

# Landscape and Identity in Early Modern Rome

*Villa Culture at Frascati  
in the Borghese Era*

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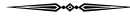
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PART ONE



# The Roman Setting

## Chapter One



# Papacy and Aristocracy

Throughout the early modern period, Frascati was the country seat of Rome. Its villas played a central role in Roman social and diplomatic politics. Like many other cities in early modern Europe, Rome was a court; yet the court of Rome was unique, “a true papal court,” as Michel de Montaigne observed during his visit of 1580–81.<sup>1</sup> “New to him was the sight of so great a court,” wrote Montaigne (who preferred to use the third person), “so thronged with prelates and churchmen, and it seemed to him more populous in rich men, and coaches, and horses, by far, than any other that he had ever seen.”<sup>2</sup> Humanists, prelates, and papal families enriched by the Church were the chief Roman patrons of the age. During the reign of Paul III Farnese, Frascati began to attract humanists and churchmen who built villas on ancient ruins and embraced the ancient ideal of *otium*, hoping to acquire an aura of virtue and sophistication associated with eminent Romans who had sojourned in the Tusculan hills in antiquity. By the early seventeenth century, Frascati had become a fashionable country seat for the popes and their families. During the pontificates of Gregory XIII Boncompagni, Clement VIII Aldobrandini, and, especially, Paul V Borghese, papal *villeggiatura* was marked by the interweaving of *otium* and *negotium*. In this period the pope enjoyed international stature both spiritual and political, and these popes carried their responsibilities with them to the countryside. They also saw villa building as a way to attain and maintain social

recognition for their families. In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, papal clans who stood at the apex of the ecclesiastical hierarchy began to use their wealth and power to climb into the highest ranks of the Roman secular aristocracy. Once a quiet hillside retreat, Frascati became a center of Roman public life, its character shaped by the distinctive nature of the papacy and of Roman society.

### AN ECCLESIASTICAL COURT AS EUROPEAN CAPITAL

In Rome, unlike a secular court, the reigning prince was the pope, his chief courtiers celibate churchmen.<sup>3</sup> The institution of the papacy and the power emanating from it were the organizing principles of the Roman court. In the single person of the pope the powers of both priest and prince were vested. Although this union of spiritual and temporal authority served as a model for the development of absolutist states elsewhere in Europe, no other sovereign could lay claim to the pope’s position as Vicar of Christ, apostolic heir to Peter.<sup>4</sup> As Bishop of Rome and of the world, the pope exercised spiritual authority that was both local and universal. At the same time, he enjoyed temporal power as ruler of the Papal States.

Upon the return of the papacy from Avignon in the early fifteenth century, the pope established the Vatican palace, just north of St. Peter’s, as his primary residence and seat of church government.<sup>5</sup>

Here the pope resided much like any other prince, attended by a household of domestic officials (known as the papal *famiglia* or papal court).<sup>6</sup> The College of Cardinals assisted the pope in his temporal duties. The administration of the Church required a large body of lay and ecclesiastical professionals, including bankers, notaries, lawyers, and humanists. Throughout the early modern period many organs of the Curia maintained offices in the Vatican, though some moved to quarters in the Borgo or in the heart of the city across the Tiber. Nevertheless, affairs of state remained intimately associated with the Vatican. There the pope called the College of Cardinals together in the Consistory. The Sala Regia was outfitted for papal reception of exalted visitors: ambassadors, princes, kings, and imperial royalty. From the state halls of the Vatican the pope had access to the church of St. Peter's, built over the apostle's tomb as a permanent symbol of Petrine succession. There the pope performed canonizations, inaugurated Jubilee years, and offered his annual Easter blessing, *urbi et orbi*.

From his twin seats of power at the Vatican and St. Peter's, the pope worked throughout the early modern period to consolidate his authority as an absolute monarch and to counter Protestant attacks on the institutional integrity of the Church. The peace and prosperity that impressed Montaigne was hard won. During the first half of the sixteenth century, much of northern Europe was lost to the Catholic faith. War disrupted the Italian peninsula as the papacy fought to overpower local tyrants and strengthen its territorial position as a princely state, which had been greatly neglected during the Avignon exile and the Great Schism. By the close of the century, papal troops had retaken Bologna, Perugia, Parma, Piacenza, and Ferrara for the Papal States. Church reform gathered momentum during the pontificate of Paul III, and the climactic sessions of the Council of Trent in the 1560s launched the militant strategies of the Counter-Reformation, reversing significant losses to the Protestants.<sup>7</sup> Clement VIII and his nephew, Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, returned Henry IV, king of France, to the Catholic fold, and it was they who reclaimed the papal fief of Ferrara.<sup>8</sup> The achievements of the Aldobrandini pontificate augured well for a new era.

For a few precious decades in the early seventeenth century, Rome enjoyed a position as a reli-

gious and political capital unparalleled in modern times. The pope's prestige grew as the Triumphant Church reclaimed Protestants in France, Germany, Austria, and eastern Europe. Missionaries pressed into Africa, Asia, and the New World. The Jubilee of 1600 brought over half a million pilgrims to Rome, a far greater number than in any Holy Year of the early Renaissance.<sup>9</sup> In the secular sphere, the city that gave birth to the word "capitol" lived up to this ancient legacy more fully in the early seventeenth century than ever before.<sup>10</sup> Political independence had been impossible for the sixteenth-century papacy, which was forced to ally itself with either France or Spain as each in turn assumed a dominant presence on the peninsula. After the 1559 Treaty of Câteau Cambresis, France abandoned its Italian ambitions, leaving Spain to consolidate its positions in the Duchy of Milan and the Kingdom of Naples. The political contours of Italy assumed a fairly stable shape. By the early seventeenth century, the papacy was able to mediate between these world powers, working to forge peaceful relations between them yet depending upon neither for survival. The pope was accepted as an arbiter of international politics, and Rome's stature was recognized as equivalent rather than subordinate to that of either Paris or Madrid.<sup>11</sup>

Early modern Rome was the center of Catholic Europe as well as a great school of diplomacy.<sup>12</sup> Here foreign princes, ambassadors, and prelates arrived seeking audiences with the pope to discuss pressing political or doctrinal matters. With the institutionalization of diplomacy in the fifteenth century, all of the Italian and European powers gradually established permanent embassies in Rome, in far greater numbers than in Paris, Madrid, or Vienna. Special envoys arrived from throughout the world.<sup>13</sup> Paul V Borghese received embassies not only from all of the major European powers but also from Persia, Japan, Armenia, Ethiopia, and the Congo.<sup>14</sup> Rome was a center for the exchange of political information. Judging from the proliferation of treatises describing ceremonial protocols, it was also a training ground in diplomatic etiquette.<sup>15</sup> Treatises on diplomacy describe the desirable attributes of an ambassador: eloquence (including a command of Latin, the language of diplomacy), prudence, fortitude, and sartorial and social decorum.<sup>16</sup> Most important, treatises explained to foreign ambassadors the complexities of

the Roman court. High-ranking figures in their own right, ambassadors were treated with all of the honor accorded to their prince. Special envoys entrusted with matters of “extraordinary” urgency or delicacy merited state entries to the city.<sup>17</sup> The pope staged state occasions in the presence of the College of Cardinals at the Vatican, though during extended periods of *villeggiatura* it became customary for him to welcome diplomatic emissaries at Frascati, a practice instituted by Gregory XIII but only fully developed by Paul V.

Rome’s standing as a cosmopolitan capital of Europe rested on historical as well as on papal foundations, for the city enjoyed a special position as a birthplace of classical culture. Beginning in the fifteenth century, the ruins of Republican and imperial Rome attracted antiquarians and archaeologists from throughout Europe. Renaissance Rome developed its own school of humanism independent of Florence; its chief goal was to assert the city’s cultural primacy.<sup>18</sup> By the mid–sixteenth century, antiquarians were joined by gentlemen travelers such as Michel de Montaigne and soon by the crowds of the Grand Tour. In 1638 John Milton wrote that he was “detained about two months in this city by its antiquities and ancient renown,” which he explored in the company of the Latinist and antiquarian Lucas Holstenius.<sup>19</sup>

Steeped in humanist culture, wealthy Roman patrons sought to display their taste, their erudition, and especially their social status by decorating their palaces and gardens with valuable antiquities unearthed at ancient sites. By the mid–sixteenth century, antiquarian accounts of Tusculum focused attention on the hillside of Frascati, which stood just below the ruined city with its ancient villas (see Fig. 25). In addition to being an abundant source of antique sculpture, the hillside was ideal for building new villas with refreshing air and panoramic views. There humanists and prelates were pleased to build directly on Roman remains while amassing collections of antiquities and emulating rituals of villa life *all’antica*.

Several popes and powerful cardinals of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries followed humanist scholars in turning to Frascati as a rural retreat. Their presence transformed Tusculan villa culture. The liturgical rather than seasonal calendar determined the rhythm of *villeggiatura*. The regular

observance of feast days kept the pope in Rome from December through April. With the close of Easter celebrations *villeggiatura* could begin. During the warm spring months the Roman court dispersed to the hills of northern and eastern Latium but especially to the Alban Hills southeast of Rome. During the summer, sacred occasions such as the feasts of Peter and Paul (29 June) and the Assumption (15 August) brought the pope and cardinals back from Frascati to Rome, despite its oppressive heat and the threat of malaria. (Fortunately, “a great beauty of Rome,” as Montaigne recognized, was “the vineyards and gardens” that covered the hills of the city – the Esquiline, Quirinal, Pincian, and Janiculum – offering ready retreat from summer contagion.)<sup>20</sup> Come September, the villas of Frascati could again be pressed into service. In addition to its singular cyclical character, papal *villeggiatura* required a grand architectural and human infrastructure to support Italian and international visitors, which the Borghese were the first to realize fully at the Mondragone. The villa functioned much like a Roman palace, providing the physical and social framework for an endless round of courtesy calls – the daily diplomacy that occupied resident ambassadors, cardinals, and members of the Roman elite – as well as for special diplomatic missions.<sup>21</sup> The Mondragone was a papal seat in the countryside, the pivot about which *villeggiatura* came to revolve.

Papal families brought with them to Frascati not only international affairs but also Roman social networks and power relations, which found a rural outlet unmatched in earlier times. Particularly for newcomers to Rome, a villa at Frascati came to be seen as an effective instrument of upward mobility as well as a visible sign of arrival. Both the Aldobrandini and the Borghese families were Tuscans recently settled at the Roman court who achieved social position through papal election. The Aldobrandini created a garden at Frascati where the iconographic program lauded the political achievements of the family pope and his cardinal-nephew. Although they rejected the conventional means employed by the Aldobrandini, the Borghese likewise transformed their villa into a dynastic monument. The Borghese used the Mondragone to demonstrate their papal power and to forge a new identity as a Roman noble house. In order to understand the symbolic function of architecture and



landscape at Frascati, the main subject of this book, we must first examine the papacy's role in social advancement and, specifically, its role in the changing relationship between the ecclesiastical and secular nobility of early modern Rome.

### A SOCIETY IN FLUX

"The city is all court and all nobility," wrote Montaigne; "every man shares in the ecclesiastical idleness." "It is nothing but palaces and gardens," he concluded.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the nobility were anything but idle; their gardens and palaces were a site of social intercourse and a sign of tremendous energy poured into self-presentation. What Montaigne neglected, in calling Rome a "true papal court," was the presence of a secular, baronial aristocracy whose hereditary titles secured them a place at the top of the social ladder, a position the ecclesiastical nobility, who stood just below, hoped to claim. For both barons and churchmen in early modern Rome, the display of elite pretension in palatial buildings, family chapels and funeral monuments, furnishings, collections, portraits, encomiastic literature, banquets, and other amusements was a full-time occupation. Matters of rank and precedence governed upper-class Roman life, from the circulation of carriage traffic to the reception of guests and management of ceremonial occasions. Skirmishes for ceremonial position among the nobility were common, for in Rome there was something to be gained and much to be lost. Many cities were closing their nobilities in the early modern era; Venice, for example, had its "golden book." Rome maintained no fixed roster of elite family lines.<sup>23</sup> It was a hierarchical, courtly society; yet in contrast to many other Italian cities, Roman society was relatively open, even in its upper reaches. There was a keen sense of good order but also of opportunity. Throughout the Middle Ages, baronial families rose and fell with regularity. For the ecclesiastical nobility the early modern era was a time of marked fluidity, when a group of ambitious provincial families formed a new papal aristocracy and penetrated the secular baronage.

This chapter reveals the strategies by which noble families achieved status, first tracing the development of the Roman baronage in the Middle Ages, then turning to the operation of papal nepotism in the formation of an ecclesiastical nobility in the early

modern era, and finally exploring the rise of papal clans who intermarried and intermingled with the Roman barons. Throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern era, the acquisition of land and titles, the arrangement of marriage alliances, the assertion of antique genealogy, and the display of status in artistic and architectural patronage were weapons in skirmishes for social position. Older, aristocratic families derived their wealth and rank from rural land and feudal titles; newer families relied on papal nepotism for the means to acquire the trappings of aristocracy. This chapter closes by looking at the transformation of the urban and rural landscape, which testifies both to the nature of these family strategies and to their success.

### *The Development of the Roman Baronage in the Middle Ages*

The original Roman baronage achieved its power and prestige through the accumulation of rural *castelli* (fiefs) and *casali* (large farm estates). After the fall of the Roman Empire and the decay of ancient clans, the first signs of a new local nobility appeared during the High Middle Ages. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, many families immigrating to Rome from elsewhere in Italy and Europe acquired feudal holdings in the Roman countryside and throughout the papal domains of central Italy. These families – among them the Colonna, Orsini, Conti, Savelli, Annibaldi, and Caetani – constituted the Roman baronage. Control of a *castello* or *stato* (an aggregation of fiefs) brought feudal rights and honors, most notably the title of prince, duke, marquis, or count (in descending order of rank). The most desirable feudal honors were attached to rural estates, never to individuals. Once granted by the pope, aristocratic titles were passed down from one generation of landowners to the next. In addition to the juridical rights that came with titled fiefs, the lasting power of the barons rested on their ability to raise tenant militias and to draw immense land-based incomes.<sup>24</sup>

The Roman baronage was a fluid class that remained open to new arrivals throughout the Middle Ages. As a source of seigniorial prerogatives and of ready cash for their relatives to invest in land, the popes deeply affected the formation of the aristocracy. By the early twelfth century the Colonna had

assumed their position as “first family” of Rome, having brought extensive rural properties as well as some urban holdings under their control. Although the Colonna did not require the help of a family member on St. Peter’s throne, slightly newer arrivals, such as the Orsini, depended for their success on the largesse of a family pope and on marriage alliance (indeed, with the Colonna). The unbridled nepotism of Nicolas III (1277–80) allowed the Orsini to consolidate a set of fortified properties in Rome and elsewhere, particularly at Lake Bracciano, which became the seat of the principal family branch. (His nepotism earned Nicolas a place in the eighth circle of Dante’s *Inferno*.) The Caetani in turn married the Orsini, and Boniface VIII (1294–1303) promoted his own family’s landed patrimony. (He, too, was destined for the eighth circle.) Nepotism was a potent weapon, for the pope had the authority to invest his own family with titled fiefs and thereby counterbalance rival clans. With papal aid, new families invested their wealth in farms and fiefs that promised long-term income as well as aristocratic rank.<sup>25</sup>

During the thirteenth century, the draw of the center for the periphery became irresistible for an aristocracy that was increasingly tied to the papacy. Having secured their military and political assets at rural *castelli*, the barons turned their energy to fortifying residential complexes in the city, impressing their claims on urban ground. By the end of the century the Roman skyline was marked by a profusion of towers rising from clan compounds. A privilege of nobility, towers testified to the rank of their owners and signaled control of neighborhoods based on kinship. Towers also challenged papal sovereignty. Nominally subject to the pope as their feudal lord, the barons engaged the papacy in a constant struggle for power. The contest between the papacy and the barons pitted the temporal authority of the Church against the powers of the local aristocracy. At the same time, it also expressed internal struggles within the aristocracy, for in this period the popes generally rose from baronial circles.<sup>26</sup>

If power rested on military might and capital resources, noble status could not be assured without fine lineage. Whether long settled in Rome or recently arrived, noble families were acutely aware of their foreign origins and anxious to claim Roman pedigrees. For the baronial elite, asserting dynastic antiquity was a primary goal, leading to a competi-

tion between the Colonna and Orsini, the two oldest and most powerful clans. Genealogical myths were common social currency. Hoping to establish a foundation in Roman antiquity, the Colonna traced their origins to the imperial gens Julia. The Orsini claimed descent from the Roman Republican aristocracy.<sup>27</sup> Each sought “to demonstrate that their greatness did not depend on the papacy” but on ancient ancestry. Hence, the Orsini displayed no portraits of Nicolas III in their city residence.<sup>28</sup> To establish more tangible foundations the barons relied on ancient sites, absorbing ruins into the groundwork of fortified strongholds and thereby associating themselves physically and symbolically with early Rome. At the beginning of the twelfth century, the Colonna had chosen Palestrina, with its remains of Roman villas and an impressive religious sanctuary, as their first rural seat. Throughout the Middle Ages, baronial clans valued their fiefs, in large part, for their antique roots. In the city itself the Colonna occupied the mausoleum of Augustus, the Orsini the mausoleum of Hadrian (later the Castel Sant’Angelo), and the Savelli the theater of Marcellus.<sup>29</sup> Describing the Savelli stronghold as he saw it in the late sixteenth century, Montaigne exclaimed that the barons never sought “any other foundations for their houses than old ruined buildings or vaults . . . but on the very broken pieces of the old buildings, however fortune has located them, they have planted the feet of their new palaces, as on great chunks of rocks, firm and assured.”<sup>30</sup>

Up until the fifteenth century, the position of the baronial aristocracy in Rome was secure, even if the constituent families changed from time to time. From their ranks the popes of the thirteenth century were repeatedly selected. During the Avignon exile and the Great Schism of the fourteenth century, the city was left to their dominion. Martin V Colonna (1417–31) led a united papacy back to Rome in 1420. He was, however, the last pope of baronial lineage for three centuries.<sup>31</sup> With his demise, the social and political landscape began to change. From this period onward increasing numbers of provincial Italians sought their fortunes in Rome, moving into church office, the cardinalate, and eventually, the papacy. The popes gained strength in the face of the medieval aristocracy, using baronial strife to their advantage. At the opening of the sixteenth century, Pope Julius II confronted tyrants

throughout the Papal States as well as in Rome, playing the Colonna and the Orsini against one another to ensure political equilibrium.<sup>32</sup>

*The Papacy and the Politics of Power in  
Early Modern Roman Society*

Papal nepotism, which had matured in the Middle Ages, reached its apogee in early modern Rome.<sup>33</sup> Nepotism supported cardinals in their status as princes of the Church, affected the composition of the College of Cardinals as a corporate body, and ultimately encouraged the rise of new families. Despite periodic reform efforts, particularly during the era of the Church Militant, nepotistic practices remained commonplace. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, nepotism was the subject of apologetic literature that portrayed loyalty to family as a virtue.<sup>34</sup> Since each new pope was obliged to supply the church bureaucracy with officials, nepotism also ensured faithful supporters and advisors essential to effective administration. By filling the College of Cardinals with relatives and intimates (known as the pope's "creatures"), the pope was able to balance powerful blocks of foreign cardinals or rival clans.<sup>35</sup> Nepotism, it was argued, served the political ends of the Church.<sup>36</sup>

Nepotism also supported the princely virtue of magnificence. Beginning in the mid-fifteenth century, Franciscan ascetic ideals for churchmen gave way to Aristotelian arguments favoring affluence. Humanist apologists defended magnificence and liberality as a moral duty. By the early modern period it was customary to accord cardinals all of the honor and privileges of secular princes. Like the pope, each cardinal lived at the center of his own court, attended by a large household of personal servants and gentlemen courtiers. Rome comprised its own universe of princely courts, each revolving about the figure of a cardinal and his power to bestow favors, the cardinals' courts in turn revolving about the pope. The wealth generated by papal largesse allowed members of the pope's circle, in particular those he raised to the cardinalate, to live in a style that had come to be expected from the high-ranking. Patronage of churches or chapels as well as private palaces was considered a gift to the city and a sign of virtue. As Rome developed into a European capital, cardinals became public figures

courted by foreign envoys as "princes of the Church." The splendor of the cardinal's court and its palatial setting were thought to benefit all of Rome.<sup>37</sup>

Papal nepotism enhanced Rome's cosmopolitan stature; first and foremost, however, it benefited family members. The special nature of the papacy as an elective monarchy opened greater possibilities for social mobility than at most other courts. The pope was a celibate, nonhereditary ruler, elected by the College of Cardinals from among its own ranks.<sup>38</sup> Each pope could influence future elections through his nominations to the cardinalate. However, no single dynasty could continuously control the monarchy, as was so often true elsewhere in Europe. On the contrary, each new pope brought his own family to the fore. The bitter politics of the conclave meant that papal succession was unpredictable; a cardinal born to one of the leading dynasties of Italy or Rome was no more likely to be selected than one born to a family of humble beginnings. In 1471 the election of Sixtus IV della Rovere launched a modest North Italian mercantile family. Sixtus IV granted the red hat to six relatives, one of whom achieved the papal tiara as Julius II (1503-13). In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the papal throne was frequently occupied by relatives of past popes. Leo X de' Medici (1513-21) was quickly followed by his cousin Clement VII (1523-34). Unlike the della Rovere, however, the Medici were already a powerful dynasty; they used their family popes to enhance their status in Florence.<sup>39</sup>

Ambitious families recognized the pope's magnetic position as a source of power. They also realized that this position was temporary, requiring quick decisions that would yield long-term returns. Most popes were elected at an advanced age, and few families achieved the repeated successes of the della Rovere or Medici in the conclave. The pope typically granted Curial offices and benefices (sacred offices with incomes attached) to kinsmen and members of his family circle. Although he might raise several relatives to the cardinalate, he invested one relative in particular with special prerogatives. The "cardinal-nephew" was meant to aid the pope in ruling the Church but also in promoting the family. The ideal candidate was a blood nephew; lacking that, the pope might adopt another close relation. The second-in-command had to be a family member

(or *nipote*), for only kinship ensured absolute loyalty. In this extremely clannish era, members of the College of Cardinals had their own allegiances to family and foreign powers. Paul III Farnese established the institutional position of the cardinal-nephew, raising his grandson Alessandro to the cardinalate in 1534 and placing him in charge of diplomacy and state affairs. Henceforth the cardinal-nephew served as a de facto prime minister. He was entrusted with key offices in the temporal administration of the Church, among them the superintendence of the Papal States. He directed many of the powerful cardinalate congregations, including the Consulta and, eventually, the Buon Governo. Beginning in 1585 with Alessandro Peretti (a *nipote* of Sixtus V), it was common for the cardinal-nephew to head the State Secretariat.<sup>40</sup> The cardinal-nephew assisted the pope in governing, but his offices were a source of personal wealth as well. He received multiple pensions and benefices (connected with bishoprics and abbeys), whose income was at his disposal for life. Most benefices could not be bequeathed to heirs; by convention, however, cardinals were permitted to will their personal estates to relatives. A secular heir, destined to perpetuate the dynasty, became the recipient of the cardinal's estate. In this manner, enormous funds were channeled from the Church to private hands.<sup>41</sup>

Although papal nepotism was a mechanism of family advancement throughout the early modern era, a distinct change occurred in the type of families who were elected to the papacy in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly from the time of Pius V Ghislieri (1566–72) onward. For much of the sixteenth century the Italian elite dominated the College of Cardinals and Curia. In 1580 Montaigne could remark on the international makeup of the College, calling Rome “the most universal city in the world . . . for by its nature it is a city pieced together out of foreigners.”<sup>42</sup> However, by Montaigne's time provincial families of modest resources had begun to join the provincial elite in the cardinalate. Well into the seventeenth century these families – including the Boncompagni, Peretti Montalto, Aldobrandini, Borghese, Ludovisi, Barberini, and Pamphilj – dominated the papacy. The accumulation of large fortunes enabled them to live in a fashion befitting their ecclesiastical rank, but these families sought more. Unlike princely Italian dynasties such as the Medici,

these papal clans had no independent power bases. Each pope sought to found a Roman dynastic *casata* (family house) and, in particular, to achieve position in the titled aristocratic establishment.

### *The Papal Aristocracy*

The Roman nobility was a popular subject among early modern writers, reflecting a broader European interest in the nature of nobility.<sup>43</sup> One of the most trustworthy observers of the Roman social milieu was the Flemish lawyer Teodoro Ameyden (1586–1656), who earned his renown as a Curial jurist and befriended a series of popes, including Paul V Borghese, Gregory XV Ludovisi, Urban VIII Barberini, and Innocent X Pamphilj. Ameyden wrote several Roman chronicles, including his “Relatione seu Raguaglio complitissimo di tutte le Nobiltà delle Famiglie Antiche, e moderne di Roma” and his “Delle famiglie Romane nobili.” Encyclopedic in nature, these manuscripts benefit from Ameyden's own transformation from immigrant to Curial insider. They offer invaluable insight into the structure of Roman society and, in particular, the strategies church families employed to join the local aristocracy.<sup>44</sup> For families of modest background, papal wealth offered the only hope of acceptance. St. Peter's throne was a mere stepping-stone on the road to higher rank and privilege. By forging marriage alliances with baronial families and by acquiring their titled fiefs, once modest clans rose into the highest ranks of Roman society, forming a papal aristocracy over the course of the century prior to Ameyden's death.

Ameyden describes the Roman hierarchy as he understood it in the mid-seventeenth century. At the top he locates the baronial aristocracy, a group of titled families of high social reputation with Roman roots in the Middle Ages. Ameyden recognizes the Orsini, Colonna, Conti, and Savelli as the oldest baronial *casate*, giving the first two families pride of place, for each “professes an ancient nobility of many centuries.”<sup>45</sup> Just below the top group Ameyden positions the Caetani, Cesarini, Cesi, and Altemps, four slightly newer baronial families. In his analysis Ameyden moves directly from the baronial clans to a set of families recognized as Roman by papal election but distinguished by their recent arrival in the city. In placing the “famiglie da papi”

(as he calls them) just below the Roman barons, Ameyden acknowledges changes effected in the social structure since the 1560s. In the Roman hierarchy, papal clans of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ranked second only to the barons. As a result of their titled status, they had become an integral part of the aristocracy. Below this mixed aristocracy of baronial and papal nobles, Ameyden positions the local patriciate or untitled *gentilhuomini romani*.<sup>46</sup> This lesser nobility comprised long-term Roman residents of gentle breeding. Roman gentlemen were entitled to hold municipal office and enjoyed civic honor. Their modest family fortunes were founded on banking or commerce, such as the leasing of land and trade in agricultural products in which the *bovattieri* (ranchers) specialized. The barrier between the untitled patriciate and titled aristocracy was almost impermeable.<sup>47</sup>

Although Ameyden traces the beginning of the new papal aristocracy to the family of Pius V Ghislieri, changes in the Roman aristocracy were already visible with the Farnese of Paul III, who used the papal tiara skillfully to acquire titled fiefs and noble mates for his relatives.<sup>48</sup> The Farnese were in some ways insiders to feudal Rome, having originated during the High Middle Ages as petty lords in northern Latium. Paul III was born from a marriage with the Caetani. In the more distant past the Farnese had intermarried with the Orsini, Savelli, and Conti and had benefited from Colonna friendship. Nonetheless, the Roman and the Italian aristocracy considered the Farnese parvenus. Their small fiefs could not compare to those of the Colonna or Orsini. To alter this perception Paul III showered his relations with greater fiefs and titles and negotiated advantageous marriages. In 1537 he established the Duchy of Castro from a cluster of Farnese holdings near Lake Bolsena, awarding the ducal title to his son, Pier Luigi, as secular head of the family (Map 1). In 1545 Paul III granted Pier Luigi the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza. Wrested from the patrimony of St. Peter, Parma/Piacenza became an independent principality no longer subject to papal authority. The pope was sovereign throughout the patrimony of St. Peter, but had no power to intervene in the matters of an independent state. The Holy Roman Emperor invested the new ducal ruler with feudal prerogatives, raising the Farnese to the rank of a princely Italian dynasty.<sup>49</sup>

During the early modern period those not born to one of the ruling houses of Italy observed with envy the Este of Modena or the Gonzaga of Mantua, who governed their states with all of the prerogatives of sovereign princes, and hoped to join their privileged ranks. This preoccupation with temporal autonomy is expressed by Giovanni Pietro de Crescenzi in his seventeenth-century treatise on nobility, where he describes a sovereign ruler as one who enjoys the free exercise of jurisdiction, unencumbered by any higher authority.<sup>50</sup> The Medici are a stunning example of a family of merchants, bankers, and ecclesiastics who ascended into the ranks of sovereign princes, forming in the early sixteenth century a hereditary ruling dynasty. Within the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Medici enjoyed legal jurisdiction, the power to coin money, and the right to maintain a standing army (though, like the Este and Gonzaga, they were nominally Imperial vassals).<sup>51</sup>

The Medici relied on ties with the Holy Roman Emperor for their elevation to the rank of ruling princes over sovereign territory, whereas papal clans more commonly relied on the authority of their family pope over valuable church lands. In the fifteenth century Sixtus IV had first transformed church land into a state for his family by granting the small dominion of Imola and Forlì, together with a hereditary title, to a secular nephew. Julius II boldly expropriated the papal Duchy of Urbino for the della Rovere. Paul III was bolder still, seizing papal land and transforming it into an Imperial fief.<sup>52</sup> Like his predecessors, Paul III used territorial nepotism to obtain temporal sovereignty for his family that would survive his pontificate, especially the threat of hostile papal successors. At the same time he married his grandsons into the French royal and Habsburg imperial dynasties. He channeled enormous sums to his family via the offices and pensions he awarded to three cardinal *nipoti*, particularly his cardinal-nephew Alessandro. The construction of multiple residences in Rome and Latium proceeded apace as a way to display noble status.

The Farnese were recognized as brilliant and daring nepotists, and for more than a century their example inspired ambitious families. The Farnese were the first provincial house to achieve footing in the Roman nobility and then, with the help of the papacy, in the Italian aristocracy. The Farnese were the last to secure a sovereign principality at the level

of Parma and Piacenza, for in 1567 Pius V outlawed the expropriation of papal land, seeking to preserve the territorial integrity of the Papal States. The elective nature of the papacy nevertheless meant that even commoners and foreigners could climb to the upper rungs of the Roman aristocracy, as was the case in the late sixteenth century for Gregory XIII Boncompagni and Sixtus V Peretti Montalto. Both came from humble North Italian backgrounds yet succeeded in raising their relations to the status of dukes and princes.<sup>53</sup> In the first half of the seventeenth century not one of the papal houses was Roman, but all extended roots into Roman soil. The Aldobrandini, Borghese, Ludovisi, Barberini, Pamphilj, and Chigi (in pontifical order) came from respected commercial or professional backgrounds in the provincial patriciates of Siena, Florence, Bologna, and Gubbio. Though some had resided in Rome longer than others (the Pamphilj arrived earliest, in the 1460s), all started out among the lesser nobility and quickly found fortune through connection with the Church.<sup>54</sup> The election, one after the next, of a series of modest foreign popes with lofty Roman aspirations led to the rapid ascendance of a new class.

Like earlier church families, the papal clans of the seicento worked ecclesiastical networks to their full advantage. In so doing they became intertwined. As each house in succession rose to eclipse its predecessor, the papal clans forged a pattern of political alliances and rivalries. Clement VIII Aldobrandini (1592–1605) named Camillo Borghese to the cardinalate, but after Camillo's election as Paul V (1605–21), the relationship between the families soured. Scipione Borghese used his new position as cardinal-nephew to force his predecessor, Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, into temporary exile. Gregory XV Ludovisi (1621–23) and his cardinal-nephew, in turn, persecuted the Borghese, whose pontificate had been unfavorable to their interests. The Ludovisi formed a political bloc with the disgruntled Aldobrandini, with whom they also intermarried. Humiliated by the Ludovisi, Scipione Borghese was loyal to Gregory XV's successor, Urban VIII Barberini (1623–44), who had been close to the Borghese ever since Paul V had raised him to the cardinalate. The Pamphilj of Innocent X (1644–55), in turn, became affiliated with the Ludovisi-Aldobrandini faction, with whom they, too, intermarried.<sup>55</sup>

Investment in ecclesiastical relationships promised

political returns, but these alliances had to be renegotiated with each new pontificate. To establish enduring power bases, papal clans turned to the baronial aristocracy and to their titled holdings in the Roman Campagna. In the sixteenth century, papal families had acquired land in distant territories of the Papal States; they now focused on Latium, and in particular on Rome, where they acquired properties through purchase rather than expropriation. This geographic shift encouraged assimilation into Roman society. Knowing that a sovereign state of international stature was no longer within reach, papal clans acquired Roman *casali* and *castelli*, seeking long-term financial security and especially seigniorial prestige.<sup>56</sup> Newcomers to Rome faced an extremely hierarchical and status-conscious society much like that of the thirteenth century. The more humble a family's background, the greater the resistance to acceptance, yet in both eras papal nepotism surmounted such barriers. Over the course of several generations, a new immigrant nobility whose fortunes were based in the Church intermixed with an old Roman aristocracy based on the land. Abandoning their former professions, the pontifical houses of the seicento redefined their identity in the prevailing language of baronial Rome.<sup>57</sup> Tracts of land held by the barons for hundreds of years passed to the ecclesiastical elite. Over the course of their respective pontificates, the Aldobrandini procured twenty-eight such properties, the Borghese ninety-eight, the Ludovisi eight, the Barberini fifty-six, the Pamphilj thirty-one, and the Chigi eight. To take the most prominent examples, twenty-eight of the Borghese properties were fiefs, as were fifteen of those belonging to the Barberini.<sup>58</sup>

Papal clans sought all kinds of hereditary titles, from the highest rank of prince or duke to the lower rank of marquis or count. As they had in the Middle Ages, the popes rewarded loyal supporters (primarily papal families but also some members of the hereditary baronage) with new feudal honors. The popes elevated extant titles on fiefs and even attached titles to *casali* in the Roman countryside (most often, the relatively lowly title of marquis). During their family pontificate the Borghese advanced several times to marquis, duke, and prince. Given the general inflation of honors, the highest titles were especially coveted. The Barberini secured six titles at the rank of duke and prince dur-

ing the pontificate of Urban VIII. The papal aristocracy sought titles not only from the pope but also from the Holy Roman Emperor and the kings of France and Spain. Many Roman families thus obtained fiefs in the nearby Kingdom of Naples. The fashion for titles derived in large part from the Spanish court, whose aristocratic behavior and attention to status and precedence were imitated in Italy.<sup>59</sup>

The barons' financial and political difficulties facilitated the formation of the papal aristocracy. In his analysis of Roman society, Ameyden notes that families such as the Orsini and Colonna were able to survive only through dealings with the church aristocracy. Baronial military might mattered little after France and Spain settled their territorial disputes, bringing relative peace to the Italian peninsula in the later sixteenth century. Both countries ceased to support the long-running baronial war on the papacy. The barons became increasingly indebted as they tried to match the princely behavior of cardinals and churchmen endowed by large ecclesiastical incomes. From the 1560s onward, land and aristocratic titles were transferred from the baronial to the church aristocracy, who were willing and able to pay exorbitant prices for fiefs. At the same time, the popes of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries followed their predecessors in striving to solidify absolute rule over the papal domain. The Congregation of Barons, a new institutional arm of the cardinalate, was formed in 1596 to seize the fiefs of baronial lords who defaulted on their loans.<sup>60</sup>

Ameyden continues to grant the oldest baronial *casate*, in particular the Colonna, Orsini, Conti, and Savelli, their historical position at the apex of Roman society, although he reports that they had lost some prestige by alienating their landholdings. Most painful was the sale of fiefs long associated with the self-image of certain *casate*, as when the Colonna of Zagarolo sold their holdings to the Ludovisi and the Colonna of Palestrina sold their ancient seat to the Barberini.<sup>61</sup> The Colonna nonetheless retained hereditary claim to princely status even after they sold Palestrina and with it the title *Principe di Palestrina*. The princely title was transferred to another Colonna fief.<sup>62</sup> The Roman lords maintained their social cachet, but their military and juridical power waned. From the era of Paul V Borghese onward, the popes granted fiefs and feudal powers almost exclu-

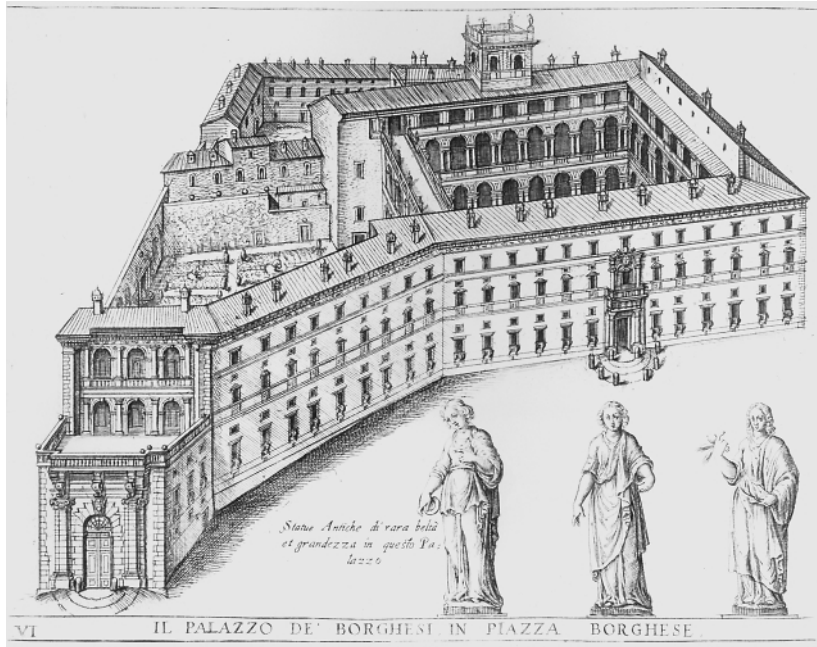
sively to their own families.<sup>63</sup> Papal clans asserted their authority in the countryside, supplanting much of the old guard while offsetting the power of those barons who remained.

Intermarriage completed the assimilation of Rome's two elite groups. The barons were willing to trade not only their land but also the antiquity of their houses for papal riches, an extreme step for a class hitherto perpetuated through endogamous marriage. The Peretti Montalto forged alliances with both the Orsini and Colonna, the Aldobrandini with the Savelli, the Borghese with the Orsini, and the Barberini with the Colonna. The Barberini acquired fifteen titled fiefs from barons in desperate financial straits and married Taddeo, the secular head of the family, to Anna Colonna, daughter of the Conestabile Colonna. This alliance was particularly advantageous, for it allowed the Barberini to legitimize their acquisition of Palestrina, the Colonna's most prized fief. Some pontifical houses aspired to connection with ruling European dynasties, which the Farnese had achieved, but most recognized the lasting value of the Roman feudal aristocracy. By marrying into the baronage, the *famiglie da papa* attained a position in the secular aristocracy that would be perpetuated by blood, which marrying among themselves could not achieve.<sup>64</sup> The composition of the aristocracy was permanently changed as feudal barons (who were themselves descended from immigrants) were joined in the upper echelons by families of non-Roman origin who formed a new group of hereditary titled lords.

#### THE URBAN AND RURAL LANDSCAPE IN TRANSFORMATION

The political and social changes of the early modern period, in particular the papacy's growing power and international prestige and the formation of a mixed aristocracy, transformed the city and its countryside. Popes and nobles employed architecture and landscape to express, and even to achieve, their new, elevated status. Popes seeking to assert their temporal authority fundamentally altered the Roman skyline as they worked to bring down those towers not already destroyed during baronial infighting of the Middle Ages. In the mid-fifteenth century the antiquarian Flavio Biondo was still able to refer to

FIGURE 8. Matteo Greuter, view of the Palazzo Borghese near the Porto di Ripetta, Rome, 1618. (Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel)



*Roma turrata*; by the time Etienne Dupérac produced his Roman vistas in the third quarter of the sixteenth century, the few surviving towers had been truncated. The consolidation of the papal monarchy, a peaceful political climate, and the rise of a new elite undermined the traditional symbolic value of the baronial tower.<sup>65</sup>

The fashion for towered clan compounds gave way to the Renaissance palace, and the medieval alley gave way to straight avenues and spacious piazzas created by popes determined to make the city into a world capital. The cardinal's palace was Rome's new signature feature, its size and requisite splendor described by Paolo Cortesi in his *De Cardinalatu* (1510).<sup>66</sup> A prince of the Church was supposed to realize antique ideals of magnificence in his residence. Inspired by classical stylistic canons, the Farnese palace block, with its airy interior court and great entrance piazza, exemplified a Renaissance urban ideal (see Fig. 11). The desire to be in view and to enjoy a view was fully expressed in baroque palaces. The papal aristocracy of the sixteenth century sought to outmaneuver one another by exploiting piazzas, avenues, and prominent corners for their palaces. The Borghese, Ludovisi, Barberini, and Pamphilj built colossal palaces and reshaped urban space around them, matching the presence of the old feu-

dal strongholds.<sup>67</sup> In his 1638 guidebook to Rome, Pompilio Totti wrote of the Borghese palace near the Tiber (Fig. 8): "Its size is astonishing, so that one could more easily judge it a castle than a palace."<sup>68</sup> Palace belvederes proliferated, offering light and air to the urban elite. Their presence on the Roman skyline served a symbolic function akin to that of the former baronial towers.<sup>69</sup>

As the militant phase of the Counter-Reformation waned by the second decade of the seventeenth century, the pontifical families left their palatial imprint on the urban fabric and inaugurated new standards of luxury, which the barons endeavored to match in magnificent patronage of their own. Some seignorial families built elegant palaces regular in plan, emulating their newer counterparts. Those who retained control of their rural castles transformed them into palatial residences by adding loggias and large windows.<sup>70</sup> In the relatively tranquil years of the early sixteenth century, the barons adopted the attitude of church families toward the countryside, recognizing that rural land might offer not only wealth and power, along with the traditional pleasures of hunting, but also cool air and open views. Nevertheless, the barons seldom built villas in the ancient mode.<sup>71</sup> Their fiefs remained symbols of their continuing rural authority.



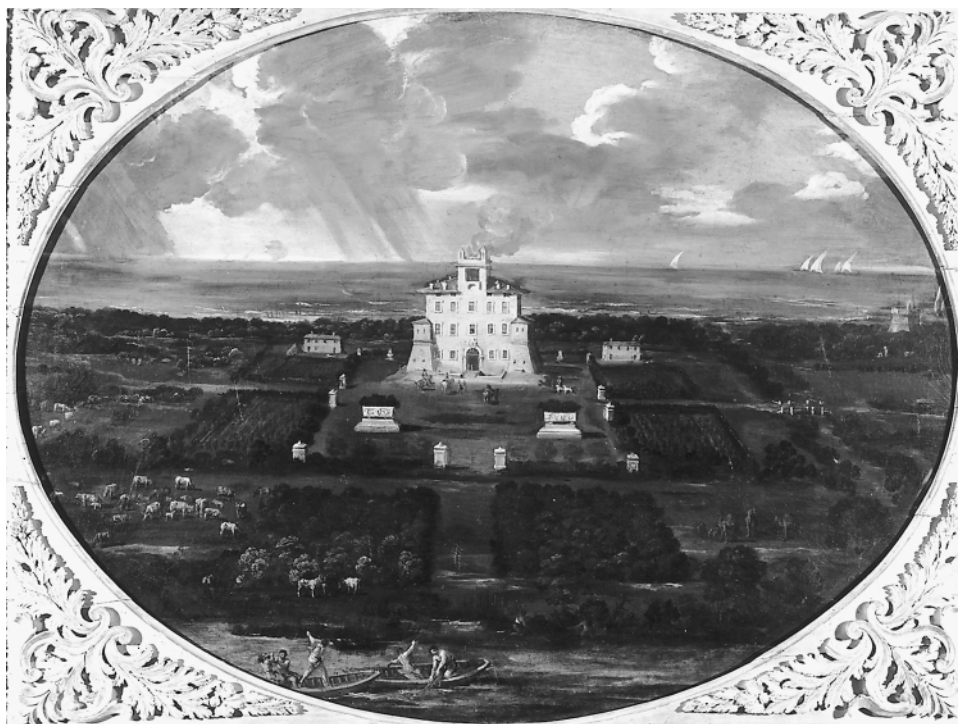


FIGURE 9. Pietro da Cortona, view of the Villa Sacchetti at Castelfusano, 1630s, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome. (ICCD)

In the countryside, church families competed with baronial clans not only by adopting key features of seignorial architecture but also by introducing novel forms of their own. Some papal clans, such as the Ludovisi or Barberini, purchased fiefs and transformed their baronial castles into palaces for *villeggiatura* while also building or renovating villas. Many villas followed Leon Battista Alberti's neo-antique prescriptions, incorporating summer and winter apartments, landscape frescoes, central courts, gardens, terraces, and classical loggias positioned to offer views. Other villas displayed archaic castellar forms, such as the Villa Sacchetti at Castelfusano, built in the early seicento by a Tuscan clan that harbored papal and noble ambitions (Fig. 9).<sup>72</sup> At the Villa Mondragone near Frascati the Borghese created a novel architectural hybrid that incorporated elements of a papal palace, a country villa *all'antica*, and a baronial castle; the planting of its woods and olive groves recalled the landscape of ancient Tusculum as well as that of nearby medieval fiefs. The villa signaled not only the family's papal

status but also, more important, its claim to antique lineage and Roman aristocratic rank.

#### FROM STATE POWER TO FAMILY POWER

Historians have argued that as the pope centralized control over the Papal States and over church government, the political authority of the baronage and the corporate authority of the College of Cardinals declined. Once rebellious and bellicose, the baronage was transformed into a courtly aristocracy subject to monarchical rule and dependent on papal credit.<sup>73</sup> The College of Cardinals, too, lost power. Formerly it had been an autonomous executive body, which the pope assembled to vote in the Consistory several times a week, issuing his decrees "with [its] advice and consent." By the early seicento, the Consistory sat once or twice a month. The pope met with the College of Cardinals to announce rather than to discuss his intentions. One contemporary observed that "the Pope governs alone, and to the Cardinals he has

left only the appearance [of taking part.]” The College of Cardinals formed part of a courtly aristocracy with declining political relevance to the state.<sup>74</sup>

Nonetheless, throughout the early modern period both the barons and the cardinals maintained tremendous dynastic and personal prestige and many of the traditional privileges of noble status. Baronial families continued to be admired for their antiquity and their hereditary rank. Cardinals built dynasties and displayed their magnificence in palaces and villas, churches and altarpieces, fountains and other public monuments. Election to the papal throne brought ecclesiastical families sufficient wealth to buy fiefs. In the seventeenth century, barons new and old were absentee lords who resided at an urban court, yet they kept a watchful eye on their fiefs, where they retained the prerogatives of noble jurisdiction.<sup>75</sup> Even as state power grew and baronial rebellion calmed, local authority in rural lands remained strong.

In early modern Rome the center did not dominate the periphery; rather, the two were interdependent. Urban court culture and rural baronial culture intertwined. When the barons first moved from country to city in the Middle Ages, they brought with them their aristocratic values. They did not relinquish their rural power bases but complemented them with ties to the papacy and city. When the papal aristocracy moved in the opposite direction in the early modern period, it maintained its connection to central authority and its reliance on courtly display while establishing loci of power and status at

castles and villas in the Campagna. City and countryside, the Church and land, were twin zones of power where papal and feudal society mixed. In Rome, as elsewhere in Europe, absolutism developed gradually; the early modern state was a hybrid of central and local authority.<sup>76</sup> The elective nature of the papacy fostered this plurality of powers. The regular fluctuations of the state regime left papal clans feeling uneasy and mindful of the need for independent sources of dynastic power. Each family therefore invested in the countryside, where the legal authority attached to fiefs, and, more generally, the ideological associations of landholding provided a base from which to maintain position in the city.

The Borghese adopted strategies that the barons and other pontifical families had employed – using ancient sites and fictitious genealogy to claim *romanitas*, amassing farms and titled fiefs, celebrating nuptials with a baronial clan, and engaging in patronal activities – doing so with a boldness that matched the Farnese and on a scale that surpassed them. Cardinal Scipione Borghese turned to his villa near Frascati not only for *otium* but also for seigniorial lordship, which he enjoyed as owner of the fiefland on which it stood. The Mondragone epitomized the interdependence of city and countryside. There the pope enjoyed the learned leisure of a cultivated urban elite and conducted state business while his nephew built an enduring dynastic symbol to outlast the pontificate. Into the nineteenth century the Mondragone and its properties sustained the aristocratic status of the Borghese.