At the turn of the 16th century, Italy was a turbulent territory made up of independent states, each at war with or intriguing against its neighbor. There were the proud, cultivated, and degenerate Sforzas in Milan, and in Rome, the corrupt Spanish family of the Borgia whose head, Rodrigo, ascended to St Peters throne as Pope Alexander VI. In Florence, a golden age of culture and sophistication ended with the death of the greatest of the Medici family, Lorenzo the Magnificent, giving way to an era of uncertainty, cruelty, and religious fundamentalism.

In the midst of this turmoil, there existed the greatest concentration of artists that Europe has ever known. Influenced by the rediscovery of the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome, artists and thinkers such as Botticelli and da Vinci threw off the shackles of the Middle Ages to produce one of the most creative periods in history - the Renaissance.

This is the story of twelve years when war, plague, famine, and chaos made their mark on a volatile Italy, and when a young, erratic genius, Michelangelo Buonarroti, made his first great statue - the David. It was to become a symbol not only of the independence and defiance of the city of Florence but also of the tortured soul who created it. This is a wonderful history of the artist, his times, and one of his most magnificent works.

My Personal Review:
I was on the east coast of the U.S., on Cape Cod, several years ago, making my way to Florence for a week. This was to be my first trip to Florence [though not to Italy]. I was trying to decide on a good book to read while in Florence, just as I happened by a local little bookstore on the street in which I was walking. As I glanced in the window, there was Anton Gills Il Gigante.

At that moment I had no doubt that this was the book for me to read on my Italian excursion.

I read Gills book as I was walking the streets of Florence, able to sit in a square upon which Michelangelo once strode, visit the many churches in which he worked, and sit for an afternoon in the Academia where `David now resides.

I found Anton gills book to be full of fascinating details not only about Michelangelo, but about the creation of art in the early renaissance. Intermingled with stories about Michelangelos `David there are tales of politics and rivalries, patrons and intrigue. It was incredible to be able to read about the history of Michelangelos commissions as I was viewing them with my own eyes.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book - and I would highly recommend reading it while in a café on the streets of Florence.

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