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Ferdinand Gregorovius

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER V.

- I. CONDITION OF ITALY AFTER THE EXPEDITION OF CHARLES VIII.—MAXIMILIAN'S UNSUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN AGAINST FLORENCE—ALEXANDER VI. BEGINS THE WAR AGAINST THE TYRANTS IN THE STATE OF THE CHURCH—WAR WITH THE ORSINI—THE PAPAL TROOPS DEFEATED AT SORIANO, JANUARY 1497—PEACE WITH THE ORSINI—DEATH OF VIRGINIUS ORSINI—GONSALVO CONQUERS OSTIA—GIOVANNI SFORZA ESCAPES FROM ROME—JUAN OF GANDIA BECOMES DUKE OF BENEVENTO—HIS MURDER, JUNE 14, 1497—IMPRESSION LEFT ON THE POPE BY THE EVENT—ENQUIRY CONCERNING THE MURDER—CAESAR BORGIA GOES AS LEGATE TO NAPLES AND CROWNS FEDERIGO—HE RETURNS TO ROME.

THE victorious enterprise of Charles VIII. compelled the great powers to form a league,—the first of European character,—from which amid tedious wars modern states gradually took their form. The Spanish house of the Habsburgs and France came prominently to the front, while Italy, still as a consequence of the facts and principles of the Middle Ages, remained the object and reward of the great struggle.

The French King had left Italy involved in the greatest turbulence. The country was severed into

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Ferdinand Gregorovius

Excerpt

[More information](#)

406 ROME IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY. [Bk. XIII.

two parties: the league between Rome, Milan and Venice, which was supported by the two great powers, and the French party, to which Savoy, Montferrat, Ferrara, Florence and Bologna, the Orsini and the Prefect of the city belonged. All existing conditions were consequently shaken. The dynasty of Aragon could no longer feel secure in Naples, where it had already summoned Spain and Venice to its aid. Florence, which had lost Pisa and other cities, was threatened with the return and despotism of the Medici, and Ludovico Sforza must inevitably perish in the storm which he himself had evoked. No less convulsed was the State of the Church, which however in the Papacy possessed a power of recuperation and endurance. The republic of Venice was still the one great power in all Italy, and Venice now hoped to obtain dominion throughout the peninsula. In return for her services to the house of Aragon she had received possession of Brindisi, Trani, Gallipoli and Otranto.

The war with the French viceroys in Naples was not yet ended in the summer of 1496, and Charles VIII. talked of his return to Italy.<sup>1</sup> In fear the allies enticed Henry VII. into their league, to which the adhesion of England gave the aspect of a European alliance.<sup>2</sup> The Pope also sought protection from the imperial power. He now wished to crown

<sup>1</sup> On January 21, 1496, he wrote from Lyons to the city of Foligno that he would soon return. The original letter is preserved in the archives of Foligno. Likewise to the Prefectissa, Amboise, March 5, 1496, *Diar. Sanuto*, i. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Announcement of the Alliance in Rome on July 31: Burkard. See Carl Lanz, *Mon. Habsb.*, Vienna, 1857, *Introd.*, vol. i. 38.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

CH. v.]

MAXIMILIAN IN ITALY.

407

Maximilian emperor; on July 6 he appointed Carvajal legate for the coronation. The King of the Romans came, he said, as advocate of the Church, to drive away the French, who still retained possession of Ostia and some places in Naples, to take the imperial crown, to bring peace to Italy, and finally to undertake the war against the Turks.<sup>1</sup>

Maximilian accepted the invitation of Italy, <sup>Maximilian in Italy, 1496.</sup> whither he was summoned as Messiah, like so many emperors before him. He came in August without an army and without money. His hopes of obtaining both from the allies proved vain. Trusting neither in the Pope nor the Sforza, he refused to go to Milan, although preparations had already been made there for his coronation as King of Lombardy. He received Carvajal and the Duke Ludovico at Crema, then journeyed to Genoa, thence to proceed to Tuscany.<sup>2</sup> For Pisa, which had received Venetian and Milanese auxiliaries, sent him an urgent summons, and he himself hoped to regain this ancient Ghibelline city for the empire. Her struggle for the recovery of her freedom had been so heroic and important, that she now, so to speak, represented the political centre of gravity for all powers. On

<sup>1</sup> Brief, Rome, July 6, 1496, Rayn., n. 4. Carvajal left with Burkard on July 29. As early as January 10 the Nuncio Leonello de Cheregatis had complained before Maximilian in Augsburg of the occupation of Rome by Charles VIII., and had demanded aid from the Empire. See his speech in the MS. diary of Sanuto, i. 14.

<sup>2</sup> He came to Genoa on September 28, and dwelt with Cardinal Julian. In the Cathedral he was shown the Holy Grail, *catinus Christi*.—Burkard.

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Volume 7 - Part 2

Ferdinand Gregorovius

Excerpt

[More information](#)

408 ROME IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY. [BK. XIII.]

the other side the republic of Florence staked her last forces in trying to reconquer Pisa; but her struggles were to prove her own death throes.

When Maximilian appeared at Pisa at the end of October with scarcely 3000 men, he found nothing but jealousy and contention among his allies. He besieged Leghorn without success; his vessels were destroyed by a storm, and as early as the end of the year 1496 he returned to Germany without honour or glory and deeply incensed against Venice.<sup>1</sup>

He re-  
turns to  
Germany,  
Dec. 1496.

Meanwhile Alexander strove to turn the Neapolitan restoration to the advantage of his domestic policy. The second and terrible period of his pontificate dates from this time. If he had hitherto erred from irresolution and apathy, he now entered on a more active career. He adopted the policy of Vitelleschi and Sixtus IV., and this he did for reasons that are perfectly intelligible. His iniquity lies solely in the aims by which he was impelled. It was necessary to rid the State of the Church of the barons, first of all of the Orsini, in order that the Borgia family might be enriched with their property. Virginius, the head of the house, had first been Charles's prisoner at Naples, had then escaped at the Taro, and had afterwards entered the service of the Medici. Virginius himself, his sons John Jordan and the bastard Charles, the young Bartolommeo d'Alviano, a member of the house of the Atti near Todi, and other Orsini nobles, contrary to the wishes of the Pope, had then

Virginius  
Orsini in  
the service  
of France.

<sup>1</sup> Camillo Gilini, *De Maximil. Caes. in Italiam adventu*, Freher, iii. 91. Sanuto, p. 36.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

CH. v.]

THE ORSINI.

409

taken pay from Charles VIII. They staked their fortunes on those of the French army in Naples, while as soon as Ferdinand recovered possession of his capital, their hereditary enemies, the Colonna, joined the side of Aragon.<sup>1</sup> When in August 1496 Montpensier now laid down his arms at Atella, Ferdinand II. included Virginius in the capitulation also, but at the Pope's desire kept him a prisoner as a rebel against the Church. John Jordan and Alviano had also been taken prisoners in the Abruzzi. Their capture facilitated the design of Alexander, who cherished an ancient grudge against the house of Orsini for having driven his brother Peter from Rome on the death of Calixtus III. He had already confiscated all their property in June 1496. With these possessions he intended to enrich his son Don Juan, the Duke of Gandia, who, summoned by him, had returned from Spain in August of the same year. Alexander determined to make this incompetent man lord of the Patrimony, and also to bestow upon him Ostia, Corneto and Civita Vecchia. In September 1496 he therefore deprived Alessandro Farnese of the legation of the Patrimony and conferred the government of this territory and that of Viterbo on his son<sup>2</sup>; whom with

<sup>1</sup> Charles VIII. therefore, *ob rebellionem Fabricii de Columna*, restored Tagliacozzo and Alba to Virginius. *Taurini die XX. Oct. 1495. Anno I. Regni Siciliae.* Orsini Archives, T. 131, n. 3. Extract from the documents of the Archives of Bracciano.

<sup>2</sup> Despatches of Joh. Carolus Scalonus, agent of Mantua, Rome, September 13 and 17, 1496 (Gonzaga Archives). Of Cardinal Farnese, he says: *quale e rimasto casso, sel ritorno proximo di M<sup>na</sup> Julia non lo adjuta.* What he writes on September 13 is worthy of

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Ferdinand Gregorovius

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 410 ROME IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY. [Bk. XIII.]

great solemnity he made Standard-bearer of the Church on October 26. And having taken Guidobaldo of Urbino into his service, he entrusted the war against the Orsini to the charge of these two captains, to whom he gave Cardinal Lunate as legate.<sup>1</sup>

On October 27 the papal troops entered the Patrimony, where the Orsini held their hereditary possessions.<sup>2</sup> Fabrizio Colonna and Antoniello Savelli readily joined them as instruments of the Pope. The Orsini immediately surrendered Anguillara, Galera, Sutri and other places, but retained Bracciano, which was strongly protected by the lake.<sup>3</sup> Bracciano was bravely defended by Alviano, who had escaped from his imprisonment, and his Amazon

remark: *Et per far che questi figli del papa non se habino invidia adesso se dubita de la vita del Carle Sto Georgio; del quale succedendo la morte: Valentino havera il Camerlengato: il palazzo che altrevolte fu della bon. mem. del Carle di Mantua che è hora il più bello di Roma: et il meglio de beneficii soi: per il che V. Ex. puo pensare quanto la fortuna spira ad questi Marani.* Caesar's jealousy of his brother was already notorious.

<sup>1</sup> Burkard. Guidobaldo came to Rome on October 23. In the same month the Venetian ambassador announced that a son had been born to the Pope by a Roman woman, whose father had acted as pander to Alexander. The deceived husband murdered his father-in-law and was exiled by the Pope. Diar. of M. Sanuto, i, 258. Concerning the war with the Orsini; Baldi, *Vita di Guidobaldo*, i, lib. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Sigism. de' Conti, *Hist.*, xii. 165, enumerates the following as fortresses of the Orsini: Isola, Scrofane, Galera, Formello, Campagnano, Bracciano, Anguillara, Trevignane, Cere and Palo.

<sup>3</sup> The oldest document that mentions Bracciano is one of March 10, 1234, *act. in Monte Arsicio*. Therein: *Landulfus fil. quond. Gottifred. Prefecti et Jofredus Amator. . . . Dom. de Brachiano et de S. Pupa*. Bracciano belonged to the Prefects. Orsini Archives, T. 97 F. n. 44.

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Ferdinand Gregorovius

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CH. v.] DEFEAT OF THE PAPAL TROOPS. 411

wife, Bartolommea, sister of Virginius. The troops of the Orsini not only defeated the papal forces, but scoured the country as far as Rome, and Alviano's cavalry almost succeeded in arresting Cardinal Caesar at Monte Mario. The besieged soon received succour; for Carlo Orsini and Vitellozzo, the tyrant of Città di Castello, both in the service of France, returned from Provence, collected an army and forced the papal troops to advance against them. These troops were utterly defeated on January 23, 1497; the Duke of Urbino was taken prisoner, Gandia was wounded, and Cardinal Lunate fled in such haste, that the exertion caused his death.<sup>1</sup> The papal troops dispersed in wild confusion.

The papal  
army de-  
feated at  
Soriano,  
Jan. 23,  
1497.

This splendid victory rejoiced all the enemies of the Borgia. The Orsini were now masters of Tuscany; they extended their hands to the French garrison, which lay in Ostia, under command of the Biscayan corsair Monaldo de Guerra. The aged Virginius however was not alive to share the triumph of his house; on January 18, while in prison at Naples, he had been carried off by fever or poison. The monument of this celebrated man is the Castle of Campagnano, which he built about 1490. The Pope, filled with humiliation and anger, now summoned Gonsalvo and Prospero Colonna from Naples to his aid; the Venetian ambassadors however

Death of  
Virginius  
Orsini, Jan.  
18, 1497.

<sup>1</sup> He died, 45 years old, August 8, 1497. Epitaph from S. M. del Popolo in Schrader, *Monum. Italiae*, Helmstedt, 1592, p. 159, and in Forcella, i. 328.—In the Gonzaga Archives are preserved the despatches of John Carolus and other agents, who describe all these events, the battle, the capture of the duke and all the negotiations.

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Volume 7 - Part 2

Ferdinand Gregorovius

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 412 ROME IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY. [BK. XIII.]

induced him to make peace, from which the Orsini issued victorious. In virtue of the treaty of February 5, 1497, they paid the Pope 50,000 gold florins, but retained their estates and were allowed to remain in the pay of France. The sons of Virginius, liberated at Naples, returned to Bracciano on April 22, and gave their father solemn burial at Cervetri.<sup>1</sup> So callous was Alexander that he did nothing for the imprisoned Guidobaldo, but himself appropriated the money which the duke had paid for his release from the Orsini.<sup>2</sup> Guidobaldo was childless; the Borgia already contemplated becoming his heirs, and Federigo's son thus expiated the error his father had committed in entering their service.

Thus the first attempt of the Pope to annihilate one of the great factions of the nobility entirely failed. He reserved his vengeance on these nobles for a later date. Meanwhile Gonsalvo came to Rome in Lent to take Ostia for the Pope. He was received with solemnity, and rode to the Vatican between Gandia and Giovanni da Pesaro. Ostia at once capitulated; on Gonsalvo's return to Rome he was preceded by Monaldo in chains. Joyfully

Gonsalvo  
forces  
Ostia to  
surrender.

<sup>1</sup> Burkard—Chigi.

<sup>2</sup> 40,000 ducats in instalments. Guidobaldo was kept at Soriano, afterwards at Poggio Mirteto. Despatches of the Mantuan agent, Benedictus de Brugiis, of March and April 1497, from Soriano (Gonzaga Archives).—The registers of the revenues of the Patrimony of Peter have been preserved for the years 1497, 1498 (in the present State Archives in Rome). The treasurer there was the Banker Alessandro Francii of Siena. Cities and clergy had to pay yearly subsidies—for example, Viterbo, 1000 ducats; Orvieto, 479; Narni, 750; Corneto, 600. The ducat stood at 72 bolognini or soldi.



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Ferdinand Gregorovius

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CH. v.] OSTIA CAPITULATES TO GONSALVO. 413

the Pope hastened to enter the fortress of the hated Cardinal Julian, and so important did its conquest appear that he loaded Gonsalvo with honours. The haughty Spaniard declined to take the Easter palm from the hands of the Pope, unwilling to receive it after the Duke of Gandia; he accepted however the Golden Rose, a gift worthy of kings. This flower, perfumed with musk, the most graceful symbol of the Christian cult, represents the purity of virtue, with the fragrance of which the Church should be filled. But in the hands of the Borgia it could appear nothing more than the symbol of pagan pleasures. The candid soldier upbraided the Pope for the corruption of the Curia and his own vicious life, and exhorted him to reform. Never had Alexander experienced a keener humiliation. He was already bitterly hated in Rome, where the insolent dominion of the Catalans was revived. Only his 3000 Spanish mercenaries sufficed to keep the people in check. On Good Friday a preliminary riot took place; the Romans entrenched themselves on the Campo di Fiore; the cardinals at length soothed their irritation against the Spaniards and the Spanish pope.<sup>1</sup> The Cardinal of Gurk, who had gone to Perugia, said to the Florentine envoy at this time: "When I think of the life of the Pope and the lives of some of the cardinals, I shudder at the thought of remaining in the Curia; I

<sup>1</sup> Pilgrimage of the knight Arnold of Harff of Cologne, edited by Groote, Cologne, 1860, p. 33: *Die Romanen hetten den paps mit bestain doît zo slayn, so verhasst was he zo deser szyt mit sinen frunden den Hispanioler.* The knight was in Rome at Easter, 1497.

Cambridge University Press

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Volume 7 - Part 2

Ferdinand Gregorovius

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 414 ROME IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY. [BK. XIII.]

will have nothing to do with it, unless God reforms his Church.”<sup>1</sup>

The same Eastertide Giovanni Sforza, Lucrezia's husband, fled from Rome to escape the dangers that threatened him; for already the Pope had decided to annul this marriage of his daughter also. The intrigues, the crimes, the tragedies of the house of Borgia now began, and were set in motion by a single man; by Caesar, who now stood secretly behind the scene on which he soon openly appeared.

Deluded in his hopes of equipping Gandia with the spoils of the Orsini, the Pope determined to enrich him at the expense of the Church. The young Borgia at this time possessed the entire affection of his father; Alexander intended bestowing every earthly splendour on his son.<sup>2</sup> On June 7 he invested him with Benevento as a hereditary duchy as well as Terracina and Pontecorvo. These were to be the steps to still higher honours in Naples. Out of twenty-seven cardinals, Piccolomini alone ventured to dissent, the others yielded to the will of the Pope. For after the restoration the partisans of France had been forced to a reconciliation with Alexander; the Colonna and Savelli adhered to him; Ascanio had made approaches; Orsini was powerless; Julian and Gurk dwelt in exile. In February 1496, moreover, Alexander had

The Duke of Gandia invested with Benevento.

<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Braccio to the *X. di Balii*, Perugia, April 8, 1497, Florentine Archives, Cl. X., Dist. 4. n. 46.

<sup>2</sup> He called himself henceforward *Dux Gandiae et Suesse ac Princeps Theani*, and thus signs himself in a letter to the Marquis of Mantua, on September 12, 1496: Gonzaga Archives.