Early Modern Mansplaining:Male-Authored Histories of Women (Florence, 26 Sep 25)

Palazzo Alberti, Via de' Benci 10, Florence, Sep 26, 2025
Deadline: Jul 10, 2025

The Medici Archive Project

Early Modern Mansplaining: Male-Authored Histories of Women.

One-Day Workshop on 26 September 2025, at the Medici Archive Project, Palazzo Alberti, Florence.

Submission deadline: 10 July 2025 Notifications by: 15 July 2025

The early modern understanding of women's historical achievements was shaped in large part by male authors. Their historiographic constructions can be found in a wide range of writings, from pro-woman treatises to hagiographies of female saints, historiographic accounts of women worthies, sermons, behavioral treatises, and even medical studies of female physiology. Some of these male authors were writing at the behest of women patrons, and in many cases it appears that their texts were intended primarily for a female readership.

One of the earliest works of European historiography to focus on women was Giovanni Boccaccio's De mulieribus claris. Completed in 1374 and containing biographies of 106 women worthies, this landmark text was not entirely celebratory, particularly in cases where women had achieved renown in realms that Boccaccio considered to be the preserve of men. By contrast, the largest treatise to have ever been written on women's history –comprising some 13,000 pages and compiled by Cristofano Bronzini in the early seventeenth century – was deemed excessively celebratory by the Catholic Church's Index of Prohibited Books. This was Bronzini's magnum opus and his dying wish was that it would one day be published, lifting his own name to prominence.

By taking a larger view of the phenomenon, we hope to learn more about the conditions under which the earliest histories of women were created and consumed.

We encourage participants to address such issues as:

— literary analyses of one or more individual texts by male authors on the subject of women

— the hagiographical tradition studied from the perspective of gender

— male authored biographies of women artists

— womansplaining, i.e. woman-authored treatises on male behavior such as Christine de Pizan's Book of Feats of Arms and of Chivalry

— comparisons of male and female writers' approaches to specific topics (such as female rulership) or historical figures (such as Cleopatra)

— Vesalius and other physicians' studies of women's bodies and illnesses

— the genesis, patronage, readership and reception of male-authored biographies of women

— women authors' and women artists' responses to male authors

— early modern male support for feminist causes

— the censorship of texts about women

— visual analysis of illustrations in male-authored texts about women

We invite papers from scholars in various disciplines, including—but not limited to—women's and gender studies, art history, book history, religious studies, the history of medicine, and literary studies.

To apply to participate, please submit an abstract of approximately 200 words, along with a short CV, to education@medici.org. The deadline for proposals is 10 July 2025. By 15 July 2025, those who have made submissions will be contacted regarding their proposals. Papers may be read in either English or Italian, and presentations should not exceed 20 minutes. The conference will take place at the Medici Archive Project in Palazzo Alberti, Florence, on Friday 26 September 2025.

Organizers: Sheila Barker (The Medici Archive Project), Florence Forte (The Warburg Institute)

Reference:

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