History 2271 (also ITAL 2270 and MEDVL 2271)
Family Life in Renaissance Italy

Fall Term 2015: Wednesdays, 2:30-4:25
Prof. J. Najemy (jmn4@cornell.edu)

How did women, men, and children experience family life in the literate, urban society of Renaissance Italy? What did it mean to belong to a family? Focusing primarily on Venice and Florence, the seminar explores the institutions of marriage and the dowry, relations between wives and husbands, childbirth, wet-nursing, the education of children, and prevailing notions of motherhood and fatherhood. The intervention of government in many aspects of family life will also be investigated. Attention then shifts to several different senses of the wider family (patrilineal, matrilineal, and marital), to the upper-class assemblages of those who shared a common surname, their sumptuous townhouses (“palazzi”), conflicts within families, and the role of families in politics. The study of these topics is made possible by the survival in large numbers of letters, memoirs, medical treatises, literary works, advice books, legal documents, and government legislation and record-keeping concerning family life. Class meetings will consist of presentations followed by discussion based on the close reading of selected primary sources and studies by modern historians.

Course Requirements:

1) Regular attendance and participation in discussion (40% of final grade)
2) One 20-minute in-class presentation of one week’s readings (15%)
3) A Mid-term paper (15%), c. 1,500 words, which further develops your presentation on the basis of some additional reading that I will suggest, due two weeks after the presentation. Please submit both paper and electronic copies.
4) Take-home final exam essay, c. 3,000 words (30%). Exam questions will be distributed at the last class meeting. Send only electronic copies to my email address.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

(Books available for purchase are marked P below; some of these are also e-books and marked E. The rest of the readings are in e-books, on Blackboard reserve (BB), and in online journals (JSTOR).)

Week 1 (August 26) Introduction

Week 2 (September 2) Two Interpretive Paradigms


Week 3 (September 9) Marriage and Dowries

Alessandra Strozzi, Selected Letters, ed. H. Gregory, letters 1, 4, 7, 10, 17, 23-27, 31 (P)
C. Klapisch-Zuber, Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy, chapters 9-10: pp. 178-246 (P)
S. Chojnacki, Women and Men in Renaissance Venice, chapters 3 and 6: pp. 76-94 and 132-52 (P and E)
Week 4 (September 16) The Married Couple
Margherita Datini, letters to her husband Francesco (electronic handouts)
Chojnacki, Women and Men, chapters 5 and 7: pp. 115-131 and 153-68
R. Bell, How to Do It: Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians, chapter 1; last part of chapter 5; chapter 6: pp. 1-16 and 208-78 (P and E)

Week 5 (September 23) Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Wet-nursing
Bell, How to Do it, chapters 2-4: pp. 17-174
Klapisch-Zuber, Women, Family, and Ritual, chapter 7: pp. 132-64
J. Musacchio, The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy, pp. 1-5, 9-15, 22-31 (BB)

Week 6 (September 30) Childhood and Adolescence
Alessandra Strozzi, Letters, letters 33 and 34
Giovanni Dominici, “On the Education of Children” (BB)
Klapisch-Zuber, Women, Family, and Ritual, chapter 5: pp. 94-116
J. B. Ross, “The Middle Class Child in Urban Italy, Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Century,” in History of Childhood, ed. Lloyd de Mause, pp. 183-228 (BB)
Bell, How to Do It, chapter 5, pp. 175-208

Week 7 (October 7) Fatherhood
Leon Battista Alberti, The Family in Renaissance Florence, Prologue and Book 1, pp. 25-91 (P)
P. Gavitt, Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence, pp. 273-302 (BB)

Week 8 (October 14) Motherhood
Alberti, The Family, book 2, pp. 92-150
Alessandra Strozzi, Letters, letters 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11-16, 18, 20, 22, 28, 30, 32, 35
Klapisch-Zuber, Women, Family, and Ritual, chapter 6: pp. 117-31
Chojnacki, Women and Men, chapter 8: pp. 169-82

Week 9 (October 21) Images of the Domestic Household
F. W. Kent, Household and Lineage, chapter 1: pp. 21-62 (BB)
Week 10 (October 28) Dissolution of Marriage

J. Ferraro, *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice* (P)
Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, chapter 4: pp. 95-111

Week 11 (November 4) Government Intervention in Family Life

Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, Introduction and chapters 1 and 2: pp. 1-75
D. O. Hughes, “Sumptuary Law and Social Relations in Renaissance Italy,” in J. Bossy, *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West*, pp. 69-99 (BB)

Week 12 (November 11) The Wider Family: Lineage and Patriline


Week 13 (November 18) Domestic Architecture and Family Spaces


Week 14 (December 2) Families in Politics

Alessandra Strozzi, *Letters*, letters 19, 21, 29