

CUET · HISTORY · CLASS XI · CODE 314

# Changing Cultural Traditions

CUET unit: World History — Background

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## Snapshot

- Europe underwent a cultural transformation from the 14th to the 17th century — urban revival in Italian city-states, the rise of humanism, classical revival in art and architecture, the printing revolution, the Protestant Reformation, and the Copernican scientific revolution.
- Jacob Burckhardt coined the term "Renaissance" (1860); a historiographical debate surrounds it (Peter Burke's critique that the break with the medieval period was exaggerated).
- CUET tests this chapter for its chronology (Petrarch, Gutenberg, Copernicus, Luther, Newton), key personalities (Michelangelo, Leonardo, Erasmus, More, Galileo), and conceptual contrasts (humanism vs scholasticism; Catholic vs Protestant; geocentric vs heliocentric).
- Strong source-criticism angle: extracts from Contarini, Pico della Mirandola, Machiavelli, Castiglione, Tyndale — these often appear as extract-based MCQs.
- Emphasises non-European debts of the Renaissance — Arab translators, Chinese printing, Mongol-era exchanges — a frequently asked NTA twist.

## Detailed Notes

### 2.1 Core concepts

- From the 14th to the end of the 17th century, towns grew across Europe and a distinct "urban culture" developed; townspeople thought of themselves as more "civilised" than rural folk, and Florence, Venice and Rome became centres of art and learning (NCERT Introduction, p. 106).
- The invention of printing made books and prints available to distant readers, and a sense of history developed in which Europeans contrasted their "modern" world with the "ancient" Greco-Roman one (NCERT Introduction, p. 106).
- Jacob Burckhardt (1818-97), a Swiss scholar at the University of Basle and a student of Leopold von Ranke, coined the historiographical use of "Renaissance" in his 1860 book **The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy**, arguing that politics was not the be-all of history and that a new humanist culture made man a self-determining individual (NCERT Introduction, pp. 106-107).
- After the fall of the western Roman Empire Italy was fragmented with no unified government; the Pope in Rome was sovereign but politically weak, while western

- Europe was reshaped by feudal bonds under the Latin Church, eastern Europe by the Byzantine Empire and the west by Islam (NCERT §Revival of Italian Cities, p. 107).
- Expansion of Byzantine–Islamic trade, the Mongol opening of the Silk Route from the 12th century, and growing western European commerce revived Italian ports; cities like Florence and Venice became republics while others became court-cities ruled by princes (NCERT §Revival of Italian Cities, pp. 107-108).
  - In Venice and Genoa the clergy were not politically dominant and there were no powerful feudal lords; rich merchants and bankers participated in city government, which helped the idea of citizenship take root (NCERT §Revival of Italian Cities, p. 108).
  - The earliest European universities were in Italian towns — Padua and Bologna were centres of legal studies from the 11th century — and the commercial demand for lawyers and notaries made law a popular subject (NCERT §Universities and Humanism, p. 109).
  - Francesco Petrarch (1304-78) represented a shift in emphasis: he saw antiquity as a distinctive civilisation best understood through the actual words of ancient Greeks and Romans, and stressed close reading of ancient authors (NCERT §Universities and Humanism, p. 109).
  - By the early 15th century, "humanist" denoted masters who taught grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy; the Latin word **humanitas** had been used by Cicero (106-43 BCE) to mean culture; these subjects were not drawn from religion and emphasised individual skills through discussion and debate (NCERT §Universities and Humanism, p. 109).
  - Florence rose to prominence through Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) and the painter Giotto (1267-1337), whose lifelike portraits broke with stiff earlier figures; the term "Renaissance Man" describes a person of many parts — scholar-diplomat-theologian-artist combined (NCERT §Universities and Humanism, p. 110).
  - Humanists believed a "dark age" had set in after the collapse of the Roman Empire and they used "modern" for the period from the 15th century; their periodisation labelled the 5th–14th century as the Middle Ages and the 5th–9th as the Dark Ages (NCERT §The Humanist View of History, pp. 110-111).
  - Arab translators preserved Greek works — Plato became **Aflatun** and Aristotle **Aristu** in Arabic; Ptolemy's **Almagest** carries the Arabic article "al"; Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980-1037), al-Razi (Rhazes) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126-98) were recognised by Italians as men of wisdom (NCERT §Science and Philosophy: The Arabs' Contribution, p. 111).
  - In 1416 Donatello (1386-1466) broke new ground with lifelike statues; Andreas Vesalius (1514-64), Belgian professor of medicine at Padua, was the first to dissect the human body — the beginning of modern physiology (NCERT §Artists and Realism, p. 112).

- Painters used geometry for perspective, observed changing light for three-dimensional quality, and used oil as a medium; Chinese and Persian artistic influence reached them via the Mongols — giving rise to "realism" (NCERT §Artists and Realism, p. 113).
- From 1417 the popes were politically stronger; ruins in Rome were excavated, and a "new" classical architectural style revived the imperial Roman manner. Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) painted the Sistine Chapel ceiling, sculpted **The Pieta**, and designed the dome of St Peter's. Filippo Brunelleschi (1337-1446) designed the Duomo of Florence (NCERT §Architecture, pp. 113-114).
- The mastery of printing was the "greatest revolution of the sixteenth century"; Europeans owed printing technology to the Chinese (via Mongol courts), along with firearms, the compass and the abacus. In 1455 Johannes Gutenberg (1400-1458) printed 150 copies of the Bible — what would have taken a monk the same time to write once (NCERT §The First Printed Books, p. 114).
- Printed books carried humanist culture across the Alps from the late 15th century, explaining why earlier intellectual movements had been regionally confined (NCERT §The First Printed Books, p. 114).
- Francesco Barbaro (1390-1454) of Venice defended the acquisition of wealth as a virtue; Lorenzo Valla (1406-1457) in **On Pleasure** criticised the Christian injunction against pleasure (NCERT §A New Concept of Human Beings, pp. 114-115).
- Niccolo Machiavelli in **The Prince** (1513, Chapter 15) argued that "all men are bad" and that self-interest is the most powerful motive of every human action (NCERT §A New Concept of Human Beings, p. 115).
- The new ideal of individuality and citizenship excluded women; dowries were invested in family businesses but women had no say; Cassandra Fedele of Venice (1465-1558) was proficient in Greek and Latin and lectured at Padua; Isabella d'Este (1474-1539), Marchesa of Mantua, ruled in her husband's absence (NCERT §The Aspirations of Women, pp. 115-116).
- In north Europe humanism attracted members of the Church; Thomas More (1478-1535) in England and Erasmus (1466-1536) in Holland criticised the Church for greed and the sale of "indulgences"; humanists exposed the **Donation of Constantine** as a forgery (NCERT §Debates within Christianity, p. 117).
- In 1517 Martin Luther (1483-1546) launched a campaign against the Catholic Church arguing that no priests were needed to contact God; this Protestant Reformation was popularised in Switzerland by Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) and Jean Calvin (1509-64); the Anabaptists blended salvation with the end of social oppression (NCERT §Debates within Christianity, pp. 117-118).
- William Tyndale (1494-1536) translated the New Testament into English in 1506; Luther suppressed the German peasants' rebellion of 1525; Ignatius Loyola founded the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1540 in Spain to combat Protestantism (NCERT §Debates within Christianity, p. 118).

- Copernicus (1473-1543), a contemporary of Luther, asserted that planets including the earth rotate around the sun; afraid of clerical reaction he refused to print **De revolutionibus** and gave it on his deathbed to his follower Joachim Rheticus (NCERT §The Copernican Revolution, p. 119).
- Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) in **Cosmographical Mystery** showed planets move in ellipses; Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) confirmed the dynamic world in **The Motion**; the revolution climaxed with Isaac Newton's theory of gravitation (NCERT §The Copernican Revolution, p. 119).
- The Paris Academy (1670) and the Royal Society in London (1662) held public lectures and experiments — establishing a new scientific culture in the public domain (NCERT §Reading the Universe, p. 120).
- Peter Burke suggested Burckhardt exaggerated the break: earlier scholars had been familiar with Greek and Roman cultures, and religion remained central. Many "Renaissance" elements trace back to the 12th-13th centuries, with similar earlier blossoming in 9th-century France (NCERT §Was there a European 'Renaissance'..., p. 120).
- Europe's cultural change owed debts not just to Greece and Rome but to India, Arabia, Iran, Central Asia and China — debts unacknowledged because the history was written from a Europe-centred viewpoint. Gradually the "private" and "public" spheres separated, and Europe began dissolving into states united by common languages (NCERT §Was there a European 'Renaissance'..., pp. 120-121).

## 2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Renaissance	Literally "rebirth"; term used from the 19th century by historians (notably Burckhardt) to describe the cultural changes in Europe from the 14th century.	106
Humanism	Culture stressing grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy; subjects not drawn from religion, emphasising individual skills through debate.	109
Humanitas	Latin word used by Cicero (106-43 BCE) to mean culture; root of the term "humanities".	109
Renaissance Man	A person with many interests and skills — scholar, diplomat, theologian and artist combined.	110
Middle Ages / Medieval Period	Humanist label for the millennium (5th-14th century) after the fall of Rome.	110-111
Realism	New quality of Italian art combining anatomy, geometry, physics and a sense of beauty; continued till the 19th century.	113
Indulgences	Documents sold by the clergy that apparently freed the buyer from the burden of his sins.	117

Term	Definition	Page
Donation of Constantine	Document falsely supposed to have been issued by Emperor Constantine giving the clergy judicial and fiscal powers — exposed as a forgery by humanists.	117
Protestant Reformation	Movement launched in 1517 by Martin Luther that led German and Swiss churches to break from the Pope.	117
Anabaptists	Radical German reformers who blended salvation with the end of social oppression, refused taxes and claimed the right to choose priests.	118
Society of Jesus (Jesuits)	Order founded in Spain by Ignatius Loyola in 1540 to combat Protestantism; mission to serve the poor and widen knowledge of other cultures.	118
Celestial / Terrestrial	"Celestial" = divine or heavenly; "terrestrial" = having a worldly quality (margin definition).	119
New Testament	Section of the Bible dealing with the life and teachings of Christ and his early followers (margin definition).	118
Petrarch	Italian humanist (1304–78), "Father of Humanism"; emphasised close reading of ancient Greek and Latin authors	109
Burckhardt	Jacob Burckhardt (1818–97), Swiss historian whose 1860 book popularised "Renaissance"	106–107
Gutenberg	Johannes Gutenberg (1400–58); printed 150 copies of the Bible in 1455 using movable type	114
Donatello	Italian sculptor (1386–1466); broke ground with lifelike statues in 1416	112
Vesalius	Andreas Vesalius (1514–64), Belgian professor of medicine at Padua; first to dissect the human body	112
Michelangelo	Italian artist (1475–1564); Sistine Chapel ceiling, <b>Pieta</b> , dome of St Peter's	113
Brunelleschi	Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446); architect of the Duomo of Florence	113–114
Machiavelli	Niccolo Machiavelli; author of <b>The Prince</b> (1513) arguing self-interest drives human action	115
Erasmus	Dutch Christian humanist (1466–1536); critic of Church corruption	117
Thomas More	English humanist (1478–1535); author of <b>Utopia</b> (1516)	117
Luther	Martin Luther (1483–1546); German monk who launched the Reformation in 1517 with 95 Theses	117
Calvin	Jean Calvin (1509–64); reformer who popularised Luther's ideas in Switzerland	117

Term	Definition	Page
Copernicus	Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543); heliocentric astronomer, <i>De revolutionibus</i> (1543)	119
Kepler	Johannes Kepler (1571–1630); planets move in elliptical orbits, <i>Cosmographical Mystery</i>	119
Galileo	Galileo Galilei (1564–1642); confirmed Copernican system in <i>The Motion</i>	119
Newton	Isaac Newton; theory of gravitation, <i>Principia Mathematica</i> (1687)	119

### 2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **MAP 1: The Italian States** (p. 107) — locate Venice, Florence, Genoa, Rome, Mantua.
- **Timeline box "The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries"** (p. 109) — 1300 humanism at Padua; 1341 Petrarch crowned Poet Laureate; 1349 Florence university; 1390 Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*; 1436 Brunelleschi's Duomo; 1453 fall of Constantinople; 1454 Gutenberg Bible; 1484 Portuguese latitude calculation; 1492 Columbus; 1495 Leonardo's *Last Supper*; 1512 Sistine Chapel ceiling.
- **Periodisation table by humanists** (p. 111) — 5th–14th c. Middle Ages; 5th–9th Dark Ages; 9th–11th Early Middle Ages; 11th–14th Late Middle Ages; 15th c. onwards Modern Age.
- **Timeline box "The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries"** (p. 119) — 1516 More's *Utopia*; 1517 Luther's Ninety-Five Theses; 1522 German Bible; 1525 German peasant uprising; 1543 Vesalius *On Anatomy*; 1559 Anglican Church established; 1569 Mercator's cylindrical map; 1582 Gregorian calendar; 1628 Harvey on blood circulation; 1673 Paris Academy of Sciences; 1687 Newton's *Principia Mathematica*.
- **Visual references** — Bellini's *Recovery of the Relic of the Holy Cross* (p. 108); Giotto's painting of the child Jesus (p. 110); Durer's *Praying Hands* (p. 112); Michelangelo's *Pieta* (p. 112); Brunelleschi's Duomo (p. 114); self-portrait of Copernicus (p. 119).
- **Process — transmission of Greek learning into the Renaissance:** (1) Hellenistic Greeks translate Aristotle/Plato; (2) Arab scholars (9th–12th c.) translate Greek into Arabic, preserving lost works; (3) Sicily, Toledo (Spain) and Constantinople become bilingual translation hubs; (4) Latin translations from Arabic reach Italian universities; (5) After 1453 Greek-speaking scholars flee Constantinople with original manuscripts; (6) Italian humanists print Greek originals on Gutenberg-style presses (NCERT §Science and Philosophy, p. 111).
- **Process — Reformation's chain:** (1) 1517 Luther's 95 Theses against indulgences; (2) printed pamphlets reach German peasants; (3) 1522 Luther translates Bible into German; (4) 1525 German peasants revolt — Luther sides with rulers; (5) Zwingli &

Calvin extend reform in Switzerland; (6) 1540 Jesuits founded; (7) 1559 Anglican Church established; printing is the multiplier throughout (NCERT §Debates within Christianity, pp. 117–118).

- **Process — scientific revolution:** Copernicus (heliocentric 1543) → Kepler (elliptical orbits) → Galileo (telescopic confirmation) → Newton (universal gravitation 1687). Royal Society 1662 and Paris Academy 1670 institutionalise the new science.

## 2.5 Timeline / Key events

Year / Period	Event	Significance
1265–1321	Dante Alighieri	First major Italian vernacular poet (NCERT p. 110)
1267–1337	Giotto	Lifelike painting breaks medieval stiffness (NCERT p. 110)
1300	Humanism appears at Padua	Beginning of secular university culture (NCERT timeline, p. 109)
1304–78	Francesco Petrarch	Father of humanism (NCERT p. 109)
1341	Petrarch crowned Poet Laureate	High status of new humanist culture (NCERT p. 109)
1349	Florence university founded	Humanism institutionalised (NCERT p. 109)
1416	Donatello's lifelike statues	Renaissance sculpture begins (NCERT p. 112)
1436	Brunelleschi's Duomo, Florence	Pinnacle of Renaissance architecture (NCERT p. 114)
1453	Ottomans capture Constantinople; Greek scholars flee to Italy	Catalyst for Italian Renaissance (NCERT p. 109)
1455	Gutenberg prints 150 Bibles	Print revolution begins (NCERT p. 114)
1492	Columbus's voyage	European overseas expansion (NCERT timeline, p. 109)
1495	Leonardo da Vinci paints <b>The Last Supper</b>	Apex of Italian painting (NCERT p. 109)
1512	Sistine Chapel ceiling by Michelangelo	High Renaissance painting (NCERT p. 109)
1513	Machiavelli's <b>The Prince</b>	New political philosophy (NCERT p. 115)
1516	Thomas More's <b>Utopia</b>	Christian humanist critique (NCERT p. 119)
1517	Luther's 95 Theses	

Year / Period	Event	Significance
		Protestant Reformation begins (NCERT p. 117)
1522	Luther's German Bible	Vernacular scripture (NCERT p. 119)
1525	German peasants' uprising; suppressed	Limits of Luther's social radicalism (NCERT p. 118)
1540	Society of Jesus (Jesuits) founded by Ignatius Loyola	Catholic Counter-Reformation (NCERT p. 118)
1543	Copernicus, <i>De revolutionibus</i> ; Vesalius, <i>On Anatomy</i>	Heliocentrism + modern physiology (NCERT pp. 112, 119)
1559	Anglican Church established	National Protestant church in England (NCERT p. 119)
1582	Gregorian calendar	Modern timekeeping (NCERT p. 119)
1628	Harvey on blood circulation	Birth of modern physiology (NCERT p. 119)
1662	Royal Society of London founded	New scientific public sphere (NCERT p. 120)
1670	Paris Academy of Sciences	French scientific institution (NCERT p. 120)
1687	Newton's <i>Principia Mathematica</i>	Universal gravitation (NCERT p. 119)

## 2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **Who coined "Renaissance"?** It was the 19th-century historian Jacob Burckhardt who popularised the term; it was NOT a self-description used by 14th-century Italians. Distractors may name Petrarch, Ranke or Peter Burke.
- **Petrarch was a humanist, not a Reformer** — students confuse him with Luther. Petrarch (1304-78) stressed reading ancient Greeks and Romans; Luther (1483-1546) led the Reformation.
- **Translation chain of Greek learning** — Greek → Arabic → Latin/Italian. Arabs preserved and translated; Europeans received Plato as **Aflatun** and Aristotle as **Aristu**. Distractors may claim Italians read Greek directly throughout the Middle Ages.
- **Copernicus did not publish in his lifetime out of confidence** — he was afraid of clerical reaction and gave *De revolutionibus* to Joachim Rheticus on his deathbed.
- **Kepler said planets move in ellipses, not circles** — a common NTA factual trap. *Cosmographical Mystery* is Kepler's, not Copernicus's.

- **Anabaptists ≠ Lutherans** — Anabaptists were more radical; they linked salvation to ending social oppression and were not supported by Luther, who in fact urged German rulers to suppress the 1525 peasants' rebellion.
- **Jesuits founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1540 in Spain** — to combat Protestantism (Catholic Counter-Reformation), not to support it.
- **Royal Society (London, 1662) predates the Paris Academy (1670)** — students often reverse the dates.
- **Utopia** (1516) was written by Thomas More (England), not Erasmus (Holland). Erasmus wrote **In Praise of Folly** (not in NCERT, but commonly confused).
- William Tyndale was English; he translated the **New Testament** into English in 1506 — students confuse him with Luther's German Bible (1522).
- The **Donation of Constantine** — exposed as a forgery by Italian humanists — does NOT date from Constantine's actual reign; it is a medieval forgery.

## Practice MCQs

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## PYQ Alignment

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This chapter has been a steady contributor of 5-7 CUET History MCQs annually since 2023, with frequent emphasis on dates from the two timeline boxes (Gutenberg 1455, Luther 1517, Newton 1687) and personality–contribution matches (Vesalius, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Copernicus, Kepler). Extract-based items from the Machiavelli, Tyndale and Castiglione quotations, and statement-based questions on the non-European debts of the Renaissance (Arab translators, Chinese printing, Mongol-era exchanges), are recurring NTA favourites. Browse all: </pyq/history>.