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# The Stones of Florence

*Mary Mccarthy*

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**Mary Mccarthy : The Stones of Florence** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Stones of Florence:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. An insightful reflection on the people, history, art, and architecture of a great cityBy C. CollinsSome reviewers have suggested that this is the perfect book to read on the plane flying to Florence Italy. I would recommend reading this book on the plane after leaving Florence since McCarthy does an excellent job of pulling together history, political intrigue, the rise and fall of the Medici family, the history of architecture, sculpture, and painting during the renaissance, and the world view of the Italians in Tuscany. This book helps the traveler make sense of what they have seen and experienced while in Florence. The names of the great Tuscan families, the great artists, and the vast array of saints all make much more sense to the reader after they have experienced Florence and now have the opportunity to read McCarthy's thoughtful reflections on this jewel of a city.McCarthy explains that during the renaissance, the fields of engineering, architecture, sculptor, and painter all overlapped and the great geniuses such as Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Giotto, Brother Lippi, Botticelli, and Brunelleschi excelled in all these fields. The power of Michelangelo's David and Sistine Chapel may cloud our understanding of Michelangelo as outstanding architect. McCarthy would have us understand that the outstanding talents and minds of the Renaissance knew few bounds as they applied their talents and innovations. Brunelleschi's architectural masterpieces of the Duomo, San Lorenzo, Santo Spirito, and the Pazzi Chapel would ensure his place in history but he also developed the concept of the vanishing point in pictorial 2-dimensional space which was a innovation of considerable power and which influenced every serious artist since. As the technical aspects of the vanishing point are learned, Masaccio paints the painting of the Trinity, showing the power of this technique, a technique that spread

quickly within the artistic community of Europe. Tales of the Duomo are peppered throughout the book since the competition to design and build this dome are legendary. McCarthy tells the essential facts which are given in more detail in Ross King's Brunelleschi's dome. She is unkind to Vasari, the favorite of Cosimo I, who designed the Uffizi and painted the frescoes within the Duomo. She is also unkind to the Mannerists that follow the giants of the late Renaissance. McCarthy is rightfully critical of aspects of Florence. The Uffizi is damp with body heat and wet breath of the crowds that are so dense that it is difficult to see the art and McCarthy invites the reader to enjoy other art treasures in other collections such as the Bargello museum and the Pitti Palace. She invites the reader to stroll in the Boboli and Bardini gardens. McCarthy has a keen understanding of human conflict and the story of Florence is also the story of rivalry, grudge, crime, retribution, violence, power, faction, alliance, and betrayal. The names of the great families such as Medici, Strozzi, Pazzi, and Brancacci begin to make sense as McCarthy weaves the ancient conflicts and rivalries into stories that illustrate how such rivalries and competition could be both destructive and also could inspire innovation and unintended developments. The conflicts were not just between the great families, they were also between the great families and the dictatorship of the Medici family. The conflicts were often between different factions of Christianity such as the Patarenes and Albigensians that challenged the dogma of the Catholic Church. The rise and fall of the evangelical monk Savonarola is often mentioned in her descriptions of the conflicting forces within Florence. McCarthy makes the point that these innovative people strove for both the ideal religion and the ideal state since every form of government was tried in Florence. McCarthy casts Machiavelli as the brilliant political scientist that he was. His cool objectivity about how power is gained and retained remains vibrant reading to this day. Machiavelli explains the attributes of a mercenary army compared to a citizen army but unfortunately it is 300 years later before these lessons take root in democratic Europe. Florence is often at the mercy of the Arno and I was amazed at the number of times over the last 700 years that the Arno floods destroyed bridges and sometimes buildings and art treasures. The Italian language derives from the dialect spoken in Florence and it is Dante's Divine Comedy that helped establish this particular dialect as the primary dialect. Florence is the birthplace of the Renaissance. This re-birth or re-discovery of the philosophers, political models, sculptors and architects of antiquity turned the God-centered world of the Middle Ages on its head and opened the door for the conceptions of modernity. McCarthy captures this transitional process in single geographic place with exceptional story telling skills. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Ahhh, Florence...By Diane PIf you've been to Florence, this is one of many books about it that will round out your understanding of the art and history of that glorious city. It's colorful, affectionate, informative and light. Mary McCarthy's few examples of travel literature are of a different era in that genre, meaning there are, thankfully, no recipes. 14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. A Welcome Antidote to Saccharine Travel BooksBy Diego BanducciPrior to reading this book, my favorite book on Florence was "The City of Florence: Historical Vistas and Personal Sightings" by R.W.B. Lewis which, like much of what one reads about the city, is generally positive. In searching out books on the subject, I had repeatedly come across references to "The Stones of Florence," which I avoided because I viewed Mary McCarthy (1912 - 1989) as a sort of upscale Danielle Steel, a popular novelist incapable of perceptive insights. That assessment was wrong. Instead, from the first page, the reader is confronted with perceptive and knowledgeable opinions that challenge his or her own perceptions (e.g., the Florentines are a cantankerous, miserly bunch). You may not agree with her, but there is no doubt that she is highly intelligent and has seriously thought out her positions. In the end, the reader comes away with strong admiration for her intelligence, candor, and succinct writing style. For example: "Up until this time (the age of Michelangelo), sculpture and architecture had been relied on by the Florentines to affirm the strength of the Republic. That is why the Uffizi, beautiful as many of its paintings are, is only a picture gallery, while the Bargello and the Museum of the Works of the Duomo are Florence." (p. 108). "The kind of vulgarity in decoration that is today thought of as middle-class seems to stem straight from Tuscany in the time of the Medici grand dukes (citing Cosimo I)... The interiors of the grand-ducal palaces and villas are sumptuously, stuffily ugly in a way that is hard to connect with a period that was contemporary, after all, with classic Palladio in the Veneto." (p. 201) "Lorenzo the Magnificent was 'incredibly devoted to the indulgence of an amorous passion', as Roscoe, his eighteenth-century biographer, puts it; his sexuality was uncontrollable, a perpetual bullish rut." (p. 176) This is not a book for readers considering a first trip to Florence or for those whose sole exposure has been a whirlwind tour of the Uffizi, Duomo and David. It presupposes an in-depth knowledge of the city itself, its history and literature. Those who have that knowledge will find it thought-provoking and rewarding. The title of this book is explained by the fact that three years before writing "The Stones of Florence," McCarthy wrote "Venice Observed," in which she relied heavily on John Ruskin's masterpiece "The Stones of Venice." Readers interested in an objective view of the Medici, particularly Lorenzo il Magnifico, should consider Medici Money: Banking, Metaphysics, and Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence (Enterprise) by Tim Parks. The final chapter is spectacular, pulling together what for me had previously been separate strands of history.

The Stones of Florence [Hardcover] [Jan 01, 1962] Mccarthy, Mary ...