

Confessional Intelligence: Early Modern Papal Diplomats and Information-Gathering Regarding England and Poland

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Abstract: This essay examines the information-gathering practices of papal nuncios and legates to argue that they performed much of the same intelligence work, and in a similar manner, as other diplomatic agents in early modern Europe. It focuses in particular on papal diplomats' efforts to gather information regarding two areas that proved especially challenging for the papacy – England and Poland-Lithuania – both of which were far from Rome and which contained large numbers of non-Catholics, who would understandably be wary of these diplomats' intelligence work. The essay explores the mechanisms by which nuncios gathered information, including via ambassadors, members of religious orders, and informal networks of informants; their efforts to verify the information they received; and their methods to securely convey that information to their superiors in the Roman curia.

The inclusion of an essay focused on early modern Catholicism in a collection on early modern espionage is not surprising: the case of Elizabethan England alone, feared to be crawling with priests

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in disguise, smuggling in prohibited books or plotting to overthrow the government, has provided ample source material for centuries' worth of articles, books, films, and other treatments. Within such studies and in the literature on espionage in general, however, Catholic diplomats are often either absent or appear only in the margins as figures with whom the protagonists briefly make contact or exchange messages. Rarely do they occupy centre stage.¹

This is doubly true for the papacy's own representatives, the apostolic nuncios and legates who served as envoys to political courts of the period. Following the trail of the fleeting examples scattered in the current literature, this essay aims to offer a framework to understand how papal nuncios and legates functioned as intelligence agents in early modern Europe, arguing that they employed many of the same practices as other ambassadors to gather and evaluate information, both in the types of informants they employed as well as their approaches to verifying and transmitting intelligence.² Exactly how nuncios and legates performed these services, particularly in the case of sensitive material, is less well understood compared to their secular counterparts, whom scholars have investigated in great depth in recent years using novel approaches. By studying a

¹ Studies on espionage have to date focused largely on channels of intelligence-gathering performed by agents rather than credentialed ambassadors: Tracey A. Sowerby, 'Elizabethan diplomatic networks and the spread of news', in Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (eds), *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2016), pp. 326-7.

² As such, it seeks to respond to Tracey A. Sowerby's call to discern 'bigger patterns in diplomatic practice based on religion': Tracey A. Sowerby, 'Early modern diplomatic history', *History Compass*, 14/9 (2016), p. 449.

range of individuals beyond formal ambassadors, the 'new diplomatic history' has revealed the degree to which premodern diplomats relied on personal networks and relationships for their embassies, something especially true in the case of espionage and intelligence work.³ Research on 'cross-confessional' diplomacy has gone a step further and asked how religious differences shaped diplomatic practices while still underlining the importance of intermediaries and unofficial agents.⁴ Still, until recently, papal diplomats have rarely been the object of such studies. Scholarship on nuncios and legates remains poorly integrated into the broader historiography of early modern diplomacy, particularly in English-language scholarship, while the expansive literature on papal diplomacy, in turn, rarely considers nuncios or legates as intelligencers.⁵

³ Sowerby, 'Early modern diplomatic history', pp. 441-56; John Watkins, 'Toward a new diplomatic history of medieval and early modern Europe', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 38/1 (2008), pp. 1-14; Catherine Fletcher and Jennifer Mara DeSilva, 'Italian Ambassadorial Networks in Early Modern Europe—An Introduction', *Journal of Early Modern History* 14/6 (2010), pp. 505-12.

⁴ See the essays in *Confessional Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Roberta Anderson and Charlotte Backerra (New York, 2021), as well as the essays included in *Journal of Early Modern History*, 19/2-3 (2015).

⁵ The Italian and German historiography is much more developed, though often with an institutional focus. See, inter alia: Maria Antonietta Visceglia (ed.), *Papato e politica internazionale nella prima età moderna* (Rome, 2013); Wolfgang Reinhard, *Paul V. Borghese (1605-1621): Mikropolitische Papstgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 2009); Alexander Koller, *Imperator et Pontifex: Forschungen zum Verhältnis von Kaiserhof und römischer Kurie im Zeitalter der Konfessionalisierung 1555-1648*

Nevertheless, if we begin to consider papal diplomats as intelligence agents, commonalities between them and secular ambassadors immediately emerge. Like other diplomats, papal representatives utilised a vast network of informants who typically had no formal connection to the nuncio or his mission, and in fact may have been unaware they were providing him with information. Although early modern intelligence work was performed by diplomats, they were necessarily dependent on a broad cast of non-diplomats who provided value, knowledge, and expertise. As Duncan Hardy has suggested, members of this broader network could pursue different goals at different times, acting alternately as faithful clients or autonomous actors.⁶ The diplomat, whether papal or not, was left to manage these sometimes unreliable relationships and assess the quality of information provided.

The first section of this essay therefore explores the different sources of information utilised by papal diplomats, including other ambassadors, secretaries, agents, members of religious orders,

(Münster, 2012). Still important are Henry Biaudet, *Les nonciatures apostoliques jusqu'en 1648* (Helsinki, 1910); and Pierre Blet, SJ, *Histoire de la representation diplomatique du Saint-Siège, des origines à l'aube du XIXe siècle* (Vatican City, 1982). Among English-language studies, an often-cited overview is Luca Riccardi, 'An outline of Vatican diplomacy in the early modern age', in Daniela Frigo (ed.), *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy: The Structure of Diplomatic Practice, 1450-1800*, trans. Adrian Belton (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 95-108.

⁶ Duncan Hardy, 'Burgundian clients in the south-western Holy Roman Empire, 1410-1477', in Tracey A. Sowerby and Jan Hennings (eds), *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World, c. 1410-1800* (New York, 2017), pp. 25-43.

and various other informants they identified. The essay then examines how nuncios sought to securely and quickly convey this information to their superiors in Rome, first by encoding it in ciphers and then by sending it via courier along postal routes, often over great distances. This was never a perfect system, as we will see, but here too the same issues were faced by secular ambassadors trying to protect sensitive information. Lastly, we conclude by suggesting parallels between the intelligence operations of papal diplomats and larger debates about truth and doubt in early modern Catholicism. Although it draws on examples from across Europe, this essay focuses on England and Poland-Lithuania, two areas that were far from the Roman curia and that contained substantial numbers of non-Catholics, which for the papacy represented an obstacle, if not overt threat, to its efforts. Consequently, focusing on these areas allows a better view of the papacy's efforts to gather intelligence in areas it perceived as more difficult to penetrate. The essay centres on diplomatic activities during the reigns of two popes, Gregory XIII (r. 1572-85) and Clement VIII (r. 1592-1605), a period that saw the expansion and professionalization of the papacy's diplomatic corps. Alongside their respective cardinal-secretaries of state, Tolomeo Gallio and Pietro Aldobrandini, these popes were also particularly active in seeking to curb the spread of reformed beliefs across Europe, which in turn demanded detailed and timely intelligence from their diplomatic envoys.⁷ The same period includes important political events in which papal diplomats were

⁷ Maria Antonietta Visceglia, 'The international policy of the papacy: critical approaches to the concepts of universalism and *Italianità*, peace and war', in *Papato e politica internazionale*, pp. 17-62. Note that during this period, the cardinals who functioned as secretaries of state were often the nephew of the reigning pope and were thus known as the 'cardinal-nephew'. This was not always the case, however: Gallio was not Gregory XIII's

engaged: in England, multiple plots against Queen Elizabeth I and her government, as well as her death and the accession of James VI/ I Stuart in 1603; and in Poland several interregna, which saw the elections of Henri d'Anjou in 1573 and Stefan Báthory in 1576.

I

The papacy's intelligence-gathering process began far from Rome, with its diplomatic agents scattered across Europe. Among the primary roles of a nuncio, as with any ambassador, was that of an intelligence agent responsible for gathering information, evaluating it, and summarising it in written reports for the curia.⁸ Nuncios were regularly reminded of this responsibility by the cardinal-nephew, particularly in light of noteworthy events or developing crises. Ottavio Mirto Frangipani, nuncio to Flanders from 1596 to 1606, was repeatedly instructed by the cardinal-nephew to provide updates about England, saying on one occasion that the pope would like daily reports, and on

natural nephew. On these particular men: Carlo Castelli, 'Tolomeo Gallio: Cardinale di Como', *Periodico della società storica comense*, 50 (1983), pp. 35-40; Elena Fasano Guarini, 'Aldobrandini, Pietro', *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* 2 (Rome, 1960).

⁸ On the evolution of this responsibility: Dante Fedele, *Naissance de la diplomatie moderne (XIIIe-XVIIe siècles): L'ambassadeur au croisement du droit, de l'éthique et de la politique* (Baden-Baden, 2017), pp. 581-607; J. K. Hyde, *Literacy and Its Uses: Studies on Late Medieval Italy*, ed. Daniel Waley (New York, 1993), pp. 217-59. Cf. Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (New York, 1988), pp. 207-13.

another: 'If [you] are able to penetrate anything of consequence, I know you will not fail to inform us given our desire to receive constant updates'.⁹ Frangipani was not singled out in this regard.

Aldobrandini sent nearly identical instructions to the French nuncio, whom he instructed to 'receive continual updates and communicate them here with all diligence', and to the Polish nuncio, to 'find the truth in all things and inform us'.¹⁰

As we will see, nuncios like Frangipani turned to a variety of channels to collect these updates and verify them, but in some cases the nuncio sought to gather information directly himself. Like other early modern diplomats he took a broad approach in surveying printed and oral sources of information, reading gazettes or news publications, meeting with local residents, or inspecting books that had been printed nearby or were otherwise in circulation.¹¹ In each case, after gathering

⁹ Archivio Apostolico Vaticano [hereafter AAV], Fondo Borghese III, 40, fols. 110r, 120v. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰ Instructions prepared for Maffeo Barberini in 1604 and Germanico Malaspina in 1599, in Klaus Jaitner (ed.), *Hauptinstruktionen Clemens' VIII für die Nuntien und Legaten an den europäischen Fürstenhöfen, 1592-1605* (2 vols.; Tübingen, 1984), II, pp. 744 and 612, respectively.

¹¹ Michael Schaich, 'Information professionals: Huguenot diplomats in later Stuart London and their European context', in Vivienne Larminie (ed.), *Huguenot Networks, 1560-1780: The Interactions and Impact of a Protestant Minority in Europe* (New York, 2018), pp. 75-91; Catherine Fletcher, *Diplomacy in Renaissance Rome: The Rise of the Renaissance Ambassador* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 105-9; Sowerby, 'Elizabethan diplomatic networks', pp. 305-27; João Manuel Oliveira de Carvalho,

information the nuncio would draft a written account for the cardinal-nephew and other officials in Rome, sometimes forwarding copies of a book or *avviso* that he found noteworthy. Besides composing his own reports, Frangipani also forwarded correspondence and other information between England and Rome.¹² Some of his intelligence work was more intensive, as when the nuncio investigated the authorship of some anonymous books that had been printed in England, attempting to discern where precisely they had been published.¹³

While the nuncio's dispatches do not always list his exact sources, they do offer clues to his methods of inquiry. In January 1599 Frangipani composed a lengthy dispatch for the cardinal-protector of England on the unrest among English clerics in the Low Countries related to Archpriest controversy, explaining his perspective on the causes of that unrest. He also cited how he arrived at these conclusions, or more precisely, the sources of his information: 'This is the information I can

'Portuguese diplomatic correspondence and information channels during the War of the Spanish Succession', *Legatio*, 2 (2018), pp. 11-19.

¹² See, for example, *Correspondance d'Ottavio Mirto Frangipani, premier nonce de Flandre (1596-1606)*, tome III: 1599-1606 [hereafter *NFL* III], ed. Armand Louant (Rome, 1942), pp. 211-12, 214-16.

¹³ *NFL* III, pp. 269-70. On diplomats' role in the exchange of books and other printed texts in early modern Europe: Tracey A. Sowerby, "'All our books do be sent into other countreys and translated": Henrician polemic in its international context', *The English Historical Review*, 121/494 (2006), pp. 1271-99.

now give Your Most Illustrious and Reverend Lordship, drawn from the examination of various English persons who are not suspect and are trustworthy, and in great part from the certain knowledge I have of it'. He added that he had assigned another cleric to perform the same task, saying that 'as much as he writes to me, I will communicate' to Rome.¹⁴ Remarks such as these reveal the process by which a nuncio could gather and evaluate information in foreign lands: by interrogating those with firsthand information or who were judged to have relevant experience, attempting to confirm that information through multiple channels, and then collating that information to share with one's superiors.

Similarly, nuncios in Poland-Lithuania were required to maintain regular correspondence with their superiors, writing several times a week with updates. In sixteenth-century Poland, this meant the papal nuncio usually resided at Kraków, a location that offered direct advantages for the nuncio, given that so much information flowed into the capital.¹⁵ If Frangipani, in Flanders, was asked to monitor events in England, Ireland, and beyond, the Polish nuncio was responsible not only for news about Polish-Lithuania but also the regions bordering it, including Sweden, Transylvania,

¹⁴ 'Quest'è la informattione ch'io posso darn'adesso a V.a S.ta Ill.ma ritratta dall'esamination di diverse persone inglesi non sospetti et degne di fede, et in gran parte dalla cognition certa ch'io n'havevo', *NFL* III, p. 9. The other cleric is listed as the 'decano di Cortrai' [Kortrijk].

¹⁵ Jan Pirożyński, 'Die Stellung der polnischen Metropolen im europäischen Nachrichtenverkehr des 16. Jahrhunderts', in Andrea Langer and Georg Michels (eds), *Metropolen und Kulturtransfer im 15./16. Jahrhundert: Prag, Krakau, Danzig, Wien* (Stuttgart, 2001), pp. 101-2.

and the Grand Duchy of Moscow. The Polish nuncios' dispatches described all manner of events, including audiences granted by the king, political rumors, and reports of wars or natural disasters. Giulio Ruggieri went so far as to compose a complete, Venetian-style *relazione* at the conclusion of his nunciature in 1568, in which he described the geography of the commonwealth, its inhabitants, its form of government, the languages spoken there, and more.¹⁶ In general, papal nuncios focused their attention on political dealings at court and ecclesiastical affairs, and to that end the nuncio would sometimes forward copies of speeches that had been given at court or before the diet (*Sejm*), as well as manuscript copies of news reports he had gathered in Poland.¹⁷ These would be sent together with the nuncio's dispatch. While the nuncio could gather such information himself, he also relied on other individuals in the region. Vincenzo Dal Portico, nuncio to Poland from 1568 to 1572, recommended that in order 'to have news of specific things' his successor keep in the major cities of

¹⁶ An edition is in *Iulius Ruggieri (1565-1568)*, ed. Tadeusz Glemma (Acta Nuntiaturae Polonae VI; Rome, 1991), pp. 145-200. On these *relazioni*: Dorota Gregorowicz, 'Final reports of papal diplomats as a cultural message: the case of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth', *Legatio*, 1 (2017), pp. 5-32.

¹⁷ See, for example, the miscellaneous contents of AAV, Segr. Stato, Polonia 4 and Polonia 9. Wojciech Tygielski, 'Geograficamente distinti ma spiritualmente vicini: La realtà politica e sociale polacca del XVI e del XVII secolo agli occhi dei nunzi apostolici', in Alexander Koller (ed.), *Kurie und Politik: Stand und Perspektiven der Nuntiaturberichtsforschung* (Tübingen, 1998), pp. 226-35.

the commonwealth 'some people who will keep you continually informed of things (*alcuni che la tenessero avvertita di continuo*)', revealing part of the nuncio's strategy for information-gathering.¹⁸

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a common source of intelligence for nuncios and legates were their diplomatic counterparts in residence at the same court, for whom information was a type of currency to be exchanged.¹⁹ Collaboration between diplomats was opportunistic and allowed diplomats to collect more intelligence than they could on their own or using their own networks. In the early seventeenth century, for instance, nuncios hungry for information about England turned to French and Spanish diplomats as well as representatives of the Archduke Albert, who all had access to the English court. Nuncios recounted their meetings with these ambassadors in their dispatches to Rome and included the information they had gleaned. Domenico Ginnasio, nuncio to Spain from 1600 to 1605, frequently forwarded information he received from the French ambassador in Spain, such as compilations of news reports from England that the latter had been sent. At times, Ginnasio even included complete copies of diplomatic correspondence the ambassador received: 'I wanted to send the copy of the letter written by the French ambassador resident in England to this ambassador'; 'now I am also sending the copy of the letters that the French king wrote to the aforementioned ambassador'.²⁰ In these cases the letters were included with the nuncio's own message so that the cardinal-nephew could read them directly. Such documents were obviously

¹⁸ AAV, Segr. Stato, Nunz. diverse 239, fols. 3v-4r.

¹⁹ Sowerby, 'Elizabethan diplomatic networks', pp. 326-7; Fletcher, *Diplomacy in Renaissance Rome*, 111-14.

²⁰ AAV, Segr. Stato, Spagna 58, fols. 79r, 112v.

provided voluntarily and thus reveal some collaboration between the two diplomats, who saw themselves in service of a common cause: the conversion of England.

Nevertheless, papal diplomats were cautious of the reasons why letters might be written or shared by other ambassadors. In the case of Poland, many such letters were sent in anticipation of a royal election, aiming to secure favor for this or that candidate. In the mid-1570s, following the abrupt departure of Henri d'Anjou and prior to the election of Stefan Báthory, the nuncio Vincenzo Lauro received a number of supremely courteous letters from different ambassadors in Poland including Giovanni Battista Guarini, representing the Duke of Ferrara, and Anders Lorichs, the Swedish ambassador, each aiming to secure Lauro's support, and by extension the pope's, for their respective candidates. Lorichs, for example, provided copies of letters from the Queen of Sweden to Lauro, who in turn forwarded them to the curia. As the nuncio assessed, their aim was to have him, on behalf of the pope, voice support for Swedish claims in future diets, and in fact the cardinal-secretary of state had already told Lauro on another occasion he did not believe the Swedish king and ambassador were operating transparently, saying some of their words 'did not come from the heart'.²¹ As a result, these freely-shared letters did not serve the ambassadors' intended function: rather than currying favour with the papacy, they became valuable pieces of information, collected by nuncios to help the Roman curia obtain a clear picture of political manoeuvring. Even among Catholic envoys the sharing of information was never without risk. In 1578, the French nuncio relayed information he had received from the Scottish ambassador in Paris to the cardinal-secretary

²¹ *Vincentius Lauro (1572-1578)*, ed. Mirolaus Korolko and Lucianus Olech [hereafter *ANP* IX/2] (*Acta Nuntiaturae Polonae* IX; Rome, 1999), p. 119 and p. 40, respectively.

of state in Rome, despite the ambassador's request that the nuncio not report any information until other conversations had occurred. 'Nevertheless', the nuncio declared, 'I have thought fit to advise you thereof, as I shall likewise advise you of the sequel'.²²

The 'other diplomats' with whom a papal envoy corresponded and shared information also included nuncios and legates elsewhere in Europe. Although each diplomat sent updates and information to the curia, the papal diplomatic network was connected not solely through Rome but also through direct correspondence between colleagues. Frangipani, for example, was in contact with many of the papacy's other representatives in western and central Europe, corresponding with the nuncios in France, Spain, Prague, Cologne, and Graz. Nuncios would exchange information on a variety of topics and newsworthy developments, but these internal channels were especially active during difficult or sensitive situations, such as those related to a royal election or succession. During Polish interregna the papal envoys in Poland were in constant contact with nuncios at the French and imperial courts, since those rulers were extremely invested in which candidate would be selected.²³ Similarly, during widespread debates in the 1590s over the potential successor to Queen

²² *Calendar of State Papers, Relating to English Affairs, Preserved Principally at Rome, in the Vatican Archives and Library. Volume II: Elizabeth, 1572-1578*, ed. J. M. Rigg [hereafter *CSP Vatican II*] (London, 1926), p. 423.

²³ At times nuncios would also forward their internal exchanges to the curia: see, for example, Lauro describing the copies of letters between himself and the nuncio to the emperor debating the Polish election he was sending to Rome: 'The aforementioned writings are four, marked as *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D*. *A* is his response to my first discourse. *B* is what I

Elizabeth, Frangipani repeatedly discussed the topic with Cesare Speciano, nuncio to the emperor, as well as the cardinal-nephew in Rome.²⁴

In recent decades historians have paid greater attention to the presence and importance of agents and other intermediaries in early modern diplomacy, whose ability to maintain interpersonal networks was valuable to diplomats.²⁵ Papal envoys were as likely to employ secretaries and agents as their contemporaries, especially in situations that demanded discretion. These agents functioned as an extension of the legate or nuncio, extending his reach geographically while increasing his ability to collect information and respond to situations more dynamically, often despite the presence of other diplomatic representatives and ecclesiastics in the area.

The Polish interregnum of 1572-3 offers one such example. When Sigismund II Augustus died in the summer of 1572, the legate Giovanni Francesco Commendone dispatched his longtime

replied to him. C is his latest reply, to which I responded with the contents of *D...*, ANP IX/2, p. 82.

²⁴ E.g., *Correspondance d'Ottavio Mirto Frangipani, premier nonce de Flandre (1596-1606)*, tome I: Lettres (1596-1598) et annexes, ed. Léon van der Essen (Brussels, 1924), p. 280.

²⁵ Marika Keblusek, 'Introduction: double agents in early modern Europe', in Marika Keblusek and Badeloch Vera Noldus (eds), *Double Agents: Cultural and Political Brokerage in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 3-4; Keblusek, 'Introduction: profiling the early modern agent', in Hans Cools, Marika Keblusek, and Badeloch Noldus (eds), *Your Humble Servant: Agents in Early Modern Europe* (Hilversum, 2006), pp. 9-15.

secretary, Antonio Maria Graziani, to the imperial court in Vienna to keep the emperor informed of events in Poland.²⁶ From there, the secretary corresponded with the legate as well as the cardinal-secretary of state in Rome, supplying a wealth of information about the international politicking in support of different candidates for the throne, and in fact, given the tumult during the interregnum as well as Commendone's movements from location to location, Graziani was central to maintaining contact between Rome and the legate.²⁷ (This episode also demonstrates collaboration among papal diplomats, since Graziani recommended the cardinal-secretary of state send instructions to the nuncio in Vienna, who would hand them to Graziani to forward to Commendone.)²⁸

When the Polish diet met in early 1573 to choose the next king, the nuncio to Poland requested that Commendone come to Warsaw to evaluate the situation. The legate decided to instead send Graziani there 'to have some certainty regarding the Diet'.²⁹ Within days, his secretary provided a written report on the situation and continued to update Commendone, who only arrived

²⁶ *Nuntiatur Giovanni Delfinos (1582-1573)*, ed. Helmut Goetz (Nuntiaturberichte aus Deutschland 1572-1585 nebst ergänzenden Aktenstücken. Abteilung III/6 [hereafter *NBD* III/6]; Tübingen, 1982), p. 425; Pierre de Cenival, 'La politique du Saint-Siège et l'élection de Pologne (1572-1573)', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 36 (1916), p. 179.

²⁷ As one example, see the dispatch from September 1572 in Cenival, 'La politique', pp. 182-8.

²⁸ *NBD* III/6, pp. 446-7.

²⁹ AAV, Segr. Stato, Polonia 3, fol. 4r, 6r.

in Warsaw shortly before the election diet began in April, via dispatches throughout the spring.³⁰ The cardinal-secretary of state also relied on Graziani to provide information about the situation and requested updates from him, and in fact, for a period in 1573 Graziani was the only papal agent in the region.³¹ When the next nuncio to Poland was selected, the cardinal-secretary of state noted that he could take comfort in knowing they would ‘send a person who is very well-informed (*informatissima*) of Polish things, who will remain with you for some months’ as a guide. That person was Graziani, whom Commendone, having already departed the commonwealth, left behind to help instruct the new diplomat.³² Graziani was eventually recalled from Poland in March 1574, but when Charles IX of France died later that year, one of the papacy’s first actions was to write Graziani and instruct him to make haste to Poland to intercept Henri d’Anjou, the then-Polish king who would seek the French crown. Importantly, the cardinal-secretary of state explained the choice had been made on the basis of Graziani’s past experience, citing his ‘prudence, skill, and knowledge of those lands’.³³ Although this plan was soon abandoned, Graziani’s movements and responsibilities reveal how, in an unusually structured situation, a secretary was able to provide some stability and support

³⁰ *Ibid.*, fols. 177r, 193r.

³¹ *NBD* III/6, p. 280.

³² *Vincentius Lauro (1572-1578)*, ed. Miroslaus Korolko and Henricus Damianus Wojtyska, CP (Acta Nuntiaturae Polonae IX [hereafter *ANP* IX/1] Rome, 1994), pp. 19, 106, 109.

³³ ‘si è conosciuta la prudenza et destrezza sua et la cognitione che ha dele cose di quei paesi...’, *ANP* IX/1, p. 370.

the activities of nuncios and legates despite not being a formal ambassador himself. His role as an informant, someone able to gather intelligence in that area and relay it to his superiors, was obvious to the curia and his diplomatic colleagues.

Another case a few years later offers a similar example. An elaborate plot was formed in 1578 to send forces led by Thomas Stucley to Ireland as reinforcements for Irish rebels who would sail under the command of James FitzMaurice FitzGerald, whom the papacy supported in his struggles against English control of Ireland. Stucley, who led a full life as a rebel, pirate, and soldier of fortune, set sail from Italy and soon stopped not in Ireland, but Lisbon, to the consternation of the pope and curia.³⁴ In early May the Spanish nuncio, Filippo Sega, elected to send 'his man' to Lisbon to more closely monitor and manage the affair, despite the fact the cardinal-secretary of state was already in contact both with Stucley and the papal envoy in Portugal.³⁵ The nuncio's chosen agent, Andrea Gambarini, was variously called a secretary or chamberlain but was most probably a member of Sega's household and someone with whom the nuncio was familiar. Gambarini was sent with detailed instructions urging the Portuguese king to send Stucley on his planned course for Ireland. The agent met with Stucley several times and also enjoyed an audience with the king, with credentials from the nuncio. Gambarini was able to provide an updated and comprehensive

³⁴ A brief summary of this affair in Thomas M. McCoog, SJ, *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England 1541-1588: 'Our Way of Proceeding?'* (Leiden, 1996), p. 115. See also Woodcock's essay in this volume.

³⁵ Roberto Fontana was the papal envoy to Portugal at the time, who held the title of 'collector' rather than nuncio. On this: Biaudet, *Les nonciatures apostoliques*, p. 34n2.

evaluation of the situation for Sega, who reported that his agent found 'such instability in Stucley, such distrust between him and the soldiers, and such dissension among the soldiers themselves as could not be exceeded'.³⁶ The presence of the nuncio's agent may have prevented even further chaos from unfolding: when Stucley offered the Portuguese king the ship's arms for a military expedition in North Africa, Gambarini insisted they not be used for any purpose other than those approved by Sega.³⁷ In all, Gambarini's mission lasted less than a month, yet it provided the nuncio and the curia critical insight into Stucley's affairs. His collection of information was especially valuable: it seems Sega forwarded Gambarini's final report to Rome, only appending a few notes of his own.³⁸ As Thomas James Dandeleet has suggested in his studies of the Colonna family, by the late sixteenth century many nobles across Europe cultivated a group of agents who could be utilised as intermediaries in a variety of political activities, far beyond what we might expect from a lower-level secretary.³⁹ Here, Commendone and Sega acted much in the same way as secular nobles would

³⁶ *CSP Vatican II*, pp. 339-40.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

³⁸ '...and from his report and the instructions that I gave him, both of which I send herewith . . . so I think it would be well to give effect to what I write with my own hand at the foot of the report'; *ibid.*, p. 451.

³⁹ Thomas James Dandeleet, 'Between courts: the Colonna agents in Italy and Iberia', in *Your Humble Servant*, pp. 30-1.

when deploying Graziani and Gambarini to meet with other diplomats, gather information, and provide regular reports.

Nuncios also frequently turned to members of religious orders as messengers and informants. Like nuncios themselves, these men and women were themselves part of transnational organizations that shared information both in parallel to, and in collaboration with, the papal diplomatic network.⁴⁰ The Society of Jesus deserves particular mention here, since their reputation as a global broker of information has been well documented by scholars, especially regarding scientific knowledge from the Americas.⁴¹ Jesuits and nuncios often also collaborated with one another, with the Society's priests fulfilling a number of roles related to diplomacy and intelligence work. When the Jesuits Stanislaus Warszewicki and Antonio Possevino were sent to Sweden to procure King John III's conversion to Catholicism in 1574, Vincenzo Lauro oversaw their missions from Poland and remained in regular contact with the priests from Poland. Possevino's instructions from his Jesuit superiors repeatedly state that he was to remain in contact with the Polish nuncio and obtain the nuncio's permission before attempting any plans that might endanger the mission or

⁴⁰ Heinz Schilling has suggested the Jesuits embodied a type of 'informal Catholic network' that paralleled those of other confessions: Heinz Schilling, *Konfessionalisierung und Staatsinteressen: Internationale Beziehungen 1559-1660* (Paderborn, 2007), pp. 108-12.

⁴¹ On this circulation of knowledge as well as use of scientific and naturalistic 'informants': Andrés I. Prieto, *Missionary Scientists: Jesuit Science in Spanish South America, 1570-1810* (Nashville, 2011).

lives of others—warning, for example, that the Jesuits needed to consult with Lauro if they were to provide or print books for the local population, since this may have put merchants at risk.⁴²

Similarly, while Robert Persons's involvement in political affairs of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is well known, foregrounding his connections with apostolic nuncios allows us to see how papal diplomats could access, and be shaped by, Jesuit intelligence networks.⁴³ After fleeing to France from England in 1580, Persons continued his involvement in international schemes to recapture and convert his homeland. In spring 1582 he participated in discussions in Paris about a potential invasion of England with several characters including the nuncio to France, Giovanni Battista Castelli. In May 1582 Castelli forwarded a memorial composed by Persons to Gallio, the cardinal-secretary of state in Rome, appending it to his dispatch and noting that the Jesuit

⁴² Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu [hereafter ARSI], Inst. 188, fols. 288r-89r. For Warszewicki: Oskar Garstein, *Rome and the Counter-Reformation in Scandinavia: until the establishment of the S. Congregatio de Propaganda Fide in 1622, Based on Source Material in the Kolsrudcollection: Volume I: 1539-1583* (Oslo, 1963), pp. 73-4, 78. For Possevino, see Lauro's letter of 6 December 1577 in ARSI, Opp. NN. 328, fols. 44r, 131a verso.

⁴³ For an examination of Persons's communications networks with the Jesuit superior general in Rome: Victor Houlston, 'Puzzles and posts: reconstructing Robert Persons' correspondence with Claudio Acquaviva, 1589-1592', *In die Skriflig*, 53/2 (2019), pp. 1-8. See also idem, 'Robert Persons's precarious correspondence', *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, 1 (2014), pp. 542-57.

seemed 'a man of great discretion'.⁴⁴ Later that year Persons traveled to the Iberian peninsula, and throughout the journey he remained connected to Gallio thanks to the nuncios in western Europe. In July, Persons wrote to Gallio from Lisbon, though the letter was actually routed through Castelli in Paris; and in October he met with the nuncio to Spain, Ludovico Taverna, who reported this meeting to Rome and also forwarded a copy of Persons's summary of his meeting with the king.⁴⁵ If Persons was a key agent in the papacy's English plans, the nuncios were the mechanisms that connected him to the curia during his travels, and even after he relocated to Rome in the early seventeenth century, he remained integral to nuncios' intelligence activities. Given his involvement in English affairs he was often in contact with Frangipani, who was frequently navigating conflicts among English exiles living in the Low Countries. Frangipani was aware of Persons's weight in these matters and sought to include him in important negotiations, as when he notified Persons that he had sent a detailed report about English exiles to the cardinal-protector.⁴⁶ The two men compared notes on many different English events, such as peace negotiations in 1600 or the question of who would succeed Elizabeth I, but this did not mean that they always saw eye to eye. In fact, because Persons was well

⁴⁴ *The Correspondence and Unpublished Papers of Robert Persons, SJ. Volume 1, 1574-1588*, ed. Victor Houlston, Ginevra Crosignani and Thomas M. McCoog, SJ (Toronto, 2017), pp. 313-19, quote at p. 318. Cf. McCoog, *Society of Jesus 1541-1588*, pp. 186-7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 343-8.

⁴⁶ *NFL* III, p. 6n1.

aware of the nuncio's tendency to forward sensitive information to Rome, he advised at least one correspondent to be cautious when sharing any information with the nuncio.⁴⁷

Apart from the secretaries and agents who were their clients, nuncios were also linked to a number of other laypeople who functioned as informants, although compared to Spanish ambassadors in Italy and elsewhere, papal envoys were much less likely to pay for information or keep such individuals on long-term retainer.⁴⁸ Like other premodern diplomats, nuncios and legates gleaned important information from merchants, whose travels to distant locales, including England, allowed precious insight into the religious and political situation in that kingdom.⁴⁹ The instructions provided for nuncios often encouraged them to seek the favour of important figures at court, such

⁴⁷ Thomas M. McCoog, SJ, *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England, 1598-1606: 'Lest Our Lamp Be Entirely Extinguished'* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 270-1.

⁴⁸ Michael J. Levin, *Agents of Empire: Spanish Ambassadors in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Ithaca, 2005), pp. 169-73.

⁴⁹ See, for example, the Portuguese nuncio forwarding a report he received from an Italian merchant who claimed to have traveled widely in England, in Ginevra Crosignani, Thomas M. McCoog, and Michael Questier (eds), *Recusancy and Conformity in Early Modern England: Manuscript and Printed Sources in Translation* (Toronto, 2010), pp. 78-83. On merchants supplying information to English diplomats: Sowerby, 'Elizabethan diplomatic networks', pp. 309-10.

as royal favorites or confessors.⁵⁰ Female members of a court or household were a particularly valuable type of contact who could not only supply information but also work clandestinely to achieve specific political goals. In the case of England and Scotland, they were an important resource given the inability for formal diplomats to be present. Anna of Denmark, consort of James VI/ I, was one such channel: as a Catholic, the papacy could openly correspond with her and, in more hopeful moments, hope she could effect the conversion of her husband. The French nuncio, Innocenzo Del Bufalo, recognized this and regularly reported on her religious disposition.⁵¹ Jane Dormer was a similarly valuable piece of the papacy's intelligence network. Dormer, who was originally a maid of honour for Mary Tudor, later married the Duke of Feria and relocated to Spain, where she led a

⁵⁰ For examples from the instructions to Spanish nuncios: Maria Antonietta Visceglia, *Roma papale e Spagna: Diplomatici, nobili e religiosi tra due corti* (Rome, 2010), pp. 60-3.

⁵¹ See *Correspondance du nonce en France: Innocenzo del Bufalo, évêque de Camerino (1601-1604)*, ed. Bernard Barbiche (Acta Nuntiaturae Gallicae IV [hereafter ANG IV]; Rome, 1964), p. 490. See also Cynthia Fry, 'Perceptions of influence: the Catholic diplomacy of Queen Anna and her ladies, 1601-1604', in Nadine Akkerman and Birgit Houben (eds), *The Politics of Female Householders: Ladies-in-Waiting across Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 267-85; Maureen N. Meikle and Helen M. Payne, 'From Lutheranism to Catholicism: the faith of Anna of Denmark (1574-1619)', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 64/1 (2013), pp. 45-69.

court filled with many English exiles who supplied a wealth of information about the kingdom.⁵² The nuncio to Spain, Filippo Sega, reported that Dormer could independently verify news he had received regarding Stucley, as well as other information about FitzMaurice FitzGerald. The nuncio noted not only the information she possessed, but also commented on the extent of her network and its quality—remarking, for example, that 'the Viceroy of Ireland is her uncle, so it is likely she has good intelligence from those parts'.⁵³ Her value was such that upon the accession of James, the nuncio Frangipani recommended Dormer be sent back to England to facilitate the king's conversion, citing her 'prudence and experience of worldly things'.⁵⁴

Dormer was one of several informants with whom Frangipani was familiar. He was certainly aware of famous intelligencers like Richard Verstegan and Hugh Owen, noting the latter's arrest following the Gunpowder Plot in his dispatches.⁵⁵ The nuncio also cultivated his own stable of informants and agents to facilitate his information gathering and dissemination. Some are only mentioned in passing and are thus difficult to identify, as the mention of 'my agent there [in Rome]'

⁵² Hannah Leah Crummé, 'Jane Dormer's recipe for politics: a refuge household in Spain for Mary Tudor's ladies-in waiting', in *The Politics of Female Householders*, pp. 51-71; Albert J. Loomie, SJ, *The Spanish Elizabethans: The English exiles at the court of Philip II* (New York, 1963), pp. 94-128.

⁵³ *CSP Vatican II*, p. 397.

⁵⁴ *NFL III*, p. 424.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 565, 568, 574. On Owen's intelligence activities, as well as his connection to Jesuit information networks, see Loomie, *Spanish Elizabethans*, pp. 52-93.

in one dispatch.⁵⁶ Having an agent near the curia was understandably valuable to a nuncio writing hundreds of miles away. Frangipani also sought more detailed information from England itself, and for this purpose employed Robert Taylor, a professor of canon law in Douai who may have also operated under the name 'Monsieur Boulant'.⁵⁷ Their relationship dates at least to 1600, when Taylor supplied the nuncio with updates on peace negotiations from Boulogne, which Frangipani duly forwarded to the cardinal-nephew, Pietro Aldobrandini, in Rome.⁵⁸ But Taylor's more prominent usage came in 1603, when Frangipani elected to send him to England to supply information following the death of Elizabeth I and in the early days of James I's reign. In a dispatch to

⁵⁶ *NFL* III, p. 165. This might be Claudio Rosa: see *ibid.*, p. 260n1. For a similar example of the Venetian nuncio's informants supplying information from Istanbul: Johann Petitjean, 'The papal network: how the Roman curia was informed about south-eastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire and the Mediterranean (1645-1669)', in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 182-3.

⁵⁷ Patrick H. Martin, *Elizabethan Espionage: Plotters and Spies in the Struggle between Catholicism and the Crown* (Jefferson, 2016), pp. 228-33; Patrick Martin and John Finnis, 'The identity of "Anthony Rivers"', *Recusant History*, 26/1 (2002), p. 73n112.

⁵⁸ *NFL* III, pp. 146-147; some of these reports can be found in *ibid.*, pp. 775-81.

Rome, the nuncio noted Taylor's academic background and described him as 'experienced and knowledgeable about that kingdom's affairs', justifying his selection.⁵⁹

What makes this case especially interesting is how unilaterally Frangipani acted and how his decision was seen by his colleagues. For comparison, during the same period the French nuncio del Bufalo also elected to send an agent to England to report on the situation there. The agent, Giovanni degli Effetti, was attached to the entourage of the Marquis de Rosny, the French ambassador to the new king. The nuncio reported all of this in detail to the cardinal-nephew, who supported the plan and for whom the choice of degli Effetti was especially unproblematic, since the cardinal was the one who had originally recommended degli Effetti as a client several years earlier.⁶⁰ Del Bufalo viewed degli Effetti as an extension of his information-gathering network. As the nuncio stated when the agent was departing, 'I have found a way through which the said sig. Giovanni will be able to receive my letters and write me in great detail (*con rigorezza*) as much as he discovers', and explained that thanks to degli Effetti, he would be 'well informed of the present state of things' in England.⁶¹ Upon arrival, degli Effetti duly provided a number of letters and reports to the French nuncio, who then forwarded them to Aldobrandini in Rome. This was a largely successful mission:

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 410. Additional context on Taylor's activities can be found in Albert J. Loomie, SJ, *Toleration and Diplomacy: The Religious Issue in Anglo-Spanish Relations, 1603-1605* (Philadelphia, 1963).

⁶⁰ ANG IV, p. 185.

⁶¹ ANG IV, pp. 471, 483.

degli Effetti supplied a wealth of information about the situation in London to Rome, and his presence was mostly undetected.

Compare this with the efforts of Robert Taylor. Once del Bufalo learned of Taylor's presence in London, he immediately alerted the cardinal-nephew, who stated that neither he nor the pope were aware of Taylor's mission. The French nuncio, who incorrectly identified Taylor as Frangipani's secretary, stated that he would like his own agent to remain in London until James I's coronation but noted the danger of having two agents operating in such close proximity: 'the one could confuse the other's business, and could also be more easily discovered'.⁶² The cardinal-nephew agreed. Although he noted that it may be advantageous to have two agents, 'provided they not spoil [the efforts of] one another', the pope's displeasure at Frangipani's decision to send Taylor was palpable in the cardinal's terse summary: 'If the nuncio to Flanders sent this secretary, he did so without direction from here. Perhaps, with direction from here, he will need to recall him'.⁶³ The papacy's diplomatic corps was far from a unified front, as this episode suggests. Despite the curia's preferences, individual nuncios had considerable autonomy in seeking out sources and collecting information, and as a result they risked interfering with parallel intelligence operations already underway.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate the varied channels through which papal nuncios and legates collected intelligence, ranging from their diplomatic colleagues and esteemed ladies at royal courts to passing merchants, spies, informants, and other clients they solicited, the latter group often operating in circles entirely removed from the former. Turning to such disparate

⁶² ANG IV, p. 504.

⁶³ AAV, Segr. Stato, Francia 291, fol. 103r-v.

sources allowed diplomats to compare and hopefully confirm reports that could be conflicting or incomplete. Nevertheless, such sources of information were not always reliable, and papal intelligence operations were often messy and disjointed, as the examples of the Thomas Stucley or Robert Taylor reveal. In all respects, these approaches and challenges mirror the experience of other early modern diplomats, who employed similar methods and faced similar challenges in their own intelligence work.

II

Once a nuncio had gathered relevant information and wanted to pass it to his superiors and colleagues, he needed to ensure it would be sent securely and arrive without delay or interception. In this section we will consider the mechanisms by which papal nuncios encoded and transmitted information to Rome, as well as how they received messages from the curia.

Like their secular counterparts, papal diplomats relied on ciphers to encode sensitive information that could not be included in regular correspondence.⁶⁴ Most often, ciphers were appended to a nuncio's regular dispatch as a separate sheet of paper, on which the entire message would be coded as an unbroken string of numbers and symbols. This was the case with a 1573 cipher

⁶⁴ On Venetian cryptography: Ioanna Iordanou, *Venice's Secret Service: Organizing Intelligence in the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2019), pp. 129-57. For English examples: Alan Haynes, *Invisible Power: The Elizabethan Secret Services, 1570-1603* (Stroud, 1992), pp. 19-22.

from Graziani that Albert C. Leighton analysed in several essays.⁶⁵ For the majority of a message, a nuncio or secretary would substitute a number or symbol as a 1-to-1 substitution for a letter: in one example, '7 . 7 + 16 + 13 . 3 8 75' actually represented '*la letera di V.S.*', since 7 stood for *l*, '.' for *a*, '+' for *e*, and so on.⁶⁶ A numerical code might be employed for certain commonly used names or locations, which were included in a nomenclator list provided to the diplomat and his secretary. While this was a timesaving mechanism for encoding a message, the nomenclator also removed a likely avenue for outsiders to understand the cipher, since the frequency of certain letters would be more easily guessed. For example, a nuncio's dispatch would be addressed to the cardinal-nephew, addressed as *Vostra Signoria*, offering the reader a point to begin guessing alphanumerical substitutions.⁶⁷ In the nomenclator for Germanico Malaspina, nuncio to Poland in the 1590s, the code 265 represented Jesuits, 278 stood for Lithuania, and 619 for the bishop of Kraków. These numerical substitutions could be included within a string of numbers comprising an entirely encoded cipher, or simply inserted in a message where most of the words were not encoded; for example, *Ho*

⁶⁵ Albert C. Leighton, 'A Papal cipher and the Polish election of 1573', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 17/1 (1969), pp. 13-28; and idem, 'Further information on a Papal cipher of 1573', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 19/2 (1971), pp. 239-42.

⁶⁶ This example taken from Henry Biaudet, *Un chiffre diplomatique du XVI siècle: Étude sur le cod. Nunz. Polonia 27a des archives secrètes du Saint-Siège* (Helsinki, 1910), p. 6.

⁶⁷ Benedek Láng, 'Real-life cryptology: enciphering practice in early modern Hungary', in Katherine Ellison and Susan Kim (ed.), *A Material History of Medieval and Early Modern Ciphers: Cryptography and the History of Literacy* (New York, 2018), p. 223.

parlato con 589, meaning the king of Poland. (Numerical codes were also used for commonly used words and prepositions such as *et*, *in*, *di*, or *con*.)⁶⁸ Cipher keys were uniquely generated for each diplomat—the same key could not be used for different nuncios—and the nomenclator would often be generated with particular locations or situations in mind. For example, it is unlikely Frangipani, in Flanders, would have need for a code to refer to the bishop of Kraków, but even nuncios in the same region could encounter difficulties depending on how the codes were assigned: Leighton points out that Graziani's nomenclator was originally designed in 1563 and thus did not anticipate many of the key actors involved in the interregnum of 1572-3, meaning that rather than inserting a simple numerical code, the secretary was forced to spell out many names letter by letter: for example, i-l-c-a-s-t-e-l-l-a-n-o-d-i-s-e-n-d-o-m-i-r-i-a.⁶⁹ Upon receipt, the cardinal-nephew and his secretaries in the curia would decipher these dispatches arriving from abroad, sometimes penning the deciphered referents above the numerical code.

⁶⁸ Liisi Karttunen, *Ciffres diplomatiques des nonces de Pologne vers la fin du XVI^e siècle: Extraits des archives des princes Chigi à Rome* (Helsinki, 1911), with Malaspina's cipher key

at pp. 5-10. For a recent analysis of early modern papal ciphers: George Lasry, Beáta Megyesi, and Nils Kopal, 'Deciphering papal ciphers from the 16th to the 18th Century', *Cryptologia*, 45/ 6 (2021), pp. 479-540.

⁶⁹ Leighton, 'A Papal Cipher', p. 27n10. In 1574 Vincenzo Lauro, writing from Kraków, remarked that he had no cipher key except that which he had been given as nuncio to Scotland nearly years eight years prior, in 1566: *ANP* IX/1, p. 151.

Much scholarship about early modern ciphers has focussed on cryptographic elements: how the codes were created and structured, or efforts to decode particular messages. This essay directs attention to the practices involved in using ciphers and what we can glean about the nuncios' attitude toward their use. While much remains to be explored, several broad themes emerge. First, despite modern interest in cryptography, the use of ciphers seems to have been exceptional, rather than standard practice within the papal diplomatic corps—far from every dispatch included an attached cipher.⁷⁰ There are several reasons for this, including the practical aspect that encoding a message required time and energy and called for additional pieces of paper that would, in turn, need to be included in diplomatic packets. In the middle of composing a substantive cipher on one topic, for example, Pietro Aldobrandini opted to continue directly onto another, saying he was doing so 'to not make another cipher' (*per non fare un'altra cifra*), suggesting that there was some expedience in avoiding the creation of a second message.⁷¹

If anything, acknowledging that ciphers were not always employed highlights the cases when they were, an explicit decision that was noted in the correspondence of nuncios and their secretaries. During the interregnum of 1572-3, for instance, Graziani recommended that the

⁷⁰ Heiko Droste reached a similar conclusion regarding Swedish correspondence from the seventeenth century: 'My impression, after reading thousands of diplomatic letters, is that codes were not as important as the use of codes in the twentieth century might imply': see 'Sending a letter between Amsterdam and Stockholm: a matter of trust and precautions', in *Your Humble Servant*, p. 145.

⁷¹ ANG IV, p. 501.

cardinal-secretary of state's dispatches be sent in cipher. During the episode involving Stucley described above, the papal envoy in Portugal made a point to say that some information sent via the Spanish ambassador in Rome was 'not in cipher', intimating that the dispatch should therefore be retrieved promptly.⁷² The determination of what information was considered sufficiently sensitive can be grasped when comparing unencoded dispatches with their attached ciphers. For example, Commendone's dispatches from 1573 provide brief summaries of his activities, but the attached ciphers go into much greater detail about his meetings with Polish clergy and negotiations over candidates in the upcoming election.⁷³ The cardinal-secretary of state's responses follow the same pattern and in both cases the plain-text dispatch refers the reader to the cipher: 'with this there will be a folio of cipher'; 'the response will be in the included folio'.⁷⁴ If delicate political negotiations merited encryption, one's location also mattered, especially if an ambassador were far away or in unfriendly (i.e. non-Catholic) lands. When William Chisolm, bishop of Vaison, was preparing to travel to Scotland upon news of Elizabeth's death in 1603, the cardinal-nephew wrote to del Bufalo in Paris and remarked: 'it would be well, or rather necessary, that he have a cipher with which he could write you more securely'.⁷⁵

⁷² *CSP Vatican II*, p. 429.

⁷³ For examples: AAV, Segr. Stato, Polonia 3, fols. 67r-v, 83r-85v, 106r-v.

⁷⁴ AAV, Segr. Stato, Polonia 3, fol. 6r; Polonia 172, fol. 78r.

⁷⁵ AAV, Segr. Stato, Francia 291, fol. 87r. On this episode with Chisholm: McCoog, *Society of Jesus 1598-1606*, pp. 418-19.

Once information was encoded, it still needed to be transmitted. In his classic study of Renaissance diplomacy, Garrett Mattingly was quick to underline how, even after encoding their messages in ciphers, ambassadors struggled to swiftly relay them due to issues with couriers and mail service.⁷⁶ I have written elsewhere of the difficulties papal nuncios faced sending news regarding England to the Roman curia; here we will instead examine how intelligence collected by nuncios in Poland was sent to Rome.⁷⁷

It should not be surprising that the papal nuncio in Vienna played a major role, given that recent scholarship has shown how the Holy Roman Empire was an important processing centre for news about the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.⁷⁸ Although Giovanni Dolfin, nuncio to the Holy Roman Emperor from 1571 to 1578, promised to use 'great diligence in informing Rome about Polish matters' on his own part, he was also responsible for handling the incoming and outgoing dispatches

⁷⁶ Mattingly, p. 214. See Midura's essay in this issue regarding the postmasters and intelligence gathering.

⁷⁷ Charles R. Keenan, 'English news in papal Rome: cross-confessional information exchange in reformation Europe', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 23/4 (2019), pp. 350-66.

⁷⁸ Pirożyński, 102, 106; Anna Kalinowski, "'Wee have Tidings out of Polonia": English corantos, news networks, and the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth', in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, p. 52.

from the Polish nuncio.⁷⁹ Correspondence between Rome and Poland was routed through the imperial court at Vienna, such that the Dolfin frequently mentioned ‘packets of letters for *monsignor* nuncio in Poland’, and the cardinal-secretary of state in Rome instructed Dolfin to pay the necessary costs to forward letters to Poland.⁸⁰ Dolfin also corresponded directly with the nuncio in Poland, as noted above.

From Vienna, dispatches from Poland would be sent to Venice, where they would be collected by the nuncio there and forwarded to the Roman curia. The Venetian nuncio would send the dispatches of both the imperial and Polish nuncios along with his own, and within a few days they would arrive in Rome, usually coming by way of Bologna and Siena.⁸¹ This system worked in

⁷⁹ *Nuntiatur Giovanni Delfinos (1573-1574)*, ed. Almut Bues (Nuntiaturberichte aus Deutschland 1572-1585 nebst ergänzenden Aktenstücken. Abteilung III/7 [hereafter *NBD* III/7]; Tübingen, 1990), p. 493. For Dolfin’s own concerns about reliable couriers: Daniela Neri, ‘Giovanni Dolfin e la sua nunziatura a Vienna presso la Corte Imperiale negli anni 1575/76’, in *Kurie und Politik*, p. 139.

⁸⁰ See *NBD* III/7, p. 550.

⁸¹ See *Nunziature di Venezia*, vol. X (26 maggio 1571-4 luglio 1573), ed. Aldo Stella (Rome, 1977), p. 300; *Nunziature di Venezia*, vol. XI (18 giugno 1573-22 dicembre 1576), ed. Adriana Buffardi (Rome, 1972), pp. 61, 82-3. See also E. John B. Allen, *Post and Courier Service in the Diplomacy of Early Modern Europe* (The Hague, 1972), pp. 64-5; and Nikolaus Schobesberger et al., ‘European postal networks’, in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 19-63.

reverse, too, since the Venetian nuncio was regularly asked to forward dispatches to Vienna and Kraków, noting the money he had paid to various couriers to carry these letters to Vienna.⁸²

Regardless of how the system was intended to function, complications often arose, and the papal mail system was often interrupted. The first source of trouble was the couriers, given that even the 'ordinary' mail service could fall behind schedule. In March 1574 Vincenzo Lauro wrote that because 'there has not been an ordinary courier from here to Vienna in some time, I am constrained to make use of the opportunities that present themselves each day'. (At one point he stated that he was sending a dispatch by way of 'a gentleman that is going to Venice'.⁸³) At other times, nuncios speculated that financial problems lay behind their missing letters. The nuncio in Venice was perplexed in August 1572 that 'there [were] no letters from Poland and Germany'. He suspected that the payment for the couriers had been lost, and although he would pay the necessary costs again, he would be sure to inform the Doge of the money that he was owed.⁸⁴

Reading the correspondence between Poland and Italy, one is struck by the constant confusion about which letters had reached their destinations. For example, the cardinal-secretary of state in Rome, Tolomeo Gallio, became upset with Vincenzo Dal Portico in 1572 for latter's claims that he had received none of the cardinal-secretary of state's letters—'which is impossible', Gallio

⁸² E.g., *Nunziature di Venezia* X, pp. 173, 385-6.

⁸³ *ANP* IX/1, p. 149.

⁸⁴ *Nunziature di Venezia* X, p. 263. On the payment of couriers: Allen, *Post and Courier Service*, pp. 41-52.

exclaimed, 'since I have written to him many times . . . I am certain that he would have received them'.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, in a letter he composed on 12 January 1575, Vincenzo Lauro tried to ascertain which of his previous letters had arrived in Rome and which may have been lost:

I received . . . the 22nd of last month the letters of Your Most Illustrious Lordship from December 6th and November 13th, by which I understand that you have received my letters from August 31st and of September 12th, 14th, 18th, 23rd, and 27th, and of October 6th . . . I am very relieved, because I was afraid that some had been lost given the delay in [your] response. Now I would like to know if two of my other letters were not lost, which I wrote from Kraków on August 10th and 17th, of which it might please Your Most Illustrious Lordship at the first convenience to let me know if you have received them.⁸⁶

Gallio experienced similar problems of his own in Rome. At one point he had not received any dispatches from Lauro in some time and wondered if the nuncio's dispatches were among some

⁸⁵ AAV, Segr. Stato, Polonia 3, fol. 77r.

⁸⁶ ANP IX/2, p. 122.

letters from Venice that were burned from fear they carried the plague.⁸⁷

Thus, apart from the many problems that arose in the course of political negotiations, and even apart from the creation of elaborate ciphers to protect information, papal diplomats were frequently hamstrung by the challenges of simply sending and receiving correspondence. Here again, this experience was shared by diplomats and rulers across early modern Europe, for whom postal routes proved to be slow, unreliable, and potentially insecure. Compare Lauro's quotes above with the remark of a contemporary Spanish ambassador, who sought to explain why his dispatches from Prague were delayed in reaching Madrid: 'It was some surprise that the mail is never lost, so unsure are the roads along which it must travel. This must explain why letters of mine have not arrived'.⁸⁸ Papal nuncios' confusion and frustration with the post, as well as their strategies and for managing such issues, were no different from their fellow ambassadors.

III

⁸⁷ *Der Reichstag zu Regensburg 1576, der Pacificationstag zu Köln 1579, der Reichstag zu Augsburg 1582*, ed. Joseph Hansen (Nuntiaturberichte aus Deutschland 1572-1585 nebst ergänzenden Aktenstücken. Abteilung III/2; Berlin, 1894), p. 102.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Cristina Borreguero Beltrán, 'Philip of Spain: the spider's web of news and information', in Brendan Dooley (ed.), *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe* (Burlington, 2010), p. 33. Cf. Fletcher, *Diplomacy in Renaissance Rome*, pp. 114-18.

This essay has argued that by examining the methods of papal diplomats, clear parallels with the intelligence practices of other early modern diplomats emerge, whether considering their informants, the issues arising during their espionage operations, or their attempts to promptly and securely transmit information to their superiors. By way of conclusion, this closing section reflects on one additional avenue for future research: namely, how espionage reflects larger anxieties about the nature of truth and doubt in early modern Europe.

Historians have examined the textual practices of premodern diplomats and archivists to establish the veracity of information they generated and received, and as E. Natalie Rothman has suggested, ‘for diplomatic personnel the “production” and “evaluation/ authentication” of diplomatic records was never simply parallel but rather deeply entwined processes’.⁸⁹ In addition to attending to the intrinsic elements of their correspondence, though, evidence suggests that papal diplomats sought to establish the veracity of their reports by affirming the reliability of their informants. For example, when Frangipani reported having spoken with English exiles in Flanders, he described them as ‘not suspect and trustworthy’ (*non sospetti et degne di fede*), and when he first described his agent Robert Taylor to the cardinal-nephew, he used almost identical language, calling him a *uomo grave degne di fede*.⁹⁰ Other nuncios employed similar language to establish the

⁸⁹ E. Natalie Rothman, ‘Afterword: intermediaries, mediation, and cross-confessional diplomacy in the early modern Mediterranean’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 19/ 2-3 (2015), p. 252. Cf. Randolph C. Head, ‘Documents, archives, and proof around 1700’, *The Historical Journal*, 56/4 (2013), pp. 909-30.

⁹⁰ *NFL* III, pp. 9, 410.

credibility of their sources: del Bufalo described Giovanni degli Effetti as someone very well-suited and faithful to this mission (*uomo molto atto, et molto fedele al servitio a che io medesimo l'havevo destinato*), citing his 'diligence, faith, and secrecy' (*la diligenza, la fede, et la secretezza*). The cardinal-nephew agreed; upon reading those dispatches, he reported both he and the pope were satisfied with the agent, taking him to be a 'reasonable man and diligent with these topics' (*l'ha per uomo sensate et diligente con questi argomenti*) who was 'very well-suited' (*attissimo*) to provide the service for which he had been sent.⁹¹

The premium placed on establishing informants' reliability resembles what Steven Shapin described in his analysis of emerging scientific practices in early modern England, in which credibility was tied to social norms and conduct; knowledge always had an interpersonal dimension and was not something that existed in a vacuum to be empirically verified. In Shapin's words: 'What we know of comets, icebergs, and neutrinos irreducibly contains what we know of those people who speak for and about these things'.⁹² In this case—individual social norms notwithstanding—nuncios and other diplomats were always careful to describe the character of their informants, thereby addressing the reliability of the intelligence they provided. A morally upstanding source could provide reliable intelligence; a suspect one would not.

All early modern diplomats worried about these issues of truth and trust, but if we follow the urging of Daniel Riches to consider 'confessional specificity' within early modern diplomacy—

⁹¹ ANG IV, pp. 529-530; AAV, Segr. Stato, Francia 291, fols. 104v, 111r.

⁹² Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, 1994), p. xxvi.

here, what concerns and practices were uniquely held by papal diplomats—these anxieties directly mirror contemporary debates about truth within early modern Catholicism.⁹³ Stefania Tutino and others have explored debates over probabilism and related epistemological concerns, often by examining the writings of theologians, philosophers, jurists, and ecclesiastical historians.⁹⁴

Diplomats, who are rarely included in such studies, shared similar concerns about the nature of truth even if they grappled with it in a different context (foreign relations), in different genres and rhetorical forms (their diplomatic dispatches and relations), and with a distinct, if less rigorously defined, methodology (the information collection and evaluation examined in this essay). They, too, sought to verify contested claims, but they were forced to rely on a vast network of individuals whose character, and thus their reliability, was not guaranteed. Informants and agents might prioritize other things (such as one's family or one's political allegiances) over moral reliability or even Catholic orthodoxy, maintaining contact with non-Catholics if it suited their interests.⁹⁵ More

⁹³ Daniel Riches, *Protestant Cosmopolitanism and Diplomatic Culture: Brandenburg-Swedish Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden, 2013), p. 13.

⁹⁴ Stefania Tutino, *Uncertainty in Post-Reformation Catholicism: A History of Probabilism* (Oxford, 2018); eadem, *Shadows of Doubt: Language and Truth in Post-Reformation Catholic Culture* (Oxford, 2014). Cf. the essays in Barbara Fuchs and Mercedes María-Arenal (ed.), *The Quest for Certainty in Early Modern Europe: From Inquisition to Inquiry, 1550-1700* (Toronto, 2020).

⁹⁵ Diego Pirillo, 'Venetian merchants as diplomatic agents: family networks and cross-confessional diplomacy in early modern Europe', in Nathalie Rivère de Carles (ed.), *Early*

research is needed in this area, but as individuals responsible for the collection and evaluation of intelligence, papal nuncios and legates participated in a common culture of information collection, one that by necessity raised questions about truth and credibility in early modern Europe.

Modern Diplomacy, Theatre and Soft Power: The Making of Peace (London, 2016), pp. 183-203.