

BY THE RIVER OF BABYLON:
HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND APOCALYPTIC DISCOURSE IN
LUIGI GUICCIARDINI'S *IL SACCO DI ROMA*

By

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To my Mom, who always believed in me

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Invasions and power struggles marked the Italian peninsula for centuries prior to the sixteenth century. Specifically, the city of Rome experienced foreign invasions due to its position as the center of the Christian religion and the ancient Roman culture. This paper will examine the paradoxical role of Rome as New Babylon and the New Jerusalem following the sack of Rome in 1527 by the Spanish and German troops of Charles V under the leadership of Charles de Bourbon. Following the event, numerous accounts and narratives described the horror and the implications on contemporary Roman society. The destruction gave contemporaries like Luigi Guicciardini an opportunity to formulate a new historiography when comprehending the vast devastation it caused. When explaining the sack, Christian writers borrowed from Biblical imagery and discourse regarding the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of Babylon, and from medieval millenarian discourse regarding a New Jerusalem. These themes derive from a pan-religious topos that describes the fall of a great city by the will of a deity, oftentimes to be followed by the rise of a new, improved city. In terms of the sack of Rome, the symbolic and real city intertwined in the historical narratives through the use of biblical topoi.

Specifically, this examination will focus on *Il Sacco di Roma* by Luigi Guicciardini, an informed historical account written shortly after the sack of Rome in 1527. Guicciardini's detailed narrative contains both political commentary and apocalyptic discourse, and is one of the most descriptive and politically informed accounts of the sack. The contention of this thesis is that Luigi Guicciardini's *Il Sacco di Roma* can be seen as an example of apocalyptic discourse somewhat typical of narratives regarding this event. His work stands as a transitional, "early modern" history caught between medieval critiques of religious corruption with their heavily biblical influences, and a more "modern" discourse of politics that would culminate in later centuries. More specifically, his discourse in *Il Sacco di Roma* highlights his own position as an educated and politically involved Florentine whose outlook on Catholicism, politics, and history was strongly influenced by current events and by Girolamo Savonarola and Niccolò Machiavelli, other contemporary Florentines.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

“By the Rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
When we remembered Zion.
There on the poplars we hung our harps,
For there our captors asked us for songs,
Our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
They said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

[Psalm 137: 1-3] ¹

“O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance;
they have defiled your holy temple,
they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble.
They have given the dead bodies of your servants
as food to the birds of the air,
the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth.
They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem,
and there is no one to bury the dead.”

[Psalm 79:1-4]

On May 6th, 1527, Imperial and German *landsknecht* troops brutally sacked the city of Rome. Arriving in the thick morning fog without having been paid for nearly eight months, the hungry soldiers wrought havoc on the city and its citizens after their leader, Charles de Bourbon, was killed in the first hour of battle. The soldiers breached the walls near Santo Spirito in the Borgo, crossed the Tiber River by way of the Ponte Sisto, and devastated the city through rape, plunder, and pillage.² Bourbon’s troops ransacked palaces, violated religious tombs, tortured noble citizens for anticipated treasure, and slaughtered all the orphans of the Pietà. According to Luigi Guicciardini, Roman nobles had been “cut to pieces, covered with mud and their own blood” on the ground, and children were seen voluntarily jumping out of windows in order to

¹ This paper utilizes the *New International Version* of the Bible. The exception is the quotation from the Book of Job, which was taken from Luigi Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*. Translated and Edited by James H. McGregor. (New York: Italica Press, Inc., 1993) All biblical citations will be included in the text and not as footnotes.

² Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Italy*. Translated by Sidney Alexander. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 382

“escape becoming the living prey” of the imperial “monsters.”³ The sun would rise on the morning of the seventh to a spectacle of destruction, rapine, and murder. The Catholic historian Ludwig Von Pastor describes the morning after as full of “the wailings of women, the plaintive cries of children...the clash of arms, and the crash of timber from the burning houses. All accounts...agree that no age, no sex, no station, no nationality...neither church nor hospital was spared.”⁴ Citizens of Rome gazed upon the horrific plunder of their holy city, and claimed that “Hell itself was a more beautiful sight to behold.”⁵

Yet, this scene of devastation was not entirely unprecedented for sixteenth-century Italians.⁶ Italy was a conglomeration of warring city states and other political entities during this period, and invasions and power struggles had marked the Italian peninsula for decades, making it a battleground for the other political powers in Europe. The centrality of the city of Rome and its physical and spiritual importance to Christianity caused contemporaries to view this particular sack as “uglier even than hell itself.”⁷ These images of hell, death, and destruction facilitated the proliferation of apocalyptic and eschatological discourse as Christians attempted to grapple with the devastation.

³ This paper utilizes the first English-language translation by James H. McGregor and the Italian version wrongly ascribed to his brother Francesco Guicciardini. *Il Sacco di Roma: Edizione Seconda*. (Cologne: 1758) Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 98. “e molti Nobili tagliati a pezzi, dal fango, e dal propio sangue ricoperti, e molti mezzi vivi giacerè miseramente in terra. Si vedeva ancora qualche volta in quella furia da questa, e da quella finestra saltare per forza e voluntariamente fuori, fanciulli, uomini, e donne, per non restare vivi, preda di tante efferate nazioni, e crudelmente per le strade poi finire la propria vita.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 189

⁴ Ludwig Von Pastor. *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*. 4th Edition, Volumes 9-10. Ralph Francis Kerr, ed. and trans (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950) 9:387, 399

⁵ Sanuto, *Diarii*, XLV, p. 219. Taken from Hook, *The Sack of Rome, 1527*. (London: Macmillan London Limited, 1972) 167

⁶ This paper will use the term “Italians” to describe those living in the peninsula who speak various dialects of what would later become the national language of a unified Italy. Italy at this time was not a unified nation and was a conglomeration of city-states, duchies, and other political entities. Yet for some general aspects of this paper, “Italians” or “Italy” will be used for pedagogical simplification.

⁷ Letter by Petrus de Franciscis, dated May 10, 1527. Quoted in Kenneth Gouwens. *Remembering the Renaissance: Humanist Narratives of the Sack of Rome*. (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 3

This paper will examine the paradoxical role of Rome as Babylon and the New Jerusalem in the Cinquecento, a pivotal period of great religious and cultural change which caused contemporaries to describe their history in terms of apocalyptic discourse. Specifically, this examination will focus on *Il Sacco di Roma* by Luigi Guicciardini, an informed historical account written shortly after the sack of Rome in 1527. Guicciardini's detailed narrative contains both political commentary and apocalyptic discourse, and is one of the most descriptive and politically informed accounts of the sack. The destruction gave contemporaries like Guicciardini an opportunity to include a new historiography when comprehending the vast devastation it caused. When explaining the sack, Christian writers borrowed from Biblical imagery and discourse regarding the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of Babylon, and from medieval millenarian discourse regarding a New Jerusalem. These themes derive from a pan-religious topos that describes the fall of a great city by the will of a deity, oftentimes to be followed by the rise of a new, improved kingdom. Apocalyptic discourse functions as a theodicy for Christians seeking to understand death and destruction in light of a greater belief in the good of God. It becomes a vindication of God and an explanation of His plan for the world despite human and material losses. In terms of the sack of Rome, the symbolic and real city intertwined in the historical narratives through the use of biblical topoi.

The contention of this thesis is that Luigi Guicciardini's *Il Sacco di Roma* can be seen as an example of apocalyptic discourse somewhat typical of narratives regarding this event. He draws from medieval biblical typologies, found in other narratives of the time, but is able to shed new light on the situation through his Machiavellian political views. His work stands as a transitional, "early modern" history caught between medieval critiques of religious corruption with their heavily biblical influences, and a more "modern" discourse of politics that would

culminate in later centuries.⁸ More specifically, his discourse in *Il Sacco di Roma* highlights his own position as an educated and politically involved Florentine whose outlook on Catholicism, politics, and history was strongly influenced by current events and by Girolamo Savonarola and Niccolò Machiavelli, other contemporary Florentines.⁹

⁸ The use of this terminology is purposeful: there is controversy between the correct period demarcations of “medieval,” “early modern,” “Renaissance,” and other terms, and the use of such terms is often arbitrary in and of itself. Yet, there is a marked change between the eleventh through early fifteen centuries, and later centuries leading up the Enlightenment when it came to the writing and understanding of history. Early modern historiography was more politically aware and factually correct compared to the medieval period, when history was often viewed without a strong sense of human agency, though still not entirely embodying the modern factual documentation that we are familiar with today. Thus, the term “early modern” seems applicable for Guicciardini’s narrative.

⁹ Girolamo Savonarola (September 21, 1452- May 23, 1498) and Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli (May 3, 1469 - June 21, 1527)

CHAPTER 2
PRECURSORS TO GUICCIARDINI: ROME AND ITS CRITICS

Roma: Loca Sancta

Long before the sack of 1527 Rome was the subject of apocalyptic and eschatological discourse. Commentators saw Rome as both the City of God (as depicted by St. Augustine) and the city of sinners (according to many Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther), which resulted not only from the city's ties to the Catholic papacy but also from its standing as a major destination for pilgrims. For centuries, people traveled to the ancient city to worship with the successor of Saint Peter, visit the holy Churches, and gaze upon the relics of martyred saints. Following the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity, pilgrims journeyed long distances and through rough conditions to worship the sanctity of the holy places and objects in Rome. Just as pilgrims traveled to the holy city of Jerusalem, the *Romipetae* (Roman pilgrims) traveled in larger numbers to Rome following the loss of the earthly Jerusalem to the Muslims in 1244. The idea that a Christian could travel to the New Jerusalem of Rome came to be regarded as a method for achieving heavenly salvation.¹⁰

Pilgrimage *ad limina apostolorum* was desirable due to Rome's strong associations with the apostles Peter and Paul, both of whom were believed to be buried within the city.¹¹ The pilgrims to Rome venerated the relics of the apostles and saints, and the physical objects represented all of the "religious and magical functions" associated with the saints.¹² Pilgrim "guides" such as the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* were developed to direct visitors to miraculous sites in Rome. The Christian God had succeeded the ancient Roman gods of the pagan religion, and an influx of pilgrims came to Rome over the course of hundreds of years. The sacred

¹⁰ Debra J. Birch. *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages: Continuity and Change*. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1998) 2

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6

¹² Sabine MacCormack. "Loca Sancta: The Organization of Sacred Topography in Late Antiquity." *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*. Robert Ousterhout, editor. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990) 7

architecture, liturgy, and extensive traffic in objects of devotion all increased the innate spirituality of the holy places in Rome.¹³

Despite the sacred aspects of the city, some historical representations of Rome through the Christian age contain the presence of a real and allegorical evil. Mixed attitudes about Rome, and its place in the war between good and evil, date back to the earliest days of Christianity. For example, Augustine of Hippo in his *City of God* defended Christianity against those who blamed the conversion of the city from paganism as the cause for its destruction by Alaric and the Goths in the 410. Among other things, Augustine contrasted the “dark” era of pagan religion to the “light” of the blossoming religion of Christianity.¹⁴ He discussed the origin, history, and destinies of the earthly and heavenly cities, and while he acknowledged the presence of evil he also claimed that it is “thoroughly overcome by good.”¹⁵ The idea that good can arise out of evil is significant, and would permeate accounts of the later sack of Rome in 1527. Augustine’s ideas reflect an assumption that Rome is the earthly Jerusalem, converted from paganism and ready to accept its divine calling.

Despite the sacred aspects of Christian Rome, time gave way to a more religiously corrupt city in the eyes of some critics. While not a staunch reformist of the Catholic faith, the twelfth-century Calabrian abbot and hermit Joachim of Fiore developed a new means of understanding the development of Christian history. He described stages of history (the Father, Son, and Spirit), wherein the final Age of the Spirit would bring about the overthrow of the Antichrist.¹⁶ The Joachimite tradition heightened medieval expectations of an eschatological

¹³ Ibid., 21

¹⁴Peter Bondanella. *The Eternal City: Roman Images in the Modern World*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987) 27

¹⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*. (New York: The Modern Library, 1950) 458

¹⁶ Cohn, 108-110

purification and renewal of the Church.¹⁷ Later, fourteenth-century schisms in the Church led to the medieval Babylonian Captivity, and early dissenters such as John Wycliff saw the sacred aspects of the papacy disintegrate into materialism. In the fifteenth century individuals like Jan Hus sought reform against the growing vanities of the Church, and the Council of Constance that ordered the execution of Hus also ended the Great Schism and brought the papacy back to Rome.¹⁸ These critiques gained headway in 1440 when Lorenzo Valla refuted the authenticity of the Donation of Constantine, a fabricated document upon which the papacy and the Roman curia previously relied. Finally, by 1500 Catholic Rome was fittingly described by the Spanish priest Francisco Delicado in a discussion of his encounters with the city's prostitutes as a "cesspool of iniquity, corruption, and rampant sexual immorality."¹⁹ By 1650 papal Rome would become one of Europe's most developed urban centers due largely to the Spanish financing that had occurred in the previous century, yet in the sixteenth century it was full of vice and a remnant of its former glory.²⁰

Analyzing Apocalypticism

Numerous studies of millennial and apocalyptic literature from the medieval era through the Renaissance outline typical themes, including those involving Rome in the paradoxical role

¹⁷ John W. O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968) 62

¹⁸ John Wycliff (c.1330 - December 31, 1384), an Oxford graduate of theology, criticized ecclesiastical abuses and obtained a large group of followers called the Lollards. His ideas on religion were said to have influenced Jan Hus (c. 1372 – July 6, 1415), who encountered Wycliff's writings while at the University of Prague. Hus denounced clerical abuses, and was burned at the stake for his "heretical" preachings by an order of the Council of Constance (1414-1418). Edward Peters, editor. "The Age of Wycliff and Hus." *Hersey and Authority in Medieval Europe*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980.) 265-307

¹⁹ Angus MacKay, "The Whores of Babylon." *Prophetic Rome*. 223 Beyond prostitution and other service industries, early modern Rome neither produced nor manufactured any materials of importance. Despite this, pilgrimage to Rome remained strong. According to Peter Partner, there were as many as 100,000 pilgrims that traveled to Rome each year, which was a vast amount of people considering the relatively small population of Rome at the time. *Renaissance Rome 1500-1559: A Portrait of a Society*. (University of California Press, 1976) 54

²⁰ Thomas Dandeleit, "Paying for the New St. Peter's: Contributions to the Construction of the New Basilica from Spanish Lands, 1506-1620." *Spain in Italy: Politics, Society, and Religion 1500-1700*. Thomas James Dandeleit, editor. (The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007) 182

as the New Babylon and New Jerusalem. The collective behavior of contemporary audiences shaped apocalyptic discourse in historical writings, and was not new in early modernity.²¹

According to Norman Cohn, many of the revolutionary movements of the poor from the eleventh century onward drew inspiration from the Sibylline or Johannine prophecies concerning the Last Days in their efforts toward economic and social change.²² Cohn's characterization of a medieval revolutionary millenarianism and mystical anarchism can be applied to early modern eschatological discourse as well. He argues that struggles that result in apocalyptic or millenarian explanations are different from other historical struggles because they serve as a cataclysm for worldly redemption and transformation.²³ Many leaders throughout history who imagined God on their side in battle or during periods of destruction also believed that good effects followed these necessary evils.

In her more recent feminist reading of the Bible, Tina Pippin finds that the end of the Bible returns to the beginning with a formless void, thus reiterating the idea that a new creation could come about following the Apocalypse.²⁴ Although Pippin does not see this biblical story as liberating, writers of the apocalyptic discourse believed that the new, post-Apocalyptic world would be a better one.²⁵ Catherine Wessinger advances this argument with her claim that millenarian beliefs are an expression of human hope for salvation, a redemption of the violence and destruction they experience on earth.²⁶ Belief in this type of salvation is significant

²¹ Stephen D. O'Leary. *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 6

²² Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972) 53

²³ *Ibid.*, 281

²⁴ Tina Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies: The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image*. (London: Routledge, 2002) 77

²⁵ Pippin claims that the Apocalypse is a "misogynist male fantasy of the end of time" and thus not a liberating story. 117

²⁶ Catherine Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000) 6

following the destructive sack of Rome, as it serves as a vindication for God in light of tragedy caused by Him. The dictum *ex malo bonum* carried past the late medieval period and found expression in early modern eschatological literature as well.

The intertextuality of biblical literature reinforces the apocalyptic theme of struggle at the will of God in order to produce a greater good. Inherent in the Book of Revelation is the idea of a great battle or struggle following which Christ will reign. Also, the Book of Daniel is described as an early specimen of apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature was used in late antiquity to explain divine judgment, and provided a model for later apocalyptic interpretation by early modernists including Luigi Guicciardini. Lorenzo Polizzotto argues that the belief in a great struggle followed by a renewed city provided a foundation for the entire ideology of the *piagnoni*, followers of Savonarola.²⁷ The program of spiritual and social renovation espoused by Savonarola led the *piagnoni* to believe that, with prayer, religious dedication, and political upheaval and destruction, the vanities of evil Florentines would give way to a new and improved Florence.

These ancient apocalyptic battles that echoed in early modern historical accounts also tie in with themes of Holy War in eschatological literature. What constitutes a “Holy War” is debatable, as the phrase has been used to describe various events ranging from the Old Testament Holy Wars for Yahweh to the fight against the infidel Muslims during the Crusades. Yet, the idea of a war fought under God’s will or at his doing has been a theme reiterated throughout history.²⁸ Although the sack of Rome in 1527 was not a “war” in the traditional sense, many contemporaries viewed the vast destruction that resulted as divinely inspired. Judith

²⁷ Lorenzo Polizzotto. *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) vii-viii

²⁸ Despite the prevalence of this theme throughout history, the specific phrase “Holy War” does not actually appear in the Bible.

Hook goes so far as to say the sack was an opportunity for religious “vendetta” on the part of the Lutheran soldiers involved. While this may be slightly overstated, Luther had indeed predicted the devastation of Rome due the lack of religiosity on the part of the papacy.²⁹

Additionally, the figure of the Antichrist is prominent in apocalyptic discourse, as well as rhetoric regarding the 1527 sack of Rome.³⁰ According to Stephen D. O’Leary’s *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric*, in which he searches for an understanding of the need for and tradition of apocalyptic discourse in rhetoric, the popularity of this Antichrist figure throughout history stems from a human impulse to personify and understand evil.³¹ Many of the New Testament Christian prophecies dealing with the theme of apocalypticism stem from the Johannine tradition which tells of an arch-enemy of God who will arise as the Antichrist prior to battle.³² This figure, often used in discourses of Holy War as well, had roots in Joachim of Fiore’s concept of history, and continued among Fraticelli circles in later centuries.³³

The figure of the Antichrist was countered with that of the Holy or Angelic Pastor. This figure was popular even among early modern humanists, who believed that the classical themes of a coming golden age resonated with the Biblical topos of the Angelic Pastor who would lead the Church into a new era.³⁴ Lutherans of the period saw Pope Clement VII as the Antichrist, and consequently viewed the actions of Charles V’s troops as divinely inspired and as heralding a new age of the Church. The sixteenth century brought a time of destruction and change, and individuals of the period hoped for an Angelic Pastor and the coming of a new era. According to

²⁹ Judith Hook, *The Sack of Rome 1527*. (London: Macmillan London Limited, 1972) 172

³⁰ This was especially due to the Lutheran view of the pope as Antichrist, as expressed in several of his writings.

³¹ O’Leary, 81

³² Cohn, 33-34

³³ The Fraticelli followed the beliefs of St. Francis (c.1182-1226) after his death. The group was persecuted in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by the Catholic Church. Peters, “The Spiritual Franciscans and Voluntary Poverty,” 235-250

³⁴ Gouwans, *Remembering the Renaissance*. 3

Marjorie Reeves, the abundance of this apocalyptic theme in prophecy and literature was unprecedented before the early sixteenth century.³⁵ Furthermore, Nelson H. Minich implies that the Fifth Lateran Council's limitations on prophecy, including those detailing the Antichrist's imminent arrival, demonstrates that apocalyptic prophecy must have been abundant in this period.³⁶ From the spiritual battles of Savonarola against the vanities of Renaissance Florence to the physical battle of the Armada between Elizabeth I of England and Philip II of Spain, God's good was believed to follow the destruction of evil.

By the River of the New Babylon

The use of "Babylon" as a code word for Rome dates to the Book of Revelation or Apocalypse of the New Testament. According to Bernard McGinn, in the Apocalypse of John the ancient city of Rome is not explicitly named but instead was referred to by its "code name" of "Babylon."³⁷ This literary tradition of comparing Rome to Babylon continued into the sixteenth century. The Antichrist figure and consequently echoes of a New Babylon and New Jerusalem were used in descriptions of the Eternal City. Contemporaries drew parallels between the ancient devastation and destruction of Jerusalem and that of Catholic Rome.³⁸ An entirely new generation of writers utilized themes from the Book of Revelation in comparisons of Rome with Babylon.³⁹

³⁵ Marjorie Reeves, "The Medieval Heritage." *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*. Marjorie Reeves, editor. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) 21

³⁶ Nelson H. Minich, "Prophecy at the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517)." *Prophetic Rome*, 64

³⁷ Bernard McGinn, "Notes on a Forgotten Prophet: Paulus Angelus and Rome." *Prophetic Rome*. 189

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 321

³⁹ Despite claims made by Irena Backus, who argues that the canonical status of the Apocalypse was "fragile" in the sixteenth century to scholars like Erasmus, the sack itself was described and depicted in numerous contemporary literary sources, including humanist writings that utilized the typologies found in traditional apocalyptic literature. Even Erasmus, who earlier challenged its place in the New Testament because of its doubtful apostolic origins, later accepted the Apocalypse due to its historical value. This type of Christian prophetic tradition thrived in sixteenth century Rome among contemporary Italians and other Europeans. "The Church Fathers and the Canonicity of the Apocalypse in the Sixteenth Century: Erasmus, Frans Titelmans, and Theodore Beza." *Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Autumn 1998) 651-652

Contemporary writers compared Rome to Babylon in order to make sense of what appeared as an incomprehensible devastation. Luigi Guicciardini suggests a divine presence behind the human devastation of the sack, thus drawing on traditional apocalyptic themes to partially explain sixteenth-century events. He sought to displace blame from God to man in some areas of *Il Sacco di Roma* by interpreting the sack as divine judgment for egregious human misbehavior.⁴⁰ Guicciardini refers to the “the culture of lust, greed, and ambition” of the papacy and Romans caused the “just wrath of God” that came through the sacking of the city.⁴¹ As such, his work was part of a long tradition associating Rome with apocalyptic and eschatological discourse, a tradition that would reecho in narratives regarding the sack in 1527.

By the sixteenth century, Rome revolved around the grandiose court of the Pope, and by this time there was a large papal “family” of nearly 700 people living in the Vatican.⁴² The city became a reflection of the ostentatious and courtly life of the popes, especially under Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503). The Borgia pope Alexander VI was disliked by many contemporaries both within and outside of Rome. He fathered the infamous and violent Cesare Borgia who tried to carve out sections of Italy for the Papal States through his various military ventures. According to Francesco Guicciardini, at the death of Rodrigo Borgia the Roman people rejoiced in the streets and lined up to see the “black, swollen, and hideous...dead body of Alexander in St. Peter’s.”⁴³ The Borgia family fell subject to criticism by a growing number of reformers, who used the vanities and *luxuria* of Roman life to highlight the need for reform and change within the Church. From Luther in the north to Savonarola within Italy’s borders, many

⁴⁰ Partner, 32. Partner is not specifically referring to Guicciardini in his work on Rome in the Renaissance, but rather is referring to many others who wrote about the events in an attempt to understand the sack.

⁴¹ *The Sack of Rome*, 106, 60 “si mantengono nella lasciva, avara, ed ambiziosa potenza” and “la giusta ira di Dio” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 206, 110

⁴² Partner, 47-48

⁴³ Guicciardini, *The History of Italy*, 165-166

influential figures used criticism of Rome as a microcosmic example of why Rome needed to be changed. These early modern critics inherited the medieval apocalyptic eschatology and compared the corruption of contemporary Rome to that of ancient Babylon. They argued that the city must be destroyed in order to build the New Jerusalem in the historical discourse, and thus it became necessary to first destroy Babylon.

Historians commonly used the symbol of Babylon to describe both pre- and post-Christian Rome. The Great Whore described in the Book of Revelation is historically identified with Babylon, and the fall is paralleled by the establishment of the New Jerusalem. Babylon, the “mother of prostitutes” [Rev. 17:5] sits upon “seven hills” [Rev. 17: 9]. As the center of Christianity some dissenters viewed Rome as the “mother of prostitutes.” The “seven hills” of Revelation are equated with the seven famous hills of ancient Rome: the Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiline, Palatine, Quirinal, and Viminal Hills. Vatican Hill and the construction of the new St. Peter’s Basilica could compare to the new Mount Zion for Catholics (after 1517), thus continuing the comparisons to a New Jerusalem. On the other hand, the indulgences that were sold to support the rebuilding of the new Basilica caused the Protestants to compare Vatican Hill to Babylon rather than Jerusalem. Another biblical comparison originates in the biblical mother of prostitutes, who has the “blood of prophets and holy ones” running through her tainted body [Rev. 18:24]. This description was compared allegorically to Rome, the location of the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul (the “prophets” of “holy ones”) and numerous other saints of the Catholic faith. The relics of these venerated saints were deposited in various churches in the city in the centuries following the conversion to Christianity, and the pilgrims who partook in the dangerous journey to Rome experienced liminal moments at these holy sites. For Protestants, these holy relics of St. Peter and other saints were corrupted by the vices and



Figure 2-1. The only known panorama of the Sack of Rome (c. 1500-1550) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, a Protestant from the Netherlands.

frivolities of the Roman Curia and the Pope (hence the “mother of prostitutes”), which had given in to a more materialistic lifestyle. Similar to the biblical prostitute, the city of Rome needed to be purged in order to liberate the holy relics contained within its walls.

According to some sixteenth-century historical narratives, these evils inherent in the city of Rome led to its destruction at the hands of Spanish and Imperial troops, who, according to this understanding, acted as agents of God.⁴⁴ For example, the Spaniard Alfonso de Valdés, secretary to Emperor Charles V, claimed that the actions of the imperial troops fulfilled God’s judgment on the corrupt city. The figure of Lactantio in Valdés’s *Dialogue of Lactancio and An Archdeacon* claims that the Pope should be a “living example of all Christian virtue,” and because Clement VII and the Roman Curia were not virtuous they brought the sack “upon

⁴⁴ Modern historians debate the impact of the sack on sixteenth-century mentalities. In *Renaissance Rome* Peter Partner emphasizes Rome’s economic and cultural recovery after 1527, while Kenneth Gouwans declares that humanists in Rome saw the end of their Renaissance patronage. While Gouwan’s statement is true in most respects, some humanists also wrote about an “incipient golden age” that would be heralded by an “angelic pastor” who would “lead Christendom into the new age.” Gouwans, *Remembering the Renaissance*, 3

themselves.”⁴⁵ Despite numerous wars on the Italian peninsula and attacks on other Italian cities in the early sixteenth-century, the sack of Rome provoked a wide variety of responses from contemporary Italians.⁴⁶ Some tracts lamented the devastation of the Eternal City while others praised it. The Spanish priest Francesco Delicado, who was living in Rome at the time of the sack, gave thanks to God for the “divine judgment” involved in the destruction of Rome in the Epilogue of his novel *La Lozana Andaluza*.⁴⁷ In four orations written between 1527 and 1528 the humanist orator Pietro Alcionio furthered this judgment when he combined criticism of Clement VII’s political mistakes with optimism about Rome’s potential for recovery following the sack. Alcionio saw the sack as divine punishment against Clement VII for his inappropriate military adventurism, which provoked “the most monstrous barbarians” to enter Rome.⁴⁸ Although Alcionio did not specifically voice millennial expectations, he did express hope that Rome would return to greatness. Both Alcionio and Delicado believed the sack was a purge that would lead to a fresh revival.

Rome as the “New Babylon” occupied the minds of the religious Catholics as well as those renouncing certain aspects of the Church.⁴⁹ One of the faithful Italians who included apocalyptic discourse in his writings about the sack of Rome was the Augustinian Giles of Viterbo.⁵⁰ Elected prior General of the Augustinian order in 1507 by Pope Julius II, Giles of

⁴⁵ Alfonso de Valdés. “Dialogue of Lactancio and An Archdeacon.” *Alfonso de Valdés and the Sack of Rome: Dialogue of Lactancio and An Archdeacon*. (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1952) 31, 64

⁴⁶ Charles L. Stinger. *The Renaissance in Rome*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 323

⁴⁷ MacKay, 225

⁴⁸ Gouwans, *Remembering the Renaissance*, 49

⁴⁹ Marjorie Reeves, “A Note on Prophecy and the Sack of Rome (1527).” *Prophetic Rome*. 272

⁵⁰ Despite the traces of religious eschatology in his writing, Giles is also viewed as a humanist by modern scholars due to his veneration for classical authors. He endeavored to “bring into harmony with orthodox Christian dogma all that he felt was good in non-Christian thought.” He searched for *concordia* of religious ideas of the past with those of the present. Giles especially found a source of genuine spiritual enlightenment in Virgil, whom he considered a “prophet” for the gentiles.” As for the ancient Greeks, he believed they had corrupted the sacred literature they received. He sought a return to the original Christian dogma, and believed that the reform of the Church and learning the Scriptures in a more profound way through more ancient languages were coinciding ideals.

Viterbo was made bishop of Viterbo in 1523 by Pope Clement VII. Giles's writings reflect a mystical vision of Christianity which was inspired by traditional Western Neo-Platonism as well as the Jewish kabbala, specifically in its messianic and apocalyptic speculations."⁵¹ In addition, Giles turned to Augustine and other philosophers and Church scholars for his understanding of the Church in history. Though he rejects Joachim of Fiore's speculation on the divine essence of the Trinity, his ideas seem compatible with other Joachimite ideas, including the expectation that a new era was due to begin.⁵²

Despite his position in the Catholic Church, Giles was aware of the problems in the Church and stressed reform in his writings. He believed that the Church was condemned to a course of decline the further away it was from the age of Christ, and described contemporary Rome as another Babylon.⁵³ He was critical of the Roman people and their reluctance to listen to sermons, and was even more critical of the Borgia Pope Alexander VI, who abused his seat of authority for materialistic ventures. Even before the sack of Rome, his writings stressed that a "greater purgation" would need to take place before Church renewal could begin.⁵⁴ Specifically, he wanted a return to the ancient laws of the Church, a process that could only be accomplished with the purgation resulting from a dramatic event. The combination of both a metahistory and rhetoric of decline created an imminent sense of messianic religious tension for Giles.⁵⁵ His rhetoric of decline was similar to Joachim of Fiore's sense of an immediately impending

Giles was a humanist who, due to his position in the Augustinian order, had "both the desire and opportunity to reform" the Catholic Church.⁵⁰ O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo*, 19, 31, 9

⁵¹ Partner, 208

⁵² O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo*, 61

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 132

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 111

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 184

religious crisis that would accompany the advent of the Antichrist.⁵⁶ Giles incorporated his own eschatological interpretation in his linear “history,” an era of decline which he believed would culminate in a religious renewal. According to Marjorie Reeves, this medieval belief in a linear history met the Renaissance cyclical concept of a returning sequence of ages in his writings, and thus for Giles a renewal of Rome as the New Jerusalem could be rhetorically possible.⁵⁷

Religious tension and a desire for reform culminated in 1530 in his only published work—the *Scechina*, a full length apology for the kabbalistic interpretation of Scripture.⁵⁸ According to Marjorie Reeve’s translation the title means “habitation of God with men,” and is significant in terms of describing the earthly Jerusalem of his time.⁵⁹ Despite being commissioned by Clement VII, it was dedicated to the emperor Charles V, the “new Cyrus.”⁶⁰ In this dedication, Giles utilized the historic representation of Cyrus as a figure who would punish the church before a return to the golden age (or New Jerusalem of Rome) could be fulfilled.⁶¹ In biblical literature, Cyrus was used to “subdue nations” for the Lord and rebuild his city after the fall of the biblical Babylon [Isaiah 45:1- 12] Similarly, the “new Cyrus,” in the guise of Charles V, would help to rebuild the formerly corrupt city of Rome. Despite the respect Giles had for Clement VII (evident in the use of his own finances in order to attempt a rescue of the pope from his virtual imprisonment in the Castel Sant’Angelo directly following the sack), Giles believed Charles V

⁵⁶ Richard J Payne, editor. *Apocalyptic Spirituality: Treatises and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-en-der, Joachim of Fiore, the Spiritual Franciscans, and Savonarola*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 98; Joachim of Fiore, “Book of Figures, The Fourteenth Table, The Seven-Headed Dragon.” *Apocalyptic Spirituality*. 136

⁵⁷ Marjorie Reeves, “Cardinal Egidio of Viterbo: A Prophetic Interpretation of History.” *Prophetic Rome*. 93

⁵⁸ By the time he wrote the *Scechina*, Giles had “completely dedicated himself to the task of investigating the meaning of Scripture...that all other intellectual interests were consciously absorbed into it.” He had obtained a level of fluency in Hebrew and Greek, and his knowledge of sources ranged from patristic and ancient sources to Jewish kabbalism. Most importantly, however, he was a Christian theologian, and of all the sources “upon which he drew, Scripture held the primacy.” Giles’s intellectual efforts culminated in the writing of the *Scechina*, where his hope for religious reform of the Catholic Church coincided with his hope that the evils that led to the sack of Rome would be amended. O’Malley, *Giles of Viterbo*, 70, 66

⁵⁹ Reeves, “Cardinal Egidio of Viterbo.” 104

⁶⁰ O’Malley, *Giles of Viterbo*, 116

⁶¹ Partner, 209

was the “divinely appointed purger” of the of the Roman Catholic Church.⁶² Charles V was the new messianic agent for God’s final purpose, a renewal of the Golden Age in Rome.⁶³

The city of Rome played a significant role in his writings, and he stressed the importance of the Apostolic succession following Peter to the history of Christianity. Giles believed that Rome had been destined to be the center of Christianity, from as early as the time of the Etruscans. He claimed that Janus, the founder of the Etruscan religion, and namesake of the Janiculum Hill, heralded a true religious tradition. He even went so far as to compare the Janiculum, near the Vatican, to Mount Zion.⁶⁴ Giles, like Luigi Guicciardini, believed that the New Saint Peter’s Basilica, which was under construction in his time, would be the new Temple of the New Jerusalem.⁶⁵ In all his writings, but especially in his vigorous opposition of the Peripatetics, Giles stressed the importance of divine providence. His conviction that God continued to intervene in history is important in his apocalyptic beliefs regarding the sack of Rome. In this new and different era of history Jerusalem would be created by God with the destruction of the old city of Rome. Yet, the citizens of Rome disappointed him following 1527, as they refused to mend their harmful ways. Similar to other critics of the Roman curia at the time, and others like St. Augustine from an earlier time, Giles believed there would be further destruction before the dawn of a new era could occur.

⁶² O’Malley, *Giles of Viterbo*, 116. Giles expressed other apocalyptic beliefs in his texts, and according to O’Malley, the Apocalypse of John was among his favorite writings of the New Testament (71).

⁶³ Reeves, “Cardinal Egidio of Viterbo.” 104

⁶⁴ O’Malley, *Giles of Viterbo*, 122-123

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 135

CHAPTER 3
LUIGI GUICCIARDINI: A MAN OF HIS TIME

Historical Consciousness and *Il Sacco di Roma*

One of the most vivid and politically informed accounts of the sack comes from the Florentine Luigi Guicciardini's (1478-1551) *Il Sacco di Roma*, a detailed narrative of events that contains both political commentary and apocalyptic discourse. Guicciardini is able to bring these together to form a new kind of apocalyptic discourse. Though his account has been largely ignored by modern historiography, it is a useful pedagogical tool for anyone studying early modern Rome and its environs. Due to his extensive political career, Guicciardini portrayed the sack with a keen eye for detail despite not having witnessed the events in person. While there are many contemporary accounts that utilize apocalyptic rhetoric when describing the events of 1527, only Guicciardini presents this discourse from a specifically Florentine viewpoint supported by well-informed political commentary and an in-depth account of events. He perceives humans as active agents in their own history while also viewing the process of history as cyclical and repetitive. Guicciardini's narrative breaks from purely medieval historical thinking by highlighting political motivations and consequences, while still retaining a sense of apocalyptic and biblical representation.

Luigi Guicciardini's *Il Sacco di Roma* contains a dedicatory letter followed by two narrative sections. The dedication to Cosimo de' Medici at the beginning rhetorically alludes to Guicciardini's political sentiments at the time of publication. *Libro Primo* recounts the events throughout Italy that led to the sack of Rome and reflects the author's extensive knowledge of contemporary events. This narrative includes information from the formation of the League of Cognac through the French attack on Milan, and even to the Florentine *tumulto del venerdì* uprising prior to the Imperial army's descent to Rome. It concludes with the army of Charles de

Bourbon sacking Laterina and Rondine on their way to Rome. The last narrative, *Libro Secondo*, is significant because the author recounts the approach of Bourbon's army and the destructive events of May 6th in explicitly apocalyptic terms. The apocalyptic discourse used by Guicciardini functions as a rhetorical solution to the problem of the evils he laments in his world, which are described in the narratives of his text. Guicciardini recounts the events of 1527 using biblical typologies and comparisons while still maintaining a historical consciousness and a desire to insert his own political commentary. His style of writing history marks *Il Sacco di Roma* as an early modern historical text.

Paul Oskar Kristeller claims that this very development of a true historiography is what distinguishes Renaissance from Medieval writings.⁶⁶ In this light, while Guicciardini recounts the historical events of the sack, he also reflects a strong apocalyptic mentality, which could be perceived as "medieval" by historians who espouse the notion that the Renaissance was the cradle of modernity. On the other hand, Randolph Starn questions these methodological divisions when he claims that the distinctions between "Renaissance" and "Medieval" are actually quite blurry in Italy at this time.⁶⁷ Eric Cochrane also counters this "Renaissance as modern" notion when he describes the Renaissance writers as "indebted" to their medieval predecessors despite their "conscious rebellion against them."⁶⁸ Cochrane acknowledges a change in Renaissance historiography, but does not completely divorce the literature of the Renaissance historians from that of the medieval writers. He even specifically refers to Luigi Guicciardini as a "chronicler," which he describes as historians who "follow a medieval

⁶⁶ Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981) xiii

⁶⁷ Randolph Starn, "Who's Afraid of the Renaissance?" In *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies*. John Van Engen, editor. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994) 133

⁶⁸ Cochrane, xv

model.”⁶⁹ Yet, Cochrane’s judgment of Guicciardini’s work seems passive and limited. His description of Renaissance historiography applies to Guicciardini’s narrative as well as the medieval “chronicler” method of historiography. Guicciardini utilizes the eschatological discourse so often found in medieval texts (hence the “medieval” model), while also allowing for a sense of human agency (through effective leadership) amidst these Divine events.

Although the use of historical period constructs seems at times diachronic and arbitrary (and often is), it is still a useful tool in highlighting transitions in specific categories.⁷⁰ In this case, the term “early modernity” exemplifies the evolving way that individuals perceived the world around them while placing themselves into a greater historical narrative. Guicciardini’s continuation of the apocalyptic notion in a secular sense also shows the changing historiography of the period. In his assessment of the development of Renaissance historiography, Marvin B. Becker claims that while medieval writers also appreciated the “secular” struggles of man, the Renaissance writers furthered this context by “elevating the terrain on which it was to transpire.”⁷¹ Although Becker’s study concludes in the early Quattrocento, his assessment can apply to the history of Guicciardini as well. The Renaissance historians placed their literature in the real world, in comparison to the metaphysical or moral landscape of medieval writers like Dante. In Guicciardini’s text, his apocalyptic rhetoric is not moralistic or contrived; rather, he is describing actual events composed of real people with human agency.

In his analysis of the understanding of the end of times in literature, Frank Kermode

⁶⁹ Ibid., 190, xvi

⁷⁰ Because of these reasons, this paper will use the less arbitrary term “early modern.” For more information on the justification of this term usage, see O’Malley, John W. *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) 1-15

⁷¹ Marvin B. Becker, “Towards a Renaissance Historiography of Florence” In *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*. Anthony Molho, editor. (DeKalb: Illinois University Press, 1971) 145-6

states that in recreating old structures writers tend to use old patterns and adapt them to the new world.⁷² Such a reuse of old patterns is apparent in *Il Sacco di Roma*. Guicciardini viewed the process of history as cyclical and repetitive, specifically in his view on the extreme “lows” of destruction as turning points.⁷³ This is exemplified in *Libro Primo* when he uses the example of the destruction of the ancient city of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 BC by the Roman Emperor Titus. Guicciardini uses this well-known example to show that even while the Jews were the victims of such devastation, they still “gained great respect” from the Romans for their “strength and tenacity.”⁷⁴ Thus, the Romans should also be able to turn this destruction into something positive, if they correct the lasciviousness that caused the sack. Another example of this cyclical history is apparent in the dedication. Guicciardini claims that “human undertakings tend to oscillate between one extreme and the other; and ultimately nothing changes but names and places.”⁷⁵ This clearly shows his belief that human history is repetitive throughout time, and the same patterns found in the sack of 1527 can be seen in previous examples, such as the earlier sack of Rome in 410. This “cyclical” aspect comes through his use of biblical typologies in his narrative, such as the repetitive theme of the suffering of humans due to their excessive vanities. He took the old patterns of biblical comparisons, and applied them to volatile situation of his time.

⁷² Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction. The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) 58

⁷³ McGregor, xxiii

⁷⁴ Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 7 “E benchè la popolosa, e fortissima Gerusalemme fosse desolata, ed arsa da Vespasiano, e Tito Imperatori, nondimeno provarano in quattro anni con mille difficoltà, e mille pericoli, la virtù, ed ostinazione de’ Giudei.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 2

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 3. “Canciossiacosachè con questi diversi, ed appositi costumi, di necessità le umane imprese da questo a quello estremo (con poco riposo e meno salute di ciascuno) continuamente girando, e ritornando, non mutano altro, che luogo, e nome.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, xv

Florentine Context and Political Commentary

Despite the acute political awareness and attention to detail displayed in his book, for most historians Luigi is the forgotten Guicciardini brother.⁷⁶ Francesco spent two years as a Florentine ambassador in the court of Spain, and then served under the Medici family following their return to power in Florence. A faithful servant of the Medici family despite his desire for a republic, Francesco penned the *Florentine History* and several other tracts before his final and most famous work. Printed in nearly one hundred editions in Italian and translated into French, Latin, Spanish, German, Flemish, and English within a century of its original publication, *The History of Italy* (published posthumously in 1561) describes the events of the Italian peninsula between 1494 and 1534.⁷⁷ In his study of the Guicciardini family dynamic, Randolph Starn claims that it was a great family but they were all eclipsed by a “great man”- Francesco.⁷⁸ The legacy of Luigi’s younger brother Francesco, praised for his extensive knowledge of Italian political events, overshadows the rhetorical merits of Luigi Guicciardini among historians.⁷⁹ For Roberto Ridolfi, Francesco is most remembered for his assistance in the production of an intellectual history of contemporary events.⁸⁰ Luigi Guicciardini also had a vast knowledge of

⁷⁶ Although Luigi’s account of the Sack was more detailed, Francesco’s shorter version seems to be cited more often in modern accounts. For example, André Chastel’s art historical account of the sack mentions and cites Francesco’s numerous texts, but not Luigi’s. *The Sack of Rome, 1527*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977)

⁷⁷ Sidney Alexander, “Introduction.” In Guicciardini, *The History of Italy*, xxv.

⁷⁸ Randolph Starn, “Francesco Guicciardini and His Brothers.” *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*. (DeKalb: North Illinois University Press, 1971) 412

⁷⁹ An example comes from the printer of the 1758 Cologne edition of *Il Sacco di Roma* asserts that the text was written “da Francesco Guicciardini,” thus attributing the authorship to the Francesco rather than Luigi. (“Il Sacco di Roma descritto in due libri da Francesco Guicciardini” Guicciardini, *Il Sacco di Roma*. i) There is no modern debate over who actually wrote the text, but due to the limited editions printed of Luigi’s text (in comparison to the many editions of Francesco’s texts), the eighteenth-century German printers seem to have confused the two and favored the more well-known brother.

⁸⁰ Roberto Ridolfi, *Studi Guicciardini*. (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1978) 21

contemporary events, yet according to Starn many of his numerous other writings remain unpublished in archives in Florence, insufficiently explored if not entirely unknown.⁸¹

Prior to composing *Il Sacco di Roma* Luigi Guicciardini had an active political career in the city of Florence. He came from a patrician family, part of the *ottimati* who partially controlled the government in Florence. Luigi was the eldest of five sons of Simona di Bongianni Gianfigliuzzi and Piero Guicciardini, and he married Isabella Sacchetti in 1502. Luigi, Francesco, and his other brothers were active in the political scene of Florence. Known for his “notorious rigidity and self-righteousness,” Luigi held his first political office in 1514 as *console del mare* and advanced to several other positions in the next few years.⁸² In March and April of 1527 (just prior to the sack of Rome in May) he was appointed as the *gonfaloniere di giustizia*, the supreme executive office in Florence. Under Pope Clement VII (Giulio de’Medici), who was Pope at the time of the sack, the Florentines were at the height of their wealth and influence in Rome.⁸³ Consequently, the sack delivered a severe, albeit relatively quick, blow to Florentine power in the Holy City. Due to his brother’s position as lieutenant general of the papal army and the long-standing family ties to the Medici rulers, Luigi Guicciardini was well-informed about the activities in the government of the Papal States at the time of the sack.

⁸¹ Starn, “Francesco Guicciardini and His Brothers.” 433 Furthermore, before James H. McGregor’s English translation in 1993 a new edition had not been published (in Italian or English) since 1867, and many other tracts by Luigi Guicciardini have not been widely published nor translated into English. This includes *Il Dialogo del Savonarola* and *Il Dialogo di Francesco Cappoini e Piero Vettori disputanti del governo di Firenze*, both from 1530.

⁸² Starn, “Francesco Guicciardini and His Brothers.” 427

⁸³ Partner, 79-80. Even before Clement VII’s papacy, Lorenzo de’Medici enlisted the aid of the governor of the Medici bank in Rome, Nofri di Niccolò Tornabuoni, along with other ambassadors sent for the specific purpose of obtaining papal favors. The efforts of Tornabuoni and the other Florentine ambassadors to Rome, such as Niccolò Michelozzi, took the Medici financial concerns into the heart of the Vatican. Melissa Meriam Bullard. “Hammering Away at the Pope”: Nofri Tornabuoni, Lorezeno De’Medici’s Agent and Collaborator in Rome.” *Florence and Beyond: Culture, Society, and Politics in Renaissance Italy. Essays in Honour of John M. Najemy.* David S. Peterson, editor. (Toronto: Publications of the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008) 386

Guicciardini used his description of the sack in order to represent his own political commentary on the ineffective leadership in contemporary Florence and other Italian cities.⁸⁴ Writing became a way to publicize political ideas, and often a way to please the patron.⁸⁵ Patronage of Renaissance writers by wealthy citizens allowed this to occur, and writers often sought to please their patron through embellished dedicatory letters and texts. This is exemplified by Guicciardini's dedication of his work to Lord Cosimo de' Medici, the "Most Illustrious" Second Duke of the Florentine Republic, who began ruling the city around 1537 at the young age of seventeen.⁸⁶ Cosimo was the son of Maria Salviati and Giovanni de' Medici, more famously known as Giovanni delle Bande Nere, a skilled military leader in Florence who was killed in battle just prior to the sack. The political climate of Florence had been volatile for many decades prior to 1537. The Medici had been expelled several times while citizens attempted to establish a Florentine Republic. Following his release from imprisonment after the sack, Clement VII worked with Charles V to reestablish Medici power in the city. In 1531 by imperial decree Alessandro de' Medici was installed as head of the government of Florence and was declared Duke in 1532. Unfortunately for Alessandro, his cousin, Lorenzino de' Medici opposed the idea of a Florentine Duchy and as part of his plan for a republic, assassinated the young Duke in 1537.⁸⁷ Many of the *ottimati* of the city, including Francesco and Luigi Guicciardini, gathered together following the assassination to elect Cosimo I as the new Duke despite Lorenzino's hopes for a Republic.

⁸⁴ James H. McGregor. "Introduction." In Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, xxi

⁸⁵ John Najemy claims that writing in the Renaissance was an extremely popular outlet in expressing thoughts, persuasions, and political sentiments. *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513-1515*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993)

⁸⁶ Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 1. "Illustrissimo." *Il Sacco di Roma*, x

⁸⁷ For more information on the struggle for power, see John Najemy's monumental work *A History of Florence: 1200-1575*. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006)



Figure 3-1. Giorgio Vasari's "Cosimo eletto duca di Firenze" (1559) Located in the room dedicated to Cosimo I, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

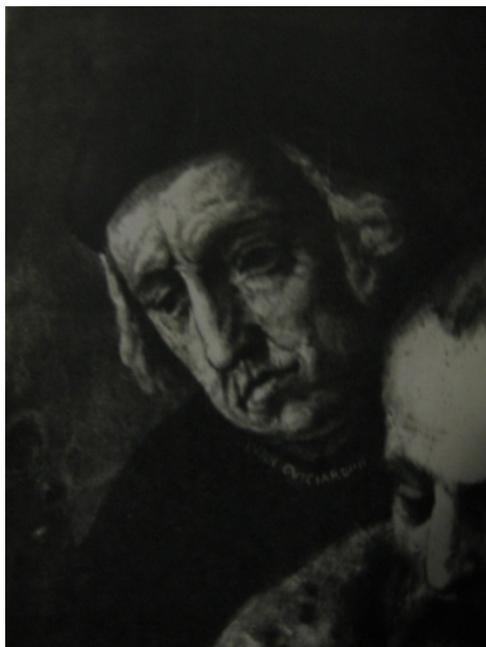


Figure 3-2. Portrait of Luigi Guicciardini, Detail from "Cosimo eletto duca di Firenze"

In the dedicatory letter, Guicciardini emphasizes his conviction that Cosimo would provide stability in a time of political turmoil by claiming that

some new legislator or monarch (like those who have arisen in past centuries in similar disasters) might have the power and sense of justice to restrain and chase back to hell the unbridled and diabolical Furies that have in recent years swept violently through every land.⁸⁸

This praise, obviously directed to Cosimo, serves as an outlet for Guicciardini to express his political sentiments. At the time of the sack while he was *gonfaloniere di giustizia* Guicciardini was a moderate supporter of the Medici family, and had even assisted in the decision to exile the family that same year. Yet, this support changed amidst developments in Florentine politics in 1537 engendered by the assassination of the Duke Alessandro de' Medici. According to twentieth-century historian and family descendent Paolo Guicciardini, Guicciardini abandoned his moderate tendency and wholeheartedly supported the ascendancy of Cosimo de' Medici as Duke.⁸⁹

Renaissance and early modern dedicatory letters were imbued with a direct intent on the part of author, or a specific reason for writing, which included efforts to please their patron.⁹⁰

The 1537 dedication of *Il Sacco di Roma* to a member of the Medici family who were once again in control of Florence illustrates Guicciardini's pro-Medici stance at the time of publication, in

⁸⁸ Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 2. "se già tosto, come nè passati secoli in tanti aniversati frangenti e successo, non sorgerà qualche nuovo legislatore, o nuovo Monarca, per la potenza, e giustizia del quale non solo si raffrenierio e si rimettano nel centro della Terra tante sfrenate, e diaboliche Furie, quante si veggono in questi ultimi anni quasi in ogni Porvincia crudelmente scorrere." *Il Sacco di Roma*, xiii

⁸⁹ "Dei Medici era stato sempre un fautore, ma della tendenza più moderata," and "Aveva abbandonato la tendenze moderata: egli voleva, così insinua maliziosamente il Varchi, <iscancellare l'azioni fatte nel suo gonfalonieratico contra i Medici e racquistarsi fede>" in Paolo Guicciardini. *Il Ritratto Vasariano di Luigi Guicciardini*. (Firenze: L'Arte Della Stampa, 1942) 17; Furthermore, Luigi became so involved in the later Florentine government that he was considered the "model of the new Medicean patrician-administrator." Starn, 430

⁹⁰ For example, Machiavelli had originally addressed *The Prince* to Lorenzo de' Medici, in order to gain favor and a possible political office with the Medici. When Lorenzo died prior to publication, Machiavelli quickly changed the dedication to reflect the new Medici leadership of Giuliano de' Medici, and thus a new hope for political favor. Machiavelli, "The Prince," 77. In Peter Bondanella, *The Portable Machiavelli*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1979)

contrast to his belief in the ineffective leadership at the time of the sack.⁹¹ In addition to the “brutal wars” and “unheard-of famine” in Florence, Guicciardini presents the ineffective leadership that plagued his and other Italian cities as another catastrophic event in *Libro Primo* of his narrative.⁹² Here he describes the events leading up to the sack in Florence, Milan, and other Italian cities, and how ineffective leadership led to defeat in many of these places. The eternal discord within unhappy Italy is detailed in Guicciardini’s descriptions of leaders such as the Medici in Florence, who caused many Florentines to favor war over peace if it meant liberation from Medicean “servitude.”⁹³ The Italian soldiers were “overwhelmed and beaten down,” not because of poor ability on their part but rather on the part of their leaders who “could not mold them and bring out their natural, age-old aggressiveness.”⁹⁴ These comments reflect Guicciardini’s disapproval of much of the political and military leadership in the year 1527.

Interestingly, his praise was reserved for Giovanni delle Bande Nere, father of Cosimo I, the recipient of the dedicatory letter of *Il Sacco di Roma*. According to Guicciardini, the Black Bands were brave enough to meet their enemies face to face thanks to the “skill and courage of

⁹¹ Despite the ten-year gap from the sack to the dedication, McGregor has argued that the text itself was written in 1527 directly after the sack. This argument seems convincing, as Guicciardini describes events in the text as if they had not yet reached a conclusion. For example, the author narrates the pope’s virtual imprisonment inside Castel Sant’Angelo and claims to have “little knowledge” of what was going on inside due to the fact that they were “completely surrounded and very carefully watched by their enemies.” Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 115. The pope was inside the Castel Sant’Angelo for several months after the attack, but by 1537 he had been free for many years. Guicciardini’s claim regarding the pope’s condition seems to imply that he was writing his account while the pope was still captive in 1527, and had he written the text in 1537 would have certainly included information on the pope’s whereabouts. Yet, McGregor lacks a full explanation of why the dedication was written so many years later, if the text was truly written directly after the sack.

⁹² Guicciardini is referring to the numerous wars that had been fought on Italian soil in previous decades, as well as a series of plagues that hit cities of Italy. In Rome, there was a severe plague in 1522 followed by several renewed outbreaks in later years. Partner, 54

⁹³ Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 12. “L’Universale di Fiorenza is questo tempo, per trovarsi malissimo contento del Governo de’ Medici, desiderava più la guerra, che la pace, stimando per quella potere facilmente nascere occasione da liberarsi dalla Medico [sic] servitù.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 12.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18. “E benchè a’ tempi nostri si vegga sbiottita, e sbiogtita, non procede tanto dall’ avere smarrita la buona educazione militare, quanto per non trovarsi sotto Capitano, che la instruisca, e gli faccia di nuovo mostrare la sua naturale e antica ferocia.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 25

Signor Giovanni [delle Bande Nere].”⁹⁵ Kenneth Gouwans convincingly argues that *Il Sacco di Roma* is tailored with certain embellishments to fit the desires of Cosimo I. This is exemplified through the previous example that highlighted the skills of Giovanni de’Medici despite Guicciardini’s belief in ineffective leadership on the part of others.⁹⁶ This tailoring is also achieved by his failure to attribute any significant blame to Charles V, who officially recognized Cosimo de’Medici as Duke of Florence in June of 1537 and thus solidified the restoration of Medici power in the city. Traditionally, Florence had been pro-French in its foreign sentiment, but following an agreement between Pope Clement VII and the Emperor Charles V in June of 1529, and especially following the return of the Medici in 1530 after the failed Second Florentine Republic, the official sentiment was more favorable to the Spanish hegemony that had taken over the peninsula. Thus, because the text was written to honor the new pro-imperial Duke, it not surprising that Charles V would be viewed in a more favorable light rather than if it had been written in 1527 directly after his troops passed a fearful Florence.

Moreover, Guicciardini demonstrates a Machiavellian influence when he states in his dedicatory letter that it is a historian’s task to “teach advisers of republics and princes how to live by using the true examples of others.”⁹⁷ Both Machiavelli and Luigi Guicciardini used political commentary when writing history in order to narrate contemporary events and inform political leaders of their day. While Machiavelli’s political commentary may be better known to modern students, Guicciardini also used this commentary to reinforce his critique of ineffectual political

⁹⁵ Ibid., 26. “Solo la Banda Nera, così nominata dal colore dell’insegne sue, per la virtù, e per l’animo del Signor Giovanni, essendo da lui gui, data, e disciplinata, mostrò continuamente vedere volentieri il nemico in viso.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 42

⁹⁶ Kenneth Gouwans, “Review of *The Sack of Rome*.” *Renaissance Quarterly*. Vo. 48, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), 375-376

⁹⁷ Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 5. “che qualunque verissima Istoria, e non simulanti adulazioni vuole scrivere, sia abbligato con sincero animo narrarla, non tanto per insegnare col vero esempio d’altri certe regole a coloro, che sono preposti a consigliare le Repubbliche, e li Principati.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, xix-xx

leadership.⁹⁸ Machiavelli, often considered Europe's first political scientist, was a close friend of both Luigi and Francesco Guicciardini, and some of the epistolary exchanges between them still exist.⁹⁹ Despite the late publication of *The Prince*, it seems reasonable to assume that Luigi Guicciardini was exposed to many of Machiavelli's political and religious sentiments due to their friendship. Both Guicciardini brothers belonged to the same Florentine school of political thought as Machiavelli, and resemblances in their text commentary reflects similar outlooks on politics.¹⁰⁰

In addition to his praise for Giovanni delle Bande Nere (who would not have “proved inferior to Alexander, or Hannibal”) Guicciardini stated that the wisest councilors of Florence did not believe their city should do anything to opposed the emperor since they stood to gain nothing from the attack on Rome.¹⁰¹ In this case, he is referring to himself as *gonfaloniere di giustizia* at the time while also giving his own perspective on political maneuvers prior to the sack. Florence stood in the face of possible destruction at the hands of the imperial troops in 1527. Thus, many Florentines considered the expense of opposing the emperor too great and preferred not to assist the Pope. Guicciardini also advises his reader not to leave fate only to God. He claims that the “wise give up hope and join the ignorant” when they believe there is no

⁹⁸ Machiavelli wrote many brief essays and sketches in addition to his longer works, many of which were printed in the first decade of the sixteenth century. *The Prince* was composed in 1513, although it was not published until 1532. Similarly, *The Discourses*, less famous but also important in terms of reflecting the author's political stance, was composed between 1513-1515 and later published in 1531. Luigi Guicciardini's belief in the ineffectiveness of the Italian leadership at the time of the sack, which is similar to Machiavelli's critique of contemporary military tactics (with the exception of Cesare Borgia.)

⁹⁹ For more information on this epistolary exchange between Machiavelli and the Guicciardini family, see *Machiavelli and his Friends: Their Personal Correspondence*, James B. Atkinson, editor. Dekalb, Ill: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996. Similarly, John Najemy has shown that Francesco Vettori made use of his epistolary exchange with Machiavelli to encourage him to rethink assumptions about language and writing that he brought to the practice of political discourse in letters and *The Prince*. *Between Friends*, xi

¹⁰⁰ Felix Gilbert, “Machiavelli and Guicciardini.” *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Jan. 1939), 265

¹⁰¹ Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 36 and 41. “senza dubbio non sarebbe stato nè ad Alessandro, nè ad Annibale.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 61

way to head off scourges sent “by the wrath of God.”¹⁰² While simultaneously critiquing the military leadership who fought for the Pope, Guicciardini also implies that men can play an important part in their own destiny.

Apocalyptic Rhetoric

In addition to his belief in individual men as active agents in historical change, Guicciardini’s narrative also reflects a strong sense of religious purpose. The Guicciardini children were raised very piously by their father, Piero, and the influence of this education is evident in his reliance on this in Guicciardini’s historical writing. Guicciardini uses eschatological discourse and apocalyptic topoi as a symbolic theodicy, an explanation of heavenly events to his reader. His apocalyptic topoi include a belief in divine justice for wrongdoing, which is shown through his reasoning for writing his narrative:

As I wrote during those terrible days [directly following the sack], it was not my intention to derive pleasure from revisiting with the pen the scene of so many and such pitiable cruelties. I wanted instead to keep continually before my eyes a strong example of the great evils that arrogance and immoderate ambition cause and of the need for erring men to anticipate and to fear divine justice.¹⁰³

Guicciardini’s generalization of erring men who should expect to fear divine justice implies that the 1527 sack is not the first event to feel the repercussions of divine justice. This apocalyptic discourse of divine justice, combined with a sense of cyclical history and a mastery of political commentary throughout the narrative, work together to produce a very “early modern” text.

¹⁰² Ibid., 62. “che i Savi si abbandonino, e con gl’ignoranti affermino, non restare a noi rimedio alcuno, per provvedere a tanto flagello della giusta ira di Dio, e che per i nostri gravissimi errori meritiamo tanto male, e peggio. *Il Sacco di Roma*, 114

¹⁰³ Ibid., 3. “benchè in quelli in felicissimi giorni del sacco di Roma scrivessi, non feci questo per pigliare allora piacere, con la penna discorrendo fra tante e tante miserabili crudeltà, ma per aver continuamente avanti agli occhi miei un manifesto esempio di quanto male sia cagione la superba e la immoderata ambizione, e quanto temere si debba, gravamente errando, la divina Giustizia.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, xiv

Guicciardini's apocalyptic rhetoric served as a technique for advancing his interpretation of history and swaying his contemporary readers.¹⁰⁴ As described earlier, Guicciardini structured his dedication to specifically praise the illustrious new Duke. This dedication precedes narratives in which he argues that bad leadership and corrupt cities lead to destruction, thus allowing the reader to understand why his dedication contained numerous references to hopeful political improvement. In addition to bad leadership, other evils of Guicciardini's time included the followers of Luther to the north and the consistent interference of "the number of foreigners" who come through "miserable Italy" assaulting and sacking cities on a continual basis.¹⁰⁵ Contemporary Italians only needed to consider the excessiveness

of the ridiculous ceremonies, the lascivious and idle pleasures of the most reverend cardinals, prelates, and courtiers of the Roman curia. Then let him see that because of such despicable frivolity, they are at present more miserable and unfortunate than any other mortals.¹⁰⁶

For Guicciardini, the idle pleasures of the corrupt Roman curia contributed to the causes of the sack of Rome. In his view, the lasciviousness was sufficient cause for God to inflict his Divine justice and destroy the city.

¹⁰⁴ O'Leary, 3-4. Although O'Leary does not discuss Luigi Guicciardini (nor specifically early modern texts), his interpretation of apocalyptic rhetoric can be applied to *Il Sacco di Roma*.

¹⁰⁵ Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 62. "in questa infelice Italia." *Il Sacco di Roma*, 114

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 8. "in Roma erano eccessive le vane, e ridicole pompe, con i lascivi, ed oziosi delizii de' Reverendissimi Cardinali, Prelati, e Cortegiani della Romana Corte, essendo al presente per tanto vilissimo ozio, sopra gli altri mortali, miseri, ed infelici." *Il Sacco di Roma*, 3-4

This attitude toward the papacy was espoused by Machiavelli as well, who claimed that the "court of Rome" had "lost all its devotion and religion" due to the frivolous and secular aspects they displayed. Niccolò Machiavelli. "The Discourses." *The Portable Machiavelli*. 212. Although Machiavelli is often seen as a religious skeptic to modern historians due to his influence on political science and his strong opinions on military matters, he considered religion an essential foundation for any healthy political structure. (Machiavelli's views on religion are complex. For more information, see David S. Peterson, "Machiavelli and the Petrine Succession." *Florence and Beyond*, 435-456.) He did not necessarily agree with the Petrine Succession of the Roman Catholic papacy, and wondered how the Church "had arrived at such power in controlling the growing territories of the Papal States. Niccolò Machiavelli. "The Prince." *The Portable Machiavelli*. 113. Yet, he still recognizes the importance of religion in society, and uses the example of the Samnites, who turned to religion in order to encourage their soldiers. This action was exemplary, and proves "how much confidence faith can inspire." Machiavelli, "The Discourses," 218. Machiavelli fused together his reflections on the importance of religion with his commentary on the politics of his time, something Guicciardini did in his less-famous text.

Guicciardini's ability to combine his commentary on contemporary society with apocalyptic discourse reflects another Florentine tradition, espoused years earlier by Girolamo Savonarola, who believed that Florence could become the New Jerusalem through sudden and universal reforms and an elimination of the existing political hierarchy.¹⁰⁷ Writing under this influence, Guicciardini laments the continuous assault on Florence by bad city leaders and foreign invasions. He saw a greater future for his city despite the foreign powers that ravaged the peninsula in recent years. The use of apocalyptic discourse and the belief in the assault on the Italian peninsula and other evils in the world ran through Savonarola's millenarian predictions, which rose in popularity following the French invasion of 1494. Savonarola believed that since the city of Florence had been divinely chosen by God, those who sought to destroy the city would receive harsh divine treatment. His *Compendium of Revelations*, written in defense of a concerted ecclesiastical campaign against him in 1495, developed this argument in detail.

Though Savonarola was burned at the stake in 1498, his ideas would live on through the work of his followers, especially the *Piagnoni*.¹⁰⁸ Medici devotees feared that the fanatical priest would carry on his mission without him, especially during the short-lived Second Florentine Republic when the Medici were expelled from the city. In April of 1527 the *Piagnoni* once again exerted a significant influence in Florentine affairs when they helped encourage the *tumulto del venerdì*. This event involved a group of youths who gathered in the Piazza della

¹⁰⁷ Polizzotto, 96

¹⁰⁸ In light of these fears, the Medici symbolically removed the bell from the convent of San Marco (which the priest had used to call people to service) and exiled it to the rival convent of San Salvatore al Monte. Furthermore, many former Savonarolan followers such as Marsilio Ficino abandoned their support in favor of a safer reform sentiment. Yet, *Piagnoni* were able to carry on his apocalyptic beliefs, and in the writings of Girolamo Benivieni (also a friend of Giulio de' Medici), he used the biblical metaphor of an old, ravaged Jerusalem whose walls needed rebuilding. Ibid., 170, 156

Signoria demanding the expulsion of the Medici and the formation of a citizen militia.¹⁰⁹ Luigi Guicciardini as *gonfaloniere* tried unsuccessfully to dissuade the rioters. Nearly a month later the situation was repeated and the Medici family left the city, which encouraged the rise of apocalyptic beliefs among the people of Florence. One of the most significant indications of these beliefs was the Signoria's addition of the Crown of Thorns to the main emblem of the city, which marked the beginning of the new Elect Nation of Florence.¹¹⁰

Savonarola's beliefs influenced Guicciardini from his childhood because of his father's staunch support of the millenarian preacher.¹¹¹ Savonarola believed that due to the vanities and excesses of the world, all of Italy and "especially Rome" would be destroyed, thus making way for the New Jerusalem in Florence.¹¹² Although Guicciardini does not seem to describe an expected millennial kingdom following the destruction (nor uses the specific phrase "New Jerusalem"), he does suggest the rise of a new and improved era when he claims that human affairs "begin to ascend the scale of happiness" following the "lowest rung of misery."¹¹³ Furthermore, his dedicatory letter is a good indication of his hope for Florence as the leading city following the catastrophic destruction. When he addresses the "new legislator or monarch" who will "have the power...[to] chase back to hell the unbridled and diabolical Furies" that had traversed Italy, he is referring to Duke Cosimo de' Medici. He expected the Florentine leader would effectively lead Italy, and chase out the foreign power who "swept violently" through

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 335

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 367

¹¹¹ Alexander, xx

¹¹² Savonarola, "Compendium of Revelations," *Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 202

¹¹³ Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 63. "quando le azioni umane sono ridotte all' infinito grado del male, non potendo più declinare, cominciano di nuovo a poco a poco, spornate dalla necessità, madre della virtù, a falire per la scala della felicità." *Il Sacco di Roma*, 116

their lands.¹¹⁴ His religious convictions and his political expectations reinforce each other throughout his entire narrative.

Savonarola was not his only influence; there was a rise in prophetic preachers throughout Italy in the early decades of the century, many of whom Guicciardini would surely have witnessed in the streets of Florence. There was a larger number of preachers who criticized the papacy around the time of the Council of Pisa from 1511-1513 and traversed the streets heralding the “imminence of divine retribution or the dawn of a new age.”¹¹⁵ Prophetic inspiration found an outlet in preaching, and in the weeks preceding the sack anti-Roman preaching became increasingly more explosive.¹¹⁶ These *romiti* were erratic preachers who often moved from town to town to avoid persecution by local authorities. However, one apocalyptic preacher in particular had a strong impact during his long stay in pre-sack Rome. This preacher, Brandano da Petroio, reproached much of the clergy and directed threatening comments toward the pope. He arrived in Rome in the year before the sack and declared there would be an “imminent punishment on the city” before climbing a statue in St. Peter’s Square in order to turn and scold Pope Clement VII, for the “scarce piety” in Rome.¹¹⁷

Similar to the apocalyptic preaching of Savonarola and Brandano da Petroio, Guicciardini describes unusual occurrences and portents of doom that heralded the destruction of the city.

Most interestingly, he describes a man resembling a prophet who appeared in Rome several days

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 2. “la quale similmente (per esser la natura del male di andare sempre, come il fuoco nella disposta maceria crescendo, ed ampliando, quando non è con prestezza annullato, e spento) sarà in breve ridotta all’ultimo suo estermínio, se già tosto, come nè passati secoli in tanti anniversati frangenti è successo, non forgerà qualche nuovo legislatore, o nuovo Monarca, per la potenza, e giustizia del quale non solo si raffrenino, e si rimettano nel centro della Terra tante sfrenate, diaboliche Furie, quante si veggono in questi ultimi anni quasi in ogni Provincia crudelmente scorrere.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, xiii

¹¹⁵ Aldo Landi, “Prophecy at the Time of the Council of Pisa (1511-1513).” *Prophetic Rome*. 53

¹¹⁶ Ottavia Niccoli, “High and Low Prophetic Culture in Rome at the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century.” *Prophetic Rome*. 120

¹¹⁷ Giampaolo Tognetti, “Sul ‘Romito’ e Profeta Brandano da Petroio.” *Rivista Storica Italiana*. Vol. 7, 1960. “Durante la Settimana Santa proclamò la punizione imminente sulla città” and “si scagliò dall’alto di una statua contro il papa benedicente, rimproverandogli la poca pietà che scorgeva nei Romani durante quelle giornate.”

prior to the sack. This prophet publicly predicted that “the destruction of the priests and of the entire city was certain and that a renewal of the Church was at hand.”¹¹⁸ It is significant that Guicciardini includes this man in his text, as his apocalyptic prophecy would in fact occur. This preacher was most likely Brandano da Petroio, and Guicciardini’s inclusion of Brandano reinforces his belief in the apocalyptic renewal of the city.

In addition to the itinerant preachers, numerous pamphlets had appeared both before and after the sack that included phenomena such as “a celestial hand holding a dagger in the sky” and “a shower of weapons and severed heads.” It was even said that the comet that appeared before the sack in 1527 was the same one that had been seen before both the destruction of Jerusalem on AD 72 and the first sack of Rome by Alaric and the Visigoths in 410.¹¹⁹ This claim suggests a parallel between the 1527 sack and that of the ancient city of Jerusalem and with the earlier sack of Rome that St. Augustine refers to in his *City of God*. Guicciardini alludes to these portents as he cautions his reader that God warns mortals with “divers and terrible signs before their punishment.” One of these signs included a lightning bolt that lifted a statue of the baby Jesus from the arms of Mary in the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, subsequently breaking it to pieces.¹²⁰ These portents of doom and the prophecy of the *romito* who called for the destruction of the corrupt papacy described in *Il Sacco di Roma* are significant because they mirror Guicciardini’s hope for better leaders and a more noble Church in the city of Rome.

¹¹⁸ Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 85. “non lascerò in dietro di narrare, come molti giorni avanti, uno di vilissima condizione del Contado di Siena, d’età matura, di pelo rosso, nudo, e macilento, e, per quanto si dimostrava allora, molto religioso, aveva più volte predetto a tutto il Popolo Romano la rovina certa de’ Preti, e di tutta la Città, con la rinovazione della Chiesa” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 162

¹¹⁹ Reeves, “A Note on Prophecy.” 276

¹²⁰ Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 86. “che voglia istruire i mortali innanzi al flagello con diverse, e spaventevoli dimonstrazioni, per tentare prima di ridurre con tali terrori più tosto, che con la giustizia, le umane menti a miglior vita” and “aver levato dal braccio di una pietosissima Nostra Donna, collocata nella Chiesa di Santa Maria Transpontina, il suo bambino, ed averne fatti molti pezzi.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 163-4

Hundreds of years after St. Augustine's *City of God*, Guicciardini felt compelled to once again explain the destruction of Rome. Although the vast devastation of a sacking was similar in these two cases, historical circumstances were not. Augustine used the 410 sack as a vehicle for expressing the merits of a new religion, while Guicciardini used the 1527 sack in order to critique the political structure of the church. Guicciardini's language echoes that of the biblical destruction of Jerusalem, thus making a comparison between the biblical city and Rome during the sack. The "holy temple" that is defiled in the ancient city in Psalm 79 is Guicciardini's holy church of St. Peter, which was vandalized by invading troops. The most important buildings of the center of Christianity,

the holy churches of Peter and Paul, the private chapel of His Holiness, the Sancta Sanctorum, and the other holy places, once full of plenary indulgences and venerable relics, now became the brothels of German and Spanish whores...[who] committed shameful acts on the altars and in the most sanctified places.¹²¹

While St. Peter's and other churches were indeed affected by the sack, Guicciardini's emphasis on the barbaric acts of rape in such sanctified places is indicative of his respect for the Catholic faith, though he took issue with the vanities of current leadership.¹²²

Guicciardini's vivid description of holy objects lying among "the dung of men and animals," is bound to evoke disgust on the part of a contemporary Catholic reader.¹²³

Additionally, Guicciardini describes the dead, unburied bodies around the city following the sack as similar to the "loyal servants" who became "carrion for wild beasts" in Psalm 78.¹²⁴ This can

¹²¹ Ibid., 114. "Vedevansi allora li sontuosi Palazzi essere al presente stalle de' Cavalli, postribolo di Concubine Tedesche, e Ispane...e far spesso molti atti disonesti, e nefandi in dispregio della Cattolica Religione." *Il Sacco di Roma*, 223

¹²² Numerous other accounts of the period describe the rape of women in the streets, and nuns in their convents. According to Thomas Dandeleet, all contemporary accounts agree that the pillaging, looting, and rape were "epic in scale." Thus, Guicciardini's observations on the acts of the invading forces are correct. *Spanish Rome 1500-1700*, 37

¹²³ Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 115

¹²⁴ Due to the lack of an effective government in the city following the sack, remains of the extreme looting and decaying bodies did indeed lie in the streets following the sack. (Hook, 180)

also be compared to the Book of Revelation, where following destruction, the “bodies will lie in the street of the great city.” [Rev. 11:8] These similarities are profound. While makes no direct millennial reference, his style reflects that of the apocalyptic biblical texts, which would be familiar to literate Florentine at the time.

Guicciardini also drew attention to corruption with the papacy in *Il Sacco di Roma*.¹²⁵ He incorporates references to divine judgment of these vanities, but also shows Machiavellian influence in terms of critique of the contemporary “political” structure. Despite lamentations over the ruin of sacred Roman places, Guicciardini declares that the “Divine Majesty” had intended that Rome “should be prey to the imperial army,” which he also refers to as a “diabolical force.” This statement implies his hope for a new and improved city after the divinely inspired destruction, and follows traditional biblical typologies reflecting the Book of Revelation by insinuating God’s intent. Furthermore, Guicciardini claims in his dedication that God “favors the worthy and humane undertakings of the emperor; and...that He has designated him monarch of the universe.”¹²⁶ Despite the Petrine Succession the papacy had become corrupt and thus God had chosen a new leader in Charles V. Implicitly, Guicciardini claims that the papacy (though not mentioning it directly) amasses wealth “under the banner of Christian piety.”¹²⁷ This critique fuses his condemnation of the vanities of the Roman Curia with his belief that the destruction was divinely inspired, and also fits into traditional biblical (and apocalyptic) literature on Babylonian corruption before the fall. Later, he describes the immense wealth of the Romans when he claims that

¹²⁵ Lutherans criticized the papacy for (among other things) the sale of indulgences for the building of new St. Peter’s, and also for the carnal desires of popes like Alexander VI. Similarly, non-Lutherans such as Erasmus criticized the papacy for unreligious acts as well, though not calling for a complete reform of the Church.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 4. “perché volendo la Divina Maesta, che la famosa Roma fosse preda delli Cesarei, visognava, che di tante eccelenti virtù, non con umana, ma con diabolica forza...ed oltre a questo, può l’Eccellenza vostra, leggendo, comprendere quanto Iddio favorisca le debite imprese dello Imperatore, e a poco a poco scuopra a ciascuno averlo disegnato Monarca dell’Universe.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, xvii

¹²⁷ Ibid., 81. “sotto la pietà della Cristiana Religione.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 153

The immense riches of the Roman nobility, preserved in their families for many centuries, were destroyed in an hour. The incredible profits that had been accumulated and multiplied unjustly and dishonestly through years of usury, theft, simony, and other immoral means by courtiers and merchants fell in an instant into the hands of these barbarians.¹²⁸

This critique highlights his belief in the excessive vanities of the Roman curia, and coincides with his praise for Charles V, and indicates his belief that he was sent by God to destroy Babylonian-like Rome in order to make way for a new Italy.

Guicciardini furthers this comparison when he recalls the luxuries of Babylon described in the Book of Revelation in his description of the pre-sack luxuries of Rome and the Curia. He uses Charles de Bourbon, leader of the imperial troops, as a vehicle for inserting Babylonian comparisons and apocalyptic sentiment into his narrative. This is exemplified when he describes Bourbon as claiming that there were “no virtuous men in Rome,” and that they were all “immersed in lustful and effeminate pastimes, and totally committed to amassing silver and gold” fraudulently.¹²⁹ Similarly, the Whore of Babylon who was “glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls” in the Book of Revelation was accused of “committing adultery” with the kings of the earth. [Rev.17:1-4]. Guicciardini refers to the physical pleasure and material wealth of the Roman Curia, implicitly invoking the biblical Whore of Babylon. Renaissance Rome had many immigrant Andalusian women who, after escaping the Spanish Inquisition, made a living as prostitutes.¹³⁰ In pre-sack Rome prostitutes walked freely in the streets and were not confined

¹²⁸ Ibid., 113. “O quante immense ricchezze delli nobili Baroni di Roma, più secoli nelle loro famiglie riserbate, in un’ora rovinarono! O quanti incredibili guadagni, in giusti, e in onesti, in molti anni per usure, rapine, simonie, e con altri crudeli, e nefandi modi, moltiplicati da’ Cortigiani e Mercanti, in un istante furono di quelle inumane nazione!” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 219-20

¹²⁹ Ibid., 81. “in Roma ora sono rinchinsi non uomini giusti, nè virtuosi...ma tutti immersi in efemmatissimo e libidinoso ozio e totalmente dediti a ragunare con fraude, rapine, e crudeltà...l’argento, e l’oro di ciascuno.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 153. There is no proof that Bourbon uttered these specific words, and thus Guicciardini is inventing a dialogue to fit his purpose. Bourbon fought for the imperial army due to his arguments with the King of France, not for the religious “vendetta” Judith Hook claims motivated the Lutheran soldiers. Hook, 58, 180

¹³⁰ MacKay, p. 232

to brothels.¹³¹ This allusion to the Whore and the riches of Babylon in *Il Sacco di Roma* is significant, for Guicciardini effectively recalls the biblical typologies when describing pre-sack Rome while also justifying the destruction with the comparison of Rome to the Babylonian Whore.

Furthermore, Bourbon claims that the “just God” has inflicted a “scourge” on the Romans for their evil acts and “irreligious lives.” In Revelation 18, Babylon is referred to as a city of power rather than the personified Whore, and its citizens lament the “great wealth” that “has been brought to ruin” with the destruction of the city [Revelation 18: 9-17]. In *Il Sacco di Roma*, Bourbon’s speech recalls the wealth of the Curia and their lack of religiosity, traits similar to those of Babylon before its destruction in Revelation. Whether or not Bourbon truly uttered these words is not important for Guicciardini’s purpose. Guicciardini’s Bourbon is effectively implying the similarities of ancient Babylon with pre-sack Rome, thus continuing the story’s biblical typology. Guicciardini’s Bourbon goes on to say that

[The Romans] expect, and with good reason, from the great and most just God (since they have been abandoned by their own army) the punishment and scourge that their evil customs and irreligious lives have deserved for so long. With the greatest justice this punishment has been postponed until this blessed day and left to the Spanish and German nations by Him who gives all things being and maintains them in motion.¹³²

Here, Bourbon realizes his purpose as the divinely-appointed purger of Rome, the city of excessive licentiousness. The fact that Guicciardini included this long speech indicates his own belief that Bourbon was in fact intended by God to destroy the Babylon of Rome. In his *Compendium of Revelations*, Savonarola claims that the “Almighty God saw the sins of Italy multiply, especially in her ecclesiastical and secular princes” and soon sent a “great scourge” to

¹³¹ Partner, p. 99

¹³² Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 80. “quanto per aspettare, e meritamente, del magno, e giustissimo Iddio (venendosi dal proprio [*sic*] esercito abbandonati) quella punizione e quel falgello, che i loro pessimi costumi, ed irreligiosa vita, hanno tanto tempo fa meritato, riserbato nondimeno infino a questo felicissimo giorno alla Tedesca Nazione con fomma giustiziada colui, che a tutte le cose dona l’essere, e mantiene il moto.” *Il Sacco di Roma*, 152

cleanse the church.¹³³ Guicciardini's Bourbon recalls the apocalyptic predictions of Savonarola that a scourge from God will cleanse the city. Thus, due to the lack of true piety, it seems justified that the city would be destroyed in order to make way for a new, more holy city, similar to the millenarian predictions in *The Compendium of Revelations*.

Guicciardini also uses the figure of Pope Clement VII to reinforce this typology at the very end of his account. The Pope was imprisoned in the Castel Sant'Angelo for several months following the sack, and although it is likely that he was dismayed by the events, there is no record of his response. Guicciardini, however, envisions a scene for his reader wherein the Pope, though he "enjoyed great honors and sweet pleasures in the past," now paid for them with "humiliation and pitiful distress." This vision is obviously fictional, yet its purpose in the narrative is profound. The Pope questions the reason for the sack and Guicciardini is able then to provide an answer. Guicciardini describes this imagery by claiming that we could "easily imagine" that following the sack Clement VII would look toward the heavens and ask God: "Wherefore, then, hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? Oh, that I had died, and no eye had seen me!" [Job 10:18]¹³⁴ The use of this biblical passage is significant, for the story of Job questions the suffering of innocent people. God "wounds" but "his hands give healing" [Job 5:17-18]. Similarly, God destroyed the old, corrupt Rome, but also left room for a new Rome. Savonarola also used the book of Job when describing the coming scourge of Italy. He claimed that God would "blind" the Italians while depriving them "of strength and good sense, as is written in Job."¹³⁵ After the destruction, the city of Florence would be "reborn for the better"

¹³³ Savonarola, 195

¹³⁴ Guicciardini, *The Sack of Rome*, 116

¹³⁵ Savonarola, 206

and “would become more glorious” than ever before.¹³⁶ Guicciardini also uses this biblical book to make clear that like Job, Christianity, Rome, and Florence would be restored for the better.

This adaptation of historic literary and religious references helps to shed light on what Guicciardini perceived to be the significance of the event. The destruction of the old Rome in order to make way for a new Rome, the allegorical new Jerusalem, is once again reiterated in a historical narrative. Yet, Guicciardini’s account differs from that of Augustine, or even his contemporaries. He gives agency to individual men from Cosimo I through Pope Clement VII in his insistence that good leadership and effective governments can change or improve the outcome of events. Rather than treating individuals as passive spectators in the course of history, he suggests that the actions of men can significantly determine the path of history. Yet, in addition to this political commentary, Guicciardini laces an eschatological and apocalyptic discourse throughout the entirety of his narrative. Specifically in *Libro Secondo*, the presence of a divine judgment permeates the political discourse and thus shows Guicciardini’s belief that the dawn of a new era was approaching. Though Guicciardini could not completely foretell the changes that would come with the Counter-Reformation, he understood that a change was necessary and inevitable, and with certain improvements on the political and religious situation of the Italian peninsula during his time, that change could occur.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 207

CHAPTER 4 EPILOGUE: AN ART HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The legacy of Rome and its mythical position as the early modern Babylon captured the imagination of contemporaries outside of the Catholic faith for decades after the sack. The Protestant painter and printmaker Pieter Bruegel the Elder of the Netherlands illustrates the “Rome as Babylon” theme through his 1563 panel of the Tower of Babel (see Figure 4-1) in addition to his Panorama of the Sack of Rome.¹³⁷ The visual narrative figures Rome and its environs as Babylon, as the spiraling Tower in the image is strikingly similar to the Roman Coliseum. Bruegel lived in Rome for several years until 1555 and would likely have seen the ancient ruins. While in Rome, he also became the acquaintance of Giulio Clovio, a miniaturist employed by Cardinal Campeggio. Clovio was held prisoner during the Sack and it is reasonable to assume that Bruegel would have heard stories of the devastation through his new acquaintance. More important, however, was Bruegel’s relationship to the printmaker and publisher Hieronymus Bock, whose concentration on Roman ruins in several of his prints influenced Bruegel’s later paintings. Classical architecture, both in a ruined and completed state, was a prominent influence on Romanist painting in the Netherlands at this time.¹³⁸

Although well known for his affinity for landscapes, Bruegel’s biblical allegories cast light on the northern response to the issues affecting the city of Rome. Bruegel dedicated three paintings to the story of the Tower of Babel- the aforementioned Vienna image, the Tower of

¹³⁷ M. Destombes attributes the Panorama of the Sack of Rome to Pieter Bruegel the Elder rather than Pieter Bruegel the Younger due to its use of perspective and elliptical shapes based on the surveys of Leon Battista Alberti. Destombes “A Panorama of the Sack of Rome by Pieter Bruegel the Elder” *Imago Mundi*, Vol. 14, 1959. 64-73

¹³⁸ Jane ten Brink Goldsmith, “Pieter Bruegel the Elder and the Matter of Italy.” *Sixteenth Century Journal*. XXIII, No. 2, 192. 206-214



Figure 4-1. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Tower of Babel* (1563) Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum



Figure 4-2. Detail from Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Panorama of the Sack of Rome*

Babel painted between 1564 and 1568 in Rotterdam, and a miniature on ivory (now lost) inventoried in the collection of Giulio Clovio. In his study of these images, S. A. Mansbach claims that this preoccupation with the Tower of Babel attests to the importance of biblical imagery in his works.¹³⁹ Bruegel was not the first to represent Rome in such a way; the story of the Tower of Babel as an allegory for Rome was also used in the sixteenth century by Martin Luther. In the Bible, the Tower of Babel was built “to reach the heavens.” [Genesis 11: 4] Allegorically, this represented Catholic Rome to Martin Luther and other Protestants, who viewed the new St. Peter’s Basilica as a representation of unnecessary Catholic wealth. Thus, the destruction of the “Tower” of the Church would represent the end of unnecessary luxuries afforded the papacy in previous centuries. God destroyed the Tower of Babel as a result of hubris and then “confused the language of the whole world” [Genesis 11: 9] Similarly, Latin, the unifying language of Roman Catholicism, would no longer be the sole language of Luther’s Bible following the success of his Reformation.¹⁴⁰

The use of this story by Pieter Bruegel following his visit to the devastated city attests to its importance as a reflection on the divinely-inspired events.¹⁴¹ The Coliseum is often used in visual narratives to represent ancient political power in Rome, despite the fact that its upkeep was largely ignored in this period.¹⁴² Bruegel combined the political and biblical traditions in his illustration, as the Tower of Babel is clearly meant to represent the crumbling Coliseum in his Vienna panel. Zygmunt Ważbiński argues that the depiction of a round tower within an urban context is significant, since it can be used to represent the urban city of early modern Rome,

¹³⁹ S. A. Mansbach, “Pieter Bruegel’s Tower of Babel.” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*. 45 Bd, H. 1, 1982. 43

¹⁴⁰ Pippin, 56

¹⁴¹ Visual representations of the Tower of Babel can be traced to the twelfth century, but scholars still debate the abundance of these depictions in the early modern period. Mansbach believes that from the early sixteenth century depictions of the Tower of Babel “increase dramatically in number, variety, and inventiveness,” while Goldsmith claims that illustrations of this subject were “considerably rare” 43, 209

¹⁴² Pippin, 55

though not directly reflecting the words of the biblical passage.¹⁴³ The rounded arches of the top of the Tower of Babel image reflect those on the Coliseum in Bruegel's *Panorama of Rome* (see Image 2). Both Waźbiński and Mansbach claim that this image represents the concept of a "Babylonian occidentalist," first used analogically by St. Augustine as a means of censuring Rome.¹⁴⁴ Clearly, Bruegel's vision of Rome as the New, Western Babylon continued even after the sack, probably due to the Spanish Catholic imperialism that oppressed the Netherlands at this time.¹⁴⁵ Thus, this depiction of Rome as the Western Babylon in the early modern period was reflected in visual narratives as well as the literary.

Sixteenth-century intellectuals like Bruegel sought to explain their teleological position in history in terms of biblical and apocalyptic discourse, both literary and visual. For early modern interpreters of the apocalypse and other biblical books, it was clear that the Bible laid out a plan for the future that would become progressively more recognizable with time.¹⁴⁶ With its vast importance as the physical and spiritual center of Christianity, the city of Rome was a frequent subject for this apocalyptic expression from the time of St. Augustine and the first sack by Alaric in the fourth century until modernity. The 1527 sack of Rome initiated drastic social, political, and cultural changes as the Spaniards and their leaders, both Charles V and later with Philip II, occupied and informally imperialized the city. Rome was once again a subject for eschatological

¹⁴³ Waźbiński also argues that this representation attests to Bruegel's growing concerns with contemporary urban projects, while also "affirming his fascination with ideal and utopian programs." Mansbach, 45

¹⁴⁴ Mansbach, 45

¹⁴⁵ Similar to the Bruegel's Netherlands, Rome also experienced an era of informal Spanish imperialism after the year 1527. The Sack ushered in an era of specifically Spanish political dominance and cultural influence. More predominant in the Netherlands, however, formal rather than informal Spanish imperialism dominated the political scene. Bruegel's attention to religious narratives may help to shed light on the sentiments of Reformist intellectuals under the Spanish hegemony of the period. The Netherlands were under strict Spanish control at this time, and many citizens were outraged by King Philip II's increase of Inquisitorial power in this area in 1556. The regal figure depicted in the lower left area of the Tower of Babel panel could represent either Charles V, whose troops brutally sacked the "Babylon" of Rome, or his son Philip II, who kept a firm grip on his provinces in the Netherlands. Though the figure does not mirror the portraits of either king, the political implications of implying a Hapsburg monarch would be effective at the time, as several of Bruegel's associates were persecuted under the increasing Spanish power. Mansbach, 43, 46

¹⁴⁶ Malcolm Bull. *Seeing Things Hidden: Apocalypse, Vision, and Totality*. (London: Verso, 1999) 120

discourse and was described in apocalyptic terms relating to those found in the Book of Revelation and other biblical passages. The conception of Catholic orthodoxy itself in the sixteenth century constantly demanded modification and nuancing due to the complicated political and religious events of the time. Contemporary Catholics sought explanations for the destruction of their holy city amidst the complexities of their time, and turned to the apocalyptic discourse for their narratives. Rome had its own place amid the sixteenth century “literature of disillusion” about their times.¹⁴⁷ Luigi Guicciardini and others found answers for their contemporary crisis and disillusionment in the Bible. Describing the sack in terms of Babylonian and apocalyptic themes allowed these individuals to express hope for political issues destroying their peninsula, religious reform, and the future success of the Eternal City in their time- all the while placing themselves into a greater historical and biblical context.

¹⁴⁷ Partner, 202

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