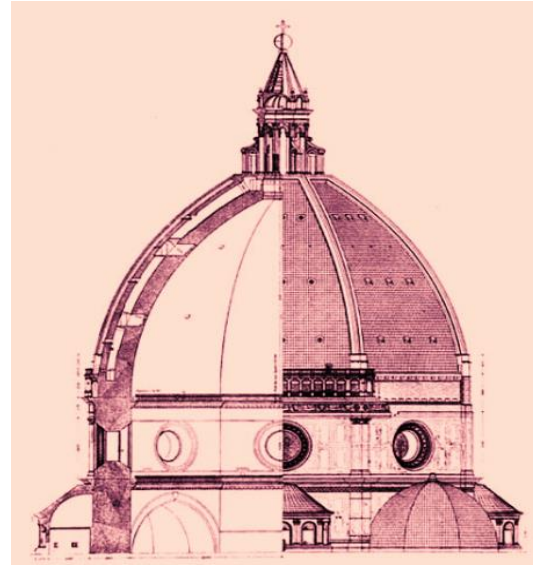


5.19 Inventing the European Renaissance in Florence

Background: The Roman Catholic cathedral in Florence, Italy, Duomo di Firenze, has one of the most famous domes in architecture. Construction started in 1296 and the structure was completed in 1436 after a series of interruptions. However, additions continued to be made to the roof and exterior of the cathedral until the 19th century. In the early 14th century construction was supervised by the renowned painter Giotto di Bondone. In 1418 a contest was held to design the cathedral's dome. Filippo Brunelleschi was awarded the commission to design the dome and supervise its construction. No dome this large had ever been built in Europe and Brunelleschi's design called for no external supports or buttresses. Construction of the dome required the invention of tools, blueprints, and new construction techniques. In a sense the European Renaissance was invented as the dome was constructed.



The dome is actually one dome inside another. The pattern of the brickwork varies to ensure stability.



Questions

1. Why was the Florence Cathedral so difficult to construct?
2. The Duomo towers over the city of Florence. In your opinion, why would the emerging financial center of the Mediterranean world want to construct such an imposing Cathedral with a unique dome?
3. Do you agree or disagree with the claim that the European Renaissance was invented as the dome was constructed? Explain your view.