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# CHAPTER 1: The Spirit of the Renaissance

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## STUDY NOTES

1. **St. Thomas Aquinas:** the most significant medieval philosopher, known for his integration of Greek philosophy with Christian thought and for his extensive and original expositions of Christian theology
2. **Wars of the Roses:** a series of civil conflicts in England in the fifteenth century over claims to the throne
3. **Tudors:** an English royal family of Welsh origins; began ruling following the Wars of the Roses
4. **Queen Elizabeth:** Elizabeth I, Queen of England, 1533-1603
5. **Hundred Years' War:** a series of conflicts waged between the royal houses of France and England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries over the right to rule France; France was ultimately victorious
6. **Louis XI:** King of France, 1461-1483
7. **Francis I:** King of France, 1515-1547
8. **Henry IV:** King of France, 1589-1610
9. **Ferdinand of Aragon:** King of Aragon (part of modern-day Spain), 1479-1516, and King of Castile, 1474-1516, due to his marriage to Isabella of Castile
10. **Isabella of Castile:** Queen of Castile (part of modern-day Spain), 1474-1504
11. **Reintroduction of Greek:** During the period of late antiquity, the knowledge of ancient Greek was gradually lost in Europe, even in centers of learning like the monasteries. Although some Greek texts were available in Latin (the intellectual language of the West during this time), many important texts, including Aristotle's works, were not. The reintroduction of Greek texts came first through contact with the Arab world, since Arab scholars had longed retained knowledge of Greek. Famed theologian Thomas Aquinas is noted for his integration of the newly rediscovered philosophy of Aristotle with mainly Platonic Christian theology, two systems that many at the time argued were irreconcilable. Throughout the late medieval era and early Renaissance, Greek texts continued to be "rediscovered" in the West, in part due to the influx of Byzantine scholars after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453,<sup>1</sup> and study of the Greek language began to slowly resurge throughout the same period. This reintroduction of Greek and Greek texts was one of the most important forces shaping the intellectual landscape in Europe in the late medieval era and throughout the Renaissance.

## WORDS TO DEFINE

1. scriptorium: the room in the medieval monastery dedicated to the writing and copying of manuscripts
2. sordid: involving ignoble motives; morally corrupt
3. temporal: relating to worldly or secular as opposed to spiritual affairs

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[1] MacCulloch 78, Eire 70

## IDENTIFICATION

1. Renaissance: era following the Middle Ages in Europe marked by great cultural and intellectual development; at its height in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries  

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2. Holy Roman Empire: the unified European political entity founded by Charlemagne and conceptualized as a Christian continuation of the Roman Empire; in the later Middle Ages, it became smaller and had significantly less power, centered around modern-day Germany  

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## COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the general ethos organizing European society in the medieval era? Give examples of areas in which this ethos was demonstrated.

The medieval world was in large part characterized by unity: unity of faith, unity of empire, unity of guild, and unity of intellectual language (Latin).  

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2. How did the European political landscape begin to shift in the early Renaissance? Explain how these changes were manifested in England, France, and Spain.

The Holy Roman Empire lost a great deal of its political power in the later Middle Ages, and several royal houses began to form their own unified nation-states. In England, the Wars of the Roses ended in the accession of the powerful Tudor line to the throne. In France, the Hundred Years' War ended in England's defeat and gave France's royal line the right to rule. In Spain, the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella united the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile, creating a larger sovereign Spanish kingdom.  

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3. Name at least five factors which influenced the changes that came about in the Renaissance, and explain what each of these factors contributed.

- The invention of gunpowder made the feudal castle useless as defense, which contributed to the political changes in the Holy Roman Empire.
- New methods of industry weakened the guilds, shifting the centers of commerce away from trade organizations.
- The reintroduction of Greek texts reinvigorated European thought, in part due to the fall of Constantinople and the flight of some learned Easterners into Europe.
- The discovery of foreign lands and increased trade raised the standard of living all over Europe.
- Printing was invented, making education and the sharing of ideas accessible to a much larger group of people.
- The new spirit of inquiry led to many scientific advances, which in turn served to question old norms.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The concept of the individual began to emerge as a more important principle in the Renaissance. Trace some of the changes discussed in this chapter that demonstrate a shift to more individualistic thinking. What are some of the pros and cons of these shifts?
2. Based on the information presented in this chapter, how would you define the "Spirit of the Renaissance"?