

The Northern Renaissance

As merchants, scholars, and diplomats moved among the various courts and trading centers throughout Europe, so too did Italian ideas rooted in the rebirth of classical antiquity known as the Renaissance. These ideas included the importance of specific historical context and a linear approach to the study of history, the critical study of texts and language in its original form and original meaning, the virtue of an active life, the centrality of human experience and emotion, and an educational curriculum grounded in the liberal arts. It also included new styles in the arts, which emphasized perfect proportions and incorporated linear perspective, giving depth to two-dimensional spaces. Spreading north from Italy, these ideas were adopted to different contexts and native traditions. The Renaissance caught on quickly in Bohemia, where the nobility modeled villas on the Italian style and Bohemian kings used Italian artists and architects for their building projects. In Prague, the castle and cathedral were adorned in the Renaissance style. Poland claimed humanist schools and became a center for Renaissance culture in Eastern Europe. Hungary also had a thriving humanist culture led by individuals educated in schools of famous Italian humanists, such as that of Guarino Veronese in Ferrara.

In the Low Countries—an assemblage of secular and ecclesiastical principalities in modern Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg—Italian ideas and models competed with artistic and intellectual movements native to the region at first. Wealthy merchants in the Low Countries commissioned works of art from local painters, just as Italians did. The most noted painters of the regions—Jan van Eyck (c. 1395-1441), Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1399-1464), and Hans Memling (1430/5-1494)—created depth in their oil paintings on wood or canvas by depicting domestic objects in detail, including those items produced in the region such as heavy and textured draperies and other textiles. In some respects, such as in music, the Low Countries led the way. Italian humanism with its focus on education, however, took root in the Low Countries, whose cities had the same concerns as those in Italy. Perhaps the most celebrated humanist of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536) led a circle of correspondence among intellectuals that included Italian humanist scholars as well as English and French humanists.

In England, Italians temporarily residing there introduced humanism in the fifteenth century. They found noble patrons and inspired early English humanists William Grocyn and John Colet to travel to Italy to study. Grocyn introduced the study of Greek to Oxford and Colet, the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, founded a secondary school that featured the classical curriculum of Italian humanist schools. In France, the unity Francis I (r. 1515-1547) brought to his realm allowed early exposure of French scholars to humanist trends at the papal court in Avignon to find expression in new schools, such as the Collège de France, founded by Francis I. In the fifteenth century, humanist studies, especially history and rhetoric, found their way into the curriculum at the university in Paris. Early humanist circles in France included the priest Jacques Lefèvre

d'Étaples, who produced commentaries on Aristotle and the Gospels and united humanist values with the Christian tradition, and the lawyer Guillaume Budé, who produced commentaries on Roman civil law and was proficient in Greek. Both men were correspondents of Erasmus. Demonstrating one's knowledge of and reverence for classical literature and motifs was not, however, restricted to males. The sister of Francis I and later queen of Navarre, Marguerite of Angoulême (1492-1549), was known for her learning, leaving behind the poem *Heptaméron* (*The Seven Days*). The structure of a centralized monarchy offered more women the opportunity to explore humanist studies. The poet Louise Labé (c. 1520-1566), the mother and daughter poets Madeline (1520-1557) and Catherine (1550-1587) des Roches, and Hélienne de Crenne (d. 1552+) joined Marguerite as exemplars of female learning. In England, Margaret More Roper (1505-1544), daughter of the humanist Thomas More, was widely known for her learning, especially her training in Greek and Latin. Her father, the lawyer and statesman Thomas More (1478-1535), was a correspondent and friend of Erasmus. Thomas Linacre (c. 1460-1524), who translated the Greek medical writer Galen, and the statesman Sir Thomas Elyot (1490-1546), who prescribed a classical education for the ideal ruler in his *Book Named the Governor* (1531), were contemporaries of More.

In Germany, the early humanists Rudolphus Agricola (1442/3-1485), Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522), and Conrad Celtis (1459-1508) produced Latin verse, composed histories, and Reuchlin produced a Christian dictionary of the Hebrew language. The second generation of German humanists, however, could not escape the tide of the Protestant Reformation. Philip Melanchthon, a close ally of Martin Luther, established schools with a solid classical background and religious education. Based on the humanist curriculum with additional religious instruction, schools could also be found in Protestant cities such as Strasbourg. In England, too, humanists were on both sides of Henry VIII's split with the Roman Catholic Church, with Thomas More being the most famous Catholic martyr in the controversy. The translation of the Bible into the vernacular under King James I was a humanist activity and those trained in humanist textual criticism carried out the work. In Scandinavia, humanism and the Protestant Reformation arrived together, with the educational initiative of humanism supporting the key place of religious education in Lutheran doctrine. In the generation after Luther, the French humanist, John Calvin, used his training in law and the liberal arts to bring his own version of religious reform to Geneva, influencing continued reform in England and in France as well.