

## Renaissance Italy Tour: Story of Five Families

### Reading List

#### **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 Niccolò 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.

---

### **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*

---

## **Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts**

by Alison Cole

This fascinating study of Renaissance courtly art and culture in fifteenth and early sixteenth-century Italy encompasses the most recent scholarship on the courts, court art and noble values. Alison Cole not only considers the role of artists, but explores the distinctive uses to which art was put at the courts, from the smaller duchies and princely courts of Ferrara, Mantua and Urbino to the larger courts of Naples and Milan. The social, intellectual and artistic milieu of each court is brought vividly to life, along with the complex personalities of the rulers, their relationships with the civic and ecclesiastical authorities, and the role of court women as patrons of the arts. Drawing on a wide range of contemporary texts and visual material, Cole paints a rich picture of these extraordinary courts in the moment of their greatest brilliance.

## **A Short History of the Italian Renaissance**

by Virginia Cox

The extraordinary creative energy of Renaissance Italy lies at the root of modern Western culture. In her elegant new introduction, Virginia Cox offers a fresh vision of this iconic moment in European cultural history, when - between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries - Italy led the world in painting, building, science and literature. Her book explores key artistic, literary and intellectual developments, but also histories of food and fashion, map-making, exploration and anatomy. Alongside towering figures such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Petrarch, Machiavelli and Isabella d'Este, Cox reveals a cast of lesser-known protagonists including printers, travel writers, actresses, courtesans, explorers, inventors and even celebrity chefs. At the same time, Italy's rich regional diversity is emphasised; in addition to the great artistic capitals of Florence, Rome and Venice, smaller but cutting-edge centres such as Ferrara, Mantua, Bologna, Urbino and Siena are given their due. As the author demonstrates, women played a far more prominent role in this exhilarating resurgence than was recognized until very recently - both as patrons of art and literature and as creative artists themselves. 'Renaissance woman', she boldly argues, is as important a legacy as 'Renaissance man'.

---

## **The Cardinal's Hat**

by Professor Mary Hollingsworth

Working with Ippolito's letters and ledgers, recently uncovered in an archive in Modena, Italy, Mary Hollingsworth has pieced together a fascinating and undeniably titillating tale of this Renaissance cardinal and his road to power and wealth in sixteenth century Europe. The ledgers document every aspect of Ippolito's comings and goings, and he comes to life out of the minutiae, as do the lives of his staff.

---

## **The Ugly Renaissance**

by Alexander Lee

Featuring the beauties of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, combined with the dark and hidden side of the Renaissance, by an acclaimed historian and expert in the period. Renowned as an age of artistic rebirth, the Renaissance is cloaked with an aura of beauty and brilliance. But behind the Mona Lisa's smile lurked a seamy, vicious world of power politics, perversity and corruption that has

more in common with the present day than anyone dares to admit. Enter a world of corrupt bankers, greedy politicians, sex-crazed priests, rampant disease, and lives of extravagance and excess. Enter the world of the ugly Renaissance. Uncovering the hidden realities beneath the surface of the period's best-known artworks, historian Alexander Lee takes the reader on a breathtaking and unexpected journey through the Italian past and shows that, far from being the product of high-minded ideals, the sublime monuments of the Renaissance were created by flawed and tormented artists who lived in an ever-expanding world of bigotry and hatred. The only question is: will you ever see the Renaissance in quite the same way again?

---

### **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 Romagna 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.

---

### **Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy**

by Lauro Martines

This work contends that the Italian Renaissance ought to be considered in two stages: one, the eleventh century to 1300 when the urban political groundwork is laid; and two, 1300 to 1600 when the resulting cultural explosion occurs.

---

### **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.

---

### **The Medici : Godfathers of the Renaissance**

by Paul Strathern

A dazzling history of the modest family which rose to become one of the most powerful in Europe, The Medici is a remarkably modern story of power, money and ambition. Against the background of an age which saw the rebirth of ancient and classical learning Paul Strathern explores the intensely dramatic rise and fall of the Medici family in Florence, as well as the Italian Renaissance which they did so much to sponsor and encourage. Strathern also follows the lives of many of the great Renaissance artists with whom the Medici had dealings, including Leonardo, Michelangelo and Donatello; as well as scientists like Galileo and Pico della Mirandola; and the fortunes of those members of the Medici family who achieved success away from Florence, including the two Medici popes and Catherine de' Medicis, who became Queen of France and played a major role in that country through three turbulent reigns.

---

### **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.

---