



A portrait purportedly showing Lucrezia Borgia, by Pinturicchio

FAMOUS CATALAN FIGURES: THE BORGHIAS

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The Borgia family or ‘House of Borgia’ are famous for their two popes (Calixtus III and Adrian VI), and even more so for the dark legend as to their unlimited greed for power and wealth, in addition to their depraved private lives. They were originally from the towns of Xàtiva and Gandia (Valencia) and therefore the common language used within the family clan was Catalan. ‘Borgia’ is thus the Italianisation of the original Catalan name Borja.

This fact has been studied by numerous historians, and many documents and examples of family correspondence in Catalan can be found in eight volumes of historical documents and papers originally from Castel Sant’Angelo in Rome, currently held in the Vatican archives.

The Borgias are well known for the aforementioned legend relating to the papacy of Alexander VI, with the particular involvement of two of his natural sons, Cesar and Lucrezia Borgia. This myth, in several areas very close to reality but in others clearly embellished, is today alive more than ever. It formed the basis of the controversial BBC TV series *The Borgias* in the 80s, but its origins go back a long way. Indeed, the Italian, particu-

larly Roman, noble families such as the Borghese, the della Rovere, the Farnese, the Orsini and the Colonnas, who for centuries shared the papacy among themselves, were most displeased by what was considered foreign interference in a post they perceived to be their personal property. They therefore devoted a great deal of time and resources to discrediting a family that, to be fair, behaved no more and no less viciously and corruptly as their Italian predecessors and successors did.

Moreover, the House of Borgia cannot be judged only by the actions of one or two of its members. It was one of the most influential European dynasties of the late 15th and early 16th centuries, which not only sired two popes (of which Calixtus III was renowned for his austerity) but twelve cardinals and even a saint, Saint Francis of Borgia. The family were also promoters and patrons of some of the greatest artists of their time such as Bramante, Raphael, Michelangelo and Pinturicchio.

For those interested in more information:
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