

Saints and Sinners in Medieval and Renaissance Italy

English 415 (46657)/533 (46658)

Summer 2011. Florence, Italy

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Please print out this syllabus and bring it with you to Florence. Copies will not be available there.

Course Description

This course will examine the intricate and often inflammatory mixture of piety and politics which permeated the society of medieval and Renaissance Italy and contributed so much to its culture. Our exploration will take us from such saintly figures as Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena (whose miraculously preserved head can be seen in the chapel in Siena) to the notorious Medici and Borgia popes, whose extravagance and love of display bequeathed to us some of the finest art in the world. We will study the fanatical Dominican monk, Savonarola, who instituted a reign of asceticism and terrorized the pleasure-loving Florentines into destroying their rich art work, fabrics and fine furniture on his famous “Bonfire of the Vanities.” And we will read the works of the great Florentine writers, Dante and Boccaccio, in the city that inspired them.

By the end of the course, you will understand the impossibility of separating politics from piety, and will also recognize how both saints and sinners contributed to the rich cultural inheritance of Italy.

Course Requirements

I expect you to complete the reading for each class **in advance of the class**, and to participate enthusiastically in class discussion. There are five requirements for the course.

1) For each of the four topics of the course, you will write a one-page response to one of the readings; this is to be handed in at some point during the days assigned to that topic (no response on **Sinners**). Late responses will not be accepted. Each response will be worth 5%, for a total of **20% of final grade**.

2) Participation in the production of the *Play of St Guglielma*, to be performed one afternoon or evening toward the end of the course (note: you won't have to learn lines). **15% of final grade**

3) A ten-minute (absolute max.) class presentation of the results of your own "Pursuit of the Past"(see below), to be scheduled during the last week of

classes. **30% of final grade.**

4) A final exam administered in class on Tuesday June 21. **20% of final grade.**

5) Participation in class discussion. **15% of final grade.** I would like you to come to class with two questions which the reading for the day has raised for you. These questions will form the basis for class discussion. I don't expect you to have answers, but I do expect you to have thought about the questions. If you do not say anything in class, you can count on losing 15% off your grade.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students who plagiarize will be given a grade of XE (failure for academic dishonesty) for the course.

The grading scale for this class is: 95+= A+; 90-94 = A; 85-89 = A-; 80-84 = B+; 75-79 = B; 70 -74 = B-; 65-69 = C+; 56-64 = C; 50-55 = D; less than 50 = E.

In Pursuit of the Past

You are expected to develop a project which will further the connections between the material studied in class and the region itself and enhance your

own experience of the area. This project can be tied in with your own travel plans. An example of such a project would be a photographic record, or series of sketches, of sites associated with Francis of Assisi. Another possibility would be to replicate part of a medieval pilgrimage, or track down the 15th-century fresco of Guglielma, or follow in the footsteps of Boccaccio's story tellers. You could visit a medieval convent or monastery and consider how its icons and stained glass windows might have inspired visions and influenced spirituality. Your pursuit must be recorded in some fashion (maps, journal, photographs, sketches, word-sketches etc. etc.) and you must develop a narrative to go with the record for the purpose of your class presentation. You can pursue the past on your own or with one other person. A one-page outline of your pursuit - what you plan, how you intend to go about it, how you will record and present it - is due on **Monday May 30/**

Texts

There are three texts which you should acquire before leaving.

1) Sarah Dunant. *The Birth of Venus*. This is a modern novel, readily available, which would make great reading for the plane. It will give you a real

sense of fifteenth-century Florence.

2) Any edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Be sure that it contains all three parts: *Inferno*, *Purgatory* and *Paradiso*. Recommended edition: Dante Alighieri.

The Divine Comedy. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. Everyman, 1982. This edition is also available on-line at: http://www.divinecomedy.org/divine_comedy.html

3) Any edition of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Please make sure that it includes the Preface, Introduction and the stories we will be studying: Preface (or Proem) and Introduction; First Day, First Story; Last Story. The material we will be reading is available on-line at:

http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/boccaccio/life1_en.php

The remainder of the course material will be available as pdf files on Blackboard, or on the Florence Program website. If you want to have hard copies, you should print them out before you leave. **Please be SURE to print out a copy of the play of St Guglielma and bring it with you.**

Attendance

We will be covering a great deal of material in a short period of time.

Attendance at **EVERY** class is required.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

(note: this schedule may change to take advantage of the opportunities that Florence offers)

Week One

May 16 Christianity 101 and tour of San Miniato

Saints

May 17 Francis of Assisi: Life

Read: Thomas Of Celano, *First And Second Lives Of Saint Francis* at:

<http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/monastic/francis/francis.html>

and *The Life of St Francis* by Bonaventure (pdf)

May 18 Tour of Santa Croce (meet at Santa Croce at 10.30)

May 19 Francis of Assisi: Legends

Read: St Francis, “The Wolf of Gubbio” (pdf)

Week Two

May 23 Catherine of Siena: Life

Read: The Life of St Catherine of Siena (pdf)

May 24 Catherine of Siena: Letters

Read: Letter of St Catherine (pdf)

May 25 Visit to Palazzo Vecchio, and tour of San Marco (meet at San Marco
at 10.30)

Heaven and Hell

May 26 Dante, *Inferno* Cantos I-III, V

[May 27 - Siena tour]

Week Three

May 30 *Inferno* Cantos XIX, XXVI, XXVII; *Purgatory* Cantos XI, XII

[Pursuit of the Past outlines due]

May 31 *Purgatory* Cantos XXIII-XXVI; XXIX- XXXII; *Paradiso* Cantos X – XIV

June 1 Tour of the Florence of Dante and Boccaccio (meet at Santa Maria
Novella 9 am)

Hell on Earth

June 2 Boccaccio, *The Decameron*. Preface (or Proem) and Introduction

Read: Boccaccio on the Plague (pdf)

Week Four

June 6 *The Decameron*. First Day, First Story

June 7 *The Decameron*. Last Story

Sinners

June 8 The Cenci (Guest lecture)

Saints? Or Sinners?

June 9 Guglielma and the Gugliemites

Read: Guglielma of Milan (pdf); look at Guglielma fresco (pdf)

[June 10 - Agricultural tour]

Week Five

June 13 Antonia Pulci

Read: Antonia Pulci (pdf); *The Play of St Guglielma* (pdf)

June 14 *The Play of St Guglielma*

June 15 Savonarola

Read: Savonarola – Life (pdf); “Treatise on the Florentine Government” (pdf)

June 16 Sarah Dunant, *The Birth of Venus*

Week Six

June 20 Sarah Dunant, *The Birth of Venus*

June 21 Final exam in class

June 22 Presentations

June 23 Presentations