

Introduction

Historiography has not taken a particular interest in Ippolito II d'Este, the second-born son of Duke Alfonso I of Ferrara and Lucrezia Borgia. When mentioned at all, this princely Italian cardinal has usually been framed as one of the most luminous sixteenth-century examples of artistic patronage, lavish lifestyle and clerical corruption. Meanwhile, his own blatant disinterest in pastoral concerns and his thirst for ecclesiastical benefices have sometimes served as a negative comparison to emphasise the new religious and institutional tensions that were changing the Catholic Church for good.¹ The fact that, for early modern standards, Ippolito had quite a long life – he died at sixty-three – has helped to cast him as somewhat of an anachronistic character, clinging onto a golden age of exterior splendour in which cardinals were more familiar with Castiglione's *Courtisan* than with the Bible. Whilst art historians have long recognised the importance of Ippolito's artistic patronage both in France and in Italy, not much has been made of his life in relation to the broader events of this time. He stood, however, at the very centre of them.

Having been destined by his family to join the clergy in order to take up the legacy of his eponymous uncle (whom Castiglione had indeed mentioned as an example of courtly refinement), Ippolito became a cardinal thanks to his brother's money and to King Francis I's influence. His close friendship with Francis I, at whose court Ippolito spent many happy years, was pivotal to kickstarting his career as one of the richest cardinals in the Sacred College, as well as to giving him a reputation for being privy to the French monarch's plans, especially after he became a member of the *Conseil du roi*. At the same time, his large household became one of the vessels through which people and culture moved between France and Italy, leading some art historians to see the presence of the cardinal's artistic entourage in France as the main channel through which the Italian Renaissance arrived into the country.² Under Henry II's reign, not only did Ippolito manage to retain the king's favour when many did not, but he went on to become the cardinal protector of the French crown, one of the monarchy's candidates to the pontificate, and, for nearly two years, the administrator of French-occupied Siena on behalf of Henry II.

¹ Examples are in H. Jedin, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient* (4 vols, Freiburg, 1951-1976), iv, p. 272 and G. Alberigo, *I vescovi italiani al Concilio di Trento* (Florence, 1959), p. 272.

² C. Occhipinti, *Carteggio d'arte degli ambasciatori estensi in Francia (1536-1553)* (Pisa, 2001), pp. XCIII-CXLVII.

Scholars are yet to map the full extent of the thick web of exchanges that linked Italy to France in the sixteenth century and that extended far beyond political and military involvement fuelled by the decades-long wars between Valois and Habsburg. Literary, artistic, financial, religious exchanges were facilitated by men who had interests, family, duties and possessions in both countries. These men could also become the vessels – directly or indirectly, as in the case, for instance, of travelling households – of ideas and innovations that ranged from artistic techniques to religious reform. Throughout the sixteenth century, one could find so many Italians in France – artists, bankers, military officials as well as choir singers and kitchen staff – that what looked like a collective fascination with the Italian Renaissance gave way, by the end of the century, to a rising anti-Italian backlash.³ At the same time, French military and diplomatic personnel – the latter often recruited from the ecclesiastical ranks – were to be found in Rome, Venice, Ferrara, whilst a number of French cardinals (especially in the first half of the century) resided in Rome – some of them continuously, some others not – and became fully integrated in the life of the city, greatly contributing to its cultural and artistic development.⁴ Whilst Ippolito d'Este was one of the brightest stars of this *France italienne* during Francis I's reign, the relationship he had with the Valois monarchy and his strong sense of belonging, I will argue, were also essential to how the cardinal was perceived by others and to how he perceived himself, therefore shaping his identity and his outlook as well as decisively influencing his family politics.

If it is true, then, that one can see a 'French Italy' still thriving and striving to influence the Italian political arena even after Charles V's imperial crowning in 1530, then Ippolito d'Este definitely remained of its nodes.⁵ His involvement in French diplomacy inside and outside the College of Cardinals, made official by his appointment as cardinal protector, did nothing but increase throughout the 1540s and 1550s, after Henry II succeeded Francis I. Whilst the duchy of Ferrara – one of the Italian areas in which French influence was strongest – was striving to adopt a more balanced and tactful foreign policy (at least from a military point of view), Ippolito remained firmly grounded in 'French Italy'. His role as member of an Italian ruling family and partisan of the Valois, became, at times, a source of trouble for his brother Duke Ercole II, who feared too strong a French influence over his state. This tension, inherent to Ippolito's figure, set him strongly apart from those French clerics who were – as they have been described – 'prelates of state'.⁶ Although from many

³ J-F. Dubost, *La France italienne, XVIe-XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1997); id., 'Enjeux identitaires et politiques d'une polémique. Français, Italiens et Espagnols dans les libelles publiés en France en 1615', in A. Talon (ed) *Le sentiment national dans l'Europe méridionale aux XVI et XVII siècles* (Madrid, 2007), pp. 91-122; H. Heller, *Anti-Italianism in Sixteenth-Century France* (Toronto, 2003). See also J. Milstein, *The Gondi: Family Strategy and Survival in Early Modern France* (Aldershot, 2013), pp. 1-5.

⁴ To the point of competing with Italian cardinals as protectors of the arts: F. Bardati, 'Ippolito II d'Este e i cardinali francesi: dialogo, emulazione, competizione', in M. Cogotti and F. Fiore (eds), *Ippolito II d'Este. Cardinale, principe, mecenate* (Rome, 2013), pp. 73-99. See also id., *Hombres du roi et princes de l'Église romaine: les cardinaux français et l'art italien (1495-1560)* (Rome, 2015).

⁵ G. Alonge, *Ambasciatori. Diplomazia e politica nella Venezia del Rinascimento* (Rome, 2019), p. 8.

⁶ The definition is by C. Michon, *La crosse et le sceptre. Les prélats d'État sous François Ier et Henry IV* (Paris, 2008).

perspectives Ippolito fitted homogeneously within the group of French cardinals, especially after his niece married into the Guise, as an Italian prince he remained a prelate of not just one state but two – France and Ferrara, whose relationship grew increasingly problematic as France lost ground, in Italy, to Spain.

Some dependency upon foreign potentates was common to all Italian ruling families and thus it also influenced the careers of their offspring. This was particularly true of those families whose states were at the doorstep of Italy and who controlled the roads and rivers that carried soldiers, goods and news to the rest of the peninsula and to the Alpine regions. As a result, small territorial entities like Ferrara or Mantua were used to defend their independency by cultivating tight diplomatic relationships with neighbouring states whilst sending cadet sons to ‘make themselves great’ at one of the European courts. Marco Iacovella has recently drawn attention to the handful of years that Ippolito d’Este’s maternal cousin, the cardinal of Mantua, Ercole Gonzaga, spent supporting the French crown at the beginning of his career in the Church.⁷ Whilst he went on to become one of the leaders of the Imperial cardinals, young Ercole Gonzaga’s brief stint as a French supporter was motivated by his family’s need to bring some balance to the duchy’s foreign politics, as Ercole’s brother, Ferrante, was already employed as a military official amongst Charles V’s ranks. Iacovella traces back to the period of French militancy the balanced view of the conflicts between Habsburg and Valois that Cardinal Gonzaga held later on in his life: the south of Italy under the Habsburg and the duchy of Milan under the French. Gonzaga’s ideal division of spheres of influence, which prioritised stability and peace around his family’s seat over a further enhancement of Imperial power, also appears as the expression of a common concern that characterised lords and states of the Po valley. We will see that a similar mindset was also shared by Ippolito d’Este – for example, when he tried to divert a French military operation to Naples rather than to Lombardy or Tuscany. In comparison to Gonzaga and other princes whose family power was rooted in the northern Italian plains, however, Ippolito’s politics appear more staunchly one-sided and his biography more markedly international.

Looking at Ippolito d’Este’s life as characterised by its particular closeness – political and physical, but also territorial thanks to his ecclesiastical benefices – to the French crown can also help us understand the relationships and tensions between the different political and spatial environments through which the cardinal moved – between the court of the Valois kings, the northern Italian states and the papal Curia. In a recent book, Matthew Vester has looked at the life of a Renaissance feudal lord, René de Challant, in light of the transregional characters of his power and possessions, which were mainly located across the Alpine regions that are now in France, Italy and Switzerland but which also stretched further north into the duchy of Lor-

⁷ M. Iacovella, ‘L’apprendistato politico del cardinal Ercole Gonzaga. Militanza filofrancese, conflitti familiari, impegno pastorale (1527-1532)’, in G. Alonge and R. Ruggiero (eds), *Relations diplomatiques franco-italiennes dans l’Europe de la première modernité. Communication politique et circulation des savoirs* (Lecce, 2020), pp. 157-182.

rairie.⁸ In doing so, Vester has highlighted the need to expand the categories used to frame the Italian Renaissance to include the experience of ‘edge characters’ such as de Challant. In the case of Ippolito d’Este, as we will see, the historiographic category of ‘family cardinal’ needs to be complemented by a consideration of the peculiarities of his family, who shared some of the transregional characters of a lord like de Challant: besides being a composition of territories and jurisdictions that stretched from the Po estuary on the Adriatic coast to the Apennines north of Lucca, the duchy of Ferrara also came to include, after the marriage of Ercole II d’Este with Renée of France in 1528, the duchy of Chartres as well as fiefs in Normandy and in the Loire Valley. As observed by Jean Sènié, the fragility of the dispersed territorial inheritance of the Este became tragically evident at the moment of the extinction of the principal male line with Alfonso II, which triggered the devolution of Ferrara, in 1598.⁹ Ippolito’s French ecclesiastical benefices, on the other hand, were so remarkable in quantity and quality to make him more similar to other French aristocratic cardinals than to his Italian equivalents.

In this book, I also look at Ippolito’s ‘Frenchness’ in light of his position within the Curia, in which he was both the cardinal protector of the French crown and, especially in the conclaves of the 1550s, one of the French candidates to the papal throne. Paolo Prodi’s now classic work on the double nature of the popes has emphasised the pontiff’s role as princely sovereign, paving the way to better knowledge of many aspects related to the governing functions of the papacy – the role of the College of Cardinals and cardinal factions, the papal elections, the papal court, and the career paths available in the Curia.¹⁰ Studies by Italian scholars Antonio Menniti Ippolito, Mario Rosa and Maria Antonietta Visceglia, in particular, have contributed greatly to improve our knowledge of these topics and have helped frame Ippolito’s experience as a leader of the French faction in the Curia.¹¹ In particular, I have tried to highlight how factional politics, family interest and self-promotion interacted and often clashed with each other every time that Ippolito and the other cardinals were called to elect the new pontiff in the secrecy of conclave, a moment – arguably the only moment – in which factions worked at full steam. In the case of Italian aristocratic cardinals like Ippolito the boundaries of their loyalty to a lay sovereign were anything but fixed: they could move back or forth based on other considerations – family interest, personal honour, religious concerns – that thus contributed to shape the contours of each faction during each conclave, and that could sometimes also nurture unexpected alliances, such as the agreement on the election of Cardinal Sal-

⁸ M. Vester, *Transregional Lordship and the Italian Renaissance. René de Challant, 1504-1565* (Amsterdam, 2020), pp. 13-19.

⁹ The fragility of the Este’s transregional possessions became evident at the moment of the devolution of Ferrara, in 1598: J. Sènié, ‘Une affaire de famille: les enjeux politiques des héritages de la maison d’Este’, *Les Mélanges de l’École française de Rome - Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines*, 131-132 (2019), pp. 357-370.

¹⁰ P. Prodi, *Il sovrano pontefice. Un corpo e due anime: la monarchia papale nella prima età moderna* (Bologna, 1982).

¹¹ See the bibliography at the end of this book.

viati that brought Ippolito and his Imperial cousin, Ercole Gonzaga, on the same side during the conclave of 1549-1550.¹²

Unlike conclaves, which are a topic that have always fascinated historians and on which much has been written, the protectorship of national crowns is an institution that has only very recently started to draw more attention and on which there is still much to say. Ippolito's protectorship was so long – almost twenty-five years – and it spanned over decades so important for the relationship between Church and France, that I have considered it as a fundamental moment of transition towards the seventeenth century protectorship, that is to say, towards a role that was more institutionalised and diplomacy-focused than it had previously been. Similarly, the changes occurred in the administration of Ippolito's French benefices after Luigi's succession, which is dealt with in the final chapter of this book, offer a glimpse into the broader changes that were restructuring the relationship between church and monarchy in France.

From a biographical perspective, this book is especially concerned with the years that marked Ippolito's political maturity, loosely from 1548 to 1563 – that is to say, from when Ippolito moved to Rome to become the new cardinal protector of France to when his mission as papal legate to France ended. Throughout this period, Ippolito's power and ambition were at their height and he was dialectically engaged with those political entities from which he derived his power and to which he addressed his ambition. Therefore, one of the recurring questions of this book will be how and to what extent the different obligations to which Ippolito d'Este was subject influenced one another; and further, whether the multiple opportunities of personal advancement that were made available to him through the exploitation of his position at the crossroads of different powers resulted in an enhancement of his personal and familial power.

I have chosen to focus in particular on three biographical moments, which occupy the central chapters of this book and follow one other chronologically. The first deals with Ippolito's administration of Siena, in the first years of the 1550s, which I have considered as the highest expression of the cardinal's affiliation to the French crown. The second looks at Ippolito as the member of an Italian ruling family – from the repercussions of his involvement with the French military to his familial leadership following the difficult political conjuncture of 1559. The third and last episode moves beyond the 1550s and deals with Ippolito's legation to Paris, in 1561. It focuses on the reversed perspective from which Ippolito had to negotiate his lifelong relationship with a very changed French court – that is to say, as a papal emissary to a France divided along religious lines and in which the fascination with the Italian Renaissance previously shared by the French aristocracy had given way to an anti-Italian backlash. The close observation of such short periods of time – historical mi-

¹² Cardinal Gonzaga's position during this and other conclaves is analysed in M. Iacovella, '«Padrone di me et del voto mio». Militanza filoimperiale e coscienza religiosa nel cardinal Ercole Gonzaga', *Riforma e movimenti religiosi. Rivista della società di studi valdesi*, 7 (2020), pp. 13-47. The conclave of 1549 and the following ones are considered in Chapter 2.3 in this book.

cro-episodes – makes it possible to reconstruct not only Ippolito’s career as a sixteenth-century Italian cardinal, lord and diplomat but also the ways in which kinship, lordship, diplomacy, political alliances and religion influenced each other – whether in Rome, France or Ferrara. In doing so, I hope to have at least partially picked up historian Heinrich Lutz’s suggestion, who first argued that evaluating the life of Ippolito d’Este in light of the historical and institutional conditions to which he was subject can only help us understand those conditions more broadly.¹³

Sources useful to illustrate episodes of Ippolito’s biography are indeed plentiful throughout the cardinal’s life. In fact, the main issue faced whilst dealing with primary materials has been how to select them. Only a very small portion of the sources that regard the cardinal has ever been published and, when some have, those documents are mainly dispersed in nineteenth-century collections of documents.¹⁴ The backbone of this work, therefore, is constituted by original material from the Archive of Modena. The overabundance of primary sources on Ippolito contrasts with the scarcity of scholarly works concerned with his figure. The only comprehensive study on Ippolito is his biography, written one-hundred years ago by Tivoli historian Vincenzo Pacifici. Although sympathetic to Ippolito’s figure overall, Pacifici focuses much on the cardinal’s contributions to the arts and is inclined to picture him as a quintessential Renaissance man unable to fit into the sombre atmosphere of counter-reformation Italy.¹⁵ Writing at the same time as Pacifici, but from a very different perspective, was French historian Lucien Romier, who first highlighted the long and important ramifications of Ippolito’s relationship with the French crown. Romier’s analysis, however, is often incomplete and sometimes quite biased, as one of his overarching arguments is that the French kings’ involvement with Italian politics was one of the factors that later determined the explosion of the French wars of religion and fractured royal power.¹⁶ In much more recent years, Mary Hollingsworth used the extraordinarily large number of ledgers carefully compiled by Ippolito’s secretaries in the 1530s to track the expenses of the then archbishop of Milan, picturing a detailed account of his and his household’s life in the years that led to the long-awaited appointment to the red hat.¹⁷ Lastly, the work on Ippolito by Jean Sènié, carried out at the very same time as mine, by focusing in particular on Ippolito’s time in France, fills many gaps in my own research and offers a richer un-

¹³ H. Lutz, ‘Il cardinale Ippolito d’Este. Schizzo biografico di un principe della Chiesa’, *Atti e memorie della Società Tiburtina di Storia d’Arte*, XXXIX (1966), pp. 127-156.

¹⁴ An exception are the publications curated by Modenese historian Giuseppe Campori, which mainly focus on the relationship between the Este cardinals and their patronage of the arts. They are included in the bibliography at the end of this book.

¹⁵ Pacifici’s work serves nonetheless as an essential point of reference, not least as it includes long extracts from Ippolito’s documents in the Archive of Modena: V. Pacifici, *Ippolito Il cardinale di Ferrara* (Tivoli, 1920).

¹⁶ L. Romier, *Les origines politiques des guerres de religion* (2 vols, Paris, 1913-1914), i, pp. 89-131 and 317-413.

¹⁷ M. Hollingsworth, *The Cardinal’s Hat: Money, Ambition and Housekeeping in a Renaissance Court* (London, 2005). Hollingsworth’s several other papers based on her reading of Ippolito’s books of expenses in different years are listed in the bibliography at the end of this book.

derstanding of this French-Italian cardinal and of his unique relationship with the French monarchy.¹⁸

Hollingsworth's study on Ippolito also coincided with a wave of renewed interest in early modern cardinals, who continue to fascinate historians as they responded to very different impulses that not only make it difficult to separate their worldly problems from their religious concerns but also to separate their efforts of self-promotion and family promotion from their roles as papal representatives. Particularly useful for this project, even if not always directly mentioned, have been studies on other cardinals of the time – either from the same generation or from an earlier or later one – who came from similar social backgrounds and who sometimes crossed paths with Ippolito. Even when they did not, though, their experiences shed light on many shared characteristics that were common to this group of men: their self-fashioning as patrons of the arts, their shrewd pursuit of family promotion, their role as religious reformers or Curial diplomats.¹⁹ A recent collective work has taken up the task to identify the common denominator amongst this variety of individual cardinal's experiences, in order to explore and frame the shared identity of this group of men, who remained at the height of power throughout the modern era.²⁰

In comparison to others in this group, Ippolito's career as a cardinal was a striking success, not just because he became one of the richest and most influential cardinals in the Curia, but also because it provided for the next generation of Este – family continuation being a concern that was pivotal to the nobility's self-representation and a concern that was particularly delicate in the case of the non-inheritable assets of the Church. The reputation and the ecclesiastical benefices that the very first Este cardinal, the first Ippolito, had grown during his lifetime were picked up and improved by the second Ippolito who, by the end of his life, was then in a position to pass on both his important connections with France and his assets to his nephew, Luigi, the third Este cardinal. Ippolito's Curial prominence, however, did not contribute to strengthen his family position in Italy. From a dynastic perspective beyond the immediate uncle-nephew succession, Ippolito's time in the Curia was rather a missed opportunity: crucially, it failed to improve the relationship between Ferrara and the papal state, whose claims over parts of the duchy never ceased

¹⁸ J. Sènié, 'Ippolito II d'Este, cardinal «de famille», agent français et médiateur des relations franco-ferrarais', in G. Alonge and R. Ruggiero (eds), *Relations diplomatiques franco-italiennes dans l'Europe de la première modernité. Communication politique et circulation des savoirs* (Lecce, 2020), pp. 129-156; id., 'Jalons pour une histoire des relations entre le duché de Ferrare et le royaume de France', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes / Journal of Medieval and Humanistic Studies*, 38 (2020), pp. 111-127. See the bibliography at the end of this book for a complete list of references.

¹⁹ Among these, and limiting myself to Italian cardinals, see G. Alonge, *Condottiero, cardinale, eretico. Federico Fregoso nella crisi religiosa e politica del Cinquecento* (Rome, 2017); S. B. Butters, 'Contrasting Priorities: Ferdinando I de' Medici, Cardinal and Grand Duke', in M. Hollingsworth and C. M. Richardson (eds), *The Possessions of a Cardinal: Art, Piety, and Politics, 1450-1700* (University Park, 2010), pp. 185-225; H. Hyde, *Cardinal Bendinello Sauli and Church Patronage in Sixteenth-century Italy* (Woodbridge-Rochester, 2009); P. V. Murphy, *Ruling Peacefully: Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga and Patrician Reform in Sixteenth-century Italy* (Washington, 2007); G. Rebecchini, "Un altro Lorenzo". *Ippolito de' Medici tra Firenze e Roma (1511-1535)* (Venice, 2010).

²⁰ Hollingsworth, M., Pattenden, M. and Witte, A. (eds), *A Companion to the Early Modern Cardinal* (Leiden, 2019).

threatening its territorial integrity – a constitutional weakness that, in 1598, led the Este to lose their capital city of Ferrara. Ippolito's involvement with the French monarchy, on the other hand, tilted Este foreign politics too strongly towards France, leaving the duchy unprepared to deal with the French retreat from Italian affairs during the second half of the sixteenth century and the Este men profoundly mistrusted by Philip II's Spain.

As a man and a cardinal, Ippolito truly appears as the mirror of his generation. Educated according to humanist ideals and raised to appreciate art and literature, he was in a position to seduce the court of France with his refined taste and his financial largesse. Throughout the 1530s and 1540s, his humanist culture also exposed him to French and Italian evangelical circles, although this association never seems to have left the sphere of learned conversation and did not make Ippolito less keen to judge very harshly Calvinist riots in France. When, in the 1560s, he briefly became an object of interest for the Inquisition led by Cardinal Ghislieri, it was clear that his past frequentations and his courtly understanding of religion and politics had become not only improper but also suspicious. In this, his experience appears to be marked by a change of atmosphere that affected an entire generation of clerics: it affected those cardinals like Giovanni Morone or Reginald Pole,²¹ who had personally pursued religious renovation within the Church, but also other patrician cardinals who had never taken an open side; Ippolito's cousin, Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga, who had been drawn to Valdesian ideas and whose secretary was found guilty of heresy by the Inquisition;²² or men like Ippolito's life-long competitor in conclave, Alessandro Farnese, who – as Gigliola Fragnito recently showed – tried to adjust to counter-reformation Rome by – quite paradoxically – forcing sobriety on his daughter's behaviour.²³ Ippolito's characterisation as the quintessential Renaissance type, then, can be replaced by a more nuanced picture in which family ties, political affiliations, artistic patronage and religious feelings all contribute to shape the experience of a man whose inherent contradictions shed light on many political and ecclesiastical tendencies of his time.

²¹ M. Firpo and G. Maifreda, *L'eretico che salvò la Chiesa. Il cardinale Giovanni Morone e le origini della Controriforma* (Turin, 2019).

²² J. J. Martin, 'Elites and Reform in Northern Italy', in P. Benedict, S. Seidel Menchi and A. Tallon (eds), *La Réforme en France et en Italie. Contacts, comparaisons et contrastes* (Rome, 2007), pp. 309-329.

²³ G. Fragnito, *Clelia Farnese. Amori, potere, violenze nella Roma della Controriforma* (Bologna, 2016).