

# Between Papal and Dynastic Power: The Case of Cesare Borgia and the Papacy of Alexander VI

*Entre el poder papal y el dinástico:  
el caso de César Borgia y el papado de Alejandro VI*

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**Abstract:** The analysis of the Borgia Papacy provides fertile ground for the study of papal temporal interests and the attempt of trying to create a secular dynasty. Apart from territorial expansion, this must be inserted within a wider and continuously evolving consolidation of traditional municipal autonomies within the context of a Renaissance papal monarchy. This can be analysed through the political project of Cesare Borgia in the Romagna and the implications this had on papal power, while expanding on whether it developed simultaneously with it, case in point being the relationship between Cesare and his father. Linked to all this lies the question of whether it is valid to speak of the Borgia Papacy as a watershed when it comes to the temporal aspirations of the Renaissance Church.

**Keywords:** Cesare Borgia. Alexander VI. Papal States. House of Borgia. Romagna. Italian Wars

**Resumen:** El análisis del papado de los Borgia ofrece un terreno fértil para el estudio de los intereses temporales del papado y del intento de establecer una dinastía secular. Más allá de la expansión territorial, este fenómeno debe enmarcarse en un proceso más amplio y en constante evolución de consolidación de las autonomías municipales tradicionales dentro del contexto de una monarquía papal renacentista. Esto puede analizarse a través del proyecto político de César Borgia en la Romaña y las implicaciones que dicho proyecto tuvo sobre el poder papal, profundizando en si se desarrolló de manera simultánea con este, siendo un ejemplo paradigmático la relación entre César y su padre. Vinculada a toda esta problemática se encuentra la cuestión de si resulta válido hablar del papado de los Borgia como un punto de inflexión en lo que respecta a las aspiraciones temporales de la Iglesia del Renacimiento.

**Palabras clave:** César Borgia. Alejandro VI. Estados Pontificios. Casa Borgia. Romaña. Guerras de Italia

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## INTRODUCTION

The Papal States were described by the Renaissance historian Jakob Burckhardt as 'a thorough anomaly among the powers of Italy'<sup>1</sup>. This 'anomaly' comes out very clearly when speaking of its distinctive and complex political composition, which is the context in which this study must be collocated. Another definition used to describe the Papal States was that of Paolo Prodi who termed it a 'two-faced Janus'<sup>2</sup>. This article will analyse the political development of the Renaissance Papal States by taking into consideration the implications the theme of 'dynasty' held on papal power, a point of view which, as will be discussed, is most valid when studying the Renaissance Papacy, and which provides insight into some of its significant attributes.

The papacy of Alexander VI (1492-1503) provides fertile ground for such an analysis especially because of the political endeavours which became so tightly connected to the fortunes of the Borgia family and which eventually became so clearly demonstrated in the creation of Cesare Borgia's Duchy of Romagna. The article will thus underline how the papacy's bifrontal nature can rightly be discussed from this perspective, especially by looking at the links which existed between the pope's family, in this case, the Borgias, and papal power. Furthermore, this is naturally connected to the relations between the papacy and the various subjects of its temporal possessions, most notably the baronial Roman families and the 'tyrannies' held by the signorial vicars. Machiavelli arrived to write that the pontiffs 'have states, and do not defend them; and have subjects, and do not rule them'<sup>3</sup>. This aspect will mostly be discussed by analysing Cesare's political and military conquests, and what effect, if any, these left on papal power, and whether they developed simultaneously or sometimes converged with it.

## I. DEFINING THE RENAISSANCE PAPAL MONARCHY

The starting point of this study would lay on the fact that the evolution of the 'monarchic' nature of the Renaissance Papacy cannot be isolated from the preceding period that had seen the great destabilising effect which the conciliarist movement had generated. This had prompted the papacy to go above the influence of the other European powers, while placing itself within a system of inter-state relations that ought to provide equilibrium. Papal primacy had successively

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<sup>1</sup> Burckhardt, 1937, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Prodi, 1982, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> All translations are of the author. Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, p. 40.

developed into the canonical term of *plenitudo potestatis*<sup>4</sup> and after having bewildered the imperial sphere, it reached its ultimate in the *Unam Sanctam* (1302) of Boniface VIII, albeit it discovered the resistance of the emerging national monarchies. This would be the real effect of the *schiaffo di Anagni*, a *schiaffo* which can be more correctly seen in the light of the humiliation of the authority and person of Boniface VIII, the repercussions of which were demonstrated in the transfer of the Roman Curia to Avignon<sup>5</sup>.

The Avignon ‘captivity’ was certainly a heavy moral blow to the Roman Papacy, yet it wouldn’t be correct to see this period as a solely ‘negative’ experience when it came to papal pretensions of power. The papacy still looked towards its interests in Italy embodied in Guelphism which by this point had taken the identity of Papal-Angevin dominium against the Ghibelline side headed by the Visconti<sup>6</sup>. The cardinal Bertrand du Pouget, as Papal legate, managed to obtain the total submission of important cities along the Via Emilia, most notably Bologna in 1327, which was placed under the direct governance of the pope. The city’s *signoria* became one of the most rigorous of the time, and this came at the expense of the communal structures of the city. Yet this was no permanent move since it was lost to the Ghibelline faction seven years later, demonstrating the temporary nature of such enterprises<sup>7</sup>.

All this can thus be interpreted within the context of the personal signorial regime that was becoming increasingly frequent, and it is therefore no wonder that another papal legate, Gil de Albornoz introduced new elements which mirrored those of the *signori*, arriving to take on the title himself. Gil de Albornoz consequently provided a model for future papal policy through his tighter dominion over the areas, which would become the approach later adopted by the papacy in the following century, in a way compared to the military and financial projects that mirrored those adopted by the rising national monarchies<sup>8</sup>. At the same time, Albornoz’s time as legate equally manifested that the power of the *tiranni* in certain areas remained absolute, also owed to the lack of familiarity of the Avignon popes with the Italian spread of these signorial regimes, whereas the local elites continued to be excluded from the growth of the papacy’s territorial authority and taxation methods<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> On these canonical terms see the works of Ullmann, 1949; Pennington, 1976; Paravicini Bagliani, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> For the various themes related to the *Schiaffo di Anagni* see Proscio, 2023. For more insight into the context of the Avignon Papacy see Guillemain, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Chittolini, 2012, p. 471.

<sup>7</sup> Partner, 1972, pp. 311-326; Jamme, 2012, pp. 255-290.

<sup>8</sup> Jamme, 2011, pp. 37-80.

<sup>9</sup> Carocci, 2012, p. 71. For the terms *signori* and *tiranni* see Kohl, 2010, pp. 61-74. For a contextualised overview of ‘tyranny’ in Italy see Zorzi, 2013, pp. 11-36.



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This state of affairs, followed by the turbulent situation of the Great Western Schism, was succeeded by the papacy's objective in underlining its supremacy and maintaining its autonomy from exterior political influence. This must be likewise collocated in the wider context of the rise of the 'Prince' at the head of the regional state and the creation of efficient administrative organization which has been recognized as that which constitutes the 'Renaissance state'. This points to the fact that as illustrated by Paul Richard and Paolo Prodi, the notion of 'papal monarchy' is mostly valid when speaking of it in relation to the political developments of the Papal State as it entered the course of the 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>10</sup>. When the Council of Constance in 1417 elected Oddone Colonna as Pope Martin V, marking the end of the schism, this point in time is conventionally used to describe the starting point or *terminus a quo* of the Renaissance Papacy<sup>11</sup>.

The development of a papal monarchy implied that the pontiff ought to rule without the prerogatives of conciliarism. This was vividly illustrated in the bull of Pius II, *Execrabilis* which condemned any recourse to the conciliarist movement and the prerogatives it could claim in limiting papal resolutions<sup>12</sup>. Papal supremacy in fact unleashed a vigorous attack on any form of constitutionalism as clearly illustrated in Juan de Torquemada's *Summa de Ecclesia*<sup>13</sup>. This theory of papal power was developed and expressed in the juridical reflection produced by the papalist Andrea Barbazza who maintained that the Sacred College did not stand as an institutional counterbalance to the *plenitudo potestatis* which was only detained by the pope. This meant that the consensus of the cardinals was not required for the pope to enact canonically legitimate dispositions<sup>14</sup>.

By the time of Sixtus IV, the influence of the cardinalate elite had greatly been minimized, and the pope became ever-more dependent on a small and restricted circle of counsellors. Out of the usual five members of the so-called *palatini*, just one or two would be cardinals, one of which would have been a cardinal-nephew<sup>15</sup>. The curia, apart from its growth in numbers, also started to undergo progressive Italianisation, something which led to the appearance of the 'cardinal-princes'. Exponents of the Italian noble dynasties, they could rightly be described as more princes than cardinals and were thus less intent on confronting the papacy through the college. This likewise rendered the college avenue of

<sup>10</sup> Richard, 1924, pp. 413-456, Prodi, 1982, pp. 15-40.

<sup>11</sup> Pellegrini, 2010, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Ascheri, 2007, pp. 76-77.

<sup>13</sup> Torquemada, *Summa de Ecclesia*.

<sup>14</sup> See Ullmann, 1976, pp. 3-35.

<sup>15</sup> Pellegrini, 2010, pp. 89-90.

patronage, with factional collisions over political questions involving the familiar and stately ambitions that they came to represent<sup>16</sup>.

## 2. THE 'FAMILIAR' ASPECT OF THE RENAISSANCE PAPACY

The trend of the Italianisation of the curia can be noticed in the high proportion of Italian appointed cardinals during the time of Sixtus IV and Innocent VIII<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, all but two popes elected in the 15<sup>th</sup> century from Martin V were Italian, with the two notable exceptions being the Borgia popes. This further confirms how their ascension to the papacy was perceived as a rupture to the established state of events. The Italianisation of the curia was a considerable step in the rooting of the papacy in the Italian peninsula. Given the closer affinity by the assimilation of Italian dynasties and curial positions, the government of the papacy became an actual 'monarchical' government with a circumambient court<sup>18</sup>. The secular policy of this court can also be noticed in the fact that nuncios were starting to serve more frequently as ambassadors. By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, various papal resident nuncios had been established among the various courts of Europe<sup>19</sup>. The papacy of Alexander VI is likewise revealing of this state of affairs. Although the Borgias were detested because of their Spanish origins<sup>20</sup>, Alexander himself pointed out that they were not necessarily bound to Spain, but they could operate within the papal hierarchy as any other Italian dynasty while attracted by the prospects of strengthening the temporal interests of the Roman Church. This was likewise seen in the creation of a strong 'Borgia-faction' in the college, which was not necessarily decided by nation but composed of those who were either relatives or clients of the Borgias<sup>21</sup>. Alexander pointed this out to the Venetian ambassador Giustinian in October 1502:

<sup>16</sup> Lazzarini, 2010, pp. 72-74.

<sup>17</sup> Notice that more than half of the appointed cardinals during the time of Sixtus IV were Italian, whereas of the mere 8 created by Innocent VIII 6 were Italians. See Miranda, *Consistories for the creation of Cardinals: 15th Century (1394-1503)*.

<sup>18</sup> Prodi, 1982, pp. 69, 103.

<sup>19</sup> For the concept of the 'resident ambassador' see Fletcher, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> This can be noted in the degrading term of *marrano* used against Alexander VI by his opponents, voicing Italian antipathy towards Spaniards. See Hillgarth, 2000, p. 236.

<sup>21</sup> Visceglia, 2017, p. 93. Seeing the list of cardinals appointed in the consistories of 1500, this is evident in the Spanish candidates elevated to the cardinalate, owed to their kinship to the Borgias mainly Pedro Luis de Borja Lanzol and Francisco de Borja. At the same time, the agreement with the French (following the creation of George d'Amboise in 1498), saw Amanieu d'Albert, brother-in-law of Cesare, gain a cardinal's hat, along with Antonio Trivulzio, nephew of the leading condottiere in the service of Louis XII, Gian Giacomo Trivulzo. See Miranda, *Consistories for the creation of Cardinals: 15th Century (1394-1503)*.

Despite being Spanish, and in some respect, we show favour towards France, we are Italian, our foundation is in Italy, and we should learn to live here like our duke<sup>22</sup>.

The duplex nature of this whole ecclesiastical arrangement, particularly when it came to 'cardinal-princes' was described by Giorgio Chittolini as a 'permeability' of the Church<sup>23</sup>. What this meant was that it became intersected with the lay sphere in so much as a regional state and thus connected to the Italian political chessboard in diverse aspects ranging from diplomatic relations to military and financial spheres. As opposed to the case of the rest of Europe, the effect of the post-conciliar situation in Italy saw the convergence of both Rome and the civil powers consisting of the regional states and the noble dynasties<sup>24</sup>. As Lorenzo de' Medici would write to his son Giovanni upon his elevation to the cardinalate, *il Magnifico* reminded his son that as a cardinal, he ought not forget to 'help the city and the house'<sup>25</sup>. The elevation to the cardinalate of Giovanni, who would later become Leo X had in fact signalled the crowning of Lorenzo's vigorous secular policy reached through the apex of the ecclesiastical sphere<sup>26</sup>. This became then realised by Machiavelli when he wrote *The Prince* during Leo's papacy. Machiavelli was perceiving the ties between the Roman Papacy and Florentine interests which Lorenzo had recognized and perceived the opportune moment for creating a secular *patria*<sup>27</sup> capable of continuing a secular policy between both states. For Machiavelli, this would have ennobled his Florentine *patria* and Italy by expelling the invading armies<sup>28</sup>. This demonstrates the humanistic nature of Machiavelli's political reflection, in which Cesare had a significant role as will be seen in some examples which will be discussed.

Going back to a century earlier, as the case of Martin V had demonstrated, the 'starting point' of the Renaissance Papacy, kinship ties and patterns of clientelism which catered individual ambitions provided favourable conditions for an effectual *instrumentum regni*<sup>29</sup>. The ties to the Colonna family were naturally an important asset to the exercise of Martin V's successes in maintaining control, yet his death demonstrated the difficulty in ensuring this stability especially given that this was organically linked to relations between the pope's family and those

<sup>22</sup> Giustinian, *Dispacci*, I, pp. 150-151.

<sup>23</sup> Lazzarini, 2010, pp. 67-68.

<sup>24</sup> Chittolini, 2012, p. 476.

<sup>25</sup> Walter, 2005, p. 264.

<sup>26</sup> Fubini, 1995, p. 198.

<sup>27</sup> For the definition of *patria*, see that given by Hay, 2004, pp. 203-216.

<sup>28</sup> Landon, 2005, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Pellegrini, 2010, p. 148.

elites which dominated the territory<sup>30</sup>. This state of events also explains the pattern of nepotism, which became a symbol of the Renaissance Papacy, and which has come to be termed *grande nepotismo* in order to differentiate it from the already existing *nepotismo ecclesiastico*<sup>31</sup>. The *grande nepotismo* initiated by the first Borgia pope Callixtus III retains its name for the fact that it included a more compound system which introduced lay relatives along with the ecclesiastical ones to the offices of the State of the Church. Along with the probable prospects of an ecclesiastical relative to become pope, the policy also came to include lay relatives that could likewise be promoted to become members of the Italian or European nobility<sup>32</sup>.

Along with the creation of one of his nephews, Rodrigo (later Alexander VI) as a cardinal in 1456, under Callixtus III this policy was mostly noticeable in the creation of his other nephew Pedro Luis as castellan of Castel Sant'Angelo and Captain General of the Papal Armies. Such a pivotal position which guaranteed the security of the pope's person as guardian of his stronghold meant that the need for persons of high trust was necessary. This pattern of state-building thus came to be imitated by successive popes, especially because of the main challenge of the papacy which proved to be that of succession. After all, as the general European context was demonstrating, both ecclesiastical administrative competence and lay military aid were perquisite<sup>33</sup>. Alexander VI would make use of such measures to strengthen the Church through his children. In the case of the Borgias, the Spanish heritage once again generated great hostility by the Italian locally-rooted powers who saw in the newcomers a threat to the traditional state of affairs<sup>34</sup>. The Ferrarese ambassador, to give an example, expressed the typical contemporary exaggeration upon the conferment of the archiepiscopal status of Valencia upon Cesare in 1492, stating that 'not even ten papacies would suffice to satisfy all this kinship'<sup>35</sup>.

This is not something which can merely be attributed to nepotistic desire but reflects the peculiarity of succession in the papal monarchy, and the almost inseparable and interdependent ties between *consorteria* and papal power<sup>36</sup>. When it came to succession, the lack of a continuous nature was deemed by Machiavelli as a factor of instability for the Italian political situation, and even

<sup>30</sup> Carocci, 2012, p. 81.

<sup>31</sup> Pellegrini, 2010, p. 172.

<sup>32</sup> Pellegrini, 2010, p. 172.

<sup>33</sup> Pellegrini, 2010, pp. 176-177.

<sup>34</sup> See the explanation given by Villarroel González, 2005, p.16.

<sup>35</sup> Gregorovius, *Lucrezia Borgia*, p. 47.

<sup>36</sup> For the notion of *consorteria* see Kent, 1977, p. 6.



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more because the Church was neither 'able to occupy the whole of Italy, nor has allowed anyone else to occupy it'<sup>37</sup>. Furthermore, for the *signori* and barons, the 'discontinuous' nature of the Church hierarchy was an advantageous aspect from which they could extract benefit for their own positions. They could easily expect to see their fortunes change with the death of the pope in power, since it was not a constant for successive popes to carry on the strategies of their predecessors<sup>38</sup>.

### 3. HOW THE START OF THE ITALIAN WARS PROVIDED A WATERSHED FOR PAPAL TEMPORAL ASPIRATIONS

The 'discontinuous' aspect of the papacy sheds light on the problematic nature of trying to with present a linear evolution of power in a papal-monarchy. For example, Innocent VIII had a different approach to the papacy than the one taken over by the typical 'Renaissance' popes. Following the Conspiracy of the Barons (1485-1486) and the bellicose actions of Giuliano della Rovere, Innocent found in Lorenzo de' Medici the means which allowed him to escape his difficult position. He thus adhered to the equilibrium policy and finally the peace with Naples which saw the papacy renounce a set of prerogatives from the side of the Camera Apostolica over the Neapolitan crown<sup>39</sup>. Although this would be the starting point of the papacy of Alexander, attracted by the prospects of ties to Naples, things would become even more intricate due to the transaction of Cerveri and Anguillara to Virginio Orsini, involving Piero de' Medici and Ferrante of Naples. Alexander in fact accused both of plotting to strengthen the Roman barons in order to 'put pressure on the Holy See and us to bend us to their will'<sup>40</sup>.

The Borgia policy cannot thus be simply reduced to the 'carnal desire' to exalt the family. This is already visible in contemporary writings such as Guicciardini, who wrote that in so much as pope, Alexander VI could turn his attention to 'exalt in any way his children'<sup>41</sup>. It is true that this would not only have allowed for the creation of a Borgia state, but it would have simultaneously allowed for the re-assertion of papal authority<sup>42</sup>. Nevertheless, as will be argued, this was likewise determined by the new state of events which characterized Alexander

<sup>37</sup> Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, p. 46.

<sup>38</sup> Carocci, 2012, p. 81.

<sup>39</sup> Pellegrini, 2010, pp. 223-225.

<sup>40</sup> Shaw, 2015 pp. 235-236.

<sup>41</sup> Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Mallett, 1987, p. 178.



VI's papacy, and which was that of the involvement of the European national monarchies, widening the horizons of papal temporal aspirations.

Following the Treaty of Lodi of 1454, the Italian peninsula had become the theatre of a 'calculated and difficult political scheming' of the European states<sup>43</sup>. The relative peace between the powers of Italy had established borders which were only seriously altered 40 years later. Yet this was a precarious peace and in the Papal States this was visible in the various spheres of influence and the several territories which gravitated towards other powers. Within the Papal States themselves, the rest of the Italian powers did not desist from affirming their 'protection' over towns and *signori* which they claimed as their 'supporters' or 'associates'<sup>44</sup>. This state of events comes out clearly in the papacy of Sixtus IV. The pope aspired for his nephew Girolamo Riario the lordship of Imola, a city from the State of the Church, which he received for the price of 40,000 florins from the Sforzas, along with the marriage of Girolamo with the illegitimate daughter of the Duke of Milan Galeazzo Maria, Caterina Sforza. By doing so, the pope was attempting to reinforce both the temporal State of the Church and insert his nephew within the circle of local powers, and the city of Forlì would in fact be added to Girolamo's lordship some years later<sup>45</sup>. But this came to converge with Florentine interests, case in point being Faenza, which although its Manfredi rulers were vassals of the Church, they were also tributaries to the Medici<sup>46</sup>. The situation saw the convergence of interests between the aspirations of Girolamo in the Romagna and its hindrance from the side of Lorenzo de' Medici, setting the stage for the conspiracy of 1478<sup>47</sup>.

The wider context of such a situation was described by Riccardo Fubini as 'a conflictual subsystem within the broader system of European powers'<sup>48</sup>. With the descent of Charles VIII in 1494 to assert his claims on the Neapolitan throne, the turning point stood in the fact that Italy now became the battleground of France, Spain and the Empire, superseding the 'Italian' policy exercised by Lorenzo later hailed as *l'ago della bilancia*<sup>49</sup>. Even if the Italian powers could coalize to counter the French army at the Battle of Fornovo (1495), the politically acute minds realised that such an army had managed to march south into Italy virtually

<sup>43</sup> Lazzarini, 2010, p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> Carocci, 2012, p. 76.

<sup>45</sup> Cardini, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Cardini, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> See Martines, 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Fubini, 1994, p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> Walter, 2005, p. 191.



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unopposed and retreat in orderly fashion<sup>50</sup>. This would indeed provide a watershed in the relationship between the papacy and the lords and the barons. With the Italian peninsula becoming a theatre of conflict between the European powers, rendering the peninsula a vast battleground, the aspirations of the popes and their kins were given a broader scope. Although the Italian peninsula continued to be a theatre of various influences, claims, and alliances, it marked a turning point from the 15<sup>th</sup> century when papal pretensions could easily appear to upset the *quiete d'Italia* as the case of Sixtus IV had demonstrated.

The vast scope of the Italian Wars and the involvement of the European powers on deciding the fate of Naples and Milan provided considerable occasions for the popes to advance their temporal interests<sup>51</sup>. And it is no coincidence that the first to do so on such a noticeable scale was Alexander VI. The papacy now had to thread within this political situation and Alexander VI first looked to Spain which aided him during the French invasion of 1494, intent on reinforcing its position in Italy<sup>52</sup>. It was in fact towards Spain and Naples that Alexander first looked to tie his children. His son Juan was made Duke of Gandia and in 1496 became Captain General of the Papal Armies. The Orsini were targeted due to their desertion of the pope during the French invasion and their control of the Cibo castles rendered them even more the natural target for making way for his son. Yet the Duke of Gandia's attack resulted in a deceive defeat after attempting to lay siege to Bracciano<sup>53</sup>. The pope realised that his projects had to wait, but hopes in the duke were shattered when he was found stabbed to death in the Tiber in 1497<sup>54</sup>. Despite the rumors of fratricide from the side of Cesare, the general situation points to a very probable hand of the Orsini who would have looked in the pope's son the target of their *vendetta* and the elimination of the one who was supposed to take their estates<sup>55</sup>. At the same time, it was known that despite having been elevated to the cardinalate back in 1493, Cesare had demonstrated that his inclinations laid in the lay sphere, and independently of his role in the murder, this proved to be a favourable turn of events for him<sup>56</sup>. In order to understand the Borgia territorial outlook, it is necessary to give an overall picture of the general situation of the Papal States.

<sup>50</sup> Mallett and Shaw, 2014, pp. 31-32.

<sup>51</sup> Shaw, 2015, p. 228.

<sup>52</sup> For the relations between Alexander VI and his native Spain see Fernández de Córdova, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Burchard, *Diarium*, II, p. 353.

<sup>54</sup> Burchard, *Diarium*, II, pp. 387-390.

<sup>55</sup> Mallett, 1987, pp. 165-166.

<sup>56</sup> See for example the account of Gianandrea Boccaccio from 1493 in Gregorovius, *Lucrezia Borgia*, p. 55. For the passing of Cesare to the secular sphere see Pellegrini, 2005, pp. 47-72.

#### 4. THE 'STATES' AND 'SUBJECTS' OF THE CHURCH

The communes and castra of the State of the Church were divided by the papal jurists into two; *mediate* and *immediate subiecte*<sup>57</sup>. The first referred to those territories which had been conceded in the feudal or vicariate manner, which continued to be governed by the *signori* such as the Montefeltro, who ruled Urbino and the Malatesta of Rimini. The second referred to the other territories which fell under the direct governance of Rome, although the cases of Bologna and Perugia, which were classified as such, show that the agreements between the State of the Church and the commune had been contracted in bilateral manners<sup>58</sup>. This suggests that the papacy's control over its territories *immediate subiecte* could likewise vary from place to place according to the economic and military might of the city in question which had a considerable effect on the way that the city was governed. A city such as Bologna was capable of resisting Papal lordship, especially since, apart from its size, the local *signori* still retained a free hand in controlling the political structures of the communal regime and the administration of finance. A local *signore* could thus operate and take advantage of the situation in a manner that the State of the Church could not. By holding *merum et mixtum imperium*, through the payment of the annual census which gave them the authority to collect the taxes due to the Church, they could benefit from their position by also controlling political and juridical institutions<sup>59</sup>.

The territory of the Romagna could be described as the most 'ecclesiastical' of the *patrimonium*. The policy of Rudolf of Habsburg in 1278 had in fact included a last measure of marginal effectiveness in the *regnum* which saw him relinquish any formal claims upon the Romagna<sup>60</sup>. Yet despite the existence of the apostolic vicariates and the payment of an annual census which sanctioned their status, some vicars arrived to even refrain from doing so and became thus usurpers in the legal sense<sup>61</sup>. Furthermore, by the 1480s, at the wake of collapse of civil government in the region, particularly in cities such as Imola and Forlì, violent conflict characterized the ties between lords and the local elites, leading to further instability<sup>62</sup>. The importance of the payment of the census can also be

<sup>57</sup> See Carocci, 2010, pp. 84, 93.

<sup>58</sup> Partner, 1979, pp. 230-243.

<sup>59</sup> Partner, 1979, pp. 252-253.

<sup>60</sup> Scott, 2012, p. 34.

<sup>61</sup> Caravale, 1978; see also Carocci, 1996, 151-224.

<sup>62</sup> Larner, 1972, pp. 40-41.



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noticed in the emphasis placed on the vicars from the side of the papacy, the failure of which could legally be used to remove them from their vicariates<sup>63</sup>.

Thus, the difference between the *de iure* clauses which established that the apostolic vicars represented papal authority, to the *de facto* reality of them operating as autonomous *signori* or *tiranni*, the pope's ability to enforce his claims depended on his military and political standing. The Renaissance Papacy noticed that the lords could stand for the interests of the Church only temporarily. All this arrangement thus amounted to a financial and political instrument which rendered it practically impossible for the Church to create a regional state which was based on 'national' connotations. In the summer of 1497, while Cardinal Juan de Borja Lanzol the Younger was sent to test the moral authority of the pope in Umbria, he wrote to the pope of the situation in the following words: 'It is necessary that provisions of armed men be sent against these demons that do not flee to holy water'<sup>64</sup>. This suggests how military power was likewise a necessary tool for the state-building policy of the papacy.

Furthermore, other Italian states continued to assert papal *signori* as their dependents, and this would likewise be the case for the Roman baronial families, a strong aristocracy and an equally strong barrier against centralization, one which amounted to a state that Alexander VI would come to lament as of 'torment'<sup>65</sup>. The baronial families provided great contributions in warfare since many of them were men of arms, and by the beginning of the Renaissance Papacy they had seized vast properties in the Roman countryside<sup>66</sup>. These all had *castelli*, far-reaching estates, and jurisdiction over their tenants and vassals. Nevertheless, they differed from the *signori* further north, for even if their power could match any one to be found in the Romagna, they did not form a *stato* in any technical sense<sup>67</sup>. Nor could they be, in any way, described as dependent on the papacy, for they did not even aim at gaining papal vicariates, and were likewise excluded from the offices of the Papal States. The complexity of this lies in the fact that as was vividly illustrated by Christine Shaw, the baronial families especially through their estates in the *campagna* such as Bracciano, belonging to the Orsini, were 'Roman but not papal'<sup>68</sup>. Shaw also demonstrated how it was through 'money, marriage and force, rather than papal grant' that the Roman families arrived to

<sup>63</sup> Jones, 1974, pp. 257, 260.

<sup>64</sup> Baron Corvo, *Chronicles*, p. 146.

<sup>65</sup> Carocci, 2012, p. 82.

<sup>66</sup> See Mallett, 1987, p. 42.

<sup>67</sup> Shaw, 2009, p. 101.

<sup>68</sup> Shaw, 2009, pp. 101-102, 106.

control their vast estates, and this likewise sheds light on the locally rooted nature of their power and influence for they were not dependent on papal goodwill for maintaining them<sup>69</sup>.

Moreover, they held great titles which were to be found in their estates within the Kingdom of Naples. But although there were no jurisdictional ties between them, the influence the barons wielded through their landed and patronage power meant that all popes had to come to terms with them. Given that they had a long tradition of serving as *condottieri*, even when serving under the papal banner, this was not decided by 'obligation' but by the simple reason that they were in a state of *condotta*, which could equally be provided by any other power<sup>70</sup>. In fact, if their estates were at stake, they would willingly take *condotte* from enemies of the pope. For example, following the descent of Charles VIII, Virginio Orsini was caught fighting for Alfonso of Naples. He was then released by the French king and opted to accept command from him rather than the League of Venice sanctioned by the pope. Virginio would have opted to throw his lot with the French, hoping that he would recover his Neapolitan possessions of Tagliacozzo and Albi<sup>71</sup>. Although Virginio wrote a letter to the pope justifying his actions, the pope responded by accusing the condottiere of rebellion and sought to create a territorial base for his son the Duke of Gandia at the expense of Orsini territories<sup>72</sup>. As seen, this project had to be postponed until one arrives to the 'secularization' of Cesare. Yet once again, the papal shift of policy towards France also meant that the Orsini were given *condotte* in Cesare's army. As the long Guelph tradition of the Orsini meant that it was much more plausible for them than the Colonna to provide their allegiance to the papacy, they were likewise connected to the powers of Venice and France<sup>73</sup>. As will be seen, this became mostly reflected when it came to the relationship between Cesare and his father at a later stage.

## 5. THE CONQUESTS OF CESARE BORGIA: A POLICY OF PACTS

The political experiences of Cesare Borgia have long provided a terrain for analysis which from contemporary times, did not fall short of quasi-legendary

<sup>69</sup> Shaw, 2009, pp. 103-104.

<sup>70</sup> For the figure of the condottiere see Mallet, 1988.

<sup>71</sup> Shaw, 2015, p. 140.

<sup>72</sup> See Camilli, 2013.

<sup>73</sup> Shaw, 2015, p. 235.



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status<sup>74</sup>. Even in more modern reflections, such as the important and rich contribution of Gustavo Sacerdote, there laid the propulsion to present the Borgia policy as gravitating towards the creation of a sort of Italic *regnum* of 'national' connotations<sup>75</sup>. Recent studies have drifted away from this view, and Cesare's experience demonstrates how it can neither be separated from the general context of the times, nor reduced to the situation or patterns of the period which might appear *prima facie*<sup>76</sup>. As already explained, the Romagna was truly an ecclesiastical domain and the labyrinthine situation was sometimes even further complicated by the actions of previous popes such as the case of Sixtus IV had demonstrated. And yet one also notices that the Romagna did not become a target of Borgia policy until seven years after the ascension of Alexander VI. Just like Callixtus III had originally looked towards Naples for his nephew, so did Cesare originally intend on marrying into the House of Naples, which furthermore points out towards an area outside of the *Patrimonium*. Lucrezia's second marriage, after her first one with a Sforza, was linked to Naples due to her union with the Duke of Bisceglie<sup>77</sup>. Cesare was likewise intent on marrying Charlotte of Naples, daughter of King Federigo, and the influence of King Louis XII over Charlotte, who was residing in France, was a significant cause for Alexander's approach of the French king. Louis likewise needed to annul his marriage with Joan de Valois in order to marry Anne of Brittany and obtain the duchy. As the marriage prospect with Naples fell apart, the Borgia attention shifted north, where Louis's claims over Milan, 'the key to Italy', would certainly be of convenient assistance due to the evolving state of events<sup>78</sup>.

The French involvement shows that the watershed in the papacy of Alexander VI mainly lies in the wider context of the Italian Wars, which provided a broader spectrum for papal aspirations<sup>79</sup>. Such a policy is easily noticeable in the diplomatic field, for ambitions in the Romagna, within the context of the political chessboard of Italy, were also dependent on the good will of Venice, equally interested in the region. The Venetian ambassador Girolamo Donate once told Alexander: 'Your Holiness, show me the donation of the Patrimony of Saint Peter and on the other side will be found the concession of the Adriatic Sea to the

<sup>74</sup> See for example a reconsideration of Cesare's example in *The Prince* in Najemy, 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Sacerdote, 1950.

<sup>76</sup> For an example of a more recent evaluation see Bonvini Mazzanti and Miretti, 2003.

<sup>77</sup> The fortunes of Lucrezia were so tightly connected to her family's that the Duke of Bisceglie's death in 1500 has been seen as the elimination of an inconvenience due to the new connections of the Borgias with France. For the murder see Burchard, *Diarium*, III, pp. 72-73. For other speculations related to the murder see Mallett, 1987, pp. 185-188.

<sup>78</sup> Mallett, 1987, pp. 176-177.

<sup>79</sup> See Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, pp. 23-24.

Venetians'<sup>80</sup>. During his mission to Venice in September 1499, Cardinal Juan de Borja Lanzol moved forward the request for Venice to refrain from aiding or offering protection to the cities of the Romagna<sup>81</sup>. The reply by Venice is equally insightful to the Franco-Venetian scheme of targeting the Sforzas, which is the starting point of the Borgia enterprise. In fact, Cardinal Borgia was informed that the Venetians gave the go-ahead for the cities of Imola and Forlì, held by Caterina Sforza as regent for her son, and Pesaro ruled by Giovanni Sforza. Regarding Faenza and Rimini however, which the cardinal had made mention of, the Venetian response was that 'it cannot permit that the pope acquires; but with regard to the other places, it will not move any interdiction'<sup>82</sup>. This would now allow Alexander to emphasise a legitimate policy of *recuperatio* which comes out very clearly in his excommunication of the lords on the grounds that they had failed to pay their annual census to the Apostolic Chamber, while declaring their titles forfeit<sup>83</sup>.

This is the context in which Cesare's starting point of his *impresa* must be collocated, sanctioned by the approval of France and Venice. The agreement of 1498 between Louis XII and Alexander VI had seen the investment of Cesare as Duke of Valentinois, providing him also with Charlotte d'Albret as his bride with the marriage taking place in May 1499. The dukedom alone provided him with a revenue of 20000 francs, but Louis also undertook to provide him with an equal sum from the royal treasury as subsidy as well as the payment of 100 lances<sup>84</sup>. Burchard also made mention of a sum of 45000 ducats lent to the pope for the military enterprise and that the Duke of Valence received the sum in the name of the Roman Church<sup>85</sup>. This connection proved to be a valuable coverage but at the same time it brought with it the obligations owed to the king in so much as *Caesar de Francia*<sup>86</sup>. In fact, following the investment of Cesare of the vicariate of Imola, he signed as *regius generalis locumtenens*<sup>87</sup>. From this point onwards, the pope confessed to be 'all French'<sup>88</sup>, and more than anything else, Alexander was mostly allured by the possibility of enlarging his son and inserting him within the

<sup>80</sup> Prodi, 1982, pp. 31-32.

<sup>81</sup> Malipiero, *Annali veneti*, p. 564.

<sup>82</sup> Malipiero, *Annali veneti*, pp. 564-565.

<sup>83</sup> Burchard, *Diarium*, II, p. 570.

<sup>84</sup> Péliissier, *Sopra alcuni documenti*, p. 37.

<sup>85</sup> Burchard, *Diarium*, II, pp. 570-571.

<sup>86</sup> Alvisi, 1878, p. 92.

<sup>87</sup> Alvisi, 1878, p. 91.

<sup>88</sup> Sanuto, *I Diarii*, II, p. 826.



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Romagna.<sup>89</sup> It was in fact the marriage agreement that brought together Alexander and the French king rather than an official alliance, and the king expressed his desire that Cesare and his allies would provide him with assistance to take Milan and Naples<sup>90</sup>. As such, following Cesare's participation in the conquest of Milan, he was given at his disposal a force of 300 lances commanded by Yves d'Alègre and a body of over 4000 infantry consisting of Gascons and Swiss<sup>91</sup>.

After conquering the cities of the Romagna, some cases of which will be discussed, Cesare reached Bologna the territory of which, particularly Castel Bolognese he aimed at controlling for the consolidation of his conquest of Faenza. At this point, Cesare was no longer dependent on French troops, yet he did not want to break his connections with France, whereas Louis XII was still intent on maintaining the pope on his side given that the Neapolitan question was not yet resolved<sup>92</sup>. Louis knew that Bologna was the second largest city of the Papal States, but unwilling to see Cesare's incorporation of the city, he maintained that Giovanni Bentivoglio was under his protection<sup>93</sup>. At the same time, the Orsini captains under Cesare's *condotta* also found themselves in a delicate situation due to Cesare setting his sights on one of their long-time Guelph allies. The situation was concluded with the surrendering of Castel Bolognese to Cesare. This point in time demonstrated that Cesare's limit as Captain General of the Church had been reached, and his mission completed. This explains the subsequent penetration into Tuscany. His *condottieri* had their own reasons for loathing Florence especially Vitellozzo Vitelli, whose brother had been executed by the Republic, whereas the Orsini were partisans of the Medici. Cesare must have known that the conquest of Florence was not feasible, but this did not desist him from gaining a *condotta* from the panicked city<sup>94</sup>. Before leaving Tuscany, Cesare laid siege to Piombino, whose ruler Jacopo d'Appiano did not fall under the French king's protection<sup>95</sup>. The various spheres of influence demonstrate how Cesare's conquests can mostly be described as a policy of pacts aimed at neutralizing, as already seen, the great rivals of Venice and France. It was once again the relations with Venice which had set the stage for Cesare's second *impresa* and which saw the Borgia incorporation of cities which Venice had previously refused to give its approval. As the pope would advocate for a crusade during the Jubilee of 1500,

<sup>89</sup> Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, p. 41.

<sup>90</sup> Pélissier, *Sopra alcuni documenti*, p. 133.

<sup>91</sup> Alvisi, 1878, p. 69.

<sup>92</sup> Mallett and Shaw, 2014, pp. 76-77.

<sup>93</sup> Mallett and Shaw, 2014, p. 77.

<sup>94</sup> Guicciardini, *Storie fiorentine*, pp. 217-218.

<sup>95</sup> Mallett and Shaw, 2014, p. 58.



a point in time where the republic's resources were at full strain due to its conflict with the Turks, the Venetian Grand Council created Cesare a *gentiluomo* of the city and forfeited its protection over Rimini and Faenza<sup>96</sup>.

#### 6. CESARE'S RULE IN THE ROMAGNA

As Cesare's pursuits described as a policy of pacts applied to the powers of Venice and France, this was equally true when speaking of Cesare's policy with regard to the cities and the populations of the Romagna. Taking the case of Imola, Cesare issued chapters in so much as *dominus* which aimed to 'reform and meliorate, correct and amend' the statutes<sup>97</sup>. This shows that alongside the weapons and the artillery of his military conquests, these concessions were an equally strong force of his power. The Borgia policy in the Romagna was insightfully illustrated by Enrico Angiolini who provided a profound comprehension of the nature of Cesare's rule<sup>98</sup>. Angiolini explained how the Borgia policy was a continuation of the vicarial system, built on recognized papal legitimacy. The duly investment of Cesare as Captain General and Gonfalonier of the Papal Armies took place following Cesare's return from his first *impresa* in March 1500<sup>99</sup>. Following this, Cesare continued to appear as lord of the various cities of the Romagna<sup>100</sup>. Then, in May 1501, the title 'Lord of the Romagna' made its first appearance<sup>101</sup>. Yet even when one expects the semblances of a Borgia 'state-like creation', particularly upon the creation of the duchy, with its territorial implications, Cesare still, in all effect, continued govern the cities of the Romagna *pro Sancta Romana Ecclesia*<sup>102</sup>.

A case study is provided by the city of Faenza which most violently resisted Cesare. Since the ruling Astorre Manfredi was prohibited by the city's defenders from capitulating, Cesare had to resort to laying siege to the city which fell following a long bombardment and the arrival of French reinforcements. The un-

<sup>96</sup> Mallett, 1987, p. 192.

<sup>97</sup> Alvisi, 1878, p. 471.

<sup>98</sup> See Angiolini, 2003.

<sup>99</sup> Burchard, *Diarium*, III, p. 26.

<sup>100</sup> In a diploma to Andrea Bernardi, Cesare is referred to as *Caesar Borgia de Francia dux Valentiniensis, Comes Diensis, Caesanae, Forlivij, Imolae, Britinorij, Isoduni item Dominus ac sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae Confalonarius et capitaneus generalis*, Alvisi, 1878, pp. 485-486.

<sup>101</sup> This appears in a diploma nominating Jacopo Pasi as Vicar of Faenza. Cesare is referred to as *Caesar Borgia de Francia Dux Valentinus, Comes Dien. Romaniaeque Dominus, ac S.R.C. Confalonarius et capitaneus generalis*. See Alvisi, 1878, p. 498.

<sup>102</sup> See Angiolini, 2003.



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fortunate Manfredi, along with his brother Giovanni Evangelista, after being imprisoned in the Castel Sant'Angelo would be found dead in the Tiber the following year<sup>103</sup>. Yet Cesare's policy in Faenza shows that not only did the city maintain its statutes but it also confirmed the patrimonial and jurisdictional privileges of the city's elites over its *contado*<sup>104</sup>. There was furthermore a policy of concession of 'honourable military positions to the most noble and esteemed of the city'<sup>105</sup>. All this resembles the 'princely court' of a signorial regime, mirroring that of the Church hierarchy itself composed of a curia well-disposed towards the pope. At the same time, it dismantles the traditional argument that there was an assertion of papal power at the expense of the urban communities. It was rather a process which saw the creation of new relationships between the papacy and its towns and cities, with the urban elites that co-operated with the increasing presence of the state. After all, the guarantee of vast revenues and prospects of social position beyond urban boundaries were concentrated in the state, both through lay officialdom or as occurring more often, prospects of advancement within the church hierarchy<sup>106</sup>.

The same 'continuous' policy is evident in Cesare's army which Machiavelli laudably perceived as a passage from *gente francese* to *armi proprie*<sup>107</sup>. As seen in the case of Bologna, it was at that point that Cesare showed more intent on not relying on French troops. This could be tied to his ambition of taking Bologna and given that it was protected by the French king, Cesare was taking the necessary precautions to not be betrayed by his troops. He had also witnessed the recalling of his French troops upon Ludovico Sforza's brief return to Milan. Yet it is likewise probable that Cesare also realised that the local troops were certainly less hated than those who brought the *furia francese*, even if Italian *condottieri* including Cesare himself demonstrated that they could likewise adapt to it as seen in the case of the Siege of Capua (1501). Yet once again, speaking for Cesare, this was mostly the case when it came to areas outside the Romagna<sup>108</sup>. It is also true that the chronicler Andrea Bernardi wrote that the entrance of Cesare's army into Forlì 'resembled the pains of hell'<sup>109</sup>. The same goes for the breach of terms following the surrender of Forlì, and particular difficulty laid in maintaining order in all parts of the army, particularly the Guascons, who did a lot of damage

<sup>103</sup> Burchard, *Diarium*, III, p. 208.

<sup>104</sup> Angiolini, 2003.

<sup>105</sup> Tonduzzi, *Historie di Faenza*, p. 565.

<sup>106</sup> Carocci, 2012, pp. 87-88.

<sup>107</sup> Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, pp. 43-51.

<sup>108</sup> For the Siege of Capua see Auton, *Chronique*, II, pp. 42-47. See also Burchard, *Diarium*, III, p. 152.

<sup>109</sup> Bernardi, *Cronache Forlivesi*, vol. I, Parte II, p. 265.

to his reputation in the case of Forlì. In fact, one can compare this with Cesare's entrance into Pesaro, one which was described as 'a very solemn entrance'<sup>110</sup>. When during the Siege of Faenza (1500-1501), Cesare quartered his army for the winter season, the same chronicler Bernardi gave a more commendable overview of Cesare's troops, who in fact sought to maintain as much discipline as possible<sup>111</sup>. And it can furthermore be pointed out that this was the only moment during which Cesare had the opportunity to turn his utmost attention to the internal situation of the Romagna<sup>112</sup>.

The judgement of Cesare's rule of the Romagna has certainly contributed to Cesare's place in his image as a 'Renaissance Prince'. For Machiavelli, Cesare's duchy was ruled well and with justice as opposed to the previous 'impotent lords'<sup>113</sup>. In the case of Imola, the term justice comes out quite clearly following the experience of the hated Riario, and Cesare in fact appears as *Dux Valentiniensis tanquam minister divinae justitiae*<sup>114</sup>. So did Guicciardini take a similar approach when writing of the *buon governo* of the Romagna, owed to the men placed to rule who did so 'with much justice and integrity'<sup>115</sup>. Although a 'good government' is not thoroughly clear to define, for Machiavelli and Guicciardini this was evident in the Romagna's reaction to when Cesare would find himself in a delicate position. What is sure is that a 'good government' did not necessarily imply a 'popular' form of government. The experience of Cesare shows that his political project must be placed in the already mentioned forms of 'concession', the safeguarding of local privileges, and a fair judicial system which ensured a constant traditional order<sup>116</sup>. This was also accompanied with a policy of 'pacification' which can be noticed in the methods of government that went beyond simple 'occupation' as had been the case during the first phase of Cesare's rule, left in the hands of the iron fist of Spanish commanders mainly Ramiro de Lorqua. His impressive execution, which had stunned many including Machiavelli himself, signalled a move towards a more administrative policy taken over by trusted and respected local administrators<sup>117</sup>.

The troops in the service of Cesare likewise point out to the nature of his position. Following the surrender of the fortress of Imola, the Romagnol condo-

<sup>110</sup> Alvisi, 1878, p. 134.

<sup>111</sup> Bernardi, *Cronache Forlivesi*, vol. I, Parte II, pp. 326-329.

<sup>112</sup> Mallett, 1987, p. 195.

<sup>113</sup> Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, p. 25.

<sup>114</sup> Alvisi, 1878, p. 454.

<sup>115</sup> Guicciardini, *Storie fiorentine*, p. 266.

<sup>116</sup> Mallett, 1987, pp. 221-222.

<sup>117</sup> Mallett, 1987, pp. 222-223.



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ttiére Dionigi Naldi had entered into Cesare's service and provided him with local infantry. This is a prime episode which emphasises Cesare's use of local troops. And it was likewise the case that Cesar employed Romagnol troops particularly during the time of the Magione Conspiracy during the retaking of Urbino, yet it would be worth pointing out that these were led by Spanish commanders and were soon disbanded. And even if Cesare did employ troops from the area of Val di Lamone, it was an area renowned for providing the recruitment of mercenaries even during the time of the vicars<sup>118</sup>. Even the case of the mentioned 'popular' Manfredi points to a loyalty predominantly owed to the infantry of the Val di Lamone<sup>119</sup>. This shows that Machiavelli's perception of Cesare's citizen-militia represents a 'humanistic' and 'idealistic' conception of the interdependence of both the political and military spheres which he expressed in his political reflection. The nerve of Cesare's army continued to be, as in any other army of the Italy of the *condottieri*, a mercenary army.

It can thus be stated that Cesare's domain was a personal 'signorial' one, albeit a potential hereditary one due to its 'vicarious' nature. Cesare likewise managed to take over cities such as Urbino and Camerino which do not form part of the 'region' of Romagna, areas which permitted him with a 'free-hand' independent of French interest. Nevertheless, Cesare's 'territorial outlook' was eventually sanctioned with the creation of the Duchy of Romagna 'with the approval of the consistory' in 1501<sup>120</sup>. Once again, the creation of a duchy served as a configuration of a more unified territorial 'signorial' state rather than a 'centralized' one. This was further strengthened in a more effective way by creating Cesena as a 'capital' and is likewise noticeable in the projects which Cesare initiated such as when he brought Leonardo da Vinci to construct a canal stretching from Cesena to Porto Cesenatico<sup>121</sup>. Nevertheless, even the case of Cesena demonstrates a continuation of a similar preceding policy especially keeping in mind that it was the only city of the Romagna to have already been under pontifical governance yet divided by the violent factionalism between the Tiberti and the Martinelli. The entrance of Cesare into the city was in fact organized by Polidoro Tiberti who rode in the midst of the crowd and invigorated it to the cries

<sup>118</sup> For the idea of Romagnol militia, see Lerner, 1966, pp. 253-268. See also Bazzocchi, 2013, p. 50.

<sup>119</sup> Mallett, 1987, p. 194.

<sup>120</sup> Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, p. 446. See for example the ducal patent conceded to Florence dated 19 October 1502, which refers to Cesare as *Caesar Borgia de Francia dei gratia Dux Romandiolae Valentiaeque, Princeps Andriae, Dominus Plumbini etc ac S.R.E. Confalonarius et Capitaneus generalis*. See Alvisi, 1878, pp. 543-544.

<sup>121</sup> Mallett, 1987, p. 223.

of *Duca! Duca!*<sup>122</sup> Once again, although the ‘conquest’ may appear as an anti-magnate one with the archbishop Giovanni Olivieri taking on the governance of the city, the city elites were rather engulfed in a policy of fiscal concession, within the context of the Guelph-Ghibelline violent factionalism that had plagued the city<sup>123</sup>. In the Papal States, particularly in the Romagna, the unstable political setup led to factionalism which still expressed itself in the evocative terms of ‘Guelph’ and ‘Ghibelline’, and this continued to characterise the political vicissitudes of the social elites well into the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>124</sup>. Although the terms did not automatically stand for those in favour and against the pope, they permitted papal government to make use of them as mediators in order to ensure peace and equilibrium as has been seen in the case of Cesena.

## 7. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CESARE AND THE POPE

The relationship between Cesare and his father demonstrates that the Borgia policy of the Church’s temporal interests as well as those of the dynasty could develop in a coherent manner. At the same time, the apparent divergences provide insight into the peculiar nature of papal power. Episodes of divergence were recorded by Giustinian who wrote of Cesare’s need of more money to which Alexander seemed reluctant due to the already given funds, although the ambassador eventually concluded that the pope would ‘eventually give in to the will of the duke in this as he does in all other things’<sup>125</sup>. The financial resources of the papacy were in fact all deployed in order to strengthen the Borgia project tied to the reinforcement of the temporal position of the papacy. As Giustinian also reported in March of 1503, upon Alexander’s attempt to create new curial offices to gain ever-more funds, the pope stated that this was all ‘to eradicate these bad thorns from this country and acquire all these states for the Church’<sup>126</sup>. This likewise sheds light on the interdependent position of Cesare’s duchy with papal resources, as became so visible during the critical period of the Magione Conspiracy. As the conspirators were still temporising and Machiavelli wrote from Imola in October 1502, he became convinced that the conspiracy would end in failure as Cesare’s position grew stronger whereas ‘neither will the pope

<sup>122</sup> Saviotti, *Pandolfo Collenuccio*, p. 109.

<sup>123</sup> Angiolini, 2003.

<sup>124</sup> For the factionalism in the Romagna see in particular Casanova, 1981.

<sup>125</sup> Giustinian, *Dispacci*, vol. I, pp. 19-20.

<sup>126</sup> Giustinian, *Dispacci*, vol. I, pp. 425-426.



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refrain from sending money, nor the French King from sending men'<sup>127</sup>. This permitted Cesare to garrison the important cities and provision the fortresses. At the same time, as had been seen a year earlier, the Borgia political project, tied to the French, had also allowed possibilities for the pope to call his son to look to the temporal interests of the papacy, which in the case of Naples, involved the Colonna. When Louis XII and Ferdinand of Aragon agreed on the fate of Naples in the Treaty of Granada of 1500, its conquest, enjoying the blessing of the pope, permitted Alexander to use the Colonna's links to Naples as a weapon against them. Subiaco was passed *in commenda* to Cesare whereas the great Colonna fortresses were passed to the pope<sup>128</sup>.

This all demonstrates that just like the Borgia's exploit was conditioned to act on terms from its starting point, it likewise had its own limitations by the very power which allowed for its initiation in the first place. Building on the political designs of the Romagna, the areas Cesare set his sights on likewise demonstrate that his project was a coherent creation of a personal dominion, and territorially speaking an insistent 'lordship'. The apparent threat towards the political set up of Italy became even more alarming during his third *impresa* in 1502, when Cesare took Camerino and Urbino, the latter of which was taken from a celebrated condottiere of the like of Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, leaving Cesare in a very strong position<sup>129</sup>. Many of the enemies of the Borgia now made their way to Louis XII at Milan, who was likewise dissatisfied with the actions of Cesare's *condottieri* in Tuscany and the prospect of annexing Bologna to his duchy. His actions now even perplexed some of his most important *condottieri* who would form the conspiracy against him. But Cesare's presence in Milan immediately won back the French king who welcomed him as his 'cousin and good relative'<sup>130</sup>. Not only did Louis disregard the pleas of the Borgia enemies, but he also gave Cesare a free hand regarding Bologna upon Cesare's pardon for the actions of Vitelli in Tuscany, which he justified to Louis by stating that his actions laid in his search of avenging the death of his brother at the hand of the Florentines<sup>131</sup>. On hearing of the recent developments, Alexander was both restless and displeased because of Cesare's decision to go to Louis, an action which he judged as impulsive. As Giustinian took note of, 'the duke went without any consultation or participation

<sup>127</sup> Machiavelli, *Le Legazioni e Commissarie*, II, p. 118.

<sup>128</sup> Mallett, 1987, p. 189.

<sup>129</sup> Mallett, 1987, pp. 204-205.

<sup>130</sup> Bernardi, *Cronache Forlivesi*, vol. II, p. 14.

<sup>131</sup> Giustinian, *Dispacci*, vol. I, p. 30.

of His Holiness'<sup>132</sup>. Nevertheless, the pope realized that his son had made a political coup and Machiavelli likewise noted this in *The Prince*:

On the Cardinal of Rouen telling me that the Italians did not understand war, I replied to him that the French did not understand the state; because, if they did, they would not have allowed the Church to reach such greatness<sup>133</sup>.

The policy of the king of France in fact can be summarised in the explanation given by Marco Pellegrini:

The king of France aimed at making Duke Valentino his privileged interlocuter in Italy: he would have delegated to him the central part of the peninsula, to rule in agreement with the papacy, while France would have spread its dominion over the Po Plain and the south of the peninsula<sup>134</sup>.

Yet recent developments were pointing towards the fact that Cesare now mainly responded to himself, and his secretive nature while handling the situation of the Magione Conspiracy had even bewildered Alexander himself who according to what Giustinian reported, could not refrain from calling his son in a loud voice a 'bastard son of a whore'<sup>135</sup>. Nevertheless, despite Cesare's assurance upon the execution of his *bellissimo inganno*, the diverging factors of his position continued to be illustrated when it came to the case of the Orsini. From the summer of 1502, Alexander had been inquiring on the reaction of the French king when he laid his sights on attacking Giangiordano Orsini, who like the Bentivoglio fell under his protection. Following Cesare's 'deceit' at Senigallia, and the arrest of the conspirators, Vitellozzo Vitelli and Oliverotto da Fermo were strangled in the same night and when the news reached Rome, Alexander ordered the arrest of Cardinal Orsini who had previously fled Rome to gather the conspirators at his castle in La Magione. Yet even so, when it came to Paolo and Francesco Orsini, these were kept alive for a little more than two weeks until they shared the same fate of the rest of the conspirators and were 'strangled in the same manner'<sup>136</sup>. What this meant was that Cesare was still intent on keeping the Orsini *condottieri* on his side, deducting that it was necessary to have the support of a strong Roman faction<sup>137</sup>. This was evident in Cesare's then reluctance to attack Giangiordano Orsini who was in possession of Bracciano, stating

<sup>132</sup> Giustinian, *Dispacci*, vol. I, p. 87.

<sup>133</sup> Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, p. 12.

<sup>134</sup> Pellegrini, 2009, pp. 99-100.

<sup>135</sup> Giustinian, *Dispacci*, vol. I, p. 284.

<sup>136</sup> Machiavelli, «Descrizione», p. 399.

<sup>137</sup> Shaw, 2015, pp. 236-237.



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that the rules of the Order of St. Michael prohibited conflict between its members while also stating that Niccolò Orsini was normally hired by Venice. By attacking them, Cesare argued that he would clearly be antagonizing both France and Venice.

This shows how Cesare was thinking of his future position had he utterly destroyed the Orsini, whereas Alexander dedicated his energy to strike the decisive blow. As Machiavelli had written: 'Should the pope die, Cesare will need some friends in Rome'<sup>138</sup>. This also provides insight into the difficulties of establishing a secular dynasty on the foundation of papal power. Machiavelli wrote of this when he stated that Cesare knew 'that the pope can die any day, and that he needs to think before his death of laying for himself some other foundation, if he intends to preserve the states he now has'<sup>139</sup>. This reveals the difference between an effectual monarchical power and the dominions of the Church, which did not include an effectual organic link between the pope's family and the state<sup>140</sup>.

Immediately following the conquest of Senigallia, Cesare's army rapidly took Vitelli's Città di Castello while his army marched north to subdue Perugia whose control was directly returned to the Church. Cesare's men then turned their attention to Siena, which expelled the conspirator Pandolfo Petrucci out of fear of retribution. At this point in time, the pope was worried about Cesare further provoking the French king and ordered him to return to Rome due to his worries following the escape of Giulio Orsini to his stronghold in Ceri. Although Cesare did return to Rome and laid siege to Ceri, he had not stopped aspiring for the cities of Tuscany. The divergence appeared when Alexander maintained that he had to liberate the countryside from the barons which meant that Cesare's attention in Tuscany had to be deviated because Alexander noticed that the downfall of the barons was necessary. He aimed at striking a decisive blow, brought about by his diplomatic accomplishments and his son's propulsion in order 'to secure the State of the Church around Rome, because he wanted to leave this gift to the Church'<sup>141</sup>. The involvement of Louis XII had also seen the king pressing Giangiordano to give up Bracciano, further intent on keeping the Borgias on his side due to the increasingly difficult situation in Naples<sup>142</sup>. What saved the Orsini from further ruin was the death of Alexander.

The Borgias had reached the zenith of their power in April of 1503. Yet the situation remained compromised due to the unresolved fate of cities such as

<sup>138</sup> Machiavelli, *Diario*, p. 137.

<sup>139</sup> Machiavelli, *Diario*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>140</sup> Carocci, 2012, p. 81.

<sup>141</sup> Giustinian, *Dispacci*, vol. I, p. 405.

<sup>142</sup> Mallett, 1987, p. 217.



Bologna, while Pisa, although forming part of 'independent' Tuscany, had even resolved to grant Cesare the city's lordship<sup>143</sup>. This led King Louis to organize a league between the cities of Bologna, Florence, Siena, and Lucca which aimed at defending their independence as well as favouring the French cause in Naples<sup>144</sup>. All this was happening while the Spanish under Fernández de Córdoba had won an important victory at Cerignola and occupied Naples. The various scheming which accompanied such a situation saw Alexander having to recognize the growing power of Spain to which he started gravitating, while simultaneously approaching Maximilian Habsburg for the investiture of Cesare of the Tuscan cities, to which his son had not stopped aspiring for<sup>145</sup>.

The outcome of Naples is very revealing of the very nature of the Italian Wars, which had seen the Borgias manoeuvring within. At this point in time, the two remaining large states which remained independent from foreign influence were the Papal States and Venice. The pope's concerns are understandable in his revelations to the Venetian ambassador: 'It would be bad for both of us if Spain took over Naples, but still worse if it fell totally into the hands of the French'<sup>146</sup>. This was followed by a plea towards the very interest of the Italian peninsula by inviting Venice to collaborate together 'for the wellbeing of Italy'<sup>147</sup>. But Alexander's appeals towards Venice would likewise lay in his own recommendation of Cesare to the *Serenissima*, knowing how difficult the situation would be had he come to die, even stating that unless he could be certain of Cesare's political security 'he would never die content'<sup>148</sup>. Alexander expressed this to Giustinian by telling him that 'without the shadow and goodwill of your Republic, all his labours would be in vain'<sup>149</sup>. The papal political and 'familiar' policy in the area comes out in a more 'coherent' way in Ferrara through Lucrezia's marriage to Alfonso d'Este<sup>150</sup>. The marriage succeeded in securing the northern territories of the duchy especially since the area continued to be one of continuous interest to the Venetians, who likewise took the opportunity to advance towards after Alexander's death and rapidly seized Rimini and Faenza, leading it to become the target of Julius II's aspirations. Roberto Cessi argued that Venice's refusal to com-

<sup>143</sup> Volpe, 1898, p. 89.

<sup>144</sup> Romane, 2020, pp. 157-158.

<sup>145</sup> Pellegrini, 2010, p. 240.

<sup>146</sup> Giustinian, *Dispacci*, vol. I, p. 242.

<sup>147</sup> Giustinian, *Dispacci*, vol. I, pp. 242-243.

<sup>148</sup> Giustinian, *Dispacci*, vol. I, p. 450.

<sup>149</sup> Giustinian, *Dispacci*, vol. I, p. 450.

<sup>150</sup> Chiappini, 1967, pp. 198-208.



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ply to Alexander's proposal, owed to more pressing concerns and their disinterest over Naples, suggests a continuous policy which eventually saw its most difficult crisis following Agnadello in 1509<sup>151</sup>.

The apparent 'divergences' which have appeared, mainly the pope's orders to his son of diverting his attention to the temporal interests of the Church, and Cesare's own volatile position provides a somewhat unclear dividing line between the 'temporal' and 'carnal' interests and *ragion di Stato* as Machiavelli would have put it<sup>152</sup>. It all presented itself upon the death of Alexander VI in August 1503, leaving Cesare unable to effectively exploit papal resources at his own will. Even if Machiavelli would judge Cesare's decision to trust della Rovere, his family's mortal enemy, as a great error, the situation suggests that Cesare actually had little choice<sup>153</sup>. He could at most have hoped of operating as the arm of a military autonomous Roman Church. But as has been seen, the Borgia ascendancy had taken place through its reliance on papal power with little regard to the existing power realities. With the egression of Alexander, Cesare fell in the shadows and would die in 1507, fighting for his brother-in-law during the Siege of Viana.

#### CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the development of the Papal States into a 'monarchy' oversaw a process of centralization which did not develop in a coherent manner. The analysis of the several concepts tied to the papacy of Alexander VI provide various insights into this. As such, an obvious question would be, how far were the Borgia conquests short-lived? Such a theme collocated to the wider picture would provide another fundamental question: is it correct to speak of the papacy of Alexander VI as a watershed when it comes to the temporal ambitions of the Church? When it came to the 'carnal desire' and thus the fortunes of the family itself, the political project was soon shattered, but it had likewise laid the groundwork for Julius II to be hailed as an 'actual founder of the Papal State'<sup>154</sup>.

It has been argued that the way things evolved became accelerated with the outbreak of the Italian Wars leading to developments in such a way that as the contemporaries Machiavelli and Guicciardini noticed, the papacy of Alexander VI proved to be the first vigorous containment of the barons and the *signori*<sup>155</sup>.

<sup>151</sup> Cessi, 1932, p. XIII.

<sup>152</sup> For the conception of *stato* see Viroli, 1994, pp. 83-108.

<sup>153</sup> Machiavelli, *Legazioni e Commissarie*, vol. 2, pp. 327-328.

<sup>154</sup> See the judgement of Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, p. 41.

<sup>155</sup> See Machiavelli, *Istorie Fiorentine*, p. 42; See also Guicciardini, *Storie fiorentine*, p. 264.

With the fall of Ceri in 1503, Alexander maintained that he had taken control of the countryside from the barons and that he had 'donated' this victory to the Church. It is true that the barons, as did the *signori*, reclaim their lands after *fortuna* had abandoned Cesare following the death of his father, and this shows how the papal prospect of radicating itself through the creation of duchies and lay relatives could not match the endurance of the locally rooted barons. The Borgias' rise was too swift and relied heavily on Papal authority for this end with little consideration for the existing divisions of power. But it was also true that the balance of power was shifting, the barons would not appear as a 'threat' on the same level as before, and by 1510, Julius II managed to bring the Romagna under direct papal sovereignty. This fits the judgement of Guicciardini who evaluating the political situation of the Papal States, remarked: 'though it sometimes seems to stagger, in the end it reaffirms its rights more strongly than ever'<sup>156</sup>.

This was illustrated in the case of Cesare's conquests in the Romagna. As has been discussed, the Borgia policy was not one which aspired for the creation of a 'centralized state' but a 'signorial state' constructed on the model of the apostolic vicariate. This was naturally made to coincide with the fortunes of the family itself, along with the apparent temporal complications that it brought with it. So Cesare's exploits allowed for the creation of a Borgia state, while simultaneously leading to the re-assertion of authority from Rome. This was done effectively although the cases of divergence between Cesare and his father were quite evident when it came to his ambitions in Tuscany, hinting to the peculiar nature of the connected 'papal' and 'familiar' strategy<sup>157</sup>.

The death of Alexander led everything to fall, and the experience of the Romagna shows how Cesare himself was well aware of his precarious position had his father died. And so was the Romagna attendant to the outcome of unpredictable *fortuna*, with the cities quickly resorting to the *signori* as quickly as they had abandoned them, while the *rocche*, which resisted longer, would do so because of their control by Spanish garrisons which would soon also be lost with a simple act of consignment<sup>158</sup>. The lasting effect of the Borgia conquests stood in the almost complete disruption of the Romagnol *signori* without creating irreversible ruptures with the urban elites. The following popes from the 'warrior pope' onwards would reap the spoils in such a way that as Pierre de Bourdeille maintained, when it came to Cesare's contribution to its temporal interests, 'the Church is well indebted to him'<sup>159</sup>.

<sup>156</sup> Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, p. 17.

<sup>157</sup> Caravale, 1978, pp. 158-159.

<sup>158</sup> Soranzo, 1954.

<sup>159</sup> Bourdeille, *Mémoires*, p. 221.



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