

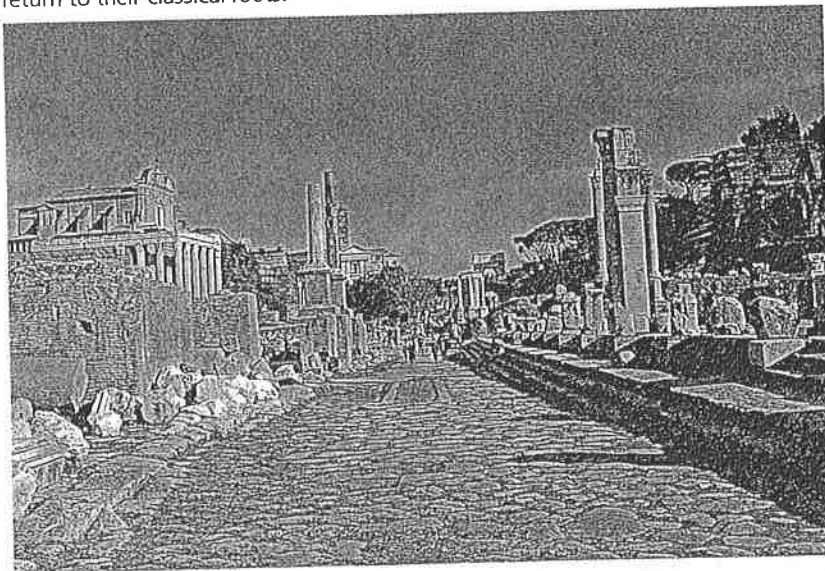
ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

Italy was different from northern Europe in many ways. First, it was the heartland of the old Roman Empire. Most of Italy still used Roman law; therefore, the problems of combining the medieval law with the Roman legal code didn't exist in Italy. Italy's clear legal code made business and trade between different regions much easier.

Also in Italy were many Roman ruins, sculptures, mosaics, and wall paintings. Some ancient works of art were brought to Italy with the fall of Constantinople. These ruins and works of art inspired many Italian artists and architects, partly because it was their ancestors who had created many of them.

Finally, one must consider geography.

Figure 7-1 The ruins of the Roman Forum, the centre of the ancient city of Rome. If you go to Italy today, you can still see some of the ruins of Roman civilization that inspired Renaissance artists to return to their classical roots.



DID YOU KNOW?

The words orange, lemon, coffee, and sugar come from the Arabic words naranj, lima, kahwa, and sukkar.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GEOGRAPHY

During the Middle Ages, Italy had developed as a collection of independent city-states. As trade increased, cities situated near or on one of Italy's few good harbours almost automatically became large and powerful because they served as

centres for trade. The two largest Italian port cities were Venice on the east coast and Genoa on the west. Venice became a major centre for both trade and ideas.

Italy is a mountainous peninsula, a fact that greatly affected Italy's development. Mountains make communication and travel difficult. Mountainous countries usually have only a few well-established trade routes, but those few tend to be very busy. Cities like Siena and Assisi, located on the old Roman roads that threaded the mountains of Italy, grew rich on the proceeds of trade. Florence, on a plain drained by the Arno River, was located at the hub of a major trade route that ran through mountains to Rome and Naples in the south and through more mountains to Genoa and Venice in the north. Partly because of its fortunate location, Florence became for a time the peninsula's most powerful city.

The climate of Italy was milder than that of the countries north of the Alps. This meant that the winter weather did not disrupt travel, trade, and commerce as it did in Germany and northern France. The milder climate also meant that food was plentiful all year long. People probably had more free time to devote to science and the arts in a place like Italy because they could spend less time earning a living.

Italy had closer ties than the rest of Europe to the Muslim world to the south and east. Muslims had ruled Sicily for a time in the early Middle Ages. During this time Italy was introduced to science, medicine, and astronomy as well as products such as oranges, lemons, coffee, and sugar. Because Italy was near the rich port cities of northern Africa and the Middle East, trade with these lands was easier and cheaper for Italy than for any other country in Europe. With trade came wealth, which in turn allowed the arts to flourish.

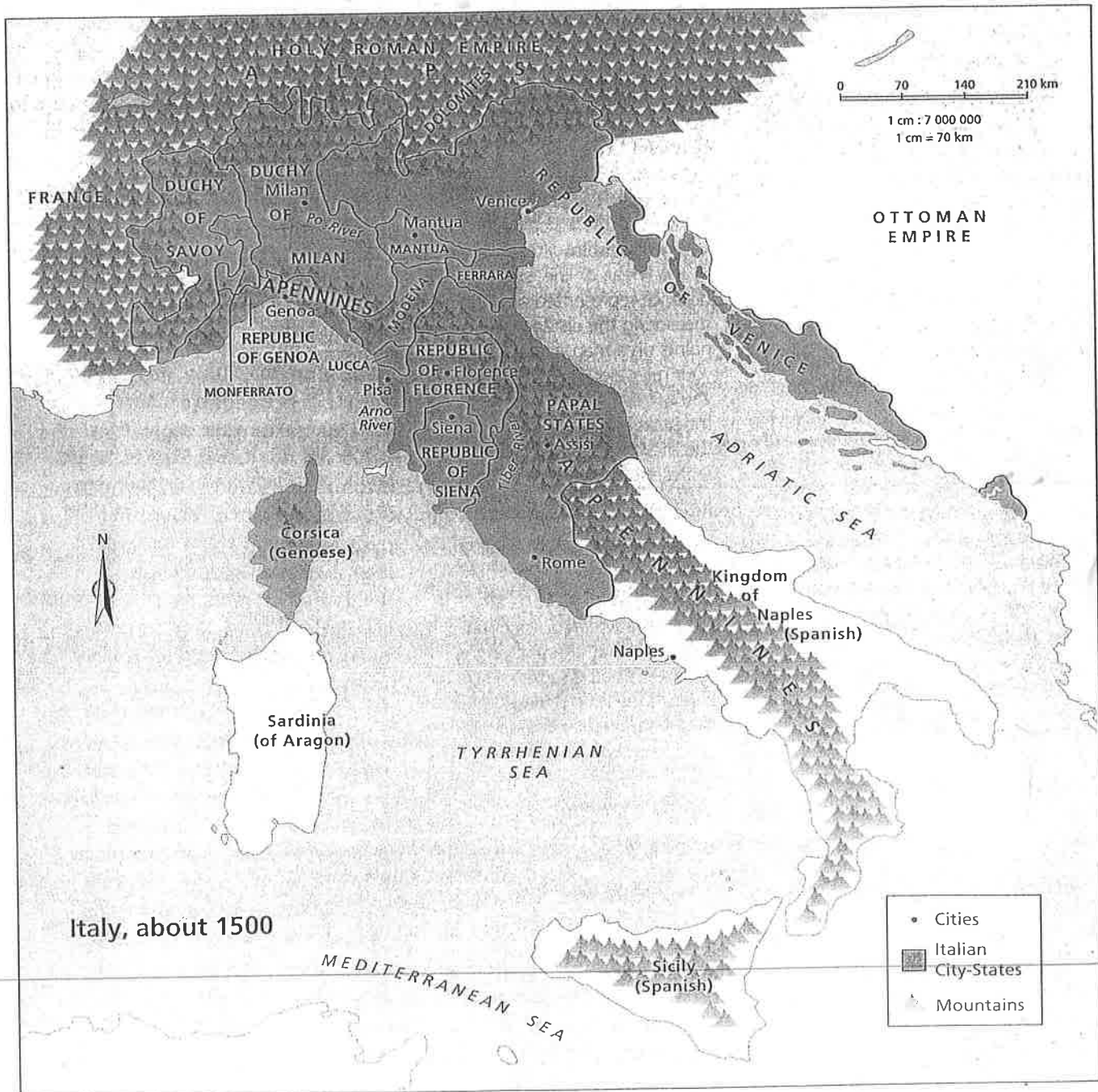
Geography in Painting

Renaissance painters paid far more attention than medieval painters had to the landscapes in their pictures. In the painting of Mary and Jesus on the opening page of this chapter (page 208), Giovanni Bellini used the geography of Italy as the background for his subjects. The distant blue mountains show that

Bellini understood atmospheric perspective. To put it simply, things in the distance look cooler and bluer than things close up. The rich brown earth shown in the painting is found in an area in Italy called "Umbria." Artists still paint with a pigment called umber made from the soil of this region.

topography: surface features of a region

Figure 7-2 Considering that all travel during the Renaissance was on foot, on horseback, by cart, or by ship, what effect did Italy's topography have on communications and trade? In such a mountainous region, which cities would have had the best chance of becoming wealthy?



ITALIAN CITY-STATES

The Renaissance did not occur because the Italian people had created a great empire. In fact, the opposite is true. Italy wasn't even a united country until the nineteenth century. The Renaissance flourished in city-states, some of them relatively small. A city-state consists of a city and the rural area immediately surrounding it. The surrounding area, called the **hinterland**, provides food and other necessities. Singapore is an example of a modern city-state that flourishes even without a hinterland. City-states have their own government and their own armed forces. The Italian city-states were democratic for at least part of their history.

Because some parts of Italy were occupied by the Holy Roman Empire, some by Spain, and some by the pope, politics was very complicated. Further, war often broke out between city-states. From the time of the Middle Ages, these city-states hired companies of **mercenary soldiers** led by **condotierri**, some from as far away as England, to fight for them. Condotierri fought for the pay and had little interest in the reasons for war. Often they were careful not to have casualties, with the result that some battles were more ceremonial than real. Some of the condotierri became the rulers of city-states.

hinterland: area surrounding a city
mercenary soldiers: soldiers for hire

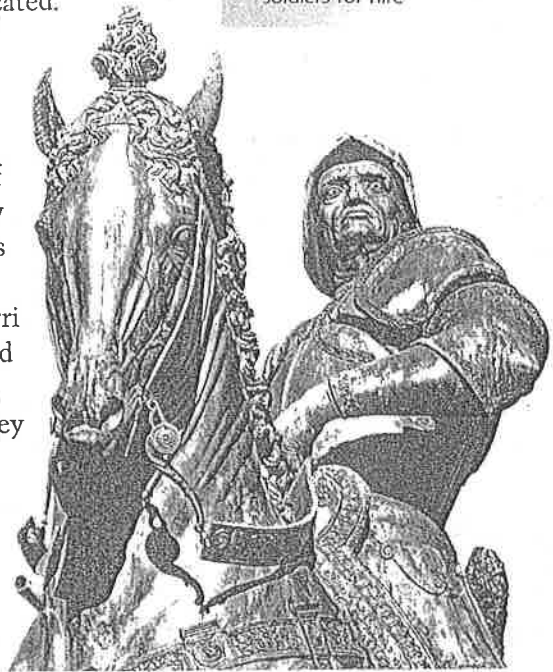


Figure 7-3 Andrea Verrocchio's statue of the Venetian condottiere Bartolomeo Colleoni. What aspects of Colleoni's character did the artist emphasize in this portrait?

Governing the City of Mantua

Like many Renaissance rulers, the Duke of Mantua was often away on military campaigns. During his absence, his wife, Isabella D'Este, governed the city. The portrait of Isabella, drawn by Leonardo da Vinci in 1500, shows Isabella when she was twenty-six. Isabella excelled in governing, in leading Italian society, and in supporting the arts. Governing the state was sometimes complicated by rumour and gossip, so Isabella often wrote to her husband to assure him that all was well. Here is an excerpt from one such letter. After reading it, describe Isabella's method of governing. What problems do you think a woman might face in the absence of her husband?

The inventors of these evil tales who have not been afraid to disturb your peace of mind when you are occupied with the defence of Italy, showed little regard for my honour, or for those of my councillors. Let Your Highness, I beg of you, have a peaceful mind... for I intend to govern the State... in such a manner that you will suffer no wrong, and all that is possible will be done for the good of your subjects... I not only listen to officials but allow all your subjects to speak to me whenever they choose [so] no disturbance can happen without my knowledge....

From her who loves and longs to see Your Highness,
Isabella,
with her own hand.
Mantua, June 30, 1495



councillor: advisor

oligarchy: government by a few powerful people

florin, ducat: gold coins weighing about 3.5 grams

Florence

Florence and Venice were the two most important Renaissance cities. Both became rich through the skill of their business people, and both were large enough to dominate their neighbours. Florence made its fortune in the cloth trade and controlled the kingdom of Naples. Today this city is famous for the Renaissance art that fills its galleries and other public buildings. Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci lived in this city as did many other painters, sculptors, and architects. The city is located in Tuscany in northwest Italy, on the banks of the Arno River. By 1330, Florence was already one of the largest cities in Europe, with a population of about 100 000.

Early Florence was ruled by a kind of democracy made up of representatives from the city's guilds. Later, the city was ruled by an **oligarchy** that was controlled by the wealthiest and most powerful families. Beginning in 1434, the extremely powerful Medici family ruled Florence.

In 1378, the cloth workers had revolted to protest poor living conditions. After this, the rulers of Florence tried hard to keep their citizens relatively happy. For this reason, and because they were proud of their city, Florence's rulers financed many beautiful public buildings and works of art. The Medicis were great patrons of the arts who sponsored both Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti.

The Business of Banking

Florence relied on the wool trade and banking for its prosperity. Florentine merchants would buy the best-quality wool from England and Spain and turn the wool into high-grade cloth that fetched high prices all over Europe. Florentine bankers began as moneychangers visiting European fairs, where they helped foreign merchants change their money to the local currency. At this time in Europe, more than 500 currencies were in use. These early moneychangers worked behind a *banc*, or bench, and so acquired the name "bankers." The Florentine gold **florin**, like the Venetian **ducat**, soon became a standard unit of currency that was accepted throughout Europe.

After becoming the pope's bankers and receiving authorization to collect taxes for him, the Florentine bankers established the wealthiest financial houses in Europe. They also introduced a



Figure 7-4 This woodcut shows the inside of a fifteenth-century Florentine bank. On the left, a banker examines a letter of credit (like a money order) that a foreign merchant has handed him. What do you think is being exchanged on the right? How would the bank make money from these transactions?

number of new banking practices. To make the flow of money easier and to keep detailed records of their transactions, they invented cheques and modern accounting methods.

Banking was often a risky business because merchants who borrowed money to buy or rent ships, purchase cargo, and hire

crews, continuously faced the threats of shipwreck, piracy, robbery, and war. Also, rulers sometimes failed to repay their loans. For instance, when Edward III of England refused to repay his loans, two of the most powerful banking families in Florence, the Perazzi and the Bardi, went out of business.

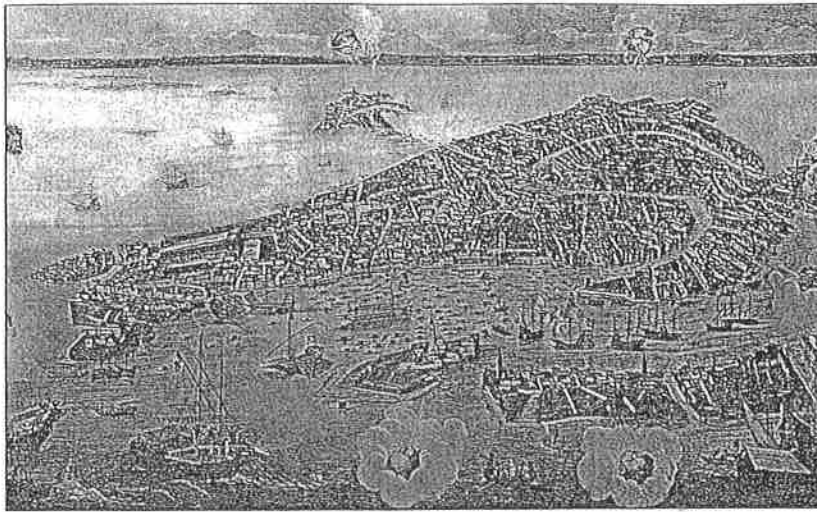


Figure 7-5 Map of Venice in the fifteenth century. With this map in mind, consider why Venice would be such a difficult city for an army to conquer. What kind of natural disaster would pose a real danger to Venice?

Venice

Venetians have always referred to their city as “the Most Serene Republic.” Venice is a one-of-a-kind city built entirely on piles sunk into marshy islands at the head of the Adriatic Sea. The city has hundreds of canals, which function as roads and highways.

With its hinterland, called the *veneto*, Venice was able to grow into one of the foremost cities of the Italian Renaissance. The city had a population of more than 150 000 people. It was

successful because its leaders created a powerful navy through which Venice was able to gain control of the trade routes on the Mediterranean Sea. The Venetians maintained hundreds of merchant ships and warships and thousands of sailors. The city’s navy and its watery surroundings made the city very difficult to attack successfully. Venice kept its independence from the Middle Ages until the end of the eighteenth century, when the city was conquered by Napoleon.

Although Venetians referred to their city as a **republic**, which is a form of democracy, the people of Venice in fact had little political freedom. The supreme ruler was the Doge (pronounced “dōj”), who was elected for life. The city also had a senate and a Great Council that passed laws. The Doge and the members of the government all came from wealthy families, however, so Venice in effect was an oligarchy, not a republic. All citizens were at the mercy of the most powerful arm of the government: the secret Council of Ten. This council had the power to imprison, torture, and execute any citizen of Venice—all in secret.

pile: a heavy beam driven upright into the earth to support a structure

republic: a state in which the citizens elect representatives to form a government

Figure 7-6 This photograph shows modern citizens of Venice costumed for one of the city’s festivals. This celebration has its roots in the Renaissance, when wealthy citizens wore masks to attend lavish parties and mingle with the masses. Why do you think they wore disguises?



Venice, like Florence, had many famous artists who were **patronized** by the wealthy merchants of the city. Architects built beautiful palaces and official buildings throughout the city. Titian was the most famous of the Venetian artists. He worked all his life, dying when he was ninety-nine. Many of Titian's works were massive paintings commissioned by the

Republic of Venice itself to record its glory. Titian also had a gift for painting people and was able to show emotion and personality better than many other artists. He often painted women with light red hair, a colour still known today as "Titian Red." Thanks to Titian and many other artists, Venice remains one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

to patronize: to support

ACTIVITIES

1. What does the term "renaissance" mean? What factors caused the Italian Renaissance in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries?
2. Imagine you are a prosperous Florentine wool trader writing to your cousin in Germany in 1420. Try to persuade him to abandon his woodworking business and move to Florence, where the business opportunities are better. In your letter, discuss the following:
 - ◆ the local climate
 - ◆ the advantageous location of Florence
 - ◆ the location of Italy in relation to other trading nations
 - ◆ the growing market for all types of goodsInclude a sketch map in your letter showing the location of Florence on the Arno River and its position relative to two trading centres in Italy.
3. What is a city-state? How did city-states manage to avoid becoming part of larger kingdoms or empires?
4. Why is a hinterland important to a wealthy city?
5. Construct a chart to compare Venice and Florence in regard to location, geographical advantages and disadvantages, population, source of wealth, political system, and important artists. What made these two city-states wealthy and powerful? Did they both grow rich for the same reasons?
6. a) Review the feature on early banking (see page 214). Make a list of functions performed by early banks. Then do the same for Canadian banks and credit unions.
b) In a small group, script and present the following drama. A pair of time travellers has been sent from the Bank of Canada to explain the wonders of machine banking to a group of Italian bankers in the mid-fifteenth century. The time travellers should describe the advantages of the instant teller and the bank card, while the bankers should ask questions. Will the standard bank machine have to be modified to make it useful for Renaissance bankers? In what ways?
Construct a mock bank machine for your drama.

THE FAMILY

THE ITALIAN FAMILY

The family was very important in Renaissance Italy. Even though the rate of infant deaths was higher than

today, and people died earlier, families were usually large. Mothers, fathers, and their children shared a house with their aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. Children generally learned the trade of their parents and worked in the family business.

Figure 7-7 This detail of *The Wedding at Cana* by Paolo Veronese shows the clothing of wealthy people in sixteenth-century Italy. African servants were rare and sought after. Why do you think the artist included the young boy shown at the front of the picture? What does this say about Renaissance society?



Getting Married

Middle-class and poorer people gave their children considerable freedom when it came to choosing a marriage partner, but wealthy people arranged the marriages of their children very carefully because the right marriage would promote the family's interest. The new family connections might bring better employment for a family

member, valuable business contacts, and acceptance into favoured social circles.

The daughter of a wealthy family was almost always much younger than the man she married, and her father would pay a large dowry to her husband's family. A young woman may not have wished to marry so young or to a man she did not know, but her wishes were not considered important.

Weddings were flashy occasions when wealthy people displayed their finery, spending vast sums on clothing and entertainment. A wedding gown of this period might have been decorated with articles such as peacock feathers, gold leaf, pearls, and flowers. Such a gown would cost as much as hiring a skilled labourer for 500 days. At a rate of \$25 an hour, in today's dollars, how much would the gown be worth?

The Sumptuary Laws

Imagine you are preparing dinner for some special friends. How would you feel if the law insisted that you provide a certain number of food courses depending on the social status of your friends?

Renaissance Italy had many such laws. If you invited a high Church official, a cardinal, to dinner, you had to serve nine courses. If you invited a bishop, archbishop, count, or duke, you served seven. Ordinary government officials would have to be content with six.

By 1460, wedding and social banquets in Venice had become so excessive that the government decided to ban most of them, along with certain foods, such as partridge, pheasant, and peacock.

All these laws were called "sumptuary laws" because they controlled consumption, or how people spent their money. Sumptuary laws also governed clothing and household goods. They were often directed at the growing middle class. Why would that be so?

Florence in 1427

Here are some statistics about families in Florence in the fifteenth century. Why do you think women tended to marry at a much earlier age than men?

Average age of head of household:	45 years
Average family size (merchant):	6.16 persons
Average family size (poor):	4.57 persons
Average age difference between bride and groom:	13.6 years
Average age for first marriage (women):	17.9 years
Average age for first marriage (men):	29.9 years
Earliest age for first marriage for wealthy men:	31.2 years
Average age for fatherhood:	39.8 years
Average age for motherhood:	26.5 years
Men who did not marry:	10 percent
Women who did not marry:	unknown but very few

In the countryside around Florence:

Average age difference between bride and groom:	7.3 years
Average age for first marriage (women):	18.3 years
Average age for first marriage (men):	25.6 years



A Betrothal and a Dowry

Isabella D'Este was betrothed (promised in marriage) at the age of six to Giovanni Gonzaga, aged fourteen. The boy's family sent a representative to inspect Isabella. Part of the report appears here.

Madonna Isabella was then led in to see me [the Gonzagas' representative], and I questioned her on many subjects, to all of which she replied with rare good sense and quickness. Her answers seemed truly miraculous in a child of six. I sent the portrait of Madonna Isabella, so that your highness ... may see her face, but I can assure you that her marvelous knowledge and intelligence are far more worthy of admiration.



At this time, a marriage involving two wealthy families had little to do with romantic love and quite a lot to do with finances. Here are the particulars of Isabella's dowry, the money paid to her husband's family upon the marriage. This was considered a relatively small dowry. In the end, the marriage took place when Isabella was sixteen, four years later than originally planned.

Jewellery	8000 ducats (about \$80 000)
A silver service	2000 ducats
A ruby	7000 ducats
Isabella's own money	3000 ducats
Other money (payable in 18 months)	25 000 ducats
Property and other gifts	10 000 ducats
Total:	55 000 ducats (\$550 000)

