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Heritage and Purple: Memory Strategies in the Barberini Archive¹

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Abstract: *This article analyses the Barberini Archive as not merely a passive repository, but as an active instrument for the social legitimation and construction of noble status by the Barberini family, following Maffeo Barberini's ascent to the papacy as Urban VIII (1623–1644). Tracing the family's strategic cursus honorum, the study confirms that the archive's documentation actively supported key steps outlined by historians such as Wolfgang Reinhard: the accumulation of vast patrimony (documented in the *Giustificazioni* and *Computisteria* series), the acquisition of fiefs (especially Palestrina), high honours (such as the Golden Fleece), and crucial dynastic marriages (e.g. Taddeo Barberini and Anna Colonna).*

The structure of the archive reveals a deliberate twofold strategy of memory: removal and accumulation. The scarcity and subsequent concealment of documents related to the family's mercantile and Florentine past, alongside the suppression of Carlo Strozzi's unfavourable genealogical work, demonstrate a clear attempt to disown non-noble origins. Conversely, the accumulation of records detailing artistic patronage, pious works, and Roman Curia honours served to construct a new, fully integrated Baroque aristocratic lineage. The documentation in the Barberini Archive provided essential proof of rank for the family's affirmation within the Roman nobility.

Keywords: *Barberini Archive, Urban VIII, Papal Nepotism, Social Mobility, Roman Nobility, Archival Science, Patrimony, Palestrina, Noble Project*

Anyone who enters St Peter's Basilica in Rome is astonished by the magnificence of Christianity's most important basilica. Certainly, one of the most striking features is the bronze baldachin, built by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The sheer size of the baldachin could easily overshadow the four decorated pedestals supporting the

1 This contribution originates from my presentation (*Just a Family Archive? New perspectives from the Barberini Archive*) at the international conference *Three Centuries in the Heart of Europe. European Aristocracy in the Early Modern Period*, held in Hradec Králové and Pardubice on 2 and 3 October 2025. I take this opportunity to thank Dr Jakub Benko (UHK) and Dr Anna Zouhar Adamčíková (UPCE, URCA). I would also like to thank Prof. Vittoria Fiorelli (UniSOB) and Prof. Félix Labrador Arroyo (URJC). Sincere thanks are extended to Ms. Verónica Gómez (TEFL).

monument's columns, on which an emblem featuring three bees is depicted. These bees have a long history. They originate from a town in the Tuscan countryside, Barberino Val d'Elsa, where the *de Barberino* family, a family of cloth merchants, lived in the Middle Ages. This family would later ascend to the Chair of St Peter in the person of Maffeo Barberini (1568–1644), who went down in history as Urban VIII, Pope from 1623 to 1644.² This ascent was not abrupt, but the result of a gradual process of economic consolidation, curial integration, and strategic advancement across generations.

That a member of a non-noble family could reach the pinnacle of Christendom was not a novelty for the time.³ Indeed, this phenomenon was fully integrated into the profound social changes that affected Europe during the Early Modern period, characterised by social mobility that also featured the merchant class, which was now carving out an increasingly large space for itself within the ranks of the nobility.⁴ Thanks to the greater availability of financial resources and the administrative capacity of new families, as well as the crisis of the old nobility, who were forced into debt to remain at court, more and more members of other social classes were counted among the nobles. The phenomenon concerned the entire European scenario. In France, for instance, the Early Modern period sees reference to the *noblesse d'épée*, a term designating the old nobility, born from the battlefields, and the *noblesse de robe*, which indicates nobility acquired through the exercise of high public offices (*offices*) in administration, justice, and finance.⁵ In Spain, on the other hand, the

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- 2 For a biography of the Pope, see Georg LUTZ, *Urbano VIII*, in: I Papi da Pietro a Francesco, 3 vols., Roma 2014 (2000¹), vol. 3, pp. 298–321, Urbano viii - Enciclopedia - Treccani, [22. 4. 2026]. On the family's history from the fourteenth century to Cornelia Costanza Barberini (1716–1797), see Pio PECCHIAI, *I Barberini*, Roma 1959. An updated and well-documented overview of the family's earliest members is provided by Luca POLIDORO, *I Barberini prima dei Barberini: indagine sulla serie Antichità della Famiglia dell'Archivio Barberini presso la Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, PhD Thesis in Studi Storici, cycle XXXIII, Università degli Studi di Firenze – Università di Siena 2017–2020, I Barberini prima dei Barberini. Indagine sulla serie Antichità della Famiglia dell'Archivio Barberini presso la Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, [22. 4. 2026]. In the course of this contribution, I will refer to 'Antichità della Famiglia' as a sub-series, intending the Barberini Archive as a fonds and not a separate archive.
- 3 The bibliography on this subject is vast. For reasons of space, I cite only Wolfgang REINHARD, *Papal Power and Family Strategy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, in: Ronald G. Asch – Adolf M. Birke (eds.), *Princes, Patronage, and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age c.1450–1650*, Oxford 1991, pp. 329–356.
- 4 For an overview of social mobility in the Early Modern period see Gaetano SABATINI, *Espacios de negociación. Prácticas políticas, gestión de recursos, circulación de agentes y proyectos a Nápoles y en Italia al tiempo de la hegemonía española*, Napoli 2025.
- 5 For France the two volumes by Richard MOUSNIER, *Les institutions de la France sous la Monarchie Absolue, 1598–1789*, 2 vols., Paris 1974–1980 remain fundamental. For a more recent view, see Robert DESCIMON – Élie HADDAD (eds.), *Épreuves de noblesse. Les expériences nobiliaires de la haute robe parisienne (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècle)*, Parigi 2010 and Laurence JEAN-MARIE – Christophe MANEUVRIER (eds.), *Distinction et supériorité sociale (Moyen Âge et époque moderne)*, Caen 2010. On the concepts of *noblesse d'épée* and *noblesse de robe* see Élie HADDAD, *Noblesse d'épée, noblesse de robe: espaces sociaux*

terms *nobleza de sangre* and *nobleza de privilegio* are used: the former designating nobility by descent, obtained through participation in wars, particularly the *Reconquista*, and the latter the purchase of a noble title, including the acquisition of *señoríos*, sold by the Spanish Crown to deal with its precarious financial situation.⁶ In Italy, the extremely multifaceted political situation does not allow for overly stark generalisations.⁷ While Southern Italy, the Kingdom of Naples and the Kingdom of Sicily, does exhibit certain consistencies as a result of both belonging to the Spanish Crown,⁸ the panorama in the rest of the peninsula is more diverse.

Unlike these monarchies, however, the Roman case was quite different and peculiar, as a result of the dual nature of the papal monarchy in the Early Modern period, which functioned as both a territorial and universal monarchy, while remaining elective.⁹ It was precisely this openness that allowed individuals from the merchant class to reach, through a combination of strategic planning and fortune, the Chair of St. Peter and subsequently establish themselves within the ranks of the Roman nobility. This trajectory is evidenced, for example, by the archives of several Florentine families who moved to Rome, as demonstrated by Irene Fosi's study of the Salviati, Ruspoli, and Sacchetti families. According to Fosi, the documentation preserved in these family archives exemplifies the 'status transformation' (*trasformazione cetuale*) that characterised 'a large part of the merchant oligarchies and patricians in the Italian states of the Ancien Régime'.¹⁰

et frontières idéologiques, L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques [online], 21 bis, 2020, Noblesse d'épée, noblesse de robe : espaces sociaux et frontières idéologiques, [22. 4. 2026].

- 6 On this distinction for Spain, I limit myself to citing Enrique SORIA MESA, *La nobleza en la España moderna. Cambio y continuidad*, Madrid 2007. For the Spanish nobility, I refer to Adolfo CARRASCO MARTÍNEZ, *Sangre, honor y privilegio. La nobleza española bajo los Austrias*, Barcelona 2000, and Enrique SORIA MESA – Juan Jesús BRAVO CARO – José Miguel DELGADO BARRADO (eds.), *Las élites en la época moderna. La Monarquía Española*, 4 vols., Córdoba 2009.
- 7 A general overview in Claudio DONATI, *L'idea di nobiltà in Italia. Secoli XIV–XVIII*, Roma 1995 (1988¹).
- 8 For an updated overview of the old and new nobility in the Kingdom of Sicily, I refer to Francisco Javier ILLANA LÓPEZ, *Entre señores y baroni. Ventas de señoríos en Castilla y ventas de feudos en Sicilia durante la Edad Moderna: un estado de la cuestión historiográfico*, in: Antonio Jiménez Estrella – Julián J. Lozano – Francisco Sánchez-Montes González (eds.), *Urdimbre y memoria de un imperio global. Redes y circulación de agentes en la Monarquía Hispánica*, Granada 2023, pp. 573–595. For the Kingdom of Naples, Giuseppe GALASSO, *Il Regno di Napoli. Società e cultura del Mezzogiorno moderno*, Torino 2011 is indispensable.
- 9 The study by Paolo PRODI, *The Papal Prince. One body and two souls: the papal monarchy in early modern Europe*, Cambridge 1987 [originally published as *Il sovrano pontefice. Un corpo e due anime: la monarchia papale nella prima età moderna*, Bologna 1982], remains fundamental to this subject.
- 10 'Per esemplificare percorsi sociali paralleli ed al tempo stesso diversi compiuti da alcune famiglie fiorentine trasferitesi a Roma nel Cinquecento e legate alla curia ed alla corte pontificia, mi soffermerò su tre casi: Salviati, Ruspoli e Sacchetti. Queste famiglie infatti possono rappresentare, proprio attraverso lesame dei loro archivi, percorsi sociali significativi e, soprattutto, decisamente esemplari, di una trasformazione che

Within this framework, the attainment of the papacy represented in many cases the starting point for obtaining noble status.¹¹ Observing the careers of various early modern families with a trajectory similar to that of the Barberini, such as the Borghese, who achieved the papacy with Camillo Borghese (Paul V, Supreme Pontiff from 1605 to 1621),¹² Wolfgang Reinhard was able to trace a *cursus honorum* for the pontiffs' families during the reign of one of their members. The concentration of offices and revenues in the hands of the Pope's closest relatives, usually nephews, as exemplified by the title and the non-institutional role of the *cardinal nepote*,¹³ represented the first element of a family strategy that was then compounded by the purchase of: a palace in Rome; a country residence, such as a villa on the outskirts of the city or in the Roman hills; a family chapel, or even a church as a family mausoleum, and acceptance by the old nobility through marriage.¹⁴ Finally, the picture was completed by the acquisition of lands or fiefs in the Roman countryside, a basis for the elevation of the owner's status, who in many cases thus became, if he was not one already, also a landowner and land administrator.¹⁵

Archivum instrumentum regni

The Barberini followed this path meticulously. After the election of Maffeo Barberini in 1623, the family implemented a policy of nepotism to consolidate their new status, through the acquisition of the most important and lucrative offices within the Curia. The Pope immediately promoted his nephew Francesco (1597–1679), who became the cardinal nepote and right-hand man of the pontiff in 1623, his brother Antonio Barberini (1569–1646), raised to the purple in 1624, and his other nephew Antonio Barberini

caratterizzò gran parte delle oligarchie mercantili e dei patriziati negli stati italiani di antico regime: Irene FOSI, *Archivi di famiglie toscane nella Roma del Cinque e Seicento: problemi e prospettive di ricerca*, in Roberto Navarrini – Laura Casella (eds.), *Archivi nobiliari e domestici. Conservazione, metodologie di riordino e prospettive di ricerca storica. Atti del Convegno di Studi (Udine, 14–15 maggio 1998)*, Udine 2000, pp. 255–276, p. 256.

- 11 For an updated overview of the Roman Curia in the Early Modern Age, see Maria Antonietta VISCEGLIA, *La Roma dei papi. La corte e la politica internazionale (secoli XV–XVII)*, Roma 2018 and EADEM, *Le donne dei papi in età moderna. Un altro sguardo sul nepotismo (1492–1655)*, Roma 2023.
- 12 Biography of the pontiff in Volker REINHARDT, *Paolo V*, in: *I Papi da Pietro a Francesco*, vol. 3, pp. 277–292, Paolo v - Enciclopedia - Treccani, [22. 4. 2026].
- 13 On this figure, see at least Antonio MENNITI IPPOLITO, *Il governo dei papi nell'età moderna. Carriere, gerarchie, organizzazione curiale*, Roma 2007.
- 14 W. REINHARD, *Papal Power*, pp. 338–340.
- 15 A complete overview of the phenomenon of fief purchase by the new Roman nobility is missing. Studies focus instead on the analysis of economic or jurisdictional aspects within the fiefs of individual families. For an overview of the Roman nobility, the volume by Maria Antonietta VISCEGLIA (ed.), *La nobiltà romana in età moderna. Profili istituzionali e pratiche sociali*, Roma 2001 remains indispensable.

(1607–1671), cardinal in 1628, referred to as *iunior* to distinguish him from his uncle.¹⁶ The Barberini built a palace worthy of a noble family by expanding and refurbishing the old Palazzo Sforza in Via delle Quattro Fontane in Rome; through the marriage in 1627 of the Pope's only lay nephew, Taddeo Barberini (1603–1647),¹⁷ to Anna Colonna (1601–1658), they became related to the Colonna, an important Roman baronial family,¹⁸ and finally, they systematically acquired several fiefs within the territories of the Papal State, the most important of which was certainly Palestrina, a city about 40 km from Rome, sold by Francesco Colonna (1571–1636), a member of the Palestrina branch of the Colonna family.¹⁹

The archives of noble families bear witness, in their documentation and organisation, to the practices and instruments through which these families grew, reached their peak, consolidated, and finally declined. In the case of the Barberini, the scholar is informed about this entire *cursus honorum* by the documents preserved in the Barberini Archive, which has been housed in the halls of the Vatican Apostolic Library since 1902, when, thanks to the persistence of the Prefect of the Library, Father Franziskus Ehrle (1845–1934), the Vatican purchased the Biblioteca Barberina along with the archive from the family.²⁰

The documentary patrimony of the Barberini Archive consists of approximately 9,000 archival units, spanning about 500 linear metres, and includes documents, packets, and registers from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, and some documents from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries.²¹ At the time of its purchase by the Vatican, the archive

16 Brief biographical profiles of the three cardinals in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (=DBI): Barberini, Francesco (edited by Alberto Merola), vol. 6 (1964), pp. 172–176, BARBERINI, Francesco - *Enciclopedia - Treccani*, [22. 4. 2026]. Barberini, Antonio (edited by Alberto Merola), vol. 6 (1964), pp. 165–166, BARBERINI, Antonio - *Enciclopedia - Treccani*, [22. 4. 2026]. Barberini, Antonio (edited by Alberto Merola), vol. 6 (1964), pp. 166–170, BARBERINI, Antonio - *Enciclopedia - Treccani*, [22. 4. 2026].

17 DBI, Barberini, Taddeo (edited by Alberto Merola), vol. 6 (1964), pp. 180–182, BARBERINI, Taddeo - *Enciclopedia - Treccani*, [22. 4. 2026].

18 On Anna Colonna and her marriage to Taddeo, with implications for the two families, see Simona FECCI – Maria Antonietta VISCEGLIA, *Tra due famiglie: Anna Colonna Barberini “prefetessa” di Roma*, in: Francesca Cantù (ed.), *I linguaggi del potere nell'età barocca. 2: Donne e sfera pubblica*, Roma 2009, pp. 257–327.

19 DBI, Colonna, Francesco (edited by Stefano Andretta), vol. 27 (1982), pp. 303–304, COLONNA, Francesco - *Enciclopedia - Treccani*, [22. 4. 2026].

20 On the sale to the Vatican by the Barberini family and the arrival of the Archive in the Vatican Apostolic Library, I refer to Luigi CACCIAGLIA, *Note sugli archivi di famiglie nella Biblioteca apostolica vaticana*, in: *Archivi e archivistica a Roma dopo l'Unità. Genesi storica, ordinamenti, interrelazioni. Atti del Convegno* (Roma, 12–14 marzo 1990), Roma 1994, pp. 380–403 and Chiara CAMBRAI, *Storia di un'amministrazione familiare dai documenti dell'Archivio Barberini*, PhD Thesis in Scienze Documentarie, Linguistiche e Letterarie, cycle XXXI, Università la Sapienza di Roma 2019.

21 General description of the Archive in Luigi FIORANI, *Archivio Barberini*, in: Francesco D'Aiuto – Paolo Vian (eds.), *Guida ai fondi manoscritti, numismatici, a stampa della Biblioteca Vaticana. I: Dipartimento Manoscritti, Studi e Testi 466*, Città del Vaticano 2011, pp. 677–683.

was well preserved and organised by subject and in chronological order, according to a practical arrangement linked to the family's economic and administrative activities, as well as genealogical and patrimonial matters.²² The series that make up the archive were largely reordered in the nineteenth century by Sante (1802–1887) and Alessandro Perialisi (c. 1847–1907). The two extracted a core of documents that would later form the series Indici, the most extensive among the series, and produced an inventory of this series, revised by Luigi Fiorani in the years 1978–1980 and still used by scholars today.²³

A preliminary note is necessary, however: while Fiorani noted in 2011 that less than a third of the documents preserved in the archive were available for consultation,²⁴ now, fifteen years later, the situation, despite the efforts of the Library's staff, has not changed significantly.²⁵ The series Indice V, Abbadie II, Carteggi, Computisteria II, and Sacre Congregazioni still need to be reordered and inventoried before they can be made available to scholars.²⁶

The series Indici I–IV is the most extensive among the series that make up the Barberini Archive. The four Indici series comprise approximately 8,249 archival units and currently form the largest part of the documentation.²⁷ Specifically, the Indice I series contains 1,252 archival units, Indice II 4,618, Indice III 685, and Indice IV 1,698: the Indice V series, which should contain material capable of supplementing what is already found in the Indici, is still excluded from consultation.²⁸

In discussing the Barberini Archive, historiography has never attempted to outline a systematic framework for this archive, both because of the objective situation in which it finds itself (where only a third of the documentation is currently reordered and inventoried, and therefore available for consultation) and because of its sheer size. The main interests relating to the archive have concentrated on the fields of art and patronage. Research and studies on family and noble archives are also rather static: the most relevant contributions

22 L. FIORANI, *Archivio Barberini*, p. 677. On the necessity of care and inventorying of archives by noble families in Tuscany, extendable to other aristocratic families, see Elisabetta INSABATO, *Un momento fondamentale nell'organizzazione degli archivi di famiglia in Italia: il Settecento*, in: *Il futuro della memoria. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi sugli archivi di famiglie e di persone* (Capri, 9–13 settembre 1991), 2 vols., Roma, 1997, vol. I, pp. 289–310.

23 Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (=BAV: Vatican Apostolic Library), Sala Consultazione Manoscritti, 382 (1–8) rosso.

24 L. FIORANI, *Archivio Barberini*, p. 680.

25 As communicated by the director of the Archive Dr Isabella Aurora and Dr Chiara Cambrai in their paper *L'Archivio Barberini: progressi, sfide e opportunità per future ricerche*, presented at the International Study Conference *Sguardi su Urbano VIII: un papato da (ri)discutere*, Roma, 6 March 2025.

26 L. FIORANI, *Archivio Barberini*, pp. 680–681.

27 During the course of the discussion, I will use round brackets to indicate a reference to the archival units, according to the various inventories indicated previously.

28 L. FIORANI, *Archivio Barberini*, pp. 680–681.

from which to start such an investigation are still the two works collecting conference proceedings, perhaps the only way to outline as complete and exhaustive an overview as possible on a topic that requires multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge.²⁹ The objective of the present contribution is therefore to present the Barberini Archive as the archive of a noble family of merchant origin, in order to seek to delineate, according to the indications outlined by Roberto Navarrini³⁰ and with attention turned to the archives of Florentine families in Rome studied by Irene Fosi,³¹ if and how the archive's documents constitute an essential instrument for the family's strategies of noble legitimation and the concealment of its mercantile origins.

Patrimonio

According to Navarrini, 'the fundamental core of the family – beyond, naturally, the people and the relationships of kinship and service – is the *patrimonio* (heritage/estate); the economic premise around which all other interests revolve' (Trans. Ms. Gómez).³²

The way these records are organised in the archive highlights the centrality of *patrimonio* within the family strategy. The Giustificazioni series, specifically Giustificazioni I, composed of 617 archival units and dedicated to the family's cardinals,³³ and Giustificazioni II, relating to the Barberini Princes,³⁴ allow for an accounting of the revenues and expenses incurred

29 I refer to *Il futuro della memoria. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi sugli archivi di famiglie e di persone* (Capri, 9–13 settembre 1991), 2 vols., Roma 1997 and Roberto NAVARRINI – Laura CASELLA (eds.), *Archivi nobiliari e domestici. Conservazione, metodologie di riordino e prospettive di ricerca storica. Atti del Convegno di Studi* (Udine, 14–15 maggio 1998), Udine 2000. On private archives, I cite the monograph by Roberto NAVARRINI, *Gli archivi privati*, Lucca 2005. Exemplary, with regard to the Orsini family archive, is the study by Elisabetta MORI, *L'Archivio Orsini. La famiglia, la storia, l'inventario*, Roma 2016.

30 Roberto NAVARRINI, *La conservazione della memoria nell'azienda famiglia*, in: R. Navarrini – L. Casella (eds.), *Archivi nobiliari*, pp. 87–97.

31 I. FOSI, *Archivi di famiglie toscane*, pp. 255–276.

32 'Il nucleo fondamentale della famiglia – oltre naturalmente alle persone e ai rapporti di cognazione e di servitù – è il *patrimonio*; il presupposto economico attorno al quale ruotano tutti gli altri interessi': R. NAVARRINI, *La conservazione*, p. 88.

33 Inventory by L. CACCIAGLIA (ed.), *Le «Giustificazioni» dell'Archivio Barberini. Inventario. I: Le giustificazioni dei cardinali*, Studi e Testi 485, Città del Vaticano 2014. The *giustificazioni* concern the cardinals Maffeo Barberini, Francesco Barberini, Antonio Barberini *junior*, Carlo Barberini (1630–1704), Francesco Barberini *junior* (1662–1738), and Benedetto Colonna Barberini di Sciarra (1788–1863).

34 Inventory by L. CACCIAGLIA (ed.), *Le «Giustificazioni» dell'Archivio Barberini. Inventario. II: Le giustificazioni dei principi*, Studi e Testi 567, Città del Vaticano 2024. The *giustificazioni* concern Carlo Barberini (1562–1630), the Pope's brother and father of Francesco, Taddeo, and Antonio, to whom the purchase of Palestrina must be attributed (DBI, Barberini, Carlo, edited by Alberto Merola, vol. 6 1964, pp. 170–171, BARBERINI, Carlo - Enciclopedia - Treccani, [22. 4. 2026]). Taddeo Barberini,

by members of the house from the seventeenth century up to the nineteenth century. It is worth noting that the term ‘giustificazioni’ refers to ‘collections, divided by month and year, according to the date of payment, of various accounting documents (accounts, warrants, and receipts), which account for, or ‘justify’, the movements of money (or goods: grain, oil, wine, and wood) for payments made’ (Trans. Ms. Gómez).³⁵ More specifically, the same term can refer to three different types of accounting record within the same document: ‘the artisan’s bill for the work requested of him, the payment order (or counter-order), i.e., the payment order issued by the Prince, and the receipt or delivery slip’ (Trans. Ms. Gómez).³⁶

The actual economic core of the archive is represented by the Computisteria series, which consists of 1,238 archival units, including journals, ledgers, and other accounting documentation concerning the administrative management of the Palazzo Barberini and the family’s fiefs, for a period from the end of the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.³⁷

The Indice III series is of particular importance in this area; its papers account solely for the assets owned by the family from the seventeenth century up to the sale of the Barberini Archive to the Vatican. The documents preserved here make it possible to trace a map of the assets and interests the Barberini had in the peninsula, such as in Ferrara and Vicenza (84–256), in Barberino (347–362), and in Florence (363–389), in addition to the immovable assets scattered around the Roman countryside which were lost by the family (570–664).

Finally, the Abbadie I series also concerns the family’s assets; it is formed of 377 archival units, which include documents dating from the seventeenth century onwards, mainly concerning the administration of the numerous abbacies of which the Barberini cardinals were commendatory abbots (such as the abbeys of S. Maria di Farfa and S. Salvatore Maggiore, later passed from Cardinal Francesco to his nephew Cardinal Carlo) and which nonetheless yielded considerable income to the family.³⁸

While it is true that *patrimonio* is one of the most important aspects of a high-ranking family, it is noteworthy that the economic section of the Barberini Archive does not

Anna Colonna Barberini, and their children, Niccolò (1635–1699: P. PECCHIAI, *I Barberini*, p. 219) and Maffeo (1631–1685: P. PECCHIAI, *I Barberini*, pp. 217–218).

35 ‘Le raccolte, divise per mese e per anno, secondo la data del pagamento, di diversi documenti contabili (conti, mandati e ricevute), che rendono conto, cioè ‘giustificano’ i movimenti di denari (o di generi: a grano, olio, vino e legno) per i pagamenti effettuati’: L. CACCIAGLIA (ed.), *Le «Giustificazioni» dell’Archivio Barberini. Inventario I*, p. 15.

36 ‘Il conto dell’artigiano per l’opera che gli viene richiesta, il mandato di pagamento (o contromandato), cioè l’ordine di pagamento emesso dal principe e la ricevuta o recapito’: L. CACCIAGLIA (ed.), *Le «Giustificazioni» dell’Archivio Barberini. Inventario II*, p. 27.

37 Consultation of this series is possible thanks to a typewritten inventory from 1982 edited by Luigi Fiorani: Città del Vaticano, BAV, Sala Consultazione Manoscritti, 382 (8) rosso.

38 The inventory is edited by Marco BUONOCORE, *Bibliografia retrospettiva dei fondi della Biblioteca Vaticana*, Città del Vaticano, 1994, pp. 193–290.

feature much documentation relating to the family's mercantile period, but begins in the seventeenth century, coinciding with the Curial activities of Maffeo Barberini. This fact could be explained by the growth of the family's administrative and financial activity in Rome, but in reality, a small proto-archive, preceding Maffeo's election to the papal throne, can be found.³⁹ This proto-archive mainly includes a few *memoriali* relating to the mercantile period and thus indicates that the archival production linked to the family's merchants was not deemed worthy of preservation by the house. This fact can also be explained by the practical and immediate nature of mercantile records, which lost their utility after serving their function,⁴⁰ but it is therefore possible to interpret this as a form of selective preservation, if not deliberate concealment (*occultamento*) of the material, especially when comparing this proto-archive to other documents preserved in the Indici series, and of an attempt to construct a noble status in the archive's composition too. In this sense, the practice was common among other Tuscan families in Rome during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who disowned their mercantile past and aimed 'towards complete assimilation into the Roman nobility, with well-targeted exogamous marital strategies, with the purchase of feudal goods and titles' (Trans. Ms. Gómez) and by also adopting the lifestyle, social practices, and behaviour of the nobility.⁴¹ The continuation of the analysis, relating to the Indici series, will provide an answer to this question.

Family Genealogy

What has been said about a sort of *damnatio memoriae* concerning the family's mercantile period, a *damnatio* resulting from the need to actually establish a foundation and history for their nobility, could be confirmed by the documents present in the sub-series 'Antichità della famiglia' within the Indice I series, which, together with the Pergamene series, contains the oldest documents in the Archive. This sub-series and the Pergamene series are viewed complementarily. Unfortunately, although the Pergamene series is theoretically available to scholars, the absence of a description and inventory makes its consultation very complicated, despite Pecchiai having provided a list of the pergamene's contents in his monograph.⁴² This list reveals the presence of over six hundred documents, dating from 1202 to 1643.

39 C. CAMBRAI, *Storia di un'amministrazione*, pp. 53–58.

40 R. NAVARRINI, *La conservazione*, p. 95.

41 'Verso la completa assimilazione alla nobiltà romana, con strategie matrimoniali esogamiche ben mirate in tale direzione, con l'acquisto di beni e titoli feudali': I. FOSI, *Archivi di famiglie toscane*, p. 256.

42 P. PECCHIAI, *I Barberini*, pp. XIII–XIV. But see the considerations of L. FIORANI, *Archivio Barberini*, p. 683 and L. POLIDORO, *I Barberini prima dei Barberini*, pp. 27–31.

The sub-series ‘Antichità della famiglia’ consists of 202 archival units, which open the Indice I series, and presents documents from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century ‘in all probability extrapolated from the *Pergamene* and from other series of the Barberini Archive, which were included into the ‘Antichità’ by Strozzi himself’ (Trans. Ms. Gómez).⁴³ The presence of this series and sub-series is indeed explained by the need to reconstruct their origins attempted by the family at the moment when Maffeo Barberini ascended to the papacy. The task of reconstructing the family’s genealogy, a habitual and necessary practice for those aspiring to nobility, within a precise legitimation strategy, but also for those who had to distinguish themselves from newcomers,⁴⁴ was entrusted by the Barberini to Carlo di Tommaso Strozzi (1587–1670), an important Florentine bibliophile and scholar,⁴⁵ who, after long years of research which also included the Tuscan archives, dedicated the *Discorso intorno all’origine della famiglia Barberina* to the Prince of Palestrina, Taddeo Barberini, printed on 2 February 1640.⁴⁶ The result of the work attempted by Strozzi, traces of which remain in the correspondence between the scholar and family members preserved within ‘Antichità’, is revealed to us by the lack of dissemination of the work, probably because the research ultimately confirmed, despite all the author’s care, the family’s humble origins. It was therefore preferred to avoid the disclosure of the work, which, furthermore, lacked a title page.⁴⁷

‘Antichità’ also allows us to reconstruct and evaluate the role of Monsignor Francesco Barberini (1529–1600) in the life and career of his nephew Maffeo. After obtaining his doctorate *in utroque iure* in Pisa in 1553, Monsignor Francesco moved to Rome to pursue an ecclesiastical career, which would lead him to hold the role of apostolic protonotary and referendary.⁴⁸ Francesco played a decisive role in Maffeo’s ascent to the papal throne,

43 ‘Con ogni probabilità estrapolati dalle Pergamene e da altre serie dell’Archivio Barberini, che furono inseriti nelle ‘Antichità’ dallo stesso Strozzi’: L. POLIDORO, *I Barberini prima dei Barberini*, p. 31. Analytical inventory of the sub-series in *Ibidem*, pp. 31–439.

44 I limit myself to citing E. INSABATO, *Un momento fondamentale*, pp. 293–295, C. DONATI, *L’idea della nobiltà*, pp. 198–246, E. SORIA MESA, *La nobleza en la España moderna*, pp. 300–317 for the Spanish situation and for Eastern Europe the paper delivered on 3. 10. 2025 at the Conference *Three Centuries in the Heart of Europe* by Dr Pavel Lasztovicza (Palacký University), ‘From Ancestry to Identity. The Genealogical Pursuits of Přemyslav (III) of Zierotin (1630–1673)’.

45 A complete and authoritative biographical profile of this figure, who was certainly important in the seventeenth-century Tuscan cultural scene, is missing (E. INSABATO, *Un momento fondamentale*, p. 295). The information in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* is sparse (entry Stròzzi, Carlo, Stròzzi, Carlo - *Enciclopedia - Treccani*, [22. 4. 2026]. The master’s thesis by Carlotta MENCARELLI, *Per la biografia di un erudito del Seicento: Carlo di Tommaso Strozzi*, Università degli Studi di Perugia, 2011, dealt with this figure, but it does not reconstruct the biography: it provides old and new elements for doing so.

46 P. PECCHIAI, *I Barberini*, p. VI and L. POLIDORO, *I Barberini prima dei Barberini*, p. 8.

47 *Ibidem*.

48 P. PECCHIAI, *I Barberini*, pp. 115–121.

providing a very solid economic foundation for his nephew, as we can deduce from the documents preserved in Indice I, 140–178. These documents indeed demonstrate the Monsignor's great acumen in the management and growth of the *patrimonio*, which was fundamental for sustaining an ecclesiastical career. From a purely mercantile perspective, within a family that was just entering the scene of the Roman Curia with Francesco, receipts for *luoghi di Monti, censi*, and legal documents demonstrating the accumulation of money and the investments made by Maffeo's uncle are accurately recorded. Francesco's will (Indice I, 170), edited by Polidoro⁴⁹ and dated to the end of the sixteenth century,⁵⁰ indicates where the prelate's efforts were directed: the document names his nephew Maffeo Barberini, who moved to Rome to live with his uncle in 1584 and would receive the office of protonotary from him in 1593, as his universal heir.⁵¹ On the other hand, the efforts made for Maffeo seem to indicate a family strategy in which the uncle bet everything on his nephew for the family's prestige: '*Possit autem dictus Maphaeus de dictis bonis meis, iuribus, actionibus et aliis quibuscunque predictis, tam inter vivos quam causa | mortis et in ultimis voluntatibus et alias quomodocunque facere et disponere prout sibi videbitur, concedo | enim et tribuo ei omnimodam facultatem de eis libere faciendi et disponendi prout ipse facere et | disponere possum et valeo, non enim dicta mea haereditate (ut credo) abutetur, sed in suos usus et | commoditatem honestam et in nostrae Barberinorum familiae honorem et utilitatem | convertet [...]*.'⁵²

In conclusion, Monsignor Francesco's activity in Rome did not merely represent the economic success of an individual; rather, it constituted a crucial phase of the symbolic and financial capital accumulation necessary to transform a mercantile family into a curial dynasty. From this perspective, Maffeo's election appears as the crowning achievement of a strategic generational project rather than a fortuitous event.

49 L. POLIDORO, *I Barberini prima dei Barberini*, pp. 560–578.

50 The will does not include a chronological indication. An attestation of the Monsignor's exhibition of two closed copies of the document is dated 30 March 1598 (Indice I, 170, ff. 10–13).

51 '[...] *Nomino haeredem meum universalem dictum reverendum patrem dominum Maphaeum Barberinum*' [I name the aforesaid Reverend Father Lord Maphaeus Barberinus as my universal heir: trans. Branelli]: L. POLIDORO, *I Barberini prima dei Barberini*, p. 562, r. 33.

52 '*However, the said Maphaeus shall be entitled to act and dispose of my said goods, rights, actions, and any other of the aforesaid things whatsoever, both among the living and by reason of death and in last wills and in any other manner whatsoever, as shall seem fit to him. For I grant and bestow upon him complete authority to freely act and dispose of them as I myself can and am entitled to act and dispose of them. For (as I believe) he will not abuse my said inheritance but will convert it to his own honourable uses and benefit, and to the honour and advantage of our Barberini family*' (Trans. Branelli): L. POLIDORO, *I Barberini prima dei Barberini*, p. 562, rr. 36–41.

Offices and Honours

If the quantity of papers in an archive related to administration reflects the importance that *patrimonio* holds for the family, the same can be said for documents attesting to offices and honours. Another substantial sub-series of Indice I concerns the honours the Barberini family was able to boast from the seventeenth century onwards. In the section ‘Barberini Eccellentissima Casa – Onorificenze’ (256–388), it is possible to find honours received from Italian States, such as the family’s inscription into the Venetian nobility in 1652, starting from Cardinal Francesco Barberini (260–265), up to Maffeo Prince of Palestrina and his sons (1075–1090). Honours were also bestowed on the Barberini by other European sovereigns. For example, in 1671 the Catholic King Charles II granted the Golden Fleece (1091–1097) to Prince Maffeo and, ten years later, Maffeo was recognised in the Grandeeship of Spain (268–308). The Golden Fleece would also be granted to his son Urbano (1664–1722)⁵³ in 1687 (1236–1249). The recognition of honours and inscription into the nobility by foreign powers allowed families to legitimise themselves further within their own territories. Also of great importance for the Barberini was the office, actually honorary, of Prefetto di Roma (301–373), obtained by Taddeo in 1631 after wresting it from the noble della Rovere family, to whom it had belonged since the time of Francesco della Rovere (1414–1484), Pope Sixtus IV (1471–1484).⁵⁴

Pious Works and Assistance

A further strategy of legitimation in the eyes of society concerned participation in pious works and the creation of assistance programmes. There is ample documentation of this in the papers of the Indice II series. The section entitled ‘Diritti onorifici e Giuspatronati’ (Honorary Rights and Patronage), which comprises the archival units numbered 1482 to 1896, well illustrates how important assistance practices were for the family in order to present a positive image of themselves within the social context in which they operated. The family did not operate in this sense only in Rome; there were also multiple initiatives in other locations, and not only in the family’s own fiefs. In Siena, for example, the Barberini, in the person of Cardinal Francesco, managed to obtain the nomination of a young man from the Siennese nobility who, through the testamentary legacy of a Siennese noble, could study in Siena without having to pay anything (1482–1497). The documents in the Archive

53 P. PECCHIAI, *I Barberini*, pp. 223–225.

54 S. FECCI – M.A. VISCEGLIA, *Tra due famiglie*, pp. 263–264. Biography of the pontiff in Giuseppe LOMBARDI, *Sisto IV*, in: *I Papi da Pietro a Francesco*, vol. 2, pp. 701–717, *Sisto IV - Enciclopedia - Treccani*, [22. 4. 2026].

do not allow us to reconstruct the reasons behind this choice, nor the actual careers of those who benefited from these subsidies: they do allow us, however, to underline the role played in the field of charity by the Pope's brother and a Capuchin friar, Cardinal Antonio, who was the protector of his order from 1632.⁵⁵ His initiative led, for example, to the founding of three Monti frumentari (Grain Banks), institutions that subsidised the poor by lending them seeds: one was founded in 1632 in Senigallia (1850–1872), where the cardinal had been bishop from 1625 to 1628,⁵⁶ one in Assisi in 1633 (1816–1849), and the last, in the same year, in Palestrina (3354–3355). Likewise, in Subiaco in 1697, Cardinal Carlo Barberini, commendatory abbot after the death of his uncle Cardinal Antonio *junior*, erected and endowed a Monte della lana (Wool Bank) (1873–1896), an institution that lent wool instead of seeds. The Cardinal of Sant'Onofrio is also credited with the founding of two scholarships, one in 1637 and one in 1639, to allow young scholars from Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa to study in Rome at the Collegio Urbano di Propaganda Fide, erected in 1627 to train missionaries. The Archive papers (1498–1516) mainly preserve the appointments of the students, arranged by the family for more than two centuries. In Florence, on the other hand, the family had the right to nominate four unmarried maidens for the Carmelite convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli (1686–1747), where, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, there lived Sister Innocenza and Sister Maria Grazia, respectively Camilla Barberini (1598–1666) and Clarice Barberini (1609–1665) in secular life, both nieces of the Pope.⁵⁷ The nieces were later moved to Rome, to the Convent of the Santissima Incarnazione, founded by Urban VIII in 1639 and aptly named 'delle Barberine', for which the pontiff appointed his brother Cardinal Antonio as protector, and which also had Sister Innocenza and Sister Maria Grazia as Prioresses.⁵⁸ Although the convent's archive was transferred to the Vatican Library in 1907,⁵⁹ Indice II of the Barberini Archive also preserves documents relating to the family convent (1749–1815). The construction of a convent held particular importance for noble families, because it allowed them to insert

55 Massimo Carlo GIANNINI, *Politica curiale e mondo dei regolari: per una storia dei cardinali protettori nel Seicento*, in: Massimo Carlo Giannini (ed.), *Religione, conflittualità e cultura. Il clero regolare nell'Europa d'antico regime*, Roma 2006, pp. 241–302, p. 266.

56 *Hierarchia Catholica* 4, 1935, p. 312.

57 P. PECCHIAI, *I Barberini*, pp. 152–154.

58 Valentina ABBATELLI – Alessia LIROSI – Irene PALOMBO (eds.), *Un monastero di famiglia. Il Diario delle barberine della SS. Incarnazione (secc. XVII-XVIII)*. Con un saggio introduttivo di Gabriella Zarri, Roma 2016, pp. 12–16, pp. 58–64. History of the convent from its origins to 1907 in Stefano POSSANZINI, *Le Barberine. Il Monastero carmelitano dell'Incarnazione detto delle Barberine (1639–1907)*, Roma 1990.

59 Luigi CACCIAGLIA, *L'archivio del monastero dell'Incarnazione detto delle «Barberine» (1639–1907)*, in: Enrico Angiolini (ed.), *Vite Consacrate. Gli Archivi delle organizzazioni religiose femminili. Atti dei convegni di Spezzano (20 settembre 2006) e di Ravenna (28 settembre 2006)*, Modena 2007, pp. 303–326.

themselves materially into the social fabric of the city, leaving a spiritual and material imprint, well indicated by the presence of the family coat of arms.⁶⁰

Art and Collectivism

Just as the promotion of pious works and religious assistance networks ensured visibility for the family, so too did artistic patronage, on the one hand, represent a form of ennoblement and, on the other, leave a tangible and recognisable mark on the urban space. Likewise, collectivism (collecting) and culture played a not insignificant role in ennoblement: a library, for example, had to be appropriate to the new status achieved and, because of the cost of books, also represented a symbol of wealth.⁶¹ In addition to the papers preserved in the Giustificazioni and Computisteria series, used by art historians to reconstruct the Barberini's patronage,⁶² the Indice II series presents multiple documents that allow for a broad reconstruction of the family's collections and book patrimony. The section 'Oggetti di Arte, Mobili e Cose preziose' (Objets d'Art, Furniture, and Precious Things) (2690–2741) provides inventories of tapestries, silverware, medals, jewellery, paintings, and statues that decorated the Palazzo Barberini in Rome and the Prince's Palace in Palestrina. In particular, regarding the family residence, there is extensive documentation on the Palazzo alle Quattro Fontane (2810–2947), from its construction to the nineteenth century, which testifies to the role of this work for the family's affirmation on the scene of the Roman nobility. The Palazzo also housed a large library, the history of which can also be reconstructed thanks to the papers in Indice II (288–328), up to the sale to the Vatican along with the Archive. The judgment of the Prefect of the Vatican Library, Father Ehrle, who at the beginning of the twentieth century considered the Biblioteca Barberina the

60 See, for example, the reflections for modern Spain, but also interesting for Italy, by Ángela ATIENZA LOPEZ, *Nobleza, poder señorial y conventos en la España moderna. La dimensión política de las fundaciones nobiliarias*, in: Esteban Sarasa – Eliseo Serrano (eds.), *Estudios sobre señorío y feudalismo. Homenaje a Julio Valdeón*, Zaragoza 2010, pp. 235–269.

61 The collections of objects and books started by the Cardinal-Nephews have recently been studied, from the perspective of overcoming the concept of *magnificentia*, by Karen J. LLOYD, *Art, Patronage, and Nepotism in Early Modern Rome*, New York 2023. On the library specifically, see Cinzia FORTUZZI, *La Bibliotheca Barberina. La raccolta libraria di Urbano VIII e Francesco Barberini*, 2018, pp. 39–42, also on the meaning of these libraries as a 'public' place, a meeting point for scholars, (8) *La Biblioteca Barberina: la raccolta libraria di Urbano VIII e Francesco Barberini*, [22. 4. 2026]. Overview of the major Roman cardinal libraries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Valentino ROMANI, *Biblioteche romane del Sei e Settecento*, Roma 1996.

62 On the family's patronage, I limit myself to citing only the recent exhibition catalogue by Maurizia CICCIONI – Flaminia GENNARI SANTORI – Sebastian SCHÜTZTE (eds.), *L'immagine sovrana. Urbano VIII e i Barberini*, Roma 2023.

fourth library in Italy, after the Vatican, the Laurenziana, and the Ambrosiana, suffices to indicate the importance of this library.⁶³

Fiefs

Reinhard identified the purchase of territories and fiefs as one of the necessary steps for a family's ascent into the ranks of the Roman nobility. Among the fiefs bought from the old nobility are Monte Rotondo (Indice III, 603–644), purchased from the Orsini in 1624, and Valmontone (Indice III, 659–664), sold by the Sforza in 1634.

Undoubtedly, the most important fief for prestige and size was Palestrina, purchased for more than half a million *scudi* (575,000 *scudi*, Indice II, 3106) from an indebted Francesco Colonna in 1630. That this was the most significant fief for the Barberini is also evidenced by the abundance of documentation, which occupies a quarter of the entire Indice II (3002–4244). Through these papers, it is possible to reconstruct the phases that led to the purchase of the city from the Colonna by Carlo Barberini in 1630 after long and complex negotiations (3075–3113) and the political and ecclesiastical government of a *sui generis* fief (3153–3355), because its holder was a Cardinal Bishop. The Barberini had chosen Palestrina specifically also because, since 1571, possession of this city ensured the title of Prince, as well documented by the archive papers (3769–3771). The economic administration of the fief (3356–3632) and the jurisdiction of the feudal lord over his vassals (3633–3810) were also of great importance.

The purchase of fiefs by the Barberini was systematic and constant: by the end of the eighteenth century, the family owned sixteen fiefs, covering an area of approximately 185 km², and governed about 12,000 vassals.⁶⁴

Maggiorasco and Marriage

Steps that were necessary to secure the future were the institution of *maggiorasco* (entail/primogeniture) and marriage which, in addition to allowing the union of a family of new nobility with one of ancient lineage, also contributed to the continuation of the line. The Maggiorasco Barberini was instituted by a bull of 1 May 1627 by Urban VIII (Indice II, 2559–2576) in order to entail the family's assets and prevent their dispersion. On 24 October

63 Città del Vaticano, BAV, Archivio Biblioteca, 191, II, in C. CAMBRAI, *Storia di un'amministrazione*, p. 19.

64 David ARMANDO, *Barone, vassalli e governo pontificio. Gli stati dei Colonna nel Settecento*, Roma 2022, p. 42.

of the same year, after several years of negotiations,⁶⁵ the pontiff celebrated the marriage between Taddeo Barberini (the only nephew who had not pursued an ecclesiastical career) and Anna Colonna, daughter of the Gran Connestabile of the Kingdom of Naples, Filippo Colonna (1578–1639), the most important member of the Colonna of the Paliano branch, in Castel Gandolfo.⁶⁶ The marriage, which was unequal because of differences in condition and *status*,⁶⁷ brought advantages to both families: the Barberini completed their ascent to the ranks of the nobility with a dowry of 180,000 scudi, while the Colonna became related to the Pope's family, receiving honours and offices, such as the purple at the beginning of 1628 for Girolamo Colonna (1604–1666),⁶⁸ Anna's brother.⁶⁹ The Barberini Archive preserves the papers of the negotiations that led to the wedding (Indice IV, 1543), a report of the marriage (Indice II, 4335) and, above all, the legal dispute that followed Taddeo's death in France in 1647, which pitted the Princess against her cardinal brothers-in-law, Francesco and Antonio, over the restitution of the dowry (Indice IV, 4–123).⁷⁰ The papers in Indice IV, which consists of 1,698 archival units, also allow us to see the agency of Anna, who, after her husband's death, worked increasingly insistently on the construction of the convent of Regina Coeli, both during her lifetime and with testamentary bequests (Indice I, 1118–1121, Indice IV, 105, 108, 122).

Conclusion

This contribution pursued the objective of analysing the Barberini Archive as an active instrument for the management and construction of noble *status*, overcoming the traditional view of the archive as a mere passive repository of documents. The examination of the documentation confirmed that the ascent of Maffeo Barberini to the papal throne was not a random event, but the result of a process. The attainment of the Papacy was just the beginning of the ascent to the Roman aristocracy by a family of modest origins.

This strategy, as hypothesised by Wolfgang Reinhard for other families outside the Roman nobility, unfolded by starting from the promotion to the purple of the members

65 Which are accounted for by S. FECCI – M.A. VISCEGLIA, *Tra due famiglie*, pp. 257–261.

66 DBI, Colonna, Filippo (edited by Stefano Andretta), vol. 27 (1982), pp. 297–298, COLONNA, Filippo - Enciclopedia - Treccani, [22. 4. 2026].

67 According to the definition of various types of marriage between members of different ranks of the nobility for Spain, but applicable to a more general context, in E. SORIA MESA, *La nobleza en la España moderna*, pp. 123–212.

68 DBI, Colonna, Girolamo (edited by Franca Petrucci), vol. 27 (1982), pp. 346–347, COLONNA, Girolamo - Enciclopedia - Treccani, [22. 4. 2026].

69 See S. FECCI – M.A. VISCEGLIA, *Tra due famiglie*, pp. 261–263.

70 *Ibidem*, pp. 306–318.

closest to the pontiff, in line with one of the prerogatives of the Papal States in the Early Modern Age, namely nepotism, and continued with the construction of a palace, the Palazzo alle Quattro Fontane, which, ideally, was meant to replace the historic house in via dei Giubbonari, the marriage between Taddeo Barberini and Anna Colonna, belonging to an ancient Roman baronial family, and the purchase of fiefs, among which Palestrina stands out for its extension and importance, sold by the Palestrina branch of the Colonna. But there were further strategies of social legitimation, such as the use of art and patronage or social assistance and pious works, which also served, as in the case of the construction of family convents, to imprint their shield (*scudo*) into the social and urban fabric of the city. Extensive traces of each of these steps remain in the papers that constitute the archival series of the Barberini Archive, thus demonstrating the intrinsic value of the documentation as proof of rank. Particular importance was given to the papers relating to the *patrimonio*, according to Navarrini's assumption that the *patrimonio* is indeed the centre of everything, an assumption also confirmed by the accumulation of income and the reinvestment pursued by Monsignor Francesco Barberini for the launch of his nephew Maffeo's curial career.

Furthermore, while the seventeenth-century intentionality behind the preservation of patrimony and honours is evident, it must be acknowledged that the current structure of the Barberini Archive is also a 'palimpsest' shaped by the nineteenth-century reorganisation conducted by Sante and Alessandro Pieralisi. This intervention acted as an additional lens of self-representation, retroactively consolidating the image of an unshakable nobility precisely as the family was entering its period of decline.

In particular, the central thesis on the archive as an instrument of self-legitimation could be confirmed by two mechanisms of memory management which summarise the concept of *encubrimiento*.⁷¹

The first is that of removal. While it is true that the extreme scarcity of papers relating to the Florentine and Tuscan mercantile period may be explained by the practical nature of these documents, destined to be destroyed after their use, combined with the failure and subsequent concealment (*occultamento*) of Strozzi's genealogical work, it could also suggest a voluntary selection of documentation for the family's non-Roman past. This phenomenon is fundamental for assimilation, confirming what Irene Fosi observed for other Florentine mercantile families in Rome who sought full integration into the Roman nobility by disowning their non-noble past.

The second is that of accumulation. The abundance of records on honours (the Golden Fleece, the Grandeanship of Spain, the inscription in the register of Venetian nobility), on pious works, and on artistic and cultural patronage (the vast library, art inventories,

71 E. SORIA MESA, *La nobleza en la España moderna*, pp. 261–317.

collecting) testifies to the need to construct a new lineage based on the values of the Roman Curia and the Baroque aristocracy, in line with the importance of the *patrimonio* as the core around which family interests revolve.

In conclusion, the Barberini Archive demonstrates that, despite and thanks to the reorganisation of the archive in the nineteenth century by Alessandro and Sante Pieralisi, the quantity of documents in the Barberini Archive reveals that this family archive was also constituted through choices that aimed to account for the ascent and the creation of a noble family. In this sense, the archive therefore proves to be a primary source for the history of the Roman nobility and of those requirements that new families considered fundamental for the acquisition of a noble title within a system that had the Curia as the almost obligatory point of arrival and, paradoxically, of departure for that goal. Although the consultation of the archive is still very partial, the analysis conducted on the consultable series has allowed us to delineate its function as a true noble project, in which documentary conservation and organisation acted as pillars for the affirmation of a new dynasty, offering promising directions for future research as soon as the remaining series, such as Indice V and Carteggi, finally become accessible to scholars.

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