

## Europe's Renaissance and Reformation

Understanding the political geography of Europe during the 1300s to the 1600s will give you a foundation on which to build your upcoming study of two crucial periods: the Renaissance and the Reformation.

Much of the power in Europe from the 1300s to the 1600s lay in three major areas: the city-states of Italy, the Papal States, and the Holy Roman Empire.

During these years, Italy was not the unified country it is today. Instead, it was a collection of city-states, or large, self-governing cities and their surrounding communities and farms. From the 1300s to the 1600s, several of these independent city-states prospered. Places such as Florence, Venice, and Milan grew in power and influence, due mostly to an increase in trade and banking.

Additionally, the city of Rome was a prosperous and important city that belonged to an area known as the Papal States. These were territories in central Italy controlled by the pope, the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church. Life was changing in Europe in the 1500s, however, and the power of the Church and the Papal States was just beginning to weaken.

To the north of the Papal States and the Italian city-states lay the Holy Roman Empire. Established by King Charlemagne in the 700s, the empire during the period of the Renaissance encompassed a large piece of land that stretched to the North Sea. Its borders changed often, as territories were won and lost. Within the Holy Roman Empire, powerful princes ruled over smaller territories. The influence of the empire as a whole, however, was beginning to weaken, despite repeated attempts by successive emperors to gain an advantage over the pope and the Catholic Church.

## Physical Features of Europe



# Europe, About 1500



DONOR