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THE POLITICAL STRATEGY OF NUNCIO ANTONIO CAETANI IN THE MAZE OF THE IMPERIAL COURT (1607–1611)*

Abstract

The archbishop of Capua, Antonio Caetani (1566–1624), was an eminent member of a Roman aristocratic family. From 1607 to 1611, he resided at the Imperial court of Prague as Apostolic Nuncio in the service to Pope Paul V, where he witnessed the turmoil that gradually overwhelmed Bohemia, ruled at that point by Emperor Rudolf II of the House of Habsburg. Caetani moved in an orbit characterised by various coexisting political, local, confessional and social forces. His negotiations within the maze of the court were characterised by a wise and cautious approach of not interfering openly in Imperial affairs: a sort of ‘wait-and-see’ policy that was almost inevitable. This was firstly because of the Imperial ministers, who, instead of acting as a conduit to reach the ears of the sovereign, were actually considered obstructive and unhelpful because of their private aims, personal resentments, and often-outright hostility. Secondly, Caetani’s mission was hampered by the Rudolf II’s suspicious nature: the Emperor feared papal intrusion in Imperial affairs. The papal nuncios did not merely embody the pope; they were also political subjects within networks of interpersonal relationships. Within these networks, they could practice their diplomatic roles, and also carry out (their own) personal affairs. Below, I will attempt to demonstrate how Caetani’s political strategy failed to establish fruitful relations with the courtiers and the Emperor.

Keywords: Antonio Caetani, councillors, courts, diplomacy, Imperial, nunciature, policy

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The archbishop of Capua, Antonio Caetani (1566–1624), was an eminent member of a Roman aristocratic family. The Caetanis’ domain was the Duchy of Sermoneta, located in the southern reaches of the Papal States. From 1607 to 1618, he served Pope Paul V as a papal nuncio. He was first posted to Prague, where he served for some three years. Here he witnessed the turmoil that overwhelmed Bohemia and Emperor Rudolf II of the House of Habsburg. Subsequently, he was posted to Madrid for almost eight years, at the court of Philip III, where he witnessed the rise and fall of the king’s favourite, the Duke of Lerma.

These nunciatures were imbued with difficulties. However, the challenge was worth the potential reward. Caetani’s negotiations would have allowed the archbishop to achieve significant renown, setting him on the way to a brilliant political and ecclesiastical career, especially as it was commonplace for the Pope to grant a cardinal’s biretta to nuncios upon the completion of their service. According to the words of Giovanni Stefano Ferrero (Bishop of Vercelli) in his final relazione, the Imperial court was the place where the major interests of Christendom were negotiated and discussed. ‘Germany […] could become the place of universal ruins […]’ Ferrero claimed, because ‘it is the most corrupted part [of

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Christendom], where the most important princes of Europe advance their interests. Ferrero warned the Nuncio that he would be fighting against insurmountable obstacles when advancing any of his requests. On the other hand, Madrid was considered one of the most prestigious courts of Europe and, consequently, postings there were the most coveted. According to the well-known opinion of Antonio’s uncle Camillo Caetani, Patriarch of Alexandria, who had resided as nuncio at Philip II’s court from 1593 to 1600, this nunciature was extremely important, and many considered it ‘the cardinalate of those who could not be cardinal.’ In fact, this office could have become a double-edged sword for the nuncios, if they did not satisfy the wishes of the papacy and the interests of the Church.

Prior to his impressive diplomatic appointments, the young Caetani had lingered in a form of limbo in the last decade of the sixteenth century. He was part of the entourage of his uncle, Cardinal Enrico Caetani, during an apostolic mission in Warsaw (1596–1597), and following his return to Italy, he began to manage the finances of the Caetani’s casa. At the same time, he frequented the court of Rome while waiting for a post in service to the Church, manifesting an increased impatience because of the uncertainty of his future prospects. However, the turning point in Caetani’s career was the election of Camillo Borghese as Pope Paul V in 1605. Caetani was appointed archbishop of Capua.

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7 Maria A. Visceglia, Roma Papale e Spagna: Diplomatici, Nobili e Religiosi tra Due Corti (Rome: Bulzoni, 2010), pp. 49–92.
10 See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Camillo Caetani, 11 July 1597: Archivio Caetani (AC), Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Miscellanea (Misc.), 75303, [n. fol].
11 Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), Secretaria Brevium (Sec. Brev.), Registra (reg.) 399, fols 289r–90r.
and the Pope selected him for the nunciature to Germany only one year later.\textsuperscript{12}

According to the thoughts of the controversial philosopher Giordano Bruno, the Empire constituted a multitude of divided states because of the ‘misshapen’\textsuperscript{13} Protestant Reformation. Accordingly, the Christian devotional cycle that had begun with St Paul would finally be completed by turning on its head, and reaching ‘[…] the lowest point in the universal wheel.’\textsuperscript{14} Fifty years after the ‘Religious and Profane Peace’ of Augsburg in 1555, the political and religious environment of the Holy Roman Empire was characterised by ‘[…] a complicated situation, [with princes] being [allied] with and [ranged] against each other, typical of a policy […] which was secular as well as confessional.’\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, the natural solution was a coexistence of various political, local, confessional and social forces.\textsuperscript{16} The most striking examples were the lands under the Crown of

\textsuperscript{12} See: Linhartová, I, pp. 1–2; Cristoforo Caetani, \textit{Vita del Sig. Card. Antonio Caetani}, 1624: BAV, Barb. Lat., 6030, fol. 21\textsuperscript{r}; ASV, Sec. Brev., reg. 418, fol. 452\textsuperscript{r}.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 41: ‘[…] il punto più basso della ruota universale.’
\textsuperscript{15} Reinhard Koselleck, \textit{Futuro Passato: Per una Semantica dei Tempi Storici}, trans. by A. Marietti Solmi (Genoa: Marietti, 1986), p. 16: ‘[…] un complicato stare con e contro l’altro, tipico di una politica […] insieme temporale e confessionale.’
St Wenceslas: as provinces with their own historical, cultural, linguistic and administrative identities, they were a confessional melting pot. Here, the noblemen were the most jealous defenders of local privileges against the centralizing policies of the Habsburg dynasty. Therefore, in 1605, the potential political and religious collapse of the Kingdom of Bohemia could have threatened the entire Holy Roman Empire, as well as the Imperial Majesty, ostensibly the secular guardian of the Catholic faith. Consequently, the universal authority of the papacy would have been gravely damaged, the worst possible scenario from a Roman point of view.

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19 See: Karel Stloukal, *Papezská Politika a Císařsky Dvur Pražský na Předelu XVI a XVII Věku* (Prague: Kom. Řívnáče, 1925); *Gli Archivi della Santa Sede e il Mondo*
For these reasons, the main goal of Caetani's negotiations was to achieve a pacific and universally acceptable solution regarding the election of the King of the Romans, thus maintaining the Bohemian and the Hungarian lands under Habsburg rule. Matters had reached an impasse, because of the well-known ‘Brother Crisis’, i.e. the conflict between the heirless Emperor Rudolf and his younger brother Matthias concerning the succession to the Imperial throne. In addition, the main issues that Caetani had to manage during his mission in Prague were in accordance with the broader mission of the Catholic Reformation. Namely, he was required to put into effect the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545–1563); and to consolidate the restyling of the Catholic Church’s image through the reformation of the religious orders and the clergy. Generally, in cooperation with the secular Catholic authorities, he had to preserve the Church’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction and prevent any concessions concerning freedom of worship, as well as the bestowal of public offices upon Protestants. But the nuncios to the Imperial


21 See: Letter from Scipione Borghese to Antonio Caetani, Instructio Antonio Caetano, archiepiscopo Capuano, nuntium apud curiam imperialem designato, 23 May 1607 in Linhartova, I, pp. 4–19; Giordano, I, pp. 439–58. On these topics, see: Das Papsttum, die Christenheit und die Staaten Europas, 1592–1605, ed. by Georg Lutz and Stefano Andretta (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1994); Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, The World of Catholic Renewal 1540–1770 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Die
lands had further facilities to fight unorthodoxy: for example, they had
the power to remit the sin of heresy and allow the reading of prohibited
books, and they could also allow marriages between people of different
religions, upon the conversion of the non-Catholic partner.

The apostolic nuncios did not merely embody the pope; they were
also political subjects within networks of interpersonal relationships,
and they played a major part in building these networks, where they
could fulfil their diplomatic roles, and also carry out their own personal
affairs. To quote Hillard von Thiessen, ‘they were, and acted as, heads
of their families, patrons of their clients and friends of their friends.’
Therefore, it was thanks to personal friendships based on the networks
created by the diplomats at court, that allowed the construction and
expansion of political relationships between states. In the forthcom-
ing pages, I will demonstrate how Caetani’s approach to the political

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Aussenbeziehungen der Römischen Kurie unter Paul V Borghese (1605–1621), ed. by
Alexander Koller (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008); Irene Fosi, ‘Frontiere Inquisitoriali nel
Sacro Romano Impero’, in Papato e Politica Internazionale nella Prima Età Moderna, ed.
by Maria A. Visceglia (Rome: Viella, 2013), pp. 257–74; Il Papato e le Chiese Locali,
ed. by Péter Tusor and Matteo Sanfilippo (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2014), pp. 33–54;
Andrew Drenas, ‘The Standard-Bearer of the Roman Church: Lorenzo da Brindisi
(1559–1619) and Capuchin Missions in the Holy Roman Empire’ (unpublished

22 Hillard von Thiessen, ‘Switching Roles in Negotiation: Levels of Diplomatic
Communication Between Pope Paul V Borghese (1605–1621) and the Ambassadors
of Philip III’, in Paroles de Négociateur: L’Entretien dans la Pratique Diplomatique
de la Fin du Moyen Âge à la Fin du XIXe Siècle, ed. by Stefano Andretta and
others (Rome: Publications de l’École Française de Rome, 2010), pp. 151–72
(pp. 156–57).


24 See: Daniela Frigo, Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy: The Structure
of Diplomatic Practice, 1450–1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996);
‘La Corte in Europa: Fedeltà, Favori, Pratiche di Governo’, ed. by Marzio A. Romani,
special issue of Cheiron, 1 (1983); Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: The Court at
the Beginning of the Modern Age, 1450–1650, ed. by Ronald G. Asch and Adolf
M. Birke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Christian Wieland, Fürsten,
Freunde, Diplomaten: Die Römisch-Florentinischen Beziehungen unter Paul V. 1605–1621
(Cologne: Böhlau, 2004); Hillard von Thiessen and Christian Windler, ‘Nähe in
der Ferne: Personale Verflechtung in den Aussenbeziehungen der Frühen Neuzeit’,
and religious climate at the Imperial court. I will also show how his political strategy generally failed in establishing fruitful relations with the ministers and the Emperor.

‘THROUGHOUT GERMANY THERE STANDS A BAD STORM’

At Spilimbergo, on 28 May 1607, the archbishop of Capua Antonio Caetani restored his strength before resuming his journey towards the Imperial court. Here, in the calmness of the valley at the foot of the Carnic Alps, his rest was undisturbed by the clash of Turkish blades, the heresy of Protestants’ sermons, and gossips and scandalmongers. Only in Prague – where he would arrive two weeks later – would he immediately and clearly see the challenges that the tortuous political maze of the Imperial court would present.

Even before Caetani had had time to acclimatize to life in Prague, he became aware of the scale of the problems ahead. Among the jousts, banquets, heavy drinking, hunts and fireworks which accompanied Christian II, Elector of Saxony’s official visit to the Emperor, the Lutheran theologian Polykarp Leyser delivered a public sermon encouraging ‘[…] the audience to pray to God for the ruin of the Turks and of His Holiness […]’. Upon learning of this, the Nuncio was horrified, and immediately asked the Emperor to intervene, so that ‘[…] such an abomination will never be repeated […]’.

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25 Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 22 September 1608: ASV, Fondo Borghese (FB), II, 148, fol. 49r: ‘Per tutta la Germania si apparecchia un brutto temporale.’

26 See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Pietro Caetani, 28 May 1607: AC, Misc., 52951, [n. fol.]


30 Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 9 July 1607 in Linhartova, I, p. 52: ‘[…] gl’auditori che preghino Dio per la depressione del Turco e di Sua Santità [...]’.

31 Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 16 July 1607 in ibid., I, p. 61: ‘[…] si reiterasse una abominazione simile […]’.
the Imperial intercession, Leyser refused to desist from his anti-papal polemic. On the contrary, three days after his first sermon, the Lutheran clergyman reappeared, preaching to an even bigger audience.

Preserving the dignity of the Apostolic See was no simple task. From the first, Caetani understood that he would need to ‘[…] be truthful in speaking and advance his reasons little by little and in opportune circumstances, so as not to provoke too much hatred’ towards the Roman Curia. ‘I will have to be well-armed […]’, he explained, and talk cautiously, as if he was ‘on a sword’s edge’ to ensure that his intentions could be carried out with the support of Rudolf II’s ministers. Caetani considered these latter to be difficult obstacles in his quest to have the Emperor’s ear, instead of being his conduits. He believed that this was firstly because of their personal interests, and secondly because of the difficulty in gaining and maintaining the Emperor’s confidence: they were afraid of Rudolf’s volatile personality. Therefore, the Nuncio could lose his path at any moment, thus causing the negotiations to come to a standstill. However, the courtiers had a crucial role. It was necessary for the nuncio to forge confidential relationships with the members of the Privy Council, and this was because Rudolf often preferred to make decisions autonomously. In doing so, the Emperor would speak directly

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33 Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 2 July 1607 in Linhartova, I, p. 37: ‘[…] parlare con fondamento et instillare questa verità a poco a poco et in congiunture che generi minor odio.’

34 Ibid., I, p. 39: ‘Mi bisognarà stare molto armato […] sopra un fil di spada.’


with his closest councillors and confidants – usually ‘[…] those who were independent from foreign influences […]’ and the complications that the diplomatic representatives of these forces – such as the papal nuncio – brought in their train. Rudolf had a notorious reputation as an introverted and solitary individual with unpredictable mood swings. Caetani often described him as being a melancholic, suspicious person with an afflicted nature, as well as a malevolent and vengeful lover, a sovereign who was ‘[…] inaccessible, and did not want to be troubled or disturbed.’

Therefore, the nuncio’s moves in the diplomatic game of chess at the court of Prague were informed by his awareness that he would need to cultivate the most important Imperial ministers and advisers. Caetani proved himself an astute observer, and collected swathes of information on the personalities of the ministers, their personal, political and religious interests, as well as their relationship with the Emperor (those who

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37 Evans, *Rudolf II and His World*, p. 87.
38 See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 7 January 1608 in Linhartova, II, p. 7.
39 See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 2 July 1607 in ibid., I, p. 37.
benefited from his confidence, as well as those who, conversely, had
fallen from grace and no longer had access to the Imperial chambers).\footnote{See: \textit{Relazione finale di Antonio Caetani nunzio all’Imperatore}, December 1610 in Giordano, II, pp. 765–70.}

According to the nuncio, private aims and personal resentments, political and confessional divisions, or dissimulation, outright hostility and lack of personality were the distinctive traits that characterised the bureaucratic sloth and the ineptitude of the Imperial court.\footnote{About the Imperial court see: Hausenblasová, \textit{Der Hof Kaiser Rudolfs II.}, pp. 115–16. See also: Josef Polišenský, ‘Faction, Patronage and the Arts at the Court of Rudolph II’, in \textit{Prag um 1600: Kunst und Kultur am Hofe Rudolfs II}, ed. by Jürgen Schultze (Freren: Luca, 1988), pp. 249–53; Stefan Ehrenpreis, ‘Der Reichshofrat im System der Hofbehörden Kaiser Rudolfs II. (1576–1612): Organisation, Arbeitsabläufe, Entscheidungsprozesse’, \textit{Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs}, 45 (1997), 187–205; Heinz Noflatscher, ‘Regiment aus der Kammer? Einflussreiche Kleingruppen am Hof Rudolfs II’, in \textit{Der Fall des Günstlings: Hofparteien in Europa vom XIII bis zum XVII Jahrhundert}, ed. by Jan Hirschbiegel and Werner Paravicini (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2004), pp. 209–34; Stefan Ehrenpreis, \textit{Kaiserliche Gerichtsbarkeit und Konfessionskonflikt: Der Reichshofrat unter Rudolf II. 1576–1616} (Göttingen: Vandehoeck & Ruprecht, 2006). See also: Jesef A. Riegger, ‘Aula Rudolphii II. Kaiserlicher Hoff Statt.’, \textit{Archiv der Geschichte und Statistik Inbes}, 2 (1793), 193–262; Roderigo Alidosi, \textit{Relazione di Germania e della Corte di Rodolfo II Imperatore negli Anni 1605–1607}, ed. by Giuseppe Campori (Modena: Cappelli, 1872).} He was a harsh critic, claiming that despite his best efforts, at the court of Prague ‘[…] what is settled on one day, the next day is already ruined.’\footnote{Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 14 January 1608 in Linhartova, II, p. 29: ‘[…] quel che s’acconcia un dì, l’altro si sconcia.’} In addition, Caetani defined the Privy Council as worthless,\footnote{See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 4 February 1608 in Linhartova, I, p. 89.} emphasising the mediocre quality of its representatives: the councillors were ‘[…] weak and hesitant, each of them embroiled in a multitude of interests’,\footnote{Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 14 January 1608 in ibid., I, p. 24: ‘[…] deboli et inresoluti, dei quali ciascheduno è involto in mille interessi.’} or, to borrow the metaphor of the Florentine ambassador Giovan Francesco Guidi, the ministers were ‘[…] more constrained than chicks in straw.’\footnote{Ibid., II, p. 109: ‘[…] più impastoiti che pulcini nella stoppa.’}

The difficulties governing interaction with the courtiers made the Emperor even more inaccessible to the nuncio. According to a letter
dated 11 February 1608, Caetani was doing everything in his power to avoid any kind of interference with the most delicate issues, so as not to provoke suspicions concerning papal intrusions in Imperial affairs. He was only too conscious that he should not cross the invisible red line that could have caused the collapse of all negotiations, and he prudently\(^{47}\) elected to bide his time.

However, the difficulties of this course of action were evident when the ministers repeatedly tried to involve Caetani in the making of decisions, or invited him to make suggestions – for instance, in order for the Imperial government to gain financial support from the Holy See.\(^{48}\) His hesitations and negative answers were justified by his taking into account the impossibility of material papal support. Caetani strongly wished to avoid any commitment that might have resulted in his back against the wall, forcing him to intervene actively and openly in Imperial affairs. He attempted to overcome the courtiers’ apprehension and the suspicion of the Emperor by clearly stating his reasons, without ‘silence or dissimulation’,\(^{49}\) indeed, precisely as he claimed at the end of his nunciature. However, the consequences of this kind of behaviour for his relationships with the courtiers were disastrous, causing the Nuncio’s role to be undermined. As a result, he failed to establish close relations with the councillors, even in affairs concerning papal interests;\(^{50}\) for instance, he was not notified when Cardinal Franz Seraph von Dietrichstein was summoned to the court.\(^{51}\)

In and of itself, Caetani judged the omission as being trivial, but at the


\(^{48}\) See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 11 January 1608 in Linhartova, II, pp. 84–90.

\(^{49}\) Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 10 January 1611: BAV, Barb. Lat., 6910, fol 20r: ‘[…] di silentio, né di dissimulatione.’

\(^{50}\) Černušák, ‘Un Pazzo sul Trono’, 61–74 (p. 63).

\(^{51}\) See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 11 February 1608 in Linhartova, II, p. 94.
same time, he regretted the ministers’ attempt to communicate with the Roman Curia without his involvement, thus diminishing his office and stature.

Moreover, Rudolf II himself manifested a distinct distrust towards Nuncio Caetani. As stated above, this suspicious attitude originated in his determination to avoid papal interference in Imperial affairs. The Emperor and the Pope differed on a number of significant issues. They disputed the status of imperial and papal fiefs on the Italian peninsula; Paul V refused to provide financial assistance to continue the war with the Ottomans; but perhaps most importantly, the Emperor feared potential papal support for the election of his brother Matthias as the King of the Romans. Rudolf’s paranoid aversion to Rome was notorious, not least because of his almost expelling the friars of the Capuchin order from the Imperial lands, because of a nightmare he had had in which they had attempted to kill him. More prosaically, he disliked the papal emissaries to his court, an attitude that was clearly revealed when he denied Caetani the right to participate in person at the Diet of Regensburg in 1608. The nuncio was obliged to send in his stead Felice Milensio, vicar of the Augustinians, as an observer. As regards Rudolf’s fears concerning his brother Archduke Matthias’ succession, the Emperor was warned that Caetani had received official documents from the Curia relating to the question of the succession to the Imperial throne, for communication to the German bishops.

The nuncio’s difficulties were further exacerbated when he tried to contest and prevent the concession of the title of ‘Illustrious’ to Alof de Wignacourt, Grand Master of the Knights Hospitallers. Caetani’s predecessor had already had to navigate this complicated matter, since it concerned questions of honour and precedence. According to the

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55 See: Letter from Lanfranco Margotti to Antonio Caetani, 30 June 1607 in Linhartova, I, pp. 33–34.
latter, the decision of the Emperor to grant such a significant honour to the Grand Master – whose power derived from the Holy See – would have entailed the Pope having to consider the leader of the Hospitallers as having equal status to the cardinals. As a consequence, an intolerable discrepancy within the Church hierarchy would have been created, and would have infringed upon the Sacred College’s prerogatives and responsibilities. Accordingly, the Cardinal-Nephew, Scipione Borghese, ordered Caetani to oppose unreservedly the concession of the title of ‘Illustrious’ to the Grand Master. If Rudolf could not – or would not – revoke the award, it was therefore to be accorded to the cardinals as well as to the Grand Master. The nuncio complained vociferously about the Imperial ministers’ behaviour, revealing his concerns about the general apathy that impeded the conduct of diplomatic business at the court of Prague:

The negotiations are at the hilt and I have no more strength to support them, because no one is willing to take up the challenge of dealing with His Majesty. […] I could not do anything but they [the ministers, Ed.] kept staring at each other and shrugging their shoulders […]. Therefore, whatever the reason, they tried to disabuse me of every hope of success […].

According to Caetani, the Vice Chancellor and privy councillor Leopold von Stralendorf could no longer be considered a suitable intermediary with the Emperor, because the nuncio suspected that he was in favour of the Grand Master. Caetani asserted that Stralendorf had received gifts in exchange for his support of Wignacourt. Moreover, the Dutch jurist Johann Anton Barwitz (aka Barvitius), secretary of

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57 Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 27 August 1607 in Linhartova, I, pp. 139–40: ‘Il negotio cammina verso l’estremo et io non ho più forza di sostenerlo per esser preclusa la strada di chi voglia pigliar l’impresa di trattare seriamente con Sua Maestà. […] non ho potuto impetare altro se non un guardarsi l’un l’altro, et un stringersi in su le spalle […]. Insomma o sia una, o una altra causa, hanno procurato sradicarmi affatto dall’animo ogni speranza del buon successo […].’

the Imperial council and a privy councillor,59 refused to co-operate with Caetani, as did the privy councillor Andreas Hannewaldt von Eckersdorf.60 This latter declined to bear one of the nuncio’s letters to the Emperor, because he was only too aware that its contents would not have been well-received. Moreover, Hannewaldt strongly condemned the nuncio’s persistence, stressing the Pope’s insensitivity towards the Emperor, and emphasizing once again the absence of any sort of papal financial aid for the war against the Ottomans. Finally, Hannewaldt reproached Caetani for the attempt he had made to gain Stralendorf’s confidence, instead of his own.61

That said, in conversations with the nuncio many councillors had professed to understand the Pope’s reasons for opposing the concession of the title to the Grand Master. But whether or not they genuinely sympathised with the papal position, none of them had the slightest intention of openly sustaining it before the Emperor:62

I did not fail to diligently inform all the councillors, and I managed to bring over to my side Attems,63 Mollart64 and Barvitius, who are of the opinion that it would be best to postpone the privilege for the Grand Master. On the contrary, Stralendorf and Hannewaldt are opposed to this course, and they are the ones who have the ear of His Majesty on a daily basis, who is angry because His Holiness wants to impose his reasons on him.65

59 Arno Duch, ‘Barvitius, Johann Anton’, NDB, 1 (1953), 615; Evans, Rudolf II and His World, pp. 97–98.
60 Franziska Landfried, ‘Hannewaldt von Eckersdorf, Andreas’, NDB, 7 (1966), 621.
65 Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 1 October 1607 in Linhartova, I, pp. 208–09: ‘Io non ho mancato di nuovo informare tutti i consiglieri diligentemente et ho tirato dalla mia parte l’Atmis, il Molart et il Barvitio, che tutti sono stati di parere che almeno si sopraseda il privilegio del Gran maestro […]. A questo ostano lo Stralendorf et l’Anibald, che sono i due che hanno quotidianamente
The twin problem was always the same: the firm resolve of Rudolf II and the stubbornness and apathy of the courtiers. Therefore, there was nothing to do but to keep the negotiations alive, but ‘[…] without any demonstration of anxiety, which would serve as a means [for the courtiers, Ed.] to ask for something in return.’

Despite these conflicts, and according to the recent research of Tomáš Černušák – who is publishing the remaining volumes of the correspondence of the nunciature – ‘we cannot claim that there was no form of communication between the Emperor and the papacy as regards his representative.’ Indeed, some kind of collaboration between the papal emissary and the sovereign did exist, in certain circumstances. For instance, they managed to reach agreement on the election of Ferenc Forgách (Bishop of Nitria) as archbishop of Strigonia (Esztergom), and then on his elevation to the cardinalate. The instability within and outwith the borders of the Empire was exacerbated by the Ottomans’ presence in the Balkans, as well as by the Magyar aristocracy’s demands for political autonomy and freedom of worship. This situation neces-
sitated the choice of an ecclesiastical representative who would be able to confront local political forces, as well as protecting Catholics and stimulating pastoral activity in the Transdanubian regions. Caetani played a crucial part in ensuring that Forgách became an archbishop and subsequently a cardinal within a few months, thereby defeating other candidates who were recommended by members of the court, as well as external contenders.

Among these candidates was Cesare Speciano, Bishop of Cremona, who was supported by Barwitz and Stralendorf, as well as by the Spanish Ambassador Guillon de San Clemente and the Imperial kam-merdiener Philipp Lang. However, the Imperial privy councillor Karl von Liechtenstein confided to Caetani that Rudolf’s preferred choice for the archdiocese of Strigonia was the former Nuncio Ferrero. This revelation embarrassed Caetani, since he no longer trusted his

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predecessor. Furthermore, Mark Sittich von Hohenems (Altemps)\textsuperscript{76} enjoyed considerable support at the Imperial court. Both Wolf Dietrich von Raitenau (archbishop of Salzburg), and the Imperial councillor Paul Sixt von Trautson recommended von Hohenems as a suitable archbishop.\textsuperscript{77} Caetani, for his part, tentatively expounded the virtues of Sigismund Báthory, Prince of Transylvania – who was a close friend and confidant of his\textsuperscript{78} – but Báthory’s candidature was not appreciated by the Emperor, because the latter feared that Báthory was aiming at the Crown of Hungary.\textsuperscript{79} Therefore, Caetani suggested the name of Ferenc Forgách, prominent member of the Hungarian nobility, and judged to be a good Catholic and devoted prelate.\textsuperscript{80} Thanks to the nuncio’s mediation, and with Paul V’s agreement, Forgách was duly elected as archbishop of Strigonia and Primate of Hungary.\textsuperscript{81} The dignity also conferred upon him the role of Chancellor and Lieutenant of Hungary (conceded by the Emperor), which entailed significant secular power. Consequently, the Magyar aristocracy immediately protested the granting of these titles to Forgách, and claimed that it contravened the rights and privileges granted to the Hungarians by the Treaty of Vienna in 1606.\textsuperscript{82}

Meanwhile, Speciano’s death had left only four names in the running for a cardinal’s \textit{biretta}. In addition to Ferrero and Forgách, there were two new candidates for the Imperial nomination: Giovanni della Torre.

\textsuperscript{76} Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg from 1612 to 1619.
\textsuperscript{78} Cristoforo Caetani, \textit{Vita del Sig. Card. Antonio Caetani}, 1624: BAV, Barb. Lat., 6030, fol. 34\textsuperscript{v}.
\textsuperscript{80} See: Letter from Scipione Borghese to Antonio Caetani, 28 July 1607 in ibid., I, pp. 83–87.
\textsuperscript{81} Giordano, I, pp. 443–44. See also: Letter from Rudolf II to Scipione Borghese, 10 July 1607 in Linhartova, I, pp. 55–56.
(Bishop of Veglia)\textsuperscript{83} and Girolamo Portia (Bishop of Adria).\textsuperscript{84} Caetani praised to Rudolf Forgách’s capacities in the fight against heresy, as well as his political ability. As a result, Rudolf agreed to support the new archbishop, although the Emperor was concerned that Forgách’s election might lead him to yearn for greater glories.\textsuperscript{85} Nevertheless, with the Emperor’s approval,\textsuperscript{86} Forgách was appointed cardinal during the Consistory of 10 December 1607. It is undeniable that the support Caetani gave to the prelate was both a wise move and a personal success. But Forgách’s rise to pre-eminence was not without its consequences. In the Transdanubian region, the Hungarian rebels vehemently continued their protests against Imperial authority.\textsuperscript{87} One of the causes that had re-ignited the this conflagration was the Cardinal’s rapid accumulation of ecclesiastical and secular powers.\textsuperscript{88}

In Prague, Caetani’s political strategy within the maze of the court was characterised by a prudent and cautious attitude. The nuncio was convinced that his best policy was to wait for events to take their course\textsuperscript{89} while avoiding having the conduct of his affairs called into question or scrutinised by the Imperial court. But as a matter of fact, this course of action proved ineffective. Clear evidence of this failure is the political turmoil that reigned in Bohemia during the months prior to Rudolf II’s concession of the \textit{Letter of Majesty} in 1609.\textsuperscript{90} This chaos is obvious in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{83} Today Krk. See: Stefano Andretta, ‘Della Torre, Giovanni’, \textit{DBI}, 37 (1989), 567–70.
\item \textsuperscript{84} \textit{Nuntiaturen des Giovanni Delfino und des Bartolomeo Portia (1577–1578)}, ed. by Alexander Koller (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003).
\item \textsuperscript{85} See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 6 September 1607 in Lihartoava, I, p. 161.
\item \textsuperscript{86} See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 21 January 1608 in ibid., II, p. 42.
\item \textsuperscript{87} See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 14 January 1608 in ibid., II, pp. 24–27.
\item \textsuperscript{88} See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 18 February 1608 in ibid., II, pp. 108–09.
\item \textsuperscript{89} See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 10 March 1608 in ibid., II, p. 163.
\item \textsuperscript{90} See: Anton Gindely, \textit{Geschichte der Ertheilung des Böhmischen Majestätsbriefes von 1609} (Prague: Carl Bellman, 1868); Tomáš Černušák, ‘Nuncio Caetani and His Defence of Catholic Interests in the Time Before the Letter of Majesty of
nuncio’s correspondence. Throughout, Caetani appeared surprised and, above all, discouraged, as he was a passive witness of such a tragic and worrying event for Catholicism in the Empire. The freedom of worship granted to the Bohemians demonstrated that the nuncio could not force Paul V’s wishes upon the Emperor and his ministers, as he simply did not have enough political weight, or a strong enough faction, at the Imperial court to advance the Pope’s position on the Letter of Majesty.

Since the summer of 1608, Caetani had been trying to persuade the Emperor to hold out against the demands of the Bohemian nobility, who were to convene in Prague to attend the Diet of the Kingdom, and were threatening to travel to the capital in arms. The nuncio understood that these religious demands masked political purposes, not least the nobles’ desire for more power in decision-making, and financial contributions for the defence of the Empire. Caetani entrusted his requests to the new Spanish Ambassador Baltasar de Zúñiga, since the Imperial chambers were off-limits to Caetani himself. Zúñiga was Caetani’s most important interlocutor with Rudolf, and was a man with whom the nuncio would enjoy a close relationship in subsequent years, during his nunciature in Madrid. The last attempt began at sunrise one day in mid-June 1609, when Caetani, the Archduke Leopold and the Spanish ambassador secretly gathered in the convent of the Capuchin friars to plot a course of action. They decided that the Archduke would write a persuasive letter to the Emperor, while Caetani and Zúñiga would try to speak directly to the ministers in order to break the impasse.

95 See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 22 June 1609: ASV, FB, II, 169, fol. 125v.
Their implorations, however, went unheeded. In his *relazione*, Caetani could do no more than simply condemn the lack of secular forces with the power to defend the Imperial authority and the Catholic religion.\(^{96}\) In the first place, he emphasised that Rudolf II – who was nicknamed the ‘stucco King’,\(^{97}\) i.e. no one could persuade him – lacked the energy required for the burdens of government.\(^{98}\) Secondly, he claimed that the Catholics appeared aboulic and hopeless, even the most fervent among them; and thirdly, in his dispatches, he once again stressed the ministers’ usual hesitance. According to the nuncio, Hannewaldt and Stralendorf suggested acquiescing to the rebels’ demands in order to stop their progress; on the other hand, Attems and Hegenmüller\(^ {99}\) were favourably disposed toward the use of armed force; Barwitz, meanwhile, was indecisive.\(^ {100}\) Therefore, Caetani was already picturing in his mind the worst possible fate for the Holy Roman Empire, torturing himself with fears of what might happen to the bishops and the Catholic princes should the Imperial vassals obtain freedom of worship in a kingdom under direct Habsburg rule.\(^ {101}\) He freely admitted that he could do nothing to prevent the storm from coming; he could only keep the Catholic churches of Bohemia open, say Masses as required, and organize processions. When the Silesians joined the Bohemian rebels in 1609, the only remedy against such a ‘cursed League of the Devil’\(^ {102}\) was to wait for the help of God:

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\(^ {96}\) *Relazione finale di Antonio Caetani nunzio all’Imperatore*, December 1610 in Giordano, II, pp. 765–70.

\(^ {97}\) Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 20 April 1609: ASV, FB, II, 160, fol. 245*: ‘Re di stucco’.

\(^ {98}\) See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 28 July 1608 in Linhartova, III, p. 144.


\(^ {100}\) See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 11 May 1609: ASV, FB, II, 169, fol. 19r.

\(^ {101}\) See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 2 February 1609: ASV, FB, II, 160, fol. 73.

\(^ {102}\) Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 1 June 1609: ASV, FB, II, 169, fol. 78*: ‘maledetta Lega del Demonio’.
[...] in so many storms and waves of these peoples, where the use of the sail and the oars of political advice would not be useful, the best path is to straighten the wheel, and do what is convenient; as to the rest, we must be carried away by the storm, because in no other way can the sailors lead themselves to a safe harbour in hopeless and desperate situations. Therefore, in this case, where we are defending the cause of God, we must not doubt his divine help.\textsuperscript{103}

This was a stark warning, borne out of fear and desperation. However, in the Empire at large, the papal nuncio was not alone in his fears for the future of Catholicism. During the following year, Caetani would particularly dedicate his time to negotiations for the creation of a Catholic League, whose main aim it was to counteract the nascent Evangelical Union in the German lands. It also seems that he asked to be replaced, as he claimed to be ill and thus physically unable to withstand the freezing conditions of a Bohemian winter.\textsuperscript{104} But at the same time, he was aware that he was essentially being ignored at court for too long, and that he had already lost any possible margin for manoeuvre. The nuncio vehemently denounced the slanderers who had tried to damage his reputation with the objective of destroying his credibility – just as the Archduke Leopold had done, in accusing Caetani of being an enemy of the House of Austria and a friend of the French.\textsuperscript{105}

After some hesitation, the Pope decided to appoint a new nuncio in September 1610,\textsuperscript{106} and Caetani finally conceded defeat, poetically giving vent to all his sorrow:

\begin{flushright}
\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{103} Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 9 March 1609: ASV, FB, II, 160, fol. 149: ‘[...] in tante procelle et ondeggiamento di questi popoli, dove usar la vela et i remi dei consigli politici non sarebbe cosa sicura, il meglio è avviar dritti il timone e con fare quel che conviene, e del resto lasciarsi portar dalla tempesta, perché neanco d’altra maniera nei casi ultimi e disperati i marinari si conducono a buon porto, senza che in questo caso, nel qual si difende la causa Dio benedetto, non si deve diffidar del suo divino aiuto.’

\textsuperscript{104} Cristoforo Caetani, \textit{Vita del Sig. Card. Antonio Caetani}, 1624: BAV, Barb. Lat., 6030, fols 33v–34r.

\textsuperscript{105} See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 10 January 1611: BAV, Barb. Lat., 6910, fols 20v–22v.

\textsuperscript{106} See: Letter from Scipione Borghese to Antonio Caetani, 18 September 1610: ASV, Segreteria di Stato (SS), Nunziature Diverse (ND), 8, fol. 278.
\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushright}
It pains me to the soul to leave these things now so intricate that only God can dissolve them, but inasmuch here the truth is so much abhorred, I gladly leave the field and surrender, because, to prevent from going to ruin those who wish to is perhaps a superhuman act, and it needs the help of the Divine power.\(^{107}\)

Despite all the setbacks he had encountered, Paul V and Scipione Borghese judged the nuncio’s political action positively. They were fully aware of the difficulties of operating in the labyrinth of the Imperial court. Moreover, Caetani’s failure in Prague did not mean the end of his career as a papal diplomat. In 1611, he was chosen to act as the Pope’s representative at the court of Madrid. The main reason for this choice was due to his family’s affinity with the crown of Castile.\(^{108}\) Moreover, his \textit{casa}'s network of Spanish relatives would have smoothed his path at court far more than his experience in Prague. That is why, all things considered, the lack of co-operation between the nuncio and the courtiers was the most important reason why he had failed to further papal objectives in Prague, and furthermore, had not been able to gain the Emperor’s confidence. As shown in this article, the nuncio’s difficulties in establishing positive relations with the council-lors, his decision to refrain from open interference in Imperial affairs, and Rudolf II’s opposition, are elements that, in sum, compromised the creation of a strong network of friends and confidants at court, which would have allowed him greater latitude and provided for greater success.

\(^{107}\) Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 10 January 1611: BAV, Barb. Lat., 6910, fol. 27: ‘A me duole nell’anima lasciar queste cose hormai tanto inviluppate, che solo Dio può disciorglierle, ma poiché qui la verità è tanto abhorrita, cedo volentieri dal campo e m’arrendo, perché procurar che chi vuol andar in ruina non vi vada è opera forse sopra humana, e richiede il mero aiuto della Divina potenza.’ Caetani officially ended his service when the new nuncio Giovan Battista Salvago, Bishop of Sarzana, was received by the Emperor. See: Letter from Antonio Caetani to Scipione Borghese, 24 January 1611: BAV, Barb. Lat., 6910, fol. 40r.

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