Castelfranco, known simply as Giorgione [jor-JOH-neh] (ca. 1478–1510), and Tiziano Vecelli, known as Titian [TISH-un] (ca. 1489–1576). Giorgione had been especially inspired when Leonardo visited the city in 1500. In the first decade of the sixteenth century, they worked sometimes side by side, gaining increased control of their surfaces, building up color by means of glazing, as Leonardo did in his soft, luminous landscapes. Their paintings, like the great palaces of Venice whose reflections shimmered on the Grand Canal, demonstrate an exquisite sensitivity to the play of light and shadow, to the luxurious display of detail and design, and to an opulent variety of pattern and texture.

**Giorgione** The mysterious qualities of Leonardo’s highly charged atmospheric paintings like the *Mona Lisa* (see Fig. 7.17) are fully realized in Giorgione’s *Tempest* (Fig. 7.35). The first known mention of the painting dates from 1530, when the painting surfaced in the collection of a Venetian patrician. We know almost nothing else about it, which contributes to its mystery. At the right, an almost nude young woman nurses her child. At the left, a somewhat disheveled young man, wearing the costume of a German mercenary soldier, gazes at the woman and child with evident pride. Between them, in the foreground, stands a pediment topped by two broken columns. A creaky wooden bridge crosses the estuary in the middle ground, and lightning flashes in the distance, illuminating a densely built cityscape.

Giorgione evidently began work on his paintings without preliminary drawings, and X-ray examination of this one reveals that in the young man’s place there originally stood a second young woman stepping into the pool between the two figures. At the time that the work surfaced in a wealthy Venetian’s collection in 1530, it was described simply as a small landscape with a soldier and a gypsy. It seems to have satisfied the Venetian taste for depictions of the affairs of everyday life, and even though its subject remains obscure, the painting continues to fascinate us.

Giorgione did not make preliminary drawings for his paintings, which led Vasari, in his *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Architects, and Sculptors*, to charge that he was simply hiding his inability to draw well beneath a virtuoso display of surface color and
light. The shortcoming of all Venetian artists, Vasari claimed, was their sensuous painterly technique, as opposed to the intellectual pursuits of the Florentines, epitomized by their careful use of scientific perspective and linear clarity.

In a certain sense, Vasari was right. Sensuality, even outright sexuality, would become a primary subject of Venetian art. Giorgione's *Pastoral Concert* (Fig. 7.36), sometimes attributed to Titian, who early in his career often collaborated with Giorgione, offers a different picture of love. Here men and women sit together in a countryside setting. The men are fully clothed, one in the costume of a Venetian nobleman, the other barefoot and in peasant garb; the women are nude. A shepherd passes by in the near distance with his flock. In the far distance is a country estate. The nobleman plays a lute while the seated nude woman with her back to us plays a flute. If we take these instruments as metaphors for parts of male and female anatomy, a usage common in both the art and literature of the period, the sexual implications become clear. However, the meaning of the activity of the woman at the left, pouring water into rather than drawing water out of the well, is somewhat enigmatic. Perhaps it has to do with the life-giving essence of water.

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**Fig. 7.35** Giorgione, *Tempest*. ca. 1509. Oil on canvas, 31 1/4" x 28 1/4". Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice. There is nothing about this painting that could be called controlled. The landscape is overgrown and weedy—just as the man and woman are disheveled and disrobed. It is as if, for a moment, the lightning has revealed to the viewer a scene not meant to be witnessed.

**Fig. 7.36** Giorgione, *Pastoral Concert* (*Fête Champêtre*). ca. 1510. Oil on canvas, 43 3/4" x 54 3/8". Musée du Louvre, Paris. The narrative of the image is purposefully mysterious, giving the viewer’s imagination the freedom to play.
Fig. 7.37 Titian, *Sacred and Profane Love*. ca. 1514. Oil on canvas, 46 1/2” × 109 3/4”. Galleria Borghese, Rome. The painting was commissioned by Niccolò Aurelio, a Venetian, to celebrate his marriage to Laura Bagarotto and was probably intended for the couple’s sleeping chamber. The husband’s coat of arms is carved on the fountain; the wife’s is inside the silver bowl on the fountain’s ledge.

Fig. 7.38 Titian, *Reclining Nude (Venus of Urbino)*. ca. 1538. Oil on canvas, 47” × 65”. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Titian’s technique contributes significantly to the power of the painting. Although not visible in reproduction, the nude’s skin is built up of layers of semitransparent yellow-whites and pinks that contrast to the cooler bluish whites of the bed sheets. Behind her, the almost black panel and curtain further contrast with the luminous light on her body. She seems literally “alight.”
The *Pastoral Concert* is a harmony of oppositions: not just male and female, but the clothed and the nude, the nobleman and the peasant, court music and folk song, city and country, and so on. What unites the diverse figures is the natural setting in which they find themselves and the uniform glow of light that bathes them all. There is nothing documentary about this scene—except perhaps the realistic portrayal of the women’s bodies, which are voluptuously rounded and fleshy. Rather, Giorgione presents us with a dream world, a representation destined for the study of a humanist nobleman who could contemplate the possibilities offered up by the scene as if it were an erotic poem by Ovid.

**Titian** Giorgione died of the plague in 1510, at only 32 years of age. It seems likely that his friend Titian, 10 years younger, finished several of Giorgione’s paintings. Certainly they share the same sensibility.

In Titian’s *Sacred and Profane Love* (Fig. 7.37), the nude figure at the right and the well at the center clearly echo Giorgione’s *Pastoral Concert*. The nude holds a lamp, perhaps symbolizing divine light and connecting her to the Neoplatonic ideal of the celestial Venus and thus sacred love. The luxuriously clothed, fully dressed figure on the left, whom we might think of as the “earthly lady,” or profane love, holds a bouquet of flowers, a symbol of her fecundity. Between the two, Cupid reaches into the fountain.

The painting was a commission from Niccolò Aurelio [oh-RAY-lee-oh] on the occasion of his marriage to Laura Bagarotto in 1514. Behind the clothed figure on the left, two rabbits cavort in the grass, underscoring the conjugal theme of the image. It seems probable that the two female figures represent two aspects of the same woman, and thus embody the limited range of roles that the Renaissance woman filled for her humanist husband, combining classical learning and intelligence with a candid celebration of sexual love in marriage.

Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (Fig. 7.38), painted for Duke Guidobaldo della Rovere of Urbino in 1538, more fully acknowledges the sexual obligations of most Renaissance women. This “Venus”—more a real woman than an ethereal goddess, and referred to by Guidobaldo as merely a “nude woman”—is frankly available. She stares out at the viewer, Guidobaldo himself, with matter-of-factness suggesting she is totally comfortable with her nudity. (Apparently the lady-in-waiting and maid at the rear of the palatial rooms are searching for suitably fine clothing in which to dress her.) Her hand both covers and draws attention to her genitalia. Her dog, a traditional symbol of both fidelity and lust, sleeps lazily on the white sheets at her feet. She may be, ambiguously, either a courtesan or a bride. (The chest from which the servant is removing clothes is a traditional reference to marriage.) In either case she is, primarily, an object of desire.

As Titian’s work continued to develop through the 1550s, 1560s, and 1570s, his brushwork became increasingly loose and gestural. The frank sensuality conveyed by crisp contours in *Sacred and Profane Love* and the *Venus of Urbino* found expression, instead, in the artist’s handling of paint itself. In *The Rape of Europa*, Jupiter has assumed the form of a bull to abduct the nymph Europa as she adorns its horns with flowers (Fig. 7.39). It is as if Titian’s brushwork is designed to convey the sensuality of his own touch. Indeed, the viewer can feel Titian’s very hand in these later works, for he would actually paint with his fingers and the stick end of his brush too. But Titian’s mastery of color—the rich varieties of warm reds, the luminosity of his glazes—so evident in all his paintings, never altered. In fact, his color came to define the art of Venice itself. When people speak of “Venetian” color, they have Titian in mind.

**The Literary Courtesan in Venice**

Among the city’s most educated citizens were its courtesans. “Thou wilt find the Venetian Courtezan a good Rhetorician and an elegant discoursor,” wrote one early seventeenth-century visitor to the city. These intellectual women were labeled “honest courtesans,” and although subject to the usual public ridicule—and often blamed, together with the city’s Jews, for any troubles that might befall the republic—they were known for their ability to be both sexual and intellectual. This group of courtesans dominated the Venetian literary scene. Many of their poems transform the clichés of courtly love poetry into frankly erotic metaphors.

Among the most remarkable Venetian courtesans was Veronica Franco (1546–1591), who published two volumes of poetry: *Terze rime* [TER-tseh REE-meh] (1575), named after the plural of the Italian poetic form first introduced by Dante (see chapter 6), and *Homely Letters to Diverse People* (1580). She also collected the works of other leading writers in respected anthologies and founded and funded a charity for courtesans and their children.

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**Fig. 7.39 Titian, The Rape of Europa. 1559–1562. Oil on canvas, 5′ 9 1/2″ × 7′ 8 1/4″. © Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA.** On the distant shore, Europa’s maidservants gesture in vain at her abduction.
Franco first gained notoriety in the 1570s at a renowned Venetian literary salon where male and female poets read and exchanged their works. Her poetry celebrates her sexual expertise as a courtesan and, in the slightly veiled imagery of the courtly tradition, promises to satisfy her interlocutor’s desires. Consider Capitolo 13, in which she playfully challenges a lover to a “duel” (Reading 7.6):

**READING 7.6 from Veronica Franco, Terze Rime, Capitolo 13**

No more words! To deeds, to the battlefield, to arms! 
For, resolved to die, I want to free myself 
from such merciless mistreatment. 
Should I call this a challenge? I do not know, 
since I am responding to a provocation; 
but why should we duel over words?
If you like, I will say that you challenged me; 
if not, I challenge you; I’ll take any route, 
and any opportunity suits me equally well. 
Yours be the choice of place or of arms, 
and I will make whatever choice remains; 
rather, let both be your decision. . . .

Come here, and, full of most wicked desire, 
braced stiff for your sinister task, 
bring with daring hand a piercing blade. 
Whatever weapon you hand over to me, 
I will gladly take, especially if it is sharp 
and sturdy and also quick to wound. 
Let all armor be stripped from your naked breast, 
so that, unshielded and exposed to blows, 
it may reveal the valor it harbors within. 
Let no one else intervene in this match, 
let it be limited to the two of us alone, 
behind closed doors, with all seconds sent away. . . .

To take revenge for your unfair attack, 
I’d fall upon you, and in daring combat, 
as you too caught fire defending yourself, 
I would die with you, felled by the same blow. 
O empty hopes, over which cruel fate 
forces me to weep forever! 
But hold firm, my strong, undaunted heart, 
and with that felon’s final destruction, 
avenge your thousand deaths with his one. 
Then end your agony with the same blade. . . .

Here Franco transforms the language of chivalric knighthood into the banter of the bedroom in a masterful use of double entendre [ahn-TAHN-druh], a figure of speech in which a phrase can be understood in either of two ways. This duality, the simultaneous expression of intellectual wit and erotic sensuality, is fundamental to the Venetian style. (Recall the multiple meanings of the instruments in Gior- gione’s Pastoral Concert.)

**Music in the Venetian High Renaissance**

Almost without exception, women of literary accomplishment in the Renaissance were musically accomplished as well. Isabella d’Este [DES-teh] (1474–1539), duchess of Mantua, a ducal city-state in the Po river valley between Venice and Milan, played both the lute and the lira da braccio, the precursor to the modern violin (Fig. 7.40). Through her patronage, she and her sister-in-law Lucrezia Borgia, duchess of Ferrara, competed for musicians and encouraged the cultivation of the frottola, discussed earlier. Courtesans such as Veronica Franco could both sing and play. And both Isabella and Elisabetta Gonzaga, duchess of Urbino, were well known for their ability to improvise songs. By the last decades of the sixteenth century, we know that women were composing music as well. The most famous of these was the Venetian Madalena Casulana [mah-dah-LAY-nah kah-soo-LAH-nah].

**Madalena Casulana’s Madrigals**

Madalena Casulana was the first professional woman composer to see her own compositions in print. In 1566, her anthology entitled The Desire was published in Venice. Two years later, she dedicated her first book of songs to Isabella de’ Medici Orsina with these words: “I would like . . . to show the world . . . the vain error of men, who so much believe themselves to be the masters of the highest gifts of the intellect, that they think those gifts cannot be shared equally by a woman.”

Casulana’s known work consists almost entirely of madrigals. The madrigal [MAD-rih-gul] is a secular vocal composition for three or more voices. It became popular throughout Italy in the sixteenth century, where it dominated secular music. Whereas the frottola uses the same music for each successive stanza, the madrigal is through-composed—that is, each line of text is set to new music. This allows for word painting, where the musical elements imitate the meaning of the text in mood or action. Anguish, for example, is conveyed with an unusually low pitch, as in Casulana’s Morir non può il mio cuore [moh-REER nohn pwo eel MEE-oh-KWOR-eh] ("My Heart Cannot Die") (CD-Track 7.3). The song laments a relationship gone bad, and the narrator contemplates driving a stake through her heart because it is in so much pain. When she says that her suicide might kill her beloved—so che morreste voi [so keh mor-EH-stay VOY] ("I know that you would die")—the word painting by rising progression of the melody suggests that, for her, his death might not be such a bad thing.
The ladies of the courts of Mantua and Ferrara were especially well known for their vocal accomplishments. At Ferrara, the “Ensemble of Ladies” attracted many of the most prominent madrigal composers of the day. But even when such ensembles were not available, madrigals and other songs could be performed by a single voice, accompanied by, perhaps, a flute and a lute. The words themselves were of paramount importance, however the music was performed.

Adrian Willaert’s Innovations for Polyphonic Form

Without question, the figure most responsible for the popularity of the madrigal form in sixteenth-century Venice was Adrian Willaert [VIL-ahrt] (1490–1562), a Netherlander who was appointed to the highest musical position in Venice in 1527, choirmaster of Saint Mark’s. By the time he accepted the position, he had already been a leading figure at the court of Ferrara for over a decade. He brought to his new position a deeply felt humanist spirit, one dedicated to innovation and originality even as it acknowledged the great achievements of the past. Willaert’s chief interest was polyphonic music such as the motet and the madrigal. To both of these forms he brought radical new ideas, as exemplified in the corpus of 27 motets and 25 madrigals for between four and seven voices called New Music, published in 1559, but probably written for the most part between the late 1530s and mid-1540s.

The madrigals of the New Music departed from all previous ones by consistently setting complete sonnets—all but one of them by Petrarch (see chapter 6)—in the form of the motet and by adapting a dense counterpoint formerly reserved for sacred music. Willaert’s chief aim was to present Petrarch’s words with as much clarity and restraint as possible. His choice of the Petrarchan sonnet, with its sense of gravitas, as the source of his lyrics was most likely driven by a desire to raise secular song to the level of the religious motet. Both were, at least musically, of equal weight and importance. And although Petrarch’s sonnets spoke of worldly love, they most often did so as metaphor for spiritual love.

Willaert’s love of polyphonic forms led to other innovations as well. At Saint Mark’s he regularly used two choirs—sometimes more—to create a polychoral style in which choirs on either side of the church sang to and against each other in increasingly complicated forms that anticipate by over four centuries the effects of stereophonic music. This arrangement drew notice after the publication in 1550 of his Salmi spezzi [SAHL-mee spayt-TSAH-tee] (literally “broken psalms,” but a reference to alternating choirs). He also added new instrumental forms to the liturgy, including an organ intonazione [een-toh-naht-tsee-OH-nay] (short prelude) and a virtuoso prelude, also for organ, called the toccata [toh-KAH-tah] (from the Italian toccare, “to touch”), designed to feature both the range of the instrument and the manual dexterity of the performer. Both were soon widely emulated across Europe. The richness of musical experience in Willaert’s Venice, then, was not unlike the richness of its painting—full of light and emotion, as words found their emotional equivalent in sound.

Fig. 7.40 Lira da braccio. Like the violin, the five strings over the fingerboard of the lira da braccio were played with a bow, but, unlike the violin, the two strings on the instrument’s bass side were plucked by the player’s left thumb.
Summary

**The State as a Work of Art** Florence was the center of a more than 150-year-long cultural revival in Europe that we have come to call the Renaissance, a “rebirth” of classical values that amounted to a revolution in human consciousness. From 1418 to 1494, the Medici family ruled Florence. They built upon a tradition of civic patronage that is exemplified in the Baptistery Doors competition of 1401, the two finalists of which were Filippo Brunelleschi and Lorenzo Ghiberti. Brunelleschi was the first Renaissance artist to master the art of scientific perspective. His findings were codified in 1435 by the architect Leon Battista Alberti in his treatise *Della pittura* ([DEL-lah pee-TOO-rah] (On Painting)). Scientific perspective informs Ghiberti’s panels for the Gates of Paradise, as well as works by the painter Masaccio. Both Masaccio and Donatello turned to classical sources to create highly realistic human figures, and Donatello’s *David* is the first life-size freestanding male nude sculpted since antiquity.

Medici control of Florentine politics was secured by Cosimo de’ Medici, who surrounded himself with humanists, championing especially the translations and interpretations of the works of Plato by Marsilio Ficino. Ficino’s Neoplatonist philosophy recast Platonic thought in contemporary terms. Cosimo’s grandson, Lorenzo, “the Magnificent,” continued the Medici tradition. His own circle of acquaintances included many of the greatest minds of the day, including Michelangelo, the painter Botticelli, the composer Heinrich Isaac, and the philosopher Pico della Mirandola.

**Beyond Florence: The Ducal Courts and the Arts** Lorenzo’s court inspired the courts of the leaders of other Italian city-states, the leaders of which were almost all nobility. At Urbino, Baldassare Castiglione wrote *The Book of the Courtier*, his treatise on the nature of courtly life and what it takes to become a well-rounded person, *l’uomo universale*. In Milan, Ludovico Sforza commissioned Leonardo da Vinci to paint the *Last Supper* for the Dominican monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie.

**From Florence to Rome: The High Renaissance** Until 1527, when German mercenaries in the employ of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V sacked the city, the patronage of the popes and their cardinals transformed Rome. Pope Julius II commissioned Michelangelo’s ceiling for the Sistine Chapel, Bramante’s Tempietto and his new basilica for Saint Peter’s, and Raphael’s frescoes for the Stanza della Segnatura. Composer Josquin des Prez shared the inventiveness of the humanist artists in the papal court, composing many polyphonic works for the Sistine Chapel Choir. Florentine statesman Niccolò Machiavelli argued, in *The Prince*, that the ideal ruler should follow the dictates of pragmatic self-interest.

**The High Renaissance in Venice** In Venice, the religious and political centers of the city—Saint Mark’s Cathedral and the Doge’s Palace—stood side by side, symbolizing peace, prosperity, and, above all, unity of purpose. The wealth and general well-being of Venice was displayed in its Gothic-inspired architecture. The painters Giorgione and Titian painted in a manner that lent their works an almost physical immediacy, helping to establish a sense of touch, sensuality, and even outright sexuality as primary subjects of Venetian art. The Venetian literary scene was dominated by a group of courtesans whose reputations were built upon the ability to combine sexual and intellectual pursuits. Chief among these was Veronica Franco, who in many poems transforms the clichés of courtly love poetry into frankly erotic metaphor. Madalena Casulana, the first professional woman composer to see her own compositions in print, composed madrigals, a form mastered by the choirmaster of Saint Mark’s, Adrian Willaerts.
The settings of Giorgione’s *Pastoral Concert* and Titian’s *Sacred and Profane Love* represent an escapist tendency that we first saw in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (chapter 6). In Boccaccio’s stories, a group of young men and women flee the onset of the plague in Florence, escape to the country, and for 10 days entertain each other with a series of tales, many of which are alternately ribald and erotic, moral and exemplary. Renaissance humanists considered retreats to the country to be an honored ancient Roman tradition, the pleasures of which were richly documented by such Roman poets as Horace in his *Odes* (chapter 3):

> How in the country do I pass the time?  
> The answer to the question’s brief:  
> I lunch and drink, I sing and play,  
> I wash and dine, I rest.

By the High Renaissance, wealthy Venetian families, following classical precedent, routinely escaped the heat and humidity of the city to private villas in the countryside. Andrea Palladio’s [pah-LAH-dee-oh] Villa La Rotonda (Fig. 7.41), located just outside the city of Vicenza, set the standard for the country villa. As in so much Venetian architecture, the house looks outward, toward the light of the countryside, rather than inward to the shadow of a courtyard. It is situated on the crest of a hill. On each of its four sides Palladio has placed a pedimented loggia, approached by a broad staircase, designed to take advantage of the view.

Built in the 1560s for a humanist churchman, the centralized plan of Villa Rotonda recalls Leonardo’s *Vitruvian Man* (see Fig. 7.20). Palladio was, in fact, a careful student of Vitruvius, as was Leonardo. It is not surprising, then, that the central dome of La Rotunda is modeled after the Pantheon (see Fig. 3.18), which was itself known in the sixteenth century as La Rotunda, as was any large, domed circular room. Although lacking the Pantheon’s coffered ceiling and size, Palladio’s villa was originally distinguished by a seven-foot diameter oculus, like that at the Pantheon open to the sky, but today covered by a small cupola. Directly below the oculus, a stone drain in the shape of a faun’s face allowed rainwater to fall into the basement. Although Venice depended on the agricultural economy of the *Terraferma*, the Villa Rotunda was not designed to be a working farm. The house was designed for family life and entertaining.

Palladio built many villas in the vicinity of Venice. Each of them is interesting in a different way, and they constitute an important body of High Renaissance architecture that influenced architects in many countries and later centuries down to our own day. Over three hundred years after Palladio’s death, Thomas Jefferson would model his own country estate at Monticello (Fig. 7.42) after Palladio’s example. Set atop a hill outside Charlottesville, Virginia, its vistas were in every way comparable to those of the Villa Rotunda. As opposed to La Rotunda, Monticello was the centerpiece of a working farm, where Jefferson continually experimented with agricultural techniques and methods. But Jefferson recognized in Palladio’s use of elemental geometric forms—circle, cube, and sphere—a sense of order and harmony that seemed, from his point of view, ideal for the architecture of his new American republic.