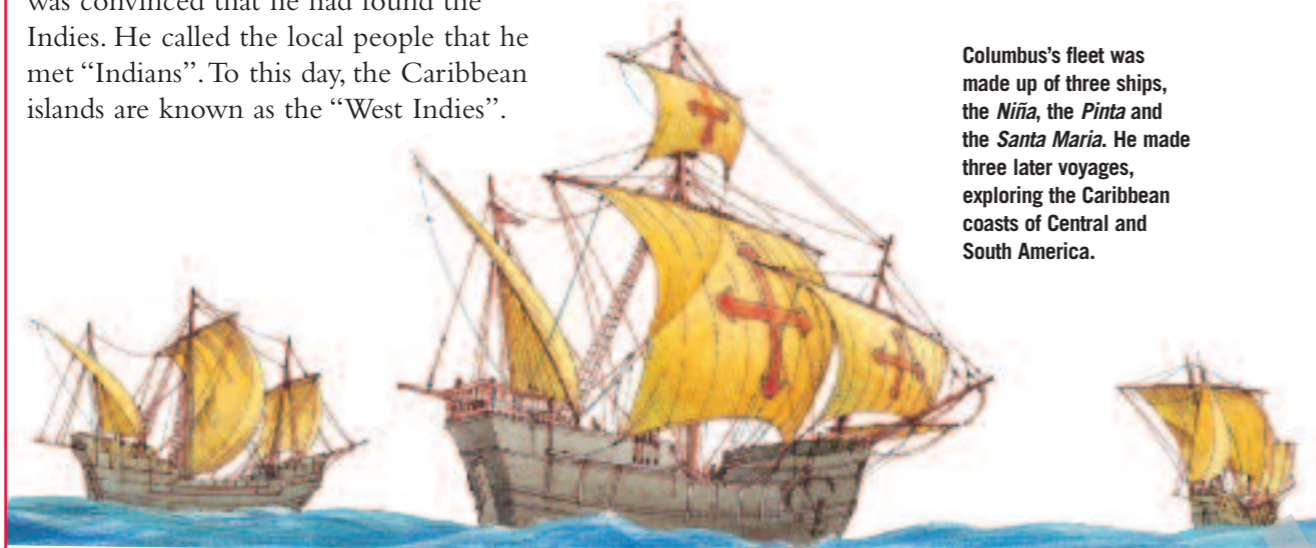


VOYAGES OF EXPLORATION

IN 1492 Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) sailed west across the Atlantic Ocean. His aim was to find a sea route to the rich lands of the Far East—the lands of spices and silks. These lands were known to Europeans as the Indies. When Columbus set foot on one of the Caribbean islands he was convinced that he had found the Indies. He called the local people that he met “Indians”. To this day, the Caribbean islands are known as the “West Indies”.



Columbus's fleet was made up of three ships, the *Niña*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria*. He made three later voyages, exploring the Caribbean coasts of Central and South America.

TRADE ROUTES

Luxury goods such as jewels, silks and spices had long been imported into Europe from the East along the Silk Road. But such overland routes had fallen under control of the Turks. In the 1400s both the Portuguese and the Spanish became interested in finding an alternative sea route to the riches of the East.

HENRY THE NAVIGATOR

Prince Henry of Portugal, known as “Henry the Navigator”, played a large part in directing Portuguese exploration in the 1400s. The Portuguese designed a new type of ship, called the caravel, which could withstand the ocean waves, yet was very easy to manoeuvre. Instruments such as the astrolabe also helped sailors to find their way with more accuracy.

PORTUGUESE VOYAGES

Between 1424 and 1434 Prince Henry the Navigator sent many expeditions to explore the west coast of Africa. He wanted to find the source of the gold that was brought by Muslim traders north across the Sahara. In 1487 a Portuguese sailor called Bartholomeu Dias became the first European to sail around the southernmost tip of Africa, the Cape of Good Hope. He turned back soon after rounding the Cape, and arrived back in Portugal in 1488. Ten years later, Vasco da Gama went even further. He sailed around the Cape of Good Hope, up the east coast of Africa and reached India in 1498. He made a second voyage in 1502.

The Chinese explorer Zheng He made seven expeditions between 1405 and 1433. He explored as far as the east coast of Africa in a junk, a Chinese ship.

In 1519 five ships set sail from Spain. They were commanded by Ferdinand Magellan. He planned to sail down the coast of South America and round its southernmost tip. His aim was to sail west to find a route to the Spice Islands in the Far East, for the eastwards route around Africa was forbidden to Spanish ships. In fact, Magellan's fleet became the first to sail right around the world, although Magellan himself was killed in the Philippines.

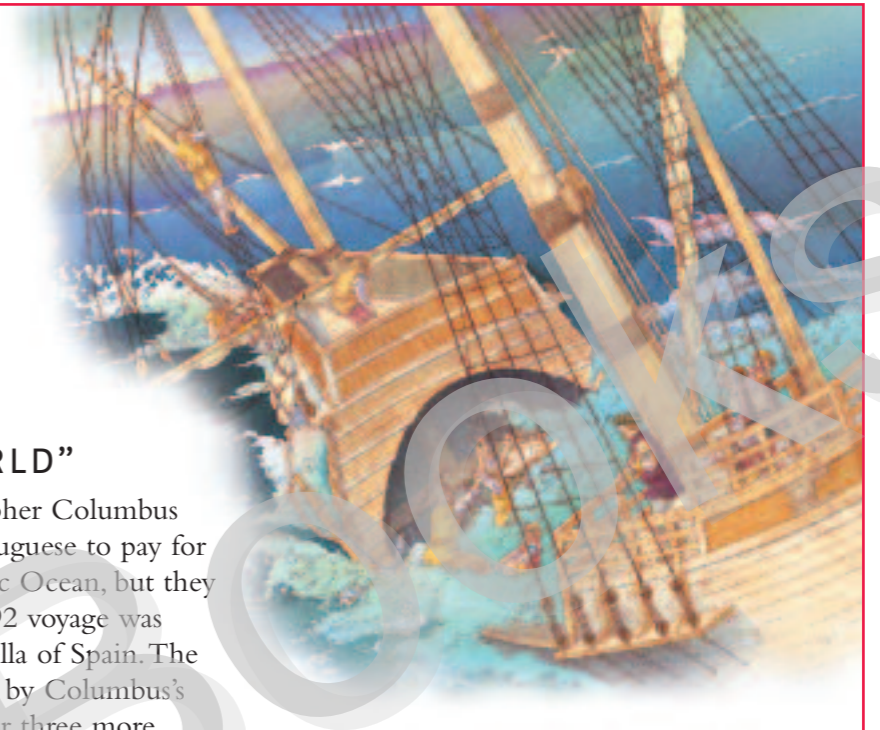
THE “NEW WORLD”

The Italian sailor Christopher Columbus tried to persuade the Portuguese to pay for a voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, but they refused. Eventually his 1492 voyage was sponsored by Queen Isabella of Spain. The Spanish were very excited by Columbus's discovery, and they paid for three more voyages under his command. However, European interest in the “New World” was to have a terrible outcome for the native peoples of the Americas (see pages 20-21).

Other sailors also set out to explore this “New World”. Another Italian, John Cabot, sailing in the service of the English king

Henry VII, reached the coast of North America in 1497. Amerigo Vespucci sailed to South America in 1499 and again in 1501. A German map-maker wrote a version of his first name, Amerigo, on an early map of the new continent, giving us the name “America”.

Spanish invaders, known as “conquistadors” (conquerors) arrive in the Americas. Two famous conquistadors were Hernan Cortes (1485-1547) and Francisco Pizarro (1475-1541). Cortes conquered the Aztec Empire, while the Inca Empire fell to Pizarro. The Spanish claimed the “New World” for themselves and quickly established colonies there, often using brutal force. The local peoples were forced to work on their plantations. The Spanish also brought with them European diseases, such as smallpox, that were previously unknown to the local peoples. Native Americans had no immunity to these diseases, and epidemics swept through their populations, killing many thousands.



RENAISSANCE

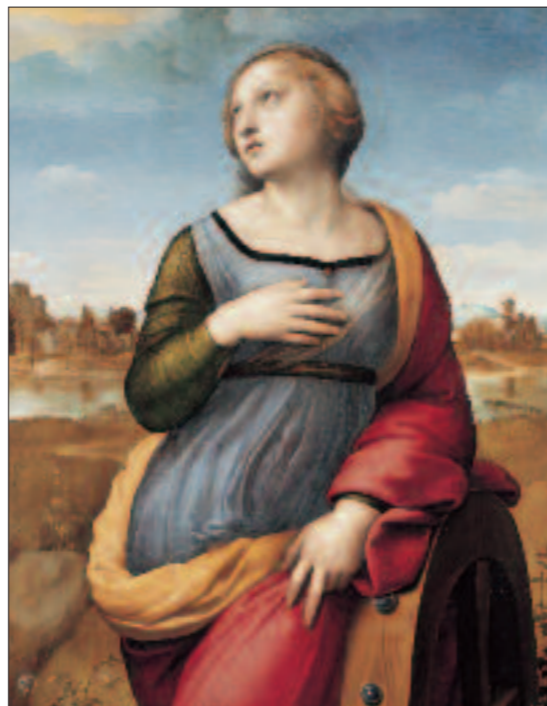
THE WORD Renaissance means “rebirth” and it describes a time when the arts and learning of ancient Greece and Rome were rediscovered by people in Europe. The Renaissance started in the 14th century in Italy, and spread across Europe during the 15th century. Many historians use the Renaissance to mark the end of the Middle Ages in Europe. It was a time when people started to think about themselves, and the world around them, in a new way.

BEGINNINGS

Italy in the 1300s was not the unified country that it is today. It was made up of many city-states which were controlled by powerful families, such as the Gonzaga family in Mantua. These wealthy families employed architects to design grand buildings that echoed the classical designs of ancient Greece and Rome, and artists to decorate them. They also encouraged scholars to study the works of ancient Greek and Roman writers.

During the 1400s the Medici family rose to power in Florence and made the city an important centre for the Renaissance. Venice became another leading centre.

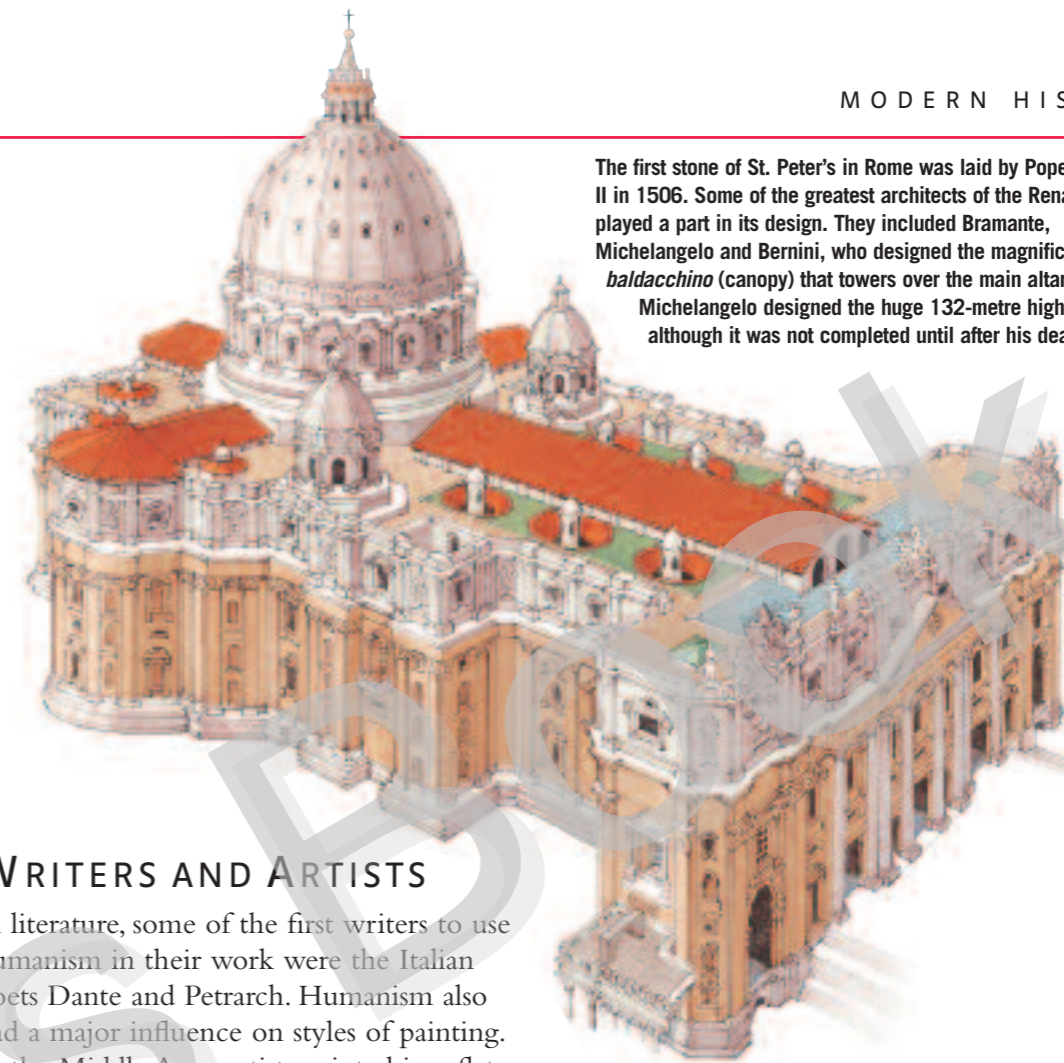
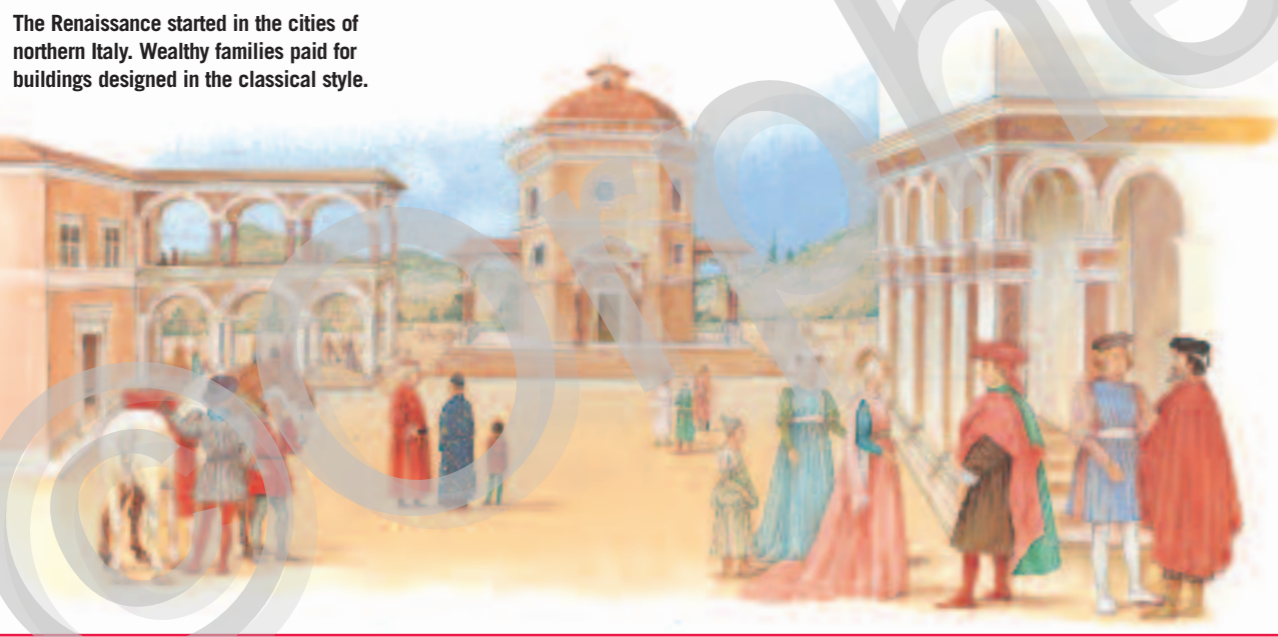
The Renaissance started in the cities of northern Italy. Wealthy families paid for buildings designed in the classical style.



Saint Catherine of Alexandria by Raphael (1483-1520)

HUMANISM

Renaissance scholars were interested in the study of human nature. This was known as humanism. They read texts about the great civilizations of Greece and Rome that had long lain forgotten. The study of humanism was boosted when many scholars fled west from Constantinople in 1453, bringing with them many precious books.



The first stone of St. Peter's in Rome was laid by Pope Julius II in 1506. Some of the greatest architects of the Renaissance played a part in its design. They included Bramante, Michelangelo and Bernini, who designed the magnificent baldacchino (canopy) that towers over the main altar. Michelangelo designed the huge 132-metre high dome, although it was not completed until after his death.

WRITERS AND ARTISTS

In literature, some of the first writers to use humanism in their work were the Italian poets Dante and Petrarch. Humanism also had a major influence on styles of painting. In the Middle Ages, artists painted in a flat, decorative style. They were not concerned with making their figures look natural. The Florentine painter Giotto became the first artist to try to portray figures in a lifelike way. Later in the Renaissance, artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael worked for rich patrons in Rome and elsewhere. Michelangelo's best-known work is the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in Rome. Leonardo da Vinci was fascinated by the natural world, and particularly by the human body.

Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), the great Italian astronomer.



NEW HORIZONS

As well as being a period of new ideas in the arts, the Renaissance was also a time for new inventions and discoveries. The 1400s was a time of exploration, when continents previously unknown to Europeans were discovered. In astronomy, Nicolaus

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was a painter, scientist and engineer: a “Renaissance Man”. This design for a rotor was made in about 1500.



Copernicus, a Polish astronomer, put forward the idea that the Earth orbited the Sun (and not the other way round as previously thought). Inventions such as the sailor's compass, gunpowder and printing also revolutionized life for many people.