

The Early Renaissance in Fifteenth-Century

N EITHER A SCHOLAR WRITING A HISTORY OF FRANC
century Paris nor a notary writing a contract in Bruges could have imagined that he was living in an age that he only knew that his age followed the cras of the past.

was distinct from the immediate past. This consciousness of historical difference separates the thinkers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from their medieval forebears. These thinkers devalued the post-Roman, or medieval world, and believed they could improve their culture by reviving the best features of antiquity, that is, Roman and Greek culture. Their efforts, beginning in the fifteenth century in Italy, sparked a cultural flowering of great significance for the history of Europe.

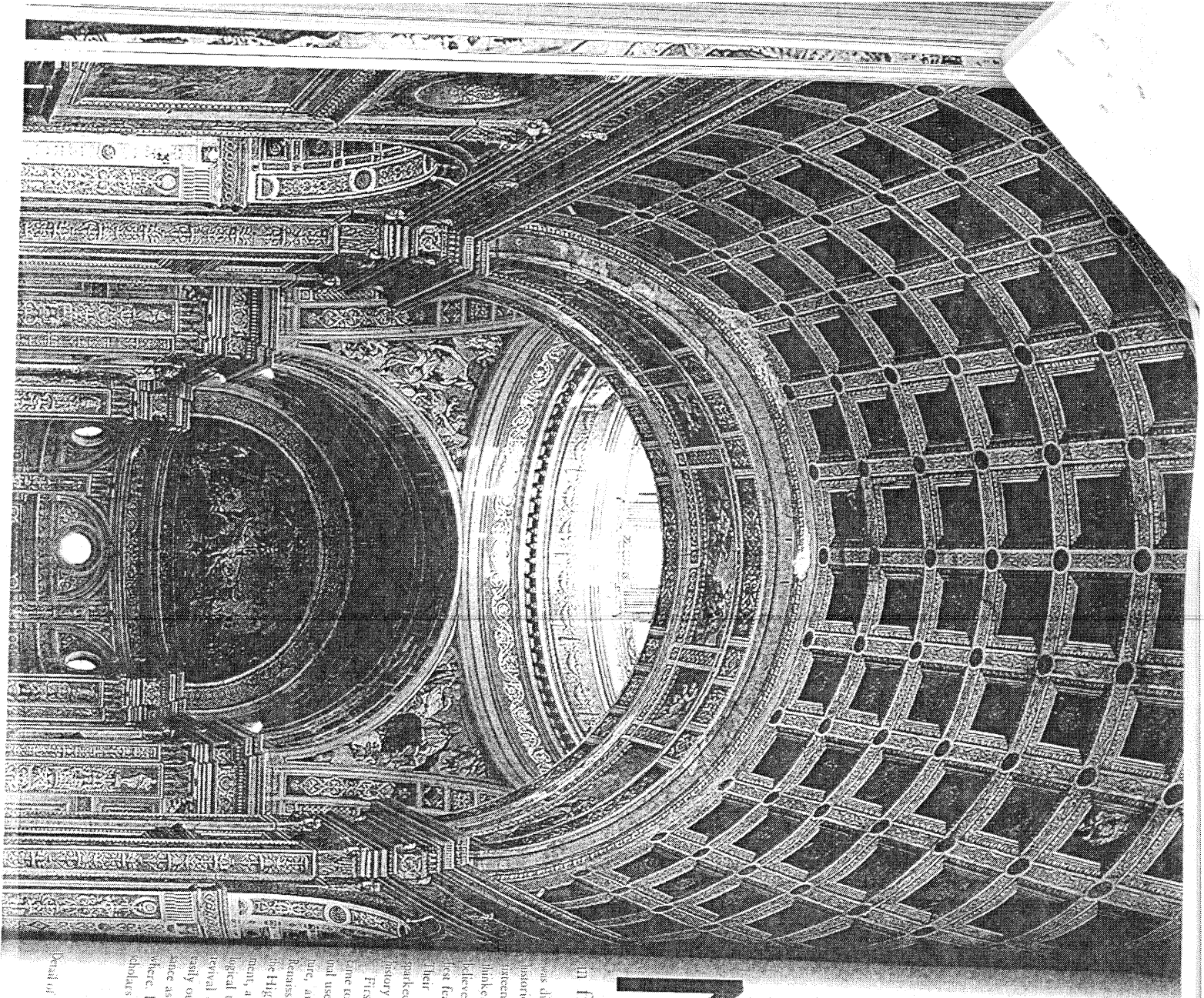
First called the *rinascimento*, Italian for "rebirth," the period came to be known by its French name, the *Renaissance*. Its original users defined it as the rebirth of classical learning, literature, and art. Modern historians have divided the Italian Renaissance into stages: an early phase in the fifteenth century, the High Renaissance denoting a period of exceptional achievement, and the Late Renaissance, which is primarily a chronological term. Neither the definition of the Renaissance as the revival of Classical forms nor the chronological limits apply easily outside of Italy, but the broader definition of a Renaissance as a cultural or artistic renewal has come to apply elsewhere. In Northern Europe, as we have seen in Chapter 14, scholars and artists did not have the same dedication to reviv-

ing the ancients, though they did see them as an economic and cultural far-reaching technical and cultural

The causes of the cultural flowering events, people, ideas, and social diffusion that produced many of the European civilization. For this reason this era as the "early modern period," fundamentally an intellectual one,"

teenth-century author Petrarch be Greece and Rome built for their own. They committed themselves to the study of human works, emphasizing moral philosophy and art forms. The medieval university, which practical use in the world for humanists, diplomats, and merchants. Intellectual activity out of Church control.

Humanist scrutiny of ancient texts knowledge of Latin authors, but also the great Greek thinkers such as Aristotle. Humanists' analytical spirit various encouraged new thinking in mathematics and natural science. The importance of individuals acting in a



Detail of figure 15.50, Leon Battista Alberti, *Invention of Saint Andrew*