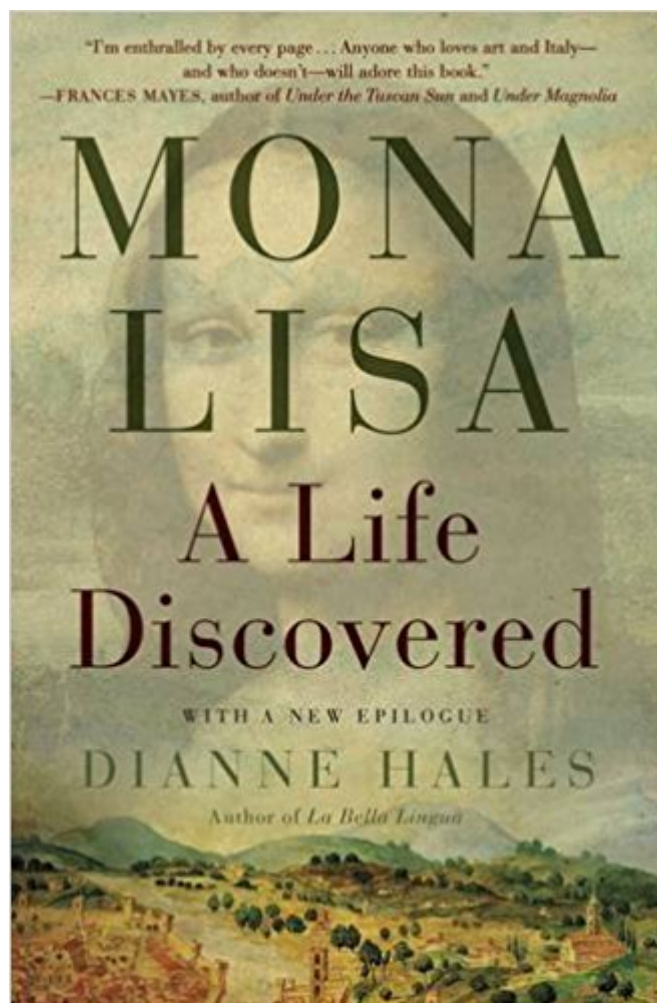


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# Mona Lisa: A Life Discovered



## Synopsis

Everybody knows her smile, but no one knows her story: Meet the flesh-and-blood woman who became one of the most famous artistic subjects of all time—Mona Lisa. A genius immortalized her. A French king paid a fortune for her. An emperor coveted her. Every year more than nine million visitors trek to view her portrait in the Louvre. Yet while everyone recognizes her smile, hardly anyone knows her story. “Combining history, whimsical biography, personal travelogue, and love letter to Italy...Mona Lisa is an entertaining (Publishers Weekly) book of discovery about the world’s most recognized face. Who was she? Why did the most renowned painter of her time choose her as his model? What became of her? And why does her smile enchant us still? Dianne Hales, author of *La Bella Lingua*, became obsessed with finding the real Mona Lisa on repeated trips to Florence. In *Mona Lisa: A Life Discovered*, she takes readers with her to meet Lisa’s descendants; uncover her family’s long and colorful history; and explore the neighborhoods where she lived as a girl, a wife, and a mother. In the process, we can participate in Lisa’s daily rituals; understand her personal relationships; and see, hear, smell, and taste “her” Florence. Hales brings to life a time poised between the medieval and the modern, a vibrant city bursting into fullest bloom, and a culture that redefined the possibilities of man—and of woman. Mona Lisa is “a readable and affectionate my-search-for-story for art lovers and anyone interested in glorious and gory Florence in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, and in the divine Leonardo in particular.” Hales’s assiduous research has made it possible for us to know Mona Lisa just a bit, enough to wonder if this otherwise ordinary Florentine housewife could ever have imagined her portrait enchanting millions for centuries (USATODAY.com).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Biography, history, and memoir are woven together in Hales's *La Bella Lingua* (2009), a lyrical biography of Lisa Gherardini, the *donna vera* (real woman) captured in Leonardo da Vinci's early sixteenth-century masterpiece, *Mona Lisa*. Hales paints a vivid history of the dramatic, often violent Renaissance Florence in which Gherardini lived: a town populated with scheming politicians, warring religious factions, and artists boasting rock-star popularity. Intertwined with this tale is Gherardini's personal biography as a daughter, a merchant's wife, a devoted mother, and a family matriarch—a story that provides counterpoint to the epic, male-dominated history of the age. The verifiable facts of Gherardini's life are scarce, so Hales leans heavily on "informed imagination," delving deeply into the customs, rituals, and relationships that governed women's lives in Renaissance Italy. Throughout the book, she scours archives, interrogates scholars, and walks the streets of Florence, seeking traces of Gherardini in detail and in spirit. These first-person accounts reveal the author's deep kinship with Gherardini, and her quest endows human subjectivity to one of art history's greatest icons. --Lindsay Bosch --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"I'm enthralled by every page of Dianne Hales's *Mona Lisa*. The mysteries of the painting remain, but through Hales's portraits of the people and her skilled rendering of customs, politics, and daily habits of the time, you come to know the painting in profound new ways. The great pleasure of her prose brings Lisa Gherardini's world to vivid life. Anyone who loves art and Italy—and who doesn't—will adore this book. (Frances Mayes, author of *Under the Tuscan Sun* and *Under Magnolia*)" "This is cultural history that reads like a detective novel as Dianne Hales tracks down the real woman behind one of the world's most famous and enigmatic faces. Expertly sleuthing her way through the treasure troves of archives and palazzos, she offers her own fascinating portrait not just of Lisa Gherardini but also of the vibrant Renaissance world that nurtured both Lisa and Leonardo's painting." (Ross King, author of *Brunelleschi's Dome* and *Leonardo and The Last Supper*) "Biography, history, and memoir are woven together in Hales' lyrical biography of Lisa Gherardini...her quest endows human subjectivity to one of art history's greatest icons." (Booklist) "Engaging...a rich tapestry of family life,

mercantile society, politics, and artistic development...enthralling." (BookPage)"Veteran journalist Dianne Hales shares with us the tumultuous lives of both Gherardini and the artist who immortalized her, and brings us along on the travels of a work of art for which love and esteem have increased markedly over the centuries." (New York Post) "A readable and affectionate my-search-for-story for art lovers and anyone interested in glorious and gory Florence in the 15th- to 16th centuries, and in the divine Leonardo in particular" |Hales' assiduous research has made it possible for us to know Mona Lisa just a bit, enough to wonder if this otherwise ordinary Florentine housewife could ever have imagined her portrait enchanting millions for centuries. (USAToday.com) "Now, thanks to meticulous research, Hales' biography-memoir-history lesson brings to life Lisa Gherardini (1479-1542), the unforgettable face behind Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa. (Fort Worth Star-Telegram)"Combining history, whimsical biography, personal travelogue, and love letter to Italy...an accessible, vivid examination of women's lives in Florence of the period....Entertaining." (Publishers Weekly)"It's a joy to follow Dianne Hales' fascinating exploration into what's behind the world's most famous smile - an enchanting mix of fascinating history and passion-filled memoir." (Susan Van Allen, author of 100 Places in Italy Every Woman Should Go)

Dianne Hales brings Mona Lisa to life in a new study of her life and times. This book is a triumph of research that should put to rest many of the absurd theories of her life and the motivation of Da Vinci in painting her. The reader may well experience both tears and smiles in finally getting to know something concrete about one of the most recognizable icons in human history. Brava Dianne! Salvatore Prisco, Ph.D. Prof. of History, Stevens Institute of Technology

I got this book to assist my 10 year old daughter on a "Faces of History" project she did through our homeschool community (Classical Conversations). It was above her reading level and with some adult content (some just complicated stuff and some regarding sexual relationships of the time - mild content, just not stuff for 10 year olds). So I read sections that pertained to her report and through others to help find more information. My daughter wrote on the main theme that there must have been something special about Lisa Gherardini del Giocondo if: her father would sell off some of his family pride (land) when they had so little left to their claim of nobility/landed gentry to secure her marriage; if her husband married her with no dowry and just a small plot of land worth much less than a proper dowry; if Leonardo chose to paint her portrait while turning down the commissions of royalty. If Leonardo's portrait of her has

captivated people so greatly and for so long. The book is fascinating and I loved the ins and outs of the adventure Dianne Hales takes us on as we discover intimate details of Lisa's life and her time and place in history. It's what some would call "a living book" -such a refreshing break from the boring and dull accounts found in textbooks and most other reference books we could find. I did not read it straight through, but plan to (soon). What I did read, through (at least half of it) was fantastic. If you want information about the most likely woman of the famous portrait, want a great look at life in Florence in the mid 1500s to mid 1600s, or looking for just a good history and travel based read -get this book!

Thank you so much Dianne Hales for this! It gives me more to understand each time I go to Italy, and to Firenze. I highly recommend it to anyone that may travel to Italy along with La Bella Lingua. Because of these books I find much more familiarity as well as curiosity in Italian art and history. Brava!

Very enjoyable book about something shrouded in mystery. We may never know the truth, but this book delved into many facets of a woman's life in the time of Leonardo da Vinci who may or may not be the subject of his famous painting. Dianne Hales is a lover of the Italian language and all things Italian and it is always a pleasure to read what she has written.

Outstanding book! It weaves the lives of Lisa, her husband, and Leonardo da Vinci with the politics and customs of the time and place. A lot of research went into telling this story, and it was well worth the effort. A very enjoyable read.

Fascinating book about what life would have been like for Lisa Gherardini. Marvelous details about a life well lived. Also contains interesting information about both Lisa "Mona Lisa" Gherardini and Leonardo de Vinci. The de medici family is also covered.

A splendid little book. From what little information is available Dr. Hales builds a life - and what a life it is! Such beauty amid the intrigue of Renaissance Italy. Out of such beauty does eternity cast its gaze. I give it five stars.

I enjoyed this book and the speculation about life in Lisa's times. Thanks, too, to Dianne for inserting many Italian phrases. One great disappointment with the book was there were no illustrations. With

so much discussion of art, places in Florence and elsewhere, I expected illustrations to enhance the reading. If I knew there were none, I would have read the book in e-book format.

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