



The Borgias

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Traces the lives of the famous Italian family, discusses their influence in religion and politics, and looks at period in which they lived.

The Borgias Details

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Author : Ivan Cloulas

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Liedzeit says

Not quite sure what I expected. But I was mildly disappointed. A solid biography. Maybe too solid. Just too many tiny battles.

So, the Borgias came from Spain and the first Pope was Kalixt III. His nephew, Rodrigo became the famous Alexander VI. His son Cesare was a cardinal but decided to rather become a new Cesar. So he killed his brother. Presumably. That has made the Pope rather sad and for a while, a fortnight or so, he thought about reforming the church. Restricting the number of servants of cardinals to 80 for example. It did not last. What I did not know was that all the popes seemed to be more or seriously inclined to finance a new crusade. Cloulas does not condemn the Borgias. And as far as I understood he does not believe half of what is normally thought about them. No incest, e.g. Well, fratricide is not very nice either. And he seems to really like Lucretia.

Most interesting is that the son of killed brother Juan became a Jesuit general and was declared a Saint a hundred years later.

Karen says

This is a useful book, telling the story of the Borgias from their origins in Spain to the death of St Francis Borgia. Cloulas is quite even-handed in his portrayal of the family, he believes that Cesare killed Juan (I personally think it unlikely) but does not believe in the incest stories, for example. I think that he sometimes portrays Alexander as a little weak in comparison to Cesare and I would have liked more information about Charlotte d'Albret and Louise Borgia after Cesare's death, although perhaps I was expecting more because the author is French. I appreciated the level of detail that he went into though and particularly enjoyed the section of the book dealing with the decline of the family. I will definitely be reading this again.

Shari says

This book reads relatively easily for a history and presents lots of information which is, for the most part, easy to follow. Be prepared for many new names and a penchant of the author to skip ahead to make a point, then return to his narrative. Pay attention to the dates to keep yourself from getting mixed up by the, sometimes, non-chronological digressions of the author.

I missed not having maps available to turn to, and while the Chronology is lengthy, it still did not answer all my questions. Also, the habit of falling into "name changes," i.e.: Giovanni when in Italy, Juan while in Spain. I questioned whether this was an editorial problem. While this is not hard to figure out, it did slow me down just a bit, but I did get used to it.

These complaints aside, I learned much from Cloulas's work, found it very informative. He maintained a, largely, open viewpoint, trying not to take sides to a noticeable degree. He held nothing back when reporting the more unsavory and cruel actions of the players. There are so many players involved that it was clear where there needs to be more investigation and recourse to other histories that hone in on individual people or families. This, however, gives a solid initial entry into Borgia history.

Judy says

Read to make watching "The Borgias on TV more interesting.

Stormy says

Excellent book. The author doesn't take a side in the Borgia love hate affair that many authors have - resulting in biased work. Cloulas is insightful, informative and takes you through the process to see where and how he comes to his conclusions when challenging/facing many of the myths about this family. Definitely worth a look if your into history.

Shawn says

OK, I confess that I read it to get some idea how far "The Borgias" television series wanders from the truth. (Answer: VERY far!) It does a satisfactory job in the "just the facts" tradition, but even within those limits I have complaints:

1. No maps, no not one. A serious lack in a book that mentions many very minor places in both Italy and Spain. And unless you're a specialist in the era, you probably have, as I did, no more than a vague idea of the shifting boundaries of the duchies of Milan and Urbino, the republics of Florence and Venice, and at least 20 more frequently-mentioned political entities that come and go. Don't set out without a decent historical atlas!
2. No family tree/genealogy. The book covers at least five generations of Borgias and their spouses and lovers and children legitimate and otherwise. Titles of some of them change several times. A graphic representation would have been very helpful.

There must be something better out there.

Roberta Marro says

The lives of Rodrigo, Lucrezia, and Chez-array were absolutely riveting. I got a new perspective on the family. The huge number of characters, made for some confusion. I didn't know until I read this book that Machievelli's "The Prince" was based at least in part on the life of Cesare. I also did not know that Leonardo da Vinci did some engineering work for Cesare. The political and ecclesiastical intrigue of that time was almost unbelievable. What I found most amazing is that the records of that period have been preserved.

Carrie Cole says

Although there were some issues with the translation, I really enjoyed this book. The author handled an infamous family with remarkable delicacy, and gave us an unbiased look at their lives.

Lily C. says

It was pretty interesting at first, but near the end I just got really bored with it. Nothing much else to say.

John Nelson says

This book focuses on the lives of Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia) and his illegitimate children, Cesare and Lucrezia. The author states in the introduction that his objective was to humanize the Borgias and relieve their reputations of the rumors and innuendos that have clung to them since the Renaissance.

If that truly was the author's objective, he failed thoroughly to achieve it. The author exonerates Alexander VI of the most egregious single charge against him - that of incest with his daughter Lucrezia. What is left, however, is thoroughly damning. Alexander more or less continuously engaged in simony, fornication (Popes, like other Catholic Priests, are supposed to be celibate), and a host of other sins, and violated every commandment in the Bible, except, perhaps, the obligation to honor one's parents.

Cesare, for his part, was directed to a career in the church (which he detested) and given a Cardinal's hat at a very young age by his father, the Pope. To escape back into lay life, he killed his brother, forcing Alexander to release him from the priesthood in order to have an heir to carry on the family's activities outside the church. For this act of fratricide the Pope, remarkably enough, forgave him completely, and Alexander remained Cesare's patron until Alexander passed away.

Cesare cut a dashing figure, and so impressed Machiavelli that the latter made him the model for "The Prince." After being deprived of Alexander's patronage, however, Cesare failed to survive for long. Other members of the nobility banded together against him and defeated him in battle. Cesare fled to the family's ancestral base in Spain to seek to rally support and raise new troops, and was defeated and killed not long after.

Lucrezia is the only one of the three who comes off moderately well in modern eyes. As was common among the nobility when marriages were used to cement alliances, she found herself a pawn for her father's machinations, and later those of her brother. Eventually, however, she settled into a dignified position as Duchess of Ferrara before dying in 1519 at the age of 39.

The Borgias may have been sophisticated and cultured, but they were devoid of almost all the characteristics that make a good person. Whether the fault was theirs, or they simply were the products of the society they lived in, is a question not considered in this book.

Ironically enough, a member of the Spanish branch of the Borgia family, Francis of Gandia, later found true religion, renounced his life of power and influence and entered the Jesuit order, died in 1572, and was canonized in 1671.

FP says

Una lectura muy dinámica sobre una época muy variopinta en la historia de los Estados Pontificios. Se trata de un texto bien informado, que despeja varias dudas y desmitifica varios mitos de la familia Borgia (incluyendo negar varias mentiras asociadas a su nombre... ellos ya eran lo bastante infames por sus acciones

como para necesitar que asesinaran su imagen aún más con falsedades). Lo que sí es que el libro se habría beneficiado con algún mapa: dada la naturaleza de la política en las ciudades-estado italianas en esos días, la relación con las potencias vecinas puede hacerse algo enredada.

El último tercio del libro, curiosamente, se enfoca en otro Borgia, San Francisco de Borja, uno con una historia completamente diferente detrás de sí, que a pesar de dar la impresión de un anticlímax otorga un buen contraste al resto del libro.

Edward says

Pope Alexander VI, his children, Lucrece and Cesar (model for Machiavelli's THE PRINCE, - what to make of them? Were they the hopelessly corrupt villains that history has often made them out to be, or were they products of a tumultuous 16th century Renaissance and no better and no worse than most of their contemporaries? This historical study, written in French, guardedly finds elements of both villainy and contemporaneity in them. the author concentrates much more on the political and military infighting of the time than upon any personal orgies. If you're interested in the Borgias,worth reading.
