

## 4 The Influence of Italian City-States

The Renaissance began in northern and central Italy. One reason it began there was the prosperity of Italian city-states.

In the Late Middle Ages, most of western Europe was made up of fiefs ruled by nobles. Above the nobles were monarchs. In Italy, however, growing towns demanded self-rule and developed into independent city-states. Each city-state consisted of a powerful city and the surrounding towns and countryside.

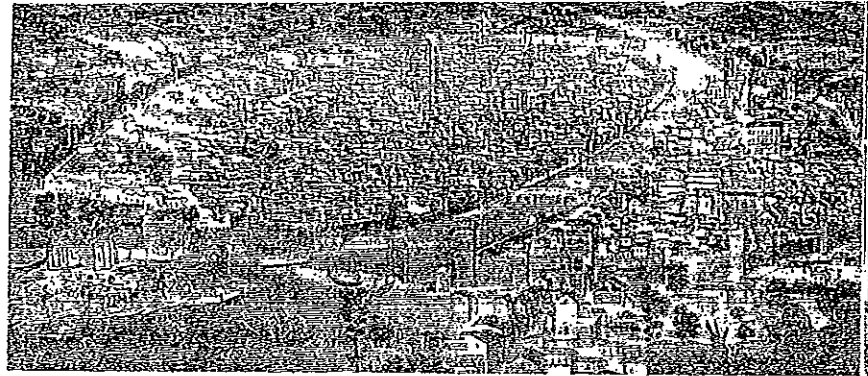
The Italian city-states conducted their own trade, collected their own taxes, and made their own laws. Some city-states, such as Florence, were republics that were governed by elected councils. Council members included commoners as well as nobles.

In theory, the power in republics belonged to the people. In fact, it often lay in the hands of rich merchants. During the Middle Ages, guilds of craftspeople and merchants became very powerful. During the Renaissance, groups of guild members (called *boards*) often ruled Italian city-states. Boards were supposed to change members often. However, wealthy families often gained long-term control. As a result, some city-states were ruled by a single family, like the fabulously rich Medicis in Florence.

Trade made the Italian city-states wealthy. Italy's central Mediterranean location placed its cities in the middle of the trade routes that connected distant places with the rest of western Europe. People from all over Europe came to northern Italy to buy, sell, and do their banking.

Some Italian city-states developed specializations. Florence became a center for cloth making and banking. Milan produced metal goods and armor. The port city of Genoa was a trading center for ivory and gold from northern Africa. Venice, the most powerful city-state, had hundreds of ships that controlled the trade routes in the Mediterranean Sea. Silk, spices, and perfume from Asia flowed into Venice.

The city-states' wealth encouraged a boom in art and learning. Rich families paid for the creation of statues, paintings, beautiful buildings, and elegant avenues. They built new centers of learning, such as universities and hospitals. From the city-states of Italy, Renaissance ideas spread to the rest of Europe.



This is a late-15th-century map of Florence, one of Italy's most powerful city-states. Notice the man on a hill in the lower right corner; the artist drew himself looking over Florence.

**city-state** an independent state consisting of a city and its surrounding territory

**republic** a form of government in which people elect representatives to rule in their name

At the time of the Renaissance Italy was governed by a number of powerful city-states. These were some of the largest and richest cities in all of Europe. Some of the more important city-states included Florence, Milan, Venice, Naples, and Rome.



Map of Italian city-states  
(click picture to enlarge)

### What is a city-state?

A city-state is a region that is independently ruled by a major city. Italy wasn't one unified country, but a number of small independent city-states. Some of these cities were run by elected leaders and others by ruling families. Often times these cities fought each other.

### Why were they important?

The wealth of the Italian city-state played an important role in the Renaissance. This wealth allowed prominent families to support artists, scientists, and philosophers spurring on new ideas and artistic movements.

### Florence

Florence is where the Renaissance first began. It was ruled by the powerful Medici Family who used their money to support artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. One of the early architectural achievements of the Renaissance was the massive dome on the Florence

Cathedral. Florence was known for its textile production as well as a banking center.

### **Milan**

In the early 1400s Milan was still a Middle Ages city focused on war and conquering Florence. However, the Sforza family took over in 1450. They brought peace to the region and with peace came the new ideas and art of the Renaissance. Milan was famous for its metalwork which included suits of armor.

### **Venice**

The island city of Venice had become a powerful city-state through trade with the Far East. It imported products such as spices and silk. However, when the Ottoman Empire conquered Constantinople, Venice's trade empire began to shrink. Venice controlled the seas around the east coast of Italy and was famous for its artistic glassware.

### **Rome**

The pope ruled both the Catholic Church and the city-state of Rome. Much of the city of Rome was re-built under the leadership of Nicholas V beginning in 1447. Rome became a patron of the arts and supported the Renaissance through commissions to artists such as Raphael and Michelangelo. Michelangelo worked as architect on St. Peter's Basilica and painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

### **Naples**

The city-state of Naples ruled much of southern Italy at the time of the Renaissance. It was one of the last city-states to embrace the movement, but in 1443 Alfonso I conquered the city. He supported Renaissance artists, writers, and philosophers. Naples also became known for its music and is where the mandolin was invented. Naples was captured by Spain in 1504.

### **Interesting Facts about the Italian City-States of the Renaissance**

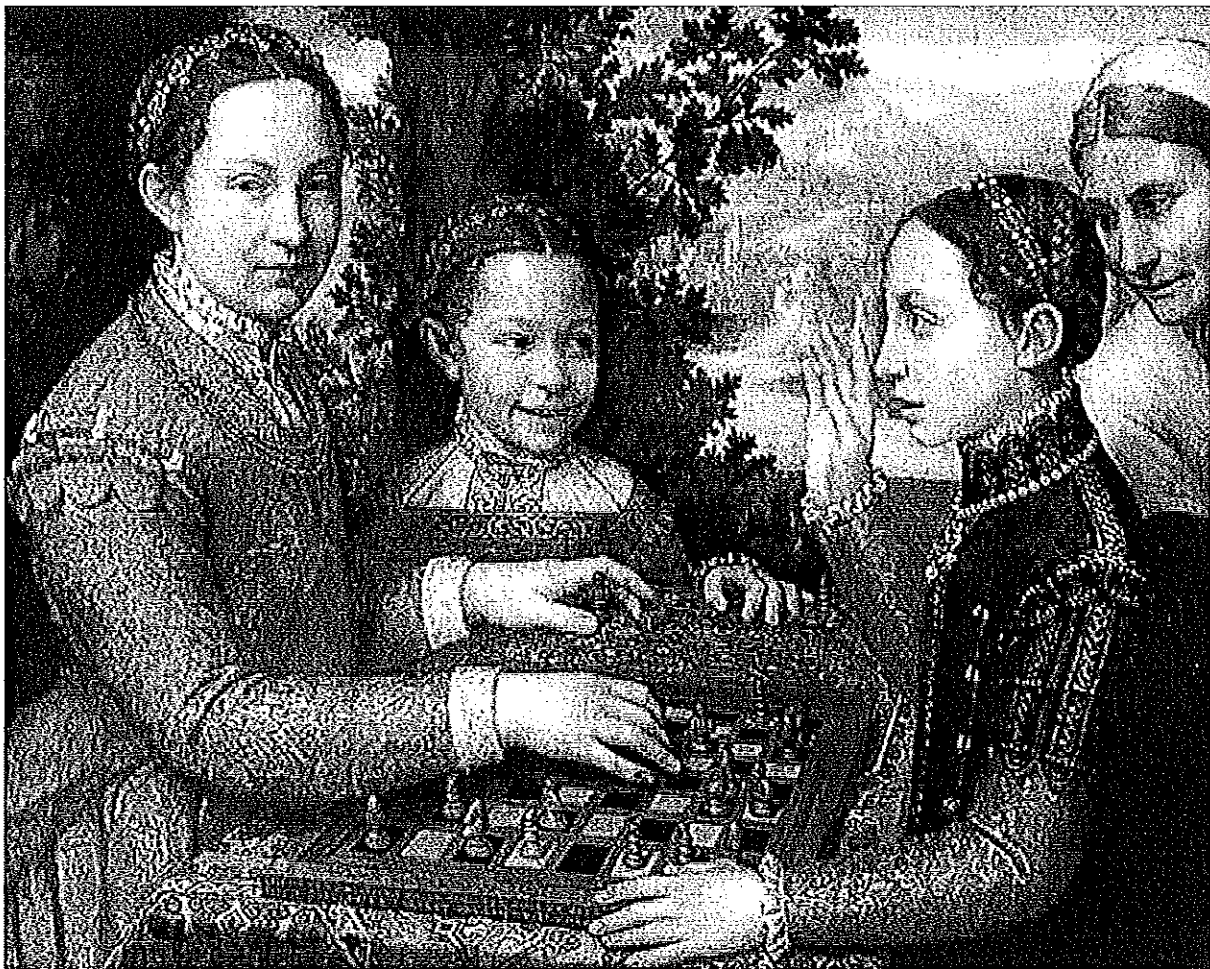
- Guilds were powerful institutions in the city-states. In some city-states you had to be a member of a guild to run for public office.
- The small city-state of Ferrara was known for its music and theatre.
- The city-state of Urbino was known for its library as well as its beautiful ceramics.
- Most of the people who lived in the city-states were craftsmen and merchants. This was a growing class of society during the Renaissance.
- Milan, Naples, and Florence signed a peace treaty called the Peace of Lodi in 1454. This helped to establish boundaries and peace for around 30 years.

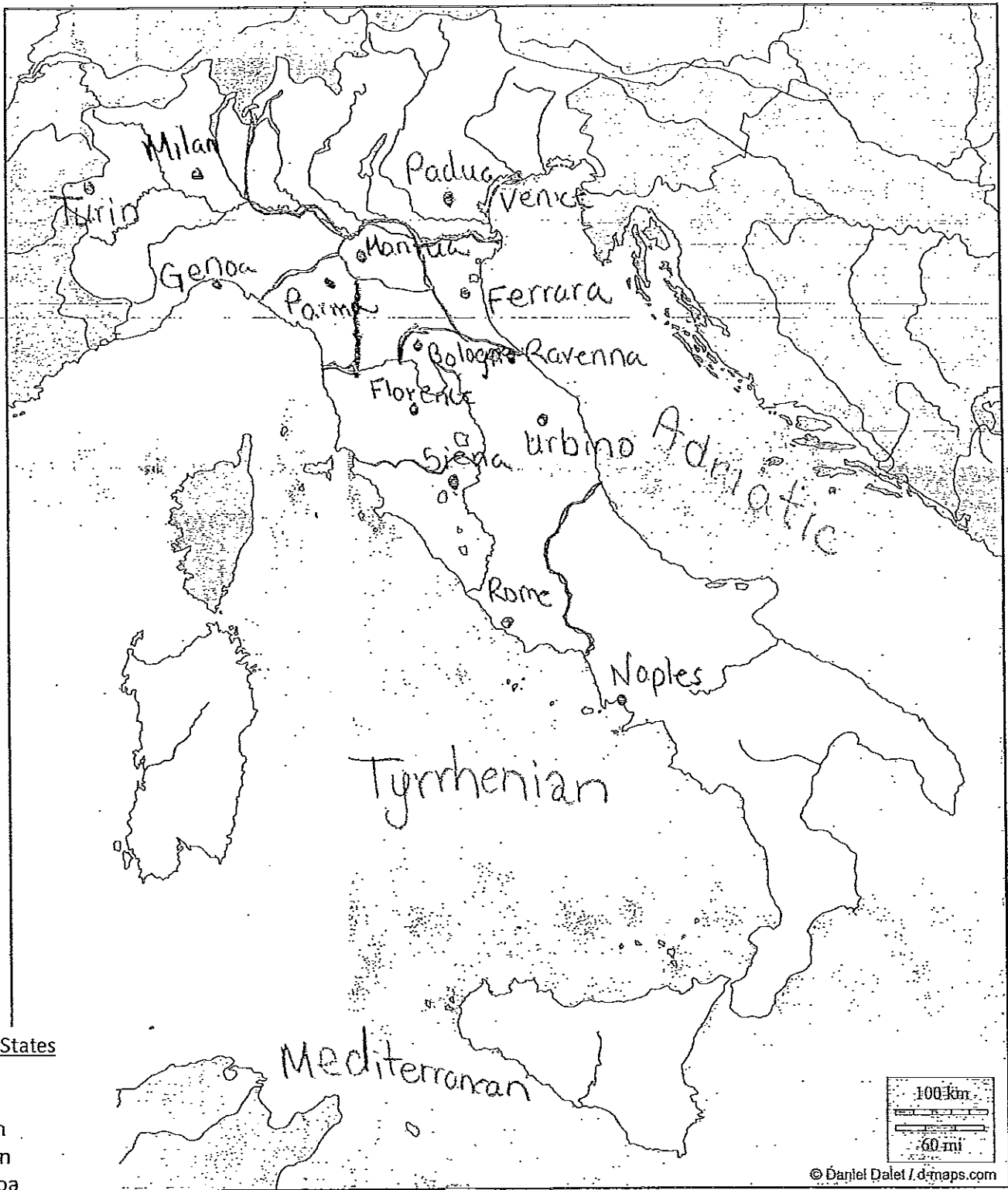
### **Bologna**

In 1337, the rule of the noble Pepoli family, nicknamed by some scholars as the "underground nobles" as they governed as "the first among equals" rather than as true nobles of the city. This noble family's rule

was in many ways an extension of past rules, and resisted until March 28, 1401 when the Bentivoglio family took over. The Bentivoglio family ruled Bologna, first with Sante (1445–1462) and then under Giovanni II (1462–1506). This period was a flourishing one for the city, with the presence of notable architects and painters who made Bologna a true city of art. During the Renaissance, Bologna was the only Italian city that allowed women to excel in any profession. Women had much more freedom than in other Italian cities; some even had the opportunity to earn a degree at the university. The School of Bologna of painting flourished in Bologna between the 16th and 17th centuries, and rivaled Florence and Rome as the center of painting.

Home to one of the earliest-known female artists of the Renaissance a nun known as Saint Catherine of Bologna, or Caterina de' Vigri. After her death, her body was exhumed and preserved for display. To this day, Saint Catherine sits on a chair in a chapel in Bologna, surrounded by her creations.



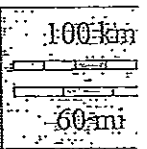
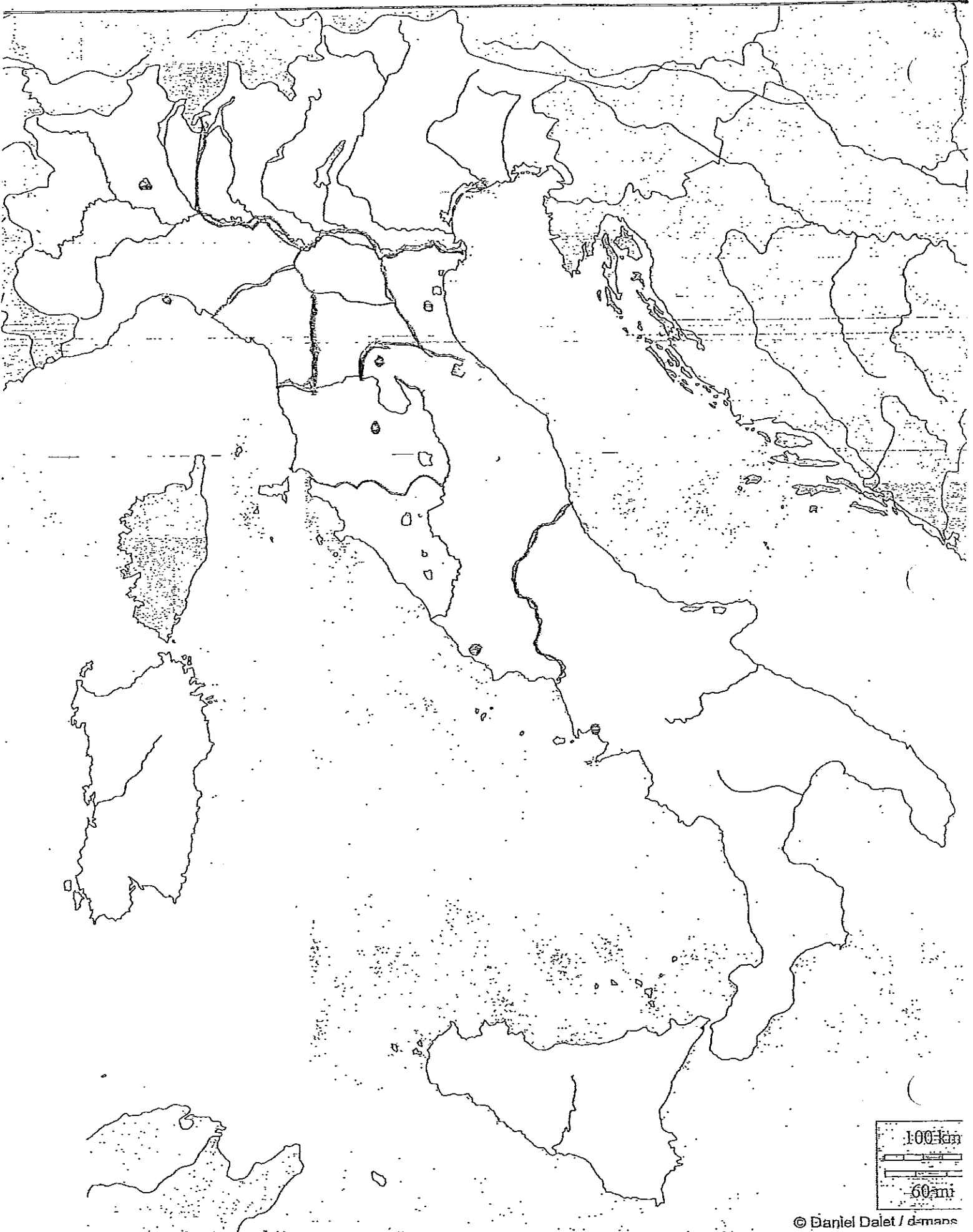


City-States

- Turin
- Milan
- Genoa
- Parma
- Mantua
- Padua
- Venice
- Bologna
- Ferrara Venice
- Ravenna
- Florence
- Siena
- Urbino
- Rome
- Naples

Seas

- Adriatic Sea
- Tyrrhenian Sea
- Mediterranean Sea



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## Renaissance City-States

Naples

Ferrara

Rome

Genoa

Florence

Milan

Bologna

Venice

Read through the text on each of the following city-states.

As you come across a particular city-state make sure you underline it and then locate the city-state on your labeled map.

For the larger blank map I would like you to label each city-state, by creating a symbol that would represent the city-state. This symbol should be one based upon what you have learned from the reading.

Create a key on a separate piece of paper, where you draw the symbol and then explain it.

Homework: Once done with the above assignment. Create flash cards using ExplainEverything. For each flash card on a slide make sure the following info is there. One location (have a map of the city-states and mark the one you are creating the flash card for, you don't want to include the name. Next include your symbol and verbally explain why that symbol represents the map. Finally, make pull in a actual picture of the city.



Map Key