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**The Borgia Reexamined: A New Look at the Borgia Family and the Influence of Adoptions
within the Family**

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by

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Abstract

The Borgia's were a powerful family that garnered a great deal of their influence through the Catholic Church during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The height of the Borgia was between 1492 and 1503, when Rodrigo Borgia was elected Pope Alexander VI. Throughout history they have been known for the rumors of murder, incest, greed, and corruption that have surrounded the family ever since they first came to power. An examination of the family may not only lead to a different perspective of the family but may also lead to a deeper understanding of how one's enemies may be able to alter how the world perceives one's family for centuries to come. Members of the Borgia family held multiple titles and were able to influence many political figures throughout Europe, such as Queen Isabella of Spain and King Alfonso of Naples. The family was in power in Rome when the French were terrorizing the Italian countryside on their way to Naples. It was due to Rodrigo Borgia's quick thinking that the King of France did not sack and burn Rome to the ground and instead carried on towards Naples. Cesare Borgia and his exploits were the inspiration of Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* and for centuries he was the topic of poetry and paintings.¹

The lives of the Borgia family were full of intrigue and drama which made them figures of popular culture in their own era through today. As Pope Alexander VI, Rodrigo Borgia played a crucial role in the division of the New World when he wrote a Papal Bull in 1493 that allowed the Catholic monarchs to lay claim to the New World.² His children were likewise influential. The impact that Cesare had on Machiavelli is a prime example of how the family

¹ R. Garnett, "Contemporary Poems on Cæsar Borgia," *The English Historical Review* 1, no. 1 (1886): 138-141.

² Pope Alexander VI, "Inter Caetera: Division of the Undiscovered World Between Spain and Portugal" Archivium Apostolicum Secretum Vaticanum. Regestum 777. F^o 192. Quoted in Peter de Roo. *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*. 4 vol. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 475-480.

was heavily influential on his contemporaries and subsequent generations of readers of Machiavelli's work. Lucretia Borgia was used as a political pawn by Rodrigo, who married her off multiple times to men that would further expand his family's power and influence. Her life led many writers and playwrights to dramatize the hardships of her life as well as the affections she held for both lovers and family. Historians still debate who killed Juan Borgia with many blaming Cesare for his brother's death.

The family is complex and for this reason many historians have interpreted details of the family inaccurately; both by not viewing their true dynamics as well as relying on propaganda spread by their enemies. Historians that wrote about the Borgia family relied heavily on the rumors surrounding the family, without providing any proof to back up their claims. A thorough examination of the historical records related to the Borgia family, such as court documents and memoirs, reveals that the Borgia children were adopted by Rodrigo Borgia and not his biological children.

Introduction

The Borgia family were powerful political figures during the Italian Renaissance and were at the height of their power during a critical moment in both Western Europe and the New World. They helped shape Italy during the Renaissance.³ The family came to be hated by the end of their reign due to their actions and rumors made against them. The hatred for Cesare was so great that Cesare's body was removed from its burial place and put beneath a road so that his body would be walked over every day.⁴ This thesis will examine not only the dynamics of the family but also the unpopular theory that Cesare Borgia was Rodrigo Borgia's nephew, adopted as a son. There will also be an examination of the first Borgia Pope, Calixtus III, who many historians merely write as a footnote. Calixtus's model of power may explain why Cesare may in fact be Rodrigo's nephew, with Cesare's relationship to Rodrigo mirroring Rodrigo's to Calixtus. The examination of the Borgia family will show that Rodrigo did in fact copy the actions of his uncle, Alonso, and adopted the Borgia children when they had lost their father at a young age. It would have been impossible for Rodrigo to be the biological father of the Borgia children due to the numerous points of evidence such as Rodrigo not being in Spain during the years of the children's births and the official documents that state that their father was deceased, while Rodrigo was still very much alive.

The research was started by looking at books from scholars such as Michael Mallet, Paul Strathern, and G.J. Meyer. It was in G.J. Meyer's *The Borgias: The Hidden History* that a priest

³ Giorgio Vasari, *Le opera di Giorgio Vasari*, edited by G. Milanesi, 8 vols. (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1981).

⁴ Robert G. La France, "Exorcising the Borgia from Urbino: Timoteo Viti's Arrivabene Chapel," *Renaissance Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (2015): 1192–1226.

by the name of Peter De Roo was mentioned.⁵ Peter De Roo had spent 30 years of his life collecting materials to write a history of Rodrigo Borgia but by the time he had finished collecting the materials he searched for, he was 80 years old and knew that he would not have the time to properly write his work.⁶ Instead, he shipped all his materials to his publisher so that they could publish *Materials for the History of Rodrigo Borgia* into five volumes.⁷ It was within this collection that a great deal of primary sources had been transcribed with a great deal of the collection being official documents that originated from noble courts, the Papacy, as well as correspondence from a variety of clergy, servants, nobility, and members of the family.

With a new evaluation of the Borgia family, there will be a formation of a revised schematic that scholars can hold for the family's dynamic. This revision will help correct the record that many historians and scholars use when describing the family. This correction of the Borgia family dynamic would bring about future historiography that is more historically accurate and would not include details of the family's dynamic that is based off rumors. Understanding that the Borgia children were not Rodrigo's biological children but were in fact adopted from within his family, would not only show that the historiography of the family holds a major fallacy but it would also show how the enemies of the Borgia were able to rewrite the family into a more corrupt version of itself.

Adoption throughout Italy and Europe has also held political aspects that could also be connected to the Borgia family's situation. Since the time of the Romans, there has been notable adoptions in politics that include adoptees that were family and those that were not. Julius

⁵ G.J. Meyer, *The Borgias: The Hidden History*, (Bantam, 2013): 316.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 5 vols. Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924.

Caesar and Octavian, the future Augustus Caesar, is a great example of a great-uncle adopting their nephew so that not just power could be transferred but the adoptee would also have a vast head start in expanding their own power with the handoff of resources given by their adopter. Politics and family have always had strong roots in Italy, as seen with Julius Caesar and Octavian. Rodrigo adopting the Borgia children would give them the same opportunity to expand the influence of the family while at the same time being legal and form a strong familial connection.

During the Renaissance, Italy was broken up into city states that each had their own rulers and ruling families. Families like the Medici had the Republic of Florence, while the Sforza had the duchy of Milan. There was a vast level of importance for these families to remain in control of their city state as the family itself could be seen as the embodiment of the city state. Rodrigo had high hopes for his family much like these Italian families that controlled city states. With Cesare being in the clergy as a child and Rodrigo becoming the second Borgia Pope, it would be the perfect setup to handoff the Papal throne to Cesare to make him the third Borgia Pope and ultimately strengthening the family's reputation in Rome and being one step closer to becoming Rome's physical embodiment, like the Medici and Sforza.

At the height of their power, the Borgia family under Rodrigo was able to drastically alter the Italian World.⁸ At the start of his Papal reign, Rodrigo showed a vast amount of opulence but was loved by the common Roman people who witnessed him as he passed by them.⁹ Court culture was very important in society during the Renaissance and the Borgia knew how to use it

⁸ Marino Sanudo, *Diarii*, Bologna: Forni Editore, 1969-1970.

⁹ Michaelis Firmus, *Historia nova Alexandri VI ab Innocenti VIII obitu*, Rome, 1493.

to their advantage.¹⁰ Some of their marks are still around today even after 500 years.¹¹ The Borgia Apartments in the Vatican depict the Borgia family in artwork painted on the walls.¹² The family is represented by a variety of biblical figures to show how Rodrigo perceived his family as not just blessed but almost saintly.¹³ There are other symbols of the Borgia still at the Vatican as well. In the Borgia Apartments there is also a depiction of the Borgia family crest, done by Bernardino Pinturicchio.¹⁴

Pinturicchio also used key members of the family as models. An example of this is Pinturicchio's painting of the *Dispute of St. Catherine* being modeled after Lucrezia.¹⁵ Some historians argue that since Lucrezia was the model of St. Catherine then perhaps there were other members of the family that were depicted in Pinturicchio's paintings.¹⁶ Usually, this topic falls upon Pinturicchio's depiction of the visitation in the Borgia Apartments but this proves to be a difficult argument.¹⁷ With the Borgia family having such a strong influence on Italian politics during their reign, any depictions and diaries are highly sought after.¹⁸

¹⁰ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, translated by George Bull. (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1976).

¹¹ J. N. Hillgarth, "The Image of Alexander VI and Cesare Borgia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 59 (1996): 119–129.

¹² *Appartamento Borgia: Emblem of the Borgia Family*, Late 15th century.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Bernardino Pinturicchio and workshop, *Appartamento Borgia; Sala Della Arti Liberali; Detail of the Ceiling Decoration Showing the Borgia Coat of Arms*, 1492 -1495.

¹⁵ Pinturicchio, ca. 1454-1513, *Rome (Vatican): Borgia Apartments: Room of the Saints: Dispute of S. Catherine*, 1492-1494, Fresco.

¹⁶ Arnold Mathew, *The Life and Times of Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI*, (Franklin Classics, 2018): 8.

¹⁷ Pinturicchio, ca. 1454-1513, *Rome (Vatican): Borgia Apartments: Room of the Saints: Visitation*, 1492-1494, Fresco.

¹⁸ Bernardino Zambotti, *Diario Ferrarese dall'anno 1476 sino al 1504*, edited by G. Pardi. Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1928.

Adoptions within the family shaped them in such a way that nepotism for nephews may have been mistaken as nepotism for sons. Was there incest among the Borgia or was this merely false propaganda brought about by future Popes that wished to defame them after their power had been drastically lost? How did the Borgia have so many enemies while also becoming romanticized in modern times? The work will also examine if the idea of Cesare killing his brother, Juan, is truly justifiable when the family had many enemies throughout Europe. If the enemies of the Borgia were able to change how the people came to view the Borgia family after their downfall in the way their enemies wanted, it would show that this could have happened to other noble families throughout history and open further pathways into family histories and how scholars come to look at historical families in a different light.

Scholarship on the Borgia family is as diverse as the family's experience. It spans hundreds of years, with some of the earliest scholarly works being published in the 17th century.¹⁹ Books, articles, historical fiction, television shows, and even video games produced about the Borgia family speak to their sustaining presence in pop culture. Eliminating these books is critical when dealing with examining the Borgia at a scholarly level. A look at the authors of these books to see if they are trained to examine history through a scholarly lens or if they are novelist that romanticize the Renaissance and the people that lived during that time is necessary.

After a careful review of the sources and research material, it is noticeable that it may not be just Cesare whose paternal side is in question. Some scholars state that at the time of Rodrigo being a Cardinal, it seemed as though all the children were the topic of debate of whether or not they were even siblings.²⁰ The evidence that Cesare may in fact be adopted by Rodrigo seems to

¹⁹ Çurita, Geronymo. *Anales de la Corona de Aragon*. 1669.

²⁰ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 5 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 1:447-529.

be slowly piling up instead of falling apart. The rhetoric in Rodrigo's letters to his children is also beneficial due to how he addresses them. A great deal of time he addresses his children as "our daughter in Christ" or "our son in Christ" which can be used by priest to address anyone younger than them instead of a blood father to their child.²¹ With the Church prohibiting marriage, making any children a clergyman had to be illegitimate, a question begins to form as to why would Rodrigo not distance himself from calling himself the children's father and instead call himself their uncle. The answer to this is, fairly, simple. Rodrigo's personal connection to family and the kindness that his own uncle showed he and his brother at a young age when they lost their father, led him to perform similar actions for his late nephew's children after their mother had remarried. The numerous primary sources that mention his love for his family also back up the strong connection he had for the children, though some scholars mix these statements with rumor to sometimes suggest the practice of incest amongst the family but there is no evidence to back up such claims that there was ever any incest practiced.

When it comes to the Borgia popes, there is a major difference in their actions during their reign. While Alonso Borgia was Pope Calixtus III, he called for crusade against the Turks.²² Even though Rodrigo would not, he was similar to his uncle in other ways. Both men enjoyed history and seemingly embraced the humanist movement.²³ The humanist movement was so influential during Rodrigo's reign that Michelangelo was able to flourish in Rome with multiple high ranking officials ordering commissions from him.²⁴ Rodrigo, like his uncle,

²¹ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 5 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 1:420.

²² Marion Johnson, *The Borgias*, (Macdonald Futura Publishers, 1981): 54-55.

²³ *Ibid*, 22.

²⁴ Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Lettere*, edited by Enzo Girardi, Arezzo: Ente Provinciale per il Turismo, 1976.

enjoyed showing opulence that rivaled higher ranking noblemen. An example of this is from the memoirs of Pope Pius II when, on Palm Sunday 1461, Rodrigo did not just decorate his own palace with banners, tapestries, and music but also decorated the neighboring palaces as well to make it seem as though there was a wonderful festival in the square around them.²⁵ Readers should keep in mind that from the tone in the memoir, Pius II saw Rodrigo's decorations as a spectacle and not in bad light. A great deal of Roman success at the time was credited towards Pope Julius II, but the praise should really go to Rodrigo due to all of the improvements he was already making in the city.²⁶

When it comes to the examination of scholarship dealing with the Borgia family, there are quite a few noticeable differences. These differences can be seen at both a glance and by thorough examination. There appears to be an unspoken line in the sand among scholars of the Borgia that seems to have been around for centuries. That line in the sand meaning that it was common practice for many scholars to embrace rumors of the Borgia and say that they were not in fact rumors but fact, while not providing any credible evidence to back up these claims.

The idea that a scholar sees an entire family as evil and corrupt would seem preposterous but the tone of some scholars may suggest that they seem to hold many negative emotions for the whole family, merely for the actions of a select few. It will come to the attention that a great deal of scholars has used many anti-Borgia propaganda stories and works as the backbone of their cases. An examination of these sources will bring to light that many of them came into being after the fall and death of many of the Borgia family. Anti-Borgia propaganda was, in

²⁵ Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, *Secret Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope*, Abridged ed. edited by F. A. Gragg and L. C. Gabel, (London: Folio Society, 1988): 254.

²⁶ J. H. Whitfield, "Historical Revision No. CV.: New Views upon the Borgias," *History* 29, no. 109 (1944): 77-88.

many cases, written and published by people that had never met the Borgia or were not present during the events in which they were writing about. So, why would so many scholars give in to these stories in which many have no grounds of proof? It can be assumed that the authors of works that openly use propaganda as sources may in fact do it because of the mere fact that drama sells books.

The contemporary source materials related to the Borgia family are relatively limited. Important examples include the works of Francesco Guicciardini, Johannes Burchard, and Niccolò Machiavelli. The consideration of credibility is especially relevant with this particular family as they were both publicly loved and hated. An example of anti-Borgia propaganda is the work of Francesco Guicciardini. Guicciardini was a child in Florence when the Borgia came to power in Rome.²⁷

He may have witnessed Rodrigo Borgia perform crimes such as simony, which provided the basis for his account of what he saw, albeit written later in 1540.²⁸ Guicciardini did not just bring up crimes when Rodrigo was pope but also accuses Rodrigo of moral failings. The fact that Guicciardini states that Rodrigo held a vast party when he was a Cardinal, where he slept with both men and women when that party was 23 years before Guicciardini was born challenges his reliability.²⁹ By the time he wrote, decades later, his work dealing with the Borgia was most likely negative and propagandic.

²⁷ Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Florence*, edited by Mario Domandi, (New York: Harper & Row, 1970): 13.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Joseph Jay Deiss, *Captains of Fortune: Profiles of Six Italian Condottieri*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966): 23.

Arguably the most important source regarding the Borgia family comes from Johannes Burchard, the Master of Ceremonies for the Vatican when Rodrigo became Pope Alexander VI. He witnessed both personal events dealing with the Borgia family, as well as the business dealings of the family when they were at the height of their power.³⁰ He did not write about the family in order to document history; rather he wrote in a private diary detailing what he saw and experienced in the Vatican. Because diaries are typically not intended for public consumption, Burchard's words may be viewed in a more credible light although even personal diaries can reflect personal false opinions and biases.

Regardless, the diaries display first-hand knowledge of what was happening in Rome. Burchard also wrote his interpretation of how the people of Rome viewed the Borgia and shows that at the beginning of their rise to power, they were actually loved by the common people.³¹ This description contradicts what some historians would claim. Although while Burchard continued his work at the Vatican his opinion of Rodrigo and his family changed as time went on. It is possible that later historians emphasized later views of Rodrigo over any earlier affectionate ones.

Burchard was not the only one to have a surviving diary dating back to the time of the Borgia. There was also a diary from a man named Luca Landucci that still survives today. Landucci was an apothecary from Florence. His diary is dated from 1450 to 1516 and includes entries ranging from the rise of Pope Alexander VI to Cesare conquering parts of Italy while

³⁰ Johannes Burchard, *At the Court of the Borgia*, excerpts from the *Diarium*, Edited and translated by Geoffrey Parker, (London: Folio Society, 1963): 53-85.

³¹ Johann D. Burchard, *Pope Alexander VI and His Court: Extracts from the Latin Diary of Johannes Burchardus*, translated and edited by Nicholas L. Brown, (HardPress Publishing, 2013): 95-104.

going by the nickname Valentino.³² The nickname originated from him being called the most handsome man in Italy.³³ Landucci provides a brief look at how news of the Borgia family was able to quickly reach Florence and that the family was the talk of the town more so when Cesare was no longer a Cardinal.³⁴

While there is a great deal of primary sources that talk about Rodrigo, there are also sources that are crucial when researching Cesare. One of the best primary sources about Cesare is from Niccolò Machiavelli.³⁵ Machiavelli personally knew Cesare when he was starting his own rise to power.³⁶ Machiavelli was heavily inspired by Cesare Borgia when writing *The Prince*.³⁷ It should be stated that the word “inspired” is not entirely in a positive light.

Machiavelli had first-hand knowledge of who Cesare was as a person and leader.³⁸ Machiavelli respected that Cesare was able to unify his people through cruelty but he did not favor how Cesare obtained his power through Pope Alexander VI.³⁹ As the Florentine Ambassador, Machiavelli was able to thoroughly critique the actions of Cesare when he was at the height of his power, a critique that is still debated about today.⁴⁰ Scholars still argue whether

³² Luca Landucci, *Diario Fiorentino*, (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1985): 55-178.

³³ Andre de Hevesy, “Portraits of the Borgias-Cesare,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 61, no. 353 (1932): 70–75.

³⁴ Luca Landucci, *Diario Fiorentino*, (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1985): 55-178.

³⁵ John P. McCormick, “Machiavelli’s *The Prince* at 500: The Fate of Politics in the Modern World,” *Social Research* 81, no. 1 (2014): xxiii–xxxii.

³⁶ Daniel Pellerin, “Machiavelli’s Best Fiend,” *History of Political Thought* 27, no. 3 (2006): 423–453.

³⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince: On the Art of Power*, (Shelton Harbor Press, 2017): 123.

³⁸ John P. McCormick, “The Enduring Ambiguity of Machiavellian Virtue: Cruelty, Crime, and Christianity in *The Prince*.” *Social Research* 81, no. 1 (2014): 133–164.

³⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince: On the Art of Power*, (Shelton Harbor Press, 2017): 40.

⁴⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, translated by Laura F. Banfield and Harvey C. Mansfield Jr. (Princeton University Press, 1988).

or not he was trying to portray Cesare in a good or bad light. Many cite his straightforward way of writing that at times feels as though he was harboring hostility.⁴¹ It is possible the hostile rhetoric meant that Machiavelli disapproved of Cesare and his actions but if anything, Machiavelli respected Cesare's drive and passion to both conquer and unify people.⁴² Diverse readers of Machiavelli's work read his tone and rhetoric differently.⁴³ Was Cesare the Prince that one should try to be or the one whose ways should be avoided at all costs?

The Borgia had many enemies that range from the noble families of Italy, like the Orsini and Sforza, to members of the clergy, like Pope Julius II and Girolamo Savonarola. Any new scholars may think that Rodrigo and Cesare Borgia would be enough for anti-Borgia rhetoric among their enemies but there was another. Rodrigo's daughter, Lucrezia Borgia was not spared by slanderers and ill-informed scholars. While Rodrigo attempted to control Cesare's destiny, he was much more successful in controlling that of Lucrezia's. Her life was like that of other noblewomen. She was an intelligent woman in a male dominated world, but she was able to take advantage of any situation she could.⁴⁴

Lucrezia was told who she had to marry for political allegiances and she was not in a position to argue with Rodrigo and Cesare.⁴⁵ By some accounts, Rodrigo and Cesare showed

⁴¹ Catherine H. Zuckert, "Machiavelli's 'Prince'—Five Hundred Years Later," *The Review of Politics* 75, no. 4 (2013): 493–496.

⁴² John P. McCormick, "Prophetic Statebuilding: Machiavelli and the Passion of the Duke," *Representations* 115, no. 1 (2011): 1–19.

⁴³ John M. Najemy, "Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia: A Reconsideration of Chapter 7 of 'The Prince,'" *The Review of Politics* 75, no. 4 (2013): 539–556.

⁴⁴ Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, "Lucrezia Borgia as Entrepreneur," *Renaissance Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2008): 53–91.

⁴⁵ Michael Mallett, *The Borgias: The Rise and Fall of the Most Infamous Family in History*, (Academy Chicago Publishers, 1987): 115.

great love for Lucrezia but at the same time they used her to further gain power in Italy.⁴⁶

Despite some scholars believing that Lucrezia had dark motives to gain her own form of power, a great deal of poets and artists for the time seemed to have loved her dearly and created a great deal of their work with her in mind.⁴⁷ She was a fan of the arts, whether it was painting, poems, or music that could fill the palace and streets with a more cheery mood.⁴⁸ Even during her late life, the common people respected her for who she was and greatly admired her.⁴⁹ Her presence in Ferrara near the end of her life seemed to be very heartfelt and peaceful for both Ferrara and Lucrezia.⁵⁰

In regards to why the Borgia family would not correct the rumors that surrounded them, it can be argued that the reason itself is Rodrigo and his humor towards hearing such rumors. The situation itself can be viewed from a different angle. These children were treated as if they were Rodrigo's biological children with arranged marriages, titles, and plans of inheritance. It may have been that the love that Rodrigo showed the children was returned in such a way that they treated him as if he were their biological father as most of the children lost their real biological father at a young age, allowing Rodrigo to fill his shoes. So, if there was already the mentality of a biological nuclear family, there would be no use in correcting rumor that called the children Rodrigo's.

⁴⁶ William Waldorf Astor, "Lucretia Borgia," *The North American Review* 142, no. 350 (1886): 68–73.

⁴⁷ Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, translated by B. Reynolds, (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1975).

⁴⁸ William F. Prizer, "Isabella d'Este and Lucrezia Borgia as Patrons of Music: The Frottola at Mantua and Ferrara," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38, no. 1 (1985): 1–33.

⁴⁹ Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, "Lucrezia Borgia's Palace in Renaissance Ferrara," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 64, no. 4 (2005): 474–497.

⁵⁰ Giovanni Maria Zerbinati, *Croniche di Ferrara*. Ferrara: Deputazione Provinciale Ferrarese di Storia Patria, 1989.

Chapter 1: Historiography

In 1940, historian Orestes Ferrara wrote a powerful biography about Rodrigo Borgia, titled *The Borgia Pope: Alexander VI*.⁵¹ The text is still used today due to its depiction of both Rodrigo's bright and dark sides. Although his work covers all that was known about Rodrigo's life, the strength of the text is his depiction of the young Rodrigo. Ferrara used official correspondence to argue that Rodrigo was most likely indulging in immoral acts during his time as a cardinal, with the strongest evidence being a letter from Pope Pius II.⁵² His use of correspondence to back up his claims of youthful immorality in Rodrigo is one of the reasons his work is still referenced today.

E.R. Chamberlin's 1974 work, *The Fall of the House of Borgia* was written in a narrative style and provides a great deal of context for the election of a pope for those that are unfamiliar with its process.⁵³ Chamberlin used a great deal of primary sources to illustrate the events in Italy during the middle fifteenth to early sixteenth century. While Chamberlin starts with how Rodrigo behaved as a cardinal, Chamberlin briefly details how Rodrigo became not just a cardinal but also vice chancellor.⁵⁴ The cause of such elevation at a young age was due to his own uncle becoming Pope.⁵⁵

A strength of Chamberlin's work is the use of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini's, the future Pope Pius II's, secret diary to shed some light on Rodrigo Borgia and his time as vice chancellor

⁵¹ Orestes Ferrara, *The Borgia Pope, Alexander the Sixth*, translated by F. J. Sheed, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940).

⁵² Ibid, 56.

⁵³ E.R. Chamberlin, *The Fall of the House of Borgia*, (Dorset Press, 1974).

⁵⁴ Ibid, 9.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

to Piccolomini.⁵⁶ Chamberlin attempts to portray Rodrigo in a neutral light by showing how he was good at the tasks that were assigned to him but also self-centered in certain circumstances, especially when it came to his money.⁵⁷ When it comes to Vannozza Catanei, Chamberlin states that an employee of Rodrigo by the name of Camillo Beneimbene was present at her fake wedding to Domenico d'Arignano but there is no source referenced to back up this claim.⁵⁸

Chamberlin struggled with the children of Vannozza. At one point he states that during the children's youth it was very difficult to determine who was the eldest child or if the children were even siblings at all.⁵⁹ Chamberlin explains that there were two Papal Bulls written to legitimize Cesare Borgia as Rodrigo Borgia's son but one of the Bulls was not published to the public and was said to have contradicted the public Bull on almost every major point.⁶⁰ Chamberlin's fumbling around the parentage of the Borgia children warrants further exploration. This could be due to Chamberlin merely going with the present knowledge of scholars of the Borgia in order to continue on with their later lives or it could be due to possible backlash he would receive from academic critics if he was to state that some of the Borgia children may have in fact not been Rodrigo's, since that was what historians believed at the time.

In Christopher Hibbert's 2008 work, *The Borgia and Their Enemies: 1431-1519*, he writes, like Chamberlin, in a narrative style painting a picture of Renaissance Italy dominated by powerful figures in the Catholic Church who had the power to drastically alter the world around them. Unlike Chamberlin, Hibbert expresses more focus on the Borgias as a whole and starts by

⁵⁶ E.R. Chamberlin, *The Fall of the House of Borgia*, (Dorset Press, 1974): 9-21.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 32-34.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 32-39.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

including a great deal more information about Rodrigo's uncle Alfonso de Borja, Pope Calixtus III.⁶¹ While Chamberlin mentions nepotism, Hibbert does not shy away from the nepotism shown among the Borgia family by detailing how Pope Calixtus III chose his own nephew, Rodrigo Borgia, to be the vice chancellor before he was even 30 years old.⁶² Hibbert includes a story of how Rodrigo came to meet Vannozza Catanei, while Chamberlin does not state how the two met.⁶³

When it comes to the children of Vannozza, Hibbert states how even though she was married to other men, Cesare, Juan, Lucretia, and Joffre were all four Rodrigo's children.⁶⁴ Hibbert only mentions Cesare being legitimized as Rodrigo's son by Pope Sixtus IV and does not mention a second Papal Bull being written.⁶⁵ Rodrigo is depicted as being extremely jealous and having a large sexual appetite, a common occurrence among Borgia scholars. Hibbert also includes a detail about the Borgia that was left out of Chamberlin's work, why Giuliano della Rovere came to despise the Borgia family. This detail is crucial to understanding why there was such an influx of anti-Borgia rhetoric that arose after the fall of Borgia influence and the rise of della Rovere as Pope.

Paul Strathern's 2009 work, *The Artist, the Philosopher, and the Warrior* is written in a more biographical style with a few narrative aspects to bring further context. There is also the fact that this is the first piece that actually states how Cesare looks instead of just saying that he

⁶¹ Christopher Hibbert, *The Borgias and Their Enemies, 1431-1519*, (Harcourt Inc., 2008): 10-19.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 29-31.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

was called the most handsome man in Italy.⁶⁶ It is a small detail, but it adds to the imagery that a scholar can have when they read about Cesare. There is also the case of when he is admitted into the college of Cardinals.

No other scholar except for Strathern mentions della Rovere speaking out at the announcement that Cesare would join the College of Cardinals.⁶⁷ With nepotism being a common feature among popes and cardinals, if della Rovere truly did speak out against Cesare being a cardinal, it suggests that his hatred for the Borgia was to the point where he would openly speak against Rodrigo while in consistory.⁶⁸ With Cesare being the main Borgia in focus in the work, it would make sense that there would be a vast amount of detail pertaining to his life but the fact that there are details not stated in other works adds a different light to the topic while also bringing the works sources into question.

G.J. Meyer, in his 2013 work *The Borgias: The Hidden History* is the most neutral in attitude towards the Borgia family. Meyer includes far more information about Alonso Borgia than other scholars.⁶⁹ Not only is it the most detailed account of Alonso's life but it also provides a new look at why Rodrigo was elevated to vice chancellor at such a young age. Meyer first shows the lighter side of the Borgia family before diving into the dark complexities of the family by including Alonso.

When dealing with Rodrigo, Meyer heavily focuses on primary sources to break down who Rodrigo was as a person. After looking at the work provided it becomes clear that Rodrigo

⁶⁶ Paul Strathern, *The Artist, the Philosopher, and the Warrior: Da Vinci, Machiavelli, and Borgia and the World they Shaped*, (Bantam, 2011): 65-66.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 68.

⁶⁸ Jennifer Mara Desilva, "Articulating Work and Family: Lay Papal Relatives in the Papal States, 1420–1549," *Renaissance Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2016): 1–39.

⁶⁹ G.J. Meyer, *The Borgias: The Hidden History*, (Bantam, 2013): 7-80.

loved his family much like Alonso and perhaps wanted to remember his late uncle by imitating some of the actions that Alonso showed him when he was growing up. This can be seen by an examination in the Borgia children's parentage, especially Cesare Borgia. With the help of both primary and secondary sources, Meyer provides a theory that is rarely mentioned, that Cesare is Rodrigo's grandnephew, the son of Rodrigo's late nephew. Meyer argues with the death of Cesare's father when he was a baby, Rodrigo mimicked the actions of his uncle, taking care of his nephew as if he were his own son, and acknowledging him as his son.⁷⁰ Meyer is not the only historian with this theory of adoption; N.M. Gwynne also theorizes that not just Cesare but also Juan, Lucrezia, and Joffre are also adopted from Rodrigo's nephew.⁷¹ The argument that Cesare was the adopted son of Rodrigo should be an excellent point of research; it could change current understanding of the Borgia family.

One of the greatest challenges scholars face when studying the Borgia family is filtering through what was rumor and what was fact. There has been a great deal of historical fiction written about the family over the last few centuries that is based off of rumor and slander.⁷² Rumors and anti-Borgia propaganda were at an all-time high during the family's fall from influence. The primary sources must be thoroughly examined in not just what their connection to the family is but also what proof does the person have that it happened how they say.

Another challenge a scholar has when it comes to primary sources and interpretations is prejudice. Due to there being a great deal of anti-Borgia propaganda during the downfall of their influence as well as after their fall, prejudice against the Borgia was at an all-time high. Some

⁷⁰ G.J. Meyer, *The Borgias: The Hidden History*, (Bantam, 2013): 239-247.

⁷¹ N. M. Gwynne, *The Truth about Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI*, (Tradibooks, 2008): 30-32.

⁷² Alexandre Dumas, *The Borgias: With Original and Classic Illustration*, (Independently Published, 2020).

historians take these anti-Borgia sources and exaggerate the Borgia family's actions even more when there is no proof of what they are arguing. There are members of the Borgia family that did terrible things and sometimes performed actions that can lead to questioning that family member's morality but scholars must be able to decipher what really happened and what originated from mere rumor. The family was surrounded by scandal not just because of their vast influence in Italy and the Papacy but also because they were foreigners in a land that hated outsiders. There were some cases of terrible treatment towards their enemies, like Benvenuto Cellini who was held as a prisoner in the Borgia's personal dungeon.⁷³

A problem amongst historians when it comes to the Borgia family is the paternity of the Borgia children. There seems to be a strong push for all of the Borgia children to be Rodrigo's. The problem with this idea is that some historians push this idea so far as to not accept any criticism of these claims. There is a growing number of historians that think that perhaps Rodrigo was not the father of all the Borgia children. There is so much confusion regarding the children that incest is said to have been common among Rodrigo, Lucrezia, and Cesare when there has been no proof that it ever happened. The very idea of incest amongst the Borgia only arose out of anger from enemies of the Borgia with no historical evidence to back it up and yet some historians argue that it may have happened.

The idea that some of the children may have been adopted by Rodrigo is a difficult argument to make due to the incredible number of historians that critique this argument. However, Rodrigo himself was adopted by his uncle, Alonso Borja, and was really born Rodrigo

⁷³ Benvenuto Cellini, *Autobiography*, translated by George Bull. (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books 1956).

Llancol.⁷⁴ With that thought in mind, it is not unheard of for Rodrigo to mirror his own uncle and adopt his niece and nephews or at least one of them? If he were to do so he would be honoring his late uncle by imitating what his uncle did for him while at the same time being the man that held the family together. An examination of Rodrigo's actions regarding the Borgia children, their correspondence, and their political positions may shed some light on whether or not there were in fact more adoptions in the Borgia family than historians realized.

In order to examine the Borgia family and determine the family's dynamic, there will be an investigation in the adoptions in the family. The first investigation will be a close look at the relationship that Rodrigo and his siblings had with Alonso Borgia. The investigation will span from the nepotism that Alonso showed the young Rodrigo and his brother when Alonso was a Cardinal compared to that of when he became Pope. The investigation will answer the question of whether or not Alonso was trying to be a good father figure for his young nephews or if the power of the Papal Crown gave him an opportunity to use the younger generation of his family to his advantage. Alonso's influence in Rodrigo's life could have been more profound than what many historians believe today.

In the chapters to come there will then be an investigation of the Borgia children that many consider to be the offspring of Rodrigo. The investigation will cover how the treatment of the Borgia children could in fact be a mirroring of how Alonso treated Rodrigo and how nepotism is one of the connecting factors in powerful families in Italy. The investigation will also cover who the father of the children could be if they were adopted by Rodrigo. While there are many historians that go with the theory that Rodrigo was the father of all the Borgia children

⁷⁴ Orestes Ferrara, *The Borgia Pope, Alexander the Sixth*, translated by F. J. Sheed, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940): 2.

due to his numerous mistresses, scholars should look towards Cesare, Juan, Lucrezia, and Joffre if one wishes to truly comprehend adoption among the family.⁷⁵ Cesare's parentage will be a main focus in the investigation due to how close he was to Rodrigo and the age of which he started to receive benefices. If there is some proof that Cesare was in fact adopted it would not only show that the adoption of nephews may have been common among Borgias for the time but it would also revolutionize how historians would view the family as a whole. The confusion of the family tree should be resolved in order to get a better grasp on the family's dynamic and dissolve any rumors about the family that are viewed wrongly as fact.

⁷⁵ Paul Strathern, *The Borgias: Power and Fortune*, (Pegasus Books, 2019): 90-94.

Chapter 2: Alonso and his Nephews

In order to fully examine how adoptions influenced the Borgia family and their dynamic, there must first be an examination to find where the first instance of adoption occurred.

Understanding adoption and its effects will greatly reveal how it would shape the family during their height of power in Italy. Adoption was not the same during the Renaissance as it is in modern times. There were a few different forms of adoption between the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. An examination of the family and the styles of adoptions will bring to light a new vision of the Borgia family for scholars.

To fully understand how adoption may have been introduced into the Borgia family, scholars must first look towards Alonso de Borja. Alonso's story is both interesting and critical when shown how it may have heavily influenced the lives of multiple young men in his family. His connections with political power and economic wealth brought the Borja family onto the world stage and his affection for his sisters and their children is evident in the sources.

Alonso Borgia was born in 1378, near Valencia, and was the only son of his family.⁷⁶ As the only son of his parents, he inherited the most and took on the responsibility of the head of the household. His sisters married husbands fitting their stations as ladies of a lesser noble house in Spain. While his sisters helped the growth of their husbands' family, Alonso received an education and was expected to have a male heir to expand the family lineage. Alonso grew up in a world that expected him to embrace his position in the family and lead the family to greatness while passing on the spoils of his successes to his children. Social and familial expectations, however rigid, were not always achieved.

⁷⁶ Christopher Hibbert, *The Borgias and Their Enemies, 1431-1519*, (Harcourt Inc., 2008): 10-19.

Alonso showed great potential in his youth. At a young age he was able to impress those around him with his quick learning skills and his willingness to take on greater tasks. He was sent to Lerida around the age of thirteen or fourteen to become educated and studied jurisprudence.⁷⁷ Alonso obtained a doctorate degree in civil and canon law and taught law at Lerida for numerous years.⁷⁸ His experience with learning canon law may have been what made him push Rodrigo to also study law.

Alonso and Rodrigo would have had an extensive education during their youth. Education is an interesting topic during the 14th to 16th century. The Church was possibly the closest many people came to being educated. Any child could learn how to read and write by going to the church but with many people needing their children at home to help with farming and chores, the more financially fortunate were the ones able to hire help so that their children could be educated.⁷⁹ When one is being educated by the Church, they would be taught how to read and write in Latin.⁸⁰ Latin was the most common language in the world of the Court, so documents and political policies were usually written in Latin.⁸¹ The official documents used in the examination are an example of this practice.

Scholars must keep in mind that although many of the common folk may not have known how to read and write, that does not mean that they did not understand that which was spoken.

⁷⁷ Arnold Mathew, *The Life and Times of Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI*, (Franklin Classics, 2018): 11.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Robert Black, "Italian Renaissance Education: Changing Perspectives and Continuing Controversies," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52, no. 2 (1991): 315–334.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Political information released to the public and rumors of the time were most likely spread word to mouth but if someone grows up around a secondary language, like Latin, they may be able to pick up various words and phrases that are in a verbal media while not understanding Latin in a written media. Sermons are the biggest example of common folk understanding Latin but not being able to write it due to most sermons at the time being presented in Latin. There were also universities that the economically advantaged could attend. These universities taught a variety of different subjects, much like universities today. Institutions of higher learning during the time of Alonso and Rodrigo taught subjects in medicine, mathematics, astronomy, architecture, engineering, history, and both civil and canon law.⁸² These universities allowed the humanist movement to grow throughout Italy and help shape the world that Alonso and Rodrigo lived in.

Alonso's intelligence opened many doorways. After years of lecturing at Lerida, Alonso was appointed in his first institutional Church role as Canon of the Cathedral of Lerida.⁸³ There happens to be an interesting story about Alonso where he received a prophecy that was said to have come up during his start in the Church. The story goes that while at Valencia as Canon, Alonso was present during a sermon being led by St. Vincent Ferrer, a well-respected Dominican of the time.⁸⁴ Around the end of the sermon, Ferrer told Alonso, "My son, I congratulate thee; remember that thou art destined to be one day the glory of thy country and thy family. Thou wilt

⁸² Robert Black, "Italian Renaissance Education: Changing Perspectives and Continuing Controversies," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52, no. 2 (1991): 315–334.

⁸³ Fredrick Baron Corvo, *Chronicles of the House of Borgia*, (Wentworth Press, 2019): 12.

⁸⁴ Arnold Mathew, *The Life and Times of Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI*, (Franklin Classics, 2018): 11.

be invested with the dignity that can fall to the lot of mortal man. I myself, after my death shall be an object of thy special honor. Endeavor to persevere in the path of virtue.”⁸⁵

With the support of his local bishop in Valencia, Alonso stepped into the world of the Papacy. At the age of thirty-eight, Alonso was appointed to the position of Private Secretary to King Alfonso V of Aragon.⁸⁶ This position was very prestigious, and Alonso proved that he would welcome any challenge. A quiet life was not fitting of an ambitious Borgia and Alonso proved his worth by performing multiple diplomatic missions. In 1429, while working for King Alfonso V and the Papacy, he was recognized for his hard work, after completing various diplomatic missions, by being appointed Bishop of Valencia by Pope Martin V.⁸⁷ Alonso’s most notable success came from his contributions towards the negotiations between King Alfonso V of Aragon and Pope Eugenius IV, where King Alfonso was appointed the King of Naples by the Pope.⁸⁸ This accomplishment is what earned him his Cardinal’s hat and secured himself a seat in Rome in 1444.⁸⁹

Alonso was incredibly devoted to his offices and those above him. His efforts when working for King Alfonso V opened many doorways for him and gave him great wealth. His position allowed him to network with not only political figures but also those in the Church. Alonso received income not just from King Alonso V but also the cathedrals that he oversaw.

⁸⁵ Vincent Ferrer, Sermon made in Valencia, 1411-1419.

⁸⁶ Christopher Hibbert, *The Borgias and Their Enemies, 1431-1519*, (Harcourt Inc., 2008): 12.

⁸⁷ Arnold Mathew, *The Life and Times of Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI*, (Franklin Classics, 2018): 11.

⁸⁸ Christopher Hibbert, *The Borgias and Their Enemies, 1431-1519*, (Harcourt Inc., 2008): 12.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

With the status of his occupation and a steady income, he led his family and was able to take care of his sisters and their children, including their education.

The origin story of Rodrigo, the son of Alonso's sister, Isabelle de Borgia, is shrouded in mystery. Scholars debate Rodrigo Borgia was born between 1427 and 1431.⁹⁰ According to Johannes Burchard, in a diary entry, dated December 25, 1502, Burchard states, "My colleague, D. Bernardinus, related to me that yesterday the Pope said to him and to the other chaplains who celebrated in his presence, that he was of the age of seventy-one years, which he would complete on the last day of the present month".⁹¹ If accurate, Rodrigo was born January 1, 1431. This means that Alonso would have already have been the Bishop of Valencia and able to support his sister and her family if they needed his help.

Rodrigo's parentage is also debated, adding to the mystery of his origins. Was Rodrigo really born a Borgia? While Rodrigo's mother was Isabelle de Borgia, his father's name is debated amongst historians. While some historians call Rodrigo's father Jofre Lançol, others call him Jofre Borgia.⁹²

The evidence suggests Lançol is the likelier candidate. The earliest evidence comes from the 15th century historian Platina, whose account consists of the history of the popes.⁹³ Platina passed away around 1458 but his work was continued by the antiquary and librarian of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, Onofrio Panvinio. Panvinio would have had access to papal records due to

⁹⁰ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 2 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 6.

⁹¹ Burchard, Johannes. *At the Court of the Borgia*, excerpts from the *Diarium*. edited and translated by Geoffrey Parker. (London: Folio Society, 1963): 228.

⁹² *Ibid*, 2-3.

⁹³ B. Platina and Onofrio Panvinio, *De Vitis Pontificum Roman*, (Paris, 1600).

his station and was able to write brief histories of both Calixtus III and Alexander VI. Panvinio states that Alexander VI was born Rodrigo Lançol and took the name Borgia due to his mother being one by name and being of higher social rank than his father.⁹⁴ An examination of Rodrigo's paternal family, done by the French historian, Alexander Gordon, also showed that Rodrigo's father may have been a blood relative of the Borgia but was mainly of the Lançol and took the family name of Borgia most likely due to his wife and the rapid growth of the Borgia family's power.⁹⁵ Another reason that Lançol is most likely the family name of Rodrigo's father is due to a stone plaque that depicts the family crest of Alonso Borgia along with the crest of his nephews Rodrigo and Pedro Luis.⁹⁶

The depiction of the family crests may have been common among those of nobility and those with power but it is the form of which Rodrigo and Pedro Luis's crest that stands out. While Alonso's crest is depicted in the Borgia style of a field of gold with a red bull grazing on a green terrace, Rodrigo and Pedro Luis's crest is a combination of two crests with one being that of Borgia and the other having three transverse bars.⁹⁷ These bars could be those of the Lançol family to represent the father of Rodrigo and Pedro Luis. So why is their family crest bipartite while Alonso's was solely the Borgia crest? The answer to this is present within the adoption practices during the time of Alonso and Rodrigo.

Adoption during the Renaissance came in different forms. The forms relevant to the Borgia family consist of those that involve close family such as grandchildren and nieces and

⁹⁴ B. Platina and Onofrio Panvinio, *De Vitis Pontificum Roman*, (Paris, 1600): 315-319, 355-360.

⁹⁵ Alexander Gordon, *History of Alexander VI*, (Amsterdam, 1732): 3.

⁹⁶ Escutcheons of Pope Calixtus III and his nephews: Cardinal Rodrigo and Pedro Luis De Borgia, Preserved on Ponte Mole near Rome.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

nephews. The form of adoption that most likely fitted that of the Borgia was be that of adopting a member of one's family while having a different last name.⁹⁸ In this form of adoption an uncle would be able to adopt his nieces and nephews provided they not only take the uncle's family name but also intertwine the two houses' coat of arms.⁹⁹ The plaque depicting the two crests may suggest that there was some form of adoption between Alonso and his two nephews, given that their crest has both his crest and another crest intertwined together. Below is an image of the plaque:



Figure 1.

Another form of adoption that may be linked to the Borgia family follows the principle of *imitatio naturae* or imitating nature. This form of adoption is used for multiple reasons that range from giving an heir to nobles and land owners that are childless to keeping property and

⁹⁸ Marina Garbellotti and Maria Clara Rossi, *Adoption and Fosterage Practices in the Late Medieval and Modern Age*, (Viella, 2016): 27.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

status in the family by adopting a nephew or close cousin.¹⁰⁰ This form of adoption can be seen as not only legally binding but also as a symbolic gesture that would show the public the formal creation of a relationship between the adoptee and the adopter.¹⁰¹ In a way, adoption treated a nephew as a son, in regards to inheritance and property.

Further complicating Rodrigo's origins, it is undisputed that his parents were distant relatives.¹⁰² However, during the Renaissance, it was not necessarily uncommon for someone to marry a distant cousin to either strengthen familial ties or enhance one's status by marrying into the wealthier branch of the same family. It must be clarified that although Rodrigo's father would have gone by the name Jofre Lançol, he was still a member of the Borgia family. With this in mind why is there a later reference to Rodrigo's father being referred to as a Borgia? This can be explained by the quick elevation of the Borgia family in noble society when compared to the Lançol family.

The nobility during the Renaissance was primarily focused on expanding their influence and reminding those around them of that status. If one's family starts to be seen as lower than that of their spouse's family, that may bring about difficult situations when confronted by a rival. Jofre Lançol may have been in this situation before but with him also having Borgia blood in him, it would be easy for him to embrace the side of his family he had rejoined with his marriage to Isabelle. It would also make more sense politically to take on the name of the higher house if someone was a blood relative but was born with a different last name. Scholars could also look

¹⁰⁰ Marina Garbellotti and Maria Clara Rossi, *Adoption and Fosterage Practices in the Late Medieval and Modern Age*, (Viella, 2016): 44.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Michael Mallett, *The Borgias: The Rise and Fall of the Most Infamous Family in History*, Academy Chicago Publishers (1987): 302-303.

at accounts dealing with Rodrigo's birth and early life on if he was adopted into the Borgia family due to his uncle's higher status and the early death of his father.

One of the best pieces of evidence that is available that shows that Rodrigo was born into the Lançol family is the account of the historian Onofrio Panvinio, who was also the librarian of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese. Panvinio stated, "Although Pope Alexander VI, was by origin a member of the Lenzuolo (Lançol) family, he retained till death the name Borja or Borgia, which the Pope, his uncle, had granted him together with his coat of arms."¹⁰³ With Panvinio's account backing up that Rodrigo was originally from the Lançol family, the stone plaque that depicts Rodrigo and Pedro Luis' crest having a combination of two crests while their uncle only had the solid crest of the Borgia shows that there was an adoption made between Alonso and his nephews.¹⁰⁴

As the only son of his parents, it was his duty to take care of his family. Like any man, Alonso wanted to see his family grow and thrive. However, with his dedication to the church there would be very few ways for proper inheritance and titles to transfer down the line of the family. Someone still had to take care of his sisters if their husbands were to pass away at a young age and Alonso wanted to make sure that his sisters were well taken care of so there had to be some steps taken in order to secure future success.

Alonso had four sisters and eight nieces and nephews.¹⁰⁵ A family of such size requires ambition for it to grow and maintain power. Alonso saw a great deal of potential in his sisters'

¹⁰³ Onofrio Panvinio, *Vita Roman. Pontificum. Coloniae Agrippinae.* 1626.

¹⁰⁴ Escutcheons of Pope Calixtus III and his nephews: Cardinal Rodrigo and Pedro Luis De Borgia, Preserved on Ponte Mole near Rome.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Mallett, *The Borgias: The Rise and Fall of the Most Infamous Family in History*, (Academy Chicago Publishers, 1987): 302-303.

children, especially the children of Isabelle de Borgia.¹⁰⁶ The three nephews that Alonso favored were Rodrigo, Pedro Luis Borgia, and Luis Juan de Mila.¹⁰⁷ Alonso ensured that these three men had the most advantages in life that he could provide. At the time, that was only possible first through formal education. Alonso saw the most potential in Rodrigo due to his high intelligence and willingness to learn.¹⁰⁸ Alonso used Rodrigo's quick ability to learn to his family's advantage by insuring Rodrigo's education of Canon Law.

Rodrigo can in a way be seen as a gifted child in more ways than one. As a child there were multiple records that stated that he would ride a pony through the streets of Xativa as though he were a prince.¹⁰⁹ He had already been given benefices from multiple cathedrals due to the efforts of his uncle, Alonso, and these benefices were coming from Xativa, Barcelona, and Valencia.¹¹⁰ The fact that at roughly the age of six he was able to obtain such benefices shows the early nepotism that Alonso had towards him. Even the laws about keeping the income outside of Spain was against Rodrigo but with the help of Alonso requesting an exception, there was a papal bull written by Pope Nicholas V that would let Rodrigo still receive the income if he was to leave Spain.¹¹¹ With the arrangements made by Alonso, all three nephews were able to attend the University of Bologna to study law.¹¹² Many great scholars and historians studied at

¹⁰⁶ Michael Mallett, *The Borgias: The Rise and Fall of the Most Infamous Family in History*, (Academy Chicago Publishers, 1987): 85.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Arnold Mathew, *The Life and Times of Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI*, (Franklin Classics, 2018): 17.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Strathern, *The Borgias: Power and Fortune*, (Pegasus Books, 2019): 34.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 35.

¹¹² Ibid.

the University. Alonso insured they received a good education and that they had enough resources at their disposal to live comfortably.

In 1455, Pope Nicholas V died and a conclave was called to elect the next Pope.¹¹³ Conclave was the meeting of Cardinals that determined who was next to become Pope. The problem with the conclave is that due to the nature of the election, many of the noble families of Rome would use everything they could to have the most influence in the election. Like any conclave at the time, there were promises, bribes, and threats being made in order to secure votes for favored cardinals.¹¹⁴ Violence was not off the table between the noble families of Italy. There came a difficult decision amongst the Cardinals regarding whom to elect as the next Pope. The final decision came down to two Spanish Cardinals with some Cardinals reasoning that this election would give the rest of the cardinals a chance to plan out the next Italian Pope.¹¹⁵ The Cardinals elected Alonso Borgia as the next Pope and due to his old age, they believed that he would just relax in his new honored position so that they could plot and make plans.¹¹⁶ Alonso Borgia took on the name Pope Callixtus III and he planned for a new crusade.¹¹⁷

Although there were reports of heavy discrimination towards non-Italians, especially towards Spaniards, the election of Alonso led to celebration in the streets.¹¹⁸ While the nobility,

¹¹³ Paul Strathern, *The Borgias: Power and Fortune*, (Pegasus Books, 2019): 22.

¹¹⁴ Christopher Hibbert, *The Borgias and Their Enemies, 1431-1519*, (Harcourt Inc., 2008): 11.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Marion Johnson, *The Borgias*, (Macdonald Futura Publishers, 1981): 41-45.

¹¹⁸ Christopher Hibbert, *The Borgias and Their Enemies, 1431-1519*, (Harcourt Inc., 2008): 11-13.

especially the Colona and Orsini families, in Rome did not like the election and were fighting each other, the common people of Rome seemed to welcome the new Pope with open arms.¹¹⁹ This shows that while the nobility were not fond of a Spanish Pope, the common people of Rome respected Alonso enough to welcome him as the new pope. Alonso may have kept his head down during the last few years but he had many plans for the future. In order to gain support for his plans he would need people close to him. What better support than one's family?

Alonso looked to his nephews as fast supporters to aid his plans. His three nephews, Rodrigo, Pedro Luis, and Luis Juan de Mila, were quickly elevated up the political ladder in the papacy. Nepotism was very common in the Church. The fact that the Borgia family were attacked for their acts of nepotism above those of other popes and cardinals may be due to the family not being Italian. However, scholars should not rule out the hatred towards outsiders from the noble families of Italy as to why the Borgia family is seen to be more corrupt due to nepotism. The family also had many enemies by the time of their downfall, leading their opponents free reign over finding ways to sully the Borgia family name.

When Alonso became Pope, he had to divest himself of all of his benefices due to his new station.¹²⁰ Benefices are the benefits provided with Church appointments. These benefices can bring about multiple sources of income to the appointed person. As Pope Calixtus III, Alonso had to choose who would receive his old benefices. The people that he chose to "inherit" his benefices were none other than his nephews that were still in their youth.¹²¹ Though these generous gifts could have ended with just additional benefices, the Borgia did not stop there

¹¹⁹ Christopher Hibbert, *The Borgias and Their Enemies, 1431-1519*, (Harcourt Inc., 2008): 11-13.

¹²⁰ Paul Strathern, *The Borgias: Power and Fortune*, (Pegasus Books, 2019): 36-37.

¹²¹ Ibid.

when it came to family. There were more and larger benefits to being the favorite nephews of the Pope. Titles would soon be upon the young Borgia.

The first to receive a new title among the nephews was Luis Juan de Mila, who would be given a Cardinal's hat just a few months after the election of Alonso.¹²² Luis Juan de Mila was not just given the Cardinal's hat but was also made the papal legate of Bologna.¹²³ With his new titles as Cardinal and papal legate of Bologna, he was in a way the governor of the northern portion of the papal states. Such power at a young age would not only draw attention but it would also create fast enemies. This was only the first nephew Alonso had chosen to give titles to.

The next nephew to receive new titles was Pedro Luis Borgia. Pedro Luis would receive the titles that can be seen as the most upsetting to the Italian nobility in Rome. Pedro Luis was to be given the titles of not just Captain General of the Papal Armies but also the new commander of the Castel Sant'Angelo.¹²⁴ His new position would not just upset the Roman nobility but also the current commander of the Castel Sant'Angelo, who at first refused to give Pedro Luis access to his new station.¹²⁵ His station would come back to haunt him.

When it comes to Rodrigo and Alonso's position as Pope, Alonso seems to happily appoint Rodrigo with new titles much like he did his other nephews. Alonso seemed to have the most hope for Rodrigo judging from the titles he was to bestow upon him compared to the others. Within months of having the appointment as Pope, Alonso would make Rodrigo a

¹²² Paul Strathern, *The Borgias: Power and Fortune*, (Pegasus Books, 2019): 36-37.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Cardinal just like Luis Juan de Mila.¹²⁶ Rodrigo was only twenty-five years old when he received his Cardinal's hat. Although it may have just started as just the title of Cardinal, Alonso would have bigger plans for Rodrigo in the time to come.

Within a year of Rodrigo becoming a Cardinal, Alonso had given him an even higher title due to his actions and work ethic. This position is heavily coveted among the College of Cardinals due to its high pay and the power that it holds. That title was that of vice-chancellor and Rodrigo gladly accepted it.¹²⁷ Rodrigo would do everything in his power to show the College of Cardinals that he was worthy of the position. It seems to have worked, given the Popes that passed after his uncle.

If scholars are to debate why Rodrigo and Pedro Luis are Borgia and not Lançol when Alonso becomes Calixtus III, it would show that the adoption of the family name Borgia was already in effect.¹²⁸ Certain situations in Europe allowed sons to take on their mother's family name if their mother's family held greater influence in court or society as a whole. Their mother, Isabelle, is stated to be an ambitious woman and takes great pride in her family.¹²⁹ With this knowledge, along with Alonso taking care of the boys' education in their youth, the name change may have been due to help pay respect to the man who supported them after the death of their father.

Rodrigo held great respect for his uncle, Alonso. Upon looking at the lives of both men, there seems to be many instances of bonding due to their intelligence and upbringing. Although

¹²⁶ Paul Strathern, *The Borgias: Power and Fortune*, (Pegasus Books, 2019): 36-37.

¹²⁷ G.J. Meyer, *The Borgias: The Hidden History*, (Bantam, 2013): 74.

¹²⁸ Paul Strathern, *The Borgias: Power and Fortune*, (Pegasus Books, 2019): 36-37.

¹²⁹ Geronymo Çurita, *Anales de la Corona de Aragon*, (1669) lib. XVI.

Alonso may have given benefices and titles to all three of his nephews in Rome, there seems to be this pull towards Rodrigo when it comes to openness and compassion. Rodrigo stands out above his brother and cousin because of the tasks that are given to him. These tasks do not define who Rodrigo was as a person but it can be argued that the tasks helped shape him into the man he would become.

The position of vice-chancellor may appear to be a simple station that just has courtly duties. That is unfortunately not all that was expected of Rodrigo.¹³⁰ With his high elevation into the College of Cardinals it may be seen that Alonso not only wanted Rodrigo by his side but also wanted to make sure he was ready for the far future. As vice-chancellor, Rodrigo was to not only fulfill the tasks given to him by Alonso but his job would also require him to handle any of the logistical aspects of special projects that Alonso was to head, with heavy focus on helping securing the money and support needed for such endeavors. When Rodrigo returned from the March of Ancona, a task given to him by Alonso that dealt with bringing law back to a rebellious area of Italy, he was to set up his household in Rome and take on the multiple mantles that were given to him.¹³¹ With Rodrigo's cousin out of Rome and his brother ill around that time, Rodrigo would have plenty of time to seek advice and familial conversation with Alonso, who was sending out papal orders from his bed.¹³² With Rodrigo's position and being so close to Alonso, this would allow Rodrigo to learn about the politics of the world and how to react to big events such as war or famine. The fact that he was given the station of vice-chancellor at such a

¹³⁰ G.J. Meyer, *The Borgias: The Hidden History*, (Bantam, 2013): 74-75.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

young age would have been to prepare him to start a dynasty of his own. An image that scared the Roman nobility more than war was a non-Italian family ruling over them.

Rodrigo was given very difficult tasks when compared to his brother and cousin. He was tasked with handling a renegade papal state and was told to bring it back under papal rule by his uncle.¹³³ He was the one that had to take care of the councils and dignitaries due to his position. His position may have been the most in salary but that does not mean that he lived an easy life when problems came to the Papacy. He would be tasked with the greatest challenge at such a young age due to the death of someone extremely close to him. He would have to save his family because his uncle died.

In 1458, Pope Calixtus III died and the Borgia family lost its most powerful member.¹³⁴ It would be understandable to think that the people of Rome would mourn the loss of Pope Calixtus III but there was more hatred on the wind than sorrow. There were riots in the streets of Rome. The noble families of Rome had enough of outsiders ruling over them and they stirred up the commoners against all outsiders.¹³⁵ The nobles had most likely stirred up the common people by reminding them of the nepotism that Alonso showed towards his nephews.¹³⁶ With the hatred of the people of Rome in full bloom, the three men of the Borgia were in danger.

Rome has never truly trusted outsiders. Throughout its history, Rome has had a stain of xenophobia that continued even during the Renaissance. It could be argued that this is due to the number of times Rome was attacked in its history or perhaps it is the nobles constantly finding

¹³³ G.J. Meyer, *The Borgias: The Hidden History*, (Bantam, 2013): 74-75.

¹³⁴ Christopher Hibbert, *The Borgias and Their Enemies, 1431-1519*, (Harcourt Inc., 2008): 15.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

scapegoats to keep in power. What matters the most is the safety of one's family and that was the focus of Rodrigo, Pedro Luis and Luis Juan de Mila when the riots started. The people of Rome's target seemed to be the Spanish, especially the Catalans.

Alonso would have taught his nephews the importance of family. He would have taught how family is everything and that if the family dies then everything that they have done may have been for nothing. He would have taught that the power of the family is important but the safety of the family should be doubly so. With the people of Rome after the family, Alonso's nephews would have to take their next actions very carefully. They would have to be extra careful because the people of Rome seemed to be especially aggressive towards finding Pedro Luis Borgia.¹³⁷

Pedro Luis' actions as the head of the Papal guard caused a great deal of negative emotions towards him. It seems that when Alonso was on his deathbed, Pedro Luis made an attempt to control the next conclave by planning to take control of the Castel Sant'Angelo.¹³⁸ When Rodrigo heard about what his brother was planning to do, he had to do something to protect him. Rodrigo knew that threats from the outside of the curia would not solve anything and would only build to the hatred that the people were gathering towards them. Rodrigo would have to dissuade Pedro Luis before it was too late.

Little is known about how Rodrigo talked down his brother from holding the Castel Sant'Angelo against the curia but he was incredibly successful when scholars consider the hostile environment that surrounded the two brothers. What is known about Rodrigo's

¹³⁷ Michael Mallett, *The Borgias: The Rise and Fall of the Most Infamous Family in History*, (Academy Chicago Publishers, 1987): 89.

¹³⁸ Paul Strathern, *The Borgias: Power and Fortune*, (Pegasus Books, 2019): 44.

negotiating skills at the time is lacking in detail until it had come to light that Rodrigo was able to talk down his brother and was also able to negotiate 22,000 ducats for the surrender of the Castel Sant'Angelo.¹³⁹ While many may see this as an incredible show of negotiating skills on Rodrigo's part, it should really be seen as a way to make sure he was not only able to save his brother from the rioters and be also able to afford a way out of Rome. Even if Rodrigo was in a well-paid position, the situation of the city may have not allowed a way to collect the money for Pedro Luis. The 22,000 ducats would allow Pedro Luis to make his escape from Rome but his story, sadly, does not end well.

Pedro Luis left Rome soon before the death of Alonso.¹⁴⁰ He had hired a ship to meet him in the port city of Ostia, a short distance from Rome, but the ship was not there when he arrived.¹⁴¹ The worry of being assaulted by the common people that may recognize him must have caused great panic judging from his next course of action. It appears that instead of waiting for the ship to arrive, he travelled forty miles up the coast to the fortress of Civitavecchia.¹⁴² Sadly, he would fall ill at Civitavecchia and die from a harsh fever.¹⁴³

With the hot summer Roman heat bringing fever, sickness, and uncomfortable living conditions, it was common for the nobility to retreat to their villas and palaces in the high hills or even outside the city to other locations with better climates. Rodrigo's cousin, Luis Juan de

¹³⁹ Paul Strathern, *The Borgias: Power and Fortune*, (Pegasus Books, 2019): 44.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Michael Mallett, *The Borgias: The Rise and Fall of the Most Infamous Family in History*, (Academy Chicago Publishers, 1987): 89-90.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Mila, also left Rome to get away from the harsh environment.¹⁴⁴ Luis Juan de Mila would retreat to his bishopric of Segorbe until he had to return for conclave.¹⁴⁵ Rodrigo stayed in Rome while his family fled. He was alone and had to use every tool at his disposal to survive the transition of power.

Many elements can be used when describing who Rodrigo was as a person during this time. While he was an intelligent man, he was also very friendly and wealthy. There were multiple accounts stating that he was very handsome as well as an overall good person. One such account is from the Renaissance era biographer, Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra. Jacopo Volterra was a statesman in Italy and was the tutor to Pope Leo X. Jacopo wrote of Rodrigo in his famous *Diario Romano* and appears to show great respect for the man but sadly the diary ends while Rodrigo was still Cardinal and not yet Pope. The account describes Rodrigo as “a man of versatile intellect, and great sense and imagination; an eloquent speaker and well-read in a rather general way; he has a warm nature but above all is brilliantly skilled in conducting affairs. He is immensely wealthy and in great favor with many kings and princes.”¹⁴⁶ With this account being written during the life of Rodrigo, it would be helpful to use this as how he appeared to both colleagues and the people he encountered.

With the loss of his uncle and brother, Rodrigo had a difficult time ahead of him, not just emotionally and mentally but politically as well. He had lost people that were very close to him and was surrounded by enemies on all sides. The elements that he had in his favor were his

¹⁴⁴ Michael Mallett, *The Borgias: The Rise and Fall of the Most Infamous Family in History*, (Academy Chicago Publishers, 1987): 89-90.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra, *Diario Romano*, ed. E. Carusi, RIS.' XXIII, 3, Citta di Castello (1904): 48-49.

intelligence and the teachings his uncle gave him throughout his childhood. Rodrigo probably held a great respect for his uncle because of all Alonso had done for him and his brother. What better way for Rodrigo to pay his respects to his uncle but by passing on what he learned from him and mirroring some of his actions.

Alonso had taught him that family should be an individual's top priority. He showed Rodrigo that ambition can both move a family and the world at the same time. Alonso pushed education as a major growing point for young minds, so that they may know the law and better the world around them. He cared not just for the youth in the family but also his siblings and their spouses as well. He represented the head of the Borgia family without having any children of his own because the sons of the Borgia were his sons as well. He was the family man until the bitter end.

Before the births of Cesare, Juan, Lucrezia, and Jofre, Rodrigo actually had four adult children that lived in Spain.¹⁴⁷ He had one son and two daughters. Both of his daughters were already married to lesser noblemen by the time any of the more well-known children were even born.¹⁴⁸ Which brings up the question of why are these children not spoke of? This may be due to the lack of documents about them but there is at least one that seems to be mentioned more than the others. That child is Rodrigo's son, Pedro Luis.

Alonso's death was tough for Rodrigo but time still went on. There was no rest for the young Borgia in Rome and he had much to do. Rodrigo kept working just like how Alonso would. His uncle would have wanted him to keep moving to make sure he could support his

¹⁴⁷ G.J. Meyer, *The Borgias: The Hidden History*, (Bantam, 2013): 239-241.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

family until the end. This would continue until a horrible event that would cause him to reshape his family once again. He would lose his precious son, Pedro Luis.¹⁴⁹

Little is known about Rodrigo's son, Pedro Luis. What is known is that he was the first Duke of Gandia and died as a young adult before he could have an heir.¹⁵⁰ It can be easily imagined that the death of his son would be a crippling blow to Rodrigo, he is just a man after all, but he had to keep going. With the first Duke of Gandia deceased, Rodrigo would have to refill the position if his family was to keep the prestige and status of the station. He would have to look at the future of his family as a whole before making a decision.

¹⁴⁹ G.J. Meyer, *The Borgias: The Hidden History*, (Bantam, 2013): 239-241.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 3: Rodrigo Mirrors his Uncle

During the Renaissance Era, family was central to the social structure and political atmosphere of Europe but especially in Italy. The main players that held social and political power in Italy were mostly from the ancient families of Italy, such as the Colonna, Orsini, and the Sforza.¹⁵¹ With the Borgia being from Spain, they were seen as outsiders and a threat to the order of things for the noble Italian families. With that in mind, the Borgia had to be even more tight knit as a family so that they could not be taken advantage of or negatively influenced by the Italian families.

There have been multiple scholars that mention family as an important element to Renaissance Italy without providing specific details. The main point that every scholar tries to focus on is the importance of a male heir. Although it is understandable that having a male heir would be beneficial for allowing the family name to survive, there are other aspects of the family that must be examined as well. James S. Grubb, a historian and who has written multiple books dealing with Italy during the Renaissance, provides a deeper look at what an Italian family had to deal with in order to survive. He does this by examining memoirs of individuals that lived in the provincial cities and countryside of Renaissance Italy.¹⁵²

Grubb's examination of the Renaissance family provides a much more in depth look at what a family had to consider for not just mere survival but also to thrive for future generations. The reliance on just obtaining a male heir is straightforward for a family in order to have its name continue across the land in which they call home but the next question is what should the

¹⁵¹ Arnold Mathew, *The Life and Times of Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI*, (Franklin Classics, 2018): 16.

¹⁵² James Grubb, *Provincial Families of the Renaissance: Private and Public Life in the Veneto*, (John Hopkins University Press, 2019): ix-x.

family do after obtaining this heir? Grubb answers this question with the simple next steps after a family obtains its heir. Grubb's work shows that the marriage of a family's heir is the next priority for the family so that the cycle can continue.¹⁵³ Marriage is not as straightforward though, as Grubb states that if more males are born to the family that already has a male heir, they are still intitled what is theirs by birthright. They are intitled to the inheritance of their family.

When it comes to children in a family during the Renaissance Period, there are certain elements that seem to stand out. These elements can be seen as the standard practice in most of Europe but there are instances that prove that there were families that sometimes did not follow what can be considered common practice. For the most part, when it comes to sons in the family, there is always the matter of inheritance if they grow to live passed the toddler stage of childhood, where sickness can easily overwhelm them. The first son was usually given priority when it comes to the majority of inheritance due to him being the oldest of the male children and carrying on the family name.¹⁵⁴ The surviving sons after the eldest would live much different lives.

The second son was mostly seen as a spare incase the first was to die.¹⁵⁵ The third son was usually sent to join the Church; this would allow the son to be taken care of due to the Church providing care for them that their parents may not have been able to provide.¹⁵⁶ This family model can be fitted into the Borgia when compared to the lives of Pedro Luis, Juan, and

¹⁵³ James Grubb, *Provincial Families of the Renaissance: Private and Public Life in the Veneto*, (John Hopkins University Press, 2019): 1-33.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 2-3.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Cesare. If the family is to be compared to that of other noble families at the time when it comes to inheritance and sons joining the Church, one outlier gains attention from the Borgia family. That outlier is Alonso Borgia joining the Church when he was the only son of his generation. Alonso would have been given all rights to his family's inheritance but he chose to join the Church as an adult, forfeiting all rights to his own inheritance. The number of sons that gain inheritance and those that go to the Church are not solely tied to the value of the inheritance but also what is needed for the family to possibly grow in society on the social or political ladder.

The idea of limiting the number of male siblings that marry can truly be reinforced by examining inheritance practices. The more legitimate male heirs a family had, the more the inheritance would be broken up. In certain regions in Italy, such as Veneto, there was also the practice of dividing inheritance evenly among any legitimate male children a family had.¹⁵⁷ By limiting the number of male siblings that can marry, it would allow the collective wealth of the family to remain high enough for future generations to not be bankrupt. The practice of limiting the number of male siblings that can marry was originally a practice done in northern Europe but there is evidence that during the mid-15th century this practice was also in provincial areas in Italy, such as Veneto.¹⁵⁸ This inheritance problem is more impactful to the noble and high class compared to the common people. When considering someone with no property to give an heir, this breaks down any restrictions when it comes to marriages since those children would be inheriting barely anything from their parents.

¹⁵⁷ James Grubb, *Provincial Families of the Renaissance: Private and Public Life in the Veneto*, (John Hopkins University Press, 2019): 2-3.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

With a third son joining the Church, this would allow the weight of inheritance to be lifted from the parents that may not be able to give enough to both sons. Early signs of high intelligence may have also been a factor in the son joining the Church due to the amount of education that the child would have to go through. A sign that that child can learn very quickly could mean that they may be able to obtain a higher station in the Church quicker due to their skills. Even though a member of the Church cannot benefit from inheritance due to their station they may still bring more prestige to their family from the actions they take or any high-ranking positions they are able to acquire. Alonso and Rodrigo are good examples of how members of a singular family can raise themselves even higher through the ranks of nobility and acquire the strongest position in the Christian World, raising the prestige of their family in the process.

In order to examine the adoption of Cesare, Juan, and the other Borgia children, first there must be an examination of another member of the Borgia household that had died before Rodrigo would become Pope. An understanding of who this member of the family is, will allow a greater understanding of who exactly the Borgia children were and if they were truly adopted by Rodrigo or if they were his biological children. That member of the family is Pedro Luis de Borgia, the First Duke of Gandia. He was most likely named after Rodrigo's brother Pedro Luis but it was very common for people to use the same names throughout their family, leaving some families to be filled with Richards, Williams, or Johns for example. While many scholars have believed for the longest time that Pedro Luis is Rodrigo's biological son, there are a few issues when it comes down to the facts. Many scholars seem to take the idea that Pedro Luis is the son of Rodrigo due to the high number of scholars that had said it before them. After an examination of the facts and documents, a different perspective may come into view.

Why is it so important to look at Pedro Luis first over others, like Juan and Cesare Borgia? Would it be due to his high station in the Spanish Court? Perhaps it is due to the young age he was when he died? How could he possibly affect the way scholars view Rodrigo Borgia and the possible adoptions within the Borgia family? His station itself holds the key to not just finding out who Rodrigo was to him but also shows that what scholars believe about his parentage could be outright misguided.

The relation of Pedro Luis and the other Borgia children to Rodrigo Borgia should be investigated due to the possibility of reexamining the very character of Rodrigo. If it can be proven that they were not the children of Rodrigo Borgia but were in fact adopted nephews, the modern depiction of Rodrigo Borgia would be very different. The investigation would show that Rodrigo used nepotistic practices towards his niece and nephews, instead of sons and a daughter. The fact that anti-Borgia rhetoric came about after their downfall, with heavy emphasis on Rodrigo raising his “children” into high positions would also mean that there was a push to make Rodrigo to have questionable morals compared to other Popes, like Pope Pius II who also used nepotism heavily during their tenure as Pope.¹⁵⁹

Given an investigation into the paternity of the Borgia children, the world’s view of the notorious Borgia family would be heavily impacted and would lead some scholarly works to be seen as obsolete. With nepotism towards nephews being common among the Popes of the Renaissance, the illusion of Rodrigo being morally worse than the other Popes that practiced nepotism because of the belief that the Borgia children were his biologically and not nephews

¹⁵⁹ Richard B. Hilary, “The Nepotism of Pope Pius II, 1458-1464,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 64, no. 1 (1978): 33–35.

would be broken and bring him to the same metaphorical level of the other Renaissance Popes.¹⁶⁰ An examination of when the Borgia children were born would also show that there would be some discrepancy between Pedro Luis and the other Borgia children. Pedro Luis was born in 1458, when Rodrigo was roughly a year or two into his appointment as Cardinal.¹⁶¹ Pedro Luis was roughly 15 when the next Borgia child was born but what really set him apart was his actions that helped gain him a position in the highest order of Spanish nobility, Rodrigo's hand in this advancement will be greatly under question.

When it comes to Pedro Luis and his position as the First Duke of Gandia as well as becoming a Grandee, the highest order of Spanish nobility, scholars must look at the formal order in which he had received such titles.¹⁶² Documents, made for court purposes and as a way to formally announce and justify the elevation of one's status or station, have thankfully survived over 500 years. King Ferdinand of Spain wrote about Pedro Luis when he was elevated to Grandee status. In his introduction, King Ferdinand refers to Pedro Luis' nobility at birth and states that his parents were highly distinguished nobility, truly fitting to that of a prince.¹⁶³ Even though King Ferdinand gives this detail that Pedro Luis' parents being from nobility, he does not give enough details as to who Pedro Luis' parents were and where his place was in the Borgia family. A bigger clue can be found in his elevation to the First Duke of Gandia.

¹⁶⁰ Stan Goff and Amy Laura Hall, *Borderline: Reflections on War, Sex, and Church*, 1st ed. (Lutterworth Press, 2015): 47-53.

¹⁶¹ Peter de Roo. *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*. 1 vol. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 170.

¹⁶² King Ferdinand of Spain. "Pedro Luis de Borgia and His Brothers are Elevated to the Rank of Grandees of Spain." (1485). From Liber V. *Diversorum Valentiae*, f^{is} 53-55^{vo}. Quoted in Fedel Fita, *Estudios Historicos, Tom. VI*. (Madrid, 1887): 224.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Although it would be an amazing find, at the moment there seems to be no document that states the names of Pedro Luis' parents at the current point of research. However, there should be a consideration for the actions of King Ferdinand when it comes to Pedro Luis. If Pedro Luis was truly the illegitimate son of Rodrigo Borgia and an unknown woman, why would King Ferdinand praise his parentage in his elevation? There were ways for illegitimate children to be legitimized but upon further inspection of the documents, the odds of Pedro Luis being the illegitimate child of Rodrigo Borgia quickly diminish.¹⁶⁴ It would not be reasonable to believe that King Ferdinand would use sarcasm in the elevation of someone to the highest order of Spanish nobility. It would be foolish to assume that King Ferdinand would mock the person he is elevating when that person would now be extremely close to him in court.

It must be noted that, at the present moment, there are no primary sources that directly mention the parentage of Pedro Luis de Borgia. There are, however, documents that can help deduce the relation he has to the Borgia family and where he is stationed in the family dynamic. There happens to be a Papal Bull that shines light on the familial relationship that Pedro Luis had with the Borgia. That Papal Bull refers to Pedro Luis being deserving of the benefits from the Church of Gandia due to him being the nephew of a Cardinal and being the Duke of Gandia.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ James Grubb, *Provincial Families of the Renaissance: Private and Public Life in the Veneto*, (John Hopkins University Press, 2019): 39.

¹⁶⁵ Pope Innocent VIII. "Pope Innocent VIII grants to Pedro Luis de Borgia, Duke of Gandia, the right of patronage of, and of presentation to, the parochial church of that town." *Archivium Apostolicum Secretum Vaticanum. Regestum 682. F^o 392*. Quoted in Peter de Roo. *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*. 1 vol. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 579. While some scholars may argue that it could have been in reference to Lewis John de Mila being his uncle and not Rodrigo, one must look at the document from a different angle.

The issue with scholars stating that it is really Lewis John de Mila that is the uncle mentioned in the Papal Bull is the fact that Pedro Luis is the nephew to Rodrigo on his father's side and he is Lewis John's nephew on his mother's side.¹⁶⁶ This can be problematic when it comes to picking Lewis John de Mila as the uncle mentioned in the Papal Bull because scholars have used that as a way to frame Rodrigo as Pedro Luis' father and not uncle.¹⁶⁷ This is also problematic due to that fact that the name of Pedro Luis' father is not even mentioned in the Papal Bull and it does not insist that his father was a Cardinal.¹⁶⁸ There is further support that Rodrigo was not the father of Pedro Luis due to yet another Papal Bull that calls Pedro Luis merely a "relative" of Rodrigo Borgia.¹⁶⁹ The identity of Pedro Luis' father leans towards a man by the name of William Raymund Lanzol y de Borgia, from this point being called William Raymund.¹⁷⁰

William Raymund was first nephew to Rodrigo Borgia because he was the son of Rodrigo's sister, Juana de Borgia.¹⁷¹ Although it was just mentioned that William Raymund is the father of Pedro Luis, it must be explained on how this could be. William Raymund married a

¹⁶⁶ Peter de Roo. *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*. 1 vol. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 169.

¹⁶⁷ Pope Innocent VIII. "Pope Innocent VIII grants to Pedro Luis de Borgia, Duke of Gandia, the right of patronage of, and of presentation to, the parochial church of that town." *Archivum Apostolicum Secretum Vaticanum*. Regestum 682. F^o 392. Quoted in Peter de Roo. *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*. 1 vol. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 579.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Pope Innocent VIII. "Pope Innocent VIII absolves the kings of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, of excommunication incurred by injustice towards certain de Borgias." *Archivum Apostolicum Secretum Vaticanum*. Regestum 682. F^o 287. Quoted in Peter de Roo. *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*. 1 vol. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 580.

¹⁷⁰ Peter de Roo. *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*. 1 vol. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 130-135.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

woman named Vanotia that was the daughter of Giovanni del Mila and Caterina de Borgia, one of the sisters of Lewis John de Mila.¹⁷² William Raymund's wife would be given the family name of Cathaneis by historians.¹⁷³ William Raymund was even noted as to having a daughter named Lucrezia who he tried to settle on a husband for her but was turned down by the family.¹⁷⁴ William Raymund's life may have been quiet for the majority of history books but his early death shaped the Borgia family into what many scholars see as they gain yet another Pope in their family.

To the knowledge of historians, William Raymund lived his life in Valencia, the city that appears to hold the roots of many members of the Borgia family. His death in 1481, left his pregnant wife, Vanotia, with multiple young children without a father.¹⁷⁵ Jofre, the youngest of the notorious Borgia children, was said to have been the son of a widow.¹⁷⁶ With Jofre being the son of William Raymund and Lucrezia's name being present in possible marriage proposals, it would not be such a far stretch to assume that Pedro Luis, Juan, and Cesare may also be the children of William Raymund and Vanotia. The evidence may shift the position of biological father away from Rodrigo but further evidence of the family's actions after the death of William Raymund will amplify the argument that the Borgia children were adopted by their uncle, Rodrigo, so that they could be taken care of properly.

¹⁷² Jacobus Wilhelmus Imhof, *Genealogiae XX Illustrium Familiarum in Hispania*, (Lipsiae, 1712): 46.

¹⁷³ Peter de Roo. *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*. 1 vol. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 133.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 133-134.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

A quick examination of Vanotia is in order to determine if she is the fabled Vannozza Catanei that was the mother of the Borgia children. Was she the concubine of Rodrigo Borgia and gave birth to his children or was she simply a widow that Rodrigo felt sympathy for due to the loss of his nephew, Pedro Luis, and decided to take care of his children as if they were his own? Vannozza was a common nickname for women in Italy during the Renaissance and the similarity of Vanotia to Vannozza is within plain view for scholars to make the connection that she may have also been referred to as Vannozza.¹⁷⁷ One of the biggest pieces of evidence that Vanotia may have in fact been the fabled Vannozza is a signature on letters at the archives of Modena that read “Vanotia Borgia de Cathaneis.”¹⁷⁸ It can be easy to piece together that with the connections of her name as well as her children’s names, that she added Borgia to her surname in order to honor her late first husband, William Raymund de Borgia.

When it comes to the possible nepotism that, at the time Cardinal, Rodrigo Borgia used for his nephew Pedro Luis, in regards to his station as First Duke of Gandia, there appears to be no evidence to back it up. The record of Pedro Luis receiving his Dukedom actually pushes back against the idea of nepotism. On December 20, 1485, King Ferdinand issued a diploma to Pedro Luis officially naming him the First Duke of Gandia.¹⁷⁹ An excerpt from the document states:

"We Ferdinand, etc. We have recently sold to you, the noble grandee, and Magnificent Lord Pedro Luis de Borja and to yours, the duchy and villa of Gandia and the castle of Bayren, in the manner and under the terms contained in the act of sale. And now we are considering the morals, talents, activity, and high-mindedness with which you have been endowed, and the fact that you

¹⁷⁷ Peter de Roo. *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*. 1 vol. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 135-136.

¹⁷⁸ Two of which are addressed to her daughter, Lucretia and seven to Cardinal d’Este. Henry Matagne, *Le Cardinal Rodrigue Borgia, in Revue de Questions History*, T. XI: 192; Ferdinand Gregorovius, *Lucrezia Borgia*, (Stuttgart, 1875): 158-162; Pasquale Adinolfi, *Il Canale di Ponte*, (Narni, 1860): 13.

¹⁷⁹ King Ferdinand of Spain. “Pedro Luis de Borgia is made Duke of Gandia.” (December 1485). From Archivo real de Valencia, fº 26-32. Quoted in Fedel Fita, *Estudios Historicos, Tom. VI*. (Madrid, 1887): 212.

originate from glorious and noble parents; and We remember with what experience and knowledge of warfare, with what courage and agility you have served Us in the war which We waged against the King of Andalusia or Granada, the enemy of our faith. Your conduct and bravery themselves, worthy of a grandee, have deservingly induced US, now that you preside over the duchy and own the soil at one time possessed by dukes, to favor and decorate you and yours with the title and honor of its dukedom. You have, indeed, covered yourself with no small credit and esteem, when at our service, you have fought during that war at your own expense with a sufficiently numerous followings of soldiers, exposing yourself to dangers, avoiding no labor, meeting the enemy hand to hand filling the place of both a private and of a captain.”

The document shows that even with his relation to Rodrigo, it was his actions that allowed him to receive the title as the Duke of Gandia. Therefore, the idea of Rodrigo performing nepotism to give Pedro Luis and Juan the positions of First and Second Dukes of Gandia should be considered false due to the very words of King Ferdinand. There is the issue of connecting the relationships between Pedro Luis, Juan, Cesare, and Joffre. The in-depth examination of Lucrezia Borgia must be withdrawn due to the fact of Joffre’s relation to Pedro Luis also proving her relation as well due to the heavy amount of evidence that pointed towards Lucrezia and Joffre being siblings. With Joffre being the youngest of the infamous Borgia children, it would be understandable to also add Lucrezia’s relation based off the preserved letters of their mother.¹⁸⁰

The relation of Pedro Luis to Juan, Cesare, and Joffre can be determined by King Ferdinand of Spain. When the King raised Pedro Luis into the order of the Grandee in Spain, he revealed an aspect of the Borgia family that does not get mentioned by modern scholars. King Ferdinand states that not only is Pedro Luis being elevated to the order of Grandee but his

¹⁸⁰ Two of which are addressed to her daughter, Lucretia and seven to Cardinal d’Este. Henry Matagne, *Le Cardinal Rodrigue Borgia*, in *Revue de Questions History*, T. XI: 192; Ferdinand Gregorovius, *Lucrezia Borgia*, (Stuttgard, 1875): 158-162; Pasquale Adinolfi, *Il Canale di Ponte*, (Narni, 1860): 13.

brothers Juan, Cesare, and Joffre would also be elevated to the same order.¹⁸¹ The fact that they are called brothers can also be broke down a different way due to them being called brother-german. Brother-german meaning full blooded brothers, if someone can find the name of a child's father, they would in effect find the name to the father of them all.

On the issue of the Borgia children after Pedro Luis, scholars must also look at his successor to his station. Juan Borgia, sometimes referred to as Giovanni, was named the Second Duke of Gandia after the death of Pedro Luis.¹⁸² Juan Borgia, like Cesare, is often seen by scholars as another son of Rodrigo Borgia but after examination of court documents this view of Juan becomes something different. While Juan is widely known by scholars as the son of Rodrigo and the Second Duke of Gandia, the documents that give him the authority of the high station provide a greater picture as to who he truly was to the Borgia family.

There is another document from King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain that is important to consider. The documents that mention the Borgia children or specific members of the Borgia family, like Pedro Luis, provide a different view of how the Borgia family was truly structured. The next document in question refers to Juan, when he was given his position as the Second Duke of Gandia and confirmed to receive the property that he petitioned them for.¹⁸³ The document is important to the dynamic of the Borgia family because it possessed a phrase that had not been mentioned in previous court documents. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella

¹⁸¹ King Ferdinand of Spain. "Pedro Luis de Borgia and His Brothers are Elevated to the Rank of Grandees of Spain." (December 1485). From Archivo real de Valencia, f^o 26-32. Quoted in Fedel Fita, *Estudios Historicos, Tom. VI*. (Madrid, 1887): 224.

¹⁸² Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 1 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 200.

¹⁸³ King Ferdinand of Spain. "The Kings of Spain confirm Giovanni (Juan) de Borgia in his Neopolitan possessions." (1495-1497). From Bibliotheque de l'Academie d'histoire de Madrid: Collection Salazar, A. 9. F^o 49. Quoted in Charles Yriarte, *Les Borgia, Cesar Borgia, sa vie, sa captivite etc.* (Paris, 1889): 315.

reveal the fate of Juan's father and in doing so filled in the missing piece of what happened to the Borgia children's biological father.

Unfortunately, the name of the Borgias children's father seems to be missing or erased from the document but there is still evidence that points towards someone specific.¹⁸⁴ The document calls upon the heritage of Juan Borgia and his brothers by saying they are of noble birth but a small detail in the document provides a better idea of who their father was. The document states that their father was the "late illustrious...de Borgia" showing that the father of not just Juan but also Pedro Luis, Cesare, and Joffre were dead by the time of the document's creation.¹⁸⁵ It should be noted that the order of King Ferdinand of Spain, rewarding Juan the Neapolitan properties and position of the Second Duke of Gandia, was created before Rodrigo died. The document shows that Rodrigo could not have been the biological father of the Borgia children due to such a high authority granting them these titles and the rhetoric that shows that their father had died years before Rodrigo.

While the examination has gone over the paternity of Pedro Luis and Juan Borgia, the most infamous of the Borgia children, Cesare, is still needed to clarify that the children may have in fact been adopted by their uncle Rodrigo after the death of their biological father. The idea that the children may have been adopted by Rodrigo could start a brand-new approach to how the modern world sees the Borgia family. A reminder is needed to clarify that the purpose of this examination is not to admonish the Borgia family or justify the actions they may have committed that can be seen as dark or unethical but merely to help resolve an issue of falsely claiming that

¹⁸⁴ King Ferdinand of Spain. "The Kings of Spain confirm Giovanni (Juan) de Borgia in his Neapolitan possessions." (1495-1497). From *Bibliothèque de l'Académie d'histoire de Madrid: Collection Salazar, A. 9. F° 49*. Quoted in Charles Yriarte, *Les Borgia, Cesar Borgia, sa vie, sa captivité etc.* (Paris, 1889): 315.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Pedro Luis, Juan, Cesare, Lucrezia, and Joffre were the biological children of Rodrigo Borgia. The investigation into Cesare Borgia would not only back up Rodrigo not being his biological father but would also impact the other children as well. While examining the details, it must be considered that the ideas that scholars and modern historians may have about the family could be tainted by the bias of the enemies of the Borgia after their downfall or from fragmented retellings of their history as the centuries have passed.

An issue with Rodrigo being the father of Cesare is his location at the time of his conception and birth. If someone was to follow the numerous scholars that say that Cesare was born in 1473 or 1474, it would seem reasonable to assume that Rodrigo was in fact the father of Cesare. The issue with this is that Cesare was not born in one of those years. By looking at the correspondence and writings written during his life that mention his age, it becomes clear that there would be no way that Cesare would have been born between 1473 and 1474. With an examination of these texts, it becomes clear that Cesare was born, roughly, in April 1476.¹⁸⁶

There is a correspondence that is to be examined written by Gianandrea Boccaccio, who was an envoy for the Duke of Ferrara, in March 1493. He was sending a report to the Duke of Ferrara and stated that Cesare was turning seventeen years old.¹⁸⁷ The report would put the year Cesare was born at 1476. There was also another report written to the same Duke by Gerard Saraceni on the 26th of October 1501.¹⁸⁸ In the report, Saraceni states that Cesare Borgia would

¹⁸⁶ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 1 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 250.

¹⁸⁷ Gianandrea Boccaccio, "Report sent to the Duke of Ferrara," (March 1493). From the Archives of State, Modena. Quoted in Gregorovius, Ferdinand. *Lucrezia Borgia*. (Stuttgart, 1875): Bd. I s. 13.

¹⁸⁸ Gerard Saraceni, "Report sent to the Duke of Ferrara," (October 26, 1501). From the Archives of State, Modena. Quoted in Gregorovius, Ferdinand. *Lucrezia Borgia*. (Stuttgart, 1875): Bd. II, s. 106, nr. 132.

be finishing his twenty sixth year of age after the next April.¹⁸⁹ This not only puts Cesare's date of birth in 1476 but also in April, due to him being 25 years old when the report was written. This information is greatly needed for the next step of the analysis. With a close look at the year Cesare was born, the place of his birth, and the location of Rodrigo Borgia at the time of Cesare's conception, scholars would be able to determine if Rodrigo truly was Cesare's father.

With the evidence that Cesare was born in 1476, it must be noted that there would be vast difficulties to assume that Rodrigo was his biological father. The biggest issue is that Cesare was born in Spain and Rodrigo was not in Spain around 1476.¹⁹⁰ Rodrigo was not in Spain around the time of Cesare's conception and birth due to the last time he was said to have been in Spain. That time was when he was on a mission from the Pope between 1472 and 1473.¹⁹¹ This would mean that it is physically impossible for Cesare to be the son of Rodrigo Borgia, while keeping in mind that William Raymond would have been alive and living in Valencia during the time of Cesare's birth.¹⁹²

With the investigation of Pedro Luis, Juan, Cesare, and Joffre's father, there must be a look at how Rodrigo could have adopted them and had taken them under his wing. Pedro Luis seems to be the most complex character when it comes to his adoption due to his early death and roughly fifteen-year age difference between him and Juan.¹⁹³ By the time that Rodrigo would

¹⁸⁹ Gerard Saraceni, "Report sent to the Duke of Ferrara," (October 26, 1501). From the Archives of State, Modena. Quoted in Gregorovius, Ferdinand. *Lucrezia Borgia*. (Stuttgard, 1875): Bd. II, s. 106, nr. 132.

¹⁹⁰ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 1 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 244-245.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid, 130-135.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 192-194.

have been taking care of the Borgia children, Pedro Luis would have been a full-grown man making his own decisions and opening doorways to higher titles through King Ferdinand's court. The fact that the actions of Pedro Luis would lead to the elevation into the order of the Grandee, along with his brothers, show that Rodrigo did not have to adopt Pedro Luis due to his ability to not only take care of himself but to also make a name for himself. The other children on the other hand would have been young and still being educated and taken care of.

The evidence that Rodrigo adopted Juan, Cesare, Lucrezia, and Joffre can be seen from his actions after the death of William Raymund. It is said that the Borgia children were moved to Rome from their home in Valencia to live in the household of one of Rodrigo's cousins.¹⁹⁴ While some may argue that Rodrigo did this in order to keep the Borgia children close to him, there is also the marriage practices that can back up why the movement of the Borgia children to Rome may have something to do with their mother. When it comes to remarriage during the Renaissance, there are certain practices that limit how a child's life in the family will be.¹⁹⁵ Remarriage during the Renaissance usually was a way for a young woman to have protection and resources that she would most likely not have if she were to remain a widow. The downside of this is that when a woman remarries, any children that were from a previous marriage are to be moved elsewhere and not to move into the household of their mother's new husband.¹⁹⁶ This would make sense for the Borgia children to move to Rome where their uncle could take care of them while their mother remarried.

¹⁹⁴ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 1 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 288.

¹⁹⁵ Hughes, Diane. "Domestic Ideals and Social Behavior: Evidence from Medieval Genoa." *The Family in History*, edited by Charles E. Rosenberg. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975): 115-144.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

To reiterate the steps that led the Borgia children to Rome, scholars should see the facts from a new angle. With the death of the Borgia children's father, William Raymund, in 1481, many of the Borgia children were still very young.¹⁹⁷ Pedro Luis may have been a young man starting to make his way in the world but there were also his siblings that had to be looked after as well. The children's mother, Vanotia or Vannoza, was still very much alive, allowing Pedro Luis to make a name for himself and in the process brought about the elevation of not just himself but also his brothers, Juan, Cesare, and Joffre as well.¹⁹⁸ The younger children remained in Spain until their mother remarried, which led to her having to send her children elsewhere due to the practices of widows remarrying.¹⁹⁹ What better place to send her children than to their late father's uncle, Rodrigo Borgia, the vice chancellor to the Pope.

¹⁹⁷ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 1 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 134.

¹⁹⁸ King Ferdinand of Spain. "Pedro Luis de Borgia and His Brothers are Elevated to the Rank of Grandees of Spain." (1485). From Liber V. *Diversorum Valentiae*, f^{is} 53-55^{vo}. Quoted in Fedel Fita, *Estudios Historicos*, Tom. VI. (Madrid, 1887): 224.

¹⁹⁹ Hughes, Diane. "Domestic Ideals and Social Behavior: Evidence from Medieval Genoa." *The Family in History*, edited by Charles E. Rosenberg. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975): 115-144.

Conclusion

The adoption of the Borgia children is close at hand in the examination. Understanding why Rodrigo would adopt the children in the first place would not only show the character of Rodrigo but also change the perspective of the Borgia family. After examining the works of numerous scholars such as Peter de Roo, G.J. Meyer, Michael Mallett, Christopher Hibbert, and court documents that span from King Ferdinand of Spain to Pope Innocent VIII, the examination of the Borgia family has shown that adoption was not only present among the family but also changing the dynamic of the family. The reasons as to why this conclusion may have been difficult for many scholars to accept is due to the centuries that the family has been seen as strictly biological and not practicing adoption, except for that of Alonso and Rodrigo Borgia.

The whole understanding of who the Borgia family were is critical to understand how information regarding a group of people can be distorted by not just their enemies after their downfall but also the common people that prefer rumor to truth. The fact that the family had clear ties to adoption and was not performing nepotism for their biological children, like their enemies proclaim, shows that scholars have been intertwined in the same distorted view of the family as the common people of Italy that had never met a Borgia once Pope Julius II came to power. This examination proves not only were the Borgia children the nephews of Rodrigo Borgia but also that the propaganda against the Borgia had greatly affected the perception of the Borgia family for centuries.

In 1378, Alonso Borgia was born near Valencia, and was the only son of his family.²⁰⁰ As the only son of his parents, he was to inherit the most of his family's wealth and

²⁰⁰ Christopher Hibbert, *The Borgias and Their Enemies, 1431-1519*, (Harcourt Inc., 2008): 10-19.

take on the responsibility of the head of the household. His sisters were to go on to marry husbands fitting their stations as ladies of a lesser noble house in Spain and he was to focus on the survival and expansion of the family. While his sisters would help the growth of their husbands' family, Alonso was to get an education and insure to have a male heir to expand the family lineage. Alonso was to grow up in a world that expected him to embrace his position in the family and lead the family to greatness while passing on the spoils of his successes to his children. However, instead of having a family of his own, Alonso would choose a life of the church while keeping an eye on his sisters' children.

Alonso Borgia was a family man. As the only son of his parents the duties towards his family must have weighed heavy on his mind. Like any man, Alonso wants to see his family grow and thrive. However, with his dedication to the church there would be very few ways for proper inheritance and titles to transfer down the line of the family. Someone still had to take care of his sisters if their husbands were to pass away at a young age and Alonso wanted to make sure that his sisters were well taken care of so there had to be some steps taken in order to secure future success.

Alonso had four sisters and multiple nieces and nephews.²⁰¹ A family of such size requires as equally large ambition for it to grow with the time. Alonso saw a great deal of potential in his sisters' children, especially the children of Isabelle Borgia.²⁰² The three nephews that Alonso seemed to favor were Rodrigo and Pedro Luis Borgia and Luis Juan de Mila.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Michael Mallett, *The Borgias: The Rise and Fall of the Most Infamous Family in History*, (Academy Chicago Publishers, 1987): 302-303.

²⁰² Ibid, 85.

²⁰³ Ibid.

Alonso would ensure that these three men would have the most advantages in life that he could provide.

The first reason Lançol fits the family name of Rodrigo's father is due to the historian Onofrio Panvinio, who was also the librarian of Alessandro Farnese. An examination of Rodrigo's paternal family, done by the French historian, Alexander Gordon, also showed that Rodrigo's father may have been a blood relative of the Borgia but was mainly of the Lançol and took the family name of Borgia most likely due to his wife and the quickening growth of the Borgia family's power.²⁰⁴ Another reason that Lançol is most likely the family name of Rodrigo's father is due to a stone plaque that depicts the family crest of Alonso Borgia along with the crest of his nephews Rodrigo and Pedro Luis.²⁰⁵

First, a visual representation of the Borgia family tree is needed. Figure 2 is what the family tree looked like for many scholars before the examination and Figure 3 is a simplified version of what the family tree looks like after the examination.

²⁰⁴ Alexander Gordon, *History of Alexander VI*, (Amsterdam, 1732): 3.

²⁰⁵ Escutcheons of Pope Calixtus III and his nephews: Cardinal Rodrigo and Pedro Luis De Borgia, Preserved on Ponte Mole near Rome.

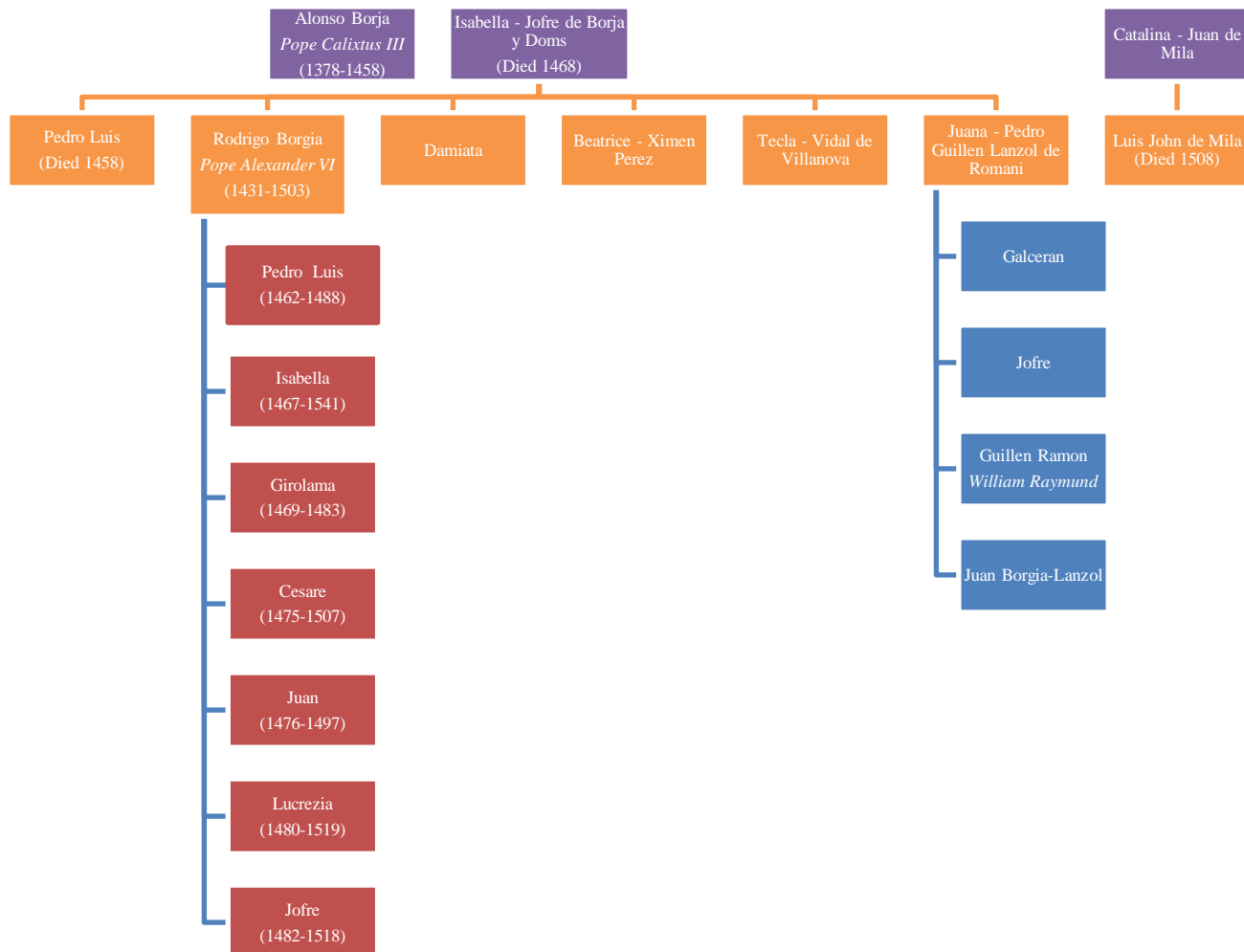


Figure 2.

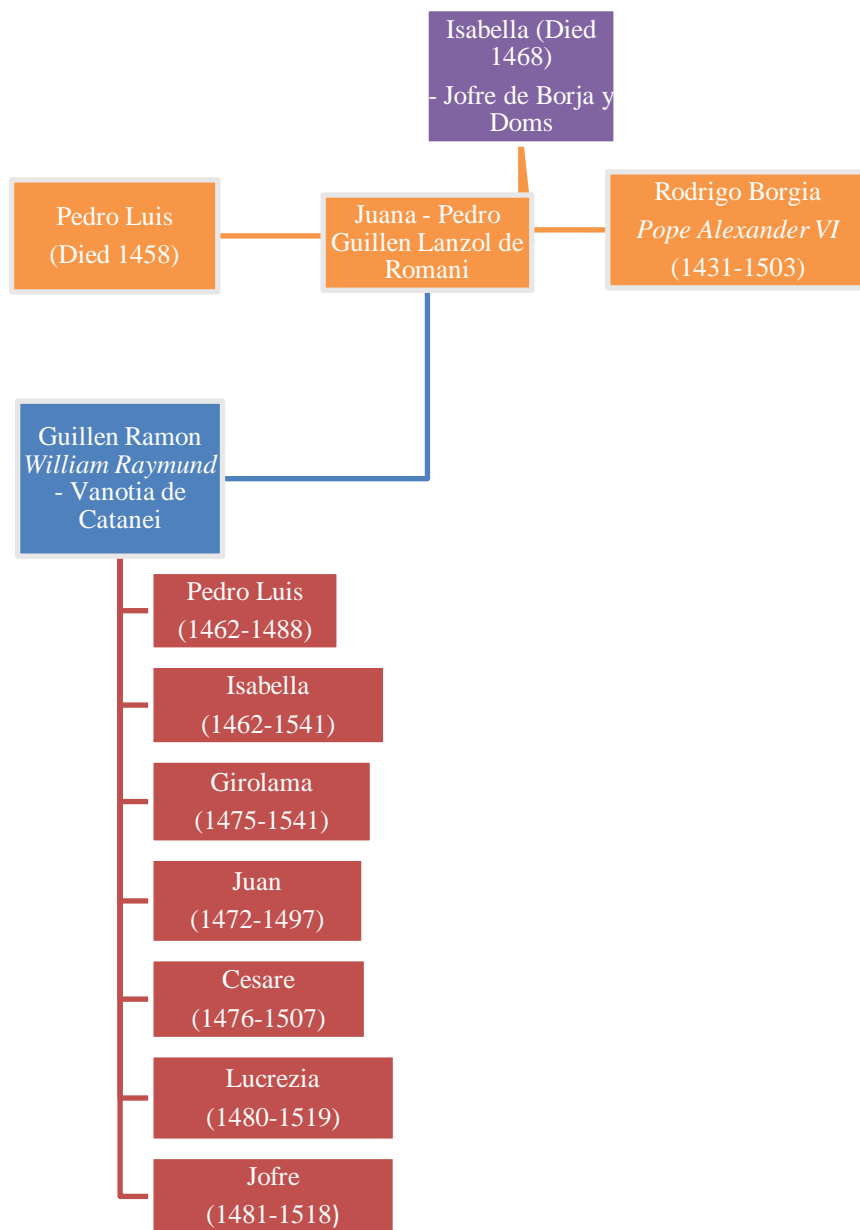


Figure 3.

The depiction of the family crests may have been common among those in nobility and power but it is the form of which Rodrigo and Pedro Luis' crest that stands out. While Alonso's crest is depicted in the Borgia style of a field of gold with a red bull grazing on a green terrace,

Rodrigo and Pedro Luis' crest is a combination of two crests with one being that of Borgia and the other having three transverse bars.²⁰⁶ These bars can only be those of the Lançol family to represent the father of Rodrigo and Pedro Luis. However, one must ask themselves why their family crest was bipartite while Alonso's was solely the Borgia crest. The answer to this is present within the adoption practices during the time of Alonso and Rodrigo. An examination of adoption practices of the time would present a clearer picture that modern historians may not put into perspective.

There were different forms of adoption during the Renaissance. The forms in detail will consist of those that involve close family such as grandchildren and nieces and nephews. The form of adoption that most likely fitted that of the Borgia was be that of adopting a member of one's family while having a different last name.²⁰⁷ In this form of adoption an uncle would be able to adopt his nieces and nephews provided they not only take the uncle's family name but also intertwine the two houses' coat of arms.²⁰⁸ The plaque depicting the two crests heavily implies that there was some form of adoption between Alonso and his two nephews, given that their crest has both his crest and another crest intertwined together.

As to why the adoption of Alonso to his nephews not being publicized, there are some reasons as to why this occurred. The first point is that it may have in fact been publicized and the documents pertaining to the adoption were lost in history, with the event happening over 500 years ago this should not be cast aside but at the same time should not be the only element

²⁰⁶ Escutcheons of Pope Calixtus III and his nephews: Cardinal Rodrigo and Pedro Luis De Borgia, Preserved on Ponte Mole near Rome.

²⁰⁷ Marina Garbellotti and Maria Clara Rossi, *Adoption and Fosterage Practices in the Late Medieval and Modern Age*, (Viella, 2016): 27.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

scholars consider. There is also the chance that the plaque itself was a representation of the adoption taking place. With Alonso surprising the Cardinals with his ambition for a crusade and reform, he may have kept family matters, like adoption, private while keeping elevations of family members public due to their public station. Like any other person in his new position, Alonso wished to have family nearby for support since he was an outsider to Italy and for this purpose, he chose nephews that he could trust to always support his endeavors. Raising their position in the family as his sons would have greatly strengthened the bond of the nephews to Alonso, a bonus to secure their support.

The man by the name of William Raymund was first nephew to Rodrigo Borgia because he was the son of Rodrigo's sister, Juana de Borgia.²⁰⁹ William Raymund married a woman named Vanotia that was the daughter of Giovanni del Mila and Caterina de Borgia, one of the sisters of Lewis John de Mila.²¹⁰ William Raymund's wife would be given the family name of Cathaneis by historians.²¹¹ William Raymund was even noted as to having a daughter named Lucrezia who he tried to settle on a husband for her but was turned down by the family.²¹² William Raymund's life may have been quiet for the majority of history books but his early death shaped the Borgia family into what many scholars see as they gain yet another Pope in their family.

²⁰⁹ Marina Garbellotti and Maria Clara Rossi, *Adoption and Fosterage Practices in the Late Medieval and Modern Age*, (Viella, 2016): 27.

²¹⁰ Jacobus Wilhelmus Imhof, *Genealogiae XX Illustrium Familiarum in Hispania*, (Lipsiae, 1712): 46.

²¹¹ Peter de Roo. *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*. 1 vol. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 133.

²¹² Ibid, 133-134.

With what is known to historians, William Raymund lived his life in Valencia, the city that appears to hold the roots of many members of the Borgia family. His death in 1481, left his pregnant wife, Vanotia, with multiple young children without a father.²¹³ Jofre, the youngest of the notorious Borgia children, was said to have been the son of a widow.²¹⁴ With the idea of Jofre being the son of William Raymund and Lucrezia's name being present in possible marriage proposals, it would not be such a far stretch to assume that Pedro Luis, Juan, and Cesare may also be the children of William Raymund and Vanotia. The death of William Raymund with the children still being at a young age would also help with the argument that Rodrigo would have adopted his late nephew's children due to his characteristics of being a family man, like Alonso.

After the examination, Vanotia is the fabled Vannozza Catanei that was the mother of the Borgia children. Vannozza was a common nickname for women in Italy during the Renaissance and the similarity of Vanotia to Vannozza is within plain view for a scholar to make the connection that she may have also been referred to as Vannozza.²¹⁵ One of the biggest pieces of evidence that Vanotia may have in fact been the fabled Vannozza is a signature on letters at the archives of Modena that read "Vanotia Borgia de Cathaneis" and is partially transcribed in Ferdinand Gregorovius' *Lucrezia Borgia* and in Pasquale Adinolfi's *Il Canale di Ponte*.²¹⁶ It can be easy to piece together that with the connections of her name as well as her children's names,

²¹³ Peter de Roo. *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*. 1 vol. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 133-134.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 135-136.

²¹⁶ Two of which are addressed to her daughter, Lucretia and seven to Cardinal d'Este. Henry Matagne, *Le Cardinal Rodrigue Borgia*, in *Revue de Questions History*, T. XI: 192; Ferdinand Gregorovius, *Lucrezia Borgia*, (Stuttgard, 1875): 158-162; Pasquale Adinolfi, *Il Canale di Ponte*, (Narni, 1860): 13.

that she added Borgia to her surname in order to honor her late first husband, William Raymund de Borgia.

There was also the document from King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain that should be considered. The documents that mention the Borgia children or specific members of the Borgia family, like Pedro Luis, provide a different view of how the Borgia family was truly structured. The document referring to Juan, when he was given his position as the Second Duke of Gandia and confirmed to receive the property that he petitioned them for is important to the dynamic of the Borgia family because it possessed a phrase that had not been mentioned in previous court documents.²¹⁷ King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella revealed the fate of Juan's father and in doing so filled in the missing piece of what happened to the Borgia children's biological father.

Unfortunately, the name of the Borgias children's father seems to be missing or erased from the document but there is still evidence that points towards someone specific.²¹⁸ The document calls upon the heritage of Juan Borgia and his brothers by saying they are of noble birth but a small detail in the document provides a better idea of who their father was. The document states that their father was the "late illustrious...de Borgia" showing that the father of not just Juan but also Pedro Luis, Cesare, and Joffre were dead by the time of the document's

²¹⁷ King Ferdinand of Spain. "The Kings of Spain confirm Giovanni (Juan) de Borgia in his Neopolitan possessions." (1495-1497). From *Bibliothèque de l'Académie d'histoire de Madrid: Collection Salazar, A. 9. F° 49*. Quoted in Charles Yriarte, *Les Borgia, Cesar Borgia, sa vie, sa captivité etc.* (Paris, 1889): 315.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

creation.²¹⁹ The fact that Joffre has also been noted as being born the son of a widow would also dismiss Rodrigo as the father since the Borgia children were brothers-german.

An issue with Rodrigo being the father of Cesare is his location at the time of his conception and birth. If new researchers were to follow the numerous scholars that say that Cesare was born in 1473 or 1474, it would seem reasonable to assume that Rodrigo was in fact the father of Cesare. The issue with this is that Cesare was not born in one of those years. After looking at the correspondence and writings written during his life that mention his age, becomes clear that there would be no way that Cesare would have been born between 1473 and 1474. With an examination of these texts, it becomes clear that Cesare was born, roughly, in April 1476.²²⁰

With the evidence that Cesare was born in 1476, it must be noted that there would be vast difficulties to assume that Rodrigo was his biological father. The biggest issue is that Cesare was born in Spain and Rodrigo was not in Spain around 1476.²²¹ There is also the evidence that Rodrigo was not in Spain around the time of Cesare's conception and birth due to the last time he was said to have been in Spain. That time was when he was on a mission from the Pope between 1472 and 1473.²²² This would mean that it is physically impossible for Cesare to be the son of

²¹⁹ King Ferdinand of Spain. "The Kings of Spain confirm Giovanni (Juan) de Borgia in his Neopolitan possessions." (1495-1497). From *Bibliothèque de l'Académie d'histoire de Madrid: Collection Salazar, A. 9. F° 49*. Quoted in Charles Yriarte, *Les Borgia, Cesar Borgia, sa vie, sa captivité etc.* (Paris, 1889): 315.

²²⁰ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 1 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 250.

²²¹ *Ibid*, 244-245.

²²² *Ibid*.

Rodrigo Borgia, when at the same time, William Raymund would have been alive and living in Valencia during the time of Cesare's birth.²²³

The evidence that Rodrigo adopted Juan, Cesare, Lucrezia, and Joffre can be seen from his actions after the death of William Raymund. It is said that the Borgia children were moved to Rome from their home in Valencia to live in the household of one of Rodrigo's cousins.²²⁴ While some may argue that Rodrigo did this in order to keep the Borgia children close to him, there is also the marriage practices that can back up why the movement of the Borgia children to Rome may have something to do with their mother. When it comes to remarriage during the Renaissance, there are certain practices that limit how a child's life in the family will be.²²⁵ Remarriage during the Renaissance usually was a way for a young woman to have protection and resources that she would most likely not have if she were to remain a widow. The downside of this is that when a woman remarries, any children that were from a previous marriage are to be moved elsewhere and not to move into the household of their mother's new husband.²²⁶ This would make sense for the Borgia children to move to Rome where their uncle could take care of them while their mother remarried.

²²³ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 1 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 130-135.

²²⁴ Ibid, 288.

²²⁵ Diane Hughes, "Domestic Ideals and Social Behavior: Evidence from Medieval Genoa." *The Family in History*, edited by Charles E. Rosenberg. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975): 115-144.

²²⁶ Ibid.

With the death of the Borgia children's father, William Raymund, in 1481, many of the Borgia children were still very young.²²⁷ Pedro Luis may have been a young man starting to make his way in the world but there were also his siblings that had to be looked after as well. The children's mother, Vanotia or Vannoza, was still very much alive and this allowed Pedro Luis to make a name for himself and in the process brought about the elevation of not just himself but also his brothers, Juan, Cesare, and Joffre as well.²²⁸ The younger children remained in Spain until their mother remarried, which led to her having to send her children elsewhere due to the practices of widows remarrying.²²⁹ What better place to send her children than to their late father's uncle, Rodrigo Borgia, the vice chancellor to the Pope.

When their mother remarried, the young Borgia children came to Rome to live under the protection of Rodrigo Borgia and stayed at the house of Rodrigo's cousin, Adriana de Mila.²³⁰ Pedro Luis was a full-grown man at the time and had already made a place for himself amongst Spanish nobility so there was no need for him to move with his younger siblings to Rome. Some accounts even point towards Juan staying with Pedro Luis in Spain and only coming to Rome after Pedro Luis' death in 1491.²³¹ With the Borgia children closer to Rodrigo, he would be able to not only take care of them but also be able to ensure that they were given proper protection

²²⁷ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 1 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 134.

²²⁸ King Ferdinand of Spain. "Pedro Luis de Borgia and His Brothers are Elevated to the Rank of Grandees of Spain." (1485). From Liber V. *Diversorum Valentiae*, f^{is} 53-55^{vo}. Quoted in Fedel Fita, *Estudios Historicos*, Tom. VI. (Madrid, 1887): 224.

²²⁹ Diane Hughes, "Domestic Ideals and Social Behavior: Evidence from Medieval Genoa." *The Family in History*, edited by Charles E. Rosenberg. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975): 115-144.

²³⁰ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 1 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 308.

²³¹ *Ibid*, 199.

and education to take on the European social and political system. Rodrigo takes it upon himself to pay respect to his late uncle, Alonso, by mirroring the very actions done for himself.

Rodrigo was not the only noble in Italy to adopt their nephew. Another example of someone adopting their nephew is that of Lorenzo de Medici and his nephew Giulio di Giuliano de Medici, the son of Lorenzo's late brother who was assassinated.²³² Giulio would not only be educated alongside Lorenzo's own children but would be destined for the church much like the young life of Cesare Borgia.²³³ Giulio was raised not as a nephew but as a son and was treated as such even though he was in fact the son of Lorenzo's late brother. With this occurring in the same time as the Borgia family, it would not be so far-fetched to say that Rodrigo adopted his own nephews not only to raise them up in Roman society but also to honor the memory of his own uncle that took him in when he lost his own father.

Rodrigo made sure that his nephews and niece had a good education with Cesare going to the University of Pisa and Lucrezia going on to learn multiple languages, like French, Greek, and Latin.²³⁴ The thought and care for his niece and nephew are not that of just the actions of a well-off uncle but of those of a father figure, much like how Alonso was to Rodrigo, his brother, and Lewis Juan de Mila. Rodrigo was a family man that wanted his family around him and why wouldn't he? He was an outsider to the Roman nobility and after the Borgia lost their power, their enemies were able to put their own spin on the Borgia legend.

²³² Paul Strathern, *The Medici: Power, Money, and Ambition in the Italian Renaissance*. (Pegasus Books, 2016): 247.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives and His Time*, 1 vols. (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1924): 308-309.

When Giuliano della Rovere became Pope Julius II, he took every opportunity to put dirt on the Borgia family name. He held resentment to the Borgia for past transgressions and was even the Cardinal that supported the French invasion of Italy if it meant that Rodrigo would be deposed.²³⁵ G. J. Meyer even claims that Della Rovere encouraged slandering the Borgia and tortured some of their followers after Rodrigo's death.²³⁶ It is understandable that a Pope that once supported the downfall of the Borgia to the point of riding alongside an invading army, may try to sully the Borgia name once he came to power. Who is to say that he may have encouraged the idea of the adopted Borgia children being in fact Rodrigo's biological children when there was no one to stand against him?

There was also the works of Francesco Guicciardini in his *History of Florence* that included heavily negative writing about the Borgia.²³⁷ It must be reminded that at the time of the Borgia, Guicciardini was a child in Florence and would have grown up hearing rumor and slander about the Borgia after their downfall and yet he is still considered to be a great source for material about them but why is this when he wrote his work in 1540?²³⁸ The odds of him being a credible source about the Borgia is slim due to the amount of slander he would have heard growing up and not as a full grown man able to come to his own conclusions.

The truth about the Borgia family is that Alonso adopted Rodrigo, his brother, and Lewis Juan de Mila and that action stayed with Rodrigo to the point that when he saw the opportunity

²³⁵ G.J. Meyer, *The Borgias: The Hidden History*. (Bantam, 2013): 395.

²³⁶ Ibid, 415.

²³⁷ Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Florence*, Edited by Mario Domandi, (New York: Harper & Row, 1970): 13.

²³⁸ Ibid.

to do the same thing for his late nephew's children, he mirrored Alonso's actions and became a father figure for the next generation of Borgia.

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