

Extraordinary Women from Medieval and Renaissance Europe | Summer School course

Reading List

The Tigress of Forli

by Elizabeth Lev

A strategist to match Machiavelli; a warrior who stood toe to toe with the Borgias; a wife whose three marriages would end in bloodshed and heartbreak; and a mother determined to maintain her family's honor, Caterina Riario Sforza de Medici was a true Renaissance celebrity, beloved and vilified in equal measure. In this dazzling biography, Elizabeth Lev illuminates her extraordinary life and accomplishments. Raised in the court of Milan and wed at age ten to the pope's corrupt nephew, Caterina was ensnared in Italy's political intrigues early in life. After turbulent years in Rome's papal court, she moved to the Romagnol province of Forli. Following her husband's assassination, she ruled Italy's crossroads with iron will, martial strength, political savvy, and an icon's fashion sense. In finally losing her lands to the Borgia family, she put up a resistance that inspired all of Europe and set the stage for her progeny including Cosimo de Medici to follow her example to greatness.

The Pope's Daughter

by Caroline P. Murphy

The untold story of how Felice della Rovere, the illegitimate daughter of Pope Julius II, became the most powerful woman in Rome. Caroline P. Murphy evokes not only the great turbulence and creativity of Renaissance Italy, but also Felice's daily life, from dealing with squabbles among servants to her advice on the best way to bribe a Pope.

Lucrezia Borgia: Life, Love, and Death in Renaissance Italy

by Sarah Bradford

The very name Lucrezia Borgia conjures up everything that was sinister and corrupt about the Renaissance—incest, political assassination, papal sexual abuse, poisonous intrigue, unscrupulous power grabs. Yet, as bestselling biographer Sarah Bradford reveals in this breathtaking new portrait,

the truth is far more fascinating than the myth. Neither a vicious monster nor a seductive pawn, Lucrezia Borgia was a shrewd, determined woman who used her beauty and intelligence to secure a key role in the political struggles of her day. Drawing from a trove of contemporary documents and fascinating firsthand accounts, Bradford brings to life the art, the pageantry, and the dangerous politics of the Renaissance world Lucrezia Borgia helped to create.

Women in the Middle Ages : The Lives of Real Women in a Vibrant Age of Transition

by Joseph Gies and Frances Gies

Reissued for the first time in decades, this ambitious work of Medieval scholarship by bestselling historians Frances and Joseph Gies traces the stories and fates of women in Medieval Europe over the course of a millennium.

Medieval history is often written as a series of battles and territorial shifts. But the essential contributions of women during this period have been too often relegated to the dustbin of history. In *Women in the Middle Ages*, Frances and Joseph Gies reclaim this lost history, in a lively historical survey that charts the evolution of women's roles throughout the period, and profiles eight individual women in depth. We learn of Hildegarde of Bingen, an abbess who was a noted composer and founded two monasteries; of Eleanor de Montfort, a 13th century Princess of Wales who was captured by Edward I and held as a political prisoner for three years; and women of somewhat more modest means, such as the spouse of an Italian merchant, and a peasant's wife.

Women in the Renaissance

by Margaret L. King

In this informative and lively volume, Margaret L. King synthesizes a large body of literature on the condition of western European women in the Renaissance centuries (1350-1650), crafting a much-needed and unified overview of women's experience in Renaissance society. Utilizing the perspectives of social, church, and intellectual history, King looks at women of all classes, in both usual and unusual settings. She first describes the familial roles filled by most women of the day--as mothers, daughters, wives, widows, and workers. She turns then to that significant fraction of women in, and acted upon, by the church: nuns, uncloistered holy women, saints, heretics, reformers, and witches, devoting special attention to the social and economic independence monastic life afforded them. The lives of exceptional women, those warriors, queens, patronesses, scholars, and visionaries who found some other place in society for their energies and strivings, are explored, with consideration given to the works and writings of those first protesting female subordination: the French Christine de Pizan, the Italian Modesta da Pozzo, the English Mary Astell.

Renaissance Woman : The Life of Vittoria Colonna

by Ramie Targoff

Ramie Targoff's Renaissance Woman tells of the most remarkable woman of the Italian Renaissance: Vittoria Colonna, Marchesa of Pescara. Vittoria has long been celebrated by scholars of Michelangelo as the artist's best friend--the two of them exchanged beautiful letters, poems, and works of art that bear witness to their intimacy--but she also had close ties to Charles V, Pope Clement VII and Pope Paul III, Pietro Bembo, Baldassare Castiglione, Pietro Aretino, Queen Marguerite de Navarre, Reginald Pole, and Isabella d'Este, among others. Vittoria was the scion of an immensely powerful family in Rome during that city's most explosively creative era. Art and literature flourished, but political and religious life were under terrific strain. Personally involved with nearly every major development of this period--through both her marriage and her own talents--Vittoria was not only a critical political actor and negotiator but also the first woman to publish a book of poems in Italy, an event that launched a revolution for Italian women's writing. Vittoria was, in short, at the very heart of what we celebrate when we think about sixteenth-century Italy; through her story the Renaissance comes to life anew.

The Deadly Sisterhood : A story of Women, Power and Intrigue in the Italian Renaissance

by Leonie Freida

This book is one of drama on a grand scale, a Renaissance epic, as Christendom emerged from the shadows of the calamitous 14th century. The sweeping tale involves inspired and corrupt monarchs, the finest thinkers, the most brilliant artists and the greatest beauties in Christendom. Here are the stories of its most remarkable women, who are all joined by birth, marriage and friendship and who ruled for a time in place of their men-folk: Lucrezia Turnabuoni (Queen Mother of Florence, the power behind the Medici throne), Clarice Orsini (Roman princess, feudal wife), Beatrice d'Este (Golden Girl of the Renaissance), Caterina Sforza (Lioness of the Romagna), Isabella d'Este (the Acquisitive Marchesa), Giulia Farnese ('la bella', the family asset), Isabella d'Aragona (the Weeping Duchess) and Lucrezia Borgia (the Virtuous Fury). The men play a secondary role in this grand saga; whenever possible the action is seen through the eyes of our heroines.

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.
