

## Summary

This book seeks answers to a series of questions revolving around two basic topics. The first concerns the papal government under Innocent XI (1676–1689) and the well-known issue of the failed attempt to abolish nepotism, with the specific case of the relationship between the Pope and his nephew Livio Odescalchi (1652–1713). The second centres on Livio's life, ambitions and self-advancement strategies, before and after his uncle's pontificate. The historical reconstruction takes into account both local and international events, allowing Livio's networks to emerge and be examined considering the subtle balances within the Odescalchi family and relations between the Duchy of Milan, the court of Madrid and the Roman Curia in those delicate years in which the peace treaty of Nijmegen (1678) and peace treaty of Utrecht (1713) were signed, and the Battle of Vienna (1683) was fought.

Livio Odescalchi's life can be divided into two distinct phases: that before 1689, the year of his uncle's death, and that after. Contrary to what one might suppose, he was undoubtedly most successful in the second period. In 1674 Benedict (still a cardinal) called to Rome the young Livio, having been appointed as his guardian in the will of the late Carlo Odescalchi (1670), Livio's father, and took total and oppressive control over his life. Once he had been elected pope (in 1676), Benedict decided not to appoint him as a Cardinal-Nephew, going against a centuries-old tradition. The new pope had been advocating projects for the institutional reform of the Church for years, with the abolition of practices that he considered wasteful and counterproductive for the Papacy, above all nepotism. Although attempts to abolish this practice failed because of the tenacious resistance within the College of Cardinals (which managed to oppose it until 1692, when the objective was achieved by Innocent XII), the pope nevertheless left Livio without any institutional assignment, keeping him in the shadows. Although Livio managed to forge ties with many members of the international aristocracy, he saw his image diminished in the eyes of Roman and European society, and he was not spared from fierce sarcasm, causing him insecurities, doubts and frustrations that tormented the years of his youth. During his uncle's pontificate, Livio was therefore constantly undecided as to whether he should remain celibate (in the hope that his uncle might have second thoughts), or stop deluding himself and accept to marry a lady whose blazon was worthy of the social prestige of the pope's nephew. This question – as the papers presented in this book show – remained of primary importance for a long time, not only for Livio but for the entire family branch, whose fortunes depended on the possibility of planning a long-term strategy that would guarantee the greatest benefits to all its members.

When his uncle died, Livio undertook a series of concrete initiatives that would lead him to accumulate titles and honours. He became General of the Holy Church and Prince of the Holy Roman Empire (respectively on 23 and 29 August 1689), purchased in 1692 the collection of the late Queen Christina of Sweden (in 1689), and of the Duchy of Bracciano (in 1694, taking on the title of Duke himself in 1698, following the death of Flavio Orsini), and was designated successor to the Polish throne of Jan III Sobieski (1697), and Duke of Sirmio (1697). Finally, he was awarded the title of Knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece in the year of his death (1713). At the same time, Livio carried on his unscrupulous activity as an art collector and patron, which kept him in contact with many famous painters, architects and sculptors. He also fuelled his new reputation as a lover and patron of song, music and literature (becoming patron of the *Accademia dell'Arcadia Nuova*, of which he was elected general guardian), and as an organiser of fashionable parties and banquets. His inclinations and activities guaranteed him visibility and social prestige, which had been fully restored and was gradually growing, thanks to his direct ties with lay and ecclesiastical figures of high political standing, including Christina of Sweden and Maria Casimira of Poland.

Finally, thanks in part to the family's ability to use wills as tools to further the economic and social growth of the entire family group, the inheritances he received led him to accumulate considerable capital, on a par with or greater than that of sovereign families. Livio managed enormous sums by following (and updating) the careful economic strategy created by his forebears – made up of acquisitions of possessions and investments on the most profitable financial markets – and had a certain ability to diversify the types of investment.

This book – based on Roberto Fiorentini's doctoral thesis (Aprilia 1987–Washington 2019) – examines extensively both phases of Livio's life. The analysis makes use of both the historiography centring on his figure, especially from the point of view of art commissions and collecting, and a considerable quantity of documents (some published for the first time in full in the appendix), from numerous archives kept in Rome, Vatican City and Madrid. Thus a wide variety of sources are interwoven in the analysis: young Livio's diary, correspondence with his relatives (including his sisters Giovanna and Paola) and his private network of influential people. The *Status Animarum* are also examined, reconstructing in detail the composition of both Innocent XI's and Livio's entourage, partly with a view to returning to the question of the subtle boundaries between nepotism as a system of government and the legitimate family interests which, despite the intentions to reform, the pope did not neglect. The book also examines and presents coupons, purchase deeds, plans for the acquisition and reclamation of the Pontine Marshes, investment statements, lists of creditors and debtors, as well as family wills: that of Livio's father, Carlo Odescalchi; that of his un-

cle, Giulio Maria; Benedetto's first and second wills (both drawn up before he became pope); and that of Livio himself, allowing an analysis of the changes in the family's long-term strategy.