

History 3334: The Renaissance Spring 2021

Instructor: Jesse Sadler

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Zoom discussion section: Wednesdays, 11:15–12:05

Zoom office hours: Tuesdays, 11:00–12:30 and by appointment



History 3334 introduces students to one of the most distinctive time periods in European history, the Italian Renaissance. The course concentrates on the Italian peninsula from the rise of urban communes in the 12th century to Spanish political dominance in the 16th century. The course will investigate a variety of actions, ideas, and beliefs through primary sources and examine a number of ways that historians have attempted to understand this exciting time period. The course will focus on the themes of the dynamic urban environment, the Renaissance's distinctive understanding of the past, and Italian society's search for social, cultural, and political legitimacy in a period of rapid change.

Assignments

- Participation: Discussion questions and section: 20%
- Essay: The early Renaissance commune (week 5): 20%
- Mapping the Renaissance Mediterranean (week 8): 10%
- Essay: Machiavelli and Renaissance political thought (week 12): 20%
- Research project (week 15): 20%
- Final (Finals week): 10%

Books and Reading

Weekly reading will consist of primary and secondary sources that can be found on the Canvas class website. In addition, students should purchase Niccolò Machiavelli, *The*

Prince ed. Quentin Skinner, Second Edition (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought).

Course Format

Lectures: Lectures will be delivered asynchronously as videos available on Canvas. Each week we will cover two related topics that will be broken down into multiple videos. Videos will be available on Canvas the preceding Friday each week. Navigate to “Pages” on the left hand bar to locate individual pages for each week.

Reading: Weekly reading assignments are listed below and on Canvas. All readings are available as PDFs on Canvas except for Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. Reading should be completed before Discussion section on Wednesday. There are about 40–60 pages of reading per week.

Discussion board: Students are expected to write **one to two** discussion questions or comments each week on a collaborative Google Doc by 8:00pm Tuesday. The weekly discussion boards will be available in a shared Google Drive Folder called Hist 3334: The Renaissance. These questions/comments will provide a basis for our weekly discussion section. Students are encouraged to add to, or comment on, each other’s questions/comments. Active engagement in the collaborative Google Doc constitutes a portion of students’ participation grade.

Discussion section: We will meet synchronously once a week on **Zoom on Wednesdays, 11:15–12:05**. We will discuss and analyze the weekly topics, readings, and lectures in greater detail. We will also discuss the assignments for the course and aspects of historical methodology that we encounter in the reading. Each student is expected to actively engage in these discussions to the best of their ability. Contribution to the weekly discussion section makes up a portion of students’ participation grade.

Communication

I can be reached by email (jrsadler@vt.edu) and will aim to respond to all queries in twenty-four hours. Each week’s Google Doc will serve as a collaborative white board on which questions can be asked to other students and the instructor. Students are also encouraged to take advantage of office hours on Tuesdays, 11:00–12:30, or by appointment.

Learning Outcomes

This course introduces students to major themes in the history of Renaissance Italy. Students will learn to analyze a wide variety of primary sources, while familiarizing themselves with different historical methodologies through secondary reading. Students will be given opportunity to practice and improve their skills of historical analysis and argumentation through two essays on aspects of social and intellectual history. Finally,

students will build research skills through a digital mapping project and a final research project to conclude the course.

Course Expectations

This course is being taught online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We all enter this course with an understanding that these are not normal times. This makes the virtues of patience and respect even more important than usual. Students are expected to have completed the weekly reading, watched the video lectures, and posted questions/comments on the Google Doc by the discussion section on Zoom on Wednesdays, 11:15–12:05. Students are expected to actively participate on the collaborative Google Docs and in the discussion section. Debate is highly encouraged, though it should follow the humanist Renaissance ideal of remaining virtuous and respectful.

All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade for the course. Late assignments will be accepted so long as students adequately communicate with the instructor. Students are encouraged to discuss any and all issues, questions, or comments with Professor Sadler over email or in office hours on Zoom on Tuesdays, 11:00–12:30, or by appointment. Students are encouraged to work together and talk to each other about the reading and assignments. However, all work should be your own. Academic integrity will be assumed and rigorously enforced.

Weekly Schedule

The syllabus is liable to change. Any changes will be made clear in class and on the website.

Week 1: What is the Renaissance? (January 19–22)

1. Introduction
2. What is the Renaissance?
3. Medieval Europe

Reading

- Burke, *The Renaissance* – Chapter 2: Italy: Revival and Innovation

Section 1: Late Medieval Italy

Week 2: Urban development in medieval Italy (January 25–29)

4. The medieval Mediterranean
5. The development of an urban society and culture

Reading

- Reyerson, “Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean World of Merchants and Pirates”
- Boccaccio, *Decameron* – Day 2, story 4
- Najemy, *A History of Florence*, pgs 13–17
- Bishop Daibert’s Order on the Height of Towers in Pisa (1090)

- Mechanisms of Communal Government Five Texts (1143–84)
- Giovanni Villani on the Origins of the Guelfs and Ghibellines in Florence (ca. 1300)
- Giovanni Villani on the Ascent of the Popolo in Florence (1250, 1293)

Week 3: Learning and religion in an urban society (February 1–5)

6. Thick description and the interpretation of cultures and texts
7. New ways of learning: Universities and the vernacular
8. The Church and lay religiosity

Reading

- Geertz, “Thick Description, Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”
- Haskins, “The Life of Medieval Students as Illustrated by their Letters”
- *Universitas*: A Papal Bull in Favor of the University of Bologna (1220)
- Duties of the Rectors of the *Universitates* at Bologna (1317–47)
- The Curriculum in Arts and Medicine at Bologna (early fifteenth century)
- Life of Umiliana de’ Cerchi (1246)

Week 4: The crisis of the fourteenth century (February 8–12)

9. Writing an analytical history essay
10. The Black Death
11. Popular politics and popular revolt

Reading

- Lindemann, “Plague, Disease and Hunger”
- Boccaccio, *Decameron* – Introduction
- Petrarch, Letters on Familiar Matters, May 1349
- Cohn, “Popular Insurrection and the Black Death: A Comparative View”

Section 2: Urban culture in the Italian Renaissance

Week 5: Rebirth amid tragedy (February 15–19)

12. Post-plague restructuring
13. Humanism and the focus on antiquity

Essay: The early Renaissance commune due by Friday, February 19th at 5:00pm

Reading

- Black, “Humanism”
- Petrarch, Letter to Cicero (16 June 1345)
- Vergerio, On Liberal Studies and the Moral Education of the Free-Born Youth (c. 1402/1403)
- Fedele, Oration in Praise of Letters (c. 1487)

Week 6: Family and gender (February 22–26)

14. The Renaissance family
15. Women and men in the Renaissance

Reading

- Kirshner, “Family and Marriage: A Socio-Legal Perspective”
- Chojnacki, “The Most Serious Duty: Motherhood, Gender, and Patrician Culture”
- Marriage, Family, and Children in the Datini Family Nine Texts (1375–1401)
- Marriage, Dowry, and Remarriage in the Sassetti Household (1384–97)
- Barbaro, On Marriage (1415)

Week 7: The moral city (March 1–5)

16. Civic rituals
17. Wealth, fashion, and social hierarchy

Reading

- Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* – Chapter 10: The Ritual of Crisis
- Stuard, *Gilding the Market* – Chapter 4: Curbing Women’s Excesses
- Regulating Consumption and Ritual Behavior Four Texts (1289–1343)
- Regulation of Brothels in Florence Two Texts (thirteenth century, 1346)

Week 8: Networks of friendship and credit (March 8–12)

18. Friendship and patronage networks
19. Banking, credit, and pawnbroking

Mapping the Mediterranean due by Friday, March 12th at 5:00pm

Reading

- McLean, *The Art of the Network* – Chapter 5: The Dynamics of Office Seeking
- Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* – Chapter 4: The Friendship of Citizens
- Usury: Six Texts (1161–1419)

Week 9: Spring Break week/day (March 15–19)

Section 3: Political power and the search for legitimacy

Week 10: State and war (March 22–26)

20. The growth of the territorial state
21. War and the Renaissance state

Reading

- Najemy, “Governments and Governance”
- Caferro, “Warfare and Economy in Renaissance Italy, 1350–1450”
- Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* – Book 2: Chapters 10, 16–18

Week 11: Culture and power (March 29 – April 2)

22. Humanism, art, and authority

23. Court society and manners

Reading

- Martines, *Power and Imagination* – Chapter 13: Art: An Alliance with Power
- Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* – Book 3
- Machiavelli, *The Prince* – Chapters 1–12

Week 12: Legitimizing political authority (April 5–9)

24. Renaissance political thought

25. Machiavelli: Republicanism and princely government

Reading

- Jurdjevic, “Political Cultures”
- Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* – Book 1: Preface and chapters 1–10
- Machiavelli, *The Prince* – Chapters 13–26

Section 4: Text and nature

Week 13: New worlds (April 12–16)

26. Voyages, mapping, and new worlds

27. Printing and manuscripts

Essay: Machiavelli and Renaissance political thought due by Friday, April 16th at 5:00pm

Reading

- Horodowich, “Armchair Travelers and the Venetian Discovery of the New World”
- Christopher Columbus to Luis de Santángel, 1493
- Amerigo Vespucci, *Mondus Novus*, 1504

Week 14: Text, nature, and the cosmos (April 19–23)

28. Learning from text and nature

29. Magic and Neoplatonism

Reading

- Ogilvie, “The Many Books of Nature: Renaissance Naturalists and Information Overload”
- Copenhaver, “How to Do Magic, and Why: Philosophical Prescriptions”
- *Hermetica* – Chapters 1–4

Section 5: Waning of the Renaissance

Week 15: Waning of the Renaissance (April 26–30)

30. Rise of the ultramontanes

31. New ways to view the world

Research project due Friday, April 30th at 5:00pm

Reading

- Flemer, “Clement VII and the Crisis of the Sack of Rome”
- Cellini, *Life of Benvenuto Cellini* – Book 1: Chapter 7
- Brown, “Rethinking the Renaissance in the Aftermath of Italy’s Crisis”

Week 16: Afterlife of the Renaissance (May 3–5)

32. Afterlife of the Renaissance

Final due Wednesday, May 12th at 5:00pm