



The Professor of Secrets: Mystery, Medicine, and Alchemy in Renaissance Italy

By William Eamon



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In the tradition of *Galileo's Daughter* and *Brunelleschi's Dome*, this exciting story illuminates the captivating world of the late Renaissance—in this case its plagues, remedies, and alchemy—through the life of Leonardo Fioravanti, a brilliant, remarkably forward-thinking, and utterly unconventional doctor. Fioravanti's marvelous cures and talent for self-aggrandizement earned him the adoration of the people, the scorn of the medical establishment, and a reputation as one of the age's most colorful, combative figures. Written by Pulitzer-prize nominated historian William Eamon, *The Professor of Secrets* entices readers into a dangerous scientific underworld of sorcerers and surgeons. Meticulously researched and engagingly written, this gripping narrative will appeal to those interested in Renaissance history, the development of science, and the historical thrillers so popular today.

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Editorial Review

Review

In this entertaining biography of Italian physician and self-promoter Leonardo Fioravanti, Eamon gives a portrait of sixteenth century Italy that is far more realistic than that of those who follow the myth of the Renaissance. --Book News

“The author presents what medicine was like during the Renaissance with a wealth of unexpected details...and a light, accessible touch...that makes this book welcome reading not only for the summer but for any time of year.” —Los Angeles Times

“In this entertaining biography of Neapolitan physician and self-promoter Leonardo Fioravanti, Eamon gives a portrait of sixteenth century Italy that is far more realistic than that of those who follow the myth of the Renaissance.” –Book News

About the Author

William Eamon is a widely published, internationally known and respected scholar based at New Mexico State University. His first book, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in the Medieval and Early Modern Culture* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in history and won the History Book Award from the Association of American Publishers. He is co-editor of the excellently reviewed *Beyond the Black Legend: Spain and the Scientific Revolution*.

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If the Italian Renaissance was a dream, the late Renaissance in Italy was a nightmare. As a checkerboard of independent principalities, Italy was tantalizing territory for the powerful, centralized monarchies newly arrived on the Continental scene. The French monarchy, which had consolidated its domestic power following the Hundred Years' War, and the Catholic monarchs of Spain—Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, who in 1492 had completed the *reconquista* of the Spanish peninsula by taking the last Muslim stronghold, Granada—regarded Italy as a region of vast wealth and strategic importance. For both France and Spain, the prospect of expansion into the Italian peninsula held a powerful appeal.

Whenever they faced a crisis, all too often the Italian city-states called upon some foreign ally to tip the balance of power in their favor. In 1494, the Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, “Il Moro,” invited the King of France to invade Naples in order to punish his old enemy, Ferrante II, the Aragonese king of Naples. French King Charles VIII, who had just come of age, wanted to do something bold, and Il Moro gave him his chance. Pressing an ancient claim to the Kingdom of Naples, Charles gathered an army of 25,000 men and invaded the peninsula. Unexpectedly, city after city capitulated to him, and within a few short months Charles marched into Naples, having conquered virtually all of Italy.

The French invasion heralded a period of foreign involvement in Italian affairs that would last for more than 60 years. Machiavelli found the situation so desperate that he exhorted some “new prince”—a thinly veiled reference to Lorenzo de' Medici of Florence—to step forth and “liberate Italy from the barbarians.” What happened instead was a succession of foreign incursions, culminating in the humiliating Sack of Rome in 1527—a fitting measure of Italy's impotence. Even if it was only a dream, to many of Leonardo Fioravanti's contemporaries the age of Italy's glory seemed far in the past.

Users Review

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