

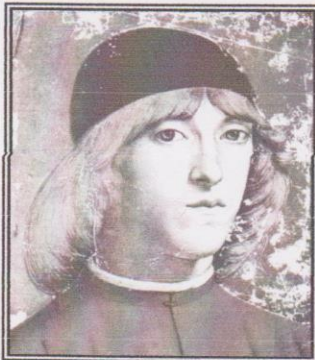
The First Family of Florence



Many scholars trace the birth of humanism and the Renaissance itself to Florence, Italy. I, Cosimo il Vecchio (the Old) de' Medici, am considered the founder of the city's most famous and powerful family.

Though other Medici before me gained wealth through trade and banking, I took control of the city in 1434 and held great hope that our family would rule for many years to come. My family placed great value on beauty and the arts. This is why we served as patrons for some of the world's most talented artists. Among those I sponsored were: Brunelleschi, Donatello, Fra Angelico, and more.

I am Lorenzo de' Medici, grandson of Cosimo il Vecchio, proud to be called by many as "Lorenzo the Magnificent." I suppose this name came to me because of my humanist interests and, many would say, talents. I admit it is true that my interests and skills vary widely. In addition to being a ruler, I was also a banker like others in my family, but I was also a poet, writer, philosopher, and artist. Also a dedicated patron of the arts, I opened an art school and sponsored some of the most famous artists of our time: Botticelli, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci were among those who benefited from my support.



It was most unfortunate that I, Piero de' Medici, son of the great Lorenzo de' Medici, came to power in Florence at such a difficult time. France was set upon conquering Italy, including Florence and its surrounding lands.

The people under my rule, it seems, were so fearful of Charles VIII of France that they supported his claim over the land rather than mine. I have heard that some say they did this more out of dislike of me and my ways than love for France, but I do not believe such foolish tales. In any event, France attacked and my family and I were forced from our home to wander through the states of Italy and Europe.

I, Pope Leo X, am of the great Medici family of Florence. Though never a ruler, I was able to influence Spain to return my family to the throne of the city after the disastrous, though thankfully short, rule of the misguided priest, Savonarola.

After the people of Florence quickly tired of his strict and cruel government, he was forced from power, tried for his crimes, and executed. It was then that Giuliano became prince for a brief period, and then another Lorenzo was named a Duke. While I cannot say the Medici that followed Savonarola proved themselves great leaders, it was still good for Florence to have our family back in power and adding to the beauty of our city.





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Though the Medici rulers since Lorenzo the Magnificent have been weak, I, Cosimo I, am proud to say that all has now changed. After taking the throne at the age of 18, I was able to strengthen my rule over the city as well as take over other lands to add to our holdings. Known as a “man of letters” since I was highly educated, I founded two academies of learning and enlarged the university at Pisa.

Named the Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1569, I established a strong government along with an art gallery in a new building called the Uffizi. I believe this building will one day become a famous art museum.



Born Giulio de' Medici in Florence, I have served as Pope Clement VII since the death of my cousin, Pope Leo X. I rose through the ranks of the Church during Leo's time as pope. Unfortunately, I have taken the pope's seat during the most difficult of times.

France, England, and Spain vie for control of their lands and others. At the same time, people are leaving the Holy Roman Catholic Church to join new religions. I felt so sure this “Protestant Reformation” as it was called could not last, but I fear I may have been wrong. After refusing to allow the English King Henry VIII to divorce his wife to remarry, even he formed his own Protestant religion!

I am Catherine de' Medici, though I am also Queen Catherine of France. Both my parents died when I was quite young, so I was raised by my uncle Clement VII. He brought me to Rome after angry crowds rioted against my family in Florence.

Once in Rome, my marriage to the would-be King Henry II of France was arranged. Henry took the throne and I became Queen in 1547 after the death of my father-in-law. Then, after Henry died in 1559, my sons took the throne one-by-one. Therefore, during most of the years since Henry's death, I have served as regent to my young sons, holding the true power over this nation. It bothers me not one bit that the French resent the fact that I am Italian-born and lack “royal” blood.



I, Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici, hold the questionable position of being the last in the line of the once-great Medici family. After marrying a German nobleman who died soon after, I returned to Florence to join my family there.

I learned that none of my brothers or cousins had produced children to take over, so efforts were made to place me in the position of ruler. I can tell you it was too much for me! As things turned out, I have had to will the Medici estates and titles to Florence under the rule of the Grand Duke of Tuscany. It is sad that after 250 years as the leading family in Florence and patrons of the Renaissance, the Medici will no longer hold power here.

Their Place in History

DIRECTIONS: Read each statement and mark whether or not you agree with it. Then use the space below to explain your position.

1. The Medici were among the world's greatest art patrons. Yes No

2. Most in the Medici Family were true humanists. Yes No

3. The Medici used their wealth to gain power in Florence. Yes No

4. The Medici Family held its position by dishonest means. Yes No

5. While most Medici were not kings or queens, they were very important in Europe. Yes No