



# Intercultura

Incontri che cambiano il mondo. Dal 1955

## Italian History in 15 minutes

(why are we so different?)

Italy is geographically long and narrow, and its territory is rich of mountains which separate it from other European countries and make internal communications hard. Due to geographical traits, the unity of the country has never been easy, worsened by historical happenings.

During the Roman time, Italy, as well as all the lands around the Mediterranean Sea, was part of the empire. From Spain to Iran, from African coasts to Great Britain.



The collapse of the Western Roman empire, conventionally indicated in 476 AD, and the beginning of the so-called barbarian invasions, marks a pulverization of the Italian territory into small, sometimes tiny, power centres (City-States and Regional Countries) that will begin a long and slow process of reunification which ends only in 1870, with the defeat of the Vatican army and the conquer of Rome by the Italian army, preceded by the birth of the Kingdom of Italy (1861) by the Savoia Family.

This process evolves gradually, especially between 1300 and 1500 when Italy, being in the middle of the main trading routes of the Mediterranean Sea, lives a very prosperous time. From an economic standpoint Italy at that time is what we would today call a "superpower". It is with the discovery of the Americas by Cristoforo Colombo (paradoxically an Italian explorer!) that the country lives another dark era due to the move of the main business routes away from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean. For Italy this is a real "economical disaster" and the reason why many of Italian historical cities are still preserved: there was no money to modernize them.



In this period, which goes from 1500 to 1800, the weakness of the Italian states opens its doors to other European powers: Spain, which dominates Southern Italy, from Naples to Sicily, Austria, which dominates and influences all of the North-East Italy as well as the direct presence of the Savoia Reign in North West Italy and the presence of the Vatican State (Stato Pontificio) in all Central Italy.

This also was certainly an element that contributed to the increase of the differences between North and South Italy. Furthermore, we must not forget the strong influence that the Catholic church had on all of the Italian states, which is also a political influence given the presence of the Vatican, which still has its own territory inside Rome, a sort of State within another State.

In this context, it is important to understand that Italy, while for certain aspects is an ancient country, can also be considered very young<sup>1</sup>, where habits and cultural differences are strong and often are reasons for apparently incomprehensible disputes.



### Class Exchanges Sector

Class Exchanges page---> <http://www.intercultura.it/For-Foreign-Teachers/>

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Italian website: <http://www.intercultura.it>

International website: <http://afs.org>

<sup>1</sup> Some historians believe that the advent of television (1954) has been the most unifying element, especially linguistically