



*From Rome to Gandía:
Family Networks in the Early
Modern Mediterranean World*

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Abstract: Pope Alexander VI worked to maintain and grow his connections in Valencia through strategic positioning of family members, including his son Joan Borgia. Joan was married into the elite De Luna family and became Duke of Gandía, but struggled throughout to live up to expectations for a young adult nobleman. By following the correspondence between Joan and his relatives held in the Archive of the Cathedral of Valencia, it is possible to trace the frustrations expressed by all members of this expanding family. Joan acted out in response to the stress of the move and his new responsibilities, and in doing so repeatedly threatened his family's regional goals. The marriage demonstrates the strategies elite families, papal and otherwise, used to expand their reach and grow their shared resources. Joan's experiences in Gandía also provide valuable insight into the expectations of youth in the transitional space between childhood and full maturity.

Keywords: patronage; nepotism; household; family; marriage; youth; networks; papacy; Spanish Italy; clothing

Introduction: Positioning Joan Borgia

In December 1493, the young Joan Borgia (1476–1497) received a sternly worded letter from his older brother.¹ It opened graciously, calling him “Most Illustrious Lord and dearest brother,” before going on to scold him in no uncertain terms for his misbehaviour in the newly acquired Duchy of Gandía on the coast of Valencia.² Reports had reached Italy from Spain that the sixteen-year-old Joan, away from his family for the first time, had been gambling away his money, hunting dogs and cats in the street for sport,

¹ For an overview of the family, see: Óscar Villarroel González, *Los Borgia: Iglesia y poder entre los siglos xvi y xvii* (Madrid: Sílex, 2005). Villarroel González engages with Spanish historiography of the Borgias and, in keeping with it, situates the family as nobility operating across different European territories, rather than as being merely Italian or Spanish. Both he and Marion Hermann-Röttgen, *La familia Borja. Historia de una leyenda* (Valencia: Alfons el Magnanim, 1994) look at Spanish archival material that has often been written off as inaccurate or non-existent. For a discussion of sources, see: José María Gómez Cruselles, “Los Borja en Valencia. Nota sobre historiografía, historicismo y pseudohistoria,” *Revista d’Història Medieval* 11 (2001): 279–305. Much of the personal correspondence in this article has been published in its original language in José Sanchis y Sivera, ed., *Algunos documentos y cartas privadas que pertenecieron al segundo Duque de Gandía don Juan de Borja: (notas para la historia de Alejandro VI)* (Valencia: La Voz Valenciana, 1919). All translations are my own. I use Catalan first names for Joan [Juan, Giovanni] and Jofré [Geoffrey, Goffredo], as this narrative focuses on the family's connections and dynasty-building in Valencia. I use the spellings “Cesar” [Cesare] and “Lucretia” [Lucrezia], as that is how they signed themselves. Joan and Jofré are consistently referred to by familial and political titles rather than by given names.

² Sanchis y Sivera, “Letter from Cesar Chastising Joan about the Consummation,” 48.

and not consummating his marriage.³ This was more than enough to cause his relatives anxiety. His older brother, Cesar (1475–1507), implored Joan to think of the distress he was causing both him—a cardinal—as well as their father—Pope Alexander VI (r. 1492–1503)—and to rectify his behaviour. Most importantly, Joan needed to consummate his marriage to the daughter of a nobleman at the Aragonese court of King Ferdinand II the Catholic (r. 1479–1516). Joan’s marriage, and the noble title that accompanied it in its legal contract, would strengthen the Borgia family’s ties to the Spanish monarchs. If Joan had any compassion for his brother, the letter went on, or for their father, he would fix this situation.⁴

This letter, and the others like it in the Archivo General de la Catedral de Valencia, raises several questions about the nature of familial networks and the role of adolescents and young adults in the early modern Mediterranean world.⁵ Early modern political structures were directly shaped by the seemingly petty politics of the nobility, who of course made up their ranks. It was not just that noble families owed allegiance to their immediate superiors, creating a chain of command up to individual monarchs, but also that their personal politics continued to stress old goals of creating networks of reciprocity based on interpersonal relationships and family ties. This is reflective of Max Weber’s notion of traditional authority, in which “personal loyalty, not the official’s impersonal duty, determine the relations of the administrative staff to the master.”⁶ As an example of early modern noble networking, the Borgias demonstrate how power flowed multi-directionally through interpersonal connections and how the family itself was an actively constructed and maintained system. As Bianca Premo has argued, the early

³ Sanchis y Sivera, “Letter from Alexander VI Chastising Joan about the Consummation,” 43–46; Sanchis y Sivera, “Letter from Cesar Chastising Joan about the Consummation,” 48–51.

⁴ Sanchis y Sivera, “Letter from Cesar Chastising Joan about the Consummation,” 49–50.

⁵ Historians have written on family networks within the Spanish Empire, but generally with a focus on immigration by families across the Atlantic. See: Jane E. Mangan, *Transatlantic Obligations: Creating the Bonds of Family in Conquest-Era Peru and Spain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Ondina E. González and Bianca Premo, eds., *Raising an Empire: Children in Early Modern Iberia and Colonia Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007). See: María de la Concepción Quintanilla Raso, “Estructuras sociales y familiares y papel político de la nobleza cordobesa (siglos XIV y XV),” *En la España Medieval* 3 (1982): 331–352, for an example among the noble classes of Córdoba; and Francis William Kent, *Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence: The Family Life of the Capponi, Ginori, and Rucellai* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), for a non-Spanish example. A discussion of networks may also intersect with studies of various communities to examine how people relate to one another and what social rules they follow within a hierarchical framework, or on community as fluid and not restricted to a physical space, with an emphasis on how networks between individuals maintain connections across distance. See, for example: Margaret Pelling, “Defensive Tactics: Networking by Female Medical Practitioners in Early Modern London,” in *Communities in Early Modern England*, ed. Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 38–39, 49–50. Finally, studies have explored how mercantile networks and businesses also depended on familial ties. See: Douglas Catterall and Jodi Campbell, eds., *Women in Port: Gendering Communities, Economies, and Social Networks in Atlantic Port Cities, 1500–1800* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2012); Kent, *Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence*; Ruth Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure: The Genoese in Seville and the Opening of the New World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *Merchant Networks in the Early Modern World, 1450–1800* (Brookfield, WI: Variorum, 1996); and Marta Vicente, *Clothing the Spanish Empire: Families and the Calico Trade in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). This article draws from all of these ideas to look at the expansion of a political family through the circulation of its members and resources into an area that had long been associated with the family in general but with which not all members were familiar.

⁶ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 227.

modern family was an active community that enabled its members to draw upon one another's resources in order to accomplish goals, such as political placement and fortuitous marriage, which would otherwise be out of reach.⁷ The ultimate goal of the early modern nobility was the creation of a familial dynasty, one that was very capable of spanning other territories.

Joan's father, Alexander VI, had spent large sums of financial and social capital to open doors for him in Valencia.⁸ He and other relatives were understandably frustrated when Joan jeopardized his new position and any future gains that might be shared among the family.⁹ More than a narrative of a wealthy son behaving badly, the correspondence between Joan and his relatives sheds light on how family dynamics influenced individuals and how early modern familial networks operated.¹⁰ Minor members of these families were seen as investments and were helped by their more established relatives to obtain lucrative positions, with the understanding that this would in the future be beneficial for the group as well as for the individual. Family members were bound together by shared resources and debt, and this shaped the roles and responsibilities given to young adults. The tension expressed over Joan's experience in Gandía draws attention to a contemporary awareness of the family as a network and underscores expectations that might otherwise be left unsaid. Joan was given an opportunity to increase his standing and resources; he needed to use both to the benefit of his relatives.

Joan's family and his position within it shaped his life in very clear ways. Like his siblings, he was born illegitimate, as his father was as unable to legally marry any of the mothers of his children. This was far from uncommon, however, since many men, lay and ecclesiastic alike, had mistresses and illegitimate offspring, as this provided a public demonstration of masculine virility and honour.¹¹ Marriage, and its accompanying domination of a man over wife and children, "was key to the full assumption of manhood," as it was an indicator of the necessary social and economic stability necessary to support a household.¹²

⁷ Bianca Premo, "Familiar: Thinking beyond Lineage and across Race in Spanish Atlantic Family History," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (April 2013): 297.

⁸ Similarly, see the assistance Alexander VI and his cousin had received in their youth thanks to their uncle Alfonso de Borja's status and connections even before he became pope Callixtus III (r. 1455–1458). For example: "Roderic de Borge, nephew of Cardinal Alfonso de Borgia, authorized to accept high offices and dignities," in *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives, and His Time*, ed. Peter De Roo (New York: The Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1924), 1:535–536; "Luis Juan del Milá and Roderick de Borge, nephews of Cardinal Alfonso de Borgia, favored by Nicholas V," in *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI*, 1:536; and "Nicholas V. grants a canonry and prebend of the cathedral of Urgel and the weightage of Desmurro in the Urgel diocese to Roderic de Borgia, nephew of Cardinal Alphonso de Borgia," in *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI*, 1:543–544.

⁹ See: Wolfgang Reinhard, "Papal Power and Family Strategy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Princes, Patronage, and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age, c. 1450–1650*, ed. Adolf M. Birke and Ronald G. Asch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 331–332.

¹⁰ Christopher H. Johnson and David Warren Sabean assert that family has been a driving influence in practically every aspect of life up to the modern era. Christopher H. Johnson and David Warren Sabean, "From Siblingship to Siblinghood: Kinship and the Shaping of European Society (1300–1900)," in *Sibling Relations and the Transformations of European Kinship, 1300–1900*, ed. Christopher H. Johnson and David Warren Sabean (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 1–2.

¹¹ Edward J. Behrend-Martínez, *Unfit for Marriage: Impotent Spouses on Trial in the Basque Region of Spain, 1650–1750* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2007), xii.

¹² Laurie Nussdorfer, "Men at Home in Baroque Rome," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 17, no. 1 (Spring

Churchmen, therefore, walked an uneasy balance between the rules of their profession and social ideals of masculinity, with the result that many did father children and work to establish them in beneficial positions.¹³ Joan and his siblings were legally naturalized, as were illegitimate children from other families with the necessary social and economic capital who needed the legal status in order to ease inheritance or to be eligible for various positions.¹⁴

Beyond issues of legitimacy and the family's ability or desire to resolve them, not all relatives were created equal. Instead, family dynamics continued to shape children's lives, as "relationships among siblings were strongly influenced by the position assigned to each child from the perspective of the family patrimony."¹⁵ In wealthy Catholic families it was common for the eldest son to have a political career in which he would inherit property or obtain new land and produce heirs to continue the family name. The second son, meanwhile, often found work with the Church and the other sons were positioned as needed.¹⁶ For the Borgias, this meant that Joan's brother Cesar went into the Church, while the significantly older Pedro Luis (c.1458–1488), one of Alexander VI's children from an earlier relationship, fought as a celebrated general in the Spanish war against the Arab Kingdom of Granada. When Pedro Luis died suddenly in 1488, Joan, as the oldest male child not primed for an ecclesiastical career, was expected to take his place.

2014): 113. See also: Grace E. Coolidge, "Contested Masculinity: Noblemen and their Mistresses in Early Modern Spain," in *Contested Spaces of Nobility in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Matthew Romaniello and Charles Lipp (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 61–83.

¹³ For example, Alexander VI's long-time rival, Julius II (r. 1503–1513), also had an illegitimate daughter and was involved in her education and marriage. See: Caroline Murphy, *The Pope's Daughter: The Extraordinary Life of Felice della Rovere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ See: "Pedro Luis Legitimated," *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI, His Relatives, and His Time*, ed. Peter De Roo (New York: The Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1924), 5:466–467; De Roo, "Cesar Legitimated," in *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI*, 5:498–499; "Joan Legitimated," *armar. IX*, caps. 11a, no. 287, Archivio Castri S. Angeli, Rome, in *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI*, 5:502–504; "Jofré Legitimated," in *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI*, 5:517–519. De Roo contests the veracity of these documents, in line with his heavily apologetic analysis of Alexander VI's papacy. This practice of legitimation in a different context is discussed in: Ann Twinam, "The Negotiation of Honor: Elites, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century Spanish America," in *Faces of Honor: Sex, Shame, and Violence in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Lyman Johnson and Sony Lipsett-Rivera (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 68–102.

¹⁵ Bernard Derouet, "Dowry: Sharing Inheritance or Exclusion? Timing, Destination, and Contents of Transmission in Late Medieval and Early Modern France," in *Sibling Relations and the Transformations of European Kinship, 1300–1900*, ed. Christopher H. Johnson and David Warren Sabean (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 31.

¹⁶ Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, "Up and Out: Children in Portugal and the Empire (1500–1800)," in *Raising an Empire: Children in Early Modern Iberia and Colonial Latin America*, ed. Ondina E. González and Bianca Premo (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 28; Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 24–25. See also the chart "Order of Birth and Family Roles (1200–1500) of Fifteen German Dynasties (Counts and Barons)" produced by Karl-Heinz Spieß in "Maintenance Regulations and Sibling Relations in the High Nobility of Late Medieval Germany," in *Sibling Relations and the Transformations of European Kinship, 1300–1900*, ed. Christopher H. Johnson and David Warren Sabean (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 49. Spieß tallies the career paths of sons with at least one other adult brother, recording a rise from 13.6% first born sons becoming clerics (79.1% marrying) to 40.3% second born (48.7% marrying), to an impressive 75.0% of sixth born sons (12.5% marrying). All six of the seventh born sons in his study became clerics. He notes that this is in spite of primogeniture not yet achieving widespread acceptance in Germany. Spieß, "Maintenance Regulations," 48.

As Joan was only twelve when Pedro Luis died, he was unable to fully pick up where he had left off. Instead, he inherited his engagement to María Enríquez de Luna (1474–1539), a young cousin of both Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile (r. 1474–1504), with the understanding that both families would wait for the couple to first grow out of childhood. This engagement, when finalized, would allow Joan to take possession of the newly created duchy of Gandía, which had been set aside for the Borgias as a reward for Pedro Luis' military service. In addition to the title and property, the duchy represented significant wealth, as it brought with it taxes from the town and surrounding countryside. The new duchy and prominent marriage would provide Joan with a respectable and lucrative lay career, one that he had access to because of his relatives, not because of any action on his own part. For his part, Joan was a desirable spouse because of his connections to Alexander VI and the power that the family as a whole could leverage, not because of any action that he personally had carried out.¹⁷ By raising his family members to positions of power, positions they could then use to the benefit of other relatives and their own progeny, Alexander VI was seeking to establish the Borgia as a dynasty on par with the other most powerful houses of his day.

Alexander VI was not the only early modern pope to have children or to acknowledge and place them in politically beneficial positions. In fact, this was culturally acceptable and even expected. It was not just that early modern popes were particularly prone to elevating members of their own families, but rather that they like other members of the nobility, much less the royalty, could not rule without it.¹⁸ Furthermore, as Mary Lindemann has written, “few early modern people regarded the use of public office to foster family or lineage goals as inherently and inevitably corrupt or, for that matter, wrong.”¹⁹ People did complain about specific actions Alexander VI took when they seemed to take away opportunities to which others had felt entitled or when whichever family member he was promoting was clearly inept.²⁰ It was widely understood, however, that noble families sought to benefit their own.

The Borgias were also not the only family to spread their network across considerable distance.²¹ The family itself in early modern Europe did not contain just parents and children, but instead a larger combination of relatives making up “a social and psychological, and often

¹⁷ For more on this placing of children as part of broader familial strategies, see Joan-Lluís Palos, “Bargaining Chips: Strategic Marriages and Cultural Circulation in Early Modern Europe,” in *Early Modern Dynastic Marriages and Cultural Transfer*, ed. Joan Lluís Palos and Magdalena S. Sánchez (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 1–18.

¹⁸ Miles Pattenden, *Electing the Pope in Early Modern Italy, 1450–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 196; Sandro Carocci, “Italian Church and Social Mobility (1200–1500),” in *Social Mobility in Medieval Italy (1100–1500)*, ed. Sandro Carocci and Isabella Lazzarini (Rome: Viella, 2018), 124.

¹⁹ Mary Lindemann, “Dirty Politics or ‘Harmonic’? Defining Corruption in Early Modern Amsterdam and Hamburg,” *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 3 (Spring 2012): 584.

²⁰ See the complaint recounted that “ten Papacies would not be sufficient to satisfy this swarm of relatives” in Michael Mallett, *The Borgias: The Rise and Fall of the most Infamous Family in History* (New York: Granada, 1981), 130. G.J. Meyer has stressed, however, that in spite of complaints to the contrary, initial bestowing of favour was carried out slowly. G.J. Meyer, *The Borgias: The Hidden History* (New York: Bantam Books, 2013), 180. See also the 1497 Easter Sunday celebrations in which Alexander VI honoured Joan's military career to the anger of his hired professional general, recounted in Johann Burchard, *Diarium sive rerum urbanarum commentarii, (1483-1506), texte latin publié intégralement pour la première fois, d'après les manuscrits de Paris, de Rome et de Florence* ed. Ernest Leroux (Paris, 1884), 2:363.

²¹ Dos Guimarães Sá, “Up and Out,” 24–25.

also an economic, unit.”²² This household was a hierarchical unit, typically headed by a socially senior male member and able to encompass non-relatives such as servants or employees.²³ Young adults like Joan passed through a liminal phase in this system as they moved from the dependency and lack of autonomy of childhood to take up greater responsibility. Although the focus has often been on their sisters’ marriages, young men also entered into political unions that were designed to join families together, and this process could be fraught. Like their sisters, minor male members of noble families were affected by how things outside of their control, such as legitimacy and birth order, positioned them in an internal hierarchy and shaped the opportunities open and resources available to them.²⁴

Surviving correspondence between Joan and his family members in Italy paints a vivid picture of him as an unruly teenager experiencing growing pains as relatives urged him to cross the threshold into adulthood. It is clear from the instructions given to him that he was expected to learn his role as a contributing member of a complex network in which the political and the familial were inextricably interwoven. Instead of a strict separation of gendered and hierarchical public and private roles, “interaction within the family was far more dynamic than the term patriarchy supposes,” which correlated with a complex relationship between family and wider politics.²⁵ This correspondence casts light on the internal hierarchy and dynamics of this particular family, but it also serves as an example of how elite early modern familial networks functioned in general. Although not monarchs ruling over hereditary kingdoms, the Borgias were working much like an Italian royal family.

Early modern Europe was full of patronage relationships, in which people received benefits in exchange for services rendered. The result, especially noticeable among members of the nobility who had more resources at their disposal and who have left a more visible historical record, was a network of shared social credits and debts.²⁶ Political agreements were not entered into between abstract states or between isolated individuals, but between families, and resources more intangible than coinage were pooled.²⁷

Joan’s adult relatives, especially Alexander VI, had already expended economic and personal capital to legitimate him and raise him as a young lay lord, and they would spend more to set him up in Gandía. They would do so with the intent that he would become another node in the family’s network, still subordinate but expected to function semi-independently to accrue resources, which would then be put to use for the good of the network as a whole. When Joan then failed to act as a mature and contributing adult member of this network, he was reprimanded and punished, ultimately, with rescinded access to the family’s resources. More than just about honour, politics, or money, Joan’s misadventure in Gandía would demonstrate the interconnected nature of all three, and the problems that could arise when family members threatened to default on credit extended on their behalf.

²² Nussdorfer, “Men at Home,” 105.

²³ Nussdorfer, “Men at Home,” 105.

²⁴ J.H. Elliott, *Spain, Europe, and the Wider World, 1500–1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 174.

²⁵ Vicente, *Clothing the Spanish Empire*, 25.

²⁶ For more on the idea of social credit, see: Clare Haru Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex: Economies of Regard in Old Regime France* (Durham, MI: Duke University Press, 2013). See also: Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

²⁷ Luis R. Corteguera, “Loyalty and Revolt in the Spanish Monarchy,” in *Early Modern Europe: From Crisis to Stability*, ed. Philip Benedict and Myron P. Gutmann (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 81.

Rome to Gandía: Establishing an Adult Role

On 31 July 1493, Joan set off from Rome to the Kingdom of Valencia.²⁸ There he would take possession of the Duchy of Gandía after finalizing his marriage to María Enríquez de Luna. Joan appears to never have previously traveled much outside of Rome, and had lived alternately in his mother's and his aunt's households with his two younger siblings.²⁹ This shift from living with female relatives to forming his own household was normal for a male youth of Joan's age and noble status.³⁰ Joan was a typical young lord, the son chosen to perpetuate his family line and create a dynasty, and he was gifted an elite household through the actions of his older male relatives instead of through his own merit, not an unusual situation but also one that highlighted his reliance upon his family even as he distanced himself geographically from his most immediate relatives.

The marriage and duchy were intended to do more than set Joan up in his adult life. They symbolized a connection between the Borgia and de Luna families and, therefore, between the Vatican and Spanish royal court.³¹ The marriage could have fallen through after Pedro Luis's death and would not be official until after the bride's family in Valencia agreed everything was legitimate. Joan, unlike Pedro Luis, had never operated independently of his father and did not have his own ties to either Castile or Aragon. He had not accrued honour through victory on the battlefield and he had never served at a royal court. Joan's first real foray into adult life was one that had been orchestrated by others and that stood to affect more than him alone. Furthermore, Joan was tasked with negotiating additions to the martial contract in order to acquire more land from the de Luna family. All of these expectations and obligations hung over Joan's trip to Gandía.

In this move, Joan was reinforcing the Borgia network's connections across the Mediterranean. The duchy of Gandía was part of the kingdom of Aragon, where the Borgia family was already established. Alexander VI himself had moved in his youth to Rome from Valencia, and Gandía was close to the town of Xátiva, where he was born. Moving to Gandía, therefore, did not lift Joan out of his familial network. As Tamar Herzog has written, territories and positions typically could only be given to someone from that same region because of the belief that it was inappropriate to claim membership in two different communities at the same time, reflective of the personal connections through which influence moved.³² Therefore, it

²⁸ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI Given to Joan at his Departure from Rome," 22–25.

²⁹ The aunt in question was Adriana de Milà, the widow of Alexander VI's cousin.

³⁰ Dos Guimarães Sá, "Up and Out," 24–25. Joan's situation is comparable to the account of the seventeen-year-old Francesco Gonzaga when he was made cardinal in 1461 and also struggled to set up and manage his own household. D.S. Chambers, "The Housing Problems of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39 (1976): 21–58.

³¹ There are numerous examples of members of the Borgia family circulating between the Vatican and the Spanish royal court. As a cardinal, Callixtus III acted as papal envoy to Spain, as did the lesser-known Galcerand Borgia, the son of one of Alexander VI's cousins. González, *Los Borgia*, 26–31; De Roo, "Safe-Conduct of Galcerand de Borgia, papal envoy to Spain," 1:557–558.

³² Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 28–29.

was the family's long connection to Valencia that led Joan to Gandía as opposed to somewhere else.

Joan was given one letter by his father when he left Rome, and another was sent after him as he waited to depart.³³ Both were written in a mixture of Catalan and Latin, reflective of the family's shared history of being Valencian nobility that had produced two popes and numerous other ecclesiastics.³⁴ The first letter offered him information on how to conduct himself while "in that little absence that you will have from us until your return" as he established himself in his new role.³⁵ Joan was instructed to keep his father well-informed of what was going on by writing to him regularly, underscoring that the move and his new household did not mean that he was operating on his own.³⁶ Rather, he was still part of the Borgia family network, as his relatives were responsible for placing him in Gandía and held vested interest in his success.

Joan received specific written instructions from his father that were focused on the maintenance and growth of economic and political capital. There were eleven distinct commands in the first letter alone, several of which can be broken down into smaller discrete orders, including to conduct himself respectably and attend mass, to safeguard his economic welfare and social status by avoiding gambling, and not to enter into contracts without approval ("*sub pena excommunicationis*").³⁷ The broad strokes of these instructions were typical of advice given to members of the nobility at the time by those concerned with their education. Most famously, Erasmus in his *Education of a Christian Prince* (1516) stressed "the need for the ruler to preserve a stainless character, to avoid flattery and arrogant behavior, and to be continually aware of his role as a divine agent."³⁸ Joan was given instructions that showed a concern with the development of his moral character and, closely intertwined, with how people would view him.

³³ Sanchis y Sivera, "Instructions from Alexander VI to Joan Delivered by Gines Fira," 22, 25.

³⁴ Members of the Borgia family used Catalan when speaking with one another and contemporaries associated their use of the language with their familial origins in Valencia, often in unflattering ways. Villarroel González, *Los Borgias*, 16; Michael Mallett, *The Borgias* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishing, 1987), 86.

³⁵ "*en aquesta poca de absència que faràs de nos, fins a la tornada tua.*" Sanchis y Sivera, "Instructions from Alexander VI to Joan Delivered by Gines Fira," 25. Alexander VI uses the royal we. Alexander VI was not the only early modern patriarch to blend family and politics. A similar example is discussed in Rachael Ball and Geoffrey Parker, *Como Ser Rey. Instrucciones del Emperador Carlos V a Su Hijo Felipe. Mayo de 1543. Edición Crítica* (New York: The Hispanic Society of America, 2004). Charles V gave his son, who like Joan was still sixteen, written instructions on how to rule and set him up in several ruling roles. Like Alexander VI, Charles V also restricted his son's power, presumably in recognition of his inexperience. Also like Alexander VI, Charles V drew explicitly upon familial connections, not only giving his son commands as ruler but also as father. Charles V was even "preoccupied with [his son]'s sexual life" and was concerned about the validity of his marriage and the consummation, something that would be determined by his son's firsthand report that the bride had in fact been a virgin (Ball and Parker, *Como Ser Rey*, 16–17, 18). Both Alexander VI and Charles V used their sons as political operatives, drawing upon their own personal resources to grant them power and expecting them to obey and work for them in return.

³⁶ "*Manante, per nostra consolació e a fi que sovint siam avisats de tos progressos, nos scrives al manco dues voltes cascun mes, de ta ma propia.*" Sanchis y Sivera, "Instructions from Alexander VI to Joan Delivered by Gines Fira," 25.

³⁷ Sanchis y Sivera, "Instructions from Alexander VI to Joan Delivered by Gines Fira," 23–25; Sanchis y Sivera, "Instructions from Alexander VI to Joan Delivered by Gines Fira," 25.

³⁸ Paula Sutter Fichtner, "Of Christian Virtue and a Practicing Prince: Emperor Ferdinand I and His Son Maximilian," *The Catholic Historical Review* 61, no. 3 (July 1975), 409.

Alexander VI's stress on not entering into contracts, furthermore, underscored that Joan did not have the authority to act as the true head of his family and make binding decisions independently. Doing so would force Joan's social superiors, perhaps even Alexander VI himself, to effectively take orders from him, and the threatened punishment for subverting the familial hierarchy was removal and social isolation. As people in early modern Europe understood, "the household was a place where hierarchies were communicated and male status inscribed."³⁹ While establishing a new household, Joan was also clearly still subordinate to other members of his family, most visibly his father. At the same time that Joan was assisted in moving into an adult role, his obligations to his social superiors and the family as a whole were stressed.

In the second letter, Joan received instructions for what he should wear for his first two days in Barcelona, with his father imploring him to continue in like fashion going forward.⁴⁰ Alexander VI wrote,

When you enter Barcelona you will wear the crimson silk tunic, and richly brocaded robe, lined with crimson damask, and the ruby necklace, and the cap in crimson chamois, with the emerald jewels. On the second day you will wear the necklace of diamonds and rubies and emeralds and pearls, with the new pendant with a ruby, a diamond, an emerald, and three pearls. The other days, the other necklaces, and chains, etc.⁴¹

After having laid out how Joan should dress when making his grand entrance, Alexander VI reminded him of the other items he was taking with him with additional briefer suggestions, including wearing "the crimson chamois cloak lined with brocade, with some pretty necklace, etc."⁴²

Dress and presentation were used by members of the nobility to "emphasize ... special status" and "display their family's health and power."⁴³ This concern is clearly evident in Alexander VI's focused attention on Joan's appearance as he first stepped over the threshold and into his new life in Spain. The cloak, robe, and lavish detailing on both all indicated that this was an adult's wardrobe. Normally looser over-garments were only worn by "men," as opposed to "youth," because this additional layer of clothing obscured the physical body and made movement more cumbersome.⁴⁴ Joan's arrival into Barcelona, however, marked his entrance into more sombre adult married life. He did not need to cut a dashing, sexual figure, or to run wild with his friends. The robe Alexander VI instructed him to wear indicated instead that he was a mature member of his family, and provided a larger canvas to "point to the

³⁹ Nussdorfer, "Men at Home," 110.

⁴⁰ Sanchis y Sivera, "Detailed Instructions Sent to Joan by Alexander VI," 30.

⁴¹ "En la entrada que farás en Barcelona iras vestit ab lo gipó de ceti carmesi, e roba de brocat rizo, forrada de domás carmesi, e lo collar de balaxos, e la barreta de vellut carmesi al cap, ab lo joyell del smaradge. Lo segon dia portaras lo collar de diamants e de rubins e de smaragdes e de perles, ab lo pendent fet de nou de un robi, un diamant, esmeragde, e tres perles. Los altres dies los altres collares, e cadenes, etc." Sanchis y Sivera, "Detailed Instructions Sent to Joan by Alexander VI," 30.

⁴² "lo capuz de vellut carmesi forrat de brocat, ab qualque bell collar, etc." Sanchis y Sivera, "Detailed Instructions Sent to Joan by Alexander VI," 30.

⁴³ Ludovica Sebreondi, "Clothes and Teenagers: What Young Men Wore in Fifteenth-Century Florence," in *The Premodern Teenager: Youth in Society 1150–1650*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 27.

⁴⁴ Sebreondi, "Clothes and Teenagers," 27.

economic wealth and social position of the wearer.”⁴⁵ This emphasis on cutting a good figure dovetailed with Alexander VI’s desire that Joan act in an adult role, with the responsibilities of establishing a household and reciprocating the support given to him that this entailed.

In spite of these markers of adult life, however, Joan’s father also instructed him on his first meeting with the Spanish monarchs and nobility to wear a “cap in crimson vellum,” identified by Ludovica Sebregondi as “the most common headgear among boys and youths in fifteenth-century Italy.”⁴⁶ This tension, or concession, reflects the reality of Joan’s young age and the uneasy position he occupied as he transitioned into an adult role. The choice of material for the hat itself was also a socially contested one, as it was quite expensive and considered a potential marker of immorality and excess, conditions that needed to be carefully controlled in youths. By 1504 Florence had passed sumptuary laws to prevent men under the age of eighteen from wearing it unless it was as a hat.⁴⁷ While Joan’s arrival in Spain itself indicated and confirmed his new adult status, he was also very clearly still a youth. This was shown both by his father’s heavy hand and frequent instructions about how to behave himself as well as by the hat he was to wear when he stepped off the boat. Alexander VI in his letters tried to strike a balance with how Joan was to present himself. With robe and hat, Joan was to embody the wealth and resources of his family, while also harmoniously joining together his youth to his adult matrimonial responsibilities.

Immediately following the discussion of his wardrobe, Joan was instructed to wear gloves on the sea voyage and to “take very good care of your hands, because people pay attention to them in our land.”⁴⁸ The letter likely used the inclusive pronoun “our” because Alexander VI, as pope, used the royal we in his writing. At the same time, however, the letters often specified actions or thoughts as being exclusive to Alexander VI by hedging them with “His Holiness.” This particular sentence was left open-ended, implicitly encouraging Joan on the eve of his journey to see Valencia, where Alexander VI was from and where many of their relatives still lived, as “his land” as well. Furthermore, it emphasized that Joan was part of a larger community and that his presentation would reflect back on other members of his family, who therefore wanted to make sure that he made a good first impression.

In addition to the other advice Joan received from his father, he was also instructed immediately upon arrival to visit his aunt, the noblewoman Beatriu de Arenós (1430–1504). Alexander VI emphasized their familial connection and Joan’s subordinate position in relation to her by specifying that Joan should display a “filial reverence” and by calling her “our sister,” “[your] aunt, the only sister of His Holiness,” and so on.⁴⁹ Beatriu, Alexander VI explained in his letter, would instruct Joan on how to interact with his bride-to-be, and she would be paid yearly for the “service and support” she would offer from Joan’s arrival in Valencia.⁵⁰ This drew upon Beatriu’s experience and connections as a noblewoman in the region. Presumably she would know how to advise Joan as he entered into adult life, as she herself was an

⁴⁵ Sebregondi, “Clothes and Teenagers,” 28.

⁴⁶ Sebregondi, “Clothes and Teenagers,” 30.

⁴⁷ Sebregondi, “Clothes and Teenagers,” 36.

⁴⁸ “*hages gran cura de les mans, per que en nostra terra si mira molt.*” Sanchis y Sivera, “Detailed Instructions Sent to Joan by Alexander VI,” 30.

⁴⁹ “*filial reverencia,*” “*nostra Sor,*” “*tia sua, unica germana de la Sdat sua.*” Sanchis y Sivera, “Detailed Instructions Sent to Joan by Alexander VI,” 26.

⁵⁰ “*subvencio e soccoriment.*” Sanchis y Sivera, “Detailed Instructions Sent to Joan by Alexander VI,” 26.

experienced member of his broader social network and in a comparable role to the one that he was moving into. Alexander VI trusted Beatriu and stressed that once Joan was in Gandía he was to respond to her letters promptly, ideally the same night that they arrived.⁵¹ Joan was not being sent away from his family through marriage, but rather was taking on a more prominent role within a pre-existing web of relations. As he stepped into adulthood he had older relatives to guide and support him. These adults were all invested in his success, as it would bolster the family as a whole.

In 1494 Joan had left Rome in order to finalize a marriage and take up a noble title, both of which were markers of adult lay nobility. This voyage had not marked a clean break with his natal family or with his childhood, however, as he had remained within the family's hierarchy and continued to be reliant upon the assistance of his more established relatives, male and female alike. Joan's father, Alexander VI, had instructed him to display his family's wealth and prestige and had urged him to be prudent with the economic resources that he had given him to fund his new life in Gandía.⁵² He had also arranged for him to meet and be aided by other members of their family in Valencia. Rather than step out on his own, Joan had been helped on his way by relatives and the significant social and economic resources they could bring to bear. The family as a whole could accomplish more than the individual, and Joan had been expected to make their investment worthwhile.

Trouble in Gandía: A Network Scored

Perhaps unsurprisingly because of his youth, Joan proved less than a perfect representative. By that fall, Alexander VI had heard from informants in Barcelona that Joan was disregarding his instructions. He was rapidly losing the capital he had been given, even in spite of Alexander VI having sent two hired advisors with him to oversee his finances.⁵³ He was also spending his time in less-than-gentlemanly pursuits, and as a result the de Luna family was furious with him. They refused to acknowledge the marriage as legitimate, claiming that Joan had not completed the necessary step of consummation, but instead had been amusing himself with other women, an affront to their family's honour.⁵⁴

Joan's behavior and the accusations surrounding him were not damaging to him alone, and other noble families would have recognized the Borgias' difficulties.⁵⁵ The situation

⁵¹ "Recort que lo Sor Duch scrivera esta nit e responga a les letres de nostre Sor." Sanchis y Sivera, "Detailed Instructions Sent to Joan by Alexander VI," 38. Although included in the same letter to Joan, this command is directed at one of the men Alexander VI sent with him to oversee his affairs and report back to him.

⁵² This is very similar to the advice that Lorenzo de' Medici gave his son, the future Pope Leo X (r. 1513–1521), and that was included by Paolo Cortese in *De Cardinalatu* (1510). D.S. Chambers, "The Economic Predicament of Renaissance Cardinals," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 3 (1966): 293.

⁵³ Alexander VI instructs Joan to listen to these two men, Mossens Fira and Pertusa, in Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI Given to Joan at his Departure from Rome," 24. Cardinal Gonzaga also received financial oversight through his tutors, Bartolomeo Marasca and Giacomo d'Arezzo, newly appointed as his master of the household and auditor respectively. Marasca in particular frequently reported back to the cardinal's parents, the marquis and marquise of Mantova, on the state of his finances. Chambers, "Francisco Gonzaga," 22.

⁵⁴ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI Chastising Joan about the Consummation," 44.

⁵⁵ For example, Joan's situation is evocative of that of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II, who also struggled to conduct himself appropriately and caused similar concern about potentially undermining his own family's politics. Fichtner, "Of Christian Virtue," 410–411.

threatened to undo the work that Joan's relatives had done to place him in Gandía, losing the opportunity to make good on their investment. The possibility of future economic and political capital was slipping away since regardless of whether or not Joan actually had consummated the marriage, he had angered his in-laws enough that they were claiming that he had not. The accusation that the couple had not consummated enabled the de Lunas to claim the marriage as null and void and leave María open for new suitors. By not behaving himself, Joan threatened the alliance between the two families and all of the social and economic benefits that the Borgias as a whole had sought to gain by establishing him in the duchy.

As seen, the response from Italy was biting. Cesar wrote to Joan on 30 November 1493, using his rank as a cardinal for authority as well as reminding him of his loyalty not only to their father but to the family as a whole. Out of respect to Alexander VI's position, both brothers consistently referred to him as "His Holiness," just as Cesar also used the formal you to talk to his younger brother the duke.⁵⁶ Unlike in most of Cesar's other letters, and especially striking since this one was written in his own hand and sent to a close family member, he signed it as "Cardinal Valencia," his official title.⁵⁷ Cesar blended affective familial bonds with more impersonal signs of status, indicating the lack of clear divide between personal and political roles, like how Alexander VI could threaten to excommunicate Joan if he entered into legal contracts without permission.⁵⁸ Religious authority was mixed in the same person with political and familial authority and if Joan outranked his older brother in secular rank, Cesar held power over him both in birth order and in his position as cardinal.

Cesar's letter opened with a flourish in recognition of Joan's new secular status and their fraternal relationship, and continued to interweave the two all the way through, with Cesar's final words to Joan being to remember him to his wife, "my dearest sister."⁵⁹ The emphasis of familial connections drove home the point that Joan's behaviour affected more than just him alone. His actions sent reverberations through the network back to Alexander VI and to Cesar. Cesar argued that Joan needed to practice greater care with his finances, behave more prudently, and most importantly consummate the marriage post-haste, because "not only His Holiness but I too am consumed by melancholy," which would not lift until they heard news of his better behavior (and, Cesar emphasized several times more, his consummation).⁶⁰ It was frustrating that Joan had gambled away his money. It was even more troubling that he had not successfully established the family's name in Gandía. Both were personal failings on Joan's part, but they affected the other people who were tied to him and stood to benefit from his success.

Alexander VI wrote to Joan on 30 November as well, confronting him about the reports that had reached Italy, "especially about the bad behaviour towards the Duchess your wife, with whom you have not yet consummated the marriage, and about going about the city

⁵⁶ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Cesar Chastising Joan about the Consummation," 48. The formal verb tense is emphasized in the text by his frequent and grammatically unnecessary use of pronouns (e.g.: "*vostres mals portaments*") and titles ("V. S.").

⁵⁷ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Cesar Chastising Joan about the Consummation," 50–51.

⁵⁸ Sanchis y Sivera, "Detailed Instructions Sent to Joan by Alexander VI," 24.

⁵⁹ "*carissima germana mia*." Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Cesar Chastising Joan about the Consummation," 51.

⁶⁰ "*no menyys sa Sad consuma a mi de melencolia*." Sanchis y Siera, "Letter from Cesar Chastising Joan about the Consummation," 48.

at night, killing dogs and cats.”⁶¹ Like Cesar, he scolded him, making use of and blending together his dual patriarchal status as the head of the Church and as Joan’s father. Unlike Cesar, Alexander VI used the informal you form in his letter as he told Joan that he was “discontented and indignant” towards him and urged him to consummate the marriage in the name of God and the Virgin Mary and send a message to Italy that it was completed, posthaste.⁶² Only after that did he discuss his displeasure over the money that Joan had lost, pointing to the exact sum missing and the ways in which this had supposedly happened, impressing upon Joan that he was not out of his sight and still under his authority.

Even though Joan had threatened the other members in the network through his misbehaviour, however, he was not shunned. No attempt was made by his natal family to distance themselves from him other than by making it clear in writing that they disapproved of his behaviour and required him to fix the problems he had caused. In fact, Lucretia (1480–1519) and Jofré (*c.*1482–*c.*1517), Joan’s younger siblings, came to visit him in Valencia (*c.* January–*c.* June 1494), just two months after news of his misconduct broke, and stayed for half a year.⁶³ This may have been an attempt to correct his behaviour by making the court at Gandía more visibly “his,” an unusual and perhaps unexpected problem since Gandía was still part of Valencia, and therefore part of what had traditionally been the Borgia family’s cultural territory. Joan, however, unlike his father or Pedro Luis, had grown up in Rome and so Gandía was an unknown place, much more familiar to María than to him, in spite of whatever Alexander VI might say about “our land” or whichever relatives to whom he was introduced.

Joan’s transgressive behaviour, beyond indicating his immaturity, points also to the particular challenges of establishing a son in a foreign court. The actions Joan took are reminiscent of those by Philip I of Castile [Philip of Hapsburg] (*r.* 1506) at the Castilian court only a few years later. Philip I, often called “the Handsome” or “the Fair,” was the first Hapsburg to rule in Spain, inheriting possession of Castile after Isabella I’s death.⁶⁴ Philip I was the son of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, and had already inherited rule of Burgundy, making him a prominent name in early modern dynastic politics, but also a stranger to Castile at the time of his marriage to Joanna I [Juana I]. As Bethany Aram has discussed, “Juana’s superior status in Castile clashed with and may have exacerbated Philip’s insistent recourse to masculine prerogatives such as hunting, sportsmanship, and, ultimately, marital infidelity,” identifying his behavior as a “rebel[lion].”⁶⁵ Like Philip I, Joan was displaced through marriage to what was to him a foreign court in his wife’s homeland, a socially unusual situation for the

⁶¹ “*preçipuant sobre los mals portaments vers la Duquesa ta muller, que encara no hauries consumat ab ella lo matrimoni, e anar de nit per la ciutat, matant cans e gats.*” Sanchis y Sivera, “Letter from Alexander VI Chastising Joan about the Consummation,” 43. At the same time, Alexander VI also wrote to Fira and Pertusa, expressing his anger over the loss of money through gambling in particular and telling them to keep Joan away from the rest of his money, including anything earned through his holdings. This was backed up with threats to excommunicate them and terminate their relationship. Sanchis y Sivera, “Letter from Alexander VI to Mossens Fira and Pertusa,” 47.

⁶² Sanchis y Sivera, “Letter from Alexander VI Chastising Joan about the Consummation,” 43.

⁶³ Sanchis y Sivera, “Letter from Alexander VI Chastising Joan about the Consummation,” 53–55.

⁶⁴ This was a contested inheritance. Isabella I had declared her daughter Joanna (now popularly remembered as “*la Loca*,” “the Mad”) unfit to rule. When Isabella I died, Philip I fought with Joanna I’s father, Ferdinand II, for control of Castile.

⁶⁵ Bethany Aram, “Voyages from Burgundy to Castile: Cultural Conflict and Dynastic Transitions, 1502–06,” in *Early Modern Dynastic Marriages and Cultural Transfer*, ed. Joan Lluís Palos and Magdalena S. Sánchez (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 103.

male spouse, and expected to take on a newly adult role. Both young men responded with an exuberance of visibly defiant and masculine activity, expressing their discontent by taking sanctioned male posturing to extremes.⁶⁶ Neither endeared themselves to their in-laws, and Joan in particular threatened to take his rebellion too far.

By the following April, mid-way through Lucretia and Jofré's visit, the situation in Gandía had been smoothed out. Joan wrote to his father claiming that the reports were all false and that he had, in fact, slept with his wife and so the marriage was therefore secure. Alexander VI encouraged him to continue to make amends with his wife and in-laws and gave him instructions for obtaining the disputed territory.⁶⁷ Now that the immediate problem of the marriage falling apart before it could begin to bring benefit to the family was removed, Joan was instructed to use the union to maximize the family's economic and political benefit. With the understanding of the Borgia sphere of influence as a network of well-placed individuals rather than a bounded territory, it is clear that Alexander VI wanted to strengthen the resources Joan had at his personal disposal, as people in the early modern world were bound to individual superiors, not to abstract political entities. In a hierarchical flow of power, Joan was a connection that Alexander VI—and other family members—could draw upon. Cultivating the resources at Joan's command strengthened the family's overall reach. Joan was indebted to others for his duchy and marriage in Gandía, but by growing his holdings and connections he could prove that he was a good investment.

Gandía to Rome: Taking on New Positions

On 7 May 1494, Jofré, the youngest son of the Borgia family, married Sancha of Aragon (1478–1506), the illegitimate daughter of the short-ruled King Alfonso II of Naples (r. 1494–1495), cousin to King Ferdinand II.⁶⁸ As with Joan, Jofré was set up with a noble marriage and an estate, becoming the Duke of Squillace, in southern Italy. Jofré was the last eligible Borgia child to get married, although Alexander VI and Lucretia later annulled her first marriage for political reasons, with Lucretia then marrying Sancha's younger brother. In 1494, however, that was all in the future. What was clear in the moment was that there had been a wedding to officially mark the connection between the Borgias and the minor branch of the Aragonese royal family. This was in light of growing aggression from the French King Charles VIII (r. 1483–1498) over claims to territory in the Italian Peninsula—most importantly, Naples. The two families arranged for the marriage to coincide with Alfonso II's coronation,

⁶⁶ Hunting was an encouraged activity for noblemen, even for ecclesiastics. Leo X was urged as a youth to participate in the hunt. Chambers, "The Economic Predicament of Renaissance Cardinals," 293.

⁶⁷ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI to Joan on the Improved State of his Marriage and Giving him Continued Instructions," 59–62. The letter from Joan is lost, but Alexander VI makes it clear at the start of his response what Joan had told him.

⁶⁸ The marriage contract was originally signed in 1493, but the ceremony itself was postponed until 7 May 1494. For two letters on the original marriage contract, see the material in the footnotes in: Johann Burchard, "Lettere agli Otto di Practica," *Liber Notarum ab anno MCCCCLXXXIII usque ad annum MDVI*, ed. Enrico Celani (Città di Castello: Tipi della Casa editrice S. Lapi, 1906), 2:504–505; and Johann Burchard, "Carte Strossiane," *Liber Notarum*, 2:505. For an account of the marriage ceremony, see: Burchard, *Liber Notarum*, 2:504–506. *Liber Notarum* and *Diarium* are both publications of the same larger work by Burchard.

an act that made it abundantly clear that Alexander VI in his position as pope backed the Spanish claim to Naples over the French claim.

On 18 April 1494, Alexander VI had written a letter to Francisco Prats, discussing the politics behind Jofré's upcoming marriage. Although not a direct relative, Prats was a member of the papal household and Alexander VI had made him not only the canon of the Cathedral of Valencia, but also his nuncio to the Spanish monarchs. Alexander VI opened his letter by listing his various sources and connections, from a letter from Ferdinand II and Isabella I themselves to meetings with various ambassadors.⁶⁹ After going through this summary he announced that Jofré's marriage had been approved, at which point he transitioned into a discussion of Sancha's background and the political connections that followed her into the marriage.⁷⁰ Underscoring how the marriage was intended to bolster the contested Aragonese claim to the throne by making explicit the alliance between them and the Borgias, Alexander VI stated bluntly that Sancha was "daughter of the *current* king don Alfonso."⁷¹ Joan had also received a copy of this letter from his father to Prats as a briefing on the political situation, effectively bringing him into the conversation among men joined together by political and personal relationships. Joan, after being eased into his new household and then chastised for immaturely risking his connections and resources in Iberia, was being treated as an adult.

Alexander VI praised the Spanish monarchs and the Aragonese royalty in Naples effusively, whom he characterized as showing "affection and devotion" and "great humility and compliance" in contrast to the "troubles and offense [caused] by the aforementioned King of France."⁷² His backing Alfonso II in his claim to the throne included a mutual military alliance between Naples and the Papacy to defend the Aragonese claim to the kingdom.⁷³ This letter made the politics of connecting two families together explicit. In his younger brother's marriage negotiations made between his father, Alexander VI, and new father-in-law, King Alfonso II, Joan received the principedom of Teano, the duchy of Sesa, the county of Celano, and other lesser holdings in perpetuity, increasing the amount of money he could collect annually.⁷⁴ In an additional transaction, Joan received from Alfonso II the rights to the principedom of Tricarico and the counties of Carinola, Claramonte, and Luria, as well as other holdings.⁷⁵ This second set of territories alone was estimated by a contemporary to bring Joan tens of thousands in ducats a year.⁷⁶ Alexander VI also discussed making Joan the Captain General of the Papal Forces in light of the French threat to Italy and in response to the Borgia

⁶⁹ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI to Francisco Prats," 63.

⁷⁰ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI to Francisco Prats," 63.

⁷¹ "*filla del modern Rey don Alfonso.*" Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI to Francisco Prats," 63. Emphasis mine.

⁷² "*nos prega e strenue molt affectadament per part de ses Alteses, volguesem haver per recomanat affavorir e abraçar,*" "*ab molta humilitat e observança,*" "*la impeticio e empresa que contra ell atentava de fer lo Rey de França.*" Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI to Francisco Prats," 63–64.

⁷³ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI to Francisco Prats," 64–65.

⁷⁴ Including Rocer, Marzain, Marranelli, Cayanelli (Cayavelo), Montis, Frumari, and Porcarini. De Roo, *Material for a History*, 5:584–587; "Juan Borgia's Receiving of New Holdings," Collection Salazar, A. 9, fo. 49, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid.

⁷⁵ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Cardinal Datario Juan Llopis to Joan Borgia," 75.

⁷⁶ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Cardinal Datario Juan Llopis to Joan Borgia," 75.

backing of the Aragonese claim to Naples.⁷⁷ In order for this to happen, Joan would have to leave Gandía for Rome.

In early May, Joan received a message from Alfonso II, to whom he was now more closely related.⁷⁸ Just as Joan's marriage to María reinforced the Borgias' ties to Ferdinand II and Isabella I through the de Lunas' blood and courtly relations with them, so too did Sancha's marriage to Jofré reinforce Alfonso II's responsibilities to and claims on the Borgias. Joan was suddenly brought into closer proximity to the king. Alfonso II recognized this and on the first of May wrote to Joan in Italian, already calling him by his presumptive military title.⁷⁹ He said that because Alexander VI believed there to be imminent threat from the King of France against "our kingdom," he desired that Joan would go to Rome to take up his new military command.⁸⁰ Furthermore, Alfonso II wrote, this was a wish shared by Ferdinand II and Isabella I. Joan had permission from the king and queen to leave Valencia, he stressed, and taking up immediate position in Rome would cause him to think of Joan "like our own son."⁸¹

By 29 May, Joan still had not replied to Alfonso II, and his father sent him a lengthy letter from Rome in reprimand.⁸² He stressed the stature of the holdings that had been given to him, and the "great obligation" that Joan therefore had in return.⁸³ Alexander VI scolded him for not taking a more active role in the maintenance and development of his own political capital, writing that meanwhile all that he himself did was to focus his energy on growing Joan's credit and estates.⁸⁴ He called upon "your honour and our expectation," pointing out that Joan often did the opposite of what was desired or necessary, in an attempt to bring him in line, and indicating that Joan's personal honour was actually something of great interest to the rest of his family.⁸⁵ He wrote that as things stood Joan was "diminishing and destroying [his] house" and that he and his wife were spending above their means.⁸⁶ He threatened to cut ties and no longer send either money or letters if Joan did not do what was requested of him and fulfil his obligations.⁸⁷ Alexander VI wanted Joan to take up his military position and, furthermore, add to the territories he already held. He saw these things as Joan's "obligations,"

⁷⁷ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI to Francisco Prats," 65–66. For more on Pope Alexander VI's lay papal relatives taking on military positions in support of the Church, see: David Chambers, *Popes, Cardinals and War: The Military Church in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 93–101, 109. For the mutually supportive relationship between Pope and lay relatives more generally, see: Jennifer Mara DeSilva, "Articulating Work and Family: Lay Papal Relatives in the Papal States, 1420-1549," *Renaissance Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 1–39.

⁷⁸ The letter from Alfonso II is dated 1 May 1494. Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alfonso II to Joan," 81–82.

⁷⁹ "*magnanime capitane.*" Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alfonso II to Joan," 81.

⁸⁰ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alfonso II to Joan," 82. Like Alexander VI, Alfonso II used the royal we, although Joan had also just been incorporated into the Kingdom of Naples with his new territories.

⁸¹ "*como nostro proprio figlio.*" Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alfonso II to Joan," 82.

⁸² Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI to Joan Scolding him for not Returning to Rome," 92–96.

⁸³ "*obligaçio gran.*" Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI to Joan Scolding him for not Returning to Rome," 92.

⁸⁴ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI to Joan Scolding him for not Returning to Rome," 93.

⁸⁵ "*la bonor tua e expectacio nostra.*" Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI to Joan Scolding him for not Returning to Rome," 93.

⁸⁶ "*diminuint e destroint ta casa.*" Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Alexander VI to Joan Scolding him for not Returning to Rome," 93.

⁸⁷ Joan was not the only young adult son dependent upon continued financial assistance from his father. Chambers, "Francisco Gonzaga," 29.

clearly indicating that Joan was expected to take independent steps to grow his status and resources and to be an active participant in the Borgia family's politics.

Joan had already been required to support his family in some relatively passive ways, such as by marrying María or by hosting his younger siblings in Gandía, although their trip appears to have been for his own benefit more than theirs. Alexander VI wanted him to do more. Becoming Captain General would directly serve the alliance between Rome and Naples, and seeking out more estates would enable him to accrue more credit and resources that would then filter through him for the benefit of other members of the network of which he was a part. Both of these would additionally grow his public honour and status. Joan's position strengthened as he became more interconnected with other members of the Latin Mediterranean, but his responsibilities to these members increased as well, as shown by the position of Captain General. Arranged through the joint wedding and coronation in Naples, it both increased his prominence and also complicated his political ties, as Alfonso II was then able to petition to him to behave towards his benefit and with the promise of similarly familial rights and obligations.

Joan wrote back to Alexander VI on 6 September from Llombai [Lombay], near the city of Valencia after a summer spent feasting and hunting without another letter or any more money from his father.⁸⁸ He opened his letter with an effusive apology, declaring that he humbly kissed Alexander VI's feet, and begged to be returned to his father's good graces while thanking him for the honour of the military position, sentiments he reiterated throughout the whole of the letter. It was with "anguish and indignation," he wrote, that so long had passed since they had been in contact, and although the fault was surely his, he had not done anything but serve and obey him faithfully.⁸⁹ Reports of his misconduct, he said, had been exaggerated, and he should not, therefore, be punished. María was indeed pregnant by this time, and while Joan was still spending money on things like hawks and crossbows, at least there were no reports of him indulging in the hunt inappropriately or shunning his wife for other women. Furthermore, Joan wrote that he recognized how indebted he was to his father for all he had done for him, including and especially for his newest position of Captain General.⁹⁰

As Joan's response showed, at the end of the day he recognized his dependency upon his father and family network.⁹¹ After first benefitting immensely from their resources and generosity, he had then found himself given an honour and responsibility he did not want. His initial response to his appointment to Captain General in May had been to ignore it and

⁸⁸ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to Alexander VI Asking Forgiveness," 96–98.

⁸⁹ "E primerament, arribant a la Sdat sua besara per part mia humilment los seus beatms peus, suplicant la me done la sua gracia e benediccio. Li presentara ma letra, dibent ab quanta angustia y enuig reste per passar ja tant temps que de la Sdat sua no he sentit noves, per sa letra que de XXVIIIo de Maig ença nom ha volgut fer merexedor de manarme escriure algun reglo. No puch pensar que sia la causa ni que per culpes mies la Sdat sua tinga rato de ser deservida com james pense, sino en servir aquella optemperant y obeynt los seus manaments, pero si alguna erra mia es." Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to Alexander VI Asking Forgiveness," 98.

⁹⁰ "E regonexent que de cada dia rebem mos germans e yo tantes gracies, honors, beneficis y merçes de la Sdat sua, bese la terra que los peus de aquella calsiuen, regraçantli molt la molta merçe quem ha feta haventme fet merexedor de la Capitania general de la sancta Esglesya, cosa de tan gran dignitat y honra." Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to Alexander VI Asking Forgiveness," 98.

⁹¹ "E axi, suplique nostre Sor Deu me done vida pera que pugua yo per mos continus serveys satisfer en alguna part antes gracies y beneficis que de cascun dia nos germans e yo rebem de costra Sdat." Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to Alexander VI Asking Forgiveness," 98.

continue to enjoy his newfound independence in Valencia. This independence, however, was not total, and by the end of the summer, with still no communication or funding from his father, Joan was ready to capitulate. Notably, when he did so, it was while stressing his obedience, and therefore dependence, as a member of the larger group. Attempting to act as a lone agent, Joan saw, was not sustainable.

Conclusion: A Debt Repaid

Joan's apologies on 6 September did not stop with his letter to his father. He wrote to the Neapolitan monarchs, assuring them of the good standing of their relationships. He signed himself in the two letters initially as the Duke of Gandía, before crossing it out and resigning himself as the Prince of Tricarico, one of the new Neapolitan titles he had gained through the marriage in May.⁹² On the same day, he wrote two more letters to Jofré and Sancha congratulating them individually on their marriage, which he had failed to do until that point, as it would have meant acknowledging the new responsibilities he had been given as part of the negotiations.⁹³ Joan then sent other letters, either undated or with the dates illegible, in the following days to a cousin and to his other siblings, all of whom had written to him earlier in the summer about Jofré's wedding and his own new holdings and position.⁹⁴

Three weeks later, on 27 September, Joan wrote once more to Alexander VI, again speaking obsequiously and explaining that he had been in contact with Alfonso II through his ambassador.⁹⁵ Joan also, however, begged off returning to Rome because of the "great peril" of traveling in the deteriorating military situation and pointing to the threat of disease in Valencia during the hot summer months as well.⁹⁶ This is the final letter in the collection at the Archivo de la Catedral de Valencia, and there is no account of his father's response. Alexander VI did eventually come to a diplomatic agreement with Charles VIII after the French forces had reached the gates of the Vatican just days before 1 January 1495, and Alfonso II himself fled Naples the same day Charles VIII left Rome.⁹⁷ The chaos may have softened any repercussions Joan faced and he did eventually return to Rome, but not until 10 August 1496.⁹⁸ He then became Captain General of the Papal Troops, as Alexander VI and Alfonso II had wished, although he fought not the French but the Italian Orsini family that had aligned with them, and was best known for being a disastrous commander.⁹⁹

⁹² Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to the King of Naples on 6 September 1494," 106-107; Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to the Queen of Naples on 6 September 1494," 107-108.

⁹³ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to Jofré on 6 September 1494," 108-109; Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to Sancha on 6 September 1494," 109-110.

⁹⁴ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to Cardinal Monreal [Giovanni Borgia the Younger] in September 1494," 110; Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to Cesar in September 1494," 110; Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to Lucretia in September 1494," 111-112.

⁹⁵ Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to Alexander VI Explaining his Absence," 113.

⁹⁶ "gran perill." Sanchis y Sivera, "Letter from Joan to Alexander VI Explaining his Absence," 113.

⁹⁷ For an account of Alexander VI's interactions with Charles VIII, see: Burchard, *Diarium*, 210-236. Burchard dates the departure of Charles VIII from Rome and Alfonso II from Naples to 28 January 1495. Burchard, *Diarium*, 236.

⁹⁸ Burchard, *Diarium*, 644.

⁹⁹ Chambers, *Popes, Cardinals and War*, 97.

Joan had learned the importance of reciprocity in the kind of individual-based networks that he operated within, even if he did not like it. He had separated himself physically from his father's Rome but remained in contact with other members of the network either in person or through frequent correspondence and, furthermore, was not an independent actor just because of his new household. Many of the individuals to whom he bore obligation were born into the network, like his aunt or brother, but others were incorporated into it later in life, just as he became a member of the Aragonese court through his marriage into the de Luna family or how he became like a son to King Alfonso II after Jofré's marriage to Sancha. Joan's letters of apology indicate a large family network, with relatives by blood or marriage at royal courts and in the Vatican. These were not only business associates to whom he owed respect; they were relationships made personal through family connections. They underscored the lack of any meaningful divide between the personal and the public in early modern politics.

Family connections were important for Joan and for other members of the early modern nobility, as it was through these connections that resources were circulated and it was through the language of family that politics was often conducted. Family ties helped to raise an individual's status, and well-placed individuals could in turn support their relatives. Joan, like other young lay lords, received his titles and estates not through any real action on his own part, but because of the longer familial history of which he was newly a part. His eldest brother, Pedro Luis, had also been dependent upon his family, since without their influence and legacy he would not have been a member at the Spanish court and would not have been in a position to distinguish himself on the battlefield. Even the duchy of Gandía, set aside for him, was purchased for his use with his father's money, with the understanding that its resources would help the family as a whole.

When Joan left Rome for Gandía it was to establish himself as a young lord on the Valencian coast and grow the resources upon which he could draw. The transition to his own household was not as smooth as his relatives had hoped and his marriage almost fell through, which would have resulted in a loss of not only the elite connections and holdings the de Luna family brought with them but also the financial and political capital the Borgias had already spent setting him up in Gandía. After being scolded by his natal family members, Joan smoothed things out with his in-laws and managed to secure the marriage as well as the additional territory his father wanted him to pursue. When Joan's younger brother Jofré was formally married the following May, it was another political coup that bound the Vatican to support the Aragonese claim to the Kingdom of Naples. Although he had not participated in the negotiations, Joan was still affected by their outcome and received three more territories as well as the position of Captain General of the Papal Troops, a job about which he was less than enthusiastic. When Joan stalled in acknowledging that he would return from Valencia to Rome to take up the post, Alexander VI cut off communication and financial assistance to force him to behave in an appropriate manner. Joan needed to reciprocate the credit that had been extended to him. Until he did, he was accumulating social debt that reflected poorly on the other members of his network.

Joan's movement from Rome to Gandía to Rome once more reflected an early modern world mapped through interpersonal social ties. He was supported financially and socially by his relatives, who also took offense when he did not act to additionally grow his economic resources or committed social faux pas. The problem was not just that Joan was lazy or had offended his in-laws. Rather, it was that just as others had extended themselves to establish

him in Gandía, so too were they depending on him to be a team player and recognize that his actions affected more than him alone.

Following the rules continued to be a problem for Joan after his return to Rome and it led not just to his murder in June 1497, but also to a centuries-long dispute over who was responsible.¹⁰⁰ While Alexander VI may have privately come to a conclusion over who was to blame for his son's death he never made his views publicly known and historians today still debate it. What is clear, however, is that Joan's behaviour had not won him many friends in a society that depended so heavily on interpersonal connections and reciprocity.

The Borgias, like other noble families, had a further reach and greater strength to draw upon when working as an organization rather than individual actors. To this end, people within the family were expected to perform various activities, from agreeing to politically savvy marriages to using money from their own titles and estates to pay for other people's expenses. These expectations were heavily influenced by familial roles, such that young adults like Joan could count on financial and social assistance from their elders, even those whom they had never met before. At the same time, however, people pushed back against other family members who behaved in a way that was not to the benefit of the group, such as the repeated attempts to get Joan to fall into line and serve the political and financial plans his father had laid out for him.

This all worked because the family had more resources, of many kinds, at its disposal than did any one individual. After a summer of ignoring his responsibilities, Joan came to the conclusion that, as much as he might dislike it, he did need to reach out to his network. The social and financial burden had become too great to bear. The strength of the family as a unit also explains why his relatives had been so keen on establishing him in Gandía, even against his wishes. If Joan had been able to grow his personal estates and status, this would have been to the benefit of his relatives as well. As it was, Joan succeeded in making the Borgia claim to Gandía, setting up the family's lineage in the duchy, and strengthening its position as an early modern dynasty.

¹⁰⁰ For an example of rumours of Cesar's involvement first published in the sixteenth century, see: Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, ed. Giovanni Rosini (Torino, 1874), 2:313–314. For a discussion of the evolution of this narrative, see: Hermann-Röttgen, *La familia Borgia*, 60–61. See also: Clara Mariás, "The Hispanic Ballad of the Death of the Duke of Gandía: Propaganda against or Sympathy for the Borgia?" *The Borgia Family: Rumor and Representation*, ed. Jennifer Mara DeSilva (New York: Routledge, 2019).