

Florence: Living in a Renaissance City

Reading List

The Italians

by John Hooper

Sublime and maddening, fascinating yet baffling, Italy is a country of endless paradox and seemingly unanswerable riddles.

John Hooper's marvellously entertaining and perceptive new book is the ideal companion for anyone seeking to understand contemporary Italy and the unique character of the Italians. Looking at the facts that lie behind - and often belie - the stereotypes, his revealing book sheds new light on many aspects of Italian life: football and Freemasonry, sex, symbolism and the reason why Italian has twelve words for a coat hanger, yet none for a hangover.

The Pursuit of Italy: A History of a Land, its Regions and their Peoples

by David Gilmour

Visiting a villa built by Lorenzo de Medici outside Pisa, David Gilmour fell into conversation about the unification of Italy with a distinguished former minister: "You know, Davide," he said in a low conspiratorial voice, as if uttering a heresy, "Garibaldi did Italy a great disservice. If he had not invaded Sicily and Naples, we in the north would have the richest and most civilized state in Europe." After looking cautiously round the room he added in an even lower voice, "Of course to the south we would have a neighbour like Egypt."

Was the elderly Italian right? Was the unification of Italy a mistake? The Pursuit of Italy traces the whole history of the Italian peninsula in a wonderfully readable style, full of well-chosen stories and observations from personal experience, and peopled by many of the great figures of the Italian past, from Cicero and Virgil to Dante and the Medici, from Cavour and Verdi to the controversial political figures of the twentieth century. The book gives a clear-eyed view of the Risorgimento, the pivotal event in modern Italian history, debunking the influential myths which have grown up around it.

Gilmour shows that the glory of Italy has always lain in its regions, with their distinctive art, civic cultures, identities and cuisine. The regions produced the medieval communes and the Renaissance, the Venetian Republic and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, two of the most civilized states of European history. Their inhabitants identified themselves not as Italians, but as Tuscans and Venetians,

Sicilians and Lombards, Neapolitans and Genoese. This is where the strength and culture of Italy still comes from, rather than from misconceived and mishandled concepts of nationalism and unity.

This wise and enormously engaging book explains the course of Italian history in a manner and with a coherence which no one with an interest in the country could fail to enjoy.

Florence: The Biography of a City

by Christopher Hibbert

This book is as captivating as the city itself. Hibbert's gift is weaving political, social and art history into an elegantly readable and marvellously lively whole. The author's book on Florence will also be at once a history and a guide book and will be enhanced by splendid photographs and illustrations and line drawings which will describe all the buildings and treasures of the city.

Rome: The Biography of a City

by Christopher Hibbert

This beautifully written, informative study is a portrait, a history and a superb guide book, capturing fully the seductive beauty and the many layered past of the Eternal City. It covers 3,000 years of history from the city's quasi-mythical origins, through the Etruscan kings, the opulent glory of classical Rome, the decadence and decay of the Middle Ages and the beauty and corruption of the Renaissance, to its time at the heart of Mussolini's fascist Italy. Exploring the city's streets and buildings, peopled with popes, gladiators, emperors, noblemen and peasants, this volume details the turbulent and dramatic history of Rome in all its depravity and grandeur.

The Popes: A History

by John Julius Norwich

John Julius Norwich examines the oldest continuing institution in the world, tracing the papal line down the centuries from St Peter (traditionally - but by no means historically - the first Pope) to the present. Of the 280-odd holders of the supreme office, some have unquestionably been saints; others have wallowed in unspeakable iniquity.

One was said to have been a woman, her sex being revealed only when she improvidently gave birth to a baby during a papal procession. Almost as shocking was Formosus whose murdered corpse was exhumed, clothed in pontifical vestments, propped up on a throne and subjected to trial.

From the glories of Byzantium to the decay of Rome, from the Albigensian Heresy to controversy within the Church today, *The Popes* is superbly written, witty and revealing.

The Borgias

by Christopher Hibbert

The name Borgia is synonymous with the corruption, nepotism, and greed that were rife in Renaissance Italy.

The powerful, voracious Rodrigo Borgia, better known to history as Pope Alexander VI, was the central figure of the dynasty. Two of his seven papal offspring also rose to power and fame - Lucrezia Borgia, his daughter, whose husband was famously murdered by her brother, and that brother, Cesare, who served as the model for Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Notorious for seizing power, wealth, land, and titles through bribery, marriage, and murder, the dynasty's dramatic rise from its Spanish roots to its occupation of the highest position in Renaissance society forms a gripping tale.

Erudite, witty, and always insightful, Hibbert removes the layers of myth around the Borgia family and creates a portrait alive with his superb sense of character and place.

SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome

by Mary Beard

Ancient Rome matters.

Its history of empire, conquest, cruelty and excess is something against which we still judge ourselves. Its myths and stories - from Romulus and Remus to the Rape of Lucretia - still strike a chord with us. And its debates about citizenship, security and the rights of the individual still influence our own debates on civil liberty today.

SPQR is a new look at Roman history from one of the world's foremost classicists. It explores not only how Rome grew from an insignificant village in central Italy to a power that controlled territory from Spain to Syria, but also how the Romans thought about themselves and their achievements, and why they are still important to us. Covering 1,000 years of history, and casting fresh light on the basics of Roman culture from slavery to running water, as well as exploring democracy, migration, religious controversy, social mobility and exploitation in the larger context of the empire, this is a definitive history of ancient Rome.

SPQR is the Romans' own abbreviation for their state: *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, 'the Senate and People of Rome'.

The Roman Forum

by David Watkin

There are few more historic and evocative places in the world. Caesar was cremated there. Charles V and Mussolini rode by it in triumph. There Napoleon celebrated his festival of liberty. In this radical reappraisal David Watkin teaches us to see the Forum with new eyes and helps us to rediscover its rich history. This is as stimulating to the armchair traveller as it is useful as a guide to the Forum itself.

'With verve, authority and no little humour, Watkin tells the detailed and complex story of this great but mutilated landmark ... it is an almost impossible task, superbly done' Peter Jones, BBC History Magazine

'In this sprightly volume ... the distinguished architectural historian David Watkin charts the shifting fortunes of the site ... he has an engagingly romantic feeling for the place... deploying a good deal of sharp wit, he reveals how the relatively recent obsession with recovering the Forum's classical past has led to much unhappy destruction and much less scarcely happy invention' Matthew Sturgis, Country Life

The Rise and Fall of the House of Medici

by Christopher Hibbert

At its height Renaissance Florence was a centre of enormous wealth, power and influence. A republican city-state funded by trade and banking, its often bloody political scene was dominated by rich mercantile families, the most famous of which were the Medici. This enthralling book charts the family's huge influence on the political, economic and cultural history of Florence. Beginning in the early 1430s with the rise of the dynasty under the near-legendary Cosimo de Medici, it moves through their golden era as patrons of some of the most remarkable artists and architects of the Renaissance, to the era of the Medici Popes and Grand Dukes, Florence's slide into decay and bankruptcy, and the end, in 1737, of the Medici line.

The Black Prince of Florence: The Spectacular Life and Treacherous World of Alessandro de' Medici

by Catherine Fletcher

'Nothing in sixteenth-century history is more astonishing than the career of Alessandro de' Medici'
Hilary Mantel

In *The Black Prince of Florence*, a dramatic tale of assassination, spies and betrayal, the first retelling of Alessandro's life in two-hundred years opens a window onto the opulent, cut-throat world of Renaissance Italy.

'Astonishing ... gripping and original ... a compelling portrait' *Financial Times*

'Packed with intrigue ... Fletcher describes with cool menace the plotting and politicking that dominated Alessandro's rule ... brought splendidly to life in this excellent book' *Sunday Times*

'Engrossing ... bursts with stabbings, poisonings, duels, eye-gougings, arquebus shootouts and people being run through with swords. Fletcher's approach is scholarly yet dramatic, immersed in Renaissance glamour ... a tremendous step forward in our knowledge of this intriguing man' *Spectator*

'Scintillating. This is everything a historical biography should be' Ian Mortimer, author of *The Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval England*

The year is 1531. After years of brutal war and political intrigue, the bastard son of a Medici Duke and a 'half-negro' maidservant rides into Florence. Within a year, he rules the city as its Prince. Backed by the Pope and his future father-in-law the Holy Roman Emperor, the nineteen-year-old Alessandro faces down bloody family rivalry and the scheming hostility of Italy's oligarchs to reassert the Medicis' faltering grip on the turbulent city-state. Six years later, as he awaits an adulterous liaison, he will be murdered by his cousin in another man's bed.

From dazzling palaces and Tuscan villas to the treacherous backstreets of Florence and the corridors of papal power, the story of Alessandro's spectacular rise, magnificent reign and violent demise takes us deep beneath the surface of power in Renaissance Italy – a glamorous but deadly realm of spies, betrayal and vendetta, illicit sex and fabulous displays of wealth, where the colour of one's skin meant little but the strength of one's allegiances meant everything.

'Bold, breathless and full of suspense' *The Times*

'Original, revelatory and gripping' Jessie Childs, author of *God's Traitors*

'Gripping ... Fletcher describes in detail without losing momentum' *Economist*

'Fascinating and profound' Paul Strathern, author of *The Medici*

'Accomplished and original. A newly sympathetic portrait of a monarch whose rule in Florence was even more unlikely than Henry VII's presence on the English throne' Diarmaid MacCulloch, author of *A History of Christianity*

'Brilliantly written and impeccably researched. A stunning book' Tracy Borman, author of *Thomas Cromwell*

The Land Where Lemons Grow: The Story of Italy and its Citrus Fruit

by Helena Attlee

Travellers have always been thrilled by the sight of citrus in Italy, where dark leaves and bright fruit seem to charge the landscape, making the trees symbols of a sun-soaked, poetic vision of the country. Citrus also holds a special place in the Italian imagination, and in *The Land Where Lemons Grow*, Helena Attlee sets out to explore its curious past and its enduring resonance in Italian culture. *The Land Where Lemons Grow* is a heady mixture of travel writing, history, horticulture and art; a unique journey through Italy's cultural, culinary and political past. Helena Attlee is the author of four books about Italian gardens, and others on the cultural history of gardens around the world. Helena is a Fellow of the Royal Literary Fund and has worked in Italy for nearly 30 years.

The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy

by Jacob Burckhardt and Peter Murray

For nineteenth-century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, the Italian Renaissance was nothing less than the beginning of the modern world - a world in which flourishing individualism and the competition for fame radically transformed science, the arts, and politics. In this landmark work he depicts the Italian city-states of Florence, Venice and Rome as providing the seeds of a new form of society, and traces the rise of the creative individual, from Dante to Michelangelo. A fascinating description of an era of cultural transition, this nineteenth-century masterpiece was to become the most influential interpretation of the Italian Renaissance, and anticipated ideas such as Nietzsche's concept of the 'Übermensch' in its portrayal of an age of genius.

Art in Renaissance Italy

by John T. Paoletti and Gary M. Radke

With a freshness and breadth of approach that sets the art in its context, this book explores why works were created and who commissioned the palaces, cathedrals, paintings, and sculptures. It covers Rome and Florence, Venice and the Veneto, Assisi, Siena, Milan, Pavia, Genoa, Padua, Mantua, Verona, Ferrara, Urbino, and Naples. Chapters are grouped into four chronological parts, allowing for a sustained examination of individual cities in different periods. "Contemporary Scene" boxes provide fascinating glimpses of daily life and "Contemporary Voice" boxes quote from painters and writers of the time. Innovative and scholarly, yet accessible and beautifully presented, this book

is a definitive work on the Italian Renaissance. This revised edition contains around 200 new pictures and nearly all colour images.

The Merchant of Prato : Daily Life in a Medieval Italian City

by Iris Origo

This extraordinary re-creation of the life of a medieval Italian merchant, Francesco di Marco Datini, is one of the greatest historical portraits written in the twentieth century. Drawing on an astonishing cache of letters unearthed centuries after Datini's death, it reveals to us a shrewd, enterprising, anxious man, as he makes deals, furnishes his sumptuous house, buys silks for his outspoken young wife and broods on his legacy. It is an unequalled source of knowledge about the texture of daily life in the small, earthy, violent, striving world of fourteenth-century Tuscany.

Still Life

by Sarah Winman

From the author of *When God was a Rabbit* and *Tin Man*, *Still Life* is a big-hearted story of people brought together by love, war, art and the ghost of E.M. Forster.

1944, in the ruined wine cellar of a Tuscan villa, as bombs fall around them, two strangers meet and share an extraordinary evening.

Ulysses Temper is a young British soldier, Evelyn Skinner is a sexagenarian art historian and possible spy. She has come to Italy to salvage paintings from the wreckage and relive memories of the time she encountered EM Forster and had her heart stolen by an Italian maid in a particular Florentine room with a view.

Evelyn's talk of truth and beauty plants a seed in Ulysses' mind that will shape the trajectory of his life – and of those who love him – for the next four decades.

Moving from the Tuscan Hills and piazzas of Florence, to the smog of London's East End, *Still Life* is a sweeping, joyful novel about beauty, love, family and fate.
