

THE SWORD OF CESAR BORGIA: A REDATING WITH AN EXAMINATION OF HIS
PERSONAL ICONOGRAPHY

By

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To those with whom I share my life and my love of the past

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The blade of the sword of Cesar Borgia, today in the possessions of the Fondazione Camillo Caetani, is elaborately etched with scenes based on the life of Julius Caesar. Six classically inspired tableaus comprise the core of the decorative program: Worship of a Bull, Crossing of the Rubicon, Worship of Love, Triumph of Julius Caesar, Worship of Faith and Pax Romana. These images are the only extant examples of the personal iconography Cesar Borgia employed to represent himself as the modern Caesar. The etched decoration is most commonly dated contemporaneously to the original fabrication of the sword which due to an inscription on the hilt is given a time frame between 1493 and 1498. The inscription refers to Cesar as a Cardinal and these are the years between which he held that title in service to the Roman Church. However, that assumption is not inevitably true, and the probability exists that these images were added at a later date.

Perhaps the most grandiose expression of Cesar's individual symbolism is found in a parade of the Triumphs of Julius Caesar, held in Cesar Borgia's honor in February 1500. This study will consider the sword and the parade together, presenting them as two key elements, one material and one ephemeral, in the development of Cesar's personal iconography. Most notable, on both the sword and in the parade, is his unusual depiction of the scene of the Crossing of the

Rubicon. This particular episode evokes Cesar's military achievements and his recent appointment as Captain General of the Papal Army.

The close alignment found between this parade and the scenes on the sword suggests that they share a common date of execution, around the year 1500. It is known through the Diary of Johannas Burchard, Master of Ceremonies to the Papacy, that Cesar was given the Blessed Sword, an annual gift presented by the pope to a secular ruler, in that year. This thesis asserts that the etchings on the Caetani sword were added to an existing blade as preparation for its presentation as a blessed sword.

The importance of the adjustment in date becomes clear when an enhanced understanding of the role played by decorative arts as means of self-representation in the political and social arenas of Renaissance Europe is attained. For an individual whose life was so clearly divided with two very different roles the intention that fueled Cesar's iconography would have been dramatically divergent from one phase to the other. Therefore a clear probability of date is paramount to our understanding of the personal iconography of Cesar Borgia.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Today in Rome, in the chattels of the Fondonzione Camillo Caetani, can be found a sword that belong to one of Italy's most infamous princes. As the fifteenth century gave way to the sixteenth, Cesar Borgia, owner to this magnificent sword, wrapped his fingers around the peninsula of Italy, leaving his mark on the soil and men residing within it.

He was the son of Pope Alexander VI, one of the five more famous children born to him by Vannozza de' Cattanei. As was dictated by his standing as the second male, Cesar dedicated much of his life to the Church. In 1493, at the age of twenty-two he attained the rank of Cardinal, no doubt due to the fact that his father was the reigning pontiff. But through the tragic death of his older brother, the secular aspirations of the Borigas were left without a conduit; so just five years later, in 1498, Cesar would put off the purple to marry and cement the standing of his family in European power politics.

Through Cesar's marriage into the French court, a political alliance was drawn between the Kingdom of France and the Papacy. His French wife, the duchy of Valentinois, and the title of lieutenant general in the French Army came at the cost of a papal dispensation for the dissolution of Louis XII's marriage to Jeanne de France and the pontiff's permission for the King to marry Anne of Brittnay, his brother's widow.

Mere months after Cesar's return to Italy with the French invasion of Milan in 1499, he began his militaristic subjugation of the northern city-states of the Romagna. Upon his return to Rome in 1500, Alexander made him Captain General of the Papal Army. With secular and religious control, the Borgias came very close to uniting the separate city-states of Italy under one rule.

After the untimely death of his father, Cesar controlled the elections of two pontiffs, losing his power to the betrayal of Julius II. He died on March 11, 1507, four days shy of the Ides of March.

Charging alone onto the field of battle, Cesar Borgia would die a death no less epic than his namesake. He would derive much more than just his name from the life of Julius Caesar, building from the deeds of the Roman Emperor his personal iconography. The engravings on the blade of this 'Queen of Swords,' provide the foremost material manifestation of his chosen propagandist narrative (Fig 1,2). Six classically inspired scenes comprise the core of the decorative program: the *Worship of a Bull*, the *Crossing of the Rubicon*, the *Worship of Love*, the *Triumph of Julius Caesar*, the *Worship of Faith*, and the *Pax Romana*. The iconography of Julius Caesar is not well developed in the arts of this period; there are a few extant examples, one being the *Triumphs of Caesar* by Andrea Mantegna. The most notable aspect of Cesar Borgia's use of the iconography of Julius Caesar is the unusual inclusion of the *Crossing of the Rubicon*. The scene of the *Triumph of Julius Caesar* serves as an additional connection to the ancient world and to traditional Caesar imagery.

Perhaps the most grand expression of this individualized symbolism is found in a parade held in Cesar's honor in February 1500. Here, on sumptuous display for the people of Rome, the Triumphs of Julius Caesar blend with Cesar Borgia's recent military victories, creating a memorable spectacle. This study will consider the sword and the parade together, presenting them as two key elements, one material and one ephemeral, in the development of Cesar's personal iconography.

The close alignment found between this parade and the scenes on the sword suggests that they share a common date of execution, around the year 1500. It is known through the Diary of

Johannas Burchard, Master of Ceremonies to the Papacy, that Cesar was given the Blessed Sword, an annual gift presented by the pope to a secular ruler, in that year. It is a clear presumption to consider that the Caetani sword could be the Blessed Sword of 1500.

However, the hilt of the sword is engraved with Cesar's name, and in this inscription he is referenced by his title of Cardinal. This citation likely dates the fabrication of the hilt and most likely of the blade to the years between 1493 and 1498, the time of his service to the Roman Church under that title. Previous scholarship has presumed that the sword and the etchings are dated to the same time. However, there is no reason to believe that an existing sword, belonging to Cesar during his cardinalate, could not have been later prepared with engravings for presentation as the Blessed Sword of 1500. The additional possibility does exist that the appearance of the title of Cardinal found on the sword, whose etched ornamentation clearly has ties to 1500, could be the persistence of an old honorific, although this circumstance is much less likely.

The elaborately worked leather scabbard intended for this sword will also be examined (Fig 3). A discussion based on the analysis of Günter Gall will provide evidence to support the assertion that the etchings on the blade date to the year 1500.

Chapter four will outline these arguments and issues of dating in further detail.

To understand the importance of such a small shift in dating, from 1498 to 1500, one must turn again to the personal iconography of Cesar Borgia. The modification makes sense in the context of his life: he would use an iconography derived from Julius Caesar, most particularly the Triumph and the Crossing of the Rubicon, during his military career, rather than during his time as a cardinal. The development of these self-fabricating images is intensely individualized, bound to how the beneficiary sees his or herself and how they wish to be seen. As

did a number of Renaissance leaders, Cesar Borgia aligned himself with an ancient figure, transferring onto himself through visual means the ideals commonly conceived to be held by that historical individual. For the obvious reason of his name, Cesar found his personal inspiration in Julius Caesar. But it is with the Roman general's military prowess that Cesar chooses to associate. No other elements of his life are valued to the same degree.

It would be truly unnecessary for a Cardinal to define himself as possessing genius in warfare while confined to a clerical way of life that offered him little but an annual income and most certainly no outlet for strength of lordship. It can be justly stated that the personal iconography Cesar formed from his relationship to Julius Caesar would only have been developed after he renounced his cardinalate in 1498 to seek a secular and military career. The only extant artifact remaining to display these deeply personal images is this sword.

During the time which Cesar lived, arms and armor were a device for self-definition and propaganda. Although part of what modern art historical studies refer to as decorative arts, those objects now bound by this categorization were an essential part to a social and political system which relied heavily on visual media.

Prominent figures from the Medieval and Renaissance periods used these images to align themselves with great leaders from history. Through this usurped magnificence, these figures of the 1400s and 1500s built a new image far greater in character than possible on their own. If the public perceived an individual ruler to be the symbolic heir of an ancient, powerful icon, that ruler becomes charged with the specific virtues of the chosen historical figure.¹ Due to the immediate impact and permanence provided by visual arts, they became highly effective tools in the portrayal of these alliances. Cosimo de' Medici desired to liken himself to the virtues of

¹ Charles M. Rosenberg, *Art and Politics in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Italy: 1250-1500* (Notre Dame, I.N.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), p.6.

Joseph; thusly he had commissioned a twenty-piece tapestry cycle of *The Story of Joseph*.² The Gonzagas, Dukes of Mantua, would place their symbolic ancestry in the Arthurian Legends, more specifically Lancelot and his code of etiquette or *couroisie*, required behavior in the paramount courts of the Renaissance.³ An episode from the quest for the Holy Grail generates the subject matter for the frescos in the Sala of the Ducal Palace in Mantua, painted by Pisanello in the 1440s at the request of Marchese Lodovico Gonazaga.⁴

Philip the Good's use of the history of Alexander the Great in his celebrated tapestry cycle as a declaration of his standing as the modern day Alexander is parallel to Cesar Borgia's use of Julius Caesar throughout the propaganda of his military campaigns.

The etchings on the Caetani sword are the perfect example of an individual deriving personal power from the adopted image of a historical icon. The parade held in 1500 is an absolute illustration of the outward propaganda intended to persuade the viewer to attribute Cesar Borgia with the characteristics of the man whom the Renaissance considered the greatest general ever to live.⁵

The importance of these visual arts, both tangible and performed, is evident. As a representation of an art form previously held in such esteem for its decisive function in the politics and society, the value of the sword once belonging to the Borgia prince should be returned to the status it originally occupied. In order for this to occur it is necessary to understand better the circumstances under which the sword and the designs that ornament its

² Marina Berlozerskaya, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), p.108.

³ Joanna Woods-Marsden, *The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello's Arthurian Frescoes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), p.147.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁵ Andrew Martindale, *The Triumphs of Caesar by Andrea Mantegna in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Hampton Court* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1979), p.59.

blade were created. Through that investigation, a picture will be revealed of the true significance held by the sword for both Renaissance art history and the personal iconography of the man who, ever so briefly, held the awe of Italy.

CHAPTER 2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SWORD AND SCABBARD

The form taken by Cesar's sword, that of a late 15th or early 16th century fighting sword, is marked by a dramatically curved quillion (cross guard), a broad, double-edged blade, and is fluted by two shallow channels that extend for close to the entirety of the blade. The blade itself measures 1.025m in length and .083m at the base. The hilt is comprised of a circular pommel, grip and cross, all of which are gold-gilt and elaborately decorated with filigree work embedded in diversely colored enamel. On both sides, in the center of the guard, a triangular field of blue enamel extends into the center of the face of the blade. On one side bears the inscription, written in silver, Ces. Borg. Car. Valen (Cesar Borgia Cardinalis Valentianus); the other holds a Borgia coat-of-arms.

Like the hilt, the first third of the blade is also gilt in gold and elaborated, but unlike the purely ornamental work on the hilt, the decorative program executed here is both narrative and complex. This section of the blade is, on both sides, divided through designed etching, into four separate scenes. Of these eight framed compartments one holds the name CESAR constructed as a multi-leveled monogram. Another displays two winged putti supporting the caduceus. The remaining six are etched with scenes of the Classical world.

With these representations begin the existing examples of Cesar's personal iconography and his alliance to Julius Caesar. These images, specifically the use of the *Crossing of the Rubicon*, will provide essential elements towards the dating of the sword. The triumphal chariot of Caesar, the presence of a sacrificial bull and the bearing of the spoils of war are customary components to the Triumphs of Julius Caesar. Here the bull is given particular attention due undoubtedly to the status of this animal as a chief emblem of the Borgia family. The *Crossing of the Rubicon* is a unique scene, uncommon to contemporary portraits of the military triumphs of

the great emperor. The inclusion of it here is revealing to the narrative iconography desired by the sword's owner.

The story told on the face of blade begins with a representation of the *Sacrifice or Worship of a Bull* (Fig 4,5). The animal stands on an architectural base, functioning in this case as an altar. The structure is inscribed 'D.O.M. Hostia' (Deo optimo maximo hostia) – 'a sacrifice to the most high god.' In the foreground of the setting lies a female nude. She is described by Charles Yriarte, a French scholar writing in the late 1800's whose body of work is littered with articles and books on the Borgia family, as a victim who is, like Medusa, "coiffée de serpents".¹ On the ground next to her sit an incensory and a carafe. To the right of the altar are a number of nude canephors (basket carriers); and to the left, a group of nude women, one who enters the sacred fire at the base of the altar. A figure dressed in a chlamyde can also be seen. The inscription CVM NVMINE CESARIS OMEN transcribes the intentions of the scene. 'A favorable omen with Caesar's divine will.'

Moving up the blade, the next composition is Cesar's monogram (Fig 6,7). It is important to note that although modern scholars spell his name with an 'e' on the end, for the majority of his life, with very few exceptions, Cesar always used the Spanish spelling which was without the terminal 'e', and this inscribed monogram is no exception. The intertwined letters are encased in a circle, surrounded by decorative foliage and flanked by two winged bulls.

Above this ornamental section, Julius Caesar crosses the Rubicon (Fig 8,9). This depiction of Julius Caesar's famous journey is taken from the description of the same event given in Suetonius' *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*.² The inscription that runs across the bottom of the

¹ Charles Yriarte, *Autour des Borgia* (Paris: J. Rothschild, 1891), p.153.

² Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.17.

scene is also taken from Suetonius; although, for aesthetic reasons the engraver has transposed the last two words; JACTA EST ALEA, 'the die is cast', the words Caesar was said to have spoken at this very moment. The composition is divided into two groups; one occupies each side of the river. Nude cavalymen carrying javelins, some mounted with flags reading 'C', ride in close formation. A figure which resembles a river nymph, described as a laurel wreathed child playing the flute, sits at the bottom left of the composition.³ A second figure, nude but draped with cloth, sits on the right bank of the river. Two bull heads frame the base of the arrangement.

The final etching on the face of the blade, capping the column of narrative design, is a depiction of *The Worship of Love* (Fig 8,10). A figure representing cupid or a personification of love is shown blindfolded, standing on a pedestal that bears the inscription T.Q.I.S.A.G.⁴ The true meaning of these letters has possibly been lost to us, but a sound proposal was made in the margins of Abbate Ferdinando Galiani's notebook.⁵ The suggestion held that the letters represented the dedication of the work, 'Tibi. Quem. Ille. Sextus. Alexander. Genuit' – 'To you son of Alexander VI'. An additional architectural structure can be seen over the nude figures on the left side of the composition. Here the letters AMOR can be read. The meaning of this inscription is an obvious reference to the subject of the scene.

As we turn the blade to the reverse our decoration opens with the *Triumph of Julius Caesar* and the word BENEMERENT – 'to the well-deserving' (Fig 11,12). Among a parade of figures and horses carrying the standards and arms of Rome, Caesar sits on a horse-drawn chariot, crowned by laurels and holding an olive branch. The orb of the world rests in his lap. One reads

³ Yriarte, *Autour des Borgia*, p.154.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Yriarte, *Autour des Borgia*, p.173. Although the inscriptions are found in Galiani's notebook they were probably not written by him.

on the seat of his chariot, D.CES. This has most commonly been read as Divus Caesar (Divine Caesar). Sarah Bradford acknowledges the possibility that the inscription refers to Cesare Borgia through his Spanish title of Don Cesar.⁶ The letters may also represent Cesare's name under the title of Duc which he received from the French King later in his life.

In the same scene, a standard is held which reads SPQRCS, 'Senatus Populusque Romanus Caesar,' 'The Senate and People of Rome and Caesar.' A round tower occupies the majority of the background. Yriarte identifies this structure as the Campanile of the Cathedral of Pisa, referencing Cesare's time at the University in Pisa as the reason for its appearance on his sword. He goes so far as to describe the lean of the etched tower as matching the degree of inclination imposed upon the structure of the bell tower.⁷ It is more likely that this is a non-specific, classically inspired structure and the square spire behind it is representative of the ancient Egyptian obelisks seen throughout Rome. This scene of victory is closed at the top by an illusionistic arch bearing the Borgia coat of arms on either side.

The following frame is another ornamental band (Fig 13,14). Decorative foliage and bulls surround an oval, very similar to the section of the opposite face bearing Cesar's monogram. Encased within this oval is the image of two winged figures holding a caduceus.

FIDES. FREVALENT. ARMIS, 'Faith is more prevalent than arms', is the inscription that opens the scene of Faith (Fig 15,16). Faith is depicted as a shrouded woman, seated resembling a statue in an architectural niche. She is surrounded by nude figures, both women and men who appear to be paying homage. This scene is reminiscent of similar compositions by Pinturicchio

⁶ Sarah Bradford, Cesare Borgia (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), p.80.

⁷ Yriarte, Autour des Borgia, p.176.

in his frescos for the Borgia Apartments, particularly in the Sala delle Arti Liberali (Fig 17a.b). The ever-present Borgia Bull is also shown twice, one at each side of the base of the image.

The final scene etched on the blade of Cesar Borgia is of the *Pax Romana* (Fig 15,18). An eagle spreads his wings as he sits atop a globe that is supported by a column. A dog sits at the base of the structure while musicians stand to each side, playing their instruments. It is directly above this image that the blade is punched with the mark of the blade smith.

A final piece of information is duplicated on each side of the blade. Running across the base, directly above the hilt, one can read the inscription OPVS HERC (Fig 5,12). This has long been considered the signature of the artist and will be discussed in chapter two with the question of authorship.

For the continued iconographic program one must look to the elaborate leather scabbard created as the counterpart to this magnificent sword; for as Claude Blair expressed in his 1966 article “Cesare Borgia’s sword-scabbard,” it is impossible to study one without looking at and understanding the other.⁸ In addition to the relative relationship found between the engravings on the sword and the images worked into the leather on the scabbard, the true importance of the scabbard to this argument, as stated previously, is found in the date given by Günter Gall in his work *Leder im Europäischen Kunsthandwerk*. Gall dates the scabbard, from stylistic comparison, to the beginning of the 16th century. He further questions that the scabbard is contemporary with the fabrication of the sword, suggesting that a simple sheath was made at the time of the sword’s manufacture. The scabbard under examination here is a more elaborate

⁸ Claude Blair, “Cesare Borgia’s sword-scabbard,” *Victoria and Albert Museum Bulletin Reprints* 6, reprinted from the *Bulletin*, vol.2, no.4 (Oct. 1966): 3.

pomp-sheath that was commissioned some time later.⁹ If the sheath, matching in design and ideology was made some time after the fabrication of the sword, one logical conclusion to be drawn is that the etchings on the blade were added at a later date, coinciding not with the blade and hilt of the sword but instead with the production of the scabbard.

The scabbard was acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1869, purchased in Italy by the Museum's director, Henry Cole, who described it as "the finest piece of Art in leather known"¹⁰ (Fig 3,19). It is evident through the same form of monogram present on the sword and scabbard and through the complementary dimensions of both, that this scabbard was made for the sword described above.¹¹ However, it is very doubtful that this sheath ever accompanied the blade for which it was intended. Evidence that the two works under question were never joined can be found in the fact that the scabbard in the Victoria and Albert Museum is unfinished. The lower decorations of the face are only lightly traced (Fig 20). The intentions of foliage, two figures seated on a shield or coat-of-arms, an oval cartouche with no suggestion of the proposed interior, and three nude figures standing to support the above oval can still be seen. The final third of the leather remains untouched.

⁹ Günter Gall, Leder Im Europäischen Kunsthandwerk (Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann Braunschweig, 1965), p.163. It should also be noted that Gall so firmly dates the sword years into the sixteenth century that he sights the death of Cesar Borgia in 1507 as a possible reason for the unfinished state of the scabbard.

¹⁰ Blair, "Cesare Borgia's sword-scabbard," p.125.

¹¹ Ibid., p.3-6. The current length of the scabbard is 33 3/16 in., 13/16 of this being waste leather at the mouth, which would have been removed had the scabbard been completed. There is also approximately 1/2 in. of leather missing from the point, so the intended length would have measured 32 3/4 in. To calculate the width for the mouth of the scabbard one must consider that the current measurement of 3 1/2 inches is a result of at least 1/8 inch of shrinking in the leather. This leaves an original measurement of 3 5/8 inches. With a design measuring 32 3/4 long and 3 5/8 at the width of the mouth, the dimensions are exact for the blade currently owned by the Caetani family. The sheath today remains mounted on a walnut former, most likely the one around which the leather was originally formed. Blair's article also gives an extensive description of how the scabbard was created and the processes that were used in the fashioning of its designs.

In his journal, Monseigneur Onorato Caetani describes the sword as he saw it in Rome at the palace of Grimaldi, the ambassador of Spain, having been brought there by Abate Galiani, owner of the sword during much of the 18th century. His words characterize the scabbard that held the sword at that time as a sheath of black shagreen (untanned leather), giving so little detail as to imply that the sheath itself had none.¹² It is obvious that this description does not match the highly decorated work currently in London; therefore it must be assumed that at this time the sword and scabbard under discussion were already separated. The scabbard which accompanied the sword when Monseigneur Caetani saw it in Rome was most likely the simple case described by Gall as being contemporary to the sword's production.

The decorations on the face of the scabbard open with a ribbon delineated by raised strips of leather and incised with the words "MATERIAM SVPERABIT OPVS" (Fig 21). The words of Ovid, found in his *Metamorphosis*, 'The work is superior to the material.'¹³ This band is shortly followed by the top of a triumphal arch that marks the background of the scene of the *Triumph of Love*. The barrel vault frames the sky of the background in which a crescent moon can be seen. Seven nude figures, men and women, prepare to pay homage to the personification of Venus who stands atop a short domed column. Venus is shown as a nude woman holding a myrtle branch and supporting a light drapery in the bend of her elbows.¹⁴ Never to be without a

¹² Yriarte, *Autour des Borgia*, p.148. This quotation is taken from the aforementioned journal entry. 'Le marquis abbé Galiani, neveu du célèbre Mgr. Galiani, étant venu à Rome, je le visitai dans le Palais de l'ambassadeur d'Espagne Grimaldi, où il demeurait. Je lui offris mon oraison funèbre en honneur de l'Impératrice Marie-Thérèse, et dans la conversation, comme nous touchions à mille sujets, nous en vînmes, à parler de l'Épée du duc de Valentinois que, d'après ce que j'avais entendu dire par Mgr Borgia qui l'avait vue à Naples, lui appartenait. A ma grande suprise j'appris qu'il l'avait apportée à Rome. Elle était dans un fourreau de chagrin noir...'

¹³ Ovid, *Metamorphosis* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2005), Book 2, line 5. The verb used by the artist of the scabbard is different from that found in Ovid's work. In *Autour des Borgia*, Yriarte attributes this modification to artist error, sighting this occurrence as not uncommon. Blair, however, translated this inscription as 'The work will be superior to the material' seeming to imply that the tense change was intentional.

¹⁴ Blair, "Cesare Borgia's sword-scabbard," p.14, note 17. The suggestion that this figure was Venus and that the greenery in her hand is a myrtle branch was made by Jennifer Montagu of the Warburg Institute.

subtle reference to the Borgia family, an additional layer of symbolic importance can perhaps be seen in the fact that Venus is also linked to the zodiac sign Taurus whose animal symbol is the Bull – the Borgia emblem.¹⁵

To the right of this elevated figure of Venus, stand four men. They walk in a procession carrying the trophies of war. Banners are also depicted, one with a coat-of-arms that is general or now indistinguishable by age; and another, carried by the leader and inscribed ‘SI’. Blair’s theory states that these initials are representative of the phrase “Sacrum Imperium”, “The Sacred Empire.”¹⁶ Gall’s assertion that the ‘SI’ is a signature of the artist is highly improbable.¹⁷ In the foreground and far right of the group of men stands a nude female with a covered vessel, possibly to hold the sacrificial wine. At her feet kneels a man preparing to sacrifice a ram. To close the scene, on the left of the deity stand two men. On the ground at the base of column another ritualistic vessel is depicted.

Below the ground of the sacrificial scene a decorative motif continues the scabbard’s raised embellishments. An eagle stands, with wings spread, on top of a floral support and flanked by two upward turned cornucopias or horn features erupting with flames. Two spiraled tendrils form what would have been the lesser end of these elements. They also mark the end of the fully formed designs.

Upon turning the scabbard the decorations continue (Fig 22). First are a series of structural components at the top of the sheath. Two leather scrolls, which had the scabbard been completed, would have been trimmed to hug the curved triangular cut of the sword’s guard, becoming the very top of the leather are the initial elements. Just below the two scrolled bands

¹⁵ Blair, “Cesare Borgia’s sword scabbard,” p.9 and note 17.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.9 and note 18.

¹⁷ Gall, Leder Im Europäischen Kunsthandwerk, p.160.

are five tubes of raised leather designed to hold the threaded attachments for a sword belt. Between the top two of these cylindrical structures lies the monogram that ties this scabbard to Cesar Borgia and to his sword. As on the blade, the form which constructs his name is an overlaying monogram encased in an oval. Extending below the two lower and horizontal belt loops are the first examples of the iconographic feature that dominated the reverse of the leather artwork, the downward pointing flames added to the Borgia arms in the 13th century and found on the coat-of-arms of Calixtus III.¹⁸

Just below the final belt loop there is a thin raised rib, mimicking in form the scrolled bands at the top of the scabbard and taking the shape of an elaborate inverted ogee. The ribs of leather which span the breadth of the scabbard merge at the point of this gothic style arch and continue as a raised spine down the length of the sheath. At two points this rib separates to form detailed cartouches. As the decoration moves down the scabbard, the first cartouche frames two winged putti, both holding long torches and supporting a now very damaged escutcheon. It is difficult to distinguish, but it does not appear that the coat of arms illustrated inside the shield was relative to the Borgias. The two figures stand on a ground disrupted by either flame or water.

Below the base of this cartouche the extent of damage found in the relief work is extensive (Fig 23,24). From two winged medusa heads, one on each side of the spine, hang additional examples of armor and trophies of war. To the right side a small rectangular ribbon with tabs on each end bears the inscription 'PAR' which Blair defines as, 'Pax Augusta Romana', 'The Augustan Roman Peace';¹⁹ although, there is nothing to suggest that the Borgia tendency for

¹⁸ Yriarte, *Autour des Borgia*, p.155.

¹⁹ Blair, "Cesare Borgia's sword-scabbard," p. 9.

self-aggrandizement did not enter into play here and that the 'A' is not representative of Alexander VI. This would not be a far stretch from the inscription found across the Triumphal arch depicted in the *Disputa* of the Borgia Apartments, reading PACIS CVLTORI and referencing a new reign or culture of peace to be established by the reigning pontiff (Fig 25). This was a motto common to Alexander VI and can also be found on a commemorative medal that he had made in honor of the completion of the projects he had commissioned on the Castel Sant' Angelo, perhaps more specifically the digging of the moat. The medal reads, ALEXANDER.VI.PONT. IVST.PACIS.Q.CVLTOR²⁰ (Fig 26). It would seem that Alexander had the desire to be judged as a peace-maker, and through the army of Cesar's he would come very close to doing so.

But to turn the focus once more to the elaborate decoration of the scabbard, what follows is the second cartouche (Fig 24). Encased here is a badly damaged figure of Love or Venus, again personified as a nude woman holding a branch and supporting a style of light drapery. This scene terminates the pictorial decoration of the verso side of the scabbard. The image of the double-pronged, downward pointing flame discussed earlier serves as the patterned element of the program, seen repeating over the surface of the leather, top to bottom. The monogram of Cesar is also repeated twice more in the upper third of the sheath.

The most distinguishing mark featured on the verso side of this magnificent work is not, however, an intended component. There are two points where the leather has split, revealing the wooden form around which the skin is wrapped (Fig 24). It is in these spaces that we find our reason for the separation of the sword and scabbard. The elaborate work in leather was never

²⁰ N.R. Parks, "On the Meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi," *Art History*, vol.2, no.3 (September 1979), p.296 and note 29.

finished, most likely due to this fault in structure, and thus the two descriptive pieces were never joined.

So how does this elaborate program coincide with the personal iconography Cesar Borgia, designed for himself and displayed so prominently on the blade of his sword? The answer to that lies in the subject herself, Venus. More than just a reference to the worship of Love on the blade or to Cesar's propensity towards sexual overindulgence; here on the scabbard she is an illustration of the Venus Genetrix, the Universal Mother aspect of the Roman goddess, and the mythical forbearer of the Gens Julia, the house of Julius Caesar. Suetonius describes a dedication before the Temple of Venus Genetrix, taking place during a military campaign as the ancient emperor sought to conquer the world.²¹ Herein lies more evidence that the etchings of Julius Caesar on the blade of the sword and this highly crafted scabbard were fashioned at the same time.

²¹ Suetonius, Lives of the Twelve Caesars, Chapter 61, p.29.

CHAPTER 3 DISCUSSION OF THE ARTISTS

The quest to name the craftsman of the blade and the artist of its decoration has dominated much of the scholarship on the sword from the time of its resurgence into history during the 1700's until recent years. Abate Galiani, the owner of the sword during the mid to late 18th century and Ademollo, an author who compiled Galiani's personal papers and correspondences, were among the first to attempt the answer. Blair dedicated a number of pages to the matter, although his article's subject was the scabbard. But the answer is not simple and lies perhaps in three different men: a blade smith, a designer, and a goldsmith.

The only artist who can be associated with the sword with some level of certainty is Pinturicchio, known through his famous works in the Sistine Chapel, Borgia Apartments, and the Piccolomini Library in Sienna. It is in under the title of designer to the images that his relationship to the sword and, subsequently the scabbard will be established. Pinturicchio's involvement elevates the status and artistic importance of the sword's decoration by associating it with a major painter of the period. There are two other men involved in the production of the sword whose identities remain unknown to us.

To begin with the blade itself, Ademollo, in his anthology of Galiani's materials, writes that the mark punched into the face of the blade, just above the etchings and at the beginning of the damascening, takes the shape of a tower and that this brand indicates the blade came from Castile.¹ Two Blessed Swords commissioned by Alexander VI, given first to an elector from Brandenburg and second in 1498 to Bogislaw, the Duke of Pomerania, bear the same

¹ F. Ademollo, "La Famiglia e L'Eredita dell' Abate Galiani," *Nuova antologia*, vol.23, series 2 (1880): 662.

swordsmith's mark.² To this end it must be considered that these two blades were also sent from Spain, most likely at the request of the pontiff in Rome.

The importation of weapons and artists from Spain was not uncommon during this period, nor was it anything less than ordinary for the Borgias. The three Blessed Swords commissioned by Pope Calixtus III, Alexander VI's uncle, were executed by Catalan goldsmiths.³ Spain enjoyed a prominence in the manufactory of armor, one with origins dating to the time of the ancient Caesars. The mines found in Spanish soil, "contained in perfection all the metals then applied to warlike uses, and its rivers were believed to possess peculiar properties for the tempering of blades."⁴ The exportation of Catalan swords to Italy continued well into the fourteenth century.⁵

It seems likely that the Borgias continued this time-honored tradition into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There was no part of the Borgia household that could be held as anything less than Spanish. In the inner circles of family and intimate confidants, the spoken word was in the Spanish tongue. It was the language of their personal correspondences, the manner of their dress, and the source of their private education.

Those positions considered most critical were only trusted to individuals of Spanish blood. Miguel da Corella, Michelotto, was the Spaniard who became known through gossip as Cesar's personal assassin. Six-thousand of Cesar's 10,000 man infantry upon his departure for the Romagna in 1500 were Spanish. Spain gave birth to all of his captains.⁶ It is indisputable that

² Charles Yriarte, "Le graveur d'Epees de Cesar Borgia," Les Lettres et les Arts, vol. 1 (Jan. 1886): 181.

³ Cyril G.E. Bunt, The Goldsmiths of Italy (London: Martin Hopkinson and Company, Ltd.), p.18.

⁴ Albert F. Calvert, Spanish Arms and Armour (London: J. Lane, 1907), p.1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁶ Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.135.

the Borgias brought the country of their origins to Italy, and in that exodus of Catalan, the blade that would become the foundation of this 'Queen of swords' found its way across the sea.

Ademollo asserts that the damascening was done by the hand of an Italian sword smith and was most probably completed in Rome.⁷ So it is here that one must look to find the second character to play a role in the sword's creation, the individual who designed the etchings.

The designs for the etchings on the blade are most likely the work of the Perugian painter Bernardino di Betto, known as Pinturicchio. Because of his close relationship to both Alexander VI and Cesar and to the etched imagery's similarity to some of his frescos, most scholars agree with this attribution.

To place an acknowledgement of participation more firmly in the hand of Pinturicchio three things must be examined: the extent of Pinturicchio's work with the Borigas; the possibility of his involvement through proximity, employment and payments; and the comparison of the designs in Pinturicchio's work to those found on the blade.

Pinturicchio began his career under the Borgias in 1492 with the complex fresco cycles in what is today known as the Borgia Apartments. Pope Alexander VI took for his private residence and receiving quarters six rooms from the first floor of the Torre Borgia, the first floor of the previous palace of Nicholas V, and one room that had belonged to the residence of Nicholas III.

The decorative paintings found on the ceilings of these rooms were almost certainly completed during the final months of 1494, but the conclusion of the paintings on the ceilings of Alexander's personal apartments did not terminate Pinturicchio's employment by the Borgia family. For Alexander, he executed additional frescos in the Castel Sant'Angelo, a series

⁷ Ademollo, "La Famiglia d L'Eredita dell' Abate Galiani," p.662.

probably completed by the end of 1495. These dates are assembled from extant documents recording two distinct payments made to the artist. On December 1, 1495 Pinturicchio was granted two parcels of land near Chiusi for a term of 29 years, in return for an annual levy of thirty measure of corn. These deeds of real estate were the means by which Pinturicchio was paid for the works executed in the Borgia Apartments and in the Castel Sant'Angelo: "Ex tuo artificio picturarum per te in Arce S. augeli ac in palatio apostolico factarum."⁸

In a second letter of the Papal Chamberlain, dated July 28, 1497 and a subsequent letter of affirmation from the Pope, this one dated October 24, 1497, the tax on those properties previously assigned to Pinturicchio was remitted, 'in consideration of his labours in the Vatican and in the Castel Sant'Angelo: "Ex suo artificio picturarum in palatio nostro Apostolico et etiam in restaurata arce Castril nostril Angelo."⁹

This method of payment was most commonly reserved for court painters that received an annual salary. These artists were paid for completed works through a system of compensation including gifts of land or houses. An example contemporary to Pinturicchio was the parcel of land gifted to Mantegna by a patron for the completion of "a little picture."¹⁰

It has not been suggested that Pinturicchio was a *familiaris* of the Borgia household, but the application of that title would not be an exaggeration of the artist's status to both Alexander VI and to his son Cesar. This remittance of taxes, demonstrated though the 1497 letter gives us additional insight to the standing held by Pinturicchio in the inner household of the Papacy and

⁸ Corrado Ricci, Pinturicchio (London: William Heinemann, 1902), p.134.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Alison Cole, Virtue and Magnificence (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), p.38.

its extended family. The exemption of taxes was a common gift bestowed upon an artist who had earned the title of *familiaris*.¹¹

Pinturicchio would return to his works in the Castel Sant'Angelo in early 1498, for shortly after their completion they were damaged in an explosion caused by a lightning strike on October 29, 1497.¹² Gregorovius recites the episode, stating that “the explosion of the powder magazine in 1497 destroyed the upper chambers, but they were afterwards restored and painted by Pinturicchio.”¹³ A letter dated February 5, 1498, grants further relief from taxation to the painter for his completed works in the Castel Sant'Angelo and the Vatican. The work in the Castel is the restoration of the previously frescoed rooms, and the mention of paintings in the Vatican are most probably a reference to frescos executed in a number of rooms that overlooked the courtyard of Belvedere in Saint Peters.¹⁴

These two buildings do house the major projects completed by the artist under the patronage of the Borgias, but evidence exists that he continued his work for the family through other avenues. At some time during the year of 1500 the relationship between Cesar Borgia and Pinturicchio became a more personal and direct one, bypassing the Pope in his former role as intermediary. Pinturicchio wrote to Cesar, now the Duke of Valentinois, requesting that he gift a well that would complete the same small property given to him by Alexander VI in 1494. The Duke promptly wrote to the Vice-Treasurer of Perugia explaining the esteem in which he held the artist and his talents, and that Pinturicchio's request was to be granted.¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid., p.37.

¹² Ludwig Pastor, History of the Popes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1950), vol.5, p.522-523.

¹³ Ricci, Pinturicchio, p.134.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.135.

¹⁵ Charles Yriarte, Cesare Borgia (London: Francis Aldor Publisher, 1949), p.125.

One cannot help but compare this grant to the previously discussed system of compensation reserved for court artists who were paid for completed works through gifts of funds for their own homes. Should it be then assumed that Pinturicchio is asking Cesar for the payment of a finished piece of art? It is known that Pinturicchio became Cesar's personal painter in 1501, leaving his service in August of 1502 at the request of Cardinal Piccolomini for whom he would paint the famous frescos in Siena.¹⁶ It is not much to assume that their patron/artist relationship began informally one year earlier, tying Pinturicchio to Cesar Borgia during the year of his sword's decoration.

Through a comparison of Pinturicchio's body of work and the ornamentation found on both the sword and scabbard it becomes more clear that Pinturicchio was the designer, as there are little elements from his palate of images found on both. A true analysis is difficult since the majority of his work for the Borgia Family has been lost, but in looking at large commissions completed around the same time associations can still be found.

The obvious illusions to the family emblems that decorate all Borgia commissions are seen in both the Borgia Apartment and on the sword and sheath of Cesar Borgia. The bull and the Lanzol coat-of-arms are two of those elements. The most convincing point of comparison with Pinturicchio's work in the Borgia Apartments is a small element found in the famous *Disputà* in the Sala die Santi (Fig 25,27). On the far right, in the top band of the triumphal arch, there is a scene that can faintly be defined and strongly resembles the representations of the *Triumph* and *Worship of Love* found on both the sword and the front of the scabbard.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Additionally in Alexander's Vatican apartments, the eagle of the *Pax Romana*, found both on the sword and the scabbard can be seen in a small corner of the ceiling of the Sala del Credo (Fig 28).

In the decorative columns in the *Annunciation* of the Baglione Chapel, a number of elements similar to scabbard can be distinguished (Fig 29). The dual cornucopia, located at the right in the same fresco, resemble those seen under the eagle portrayed on the face on the leather work. From the Medusa heads, seen in the column on the right of the painting, hang additional elements, similar in concept to the pair of heads on the verso side of the scabbard (Fig 24). The tabbed cartouche also on the same column is common in Pinturicchio's work, and as it has been stated is present on the back of the sheath. In the same chapel on the right-hand column framing the depiction of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, the decorative foliage and floral motifs are reminiscent of the ornamental work on both the sword and scabbard (Fig 30).

Pinturicchio's *Visitation of Saint Bernardino* in Santa Maria in Aracoeli provides a final example (Fig 31). The decorative columns inside the work, supporting the rounded arch, are weapons and trophies of war much like those on the back of the scabbard. The medusa head is also depicted here. But it is the small cupid standing on the cornice that is of particular interest. Standing with a tall staff resting on one shoulder and a Borgia shield supported in the opposite hand, this figure is repeated at least twice more in works tailored to the Borgia taste. He is seen again in the Borgia Apartments, in a more generalized form, at the feet of the personified Liberal Arts in the Sala delle Arti Liberali; and more closely replicated in the damaged cartouche on the back of the scabbard (Fig 17a.b.).

Out of this comparison, it can be clearly seen that Pinturicchio's style is very present in the designs used as blueprints by the final artist to play a part in the creation of this elaborate arm.

The identity of the goldsmith who transferred Pinturicchio's designs to the metal of the blade is still debated.

A great deal has been devoted to the identity of this artist. After first identifying the name of the goldsmith who signed his work, OPVS HERC, as Hercule de Pesaro, a goldsmith mentioned in Vatican documents, Yriarte ultimately settles on Hercule de Fideli, goldsmith to the Dukes of Ferrara.¹⁷

Hercule de Fideli was the Christian name of the once Jewish artist Salomone da Sasso. His life in the employ of this great Renaissance family began with the interest of Duke Ercole d'Este shown in the late quarter of the 15th century. This "Hercule Aurifex III^{mi} Duics Ferrarie" made jewelry for Isabella d'Este and, according to Yriarte, most probably swords for Alfonso d'Este and Francesco Gonzaga.¹⁸ Hercule de Fideli was in the employ of Alfonso I d'Este when, in December 1501, this Duke of Ferrara married Lucrezia Borgia, beloved daughter of Pope Alexander VI joining the d'Este family with that of the infamous Spaniards. Hercule's standing with the d'Este family was proven by the selection of his daughter by Alfonso for the honorable position of lady in waiting to his new bride.¹⁹

The piece of evidence that Yriarte holds as the lynch pin is found etched on a magnificent blade gifted to the Berlin Museum by the prince Frederick-Charles.²⁰ This sword belongs to the body of work thought to be that of the artist of the Caetani sword. Here, on the sword of Frederick-Charles, inscribed on the cornice of a building, Yriarte claims to have found the

¹⁷ Yriarte, "Le Graveur d'Epees de Cesar Borgia," p.182.

¹⁸ Yriarte, Autour des Borgia, p.202.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.202-204.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.206.

signature of the artist, FIDELI.²¹ For him this is the proof that Hercule de Fideli, goldsmith to the Dukes of Ferrare is the artist of the Borgia sword and of all those in the compiled body of work.

Based on this identification a number of additional contemporary, late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century blades bearing similar etchings to Hercule's work were attributed to him. However, Blair challenges Yriarte's conclusion with a strong re-examination of evidence. He discusses Yriarte's deduction and ultimately dismisses his final attribution.

The sword that identifies the artist as having worked for Alfonso I d'Este is included in what Blair refers to as, "a well-known group of fakes, probably produced in Milan in the 1830's." Additionally, and perhaps more damaging to Yriarte's argument, the inscription labeled by the scholar as the signature of Hercule de Fideli does not read FIDELI but is instead FIDELIS. The scene in which this 'signature' is found is the *Worship of Love*, and, therefore, the inclusion of the word FIDELIS cannot be considered as anything but a traditional inscription.²² With the knowledge of the d'Este sword as a fake and the loss of the signature 'FIDELI', we have returned to an unknown artist who bears the very common Christian name Hercule.

With this Blair restores the uncertainty concerning the artist of Cesar Borgia's sword. The name of Angelino di Dominco de Sutri was posed by Cyril G.E. Bunt in his book *The Goldsmiths of Italy*. He was the favored goldsmith of Alexander VI, making the Blessed Sword for the ten consecutive years between 1492 and 1501. He was also responsible for each Rosa d'Oro, golden rose, created from 1493 to 1506. It is known through the Vatican archives that

²¹ Blair, "Cesare Borgia's sword scabbard," p.12.

²² Ibid., p.12-13.

Angelino made the blessed sword, belt, and ducal cap that were presented to Alphonso d'Este in 1501.²³ As this artist was working in Rome, specifically in the Papal circle, and as it is generally accepted that the sword of Cesare Borgia was made in those same locations, it is highly plausible that Angelio di Domenico de Sutri was responsible for the execution of the Caetani sword. As for the inscription OPVS HERC, Yriarte's Hercule de Fideli is known to have worked with Angelino di Domenico, so perhaps Blair's convincing argument as to why he would not have been the premier goldsmith does not completely exclude him from involvement.

History has perhaps swallowed the evidence that would give us a definitive answer to this question. It can most certainly not be achieved through the known documentation, but perhaps through future research, including most certainly those pieces of the Papacy of Alexander VI and the Borgia family that have found preservation in the Vatican archives a resolution can be established.

²³ Bunt, The Goldsmiths of Italy, p.19-20.

CHAPTER 4 PROVENANCE

There does exist a thin trail of the sword's provenance after its production, although unfortunately it does not begin until the 18th century, long after the work's forging and decoration. One must again turn to Ademollo for the origins of the sword's resurgence. Ademollo, through the papers of Abbate Galiani, cites that the sword came into the possession of the House of Montallegro in Spain. To the particular member of the family, history finds the first known owner of the weapon in Gioacchino di Montallegro, Marques de Salas, Councilman and Secretary of State and War of the Infant Charles of Bourbon. It is this Duke of Montallagro who, in 1734, brought the famous sword across the Mediterranean from Spain to Naples.¹

It should be noted that Agostino di Cesaretti, in his work, *Istoria del Principato di Piombino*, mistook the individual who owned the sword, incorrectly attributing custody to a Duke of Montalbano.² This inaccuracy was quickly corrected by other scholars, and it has been written by no other that it was not the Duke of Montallagro through whom the sword found its way back to Italy.

It is established that the Spanish Duke was still in possession of the blade in 1759. From his hands the weapon passed as a gift to a man whose identity is not known. It is from this private individual that Abate Galiani acquired the work for an undisclosed price. He was uncharacteristically elusive on the subject even to his closest friends. In a letter to Madame d'Épinay, dated October 2, 1773, he claims the means by which he came to possess the sword to be an unnecessary detail.³

¹ Ademollo, "La Famiglia e l'eredita dell'abate Galliani," p.663-665.

² Agostino di Cesaretti, *Istoria del Principato di Piombino* (Forni Editore S.p.A., 1974), p.87-88.

³ Eugène Asse, *Lettres de L'abbé Galiani a Madame d'Épinay* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1881), vol.1, p.93. " ...Il est superflu de vous conter comment, par quels detours, cette épée est tombée dans mes mains... "

Over the following years Galiani would search endlessly for information on the sword and the man for whom it had been designed. It had been his desire to write a biography of Cesar Borgia and to include in that work a monograph of the weapon. To this end he exhausted sources, asking Madame d'Épinay to serve as his liaison for any remaining information in France. His aspiration was unfortunately never met, and upon the death of Abbate Galiani in October 1787, the once special notebook on which he had written "The Sword of Duke Valentino" was placed with the other 22 volumes of letters, ten cases of manuscripts, and other miscellaneous papers.

The sword itself did not meet such an ordinary end; in fact fate would have it seek to cauterize a wound torn by Cesar and Alexander's campaign to unite the Italian city-states. The will of Abate Galiani, drawn the day of his death and found by Ademollo in the archives of Naples, illustrates his wishes:

Mes exécuteurs testamentaires savent que j'ai promis de céder pour le prix de trois cents ducats napolitains à Monseigneur Gaetani d'Aragon, qui est à Rome, une célèbre épée du duc de Valentinois, avec les memories que j'ai recueillis sur ce précieux objet. Je les prie donc de l'offrir au prélat pour le prix indiqué. Mais s'il ne desirait plus l'acquérir, je veux qu'on offre respectueusement, en mon nom, la susdite épée à S.M.I. l'Impératrice de toutes les Russies, comme souvenir de ma reconnaissance infinie pour rous ses bienfaits. - 14 octobre 1787 ⁴

⁴ Yriarte, Autour des Borgia, p.149. "The executors of my will know that I promised to cede for the price of 300 napolitan ducats to Monsigneur Gaetani d'Aragon, who is in Rome, a famous sword of the Duke of Valentinois, with the memories that I gathered on the precious object. I pray them then to offer it to the prelate for the indicated price. But if he would not desire anymore to acquire it, I want that one offers respectively, in my name, the above mentioned sword to S.M.I. the Empress of all the Russians as remembrance for my infinite recognition for all its kindnesses."

Galiani had abandoned an earlier intention of presenting the sword as a present to the Pope due to the accession of Pius VI to the pontifical throne and the new ill-favor in which he found himself with the papacy.

Catherine the Great, the Empress mentioned by Galiani, was a personal friend to the Abate and the source of a number of gifts he received throughout his life. A particular present that arrived in the days before his death was a jeweled snuffbox, on which could be seen a portrait of the Empress, and a letter offering thanks to Galiani for the part that he had played in the drafting and negotiation of trade agreements that had taken place between Russia and the Kingdom of Naples during the previous years.⁵ For this personal connection and for the infamy of the Renaissance prince, Catherine was ardent to acquire the sword for her esteemed collection, immediately dispatching her ambassador. Much to the disappointment of the Russian Empress he arrived too late, and through the right of pre-emption, the Caetani family took ownership of Abate Galiani's beloved sword.

The Monsigneur Caetani did not, however, take lightly this usurpation of an item desired by the famous royal collector and asked through a friend that it be published in a number of Gazettes around Europe that he would present the sword to Saint-Petersburg upon their request.⁶ That petition was never made.

The Caetani family held a strong and bitter connection to the Borgias. Throughout the Middle Ages they held the seat of feudal power in a number of fiefs in the country surrounding Rome and in the Kingdom of Naples. They held that power still during the Borgia reign of the late fifteenth century. The greatly respected and ancient family was no stranger to Roman

⁵ Francis Steegmuller, A Woman, A Man, and Two Kingdoms (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), p.242.

⁶ Ademollo, "La Famiglia e l'eredita dell'abate Galiani," p.666.

religious politics: Benedetto Caetani would become Boniface VIII, reigning from 1294 to 1303. Still that would not be enough to stop Alexander VI from confiscating their lands for the offense of supporting the Neapolitan cause at the expense of the Papacy.

The Caetani estates were surrendered in November of 1499, only to be promptly sold to Lucrezia Borgia for 80,000 ducats. The title of Duke of Sermoneta was given to the son that she bore for Alphonso d'Este. The insult was vile with the taste of blatant nepotism, but far worse was the death of Giacomo Caetani during his imprisonment in the Castel Sant'Angelo. Although the circumstances of his death were not suspicious, murder was whispered as it often was when the Borgias were concerned. The estates of the Caetani family were restored during the papacy of Julius II, but the Borgia's mark was not one to soon be forgotten.

Monsieur Caetani had first become aware of the sword's presence in Italy seven years earlier during a trip that Abate Galiani had taken to Rome. The circumstances surrounding the meeting that had taken place between the two men is detailed in the letter that Caetani promptly sent along with the asking price of 300 napolitan ducats, to Don Francesco Azzariti, executor of Abbate Galiani's will:⁷

Sono io stato molto sensibile alla perdita che si è fatta di un ingegno non comune qual'è stato il Consigliere Abbate Galiani suo Zio, ma sempre più la sua memoria mi sarà cara, perchè dopo 7 anni si è ricordato di una promessa a me fatta o per meglio dire fatta alla mia famiglia indotta da me ad acquistare il monumento di questa spada e collocarla nella fortezza di Sermoneta assediata, e malmenata dal Duca Valentino nemico capitale della mia Casa. Ringraziando dunque sì la sua degnissima Persona che si è data il pensiero di registrarli l'articolo del Testamento che mi concerne, quanto il sig. Barone D. Lorenzo Ripa, le partecipo

⁷ Yriarte, Autour des Borgia, p.149.

che saranno rimessi nelle loro mani i trecento ducati Napolitani dal latore di questa istessa lettera e supplico di trasmettere nelle mani stesse in un pacchetto ben chiuso e sigillato tutte le memorie manoscritte raccolte dal sig. Abbate Galiani su questo importante monumento, memorie che mi ricordo bene di averne letto qualche cosa, allorchè da Amico il Sig. Abate Galiani mi fece la confidenza di mostrarmele nel suo ultimo viaggio che fece in Roma dimorando nel Palazzo del Marchese Grimaldi allora Ambasciatore di Spagna. Questo monumento acquistato sarà una memoria eterna nella mia famiglia dell'amicizia che vi è stata tra il Galiani e me; il l'ho conosciuto la prima volta nel 1769 nel Conclave di Clemente XIV, allorchè ritornava da Parigi, e da quel tempo in poi ci siamo sempre riguardati come due Amici che avevano qualche rapporto d'idee sopra Medaglie, Antichità, ecc. – Roma, 17 Novembre 1787 ⁸

Monseigneur Onorato Caetani was an ancestor of those deposed Dukes of Sermoneta and a man who held an interest in art and archaeology. After becoming aware of the sword's existence and viewing first hand its presence in Italy he dreamt of ruling over a prized piece of the man that had persecuted the Caetani family and of placing it in the castle of Sermoneta with an inscription written to recall the crimes of the Borgias.

Once ownership had been achieved Massimiliano Caetani d' Aragon was assigned the task of composing Onorato's long awaited inscription. Massimiliano corresponded with Cancelliere:

Je me suis vu, lui dit-il, dans la nécessité de demander une inscription sur l'épée du Valentinois, si intéressante pour nous, les Gaetani, contre lesquels, ainsi que contre les Orsini et les Colonna, cet home pervers a employé la force, assiégeant Sermoneta et assassinant nombre

⁸ Ademollo, "La Famiglia e l'eredità dell'abate Galiani," p.665-666.

de membres de notre famille..., je vous prie done de jeter un coup d'œil sur ce que je vous envoie.⁹

Despite the symbolic choice of the castle in Sermonta, the fortress taken by Alexander and Cesar in 1499, the weapon does not find a home there. Due to the schedule of the Duke which rarely allowed him to visit the Rocca, the sword was kept in Rome where it remains today, held by the subsequent generations of this famous Italian family.¹⁰

⁹ Yriarte, Autour des Borgia, p.169-170. "I saw myself, he tells him, in the necessity to demand an inscription on the sword of Valentinois, if interesting for us, the Gaetani, against which, like against the Orsini and the Colonna, this perverse man employed the force besieging Sermonta and assassinating a number of members of our familiy..., I pray you then to throw a trick of the eye on that which I send you."

¹⁰ Ibid., p.170.

CHAPTER 5 DATE OF THE SWORD

The true question of this inquiry lies in the date and the occasion for which the etched images on the sword were produced. Previous scholars' presumption that the sword and the etchings that decorate its blade were produced contemporarily, has hindered their pursuit for the date of fabrication. Cesar Borgia was given the Blessed Sword, as well as the Ducal Cap of Honor and the Golden Rose, in 1500. Through an examination of existing scholarship on papal history, Italian goldsmiths of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and events in the lives of Borgias themselves, it will be made evident that the Caetani sword is almost certainly the Blessed Sword gifted to Cesar by his father and that the images were inscribed upon the blade for this occasion.

These three gifts, the Golden Rose, the Ducal Cap of Honor and the Blessed Sword were papal gifts, presented annually to a single prince who had sacrificed significant service to Christendom and to the Church. The history for all of these gifts stretches to early Christianity. For the Golden Rose, it is first mentioned in a papal bull dated 1049, but the tradition is rumored to have begun during the pontificate of Gregory the Great (590-604).¹ No early examples are still in existence. It is presumed that in its originally the gift took the form of a single stemmed bloom, resembling closely the natural flower, and was made of pure gold (Fig 32). This is the style that most closely resembles the Rose given to Cesar, the ceremony and description of which will be recounted below.

In later centuries the Golden Rose was created in much more elaborate form as evident in the report of the Rose presented by Clement VIII in 1524 to England's Henry VIII:

¹ Charles Burns, Golden Rose and Blessed Sword (Glasgow: John S. Burns & Sons, 1970), p.2.

This tree was forged of fine gold and wrought with branch leaves and flowers resembling roses set in a pot of gold...In the uppermost rose was a fair sapphire, loup pearced, the bigness of an acorn. The tree was of height half an English yard, and in breadth a foot.²

Early examples were treated, giving the metal blossom a red tint, but this practice was eventually discarded.

As for the Ducal Cap of Honor and the Blessed Sword, it is generally acknowledged that the first references are found in the early thirteenth century, much later than those of the Golden Rose.³ The Cap and Sword were designed as a significant manifestation of the confidence the papacy bestowed upon the receiver for their ability to defend the Church and its faith both spiritually and temporally. The two objects were often gifted in the same ceremony, as the Ducal Cap held an element of symbolic protection particular to the needs of the men who generally received the Blessed Sword. It is believed by some that the tradition of the Blessed Sword is taken from the ancient custom of offering the standard of St. Peter and the keys to a leader who was preparing to confront the enemies of the church.⁴ The Cap, representing the unfaltering protection of the Holy Spirit, offered to guarantee the temperance of danger soon to be encountered for the cause of Christendom.⁵

The Ducal Cap of Honor was traditionally made of dark crimson or black velvet and was trimmed with ermine (Fig 33). It was ornamented with gold thread and pearls, woven into a representation of the Dove of the Holy Spirit. Alternating rays were depicted extending from the crown of the Cap, using the same materials. At last there is the Blessed Sword, customarily

² Bunt, The Goldsmiths of Italy, p.15-16.

³ Burns, Golden Rose and Blessed Sword, p.11-12.

⁴ Bunt, The Goldsmiths of Italy, p.17.

⁵ Burns, Golden Rose and Blessed Sword, p.15.

taking the form of a cross-handled arm with detailed engravings or etchings on the blade and highly crafted, ornate repoussé work in the metal of the guard, grip and pommel.⁶

It is the claim of this examination that the Caetani sword is the Blessed Sword of 1500; therefore, an examination of the blades commonly used for these ceremonial gifts is necessary. As discussed previously, a number of the blades used by Alexander VI and his uncle Calixtus in their commissioned papal gifts were imported from Spain. The use of a pre-fabricated blade is a pivotal piece of evidence in the classification of Cesar's sword in Rome as a Blessed Sword.

The Blessed Sword was commonly a costly gift. Approximately three gold florins were paid for the blade alone, despite the fact that it was not a directly commissioned piece; they were purchased ready-made.⁷ As this was already standard practice and Alexander being a frugal man, the pontiff likely took a sword belonging to Cesar during his years as a Cardinal, and created the Blessed Sword of 1500 through the addition of the elaborate etchings designed by Pinturicchio and the traditional blessing.

The blessing of the papal sword always took place early in the evening on Christmas Eve, preparing it for presentation the following year. On the rare occasion that a Pope did not intend to present the sword to anyone, the rite was still observed and the Blessed Sword was kept for future donation. Because no document of the blessing or investiture of Cesar Borgia's Blessed Sword survives, we are left with a variety of possibilities. The sword could have been blessed on either Christmas Eve in 1498 or one year later in 1499. Between these two years there exists such a range of scenarios. It seems a futile effort to try to pinpoint one in particular as holding a stronger possibility of proof than another.

⁶ Ibid., p.14.

⁷ Ibid.

It is known, nevertheless, that Cesar did receive all three of these gifts, each during 1500, the year of his return from France and his first victories in the Romagna. On the 26th of February, in that same year, the Duc of Valentinois was met by dignitaries and officials of the Roman Curia at the Porto del Popolo, from where he would make his public return to the Vatican.

For those who lined the streets to see the magnificence of 'il Valentino', he did not disappoint. First to cross their gaze were his baggage wagons, mules draped in his colors and two heralds, one wearing the colors of France, the other Cesar's arms. Behind them marched a thousand infantry, fully dressed for battle. One-hundred select members of his personal guard bore the name CESAR embroidered on their chests in threads of silver.⁸ The manner of dress chosen by Cesar on this occasion was dramatically different from that seen during his earlier and much more elaborate entrance into France. For this entry, he wore a simple black robe of velvet, ornamented only by the gold collar of the Order of St. Michael, an honor bestowed upon him by the King of France. This display wound through the streets of the Eternal City, finding its way to the Castle Sant' Angelo where standards bearing reference to the glorious exploits of the Duc were flown by his father. The pageant parade would end where Alexander, on a balcony in the Vatican, waited for sight of his son. Cesar had made his celebrated return.

Days later in a ceremony on March 29, the fourth Sunday after Lent, as was the tradition, he would become Gonfaloniere and Captain General of the Holy Roman Church and would receive the Golden Rose and the Ducal Cap. The details of the ceremonies are recounted in Burchard's diary.

⁸ Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.114.

Alexander spoke as Cesar stood before him in the medieval basilica, imploring God to bestow upon the man, who would within moments become Gonfaloniere, all blessings, spiritual and temporal. He wrapped his son's shoulders in the mantle of the Gonfaloniere reciting the words, "May the Lord endow you with the cloak of salvation and place around you the garment of joyousness, in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen."⁹

The Pope then placed the Ducal Cap on Cesar's head. This particular example of insignia must have been exceptional in expense, for the size of the pearls was large enough that they warranted particular notice in Burchard's description. He details the cap as being ornamented with pearls "the size of an ordinary nut." The Pontiff again recited the tradition, "Receive this insignia of the pre-eminence of the office of Gonfaloniere... You will, from now on, be bound to defend the Faith and the Holy Church, and may He, who is blessed through the ages, give you the strength to perform your duty."¹⁰ Cesar responded in turn, pronouncing the oath of fidelity.¹¹ The Borgias now ruled over Italy, body and soul.

Immediately following the investiture of Gonfaloniere, Cesar received the Golden Rose, placed in his right hand by the Cardinal of St. Clemente while Alexander spoke.

Take this rose from our hands, from us who, although undeservedly, hold the place of God on earth; this rose which symbolizes the joy of Jerusalem triumphant and the Church militant; this exquisite flower which is the manifestation of the faithful in Christ and the joy and the crown of all the saints. Take this rose planted by the river of many waters, my most beloved son who are, in the judgment of the world, noble, powerful and endowed with many talents, that you

⁹ Carol Beuf, Cesare Borgia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), p.148.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p.149. "I Cesare Borgia of France, Duke of Valentinois, Gonfaloniere, and Captain General of the Holy Roman Church from this hour forth will be faithful and obedient to St. Peter, the Holy Church, and You, my Lord, Alexander VI, Pope, and to your successors...so may God and these Sacred Gospels help me"

may become more renowned in every virtue. He who is the Trinity and the Unity through all the ages. Amen.¹²

Cesar knelt to kiss the feet of his father, thus concluding the rites.

But no mention has been made of the sword usually gifted in the same ceremony. It is later referenced in Burchard's diary that Cesar was given the Blessed Sword, but no firm statement is made of a payment or ceremony. As we are left with no descriptive memory of it, various dates are cited by different authors.

The earliest year is given by Burns where he states that Alexander gives the Blessed Sword to his own son in 1499.¹³ In his 1890 article, Eugene Müntz, a renowned French scholar on the arts of the Papal Courts, strangely skips the year 1500 in his discussion of those swords gifted by Alexander VI. He does mention the sword of Cesar Borgia, but it is not in alliance with a papal gift; it is only referenced as a discussion point for comparative iconography with a sword of Innocent VIII.¹⁴ It is not until a later work from 1898 that Müntz suggests Cesar Borgia as a recipient for the sword of 1500. He states that "l'èpée de 1500 (ou 1501)" was given to Cesar Borgia.¹⁵ Bunt also mentions the presentation of the Blessed Sword to Cesar, giving the date of 1501.¹⁶ That date can, however, be quickly excluded from consideration as it is readily acknowledged that Alfonso d'Este received the papal gifts in that year, leaving the year 1500 as the most probable suggestion.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Burns, Golden Rose and Blessed Sword, p.23.

¹⁴ Eugene Müntz, "Les epees d'honneur distribuees par les papes pendant les XIVe, Xve, et XVIe siecles," *Revue de l'art chretien*, issue 39 (1889), p.291.

¹⁵ Eugene Müntz, Les Arts a la Cour des Papes Innocent VIII, Alexandre VI, Pie III (1484-1503) (Paris: Ernest Leroux, Editeur, 1898), p.238.

¹⁶ Bunt, The Goldsmiths of Italy, p.20.

To find the strongest piece of evidence in support of the supposition that the etchings found on the sword were completed for this occasion, we need to look no further than the sword itself and to Cesar's sojourn in Rome during the spring months of 1500. A very strong alliance exists between the images of Julius Caesar seen on the blade and a number of celebrations held to honor the victories of Duc upon his return to Rome and upon his elevation to Gonfaloniere and Captain General of the Papal Army. Races were held, as was customary to the Jubilee, but on February 28, the day after Cesar's processional entrance, the people of Rome were treated to a spectacle outside the bounds of the normal celebrations.

In a parade that wound from the Piazza Navona to the Vatican and back again, twelve chariots showcased the triumphs of the ancient Caesar. Eleven of the wagons were decorated with scenes, mastered by Papal artists, representing tableaux relative to recent events in the life of the Duc. Among the scenes, most notable to this discussion, was the Crossing of the Rubicon.

Cesar rode on horseback alongside the parade. Some have suggested that he went as far as to mount the final chariot as it returned to the Piazza the final time and adopt the persona of the Roman Emperor, but this is most probably legend. It was not an uncommon practice to represent the triumphs of the ancient military leaders during carnival, but the very personal elements of Cesar Borgia that are present in this particular event should not be written off as immaterial.¹⁷ Episodes from the life of Julius Caesar, specifically, the moment of Crossing the Rubicon and his Triumph, comprise one-third of Cesar's sword's decoration. This creates an association between the sword and the events of 1500, but the unique nature of the choice to represent the crossing is all the more telling.

¹⁷ Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1999), p.257.

The Crossing of the Rubicon is not a commonly included in Renaissance depictions of the Triumphs of Caesar. The standard procession, both in art and life, followed a similar formula. No particular scenes from the life of the leader were shown. It was a generalized procession mimicking the antique practice and style. Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar*, which he painted for the Dukes of Mantua, are an example of this formulaic picture. Trumpets and standard bearers begin the series, followed by the trophies and weapons of war; next more men, marching with plunder and sacrificial bulls, bear standards and play music. In Mantegna's paintings we find Julius Caesar at the end of the spectacle, seated in the triumphal chariot. Traditionally, Caesar was more commonly found in the center of the parade; however, there is evidence that Mantegna's work is unfinished and that he had intended a number of additional canvases.¹⁸

What is important is the general nature of what was considered the *Triumphs of Caesar* and the stark absence of any specific events in the life of Julius Caesar. This makes the parades of 1500 unique. Andrew Martindale goes to the length of suggesting that the artists and organizers of Cesar's celebrations were influenced by Mantegna's famous work.¹⁹ The representation of the Crossing of the Rubicon then becomes a conspicuous addition whose significance should not be overlooked.

It must be assumed then that it was Cesar's desire to adopt this scene as part of his personal iconography, both on his sword and during the parades that honored his recent triumphs in northern Italy. A personal connection must have been felt by Cesar between this moment in his life, representing his newfound military dominance and this event in the life of the ancient general, who ruled the known world through military power. More importantly, Cesar had

¹⁸ Martindale, *The Triumphs of Caesar by Andrea Mantegna*, p.64-66.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.49.

replaced the ancient conqueror as the general of the army of Rome. He marked this association through the engravings on his sword and in the parade.

Cesar Borgia cites Suetonius' description of this event on another object of virtue in his possession, further developing his attachment to this particular scene. Inscribed in small black letters on a signet ring belonging to the Duc is written "fais ce que dois advienne que pourra," 'do what thou must, come what will.'²⁰ These are the words spoken by Julius Caesar, immediately following the utterance "the die is cast."²¹ Through the use of this inscription on a personal item of adornment, it is all the more clear that Cesar is deeply attached to this moment in the life of the Roman general, and the fact that the inscription is written in French is the most telling piece. Never would he have strayed from his native tongue until after he had quartered his arms with the lilies of France in 1499, giving great weight to the suggestion that it is only after he takes up military arms that he can find self-definition in this moment of Caesar's life.

Another element connecting the 1500 triumphal parade and the Caetani sword is a motto closely tied to this moment in the life of the Duc. It is on this occasion that he adopts the motto "Aut Caesar, aut nihil," 'either Caesar or nothing'. In his 1911 description of the events of February 28th, under the pretense of a carnival masquerade, Alexander Dumas states that the standards held by the bearers bore this inscription as the device.²² Although Sabatini disagrees, stating that it is a fiction to believe that Cesar ever adopted the phrase into his repertoire, he immediately contradicts himself with the assertion that the device was engraved on his sword.²³

²⁰ From the Notes and Queries section of The Connoisseur. The Connoisseur, vol. XVIII. (May-August 1907), p.59. This is a response to a question posed in the Notes and Queries section of The Connoisseur, vol.17. (January – April 1907), p.116.

²¹ Suetonius, History of the Twelve Caesars (London: David Nutt, 1899), chapter 32, p.39.

²² Alexander Dumas, The Borgias (London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1911), p.174.

²³ Rafael Sabatini, The Life of Cesare Borgia (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930), p.203.

This is clearly an inaccuracy, as it is seen nowhere on the sword or scabbard. But the association between the sword and this motto is a curiosity, and Sabatini is not the only author to have made the mistake. It is also fallaciously mentioned by Cancellieri and Ademollo.^{24 25} However, it must have held some reference in the minds of Cesar's near contemporaries, for it is found in the 1591 *Symbolica Heroica* of M. Claudius Paradin above an image and description of the Duc of Valentinois.²⁶

Although it is not known for certain that the Duc adopted this device, the continuation of references to it throughout Borgia scholarship again implies an intimate correlation between the events of the parade in 1500 and the engravings on the sword. This evidence, in conjunction with the knowledge that the Blessed Sword was bestowed upon Cesar during this year, offers substantial weight to the suggestion that the Blessed Sword given to Cesar Borgia and the sword now in Rome are the same work.

This inquest is not the first indication ever made that these two swords are perhaps the same. Although he does not reference it as the Blessed Sword, Ivan Cloulas states that Cesar, "had his magnificent parade sword engraved with episodes of Caesar's triumphs along with scenes of his own triumphal chariot procession of the previous spring."²⁷ Cloulas give this impression despite the fact that he cites Yriarte's discussion in *Autour des Borgia* as a source for material regarding the sword. He leaves no additional note with which to track his assertion, but

Sabatini believes that the sword which bears the inscription of the motto is the sword made for the coronation of the King of Naples, but does reference that it is the same sword that today belongs to the Caetani family and whose scabbard is in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

²⁴ Cancellieri, Lettera, p.18

²⁵ Ademollo, La Famiglia, p. 663

²⁶ M. Claudius Paradin, The Heroical Devices of M. Claudius Paradin 1591 (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1984), p.347.

²⁷ Ivan Cloulas, The Borgias (New York: Franklin Watts, 1989), p.183.

it raises the question that there was perhaps some archival document that led him to such an uncommonly held belief.

To return to the authorities of goldsmith and papal artists who more closely tie the two swords together, Bunt states that it is “probable that we might add the famous Borgia cinquedea to the list of extant papal swords.”²⁸ Burns asserts that there are ten Blessed Swords still in existence. He continues that, “One particularly ornate and sumptuous example can be seen in the Sword given to Cesare Borgia in 1500, the enamel decoration of which is remarkably fine.”²⁹ Although Burns does not directly reference the sword that belongs today to the Caetani family, it is the only weapon known still to exist that once belonged to Cesar Borgia. Nor can it be ignored that the sword described by Burns as being the Blessed Sword of 1500 has enamel work, as that is the only type of decoration found on the hilt of the Caetani sword. As the typical form taken by the Blessed Sword has a grip and pommel worked in decorative silver repoussé, Burn’s recounting of the enamel as the remarkable feature is logical.³⁰

From here the direct indications of a correlation, end and one must piece together multiple sources at a time. Müntz implies, in his discussion of the Blessed sword given to Cesar, that although there is no piece of evidence to solidify the idea, it is possible this sword, the Blessed Sword, is the same sword mentioned in the inventory taken of the belongings of Cesar’s wife.³¹

In 1878, Edmond Bonnaffé published the inventory of Charlotte d’Albret, Duchess of Valentinois and wife of Cesar Borgia. Upon her death in 1514 a register of her possessions was

²⁸ Bunt, The Goldsmith’s of Italy, p.20.

²⁹ Burns, Golden Rose and Blessed Sword, p.14.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Müntz, Les Arts a la Cour des Papes Innocent VIII, Alexander VI, Pie III (1484-1503), p.238. Müntz does not believe that the Blessed Sword is the sword that today belongs to the Caetani family. He mentioned this sword as another sword that had belonged to Cesar.

taken in which was naturally found a number of objects having once belonged to her late husband. Of those things, Bonnaffé references a sword in Rome decorated with gold enamels, which in the eighteenth century had belonged to Abbe Galiani, the leather sleeve of which was located in the Museum of Kensington (today the Victoria and Albert Museum).³² He is without question describing the sword in discussion here.

If the two sources, Müntz and Bonnaffé, are combined, along with the statement by Burns that the Blessed Sword of 1500 was decorated with enamel work and not the traditional repoussé, an agreement is formed that the papal gift presented to Cesar Borgia in 1500 found its way into the inventories of his wife and is today within the property of the Caetani family in Rome.

Despite this evidence, or perhaps because to date it has never been compiled, it is the commonly held opinion that the terminus post quem for the fabrication of the weapon and its decoration is 1493, the terminus ante quem 1498. This opinion rests solely on the assumption that the inscription on the hilt that references Cesar as a Cardinal is contemporaneous to the etchings on the blade. As stated, that is not necessarily the case. To this possibility an argument will be addressed that allows for Cesar and his father continuing to refer to Cesar as Cardinal after 1498.

It is known, through Burchard, that a private consistory took place on August 17, 1498 in that Cesar formally asked permission to be released from his obligations to the church.

On Friday, the 17th of the month of August, 1498, there was a private consistory, in which the Most Reverend Lord cardinal of Valencia made the statement, that, from his tenderest age, he had felt an inclination to the secular state of life; that, however, the Holy Father had absolutely willed that he should change his view and devote himself to the clerical career; and had, to this effect granted him continually so many ecclesiastical dignities, and ordered that he should be promoted to the Order of Deaconship, while he himself had not considered it proper to oppose the Pontiff's command. But, since his mind, his wish and his inclinations still are, as they ever were, for the secular state, he now supplicated our

³² Edmond Bonnaffé, Inventaire de la Duchesse de Valentinois Charlotte d'Albret (Paris: A.Quantin, 1878), p.53.

Most Holy Lord to design and favor him with uncommon clemency, and give him dispensation to depose his ecclesiastical habit and dignity, and allow him to return to the world and contract marriage; and he begged the most reverend lords cardinals to consent to such a dispensation, and to request our Holy Father for him and, together with him, that he may release him of all the churches, monestaries and whatever other ecclesiastical benefices in his possession, and which he would all resign into the hands of the same Holy Lord. All the cardinals, by common consent and accord, referred the matter of this dispensation to the will and discretion of Our Most Holy Lord, the Pope.³³

The exact date by which Cesar had returned all benefices to the arms of the Church is unknown, although a few of the stepping stones along that path are recorded in the documents of the Vatican archives. By November 4, 1498 he had surrendered the diocese of Nantes. His resignation of his diocese in Valencia and Elna was accepted by Alexander VI, as was the renunciation of the abbey of Vallisdegna in a consistory on November 26th of the same year. It is assumed that the remaining benefices were also resigned; although, there are no existing documents to offer confirmation.³⁴

According to common belief Cesar ceases to be a Cardinal through this abdication. For those who hold this statement to be true, a terminal date of production is created and it falls in the final months of 1498.

The keepers of the Borgia history and more particularly the sword of Cesar Borgia have sought to identify the instance for which such a piece of art would have been made for a cardinal. There are two occasions during this time that have been branded as worthy of the production.

The first of these events came when Ferrantino d' Aragon died unexpectedly at the age of twenty-seven and was succeeded by his uncle Federigo as the new King of Naples. In a consistory on June 8th 1497, Cesar was appointed as the papal legate who would travel in place

³³ Peter De Roo, Materials for the History of Pope Alexander VI His Relatives and His Time (Bruges: Desclee de Brouwer and Co., 1924), vol.1, p.284.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.284-285.

of the pontiff when the time came for the formal investiture and coronation, although this was an honor well above his standing in the College of Cardinals.

Three thousand *zecchini* left the pontifical treasury to finance the travel of Cesar and his substantial group of retainers, prelates, camp followers, and horses.³⁵ The coronation took place on August 11, 1497. Cesar arrived at the cathedral in Capua dressed in crimson velvet and a mantle of gold cloth, carried in a *sedia gestatoria*.³⁶ Regrettably the ceremony itself is poorly documented. It is known that Cesar followed all the dignity and ceremony befitting such an event. It is rightly assumed that a sword was involved in the rites of formal investiture. There is no description of the sword used on this occasion, and so it becomes this point in time that is linked to the Caetani sword.

Burchard, who is usually diligent in his recording of activities relating to the pontificate, does not recount this coronation, and is in fact uncharacteristically quiet during the months of June, July, and August in 1497. This intermission has frustrated researchers whose interests lie with the Borgia family, as June 14 marks the death of Juan Borgia, Duke of Gandia and favorite son of Alexander VI.

In his grief, the pope vowed to reform the church, and in these months the Vatican was kept busy planning the immense canonical repentance for Alexander's self-admitted sins. During a public consistory held on June 19, speaking more as a father than a Pope, Alexander would say the following:

The Duke of Gandia is dead. His death was given us the greatest sorrow, and no greater pain that this could be suffer, because we loved him above all things, and esteemed not more the Papacy nor anything else. Rather, had we seven papacies, we would give them all to have the Duke alive again. God had done this perhaps for some sin of ours...³⁷ We

³⁵ Beuf, Cesare Borgia, p.90.

³⁶ Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.67.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.64.

have decided, therefore, to regulate the manner of living in the Church, and to appoint a commission of six cardinals, who shall have the charge of preparing the holy work...and we submit our own person to the regulations that they shall make.³⁸

The explanation for Burchard's absence at the ceremony in Naples can be found in Alexander's response to the loss of the Duke and in the work being done in Rome that would require the attention of the chronicle kept by his master of ceremonies.

Since the description of the sword used in the coronation ceremony in 1497 has been lost to time, we may examine the details found in Burchard's *Diarium* of the coronation of King Alfonso II that took place on May 8th 1494 in Naples:

From the royal treasure chamber were brought first, the royal crown in a vessel of gilded silver...Then the sword was brought in its scabbard, studded with pearls and precious stones from the end to end...³⁹

In this we find the first piece of evidence why it is unlikely that the weapon that is today known simply as the sword of Cesare Borgia was the sword made for the coronation of King Federigo in 1497. The sword used in 1494 is kept in an elaborate and highly decorative scabbard. It is improbable that in a matter of three years the style chosen by Alexander or accepted as appropriate would have changed in such a dramatic degree. If Cesar's sword and the scabbard that was intended for it are those used in this coronation, the sheath has departed from a style of jeweled encrustation to one of a beautiful but subdued and simple decorative relief executed in leather.

It must also be remembered that the intended scabbard was never finished and that the sword, when as last described in the 18th century, was encased in a sheath of rough, black hide. Would either the Pope or the new King have accepted this as the coronation sword? Most assuredly not.

³⁸ De Roo, Materials for a History of Pope Alexander VI His Relatives and His Time, vol.3, p.171.

³⁹ Johannes Burchardus, Pope Alexander VI and His Court (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1921), p.71.

Moreover, the royal insignia, of which the sword is part, are resigned to the King during the coronation ceremony.⁴⁰ To this end, if the date of execution for the designs was 1497, King Federico would have received a sword decorated without reference to Naples, the Papacy, Alexander VI, Federigo himself, or devices of the Aragonese family from which both the Pope and the Neapolitan King claimed ancestry. It would have been instead etched solely with references to the life and aspirations of the man in *pontificalibus* that had handed it to him.⁴¹ The suggestion that this explains the circumstance surrounding the fabrication and decoration of the sword can be quickly dismissed. Far more telling is the question of why Cesar would trouble to design a sword and scabbard with scenes so personal in narrative and image as a gift for someone else. Again this is a highly unlikely circumstance. It is much more probable that the sword was designed for a different moment in the life of Cesar Borgia.

The possibility has been suggested that the sword was made for this occasion, but not used as the coronation sword, instead held before Cardinal Borgia during the ceremony as a symbol of spiritual and temporal power. Blair dismisses this as the reason for the sword's creation, arguing that the type of sword used in this capacity would have been a bearing sword which is a larger two handed arm that is intended for processional or ritual use. These situations require the sword to be held upright, leaving no need for belt attachments on the scabbard.⁴²

The other occurrence in the life of Cesar that scholars have considered significant enough to bear the weight of such a weapon is his renunciation of the purple in 1498. It is known that Cesar and his father had considered this secularization as early as February 1498. It was

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.76. "The King was then crowned in the proper order and the royal insignia were handed over to him..." This is from Burchard's account of the coronation of King Alphonso II.

⁴¹ See Albert Van de Put's The Aragonese Double Crown & the Borja or Borgia Device (London: Gryphon Club 1910), for an account of the Borgia use of the Aragonese heraldic symbols.

⁴² Blair, "Cesare Borgia's sword scabbard," p.9-10.

whispered that Cesar considered it as he stepped over the body of his freshly slain older brother in June of the previous year;⁴³ but whatever the length of deliberation, it is generally agreed that with his departure for France in October 1498, Cesar disavows the title of Cardinal. As stated before, this is considered to be the final moment in Cesar's life that could be aligned with the production of the sword due to the inscription on the hilt. As this was the most significant event to date, it became a natural instance to which scholars could pin production.

If Cesar had designed this as a tangible example of his secular aspirations, as is greatly theorized by most scholars, he would have undoubtedly carried it with him as he embarked upon the journey to solidify those ambitions. But, although his entry into France was described in acute detail, there remains no mention of any sword. An astonishing 200,000 ducats were spent for Cesar's departure to France, the glory of which was displayed during his entrance into Chinon where he was to meet Louis XII, King of France. This exceptional and theatrical affair was witnessed by an ancestor of Brantôme and whose recording of it was woven into elegant prose in the author's *Femmes Galantes*.⁴⁴ Sarah Bradford recounts the event through a translation of Brantôme:

The Duke of Valentinois entered thus on Wednesday, the eighteenth day of December 1498. Before him marched the Cardinal of Rouen, M. de Ravestain, the Seneschal of Toulouse, M. de Clermont, with many Lords and Gentlemen to the foot of the bridge; he was preceded by twenty-four handsome mules carrying trunks, coffers and chests, covered with cloths bearing the Duke's arms, then again came another twenty-four mules with their trappings halved in red and yellow...the colours of the King, then twelve mules with coverings of yellow striped satin. Then came six mules with trappings of cloth of gold, of which one stripe was of cloth of gold cut, the other smooth, which made seventy in all...And after came sixteen beautiful great chargers, led by grooms, covered in cloth of gold, crimson and yellow...after these came eighteen pages, each one on a fine charger, of whom sixteen were dressed in crimson velvet, the two others in cloth of gold. These, the people said, must be his two favourites. Then came six fine mules richly equipped with

⁴³ It is believed by some scholars, and by a number of his contemporaries, that Cesar was responsible for the death of his brother.

⁴⁴ Beuf, *Cesare Borgia*, p.100.

saddles, bridles and trappings in crimson velvet, accompanied by grooms dressed in the same. Then two mules carrying coffers and all covered in cloth of gold. The people, said that those two must be carrying something more exquisite than the others, or some Bulls and fine Indulgences from Rome, or some Holy Relics. Then after came thirty gentlemen (Cesare's Roman noblemen) clad in cloth of gold and silver, followed by three musicians, two tambours and one rebec, dressed in cloth of gold according to the style of their country, and their rebecs had strings of gold. They marched between the gentlemen and the Duke of Valentinois, playing all the while. Then came four with trumpets and clarions of silver, richly dressed, playing their instruments without ceasing. There were also twenty-four lackeys all clad in crimson velvet halved with yellow silk, and they were all around the Duke; beside him rode the Cardinal of Rouen, conversing with him...As to the Duke, he was mounted on a great tall horse (one of the Gonzaga corsierei) very richly harnessed, with a covering of red satin halved with cloth of gold (in truth I am not very sure what stuff it might be) and embroidered with very rich gems and large pearls. In his bonnet were two double rows of five or six rubies, as large as a bean, which gave out a great light. On the brim of his bonnet there were also a great quantity of jewels, even to his boots, which were all adorned with chains of gold and edged with pearls.⁴⁵

There are two effects further described as particularly remarkable examples of the wealth spent on Cesar's unveiling to the French. The first, an additional description by Brantôme's ancestor was of the collar worn by the Duc over his costume of black velvet. It was described as being worth over 30,000 ducats, with a medallion of diamonds suspended from it.⁴⁶

The second is perhaps more legendary than the reasonably accurate account given by Brantôme, but is nonetheless descriptive of the impression the magnificence of the Duc's display left upon the people who witnessed the affair. It is said that the horse upon which the Duc rode was shod in shoes of solid gold. As the story was told, a number of his mules were also shod with the same precious metal and that during the long procession through Chinon the shoes, either due to intentionally loose fittings or to the malleability of the gold, parted from the hooves and were left in the streets as examples of the Duc's generosity.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.89-90.

⁴⁶ Sabatini, The Life of Cesare Borgia, p.161.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.162.

What is to be gained from this extensive description of the elaborate entrance performed by the Duc upon the occasion of his initial audience with Louis XII is an awareness of how well this moment in history was documented, and most particularly the minute degree to which the detail of his dress was observed. There is a notable absence of any description of arms or armor. If a sword of such magnificence had been by the side of the man at the center of the procession, it would have been noticed. The lack of mention strongly indicates that no sword was on hand to be observed.

There are alternative reasons as to why the title of Cardinal is present on a sword produced for Cesar after the year 1498. Cesar asked to be released from his ecclesiastical dignity on August 17, 1498. The Royal Patents conferring upon him the duchy of Valentinois in France had reached Rome on August 7.⁴⁸ In October of that same year he took formal leave of his father, departing for the land where he was to marry and rule as Duc. Although he had already been bestowed with his new title, on the day of departure he signed his name, not under the designation of Duc but as Cardinal Valentinus. Cattaneo, a Mantuan envoy, writes:

Valencia has certainly left in lay clothes, and having made his preparations as duke, nonetheless he signed himself up to the last moment as Cesar, Card. Valentino...and this perhaps as a precaution...⁴⁹

For a time, Burchard would also continue referring to Cesar as Cardinalis Valentinus, doing so on this same occasion.⁵⁰

If this was precautionary, his fears were not unfounded. Carlotta of Naples, daughter to King Federigo, was Cesar's desired bride, but she and her father would hear nothing of it.

Federigo declared:

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.153.

⁴⁹ Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.81.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.83.

The son of a Pope, who is also a Cardinal, is not a fitting husband for my daughter. Let it be ordained, however, that a Cardinal may enter into the state of wedlock; then he may keep his hat, and I will, notwithstanding, give him my daughter.⁵¹

Carlotta showed no disappointment, claiming she herself had no desire to be known as ‘La Cardinala’.⁵² Despite this proclamation, Cesar’s dispensation and elevation to the status of Duc was not enough to satisfy Federigo’s distaste. In February of 1499 Louis XII had failed to find a bride for him. Cesar wrote to his father telling Alexander of his preparations to return to Italy. It was said that he would be reinstated as a Cardinal.⁵³ So imminent was his departure that he received the King’s messages for the Pope.⁵⁴

As late as August 1499, Baldasare Castiglione described Cesar as “the son of a pope, a renegade cardinal, a prince of France, and a great captain.”⁵⁵ It seems that no one believed Cesar had truly given up his status in the church. The young Duc knew all too well the fickle nature of fate and seemed himself to doubt his own secular success.

Although Cesar did marry in May of 1499, we have already far extended the time to which he and his father could have clung to his previous title. It seems that, at least for a short time, he was genuinely a Cardinal of the Roman Church and a Duc of France. But it is additionally possible that, though Cesar gave up his benefices in the consistory of 1498, he nonetheless retained some religious bond to the church, possibly perhaps even his title.

To prove conclusively that the etchings on the blade of the Caetani sword were completed in 1500 cannot be accomplished through the available documentation. It is entirely possible that

⁵¹ E.L. Miron, Duchess Derelict: A Study of the Life and Times of Charlotte d’Albrecht, Duchess of Valentinois (London: S. Paul & Co., 1911), p.121.

⁵² Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.93.

⁵³ William Harrison Woodward, Cesare Borgia (London: Francis Aldor, Publisher, 1947), p.141.

⁵⁴ Sabatini, The Life of Cesare Borgia, p.163.

⁵⁵ Yriarte, Cesare Borgia, p.88.

the intimate nature of the participants negated the need for the kind of papers that would have left definitive proof. Nonetheless, the sword and the scabbard intended as its cover are exceedingly critical to our understanding of the development of Cesar Borgia's personal iconography.

CHAPTER 6 THE IMPORTANCE OF DECORATIVE ARTS

The question has been posed on a number of occasions as to why the study of this sword is important and, in particular, why the shifting of a few years makes a difference in our understanding of the work. To answer this, one must first appreciate the profound and essential role that the category of arts into which this sword falls, what we now refer to as decorative arts, played during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries.

Throughout the discipline of art history, the movement towards this awareness has proven lethargic due to the concept of the great academic triad of painting, sculpture and architecture, perpetuated over the centuries by Vasari, Winckelmann, and Goethe. In the eras which surround the medieval and Renaissance periods, starkly different standards held true. Value was placed on costly works in gold, tapestries, arms and armor, and the pageantry of the court. These works were esteemed not only for their substantive worth but also for the powerful significance they held.¹ Upon the realization of the critical importance these works played in the political and social sphere of medieval and Renaissance Europe, we can then turn to the question of why a minor shift in the dating of our ‘Queen of Swords’ is significant enough to warrant our scholastic attention.

Political power can be expressed in a number of ways. During the Renaissance the visual played a substantial role in the acquisition, retention, and expression of power. These accomplishments were made through the creation and manipulation of representative objects and in the environments that quartered the worthy. Visual arts grew to be important weapons in the game of persuasive politics. As Charles Rosenberg writes:

¹ Marina Belozerskaya, Rethinking the Renaissance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.4.

Their efficiency lay in the manner in which they could convey multivalent messages quickly and forcefully to a public accustomed to thinking in terms of images and allegories, and persuaded the audience of the truth and significance of their arguments.²

They offered an immediacy and tangible permanence that few other things could, allowing a patron to solidify an idea or image of him or herself in the consciousness of the material world.³

For a political environment and social system where the maintenance of the hierarchical structure through the use of the visual is essential to its survival, luxury arts are vital symbols of a patron's authority and distinction, their taste and virtue.⁴ Although all art objects generally provided some form of outward projection in regards to their owner, objects rendered in the more precious materials were among the most sought after and admired. In this visual competition, elaborate ensembles of tapestries, arms, and objects of virtue were the most highly prized items.

This expenditure was a signaling system for those worthy to display a manifestation of their power. The period understanding of the value of visual demonstration found justification in Aristotle.

A magnificent man...has the capacity to observe what is suitable and to spend large sums with good taste. For as we said at the outset, a characteristic is defined by its activities and by its objects...A magnificent man will spend amounts of this kind because it is noble to do so...He will try to find out how to achieve the most noble and suitable result rather than how much it will cost him and how it can be done cheaply...The most valued possession is the most costly such as gold, but the most valued achievement or result is one that is great and noble: to look at it will be to admire it, and what is magnificent is admirable...In private affairs, magnificence is shown in those expenditures which are made only once – e.g., a wedding and the like, and anything of interest to the whole city or to eminent people – and also in receiving and taking leave of foreign quests...It is also typical of a magnificent man to furnish his house commensurate with his wealth – for it, too, is a kind

² Rosenberg, Art and Politics, p.3.

³ Ibid., p.1-4.

⁴ Berlozskaya, Luxury Arts of the Renaissance, p.16.

of ornament – and to prefer spending his money on works that endure, since they are the noblest.⁵

Magnificence came to dominate the desired virtues of man. In Sabadino's volume *De Triumphis Religionis*, a book dedicated to Ercole d'Este, the weighted value placed on this one characteristic is evident. Book five dedicated the entirety of its thirty-seven folios, approximately one third of the entire work, to magnificence. Nine other princely virtues were discussed in the remaining space. To the author writing in 1497, the aspects of magnificence have changed little from the Aristotelian view. It remained the product of lavish spending, symbolizing, and reaffirming power and authority. Magnificence and the visual portrayal of it in tapestries, arms, military triumphs, and tournaments grew increasingly important to the modes of self-presentation used in Renaissance courts and the iconographies developed for each.

Tapestries were among the most prized arts used for the visual propaganda of self-definition and transference of virtue. They orchestrated court environments and relayed political allegories, cast under the appearance of a mythological, biblical, or historical tableau.⁶

The astonishing amounts of money spent on these textiles made of silk, gold, and silver threads are telling of their worth in the terms of political currency. Charles V took his *Capture of Tunis* weavings to war to impress his enemies with superior magnificence and grandeur. So important to him was the accuracy of the scenes that he had Jan Vermeyen, his court painter and designer of the series, accompany him on to the field of battle.⁷ Twenty-seven thousand Flemish pounds were spent on the luxurious hangings, all this at a time that the coffers of the emperor

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1962), p.90-92.

⁶ Belozerskaya, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance*, p.102.

⁷ Albert Calvert, *The Spanish Royal Tapestries* (London: John Lane, 1921), p.viii.

were exhausted from war.⁸ The justification in such time for this expense can only be attributed to the political gravity Charles felt they would carry.

During that same campaign, Emperor Charles V took with him 96 of his already woven tapestries, including the *Los Honores*, the *Story of Alexander the Great*, the *Deeds of Hercules*, *David and Goliath*, a cycle devoted to *Our Lady*, and the *Passion of Christ*. With sets for every impression the emperor could wish to leave, from his military prowess to his virtues, he traveled with an arsenal of visual propaganda. The *Los Honores* tapestries also made an appearance at his coronation at Aachen where they served as, “An overview of the virtues a monarch must practice...to attain greatness” and acting as “a metaphor of his rule.”⁹

The same must have held true for Charles the Bold when in 1476 he took the *Triumph of Caesar* ensemble and the *Millefleur* tapestry on his campaign of war. The militaristic virtue derived from the *Triumph of Caesar* is evident, but even the *Millefleur* tapestry which appears to be no more than decorative foliage, through the placement of the ducal arms in the center, gives the claim of an earthy paradise brought to being by the rule of the Burgundians.

For those that could not afford this luxury, painting became their method of illustrated propaganda. Today, frescos are the privileged wall décor, this referencing once again the academic triad where painting is held to a higher status. But during the Renaissance, frescos were only seen on walls when tapestries were not superimposed upon them or if the cost of these luxurious textiles proved too much for the patron and this less expensive form of ornamentation was all that could be afforded. In the case of the latter, the frescos were often painted to imitate

⁸ Belozerskaya, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance*, p.97.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.100-102.

the trappings of hanging tapestries. A series of hunting frescos found in the castle of Bartolomeo Colleoni included metal hooks and the fringe of fabric threads.¹⁰

The previously discussed frescos in the Sala dei Pisanello sought to display the power of the Gonzagas. The Sala frescos were used to promote the military reputation and most specifically the magnificent war-horses for which the Gonzaga were famous. Cesar wrote to Francesco Gonzaga upon his departure for France in 1498, asking him to send one of these great horses, as he had found himself, “absolutely destitute of fine coursers suitable to us in such a journey.”¹¹

Parts of the surface of the Sala dei Pisanello are textured, and it has been shown through reconstructions of an unfinished tournament scene that a substantial portion of the commission was to be covered with raised relief and overlaid in gold and silver:

The extent of the gilded relief in the tournament scene should be recognized as an imaginative response to the challenge of providing a work with a precise function within a particular context: that of endowing Lodovico Gonzaga with an appearance of splendor in a setting in which received visitors...The scene’s ostentatious glow would have symbolized Gonzaga power by suggesting the physical splendor of Gonzaga rule – at the moment in Mantuan history when a more expensive medium than fresco for a large scale work was financially out of the question.¹²

The use of gilding in the frescos was intended to mimic the gold and silver threads of tapestries. The raised relief added to this illusion, as tapestries were not static works of art but instead shifting with the movements made by the guests of the atmosphere.

But for all their worth in political persuasion, tapestries were not the only means by which these rulers displayed their majesty and military might. Arms and armor were additional

¹⁰ Cole, Virtue and Magnificence, p.30.

¹¹ Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.82.

¹² Joanna Woods-Marsden, “Pictorial style and ideology: Pisanello’s Arthurian cycle in Mantua,” Arte Lombarda, (1987/1-2-3): 133-134.

instruments used in these exhibitions. The nobility of the feudal system were a military class who through arms and armor dressed the part. These adornments were seen as symbols of superior status, and the attire of warfare became a uniform of noble class identity. Military costume expressed the virtues that all Renaissance statesmen desired to be associated with: strength at arms, nobility of character and chivalric presence. This form of dress offered to impress and intimidate the admirers and enemies of the wearer, presenting important authentication to the image desired by the ruler. Additionally, because of the cost, supremely crafted and richly elaborated armor served to distinguish the gentlemen that wore it above the ranks of others. It was an exclusive art that carried a political resonance of wealth and served as invaluable assets to an individuals' iconographic alliance to the great figures of history.

Allusions to the ancients were frequent in the decoration of these objects, seeking through this iconography to present those who donned them as a new Hercules, Alexander, or Caesar. As with tapestries, the more elaborate, the more magnificence seeped into the image of the ruler. The ever-ostentatious dukes of Burgundy were often seen riding onto the field of battle wearing armor decorated with gold and precious stones.

The example that most truly represents the value and use of arms and armor can be found in the inventories of the great art cabinets. The objects accumulated in these collections were representative of what was held important by the individual, and what was esteemed at the time. In his 16th century *Kunstammer* (art cabinet) amassed at the Ambras castle in Innsbruck, Archduke Ferdinand II accumulated a collection that required the space of four separate but interconnected buildings. One of these buildings housed a variety of his curiosities, assorted arts from nature and man. The other three contained this anthology of arms and armor. Through these halls he divided his collection into rooms by theme and desired impression. The first

offered glory to the chivalric tradition through a display of tournament harnesses worn from the time of Maximilian I to his own. Another displayed the military supremacy of the archduke himself, housing in chronological order seventeen examples of his personal armor. Thirdly, he amassed a room of Turkish armor. The advertisement made through these 120 suits of armor was the Christian and Habsburg dominance of the Ottomans and their belief in Islam.¹³

In the same vain, Charles V created a collection to inventory his personal arms and armor. Through their display he documented his political and military victories, deriving personal pride when viewing them himself and instilling fear and admiration when viewed by others.

The exhibition of these items was common in the portraits of military men. A painting of Philip II in which he wears an exceptional suit, illustrated in explicit detail, is an example of this trend. Through this seemingly simple choice of dress he has eluded to his military career, his social rank, refinement, and wealth. Due to the power of these armaments they became essential elements in a statesman's arsenal of political propaganda.

The western preoccupation with this form of iconographic demonstration did not escape the notice of their eastern counterparts. The Sultan Suleyman I, earning the epithet of "the Magnificent" from his luxurious displays of the regalia of warfare, commissioned from the Venetians a helmet to demonstrate his standing in this game of supremacy through opulence. So impressive was the work that before it was sent to its patron, it was displayed for three days in the Doge's Palace. The design of the helmet that carried a 100,000 ducat price tag was not left to chance. It was intentionally patterned, mimicking the papal tiara, trumping its triple crown with a four tiers.¹⁴ The inference of his superiority over the leader of Christianity is an example of the

¹³ Berlozerskaya, Luxury Arts of the Renaissance, p.135-136. The final room housed a collection of unique and peculiar armor belonging to children, giants and dwarfs.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.144.

use of these adornments as proclamations of authority and greater magnificence. He said of his sumptuous spending that he desired to speak to his European rivals through the contextual language that they most strongly recognized.¹⁵

Triumphs and tournaments are ephemeral examples of these luxurious material displays. The examples of both, staged by the leaders of Europe, are boundless. What makes the pageantry of this period different is the shift in focus from the middle class to the elites as the focal point towards which to direct the impression of magnificence.

As to state ceremonies, of which the triumph is part, the Renaissance revival of the ancient world caused them to search for ancient forms of performance. The development of state entry is a direct descendant of the Roman imperial triumph. During this period the ideological structure of the existing form of entrance changed, distinctively weakening its connection to the middle classes. What had first been a series of *tableaux vivants* staged as a procession for the enjoyment of the masses developed into an exceedingly symbolic instrument in the world of political propaganda:¹⁶

What spread across Europe was the notion of the entry as a triumph in terms of the monarch as hero, reflecting exactly the change in political climate as the nation states of early modern Europe developed their identity by focusing a people's loyalty on the cult of a dynasty. As a result the entry gradually ceased to be an assertion of absolute power with corresponding expression of subservience by the urban bourgeois classes...The result was that any entry into an Italian princely city became an *instrumentum regni* devised and designed under the aegis of the court poets, humanists, and artists.¹⁷

Ceremonies became an expression of the hierarchical structure of society. The procession, through its display of symbolic visual and often physical authority illustrated the power politics.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.115.

¹⁶ Strong, *Art and Power*, p.42-44.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.47-48.

The Medici were quite skilled in this art by 1589 when Christina of Lorraine entered Florence as the bride-to-be of Grand Duke Ferdinand. The street festival held on this occasion gave little concern to the desires or impressions of the commoners; it was no more than an expansion of the announcements intended for the insular world of the ducal court.¹⁸ The perfection of the state ceremony was of such critical importance to Venetian rulers that the *Savaii de Terraferma* was formed. This group of five men, one of which was the political supervisor of official ceremonies, were elected to the collegio of the senate and were charged with ensuring that the ducal ceremonies produced the desired political conclusion.¹⁹

The fundamental elements behind the Renaissance triumphs and state ceremonies were consistent in their desire for one thing: the substantiation of propagation of not the reality, but the idea of rulership. Through the spectacle of these triumphs, Renaissance figures gained the same perceived magnificence as was derived from the use of references to the ancients in material luxury arts.

Tournaments offered a similar vehicle for political persuasion, serving as vital expressions of elevated nobility and class identity. Despite the advent of firearms, the tournament continued to be an important element of the staged propaganda by a court or ruler, over time it became increasingly scripted in order to ensure that the appropriate individual was the recipient of victory.²⁰ In addition to the display of military expertise and individual excellence, tournaments served as a ground for the display of the fashion of arms. Premier examples of arms and armor were required dress. Each separate sport involved a distinct form of each, which made participation quite cost prohibitive. This parade of the regalia of warfare asserted the wealth of

¹⁸ Ibid., p.48.

¹⁹ Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), p.187.

²⁰ Strong, *Art and Power*, p.50.

the taste of the respective owner. Other forms of tournament, different from the stereotypical view of it as a chivalric joust, involved animals, for example, the bullfight. The achievement of skill required the kind of leisure time few members of the common classes had.

The seventeenth century would eventually remove the tournament entirely from the view of the public; the foundations of that change can be seen during the Renaissance. They were removed from the piazzas and open city spaces where they were accessible to the populace, and brought within the architectural complexes and closed world of the courts. This change was part of the development of the view of accessibility as indicative of social status.²¹ The true importance of the impression of princely virtues lay in the observance of it by enemies, peers, and pawns in the political games of the day.

With the establishment of the significant and complex role that these luxury arts and pageants play in the political atmosphere of Renaissance Europe, it should be shown that the Borgias prescribed to this form of dynastic and self-propaganda. To do this it is unnecessary to take more than a surface glance at their history.

Popes and men of the church were not immune from the desire to be viewed as magnificent and virtuous. The decoration of the Sala Regia, the room used for conclaves, public consistories, and the formal reception of foreign sovereigns and dignitaries by the pope, was designed for its impression of the triumph of the church. The pictorial cycle began with scenes of six kings that had defended the Roman Church, personifying the ideal relationship of the great secular states to the great faith. Additional scenes were added later, these showing a number of sovereigns submitting obedience to the pope. Among these was the victory of the Christian army over the Turkish forces at Tunis. The Emperor Charles V, leader of that Christian army, is shown

²¹ Ibid., p.43.

offering the victory and his deference to the Church by kissing the foot of the supreme pontiff. The theme being demonstrated was a common one in papal propaganda during the Renaissance, the illustration of the supremacy of papal authority over temporal rule.²² The need to legitimize Rome as the true seat of the papacy was another particular piece of religious propaganda popular in the Renaissance. The inscriptions found under Vasari's painting *Gregory XI Returns to Rome from Avignon in 1376* speaks to this need, stating that it was divine inspiration that caused Gregory to return the Church to Rome.²³

Alexander VI would prove no exception to this papal desire. For his advancement to the Holy See he spared no expense, nor did he spare the iconographic references to ancient heroes. "Divine Alexander, Alexander the Great," were the cries of the Roman public as Pope Alexander VI made his way to the Lateran basilica for his coronation. The streets were lined with tapestries, draped with garlands, and intersected with triumphal arches. A fountain of wine, shaped as the Borgia Bull, stood outside the church of San Marco. A banner twelve-meters long and bearing the papal standard flew over the Castle Sant'Angelo. "Anthony was not received with as much splendour by Cleopatra as Alexander by the Romans."²⁴

Alexander's want for magnificence and luxury arts was not exclusive to his rule as pope and to the papacy's need for the assertion of power. In a description given in 1484, by Ascanio Sforza upon viewing the palace built in Rome by Pope Alexander VI during the time that he was

²² Randolph Starn, "Triumphalism and the Sala Regia in the Vatican," in "All the world's a stage..." Art and Pageantry in the Renaissance and Baroque, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 1990), vol.6, part 1, p.31.

²³ Ibid., p.31-32.

²⁴ Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.28.

still Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, it was likened to the Golden Palace of Nero. He mentions vast tapestries of hunting scenes, chests of gold, and silver plate.²⁵

As for his children, they all inherited their father's taste for luxury, but for brevity only the manifestations of Cesar's character will be discussed. There is little need to look further than his entrance into Chinon, but as there are other examples and this one has already been recounted, a brief mention of the rest of Cesar's extravagance is in order.

Little remains in Rome, as it was wiped clean of the Borgia presence shortly after the death of Alexander, so the inventory of Cesar's wife Charlotte d'Albret, the majority of which came into her possession through her marriage, again proves useful. "Neither 'rare books' nor 'valuable paintings' indeed find their way into her list of possessions; but not Anne de Bretagne herself could boast more princely parures, more exquisite stores of gold and silver plate..."²⁶ The list of rich fabrics and their various uses throughout the palace is exhaustive, the number of precious jewels that lined her clothing substantial.

Eight-two tapestries were named in her collection. Forty-seven of them were of Felletin manufacture. *Haut Lice* tapestries representing the *Passion* and *Resurrection of Christ*, the *Infant Moses*, *Alexander the Great*, and *Hercules* are also listed. Upon Charlotte's death all of Cesar's rich weavings passed into the possession of her nephew, Henri II of Navarre. Cesar must have held a particular taste for tapestries. During his campaigns in the Romagna, Cesar acquired through the confiscation of the property and possessions of Fererigo da Montefeltro an eleven-piece tapestry set of the *Trojan War*. These he kept for himself while gifting the *Sleeping Cupid*

²⁵ Marion Johnson, *The Borgias* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), p.66.

²⁶ Miron, *The Derelict Duchess*, p. 237.

of Michelangelo, obtained in the same usurpation as the tapestries, quite readily to Isabella d'Este.

To the triumphs that he displayed, the most prevalent manifestation has already been discussed, but the festivities held in honor of Lucrezia Borgia's marriage to Alfonso d'Este during the time bridging 1501 and 1502, are worthy of note. On New Year's Eve triumphs were staged in which the first two floats were the triumphs of Hercules, an allusion to the duke of Ferrara, and the triumphs of Julius Caesar, Cesar's chosen iconographic representation. No reference was made to the bride. As the wedding celebration continued, a comedy staged on the night of January 2 used the same metaphoric ancient figures, illustrating that both Hercules and Caesar overcame Fortune with their Virtue. All present would have understood the ancient men as thinly veiled references to the princes of the Renaissance. Facts regarding the career of the new Borgia Duc were recounted, and with the appearance of Jupiter, Alexander VI was personified.²⁷ Cesar was present for these ceremonies, and perhaps had a hand in their design.

Tournaments were something in which Cesar once again looked to Spain for inspiration. As has been discussed, tournaments, once public spectacles held for the delight of the masses, at this time became a means by which to impress the elite. During August, just before Cesar's departure for France, Cattaneo witnessed an example this change.

In these days Valencia, armed as a janissary, with another fourteen men, gave many blows and proofs of strength in killing eight bulls in the presence of Don Alfonso, Donna Lucretia and "his Princess" (Sancia), in Monsignor Ascanio's park were he had taken them remote from the crowd for greater privacy.²⁸

²⁷ Bonner Mitchell, "Les Intermèdes au Service de L'État," in Les Fêtes de la Renaissance, (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1956), vol.3, p.119-120.

²⁸ Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.80.

But for an event that was traditionally inclusive of other men in standing, and that previously, as described above, Cesar had performed with others, on June 24, 1500 he would showcase no strength and honor but his own. Just months after his entrance into Rome and the conference of his recent dignities Cesar again treated the Roman spectators to a show of his magnificence. He entered the bullfighting arena on horseback, as was the Spanish style, killing six, some say seven, wild bulls. For the last slaying, he dismounted, and with a single stroke the bull was beheaded, 'a thing which seemed great to all Rome.'²⁹ However it appeared this was not a feat for the pleasure of Rome; it was a statement to those in power who witnessed it or would hear of it through the rivers of Italian gossip. "Princes and governments all over Italy now regarded him with mixed feeling of wonderment, expectation, and awe."³⁰ He had dismissed the traditional tournament, stacked in favor of the king, yet still offering some opportunity for others to showcase their skills. This display was for the aggrandizement of Cesar alone.

It is evident that the Borgias were not strangers to the use of luxury arts and the physical manifestations of it. Clearly the sword of Cesar Borgia is part of this display. The answer to the question of why the appropriate dating of this work is important can now be fully appreciated.

If one is to view the object as it was originally intended, as a representation of the self-fabricated image and personal iconography chosen by Cesar Borgia, it offers tremendous insight into his life and motivations. However, for this individual, life was spent in two very distinct phases. If the date commonly given for this sword is correct, and Cesar has in these years, 1493-1498, created a personal iconographic image modeled after Julius Caesar, the question must be asked as to why. It would be a strange and almost mocking choice for an individual who was

²⁹ Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.122. A quote by Paolo Capello, the Venetian envoy.

³⁰ Beuf, Cesare Borgia, p.152.

bound to an ecclesiastical life that offered no outlet for military supremacy. If instead the other faction of Cesar's life is considered as spawning the iconography, a strong correspondence in context develops. As the new leader of the army of Rome, Caesar's army, Cesar Borgia has crossed his Rubicon to this long dreamt of military position, one that is seeped in the politics of power. This is the moment in which he aligns himself through the creation of his personal iconography, to the virtues of the ancient Caesar.

APPENDIX
FIGURES

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 1. The Sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Bulgari, Argentieri
Gemmarie Orafi d'Italia)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 2. Sword of Cesar Borgia, face and verso, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Boccia, Armi Bianche Italiane, 209-214.)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 3. Scabbard to the sword of Cesar Borgia, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Alfano, I Borgia, p.193.)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 4. Photograph of the scene of the Worship of the Bull taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Boccia, Armi Bianche Italiane, 209-214.)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 5. Drawing of the scene of the Worship of the Bull taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.79)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 6. Photograph of the monogram taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Boccia, Armi Bianche Italiane, 209-214)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 7. Drawing of the monogram taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.78)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 8. Photograph of the scenes of The Crossing of the Rubicon and the Worship of Love taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Boccia, *Armi Bianche Italiane*, 209-214)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 9. Drawing of the scene of The Crossing of the Rubicon taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Yriarte, *Autour des Borgia*, p.172)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 10. Drawing of the scene of the Worship of Love taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Yriarte, "Les Graveur d'Epees de Cesar Borgia," p.166)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 11. Photograph of the scene of the Triumph of Caesar taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Boccia, Armi Bianche Italiane, 209-214)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 12. Drawing of the scene of the Triumph of Caesar taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Yriarte, Autour des Borgia, p.176)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 13. Photograph of a decorative band taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Boccia, Armi Bianche Italiane, 209-214)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 14. Drawing of a decorative band taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Bradford, Cesare Borgia, p.79)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 15. Photograph of the scenes of the Worship of Faith and the Pax Romana taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Boccia, Armi Bianche Italiane, 209-214)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 16. Drawing of the scene of the Worship of Faith taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Yriarte, "Les Graveur d'Epees de Cesar Borgia," p.169)

A. Image not shown due to copyright

B. Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 17. A. The figure of Music, Borgia Apartments, Vatican City. (Acidini, Pintoricchio, fig.35) B. The figure of Rhetoric, Borgia Apartments, Vatican City. (Acidini, Pintoricchio, fig.36)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 18. Drawing of the Pax Romana taken from the sword of Cesar Borgia, Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Rome. (Yriarte, "Les Graveur d'Epees de Cesar Borgia," p.169)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 19. The face of the scabbard of Cesar Borgia, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
(Boccia, Armi Bianche Italiane, 215-223)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 20. Detail of the trace lines on the face of the scabbard of Cesar Borgia, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (Boccia, Armi Bianche Italiane, 215-223)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 21. Detail of the Worship of Love and additional decorative elements taken from the scabbard of Cesar Borgia, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (Boccia, Armi Bianche Italiane, 215-223)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 22. Detail of the top of the back of the scabbard of Cesar Borgia, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (Boccia, Armi Bianche Italiane, 215-223)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 23. The Back of the scabbard of Cesar Borgia, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
(Boccia, Armi Bianche Italiane, 215-223)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 24. Detail of the back of the scabbard of Cesar Borgia, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (Alfano, I Borgia, II.9, p193)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 25. Pinturicchio, Disputà, 1492-1494, fresco, Borgia Apartments, Rome. (Saxl, Lectures, vol.2, pl.124.a)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 26. Medal of Alexander VI, Vatican City. (Alfano, I Borgia, I.93, p.163)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 27. Pinturicchio, Detail of the arch from the Disputà, 1492-1494, fresco, Borgia Apartments, Vatican City. (Alfano, I Borgia, p.282)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 28. Pinturicchio, Ceiling of the Sala del Credo, 1492-1494, Borgia Apartments, Vatican City. (Saxl, Lectures, vol.2, pl.117.b)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 29. Pinturicchio, Annunciation, 1479-1510, fresco, Baglione Chapel, Santa Maria Maggiore, Spello. (Roettgen, Italian Frescos: The Flowering of the Renaissance 1470-1510, pl.148)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 30. Pinturicchio, Adoration of the Shepards, 1479-1485, fresco, Baglione Chapel, Santa Maria Maggiore, Spello. (Roettgen, Italian Frescoes: The Flowering of the Renaissance 1470-1510, pl.144)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 31. Pinturicchio, Visitation of St. Bernardino, fresco, Santa Maria in Aracoeli, Rome.
(Palombi, S. Maria in Aracoeli, fig.55)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 32. An early example of the Golden Rose, MS. Barb. Lat. 3030, Biblioteca Apostolica, Vaticano. (Burns, Golden Rose & Blessed Sword, pl.i)

Image not shown due to copyright

Figure 33. An example of the Ducal cap, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. (Burns, Golden Rose & Blessed Sword, pl.xv)

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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