

# Onorato Caetani

Duke of Sermoneta

1542-1592

The firstborn of Boniface, Lord of Sermoneta, and of Caterina Pio of Savoy, was born, fourth of this name in 1542. He was educated in Rome under the supervision of his paternal uncle, Cardinal Nicola Caetani, and already in 1557 it was decided between his family and the other mighty Roman Colonna house, his marriage to Agnesina Colonna, Marcantonio's sister: the marriage chapters were signed in Naples on July 26, 1558 and the wedding took place in 1560.

At Caetani's wedding, they were of great importance, not only for the great dowry of the bride (33,000 ducats), but above all because they hoped for a satisfactory solution to the longstanding rivalry with the Colonna, with whom they had long suspended various issues related to respective feudal prerogatives. Tied for many years at the French party, whose father Camillo had been an active exponent in the ecclesiastical state, and that his cardinal brother then represented in the Sacred College, Bonifacio also felt he had to ask for the king of France to approve this bond matrimonial, and the sovereign warmly gave his consent, for he hoped that the new kinship with his old supporters would lead Marcantonio Colonna to move away from the Spanish party.

In fact, the opposite happened, because the hopes that the Caetians had for a long time enjoyed in the court of Paris went largely disappointed, both because the young Caetani suffered from the beginning the influence of the older and prestigious brother-in-law, lastingly to its political inclinations and military fortunes.

Thus, when in 1570 Marcantonio Colonna was appointed under the command of the Papal-Papal fleet, which, following the tedious agreement reached between Pius V and Philip II, should, in conjunction with the Venetian fleet, bring relief to the island of Cyprus assailed by the Turks , Caetani decided to follow his brother-in-law in the expedition, although this initiative equally opposed the father and uncle Nicola whose resistances - probably determined by French hostility to the approach of the Pope and Spain - were only won by the intervention of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese.

There is no news of Caetani's participation in the unhappy expedition, compromised from the beginning by the resigning tactic of Gian Andrea Doria. He always stayed alongside his brother-in-law, until the league team dissolved without having been able to provide any real help to the island, and then during the fortunate return journey of the pontifical team, decimated by storms. In any case, the episode had to strengthen the bonds between Colonna and Caetani, to which the latter had the next year, in the new expedition that ended with the victory of Lepanto, the actual charge of General Captain of the Pontifical Infantry . Officially, on the other hand, the charge, promised by Pope to Caetani at the request of Marcantonio Colonna, was contested by the men of the nephew of Pius V, the young and ineffective Michele Bonelli who. with the support of some members of the Curia hostile to the Colonna, did not hide their aspirations at that military office. The Bonelli even made it impossible for Caetani to recruit in the Papal

State, but could not prevent his rival from executing the command during the expedition.

At the Battle of Lepanto, Caetani participated aboard the galley "Grifona", the first Christian ship to come into contact with the Turks, being immediately attacked by the Governor of Valona, Kara Khodja and the other famous Kara Djali. The outcome of the clash was lucky for the young man with a pontifical dictator who managed to seize both of the opposing galleys. Less brilliant was the return, as in Naples, Caetani dismissed Pontifical militias without gratifying them, as they expected. However, he did not feel that he was responsible for the episode, which was often reproached for him, for his accused appeals were the Apostolic Chamber to oppose the most indifferent silence. Back to Sermoneta, Caetani immediately began building the church of S. Maria della Vittoria, in fulfillment of a vote made during the Battle of Lepanto, but the work had to proceed with a slower proportionality to the economic constraints of the family that did not to the enthusiastic congratulations of Caetani, for the building of the church was finished only thirty years later.

Bonelli's maneuvers against Caetani culminated in the spring of 1572 while preparing for a third expedition of the Christian League against the Turks - not after the defeat of the Republic of Venice - with the official concession of the charge and title of general of the papal infantry of the pope's nephew (however polemically this title was referred to Caetani in the Bull of Sisto V of October 23, 1586, with which Sermoneta's lordship was elevated to the duke).

The disappointment prompted Caetani to abandon the pontifical service to go to the Spanish one: his request was welcomed by Philip II, who gave him the command of a Sicily squad jail with an annual pension of 1,500 shields. Thus it was explicitly sanctioned the passage of the Caetani family from French to Spanish, as in the conclave followed shortly after the death of Pius V, Cardinal Nicola Caetani emulated his grandson, claiming until the election of Philip II's candidate, the Cardinal Boncompagni. Gregorian XIII's gratitude for the Cardinal of Sermoneta was expressed on May 13, 1572, the day of the election, with the granting to Caetani of the offices of the governor of Borgo and the general captain of the pontifical guard; Caetani was naturally forced to renounce to the Sicilian jail, but Philip II retained his retirement, even this in homage to the work performed by conclave by Cardinal of Sermoneta.

At the death of his father in 1574, Caetani inherited the succession; in fact the direction of the family remained in the hands of the old cardinal and Caetani had all the advantages and disadvantages of his uncle's relationship with Gregory XIII, who ended up depriving Caetani of his duties and of various benefits. Nearly at the same time Cardinal Nicola and Pope Boncompagni died at the same time, Caetani's fortunes had a new resumption with the election of Sisto V. This was in fact a prodigy of favors for the Caetani family, probably in memory of his old friendship with Nicola: the place of this in the Cardinal's College was in fact kept at Caetani with the election of a brother of Caetani Enrico; and, as far as the same C was concerned, the Pope satisfied that which was an ancient aspiration of the lords of Sermoneta, elevating this feud to the ducat ducat with a 23 October bubble. 1586. It seems that with this concession Sisto V also intended to solicit Caetani's participation in the grandiose Pontina remediation projects which constituted one of the central motives of the pontificate.

With the new dignity also opens for Caetani the possibility of establishing on new and more prestigious bases the devotion of his home to Philip II. In January 1587 he went to Madrid, accompanied by his son Gregory, and above all by considerable sums of money that allowed him the indispensable glory in his stay at the court; Philip II granted him the hearing on February 8th. Caetani could fully declare the 40,000 shields that cost him the initiative, since the sovereign, in the name of Caetani a Lepanto, but above all for the usefulness of preserving the devotion of one of the oldest families of the patriziate Roman, granted him the Order of the Golden Tison, a dignity enjoyed at that time in Rome only by Marcantonio Colonna.

The particularly happy moment crossed by the Caetani family seemed crowned by the concession to Cardinal Enrico of the Camerlengo charge, that is, of papal finances. To the sum demanded by the pontiff, 50,000 shields, the cardinal and his brothers competed with money borrowed from the banks and Cardinal Alessandro Farnese. Thus the economic situation of the family, already compromised by the brilliant stay of the eldest son in the Spanish court, became of considerable gravity. In fact, Caetani and his brothers had to recall that the exercise of the camerlengate could magically revitalize family finances, such as he was in the traditions of this important office.

Caetani's calculations could have been successful if they had not felt more inclined to increase the prestige of the house, which seemed to return to the splendor of the XIV century, which did not worsen the economic situation. And when Sisto V, on the 24th of September. 1589, he appointed Cardinal Enrico to the difficult nunciature of France, at the time of the most virulence of the wars of religion, nor did the cardinal or his brothers prevail the reasons of the household to the attractions of a charge that flattered their pride and their ambitions. As Brother Camillo, Patriarch of Alexandria, wrote to Caetani, "this thing will either give the last collapse to our House or exalt it to heaven". Indeed, as demonstrated in the short turn of a year, as long as the nunciature lasted, the pessimistic hypothesis had too much reason to be because the legation, with the dangerous flaws in which the cardinal came to be and with the costs disproportionate to the which was forced, translated into an unsustainable load for the family.

Shortly after the departure of Cardinal Enrico for France, when again, that is, Sisto V had not been able to involve in the disapproval of the work of the nuncio even his relatives, was the visit of the pontiff to the Caetani state, and more particularly to the pond swamps that should have been at the center of the reconstruction work planned by the pope. On this same occasion, the pope renewed to Caetani his good dispositions regarding the family of Sermoneta, explicitly declaring that "he wanted to make him rich".

But these good intentions did not last long, as the dissension broke out between the pontiff and his ally in France, guilty of too many personal initiatives and in particular of an attitude of too rigid support to the league - while the pope was increasingly inclining to a attempting to agree with Henry of Navarre - compromised the favor that until then the Caetians had enjoyed the papal court.

Sisto V's decision to suspend payment of the monthly allowance to the nuncio and to deny him any sums needed for his mission - a decision that actually exaggerated the

legate, although the formal injunction did not come to the opposition of the Cardinal's College - he soon reduced Caetani to complete ruin: he wrote to his brother Henry in January 1590: "The House is in a sense that we can not hope for an uprising unless our Lord God does it miraculously, and we will have to need to resolve, or sell part of the state, or the duty of the Camerlengato, who already owes them already to 300,000, and I shall see in the beginning, nor will it be hoped for, nor taken into account, except in ours ... and in the end I infinitely doubt that the memory that we will lose of us will be to have annihilated our House".

In these crises Sisto V threatened to pay for the expenses incurred in France in his name by the legate on the ecclesiastical benefits of him and selling for sale the office of camerlengo the Caetians thought of as the last resort; not only, but he showed all his resentment to the unrelated nun communion by giving the patriarch of Alexandria, guilty of expressing sympathy with the brother's policy, to hold a fine of 10,000 shields under house arrest Caetani himself to remain in his feuds, out of reach of the terrible pontiff.

The attitude of the pope to his ancient protectors seemed so unequivocal that when, with great relief from Caetani and his brothers, Sisto V died, the Cardinal's College decided on some repairing measures: while the nuncio in France was honored recalled in Rome with explicit approval of his work and payment was made in favor of the checks suspended by Sixtus V and a sum of 25,000 shields, partially reimbursing the expenses incurred for the legation, the duke of Sermoneta, on the proposal of Cardinal Montalto, was accompanied by the captain of the pontifical troops, the great-great-grandson of Sisto V Michele Peretti, with the office of Lieutenant General and the task of enlisting 2,000 infantrymen for maintaining the order and defense of Rome in time vacancy, a charge that was still his during the three conclave for the election of Gregory XIV, Innocent IX and Clement VIII. Thus, Caetani dignitatively resumed his place at the Pontifical Court, comforted in the last years of his life by a more balanced attitude of the successors of Sixtus V - the rest too shortly ruling - towards the Caetani family, without any doubt the great effusions of Gregory XIII and Pope Peretti, but equally alien to their humiliating mood changes.

Despite the state of serious economic discomfort, or perhaps precisely because, with the exercise of the camerlengate finally taken over by Cardinal Enrico, ecclesiastical duties and benefits were now the main resource for the exhausted finances of the family, Caetani and his brothers they engaged as much as they could in procuring new ecclesiastical offices for themselves and their associates, even though these at least at the beginning involved new heavy economic commitments to meet the expenses of representation: so Camillo had also had the courageous prosperity of Caetani and his relations with the Spanish court, first of all the nunciature of Germany and, above all, that of Madrid, which was considered the most important of the time not only politically but also because it promised the most substantial pensions, a true "bolognese bachelor" Camillo himself expressed.

As far as Caetani he is still remembered in the exercise of a public function in 1591, when, together with Virginio Orsini and with Carlo Spinelli, he headed an expedition against the brigands of the ecclesiastical state, but ended without any satisfactory result.

He died in Rome of "malignant fever" on Nov. 9. 1592 and was buried in S. Maria della Vittoria in Sermoneta.

Torquato Tasso, who was in good relationship with two sons of Caetani, Antonio and Bonifacio, remembers the duke of Sermoneta in Canto XX, verse 131, of "Jerusalem Conquered".

From his marriage to Agnesina Colonna, who died in 1578, C. had eight children, all males: Peter; Antonio; Benedict, who had several minor ecclesiastical benefits, accompanied his uncle Camillo in the nunciature of Germany and Spain, here studying at the University of Alcalá, protected by Philip II who seemed to reserve "the greatest venture that can have Italian in this court" (Caetani, p. 294) but died early in Alcalá on 18 October. 1596; Bonifacio; Ruggero, captain in the Spanish army in Flanders and France, Knight of the Order of Alcantara, who died in Barcelona in December 1602 or in January; Philip; Gregory, knight of the Geronimo Order, who died in Florence in 1592.

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