



*Princely Patronage on Display:
The Case of Cardinal Pietro Riario
and Pope Sixtus IV, 1471-1474*

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Abstract: Following on from the translation of Nikolaus of Modruš' funeral oration for Cardinal Pietro Riario in issue 5.2 (December 2018), which explored his developing posthumous reputation, this study examines the role of Pope Sixtus IV's nephew as a representative of the pontificate. Less constrained than the pope by behavioral restrictions, cardinal-nephews could mix ecclesiastical and secular activities, welcoming and hosting visiting ambassadors and princes. The cardinal-nephew's blood ties emphasized his elite position in his uncle's pontificate, while his wealth, derived from lucrative benefices bestowed by his patron the pope, allowed a magnificent display that projected messages about power based on liberality. This practice shows a sort of resource-sharing that benefitted both the pope and his nephew, while performing necessary ceremonial, political, and social functions. Via these events observers could identify important members of the papal court and thus the pope's relatives were able to establish alliances that benefitted both clerical and lay papal kin. Using Nikolaus of Modruš' funeral oration, ambassadorial letters, contemporary chronicles, and household inventories, the cardinal's household emerges as an important vehicle for the display of dignity and the development of diplomatic relationships. Read together with the translation of Nikolaus of Modruš' funeral oration, this essay presents Pietro Riario as a front-runner in the use of elite households as a conduit for patronage systems that extended papal reach across and beyond the city of Rome, at the onset of a period of change characterized as a papal monarchy.

Keywords: cardinals; magnificence; diplomacy; patronage; nepotism; ritual; papal monarchy; household

As the anonymous author of *Ordine et officii de la casa de lo Illustrissimo Signor Duca de Urbino* (1482–1489) wrote: “The dignity of the *signore* manifests itself in all that is seen.”¹ Although this particular author was describing a lay lord's household staff and home environments, one might just as easily consider this statement more broadly and loosely in light of the world of diplomacy and patronage in which the author's own master participated. Like many other rulers and governments, the duke of Urbino looked to papal Rome as a political, spiritual, and cultural center.² As many early modern people

¹ I am grateful to Brendan Cook, Jill E. Blondin, and Timothy McCall for graciously reading this article and offering suggestions that have strengthened it.

² To this treatise's author, the web of employment, alliances, and kinship that spread out from the duke of Urbino

believed, the household was a microcosm of the state, and its smooth running was evidence of the *signore's* strength, virtue, and success. Through this period, which historians have characterized as a papal monarchy, Pope Sixtus IV della Rovere (1471–1484) acted as *signore* or lord and patron to the College of Cardinals and many other individuals, institutions, and communities. As pontiff, Sixtus guided the global Catholic Christian community's spirituality, while as prince of the Papal States, he governed a substantial slice of the Italian peninsula. These two roles brought many visitors to Sistine Rome, dramatically expanding the city's population, wealth, and influence through the late fifteenth century. A consequence of the pope's bi-partite identity was a more complex understanding of papal dignity that intermingled both his spiritual and political mandates and his supporters. Just as Evelyn Welch has argued for Milan, the projection of the early modern papal dignity was "a collaborative rather than a purely individual effort," involving the effort of people and sites beyond the papal throne and the Vatican Palace, and especially of cardinals and papal kinsmen.³

At the crux of twentieth-century historians' historiographical discussions of the papacy has been a conflict between early modern and modern interpretations of papal "dignity." The former reflects the *Ordine et officii* author's vision of magnificence, household efficiency, and material splendor equating with institutional authority, political strength, and cultural achievement, while the latter adopts an exclusionary model linking clergy with a spiritual and ascetic lifestyle based on prayer and piety leading to salvation. In practice, the early modern papacy mixed aspects of both models, as its predecessors had done before. The papal court's willingness to experiment with institutional and social strategies, mixing clergy and laymen, in the service of politics has earned it the reputation of a "political laboratory."⁴ While scholars debate whether Rome or Milan functioned as the center of late fifteenth-century diplomacy, recent work has emphasized the importance across all venues of ritual protocols and magnificent events that framed negotiations with envoys and articulated relationships between the pope and European princes.⁵ Indeed, as this article shows, Milanese ambassadors conveyed

spoke just as much about dignity and authority, as did the efficient functioning of his household: Sabine Eiche, ed., *Ordine et officii de la casa de lo Illustrissimo Signor Duca de Urbino* (Urbino: Accademia Raffaello, 1994), chapter 15: "De l'instrumenti circa la persona del signore"; Jennifer D. Webb, "'All that is Seen': Ritual and Splendor at the Montefeltro Court in Urbino," in *The Early Modern Italian Domestic Interior, 1400–1700: Objects, Spaces, Domesticities*, ed. Erin J. Campbell, Stephanie R. Miller, and Elizabeth Carroll Consavari (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 195.

³ While Sixtus IV collaborated widely with both his Riario and della Rovere relatives, his nephews who were cardinals should not be confused with the men who occupied the later office of "Cardinal-Nephew" from 1566. Pius V Ghislieri codified the responsibilities of these administrators, which resulted in Cardinal Michele Bonelli's work as *secretarius papae et superintendens status ecclesiasticae*. Madeleine Laurain-Portmer, "Absolutisme et Népotisme: La Surintendance de l'État Ecclésiastique," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 131 (1973): 494–496; and Evelyn S. Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 244.

⁴ Gianvittorio Signorotto and Maria Antonietta Visceglia, "Introduction," in *Court and Politics in Papal Rome 1492–1700*, ed. Gianvittorio Signorotto and Maria Antonietta Visceglia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

⁵ Christine Shaw, "The Papal Court as a centre of diplomacy from the Peace of Lodi to the Council of Trent," in *La Papauté à la Renaissance*, ed. Florence Alazard and Frank B. La Brasca (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2007), 621–638; Thomas James Dandele, *Spanish Rome, 1500–1700* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 7; Gregory Lubkin, "Strategic Hospitality: Foreign Dignitaries at the Court of Milan, 1466–1476," *The International History Review* 8, no. 2 (May 1986): 189; and Vincent Ilardi, "Fifteenth-Century Diplomatic Documents in Western European Archives and Libraries (1450–1494)," *Studies in the Renaissance* 9 (1962): 87, 98. On this issue see also the work of Richard C. Trexler and Edward Muir for Florence and Venice in this period.

enthusiastic accounts of the festive diplomacy (or *politica festiva*) pursued by Sixtus IV's nephew Pietro Riario (card. 1471–1474).⁶ However, the fascination of early modern contemporaries with the expensive and spectacular strategies of festive diplomacy waged during Sixtus' pontificate has colored permanently both his family and the papacy's reputation.⁷ Additionally, and most importantly, this interest has obscured the papal monarchy's participation in diplomatic activities that contemporaries accepted, admired, and emulated, placing the pope's closest supporters, often kinsmen and longtime clients, at the forefront of affairs.⁸

This article examines the role of the young Cardinal Pietro Riario, who served as a diplomatic proxy for his uncle, Sixtus IV, organized extraordinary feasts and games for visitors and envoys, and for his troubles earned a lasting reputation as “a go-between and negotiator” with a flair for public displays.⁹ A funeral oration written by Nikolaus, bishop of Modruš, provides a more flattering portrait of the cardinal, and provides partial context for the basis of this reputation.¹⁰ Written and published in 1474, this oration offers an insider's perspective on the cardinal's reputation with a focus on his household, echoing the connection between elite household and dignity. Although the oration appeared in print several times during Sixtus IV's pontificate, it is ambiguous in its depiction of Riario. Yet, as the sole printed funeral oration, Isidoro Gatti has identified Nikolaus of Modruš' text as becoming practically “official,”¹¹ nevertheless Bartolomeo Sacchi, called Platina, detailed in his life of Sixtus IV what would become Pietro's posthumous character:

By the judgement of all Sixtus is considered too loving and indulgent towards them [his nephews.] ... With the most ample income from benefices, Pietro was a splendid man, in that he seemed to be born to spend money, and in the last two years of his life, he spent 200,000 pieces of gold on victuals. However, a debt of 60,000 coins outlived him, and he left 300 pounds of silver. He died destroyed by pleasures, at

⁶ Giulio Ferroni, “Appunti sulla politica festiva di Pietro Riario,” in *Umanesimo a Roma nel Quattrocento: atti del Convegno su umanesimo a Roma nel Quattrocento, New York, 1–4 dicembre 1981*, ed. Paolo Brezzi and Maristella de Panizza Lorch (Rome: Istituto di Studi Romani, 1984), 47–51.

⁷ Isidoro Gatti has already explored this Black Legend: Isidoro Liberale Gatti, *Pietro Riario da Savona francescano cardinale vescovo di Treviso (1445–1474): profilo storico* (Padua: Centro studi antoniani, 2003), 6–8, 111–113, 127–140.

⁸ The placement of the Riario family in the early history of the papal monarchy makes them an important case study for understanding how patterns developed in the fifteenth century that would become consistent trends in the sixteenth century. On this development stretching from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, see work done by Marco Pellegrini, Wolfgang Reinhard, Werner L. Gundersheimer, Maria Antonietta Visceglia, and Paolo Prodi.

⁹ Christine Shaw, *Julius II: The Warrior Pope* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 11–15. Egmont Lee's statement is characteristic of the divided opinion amongst historians about uncle and nephew's behavior: “We must assume therefore that the pope's motives in supporting Pietro Riario were not only personal but, at least in part, political as well. Riario's squandering of the wealth of the church brought to the Curia of Sixtus IV all the prestige of a secular court, which was important above all as an instrument of politics.” Egmont Lee, *Sixtus IV and Men of Letters* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1978), 34.

¹⁰ There is no doubt that, as a genre, early modern funeral orations were expected to be flattering and, thus, historians must set them beside other types of evidence to understand how oration authors drew on contemporary beliefs and social norms to craft such positive portraits. These contemporary beliefs and social norms about household display sit at the heart of this study of Pietro Riario's actions.

¹¹ Gatti, *Pietro Riario*, 15n32. All English excerpts of Nikolaus of Modruš' text are from Brendan Cook's translation in Brendan Cook and Jennifer Mara DeSilva, “Princely Ambiguity: A Translation of Nikolaus of Modruš' Funeral Oration for Cardinal Pietro Riario: *Oratio in funere Petri Cardinalis Sancti Sixti* (1474),” *Royal Studies Journal* 5, no. 2 (2018): 92–128.

28 years old.¹²

Although there is little to this description beyond spending so much on provisioning his household, it highlights an important papal strategy that remains relatively understudied and often misunderstood. The early modern papacy depended on its clients—in this case a cardinal and a papal kinsman—to pursue strategies, wrangle allies, and enforce policy in ways and venues that were forbidden to the pope himself. In the late fifteenth century there were very clear protocols and ceremonial rules that constrained the pontiff’s interactions with diplomatic agents and his dining habits, and thus prevented his use of festive diplomacy to its fullest extent. These rules ensured that the pope could navigate the challenging waters of European diplomacy with an equal regard for all states and a detachment appropriate in a spiritual leader and the father of all Christians.¹³ Yet, to maintain this position and protect the Papal States, the pope needed unquestioningly loyal clients who could assume the flexible creativity of successful political agents at events that transcended papal protocol. Often the pope’s natal kinsmen fulfilled these roles, knowing that their own reputation and authority rose and fell with the pontificate’s success.¹⁴ Nikolaus of Modruš identified Pietro Riario as a “partner in [Sixtus’] private affairs, his collaborator in his public labors, his companion in his travels, his relief from his worries, and the one he relied upon to correspond with princes across the world, sending and receiving messages with perfect fidelity.”¹⁵ In contextualizing this behavior, Gatti has called Riario “a son of his time ... in both religious and cultural formation.”¹⁶

Pietro Riario’s ample household facilitated the combined roles of papal diplomat and Roman host, in the service of which the papal nephew used banquets as opportunities to project virtue and build alliances. Yet for many years historians have applied Pina Palma’s argument to Riario’s posthumous reputation—that “banquets turned the host’s private ambitions into public spectacles”—implicitly encouraging a vision of disinterested and ascetic negotiation that was out of step with fifteenth-century political practice.¹⁷ Instead of accepting

¹² Bartolomeo Platina, *Historia B. Platinae de Vitis Pontificum Romanorum* (Cologne: Apud Bernardum Gualtherium, 1600), 344.

¹³ The papal ceremonialist Agostino Patrizi Piccolomini stated that the pope was forbidden to dine with women and sketched a formal code of dining etiquette that upheld the rigorous hierarchy that dictated precedence and participation in liturgical events as well as consistory sessions. There was little room within this model for the more reciprocal relations that contemporary advice to diplomats encouraged. Catherine Fletcher, “The city of Rome as a space for diplomacy,” in *Atti del convegno Early Modern Rome 1341–1667*, ed. Portia Prebys (Ferrara: Edisai, 2012), 78–87; Marc Dykmans, *L’oeuvre de Patrizi Piccolomini, ou, Le Cérémonial papal de la première Renaissance* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1980–1982), 1:84–91, 1:190–210.

¹⁴ J.H. Elliott has argued that the cardinal-nephew, who in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries often became the papal secretary of state, acted as the pope’s “direct agent,” much as Cardinal Richelieu and the count of Olivares did in France and Spain in their roles as favorites and first ministers. Their efforts supported governors amid a “system of social relationships tied together by family and personal loyalties”: J.H. Elliott, “Introduction,” in *The World of the Favourite*, ed. J.H. Elliott and L.W.B. Brockliss (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 6.

¹⁵ “participem secretorum, laborum socium, peregrinationis comitem, leuamen curarum, et per quem totius orbis principibus fidissima responsa et reddere consueuerat et accipere.” *Oratio in funere Reverendissimi domini domini Petri Cardinalis sancti Sixti habita a Reverendo patre domino Nicolao episcopo modrusiensi* [Rome: Johannes Gensberg, 1474], fols. 19r–19v.

¹⁶ Gatti, *Pietro Riario*, 10.

¹⁷ Pina Palma, “Banquets and Power: Boiardo’s *Innamorato* and the Politics of Gastronomy,” *Quaderni d’italianistica*

Pietro Riario as a cardinal-nephew acting to achieve his uncle's goals and in the service of his pope, Riario has become a flamboyant spendthrift, intent on self-aggrandizement.¹⁸ Drawing on the Milanese chronicler Bernardino Corio, Giulio Ferroni argued that at the center of Riario's diplomatic strategy stood "his personal figure, his own ambition to control and manage the political destiny of papal Rome."¹⁹

Indeed, from his elevation at the age of twenty-six, Riario's collaboration with his uncle has provoked "scandal [due to his] frivolity and arrogance," in both contemporary observers and modern historians.²⁰ To Giles of Viterbo (1472–1532), the prior general of the Augustinian Order (1507–1517), the elevation of papal nephews and cousins, especially by the della Rovere (1471–1484 and 1503–1513) and Borgia popes (1455–1458 and 1492–1503), was a great stain on the office of papacy and one of the chief abuses needing reform.²¹ To the Calvinist polemicist Nicolas Colladon (died 1586), the activities of Riario and the della Rovere popes were indicative of the Antichrist's residence in Rome, which had become the new Babylon.²² Paradoxically at the same time, Riario's achievements also created "the brilliant court entertainments the Renaissance judged necessary for successful diplomacy" and which became an emblem of early modern cultural and intellectual cross-fertilization.²³ As Andrew Blume has argued, to view nepotism and cultural patronage as "self-aggrandizing" is to ignore the fact that Sixtus and his successors pursued a larger campaign in which these tools built a stronger and more efficient Catholic Church.²⁴ Without the splendid events and constructions directed by Riario "that exceeded the power of retelling," Sixtus IV, the papacy, and the city of Rome would have been far less spectacular and influential through the challenging decade of the 1470s, when the Turks seemed poised to invade Italy and under pressure Milan and Naples edged towards a *rapprochement* with the papacy.²⁵ Exploring Pietro Riario's role and reputation

27, no. 1 (January 2006): 21.

¹⁸ Christine Shaw writes that "By contrast with Pietro, almost anyone would seem sober and frugal": Shaw, *Julius II*, 14.

¹⁹ Corio also claimed that the cardinal hoped to overthrow the pope and take personal control of the papacy. Considering the broad powers already entrusted to Pietro Riario in the early 1470s, such a risky plan seems unnecessary and unlikely: Ferroni, "Appunti sulla politica festiva di Pietro Riario," 47.

²⁰ Marco Pellegrini, *Il papato nel Rinascimento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010), 97.

²¹ Giles believed that the Catholic Church had experienced a consistent decline since the period the Apostles, which was evinced by Sixtus IV's nepotistic elevations and Alexander VI's carnal preoccupations. Giles of Viterbo, *Historia Viginti Saeculorum*, Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Ms. Lat. 502, fols. 26r, 52r, 59v, 90v, 142v, 154v, 155v, 173r, 201v–202r, 203v–204r, 214r–214v, 230v, 240r, 248r–248v, 260v, 322v. See also: John W. O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform: A Study in Renaissance Thought* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 110–112, 170–172.

²² Nicolas Colladon (d. 1586) wrote *The Hunt*, a poem that satirized the papal court and upbraided it for its luxury and immorality, as part of his commentary on the Apocalypse. This poem presented the della Rovere popes and Cardinal Pietro Riario as central examples of licentious culture, prodigality, and Rome as the home of the Antichrist: Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 68–71. See also: Wolfgang Strobl, "Der Papstneffe Pietro Riario als Antichrist – Zeitkritisches in einem Apokalyptischen Epos des 15. Jh?," *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 41 (2003): 73–81.

²³ Charles L. Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 95.

²⁴ "Sixtus's cultural patronage in and around the city of Rome, which did not begin in earnest until he became pope, blurred distinctions between the church and his own family": Andrew C. Blume, "The Sistine Chapel, Dynastic Ambition, and the Cultural Patronage of Sixtus IV," in *Patronage and Dynasty: the Rise of the Della Rovere in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Ian F. Verstegen (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2007), 3, 5.

²⁵ Notably, at other times Ammannati Piccolomini was not so complimentary about Riario: Jacopo Ammannati Piccolomini, *Epistolae et Commentarii Iacobi Piccolomini Cardinalis Papiensis* (Milan: Apud Alexandrum Minutianum,

as a cardinal-nephew and festive diplomat reveals how papal kinsmen could transcend restrictions in the service of papal strategies.

The Papal Monarchy and the Cardinal's Household

Since the concept of papal monarchy emerged several decades ago historians have debated it with relative enthusiasm. While historians generally agree that it is a far more complex situation than Walter Ullmann's declaration that in the fifteenth century the papacy renounced its universal mission and became a purely political power, there is still some hesitancy and anxiety surrounding the term.²⁶ While Paolo Prodi's vision of the papal monarchy as a phase in the Italian peninsula's movement towards modernity has provoked the greatest response, Maria Antonietta Visceglia has noted that the context for this discussion has shifted dramatically since it began in the late 1970s.²⁷ To date Agostino Paravicini Bagliani has offered the most detailed understanding of "papal monarchy," but from a politico-cultural perspective, charting its development from the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries. Although his vision is based on political imperatives, rhetoric, and symbolic arguments, he has highlighted important themes that conceptualized the cardinalate as subordinates sharing in the pope's jurisdictional power. This hinged on bodily metaphors connecting pope and cardinal through shared authority and administrative goals, which have added resonance when considering the role of papal kin and cardinal-nephews in the early modern period.²⁸ These groups profited from both the rhetoric encouraging the delegation of papal administrative responsibility to the College of Cardinals, as well as the contemporary encouragement that to aid one's family toward social and financial success was a virtue.²⁹

One of the most fruitful results of the discussion of papal monarchy has been a revived interest in the papal court as a site for examining patronage structures and contemporary strategies of social mobility.³⁰ Although the papal court appears to be dominated by clergy and

1506), fol. 272v: "Excessit honor nonmodo credenda fidem: sed facultatem narrandi."

²⁶ Walter Ullmann, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen & Co., 1972), 331–332; Mario Caravale and Alberto Caracciolo, *Lo Stato pontificio da Martino V a Pio IX* (Turin: UTET, 1978); Wolfgang Reinhard, "Struttura e significato del Sacro Collegio tra la fine del XV e la fine del XVI secolo," in *Città italiana del '500 tra Riforma e Controriforma: atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Lucca, 13–15 ottobre 1983* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 1988), 257–260; and Pellegrini, *Il Papato*, 9–10.

²⁷ Paolo Prodi, *The Papal Prince, One Body and Two Souls: The Papal Monarchy in early modern Europe*, trans. Susan Haskins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) (originally published in Italian as *Il sovrano pontefice: un corpo e due anime, la monarchia papale nella prima età moderna* [Bologna: Il Mulino, 1982]); Maria Antonietta Visceglia, "The International Policy of the Papacy: Critical Approaches to the Concepts of Universalism and Italianità, Peace and War," in *Papato e politica internazionale nella prima età moderna*, ed. Maria Antonietta Visceglia (Rome: Viella, 2013), 23.

²⁸ Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *Il potere del papa. Corporeità, autorappresentazione, simboli* (Florence: Sismel – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2009); Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *Le Chiavi e la Tiara. Immagini e simboli del papato medievale* (Rome: Viella, 1998); Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *The Pope's Body*, trans. David S. Peterson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) (originally published in Italian as *Il corpo del papa* [Turin: Einaudi, 1994]).

²⁹ Wolfgang Reinhard, "Nepotismus. Der Funktionswandel einer papstgeschichtlichen Konstanten," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 86 (1975): 161–162. See Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* (2.II.q.63 and q.101) for support of this idea as acknowledged by early moderns.

³⁰ Peter Partner, *The Pope's Men: The Papal Civil Service in the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); and John F. D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome: Humanists and Churchmen on the Eve of the Reformation*

clerical ambition, closer examination reveals the presence of many laymen and lay relatives of both elite and lower clergy, who sought to support and participate in their clerical relatives' success.³¹ Fortunately, recent scholarship has striven to banish the antiquated and incorrect conception that a court must be “identified either with the merely ceremonial and cultural (at best) or with irrationality, waste, and luxury (at worst), in antithesis to the rational and positive development of bureaucratic institutions, offices, and mentalities.”³² Ronald Asch has offered a more refined articulation of the shift in behavior and location of elites from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, showing how the court grew as a space for gaining and invoking influence, specifically through noble and royal households.³³ To Asch's list Gigliola Fragnito, D. S. Chambers, Lucinda Byatt, and Mary Hollingsworth have added the cardinal's household.³⁴ This renewed interest has produced a general success with scholars applying new lenses to their investigation of the past that questions the intentions, processes, structures, and understandings found in court environments globally.

This shift has resulted in excellent studies of patronage and financial networks connected to the papal court. As Werner Gundersheimer has noted, the pope is presented as an ideal patron in many early modern Italian visual depictions.³⁵ His paternalistic but formal gestures suggest a willingness to aid clients, while asserting his elevated position in the celestial hierarchy. The pope's role as Vicar of Christ on Earth established him as a universal father and judge upholding the social hierarchy, while his responsibilities as the ruler of the Papal States supplied him with funds for patronage and demanded that he project messages about his terrestrial authority that diplomats and other princes would understand. As these responsibilities grew in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, so did the pope's reliance on members of the College of Cardinals, his household (*familia* in Latin), and his natal family (*noster carnem nepos*) to articulate messages of strength through ceremonial acts, public display,

(Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

³¹ Maria Antonietta Visceglia, “Burocrazia, mobilità sociale e patronage alla corte di Roma tra Cinque e Seicento. Alcuni aspetti del recente dibattito storiografico e prospettive di ricerca,” *Roma moderna e contemporanea* 1, no. 1 (1995): 11–54; Renata Ago, “Burocrazia, ‘nazioni’ e parentele nella Roma del Settecento,” *Quaderni storici*, n.s., 67 (1988): 73–98. See also: Jennifer Mara DeSilva, “Articulating Work and Family: Lay Papal Relatives in the Papal States, 1420–1549,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 1–39.

³² Trevor Dean, “The Courts,” in *The Origin of the State in Italy 1300–1600*, ed. Julius Kirchner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 136. See also: Robert Harding, “Corruption and the Moral Boundaries of Patronage in the Renaissance,” in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 47–64. For an analysis of that early historiography see: Cesare Mozzarelli, “Principe e corte nella storiografia del Novecento,” in *La corte nella cultura e nella storiografia: Immagini e posizioni tra Otto e Novecento*, ed. C. Mozzarelli and G. Olmi (Rome: Bulzoni, 1983), 248–275.

³³ Ronald G. Asch, “Introduction: Court and Household from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries,” in *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age*, ed. Ronald G. Asch and Adolf M. Birke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1–38.

³⁴ Gigliola Fragnito, “Le corti cardinalizie nella Roma del Cinquecento,” *Rivista storica italiana* 106 (1994): 5–41; David Chambers, *Renaissance cardinals and their worldly problems* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997); Lucinda Byatt, “Aspetti giuridici e finanziari di una «familia» cardinalizia del XVI secolo: un progetto di ricerca,” in “*Familia*” del Principe e Famiglia Aristocratica, ed. Cesare Mozzarelli (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1988), 611–630; and Mary Hollingsworth, *The Cardinal's Hat: Money, Ambition, and Everyday Life in the Court of a Borgias Prince* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 2004).

³⁵ Werner L. Gundersheimer, “Patronage in the Renaissance: An Explanatory Approach,” in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 13–14, 16.

and the liturgy.³⁶ As potential members of all three of these groups, cardinal-nephews shouldered a substantial responsibility to act as representatives of their uncles' pontificates in administration, foreign relations, and Roman social and artistic life.³⁷ To support these activities cardinal-nephews acquired high incomes that allowed them to employ large households in support of this magnificent display.³⁸ Through these displays and activities pursued outside their papal patron's immediate presence – in their homes, churches, and on the streets – these client-cardinal-nephews affirmed relationships, projected messages, and enlarged papal influence far beyond the Vatican Palace.

The existence of these households as autonomous and dynamic centers of *clientelismo* throughout the pre-modern period argues against imposing a rigid top-down or hierarchically absolutist model on the papal court. As Fragnito has shown in her work on cardinals' courts, instead of envisioning papal Rome as having a single focus, it is more accurate to consider the pope and his household surrounded by satellite households that focused on elite clergy (cardinals, bishops, curialists) or laity (princes, papal relatives, diplomats, bankers, merchants).³⁹ Between these households bonds were developed and maintained that could strengthen factions as well as establish connections with people outside Rome. This is illustrated abundantly in the letters of ambassadors to the papal court, who periodically placated anxious or impatient princes with advice or information gained from visits to cardinals and other ambassadors.⁴⁰ Moreover, the cardinal's wealth, made visible publicly through his household, reassured observers of his own power and influence, as many benefices indicated support from either the pope or foreign monarchs.⁴¹ Consequently, from the 1470s cardinal-nephews like Pietro Riario, who used their own palaces and household staff to host events for diplomatic envoys and visiting princes, were valuable liaisons and far more accessible negotiators, while

³⁶ Maria Antonietta Visceglia and Catherine Brice, *Cérémonial et rituel à Rome (XVIe–XIXe siècle)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1997); and Elizabeth McCahill, *Reviving the Eternal City: Rome and the Papal Court, 1420–1447* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

³⁷ Indeed, Werner Gundersheimer noted that traditional “Big Man” systems of patronage, like the papal court, which were found throughout early modern Europe, were maintained through ties to corporate structures, the chief one being the patron's own family: Gundersheimer, “Patronage in the Renaissance,” 19.

³⁸ Byatt, “Aspetti giuridici e finanziari,” 611–630.

³⁹ Gigliola Fragnito, “Cardinals' Courts in Sixteenth-Century Rome,” *Journal of Modern History* 65, no. 1 (March 1993): 26–56; and Gigliola Fragnito, “Parenti' e 'familiari' nelle corti cardinalizie del Rinascimento,” in *Famiglia' del Principe*, ed. Cesare Mozzarelli (Rome: Bulzoni, 1988), 565–587. For the papal household, see: Maria Antonietta Visceglia, “The Pope's Household and Court in the Early Modern Age,” in *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective*, ed. Jeroen Duindam (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 239–264; Alessandro Ferrajoli, *Il ruolo della corte di Leone X (1514–16)*, ed. Vincenzo de Caprio (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1984); and Theodor Ritter von Sichel, “Ein Ruolo di famiglia des Papstes Pius IV,” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 14 (1893): 537–588.

⁴⁰ On the activities of ambassadors in Rome at this time, see: Catherine Fletcher, *Diplomacy in Renaissance Rome: The Rise of the Resident Ambassador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁴¹ Paul M. Dover, “‘Saper La Mente Della Soa Beatitudine’: Pope Paul II and the Ambassadorial Community in Rome (1464–71),” *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 3–34. In 1489, the ambassador of Mantua Giovanni Lucido Cataneo wrote that he did nothing without collecting the advice of one or two cardinals: “[N]on facto passo che prima non voglia el consilio de uno o dui Cardinali.” “Letter from Giovanni Lucido Cataneo to the Duke of Mantova,” Mantua Archivio di Stato, Archivio Gonzaga (hereafter ASMa, AG), Roma, Carteggio degli Inviati e Diversi, busta 848 (11 February 1489).

maintaining the larger reputation of papal power and prestige.⁴²

In the 1470s, the banquet became another opportunity to experience “the dignity of the *signore*” – in this case, both the cardinal-nephew and his patron, the pope. Events organized to entertain visiting dignitaries show how the pope used his kinsmen as a public extension of himself, gracing lesser occasions with prestige and “triumph” by providing the resources necessary to create expressions of ritualized honor through public ceremony. Banqueting provided opportunities for cardinal-nephews to put their household resources to work for their papal patrons and develop reputations for magnificence and wealth that reflected well on their uncle, highlighting both his hard and soft power. In a cardinal-nephew’s household, guests could not forget that all they ate, drank, and marvelled at was funded and mobilized by the pope.

Cardinal Pietro Riario’s Household and Festive Diplomacy in Rome

Several historians have identified Sixtus IV as the initiator of broad-scale nepotistic strategies involving both clerical and lay relatives. Marco Pellegrini has described the Sistine strategy as “the multiplication of avenues of aristocratization of a race of *parvenus*.”⁴³ A chief beneficiary of this strategy, and also historians’ frequent target, is Pietro Riario, who was twenty-six when his uncle Sixtus IV raised him to the College along with his twenty-eight-year-old cousin, Giuliano della Rovere. In a letter to Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga after Riario’s death, Cardinal Jacopo Ammannati Piccolomini wrote:

You have seen how this man—part of the Franciscan Order—although still a youth, his past distinguished by no illustrious accomplishments, was made a cardinal in the fifth month of Sixtus’ pontificate through the pope’s strenuous exertions. From that day forward he was able to do whatever he wished You know the size of the crowd that accompanied him, in going to and from the Curia, men of every rank and station. The street was not sufficient for the multitude before and after him.⁴⁴

Ammannati Piccolomini’s description of Riario’s public presence, both captivating and apparently disruptive, is emblematic of the stereotype of the Renaissance cardinal. Della Rovere historiography asserts that Sixtus IV’s nephews acquired large incomes from many benefices and pensions, which funded large households.⁴⁵ These resources allowed the young

⁴² Joyce de Vries has affirmed that personal negotiations, interactions, and display played a vital role in securing status, building identity, and entrenching political authority in late fifteenth-century Italy, especially for aspiring families like the Riario: Joyce de Vries, *Caterina Sforza and the Art of Appearances: Gender, Art and Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 14–16.

⁴³ “[M]oltiplicazione dei canali di aristocratizzazione di una schiatta di *parvenus*.” Pellegrini, *Il Papato*, 96.

⁴⁴ At the time that Ammannati wrote this letter in February 1474 from Bologna, he was on less good terms with Sixtus IV, which likely colored his view of Riario. I am appreciative of the anonymous reviewer for noting this conflict. Ammannati Piccolomini, *Epistolae et Commentarii*, fol. 272r: “Vidisti hunc quinto a Xysti Pontificatu mense cu[m] ex minorum esset ordine: iuvenis adhuc: nulla illustri re antea cognitus: gravi Pontificis contentione creatum Cardinale[m] esse: Ex illa die potuisse: quod voluit. ... Euntem illum in curiam: atq[ue] redeuntem scis quanta omnis ordinis ac dignitatis multitudo comitaretur. Multitudini antecedenti ac sequenti iam viae satis non erat.” I am grateful to Brendan Cook, who provided this translation.

⁴⁵ Within the first six months after his uncle’s election, Pietro received the bishopric of Treviso (450 florins), several priorates and abbasies, including the abbacy of Saint-Vincent in Metz (1000 ducats), and he acted as papal treasurer (October–December 1471). Paolo Cortesi asserted that Pietro’s annual income soon exceeded 60,000

cardinal to lay plans for a renovated palace at SS. Dodici Apostoli, a public library, and ecclesiastical patronage, much of which came to naught through his early death in January 1474.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, these preparations and the events that his household organized on behalf of papal diplomacy brought him a reputation as “a shining example of greatness of spirit; he died the father of generosity, of gratitude, and of every bounty.”⁴⁷

In his oration on Riario’s death in 1474, Nikolaus, the bishop of Modruš and once the cardinal’s familiar, described his household as a site for witnessing virtues appropriate to a prince and patron, as well as his clients.⁴⁸ Modruš wrote that:

He fed no less than five hundred individuals in his household, some of distinguished birth, others noble, but all of them honest: priests, soldiers, scholars, orators, poets, or men devoted to some other honest art. The costs incurred in supporting so many never burdened him. He would say that all good men were his guests, words truer than truth itself.⁴⁹

This oration establishes Riario’s household as a community similar to the one that Quattrocento humanists seeking work at the papal court often hopefully described.⁵⁰ Modruš depicts the cardinal as creating a diverse community of skilled and respectable men, who upheld contemporary social expectations by seeking honorable employment and position under a patron’s protection. Notably, this description refutes accusations of self-aggrandizement by affirming the appropriate passage of ecclesiastical wealth back into the community through the feeding and sheltering of Riario’s honest and skilled household.⁵¹

Indeed, Modruš’ oration echoes the model of a lavish and forward-thinking civic patron that Giannozzo Manetti applied to Pope Nicholas V in order to build his posthumous

gold florins: Paolo Cortesi, *Pauli Cortesii Protonotarii Apostolici De Cardinalatu libri tres* (Castro Cortesio: Symeon Nicolai Nardi, 1510), Liber II, XLIV, fol. XXXXIIIr; Pellegrini, *Il Papato*, 97; Shaw, *Julius II*, 13; Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, 4:234, 238; Denys Hay, *Italian Clergy and Italian Culture in the Fifteenth Century. Annual Lecture of the Society for Renaissance Studies* (London: The Society for Renaissance Studies, 1973), 117; Gatti, *Pietro Riario*, 57–58.

⁴⁶ Notably, on his death some of Pietro’s role, resources, and projects transferred to his cousin Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, the future Pope Julius II. In particular, the titular church of SS. Dodici Apostoli passed to Giuliano *in commendam* in January 1475, as did the attached palace. Giuliano renovated further the palace that Pietro had left unfinished and built a second smaller palace on the northern side of the site for personal use, which in 1501 he gave to the Franciscan Order; Konrad Eubel, *Hierarchia Catholica Medii Aevi ... ab anno 1431 usque ad annum 1503 perducta* (Monasterii: Sumptibus et Typis Librariae Regensbergianae, 1914), 2:71; Deborah Taynter Brown, *Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, Patron of Architecture, 1471–1503* (PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1988), chapter 4; Gatti, *Pietro Riario*, 77–79, 81–82, 87–90.

⁴⁷ “Corruit praeclarum magnanimitatis exemplar; cecidit munificentiae, gratitudinis, et totius liberalitatis alumnus.” *Oratio in funere*, fol. 19v.

⁴⁸ Luka Špoljarić, “Nicholas of Modruš and his Latin translations of Isocrates’ *To Nicocles* and *To Demonicus*: Questions of Authorship, Sources and Dedication,” *Colloquia Maruliana* 24 (2015): 18.

⁴⁹ “Quingentos ferme pascebat familiares, partim illustri, partim nobili, omnes honesto loco natos: praelatos, milites, doctores, oratores, poetas, aut alicui alii honestae arti deditos. Nullis tantorum sumptibus, nullis grauabatur impensis. Hospitem enim sese omnium honestorum uirorum esse dicebat, quod ipsa ueritate erat uerius.” *Oratio in funere*, fol. 23r.

⁵⁰ McCahill, *Reviving the Eternal City*, 50–58.

⁵¹ The epigrammist Giannantonio Campano offers an example of someone who sought to join Riario’s household and benefit from his patronage: Susanna de Beer, “The *pointierung* of Giannantonio Campano’s epigrams: theory and practice,” in *The Neo-Latin Epigram: a Learned and Witty Genre*, ed. Susanna de Beer, Karl Enenkel, and David Rijser (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), 156–158.

image as a “Renaissance pope.”⁵² Modruš wrote:

Here lies deceased the worthiest arts’ most devoted lover. Here has perished every scholar’s foremost friend, the supporter of good men, the splendor of the curia, the adornment of the state, and this city’s most enthusiastic and assiduous rebuilder.⁵³

This passage suggests that Riario planned big projects that would benefit Rome both physically and intellectually, and that made use of the community’s valuable human resources. Giulio Ferroni identified in Riario “an urban preoccupation” that sought to make the papal see the center of both cultural and political worlds.⁵⁴ Although few of Riario’s bricks and mortar projects came to completion, in the following years similar virtues would be ascribed to Riario’s uncle, Sixtus IV, based on his patronage of the Vatican Library, the Sistine Chapel, the Ponte Sisto, the Ospedale di Santo Spirito, and the Aqua Vergine. Aurelio Brandolini’s epigram entitled *De urbe Roma a Sixto iterum condita* (1480–1482) validated the pope as an urban hero renewing the physical city, Rome’s intellectual activity, Christian spiritual sites, and even quenching the people’s thirst.⁵⁵ Across many accounts, contemporary observers applied the virtues of splendor, magnanimity, and liberality to both Sixtus and his nephew, suggesting that papal and cardinalatial patronage was acknowledged and appreciated.⁵⁶ Indeed, Modruš’ characterization foreshadows Pope Leo X’s bull *Supernae dispositionis arbitrio* (1514), which encouraged cardinals not only to renovate the urban fabric, but also to patronize honest and educated men through their households, thus adding to the city’s luster and connecting worthy candidates to curial employment.⁵⁷

However, based on what is known of late fifteenth-century households, 500 mouths is likely an exaggeration and surely did not account for the contraction and expansion that occurred with the cardinal’s movements as legate in Umbria and on his visits to Venice and Milan (August to October 1473).⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Modruš’ description reinforces the image of

⁵² Charles Burroughs, “A Planned Myth and a Myth of Planning: Nicholas V and Rome,” in *Rome in the Renaissance: The City and the Myth. Papers of the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies*, ed. P.A. Ramsey (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1982), 197–199.

⁵³ “Interit omnium studiosorum praecipuus fautor, cultor bonorum, curiae splendor, ornamentum ciuitatis, et huius urbis diligentissimus restaurator.” *Oratio in funere*, fol. 19v.

⁵⁴ Ferroni, “Appunti sulla politica festiva di Pietro Riario,” 49.

⁵⁵ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (hereafter BAV), Urb. lat. 739, fols. 82r–82v; Jill E. Blondin, “Power made visible: Pope Sixtus IV as *urbis restaurator* in Quattrocento Rome,” *Catholic Historical Review* 91, no. 1 (January 2005): 1–21; and Minou Schraven, “Founding Rome Anew. Pope Sixtus IV and the Foundation of Ponte Sisto, 1473,” in *Foundation, Dedication and Consecration in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Maarten Delbeke and Minou Schraven (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 149–150.

⁵⁶ Staunch supporters of Pietro Riario, who wrote favourably on his behalf, included Ilarione da Verona (*Dialogus ad Petrum S. Sixti cardinalem*, pub. 1473) and Ottavio Cleofilo (*Epistola ad amicos Ferrarienses de rebus Romanis*, pub. 1485). See: Gatti, *Pietro Riario*, 53–54, 94–96.

⁵⁷ *Magnum Bullarium Romanum*, 3.1:608.

⁵⁸ Surprisingly, Ferroni accepts this calculation at face value. The Piacentine chronicler Alberto da Ripalto estimated that when Riario entered Piacenza in September 1473 his household was reduced, but still included 200 horses. A month later Ugo Caleffini, a Ferrarese chronicler, counted around 300 horses when the cardinal entered Ferrara on 13 October 1473; Vatican City, BAV Ms Chigiana, I, I, 4; Ugo Caleffini, *Cronica Ferrariae*, fol. 38 as quoted by Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, 4:248; Antonio da Ripalta and Alberto da Ripalta, *Annales placentini ab anno MCCCCLXVIII* (Milan: Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, 1732), vol. 20, col. 943; Ferroni, “Appunti sulla politica festiva di Pietro Riario,” 48.

the cardinal as the master of a small domain in which he could funnel patronage to others and use his household as a platform for performing traditional social virtues and a patriarchal identity. In Riario's case, the household was a stage on which the virtue or vices of many groups could be displayed: the cardinal as the household's governor, the pope as its benefactor, and the familiars themselves who became the public, street-side face of both governor and benefactor.⁵⁹ As Modruš asked his audience: "surely, in regard to his abundant liberality and generosity, is there anyone who has not experienced it, save whoever did not wish or understand how to enjoy it?"⁶⁰ Alongside those virtues, the "arts" or skills of the large and diverse household described by Modruš would lend themselves to many projects, from spiritual to scholarly, and political to militant. This would have been especially important to a young cardinal with little independent administrative experience.

Traditionally historians have followed Ludwig von Pastor's depiction of Pietro as the more social and cultivated nephew, in contrast to his supposedly more serious and less humanistic cousin Giuliano della Rovere, the future Pope Julius II (1503–1513). Pastor emphasized Pietro's role as the host of many visitors to his uncle's court, noting that he organized "extravagant banquets," "brilliant tournaments," and Carnival festivities that fascinated resident ambassadors.⁶¹ These events formed part of both the papacy's campaign of *politica festiva* and the more widespread princely "prerogative of display."⁶² While some modern observers have highlighted the dissonance they see in a cleric hosting banquets, tournaments and other lay festivities, this perspective ignores the political responsibilities of the papal monarch and the frequent use of festivities as an occasion for peacekeeping and negotiation. Within this context the cardinal-nephew's household becomes an indispensable tool in pursuit of the pope's diplomatic and political goals.

In July 1472, the Milanese ambassador Giovanni Arcimboldo reported to his master that Pietro had held an event to honor the French ambassador, while further publicizing his uncle's plans to partner with France and Venice to recapture Negroponte, a city lost to the Turks two years earlier. Borrowing the house of the absent Cardinal Gonzaga, the cardinal and his guests ate within walls covered in velvet, tapestries, and silk.⁶³ In his letter Arcimboldo repeated the words "dignissimi ornamenti" ("the most worthy ornaments") to describe the character of the furnishings and decoration.⁶⁴ By indicating the existence of a decorative scale that took into account social standing and the occasion's importance, Arcimboldo offered a glimpse of how early modern reputations were made through festive diplomacy, and

⁵⁹ Laurie Nussdorfer, "Masculine hierarchies in Roman ecclesiastical households," *European Review of History* 22, no. 4 (2015): 626, 627, 630.

⁶⁰ "Sane munificentiae liberalitatisque eius largitatem quis est qui ignoret, nisi qui illa uti uel noluerit uel nescierit?" *Oratio in funere*, fol. 22v.

⁶¹ Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, 4:238–240.

⁶² De Vries, *Caterina Sforza*, 17.

⁶³ This was likely at the palace adjacent to the church of San Lorenzo in Damaso, which Cardinal Raffaele Riario demolished in 1483: D.S. Chambers, "The Housing Problems of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39 (1976): 39.

⁶⁴ "Tutta la superscripta casa era adornata de sopra et de sotto de veluti et tapezarie, et de altre cose et ornamenti dignissimi. La loggia in lorto, in la quale hano mangiati el Cardinale et li soprascripti Ambasciatori, de sopra era coperta de veluto cremisi: a torno alle mura pano de raso, lavorati tutti doro fino et de seta con altri dignissimi ornamenti." Archivio di Stato, Milano, Archivio Sforzesco Ducale, Potenze estere Roma (hereafter ASMi, ASD, PE Roma), Cart. 70: Letter of Giovanni Arcimboldo to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (16 July 1472).

consequently household expenditure.⁶⁵ This phrase, “dignissimi ornamenti,” justifies the luxury and extravagance, as well as cost, since it implicitly acknowledges the décor’s propriety and the cardinal’s right to display wealth and magnificence as a representative of the pope meeting with a representative of the king of France. Together the pope and the French king merited the highest selection of ornaments, mirroring their elite positions in global politics. As their personal representatives, Pietro Riario and the French ambassador adopted this level of luxury, and in doing so reminded observers that their masters deserved the highest respect and expenditure. Indeed, Modruš’ oration echoes this proxy position, reminding readers that in waging campaigns of festive diplomacy Riario “had purchased all things for this purpose, and that all his arrangements had been made not for himself, but for the papacy.”⁶⁶

Comparing Arcimboldo’s description of the banquet’s walls covered in velvet, tapestries, and silk to visions offered by contemporaries helps to determine the propriety of Riario’s ornamental style. Only a year later Galeazzo Maria would comment to the Mantuan ambassador in Milan that “I am a little bit ostentatious, but that is no great sin in a lord.”⁶⁷ Indeed, the duke of Milan’s love of jewels and rich fabrics is amply reflected in Sforza inventories and ambassadorial accounts.⁶⁸ Similarly, in the *Book of the Courtier* (pub. 1528), Baldassare Castiglione reminisced about the style and comfort he experienced at the ducal court of Urbino in the early 1500s. Not only was the company and conversation genteel and uplifting, but the material environment of “what is customary, such as silver vases, wall hangings of the richest cloth of gold, silk, and other like things” reinforced the elite quality.⁶⁹

The household inventory made after Lorenzo de’ Medici’s death in 1492 shows a similar collection of splendid possessions designed to decorate and accommodate his

⁶⁵ To offer a comparison, the Milanese ambassadors, Sagramoro da Rimini and Giovanni Arcimboldo, routinely used the word “dignissimo” when addressing Cicco Simonetta, the duke of Milan’s primary secretary, who read and responded to the ambassadors’ letters conveying the duke’s thoughts and instructions. In contrast to “nostro secretario dignissimo,” letters from Duke Galeazzo Maria and Simonetta addressed the ambassadors as “nostro oratore carissimo” or “dilectissimo.” In this context, “dignissimo” denotes a close proximity to ultimate authority, reflecting both Simonetta’s and Pietro Riario’s positions in Milan and Rome. There are many examples of these appellations on letters in ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Carts. 70 and 72 (1472 and 1473). For a useful comparative examination from Milan in the same period, see: Federico Piseri, “*Filius et Servitor*. Evolution of Dynastic Consciousness in the Titles and Subscriptions of the Sforza Princes’ Familiar Letters,” *The Court Historian* 22, no. 2 (2017): 168–188.

⁶⁶ “Vnde et in hos usus omnia illa se comparare affirmabat, nec sibi, sed summis pontificibus, quicquid praeparabat, componere.” *Oratio in funere*, fol. 22r.

⁶⁷ “Indebitamente sonno pomposo un pocho, e non è gran peccato in un signore.” I am grateful to Timothy McCall, who alerted me to this reference. Letter of Zaccaria Saggi da Pisa to Ludovico Gonzaga (15 April 1473), ASMa, AG, Milano, Carteggio degli Inviati e Diversi, busta 1624, as quoted by Welch, *Art and Authority in Renaissance Milan*, 316.

⁶⁸ Timothy McCall, “Brilliant Bodies: Material Culture and the Adornment of Men in North Italy’s Quattrocento Courts,” *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 16, no. 1-2 (September 2013): 455, 457–460, 478–479. See also: Paola Venturelli, *Glossario e documenti per la gioielleria milanese 1459–1631* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1999), 144–151. Venturelli has published archival inventories of jewels owned by Galeazzo Maria’s mother, Bianca Maria Visconti (1468 and 29 October 1468), jewels given by Galeazzo Maria to Bona of Savoy (26 July 1468 and 2 November 1480); and jewellery made by the Milanese goldsmith Maestro Dionisio da Sesto for the Sforza duke and courtiers. When Girolamo Riario traveled to Milan to court Caterina Sforza in late 1473, he followed tradition and brought her a large quantity of jewels, supplementing these with a pearl and pendant necklace worth 5,000 ducats when she arrived in Rome in May 1477 as his bride: De Vries, *Caterina Sforza*, 19, 25, 134–136.

⁶⁹ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 13.

Florentine palace. The great number of tapestry wall hangings, figurative, floral, and bearing the Medici coat of arms, as well as similarly styled table and bench-back covers, attest to the practice of entertaining visitors.⁷⁰ A large number of cushions covered in rich fabrics (*e.g.*, velvet, satin, taffeta, and damask), along with dozens of tablecloths and runners, often of French linen, and a valuable collection of goblets carved of crystal and gemstones (*e.g.*, agate, jasper, amethyst, and sardonyx) support this conclusion and enlarge a vision of late fifteenth-century luxury hospitality.⁷¹ Katherine McIver has noted the flexible use of trestle tables, benches, linens and cushions to create a comfortable atmosphere tailored to any size banquet.⁷² In addition to use as table cloths, serviettes, and towels, a multitude of fine white linen was necessary for clothing *credenze* where banquet courses would be prepared and carved, as well as tiered *credenze* that displayed silver services, istoriated *maiolica* ware, and other precious vessels.⁷³

A closer comparison to the unusual situation of a cardinal-nephew entertaining lay elites as a papal diplomat may lie in the post-mortem inventory of the household goods of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga (1444–1483), the son of the marquis of Mantua, whose palace at San Lorenzo in Damaso Pietro Riario borrowed in 1472. Like his lay counterpart Lorenzo de' Medici, Gonzaga's inventory lists a number of goblets with gilt decoration, as well as an extensive collection of tapestries, including multi-piece sets illustrating the story of Old Testament figures, classical heroes, and Christian themes.⁷⁴ In addition, Gonzaga's inventory shows a similar preparation for large-scale entertaining in the wall hangings, tablecloths, and cushions made of velvet, satin, damask, brocade, linen, and cloth of gold.⁷⁵ The presence of similar objects across all these sources, both ecclesiastical and lay, argues for a shared culture of splendid furnishings that projected messages of nobility and luxury. Indeed, Joyce de Vries has noted that these objects were “fundamental to the princely interior and often constituted the majority of elite commissions and collections.”⁷⁶

As Gonzaga had written to his parents in 1462 soon after his elevation to the cardinalate and move to Rome, it was necessary to find a house that reflected the “beauty and dignity of the house of Gonzaga.”⁷⁷ Part of his role in the Eternal City was to liaise between the foreign ambassadors, fellow cardinals, pope, and curia, in order to raise the status and

⁷⁰ Richard Stapleford, ed. and trans., *Lorenzo de' Medici at Home: The Inventory of the Palazzo Medici in 1492* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 67–69, 76, 79, 136, 157.

⁷¹ Stapleford, *Lorenzo de' Medici at Home*, 88, 94–96, 129–130, 139, 144–145, 172–173.

⁷² Katherine A. McIver, “Let's Eat: Kitchens and Dining in the Renaissance Palazzo and the Country Estate,” in *The Early Modern Italian Domestic Interior, 1400–1700: Objects, Spaces, Domesticities*, ed. Erin J. Campbell, Stephanie R. Miller, and Elizabeth Carroll Consavari (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 165.

⁷³ Valerie Taylor, “Banquet plate and Renaissance culture: a day in the life,” *Renaissance Studies* 19, no. 5 (November 2005): 623, 627–628, 633.

⁷⁴ D.S. Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and his Worldly Goods: The Will and Inventory of Francesco Gonzaga (1444–1483)* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1992), 144–145, 150–152.

⁷⁵ Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and his Worldly Goods*, 154, 156, 164, 165–166.

⁷⁶ When Girolamo Riario's bride arrived in Imola in May 1477, she encountered rooms richly decorated with gold and silken tapestries, velvet, damask, and silk hangings, as well as “a very high credenza well-stocked with silver” that was once owned by Pietro Riario: Letter from Gianluigi Bossi, Caterina's chaperone, to Bona of Savoy, her step-mother (4 May 1477), ASMi, AS, PE Romagna, Cart. 186, as quoted in De Vries, *Caterina Sforza*, 4, 129.

⁷⁷ “Et per questo voglio concludere che quanto sera ben fatto e fatto per honore de la illustre Signoria vostra, se convenerà comprare una casa et paulatim farla bella e digna de la casa de Gonzaga, et farla fuori de titolo aciò sia perpetuo de la casa.” Letter from Bartolomeo Marasca, Cardinal Francesco's *maestro di casa*, to Barbara of Brandenburg, Marquise of Mantua (1 May 1462), ASMa, AG, Roma, 841/689.

reputation of his noble family. In the same way that Marquis Ludovico III looked to his son to establish Mantua in Rome, and facilitate his agenda with people and at sites that he could not access, Sixtus IV empowered his own nephew. The Gonzaga cardinal's household proclaimed the two-fold dignity of noble son and ecclesiastical prince, just as Pietro Riario advertised his role as papal deputy and cardinal. As contemporary descriptions affirm, both clerics pursued lay political mandates using the language of material possessions, rich furnishings, and festive diplomacy, showing clearly that these practices cut across the lay-clerical divide.

Notably, Nikolaus of Modrus's funeral oration frames Pietro Riario as concerned that the late fifteenth-century Vatican Palace offered an insufficient stage for extensive festive diplomacy. He wrote that

[Riario] rightly considered it base and unworthy, that in this capital of the entire world, in this, the first seat of the Christian faith, to which emperors, kings, and every single prince on earth is constantly drawn to worship, that there should be no furniture, or that there should be no palaces suitable for the supreme pontiff to receive them honorably, and to honor them with a splendor befitting his dignity and theirs.⁷⁸

Thus, Riario's palace adjacent to the church of SS. Dodici Apostoli substituted for Sixtus' own residence as a stage for hosting diplomats and visiting princes, just as the cardinal-nephew shouldered some of the pope's political burdens by acting as his diplomatic spokesman and liaison. Not only was the cardinal a papal proxy, but his household and his dignity stood proxy for the values and investment of the pope, his uncle.⁷⁹

This model of representation reveals why the ambassadors observing Riario's household found few faults with what appears to be a level of extravagance that was awe-inspiring. Giovanni Pontano, a secretary and court humanist to King Alfonso of Naples, in his treatise *On Splendour* (*De splendore*, 1498) noted the importance of "the just measure," which observes dignity, occasion, class, age, or reason.⁸⁰ While such an environment would have been unseemly for a recently-elevated cardinal from a *parvenu* family who was still under the age of 30 to enjoy on his own, chambers flowing with velvet, tapestries, and silk were entirely appropriate to entertain the representatives of Europe's royalty and nobility.⁸¹ Pontano elaborated on this theme, writing that a splendid man's goods should not only "correspond to

⁷⁸ "Turpe enim et indecorum merito ducebat in hoc totius orbis capite, in hac prima Christianae religionis sede, ad quam adorandam imperatores, reges, et cuncti ferme principes terrarum uentitare solent, non talem esse suppellectilem, non talia exstare palacia quibus eos summus pontifex et suscipere honorifice posset, et pro sua ipsorumque dignitate splendide honorare." *Oratio in funere*, fol. 22r.

⁷⁹ Following Cardinal Bessarion's death in November 1472, Pietro Riario received both his titular church of SS. Dodici Apostoli (*in commendam*) and access to the adjacent small palace. Although his plans for its expansion and amalgamation with the basilica mostly came to naught, today much of the palace's fifteenth-century remains have been incorporated into later expansions of the nearby Palazzo Colonna: Lisa Passaglia Bauman, *Power and Image: della Rovere Patronage in late Quattrocento Rome* (PhD thesis, Northwestern University, 1990), 1:80–83, 102–104, 107.

⁸⁰ Giovanni Pontano, "Ioannis Ioviani Pontani to Chariteo: On Splendour," trans. Evelyn Welch, *Journal of Design History* 15, no. 4 (2002): 222, 223.

⁸¹ This discussion, and especially Marco Pellegrini's use of the word *parvenus* in describing new families' entry into the fifteenth-century papacy, highlights the contemporary tension between models of clerical asceticism and liberality. In addition, readers are reminded of the contribution of age and family background to early modern social judgments. Where Francesco Gonzaga's ostentatious purchases reflected his father's stable marquisate, Pietro Riario's crowd of familiars reminded Jacopo Ammannati of the family's relatively recent entry into the cardinalate. Ammannati Piccolomini, *Epistolae et Commentarii*, fol. 272r; Pellegrini, *Il Papato*, 96.

his wealth but also to the expectations of others and to his dignity; it may not be indecorous to exceed this slightly in such a case.”⁸² Following his description of the dining space, Arcimboldo noted the presence of the coats of arms of the pope, the French king, Cardinal Riario, and the ambassador, which were exhibited for all to see. These four armorial displays acted as conspicuous reminders to all guests and servants of the household’s greater patron and the strategic purpose behind what might appear to be a simple love of luxury and pomposity. These coats of arms traced both the host and guest’s political responsibilities and validation, placing the jovial event within the broader context of statecraft.⁸³ The presence of four coats of arms emphasized the ambassador and cardinal’s representative roles and infused the event and the relationships forged between them with a deeper meaning and urgency.

Botticelli’s depiction of the fourth episode of the story of Nastagio degli Onesti presents a Florentine banquet scene that is useful for envisioning the events that Arcimboldo described in Rome (Figure 1). Although the panel dates to 1483, almost a decade after Pietro Riario’s death, the scene includes many attributes that observers and scholars have identified as contributing to the exceptional environment, and, more generally, that were found in elite household inventories. Botticelli’s banquet guests sit at long tables covered in crisp white linens while servants in bright doublets and hose approach bearing platters with varied foods.⁸⁴ Separating the two tables is a *credenza* covered by an *alla verdura* tapestry and laden with finely wrought serving dishes.⁸⁵ Above the scene hangs a set of three coats of arms, reminding the panel’s viewers of the picture and the banquet’s patrons.⁸⁶ As at Botticelli’s banquet, when the Riario household hosted visitors luxury smoothed the path towards friendship and cooperation. Arcimboldo’s comment that “every thing was in a manner so well disposed and ordered that one could not say that more could be done,” reaffirms that to observers Cardinal-nephew Pietro Riario appeared to be an appropriate and largely successful conduit for effective festive diplomacy.⁸⁷

⁸² Pontano, “On Splendour,” 223.

⁸³ Similarly, at the banquet honoring Eleonora d’Aragona, there hung the arms of Pope Sixtus IV, Cardinal Pietro Riario, Ferrante, king of Naples, Galeazzo Maria, duke of Milan, and Eleonora’s husband, Ercole, duke of Ferrara: Passaglia Bauman, *Power and Image*, 1:88; Jane Bridgeman, “‘Bene in ordine et bene ornata’: Eleonora d’Aragona’s Description of Her Suite of Rooms in a Roman Palace of the Late Fifteenth Century,” *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 13 (2017): 109–110.

⁸⁴ Viewers of the painting should note that the servant to guest ratio (9:20) reflects the high numbers of table servers employed by large urban households like those of Pietro Riario and Lorenzo de’ Medici.

⁸⁵ Another silver display that may have links to Pietro Riario is the frescoed *credenza* with two upper tiers full of serving ware and display items that remains in the *Sala dei Notabili* of Palazzo Altemps in Rome. Dated to c.1470–1480, the fresco overlaps with the period in which Girolamo Riario lived in another version of the building. Joyce de Vries has suggested that this fresco acted as a *trompe l’oeil* reminder of the family’s wealth even as visitors enjoyed the real silver service, some of which Girolamo had inherited from his brother Pietro: De Vries, *Caterina Sforza*, 87–88, 129.

⁸⁶ Antonio Pucci commissioned this panel and three others to decorate *cassoni* (wedding chests) commemorating the union of his son Giovanni with Lucrezia Bini in 1483. From left to right the armorial shields include: the Pucci family, the Medici family, and the Pucci-Bini alliance.

⁸⁷ “[I]n modo che ogni cosa era tanto ben disposta et ordinate che più non se potria dire ne fare”: ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 70, Letter of Giovanni Arcimboldo to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (16 July 1472).

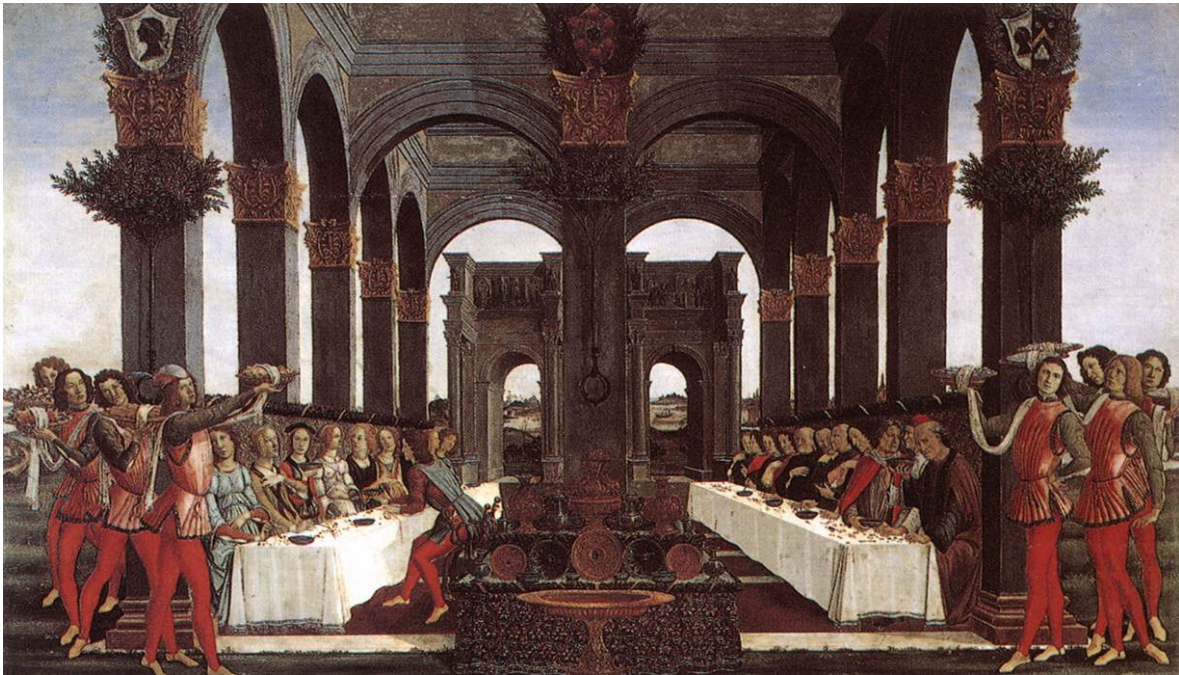


Figure 1: Sandro Botticelli, *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti (fourth episode)*, c.1483, tempera on panel, 83 x 142 cm. Florence, Private Collection, Palazzo Pucci.

Indeed, the Milanese response was particularly important to Sixtus IV and the Riario family. The pope had courted the duke of Milan, hoping to improve relations with the northern state, and attract support against any conflict with the southern kingdom of Naples.⁸⁸ The letters of the Milanese ambassadors, Giovanni Arcimboldo, Giovanni Antonio Ferrofino, and Sagramoro da Rimini, chronicle the relationship between the two states and families, as they negotiated mutually beneficial assistance.⁸⁹ In December 1472, Girolamo Riario arrived at Pavia, ostensibly to request in marriage the hand of Caterina, Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza's natural daughter.⁹⁰ Not only would this match cement personal and political ties between Milan

⁸⁸ Galeazzo Maria also expressed interest in the Sistine papacy as part of his ongoing rivalry with Naples: Gregory Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court: Milan under Galeazzo Maria Sforza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 157, 163–166.

⁸⁹ One example of this two-way relationship was the nomination of Riario family members and their clients to benefices in exchange for support at the papal court. In June 1472 Pietro Riario wrote to the duke expressing gratitude for his brother's investiture as the count of Bosco, a feudatory within the Milanese duchy: ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 70, Letter of Cardinal Pietro Riario to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (20 June 1472). In February 1473 Pietro Riario wrote again noting that he was satisfied with the priorate of S. Maiolo in the Milanese city of Pavia, which he held *in commendam*, and hoped that he could satisfy the duke similarly. The same day Arcimboldo wrote to the duke that “the Cardinal of S. Sisto has promised the archbishop of Milan to have him promoted to the cardinalate” and that the papal nephew “has the best path to power to obtain this promotion”; ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letter of Cardinal Pietro Riario to Galeazzo Maria Sforza and Giovanni Arcimboldo to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (both 26 February 1473).

⁹⁰ Cicco Simonetta, the duke's secretary, noted Girolamo's arrival and his intent to “contract *parentato*,” which was fulfilled in a betrothal ceremony on 17 January 1473. The duke had already tried to arrange a marriage between Girolamo and Constanza Fogliani, but met with implacable resistance from her mother Gabriella Gonzaga: ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Carts. 70 (several letters from June 1472) and 72 (letters from January 1473); Cicco Simonetta, *I*

and Rome, but it would place the Riario family definitively within the Italian nobility. While Pietro Riario's festive diplomacy had already framed his family in that role, the marriage would secure its position there. In response to the duke's hosting of Girolamo and the latter's letters, Pietro Riario wrote that Galeazzo Maria had done them such honor and confirmed his ducal dignity in ways that only increased the family's desire to please him.⁹¹ Undoubtedly, part of that honor was based on the lavishness of the ducal Christmas festivities and the fact that Galeazzo Maria had extended to Girolamo an invitation to participate with him as a privileged guest.

This invitation, followed by the *sponsalia* of Girolamo and Caterina, honored the entire Riario family, and laid the responsibility of reciprocation and *parentado* (support due to kinship) at their feet. As Pietro already knew, the duke was particularly interested in the elevation of Stefano Nardini, the archbishop of Milan, to the cardinalate.⁹² Arcimboldo reminded the duke that Pietro Riario prayed to be remembered to him, and would do his utmost to bend the pope to his desires.⁹³ When the pope announced the elevation, Pietro wrote to the duke that he had not stinted in every labor and diligence on Milan's behalf.⁹⁴ In response to the news, Galeazzo Maria conveyed his pleasure in letters sent to both the cardinal and his brother.⁹⁵ These exchanges illustrate the Riario brothers' understanding of festive diplomacy, a desire to use their influence on behalf of Milan, and to display their power as papal advisors who could facilitate a boon. Yet simultaneously this correspondence shows a wish to maintain some distance and, thus, their position as an independent rising family with its own goals and reputation.⁹⁶

However, if Arcimboldo was in any doubt about the Riario family and Cardinal Pietro's ability to project further than the papal court elite, he was mistaken. In February 1473 Pietro organized a banquet with a Turkish theme for all the ambassadors in Rome, four cardinals, many prelates, the prefect of Rome, the despot of Morea, and his own Riario brothers.⁹⁷ This

Diari di Cicco Simonetta, ed. Alfio Rosariso Natale (Milan: per i Tipi dell'Editore Dott. Antonino Giuffrè, 1962), 1:5; Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court*, 157–158; and Pietro Ghinzoni, "Usi e costumi nuziali principeschi: Gerolamo Riario e Caterina Sforza (1473)," *Archivio storico lombardo* 5 (1888): 101–111.

⁹¹ ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letter of Cardinal Pietro Riario to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (4 January 1473).

⁹² Sixtus IV made Nardini a cardinal in the elevation of May 1473, and the letters of winter 1472 and spring 1473 reveal extensive Milanese lobbying of the pope and his closest advisors, especially Cardinal-Nephews Pietro Riario and Giuliano della Rovere; ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Carts. 71 and 72, Letters from both Galeazzo Maria Sforza and his ambassadors (September 1472 through May 1473).

⁹³ ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letter of Giovanni Arcimboldo to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (4 February 1473).

⁹⁴ ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letter of Cardinal Pietro Riario to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (8 May 1473): "et dal canto mio non son mancato dogni studio et diligentia per satisfare in q[ue]sta cosa al desyderio de v[ost]ra ex[cellent]ia."

⁹⁵ ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letters of Galeazzo Maria Sforza to Count Girolamo Riario and Cardinal Pietro Riario (both 9 May 1473), and also Letter of Cicco Simonetta to Sagramoro da Rimini (13 May 1473).

⁹⁶ This concurs with Isabella Lazzarini's argument that many communities and individuals had "flexible identities" when it came to diplomacy. Pietro and Girolamo Riario were Italian, papal, Ligurian, and Savonesi, but also an autonomous family. In addition to being allied with Milan, from 1473 Girolamo was Imolese and from 1480 he became Forlivese. These identities and alignments complicated early modern diplomacy: Isabella Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict: Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350–1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 14.

⁹⁷ Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 223–224. For more information about Greek émigrés in Italy, see: Jonathan Harris, *Greek Emigrés in the West, 1400–1520* (Camberley: Porphyrogenitus, 1995).

banquet was a timely reminder of the pope's campaign to launch a fleet against the Turkish menace, the recent return to Rome of Oliviero Carafa, the cardinal-admiral, and Pietro's efforts to coordinate peace in the face of threat.⁹⁸ The Milanese ambassador noted that Girolamo Riario was one of the *giostratori*, perhaps signaling his willingness to take a larger role in papal military affairs.⁹⁹ Indeed, the French ambassador's arrival in Rome signaled the expansion of papal negotiations for a larger commitment of forces by European states and a renewed campaign.¹⁰⁰

Arcimboldo noted the cost of the lavish event and that the palace walls were hung with "bellissime tapezarie," two *credenze* full of silver serving vessels, and that most of the costumes worn by servants and entertainers were either cloth of gold or bejeweled, and of a "great price."¹⁰¹ The dinner itself lasted "three long hours" and the guests enjoyed songs and *moresco* dances. On the following day Pietro continued the festivities with a mock battle ("un bellissimo torneo") held in the piazza of SS. Dodici Apostoli between the king of Macedon and the Great Turk's soldiers. The Milanese ambassador recorded both the cost of the battle as well as the identity of some of the participants. The battle was so popular with Roman citizens that it was repeated a month later, again at the cardinal's expense. At that time another Milanese ambassador, Giovanni Antonio Ferrofino, described it as: "events that bring great joy to everyone: without even a minimum of inconvenience, and with the greatest glory to our Most Reverend Monsignor, whose generosity of spirit and liberality is preached by every verse."¹⁰² Witnessing these events reassured the ambassadors that Cardinal Riario had great power, which he could use for the benefit of Milan.¹⁰³ Indeed, just as Timothy McCall asserts: "representational significance was not entirely distinct from monetary worth"; for this event reminded spectators of their host's great wealth, which indicated the pope's own willingness to support Riario and through him the cardinal's allies and servants.¹⁰⁴ Specifically, the ambassador highlighted Riario's "magnanimity and liberality" and concluded that the costly

⁹⁸ Carafa entered Rome on 23 January 1473, while the banquet took place on 1 February 1473. This event also marked the Roman Carnival season. Notably, later in the month, the Milanese ambassador, who attended the banquet, recorded the appearance in Rome of a secular priest who was seeking a license to preach the crusade. His great popularity encouraged listeners to believe that a Turkish invasion of Rome was imminent. ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letter of Giovanni Arcimboldo to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (26 February 1473).

⁹⁹ ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letters of Giovanni Arcimboldo to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (3 February and 4 March 1473). Indeed, the previous year Arcimboldo had recounted the possibility of Girolamo Riario leading 400 or 500 horses into the Marches on the Papal States' behalf. ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 70, Letter of Giovanni Arcimboldo to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (28 June 1472).

¹⁰⁰ See: ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Carts. 72 and 73. For a discussion of the fall of Negroponte to Mehmed II's forces in July 1470 and the Italian reception of news and papal plans for retaliation, see: Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, 125–126; and Margaret Meserve, "News from Negroponte: Politics, Popular Opinion, and Information Exchange in the First Decade of the Italian Press," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 454.

¹⁰¹ ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letter of Giovanni Arcimboldo to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (3 February 1473).

¹⁰² ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letter of Giovanni Antonio Ferrofino to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (4 March 1473): "et cosi son simile queste feste cum grande letitiade ogniuno: senza uno minimo inconveniente, et cum sum[m]a gloria del Rev[erendissim]o Mon[signo]re n[ost]ro, de la cui generosita danimo et liberalita da ogni canto se predica."

¹⁰³ For the Mantuan ambassador's description of the banquet, which he sent to Barbara of Brandenburg, see: *Una cena carnevalesca del Cardinale Pietro Riario. Lettera inedita di Ludovico Genovesi, 2 marzo 1473* (Rome, 1885).

¹⁰⁴ McCall, "Brilliant Bodies," 453.

public spectacle had shown him to be “not without glory.”¹⁰⁵ Repeatedly Modruš’ oration emphasizes the same themes: liberality and generosity, honor, and glory.¹⁰⁶ Through events like these, which displayed his virtues, Riario made an essential contribution to papal affairs and diplomacy.

The cardinal-nephew’s role as host and papal representative to the diplomatic community aligned with Giovanni Pontano’s advice concerning the proper use of splendid furnishings, entertainments, and refreshments. Pontano advised readers that “[t]he splendid man must ensure that it is clear from his deeds that he has not purchased the goods for himself, but for his household, his friends, and his family and when the public good requires it, for the use and the comfort of the people as a whole.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, in his role as a papal representative both Riario’s household and occasional expenditure was put in the service of papal diplomacy and on occasions like Carnival 1473 for the entertainment of the Roman people. Not only did Riario’s household function as an outpost of Sistine politics, but the palace at SS. Dodici Apostoli became a visible reminder of the pope’s continued political activity, cultural patronage, and dissemination of wealth through the city’s merchants and artisans. Both his household expenditure and his ecclesiastical patronage earned prominent places in Modruš’ oration.¹⁰⁸ Yet, as the ambassadors’ letters show, and as Cardinal Ammannati Piccolomini wrote to Cardinal Gonzaga, Riario’s fame as a host and papal representative extended far beyond Rome and even to France.

Furnished with a magnitude and a variety: the ranks of the ministers: the number of banquets: observers considered the prices of things, which were sent by letters and described in verse. Not only were these passed in the vulgar tongue through the city, but also sent throughout Italy and also on the other side of the Alps for special study.¹⁰⁹

At Cisalpine courts Riario’s success cast a golden glow on the people and communities with whom he was affiliated, including Pope Sixtus IV, the Riario and della Rovere families, the College of Cardinals, the city of Rome, and, more generally, Italian elites.¹¹⁰ Broadly speaking, Pietro Riario’s fame as an adept manipulator of festive diplomacy contributed to a larger

¹⁰⁵ This accords with Joyce de Vries’ argument that sponsoring public celebrations and lavish festivities could increase popular support for and confidence in a ruling family or faction: De Vries, *Caterina Sforza*, 16–17; ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letter of Giovanni Antonio Ferrofino to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (4 March 1473). On the contemporary Milanese expectation of hospitality for noble visitors, see: Lubkin, “Strategic Hospitality,” 174–189.

¹⁰⁶ *Oratio in funere*, fols. 3v, 4r, 4v–5r, 5v–6r, 7v–8v.

¹⁰⁷ In his oration, Nikolaus of Modruš stressed that the cardinal’s splendid and sumptuous efforts were always on behalf of others, while Riario and his household strove daily to live moderately: *Oratio in funere*, fols. 23v–24r; Pontano, “On Splendour,” 224.

¹⁰⁸ *Oratio in funere*, fols. 23r, 24r, 26r.

¹⁰⁹ Ammannati Piccolomini, *Epistolae et Commentarii*, fols. 272r–272v: “Apparatum magnitudo & varietas: Ministorum ordines: epularum numerus: Rerum precia appositis speculatoribus adnotata sunt litteris: descripta versibus: nec per urbem modo vulgata passim: sed per Italiam quoq[ue] & trans alpes singulari studio missa.”

¹¹⁰ The accounts that Cardinal Ammannati Piccolomini referred to likely recorded Eleonora d’Aragona’s visit to Rome, which several humanists witnessed and immortalized in verse. These include: Porcellio Pandone’s *Admirabile convivium ad divam Leonoram Ferdinandi regis filiam a divo Petro car. Scribitur* (BAV MS Urb. lat. 707); Emilio Boccabella’s *De convivio habito cum Leonora Ferdinandi regis filia eunte ad nuptias Herculis ducis Mutinae. Ad Famam* (BAV MS Ottob. lat. 2280); and Tito Vespasiano Strozzi’s *Convivium factum Romae a Petro Cardinale*, which later appeared in *Aelostichon Liber Primus* (Venice, 1513).

reputation for all these groups based on wealth, ritual, and display that grew throughout the early modern period in foreign minds and congealed in the Italian disposition for *la bella figura*, political dissimulation, and ceremoniousness.

As Arcimboldo's report indicates, many observers drew a line connecting household expenditure through festive diplomacy to elite virtue, in line with Pontano's treatise and the virtues described in Aristotle's *Ethics*. As Pina Palma has noted, events like Riario's banquets and staged battles acted as public statements of the host's resources, relationships, and responsibilities. These events endowed festivities with a status-building character that aggrandized the host and the papal patron in whose name he acted, while inviting all the guests and observers to confer on him a greater reputation for princely power and virtue.¹¹¹ Giulio Ferroni argued that the very ostentation of Riario's events affirmed the divinity of papal power.¹¹² While it is tempting to see Riario standing alone as the host and organizer, all guests and observers would have acknowledged the absent Sixtus IV as the true facilitator and benefactor of these successful events. Through the pope's conferral of titles, benefices, the palace of SS. Dodici Apostoli, and responsibility for waging a campaign of festive diplomacy that entranced the Roman court in the early 1470s, Sixtus deputized his nephew as a papal agent and extended the mandate to greet, comfort, and communicate with visitors from the city gates to the Riario household. Most historians would agree with Palma that "the banquets turned the host's private ambitions into public spectacles," but few historians have considered in detail the necessary partnership that existed between the pope and his nephew, making papal ambitions the focus of the cardinal's festive strategies.¹¹³

Pietro Riario's success in entertaining ambassadors and other members of the court, as well as providing public entertainments, led to his organizing a reception for Eleonora d'Aragona, daughter of the king of Naples. The princess stopped in Rome in June 1473 as she travelled north to meet her new husband Ercole d'Este, the duke of Ferrara.¹¹⁴ Greeting the princess with honor would please both Ferrara and Naples, two states whose alliance could have consequences for papal politics. Just as his successors would do, Sixtus IV sent two nephews, Cardinals Riario and della Rovere, to greet Eleonora and escort her to a reception at Riario's palace at SS. Dodici Apostoli.¹¹⁵ Not only would Pietro Riario welcome the princess, but he would house her and her retinue, entertain the group lavishly, and accompany her to all her assemblies with the pope. The cardinal was host, chaperone, and would entertain her for the duration of her six-day stay. As Eleonora's visit spanned Easter weekend, she enjoyed a combination of events that portrayed Quattrocento Rome at its most diverse. In addition to the banquet and Riario's household magnificence, Eleonora was received by the pope, participated in Mass at St. Peter's basilica, prayed before the relics at St. John's Lateran church,

¹¹¹ Palma, "Banquets and Power," 21. On building reputation through publicly observed acts, see also: Jennifer Mara DeSilva, "Taking Possession: Rituals, Space, and Authority," *Royal Studies Journal* 3, no. 2 (2016): 4, 5, 9, 12.

¹¹² Ferroni, "Appunti sulla politica festiva di Pietro Riario," 58.

¹¹³ Palma, "Banquets and Power," 21.

¹¹⁴ The seminal analysis is Constantino Corvisieri, "Il trionfo romano di Eleonora d'Aragona nel giugno 1473," *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria* 1 (1878): 475–491; and Constantino Corvisieri, "Il trionfo romano di Eleonora d'Aragona nel giugno 1473," *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria* 10 (1887): 629–687.

¹¹⁵ Pietro's brother, Girolamo Riario, while still a bachelor and seven years older than Eleonora, was responsible for maintaining conversation with her at banquets and other events: De Vries, *Caterina Sforza*, 22; Corvisieri, "Il trionfo romano," 475–491.

and attended two *sacre rappresentazioni*.¹¹⁶

As during the Carnival banquet, Riario's palace was adorned sumptuously, but this time a wooden *palazzetto*, painted *à la trompe l'oeil* to resemble marble, had been built to house the princess and her retinue. Rich carpets and tapestries covered the walls and a theatre was erected on one side to entertain visitors.¹¹⁷ As Eleonora had arrived with such a vast retinue, possibly beyond 300 members, underlining her own understanding of the household as a public sign of magnificence, to honor the princess in a fashion appropriate to her station, Riario needed to do far more than simply house her entourage.¹¹⁸ Another banquet was prepared, this one lasting six hours and composed of forty-four dishes, which included sweet and savory delicacies, as well as heraldic devices and mythological scenes made out of confectionary, and a young boy who sang Latin verses. Following the banquet there was a ballet during which a band of centaurs disrupted the performance, and Hercules (an allusion to Ercole of Ferrara) arrived just in time to save the audience and dancers. Eleonora herself regaled her father King Ferrante with a detailed account of the banquet, suggesting by her attention to detail how much she enjoyed the event and understood the significance of its material luxury.¹¹⁹

Interestingly, the Milanese ambassador's account of Eleonora's visit was fraught with tension. On 5 June 1473, Sagramoro da Rimini reported that the new duchess had arrived in Rome and was lodged with Pietro Riario, whose house was most sumptuously decorated with carpets, ornaments and silver vessels, which would gratify both the king of Naples and the duke of Ferrara.¹²⁰ Clearly the use of luxury was appropriate to honor secular rulers, but Sagramoro is less happy with the outlay of ecclesiastical funds. His report of Riario's banquet is laden with estimates of price and value, suggesting that the magnificent show so enjoyed by Eleonora, and on other occasions by Giovanni Arcimboldo, could produce a sort of alienation. Sagramoro calculated that the total outlay by pope and cardinal across all the Papal States for "this honor" (*questa honoranza*) was 12,000 ducats. Dourly, he ended his letter with the assertion: "Beautiful is not reputable."¹²¹

The contrast between Sagramoro and Arcimboldo's reactions to Riario's festive diplomacy is important as it reflects the division amongst Christians that would grow over the next decades and also the costs of a reputation built on soft power.¹²² Historian Jane

¹¹⁶ On Pietro's patronage of this form of theatre, see: Gatti, *Pietro Riario*, 79–81; Ferroni, "Appunti sulla politica festiva di Pietro Riario," 53; and ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72. Letter of Sagramoro da Rimini to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (5, 7 and 8 June 1473).

¹¹⁷ Corvisieri, "Il trionfo romano," 643–644.

¹¹⁸ It is likely that most of the retinue was made up of an escort sent by Duke Ercole, and led by Sigismondo his brother, to accompany his bride to her new home. In his chronicle of Ferrara the notary Ugo Caleffini included a list of 325 *boche* and *cavalli* ("mouths and horses") that were sent from Ferrara to Naples. Corvisieri, "Il trionfo romano," 480–483. Olvi has published the instructions that Ercole gave to his brother for the trip: Luigi Olvi, "Delle nozze di Ercole I d'Este con Eleonora d'Aragona," *Memorie della Regia Accademia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti in Modena*, serie II, 5 (1887): 57–59.

¹¹⁹ The letter has been published by Corvisieri, "Il trionfo romano," 645–654 and translated into English with a useful introduction by Bridgeman, "Bene in ordine et bene ornate," 107–120.

¹²⁰ ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letter of Sagramoro da Rimini to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (5 June 1473).

¹²¹ "Bella no[n] e reputata." ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letter of Sagramoro da Rimini to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (7 June 1473).

¹²² Also, it is possible that Sagramoro's dismay stemmed from the nature of the visit. Eleonora was neither an

Bridgeman has called Eleonora's visit "an extravagant theatre of display ... [that] illuminates the role of soft diplomacy and the propaganda value of material luxury" within fifteenth-century Europe.¹²³ Other observers of the cardinal's efforts might recall the words of the frustrated and satirical humanist Lapo da Castiglionchio, who publicized the cardinal's role as host in his dialogue *On the Benefits of the Curia* (1438). Although Lapo's evaluation of the low virtue and gluttony of cardinals and curialists might be satirical, his emphasis on the role of the cardinal's household in papal diplomacy and social networking was correct.¹²⁴ Lucinda Byatt has explored the paradox acknowledged by contemporaries between the expectation that as princes of the church cardinals would use their benefice income to offer liberal and costly hospitality, and the encouragement that Catholic clergy should be models of ascetic discipline in both mind and body. As Byatt showed, magnificence, often displayed through festive diplomacy, was generally held to make the greatest impact, both socially and politically.¹²⁵ Undoubtedly there is a stark separation between the utility of expenditure and excessive and unaffordable expense. In his *History of Italy* (1537) Francesco Guicciardini twisted the definition of Liberality by criticizing Pope Leo X as "a man of very great liberality, if such be the proper name for excessive and boundless spending."¹²⁶ This definition has haunted participants of festive diplomacy, obscuring the broad benefits, context, and acceptance of its practice by other contemporary observers of the papal monarchy.

Conclusion

In January 1474 on Pietro Riario's death, the Roman diarist Stefano Infessura wrote: "and so our parties came to an end, with the death of one for whom every man wept."¹²⁷ Although Pietro Riario's contribution to his uncle's foreign policy was not limited to organizing banquets and spectacles, his ability to create environments and events that portrayed the Sistine papacy and the Riario and della Rovere families as paragons of magnificence and purveyors of ancient culture, helped improve foreign relations. Indeed, the

autonomous male ruler, nor an accredited ambassador, but a young female proxy, whose experiences enhanced reputations and soft power, but did not result in a treaty or any economic advantage. From a hard power perspective, the papacy's investment was quite extravagant considering the few concrete benefits that resulted from it.

¹²³ Bridgeman, "Bene in ordine et bene ornate," 115.

¹²⁴ Christopher S. Celenza, *Renaissance Humanism and the Papal Curia: Lapo da Castiglionchio the Younger's De curiae commodis* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 26–27: "They prepare splendid and refined foods in relation to the rank of their guests; yet the banquets themselves—the costs, the servants, and the rest of the refinement and pomp—are calculated in relation not to pleasure but rather to their own honor and greatness and to that of the whole curia. They invite into their homes not drinkers and their drink but rather foreign guests, legates, and princes, curialists as well as pilgrims—most honorable and magnificent men. In this way, among all foreign peoples the name of curia is made famous."

¹²⁵ Lucinda M. C. Byatt, "The concept of hospitality in a cardinal's household in Renaissance Rome," *Renaissance Studies* 2, no. 2 (October 1988): 312–320.

¹²⁶ Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Italy*, ed. and trans. Sidney Alexander (New York: Princeton University Press, 1969), 361.

¹²⁷ "[E]t così fecemo fine alle feste nostre, delle morte dello quale ogni uomo ne pianse." Stefano Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma di Stefano Infessura scribasenato*, ed. Oreste Tommasini (Rome: Forzani e C. Tipografi del Senato, 1890), 78. Egmont Lee has wondered if that comment hints at sarcasm and perhaps a veiled criticism of Riario's lavish entertainments: Lee, *Sixtus IV and Men of Letters*, 37.

pope succeeded in marrying his nephew Lionardo della Rovere to a natural daughter of King Ferrante, while Pietro Riario's brother Girolamo wed a natural daughter of Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan.¹²⁸ These matches helped to smooth diplomatic relations. Both Lionardo as the prefect of Rome (1471–†1475), and Girolamo as the captain-general of the Church (from 1471), participated in the banquets and tournaments sponsored by Pietro.¹²⁹ The interest expressed by the Milanese ambassador in Pietro's actions and his good impression of the cardinal based on these spectacles, reflects the duke of Milan's interest in Girolamo, as simultaneously negotiations took place between Florence, Milan, and Rome over the transfer of Imola to the Riario family.¹³⁰ At the same time, the duke of Milan and his ambassadors were in communication with both Pietro and Girolamo, encouraging them to lobby their uncle Sixtus to elevate the bishop of Novara (Giovanni Arcimboldo) to the cardinalate.¹³¹ Following the pope's announcement that Arcimboldo would receive a red hat, letters from the duke and his ambassadors followed the chain of influence thanking Girolamo, Pietro, and Sixtus in turn, and requesting that each Riario brother also thank the pope in the duke's name.¹³² Thus, the role that Pietro played, on behalf of his uncle, projected an image of power founded upon wealth and liberality that had beneficial outcomes for his relatives, as well as for the individuals and states that allied with them helping to support this vision of the family's strength.¹³³

This practice was not an innovation, but through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was a pragmatic and widespread strategy by which papal relatives, and especially nephews made cardinals, could use their wealth and their increasingly large households in the service of their patron, the pope. Pietro's innovation was to use a combination of "princely" and "ecclesiastical" acts and virtues in order to strengthen and frame negotiation with the papal monarchy.¹³⁴ Understanding how papal kin contributed to the pope's larger goals reveals the mechanics of elite patron-client relationships, the necessity of resource-sharing, and the social side of Roman court life. Nikolaus of Modruš' oration describes the relationship between Sixtus and Pietro as supportive, collaborative, and successful. His oration explicitly connects Pietro's virtues with his popularity and success in diplomacy, identifying the cardinal's household as the stage on which he performed these virtues, and implicitly offering a model

¹²⁸ While both unions were successful initially, Lionardo died in 1475 and instead of marrying the duke of Milan's grand-niece (daughter of Conrad of Cotignola), Girolamo wed Caterina Sforza, his illegitimate daughter: Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, 4:247; George L. Williams, *Papal Genealogy: The Families and Descendants of the Popes* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1998), 51–54.

¹²⁹ In addition, some of the leaders of the prefect's squadrons of men-at-arms fought in the mock battle of March 1473: ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, Letters of Giovanni Arcimboldo and Giovanni Antonio Ferrofino to Galeazzo Maria Sforza (3 February and 4 March 1473).

¹³⁰ Ian Robertson, "The Signoria of Girolamo Riario in Imola," *Historical Studies* 15 (1971): 89–91.

¹³¹ For this series of letters, sent in advance of the elevation, see ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72 (1 January–30 June 1473).

¹³² ASMi, AS, PE Roma, Cart. 72, letters of 8–18 May 1473.

¹³³ Girolamo Riario impressed the Milanese court, particularly with the gifts of robes made of cloth of gold and silver, and the pearls and precious gems that he brought his future wife Caterina. The duke's secretary recorded the number and size of each gem: Simonetta, *I Diari di Cicco Simonetta*, 1:6. In many letters the Milanese ambassadors noted that Girolamo accompanied his brother, sitting at the high dinner table with him and illustrious guests, or joining the cardinal in the pope's chambers for a private audience with an ambassador.

¹³⁴ Passaglia Bauman, *Power and Image*, 1:96.

for other cardinals and papal kin.¹³⁵ Although after January 1474 Cardinal Ammannati Piccolomini wrote that “The glory of banquets is lost!” considering the repeated printings of Nikolaus of Modruš’ oration and the tenacity of Pietro Riario’s posthumous reputation, there is little doubt that interest in this topic has persisted for both contemporary observers and modern scholars.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ For a discussion of this aspect of the oration, see: Brendan Cook and Jennifer Mara DeSilva, “Princely Ambiguity: A Translation of Nikolaus of Modruš’ Funeral Oration for Cardinal Pietro Riario: *Oratio in funere Petri Cardinalis Sancti Sixti* (1474),” *Royal Studies Journal* 5, no. 2 (December 2018): 103–105.

¹³⁶ Ammannati Piccolomini, *Epistolae et Commentarii*, fol. 272v: “Conviviorum gloria periit.”