

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE
Department of History

History 19
Autumn 2007
Tues./Thurs., 9:55-11:10

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THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, Italy experienced remarkable cultural and intellectual efflorescence against a backdrop of social and political innovation. The origins, distinctiveness, and meaning of the Italian Renaissance have been variously understood and long debated. Was it the rebirth of the classical past, as humanists of the time claimed? Or was it the seedbed of modernity, as the dominant interpretation, originally propounded by Jacob Burckhardt, would have it? Was it essentially a Florentine movement or was it firmly rooted throughout Italy? Was it simply the cultural expression of economic and political elites, or did other social groups participate in significant ways? In this course, we will explore a variety of sources in order to understand the development and nature of Italian Renaissance culture within its political and social contexts and try to answer some of these questions. By virtue both of the sources and readings available in English and of the development of historiography, we will pay most attention to developments in Florence.

The course consists mainly of discussions. Every student is expected to participate, so reading assignments must be completed in advance of the class meetings.

The following required books are available for purchase in the bookstore:

Duccio Balestracci, *The Renaissance in the Fields. Family Memoirs of a Fifteenth-Century Tuscan Peasant*

Gene Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, 2nd ed.

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton

Other readings will be found on Blackboard under "Course Reading" or (occasionally) on-line at the sites indicated; two are in books in McCabe (Reference and Honors Reserve). The general topics to be discussed in each class are given on the syllabus; these topics are facilitative rather than restrictive, so I encourage you to raise other relevant issues in class.

Students seeking background knowledge are advised to consult Wallace K. Ferguson, *Europe in Transition 1300-1520*; John Hyde, *Society and Politics in Medieval Italy*; and Brian Pullan, *A History of Early Renaissance Italy*. All are to be found on Honors reserve for History 116, seminar in the Italian Renaissance, which is not being given this semester, so books shelved there circulate as if they were on General Reserve.

The requirements for the course are as follows:

- 1) Regular, informed participation in class discussions.
- 2) An in-class hour test on 11 October.

- 3) Analysis of a primary source from the Florentine archives. This paper, of about 5 typed pages, is due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, 2 October; A separate sheet gives full details (see Blackboard. Course Documents>Paper Assignments>Paper 1).
- 4) Analysis of a dialogue written by a humanist. This paper, of 5-7 typed pages, is due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, 13 November. A separate sheet gives full details (see Blackboard. Course Documents>Paper Assignments>Paper 2).
- 5) A paper of 10-12 typed pages on an artist or writer, due at the beginning of class on Thursday, 6 December. A separate sheet gives full details (see Blackboard, Course Documents>Paper Assignments>Paper 3). You must choose your artist or writer no later than Tuesday, 20 November.
- 6) A take-home final examination, which will be distributed in class.

The history department has implemented the following policy on attendance: Students are required to attend **all** classes for the successful completion of the course. Unexcused absences will result in a lower grade.

This course, like any other, is premised on mutual respect and honesty. More specifically, I expect that the work you submit is your own. Plagiarism will therefore be severely penalized: any work containing plagiarized material will be granted the grade of no credit and may subject you to prosecution before the CJC. In order to clarify the issue of academic honesty, I will distribute copies of the History Department's guidelines. When in doubt, check with me.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

4 Sept. Introduction: What was the Renaissance?

Reading:

Encyclopedia of the Renaissance [1999], ed. Paul Grendler, vol. 5, pp. 259-263 ("The Renaissance in Historical Thought" through "Revolt of the Medievalists") and pp. 286-305 ("Renaissance, Interpretations of the")
(McCabe Reference: CB361 .E52 1999)

Machiavelli, *Political Writings*, map following p. xlv

Political Settings

6 Sept. Political Environments: Republics, *Signorie*, and Mixed States

Discussion Topics:

Comparison of similarities and differences among the **diverse regimes** that ruled Italians during the Renaissance.

11 Sept. Florence: Magnates, Patricians, and Popolani

Reading:

Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, pp. 128-151

"Florence Political Documents I" (docs. 37-45, 55-58) (Blackboard)

Discussion Topics:

What were the foundations of Florentine **civic spirit**? What were **confraternities**? Why did they arise? What were their purposes? How were they organized? What activities did they engage in? Who belonged to them? Why were they dissolved?

What were social and political purposes of **guilds**, and why were they rivals? Who and what were **magnates**, and what happened to them?

13 Sept. Florence: Rituals, Revolutionaries, and Medici Rule

Reading:

Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, pp. 38-50, 151-171, 256-280

Dale Kent, "The Dynamic of Power in Cosimo de' Medici's Florence," in *Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. D. Kent and P. Simons, chap. 4 (Blackboard)

"Florence Political Documents II" (docs. 35-36, 116) (Blackboard)

Discussion Topics:

What purpose(s) did **civic ritual** serve in Florence?

Who were the **Ciampi**, what did they want, and why did they fail?

How and why did the **Medici** come to power? How did they maintain their rule? How and why did their rule end?

Economic, Social, and Religious Worlds

18 Sept. The Few

Reading:

Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, pp. 50-56, 68-88 and Chap. Three

"The Few Documents" (docs. 2, 3, 15, 25, 26) (Blackboard)

"Earning a Living Documents" (docs. 1, 7-14) (Blackboard)

Discussion Topics:

Who belonged to the Florentine **elite**? Why? What were its most important values? How did the members of the elite earn a living? What strategies did members of the elite pursue to perpetuate their and their families' position?

What was **vendetta**? Why did members of the elite practice it? Why did they give it up?

20 Sept. The Many in the City: the *popolo minuto*

Reading:

Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, pp. 56-68

"The Many Documents" (Docs. 4-6, 27, 102-115; review doc. 1) (Blackboard)

Samuel Cohn, "Women and Work in Renaissance Italy," in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, chap. 5 (Blackboard)

Discussion Topics:

What were the socio-economic characteristics and life experiences of the **mass** of the Florentine population? What most significantly distinguished their experiences and attitudes from those of the few? What most differentiated the lives of women and men within the popular classes?

Who became **servants**, and what was their life like?

Who was enslaved in Renaissance Tuscany? Why did **slavery** take hold, and why did it decline?

25 Sept. The Many in the Countryside: the *contadini*

Reading:

Balestracci, *The Renaissance in the Fields*, pp. ix-xxv, 1-61, 71-88

Discussion Topics:

Compare the characteristics and life experiences of the urban popolo minuto and the **peasantry**. In what ways were they similar and what different?

27 Sept. Peasants, Authority, and History

Reading:

Balestracci, *The Renaissance in the Fields*, pp. 89-114

"Urban and Rural Experience Documents" (docs. 49-50, 61, 63, 64)

Discussion Topics:

What relations governed rural relations with secular and religious **authorities**? What means of redress did peasants have against abuses of authority?

What does Benedetto's particular **family history** reveal about the peasantry and rural life during the Renaissance more generally?

2 Oct. Family Formation and Structure

Reading:

David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families*, chap. 7 (Honors Reserve, History 116; also online e-book via Tripod)

Review Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, pp. 101-118

"Family Formation and Structure Documents" (docs. 16-24, 2-6) (Blackboard)

Discussion Topics:

What were the common and divergent features of **family** (both household and lineage) **structure** in Renaissance Tuscany within and between social classes?

Why were **dowries** and marriage gifts exchanged, and what did they comprise?

What were the characteristics of a desirable **marriage partner**? Of an undesirable partner?

What were the major issues involved in **illegitimacy** and legitimization in Renaissance Florence, and how were they resolved?

How did Florentines deal with **death** attitudinally?

Analysis of primary document due (see requirement 3, above)

4 Oct. Family Deformations

Reading:

“Family Deformations Documents”(docs. 25-34, 65-67, 80) (Blackboard)

Discussion Topics:

How did Florentines deal with **death** materially? What rules of inheritance, even informal, did they follow?

How did **family conflicts** relate to Florentine civic and family values? How did Florentines negotiate conflicts over honor within their families?

What were Florentine attitudes toward and ways of responding to **adultery**? To **infanticide**?

9 Oct. Gender Relations

Reading:

Thomas Kuehn, “Person and Gender in the Laws,” in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, chap. 4 (Blackboard)

Balestracci, *The Renaissance in the Fields*, pp. 63-70

“Gender Relations Documents” (docs. 69, 83-85) (Blackboard)

Review “Family Formation and Structure Documents”(docs 16-20 only)

Review “Family Deformations Documents”(docs. 25-27 only)

Review “Urban and Rural Experience Documents” (docs. 49-50 only)

Discussion Topics: see next page

Discussion Topics:

How would you characterize the principal rules, understandings, and practices that governed **relations between the sexes** in Renaissance Florence? In the countryside?

What were the reasons for **sumptuary laws** in Renaissance Florence? How did they function? How well did they fulfill their authors’ objectives? Why was it difficult to enforce them?

Are you convinced by Kuehn’s thesis about the **position of women**?

11 Oct. Hour Test

AUTUMN VACATION

23 Oct. Sexual Relations

Reading:

“Sexual Relations Documents” (docs. 88-96, 105) (Blackboard)

Michael Rocke, "Gender and Sexual Culture in Renaissance Italy," in *The Renaissance: Italy and Abroad*, ed. J. Martin, chap. 8 (Blackboard)

Review "Gender Relations Documents" (doc. 69 only)

Discussion Topics:

Define the hegemonic **sexual mores** and attitudes in Renaissance Florence.

Who became **prostitutes** in 15th-century Florence, who patronized them, and how did city officials deal with them both?

Compare Florentine popular and official attitudes about **sodomy**.

25 Oct. Religion and Spirituality: Orthodoxy and Its Problems

Reading:

Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, Chap. Five

"Religion: Orthodoxy Documents" (docs. 64, 69, 78-79, 97-101) (Blackboard)

Review "Florence Political Documents I" (doc. 45 only)

Review "Family Formation and Structure Documents" (docs. 22-24 only)

Review "Family Deformations Documents" (docs. 25-27 only)

Review "Urban and Rural Experience Documents" (doc. 63 only)

Discussion Topics:

What were the leading preoccupations, beliefs, practices, and perplexities of **orthodox religion** among Renaissance Florentines? What were the defining characteristics of Florentine lay piety?

How did Florentines regard and act with respect to **convents**?

30 Oct. Religion and Spirituality: Intolerance

Reading:

"Religion: Intolerance Documents" (docs. 117-132) (Blackboard)

Discussion Topics:

What general beliefs or attitudes, if any, underlay Florentines' manifestations of religious **intolerance**? In particular, what were the bases of their **anti-Semitism**?

Who were the **Fraticelli**? What were their doctrines? Why were they persecuted?

How widespread was belief in and practice of **sorcery**? Was it an alternative religion? Was it suppressed?

Humanists and Others

1 Nov. Early Humanism

Reading:

Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, pp. 230-240

Petrarch, "Ascent of Mont Ventoux"

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/petrarch-ventoux.html>

Petrarch, *Rerum familiarium* (*Letters on Familiar Matters*), I, 3, 9, 12 (Blackboard)

Petrarch, *Rerum familiarium* (*Letters on Familiar Matters*), XXII, 10; XXIV, 6-9 (Blackboard)

Coluccio Salutati, "Two Letters to Giuliano Zonarini," in *Humanism and Tyranny*, ed. E. Emerton, pp. 290-308 (Blackboard)

Coluccio Salutati, "Letter to Brother John of San Miniato," in *Humanism and Tyranny*, ed. E. Emerton, pp. 312-341 (Blackboard)

Discussion Topics:

Why did **humanism** emerge in Renaissance Italy?

Based on these writings by Petrarch and Salutati, what were the central ideas and attitudes held by **early humanists**?

6 Nov. Humanist Learning and Schooling

Reading:

Coluccio Salutati, "Letter to Brother John Dominici," in *Humanism and Tyranny*, ed. E. Emerton, pp. 346-377 (Blackboard)

Petrus Paulus Vergerius, "The New Education"

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/vergerius.html>

Costanza Varano, "Oration to the People of Camerino;" Isotta Nogarola, "Of the Equal or Unequal Sin of Adam and Eve;" Cassandra Fedele, "Oration for Bertuccio Lamberto" and "Oration in Praise of Letters;" Laura Cereta, "Defense of the Liberal Instruction of Women" and "Against Women Who Disparage Learned Women," all in *Her Immaculate Hand*, ed. M. King and A. Rabil, nos. 4, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 (pp. 42-44, 57-77, 81-86) (Blackboard)

Discussion Topics:

What made an **educational** program humanist?

In what ways did the interests of **female** and male **humanists** converge and diverge?

8 Nov. Machiavelli: The Central Concepts

Reading:

The Prince, in Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, pp. 5-80

Discussion Topics:

What does **Machiavelli** mean by **virtù**? By **fortune**? By **necessity**? By **the state**?

13 Nov. Machiavelli: Apologist for Despots?

Reading:

The Prince

Discussion Topics:

Does *The Prince* represent **Machiavelli's true beliefs** and commitments?

Could a true republican have written *The Prince*? Could a true Christian have written *The Prince*?

Analysis of humanist dialogue due (see requirement 4, above)

15 Nov. Machiavelli: A Republican?

Reading:

The Discourses (selections), in Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, pp. 81-217

Discussion Topic:

How could the author of *The Prince* have written *The Discourses*? What are the significant differences and similarities between the two works?

20 Nov. Machiavelli: An Evaluation

Reading:

Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, pp. xi-xliv, 1-4

Discussion Topics:

What is your considered opinion of what **Machiavelli** intended to accomplish in his political writings, and what do you think that he actually did **accomplish**?

Was Machiavelli a **humanist**?

Choice of artist or writer must be made **no later than today** (see assignment 5)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Cities, Consumption, and Artistic Patronage

27 Nov. The Foundations of Artistic Activity: Urban Consumption

Reading:

Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, pp. 213-230, 240-255

Richard Goldthwaite, "The Empire of Things: Consumer Demand in Renaissance Italy," in *Patronage, Art, and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. F. W. Kent and Patricia Simons, chap. 9 (Blackboard)

Discussion Topic:

What specifically **urban** patterns of **expenditure** gave rise to **artistic production** in Renaissance Italy?

29 Nov. The Foundations of Artistic Activity: Urban Spaces

Reading:

Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, pp. 1-38

Discussion Topic:

What made Florence physically a **Renaissance city**?

4 Dec. The Foundations of Artistic Activity: Patronage

Reading:

Documents on Isabella di Gonzaga's patronage of Perugino's "Battle Between Love and Chastity" (Louvre), together with the painting (Blackboard)

Creighton Gilbert, "What did the Renaissance Patron Buy?" *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 51 (1998), pp. 392-450 (Blackboard)

Discussion Topics: see next page

Discussion Topics:

What were the **roles of patron and artist** in the creation of an artwork? Was either one more important than the other? How were influences transmitted between them?

What, why, and how did a patron acquire? Do you find **Gilbert's thesis** compelling?

6 Dec. The End of the Renaissance?

Paper on artist or writer due (see requirement 5, above)

Final Examination: Take-Home