

Rinaldo was alarmed at the reception which Cosimo received from neighbouring states and a new and more friendly Balia was elected. Some months later Pope Eugenius IV happened to be staying in the Florence area. Rome at the time was not very safe for him, and Cosimo's friends arranged for Rinaldo to be received in audience. The outcome of this strange meeting was the recall of Cosimo and the flight of Rinaldo. Cosimo returned in triumph to Florence, and the city invested him with the *signoria* for life. From this time dates the personal rule of the Medici which persisted with brief intervals for 300 years.

The old form of city government was outwardly maintained. In addition to the College of Priori, the nobles and magnates, a council similar to its predecessors preserved the democratic form of government. Real power, however, passed gradually into the hands of Cosimo and his successors. Cosimo maintained personal rule by a mixture of ability, blandishment and subtle benefactions. At the same time he took the precaution of appointing the leading condottiere of the age to take over the armed forces of the city.

After Cosimo's death, and the brief and bad rule of Piero di Medici, came Lorenzo, the greatest of the Medici, not only as a statesman, but also as a great patron of the arts and a writer of considerable ability. During his reign one attempt was made—at Easter 1478—to murder him and his family during the celebration of Mass in the new sacristy of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore.

The signal for the uprising was the moment when the Archbishop of Pisa (himself a suspect party to the plot) raised the Consecrated Host. Lorenzo escaped, his brother Giuliano was killed, and the people rose against the plotters who were pursued through the city. The leaders, including the archbishop, were hanged from the windows of the Palazzo Vecchio.

This, in turn, led to the Papal excommunication of Lorenzo, and a ban upon the city. The excommunication was annulled shortly afterwards in 1480, when the Moslems seized Otranto and directly threatened Southern Italy.

Later, Lorenzo married his daughter into the family of Innocent VIII, to whom he lent the services of Pollaiuolo, one of the leading sculptors of his day. Lorenzo systematically spoiled and placated the citizens of Florence by many well-meant indulgences, all of which served to maintain his power.

Under him, it was possible that Italy might have been united during the XVth Century.

Lorenzo ruled the city with the aid of a College of Priori and a consiglio of 70, all of whom were Medici or their followers. On Lorenzo's death in 1492, the city of Florence may be said to have reached the summit of its power and development. In many ways this date also marks the end of an age in Italian and even Southern European history.

XVI CENTURY —The next 30 years were marked by the frequent passage of armies during the wars of succession for the Kingdoms of Naples and Aragon. It was just before this time that the curious figure of the Ferrarese monk Savonarola disturbed the easy-going Florentines with his ascetic preaching and for a time gained control of the city government. Sincere bigot or astute politician, he roused the masses. His puritanical hatred of all and any artistic ostentation led Savonarola to destroy and burn some of the city's paintings and works of art which were to him symbols of luxury and pride. Alexander VI, that great patron of the arts, authorised the excommunication which led to the downfall and burning of Savonarola himself. Florence never again paid heed to similar puritanical excesses which were foreign to the spirit of her people and the traditions of the city.

During the 30 years of war Florence was opportunist and enlarged her territory at the expense of Pisa and the end of the period saw the Medici again firmly established in the city. During this time was born the famous Catherine who became Queen of France. The Medici found not only rulers for Florence, but occupants for the throne of St. Peter, and established connections with many European courts.