

In this part . . .

Europeans really discovered the world in the 16th and 17th centuries – and the world discovered Europeans. Mariners such as Columbus and Vasco da Gama, sailed the world's oceans and sent back excited tales of the lands they encountered. Other Europeans, excited at the idea of adventure, Christian mission, or (usually) the chance of making a fortune, set off in their wake and spread European ideas and influence, not to mention military power, political domination, and disease, all over the globe.

But this was also the age when Europeans grew to understand the world in a deeper sense, exploring the natural world and learning through careful observation the rules that governed it. This deep exploration meant that, like it or not (and many Europeans didn't like it one bit), they were also delving in the mind and intentions of God. And exactly how best to understand God was something that divided Europeans dangerously. This part explores a period of growing knowledge and understanding, but the 16th and 17th centuries also brought devastating religious civil war, the persecution of witches, and organised state intolerance.

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Chapter 9

Back to the Future: The Renaissance

In This Chapter

Introducing the Italian city states

Reading about Renaissance scholars and artists

Witnessing wars in Italy, and the end of Muslim Spain

A 19th-century Swiss historian called Jacob Burckhardt coined the term 'Renaissance' (rebirth) for the big changes in thinking and the arts which took place in Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries. The rebirth in question was of the world of the ancients, the Romans, and especially the Greeks. The writings and ideas of these civilizations seemed to offer meanings which were applied to every aspect of life – education, music, politics, painting, religion, even falling in love. Renaissance scholars called this new learning *humanism* – everything you'll ever need to know about being human. You'd never know it from the clothes, but this period was when the modern age began. We are looking at an early photograph of us.

Small City States – Beautiful but Very Vulnerable

The Renaissance story starts in Italy. The Italians had set up lots of separate states based around individual cities, such as Florence, Venice, Milan, and Pisa. City states were small enough to be run along proper republican lines, where everyone – well okay, some of the richer men – was able to have a say in making decisions, just like in ancient Greece. These city states didn't have huge resources of manpower to draw on, but they did have the next best thing: money.

Fifteenth-century Italy was *the* place to be if you were a mercenary, or *condottiere* as the Italians called them. Some enterprising condottiere simply took over states like Milan, Mantua, and Ferrara. Condottiere were not to be messed with. Duke Galeazza of Milan was a James Bond-type villain, very well spoken and obsessed with how beautiful his hands were, but cruel and sadistic: he enjoyed humiliating prisoners by making them eat excrement. (Galeazza was stabbed to death as he was coming out of church, you'll be pleased to hear.)

Some city states, such as Parma or Genoa, were fairly small; others were a bit bigger and weightier. The main city states were:

- ✓ **Florence:** Florence was ruled by a small elite group of feuding families called the *signoria*. The signoria expelled the up-and-coming banker Cosimo de Medici in 1433, but he came back the next year and took the city over himself. The Medici were popular, but they had powerful enemies.
- ✓ **Milan:** Milan had been a republic, but it had been taken over by a dynasty of condottiere, the Visconti family. When they died out, another condottiere dynasty, the Sforza family, replaced them.
- ✓ **Pisa:** Pisa was an important port, always wary of being taken over by Florence. The Pisans also very much wanted a word with the surveyor regarding their bell tower, but according to his secretary he was always in a meeting.
- ✓ **Rome:** Ruled by the papacy. Pope Sixtus IV appointed his own relatives cardinals and bishops so blatantly that it gave nepotism a bad name; Innocent VIII made his 13-year-old grandson a cardinal; Alexander VI fathered a string of illegitimate children and tried for years to get hold of the Romagna region for his son Cesare; Julius II went to war with Venice and led his troops in person, in a special papal suit of armour. These successors to St Peter had moved a long way away from the message of the gospels.
- ✓ **Naples:** Naples was ruled by King Ferrante, an appalling character, who ruled by terror and had his enemies embalmed after execution as a keepsake. The Neapolitan nobles were always plotting against Ferrante, and no wonder.
- ✓ **Genoa:** An important seaport, increasingly eclipsed by Venice.
- ✓ **Venice:** Venice was known as *la Serenissima*, the Serene Republic – serene, but wet. Venice was a major trading centre for the Adriatic and eastern Mediterranean, and very jealous of its independence. The city fathers elected a prince called a Doge, who had to wear a very silly hat and go through an annual marriage ceremony with the sea. More importantly, the Venetians made sure the Doge had virtually no power. The other Italians tended not to like Venice very much as they felt the city was far too full of itself. And too full of water.

The Borgias were already produced by Callistus's nephew Alexander VI in 1494. Wholesale bribery and nepotism sorted: most on pocketing as making a serious enemy for the greatest nephew fathered by a pope. Alexander's daughter through a string of at least one of her husbands in Rome while her father's brother, Juan, always married a Spanish princess twice over. Sadly, ...

Forty Years The Italian

In 1454, Florence signed the Peace of Lodi, which joined in and others out. It was on other terms of the Peace wouldn't his figures of ...

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At home with the Borgias

The Borgias were a Spanish family who had already produced one pope, Callistus III. Callistus's nephew, Rodrigo, became Pope Alexander VI in 1492, by the simple means of wholesale bribery. Pope Alexander had his priorities sorted: most of his time and energy went on pocketing as much money as possible and making a serious attempt at the all-time record for the greatest number of illegitimate children fathered by a pope.

Alexander's daughter, Lucrezia, worked her way through a string of political marriages, had at least one of her husbands murdered, and ran Rome while her father was away. Lucrezia's brother, Juan, always his dad's favourite, married a Spanish princess and became a duke twice over. Sadly, Juan's brother Cesare had

him murdered – obviously a bad case of sibling rivalry.

Alexander was so shocked by the murder of one son by another that he nearly decided to give up being pope and become a humble priest, but he got over his distress, and decided to remain as pope. To show that he bore no hard feelings, Alexander made Cesare (age: 17) a cardinal and set about conquering the whole of central Italy for him. 'Conquering' meant having leading Romans murdered and then confiscating their lands.

In 1503, Alexander and Cesare went to a farewell supper for the Cardinal of Corneto, intending to poison him. Unfortunately, a mix-up occurred at the table, and Alexander and Cesare got the cardinal's food by mistake. Cesare survived, just; Alexander didn't.

Forty Years of 'Peace': The Italian League

In 1454, Florence, Naples, and Milan decided to patch up their differences and sign the *Peace of Lodi*. These major city states got the other Italian states to join in and set up a special Italian League, to keep the peace and keep foreigners out. Italy got a breathing space of approximately 40 years to concentrate on other things, like encouraging artists and writers. You may not have heard of the Peace of Lodi or the Italian League, but without them we probably wouldn't have heard of Michelangelo or Leonardo or any of the other great figures of the Renaissance either.

The Medici had a very effective way of maintaining peace. Whenever another state threatened Florence, they wrote saying that in the circumstances the Medici bank would regretfully have to foreclose on them and call in their loans. Because these states were all deeply in debt to the banks, this method worked very well.

However, not everyone took kindly to the Medicis's way of doing business. When the Medici bank refused a loan to Pope Sixtus IV, he turned instead to the Medicis's great rivals, the Pazzi family, who gave him his money, and they all hatched a plot to get rid of the Medici. At the high point of Mass under the great dome of Florence's magnificent cathedral, Pazzi hitmen stabbed Giuliano de Medici and tried to stab his brother Lorenzo. Lorenzo got away, turned the tables on the Pazzi, talked the king of Naples (who'd also been in on the plot) out of attacking, and sent the Pope's men packing. Lorenzo wasn't called 'the Magnificent' for nothing.

The Roots of the Renaissance: Italy

Fifteenth-century Italy had all the ingredients for an artist's paradise. Rulers and rich merchants abounded, all with cash to spend and looking for some way of showing off their wealth to everyone else. What better than to get the latest Renaissance painter to come and decorate your reception area?

A city didn't even need to have a university to take advantage of the 'new learning', as it was called. Venice's Aldine Press produced editions of all the great Greek authors for libraries right across Europe. Pope Nicholas V founded the great collection of books that became the magnificent Vatican Library. Later, the new learning would penetrate the universities and take them over.

Francesco Petrarch: The man who loved books

You can't usually date movements and trends like the Renaissance from one event or person, but Francesco Petrarch has a good claim to having started off the Italian Renaissance. Francesco was a poet with a reputation for pure and spotless love, which was just as well because the lady who was the object of his passion was a respectably married mother of 11 children.

Petrarch developed the sonnet, but his real importance was as an avid book collector. Petrarch didn't just collect them - he used to sit stroking their pages and talking to them. And Petrarch couldn't read Greek so he used to kiss his Greek copy of Homer instead. Er, quite.

Digging around in attics and cellars in Florence, Petrarch found lots of old Latin manuscripts, and when he read them he was astounded by the purity of their language. The only Latin Petrarch or anyone else knew was the rather clumsy Latin of the Church and universities. Imagine for a moment that the only English you ever heard, the only English that *existed*, was the language of a firm of chartered accountants, and then you opened an old cupboard and

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found the complete works of Shakespeare. Soon, not an attic in Italy was safe from scholars prising open old chests and cupboards to see if any old documents were inside. This period was the only time in history when the season's must-have was a book of Latin grammar.

Yes, but can you do anything with humanist scholarship?

In Petrarch's eyes, poetry and literature were for scholars only; his book collection formed the basis for the library of Florence's new university. However, one of Petrarch's followers, a scholar and civil servant called Coluccio Salutati, came up with a more far-reaching idea.

Salutati had come across the speeches of the great Roman lawyer Cicero. These documents were all top quality stuff – lots of rhetorical flourishes and learned allusions – but what interested Salutati was that these were not composed for private reading or scholarly study, but for use in court, to get Cicero's client off with a caution. Salutati liked that notion and he called it *negotium* – applying your learning to practical life. Salutati became Chancellor of Florence, and started writing his diplomatic correspondence in the style of Cicero (though obviously he had to remember to write 'Dear Sir' and not 'I put it to you, members of the jury'). Soon, other states started to get interested in the new 'humanist' scholarship being pioneered in Florence.



Nowadays, a humanist is someone who does not believe you need religion in order to lead a good life and treat other people properly. In the Renaissance, a humanist was someone who studied the ancients in order to understand the human condition and the mind of God. Same word, two very different meanings.

Florence soon became a major centre of humanist scholarship, thanks to another scholar-Chancellor, Leonardo Bruni. When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, many Greek scholars ended up in Florence and introduced the Florentines to some of the ancient Greek masters, like Aristotle in the original (previously they only had a very bad Latin translation) and the big new discovery, Plato. Forty years later, the whole Jewish population of Spain was kicked out, so now Hebrew scholars headed for Florence too. The new learning was about to become very practical indeed.

Lost in translation

The humanist scholar Lorenzo Valla looked closely at the *Donation of Constantine* (see Chapter 6), the charter that the Emperor Constantine supposedly gave to the popes to say that they were in charge of the Church, and showed that it was a medieval forgery. Oops. Humanists started looking at the official Latin translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate, and found mistakes there, too. Hmm.

All this comparison of translations and questioning of texts didn't go down well with the universities. The universities were run along *scholastic* lines – you studied certain texts by the great masters of the past and while you might debate their implications and even how best to interpret them, you didn't dispute the texts themselves. The scholastics found this new trend for questioning accepted doctrines very difficult to take.

Purely platonic: Neoplatonism

The humanists' big find was Plato (and you can find him in Chapter 3). The humanists wanted to create a philosophy called *neoplatonism*, that married Plato's ideas with Christian teachings.

The leading neoplatonist was a Florentine scholar called Marsilio Ficino. Plato said that pure love is a desire for beauty. Beauty, said Marsilio Ficino, is a reflection of the perfect nature of God, so if love leads to beauty it also leads eventually to God. When you tell someone today that you want a 'purely platonic' relationship, what you really mean is that you want a pure friendship the way Plato meant 'pure' – if you start adding lust or sex, the relationship becomes less pure, though more fun.

Now according to humanists, what is the most beautiful thing in Creation? Man. So Marsilio Ficino taught that to understand God you need to study Man, which is why Renaissance artists were so interested in anatomy and analysing how the body operates. The neoplatonists went on so much about how wonderful man is that the Church got worried. Where was God in all this philosophising?

The Birth of Renaissance Man

The neoplatonists (see preceding section) dreamed of creating the ultimate man – *Renaissance Man*. The ultimate Renaissance Man was a prince, because being a prince was clearly the recipe for creating the perfect ruler. So education Renaissance-style encompassed theology, philosophy, Latin and Greek obviously, other languages, rhetoric, history, mathematics, break for lunch, then music, dancing, wrestling, riding, fencing, all topped off with perfect manners.



Manners didn't just mean holding doors open: Manners meant being imbued with what the Italians called *virtù*, which is like the English 'virtue' but bigger. *Virtù* meant having the strength of character to grasp your fate and make the most of it. Rudyard Kipling's poem *If* ('If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you . . .') provides an idea of what the Italians meant by *virtù*.

The Florentine writer Niccolo Machiavelli wrote about the sort of *virtù* a prince was supposed to have – or at least to *appear* to have – and Baldasar

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Castiglione wrote a book of etiquette called *The Book of the Courtier*, teaching you how to treat everyone with perfect politeness and courtesy while keeping your real opinions strictly to yourself.

The Body Beautiful: Renaissance Art

What excited Renaissance artists about classical art was the way that it managed to reproduce the beauty of the human body in 3-D. A remarkable Greek statue of the priest Laocoön and his sons being dragged under by a sea serpent, all twists and turns and agonised biceps, turned up at just the right time. This sculpture made all those static kings and angels in medieval cathedrals look very boring.



Medieval artists wanted to go beyond the individual into the timeless nature of being, so medieval paintings and sculptures tend to show people all with the same sort of faces and poses. Renaissance artists were scornful of medieval art – they wanted to recreate creation itself.

The first statue that really created a stir was Donatello's statue of David, holding Goliath's sword and completely naked apart from a large hat. Donatello was using the image of the boy David to show the perfection of the human body. However, Donatello's pure motive didn't stop people seeing *David* as a rude statue, and wondering whether they shouldn't drape a cloak over him, at least when they had visitors.

Michelangelo's *David* showed a much more fully developed David in his full anatomical glory. (David was a sort of Florentine patron saint, in case you're wondering why everyone seemed to be carving him. You know, brave little lad standing up to the big guy and winning – just the sort of mascot for a small Italian state surrounded by more powerful enemies.)

So Much Art, So Little Time

I once heard of an American tourist who ran into the Louvre and demanded, 'Where's the Mona Lisa? I'm double parked!' If you want to see some of the art of the Renaissance, you'll need to plan things a bit better than that tourist.

Artists got commissions the length and breadth of Italy, so nearly every Italian town has a collection of Renaissance painting in its local art gallery. The three main centres of Renaissance art were:

- ✓ **Florence:** See the Uffizi gallery and the magnificent cathedral. The city fathers held a competition for someone to design a dome for the cathedral. The architect Brunelleschi won it by building up rows of overhanging

bricks – simple really, but truly a great mind thought up this design. The runner-up, Ghiberti, got to design the panels for the enormous doors to the cathedral's baptistery, which are little masterpieces in bronze relief, showing scenes from the Bible in beautiful detail.

Some artists turned to Greek mythology, like Botticelli, who painted the famous *Birth of Venus* and various other good-looking young people lazing around in advanced states of undress – all in the name of art, of course.

- ✓ **Rome:** Check out the Vatican Museum, which you approach via an enormous queue. The popes seized the chance to put Rome at the cutting edge of European culture. Nicholas V and Sixtus IV created the Vatican Library, and Paul II set up the Vatican's first printing press. Julius II commissioned Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, and got Raphael in to decorate his private apartments. Raphael's painting of the School of Athens, with Aristotle and Plato in the centre, was daring subject to paint in the heart of the Vatican.

Michelangelo's *Pietà*, showing Mary holding the dead body of her son, Jesus, the *Pietà*, is still regarded as one of the most perfect pieces of sculpture in art. Michelangelo said that he didn't carve the stone, just that he found the shape which was already in the stone and brought it into the light.

- ✓ **Venice:** The two big Venetian painters were Titian and Tintoretto (real name Jacopo Robusti – 'Tintoretto' meant 'dyer', which may win you a pub quiz one day). Venice came to the fore a bit later than the other Italian cultural centres, mainly because while these cities were all being overtaken by war, Venice's geographical position put it out of the line of fire.

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Leonardo

Leonardo da Vinci was quite simply the most remarkable man of his age, being a painter, musician, astronomer, engineer, and general visionary. Not all Leonardo's plans came to fruition: his giant horseman statue project never happened, and he never did work out how to fly. Leonardo's great mural in the Council Chamber of Florence faded before the councillors very eyes when he unveiled it – he hadn't realised quite how porous the wall was. In fact, relatively few of Leonardo's paintings have survived, though the ones that have certainly show his genius – just look at how people have enthused over every detail of the Mona Lisa.

Leonardo's greatest legacy lies in his notebooks. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Leonardo didn't draw much inspiration from classical art. Leonardo's strength lay in close observation, and he mastered human anatomy in order to portray the human body in a way that was absolutely true to life. Leonardo's insistence on learning from observation prefigured the basis for the great scientific revolution of the 17th century (see Chapter 15). In fact, Leonardo may even have worked out the very thing that would make the names of Galileo and Copernicus later – that the sun does not move. And, da Vinci wrote that fact with his left hand. Backwards.

Bang go the Middle Ages!

By the end of the 15th century armies were using gunpowder. Cannons kill a lot more people, so armies had to be a lot bigger. Cities had to pull down their old high walls and built new fortifications, with low bastions with thick sloping sides to absorb cannon shot. Doctors had to work out new treatments for bullet

wounds and what soldiers wore also had to be rethought.

Historians call this period the Military Revolution because of its huge implications. And the place where all these boys' toys got to be tried and tested – and found to work very well – was Renaissance Italy.

Pope Paul II may have brought the printing press to Rome, but he banned the study of pagan ideas or rituals, and when the humanist scholar Bartolomeo Platina objected, he had him arrested and tortured. Paul's actions were a little sign that the humanists were not going to have everything their own way. (When Paul II died, Platina was given the job of writing his official biography, and I bet he enjoyed it.)

One Good Turn for Milan, 60 Years of War for Italy

The Italian Renaissance was killed off when Italy plunged into a long period of war. This war all started with a fairly typical Italian power struggle. Milan was being ruled by Ludovico Sforza, known as 'Il Moro' (the Moor) because of his dark complexion, on behalf of his young nephew, Gian Galeazzo. The trouble was that Ludovico had become used to power and wasn't keen to give it up, even though his nephew had grown up and married a granddaughter of the king of Naples. The granddaughter urged her husband to get his act together and take power properly, and she got her granddad to agree to help.

Ludovico had to run for his life, but he wasn't a man to give up easily, so he went to have a word with his good friend King Charles VIII of France: Would Charles put him back on the throne of Milan? But what exactly, King Charles wanted to know, was in it for France? So Ludovico pointed out that since the king of Naples had helped get rid of him, perhaps King Charles might be interested in marching south and taking hold of Naples? King Charles was very interested, especially as his court was full of disgruntled Neapolitan nobles all begging him to come down and get rid of their appalling king. So in 1494, at the head of an enormous army with all the latest equipment, the king of France led his troops into Italy. This invasion was the start of 60 years of war that finally put an end the Italian Renaissance.

Bonfire of the vanities: Florence turns to God

Not everyone thought that France invading Italy was a disaster. A Dominican friar called Girolamo Savonarola, who had taken Florence by storm with his fiery sermons condemning loose living and decadence and predicting the end of the world any day now, welcomed Charles VIII as the instrument of God to purge Florence of its vanities.

Savonarola hated the Renaissance, with all its pagan gods and writers and its talk about the beauty of the human body. Filth, the lot of it! God was not fooled! When the Florentines sent the Medici packing, Savonarola took charge and turned Florence into a godly state, ruled by God's laws. Savonarola told the people of Florence to throw their fine clothes and ornaments and trinkets onto a great 'bonfire of the

vanities' in the town square. Botticelli burned most of his paintings – there was no place for naked Greek gods in Savonarola's brave new Florence.

Savonarola also attacked the corruption and decadence in the Vatican. Doing so was a bad idea: Savonarola got himself investigated and excommunicated. Savonarola's excommunication got the Florentines scared. Were the people being led astray by a false prophet? Someone suggested that Savonarola should walk through fire to show that he was a real prophet, but he didn't show up to do so. So the Florentines turned on Savonarola, tortured him, and burned him in front of the cathedral. Well, I did say that Savonarola was a fiery preacher.

Charles VIII took Milan, put Ludovico on the throne, and headed for Florence. Piero de Medici had thoughts of trying to stop him, but the Florentines kicked the Medici out and set up a proper republic again, under a rather scary monk called Savonarola (see the nearby sidebar, 'Bonfire of the vanities: Florence turns to God').

Charles pressed on to Rome, marched his 30,000 heavily armed men past the Vatican – it took two hours – and headed down to Naples, where the king, who knew a hopeless cause when he saw one, abdicated and left his young son to sort it out. Thanks dad. In 1495, Charles VIII entered Naples, feeling very pleased with himself thinking that the invasion was all over.

In fact, the war had only just begun:

- ✓ **1495:** Pope Alexander VI teams up with Venice to form a big kick-the-French-out-of-Italy league, with King Ferdinand of Aragon (Spain) and the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I. Even Ludovico of Milan joins in. However, the prostitutes of Naples entertain Charles's troops and give them all syphilis (only recently arrived from the New World). The French have to head back to France, where their wives await them.
- ✓ **1500:** New French king, Louis XII, takes Milan, throws the treacherous Ludovico into prison, where he dies, and divides Naples with King Ferdinand of Aragon. No, they didn't ask the Italian king of Naples first.

The Renaissance

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- ✓ **1503:** The Spanish drive the French out of Naples.
- ✓ **1508:** Pope Julius II forms a big international league to crush Venice. Why? The Italians all hated Venice.
- ✓ **1511:** Pope Julius II forms another big international league, this time to crush France. Amazingly, Venice joins in. Swiss drive French out of Milan, tidy the place up a bit, and put the Sforza family back in charge.
- ✓ **1515:** New French king, Francis I, comes marching in and blows the Swiss to smithereens with cannon in a two-day battle at Marignano. Francis drives the Sforzas out, makes himself Duke of Milan, and signs peace with the new King Charles I of Spain. *End of Round One.* (For Round Two, see Chapter 11.)

The Renaissance Heads North

The ideas that had been gripping Italy were now spreading to the rest of Europe. King Francis I of France invited Leonardo da Vinci to his court, but some very good home-grown north European painters were also in evidence, such as Albrecht Dürer and Hans Holbein, who worked in the new medium, oils. Hieronymus Bosch (a name you can't forget in a hurry) painted weird nightmare scenes that would have had Sigmund Freud reaching for the paracetamol, and Peter Breughel, who left saints and VIPs to the others and concentrated on beautifully-observed pictures of peasant life, which can still make you burst out laughing today.

However, the northern Renaissance's biggest contributions were in printing and theology. Johannes Gutenberg of Germany set up Europe's first printing press and the Germans, Dutch, and English became avid producers and readers of printed material. Much of what people read was about theology (see Chapter 10).

Plenty of royal courts and rich city states in northern Europe were eager to attract good artists-in-residence. The most magnificent of these places was the ambitious new state carving out a place for itself: Burgundy.



Burgundy may just mean a rather nice red wine to you, but in the 15th century it was the European state most likely to succeed. Burgundy had carved out a little empire along the border between France and Germany, and up in the Netherlands.

Because the Netherlands were one of the wealthiest trading centres in Europe, the court of Burgundy became a by-word for magnificence: Its Order of the Golden Fleece was the knightly must-have of the century. Burgundy's dukes dreamed of turning their duchy into a kingdom. The kings of France had other ideas, however.

The ups and downs of 15th-century Burgundy:

- ✓ **1415:** Henry V of England invades France. Duke John 'the Fearless' of Burgundy stays neutral, so French dauphin has him murdered. The new Duke, Philip 'the Good', fights on the English side. Philip's men capture Joan of Arc and his church court condemns her to death as a witch. So the epithet 'Good' depends rather on your point of view.
- ✓ **1467:** Philip's son Charles the Bold becomes duke. Charles tries to stir up a rebellion against his great enemy, King Louis XI of France. The plan doesn't work. Louis tries to do the same to Charles; Charles takes Louis prisoner and takes him to see the would-be rebels being disembowelled.
- ✓ **1473:** Charles tries to add to his collection of captured European monarchs by capturing the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III but Frederick escapes. Louis XI and Frederick III are now determined to crush Burgundy.
- ✓ **1477:** Louis XI hires the Swiss to defeat Charles in battle. The Swiss do better than that – they kill him.

Louis XI took over the French part of Burgundy and nearly got the Netherlands as well. Luckily, the Dutch managed to marry Charles's daughter Mary to the Holy Roman Emperor's boy, Maximilian, just in time. From now on, the emperor protected the Netherlands and told the French to keep their grubby hands off.

Mary and Max had two children, Philip and Margaret. Both children married into the royal house of Spain. These marriages were the start of a link between the Netherlands and Spain and went on to have very big consequences in the 16th century.

The Reigns in Spain

Strictly speaking, 'Spain' was made up of different kingdoms: Portugal, Navarre, Aragon, and the biggest one, Castile. In 1469, in one of those weddings which occasionally make history, Prince Ferdinand of Aragon married Princess Isabella of Castile. The marriage didn't actually mean that their kingdoms were united, but Ferdinand and Isabella developed such a good working partnership that it might just as well have done. The couple imposed their authority in person, and they knew just how to divide and rule. Ferdinand and Isabella married their daughter Joanna to the handsome Duke of Burgundy, Phillip of Habsburg, and their daughter Katharine (Katharine of Aragon) married into another up-and-coming dynasty, the Tudors. No, not Henry VIII but his big brother, Prince Arthur. (For what happened next, see *British History For Dummies* (Wiley).)

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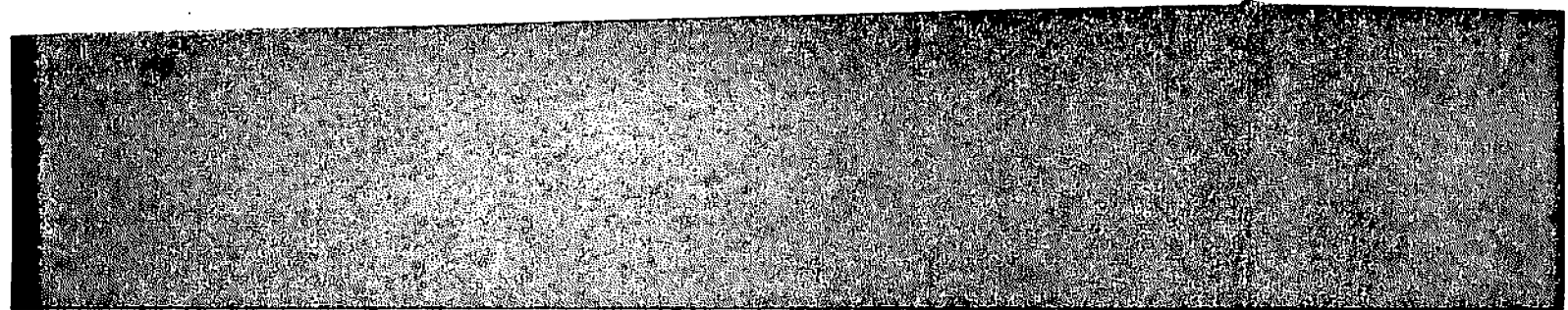
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The fear of God: The Spanish Inquisition

After years of Muslim rule, Christian Spain had a large Jewish and Muslim population. Many of these people had converted to Christianity (they weren't given much choice) but many churchmen suspected that they continued to practise their old religion in private.

Isabella invited Pope Sixtus IV to set up an inquisition in Spain to find out exactly what was going on. The Spanish Inquisition, under its ruthless Grand Inquisitor, Tomas de Torquemada, didn't have to bother with bishops as it reported directly to the Crown. The Spanish Inquisition did use torture, but found that close questioning got better results. Those people found guilty of slipping back into their Jewish or Muslim ways were paraded in the streets and made to wear tall paper hats with slogans or pictures on them, rather like those poor people ritually humiliated in communist China. Then, the guilty were burned at the stake. The whole ceremony was called, without a shred of irony, an *auto da fe*, an act of faith.

The last crusade

In 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella wrapped up the story of the *Reconquista* (see Chapter 7) and took Granada (the ruling dynasty in Granada were all at each others' throats, which helped). The Muslims of Granada were forcibly converted to Christianity and the Jews of Spain were thrown out. The Pope rewarded Ferdinand and Isabella by naming them 'the Catholic kings'. And while they were taking stock of their victory Ferdinand and Isabella had an unexpected visitor in the form of a young Italian sea captain, called Christopher Columbus, seeking their backing for an idea he had to sail to the Indies by heading west (for more on Columbus, see Chapter 11).

Isabella died in 1504. Isabella's throne passed to their daughter Joanna, but Ferdinand, who wanted to keep his son-in-law firmly in his place, didn't allow Joanna's husband, Philip, to become king of Castile alongside her. Philip bided his time, and made some friends among the Castilian nobles, who didn't like being told by an Aragonese who they could or could not have as their king.

Two years later, the Castilians rose up and threw Ferdinand out, though they could have saved themselves the trouble because Philip promptly died and Joanna went mad; she was always a bit on the edge, poor thing, but when she started carting Philip's body round with her in its coffin and refusing to let anyone take it away, even her dad could see that something wasn't quite right. And if Ferdinand couldn't see it, he could smell it.

Ferdinand ruled Castile as regent for his daughter until he died in 1516. Then, all those dynastic marriages came home to roost in a rather unexpected way.