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Between 1300 and 1600, the Western world changed, dramatically. This time of "rebirth" is known as "[The Renaissance](#)."

Beginning in the fifteenth century, the Medici family, more than any other, presided over this time of cultural change (which ultimately impacted religion, art, politics, science and architecture). How did this happen?

In 1389, a young boy is baptized into a medieval world. Born to a local merchant - in Florence, Italy - the boy's family will become the most powerful in Europe. Commissioning works from artists, funding ideas of new thinkers and ultimately taking the greatest seat of power at the time - the papacy - the Medici family has humble beginnings.

Who were these people - and - how did they transform themselves?

At the dawn of the 15th century, an illicit trade begins. Men are not looking for jewels or treasures. They are searching for manuscripts - sources of knowledge - hidden in the vaults of churches. Cosimo de Medici (the young boy baptized in 1389) is now grown. He and his friends are seeking to uncover lost secrets from the ancient world.

From across Europe, ancient learning is carried back to Florence, the city of Cosimo's birth. Unlike other European cities, in 1400, Florence is a republic in which powerful families vie for political control.

At the time, the Medici family has a small banking business, managed by Cosimo's father, Giovanni. Using financial caution and aggressive salesmanship, the elder de Medici has risen in his community. He values loyalty, not just profit, and builds a significant network of friends.

The Catholic Church is then in chaos. Giovanni agrees to back the campaign of Baldassarre Cossa, a former pirate, who wants to be pope. In 1410, Baldassarre achieves his ambition.

The problem with Cossa's election, however, is that it occurs during a tumultuous time - known as "The Western Schism." Cossa isn't an "official" pope because he is one of two men (the other was Gregory XII) holding the papal office during an "interregnum period." (Today, Cossa's title is "Antipope," not "Pope.")

Despite the wrinkles in his status, Baldassarre Cossa has a great deal of power and controls enormous wealth. His papal name is Antipope John XXIII (not to be confused with Pope John XXIII who served in the 20th century), and he awards his friend, Giovanni de Medici, a significant prize for backing Cossa's papal election campaign: the papal-banking business.

The Medicis - not the leading families of Florence - are now papacy bankers. Soon Giovanni, and his son Cosimo, are known as "God's bankers."

As a family, the Medicis no longer have humble status, and their fortunes (and influence) are about to drastically change.

See, also:

[Birth of a Dynasty, Part 2](#)

[Birth of a Dynasty, Part 3](#)

[Birth of a Dynasty, Part 4](#)

[Birth of a Dynasty, Part 5](#)

[Birth of a Dynasty, Part 6](#)

Credits:

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