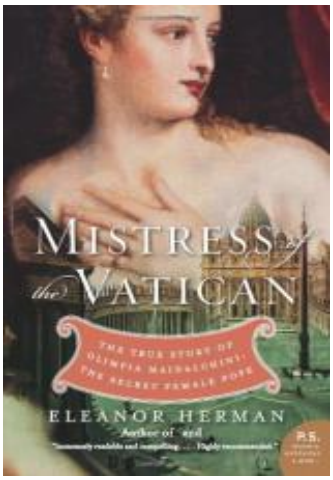
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Mistress of the Vatican

by Eleanor Herman



About the Book

Born in 1591, Olimpia Maidalchini rose from being a poor dowerless girl to governing the most important institution in Europe --- the Catholic Church --- through her brother-in-law and reputed lover, Pope Innocent X. The story of this complex and formidable woman has been forgotten --- until now.

Discussion Guide

1. After reading **Mistress of the Vatican**, has your perception of the Catholic Church changed? If so, how?

2. At age fifteen, Olimpia was almost forced into a convent for life against her will. How do you feel this stamped her personality? What effects did it still have decades later?

3. Do you believe there was a sexual relationship between Gianbattista Pamphili and Olimpia? Why or why not? If so, do you believe it had stopped by the time he was elected pope?

4. Do you feel Pope Innocent was right to turn against Olimpia? Why did he reverse his decision and bring her back to power? Was this the right move? Did the pope truly love her?

5. Olimpia is, admittedly, a flawed heroine. Which of her characteristics do you admire? Which do you dislike? Would you have liked to have been her friend? Why or why not?

6. Do you think Olimpia loved Gianbattista? Do you think she loved her granddaughter Olimpiuccia? How about her children? Her first husband? Her sisters in the convent? Did she really love anybody?

7. If Olimpia had been born in the mid-twentieth century instead of the late sixteenth, what do you think she would have

become? If she had been born in a less misogynistic society, would she have been a nicer person?

8. What differences did you notice between a seventeenth-century conclave and a modern one? Between a seventeenth-century papal funeral and a modern one?

9. Could you describe life in seventeenth-century Rome for the very wealthy? For the very poor? What disasters affected rich and poor alike? What measures did the government take to protect the population?

10. Why do you think Olimpia's riveting story has been forgotten by history? Do you believe that the Church is uncomfortable that it was once governed by a woman?

Author Bio

Eleanor Herman is the *New York Times* bestselling author of SEX WITH KINGS, SEX WITH THE QUEEN, SEX WITH PRESIDENTS and several other works of popular history. She has hosted "Lost Worlds" for The History Channel, "The Madness of Henry VIII" for the National Geographic Channel, and is now filming her second season of "America: Fact vs. Fiction" for The American Heroes Channel.

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