VIOLENCE AND DISORDER IN THE SEDE VACANTE OF EARLY MODERN ROME, 1559-1655

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By
John M. Hunt, M. A.

The Ohio State University
2009

Dissertation Committee
Professor Robert C. Davis
Professor Noel G. Parker
Professor Barbara A. Hanawalt Advisor
Professor Terri Hessler History Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

From the death of every pope until the election of his successor in the early modern era, the entire bureaucratic and judicial apparatus of the state in Rome and the Papal States effectively ceased to function. During this interregnum, known as the *sede vacante* (literally, “the vacant see”), violence and disorder dramatically increased as the papal government temporarily lost its control over the populace and its monopoly of violence. The College of Cardinals and local civic governments throughout the Papal States, authorities deputized to regulate affairs during *sede vacante*, failed to quell the upsurge of violence that commenced immediately upon the pope’s death.

Contemporary observers and modern scholars have labeled the violence of *sede vacante* as meaningless and irrational. I argue, rather, that this period of unrest gave Romans and subjects of the Papal States an opportunity to perform actions increasingly forbidden by the centralizing papal government—and thus ultimately to limit the power of the government and prevent the development of the papacy into an absolute monarchy. Acting as individuals or as collectivities, Romans and papal subjects sought revenge against old enemies, attacked hated outsiders, criticized papal policies, and commented on the papal election.

My dissertation, the first book-length study of the papal *sede vacante*, examines this interlude of disorder and violence by highlighting this poorly studied but important aspect of Roman society. Using primarily police reports, testimonies from witnesses, and trial records, I point out the ways in which *sede vacante* served to disrupt and limit papal authority.
Moreover, I emphasize the negotiable quality of power in the early modern Papal States and the roles that the civic government of Rome, the nobility, and even single individuals played in contesting the growth of papal power. *Sede vacante* allowed individuals and collective bodies to pursue their own goals. Finally, my study of the papacy’s *sede vacante* reveals the weakness in absolutist goals of the papal monarchy. Rather than following in the example of French absolutism, the papacy shared much in common with Poland and the Holy Roman Empire, other elective monarchies of the early modern era. But, in the end, Rome was unique in the amount of violence and disorder that occurred during its interregnum.
Dedicated to Danielle and Erin
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have possible without the support and advice of numerous individuals and institutions over the years. First and foremost, I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee. Each one has made a great contribution to the evolution of this work. My advisor, Robert Davis, read every chapter with a critical eye. The work is much better due to his advice. Geoffrey Parker helped me to look at my dissertation in broader terms and always remained a bastion of support through rough times. In addition to her advice, Barbara Hanawalt generously provided me with a teaching position during the last stages of the writing phase. To each I owe a tremendous amount of thanks and I hope the end result is pleasing to them. Of course, as with all works, any of its flaws are my own.

I would also like to thank other members of the History Department who have helped me during my time at the Ohio State University. John Rule, David Cressy and Matt Goldish all gave me useful advice at the early stages of my research. I have also benefited from the assistance and conversation of fellow graduate students. In particular I want to thank James Bennett, Gunhan Borekci, and Andrea Ottone.

I owe much to scholars in the broad community of early modern Rome. Thomas and Elizabeth Cohen have helped me from the beginning of this project, giving me guidance as I ventured into the state archives of Rome, providing a friendly face in the
archives while I did my research, and critically reading several chapters. They represent
the best that is academe. Dr. John Brackett, my former advisor at the University of
Cincinnatti, commented on several chapters. I also learned much from him as his student.
In Rome, I benefited from the advice of Irene Fosi and Michele Di Sivo, archivist at the
Archivio di Stato di Roma. I want to thank fellow graduate students, Amy Brosius,
Camilla Kandare, and Virginia Lamothe, who shared sources and the details of their
fascinating research during breaks from the archives.

I want to thank the people who made my stay in Rome exciting and welcoming.
Gaby Ford not only found me rooms but also entertained with her sardonic wit. The
proprietors of the Sedici Bar and Le Bon Bock in Monteverde provided me with a
welcoming haven away from the tourist-heavy streets of Rome, as well as interesting
discussions on topics ranging from politics to the World Cup. Giancarlo and his wife,
owners of the Sedici Bar, were very generous, often providing me with a lunch to take to
the archives.

I need to thank the archives in Rome, Venice and Mantua that allowed me to
peruse their materials. I also thank the Getty Research Institute, the Marian Library of
the University of Dayton, the Houghton Library of Harvard University, the Lilly Library
of Indiana University, and the library of the L’École Française de Rome for giving me
access to rare printed materials. In particular, I thank Nicoletta Hary, Curator of Rare
Books at the University of Dayton library, for her assistance.

My research owes much to the institutions that helped fund my research in Italy
and in the United States. The History Department awarded me the John C. Rule Award,
allowing me to conduct early research in the archives of Rome. A Fulbright to Italy
allowed me to spend a productive and exciting year and a half in Rome. And a combination grant from the Delmas Foundation, Duke University and the Venice International University allowed me to conduct research in Venice and present my first findings at a seminar sponsored by all three institutions. Finally, a Presidential Fellowship from the Ohio State University gave me a year free from teaching to think deeply on my topic and write up the results of my research.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, who has supported me through the entire process. In particular I would like to thank my father, who has been extremely supportive of my academic endeavors, as well as Corbin, Danielle, Eliza, and Erin, each of whom in their own way have helped to see this work to its final conclusion.
VITA

5 September 1973…………………………New Albany, Indiana, United States

2000………………………………………M.A. Medieval and Renaissance History, University of Cincinnati

Autumn 2000……………………………..Instructor, Northern Kentucky University

2001-present……………………………..Graduate Student Assistant
Department of History
The Ohio State University

Spring 2009…………………………………Instructor, Wright State University

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: History
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<td>ASM</td>
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<td>ASR</td>
<td>Archivio di Stato di Roma</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCG</td>
<td>Tribunale criminale di Governatore di Roma</td>
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UNITS OF MONEY, WEIGHT AND TIME

MONEY

scudo = 100 baiocchi; money of account

giulio = 10 baiocchi; derived its name from Julius II

grosso = 5 baiocchi

baiocco = 1/100 of a scudo

quattrino = 1/5 of a baiocco

WEIGHT

rubbio = a measure of capacity equivalent to 2.94 hectoliters

TIME

Italian time-keeping counted the hours from sunset. The first hour of night would translate as six PM at midwinter; around ten PM at midsummer.

By the temporal points of this study (1559-1655), most Italian states had dated the beginning of their year from January 1. Documents using other points as a calendrical reference point have been translated to the modern style.

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LIST OF POPES AND THEIR SEDE VACANTE (1559-1655)

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<tr>
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<td>1555-59</td>
<td>18 August-25 December 1559</td>
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<td>Sixtus V (Peretti)</td>
<td>1585-90</td>
<td>27 August-15 September 1590</td>
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<td>Urban VII (Castagna)</td>
<td>1590</td>
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<td>Gregory XIV (Sfondarti)</td>
<td>1590-91</td>
<td>16 October-29 October 1590</td>
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<td>Innocent IX (Facchetti)</td>
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<td>30 December 1591-30 January 1592</td>
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<td>Clement VIII (Aldobrandini)</td>
<td>1592-1605</td>
<td>3 March-1 April 1605</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leo IX (de’ Medici)</td>
<td>1605</td>
<td>27 April-16 May 1605</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul V (Borghese)</td>
<td>1605-21</td>
<td>28 January-9 February 1621</td>
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INTRODUCTION

On 2 April 2005, John Paul II died after reigning as pope for nearly twenty-seven years, one of the longest pontificates in the history of the papacy. As a witness to his *sede vacante*, or the vacancy of the bishop of Rome’s see, I saw pious pilgrims and curious Romans flock to St. Peter’s to view the dead pope. My landlady invited me to join her, as she made her way to the Vatican, in order “to witness history.” The entire world stopped to pay homage to the popular pontiff. But, as an historian of early modern Rome, I was more interested in the local perspective of the city’s inhabitants. A quick trip to Pasquino—the focal point for church and government criticism in early modern and modern Rome—rewarded me with a heap of encomia dedicated to John Paul’s memory rather than the sardonic and often inscrutable invectives that usually draped the ancient statue. John Paul’s vacancy caught both Rome and the world in a reflective moment, as it focused on the good deeds of the Polish pope.

But four hundred years earlier, a different scene played itself out in Rome after the death of the pope. Romans of all ranks, but particularly the lower classes, filled the city’s streets and squares in order to enact all sorts of agendas, both private and collective. In exceptional cases of oppressive popes who raised tariffs on staple foods or reigned in the feudal liberties of the barony, Romans united in collective opposition to the dead pope’s family and memory. More common, however, were the brawls and popular duels that multiplied after the pope’s justice ceased functioning after his death. The
addition of vagabonds and criminals from the countryside, who took advantage of the vacancy to commit a variety of misdeeds, only exacerbated the violence. Thus, *sede vacante* of early modern Rome opened up a new world of possibilities for Romans, used to respecting (or at least paying lip service to) law and hierarchy when the pope occupied his see (*sede plena*).

This dissertation seeks to examine this enduring *mentalité*—to borrow a term from the Annales School—among the Roman populace that saw *sede vacante* as the optimal time to seek vengeance against enemies and to protest against the dead pope’s regime.¹ This *mentalité* persisted among Romans well into the eighteenth century and even into the nineteenth century. For example, *Carbonari* conspirators planned insurrections in Rome and Bologna during the vacancy of Pius VIII of 1830.² This study focuses on the years, 1559 to 1655, the heyday of papal power and nepotism. It was in these years that some of the most violent and tumultuous *sedi vacanti* took place in Rome. The vacancies of 1559, 1585 and 1644 witnessed violent demonstrations against the memory of Paul IV, Sixtus V and Urban VIII, each of whom had imposed heavy taxes and stringent laws on the people. The practice of writing pasquinades against the memory of deceased popes and their nepotistic plans continued into the eighteenth century and nineteenth century. Much of the vitriol against the family was lost after Innocent XII abolished the curial office of cardinal-nephew and nepotism in general with


his bull, *Romanum decret Pontificem*, of 1692. A modern bureaucracy developed in the wake of the bull—a system that was more “professional” than the earlier system marked by personal ties and venality.³

Rome and Its People

*Sede vacante* owed much of its violence and disruptive character to Rome and the papacy’s unique social and political structures that set it off from other early modern states. Papal bulls expressively rejected any notion of dynastic continuity. Both papal law and ritual emphasized the breakdown of government during the vacancy. Other states had interregna, but most monarchies had some tradition of dynastic continuity. Those states that shared with the papacy a similar wariness of the dynastic principle—the Venetian Republic, the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania, and the Holy Roman Empire—all had retained political structures that generally ensured stability and continuity of the government. The electoral dispute of 1619 in the Holy Roman Empire that led to the Thirty Years’ War was an anomaly. Generally, the seven electors, although asserting their distaste for dynastic continuity, chose a Habsburg heir to succeed to the Imperial throne.⁴ In Rome, as we shall see in Chapter One, the pope’s law and

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justice all but died with him. His tribunals pared down and a power void opened up that saw the College of Cardinals vie with the municipal government—the Popolo Romano—for jurisdictional supremacy. Individual nobles and commoners also saw this as a time to make their own claims to power and authority.

Thus, to understand Rome in *sede vacante*, we need to know the social and political structures that bound its people together during *sede plena*. It is best to see Rome as pyramid from which power and patronage flowed from top to bottom. At the top of this pyramid sat the living pope. The pope, as Machiavelli and Venetian ambassadors observed during the sixteenth century and Paolo Prodi most recently discussed in his magisterial study of the papacy, was a monarch with two-souls, a “rex-papa.”⁵ As pope, he was the father of the Catholic world, which not only included the principle Catholic states of Europe, but also new converts throughout the world, the efforts of the Tridentine ministry of new souls. He had a duty to discipline the popular customs of his flock, to combat heresy and the looming Turkish menace, and to proselytize the peoples of Asia and the Americas. At the same time, he was prince of the Papal States, a sizable kingdom in the center of the Italian peninsula that, along with Venice, was able to maintain a degree of independence after the conclusion of Italian Wars in 1559. As secular princes, early modern popes sought to subdue the rebellious

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⁵ Paolo Prodi, *The Papal Prince, One Body and Two Souls: The Papal Monarchy in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Susan Haskins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). This translation has some problems and should be read in conjunction with the original Italian version, see idem, *Il sovrano pontefice, un corpo e due anime: La monarchia papale nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006 [1982]).
city-states of the Marches and the Romagna and tame the violent nobility of Rome and the provinces of the Papal States. This instinct led the papacy to incorporate the duchies of Ferrara and Urbino into the Papal States once their rulers—vassals of the popes—died in 1598 and 1626 respectively. To regulate the subject cities and duchies, popes developed several bureaucratic offices and stationed cardinal-legates or governors in important provincial centers. Moreover, with the loss of revenue from rebellious Protestant states and the independent Catholic monarchies, popes had to tax the provinces more heavily to finance missionary and pastoral activities as well as their grandiose schemes to make Rome into a capital city. Indeed, Prodi and Jean Delumeau have argued that early modern popes established the papacy as an absolute monarchy by centralizing the political structures of their state. Yet others, notably Mario Caravale and Alberto Caracciolo, in their history of the medieval and early modern Papal States, argue that the ideal was far from the reality. Bandits, renegade nobles, and fiercely interdependent city-states continued to thwart the plans of the pope-kings. In many ways the reality did not always support the image of omnipotence that popes wished to convey to their subjects.

The double nature of the pope carried special resonance in Rome, where the pope was both bishop of the city, with his cathedral of San Giovanni in Laterano, and patron of


the people. In this guise, the pope had certain duties. First, he had to maintain the
grandeur of the city and its churches so that visiting pilgrims and dignitaries would be
sufficiently impressed with the *caput mundi*. In this regard, he had to keep the streets in
Rome clean and the highways leading to the city clear of brigands and other criminals.
Second, he had to keep the Roman people supplied with bread and other staples. As
such, early modern Romans ate much better than contemporaries elsewhere in Italy and
Europe. Of course, the provinces, particularly the Marches, suffered under the needs of
the capital: they were taxed heavily and saw much of their grain taken to feed the
pampered Romans, whom papal officials feared might rebel if their needs were not met.
The strategy worked: Romans never rebelled, not even during the intense famines of the
1590s and 1646-48. Yet, there was a price to pay for such security; the Roman economy
and agrarian sector stagnated and remained conservative well into the nineteenth century.
Third, as pastors, popes were expected to give alms to the poor, to build hospitals, and to
perform other charitable acts. This, too, met with trouble, as thousands of vagabonds
descended upon Rome to take advantage of the dole. By the late sixteenth and early
seventeenth centuries, they had become such a problem as to warrant the issuing of
*bandi*, or decrees, outlawing able-bodied mendicants and patron-less foreigners from the
city. Sixtus V even sought to sequester a great body of them in the Hospital of Ponte

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9 See Jacques Revel, “A Capital City’s Privileges: Food Supplies in Early Modern Rome,” in Robert
Forster and Orest Ranum, eds., *Food and Drink in History: Selections from the Annales: Économies,
Sociétés, Civilisations*, trans. Elborg Forster and Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University
Post-Tridentine Syndrome and the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 175-95;
and Volker Reinhardt, *Überleben im der frühneuzeitlichen Stadt: Annona und Getreideversorgung in
Sisto in 1585. Finally, popes had to aggrandize their families during their pontificate. The acquisition of papal offices for ecclesiastical nephews and noble titles for lay nephews was the norm. Various art programs and building projects not only beautified the city but also served as propaganda for the pope and his relatives. After the pope’s death, his relatives, with their papal credentials, easily became permanent additions to the constellation of nobles in the city.

But Rome was a hierarchically complex city with numerous nodes of power groups that worked with and sometimes clashed with the pope. Within the papal government, the College of Cardinals loomed as an important power. Since the bull, *In nomine domini* of 1059, the college served as a “senate” to the pope, voting on papal policy in consistories and electing a new pope during the vacancy. This changed with the papacy’s definitive return to Rome with Martin V in 1420. During the next two centuries the college grew in size from 24 at the time of the Council of Constance (1414-18) to 70 by Sixtus V’s pontificate. The appointment of cardinals increasingly rested in the hand of the popes. This allowed the pope to make cardinals beholden to him; these were his so-called creatures.

The weakening of College of Cardinals as a political body continued with the creation of papal congregations during the second half of the sixteenth century. Paul III created the first congregation—that of the Inquisition—in 1542. Paul IV followed with

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10 On the efforts of popes to stem the flow of vagabonds into Rome, see Delumeau, *Vie économique et sociale*, vol. I, 407-16; pp. 413-15 for the Hospital of Ponte Sisto.

the first council of state, the “consulta di Stato,” in 1559 on the occasion of exiling his rebellious nephews. Once again, the process culminated with Sixtus V, who in 1588 organized fifteen congregations that oversaw both secular and ecclesiastical affairs throughout the Papal States and the Catholic world. Clement VIII added the Congregation of the Buon Governo in 1592 to better regulate the finances of the various communes of the Papal States. Excluding the majority of the cardinals from their proceedings, the pope allowed his cardinal-nephew and a small group of intimates to monopolize the decision-making that occurred in the congregations. Indeed, in a report of 1640, the Venetian ambassador Giovanni Nani wrote that “[i]f ever the pope’s will has been absolute, it is at the present. Everyone is excluded from participation in state affairs, which are all referred to the pope to resolve, to the nephew to direct, and to some minister to execute.”

Diagonally across from the Vatican was found a third locus of power—the municipal government of Rome situated atop the Capitol Hill, the ancient religious center of the Roman Republic. This civic body, called the Popolo Romano after the SPQR of the republic, had developed over the course of the twelfth century and asserted a greater

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13 “Relazione of Giovanni Nanni, 1640” in Nicolò Barozzi and Guglielmo Berchet, eds., *Relazioni degli Stati europei lette al Senato dagli ambasciatori veneti nel secolo XVII*, ser. III, vol. II (Venice: P. Naratovich, 1856), 24-25: “Se mai è stato assoluto l’arbitrio del papa, lo è ne tempi presenti: escluso ogni altro dalla partecipazione dei negotii, che tutti fanno capo al pontefice per risolverli, al nipote per dirigerli et a qualche ministro per eseguirli.” Nanni was the only Venetian ambassador to note this change; see also the reports of Paolo Paruta of 1585, Francesco Contarini of 1609, and Nicolò Sagredo of 1661. Sagredo commented that Alexander VI had held only one congregation of state in seven years, adding that “even to this day, he makes fun of it” (“anche al giorno presente se ne burla”). For Paruta, see Eugenio Albèri, ed., *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, ser. II, vol. IV (Florence: Società editrice fiorentina, 1857), 460. For Contarini and Sagredo, see Barozzi and Berchet, *Relazioni degli Stati europei*, ser. III, vol. I, 89-90, and vol. II, 234.
political authority over the city during the years of the Avignon papacy and the Great Schism. Once again, with the return of the papacy after Martin, the Popolo Romano’s authority gradually deteriorated. The process, as with the College of Cardinals, culminated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the popes sought to assert themselves over all independent powers in Rome and the Papal States. The most important civic magistrates of the Popolo Romano included three conservators, heads of the two patrician assemblies, and thirteen *caporioni*, representatives of each of the city’s thirteen quarters (*rioni*) who took part in the assembly and led the civic militia during times of emergency, including the vacancy.\(^\text{14}\) Another integral figure of the municipal government was the senator, a noble trained in jurisprudence from outside Rome, but usually from the Papal States, who was chosen by the pope.\(^\text{15}\) Compared to other Italian states, such as Genoa and Venice, the Roman civic government remained open to new blood, perhaps just because it had lost much of its authority in the early modern era. Foreign families could easily enter among the ranks of the ruling elite.\(^\text{16}\) Despite Laurie Nussdorfer’s influential argument of the continued relevancy of the civic regime, the pope dominated the ritual and political scene of Rome. This was demonstrated by the growing power of the principal papal criminal tribunal, the Governor of Rome, which gained jurisdictional supremacy over the other tribunals of the city, including the


\(^{15}\) On the senator of Rome, see Nussdorfer, *Civic Politics*, 69-71.

senator’s, and by the fact that the senator owed fealty to the pope, not the Popolo Romano. The civic magistrates and their tribunal continued to exist well into the nineteenth century, but like many papal offices, only with a modicum of the power that they enjoyed in the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{17}

The old Roman barony added another layer to the hierarchical structure of early modern Rome. Closely connected to the Popolo Romano, members from these illustrious families had dominated Roman affairs since the tenth century. The Orsini, Colonna, Conti and Savelli were the most powerful of these aristocratic clans, but below them stood the Caetani, Cenci and Mattei. These families had powerful cardinals, abbots and even popes in their past and continued to maintain at least one member among the College of Cardinals in the early modern era. Newer and foreign families joined their ranks throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The fastest way to ascend to the Roman nobility was to have a family member elected pope. This is how the Medici, the Aldobrandini, the Borghese, and the Chigi all rose to power. Regardless of their origin, these families gathered around a central palace that displayed their magnificence to the city. Rather than the fortified towers of the Middle Ages, their residences embodied the aesthetic of the Renaissance and Baroque. Nevertheless, like the medieval towers, these palaces dominated the city squares, providing a focal point for family solidarity in the neighborhood. The most important families sought to maintain several

\textsuperscript{17} On the increasing power of the Governor’s tribunal over urban tribunals, including the senator’s, see Peter Blastenbrei, \textit{Kriminalitä in Rom, 1560-1585} (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1995), 11-14 and 39-44; Michele Di Sivo, “Roman Criminal Justice between State and City: The Reform of Paul V,” in Peter van Kessel and Elisja Schulte, eds., \textit{Rome/Amsterdam: Two Growing Cities in Seventeenth-Century Europe} (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997), 282-84, and Irene Fosi, \textit{La giustizia del papa} (Rome: Laterza, 2007), 23-29.
palaces and chapels throughout the city to broadcast their pretension to a larger audience.\textsuperscript{18} However, the true source of power, especially for the old nobility, remained their feudal estates outside Rome. They could always escape the oppressive policies of the papacy by returning to their castles in the countryside. Indeed, many of the more youthful or rebellious scions of the baronial families remained a constant source of disorder throughout the early modern era.\textsuperscript{19}

Added to this jumble of power elites in Rome were the ambassadors of the various Catholic states of Europe and their cardinals. The palaces of these foreign potentates served as islands to which their fellow countrymen and women gravitated for protection and assistance. Not only did foreign cardinals and ambassadors sustain their foreign communities through work and charity, but the very space of their palace became a haven for their wayward \textit{paesani}. The immediate area around the palace door—the \textit{franchigia}—became a place for sanctuary for criminals escaping from the law. Although all the major Catholic powers, including those from the various Italian states maintained communities in Rome—the most powerful were those of the Spanish and French. The ambassadors of both states used Roman streets to wage an informal battle of supremacy. During the sixteenth century, the Spanish proved more adept at playing power politics in the streets of Rome—much Spanish silver flowed into the city, paying for the


construction of the city monuments, including St. Peter’s.\footnote{On the Spanish community and its influence on the papacy, see Thomas Dandelet, \textit{Spanish Rome, 1500-1700} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) and Alessandra Anselmi, “Il quartiere dell’ambasciata di Spagna,” in Donatella Calabi and Paola Lanaro, eds., \textit{La città italiana e i luoghi degli stranieri, XIV-XVIII secolo} (Rome: Laterza, 1998), 206-21. On the Spanish role in financing St. Peter’s, see Dandelet, “Paying for the New St. Peter’s: Contributions to the Construction of the New Basilica from Spanish Lands, 1506-1620,” in Dandelet and John A. Marino, eds., \textit{Spain in Italy: Politics, Society and Religion, 1500-1700} (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 180-195.} Meanwhile, Spanish soldiers often had to help the pope defend his state from bandits and foreign threats. By the seventeenth century, the French had caught up with the Spanish in inserting their influence on the city.\footnote{Delumeau, \textit{Vie économique et sociale}, vol. I, 201-02.} This contest always heated up during the vacancy, when each diplomat sought to influence the papal election.

Below the pope and the city’s elites were the people of Rome, a mixed group of artisans, day-laborers, servants and agricultural workers. Rome’s economy, parasitical to the core, prevented the emergence of a strong mercantile class. Yet, brokers, bankers and long-distance merchants—usually of Florentine extraction—based themselves in the area near Ponte Sant’Angelo called the Banchi, the Banks. The majority of Romans lived in the eastern half of the city. After tenth-century Normans destroyed all the aqueducts leading to the hilly, ancient quarters of the city called the Monti, the populace moved west to the plains along the banks of the Tiber River.\footnote{Ibid, 225.} This area, as well as the markets of Campo de’ Fiore and Piazza Navona, continued to play an important role in the social life of the people. The ancient population center, situated around the Capitoline and the Roman Forum, became desolate during the Middles Ages. Well into the sixteenth
century, shepherds grazed their cattle in the Roman Forum, earning it the new name Campo Vaccino, “the field of cows.”

Starting with Nicholas V, popes sought to beautify and rationalize the space of the city. Sixteenth century popes encouraged the populace to move to the north of the city—into the quarter known as Camp Marzo. Sometimes force could be used, as in the case of the city’s prostitutes, whom popes Pius V and Clement VIII confined to an area in the quarter known as the Ortaccio, “the wicked garden.” Due to the incessant flooding of the Tiber, Sixtus V encouraged the repopulation of the Monti. He gave special incentives, including tax exemptions, to Romans who moved there. Despite the movement of its people, Rome’s neighborhoods remained quite heterogeneous. Nobles and commoners lived intimately side-by-side. Indeed, nobles, cardinals and ambassadors hired many of them as servants or acted as their patrons.

The term Roman can be misleading, since Rome was a city of foreigners. Immigrants from all over Italy and Europe came to reside in the city of popes, both on a permanent and temporary basis. Many came because of the numerous work opportunities the parasitic capital had to offer, finding jobs either as servants or seasonal labor. Fellow countrymen followed cardinals from their region to the city in search of work in the city

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and court. The same was true of popes. Florentines flocked to Rome under the Medici popes Leo X and Clement VII, while the so-called “Tedeschi,” that is Lombards, came during the pontificate of the Milanese pope Pius IV.\textsuperscript{25} But the foreign nature of the Roman people can be emphasized too much. Egmont Lee, working with the census of 1527, which was taken just before the city was sacked by Charles V’s men, has argued that Italians from the Roman countryside and the Papal State far outnumbered the true foreigners. He suggests that these foreigners quickly acquainted themselves with culture of the city and thus became “Romanized.”\textsuperscript{26} Thus, I will use the term “Roman,” as an umbrella term for inhabitants of Rome, knowing full well that it encompasses several “nationalities.”

In addition to these “stable” Romans who worked as artisans and servants, was a vast floating population of seasonal workers, pilgrims and vagabonds. The former came to work in the vineyards and farms around the city during harvest time. Pilgrims, a mainstay of the economy for taverns, inns and the trade in religious trinkets, descended upon Rome all year round, but particularly at Easter and during Holy Years. Their numbers could be quite impressive. During the Holy Years of 1575 and 1600, respectively 400,000 and 550,000 pilgrims visited Rome and its churches.\textsuperscript{27} Considering

\textsuperscript{25} On the Florentines and Milanese in Rome, see Delumeau, ibid, 207-213 and Irene Fosi, “\textit{Roma patria comune}? Foreigners in Early Modern Rome,” in Jill Burke and Michael Bury, eds., \textit{Art and Identity in Early Modern Rome} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 31-35.

\textsuperscript{26} Egmont Lee, “Foreigners in Quattrocento Rome,” \textit{Renaissance and Reformation} 5 (1983), 135-46. Based on the census of 1527, Lee suggests that 50 to 70% of the population of they city was Romanized and another 5 to 15% came from the Roman countryside (and thus easily acclimated themselves to Roman society).

that Rome had a population that hovered near 100,000 between 1580 and 1660, this was a huge number that no doubt caused many problems.\textsuperscript{28} As we have seen, the latter group, the vagabonds, became a growing problem in the latter half of the sixteenth century and continued to vex Rome throughout the seventeenth century. The vagabonds were attracted to the alms that the pope, as the charitable father, gave to the needy. The Roman nobility’s turn to pasturage in the latter sixteenth century only exacerbated the large numbers of the idle poor.\textsuperscript{29} A treatise on beggars in Rome, published in 1693, complained of the “number of poor men grew beyond measure, and their solicitation [of alms] not only disturbs the rest of the wealthy in their houses and in the public streets, but with extreme irreverence also interrupt the most holy mysteries in the churches.”\textsuperscript{30} Starting from the pontificate of Pius V, popes outlawed begging near churches and sought to either ban vagabonds from the city or put them to work in the papal galleys.

\textit{Sede vacante}, as social phenomenon, highlighted the unique character of Rome. During the vacancy, the people of Rome, accustomed to the privileges of a capital city, mocked the memory of popes who could not feed them and rioted against their families. Foreigners descended upon the city to serve as soldiers or assassins. The various power elites of the city sought to exert themselves in the absence of their lord. The very

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\textsuperscript{29} Delumeau, \textit{Vie economique et sociale}, vol. II, 566-78
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\textsuperscript{30} Carlo Bartolomeo Piazza, \textit{La mendictà proveduta, nella città di Roma collo spazio publico, fondato dalla Pietà, e Benificenza di Nostro Signore, Innocenzo XII, Pontefice Massimo} (Rome: Gian Giacomo Komarek, 1693), 21-22: “il numero de’ Poveri era cresciuto fuor di modo, e l’importunità loro non solamente turbava il risposo de’ ricchi nelle case e nelle strade pubbliche, ma con estrema irreverenza interrompeva anche i misteri più santi nelle Chiese.”
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violence and disorder of the vacancy was tied to the paradoxical nature of the “two-souled” prince of Rome.

**The Historiography of Sede Vacante and Interregnal Pillages**

Despite its impact on Rome, *sede vacante* has received little scholarly attention as a political and social phenomenon. Older and contemporary studies have focused solely on the papal election that took place during the vacancy. Lorenzo Spinelli, in the middle of the twentieth century, was the first scholar to examine aspects of *sede vacante* besides the election of the pope. In *La vacanza della Sede apostolica*, he traced the evolution of the College of Cardinals as the primary regents of the Apostolic See in the pope’s absence from the origins of the papacy to Pius IV’s bull, *In eligendus*, of 1562. Spinelli showed, besides participating in the election of the new pontiff, that tradition and papal bulls limited the authority of the College of Cardinals to upholders of the law. Its members could not make permanent decisions affecting church doctrine or the governance of the Papal States.  

Three decades later, Laurie Nussdorfer, in a chapter of her *Civic Politics in the Rome of Urban VIII*, sought to create a fuller picture of *sede vacante*. She examined the arguments and jurisdictional contests between the College of Cardinals and the Popolo Romano, the two principal interregnal authorities during the vacancy of Urban VIII, arguing that the civic officials asserted themselves as a group after the pope’s death. She

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also depicted the vacancy as a time of protest against the Barberini and their regime. While she made several important arguments, she studied only the vacancy of 1644 and did not examine many of the rituals and customs that regularly transpired during most early modern *sedi vacanti*.

The last attempt to define *sede vacante* is Joëlle Rollo-Koster’s *Raiding Saint Peter.* Although examining the vacancy of 1378, which saw the election of Urban VI and the eventual creation of the Great Schism, Rollo-Koster sought to make broader statements about papal vacancies in general. She examined the looting that occurred at the palaces of cardinals rumored to have been elected during the conclave of 1378. She described these interregnal pillages in terms of liminality, but never adequately defined what she meant by the term. Ultimately, her study tells us more about ritual theory than the actual beliefs behind the practice or the *mentalité* attached *sede vacante*. Thus, her study demonstrates what Philippe Buc has called the “dangers of ritual,” the problems that historians face when applying ritual theory to past documents.

Most of the scholarly attention on the vacancy has focused on the so-called “ritual pillages,” that frequently occurred either at a pope’s or bishop’s death during the early and High Middle Ages or after a pope’s election during the early modern era. During the pillages, members of the clergy and the community looted the belongings of the dead

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prelate. The phenomenon has a long history. The first incidence of it took place after bishops’ deaths and, later, after popes’ death in the early Middle Ages. Members of the clergy were the main participants in these early pillages. Numerous decrees of early councils and synods denounced the custom and laid the responsibility of protecting the dead bishop’s tomb on the neighboring bishop who presided over his funeral rites. The first occurrence of pillaging a dead pope’s property occurred after the death of Adrian III in 885. When his successor, Stephen V, took possession of the Lateran Palace as the bishop of Rome, he found its treasury of liturgical ornaments emptied. After a long hiatus, the next episode of a pillage of a dead pope’s possessions, took place at the rumored death of Honorius III in 1227. According to the English chronicler, Matthew Paris, the ailing pope had to make an appearance at the window of the Lateran Palace to disperse the Roman people—their first mention of the event—who had “begun to unleash themselves against the pontifical goods.” After the vacancy of Honorius references to interregnum pillages disappeared from the chronicles of medieval historians and the corpus of canon law.

Nineteenth-century historian Lucius Lector was the first to examine interregnal pillage in any serious way (albeit in two short pages). Lector argued that Europeans had learned the custom from the invading Germanic tribes. He argued that Europeans and later Romans learned the custom from the Goths and Lombards and that it signified that these episcopal and papal goods were held in common as members of the Christian

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community. In Rome, the inhabitants always launched their pillages on the papal goods housed in the Lateran palace, never touching the personal goods of the pontiff. Lector noted that the custom seemed to stop with Honorius, but reappeared in altered form during the fifteenth century. Now Romans and conclavists sacked the palace and cells of the pope-elect and sometimes, whether intentionally or not, also sacked those of nearby cardinals or cardinals who they mistakenly thought had been elected. The practice continued until the Cardinal Chamberlain Gaetano Altieri outlawed the practice in 1721.37

Agostino Paravicini Bagliani adapted many of Lector’s arguments in his study of the popular and theological beliefs and rituals surrounding the pope’s body. He argued that the interregnal pillages represented the people’s connection to the institutions of the church and the pope. He added some important arguments to Lector’s ideas. First, he noted that the interregnal pillages disappeared after Honorius III because most popes after him lived away from Rome due to the internecine fighting between the noble factions of Rome. Indeed, for a while Viterbo became the center of papal elections. Second, he pointed out that the new goods that the conclavists and Romans sacked upon the election of the pope were the private property of the pope, not the goods in common belonging to the pope’s flock.38

Rollo-Koster added an important element to the history of interregnal pillages with her account of the sede vacante of 1378. She found that Romans, who had not witnessed a papal election, nor participated in an interregnal sack, remembered the

rudiments of the custom, pillaging the residence of Cardinal Tebaldeschi, the Cardinal of St. Peter’s, when a rumor spread throughout the city that he had been elected. She convincingly argues that Romans created the new ritual of sacking the pope-elect’s palace. To her, this was vestige of the vox populi, vox dei, the idea that the community of Rome had the right to elect the pope. She claims, however, this was the illusion of participation, implying that their efforts were for naught.39

Carlo Ginzburg, along with several of his students at the University of Bologna, also looked at the interregnal pillages. Ginzburg called them “ritual pillages” and never made the historical distinction between the different phenomena, as Lector, Paravinci Bagliani and Rollo-Koster have recently done. He grouped together various episodes that shared little in common, including political protests against Paul IV that were derived from a different impulse, and ignored the political background behind the events. Ginzburg mostly studied the “electoral pillages”, arguing that they were a ritual that highlighted his transformation into his “new superpersona.” This unsatisfactory argument relegates the pillagers to a ritual function without really exploring their beliefs. Ginzburg did note that the pillages reflected the connection that the Romans as well other followers (he examined the phenomenon in Bologna and Mantua as well) had with their ruler and patron.40

This dissertation fits into the historiography by examining the violence and disorder of *sede vacante* in their totality. It does so by looking at the causes of and the motives behind interregnal violence from several perspectives—social, cultural and political—unique to Rome and the Papal States. Besides the interregnal pillages and political squabbles, this study will consider a myriad of activities that contributed to violence and disorder during *sede vacante*. These include rumor, gambling, pasquinades, riots, and theft. In particular, Chapters Three to Five will explore murders, brawls, vengeance, and attacks against Jews and the papal constabulary.

The dissertation will thus examine a long-engrained *mentalité* that saw the vacancy as the optimal time to perform a variety of activities that were illicit during *sede plena*. In this way, *sede vacante* resembled Carnival and other forms of festive misrule in early modern Europe. Like Carnival, the vacancy presented Romans with an opportunity to protest governmental polices and to mock the dead pope and his family. And, like the violent episodes that occurred during the Carnival of Udine in 1511 and Romans in 1580, *sede vacante* sparked riots against the papacy, but never full-scale revolts. Yet, while Carnival potentially carried the elements that could provoke violence, *sede vacante* always produced some form of violence and disorder in Rome.

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But the two social phenomena were also quite different. Carnival and other forms of festive misrule were based on the Christian liturgical calendar. They were tied to the celebration of the life, death, and afterlife of Jesus Christ. In this regard, the misrule and disorder were always predictable according to an established date.\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Sede vacante}, on the other hand, was based on the death of the pope, which meant that there was always an element of unpredictably in its coming. Romans both anticipated and feared the death of the pope and a sickly pope could keep the city on edge for weeks, or even months.

Moreover, the emotional release of both phenomena differed greatly.\textsuperscript{44} Whereas laughter, joy, and indulgence dominated Carnival, in Rome during \textit{sede vacante}, hatred, anger and revenge reigned supreme among the populace. Yet, the anger of the people could be colored by joy, as the news of particularly hated popes was received with outbursts of celebration. As such, \textit{sede vacante} almost invariably produced brawls, fights, and even murders in addition to protests against papal policy. Both Carnival and \textit{sede vacante} worried early modern rulers. Indeed, in Rome, Carnival activities were attenuated or even cancelled when they coincided with \textit{sede vacante}—no doubt out of respect for the dead pope, but also due to the potential for greater chaos. Generally, however, despite Counter-Reformation popes placing a greater emphasis on edifying Jesuit plays and devotional forty-hour celebrations, they made no effort to abolish the


\textsuperscript{44} On the historical study of emotion, see Barbara H. Rosenwein, ed., \textit{Anger’s Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).
popular festivities. *Sede vacante*, in contrast, worried popes before they died. They made every effort to ensure a peaceful vacancy. The principal interregnal bodies—the College of Cardinals and the Popolo Romano—undertook inadequate efforts of policing the people during *sede vacante*, but their efforts were in vain. By the late sixteenth century, the Governor’s *sbirri*, or constables, started to patrol the streets to maintain some semblance of order.

Thus, this dissertation will focus on the *sedi vacanti* between Paul IV (1559) and Innocent X (1655), although sources from the entire sixteenth and seventeenth centuries will be used. These years are important because they saw the most violent demonstrations against the dead popes, which coincided with the reigns of strict popes of the Counter Reformation and also the zenith of nepotism. The first two chapters of this study examine the political and ritual structures of *sede vacante* in Rome. Chapter One shows that the political vacuum left by the pope’s death was only partially filled by the Popolo Romano and the College of Cardinals, who competed with each other in a war of decrees (sometimes also in physical altercations through their constables) for jurisdictional supremacy over Rome. Chapter Two examines the rites, both popular and official, that announced the pope’s death and the vacancy of the papacy. In both chapters, the very political and ritual structures themselves, which were supposed to provide for peace and stability, served to exacerbate violence and disorder in Rome.

The next three chapters explore the personal and collective violence that spiked in the wake of the pope’s death and the cessation of his law. During *sede vacante*, Rome became, in the words of the Venetian ambassador, Alvise Mocenigo, “the Forest of
Chapter Three argues that a major force of disorder and violence can be attributed to the vagabonds, bandits and poor peasants who came to Rome to find jobs as guards in the house of cardinals and magnates. Chapter Four explains the custom of Romans getting revenge during *sede vacante*. Romans often stored pent-up desires for revenge until they could be released during the vacancy. They rarely took part in the classic vendetta of the nobility, but followed a set of cultural scripts of revenge that used verbal insults and physical punishments to obtain and broadcast their “wild justice.” Their need for vengeance stemmed from arguments in the neighborhood and marketplace. This chapter demonstrates that not only did law and order breakdown during *sede vacante*, but so did community consensus. Despite this breakdown of the community, Romans could unite during the vacancy against “intimate outsiders,” that is, groups within the community who had earned the distrust and hatred of the people.

Chapter Five examines the collective violence against the Governor’s *sbirri*, the civic militia led by the *caporioni*, and the Jews of the city.

Chapters Six and Seven continue the exploration of city-wide demonstrations of violence and disorder. Chapter Six examines the window of opportunity that *sede vacante* opened to Romans in allowing them to critique the pope and protest his policies, activities normally curtailed by the living popes. This criticism took the form of handwritten invectives and letters since the Counter-Reformation popes prevented a printed newspaper from developing in papal territory. The most hated popes saw riots against their name, property and family in death. These riots borrowed the language of

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pillaging, but rather than reflecting personal ties that relatives and subjects shared with the pope, they criticized his heavy-handed policies. This was something new that emerged with papacy’s definitive return to Rome with Martin V and the subsequent state-building efforts of his successors. The pasquinades and the riots, taken as a whole, reveal that Romans could distinguish between what Paolo Prodi has called the pope’s two souls, his dual roles as spiritual father and secular prince. On one hand, in death, they could attack his name and his symbols of power. On the other, they flocked to St. Peter’s to venerate his corpse. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I examine the conflicts surrounding the conclave. Although papal bulls supposedly prevented outside influence, rumor, waging on the election, and “ritual” pillages all served to include the city in the politicking that occurred within the conclave. The conclave and papal election thus created a unique public sphere, one guided by rumor, disorder, and a myriad of voices, a public sphere that was very different from Jürgen Habermas’s classic bourgeois public sphere of the Enlightenment.46

Criminal Sources and Sede Vacante

Besides the usual sources—diaries, newsletters, and decrees of the College of Cardinals and Popolo Romano—with which historians of early modern Rome have had recourse, this dissertation, especially in Chapters Three to Five, makes use of new sources. The first are the trials (processi) and depositions (costituti) of the tribunal of the

Governor of Rome, the most powerful criminal judiciary in Rome and the surrounding countryside, found at the Archivio di Stato di Roma. Although its activities were supposed to cease operating during the vacancy, the Governor continued to send his sbirri out and to receive reports. In a few cases, the Governor’s judges even conducted trials during the vacancy, but most of them date to after the papal election vacancy, when his tribunal fielded denunciations and complaints from victims of crime during the vacancy. In other cases, criminals under torture confessed to crimes that they had committed during past vacancies. The trials and costituti of the Governor’s tribunals are long and detailed. The governor’s notaries took down everything the witness or criminal said, including their screams and prayers while under torture. Thus, they give the voice and attitudes of people—with the caveat that the accused and sometimes even the witnesses faced torture, usually the corda, having their hands tied behind their back and being dropped from various heights. In many ways, then, the Governor’s tribunal operated similarly to the Inquisition trials, as its officials sought the truth primarily through denunciation and torture, both of which present problems to the modern researcher.

Another factor with which one must contend is that many of the witnesses and accused presented to the court their version of the truth. Like early modern Frenchmen who spun tales to procure a pardon from the king, Romans typically either stretched the truth or refused to divulge the entire story in order to save themselves before the judges and notaries.47 This does not make the trials useless, as the incidental details of the

denunciations and trials often provide details about society not found in other sources. Indeed, scholars have only recently used these trials to examine popular mores in early modern Rome.\textsuperscript{48}

Unfortunately, only a few trials from the Governor’s tribunal have survived for each \textit{sede vacante}. Therefore, I have also made use of the registers of the Tribunale dei Conservatori, which are filed under the records of the Tribunale del Senatore in the Archivio di Stato di Roma. The conservators and the \textit{caporioni} carried out trials and heard testimony from witnesses during \textit{sede vacante}. The registers of the conservators’ tribunal are quite fragmentary, often ending abruptly due to their state of preservation. Many of the criminal proceedings are just the nightly reports of the \textit{caporioni} or their patrol members, while others consist of the denunciations of victims. However, a few were true trials, which included depositions from witnesses and the accused before the caporioni (or conservators’ judges) and their notaries. On the whole, each “case” was quite small. Moreover, none have survived before 1623; thus I make use of three codices that contain the registers of the sede vacante of 1623, 1644, and 1655. These tomes are organized differently: the registers for the years 1644 and 1655 are arranged in bundles called \textit{buste}. Only about 40 \textit{buste} have survived for the \textit{sede vacante} of 1644, whereas

that of 1655 contains several hundred, numbering almost two thousands pages. The registers for the *sede vacante* of 1623 were not kept in *buste*.

Both sources have their advantages. The Governor’s tribunal, although containing only a handful of trials pertaining to *sede vacante*, provides the richest and longest trials. For their part, the records of the conservators’ provide an immediate snapshot of the details of events as it occurred during the vacancy—while they were still fresh. Both provide us with privileged insights into the violent world of ordinary Romans during *sede vacante*. 
CHAPTER 1

THE POLITICAL STRUCTURES OF SEDE VACANTE

“The King is dead! Long live the King!” These words habitually resounded in the ears of French subjects at the death of their king and the immediate succession of his heir in the early modern era. This ceremonial phrase developed from the efforts of jurists and royal officials during the latter part of the Middle Ages to provide a political and symbolic continuity during the brief interregnum between the death of reigning king and the coronation of his successor. The idea was to give the illusion that neither the dignitas of the king fell vacant nor the judicial structures of the realm ceased functioning with his death. Royal officials first accomplished this with an effigy of the dead monarch that would lie in state until the coronation of his successor, but by the time of Louis XIII the French crown had adopted this phrase and the hasty presentation of the heir-apparent as the king to the people.1 Papal magistrates and masters of ceremonies, in contrast, responded quite differently when the pope died. Rather than perform rites that fictitiously maintained the pope’s existence and the continuation of his government during sede vacante, they baldly proclaimed the abrupt lapse of his dominion. Since the papacy was an elective monarchy, papal officials could not adopt the French rite of

1 On the efforts of medieval and early modern jurists and officials in grappling with the ceremonial and legal problems of interregna, see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology (Princeton: Princeton University, 1957), 314-450. For the development of the funeral ceremonies of the French monarchy, see Ralph Giesey, The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France (Geneva: Droz, 1960), 177-91.
swiftly declaring a successor after the death of the pope. The Catholic world but also Rome and the Papal States had to wait as the cardinals gathered in the conclave to elect the next occupant of St. Peter’s throne—a wait that could be as short as two weeks or as long as several months in extreme cases, although, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, on average the cardinals took about a month to select a pope.

According to a venerable tradition, codified in several bulls that culminated in Pius IV’s *In eligendis* of 1562, most of the machinery of papal government shut down from the time of the pope’s death until the coronation of his successor. The offices of the Dataria and Cancelleria, important bureaucracies respectively dealing with dispensations and papal finances, closed for the duration of the vacancy while the criminal and civic tribunals of Rome, including the dominant court of the Governor of Rome, could not open new cases. Only the financial heart of the papacy, the Apostolic Chamber, continued its activities under the guidance of the Cardinal Chamberlain. This prelate broke the “ring of the fisherman” used to affix the pope’s seal on official documents, thereby signifying the end of his regime and the prohibition of making new laws during *sede vacante*. In this regard, the papacy shared much in common with other early modern elective monarchies, such as the Holy Roman Empire and Poland, which

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emphasized the sudden lapse of government with the death of the monarch. In the case of the papacy, a fear existed of a family attempting to establish dynastic control over the papal crown—a fear not so farfetched when one thinks of the ambitions of the Medici and Farnese families.

With the death of the pope, Rome lost its political and charismatic center. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, popes had claimed the largest share of political and ceremonial space in the city through the transformation of recalcitrant feudal lords into tamed court nobles and through the progressive weakening both of the College of Cardinals and the municipal authorities on the Capitoline Hill. The growing absolutist tendencies of the popes were reflected in their demands that they be the only actor in the city’s ceremonial stage. In 1637, for example, at the crowning of the heir-apparent of the Habsburg family as King of the Romans, foreign ambassadors and Roman nobles competed with one another in staging celebrations in his honor throughout the city. When the communal magistrates sought permission from Urban VIII to hold their own festivities to pay respect to the new king, the pope rebuked them, saying that, “in Rome

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3 In Poland, for example, from 1370 until the last royal funeral before the partition, royal officials placed a mounted knight wearing a helmet with a closed visor in the main cathedral. They then knocked the knight down from the horse, shattered his lance and broke the royal seal, all to symbolize the end of the king’s power. See Aleksander Gieysztor, “Gesture in the Coronation Ceremonies of Medieval Poland,” in János M. Bak, ed., Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1990), 153-55.


he was King of the Romans.” 6 Without the powerful figure of pope, Rome fell into a jurisdictional limbo characterized by competing institutional groups normally held in check by his presence. The two principal powers that claimed greater authority during the sede vacante were the College of Cardinals and the municipal officials. Hitherto downtrodden by the living popes, they demanded a larger role in the political life of the city during the interregnum and frequently clashed with one another in the defense of their claims to dominion. But other players demanded a share in new opportunities that the vacancy presented to the city. Romans from nobles to the members of the city’s militia sought a role in the governance of the city that frequently led to very real battles in the streets.

The Pope’s Relatives

Sede vacante not only saw the demise of the pope and the cessation of his law, but also witnessed the abrupt decline in influence of his house. When a cardinal assumed the title of pope, he raised his family and familiares up with him. The newly-elected pope lost no time in bestowing cardinalates onto his relatives and allies, turning his remaining lay relatives into princes and marrying them into old feudal families, and supplying both family and clients with a myriad of sinecures. 7 The cardinal-nephew, known colloquially as the cardinale padrone (“the boss cardinal”), played a large role in the papal


government as the secretary of state and sometimes, as in the case of Paolo Emilio Sfondrati and Ludovico Ludovisi, dominated their infirm uncles, respectively popes Gregory XIV and Gregory XV. At the onset of sede vacante, the loss of this power and patronage loomed over the nephews and the papal family. At best, the family would be able to maintain some influence over the conclave, enough to have a candidate less hostile to them elected as pope. At worst, it might suffer from a backlash of anger and resentment aroused by the excesses of its years of rule as happened both to the Carafa in 1559 and the Barberini in 1644. A few papal families attempted to maintain their authority during sede vacante beyond involving themselves in the political maneuverings for which early modern conclaves are notorious. In 1549, during the vacancy of his grandfather Paul III, the cardinal-nephew Alessandro Farnese, fearing the end of his family’s influence, took extraordinary measures to ensure their continuation through the interregnum. Before the pope had died, Alessandro ordered all the gates of Rome closed and forbade all travelers from entering or leaving the city, including the couriers of foreign dignitaries, much to the Spanish ambassador’s chagrin. The cardinal-nephew then established his control over Castel Sant’Angelo, the papal fortress and prison where the city’s munitions and treasury were located, and placed sixty guards there, making “them swear an oath to him in front of the warder.”8 He finally had captains raise five thousand foot soldiers from the surrounding countryside for the protection of the city.

Alessandro’s actions angered many cardinals, who felt that he “ought not to have acted

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on his own account, but in the name of the Sacred College,“ the primary power of sede vacante.9

A far greater challenge to the customary rules governing sede vacante occurred in November 1558, when Paul IV took the unprecedented step of naming his grandnephew Alfonso Carafa, the cardinal of Naples, regent and taking the seal of Apostolic Chamber away from the Chamberlain, Guido Ascanio Sfroza. Why the pope chose the young and inexperienced Alfonso over his nephew Carlo Carafa is unclear. Perhaps he had already gotten wind of the immoral ways of Carlo, which led to his exile by his uncle in January 1559. Regardless, Alfonso was to share control of the papal finances and head the conclave alongside Sfroza during the imminent vacancy.10 Once Paul died on 18 August 1559, Sforza and Alfonso “had words with one another,” with the chamberlain complaining that he “did not want [the regent] to meddle in anything.”11 Alfonso, for his part, had stationed himself with two companies of foot soldiers and fifty harquebusiers in the city with the intention of taking on his role as regent of the Holy Church during the vacancy. Meanwhile, Sfroza called the cardinals into a congregation on 20 August 1559 and “protested with these [cardinals] of not wanting a companion in his office” and “that it was not fair to have his authority, given and confirmed by so many pontiffs, diminished

9 CSP, p. 272.


without any fault on his part.”\(^{12}\) No doubt Sforza’s anger was magnified both by the fact he had purchased the office of chamberlain from Paul III in 1537 and because the chamberlain remained the highest ranking official to keep his power during *sede vacante*. The cardinals debated the issue and resolved to remove Alfonso from “the administration of matters concerning Sede Vacante” and to keep the chamberlain in his jurisdiction, “as was the ancient custom.”\(^{13}\) During the discussion in the conclave, the conservators, the three leaders of the communal government, and the several nobles from distinguished Roman families, appeared at the congregation to demonstrate their support of the chamberlain. Faced with such opposition, further aggravated by the popular discontent with the Carafa, Alfonso prudently respected the College’s decision.

Both episodes show that the laws of *sede vacante*, although established by tradition and inscribed in papal bulls, were not always written in stone. Papal families sought to find ways to subvert these laws in their favor and, in the case of the Carafa, sought to change these rules. The desire to retain a hold on the power to which these families had grown accustomed motivated the actions of the nephews and popes. But fear played no less of a role in their actions as many papal families suffered major repercussions for their years of misrule. Members of both the Carafa and the Barberini families were exiled after the death of their papal leader.

Most families of the deceased pope preferred to work with the College of Cardinals rather than fight against its authority. In most cases the College of Cardinals

\(^{12}\) ASM, Carteggio, Rome, filza 889, dispatch of Emilio Stangheli, f. 662v: “che non honesto che senza demerito suo, fassi, et diminuta la potesta data, et confirmata da tanti altri pontefici.”

\(^{13}\) BAV, Urb.lat 1039, f. 71v.
accorded them a small role during the vacancy through the bestowal of minor offices. Since the second half of the sixteenth century, most popes had granted the office of castellan of Castel Sant’Angelo to a lay relative, typically a brother or nephew, with the duty of guarding the papal treasury and prisons both in normal times and during sede vacante. The title was really a sinecure as a vice castellan with military experience took care of the quotidian duties that position warranted. The College of Cardinals always confirmed the pope’s relative in this position after his death.¹⁴

A far more important position that cardinals entrusted to the lay nephew of the deceased pope was the Captain (later General) of the Army of the Holy Church, which entailed recruiting soldiers from the Roman countryside and Umbria to watch the city and the conclave as well as monitoring their behavior during their stay in Rome. The cardinals voted on whom to bestow this office in the first meeting of the Sacred College. Generally the lay nephew of the pope had no trouble getting elected, with only a few negative votes at each congregation. However, personal animosities occasionally surfaced. Taddeo Barberini, for example, feeling the general hatred of his family after Urban VIII’s death in 1644 only succeeded to the generalship after a heated debate among the cardinals. Many of the cardinals still held a grudge against Taddeo for his holding the honorific title of Prince Prefect. The title had once belonged to the Della Rovere rulers of Urbino until the dynasty’s extinction in 1631 and should have died with the family, but Urban VIII, in effort to add luster to his family’s name, gave it to his nephew. This angered many of the nobles and ambassadors in Rome who refused to

acknowledge Taddeo’s possession of it. Annoyed with the Barberini upstart, the Cardinals de’ Medici and Este vigorously opposed Taddeo’s investiture as General of the Holy Army, but in the end he won the office. However, the cardinals ordered him “to have a simple name,” a reference to his title of Prince Prefect.

The General of the Holy Church, like the castellan, was largely an honorific title, especially since many of its holders came from bourgeois backgrounds whose families, such as the Borghese, Barberini and Pamphilj, lacked the military experience of the more ancient feudal families of Rome. The general possessed no legal authority during the vacancy, but could issue bandi, or decrees, stamped with the arms of sede vacante, the crossed keys surmounted by a canopy, that regulated the soldiers stationed at the conclave and the city walls. Only three of these bandi have survived for the sedi vacanti of 1592, 1623 and 1644; they concern themselves primarily with the discipline of soldiers. For example, they prohibit gaming in the barracks and while on duty as well as admonished soldiers not to molest travelers or steal from vineyards as they watch over the city gates.


16 For the opposition of de’ Medici and Este, see ASVenice, Dispacci degli ambasciadori al senato, Rome, filza 121, dispatch of Cardinal Federico Cornaro of 30 July 1644, f. 45v-46r. Cornaro represented the Venetian government as an extraordinary ambassador in place of regular ambassador during Urban VIII’s vacancy. For the quote, see BC, cod. 1832, Ameyden, “Diario di Roma,” p. 106: “havesse il nudo nome.”

17 Besides the General of the Holy Church, only the Cardinal Chamberlain, the Governor of Rome, and the Governor of Borgo, whose jurisdiction encompassed the neighborhood surrounding the Vatican, could issue bandi bearing these arms.

18 ASR, Bandi, vol. 8, bando of Cesare Facchinetti, [no day given] January 1592; ASV, Misc. Arm. IV & V, t. 73, bando of Honorato Ludovisi, 13 July 1623, f. 296r; and t. 74, bando of Taddeo Barberini, 3 August 1644, p. 346.
Since the general often lacked experience in the ways of war, the Sacred College sometimes elected a lieutenant from the ranks of the Roman Barons. Prized for their military expertise throughout Europe, these nobles did the actual work of recruiting and regulating the soldiers necessary for the interregnum. During the vacancy of Sixtus V, for example, the college of cardinals elected his nephew Michele Peretti, a youth of “tender age” as the General of the Holy Church, but charged Honorato Caetani, a noble Roman of old stock with much battlefield experience, with taking care of the daily affairs of protecting the city and conclave. Throughout Sixtus’ vacancy, according to the avvisi, the cardinals relayed orders exclusively to Caetani, thoroughly bypassing Peretti.

On 12 September 1590 the Sacred College ordered Caetani to increase the number of soldiers guarding the city to five hundred due to the many murders and disturbances occurring throughout Rome. The college later told Caetani to execute anyone who attempted to break into the conclave.

Other times, the cardinals allowed the general to choose his own lieutenant, as did Alessandro de’ Medici during the vacancy of Leo XI in 1605, under the stipulation that “he must be a Roman”—meaning he must be a noble from the feudal families that had

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20 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 29 August 1590, f. 441v. The Caetani were the dukes of the small fiefdom of Sermoneta.

21 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 12 September 1590, f. 467r.

22 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 24 November 1590, f. 610v. This order came during the vacancy of the short-lived pope, Urban VII, who did not have enough time to insinuate his family into the power structures of the papacy. Hence both Peretti and Caetani retained their positions until the election of Gregory XIV on 5 December 1590, a good indication that the College of Cardinals had confidence in Caetani’s ability as a commander.
dominated the Roman countryside for centuries. De’ Medici selected another Caetani, Pietro, as his lieutenant, which “was praised not only by the Sacred College, but by all of Rome.”\(^{23}\) However, the cardinals generally sought to keep the ability of selecting and overseeing the lieutenant as their prerogative. In a subsequent congregation during Urban VIII’s vacancy, the cardinals stipulated that they had the authority “to order the Signor General of the Holy Church all that which is necessary for the security of all these [cardinals and retainers] that come to the Conclave” and that the general should be “totally dependent” on them.\(^{24}\) Thus, the cardinals saw the old papal family as a threat to the authority it had gained during \textit{sede vacante}. Nevertheless, the papal nephews still held onto the military office of General of the Holy Church until Innocent XII’s bull \textit{Romanum decret Pontificem} (1692), which effectively abolished nepotism within the Church.\(^{25}\)

\textbf{The College of Cardinals}

The major power of \textit{sede vacante}, stipulated by written constitutions since Nicholas II’s \textit{In nomine Domini} (1059), was the college of cardinals. At one time, the

\(^{23}\) ASV, Segretario di Stato, Avvisi, t. 1, \textit{avviso} of 4 May 1605, f. 7r.

\(^{24}\) ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 121, dispatch of Cardinal Federico Cornaro of 6 August 1644, ff. 51r-v.

\(^{25}\) Antonio Menniti Ippolito, \textit{Il tramonto della Curia nepotista: Papi, nipoti e buricrazia curiale tra XVI e XVII secolo} (Rome: Viella, 1999), 112-16, especially for p. 113 for the generalship of the Holy Church. Innocent’s vacancy of 1700 was the first time the lay nephew of the pope did not hold the position of general. The amateur historian, Francesco Valesio, left this account in his diary: “for the abolition of nepotism, it was prohibited to create generals of the Holy Church.” See his \textit{Diario di Roma}, ed. Gaetana Scano, vol. I (Milan: Longanesi, 1977), 62: “per l’abolizione del nepotismo, si proibisce il creare generali di Santa Chiesa.”
cardinals wielded real power as advisors to the pope and shapers of policy. During the Great Schism they challenged the papacy with the idea of a permanent council that would check the power of the pope. But with the end of the Great Schism and the permanent return of the papacy to Rome under Martin V in 1420, the cardinals as a group saw their influence steadily diminished throughout the fifteenth century as papal authority waxed throughout the fifteenth century. By the late sixteenth and seventeenth century, the cardinals had been relegated to mere administrative and ceremonial roles within the church bureaucracy.\(^\text{26}\) The vacancy opened new horizons for the cardinals. First, it allowed them to exercise their one source of true power with the papacy: the ability to elect the next pope. Second, it allowed them to regulate Rome and the Papal States in the absence of their lord. However, popes, ever fearful of the liberties that the cardinals might take during *sede vacante*, had established severe limitations on the college’s ability to act through bulls that culminated in the early modern period with Pius IV’s *In eligendis*.\(^\text{27}\) This bull defined the authority of the College of Cardinals solely in administrative terms. They could provide for the defense and provisioning of Rome and the Papal States, but could not exercise any legislative or judicial powers in both religious and temporal affairs.

\(^{26}\) The gradual weakening of the College of Cardinals coincided with both its Italianization and steady augmentation from twenty-four members at the time of the Council of Trent to seventy during the pontificate of Sixtus V (1585-90). This transformation had the effect of making the college more dependent on the papacy as each pope filled its ranks with Italian members indebted to him for their rise to the purple. See Jean Delumeau, *Vie économique et sociale de Rome dans la seconde moitié du XVIe siècle*, t. I (Paris: Boccard, 1957-59), 291; Barbara McClung Hallman, *Italian Cardinals, Reform, and the Church as Property* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985); Denys Hay, *The Church in the Italy in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 37-40; and Prodi, *The Papal Prince*, 82-86.

\(^{27}\) Spinelli, *La vacanza*, 229-45.
The Cardinal Chamberlain and the Capi degli Ordini, the three deans of the orders of deacons, priests and bishops, assumed leadership of the cardinals at this time. Consequently they lead the college’s congregations that met both before and after they had entered the conclave. The Cap degli Ordini normally fulfilled ceremonial roles while the pope lived. The Cardinal Chamberlain, however, who as head of the Apostolic Chamber already held tremendous authority over the papacy’s economic policy, saw his power magnified considerably as he assumed the leadership of the college until the election of a new pope.\textsuperscript{28} The benefits of this life-long office, especially during the vacancy, can be seen in reigning popes’ efforts to secure it for their families: Clement VIII bought the office for Pietro Aldobrandini, in 1599 and Urban VIII for Antonio Barberini in 1638. The acquisition of the offices by both popes’ nephews stirred up controversy in the Curia.\textsuperscript{29}

Although the cardinals voted on all major decisions that the Sacred College undertook, the chamberlain had the ability to act alone in matters of urgency and along with the Capi degli Ordini could issue \textit{bandi} that regulated Rome during the vacancy. A reflection of his authority was his use, together with the Governors of Rome and Borgo and the General of the Holy Church, of the arms of \textit{sede vacante} on his \textit{bandi}. This was

\textsuperscript{28} On the Cardinal Chamberlain and Capi degli Ordini, see Del Re, \textit{La Curia Romana}, pp. 285-97 and Giovanni Battista De Luca, \textit{Il dottor volgare ovvero il compendio di tutta la legge civile, canonica, feudale e municipale} (Florence: V. Batelli, 1839-43 [1673]), vol. IV, bk. 15, ch. 6, and pp. 503-04. For the Chamberlain and his authority while the pope lived; see Maria Grazia Pastura Ruggiero, \textit{La Reverenda Camera Apostolica e i suoi archivi} (Rome: Archivio di Stato in Roma, 1984), 63-75.

\textsuperscript{29} Pietro Aldobrandini held this position until his death in 1621. Antonio Barberini enjoyed the office for the long tenure of twenty-three years (1638-71). On the purchase of their offices; see Pastura Ruggiero, \textit{La Reverenda Camera Apostolica}, 66 and Nussdorfer, \textit{Civic Politics}, 46. In the early 1630s, curialists valued the office at 50-70,000 scudi; see Fausta Piola Caselli, “Aspetti del debito pubblico nello Stato Pontificio: Gli uffici vacabili,” \textit{Annali della facoltà di scienze politiche dell’Università degli studi di Perugia}, vol. 1 (1970), 55-56.
a *padiglione*, or canopy, that covered the crossed keys of the papacy. The *padiglione* represented the lapse of papal authority and the temporary leadership of the chamberlain, who of all of officials of the interregnum had the right to employ it in conjunction with his personal insignia. The chamberlain also minted real coins with the *padiglione* on one side and his arms on the other that would be used for the duration of the interregnum. In addition, he sometimes issued commemorative medallions bearing both emblems that from the *sede vacante* of Urban VIII onward were used as permits to allow servants and ambassadors entry into the conclave.\(^{30}\)

Immediately after the death of the pope, the chamberlain and the Capi degli Ordini, sometimes in union with the cardinal-nephew, summoned the cardinals present in Rome to the first congregation in the sacristy of St. Peter’s. At this consistory they planned the nine days of funeral rites, the *Novendiales* that preceded the start of the conclave and made the necessary arrangements for the regulation of Rome and the provinces. One of the first tasks to occupy the cardinals was the nomination of officials, who provided law and order to Rome during the frequently turbulent time of *sede vacante*. As we have already seen, the cardinals voted in a typically default election on the General of the Holy Church. They also chose an ecclesiastic to replace the lay Governor of Borgo, a relative of the deceased pope who policed the autonomous area

around the Vatican. For the duration of the vacancy, the new Governor of Borgo, sometimes called the Legate of the Conclave, watched over the conclave and this neighborhood. The governor commanded the squad of Swiss guards stationed at the conclave and had control over Castel Sant’Angelo, taking over the position of castellan of the papal fortress that was generally held by the lay nephew of the dead pope. In this capacity he watched over the papal treasury, prisons and munitions. To help him regulate Borgo and the conclave, he had the ability to issue bandi in his own name, which lacked power outside his jurisdiction. In 1586, jurisdiction became even more complicated after Sixtus V annexed Borgo to Rome, thus making it a rione, or district of the city. Civic officials now patrolled Borgo alongside the governor’s men during the vacancy.

The cardinals also voted on whether to confirm the Governor of Rome in his position. The Governor of Rome was the most powerful judicial authority in the city while the pope lived. His jurisdiction in criminal matters extended well beyond Rome and even touched subject cities. Since its formation in the fifteenth century, the office of Governor of Rome grew with the march of papal absolutism, so that by the end of the sixteenth century, it had marginalized the numerous smaller tribunals that dotted the judicial landscape of Rome. He was the only judge who had the power to speak in the

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31 Niccolò Del Re, “Il Governatore di Borgo,” Studi Romani 11 (1963), 13-14 and 20. The lay office of Governor of Borgo was created in 1555 by Julius III and was abolished by Clement IX in 1667. The ecclesiastic office of Governor of Borgo was created during the vacancy of Paul III in 1549 and was abolished by Clement X in 1732.

32 The bandi issued by the Governor of Borgo centered primarily on the conclave: punishing those who attempt to disrupt the election and disciplining unruly soldiers; see ASV, Arm. Misc. IV & V, t. 26, bando of 28 April, 1605, p. 224; bando of 21 February 1621, p. 225; bando of 31 July 1644, p. 226; and bando of 9 January 1655, p. 227.

33 Peter Blastenbrei, Kriminalität in Rom (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995), 11-12 and 39-44; Irene Fosi, La giustizia del papa (Rome: Laterza, 2007), 23-29; Niccolò Del Re, Il Monsignor Governatore (Rome:
living pope’s name. With his master dead, his position changed dramatically. His tribunal shut down; he could not hear any new cases and his squad of policemen called sbirri quit patrolling the streets because tradition had accorded that responsibility to Rome’s civic militia instead since the fourteenth century. Nonetheless, he remained the eyes and ears of the cardinals ensconced in the conclave, reporting to them through letters on the crimes and tumults that occurred in the streets and squares of the city.34

Always a bishop with a thorough training in law, the governor also served as the voice of the Sacred College. After the death of each pope the governor under the command of the chamberlain and Capi degli Ordini proclaimed a general bando posted at the entrances into the city, outside all of its inns, and in the central market of Campo de’ Fiori that provided for the peace and quiet of Rome during the interregnum.35 This bando did a number of things. It reaffirmed all bandi already in effect that the governor had published before the sede vacante, but under the aegis of the Sacred College rather than the deceased pope, thus highlighting the change in dominion that occurred with his death. It also revoked all licenses to carry weapons issued by all powers in Rome, whether issued by the conservators or by any of the heads of the Curia’s various departments, including those of the chamberlain. Only soldiers recruited by the General of the Holy Church, the artisans of the civic militia, and guards licensed to watch the

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34 Only the letters of the Governor Giovanni Girolamo Lomellino from the vacancy of Urban VIII (1644) have survived, see ASV, Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Urbano VIII, ff. 479r-683r.

35 Like the chamberlain, General of the Church, and Governor of Borgo, the governor affixed the padiglione seal on the bandi he issued during the vacancy. The general bandi were entitled “Bando concernente il governo di Roma durante il Sede Vacante.”
palaces of cardinals and other magnates were allowed to carry weapons. These soldiers were given new licenses that expired at the end of the vacancy.\textsuperscript{36} Even the conservators had to seek approval from the cardinals and governor in order to arm the militia—no doubt a humbling experience for the heirs of the Roman Republic.

The general \textit{bando} forbade a variety of activities that were normally illegal during normal times. These included prohibitions against gambling, street-fighting, and carrying short and thus easily disguised weapons, such as daggers and handguns. Some of the points of the \textit{bando} centered on the type of activities that only occurred during \textit{sede vacante}, such as disturbing the conclave, betting on the papal election, and keeping an excessive number of guards at one’s home. The governor could also issue ad hoc \textit{bandi} according to the needs of the vacancy. These typically concerned the carrying of illicit weapons, always a problem during \textit{sede vacante} when armed men inundated Rome, looking for employment as palace guards or as soldiers for the conclave.\textsuperscript{37}

In theory, the governor’s tribunal ceased functioning for the duration of \textit{sede vacante}. In reality the governor sometimes sent his \textit{sbirri} out to patrol the city and even practiced summary justice.\textsuperscript{38} In most cases, the governor waited until the election of a new pope before trying criminals that he had arrested during the vacancy. Yet,

\textsuperscript{36} Upon the election of the new pope, the governor issued a \textit{bando} that revoked all licenses issued during the vacancy and that compelled all soldiers recruited to guard the city and the palaces of potentates to leave the city. ASV, Misc. Arm IV & V, t. 26, \textit{bando} of 13 December 1565, p. 210; \textit{bando} of 28 August 1590, p. 211; \textit{bando} of 5 March 1605, p. 212; \textit{bando} of 30 January 1621, p. 213r; \textit{bando} of 9 July 1623, p. 214; \textit{bando} of 31 July 1644, p. 215; and \textit{bando} of 9 January 1655, f. 217.

\textsuperscript{37} ASV, Misc. Arm. IV & V, t. 26, \textit{bando} of 19 August 1644, p. 251 and t. 48, \textit{bando} of 9 December 1590, p. 266.

\textsuperscript{38} On the activity of the governor’s \textit{sbirri} during \textit{sede vacante} and the controversy this provoked, see below in this chapter.
sometimes he meted out punishments for serious offenses to make an example for the population. During the vacancy of Gregory XIV (1591), his *sbirri* went about the city, confiscating illegal daggers and guns from soldiers and administering the strappado on the offenders immediately in the full public view, despite the dangers of doing so in such a volatile time. With the approval of the College of Cardinals the governor also administered the death penalty. During the vacancy of Sixtus V, the governor Girolamo Matteucci had the son of a cloth merchant hanged for attempting to shoot a *caporione*, one of the leaders of Rome’s neighborhood militia. Not even his father’s offer of two thousand scudi could save him from the gallows. On 26 March 1605, in the vacancy of Clement VIII, two bandits were drawn and quartered who had robbed two grain merchants in the Roman countryside. Governor Giovanni Girolamo Lomellino wrote the Sacred College during the *sede vacante* of Urban VIII that he had executed two criminals: a bandit who was caught inside the walls of the city and a counterfeiter, at piazza di Ponte.

As the governor possessed a great deal of authority during vacancy, his confirmation remained an important decision of the cardinals. Typically, they retained the governor of the deceased pope until his successor could select a permanent replacement. Yet, two examples exist of governors who had a much different experience.

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40 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 15 September 1590, f. 473r. A year later, during the vacancy of Gregory XIV, a soldier of the Grand Duke of Tuscany was hanged for carrying a small hand gun with a dagger attached to its end. See BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, *avviso* of 26 October 1591, f. 343r.


42 ASV, Conclavi, “Urbano VIII,” letters of 2 and 9 September 1644, ff. 560r and 569r.
In 1585, the governor of Gregory XIII, Francesco Sangiorgio, narrowly missed receiving confirmation from the Sacred College. The politicking of Cardinal Gonzaga on his behalf ensured he kept his position, but the Venetian ambassador Lorenzo Priuli wrote that his election succeeded “with few votes and with the dissatisfaction of the city.” Sangiorgio, known for his severity, not only angered the cardinals but all of Rome and “was little loved by this people [of Rome].” According to Priuli, the cardinals, “in order to better insure the authority and reputation of the Governor,” had Paolo Giordano Orsini accompany the governor with the conservators to the Capitol where the Roman baron used “loving words for the quiet of this city.”

Giacomo Francesco Arimberti, the governor of Rome under Innocent X, was even less successful than Sangiorgio. The Sacred College rejected his confirmation in 1655; he was the first and only governor to receive this indignity as the Venetian ambassador Niccolò Sagredo astonishingly wrote it “will be a thing without example.” The cardinals made this decision, according to Sagredo, due to his poor conduct while in office. The Roman diarist Giacinto Gigli was more specific. He complained just before Innocent X had died that Arimberti always used a certain severity and harshness without having regard to whatever sort of person, both against nobles and against their families and subjects in the castles around Rome of the Roman Barons, sending inspectors, who without any respect damaged the possessions and livestock of many. And so in Rome having jailed anyone that he might find in the night with unlicensed forbidden weapons or lantern, although he is of the

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43 ASVenice, Disacci, Rome, filza 19, dispatch of 12 April 1585, f. 99r. An avviso of 13 April noted that many of the cardinals did not want Sangiorgio’s confirmation: BAV, Urb.lat 1053, f. 171r.

44 ASVenice, Disacci, Rome, filza 19, dispatch of 20 April 1585, f. 119r.

45 Ibid.
family of whatever Cardinal or Prince, for something he has stirred against himself the hatred of all.\footnote{Gigli, \textit{Diario}, vol. II, 720: “haveva sempre usato una certa severità et aspressa senza haver riguardo a qualsivoglia sorte di persone, tanto contro i nobili, quanto contro le loro famiglie et Sudditi nelli Castelli intorno a Roma, della Baroni Romani, mandando Commissarii, li quali senza alcun rispetto rovinarono le possessioni, et i bestiami di moltim et cosi in Roma facendo carcerare qualunque di notte fusse trovato con arme o lanterna prohibita senza licenza, ancorché fusse stato della famiglia di qualsivoglia Cardinale o Principe, per la qualcosa si era concitato contro di se l’odio di tutti.” Gigli noted that even before Innocent X had died that Arimberti, fearing repercussions for his severity, had sought safety in the Chiesa del Giesù.} 

Once the cardinals had made their decision, the Master of Ceremonies told Arimberti, who was waiting outside the sacristy of St. Peter’s, that “he could go to his house in private dress because the Signor Cardinal’s had elected another Governor.” In order to show the court and the city that Arimberti had been replaced, the Master of Ceremonies then removed the insignia of the office of governor from his carriage and placed them on the carriage of the new governor, Giulio Rospigliosi.\footnote{Ibid., 730. Arimberti responded to this unprecedented dismissal by storming back to his home in central Rome. On his way, he encountered some armed men in Piazza Scossacavalli, perhaps inspired by the license of sede vacante to assert itself in the patronage system of the city and the case of Arimberti repeal a pope’s decision. These were not isolated cases. They also addressed liberties that the popes had trampled on while he lived. After the death of Paul IV, the cardinals freed several prelates, including Cardinal Giovanni Morone, who the Carafa pope had imprisoned on trumped-up charges of heresy.\footnote{Ibid., 731. The Guardian of the Conclave was also known as the Marshal of the Holy Roman Church, an office that the Savelli family had held since fifteenth century. At first the Marshal served as a military} 

In both cases the cardinals, responding to the discontent, particularly of the elite, with a papal official, used the opportunity of \textit{sede vacante} to assert itself in the patronage system of the city and the case of Arimberti repeal a pope’s decision. These were not isolated cases. They also addressed liberties that the popes had trampled on while he lived. After the death of Paul IV, the cardinals freed several prelates, including Cardinal Giovanni Morone, who the Carafa pope had imprisoned on trumped-up charges of heresy.\footnote{Ibid., 731. The Guardian of the Conclave was also known as the Marshal of the Holy Roman Church, an office that the Savelli family had held since fifteenth century. At first the Marshal served as a military} In the vacancy of Innocent X, the Sacred College voted in its first congregation
held on 7 January to restore Bernardo Savelli to his office of Guardian of the Conclave, which the pope had abolished in 1652. Some of these acts might have had the spirit of revenge guiding them. The Cardinal Chamberlain Antonio Barberini, whose family had suffered exile during much of Innocent’s pontificate, issued an edict allowing the itinerant vendors to return to Piazza Navona. Innocent had forbidden them from selling their wares in the square in order to construct the Fountain of the Four Rivers. Thus, although bound by bulls not make innovations in papal governance, the cardinals often took the opportunity of sede vacante to redress the wrongs of the pontificate of the deceased pope.

The Popolo Romano

The other major power of the papal interregnum was Rome’s communal government. Its officials met at the Capitoline Hill on the site formerly occupied by the commander, but by the sixteenth century he had become the protector of the conclave. The Marshal also had a tribunal called the Curia Savella with its own prison located near Campo de’ Fiori. In 1652, Innocent X permanently abolished the Savelli’s tribunal and closed their prisons in order to increase the authority of the Governor’s tribunal and to build a larger prison, the Carceri Nuove, on via Giulia. On the Marshal, see Niccolò Del Re, Il Maresciallo di Santa Romana Chiesa, Custode del Conclave (Rome: Istituto di studi romani, 1962).

49 BAV, Urb.lat 1039, avviso of 26 August 1559, ff. 74v-75r. Alessandro Pallantieri, a fiscal procurator jailed for malfeasance, was also freed by the cardinals. During the vacancy of Sixtus V, the cardinals freed a Captain Perugino, likewise accused of heresy, see Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 2 September 1590, f. 462r.

Roman Republic’s religious and civic center. First emerging in the twelfth century, the communal government, composed of a senator, three conservators, fourteen caporioni who lead the city’s artisan militia, and patricians and nobles eligible to attend its general councils was collectively known as the Popolo Romano.\textsuperscript{51} Like all independent institutions in early modern Rome, the Popolo Romano faced a growing marginalization with the papacy’s return from Avignon. By the sixteenth century, it lost many of its traditional privileges and saw its freedom of action hampered by the absolutist papal government. After each papal election in this period, the Popolo Romano sent a series of requests, or grazie, to the new pope asking him to restore liberties and privileges curtailed by the predecessor. Although characterized by a defiant tone at the beginning of the sixteenth century, by the end of the century the grazie had become more submissive as popes more often than not refuse to accord them to the civic government.\textsuperscript{52} In particular, the magistrates sought to defend its court, the Tribunal of the Senatore, from the progressive usurpation of its jurisdiction over criminal and civil matters by the Tribunal of the Governor.\textsuperscript{53} Despite failing to stop these incursions from the papacy, Rome’s communal government continued to exist until the nineteenth century.

As with many municipal governments of the early modern era, the Popolo Romano was dominated by a small oligarchy of elites composed of old Roman families


\textsuperscript{52} Rodocanachi, \textit{Les institutions communales}, 211, 263, and 320; and Pio Pecchiai, \textit{Roma nel Cinquecento} (Bologna: Cappelli, 1948), 215-46.

and new men who had grown wealthy from trade and rents. In contrast to most Italian cities, Rome made room in its communal regime for wealthy foreigners, who made eligible for office after five years of residence in the city. For example, the Sienese Borghese and the Umbrian Pamphilj families held high positions within the Popolo Romano after becoming thoroughly Romanized.\(^{54}\) Nevertheless, only a small number of Romans enjoyed the right to take to part in its government. Laurie Nussdorfer estimates that in Urban VIII’s day, around five- to six-hundred men out of a population of 115,000 monopolized the city’s political offices, particularly those of the conservators and caporioni.\(^{55}\)

While this group of nobles and patricians had once stood out as a volatile element in the Roman population, having staged two rebellions against the popes in the fifteenth century, by the early modern period it had resigned itself to papal leadership and had to supplicate each pope for the renewal of its rights and privileges. Hence sede vacante presented the magistrates with a coveted opportunity to exercise real dominion in the city.

In contrast to the cardinals, whose activities during sede vacante were defined by papal bulls, the civic magistrates lacked a written constitution outlining their interregnal powers and privileges until the mid-eighteenth century.\(^{56}\) Rather the Popolo Romano based its authority in the sede vacante on a tradition whose obscure origins are difficult to


\(^{55}\) Nussdorfer, Civic Politics, 67. All positions in the civic government were held for three months so that in any given year there would be twelve conservators and fifty-six caporioni.

establish, but which had a longstanding recognition from the fifteenth century onward. As soon as the Capitoline bell tolled, signaling the death of the pope, his laws ceased to function and the Popolo Romano began to exercise its newfound authority. To signify this change, the Senator of Rome, the chief judge of the Capitoline court and ceremonial head of the Popolo Roman chosen by the pope, took on a smaller role in its administration during the vacancy. In theory the senator stepped down from his position as judge and allowed the conservators to assume the task of meting out justice while he stayed in his palace on the Capitoline Hill with a squad of soldiers. Sometimes, due to the dramatic increase in violence during the vacancy, the conservators allowed the senator to hear criminal and civil cases as long as he kept them informed of the fines and punishments he administered.

The real power at the Capitol during sede vacante could be found in the Palace of Conservators, where all the civic magistrates and those eligible for office gathered in a general council after the pope’s death. In this general council the members of the Popolo Romano elected through sortition forty deputies who would help in the decision making and defense of the city. These deputies always came from the ranks of the city’s

57 Pecchiai, Roma nel cinquecento, 338. The Senator of Rome was similar in many ways to podestà of the medieval communes. Like the podestà, he was a foreign knight with legal training, who was to be an impartial judge and stand above factional rivalries. He generally came from cities subject to the papacy. See Del Re, La Curia Capitolina, 13-20 and Nussdorfer, Civic Politics, 69-70.

58 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, 10 May 1555, ff. 39r; 21 August 1559, f. 48v; and 8 May 1572, f. 122r.

59 ASC, Cred. I. vol. 6, 17 October 1591, ff. 217v-18r; 7 March 1605, f. 246r; and 23 July 1623, f. 286r. The conservators accorded the senator a lieutenant to help judge the numerous acts of violence committed during the vacancy of Gregory XV in 1623 (f. 286v). The senator could administer punishments up to the death penalty during the vacancy as he had one Virgilio di Capranica hanged in the main square of the Capitol for killing a locksmith: ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, 5 October 1590, f. 183r.
patriciate. After electing the gentlemen deputies, the general council disbanded, never to meet again during the interregnum unless in extraordinary circumstances. The group of forty deputies as well as the three conservators and fourteen caporioni served as the core of the communal government for the rest of the vacancy. They met in secret councils called congregations that proclaimed decrees and issued directives concerning the maintenance of the peace. The magnified importance of holding these offices during the vacancy sometimes led to arguments among the Popolo Romano. Outgoing officials refused to cede their seats to their newly elected replacements when the Popolo Romano gathered in the general council at the false news of Gregory XIV’s death on 2 October 1591. Similarly, the old caporione of the neighborhood district of Sant’Eustachio refused to give up his position to the recently elected Rutilio Puro at the start of Clement VIII’s vacancy in 1605. And Gigli noted that on the morning of Innocent X’s death the general council elected fifty gentlemen deputies instead of the usual forty, so coveted were the offices of communal government among the city’s patriciate now that they had authority during the interregnum.

At the secret councils, the magistrates decided upon edicts that the conservators later proclaimed under their own name. These edicts, like those of governor, provided for the peace and order of the city during the vacancy. Hence they,

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60 Notaries drew up lists of these deputies at the general council. Surnames from old Roman families such as Frangipani, the Mattei and the Muti appear frequently in these lists.

61 BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, avviso of 2 October 1591, f. 289v. Gregory died two weeks later on 16 October. The Popolo Romano had just elected its new officials when the false news of the pope’s death spread throughout the city.

62 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, f. 245r.

too, prohibited a number of activities: the carrying of daggers, handguns and other small weapons; going about in disguises; disturbing Jews both in and outside the Ghetto; gambling; and prostitutes riding in carriages. Other edicts ordered innkeepers to maintain a ledger of their guests and residents to keep a lighted candle at one of their windows at night to forestall crime. A concern for security prompted these edicts, but the conservators were eager to emphasize their jurisdictional authority over the Sacred College, which often lead to quarrels with the cardinals.

When not leading the secret councils, the three conservators occupied themselves with different duties. One of the conservators rode daily through Rome in a cavalcade of two hundred men that consisted of caporioni, gentlemen, and guards “in order to keep the city in peace and fear.” In addition to deterring violence among the population, the

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64 For short weapons; see ASR, Bandi, vol. 12, edict of 9 July 1623; vol. 18, edict of 29 July 1644; and vol. 21, edict of 11 January 1655. For disguises; see ASR, Bandi, vol. 12, edict of 10 July 1623; vol. 18, edict of 29 July 1644; and vol. 21, edict of 11 January 1655. For disturbing the Jews; see ASR, Bandi, vol. 12, edict of 10 July 1623; vol. 18, edict of 29 July 1644; and, vol. 21, edict of 9 January 1655. For gambling, see ASR, Bandi, vol. 12, edict of 10 July 1623; vol. 18, edict of 29 July 1644; and vol. 21, edict of 11 January 1655. In the sixteenth century, the secret councils had proclaimed decrees against gambling, but these have not survived: ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, f. 83v, decree of 18 October 1559; f. 94v, decrees of 17 December 1565; ff. 122r-v, decree of 8 May 1572; f. 182r, decree of 29 September 1590, f. 192r-v, decree of 3 October 1590; and f. 233r, decree of 2 January 1592. For prostitutes in carriages, see ASR, Bandi, vol. 12, edict of 10 July 1623; vol. 18, edict of 29 July 1644; and vol. 21, edict of 11 January 1655. Earlier decrees exist against prostitutes going about in carriage but they have not survived: ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, f. 83v, decree of 18 October 1559 and f. 122v, decree of 8 May 1572.

65 For keeping lights at the windows, see ASR, Bandi, vol. 18 edict of 29 July 1644 and vol. 21, edict of 11 January 1655. For the keeping of ledgers of guests, see ASR, Bandi, vol.18, edict of 29 July 1644.

66 Nussdorfer expresses this idea in Civic Politics, 240-43.

67 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, 12 April 1585, f. 144v. This was a traditional duty of the conservators. A Capitoline notary wrote during the sede vacante of Clement VIII that the conservator “rode through the city with a retinue of gentlemen and guards as was custom for the terror of the plebe.” ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, 12 March 1605, f. 247r. See also ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, 29 October 1591, f. 266v: wherein a notary reported that the noble magistrates and soldiers rode through Rome “with the Monsignor Governor of Rome to maintain the calm and fear of the people.” And an avviso of 1623 noted that the conservators had resolved “to go through the city often with the end of keeping it in greater calm,” ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 9, avviso of 29 July 1623, f. 206r.
cavalcade accorded the Popolo Romano an honorable place in the city as an avviso writer praised the orderliness of the military procession undertaken during the vacancy of Clement VIII and described it as “beautiful sight.” 68 Meanwhile, another conservator stood guard at the conclave with eight soldiers. A face-saving custom since this force was much smaller than the squad of Swiss guards of the Governor of Borgo and the company of soldiers under Duke Savelli that watched over the cardinals. 69 The last conservator remained at the Palace of the Conservators with a troop of fifty soldiers. There he heard the reports of the caporioni relating to the daily patrols of the artisan militia and judged criminal cases that arose during the vacancy. 70

The most important duty of the Popolo Romano was maintaining order in the streets and neighborhoods during the heightened period of violence and license that the pope’s death produced. The artisan militia, composed of three-hundred-twenty men from the fourteen rioni, or neighborhood districts handled this task. Normally playing a ceremonial role in the civic processions of Rome, the Popolo Romano only activated the militia in times of crisis that included war, plague and the sede vacante. Each rione contributed twenty to thirty artisans and shopkeepers to serve as constables in its patrol with the more populous districts in the city center such as Trastevere and Ponte receiving a greater share of men. 71 A master craftsman called a capotoro, or sometimes

68 BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 23 March 1623, f. 141r.
69 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, 8 May 1572, f. 121r.
70 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, 10 May 1555, f. 38v; 21 August 1559; f. 48v; 27 August 1559, f. 54r; and 8 May 1572, f. 121v.
71 Nussdorfer, Civic Politics, 72 and Pecchiai, Roma nel Cinquecento, 147 and 241-46. The artisan militia grew first emerged in the fourteenth century and once played a larger role in Rome’s military. This role
capostrada, led each patrol in the name of the caporione, who had to attend the meetings of the secret councils.\textsuperscript{72} Although the caporioni themselves frequently led the many of the patrols.

Each caporione used his home as a headquarters for his company where his constables met and he tried criminal cases that originated in his district. At the sounding of the Capitoline bell, a caporione would summon his men to duty by marching through the neighborhood with a drummer and the rione’s standard. Once he had collected all of his constables, the caporione marched with his company to the Capitoline Hill, where the he would attend the general council of the Popolo Romano. The caporioni of Ponte, Sant’Angelo and Campitelli took their men to the prisons located in their districts to free the jailed debtors before going to the Capitol.\textsuperscript{73} After this procession the companies set out to perform their interregnal duties, which included not only including patrolling the streets but also preventing the looting of cardinals’ palaces and imposing fines on lawbreakers.\textsuperscript{74}

diminished once popes began to rely on mercenary armies in the fifteenth century. The fourteen rioni are Borgo, Trastevere, Campo Marzo, Ponte, Parione, Regola, Sant’Eustachio, Pigna, Sant’Angelo, Ripa, Campitelli, Monti, Colonna and Trevi. Unlike the men of his company, the caporione did not have to live in the rione he represented.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., The members of each neighborhood company nominated three members from whom the caporione would choose to serve as capotoro for that year.

\textsuperscript{73} The Capitoline prison was found in the Palace of the Senator at the Capitol and in the district of Campitelli. The other main prisons, the Tor di Nona and the Curia Savelli, were respectively located in Ponte and Regola. The Governor of Rome, before the pope’s death, had transported all those imprisoned for serious crimes such as theft, banditry and murder to the papal prison of Castel Sant’Angelo, which remained locked during the sede vacante. .

\textsuperscript{74} On guarding the palaces of cardinals rumored to have been elected pope, see ASC, Cred. I., vol. 6, 9 May 1555, f. 27r. The capotori could issue summary fines for smaller offenses, such as failure to keep a light at the window. Edicts issued by the conservators imposed a heavy fine of fifty scudi on those that did not comply with the edict, although a decree issued to the caporioni on 6 March 1605 told the patrols not “to use severity in the issuing of penalties,” see ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, f. 244v. Evidently the caporioni and their
The Popolo Romano also had the traditional right of guarding the gates of Rome during the vacancy. A *caporione* along with a patrician of Roman origin watched each of the city’s thirteen gates with a contingent of soldiers recruited by a captain elected in the general council. In the same council, the *caporioni* would be assigned gates by sortition.75 The patricians generally stood guard at the gates for the duration of the vacancy since the *caporioni* had to lead their patrols through the streets and attend the meetings of the secret council at the Capitol. The civic magistrates always ensured that this duty was given to “a poor gentleman” and a citizen—because the position paid a small stipend and accorded a degree of honor to its holder.

Noble Offices of *Sede Vacante*

Many members of the most venerable families of Rome, called the Roman Barons, generally did not hold office in the civic government by the late sixteenth and...
seventeenth centuries. Yet these dukes and princes often sat in on the general and secret meetings of the Popolo Romano during *sede vacante*. Moreover, the vacancy also allowed certain members of the Roman nobility a direct experience of power through several hereditary offices tied to the interregnum. The Cesarini family who held the normally ceremonial position of Gonfalonier of the People, vestige of Rome’s medieval commune, saw it acquire a new authority after the pope’s death. The Gonfalonier, under the supervision of the conservators, patrolled Rome with a contingent of soldiers recruited jointly by the Popolo Romano and the Sacred College. Giuliano Cesarini, for example, as Gonfalonier of the People in the vacancy of Paul IV, played an instrumental role in calming the riots that erupted at the death of the hated pope. In a meeting of the Popolo Romano during Paul’s vacancy, the gathered magistrates recognized the “ancient custom of the signor Gonfalonier of this People” to help the *caporioni* watch over the city.76 Yet, the conservators also recognized his potential for troublemaking during the vacancy and consequently limited his activity. During the *sede vacante* of Gregory XIII in 1585, they ordered him “not to go about other than to the Church of San Giorgio to bless the flag because of it’s being sede vacante and for not causing a tumult.”77 By the late sixteenth and seventeenth century, the Cesarini, as Gonfaloniers, increasingly played a smaller role in the city’s defense during the vacancy.78 Thereafter, civic magistrates

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76 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, meeting of 21 August 1559, f. 47v.

77 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, decree of 22 April 1585, f. 153v: “non si andà altrimente alla chiesa di S. Giorgio a benedire il Gonfallone, per esser sede vacante, et per non far tumulto.”

78 On the Gonfalonier in the early modern era, see Rodoconachi, *Les institutions communales*, 347. The Cesarini held the office starting in 1530.
assigned his duties to a Captain of the Popolo, elected from among the patriciate at the first meeting of their general council.\footnote{For the election of the Captain of the Popolo, see BAV, Urb.lat 1073, \textit{avviso} of 19 March 1605, f. 131r and ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 9, \textit{avviso} of 15 July 1623, f. 192r and t. 96, \textit{avviso} of 20 August 1644, f. 222v.}

A longstanding tradition, recognized by both the College of Cardinals and the Popolo Romano, allowed Duke Mattei to assume the title of “Guardian of the Bridges and Ripa” during the vacancy. In this capacity, the duke posted soldiers at the bridges that connected Trastevere with the city’s port of Ripa, which were located close to family holdings on both sides of the Tiber. As with many \textit{ancien régime} offices, the duke’s role as guardian of the bridges had its benefits. The Jews in the nearby ghetto had to pay the duke’s soldiers five giulii when crossing the Ponte Quattro Capi to bury their dead outside Porta Portese on the Aventine Hill. In theory, the guards were paid to protect the Jews, but, in reality, it was a toll, which the Jews resented. During the \textit{sede vacante} of Innocent XI in 1689, Jewish leaders sent a petition to the Capi degli Ordini requesting the ability to use their own guards when crossing the bridge. The cardinals refused the request and the Jews continued paying the Mattei until the vacancy of Clement XIV (1774).\footnote{Attilo Milano, \textit{Il Ghetto di Roma} (Rome: Staderini editore, 1964), 262-66.} Edicts issued by the Popolo Romano throughout the early modern era recognized the Mattei’s rights to interregnal emoluments from the Jewish community.\footnote{ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, edict of 5 October 1590, f. 183r and edict of 2 February 1621, f. 274r. The eighteenth-century treatise on the rights of the conservators during \textit{sede vacante} included the last edict in its text; see ASC, Cred. XVI, vol. 27, “Trattato di Giurisdizione,” ff. 296v-97r.}

The Savelli family, however, held most important noble position during the vacancy. This was the position of Marshal of the Holy Church and Perpetual Guardian...
of the Conclave. This evolving office first originated as a military post in the twelfth century, then assumed a judicial function in the thirteenth century (which it kept until abolished by Innocent X in 1652), and finally in the second half of the sixteenth century acquiring the function of warden of the conclave. The position remained a hereditary possession of the Savelli family since Martin V had accorded it to Battista Savelli in 1430. Before the second half of the century, the position of warden of the conclave had generally been given to a powerful magnate of the Papal States.\textsuperscript{82}

Duke Savelli, as Marshal of the Conclave, served as a go-between for the cardinals. He held the three keys to the only door of the conclave and monitored the four wheels \textit{[rote]} through which food passed to the cardinals. These keys were a powerful symbol of his authority; the duke even incorporated them into the Savelli banner that hung from the apartment in the Vatican where he stayed during the vacancy. The Marshal controlled all access, whether in person or in written form, to the cardinals in the conclave. Those who wanted entrance into the conclave had to carry specially minted coins, usually lead, that bore his arms on one side and the symbol of \textit{sede vacante}, the crossed keys beneath an umbrella, on the reverse.\textsuperscript{83}

To aid him in his duties, Savelli recruited four companies of soldiers for a total of five hundred men. Three of the companies were auxiliaries composed of artisans that

\textsuperscript{82} For the history of the Marshal of the Holy Church; see Del Re, \textit{Il Maresciallo}. The Savelli held the position of marshal until the extinction of the family in 1712 with the death of Giulio Savelli. Clement XI sold the office to Augusto Chigi, whose family held the office until its abolishment by Paul VI in 1975. With the bulls of 21 March and 7 April 1652, Innocent X abolished the office of Marshal of the Conclave, but on the first day if the vacancy of the Pamphilij pope, the College of Cardinals reinstated the Savelli to their position; see Del Re, 46-47 and Gigli, \textit{Diario}, vol. II, 731 and 734.

\textsuperscript{83} Del Re, \textit{Il Maresciallo}, 50-51.
either lived near the Savelli palace at the Aventine Hill (also known as Monte Savelli) or near the conclave in the rione of Ponte. The first company was composed of fishmongers from the rione of Regola; the second of tanners from the same quarter; and the third of brass workers and rosary-makers from Ponte. Although divided in regiments of pike men and musketeers, the artisans of these regiments lacked training in the use of arms and were quite rowdy. By the vacancy of 1720, the Marshal had replaced them with soldiers supplied by the Sacred College. A far more reliable force was the larger company of two hundred soldiers recruited primarily from artisans of all types who lived near the Savelli ancestral home in Rome and “vassals” from the family fief in Albano. Savelli stationed a corporal and three of four soldiers at each wheel and the main entrance. The remainder of the troops remained at guard in St. Peter’s square where two temporary barracks had been constructed. As a show of force, the day of the closing of the conclave, the soldiers of the Marshal marched in a procession from Aventine Hill to the Vatican. The procession passed through the major centers of Rome: the Jesuit Church of Gesù, the church of Sant’Andrea dalle Valle, the piazza di Pasquino, the Orsini enclave at Monte Giordano, the Ponte Sant’Angelo and finally St. Peter’s Square.84

All three offices reflected that sede vacante offered new governmental opportunities not only to the ruling bodies such as the College of Cardinals and Popolo Romano, but also to individual nobles and their families. The importance of these

84 For the composition of his soldiers and the procession to St. Peter’s; see BAV, Chigiani, RVIII, cod. b, “Memorie et atti concernente la giurisdizione del Marescellato in Sede Vacante,” ff. 1-16r for Urban VIII’s vacancy and ff. 17r-58r for that of Innocent and Del Re, Il Maresciallo, 52-53. For the vacancy of 1644, the notary who wrote down the marshal’s various activities, referred to the soldiers as being “da amorevoli di Casa Savelli,” f. 13v. The diarist Gioseffé Gualdi noted that in the vacancy 1655, the main contingent of Savelli’s forces was composed of “many Albanesi, Ricciaroli and other subjects of the signor Prince,” see the Getty Research Institute, MS, “Diario di Gioseffé Gualdi,” t. II, f. 22v.
interregnal offices to the Roman Barons is reflected in their longevity. The Cesarini acted as Gonfalonier until 1688, when conservators eliminated the obsolete office to save money. The Mattei served as guardians of the bridges of Rome until 1774. The position of Marshal of the Conclave, although passing over to the Chigi family in 1712, survived the vicissitudes of the Papal States in the early modern and modern era only to be abolished by Paul VI in 1975.

**Jurisdictional Battles**

*Sede vacante* saw the cardinals, civic magistrates and Roman Barons all assert a greater authority that was denied them by the living pope. These groups invariably butted heads as they jostled over rights and jurisdictional authority during the interregnum. For example, Duke Savelli, as Marshal of the Conclave, frequently clashed with the Governor of Borgo over jurisdiction. In the vacancies of 1644 and 1655 the Marshal and the Governor argued over possession of the keys to the conclave. In 1655, the Governor of Borgo had a contingent of halberdiers prevent Savelli’s soldiers from entering into the Vatican, resulting in a clash that wounded two of the Governor’s men. During his uncle’s vacancy, Taddeo Barberini in attempt to assert his family’s weak position quarreled with the Marshal over the keys. The Capi degli Ordini, siding with tradition, restored the keys to the Marshal. Although asserting themselves, the cardinals

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86 BAV, Chigi, R VIII, cod. b, ff. 54r-v.
revealed their weakness as well since they only decided that Savelli carry the keys “till the new Pope should publish his particular decree in the case.”

However, the principal conflict during *sede vacante* pitted the Popolo Romano against the Sacred College as the two authorities, hitherto overshadowed by the pope and his family, vied for political dominion of Rome. The Popolo Romano claimed through a venerable but unwritten tradition that it had full authority over the policing of Rome during the vacancy while the Sacred College, often represented by the Governor of Rome, asserted itself based on papal bulls and on apparent failings of the communal government to keep the city peaceful and quiet. The jurisdictional battles that frequently marked *sede vacante* focused on patrolling the city, guarding the gates and issuing decrees.

In theory the artisan militia under the leadership of the *caporioni* took over the reins of justice during *sede vacante*. Although the governor’s tribunal supposedly did not dare to make any executions “out of respect for the people,” as the Venetian ambassador wrote in a report after the vacancy of Paul IV, in practice the governor frequently sent out as his *sbirri* during the interregnum. We have already seen the *sbirri* administering summary justice in the vacancy of Gregory XIV. *Avvisi* writers regularly complained of the continued and often substantial presence of the governor’s police. In the vacancy of

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87 ASV, Conclavi, “Conclavi da Pio II a Innocenzo X,” ff. 764v-65r and Biblioteca Casantense, cod. 1832 meyden, “Diario di Roma,” p. 117. The quote is from Gregorio Leti, *Il Cardinalismo di Santa Chiesa, or the History of the Cardinals of the Roman Church*, written in Italian, and faithfully Englished by G. H. (London: John Starkey, 1670), 282. Leti obviously had access to the above anonymous conclave report as his texts mirrors it word for word.

Gregory XIV in 1591 an avvisi writer grumbled that “the sbirri go about [Rome] alone or accompanied as they please” and another in the violent vacancy of Gregory XV of 1623 that “the Bargello of Rome makes [his rounds] freely through Rome with a large squad of Birri, doubly armed with wheel locks” so that “all was reduced to pristine quiet.” 89 The number of sbirri patrolling the streets could be large. After the death of Sixtus V a hundred of the governor’s men still made their rounds through the city, while in the vacancy of Gregory XV the governor ordered “almost all of the police together with their Bargello to go out every day through the city in order to obviate any troubles and noises that might occur in Rome in the present Sede Vacante.” 90 Thus the governor regularly defied the civic custom, especially considering that throughout the early modern period his sbirri only numbered about a hundred men in normal times. 91

From the extant letters that governor Giovanni Girolamo Lommelino wrote to the College of Cardinals during Urban VIII’s sede vacante, we know that the Governor of Rome kept the cardinals updated on the daily acts of crime and violence committed during the vacancy and had to ask for their permission to send forth his sbirri or notify

89 BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, f. 331r, avviso of 23 October 1591; Urb.lat 1093, f. 545r, avviso of 19 July 1623.

90 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, f. 473r, avviso of 15 September 1590; ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 9, f. 206r, avviso of 23 July 1623. The Venetian ambassador Agostino Nani noted that during the vacancy of Leo IX the governor sent out fifty of his sbirri for the needs of the city, ASVenice, Dispacci, filza 54, dispatch of 30 April 1605.

them that he had done so. The governor then had become a tool of the cardinals to assert their control over the city in the wake of the pope’s death.92

The Sacred College also turned its eye to the custodianship of the gates, which the Popolo Romano had long claimed as its right in times of crisis, including the *sede vacante*. Fearing that the *caporioni* and their men could not stop the deluge of vagabonds, bandits and foreigners that attempted to enter Rome at the death of every pope, the cardinals often ordered the conservators to wall up all but the most frequented gates of the city. Those left open varied from *sede vacante* to *sede vacante* but generally included the gates of Popolo, San Giovanni, San Paolo, San Sebastiano, Pio, Maggiore and Portese.93 During a major plague of banditry that broke out in the vacancy of Gregory XIV, the cardinals ordered all the gates of the city closed. The Popolo Romano had to send the patricians Mutio Matthei, Ottavio Gabicelli and Lorenzo Castellani to the Capi degli Ordini to ask them to keep some of the gates open “for the public utility of the citizens.” The civicmagistrates succeeded, but had to defend the ability to keep open the

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92 ASV, Conclavi, “Urbano VIII,” ff. 479r-683r. A single letter of Giovanni Beninni exists from the *sede vacante* of Gregory XV in which the governor notified the cardinals that he had sought out his men to investigate a brawl that occurred in the city’s port of Ripa. See ASV, Conclavi, “Lettere spedite per le morti di Clemente VIII, Leone XI, Paolo V e Gregorio XV,” letter of 3 August 1623, f. 299r.

93 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, 12 April 1585, f. 149v. At the secret council of 2 February 1621, the conservators received an order to “immediately have walled those Gates that are customarily walled on the occasion of sedia vacante (f. 273v).” Other examples include: BAV, Urb.lat 1040, *avviso* of 9 December 1565, f. 148r; Urb.lat 1053, *avviso* of 13 April 1585, f. 171r (which stated that only six gates remained opened); Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 29 September 1590, f. 500v; and Urb.lat 1073, *avviso* of 16 March, f. 129r, noted that the cardinals ordered all the gates but Popolo, Pia, San Giovanni and San Paolo closed.
gates at subsequent vacancies. On top of this the cardinals sometimes substituted *sbirri* or its own soldiers for the guards of the Popolo Romano.

In addition to asserting its jurisdictional hegemony in the city, a major reason for the Sacred College in sending out its *sbirri* and controlling the gates was the poor reputation of the artisan militia and soldiery of the Popolo Romano. The historian Pio Pecchiai wrote that “the stalwart communal legions of Middle Ages were but a faint memory.” Early modern contemporaries would have agreed with him. The Venetian ambassador Dandolo equated the police efforts of the Popolo Romano during the vacancy of Paul III with those of the Friuli before the Venetian government took over that wild region in northeastern Italy. Ten years later, his fellow ambassador Mocenigo dismissed the militia’s ability to maintain the peace in *sede vacante* in a report to the doge, writing that *caporioni* “had the task both day and night [of guarding the city, but] as I said to Your Serenity, every day one hears of some disorders.” An *avviso* circulating during of vacancy of Gregory XV complained of the “many crimes caused by the little skill of the soldiers new to handling arms.” Even Giacinto Gigli, six times

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94 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, 17 October 1591, f. 117r: “si per utile publico delli cittadini,” See also ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, 15 March 1605, f. 248r, when the conservators protested to the Sacred College that only the usual gates should be closed.

95 BAV, Urb.lat 1089, 3 February 1621, f. 101v: “Onde per le diligenze che si fanno alle Porte di non lassare entrare soldatesche per quelle de sbirri si è molto bene previsto alla quiete, et alla sicurezza della città.”


98 “Relazione di Luigi Mocenigo,” 37.

99 BAV, Urb.lat 1093, *avviso* of 26 July 1623, f. 564v.
elected as a *caporione*, wrote disparagingly of the militia as it prepared for war against the Duke of Parma in 1642:

These were all the Artisans of Rome, who for the major part were not trained in the use of arms. They not only do not know what a musket or pike is, but do not even know how to wield a sword.\(^{100}\)

When faced with a superior enemy the militia came up short. In the fall of 1590—during the vacancy of Urban VII—bandits raiding the Roman countryside easily overpowered artisans called to defend the city gates and then held them for ransom in vineyards surrounding the city.\(^{101}\)

The patrols of different *rioni* more often than not clashed against each other over jurisdictional boundaries. During the vacancy of Clement VIII, the *caporioni* of Ponte and Regola met each other at their boundaries and, “each one claiming that this was his jurisdiction, came to blows,” leaving eight soldiers wounded and two dead.\(^{102}\)

Boundaries between the *rioni* remained fluid until the eighteenth century and even civic officials remained confused about their exact location. For example, the chair maker Giovanni Romano, whose shop sat at the confines of Parione and Sant’Eustachio near Sant’Andrea dalle Valle, served in the militia of the *caporione* of Parione during the vacancy of Clement VIII, but a month later, during the vacancy of Leo XI, he marched with the patrol of the *caporione* of Sant’Eustachio.\(^{103}\) During the vacancy of Urban VIII,

\(^{100}\) Gigli, *Diario*, vol. I, 398: “Questi erano tutti li Artigiani di Roma, li quali per la maggior parte non erano avvezzi all’Arme, et non solo sapevano che cosa fusse mischetto, o picca, ma ne anco sapevano maneggiar la spada.” The pope never called upon the militia during the disastrous war.

\(^{101}\) BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 3 October 1590, f. 511r.


\(^{103}\) ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 553, testimony of Giovanni Romano, 14 May 1605, f. 1r-v.
the patrols of Colonna and Trevi bumped into each other during the night, provoking an exchange of gunfire amid the confusion of the night.\textsuperscript{104}

Yet, deliberate defense of authority rather than ignorance, caused many of the skirmishes between the rione patrols. The reckless pretension of the caporione of Regola, Benedetto Finocchieti, during Urban’s vacancy is an extreme example. Finocchieti involved his patrol in at least two battles while on patrol. During the night of 14 August, he ordered the artisans of his patrol to advance against the patrol of Parione when the two encountered each other in the Piazza della Monte Pietà. Upon hearing the skirmish, soldiers guarding the palace of Taddeo Barberini joined the fray. A gunfight ensued between the three groups that killed a member of the patrol of Parione and a notary who had stuck his head out of a window to investigate the noise.\textsuperscript{105} Less than a month later, during the evening of 5 September, the patrol of Regola encountered the patrol of Sant’Angelo at the border between the rioni. Once again, Finocchieti’s men, claiming that the patrol of Sant’Angelo “had passed the boundaries of their rione,” fired their guns at the opposing patrol.\textsuperscript{106} This time three or four soldiers of Sant’Angelo were wounded and one from Regola. The Conservators, having enough of these disputes, sent “a great

\textsuperscript{104} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 24, testimony of various artisans of both patrols, 8 August 1644, ff. 1r-4v.

\textsuperscript{105} ASV, Conclavi, “Urbano VIII,” letter of Governor Giovanni Girolamo to the Capi degli Ordini, 15 August 1644, ff. 529r-v. For the investigation, see ASR, TCS, busta 144, c. 147, testimony of various patrolmen, 24-27 August 1644, ff. 1r-16v.

\textsuperscript{106} ASV, Conclavi, “Urbano VIII,” letter of Governor Giovanni Girolamo to the Capi degli Ordine, 5 September 1644, f. 561r: “che questa fusse trascorsa i confine del suo Rione.” See also, ASV, Segretario di State, Avvisi, t. 96, avviso of 10 September 1644, f. 242r.
squadron of men armed with muskets and halberds” to patrol the region. Then they had Finocchieti and several soldiers from both rioni arrested the next day. Finocchieti was only released after paying a security of four thousand scudi and submitting to house confinement for the rest of the vacancy.

Although the caporione Finocchieti could be blamed for much of the trouble that occurred between Regola and its neighboring rioni, his capotoro and other members of the patrol took the border between the rione seriously. When Francesco Cordelli, the Finocchieti’s capotoro, stopped a Jew wandering outside the Ghetto in Piazza Farnese, he emphasized in his report that he arrested the man “because the said piazza was the jurisdiction of the signor caporione and my obligation.” Both Cordelli and Finocchieti had something to prove as caporioni and capotori rarely used such frank language in their reports. The conflict between Regola and Sant’Angelo had been brewing for much of the vacancy. On 14 August 1644 an off-duty member of the patrol of Regola fought with a member of the patrol of Sant’Angelo outside a tavern in the latter rione.

Conflicts over jurisdiction nevertheless remained a constant problem during sede vacante, even after Benedict XIV established their modern boundaries in 1744. A treatise written after 1767 on the powers of the Popolo Romano during the vacancy repeatedly warned the caporioni and the capotori to not “make the rounds outside the

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107 ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 96, avviso of 10 September 1644, f. 242r: “grossa squadra di gente armata di moschetto et alabardieri.”


109 ASR, TCS, b. 147, c. 135, report of Francesco Cordelli, 30 July 1644, f.1r: “et per esser detta piazza iurisdizione del detto signor Caporione, e mio debito.”

110 ASR, TCS, b. 147, c. 149, testimony of Andrea Castellani and Vincenzo Bicci, 14 August 1644, ff. 1r-2r.
boundaries of one’s own rione” and to “not give any cause for contrasts and imbrolios.”

This proved to be difficult task as sede vacante not only opened upon new horizons for the Popolo Romano but also as individuals. During the vacancy of Alexander VII in 1667, the caporione of Ripa clashed with the Bargello of the Senator, the head of the Capitoline police in normal times who was sometimes charged with helping the various patrols arrest troublemakers. The caporione stopped the bargello as he was taking the butcher to jail for carrying a sword. Demanding why “he went to taking prisoners in his rione,” the caporione seized the prisoner and took him to the Capitoline jails with his men.

The Sacred College responded to the deficiencies of the Popolo Romano by taking over the defense of the city. After the death of short-lived pope Urban VII (1590), the Venetian ambassador Alberto Badoer wrote that because many outlaws had entered Rome in the previous vacancy of Sixtus V, with great danger to all, [the cardinals] have resolved henceforth to have all the Gates of the Land walled up except the three most frequented, where thirty soldiers of [Honorato] Gaetano are to be posted at each one, and for the satisfaction of the Romans there will be an assistant gentleman. Moreover, the Caporioni do not patrol at night.

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111 ASC, Cred. XV, vol. 27, “Trattato,” f. 277r. See ff. 182v, 183r and 185r for similar statements.

112 ASR, TCS, b. 242, testimony of the Senator’s Bargello, Ottavio Romano, f. 19v: “dicendomi come io ero andato a catturare nel suo rione.”

113 ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 26, dispatch of 27 September 1590, ff. 72r-v: “con gran pericolo de tutti, hanno risoluto di far murar tutte le Porte della Terra da tre in poi più frequentate alle quali siano posti trenta soldati del Gaetano per cadauno, et per satisfattioni della Romani vi sia anco un gentilhuomo assistente, et nel resto, che li Caporioni non camino la notte.” The Porta della Terra refers to all the gates on land leading into Rome. The Venetian ambassador Agostino Nani wrote that during Clement VIII’s vacancy, the conservators had unsuccessfully supplicated the cardinals concerning the restoration of their custodianship of the gates, see ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 54, dispatch of 26 March 1605, f. 53r.
Instead of the *caporioni* and their militia, the Capi degli Ordini charged Governor Girolamo Matteucci to recruit five hundred men to watch over the city. The Popolo Romano “greatly resented” these changes; they sent a letter to the cardinals demanding that “at least the Captains of the Gates be Romans.”\(^{114}\) Later that week the conservators themselves vainly supplicated the congregation of cardinals that they might recruit two hundred soldiers of the defense of the city.\(^{115}\)

During the vacancy of Urban VIII the Popolo Romano and the College of Cardinals again battled for jurisdictional control of the city. This time the Popolo Romano’s ability to issue edicts was at stake. On 12 August 1644 the conservators met the cardinals in an audience where, according to Gigli, they threatened the Popolo Romano with the prospect of sending out “the Bargello with the *sbirri* through the city after the Patrols of the Caporioni had gone out.” The conservators, Gigli continued, “contracted [the cardinals], saying the Caporioni had sufficiently done their duties.”\(^{116}\) The Marshal of the Conclave, Bernardo Savelli, argued on behalf of the Popolo Romano, but apparently to no avail as Governor Lomellino’s reports to the Sacred College show that the *sbirri* patrolled the streets during Urban’s *sede vacante*. The skirmishes between the *rioni* of Regola and Sant’Angelo only supported the Sacred College’s poor assessment of the Popolo Romano’s ability to maintain the public peace. Lomellino

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\(^{114}\) Ibid., f. 72v.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., f. 76r.

\(^{116}\) Gigli, *Diario*, vol. II, 428: “il Bargello con i Sbirri per la Città doppo che fussero andate le Ronde degli Caporioni, al che contradissero li Conservatori dicendo, che li Caporioni facevano a bastanza diligenze necessarie.”
meanwhile sought permission to send his sbirri out at night to prevent future disorders among the patrols of the caporioni. 117

The opposite sides of the Tiber also fought each other with rivaling bandi, which could confuse the populace of Rome regarding which authority to follow. A bando, for example, issued by the Capi degli Ordini and the Cardinal Chamberlain on 8 August 1644 forbade conservators from issuing their own edicts “lest the multiplicity of the bandi keep the People in doubt as to which they must obey, which would not only cause confusion but also be very harmful to the Law and the public tranquility.”118 In particular the revocation of licenses to carry weapons that both the Popolo Romano and the Sacred College proclaimed at the start of each vacancy caused much trouble in the streets. Servants of prelates, soldiers and thugs (sometimes one and the same) used the uncertainty produced by the rival bandi to plead ignorance of the laws or claim to have viable licenses.119

Throughout the latter part of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the College of Cardinals and the Governor of Rome sought to gain more authority over Rome during sede vacante. In addition to invalidating weapon licenses issued by Capitoline magistrates, the cardinals focused on another way to maintain order in the vacancy: they ordered all barbers, surgeons and doctors to report all the cases of violent wounds and


118 ASV, Misc. Arm. IV & V, t. 26, bando of 8 August 1644, f. 216r: “Affinche per la multiplicità di detti Bandi il Popolo non resti in dubito a quali si debbe odedire, che causarebbe non solo confusione, ma molto pregiudito alla Giustitia, & alla quiete publica.”

119 See Chapter 3 for further discussion on the guards and familiars of cardinals, ambassadors and nobles during the vacancy.
deaths that they had examined to the notaries of the Governor of Rome. The *bandi* issued on this matter threatened with a double fine those who failed to comply with the order or who submitted their report to another tribunal.\(^{120}\)

Starting with the vacancy of Gregory XV in 1623, the battle between the Popolo Romano and Sacred College grew intense as the cardinals questioned the Capitoline magistrates’ long-established ability to issue edicts during the interregnum. On the first of August 1623, the Governor of Rome, Giovanni Benini, wrote the Capi degli Ordini that the conservators had intruded on the jurisdictional rights of the Sacred College:

This morning I saw a new bando that had been published in the name of the signor Conservators and now I am informed that are talking about publishing another. Issuing bandi presupposes having jurisdiction concerning the subject that they discuss, and I have said several time in congregation that the Conservators do not have [this jurisdiction] and that the tradition through which they advance [its defense] is mere corruption, the continuation of which must not be permitted.\(^{121}\)

The governor defended the jurisdictional rights of the cardinals but also protected the authority of his own tribunal during the vacancy. He asserted that history was on his side, arguing that “one would not find that in any Sede Vacante there might have been seen bandi of the signor Conservators on the matter of crimes and the Governance [of the

\(^{120}\) ASV, Misc. Arm, t. 105C, *bando* of 25 May 1555, f. 8r; t. 26, *bando* of 28 August 1590, f. 211r; *bando* of 5 March 1605, f. 212r, *bando* of 30 January 1621, f. 213r; *bando* of 9 July 1623, f. 214r; *bando* of 31 July 1644, f. 216r; *bando* of 9 January 1655, f. 217r; ASR, Bandi, vol. 5, *bando* of 3 May 1572; and ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 28, *bando* of 19 October 1591 that was placed in the volume of dispatches.

\(^{121}\) ASV, Conclavi, “Lettere spedite per la morte di Clemente VIII, Leone XI, Paolo V e Gregorio XV,” letter of 1 August 1623, f. 298r: “Questa matina ho veduto un nuovo bando, che a nome de signori Conservatori è stato publicato, et hora sono avvisato che trattano di publicarse un altro. Il far bandi presuppone haver giurisdizione intorno alla materia, che si tratta, et io più volte in congregazione ho detto, che i Conservatori non l’hanno et che la consuetudine che p loro si adduce è mera corrutela da non permetterne la continuat.ne.”
city].” He continued by pointing out that since conservators “did not have such ability to issue bandi concerning criminal activity] in the Sede plena,” they should not have it during the sede vacante and that “the Bull of Pius IV conceded [this ability] only to two Governors of Borgo and Romo.” Benini must have convinced the cardinals with his arguments as eights days later, the Capi degli Ordini and the chamberlain published a bando prohibiting the caporioni and their notaries from trying criminal cases and ordering them to refer trials and investigations to the Governor of Rome. Nevertheless, this first salvo over the jurisdictional hegemony remained a moot affair. The Popolo Romano ignored the Sacred College’s bando as an extant book of criminal reports from the vacancy of Gregory XV attests. Moreover, the cardinals never addressed the conservator’s ability to publish edicts during the vacancy.

Twenty-one years later, however, the cardinals issued a bando during the Urban VIII’s sede vacante which revoked and annulled all the bandi published by the conservators. The stated reason for the revocation, as noted above, was the confusion

122 Ibid: “che non si trovarà, che in alcuna Sede Vacante siano stati veduti bandi de ss.sri conservatori in materia di delitti, et del Governo.”

123 Ibid: “‘non hanno in Sede plena tal facoltà” and “che la Bolla di Pio 4.o la concede alli duo soli Governatori di Borgo, et Roma.” Sede plena, the full see, is period in which the throne of St. Peter is occupied by a pope.

124 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67 (1623). The volume contains almost two thousand pages of reports and trials for a month-long vacancy.

125 The issuing of the bando can be found in BAV, Urb.lat. 1093, avviso of 9 August 1623, f. 527r. The avviso explains that the governor’s tribunal “might better attend to the many crimes being committed with the license of sede vacante.” Gregory XV’s vacancy was not the first time that the Sacred College attempted to strip the Popolo Romano of its ability to hear criminal cases. During the sede vacante of Gregory XIV, an avviso told of the Popolo Romano’s attempt to maintain its jurisdiction against the encroachment of the Governor of Rome. The governor had beseeched the College of Cardinals to prevent Capitoline judges from exercising their duties, see Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, avviso of 26 October 1591, f. 338r.

126 ASV, Misc. Arm IV & V, t. 26, bando of 8 August 1644, f. 216r.
generated by rival edicts of the Popolo Romano and Sacred College. Yet, the struggle for jurisdictional authority provided the main impetus behind the cardinals’ reasoning. Gigli, the caporione saw this, when he wrote that the cardinals had annulled the edicts of the conservators, which they “had issued as usual.” The conservators had long proclaimed edicts regulating the city during sede vacante. Although extant copies of these edicts only exist from 1623 onwards, the congregations of the secret councils illustrate that they had made decrees concerning gambling, prostitutes riding in carriages, and maintaining the city’s gates.127 By 1644, the ability of the Popolo Romano to proclaim edicts regulating the city had become an unwritten tradition that governors like Beninni and the cardinals countered with Pius IV’s In Eligendis.

The revocation of the power to publish edicts was a great blow to the Capitoline officials as Gigli indignantly complained that “through this thing the Popolo murmured that, [already] the Pope having taken away all the authority from the Popolo, that now the College of Cardinals wanted to remove this Dominion that remained theirs in the time of Sede Vacante.”128 In response the Popolo Romano held a congregation on 10 August in which they contemplated throwing the Capitoline fiscal procurator, Angelo Giardino, from the window of the Palace of Conservators for having aided in the invalidation of their edicts “in order to gain the favor of the governor and the cardinals.”129 Fortunately


128 Ibid: “Per la qual cosa tutto il Popolo mormorava, che havendo i Papi tolta al Popolo tutta l’autorità, che hora il Collegio de’ Cardinali voleva levarli quel Dominio che li era rimasto nel tempo della Sede Vacante.” Popolo in both instances means the Popolo Romano.

129 Ibid., 428. It is unclear in what way Giardino helped the cardinals. The Roman patricians were Stefano Alli, Bartolomeo Capranica, Virgilio Cenci, and Giacomo Benzoni.
for Giardino cooler heads prevailed and the magistrates decided to send four patricians from old Roman families along with the conservators to the conclave in order to petition the cardinals for the return of their authority. They were denied an audience on that day, but met the cardinals in a congregation the day after where the cardinals threatened to send out the sbirri after the patrols of the caporioni had performed their rounds. The argument eventually calmed down between the two parties as the cardinals adopted a face-saving measure at the suggestion of Governor Lomellino. The conservators would submit all the edicts they wished to decree to the College of Cardinals, which after inspecting them would allow the conservators to publish them with the phrase “with the consent and participation of the Sacred College.”

This compromise mollified both parties, but only until the next vacancy, that of Innocent X eleven years later. This time the Popolo Romano had a much more difficult time of defending their jurisdiction. Immediately upon the pope’s death, the Sacred College fired the first volley, issuing a bando that outlined its jurisdictional supremacy in the interregnum. The bando commanded all judicial officials to notify the Capi degli Ordini before administering corporal punishments and monetary fines over twenty-five scudi. Decisions made without their approval would be declared null and void. The cardinals specifically targeted the Popolo Romano. The bando ordered civic magistrates not to “make any changes” concerning the obligation of barbers and surgeons to notify the Governor of Rome of injuries that their patients had received during the vacancy. The cardinals emphasized that the Capitoline officials should “precisely comply with the

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laws that are the Sede plena,” that is when the pope lived and they could not issue decrees.\textsuperscript{131}

The Conservators could still issue bandi, but had to submit them to the College of Cardinals before publishing them. On 11 January 1655 the cardinals approved six different edicts that the conservators had sent them, although they had been published the day before.\textsuperscript{132} Nevertheless, the process could humble the civic magistrates as a month later during Innocent’s five-month vacancy the Capi degli Ordini and the chamberlain “after mature discussion ordered that the Conservatori and Prior of the Popolo Romano be allowed to publish two bandi,” one concerning the soldiers guarding the city gates and the other monetary punishments that caporioni had to pay for failing to inform the conservators of their judicial activities.\textsuperscript{133}

In order to wring these concessions from the Sacred College, the conservators had to supplicate the Capi degli Ordini after the death of Innocent X. In a letter of 7 January 1655, they emphasized that the College of Cardinals had revoked the bando that revoked their ability to issue edicts in the vacancy of 1644. The conservators asserted the venerability of these jurisdictional privileges, arguing that they dated to the time of the pontificates of Urban VI, Innocent VII and Eugenius IV and that the Popolo Romano had “always published Bandi in the time of Sede Vacante.”\textsuperscript{134} At once assertive and

\textsuperscript{131} ASR, Bandi, vol. 21, \textit{bando} of 7 January 1655.

\textsuperscript{132} ASV, Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Innocenzo X,” f. 305r.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, 12 February 1655, f. 443r.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid, 7 January 1655, f. 912r.
obsequious, the conservators expressed the hope the cardinals might continue to grant them this power “from the kindness and grace of Your Excellencies.”

The struggle between the Sacred College and the Popolo Romano over jurisdictional hegemony during sede vacante did not end in 1655. Vacancies throughout the rest of seventeenth century were marked by the jurisdictional tug of war between the two powers. Each argued that it had tradition on its side. The Popolo Romano claimed that they had jurisdiction over the sede vacante since time immemorial. In contrast, the cardinals based their authority on the papal bulls dating to 1059, when Nicholas II created the College of Cardinals. Yet, neither side fully asserted itself during the vacancy. The cardinals checked the dominion of the civic magistrates through bandi and the increasing role that the Governor of Rome assumed during the interregnum. The cardinals in turn were hindered by the word of the bulls that limited them to an administrative role. Although both asserted their authority after the death of the pope, neither was able to fully exercise it in the void of sede vacante. The shadow of the pope loomed over the Sacred College and the Capitol as one of the most important works of the vacancy was the election of a new leader.

The jurisdictional confusion between the various interregnal authorities fed the violence that so often erupted during sede vacante as the people of Rome, whether noble or common, opted to take advantage of the lapse in authority and make their own law. In many cases, the authorities charged with protecting Rome clashed in bloody skirmishes. Thus, the violence of sede vacante was endemic to its political structures. The Scottish

bishop of Salisbury mocked this aspect of the vacancy in a polemic against the papacy in 1680. He asked, “In the interval of the sede vacante, who is the Head of the Church? Is it a dead body without a head or is it a Monster of many heads?”\footnote{Gilbert Burnet, \textit{The Infallibility of the Church of Rome examined and confuted in a letter to a Roman Priest} (London: Printed by M. Clark, 1680), 33.} Indeed, Rome became a hydra during the vacancy, whose many heads incessantly nipped at each other in their quest for power.
CHAPTER 2

THE POPE IS DEAD! THE RITES OF SEDÉ VACANTE

When the Pope died, the Catholic world lost its spiritual father. But Romans also lost their prince. The impact of his death, like earthquake, was more terribly felt at its epicenter as the city fell into chaos and confusion while the cardinals entered the conclave to elect the next occupant of St. Peter’s throne. A series of customs and ceremonies, both informal and formal, heralded and marked this important event to the city and its inhabitants. These rites followed a three-phase process, each of which represented a change in the relationship between to Romans and their deceased lord.

The first phase was the eager anticipation of the city for the death of its pontiff, particularly if he had enjoyed a long pontificate or had promulgated measures that antagonized his subjects. In this atmosphere rumors emerged both from the papal court and the streets, keeping the city informed about the pope’s health and sometimes spreading false reports of his death. This stage was the most informal of the three phases and it did not necessarily lead to the next two, the death and burial of the pope, as in many cases, news of the moribund state of the pope might just be rumors. Even if true, many popes might thwart the desires of the city by making a sudden recovery. Nevertheless, rumors of the pope’s death generated many false starts of a sede vacante that never actually happened. The second phase of this process was the actual death of
the pontiff, which was announced by several rites underscoring the end of his regime and the ascendency of the College of Cardinals as his interregnal substitute. The final phase, the burial of the pope, highlighted his mortal nature in death. By the early modern era the papacy had fully adopted the *novediales*, nine days of funeral obsequies that proclaimed his death to the entire city and that gave nonresident cardinals the opportunity to travel to Rome in order to participate in the papal election. For three of those days, the public came to venerate his body by kissing his feet. Paradoxically, this last rite emphasized the sacredness of the pope and the connection of the people to their prince, which juxtaposed sharply with the previous rites and customs that severed the bond between subject and ruler. And that, as we shall see in future chapters, also contrasted with protests staged by the people against the deceased pope’s policies and family during *sede vacante*.

**Rumor and the Anticipation of the Pope’s Death**

The imminent death of the pope sparked rampant rumors among the populace of Rome, which remained attuned to any signs that the pope’s reign was at an end. This discussion was fed by *avvisi* writers and others, such as the ambassadors of the various monarchs of Europe, who had regular contact with the papal court, which in turn fueled rumors of a looming *sede vacante*. Much of this informal discussion centered on the poor health of the pope. Persistently ill popes kept the city on edge as it awaited for a *sede vacante* that sometimes took months and, sometimes, even years to come. For example, *avvisi* throughout the winter and spring of 1558 commented on the condition of Paul IV, noting that he would likely be unable to observe dietary rubrics required during the
Lenten season.\textsuperscript{1} Throughout the summer of 1590, \textit{avvisi} writers wrote about the effects of the heat on the increasingly weak constitution of Sixtus V. Likewise the ailing state of Clement VIII from 1601 onwards was a recurrent topic of interest in the \textit{avvisi} of Rome.\textsuperscript{2} An anonymous account of the conclave that elected Urban VIII noted that “in the beginning of this yeare 1623 the Indisposition of the Pope [Gregory XV] was so apparent that all men did forsee that it would not be long before the Roman court received a change in the government.”\textsuperscript{3} These microscopic lenses on the pope’s health, in turn, often inspired false reports of his demise. In January 1655 the Venetian ambassador Niccolò Sagredo informed the Doge that Innocent X, suffering from poor health for much of the previous year, had had two accidents, which “gave rise to a rumor that ran through Rome that the Pope had yielded [to death],” provoking papal attendants to steal several items belonging to the dying pope, including a bowl from which he usually ate his soup.\textsuperscript{4}

Romans were astute observers of the pope’s daily activities. His failure to perform his usual duties as supreme pontiff and bishop of Rome were tell-tale signs of imminent death in the eyes of the people. Pius V was so feeble for much of the early part of 1572 that he could not say mass on Sundays, provoking rumors of his approaching

\textsuperscript{1} Retrieved from the Medici Archive Project, http://documents.medici.org: ASF, Minute di lettere e registri, \textit{avvisi} of 24 February and March 4, 1558, ff. 326r and 327r.

\textsuperscript{2} For Sixtus V, see BAV, Urb.lat 1058, \textit{avvisi} of 11 and 25 August 1590, ff. 407r and 428r. For Clement VIII, see Ludwig von Pastor, \textit{The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages}, vol. 24 (London: Kegan Paul, 1933), 432-34.

\textsuperscript{3} Anonymous, \textit{The Last Conclave, containing a relation of such occurents as happened in the conclave wherein was chosen the present Pope Urban the eight} (London: Printed by Stephen Bulkley for Henry Seile, 1642), unpaginated.

\textsuperscript{4} ASVenice, Dispacci degli ambasciatori al senato, Roma, filza 136, dispatch of 5 January 1655, ff. 605v-606r.
death, which finally occurred on the first of May of that year.5 The civic magistrate Giacinto Gigli noted every sickness that beset Innocent X, recording in his diary that the pontiff did not meet with the conservators and officials of the Popolo Romano, newly elected in August 1651, due to illness and, three years later, that he neither left the papal palace at Monte Cavallo nor performed any religious functions for the entire month of August.6

Failing to perform duties on certain feast days was another sure sign that something was wrong with the pope. According to Gigli, in 1622, rumors raced through the entire city when poor health forced Gregory XV to skip the annual bestowal of dowries to poor girls that took place on the Annunciation at Santa Maria sopra Minerva and again in the spring of 1643 when Urban VIII neither gave the benediction to the faithful on Ascension, nor took part in the Corpus Christi procession of that year.7

In an attempt to squash the growth of rumors, many popes sought to hide their poor health by continuing to perform their sacred and temporal duties as the Vicar of Christ. Both Paul IV and Pius IV, despite their fragilities, continued to perform their duties until their deaths.8 Pius IV, although weak throughout much of the year of 1565, still managed to celebrated Easter mass at St. Peter’s and even, according to the Florentine ambassador Ugolino Grifoni, “sang it with a voice so clear and sonorous that

7 Gigli, *Diario*, vol. I, 102 and 308.
8 Pastor, HOP, vol. 24 (1924), 413 and vol. 26 (1928), 398.
he put to shame Cardinal [Vitellozzo] Vitelli,” who assisted him during the ceremony.\(^9\)

Pasquinades mocked Pius’s attempts to hide his illness during the last year of his life. One in particular, wondered,

He died or he didn’t die. He has grown worse.
He is worsening or not. Now he has gotten better.
He has lost his speech. He has lost the use of his arms.\(^{10}\)

Similarly, Gregory XIII tried to conceal his long illness of 1581, but his condition grew worse and he could not carry out his sacred functions for much of the year, causing much concern over his health.\(^{11}\) In January 1644, several months before his death, Urban VIII attempted to keep his ailing health a secret, but the rumors of his death were so rampant that the conservators locked and fortified the windows and doors of their palace where a statue of the hated pope was found “in order to ward off any disorders that could happen.”\(^{12}\) In 1654, Innocent X “kept hidden” his ill health, even among the members of his court, by attending a consistory on 16 March.\(^{13}\)

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\(^{10}\) Pasquinate Romane nel Cinqucento, eds. Marucci et al., t. II (Rome: Salerno, 1982), no. 722, 931: “é morto e non é morto, é peggiorato,/sta peggio e non sta peggio, é migliorato/ ha perso la parola, ha perso il braccio.” The fluctuating health of Alexander VII in the last year of his pontificate (1667) inspired similar pasquinades; see Pasquinate del Seicento: Le invettive delle “statue parlanti” contro il potere delle nobili famiglie al conquista di Roma barocca (Rome: Rendina, 1995), 28-29.

\(^{11}\) BAV, Urb.lat 1049, avviso of 16 April 1581, f. 324r. Gregory XIII recovered later that year, but remained in poor health throughout his pontificate, which lasted until 1585. See Pastor for continual concerns over his health throughout his reign, HOP, vol. 20 (1930), 633.


\(^{13}\) Ibid., vol. II, 702: “teneva segreto.”
Popes also made public appearances to quell rumors of their deaths and to alleviate the fears of the populace. In November 1602, Clement VIII, who had been in poor health for much of the autumn, appeared outside the balcony of the Vatican palace in order to quell rumors that he was dying.\textsuperscript{14} Sometimes this could backfire as happened to Urban VIII on 27 March 1644 when he attempted to give the Easter benediction from a window overlooking St. Peter’s square rather than from the customary portico of St. Peter’s Basilica. It was rumored that the pope was so weak that when the papal attendants attempted to dress the pope, “it was necessary to unstitch the sleeves [of his gown] and throw it over him without moving his arms” for fear that he might die.\textsuperscript{15} A shaky, feeble pope did little to instill confidence in the populace.

Superstition and astrology could give rise to rumors circulating about the health and death of popes. Despite Paul IV’s attempts to keep his dropsy a secret during the summer of 1559, news of his illness reached the populace and by June 17 a rumor spread throughout the city that he had died. The appearance of a comet that night over the Vatican further convinced the city that the pope had died.\textsuperscript{16} A similar episode occurred near the end of Pius IV’s life. Although able to perform his duties throughout the autumn of 1565, his fragility increasingly was visible to the populace, who believed the pope would not live to see the New Year. This belief was supported in their minds by the fact

\textsuperscript{14} Pastor, HOP, vol. 24 (1933), 432.

\textsuperscript{15} Gigli, \textit{Diario}, vol. I, 414: “et che in quel punto hebbe a morire, onde fu detto, che bisognava scucire le maniche, et buttagliele sopra senza muovere le braccia.”

\textsuperscript{16} BAV, Urb.lat 1039, \textit{avviso} of 17 June 1559, f. 49r. See also von Pastor, HOP, vol. XIV (1924), 411-13. An \textit{avviso} of 8 July gave Paul IV two weeks to live and that there was talk of the conclave among the curialists and ambassadors in Rome; see BAV, Urb.lat 1039, f, 58v.
that on 2 December, the first Sunday of Advent, the candle nearest to the papal throne twice went out for no apparent reason.17 And an avviso reported that an eclipse of the sun on the day of his death presaged the demise of Innocent IX on 30 December 1591.18

Urban VIII’s long pontificate engendered many omens of his death. A lunar eclipse in January 1628 and solar eclipses of December 1628 and June 1630 generated the widespread belief in Rome, supported by the prognostications of astrologers, of the pope’s imminent death. Urban himself, an affirmed believer in the efficacy of astrology and the dangers of celestial influences, took fear from the portents of his death and had recourse to the counter-magic of the natural philosopher Tommaso Campanella in 1628.19 Another omen concerning Urban occurred towards the end of his life in June 1644 as he lay sick and exhausted from the war with the rebellious vassal, Duke Farnese, over the fief of Castro. The sculptor Bernini had just completed erecting the Fountain of the Bees for the pope near the Barberini palace. Bernini inscribed this dedication on the fountain: “Pope Urban made it [this fountain] in the Year XXII of his Pontificate.” The populace was quick to point out that the ailing pope had a month before he actually entered into the twenty-second year of his reign and one wag attached a poster over the inscription with this motto: “PRIMA CIECO CHE INDOVINO” (roughly, “before [this happens] the blind will be able to see the future”). The diarist Gigli wrote that this poster “was seen and read by many until Cardinal Antonio Barberini sent an engraver to remove

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18 BAV, Urb.lat 1060, avviso of 1 January 1592, f. 2v.
one of the numbers and left written on it XXI.” Gigli continued that the removal of the Roman numeral one was seen by many as “an augury concerning Pope Urban, who would not reach Year 22 [of his pontificate].”\(^{20}\) No doubt the popular belief that no pope would ever reach the twenty-five year pontificate of Peter, the first bishop of Rome, fed this belief among the populace. In the early modern era, most pontificates lasted less than ten years, so Urban’s reign of twenty-one years was quite extraordinary, although in the minds of the people fate conspired against his overcoming Peter’s tenure as the Vicar of Christ. Indeed, it was rumored that as Urban lay near death’s door in August of that year, a cleric whispered in his ear, “you will not see Peter’s years” (non videbis dies Petri), referring to the twenty-five years of Peter’s pontificate.\(^{21}\)

Prognosticating both the death and the election of popes was quite common in early modern Rome. In 1581, amid rumors and concerns about Gregory XIII’s health, an astrologer made the prediction that the pope would die on the 16 October—a prediction that, while ultimately proved false as the pope lived until 1585, fueled rumors further.\(^{22}\) Although Clement VIII enjoyed good health in 1599, astrologers prophesied his death that year, prompting many in the city to believe them.\(^{23}\) More than forty years later, during a severe flooding of the Tiber in December 1647, inquisitors jailed an astrologer

\(^{20}\) Gigli, *Diario*, vol. I, 423: “Papa Urbano l’haveva fatta nell’Anno XXII del suo Pontificato,” “fu vista et letta da molti, sin che il Cardinale Barberino vi mandò uno Scarpellino a cancellare uno dei Numeri, et vi lasciò scritto XXI,” and “uno augurio a Papa Urbano, che non fusse per arrivare all’Anno 22.”


\(^{22}\) Pastor, *HOP*, vol. 20 (1930), 633.

\(^{23}\) Pastor, *HOP*, vol. 24 (1933), 431.
for predicting that once the flood waters receded Pope Innocent X, who was suffering from gallstones, would die.24 This latter example was likely motivated by political factors since many in Rome felt Innocent had failed to respond adequately to the famine that struck Rome in 1647-48.

The rumors astrology provoked could be felt beyond Rome. In May 1630, Orazio Morandi, the abbot of the monastery of Santa Prassede in Rome and the former general of the Vallombrosa order, prophesied that Urban would from the harmful celestial influences of solar eclipse. Avvisi writers immediately picked up Morandi’s prophecy and soon the news of Urban’s imminent death had spread not only throughout Italy and Europe. By the summer other astrologers had joined Morandi in predicting the pope’s death. The spread of Morandi’s prophecy eventually had acquired so much credence that Spanish and German cardinals made ready to travel to Rome for what they assumed would be the next conclave.25

Despite their wariness of astrologers, popes and their relatives nevertheless had recourse to their predictions to project an image of a healthy and long pontificate. During the last year of the sickly pope Gregory XV’s life, Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi, his nephew and secretary of state, “used all industrious subtleties to make the Pope, his uncle seeme vigorous, yea not omitting to make use of some predictions of Astrologers to


25 The rumors provoked by Morandi’s prophecy sparked “many discussions in writing that dealt with the election of the new pope as if it were sede vacante,” which then caused the Spanish and German cardinals to prepare their journeys to Rome. See an avviso of 18 May 1630 in the appendix of Luigi Amabile, Fra Tommaso Campaenilla, la sua congiura, i suoi processi e la sua pazzia, vol. II (Napoli: Morano, 1882), 149: “molti discorsi in scritto, che trattato dell’elettione del nuovo Pontefice come se fosse sede vacante.” Also see Brandon Dooley, Morandi’s Last Prophecy and the End of Renaissance Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
foretell and divine a long continuance of his papacie.” In 1642, a Portuguese astrologer predicted, to Urban VIII’s delight, that his pontificate would last for another nine years, a prediction that ultimately failed to come true.

Papal officials concerned themselves with keeping the details of the pope’s health a secret because they knew that the mere rumor of the pope’s death could provoke disorder in Rome as its inhabitants eagerly anticipated the license that opened with the onset of sede vacante. For example, when Pius IV was rumored to have died in the night between 6 and 7 December 1565, the city erupted in a spat of violence typically associated with sede vacante and a few important criminals escaped because the caporioni emptied the prisons before the governor could transport the hardened prisoners to Castel Sant’Angelo.

Papal authorities also feared the looting that sometimes took place during the vacancy. When rumors spread throughout the city that Sixtus V was suffering from the excessive heat of the summer during the day of 11 July 1590 and that he had to curtail an audience with ambassadors, the Jews who found themselves in Piazza Navona for the Wednesday market around midday “gathered their goods and fled toward Piazza Giudea [i.e., the Ghetto] to save themselves [from pillaging],” which only “gave rise to a rumor that the pope might have died, whence for a quarter of an hour were closed many streets

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26 Anonymous, The Last Conclave, unpaginated.
27 Pastor, HOP, vol. 29 (1938), 402.
28 Pastor, HOP, vol. 16 (1928), 400 and BAV, Urb.lat 1040, avviso of 9 December 1565, ff. 148r-v.
and palaces.” But the rumor turned out to be false and several Jews were imprisoned and punished by the torture of the srtappado for originating the rumor of the pope’s death. Later that week, Sixtus left the palace to give mass “in order to allow himself to be seen” by the people of Rome. A little more than a year later, the Jews fled the market at Banchi, the financial center of Rome, on 25 September 1591, “retreating to their seraglio due to a certain rumor than ran among the people concerning the interregnum” because of continual ill health of Gregory XIV and “having seen hanged six prisoners condemned to death.” Generally, the most nefarious criminals were either sent to Castel Sant’Angelo or executed before the general release of prisoners confined in Rome’s prisons. Hence the Jews believed the sede vacante of Gregory was at hand. The pope, however, hung on for another three weeks, dying on 16 October 1591. Rumors of his impending death persisted during the last weeks of his life and even attracted the attention of bandits outside Rome. Cardinal Giustiniani, the legate of the Marches, told several cardinals that he could not stop a group of “700 bandits that came in the direction of Rome from the region of the Marches and Ascoli under an unfurled banner with trumpeters and

29 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 21 July 1590, f. 382r: “che sgombrandole, et fuggendosene verso Piazza Giudea per salvarsi diedero voce, che’l Papa fosse morto, onde per quarto furono serrarle molte strade, et palazzo.” Another avviso of 14 July 1590 stated the Jews, “who found themselves in the market of Piazza Navona suddenly boxed up their merchandise returning in a hurry to the Ghetto due to a false rumor that spread among them about the death of Pope, fearing in that case of being sacked.” See BAV, Urb.lat 1058, f. 365r: “che si trovavano nel Mercato di Piazza Agone incassaro d’improvviso nel mezzo giorno le robbe loro tornandosene in fretta al seraglio per una voce falsa, che si sparsa tra essi della morte del Pontefice, dubitando in quel caso di essere saccheggiati.”

30 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 21 July 1590, f. 382v.

31 BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, avviso of 28 September 1591, f. 275r. An avviso of 25 September 1591 stated that “This evening in Banchi there was a great racket among the Jews who fled in a hurry, speaking of the death of the pope,” BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, f. 272r.
The bandits had heard of the “desperate health of the pope and in the sede vacante they wanted to try their luck and see what they could do.”

The circulation of rumors also had an effect on the officials of Rome’s communal government, who eagerly anticipated the opportunity to exercise unaccustomed power during the vacancy. False reports of the death of Gregory XIV prompted the recently elected conservators and caporioni to rush to the Capitoline to take part in the general council where important decisions regarding the regulation of Rome during the interregnum would be decided. The cardinal chamberlain Enrico Caetani had to convince the communal magistrates that the pope was still alive. And in 1605 an avviso reported that: “Such is the desire of some, both the wicked and the stupid, that His Holiness be finished, so that it seems so, and among these others showed up the Caporione of Campo Marzo, who pulled out his flag [of his rione] as if it had been sede vacante.” Similarly, the day after Paul V fell sick on the 25 January 1621, rumors raced through Rome that he had died from a stroke. Gigli wrote that “the following morning that was the 27th the entire city was stirred up, and the caporioni opened all the prisons and freed those that were there for civil matters, but those who were there for criminal matters had already


33 Ibid., f. 303v: “dicendo di havere inteso la desperate salute del Papa, et che nella sede vacante vogliono tentare la fortuna loro, et vedere quello potranno fare.”

34 BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 26 Febraury 1605, ff, 90r-v: “È tanto la voglia di alcuni et Maligni, et senza cervello, che S. Stà la finischi, che è uno che pare, et fra gli altri l’ha mostrato il Caporione di Campo Marzo, che mise fuori la sua Insegna come se fosse stata sede vacante.”
been led to Castel Sant’Angelo, and [the people] began to make an uproar as if it were 
sede vacante.”35

Rumors could feed wishful thinking on the part of the officials. In 1559, after 
hearing rumors of the moribund state of the despised pope Paul IV, the communal 
magistrates assembled in the Palace of the Conservators, where “after having said infinite 
evils against the Pope, resolved to bust open all the prisons, and in particular Ripetta, that 
is the prison of the Inquisition.”36 By ancient custom, the Popolo Romano had the right 
to free all debtors and other prisoners sequestered in the city’s main prisons—the Tor di 
Nona, Capitol jails, Corte Savella, and, after 1585, the small jails of the Governor of 
Borgo, for civil matters—at the moment of the pope’s death. However, in 1559, not only 
did they rebelliously free the prisoners before Paul had died, they also made the political 
statement of freeing the heretics in the dungeons of the Inquisition, an institution 
associated with the hated pope, who as its former chief had imprisoned many for heresy. 
Eventually the actions of the magistrates sparked the infamous sacking of the Inquisition 
offices in which seventy-two heretics were freed, its warehouses pillages and the building 
set to fire.37

At times, the very actions of the pope and his government, which sought to 
prepare for the coming sede vacante, only contributed to the confusion and spread of

Regioni apersero le pregioni, et furno liberati quelli che vi erano per cause civili, ma quelli, che erano per 
cose criminali erano già menati in Castello, et cominciossi a far romore come per sede vacante.”

rosolvero di scassar tutte le carceri, e particolarmente Ripetta, che era la priggione dell’Inquisizione.” The 
prisons of the Holy Office were located on via Ripetta, the street leading to one of Rome’s two river ports.

37 Ibid, ff. 161v-162r and BAV, Urb.lat 1039, avviso of 19 August 1559, f. 71r.
rumors that churned around his imminent death. For example, as Pius IV lay in bed suffering from exhaustion and fever in December 1565, the cardinal nephew and governor of Rome had the city gates locked, from which the people “took it that he was dead.” The introduction of troops in Rome to protect the city and the palaces of the pope’s family was another sign that the pontiff was near the end of his life. An avviso dated Wednesday, 23 February 1605 noted that the Pope [Clement VIII] was about to die because another company of Corsican soldiers, who were outside [the city walls], was made in Rome, and Monday additional weapons, that is ammunition and pikes, were extracted from Castel Sant’Angelo to give them. In addition, Cardinal San Giorgio [the chamberlain] had closed and walled up some of the places in the Palace of Alessandro where he stays in the summer. The Aldobrandini further had all their possessions removed from the palace at Frascati, “just as is done in sede vacante.” On the 2 March, the Aldobrandini placed guards at the house of the pope’s niece Olimpia as well as the farm houses of the jails of the Tor di Nona and the family villa at Frascati, which an avviso noted was a “bad sign.” The Dutch diarist Teodoro Ameyden cited Cardinal Mario Theodoli’s sudden recourse to armed men as proof of Urban VIII’s future sede vacante.

38 BAV, Urb.lat 1040, avviso of 9 December 1565, ff. 148r-v: “si tenevea forse morto, per il che le porte della citta stesero serrate, sendosi publicata la morte, onde si ridussero molte genti, onde a Tora di Nona si ridussero per veder rompere le prigioni, et liberar li carcerati si come si costuma in tempo di sede vacante et ne scamporno alquati, benche il Governatore haveva fatto prima trasportare in Castello quelli di piu importanza.”

39 BAV, Urb.lat 1073, f. 86v: “che Il Papa fosse per finirla perche si è fatta un’altra compagnia de Corsi a Roma, che era fuori, et lunedì cavarono altre armi da Castello, cioè munizioni et picchi per darle a loro, et in oltre si vide il Cardinal San Giorgio far serrare et murar alcuni luoghi al Palazzo d’ Alessandro over egli sta l’estate.” The palace of Rufini refers to the villa that the Aldobrandini owned in Frascati.

40 Ibid, f.86v: “come proprio se fa in sede vacante.”

41 BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avvisi of 2 and 5 March 1605, ff. 97r and 124r.

The most certain and visible sign that the pope’s death was close at hand was the Governor of Rome’s transference of the “most important prisoners”—the favored phrase of officials and *avviso* writers—from the jails of the Tor di Nona, Corte Savella, Capitol, and Governor of Borgo to the iron tight papal prisons of Castel Sant’Angelo, located in the former tomb of the Roman emperor Hadrian. This euphemism meant not only the most dangerous prisoners such as bandits and murderers but also all others imprisoned for criminal acts (as opposed to civil crimes). The governor had these prisoners moved because the civic officials had the ancient right of opening the three main prisons of the city and setting free all those held in dungeons for petty offense, the most common being debt. The decision to have the prisoners moved, generally decided by the cardinal-nephew, was a difficult one to make since suspicions were quickly roused once the populace saw the prisoners being taken to Castel Sant’Angelo. It was only made once the pope’s condition was considered hopeless. For example, after Clement VIII suffered a serious stroke the day before he died, his cardinal-nephew ordered all the “prisoners of consideration removed from the jails” and taken the more secure prisons of Castel

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44 Although an undated *avviso* released just before Gregory XV died on 8 July 1623 noted that among the criminals sent to Castel Sant’Angelo was the former master of the house of Prince Michele Peretti who owed the grandnephew of Sixtus V the large sum of 20,000 scudi; see BAV, Urb.lat 1093, ff. 524r-v.
Sant’Angelo.⁴⁵ Although the Ludovisi had attempted to conceal Gregory XV’s illness, once he was near death, an avviso reported that “already the house Ludovisi was seen in mourning and the prisoners had been sent to Castel Sant’Angelo in great number” and “two squadrons of Corsican soldiers were present at the antechamber of the Ludovisi.”⁴⁶ The Pamphilij family had the prisoners transferred after Innocent X fell ill with bouts of bladder problems, fever and gout and “was held dangerously close to death.”⁴⁷ Innocent X lived for another four years and the transference of the prisoners to Castel Sant’Angelo proved to be misleading to the populace. In contrast, most papal families tended to wait until the last minute to make this decision to avoid confusing the populace and facilitating the spread of rumors. For example, when the Governor of Rome asked the pope’s nephew Cesare Facchinetti about moving the prisoners of importance, he responded that “he [the pope] was in good condition” and that it “would be for the worse if it [i.e., his poor condition] was made known” The Facchinetti thus told the governor to delay the transfer of prisoners.⁴⁸

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⁴⁵ BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 5 March 1605, f. 123v.

⁴⁶ BAV, Urb.lat 1093, undated avviso, ff. 524r-v: “la casa ludovisi si viste du lutto, et li prigioni sono stati mandate in Castello in molto numero...Questa mattina due squadre de Corsi assistevano all’anticamera de Ludovisi.” Other recorded examples include: BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, avviso of 5 October 1591, f. 300r: “other prisoners were transported to Castello on the occasion of the illness of the Pope.” Gregory XIV had been ill for most of his pontificate; since he grew increasingly feeble in the autumn, his cardinal-nephew Emilio Sfondrati had the hardened criminals moved to the papal dungeons almost two weeks before his death on 16 October 1591. When Urban VIII, who had fallen ill with dysentery and catarrh on Tuesday morning, Cardinal Francesco Barberini ordered the prisoners removed to Castel Sant’Angelo later on Wednesday night, see ASV, Segretario di Stato, Avvisi di Roma, t. 96, avviso of 30 July 1644, f. 203r and ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 121, dispatch of 30 July 1644, f. 44r.

⁴⁷ Gigli, Diario, vol. II, 632. The cardinal-nephew Camillo Pamphilij also had a million scudi and other treasures moved from the papal palace on the Quirinal Hill to his house.

⁴⁸ BAV, Urb.lat 1060, avviso of 1 January 1592, f. 2v.
The avvisi spread the observations from the street and from the court not only throughout Rome but all of Italy and even Europe as the example of the prophecies of Orazio Morandi demonstrate. Papal authorities attempted to curtail the activities of avvisi writers, particularly those who wrote on sensitive political information centering on the papal court and papal policy, including the pope’s health, always a major concern for the powers of Europe and Italy. In 1571 Pius V had several writers arrested and some hanged. On 22 March 1572 he promulgated the constitution Contra scribentes, exemplantes et dictantes monita vulgo dicta gli avvisi e ritorni, which banned writings that defamed the pope and other prominent men and that spread predictions and rumors. Pius V’s successors continued these bans, which forced many avvisi writers to produce a more secret news pieces called avvisi secreti whose contents nonetheless became known to the court and city of Rome. All the papacy could do was to make examples of the few avvisi writers that managed to fall into its hands. For example, authorities sentenced the avvisi writer Luperzio to life imprisonment after he spread news of Gregory XIII’s poor health in 1581.

Popes hounded astrologers as well. On 15 July 1630, Urban VIII, both frightened and angered by the whirlwind of predictions concerning his death, had Orazio Morandi and other astrologers arrested and jailed. Gigli noted that Urban had singled out

49 For the avvisi, see Mario Infelise, “Roman Avvisi: Information and Politics in the Seventeenth Century,” in Gianvittorio Signorotto and Maria Antonietta Visceglia, eds., Court and Politics in Papal Rome, 1492-1700, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 212-28 and Dooley, The Social History of Skepticism: Experience and Doubt in Early Modern Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 9-44. Both Infelise and Dooley emphasize the political nature of the avvisi and the role they played in spreading political news throughout early modern Italy


51 BAV, Urb.lat 1049, avviso of 21 October 1581, f. 399v.
Morandi, who had “written discourses and letters, which had blasphemed the Eminence of the title given to the Pope by the Cardinals, and sent them to various places.” Even the scribes who had copied the writings of Morandi and other astrologers faced imprisonment. A year later, Urban, still angry, promulgated the bull Inscrutabilis, which forbade predicting the deaths of popes and other prelates on the pain of death and the confiscation of property. Ecclesiastics like Morandi, who accounted for the majority of astrologers, would lose their clerical status if they made prophecies involving the pope.

Despite the efforts of the papacy to silence rumors and their primary fomenters—avvisi writers, astrologers and courtiers—news of the impending death of the pope, whether true or not, leaked out among the people. The rumors reflected a desire among people of all ranks to shape and control the social and political world around them. Rumor, as Jean-Nöel Kapferer, has argued “convey information, we want to believe. Our desire to believe is sometimes our usual criteria of realism and plausibility.” Romans desired the sede vacante for numerous reasons. Many popes, especially those who imposed excessive taxes, waged costly wars or ruled severely all angered the populace enough for it to wish for an end to their reigns. Paul IV, Sixtus V and Urban VIII stand

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53 Bullarum, diplomatum et privilegiorum, t. 14, ed. Luigi Tomassetti (Turin: Dalmazzo, 1868), 211.

out as the most extreme examples of this kind of pope. Many others hoped for the pope’s death due to the customary license that accompanied the *sede vacante*: some hoped to profit during the vacancy through burglary or sought revenge against enemies. The merchants and bankers of Banchi who often arranged bets on the lives of popes looked forwards to windfalls from a successful prediction of a pontiff’s death.\(^{55}\) In the case of long pontificates, such as that of Paul V, the populace, especially those with connections to the papal court, simply desired a change of regime that would open up the doors of patronage to new people. Despite Paul’s being well-liked by populace for keeping them in bread and work, diarist Gigli wrote that “[i]n sum he was worthy of reigning as much time for his virtues, even if the mob seemed annoyed with the length of this period for no other reason, but only because it desired new things”\(^{56}\)

The rumors of the pope’s fulfilled several needs for the people of Rome. They were a form of political discourse in which Romans commented on the policies of their

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\(^{55}\) The practice had become so prevalent that Gregory XIV banned it along with wagering on the future election in a bull of 21 March 1591; see Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Library, “Bolla della Santita di N. S. Gregorio PP XIV contra chi fà scommesse sopra la vita & morte ò sopra la future elettione del Pontefice Romano ò sopra le promotioni dei Cardinali della Santa Chiesa Romana.” For a more in depth discussion of wagering on the papal election, see chapter 7 of this dissertation.

\(^{56}\) Gigli, *Diario*, vol. I, 80: “In soma era degno di regnare altrettanto tempo per le sue virtù, ancor che il volgo pareses infastidito per la lunghezza del tempo non per altro, se nonperché desiderava cose nove.” After the death of Gregory XV, Gigli remembered the disappointed hope the people had for Paul’s successor: “When he assumed the papacy there was an incredible expectation that the People had of him, as that, which desirous of new things, was annoyed by the length of the pontificate of Paul V. But in the shortest time they new how they had been tricked, p. 120: “Quando fu assunto al Pontificato era incredibile la aspettazione che di lui haveva il Popolo, come quello, che desideroso di cose nove era infastidito del lungo Pontificato di Paolo Quinto. Ma in pochissimo tempo si conobbe quanto si era ingannato.” Similarly, the Mantuan ambassador Giovanni Battista Tarabucci noted in a dispatch of 20 May 1643 that, after twenty years of Urban VIII’s pontificate, Romans “were eager for change,” see Pastor, *HOP*, vol. 29 (1938), 402.
popes, as rumors functioned in other early modern societies. But more than that, rumors reflected the eagerness of Romans for the imminent *sede vacante*, during which all sorts of social and political agendas, that ranged from personal vengeance to protests against the dead popes, could be executed. Whatever their origin or motive behind them, rumors allowed many of those barred from the doors of power a voice and in many cases an opportunity to shape the world around them. In this regard, rumors served an example of the many “weapons of the weak” outlined by James C. Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. The power of rumor can be seen in the fear it instilled in papal authorities and in their attempts to stifle the spread of reports of the pope’s death, whether true or false.

The Pope’s Death

Despite the rumors that multiplied concerning the pope’s death, official rites symbolically proclaimed his death and the end of his regime for all of Rome to witness. The first of these ritual signifiers of the pope’s death was the tolling of the Patara bell on the Capitoline Hill. This bell only tolled at certain times of the year, which included not only the pope’s death but also the onset of Carnival, the execution of prisoners and the summoning of the general council of the communal magistrates. By the sixteenth

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century, with fewer executions taking place on the Capitol and the general council meeting with less regularity than in the past, the tolling of the Capitoline bell had become associated with the pope’s death and Carnival and with the license that both occasions brought to Rome. The cardinal chamberlain usually sent orders that the bell of the Capitol be rung “as a funeral sign of the death of the pope.”

The tolling at the pope’s death was greeted by echoing tintinnabulation of all the city’s bells and by several salvoes fired from the papal fortress Castel Sant’Angelo. Finally, so that no doubt would hang over the news of the pope’s death, the cardinal chamberlain notified the Popolo Romano, who then sent the caporioni and the militia patrols to proclaim the news by beat of drums throughout the neighborhoods of the city. Once these displays were seen and heard, the official news of the pope’s death was spread throughout Rome and crowds began to roam the streets, either heading to the area of the Vatican to be close to the excitement or to the prisons where those in jail would soon be freed. The novelty of the pope’s death also impelled many Romans to take to the streets with the onset of sede vacante as an anonymous satire written at the time of Alexander VII’s death in 1667 read,

was then used as the bell for the communal government and named after the Italian Cathars—the Patarini—who had sought refuge in that city.

60 Girolamo Lunadoro, Lo presente stato della corte di Roma (Rome: Venanzio Monaldini, 1765 [1635]), 76.


62 Anonymous, A New History of the Roman Conclave, concerning the rites and ceremonies used and observed at the death, election, and coronation of the Pope (London: Printed for Samuel Smith, 1691), 2.
“At the sound of the Big Bell the people showed up at the Capitoline, more curious than usual since they had only heard it ring twice in 44 years.”

In this atmosphere, the possibility for confusion and, even worse, tumults and greater violence was great. The threat of trouble loomed so heavily at the death of Clement VIII during the night of March 3 that the cardinal-nephew, Pietro Aldobrandini “did not want to ring the bell at the Capitol until morning, as usual, in order to avoid any sudden tumult.” Moreover, the very act of sounding the bell often became a moment of disorder as it could be accidentally rung before the pope’s death. This was obviously the case when the new magistrates were summoned to the general council before Gregory XIV had actually died in October 1591.

As one moved further way from Rome and the news of the pope’s death became less certain, the possibility for confusion grew even more. During Paul IV’s war with Spain, the pro-Spanish noble Ascanio della Corgna seized the papal fortress at the coastal town of Nettuno by having the town’s bells rung and shouting through its streets “that it was sede vacante.” Della Corgna left sixteen of his henchmen at the fortress, who later excused themselves to the papal forces that regained the town, maintaining that “they were tricked by him, with his saying that it was sede vacante.” Another example occurred on 3 May 1572, while waiting for certain news of the Pius V’s death, the

63 BAV, Vat.lat 9729, “Satira per la morte di Alessandro VII,” p. 295: “Al suono del Campanaccio camparse in Campidoglio il Popolo più del solito curioso, che in 44 anni non s’era inteso, che due volte.”

64 ASVenice, Disacci, Rome, filza 54, dispatch f 5 March 1605, f. 7r: “Non volsi il Cardinal Aldobrandini, che si sonastero le campane fin’alla mattina in Campidoglio giusta’l solito, per fuggier qualche improviso tumulto.”

65 BAV, Urb.lat 1038, avviso of 1 August 1556, f. 105r.

66 Ibid, f. 105r: “fussero de lui ingannati, con dire ch’era sede vacante.”
Governor of Città di Castello on the Tuscan border heard the city’s bells announced the pontiff’s death. 67 Immediately the banned signore Vincenzo Vitelli rode through the town yelling his family name while his followers poured out of their homes and followed him to the Piazza di Vitelli, where the family palace stood. During the next few days, the governor and sbirri were harassed by Vitelli’s men and several assassinations occurred by men hired by the family. 68

Adding further to the disorder surrounding the pope’s death was the Popolo Romano’s ancient right of setting free all those contained in the city’s prisons for lesser crimes and civil offenses. At the same time that the caporioni and their patrols marched through the rioni at the beat of a drum and under their neighborhood standards, the caporioni of Regola, Ponte, Campitelli and Borgo freed the prisoners in the jails of Corte Savella, Tor di Nona, Campitell and the Governor of Borgo respectively. 69 Giacinto Gigli, the caporione of Campitelli during the sede vacante of Urban VIII in 1644 provided a rare firsthand account of the ritual freeing of the prisoners from the cells of the Capitoline jails:

On the 29th of July, the death of Urban VIII was proclaimed and when the bell of the Capitol sounded, I being the Caporione of Campitelli, the Capotoro of my Rione, who was the Captain of the Capotori, came to my house with many soldiers and with two

67 ASR, Tribunale criminale del governatore, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 150, c. 1, testimony of Governor Bernardino Tempestrio, 8 June 1572, f. 7v.

68 Ibid, ff. 2v-8v.

69 Pecchiai, Roma nel Cinquecento, 76 and Emmanuel Rodocanachi, Les Institutions communales, 243. In 1652, Innocent X ordered the permanent closing of the Corte Savella, replacing the old prisons with the Carcer Nuove, the new prisons, on via Giulia in 1655. The caporione of Regola still enjoyed the right of freeing the prisoners in the new prisons since they lay in his rione. For a reference of the caporione of Borgo freeing prisoners in his district, see The Getty Research Center, MS, “Il Diairo di Gioseffe Gualdi, 1654-55,” t. II, f. 6r. He led fifteen prisoners from the jails of the governor during the vacancy of Innocent X.
drums. With these men accompanying me, I went to the Capitol, where there were numerous people and, climbing the stairs of the Palace of the Senator, I went to the prisons, which I were immediately opened for me. And I had the secret cells and the rooms opened, and I had the key given to me. I had all the prisoners who were there come before me and with the soldiers and drums I went outside followed by all the prisoners, who came one by one. And so that my soldiers could not carry away the rope used to give the corda, as is usual, the captain of the prisons gave them a scudo. But other times it was custom that the last of the prisoners carry away the said corda, following the Caporione until his house, and the Warden of the prisons, in order to recover it, paid fourteen giulii, which were given to the soldiers of the Caporione. This duty was mine to perform because in my Rione stood the Capitol, and the other Caporioni, who had prisons in their Rioni, also did their duty. Afterwards we met again with the others in the Palace of the Conservators at the council.\footnote{Gigli, \textit{Diario}, vol. I, 426: “A di 29 di Luglio fu publicata la morte di Papa Urbano 8 et quando sonò la Campana di Campidoglio, essendo io Caporione di Campitelli venne a casa mi ai Capotoro del mio Rione, il quale era Capitano dellii Capotori, con molti Soldati, et con doi tamburri, et da questi accompagnato me ne andai in Campidoglio, dove era Popolo numerosissimo, et salite le Scale del Palazzo del Senatore, me ne andai alle Prigioni, le quali mi furno subito aperte, et feci aprire tutte le secrete, et tutte le camere, et mi feci consegnare le chiavi, et feci venire alla mia presenza tutti li Carcerati, che vi erano, et con i detti Soldati et tamburi me ne uscii fuora segitato da tutti li Prigioni, li quali venivano ad uno ad uno. E acciò che li miei Soldati non si portassero via la fune da dare la corda, si come è solito, il capitano delle Carceri gli donò uno Scudo. Ma altre volte è stata usanza, che l’ultimo delle Prigioni porta via la detta corda seguitando il Caporione sino a sua casa, et il Custode delle Carceri per ricuperarla, paga giulii quindici, li quali si donano alli Soldati del Caporione. Questa funzione toccò di farla mè, perché nel mio Rione stava il Campidoglio, et la fecero anco quegli altri Caporioni, che havevano nel suo Rione le Caporioni, che havevano nel suo Rione le Carceri, et doppo ci ritrovammo con gli altri nel Palazzo della Conservatori al Consiglio.”}

It was customary, according to Gigli, that the last of the prisoners follow the \textit{caporione} home with the \textit{corda}, the rope used to give the torture of the strappado, used both as an interrogation device and, increasingly from the sixteenth century onward, as a form of punishment for all sorts of crimes that included gambling and vagabondage.\footnote{These crimes typically warranted three hoists (\textit{tratti}) with the \textit{corda} in addition to a monetary fine or time as a rower in the papal galleys.} The warden would then pay the \textit{caporione} fourteen giulii to get the \textit{corda} back and then the \textit{caporione} would give the money to his men. The warden of the Capitoline prisons, fearing a tumult among the people gathered at the Capitol might erupt at the sight of the hated torture device instead paid the constables a scudo (equal to ten giulii) in advance so that it would not be taken out in public. The warden clearly sought to avoid the type of
violent display that could occur at the opening of the prisons, as happened at the Corte Savella during the first evening of the vacancy of Gregory XIII in 1585. Once the last prisoner exited the jail with the *corda*, a crowd, composed of both prisoners and bystanders, rushed him, shouting, “Throw it in the river!” Two ringleaders from the prisons, named Domenico and Giovanni, grabbed the rope and led the crowd to the nearby Ponte Sisto, where they threw it into the Tiber—a symbolic method of destroying odious objects and people common in early modern Europe. Elsewhere in the provinces of the Papal States, giving the *corda* in public during the vacancy could provoke unrest. Riots broke out in the cities of Todi and Ancona when papal governors sought to punish wrongdoers with the hated torture during the *sede vacante* of Urban VII. In the minds of many papal subjects, the pope’s death thus freed them from confinement but also brought an end to the harsher aspects of his justice.

Many of the prisoners released at the time of *sede vacante* were the insolvent debtors that flooded the jails of Rome from the second half of the sixteenth century as poverty gripped the lower classes of the city. According to Jean Delumeau, debtors accounted for half of those incarcerated in the city’s prisons and in the 1580s at least six percent of the population of 100,000 had spent time in jail for debt. Through charity and papal dispensations, many of these prisoners were eventually released. Nonetheless, the

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73 For Ancona, see TCG, Processi, b. 230 (sixteenth century), c. 1, ff. 1r-45v; for Todi, see TCG, Processi, b. 244 (sixteenth century), c. 37, ff. 1086r-1087v and 1092v-1093r.
prisons of Rome remained crowded. In addition to the debtors and the more violent prisoners, already transferred to Castel Sant’Angelo, Rome’s jails housed hundreds of thieves, beggars, and others imprisoned for petty crimes. Vincenzo Paglia, in his study of confraternities that helped imprisoned debtors, estimated that Rome’s main jails housed three hundred men on any given day. This was not an unsubstantial number of men who could further add to the violence of sede vacante. Moreover, we have already seen how several hardened criminals were accidentally freed by the caporioni because the prisons were opened before the Pius IV’s death in 1565 and thus before the Governor of Rome had the opportunity to transfer them to the papal dungeons. Incidents like this were not exceptional. For example, an avviso of 4 January 1592 reported that because Innocent IX had “died suddenly the Governor of Rome did not have time to transport more than fifteen prisoners condemned to death in Castel Sant’Angelo; the others were all freed by the Popolo Romano, at which the Congregation of Cardinals made a great clamor” about the mistake. An earlier avviso noted that the governor was able to transfer the prisoners of the Tor di Nona to Castel Sant’Angelo, but that the “Caporione of Regola, freed all those in Corte Savella, where were found bandits, thieves and others


76 BAV, Urb.lat 1060, _avviso_ of 4 January 1592, f. 11r: “morte d’Improviso non ha hauto tempo Il Governatore di Roma di trasportare più di 15 pregioni per la vita in Castello, gli altri sono stati liberati dal Popolo, onde dalla Cong.re de Cardinali se ne fatto gran risentimento.”
arrested for terrible disorders.” An *avviso* of 8 January 1592 reported that among the prisoners that escaped during the opening of the prisons at the beginning of Innocent’s vacancy were two bandits sought by the grand duke of Tuscany. During the vacancy of Paul V in 1621, the Venetian ambassador Girolamo Soranzo wrote that “all the prisoners have been freed and all passes with much confusion, filling the city with bandits and all kinds of people.” Soranzo continued, telling the Senate that all the cardinals and ambassadors armed their houses in this atmosphere of disorder. Events supported his concerns; during the *sede vacante* of Clement VIII of 1605, several bandits, one of whom was condemned to the galleys and accidentally freed at the opening of the prisons, were hanged for holding two customs merchants for a ransom of a thousand scudi.

Some criminals used the chaos surrounding the pope’s death and the opening of the prisons to break out of jail. At the announcement of Gregory XIII’s death on 10 April 1585, thirty-six prisoners condemned to death before Easter, burst out of the prisons because the governor did not have time to transfer them to Castel Sant’Angelo. In the same vacancy, Giulio Galligano and Leonardo Lazzarini, prisoners released two weeks before the pope’s death, took advantage of the confusion to help several friends escape

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77 Ibid, *avviso* of 1 January 1592, f. 2v: “Caporione della Regola diede libertà a tutti quelli di Corte Savella, ove erano banditi, ladri, et altri presi per eccessi brutti.” The Venetian ambassador Giovanni Moro noted that in sudden opening of the prisons, “some of the most wick men, worthy of a thousand deaths, saved themselves,” see ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 28, dispatch of 11 January 1592, f. 328r.

78 BAV, Urb.lat 1060, *avviso* of 8 January 1592, f. 17r.


81 BAV, Urb.lat 1053, *avvissi* of 13 April 1585, ff. 171v and 174r.
from the Tor di Nona. A similar episode occurred when the bandit chief, Captain Marco da Monte Falco, made a daring escape while being transferred to the papal prisons before the death of Gregory XIV: he stole a cape and hat from castle’s wardrobe and pretended to be the castellan’s servant. For the lower strata of Rome, sede vacante was associated with new rules, hence the freeing of the prisoners. This was so engrained in the popular mind that one Luca and his compatriots escaped from the jail of Nepi at the start of Clement VIII’s vacancy on the urging of his mother, who told him that “the pope was dead and that it was sede vacante, therefore he could break out of the prisons and leave because that is what is done in Rome.” Although Rome was the only city in the Papal States to free its prisoners at the death of the pope, small towns in the Roman Campagna had heard of the practice. And, evidently other types of “prisoners” saw in sede vacante an opportunity to escape confinement. After the death of Sixtus V, the beggars and vagabonds interned in the Ospedale di San Sisto fled the hospital upon hearing the news. This was quite a flood of people into the streets: in 1581, the beggars numbered 850 and, in 1591, a year after Sixtus’s death, their numbers rose to 2000.

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83 BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, avviso of 5 October 1591, f. 296r.

84 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 552, f. 11v, testimony of Silvestro di Nepi, 21 April 1605: “che il papa era morto et che era sede vacante in pero che poteva le pregione et uscire ne perche così se faceva a Roma.”

85 From the testimony of criminals before the Governor’s judges, we know that many of those housed in Roman prisons came from the small towns and cities of the Papal States. For example, Giulio Galligano and the friends he helped to escape from the Tor di Nona all hailed from the town of Velletri, located to the south of Rome in the Alban Hills; see ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 342, testimony of Giulio Galligano, 29 April, ff. 49v and 51r-v.

86 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 12 September 1590, f. 466v. For the numbers of vagabonds in San Sisto, see Eugenio Sonnino, “The Population of Baroque Rome,” in Peter van Kessel and Elisja Schulte, eds.,
For the Popolo Romano the freeing of prisoners held a different value. Despite the dangers that freeing the prisoners presented, civic magistrates cherished this task as it increased their political and social capital in the city. It reflected the magnanimity of the Popolo Romano towards the populace as well as the eclipse of papal power and the temporary ascendancy. In ordinary times, only the pope had the right to free prisoners en masse at his coronation or during Christmas festivities, which reflected his role as the forgiving heir of Christ. Now, at the start of the vacancy, the civic magistrates had this right, which not only symbolized their new power but also highlighted the death of the pope to the city.

As the caporioni marched through the streets to free the prisoners, other ceremonies took place in the Vatican that proclaimed the pope’s death to the populace. Immediately after the pope had died, the cardinal-nephew and other relatives of the pope had to leave the papal palaces at the Vatican and the Quirinal Hill and return to their own homes in the city. Symbolizing his role as the provisional leader of the Rome and the Papal States during the vacancy, the cardinal chamberlain “took possession of it [the Vatican palace] in the name of the Apostolic Chamber.” The chamberlain resided in the pope’s apartments until he and the other cardinals entered the conclave after the nine days of funeral obsequies for the deceased pope; during this time the pope’s guard of Swiss soldiers accompanied the chamberlain throughout the city.

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87 Rodocanachi, *The Roman Capitol*, 160.


Further highlighting the death of the pope and the change in regime were a serious of private rites that took place at the first meeting of the congregation of cardinals in the Sistine Chapel. Here in the presence of the cardinals, the two masters of ceremonies, and clerics of the Apostolic Chamber and other officials of the Roman Curia, the chamberlain removed from the dead pope’s finger the *annulus piscatoris*, the ring of the fisherman, which the pope used to seal bulls and briefs issued in his name, and smashed it with a silver hammer. Next, the Datary, the curial official who dispensed benefices and marital dispensations, and the secretaries of the other offices of the Curia, surrendered to the chamberlain the seals of the deceased pope that gave their documents authority. Again the chamberlain broke the gold molds bearing the pope’s seals before the gathered cardinals and officials to underscore the end of the deceased pope’s law. The fragments of the ring and seals, worth a hundred scudi all together, were then given as a gift to the masters of ceremonies.  

Except for the Apostolic Chamber headed by the chamberlain, all papal institutions and offices ceased functioning in the time of *sede vacante*; no new laws could be made, no dispensations granted, nor any trials conducted. The destruction of the molds also served a logical function; preventing them from falling into hands of others who could then use them to falsify letters in the dead pope’s name. All briefs the

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90 On the destruction of the ring, see Lunadoro, *Lo stato presente*, 72-73 and Giovanni Battista De Luca, *Il dottor volgare ovvero il compendio di tutta la legge vicile, canonica, feudale e municipale* (Florence: V. Batelli, 1839-43 [1673]), vol. IV, bk. 15, ch. 3, 480. On giving the masters of ceremonies the fragments of the ring [and seals], see Anonymous, *New History of the Roman Conclave* (1691), 2 and Gutsave Constant, “Les maîtres de ceremonies du XVle siècle,” *Mélanges d’archéologue et d’histoire* 23 (1903), 202. Masters of ceremonies kept diaries of the major ceremonial functions of the papal court, including the funeral rites of deceased popes. For the most part they are formulaic; for example, see master of ceremonies Paolo Alaleone’s laconic account of Gregory XV’s funeral ceremonies, BAV, Vat.lat 12323, Diaria Caeremoniarum Pauli Alaleonis, ff. 458r-61r.
pope had not completed and petitions to the Datary not validated at the time of his death were placed in two chests that were sealed for the duration of the vacancy.  

Avvisi writers were quick to report these private ceremonies to the entire city and beyond. The city, however, did not need these reports as the crowds that gathered around St. Peter’s and the Vatican to witness the body of the dead pope could see the mourning clothes of the cardinals. By tradition, all the clerics of the Curia wore black to represent the death of the pope and the lapse in their jurisdiction during the vacancy.

This stood in contrast to contemporaneous France where the presidents of the Parlement wore their customary red robes, symbolic dress reflecting royal authority, to show that “Justice never dies,” that is the eternal quality of the monarchy. Cardinals and clerics of the Apostolic Chamber, however, did not wear mourning clothes in order to reflect that while the pope had died, the Church as represented by the Sacred College persisted. The cardinal chamberlain wore purple robes, while cardinals and curialists holding perpetual offices wore dark clothing, but not black. The exceptions to this tradition were important officials, such as the Governor of Borgo, a relative of the pope, and cardinals whom the deceased pope had nominated.

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91 On the breaking of the seals’ molds, see Lunadoro, Lo stato presente, 73 and Anonymous, New History of the Roman Conclave, 2. For the ceremony in the late Middle Ages, see Paravicini-Bagliani, The Pope’s Body, 119.

92 For example, see BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 29 August 1590 and Urb.lat 1093, avviso of 12 July 1623, f. 592r; ASV, Segretario, Avvisi di Roma, t. 9, avviso of 15 July 1623, ff. 191r-v and t. 96, avviso of 30 July 1644, f. 203r.


Papal rites thus emphasized the complete lapse in papal and the temporary ascendancy of the College of Cardinals headed by the cardinal chamberlain. From the High Middle Ages, jurists and scholars had associated the pope with the Roman Curia; Hostiensis (d. 1271), a professor at the University of Paris coined the maxim, “ubi papa, ibi Roma” to emphasize the power of the pope by subsuming all of the cardinals and clerics to his authority.95 This implied that without the pope, Rome as well as all of Christendom remained leaderless, or headless in the corporate terminology favored by jurists. The death of the Church’s leader was made direr since at the same time the popes and their propagandists had begun to emphasize the pope’s position as the Vicar of Christ on earth (rather than the Vicar of Peter as had been emphasized in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages). The dignitas, or symbolic title, of the pope carried weighty implications and could not be passed to another human being until the election of the succeeding pope, unlike the legal and ritual practices of the French and English monarchies, whose jurists had argued that “dignitas non moritur,” or colloquially transformed into “le roi ne meurt jamais” and “the king as king never dies.”96 In contrast, the pope did not have two bodies—a physical and metaphysical one—as French and English sovereigns had. Instead, the pope only had a natural body that died with

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95 Paravicini-Bagliani, The Pope’s Body, 62; the phrase means “where the pope is, there is Rome.”

96 Ibid, 70-73. For the French and English legal and ceremonial phrases, see Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies, 314-400, particularly pages 383 and 412, and Giesey, Royal Funeral Ceremony, 177. The phrase, “the king never dies” entered French parlance with Jean Bodin’s Six Books on the Republic.
him. As Reinhard Elze eloquently put it; “What remained were Christ, the Roman Church, and the Apostolic See, but not the pope.” 97

Papal interregnal rites, like those of the similarly elective monarchies of the Republic of Venice and the Commonwealth of Poland, displayed a suspicion with dynastic continuity.98 Since papal families often sought to maintain their authority after the death of their leader and even attempted to sway the coming election, ceremony had emphasized their lack of power. The cardinal chamberlain assumed the papal apartments in the Vatican and went about the city with the Swiss Guard. Yet, the cardinal chamberlain and his fellow cardinals in the college were only temporary substitutes who neither inherited the papal dignitas nor exercised full authority during the vacancy. Only the deceased pope’s successor could hold his sovereignty. Hence another maxim among papal curialists: “Apostolica sedis non moritur. Papa moritur.” (“The Apostolic See does not die. The pope dies”).99 The Apostolic See remained vacant until filled by another occupant of St. Peter’s throne.


98 For interregnal rites in early modern Venice, see Edward Muir, Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1981), 263-89. For early modern Poland, see Aleksander Gieysztor, “Gesture in the Coronation Ceremonies of Medieval Poland,” in János Bak, ed., Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 153-55. Although the Polish had adopted their own version of the idea that dignitas non moritur, they also emphasized the death of the king and his successor’s lack of judicial power until the coronation. From 1570 until the last royal funeral before the partition of Poland, royal officials placed a mounted knight with a closed visor in the main cathedral. They knocked the knight down from the horse, shattered his lance and broke the riyal seal, all to symbolize the end of the monarchical power until the election and coronation of a successor.

“Sic transit gloria mundi”: Papal Funeral Rites

In contrast to early modern France, where the monarchy developed elaborate rites to demonstrate the continuity and perpetuity of the French crown, early modern Rome witnessed funeral ceremonies that emphasized the pope’s death and the power void in his absence.100 In the High Middle Ages, popes were often abandoned semi-nude in death, their possessions down to their funeral robes having been stolen by familiars, household servants and curial officials. Even Innocent III, the most powerful pope of the Middle Ages, suffered this humiliating fate. This rite highlighted the maxim intoned to each new pope on his coronation day: *sic transit gloria mundi*, thus passes the glories of the world.101 This phrase as well as the pillaging of his possessions in death displayed the ephemerality of papal power and served to humble all those that wore the papal tiara.

Although the custom of papal familiars pillaging the dead pope’s possessions survived well into the early modern era (as attested by the fears of Julius II expressed to

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100 For the French interregnal ceremonies emphasizing the perpetuity of the crown, see Giesey, *Royal Funeral Ceremony* and Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 419-31. Following the death of Charles V in 1422, French masters of ceremonies placed a life-like effigy of the deceased king in the main hall of the palace that represented a fictitious continuity of his reign until the coronation of his heir. The heir, who was already ruling, did not approach the simulacrum, which held the symbols of royal sovereignty—the crown, scepter, and the *main de justice*—until the burial of the dead king. During this time the effigy was treated like living person—even being fed—and the heir discreetly stayed out of sight until the funeral. This ritual declined with the death of Henry IV as his son Louis XIII immediately held his first *lit de justice*—that is, sat on the Parlement in Paris—before the dead king’s burial and before his coronation. Thus the king assumed his full authority immediately after the death of his predecessor. The old formula, “Le roi est mort! Vive le roi!” became fashionable once again among the populace to reflect this rapid transference of power.

101 For the coronation rite, see Bernhard Schimmelpfennig, “Papal Coronations in Avignon,” in Bok, ed., *Coronations*, 184 and Paravicini-Bagliani, *The Pope’s Body*, 29-39. During the coronation ceremony, which dates to the thirteenth century, bands of flax were burnt to highlight the transience of the pope’s life and his power.
his master of ceremonies, Paride de Grassi, on his death bed in 1513), the ritual humiliation of the pope’s body gradually declined with the creation of the modern conclave by Gregory X with his bull *Ubi periculum* (Where there is danger) of 1274.102 This bull established the tradition of sequestering the cardinals in the conclave after nine days of funeral obsequies for the deceased pope.103 Gregory’s primary object was to free the election from outside influence and to hasten the process along, which could take months and even years in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The *Novendiales* (also called the *novena*), nine days of funeral obsequies, had the consequence of highlighting the pope’s death and the vacancy of the Apostolic See as during this time the pope’s body was put on display for the entire city and court to see. At the same time *Novendiales* allowed the College of Cardinals to be seen by the populace before its members entered the conclave on the tenth day after the pope’s death. Each morning of the *Novendiales*, the cardinals gathered in the Sistine Chapel to say prayers for the soul of the deceased pope, before meeting in congregations that provided for the defense of the city during *sede vacante*.104

On the first day of the novena the pope’s body was prepared for its display to the populace at St. Peter’s Basilica for three days. If the pope had died at the papal palace on the Quirinal Hill, as many early modern popes did since it was the main residence of the

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102 See Elze, “‘Sic transit mundi gloria,’” 29 and Paravicini-Bagliani, *The Pope’s Body*, 127. The proud pope wanted to pay de Grassi to avoid the customary pillaging and the abandonment of his body in order to retain some of the majesty of his office.


104 Paravicini-Bagliani, *The Pope’s Body*, 146. See also Anonymous, *New History of the Roman Conclave*, 3. Although stipulated by papal bulls starting from *Ubi periculum*, the cardinals often entered the conclave after the prescribed tenth day.
papal family, the body was transferred in a funeral procession during the night to the Vatican. A vanguard of light horsemen led the procession to clear the way of curious onlookers, eager to see to the pope’s funeral litter. This was followed by papal grooms bearing torches, Swiss guards carrying the folded banner of the Apostolic See, and the masters of ceremonies on horseback with several palace servants in red and purple liveries. The pope’s litter, carried by two white mules followed this group. Jesuit penitentiaries, since the 1540s, stood around the litter, reciting prayers, while Swiss guards armed with halberds marched along both of its sides. Behind the deceased pope trailed a rearguard of artillery and two companies of horsemen. The first company consisted of lightly armed soldiers carrying banderoles wrapped around poles and pistols with their barrels pointed to the ground; the second company wore heavier suits of armor and bore flags wrapped around poles and swords likewise pointing to the ground. Musicians rounded out the funeral procession, playing a dirge composed of muted trumpets and discordant drums. The message to those who heard and saw the procession was thus clear; the pope’s reign was at an end.

Once at the Vatican, the masters of ceremonies prepared the body for its presentation in St. Peter’s. After washing the body a mixture of herbs and white wine, the masters of ceremonies had professional apothecaries embalm the body so that its face would not putrefy for the remaining eight days of the novena. Then they dressed it in red robes and white sandals (if the pope had been a member of a religious order, these

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105 Lunadoro, Lo state presente, 80-83.
vestments were put over his habit). After embalming and dressing the body, a procession of cardinals and officials took it to St. Peter’s and placed on a funeral bier called the *castrum doloris*, the fortress of sorrow, so called because the edifice, which was often shaped like a pyramid, resembled a castle. Four black banners, rather than the customary standards bearing the papal coat-of-arms, perched on the top of the monument, while torches and candles on silver candleholders surrounded the body. A painting of a skull and bones at the base of the bier served as a *momento mori*, which contrasted sharply with the signs of the pope’s former might that were placed inside the coffin: a silver cross lay on his breast and two cardinal’s hats were at his feet, “representing his spiritual and temporal authority.” The only reference to the pope’s past as an individual was the carving of his family arms along with the insignia of the papacy on the side of the bier. The body was kept by a grating and was vigilantly watched by Swiss guards “in order to quell disorders that could occur due to the throng of people that flocked there.”

For the next three days St. Peter’s saw “an infinite number of people, who competed to kiss the [pope’s] foot,” as an account of Leo IX’s death in 1605 described

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108 Lunadoro, *Lo stato presente*, 85: “per sedere le confusioni, che posson succedere per la calca del Popolo, che vi concorre.” The Swiss guards could be a source of disorder. In 1605, the College of Cardinals thought it prudent to bolster the guard over the pope’s body with several Corsican soldiers, which led to a fight between the two groups. One of the Corsicans was wounded and priests had to re-bless St. Peter’s, see BAV, Urb.lat 1073, *avviso* of 5 March 1605, f. 102v. For the sacral quality of early modern rulers, including popes, see Francis Oakley, *Kingship: The Politics of Enchantment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 108-31.
the only part in the papal funeral rites where the masses actively participated.109  Barely
two months earlier, the crush of pilgrims outside St. Peter’s to see the body of Clement
VIII delayed a congregation of the College of Cardinals until the evening.110  Romans
even came in great numbers to adore the feet of unpopular popes such as Gregory XV
and Urban VIII, both of whom had earned the ire of the populace due their weighty
taxes.111

The rite of kissing the pope’s foot was the last demonstration of respect for his
power, but it was especially important for the people of Rome as the dead body still
retained some its numinous aura associated with his former position as the Vicar of Christ
and prince of the people. The Venetian ambassador, Matteo Dandolo, provided a more
detailed look at the populace’s frenzied desire to be close to the holy body of the pope in
a description of Paul III’s obsequies. In a dispatch of 13 November 1549, he wrote:
The body was taken into Christ’s chapel at St. Peter’s and although it rained hard, there
was such a crowd of people of all sorts to kiss his feet, that they stood outside the grating,
crying peccavi mea culpa, and making those within touch the corpse on their behalf, a
thing unheard of.  This continued throughout yesterday.112

109 BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 30 April 1605, f. 224r: “Infinito popolo, che concorse a baciari il piede.”
110 Ibid., avviso of 5 March 1605, f. 101v.
111 For Gregory XV, see BAV, Urb.lat 1093, avviso of 12 July 1623, f. 528v, which reported that “as usual,
a great number of people having converged there to kiss [his feet]” (“secondo il solito sendovi concourse
gran quantità di Popolo a bacciar”) and ASV, Segretario, Avvisi di Roma, t. 9, avviso of 15 July 1623, f.
191v.  For Urban VIII, see ASV, Segretario, Avvisi di Roma, t. 96, avviso of 6 August 1644, which stated
that “the people flocked there in great numbers to be able to kiss the [pope’s] feet” (“il Popolo concorrosi
in gran numero gli potesse bagiare li piedi”).
112 Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs in the Archives and Collections
of Venice and in other Libraries of Northern Italy, Vol. V (1534-54), ed. Rawdon Brown (Nendeln,
The behavior of the crowd resembled that of devotees before wonder-working images of the Madonna found in sanctuaries throughout Italy. Pilgrims at these sanctuaries threw themselves to the ground, shouted, and yelled to get the attention of the Madonna, who as a divine patron would bestow her aid to them or intercede on their behalf before Christ. Likewise, the crowds waiting to kiss the pope’s feet shouted “peccavi, mea culpa” (“I have sinned, it’s my fault”), an abridgement of the prayer Confiteor said at mass and before receiving extreme unction. Traditionally, when the faithful uttered this prayer, they struck their breast three times at the utterance of the phrase “mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.” It is obvious that they wanted the pope to intercede on their behalf in the next world. If they could not touch the pope, the next best thing would be to gain his attention by making a racket.

In many cases, members of the crowd sought “relics” from the deceased pope as protective talismans. Thousands of Romans gathered at St. Peter’s to see Pius V, renowned for holiness and popular with the people due to his victory against the Turks at Lepanto and reduction of taxes. Many attempted to take items belonging to the pope, but were prevented by the Swiss guards. Instead they had to make due with touching their rosaries and other sacred objects to the bier. The actions of the crowd show that, despite the funeral rites emphasizing the death of the pope and the end of his governance, the people had not yet severed the bonds that connected them to their deceased ruler. In death, the pope was now a divine intercessor for his living subjects.


114 Pastor, HOP, vol. 28 (1929), 457. This was well before Pius V’s canonization as a saint, which occurred in 1712.
Yet popes also suffered the ire of his subjects in death. Wits wrote invectives against his memory and Romans of all ranks took part in riots that target the property and memorials of popes who had ruled with a heavy hand. This paradox of expressed love and hate for the dead pope was tied to what Paolo Prodi has called “double soul” of the early modern pope: as Vicar of Christ, he was the spiritual head of the Catholic Church, and, as ruler of the Papal States, he was the secular prince of one of the largest independent states in the Italian peninsula. Romans could criticize his secular soul while still venerating his spiritual soul. Of all the early modern popes, only Paul IV completely lost the aura of sanctity that surrounded the pope. After his death in 1559, masters of ceremonies had his body quickly entered in Saint Peter’s rather than display it for the customary three days of public presentation “out of fear that the people would comment some outrage against it.”

Household attendants and papal officials also refused to sever the ties with their former lord so quickly. These familiars often asserted ownership over personal items that he had touched before he died. The pope’s barber claimed the razor and basin he used to shave the deceased’s beard and head before burial, while the masters of ceremonies claimed the bedding of their formal master. Starting in the thirteenth century, the papacy gave these attendants money in lieu of the personal objects of the pope to

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prevent pillaging: the barber received several scudi and the masters of ceremonies the remnants of the golden *annulus pescatoris* and molds of the papal seals. Yet, pillaging the personal effects of the pope continued until the papacy’s adoption of a modern, depersonalized bureaucracy in the nineteenth century. For example, as Innocent X lay moribund, attendants had already taken his favorite bowl and the majordomo of the palace had stolen a ring he was accustomed to wearing on his hand.  

Although Reinhard Elze claimed that the pope’s familiars sought these items as relics, in all likelihood these pillages represented the last bit of income for many of these servants and attendants. With the exception of a few officials, such as the masters of ceremonies, the election of the pope saw the change of the entire papal household and the onset of a new patronage network. The pope and his family often favored fellow countrymen when allocating positions within the household. Thus, in the case of papal familiars, the theft of papal household goods and treasures emphasized both the continuation and the severance of personal bonds with their master.

At the end of third day, the public display of the pope’s corpse stopped, although the funeral obsequies did not. The cardinals continued to hold mass each morning for the deceased pope. On the last day of the *Novendiales*, a priest versed in humanism gave a eulogy on the pope’s behalf. After the funeral sermon, five cardinals led by the chamberlain celebrated mass, aspersed the body with holy water and burned incenses

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118 ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 136, dispatch of 5 January 1655, f. 606r.

119 Elze, “‘*Sic transit gloria mundi,*’” 26.
around it. Then the body was entered in a chapel that had been arranged to hold tomb before his death.\textsuperscript{120} With the burial of the pope, the rites heralding the pope’s death were completed, although the vacancy would only end with the election of his successor.

CHAPTER 3

THE FEAR AND VIOLENCE OF SEDE VACANTE

During _sede vacante_ Rome not only experienced jurisdictional confusion as cardinals, nobles and civic officials claimed new authority with the death of the pope, but also a marked increase in violence among its populace. Romans of all orders exploited the pope’s death to seek vengeance against enemies or to commit crimes in the license of the moment. Both papal and civic authorities sought to deter violence by increasing the number of soldiers watching over the city and the conclave. Cardinals and nobles meanwhile hired men from the city’s poor as well as peasants from the villages of the Papal States to act as personal and palace guards during the interregnum. Paradoxically, these very men employed by both the state and the city’s potentates only exacerbated the violence. Many of them fell into the life of a soldier and criminal at various points of their life and came to Rome for the vacancy. The vacancy also stirred up brigandage in the Papal Staets, as many bandits sought either to find employment as guards in Rome or raid the the Roman countryside in great bands of outlaws.

The Increase in Violence during _Sede Vacante_

Early modern Rome was extremely violent. The city’s ancient nobility and new families strutted through its streets with armed retainers that frequently clashed with one
another. The retinue of these barons and prelates were fed by poor men from the countryside and from further afield in the Papal States and Italian peninsula. The violence continued well into the seventeenth century with the politics of the great European powers—particularly France and Spain—being played out in Rome as the servants and supporters of the ambassadors of these countries took diplomatic controversies to the streets and squares of the city. The countryside around Rome, called the Campagna, fared no better. Bandits and highwaymen roamed the roads leading to Rome, plundering caravans and robbing messengers, pilgrims and travelers. Banditry reached a zenith in the early 1590s when thousands of bandits, whose numbers were fed by vagrants and ex-soldiers, roamed the Campagna and the Papal States. The bandits always had a steady source of prey in the caravans laden with luxury items that supplied the courts of the cardinals and ambassadors that entered the city for church and diplomatic business.1

The papacy thus never had a firm grip on the monopoly of violence in its state and even in its very capital. This is attested by the number of violent altercations that occurred each day in the late sixteenth century. Historian Peter Blastenbrei, using the reports filed by the city’s barbers and surgeons with the Governor of Rome, found that on

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average 1.8 violent attacks occurred each day from 1560-85. Police action did not solve the problem; the major papal police forces, those of the tribunals of the Governor and Senator of Rome, lacked both manpower and ability. The largest police force, the Governor’s tribunal, numbered less than a hundred men throughout the early modern era. Although heavily armed, they lacked discipline and often came from the very ranks of the criminals they were meant to monitor. The Senator’s police force numbered less than ten sbirri. To make up for these deficiencies, popes relied on a mixture of propaganda and severity to project the strength of their judicial authority. Sixtus V, for example, not only employed an art program to broadcast forcefully his justice throughout Rome and the Papal States, but also ruthlessly sought to extirpate banditry and all sorts of crimes. In the first year of his pontificate, the number of capital sentences shot up from 54 to 97. These palliatives, however, did nothing to stop the omnipresent violence and criminality of the era.

Rome became even more violent during sede vacante. After the pope’s death, papal justice temporarily ceased to exist in Rome. Contemporary accounts reveal both the increased levels of violence during the vacancy and the expectation for such violence. The Venetian ambassador, Alvise Mocenigo noted in his report before the Venetian Senate that after the death of Paul IV in 1559 “there were many hundreds of deaths in a

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few days.”\(^5\) Similarly, Giovanni Vertua, an agent of the Milanese lord, Count Brunoro de Gambara, wrote his master that “[i]n this time, discord reigns; no pope is made and this city suffers greatly if only because every day there are wounded and killed many people.”\(^6\) The Mantuan ambassador Emilio Stenghali agreed, writing to Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga that

Here one does not walk about if not armed. One does not hear other than fights and such a great number of people were wounded and killed that this sede vacante proves to be from the beginning more turbulent than any other in last fifty years.\(^7\)

These examples all come from one vacancy—one that was marked by riots against the memory of the dead pope. Yet, even during less tumultuous vacancies, violence reigned as Romans took advantage of the opportunities that the interregnum offered. An avviso issued during the vacancy of Gregory XIII stated that “[t]here was no lack of effort then in keeping this city in check by issuing other laws and publishing rigorous bandi for the many murders that were committed and for the license that everyone took in carrying prohibited weapons.”\(^8\) And during the vacancy of Gregory XV in 1623, the civic official Giacinto Gigli left this detailed entry in his diary:


\(^{7}\) ASM, Carteggio deli inviati e diversi, Rome, filza 889, dispatch of 21 August 1559, f. 664v: “Qui non si viaggiano si non armi, ne si non questione, et sono amazzato tante persone, et tante ferrite, che questa sede vacante mostra principio di più turbulente che sia anco stata gia cinquant’anni.”

\(^{8}\) BAV, Urb.lat 1053, avviso of date needed, f. 171v: “Non si manca poi per tenere in freno questa città di dare altre leggi, et publicare rigorosi bandi per i molti homicidi, che si fanno, et per la licenza, ch’ognuno s’ha preso di portare l’armi prohibite.”
Meanwhile this Sede Vacante was very noteworthy for the great disorders that were committed, especially in Rome, which no one living had remembered ever seeing in a similar time. There does not pass a day without many fights, murders, treacheries and the discovery of many slain men and women in various places. Many were found headless and others were similarly gathered headless who had been into the Tiber like that. Many houses were broken into and wickedly robbed at night: doors were forced open, women raped, others killed, others abducted, so that many maidens were shamed, raped and kidnapped.9

Even if most vacancies were not characterized by the exceptional levels of violence recorded in 1559 and 1623, there was nevertheless an expectation and even an acceptance that violent crimes would occur in the wake of the pope’s death. For example, more than two weeks into the vacancy of Clement VIII, the Venetian ambassador Agostino Nani wrote to his government that “in the city people continue to live quietly enough, although one hears of some murders.”10 Gigli nonchalantly wrote that in the days following the death of Urban VIII in 1644 “there were committed several murders.”11


10 ASVenice, Dispacci degli ambasciatori al senato, filza 54, dispatch of 19 March 1605, f. 49r: “nella Città li continua a vivier assai quietamente, se bensi senti qualche homicidio.” A month and a half later, during the vacancy of Clement’s successor, Leo XI, *avvisi* writers noted that among the populace there were “some fights and murders” and “in the time of the death of Pope Leo there have been committed a good number of murders.” See BAV, Urb.lat 1073, *avviso* of 7 May 1605, f. 239r: “si farne delli questioni et homicidii” and ASV, Segretario di stato, *Avvisi*, t. 1, *avviso* of 4 May 1605, f. 8r: “In questo tempo della morte di Papa Leone si è fatta ben qualche morte.”

11 Gigli, *Diario*, vol. I, 427: “nelli altri seguenti furno fatti diversi homicidi.” Gigli also commented, rather causally, that after the death of the popular pope, Paul V, “the entire city stirred,” an obvious reference to the proclivity of Romans for attacking each other during *sede vacante* rather than a revolt since no other sources make reference to any manifestations against the popular Borghese pope. See, ibid, vol. I, 80: “si sollevo tutta la città.”
But can the accounts of diarists, ambassadors and newsletter writers accurately attest to the number of brawls and murders that took place during the vacancy? Many of their reports use the same stereotypes and even the same commonplace phrases in describing the violence of *sede vacante*. It is true, as Claude Gauvard has shown for journals and chronicles concerning the violence of the Hundred Years’ War that these stereotypes were not neutral. Many, in her case, were written by royalists who used the fear of violence to criticize the weak kingship and lack of strong government of the French monarchy in the fifteenth century.  

Similarly, during the vacancy, *avvisi* writers liked to stoke the fires of fear with their accounts of the levels of violence. Many observers kept minute track of the murders that took place during the vacancy. The nobleman Lelio Dalla Valle recorded the lurid details of murders committed by nobles and bandits during the *sede vacante* of Gregory XIII in 1585. *Avvisi* writers enumerated the brawls, thefts and assassinations that occurred during the vacancy of Clement VIII in 1605 and the *avviso* writer Gioseffe Gualdi did the same for the vacancy of Innocent X in 1655. Observers tended to avoid classic stereotypes of plundering and rape, instead focusing on the more traditional *sede vacante* crimes of brawling and murder, especially if they involved members of the city’s elite. In several cases, the crimes recorded in their accounts can also be found in the registers of the Governor’s tribunal.

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14 For example, the registers of the Governor of Rome contain trials concerning the high-profile murders mentioned by Dalle Valle in his diary; see ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth-century), busta 196, case 10 and busta 198, c. 4. Of the several violent crimes described by the avvisi writers during the vacancy of Clement
extraordinary is the number of violent crimes and tumults found in the both the Governor and Conservators’ tribunals on which avvisi writers failed to comment. Thus, they did not embellish the violence of sede vacante and may have downplayed it with their silence. An anonymous avvisi writer, for instance, casually wrote about the sede vacante of 1605 that “although it appears [this] sede vacante unfolds quietly, nevertheless there does not lack occurrences of disturbances,” before launching into an account of several fights and murders that occurred with the announcement of Clement VIII’s death.¹⁵

Criminal records of the Governor’s tribunal verify the increase in violence during the vacancy. Specifically, the relazioni dei medici et barbieri demonstrate this increase in violence. These relazioni were reports of all suspicious wounds that barbers, surgeons and doctors registered at the Governor’s tribunal within one day of treating patients. The papacy, as did many other Italian states, began to use the reluctant barbers and doctors as denouncers of crimes starting from the 1530s.¹⁶

Even during the vacancy, despite the cessation of papal government and the Governor’s Tribunal, the Sacred College issued decrees forcing barbers and surgeons to report all suspicious wounds to its notaries (as opposed to those of the Senator’s

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¹⁵ BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 9 March 1605, f. 110r:” se bene pare che la sede vacante vada quieta, tuttavia non mancano occori de romori.”

¹⁶ For a study of the early modern state’s employment of medical professionals in the surveillance of crimes, see Alessandro Pastore, Il medico in tribunale: La perizia medica nella procedura penale d’antico regime (secoli XVI-XVIII), (Bellinzona: Edizioni Casagrande, 2004). Pastore studies the cities of Bologna, Lucca, Venice, and Verona as well as the towns of northern Lombardy. He provides statistics for the number of daily woundings in seventeenth-century Lucca, which, for a small town, nevertheless had the high rate of .43 and 1.15 reports of violent wounds a day in 1600 and 1630 respectively; see p. 193. For Rome, see Blastenbrei, Kriminalität in Rom, 39-42 and 51-71, esp. 60-65.
Tribunal) under the penalty of a double fine. Unfortunately, for the period under investigation (1559-1655), only the registers for the vacancies of 1572 and 1644 have survived. Nevertheless, they confirm that the vacancy was indeed a violent time. The thirteen-day *sede vacante* of Pius V, despite being one of the more peaceful interregna, saw a total of 114 violent injuries that amount to 8.8 a day during the vacancy. Seventy-two years later, *sede vacante* continued to be a time of violence: during the 48-day vacancy of Urban VIII 394 violent injuries were reported to the Governor’s tribunal, about 8.2 violent acts a day.

These are remarkable figures, especially compared to the daily average of 1.8 violent acts during the *sede plena*. Moreover, they give credence to Mocenigo’s assertion that hundreds of murders took place during the vacancy of Paul IV or Vertua’s somewhat exaggerated claim that more than five hundred deaths had been registered in the criminal tribunals of the Governor and the Capitol almost two months into the same vacancy. And the figures for 1644 may actually not report all the crimes that occurred during the vacancy. Peter Blastenbrei has noted that in the 1570s and 80s Romans increasingly sought to hide their crimes by lying to the doctors and barbers when asked about their

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18 ASR, TCG, Relazioni dei medici et barbieri, vol. 13 (1571-74), ff. 127r-136r: reports from 1 May to 13 May 1572. Blastenbrei also came up with the same figure, although if one included the reports of 14 May 1572 (since the barbers had one day to register their reports), the figure rises to 120 violent crimes for the period of the vacancy.

19 ASR, TCG, Relazioni dei medici et barbieri, vol. 73, unpaginated, reports from 29 July to 15 September 1644.

20 For Vertua, see his letter of 7 October 1559 to Count Brunoro de Gambara in Rezzaghi, “Una cronaca di conclave,” p. 565.
injuries. Blastenbrei ascribed this to widespread distrust of the papal judicial authorities, but in reality most delinquents were reluctant to incriminate themselves before the barbers. Throughout the seventeenth century, Romans continued to fabricate stories before the barbers. Nevertheless, the barbers dutifully took down all the lies out of fear of reprisal from the governor. Hence, barbers recorded several wounds improbably incurred from falling down stairs or from being kicked by horses. For example, in one day during the vacancy of 1644, five men had various wounds mended by different barbers, each claiming that they had been kicked by a horse. One wonders how many wounds were not reported or were taken care of secretly with the aid of powerful patrons.

Contemporaries noticed that violence not only continued for the duration of the vacancy, but also increased after the cardinals entered the conclave. This made sense, as the cardinals, although acting as regents in charge of the peace during interregnum, were often distracted by the requirement to elect the new pope. The Venetian ambassador Lorenzo Priuli was surprised at how few murders took place on the beginning of sede vacante in 1585. He surmised that “the sudden death of the pope was the cause,” but prophesied that “if the conclave went longer than usual there could well happen many evils.”21 Giacinto Gigli also feared that a long conclave would only increase the number of violent acts in Rome: during the vacancy of Gregory XIII, after writing about the numerous acts of violence, he wrote that

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21 ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 19, dispatch of 12 April 1585, f. 100r: “Si crede per la improvis morte del papa era causa….ma se'l conclave anderà alla longa di solita bene, et possono seguire molti mali.”
[i]n sum, evil thus kept growing day by day so that if the creation of the new Pope is prolonged, as it appears will happen on account of the discords among the Cardinals, it is feared that much stranger and more serious troubles [will occur].

Both the accounts of observers and the *relazioni dei medici* support the idea that violence continued unabated during the conclave. An *avviso* of 23 September 1559 expressed the wish that the cardinals hasten the election of a new pope “because the business of the city goes badly and with little governance, causing day and night many assassinations and murders.” Near the end of the *sede vacante* of Sixtus V in 1590, the cardinals had the lieutenant general of the papal army, Honorato Caetani, recruit another five hundred soldiers to watch the city because “one hears of many murders and other disturbances.” And during the vacancy of Gregory XIV a year later, a troop of seven hundred bandits waited to descend upon Rome and its countryside until “the Cardinals entered in the conclave.” The *relazioni dei medici* for the vacancy of 1644 reveal that some of the highest murder rates occurred during the thick of the conclave. For example, on the third, seven, eighth and sixteenth days of the conclave the reports of violent injuries respectively reached the incredible rates of 12, 15, 16 and 16 a day.

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22 Gigli, *Diario*, vol. I, p. 125: “Et in soma andava il male di giorno in giorno così crescendo, che se la creazione del novo Papa si prolongava, quanto pareva, che per le discordie de’ Cardinali, prolongar si dovese si dubitava di molto più strani et gravissimi inconvienieti.”


24 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 12 September 1590, f. 467r: “si sentono di molti homicidi, et altri eccessi.”


26 ASR, TCG, Relazioni dei medici et barbieri, vol. 73, unpaginated.
Official and Private Measures against the Violence

The dramatic increase in violence during the vacancy caused the College of Cardinals to have the General of the Holy Church increase the scanty forces guarding the city and the conclave. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the pope only kept two companies of light horsemen, usually from Albania, and two hundred Swiss footmen as permanent guards of the city. A company of light horsemen as well as a company of Corsican infantry patrolled the Campagna. Their number could be augmented, and often were, to fight the inveterate banditry in the Roman countryside. 27 Throughout the Papal States the papacy relied on local leaders to defend their own cities and only kept large numbers of troops at the important garrisons of Civitavecchia in Lazio, Castelfranco in Emilia, and, after 1598, Castello Estenese in Ferrara. The majority of the papacy’s 8000 to 10,000 soldiers were kept at these posts as well as the papal enclaves of Avignon and Benevento. 28 The Venetian ambassador Paolo Paruta, unimpressed with papal defenses in Rome and throughout the state, reasoned that the papal authorities kept the troops’ numbers to a minimum because “the memories of the


terrible sack of Rome in the pontificate of Clement VII and the threat [of another sack] that almost happened in the pontificate of Paul IV were not very distant.”

During the vacancy, as we have seen, the civic militia of the Popolo Romano took over policing the city and the four companies of the Marshal of the Conclave guarded the conclave. But these forces were not enough. The General of the Holy Church relied on local reserves from the provinces as well as Corsican mercenaries to watch the city during the vacancy. These could be quite considerable. The Sacred College raised seven thousand soldiers for the vacancy of Paul III in 1549. For the most part, however, the troops recruited for the vacancy numbered around 2000 or 3000 men—the fear of large numbers of foreign soldiers still haunted the authorities. Companies of soldiers generally came from the Patrimony (northern Lazio) and Umbria, regions that were only


30 “Relazione di Matteo Dandolo, 1551” in Albèri, Relazioni degli ambasciatori, ser. II, vol. III, 345, the ambassador cites 7000 soldiers for 1549, but notes they progressively diminished towards the end of the vacancy.

31 BAV, Urb.lat 1038, avviso of 24 March 1555, 47v: 3000 soldiers. After the short pontificate of Marcellus II, the Duke of Urbino, acting as General of the Church, recruited 2000 soldiers for the second sede vacante of 1555; see the avviso of 4 May 1555, f. 54r. BAV, Urb.lat 1039, avviso of 16 September 1559, f. 84r: 1500 soldiers; BAV, Urb.lat 1040, avviso of 15 December 1565, f. 152v: five companies, at the time a company of the papal army ranged from 150 to 400 men; BAV, Urb.lat 1053, avviso of 21 April 1585, f. 189r: 3400 soldiers for the sede vacante of Gregory XIII; BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 29 August 1590, f. 441v: “2/m fanti forastieri;” for the vacancy of Sixtus V; BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, avviso of 19 October 1591, f. 328r, 1000 soldiers; BAV, Urb.lat 1060, avviso of 4 January 1592, f. 12r: 2000 soldiers; BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avvisi of 2 March 1605 and 16 March 1605, ff. 97r and 129r: a company of light cavalry and a company of Corsicans and a thousand soldiers for the Capitol for the vacancy of Clement VIII. A dispatch from Agostino Nani noted that thousand Corsicans were brought into the city as well; see ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 54, 26 March 1605, f. 52v. ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 83, dispatch of 6 February 1621, f. 445v: 1200 soldiers; BAV, Urb.lat 1093, avviso of 12 July 1623, f. 530r: five companies from Perugia and Umbria; ASV, Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Urbano VIII,” letter of 1 August 1644 from the Capi degli Ordini to Taddeo Barberini, General of the Holy Church, f. 479r: 2000 soldiers; and ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza, 136, dispatch of 9 January 1655, f. 637r: 1600 foot soldiers and 200 horsemen.
a day or two away from Rome. They thus could hastily march to the city after the pope’s
death. Captains, generally the local potentates, recruited the soldiers to bring to Rome.
For example, on 14 April 1585, four days after the death of Gregory XIII, the local
magnate of Perugia, Ulisse Piccini, “raised a company of foot soldiers for the Apostolic
See.” He had a crier beat a drum throughout the city to announce the call for men to
serve in Rome. The same day other Perugian captains—Signorello Signorelli, Cesare
Monte Melino, Ettore Graziani and Fabio Bagliani among others also raised companies
that headed for Rome to defend the city during the vacancy. The captains either collected
their men in town squares or gathered them in the small villages and farmsteads in the
countryside. To these soldiers were often added several companies of Corsican
mercenaries that served the papacy. During longer vacancies, these numbers could be
augmented. At the end of the vacancy of Sixtus V, five hundred soldiers were recruited
due to the extraordinary violence of the vacancy and during the long vacancy of Urban
VII another thousand soldiers were summoned to the city. Thus, Rome, accustomed to
having fewer than five hundred soldiers in the city at one time, might see that number
magnified four times over or more.

The recruited companies were stationed in key points in the city: St. Peter’s, the
Capitoline Hill, and the city’s gates and bridges. Several were placed to guard important
locales, such as Castel Sant’Angelo, the offices of the Cancelleria and the papal bank, the

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dell’editore, 1894), 55. These soldiers came from such places as Terni in Umbrian, Viterbo and
Montefiascone in the Patrimony, and Velletri and Frascati in the Alban Hills, south of Rome; see ibid.
Recruiting followed the same practices outlined by John R. Hale in his War and Society in Renaissance
Europe, 1450-1620 (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 75-76.

33 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 12 September 1590, f. 467r and avviso of 28 November 1590, f. 621r.
Monte di Pietà. The soldiers themselves were garrisoned in barracks in three main areas: St. Peter’s Square, the Roman Forum and near Ponte Sisto in Trastevere. The General of the Holy Church issued a *bando* once all the necessary troops arrived that ordered the men “to live quietly and in fear of God.” Specifically it prohibited the soldiers from blaspheming or assaulting the residents of the city—offenses punishable by three pulls on the strappando and three years in the papal galleys. The *bandi* did allow for some leniency in the behavior of the soldiers; they could gamble in the barracks as long as they did not wager their weapons.

Not only the Roman authorities but individuals of all ranks armed themselves for protection against the ubiquitous violence of *sede vacante*. During the vacancy of Paul III in 1549, the Venetian ambassador Matteo Dandolo noted that “everyone is in arms, both at home and abroad, with wheel-lock harquebuses in their hands instead of handkerchiefs.” In the vacancy of Paul IV, the nobleman Vicenzo Crescenzi told the Governor’s tribunal that “you should know that it being sede vacante I took with me about five or six men in a coach armed for my guard with swords and daggers, and I believe that there were two harquebuses.” When papal police stopped Gabriel Gui Piemontese for carrying a sword during the vacancy of Innocent IX in 1592, he justified

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36 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 65, testimony of Vincenzo Crescenzi, 14 February 1560, f. 130v: “Dovete sapere che essendo sedia vacante meeni con me da cinque o sei in cochio armati per guardia mia con spade et puganli et credo che ci fussero doi Archibussi.”
himself by saying “I carried it because everyone carried them during sede vacante.” 37 Likewise, Domenico da Velletri used the same defense when stopped by sbirri during the vacancy of Gregory XV in 1623, claiming that “everyone had swords.” 38 Finally, in the vacancy of Urban VIII in 1644, the butcher Gian Francesco Pellegrino, arrested for fighting by the constables of Regola, excused himself by saying that “I carried the unsheathed sword for my defense because it was sede vacante.” 39

Others bought weapons specifically on account of the violence of the vacancy. One Cipriano da Collegiove, arrested not far from Campo dei Fiore for carrying a sword, explained to the authorities of the Governor’s tribunal that “I bought the sword because I heard it said that it was sede vacante.” 40 He had just bought the weapon from a sword maker in Campo dei Fiore. Similarly, Carlo Bongiatti, stopped for carrying a terzarolo, an outlawed handgun, told authorities that he had bought it from a smith on the first evening of sede vacante for 33 giulii, the equivalent of the average monthly wage of an artisan in

37 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 427, testimony of Gabriel Gui Piemontese, 2 January 1592, f. 72r: “Io la portavo perche tutti le portano sede vacante.”

38 Ibid, vol. 712, testimony of Domenico da Velletri, 16 August 1623, ff. 92r-v: “che tutti havevano le spade.” Also during the vacancy of 1623, Giovan Battista Bonzi, arrested for fighting with a co-worker at a wine shop in Trastevere, excused his carrying of arms, claiming that “[i]n this sede vacante I carried both sword and dagger;” see ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 713, 21 August 1623, f. 107r.

39 ASR, TCS, Processsi, b. 147, c. 136, testimony of Gian Francesco Pellegrino, 1 August 1644, f. 2r: “Io portavo la detta spada sfoderata per mia difesa per essere sedia vacante.” Likewise, during Urban’s vacancy, one Giovan Battista Lucino da Sermoneta, who was arrested for fighting with a constable of the rione of Sant’Angelo, justified his carrying of a sword with these words: “In the sede vacante it is my habit to carry a sword and dagger at my side for my defense.” See ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 149, 14 August 1644, f. 4r: “Io nella sede vacante solevo portare la spada et pugnale al fianco per la mia difesa.”

40 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 427, testimony of Cipriano da Collegiove, 2 January 1592, f. 76r: l’havevo comprato perche sentivo dire che era sede vacante.”
early modern Rome.\textsuperscript{41} The \textit{caporioni} often patrolled the shops of gunsmiths and other weapon makers during the vacancy to prevent the sale of weapons.\textsuperscript{42}

Both the Sacred College and the Popolo Romano took measures against the carrying of arms. The Governor of Rome always re-issued \textit{bandi} that revoked all previous licenses to carry weapons and that renewed bans on prohibited weapons such as blades shorter than three \textit{palmi} (thirty inches) and handguns. The Popolo Romano matched the \textit{bandi} of the Governor with edicts. The provisions of both kinds of \textit{bandi} were the same as those issued while the pope lived, except that fines were doubled. The resulting fifty-scudi fine was a princely sum for a poor artisan, who also faced three pulls on the strappado. Those carrying outlawed weapons faced the death penalty.\textsuperscript{43}

Despite the firm language of the decrees, nobles and their henchmen regularly armed themselves for the vacancy. Indeed, the general \textit{bandi} of the papal Governor allowed nobles to walk in groups of eight during the vacancy, regardless of fears that armed groups might provoke brawls and tumults throughout the city. Commoners could only walk about in groups of four or fewer. These \textit{bandi} recognized a general fact that, as Matteo Dandolo put it during the vacancy of Paul III, “these Roman Barons who come

\textsuperscript{41} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 3, testimony of Carlo Bongiatti Romano, 8 January 1655, f. 4v. For the pay of the average artisan, see Renata Ago, \textit{Economia barocca: Mercato e istituzioni nella Roma del Seicento} (Rome: Donzelli editore, 1998), 14.

\textsuperscript{42} See ASR, TCS, b. 196, c. 9, 14 January 1655, f. 1v and c. 29, testimony of Orsino Galato, \textit{capotoro} of Sant’Eustachio, 6 April 1655, f. 1r

\textsuperscript{43} For the \textit{bandi} of the governor concerning weapons; see ft. 20 of this chapter. For those of conservators; see ASR, Bandi, vol. 12, \textit{bando} of 17 July 1623; vol. 18, \textit{bando} of 31 July 1644; and vol. 21, \textit{bando} of 9 January 1655; conservators revoked all licenses to carry weapons, particularly small weapons and pistols on the pain of death.
into the city are attended…by armed followers.”\textsuperscript{44} Alvise Mocenigo agreed, writing that during the vacancy of Paul IV, “[t]hroughout the city then one did not see other than armed companies that they call quadriglie and few cared to go about during the day alone or in the time of night with others in such a way that it appeared to me like being in the countryside in an army, as I found myself in 1547 in Germany, rather than in a city of peace and quiet as Rome usually is.”\textsuperscript{45} A \textit{quadriglia} had originally referred to small bands of knights, but by the sixteenth century meant a nobleman and his retinue of armed henchmen.

At times the \textit{caporioni} stopped these servants and retainers of cardinals and nobles, arresting them and confiscating their weapons. But this could entail threats and even danger. When the constable Ambrogio Galli and his patrol, watching Porta di San Giovanni in the south of Rome seized a pistol from a servant of the Colonna family seeking entry into the city, the servant warned him “to keep good care of it because he was a servant of the signor Constable Colonna.”\textsuperscript{46} During the vacancy of Urban VIII, a gentleman in the service of Cardinal Mattei killed the \textit{capotoro} of Sant’Eustachio after the latter had seized swords and daggers that servants of the house carried on their persons. The henchman, after arguing with the \textit{capotoro}, surprised him later that evening

\textsuperscript{44} Dispatch of Matteo Dandolo of 13 November 1549, \textit{CSP}, vol. V, 276.

\textsuperscript{45} “Relazione di Luigi Mocenigo,” Albèri, ed., \textit{Relazione degli ambasciatori}, ser. II, vo. IV, 38: “Per la città poi non si vedevano se non compagnie d’armate insieme, che loro chiamano quadriglie, e pochi si curavano d’andar il giorno soli attorno, né in tempo di notte alcuno; di modo che mi pareva piuttosto esser alla campagna in un essercito, come mi ritrovavo nel 47 in Germania, che in una città di pace e quiete com’è solita d’esser Roma.” Here Mocenigo referred to the Schmalkaldic War, which pitted Charles V and his Catholic allies against the Protestant princes of the Holy Roman Empire.

\textsuperscript{46} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Ambrogio Galli Romano, 4 August 1623, f. 789r: “ne tenesse buona custodia per esser lui servitore del signor Contestabile Colonna.”
with a posse of men, firing seven or eight shots at him.\textsuperscript{47} Another Mattei henchman, this time during the vacancy of Innocent X, refused to give his sword to the constables of the patrol of Campo Marzo by saying that “he was a soldier of the guard of the Illustrious Lord Baron Mattei.” \textsuperscript{48}

In addition to arming their servants, the prelates and nobles of Rome also armed their houses, turning Rome into an army camp. They locked the doors and windows of their palaces with chains or portcullises, and at their towers (at least during the vacancy of Paul IV) they kept light artillery.\textsuperscript{49} Cardinals also kept large numbers of guards at their palaces as protection against general burglary and also the pillages that occurred at the rumor of a pope’s election. As noble households decreased in size after the financial crisis of the sixteenth century, potentates began to rely on subjects from their fiefs or hired men from the streets to serve as guards.\textsuperscript{50} These numbers could well rise to the hundreds. During the vacancy of Gregory XIII, the diarist Della Valle noted that because of the large number of outlaws in the city “all the cardinals and great lords keep many

\textsuperscript{47} ASV, Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Urbano VIII,” letter of the Governor of Rome to the Capi d’Ordini, 31 July 1644, f. 527r. For the trial, see ASR, TCS, Processi, busta 147, c. 4.

\textsuperscript{48} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 6, testimony of the constable Domenico Capone da Colleferro, 20 February 1655, f. 1r: “che era soldato del Corpo di Gaurdia dell’Illustrimo Signor Baron Mattei.”


\textsuperscript{50} For the decreasing numbers of servants that cardinals and other members of the Roman elite kept at their palaces, see Delumeau, Vie économique et sociale, t. 1, 434-37 and 451-53; and Patricia Waddy, Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces: Use and the Art of the Plan (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990), 33-34.
men in their houses.” He estimated that several lords kept between two hundred and four hundred soldiers at their houses.\textsuperscript{51}

The ambassadors of other Catholic states also kept a armed men at their palaces. The Spanish ambassador in particular always sought to keep his palace well-guarded, to the point that his actions might threaten the authority of the College of Cardinals. During the vacancy of 1549, the ambassador Diego Hurtado de Mandoga issued a decree ordering all his Spanish and Siennese subjects to assemble before his palace in Piazza di Spagna under the penalty of being punished at his discretion. The Capi degli Ordini rebuked the ambassador, who apologized by “saying that he saw so many weapons in the hands of the French.” The cardinals rejoined “that he might provide what was necessary for the safety of his own dwelling, but that if he exceeded that limit they would not put up with it, using very resentful language.”\textsuperscript{52} This supports Thomas Dandelet’s argument that the Spanish had a great deal of power over the papacy, but also shows that during sede vacante the papal government lost its monopoly, if it ever had it, over weapons and violence.

This can be seen in an \emph{avviso} issued during the vacancy of Clement VIII that complained “[a]mong the many men that appeared here and were also made to come by these lords and Barons for this sede vacante there was a company of Spanish soldiers made to come for the service of the palace of the Catholic ambassador, hence one sees through the streets so many armed men that one cannot go about without forcing himself

\textsuperscript{51} Gatta, “Diairo di Lelio Della Valle,” p. 252.

\textsuperscript{52} Dispatch of Matteo Dandolo of 13 November 1549, \textit{CSP}, vol. V, 275-76.
Earlier, the company, which numbered two hundred soldiers, paraded before the Spanish Embassy in Piazza di Spagna, a true example of Spanish hegemony in Rome.  

The Spanish ambassador continued to keep large numbers of troops at his palace despite the protests from the cardinals. During the vacancy of Gregory XV, a company of Spanish soldiers entered Rome to watch the homes of the two Spanish cardinals in Rome as well as for the ambassador.  

Politics could account for the flood of Spanish troops into the city during the vacancy. After the death of Urban VIII, the viceroy of Naples protested the numerous Frenchmen, left over from the War of Castro, in Rome and began posting soldiers along the border of the Papal States. A company entered the city for the protection of the Spanish ambassador. Eleven years later after the death of Innocent X, the Venetian ambassador Niccolò Sagredo informed his government that the Spanish had amassed “at the borders of the Kingdom, not more than 40 miles from Rome around 50 companies of infantry.” Many of these men, he continued, “filed toward Rome and put themselves in the house of the Ambassador of Spain. It is believed that he wants to

53 BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 12 March 1605, f. 138r: “Fra le molte genti che sono compares qui per questa sede vacante, et fatte anco venire da questi signori et Baroni particolari vi è una compagnia di soldati spagnoli fatto venire per servitio del suo Palazzo dell’Ambaciatore Cattolico, onde si vedono per le strade tanti Armati che non si può andare senza introporsi.” For Spanish hegemony in Rome, see Thomas James Dandelet, Spanish Rome, 1500-1700 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

54 BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 19 March 1605, f. 49r.

55 BAV, Urb.lat 1093, avviso of 15 July 1623, f. 539r.

56 ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 121, dispatch of 6 August 1644, f. 50v.
increase his guard to a thousand soldiers.”\textsuperscript{57} On the day of the pope’s death, Sagredo had written that the ambassador already had five hundred, but nevertheless “it appears that he wants to increase even this extraordinary number.”\textsuperscript{58} The extraordinary numbers of soldiers of the Spanish far surpassed what the ambassador and the cardinals actually needed; rather it was a show of force intended to impress and influence the College of Cardinals during the conclave.

Smaller states also stationed large numbers of troops at their embassies. During the vacancy of Gregory XV in 1623, one hundred soldiers from the Duke of Braccaccio watched over the Medici palace in Piazza Madama and two hundred harquebusiers protected the Cardinal of Savoy.\textsuperscript{59} In the vacancy of Urban VIII, the Vice Legate of Viterbo notified the cardinals of “a troop of disarmed Tuscan youths passing through here for Rome at all hours.” The youths, who numbered more than two hundred, sought to serve the Medici cardinal, “their lord.”\textsuperscript{60}

The defensive needs of the prelates and magnates thus attracted great numbers of young men to Rome during the vacancy. At the start of the vacancy of Innocent X, the Venetian ambassador Sagredo wrote that “here arrive an infinity of men of the Kingdom

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\item \textsuperscript{57} ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 136, dispatch of 9 January 1655, f. 632v: “non più che di 40 migla da Roma circa 50 Compagnie di Infanteria….filassero verso Roma, et si ponesero in Casa dell’Ambasciatore di Spagna. Il quale si faceva conto havesse accresciuta la sua Guardia a mille soldati.”
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid, dispatch of 7 January 1655, ff. 618r-v: “pare voglia accrescer anche questo numero extraordario.”
\item \textsuperscript{59} BAV, Urb.lat 1093, avviso of 15 July 1623, f. 539r and ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 88, dispatch of 5 August 1623, f. 532r.
\item \textsuperscript{60} ASV, Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Urbano VIII,” letter of the Vice Legate to the Capi degli Ordini, 2 August 1644, f. 234r: “Passando qua per Roma a tutti l’hore troppa gioveni Toscani disarmati dicesi per unirsi poi nella Città al servitio del signore Cardinale loro signore.”
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of Naples and subjects of the Barons.”⁶¹ That these people had already arrived on the day of the pope’s death shows that they eagerly anticipated the opportunities of sede vacante. During the vacancy of Clement VIII of 1605, an avviso noted that “there appeared many armed men in Rome in this sede vacante—more than usual—such that one could not walk through the streets unless in an armed troop. Moreover, it is said that beyond [Rome], in the bordering regions, there are many more, and among so many soldiers had been made to come by the private lords.”⁶² Similarly, in the vacancy of Gregory XV, an avviso stated that “[t]here was never seen in a similar Sedia Vacante a greater number of soldiers than this time and the provisions are not directed well and the edicts are of little use.”⁶³ The Governor of Rome complained to the Capi degli Ordini during the vacancy that “the multitude of soldiers that are seen and similiary of those that are not of the Prince [e.g., Taddeo Barberini, the General of the Holy Church, and hence not official].”⁶⁴ And during the vacancy of Innocent X, the diarist Carlo Cartari noted that “in all the palaces

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⁶² BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 12 March 1605, f. 114r: “Sono comparse molte genti armati in Roma in questa sede vacante et più del solito, in tanto, che non si può andar per strade che non si’intruppa in armati, oltre che s’intende fuori per li contonri ce ne siano molti più, et fra lit anti soldati fatti venire da signori particulari.”


⁶⁴ ASV,Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Urbano VIII,” letter of Giovanni Gregorio Lomellino to Capi degli Ordini, 20 August 1644, f. 546r: “moltitudine di soldati che si vede e di quelli similimenti che non hanno soldati del Principe.”
of the Cardinals, Ambassadors, Princes and Titled Lords are many soldiers as guards who
carry all sorts of weapons and many more than in the past sede vacante."65

Many of these men sought to situate themselves as soldiers in a company
watching over the city or as guards in a cardinal or ambassadors’ palace. The soldiers,
generally peasants and laborers from the small towns and countryside of Lazio and
Umbria, were drawn by the easy work of guarding (as opposed to fighting in a campaign)
in a city full of temptations. The average pay of three scudi a month, constant for this
period, while paltry compared to the five or six that a master artisan made in the same
era, was still a great deal more than peasants and unskilled laborers typically earned.66

Giovan Battista, a peasant from the small Lazio town of Bassano, told authorities that he
came to Rome to serve as soldier under the Captain Simone Romano during the
interregnum of Paul IV of 1559.67 Likewise, during the vacancy of Sixtus V, Pietro Paolo,
a plowman for one Angelo Pratolo from Castelnovo, quit his job, “since around this sede
vacante” and with his payment of three and half scudi in the various small coins of the
Papal States, headed south to Rome, where “I took time off to spend the money Angelo

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65 ASR, Cartari-Febei, vol. 77, “Diario e cronache,” f. 18r: “in tutto li Palazzi de’ Cardinali, Ambasciatori,
Principi, et Titolati siano molti soldati per la guardia, et in molto maggior numero della passata sede
vacante, con portar tutte sorte d’armi.”

66 Lutz, “Das Päpstliche Heer in Jahre 1667,” 183-85, notes that foot soldiers earned 3 scudi a month and
cavalrymen five to eight scudi a month. This is quite similar to what Hale finds most soldiers throughout
Europe were paid in the early modern period; see idem, War and Society in Renaissance Europe, 109-111.
Various contemporary sources confirm this for the guards of sede vacante: Giulio di Velletri, a soldier in
the company of Captain Alessandro di Velletri, made three scudi a month during the vacency of Gregory
XIII; see ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 342, testimony of Giulio da Velletri, 6 May 1585, f. 61v. An avviso
of 23 April 1585 noted that the pay of the soldiers at the conclave was three scudi; see BAV, Urb.lat 1073, f.
208r. Finally the avvisi writer, Gioseffe Gualdi, wrote that the soldiers made for the vacancy of Innocent X
in 1655 made three scudi a month; see The Getty Research Institute, MS, “Il Diario di Gioseffe Gualdi,
1654-55,” t. II, p. 6r. For the pay of skilled artisans and unskilled laborers; see Ago, Economia Barocca,
14.

had given me, with which I bought a sword in order to become a soldier.\textsuperscript{68} Similarly, during the vacancy of Pius IV, Sivlio da Scapezzano, who had worked in the vineyards of Cardinal Orsini “until this sede vacante,” left his position to join up with the company of soldiers watching the conclave.\textsuperscript{69} In 1605, Checco, a vineyard worker from town of Vignanello in northern Lazio, came to Rome “at the sede vacante and spent two days at the inn of the Campana on via Scrofa” before finding work as a soldier in Borgo.\textsuperscript{70} At the onset of the vacancy of Clement VIII, the peasant Silvestro and several companions broke out of the local prison in Nepi. They then proceeded to make their way down to Rome where they found work as soldiers in the companies guarding the palaces at the Capitol.\textsuperscript{71}

Soldiers had to hurry to Rome if they were going to find work, as many sedi vacanti only lasted a few weeks. Even in longer sedi vacanti, there seems to have been a brief window of opportunity when companies would take recruits. Lorenzo da Spello failed to find work during the long vacancy of Urban VII in the autumn of 1590. Arrested for fighting with an acquaintance from his town, he told the officials of the Governor’s tribunal that “[m]y profession is being a soldier and in the present sede vacante of Urban I came to Rome in order to enlist in some companies of Rome but, because it was already

\textsuperscript{68} ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 238, c. 9, testimony of Pietro Paolo da Castelnovo, 12 September 1590, f. 131v: “Me ne sono andato a spasso spendomi li denari che mi haveva dati detto Angelo coli quali comprai una spada per esser soldato.”

\textsuperscript{69} ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 123, testimony of Silvio da Scapezzano, 14 December 1565, f. 81v: “sino che cotesta sedia vacante.”

\textsuperscript{70} ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 522, testimony of Checco da Vignanello, 22 May 1605, ff. 95r-v: “Io venni a Roma di sedia vacante et mi tratteni la venti giorni in circa alloggio all’hosteria della campana della Scrofa et stette p soldato in Borgo…et stette fino che fatto il papa.”

\textsuperscript{71} Ibidi, testimony of Silvestro da Nepi, 21 April 1605, ff. 11v-12r.
finished, I have been so without any association, lodging now at this or that inn.”72 He had been in Rome since 20 October and the pope had been dead since 27 September, so at least after a month, recruiters quit accepting men. Others fell into the work of a soldier. One Christoforo, a peasant from a small hamlet near Perugia, told the Governor’s tribunal that he “came to Rome after Pope Urban died, so I went to settle in some vineyard so that I would not die of hunger.”73 Instead, he enlisted in the company of the Captain Annibale da Perugia that was stationed in St. Peter’s Square

Patronage helped others find jobs as guards in the official companies guarding the city and conclave. Giovan Battista da Stabio came all the way down from the Lake Como region to find work during the vacancy. He told the governor’s judge that “in my village it was too difficult to make a living…so that when the Pope died, and it being near Christmas, I came to earn something to sustain myself [in the service] of the Captain Paolo,” who headed a company guarding the conclave.74 A minor Lombard noble from the region, one Alessandro Posterla from Lignornetto, a courtier in Pius IV’s court, had helped Giovanni Battista and several other men from that region find jobs at the

72 ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 235, c. 24, testimony of Lorenzo da Spello, 30 October 1590, f. 381r: “La professione mia è d’essere soldato et nella presente sede vacante de Urbano Io venni a Roma p accomodarmi in qualche compagnia di Roma ma pche era gia finite mi ne son stato cosi senza partito alloggianto mo’ in una et mo’ nel’altra hosteria.”

73 ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 244, c. 38, testimony of Christoforo da Villa San Rinato, 18 December 1590, f. 1435r: “Io andai in Roma doppo che fu morto Papa Urbano che ce andai per accomodare qualche vigna per non morire de fame.”

74 ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 110, c.12, February-April 1566, testimonies of Giovan Battista da Stabio and Francesco Terda, ff. 674r, 692r and 717r; Giovan Battista’s quote, f. 674r: “Io son venuto a Roma pche al mio paese ci era caro il vivere…che venne che morse il papa et essendo presso a natale per guadagnar qualche cosa per sustntarmi col Capitano Paolo.”
conclave. Thus, even after death of the pope, the ties of patronage that linked him to his countrymen continued.

Most of those coming to Rome for the vacancy sought to find work among the cardinals and potentates of the city. For example, Gian Maria came to Rome from his native Subiaco “in service of the signor Prospero Colonna to guard his palace and do other necessary things.” Giulio Rovelli and Martiano Muscanio of Ferentino, arrested for stealing horses in Campo dei Fiore, had left the company of Ortensio Tenore da Velletri that had spent the summer and autumn hunting bandits, to find work as guards during the vacancy. Martiale explained that “I came to Rome eight or ten days after Pope Gregory XIV had died, though I don’t exactly remember the day, and with me came Giulio, Giovanni Franco, Giovanni Corazzino, godfather Ambrosio Malatesta, and one or two others whom I don’t remember. All of us came here to Rome in order to get set up in some palace as soldiers as is usually done in sede vacante.” As this example shows, troops of the papal forces often deserted their posts in order to find jobs—no doubt better-paying—with the potentates of Rome. The vicissitudes of the soldier Giuseppe Pataccino’s employment during the back-to-back vacancies of 1605 is a case in point.

75 ASR, TCG, Costtuti, vol. 343, testimony of Gian Maria da Subiaco, 28 April 1585, f. 55v.

76 ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 244, c. 14, testimony of Martiale Muscano da Ferentello, 9 November 1591, ff. 529v-30r: “Io venni in Roma otto, o dieci giorni doppo che morse la bon. Me: di Papa Gregorio XIV, che non me ricordo precisamente del giorno, et con me ci vennero il detto Giulio, Giovanni Franco, Giovanni Corazzino, il compare di Ambrosio Malatesta, et un altro o doi che non me ricordo, che tutti venissem qui in Roma per accomandarci in qualche palazzo per soldati come si suol fare in sede vacante.”

77 In the sede vacante of Urban VIII, the Governor of Rome wrote to the Capi degli Ordini that many of the Corsican soldiers “leave their company and go to serve in the palaces of these ambasassdors, princes and others with the greatest harm to the good service of the Holy See.” See ASV, Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Urbano VIII, undated letter of Giovanni Girolamo Lomellino to the Capi degli Ordini, f. 668r: “hanno absento dal loro Compagnia, et andare a servire ne’ Palazzi di questi Ambasciatori, Principi, et altri con grandissimo pregiudizio del buon servitio dellla Santa Sede.”
Giuseppe, already living in Rome for ten months, served before the vacancy as a soldier of the papal fortress of Castel Sant’Angelo, making three scudi a month. But from the “first day of sede vacante of Pope Clement and throughout all of the sede vacante I stayed in the house of the most Illustrious Signor Ambassador of Venice, and I left Castel Sant’Angelo because I didn’t like to stay there anymore.” His reason for not liking the service was the greater pay he earned in the service of the Venetian ambassador. He claimed that, “in the time of sede vacante while I stayed in the service of the signor Ambassador, who gave me ten gold scudi.” After the death of Leo XI a month later, he could not find work with the ambassador, because he had gotten into a fight near San Marco, and so he enlisted as a soldier in the company of Captain Giovan Battista Scotti in Borgo. His case was not an isolated one. In the vacancy of Paul IV, Teodoro d’Ascoli left the employment of Captain Prospero of Ascoli to assume guard duty for the Cardinal of Urbino, showing a regional loyalty. This was not the case for many, however. The Venetian ambassador did not have many of his fellow countrymen in Rome to employ as guards. Even potentates with large numbers of paesani in the city often relied on members of the rootless masses to act as guards. For example, the Cardinal de’ Medici employed an impoverished boatman as a soldier for his palace during the sede vacante of 1585. The boatman, named Gaspare, who normally slept wherever he could find a

78 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 552, testimony of Giuseppe Pataccino, 2 May 1605, ff. 99r-99v: “me lasciasse da Castello S. Angelo ma fu prima della sede vacante de Clemente et per tutto de d.a sede vacante Io me sono ratenuto in casa de Illustrimo signor Ambasciatore de Venetia, et me usciai da Castel S. Angelo perche non me piaceva star ve più” and “in tempo de sede vacante mentre stati il servitio de detto signor Ambasciatore che ne dette dieci scudi de oro.”

79 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 66, testimony of Teodoro d’Ascoli, 2 February 1560, f. 33v: “quale che circa 15 o 20 di doppo la morte di Papa Paolo.” For the absence of a large Venetian community in Rome, see Delumeau, Vie économique et sociale, t. 1, 211.
welcoming bed, sometimes even a makeshift one on his boat, could tell the Governor’s tribunal that “this sede vacante, I slept in the palace of the Medici with the other soldiers that the cardinal kept there as I, too, was a soldier and we slept in the courtyard under the loggias.”

The Capi degli Ordini saw the potential danger from these people and from the late sixteenth century issued provisions in general bandi that limited the number of soldiers that each potentate could bring into the city to guard their homes during the vacancy. The first extant bando against the number soldiers was issued in the vacancy of Gregory XIV. It read that beyond the usual number of familiars, & servants that daily live at the expense of their Illustrious Signors who wish to have more men, or soldiers at their house, it is ordered, commanded and prohibited expressively that no one have in any way or keep a greater quantity of twenty-five foreign, irregular or extraordinary men or soldiers number in each house of these signor cardinals; up to the number of twenty in those of the signor ambassadors of Kings & Princes; fifteen for homes of the signor Barons; and in each of the homes of whatever person cannot exceed the number of eight persons.

The cardinals and nobles who brought these men from their fiefs or hired those who came to the city had to register their first and last names and country of origin in the lists of the Governor’s tribunal within days. Failing to do so resulted in a punishment at the Governor’s arbitration. Starting with the vacancy of Clement VIII, all potentates and merchants, including bankers, could only keep ten “foreign” soldiers at their premises.

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80 ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 198, c. 4, testimony of Gaspare Romano, 4 June 1585, f. 248r: “Questa sedia Vacante fui dormito nel palazzo de medici con li altri soldati che il cardinal teneva in palazzo che ancora io ero soldato et dormevamo nel cortile sotto le loggie.”

81 Bando of the Governor of Rome of 19 October 1591 in ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 28, unpaginated: “oltre al consueto numero de familiari, & servitori, che quotidianamente vivono a spese di loro Illustri. Sig. vorranno haver più homini, o soldati forastieri, adventitii, o estraordinarii in ciascuna casa di essi Signori Cardinali, in quelle de Signori Ambasciatori de Rè, & Principi, sino al numero di 20 de Signori Baroni 15 & in ciascuna casa di qualsivoglia persona, non si possa eccedere il numero d’otto persone.”
Those who wanted more had to seek a license from the Governor of Rome.\textsuperscript{82} As we have seen cardinals blatantly ignored these provisions. In an extant register of soldiers recruited to guard the palaces of cardinals for the \textit{sede vacante} of Urban VIII, many either failed to list the number of troops at their palace or grossly underrepresented their numbers. For example, Cardinal Cennino, a favorite of the people for election, claimed to have no troops guarding his palace, as did the Cardinals Bichi and Monti. Others, such as the Barberini-backed Sacchetti did not list their troops in the rolls.\textsuperscript{83} Nevertheless, many cardinals felt that ten foreign soldiers was not enough and, in 1644, the Cardinals d’Este and de’ Medici, with the support of their Spanish followers, pushed for a new law in the first congregation of the Sacred College that would increase the number of guards each cardinal and ambassador could have to twenty-five foreign men.\textsuperscript{84} In spite of this new law issued at the vacancy of Urban VIII, the Venetian ambassador Niccolo Sagredo noted that at the vacancy of Innocent X, the Capi d’Ordini had to warn the cardinals and ambassadors in Rome to “moderate the guards of their houses to twenty-five soldiers, and truly in many [of these houses] there were excesses, seeing castles that occupy the streets and public squares with their numerous guards that kept changing.”\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{82} ASV, Misc. Arm IV & V, t. 26, \textit{bando} of 5 March 1605, p. 212; \textit{bando} of 30 January 1621, p. 213; and \textit{bando} of 9 July 1623, p. 214.

\textsuperscript{83} ASV, Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Urban VIII,” ff. 601r-619r

\textsuperscript{84} ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 121, dispatch of Cardinal Federico Cornaro, 30 July 1644, ff. 45v-46r and ASV, Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Urbano VIII,” decree of Sacred College, 31 July 1644.

\textsuperscript{85} ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 136, dispatch of 9 January 1655, ff. 627r-v: “a moderare le Guardie delle proprie case a 25 soldati, et veramente in molti vi sono ecessi, vedendosi Castelli che occupano le stradde, e Piazze publiche, con numerous sue Guardie che si vanno mutando.”
The Paradox of Protection

Out of fear from the very real violence that accompanied every sede vacante, both city officials and private individuals resorted to hiring soldiers from a pool of young men who came to Rome to seek employment. Paradoxically, the huge numbers of these men and the proclivity to crime only exacerbated the violence and disorder. An anonymous Perugian chronicler noted that, during the vacancy of 1585, “so many lords and cardinals went to Rome with as many soldiers as they could bring, and it is said, that all of Rome is topsy-turvy.”\textsuperscript{86} Similarly, during the vacancy of Leo XI in 1605, an avviso blamed much of the disorder on “the necessity of [rehiring] these soldiers dismissed a little while ago from which it is heard of their having assaulted poor wayfarers in the streets, not only stealing their money, but also killing them.”\textsuperscript{87} And in the vacancy of 1623, an avviso writer also linked the increased violence with the soldiers, writing that Rome, “finding itself without the Vicar of Christ and full of soldiers, several other murders and crimes


\textsuperscript{87} ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 1, avviso of 4 May 1605, f. 8r: “con l’occasione di questi soldati licentiate poco fa da quale s’intende essere stati fatti assassinamenti alle strade ai poveri viandati non solo lever denari, ma ammazzate ancor le persone.”
happened this week.” He then mentioned that some of the soldiers had killed an
innkeeper at Piazza di Sciarra and a sbirro.\textsuperscript{88}

Veterans of wars that popes had waged just before their deaths tended to file into
Rome for the vacancy. After two weeks of the sede vacante of Paul IV, the governor
promulgated a \textit{bando} on 6 September 1559 that stated “in consideration of the great
number of people flocking to Rome on account of the sede vacante, it is ordered to those
lacking an office or profession to leave the city in the term of two days, under the pain of
the galleys.”\textsuperscript{89} Many of these men were mercenaries who had recently fought in Paul
IV’s war against Philip II’s forces in Naples. For example, Giovan Battista and Gabriele,
two veterans of the war, found employment in company guarding Rome during the four
months of Paul’s sede vacante.\textsuperscript{90} Others came from the ranks of Spanish soldiers who
had fought in the war.\textsuperscript{91}

After the death of Urban VIII, disbanded soldiers from the War of Castro joined
those coming to Rome for the vacancy. A series of letters from the various governors of
the papal cities to the College of Cardinals reveals how officials feared these soldiers and

\textsuperscript{88} ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 9, \textit{avviso} of 5 August 1623, f. 215v: “trovandosi senza il Vicario di Christo et
tutta piena di soldati, sono anco di questa settimana successi alcun altri homicidii, et delitti.” The Roman
diarist Gigli also commented on the violence of soldiers during the sede vacante of 1623, writing that
“mnoy of the...disorders and insolences were committed by soldiers who stayed in Rome as the guards for
several lords and princes.” See Gigli, \textit{Diario}, vol. I, 125: “molti delli disordini et insolenze sopradetti furno
fatte dalli soldati che per gaurdia di diversi Signori, et Principi stavano in Roma.”

\textsuperscript{89} Regesti di editti, notificationi e provvedimenti diversi relative alla città di Roma et allo stato pontificio,
vol. I (Rome: Cuggiani, 1920), no. 70, p. 28: “in considerazione del gran numero di persone afflitte a
Roma per la sede vacante, si ordina a coloro che sono sprovvisti di ufficio o professione di lasciare la città
nel termine di 2 giorni, sotto pena della galera.”

\textsuperscript{90} ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 65, testimonies of Giovan Battista da Brisichella, 3 March 1560, f. 159v.

\textsuperscript{91} Ludwig von Pastor, \textit{History of the Popes, from the Close of the Middle Ages}, vol. 15 (London: Kegan
Paul, 1924), 30.
took measures against them. On 9 August 1644, the Governor of Perugia wrote that he issued bandi to “impede those travelers who in crowds set out in your direction with evil thoughts.” He expressed particular concern about the recent disbanding of soldiers in the War of Castro and for the local pilgrims, who had attended the feast day of the Perdono d’Assisi. The Governor of Città di Castello likewise wrote that he gave orders denying licenses to those who wanted to pass through his city “in order to be able, according to the occasion, to avoid the convergence toward Rome.” Despite the governors’ efforts, bands of soldiers entered Rome a week later. The Governor of Rome, Giovanni Girolamo Lomellino, wrote to the Capi degli Ordini that “at this time entered in Rome disbanded soldiers; now I hear through fairly certain reports that their number is growing ever larger.” Lomellino complained that “through the streets one could not see other than swords and daggers.” The soldiers, he continued, excused themselves “of having come to Rome because of the curiousness of the sede vacante,” which a good number of the soldiers may have never witnessed before. Although men from the Papal States

92 ASV, Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Urbano VIII,” ff. 35r-160r. Other letters include: letter of the Governor of Viterbo, 6 August 1644, f. 149r: “non legitima causa volverint immigrare;” letter of the Governor of Spoleto, 10 August 1644, f. 150r; letter of the Governor of Narnia, f. 151r, f. 151r; letter of the Governor of Urbino, 10 August 1644, f. 158r; letter to the Governor of Ferrara, 13 August 1644, f. 159r; and letter of the Governor of Ascoli, 10 August 1644, f. 160r.

93 Ibid, letter of the Governor of Perugia to Capi degli Ordini, 9 August 1644, f. 152r: “d’impedire quei Passaggieri, che in moltitudine s’incaminano a cotesta volta con cattivi pensieri.”

94 Ibid, letter of the Governor of Città di Castello to Capi degli Ordini, 13 August 1644, f. 139r: “p poter secondo l’occasione evitare il concorso verso Roma.” The Governor added that had had the roads to Rome well guarded to prevent outlaws from coming to the city. For other letters, see Ibid., letter of the Governor of Rieti to the Capi degli Ordini, 9 August 1644, f. 136r; letter of the Governor of Frostone to the Capi degli Orini, 6 August 1644; letter of the Governor of Viterbo to Capi degli Ordini, 10 August 1644; and letter of the Governor of Norcia to Capi degli Ordini, 11 August 1644, f. 138r.

95 Ibid, letter of Giovanni Girolamo Lomellino to the Capi degli Ordini, 17 August 1644, ff. 543r-53v: “di questo tempo che entravano in Roma soldati alla sfilata, adesso sento p relationi assai certe che cresca
constituted the majority of these disbanded men, quite a few were French soldiers that the Cardinal Mazarin had sent to Parma to aid his Barberini allies.96

Many of these men had been previously arrested for a variety of crimes. For example, Martiale Muscano, who came to Rome looking to serve as a guard in a potentate’s palace, had been arrested twice in Ferentino “on account of going about singing at night around ten years ago.”97 Silvestro da Nepi, hired as a soldier of the conclave, had been arrested for sleeping with a widow in his native town. His companions too had committed minor crimes: one Giovanni had been jailed for debt and one Luca for stealing a goat.98 Other soldiers had been exiled from Rome or their homelands. Giulio da Velletri, a soldier of the conclave during Gregroy XIII’s vacancy, had left Rome because the pope had banned him.99 Several soldiers arrested near Piazza Navona, a favorite hangout for vagrants, after the vacancy of Gregory XIV all had similar criminal pasts. One Giovanni Alfani da Velletri, a soldier who served the house of Aldobrandini, had been exiled during the deceased pope’s reign for buying a stolen cloak.100 Another soldier, one Tulio da Zagarola who had served at the Capitol, had also

96 ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 121, dispatch of Cardinal Federico Cornaro, 6 August 1644, f. 50v.
97 ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 244, c. 14, testimony of Martiale Muacano da Ferentello, 9 November 1590, f. 530r: “Io sono stato pregione doi volte in fiorentino p conto dell’andare cantanp ;a note circa diece anni sonno.”
98 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 552, testimony of Silvestro di Nepi, 21 April 1605, f. 12r. Similarly, Checco da Vignanello had been arrested in his home town for an undisclosed cause; see ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 552, 22 May 1605, f. 95r.
100 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 713, testimony of Giovanni Alfani da Velletri, 13 August 1623, ff. 86r-v.
been banned for an undisclosed reason, but reasoned that he could come back to Rome, “because it was sede vacante.” Sbirri also arrested the soldier Tommaso d’Orvieto, who had been exiled during the time of Gregory XV for stealing a pouch of twenty-five scudi.  

The registers of the criminal tribunals of both the Governor and the Conservators of Rome corroborate the violence of the soldiers recruited during the vacancy. They committed violent acts that soldiers throughout history have committed: brawling, rape, and theft. Regrettably, the fragmentary nature of the criminals sources often outline only the barest details of these brawls. In most cases, the only information divulged by the victim and witnesses is the act itself and perhaps the name of the brawlers.

Fighting among themselves or with civilians was the most frequent offence of the soldiers. Games of chance or skill provoked many brawls among soldiers. For example, a game of pallmall between soldiers of the conclave and several bakers’ apprentices in Piazza di San Silvestro devolved, after taunts were traded, into a major tumult with stones and swords flying. During the sede vacante of 1644, a Perugian captain shot another mercenary captain over a game of chance while standing on duty as guards of the palace of the Cancelleria. Drinking tended to exacerbate the hot-headed nature of the soldiers. Soldiers, who were stationed at the gate of San Sebastiano, attacked the

101 Ibid, testimony of Tulio da Zagarola, 13 August 1623, f. 87r: “perche è stata sede vacante.”
102 Ibid, testimony of Tomasso d’Orvieto, 15 August 1623, ff. 91r-v.
103 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of various witnesses, 24 and 28 July 1623, ff. 161r-163r.
104 ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 96, avviso of 17 September 1644, f. 249r and ASV, Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Urbano VIII,” letter of Giovanni Girolamo Lomellino, Governor of Rome, to the Capi degli Ordini, 11 September 1644, ff. 571r-v.
capotoro of Sant’Angelo and his men after a night of drinking at a tavern with several prostitutes. Soldiers outside a tavern in the Piazza della Consolatione, engaged a groups of peasants in a sassiola (stone-throwing fight) after the peasants had goaded them by letting several farts. The fight turned violent when one of the peasants struck a soldier with a staff that the innkeeper had used to separate the two parties. During the vacancy of Alexander VII in 1667, a brawl erupted between soldiers of the Marshal of the Conclave at tavern near the Madonna del Loreto once the soldiers began to drink. When a caporione of Campitelli and his men showed up, one youth pulled his sword out against one of the members of the patrol.

Soldiers firing their guns into the air remained a constant problem. Measures in the bandi issued by the General of Holy Church provided vigorous punishments for those who did this, particularly in St. Peter’s Square. It was something of a celebration and sometimes a form of resistance against authority of the captain. Giovanni and Checco, both peasants from the small village of Vignanello in northern Lazio serving as conclave guards, were arrested by papal sbirri for shooting a gun off as a “joke” (burla) when they were called to attention in St. Peter’s square. In the vacancy of Innocent X, despite the fact the Marshal of the Conclave had given rigorous orders not to shoot any guns off, Gian Maria Roviaro, an innkeeper serving among his troops, shot off a

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105 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of the capotoro of Sant’Angelo and several soldiers, 10 July and 7 October 1623, ff. 1322v-1327v.

106 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 25, testimony of the soldier Paolo Baltranni, 27 January 1655, f. 1v.

107 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 242, testimony of various soldiers of the patrol of Campitelli, 25 May 1667, ff. 159r-163v.

108 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 552, testimony of Checco di Vignanello, 22 May 1605, f. 95v.
harquebus while on duty in St. Peter’s square “with a great arrogance.”

Another Savelli soldier was arrested two days later for firing a harquebus near the family’s palace in Ripa. The undisciplined shooting of guns became such a problem that the governor of Rome had to issue harsh *bandi* against the custom during the vacancies of 1644 and 1655 that called for the capital punishment for anyone who disobeyed them. These decrees were issued no doubt because gunfire outside the conclave frightened the cardinals. In the vacancies of 1590 and 1655, random gunshots outside the Vatican Palace disturbed the cardinals in their congregations.

With the influx of male soldiers into an already “male city,” as demographer Eugenio Sonnino, has dubbed an early modern Rome that had a sex-ratio of 140 men for every 100 women, violence against women naturally increased. Although Gigli mentioned in his account of the vacancy of 1623 that soldiers had forced open doors and raped many women, very few cases of rape appear in the registers of the Conservators’

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109 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 9, Ripa, testimony of Raimo Silvestro, 22 February 1655, f. 1r: “con grande arroganza.”

110 Ibid, c. 10, Ripa, testimony of various soldiers of the patrol against Giovanni Moresco Romano, 24 February 1655, f. 1r-2r. Moresco carried a medal given to him by the marshal to carry both a harquebus and a pistol.

111 ASV, Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Urbano VIII,” letter of Giovanni Girolamo Lomellino, Governo of Rome to the Capi degli Ordini, 1 August 1644, f. 513r, and “Conclave per la morte d’Innocenzo X,” letter of Giulio Rospigliosi to the Capi degli Ordini, 24 January 1655, f. 388r.


and Governor’s tribunals—no doubt because rape was an under-reported crime.\(^\text{114}\) In the vacancy of Gregory XIII in 1585, some of the light horsemen of the General of the Holy Church, Giacomo Boncompagni, sought to kidnap the wife of an innkeeper near San Clemente in Monti, but the innkeeper and several neighbors successfully drove them away.\(^\text{115}\) There are, however, many cases involving soldiers fighting over prostitutes and threatening unmarried women during \textit{sede vacante}. In 1644, for example, a soldier interrupted another soldier having sex with a prostitute. Since he claimed that she was already “used,” he sodomized her and then threatened to kill her.\(^\text{116}\) And in the vacancy of Innocent X, unnamed soldiers threw stones at the shutters of the prostitutes Catherina, Lucia and Verginia while they were entertaining clients.\(^\text{117}\)

More frequently, soldiers and servants of the city’s elites performed what Elizabeth Cohen has called a house-scoring, a ritual in which she argues men and sometimes women sought to shame enemies by throwing vials of ink and stones at their doors and shutters. The attacks on the doors and shutters also served as an attempt by these soldiers to enter the house of a prostitute or single woman. Usually the women lived alone and occasionally engaged in prostitution to supplement their meager


\(^{116}\) ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 22, testimony of Dorothea Ventura Curiale, 6 August 1644, f. 1r.

\(^{117}\) ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 14, Colonna, testimony of the \textit{capotoro} of Colonna, 18 January 1655, f. 1r.
incomes. One Beatrice Martella lodged a complaint to the Governor’s tribunal against a servant of the Peretti family because “while it remained sede vacante over and over he wanted to enter my house by force and because I didn’t want his acquaintance as he saw me at the window in the middle of the street, he began to yell and insult me, calling me a cowardess, a bugger, and an over-ridden, bottomless whore.” Eventually he forced his way into her house, but the women in the neighborhood came to Martella’s aid, driving the servant away with blows. Similarly, during the vacancy of Gregory XV, a band of fishmongers and soldiers of the Cardinal of Savoy, knocked at the door of the widow, Catherina Matriciana, saying that “ah, you old procuress, we are five that want to give you five fucks, you cowardess, pox-ridden whore, bugger.” This mixed band of youths could not force their way in, but other encounters during vacancies were much more violent. During the same vacancy, Felice Pomaro and some fifteen soldiers guarding the Capitol attempted to force their way into the home of a single woman and her servant. Unable to force their way into the house, they proceeded to fire their muskets and handguns at her shutters. In another case from that vacancy, ten to twelve soldiers who stood guard at the palace of the Duke of Zagarola, the nephew of the dead pope,

118 On the occasional nature of many prostitutes in early modern Rome, see Tessa Storey, Carnal Commerce in Counter-Reformation Rome, 116-25.

119 ASR, TCG, Investigazioni, vol. 347, testimony of Beatrice Martella di Viterbo, 12 April 1605, f. 176r: “mentre è stata sede vacante più e più volte ha voluto entrar per forza in casa mia et perche io non volevo pratica sua come me vedeva alla finestra in mezzo della strada cominciava a gridare et insultarmi dicendomi poltrona, bugiarona et sfondataccia.”

120 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Catherina Matriciana, 19 July 1623, f. 1547r: “ah, vecchia ruffiana, semo cinque, ti volemo dare cinque fottitore, poltrona, corolara, bugiarona.” Catherina’s neighbors corroborate her story; see ff. 1548r-49r.

121 Ibid, testimony of Catherina di Pietro and various neighbors, 31 July -17 August 1623, ff. 1093r-98r. Some neighbors testified that Felice Pomaro had more than twenty men with him.
stood outside the home of Doralice Castagna yelling that “we want to give you a grosso and we want to bugger you.” When Doralice refused to come out, they attempted to force the door open by firing into it about thirty times. During the vacancy of Innocent X, soldiers of Maffeo Barberini, Prince of Palestrina, shot their guns at the shutters of the home of a Susanna after her father Ascanio Mencarelli told them to quit banging at the door. In this case the woman in question was not a prostitute or a single woman, but an honorable maiden (zitella honorata).

In addition to rape, soldiers often supplemented their income by stealing from their captains and from the populace of Rome. The excessive thefts in the Vatican Palace committed by the soldiers of Benardo Savelli, Marshal of the Conclave, during the sede vacante of Sixtus V in 1590, induced the cardinals to ban his soldiers from serving in the vacancy of the short-lived pope, Urban VII. The Marshal had to reimburse the damages committed by his men in the palace before they were finally allowed to return to their posts. During the vacancy of Urban VII in 1590, several Perugian soldiers stole horses from their commanders, which they then tried to resell later in Perugia. During the vacancy of Gregory XV, the Perugian soldier, Elia Castellucio, along with several other soldiers stationed at the Vatican, was arrested for selling seven of their barracks’s tables

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122 Ibid, testimony of Doralice Castagna Romana and various neighbors, 27 July 1623, ff. 1532r-35v.

123 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 21, testimony of Ascanio Mencarelli and various neighbors, 13 February 1655, ff. 1r-4r.

124 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 29 September 1590, f. 500r.

125 ASR, TCG, Processi, b. 244, c. 38, testimony of Francesco da Perugia, Christoforo da Villa San Rinato, and Tomasso Cerone da Perugia, 17-19 December 1590, ff. 1429r-1440v. Soldiers of Cardinal Antonio Barberini stole some horses from the stables of the barracks of the caporione of Monti during the vacancy of Innocent X. See ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 6, testimony of the caporione of Monti, Angelo de Massimi, 13 January, 1655, f. 1r.
at the Ponte Sisto to the innkeeper of the Croce Bianca.\textsuperscript{126} In the same vacancy, soldiers at the guard of Porta Angelica, the entrance into the Vatican, stole hens from an inn in Trastevere.\textsuperscript{127} In the vacancy of Urban VIII, many soldiers of Colonna, placed at the Capitol to defend the statue of the dead pope, committed many crimes near the Coliseum, robbing passersby and shooting off their guns, so that Colonna had to send them back to his duchy at Paliano to be punished.\textsuperscript{128}

\textit{Sede vacante} also attracted a host of criminals and vagrants, notably bandits, men that were exiled from Rome or provincial towns and who generally fell into a life of crime, terrorizing the highways and rural communities of the Papal States. The Venetian ambassador Alvise Mocenigo described the \textit{sede vacante} of Paul IV as “the Forest of Bacchus,” in which “there converged on the city so many lowlifes, bandits and outlaws for different reasons that one did not hear other than the murders of this or that person.”\textsuperscript{129} Mocenigo certainly meant to convey to the Venetian Senate the disorder associated with the god, but also referenced a very real place, the Bosco di Bacco, a forest near the Via Cassia that served as a hideaway for bandits and highwaymen in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{126} ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 712, testimony of Elia Castelluccio da Perugia, 2 August 1623, ff. 153r-154r.
\item \textsuperscript{127} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of several soldiers, 7 August 1655, ff. 152r-55v.
\item \textsuperscript{128} ASV, Archivio DellaValle-Del Bufalo, t. 186, “Diario di Pietro Della Valle di alcune cose notabili, 1628-1652,” unpaginated, entry for 3 August 1644.
\item \textsuperscript{129} “Relazione di Luigi Mocenigo,” in Albèri, ed., \textit{Relazioni degli ambasciatori}, ser. II, t. IV, 38: “bosco di bacco,” and “concorsero nella città tanti falliti, banditi e fuorusciti per diverse cause, che non si sentivea altro che omicidi di questo e di quell’altro.”
\end{itemize}
northern Lazio. After the death of Gregory XIII in 1585, an *avviso* noted that “the outlaws having entered [the city] in great numbers demanded ransoms.”\(^{130}\)

Even the death of Sixtus V, who had boasted of eradicating banditry in the Roman countryside and the Papal States, saw an upsurge in outlaws coming to Rome for the vacancy. An *avviso* of 5 September 1590 noted that while the cardinals performed the obsequies for Sixtus and held congregations for the public order of the city, “converging toward Rome was a greater number of foreigners that has ever been seen in another sede vacante.”\(^{131}\) The two-week pontificate of Urban VII did nothing to stem the flood of bandits into the Campagna. Many of them entered Rome “by means of guile and force,” which prompted the Capi degli Ordini to have all the gates walled but the three busiest. The onset of *sede vacante* attracted the bandits, as an *avviso* of 6 October 1590, noted that “the bandits heard of the death of the pope, have dared to approach the walls of Rome and the other day it was necessary to send armed men to Porta Maggiore because they threatened of wanting to enter.”\(^{132}\) The bandits retreated from this show of force, but continued to menace the countryside for the duration of the vacancy.

With the death of Gregory XIV in 1591, bandits once again turned their attention to Rome. In October 1591 the Governor of the Marches, Cardinal Giustiniani, wrote to Cardinal Nephew Emilio Sfondrato that seven hundred bandits were marching from his

\(^{130}\) BAV, Urb.lat 1053, *avviso* of 21 April 1585, f. 192v: “essendo entrati li fuorusciti in gran numero facero una tagliata.”

\(^{131}\) BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 5 September 1590, f. 453v: “concorrendo a Roma più quantità de forastieri che sua mai stata vista in altra sede vacante.”

\(^{132}\) AS Venice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 26, dispatch of 27 September 1590, f. 72r and BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 6 October 1590, f. 514r: “molti de quali banditi sono anco entriti in Roma per arte, et per forza,” and “Li banditi intesa la morte del Papa havuta ardire di accostarsi fino alle mura di Roma, et l’altro giorno bisognò andare con gente armata fino a Porta Maggiore per la quale minacciavano di voler retiroro.”
region to Rome under an unfurled flag and drums. The bandits had made known “that they were aware of the desperate health of the pope, and that in the sede vacante they wanted to try their luck and to see what they could do.” 133 When they heard that the pope had not died they “decided to make their way slowly [to Rome] to arrive in these parts just in time for his death.” 134 The bandits expressed a desire to sack the Jewish Ghetto of Rome, but contented themselves with holding as ransom the villas and farmhouses of “the wealthy and greedy landowners.” 135 Other bandits also arrived to wreak havoc on the city and its hinterlands. An avviso noted “in this city on account of the illness of the pontiff almost all trade sleeps and much wickedness and calamity reign, and on Sunday a leader of bandits entered Rome with many companions.” 136

Historians credit Clement VIII with taming the problem of banditry by the end of his pontificate, bandits nevertheless continued to plague Rome and the Campagna during sede vacante well into the seventeenth century. At his death in 1605, the Venetian ambassador Agostino Nani could write that “[n]ow the bandits make themselves felt, but they are mostly rather people, who for the happenstance of Sede Vacante have taken to the road, rather than outlaws of importance, and already by the means of a company of


134 Ibid, avviso of 12 October 1591, f. 309r: “deliberaro di venire lentamente per trovarsi in queste parti giusto in tempo della sua morte.”


136 Ibid, avviso of 12 October 1591, f. 309r: “et in questa città per il male del Pontefice dormono quasi tutti i negotti, et regna molta militia, et calamità, et Domenica entrò un capo de banditi con molti compagni.”
Corsicans some have been captured and executed.\textsuperscript{137} Almost twenty years later, during the vacancy of Gregory XV, the Capi degli Ordini had to send a contingent of Corsicans toward the Orsini duchy of Montelibretto where a gang of bandits had committed several outrages.\textsuperscript{138}

Many of Roman potentates found it useful to keep bandits as henchmen and guards during the vacancy. Indeed, bandits typically gained entrance into the city with noble collusion. It was said that Cardinal Alessandro Farnese kept as many as eighty bandits at his palace near Campo dei Fiore during the vacancy of Gregory XIII.\textsuperscript{139} In the same vacancy, the Colonna had at least one bandit, a Giuliano Ciagli from their fief in Marino, as palace guard.\textsuperscript{140} Even Duke Savelli, the Marshal of the Conclave, employed a bandit as the captain of his troops at the Vatican during the vacancy of Gregory XIV. The captain, named Alvigi Carrara Romano, was arrested along with several other bandits for carrying a small harquebus, a prohibited gun. Innocent XI, the new pope, had him arrested and despite the protests from Savelli “that he was honest man,” had him hanged.\textsuperscript{141} Another bandit who came into Rome during the Gregory’s vacancy, one Terni da Terni was arrested in the coach of his master, the Marchese Malatesta. As with Savelli, Malatesta protested “this affront, affirming that Terni was his gentleman, not a

\textsuperscript{137} ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 54, dispatch of 26 March 1605, f. 53r: “Horal i banditi si fanno sentire, ma sono più tosto genti, che per la congiuntura di Sede Vacante si gettano alla strada, che fuorusciti di considerazione, et gia col mezzo d’una compagnia de Corsi ne sono stati ritinuti alcuni, et giustiziatì.”

\textsuperscript{138} ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 9, \textit{avviso} of 5 August 1623, f. 213v.

\textsuperscript{139} Gatta, “Diario di Lelio Dalle Valle,” 252.

\textsuperscript{140} ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 343, testimony of Giovanni Ciagli da Marino, 28 April 1585, f. 53r.

\textsuperscript{141} BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, \textit{avviso} of 6 November 1591, f. 362r: “che era huomo dabene.”
bandit.”142 The Spanish ambassador also made use of bandits. During the sede vacante of 1700, he employed the captain, Merolla, “exiled for life for misdeeds [committed] in the last sede vacante of 1690.”143 Many of these bandits returned to Rome as part of large retinues of banned nobles, who had returned to the city after the pope’s death. Pompeo Colonna, banned by Gregory XIII, returned to Rome with a large entourage of bandits after the pope’s death in 1585. Gian Antonio Orsini, banned for murder a month before Gregory XIV’s death, likewise entered Rome during sede vacante with a company of two hundred bandits.144

Even the state employed these bandits, ironically to combat banditry. During the double vacancies of 1590, the Sacred College charged the nobleman Virginio Orsini della Mentana to recruit two companies of bandits to fight against the bandits that infiltrated the Campagna after the death of Sixtus V. Many of these bandits, however, deserted Orsini’s company to enter Rome, where “with much courtesy, they escorted the prelates and lords who came here.”145 A great number had once served the bandit-lord Alfonso Piccolomini and revered their former master. When Piccolomini sought to burn down Orsini’s fief at Mentana, half of his troops refused to help out of loyalty to the Roman

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142 Ibid, avviso of 9 November 1591, f. 366r: “questo affronto, affermando, che’il detto Terni era suo gentilhuomo, et non bandito.”


144 For Colonna in 1585, see Gatta, “Diario di Lelio Dalle Valle,” 253. For Orsini in 1591, see BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, avviso of 23 October 1591, f. 331r.

145 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 5 Spetember 1590, f. 453v: “furno scorta alli Prelati, et Signori, che vengono qua con molta cortesia.”
Bandits, often former soldiers, thus committed a great deal of violence in the countryside around Rome during the vacancy. An *avviso* of 17 November 1590 complained that “the poor villagers are devoured by bandits, soldiers and other wanderers who under the name of bandits and soldiers commit every evil.”\(^\text{147}\) Soldiers who patrolled the Campagna, many of whom were bandits, deserted their posts after the death of Innocent IX in 1591, saying that “everything remained in suspense and that they could do as they liked as much as they wanted.”\(^\text{148}\)

Only small groups or individual bandits were typically able to enter the city. The larger bands of bandits more often pillaged the large farms (*casali*) and villas of ecclesiastical and secular magnates that dotted the Roman countryside. During the vacancy of Urban VII, bandits looted Villa Giulia, just outside of Rome, which belonged to the family of Julius III.\(^\text{149}\) In one week, the noble bandit Alfonso Piccolomini plundered the *casali* of the Inquisition and of a wealthy Florentine merchant. Rather than destroy what he could not take with him, he sold the grain from these *casali* to the locale populace at eight scudi a rubbio rather than the price of twelve scudi which it had risen

\(^{146}\) For the *sbirri della campagna* out during the vacancy, see Blastenbrei, “La quadratura del cerchio,” 13. For the companies under Orsini and Ghislieri, see BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avvisi* of 5 September and 31 October 1590, ff. 433r and 562v.

\(^{147}\) Ibid, *avviso* of 17 November 1590, f. 593v: “i poveri paesani sono divorati da banditi, da soldati, et da altri stradaroli che sotto nome de banditi, et soldati fanno ogni male.”

\(^{148}\) ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 28, dispatch of 11 January 1592, f. 327r: “tutto restava in sospeso; onde potrano far a lor piacere quanto ma li vorranno.”

\(^{149}\) BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 6 October 1590, f. 514r.
during the famine of that autumn. After the death of Clement VIII, bandits specifically targeted his villa at Frascati and the farmhouses of the Tor di Nona.

In addition to looting the *casali* of the Campagna, bandits also held them for ransom by threatening to burn them if their owners did not give them money. During the *sede vacante* of Sixtus V, bandits under Piccolomini threatened to burn the *casali* of Camilla Peretti, the deceased pope’s sister, if she did not pay them a two-thousand scudi ransom. Two weeks later, they raised the amount to six thousand scudi after the death of Urban VII. The pope’s sister was not the only one to suffer the extortions of the bandits after the deaths of Sixtus V and Urban VII. Bandits also ransomed the *casali* of the Cesi and the Cevoli families. By the end of the vacancy, emboldened by the prolonged lack of effective leadership, they began hitting all the casali of the Campagna so that “out of fear, the Cevoli and other wealthy families of Rome send the bandits money, clothes, food, and other refreshments.” Nobles and merchants who refused to pay saw their farms burned and their livestock shot. For example, during the *sede vacante* of Urban VII, bandits burned the farm of a wood merchant because he refused to pay a three

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150 Ibid, avvisi of 3 and 7 November 1590, ff. 565r and 575r.

151 For attacks on the towns of Matrice and Fara in Lazio, see BAV, Urb.lat 1060, avvisi of 15 and 18 January 1592, ff. 15v and 43r. For attacks on the Umbrian towns, Amelia and Orti, not far from the border with Lazio, see BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 14 November 1590, f. 600r. For bandits near Frascati and the casali of the Tor di Nona, see BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 5 March 1605, f. 1124r.

152 For the ransoming of Camilla Peretti’s *casali*, see BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avvisi of 6 October and 21 November 1590, ff. 514r and 606v. For the casali of the Cesi and Cevoli, see BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avvisi of 6 October and 14 November 1590, ff. 514r and 590r.

153 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 1 December 1590, f. 624r: “per timore il Cevoli, et altri Ricconi di Roma mandano alli detti banditi danari, vestiti, et vettovaglie, con altri refrescamenti.”
hundred scudi ransom. And, in the end, Piccolomini, true to his word, burned several of the casali of Camilla Peretti.\textsuperscript{154}

Bandits also robbed travelers; particularly the messengers of various Italian and European states who carried news of the papal election to their governments. Avvisi writers and Venetian ambassadors lamented the misfortunes of these messengers, especially the Venetian couriers who were often waylaid on the highways. An avviso of 3 November 1590, commented in frustration that “the couriers of Venice for some time were all killed [by bandits], except this week.”\textsuperscript{155} Even Spain and its allies, rumored throughout the autumn of 1590 to be fostering banditry in the Papal States, saw their messengers robbed by highwaymen.\textsuperscript{156} Wealthy travelers were also seized, not only for their money, but also for the ransoms that the bandits could extract from them. During the vacancy of Urban VII, highwaymen ransomed a Polish gentleman for three thousand scudi. And during the vacancy of Clement VIII, they kidnapped two customs merchants as they went to inspect the spring sowing. Sbirri arrested them before they could obtain a thousand scudi ransom from the merchants.\textsuperscript{157} Even ordinary people might

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, avviso of 8 December 1590, f. 632v.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid, avviso of 3 November 1590, f. 565r, “i corrieri di Venetia da un pezzo in quà sono stati tutti assassinati fuorché quello di questa settimana.” For other attacks on the Venetian courier, see ibid, avviso of 20 October 1590, f. needed and the dispatch of the Venetian ambassador Alberto Badoer, ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 26, dispatch of 27 October 1590, f. 145r.

\textsuperscript{156} BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 1 December 1590, f. 625r. In one week, messengers from Naples and Genoa as well as an extraordinary one from Madrid were all robbed on the roads to Rome. For attacks on messengers from other states and potentates, see avvisi of 28 November and 5 December 1590, ff. 621r and 632r.

\textsuperscript{157} BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 26 March 1605, f. 145v.
be ransomed: 150 bandits entered Rome during the vacancy of Urban VII, kidnapping many people and holding them for ransom in the vineyards outside the city walls.  

The prelates who took part or served in the conclave had much to fear from a bandit attack. For protection, cardinals had to travel to the conclave in well-guarded trains. In 1585, Cardinal d’Este was carried in a sedan to the conclave from Tivoli accompanied by an army of three hundred soldiers. During the vacancy of Sixtus V, the cardinal-legate of Perugia was only able to make it to Rome to participate in the conclave with an escort of soldiers sent by the Grand Duke of Tuscany to protect him from the bandits of the Romagna who “have taken the roads of Tuscany to come to Rome.” Yet, lesser prelates were not so fortunate. More than a month later, during the vacancy of Urban VII, a band of fifty bandits chased a group of monsignors that included members of the prominent Vitelli, della Corgnai and Cesi families to the walls of Rome with hopes of extracting a ransom from them. A year later, during the vacancy of Gregory XIV, sixteen bandits stopped a train of forty people near Terracina, capturing the archbishop of Rossano and the nephew of the Cardinal Iñigo d’Avalos d’Aragona, who alone fetched a 5000 scudi ransom.

Sede vacante certainly did not cause banditry, whose roots were found in papal authorities’ practice of exiling criminals and the ubiquitous poverty of the early modern

158 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 28 November 1590, f. 521r.
159 Ibid, avviso of 13 April 1585, f. 171v.
161 Ibid, avviso of 17 November 1590, f. 595r.
era. But *sede vacante* can be said to have stimulated the activity of bandits in the Papal States. Scholars have noted a resurgence of banditry from the second half of the sixteenth century throughout the Papal States and Italy. Although Sixtus V quelled banditry in the Papal States during his reign, near his death banditry began to grow again as famine and spiraling debt gripped the lands of the pope.\(^{163}\) The resurgence of banditry in the 1590s coincided with a period of four *sedi vacanti* that were almost continuous in the years 1590-91. Two of the popes, Urban VII and Innocent IX, ruled less than a month before succumbing to illnesses, while the feeble Gregory XIV failed to provide strong leadership during his reign of ten months. The lack of a strong leader certainly allowed for banditry to flourish. Only at the end Clement VIII’s pontificate was the epidemic curtailed.

*Avvisi* writers connected the lack of leadership to the rise of banditry throughout these years of almost perpetual *sede vacante*. An *avviso* of 3 November 1590 lamented that “[w]hile the cardinals remain divided in the conclave for the election of the Pope, the bandits at every turn stay united to do the worst that they can.”\(^{164}\) Another *avviso*, a week later, recollected the strong leadership under previous popes, when “this poor state, which at other times, had been reputed fortunate and envied under the Pope, now is reputed to be more miserable than some other state under under an Absolute Prince.”\(^{165}\) The bandits

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\(^{164}\) BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 3 November 1590, f. 565rr: “Mentre i cardinali stanno in conclave divide per la elettione del Pontefice i banditi d’ogni intorno uniti a fare il peggio.”

\(^{165}\) Ibid, *avviso* of 17 November 1590, f. 593v: “questo povero stato, che altre volte è stato reputato felice et invidiato sotto il Pontefice, hora è reputato il più di qual altro stato sotto Principe assoluto.”
had become “masters of the Campagna” during these years and Gregory XIV’s reign from December 1590 to October 1591 did nothing to prevent the growth of banditry in the Papal States.\footnote{Ibid, \textit{avviso} of 28 November 1590, f. 521r: “padroni della campagna.”} In fact, \textit{avvisi} writers openly wrote that one could not tell if the papal seat “were vacante or full” during his pontificate.\footnote{BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, \textit{avviso} of 16 October 1591, f. 319v: “se fusse sede vacante, o piena.”} When bandits returned to the Roman countryside at the death of Innocent IX, an \textit{avviso} concluded that “on account of the so many sedi vacanti, Rome with the entire Papal States is all but destroyed.”\footnote{BAV, Urb.lat 1060, avviso of 18 January 1592, f. 37r: “che per le tante sedi vacanti Roma con utto lo stato ecc.co siano quasi destrutti.”}

The papacy never had a firm grip on the monopoly of violence over its subjects, even in its very capital of Rome. Severe popes, such as Pius V and Sixtus V, implemented measures to control the violence, but they were never able to eradicate its roots, which were grounded in the proclivity of Romans, especially the nobility, to carry arms. The police of Rome were never able to tame the private forces of cardinals, nobles and ambassadors. \textit{Sede vacante} only exacerbated the tendency of the populace to walk about armed. With the lack of a strong leader and a tradition of self-help (which will be discussed in the next chapter), commoners and elites armed themselves out of fear of violence. Prelates and magnates took further precautions by increasing the number of guards that they kept at their palaces. The Capi degli Ordini also sought to project strength by augmenting the meager forces in the city with mercenary soldiers. Not unsurprisingly, this influx of soldiers, further fed by poor men throughout the provinces, only served to increase the level of violence. This scenario was repeated at every \textit{sede}
vacante, demonstrating that the papacy was far from being the absolute power that historians Jean Delumeau and Paolo Prodi depicted it to be.\textsuperscript{169} Moreover, the four vacancies from 1590 to 1592 show that \textit{sede vacante} could create a true crisis of authority within the papacy. These years saw a resurgence of banditry throughout the Papal States, but particularly around Rome, as outlaws sought to take advantage of the prolonged absence of a pope. Near the end of his reign, Clement VIII restored order in the Papal States through the creation of the \textit{Buon Governo}, a magistracy that sought to better regulate relations between the capital and the local governments of the provinces.\textsuperscript{170} Nevertheless, in the capital and its countryside, \textit{sede vacante} continued to be marked by violence and lawlessness throughout the seventeenth century.


CHAPTER 4

THE VENGEANCE OF SEDE VACANTE

Before the Venetian Senate in 1560, the ambassador Alvise Mocenigo described in excruciating detail the violent landscape of Rome that he had witnessed during the interregnum of Paul IV. In his speech, he noted that one did not hear other than this or that murder. Nor was it a wonder because, as was said publicly, one could find some of them [the murderers], who for ten, eight, six and even four scudi, would take the job of killing a man, so that there were in a few days many hundreds of deaths, some due to enmity, others due to arguments, many due to the inheritance of property, and others for different reasons.¹

As Mocenigo’s account reveals, Rome became a violent place during sede vacante. With the death of the pope and the breakdown of his law, Romans took advantage of this time to take care of all sorts of agendas. As we have seen the College of Cardinals and the Popolo Romano both claimed greater authority than in the sede plena. Romans of all ranks, but particularly commoners, took justice in their own hands by seeking vengeance against rivals and enemies. Mocenigo was right to compare Rome with bacchanalian disorder and, in many ways, sede vacante was a time of festive misrule against papal authority (as will be seen in Chapters Six and Seven). But unlike Carnival, when

¹ “Relazione di Luigi Mocenigo, 1560” in Eugenio Albèri, ed., Le Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto, ser. II, t. IV (Florence: Società editrice fiorentina, 1857), 38: “che non si sentiva altro che omicidii di questo e di quell’altro; ne era maraviglia, perchè come pubblicamente si diceva, si ritrovavano alcuni di loro che con dieci, otto, sei, e fin quattro scudi si pigliavano il carico d’ammazzar un uomo, tanto che ne furono in pochi giorni morti molte centinaia, alcune per inimicizia, altri per lite, molti per ereditar la roba, ed altri per diverse cause.”

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laughter and excess took the center stage, during *sede vacante*, hatred and vengeance dominated the thoughts of Romans.\(^2\) During the vacancy, long simmering disagreements over money and property as well as the shameful memory of insults boiled over into violence. Rome became an “anti-community,” in which individuals placed their own agendas over the rule of law and the needs of the community. In this sense, *sede vacante* did not provide a sense of *communitas* that Victor Turner has argued for other so-called liminal moments.\(^3\)

Yet, with the absence of the leviathan, Rome did not descend into a Hobbesian “war of everyman against everyman.”\(^4\) The violence of *sede vacante* followed its own rules, which attenuated its potential for bloodshed. First, the Romans who sought revenge tended to store up their grudges, releasing them during *sede vacante*. Second, they performed their revenge, following a ritual script that often times lessened the violence. They sought to use physical punishment to pay their enemies back for money owed or imagined slights, but this punishment took the form of name-calling, beatings

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\(^4\) Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 77. Taking advantage of the death of the pope was enshrined in a pasquinade, probably based on a popular proverb, issued during Leo X’s *sede vacante* that read: there being no cat, the mice play.” See Valerio Marucci, et al., *Pasquinate romane del cinquecento*, t. 1, no. 289, 286: “non ci essendo gatto, sorce balla.”
and scarring that publicly broadcasted the righting of wrongs, but did not intend to end in the death of their enemies.

During the vacancy, a long engrained popular tradition of taking revenge asserted itself. Yet, as with the Roman Carnival, although the people might think “everything is permitted,” both papal police and civic patrol of the Popolo Romano sought to enforce the law. Victims of revenge typically denounced the avengers to interregnal authorities. Thus, taking revenge during the vacancy was a calculated risk. With the attenuation of most of the papal tribunals and the inefficacy of the Popolo Romano, many Romans believed they could get away with their acts of self-help. But, as the sources from the Governor’s and Conservators’ tribunals, the long arm of the law nevertheless continued to operate. Moreover, misdeeds performed during sede vacante, could never fully be erased or forgotten. Papal authorities frequently arrested many avengers months and even years after the vacancy.

Waiting for Vengeance

By a venerable tradition whose origins are lost in time, both insiders and outsiders expected a series of revenge killings to take place after the death of the pope. The rumor of Pius V’s death in the autumn of 1571 provoked panic in the populace as “men and women to run through the streets, fleeing to their houses on foot, on horse or in carriages,

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5 Burke, Popular Culture, 202.
as if they had entered the city as enemies.”

During the vacancy of Gregory XIII in 1585, the Venetian ambassador Lorenzo Priuli informed the Venetian Senate in a dispatch that “Up to now there have occurred some private murders in the city but no so many at this point, as is usual in the time of other sedi vacanti.” The conclavist who recorded the political machinations of the conclave that elected Urban VIII in 1623 noted that the imminent news of his predecessor’s death was “accompanied by some kinds of vendetta in a way that for these and other quarrels so that it seemed that in this sede vacante that the people caught its breath a bit, but still hoped with the change of lords to change its condition, or fortunes.”

The records of the conservator’s tribunal reveal more intimately the long-engrained mentalité of Romans who saw sede vacante as the optimal time to seek vengeance and personal justice. The very night of Urban VIII’s death, after the news had had time to spread throughout the city, a servant of an unnamed magnate attacked one Francesco Bonafede as he walked past the Pantheon to buy lettuce for his dinner. Before stabbing Francesco three times with a dagger, the assailant shouted, “Now it’s sede

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6 Autobiografías y memorias, ed. Manuel Serrano y Sanz (Madrid: Librería editorial de Bailliére, 1905), 173: “La hora que se certificó en Roma que el Papa era muerto, iban per las calles hombres y mujeres huyendo á casa, á pie y á caballo y en coches, como que se hubiera entrado la ciudad por enemigos.”

7 ASVenice, Dispacci degli ambasciatori al Senato, Rome, filza 19, dispatch of 12 April 1585, f. 99v-100r: “fin hora sono seguiti alcuni homicidii privati nella citta ma pero non son tanti a questa gionta, come sogliono essere in tempo dell’altra sedie vacanti.”

8 ASV, Conclavi, “Conclavi da Pio II a Innocenzo X,” f. 719r: “visto le resolutini prese forse prima del tempo necessario di cause gravi che pareva che con la giustitia ci fosse accompagnata qualche spetie di vendetta di modo che per queste, et altre cause in questa sede vacante pareva che il popolo ripigliasse al quanto di fiato sperando pero col mutare signori mutare stato, o fortuna.”
vacante, it’s time to settle things between us.”9 As Giovanni Battista de Alberi made his way to the Vatican “to see the conclave,” a servant of the gentleman Giovanni Battista d’Asti, with whom he had a fight before the death of Gregory XV, stabbed him twice, crying out as Francesco’s attacker had, “Now that it’s sede vacante.”10 Likewise, Antonio Pissero, whom the caporioni had freed from jail as was custom on the first day of the death of the pope, immediately went to the house of Menica Franchi, where he yelled “Now my time has come” and “I want to avenge myself.” Franchi had had him tried and jailed for debt before the pope’s death.11 The call “Now my time has come” or “Now it’s sede vacante,” seemed to be a battle cry that Romans hurled at their “victims” before attacking—a cry probably shouted more than sources say.12

Many Romans felt that, during sede vacante, they could commit all sorts of acts of vengeance. The basket-weaver Domenico and his apprentices lured rabbi Abram, who was in his debt, into a trap. Summoning the rabbi to his own house, Domenico and his apprentices assaulted him, yelling that since he was “my creditor…he wanted to make

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9 ASR, Tribunale criminale di senatore, Processi, b. 147, c. 164, testimonies of Francesco Bonafede and his father-in-law Giovan Battista, 29 and 30 July 1644, ff. 1r-1v: “Adesso che è sedia vagante è tempo di fiirla tra di noi.”

10 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Giovanni Battista de Alberi, 19 Jul 1623, f. 420r: “adesso che è sedia vacante.”

11 Ibid, testimony of Menica Franchi, wife of Agostino Franchi, testimonies of 11 and 13 July 1623, ff. 886r and 942r: “adesso è venuto il mio tempo,” and “me ne voglio vendicare.”

12 Other examples exist; at the beginning of the vacancy of Gregory XV, Angelo Palmolino went to the house of a Luciola to demand money he had loaned her—itself an act of personal justice—where he was met by her friend, Annibale Rotta, a servant of the ambassador of Ferrara, who threatened him with a gun, telling him that “adesso era sedia vacante,” see ibid, testimony of Angelo Palmolino d’Amelia, 12 July 1623, f. 423r. During the same vacancy, Marco Antonio Pennacchia, estranged from his mother Angela, threatened to kill her, shouting “adesso è sede vacante,” see ibid, testimony of Angela Pennacchia, 10 July 1623, f. 1290r. Another example involved two rival prostitutes: Urania and her lover Giuseppe assaulted Madalena. As Giuseppe grabbed her by the throat, he yelled, “I want to settle things between us now that it is sedia vacante.” See ASR, TCS, b. 196, c. 4, testimony of Madalena, 15 January 1655, f. 1r.
justice for himself, it being sede vacante.” One Andrea Berganzono claimed that his assaulter had attacked him because of the onset of *sede vacante*. He told the judge of the *caporione* of Ponte that his enemy, one Carlo Magani, had attacked him “on account of the present sede vacante, on the first day that was announced the death of Pope Innocent X.”

Romans often postponed getting immediate revenge against those whom they felt had wronged them as they knew that they could seek vengeance during the *sede vacante*, when the pope’s justice ceased to function. The satirist Gregorio Leti wrote in his account of the *sede vacante* of Alexander VII that disorders “which are many times very great, proceeding hence, that such as have been harshly or injuriously dealt with, during the precedent papacies, do for the most part defer their resentments thereof to the next Vacant See, so that it happens many Murthers and Assassinations be committed.”

Although revenge committed against one’s enemies constituted “a kind of wild justice,” to borrow Francis Bacon’s words, it was not generally spontaneous. Indeed, as the cliché goes, the revenge of *sede vacante* was a dish served cold, accomplished long after the occurrence of the initial incident that had provoked feelings of resentment and animosity. Disputes between Romans that led to vindicatory violence had their origins anywhere from a few days before the death of the pope to several years in the past. The

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13 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 19, testimony of Abram Sacerdote, 7 Febraury 1655, ff. 1r-1v: dicendo deto Domenico essere mio creditore et che vuole fare la giustitia de se per essere Sedia Vacante.”

14 Ibid, c. 9, testimony of Andrea Berganzono, 17 Febraury 1655, f. 1r: “con occasione della presente sede vacante il primo giorno che fu publicata la morte della santa memoria di Papa Innocenzo X.”

average time was around a year. For example, Olimpia Collarara and her husband Gian Paolo affixed horns—a popular symbol besmirching the sexual honor of the household—on the door of their neighbors after a year of continuous arguments, which had originated from the latter’s filing a lawsuit against a friend a year earlier. Even incidents that appear trivial could ignite the passion for revenge: when the judge of the caporione of Regola asked Gian Paolo Balsano why Giacinto Carrarria slashed him with a sword as he leaned against the wall of a tavern during the interregnum, the only explanation he could give was that “one time around a year ago I shouted at Giacinto because he had said that my mother was a whore and a witch.” Others had a much longer provenance. One of the most famous cases is that of Benvenuto Cellini, who wrangled for two long years with a rival, Pompeo de’ Capitaneis, at the court of Clement VII over the position of papal minter. Three days after the pope’s death in 1534, as Cellini would have it, his adversary with a posse of ten armed men sought to provoke him as he sat in the Banchi with his friends. Unfortunately for Pompeo, Cellini proved quicker at drawing his dagger as Cellini unintentionally killed him with a wound to the head. Likewise, the muleteer Angelo Matteo da Cavi, fined five scudi by a customs official for evading a tariff on the

16 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Olimpia Massimi [against Olimpia and Giuseppe Collarara], 2 August 1623, f. 476r.

17 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196 c. 3, testimony of Gian Paolo Balsano, 19 January 1655, f. 1r-v: “una volta circa un anno fa gridai con detto Hiacinto perche haveva detto mia madre che era una puttana et una strega.” For other substantial delays in seeking vengeance, see TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Ruggero Delfino, 16 July 1623, f. 328r [at least three months]; testimony of Menica Franchi, 11 July 1623, f. 942r [several months]; and testimony of Orintia, wife of Domenico Vannoli, 28 July 1623, f. 1389r [three months]. Processi, b. 147, c. 164, testimony of Madalena da Corsica, f. 2v, 31 July 1644 [almost a year]. Processi, b. 196, c. 1, testimony of Bartolomeo Torciatti, 17 January 1655, f. 1r [two months] and testimony of Andrea Berganzono, c. 9, 17 February 1655, 1r [a year and a half].

18 Benvenuto Cellini, La vita (Florence: Editrice Adriano Salano, 1938), 183-184.
wine that he brought into Rome, waited until Alexander VII’s vacancy of 1667—three
years later—before seeking vengeance against the official. The longest delay in seeking
revenge occurred in the vacancy of 1644. The priest Francesco Marchier, whose election
as vicar of the Church and Hospital of Sant’Antonio dei Portoghesi in 1635 was nullified
by the order of the church, simmered for nine years. During Urban VIII’s interregnum,
he acted on his desire for vengeance, leading a troop of fifty men armed with harquebuses
to the church. There he assaulted the abbot and friars and seized its treasury.

Romans eagerly anticipated the coming of the vacancy and the opportunity to
enact revenge against hated enemies and offenders. In the days and months leading up to
the pope’s death, many sought to intimidate those who had wronged them. These threats
intensified as the pope slipped towards death. Not forgetting the fine imposed on him
three years earlier by Jacomo Nanzi, the muleteer Angelo da Cavi sought out the customs
official three months before the sickly Alexander VII died and threatened him by saying
“come sede vacante” and by “biting his finger.” With the latter action, Jacomo asserted
that Angelo clearly meant to kill him. When Alexander VII did die three months later,
Angelo accosted him in Piazza San Marco with two armed youths, grabbing him by the
arm and telling him that “certain youths want to talk to you.”

19 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 242, testimony of Jacomo Antonio Nanzi, 25 May 1667, ff. 74r-74v.

to the Sacred College [the attack took place on 11 August 1644], f. 683r.

21 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 242, testimony of Jacomo Nanzi, 25 May 1667, ff. 74v: “verrà sedia vacante con
morticarsi il ditto,” and “che le sono certi giovani che ti vogliano parlare.”
Several days before the *sede vacante* of Paul IV, an unnamed apprentice of the card-maker Antonio Mangione repeatedly passed before the shop of the card-maker Bartolomeo da Tortona and “began to taunt me,” calling him a “cripple and many other words” as well as unsheathing his dagger.\(^\text{22}\) Later, during the vacancy, Magione and Bartolomeo’s apprentices clashed in a swordfight that left one of them dead. In the days before Gregory XV died, one Ludovico Pitiso yelled insults outside the door of his “enemy,” the priest Clemente Brumani, before attacking him during the interregnum.\(^\text{23}\)

A day before the same *sede vacante*, Bartolomeo, a servant of Signor Ludovico Ragazzi, went to the shop of the tailor Gian Pietro Cerrone, where he challenged and threatened one of his apprentices. When Gian Pietro told Bartolomeo to go away, the servant left but now threatened the master telling him that “a time would come to chastise him.”\(^\text{24}\)

True to his word, Bartolomeo stabbed the tailor with a dagger as he walked along the Strada de’ Pontefici during the first week of the vacancy. Likewise, Francesco Bonafede insulted his neighbors, three Corsican prostitutes, a day before Urban VIII’s death, calling them whores, sluts and “used flowers” and professing a desire “to cut their faces,”—to *sfregiare*, a common form of assault in early modern Rome, especially

\(^{22}\) ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 67, testimony of Bartolomeo Cartaro da Tortona, 17 March 1560, f. 80v: “lui mi cominciò a dar la baio” and “zoppo et molti altri parole.”

\(^{23}\) Ibid, testimony of Dom Clemente Brumani, 12 July 1623, f. 230r.

\(^{24}\) Ibid, testimony of Gian Pietro Cerrone, 13 July, 1623, f. 1350r-1351r: “lui si parti minacciando et bravando dicendo che sarebbe venuto tempo di gastigarlo.”
against women, that left a permanent scar on the victim and served as an indelible sign of successful vengeance.\textsuperscript{25}

As these examples demonstrate, many Romans found satisfaction in deferring their immediate desire to seek vengeance. In this regard, they had much in common with the hardy farmers and warriors of Icelandic sagas, who believed that “the longer vengeance is drawn out the more satisfying it will be.”\textsuperscript{26} Relishing a protracted vengeance, Romans bided their time and used intimidation to signal potential future retribution for real and imagined slights. Once the threat of a vacancy drew near, the avenger made his imminent retaliation known to his victim.

As a consequence, in every \textit{sede vacante}, Romans prepared for the attacks from their enemies. Despite prohibitions of the Conservators and Governor of Rome, fear of retaliation caused Romans to arm themselves with mail shirts, swords, and guns. Upon hearing of the illness of Clement VII Cellini’s rival at the papal court, Pompeo de’ Capitaneis, hired a group of Neapolitan soldiers to accompany him throughout the city during the looming vacancy.\textsuperscript{27} The Venetian ambassador Matteo Dandolo painted a similar picture of trepidation in his description of the interregnum of Paul III in 1549, writing the Senate that “everybody is armed, both at home and abroad, with wheel-lock

\textsuperscript{25} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 164, testimony of Madalena da Corsica, 31 July 1644, f. 2v. Francesco did not have time to act on his promise as the prostitutes turned the tables on him, getting a servant of neighborhood lord—perhaps a lover or a client—to stab Francesco on the day of Urban’s death.


\textsuperscript{27} Cellini, \textit{La vita}, 183.
harquebuses in their hands instead of handkerchiefs, everyone relying on himself.”

Dandolo went on to equate the inadequacy of papal justice during the interregnum and the prevalence of violent self-help with the lawlessness of Friuli, a region of northeastern Italy known for its internecine feuds that Venice had recently pacified. Ten years later, Alvise Mocenigo described the vacancy of Paul IV in similar terms, writing that “everyone remained suspicious…and few cared to go about alone during the day, or in the time of night with others.” Indeed, when the caporioni and their patrols stopped armed men, they commonly excused themselves by stating that they carried the arms for protection.

Romans had much to fear as the announcement of the pope’s death saw a spate of assaults and murders. After the publication of Innocent X’s death, Andrea Berganzono’s enemy Carlo Magani hunted him down in the streets of the Borgo, the neighborhood adjacent to Vatican. A fragmentary trial of 1585 shows the celerity in which enemies could enact their vengeance. In the trial, Lutero Fortoni, a servant of messer Nicola Retilone da Tolentino, familiar of Cardinal Michele Bonelli, recounted how his master had sent him to the Banchi to buy a certain pair of stockings on 10 April that he wished to send to a friend in Ancona. While in the Banchi, he saw many people running about, who “told him that the pope was dead.” Immediately, he went to find his master, who by


30 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 9, testimony of Andea Berganzono, 17 February 1655, f. 1r.
then had gone to Trastevere to the house of one Monsignor Pangrano, in order to “inform him of the death of the Pope.” There Lutero learned that Retilone and Pangrani had gone to Monte Giordano, near the Banchi, to visit Cardinal d’Este. Rushing back across the Tiber, Lutero heard in Piazza di San Spirito confirmation of Gregory XIII’s death. Finally arriving at the cardinal’s palace, he found his Retilone dying from sword wounds in an alley outside its walls. He saw his master’s murderers, Curtio Benaduci and Emilio Ceciliano, both from Tolentino and thus possibly holding some old grudge from there, fleeing the scene with swords and daggers in hand.31

In the days following the pope’s death enemies tracked each other down, seeking to adjust wrongs. Mindful that time was short; most men must have hurried to strike their enemies, as most early modern papal interregna lasted no more than a month, many not even reaching two weeks.32 Nevertheless, many avengers opted to commit their acts of vengeance until the closing of the conclave. The Governor of Rome, Giovanni Girolamo Lomellino, wrote the Sacred College that the former vicar of Sant’Antonio dei Portoghesi waited until the “Your Eminences were shut in the conclave” before launching his assault on the church.33 Stefano, a servant of Signor Gian


32 In the period 1559-1655, interregna lasting about a month included those of Sixtus V, Innocent IX, Clement VIII, Gregory XV, and Urban VIII. Those lasting about two weeks include Pius IV, Pius V, Gregory XIII, Gregory XIV, Paul V, and Leo IX. Vacancies lasting longer than a month included those Paul IV (four and half months), Urban VII (two and half months), and Innocent X (three months). Paul IV was the longest sede vacante in the early modern period until those of Clement IX of 1669-70 (almost five months) and Alexander VIII of 1691 (a little more than five months).

33 ASV, Conclavi, “Urbano VIII,” f. 683r: “che’l Em.i VV si erano rinchiusi nel conclave.”
Battista d’Asti, assaulted his rival for the affection of a woman as the latter made his way “to see the conclave.”34 And the Milanese gentleman Alessandro Posterla also waited for the cardinals to gather in the conclave before acting on his plans for revenge against a rival gentleman. Posterla even hired several guards of conclave as assassins.35 No doubt many waited for the conclave, as it left the city without a strong government to enforce legal order. Thus, the Venetian ambassador Lorenzo Priuli, noting fewer murders than usual were committed after the death of Gregory XIII, speculated that “if the conclave lasts longer than usual, there could well occur many evils.”36

But why did people wait until sede vacante when they could seek vengeance against an opponent at any time (which many in fact did)? Venetian ambassadors, as we have seen, thought the answer lay with the breakdown of law in Rome and the reduced presence of papal policing authorities. This can only partially explain the actions of Romans. Gregorio Leti in fact maintained that during sede vacante,

[n]ot but that Justice is very severely administered at that time, and with greater expedition, then [sic] at any other; but of the Mutherers and other mischievous persons be not surpriz’d in the very Facts, and can make a shift to abscond themselves and keep out of the way till the creation of a new Pope, they return to their habitations as if they had committed those crimes in some other Countrey.37

This shows that many Romans took advantage of sede vacante to perform their own forms of “wild justice” despite the threat of severe punishment from the judicial

34 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Gian Battitsa de Alberi, 19 July 1623, f. 420r.

35 ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 110, c. 12, testimony of Alessandro Posterla, 19 March 1566, ff. 717v-718r.

36 ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 19, dispatch of 12 April 1585, f. 100r: “se’l conclave anderà alla longa di solita bene, et possono seguire di molti mali.”

authorities of the papal interregnum and the pope and his administration upon his
ascension to the throne. There was no amnesty for crimes committed during _sede
vacante_. The conservators and the _caporioni_ arrested and punished wrongdoers during
the vacancy and, with the election of a pope, the Governor of Rome resumed his judicial
activities in full and investigated recent crimes with the help of spies and witnesses.
Time did not conceal crimes one committed during _sede vacante_. Years after their
misdeeds, many avengers admitted to their crimes under torture before the Governor’s
judges. Bastiano Nardi di Norma, for example, confessed to shooting someone during
the vacancy of Paul III seventeen years later, while papal officials were questioning him
about his poisoning of a lover in 1566.38

Romans, however, had grown accustomed to the cessation of the Governor’s
tribunal and the ineffectiveness of the civic patrols during the vacancy. The son of
Angela Pennacchia ignored an order of the Governor of Rome not to enter her house
“under the pain of the galleys,” seeking to harm her on the first day of _sede vacante_.39
While performing a house-scorning before the house of the widow Menica Aganti and
her nubile daughter, a young servant of the auditor of the University of Rome family
shouted, “I am not afraid of the Senator or the caporioni.” One witness stated that he said,
“I am not afraid of these whores or of the Governor.”40 Butio Tasca and Ascanio

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38 ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 104, c. 11, testimony of Bastiano Nardi da Norma, ff. 713r-743r, for the confession of attempting to kill someone during Paul III’s vacancy, see ff. 753r-754v.

39 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Angela Pennachia, 10 July 1623, f. 1290r-1291v.

40 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 4, testimony of Menica Argenti, 5 March 1655, f. 1r: “non ho paura di Senatore ne di Caporioni;” and testimony of Angela Preta Piemontese, 5 March 1655, f. 2r: “non ho paura di queste puttane ne del Governatore.”
Guidotto displayed the same attitude when they threw stones and shot their guns at the shutters of a widow with two marriageable daughters. When one of the young women yelled at them to stop harassing them, they responded, “Go tell it to Cardinal Aldobrandini [the Cardinal Chamberlain].”

The Motives behind Vengeance

Behind these acts of vengeance lay disputes over money and material items as well as less tangible commodities such as honor and love. In the realm of the material, the Venetian ambassador, Alvise Mocenigo, related that many of the murders had grown from disputes over inheritance. For example, brothers from Narni clashed over a princely inheritance of five thousand scudi. After the sede vacante of Gregory XIII, Gian Battista Massari testified his half-brother brother Ennio, “having sought by all the means possible to have and enjoy the inheritance,” had “many times wished to kill him in the city of Narni.” Gian Battista had taken his case to Rome, where he served as a retainer of Cardinal Sermoneta and stood guard at his palace after Gregory XIII had died. At the time Ennio came to Rome with ten men to kill his brother. Finding him before the door of the cardinal’s palace on Via Botteghe Oscure, they menaced Gian Battista with their wheel-lock harquebuses and swords, but respected the franchegia, or zone of sanctuary.

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41 ASR, TCG, Processi (seventeenth century), b. 46, c. 6, testimony of Prudentia, daughter of Giulia da Paliano, 3 May 1605, f. 384r: “va a dire al Cardinale Aldobrandini.”

42 ASR, TCG, Investigazioni, vol. 176, testimony of Gian Battista Massari, 30 April 1585, ff. 145v-46r: “per questo effetto haver cercato et godere tutti li mezzi possibili per havere et godere li heredi” and “nella citta di Narni havendole per molte volte voluto amazzare.” Parts of the case can also be found in ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 342, testimony of Ennio Massari di Narni, 14 May 1585, ff. 94r-95v.
that surrounded the palaces of cardinals, ambassadors, and other foreign dignitaries. During the same vacancy, tensions flared between Paolo Emilio Cesi, the Marchese di Riano, and his deceased wife’s family, the Orsini de Stabbia, over her property. After his wife’s death in 1583, the Orsini contested the will. Relations between the two so soured that after Gregory’s death, the marchese retreated into the palace of his uncle, the Cardinal Cesis with “large guard.” The son of Aversa Orsini rode through the streets with a large retinue, looking for Riano. Similarly, on the first day of vacancy of Pius IV, Ottaviano Terni had men armed with swords and wearing mail shirts assault the home of an official of the Apostolic Chamber who, as an arbitrator in an inheritance dispute, had favored Terni’s rival.

Fights over debts figured heavily in the records of the Conservators’ tribunal. Renata Ago has noted the ubiquity in early modern Rome of informal networks of credit among merchants, shopkeepers and artisans of all levels. To get the things they needed to make a living, impoverished Romans frequently had to borrow both money and materials on trust. Artisans and shopkeepers sold their goods on credit and tolerated late payments so as not to disrupt their relationships with their clients. This network of credit and exchange bound Romans together, nevertheless it could lead to both litigation in the papal courts and interpersonal violence.

43 Ibid, f, 146r, see also the testimony of Gian Battista’s fellow guards, ff. 148r-151r.
45 ASR, Processi, b. 108 (sixteenth century), c. 36, testimony of Giulio Antonio de Angelis, 8 January 1566, ff. 721r-725v.
Starting from the second half of the sixteenth century, tension and conflict increasingly marked the relationship between creditors and debtors. Jean Delumeau characterized the problem as an economic plague. Between 1550 and 1700, more and more Romans, particularly the working poor, fell into deeper debt. Unable to retrieve their loans, creditors sued debtors, causing a surge in the amount of prisoners in the jails of Rome. Between January 1582 and January 1583, almost 6000 workers—6% of Rome’s population—found themselves in prison for debt. This group was primarily composed of poor artisans—blacksmiths, shoemakers, and tanners—not vagabonds and beggars. Papal censuses of Christmas 1642 and Easter 1679 reveal that most prisoners had taken loans to pay their rents and to buy the tools of their trade. The work of confraternities to loan money to impoverished workers and to free imprisoned debtors alleviated some of the problems, but did not stem the tide of poor entering the jails.

Many creditors no doubt never saw their loans repaid. Relationships once bound by trust and even affection soured over time as creditors resented their loss of capital. *Sede vacante* thus opened an opportunity for creditors to retrieve their loans. We have seen how the basket-weaver Domenico and his apprentices assaulted his debtor, the rabbi Abram, justifying his actions by shouting “he was my creditor and he wanted to make

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justice for himself on account of its being 
sede vacante.” Violence and intimidation
were key tools to make debtors pay. For example, Tommaso Serveni complained that, at
the beginning of the 
sede vacante
of 1559, his creditor Gian Antonio rounded up three
companions and demanded a giulio that he had loaned him a year earlier. When Serveni
protested he did not have the money, Gian Antonio retorted that he “would extract it from
my eyes.” Likewise, in the beginning of the vacancy of Innocent X, the landlord
Filippo Aratore demanded the two giulii of late rent from Carlo Bolognese, calling him a
“knave” (furbo), “thief” (ladro) and “filthy drunkard” (briccone), all words that detracted
from honor and financial credibility in the artisan world of early modern Rome. Later
that evening, Aratore and an accomplice jumped Carlo in the street, beating him with fists
and paving stones. The muleteer Pasquino and his son Andrea flailed the pregnant
Anna da Lione with the backs of their halberds over her husband’s unpaid debt. The
fishmonger Lorenzo used force to retrieve money that Francesco Acovano had extended
to him on credit. Giovanni, a servant of the Austrian cardinal, Melchior Klesl, struck
Anastasia Stafei d’Austria several times with the pommel of his sword when she refused

49 TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 19, testimony of Abram Sacerdote, f. 1r: “essere mio creditore et che vuole fare
la giustitia de se per essere Sedia Vacante.”

50 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 66, testimony of Tommaso Serveni Romano, 9 February 1560, f. 89v: “haveria
cavato da l’occhi.”

51 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 9, testimony of Carlo Bolognese, 16 January 1655, ff. 1r-1v. For another
example of a landlord using force against a tenant for late payment during the vacancy, see ibid, c. 25,
testimony of the prostitute Caterina, 17 March 1655, f. 1r. For the connection between honor and credit in
the early modern era, see Scott Taylor, “Credit, Debt and Honor in Castile, 1600-1650,” Journal of Early
Modern History 7 (2003), 8-27.

52 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 8, testimony of Anna da Lione, 1 March 1655, f. 1r. For another attack
originating from the late payment of rent, see ibid, c. 16, testimony of Beatrice Sorbi d’Aveezzano, 24
February 1655, ff. 1r-1v.

53 Ibid, c. 25, testimony of Francesco’s apprentice, Marco di Cavi, 18 February 1655, f. 1r.
to return the jewelry he "loaned" her. And the Governor of Rome during Urban VIII’s 
vacancy wrote the Sacred College that a servant of one Vincenzo Paterno, accompanied 
by several men-at-arms, sought to make his debtor, a potter, pay his loan of thirty scudi 
"by using violence." 

Violence could flow in the opposite direction as well—against lenders who 
demanded payment of debts before or during the vacancy. The smith Tiberio Siense 
brought a bandit into Rome to intimidate his creditor Giuliano Florentino to stop 
demanding the payment of nine giulii that he owed him. Since Giuliano refused to quiet 
down, Tibero threatened him three or four months before the death of Pius V, saying that 
“You’ll be sorry some day.” A day before the pope had died, Sillo da Pescharina, 
Tiberio’s brother-in-law, began staying at his home. Sillo, a bandit, would walk by 
Giuliano’s house brandishing a harquebus and stare at him as he passed by. Once Pius 
had died, Tiberio announced to Giuliano that “Now then the pope is dead.” The next 
morning, as Giuliano worked in his shop across from Tiberio’s house, he saw Sillo 
looking him “with certain wild eyes,” who then aimed his gun through the window as if 
to shoot him.

54 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Anastasia Stafei d’Austria, 28 July 1623, ff. 790r-90v. Clearly 
these were items that he allowed her to use while they remained lovers. For a similar case in which 
neighbors fought over loaned articles of clothing see b. 196, c. 40, testimony of Portia Romana, 27 March 
1655, ff. 1r-1v. 

656r: “sia fatto pagare con usar violenza.” Lomellino noted that the servant had first complained to the 
caporione of Sant’Eustachio and the Conservators to no avail, which reveals dissatisfaction with “official” 
justice during the vacancy. 

56 TCG, Investigazioni, vol. 112, testimony of Giuliano da Sesto Florentino, 5 May 1572, ff. 28v-29r: 
“minacciandomi te ne pentirai a qualche tempo,” “Adesso poi che è morto il papa,” and “certi occhi 
tralunati.”
When Angelo Palmolino d’Amelia demanded the thirty scudi from one Luciola
“for different jobs done by me and also for different things [given to her],” she not only refused to reimburse him, but also had a servant of the Ambassador of Ferrara threaten him the next morning. The servant, “swaggering and raising uproar” as Angelo walked by, cried “Now it is sede vacante” and “put his hand in his cloak as if to pull out a weapon.” When Consalvo Carini, on the first day of the sede vacante of Gregory XV, demanded a sword he had lent to the doughnut-maker Tomasso Candidi some time before, he did not expect the latter to return the next day with a wheel-lock terzaro.

Similarly, two millers threatened the grinder Bartolomeo with daggers when he demanded the money he had lent one of them at the start of the interregnum. The ensuing brawl was stopped by soldiers stationed at the nearby palace of the Colonna family. Using the courts to win back a loan could also provoke violence during the vacancy. Damiano Vannuccio attacked Antonio Pellegrini for taking him to court before the vacancy of Gregory XV to retrieve fourteen scudi in loans.

Landlords who demanded the payment of late rent suffered, too, at the hands of their tenants during the vacancy. The crippled courtesan Lavina Ascolana had her lover, a groom of Duke Savelli, and his friend, both from Ascoli, rough up the prior of the Ospedale della Consolatione, Signor Giuseppe Frigoniero, after he demanded earlier in

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57 ASR, TCS, b. 67, testimony of Angelo Palmolino d’Amelia, 12 July 1623, ff. 433r-424r: “trenta scudi in circa per diversi lavori fattili da me et anco per diverse fatteli dare,” “bravando et tumultiando,” and “adesso era sede vacante.”

58 Ibid, testimony of Consalvo Carini, 10 July 1623, ff. 1481r-81v.

59 ASR, TCG, Investigazioni, vol. 112, testimony of the sausage vendor Jacomo di Cremona, 19 May 1572, f. 43r and testimony of stonecutter Jacomo Milanese, 21 May 1572, f. 49r.

60 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 712, testimony of Antonio Pellegrini, 15 August 1623, ff. 184r-v.
the *sede vacante* that she pay for the room in the hospital that she had promised to take three years earlier. During an argument before the attack, Lavina told the prior that “I want the house when it pleases me, not when it pleases you,” threatening the prior at the same time that she “I have someone who will teach you to take care [of your tenants].”61

The inhabitants of Ascoli had a reputation for being a belligerent bunch, but *sede vacante* surely loosened her tongue. Strikingly, she used the impolite tu [“non quando piace a te”] when addressing the prior, a man much further up the social hierarchy.62

Vengeance for stolen property featured prominently in the assaults committed during *sede vacante*. The weaver Bartolomeo Fiorentino besieged the shop of Battista Venetiano with a troop of fifteen men wearing mail jackets and armed with swords during the vacancy of Pius IV to recover some cloth that he claimed the latter had taken from him. Bartolomeo’s plan backfired, however, as Battista killed him in the ensuing swordfight.63 His plan for revenge similarly defeated, Fabio the candle-maker sought to retrieve his stolen goldfinch by force but suffered under the blows of his enemy Barnabo Merciano. Even under the roof of the Governor of Rome vindicatory acts occurred.

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61 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Giuseppe Frigoniero, 20 July 1623, ff. 1211r-1213r and testimony of Lavina Ascolana, 21 July 1623, f. 1216r-20r. For the quote see the testimony of Lavina’s neighbor, Girolamo Romano, f. 1214r: “Io volevo la casa quando piace a me, e non quando piace a te” and “Io quelchuno che ti insegnarà di provedere.” Lavina had attempted to threaten her female neighbors, Santa Ascolana and the widow Girolama da Macerata, into silence, see f. 1219r. Lavina most likely had changed her mind about the room as she had secretly married Venanzo Ascolano, the above groom of the Savelli family. The prior of the hospital referred to him as her *bertone*, a secret lover.


63 ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth-century), b. 110, c. 9, testimony of the weaver Bartolomeo Milanese, 12 January 1566, unpaginated. Bartolomeo Milanese was dining with Battista Venetiano when the attack occurred.
During the vacancy of Clement VIII, the Governor’s master of the house, Gioseffe Milano Cremonese, clashed with another familiar, claiming that he had stolen his handkerchief. Underlying this attack, as with many brawls occurring during sede vacante, was pre-existing hatred. The other brawler, one Signor Marco Torrone Bresciano testified that the “master of the house was always hated [by the other familiars],” and that “had shamed me a hundred thousand times as is known in this house.” This suggests that the two had a longstanding grudge and that the theft of the handkerchief, an important accessory of all Renaissance gentleman laden with notions of honor, was the final straw for the master of the house. In other cases, larger sums of money could be involved.

Stolen items of food, at times a scarce resource in early modern Europe, also provoked acts of vengeance among neighbors during sede vacante. Marco d’Alatri, who, like many Romans, kept a small vineyard in the city, sought revenge against his neighbor Giulia da Città di Castello because she had taken some unripe grapes from him. In response, four or five days after the death of the pope, Marco and several accomplices threw stones at her shutters and a few days later physically assaulted her with a dagger. The innkeeper Francesco similarly had five neighborhood youths harass and attack Prudentia Muscatelli because she stole some fruit that he had stored near her door. The

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64 ASR, TCG, Processi (seventeenth-century), b. 47, c. 27, testimony of Marco Torrone Bresciano, 7 March 1605, ff. 1417v: “che il maestro di caso è sempre odiato,” and “mi ha vittuperato cento mila volte come è notato in casa.” Torrone added that Milano called him names such as fucked goat and shameful traitor “almost continuously” although he himself “never displayed any resentment” toward the master of the house, clearly a sign that both hated each other.

65 ASR, TCG, Investigazioni, vol. 69, testimony of Stefano Angelo, 29 January 1560, f. 71r. Theft from neighboring gardens was a widespread phenomenon in early modern rural Italy. Some scholars have argued that Italian peasants saw it as something of right.
youths first raped her and then a few days later hurled volleys of stones at her windows. After the theft, Prudentia told the judge of the *caporione* of Colonna that Francesco carried “this hatred of me.” The widow Pasquina had her son Paolo throw stones at the gentleman Signor Santi Florio Perugino after he had taken some of her fruit. Florio, taken aback by the attack, described the youth as “swaggering and threatening me” before this attack and demanded justice, since he was “a man of honor and esteem.” This as well as the attack Lavina made on the prior of the Ospedale della Consolatione were rare examples of vindicatory acts that traveled up the social ladder. Most avengers in Rome attacked only members of their social rank.

These acts of vengeance took on a disciplinary tone and show that during *sede vacante* what sociologists have called self-help, or private justice, became more prominent than the official justice of the state. This type of self-regulation of society had come under assault by the growing power of centralizing states throughout early modern Europe, but the process was a gradual one. Instead the two systems of social control coexisted and often conflicted with one another other. However, during the *sede vacante* this self-help, or popular form of justice, assumed a larger role with the lapse in the papal tribunals, particularly that of the Governor of Rome. Susan Dwyer Amussen

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66 ASR, TSC, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Prudentia Muscatelli Romana, 2 August 1623, ff. 4254-v. It is unclear if the youths acted on their own accord in raping Prudentia.

67 Ibid, testimony of Santi Florio Perugino, 30 July 1623, ff. 427r-428r: “essendo io homo di honore et reputate.” The youth, named Paolo, used the tu form with Florio, who said the youth had “mi haveva levato la pazzia dal Capo.” Witnesses say that after the two had exchanged words and that after Paolo had brandish a stone, Florio pulled out his dagger, see the testimony of Baldassare Pistolese, 30 July 1623, ff. 428r-v; Giovan Battista Sario Neapolitano, 2 August 1623, ff. 428v-29r; and Paolo Baldorno Romano, 29 October 1623, ff. 429v-430r.

has argued that a certain level of violence—if controlled and measure—was accepted and even considered legitimate in early modern England. Similarly, in the time of sede vacante Romans had come to accept a greater amount of violence when used to seek vengeance. The forms of violence often took on disciplinary tone—spanking, slapping, and scarring—all examples a style of justice that equated physical pain as compensation for the loss of property and face. These attacks, because they were often restrained, shamed the victim even more.

This style of justice could even emulate that of the official justice of the state. The mason Michelangelo da L’Aquila severed the tongue of an enemy who insulted his father and desired to cut off the hands of the man who had killed his mother. That sede vacante opened an opportunity for this kind of disciplinary revenge can be seen in the words of the prostitute Camillo Sienese before the Governor’s criminal judge after the vacancy of Paul IV. She claimed that her former lover Paolo de Grassi “bothered me on several occasions and, among other things, a bit after the death of Paul IV, which was sede vacante, he beat me several times, hitting me in the face with his mailed gloves.” After the election of Pius IV, he continued to menace her. She warned him off saying, “I warn you, Paolo! Now, it’s not Sede Vacante any longer!” To which Paolo tellingly responded, “By the blood of the Madonna, I’ll very well make Sede Vacante come!”

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70 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 65, testimony of Nicolò da Ferrara, 1 February 1560, ff.23r-25v and Invesitgazioni, vol. 69, testimony of Matthea da Ferrara, 23 January 1560, ff. 52r-52v.

71 ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 48, c. 19, testimony of Camillo Sienese, 1 May 1560, f. 141v: “Più volte questo Paolo mi ha molestata et fra le altre poche doppi la morte di Paolo 4o [sic] ch’era sede
He thus knew that _sede vacante_ was propitious moment to claim the power to execute his
own form of justice.

Other avengers favored taking what they believed was owed them during _sede vacante_. The tanner Carlo Artigiano went to the shop of the smith Battista Vitale, who owed him a slight sum of twenty-two quattrini, and “of his own authority took the two feet of his sawhorse and carried them away” as compensation. Not content with taking what he considered his, Artigiano assaulted Vitale later that evening. Vitale emphasized that Artigiano “killed [sic] me because I was his debtor.”72 The basket-weaver Domenico similarly forcibly took items from his debtor—a hat and the two cloaks from the Rabbi Abram. The prostitute and landlady Madelena had her lover take items from her tenant for not paying rent.73 Finally, the husband of Caterina da Sermoneta, who had left her three months earlier, broke into her home during Innocent X’s _sede vacante_ in order to take several articles of clothes and other household items.74 Another means of vengeance adopted by Romans during the vacancy was to damage the property of those they felt owed them recompense. When Angela Lucatelli, wife of a potter, refused to the baker’s widow Faustina for the bread she had given her, Faustina and her son threw

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72 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 18, testimony of Battista Vitale, 18 January 1655, ff. 1r-v: “di propria autorita mi levo dui piedi di cavaletto e se li portava via.” And “mi amazzi perche se io gli ero debitore.”

73 Ibid, c. 7, testimony of prostitute Veronica Angela, 25 February 1655, f. 1r.

74 Ibid, c. 12, testimony of Caterina di Sermoneta, 12 February 1655, f. 1r.
stones at the pottery in her husband’ shop, shattering a vase and a majolica bowl worth three giulii (far more than the three baiocchi she had originally demanded).  

However, as Mocenigo stated, many of the murders and attacks stemmed from long-standing hatreds between rivals and enemies. Historians have recently commented on the widespread existence of hatreds in pre-modern Europe that often exploded into revenge killings, feuds among clans, brawls and tumults among individuals. Daniel Smail has even gone so far as to say that hatred tied neighbors and townsfolk together in late medieval Marseille.  

During sede vacante, Rome became an “anti-community,” in which hatreds, some open, others simmering quietly, came to the fore to disrupt normal relations between neighbors and associates. Before the judges of the caporione, Romans explained that the act of violence against them or the ones they committed against others originated in inimictia and nemictia or that they had a particular odio (“hatred”) or mala animo (“ill will”) with this or that person. For example, the prostitute Veneranda Gonstia Napoletana assumed that the five men who had kicked her door and thrown stones at her shutters had been sent by her neighbor “because I have always had a hatred of Vincenza di Francesco di Vitorchiano.”

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75 Ibid, c. 24, testimony of Angela Lucatelli, 29 March 1655, ff. 1r-v. Hatreds also inspired retaliatory attacks against rivals. For example, the bandit-captain Guercio, “out of enmity,” burned two hundred sheep of the Massimi family. See BAV, Urb.lat 1060, avviso of 25 January 1592, f. 53v: “per inimicitia.”


77 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Veneranda Gonstia Napoletana, 29 August 1623, f. 859r: “perche Io ho hauta sempre Inimica donna Vincenza di Francesco da Vitorchiano.”
Pitiso, “having declared himself my enemy” had made threats prior to Gregory XV’s death and continued to stalk and menace him during the subsequent sede vacante. And when asked by the judge of the caporione of Monti why Battista Romano had smashed Caterina Minucci’s shutters with a cudgel, a neighbor answered “I know well that they argue among themselves like cats and dogs.”

As this last example indicates, much of the violence of sede vacante had its origins in neighborhood rivalries. Countless beatings and brawls no doubt originated from spontaneous arguments, such as the beating the prostitute Angela Serena da Palermo suffered in the hands of her rival Vittoria Napoletana. When Angela saw Vittoria’s son dump the contents of a chamber pot in front of her house, she ran out to scold him. Immediately, Vittoria sent out her lover and his friend to beat her.

When Matteo Naldi da Recanati encountered his enemy Martio Gubile Romano and his companions outside a tavern, they exchanged insults with Martio telling Matteo “to drown in the Tiber,” and Matteo responded by insulting Martio’s father. Two hours into the night they clashed in the street outside their homes. Martio claimed that his neighbor accosted him, saying that “now it is time that I settle things with you,” before attempting to strike him three times with a dagger, which prompted Martio’s family to rush outside in order to join the fray. His father rushed out with a club, his pregnant


79 ASR, TSC, Processi, b. 196, c. 25, testimony of Gian Domenico Smacchia, 4 April 1655, f. 2v: “so bene che fanno litigare tra di loro come cani e gatti.”

80 ASR, TSC, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Angela Serena Panormitana, 13 July 1623, f. 1238r.

81 Ibid, testimony of Matteo Naldi da Recanati, 19 July 1623, f. 1257r: “ti affoga a fiume.”
sister with a crude halberd, and his mother with a handful of stones. All three proceeded to attack Matteo, who, getting the worst of the fight, fled to his house to fetch a harquebus, but by then neighbors had arrived to quell the brawl.⁸²

All peace agreements, both formal and informal, colloquially called “fare la pace,” ceased to function after the pope’s death. Formal peace alliances generally received their binding authority in the presence of a notary of one of the many civil and tribunals of the city or sometimes before a priest in a chapel of a church.⁸³ Informal alliances, favored more by the working classes, were performed in taverns and inns, ritually binding the parties by sharing wine, and sometimes bread, at a table.⁸⁴ But during the vacancy, many Romans felt that all previous peaces, whether formal or informal, lost their binding powers. The innkeeper Ruggero Delfino Romano had opted

⁸² Ibid, testimony of Martio Gubile Romano, 30 August 1623, f. 1261r: “adesso è tempo che io ti chiarisco.” Matteo gave a different account of the fight, saying that Martio and his family initiated the brawl (see f. 1257v). The testimony of a neighbor corroborates Martio’s version of the fight, see ff. 1261v-r, testimony of Horatio Belli Romano, 30 July 1623. The testimonies of Martio’s family and Matteo’s family are of course biased; see ff. 1258r-1259r and 1262v-1263r. In any event, the brawl highlights the tensions born from hatred that could explode during sede vacante.


to make a formal truce with his enemy, Belardino, three months before the death of Gregory XV. Yet, Belardino evidently believing that the peace had ceased with the vacancy, shot his wheel-lock *terzarolo* at the innkeeper as he made his way back to his inn in Trastevere.\(^8^5\) Similarly, the stonemason Domenico had made peace with his neighbor Giovanni over a boundary dispute, but the latter nevertheless surprised him with an attack by a servant of Monsignor d’Aquino during *sede vacante*.\(^8^6\) The legitimacy of these attacks depended on perspective. The attackers no doubt felt justified because of the new rules of the interregnum while their victims felt betrayed. Domenico, who remembered the very words that Giovanni had uttered as they made an informal truce at the Inn of the Fontanella—“if there had been some words between us, it is nothing and now we drank as a sign of peace”—felt betrayed that he “was so maltreated under the peace.”\(^8^7\) The innkeeper Ruggero uttered similar sentiments before the judge of the *caporione* of Regola, emphasizing that he Belardino had acted “against the form of the wise canons, laws and constitutions [of Rome] and also against the peace” and that he wanted to make “an example of such a traitor.”\(^8^8\)

Truces made during *sede vacante* frequently carried little weight with enemies. After the neighbors Simona and Francesca exchanged insults from their windows, they and their husbands as well neighbors went to the Inn of the Moro in Trastevere to make

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\(^8^5\) ASR, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Ruggero Delfino Romano, 16 July 1623, ff. 328r-328v.

\(^8^6\) ASR, TSC, Processi, b. 196, c. 43, testimony of Domenico di Pietro, 18 March 1655, ff. 1r-1v.

\(^8^7\) Ibid, “se ci è stato qualche parola fra noi altri non è niente e bevessimo in segno di pace” and “così maltrattato sotto la pace.”

\(^8^8\) ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, f. 328v: “contra la forma de Savi Canoni, leggi, et const.i et anco contra la pace….in esempio di tale traditore.”
peace. As the group left the inn, Simona’s husband, seized by a “diabolical spirit,”
attempted to stab Francesca’s husband in the throat.89 Similarly, the candle-maker Fabio
made the peace with Barnabo Merciano after attempting to use force to retrieve a
goldfinch the latter had stolen at the onset of the sede vacante of Paul IV. Agreeing to
“take faith with one another and to not trouble each other for fifteen days,” the peace did
not have lasting effects in the long vacancy of Paul IV and Barnabo assaulted Fabio as he
left an apothecary near the Pantheon.90 These failed peaces during the vacancy reflect
not only existing fissures in the social fabric of early modern Rome, but also that sede
vacante widened the gulf between neighbors, turning these hatreds into violent
altercations. Moreover, they reveal the failure of community regulation in the face of the
individual, personal self-help that flourished in the vacancy. This can be seen in the
enmity between neighbors Olimpia Massimi and Olimpia Collarava and their respective
husbands. The constant bickering between the two women, described as haughty by their
neighbors, disrupted the small world behind the palace of Marchese Pallavicini in the
rione of Ponte for more than a year. Neighbors sought in vain to have them reconcile; the
sculptor Martino Fulino da Novara, who had known them for two years, said that “they
no longer talked and several times I tried to put them in peace, but it was never
possible.”91 The tensions were finally unleashed with the coming of sede vacante, when

89 Ibid, testimony of Francesca, wife of Orlando, 28 July 1623, f. 1267r, see ff. 1267r-1271v for the
testimony of neighbors.

90 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 65, testimony of Fabio di Jacamo, 13 February 1560, ff. 123v-125r: “pigliamo
la fede del’uno et del’altro di non fare dispiacere per quindici giorni;” quote from f. 124r. “after saying
that Barnabo gave him five stabs, ma posso ringratiar dio che non me incontrai di poi havemo fatto pace, et
non posso essere preso per altro perche non ho fatto errore niss.o”

91 ASR, TSC, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Martino Fulino da Novara, f. 482v: “non si sono mai più parlato,
et più volte ho cercato di metterle in pace et mai è stato possibile.” Another neighbor voiced a similar
Olimpia Collarava had her husband and three servants of the marchese hung horns (corna) on the door of the house of Olimpia Massimi, which threw the neighborhood into further turmoil from the scandal that arose. Thus, not only did the state’s justice fail during sede vacante, but so did the informal networks of community social control.

Much of this tension and resulting enmity arose from the agonistic relationship between neighbors, particularly in economic conflicts. The street-vendor Giovan Battista and his wife Maria clashed with their business rivals, Giovanni Ranier d’Aielli and his wife Margherita, during the vacancy due to mounting pressure from their economic competition. Both couples had stationed their fruit and nut stands before the Ospedale della Consolazione and had agreed that they would sell their products at six quattrini a pound. However, whenever a customer had agreed to purchase fruit from Giovanni at the set price, Giovan Battista would start shouting “four quatrini,” and steal the customer as he weighed the fruit. After several days of this, Maria and Magherita began to exchange insults and eventually all four came to blows in the vacancy of Innocent X. Likewise, competition for customers during the same vacancy caused the fruit vendor Francesco and his wife to assault their rival in the square before the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria. Attacking his honesty and business credibility, they called him a “dishonest rogue” as they brandished their improvised weapons—a cudgel and a hammer—before nearby soldiers separated them.

assessment of the enmity between the two Olimpias, see the testimony of Jacopo Bolognese, 2 August 1623, f. 477v.

92 ASR, TSC, Processi, b. 196, c. 5, ff. 1r-6v; includes the testimony of all four street vendors and their neighbors redacted throughout January 1655.

93 Ibid, c. 28, testimony of the fruit-vendor Carlo Daverio Milanese, 3 March 1655, f. 1r.
Other tensions originated far beyond the walls of Rome in the subject towns of the Papal States. Acts of vengeance occurred between *paesani*, or fellow countrymen, as migrants brought their enmities to Rome. Biascio Morgnatino and Simone Mariochi, both servants of Cardinal Cesi originally from Subiaco, were assaulted by Carlo Sartucci and six or seven others who had come to Rome to serve Cardinal Antonio Barberini as guards during the *sede vacante*. Both Biascio and Simone held these newcomers from Subiaco as “enemies” from an incident in their hometown. The hatred between the two groups was so intense that Carlo sought to kill them twice during the vacancy; first by attacking them in alleyway near Piazza dei Mattei and then by shooting at them as they rode by San Nicolò de’ Cesarini.  

And we have already seen how one brother sought to resolve a dispute over inheritance originating in Narni by coming to Rome to kill his sibling during the vacancy of Pius V and how Nicolo Retilone from Tolentino was killed by two of his *paesani* on the day Gregory XIII died.

Jealously over lovers fed the emotions of many who sought vengeance against enemies during the vacancy. Teodoro d’Urbino, a soldier in the employ of the Cardinal of Urbino, assaulted Cosimo, his rival for the affection of a certain Nina. When asked why he attacked Cosimo, he told authorities that “because he [Cosimo] was in love with Nina, but that Nina was in love with me.” In another case, Evangelista Bolognese counted Giovan Battista Cremonese as “my enemy” because “he [Evangelista] had stolen...”

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94 Ibid, c. 42, testimonies of Biascio Morgantino and Simone Mariochi, 28 February and 29 March 1655 respectively, ff. 1r-v and 4r-v.

95 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 66, testimony of Teodoro d’Urbino, 2 February 1560, f. 34 v: “pche lui era inamorato della Nina et la Nina era inamorato di me.’
the wife of Heronimo Calabrese,” his friend, some months before. The two found in *sede vacante* the perfect opportunity to seek vengeance against their enemy, but when they went to his house, Giovan Battista charged them with a sword, routing them. Angered Giovan Battista rounded up armed men to assault Heronimo in his home.  

96 A groom of Cardinal Colonna assaulted a rival for the affections of a prostitute named Urbana Beruscena during the vacancy of Clement VIII.  

97 Fifty years later Stefano Romano twice sought to kill Gian Battista de Alberi during the vacancy of Gregory XV on the account of “a friendship of woman.”  

98 A rival lover of the prostitute Checca assaulted Vincenzo Monacello as he walked to buy wine for their evening together during the vacancy of Innocent X.  

99 Upset that Andrea Pinto refused to give the hand of his niece to him, Ludovico Carriero stalked the two as they went to the Vatican to see the corpse of the pope. On their return home, he accosted them when they stopped at the house of friend.  

100 An innocent talk could begin a grudge whose violent culmination would end during *sede vacante*. Three months before the *sede vacante* of 1623, the prostitute Lucia saw her lover talking to the married Orintia Vannoli. “On account of jealously of her

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97 ASR, TCG, Processi (seventeenth century), b. 47, c. 11, testimonies of Francesco Socicio da Torino and Enea Scardutio da Cerreto, servants of Filippo Guicciardini, 8 September 1605, ff. 1114 v-1115r and 1115v-1116r.  

98 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Benedetto Rocco Ponesino, 20 July 1623, f. 421r.  

99 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 16, testimony of Francesca, alias Checca, 22 January 1655, ff. 2v-3r.  

100 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Andrea Pinto Romano, 10 July 1623, ff. 405r-406v.
friend,” Orintia told the judge of the caporione of Sant’Angelo, “she began to insult me and call me many impolite words together.” 101 One woman of the neighborhood said that because of this episode, “there always had been an enmity between them.” 102 This led to further tensions between the two. Eight days before the vacancy, while the women of the neighborhood washed their clothes around the fountain in Piazza Mattei, Lucia and the wife of a tripe vendor exchanged words with Orintia, which escalated into a scuffle between the two women. Finally, during sede vacante, Lucia had several men, including some servants of Cardinal Giovanni Battitsa Deti, throw stones at her shutters and yell insults outside her home. 103

At the root of much of the revenge that occurred during sede vacante was a concern to defend and protect honor. In essence, Rome became a battlefield in which agonistic concerns for honor fueled fights and vindictory acts in its streets and squares among all ranks of society. All people felt sensitive to the dictates of honor despite the myriad of fencing and advice books that claimed it was the prerogative and monopoly of gentlemen and soldiers. Honor, as anthropologists of the Mediterranean basin define it, was a social commodity that had tangible benefits among one’s peers. It had to be continually guarded and defended as enemies and rivals were always out to steal it or claim it for themselves. It meant different things to different people: for an artisan it was

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101 Ibid, testimony of Orintia Vannoli Romana, 28 July 1623, ff. 1389r-v: “è per gelosia del suo amico mi comincio ad ingiurare et dirmi delle villanie insieme.”

102 Ibid, testimony of Dorotea Porceni da Gubbio, 29 July 1623, f. 1391r: “e sempre sono state inimicitia tra loro.”

103 Ibid, testimony of Luigi Arinello Milanese, 5 August 1623, f. 1392r. This neighbor noticed that at least one of the men wore the livery of the Cardinal Deti and recognized him as the servant of the master of the house of the cardinal’s palace.
grounded in professional trustworthiness; for nobles, it meant prowess in battles. But for all men honor was grounded in manliness, virility and the ability to stand up for oneself when challenged. For women, honor resided in their sexuality and any woman whose sexual virtue was besmirched brought shame to her household. Thus, for all Romans honor was a public commodity subject to the attacks of enemies, assessed by the critical assessment of neighbors, and broadcast by networks of gossip. Those with a reputation for lacking honor (as well as their families and familiars) could suffer not only social but also material repercussions within the community.  

The dictates of honor thus impelled Romans from all social strata to seek revenge. For example, an avviso of 15 July 1623 noted that during the sede vacante of Gregory XV a man killed his wife and mother-in-law “on account of a cause of honor.” In a letter addressed to the Bishop of Feltre, one Giovanni Cagarra wrote that a member of the noble Mattei family had killed his brother, sister-in-law and their children during the vacancy of Marcellus II because his brother “had made peace with one who had killed another brother of theirs.” This latter example reflects the grave shame that early modern Italians could feel at not avenging slights and wrongs done to them. Edward


105 ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 9, avviso of 15 July 1623, f. 192v.

106 BAV, Chigiani, R II, t. 54, letter of Giovanni Cagarra to the Bishop of Feltre, 28 May 1555, f. 234r” “haveva fatta pace parentado con chi haveva morto un altro loro fratello.”
Muir, writing on the feuding and vindicatory violence of the Friulian countryside at the beginning of the sixteenth century, had argued that many Renaissance nobles were caught in what he calls the “double binds of manly revenge.” Friulian nobles had two conflicting choices in seeking vengeance in a blood feud: they could ignore the murder of a relative and suffer a tremendous loss of honor among their peers or they could avenge the deed, satisfying the cultural dictates of their class but risk exile, life or loss of property at the hands of the centralizing Venetian state. Muir argues that the Friulian nobles influenced by the so-called “civilizing process,” learned to sublimate their fiery emotions and adopted less violent means such as the invective and the judicial courts to seek vengeance against rivals and foes.107

Although Muir concentrated on nobles, evidence from the tribunals of Rome suggests that common men and women faced a similar dilemma in seeking justice against wrongdoers or revenge against enemies. Ruled by the dictates of honor, Romans could take enemies to court and feel emotionally satisfied from the social drama that unfolded publicly for the neighborhood to see and hear, as Daniel Smail has shown for late medieval Marseilles. They could also take justice into their own hands as Peter Blastenbrei has argued in his quantitative study of crime in Rome from 1560 to 1585. This is an important point, but one that ignores that artisans, workers and women

frequently had recourse to the courts as demonstrated by Renata Ago. Yet, Romans had a
third option: they could wait until the vacancy to assuage blows to their honor.\textsuperscript{108}

Thus, we see men and women, “of the lower sorts,” as Venetian ambassadors
called those seeking vengeance, defending slights to their honor in the wake of the pope’s
death. Women avenged insinuations against their sexual honor. For example, Madalena
Corsetta and her two companions arranged to have Francesco Bonafede stabbed because
“he had so insulted them over the honor,” nearly a year before the arrival of \textit{sede vacante}.
They had arranged before the Governor of Rome an agreement “between ourselves so
that we did not speak from around the past October or November,” but the memory of the
slight did fade away.\textsuperscript{109} The prostitute Agnese did not forgive the slight when her
neighbor Anna Maria refused to allow a girl she had adopted to hang out with “a public
whore.” Consequently, during the vacancy, Agnese had her lover Christoforo Spagnolo
slap this neighbor and threaten her with his sword.\textsuperscript{110} Francesca demanded revenge after
her neighbor Simona had accused her of having sex with a Jew. She had her husband
confront Simona’s husband as “that was not the way to speak to a married and honored
woman.”\textsuperscript{111}

Men, on the other hand, were duty bound to avenge slights to their honor and
attacks on their body and their family. Here the double bind becomes forcibly clear.

\textsuperscript{108} Smail, \textit{Consumption of Justice}; Ago, \textit{Economia barocca} and eadem, “Una giustizia personalizzata: I
tribunali civili di Roma nel XVII secolo,” \textit{Quaderni storici} 101 (1999), 389-412; and Peter Blastenbrei,
\textit{Kriminalität in Rom, 1560-1585} (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995).

\textsuperscript{109} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 164, testimony of Madalena Corsetta, 31 July 1644, f. 2v: “perche lui ha
ingiurato tanto sopra l’honore” and “tra di noi non li semo parlato da 8bre o 9bre passato in qua.”

\textsuperscript{110} ASR, Processi, b. 196, c. 196, testimony of Anna Maria, 22 January 1655, f. 1r.

\textsuperscript{111} ASR, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Francesca, wife of Orlando di Curtio, 28 July 1623, f. 1267r.
When Cellini’s rival at the papal court confronted him on third day of *sede vacante* in front of his friends in the busy commercial district of the Banchi, he backed down to their chagrin. Even chiding from Albertaccio del Bene, Cellini’s “dearest friend,” failed to stir him. A few hours later, however, after hearing that Pompeo “had boasted of this challenge *[bravata]* he thought he had given me,” and upon seeing him exit an apothecary, Cellini immediately unsheathed his knife.¹¹² Cellini could not ignore the dictates of honor for too long, especially in the tension-filled time of the vacancy.

Further down the social scale, the mason Michelangelo da L’Aquila felt a keen need to kill the man who had insulted and attacked his father four years before. During this time, witnesses reported that he talked incessantly of getting revenge. After he had killed his father’s assailant, friends warned him that the Governor’s police had been sent to arrest him. Recognizing his hopeless situation he stated that “I wished to kill two or three sbirri before they take me.”¹¹³ During the same vacancy, Blasio d’Alatri sought revenge against the steward of Cardinal Cesi, who a few days before *sede vacante* pushed his Blasio’s wife aside and struck Blasio as he haughtily made his way to the cardinal’s palace.

Blasio opted to wait until *sede vacante* to ambush the steward with his brother-in-law as the steward performed his daily duties.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Cellini, *La vita*, p. 185: “lui si era millantato di quella bravata che a lui pareva aver fattami.”

¹¹³ ASR, Costituti, vol. 65, testimony of Nicolò da Ferrara, 1 February 1560, f. 25v: “che tu havesti voluto amazzare doi o tre sbirri prima che ti pigliassero.” I have rendered these words into the first person. Nicolo is speaking to Michelangelo here as it was common to have witnesses confront the accused before the judge.

¹¹⁴ ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 66, testimony of Blasio d’Alatri, 22 January 1560, ff. 1v-2r.
The Scripted Revenge of Sede Vacante Violence

Anthropologists until recently have categorized violence into two major conflicting binaries: instrumental versus ritual, that is violence that is performed towards a goal and violence that expresses a message; and impulsive versus rational, that is violence performed spontaneously and that which is carefully planned in advance. Others have rejected these simple dichotomies, arguing that violence often contains elements of all the above traits.\textsuperscript{115} Dutch historian Pieter Spierenburg agrees with the latter camp, but, influenced by Norbert Elias’s \textit{The Civilizing Process}, maintains that from the early modern period onward, more rational and instrumental forms of violence have prevailed, with impulsive and ritual violence being more a medieval form of violence.\textsuperscript{116}

The violence of \textit{sede vacante} shows that such binaries often ring hollow. As we have seen, Romans frequently checked their thirst for vengeance, delaying their impulses until the pope’s death. During this time, plans for revenge could be laid out. Some avengers laid out carefully formalized plans such as the Milanese gentleman Alessandra Posterla for the vacancy of Pius IV. Posterla desired vengeance against Ferrante Ruscante, a familiar of Cardinal Castiglione, who had killed his brother several years previously. A vendetta had already existed between the two families, but Posterla waited

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{116} Pieter Spierenburg, “The Faces of Violence,” \textit{Journal of Social History} 27 (1994), 701-716, esp. 703-704. Spierenburg implicitly agrees with Elias that violent impulses were increasingly subject to constraints and regulation, but found more rational ways of expressing themselves.
\end{footnotesize}
until *sede vacante* to enact his vengeance. He hatched a plan in which he would have a professional assassin and several lower class *paesani* enter Rome to kill Ruscante.\(^{117}\) Posterla found many of his countrymen jobs as soldiers in the conclave and others stayed at his palace, even eating at his table. Posterla would have succeeded, but several of his henchmen were arrested for carrying prohibited weapons and, under torture, divulged his plans for vengeance. Similarly, one messer Adriano met the journeyman, Hieronimo Perugino, several times before and during the vacancy of Pius IV to discuss plans to “rough up a certain enemy of his.”\(^{118}\) Adriano frequently stopped by the tailor’s shop where Hieronimo worked and also showed him where his enemy, one Pietro Spagnolo lived. The particulars of the arrangement were hammered out at an inn where the two shared bread and wine. When Hieronimo lost his nerve, Adriano cajoled him with words and some coins. Hieronimo finally acted during the vacancy, surprising Pietro outside his shop.\(^{119}\)

Most acts of revenge—especially those committed by the city’s artisan and laboring classes—were probably less elaborate but no less planned for. As we have seen, Romans postponed revenge, waiting until the vacancy to spring on their rivals and foes. The preferred method of attack followed a script that allowed them to express in ritual terms that would broadcast their revenge to the neighborhood. The act of revenge thus had to be public or any shame that had resulted from the slight would not have been

\(^{117}\) ASR, TCG, Processi, b. 110 (sixteenth century), case 12.

\(^{118}\) ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 123, testimony of Hieronimo Perugino, 2 January 1566, f. 111v: “azzolassi un certo suo adversario.”

\(^{119}\) Ibid, testimony of Hieronimo Perugino, 2 January 1566, ff. 108r, 111v-112v.
healed. Thus, in the more than hundred years of this study not one case of poisoning or a secret murder while the victim slept in bed occurred during sede vacante. Instead, Romans preferred to assault their enemies in the public eye—in the squares, streets, shops and even churches of the city. Moreover, they preferred injuries and insults, such as facial scarring and public taunting, which publicized their act of vengeance to a greater audience.

The majority of vindicatory acts followed a similar cultural script that Romans unconsciously followed, but to which they did not slavishly adhere, when insulting and attacking enemies. Typically, the avenger announced his intentions with a shout or battle cry, which served make the assault public and to insult the honor of the victim. We have seen that this was often a variant of, “Now it is sede vacante,” but the shouting of insulting names such as “traitor” (tradicore), “fucked cuckold” (becco fotutto), “spy,” “rogue” (briccone or furfante), and “thief” (ladro) was just as common. Although these were common, stereotyped names, they often reflect the nature of the vindicatory act. Accusations of spying often reflected that the victim had denounced the avenger before the papal police authorities. While accusations of “thief” and “rogue” often were tied to arguments over business transactions, loans and the payment of rent. In addition to the

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physical punishment that was meted out, the name itself served to defame the 
trustworthiness of the victim. When the victim was a woman, avengers of both sexes 
used terms tied to her sexuality: “whore” (puttana or bagascia), “used flower,” “diseased 
vagina” (carolara), and “buggered woman” (bugiarona). Women typically called their 
enemies “cowards” (poltrona) and a variant on “whore” before launching into an attack. 
Of course, when the term becco or cornuto was used against a man, it shamed him 
because it implied he had no control over his wife or lover’s sexual activity. These 
insults carried a violence of their own that could seriously damage the honor and 
reputation one enjoyed in the neighborhood.122

The majority of the victims who suffered from insults and attacks during sede 
vacante used the words bravare and minacciare to describe the actions of their assailants. 
The terms respectively mean “to swagger, to boast, to vaunt, to challenge” and “to 
threaten,” and imply once again that these attacks were made openly. This in itself was 
the opening salvo of the ritual of revenge and was accompanied by the brandishing of a 
weapon: holding up a stone in the act of throwing, lowering the barrel of the gun in the 
direction of the victim, feigning withdrawing a weapon from a cloak, and putting the 
hands on one’s sword (or displaying it). No doubt other rude gestures were made, but 
were left out by the victims and witnesses more eager to explain the physical aspects of 

122 On insults in early modern Rome, see Peter Burke, “Insult and Blasphemy in Early Modern Italy,” in 
idem, Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy, 95-109; Burke’s article primarily uses Roman 
criminal sources. For the economic basis of insults, see David Garrioch, “Verbal Insults in Eighteenth- 
Century Paris,” in Peter Burke and Roy Porter, eds., The Social History of Language (Cambridge: 
Cambridge University Press, 1987), 104-119. On the meaning behind insults involving goats, see Anton 
Blok, “Mediterranean Totemism: Rams and Goats,” in idem, Honor and Violence, 173-207. Finally, for 
the violence of insults, see Elizabeth Horodowich, Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice 
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 91-93.
the assaults (the muleteer Angelo’s biting his finger is thus a rare glimpse at this type of challenging gesture). As we have seen this final act of intimidation before the attack had often been preceded by other threatening acts during the vacancy and in some cases days and months before the death of the pope.

Sometimes the goal was an open challenge, an attempt to provoke an opponent to a popular duel. This can be seen in Cellini’s account of his brawl with Pompeo in the sede vacante of Clement VII. Pompeo attempted to shame Cellini into fighting him with knives. Cases preserved in the Senator’s tribunal confirm this function of the taunt. The daughter of Andrea Pinto told authorities that Ludovico Corroro, seeking vengeance for Pinto’s refusal to give his niece hand to him in marriage, “provoked my father into issuing forth” from his chair by calling him a pig and cuckolded goat and unsheathing his dagger when he accosted them at the house of a family friend. The use of insulting names served to incite the ire of the enemy. For example, one Francesco Stregano provoked the tanner Ludovico Vacante by “making a fool of him” and “insulting his honor” by calling him “fucked goat.” The appropriately named Vacante immediately wrapped his cloak around his arm and grabbed a stone from the ground to duel with Stregano in a rock fight. Carlo Bolognese’s landlord, wanting his rent, provoked him

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124 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Orsola Romana, daughter of Andrea Pinto, 10 July 1623, f. 407r: “provo mio padre uscir fora.”

125 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 18, testimonies of Ludovico Vacante and Gismondo d’Arpino, respectively 11 March and 2 April 1655, ff. 1r and 2r: “comincio a minchionarmi” and “inguirarmi sopra l’honore,” quote from f. 1r.
into fight by calling him a knave and a thief. As they fought, Carlo protested, “I am not a rogue, nor a thief!”

Romans rarely issued formal challenges during the vacancy, preferring to use intimidation and insult to invite their foes to battle. This does not mean that avengers wanted a fair fight. In many cases, after issuing their threats or shouting a war cry, avengers launched into an aggressive assault on their rivals. Many victims barely had time to shield themselves with an arm from the weapons of their assailters. Indeed, Brantôme, author of *Discours sur les duels*, wrote that many wild fights that resembled a duel in name only occurred during the vacancy of Paul IV.

Moreover, Romans found strength in numbers when pursuing vengeance; avengers often attacked with an ally or even a troop of men. Relatives helped avengers out in many cases. Gian Domenico da L’Aquila called on his brother Ascanio among others to help retrieve a debt during *sede vacante*. Tiberio Senese had his exiled brother-in-law threaten his enemy. One could also count on friends and neighbors. But in many cases, avengers hired *bravi* and thugs from the pool of servants and apprentices in the city as well as the deluge of men serving as guards for the vacancy. These may

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126 Ibid, c. 4, testimony of Carlo Bolognese, 16 January 1655, f. 1r: “non son furbo ne ladro.”

127 I have found only one reference to a duel during *sede vacante*. In 1623, the Baron Paravicino challenged a Piemontese noble to a knife fight outside Porta del Popolo. Even so, this did not conform to the formal ritual of the duel that required the issuing of letters of challenge and the presence of seconds; see BAV, Urb.lat 1093, *avviso* of 26 July 1623, f. 564v.


129 ASR, Processi, b. 104 (sixteenth century), c. 11, testimony of Bastiano Nardi da Norma, 22 March 1566, ff. 751r-v.
very well be Mocenigo’s one-scudo assassins. Alessandro Posterla hired a fellow paesano named Gian Ambrogio to help him assassinate a rival at the court of Pius IV during the vacancy of 1565. During the same vacancy, one messer Adriano hired a tailor’s assistant to rough up an enemy for less than a scudo and one messer Vittorio had the vineyard worker, Silvio da Scapezzano, to break the arms of his rival for an undisclosed amount.\footnote{ASR, TCG, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 110, c. 12, testimony of Gian Ambrogio Milanese, 9 March 1566, f. 697v and Costituti, vol. 123, testimony of Hieronimo Perugino, 2 January 1566, f. 112v and ibid, testimony of Silvio di Scapezzano, 14 December 1565, ff. 82r-83v.}

Married women often had husbands and relatives avenge slights. Prostitutes typically had lovers and clients enact vengeance in their name. Lavina Ascolani had her bertone, or secret lover, a groom of Duke Savelli, rough up her landlord.\footnote{ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, various testimonies of 20 and 21 July 1623, ff. 1211r-1220r.} Madalena, a landlady as well as a prostitute, had a “young friend assault Veronica Angela for not paying the rent.”\footnote{ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 7, testimony of Veronica Angela , 25 February 1655, f. 1r.} Francesca had “her lover” and an apprentice from a nearby shop attack Bartolomeo Torciati for “fare la spia,” that is, “being an informant.”\footnote{Ibid, c. 15, testimony of Bartolomeo Torciati Milanese, 18 January 1655, f. 1r-v. Another version of this case can be found in busta 1, testimony of Bartolomeo Torciati Milanese, 17 January 1655, ff. 1r-v. Both accounts tell the same story. During the first week of the vacancy, Francesca told Bartolomeo’s wife that she “wanted to settle things with him and wanted to have him killed.” Three days later, her lover Carlo Braccheri and an apprentice named Luca lured Torciati “with nice words” into an alleyway, where they unsheathed their swords. He fled to find sanctuary in the church San Croce in Jerusalemme as a hail of stones followed him.} Others no doubt relied on their feminine charms to get servants and soldiers to attack their enemies.

Vittoria Napoletana had a familiar of the Cardinal of Savoy help her lover attack her neighborhood rival, the prostitute Angela Serena da Palermo. One Luciola had a standard-bearer of the Ambassador of Ferrara assault a creditor, who demanded the
payment of a loan. These are just a few examples of the many found in the reports of the civic patrols. They show that women, especially single women, exhibited a high degree of independence.

Many women even participated in the acts of revenge, either gleefully watching from the sidelines or immersing themselves in the brawl itself. For example, the prostitute Madalena Bonciuto stabbed her rival Belardina Rinaldi in a brawl at the Hosteria del Moretto in Trastevere. Francesca, a landlady and prostitute, threw stones at the wife of Giovanni Vennoni da Velletri because she had damaged the water flow of the fountain in her courtyard. She followed the usual script, first insulting his wife’s honor with a “thousand villainies” before physically assaulting her. Another prostitute Ortentia Bartolini dragged her rival Giovanna Malostico by her hair and ears through the streets, while kicking her and insulting her honor.

The assault itself took different forms. In many cases avengers sought only to dishonor and chastise their victims. The choice of “punishment” for the victim differed according to gender. Against women, both male and female avengers preferred a set of attacks, often used in conjunction with name calling. These were the relatively mild attacks of hair-pulling, spanking, slapping with an open hand, and scratching (a specialty of women) but also included the sfregio, facial scarring, hard blows to the face, and

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134 ASR, TCS, Processu, b. 67, testimony of Angela Serena Panormitara, 13 July 1623, f. 1238r and busta 67, testimony of Angelo Palmolino d’Amelia, 12 July 1623, ff.423r-424r.

135 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 28, testimony if Belardina Rinaldi Romana, 24 February 1655, f. 1r.

136 Ibid, c. 7, 11 February 1655, testimony of Fausina Vennoni, ff. 1r-v.

137 Ibid, c. 44, 11 March 1655, testimony of Giovanna Malostico, f. 1r. In lodging her complaint to the caporione’s judge of Regola, Giovanna asserted that she was “a woman with honor,” thus showing that concerns for honor existed at all levels of Roman society.
beatings. Indeed, Romans favored attacking the face, a potential source of humiliation, in their attacks against enemies during the vacancy. Facial wounds accounted for 46% and 49% of all the injuries in the extant reports of barbers and doctors respectively during the vacancies of 1572 and 1644. Mild assaults made on men often took the form of beatings with fists, the flats of a sword, and attempts to wound with either edged or blunt weapons. In each of these examples, the idea was not to kill, but publicly punish the person, to show that vengeance had occurred and that lost honor had been restored by taking honor away from the victim (who at one time may have been the aggressor). Romans seemed to have been guided by measurable standards of justice when meting out punishments for slights and injuries. This is testified by the fact that, despite the diarists and avvisi writers who emphasized the scandalous murders that occurred during the vacancy, very few people actually died. In the three-month vacancy of Innocent X in 1655, only handful of deaths is mentioned in the more than 2000-page book of the Conservators’ criminal tribunal. In some cases, the intent may have been only to save face before one’s peers. To repair indignities he had suffered at the hands of Cardinal Cesi’s steward before sede vacante, Blasio d’Alatri threatened him with a

138 A few examples: Francesco Tabanaro began to “inguirare sopra l’honore” Domenica Silvia as soon as her husband Francesco Cenci left Rome to do work on the boats. He grabbed her hair and gave her slaps with his an open hand, ASR, TCS, b. 196, case 6, 11 February 1655, testimony of Domenica Silvia Cenci, ff. 1r-v. Mario di Giovan Battista likewise grabbed Diana Appollonio d’Amatrice as she walked to the Sacred Stair by the hair and beat her while calling her a spy and a liar, see ASR, TCS, busta 196, c. 12, 18 February 1655, f. 1r.

139 ASR, TCG, Relazioni dei barbieri et medici, vol. 13, ff. 127r-135v and vol. 73, unpaginated.
dagger. Before papal authorities, Blasio claimed that he wished “only to put some fear into him [the steward].”

This is not to say that Romans did not seek to kill their enemies during sede vacante. During the vacancy of Gregory XV the diarist Giacinto Gigli wrote that several bodies were found at various parts of the city, including the Tiber, without any heads, showing that blood vengeance did occur. Assassination, however, seems to have been the monopoly of the upper classes as in the few cases where visible exchange of money had occurred involved nobles and gentlemen. Alessandro Posterla arranged for several minions and a professional assassin to kill his enemy Ferrante Rusco during the vacancy of Pius IV. Posterla and his men were arrested by the Governor’s sbirri before they could commit their murder, but the hired killers of Romolo Condopoli, the son of Numa Pompilio, a criminal judge of the Senator of Rome, succeeded in shooting him in front of the palace of the Cardinal de’ Medici. As we have seen, commoners made use of thugs, but preferred to have opponents beaten rather than killed. The dissemination of the gun in early modern Italy may have inadvertently made it easier for Romans to get revenge as the majority of the murders committed during sede vacante involved guns. Enemies could now be killed from a distance. Nevertheless, the avenging act had to be public; before shooting Romans shouted battle cries and the early modern harquebus,

140 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 66, testimony of Blasio d’Alatri, 22 January 1560, f. 2r: “solamente metter li paura.”

142 ASR, TCG, Processi, b. 110 (sixteenth century), c. 12, trial of Alessandro Posterla and Ambrogio Posterla, February-May 1566 and busta 198 (sixteenth century), case 4, trial of Angelo Bubalo and Curtio Cencio, June-July 1585.

particularly wheel-locks, were clumsy affairs that made lots of noise and sprayed a rain of sparks and smoke when fired—hardly conducive to secrecy. Indeed they may have helped broadcast the act of vengeance. The gun’s main purpose may have been to threaten enemies rather than kill as avengers typically brandished the gun or pointed at their victims, but when attacking switched to a sword or dagger. In other cases, the intent in firing a gun may have been only to scare or wound an opponent rather than to kill. After stones, the gun was the tool of choice employed by youths and men when trying to damage the shutters of former lovers and prostitutes.

Despite conservators’ edicts prohibiting the wearing of false beards, masks, hoods, and the frocks of confraternity brothers, many avengers disguised themselves during *sede vacante*. The criminal sources reveal that those who did disguise themselves preferred to dress *alla longa*, that is to wear the robes of a priest or scholar in the folds of which they could hide all sorts of weapons, including long-barreled harquebuses and swords. Many assassins and brawlers disguised themselves as pilgrims or peasants in order to fool interregnal authorities. Others preferred to wear black garments to aid escape in the night. Despite the efforts at disguising themselves, many avengers made no effort to disguise their voice, and thus wanted their victims to know their identity. Most victims told the *caporioni* that they recognized their assailters by their voice even if they did not recognize them behind the disguise. Avengers or hired assassins thus blatantly performed in public squares and streets to broadcast the act of vengeance.

144 ASR, Bandi, vol. 12, edict of 10 July 1623; busta 18, edict of 30 July 1644; and vol. 21, edicts of 9 and 11 January 1655. The edicts punished the offense with a hundred-scudi fine and three pulls on the strappado.
As many examples throughout this study have shown, Romans frequently preferred the “language of rock-throwing” when seeking revenge. A cascade of rocks expressed much in early modern Rome—contempt, disapproval and hatred—all emotions found in the desire for revenge. Rock-throwing was not a monopoly of the youths of the city, all poor Romans, male or female, young or old, could always have recourse to rocks, tiles and loose paving stones that dotted the cityscape. For example, Giovannella Corperti and her son hurled stones at Faustina Stefanelli and her two companions as they made their way from Trastevere to visit the Sacred Stairs at San Giovanni in Laterano.

In addition to surprising opponents in the streets with stones or engaging in rock fights, Romans directly assaulted the homes of their rivals in loud affairs that historian Elizabeth Cohen has dubbed, “house-scornings.” This term, never used by papal or civic officials who seemed at loss on how to categorize it, defines the throwing of rocks, excrement, vials of ink, and other objects at the doors and windows of a victim’s home. Acts of house-scorning, rooted in hatred and vengeance, multiplied during the vacancy. Whereas Cohen has found two dozen cases of “house-scorning” in the trials of the Governor’s tribunal from 1600 to 1608, respectively 13 and 17 examples of this

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146 ASR, TSC, b. 196, case 17, testimony of Faustina Stefanelli da Norcia, 25 February 1655, ff. 1r-1v. Francesca Parlabene da Viterbo and her husband Carlo, Faustina’s companions, indicated their testimony that Giovannella was a wife of miller in Trastevere and thus traveled the length of the city to get revenge, see ff. 2r-3v. As with other assaults, Giovannella mixed in insults with her violence, as Carlo stated that she, “began to mock her, calling her a little whore [putanella],” before throwing her stone at Faustina, see f. 3r.

activity appears in the Conservators’ tribunals during the vacancies of 1623 and 1655. 148 Typically, jealous lovers avenged themselves in a storm of stones that broke the shutters of the women, often prostitutes, who had jilted them. For example, the hat-maker Antonio Maria Tedeschi, jailed during the pontificate of Gregory XIII for insulting Bernardino Bilancia, sought revenge against her upon his release from prison with the pope’s death in 1585 by knocking down the shutters of her home.149 Yet house-scorning could convey all sorts of messages. Prudentia Muscatelli’s neighbor had recruited neighborhood youths and servants to throw stones at the window of her house for stealing his fruit before the vacancy.150 Urania and her lover Giuseppe threw stones at the loggia of her neighbor Madalena after relations soured between the two before sede vacante.151 The ruckus these events made as well as broken shutters that lay on the ground ensured that the entire neighborhood knew of the event. Similarly, the prostitute Vincenza Bolognese had her lover, a servant of the Senator of Rome, and several other men throw stones at shutters of her rival, the prostitute Cecilia Siciliana. Vincenza, dressed as a man, participated in the house-scorning herself. House-scorning could also be coupled with physical assaults as Cecilia claimed in her testimony that Vincenza wanted to slash her face (sfregiare).152

148 Cohen, “Honor and Gender,” 609 and ASR, TCS, Processi, buste 67 and 196.
149 ASR, TCS, Costituti, vol. 343, testimony of Antonio Maria Tedeschi, 20 April 1585, ff. 51v-53r.
150 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Prudentia Muscatelli Romana, 2 August 1623, ff. 425r-25v.
151 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 4, testimony of Madalena, 15 January 1655, f. 1r. Giuseppe also punched and scratched her in the face, saying, “now that it is sede vacante, I want to avenge myself.”
152 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Cecilia Siciliana, 10 July 1623, ff. 1190r-1191r.
Often the house became a target for more violent assaults as bands of armed men, referred to variously as *quadriglia* or *comitava* led by an avenger attacked a debtor or rival. These assaults followed a similar script to those made in the streets: the avenger and his men loudly knocked on the door and issued a challenge. If the occupant did not respond these bands might throw stones at the shutters before proceeding to either leave or force entry into the home. For example, the weaver Bartolomeo Florentino gathered a troop of fifteen men to assault the weaver Battista Venetiano at his home near the Coliseum. Banging on his door, Bartolomeo sought to provoke Battista into coming out, yelling, “Oh, cuckolded goat! Are you here? Come here! Come out!”\(^\text{153}\) Bartolomeo’s taunting worked; Battista came out and the two clashed.

Both civic and papal authorities feared large gatherings of men and issued *bandi* regulating the number of people that could travel in a *quadriglia*. “Base men” could not travel in groups larger than four whereas as “citizens and gentlemen” were limited to eight.\(^\text{154}\) Although the authorities were more lenient towards elites, it was also this class that most often abused the laws of traveling in groups. During the vacancy of Paul III, the Venetian ambassador Matteo Dandolo complained to the Senate about “these Roman barons who come into the city are attended…by armed followers.”\(^\text{155}\) A long tradition existed, dating to the return of the papacy from Avignon, in which previously banished

\(^{153}\) ASR, TCG, Processi, b. 110 (sixteenth century), c. 9, testimony of Bartolomeo Pezzari Milanese, 22 January 1566, unpaginated: “oh becco cornuto tu sei pur qui vieni qui vieni fuora.”

\(^{154}\) For the decrees of the conservators, see ASR, Bandi, vol. 12, edict of 10 July 1623; vol. 18, edict of 30 July 1644; and vol. 21, edict of 9 January 1655. For the decrees of the Governor of Rome, see ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 29, loose bando stuffed in the filza, 19 October 1591; ASV, Misc. Arm. IV & V, t. 26, bando of 5 March 1605, p. 212; bando of 30 July 1621, p. 213; bando of 9 July 1623, p. 214; bando of 31 July 1644, p. 215; and bando of 9 January 1655, p. 217.

nobles returned to Rome in order to take part in vendettas against rival clans. The most famous of these feuds existed between the Orsini and Colonna families. Throughout much of the High and Late Middle Ages the clans fought internecine battles in the streets of Rome that often flared up during *sede vacante* when the city lacked the leadership of a strong ruler.

In the early modern period this tradition continued. The great old families—the Savelli, the Caetani, and the Conti as well as the Colonna and Orsini—clashed most noticeably in the vacancies of Sixtus IV (1484) and Alexander VI (1503). The rumors of Julius II’s death in 1511 sparked the renewal of the feud between the Colonna and Orsini after the pope had reconciled the two families.\(^\text{156}\) However, throughout the sixteenth century the great feudal families tended to avoid direct confrontations with each other during *sede vacante* despite tensions that existed among them. Dandolo noted that “there no longer remained any particular enmity between the Orsini and Colonna,”—nevertheless during Paul III’s vacancy, “they entered into their castles in Rome with their men.”\(^\text{157}\)

This did not stop younger, more turbulent members of these clans from committing all sorts of misdeeds during the vacancy. Unfortunately, there are scant traces of the violence of the nobility in the registers of the conservators’ tribunal. Since these old families dominated the Popolo Romano, its judicial organs ordinarily did not punish the misdeeds of their members. Moreover, even when the pope lived, the state


had a high threshold of tolerance for noble impropriety and violence so that, as the historian Irene Fosi has stated, noble violence in Rome was “far-reaching, omnipresent and inextirpable.”

Banishing nobles only turned them into outlaws so that by the later sixteenth century popes had sought to channel their violence by sending them to fight foreign wars against heretics and the Turks. Occasionally, a pope, upon his ascension to the papal throne, would make a few examples of nobles or rather some of their minions who committed crimes during the previous vacancy. For example, Clement VIII, elected in 1592 after a turbulent period in which three popes reigned in less than sixteenth months, refused to listen to the calls for clemency from the Popolo Romano concerning the death sentence of the nobleman Stefano Muti, arrested during the vacancy of Innocent IX for carrying a harquebus. But many favorites of the elites may have ultimately escaped punishment (and inclusion in the criminal records of sede vacante), as Cellini did for the murder of Pompeo, with the protection of powerful cardinals, ambassadors and barons. In Cellini’s case his patrons were none other than the cardinal nephew Ippolito de’ Medici and the Venetian cardinal Francesco Cornaro.

To find evidence of noble revenge during sede vacante one has to turn to contemporary diaries and avvisi. The nobleman Lelio Della Valle kept a list of crimes and violent acts in his diary that occurred during the vacancy of Gregory XIII. Among them were a number of acts of vengeance committed by nobles including the Orsini and

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159 BAV, Urb.lat 1060, avviso of 5 February 1592, ff. 80v-81r. For Cellini’s protectors, see La Vita, pp. 186-188.
the nephew of the deceased pope, Giacomo Boncompagni.\textsuperscript{160} Avvisi during the three sedi vacanti from August 1590 to January 1592 also note numerous acts of vendetta, although many of them took place outside Rome, in the Campagna and in remoter parts of the Papal States. Much of this activity also took the form of banditry.\textsuperscript{161} Many Roman nobles who returned to Rome directed their anger at the papal government or the memory of the dead pope. Their actions thus represented a revenge against the state (but not a revolt) that will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

The feuding and banditry of the nobility gradually declined after the high point in the early 1590s. The energetic pope Clement VIII vigorously sought to extirpate banditry and created the congregation of the Buon Governo, a bureaucratic organ that sought to regulate the subject towns of the Papal States more efficiently.\textsuperscript{162} Neither Clement nor his successors could completely stamp out banditry and the violence of nobles. The diary of Giambattista Spada, beleaguered Governor of Rome from 1635-43, filled with accounts of swordfights and shootings between noble factions, often aligned to the Spanish or French monarchy, shows that Roman Barons were still a violent bunch.\textsuperscript{163} Nevertheless, noble violence, particularly vengeance against foes, rarely appeared in the

\textsuperscript{160} Gatta, “Il Diario di Lelio Della Valle,” 252-253.

\textsuperscript{161} See Chapter 3.


\textsuperscript{163} Giovanni Battista Spada, Racconto delle cose più considerabili che sono occorse nel govenro di Roma, ed. Maria Teresa Bonadonna Russo (Rome: Società romana di storia patria, 2004). Urban VIII made Spada a cardinal in 1643 and his successor Giovanni Girolamo Lomellino held office during the vacancy of the next year.
criminal sources of the seventeenth century, unless against an official, which then was labeled a *crimen laesae maiestatis*. This can be explained by the fact the Popolo Romano protected its own. Yet puzzling is the silence of diaries and *avvisi*, usually attuned to the salacious and to crimes of passion and honor, concerning noble violence (unless directed against the pope’s memory) during the vacancies of the seventeenth century.

Seventeenth-century Roman nobles thus rarely sought vengeance during *sede vacante*. Perhaps the violence of *sede vacante* had become a prerogative of laboring classes of Rome during the 1600s. This is confirmed by a dispatch of Venetian ambassador Renier Zen wherein he commented that “after the death of the Pope in the city were murdered some people, but [they were] of low rank and common people.”

Revenge and the emotions behind it took a center stage during the vacancy. Increasingly throughout the early modern era, violent revenge, once considered the only means of righting wrongs by elites, came under fire by humanists as destructive and by moralists as the preserve of God. The upper and middle classes, as Elias Norbert has argued, moved to less violent means of expressing resentment and avenging slights (such as writing invectives, dueling and using the courts) during the Renaissance. In turn, governing elites sought to discipline the violence of the masses and to inculcate restraint in them through law. Scholars have recently questioned this thesis, showing that violent

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164 ASV, Dispacci, Rome, filza 88, dispatch of 15 July 1623, f. 484r: “doppo la morte del Pontefice è nella città state amazzate alquante persone, ma di bassa taglia, et gente popolare.” In a letter copied in an *avviso* noted that during Leo XI’s vacancy “some fights and killings occurred, however among base people, and outside [the city] they go committing murders,” see BAV, Urb.lat 1073, letter of Antonio Gavelli in an avviso of 7 May 1605, f. 239r: “si fanno delli questioni et homicidii pero fra gente bassa, et fuori si vanno facendo dell’assassinamenti.”

emotions still guided the actions of early modern Europeans of all ranks. Moreover, sede vacante reveals that violent emotions and the need for vengeance still held sway among early modern Romans, despite efforts by the College of Cardinals and the Popolo Romano to curtail them.

Rome became an “anti-community” during the vacancy in which a Pandora’s Box of violent emotions, embedded in a need for vengeance, could be released in its streets and squares. Underlying the hate and need for revenge were shame, jealously, anger, greed, and resentment which could be alleviated in the catharsis of sede vacante. Yet the violent revenge of sede vacant was not a vicarious experience as Aristotle’s original definition implies. Rather in the revenge of sede vacante people injured and sometimes killed each other. The violence was real. Thus, sede vacante was collective catharsis in which hatreds and desires for vengeance were alleviated, replaced by pleasure and joy. This can be seen in rare examples of emotional talk found in the criminal sources. In explaining to the caporione of Pigna why the servant Stefano had attacked him twice during the vacancy of Gregory XV, Gian Battista de Alberi stated that his enemy “was not content with the wound he gave me to the head in the past days.”

Moments after her lover had physically punished her neighbor Anna Maria for insulting her before the vacancy, the prostitute Agnese walked past her victim and “began to laugh


167 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, testimony of Gian Battista de Alberi, 3 August 1623, f. 422r: “non contento della ferita che mi diede in testa li giorni passati.”
and mock her.” 168 These statements implied that the avenger felt a purging of hatred with the act of vengeance and a subsequent replacement of that emotion with joy, pleasure and even glee at their enemies’ comeuppance. Few, however, could voice their contentment in the pious tones of Michelangelo da L’Aquila. Having killed his enemy, the vineyard worker Battista Lombardo, after a four year wait, his mother-in-law asked him if he felt had committed a “great sin.” Michelangelo responded, “There was no sin. My hands are blessed.”169

Revenge was a morally and emotionally satisfying prerogative that Romans consciously chose during the sede vacante.170 People who had considered themselves victims or wronged now claimed the moral high ground in enacting revenge. But this anger was not uncontrolled; Romans rationally controlled and directed their anger and need for revenge, biding their time for the sede vacante. It calls into question depictions of early modern violence as impulsive and out of control. Sede vacate shows that people of all levels had anger and a desire for revenge and could hold it and control until the death of the pope. Most Romans did not plan elaborate plots of revenge. Instead they waited for the vacancy and expressed their anger and hatred in the dominant cultural scripts of the days.

168 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, case 22, testimony of Anna Maria Giulio, 22 January 1655, f. 1v: “comincio a ridere et a sbefeggiarmi.”

169 ASR, TCG, Investigazioni, vol. 69, testimony of Matthea da Ferrara, 23 January 1560, f. 52r: “non fu peccato niente, benedette siano le mani.”

Sede vacante also shows that many Romans found it more emotionally satisfying to seek vengeance, or practice violent self-help. This is not to say that they did not make use of the criminal or civil courts. Rather during sede vacante, revenge was the order of the day and Rome became an anti-community. It was the time par excellence to practice self-help rather than rely on judicial institutions of the state to do this work for them. Even women, whom historians have argued had recourse to the state and its institutions with more regularity than men, sought vengeance through lovers or by their own hands during the vacancy.

Venetian ambassadors and avvisi writers often portrayed sede vacante as a Hobbesian “state of nature” in which war was waged by all against all, but this would be too simple of assessment. It was true that sede vacante revealed the hatreds and divisions that existed among Romans, but the violence and vengeance of sede vacante followed rules that most avengers observed. Justice and discipline were to be meted out in tolerable levels for the most part—the vengeance followed a script and for the most part was not out of control. Assassinations and murders did take place—usually because the avenger felt that only death could assuage the hatred of his enemy (in many cases who had killed a family member). A certain degree of violence was thus tolerated by Romans (but not by the state or the victims) and shows that they that the papal state did not have a monopoly of violence during the vacancy.

The violence of sede vacante divided Romans and allowed them to vent their hatreds. But it was no safety-valve that sought to bottle the emotions and violence into one so-called liminal, collective moment. After sede vacante, Rome continued to see murders, brawls and tensions. What sede vacante did was allow individuals to transform
themselves by seeking vengeance. In practicing self-help Romans also laid claim to power and authority; they took justice in their own hands.
CHAPTER 5

VIOLENCE AGAINST INTIMATE OUTSIDERS DURING SEDE VACANTE

Although sede vacante divided Romans into enemy camps, it also had the potential to unite them, most often, as we shall see in Chapter Six, against the memory and family of a deceased pontiff. But, as a collectivity, they could direct their ire against groups within Roman society that they found odious. Romans frequently attacked members of the law enforcement, both the Governor’s sbirri, who by tradition ceased their duties after the death of the pope, and the civic militia of the Popolo Romano, charged with ensuring the peace during the vacancy. They also committed violent acts against the city’s Jewish population. What did these disparate members of Roman society have in common? Not much—other than that they occupied an ambiguous place in Roman society. Neither completely insiders, nor completely outsiders, Romans passed moral judgments on these groups during the vacancy for different reasons. The people directed much of the ire against the Governor’s police because, by unwritten custom, they were supposed to cease operating during the vacancy. The violence and misrule directed against the artisan militia reflected the notion among Romans that its members betrayed them by patrolling the streets and enforcing the law during the vacancy. Finally, like the ghetto itself, this violence against the Jews served to delimit a space for the Jewish community in Roman society that stood in contrast to the papal policy of converting it to
Christianity. Each of these groups was on familiar terms with Romans and so I have borrowed Thomas Cohen’s term “intimate outsiders” as it best signifies their ambiguous place in Roman society.¹

The Sbirri and the People during Sede Vacante

Common targets of popular violence during sede vacante included both the papal police force, which included the Governor, his bargello and their squad of sbirri, collectively known as the Court, and the caporioni and their militia of artisans. The caporione Giacinto Gigli gives us a glimpse into this crescendo of violence against the city’s law enforcement in his diary. In describing the murders and disorders of Gregory XV’s vacancy of 1623, he wrote that

the sbirri who then wanted to take some [of the malefactors] to prison were killed and others grievously crippled and wounded. The Caporione of Trastevere was stabbed with a dagger as he went through the night patrolling his Rione [neighborhood] and other caporioni went in danger of their lives many times.²

But the sede vacante of 1623, although noted for the number of altercations between the populace and the interregnal law enforcement, was in no way exceptional. At the onset of the vacancy the Governor of Rome issued bandi that forbade on the pain of the gallows anyone from “daring to oppose the Court with weapons or impede it so that it


can not carry out the law, & make their captures, & executions [of justice], or offend in the person in whatever way any of the ministers and executors of this law,” the papal police and civic patrols faced violence and opposition from the people of Rome. The decrees also prescribed a punishment of the *strappado* for any that “dared in any way to oppose the Bargello of this city or his executors or other ministers of the Law” with injurious words. These *bandi* also extended protection to the *caporioni* and their constables, who also faced opposition, as we shall see for different reasons, from the populace.

During *sede vacante* Romans frequently fired harquebuses and handguns at the patrols of the *sbirri* and *caporioni* as they passed through the streets. No doubt the intention of many of these shootings was to scare or mock the officers, a more dangerous version of the rocks that young men liked to hurl at the police. In other cases, the results proved more lethal. Gigli noted in 1623 that the guards stationed at the palace of the ambassador of Savoy shot a *sbirro* who had come to arrest several of them for disrupting

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6 See for instance, BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 15 September 1590, f. 473r, for a an attempted shooting of the *caporione* of Ponte by the son of cloth merchant with a prohibited small harquebus; ASR, TSC, Processi, busta 147, cases 17 and 46, for two unrelated occurrences of shots fired at the patrol of Trevi from the vacancy of Urban VIII in 1644, ff. 1r-7r and 1r-3r respectively. See TCS, Processi, busta 196, c. 1, ff. 1r-2v, for an attempted shooting of an artisan of the patrol of Parione during the vacancy of Innocent X in 1655.
the peace, killing an officer.⁷ In 1644, during Urban VIII’s sede vacante, the four men hired as guards at the palace of the papal nephew Taddeo Barberini killed an artisan serving in the patrol of Parione as it passed through the piazza in front of the palace.⁸ And in the vacancy of Innocent X, a Corsican soldier killed a young glove maker serving with the caporione of Trastevere as his patrol passed the guard barracks at Ponte Sisto.⁹

The activities of the papal police and the artisan militia provoked the ire and violent actions of Romans for different reasons. Papal judicial officials, from the governor down to the sbirro on the street, had gained a reputation among the Roman populace for their heavy-handed way in executing the law. Corruption was rife among the sbirri, who more often than not came from the ranks of bandits, mercenaries and highwaymen with a long list of crimes to their credit and who were more apt to cheat and rob the people they were hired to protect. Besides a badge and an arsenal of visible weapons, nothing distinguished them from outlaws and other crooks. Indeed, during the sede vacante of Pius IV in 1565, a servant of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, arrested for carrying an unlicensed sword, had fled the police because he feared “they might be thieves or bandits.”¹⁰ Historian Steven Hughes has described the papal police as “the lowest of the low,” whose forces, like hangmen and executioners, only attracted the most

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⁷ This episode gained much attention in Rome; see ASVenice, Dispacci degli ambasciatori al senato, Rome, filza 88, dispatch of 5 August 1623, ff. 532v-33r and ASV, Segretario di Stato, Avvisi, t. 9, avviso of 5 August 1623, f. 215. The investigation of the caporione of Ponte into the shooting of the police officer can be found in TCS, Processi, busta 67, 30 July 1623, ff. 356r-361v.

⁸ ASV, Conclavi, “Conclave per la morte di Urbano VIII,” undated letter of the papal Governor Giovanni Girolamo Lomellino to the College of Cardinals, f. 621r.


¹⁰ ASR, Costituti, vol. 122, testimony of Giovan Angelo, 23 December 1565, f. 72r: “fusseri ladri o banditi.”
Moreover, the work of the papal police brought them into frequent conflict with the Roman populace. Their principal duties besides patrolling the streets were serving arrest warrants and confiscating the goods of debtors, whose numbers had increased dramatically from the second half of the fifteenth century. The sbirri were the quotidien face of judicial system marked by growing absolutism and corruption. As insiders, they had frequent contact with the people, but, as outsiders they could never penetrate the populace’s resolute omertà. Consequently, Romans not only distrusted the police and refused to cooperate with them, but regularly subjected them to violence and abuse.

Yet this was not the main reason the sbirri attracted so much violence during the vacancy. It was their very presence on the streets during sede vacante that, as we have seen only increased in the seventeenth century, incensed the populace. By unwritten tradition, the papal sbirri ceased to function in the period between the pope’s death and the election of his successor, during which his “justice” was temporarily suspended. Highlighting the cessation of papal justice was the fact that the Governor of Rome temporarily lost his authority until re-elected to his post by the College of Cardinals. This could provide for some scary moments for the governor. In 1585 the draconian governor, Francesco Sangiorgio, whose tenure saw the highest number of capital

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punishments, not only suffered the indignity of barely receiving confirmation by the cardinals in the first congregation but also encountered so much popular hatred that he had to increase the number of his personal guards.\textsuperscript{13} As we have seen, Giacomo Francesco Arimberti, the only governor deposed by the College of Cardinals during sede vacante, remained hidden in his palace after the death of Innocent X out of fear of retribution from the populace for his authoritarian rule as head of the papal police.\textsuperscript{14}

In the place of the \textit{sbirri}, the civic patrols of Rome’s fourteen \textit{rioni}, led by the gentlemen and nobles of Popolo Romano and composed of artisans and shopkeepers, were supposed to maintain the peace and quiet and judge criminals.\textsuperscript{15} Many Romans felt this task and honor belonged to the artisan patrols. In 1555, the papal Governor of Rome had to lock himself in his palace, because “Romans had promised to kill him in his house,” because they suspected he had ordered that more \textit{sbirri} and soldiers patrol the streets during the vacancy of Marcellus II.\textsuperscript{16} Popular anger could lead to greater violence, as happened during the \textit{sede vacante} of Sixtus V when a mob attacked the \textit{sbirri} and forced them to retreat into the palace of the Governor. It took the efforts of the \textit{caporione} of Ponte, who lined the streets leading from up to the Governor’s palace with constables, to save the \textit{sbirri} from the angry crowd.\textsuperscript{17} In the \textit{sede vacante} of Clement VIII the Governor provoked a tumult among the people gathered on the Capitol when he

\textsuperscript{13} Bav, Urb.lat 1053, \textit{avviso} of 13 April 1585, f. 171r.


\textsuperscript{15} See Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{16} BAV, Chigi R II, t. 54, letter of Giovanni Cagarra to the Bishop of Feltre, 11 May 1555, f. 230r: “come gli hanno promesso, ad ammazzarlo in casa.”

\textsuperscript{17} BAV, Urb.lat 1058, \textit{avviso} of 15 September 1590, f. 473r.
sent *sbirri* to arrest members of the artisan militia who fired their guns off as a sign of solidarity while the Popolo Romano met in the Palazzo dei Conservatori.\(^{18}\)

Private letters, diaries and *avvisi* have left enticing details, but never get to the bottom of this long-engrained stance against the police during the vacancy. Fortunately, two informative trials redacted by the Governor’s tribunal during the *sedi vacanti* of 1559 and of 1605 respectively provide some context for the violent popular protests against police activity during the papal interregnum. In the trial of 1559, Paolo de Grassi, a gentleman living near the customs office in the heart of Rome, found himself in trouble with the Governor’s tribunal over what the judges and officials dubbed an *eccesso*, a tumult that greatly disturbed the peace. During the vacancy, Paolo and his retinue of followers—most of whom were heavily armed with swords, daggers, and mail jackets and sleeves—went to visit a prostitute on the street of Banchi. On the way there, he passed through Piazza Madama on which the Palace of the Governor then stood. Paolo then claimed that as he walked by, several *sbirri*, who stood inside the palace, asked through a small window, “Who goes there?” Paolo impertinently responded, “Who goes there to you!” Then words were exchanged from both sides and Paolo reached through the small window and grabbed the speaker by the shoulder, threatening him with his dagger and saying, “I have a thought of teaching you to do your duty! This is the duty of the Caporione to identify people in the night.”\(^ {19}\) At this arrogant retort, the soldiers

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\(^{18}\) BAV, Urb.lat 1073, *avviso* of 30 March 1605, f. 153v.

\(^{19}\) ASR, Tribunale criminale di governatore di Roma, Processi (sixteenth century), b. 48, c. 4, f. 137r: “Chi è la,” “Che è la voi,” “sto in pensiero del insegnarti a far il debito tuo. Questo è off. o del Caporione riconoscere la notte le genti.” Thomas and Elizabeth Cohen have translated this trial in their, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome: Trials before the Papal Magistrates* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 65-91.
unsheathed their swords and ran out of the palace. Paolo and his retinue likewise readied their weapons, but retreated into the nearby palace of Cardinal De la Cueva, where he issued a challenge to one of the soldiers, yelling: “I am Paolo de Grassi! If anyone of you wants to be killed by me, come here!” At this one of the soldiers apologized to Paolo for failing to recognize him and the would-be tumult dissipated.

Paolo, a hot-blooded gentleman, had made a brash and daring move, insulting the soldiers, whom he felt had slighted him, while they were inside the very palace of the Governor. But this was not the end of Paolo’s confrontation with the Governor’s men. Several days later into Paul IV’s vacancy, Paolo and his friends stood outside the stable where he kept his horse, staging a mock swordfight, when fifteen or sixteen of the Governor’s sbirri, having heard the noise of their play, arrived and offered, thinking they were really fighting, to separate them. Paolo, still fuming over the earlier encounter with the governor’s men, launched into a tirade against them. In response, the soldiers fired two shots from their harquebuses into Paolo’s company, wounding one of his men. Paolo raised a major tumult this time, screaming, “I have been killed [sic].” Paolo fled with his associates to the nearby Piazza Navona, and, as they ran away, they claimed that the sbirri chanted the battle cry “Governor! Governor!” The gun shots and shouting then attracted the attention of a crowd as well as the caporioni of Sant’Eustachio, in whose

20 ASR, TCG, ibid, f. 137r: “Io son Paolo de Grassi, se ci è nissun di voi che voglia ammazzarsi con meco venga.”

21 ASR, TCG, ibid, f. 134r: “Sono stato assassinato.” Paolo, of course, did not mean that he had been killed; early modern Romans typically used this dramatic phrase to indicate that they had been assaulted or attacked.
quarter the tumult was taking place, Colonna and Ponte. When the caporione of Sant’Eustachio, a Gioambattista Vittore, asked Paolo what happened, he responded We have been killed and assaulted by those men of the Governor. They had screamed “Governor! Governor!” What business is this? Do we have to allow this? We are in our own house; we are Romans. In sede vacante, we are the masters. The popolo [Romano] is the master. If they were those men of the governor’s, it will be best that we go to cut them all to pieces, and burn them alive in their house. All we Romans must help each other, and it if was them, burn them.” 22

Here Paolo asserted the centuries-old tradition that the Popolo Romano, meaning the Roman barons and officials who comprised the Capitoline government, should be fully in control of Rome during the vacancy. While motivated by his own self-interest and concerns for honor, Paolo nevertheless fell back on a spirit of noble revolt during the vacancy.23 Its language and symbolism were at the tip of his tongue and could be quickly called upon in his rage. Indeed, he used the police’s presence, even if provoked by his outbursts, to justify his anger.

Paolo was hoping to justify his actions and gain the support of the caporione of Sant’Eustachio. However, in this regard, he failed, as Vittore proved quite prudent, responding, “No, Paolo, Justice is the master; let us understand that if it had been those [men] of the Governor, the Governor will punish them.”24 With that he walked Paolo

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22 ASR, TCG, ibid, f. 134r: “Noi siamo stati assassinati e assaltati da questi del Governatore essi hanno gridato governatore governatore che cose son queste, havemo noi a comportar questo? Noi siamo in casa nostra, siamo romani, sede vacante siamo proni noi, et e prone il popolo, se fossero stati quelli del governatore saria bene che noi andassimo e tagliarli tutti a pezzi, et brugiarli vivi nellla casa loro, et tra noi romani ci dovremmo aiutari, et se fossero stati essi abbrugiarli.”

23 For examples of rebellious behavior of the nobility in the vacancy, see Chapter 6.

24 Ibid: “No, Paolo pronde è la Giustitia faccia, che s’intende, se sarei stati questi del Governatore il Governatore li gastigara.” Once home Paolo still complained of the episode and plotted vengeance against the Governor, telling his associates that “it was necessary for Romans to stick together and to burn the Governor and his men that were in [that] house.” [“bisognaria ristringersi insieme li Romani et infuocar il Governatore et genti ci erano in casa, f. 135r]. With his desire to burn down the governor’s palace, Paolo
home, who nonetheless complained the entire way. The caporione showed great restraint, leaving the Governor to decide on Paolo’s punishment, rather than jealously watching over his jurisdiction as occurred in other vacancies. His choice of words however proved ambiguous, as in Italian the word giustizia can refer to justice in the abstract sense of the term or specifically to the law as embodied by the Governor and his police. Given the Popolo Romano’s agonistic relationship with the Governor during the vacancy, I would argue that Vittore meant that justice in the abstract had to take its course over Paolo’s desire for personal revenge.\textsuperscript{25} Thus, the caporione deftly calmed Paolo while conceding none of his authority to the Governor.

In the vacancy of Leo XI in 1605, a similar episode unfolded as a tumult broke out between the Governor’s sbirri and the caporioni over the arrest of brawlers. The incident started in a tavern where the brothers Paolo and Lavinio Rugieri had met Battista the Baker. The three, originally from Bergamo, sought to settle an old dispute over drinks. After much wine, the tensions resumed, words were exchanged and swords unsheathed. A fight broke out, which spilled into the Piazza della Trinità and attracted other toughs into the fray. Hearing the commotion, several of the Governor’s sbirri, who were patrolling the streets, “as is customary for the sede vacante” as the bargello of the Governor claimed, ran to investigate.\textsuperscript{26} Seeing the size of the brawl, one of the sbirri

\textsuperscript{25} See Cohen and Cohen, \textit{Words and Deeds}, 283.

\textsuperscript{26} ASR, TCG, Processi, b. 46 (seventeenth-century), c. 8, f. 446r: “come si suole p la sede vacante.” For the making of the peace, or “fare la pace,” between the Rugieri borthers and Battista Fornaro, see ff. 464r, 466r and 446r of the same trial.

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claimed he saw “more than thirty swords in the fight” and then summoned the *bargello* and the rest of his men. Joined by the rest of the police force, the *sbirri* arrested seven or eight of the fighters, although not without much resistance. In particular, Battista refused to relinquish his sword and yelled obscenities commonly hurled at the law enforcement by the Roman people, including “sbirro becco, sbirro cornuto, sbirro traditore, you are killing me!” Only after the *bargello* warned him that resisting arrest warranted the gallows did he back down.27 The *bargello* had the officers tie the prisoners together and ordered his lieutenant to lead them to the nearby Tor di Nona with Battista kicking and yelling the entire way.

If the pope had been alive, the work of the police and the story might have ended with the incarceration of the fighters. As it happened, as the *sbirri* made their way to the Tor di Nona, they encountered the patrol of Giovanni Francesco Tomassoni, the *caporione* of Campo Marzo, in the Piazza Borghese. Once Battista spotted the *caporione* he began to shout, “It is sede vacante! Sede vacante! Help! Help! We have been killed! What Catalan justice is this?”28 The other prisoners soon joined him in yelling for help from the *caporione* and his men. The *caporione* asked the *sbirri* why they had arrested the prisoners when the lieutenant responded that they had stopped a fight in Piazza della Trinità. Tomassoni asked if the fight had occurred in his own *rione*. Hearing that it had happened on the Strada dei Condotti, located in Campo Marzo, Tomassoni demanded that

27 Ibid, ff. 446r-v and 461r: “sbirro becco, sbirro cornuto, et sbirro traditore, ti assassinano.” I have not translated Battista’s imprecations. The closest meaning here would be “cuckold cop, cuckolded cop and traitor cop.”

28 Ibid, ff. 437r-v, 458r, 459r and 493r: “fusse sedia vacante, sedia vacante, agiuto, agiuto et altre parole simile” and “agiuto, agiuto, che siamo assassinate o che giustizia catalana e questa.”
he release the prisoners, “because I want them in my power, and I do not wish them led
[to the Tor di Nona].” 29 At this, the lieutenant warned the caporione, “not to impede me, allow me to lead them [prison].” 30

With this exchange, the encounter became heated. The artisans of the patrol along with the two brothers started to yell, “Leave them here! Leave them here! To arms! To arms!” They had the drummer signal the call of arms in order to summon the people to help them against the Governor’s men. 31 Immediately, the piazza filled with armed men, who surrounded the sbirri. Those without weapons grabbed stones. The caporione, aiming a pistol at the lieutenant and his men, said, “Release them, becchi fottuti! If you do not, we will cut all of you to pieces!” 32 To emphasize their words, one of the artisans pushed the lieutenant with his halberd.

Faced with a tumult of “a thousand people,” in the words of one sbirro, the police fled to the palace of the governor to find the bargello. 33 With the sbirri gone, the caporione had the prisoners cut from their shackles and took them to his house, which stood nearby. From there he had planned for the sbirri of the Senator to take them to the

29 Ibid, f. 427r.: “perche li voglio Io in poter mio, et non voglio che li menate.” Tomassoni was particularly concerned if the fight occurred “in our rione,” see f. 431v of the same trial.

30 Ibid, f. 429v: “non me impedite, lassateve li menare” [perche costoro pigliano forza sopra di voi et V.S. parli con il barigello, che venne a dietro, ò con Monsignor Governatore, che haverà sodisfatione.”].

31 Ibid, f. 429v: “Lassateli, la, lassateli la, arme, arme.” For the beating of the drums, see ff. 428v and 432r. For people grabbing stones, see f. 435r.

32 Ibid, f. 429v-30r: “lassate costoro becchi fottuti se non ve faremo tutti togliare a pezzi.” The Governor’s sbirri taking prisoners during the vacancy often provoked visceral responses from the people. In 1623, during the vacancy of Gregory XV, one Pietro Paolo di Parma was arrested by sbirri because he shouted the insult, “becco, becco,” at them as they led two men to prison, see ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 712, f. 188r.

33 Ibid, f. 488r.
Capitoline prisons. In the meantime, the bargello and his men returned to negotiate with the caporione, but the two sides resolved nothing. Only after the bargello had sent messengers to the Governor and the Cardinal Chamberlain was the situation resolved in his favor. Sbirri were sent to apprehend the prisoners on their way to the Capitol and take them back to the Tor di Nona. Fearing further violence, Tomassoni acquiesced, sending one of his men to the home of caporione of Ponte, who had been notified of the situation and who offered to help, to tell him not to “bother the sibirri that led the prisoners to the Tor di Nona.”34

All sorts of agendas related to sede vacante can be found in this episode. The prisoners, as a last resort, took advantage of the time of sede vacante to elicit help from the caporione and those in Piazza Borghese. The caporione proved more concerned with his jurisdiction than the actual fate of the prisoners. What is perhaps most important is the response from the artisans in the patrol. They reacted quickly in freeing the prisoners and calling the people to arms, even having drums beaten to summon the people of the rione of Campo Marzo. The reaction of the people is important here—they came out in droves, some armed with makeshift weapons, to surround the sibirri and force them to free the prisoners. It was their interaction, more than the caporione’s, which frightened the sibirri, as they feared, “being cut to pieces…because the people were still running [into the piazza]” during the entire encounter between the two forces.35

Traitors to the People: Violence against the Artisan Patrols

34 Ibid., f. 508v, “non dovesse dar fastidio alli sibirri, che menavano detti pregioni in Tor di Nona.”

The patrols of the caporioni fared no better than the sbirri in the eyes of the people of Rome, although for different reasons. Sede vacante let Romans criticize those in power, and since the caporioni and their patrols were the authorities with which they had the most contact, their members suffered the brunt of the ire and scorn of the Roman people. As the patrols made their rounds through streets and alleys, their constables faced all kinds of ritual derision. Typically, people in the streets or those looking out of windows hurled insults at them as they passed through the city. Favored names were “becchi fotutti,” “cunning thieves” (furbi ladri), and “knaves” (bricconi). For example, as the patrol of Ripa passed a tavern, a group of charcoal sellers drinking inside mocked them by farting and whispering obscenities at its members. The ridicule continued over the next days, growing louder, until the capotoro ordered their arrest.

Sometimes objects were hurled at the constables from the safety of windows and other high places. Unknown assailants bombarded the patrol of Sant’Eustachio with basins of water. The capotoro was so incensed that he had his men force their way into the apartment building to find the culprits. Those soaked with water were more fortunate as Romans often employed more lethal objects to throw at the patrol, including

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36 See ASR, TCS, b. 67, 24 July 1623, ff. 1101r-v,623, for eight or ten people yelling becchi fotutti at the patrol; b. 196, c. 46, 16 March 1655, ff. 1r-v, in which a man hurled the obscenities of becchi fotutti and furbi ladri at the patrol of Regola from the window of a prostitute’s house; b. 196, c. 7, 15 January, 1r-1v-, for men insulting the patrol of Sant’Angelo with becchi fotutti; and, b. 196, c. 20, ff. 1r-v, for a group of masons yelling becchi fotutti at the patrol of Monti.

37 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 12, 17 and 19 March 1655, ff. 1r-2r.

38 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 23 July 1623, ff. 1036r-1038v. In a similar incident, a constable of the artisan militia claimed that as he was assaulted by a Christian butcher named Apostolo without provocation as he sat drinking in a tavern located in the Ghetto. The butcher threw water in his face and called him a becco fottuto, see ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 66, 4 September 1644, ff. 1r-3v.
the stones, tiles and bricks that littered the streets and squares. The use of these materials was the most convenient way for lower class Romans to convey the scorn and anger they felt towards both enemies and authority figures.⁴⁹ In another case involving the patrol of Sant’Eustachio, the capotoro and his men were pinned down for a quarter of an hour in an alleyway by a volley of bricks coming from the window of a prostitute and her lover. The two screamed “traitors” as they hurled the bricks at the patrol, seriously injuring several soldiers. The patrol had to retreat and returned later that day to arrest the two brick-throwers.⁴⁰ During the vacancy of Innocent X, youths in the neighborhood even assaulted the headquarters of the patrol, throwing rocks at the windows and shutters of the home of the caporione of Campo Marzo.⁴¹

Guns, which revolutionized much of life in the early modern era, may have been used as a form of ritual ridicule against the patrol. Numerous cases exist of anonymous shots aimed at the patrol as it passed through the neighborhood. For example, a wheelwright shot a harquebus at the patrol of Monti near the Church of Santa Maria ai Monti. He then fled inside his house, locked the door and hurled the usual maledictions of “becco fotutto” and “furfante” (scoundrel) at its members as they attempted to break

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⁴⁹ ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 14 July 1623, ff. 290r-93v, for three Neapolitans throwing tiles and stones at the patrol as it passed through an alleyway behind Sant’Andrea delle Fratte. On the message conveyed through stone throwing, see Davis, “Say It with Stones,” 113-28.

⁴⁰ ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 31 July and 1 August 1623, ff. 1142r-1153v. One of the artisans in the patrol stated that the onslaught lasted half of an hour, but most had it lasting a quarter of hour. Two members of the patrol were hit in the head, one in the shoulder and another in the foot. For the screaming of “traditori,” see f. 1153v.

⁴¹ ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 4, 21 January 1655, ff. 1r-1v. During the same vacancy a servant of the Borghese family hurled the insult “becco fotutto” at the constable Giovan Battista Thicani as he returned to the home of the caporione of Campo Marzo; see ibid, c. 2, 10 January 1655, f. 1r.
down the door. One Giovanni Cannataro shot at the patrol of Trastevere as it passed his house. Others preferred to menace isolated constables of the patrol. Francesco the Barber and two companions performed their own version of a charivari, firing a harquebus at the shop of the constable and shoemaker Giovanni Palmerio, who claimed that he had no clue as to why the attack was made. And several carpenters attacked two members of the patrol of Parione; first firing a terzarolo at the constables and then, when the wheel-lock pistol did not take fire, resorting to throwing stones at them.

But what lay behind this violence and aggression directed at the civic patrols? An assault on hierarchy and the rules and regulations that governed everyday life stood behind the actions of Romans during the vacancy. The patrols, which tried to enforce many of the Governor’s old laws and the new ones of the Popolo Romano, became prime targets for popular derision. This can be clearly seen in the words of a youth who, while performing a charivari with his companions against a widow and her nubile daughter, yelled, “I am not afraid of the Senator, or of the Caporioni.” Romans could speak out against their superiors at this time. When the patrol of Ripa stopped the tailor Donato

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42 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 36, 14 and 22 August 1644, ff. 1r-2v.

43 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 18 July 1623, ff. 150r-v. Cannataro was sentenced to exile in a rare, extant sentence issued by the Senator of Rome, who occasionally heard cases during the vacancy; see ff. 150r-v.

44 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 29, testimony of Giovanni Palmiero, 8 August 1644, ff. 1r-1v. Palmiero stated to the judge of the caporione of Trevi that he had no idea why his house was attacked and that he had no enmity with the defendants.

45 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 1, ff. 1r-2v. The artisans were angry because earlier in the evening the constables had caught them gambling and had confiscated their dice.

46 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 4, testimony of Menica Aganti, 5 March 1655, f. 1r: “non ho paura di senatore ne di caporioni, danni di naso in culo.” The charivari consisted of the youth and a friend pissing before the door of her house, and then shooting fireworks at her door. Later in the evening, they returned to throw stones at her shutters and windows.
with a sword under his arm and asked him for his license to carry the weapon, he responded “with great arrogance,” saying that “he carried it because he could carry it.”\textsuperscript{47} When the patrol of Ripa stopped an armed man with a prostitute in Piazza Montanara, the capotoro was shocked that the woman “responded with insolence.”\textsuperscript{48} Carlo, the son of a nail maker serving as a guard of the Prince Savelli, brandished his sword at the capotoro of Monti as he walked out of a tavern near Trajan’s Column.\textsuperscript{49}

The caporione, as the highest ranking member of the patrol—usually a gentleman or even a noble from an ancient family, attracted much of this ritual scorn. While the caporione of Sant’Eustachio stood outside his office talking to a canon of the Church of Sant’Eustachio, a youth from a nearby shop began to sweep the street, “spreading a great amount of dust” on both men. When told to stop, the youth returned to the shop, but stuck his head out its window, calling the caporione a “rogue” and the canon an “old man.” He threatened violence as well, promising the caporione that “I am going to give you a few blows [with the flat of my sword].”\textsuperscript{50} The youth’s audacity in using “dirty words” and threatening to strike the caporione with some scornful piattonate, blows from the flat of a sword, crossed hierarchical boundaries. Perhaps the youth had replayed in his mind his own version of what James C. Scott has called the “hidden transcript” during

\textsuperscript{47} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 11, 20 February 1655, f. 1r: “che la portava perche poteva porterla.” When asked for his license a second time, he lied and claimed to be a soldier of the neighborhood potentate, Baron Mattei.

\textsuperscript{48} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 12, 2 March 1655, f. 1r.

\textsuperscript{49} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 242, 25 and 30 May 1667, ff. 159r-161v. On 29 July 1644, the first night of Urban VIII’s vacancy, the patrol of Parione encountered a man who feigned shooting his hunting gun at its soldiers; see ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 165, ff. 1r-2v.

\textsuperscript{50} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 22 July 1623, ff. 779r-v: “briccone, briccone,” and “vecchione, vecchione, ti davo delle piattonate.”
his quotidian dealings with his social betters, never daring to act on it until the coming of 

sede vacante, temporarily released him from the bounds of hierarchy.  

The caporioni often accompanied their men on patrol and presented the populace an unusual opportunity to clash with a higher-ranking member of society. Most of the sbirri with whom the people had regular contact in normal times came from the same or, more often, lower social origins. The very term sbirro denoted low status. In his Italian dictionary, John Florio defined a sbirro for his English audience as “a Catchpole, a Varlet, a base Serjeant or officer to arrest men.”  

When stopped by the caporioni, Romans responded with insolence and arrogance. They often addressed them using the informal and disrespectful “tu” rather than the subservient “voi.”  

Others used stronger words. The caporione of Parione and his men encountered a man armed with a prohibited handgun, the small terzarolo, who, when ordered by the watch to stop, responded, “I don’t recognize the patrol.”  

When the soldiers of the patrol attempted to seize the weapon from him, he told the caporione that he was a groom of the Governor of Rome and lifted the gun as if to fire it at him. More scornful were the four men arrested by the caporione of Colonna during the vacancy of Gregory XV. Stopped for carrying prohibited guns, one of the four pointed a loaded pistol at the soldiers of the patrol, which included the Francesco de Cupis, the prior of the caporioni, and boasted that he “was of

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53 See above, as well as ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 18 July 1623, f. 556r, for use of tu before the prior of the caporioni, and busta 242, 28 May 1667, f. 155r, for use of tu before the caporione of Ponte.

54 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 166, 31 July 1644, f. 1r: “non conosco la ronda.”
the rione of Parione.” When the prior told them that they were in the rione of Colonna, they began to use “words extremely arrogant and threatening in a high voice.”\footnote{ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 18 July 1623, ff. 555r-v: “parole assai arroganti et bravatorie con voce alta.”} When the incredulous and now irate prior asked them if they knew who he was, their leader responded, “I know you [tu] even though you have good masters.”\footnote{Ibid, f. 555v: “che ti conosco benche havresti li boni padroni.”} In another case, the caporione’s symbol of authority was assaulted. The caporione, or the capotoro when he was not present, carried a mace as he marched with the patrol. During the vacancy of Innocent X, two apprentices of a shoemaker seized the mace from the capotoro of Sant’Eustachio and beat him with it.\footnote{ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 7, 27 January 1655, ff. 1r-v. There is also a case in which a fisherman insulted the caporione of Borgo as stood watch with his men at Porta dei Cavalliegeri, see TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 10, 16 January 1655, ff. 1r-v.}

Although these words and actions were performed by lower class men against their social betters, they nevertheless carried weight and power in the minds of the caporioni and the capotori. The already-mentioned caporione of Sant’Eustachio wrote about the sweeping youth who had “little respect for my reputation” and “carried such little respect for a man of wisdom and old official of the Curia.” For assaulting his “reputation,” he sought to have the youth punished by the court.\footnote{ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, f. 779r: “poco rispetto con la riputatione mia” and “che portosi tanto poco rispetto a un huomo tempo e curiale vecchio.”} The prior of the caporione who faced the four armed men had a similar reaction, demanding punishment for the “the insolence that was made against him and little respect that was shown to a
man such as myself by low men and of low condition.” Similarly, when the caporione of Campo Marzo and his patrol confiscated the sword, lantern and Spanish guitar of a carpenter named Giuseppe Romano, who had been walking about the rione for several nights playing and singing “with little modesty,” the youth responded arrogantly to the caporione that he wanted his items restored to him. Because “he responded impertinently”—in the words of the caporione—he was taken to the Capitoline prisons. On the way to the jails, he “kept challenging and threatening me.” This was a common refrain in the reports of the capotori made to the caporioni in their reports—that the people, through their rock-throwing and insults, showed little respect for the patrol. The new horizon opened by sede vacante allowed the people to criticize the patrol and its higher ranking officials, who were now exposed to popular aggression due to their interregnal duties.

The license opened up by sede vacante can only explain in part the attacks made on the caporioni and their patrols. Many of the attacks occurred while they administered justice, usually issuing warrants and fines for transgressions of the conservators’ bandi during the vacancy. On 18 July 1623, when Girolamo Bellochio and other members of the patrol of Colonna delivered a warrant to the home of a Spanish gentleman named Rodrigo Basso, they were greeted with a hail of stones as well as “a thousand insulting words” that displayed the “scant reverence that he had for the caporione and all the

59 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, f. 555v, “che si habbia a castigare p l’insolenze et poco rispetto che ha portato et fatto ad homo come sono Io da homini bassi ed bassa conditione.”

60 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 2, 9 March 1655, ff. 1r-v: “ando sempre bravando e minacciando…a me.”
magistrates.” Under attack from Basso and another Spaniard, Bellochio had to seek protection in the nearby church of Santa Maria in Via. Similarly, when the patrol of Pigna served Andrea Carettiere a warrant for failing to show up for his service during the vacancy, it faced a volley of insults from his wife Vincenza, who threatened to kill them if they did not leave.

Romans may have reacted violently to warrants because the caporioni and their warrant officers too eagerly issued them. The conservators repeatedly admonished the caporioni not to be overzealous in administering the penalties for not complying with interregnal decrees. The caporioni seemed particularly keen on executing fines for those who refused to keep a candle at the window. Romans, for their part, resisted this practice, which the conservators insisted upon during sede vacante. In the sede vacante of 1623, for example, several episodes of resistance occurred. When the warrant officer Annibale Fabro, who accompanied the patrol of Colonna, attempted to issue a citation to the father of Fulvio d’Orte, the youth began to insult him. Similarly, the widow Bernardina insulted the capotoro and the patrol of Borgo with all the curse words in the

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61 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 18 July 1623, ff. 793r-94r, for quote, see f. 793r: “che poca reverenza che lui haveva nel caporione e tutto il magistrato.”

62 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 20, 6 August 1644, f. 1r; for the testimony of Andrea and his wife Vincenza, see ff. 1v-4v.

63 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, decree of 22 October 1591, f. 233v, and decree of 6 March 1605, f. 244v, which warned the caporioni “not to make a noise throughout Rome on account of both the tables [on which artisans placed their wares] and for the lights; and not to use rigor in the tax of the punishments and prohibitions of the games,” [non far per Roma tanto per tavoletti quanto per li lumi, e di non usar rigore nella tassa della pene, e prohibitone di Giuochi”].

64 ASR, Bandi, vol. 12, edict of 10 July 1623; Bandi, vol. 18, edict of 29 July 1644; and Bandi, vol. 21, edict of 9 January 1655.

65 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 15 July 1623, f. 808r.
Roman vocabulary—coglioni [“dickheads”], bricconi, furfanti, becchi fottuti, furbi ladri and spies—when they attempted to leave a mark on her door notifying her of the fine she owed for lacking a light at her window. The commotion attracted many people in the neighborhood, which only compounded the dishonor felt by the officials of the Popolo Romano.66 One Giovan Battista hurled similar insults at the patrol of Trastevere, when its members cited him for not keeping a candle in his window.67

The caporioni and their soldiers practiced summary justice, which could lead to further violence. During the vacancy of 1623, the capotoro of Regola and his patrol seized a red dress from a prostitute who refused to pay the fine for not keeping a light in the window at her home near Campo dei Fiore. In response, the prostitute had several Corsican soldiers, stationed nearby at the Palazzo della Cancelleria, to threaten the patrol with their guns until the capotoro returned the dress.68 When the capotoro of Borgo seized his friend’s cloak for an unnamed transgression, the innkeeper Sigismondo Nobili launched into the usual tirade, calling the patrol knaves, and accusing them of being “thieves who steal cloaks.”69 After the constables protested that they “were honest men,” the innkeeper countered that they were “a pack of thieves and fences.”70

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66 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 10 July 1623, f. 1042r-v. When interviewed, Bernardina called the capotoro’s leaving a mark on her door an act of a “bricconacio” [“wicked rogue”]. She also must have insulted the caporione of Borgo as the caporione’s judge kept asking her what she had said about him, see ff. 1043r-v. Evidently the caporione was with the patrol that day, although she claims when she had yelled those words the caporione had already passed and that they were directed at the soldiers.

67 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, 12 January 1655, ff. 1r-v.

68 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 24 July 1623, ff. 684r-v.

69 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 20, 16 March 1655, f. 1r: “ladri rubbono feraioli.”

70 Ibid, f. 2v and 11r: “erano Galanthomini” and “una matta di ladri e recattatori.” When the police attempted to arrest Sigismondo, he had his apprentices, who were armed with knives, close ranks with him.
Romans, then, the activities of patrol were akin to those of thieves and fences, who exploited the population. Once again, none of those arrested for resistance insulted the name of the government. Instead they launched their attack on those with whom they were most familiar—the soldiers of the patrol. And in many ways the actions of the patrols did appear extortionate. In addition to the conservators’ calls for leniency in executing fines, they also issued decrees admonishing the patrols not to extort money from the people.\(^1\) But these decrees seemed to have fallen on deaf ears. In the vacancy of Innocent X, the caporione of Sant’Eustachio caught one of his men taking bribes for not punishing those who kept no lights at their windows.\(^2\) Even higher ranking officials accepted these bribes. For example, after his brother gave the caporione of Regola and his judge several pigeons and chickens, they released the poulterer Pietro Paolo Gamba, jailed for inferring with the arrest of his neighbors.

The stigma associated with the patrol could attach itself to those who aided its members in their policing activities. In the vacancy of Alexander VII, an innkeeper accosted Giovan Antonio, a Capitoline sbirro who helped the civic patrol arrest and incarcerate malefactors, as he climbed the stairs leading to the Capitol Hill. The innkeeper hurled the usual epithets at the officer, but called him a spy as well, implying that he was betraying the people with his activities. Later that evening as Giovan Antonio left a tavern in the rione of Pigna, the innkeeper again insulted him and

\(^{1}\) ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, decree of 22 October 1591, f. 233v. ASR, Bandi, vol. 21, decree of 9 January 1655.

\(^{2}\) ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 1, 16 January 1655, ff. 1r-2r.
proceeded to chase him down the alleyway, beating him with the flat of his sword.73 Similarly, the Jew Davide Corcosco suffered extended repercussions for helping the patrol in its activities. One Camillo Caivano, a resident of Sant’Angelo, called him a spy and gave him two blows with the flat of his sword after seeing him helping the Capitoline officials to measure and to demark the boundaries of the rioni of Sant’Angelo and Ripa. Later that day, he accused Corcosco of being “spy” after seeing the Jew talking to members of the patrol of Sant’Angelo who had been going through the neighborhood citing its inhabitants for not keeping candles in their windows. The next day, Caivano again assaulted Corcosco; finding him in Piazza Giudia talking to some Christians, he proceeded to accuse him of being a “spy and a liar” and punched him the eye.74 The accusation of “spy” could even provoke violence among friends and associates. As members of the patrol of Campitelli returned home after their duty, several, “as a joke,” began to call the mason Gabrielle a “spy.” Gabrielle became so incensed that he immediately began to fight with his compatriots and a day later stabbed the main instigator of the mockery.75

The populace of Rome saw the members of the patrol as oppressors during the sede vacante as they fully enforced the conservators’ decrees regulating taverns, gambling, and prostitution.76 The patrols stopped and jailed Romans while they

73 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 242, 28 May 1667, ff. 152r-v.
74 Ibid, 24 May 1667, ff. 7r-8r.
75 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 29 and 30 July 1623, ff. 1352r-1358r.
76 For taverns and prostitution, see ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, decree of 8 October 1559, f. 83v and, decree of 8 May 1572, f. 122r. For whores riding in carriages and in disguise, see ASR, Bandi, vol. 12, edict of 17 July 1623; vol. 18, edict of 29 July 1644; and vol. 21, edict of 11 January 1655. For gambling, see ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, decree of 8 October 1559, f. 83v; decree of 17 December 1565, f. 94r; f. decree of 8 May 1572,
performed all sorts of quotidian activities: they arrested women, both married and single, in taverns; gamblers in dens; youths playing ball; and even an innkeeper who kept his establishment open on a feast day. In the latter example, the capotoro of Campo Marzo took six silver spoons as a fine from the innkeeper of the Three Columns for being open, “against the bandi,” on Holy Saturday. 77 As the insults of traitor, becco fottuto and knave demonstrate, many Romans despised the patrol and perhaps felt that it had taken up the moral policing associated primarily with the Governor’s police force.

We know the social status of those who insulted the civic patrols as they did their rounds during the interregnum. However, nobles are poorly represented in the reports of the civic patrols—most likely because their social position allowed them to evade punishment. One example does exist in which a young courtier of Cardinal Mattei assaulted the patrol of Sant’Eustachio. Yet this was more of a case of revenge as the courtier had shot at the constables after the capotoro had confiscated the swords and daggers from several Mattei servants. The assault made it to the records because the courtier killed an artisan of the patrol. 78 Generally noble status seems to have protected one from prosecution during the vacancy, just as it did while the pope lived. Servants and grooms of cardinals, barons and ambassadors appear more often, who usually

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77 For the arrest of women in taverns, see ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 14 July 1644, ff. 999r-1001r and b. 196, c. 3, 13 March 1655 and c. no number, 22 February 1655, ff. 1r-2v. For the arrest of boys playing ball, see TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 6, 1 April 1655, ff. 1r-2v. On the innkeeper, see TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 4, 27 March 1655, ff. 1r-v. For gambling, see TCS, b. 196, c. 3, 15 January 1655, ff. 1r-3v, c. 7, 11 February 1655, ff. 1r-2v; and c. 35, 1 April 1655, 1r-1v.

78 ASR, TSC, Processi, b. 147, c. 4, 31 July and 19 August 1644, ff. 1r-20v.
responded with “arrogance” to the patrols call to halt. But fellow artisans committed most assaults against the patrols. Some were apprentices that worked in the warehouses located near the customs office in Sant’Eustachio or in the river port of Ripa; others worked in the shops in the artisan districts of Regola and Ponte. A large number, however, were also masters in their own right, the very men called to serve in the patrols during the vacancy. While some sought to shirk service in order to continue to work, the attacks reveal a stigma to serving in the civic patrols. We have already seen the resistance the wheelwright Andrea put up against serving as a constable in the civic patrol in the sede vacante of 1644.79 During the same vacancy, the jeweler, Patriano Gambanucci had his apprentice fulfill his duties in the patrol of Parione. His apprentice resented this duty and was later arrested for insulting the caporione with the epithet “coglioni.”80 This was not an isolated case; other artisans similarly displayed the same reluctance and irritation at having to serve in the neighborhood patrols. While on patrol in the rione of Ponte during the sede vacante of 1655, the constable Pietro Cavallini “kept making a ruckus” with his complaints and backbiting that his caporione, the nobleman Maffeo Caponi, had him arrested so that “justice would takes its course.”81 During the same vacancy, the noble caporione, Carlo Capranica, had the constable Giulio Sabino arrested for “creating a racket” while on duty with the patrol of Ripa. When Capranica confronted him, Sabino “responded with arrogance that he had a tongue for talking” and

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79 In 1605, the boatmen of the port of Ripetta petitioned the conservators to be exempt from serving in the patrol of Campo Marzo, see ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, ff. 249r.

80 ASR, TSC, Processi, b. 147, c. 168, 14 August 1644, f. 1r.

81 ASR, TSC, Processi, b. 196, c. 6, 16 and 17 January 1655, ff. 2v and 1r: “andando facendo il chiasso” and “la giustitia faccia il suo corso.”
then called the *caporione* a “dickhead.” In the end, Roman artisans did not embody the values found in Rembrandt’s *Night Watch*.

**The Jews and the People during Sede Vacante**

*Sede vacante* brought new rules not only to the artisans of the *rione* who patrolled Rome’s streets and squares, but also to the Jews, who, with the death of the pope saw a change in their master. While the pope lived, the Cardinal Vicar of Rome oversaw both criminal and civil matters of the Ghetto in addition to regulating the social and religious mores of the city’s clergy and laity. Although popes imposed his authority on the Jewish community, many Jews, in search of a neutral arbitrator, made use of the Vicar’s court in marriage and inheritance disputes in lieu of the local rabbis. With Paul V’s constitution, *Universi agri dominici*, of 1612, the Governor of Rome assumed jurisdiction over criminal matters of the Jews and consequently his police patrolled the Ghetto. During the vacancy both the Vicar and the Governor ceased to regulate the Ghetto and the Jews; instead the Popolo Romano and its artisan militia took up this duty. At the start of *sede vacante*, this was physically and symbolically highlighted by the Vicar handing over to

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82 ASR, TSC, b. 196, c. 8, 13 February 1655, f. 1r: “faccia rumore” and “mi rispose con arroganza che lui haveava la lingua per parlare.”


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the conservators the keys to the five gates to the Ghetto.\textsuperscript{84} The officials of the Capitoline government, as the heirs of the Roman Republic and Empire, saw themselves as the masters of the Jews and, while the pope lived, received a tribute of three hundred scudi each year from the Jewish community to fund Rome’s Carnival activities. The vacancy, however, saw the Popolo Romano assume unprecedented jurisdiction over criminal matters of the Jewish community with the caporioni and their men patrolling the Ghetto day and night.\textsuperscript{85}

Three of the five entrances remained open from sunrise to sunset during the sede vacante. These were the ones that facilitated the business of daily life for the Jews: the gate that opened up into Piazza Giudea, where the Jewish market was situated; the gate near the fish market at the Porta d’Octavia, where the Jews purchased their fish; and the gate near the Ponte Quattro Capi, the bridge they used to bury their dead outside the city. The gate near Monte Savelli remained closed, while the one near the city’s mills, colloquially called the “gate of Regola” was frequently left open on the insistence of the Popolo Romano after 1605 in order to give the millers easier access to the town.\textsuperscript{86} As soon as the bell of the Capitol Hill announced the death of the pope and the keys were entrusted to the conservators, the Popolo Romano gave the keys to the caporioni of Regola, Ripa and Sant’Angelo, whose rioni encompassed parts of the Ghetto. In turn, the

\textsuperscript{84} ASC, Cred. XVI, vol. 27 (written after 1765), “Tratatto di giurisdictione de sig.ori conservatori in sede vacante,” f. 289v.

\textsuperscript{85} In above treatise, the Popolo Romano claimed the Jews as clients since they “had bee subjugated by Pompeius, and then by the Emperor Vespasian obligated to render Tribute each year to the Capitol,” [“fu soggiogata da Pompeo, et indi dall’Imperatore obbligata a prestare ogni anno al Campidoglio il Tributo”], see ASC, Cred. XVI, vol. 27, “Trattato,” f. 289v.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, ff. 289r and 292v.
caporioni gave the keys to their capotori who, in addition to marching through the streets to announce the interregnum, went to the Ghetto to lock the required gates. Thenceforth, the capotori and their men patrolled the parts of the Ghetto under their jurisdiction. After nightfall, the caporioni had all the gates of the Ghetto locked until the morning.87

The patrols monitored the Ghetto with two somewhat conflicting aims, “so that the Jews do not suffer insolences, nor that they might infest the Citizens and Inhabitants of Rome.”88 In order to satisfy both aims, Jews were not allowed to leave the Ghetto after the first hour of night and the conservators had issued decrees forbidding Jews from wearing black hats, instead of the usual yellow ones that signified their status to onlookers.89 The patrols could be quite vigilant in ensuring the Jews followed the bandi, stopping Jews both inside and outside the Ghetto for not wearing hats or leaving the confines of the Ghetto without licenses.90 Typically, the Jews, when stopped by the

87 Ibid, ff. 292r-293v. By the middle of the eighteenth-century, the conservators had started to entrust the keys to the Ghetto to the Bargello of the Senator and his police force for the first few days of the vacancy, while the civic patrols adjusted to their new duties.

88 Ibid, f. 290r: “accio gl’Ebrei non soggiaccino ad insolenze, ne abbiano ad infestare i Cittadini, et Abitanti di Roma.”

89 Ibid, f. 291r. For the decrees against wearing black hats, see ASR, Bandi, vol. 12, edict of 17 July 1623; vol. 18, edict of 29 July 1644; and vol. 21, edict of 11 January 1655. These edicts revoked all licenses, issued by various curial officials that allowed Jews to wear black hats and to carry weapons. Governments throughout Italy since the fifteenth century had Jews wear badges that separated them from the Christian populace, see Diane Owen Hughes, “Distinguishing Signs: Ear-rings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian City,” Past and Present 112 (1986), 3-59 and Benjamin Ravid, “From Yellow to Red: On the Distinguishing Head-Covering of the Jews of Venice,” Jewish History 6 (1992), 179-210.

90 For 1644, see ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 149, undated [1644], ff. 1r-2v, in which soldiers of the patrol spotted a Jew wearing a black hat selling a cloak to a doughnut vendor in the middle of the night; b. 147, c. 149, undated [1644], f. 5r ; b. 147, c.147, 30 July 1644, f. 1r, b. 147, c. 148, 14 August 1644, ff. 1r-3v, in this case the patrol picked up three Jews on different occasions inside the Ghetto. Thus the patrols could be quite intrusive, perhaps mention above. For 1655, see b. 196, c. 9, 19 January 1655, ff. 1r-2r; c. 15, 16 January 1655, f. 1r; c. 17, 16 January 1655, f. 1r; and c. 40, 3 March 1655, ff. 1r-3v, in this case a party of sixteen or eighteen Jews were stopped by the soldiers of the patrol as it left a tavern outside the Ghetto. The patrol caught twelve of them and arrested them for wearing black hats, despite the fact that
patrols, like their Christian counterparts, answered simply that they were “Just going for a walk” (*Vado a spasso*). And for the most part the Jews were either picked up in the Ghetto or near the Ghetto, and thus they might have been doing some of their daily activities. Others might have left the Ghetto, like the banker Claudio Pace, who went “to St. Peter’s out of curiosity to see the dead pope.”

The other aim of the Popolo Romano’s patrols was to protect the Jews from the violence against them during the interregnum. Violence against Roman Jews dramatically increased with the death of their paradoxical protector, the pope, who, while alive, sought to prevent outrages against the Jews and yet sought their conversion to Christianity. The Wednesday market in Piazza Navona, where the Jews could sell used clothing and other items, and the Jewish banks and pawnshops located in the financial district of Banchi, were primary targets for looting that could erupt at the mere rumor of the death of the pope. We have already seen how the rumors of the death of Sixtus V in July 1590 so frightened the Jews at the Wednesday market that they “suddenly boxed up

more than half of them had licenses from the Auditor of the Apostolic Chamber and a few from the Cardinal Chamberlain Antonio Barberini, to be exempt from wearing the yellow hats during the vacancy.

91 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 7, 7 August 1644, f. 1r. Claudio Pace was accused of stealing from the dead pope’s body.

92 On the conversion policy of the early modern papacy, see Marina Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati; Storia di ebrei, cristiani e convertiti nella Roma dei Papi* (Rome: Viella, 2004) and Kenneth Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy, 1555-1593* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1977). On Roman Jews as “vassals” of the pope, see Adriano Prosperi, “Incontri rituali: Il papa e gli ebrei” in Corrado Vivanti *Storia d’Italia, Annali 11, Gli Ebrei in Italia*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 495-520. The relationship between the pope and the Jewish community was both reaffirmed and symbolized during the papal coronation procession, called the *possesso*, wherein the rabbis presented their laws to the new pope at the Arch of Titus.

their merchandise at noon, hurriedly returning to the Ghetto.”94 Similarly, a year later, a rumor of Gregory XIV’s death in the autumn of 1591 provoked panic among the Jews in Banchi.95

Rumors often took on a life of their own and produced their own reality, but behind the Jewish fears of pillaging stood a very real tradition. During the long vacancy caused by the deaths of Sixtus V and Urban VII in the autumn of 1590, the bandits who descended upon the Roman countryside made known their desire “to come to sack the Jews of this city.”96 We know that it was nevertheless a common offense from the repeated number of bandi issued by the conservators at every sede vacante, admonishing the people not “to bother, trouble or disturb those who sell their wares through the city.”97 The crime was punishable by a fine of five hundred scudi.

The interrogation of a looter during the vacancy of Gregory XIII by the Governor’s tribunal gives a rare glimpse at what the pillages of the Jewish market actually looked like. Francesco Padovano, an itinerant vendor of various objects who traveled from square to square selling his wares, had set up shop in Piazza Navona where “stood many Jews with many hairpins, necklaces, pans, cloaks and capes, and as many

94 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, f. 365r, avviso of 14 July 1590: “incassaro d’improviso nel mezzo giorno le robbe tornandosene in fretta al seraglio.” See also the avviso of 21 July 1590, BAV, Urb.lat 1058, f. 382r.

95 BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, ff. 272r and 275r, avvisi of 25 and 28 September 1591.

96 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, f. 622r, avviso of 28 November 1590: “voler venire a saccheggiare gli hebrei di questa Città.”

97 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, decree of 22 April 1585, ff. 154r-v. For later decrees, see ASR, Bandi, vol. 12, edict of 10 July 1623; vol. 18, edict of 29 July 1644; and vol. 21, edict of 9 January 1655. There is a lacuna in the bandi issued by conservators concerning the Jews in the sources until 1623. However, the wording of the later documents is exactly that of the first extant decree concerning the Jews, so it is safe to assume decrees were issued in the sede vacante between 1585 and 1623.
gloves.”98 As soon as it was announced in the market that the pope had died, the people in the piazza, who seconds before had been peacefully dealing with the Jews, now shouted, “Get the Jews!” provoking “a great uproar of people that pushed this way and that way and all the Jews began to pick up their merchandise because they had heard of the pope’s death.”99 Francesco, although denying that he stole a cashbox from one of the Jewish vendors at the market, did admit to grabbing some items that fell off the cart of some fleeing Jews.

Sede vacante could spark violence against the Jews elsewhere in the city—often this took the form of gratuitous attacks against individuals or small groups rather than against Jews gathered in markets. In February 1655, the Jews Beniamino Scarzano and Efraim Ciprano ran for their lives in the popular quarter of Monti, as workers in the garden of San Lorenzo in Panisperna threw stones at them. These gardeners were joined by two others, a mason named Alberto Milanese and a servant of Cardinal Aldobrandini, who assaulted them with blows and then pursued them down the winding via delli Serpenti. Alberto and the servant began to throw stones at the Jews while inciting onlookers to join the fray, yelling, “Get them! Get them! It’s sede vacante!”100 One witness testified that Alberto yelled “Neighbors, get them!”101 A crowd gathering behind them, Scarzano and Ciprano ducked into the shop of a potter, where Alberto and the

98 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 343, testimony of Francesco Padovano, 2 May 1585, f. 61v: “dove stavano de molti guide con molti forcine, collane, patelle et farioli, et cappe et altre quanti guanti.”

99 Ibid: “dalli giudei….un gran rumore de gente chi spingeva qua et chi la et li giudei tutti cominciorno a remetter le robbe perche havevano inteso la morte del papa.”

100 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 40, 16 February 1655, testimony of Efraim Ciprano, f. 1v: “dalli, dalli, che e sede vacante.” Beniamino (f. 1r) also testified that the mason yelled, “Get them! It’s sede vacante!”

101 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 40, 16 February 1655, testimony of Giovanni Angelo, f. 2r.
servant cornered them and abused them with more punches. Not only did the neighbors participate in the abuse of the two Jews, some refused to cooperate with the caporione’s judge. The potter, who admitted that Alberto was his neighbor, denied seeing Alberto in the scuffle that took place in his shop.102

During the vacancy, throwing of rocks at Jews caught outside the Ghetto seemed to be the most popular attack among youths. As we have seen with attacks against the sbirri and the civic militia, rocks were a convenient weapon of the lower classes, which nevertheless conveyed their scorn for certain groups within Roman society. Rocks thrown at Jews carried this message of contempt, but also warned the Jews against leaving the protective space of the Ghetto. For example, a gang of ten or twelve youths assaulted Simone Spizzichiere and his son Moise with a volley of stones as they walked through the Piazzetta dei Cesarini to get back to the Ghetto.103 As Raphael di Raphael walked through the fish market at Portico d’Octavia, a boy of twelve or thirteen years, began threatening him and then started to throw stones at him.104 Others preferred more direct assaults: Giuseppe di Davide Monasci was beaten by a servant wearing livery, another Giuseppe was walking past a tavern near Campo dei Fiori when a youth threw a glass of wine in his face and then proceeded to beat him with a club, and Abram Calvano

102 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 40, 17 February 1655, testimony of Bartolomeo Bertoni da Vercelli, f. 3v.

103 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 38, 15 August 1644, testimony of Simone Spizzicchiere, f. 1r. For an earlier example, see ASR, Costituti, vol. 552, 21 May 1605, ff. 30r-v, in which Agostino Napolitano was arrested by papal police “because one day during the sede vacante of Pope Leo, as I was standing before my father’s shop, I threw a stone which hit a Jew,”[perche un o giorno a sede vacante di papa leone stando in bottega di mio patre tirai una sasata quale colse ad un hebreo”].

104 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 31, 29 January 1655, f. 1r, testimony of Raphael di Raphael.
was assaulted by a woman with an iron rod when he asked for directions to the nearest charcoal seller.\textsuperscript{105}

All of the above cases occurred in rioni of Sant’Angelo and Regola, the quarters closest to the Ghetto. While this reflects the proximity of the Jews to these popular quarters, it also denotes the tensions that existed between the two groups. This can be seen in particular by the number of assaults committed against the Jews by the fishmongers of the nearby market at Portico d’Octavia. The fishmongers were well-known for their animosity towards their neighbors in the Ghetto, particularly for the giudiate, popular plays mocking the Jews and their customs, staged during Carnival.\textsuperscript{106}

Attacks made by the fishmongers frequently occurred when the Jews bought fish and were provoked when the vendors felt the Jews had slighted them, that is, claiming their fish was bad or claiming they had been cheated.\textsuperscript{107} However, the actions of one person could create a tumult. The abovementioned boy who threw stones at Rapheal at Portico d’Octavia attracted a group of fishmongers who yelled, “Get him! Get him!” and who proceeded to punch and kick him, taking his scissors, money and hat in the process.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{105} See respectively, ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 15, 22 February 1655, testimony of Giuseppe Monasci Hebreo Romano, f. 1r; c. 5, 10 February 1655, testimony of Giuseepe del Monte Hebreo, f. 1r; and c. 22, 4 February 1655, testimony of Abram Calvano, f. 1r. Another case in 1655 had a fishmonger attacking a group of Jews who watched the members of the patrol of Sant’Angelo gamble, see b. 196, c. 16, 14 February 1655, testimony of Ischaele Ferrarese, f. 1r.

\textsuperscript{106} On the giudiate of the fishmonger at the Portico d’Octavia, see Martine Boiteux, “Les Juifs dans la Carnaval de la Rome moderne, Mélanges de L’École Française de Rome: Moyen âge/temps moderne, 88 (1976), 780-82. On the fish market at Portico d’Octavia, see Anna Modigliani, Mercati, botteghe, e spazi di commercio a Roma tra Medioevo ed età moderna (Rome: Roma nel Rinascimento, 1998), 61-76.

\textsuperscript{107} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 16, 4 February 1655, testimony of Moise delli Tern, f. 1r i and c. 21, 17 March 1655, testimony of Sabbato Pantiiero Hebreo, ff. 1r-v.

\textsuperscript{108} ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 31, f. 1r.
Seldom does revenge seem to have been a factor behind such violence against Jews. In a rare example, a Christian basket-weaver named Domenico da Tronto sought revenge against a rabbi, who owed the money. One of the apprentices called the rabbi to Domenico’s house, where Domenico and his other apprentices surprised him, threw him to the ground and took his possessions including his yellow hat, two cloaks he carried on his back and some other clothing. The rabbi told the caporione’s judge that “he wished to make justice by himself since it was Sede Vacante” 109

Thus, a desire for revenge or material gain cannot explain all the violence committed against the Jews during the vacancy. Rather this violence must be situated in the tension-filled relationship, marked by both intimate and hostile encounters, which Jews and Romans shared with one another. Sociologist Anton Blok, utilizing Sigmund Freud’s notion of “narcissism of minor differences,” has argued that the most intense hatreds and violent confrontations occur between peoples sharing similar cultural and social backgrounds. Although Blok focused on ethnic groups in the modern Balkans and the Levant, his argument can help explain the violence between Jews and Christians during sede vacante. Roman Jews and Christians spoke the same dialect of Italian, ate the same foods (even with Jewish dietary regulations) and participated in the same overall culture.110 Although Roman Jews had adapted some of the customs of the dominant Christian culture (and in many ways influenced this culture as well) through

109 ASR, TCS ,Proecssi, b. 196, c. 19, 7 February 1655, testimony of the Rabbi Abram, f. 1r: “che vuole fare la giustitia per se essere Sedia Vacante.”

acculturation, they never lost the core principles of their faith and its traditions. The papacy felt the necessity of employing physical demarcations—yellow hats and badges in addition to the Ghetto itself—to ensure that these minor differences were clearly visible to the Christian populace. Roman Jews often resisted the laws keeping them in the Ghetto at night or requiring them to wear differentiating signs. Thus, the popular violence against Jews—the pillages, the *sassaiola* (rock-throwing) and the beatings—helped to highlight the differences between the Jews and Christians.

But violence against Jews in early modern Rome was not omnipresent. Scholars have attenuated the older view that Jews lived in constant terror of their Christian neighbors throughout early modern Europe. Instead they have emphasized the sporadic nature of violence against Jews and have argued that Jewish-Christian relations must be grounded in their local context. In Rome, Jews and Christians lived uneasily together, but Christian violence against Jews was never a constant force. However, *sede vacante*, like Holy Week, allowed for a regular time frame in which violence against the Jews not only increased but was also legitimized in the eyes of its perpetrators. Yet, unlike the violence of the Holy Week, the violence of *sede vacante* took place without the involvement of the clergy, particularly members of the mendicant orders who often incited the populace against the Jews with fiery sermons. Rather the violence was a popular commentary on the place of the Jews in Roman society—a commentary that stood in contrast to official papal policy, which protected the Jews but sought their

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eventual conversion. With the death of the pope, the protector and patron of the Jews, Romans were free to attack the Jews. This violence against the Jews highlighted their ambiguous, liminal role in Roman society: it did not seek the ultimate destruction of the Jewish community, but rather accorded its members an inferior position in Christian society. In this regard, the violence of *sede vacante* “was simultaneously a gesture of inclusion and exclusion,” as David Nirenberg has argued for Christian violence against Jews in medieval Spain. Thus, although Kenneth Stow has maintained that the Ghetto ended the “medieval liminality” of the Jewish community, the violence of *sede vacante* shows that the Jewish still occupied a nebulous position in Rome, one better captured by Thomas Cohen’s apt phrase, “intimate outsiders.”

The Jews attempted to stave off attacks committed in the Ghetto and strove for some measure of autonomy during the *sede vacante*. This mostly took the form of controlling the gates into their “city.” The Jewish community agreed with keeping the three gates at Piazza Giudia, Ponte Quattro Capi and Portico d’Octavia open, but resisted the conservators’ decision to keep the gate at Regola open. As soon as the conservators decided upon opening the gate during the vacancy of Clement VIII, the Jews sent them a petition requesting that the gate be kept closed, as “should be observed as usual.”

The gate at Regola became a major point of contention between the Jews and the Popolo Romano. On the night of Urban VIII’s death, the *capotoro* of Regola, Francesco Cordelli, along with his men and the drummer made their way through the *rione* to

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113 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, f. 249r: “debba osservare il solito.”
announce the beginning of the vacancy and to do their first rounds. When they arrived at the gate of Regola, they found the Jews had locked it from the inside with a bolt. The capotoro smelled defiance, as he wrote in his report to the caporione Benedetto Finochietti that the Jews sought “to impede entrance into the Ghetto to the patrol, so that it could not discover the transgressions of the decrees that could be made in not keeping the lights [at the windows], and other infinite ways that they could commit crimes that could be easily committed if the guard did not enter there.”114 Cordelli most likely exaggerated the motives of the Jews as both Cordelli and Finochietti were keenly sensitive to their jurisdictional rights during the vacancy and had later clashed with the rioni of Ponte and Sant’Angelo over the boundaries of their watch. Cordelli had the bar removed and initiated a trial against the Jews who locked the door and the locksmith they hired to do the work “so that it would serve as an example to others and so that the patrol could exercise its duty freely.”115 The anger of the caporoto may explain why the patrol stopped many Jews during that sede vacante for not wearing their yellow “signs” and for walking about the rione without licenses. His measures had no effect on the Jews as, Cordelli, who was again chosen as the capotoro of Regola during the vacancy of Innocent X in 1655, found the gate of Regola locked from the inside. Cordelli, for the

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114 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 134, 30 July 1644, f. 2r: “impedire l’ingresso in Ghetto alla Ronda, accio non possa scopire e contraventioni de bandi, che possono fare in non tenere li lumi, et in altri infiniti modi che posson commettere, et altri delitti che facilmente possono esser commessi non entrandovi la guardia.” Laurie Nussdorfer mentions this event, but assumed that all the gates were locked, thus not placing it in the context of the debate over the gate of Regola, see Nussdorfer, Civic Politics in the Rome of Urban VIII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 244-45.

115 ASC, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 134, f. 2v: “accio servi in esemplio alli Altri, et la Ronda possi esercitare il loro offitio liberamente.” The testimony of the locksmith, Antonio Laetani Spoletano, ff. 7r-12r of the same busta, reveals that he was hired by a Sabbato Tedescho and several other Jews whose names he did remember.
second time in two vacancies, proceeded against the Jews “with every rigor of the law” for their act of “rebellion.”

While it may perhaps be true that the Jews, like their Roman counterparts, attempted to avoid following some of the odious regulations imposed upon them by the Popolo Romano, they seemed more concerned with protecting themselves than anything else. The Ghetto, already quite porous with three open gates, only became much more so with an additional one. Moreover, Romans often sought to evade the law by hiding out in the Ghetto. And, as we have seen, violence against the Jews, increased during *sede vacante*. Even the patrol, charged with protecting the Jews, participated in the violence against them during the vacancy. During the vacancy of Gregory XIV, the Cardinal Vicar, despite the lapse in his jurisdiction over the Jewish community, had to remind the *caporioni* of Sant’Angelo, Ripa and Regola not to allow their men to vex the Jews in their closure. In later years, we have a few examples of violence against the Jews.

While Moise di San Lorenzo searched for his missing son in the vacancy of Gregory XV, a constable of the patrol of Regola hit him and another Jew named Abram Sionacho with the butt of his gun. And several soldiers of Regola in 1644 abused Gratiano Manzocchi as he stood in Piazza Giudia.

As with the Roman populace, *sede vacante* allowed the Jews to take a more direct stance against authority figures and this rings true with the patrols. The Jews could

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116 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 196, c. 13, 16 January 1655, f. 1v: “con ogni rigor di giustizia.”

117 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, f. 222v.

118 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 22 July 1623, testimony of Moise di San Lorenzo Hebreo, ff. 722r-v.

119 ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 59, 26 August 1644, testimony of Gratiano Manzocchi Hebreo., ff. 1r-v
likewise mock their guardians. During the vacancy of Gregory XV a rabbi and his wife poured a full chamber pot on top of a soldier of the patrol of Sant’Angelo. The episode was so important that it occupied five folios in the normally short reports produced during the vacancy.\textsuperscript{120} And when the patrol of Regola attempted to arrest “a number of Jews gathered together in a conventicle,” someone yelled at them from the window of a Jewish banker, “Oh, you cunning thieves who so lead the poor devils to death.”\textsuperscript{121} The tensions of \textit{sede vacante} could also spill out into greater violence against the constables of the patrol. For example, during the vacancy of Pius IV, several Jews assaulted a constable of the \textit{caporione} of Sant’Angelo when he attempted to seize the weapons they carried. They in turn grabbed his halberd and beat him with his very own weapon.\textsuperscript{122} And, in 1623, four Jews attacked a member of the patrol of Sant’Angelo and the son of the \textit{caporione} when they attempted to question a Jew wandering in the streets.\textsuperscript{123}

Scholars have pointed out that acts of resistance against the dominant Christian society in Rome grew increasingly rare with the advent of the Ghetto. This may have been overstated as Jewish youths continued to participate in \textit{sassaiole} with their Christian counterparts.\textsuperscript{124} Moreover, the \textit{sede vacante} saw the Jewish community flouting the will

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{120}] ASC, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 29 August 1644 and 18 September 1623, ff. 1224r-29r.
\item[\textsuperscript{121}] ASC, TCS, Processi, b. 147, c. 143, 9 August 1644, ff. 1r-1v.; “una quantità di Hebrei coadunati assieme in conventicola” and “o furbi ladri così si menano alla mazza li poveri huomini.” For the testimony of the other soldiers, see ff. 1v-3v.
\item[\textsuperscript{122}] ASR, TCG, Costituti, t. 123, testimony of Jacomo Berloni of 7 February 1566 f. 184r.
\item[\textsuperscript{123}] ASR, TCS, Processi, b. 67, 13 July 1623, ff. 456r-v.
\item[\textsuperscript{124}] See Cohen, “Street Life and Jewish Persona,” 209-21; Simona Feci, “The Death of a Miller: A Trial \textit{contra hebreos} in Baroque Rome,” \textit{Jewish History} 7 (1993), 9-27; and Stow, “End of Liminality,” 82-83. Davis, however, finds that Jews and Christians participated in rock fights well into the seventeenth century; see “Say it with Stones,” 121.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
of the Popolo Romano and even assaulting members of the patrol. Thus, the papal interregnum allowed both Christians and Jews in Rome to shape their respective communities. In this regard, sede vacante had much in common with Christian Carnival and Jewish Purim.125

Jews, sbirri and artisans of the civic patrol—a strange and, at first, dissimilar group that all suffered the people’s scorn during the vacancy. However, a deeper look reveals several commonalities among them, especially between the sbirri and the Jews. Both of the latter shared a distinct connection to the deceased pope. The sbirri served the papal governor of Rome, who took direct orders from the pope. As such, they were the quotidian face of papal justice. The Jews, for their part, had long had an ambivalent relationship with the popes, who both protected their community and subjected them to hardships. On one hand, early modern popes compelled the Jews to pay exorbitant tithes, forced Jewish bankers to give loans to insolvent Christians, and, after 1559, sequestered the entire community to live in the Ghetto. On the other, the popes, as patrons of the Jewish community, allowed the Jews to live by their own laws and issued decrees protecting them from the violence of their Christian neighbors. When the pope died, both the Jews and the sbirri lost their master and thus became unprotected targets of the people’s violence and aggressive ridicule. Their very presence in the streets during the vacancy no doubt contributed to attacks made against them. With the cessation of the pope’s justice, the sbirri were supposed to stop patrolling the city. The Jews, who also lost their master, were forbidden by law to leave the Ghetto after nightfall.

The constables of the civic patrols suffered from the populace’s contempt because they had become traitors to the people in maintaining law and order during the vacancy and imposing fines for noncompliance with the conservators’ decrees. The constables were the insiders par excellence, as they were recruited by the capotori from the ranks of the neighborhood artisans. Many Romans, particularly fellow artisans, were galled by the requirement to obey these men. Many constables, in their turn, resenting the loss of work days and, perhaps, feeling the stigma associated with the patrol duty, sought to evade their service.

All three groups faced scorn from individuals and the community at large. Sede vacante, although dividing Rome into atomized chaos, could also unite Romans against these intimate outsiders. During the vacancy, this was the closest Rome got to achieving what Victor Turner has called comunitatis, a fleeting and unstructured sense of solidarity born in liminal moments.126 In all three cases, Romans asserted their own conceptions of justice and community over these groups.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE CRITICISM, PASQUINADES, AND RIOTS OF SEDE VACANTE

In his biography of Donna Olimpia Maidalchini, the universally hated sister-in-law of Innocent X, Gregorio Leti wrote that as soon as the Pamphilij pope had died “the City began to rejoice, as it always does in such Conjunctures. And no wonder; since that which gives the People so great a satisfaction, is the Liberty that they have during an empty chair.”¹ As we have seen sede vacante afforded the populace of Rome a unique opportunity to seek customary vengeance against personal enemies and to perform a variety of illicit activities. But it also opened up the Roman public sphere, normally kept underground by surveillance of papal authorities. During this time, the pope’s subjects criticized him, protested his policies and, in some cases, blackened his memory to posterity. Sede vacante presented Romans with an occasion to assess the pope’s leadership at the end of his pontificate and it also revealed the paradoxical relationship that they had with their two-souled ruler, the “pope-king.” This criticism took the form of the open discussion of his reign’s policies, pasquinades, and, in less frequent cases, riots.

¹ Gregorio Leti, The Life of Donna Maldachini who governed the Church during the Time of Innocent X (London: Printed by W. Godbid, 1667), 113. Leti’s work originally published his work in Italian in 1666 as La vita di Donna Maidalchin in Geneva concealed as Cosmpoli.
Public Opinion in *Sede Vacante*

A pope suffered this critical assessment of his reign no matter how loved he was during his lifetime. In many cases, the death of a pope after a lengthy pontificate could inspire celebration among his subjects, eager for a change in rulers. A pasquinade writer at the death of the popular and mild-mannered pope, Pius IV, in 1565 complained that his pontificate of six years felt like twelve.² Disappointment with the lack of patronage fueled his lament as the author continued, complaining of the Milanese pope’s bestowal of offices and rewards on his “tedeschi” relatives and followers from the Lake Como region. Another pasquinade issued in 1644 rejoiced at the end of the nearly twenty-one year pontificate of Urban VIII:

> Finally Urban VIII has indeed died.
> It was believed that his papacy would be eternal,
> but if living have a thought so wicked,
> it is that the deceased has a perpetual see in hell.”³

But sometimes even sheer boredom inspired complaints at the end of pope’s reign. Despite Paul V’s efforts in providing work for Romans and keeping bread abundant and cheap, the diarist Giacinto Gigli recorded that after sixteen years of his rule, “the common multitude appears annoyed for no other reason than the length of his reign

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³ The Medici Archive, http://documents.medici.org, MdP 6425; DocID 11987, f. 458; originated in Rome, August 1644: “È pur morto alle fine Urbano ottavo/Ch’essere credea nel suo papato eterno/Ma se vivente ebbe pensier si pravo/Perpetua sede estinto ha nel inferno.”
because it desired new things.”

Thus we are presented with the origins of the blasé attitude behind the Roman proverb, “if a pope dies, another will be made.”

When Paul’s successor, Gregory XV of the Ludovisi family, assumed the throne in 1621, “the expectation of the people of him was incredible…but in the shortest time they knew how they had fooled themselves” as the sickly pope left the reins of the government in the hands of his ambitious cardinal-nephew, Ludovico. The cardinal-nephew, knowing he had little time in his privileged position, sought to enrich his family while their uncle occupied the papacy. As with all papal families, the Ludovosi used the coffers of the Church to further their family interests. They used money from the treasury at Castel Sant’Angelo to purchase fiefs and noble titles for its lay members. Far worse, the cardinal-nephew increased taxes on bread and reserved large quantities of grain for his home city of Bologna during a famine, angering Rome. At Gregory’s death, two years later in 1623, the populace loudly measured up to the two pontificates to which Gigli attested in his diary:

One could not express how it appears that the people breathe [more easily], accordingly making comparisons between the pontificate of Paul V and that of Gregory XV. They

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5 Marco Besso, Roma e il Papa nei proverbi e nei modi di dire (Rome: Fondazione M. Besso, 1981), 312: “morto un papa, se ne fa un altro.”

were more vexed with the twenty-nine months of papacy of the latter than they were with the nearly sixteen years of the former.7

An account by a servant of the conclave that elected Urban VIII provides a similar picture of the popular resentment toward the Ludovisi. The anonymous conclavist wrote that the people complained of the high price of meat and lack of grain, which Paul V had so abundantly provided as “Father of the Poor,” so that they “nurtured a manifest hatred of Cardinal Ludovisi.”8 While most of the people’s ire directed itself at the cardinal-nephew, they kept an astute watch on the health and ceremonial participation of the infirm pope with the hope that “perhaps through his death, the anguish that they still feel will be assuaged.”9

The root of the popular grievances against papal families lay in the excesses of nepotism, which resulted in bad government in the form of burdensome taxes and the poor management of the state. The vicissitudes of Gregory XV’s reign fully demonstrate how the ambitions of the cardinal-nephew could attract the hatred of the people of Rome. As Gigli wrote in his diary, the lack of grain and its high cost were “blamed on Cardinal Ludovisi, who in all the time [of the pontificate] carried himself in such a way that no one, generally speaking, bore him any good will, acquiring quite swiftly hatred to himself

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8 ASV, Conclavi, “Conclavi da Pio II a Innocenzo X.” ff. 718r-v: “si concepi il Cardinal Ludovisio odio manifestissimo.”

9 Ibid., f. 719r: “temerò anco il dolore che si saria forse potuto sentire per la sua morte.”

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and his uncle.”\textsuperscript{10} A vita of Gregory XV later complained that the people had forgotten all the goods deeds that the pope had ever done for the poor and the sick of Rome.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, even though nepotism as a system tended to lay the blame of bad government on the papal relatives, sometimes the public censure and even hatred reached the pontiff himself. And no matter how many good deeds a pope performed, he not could counterbalance the ill will that the city expressed at the end of his pontificate.

In most cases, as the example of Cardinal Ludovisi demonstrates, popes avoided direct censure of the populace. Nepotism conveniently attributed all the blame for governmental troubles on the ambition and inexperience of the cardinal-nephew, who supposedly manipulated his frail uncle. An \textit{avviso} issued at the start of the \textit{sede vacante} of Gregory XIV in the autumn of 1591 commented that due to the misgovernment of the cardinal-nephew, Pietro Emilio Sfondrati, it was difficult to know “if it were sede vacante or piena, whence everyone desired the death of His Beatitude.”\textsuperscript{12} Although many hoped for the death of Gregory XIV, who like Gregory XV remained feeble throughout his pontificate, most of the populace’s anger fell on his nephew. Sfondrati kept the old pope in the dark about the dire social and economic situation of Rome in 1591, telling him that the people had enough bread to eat and that papal forces had cleared the countryside of bandits. The \textit{avviso} ironically concluded that “it is hoped we must be better governed in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} Gigli, \textit{Diario}, vol. I, 21: “pubblicamente si dava al Cardinal Lodovisio, il quale in tutto il tempo si portò in modo, che da niuno, generalmente parlando, si fece ben volere, acquistando piú’ presto odio a se et al Papa suo Zio.”
\item \textsuperscript{11} See Ludwig von Pastor, \textit{History of the Popes, from the close of the Middle Ages}, vol. 27 (London: Keegan Paul, 1937), 270.
\item \textsuperscript{12} BAV, Urba.lat 1059, pt. II, \textit{avviso} of 16 October 1591, f. 319v: “se fosse sede vacante, o piena, perilche era da tutti desiderata la morte di Sua Beatitudine.”
\end{itemize}
this time of sede vacante than during the sede piena.”13 In the second half of the seventeenth century, well after Gregory’s death, the lack of leadership of his pontificate was remembered by Leti in his history of the conclaves. The satirist wrote that the Sfondrati pope’s reign “appeared as if it were sede vacante.”14

The memory of other popes was not so fortunate. Due to their severe policies and weighty taxes, both Paul IV and Sixtus V earned the hatred of the populace. At their death, Romans withheld the customary signs of grief that were required of them at the death of the pope. The Venetian ambassador Alberto Badoer wrote that after the death of Sixtus V “one saw few signs of sadness” among the people.15 Instead Romans felt a joy that Leti alluded to in his account of Innocent’s vacancy, but this was a joy laced with anger—an anger that commoners were never supposed to express to their superiors, if ever to the pope. Likewise, the news of Paul IV’s death thirty-one years earlier “was heard by everyone with the greater joy than had been their sadness at the news of his creation.”16 The French ambassador Philibert Babou d’Angoulême described to the

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13 Ibid., f. 320v: “speranza che debbiamo essere meglio governati in questo tempo di sede vacante, che nella piena.” The avviso writer commented on both the greed and inexperience of Sfondrati, calling him a “featherless peacock” who, instead of attending to the business of government, sought to enrich himself and his family through offices and schemes.

14 Gregorio Leti, _Conclavi de’ pontefici romani quale si sono potuti trovare fin à questo giorno_ (No publishing information: 1667), 282. Leti published the first edition clandestinely; another edition was printed in Cologne in 1691. Both editions were published for the occasion of papal conclaves, those which respectively elected Clement IX and Innocent XII.

15 ASVenice, Dispacci degli ambasciatori al senato, Rome, filza 26, dispatch of 1 September 1590, f. 1r: “si sono veduti pochi segni di mestizia.” More than thirty years later, a conclavist, wrote that Gregory XV “was little mourned by the Roman People” for his leaving the government in the hands of his nephews; see ASV, “Conclavi da Pio II a Innocenzo X,” f. 718r: “Questo Pont.ce dal Popolo Romano non fu molto pianto.”

Cardinal of Lorraine the emotional state of the populace as “almost furious with joy.”

The resentment of the city was so intense that the official historian of the Council of Trent could envision itinerant street vendors of glassware refusing to yell “caraffe” as they sold their goods. Instead he had them calling out to potential clients with “ampolle,” which did not remind them of the Caraffa family name. The anger against a deceased pope could also reflect itself on an individual level. The scribe of the Popolo Romano, who recorded all the decrees that the secret council issued during sede vacante, inscribed his loathing of Sixtus V while writing a memorial of the pope’s death in the book of decrees. In mid-sentence he changed “mestitia mortuus” to “letitia mortuus”—“sad death” to “happy death.”

Fifty years passed before another pope’s death was met with such joy. This was Urban VIII, who, despite earning the good will of the populace in the first half of his pontificate by organizing efforts against the plague of 1629-32, had earned the hatred of his Roman subjects by the time of his death in 1644 through his excessive taxation. Diarists give us a privileged look at the mixture of joy and anger that the populace expressed during his sede vacante. Gigli noted in his diary that “the people were

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17 Guillaume Ribier, *Lettres et mémoires d’estat, des rois, princes, ambassadeurs, et autres ministres, sous les règnes de François I, Henry II et François II*, vol. II (Blois: Chez Ivles Hotot, 1666), 827: “Ce peuple est quasi furieux s’allegrasse qu’il a conceu du cette mort.”


19 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, f. 158r.
overjoyed on account of Urban’s death.”

An anonymous report of the conclave of 1644 recorded that the people ran through the streets, yelling “We are free from so many misfortunes.”

*Sede vacante* thus opened a time when Romans could voice their opinions concerning the deceased pope’s regime and his family. The freedom of the interregnum came in part from the breakdown of authority. Once again Gregorio Leti summarized the opportunities available to Romans with the death of their leader. In a history of the conclaves, he wrote that “at that time, the authority of the tribunals cease [to function], & everyone is allowed the ability to speak, to write, and to say openly that which for every respect they must keep hidden in other times.” In *sede piena*, Romans had to watch their tongues, as popes sought to regulate public opinion through strict surveillance and harsh decrees against those who defamed the pope and his family. The populace could murmur against popes and occasionally stage protests against their policies, but collective action was quite rare for Romans in the early modern era. *Sede vacante*, in this regard, shared much in common with Carnival and other moments of festive rule. During these times, not only did the lowborn criticize their leaders, but also they did it in an excess of joyous anger. Thus, they displayed what James C. Scott has called the “hidden

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21 Quoted in Romano, *Quod non fecerunt barbari*, 107: “Siamo pur liberi di tante sciagure!”

22 Leti, *Conclavi de pontefici romani*, 373-74: “Cessano all’hora l’autorità de’ Tribunali, & è libera a ciascuno la facoltà di parlare, e dello scrivere, e di dire sveltamente quel, che per ogni rispetto era d tenersi in altro tempo celato.”
The hidden transcript, in many similar to Mikhail Bakhtin’s “second life,” was how commoners perceived the world around them. Scott contrasted the hidden transcript with the public transcript of the elite, which told commoners to accept the hierarchy and pay lip service to its political and social ethos. It was dangerous to do otherwise. Only at special times, such as Carnival or, in Rome, sede vacante, could commoners display their transcript. Yet, Rome’s sede vacante differed from Carnival in that the criticism was mostly directed at the pope and his family rather than a generalized criticism of hierarchy.

Pasquinades and Sede Vacante

Sede vacante also saw the flourishing of pasquinades, or poetic satires of various lengths that took the form of invectives or biting dialogues. Pasquinades were the means par excellence that Romans used to censure the memory of dead popes and their family members. The tradition of writing pasquinades first originated among students and professors of the University of Rome and among curialists and courtiers of the papal court. Cardinal Oliviero Carafa, the original patron of pasquinade writers, staged poetry competitions on St. Mark’s Day (April 25) in the early years of sixteenth century. The competitors attached classically influenced epigrams to the base of an ancient Roman


copy of Menelaus that rested near the Carafa palace in the *rione* of Parione. The statue, colloquially called Pasquino after a tailor who lived nearby, imparted its name on the poems that decorated its base. While at first harmless, by the time of the pontificate of Leo X, the pasquinades began to criticize the Curia and the Medici’s pope’s government until reaching a crescendo—a veritable “uproar” in the words of historian Domenico Gnoli—during his *sede vacante* and the conclave that elected Adrian VI. From its very origins, the pasquinade tradition was closely entwined with two events of the papal interregnum: the pope’s death and the election of his successor.

Historians since the nineteenth century had claimed that Pasquino spoke with a distinct voice that represented a certain social group. The first historians of pasquinades, influenced by the nationalism of their age, claimed that they represented the anticlericalism of the bourgeoisie against the papacy and the Curia. Others have cast the invectives of Pasquino in a more popular light, dubbing them the “opposition of the piazza.” Recently Ottavia Nicoli has merged the two schools of thought, arguing that Pasquino represented a popular tradition of anticlericalism of the Roman people.

All these assessments overlook Rome’s unique position as a capital city of both a state and of the Catholic world. Rome was full of ecclesiastics and officials, often one


and the same, and thus, its inhabitants by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had
grown accustomed to government by the clergy. Moreover, most Romans accepted the
system of nepotism that emerged with the papacy’s definitive return to the city after the
Council of Constance. They might complain about its excesses, but few seriously
questioned its legitimacy. Indeed, pasquinade writers from the beginning sought jobs and
patronage from cardinals and popes if they already did not have them. Pietro Aretino,
one of the first celebrated pasquinade writers, was a client of both Medici popes. Nicolò
Franco sought but failed to gain the patronage of Paul IV and his nephews. Rome and
Pasquino became extremely unhappy when the Dutch pope, Adrian VI, assumed the
papal throne in 1521. He pleased no one, as he was an outsider with little knowledge of
Rome’s patronage system. At Adrian’s death in 1523, Pasquino rejoiced with biting
epigrams and invectives. One wit hung a placard on the door of the pope’s doctor
thanking him for liberating the city from the ascetic barbarian.

Although most pasquinades can trace their genesis to members of the Curia, like a
blog in cyperspace, they took a life of their own in the squares and streets of Rome.

Pasquinade writers generally attached their criticisms with a paste made from wheat onto

28 For the Curia and its officials, see Renata Ago, Carriere e clientele nella Roma barocca (Rome: Laterza,
1990), John F. D’Amico, Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome: Humanists and Churchmen on the Eve of
the Reformation (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1983), and Peter Partner, The Pope’s Men: The Papal
see Anne Reynolds, “Cardinal Oliviero Carafa.”

29 For Franco, see Paul F. Grendler, Critics of the Italian World, 1530-1560 (Madison: University of
Wisconsin Press, 1969), 46. For Aretino, see Rossi, Pasquinate di Pietro Aretino. On the conservative
nature of pasquinades, see Rossana Arzone, ed., Pasquinate del Seicento: Le invettive delle “statue
 parlanti” contro il potere delle nobili famiglie alla conquista di Roma barocca (Rome: Rendina editore,
1995), 7.

30 Renato Silenzi and Fernando Silenzi, Pasquino: Quattro secoli di satire romana (Milan: V. Bompiani,
1932), 13.
one of the city’s many statue parlanti, or talking statues. The statues included not only the more famous Pasquino but also Marforio, an ancient statue of Neptune in the main square of the Capitol.\footnote{Other talking statues in Rome included Babuino, a Roman statue of Silenus located in the northern quarter of Campo Marzo, and Abate Luigi, a statue of a Roman patrician, located near Santa Andrea dalla Valle. Other cities knew this tradition. Venice had the famous Gobbo of the Rialto, but Naples, Florence and Mantua also had lesser known talking statues.} Although these statues served as the primary locus of criticism, during sede vacante, some brave writers placed placards bearing satirical epitaphs on the dead pope’s tomb in St. Peter’s.\footnote{For example, during the vacancy of Sixtus, someone left a placard on the tomb of the dead pope that stood between those of Pius IV and Pius V. It read “Impius Inter Duos Pios;” see Silenzi and Silenzi, Pasquino, 229.} Once posted, scribes, whose shops and offices were located near Pasquino in Parione, quickly copied the pasquinades, selling them to clients and thus dispersing them throughout the city. Avvisi writers sometimes helped to spread the pasquinades by including entire pasquinades in their newsletters.\footnote{BAV, Urb. Lat 1039, f. 76r and Urb.lat 1040, f. 162r. These entries were undated, but were issued during the sedi vacanti of Paul IV and Pius IV respectively.} Once in the streets, the populace at large could embrace the pasquinades. Although literacy rates had increased with the printing revolution, the early modern world was still one in which orality loomed large. Pasquinades were ideally suited to this oral world: the literate could read them out loud to a crowd gathered around Pasquino. Moreover, many pasquinades were accompanied by pictures, always helpful in conveying messages to the unlettered.\footnote{Robert W. Scribner, For the Sake of the Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). See also Claudia Evangelisti, “‘Libelli famosi’: Processi per scritte infamanti nella Bologna di fine ‘500,” Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi 181 (1992), 181-239, esp. 182-195.} Medals were sometimes passed around bearing a few sardonic lines with accompanying images. On the onset of Urban VIII’s unpopular War of Castro in 1643, critics of the
pope distributed coins throughout the city bearing an image of Pasquino burdened by several kinds of weaponry. On the reverse side, an inscription read, “Come, come to chase away the flies.”

35 This mocked the Barberini coat-of-arms—three golden bees on an azure background, equating the family to parasitical flies rather than productive bees. But perhaps the best indication of popular participation in the pasquinade tradition was the use of music to convey the poems. Many of the invectives took the form of ballads and songs, some of which ironically borrowed the liturgical music of the Church as their base. The diarist Giacinto Gigli noted that during the vacancy of Innocent X pasquinade writers wrote songs using the Salva Regina, Paster Noster and the Te Deum Laudamus as inspiration—hymns familiar to Romans who, like all early modern Catholics, attended mass on Sundays.

36 Pasquinades using the Te Deum irreverently played with the hymn that Masters of Ceremonies usually had sung at papal coronations and processions.

Since the sede vacante of Leo X, the pasquinades written at the death of popes boldly denounced the nepotism and financial corruption of his papacy. Yet, in some cases, pasquinades cannot be seen as a measure of popular opinion on a pontificate. During his pontificate, Paul III suffered countless invectives lambasting his creation of the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza for his son, Pier Luigi Farnese, in 1545. During Paul’s sede vacante in 1549, pasquinades continued on this line, mocking his conflict with his grandson, Ottavio, who had defied his orders to assume governance over the duchy after

35 Silenzi and Silenzi, Pasquino, 77: “Ventagli, ventagli, per discacciare le mosche.”

Pier Luigi’s assassination in 1547.

But the populace itself did not loudly embrace these tirades against his excessive nepotism. Instead, a pasquinade marveled that “the Roman people in the sede vacante of Paul III did not plot or perceive any tumult,” against the pope. The same held true for Gregory XIII, who although renowned for his many reforms, nevertheless made room for his Boncompagni relatives from Bologna in Rome and bought with papal monies the duchy of Sora for his illegitimate son, Giacomo. At his death in 1585, an avviso noted that “Pasquino keeps himself quiet, perhaps waiting until the conclave will be closed [to speak],” thus implying that pasquinade writers would satirize the upcoming election and the cardinals rather than the deceased pope.

Well-liked popes retained their popularity in death despite the great ambition of their families. Both Clement VIII and Paul V aggrandized their houses through great building projects throughout their pontificates. Moreover, both popes had to resort to taxes at times, which in turn attracted negative pasquinades. Despite these fluctuations

37 Several epitaphs were written for his death; see Pietro Romano, Pasquinate e la satira in Roma (Stab. Tipo-Lit. V. Ferri, 1932), 28: “In this tomb lies/A covetous and rapacious vulture:/He was Paul Farnese/Who never gave anything, but took everything./Say a prayer for him:/Poor Devil! He died of indigestion!” [In questa tomba giace/Un avvoltoio cupido e rapace:/Ei fu Paolo Farnese/Chi mai nulla donò, che tutto prese/Fate per lui un orazione: Poveretto! Morì d’indigestione!]. See also Pasquinate romane del Cinquecento, t. II, ed. Marucci et al. (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1983), no. 641, 732: “O tu che passi, qua dentro è sepolto/Paolo il pastor: morte crudel lo tolse,/perché Ottavio, il nepote, a Carlo voles/dar Parma, ch’al buon Pietro avea tolto” and no. 642 bis, 754: “In questa fossa di orinale/è Paolo avaro, Sandro [i.e., Cardinal Alessandro, his son] discortese/morto di papa si stavo Farnese/o tu, viator pissgli adosso e vale.”

38 Marucci et., Pasquinate romane, no. 651, 773: “Popol roman s’in la sede vacante di Pavol terzo non s’intende o sente/tumulto alcun.”

39 BAV, Urb.lat 1053, avviso of 20 April 1585, f. 185r: “Pasquino tace forsi aspettando, che’l conclave sia chiuso.” Another avviso issued on the same day repeated the same lack of activity in Piazza di Pasquino: “Pasquino keeps himself quiet, perhaps waiting for the cardinals to enter the conclave;” f. 186v. Both Gregory XIII and Paul III fathered their children before their elections as pope and, thus, before becoming priests.

40 When Clement VIII raised taxes in January 1602, he suffered a spat of pasquinades at his expenses; see Ludwig von Pastor, The History of the Popes, vol. 24 (London: Keegan Paul, 1932), 373. Paul V imposed
in popularity, what mattered during *sede vacante* was the general assessment that the populace accorded the pope’s pontificate. Pasquino not only kept quiet during Clement’s interregnum, but also praised the deceased pope upon the ascension of his successor, Paul V. An *avviso* of 21 May 1605 noted that all of Rome “hopes for a pontificate like Clement’s,” which had put an end to the lawlessness and famine of the early 1590s. A few days later a writer left a poem on the statue that said the soul of Clement had become lost in death only to re-enter in Paul and “so it is believed that we will have another pontificate like Clement’s.”\(^\text{41}\) Despite their annoyance with his long reign, the populace of Rome remembered all that Paul had done for them. When his body was exposed in St. Peter’s for three days, Gigli commented that “so many people flocked to kiss his feet that the more aged spoke of never remembering anything similar in other pontificates.”\(^\text{42}\) Because he maintained an abundant amount of bread for the people of Rome during his pontificate, he was remembered well into the seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries as *Papa buono*.\(^\text{43}\)

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\(^{41}\) For both pasquinades, see BAV, Urb.lat 1073, *avvisi* of 21 and 25 May 1605, ff. 271v and 281r-v: “si spera un pontificato di Clemente” and “così si crede che havremo un altro pontificato di Clemente.” Similarly, during the *sede vacante* of John Paul II in April 2005, encomia rather than invectives decorated Pasquino’s torso and pedestal.

\(^{42}\) Gigli, *Diario*, vol. I, 81: “concorse tanto Popolo a baciarli i piedi, che i più vecchi dicevano non si ricordar mai negli altri Pontefici simil cosa.” Gigli praised the deceased Borghese pope as “Magnanimous, splendid, an observer of the law, a lover of peace, a protector of the poor, a maintainer and increaser of abundance, which was so dear to his heart, that he had a heated argument with merchants and bakers when he wanted to increase the size of bread to one pound per loaf [pagnotta];” see p. 79.

The vitriol against cardinal-nephews could also extend to other powerful relatives of the pope. Donna Olimpia Maidalchini, Innocent X’s domineering sister-in-law and arguably the first cardinal-niece, attracted invectives throughout the Pamphilij’s reign. Both city and court mockingly called her “the papessa,” because anyone desiring a papal audience had to schedule it through the pope’s sister-in-law. Donna Olimpia acted as a cardinal-nephew from the start, dispensing favors and positions in exchange for money, promoting the interests of her sons and relatives, and clashing with members of the Curia, particularly the Secretary of State, Giacomo Panciroli. Once the pope died, Gigli wrote that “while the obsequies were performed in St. Peter’s as is customary, there were published many verses and other pasquinades in censure of the deceased Innocent and of Donna Olimpia.”

During the subsequent sede vacante, pasquinades rejoiced at the end of Donna Olimpia’s influence over the pope and papal government. Most were in the vein of this invective posted on the base of Pasquino:

Finished is the beastly lust
of this roguish woman
of Piazza Navona:
summoned to the hangman.
Finished is her beastly lust.

Gigli, normally respectful of popes and their families, wrote two octaves assessing the accomplishments of Innocent’s pontificate. The first lauded the deeds of the Pamphilij pope, praising him for the churches “he had decorated with splendor,” the obelisk he had


45 Arzone, Pasquinate del Seicento, 23: “Finita è la foia/di questa poltrona/di piazza Navona:/chiamatole il boia./Finita è la foia.”
raised in Piazza Navona, and the new prison he had built on via Giulia. The second, however, criticized him for the license he accorded Donna Olimpia:


Although Gigli laid most of the blame on Donna Olimpia, the pope did not escape his censure as one “whom, in order to satisfy the greed of a most avarice and infamous woman, had done many unworthy things.”  

During his pontificate, Innocent had inadequately responded to an intense famine that had raged through the Papal States. He and his family instead concentrated their efforts on leaving a testament to their magnificence in Piazza Navona in the form of Bernini’s *Fountain of the Four Rivers*. 

Leti agreed, writing in his life of Donna Olimpia that “[a] pope that truly might have deserved a better Record, had not his Manners been debauched by his Sister-in-law.” Thus at the end of a pope’s reign, all of his subjects assessed his pontificate, weighing the good and the bad, and ultimately casting judgment through invectives, but also emotion. 

Leti noted that “if ever Rome was in a merry mood for the Death of a Pope, it was

46 Gigli, *Diario*, vol. II, 732: “Nocque Innocentio al Popolo Romano/Et fu la Gloria sua molto schemata/Per haver posto il bel dominio in mano/Della vedova Olimpia sua Cognata:/Che spesse volte diè la tratta al grano/Et la fava per pan fu mancinata/Et chi chiedea la Gratie, havea l’itento/Porgendo alla Signora et argento.”

47 Ibid.: “che, per sodisfare all’ingordigia di una Donna avarissima, et infame, havesse fatto molte cose indegne.” Leti concurred with Gigli, writing “[t]he great inconveniency every way to see the Supreme of the Church subjected to the licentious appetite of a most ambitious woman, to the general dissatisfaction of the court; see *Life of Donna Olimpia Maldachini*, 60.

certainly for that of Innocent.”49 In the case of the Pamphilij pope, as well as Gregory XIV and Gregory XV, excessive nepotism tarnished the pope’s memory and undid all his efforts to leave a lasting record on the architectural landscape of Rome.

In death, most popes then avoided direct censure from their subjects. This was not the case for three popes, whose governmental policies earned them the powerful hatred of the Roman people. Paul IV (1555-59), Sixtus V (1585-90), and Urban VIII (1623-44) each forged a set polices that had much in common: they waged costly wars that required heavy impositions on grain, wine, salt and meat—staple foods of a capital city accustomed to eating better than the countryside and provinces. Paul, one of the founders of the Theatine order and once head of the Inquisition, and Sixtus, a friar of the Franciscan order and a strict ruler in his own right, sought to reform popular mores with draconian bulls and edicts. Urban, although a mild pope, had ruled for almost twenty-two years and had consequently made many enemies through his laws and decrees. All three popes also vexed the ancient Roman nobility who had enjoyed a wide authority for centuries in the city and its countryside: Paul and Urban both sought to confiscate the fiefs of prominent families while Sixtus specifically targeted the nobility in his campaign against lawlessness and banditry in the Papal States.50

49 Ibid., 114.
The pasquinades that circulated during the vacancies of these three popes shared much in common, even adopting the same form and style. For example at the death of Paul IV in 1559, an invective condemned his government with a laundry list of grievances:

Friar, priest, Theatine, imprisonment, exiles, taxes, hatreds, predations, slanders, famines, accusations and tortures, weapons, trumpets, drums, wars and destruction, bulls, bandi, reforms and with these wrongs, were the divine works of your government.51

More than thirty years later, at the death of Sixtus V in 1590, a similar pasquinade circulated through the city:

Thefts, duties, taxes, hatreds, predations, bulls, reforms, bandi, assaults and tortures, imprisonments, exiles and many unjust deaths, through the death of Sixtus they will end.52

The writers of both invectives drew inspiration from the same poetic form to describe the injustices done by Paul and Sixtus respectively. Each pope was a true Counter-Reformation disciplinarian who sought to reform the city of Rome. Paul instructed neighborhood priests to monitor the confessions of parishioners and used the Roman Inquisition more vigorously in regulating the piety than any pope before or after him. Meanwhile, Sixtus sought to suppress the crimes of nobles and common people by enacting rigorous laws. In the first months of his pontificate alone, avvisi writers claimed

51 Pasquinate del Cinquecento, ed. Marucci et al., t. II, no. 707, 909: “frate, prete, chietino […] carcer, essili, gabelle, odi e rapine,/calunnie, carestie, accuse e torti,/ armi, trombe, tambur, guerre e rovine,/bolle, bandi, rinforme e colli torti,/fur del governo l’opere tue divine.”

52 Romano, Pasquinate e la satira, 39: “Furti, dazi, gabelle, odi, rapine/bolle, rinforme, bandi, assalti e torti/carceri, esili, e mille ingiuste morti,/ per la morte di Sisto ebbero fine.”
that the decapitated heads of bandits and criminals displayed as warnings on the Ponte Sant’Angelo outnumbered the melons in the fruit market at Banchi.  

The hatred inspired by these popes was new to the pasquinades. Historian Massimo Firpo has noted that after a disappearance in the 1550s, the pasquinades returned the day after Paul’s death with “an extraordinary violence” and “a deep-seated rancor” not found in previous invectives written against the popes. Pasquinades focused on the Neapolitan pope’s love of the Inquisition. He had once served as the chief of the Inquisition and continued to attend its congregations after his election. Pasquinade writers attacked him as “an infernal spirit,” “a cruel demon,” and “a fierce dragon,” who “wanted to be feared through the cruel Inquisition and through fire and iron.” He was even mocked as as “a hypocritical pope” and “an open Lutheran,” references to his diligence against Protestantism, which included imprisoning Cardinal Giovanni Morone, whom he accused of sympathizing with Martin Luther. An epitaph written at his death summed up his unhappy reign: “Carafa, hated by the devil and by heaven, is buried here,

53 On Paul IV and the Inquisition, see Alberto Aubert, “Alle origini delle Controriforma: Studi e problemi su Paolo IV,” Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa 22 (1986), 303-55 and John Tedeschi, The Prosecution of Heresy: Collected Studies on the Inquisition in Early Modern Italy (Binghamton, NY: MRTS, 1991), xiii. Tedeschi argues that the Roman Inquisition generally concentrated on heresy and used leniency in its proceedings; see idem, 127-203. Pius IV curtailed the Inquisition’s activity upon his election in 1565. See BAV, Urb.lat 1053, avviso of 18 September 1585, f. 437v, for the decapitated heads of bandits on Ponte.

54 Massimo Firpo, “Pasquinate romane del Cinquecento,” Rivista storica italiana 96 (1984), 619. In the late nineteenth-century, Fabio Gori collected all the pasquinades issued against Paul IV and his nephews during the sede vacante of 1559; see “Papa Paolo IV ed i Carafa suoi nepoti: Pasquinate contra la memoria di Paolo IV ed i Caraffeschi,” Archivio storico, artistico, archeologico e letterario delle città e provincia di Roma 2 (1877), 170-206.

55 Gori, “Pasquinate contra la memoria di Paolo IV,” 172, 179 and 180: “Volea con crudel inquisitione e con ferro e foco esser temito.”

56 Ibid., 172 and 179.
with a putrid body, Erebus welcomed his spirit…He ruined the Church and its people; he wronged men and heaven.”

Few comparable pasquinades written during Sixtus’s *sede vacante* have survived. *Avvisi* writers, whose shops were located near Pasquino in the quarter of Parione, often included in their reports gossip, most likely influenced by the pasquinades. Thus, it was rumored that Sixtus “had been tricked during the time he had lived in the papacy” by a demonic familiar named Dante. Along similar lines, another *avviso* “considered it a tale” that Sixtus was in Paradise in death. Another *avviso* greeted the news of the draconian pope’s death with this line, inspired by Exodus 32:14: “The Lord repented the evil and is piteous toward his people.” The author castigated Sixtus and his severe justice by showing that even the God of Old Testament regretted his harsh treatment of his followers.

Personal revenge against the pope motivated many pasquinades written during *sede vacante*. The satirist Nicolò Franco came to Rome in May 1558, seeking patronage from Paul IV and his nephews. Instead, the Inquisition confiscated the ribald writings of the poet and imprisoned him from June 1558 to February 1559. Arrested in 1568 by Pius

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57 Silenzi and Silenzi, *Pasquino*, 228: “Carafa in odio al diavolo e al cielo è qui sepolto/Col putrido cadaver, lo spirito Erebo ha accolto…Ruinò Chiesa e Popolo uomini e cielo offese.”

58 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 5 September 1590, f. 454r: “sia stato ingannato circa il tempo, che doveva vivere in Pontificato.”

59 Ibid., *avviso* of 15 September 1590, f. 476r: “si tien per favola.”

60 Ibid., *avviso* of 29 August 1590, f. 437r: “Placatus est Dominus ne faceret malum et miseratus est populo suo.” Compare to Exodus 32:14 in the Vulgate: “Placatusque est Dominus ne faceret malum quod locutus fuerat adversus populum suum.”
V for having written pasquinades against Paul in his *sede vacante*, Nicolò excused himself, saying:

I am surprised that my anger did not induce me to say more words than these in a time in which everyone said things. I had been called to Rome by his nephews and then betrayed, imprisoned in the Corte Savella, led chained to Ripetta where I was unjustly treated and tortured. After eight months I was freed and left in such a state that I went begging for a bit to eat.  

Franco wrote several pasquinades during Paul IV’s vacancy and gathered around himself others who had suffered under Paul’s regime, including Alessandro Pallantieri, deprived of his post as fiscal procurator for the Apostolic Chamber and jailed for fraud.

The Flemish jurist Teodoro Ameyden expressed amazement at the number of pasquinades issued at the Barberini pope’s death, writing that “never has Pasquino prattled as much than for the death of this pope.”  

He commented that “the multitude of pasquinades and great insults said and written against a pope were never all together as great as those said of Urban.”  

Gigli concurred:

Meanwhile the people vented against the dead Urban and the Barberini with insulting words and with the pen, writing every evil of them. Whence were published numerous compositions, some in Latin, others in the vulgar tongue, some in prose, some in verse, such that I cannot believe I have seen anything like this before.

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61 Angelo Mercati, *I costituti di Nicolò Franco (1568-70) dinanzi l’inquisizione di Roma* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1955), 127: “e me maraviglio che il mio furore non me inducesse a dire più parole di queste a tempo che ogni un diceva, havendone visto chiamato in Roma da suoi nipoti et poi tradito, poste prigione in Corte Savella, menato legato a Ripetta dove iniustamente fui trattato et dannegiato et a capo de 8 mesi liberato et condotto a tale che andai mendicando per una pezza.”

62 Quoted in ibid., 100: “non mai Pasquino tanto cicalò e morto questo papa.”

63 BC, cod. 1832, Teodoro Ameyden, “Diario di Roma, 1640-47,” 133: “Le moltitudine de pasquinate et infamie grandi non dette mai nè scritte non dico contro un Papa, che mai furono tutte insieme non sono tante quanto si diconi di Urbano.”

64 Gigli, *Diario*, vol. II, 429: “il Popolo si sfogava contro Papa Urbano morto, et i Barberini, con parole ingiuriose, et con la penna, scrivendone ogni male, onde furono pubblicate infinite composizioni così latine, come volgari, così in prosa. Come in versi, che io non credo che fusse già mai simil cosa.”
The populace’s hatred of Urban VIII centered on his taxes, and the pasquinades, too, focused almost solely on this aspect of his regime. During his pontificate, particularly toward the end to fund the war against the Farnese, Urban imposed fifty-two taxes on food staples, including an unprecedented tariff on the local *vino romanesco*. As he lay moribund in late July 1644, Urban issued a tax on salt, meat and bread, which particularly wrankled the populace.65 A popular pasquinade, *Papa Gabella*, attributed to Monsignor Filippo Cesarini before the death of the pope, was chanted in the streets by the populace during the vacancy. One line in particular touched upon Urban’s attempt to make the taxes more palatable to the populace by dispensing indulgences prior to their imposition: “Urban VIII, of the fine beard, imposes a tax after the jubilee.”66 Ameyden wrote that each night during the vacancy the populace sang songs against the pope “with a great number of carriages that sang the ballad Papa Gabella, which grows every night.”67 In particular he noted that the “people repeat the refrain as a chant,” a sure sign that the people were protesting the dead pope’s polices.68 This sheds light also on the above pasquinades written against the stern measures of Paul and Sixtus during their vacancies. With their marshal tones, they could have easily been shouted openly through the streets of Rome. Ameyden even noted that women, normally absent in the accounts


68 Ibid., 131: “il popolo ripeteva il ritornello come una cantilena.” Tantalizingly, both the *caporioni* and the governor’s police frequently arrested young men and women singing ballads and playing guitar “alla spagnola” (or sometime “alla romana”) during *sede vacante*. Unfortunately, the police reports never mention what the youths were singing.
of protests made against the pope during the vacancy, were particularly fond of singing

cApha Gabella.\textsuperscript{69}

Some of the additions made during Urban’s \textit{sede vacante} complained against his
taxes and their ill effects:

Forty or more duties
he has imposed in his life;
he has marked up
even veal.
O papa Gabella!

In the time of Urban
the big loaf of bread,
light and poorly cooked,
has now become a roll.
O papa Gabella!\textsuperscript{70}

Other invectives targeted Urban’s nepotism that had caused him to seek to
conquer Duchy of Castro for his nephew Taddeo. This was the last example of a pope
attempting to seize a dukedom for his family since Paul IV. In the time between these
two pontificates, popes had preferred to buy small fiefs from the declining ancient
families of Rome as a way of bolstering their credentials. Urban VIII had followed this
course, buying several fiefs from the Colonna and Orsini. Yet, when Odoardo Farnese,
the duke of Castro, refused to pay the debts he owed the papacy, it presented Urban with
a chance to seize the large duchy for his family. Urban’s plan backfired and the
Barberini dragged the Papal States into an unpopular war. For example, a pasquinade


\textsuperscript{70} Romano, \textit{Quod non fecereunt}, 108-109: “Quaranta e piú dazi/ha msso in sua vita/ci ha rincarita persin la vitella/o papa Gabella” and “Nel tempo d’Urbano/la grossa pagnotta/leggera e malcotta/divenne panella/o papa Gabella”.

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lamented that “he stirred up cruel war; he filled the world with his wicked fame that invented fifty taxes.”

An epigraph laid at the tomb of Urban mocked the greed of the pope and his nephews by playing with the Barberini’s coat-of-arms: “Fattened the bees; fleeced the herd.”

Both writers of pasquinades and those who commented on the vigor of public opinion during the vacancy expressed the view that the ability to speak freely about the pope and his regime during sede vacante had become something of a right. Nicolò Franco defended himself before the Inquisition when tried for writing pasquinades during Paul IV’s vacancy by claiming that “at that time others besides me freely slandered” the pope. One anonymous onlooker during Urban VIII’s sede vacante wrote about the flowering of pasquinades after years of intense surveillance from the Barberini pope, who had sought to defend his reputation and his life after several astrologers predicted his death in the 1620s:

the more famous wits competed among themselves in writing satires against him, everyone finding their tongues free after many years in which the Barberini kept them tied from fear of slander against them.

Another anonymous reporter during Urban’s vacancy commented that the city “speaks, writes and curses, without respect and without fear” after the death of the pope.

71 Ibid., 103: “Guerra crudel nel mondo sucitò/di fama iniqua l’universo empi/che cinquanta gabelle ritrovò.”

72 Arzone, Pasquinate del Seicento, 16: “Ingrassò l’appi e scorticò l’armento.” Also recorded in Latin: “Quam bene pavit Apes, tam male pavit Ovis.”

73 Mercati, I costituti di Franco Nicolò, 127: “altri all’hora oltre che sparlasse alla libera.”

74 Quoted in Romano, Quod non facerunt Barbari, 99: “gl’ingegni piú celebrati, gareggiando fra loro nelle satire contro di lui e retrovandosi sciolta la lingua di ciascheduno, che molti anni stette con nodi dal Barberino, per timore della maldicenze contro di loro.”
This tradition could confuse non-Italian visitors to Rome during the vacancy. The Swedish prince, the future Charles XI, who was in Rome during Innocent X’s *sede vacante* of 1655, wondered “if the evil that they say of Innocent was true, then the people must protest while he was living rather than waiting to rip him apart with words in death.”

But there was a good reason why Romans waited until the pope’s death to criticize his policies. Not only Urban VIII, but all early modern popes sought to protect themselves and their regimes from criticism from the populace. Most popes before the Counter Reformation acted on an ad hoc basis against pasquinade writers and *avvisi* writers, who employed the same copyists from Parione to spread their ideas. Paul III excommunicated and banished Nicolò Franco for writing invectives against his government. Even the so-called last Renaissance pope, Julius III, who once enjoyed the pasquinades as a cardinal, cracked down on their writers after suffering their withering attacks during his reign. His campaign was so intense that, coupled with Paul IV’s later crackdown on them, Pasquino remained silent until an outburst of activity the day after the Carafa pope’s death in 1559.

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75 Quoted in ibid: “si parla, si scrive, si bestemmia senza rispetto, senza timore.”

76 Gigli, *Diario*, vol. II, 734: “che se era vero il male, che dicevano d’Innocentio, il Popolo doveva risentirsene, mentre era vivo, e non aspettare a lacerarlo con parole dopo la morte.”


78 Silenzi and Slienzi note Julius III’s opposition to pasquinade writing during his pontificate; see *Pasquino*, 55. This accounts for the decline in pasquinade activity in the early 1550s. Firpo notes the disappearance of pasquinades throughout the 1550s, but attributes it solely to vigorous efforts of Paul IV; see “Pasquinate romane,” 619.
A more intense campaign against the pasquinade writers and other defamers of popes and other eminent people did not commence until the ascension of Pius V, who blamed wanton public speech for disturbing the peace in Rome. Once in power, the former head of the Inquisition, had arrested several pasquinade writers and news writers, including Franco, who was tried by the Inquisition and executed on 10 March 1570. Two years later Pius issued the bull, Romani Pontifices, against pasquinade writers on 19 March and a constitution against avvisi writers three days later. Although Pius died a few months later, his successors, Gregory XIII and Sixtus V, made an example of a few scribes and writers during their pontificates. For the most part, papal authorities employed severe punishments and public spectacle to deter others from defaming the pope. Thus, tongue severing, hanging, and decapitation at Ponte and in Campo de’ Fiore were the normal means of punishing writers of pasquinades and defamatory avvisi.

But authorities throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tolerated pasquinade and avvisi writing as long as it remained underground. Both forms of writing were transmitted not through print, but rather by hand-copied documents that passed from hand to hand in squares and streets, or, in the case of invectives, were also attached to the various talking statues of the city (before being copied by scribes). Powerful patrons—nobles, cardinals and ambassadors—often protected the writers from prosecution. Instead the authorities tended to arrest and make examples of the starving scribes who

79 For the bull against pasquinade writers, see Silenzi and Silenzi, Pasquino, 357. For the constitution against avvisi writers, see Mario Infelise, “Roman Avvisi: Information and Politics in the Seventeenth Century,” in Gianvittorio Signorotto and Maria Antonietta Visceglia, eds., Court and Politics in Papal Rome, 1492-1700, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 214.

copied the invectives and news reports for their masters and private clients. Typically, the punishment for these scribes was a stint in the papal galleys.81

Notable exceptions did exist, however. The extremely thin-skinned Urban VIII had several pasquinade writers arrested and executed a few of them during his pontificate.82 Social crises also provoked a stricter control of Pasquino. During the famine of 1646-48, pasquinade writers protested Innocent X’s construction of the central fountain in Piazza Navona by attaching invectives on the huge stone blocks that were to be used to build its obelisk. The pasquinades read: “We don’t want Needles and Fountains; we want bread. Bread! Bread! Bread!” Innocent, alarmed by the already seditious air in the city and urged by Donna Olimpia, acted quickly. He had several authors arrested, including an agent of the Duke of Modena, and placed disguised spies in both Piazza Navona and the nearby Piazza di Pasquino.83

81 For the underground nature of much of the public writing of Rome, see Brendan Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism: Experience and Doubt in Early Modern Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), chapter 1, esp. 32-33 and 36-38.


83 Gigli, *Diario*, vol. II, 534: “Noi volemo altro che Guglie, et Fontane, Pane volemo, pane, pane, pane.” Papal police arrested three brothers from the Giudotti family who wrote some of the lampoons, but Gigli mentioned that they arrested many more authors as well. The Duke’s agent was one Francesco Mantovani, who also wrote *avvisi* and was known for passing pasquinades that he found in Rome to the Este. He was arrested for writing in an *avviso* that the “papessa” would be meeting with ministers of the Annona, the papal office that regulated the buying and selling of grain.

Not only in Rome, but all of the Papal States was ready to revolt in the summer of 1648. In Viterbo, where the Maidalchini family had originated, protestors fired shots at Donna Olimpia’s brother as he walked through the street; see Gigli, 533. The city of Fermo did revolt in July and killed its papal governor; see Gigli, p. 529 and Yves-Marie Bercé, “Troubles frumentaires et pouvoir centralisateur: L’émeute de
In theory, the Governor of Rome issued provisions in his bandi that forbade the writing of pasquinades during sede vacante. The reality, however, was much more complex. In many cases, the Governor lacked the ability and the will to stop the deluge of pasquinades, particularly those directed at the memory of hated popes. After the vacancy of Urban VII, which had lasted the entire autumn of 1590, the Governor, with the approval of the newly elected Gregory XIV, freed several scribes who had been arrested for copying pasquinades, because “this matter entangled almost the entire city.” Under torture the scribes had already implicated the brother of the lieutenant auditor of the Apostolic Chamber and so, fearing a witch hunt of important personages, the Governor stopped the trial and released the prisoners. Similarly, during his uncle’s sede vacante, Taddeo Barberini demanded that the Sacred College arrest the authors of pasquinades against the dead pope. When the cardinals forwarded the request to the Governor Lomellino, he responded that “it would be necessary to punish all of Rome.”

In any case, Lomellino attempted to stop the dissipation of pasquinades, but, several weeks later, he wrote the Sacred College of his inability to stop the flow of criticism directed at the dead pope and, by then, the cardinals as well:

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84 Few of these bandi have survived. BAV, Urb.lat 1040, avviso of 15 December 1565, f. 153r, which mentioned a bandi issued against bandits, fighting and the writing of pasquinades. ASR, Bandi, vol. 21, bando of 12 February 1655. Gioseffe Gualdi mentioned this bando in his diary; see the Getty Research Institute, MS, “Il diario di Gioseffe Gualdi, 1654-55,” t. II, f. 36v.

85 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 26 December 1590, f. 678r: “che questa materia intricava quasi tutta la Città.”

The writings that slander the Holy Memory of Pope Urban and others that concern eminent members of this Sacred College are so numerous that one sees them in everyone’s hands.\textsuperscript{87}

He concluded his letter, telling the cardinals that he had stationed guards at “the places where they usually affix pasquinades” but he could not find any there because “they continue to spread among people.” To mollify the cardinals, he offered to arrest some scribes, the principal disseminators of this satirical literature.\textsuperscript{88} Thus, at best, interregnal authorities could only “repress somewhat the excess license.”\textsuperscript{89} The Flemish jurist and avvisi writer Teodoro Ameyden wrote these words when he notified his readers that the Governor of Rome had arrested a few scribes who had copied pasquinades against the deacessed Urban.

Despite the potential threat of arrest and punishment, \textit{sede vacante} was a real opportunity for these scribes. The aforementioned copyists arrested after the election of Gregory XIV in December 1590 claimed that they had resorted to selling pasquinades because they had “no other means to make earn a living in these times.”\textsuperscript{90} In normal times, a wealthy client would pay upwards of two hundred scudi to have a piece of political satire copied. This was a fortune considering that most copyists made eleven

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88 Ibid., “Ne luoghi dove si sogliono affigere le Pasquinate” and “non vi si vedono perch’e vanno sparse tra le persone.”

89 BC, cod. 1832, Ameyden, “Diario,” 133: “per reprimere alquanto la troppa licenza.”

90 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, \textit{avviso} of 15 December 1590, f. 648r: “che non havendo in questi tempi altro remedio da guadagnarsi il vitto.”
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And during sede vacante there was no shortage of potential buyers. In the vacancy of Paul IV, for example, the agents of the Duke of Mantua assiduously sought to purchase pasquinades written against the dead pope for their master. Some clients came from further afield; during Innocent X’s sede vacante, the prince of Sweden reputedly “paid many pieces of gold to take some pasquinades back to his country.”

Interregnal authorities had difficulty arresting the scribes, a footloose bunch that frequently moved their offices to avoid capture. But even if many managed to escape during the vacancy, both scribes and authors still had to face the justice of the newly elected pope. Both Gregory XIV and Clement VIII had copyists and writers rounded up within days of their ascension. Although avvisi writers hoped that the latter’s name might bode well for the pasquinades writers, their hopes were shattered when Clement sent them to the papal galleys. Some popes showed less mercy than Clement. Sixtus V had executed a doctor who had written a pasquinade in the sede vacante of Gregory XIII. Paul V had Giovan Battista Piccinardi decapitated for writing pasquinades against Clement’s execution of the parricide Beatrice Cenci.

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91 For the cost of a pasquinade and the daily wages of the scribes, see Dooley, *Social History of Skepticism*, 43 and 38 respectively.


93 See footnote 84 for Gregory XIV’s arrest of scribes who had copied pasquinades during the vacancy. For Clement VIII’s arrest of writers of “poems and pasquinades that ran through the court in this time of sede vacante;” see BAV, Urb.lat 1060, avviso of 1 February 1592, f. 69v: “Poesie, et Pasquini corsi per la corte in questo tempo di sede vacante.” For the avvisi writers’ hopes of merciful pope based on Clement’s name, see ibid, f, 69v.

Time did not dull the impact of words said and written during *sede vacante*. Pius V had both Nicolò Franco and Alessandro Pallantieri, his high-ranking patron, tried and executed more than ten years after they had written pasquinades during Paul IV’s vacancy. While the easygoing Pius IV could ignore and even enjoy the invectives targeting the Neapolitan pope, Pius V set out to punish them from the start of his pontificate.\(^95\) Thus, *sede vacante* opened up the underground world of public opinion and allowed for criticism of the pope, but it was still occasionally monitored.

The punishment of authors of pasquinades after the vacancy shows that papal authorities took their criticism seriously. Although their target—the pope—was dead, pasquinades still defamed the Church as a whole. Popes were supposed to be remembered in death for good works that they performed for the Church and the faithful. Whenever papal officials, Capitoline magistrates, and even private individuals wrote about a deceased pope, they prefaced his name with the formula, “santa memoria” or “felice memoria.” Pasquinades in contrast besmirched the honor of the pope and the Church by reminding readers and listeners of a pope’s less-than-holy deeds and associating his memory with the lowly and diabolical. Many pasquinades borrowed the scatology of the streets so favored by early modern authors such Rabelais, Aretino and Leti. At their core then, pasquinades were an insult against the papacy as well as a criticism of the pope’s regime.\(^96\)


\(^{96}\) On the role of written and verbal insult in tarnishing the honor of others, see Evangelisti, “Famosi libelli,” 181-239; Peter Burke, “Insult and Blasphemy in Early Modern Italy,” in idem, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997), 95-109; and Elizabeth Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 91-125.
The honor of the Church was at stake and the fear that this literature might fall into the hands of Protestants alarmed papal authorities. Immediately after hearing how the Swedish prince had expressed “much curiosity” about pasquinades written against Innocent X, the Governor of Rome, Giulio Rospigliosi, jailed those found with such compositions on their person, and sent four scribes to the galleys and others to the prisons of the Inquisition.97 A month later into Innocent X’s vacancy, papal printers published an account of the pope’s death in order to “overcome the public rumor, unfortunately true,” that Donna Olimpia had spent the last days before Innocent’s death carting off moveables from the Vatican and that the pope had died with his eyes wide open and with a fearful visage. Gigli wrote that authorities published the report so that the Heretics and enemies of the Apostolic See would not speak ill of or laugh at Catholics.98 Gigli therefore approved of the counterattack for “not giving material to the heretics.”99

Yet the efforts of the Catholic authorities were in vain. Pasquinades and unflattering stories about the popes frequently made their way north of the Alps. The Protestant writer, Gregorio Leti, particularly specialized in writing accounts of papal vacancies and conclaves from 1667 until his death in 1701. Leti, who seemed to have access to avvisi and other sources of information on popes and their families, included much gossip and an occasional pasquinade in his printed works. Although he wrote in

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97 Gigli, *Diario*, vol. II, 734.

98 Ibid., vol. II, 736: “ad effetto di superare la pubblica fama, pur troppo vera” and “acciò che gli Heretici, et nemici della Sede Apostolicanon dichino male, ne si ridano de Catholici.”

Italian and later in French, his works were published in most of the principal languages of Europe—one historian has called him the most translated Italian author of the seventeenth century. Thus, his works met a receptive audience in the Protestant world and many accounts of papal conclaves owe their information, if not their entire substance, to him.

Interregnal Riots

Closely connected to pasquinades was a tradition of rioting that Romans sometimes staged against hated popes during the *sedi vacanti* from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth century. The riots communicated the anger of the entire city more forcefully than pasquinades by having the potential of uniting groups from different social levels in opposition to the deceased pope’s policy. Through these riots nobles protested the growth of papal authority over their traditional feudal and civic rights, while commoners criticized popes who had burdened the city with taxes and failed to keep the populace supplied with bread. Both classes criticized popes who had sought to discipline the populace through severe measures. Moreover, the very memory of some popes had to be extinguished for the community to move on.

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100 Danilo Romei, “Gregorio Leti, sosia e ciurmatore di Pasquino,” in Chrysa Damianaki, Paolo Procaccioli and Angelo Romano, eds., *Ex marmore: Pasquini, pasquinisti, pasquinate nell’Europa moderna* (Rome: Vecchiarelli Editore, 2006), 188. Leti, although a critic of the papacy, never made gross exaggerations in his histories of the vacancy and conclave. His fictional work is another matter, but even here he owes more to Aretino than the severe propaganda of many Protestants. Leti gathered and printed all the pasquinades written during the *sede vacante* of Clement IX (1669-70) in *L’ambasciata di Romolo à Roma, nelle quale vi sono annessi tutti tratti, negotiate, satire, pasquinate, relationi, apologie, canzone, soonetti, ritratti, & altre scritture sopra gli interessi di Roma durante sede vacante* (Cologne: Per Antonio Turchetto, 1676 [1671]). He included 89 pasquinades in the tome, which gives an idea of the great number of pasquinades a vacancy could produce.
This ever-evolving tradition of rioting borrowed from the practices common to all pre-industrial riots, but also employed rites and customs unique to Rome and the papal interregnum. Rather than following a static ritual code, Romans drew from a repository of symbols and violent actions when rioting during *sede vancate*. In this regard, the riots of the Romans were like a performance, adapting their scripts and props to the exigencies of the historical moment. Charles Tilly has even called early modern and modern riots and revolts “contentious performances” in that, while they followed similar scripts, groups could tailor them to their needs or even change them when necessary. 101 The riot that occurred in the *sede vacante* of Paul IV in 1559 is a case in point. On one hand, this riot looked back to a tradition of interregnal protest that Romans had used against fifteenth century popes upon their return from Avignon. This tradition in turn borrowed much from the pillages of church property that clerics and laypeople performed at the death of bishops and popes before the Babylonian Captivity. 102 On the other hand, it created, perhaps accidentally, a new practice of assaulting the pope’s statue on the Captitoline Hill. Romans sought to destroy the statues of Sixtus V (1590) and Urban VIII (1644) during their vacancies. During Paul’s *sede vacante*, Romans added a new element

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to their interregnal protest against the pope, one that is attested to by the numerous accounts in the dispatches and diaries of contemporary observers.

The riot against Paul IV’s memory was from the start a planned affair rather than a sudden pillage. On the morning of 18 August, upon hearing of the pope’s moribund state, the Popolo Romano met in a secret council, where, “after having said infinite evils against the pope, they resolved to open all the prisons, and, in particular, Ripetta, that is the prison of the Holy Office.” This decree broke with the traditions of the papal interregnum on two counts. First, the pope was still alive when the caporioni later that morning freed all the prisoners in the Tor di Nona, Corte Savella and Capitoline jails. Second, the conservators and caporioni had no right to free the prisoners of the Inquisition, who for the most part were heretics and authors of forbidden works from outside the city. In a letter to the abbot of Gambara, Giovanni Tommaso Vertua, expressed shock at the actions of the Capitoline officials, writing that they did not have the authority “to break open these prisons of Ripetta, that is to say, those of the Inquisition.”

The Popolo Romano thus sought to punish Paul even as he lay dying. But they did not act alone. Ringing the Senator’s bell that announced the death of the pope, they attracted a mixed crowd of gentleman and commoners to the Capitoline Hill. With this

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105 On the mixed crowd, see a letter of Vertua to the Abbot of Gambara of 19 August 1559 in Rezzaghi, “Cronaca di un conclave,” 549; the letter of the French ambassador, Philibert Babou d’Angoulême to the cardinal of Lorraine of 18 August 1559 in Ribier, Lettres et mémoires d’estat, vol. II, 827; and the letter of
crowd, estimated at upwards of two thousand, the *caporioni* marched to the prisons of the Inquisition, at the opposite end of the city. Onlookers variously described the crowd as “joyful” and “furious.” A Spanish inquisitor noted that its members shouted, “Liberty” as they made their way to the prisons.106 Once at the prisons, the *caporioni* and the crowd freed the accused heretics only after they “swore to adhere to the Holy Church and to the Catholic faith.”107 Then they proceeded to burn all the records and books of the Inquisition, fetching fagots from a nearby wood merchant and setting fire to the prisons and offices of the Inquisition itself.

As often happened in many pre-industrial riots, members of the crowd took time to loot the Inquisiton palace before setting it on fire. The rioters consumed all the wine and food found in the pantry, but in their anger threw everything else, including property belonging to the head of the Inquisition, Cardinal Alessandrino, into the streets or into the fire.108 The rioters killed Fra Tomasso Scotto, commissary of the Inquisition, wounded his secretary, and imprisoned the judge, messer Giovan Battista Birone, after giving him several blows.109 Many friars and officials just barely escaped from the crowd.

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109 BAV, Barb.lat 5243, “Diario di Vincenzo Belli,” ff. 161r-v
Most likely, few of the rioters had actually suffered in the dungeons of the Inquisition in Rome, which tended to concentrate on heresy outside the city. Why then did they target the Inquisition prisons on the eve of Paul’s death? Romans saw the Inquisition as a reflection of the pope and his moral reform. By attacking the Inquisition, they were castigating him for his severity.

But the anger of the rioters was not sated with an attack on the Inquisition; they attacked anyone associated with its activities and with Paul IV. From Ripetta, the rioters went to the house of Claudio della Valle, a notary of the Inquisition, carrying away trials and other records that he kept there.\(^{110}\) Then they went to the Dominican monastery and church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, whose friars worked closely with the Inquisition. According to observers, they wanted to burn down the monastery and kill the friars, but were prevented from doing so by the conservators and Giuliano Cesarini, the Gonfalonier of the People. The rioters only left after Cesarini convinced the friars “to leave Rome in the morning.”\(^ {111}\) Perhaps to placate the crowd further, the conservators “took three or four friars as prisoners to the Capitol.”\(^ {112}\) Before leaving, rioters somehow found a portrait of Paul, which they “tore into minutest pieces.”\(^ {113}\) All of this suggests that the rioters wanted to erase the memory and the deeds of the dead pope.


\(^{111}\) On Cearini getting the crowd to leave; see Novalín, *El inquisidor*, 256; BAV, Barb.lat 5243, “Diario di Vincenzo Belli,” f. 266v; and Rezzaghi, “Cronaca di un conclave,” 549.

\(^{112}\) Novalín, *El inquisidor*, 256: “oltros tres o cuatro frailes lleveron presos a Campidoglio.”

This is attested by the attacks against other relatives and associates of Paul after the following day on 19 August 1559. The Venetian ambassador Alvise Mocenigo told his city’s Senate that “immediately after the pope’s death the people rioted for many days, always demonstrating their intrinsic and universal hatred that they have of the house of Carafa.” On that day, a band of rioters tried to burn down the house of the merchant Giovanni Celsi da Nepi, because “he had been behind many taxes imposed on this city.” Once again, Cesarini and several other notables prevented the crowd from killing Celsi, who had helped the pope collect taxes to support his war against Philip II. According to an avviso of 26 August, Cesarini, no friend of the Carafa, made Celsi pay thirty thousand scudi for the protection he offered his house and person. Although this did not stop Romans of various social strata from taking back what they felt the pope and the Carafa owed them. Ludovico Savelli, who during the war had his fiefs and property confiscated as “a rebel and enemy of the pope,” led a raid on the the pope’s vineyard outside Porta del Popolo, taking back many horses and cows that once belonged to him. Another band of rioters stole grain intended for the Carafa home. Crowds also sought to destroy the house where the pope had lived as a cardinal, but “men of reputation” had

114 “Relazione di Luigi Mocenigo,” 37: “Subito morto il papa, il popolo per molti giorni tumultò sempre facendo dimostrazione dell’odio intrinseo ed universale che aveva contro la casa Caraffa.”

115 Ibid.: “perché era in nome d’esser stato causa di molte angherie poste a quella città.” Vertua noted that the crowd sought to kill Nepe because of “all the impositions that the Carafa had placed on the city, he had been their inventor.” See Rezzaghi, “Cronaca di un conclave,” 549: “tutte le gravezze ch’hanno posto i carafeschi, esser stato lui lo inventore.

116 BAV, Urb.lat 1039, avviso of 26 August 1559, f. 74r.

turned them back since the house had been turned into a convent for nuns who “were for
the most part honest Roman women, daughters of good fathers, gentlemen and Roman
citizens.”

Avvisi writers had no doubt who was behind these riots. An avviso of 21 August
spread the current rumor “that the Colonna had prepared to raise hell against the
dependents of the pope.” Marc’Antonio Colonna had sided with Philip II in Paul’s war
against the Spanish, even becoming a captain in the Duke of Alba’s army. As a
consequence, the pope had confiscated the Colonna fief of Paliano and gave it to his
nephew Giovanni, making him Duke of Paliano. When Marc’Antonio heard of the
pope’s death, he first seized his fief and then returned to Rome, where he was accorded a
hero’s welcome by the populace. Colonna, thus, had a hand in the violence against the
pope’s memory and the Carafa followers. This is corroborated by the fact that in the city
of Perugia—at the very same time as the riots against the Inquisition and monastery of
Santa Maria sopra Minerva—crowds sought to set fire to the Church of San Domenico,
which housed the local branch of the Inquisition. One of the major nobles of Perugia,
Ascanio della Corgna, likewise had seen his fief confiscated by the pope and had joined
Duke Alba’s army as a captain. Della Corgna, who was also the nephew of Julius III,
knew the power of sede vacante; during the war with Spain, he incited the coastal town

71r-v: “et hanno ruinato quello, a tal che si vede che non vogliano che resti memoria delli fatti loro.;”
664r: “vi erano per la maggior parte donne Romane, honeste, figliuole di boni padri, gentilhuomini et
cittadini Romani.”

119 BAV, Urb.lat 1039, avviso of 21 August 1559, f. 73r “s’udiva ch’i Colonnesi si preparavano per far il
diavolo contr’i dependenti d’esso Pontefice.”

120 BAV, Urb.lat 1039, avviso of 26 August 1559, f. 74r.
of Nettuno to rebel against the pope by having the town’s bell rung while riding through its streets, yelling “its sede vacante!” The timing of these events could not have been sheer coincidence.

Thus, both the civic magistrates and the nobility of Rome had planned to make a demonstration of their opposition to Paul’s pontificate at his sede vacante. The people of Rome happily complied as is attested by ferocity in which they attacked the images and associates of the Carafa. But their work against the pope was not yet completed. On 20 August, the Popolo Romano issued a decree making known to any person who has before his house, whether a placard, painted on the wall, or in relief, the arms of this tyrannical house of Carafa, enemy of the people, must between today and tomorrow have them tore down, blotted out and broken under the pain of being held infamous and as a traitor of this people. Houses where these arms are found will be at this time sacked and burned, so that in any way possible this much hated name can be annihilated and extinguished.

This recognized what the city had already done to the many of the pope’s associates. But it also provoked a new spate of violence against the property of the Carafa. The populace of Rome did not need any threats to attack the vestiges of the Carafa in the city. An avviso of 21 August said that “everyone carried this out with boundless joy with respect


122 Recorded in an avviso of 26 August 1559; see BAV, Urb.lat 139, f. 74r: “a qualche persona che habbi inanzi casa sua, ò, di carta, ò dipinto in muro, ò, di rilevo l’arme della tanta a questo popol inimico et tirannica casa Caraffa, la debbia fra il di hoggi et domane haverla strasciata, scancellata et spezzata, sotto pena d’esser tuuto traditore dìquesto popol et infame, et d’esser quella casa dove sarà trovata di questo tempo in la sacchegiata et brusciata, accio si possi per tutte le vie possibil amnichillar et spegnere questo tanto odioso nome.” The deccres was given on 20 August 1559. An anonymous diarist wrote that the “people called a council in which it was decided to erase every memory of the pope;” see Nores, “Storia della guerra,” 451: “fu chiamato il popol a consiglio, nel quale fu deliberato di cancellare ogni memoria del papa.”
to the boundless severity that His Holiness had used in all things.”¹²³ The ambassador of Mantua wrote to the Duke of Gonzaga that the orders were carried out “with a rejoicing and glee so great by the multitude and by pratically everyone [in Rome] that it appears that each was winning a prize.”¹²⁴ On that day, Romans knocked down and destroyed the Carafa coat-of-arms on the church doors of Santa Maria sopra Minerva and Santa Maria della Pace. Likewise the coat-of-arms of the Oliviero Carafa (1430-1511), a respected cardinal and admiral of the papal fleet, were removed from the family chapel in Santa Maria sopra Minerva. ¹²⁵

The day of the decree, the Popolo Romano also decided to remove a statue that it had dedicated to Paul just three months before as thanks for his lifting of several taxes that he had imposed on the city. The Capitoline officials then emulated the judicial punishment meted out to traitors to the city. In front of a crowd gathered in the Sala dei Conservatori where the marble statue stood, they had a stonemason “trim the face” of the statue and then cut off its nose, ears and arm.¹²⁶ The severing of the arm was particularly a clear comment on Paul’s authority as pope. Roger Aikin has shown how papal statues since Paul III had emphasized the power of the pope by borrowing from the pose of

¹²³ BAV, Urb.lat 1039, avviso of 21 August 1559, f. 73r: “ch’ha apporto smisurata allegrezza a tutti per la smisurata severa della Santa sua usato in tutte le cose.”

¹²⁴ ASM, Carteggio, Rome, filza 889, dispatch of Emilio Stangheli to Duke Gonzaga of 21 August 1559, f. 663r: “con un’allegrezza et Jubilo del Volgo et d’ognun universamente tanto grande che pare ce ognuno guadagne Premio.”

¹²⁵ “Relazione di Luigi Mocenigo,” 37 and “Diario di Vincenzo Belli,” f. 268r.

The upraised arm also invoked the pope’s spiritual authority—with it he blessed the crowds that came to religious functions held in St. Peter’s square. The officials underlined their criticism of Paul’s regime by severing the papal tiara from the statue and topping the head with the hat of a Jew “in remembrance that he introduced the wearing of the yellow hat to the Jews of Rome.”

An executioner then decapitated the statue. The officials read a pronouncement against the simulacrum that stood for the dead pope, saying, “Tyrant, this is your reward for your deeds.” Finally they threw the severed head out the window of the Palace of the Conservators “in infamy and greatest hatred.”

Children then dragged the head around Rome for several days, during which time they “cursed and mocked it in the way that Romans are accustomed to doing in Piazza di Pasquino.” The ridicule of children, whose innocence allowed them to criticize those

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129 Ibid., f. 74r, “Tiranno questo è il premio delli tuoi meriti.”

130 BAV, Barb.lat 5243, “Diario di Vincenzo Belli,” f. 269r: “per infamia, et odio grandissimo.”

in power, could impart important messages in the early modern era. In this case, the children of Rome protested Paul’s severity as they took the statue’s head to each of the areas where secular authorities executed criminals and heretics, namely Ponte and Campo de’ Fiori. However, adults took part in attacks on the statue’s head. As it passed through the streets and squares of the city, passers-by hurled insults and blows at it. After several days of this ritual abuse, the conservator Giovan Battista Salviati paid the children two giulii to throw it into the Tiber, ridding the city of a memory of the pope and his regime.132

The riots, particularly the Popolo Romano’s treatment of Paul’s statue worried the College of Cardinals, which held attenuated funeral rights for the dead pope out of fear that “the people might take his corpse and drag it through the city.”133 Rather than displaying the body for three days, they had Paul’s corpse laid in the Sistine Chapel for three hours. The dead pope was then quickly entered in St. Peter’s where a guard of two hundred harquebusiers watched the tomb to prevent any mischief on the part of the


133 BAV, Urb.lat, avviso of 26 August 1559, f. 74v: “per dubio ch’el popolo non lo pigliasse et strascinasse per la città.”
populace. Meanwhile, because of “the intense hatred against the name of Carafa” Cardinal Carlo Carafa stayed in his palace like “a wet hen” until the opening of the conclave on 5 September.

Cardinal Carafa had much to fear. On 21 August, the Popolo Romano and the city’s barons had gathered in a general council and voted to deprive the lay members of the Carafa of their Roman citizenship. Many nobles, including the hot-blooded della Corgna, expressed a desire to chase the Carafa out of the Papal States by force, but the council remained divided on whether to attack Giovanni and Antontio Carafa, who remained hidden in their estates outside of Rome. The College of Cardinals sharply rebuked the Capitoline and Roman nobles, arguing that these were matters for the future pope to consider. By the time of the conclave, the entire populace focused its attention on the papal election, and the violent manifestations against the pope and his family consequently came to halt.

Extraordinary as this riot was, similar episodes had occurred during fifteenth-century vacancies after the papacy’s return to Rome at the conclusion of the Great Schism. Roman nobles and Capitoline magistrates had grown accustomed to years of self-governance. The election of Martin V, a Roman and a Colonna, may have made the loss of independence more acceptable to the city’s elites. However, the next pope, the

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Venetian Eugenius IV, had to spend much of his pontificate in Florence due to the uprising of the Roman nobles. When Eugenius died in Rome in 1447, the knight Stefano Porcari sought to incite the populace to rebel against the papacy with a patriotic speech in Santa Maria in Aracoeli, the church of the Popolo Romano on the Capitoline Hill. Porcari failed to find support, but later plotted a revolt against Nicholas V for which he was tried and executed in 1453.137

A tradition of standing up to papal authority during *sede vacante* gradually emerged. This tradition borrowed from medieval custom of clergy and laypeople looting the property of popes and bishops after their death, but now extended it to the pope’s familiars and associates. Carlo Ginzburg called this practice a “ritual pillage,” although he indiscriminately associated the pillaging after the pope’s death with post-Constance practice of pillaging the newly elected pope’s property.138 Sergio Bertelli followed his lead, arguing that ritual pillages represented the connection that people shared with their lord, whether a king or a pope.139 Both interpretations rightly explain the post-election pillages as a right of spoil connecting lord and subject, but they de-politicize the actions of pillagers after the pope’s death. Both Ginzburg and Bertelli focus more on the


medium rather than message that the pillages conveyed. Instead, the pillages should be seen as a part of a protest against the dead pope’s policy.\textsuperscript{140}

The rioting that took place during the vacancy of Sixtus IV, in 1484, serves a good example of the protest behind this custom. After the Genoese pope’s death, noble and common Romans sacked the palace of the pope’s nephew, Count Girolamo Riario, looting and destroying everything in sight. The building itself was reduced to rubble; not even the trees in the garden were spared. The same day, crowds attacked the Genoese community in Trastevere and the warehouses of its merchants located at the port of Ripa. After taking all the grain and foodstuffs from the merchants in Ripa, some members of the crowd sacked the granaries of the nearby churches of Santa Maria Nova and San Teodoro. Others assaulted Castello Giubileo, the della Rovere fortress outside the city’s walls, pillaging the pantry and stealing livestock from the stables and pens.\textsuperscript{141}

Sergio Bertelli has categorized the actions of crowd as a ritual pillage of the dead pope’s possessions, but, as recent scholars have argued, the practice had died out during the papacy’s time in Avignon. Moreover, Bertelli ignored the political and social context of the riot during Sixtus’s vacancy. In attempting to put an end to the inverterate warfare between the Colonna and the Orsini, Sixtus had sided with the Orsini and thus gained the ire of Prospero Colonna. At the moment that the pope died, Girolamo Riario was besieging the Colonna fief of Paliano. As a consequence the Colonna and their followers

\textsuperscript{140} Laurie Nussdorfer made this case for the rioting that occurred during Urban VIII’s vacancy; see her \textit{Civic Politics}, 182-85.

organized the riot against the relatives and associates of the pope. When the crowd marched toward the Riario’s palace, they shouted the war cry, “Colonna, Colonna!”

During much of the vacancy, the Orsini allies of the pope and Colonna continued their factional disputes.

But the riot would not have been so great without the participation of much of the populace. Rome also had suffered under the rule of Sixtus. In order to support his family’s ambition, Sixtus had burdened the city with taxes, gave favorable trading concessions to his Genoese allies and trafficked in grain that could have been used to feed the city. The rioters obviously targeted the granaries and warehouses of della Rovere family members or Genoese merchants. The attack on the granaries of Santa Maria Nova and San Teodoro was not random; Sixtus had kept grain in them that he planned to sell outside of Rome in the future. Thus, rather than belonging to a ritual of pillaging the papal goods of the dead pope, the rioting during the vacancy of 1484, as that of 1559, was a protest that temporarily united the various social strata of Rome against the pope and his family.

Since the pope was dead, his relatives and allies were targeted for abuse by the rioting crowds. This pattern was repeated in the sedi vacanti of Alexander VI (1503) and Clement VII (1534). During the vacancy of the former, the warehouses and homes of the pope’s Spanish allies and associates were looted and destroyed by a mixed crowd of

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143 Infessura, *Diario*, 162: “quod anno praeterito vendi non poterat; sperabat tamen papa vendere illud in anno futuro.”
elites and commoners, many of whom were partisans of the Orsini family. During Clement’s vacancy, crowds stormed the warehouses of the papal in-law, Filippo Strozzi, who had sold overpriced, poor-quality grain during the famine of 1533-34. Angry Romans had also threatened nearby banks and warehouses in the Florentine neighborhood of the Banchi.

Interregnal riots in Rome before 1559 followed a pattern to which all pre-modern riots loosely adhered. The monarch rarely felt the fury of the rioters; instead they blamed high taxes or odious measures on corrupt ministers or provincial governors. Typically, angry crowds both looted and destroyed the property of these officials. The vacancy conveniently shielded the dead pope while offering his family and minions as scapegoats.

But all this changed with Paul IV’s vacancy. True, the crowds attacked friars, inquisitors and tax-collectors that were associated with Paul IV. And crowds looted the vineyards and stables of the Carafa. Nevertheless, his vacancy added a new element to the rioting. No previous sede vacante had witnessed such hatred against a pope, who, although dead, was censured for the policies of his pontificate. Moreover, both Capitoline officials and the populace at large sought to destroy every memory of the pope and his family, who were now seen as a contagion that had to be removed from society.


In particular, they focused on his statue, treating it like a criminal by trying it, punishing it, and eventually casting it into the Tiber. This, too, followed the common practice, not only in early modern Europe but in societies throughout the world, of ritually shaming and discarding the bodies of dead tyrants, practitioners of opposing religions, and ethnic enemies. Since it was impossible for Romans to shame the body, they made do with his images and, especially, his statue. The memory of the defacing and defaming of Paul’s statue held sway throughout the early modern era. In the autumn of 1571, the sickly Pius V, while discussing the business of the Inquisition with subordinates, recalled that Romans “had dragged the head of his [i.e., Paul’s] statue [through the city]” in addition to burning the palace of the Holy Office.

After 1559, only two demonstrations against dead popes occurred during sedi vacanti in the rest of the early modern era. These riots, less violent than Paul IV’s, took place during the vacancies of Sixtus V (1590) and Urban VIII (1644). Both popes, as we have seen from the pasquinades written against them, had attracted much criticism during their pontificates. The rioters on both occasions ignored the property and associates of the dead popes. Instead they focused solely on their statues housed in the Sala dei Conservatori on the Capitoline Hill. No other image was targeted, as is attested by the reports of avvisi writers and Venetian ambassadors, all of whom loved a good story about the popes.

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147 See Davis, Beik and Ranum in footnote 127; much of these studies owe much to Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge, 1966).

148 Autobiografias y memorias, ed. Manuel Serrano y Sanz (Madrid: Libreria editorial de Bailly Bailliére, 1905), 171: “habían arrastrado la cabeza de su estatua.”
But why the statues on the Capitoline Hill, as opposed to the numerous statues that popes placed in churches throughout Rome? The Capitol, as seat of the civic government and receptacle of republican tradition dating to antiquity, had always served as a focal point of resistance against the papacy. Cola di Rienzo had staged his revolt from the Capitol and the memory of his brief Republic lived on in the minds of many nobles and magistrates.\(^{149}\) During *sede vacante*, the rebellious spirit of the Popolo Romano surfaced as it sought to claim a greater share of the authority during the interregnum. The general populace even saw the Capitol as one of the crucial loci of the vacancy. Crowds rushed up the Capitoline Hill at the sounding of the bells that announced the pope’s death, curious about the activity transpiring in councils of Popolo Romano.

More importantly, the Popolo Romano saw the statue as something with which they could award a living pope for his deeds, but also take away in death if his pontificate became oppressive and odious. In offering a statue to a pope, civic officials sought the patronage and support of the papacy. The first statue civic officials accorded a pope was one of marble for Leo X in 1518. They had it erected in thanks for the restoration of several privileges upon his ascension to the throne in 1513 that Julius II had abolished. Paul III likewise received a marble statue, housed in the Senator’s Palace, for his generosity toward the people in 1543. Paul IV received his bronze statue just three

months before his death in 1559 in gratitude for his elimination of several taxes.

Ironically, he had requested a marble statue, fearing that a bronze statue might be melted for ammunition during a future war as Alfonso d’Este, Duke of Ferrara, had done to Michelangelo’s statue of Julius II in Bologna in 1511. Gregory XIII also received a marble statue for his goodwill toward the Popolo Romano in 1576. Sixtus V, the last sixteenth-century pope to receive a statue at the Capitol, received a bronze statue in recognition of his extirpation of banditry in 1585.150

When Sixtus V died on 29 August 1590, an armed crowd of nearly nearly two thousand nobles and commoners stormed the Capitol, “demanding the statue of Sixtus in order the statue drag it about.”151 The Venetian ambassador Alberto Badoer particularly noticed the composition of crowd, writing in a dispatch of 1 September that “a multitude of gentlemen and Popolo Romano went to the Capitol to knock down the statue of His Holiness and to abuse it.”152 The use of the term Popolo Romano is quite ambiguous but surely included members of the civic government. Also among the crowd were the nobleman, Mario Capizucchi, who wanted to to sever the statue’s head, and Pietro Lopez,

150 For the statues at the Capitol in the sixteenth century; see Emmanuel Rodocanachi, *The Roman Capitol in Ancient and Modern Times*, trans. Federick Lawton (London: William Heinemann, 1906), 171-73. Leo X’s statue as Sixtus’s ran into financial as there was no money in the Capitoline treasury; it was finally built in 1520. For Este’s melting of Julius II’s statue in Bologna, see Butzek, *Die kommunalen Repräsentationsstatuen*, 98-100.

151 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 29 August 1590, f. 442v: “dimando la statua di Sisto per strascinarla.” See also Butzek, *Die kommunalen Repräsentationsstatuen*, 308.

152 ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 26, dispatch of 1 September 1590, f. 1r: “andò multitudine de gentilhuomeni et Popolo Romano al Campidoglio per lever la statue di Sua Sanita, et maltrattarla.”
a Portuguese Jew who had suffered under the pope.\textsuperscript{153} The crowd would have succeeded had not the College of Cardinals posted Filippo Colonna, the Constable of Naples, with a guard near the statue. The cardinals must have suspected that the statue would serve as lightning rod for trouble. Once they heard of the troubles at the Capitol they dispatched the noble Mario Sforza with several soldiers to assist Colonna in the defense of the statue. Colonna and Sforza were only able to pacify the crowd by hiding the statue behind a partition. Hence, the contagion had to be removed, even temporarily, from the immediate sight of the angry Romans. The following day, emboldened by the actions of crowd, civic officials issued a decree forbidding the erection of statues at the Capitoline in honor of reigning popes or their living relatives.\textsuperscript{154}

The Popolo Romano upheld the decree until rescinding it in 1634, when a statue was offered to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, nephew of Urban VIII. Barberini circumspectly refused the statue, although Urban accepted one in 1635, which was completed and posted in the Sala dei Conservatori in 1640. Between these two points, Capitoline officials did not raise any statues to living popes or their relatives. Instead the Popolo Romano erected statues to heroes of the Church and Rome. After Duke Alessandro Farnese died during his campaign Dutch heretics in 1592, he was accorded a classical statue in what has become known as the Sala dei Capitani. The Colonna, jealous of their rivals, demanded a statue to Marc’Antonio, hero of Lepanto, in 1595. The Orsini requested a statue for Virginio Orsini a year later, but financial problems

\textsuperscript{153} BAV, Urb.lat 1058, \textit{avviso} of 29 August 1590, f. 442v and ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, dispatch of Alberto Badoer of 1 September 1590, f. 1r. For Capizucchi’s involvement, see Joseph Connor, “Alliance and Enmity in Roman Baroque Urbanism,” \textit{Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotechec Hertziana} 25, 254.

\textsuperscript{154} For the decree, see Rodocanachi, \textit{The Roman Capitol}, 173.
Prevented the ancient family from having it made. Later, honorary statues were accorded to Gian Francesco Aldobrandini, who died in 1602 fighting the Turks in Hungary and to Carlo Barberini who died, less heroically, while on a mission to Bologna in 1630.\textsuperscript{155}

*Sede vacante* reminded Romans of the symbols of papal authority that stood in the Palace of the Conservators. Even though Clement VIII did not have a statue in the Sala dei Conservatori, during his vacancy in 1605, the Popolo Romano reaffirmed the decree of the *sede vacante* of 1590 in a secret council. An air of defiance accompanied the reissuing of this law as many Roman Barons had joined the council and days before had agreed that the conservators should send the new pope a request to repeal a bull of Clement VIII’s against the Roman nobility.\textsuperscript{156} The Popolo Romano had the *caporioni* and their civic patrols station themselves in the Capitol’s square in a show of force on the day that the request was made. In addition to the *caporioni* and their men, over three thousand people showed up at the Capitol. Despite orders from the conservators, members of the militia kept shooting off their guns as a sign of support until the Governor’s *sbirri* arrested several artisans.\textsuperscript{157}

The Popolo Romano’s defiance may have lost some of its edge by 1634, when it offered a statue to Francesco Barberini and then in 1635 to Urban in gratitude for his efforts in preventing the plague of 1629-32 from reaching Rome. The desire for

\begin{footnote}{155}{For a discussion of the heroic statues of noble Romans, see Roger Aikin, “Christian Soldiers in the Sala dei Capitani,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16 (1985), 206-28.}
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\begin{footnote}{156}{BAV, Urb.lat 1073, *avvisi* of 30 March and 2 April 1605, ff. 153v and f. 159r. .}
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\begin{footnote}{157}{Ibid, *avviso* of 30 March 1605, ff. 153v-154r.}
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privileges from the Barberini family also figured into their decision. The marble statue, made by Bernini, was unveiled in late September 1640 in the Palace of Conservators.  

The Popolo Romano had offered the statue to Urban at the height of his popularity. By the time of its erection on the Capitol, his credit with the people had already begun to plummet due to his heavy taxation of the populace made worse by the War of Castro in the coming years. At his death on 29 July 1644, the discontent with his pontificate was so great that, in the words of Gigli, the people, “would have surely made some crazy demonstration against his statue had not the conservators taken measures in time.” These included locking the doors and windows to the Palace of Conservators, posting a company of soldiers and vassals of Filippo Colonna and several pieces of artillery before the palace, and keeping a company of horsemen in the nearby Roman Forum. Prevented from attacking the object of their hatred, “everyone stood back to look at the statue and there were many who expressed their longing [to get ahold of it].” Undaunted, Monsignor Filippo Cesarini, who had a personal hatred of the Barberini, stood at the steps of the Capitoline Hill, urging the people toward the statue by yelling, “Now the time has come to take revenge against the tyrannical barbarians [Barbari tiranni].” Once he realized the impossibility of damaging the statue, Cesarini, a priest, directed the crowd from the Capitol to the nearby Roman College, where he knew a


159 Ibid., 426: “haverebbe fatto securremente qualche pazza dimostrazione verso la Statua di quello, ma li Conservatori havevano a tempo provisto.” See also Nussdofer, *Civic Politics*, 232 and 234.


161 Ibid.: “che era venuto il tempo di vendicarsi contro i Barbari tiranni.”
stucco replica of Bernini’s statue had been installed. Members of the crowd threw themselves at the replica in such a rage that in less than forty-five minutes “the statue was no more.”  

The assaults of the Romans against the statues of Sixtus V and Urban VIII as well as the preparations that the Popolo Romano and College of Cardinals made to protect them demonstrate that from 1559 onward a new element had been added to the tradition of interregnal protest against deceased popes and their policies. The fury of all three attacks on the statues show that the vengeance that Romans enacted against one another could also be used against the pope. But compared to the riots of Paul’s sede vacante, those that occurred in 1590 and 1644 were decidedly less violent. From the sources, it would seem that the hatred that the people carried towards all three popes was quite comparable. What had changed was that the statues had come to embody all the negative qualities and misdeeds of the popes. Rather than attack associates and images of the pope scattered across the city, the pope’s statue on the Capitoline Hill had become the new target of protest during the vacancy. The social memory of the Roman people, particularly the elites, thus had come to focus on the papal statues on the Capitoline as symbols of the loss of their ancient liberties.  

Urban VIII’s vacancy saw the last major tumult during the vacancy as well as the last attempt at a pope’s Capitoline statue. The Popolo Romano did raise statues to other popes. It accorded Innocent X a bronze statue in 1645 as reward for his legal action against the Barberini nephews. Despite Innocent’s unpopularity with the people, his  


statue was never assaulted. This was because the civic nobility and the Roman nobles as a whole did not have any major grievances against the Pamphilij pope. It took united action to stage a protest against the pope. Moreover, members of Popolo Romano and Roman baronage seemed to have played a large role in directing the crowds to the papal statues on the Capitoline Hill.

After Innocent X, the only pope to receive a statue while reigning was Clement XII. The Popolo Romano accorded him a bronze statue in 1734, which was only finished in 1740, ten months after he died. But before the eighteenth century, the practice of assaulting papal statues had died with Urban VIII. Republican armies during the revolutionary on 11 February 1798 melted the bronze statues of both Clement and Sixtus V for artillery. Their destruction represented the needs of the military as well as the Revolution’s attack on the ancien regime, which the papacy represented in their minds, rather than a critique of a particular pope. Yet, remembering the severity of Sixtus V, they read a pronouncement against the hated symbol of the Counter Reformation as they destroyed his bronze statue.

Popular opposition to papal policy during sede vacante nevertheless continued after Urban VIII’s vacancy. But without the united efforts of the nobility and the commonfolk, these demonstrations were less spectacular. In his biography of Donna Olimpia, Gregorio wrote that at Innocent’s death, many thought that “during the vacancy, the Fury of the rude Multitude would have offered some Insolence to the Palace and

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165 Butzek, Die kommunalen Repräsentationsstatuen, 319. Revolutionaries in 1796 and, again, in 1848 destroyed papal statues in the major centers of Bologna and Perugia; see Butzek, 135-36, 139 and 198.
Person of this Lady.” But to everyone’s surprise, “nothing happened.”166 Leti, an inveterate writer on the vacancy, mentioned no attempt at the statue in the Palace of Conservators. Instead, he wrote that the common folk thought of making an attack on the pope’s sister-in-law, but thought better of it out of fear that they would “draw the displeasure of those other great Families, she was allied to.”167 After Alexander VII died in 1667, angry Romans had smeared ink and dung on the palace of his nephew, Cardinal Mario Chigi, whom they held responsible for “new Gabels, imposed on Grist, Wine, Wax, Paper, Hay, Straw, Sope, Aqua-vitae, Tobacco, and other things, to the number of fifteen or sixteen; though the people were oppress’d with the other Gabels impos’d by Urban the 8th.”168 The populace thus continued to give popes the benefit of the doubt, laying most of the blame on corrupt nephews.

The Pope, Protest and Sede Vacante

The pasquinades and riots of sede vacante were both a criticism of and a protest against the increasing absolutism of the papacy and the nepotism that was inextricably connected to it. They critiqued the excesses of papal rule. For the most part, Romans laid the blame of bad government on the pope’s relatives; thus, the very structures of papal government tended to hold the pope above censure. Nevertheless, criticism touched those popes who had taxed the city heavily and ruled with severity. The memory of these


167 Ibid., 115.

168 Gregorio Leti, Il Cardinalismo di Santa Chiesa, or the History of the Cardinals of the Roman Church (London: Printed for John Starkey, 1670), 297. The same version of the event appeared in an avviso issued after Alexander’s death; see Infelise, “Roman Avvisi,” 221.
popes provoked Romans to attack their associates and images throughout the city and, after 1559, focused solely on their statues at the Capitol.

The people’s criticism of the popes during sede vacante shows that they recognized what Paolo Prodi has called the two-souled nature of early modern popes. After their return from Avignon, popes had become princes of the Papal States in addition to being the supreme leaders of the Church. Prodi argued that popes had increasingly emphasized their absolute authority through propaganda. After more than a century and half of rule by the pope-kings, Romans had conceived a new image of their ruler. This can be seen in the way the pope was treated in death. Riots and pasquinades focused on his failings as a secular leader by criticizing his wars, taxes and treatment of his subjects. In death, certain popes became tyrants, arch-tyrants and Neroes. Gigli wrote that the numerous pasquinades written against Urban VIII during his sede vacante were “too biting and unworthy of a Christian man in ripping apart the reputation of a Pope, even with false calumnies, as if an impious and most wicked tyrant had died.” Gigli recognized this new image of the pope when he complained that the numerous pasquinades written after his uncle’s death “all conclude that Urban is a mere

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170 See pasquinades on Leo X, Paul IV and Sixtus V in Pietro Romano, *Pasquino e la satira*, 14, 33 and 39 respectively.

171 Gigli, *Diario*, vol. II, 429: “troppo mordaci et indegne di huomo Christiano in lacerar la fama di un Papa, ancora con false calunnie, come se fusse morto un empio, et sceleratissimo Tiranno.”
statesman who never had any religion nor anything divine or civil about him so that they imprudently said that he had never been pope.”

Romans, as Machiavelli did in his political writings, could emphasize the secular nature of the pope. But, paradoxically, they still recognized him as a spiritual father. At every vacancy, except Paul IV’s, crowds of the faithful lined up to view the body and kiss the feet of the dead pope displayed in St. Peter’s. Although a secular prince, the popes retained their aura of saintliness even in death. This demonstrated the limitations of papal absolutism and the critique against it. Both were rooted in the unique nature of the papacy: the people held the pope to a conservative standard of governance to which the pope, as a religious leader, had to adhere or suffer both in word and deed during sede vacante. The sacralized body of the pope, represented by his real body in St. Peters, was venerated, while the secular body of the pope, symbolized by the statue suffered scorn and misuse.

Sede vacante allowed Romans to display their “hidden transcript,” a major accomplishment in the hierarchical world of early modern Europe. Yet it might be asked whether this criticism was nothing more than a safety valve that prevented more violent outbursts from occurring, particularly with the later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century focus on the papal statue. It could gather opposition against hated popes and their families—opposition that could last the duration of the vacancy and continue over after

172 BC, cod. 1832, Ameyden, “Diairo,” 130: “tutte conchiudenti che Urbano meno politico non hebbe mai religione ne divina ne humana cosa che sfacciamente non si è detto mai nessun Pontefice.”

the election of a new pope. The papal interregnum was then retribution directed against
the rule of oppressive popes that could have severe consequences for papal families.
Both the Carafa and Barberini suffered major repercussions after the papal election.
Ironically, Carlo Carafa and Antonio Barberini helped steer the cardinals in the conclave
to candidates who they thought would be less hostile to their family. Upon Pius IV’s
ascension, enemies of Paul IV surfaced to pressure the pope to prosecute the Carafa
nephews. Pius IV, who had promised leniency to Cardinal Carlo in the conclave,
restored Alessandro Pallantieri as fiscal procurator of the Apostolic Chamber and
Girolamo de’ Federici as governor of Rome. Paul IV had deprived both men of their
offices during his pontificate. Now back in power they encouraged Pius IV to prosecute
Carlo on charges of embezzlement and heresy and his brother Giovanni for the murder of
his wife’s lover. On 8 June 1560, Pius had the two brothers arrested and, after a year of
interrogations in the Castel Sant’Angelo, they were executed in March 1561. The pope
exiled the remaining Carafa, who fled to their native Naples. Only with the election of
the family friend, Cardinal Alessandrino, as Pius V, in 1566 did the Carafa return to

The Barberini likewise faced tremendous hostility after the vacancy. Antonio
Barberini helped elect Innocent X, his uncle’s successor, after Philip IV employed his
right of exclusion to block the cardinal’s first choice, the Florentine cardinal, Giulio
Sacchetti. After his coronation, Innocent promised to lower taxes on bread and ordered
Antonio Barberini to turn over his family’s account books so that he could inspect them
for evidence of fraud during the War of Castro. Although he failed to keep his promise concerning taxes, Innocent did proceed against his family, causing Antonio to seek the protection of Cardinal Mazarin in France at the end of September 1645. His brothers, Taddeo and Cardinal Francesco, joined him in January 1646 after Innocent had several family servants arrested. Only after long negotiations did Innocent allow the Barberini to return to Rome in 1653. They fared better than the Carafa as Antonio kept his position as Cardinal Chamberlain and the acquisition of the Duchy of Monte Libretto from the Orsini in 1644 turned them into titled Roman nobles.175

Romans of all ranks who participated in the riots rarely faced repercussions for their actions during sede vacante. Criminal records fail to reveal rioters after the tumults of 1559, 1590 and 1644, despite the state had the power to find ringleaders through spies and police. Conversely, the rioters could get a pardon. Pius IV issued a bull pardoning the rioters of Paul IV’s vacancy.176 There was a lack of will because a full inquisition would turn up most of the city, including nobles and ecclesiastics. Papal authorities often took a sterner stance against pasquinade writers and their scribes because unlike the riots, words on paper took on a life of their own; they could last forever and wind up in the wrong hands. The protest and violence of the vacancy was then endemic to the political and social structures of the papacy. Romans may have complained about nepotism and even staged riots against the rule of heavy-handed popes, but they never seriously


considered revolting from the papacy. The Venetian ambassador Alvise Mocenigo, alluding to the years of the Avignon papacy, saw that the people gained too many benefits from popes and their government. In his report of 1560 to the Venetian Senate he described the ambiguous relationship that the Roman people had with their pope-king:

[I]t would be an easy thing for the Popolo Romano in these vacancies to seize the city of Rome, but then they would not be able to hold onto it for themselves. Rather they are content to stay under the Church than under any other prince. One trusts that it must be difficult for them to rebel against the Holy Church. In particular, they greatly fear, not carrying themselves affectionately and faithfully, that a pope might have a longing to move the See to some other place or city. It would be the total ruin of Rome because rapidly it would become disinhabited.177

177 “Relazione di Luigi Mocenigo,” 39-40: “facil cosa che il popolo romano in queste vacanze potesse impadronirsi della città di Roma, ma non potendo essa mantenersi poi per sé, e contendosi pittosto di star sotto la Chiesa che ad altro principe, si può credere che difficilmente debbia ribellarsi mal da Santa Chiesa, e masime che dubita grandemente, non portandosi bene e fedelmente, che ad un Pontefice non venisse voglia di trasferire la Sede in qualche altro loco o città: il che sarebbe la total ruina di Roma, perché presto resteria disabitata.”
CHAPTER 7

THE DISORDER OF THE CONCLAVE

Sede vacante was a Janus-faced time for Romans. During the vacancy they avenged past slights and criticized the deeds of the dead pope, but they also looked to the future, that is, the cardinals still had the duty of electing the pope while sequestered in the conclave. Countless scholars, both serious and popular, have told the story of the politicking and machinations among the cardinals locked in the conclave.¹ This chapter will instead focus on the disorders that occurred outside the supposedly hermetically sealed conclave, whose name, cum clavis, meant “with key” in Latin.

Although the dealings of the conclave were supposed to remain secret, information frequently leaked and spread throughout the city. Romans of all ranks thus were privy to secret information, which reverberated throughout the city in the form of rumors, pasquinades, songs and poignant criticisms. People added their opinions on the political future of the city. This was not a single, monolithic vox populi, but rather a chorus of discordant and conflicting opinions, both favorable and critical to the cardinals and their decisions, forcefully appearing in a city where freedom of speech was generally restricted when the pope reigned. The conclave thus presented Romans with an

exceptional opportunity to play a role in the political life of their city beyond simply grumbling about papal policy.

The Porous Conclave

On the morning of the tenth day after the pope’s death (although in many cases, several days after this date), the cardinals gathered in St. Peter’s, where the Cardinal Dean of the Church sang the Mass of the Holy Ghost and a preacher gave an oration, exhorting them to forgo self-interest and to elect a worthy successor as pope. Then the cardinals walked in a procession through the entrance of the Vatican Palace, the Sala Regia, and made their way to the Pauline Chapel while papal musicians sang the hymn *Veni Creator*. Once there, the cardinals took an oath to obey the bulls and constitutions concerning the election of St. Peter’s successor. Finally, they cast lots in order to distribute the temporary cells that had been constructed in the corridors surrounding the Sala Regia and the Sistine Chapel, where the electoral process would take place. Each cell was just large enough to maintain a cardinal comfortably with a few personal belongings. Servants decorated the cells with tapestries that reflected the relationship between the cardinals and the deceased pontiff. Those cardinals who were his *creature*, that is, those who owed their position to him, covered their cells with a purple tapestry;

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all others used green cloth. The family coat-of-arms of each cardinal was hung over his cell’s door.\(^3\)

But the conclave was not sealed at this point. Instead, “[a]ll that day the Conclave lies open to satisfy the curiosity of the people, who are permitted during that time to visit.”\(^4\) The ambassadors of the Catholic princes of Europe and the Roman barons used this time to advise the cardinals and try to influence the election. One can easily imagine the scene as the astonished crowd got a rare glimpse of the Sistine Chapel, while ambassadors jockeyed with one another to relay the desires and perhaps monies of their respective monarchs to the factional leaders among the cardinals. Naturally, it was the French, Spanish, and Imperial ambassadors, representatives of the Catholic monarchies, who sought the ears of the cardinals one last time before the door of the conclave was shut. Although Italians made up the majority of the cardinals in the conclave, each papal election pitted the pro-Spanish and pro-French factions against each other.\(^5\)

Toward the evening, the two Masters of Ceremonies rang a small bell, signaling to the gathered crowd that it was time to leave, while heralds more brusquely yelled, “Extra omnes” (“Everyone Out!”). The cardinals then returned to their cells as the Marshal of the Conclave, a member of the ancient Savelli family, ushered everyone out.

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\(^3\) Leti, *Ceremonies of the vacant see*, 23-24 and Anonymous, *A New History*, 7. The anonymous authors of the latter tome wrote that “All manner of persons may go in that Day to sastifie their curiosity; it being an Old custom to leave the Conclave Door open all that Afternoon, to give the more delight and satisfaction to the People;” see ibid, p. 12.

\(^4\) Leti, *Ceremonies of the vacant see*, 14-15.

\(^5\) For specific mention of the French, Spanish as well as Imperial ambassadors, see ASV, Segretario di State, Avvisi, t. 96, *avviso* of 13 August 1644, f. 215v. Also see ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 9, *avviso* of 22 July 1623, f. 199r, in which the Cardinal Nephew Ludovico Ludovisio talked with the ambassadors and Roman Barons, particularly the Colonna and Orsini, before the conclave was sealed.
and locked the only door to the conclave, which opened into the Sala Regia. He stationed 
guards at the door to watch it day and night. The political importance of the last 
opportunity to converse with the cardinals is attested by the refusal of French 
ambassador, François Annibal d’Estrées, to leave at the closing of conclave that elected 
Gregory XV in 1621. Advising the pro-French party of cardinals, he kept the conclave 
open until two in the morning before Savelli convinced him to return to his palace. At 
the closing of the conclave of 1644, it was the Spanish ambassador’s turn to tarry with 
the cardinals.

The cardinals were sequestered inside the conclave to prevent any contact with 
the corrupting influences of the city and foreign princes. The papal bulls *Ubi periculum* 
of Gregory X (1274) and *In eligendis* of Pius IV (1562) provided stringent rules for 
keeping the cardinals free from outside influence. Gregory X’s bull established the 
rubrics of the conclave (until Pius IV’s bull replaced it) in order to prevent the two-and-a- 
half year conclave in Viterbo that eventually elected him in 1268. The bull stipulated that

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9 On the bulls *Ubi Periculum* and *In Eligendus*, see Del Re, *Curia romana*, 461-94; Lorenzo Spinelli, *La vacanza della Sede apostolica dalle origini al Concilio tridentino* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1955), and Alberto Melloni, *Il conclave. Storia di una istituzione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), 45-47 and 58. Gregory XV issued the bulls *Aeterni patris* (1621) and *Decet Romanum Pontificem* (1622) to establish rules for secret balloting inside the conclave. These bulls were the last major changes in the rules of the early modern conclave.
the cardinals were to gather in the city where the pope died after ten days to elect his successor. This gave at least some of the cardinals who were not in the city at the time of the pope’s death the opportunity to travel to the conclave. However, the distance was too great for many ultramontane cardinals, who opted to remain in their home countries for the duration of the conclave. For example, an *avviso* discussing the details of the second papal election of 1605 noted that among the absent were two French cardinals, two Spanish cardinals and the bishop of Krakow. Consequently, most of the fifty to sixty cardinals who regularly participated in papal elections from 1559 to 1655 were Italian.

To avoid a prolonged *sede vacante* and the possibility of violence and disorder that frequently marked interregna, Gregory’s bull sought a hasty election. After three days without the election of a pope, the guardians of the conclave would reduce the cardinals’ rations. After another five days without results, the cardinals would be served only bread, water and wine. The prison-like environment of the conclave, coupled with the heat of summer and cold of winters, resulted in frequent illnesses and sometimes deaths among the old and infirm cardinals. During the election of 1644, excessive heat and an outbreak of malaria forced four cardinals to leave the conclave. One of them, Guido Bentivoglio died after returning to his palace in Rome. Gigli wrote that “he had a

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10 ASV, Segretario, t. 9, *avviso* of 11 May 1605, f. 14v.

11 Membership in the College of Cardinals gradually increased from twenty-five at the time of the Council of Constance (1414-18) to seventy after augmented it to seventy in 1586. See Paolo Prodi, *The Papal Prince: One Body and Two Souls: The Papal Monarchy in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Susan Hawkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 83. The actual number of cardinals in the college hovered between forty and seventy between 1559 and 1655. During these years, on average fifty-four cardinals took part in the each conclave, representing eighty-two percent of college. The preponderance of Italian cardinals in the conclave also reflected the Italianization of the college.
good chance of becoming pope, had he not died.” Likewise, during the more than two month conclave of 1655, many cardinals became sick and four left its premises. Several ill cardinals nevertheless refused to quit the election. The Tuscan cardinal, Vincenzo Maculano, although sick, remained in the conclave “because he hoped to become pope.” An absent cardinal had no chance of being elected pope.

_Ubi periculum_ also sought to free the election from outside influence, particularly from foreign rulers—at that time of the bull the French Angevin and the German Hohenstaufen—and their allies in Rome. In theory, anyone interfering with the election from outside would be excommunicated from the Church. Over the next three centuries, however, its rules were regularly flouted, so that Pius IV, after the long and tumultuous conclave that had raised him to the papal throne in 1559, issued _In eligendis_, which further restricted access to the conclave. This bull restated the prohibitions against outside contact, but also focused on the activities of those inside the conclave. The servants of the cardinals, called conclavists, had always been a major source of disorder in the conclave. Due to the excessive numbers of servants and courtiers in the conclave, its secrets quickly dispersed into the city. In 1549, the Venetian ambassador Matteo Dandolo, for example, commented on the disruption caused by the over four hundred men confined to the small space of the Vatican in the conclave that eventually elected

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12 Gigli, _Diario_, vol. II, 428, 429 and 430: “Era in gran concetto di dover riuscir Papa, se non moriva.”

13 Ibid, 735, 736, and 737: “perche sperava di esser papa.” Cardinal Pier Luigi Carafa died in the conclave, while cardinal Bernardino Spada “became sick with delirium because he had pretensions of being made pope” [ammalato di delirio, perche pretendeva di essere fatto papa”].
Julius III. Information on the election was so public during that conclave that a letter sent to a conclavist stated that Charles V “will know when they urinate in the conclave.”

Pius’s bull limited the number of conclavists each cardinal could have to two apiece, although infirm cardinals could have three with the approval of the Capi degli Ordini. These conclavists could not be relatives of the cardinals and had to have served them for at least a year. Each of them had to swear an oath to uphold the laws of the conclave. For their services in the conclave, the conclavists were to share 10,000 scudi among themselves, perhaps in a futile effort on the part of the cardinals to prevent the customary pillaging of the pope-elect’s cell that frequently occurred after the election’s announcement.

Other members of the conclave included two masters of ceremonies, charged with regulating all the rites surrounding the election of the next pontiff. Two surgeons, one apothecary, and two barbers took care of the medical needs of the cardinals. A chaplain and a sacristan saw to the spiritual needs of the cardinals. A master mason and a master carpenter saw to the continuous repair of the conclave walls. Finally, a team of about twenty servants performed menial tasks such as sweeping the chambers of the conclave


and carrying wood inside. Thus, despite Pius’s bull, the number of persons ensconced in the conclave was still quite high.  

As soon as the ambassadors left, “orders are given for the shutting up, and plaisteering all Holes and Doores about the Conclave, which is suddenly so well done that there’s scarce Room for a Fly to come in unto them.” Every door and entry was sealed with a combination of timber, wooden boards and bricks except for the main entrance to the conclave—which remained locked at all times—and four rota, or wheels, on which food and other necessary supplies could be sent to the cardinals. The Cardinal Chamberlain and one of the Capi degli Ordine inspected the sealing of the doors to make sure that they were airtight. Once the conclave was closed, all forms of communication, both written and verbal, with the outside world was forbidden to the cardinals and their servants. Officials of the conclave even inspected the plates and dinnerware of the cardinals to detect hidden letters, notes, and avvisi when their scalchi [masters of the table and kitchen] delivered food from outside.  

To help maintain the secrecy of the conclave and prevent tumults from bursting forth among the crowds that frequently gathered outside it, the College of Cardinals posted four different sets of guards. The first was a small guard of five or six soldiers from the artisan militia under the leadership of one of the conservators, an honorific post

16 For the servants, see Leti, Ceremonies of the vacant see, 18-19; Anonymous, A New History, 9; and Giovanni Battista De Luca, Il dottor volgare ovvero il compendio di tutta legge civile, canonica, feudale e municipale (Florence: V. Batelli, 1839-43 [1673]), vol. IV, bk. 15, ch. 3, pp. 481-82.

17 Ibid, 12.

18 Ibid, 12 and Leti, Ceremonies of the vacant see, 29.

19 ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 9. avviso of 29 July 1623, f. 205r.
 accorded to the Popolo Romano to include them in the electoral process. A far more important guard was composed of several companies of soldiers levied by the General of the Holy Church. The General was usually a relative of the deceased pope and one of the few offices connected to the pope’s family that continued in the vacancy. His soldiers typically came from the Patrimony of the Church (northern Lazio) and Umbria although sometimes they were supplanted with Corsican mercenaries.

The Governor of Borgo and the Marshal of the Conclave also oversaw a substantial body of soldiers. The Governor of Borgo, an ecclesiastic, watched over the area around the conclave as well as neighborhood around the Vatican. He helped inspect the provisions that entered the conclave and oversaw the papal prisons of Castel Sant’Angelo along with the vice castellan of that fortress. The Governor of Borgo kept a guard of twenty-four halberdiers to aid in him in his office and supervised four companies of Swiss guards stationed at the entrance into the Vatican and at the stairs leading up to St. Peter’s Basilica. The Marshal of the Conclave, a member of the Savelli family until the extinction of the line in 1712, levied four companies of soldiers for a total of five hundred men to protect the conclave.

20 ASC, Cred. I, vol. 6, 8 May 1572, ff. 118v and 122r.

21 On the soldiers of the General of the Holy Church, see Anonymous, A New History, 8 and ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 96, avviso of 13 August 1644, f. 215v.

22 On the ecclesiastical Governor of Borgo, see Niccolò Del Re, “Il Governoatore di Borgo,” Studi Romani 11 (1963), n. 20 on p. 20.

23 On the soldiers of the Governor of Borgo, see Anonymous, A New History, 8 and ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 96, avviso of 13 August 1644, f. 217r.

24 For the Marshal of the Holy Church; see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.
The Marshal served as a go-between for the cardinals. He held the three keys that opened the only door of the conclave, located at the Sala Regia. These keys were a powerful symbol of his authority; he even incorporated them into his banner that hung from the apartment in which he stayed during the length of the vacancy. Those who wanted entrance into the conclave had to carry special coins, usually lead, that bore his arms on one side and the symbol of *sede vacante*, the crossed keys beneath an umbrella, on the reverse.\(^{25}\) He also had a corporal and several soldiers monitor each of the four wheels through which food passed to the cardinals. Because Savelli performed many of the same duties as the Governor of Borgo, the two officials frequently clashed with one another, particularly over possession of the keys to the conclave.

The Marshal controlled all access, whether in person or written form, to the cardinals in the conclave. Nobles and foreign ambassadors had to announce their intentions if they wished to converse with the cardinals concerning matters of state. Since the Marshal was typically busy elsewhere in the conclave, he sent a gentleman in his stead to greet noble visitors as well as late cardinals entering the conclave after its closure. Although the Marshal could not welcome each visitor, their arrival was hailed with the roll of a drum and the unfolding of the Savelli flag.\(^{26}\)

\(^{25}\) Niccolò Del Re, *Il Maresciallo di Santa Romana Chiesa, Custode del Concalve* (Rome: Istituto di studi romani editore, 1962), 50-51. In addition to the coins, the Marshal, his troops and the Swiss guards often used passwords that allowed conclavists and fellow guard to enter restricted areas of the conclave. The password consisted of a name of a saint, followed by the name of a city. It was changed nightly (p. 57). Each of the Savelli soldiers in their turn carried licenses so that the civic patrols of the caporini would not interfere with their duties, see BAV, Chigiani, R II, t. 67, “Patente di Giulio Savelli per la sede vacante di Clemente XI,” 29 September 1700, f. 175r.

\(^{26}\) Ibid. See also BAV, Chigani, R II, t. 67, “Ricordi per il Conclave: notizie avute dalla Casa Savelli [1721],” f. 30v.
The number of soldiers guarding the conclave impressed observers. The anonymous authors of a history of the conclave wrote that “from St. Angelo’s Bridge to the Stairs of the Conclave, there’s to be seen besides Arms and armed Men, all designed for the Security of the Conclave, and the Free Election of the Pope.” Yet, despite the bulls calling for a strict closure of the conclave and the forest of pikes and harquebuses guarding the Vatican region, information flowed in and out of the conclave quite easily. The four rote were an obvious weak spot through which ambassadors and nobles could talk to or pass notes to the conclavists and cardinals inside the conclave. In the vacancy of Paul IV in 1559, an avviso noted the openness of the conclave: “In effect the business of the Conclave proceeds very foolishly without any order, a thing that is not usual, because now they freely write and send letters inside and out.”

During the sede vacante of Clement VIII, the Governor of Borgo, Monsignor Serra, wrote the Capi degli Ordini that letters entered the conclave without their official approval. He promised to send two prelates to inspect the wheels with more care. Nearly forty years later, during the conclave of Innocent X, the Marshal of the Conclave wrote to the Capi degli Ordini that “if the rote remained opened notes and other things might pass through [into the

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28 BAV, Urb.lat 1039, *avviso* of 23 September 1559, ff. 85r-v: “In effetto le cose del Conclave procedono molt’alla balorda senz’alcn ordine, cosa che non suol essere, perch’adesso si scrivon et si mandono delle lre, et dent’ et fuori senza rispett’alcuna.”

29 ASV, Conclavi, “Lettere spedite per la morte di Clemente VIII, Leone XI, Paolo V, e Gregorio XV,” letter of 19 March 1605 from Monsignor Serra to the Capi degli Ordini, f. 90r. A testament to the openness of the conclave, the incident was revealed in an *avviso* of 23 March 1605, see BAV, Urb.lat 1073, f. 141r, which stated that the “wheels and door of the Conclave until now were kept with very little guardianship, therefore inside they resolved to changing guards and restrain things”: “Sono state le rote et porta del Conclave fin hora tenute con molta poca custodia però di dentro rissolvero muttar custody, et di ristrender le cose.”
conclave].”

Gregorio Leti, in his treatise on the papal conclave, concluded that
“notwithstanding all the caution and vigilance us’d as to this particular, yet cannot some
abuses be prevented; and people come to know what passes there. This happens
sometimes by the way of Notes or Advertisements in writing.”

The servants and conclavists frequently leaked information concerning the
election to the outside. During the long vacancy of Paul III in 1549-50, some 70
conclavists, gentlemen, merchants, and royal agents were expelled from the Conclave,
“who were of no service there and troubled negotiations by sending out false advices, and
receiving others of the same nature.”

It is telling that when Pius IV turned his attention
to addressing the problems of the conclave in his bull In eligendis, he forbade merchants,
foreign agents and relatives of cardinals from acting as conclavists for the cardinals.

According to Leti, letters were not the only means with which cardinals and
conclavists communicated to those outside the conclave. He wrote of “a secret kind of
language beforehand, studied and agreed upon between the Conclavists, and their
correspondents, whereof they make their advantages when occasions serves, they enquire
News, the Names of such Cardinals as are propos’d, or excluded, or that stand fair for the
Papal dignity, and so by disguiz’d discourses, and an affected Jargon applicable to divers
senses, disclosing what is most secretly carried on in the conclave.”

Leti indicated that

30 ASV, Conclavi, “Urbano VIII,” undated letter to Capi degli Ordini, f. 380r: “si le Rote restat.o aperte, si
potrebbe trasmettere, e polize et altro.”

31 Leti, Ceremonies of the vacant see, 25-26.


33 Del Re, La curia romana, 485-87.

34 Leti, Ceremonies of the vacant see, 26-27.
Cardinals intentionally leaked news to the public in order “to promote their different engagements and affections, or to prevent prejudicing their hopes, or that their precautions are really excluded.”

*Avvisi* writers made great use of such information and dispersed it throughout Rome and Italy in their hand-written newsletters. They often employed spies in the conclave as an *avviso* writer noted that an “Amico” informed him of the infighting and discord among the cardinals so that he speculated they would take a long time in creating a pope. Another *avviso* writer announced that “through a note of the Conclave it is heard that the business [of electing a pope] goes very uneasy and with great discord.”

A conclavist writing about the election of Innocent X further commented on the process of information disseminating from the conclave to the court and city:

Truly there was never found any Conclave that stirred such curiosity in the Court to search with much fervency the intrigues as the one that created Innocent X. Therefore many writers, in order to satisfy the repeated requests of their friends, made known to the World the affairs of the said Conclave. And what is worse, many of them failing to obtain the news of things more essential, curious and substantial went roaming in the explanation of certain reports that have done well in the market.

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35 Ibid.

36 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 12 September 1590, f. 467r: “Si dicono veramente gran cosa delle iscordie, che passano fra’ li Cardinali et si tien per fermo del conclave sia per andare in lungo assai…..Hier sera trovandomi a Palazzo, un mio Amico mi venne a dire, che in quel parto essendo lui alla Ruota del Conclave, haver udito, quando li Cardinali fecero chiamare il signor Honorato, et gli ordinorno che crescesse cinquecento soldati alle guardie.”

37 BAV, Urb.lat 1039, *avviso* of 23 September 1559, f. 85r: “et per una pollzia del Conclave s’è inteso, che le cose vanno molto strette, e con discordia grande.”

38 ASV, Conclavi, “Conclavi da Pio II a Innocenzo X,” f. 453f: “Veramente non si trovò mai Conclave alcuno, che svegliese tanto la curiosità della Corte, a cercarne con ogni caldezza gli intrighi, come fu quello nel quale fu creato Innocentio X. Quindi e che molti scrittori, per sodisfare alle replicate instanze de’ loro amici, si diedero a publicar al Mondo gli affar di detto Conclave; e quel ch’è peggio, che mancando a molti di loro le notitie delle cose più necessarie, curiose, e di sostanza, andarono vagando nelle speigatura, di certi racconti, ch’erano bene stati in piazza.”
The cardinals themselves broke the rules of the conclave with abandon. During Paul III’s vacancy, the Venetian ambassador Matteo Dandolo wrote that the cardinals “may indeed be said to be at large, rather than locked up; for their dispatches go and come by ordinary mails as if they were each of them free in Rome, and not confined in the Conclave; and the servants, whether sick or sound, depart and return at their pleasure.” And they found various ways of circumventing the rules of the conclave. During the conclave of 1566, the Governor of Borgo found a note in the glove of Cardinal Innocenzo Ciocchi del Monte. The discovery of the note caused a great stir in the court, but its contents were not published. According to the diarist Giacinto Gigli, Cardinal Antonio Barberini was so intent on “making a pope according to his taste” after the death of his uncle, Urban VIII, he was prepared “to die in the conclave” to secure his choice. Before entering the conclave he made up a will and had servants bring to his cell many books and other things to pass the time. In order to keep abreast of outside news, he had a hole made in his cell that corresponded with the courtyard of the Belvedere. The Capi degli Ordini had the opening sealed and arrested the mason who made it. During the vacancy of 1655, a servant of Cardinal Gualtieri was caught sending notes discussing

40 BAV, Urb.lat 1040, avviso of 15 January 1566, f. 161v.
41 Gigli, Diario, vol. II, 427. The anonymous authors of the A New History of the Roman Conclave also noted that complete secrecy was impossible as “for there is still found out some new abuse, or some crafty trick of conveying Tickets or Notes of Intelligence into unsuspected corners, so that it is daily known what has agitated in the Conclave (p. 9);” the authors speculated that ciphers and occult symbols may have been used in disseminating this information.
the election of pope to Innocent X’s sister-in-law, Dona Olimpia Maidalchini. Like many papal relatives, Donna Olimpia sought to manipulate the election in favor of the Pamphilij in order to prolong their influence within the Curia and in Rome.

As the last two examples indicate, the Sacred College and its guardians could take their duty to watch over the conclave seriously. Other examples exist as well. On the last day of November 1549, during Paul III’s vacancy, the Governor of Borgo had seven individuals removed for unlawfully entering the conclave. During the back-to-back vacancies of Sixtus V and Urban VII in the late summer and autumn of 1590 the Conclave remained so porous the College of Cardinals ordered the lieutenant general of the Holy Church, Honorato Caetano, to hang immediately anyone that made a hubbub around the conclave or sought to enter its premises. Ironically, this in-house order was leaked to the avvisi writers who then broadcasted through Rome in their news reports. The Marshal of the Conclave, as well, arrested several interlopers during the vacancies of 1644 and 1655. For the most part, however, these rules remained unenforceable since the cardinals, relaying information to friends and allies outside, blatantly disregarded them when it suited their purposes. Thus, arrests for disturbing the conclave despite these provisions are virtually nonexistent.

42 Gigli, *Diario*, vol. II, 737. The servant, one Francesco Ravizza, was imprisoned in Castel Sant’Angelo on 3 March 1655.


44 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 24 November 1590, f. 610v.

45 For the arrests made during the conclave of 1644; see BC, cod 1832, Teodoro Aneyden, “Diario di Roma,” 125. For those made during the conclave of 1655; see the Getty Research Institute, MS, “Diario di Gioseffe Gualdi, 1654-55,” t. II, f. 38r.
Rather the Capi degli Ordini frequently made exceptions for the powerful nobles of the city as an avviso issued during the conclave of 1623 reveals: “Many of these Roman Barons and other lordships were granted the favor of being able to go to speak at the Ruote of the conclave with the Cardinals [who] were their relatives and on friendly terms, always with the help of the Cardinal Capi degli Ordini on the part of those inside and those on the outside with the help of Monsignor Cesarini, Governor of this Conclave, and other prelates.”

The ambassadors of Italian principalities and the three Catholic crowns of Europe openly disregarded the rules of the conclave more than anyone else. Venetian ambassadors routinely disclosed to the Senate of Venice the results of the daily scrutinies and the general direction that the election was taking. Often their dispatches informed the reports of the avvisi writers. While Venetian ambassadors were known for their penetrating analysis, other ambassadors, particularly those of the Catholic monarchs north of the Alps were better known for their attempts to sway the conclave. Thomas Dandelet had shown how, starting with Charles V and the conclave of 1523, Spanish gold flowed into papal coffers in an effort to influence the election. Philip II regularly sent a list of acceptable candidates to his ambassador to give to the cardinals at the onset of the election. Even the Marshal of the Conclave was on the Spanish crown’s bankroll as

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46 ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 9, avviso of 29 July 1623, f. 205r: “A molti di questi Baroni Romani, et ad altri Signori e stata concessa gratia di poter andar a parlare alle Ruote del Conclave con Cardinali loro Parenti, et affettionati, ma sempre con l’assistenza de Cardinali Capi d’Ordini dalle parte di dentro, et da quella di fuori con l’assistenza di Monsignore Cesarini Governatore d’esso Conclave, et d’altri Prelati.”

Giulio Savelli received an annual pension of one thousand ducats from Philip IV in order to pay for the weapons and supplies needed by his troops during sede vacante.\textsuperscript{48} The French kings, too, played this game. At first, they were less successful than Philip II, but by the seventeenth century they had made his influence felt on conclave.

During the sixteenth century, the monarchs of Spain, France and the Holy Roman Empire acquired the right of exclusion; that is, they could signal to their ambassadors in Rome that one candidate would never meet their approval and thus should be removed from the election. With this veto, the French and Spanish exerted a greater control over the outcome of the election. Philip II used it to dictate the three elections after the death of Sixtus V in the early 1590s. For example, during the conclave of Innocent IX, the Venetian ambassador Alberto Badoer wrote to his government that he expected a long conclave “because in the end many of the signor cardinals wish that the election to fall on some candidate other than the seven named by Spain and to others it does not appear to be reasonable to make one excluded by the King.”\textsuperscript{49}

Whether or not the Spanish and French factions had asserted themselves, the ambassadors representing their monarchs tried every means to infiltrate the conclave in order to acquire election news and to relay their monarch’s wishes to the cardinals.

Dandolo mentioned that during the conclave of 1549 the French ambassador appeared

\textsuperscript{48} BAV, Chigiani, R II, t. 67, ff. 15v-17r, letter from Viceroy of Naples to Giulio Savelli, 22 November 1664. This letter, preserved in Italian and Italianized Spanish, discusses the annual payment that Savelli received to offset the expenses of defending the conclave.

\textsuperscript{49} ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 26, dispatch of 25 October 1590, ff. 134v-135r: “perche infine molti delli signori cardinali voriano, che la elettione cascasse in alcuno soggetto, che non fosse delli sette nominate da Spagna et altri non parendo ragionevole far alcuno delis escludi dal Re.”
outside the *rota* talking to the French cardinals and giving them letters from Henry II.\(^{50}\)

The Spanish ambassador, Francisco de Vargas, brazenly violated the rules of the conclave during the vacancy of Paul IV, visiting the conclave as often as four times a day.\(^{51}\) The ambassadors all took the turns at the wheels, according to an *avvisi* issued during the conclave of 1644, which noted that “Sunday the signor Ambassador of Spain was at the audience of the Conclave at the Ruote, Tuesday the signor Ambassador of France was there, and also the signor Duke Savelli, as the Imperial Ambassador, went there often.”\(^{52}\) As this *avviso* shows it was commonplace for royal ambassadors to talk to the cardinals via the wheels as the conclave officials turned a blind eye to the forbidden transactions. Even the Duke Savelli, both the Marshal of the Conclave and ambassador to the Holy Roman Empire during Urban VIII’s vacancy, ignored the rubrics of the conclave. Occasionally, the Capi degli Ordini conceded to the inevitable, allowing the ambassadors and members of the Roman baronage, such as the Colonna and Orsini, a few hours to enter the conclave to negotiate with the cardinals and discuss matters relating to the election.\(^{53}\)

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\(^{50}\) Dispatch of Matteo Dandolo of 7 December 1549, *CSP*, vol. V, 281.

\(^{51}\) Baumgartner, *Behind Locked Doors*, 118

\(^{52}\) ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 96, *avviso* of 3 September 1644, f. 235r: “Domenic il signor Ambasciatore di Spagna fu all’audienza del Conclave alle Ruote di esso, e martedi vi fu il signor Ambasciatore di Francia, andandovi anco spesso il signor Duca Savelli com’ Ambasciatore Cesareo.”

\(^{53}\) During the conclave of 1644 alone the cardinals met with the notables and ambassadors on several occasions. On 13 August 1644, the entire day the door of the Conclave was left open for the ambassadors of the three Catholic monarchs to enter and talk with the cardinals. That day the Signor Contestable Colonna and other barons also entered into the Conclave; see ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 96, *avviso* of 13 August 1644, f. 215v. Later in the vacancy, the Marchese di Soragno, sent by the Duke Odoardo Farnese, talked to the senior members of the Sacred College outside the *rota* on behalf of his friend with regard to the War of Castro; see *avviso* of 10 September 1644, f. 241r.
In some cases, the threat of violence could be used to influence the election, even when not used directly against the conclave. The Spanish and their allies used the Sienese nobleman Alfonso Piccolomini and his bandits to intimate the cardinals in the election of 1585. They even smuggled Piccolomini into the city to meet the Spanish ambassador and his bandits entered the city in such great number that the “cardinals, being in the conclave, resolved to make the pope immediately.”54 The Spanish failed in 1585; the cardinals elected the vigorous and independent Sixtus V. But they had better luck after his death. During his sede vacante and that of his successor, Urban VII, Piccolomini directed his bandit army against papal forces and territory as a gambit to win back his confiscated papal fief of Monte Marciano. According to the Venetian ambassador Badoer, Piccolomini said he would cease his raids into papal territory if “the signor cardinals would make Mondavi, Colonna or Cremona pope.”55 So eager was he for results of the election that Piccolomini offered one thousand scudi to anyone who could bring him news of the conclave.56 Rumors ran rampant throughout the vacancy that behind Piccolomini raids were Spanish arms and money.57 To make matters worse, the papacy, ever dependent on foreign grain to feed its populace, suffered through an intense famine in the same months as the conclave. Ministers of the Viceroy of Naples, with Philip II’s approval, withheld grain from Sicily, “wanting to wait to send it until a pope

54 BAV, Urb.lat 1053, avviso of 21 April 1585, f. 192v: “li Cardinali essendo in Conclavio si risolvuno a far subito il Papa.” For the Spanish bringing Piccolomini into Rome during the vacancy, see Lorenzo Grottanelli, Alfonso Piccolomini: Storia del secolo XVI (Florence: Uffizio della rassegna nazionale, 1892), 94-94.

55 ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 26, dispatch of 1 December 1590, ff. 203v-204r: “se li signori Cardinali faranno Papa Mondavi, Colonna, o Cremona usciranno senz’altro del Paese.”

56 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 8 December 1590, f. 640v.
was made in their way."58 The reputation of Spain and its people suffered as the famine worsened during the autumn. Murmurings against Spain grew until in November a crowd of Romans attacked six Spaniards as they walked past the Pantheon, blaming them for the lack of grain.59 Generally, violence against the Spanish, despite the power their king wielded, rarely occurred during sede vacante. This was most likely because the Spanish ambassador brought several companies of soldiers from the Kingdom of Naples into the city at every sede vacante.60

The Conclave and Public Opinion

The papal election could not escape the machinations of kings and emperors. But interregnal officials also could not prevent the market from touching the election in the form of gambling, to the chagrin of reforming prelates. Wagering on the papal election was a popular pastime, but also a business that was officially conducted through brokers (sensali) who located their shops in Rome’s financial district of the Banchi, the Banks. Florentine merchants and bankers typically filled this role. The bettor would choose a cardinal that he considered papabile and then wager his money on this candidate just as one does when placing a bet on a horse. The broker would then give the bettor a ticket (a

58 Ibid, avvisi of 24 November and 15 December 1590, ff. 616r and 648r; quote from 616r: “ma i ministri Regii lo ritengono, volendo aspettare, che sia fatto il Papa a loro modo.”

59 Ibid, avviso of 21 November 1590, f. 606r.

60 I make this point in Chapter 3. During the vacancy of Clement VIII, an avviso noted that a confectioner attacked an official of the Spanish mail service after having words with him, but it is unclear if this had anything to do with the election or to his connection with the Spanish government; see BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 9 March 1605, f. 110v.
poliza or cedole) as proof of his wager. For example, the saddle-maker, Gaspar Romano, arrested for betting on the first election of 1590, admitted that “I bought two tickets for [cardinal] Santi Quattro for four scudi and one for Castagna [i.e., elected Urban VII] for three scudi, which I then sold for twenty-two scudi.”

Although commoners could play, it was the nobility and wealthy merchant classes that played for the high stakes. At the end of the conclave that elected Julius III, the merchant Ceuli Banchieri of the Banchi won more than twenty-thousand scudi in the wagering. Most bettors were not so fortunate: five merchants in Florence went bankrupt after placing large sums on Cardinal Santa Severina in the vacancy of Urban VII in 1590. During the same interregnum, the Sienese noble Fabio Piccolomini also lost much money in the betting. Even the cardinals in the conclave took part in the gambling, as the Venetian ambassador Matteo Dandolo wrote in 1550 that the “Cardinals themselves” made “wagers of amber rosaries, perfumed gloves (which no one can do without out), she mules, chains, and even of money.”

Forty years later Alberto Badoer wrote that many cardinals had placed bets with the brokers of the Banchi. The wagering also took place outside of Rome, principally in Florence and Venice. Even princes took part in the gambling as the prince Pietro de’

61 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 411, testimony of Gaspar Sellaro Romano, 23 October 1590, f. 74r. Sbirri arrested Gaspar during Urban’s vacancy for placing additional bets at the Banchi.

62 For Ceuli, see the dispatch of Matteo Dandolo of 12 February 1550, CSP, vol. V, p. 310. For the bankruptcies in Florence, see BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 22 December 1590, f. 668v. For the brokers that organized wagers in sixteenth-century Rome; see Francesco Colzi, “Per maggiore felicità del commercio: I sensali e la mediazione mercantile e finanziaria a Roma nei secoli XVI-XIX,” Roma moderna e contemporanea 6 (1998), 404.


64 ASVenice, Dispacci, Roma, filza 26, dispatch of 29 November 1590, f. 139r. During the same vacancy, a servant of Sixtus V’s Camilla Peretti was arrested by police for placing a bet of five hundred scudi in her
Medici requested the names of *papabili* from his agent after the death of Gregory XIII in 1585 so that he could make an informed bet.65

The brokers kept well informed of the scrutinies, or the ballots that the cardinals once a day, which consequently influenced the betting as a dispatch from Matteo Dandolo reveals during the vacancy of Paul III:

England got up both beyond 46 and 50 [votes], so that at the second hour he was at 80 percent, and 30 percent was wagered that he would be proclaimed this morning. Salviati was at once and Sfondrato at two. At the eighth hour there were so many sure votes for the Right Reverend of England [i.e., Cardinal Reginald Pole], that they were at the point of adoring him, and they had already commenced unnailing [sic] the cells, but the Cardinal of Trani, and his other opponents commenced exclaiming that in this way one might promote a schism, unless one scrutiny at least were made.66

Dandolo continued, exclaiming that “[i]t is therefore more than clear that the merchants are very well informed about the state of the poll, and that the Cardinal’s attendants in Conclave go partners with them in wagers, which thus causes many tens of thousands of crowns [scudi] to change hands.” Five years later, during the vacancy of Marcellus II, Giovanni Cagarra complained to the Bishop of Feltre that “the Banchi with its wagers discovers the secrets of these intrigues” in the conclave.67 Ambassadors and particularly

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65 The Medici Archive Project, MdP 1234a, vol. 2, letter of Pietro de’ Medici to Piero Usimbardi, 13 April 1585. De’ Medici wrote that he wanted “to pass the time making some wagers as is usual during sede vacante.” Wagering took place in other large cities in Tuscany. At the end of the vacancy of Urban VII, the granducal criminal tribunal, the Otto sequestered the property and wagering tickets of merchants, including the Roman Tiberio Cevoli, in Pisa and Florence who had sent money and help to Alfonso Piccolomini; see BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avviso* of 22 December 1590, f. 66v.

66 Dispatch of Matteo Dandolo of 5 December 1550, *CSP*, vol. V, 280-81. After the electoral reform of Gregory XV in 1621, two scrutinies were held daily. By this time, however, the heyday of betting on the papal election was over.

67 BAV, Chigiani, R II, t. 54, letter of Giovanni Cagarra to the Bishop of Feltre, 11 May 1555, f. 229r: “Et banchi che con le sue scommesse scopre i secreti di questi maneggi.”
the *avvisi* writers recorded both the scrutinies and the wagering percentages to an eager audience throughout the sixteenth century.\(^{68}\) Indeed, one Juan Aghilar, a servant of cardinal Ippolito de’ Rossi, was arrested at the Banchi, carrying tickets, a purse of twelve scudi, and three letters respectively addressed to the Spanish ambassador, Cardinal Juan de Mendoza, and Cardinal Colonna.\(^{69}\)

The influence the wagering at the Banchi could have on the election and the rumors it could generate frightened observers and authorities. In listing the results of the day’s bets at the Banchi, Dandolo complained of the hopeless situation in the Conclave, writing that “the Pope, please God, will be created in conclave [and not in the marketplace] by a majority of two-thirds of the cardinals.”\(^{70}\) In the vacancy of Paul IV, The Mantuan ambassador Emilio Stangheli wrote to the Gonzagas that only the “foolish” listen to what the Banchi has to say about the election.\(^{71}\)

But listen the people did. Whenever a cardinal rose in the betting, immediately word spread through the city, sometimes becoming altered in its circuit into a rumor of a

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\(^{68}\) Most of these are merely number keeping; for examples see, BAV, Urb.lat 1038, *avvisi* of 6 and 30 April 1555, ff. 50r-50v; Urb.lat 1039, *avvisi* of 19 August and 23 December 1559, ff. 71v and 110v; Urb.lat 1053, *avvisi* of 13, 17 and 22 April 1585, ff. 171r, 177v, and 181r; BAV, Urb.lat 1058, *avvisi* of 12 September 1590, f. 466r. For ambassadors, see Dandolo’s dispatches of 10, 13 and 30 November 1549; 5 December 1549; and 15 January 1550, *CSP*, vol. V, 274, 276, and 278-80. The first evidence of wagering on the election of the pope through brokers can be found in the dispatches of the Venetian ambassador Agostino Giustinian for the conclave of Julius II in 1503; see Marino Sanudo, *I Diarii*, vol. 5 (Venice: F. Visentini, 1879-1903), 73ff.

\(^{69}\) ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 411, testimony of Giovanni Aghilar Spagnolo, 23 October 1590, ff. 72r-v. The ambassador in question was Enrique de Guzman, Count of Olivares. Aghilar did not specify whether the Cardinal Colonna was Marc Antonio or Ascanio.

\(^{70}\) Dispatch of Matteo Dandolo of 13 November 1549, *CSP*, vol. V, 276. Brackets are the addition of the editor Rawdon Brown.

\(^{71}\) ASM, Caretggio, filza 889, dispatch of Emilio Strangheli to Duke Gonzaga of Mantua, 8 November 1559, f. 685r.
cardinal’s election as pope. In the conclave of 1559, Giovanni Vertua wrote his master, Count Brunoro of Gambara, that “from the Conclave in the Banchi came a rumor that Cardinal Puteo was pope.”72 A more far-reaching example happened during the vacancy of Urban VII in 1590 when the Bolognese cardinal Gabriele Paleotti increased to seventy percent in the wagering starting a rumor of his election that led to a tumultuous chain of events that even misled the interregnal officials:

Wednesday at the twenty-second hour rumor began to hold Paleotti as Pope, and it went on increasing so that at the end of the morning he had risen to 70 in the wagering. Messengers were sent out [with the news of his election], his coat-of-arms were attached in different places in the city, the Caporioni kept guard at his house beneath the Conclave, and in St. Peter’s candles were lit, and other preparations made by the clergy.73

Later that evening the rumor died down, but as a result the Capi degli Ordini had carpenters reinforce the walls of the conclave and made the conclavists swear an oath over the Bible “not to send forth news” of the election. Moreover, they had the Governor of Rome arrest thirty brokers and merchants of the Banchi as well as several men armed with outlawed handguns that they kept as guards.74

Other examples exist of wagering at the Banchi stirring rumors of an election of the pope, but the brokers also intentionally created stories that could have an impact on

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73 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 13 October 1590, f. 525v: “Mercoledì su le hore cominciò a tenersi Paleotto per Papa, et ando crescendo tanto fino alla mattina, et ne furono a 70 su le scommesse, et ne furono spedito corrieri, attaccate l’armi in diversi luoghi della Città, i Caporioni tesserò alla guardia della casa di esso Paleotto, sotto il conclave, et in San Pietro accesi i lumi, et fatte altre preparationi da ql clero.”

74 Ibid, ff. 525v-26. Among those arrested was a relative of the Ambassador of Tuscany. The brokers kept “intelligence, traffic and commerce” with those inside the conclave by making scaffolds from which they
the election.\textsuperscript{75} In 1555, the cardinal of Naples stood a good chance of being elected pope, ranking among the top three \textit{papabili} in the first scrutiny of the conclave that elected Paul IV. Yet, brokers intentionally “spread the rumor that Naples had died,” which conclave observers believed because he failed to attend both Mass that morning and the congregation of cardinals later that afternoon. The rumor immediately lowered his chances in the wagering at the Banchi. The rumor caused so much consternation that the cardinals in the congregation ordered that originators of the rumor suffer the gallows and the confiscation of their property.\textsuperscript{76} This episode shows how public opinion could be manipulated by a small cadre of merchants for their own gain.

The Capi degli Ordini made repeated efforts to stop the wagering on the election in the vacancy, but to no avail. During the conclave that elected Paul IV, they forbade all wagering—a degree that was largely ignored.\textsuperscript{77} Pius IV had banned gambling on the papal election in his bull \textit{In eligendis}, although brokers and their clients largely flouted this law. In the vacancy of Gregory XIII, an \textit{avviso} noted that Romans waged on the election of the pope “in contempt of the Bull.”\textsuperscript{78} These decrees and bulls were largely ignored because the cardinals themselves only haphazardly enforced them. As with many practices in the early modern world, the cardinals took an ambivalent stance

\textsuperscript{75} For other examples, see BAV, Urb.lat 1039, \textit{avviso} of 11 November 1559, f. 101v and Urb.lat 1053, \textit{avviso} of 17 April 1585, f. 177v.

\textsuperscript{76} BAV, Chigiani, R II, t. 54, letter of Giovanni Cagarra to the Bishop of Feltre, 11 May 1555, ff. 230v-31r.

\textsuperscript{77} BAV, Urb.lat 1038, \textit{avviso} of 4 May 1555, f. 54r.

\textsuperscript{78} BAV, Urb.lat 1053, \textit{avviso} of 20 April 1585, f. 184r.
towards betting on the election. On one hand, they could condemn the pernicious effects
it had on the election; on the other, many actively participated in the wagering.

The situation began to change during the pontificate of the stern pope Sixtus V,
who issued a deluge of bandi in 1587-89 through his Cardinal Chamberlain Enrico
Caetani curtailing all forms of wagering, such as maschio et femina (betting on the sex of
unborn children) and the promotion of cardinals. These decrees begrudgingly allowed
wagering to occur, but only through thirty brokers officially recognized by the Apostolic
Chamber and hindered by a set of criteria. The Apostolic Chamber imposed a five
hundred scudi penalty as well as a five-year stint in the galleys to all unregistered brokers
who refused to close shop. In 1587, betting on the promotion of cardinals was the first
form of wagering attacked by Sixtus, who banned it outright, not only because it
subjected holy people to the affairs of the market, but also because “it ruined poor
artisans.” Finally, Sixtus outlawed the wagering on the sex of unborn children and

For the bando on the thirty brokers, see ASV, Bandi Sciolti, ser. I, busta 2, bando of 10 August 1588, p.
40. Six months earlier, Caetani issued a bando forbidding wagering on feast days because of “little
respect” it carried towards such holy days; see Ibid, bando of 19 February 1588, p. 64. The Apostolic
Chamber imposed a fine of five hundred scudi on brokers and betters caught gaming on feast days. This
bando also tried to limit the amount people could wage to twenty-five scudi. Caetani reissued the same
provisions in a bando of 10 July 1589; see ASV, Misc. Arm IV & V, t. 203, p. 518.

ASV, Misc. Arm IV & V, t. 203, bandi of 2 September and 28 December 1588, pp. 520 and 524.

ASV, Misc. Arm IV & V, t. 203, bando of 17 December 1587, p. 527; the Governor of Rome Giovanni
Matteucci rather than Caetani issued this decree. “poiche per esse si rounano li poveri Artigiani; s’apre la
strada ad infinite falsità, si detrache [sic] la fama del prossimo, per il che viene a pericolo d’inimicitie, e
questioni” and was also an “offesa di Dio, e dell’anime loro.” The Apostolic Chamber fined lords and
gentlemen five scudi for wagering on the promotion of cardinals; artisans and “people of low condition”
were sent to the galleys for five years and lost their bets. Jews who bought and sold tickets of wager lost
their money and were sent to the galley in perpetuum. Brokers could also be sent to the galleys.
renewed the ban on betting on the promotion of cardinals under the pain of hundred scudi in December 1589.\footnote{ASV, Misc. Arm IV & V, t. 203, \textit{bando} of 5 December 1589, p. 526. Just four months earlier, he had imposed regulations on \textit{maschio et femina}, but had not outlawed it; see ASV, Misc. Arm IV & V, t. 203, \textit{bando} of 31 July 1589, p. 589.}

The efforts of Sixtus to curtail all forms of wagering influenced the cardinals in their regulation of Rome during his vacancy. Upon entering the conclave they outlawed wagering on the papal election.\footnote{BAV, Urb.lat 1058, \textit{avviso} of 12 September 1590, f. 466r.} A month later, after the brief pontificate of his successor Urban VII, the cardinals renewed the ban on betting on the future election.\footnote{ASR, Bandi, Governatore, vol. 410, \textit{bando} of 13 October 1590.} Four days later, the Governor of Rome, Giovanni Matteucci, showed that he intended to enforce the decree. He had \textit{sbirri} raid the shops of Banchi where they confiscated tickets and subjected many brokers to the \textit{corda} “to extract from them those people who had commerce with them.” Matteucci planned to strike at the wealthy supporters of those who wagered on the election, and his strategy succeeded, as an \textit{avviso} writer reported “this was a mess that will entangle and embrace many lords and several Illustrious [Cardinals].” He went on to say that “this prohibition against wagering removes the freedom from this market and will make money flow to Florence, Naples and elsewhere” and complained of the loss of “freedom of the conclave to talk [about the election], send forth notes, speak in jargon and to know almost openly what happens inside.”\footnote{For all four quotes, see BAV, Urb.lat 1058, \textit{avviso} of 17 October 1590, f. 536r: “per cavare da loro qual persone habbiano tenuto commertio con essi” and “che inviluppa molti signori, et parecchi Ill.mi, la qual prohibizione di scommesse leva la libertà a questa piazza, et fa che il denaro corre a Fiorenza, Napoli, et altrove,” and “libertà del conclave di parlar, mandar fuori polize, parlare gergo, et finalmente sapersi quasi in publico quanto si fa la dentro.”}

Released

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on a 10,000 scudi security, the brokers and merchants remained defiant. They continued to make wagers, but since sbirri closely monitored the Banchi, they met their clients within the sanctuary [franchigia] of Cardinal Francesco Sforza, head of the Capi degli Ordini, who ordered the arrest of the brokers. Sforza had them chased away after he was informed of their activities by his mother. Nevertheless, they refused to give up, retiring first to the sanctuary of the Orsini in Monte Giordano until again they were again forced to leave. Then they fled to the palace of the Colonna at the opposite end of Rome, before settling in the vineyard of Paolo Sforza near Monte Cavallo. The choice of the Sforza residences had obviously mocking undertones, while that of the Orsini and Colonna was perhaps an attempt to enlist the protection of these two powerful families.86

Urban VII’s successor, the pious Gregory XIV, issued the definitive statement on wagering on papal elections. On 21 March 1591, he issued the bull Cogit nos that outlawed wagering on the election of popes, the duration of their pontificates, and the promotion of cardinals on the pain of excommunication and perpetual banishment.87 The bull complained of sacrilege committed by brokers and their clients since “with the spiritual and the sacred they mix any sort of money, & go about attaching to them the foulest customs of the market.” It condemned them for forgetting that these “affairs

86 Ibid, avviso of 27 October 1590, f. 556r. Others met under the protection of the franchigia of the Florentine ambassador; see ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 411, testimony of Giovanni Aghilar Spagnolo, 23 October 1590, f. 73r. Also arrested for placing bets on the election at the franchigia of Cardinal Sforza were the goldbeater named Girolamo Lanni da Montepulciano, a glovemaker named Agostino Gatti, and a shopkeeper’s apprentice named Pietro Tornaroli Romano, see their testimonies in ASR, TCG, Costituti, vo. 409, 4 December 1590, ff. 198v-99v.

87 Yale University, Beinecke Library, no. 245, “Bolla della Santità di N. S. Gregorio PP XIV contra chi fa scommesse sopra la vita & morte o sopra la futura elezione del Pontefice Romano o sopra le promotioni dei Cardinali della Santa Chiesa Romana,” 21 March 1591.
belonged to God.” 88 Although Gregory’s bull concerned the entire Catholic world, parts of it seemed specifically addressed to the players at the Banchi. For example, it condemned them for impeding and delaying the election, which as we have seen could happen due to the rumors produced at the banks and shops in the financial district. The papacy had the details of the bull printed in Italian and posted along the walls of the city, outside its churches and on the doors of taverns. 89

The impact of *Cogit nos* on wagering on papal elections was immediately felt during his *sede vacante* that occurred less than six months later. An *avviso* issued after the election of Innocent IX noted that “in this last sede vacante there were wagers made here, but [only] among a few, in spite of the rigorous bull made against them by Gregory XIV.” 90 Four months later, during the vacancy of the short-lived Innocent, the Venetian ambassador Giovanni Moro noted the greater diligence that the cardinals employed against the brokers and their activities. 91 Gregory’s bull then was the death knell for the organized wagering on papal elections that took place through brokers at the Banchi. A final decree against the practice was issued as part of a general *bando* during the vacancy of Clement VIII in 1605, but by then wagering in general had gone underground. 92

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88 Ibid.: “spirituali, & sacre si mescola sorte alcuna di danari, & si va attacando una bruttissima maniera di mercantia” and “cose appertinenti a Dio.”

89 See above. The Legate of Bologna also had an Italian copy posted throughout his city; see ASR, Bandi, vol. 8, summary of the bull of Gregory XIV, *Cogit nos*, of 19 October 1591.

90 BAV, Urb.lat 1059, pt. II, *avviso* of 2 November 1591: “in questa ultima sede vacante si sia giocato qua a scommesse, ma tra pochi, non ostante la rigorosa Bolla fatta sopra ciò da Gregorio XIV.”

91 ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 29, dispatch of 18 January 1592, f. 334r.

the 1590s its institutionalized form at the Banchi had disappeared. The conclave reports and *avvisi* of the seventeenth century make no mention of this practice and interregnal authorities, who still issued decrees against dicing, card-playing and other forms of gambling, remained silent on the matter as well.

The cardinals’ efforts to regulate wagering on the papal election met with stunning success, but their attempts at controlling other forms of public discourse during the vacancy failed utterly. The astrological discourse, both scholarly and popular, concerning the election was a case in point. Foretelling the election was closely tied to the wagering in the Banchi as Gregory XIV’s bull made provisions against divinatory means of forecasting the election. But even after the brokers of the Banchi were shut down, predicting the next pope remained a pervasive activity. Since Gregory’s bull banned astrological calculations on the election, most writings on the election had to be passed surreptitiously from hand to hand rather than published openly in printed treatises. Two have survived for the conclave of 1623, included by archivists with accounts of papal elections from Pius II to Innocent X. Both accounts give the horoscope of several cardinals deemed *papabile*, explaining the celestial influences that may aid the candidate in his bid for the throne of St. Peter. Predictions were made regarding the length of the vacancy as well. In 1605, several astrologers, after reading the signs in the heavens, predicted a long *sedē vacante* after the death of Clement VIII. Astrologers also sold their

93 Yale University, Beinecke Library, no. 245, “Bolla contra chi fa scommesse,” 21 March 1591.

94 ASV, “Conclavi da Pio II a Innocentio X,” “Scritture sopra sette Card.li Papabili p la presente Sede Vacante,” ff. 753r-758r and “Discorso politico astrologico sopra il futuro pontefice,” ff. 916r-919r.”
services to those with a vested interest in the outcome of the election. This could have dangerous results for some. During the vacancy of Innocent IX in 1592, four masked men attacked a professor of astrology, telling him at dagger point to quit predicting the election in favor of Cardinal of Como.

More popular forms of predicting the election existed. The satirist Gregorio Leti wrote that the vacancy, “finds so much exercise for the wits of the Citizens of Rome, whom the Air of the Countrey ordinarily entertains languishment, whence it comes that they spend the best of their time in speculative discourse, and political divinations.”

Leti then proceeded to list some of the methods of forecasting the election among Romans. Some were based on a logical assessment of the machinations that took place in the conclave: Romans often guessed that one of the older candidates would be given the tiara since many cardinals desired the papacy for themselves. A short-lived pope would not get in the way of the political ambitions of younger cardinals and also made a good compromise candidate when the various factions remained at loggerheads.

Speculations took on a more superstitious nature. A type of omonancy was popular among the people in which the newly elected pope would not have the letter “r” in his surname if the deceased pope’s surname had contained the same letter. Leti pointed out this was based on an alternating pattern of popes with or without the letter “r”

95 BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 16 March 1605, f. 129r. These same astrologers predicted that Cardinal de’ Medici would win the election in April and bring prosperity to the city. Half of the forecast proved correct: the cardinals raised Alessandro de’ Medici to the papal throne as Leo IX in April but he died later that month after a reign of less than two weeks.

96 BAV, Urb.lat 1060, avviso of 8 January 1592, f. 16r.

97 Leti, Ceremonies of the vacant see, 75.
in the names that had lasted for fourteen elections. Others preferred to find answers in
the coat-of-arms of the cardinals’ houses found in various parts of St. Peter’s. Crowds
gathered in St. Peter’s to search for omens that would foretell the election. Gigli
recounts two omens that supposedly predicted the elections of 1623 and 1644. For two
days during the conclave of 1623 a swarm of bees entered the conclave and buzzed about
Cardinal Maffeo Barberini’s cell, assuming the form of a papal tiara over his door. Two
days later, the cardinals elected Barberini, whose family arms was composed of three
bees in a blue field. In 1644, a dove, the sign of the Pamphilij family, flew into conclave
and rested over the door of Cardinal Giovan Battista Pamphilij, who was shortly elected
pope. In the conclave, the cardinals hoped to be assigned cells under Perugino’s Christ
Giving the Key’s to St. Peter or Signorelli’s Moses Giving the Rod to Joshua in the
Sistine Chapel, as they regarded them as auspicious indicators of the election’s
outcome.

98 Ibid, 76. Leti’s assessment pans out if checked; the chain lasted from Giovanni Pietro Carafa (Paul IV)
in 1555 to Giovan Battista Pamphilij (Innocent X) in 1644. The election of Fabio Chigi in 1655 broke the
chain. The surnames of the popes in between these two points are as follows: Medici, Ghislieri,
Boncompagni, Peretti, Castagna, Sfondrati, Facchinetti, Aldobrandini, de’ Medici, Borghese, Ludovisi, and
Barberini.

99 Ibid, 77-78.

100 Gigli, Diario, vol. I,125 and vol. II, 431. The dove may have a double omen for Pamphilij’s election as
it was also a symbol of the Holy Spirit, which was supposed to guide the decision of the Sacred College in
the electoral process. The editor of Gigli’s diary writes of an omen during the Conclave of 1605 that
elected Paul V of the Borghese family. During the Conclave, an eagle owned by the Cardinal Altemps flew
to Castel Sant’Angelo, where it perched itself on the coat-of-arms of Gregory XIII, which was a dragon.
Since the Borghese arms was composed of an eagle and dragon, many in Rome took it as an omen that
Cardinal Camillo Borghese would be pope, see p. 30, n. 16.

101 David S. Chambers, “Papal Conclaves and the Prophetic Mystery in the Sistine Chapel, “Journal of the
As we have seen, the area par excellence for unrestrained public discourse on the political life of Rome during the vacancy was the Piazza di Pasquino, where an ancient Roman statue rested near the former palace of the Olvierio Carafa. Pasquino criticized the dead pope’s family and assaulted his memory, but he also commented on the papal election itself. Writers of pasquinades often waited until the conclave closed to start dipping their pens in the vitriol against the cardinals.\footnote{An avviso of 20 April 1585 commented that “Pasquino keeps himself quiet enough, perhaps waiting for when the Conclave will be closed;” see BAV, Urb.lat 1053, f. 185r: “Pasquino tace forsi aspettando, che'l conclave sia chiuso, che sara dimane.”} During the conclave of 1644, Gigli commented on the political discourse issuing from Pasquino concerning the election. Other than the invectives against the Barberini he noted that “many other compositions, witticisms, dialogues and judgments were made over all the Cardinals, publishing the habits, vices, inclinations, and defects of each one, especially those who aspired to the papacy, with judicial discourse on the results if they succeed in becoming pope.”\footnote{Gigli, Diario, vol. II, 430: “Molte altre compozitioni et motti, et discorsi, et giuditi furno fatte sopra tutti li cardinali, palesando i costumi, vitii, inclinationi, et difetti di ciascuno, massime di quelli, che aspiravano al Papato, con discorso giudicario della riuscita, che erano per fare se gli toccava di esser Papa.”}

Examining the faults of the papabili and the potential consequences of their pontificates through Pasquino can be traced back to the sede vacante of Leo X in 1521 in which the Flemish pope Adrian VI was elected. A veritable maelstrom of commentary issued from the pasquinade writers in Rome, including the satirists Pietro Aretino and Anton Lelio. They, along with other anonymous writers provided the tropes from which pasquinade writers over the next two centuries modeled their own invectives against the
Sacred College. The most common trope was a simple listing of the traits of the cardinals in Conclave, sometimes in a very straightforward approach; other times incorporating the scatology of the streets or themes from history and classical literature to both mock the cardinals and inform readers about their attributes. Another enduring theme has the cardinals making promises to the Roman people if elected pope.

Portraying the cardinals playing various games of chance was also a popular motif in which their qualities as candidates were discussed. Naturally, the wagering at the Banchi inspired a good many pasquinades, but so did the tarot. In this latter trope, the cardinals determined the election through a shuffling of a pack of tarot cards. Similarly a pasquinade written in the vacancy of Paul IV has the cardinals playing the card game trionfi to determine an occupant of St. Peter’s throne. In the same vacancy a pasquinade has the election riding on a chess match.

104 See Giovanni Angelo Cesareo, Pasquino e pasquinate nella Roma di Leone X (Rome: Deputazione romana di storia patria, 1938 [1894]); Vittorio Rossi, ed., Pasquinate di Pietro Aretino ed anonime per il conclave e l’elezione di Adriano VI (Turin: Clausen, 1891); Domenico Gnoli, Le origini di Maestro Pasquino (Rome: Ermanno Loescher, 1890); and idem, La Roma di Leon X (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1938), 309-27.

105 This theme was first introduced in the sede vacante of Leo X. Extant copies of pasquinades influenced by this theme exist for the Conclaves of 1523 and 1559. See Valerio Marucci et al., Pasquinate romane del Cinquecento, vols. I and II (Roma: Editrice Salerno, 1983), no. 162, 161, no. 208, 193-94, and no. 714, 918-19.

106 For pasquinades having the cardinals place wager on the election, see Marucci et al., Pasquinate romane, vols. I and II, no. 166, 139 (issued during the election of 1521), no. 168, 141-142 (is a variation of no. 166 issued in 1521), no. 168, 142-43 (also issued in 1521), no. 652, 776-779 (issued during the conclave of 1549-50), and no. 706, 908-09 (issued during the conclave of 1559). The pasquinade of Aretino using the metaphor of betting on the election, paints an evocative picture of Rome during the Conclave: “Rome is all in wagering and disputes over who it wants as Pope,” see Marucci, vol. I, no. 166, 139: “Roma è tutta in scomesse ed in contese che vuol papa.” For the use of tarot cards as a theme, see ibid., vols. I and II, no. 195, 177-80 (issued during the conclave of 1521) and no. 713, 916-18 (issued in vacancy of 1559). The wording of these two pasquinades, although written more than thirty years apart and by different authors, is almost identical with only the names of the cardinals changing. For the game of trionfi, see ibid., vol. II, no. 687, 863-67. For the chess match, see ibid., vol. II, no. 690, 870-871.
on the election was not difficult for the pasquinades writers to imagine; as we have seen they very often did place bets on the election. And despite the efforts of reforming popes and governors of Rome, who issued *bandi* against gaming, many cardinals enjoyed this form of entertainment.107

The intent of these pasquinades was to inform the populace about the election and perhaps allow it to reach an opinion about the great events taking place in the conclave. This can especially be seen with the dialogues that took place between Pasquino and Marforio, another ancient *statua parlante* located on the Capitol Hill. Wits had the two of them discuss the various characteristics of each of the *papabili*, frequently in ribald terms. For example, during the vacancy of Pius IV, Pasquino asked Marforio if he thought the cardinal Giovanni Morone would make a good pope. Marfario answered, “No devil! He has been questioned by the Inquisition. You know very well that he had been in Castel Sant’Angelo since he wore his hair as a hermit.” In this dialogue, Cardinal Crispo would not make a good candidate according to Pasquino because he had too many children.108 Both criticisms reveal the conflicting nature of the desires of the court and the city in general: Romans neither wanted a saint, nor a sinner, but rather someone who would ensure the wheels of patronage ran smoothly without committing egregious

107 Renaud Villard argues that the pasquinade of the cardinals playing tarot was a device that conveyed rumors; see “Incarnare una voce: Il caso della sede vacante (Roma, XVI secolo), *Quarderni storici* 121 (2006), 42. It is hardly likely that a trope dating to the conclave of Adrian VI (1521) that was used repeatedly in the sixteenth century could provoke rumors. It was rather a didactic trope.

108 Marucci et al., *Pasquinate romane*, no. 729, 944-48: “No, diavol, perché gli è stato inquisitor,/tu sai pur ben che gli è stato in Castello,/ se ben porta i capelli da romito.”
nepotism. A reforming saint was not desired. Romans displayed great disappointment with the elections of Adrian VI in 1521, Pius V in 1566, and Sixtus V in 1585.¹⁰⁹

Dialogues proved a popular means to broadcast information on the conclave well into the seventeenth century, and the genre changed little throughout this time.¹¹⁰ For example, a dialogue written in the vacancy of Alexander VII had two characters named Critilao and Diogene discuss the qualities of the cardinals thought to be papabile.¹¹¹ The motif was so entrenched in the minds of those familiar with the papal election that the satirist Gregorio Leti had the prostitutes who met in his imaginary conclave to elect Alexander VII’s successor participate in a dialogue examining the qualities of each of the papabile.¹¹²

The pasquinades served to inform the elite and common folk alike by expressing and shaping public opinion on the electoral process during the interregnum. But they generally had their provenance in high culture. The lower levels of society had their own ways of commenting on the election. They ridiculed the cardinals in the conclave and asserted their role in the electoral process by electing one of their own as pope in a form of misrule very similar to the making of mock bishops and mock kings during Carnival,


¹¹⁰ See BAV, Barb.lat 3870, Satire ne’ Conclave di Alessandro VII, Clemente IX e Clemente X.

¹¹¹ Ibid, “Critolao, e Diogene s’incontrano di notte nel Conclave l’uno con la statera, l’altro con la lanterna, ciascercando, et osservando le qualità de’ cardinali Papabili.” ff. 1r-7r.

the Feast of Fools and other festive occasions. For example, during the conclave that elected Urban VIII in 1623, papal grooms elected one of their numbers as pope. Imitating the official papal coronation ceremony, they enthroned him on a litter and carried him throughout the Basilica of St. Peter’s until stopped by Swiss guards.¹¹³

The mock pope was not just a form of festive inversion. It could also act as a statement of defiance. Bandits in the hills of the Marches elected their leader Jacopo Galli as pope, “adoring him and obeying him as if a true pontiff had been made.” The Florentine diarist Agostino Lapini wrote that they made Galli pope “in derision and contempt of our Holy Apostolic See.”¹¹⁴ But, more importantly, they made their own pope during the “long vacancy” of the 1590s, when four popes wore the papal tiara in rapid succession. Much like the men of Sherwood Forest in the English ballads of Robin Hood, the bandits provided their own leadership, one that defied the dominant social and political order by mirroring it. Also in the vein of Robin Hood were peasants near Ascoli, who elected a “pastoral pope” during the vacancy of 1655 and, as with the grooms and bandits, dressed him pontifically, carried him about on a litter, and adored him. This act not only expressed the hopes of the peasants but also their censure of the dead pope. The peasant pope’s first act was to abolish the taxes on salt and bread that


Innocent X had retained from Urban VIII’s pontificate.\textsuperscript{115} The pervasiveness of this form of misrule no doubt inspired Leti’s conclave of whores, reflecting the mutual influence of high and low culture in mocking the papal election.

Another way in which the people expressed their will was to stand outside the conclave in St. Peter’s square, or at least as close as the various guards permitted, shouting acclamations in favor of their candidate. During the vacancy of Innocent X, the diarist Gioseffe Gualdi wrote that the “concourse of people to see the Conclave was the greatest [he had ever seen], whence one could not walk [through the crowds].”\textsuperscript{116} He noted especially the great number of women outside the conclave. One custom had the people positioning themselves before the gates of the conclave, shouting vivas at the favored cardinals entering the conclave. Hence, in his history of the papal conclaves, Leti noted that at the start of the conclave that elected Innocent IX, “opinion was so great that the signor Cardinal Santi Quattro must succeed as Pope that the little women and the plebe acclaimed him in his passing” and “remind[ed] him about Justice and the Poverty, and to bring abundance [to Rome].”\textsuperscript{117} Negative opinions could be expressed as well. When rumors spread that Cardinal Antonio Barberini might succeed at getting his ally Giulio Sacchetti elected as pope during the interregnum of his uncle, “the People took it


\textsuperscript{116} The Getty Research Institute, MS, “Il diario di Gioseffe Gualdi, 1654-55,” t. II, ff. 19v-20r: “il concorso delle genti per veder il Conclave fu grand.mo, onde non si poteva caminare.”

\textsuperscript{117} Gregorio Leti, Conclavi de’ romani pontefici quale si sono potuti trovare fin à questo giorno (No publishing information, 1667), 283-84: “opinione che il signor Cardinal Santi Quattro dovesse riuscir Papa, quale fu tanto grande, che le Donnicciole e la Plebe al suo passare l’acclamavano” and “ricordandogli la Giustitia, & la Povertà, & a far venire l’abbondanza.”
poorly because they feared a pontificate similar to that of Urban VIII.” The people so hated the Barberini pope and his allies that a day later the people stood in the courtyard of the Vatican palace yelling, “Don’t make Sacchetti pope, he will pillage Rome.”

The presence of crowds outside the conclave could also set off rumors. When Cardinal Francesco Sforza arrived at the first conclave of 1605, with a large retinue of nobles and servants, the shouting of “Viva Sforza” caused many to assume his chances of election were good. In 1655, with the arrival of the Roman cardinal Gianjacopo Panciroli at the conclave, rumors quickly spread that he would ensure the election of his fellow Roman, Giovan Battista Pamphilij as pope. Pasquinade writers soon followed suit as Gigli noted that “some jesting said that the son of Master Virgilio to make Panfilio the pope.”

Rumors and public opinion were intimately tied to the frequent sacking of the pope-elect’s palace and other residences in the city. For example, in the vacancy that raised Clement VIII to the throne a rumor provoked a massive unrest in which the people screamed the name of Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti throughout Rome causing the vice castellan of Sant’Angelo to close the bridge leading to the Vatican and the caporioni to

118 For both quotes, see Gigli, Diario, vol. II, 430: “‘il Popolo ne stava di malavoglia, perché tenevano un Pontificato simile a quello di Urbano Ottavo” and “Non fate Papa Sacchetti, che sarà Roma saccheggiata.”
119 BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 5 March 1605, f. 101r.
120 Gigli, Diario, vol. II, 431: “alcuni motteggiando dicevano, che era venuto il figlio di Mastro Virgilio per far Papa Panfilio.” Panciroli’s father was a master tailor named Virgilio. The Pamphilij were originally from Gubbio, but moved to Rome in the late fifteenth century. By the seventeenth century they had become completely Romanized and enjoyed all the high offices of the Popolo Romano, including the position of conservator. The rumor not only reflected the populace’s desire for a Roman pope, but also their anger over the tariffs of the Barberini, as other pasquinades predicted that Urban VIII’s nephews would suffer repercussions for their bad government. See the pasquinade in Mario Dell’Arco, ed., Pasquino e le pasquinate (Rome: Bulzoni editore, 1967), 103: “Se sarà Panfili papa/ io vio guiro, o Barberini,/ che la nostra Maldacchini/ vi farà del capo rapa.”
rush to watch his house. As was typical during vacancies, the rumor dissipated after more reliable information concerning the election leaked out of the conclave.\textsuperscript{121} In the vacancy of Innocent X, rumors of Antonio Barberini’s election incited people to attempt to sack his properties in Rome, as the \textit{avviso} writer Gioseffe Gualdi recounted in his diary:

Immediately people filled all of St. Peter’s Square and Borgo, and many people ran to the Cancelleria [where Antonio Barberini served as the Cardinal Deacon] that was therefore locked and guarded by a force of men-at-arms, as was also done at the Barberini palace at Quattro Fontane. But before the beginning of night the rumor faded and the news was found to be false.\textsuperscript{122}

Gigli also mentioned the rumor, writing that it had originated when spies in the conclave saw the two factional leaders of the election, Antonio Barberini on the French side and Gian Carlo de’ Medici of the Spanish party conferring together.\textsuperscript{123} Later in the same vacancy, a rumor arose during the night of 19 February that the cardinals had made the Roman Ulderico Carpegna pope. Once the false news of his election circulated through Rome, a crowd ran to his palace in the \textit{rione} of Trevi, but was prevented from pillaging it by the combined efforts of the \textit{caporioni} and the cardinal’s private soldiers. The rumor itself proved difficult to quell and it even tricked interregnal officials. Bernardino Savelli’s troops sounded the election of the new pope by beating a drum through the

\textsuperscript{121} BAV, Urb.lat 1060, \textit{avviso} of 18 January 1592, f. 36r. The \textit{avviso} reads: “Mercore su le 23 hore fu gridato Papa Paleotto per Roma, chiusi li rastrelli di Ponte, andati i soldati alla guardia di sua casa, et fatte altre demostrationi simili.”


\textsuperscript{123} Gigli, \textit{Diario}, vol. II, 735.
streets, and the next morning the Marshal himself went to the Vatican to announce the news of Carpegna’s election, but by then the rumor had been proven false.124

As the last example shows, public opinion heavily favored a Roman. The first recorded sacks that took place during the papal election occurred in the first conclave to be held in Rome after the Babylon Captivity of 1378. Romans stood outside the Vatican yelling their desire for a Roman pope and sacked the palace of the Roman Cardinal Francesco Tibaldeschi when rumor spread that he had been elevated to the papal throne. The rumors and the pillages of those rumored to be elected pope, as Joëlle Rollo-Koster has argued for the conclave of 1378, were a way that Romans participated in the papal elections since being excluded from the election process with the creation of the College of Cardinals in 1059. From the time onward, Romans merely voiced their consent of the new pope when he was presented to them with the formula, “Habemus Papam.” Although a true, unadulterated vox populi never existed—factions played a dominant role in papal elections before the eleventh century and continued to do so in the early modern period—the rumors and pillages could represent the desires of a large segment of the populace.125

124 The Getty Research Institute, MS, “Diairo di Gioseffe Gualdi” t. II, f. 39r.
The example of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese was a case in point. From 1555 to 1585, the grandson of Paul III remained a strong contender in the papal elections and was quite popular with the people since he came from an old Roman family and was known for his magnanimity. During this period, except for that of 1565-66, rumor and the activities associated with the vacancy—betting and pillaging—worked in favor of Farnese. In 1555, for example, two soldiers assigned to watch the conclave came to blows near the apartments of the cardinal in the Vatican palace. One of the soldiers, losing the fight, started yelling out Farnese’s name to invoke his protection, which was granted. But according to Giovanni Cagarra, “the people, without eyes and who heard things wrongly, heard these violent screams and interpreted that Farnese was Pope.” Servants and the crowd outside the conclave quickly took the news of Farnese’s election to the rest of Rome and “it had grown to such a point that one could not ever see in this city a greater confusion, or joy.” The people attempted to sack the palaces of the Farnese family but were stopped by the Duke of Urbino and the caporioni. Nevertheless the rumor continued to spread throughout the early evening. Painters sold copies of the Farnese coat-of-arms with the papal miter and all through streets, according to Cagarra, people of all ages “joyfully yelled Farnese, Farnese, a thing that might awaken Paul III.” The false news later reached cities and towns in the Papal States and Italy, which sent letters congratulating the cardinal on his election.  

126 BAV, Chigiani, R II, t. 54, letter to the Bishop of Feltre of 18 May 1555, ff. 233r-34r: “ma il popolo che è senza occhi, et che intende le cose al roversio, udito quel grido vehemete, interpreto che Farnese fosse Papa,” “che non si vide credo mai in questa città maggior confusione, o allegrezza,” and “per tutte le strade tutte l’etadi giubilando privada Farnese Farnese, et cosa che se fosse rescusciato Paolo.”

lasted almost three hours, Farnese’s rankings at the Banchi shot up. Although the rumors proved false, an avviso noted that the people still “held that he will become Pope in the conclaves as his grandfather had done.”

Four years later the ambassador of Mantua, Emilio Strangheli, noted a similar episode involving Farnese during the vacancy of Paul IV in 1559. Once again the rumor was provoked by a fight outside the conclave; this time a “rogue” arguing with a sbirro sought to aid his escape by crying out Farnese. Crowds near the conclave quickly spread the news across the Tiber to the Banchi, where it was given credence and spread throughout the city, causing guards to station themselves at his palace as well as along the Ponte Sant’Angelo. Again, during the conclave of 1585, rumors of Farnese’s election originated in a brawl. The vice castellan of Castel Sant’Angelo had several rounds of cannon shot to quiet down a large fight that took place in the Banchi and Borgo. Once the people heard the cannon fire, the customary rite of announcing the election of a pope, the rumor grew that “Farnese had been made pope and the people with an immeasurable joy congregated everywhere.” Although the rumors were quickly squashed, the noble diarist Lelio Della Valle wrote that people “cried Farnese until four o’clock but in vain.”

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128 BAV, Urb.lat 1038, avviso of 18 May 1555, f. 62v. The avviso writer described Rome as “topsy-turvy (sotto sopra)” at this time and along with Cagara gives the rankings at the Banchi. He also gives a different account of the rumor’s origin, writing that it was caused by a conclavist who yelled Farnese’s name from the Conclave’s wicket. Either way, the results show the populace’s desire for Farnese.

129 ASM, Carteggio, Rome, filza 889, dispatch of 4 November 1559, f. 684r.

130 Gatto, “Diario di Lelio Della Valle,” 254: “si levò rumore che Farnese era facto papa il popolo, con una allegrezza inestimabile, concoreva pertutto” and “Fu gridato papa Farnese a hore 23 ma non fu niente.”
Rome ordered the cannons at Castel Sant’Angelo to remain silent in order to prevent further confusion.

In each case, the people interpreted an event through the lenses of their own desires, which was to have a magnanimous pope from Rome. Farnese best fit this bill throughout the second of the sixteenth century; he consistently had the support of the popular will but never succeeded to the papacy in the conclave, where the real decisions were made. Although the voice of the people remained unheeded by the cardinals, it does not mean their efforts were in vain. We must remember that this was a society in which free speech did not exist; the vacancy and the election opened up an opportunity for the people to express the desires and voice their opinions. Yet, this was a hard-won right as interregnal officials sought to prevent the ritual sacks and expressions of opinion. In addition to posting guards at the conclave and the houses of papabili, at the onset of rumors and tumults that threatened the conclave, officials regularly barred entry into Borgo by closing the Ponte Sant’Angelo, the only point of entry from Rome to the Vatican. Despite these efforts, Romans still managed to surround the conclave, shouting their desires. During the conclave of 1565-66, Romans shouted their

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131 Farnese died in 1589, but in the conclave of the following year of Urban VII, Cardinal Marcantonio Colonna, from another respected Roman family, proved a popular candidate among the people. Naturally rumors fixated on his election and on 11 October 1590 grew so believable that crowds tried to sack the family palaces throughout the city; see the account of the Venetian ambassador Alberto Badoer, ASVenice, Dispacci, Rome, filza 26, ff. 113r-v, dispatch of 13 October 1590. Neither a Farnese nor a Colonna ever succeeded to the papacy after their ancestors, Paul III and Martin V respectively, had occupied St. Peter’s throne. In 1605, an avviso noted that cardinal Serafino “would be pope if one went by the gossip of the people for the belief that he would provide for the abundance and would be a good pastor.” See ASV, Segretario di Stato, Avvisi, t. 1, avviso of 7 May 1605, f. 9r: “Serafino sarebbe papa se andasse a voce del popolo per la credenza che farebbe abondanza, et che sarebbe boniss.o pastore.” The avviso indicated that Spanish would never allow Serafino to be elected since he belonged to the French party.

132 For example, see ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 1, avviso of 11 May 1605 and BC, cod. 1832, Ameden, “Diario di Roma,”121, 130 and 134-35.
acclamations for Farnese insistently outside the Vatican. As we have seen, they refused
to quit yelling their battle cries in 1585 after the news of Farnese’s election had been
determined false. Even when the election did not fulfill their desires, the people could
always express their disapproval through their grumbling and lack of joy. John Florio
informed his English audience that celebrations in honor of the new pope, the severe
Sixtus V, in 1585 were “nothying so much as was accustomed, & that because it is
thought the people would rather have Cardinall Farnese.”

This *vox populi* did not always speak with one voice and, as we saw with the
brokers of the Banchi, it could be manipulated as well. More often than not Romans had
to align themselves to one of many factions of the conclave that not only included the
party of cardinals made by the dead pope but also the French and Spanish parties. From
the late sixteenth century onward, during the vacancy, the supporters of the latter two
factions, no doubt led by loyal supporters of the French and Spanish monarchs, competed
with each other in shouting “Viva Francia!” or “Viva Spagna!” outside the conclave.
Ambassadors from each monarch were met by their supporters with loud acclamations
whenever they entered the conclave. In the city, the cardinals who acted as party
leaders in the conclave had the banners of their respective monarch hung from their
palaces, which also served as convenient loci of factional pride. For example, in the

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133 Pastor, HOP, vol. 17 (1929), 33.


135 See, for example, the conclave of Paul V (1605); Remi Couzard, *Une Ambassade à Rome sous Henri IV (Septembre 1601-Juin 1605) d’apres docuements inedit* (Paris: Alphonse Picard et fils, 1900), 380-81.

136 For an example from the conclave of 1644, see BC, cod. 1832, Ameyden, “Diario,” 114-15.
vacancy of his uncle, Antonio Barberini had the standard of France unfurled from a
window of his palace on Quattro Fontane and another from the Cancelleria, where he
headed the Apostolic Chamber as chamberlain. During the conclave of Alexander VII in
1655, Cardinal Gian Carlo de’ Medici had the banner of the King of Spain displayed at
his palace in Piazza Madama.137

The rival factions often taunted each other as the Hispanophile Teodoro Ameyden
noted in his diary during the conclave of 1644.138 Brawls between the Spanish and
French factions sometimes occurred outside the conclave. During the vacancy of Urban
VII in 1590, a supporter of Henry IV killed a member of the Catholic League in a fight
outside the conclave.139 These factional squabbles could promote further disorder in the
city by creating rumors of an election as happened in the conclave that elected Paul V in
1605. During a fight between two captains of rival factions outside the conclave, some of
the numbers began to yell, “Help, Help!” (salva, salva), which the crowds interpreted as
“Sauli, Sauli!” As with many rumors born in the vacancy, the noise misled both the
authorities and the people, with the caporioni and a crowd of people that continually
screamed the cardinal’s name, “Sauli!” both rushing to his palace at the same time.140

The conclave of Leo XI, also in 1605, was perhaps one of the most virulent ones
in history as tensions between the Spanish and French were heating up after somewhat

137 For Barberini and the French standard, see Ibid., 108. For the de’ Medici and the Spanish flag, see the
Getty Research Institute, MS, Gualdi, “Diario,” t. II, f. 32v.


139 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 22 December 1590, f. 661r. Soldiers of the conclave imprisoned the killer,
but Gregory XIV granted him clemency upon his ascension.

140 ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 1, avviso of 11 May 1605, f. 15r.
dormant period in the late sixteenth century and the Spanish ready to get revenge for losing the first conclave of that year that had elected Francophile Leo XI. Throughout the *sede vacante*, clashes between the adherents of Domenico Toschi, the French candidate, and Pietro Valier, the Spanish candidate, sparked alternative rumors of each one’s election that had crowds gathering at the palaces of both cardinals. Yet, when the cardinals compromised and elected cardinal Camillo Borghese, from a Romanized family of Sienese origin, the crowds went wild with joy at the prospect of a “Roman” sitting on the throne, forgetting their factional differences and that Borghese, although professing his neutrality throughout the conclave, had close ties with the Spanish stemming from his time as a nuncio to Spain.\textsuperscript{141}

The cardinals in the conclave often served as a magnet for criticism from all ranks of society and in various media. In the sixteenth-century, Romans had a low threshold of tolerance for delays in electing a pope. Typically, after two or more weeks without a pope, growing criticism began to surround the politicking cardinals. By the seventeenth century, due the incessant infighting between Spanish and French factions and Gregory XV’s introduction of two daily scrutinies in 1621, Romans had grown more accustomed to a conclave that lasted about two months. After this threshold had been reached, Romans used a variety of media to mock and criticize the electoral process, which included pasquinades, betting on the length of the election, loud grumbling and impolite talk, and processions that all formed a protest against the College of Cardinals.

\textsuperscript{141} For the rumors and joy at his election, see ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 1, *avviso* of 18 May 1605, f. 266v and Couzard, *Une Ambassade*, 386 and von Pastor, HOP, vol. 25 (1937), 35-36. Paul V’s father, Marcantonio, had moved the family from Siena in 1541 and quickly insinuated himself and his family in the Roman social and political milieu.
The nearly three-month long conclave that eventually elected Julius III in 1550 attracted all sorts of critiques. Pasquinades writers wrote insistently of the “widowed church” and compared the Papal States to a ship without a pilot. The people grumbled in the streets about the length of the election. On the evening of 5 December 1549, rumor held that the cardinals were about to make a decision, but, when the cardinals ordered dinner, “the people drew breath.” A month later, according Dandolo, Romans had given up hope as recorded in a dispatch of 8 January 1550 that “Everybody is of the opinion that there is not the slightest hope of having a pope, not even in the course of a month.” Later that month, the wagering at the Banchi echoed the public opinion with bets being on the length of the vacancy rather than on papabili—some even wagered that the cardinals would exit the conclave before electing a pope as their servants had begun to limit their food in order to hasten a decision.

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142 Like many pasquinades, these drew inspiration from those written in the Conclave of 1521; see Marucci, *Pasquinate romane*, t. I, no. 190, 172-174 and t. II, no. 644, 757-64 and no. 746, 950-51. Yet, wits played with the form; form example, in the same vacancy, one pasquinade compared the cardinals in the conclave to Noah’s Ark. Each cardinal was represented by an animal, see no. 641, 754-56. In the vacancy of Gregory XIV, the poet Torquato Tasso wrote a poem about the need for a pope to fill the widowed seat of the Holy Church, although his work was less an invective than a lament provoked by the rise of banditry during the three sedi vacanti from 1590 to 1591; see Angelo Solerti, *Vita di Torquato Tasso*, vol. I (Rome: Ermanno Loescher, 1894), 665.

143 Dispatches of Matteo Dandolo of 7 December 1549 and 8 January 1550, *CSP*, vol. V, 281 and 293 respectively.

144 Dispatches of Dandolo of 1, 18, 22 January 1550, *CSP*, 290 and 299-300. The conclavists tried several approaches to hurry the cardinals, even locking them in the loggia of St. Peter’s until they made a pope and eventually several left the conclave in protest; see ibid., dispatches of Dandolo of 8 and 29 January 1555, 293 and 303.
bettors making wagers during the conclaves of 1559 and 1590 also focused on the length of the election.  

During the back-to-back vacancies of Sixtus V and Urban VII of 1590 similar protests were made by the populace of Rome. After the brief pontificate of Urban VII, the cardinals, who had chosen him as a compromise candidate, could not decide on a pontiff until 8 December. In between these two points, avvisi recorded the growing anger over the cardinals’ inability to make a pope, exacerbated by the effects of a prolonged famine and increasing raids by bandits into the Roman countryside. The newsletters noted the protests the people staged outside the conclave and recorded the whispered talk of revolt in the autumn of 1590. Through it all, the people laid the blame for the dire situation on the cardinals in the conclave as an avviso of 24 November attests:

Today the conclave has lasted fifty-two days and, as far as one knows, we will not have a Pope until Christmas, and, furthermore, the contests and discords continue among the cardinals without regard that the bandits are masters of the countryside and keep it besieged at every corner, robbing and assassinating all the travelers [who come to Rome].

Protests were made before the Vatican palace as the city suffered the predations of bandits and the bite of famine. The criticism of the Sacred College inscribed itself in the memory of the city, as Gregorio Leti wrote in his history of the papal conclave almost a

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145 For 1559, see BAV, Urb.lat 1039, avvisi of 25 November and 2 and 23 December 1559, ff. 104v, 105r, and 108r-v. For 1590, BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avvisi of 27 October and 17 and 24 November 1590, ff. 528r, 603v, and 616v.

146 See BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avvisi of 27; October 3, 10 and 24 November; and 1 and 5 December 1590, ff. 558r, 580v, 582r, 610v, 624r and 632v.

147 Ibid, avviso of 28 November 1590, ff. page numbers needed: “Sono hoggi 52 giorni che dura il conclave, et per quanto si sorge non haveremo Papa ne anco fina a Natale, et forsi piu oltre continuando le gare, et discordie tra cardinali senza riguardo, che i banditi sono padroni della campagnia d’ogni intorno, et ne tengono assediati svaligiando, et assassinando tutti i passeggeri.”
hundred years later that the people “cursed and blasphemed that so great length of the Conclave, whence if there ever had been a time to hasten the election of the Pope, it was then.”

A subtler method of criticizing the conclave took the form of the religious processions that made their way to the Vatican and the conclave from various churches in the center of Rome. Although guided by piety, censure played a role in many of these processions. Three months into the sede vacante of 1559, the Popolo Romano organized a procession of its ministers, artisans, and members of the clergy that made its way from the Capitoline Hill to the Vatican in order “to pray to God to inspire the Sacred Holy College of Cardinals to elect without delay an excellent Pontiff.” When the civic magistrates voted to stage the procession, they also recommended that the cardinals be reduced to one meal a day and that ingress to the conclave be more securely watched. In order to effect these recommendations, they vainly demanded custodianship of the conclave. Similarly, in the vacancy of Urban VII, amid the forty hour orations and processions calling for the election of “good pastor” organized by confraternities and religious orders, the Popolo Romano sent the conservators and Roman nobles to encourage the cardinals to expedite the election of a pope. The irritated Sacred College responded that the civic officials “should attend to the governance of the city.”

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148 For the protests, see ibid, avviso of 10 November 1590, f. 580r. For the quote, see Leti, Conclavi de pontefici romani, 261: “maledicevano, & biasamavano quella tanta longhezza del Conclave, onde se mai era stato tempo, d’accelerare l’elettione del Papa, era allora.”

149 BAV, Urb.lat 1039, avviso of 25 November 1559, ff. 104r-v: “per pregar Iddio, ad insipirar il sacro santo Collegio di Cardinali a far elettione presta d’un ottimo Pontefice.”

150 BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 27 October 1590, f. 556r: “fu risposto che attendessero al governo della città.” According to the Venetian ambassador Giovanni Moro, the conservators again beseeched the Sacred
By the seventeenth century we have evidence that these processions had become routinized, perhaps as a response to the longer vacancies of the Baroque era. The Cardinal Vicar established a program of processions and forty hour orations—announced through broadsheets—that commenced a few days after the closure of the conclave and that would last the duration of the vacancy of St. Peter’s throne. Daily processions staged by confraternities visited a designated church where they viewed the Sacrament and then marched to St. Peter’s, praying for “the prompt election of the new pope.” In addition to the confreres, parishioners of the selected churches and pilgrims that had traveled to Rome for the election of the pope took part in the processions. With the processions, the Cardinal Vicar sought to co-opt the criticism issuing from these processions and perhaps unite the city, divided by personal hatreds and factional discord. Nevertheless, the processions still functioned as subtle vehicles of criticism as they circled the Vatican and intentionally sung the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, the hymn that cardinals sang to begin the electoral process, under the loggias of the conclave where the prelates gathered to negotiate the making of the new pope. A subtle hint that the Holy Spirit rather than

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151 For the published programs, see ASV, Misc. Arm IV & V, t. 26, ff. 172r-74r (for 1644) and 175r-176r (for 1655). For the quote, see ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 96, avviso of 3 September 1644, f. 234r. The practice was continued well into the seventeenth century as Leti noted in his account of the election of Clement IX that “[t]here passes not a day without some processions, which from all churches and Monasteries take their way to St. Peters, and about the Conclave, singing as they go the Hymn Veni Creator, to implore the assistance of the Holy Ghost and its Inspirations upon the cardinals;” see Leti, *Ceremonies of the vacant see*, 22. The earliest reference to these processions can be found in the avvisi of 1623; see ASV, Segretario, Avvisi, t. 9, avvisi of 22 and 29 July and 5 August 1623, ff. 199v-200r, 205r and 215v.

152 On the potential of processions to unite communities, see Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 237-39. On the processions as ways of distracting the populace from violence during the vacancy, see Laurie Nussdorfer, *Civic Politics*, 251. See Leti for hymn as well as the above avvisi.
political ambition should motivate the cardinals and that they should hurry in their holy work.

The Election and Its Public Reception

Once the cardinals had decided on a candidate, they first adored him in the Sistine Chapel, bestowing kisses upon his feet, hands, and cheeks, a custom that all visitors would perform in front of the pope throughout his reign. Then in a ritual that proclaimed his new status, the cardinals dressed him in a white tunic representing the purity of Christ and asked what name he wished to use during his pontificate. After selecting a new name, he swore an oath before an altar in the Sistine Chapel. The cardinals then adored him once more before carrying him in a litter to the window overlooking St. Peter’s Square to present him to the crowds gathered outside the Vatican Palace to see the new head of the papacy. The Cardinal Dean told the gathered crowd of Romans and pilgrims, “Habemus Papam,” and gave them his name. The pope, in his first public act, blessed the crowd. This ritual had its origins in the participation of the laity in the election of the Bishop of Rome during the early years of the Church.  

So that the entire city would know of the pope’s election, the vice castellan had cannon shots discharged from the fortress of Castel Sant’Angelo, the Marshal of the Conclave had his soldiers fire several salvoes in St. Peter’s Square, and the Masters of Ceremonies sent heralds throughout the city to announce the news in the streets. Despite
these efforts, as we have seen with the false news of Farnese’s election of 1585, ascertaining the veracity of the papal election was fraught with trouble. Rumors of the election, both true and false, typically preceded the announcement from the Vatican. For example, Gigli wrote that the news of the elections of Gregory XV in 1621 and Innocent X in 1644 had anticipated the Sacred College’s official pronunciation. Rumors could even delude observers; on the election of Julius III in 1550, the Venetian ambassador Matteo Dandolo put more credence in the single cry of England than in the many shouts of Monte that he heard through the streets. Miscommunication, so often the cause of tumults during the conclave, could occur at the announcement of the pope. In 1644, crowds misunderstood, or rather wanted to misunderstand, the acclamations in honor of Innocent X upon his election, hearing “Viva Papa Crescentio” instead of “Viva Innocentio.” A large crowd soon gathered at the house of Crescentio, a Roman with a reputation of magnanimity. Once the people learned that Pamphilij was pope, “they remained doubtful, and did not celebrate loudly because he was held to a strict man and not very liberal.”

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154 Gigli, *Diario*, vols. I and II, 81 and 431. The cardinals were still hammering out the details of Pamphilij’s election when news leaked of his ascent to the throne of St. Peter.


156 Gigli, *Diario*, vol. II, 431: “Ma poi stendo che era Papa Pamphilio il Popolo stava sospeso, et non faceva gran festa, perche era tenuto per homo severo, et non molto liberale.” Pietro Paolo Crescenzi was from an old Roman family. Despite being a Roman, Pamphilij’s severity did not sit well with the populace.
Once the news had disseminated throughout the city, people of all ranks rushed the conclave. Before announcing the news, the Cardinal Dean, one of the Capi degli Ordini, ordered the walls of the conclave torn down, and signaled for the crowds outside to enter by displaying the cross and crying out a viva in honor of the new pope.\footnote{See Leti, Ceremonies of the vacant see, 86. Upon the election of Innocent X, Antonio Barberini, as Cardinal Dean, “displayed the cross to the People as is customary for the rupture [of the conclave] near the Piazza di San Pietro;” see ASV, Conclavi, “Conclavi da Pio II a Innocenzo X,” f. 789v: “Cardinale Barberino come Diacono mostrò la Croce al Popolo come è solito p una rottura incontro la Piazza di San Pietro.” See also BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 12 September 1590, f. 465r, for another reference to the custom of showing the cross to the people as a sign to enter the conclave.} In an obvious vestige of their former participation in the election process, Romans of all ranks sought entry into the conclave at this time. Nobles and their retainers were the first to enter the now open conclave, seeking either to embrace their relative if he had been elected or to be the first to congratulate the pope on his election. Upon hearing the false news of Cardinal Colonna’s election in 1590, familiars and minions of the family broke into the conclave, victoriously carrying his cousin Martio inside. Leti noted that, after the election of Innocent IX, carpenters barely had time to break down the walls before a “flock of nobles” burst into the Vatican to see the pope. Similarly, with the rumors of Cardinal Sacchetti’s election in 1644, Taddeo Barberini and Sacchetti’s brother’s, who stood outside with a large retinue of men, sought to break through the walls of the conclave.\footnote{For Colonna in 1590, see BAV, Urb.lat 1058, avviso of 12 September 1590, f. 465r; for Innocent XI’s election, see Leti, Conclavi dei romani pontefici, page needed; and for Sacchetti’s false election, see ASV, Conclavi, “Conclavi da Pio II a Innocenzo X,” f. 772r.}

Following close on the heels of their noble superiors were crowds of Romans, who had an entirely different reason for rushing inside the conclave. They sought to pillage the cell of the newly elected pope. Dating to the first conclave held in Rome after...
the Babylonian Captivity in 1378, customary pillages of the cells and palaces of the pope-elect occurred at the announcement—true or not—of his election. As we have seen, the desires of Romans for a pope to their liking sparked rumors and sacks throughout the vacancy, but the practice was more akin to a “right of spoils” claimed by the new pope’s subjects. By the time the crowds made their way into the Vatican, the cell of the pope-elect had already been looted. Conclavists claimed the books, clothing and eating utensils that he kept there. In order to stop looting by the conclavists, who saw it as their payment for having served in the harsh conditions of the conclave, Pius IV’s bull, *In eligendus*, forbade the ransacking of the pope-elect’s cell, but also offered them a collective compensation of ten thousand scudi and two thousand more in vacant benefices. All this proved in vain as the conclavists continued their customary pillages well into the eighteenth century. The Cardinal Chamberlain, Annibale Albani, for example, issued a decree threatening conclavists with fines during the vacancy of Clement XII (1721) if they looted the cell of pope-elect. This effectively ended the practice of conclavists looting the pope-elect’s cell. It signaled the modernization of the

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159 The most familiar example can be found in Pius II’s account of his own election in 1458; see his Commentaries, p. 199. For a selection of early modern examples; see ASV, Conclavi, “Conclavi da Pio II ad Innocenzo X, ff. 356-v (for Marcellus II’s election in 1555); Leti, *Conlavi dei romani pontefici*, 272 (for the false election of Cardinal Paleotto in 1590); and ASV, Segretario, t. 96, avviso of 17 September 1644, f. 250r (for the election of Innocent X). Also see Philip Skippon’s journal of his trip to Rome in 1663; *An account of a journey made thro part of the Low Countries, Germany, Italy, and France* (London: For Awshwam Churchill, 1732), 684. Although not present during sede vacante, he either read about or was informed about the electoral pillaging, as he noted in his journal that “When a new one [pope] is chosen, his friends and relatives ransack and carry away what they can find in his palace.”

160 See *Bullarium diplomatum et privilegiorum sanctorum romanorum pontificum*, vol. 7 (Turin: Sebastiano Franco and Henrico Dalmazzo, 1862), 230-36.

161 Lector, *Le conclave*, 270-71. Alexander VIII issued a decree in 1690 against the looting of the conclavists as well.
papal bureaucracy by severing the close bonds that conclavists and papal servants shared with their lord.

Since the conclavist had already pillaged his cell, the people often looted the cells of other cardinals and seized furnishings inside the Vatican and even parts of the palace itself. The Cardinal Chamberlain forbade the pillaging of both the cardinals’ cells and the Vatican at the election of the new pope, but as a bando issued as late as 1691 indicates, Romans largely ignored his admonitions.\textsuperscript{162} The edict expressively prohibited Romans from, “on the day of the election of the Supreme Pontiff...removing, taking, carrying away, hiding, stealing, giving away, and offering any sort of belonging found in this Conclave.” It offered a list of items—many quite mundane, but useful—that Romans should not pillage. These included, among other things, buckets, washtubs, iron pipes, bells, bricks, windows, tables, ropes, lanterns, and iron trimmings of stoves. The punishment for disobeying the decree was excommunication and restitution of any damages done to the Vatican.\textsuperscript{163} The decree promised that the various guards of the conclave would carefully watch out for any malefactors. Well before the Chamberlain’s decree, a vigilant protection of the conclave was the norm. For example, with the news of Gregory XV’s election, a crowd of “all the classes” poured into the conclave, but the

\textsuperscript{162} Extant \textit{bandi} issued by the Cardinal Chamberlain exist for the vacancies of Gregory XIV (1591) and Alexander VIII (1691); see ASV, Misc. Arm. IV & V, t. 26, \textit{bando} of 17 October 1591, p. 235 and \textit{bando} of 11 April 1691, p. 237.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, \textit{bando} of 11 April 1691, p. 237: “nel giorno dell’elettione del Sommo Pontefice...levare, pigliare, portar via, nascondare, rubare, dare, e sprogere ad altri qualsisia sorted i robbe si esistenti in esso Conclave.”
“prompt and vigorous opposition of the guards” prevented the populace looting the
place.164

More often than not the principal target of the people’s sack was the palace of the
pope-elect, or cardinals rumored to have been elected to the papacy. Papal authorities
inveighed against this practice. Prelates at the Council of Constance in 1417 condemned
what was then the relatively new practice of sacking both the cell and house of the new
pope. The prohibition went unheeded and Leo X issued a bull at the Fifth Lateran
Council in 1516 that excommunicated those taking part in the pillaging of the newly
elected pope’s palace. After Leo’s bull, popes no longer took any actions against the
customary pillages, but cardinals attempted to forestall them.165 Throughout the sixteenth
and seventeenth centuries the cardinals regularly flouted the decrees they had made while
in the Sacred College against keeping large numbers of soldiers at their palaces. The
soldiers were needed, as Leo’s bull complained mobs sought to force their way into the
cardinal’s palace “by breaking down the doors or digging under the wall…unless a
defense is made by armed guards.”166 Some cardinals also hid their most valuable

164 “Relazione di Girolamo Giustinian, Antonio Grimani, Francesco Contarini, e Girolamo Soranzo, 1621,”
dagli ambasciatori veneti nel secolo deimosettimo (Venice: Pietro Naratovich, 1877), 116: “tutti gli ordini”
and “la resistenza delle milizie ben pronta et vigorosa.”

165 For the Council of Constance and Leo X at the Fifth Lateran Council, see Paravicini-Bagliani, The
Pope’s Body, 152-53. For the Fifth Lateran Council, also see Norman P. Tanner, ed., Decrees of the
the election of the pope to be a novel custom, as the bull against the practice complained “there has recently
grown up in Rome a damnable abuse and lack of restraint in wrongdoing.”

166 Tanner, ed., Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 650. In his guidebook on the cardinalate, the
humanist and papal clerk Paolo Cortesi recommended that each cardinal keep guardroom and armory on
the lower level of his palace, should “any danger or disturb seem likely to arise.” See Kathleen Weil-
garris and John F. D’Amico, The Renaissance Cardinal’s Ideal Palace: A Chapter from Cortesi’s De
Cardinalatu (Rome: Edizioni dell’Elefante, 1980), 77-78.
possessions for the duration of the vacancy. At the first rumors of a cardinal’s election, his relative immediately fortified the family palace and other properties in the city.\footnote{167 For example, when the Domenico Tosco [or Toschi] was rumored to have been elected during the first conclave of 1605, his relatives and retainers “fortified his palace so that it would not be plundered;” see BAV, Urb.lat 1073, avviso of 19 March 1605, f. 131v: fortificarono il Palazzo per non esser svaligiato.” For the cardinals’ hiding of personal property, see John Florio, \textit{A letter lately written from Rome}, unpaginated: “In times past they were woont to find there many things of value, especially household stuff, but now they have but the least hope to bee Pope, cause theyr servants secretly convey there all the best, leaving nothing but such things as they care not for losing.”} The Popolo Romano likewise responded by sending the \textit{caporioni} to the cardinal’s palace.\footnote{168 See Chapter 1 for Popolo Romano and Chapter 3 for soldiers.}

The cardinals’ defensive measures worked as none of the attempts at sacking the newly pope’s palace in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Rome were successful. Elsewhere in early modern Italy, those among the populace who had past connection with the new pontiff succeeded in pillaging his property. In 1559, the rumor that Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga had been elected pope stirred the Mantuan subjects of his nephew Guglielmo to pillage some of his benefices. The election of the Bolognese popes Gregory XV (1621) and Benedict XIV (1740) provoked looting in Bologna as did the election of the short-lived pope, Urban VII (1590), who had served as Governor of Bologna in 1577-78.\footnote{169 Carlo Ginzburg et al, “Ritual Pillages: A Preface to a Research in Progress,” in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, eds., \textit{Micorhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991 [1986]), 21 and 25.} The authorities of these areas, not expecting a sack, did not take the precautions to prevent them.
But the sacks were a right, a “Priviledge,” as one account put it, which Romans were not to be denied as they expected some compensation.\textsuperscript{170} Beginning with Paul II, pope-elects distributed large sums of money to dissuade the crowds from attempting to plunder their palaces. Other cardinals took a different approach; with the false report of Cardinal Sacchetti’s election, members of his family gave wine to the celebrating crowds that lined the streets of Rome from St. Peter’s to his house, “so that no one could pass through the people.”\textsuperscript{171} Parsimonious popes started off on the wrong foot when they refused to give something to the people. When the cardinals elected Dutch pope, Adrian VI, the people complained that he did not have a palace to sack. Upon hearing the news of her brother-in-law’s election as Innocent X, Donna Olimpia Maidalchini had all the Pamphilij’s property hidden away. With nothing to pillage or receive, the people began to imprecate the Pamphilij name as well as the new pope because they had flouted the tradition.\textsuperscript{172}

Rather than rituals highlighting the transformation of the cardinal into his “new superpersona,” or as a manifestation of a unified vox populi, customary sacks in Rome might best be seen as a charivari.\textsuperscript{173} In order for the populace to accept and consent to

\textsuperscript{170}Anonymous, \textit{A New History}, 18.

\textsuperscript{171}For Paul II, see Pastor, HOP, vol. 4 (1900), 16-17. For Sacchetti in 1644, see ASV, Conclavi, “Conclavi da Pio II a Innocenzo X,” f. 773r: “che da San Pietro sino alla casa di detto Sacchetti nonsi poteva passare per la gente.”

\textsuperscript{172}For Adrian VI, see Baumgartner, \textit{Behind Locked Doors}, 97. For Donna Olimpia Maidalchini, see \textit{The Life of Donna Olimpia Maldachini, who governed the church during the time of Innocent X} (London: Printed for W. Godbid, 1667), 28-29. Leti originally published this work in Italian in 1666.

the new pope’s rule, he had to pay them. Moreover, in paying them, the pope demonstrated his magnanimity and, in this regard, the sacks served the same function as the dispersal of coins to the masses at his coronation. Popes, influenced by Counter-Reformation dictates on decorum, discontinued the latter practice. Pius V, wanting to help the truly needy rather than the vagabonds who gathered in St. Peter’s Square, gave alms to charity instead of dispensing money during his coronation ceremonies. Sixtus V and subsequent popes followed this custom.\(^{174}\) Romans, however, continued to demand payment from their new leader in the form of customary pillages, which persisted throughout the early modern era. The pillages thus reflected the close bonds they had with the pope, which were only severed with the onset of modernity.

In addition to the pillages, the election of a new pope was met with official and private expressions of joy. The papal officials had church bells rung, drums beat, and trumpets sounded.\(^{175}\) The vice castellan of Castel Sant’Angelo also fired cannons during the next three nights, both in celebration and to broadcast the approaching end of the vacancy (which would finally come to a close with the new pope’s coronation). Through the night and the next three nights the city was aglow with the light from bonfires that burned from its towers and squares and from the fireworks that ambassadors and Roman nobles shot before their palaces.\(^{176}\) The celebrations were politicized as the French and

\(^{174}\) For Pius V and Sixtus V initiating the tradition of giving alms rather than dispensing money at their coronation ceremony and the papal advent called the *possesso*; see Francesco Cancellieri, *Storia de’ solenni possessi de’ sommi pontefici detti anticamente processi dopo la loro coronazione dalla basilica vaticana alla lateranense* (Rome: Luigi Lazzarini, 1802), 110 and 121.


\(^{176}\) For the bonfires, fireworks, candles and artillery; see BAV, Urb.lat 1073, *avviso* of 2 April 1605 (Leo XI), f. 182v and Urb.lat 1093, *avviso* of 9 August 1623, f. 589r (Urban VIII) as well as ASV, Segretario,
the Spanish both tried to outdo each other in honoring the new pope, especially if their
candidate had been elected. Upon the election of Leo XI in 1605, the French and their
supporters yelled through the streets, “France has won!” “Bless the French!” and “Long
Live France and Florence!” But after the election of Innocent X, the supporters of Spain
and the Holy Roman Empire as well as the Duke of Parma, who had successfully resisted
the pro-French Barberini in the War of Castro, celebrated the loudest. Nevertheless, a
Roman was always the most preferred candidate. When Camillo Borghese, from a
Romanized Sienese family, was elected in 1605 as Paul V, the French supporters in
Rome to forget their sorrow at the death of Leo and celebrated his election with
“explosions of joys.”

The importance of the discussion surrounding the conclave represented its own
version of a public sphere, although one that did not match up exactly to Jürgen
Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth century. In Habermas’s model,
the public sphere was a place where the secret workings of the government were laid bare
for open discussion among intellectuals in the press and at coffeehouses and parlors. In
contrast, Romans experienced the political secrets of the conclave through rumor,
speculation, factionalism, and disorder. Public opinion—in the form of the so-called vox

Avvisi, t. 96, avviso of 17 September 1644, ff. 250r-v (Innocent X) and t. 102, avviso of 20 April 1655, f. 270r (Alexander VII).

177 For the election of Leo XI, see the account of the French Cardinal Jacques-Davy Duperron in Couzard,
Une ambassade, 367: “France a vaincu,” “Soiyent biens les Français,” and “Vive France et Florence.” For
the celebration of the Spanish, Imperialists and supporters of the Duke of Parma, see ASV, Segretario, t. 96,
avviso of 17 September 1644, f. 250r.

178 Couzard, Une ambassade, 388.

179 Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of
populi—was fragmented into different, often competing voices. Nevertheless, the papal election was a time in which Romans of all ranks and backgrounds—nobles and commoners, brokers and bettors, French and Spanish—used a variety of means to voice their opinions on the election. This was a major accomplishment in an age of absolutist government when most people were barred from the “mysteries of state.”

CONCLUSION

The Restoration of Authority

In his famous memoirs, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini depicted the reception in Rome of his election as Pope Pius II in 1458. In an account, full of hubris and self-promotion, he wrote

Once they knew for certain that Aeneas sat in Peter’s chair, however, all joined in the celebrations. You would have thought that not only the people but even the beasts and the buildings of Rome were swooning with delight; everywhere there was laughter and joy…Before, the city had been in arms; no one seemed to trust in anything but the sword. But now, with the news that the papacy had gone to Aeneas, the atmosphere changed. What had been a city of Mars all at once became a city of—well, I will not say Venus, mother of Aeneas of Troy—but a city of Peace and Quiet. Everywhere, joy and tranquility reigned.¹

Rome, once a Bacchanalian forest and battlefield now became a city dedicated to the goddess of love. Of course, one must take Pius II—always an exaggerator—with a grain of salt. Although the election filled the void left by the pope-elect’s predecessor, he officially did not assume full authority until he was presented to the crowd gathered in St. Peter’s square and then crowned in the basilica’s portico before a crowd of ecclesiastical

and noble witnesses.\(^2\) In the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, the coronation generally took place a week after the election.\(^3\)

But popes, concerned with asserting their authority and restoring order to the city, regularly issued *bandi* several days before their coronation that revoked all licenses to carry weapons that were issued by various interregnal authorities and confirmed the previous decrees of his predecessors. As with all papal *bandi*, officials posted them at the entrances of the city, on tavern walls, and in the major markets with accompanying fanfare so that no one could claim ignorance of the law. The decrees also called on “soldiers, both private and general, hired for the occasion of sede vacante, to leave Rome within three days” or suffer the punishment of the galleys.\(^4\) Included in these provisions were “all vagabonds, men without a profession or an occupation, and those who make the profession of staying in the houses of others, vulgarly called sgherri, or bravi.” The latter referred to the youthful thugs that many potentates kept around their palaces—the kind of people cardinals and ambassadors hired as guards during the vacancy.

\(^2\) Gregorio Leti, *The ceremonies of the vacant see* (London: Printed by H. L. and R. B. for Tho. Bassest at the George in Fleet Street, 1671), 93: “As all the Pope’s Tribunals cease during the vacancy of the See, so they began not their Functions again till after the Pope’s Coronation, upon which all Affairs reassume their ordinary Course.”

\(^3\) Luigi Fiorani, *Riti, cerimonie, feste e vita di popolo nella Roma dei papi* (Bologna: Cappelli editore, 1970), 141.

\(^4\) See the following *bandi*: ASV, Misc. Arm. IV & V, t. 48, *bando* of 9 December 1590 [coronation of Gregory XIV occurred on 8 December 1590], p. 268 and t. 74, *bando* of 9 November 1591 [coronation of Innocent IX occurred on 3 November], p. 94. See the following *bandi*: ASR, Bandi, Governatore, vol. 410, *bando* of 29 April 1585 [Sixtus V crowned on 1 May 1585]; ASV, Misc. Arm IV & V, t. 48, *bando* of 17 September [Urban VII died before his coronation, but the *bando* was issued two days after his election], p. 267; t. 48, *bando* of 8 February 1592 [coronation of Clement VIII occurred on 9 February 1592], p. 270; t. 48, *bando* of 7 April 1605 [Leo IX’s coronation occurred on 10 April 1605; and ASR, Bandi, vol. 410, *bando* of 21 September 1644 [Innocent X was crowned on 4 October 1644]. The *bandi* read: “soldati stipendiati per occorenze della sede vacante tanto nel genle come nel particolare, che fra 3 di partono di Roma” and “che tutti vagabondi, persone denza partito, & arte, o chi fanno professinoe di stato in case d’altri, volgarmente detti sgherri o bravi.”
The Governor of Rome, nominated by the new pope, acted quickly to enforce the pope’s order. After the promulgation of the *bandi*, his *sbirri* regularly scoured the streets and main squares, arresting soldiers and vagabonds that remained in Rome after the election of the pope. For example, after the election of Sixtus V, several soldiers hired to watch the Capital during Gregory XIII’s vacancy were arrested for not leaving the city and for carrying [now] unlicensed weapons. The police were sent in full force after other vacancies as well. Within a week after the election of Urban VIII on 6 August 1623, *sbirri* began arresting soldiers brought into the city during the vacancy of Gregory XV. The postponement of Urban’s coronation due to illness may have confused the captains and their soldiers. One Tulio da Zagarolo, a soldier at the Capitol arrested after the vacancy, excused himself, saying that “Signor Giulio Mass [the Captain of Capitoline soldiers] told me that I should carry my weapons until the coronation [of the pope].” Tulio and two of his companions were asked by the Governor’s tribunal if they were vagrants, specifically if they were gypsies (*zingari*), betraying a deep concern for the presence of strangers in the city.

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5 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 342, testimony of various arrested soldiers, 6 May 1585, ff. 59r-63v and 92r-v. The soldier, Domenico Fiorentino, admitted to knowing about the bandi, but wanted to stay in room in order to find work as a baker’s assistant (f. 63v).

6 After the ascension of Clement VIII in 1592, papal sbirri picked up several vagabonds lingering in the major squares of the city, see ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 423, ff. 12r-14r. Before the coronation of Paul V, papal police arrested several soldiers hired to protect the conclave for not leaving the city; see ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 553, various testimonies of arrested soldiers, 27 May 1605, ff. 13v-18r

7 ASR, TCG, Costituti, vol. 713, testimony of Tulio da Zagarolo, 13 August 1623, f. 85v: “Detto signorr Giulio Massa m’ha detto che porti le mia arme sino al Incoronatione.”

Popes were thus eager to lay down the law and make examples of those who had committed misdeeds during the vacancy. Both Gregory XIV and Innocent IX had several pasquinade writers arrested upon their ascension to the papal throne. Innocent also had fifty malefactors, arrested during his predecessor’s vacancy, sent to the galleys before his coronation and refused to give clemency to the retainers of two nobles arrested during the vacancy.  

Clement VIII had pasquinade writers arrested and condemned the nobleman, Stefano Muti, to decapitation for carrying a prohibited handgun during the vacancy before his coronation on 8 February 1592. Furthermore, he issued an edict that exiled all the prostitutes and women renters of rooms from the Borgo, the district adjacent to the Vatican, because their immorality had led “to the calamitous times, both present and past, of famine, sedi vacanti, and bandits.” Indeed, after receiving letters from several towns in the Marches complaining about the depredations of bandits and saying that “they could no longer live in this state, and that they would be forced to put themselves under another Prince” Clement let it be known “that he wanted to help them and spend all of the treasury of the church for the destruction of these wicked men.”

The Two Ceremonies of the Papal Inauguration

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9 BAV, Urb.lat 1059, *avvisi* of 2 and 6 November 1591, ff. 351r, 353r, and 362r.

10 BAV, Urb.lat 1060, *avvisi* of 1 and 5 February 1592, ff. 69v and 80v-81r.


12 Ibid: “che non possono più vivere in questo stato, et che saranno forzata di andare a ponere sotto altro Prencipe” and “volervi providere, et spendere tutto il Thesoro della chiesa per destruttinoe di questi scelerati.”
Although popes began ruling shortly after the announcement of his election, tradition nevertheless dictated that his new status be ritually enacted through a double inauguration ceremony: a public coronation in the portico of St. Peter’s and an advent called the pos sesso, in which the pope and the city’s ecclesiastical and lay elites marched to San Giovanni in Laterano, where he took possession of the city of Rome as its bishop. Originally, the two ceremonies took place on the same day. In order to give the city and private individuals time to embellish the processional route with triumphal arches and other decorations, popes, starting with Julius II in 1503, began to separate the two ceremonies. On average, a two-month interval separated the two ceremonies, although seventeenth-century popes tended to wait even longer interval to stage the pos sesso. In time, the delay imparted different ritual functions on the two inauguration ceremonies. The coronation ritually broadcasted the full ascension of the pope, while the pos sesso introduced the pope to the city at large. Popes sought to display their power and authority as absolute lords during the procession to San Giovanni. But the communication during the pos sesso was multivalent. His subjects talked to him with inscriptions and paintings that lined the streets. These called on the pope to be a good father and prince. Thus, the pos sesso served as a “mirror for princes,” holding the pope to standards of good government.

The coronation occurred in the portico, or atrium, of St. Peter’s before a gathering of cardinals, important ecclesiastics, ambassadors, and Romans nobles. This could be a large crowd, as Gregorio Leti noted that “in some parts of the Church, there are Scaffolds set up for the principal Lords and Ladies of eminent quality, who are desirous to be
Spectators of that celebrious [sic] Action."13 The pope was carried in a sedan by various sub-deacons into the atrium where he was deposited on a chair. Inside, the Master of Ceremonies stood before him, burning pieces of flax, while a priest intoned the ritual phrase, “Holy Father, thus does the glory of the world pass away.” This was performed two times, not only signaling the vanity of earthly power, but also looking forward to his future vacancy.

The pope was then led to the door overlooking the crowd in St. Peter’s, where he gave his second public benediction of his pontificate, the first being when he was introduced upon the election with the words “Habemus papae.” Leti noted that this public appearance was important: “he gave time to all the people to go out of the Church to see the Act of his Coronation.”14 Upon seeing the pope, the people shouted “Vivas,” thereby giving him their own blessing of a long life. Up until 1566, this public display was accompanied by the throwing of silver and gold coins to the crowd gathered in the square. At Pius IV’s coronation on 6 January 1560 wintry rain had made the marble steps of St. Peter’s slippery. Once the acolytes began tossing coins into the piazza, the mad crowd pushed forward to gain the money, many slipped and fell, causing a crush of people to fall. In the confusion, twenty-five people died and forty more were seriously injured. Subsequent popes, to avoid the tumultuous contests for the coins, distributed alms to hospitals and other charitable institutions on their coronations and the day of their

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13 Leti, Ceremonies of the vacant see, 86-87.
14 Ibid, 87.
possesso, as a way of displaying their magnanimity as princes to the people. The papacy, like other early modern monarchies, had moved toward more decorous coronation rites.

After the public benediction, he returned to the atrium, where he was crowned with the papal tiara. Then, each of the prelates and dignitaries, starting with the elder cardinals and ending with the lay nobles, paid homage to the new pope by giving him “adoration,” that is, by kissing his feet and hands in a rite that reflected the power of the pope. To further highlight the coronation, three full nights of celebration ensued. Papal officials shot artillery and fireworks from Castel Sant’Angelo. The city’s prelates and magnates all competed to honor the new popes by giving “their contentendness [sic] with Lumieres, Artillerie fires, and burning great quantities of Pitched Barrels.” Thus, no one could claim ignorance that the city had a new ruler and that sede vacante was over.

The possesso saw the pope travel in a cortege of his ecclesiastical, civic and baronial vassals from the Vatican to his bishopric at San Giovanni in Laterano. There, he took part in a private ceremony inside the church in which he was invested with his symbols of episcopal authority, the papal keys and the ferula, or shepherd’s staff. During the possesso, he traversed the entire city, claiming it as his and broadcasting his absolutist

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pretensions. The procession cast the pope as a triumphant victor, as collective entities such as foreign nations, churches, and guilds as well as private individuals decorated the streets and building on the processional path—the via papale—with arches, flowers, rugs and tapestries, and tableaux vivants. Yet, scholars have emphasized the one-sidedness of the possesso too much: the possesso was also an advent in which the pope entered Rome from the Vatican, technically outside Rome, and was greeted by his people. Indeed, the Jewish community and the Popolo Romano paid homage to the pope at the Arch of Titus and the Capitol Hill. But in decorating the streets, various groups in Rome talked to the pope in a subtle dialogue. The arches and decorations were usually decorated with epigrams and other inscriptions calling on the newly crowned pope to rule justly, maintain good government, and to feed the people. Many also included admonitions to avoid being a tyrant. Implicit in this exchange was the notion that the pope’s sede vacante lay at any moment in the future and that future retribution might be

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taken against a bad pope. Thus, the *possesso* rather than closing the *sede vacante* of his predecessor’s, held the possibility of a future *sede vacante* before the newly crowned pope.\(^{20}\)

Since Julius II popes had delayed taking the *possesso*. Julius postponed the *possesso* until two weeks after the coronation—most likely in order to give artisans time to construct arches in his honor. Subsequent popes commonly delayed the *possesso* so that private individuals and collective entities, such as the Popolo Romano and the Jewish community, could plan and execute the decorations and arches along via papale. Despite these delays, many arches remained incomplete on the day of the possesso. For example, Francesco Albertonio, the author of a pamphlet on Gregory XIV’s possesso, noted that the Popolo Romano did not have enough time to “arrange in total perfection” the arch it had constructed at the top of the Capitol Hill.\(^{21}\) Likewise, the *caporione*, Giacinto Gigli, wrote in his diary that the arch that the Farnese family had dedicated to Innocent X remained unfinished by the time of the *possesso*.\(^{22}\) Indeed, printed pamphlets usually depicted the arches as they should have looked rather than their actual state at the time of the procession.

Popes and their masters of ceremonies staged the *possesso* a week to several months after the coronation, usually aligning it with a Sunday or a major feast day of the


Catholic liturgical calendar. The shortest interval between a coronation and a *possesso* from the time of Paul III (1534) to Alexander (1655) was four days—the *possesso* of the severe and frugal Sixtus V (1585), who refused any triumphal arches at his procession to San Giovanni in Laterano. The longest was the almost six-month period between the two inauguration ceremonies of Paul V (1605). Two months was the average for these Counter-Reformation popes, although the general trend tilted toward longer intervals in the seventeenth century.\(^23\) Throughout the early modern era, popes normally postponed taking the *possesso* and displayed no concern for the lingering disorder of *sede vacante*. The coronation had tacitly come to serve the purpose of closing the papal interregnum.

Gregory XIV officially separated the *possesso* from the coronation in 1590, thereby recognizing the practice begun by Julius II. The first historian of the *possesso*, the abbot Francesco Cancellieri, noted that from this time onward “the Popes began their ministry with all the fullness of their supreme authority on the day of the Coronation.” But why would Gregory XIV publicly recognize the separation of the two inaugural ceremonies after almost a century of tacit tradition?\(^24\) The answer lies in the long vacancy of 1590-92, a period which saw the death of four popes and, as we have seen, the onset of a number catastrophes for the Papal States. Bandits, due to the lack of strong leadership, infested the Roman countryside. Concomitant with the bandits and exacerbated by their depredations was a famine that spread throughout the lands of the

\(^23\) Some popes did not even have a *possesso*. Marcellus II (1555) and Urban VII (1590) did not live long enough to make the procession. Paul III did not stage a *possesso*; instead he allowed the Roman baronage and the civic magistrates to stage a celebration, complete with jousting, on the night of his coronation at the Vatican. See Cancellieri *La storia de’ solenni possessi*, 90-105, 121-27, and 168-87; and Ingersol, “Ritual Use of Space,” 198-213.

\(^24\) Cancellieri, *La storia de’ solenni possessi*, 128.
Church. Gregory XIV emphasized the coronation over the \textit{possesso} in order to highlight the abrupt break with the troubles provoked by \textit{sede vacante}.

This concern for order can be seen in the arch that the Popolo Romano erected in the Capitol for Gregory’s \textit{possesso}. Perhaps not coincidently, this was the first time the civic magistrates had accorded a pope such an honor. The magistrates charged the noble Gabriele Cesarini with the planning of the allegorical themes of the arches. According to Albertonio, Cesarini wished “to apply the Statues, mottos, inscriptions and signs to the person of the Pontiff in the hope that the Rome of His Holiness will understand the qualities and needs of the present times.”  

The “needs of the present times” were readily discernible through the six statues located on both sides of the arch. Three of them displayed the conventional themes of Clemency, Charity and Liberality, but the others reflected a rather usual concern with disorder and dearth—Abundance, Security and Quiet—surely allusions to the bandit unrest and famine of the \textit{sede vacante} of the autumn 1590.

Interior paintings of the arch reveal Gregory’s emphasis on the coronation as the ceremony ending \textit{sede vacante}. Cesarini consciously juxtaposed Old Testament scriptures with scenes from the two inauguration ceremonies to highlight this change in papal ritual. The painting on the right side of the interior depicted Gregory’s coronation at St. Peter’s, accompanied by these lines in Latin from Proverbs 1:27-28: “when sudden calamity shall fall upon us, and destruction, as a tempest, shall be at hand, then we shall call you, and you will not hear us.” Beneath the painting was a depiction of the Tiber

\footnote{Albertonio, \textit{Ragguaglio della cavalcata di N. S. Gregorio XIV}, unpaginated.}
with the quote from Psalms 93:3: “the floods have lifted up their voice.” On the left side, Gregory was shown on his *possesso*, blessing the people as he made his way to San Giovanni in Laterano. A quote from Isaiah 11:11 underscored the point: “the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant of his people.” Beneath this painting was a depiction of a wolf nursing children with this abridged line from Leviticus 20:24: “possess their land flowing with milk.”26

The right side of the arch demonstrated the role of coronation in ending to *sede vacante* by alluding to the troubles and lack of leadership during the interregnum. These calamities would be “lifted” and the wayward brought back to the fold once the pope was crowned. The left side of the arch emphasized the good government to come under the recently crowned pope; the pope would gather the people under his just rule and provide them with abundance during the time of famine. The paintings summarize the new role of the double inauguration: the coronation looked backward in order to restore peace after the vacancy and the possesso looked forward to the good things to come in the reign of the new pope. Freed from any lingering fears concerning *sede vacante*, seventeenth-century popes greatly extended the interval between coronation and the *possesso*.

The calls for the pope to be a just ruler were not unique to Gregory’s *possesso*. By the time of the Counter-Reformation popes, themes of justice and the militant church had come to replace the “self-promotion” of the Renaissance popes Julius II and Leo X. But processions after 1590 tended emphasize traditional qualities of a good prince and

26 Ibid, the Latin verse read, on the right side: “cum irriut repentina calamitas, quando venit super nos tribulation, et angustia, tunc invocavimus te, et exaudisti nos” and “elevaverunt flumina vocem suam.” The left side: “adjciet Dominus manum suam ad possidendium residuum Populi” and “posside terram flentem lacte.”
pastor. The Popolo Romano as well as private individuals used the occasion to broadcast their expectations of good government to the pope. These displays were more than laudatory odes to the absolutist pope; they were a tacit but firm reminder that the people held the popes to a standard of princely government. They listed the traits that the people demanded of the pope. For example, the Sienese spice dealer, Marc’Antonio Ciappi decorated his shop, the Drago d’oro, in the Banchi during the possessi from the Gregory XIV to Gregory XV (1621).27 His shop sat at the corner that faced the Vatican, which allowed him to set up two stages to greet the pope as he crossed the Ponte Sant’Angelo. He placed statues and tableaux vivants on these stages that represented the allegorical traits a good ruler should possess. The traits that Ciappi sought in a pope were Peace, Charity and Abundance. He had children distribute bread to the poor and candies to passing noblemen. The allegories and his charity were meant to stimulate similar activity in the pope. A pamphlet that Ciappi had written about his display for Gregory XV’s procession, read

The great liberality of Ciappi was praised and acclaimed by everyone, but principally his beautiful and learned invention, wanting by means of Children so dressed, who distributed Bread to the Poor, to denote the works of Charity, so necessary to all, and in particular to Princes.

The pamphlet outlined the virtues a prince should possess, stating “as Cicero wrote, he must be strong, just, stern, serious, magnanimous, beneficent, [and] liberal.”28

27 Cancellieri, La storia de’ solenni possessi, 139, 165-66, 179-88 and 189-92. Also see the pamphlets that Marcantonio Ciappi had written about his displays; Relazione del vago, et nobile apparato fatto alla Spetiera del Drago in Banchi (Rome: Guglielmo Facciotti, 1605) and Descrittione del vago et gentil apparato fatto dal Signore M. A. Ciappi Senese alla Spetiera del Drago in Banchi (Rome: Guglielmo Facciotti, 1621).

28 For both quotes, see Cancellieri, La storia de’ solenni possessi, 192 and Descrittione del vago et gentil apparato, unpagedinated.
The arch that the Popolo Romano posted at the possesso of Urban VIII (1623) demonstrated similar concerns over good government. The language, as with that of Ciappi’s and others, was a subtle mix of flattery and tacit expectations. The statues and imagery of the triumphal arch celebrated the Barberini pope’s talents as a humanist and poet. But there was a sharper edge to the allegory of the display. Ten allegorical statues along the balustrade greeted the pope as he climbed the steps to the Capitol. Most represented his scholarly interests in Greek, history, poetry and the humanities, but, two statues, representing Abundance and Public Felicity stand out. The fluctuating price of bread and the threat of famine were major concerns in the Papal States during the early 1620s. The civic magistrates held the pope responsible for keeping the people content with bread. Agostino Mascardi, who the civic officials commissioned to write a lengthy account of the festivities at the Capitol for Urban’s possesso, underlined this point more forcefully. Commenting on the two statues, Mascardi maintained that “the Prince must keep the state well provided because under the heap of grain can easily hide the errors of his government; so that he cannot ever silence the complaints of his subjects in a better way than by filling their mouths.” The solution was to satisfy the people with “bread and circuses.” Almost prophetic with regard to the latter years of Urban’s pontificate, Mascardi reminded the pope that he must not fail to keep the people fed in times of famine in order “to avoid the insult of posters that are attached to the walls at night in his dishonor.”

his description of the display by praising Urban for knowing the difference between a prince and a tyrant. He highlighted the traditional moral economy of the Roman people and their view of the pope as a ruler.

The Popolo Romano underscored their call for a pope to provide for the needs of the people by giving to charity. The civic official Gigli noted that between the election and the coronation of the popes from Gregory XV to Alexander VII, the Popolo Romano had held a mass in honor of the newly elected pope at the civic church, Santa Maria in Aracoeli. After the mass they also distributed bread to the poor.30 During the possessio, the Popolo Romano had wine flow from the two marbles lions—symbols of the civic government since the Middle Ages—that stood at the foot of the stairs. During the ceremony in which the senator of Rome paid homage to the pope, civic officials threw silver coins emboss with the papal coat-of-arms to the crowd in the Capitoline square.31 In addition to claiming some of ritual space of the possessio, the Popolo Romano also called on the pope to follow standards of princely rule.

As the pope traversed the city, he was also greeted by the people of Rome, who watched the possessio unfold from roofs and stages built for the event. Although relegated to the sidelines, they did not play a passive role in the ceremony. During Gregory XIV’s cavalcade to San Giovanni, Albertonio noted that “the Streets were full of an infinite multitude that in competition with the highest voices acclaimed the Pontiff:


Viva, Viva!”32 Perhaps the members of the crowd hoped to catch the pope’s attention as he was carried in a sedan. Here the mutuality of the possessio is revealed; the people and the pope blessed each other. The pope gave his benediction to the people and the people did the same with their Vivas, in the hopes that the usually old ecclesiastic would have a long pontificate. The English traveler, John Evelyn, observing Innocent X’s possessio with a birds-eye view from Santa Maria in Aracoeli, summed up the exchange: “he went holding up two fingers, & blessing the people & multitudes upon their knees, looking out their windows and houses with loud viva’s [sic] & acclamations of felicity to their Prince.”33

As with monarchical advents, the possessio connected the pope and his subjects in a shared vision for the future. The pope began his pontificate not only with a clean slate but also with the good will of the people. Yet, the pope could easily squander this approval through excessive nepotism and unpopular policies. The allegorical displays that popes passed during the procession held up popular standards of princely rule to which the people held him accountable. If he did not live up to these standards, criticism would surely follow in the form of pasquinades. This was made transparent as the pope’s cavalcade rode past Pasquino on the way to San Giovanni in Laterano, a potent reminder of what could lay in his future sede vacante. This was made more explicit during the possesso of Gregory XIV, when some wags dressed Pasquino as Justice. But the final

32 Albertonio, Raguaglio della cavalcata di N. S. Gregorio XIV, unpaginated.

justice in the minds of many Romans was the *sede vacante* in which they could seek revenge against the memory and monuments of popes who had ruled unjustly.

*Sede Vacante* and the Papal Prince

*Sede vacante* revealed the troubles with Rome’s prince with two souls. The ecclesiastical and elective side of the popes always checked the absolutist ambitions and state-building efforts. The pope, unlike hereditary monarchs, could not pass his title and its power to his relatives. Consequently, the papacy could not maintain governmental continuity and stability. With the pope’s death, papal tribunals ceased to function and would not resume their normal activity until the election of his successor. Due to the political intrigues of the conclave and foreign influence on the election, the College of Cardinals generally took two months in the early modern era to choose an occupant of St. Peter’s throne, although sometimes they took even longer (e.g., in 1559, 1590 and 1655).

The political void that the pope left in the wake of his death was not adequately filled. The College of Cardinals and the Popolo Romano—the two principal interregnal authorities—challenged one another over jurisdictional hegemony during the vacancy and generally cancelled each other’s effectiveness in maintaining law and order. In several cases, the very political structures of *sede vacante* carried the seeds of discord and violence, as papal *sbirri*, under the college’s control frequently clashed with the civic militia while on patrol. The populace also sought to take advantage of this jurisdictional confusion by taking the law into their hands. Brawls and violent altercations based on a
need for revenge dramatically increased during the vacancy. Romans saw *sede vacante* as the optimal time to practice violent self-help.

Other traditions and practices of *sede vacante* further increased the violence and disorder. The opening of the prisons at the pope’s death filled the streets with petty criminals—some of whom were debtors who wanted to take revenge against their creditors. The reliance on men from outside of Rome as soldiers watching the city and conclave only exacerbated the situation. Cardinals and barons employed many of these men as well, who often supplemented their income with theft or by serving as thugs and assassins to those seeking revenge during the vacancy. Not only did the papacy regularly lose effective leadership during the vacancy, it also lost its monopoly of violence. The vacancy of 1590, demonstrated the inadequacy of papal governance during the *sede vacante*. Neither the College of Cardinals nor the Popolo Romano could stop the incessant bandit raids into the Roman countryside or find an adequate source of grain to feed the city in the midst of famine.

Finally, Romans held the pope to standards of princely rule, based on his role as the father of his people. This standard was rooted in a traditional moral economy that saw supplying the city with an abundant and cheap food supply as the pope’s primary duty. Popes who failed to do this—especially those who placed taxed staples such as bread and oil to finance war and building projects—suffered popular chastisement in death.34 Romans tolerated and even expected the nepotism of the popes; they only

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balked when its excesses led to high taxes. *Sede vacante* thus allowed Romans to do and say things that the papacy forbade while the pope lived. The memory of popes who did not meet the expectations of the populace suffered during *sede vacante*: pasquinades and popular songs besmirched their names and, in the cases of Paul IV, Sixtus V, and Urban VIII, crowds sought to destroy their statues at the Capitol.

*Sede vacante* was then a regular check on the absolutist pretensions of early modern popes, one that was rooted in the ecclesiastical nature of the papacy. In spite of the state-building efforts and centralizing policies of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century popes, the vacancy laid bare the weaknesses of papal governance.\(^35\) The populace held its paradoxical prince to traditional standards of rules and displayed its anger during the vacancy if these were not met. The clerical bureaucracy could not fill the void left by the death of their master.

*Sede vacante* cannot be said to have been the main cause of reason behind the weakness of the papacy. It certainly contributed to it. In this regard, the papacy shared much in common with other elective monarchies, such as the Holy Roman Empire and the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania, which failed to become effective powers in the

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early modern era. Unlike the latter two states, the papacy, as state, survived until absorbed by the Italian nation-state in 1870. It survived, at least in Rome because, as the observant Venetian ambassador, Alive Mocenigo, suggested, its people derived too many benefits from the capital of Christendom and the Papal States. *Sede vacante* ensured that Romans could critique their leaders, but no one seriously considered replacing their paradoxical prince.
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