ITALY DURING THE RENAISSANCE: FLORENCE

Tuesday, 9:00-11:45
Office: Tuesday, 12:00-1:30 (by appointment only. Prof. Duni’s e-mail: mpgduni@syr.fi.it)

Course Description
This course presents an overview of the political, social, and cultural history of Italy from roughly 1300 to 1600. Its aim is to provide students with a basic understanding of the forces and processes that shaped the states and the societies of the Italian peninsula in an era of extraordinary changes: from the developments of urban civilization and the rise of humanism in the fourteenth and early fifteenth century, to the political and religious crisis of the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento, and finally to the establishment of a new balance of power and a new cultural climate in the course of the sixteenth century.

We will begin discussing the meaning and the history of the concept of “Renaissance”, one of the most successful - and controversial - historical myths. We will then move on to examine the social and economic foundations and the typical forms of political organization of the Italian states from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. Our attention will focus especially on the city of Florence and on the evolution of Florentine society and politics from the times of the “Commune” to the oligarchic government of the early Quattrocento. We will concentrate eventually on the institutions of the Catholic Church and the religious beliefs and practices of the Italian peoples in the age in which the papacy created its secular state. An investigation of the innovations in intellectual life brought about by the humanists, the men that changed radically the contents and the scope of human knowledge, will conclude the first half of the course.

The focus will be then on the aristocratic society and the political culture of republican Florence during the domination of the Medici family. The final section of the course will deal with the dramatic crisis of the early sixteenth century, when the Italian states lost their political autonomy, and Italian society and culture were profoundly shaken by the spread of radical religious doctrines. The brilliant pages of Machiavelli will guide us to understand the direction of the political changes, while a closer look at the working of the Roman Inquisition will accompany the examination of the new cultural climate of Counter Reformation Italy.

Requirements
Grading for this course is based, first of all, on class participation, which means not only attendance but active participation in the discussions. Students are expected to have completed all reading assignments before meetings, to present to the class on a theme of their choice, and to lead the discussion following their presentation (see additional note at the end). Participation and class presentation will count for 25% of the final grade.

Other requirements include a term paper, worth 25% of the final grade (see Note at the end for details); two in-class exams, one mid-term and one final, each worth 25% of the final grade.

Students are expected to abide by New York University’s rules concerning academic honesty. The work that they turn in or present orally must be their own. All sources must be cited. Failure to do so may result in an “F” for the assignment, or, in some cases, for the course. Please consult the NYU website for more complete information on this subject.

Any absence must be excused in writing; if due to illness, a doctor’s certificate is required. More than one unjustified absence will result in the lowering of the final grade (illness or natural calamity are the only grounds for excused absence). Punctuality is not optional: if you’re late to class twice in a row you will be counted as absent. Eating and drinking are not allowed in class. Mobile phones will have to be switched off during class; laptops will have to be switched off during class discussions. There are two obligatory site visits scheduled during the semester.
Readings

It is recommended that students purchase the books marked with *. The library of Villa Ulivi holds both the originals and the master copies of all the other readings.

*MACHIABELLI, NICCOLÒ, The Prince (with selections from the Discourses), New York, Bantam Books, 1981.
MATTINGLY, GARRETT, “The Prince: Political Science or Political Satire?” in Major Problems in the History of the Italian Renaissance, 179-86.
NAJEMY, JOHN M., “Governments and Governance” in Italy in the Age of the Renaissance: 1300-1550, 184-207.
PETERSON, DAVID S., “Religion and the Church” in Italy in the Age of the Renaissance: 1300-1550, 59-81.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

9/7   Introduction: themes, focus and format of the course

9/14   The Renaissance: geography, chronology, and myth

9/21 -- Site visit: the medieval commune (read BRUCKER, Renaissance Florence, 1-50).
September 28
The Making of the Italian Renaissance: Economy and Society

October 5
The Political Framework
BRUCKER, Renaissance Florence, 128-171; NAJEMY, “Governments and Governance”, 184-207.

October 12
The Catholic Church and Religious Life

October 19
MID-TERM EXAM

FALL BREAK

November 2
Site visit: Medici Palace and San Lorenzo

November 9
New Trends in Cultural Life: Humanism

November 16
Republican Aristocracy: Florence and the Medici

November 23
Italy in the Eye of the Storm

November 30
Thinking the Crisis: Machiavelli
MACHIAVELLI, The Prince, and selections from the Discourses, all, and “Letter to Vettori”, 195-197; NAUERT, Humanism and the culture of Renaissance Europe, 70-2; MATTINGLY, “The Prince: Political Science or Political Satire?”, 179-186.

December 7
Towards the Counter-Reformation: Papacy and the Inquisition
GINZBURG, The Cheese and The Worms, all

December 14
FINAL EXAM
A Note on

REQUIREMENTS

Class presentations
Students have to present to the class on a theme chosen among the weekly topics listed on the syllabus (it is also possible to choose alternative topics: ask the professor). Students will have to show clearly the main points discussed by the author(s) of the texts, expressing their personal point of view, comparing the readings examined to other texts read in class, and explaining whether they are convinced of the authors’ opinion and why. Presentations must be an exercise in critical thinking, not a mere repetition of the readings’ contents; they will have to be concise (max. 30 minutes), lively and to the point. After their presentation, students will chair the class discussion, that is, questions and comments from their peers. PowerPoint, handouts, and other creative methods of interaction/presentation are encouraged, but must be discussed with the professor. Students may have to read additional bibliography to prepare for presentation, and in any case must meet with professor beforehand. Presentations can be done in pairs, or in groups of three. The first week available for presentations is that of Sep. 28, the last one that of Dec. 7. Professor will circulate a sign-up calendar of presentations in the week of Sep. 21. All students MUST sign up for a presentation by that week. No rescheduling of presentations will be allowed.

Term Paper
Students choose a topic on which they will write a paper, approx. 8-10 pages long (typewritten, double-spaced, with bibliography and notes). Papers may be related to the theme of class presentation, but do not have to. Professor will circulate a list of possible topics, and meet individually with students to help them choose one. The final deadline for the submission of the paper is Nov. 23. No extensions will be granted.

In-class Examinations
They consist of two parts. The first part will be a list of names, dates and events which students have to identify with short definitions - 2-3 complete sentences each. The second part will be composed of four essay questions. Students will choose two, and answer them fully, that is, with essays approx. two pages long each. The final exam will not be cumulative. Professor will hand out study sheets before both exams.