



AP[®] European History 2003 Sample Student Responses Form B

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The Renaissance was an age of cultural effluence that began in Italy during the fourteenth century.

It concentrated mainly on the study of ~~Latin~~ Latin and Greek classics and it was an elitist movement confined almost exclusively to men. Indeed, it has been said that the idea of the sexual double standard originated in the Renaissance. ~~Man~~ The role of women changed dramatically during the Renaissance, as did contemporary opinions of women. Although there were some women who proved themselves and their intellectual, dramatic, and artistic talent during the Renaissance, the ~~traditional~~ role of women during the Renaissance was, for the most part, confined to being simply ornamental ~~decorative~~ displays of wealth.

The social status of women declined dramatically during the Renaissance in terms of their participation in household and local affairs. According to Baldassare Castiglione in The Courtier, women were expected to use the education they received in order to prepare for the social life at home, using it only to participate in, but not initiate, witty conversation and to entertain her husband's guests; ~~Women~~ the only area in which women's social status did not decline in during the Renaissance was in their access to education, which significantly improved. Women were viewed as both a

means to display wealth, and were therefore not expected to use their education for practical means, as was expected of men at the time. However, amid their seemingly limited ~~the~~ role in the Renaissance, ~~there~~ there the emergence of some extraordinary women was also witnessed.

Perhaps, the most notorious woman intellectual of the day was Laura Cereta, who spent most of her childhood and widowhood in study. She was a prodigy and she therefore attracted much of the scorn from local men, who considered her intellectual prowess as a threat to their dominance. In artistic and dramatic fields, women such as Sofonisba and Anguissola made names for themselves and were as famous in many parts of Italy as many renowned male artists. Another remarkable woman was Isabella de Este, who ran her ~~own~~ husband's estate when he was at war and even dressed as a man and took up her husband's sword to fight in his stead. However, all of the mentioned women were of wealthy backgrounds, and they therefore had the time, the financial security, and the luxury to pursue their own interests without worrying about the financial consequences of their actions. Therefore, the most active female participants of the Renaissance were those of the upper classes.

Although there were some women who proved themselves critically, intellectually, and dramatically during the Renaissance, the ~~majority~~ role of the majority of women was limited to being an ornamental display of wealth whose primary purpose in life was to be pleasing her husband and entertain his visitors and guests. Participation of women in the Renaissance was strictly limited to their social class to which they belonged. Their impact on the Renaissance as a whole was only significant because these women ~~were among the best of a~~ constituted such a small percentage of all total participants of the Renaissance. Italian women such as Laura Cereta and Isabella de Esté been born as men, and had they performed the acts and ~~excelled~~ excelled in the areas that they did, they would hardly ~~have been~~ be recognized to the same extent to which they are today. Their contributions to the Renaissance were not equal to those of Petrarch, Castiglione, Raphael, Machiavelli, or Ponce, for instance, and stand out only because of their sex.

During the Renaissance, which was mostly dominated by men, woman played an influential role, however minor.

Women mostly helped develop an environment that helped the Renaissance grow. While merchants were away on business, the Italian women especially, worked to maintain stores and households. This allowed for the economic stability that brought on the Renaissance. There were also many widows who patronized artists, as the Italian's had a peculiar marriage age. Men married at around 35, when already economically developed, while women married around age 18. This high count of widows also meant that children developed more in a feminine direction, appealing to emotions and appreciating art. No sexism is implied, but life without fathers led to a more Renaissance-friendly environment.

Women did take active roles in encouraging new thoughts such as civil humanism, despite an oppressive society. Rules for the correct behavior of women were detailed in Castiglione's The Courtier claiming

that women should be well versed in many skills, but that they, unlike men, should not learn rhetoric. Even in ~~the~~ northern Europe, where women were allowed more freedom, women were still very restrained. Dürer's wife for example, was limited to selling his art.

Though women were largely oppressed, and had their chances of active work taken away, they contributed to the Renaissance. Their contribution consists mostly of a subtle one, one which primed Europe for the Renaissance.