

Main events in Modern History

The history of Italy in the Early Modern period was characterized by foreign domination and economic decline. Nonetheless, following the Italian Wars (1494 to 1559), Italy saw a long period of relative peace, first under Habsburg Spain (1559 to 1713) and then under Habsburg Austria (1713 to 1796) in which some important cultural and scientific achievements were made. During the Napoleonic era, Italy was invaded by the French Empire and divided into a number of client states. The Congress of Vienna (1814) restored the situation of the late 18th century, which was however quickly overturned by the incipient movement of Italian unification.

The 17th century was a tumultuous period in Italian history, marked by deep political and social changes. These included the increase of Spanish influence over the Peninsula, as well as of the power of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church at the peak of the Counter Reformation, the Catholic reaction against the Protestant Reformation. Despite important artistic and scientific achievements, such as the discoveries of Galileo in the field of astronomy and physics and the flourishing of the Baroque style in architecture and painting, Italy experienced overall economic decline.

Effectively, in spite of Italy having given birth to some great explorers such as Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci and Giovanni da Verrazzano, the discovery of the New World undermined the importance of Venice and other Italian ports as commercial hubs by shifting Europe's center of gravity westward towards the Atlantic.[53] In addition, Spain's involvement in the Thirty Years' War (1618-48), financed in part by taxes on its Italian possessions, heavily drained Italian commerce and agriculture; so, as Spain declined, it dragged its Italian domains down with it, spreading conflicts and revolts (such as the Neapolitan 1647 tax-related "Revolt of Masaniello").

The Black Death returned to haunt Italy throughout the century. The plague of 1630 that ravaged northern Italy, notably Milan and Venice, claimed possibly one million lives, or about 25% of the population.[55] The plague of 1656 killed up to 43% of the population of the Kingdom of Naples. Historians believe the dramatic reduction in Italian cities population (and, thus, in economic activity) contributed to Italy's downfall as a major commercial and political centre. By one estimate,

while in 1500 the GDP of Italy was 106% of the French GDP, by 1700 it was only 75% of it.

The War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14) was triggered by the death without issue of the last Habsburg king of Spain, Charles II, who fixed the entire Spanish inheritance on Philip, Duke of Anjou, the second grandson of King Louis XIV of France. In face of the threat of a French hegemony over much of Europe, a Grand Alliance between Austria, England, the Dutch Republic and other minor powers (within which the Duchy of Savoy) was signed in The Hague. The Alliance successfully fought and defeated the Franco-Spanish "Party of the Two Crowns", and the subsequent Treaty of Utrecht and Rastatt pass control of much of Italy (Milan, Naples and Sardinia) from Spain to Austria, while Sicily was ceded to the Duchy of Savoy. However, Spain tried again to retake territories in Italy and to claim the French throne in the War of the Quadruple Alliance (1718-1720), but was again defeated. As a result of the Treaty of The Hague, Spain agreed to abandon its Italian claims, while Duke Victor Amadeus II of Savoy agreed to exchange Sicily with Austria, for the island of Sardinia, after which he was known as the King of Sardinia.

At the end of the 18th century, Italy was almost in the same political conditions as in the 16th century; the main differences were that Austria had replaced Spain as the dominant foreign power after the War of Spanish Succession (and that too was not true with regards to Naples and Sicily), and that the dukes of Savoy (a mountainous region between Italy and France) had become kings of Sardinia by increasing their Italian possessions, which now included Sardinia and the north-western region of Piedmont.

This situation was shaken in 1796, when the French Army of Italy under Napoleon invaded Italy, with the aims of forcing the First Coalition to abandon Sardinia (where they had created an anti-revolutionary puppet-ruler) and forcing Austria to withdraw from Italy. The first battles came on 9 April, between the French and the Piedmontese, and within only two weeks Victor Amadeus III of Sardinia was forced to sign an armistice. On 15 May the French general then entered Milan, where he was welcomed as a liberator. Subsequently, beating off Austrian counterattacks and continuing to advance, he arrived in the Veneto in 1797. Here occurred the Veronese Easters, an act of rebellion against French oppression, that tied down Napoleon for about a week.

Napoleon conquered most of Italy in the name of the French Revolution in 1797–99. He consolidated old units and split up Austria's holdings. He set up a series of new republics, complete with new codes of law and abolition of old feudal privileges. Napoleon's Cisalpine Republic was centered on Milan. Genoa the city became a republic while its hinterland became the Ligurian Republic. The Roman Republic was formed out of the papal holdings while the pope himself was sent to France. The Neapolitan Republic was formed around Naples, but it lasted only five months before the enemy forces of the Coalition recaptured it. In 1805 he formed the Kingdom of Italy, with himself as king and his stepson as viceroy. In addition, France turned the Netherlands into the Batavian Republic, and Switzerland into the Helvetic Republic. All these new countries were satellites of France, and had to pay large subsidies to Paris, as well as provide military support for Napoleon's wars. Their political and administrative systems were modernized, the metric system introduced, and trade barriers reduced. Jewish ghettos were abolished. Belgium and Piedmont became integral parts of France.

In 1805, after the French victory over the Third Coalition and the Peace of Pressburg, Napoleon recovered Veneto and Dalmatia, annexing them to the Italian Republic and renaming it the Kingdom of Italy. Also that year a second satellite state, the Ligurian Republic (successor to the old Republic of Genoa), was pressured into merging with France. In 1806, he conquered the Kingdom of Naples and granted it to his brother and then (from 1808) to Joachim Murat, along with marrying his sisters Elisa and Paolina off to the princes of Massa-Carrara and Guastalla. In 1808, he also annexed Marche and Tuscany to the Kingdom of Italy.

In 1809, Bonaparte occupied Rome, for contrasts with the pope, who had excommunicated him, and to maintain his own state efficiently, exiling the Pope first to Savona and then to France. After Russia, the other states of Europe re-allied themselves and defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig, after which his Italian allied states, with Murat first among them, abandoned him to ally with Austria. Defeated at Paris on 6 April 1814, Napoleon was compelled to renounce his throne and sent into exile on Elba. The resulting Congress of Vienna (1814) restored a situation close to that of 1795, dividing Italy between Austria (in the north-east and Lombardy), the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (in the south and in Sicily), and Tuscany, the Papal States and other minor states in the centre. However, old republics such as Venice and Genoa were not

recreated, Venice went to Austria, and Genoa went to the Kingdom of Sardinia.

On Napoleon's escape and return to France (the Hundred Days), he regained Murat's support, but Murat proved unable to convince the Italians to fight for Napoleon with his Proclamation of Rimini and was beaten and killed. The Italian kingdoms thus fell, and Italy's Restoration period began, with many pre-Napoleonic sovereigns returned to their thrones. Piedmont, Genoa and Nice came to be united, as did Sardinia (which went on to create the State of Savoy), while Lombardy, Veneto, Istria and Dalmatia were re-annexed to Austria. The dukedoms of Parma and Modena re-formed, and the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples returned to the Bourbons. The political and social events in the restoration period of Italy (1815-1835) led to popular uprisings throughout the peninsula and greatly shaped what would become the Italian Wars of Independence. All this led to a new Kingdom of Italy and Italian unification.