

Articulating Work and Family: Lay Papal Relatives in the Papal States, 1420–1549

JENNIFER MARA DESILVA, *Ball State University*

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries popes increasingly depended on clerical and lay kin to supervise the implementation of papal policy. This article argues that the charge of papal nepotism is a result of the continuing idealization of the pope as separate from the issues of work and family. By acknowledging that the preoccupations of the early modern pope extended beyond pastoral activities into a world of administration, legislation, militarism, and diplomacy, historians can better understand the pope's use of and observers' criticism of nepotism.

INTRODUCTION

IN THE INTRODUCTORY essay to their 2002 collection on the politics of the papal court, Gianvittorio Signorotto and Maria Antonietta Visceglia called nepotism the “most characteristic phenomenon of the papacy in the early modern era.”¹ Indeed, the involvement of papal relatives in the administration of the Catholic Church or papacy, which reached its peak in the early modern period, stretched back to the papal dynasties of the institution's first centuries. More recently, Marco Pellegrini used nepotism effectively as a thematic skeleton for the history of the Renaissance papacy. Through this he followed the reduction in power of the college of cardinals and the rise of a more autocratic pontiff amid political instability in the Italian Peninsula.² While in the past few decades there has been a renewal of interest in the conceptualization and evolution of the cardinalate, beyond Pellegrini few historians have paid similar attention to the lay relatives that surrounded the pope both in official and unofficial capacities.³ In a fashion similar to the cardinal-nephew, lay relatives occupied offices that monitored territories and resources while extending the

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¹*Court and Politics in Papal Rome*, 3.

²Pellegrini, 2010 and 1998.

³Richardson; Hollingsworth and Richardson; Chambers; Signorotto and Visceglia; Fattori; Carocci; Fragnito.

pope's reach across the Papal States. Through the nineteenth century their presence in papal histories highlighted the perception of scandal, corruption, or weakness in a pontificate, casting a pall over the pope's praiseworthy achievements.⁴ However, as the perception of political factionalism grew through the twentieth century, from a static party model with the papal throne as the single goal to a more complex model that experienced constant change and embraced a variety of short- and long-term goals beyond the walls of conclave, the patronal relationship between the pope and his relatives, both lay and clerical, has been further contextualized.⁵

In charting the development of nepotism from the Duecento through the Avignonese papacy and into the early modern period, Sandro Carocci has seen a progression toward a golden age of nepotism. Although the practice of nepotism changed little in the move from Rome to Avignon, Carocci notes an intensification seen in the rise in numbers of papal relatives and compatriots employed at Avignon and the development of a quasi-official character. This characterization, encouraged by the instability of the Italian Peninsula and the twin specters of schism and conciliarism, grew through the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, replacing compatriots more often with blood relatives.⁶ As the papacy regained control of the Patrimony of Saint Peter in the fourteenth century and expanded the use of papal vicariates, the need for loyal local rulers paralleled the growing need for loyal military commanders. The strategy of granting illegitimate and intractable local lords legitimacy through the apostolic vicariate established peace but did not necessarily ensure papal dominion over the lands or control over the vicars.⁷ In many places of strengthened noble power, these vicars overshadowed, defied, and minimized the local coercive power of the episcopate, further highlighting the challenge of papal overlordship.

Against this backdrop the use of lay papal relatives appears practical and rewarding for both the papacy and their families, since they reinforced papal political and military power by serving as vicars and lay officers. Unlike local lords, who had few reasons to privilege a patron-client connection with the pope, papal relatives were often new men, whose elevation was a substantial reward for their obedience to the pope.⁸ As Gunner Lind has noted, the most loyal clients were those raised to a new social class by their patron.⁹ Where local lords might

⁴The work of the nineteenth-century historians of Rome Leopold von Ranke, Ludwig von Pastor, and Ferdinand Gregorovius all show this tendency.

⁵See Menniti Ippolito; Visceglia, 1995; Pellegrini, 1994; Ago; Weissman; Gundersheimer.

⁶Carocci, 197–98; Visceglia, 2011, 240; Lemaitre.

⁷De Vergottini; Partner, 1972, 342–44.

⁸In this study the designation “new men” follows Barbara McClung Hallman’s usage, and denotes men “who founded the fortunes of their families and succeeded in establishing their heirs as part of the Italian ruling class”: Hallman, 9.

⁹Lind, 136.

desire the legitimacy of a vicariate and a title publicly bestowed by a papal legate, their *de facto* power and local control was hardly amplified by this *de jure* submission to a former opponent.¹⁰ By contrast, the lay papal relative was often a new man whose allegiance to the pope was doubly strengthened: first, through kinship ties, and second, through the paradigm of clientelism that aligned individual interests for mutually beneficial gain. Between 1420 and 1549 there developed a pattern of involvement of lay papal relatives in elite offices within the Papal States that emphasized the cooperation of family members in a fashion that was acceptable in fully lay circles but that sometimes aroused criticism when laymen assisted their clerical relatives.

The increasing incorporation of lay relatives into the administration of the Papal States transformed kinship ties and also had a great effect on papal historiography. With the election of Oddone Colonna as Pope Martin V (r. 1417–31), his relatives took on a new and more public importance. As the vicar of Olevano, Belvedere, and Passerano, Giordano Colonna now viewed his brother the pope as both his temporal overlord and the “*paterfamilias*” or “*capoclan*” of the Colonna family.¹¹ Instead of the most powerful adult layman serving in the capacity of “*paterfamilias*” or “*capoclan*,” the responsibility for the family’s continued profit and protection transferred to the pope, an elite ecclesiastic who controlled far more wealth, authority, and prestige.¹² The two sides to this relationship — personal and institutional — have problematized the role and study of papal relatives for centuries. In traditional patron-client relationships both sides unashamedly sought the advantages that one could offer the other and considered their connection to be based on converting resources and the amplification of each side’s assets.¹³ While at times there was not enough resource amplification to entrench the local lord-turned-vicar’s obedience to Rome, the pope could usually depend upon the blood kinship that bound the vicar to him in order to ensure the continuation of loyal obedience.¹⁴ Likewise,

¹⁰Jones, 323–24.

¹¹Archivio Segreto Vaticano (hereafter ASV), Registrum Vaticanum (hereafter Reg. Vat.) MS 344, fol. 100^r.

¹²Giordano Colonna’s strength and position in Lazio through the schism led to his occupation of several towns (Genazzano, Cave, Rocca di Cave, Capranica, San Vito, Pisoniano, Ciciliano, and Olevano) under Pope John XXIII and the reconquest of several more (Ardea, Frascati, and Marino, among others) during his brother’s pontificate: Rehberg, 238, 270; Partner, 1982; Pellegrini, 2010, 73–74.

¹³Lind, 124–26; McLean, 1–6, 15–16, 34.

¹⁴In the early 1420s, when the Patrimony of Saint Peter experienced attacks from Piccinino and Braccio da Montone, Martin V’s relatives received offices that placed strategic cities, like Orvieto and Orte, under their reliable control: ASV, Reg. Vat. MS 349, fols. 151^v (Agapito Colonna, governor of Orvieto) and 159^v (Antonio Colonna, governor and podestà of Orte).

the vicar who was a lay relative expected his filial behavior to enhance his identity as a client. Although Giordano Colonna's relationship with Pope Martin V was articulated legally through contracts, their kinship ties provided a foundation of filial alliance upon which the rhetoric of faithful support and stewardship could stand truthfully.¹⁵

In studying the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century papal court, Visceglia has noted that its factions could call on supporters, both lay and clerical, from across class boundaries and exert influence far outside of Rome. While these factions bore the public face of the cardinalate and foreign ambassadors, they grew out of patronage networks that needed constant renewal, that embraced both "horizontal and vertical" patronal relations, and that profited from existing extended family structures.¹⁶ As Pellegrini and Wolfgang Reinhard have shown, the fifteenth-century movement toward establishing a papal monarchy reduced the college of cardinals' role in advising the pope and enlarged the opportunities of a subsection of papal counselors.¹⁷ While this group included elite curialists (select secretaries, select referendaries, the datary, and the treasurer) and palatine cardinals, whose skill and loyalty to the pope was proven, the pope's own relatives remained at its core. From the mid-fifteenth century, as Pellegrini argues, papal relatives, chiefly nephews, occupied an important place, either as cardinals or as lay officers, in developing and implementing strategies and overseeing ecclesiastical and temporal affairs.¹⁸ Pope Paul III's *ricordi* (1546–49) addressed to his nephew, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese *juniore*, illustrates plainly how the pope envisioned the faction that supported him as built on patron-client relations that could shift with the arrival of a new resource-rich patron. The elderly pope stressed the need for his family members, both clerical and lay, to maintain mutually profitable connections with "our creatures" ("le nostre creature") after his death if they wished to keep their positions in Rome and across the Italian Peninsula.¹⁹

The current scholarship on papal nepotism relies heavily on the work of both Reinhard and Pellegrini. In his important essay "Nepotismus: Der Funktionswandel einer papstgeschichtlichen Konstanten," Reinhard examined the involvement of papal relatives in the administration of the Church and the Papal States in order to understand whether papal nepotism had a recognizable social structure and to delineate what Reinhard called the rule function and the supply

¹⁵This could be seen geographically, since the collected territory under Giordano's stewardship and control followed the path from Rome to Naples, allowing the Colonna family to both secure access to the papacy and act as its defender: Rehberg, 265.

¹⁶Visceglia, 2002, 99, 102–03.

¹⁷Pellegrini, 2010, 43–46; Reinhard, 1988.

¹⁸Pellegrini, 2002, 17–18, 20–23.

¹⁹Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (hereafter BAV), Barberianus latinus 5366, fol. 135^r; Robertson, 4–7.

function of the practice.²⁰ Reinhard found that there was a recognizable pattern in creating cardinal-nephews and appointing lay nephews to a specific slate of offices. Moreover, Reinhard determined that the function of nepotism changed through the first half of the sixteenth century. While it was possible to identify a military contribution to papal rule (i.e., the rule function) in the involvement of the pope's relatives in the fifteenth century, this diminished through the sixteenth century and increasingly the function of nepotism was to promote the pope's natal family (i.e., the supply function). In a later essay, "Papal Power and Family Strategy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," Reinhard revealed how a series of papal dynasties achieved wealth and position through advantageous marriages and officeholding and joined the Italian nobility. Based on the contemporary acknowledgement of this strategy's success and its repetition in nearly every pontificate from 1538 to 1692, Reinhard described this period as the "age of institutionalized nepotism."²¹

In his recent history of the Renaissance papacy Pellegrini discusses papal nepotism from a structural perspective, showing patterns in officeholding seen from the pontificate of Martin V in 1418 through Clement VII in 1534. Building on Reinhard's analysis of structure and function, Pellegrini identified two strains of nepotistic practice within this period: *nepotismo ecclesiastico*, or *cardinalizio*, and *grande nepotismo*. While the former practice limited the introduction of papal relatives to clerical offices and the sacred college, the latter practice incorporated lay relatives as well as clerical relatives.²² Beginning with Calixtus III (r. 1455–58), Pellegrini identified the imposition of a more complex set of strategies (*grande nepotismo*) that endowed both lay and clerical relatives with offices, resources, and responsibilities within the Papal States that were both immediately enriching and future oriented. The ultimate goal was to position clerical relatives as likely candidates for the papal tiara in a future conclave and lay relatives as members of the Italian or European nobility. Seen through an elite fifteenth-century perspective, which was frequently preoccupied with state building (both rebuilding the Papal States and carving out new dynastic territories), the combination of clerical administrative experience and lay military support was very attractive. As Martin V's Colonna relatives — military leaders already established in newly returned areas — illustrate, lay relatives were a natural choice as vicars under the pope's overlordship.²³ This

²⁰Reinhard, 1975.

²¹Reinhard, 1991, 330. For a more detailed example of later papal nepotistic strategies, see Reinhard, 2009 and 1974; Fernández.

²²Pellegrini, 2010, 84–86.

²³Ibid., 75–76, 84–85, 97; Lanciani. Already in 1410 Pope Alexander V had made Giordano and Lorenzo Colonna, Martin's brothers, vicars of Castro and Ripi, expanding the family's control over important parts of Lazio, in the Roman countryside: ASV, Reg. Vat. MS 341, fols. 80^r–85^f.

contractual relationship gave lay relatives an accepted role as institutionalized contributors to the papacy and problematized criticism directed at them as financial parasites preying on doting patriarchs.

To the present, the central focus of scholarship has been on the role of papal relatives in church governance and papal military strategies.²⁴ While historians acknowledge the theoretical framework provided by Thomas Aquinas's elevation of *pietas* in transforming nepotistic instincts into an accepted social virtue, there has been little investigation of how this framework and the cooperation or relations between the pope and his relatives appear in official documents. In his *Summa Theologica* (1265–74), Aquinas argued that individuals had a moral duty to care for their relatives by sharing wealth and aiding each other's success. The pious man incorporated virtuous and hardworking relatives into his affairs in order to raise the family's status, increase their financial welfare, and profit from the loyalty guaranteed by their kinship ties.²⁵

As both Reinhard and Pellegrini have shown, the popes that engaged in the greatest nepotistic strategies sought a permanent foothold for their families in the territory and nobility of Italy, which often began with the receipt of a vicariate within the Papal States. Not only did this legally bind the vicar to his land and the authority of the pope as his secular overlord, but the vicariate made the newcomer a social equal to the other Italian noblemen who held similar vicariates. Pellegrini's work suggests that frequently the lay nephew, often also the captain-general of the Church's military, acquired the vicariate or a fief chiefly so that the family could survive the death of the pope, both socially and financially.²⁶ This essay argues that there was an additional social purpose in bestowing vicariates, for they raised the lay nephew to the level of other papal commanders. This was not a concern for the Colonna men, who already occupied a great deal of the countryside, held baronial titles, and were trained from youth in military leadership. However, members of papal families that emerged from the urban patriciate without military training or noble titles needed the instant social and military platform that a vicariate or fief provided. As new men, most lay relatives were doubly bound to papal obedience, both through kinship ties and as newly elevated clients who depended on their papal patron for offices, wealth, and prestige. This elevation was the beginning of a strategy of social advancement that existed to facilitate the elite work of

²⁴Chambers; Pagliucchi; Pastor. The work of Natalie Tomas and Caroline Murphy are exceptions to this statement, which can be explained by their focus on women, who existed outside of the world of papal officeholders.

²⁵Aquinas, 2:66 (II/ii, q. 63) and 2:104 (q. 101).

²⁶Pellegrini, 2010, 85. This situation is identical to the one that Niccolò Machiavelli, 2005, 23–30, described Cesare Borgia preparing for in *The Prince*.

leadership and governance expected of the lay relative in his capacity as vicar and in his other offices.

At the heart of this study lies a concern for how the twin issues of work and family appear in the relationship between early modern popes and their lay relatives. Theoretically, both administrative work and flesh-and-blood kin were considered alien to the pope; however, the reality of the early modern papacy was that it depended heavily on a network of kinship ties that crossed the clerical-lay divide. In the same vein as Signorotto and Visceglia, Gunner Lind has argued that “in many ways the Church accepted the power of kinship,” although legally ecclesiastical offices were not heritable. Yet while “celibacy changed the character of the family bond . . . it was far from erased.”²⁷ In order to enlarge the current understanding of the contribution made by lay papal relatives and the contemporary vision of it, this essay brings together the two aspects of Reinhard’s work on the function of nepotism (by rule and social advancement) and grounds them in the documents that granted landed social status and articulated the vicar’s new responsibilities both to the pope and the subjects he ruled. Madeleine Laurain-Portemer has examined the letters providing cardinal-nephews to the role of secretary of state, yet there has been little examination of the documents that frame the role of lay nephews.²⁸ While several historians have investigated the use of vicariates in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, most have gone no further than constructing the legal framework that surrounded the struggle to establish their rule and their later relations with other states.²⁹ Historians have not yet sought to put them in context using the documents that identified their new status and articulated their responsibilities and relationship with the pope. By investigating the period of 1420 to 1549, when vicariates and fiefs were granted routinely to lay relatives and rule and lay social advancement became intertwined, a more authentic vision of their contribution appears, built out of the papacy’s own words.

THE RHETORIC OF WORK, FAMILY, AND LOYALTY

Pellegrini’s declaration that Martin V turned nepotism into “an instrument of government” emphasizes how deeply integrated the pope’s lay relatives were in the larger structure of governing the church and the Papal States. The focus by sixteenth-century writers Niccolò Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini on lay relatives as the agents of the pope’s political and military strategies reveals their frustration with their own difficulties in papal service, but also reflects a narrow perspective on the notorious personalities and conflicts of Cesare Borgia,

²⁷Lind, 126; *Court and Politics in Papal Rome*, 3.

²⁸Laurain-Portemer.

²⁹Jones; Partner, 1972; De Vergottini.

Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, and Francesco Maria della Rovere.³⁰ These authors reveal an ambivalence toward the involvement of papal relatives and clients in matters that had a tangible effect on the lives of early modern Italians. Rather than assuming that Machiavelli's and Guicciardini's expressions show a desire for institutional reform or a redistribution of rewards and privileges, as many historians state was indicative of contemporary culture, one should reconsider the issue of family involvement in the pope's work. By considering how laymen who were not papal relatives, like Machiavelli and Guicciardini, stood at the edge of the web of loyalty and trust, one can investigate the rhetoric that framed the contribution of papal relatives and nonrelatives alike.

Even close kinship ties to the pope and reliance on his wealth and support could not replace the requisite social standing and skill necessary for success in the elite lay world. Just as the ennoblement of lay relatives established them socially as appropriate participants in the highest level of papal administration, their status as new nobles marked them as emblems of fraud to certain contemporary observers. The need for ennoblement stemmed from the fact that most of the early modern popes came from patrician families whose members had variable levels of wealth, training for military leadership, or involvement in civic governance; but rarely did any of the pope's immediate relatives hold an inherited noble title.³¹ In order for the pope's lay relatives to negotiate with other nobles as equals, and often to command condottieri employed in the papal army, they needed the support that a legitimate place in the formal social hierarchy provided. Social capital based on a familial connection to the pope was not enough. A noble title not only provided prestige, wealth, and a territorial stake in politics, it also made lay relatives socially equal to the vicars, commanders, and local leaders that they encountered as captain-general of the Church or urban governors within the Papal States. Moreover, the title established a place for lay relatives within papal ceremonies, much of which bound participants to certain roles according to their place in the noble or civic hierarchy, rather than their personal relationship with the pope. Participation in public rituals was a crucial part of establishing the identity and authority of both secular and lay relatives, as well as revealing to observers (both

³⁰Unger, 250–53, 285–86.

³¹To this end it becomes clear why the future Pope Julius II considered it so important that the heirless condottiere Duke Guidobaldo legally adopt his nephew Francesco Maria della Rovere and raise him at his court in Urbino. To build skill and achieve acceptance as an appropriate candidate for inheriting the duke's position as captain-general of the Church, it was imperative that Francesco Maria grow up and train in that milieu rather than acquire the position exclusively based on his kinship ties to the pope. Antonovics, 317, has estimated that in the period from 1534 to 1590 just under 5 percent of the college of cardinals came from noble families.

elite and nonelite) the bonds of trust that held the papal family together. Without occasions that allowed the visual reinforcement of the pope's reliance on his family, and his relatives' loyalty to and dependence on him, the ability of relatives to act in place of the pope or as his liaisons would have been severely weakened. Few people beyond the pope's intimates would know who his relatives were or whether the rhetoric constructing their relationship had substance.

The early modern papacy repeatedly demonstrated that it needed soldiers to implement its secular policies, protect its authority with martial force, and govern its cities. Through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the papacy adopted a compromise strategy that facilitated the fulfillment of its obligations as both a territorial governor and a spiritual leader, while publicly privileging the latter part of the pope's identity. By incorporating the pope's relatives into the Papal States' ecclesiastical and secular administration, the pope was able to maintain his separation from the secular responsibilities of the prince of the Papal States by committing the work to men whose loyalty to him seemed above reproach. Although papal relatives vowed obedience to the Roman Church, their positions and authority derived from the pope, whose patronage privileged family ties and loyalty rather than exclusively virtue and skill.³² This nepotism annoyed Guicciardini and Machiavelli, whose own advancement hinged on lay political factions that stood outside the ecclesiastical and noble circles inhabited by rapidly advancing papal families.³³ While they understood the demand for and evolution of papal nepotism, rarely did it profit them. Nor in the increasingly abuse-conscious and reform-minded culture in which they wrote did this policy seem to profit the long-term papacy.

Nevertheless, the grant of governing power to lay papal relatives continued with relative consistency from the mid-fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries. Even though P. J. Jones has called the practice "a product of a failure by the papacy to make its government effective, of a political weakness already centuries old," this continuation suggests that all parties involved derived a certain amount of contentment.³⁴ The papacy hoped to end

³²As part of the ceremony investing Cesare Borgia as gonfalonier of the Church, the pope called on Cesare to "accept this sign of the preeminent gonfalonierate . . . in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and understand yourself to be one who owes a debt completely to the defense of the faith and the Holy Church." After receiving the Church's standard, Cesare responded: "I will be loyal and obedient to blessed Peter, the Holy Roman Church, and to you, my most holy Lord, Pope Alexander VI, and to your canonically elected successors": Burchard, 2:210 (29 March 1500).

³³Only after the death of Leo X's brother Giuliano, the duke of Nemours, in March 1516, did Francesco Guicciardini receive control of Modena (1516) and Reggio (1517) as papal governor: Pastor, 7:111–13, 8:43; Phillips, 13–14.

³⁴Jones, 321.

the turbulence of the fourteenth century by acknowledging men who had come to control territory within the Papal States *de facto*. Bestowing a vicarial license on men like Braccio da Montone or Obizzo d'Este added *de jure* authority to their control, but also established a contractual relationship between them and the pope that hinged on their ability to maintain the rule of law in their vicariate and acknowledge the overlordship of the pope.³⁵ These were not insignificant expectations, although the creation of a vicar did not automatically transform an opponent into an ally: instead it established a temporary legal contract that could maintain allegiance by fulfilling certain conditions. These included the payment of an annual cash tribute (*census*), which could be waived; a pledge of loyalty to the pope as overlord (*iuramentum fidelitatis*); military service in defense of the Papal States; and, finally, attendance at papal assemblies (*parlamenta*).³⁶

The temporary quality of this arrangement was important, for it reasserted the pope's authority and the ultimate rule of the territory by the papacy. While it was rare for there to be much alteration in the obligations laid on the vicar, the approaching end of a contract allowed for negotiations to take place between the vicar and the pope and even the reversal of the territory to direct papal rule. This occurred on many occasions and could also be an interim step facilitating the vicariate's transfer to a lay papal relative. In 1415, as part of the deposition of John XXIII, the Council of Constance decreed that papal territory should never be alienated. Later clarification stated that vicariates be offered for no more than three years at a time. The council's new pope, Martin V, was scrupulous in holding his own relatives to this limit, but happily renewed the contracts every three years.³⁷ Through these contracts the vicar became *homo ecclesiae* (a man of the church), legally and politically, and through his obligations, he was bound to obtain the consent of the pope before he entered the service of another state as a mercenary captain by accepting a *condotta*. This idea of the *homo ecclesiae* is the contemporary response to the difficulty that Robert Harding described.³⁸ Rather than suppressing personal interest, the *homo ecclesiae* bound his interests to the Church's wellbeing. In contrast to P. J. Jones's poor opinion, Peter Partner considered Pope Martin V's creation of a network of papal vicars to be "a matter of practical politics," leading to a general admiration for the pope's ability to conjure peace for the weakest state in the Italian Peninsula while surrounded by soldiers.³⁹

Following Martin's lead, early modern popes extended vicarial contracts to *signori* (lay rulers) within the Papal States, and, as noted, an increasing number of

³⁵Jones; Whaley; Partner, 1958, 187–88.

³⁶Jones, 326–27; Partner, 1958, 188–92.

³⁷Jones, 328; Stump, 25; Partner, 1958, 191; Mansi, 27:1181.

³⁸Harding, 47–49.

³⁹Partner, 1958, 192.

their own lay relatives. An examination of the documents that describe and define the role of the papal vicar shows how papal kin existed in a paradoxical position, as both fictive political sons, but also loyal blood relatives. The bonds of fealty that were pledged by vicars and that should have existed between an obedient vicar and his overlord the pope were found most readily in the rhetoric that described the bestowal of a vicariate on a papal relative. Martin V's bull of 1427 defining the privileges of his Colonna relatives, which was confirmed by his successor Nicholas V, establishes a framework for a reciprocal relationship based upon kinship ties and the responsibilities that followed from them.

For if even the wise patriarch . . . makes a wise provision and disposition of his assets for the peace of his family, taking care that his household will rest in sweet harmony after his passing, how much more must we take care of these affairs of ours? For while we strive, under the duties imposed upon us as pontiff, to direct our attention to preserving peace and tranquility among the faithful for the common benefit of the human race, we may also rightly strive on behalf of our own bloodline. Charity herself admonishes us not to forget her own, but to think, with fatherly care, of how we may dispose of our cities, fortresses, lands, and other goods, both from our ancient patrimony as well as from those lawfully acquired through ourselves and through the praiseworthy labors of our brother of famous memory, Giordano Colonna, prince of Salerno, distributing them while we still live among those beloved children of ours, those noble gentlemen, our nephews.⁴⁰

Throughout this excerpt runs a theme of paternal concern and responsibility for lands and individuals that mingled during Pope Martin's pontificate. The pope recalled the obligations laid on Giordano Colonna by himself and his predecessors, which the vicar carried with "paterna diligentia" ("fatherly care") for the maintenance of "fideles pacem et tranquillitatem" ("public peace and tranquility"). Just as the pope chose his brother as vicar out of concern for continued stability in the Papal States, Giordano labored for the benefit of his

⁴⁰ASV, Reg. Vat. MS 407, fol. 91^{r-v}: "Etsi prudens paterfamilias . . . pro pace suorum sapienter providet et disponit considerans, ut familia domus su[a]e post eum in pacis et unitatis dulcedine conquiescat, quanto magis nos ista considerare debemus, qui cum ex iniuncto summi apostolatus officio ad considerandum inter omnes fideles pacem et tranquillitatem pro publica humani generis utilitate sedulo laboramus merito etiam proprii sanguinis nostri caritas ipsa nos a[d]monet, ut non obliviscamur sui sed paterna diligentia cogitamus, ut de civitatibus castris terris et aliis bonis tam ex antiquo patrimonio nostro quam etiam per nos et celebris memori[a]e Jordanum de Columna principem Salernitanum germanum nostrum ex eius laudabilibus operibus iustis titulis acquistis ita disponamus in vita distribuentes eadem inter dilectos filios nobiles viros nepotes nostros." Translation by Brendan Cook.

brother the pope out of a sense of familial obligation that joined with a universal obedience to the Holy See. Papal land under Colonna stewardship was protected doubly by the duty that a Christian man held to the pope and the duty that a family member owed to the paterfamilias. Likewise, after Giordano's death Martin felt compelled, both by family ties and as papal overlord, to settle the rights and responsibilities of Giordano's heirs so that "rightly might be preserved praise of the Almighty God with peace and harmony" in the Papal States.⁴¹

Following this framework is a contract that laid out the parameters of the legal relationship built on kinship ties. The vicars served at the pleasure of the pope and his legitimate successors. None of the named heirs might alienate, either in part or whole, the territory under their charge. They were bound to uphold the laws of the territories and all papal decrees, as well as pay tribute of 6,000 gold florins to the Apostolic Camera.⁴² This legal framework constructs a kinship model based on the patriarch's need to entrust governance of the Papal States to reliable men who would bring virtue, skill, and loyalty to their work and truly act as the *homo ecclesiae* should. Without loyal adherence to this model there could not be political or social stability and papal governance would weaken. A filial bond between the pope, as paterfamilias, and the lay officer, as the loyal son, was integral to both the metaphor used repeatedly in papal documents, and to the intrinsic value and attraction of lay papal relatives.⁴³

While noble titles provided lay relatives with a formal and superficial entrée into the world of elite politics and warfare, the source of their rapid advancement was no secret. Without the opportunities afforded by the pope, ennoblement of lay relatives would have been unlikely and the family's social capital substantially lower. While critics feared avarice and a lack of training in papal relatives, the documents issued by the papacy present a culture of virtue and experience that established a prerequisite character for lay officers that hinged on the pope's trust in the officer's character. A similar rhetorical vision framed the bulls provisioning all administrators and justifying their appointments by repeating a litany of their virtues. However, without indications of prior connections and skills proven in office the rhetoric is hollow and generic. Relatives of the pope could count on other offices and blood ties to prove their loyalty in a culturally convincing way to contemporaries. Using the documents that describe the ideal relationship

⁴¹Ibid., fol. 91^v: "ad omnipotentis Dei laudem recte cum pace et concordia conserventur."

⁴²Ibid., fols. 91^v–93^r.

⁴³By virtue of his political leadership, the pope acted as the chief householder in the Papal States, and thus only he could designate a legitimate substitute governor. Just as a father protected his estate, so too should a son endeavor to aid his father and loyally conserve the family patrimony and his father's legacy. Framing ecclesiastical administration in terms of domestic relations that bound individuals together in pursuit of good governance was traditional, dating back to the pontificate of Gregory I (590–604). See Sessa, 15–16.

between the pope and the men that served as papal vicars and military leaders, a standard emerges against which to compare and explore the contribution expected of the lay relative.

In the bulls issued by Calixtus III to men appointed as governors, castellans, and military commanders within the Papal States, loyalty was not entrenched by kinship ties but through integrity, sincerity, and Christian faith. This rhetorical framework established an ideal relationship between the pope and his lay officers that was based upon the pope's authority as the ruler of the Papal States, the head of the Roman Church, and the patriarch of all Christians. The bull presented the recipient as a *homo ecclesiae* whose loyalty was doubly bound to the pope as a worthy leader and to the Roman Church as an institution meriting protection.⁴⁴ In almost all of the documents the pope praises the appointee's sincerity of faith and devotion to the papacy and the Roman Church. This framework appears in the May 1456 bull by which Calixtus appointed Georgius Spinola to be the new podestà of Perugia: "The proven sincerity of your faith and the feeling of singular devotion which you bear toward us and the Roman Church promises that we will honor your person with our special favor. We benefit greatly from your integrity and your experience in administrative matters, trusting in the Lord and expecting that you will carry out those things which we have seen fit to entrust to you in our city of Perugia in a wise and praiseworthy manner."⁴⁵ The bull uses phrasing that reappears in many of the grants that Calixtus made during his brief pontificate. Spinola's sincerity of faith and singular devotion to the pope and the Roman Church identified him as a worthy recipient of papal favor. Moreover, Spinola's integrity and previous experience recommended him and provided the inspiration for this further grant of responsibility.

In the same year, Calixtus named a new governor to the city of Rieti using similar language to highlight the appointee's praiseworthy qualities. The pope valued the new governor for the "integrity of his faith," rather than the "sincerity of faith" held by Georgius Spinola, and his gift of many virtues appears much like Spinola's own grace of special favor.⁴⁶ In another echo of Spinola's grant, Calixtus stated that he expected the governor to lead the city "prudenter et

⁴⁴There are many examples of this in the volume ASV, Reg. Vat. MS 465 that use the stock phrase "that you bear toward us and the Roman Church" ("ad nos et Romanam geris ecclesiam").

⁴⁵Ibid., fol. 4^v: "Probate fidei sinceritas ac singularis devotionis affectus quem ad nos et Roman[am] geris eccl[es]iam p[ro]m[it]etur ut p[er]sona[m] tuam sp[eci]alis favoris gra[tiam] p[ro]sequamur. De tua utitur p[ro]bitate ac in rebus attendis exp[er]ientia pl[ur]imu[m] in d[omi]no confidentes ac sp[ec]tantes qual ea que t[um] duxerim[us] co[m]mitenda prudent[er] [et] laudab[i]lit[er] ex[s]equeris civitatis n[ost]r[ae] Perusin[ae]." Translation by Brendan Cook.

⁴⁶Ibid., fol. 158^v: "The proven integrity of your faith and the many gifts of virtues which you bear towards us and the Roman Church."

laudabiliter” (“prudently and praiseworthy”).⁴⁷ Two years later, in 1458, the same pope appointed Jacobo Galeotti de Normandis to be the governor and castellan of the “Castri Barbaran” near Viterbo.⁴⁸ This bull used another variation on the text found in earlier documents, again praising the sincerity of his faith and noting the expectation that Jacobo Galeotti would govern “prudently and faithfully.”⁴⁹ At the close of the document Jacobo Galeotti was reminded that his behavior in office should reflect the virtues listed earlier: “Diligently and prudently exercise care that can justly be recommended from you.”⁵⁰ In a similar fashion, when bestowing the vicariate of Rimini on Roberto di Sigismondo Malatesta in 1465, Pope Paul II commended his great prudence, integrity, and devotion.⁵¹ The bull of provision stresses the importance of the office of vicar and the care and vigilance expected from vicars in the governance of their entrusted territories. This concern mirrors the pope’s own desire to find a man as committed to preserving the peace: “let them rule prudently, justly and providently and govern with one accord.”⁵² Neither were the pope’s expectations personalized nor were they dependent on the recipient’s background, but standardized according to an administrative vision of the *homo ecclesiae* whose skills were deemed sufficient to transform his virtuous character into virtuous governance.

These documents, and many others in Calixtus’s and Paul’s registers, highlight the qualities that were considered worthy in lay papal administrators, and connect supposed personal virtues with an expectation that good character would surely bring new proofs of the recipient’s continued virtue and merit of favor.⁵³ This consistently employed framework identified reliable individuals in a broadly virtuous but generic style that conveys nothing about the specific relationship between the recipient and the pope, and little about the recipient’s previous skills and experience. Typically what follows these introductory sentences is an explanation of the terms of the position granted, including salary, duration of employment, limits of authority, and details of the recipient’s relationship with any other local administrator or incumbent in that position. The relative standardization of these texts is not unusual, but argues also for a standardization of the description of Papal States administrators.

⁴⁷Ibid., fol. 158^v.

⁴⁸Ibid., fol. 268^v.

⁴⁹Ibid.: “prudenter et fideliter.”

⁵⁰Ibid.: “diligenter iuste et prudenter exercere procures quod avobit possit merito commendari.”

⁵¹ASV, Armadio (hereafter Arm.), XXXV, vol. 37, fol. 33^r.

⁵²Ibid.: “prudenter iuste et provide regeant pariter et gubernent.”

⁵³ASV, Reg. Vat. MS 465, *Rubricella primi libri Officiorum*. This volume includes provisions made by Calixtus III and his successors through the pontificate of Paul III.

The words *fdeliter*, *laudabiliter*, *diligenter*, and *prudenter* appear frequently in these documents suggesting that loyalty, praiseworthiness, diligence, and care in the general representation of papal government and the pursuit of specific goals were constant concerns.⁵⁴

In 1456, when Calixtus III endowed his nephew Pedro Luis Borgia as governor of Spoleto, a framework appeared in the bull of provision that would become a standard way to contextualize the contribution of lay papal relatives. This framework is similar to the rhetoric seen by Madeleine Laurain-Portemer in briefs providing authority to cardinal-nephews as papal secretaries of state. Although as a layman Pedro Luis could not stand in for his uncle as the vicar of Christ, the bull highlights his blood ties to the pope (“nepoti nostro carissimo,” rather than simply “nobili viro,” as nonrelatives were addressed) and, in a fashion similar to the officers discussed above, notes Pedro Luis’s loyalty to the Roman Church and the pope. He too has proven the integrity of his loyalty through previous valuable service to the church.⁵⁵ In this case that service is identified as his work as captain-general of the Church. Holding this office identified him as a trusted layman in close proximity to the pope, which gives added emphasis to his characterization as loyal to the pope and the Roman Church. Bulls to other laymen included variations on the phrasing present in Pedro Luis’s bull, noting proof of their prudence, fidelity, and/or devotion to the Church, and the same reminder that the pope’s trust of authority to an administrator should always be prudently and faithfully done has added resonance.⁵⁶ However, the inclusion of Pedro Luis’s titles and kinship tie to the pope reveals an important way of identifying more elite administrators and justifying the contribution of lay papal relatives.

A comparison between Calixtus’s depiction of his nephew, Pedro Luis, and Julius II’s nephew, Francesco Maria, is revealing. When bestowing the territory of Pesaro on Francesco Maria in 1513 Julius acknowledged his blood tie to his nephew. The pope identified the new lord of Pesaro as a descendant of Pope Sixtus IV, in a manner that provided a pedigree of familial contributions to the papacy.⁵⁷ This reminder of the family’s intergenerational service reinforced

⁵⁴The generic praise of these administrators seems undercut somewhat by the reminder to maintain their upright behavior in office.

⁵⁵ASV, Reg. Vat. MS 465, fol. 204^r: “The proven integrity of your loyalty which you bear in our affairs and the affairs of the Roman Church indicates that we will herald your person with our apostolic favor and that we may commit the affairs of the same Church to you for governing in a steadfast manner.”

⁵⁶Ibid.: “Those things that we have entrusted to you, we expect that you will perform in a wise and faithful manner.”

⁵⁷Biblioteca Oliveriana di Pesaro (hereafter BOP), MS Oliveriana (hereafter Oliv.) 380 vol. 3, fol. 1^v: “you have generally been known according to the flesh as the grandson of Pope Sixtus IV, and considered honored beyond these things.”

Francesco Maria's role as the captain-general of the Church and obscured his youth. Moreover, the pope noted the importance of coupling virtue with social standing and leadership experience in this office, without which peace, concord, and stable governance could not occur.⁵⁸ In this textual investiture of Francesco Maria as lord of Pesaro, Julius showed the continued use of lay offices and kinship ties to reinforce the undoubtedly loyal administrative contribution of lay relatives and the desire to go beyond mere repetition of valued but generic virtues that would be expected of all officeholders.

Perhaps most interesting is the similarity between the bulls granting lay relatives responsibilities within the Papal States and the bulls granting cardinal nephews an elite administrative role in the pope's stead. In establishing his nephew Carlo Carafa's authority and character, Paul IV stated: "of whose prudence, virtue and integrity, we promise nothing that is not honorable and a compliment to this and of us and the Holy See."⁵⁹ By 1555 these characteristics were an established standard for identifying the *homo ecclesiae*, an administrator whose values aligned with the church and whose allegiance the pope held. The repetition of these characteristics and their application to both clergy and laity, and relatives and nonrelatives, suggests a need for a further level of encouragement. Notably, bulls provisioning papal relatives often have a conscious indicator of that prior relationship. In the brief bestowing authority on Carlo Borromeo to act in his papal uncle's stead, Pope Pius IV described him by both his office and his kinship tie.⁶⁰ This dual identification pinpointed the two criteria that urged the pope to rely on his nephew and entrust him with the administration of the church. Although Carlo had only been a cardinal for six weeks when he received this brief, this office established the social standing necessary for such elite administrative responsibility and interaction with vicars, cardinal-legates, ambassadors, and prelates. Beyond this social parity, it was the intimate bond of kinship that convinced the pope of Carlo's loyalty and personal commitment to his uncle's commission.

The same dual identification of office and kinship tie is seen in documents providing lay papal relatives to vicariates within the Papal States. In 1456 Calixtus III identified his lay nephew as "our beloved son, the nobleman

⁵⁸Ibid., fol. 1^r.

⁵⁹ASV, Arm. XLIV, vol. 4, fol. 100: "de cuius prudentia, virtute et integritate nihil non honorificum et commodum nobis et Sanctae huic Sedi pollicemur."

⁶⁰ASV, Arm. XLII, vol. 13, fol. 92: "Our beloved son, Carlo Borromeo, called the Cardinal-deacon of SS. Vito and Modesto, our nephew according to the flesh" (15 March 1560). A similar identification is used by Pius IV's successors to bestow administrative authority on their own nephews: Pope Sixtus V and Cardinal Alessandro Peretti, ASV, Segreteria dei Brevi MS 116, fol. 233 (28 December 1585); Pope Gregory XIV and Cardinal Paolo Camillo Sfondrato, ASV, Segreteria dei Brevi MS 184, fol. 133 (31 October 1591).

Pedro Luis Borgia, the Captain-General of the armed forces for us and the Apostolic See, and Governor in our city of Spoleto, and nephew most dear to us and to the Roman Church.”⁶¹ In 1513 Julius II identified Francesco Maria della Rovere as a nobleman, a vicar-general, the captain-general of the Church, and, finally, as a papal relative, descended as Julius was from Pope Sixtus IV.⁶² These identifiers were spread throughout the bull, rather than clustered in the salutation, indicating that these offices and ties were more than merely titular. Rather, their integrated placement across the bull suggests that they acted as a dialectical justification and encouragement that Francesco Maria was likely to fulfill the charge laid upon him by the bull to protect and cultivate the city and citizens of Pesaro as a good lord and vicar should.

In 1542 Paul III greeted his grandson Sforza Sforza and confirmed his possession of the vicariate of several towns in Emilia-Romagna. The bull established Sforza’s official and familial pedigree right from the start:

To our beloved son, the noble gentleman Sforza, son of Sforza, count of Santa Fiora, our nephew according to the flesh: greetings and apostolic blessings. The purity of faith and devotion you show in revering us and the Roman Church, which has received so many dear and welcome services, first from your father of good memory, Bosio Sforza, count of Santa Fiora, captain of arms and of our guard, and then after his death from you, who serve currently as our captain of arms, as well as the expenses you have incurred previously for the Apostolic See, and which you do not cease to make continuously until this very moment, as well as your virtues and your outstanding services, through which we have learned the nobility of your character; all of these things shall rightly lead us to make a favorable concession of those things which we foresee will be advantageous to you and your descendants.⁶³

⁶¹ASV, Reg. Vat. 465, fol. 204^r: “Dilecto filio Nobili Viro Petro Ludovico de Borgia gentium armigerar[um] p[er] nob[is] et ap[osto]lica Sede Capitaneo gen[er]al[is] et in Civitate n[ost]ra Spoletan[is] p[er] nob[is] et Roman[a] Eccl[esi]a Gubernatori et locum[en]s nepoti n[ost]ro carissimo.”

⁶²BOP, MS Oliv. 380 vol. 3, fols. 1^r–2^v.

⁶³ASV, Arm. LXI, vol. 2, fol. 281^r (5 May 1542): “Dilecto filio Nobili Viro Sfortiae Sfortiae Comiti S[anc]tae Florae, nostro s[ecundu]m carnem Nepoti salutem, et Ap[osto]lica[m] ben[edictionem]. Fidei, ac devotionis, sinceritas, qua Nos, et Romanam revereris Eccl[esi]am, quam plura[ue] grata, et accepta servitia per bo[nae] me[m]oriae Bolium Sfortia Comitem S[anc]tae Florae armor[um] et custodiae nostrae Capitaneum genitorem tuum, et post illius obitum p[er] te, qui etiam armorum Capitaneus noster existis nobis, et Ap[osto]licae Sedi hactenus impensa, et quae tu sollicitis studijs continuo impendere non desiris necnon virtutes, et praeclara merita, quib[us] personam tuam novimus insignitam, merito nos inducerint, ut illa tibi favorabiliter concedamus, quae tibi, ac posteritati tuae fore conspicimus opportuna.” Translation by Brendan Cook.

In this case the pope goes further to describe a history of distinguished service to the papacy, noting that both Sforza and his late father Bosio served as papal captains and counts of Santa Fiora. This dual generational service and elite social position provides an added reinforcement to the virtuous character that Sforza boasts, which was seen in a fairly consistent and generic form as early as Calixtus III's bulls bestowing offices on nonrelatives.

While these bulls chiefly functioned as statements of the vicar's new privilege and position, they have a further character when considered as messages sent to newly elevated employees. In this light the documents also acted as prescriptive texts urging good government on the new vicar, defining the parameters of his responsibility vis-à-vis a model of best practice. Implicitly these documents present a dialectic between the model of the ideal vicar and the chosen man. While the papal author describes the Church's expectations, the description of the vicar according to his offices, virtues, and ties to the pope indicates his preparation to meet these expectations and likeliness to do so. In any grant of governing responsibility there was an expectation that the new administrator would have a reputation for prudence and virtue. As the earlier discussion shows, this appeared in bulls providing relatives and nonrelatives alike to papal offices. However, in the documents that named lay papal relatives to vicariates there was a further effort made to indicate in a specific fashion, based on current or previous offices and kinship ties, that the candidate was an appropriate and justified choice.

PAPAL WORK AND FAMILY

At the core of the discussion of the role of lay papal relatives in ecclesiastical affairs stand the twin issues of family and work. In a sense, both of these themes were antithetical to the rhetoric of the pope, the heir of Saint Peter whose election the Holy Spirit facilitated and whose goal was to lead the Catholic faithful along the steep and narrow path to virtue and salvation. The pope's vocation, described evocatively and pastorally as the good shepherd, has little connection to the administrative and diplomatic tasks that filled his days in the early modern period. Although reformers enjoyed comparing Jesus's poverty and perceived asceticism with the wealth of the pope, there was little similarity between the daily activities of the Catholic Savior and the vicar of Christ who led and organized the corporate Roman Church in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁶⁴ The great expansion of the Roman Church over 1,500 years ensured

⁶⁴The most popular example of this comparison was Lucas Cranach's *Passional of Christ and Antichrist* (1521), which juxtaposed the Passion of Jesus with scenes from papal ceremonies and administration: Whitford, 42–48. For a contemporary literary argument about the pope's preference for the prince's work over the priest's work, see Erasmus, 1968.

that the vicar of Christ could not be a wandering preacher, but must attend to the business of running a religious organization while maintaining a pious life that echoed the sustained focus on salvation and personal asceticism of Jesus himself.⁶⁵ Not surprisingly this balance was difficult to achieve.

Following his election as the vicar of Christ on Earth the new pope divested himself of family and all work for profit in the conventional sense. He adopted a new name that emphasized his rebirth as a more spiritual man separate from his former mortal self.⁶⁶ As pope he was a father guiding his dependents, a shepherd protecting his flock from harm, and a mediator between Earth and heaven, revealing the path to salvation for militant Christians. All of these roles appear in early modern documents relating to the activities and preoccupations of the pope,⁶⁷ but few documents identify his concrete administrative tasks, except when criticizing a pope's intervention or his expression of favoritism.⁶⁸ Uniformly, the working pope was an earthly incarnation that stood at odds with the traditional rhetoric describing the vicar of Christ on Earth and the more spiritual goal of Christian salvation.

The anomalous character of the pope, and his separation from the practical demands of his office, is continued in the fiction that the vicar of Christ had no mortal kin. From the late Middle Ages there was an inherent paradox in the body of the pope, which proved to be simultaneously physical and metaphorical. While Ernst Kantorowicz described the early modern king as having had two bodies, the pope, who was sometimes considered to be the king's spiritual counterpart, had only one body.⁶⁹ Where the pope's physical body decayed and died, in its place remained the metaphysical body of the church and of Communion, which was considered to be Jesus Christ's body. Into this body each pope was reborn at his coronation as the vicar of Christ, but at his death the

⁶⁵The pontificate of Celestine V (r. from July to December 1294) proved that even in a period that prized the values of poverty, humility, and minimalism, as seen in the rapid rise of the Friars Minor through the thirteenth century, the pope could not live in constant ascetic contemplation of Christ, removed from the political and judicial concerns: Eastman, 196, 200, 208–10; O'Malley, 132, 134–35.

⁶⁶For a brief description of how the cardinal died liturgically (in black vestments) before being reborn as the pope (in white vestments), see *L'ordine che si tiene nel creare il sommo pontefice, con le cerimonie che si fanno della coronazione in S. Giovanni Laterano*.

⁶⁷Bernard Barbiche has noted how the pope's pastoral mandate appears in diplomatic documents, specifically endowing legates with the power to mediate between princes akin to an *angelus pacis* (angel of peace): Barbiche, 367–68.

⁶⁸Lapo's dialogue *On the Benefits of the Curia* (1438) expands this paradox to embrace the entire Roman curia. While the papal responsibilities and administrative offices are essential to Christendom, Lapo portrays the curialist officeholders themselves as corrupt and preventing the achievement of the papacy's greater goals: Celenza, 31, 62–65.

⁶⁹Kantorowicz, 7, 9, 194–98, 204.

pope returned to being a mortal man. In the office of the papacy Jesus Christ was omnipresent, providing a continuity of leadership for the church.⁷⁰ The complexity of the transition from mortality to being the vicar of Christ, and then returning to mortality in death, was reflected in the clothing worn by the pope's corpse. Although the master of ceremonies, Paris de' Grassi, instructed that the corpse should wear the habit that the pope wore before his election, the corpse should also wear the pontifical vestments for Mass on top of his habit because he was once the vicar of Christ. This custom of double robes reveals the complexity of the pope's identity in cloth. He was at once greater than any other mortal man and divinely separated from them, yet still he carried the memory of his mortal identity and connections.⁷¹ While this belief maintained the fundamental but intangible connection between the mortal leader of the Roman Church and the Christian God, it favored the idealization of a leader whose leadership remained separate from the economic preoccupations and administrative realities of his position, and who focused only on the otherworldly results of prayer and pious inspiration, rather than on the human assistants that supported his authority and carried out his mandate.

Within this environment the increasing involvement of the pope's relatives in papal governance appeared to be the precise opposite of the ideal enthusiastically described throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Not only was the working pontiff in need of assistance in his administrative and spiritual roles, but increasingly he preferred to draw close advisors from his blood kin and family clients. Beginning with Sixtus IV's pontificate the number of cardinals bearing these ties rose, expanding dramatically under Alexander VI, Julius II, Leo X, and Paul III. Pope Sixtus IV raised more blood relatives to the college than any previous pope (six men), and for the most part his successors continued the trend. Alexander VI raised five blood relatives, Julius II raised four blood relatives, Leo X raised five blood relatives, and Paul III raised four or five blood relatives to the cardinalate. These numbers are in contrast to the relative scarcity of cardinals drawn from papal families and generally a smaller college of cardinals in the period from 1420 to 1471. In the earlier period, Paul II elevated three nephews, while Eugenius IV, Pius II, and Calixtus III elevated two nephews each.

Paradoxically, the decay of legitimate authority and honest leadership that critics identified in increased nepotism stood in opposition to the pope's purpose of introducing papal relatives. Popes elevated relatives to the college of cardinals and to other offices in order to ease the transition between pontificates through the entrenchment of their authority, and thus improve organizational efficiency

⁷⁰See Paravicini-Bagliani.

⁷¹BAV, Vaticanus latinus (hereafter Vat. lat.) MS 5986, Paris de' Grassi, *Tractatus de funeribus et exequiis*, fol. 127^v.

by reducing factionalism.⁷² As Reinhard has shown, social advancement was often equally important to papal families. As Paul III reminded his grandson Cardinal Alessandro, one of the achievements of his pontificate was the elevation of the house of Farnese and the creation of a faction that depended on their continued access to authority and wealth. Both the family and the supporting faction helped the pope to rule, but also expected remuneration for their services, both financial and social.⁷³ Unfortunately, in some cases both lay and clerical nephews proved less apt or committed to their offices, as seen in the examples of Juan Borgia, Ippolito and Alessandro de' Medici, Innocenzo del Monte, and the Carafa nephews.⁷⁴ Although the plan did not always work effectively, the role of papal relatives was to aid their patron and carry out tasks that he could not do personally, in pursuit of greater papal glory. In a similar fashion, early moderns could accept the presence of these papal relatives as a practical aid that was common in secular affairs and that carried over into the ecclesiastical world. The medieval emphasis on aristocratic family power as the foundation of political organization and proof of the descent of authority encouraged the acceptance of nepotism across all fields.⁷⁵

The immediate attraction of this pool of advisors and appointees expanded through the fifteenth century as the popes increasingly came from patrician families who sought ennoblement through their relative's election. Of the fifteenth-century papal families only Martin V's Colonna relatives were already noble, while many others had roots in monastic orders, universities, or trade.⁷⁶ The latter families sought dynastic stability and immediate allies by marrying into the collection of noble families that ruled the smaller Italian states and the condottieri that sought to acquire them. Michael Mallett has noted how these petty rulers and the more successful condottieri "formed a group whose aspirations and behaviour corresponded closely with those of other sections of the upper class. Their non-professional interests lay in the acquisition of lands, the patronage of culture, the accumulation of status and wealth through good marriages and dowries, and the preservation of *reputazione*."⁷⁷ Thus as the popes turned to their relatives for assistance and assured support, especially in the complex game of Italian diplomacy, noble titles and ownership of fiefs played an

⁷²Reinhard, 1991, 330–31.

⁷³BAV, Barberianus latinus MS 5366, fols. 134^v–135^r.

⁷⁴In Pope Pius IV's attempt to remove the Carafa nephews from power and limit his own nephew's involvement to purely bureaucratic tasks, Federico Gorla, following Paolo Prodi, sees the beginning of a permanent change in the contribution of papal nephews to the Church: Gorla, 97–99; Prodi; Mallett, 1969; Dall'Aglio; Pattenden.

⁷⁵Reinhard, 1991, 332.

⁷⁶Richardson, 22–23.

⁷⁷Mallett, 1974, 219.

important role in elevating individuals and encouraging respect for new men, while urging loyalty to old but contested obediences.

Within this environment the pope was well positioned to unite families through marriage, reward allies with vicariates within the Papal States, and elevate relatives to elite ecclesiastical offices. The pope has been called “the mightiest of patrons,” whose protection could bring benefits to both clergy and laity.⁷⁸ While the pope’s military power was small, his ability to reward alliances was enormous in ways that proved attractive to lesser families seeking to put down dynastic roots in the Italian Peninsula. This attraction was based on the assumption that rewards hinged upon collaboration with papal relatives, either natal or marital kin, and that rewards would appear over generations as a family accrued offices, land, and contributed more individuals to the collaboration. Thus, in a letter discussing how to motivate Alexander VI to crown him king of Naples, Alfonso II noted that he had no doubt that the matter would be resolved, since the pope had a son and understood how to help both the Holy See and His Holiness.⁷⁹ In the same way, one generation’s achievements and connections lay the foundation for the following generation to create even more profitable collaborations based on experience, reputation, and resources.⁸⁰

PATTERNS AND STRATEGIES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF LAY RELATIVES

Further investigation of the rise of papal families in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries reveals not only a pattern of officeholding, but also a larger conflict between work, family, and noble titles. Some observers saw little nobility or honor in lay relatives serving the pope. Instead, their promotions, based on patron-client ties rather than an open and institutionalized meritocracy, appeared as unjust as the protection of incompetence, absenteeism, malfeasance, and misuse of ecclesiastical wealth.⁸¹ While the identification of this conflict explains why some early moderns viewed the papacy with a cynical eye, that this process was based on accepted lay patronage practices makes the discussion much more complex and less readily reconcilable.

⁷⁸Lind, 127.

⁷⁹British Museum, Additional MS 22818, fol. 19b, *Littera Regis Alphonsi II ad Aloisium de Paladinis* (29 April 1494); Nunziante, 548. Alfonso received the crown of Naples from the pope that same year, while months later his illegitimate daughter Sancha of Aragon married the pope’s son, Gioffré Borgia. The latter also received the title prince of Squillace the same year from his father-in-law, and in 1497 added the duchy of Alvito.

⁸⁰This multigenerational investment is evident in the experiences and strategies of the della Rovere, de’ Medici, and Farnese families.

⁸¹Lind, 126.

In the mid-fifteenth century a pattern emerged, coalesced from the individual achievements of papal relatives into a strategy that placed these lay relatives in offices with control over important resources or areas, and also public ceremonial roles.⁸² Emergent aspects of this strategy were present in the work of Martin V's Colonna relatives in the 1420s, but they did not fully bloom until the 1450s and 1460s. The short-lived pontiff Calixtus III initiated a more cohesive effort to bring offices, roles, and places under evident papal control through the officeholding of his lay relatives. Pellegrini has called Calixtus the initiator of *grande nepotismo* based upon his introduction of Pedro Luis Borgia as the first lay nephew and his parallel efforts to prepare his cardinal-nephew Rodrigo to claim the throne in a future conclave. Pedro Luis's status as the first lay nephew is founded on his collection of influential and highly visible offices, specifically captain-general of the Church, prefect of Rome, and castellan of Castel Sant'Angelo.⁸³ These offices placed him at the center of local temporal leadership, where he could defend the pope's priorities and the city of Rome itself. Miguel Navarro Sorní has noted Calixtus's shift in focus from his election through his pontificate. Known as an ally of King Alfonso of Naples during the conclave that elected him, Sorní argued that the new pope built a new identity as a *homo ecclesiae* by privileging plans for a crusade and the establishment of peace in the Papal States, over the interests of Naples. Through these new preoccupations Calixtus distanced himself from Alfonso, and by involving his relatives in papal administration and providing them with benefices, he was able to sideline the king's representatives who repeatedly requested favoritism.⁸⁴ Notably, Pedro Luis did not hold any vicariates for a substantial period of time and his career was cut short by his own and his uncle's deaths.⁸⁵ The vicarial role, as part of the lay contribution, reappeared during the pontificate of Calixtus's successor Pius II, who expanded the involvement of lay nephews dramatically.⁸⁶

⁸²In addition, Bernard Barbiche has shown evidence of a slow secularization of the personnel involved in papal diplomacy through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, separating so-called temporal functions from the implementation of Tridentine reform, which remained under clerical leadership: Barbiche, 368–69.

⁸³ASV, Reg. Vat. MS 465, fol. 152^r–153^r (captain-general of the Church); Pellegrini, 2010, 86–89; Brezzi.

⁸⁴Sorní, 475, 488–90.

⁸⁵On his death bed Calixtus bestowed the vicariates of Terracina and Benevento on Pedro Luis, which was an unpopular decision and drove the new vicar to flee Rome in August 1458. Pedro Luis died the next month: Mallett, 1969, 74–75.

⁸⁶Ironically, in his *Commentaries* Pius II lamented his predecessor's preoccupation with privileging "the ties of the flesh to the interests of the church." This is an example of the *Commentaries'* ambiguous attitude toward nepotism, which shows how the pope could profit from nepotistic acts, but which only admits public censure for similar acts committed by others. Pius II, 1:149.

Soon after Enea Silvio Piccolomini was elected as Pope Pius II in 1458, he began a series of projects designed to elevate his family from the relatively impoverished and marginalized position that they occupied in the Sienese *contado* (countryside). Best known to modern historians are the pope's efforts to revitalize his hometown of Corsignano by making it a papal center, renamed Pienza, and exerting pressure on the college of cardinals to build palaces there.⁸⁷ However, less well known is that Pius hoped to move his family beyond Corsignano, up the social ladder, and ultimately into the front ranks of the Italian nobility.⁸⁸ Through negotiations with the king of Naples, the pope secured for his nephew Antonio the title of Duke of Amalfi.⁸⁹ This gift was a result of the pope's military support of King Ferrante against the pretender John of Anjou. To entrench the connection between Rome and Naples further, Antonio wed Maria, Ferrante's illegitimate daughter, in autumn 1461 at the height of pressure to break this alliance. The pope also made Antonio the captain-general of the Church and castellan of Castel Sant'Angelo, securing his position at the papal court as an important advisor with a public ceremonial role.⁹⁰ Although Antonio was the chief lay nephew, his two brothers Andrea and Giacomo also each received a small fief, elevating them to the nobility.⁹¹ These acts paved the way for future relations between papal and royal kin. Alfonso II's strategy to hasten his papal coronation in 1494 was neither innovative nor

⁸⁷See Mack; Nevola, 47–113.

⁸⁸On the topic of how the pope sought to construct his own historical legacy, see O'Brien.

⁸⁹In addition to receiving Amalfi, Ferrante also invested Antonio as Duke of Sessa, chief justice of the kingdom of Naples (both in 1461), and Count of Celano (in 1463): Puglia, 44–50; Pastor, 3:27–28, 121–24; Chambers, 59.

⁹⁰Usually the laymen (excluding lay curialists) were grouped together following the vice-chancellor and/or the governor of the city with the prefect of Rome, the senator, the conservators, chancellors, *caporioni* (thirteen officers, each of whom led one of the thirteen *rioni*, or districts, in Rome), and other officials and noble citizens following. Only the prefect of Rome had a reliable position in the public processions, which allowed a certain amount of flexibility in their public placement. This is likely a reflection that only the prefect would be reliably resident in Rome, whereas the captain-general of the Church and the gonfalonier would be preoccupied with military organization outside the city. See Dykmans; Chambers, 59–60.

⁹¹Ferrante invested Andrea Piccolomini with the lordship of Castiglione della Pescaia in Tuscany and the island of Giglio near Grosseto, while the pope gave Giacomo Piccolomini the duchy of Montemarciano in the Marche of Ancona and the lordship of Camporosevoli. Interestingly, both of these men wed women from Roman baronial families, ensuring that the Piccolomini family's links with Rome would outlast the pontificate and the lives of the family's cardinals. Andrea married Agnese di Gabriele Francesco Farnese, the aunt of Pope Paul III, while Giacomo married Camilla Mondaldeschi and later Cristofora Colonna: Puglia, 40–41, 78; Pastor, 3:105; Litta, fascicolo 31, tavola 1.

indiscreet, but followed a path that was already paved and celebrated by his father King Ferrante.

In addition to the elevation of lay kin, supporting Pius II and Antonio were three new cardinals: Francesco, who was Antonio's brother; Jacopo Ammanati, a longtime family client; and Niccolò Forteguerra, a maternal kinsman.⁹² In describing these advancements, both ecclesiastical and lay, Ludwig von Pastor wrote that a "too great attachment to his relations is an often recurring blot on the Pontificate of Pius II."⁹³ Although this sentiment is consistent with five centuries of commentary on the appointment of papal relatives to elite offices, not only was Pius's behavior relatively restrained compared to his successors, but Pastor missed an opportunity to identify innovation. While nepotism was not innovative per se, the combined integration of Piccolomini relatives as close advisors in both ecclesiastical and lay offices and the pope's act of making that authority permanent and public by investing them with noble titles and lands was a new development. Where the offices of cardinal and captain-general brought the nephews into the pope's advisory circle, endowing them with noble titles justified their elevation socially. Without ennoblement the Piccolomini would remain dependent nephews seeking authority on the coat tails of their uncle. However, the Neapolitan investment introduced them to a socially appropriate level for service in these offices, with the suggestion of independence. As far back as the Carolingian period the pope had called upon the nobility for assistance and protection. There was a tradition of popes relying on the nobility, a class of people whose rank supposedly reflected their vocation to public life and dedication to virtue.⁹⁴ The nobility provided skills and perspectives that complemented the ecclesiastical view of the curia. In the same way that a cleric's vows singled him out as a man dedicated fully to the Church, a nobleman's enfeoffment supposedly signaled his elite ability, dedication, and status. In both cases, vows and enfeoffment privileged men to

⁹²For a discussion of how the Piccolomini family built an ecclesiastical empire in Siena, Pienza, and Rome, see Chironi. For how Pius used his cardinal relatives, especially Forteguerra, in war and diplomacy, see Chambers, 59–74.

⁹³Pastor, 3:123.

⁹⁴The popular literary genre of *speculum principum* (mirror for princes) reinforces this connection between nobility, virtue, and public contributions. Erasmus's contemporary text, *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516), written for the future Emperor Charles V, asserts, "Teach the young prince that nobility, statues, wax masks, family-trees, all the pomp of heralds, over which the great mass of people stupidly swell with pride, are only empty terms unless supported by deeds worth while. The prestige of a prince, his greatness, his majesty, must not be developed and preserved by fortune's wild display, but by wisdom, solidarity, and good deeds": Erasmus, 1963, 148–49.

work with the pope.⁹⁵ In the city of Rome the local barons played an important ceremonial role at the papal court, in addition to filling military and lesser civic roles.⁹⁶ However, the history of armed conflict in the city of Rome through the early modern period shows that the popes were prudent in cultivating an alternative to relying on the altruistic protection of Roman barons.

The importance of this social advancement cannot be underestimated, both for its practical significance to the papal administration and since it became the model for a century of papal successors. With the introduction of lay nephews as advisors, the pope had a larger pool of advisors and proxies available to employ. He could place loyal representatives in strategic secular offices, either at calculated geographic junctions that had economic, topographic, or political import, or in positions that would bring them into contact with unpredictable nobles who needed supervision. Surely Pius II believed that the kingdom of Naples, Rome's large, wealthy, and recently unstable neighbor to the south, counted as such a territory. The conflict between the ruling house of Aragon and the house of Anjou was uncertain enough that Pius committed papal troops on Aragon's behalf. Having a loyal representative, such as his nephew Antonio, the king's new son-in-law, in contact with the Neapolitan court and looking out for future conflicts transformed a simple strategy for family advancement into the creation of a long-term diplomatic liaison.

As noted earlier, the Piccolomini model of family involvement drew on the plans that Pius's predecessor Calixtus III had not lived long enough to fulfill. Calixtus's three-year pontificate (1455–58) had offered enough time to introduce two nephews to the college of cardinals, Rodrigo Borgia (the future Pope Alexander VI) and Luis Juan de Milà, as well as a lay nephew, Don Pedro Luis Borgia, who was the brother of Cardinal Rodrigo. While the cardinal-nephews played roles as general ecclesiastical advisors, and specifically as legates and as vice-chancellor,⁹⁷ the pope positioned his lay nephew as the secular face of the pontificate. Calixtus named Don Pedro Luis to the offices of captain-general of the Church and gonfalonier, ensuring that his nephew carried both practical and ceremonial responsibilities, and at least theoretically held authority over the papal army.⁹⁸ In addition, Calixtus entrenched his nephew's, and by extension the Borgia family's, authority within the city of Rome, by appointing Don Pedro

⁹⁵In a study of the pope's household in the early modern period, Visceglia notes the continuous presence of *dominicelli* (young noblemen) serving the pope, as well as the frequency of the noble titles *dominus* and *reverendus dominus* in Pope Leo X's *Rotulus familiae* (1514–16): Visceglia, 2011, 246, 249.

⁹⁶Dykmans, 1:76–81.

⁹⁷Calixtus appointed Luis Juan de Milà to be legate to Bologna (1457) and Rodrigo Borgia as legate to the Marche of Ancona (1457). Rodrigo also became vice-chancellor of the Church in 1457: Mallett, 1969, 75–76.

⁹⁸ASV, Reg. Vat. MS 465, fols. 152^r–153^r.

to be the prefect of Rome as well as the castellan of Castel Sant'Angelo. For two years the four most prestigious offices that the pope frequently reserved for laymen were occupied by one man. Moreover, in addition to these offices the pope made Pedro Luis the secular governor of the important cities of Terni, Narni, and Todi, and invested him with the duchy of Spoleto.⁹⁹

Loading a single nephew with so many important offices suggests that the pope had great hope for this nephew as the secular scion of the Borgia family. Until the premature deaths of both Calixtus III and Don Pedro Luis in 1458 all the evidence pointed to the consolidation of the Borgia nephews into an administrative and authoritarian cadre that could supervise all aspects of the Papal States' government and mobilize resources to swiftly implement papal policy.¹⁰⁰ Undoubtedly the rapid collection of key offices in the hands of only a few men, all of whom were papal nephews and thus bound by blood ties to the pope, prompted some criticism.¹⁰¹ After Calixtus's death, Pope Pius II supposedly feared that Don Pedro Luis would ally with the successful condottiere Niccolò Piccinino to invade Rome. Pastor has noted the new pope's apprehension in the days before Don Pedro's death and Pius's desire to renovate the papal administration, replacing all the Catalan governors.¹⁰² As already discussed, Pius went further than simply replacing Calixtus's officers. He adopted the same strategy: in order to bolster his own authority he placed Piccolomini advisors in strategic positions. The greater length of Pius's pontificate (six years) allows one to see how over time the pope could introduce more relatives and build up the roles of his nephews in ways that the brief pontificate of Calixtus (three years) did not allow. Inexplicably, where Pius is sometimes cited as a strategist in this regard, Calixtus is prejudicially the ambitious precursor to the nepotistic orgy supposedly conducted by Alexander VI.¹⁰³

⁹⁹These cities constituted an important part of the Patrimony of Saint Peter, as well as the northern approach to Rome. During the early years of Martin V's pontificate he had been forced to concede control over them to the occupier Braccio da Montone, which seriously jeopardized the security of Rome: ASV, Reg. Vat. MS 465, fols. 202^r–207^v; Partner, 1958, 62–64, 67–79; Williams, 59; Pastor, 3:28; Whaley.

¹⁰⁰Mallett notes that amid the highly overestimated migration of Catalans to Rome during Calixtus's pontificate and "the turmoil of Italian rivalries" the pope prudently positioned men that he knew and could trust — not surprisingly, Catalans — in important administrative and military offices. Although this approach supports the trend of popes promoting relatives, friends, and neighbors, it also avoided further involvement in divisive Italian affairs: Mallett, 1969, 76–77.

¹⁰¹While some observers believed that Calixtus hoped to remove Alfonso and place Pedro Luis on the Neapolitan throne, Mallett has theorized that the introduction of close relatives to so many important posts was done to counterbalance the danger posed by the Colonna and Orsini families: Mallett, 1969, 73, 76; Pastor, 2:447.

¹⁰²Pastor, 3:20–21; Chambers, 60.

¹⁰³Mallett, 1969, 74–75; Pastor, 2:447.

The adoption of this strategy of combining both lay and clerical relatives in elite papal administration by almost all the popes from Pius II through the end of the sixteenth century moves the discussion beyond simple avarice or the desire for social advancement that Reinhard called the supply function of nepotism. The danger of bestowing weighty leadership responsibilities on potentially weak shoulders was certainly acknowledged. However, the pope's need for loyal representatives who could liaise with other states in political and military capacities is also well known. In the same vein as Paolo Prodi, D. S. Chambers has argued that "in order to survive, dominate and flourish . . . the papacy almost inevitably became in many respects more like other Italian principalities."¹⁰⁴ However, where Prodi and Chambers suggest increased military strength and involvement, the presence of increased papal relatives argues for using them as any *signore* would deploy a cadet branch of his noble house. This practice is best seen in the ducal house of Gonzaga in Mantua, which had several cadet branches, the most important of which were the duchies of Guastalla and Sabbioneta,¹⁰⁵ and less successfully the house of Sforza in Milan.¹⁰⁶ The cadet branches provided an array of resources to the family's leader, including the provision of information and military support, local judicial and economic management, and the maintenance of the family's name and honor throughout the peninsula.¹⁰⁷ Papal relatives provided the same support network for their familial and religious leader, the pope. While clerical relatives occupied important benefices and served as ecclesiastical protectors in order to establish connections with cities, monasteries, and monastic and military orders, secular relatives oversaw the rulership of feudatories within the Papal States, and sometimes further afield. Secular relatives functioned as more mobile and flexible agents who could carry out papal policy as rulers, and whose authority and public image could exert different types of force than could an ecclesiastical vicar.¹⁰⁸ The bestowal of a vicariate and the enfeoffment of secular relatives expanded the reach of the pope, allowing him to pursue his responsibilities as papal prince through recognizable agents whose authority and success were entwined with his.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴Chambers, 40; Prodi, 7, 36.

¹⁰⁵There were also the marquisates of Bozzolo, Solferino, Luzzara, Castel Goffredo, Monferrato, and Castiglione delle Stiviere, and the county of Novellara among many others. In 1588 a Venetian ambassador recorded that there were eighty-five Gonzaga lords and knights, twenty-four of which held fiefs from the Holy Roman emperor: "Relazione di Francesco Contarini (31 Ottobre 1588)" in Segarizzi, 1:81, as quoted in Grendler, 2; see also *ibid.*, map 1.

¹⁰⁶The Milanese house of Sforza had cadet branches established for brief periods in the counties of Cotignola and Santa Fiora, and the lordships of Gradara and Pesaro.

¹⁰⁷For more information on the Gonzaga and Sforza cadet states, see Ferri; Tomalio; Bazzotti, Ferrari, and Cesare; Eiche.

¹⁰⁸Carol Richardson has suggested that papal nephews allowed a convenient distance to exist between the pope and "unseemly" or extravagant activities: Richardson, 24.

¹⁰⁹This relationship was made visible to all through shared heraldic devices and the use of the papal standard by relatives appointed as captain-general of the Church and the gonfalonier.

The culmination of the lay relative's development occurred during Pope Julius II's pontificate (r. 1503–13). Although Machiavelli would claim that Francesco Maria della Rovere acquired his state by fortune, it is more accurate to consider strategy as the motivating force. Building on the success of his own papal uncle, Pope Sixtus IV, Julius II nurtured his nephew Francesco Maria to be his lay representative by elevating him socially and politically. Any powerful lord or client needed offices, land, and authority, as well as his own network that could be spurred for his patron's support.¹¹⁰ At his father's death in 1501, Francesco Maria inherited his office of prefect of Rome, and on his uncle's election to the papal throne he became the captain-general of the Church and the gonfalonier.¹¹¹ A few years later, the pope urged the heirless Duke Guidobaldo to adopt his nephew Francesco Maria, who would then inherit the duchy of Urbino. When the duke died in April 1508 Francesco Maria succeeded to the throne and became one of the most important vicars in the Papal States. An advantageous marriage established further connections with Mantua and Ferrara, the latter being one of the most contested vicariates after Urbino. In addition to the duchy, which elevated the della Rovere family into the upper tier of the Italian nobility, Francesco Maria inherited from his father Giovanni (d. 1501) three contiguous papal vicariates in the Marche (Senigallia, Mondavio, and Mondolfo) and the Neapolitan duchy of Sora. In May 1510 the pope added the vicariate of San Lorenzo in Campo and Montafogli. Finally, in February 1513 he invested his nephew with the lordship of Pesaro.¹¹² On Julius II's death Francesco Maria seemed to be securely established within the Italian nobility as an acknowledged legal heir, as well as a second-generation product of nepotistic strategies. Beneath these offices and titles lay the assumed noble culture that was characteristic of a man raised from birth to lead, rule, and fight.¹¹³

¹¹⁰Lind, 134.

¹¹¹Francesco Maria served as captain-general of the Church (1508–15) and as prefect of Rome (1501–16), although he lost these offices and his vicariates later under Leo X and Clement VII: Clough; Verstegen's introduction in *Patronage and Dynasty*, xiii–xxviii.

¹¹²On the topic of Julius II's relations with his relatives, Christine Shaw has argued that Julius believed that he strengthened the Papal States by promoting loyal lay clients, like his nephew Francesco Maria, and thus secured the independence of the papacy: Shaw, 314; Clough, 78; Verstegen, 144–45.

¹¹³An early sixteenth-century life of Pope Sixtus IV emphasized the importance of military training and cultural immersion in transforming a papal nephew with a title into a functioning lord. BAV, Urbinate latinus MS 1023, fol. 9^v: "However after contracting the marriage [between his daughter and the pope's nephew], the duke [of Urbino] returned to his homeland taking the teenaged Giovanni [della Rovere] with him; in order that he should thoroughly learn military affairs, so that he would have the means of the character of a prince." This militaristic character is also seen in most of the portraits of Giovanni's son Francesco Maria: Giorgione's (attributed) boy with a helmet (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 1502); Raphael's portrait (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, 1504); Vittore Carpaccio's young knight (Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid, 1510); Titian's mature portrait (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, 1536–38).

However, since the pope remained the patron of his lay relatives, by virtue of the vicarial role, he could withhold authority and patronage from them, just as he might from any other client. As Cecil Clough has argued, Julius II and Leo X bestowed and stripped offices, like the prefecture of Rome, captain-general, and gonfalonier, on relatives to signal the intensification of favor, loyalty, and dependence on papal authority.¹¹⁴ When Francesco Maria was implicated in the murder of Cardinal Alidosi in May 1511, the pope proposed depriving his nephew of his offices, decrying the duke's deed, and refusing to see him. Only after a cooling-off period, and when Julius seemed to be at death's door, did he absolve his nephew for the crime of killing a cardinal.¹¹⁵ Thus Francesco Maria's return to papal grace signaled to the world the pope's desire to reaffirm his reliance on the traditional bonds that family loyalty should build. When Leo X wished to signal a shift in political culture he turned to his own relatives, depriving Francesco Maria and investing his brother Giuliano (in 1515), and then his nephew Lorenzo (in 1516), as captain-general of the Church.¹¹⁶ In the same way that Leo's predecessors sought control of Urbino, Benevento, Imola, and other parts of the Marche or Romagna, these lay relatives offered the pope a way to secure territory that had been a source of controversy and campaigns since early in Julius II's pontificate.¹¹⁷ Observers were well aware of the pattern followed by these popes in elevating lay relatives to important and high-profile positions in the papal court. The Venetian ambassador to Rome, Marino Giorgi, noted the elevation of Lorenzo at the expense of Francesco Maria, Leo and Lorenzo's interest in the duchy of Urbino, and the similarity to the strategy followed by Alexander VI as he transformed his son Cesare into a lay military representative who could also act as a guarantor of security and state builder in

¹¹⁴Clough, 78–83.

¹¹⁵The papal ceremonialist Paris de' Grassi recorded in his diary that the pope was torn between his friendship with the cardinal and his blood tie to his nephew, both of which had caused him recent grief: BAV, Vat. lat. MS 12268, fols. 295^{r-v}, 307^r.

¹¹⁶Leo even issued an indulgence on the occasion of Lorenzo's elevation to the duchy of Urbino and lordship of Pesaro: BAV, Vat. lat. MS 12275, fols. 137^v, 176^r, 177^v–180^v.

¹¹⁷Arguing that governance by Leo X's Medici relatives was part of a larger strategy to secure the Papal States from French or Spanish control, Pastor has noted that the grant of Parma, Piacenza, Modena, and Reggio to Giuliano as governor was part of the marriage portion of Filiberta of Savoy. Controversially, both France and Milan claimed Parma and Piacenza, while Ferrara claimed Reggio and Modena. Nevertheless, Leo bought Modena from Emperor Maximilian for 40,000 ducats. Establishing these four cities under a governor loyal to papal authority would ensure the security of the northern part of papal lands directly south of the contested duchy of Milan: Pastor, 7:94, 106–13. Two decades later, Paul III bestowed Parma and Piacenza on his son Pierluigi Farnese as duke, emphasizing the cities' continued importance and the continued culture of nepotistic assistance: ASV, Arm. LXI, vol. 2, fols. 379^r–404^r, 409^r–415^v.

the Romagna.¹¹⁸ Giorgi's commentary on Leo X's actions shows that in the 1510s the loading of lay relatives with offices that placed them close to the pope provided access to territories in the Papal States, and publicly identified them as loyal administrators. Shouldering some of the papacy's secular burden through officeholding signaled a relative's influence and was a publicly acknowledged and accepted strategy rather than a covert operation.¹¹⁹

Giorgi's observation aside, the public reaction to ennobling lay relatives in order to prepare them for involvement in papal administration was mixed. The most outspoken critics of papal nepotism were the historians Francesco Guicciardini and Niccolò Machiavelli, whose diplomatic experience brought them into contact with relatives of the Borgia, della Rovere, and Medici popes. While both men lamented the expansion of agglomerated nepotistic webs that prevented a larger number of men from acquiring offices, the most striking issue in contemporary comments is the papal relatives' general lack of skill and virtue.¹²⁰ Machiavelli's writings are characterized by a preoccupation with ideal behaviors and strategies that would lead to political success and stability of rule. While dedicated to one lay papal nephew, Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, *The Prince* (1513) focuses on another lay nephew, Cesare Borgia, who is one of the exceptions to this charge that papal relatives lacked skill. Through Machiavelli's postmortem analysis he has become the quintessential papal relative. Although Cesare's father Alexander VI provided the resources to facilitate his son's achievements, Machiavelli saw a public demonstration of strength and skill (*virtù*) that he claimed was usually absent in other lay papal relatives before 1500.¹²¹

As a cardinal, Cesare served as legate to the French army (1495) and to the Neapolitan court (1497), in addition to acting as one of his father's closest

¹¹⁸Sanudo, 21:496, 22:51; Albèri, 7:51: "Lorenzino has a strong mind, he is clever and able to do things, not like Valentino, but a bit lacking."

¹¹⁹Nevertheless, on his brother Giuliano de' Medici's death in March 1516, the ceremonialist de' Grassi reminded Leo that it was inappropriate for the vicar of Christ of Earth, whom he described as *semideus*, to mourn so passionately his mortal kin: BAV, Vat. lat. MS 12275, fol. 167^{r-v}.

¹²⁰Machiavelli's comments about the War of Urbino suggest that this concern applied more to Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici than Francesco Maria della Rovere: Machiavelli, 1996, 148, 189.

¹²¹Machiavelli, 2005, 62, exhorts his reader: "let a prince conquer and maintain his state, and his methods will always be judged honorable and praised by all. For ordinary people are always taken in by appearances and by the outcome of an event." In contrast to this passage, and to Cesare Borgia's swift and successful conquest of the duchy of the Romagna, most of the pope's ennobled lay relatives received their fiefs through purchase, as did Innocent VIII's son Franceschetto Cybo, and had few chances to prove their individual abilities militarily: Gilbert, 170, 179–81.

counselors. After he resigned from the college of cardinals and sacred orders in 1498, Cesare also revealed that his skill as a military commander surpassed that of many noblemen whom the pope had dispossessed from their vicariates. Between October 1500 and August 1503 Cesare built a duchy in the Romagna that included the vicariates of Urbino, Pesaro, Senigaglia, Camerino, Forlì, and Cesena. Although historians have often questioned Cesare's method, there is no doubt that his campaign fulfilled both the rule and supply functions identified by Wolfgang Reinhard, facilitating his family's social advancement while consolidating the Romagnol vicariates into a single state under the control of the captain-general of the Church.¹²² From this latter perspective, Cesare certainly fulfilled the role of *homo ecclesiae*, acting as a stalwart protector under papal direction, just as he had promised at his investiture as gonfalonier in March 1500.¹²³

In contrast to this relatively restricted admiration, Guicciardini's distrust of what he described as the "tyranny of these wicked priests" was virulent and broad based.¹²⁴ Although he wrote that phrase in his private *ricordi*, a similar theme appears in his *History of Italy* (1537). In this text Guicciardini accuses the popes of choosing ambition and familial aggrandizement over peace and the patronage of virtue. He wrote that the popes "[showed n]o concern about their successors, no thought of the perpetual majesty of the pontificate, but instead, an ambitious and pestiferous desire to exalt their children, nephews and kindred, not only to immoderate riches but to principalities, to kingdoms; no longer distributing dignities and emoluments among deserving and virtuous men, but almost always either selling them for the highest price or wasting them."¹²⁵ Placing Guicciardini's passage in context, Barbara McClung Hallman has shown that the *clientismo* practices engaged in by the pope and his relatives, which have been identified as corrupt, were commonly practiced across the elite Church and even periodically by reformers.¹²⁶ In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries papal families were not unusual in depending on nepotism to build their influence, increase their success in affairs, or launch the careers of their junior members.¹²⁷ The strategies that provided authority and wealth to elite clergy in early modern Italy were similar to the strategies that the elite laity relied upon. Indeed, these strategies usually emanated from a single paterfamilias who bore the responsibility for plotting and nurturing the careers of both lay and clerical kin.

¹²²Sabatini, 118–41, 161–74.

¹²³Burchard, 2:210.

¹²⁴Guicciardini, 1965, 144 (notebook 2, 17).

¹²⁵Guicciardini, 1969, 149 (book 4).

¹²⁶These *clientismo* practices include the resignation of offices to relatives, pluralism, simony, and the reservation of income from benefices before resigning them to others: DeSilva, 103–06.

¹²⁷See Hallman.

Ronald Weissman has emphasized that the relationship between early modern patrons and clients was “multistranded and multipurpose,” reaching beyond a single goal or collaboration, as is evident in the work of popes and their relatives.¹²⁸ Far more was at stake than mere familial aggrandizement. Nevertheless, the result of some historians’ desire to project modern labels or finite judgments on these collaborations is the periodic inference of dishonesty or immorality in early modern motives. Robert Harding has identified the separation of the public and private spheres as one of the great presentist challenges faced by modern historians. In the early modern world there was no sense of public office that demanded officers to consistently disregard their own private interests. According to Harding, the result of this difference and its challenge to historical empathy is that historians often “use the word corruption in a ‘value-free way,’ grouping together phenomena like bribery, extortion, nepotism, string-pulling, squeeze, and protection under the label corruption, perfectly aware that in early modern societies these practices were legitimate.”¹²⁹ In essence, Harding sees the charge of corruption to be inappropriate. Instead he describes what modern historians would call the sacrifice of public to private interests through the practice of governments promoting clients who were only second-rate administrators in order to maintain factions.¹³⁰ Generally, this has been an added complaint laid on the accusation of papal nepotism, the result of which was not only the absence of consistently excellent leaders, but a collection of relatives who were sometimes lackluster administrators or military commanders.

In his nephew the pope chose a man bound to him as a client by blood, whose career and social status hinged on the fidelity and devotion repeatedly associated with papal administrators. Where the documents generically praise other men for their alliance and service toward the institution of the papacy and the Roman Church, a nephew’s loyalty was tied to the pope as his familial patriarch as well as his temporal master and spiritual father. The relationship between these men — patron and client, pope and nephew — is articulated in the emphasis on offices and kinship ties that is seen in vicarial bulls. While mixing work and family might seem dangerous to reforming observers, it is clear that through the fifteenth and into the sixteenth century these issues were an accepted combination in administration. In 1547, in the midst of the crisis that followed the assassination of Pope Paul III’s son Pierluigi Farnese by Parmesan nobles, Imperial troops occupied Piacenza. As part of an attempt to regain the city and moderate the damage caused by Pierluigi’s son Ottavio, who had turned to France for assistance, Paul wrote to Emperor Charles V. In the

¹²⁸Weissman, 25–26, 30, 32.

¹²⁹Harding, 47.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 48–49.

letter the pope mobilized some of the rhetoric found in the bulls of provision, emphasizing the devotion that both he and Ottavio bore for the emperor as well as their shared bond of kinship. The pope's grandson had wed Margaret, the emperor's illegitimate daughter, nine years before, making Ottavio subject to two patriarchs with periodically conflicting goals. Nevertheless, on this occasion Paul reminded Charles of their shared kinship tie and insinuated that this would ultimately draw Ottavio back to proper obedience and hopefully induce the emperor to consider returning control of Piacenza to the Church.¹³¹ Not only did this letter openly cross the lay-clerical divide, highlighting the lay contribution, but it shows how the pope and emperor could negotiate for peace in the Italian Peninsula using their shared kinship with lay papal relatives as a bridge.

In sum, these documents articulate the cultural expectation that supported the continued incorporation of papal relatives into papal administration from 1420 to 1549. In addition to describing the mechanism by which Reinhard's rule and supply functions came together, the bulls of provision indicate how nepotism was conceptualized as a valuable mechanism for incorporating men with certain loyalty to the pope into sensitive political and military positions. Offices and kinship ties reinforced the generic rhetoric of faith and praise, which identified and justified the pope's reliance on lay relatives, and would later support the use of cardinal-nephews as elite administrative aides. Fixed in the contemporary expectation was the idea that service to one's familial patriarch was beneficial to all his relatives, and grew out of insoluble ties that were similar to the religious duty that bound the *homo ecclesiae* to the pope.

¹³¹ASV, Arm. LXI, vol. 2, fols. 445^r–446^r.

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