

## **HISTORY: RENAISSANCE ITALY**

### **Political and Economic Structures of the City States on the Italian Peninsula:**

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#### **Milan:**

##### **Political structure**

(For the greater part of the Renaissance, Milan was under despotic rule and experienced three distinct periods of government. Giangaleazzo Visconti in 1385 seized and united the lands, which had been ruled by other Visconti, and in 1395, procured the title of Duke of Milan by conferring money to the Holy Roman Emperor. Thus the Duchy of Milan was established. Visconti despotism concluded after Filippo Maria Visconti in 1447 and the Ambrosian Republic governed Milan between 1447 and 1450. In 1450, Francesco Sforza, who was a condottiere, re-established despotism in Milan, which then crumbled in 1500 with Lodovico II Moro Sforza.)

As a despotic state, the Visconti established a political structure in which a single ruler exhibited absolute power and influence over his state. James Patrick argues that the Visconti “established and administered a political system that allowed limited autonomy to the citizens of Milan ... but was on balance, autocratic in nature.” Martines claims that the “major legislative bodies survived in nearly all the cities that fell to signorial rule,” where ‘signorial rule’ here refers to the despotic rule of the Visconti. In the duchy, most of the authority was bestowed on to the twelve-member Consiglio delle Provvissioni. Hale states that the “main organs of government were the ducal Consiglio Segreto and the Consiglio di Giustizia.” One of the Consiglio’s functions was to select with the signore (or Duke) the members of the Council of Nine Hundred, originally Twelve Hundred. The members of the Consiglio were in turn rotated every two months by the signore (or Duke) himself. Hence, the Duke, through the power of electing his members of government ultimately held the supreme authority. James Patrick argues that “Essentially, the head of the Visconti family at any given time presided over a hierarchical government structure whose most prominent officials he appointed.” Martines states that the purpose of this method of selection as “a large assortment of citizens seemed to be brought into the process of election, but there was complete control from above.” The nobility in the context of this despotic political hierarchy, Martines claims that on the “Contrary, however, to what happened to the nobility in big Tuscan cities, the Milanese (nobility) retained its separate and strong identity.”

##### **Economy – trade and industry**

Milan’s situation in the fertile Lombardy plains, or terraferma, and access to the River Po enriched the city-state’s trade and industry as Malone expresses that “Part of Milan’s economic strength ... (stemmed) from its geographical position.” According to James Patrick, the Visconti of Milan overcame its disadvantage in lacking direct access to sea lanes connecting the Italian peninsula to Africa, the Middle East and Asia by making Milan the “administrative hub of the highly productive agricultural system.” The Milanese and its neighbouring cities capitalized on the largest fertile area in Italy with favourable climate and rain to grow produce such as grain, olives and grapes. The produce was then traded to other parts of the Italian peninsula. Martines imparts that “Milanese revenues banked heavily upon the gabelles on such goods.” Furthermore, Martines describes Milan as a “metallurgical centre,” as the Milanese harnessed their rich supply of iron ore to create industries of weaponry, armour and jewellery. Malone describes that Milanese swords and armour were “highly prized for their high quality and workmanship as Milanese industries relied upon skilled craftsmen rather than large scale factory production.” Another industry of Milan was the silk and woollen fabric industry, which followed in quality to those of Florence. Moreover, the River Po provided a trading route to the other city-states of the Italian peninsula and to Northern Europe. Milan being on a trade route resulted in its ability to impose tariffs on those who were transporting goods across Milan’s borders. This too was a form of income for the state. Malone states that Milan as a “central city of Lombardy, (was) also in an excellent position for trade, but (was) open to

invasion from all sides.” Although the geographical position of Milan and the rest of Lombardy was favourable for its economy, it also caused continual susceptibility to invasion and unrest.

## **Bibliography**

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## **Florence:**

### **Political Structure**

During the Renaissance period, Florence was considered to be a Republic; a system of government controlled by a rotating body of elected officials. After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th Century AD, Florence became one of the largest and most powerful of the city-states on the Italian peninsula. This was largely due to its political system. The system which was said to represent the people seemed only to be comprised of elite men who came from the guilds, which emerged in the years leading up to the 1180s. The guilds were comprised solely of merchants and were created as describe by historian Lauro Martines, as a way “to stand up to the powerful men of the neighbourhoods”. This form of government by a specific class reflects the Florentine view that only the rich were capable of governing. The term ‘popolo’ used to describe the citizens, excluded women, slaves, the poor and servants. Priests, nuns and monks were also considered to be excepted as they belonged to the church and not the government. In 1250 the popolo bounded into power, pressing tax reforms and controlling the guilds.

The Florentine republic which we know famously, was officially founded in the 1290's with the Ordinances of Justice (1293 and 1295) putting the government of Florence firmly under the control of the 21 guilds. In addition, the ordinances set out the names of certain landowning families who were forbidden to hold office. The system of government relied upon a rotation of officials which allowed a number of people to participate at any one time and prevent absolute control by one person. However, despite being named a republic, Martines sees Florence as being more of a 'republican oligarchy' due to its dependence upon a specific ruling class. The existence of a relatively large number of wealthy individuals in Florence made it difficult for any one person or family to impose its rule on the city with the amount of men in power at one time numbering between 1,500 and 1,800 (Mohlo).

Florentine government also consisted of a number of various checks and balances which provided a separation of powers; authority was distributed amongst various agencies. The legislative branch was made up of the Council of the Commune and the Council of the Popolo and the Executive branch was made up of the Tre Maggiore: the Priorate/Signoria (a nine person magistracy), which was the city's most powerful body, the 12 Buonuomini, which represented the minor and major guilds and the Gonfalonieri (representatives from Florence's 16 sections). Candidates for the Priorate were changed every 2 months and were only chosen from 'a field of select nominations' (Martines), the Gonfalonieri held office for 4 months, whilst the Buonuomini stayed in power for 3 months. Each of these councils, although primarily working separately, acted to scrutinise and protect the power of the others. Officials were also appointed to supervise the police, the fire department and the prisons (6 men in each department), as well as be in charge of tax commissions. Temporary councils called Balie were also created when necessary to take on executive and judicial powers.

Historian John M. Najemy attributes the popularity and stability of the government to the 'political feeling' in the city state; he claims that it was the attachment to one's homeland (Campanalismo) which caused the rise of local patriotism. However by the 1420's Florence's republic was losing its powers due to wars with other city states. During this time of struggle, a man named Cosimo de' Medici was able to seize power over Florence. This man was popular with the people, according to historian Robert Hole, due to his ability to keep most of the features of the republican government and to merely act as a head of state. Mohlo states that in keeping the old system of government in place, Cosimo was able to "hold real reins of power without arousing the opposition of the public". Mohlo also claims that "the Florentine republic came to an end when Cosimo came to power". However although Cosimo provided the people with peace, jobs and beautiful art, it can be seen that this came with the loss of freedom and way of life that the republic provided.

### **Economy:**

In Renaissance Florence, guilds were central to its economy, dominating the city both politically and economically. There were 14 guilds in existence, with 7 considered of major importance and influence. The 7 major guilds consisted of cloth importers, bankers, doctors and pharmacists, furriers, silk manufacturers, the wool producers/processors and judges and notaries. The goods produced were of high quality and the manufacturers were closely regulated by the guilds. This strict regulation ensured fierce competition between manufacturers hoping to gain acceptance into the guild which would in turn enable them to make produce within Florence and thus guaranteed that goods being exported from Florence were of highest quality. Florence interacted with other Italian Peninsula city-states via the trade of her manufactured goods, especially her fine cloth.

Florence was considered the banking capital of Europe and banking became one of the most lucrative industries of the Florentine economy. City states from all over the Italian Peninsula invested their money in Florentine banks. Molho describes the significance of Florence's banking system; "they made loans to Kings and high churchmen and to countless European nobles". It was the Florentine bankers who first developed the concept of book keeping.

### **Naples:**

#### **Political Structure:**

From the mid C12th the Emperor Frederick took control of Southern Italy, but the nobles who were in control of the interior regions were not threatened. So, even in the C12th, there was confusion about who was in control of this area. The Pope invited the French in, in 1266 and there was a French king of Naples and Sicily.

Sicily was divided from Naples and the Spanish controlled Sicily from the end of the C13th. Naples then became the capital of a French kingdom.

Charles of Anjou was King of Sicily from 1262-1282, and there had been conciliar government from his time. There was a council called the Magna Curia, a council of the King's advisors and administrators, which coordinated the work of the Cabinet, the Treasury and the Criminal court. There was a Parliament in Naples which was made up of the barons.

Naples was still a feudal area with little industry beyond local handcrafts. Large landowners controlled the land, but they hired peasant labour. These were not serfs, but their lives were poverty stricken and very hard.

Grain was the most important crop, but the peasants moved to the mountain areas. The land they abandoned was taken over by the nobles to use for grazing. Less grain was produced then yields of cattle and wool rose. Southern Italy produced saffron, olive oil, wines, raw silk, and cotton and these with the raw wool and grain were exported through Genoa and Venice.

The Neapolitan towns were prosperous to some extent but were overshadowed by Genoa and Venice.

Naples was therefore predominantly agricultural was useful as a supplier of raw materials. Alum was a product found near Ischia and Pozzuoli, near Naples.

The story of the small urban centres in Naples by the mid C16th is one of subservience to the baron, foreign indebtedness to foreign bankers and complete loss of political freedom to the central government. So, these towns some of whom were ancient centres of development did not develop into the autonomous communes as did the towns of Northern Italy.

### **Economy:**

Larger towns like Sorrento, Salerno and Reggio Calabria which had regional fairs and good harbours like Bari, Brindisi and Amalfi and those with universities like Salerno and Naples retained their prosperity and attracted foreign and local trading.

One important industry was soap making, using local olive oil. A silk industry was eventually established and King Ferrante encouraged this in the C15th, but it was tiny compared to the industries of Florence and Milan.

**C16th the population of Naples was the most populated on the Italian Peninsula, and second only to Paris. Trade links were established with Florence, Venice, trading in raw wool, grain, silk, alum**

There were several towns that attracted scholars and artists, but Naples remained the main intellectual and cultural centre. There was an intellectual life in this city although the famous humanists and artists were not there, although Caravaggio did work for the Court. There was development of the study of Greek and an interest in Greek culture, as the Greeks were one of the Classical societies who had invaded Naples in the past.

There were disciples of Petrarch in Naples and Boccaccio was sent to Naples in 1329, to study business and canon law. King Ferrante supported both Lorenzo Valla and Poggio Braccolini, both important Florentine humanists. Ferrante set up an academy similar to Cosimo's Platonic Academy in Florence.

### **The Papal States:**

#### **Political Structure:**

The Papal States in Renaissance Italy can be identified as neither a Kingdom as Naples was, nor a Republic like the city-states of Venice and Florence. Instead, the Papal States were ruled absolutely by the Pope in what was known as the 'Papal Government'.

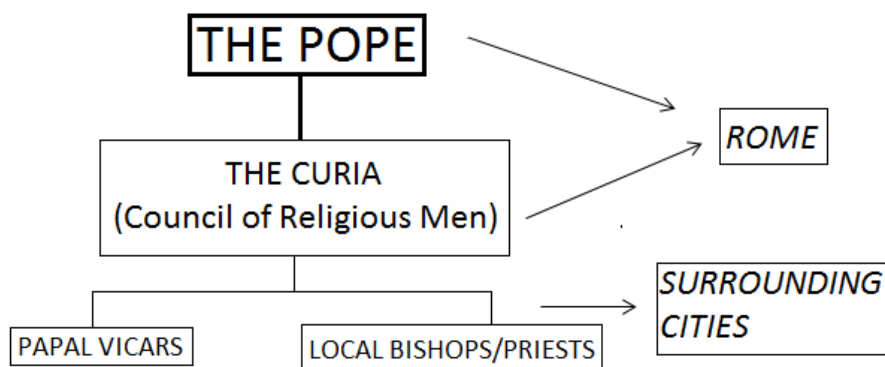
The political head of the Papal States was the Pope, and it was the Pope's personality which dictated the way in which the Papal States would be ruled. Much the same as a Prince or Despots would. However, in order for the Papal Government to run properly there was a chain of different groups holding authority within the Papal States, both in and outside of Rome to ensure that the law was being practised properly.

As well as the Pope in Rome, there was also the Curia. The Curia was a council of religious men who assisted the Pope in deciding on laws and jurisdictions which would be imposed within the Papal States. But in order for these to be imposed there was the necessity of the 'vicars' of the multiple cities within the Papal States. The word 'vicar' means substitute. It is important to note however that vicars were often secular rulers and not clergymen and so were often accompanied in their city by a bishop or priest. In reality many of these Vicars enjoyed almost complete

independence from Rome and the Vatican. Historian Robert Hole claims that this independence from the absolute rule of the Pope increased as the proximity to Rome decreased. For this reason Rome and the Vatican had very centralised power and the Church held huge social influence on the residents. In contrast to this, places like Urbino needed to be reclaimed in 1598 after an uprising of independence from the Papal Government.

There is evidence of this power struggle through actions of the Popes during the years of the renaissance, as they continually attempted to retain their influence upon places like Ferrara and Bologna (outer regions of the Papal States). Pope Paul iii reintroduced The Inquisition, and Pope Paul iv introduced the censorship of books through the Index Of Forbidden Books. Some Popes displayed different qualities, such as Pope Julius ii, who was known as the 'warrior Pope' because he fought on behalf of the Papal States.

The political structure of the Papal States was fragile due to the continually enlargement and revolts of its outer regions. The employment of mercenaries by the Popes contributed to this fragility of the political structure as the corruption of the church filtered down through both the Curia and Vicars. This corruption was particularly prominent through the appointment of vicars who were known relations of the Pope. Malone states that the 'needs of the Papal nepotism made for the movement and increase of foreign armies in Italy'.



### **Economy:**

The economic basis of the Papal States in Renaissance Italy was unique because of both the structure and characteristics of its government and also its geographical positioning.

Lauro Martines describes the Papal States as being the 'Capital of Western Christendom' and for the greater part of their city-states income the Papal States relied on this revenue. Donations were generally made by powerful and wealthy emperors in power due to their belief that it was Gods divine right which had placed them in their position. However, the Papal States also collected a large sum on money from the tributes (taxes) of Papal Vicars. These donations and taxes went partly to the local priests and bishops for living expenses etc. But majority went into beautifying both Rome and the Vatican in order to display its supremacy as both a religion and city-state.

As well as the revenue subsequently made from the donations to the church the Papal States also taxed heavily those travelling along trade routes to the North of Italy, particularly those who could not afford to travel by boat. The position of the Papal States as running directly across Italy made it impossible to be avoided by land and therefore the Papal Government could impose any taxes they saw fit to any good travelling into, or through their city-state.

In comparison to city-states in the North of Italy, such as the republics of Florence and Venice, industry and trade was not a prominent part of the Papal States identity within the Italian peninsula. However, there were definitely small industries which were present within the Papal States during this time which contributed to a reasonably strong economy. Within Bologna there was a silk industry which both employed some of the population in the Papal States as well as allowing an alternative to the expensive silks spun in Milan, Florence and Venice. Also, the Northern parts of the Papal States contained fertile pockets of land, in places such as Latium and Umbria. Here things like cereals, olives, vines and livestock flourished for those who farmed there. Fishing along the coast of the Papal States also contributed to the Papal States economy, and although not built upon the water like the Venetians, a long-standing fishing industry and culture within the Papal States allowed for good trade in this area. The Apennine Slopes provided large amounts of timber to the Papal States who were able to utilise this in both the fishing industry as well as in architecture etc.