

Origin and development of Florence



Located in the central Italian region of Tuscany, Florence is one of the most breathtaking cities in Europe. Celebrated as the birthplace of the Renaissance, the city is home to many of its most famous artistic treasures.

The ancient Roman colony of **Florentia** - in which the Forum at the centre of the castrum corresponded to the point where Piazza della Repubblica is located today - **was founded in 59 BC**. The rapid territorial expansion soon came to include the nearby Etruscan settlement of Fiesole.

After the decline of the barbaric ages, the city, from the **eleventh century**, began to establish

itself as a free *Comune* in a happy balance between the authority of the **Popes** and that of the **Emperors**, thus leaving behind the uneasy internal struggles between the **Guelphs and Ghibellines**. Between the **thirteenth and fourteenth century**, at the time of **Dante** and **Boccaccio**, **Giotto** and **Arnolfo di Cambio**, when some of the iconic buildings like the **Palazzo Vecchio** and the **Duomo (Cathedral)** were built, Florence enjoyed a fertile cultural period, coinciding with an extraordinary economic development thanks to its artisans, merchants and bankers, who were organized into the famous **Arts and Crafts Guilds** - the Arts of Calimala and Wool, related to the processing

and marketing of famous textiles, some of the most powerful of the corporations - Florence confirmed its economic power in Europe, particularly with the introduction of the gold florin, the first truly international currency.



In the **fifteenth century**, at the height of the Renaissance, Florence achieved its greatest moment, thanks to the concentration of extraordinary and brilliant personalities like **Filippo Brunelleschi** and **Leon Battista Alberti** in architecture, **Masaccio**, Filippo Lippi and **Sandro Botticelli** in painting, and **Donatello**, Ghiberti,



Luca della Robbia in sculpture, at the height of which were the two great talents of **Leonardo da Vinci** and **Michelangelo**.

In the **fifteenth century**, thanks to **Cosimo the Elder** and **Lorenzo the Magnificent**, the rule of the Medici family and their extensive influence was established. In the sixteenth century - after the Republican period whose leaders were Savonarola and Machiavelli - a dynastic regime was established. The artistic movement of **Mannerism**, which was established around 1520 with Pontorno and Rosso, well reflects the political unrest of the times. In **1555**, with the



conquest of Siena, which took place a century after that of Pisa, the **Grand Duchy of Tuscany** reached its greatest territorial expansion under the rule of Cosimo I de' Medici.

The **seventeenth century** is characterized by the extraordinary development of science - with **Galileo** as one of the leading protagonists - with the many museums bearing witness to this. In the eighteenth century, Florence experienced another interesting phenomenon, the Grand

Tour. Along with other Italian cities, Florence, "**Cradle of the Renaissance**", was a mandatory stop for the many young aristocrats and intellectuals from northern Europe. The Medici dynasty died out in 1737, and the Grand Duchy passed to the **Lorena** who governed Florence and Tuscany **until the unification of Italy**, apart from the period of French rule (1799-1814).



During the time in which **Florence** was **capital of Italy** (1865 to 1870) the **city underwent major transformations**, such as the demolition of the walls which were then replaced by the ring of boulevards, and the demolition of the Old Market, now **Piazza della Repubblica**.



By the mid-nineteenth century, the artistic **movement** of the **Macchiaioli painters** (Fattori, Lega, Signorini) was established, anti-academic and parallel with French Impressionism.



Hard hit during the **Second World War**, Florence experienced its most **dramatic moments** in its recent history being severely damaged by the retreating Germans, who blew up all its bridges except the Ponte Vecchio. In August 1944 the city liberated from Nazi-Fascists.

In November of 1966 Florence experienced another dramatic moment when the waters of the Arno river flooded the city.

Since **1982** the historic centre of **Florence** has been a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. Today Florence continues to thrive as a city of great historical and artistic significance boasting an unparalleled quantity of Italian Renaissance art being a popular destination for tourists and students of art and culture.

The city is **currently** experiencing a period of **deep transformations** – from the pedestrian area of Piazza del Duomo and Oltrarno to major infrastructure works, such as the tramway, or architecture works such as the **Nuovo Teatro dell'Opera** and the **Palazzo di Giustizia**, in an attempt to combine the demands of the modern age with a respect for tradition.