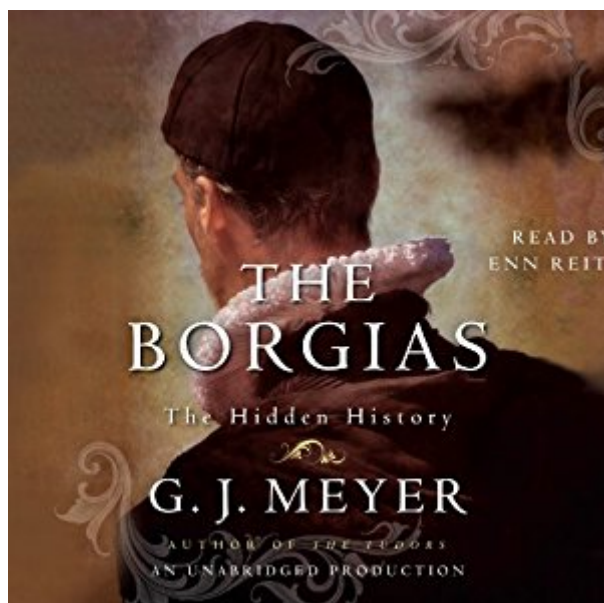


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# The Borgias: The Hidden History



## 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 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, the Borgia who bought the papal crown and prostituted the Roman Church; Cesare, the Borgia who became first a teenage cardinal and then the most treacherous cutthroat of a violent time; Lucrezia, the Borgia 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A commenter below thinks Meyer went too far in the rehabilitation of the Borgias: "Lucretia, if the author is to be believed, is destined for sainthood once her dastardly biographers see the light." Well, there could be a reason that in Ferrara she is still known as "Lucrezia l'Amata" (Lucrezia the Beloved). And since the Showtime view of the Borgias is about as accurate as Foghorn Leghorn depicting the barnyard antics of roosters, maybe a bit of extremism on the other side, even as educated speculation, is called for.

This was the reviewer's first foray into Borgia history, which leaves him at a loss to speak of this history within the context of the broader history of Renaissance Italy and, in particular, the Borgias. All the present reviewer can offer is their personal experience with this revisionist history. Hopefully, this will be of some use to the reader and will inspire them to pursue the history of the Borgias and Renaissance Italy. The Borgias was a compelling, but emotionally distant, history. G. J. Myer brings the reader, calmly and methodically, into a re-reading and a problematizing of the Borgia Legend with particular cool and a great deal of discretion. Given the salacious nature of the author's subject matter this works extraordinarily well and lends a sense of probity which is often, according to the author's general sentiment, missing from Borgia histories. Myer lays out the case for Alexander VI not being the father of Cesare and his siblings with care, and interrogates the flimsy evidence for this with equal care. Those readers not interested in a careful reading of Borgia history will, perhaps, find this work tedious, but those interested in a careful re-interpretation of the Borgias will find much to satisfy them here. Much is done to re-examine the hedonistic and perverse reputation of Alexander VI. In the course of this re-examination much of the legend is exposed not as history but myth. What is not stripped away and exposed is contextualized within the frame of Renaissance Italy's politics, geopolitics, and cultural milieu. Occasionally Myer may be over-indulgent in this context, but for the most part it is an excellent re-interpretation of the facts and the exposing of myth which has passed itself off as history for some five hundred years. In sum, this is an excellent family history of a much maligned and misrepresented political dynasty. Rating: 5 out of 5 stars. A must read for those interested in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Renaissance Italy, and the history of this

powerful and much misunderstood family.

Reality truly exceeds fantasies in the history of the Borgias. In this well researched book, the author provides facts, possible interpretations and questions about this powerful and sensational family as well as the background information of the 15-16th century European politics and culture. His writing style is so vivid and lively, the stories kept me captivated for days,-- my version, perhaps similar to binge watching the Game of Thrones for other people. The mysterious complexity of church politics and individuals survival, greed, desire and perhaps some true and some deluded sense of piety and justification, is both perplexing and deliciously melodramatic to read. It makes you realize, sadly, that the endless and clearly foreseen cycle of vengeance among the rivaling powers has never discouraged them to change courses to this day.

This fascinating book strives (through meticulous research) to clean up the reputation of the Borgias as minions of satan. Meyer makes the convincing case that they were no worse than the rest of the endlessly quarrelsome and back stabbing players that gave Renaissance Italy the texture it has passed on to the troubled Italy of today. Rodrigo Borgia, so this book says, was a highly competent administrator for the previous pope, earning a well-documented reputation for his dedication to his work. The point also is made that his famous "children" were actually his nephews and neice. Lucretzia ultimately comes through as a much loved governor. At times it is difficult, as one reads along, to keep track of the bickering families, loyalty switches and general warfare going on between city states and the condottieri that ran them. However, the overall impression of the Italy of the period is eye-opening and well worth the read. I would recommend reading Machiavelli's "The Prince" before reading this book, however. It is not long and is available at no cost for Kindle readers. It is a great introduction to the motivations of the Borgias (particularly Cesare Borgia) and the Italy of that period. Who knew that Machiavelli and the infamous Cesare Borgia were special friends? After you've worked your way through those tomes, I would suggest trying "The Tigress of Forli" by Elizabeth Lev. It picks out one fascinating character during that time: Caterina Sforza, and fills in the details of one life among the myriad families, city states and general competing interests of a hugely fragmented part of Southern Europe--all of which impacted the history of the known world at the time--just around the time of the discovery of a new world (circa 1490's).

The tale of a historical family with a reputation. Meyer tries to tell the true story, and I believe him. I enjoyed it. Couldn't keep all the characters straight all the time, but it wasn't a problem to me.

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