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# *Abbreviations*

| | |
|---|---|
| ASR | Archivio di Stato, Rome |
| ASV | Archivio Segreto Vaticano |
| BAV | Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana |
| CAMBRIDGE | Cambridge University Library (Acton manuscripts) |
| FLORENCE | Archivio di Stato, Florence |
| MADRID | Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid |
| MANTUA | Archivio di Stato, Manuta (Archivio Gonzaga) |
| MODENA | Archivio di Stato, Modena (Archivio d'Este) |
| SIMANCAS | Archivo General de Simancas, Valladolid |
| TCRGR | Tribunale criminale del governatore di Roma (Archivio di Stato) |
| VENICE | Archivio di Stato, Venice |

# Introduction

This book sets out to reconstruct the events surrounding the series of trials in 1560–1 in which pope Pius IV (1559–65) prosecuted the Carafa family—nephews of his predecessor Paul IV (1555–9)—along with other senior clerics for various acts of theft, corruption, and abuse of power. Taking place just as preparations were begun for a final resumption of the Council of Trent, the affair was a cause célèbre that led to the executions of Cardinal Carlo Carafa and his brother Giovanni the Duke of Paliano and to the disgrace of Cardinals Alfonso Carafa, Innocenzo del Monte, and Scipione Rebiba. It precipitated a rare and vigorous debate about how papal authority might be used, the ends to which it should be directed, and the role of the pope's family in assisting in its exercise. In the following pages, I make use of the evidence from those discussions to show both that attitudes to these questions were less well formed and more fluid than has often been implied and also that the trial was part of a wider strategy by Pius IV to establish and assert his authority as pope over the College of Cardinals and the rest of the Catholic Church.

This approach advances on the interpretation of the trial as a critique of papal nepotism in which it has languished for the past two hundred years. The tone of this historiography was set by Leopold von Ranke, who opined in the *History of the Popes* he first published in the 1830s that the Carafa's deaths brought to an end the last occasion in which 'on the grounds of consanguinity with the pontiff, [a family] brought about great and general movement for the sake of their own political projects'.[1] This idea was adopted and refined by a generation of historians in Italy and beyond who mined the archives in search of documents that could establish or disprove the carafa's guilt. The most significant of these scholars, René Ancel, argued that:

[1] Leopold von Ranke, *The ecclesiastical and Political History of the Popes of Rome during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, tr. Sarah Austin, 3 vols (London, 1840), i. 330.

> In studying them anew, we engage in the same act of trying to determine the responsibilities of the three popes who took part: who had truth and justice on their side, Paul IV and Pius IV, who condemned them, or Pius V, who [later] absolved them? The Carafa—and particularly Cardinal Carlo—were they perpetrators or victims?[2]

The conclusion that Ancel reached was hardly favourable: 'the nephews of Paul IV were not merely vulgar politicians, for looking into their private lives or following them as they performed their public duties, we discover they had all the vices, all the covetousness, and all the tricks of adventurers and upstarts of their time: of corruption hidden under refinements of hypocrisy'.[3] This depiction was endorsed whole-heartedly by Ludwig Pastor, in his monumental sixteen-volume study of the early modern papacy (forty in the English translation), and he himself denounced Carlo Carafa as an 'unprincipled' man whose activities 'were wholly selfish and unscrupulous and directed to his own advancement and that of his family'.[4] Even the cardinal's most sympathetic biographer George Duruy could do no more than admit that the appeal of his subject lay in the contrast between his 'substantial talents and still greater vices', 'his early glory and his wretched end', and 'his sudden rise and still more dramatic fall'.[5] Building on Ranke, all three historians subscribed to the view that Pius's condemnation of the family was less the censure of particular individuals than it was of the whole system that had given rise to them and that it represented a pivotal moment when the old era of *népotisme politique*, in which great noble families had attempted to exploit the papal office as a tool for state-building, ended and was replaced by a new one of *népotisme bourgeois*, in which the use of papal resources for state-building on the part of papal families was curtailed and familial advancement could henceforth be pursued through the accumulation only of movable wealth.[6]

The moralistic tone adopted by these historians about the Carafa and their role as nepotists in fact is symptomatic of a deep-seated reluctance on the part of historians of the early modern papacy to historicize the subject of their inquiries or to contextualize it in relation to the practices of other

[2] René Ancel, *La Disgrace et le procès des Carafa d'après documents inèdits, 1559–1567* (Mardesous, 1909), 2, previously publ. in the *Revue Bénédictine,* 22 (1905), 525–35, 24 (1907), 224–53, 479–509, 25 (1908), 194–224.

[3] Ancel, *La Disgrace*, 180.

[4] Ludwig Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages: Drawn from the Secret Archives of the Vatican and Other Original Sources*, tr. Ralph Francis Kerr, 40 vols (London, 1891–1953), xiv. 88–9.

[5] George Duruy, *Le Cardinal Carlo Carafa (1519–1561): Étude sur le Pontificat de Paul IV* (Paris, 1882), p. viii.

[6] Ancel, *La Disgrace*, 182. Duruy, *Le Cardinal Carlo Carafa*, 342–4. Pastor, *History of the Popes*, xv. 177–8.

contemporary states. Thus even as recently as 1985 Barbara McLung Hallman produced a study of the financial activities of sixteenth-century cardinals, in other respects important and valuable, that took as part of its initial premise that any distribution of ecclesiastical property for the purposes of political patronage has necessarily to be viewed in terms of abuse.[7] Only recently have such judgements been challenged and corrected, notably by the school of historians based around Wolfgang Reinhard (who, eschewing such potentially anachronistic value judgements, have instead sought to explain how nepotism's systemic function related to other institutional arrangements for the delegation of authority in other early modern states), but such studies have hitherto been confined to a brief moment around the turn of the seventeenth century during the unusually long and stable pontificate of Paul V.[8]

The implication of Ancel, Pastor, and Hallman has been that the changes in the structure and institutions of the papacy and the ecclesiastical hierarchy in this period were driven by a desire to prevent, or at least to limit, corruption and to respond to the criticisms of reformers on both sides of the confessional divide. Even the reason for the shift in the profile of popes themselves from the mid-sixteenth century, from aristocratic figures like Paul IV to bourgeois ones like Pius IV and his successors, was seen from this perspective as a deliberate attempt by the cardinals to reduce the consequences if an ambitious pontiff tried to harness his tenure of the papal office for private political gain. Amongst the aims of this study is to test and refute that thesis with reference to one of its central examples. Stripped of the pious rhetoric of religious ideals, it is in the end a profoundly pessimistic view about human nature and the way in which political institutions develop, and while there were certainly some figures in Italian politics (notably the Emperor Charles V and Philip II of Spain) who were always reluctant to consent to the election of any pope they feared might destabilize the existing balance of powers in the peninsula, there is no indication that such sentiments were shared by those who brought down the Carafa. What the case shows instead is that, rather than being guided by an idealistic vision of the practices of papal government, those who

[7] Barbara McLung Hallman, *Italian Cardinals, Reform, and the Church as Property, 1492–1563* (Berkeley, Calif., 1985).

[8] Wolfgang Reinhard, *Papstfinanz und Nepotismus unter Paul V. (1605–1621): Studien und Quellen zur Strukur und zu quantitativen Aspekten des päpstlichen Herrschaftssystems* (Stuttgart, 1974) and *Paul V. Borghese (1605–1621): Mikropolitische Papstgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 2009). Volker Reinhardt, *Kardinal Scipione Borghese (1605–33): Vermögen, Finanzen und sozialer Aufsteig eines Papstnepoten* (Tübingen, 1984). Birgit Emich, *Bürokratie und Nepotismus unter Paul V. (1605–1621): Studien zur frühneuzeitlichen Mikropolitik in Rom* (Stuttgart, 2001).

participated in it in 1560 had surprisingly flexible, and perhaps even undeveloped, understandings of the legitimate bounds of nepotism or the use of papal authority and that even Pius IV himself, though he engineered the Carafa condemnations, was in most respects extremely reluctant to allow them to crystallize around any particular opinion.

What this suggests at the very least is that there is more to be written about the processes that influenced how these aspects of government developed in the mid-sixteenth century as they built up to the mature and apparently stable system described by Reinhard and his colleagues fifty years later and that a greater sense of the fluidity and spontaneity of how approaches to nepotism unfolded needs to be explored and conveyed. Even if a discussion of the Carafa's trial is not the perfect vehicle through which to achieve this, its extraordinary nature and the widespread participation that it engendered do nevertheless offer a range of insights into how the Roman clerical elite of the mid-sixteenth century perceived the relationship between a pope's public office and his private family which can, in turn, be compared with Reinhard's research to present a more fully formed sense of the change than in the traditional view and to help identify the dynamics that lay behind it.

More importantly than this for the scope of the present study, however, is that the uncritical endurance of belief in the significance of the Carafa's trial as the condemnation of a particular form of nepotism has left alternative explanations undiscussed. Most important amongst these is the possibility that the family and their associates were targeted not because they were papal nephews but because of their secondary identity as members of the College of Cardinals. Placing it in the context of the tense and fractured relationship between pope and cardinals that had developed over the middle decades of the sixteenth century, this study tries to show that the trial was less an illustration of justice against a single nefarious family than a vehicle by which Pius sought to enhance his own authority as pope at this crucial juncture in the history of the Counter-Reformation papacy. Other questions besides those about the Carafa's supposed guilt or the rules it did or did not establish about nepotistic practice, such as how Pius was able to persuade the other cardinals to acquiesce in condemning several of their own and why he thought that members of previous papal families and regimes were the most propitious targets, thus become far more interesting and relevant.

Amongst the most important consequences of this change in approach is to shift the focus from the Carafa themselves to the man who prosecuted them. The paradox of the historiography of the Catholic or Counter-Reformation (the merits of which is the better term have been extensively debated elsewhere) is that most of those who have written about the subject have accepted its importance as a transformative era without

paying much attention to questions of personality or the pope's own role in how that transformation took place. As Elisabeth Gleason noted in 1995, the emphasis on studying institutions and structures has meant that there have been no biographies of Counter-Reformation popes that break new ground for a considerable time and that 'in dealing with individual pontiffs . . . we still fall back on the work of the historians like Ranke [and] Pastor'.[9] Discussion of personality and individual agency has thus been left to flourish only in studies of dissenters from the papal monarchy or of local heroes in the implementation of Tridentine reform (who were often also papal opponents) undertaken by the school of Italian historians around Delio Cantimori and more recently Paolo Prodi, Adriano Prosperi, and Massimo Firpo. Yet, though this research has greatly expanded historical appreciation of the vitality and variety of religious expression during the mid-sixteenth century, it has also in turn reinforced the image of the papacy itself as an impersonal behemoth that set about absorbing all around it and suppressing local Italian traditions and cultures.

Even amongst the office-holders of the Counter-Reformation papacy, Pius IV has suffered more than most from this characterization, with those who have taken an interest in his reign portraying him at best as a faceless bureaucrat whose only value lay in being contrasted with his nephew Carlo Borromeo, his successor Pius V, and the other charismatic spiritual leaders of the age. Though Pastor dedicated a full volume of the original German edition of his *History of the Popes* to the events of Pius's reign, he lamented that 'he was not one of those outstanding personalities, such as a biographer delights in', and further protested at the unfairness that such momentous changes occurred during the watch of a man 'so little imbued with the new ecclesiastical spirit, and [with] so many weaknesses'.[10] Josef Šusta, Pius' only nineteenth-century biographer and the first major excavator of the documents related to the phase of the Council over which he presided, dismissed him as 'an independent, even if not especially significant personality'; even Hubert Jedin, the Council's definitive historian in the twentieth century, also belittled him, claiming that, as a mere canonist rather than a theologian, he had been incapable of attaining the robust convictions and deep appreciation of ecclesiastical traditions necessary to resolve the problems it faced.[11] Reflecting the paucity of his influence on this historiography (let alone on wider studies of the Counter-Reformation),

[9] Elisabeth Gleason, 'Who was the First Counter-Reformation Pope?', *Catholic Historical Review,* 81 (1995), 174–5.

[10] Pastor, *History of the Popes*, xv. 415, xvi. 402.

[11] Josef Šusta, *Die Römische Curie und das Konzil von Trient unter Pius IV. Actenstücke zur Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, 4 vols (Vienna, 1904–14), p. xxx. Hubert Jedin, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, 4 vols (Freiburg, 1949–75), iv/1–2.

Pius does not even feature once by name in John O'Malley's recent survey of scholarship on the subject *Trent and All That*.[12]

What needs to be written about Pius is a comprehensive study that reappraises his contribution to the resurgence of the papacy after 1560, but the constraints of retaining the structure and subject matter of my doctoral thesis preclude that for this book. What I hope to show instead, through the reconstruction of the Carafa trial and the context surrounding it, is that Pius's personality and personal actions were both rather more interesting and complex than the prevailing stereotype of him has indicated and also that they mattered rather more to how the events of his reign unfolded than has been assumed by his accidental biographers. Yet though my aim is to suggest that Pius's contribution to the development of the political structures of Counter-Reformation papacy was important, this does not mean that his actions were especially desirable or that their effects were benign. In the way that the destruction of the Carafa was orchestrated, how opinion was manipulated, and how arguments were appropriated to support the case against them, we can observe a mind that was both extremely calculating and highly opportunistic. For Pius, the affair was a means to an end but that end was probably more for the personal benefit of himself as pontiff than it was to protect or establish any abstract constitutional principles that might survive him. The end result of Pius's activities, if it can be considered dispassionately, was to increase the arbitrary authority of the pope himself and to subordinate the position of the cardinals without necessarily making the rules and norms governing papal action more transparent. In the long run, though it stretches beyond my present scope to make such an assessment, this undoubtedly contributed to the construction of the complex and burdensome structures that came to characterize government in Rome throughout the remainder of the *Ancien Régime* and which, though they proved very effective at entrenching the status quo, ultimately retarded the economic prosperity of the Papal States compared to other areas of Europe.

The book is structured so as to provide a broadly narrative account of the trial and its main points of interest while discussing what it reveals

[12] John O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000). Even in Italian there have been few biographies of Pius since the 16th cent. and his personal history largely escaped the attentions of the 19th-cent. antiquarian scholars. Partly as a result of the plethora of studies on the events of his reign and the better-known figures with whom he was associated, this trend has been reversed in recent years—as witnessed by the publication of two popular biographies of him in Italian: Federico Rossi, *Lo Zio di San Carlo: Pio IV, il papa che 'scoprì' Carlo Borromeo* (Milan, 2001) and Sergio Redaelli, *Pio IV, un pirate a San Pietro: Santi e tagliagole nell'Italia del 1500* (Milan, 2010)—but there remains no substantial scholarly point of reference for him as a person besides the passages in Pastor.

about the structural questions of papal government. The first chapter offers a brief summary of the reign of Paul IV and the material that was subsequently to form the basis of discussion at the Carafa's trial. Chapter 2 focuses on Pius himself and what motivated him to instigate it. Chapter 3 lays out how Pius constructed the case against the family and their associates and the means by which he attempted to encourage collusion with his plans. Chapter 4 considers how the Carafa sought to defend themselves and the reasons why they were ultimately unsuccessful. Chapter 5 explores Pius's activity in the aftermath of the trial and its continued resonance throughout the following century. Finally, the Conclusion returns to some of the themes raised in this introductory essay and attempts to evaluate the significance of the trial for what it reveals about the general development of the papacy as an institution.

# 1

# The Carafa and the Pontificate of Paul IV

## THE CARAFA'S ARRIVAL IN ROME

The sequence of events that eventually culminated in the deaths of Carlo and Giovanni Carafa had begun five years earlier when their uncle Gian Pietro, cardinal archbishop of Naples and head of the Roman Inquisition, was unexpectedly elected as pope Paul IV. A tall, thin, imposing man whose feet (we are told) seemed hardly to touch the ground, Gian Pietro ought on the face of it to have been a strong candidate for this most exalted of offices. Deeply learned, admirably ascetic, and extremely pious, he had never been associated with scandal and was moderate in his habits, with his only vice the thick, black, fiery wine he drank with meals twice a day.[1] He came from an ancient and noble Neapolitan house and since his arrival in Rome at the age of 20 in 1494 had enjoyed an exemplary career of ecclesiastical service.[2] In 1506, he had been invested as bishop of Chieti and in 1515 was sent as a special nuncio to the Spanish court. In 1524, dismayed by the laxness of clerical discipline, he had co-founded the Theatine order and in 1536 was created cardinal.[3] A prominent advocate of reform, he had been a signatory to the *Consilium de emendanda ecclesia* of January 1537, but although he was appointed to the General Council he played only a muted part in its deliberations. His breakthrough as a figure of real significance had occurred in 1542 when Paul III appointed him as the first head of the newly constituted Roman Inquisition and following this translated him in 1549 to the prominent metropolitan

[1] Bernardo Navagero, 'Relazione', in Eugenio Alberì, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, 2nd ser. (Florence, 1839–63), iii. 379–81.

[2] On the origins of the Carafa, see Casanatense, *F.III.32*, 1v. There are few modern studies of Paul's career prior to his election as pope and most of what is known about Paul's earlier life is drawn from the 17th-cent. biography by Antonio Caracciolo (see Ch. 5) and Navagero's *relazione* to the Senate. See Alberto Aubert, 'Paolo IV', *Enciclopedia dei papi,* 3 vols (Rome, 2000), iii. 128–42, and Ludwig Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, xiv. 65–80.

[3] Navagero, 'Relazione', in Alberì, *Relazioni*, iii. 378.