Unit 1:3, Renaissance economics and politics

1. Background and Historiography
   1. THe Birth of the Modern?
      1. Many believe that this is the birth of Modernism, I think they are a bit early
      2. It is a rebirth, of Classical Greek and Roman influences
      3. It is a rebirth of Individualism and an optimism based solely upon humanity
      4. However, we need to see this as a dawning
      5. This change also is located among the elite only! It will take a hundred years or more for these ideas to spread to the other classes.
   2. Renaissance?
      1. Occurred first in Italy from around 1300-1600
      2. Renaissance spread to Northern Europe around 1450
      3. In England the Renaissance did not begin until around 1500 and ends with Shakespeare’s death
   3. The Concept of the Renaissance
      1. We owe much of it to Jacob Burkhardt
      2. He claimed there was a distinct contrast between the Renaissance and the Medieval
      3. His scholarship has a limited scope. Does not consider the other classes etc. other expressions of art located in the medieval period etc.
2. Northern Italy
   1. Geography
      1. Italy lay on the crossroads of trade between Europe and Asia
      2. Italy was just a geographic expression, not a country with a state
      3. Italy was made of several independent city-states of varying size and power
3. The Rise of the Italian City-States
   1. Northern Italian cities developed due to free markets and internation trade
      1. These Italian city states are in a special position for four main reasons
         1. Wealth: they have it! And have it indeed!
         2. Rise of the merchant classes due to charters from the Emperors
         3. Urbanization: people go where the wealth and prosperity is!
         4. They saw themselves as the heirs to the Roman Empire and classical culture
      2. Genoa, Venice, Milan
      3. Signori or oligarchies: rule of the merchant aristocracies, controlled much of Italy by 1300
      4. Commenda: Contract between merchant adventurers who agreed to take goods to distant locations and return with the proceeds (usually received 1/3 of the profits)
      5. As a result of these developments Italy became more urban
         1. More towns and cities than anywhere in Europe at this time
   2. Politics amon the Italian City Sates
      1. Competition among the city states meant two things
         1. The Italian city states did not unite until the late 19th century
         2. Warfare
      2. In effect, an early balance of power pattern emerged where weaker states would ally with other states to prevent a single state from dominating the peninsula
      3. The political disunity of the Italian city states led to their downfall by the early 1500s when French and Spanish armies invaded Italy
      4. The Condottieri
         1. Mercenary generals of private armies
         2. They were hired by cities to carry out wars against other cities, they could and would switch sides depending upon finances
   3. Major Cities and personalities
      1. The Republic of Florence
         1. Built upon trade and textile manufacturing
         2. Became known as the “queen city of the Renaissance”
         3. Home of arists such as Giotto, Masaccio, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Fra Filippo Lippi, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Cellini et Al.
         4. Home of poets Dante, Terarch and Boccaccio
         5. Home of Machiavelli and Guicciardini, as well as Buni and others
         6. All of this was despite political instability and warfare which the city was embroiled
            1. Rival loyalties: to the Holy Roman Empire (Ghibellines) or the Pope (Guelfs)
            2. Nobility was actively excluded from politics
            3. There was strife between the guilds

Great guilds (textile manufacturers, judges, doctors, apothecaries etc)

Lesser guilds (blacksmiths, butchers, shoemakers, carpenters, bakers, retailers etc.)

* + - 1. The Government was modeled after the Roman republic and included institutions like the Signoria, Twelve Good Men, and the Standard Bearer of Justice which served very sort terms (some as short as two months)
    1. Florence and the Black Death
       1. In 1349, nearly half of all Florentines died as a result of the Black Plague
       2. The resulting food shortages led to periodic famines in the countryside surrounding Flornce
    2. The Ciompi Revolt
       1. The lesser guildsmen revolted in 1378
       2. Riots in the city caused widespread damage
       3. It took four years to restore order
       4. The lesser guilds were granted government participation
    3. Florence and War
       1. There were cyclical wars between Florence and Lucca and Milan
       2. In 1402, Milan nearly conquered Florence but the Milanese Duke died and the attack was halted.
          1. This event caused many Florentines to identify themselves with King David of the Old Testament, who faced Goliath and was victorious by God’s help
          2. Thus the Davidic themes of Florentine artists
  1. the Medici Family
     1. Although there were many powerful families in Florence the Medici came to dominate the city for 300 years
     2. The Medici were a well-established banking and cloth manufacturing family.
     3. There rise was secured by their patriarch Cosimo
     4. Cosimo de Medici 1389-1464
        + 1. Managed a textile empire that included wool, silk, and furrier trade
          2. Also, made clever loans to the powerful in Florence, Italy, and Europe which gained him friendships and alliances in high places
          3. Supported the Ciompi revolt which garnered the support of the lesser guildsmen
          4. Cosimo made huge loans to the City of Florence in critical times: Florentines saw him as a patriotic father figure for the city
          5. Did go on to hold public office but only held the highest office for six months
          6. His leadership was more de facto than de jure
          7. Began to expand his influence across Italy through church appointments and marriages etc.
          8. Cosimo declared that business and politics were not enough to hold his attention

Learned German, French, Latin, some Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic

Joined and attended Humanist discussion groups

Adopted the philosopher, Marilio Ficino

Established a Platonic Academy

* + - * 1. Cosimo also patronized the Arts and building projects

He believed it could enhance his family’s honor

He had the notion that the rich must give something back to ther communities

Church of San Lorenzo

Monestary of San Marco

His wife Lucretia helped her husband patronize the great artists of his day and educated their children, they would come to dominate European politics for more than a century

* + - 1. Lorenzo de Medici 1449-92
         1. Cosimo’s son
         2. Significant patron of the arts

Many talented artists musicians and philosophers were directly supported by Lorenzo

Founded a Platonic Academy for Ficino

Also wrote poetry himself which was often provocative

During his life, the Medici spent 663,755 gold florins on architecture and artistic commissions.

* + - * 1. Came to be known as “the Magnificent”
        2. Continues his father’s activities
        3. Attempted to defend agreesively the financial interests of the city which at times would place him at odds with the Pope
        4. He helped to create a new executive committee in the City of Florence: The Council of Seventy

This made the administration of the government more efficient

Lorenzo was a permanent member

* + - * 1. Lorenzo began lending risky loans to prominent people, even foreign monarchs, some of which were never repaid
        2. Medici banks began to close by the time of Lorenzo’s death
        3. Two years later (1494), the French invasions spelled disaster for the Medici financial empire
        4. There was still enough wealth for their children to rebuild them empire, but it was mismanaged
        5. The Medici were reduced to maintaining influence through church appointments and marriages
      1. Due to their patronage, Florence becomes the center of the Renaissance
  1. Other Major Cities
     1. Duchy of Milan
        1. Ruled by the Sforza’s family after 1450
        2. Milan was the principal adversary of Venice and Florence until the Peace of Lodi, 1454
           1. This created a relative peace for 40 years
     2. Rome
        1. Popes served both as religious and political leaders
        2. Controlled much of central Italy
        3. Would not become a leader in the Renaissance until the “High Renaissance” when the Church began to increasingly patronize the arts
     3. The Venetian Republic
        1. Longest lasting of the Italian states (until conquered by Napoleon in 1806)
        2. One of the world’s great naval and trading powers during the 13 and 1400s
        3. A primary link to both the silk road trade and spice trade through the Black sea and Eastern Mediterranean
     4. Naples and the Kingdom of the two sicilies
        1. Included southern Italian region of Naples and the Island of Sicily
        2. Only Italian city state to officially have a king
        3. Controlled by France from 1266-1435
        4. Controlled by Spain after 1435
        5. Was in a constant war stance due to Muslim raiders and the Italian wars
        6. Never really became a seat of the Renaissance
  2. The Decline of the Italian City-states
     1. French invasions began in 1494
        1. Ludovico Sforza
           1. 1494 Requested the French King Charles VIII to send troops to invade and assist Milan in defeating its Northern Italian enemies
           2. Once France did this, the French turned on Milan and attacked ad occupied the city
        2. The Medici
           1. When France invaded in 1494, it led to the expulsion of the Medici Family from Florence
           2. A monk named Guillermo Savonarola stepped into the power vacuum left by the Medici
        3. Savonarola
           1. Savonarola pledged to rid Florence of the decadence and corruption that he claimed led to its defeat
           2. He had prophesied that Florence would fall due to paganism and moral decay in the Italian cities
           3. He established a theocracy in Florence, with himself at the head
           4. Under his rule, Florence became a puppet of the French invaders
           5. When France was pushed out of Northern Italy, the people of Florence arrested Savonarola, he was executed, and the Medici returned
        4. The Italian cities were severely weakened
     2. Italy became a battleground in a series of struggles between Spain and France known as the Habsburg-Valois Wars
     3. Sack of Rome in 1527
        1. The Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V attacked and occupied Rome
        2. This symbolized the end of the Renaissance in Italy
        3. Devastation was widespread
        4. Economic and political stability was destroyed

1. Niccolo Machiavelli
   1. The Prince 1513
      1. The essential political philosophical work of the 1500s
      2. Advise to Cesare Borgia who had ambitions to unite the Italian city-states under his own rule.
      3. States that politically, the “ends justify the means”
      4. For rulers, it is better to be feared than loved
      5. Rulers had to practical and cunning, in addition to being aggressive and ruthless
         1. At times rulers should behave like a lion and at other times like a fox
      6. This work continued to influence European politics for centuries