



How Did Genoa Help Shape the Renaissance Worldview?

Genoa, or Genova in Italian, is Italy's main commercial port city today. Located in northwestern Italy on the Tyrrhenean Sea, it is sandwiched on a narrow strip of land between the sea and the mountains to the north. The name *Genoa* came from its ancient name, Genua, a city supposedly founded by the two-headed Roman god Giano, protector of ships and coins. Genoa is a city of two faces: one that looks inland and the other that looks towards the sea. The old city was surrounded by high walls to protect its inhabitants from invaders from the mountains and from the sea.

Walled cities were common in the past; the barriers protected the citizens from attack. La ville de Québec (Québec City) was established 400 years ago on the banks of the St. Lawrence River by settlers from France. Vieux Québec, Québec's Old Town, is the only city in North America whose fortified walls still exist. Vieux Québec was declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1985.

Genoa had been a crossroads of traffic and culture between western Europe and the Mediterranean for centuries. Most of the trade between Italy and northern Europe crossed this narrow strip of land. Its location and the initiative of its citizens made Genoa one of medieval Europe's major centres of trade and commerce.

Beginning with the first crusade in the Middle Ages, crusaders poured into Genoa from England, France, and other Western European areas. Genoese fleets transported the crusading armies to ports in the Holy Land. In return for their services, the Genoans were paid well and granted important trading privileges among the Christian-controlled areas of the East.

View of Genoa, 1481. Genoa was a walled city. How might living within a walled city affect the worldview of the people?



In 1261, the Genoese navy gained control of Constantinople, the largest city in Europe and, thus, the trade in the Black Sea. Genoa's traders quickly developed markets at key ports on this sea. They exported wine, olive oil, and wool to the area, and imported furs, corn, spices, and Persian goods.

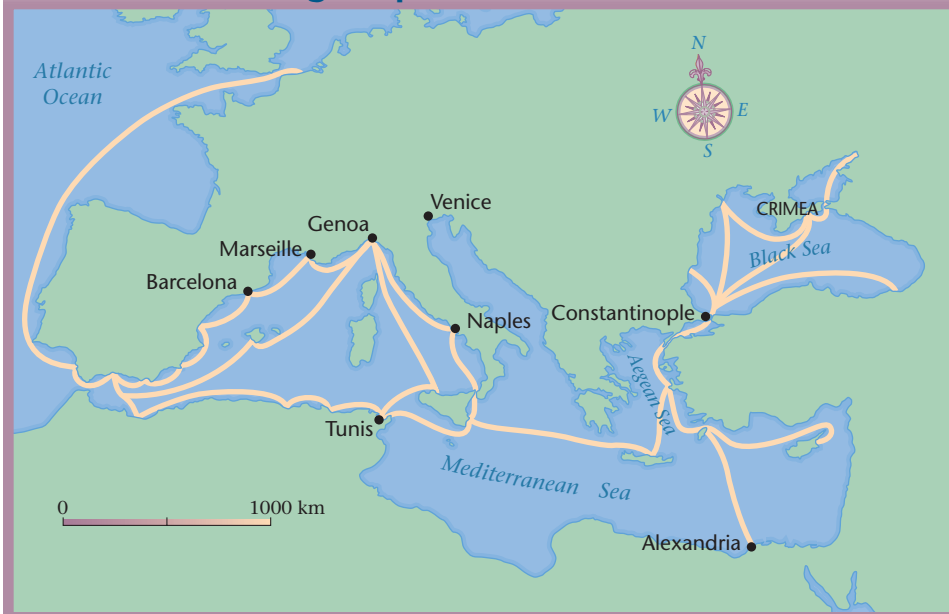
Wealthy families in Genoa saw this expansion and trade as an opportunity and founded a powerful bank, the Banco San Giorgio (Bank of St. George), to finance both the trade and the navy of Genoa. Genoese merchants, shipbuilders, traders, and the navy were able to borrow money at low rates and were, therefore, able to build more ships and hire more sailors. More ships allowed Genoese traders to expand to the Eastern Mediterranean and to increase trade with the Arab Muslim world, bringing huge wealth to the city-state of Genoa.

At the same time, Venice, the strongest city-state in Italy, also developed key trading ports in the Eastern Mediterranean. Genoa and Venice were rivals, fighting to gain control of lucrative trading posts throughout the Aegean Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Black Sea. The two city-states signed the Peace of Turin in 1381, which allowed each city-state to maintain its current trading posts without interference from the other. This reduced the need to put valuable resources into war and defense; the city-states could focus on trade and business.

During the Middle Ages, Genoa was a republic, governed by rival clans or families. In the 1300s, the families struggling for control agreed to a truce, each more or less controlling a section of the city. This period of peace allowed the city to focus on expanding its trading empire. Because of the economic success of the city, the population increased to almost 100 000 by 1400.

Your favourite pair of jeans owes its name to *Gênes* (pronounced *jen*), the French name for Genoa. Blue cotton cloth, a noted Genoese product, was exported to France, and from there to areas of the English-speaking world in bales marked *Gênes*.

Genovese Trading Empire, 1200s



This map shows Genoa's trade routes in 1261. How might these routes have led to conflict with the city-state of Venice?

fresco: a watercolour painting done on a wall or ceiling on wet plaster



University of Genoa, present day. The University of Genoa is one of the oldest in Italy. It dates back to the 13th century and became prominent for the study of law, medicine, philosophy, and theology. Today, it has more than 40 000 students.

Andrea Doria, statesman
 Ottaviano Grimaldi, statesman
 Christopher Columbus, explorer

The Grimaldi family began ruling a small piece of land on the coast just west of Genoa in 1297. They have ruled the Principality of Monaco, which is much like a city-state, for more than 700 years and have made it into a prime destination for the world's wealthy and famous. Who is its ruler today?

I wonder ... how has Monaco survived as a city-state from the Renaissance to present day?

Genoa's strength declined after 1463 when it lost Constantinople, the gateway to its trade in the Black Sea, in a battle to the Ottoman Turkish Empire. The Italian city-state of Milan, and later France, took control of Genoa. Although the Genovese families maintained their wealth and some independence, the power of Genoa was not revived until 1528 when Andrea Doria, a navy commander and statesman, became dictator. During his rule, Genoa experienced the Renaissance in art and architecture that had already occurred in other areas of Italy.

Wealthy Genovese families paid for the creation of daring architecture, splendid **frescoes**, and imposing, noble palaces. The families competed to commission palaces and art masterpieces by the most famous architects and artists of the time. They hired master artists from Rome, Florence, Venice, and northern Europe to beautify their homes and public buildings.

THE FAMOUS AND THE TALENTED of Genoa



Doria



Grimaldi



Columbus

REFLECT AND RESPOND

1. What were some of the details of the elements of worldview of the citizens of Genoa — social systems, political and economic systems, and culture — that were presented in the last few pages? Use a graphic organizer to show the details of the Genovese worldview.
2. Why did Genoa become an important city-state?
3. Discuss in groups: How might competition between Venice and Genoa have contributed to the spread of Renaissance ideas? What cities in today's world are in competition with each other? Why does this happen? What aspects of worldview are illustrated by this competition?