

*Routledge Studies in Renaissance and Early Modern Worlds of Knowledge*

# NICCOLÒ RIDOLFI AND THE CARDINAL'S COURT

**POLITICS, PATRONAGE AND SERVICE  
IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY**

Lucinda Byatt



# Niccolò Ridolfi and the Cardinal's Court

Niccolò Ridolfi (1501–1550) was a Florentine cardinal, nephew and cousin respectively, to the Medici popes Leo X and Clement VII, and he owed his status and wealth to their patronage. He remained actively engaged in Florentine politics, above all during the years of crisis that saw the Florentine state change from republic to duchy. A widely respected patron and scholar throughout his life, his sudden death during the conclave of 1549–1550 led to allegations of poison that an autopsy appears to confirm.

This book examines Cardinal Ridolfi and his court in order to understand the extent to which cardinalate courts played a key part in Rome's resurgence and acted as hubs of knowledge located on the fault lines of politics and reform in church and state, hospitable spaces that can be analysed in the context of entanglements in Florentine and Roman cultural and political patronage, and intersections between the princely court and the increasingly professional practices of household management in the consumer and service economy of early modern Rome. Based on an array of archival sources and on three treatises whose authors were closely linked to Ridolfi's court, this monograph explores these multidisciplinary intersections to allow the more traditional fields of church and political history to be approached from different angles.

*Niccolò Ridolfi and the Cardinal's Court* will appeal to all those interested in the organisation of these elite establishments and their place in sixteenth-century Roman society, the life and patronage of Niccolò Ridolfi in the context of the Florentine exiles who desired a return to republicanism, and the history of the Roman Catholic Church.

**Lucinda Byatt** is a Lecturer in history at the Centre for Open Learning, University of Edinburgh, and a fellow of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting. Her numerous translations include Giovanni Andrea Gilio's *Dialogue on the Errors and Abuses of Painters*, translated by Michael Bury and Lucinda Byatt, edited by Michael Bury, Lucinda Byatt and Carol M. Richardson (Getty Research Institute, 2018).

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# **Niccolò Ridolfi and the Cardinal's Court**

Politics, Patronage and Service  
in Sixteenth-Century Italy

**Lucinda Byatt**

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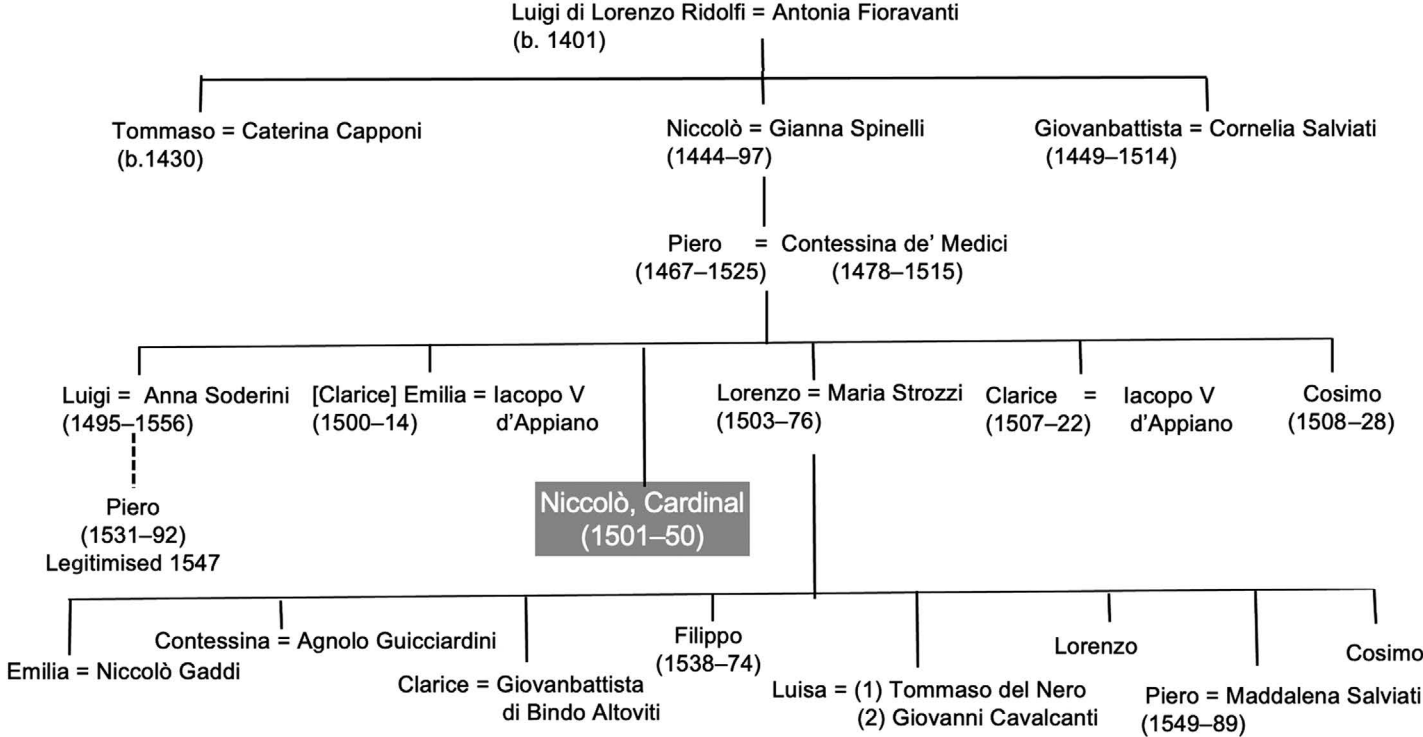
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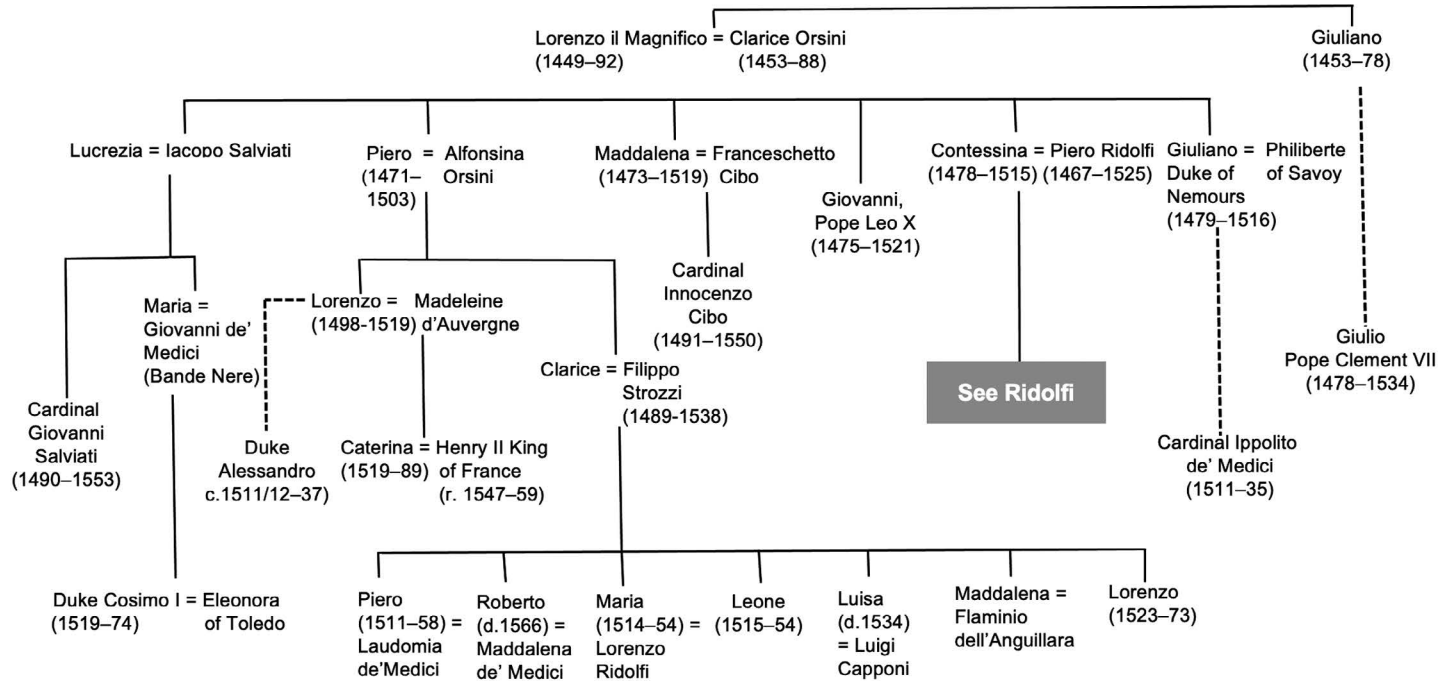
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# Selective Genealogy of the Medici and Strozzi



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# Abbreviations

<b>AAV</b>	Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Rome
<b><i>AeD</i></b>	<i>Acquisti e doni</i> , ASF
<b>AOSMF</b>	Archivio storico dell'Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence
<b>ASF</b>	Archivio di Stato, Florence
<b>ASMN</b>	Archivio di Stato, Mantua
<b>ASR</b>	Archivio di Stato, Rome
<b><i>ASRSP</i></b>	<i>Archivio della società romana di storia patria</i>
<b>BNF</b>	Bibliothèque national de France
<b><i>CSP</i></b>	<i>Calendar of State Papers</i>
<b><i>DBI</i></b>	<i>Dizionario biografico degli italiani</i> (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–2020)
<b><i>Del governo della corte</i></b>	Unless otherwise specified page references are to the edition of <i>Del governo della corte d'un signore in Roma</i> , ed. Lorenzo Bartolucci (Città del Castello: S. Lapi, 1883)
<b><i>Dottrina singolare</i></b>	Domenico Romoli, <i>La Singolare Dottrina di M. Domenico Romoli soprannominato Panunto, dell'ufficio dello Scalco</i> (Venice: Michele Tramezino, 1560)
<b>Eubel</b>	Conrad Eubel, Wilhelm van Gulik, <i>Hierarchia catholica medii et recentiores aevi</i> , vol. 3: <i>Saeculum XVI ab anno 1503 complectens</i> (Monasterii: Librariae Regensburgianae, 1923).
<b>Florio</b>	<i>Queen Anna's New World of Words, or Dictionarie of the Italian and English Tongues, collected and newly much augmented by John Florio</i> (London, 1611)
<b><i>LCF</i></b>	<i>Libri di commercio e di famiglia</i> , ASF
<b>NLS</b>	National Library of Scotland
<b>Sanuto</b>	Marino Sanuto, <i>I diarii di Marino Sanuto, 1496–1533</i> . Ed. Rinaldo Fulin et al., 58 vols (Bologna: Forni, 1969–1970)

**Trattato**

*Trattato di M. Mau. Salvidio dove brevemente si ragiona et discorre il modo che si dovrebbe tenere e l'ordine che si converrebbe osservare, nel regger' et governare la corte di un magnanimo e generoso prelato* (Rome: Antonio Blado, 1544)

**von Pastor**

Ludwig von Pastor, *Storia dei Papi dalla fine del medio evo*, ed. Angelo Mercati, 17 vols (Rome: Desclée & C. Editori pontifici, 1958–1964)

# Acknowledgements

There is a backstory that needs to be told about how this project took shape. During my doctoral thesis at the European University Institute (1979–1983), my supervisor Professor Carlo Cipolla steered me towards the accounts of Cardinal Niccolò Ridolfi in the Florentine State Archives. In Florence, I met Marzia Palladini Ridolfi, daughter-in-law of the widely respected historian Roberto Ridolfi (1899–1991), a direct descendant of the cardinal. I later visited Marchese Ridolfi at La Baronta. I have always wondered what he made of a very young Scottish postgrad who arrived in a rather battered car and professed an interest in his ancestor, while at the same time being too naïve to be in awe of such a great historian. While I was working in the family archive, Marchese Ridolfi kindly shared with me the archival notes he had made for his own biography of the cardinal, an outline of which he had drafted in 1924–1925. That book would have been titled *Il Cardinale Niccolò Ridolfi. L'ultimo fautore della libertà fiorentina* (Cardinal Niccolò Ridolfi. *The Last Advocate of Florentine Freedom*).<sup>1</sup> The mock cover, which is preserved in the archive, has an autograph note recording how he destroyed the text “in one of my bonfires of vanities”.<sup>2</sup> Like his later political biographies – on Girolamo Savonarola (1952), Niccolò Machiavelli (1954) and Francesco Guicciardini (1960), all cornerstones of Florentine historiography – there is every reason to suppose that this, too, would have been a work of impressive scholarship, particularly in view of Ridolfi’s ability to bring out the humanity of his subjects.<sup>3</sup> My study is no phoenix, and I take this opportunity to thank Niccolò Ridolfi, the current marchese, and his wife Anna for their generosity.

I have been inspired by many excellent scholars: Peter Partner, who was my Div don at Winchester College, Donald Bullough and Geoffrey Parker whose tutorials I attended at St Andrew’s, and Carlo Cipolla, Denys Hay and Gigliola Fragnito, whose guidance was so valuable at the European University Institute in Florence. To David Chambers, my external supervisor all those years ago, I am grateful for welcoming me to the (then) niche topic of cardinals. Here in Edinburgh, the late Michael Bury was an inspirational fount of knowledge – and a brilliant translator with whom I had the privilege to collaborate. I also owe thanks for their scholarship and

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No researcher can achieve much without archivists and librarians, all the more so while travel was restricted in the past few years. I thank all of them at the many libraries and archives where I have worked, and those whom I have since contacted online.

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## Notes

1. The publication was announced prematurely by Gaetano Pieraccini, *La stirpe de' Medici di Cafaggiolo*, 1st ed. (1924); Roberto Ridolfi, *Memorie di uno studioso* (1956), 60–61, 247. The phrase stems from Benedetto Varchi's assessment in 1527 that "nel vero il cardinale [Ridolfi] fu sempre della libertà di Firenze amatore e fautore", Varchi, *Storia fiorentina*, ed. Lelio Arlib (1843), I, Bk 5, 355.
2. "Gli scartafacci dati alle fiamme", *Corriere della Sera* (30 April 1981).
3. Roberto Ridolfi, *La vita di Girolamo Savonarola* (1952); Id., *Vita di Niccolò Machiavelli* (1954); Id., Roberto Ridolfi, *Vita di Francesco Guicciardini* (1960). See also Mauro Moretti, "Roberto Ridolfi", *DBI* 87 (2016).

# A Note on Dates and Money

During the sixteenth century, the Italian states used different calendars. Rome followed the Julian calendar, which became the Gregorian calendar in 1582. The Florentine system of dating (*stile dell'Incarnazione*) was different because the Feast of the Annunciation on 25 March marked the first day of the year. For the Venetians, the first day of the new year fell on 1 March (*more veneto*). To avoid confusion, dates have been adjusted to the modern style of the Gregorian calendar.

Several different coinages are mentioned in this study. Each state on the Italian peninsula tended to use a different gold coin, as well as different smaller coins (silver and copper) for everyday use. For example, the gold florin in Florence, gold *écu* in France and gold *ducato di camera* in Rome were internationally recognised; on the streets, in Rome, the silver *giulio* was used, together with other petty coins. Exchange rates fluctuated all the time, whether between different currencies or between the value of the gold and silver coinage and their smaller denominations. Between 1530 and 1540, the *scudo d'oro in oro* replaced the gold *ducato di camera* in Rome. Coins that are described as “d'oro in oro” were actual coins in circulation.

The accounts, on the other hand, were kept in a “money of account” that did not circulate on the streets but was used as a stable unit. In Cardinal Ridolfi's case, since the accounts largely referred to Rome, they are reckoned in *ducati di giuli dieci* or *ducati di moneta*, which remained fixed at 10 *giuli*, or 100 *baiocchi* each. A similar French money of account is also mentioned in relation to some of Ridolfi's French benefices and pensions, the *livre tournois*.

For more detailed accounts of the effects of inflation and devaluation on money and its purchasing power in Florence and Rome during this period, I refer readers to the work of Richard A. Goldthwaite (*The Economy of Renaissance Florence*, 2009, 609–14) and Francesco Guidi Bruscoli (*Benvenuto Olivieri: i mercatores florentini e la camera apostolica nella Roma di Paolo III Farnese, 1534–1549*, 2000, xxv–vii [a fuller version], and in English translation, *Papal Banking in Renaissance Rome: Benvenuto Olivieri and Paul III, 1534–1549*, 2017, xiii).

# Timeline of Significant Events

- 1492 Death of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici known as Il Magnifico.
- 1493 Marriage of Contessina di Lorenzo de' Medici to Piero di Niccolò Ridolfi.
- 1494 Piero de' Medici, Cardinal Giovanni and Giuliano de' Medici forced out of Florence.
- 1495 Birth of Luigi di Piero Ridolfi (d. 1556).
- 1497 Execution of five Medici supporters in Florence, including Niccolò di Luigi Ridolfi.
- 1498 Execution of Girolamo Savonarola.
- 1500 Birth of Clarice di Piero Ridolfi (known as Emilia), second wife (d. 1514) of Iacopo d'Appiano V of Piombino.
- 1501 Birth of Niccolò di Piero Ridolfi, later Cardinal Ridolfi.
- 1502 Piero Soderini elected lifetime *gonfaloniere* of Florence.
- 1503 Death of Pius III and election of Pope Julius II.  
Birth of Lorenzo di Piero Ridolfi (d. 1576).
- 1507 Birth of Clarice di Piero Ridolfi, third wife (d. 1522) of Iacopo d'Appiano V.
- 1508 Marriage of Filippo Strozzi to Clarice di Piero de' Medici.
- 1512 The Medici returned to Florence after the sack of Prato on 29 August and the fall of Soderini.
- 1513 Death of Julius II on 21 February.  
Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici elected Pope Leo X on 9 March.
- 1515 Death of Contessina Ridolfi; Francis I crowned King of France.
- 1516 Death of Giuliano de' Medici, Duke of Nemours.
- 1517 Petrucci "conspiracy" against Leo X.  
Niccolò Ridolfi elevated to cardinalate on 1 July.
- 1519 Death of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian on 12 January; succeeded by Charles V.  
Death of Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino.
- 1520 Cardinal Ridolfi given administration of bishoprics of Orvieto and Forlì.

- 1521 Death of Leo X on 1 December.
- 1522 Cardinal Adrian Dedel elected Pope Adrian VI on 11 January.
- 1523 Death of Adrian VI and election of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici as Pope Clement VII on 19 November.
- 1524 Cardinal Ridolfi given administration of archbishopric of Florence and bishopric of Vicenza.  
August, contract of marriage between Lorenzo Ridolfi and Maria di Filippo Strozzi.
- 1525 Death of Piero Ridolfi.
- 1526 September, Colonna revolt in Rome.  
Census of Rome undertaken between December 1526 and spring 1527.
- 1527 17 April, "Friday tumult" in Florence.  
5–6 May, Sack of Rome.  
June, death of Niccolò Machiavelli. Donato Giannotti appointed secretary to the Ten, Florence.
- 1528 Clement VII in Orvieto; returned to Rome in October.
- 1529 Siege of Florence by imperial and papal troops.  
Charles V made ceremonial entry into Bologna.
- 1530 February, Charles V's coronation in Bologna.  
August, end of siege of Florence and defeat of republican government.
- 1532 Change in constitution of Florence marked the end of republic and Alessandro de' Medici appointed first duke.  
Cardinal Ridolfi appointed administrator of the bishopric of Viterbo.
- 1533 Cardinal Ridolfi appointed administrator of bishopric of Imola and archbishopric of Salerno.  
Marseille, marriage of Caterina de' Medici to Henri of Orleans.
- 1534 Death of Pope Clement VII on 25 September.  
Cardinal Alessandro Farnese elected Pope Paul III on 13 October.
- 1535 Death of Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici in July.  
Cardinal Ridolfi travelled to Naples to meet Emperor Charles V.
- 1537 6 January, assassination of Duke Alessandro de' Medici by Lorenzino di Pierfrancesco de' Medici.  
Succession of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici.  
2 August, defeat of Florentine *fuorusciti* at battle of Montemurlo and imprisonment of Filippo Strozzi.
- 1538 Plans to hold Council of Vicenza on 4 July failed.  
18 December, suicide of Filippo Strozzi.
- 1539 Marriage of Duke Cosimo to Eleonora of Toledo in Naples (Luigi Ridolfi acted as proxy).
- 1541–1543 Cardinal Pole in Viterbo.

- 1543 June, meeting of Paul III and Charles V in Busseto, near Parma. September, Cardinal Ridolfi made formal entrance into Vicenza. Cola da Benevento, *Del governo della corte d'un Signore in Roma dove si ragiona di tutto quello che al Signore e a' suoi Cortigiani si appartiene di fare, opera non manco bella, che utile e necessaria* (dedicatory letter dated All Saint's Day, 1543), Francesco Priscianese, Rome.
- 1544 Mauro Salvidio, *Trattato dove brevemente si ragiona et discorre il modo che si dovrebbe tenere, et l'ordine che si converrebbe osservare, nel regger' et governare la Corte di un Magnanimo et Generoso Prelato*, Antonio Blado, Rome.
- 1545 First session of Council of Trent opened on 13 December.
- 1546 Domenico Romoli's menus (1546–1547), later published in *La singolare dottrina di M. Domenico Romoli soprannominato Panunto, Dell'ufficio dello scalco ...* Michele Tramezino, Venice 1560 (papal *motu proprio* dated 23 October 1550).
- 1547 31 March, death of Francis I of France.  
Succession of Henri II and queen consort Caterina di Lorenzo de' Medici.
- 1548 Assassination of Lorenzino de' Medici in Venice.
- 1549 Death of Pope Paul III on 10 November. Conclave opened on 29 November.
- 1550 Cardinal Niccolò Ridolfi taken ill on 19–20 January and died on 31 January.  
Autopsy performed by Realdo Colombo in Palazzo Sant'Apollinare, Rome.



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# Prologue

The burden of running a cardinal's household fell largely on the *maestro di casa*, or majordomo, one of the most senior officials in this complex structure. Cardinals were in many respects Princes of the Church, and their households were as complex as those of any lay court. Antonio Petrei had first been appointed majordomo of Cardinal Ridolfi's household in 1541. Two years later, Petrei accompanied the cardinal to Vicenza.<sup>1</sup> He probably had no choice, but the prestige of the cardinal's journey north from Rome to the meeting between Pope Paul III and Emperor Charles V early in the summer of 1543, and the chance to take part in the magnificent entry into Vicenza that took place in September may have repaid some of his added work. Yet, since their arrival in the northern Italian city, matters had not gone smoothly. The expense of the formal entrance had strained the cardinal's finances and Petrei was asked to economise. He was familiar with the city, having acted as the cardinal's agent there some years earlier, but even so, retailers and suppliers were no doubt eager to benefit from the new visitors. In Petrei's letter to the cardinal's brother, Lorenzo Ridolfi, dated 28 December 1543, it appears that other members of the household had complained to the cardinal about the lack of control, especially over everyday spending.

Together Messer Ludovico Becci and Cola Cerretano have intimated that matters could be organised better, spending a third less than at present, and they have given me a list and have imposed limits, saying that I should not spend more than 18 *quattrini* a day per gentleman, for his bread, wine and everything else.<sup>2</sup>

In the same letter, Petrei wrote that Becci and Cerretano had even charged him with fraudulent conduct in Rome, saying that he had "emptied the cardinal's house" by filling a sack of grain brought by Lorenzo Ridolfi's servant every morning.<sup>3</sup> The trope of the thieving servant – and the cardinal's greedy relatives – was never far from the management of such large establishments, but in this case the accusations seem to have been unfounded. However, Petrei seized the opportunity to resign from the

## 2 Prologue

office in a burst of righteous resentment. The prospect of not having to manage the Vicentine suppliers and oversee household arrangements there prompted him to exclaim: “Praise the Lord without end that I am no longer *maestro di casa*.”<sup>4</sup>

In his place, the cardinal appointed Petrei’s detractor, Messer Cola Cerretano, who took to the new position with an exaggerated show of punctiliousness. The events were again reported back to the cardinal’s brother, this time by a certain Fra Lionardo el Norcino:

So you can understand how changes come about in this world, he [Cardinal Ridolfi] has changed majordomo and has given the post to Messer Cola Fontanarosa da Benevento, who, in order to stave off the cardinal’s bankruptcy, goes in person with the purchaser [*spenditore*] to buy salad [*le insalate*], which has amazed the whole of Vicenza.<sup>5</sup>

While these comments possibly contain more than a touch of irony, they reveal a very real problem of image – *onore* is a term that occurs frequently in the sources. The fact that the majordomo was seen by “the whole of Vicenza” to accompany the purchaser to buy salad, the humblest – and cheapest – of all ingredients brought ridicule not only to the official himself but to the cardinal. Appearance, honour and public image were extremely important in early modern Italy, not only to cardinals. The letter also reveals the politics of the household and the barriers faced by new appointees, like Messer Cola, whose title indicates that he was not in holy orders. The writer of this letter concludes that within the space of just four days, Cola had turned the cardinal’s household upside down. Such reversals did, however, help to show the former majordomo in a more positive light, which is confirmed by Fra Lionardo in his closing comment, that “blessed be Petreo [sic]”.<sup>6</sup>

The practical challenges of household management, whether for royalty, nobility or cardinals, were not new, nor was the fact that some officials overcame them better than others; what did change in this period was the method of transmitting this knowledge. The number of printed handbooks on the household and its officials burgeoned in the sixteenth century, and in Italy most of them focused on Rome and the princely courts of its ecclesiastical lords. Cardinal Ridolfi’s newly appointed majordomo, the over-zealous Cola da Benevento, will re-appear in the middle section of this study, since he was the same man who used his extensive knowledge to write a *libretto* on household management which was edited and printed by another member of the cardinal’s circle, Francesco Priscianese, who has sometimes been taken as the book’s author. The “booklet” describing the household of a “Signore” in Rome was published in 1543 and its analysis of the duties of the officials in a cardinal’s court, and its breakdown of household expenditure and the ideal size of stable provides one of the main sources for this study.

## Notes

1. Roberto Ridolfi, "Antonio Petrei letterato e bibliofilo del Cinquecento", *La Bibliofilia* 49 (1947): 53–70.
2. ASF, *AeD* 67, fol. 41. A *quattrino* is a copper coin, of little value.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. Fra Lionardo el Norcino to Lorenzo Ridolfi, Vicenza, 25 December 1543, ASF, *AeD* 67, fol.40r.
6. *Ibid.*; "et ha messo già in 4 giorni so'sopra tutta la casa, che benedetto sia el Petreo [sic]".



F.lli Alinari N. 55221 (Ediz. 1962) Firenze, propr. Del Panta-Ridolfi - Ritratto del Card. Nicola Ridolfi (Sebastiano del Piombo)

*Figure Introduction.1* Portrait of Cardinal Niccolò Ridolfi. Attributed to Sebastiano del Piombo (Del Panta-Ridolfi Private Collection, Florence). Alinari Archives, Florence.

# Introduction

On 11 March 1513, Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici became the first Florentine to be elected pope. In his home city, the election had been preceded by a return to a narrow form of government headed by his brother, Giuliano, after Piero Soderini, the standard-bearer of justice and leader of a broader form of republican oligarchy, had been forced to flee on 31 August 1512. Leo X's election was an affirmation of the city's regime change. An amnesty, issued to celebrate the election results, freed those unfortunate citizens locked up on political charges in Le Stinche. Among those who regained their freedom was Niccolò Machiavelli. For supporters of the Medici, and most of the city's elite families, the new papacy marked a change of direction, and for many a new road to riches: none more so than for the new pope's relatives and those linked to his family by patronage. Among them, a select group would play a particularly important role: the Florentine cardinals.

In her study of Cardinal Francesco Soderini (1453–1524), Kate Lowe notes how “remarkably few Florentine cardinals there had been in living memory” at the time of Soderini's elevation in 1503.<sup>1</sup> Ten years later, there were still only two Florentines in the College of Cardinals: Soderini and Giovanni de' Medici (1475–1521) himself, who had become a cardinal in 1489 after his father, Lorenzo the Magnificent, had persuaded Pope Innocent VIII to elevate him at the tender age of thirteen.<sup>2</sup> Within months of Leo X's election, he promoted two relatives to the cardinalate – Giulio de' Medici (1478–1534), his cousin, and Innocenzo Cibo (1491–1550), his nephew – as well as another Tuscan, Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena (1470–1520). The tally of Florentines increased again in July 1517 in what was the largest cardinalate promotion of the early modern era, when out of thirty-one new cardinals, six were Florentine either by birth or allegiance.<sup>3</sup> One of them was Niccolò Ridolfi (1501–1550), the central figure of this study ([Figure Introduction.1](#)).

As the first English-language study of Ridolfi, grandson of Lorenzo the Magnificent and a protégé of both Medici popes, the aim of this book is threefold: first, to explore Ridolfi's role in Florentine and papal politics, and to a lesser extent in church reform; second, to examine his court in order to further our understanding of professional service in the household and how these officials supported the cardinal's day-to-day life and affairs; and

## 6 Introduction

third, to analyse how the political and cultural patronage provided by the cardinal's court merged to create a hub of learning and knowledge. The first aim goes to the heart of that age-old question of the division between private and public interests, in this case including temporal and ecclesiastical ones, and the fluidity of any allegiances – family, state and curial – during the period. Ridolfi is well placed to examine the impact of politics on an early modern cardinal's career, particularly through his support of the Florentines who rebelled against the new dukes of Florence, first Alessandro de' Medici (r. 1532–1537) and then Cosimo I (r. 1537–1574). Many of these Florentines became exiles, or *fuorusciti*, and Ridolfi's court in Rome was an important centre of this network. The relations between Florence and Rome are an important strand of this book because Ridolfi and his circle – which included the staunch republican theorist Donato Giannotti – were at the crux of these tumultuous events. The second and third aims are more ambitious because they are more multifaceted. I attempt to tease out the overlaps between court and household and to offer an insight into the financing and functioning of the court by comparing the ideal versions represented in treatises with the actuality of Ridolfi's own establishment. As hubs of knowledge, these courts served as hospitable spaces that intersected with Florentine and Roman cultural, ecclesiastical and political patronage. They can also be analysed in the context of entanglements between the princely court and a more professional and complex knowledge and practice of household management in the consumer and service economy of early modern Rome. I argue that there was a “trickle up” of knowledge, whereby the middling sorts – the majordomo and steward, in particular – established the rules that influenced the image of the cardinal and the ostentation of display.<sup>4</sup> By exploring the multidisciplinary aspects of these various strands – expanding the study of the cardinalate court to include themes of social and cultural history, food history and consumption – I hope to allow the more traditional fields of political and church history to be approached from different angles.

The first part of this study will examine the Florentine background of the Ridolfi family and analyse the close connections between the cardinal and the two Medici popes, Leo X and Clement VII. The political background of the period is also discussed in order to enable a fuller understanding of the cardinal's patronage and later actions. I also focus on the wealth of the new cardinal as he followed the well-worn path to riches by accumulating benefices and offices through nepotism and political ties. Before analysing the expenditure, it is first necessary to gauge the credit side of the balance sheet – income and other forms of wealth and assets – with the appropriate caveats. This ideal balance sheet must be taken as informed guesswork since much documentation is missing and the web of payments is hard and frequently impossible to trace. However, the expectation of wealth was a vital part of the credit system that provided the foundation for the service economy, not just in Rome but throughout early modern Europe.<sup>5</sup> It was the cardinal's standing – his credit rating – that set in motion the machinery

of consumption and service that allowed the management of the household along the lines outlined by the handbooks on a cardinal's ideal court that form the subject of **Part II**.

The subject of household management was elevated into an art at the courts of Renaissance Italy and the resulting professional expertise led to an expanding pool of knowledge among practitioners and the growing aspirations of their patrons. Since ancient times, the liberality and magnificence of courtly display had been an acknowledged route for those wishing to establish reputation and renown. In Book 4 of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle linked the virtue of magnificence (*megaloprepeia*, which is sometimes translated as munificence) to generosity and expenditure on a very large scale. As examples of such expenditure, he wrote:

some are of the sort we call prestigious, e.g. those relating to gods – votive offerings, ritual paraphernalia, and sacrifices ... and all the kinds of public benefaction for which it is good to compete, e.g., perhaps if people think a play should be staged brilliantly, or a trireme fitted out, or a feast provided for the city.<sup>6</sup>

But Aristotle noted that such magnificence should be proportionate to the agent and to the effect achieved. Perhaps most pertinent to this study is that Aristotle – writing in the context of the fourth century BCE – noted:

It is the mark of a munificent person to furnish himself with a household in a way suitable to his wealth (for a household too is a kind of adornment), and to prefer to spend on things whose effects will be long-lasting (for these are the finest) – in each sort of case spending what is suitable.<sup>7</sup>

The most incisive discussion of magnificence in late fifteenth-century Italy as the rationale for such large-scale expenditure appears in the works of the Neapolitan humanist, politician, philosopher, astrologer and historian Giovanni Pontano (1429–1503) and his discussion of Aristotle's virtue ethics. Pontano's treatises on these virtues, especially those concerning money, and including liberality, magnificence and splendour, were completed in around 1493–1494 and printed in Naples in 1498.<sup>8</sup> Matthias Roick notes how closely Pontano's work was based on Leonardo Bruni's translations of the Greek texts, breathing new life into Aristotle and drawing him to the attention of many humanists who had previously shunned his works.<sup>9</sup> Pontano integrated these works into the framework of late fifteenth-century culture, and as Evelyn Welch comments, his "greatest innovation" was to expand the single Aristotelian understanding of magnificence into two parts, magnificence and splendour.<sup>10</sup> When discussing magnificence and splendour, whether of the courts of Ferrara and Urbino, or the patrician society of Florence, the studies of Richard Goldthwaite, Guido Guerzoni and Allen Grieco are essential to understanding the rationale for magnificent display, which included

food service.<sup>11</sup> However, with regard to the ecclesiastical courts of Rome, a pivotal tension – or what David Chambers terms the “splendid paradox” – between the moral obligation of conspicuous display and the profession of poverty has been highlighted by a growing body of research.<sup>12</sup>

Chambers was a pioneer in this regard, and since the 1950s Renaissance cardinals and their style of living has progressed from being a niche subject to being “triumphantly in vogue”.<sup>13</sup> However, it is also worth briefly noting how the topic also developed in Italy in the 1980s and 1990s. The courtly household and the nuanced dividing line between private and public was the focus of two volumes edited by Cesare Mozzarelli and published as part of the “Europa delle Corti” series in 1988.<sup>14</sup> A sub-section focused on the cardinal’s *familia*. These chapters followed in the wake of Chambers’s research on Gonzaga cardinals,<sup>15</sup> as well as earlier work by Hurtubise on the Salviati cardinals.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, in an important study of 1980, Amedeo Quondam had focused on Paolo Cortesi’s *De cardinalatu* (1510), written about the time of Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier* and a forerunner of the courtly discourse.<sup>17</sup> Hospitality was also a focus of these earlier studies.<sup>18</sup> In the 1990s, Fragnito’s studies of the treatises that burgeoned from the 1540s onwards – motivated by the unique circumstances of Rome, with its numerous cardinal’s courts, each a microcosm of power and display – provided important context against which individual courts were then studied.<sup>19</sup>

Most of the authors of these handbooks on the cardinalate court based their knowledge on personal experience. Their books codified the profession and formulated and classified the knowledge required, thereby helping to create career paths whether for the administrative offices or the myriad of offices that serviced the material needs of these cardinals’ courts. The choice of Cardinal Niccolò Ridolfi presents an important microstudy that builds on this body of research, while uniquely allowing the ideal descriptions of the treatises to be compared with the actual situation described in Ridolfi’s accounts and letters. This is possible because Cardinal Ridolfi’s household is intimately connected to three contemporary handbooks: the first written by Cola da Benevento (with the help of Francesco Priscianese), the second by Mauro Salvidio and the last by Domenico Romoli. **Part II** of this study presents these individuals and their links to the Ridolfi household. Above all, their works allow the “ideal” management of the household to be compared with the extant detail of Ridolfi’s household, its personnel, management and expenditure. All three treatises stress that the magnificence and the honour of their “Signore”, the cardinal, were the prime concerns of those who worked in the court. Magnificence continued to be expected of a cardinal, but it became difficult to fulfil this requisite against growing calls for reform prior to the Council of Trent. A closer look at Ridolfi’s court, together with the related treatises, confirms that its management and professionalism were largely unaffected in the 1530s and 1540s. It was only gradually, and all the more so for the post-Tridentine cardinals, that the continued expectation of a magnificent lifestyle was

combined with a greater emphasis in the treatises on the duties of the cardinal's chaplains and on religious observance, as well as on a growing bureaucratic role.<sup>20</sup>

Early modern society considered household management to be a microcosm of state and institutional management. By studying household management, we raise questions concerning the degree to which such social formations and the constructs of civil society act in lieu of formal control, or to use Foucault's term, as a form of governmentality.<sup>21</sup> Foucault also touched on the subject of "governing" the household, a term that is frequently referenced by contemporary treatises. He noted that while these comments concern terminology, "[they] actually have important political implications" and pose questions regarding the degree to which the government of a cardinal's *familia* is "internal to society itself, or to the state"?<sup>22</sup> I focus on the structures, the upstairs and downstairs of the household, as well as the open and closed doors of these spaces, both conceptual and physical, that served to regulate and form the "civil" society of the household. The size of these cardinalate households has also raised questions regarding their place in the city. The courts/households were not closed but rather fully integrated into the fabric of Rome; their doors were generally open – as were their gardens – and the palace environment was a permeable space. The reforms of the Fifth Lateran Council also endorsed the notion of the cardinal's house as being "open", encouraging charity and learned pursuits.<sup>23</sup> Where possible, this study of Cardinal Ridolfi's household has attempted to plumb the social hierarchy of the household and to spread outwards from it, adding to our knowledge of the supply chain providing food and services to Ridolfi's and many other similar establishments throughout Rome.

Mary Hollingsworth's work on Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este, and on cardinals' households more generally,<sup>24</sup> drew attention to the treasure trove of information contained in account books and this study of Cardinal Ridolfi's household reflects several of her findings, although the Ridolfi were not the ruling Este. At a different level, the work of Maria Antonietta Visceglia and also of Jennifer Mara DeSilva on the papal household looks at the pivotal role of this court at the heart of Roman society, its culture and its economy: it was the orb around which the cardinals' satellite courts revolved.<sup>25</sup> Equally important, within the context of Rome and its society, Laurie Nussdorfer has highlighted the gendered aspects of the ecclesiastical households of Rome and their "masculine hierarchies" as part of broader studies of masculinities.<sup>26</sup> It is against this background that, in [Part II](#), I also attempt to highlight the functioning of a cardinalate household, its patriarchal structure and the organisation of the primarily male personnel within it, while also turning to look at production and consumption.<sup>27</sup>

The third and final part of the book returns to focus on the patronage provided by the cardinal's court as a centre of knowledge, against the background of broader cultural, ecclesiastical and political affairs. Ridolfi's cultural patronage, and its special focus on his extensive library, is well known,

but by singling out the scholars based at Sant'Agata dei Goti, in Rome, and looking in particular at medicine and the work of Guido Guidi (*Vidus Vidius*) and Realdo Colombo, I build on existing research to emphasise this important hub of learning.<sup>28</sup> Many of the cardinal's household were Tuscans living in exile in Rome and the influence of exile is traced as a theme that links politics with everyday aspects, like food. All these aspects were influenced by Cardinal Ridolfi's fervent commitment to Florentine republicanism and his engagement with the cause of the Florentine exiles. It is in this regard that I also examine the impact on the household of the cardinal's notoriously poor relations with Duke Cosimo I de' Medici in [Part III](#). Entanglements of cultural and political patronage highlight the topicality of the figure of Brutus, not only in Michelangelo's famous bust commissioned for the cardinal but above all in Donato Giannotti's literary dialogues, the interlocutors of which were members of Ridolfi's household or patronage network.<sup>29</sup> The political thread of Cardinal Ridolfi's actions intersects with the all-important questions of church reform which gathered momentum during the Farnese papacy. Lastly, I present the circumstances of Cardinal Ridolfi's death during the conclave of 1549–1550, at which he was a serious contender, and discuss Realdo Colombo's report of the autopsy, which is included in the Appendix.

This three-part structure aims to provide the background to the cardinal's life and, above all, to the sources of wealth and influence that allowed him to maintain and be served and supported by a large, all-male court and household. The three treatises intimately linked to Ridolfi's establishment reveal the complexity of the offices, as well as the interconnections between these courts and the economy of Rome and further afield. Many questions remain, and this is undoubtedly an area of research that will continue to prove fruitful to understand the nexus between high ecclesiastical office, politics, patronage and service in sixteenth-century Italy.

## Notes

1. K.J.P. Lowe, *Church and Politics in Renaissance Italy. The Life and Career of Cardinal Francesco Soderini, 1453–1524* (1993), 58.
2. Given his age, the promotion was kept secret for three years; Marco Pellegrino, "Leone X", *DBI*, 64 (2005).
3. These were Luigi de' Rossi, Silvio Passerini, Ferdinando Ponzetti (of Florentine family but Neapolitan by birth), Niccolò Pandolfini, Niccolò Ridolfi and Giovanni Salviati; von Pastor, IV, pt. 1, 128–32.
4. Trickle up, or even trickle round, is a term used by historians of consumption, as well as economists. For example, Andrew Trigg comments that "For critics of Veblen a common theme is the argument that the 'trickle up' of consumption patterns may be at least as important as 'trickle down'"; Andrew B. Trigg, "Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption", *Journal of Economic Issues* 35 (2001): 103.
5. For an overview of credit in the private, company and public finances of early modern Europe, which is still useful, see Geoffrey Parker, "The Emergence

- of Modern Finance in Europe, 1500-1730”, in *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Carlo M. Cipolla (1974), 527–94; Richard Goldthwaite writes of the accounting mentality of the Florentines and the “endless maze of debit-credit relations”, *The Economy of Renaissance Florence* (2008), 463.
6. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Christopher Rowe, introduction and commentary by Sarah Broadie (2002) IV.2, 147 (1122b20–1122b24). For further comments, also see Helen Cullyer, “‘The Social Virtues’”, in *Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Ronald Polansky (2014), esp. 137–38.
  7. *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV.2, 147 (1123a6–1123a10).
  8. For the treatises, see Giovanni Pontano, “De magnificentia”, in Id., *I libri delle virtù sociali*, ed. F. Tateo (1999), 168–93 (esp. 184–85).
  9. Matthias Roick, *Pontano’s Virtues. Aristotelian Moral and Political Thought in the Renaissance* (2017), 179.
  10. Evelyn Welch, “Public Magnificence and Private Display: Giovanni Pontano’s De Splendore (1498) and the Domestic Arts”, *Journal of Design History* 15 (2002): 214.
  11. Richard A. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300–1600* (1993), esp. 204–12; Guido Guerzoni, “Liberalitas, Magnificentia, Splendor: The Classic Origins of Italian Renaissance Lifestyle”, in *Economic Engagements with Art*, ed. Neil De Marchi, Crauford D.W. Goodwin (1999), 332–78; Id., “Between Rome and Ferrara: The Courtiers of the Este Cardinals in the Cinquecento”, in *Art and Identity in Early Modern Rome*, ed. Jill Burke, Michael Bury (2008), 59–77; Allen J. Grieco, “Conviviality in a Renaissance Court: The *Ordine et Officij* of the Court of Urbino”, *Food, Social Politics and the Order of Nature in Renaissance Italy* (2019), 76–78.
  12. David S. Chambers, “The Renaissance Cardinalate. From Paolo Cortesi’s *De Cardinalatu* to the Present”, in *The Possessions of a Cardinal. Politics, Piety, and Art, 1450-1700*, ed. Mary Hollingsworth, Carol M. Richardson (2010), 18.
  13. *Ibid.*, 17.
  14. Cesare Mozzarelli, ed., *‘Familia’ del principe e famiglia aristocratica*, 2 vols (1988). The authors in Section V, “La *familia* del cardinale”, included Gigliola Fragnito, Pierre Hurtubise, Lucinda Byatt and Nicoletta Pellegrino.
  15. Among others, David S. Chambers, “The Economic Predicament of Renaissance Cardinals”, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 3 (1966): 289–313; Id., “The Housing Problems of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39 (1976): 21–58.
  16. Pierre Hurtubise, “Familiarité et fidélité à Rome au XVIe siècle: les “familles” des cardinaux Giovanni, Bernardo et Antonio Maria Salviati”, in *Hommage à Roland Mousnier. Clientèles et fidélités en Europe à l’époque moderne*, ed. Y. Durand (1981), 335–50; reprinted in Pierre Hurtubise, *Tous les chemins mènent à Rome. Arts de vivre et de réussir à la cour pontificale au XVIe siècle* (2009), 151–71.
  17. Amedeo Quondam, “La ‘forma del vivere’: schede per l’analisi del discorso cortigiano”, in *La corte e il “Cortegiano”*, ed. Adriano Prosperi (1980), II: *Un modello europeo*, 15–68.
  18. Lucinda Byatt, “The Concept of Hospitality in a Cardinal’s Household”, *Renaissance Studies* 2 (1988): 312–20.
  19. Gigliola Fragnito, “La trattatistica cinque e seicentesca sulla corte cardinalizia. ‘Il vero ritratto d’una bellissima e ben governata corte’”, *Annali dell’Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico in Trento* 17 (1991): 135–83; Ead., “Cardinals’ Courts in Sixteenth-Century Rome”, *The Journal of Modern History* 65 (1993): 26–56; Ead., “Le corti cardinalizie nella Roma del Cinquecento”, *Rivista storica italiana* 106 (1994): 5–41.
  20. Fragnito, “La trattatistica cinque e seicentesca”, esp. 176–78

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21. For Foucault's theory of "gouvernementalité", see his lecture of 5 April 1978; Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (2007), esp. 348. For bibliography on the ample debate regarding court and state, see Trevor Dean, "The Courts", *The Journal of Modern History* 67 (1995): S136–51.
22. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 93.
23. Cited by Jennifer Mara DeSilva, "Episcopal Charity and Princely Liberality: Leo X's Household and His Possesso (1513)", in *Eternal Ephemera: The Papal Possesso and Its Legacies in Early Modern Rome*, ed. Jennifer Mara DeSilva, Pascale Rihouet (2020), 229.
24. Mary Hollingsworth, *The Cardinal's Hat. Money, Ambition and Housekeeping in a Renaissance Court* (2004); Ead., "The Cardinal's Household", in *A Companion to the Early Modern Cardinal*, ed. Mary Hollingsworth, Miles Pattenden, Arnold Witte (2020), 260–75.
25. Maria Antonietta Visceglia, "The Pope's Household and Court in the Early Modern Age", in *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective*, ed. Jeroen Duindam, Tülay Artan, Metin Kunt (2011), 239–64; DeSilva, "Episcopal Charity and Princely Liberality". See also Peter Partner, *Renaissance Rome: 1500-1559. A Portrait of a Society* (1976), 117–22.
26. Laurie Nussdorfer, "Men at Home in Baroque Rome", *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 17 (2014): 103–29; Ead., "Masculine Hierarchies in Roman Ecclesiastical Households", *European Review of History* 22 (2015): 620–42; Ead., "Managing Cardinals' Households for Dummies", in *For the Sake of Learning. Essays in Honour of Anthony Grafton*, ed. Ann Blair, Anja-Silvia Goeing (2016), I, 173–94.
27. This and other related directions for research on the Roman curia are mentioned by Miles Pattenden, "The Roman Curia", in *A Companion to Early Modern Rome, 1492–1698*, ed. Pamela M. Jones, Barbara Wisch, Simon Ditchfield (2019), 57–58.
28. For Ridolfi's patronage, see Giorgio Costa, *Michelangelo alle corti di Niccolò Ridolfi e Cosimo I* (2009); Davide Muratore, *La biblioteca del Cardinale Niccolò Ridolfi*, 2 vols (2009); Lucinda Byatt, "Sant'Agata dei Goti on the Quirinal: An Early Sixteenth-Century Fulcrum for Politics and Learning under Cardinal Ridolfi", in *Early Modern Rome, 1341-1667. Proceedings of a Conference Held in Rome, May 13-15, 2010*, ed. Portia Prebys (2011), 230–38.
29. Donato Giannotti, *Dialoghi di Donato Giannotti de' giorni che Dante consumò nel cercare l'inferno e 'l Purgatorio*, ed. Dioclecio Redig De Campos (1939).

# Part I