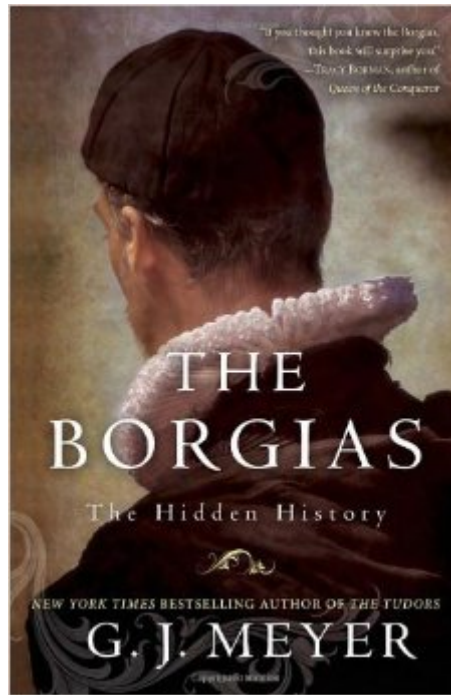


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# The Borgias: The Hidden History



## Synopsis

The startling truth behind one of the most notorious dynasties in history is revealed in a remarkable new account by the acclaimed author of *The Tudors* and *A World Undone*. Sweeping aside the gossip, slander, and distortion that have shrouded the Borgias for centuries, G. J. Meyer offers an unprecedented portrait of the infamous Renaissance family and their storied milieu.

THE BORGIAS

They burst out of obscurity in Spain not only to capture the great prize of the papacy, but to do so twice. Throughout a tumultuous half-century—as popes, statesmen, warriors, lovers, and breathtakingly ambitious political adventurers—they held center stage in the glorious and blood-drenched pageant known to us as the Italian Renaissance, standing at the epicenter of the power games in which Europe’s kings and Italy’s warlords gambled for life-and-death stakes.

Five centuries after their fall—a fall even more sudden than their rise to the heights of power—they remain immutable symbols of the depths to which humanity can descend: Rodrigo Borgia, who bought the papal crown and prostituted the Roman Church; Cesare Borgia, who became first a teenage cardinal and then the most treacherous cutthroat of a violent time; Lucrezia Borgia, who was as shockingly immoral as she was beautiful. These have long been stock figures in the dark chronicle of European villainy, their name synonymous with unspeakable evil.

But did these Borgias of legend actually exist? Grounding his narrative in exhaustive research and drawing from rarely examined key sources, Meyer brings fascinating new insight to the real people within the age-encrusted myth. Equally illuminating is the light he shines on the brilliant circles in which the Borgias moved and the thrilling era they helped to shape, a time of wars and political convulsions that reverberate to the present day, when Western civilization simultaneously wallowed in appalling brutality and soared to extraordinary heights.

Stunning in scope, rich in telling detail, G. J. Meyer’s *The Borgias* is an indelible work sure to become the new standard on a family and a world that continue to enthrall.

Praise for *The Borgias*

“A vivid and at times startling reappraisal of one of the most notorious dynasties in history . . . If you thought you knew the Borgias, this book will surprise you.” —Tracy Borman, author of *Queen of the Conqueror* and *Elizabeth’s Women*

“The mention of the Borgia family often conjures up images of a ruthless drive for power via assassination, serpentine plots, and sexual debauchery. . . . [G. J. Meyer] convincingly looks past the mythology to present a more nuanced portrait.” —Booklist

“Meyer brings his considerable skills to another infamous Renaissance family, the Borgias [and] a fresh look into the machinations of power in Renaissance Italy. . . . [He] makes a convincing case that the Borgias have been given a raw deal.” —Historical Novels Review

“Fascinating . . . a gripping history of a tempestuous time and an infamous family.” —Shelf Awareness

From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

Paperback: 512 pages

Publisher: Bantam (April 29, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0345526929

ISBN-13: 978-0345526922

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (183 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #130,765 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #35 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Italy](#) #129 in [Books > History > Europe > Italy](#)

## Customer Reviews

I received a galley proof edition of this work, free of charge, in exchange for providing a review. As such, many of the maps and family trees that may appear in the final version were not included in this draft. This review was written from the perspective of one who reads for pleasure and entertainment. I requested a copy of this book because the subject matter and the time period both fascinate me. While I do not subscribe to SHOWTIME, and thus have not viewed the mini-series focusing on the Borgias, I was vaguely familiar with the history prior to reading this book. As it turns out, one of the author's aims in writing the book was to correct what he felt was blatant historical misrepresentation of many of the family members, based largely on poorly researched sources, many of which were certainly not without bias. Now, in general, I'm leery of what has become a common practice of taking well established history and trying to construct new and counter intuitive arguments just for the sake of being "revisionist" or "contrarian", but what the author presents in this work bears consideration. Much of what has become "gospel" with respect to the Borgias rests on pretty flimsy evidence, largely originating with their mortal enemies, given credence by 19th century historians utilizing poor or non-existent fact checking or judgment. I recently read and reviewed a history of Constantine and was pilloried for panning the dry and painfully boring prose, as if any kind of scholarly work could be expected to be virtually unreadable. This work is the best answer I could give to those critics. It is educational while at the same time being frequently fascinating. Of course, given the subject and time frame, how could it fail to be so?

This is an excellent book for anyone who wants to learn more about how the office of the Pope

commenced and continued through certain centuries. It contains the histories of Popes, their families, their weaknesses, their strengths and the horrific conditions that often ensued because of the less than spiritual nature of these men. But the purpose of this author is to erase or at least place in doubt the tales of the debauchery and ruthlessness of Rodrigo Borgia, who became Pope Alexander VI, although he was superseded by his Uncle Alfonso who became Calixtus III. The history also included during their terms other Borgias who held important positions, but did not become Pope. Also the Borgia families were Spanish and not Italian, which had some dark aspects among the Italians. The author says, "The Borgia problem is rooted in the fact that from the early sixteenth century forward, for reasons ranging from Pope Julius II's hatred of his predecessor, Alexander VI, to the eagerness of Reformation Polemicists to depict the papacy in morally horrific terms, every conceivable crime was credited to the Borgias." Rodrigo was handsome, intelligent and extremely good at whatever he set out to do. He was handed many good benefices, positions, even to running the military, but perhaps his greatest asset to the office of the Pope, especially before he became Pope was he could negotiate treaties and agreements that generally satisfied all interested parties because he understood the problems and covered them. He was raised through the ranks through the efforts of his Uncle Alonzo, but had the patience to deal with them. This became especially important to the Popes following Alonzo's death.

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