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The Imperial ambassador, the nuncio and the favourite: The Count of Pötting, Vitaliano Visconti Borromeo and Juan Everardo Nithard at the time of the Spanish crisis (1668–1669)

Abstract: *The essay aims at touching different aspects of Spanish policy during the regency of Mariana (1665–1675), the interest in the political and physical weakness of the heir to the throne Prince Charles and future King Charles II, the last Hapsburg on the Spanish monarchy. At that time, Madrid's fate was mainly in the hands of three men: the Austrian Jesuit Nithard, the Count of Pötting, and the Apostolic nuncio, Vitaliano Visconti Borromeo.*

Keywords: *regency – Charles II – Spanish foreign policy – European diplomats*

The political period that the Jesuit Juan Everardo Nithard (Johann Eberhard Nidhard)¹ lived and acted in was marked by the demise of the presence of those ministers who had previously monopolised the political landscape – to some extent unlawfully when not clearly illegally² – in Europe's leading courts from the first half of the seventeenth century through to 1661.³

The presence and the role of powerful ministers in Western European courts only became the subject of heavy criticism⁴ following condemnation of the political inappropriateness of an instrument such as the presence of the favourite ministers, ironically set down in

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- 1 We will use the Spanish form of the Jesuit's name, María del Carmen SÁENZ BERCEO, *Juan Everardo Nithard, un valido extranjero*, in: L. Suárez Fernández – J. A. Escudero López (edd.), *Los validos*, Madrid 2004, pp. 323–352. See Fernando NEGREDO DEL CERRO, *Los predicadores de Felipe IV: corte, intrigas y religión en la España del Siglo de Oro*, Madrid 2006 and especially, María del Carmen SÁENZ BERCEO, *[Confesionario y poder en la España del Siglo XVII: Juan Everardo Nithard]*, Logroño 2014.
 - 2 Francesco BENIGNO, *Il fato di Buckingham: la critica del governo straordinario e di guerra come fulcro politico della crisi del Seicento*, in: F. Benigno – L. Scucimarra (edd.), *Il governo dell'emergenza. Poteri straordinari e di guerra in Europa tra XVI e XX secolo*, Roma 2007, pp. 75–93.
 - 3 Giovanni RUOCCO, *Lo stato sono io. Luigi XIV e la «rivoluzione monarchica» del marzo 1661*, Bologna 2002.
 - 4 Ibidem. About the *ministeriat* in Europe see Francesco BENIGNO, *Favoriti e ribelli. Stili della politica barocca*, Roma 2011.

his will (in 1661) by the highly powerful favoured minister of Louis XIV, Cardinal Giulio Mazzarino.

The absence of power these figures left behind took on undefined and unique contours in each of the courts: in Paris, Louis XIV embarked on period of absolutism and foreign policy clearly targeted at war and the conquest of power forming part of a large-scale hegemonic design that went as far back as Charles V;⁵ in London, it helped accelerate the separation between court and country in the radical form of the clash between the Stuarts and Parliament which was to be the most violent expression of the modern age prior to the French Revolution; in Madrid, from 1643 up to the death of Philip IV in 1665, both the court and the new favourite minister Luis de Haro had to reckon with Olivares' legacy, resulting in a system of power more similar in many ways to the multi-party system, which existed prior to the government of the Duke of Lerma, than to the single-party system of traditional government of favourite ministers;⁶ at the Court of Rome, the power of Secretaries of State gradually went to replace the totally unofficial one of nephews, however for certain aspects in a completely antithetical manner from the previous power;⁷ in Vienna, something similar happened upon the death of Portia who had been behind a policy aimed at keeping the Emperor Leopold I away from government-related matters and, at steering him instead towards more suitable activities for a Baroque ruler such as literature, music and theatre.⁸

5 Giovanni RUOCCO, *Il bellum contra omnes di Luigi XIV e l'ambivalenza del modello hobbesiano*, in: F. Benigno – L. Scucimarra (edd.), *Il governo dell'emergenza*, pp. 95–106.

6 Alistair MALCOLM, *Royal Favouritism and the Governing Elite of the Spanish Monarchy 1640–1665*, Oxford 2017; Rafael VALLADARES, *Origen y límites del valimiento de Haro*, in: Idem (ed.), *El mundo de un valido. Don Luis de Haro y su entorno, 1643–1661*, Madrid 2016, pp. 97–152. About the importance of the Count-Duke of Olivares's model of *valimiento* see Manuel RIVERO RODRÍGUEZ, *El conde duque de Olivares. La búsqueda de la privanza perfecta*, Madrid 2017. On one *versus pluri faccional* system see F. BENIGNO, *Favoriti e ribelli*.

7 About the Court of Rome during the early modern period, see Gianvittorio SIGNOROTTO – Maria Antonietta VISCEGLIA (edd.), *La corte di Roma tra Cinque e Seicento "Teatro" della politica europea*, Roma 1999. See also Antonio MENNITI IPPOLITO, *Il tramonto della curia nepotista. Papi, nipoti e burocrazia curiale tra XVI e XVII*, Roma 1999. About the role of the Holy Siege in the international relationship during the early modern period see Maria Antonietta VISCEGLIA (ed.), *Papato e politica internazionale nella prima età moderna*, Roma 2013.

8 Jean BÉRENGER, *La supresión del ministro-favorito o el crepúsculo de un modelo político: el caso austriaco*, in: J. H. Elliott – L. Brockliss (edd.), *El mundo de los validos*, Madrid 1999, pp. 365–366. See also IDEM, *Léopold Ier (1640–1705), fondateur de la puissance autrichienne*, Paris 2004.

Vienna, Madrid and Rome in the season of the crisis of favourite ministers' system.

Upon Portia's death in February 1665, the young emperor wrote to his ambassador in Madrid, the Count of Pötting, announcing his intention to carry out the same political revolution as the one carried out by the French king and which had become a model for the European courts⁹ “*firstly, because I am young and I can work; secondly, I will be the leader.*”¹⁰

While Leopold's intention had still yet to be disclosed, the fact that he had already chosen a High Steward although he had not decided to assign the latter the position of favourite alarmed the anonymous author who hoped that the emperor “*would lead by himself, it would be the best thing for his subjects while they will not respect the favourites' obscurity, gains, and caprice.*”¹¹

Leopold's decision had dashed the hopes of those who, during Portia's government, had thought they would be take over from him in the favourite government. The Prince of Auersperg, in particular, did not greet the news of the emperor's decision with any enthusiasm¹² “*because he cannot cure his own insane ambition; not to reach the highest place he longs for.*”¹³

The prince, who had been one of the Emperor Ferdinand III's trusted aides and who was renowned throughout Europe for his diplomatic ability, was also undoubtedly well-known for his lack of fondness for Emperor Leopold I, who had preferred Portia as his favourite minister over him, opting to forego political continuity with his father's government.

Despite the emperor's wishes, Auersperg was a member of the Aulic Council as from 1665 and was not excluded from the empire's political life, nor was he completely incapable of influencing the emperor's choices in the aftermath of the Viennese changes of 1665.¹⁴

- 9 Jeroen DUINDAM, *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1550–1780*, Cambridge 2003. About the spread and rooting of political models see the case of the influence of Nithard's *valimiento* in Spanish colonies in America in Michèle GUILLEMONT, *Extension de la privauté aux confins du monde. Les réductions jésuites du Paraguay au temps du favori Jean-Everard Nithard (1665–1669)*, *Dix-septième siècle* 2012/3, n° 256, pp. 487–498.
- 10 “*Porque en primer lugar soy joven y puedo trabajar, en segundo lugar me mantendré como señor y ningún otro puede vanagloriarse de que todo depende de él, y en tercer lugar puedo responsabilizarme mejor, pues puedo atribuirme todo a mí*”, Vienna, 18 February 1665, quoted in J. BÉRENGER, *La supresión*, p. 380, n. 4.
- 11 “*Volesse diligersi da se stesso sarebbe gran fortuna de' propri sudditi mentre non soggiocarebbero all'[oscurità], interesse e capriccio de' favoriti*”, BAV, Borg. Lat. 80, Anonymous, without a date, 1665, without folio.
- 12 Hubert Christian EHALT, *La corte di Vienna tra Sei e Settecento*, Roma 1984, p. 45 and following.
- 13 “*Non puol guarire la sua ambitione inferma, perché non puol giungere a posto elevato, dove aspira*”, BAV, Borg. Lat. 80 cit.
- 14 H. Ch. EHALT, *La corte di Vienna*; Stefan SIENELL, *Die Geheime Konferenz unter Kaiser Leopold I. Personelle Strukturen und Methoden zur politischen Entscheidungsfindung am Wiener Hof*,

Together with important ministers such as the Princes Lobkowitz¹⁵ and Schwarzenberg and the Count of Lamberg,¹⁶ Auersperg was part of the emperor's Privy Council.¹⁷ For a decade, he was one of the main figures of reference at the Viennese court for Madrid's pro-empire party, to the extent that we can define him as one of the key players in European politics, especially with regard to the 1660s, without running the risk of being rhetorical. His political actions and influence went beyond the empire's boundaries (as far as Madrid) and even succeeded in significantly influencing the dynamics within the Catholic monarchy's government.¹⁸

In order to truly understand the role the court of Vienna and its leading ministers played in Spanish politics during the critical period of the Nithard's affair, it is necessary to highlight the presence of two opposing parties: a pro-Spanish action whose main representatives included the very Prince of Auersperg, and a pro-French faction led, ironically, by Emperor Leopold in person.¹⁹

The previously mentioned pro-Spanish political group within the imperial court was closely linked to Madrid's pro-empire party and had a strong sense of loyalty to the common Hapsburg dynasty. Nevertheless, each faction acted independently with most internal political questions concerning Madrid and Vienna. This approach seemed to be confirmed by the words spoken by a leading Spanish minister to one of his trusted aides at the Viennese court:

*"If the Prince of Auersperg or that of Lamberg would become the favourite minister it would be the same to me, as things occurred in the Philippines that are not so far from my concern and my reason of state than Vienna."*²⁰

Frankfurt am Main 2001.

- 15 Adam WOLF, Fürst Wenzel Lobkovic, erster geheimer Rath Kaiser Leopold's I. 1609–1677. Sein Leben und Wirken, Wien 1869; Stefan SIENELL, *Die Ersten Minister Kaiser Leopolds I.: Johann Ferdinand von Portia und Wenzel Eusebius von Lobkowitz*, in: Michael Kaiser – Andreas Pečar (ed.), *Der zweite Mann im Staat. Oberste Amtsträger und Favoriten im Umkreis der Reichsfürsten in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin 2003, pp. 317–330; about Lobkowitz Family: Pavel MAREK (ed.), *Svědectví o ztrátě starého světa. Manželská korespondence Zdeňka Vojtěcha Popela z Lobkovic a Polyxeny Lobkovické z Pernštejna*, České Budějovice 2005.
- 16 H. Ch. EHALT, *La corte di Vienna*, p. 52 and following.
- 17 Henry Frederick SCHWARZ, *The Imperial Privy Council in the Seventeenth Century*, London 1943; Grete MECENSEFFY, *Im Dienste dreier Habsburger. Leben und Wirken des Fürsten Johann Weikhard Auersperg (1615–1677)*, in: *Archiv für Österreichische Geschichte* 114, 1938, pp. 295–509, esp. pp. 458–493.
- 18 J. BÉRENGER, *La supresión*, pp. 368 and following.
- 19 About the strong influence of French King Louis XIV on Emperor Leopold's political attitude, see the study Gabriel MAURA Y GAMAZO, *Vida y reinado de Carlos II*, I–III, Madrid 1942, here vol. I., pp. 114–115.
- 20 *"Sea el principe de Auesperg el valido o sealo él de Lamberg, a mi poco me importa por que las Filipinas no están más lejos de mi concepto y para mi razón de estado que Viena"*, BNE, Ms 13.307, Cardinal Moncada to the Marquise of Grana, Madrid, 25 February 1667.

Why was a well-informed minister still referring to the favourite ministers' system in 1667? Had it not been done away with after the 1665 revolution? Had the emperor been considered none too convincing? Or perhaps the Spanish minister adopted old terminology to speak about something new?²¹ The minister from Madrid seemed to be solely interested in hearing about the relationship between the Prince of Auersperg and the Jesuit Nithard.²² Once the prince's hostile attitude to the Jesuits had been assured – a theory which Nithard himself confirmed in his memoirs²³ – as from the time of Fernando III when, in his capacity as favourite minister, he had attempted to boycott them, Auersperg was looked on in Madrid as a possible way to exercise pressure on Emperor Leopold in Vienna.²⁴

Vienna's neutrality during the Spanish crisis tended to promote the conspiracy theory as an *extrema ratio* to save a kingdom on the irreparable path towards ruination. For their part, the Spanish ministers attempted to involve the emperor (suspected of being too close to the French king) in the anti-Nithard group on numerous occasions, and, in some way to defend a queen, Leopold's sister, who was completely dominated by the decisions of her confessor and favourite minister.

The reality which the Madrid – based ministers involved in the plot to get rid of Nithard had to contend with were the politics of an emperor hostile to Spain's highest aristocracy and in favour of the Jesuit's cause. The Spanish ministers were unaware of the actual reasons why Leopold had decided to support the Jesuit: on the one hand the pressure of his own confessor, the Jesuit Müller, on the other the magnetism a figure such as Louis XIV had over him, as he did over most of his contemporaries. Leopold had gone as far as humiliating Spain's highest aristocracy, his acolytes, treating them like derelicts. This unacceptable way of treating them has decisive in the highest aristocracy's decision to act, regardless of the backing of Vienna. On the eve of the Jesuit being banished, the situation was that described by Cardinal Moncada to the Marquis de Grana, the emperor's envoy in Madrid, in the spring of 1667: "*regency became tyranny; the king is Eberardo Neydart; [...] and the confessor's loyalty are with the French ministers.*"²⁵

21 Jean BÉRENGER, *La conjuration des magnates hongrois (1664–1671)*, in: Y. – M. Bercé – E. Fasano Guarini (edd.), *Complots et conjurations dans l'Europe moderne*, Roma 1996, pp. 317–345.

22 BNE, Ms 13.307, Cardinal Moncada to marquise of Grana, Madrid, 8 March 1667.

23 Rafaella PILO, *Juan Everardo Nithard y sus «Causas no causadas». Razones y pretextos para el fin de un valimiento*, Madrid–Córdoba 2010, pp. 174–175.

24 J. BÉRENGER, *La conjuration*, p. 368.

25 "*La Regencia se ha reducido a tiranía; el monarca es Eberardo Neydart; [...] las confidencias del confesor son con los ministros de Francia*", BNE, Ms 13.307, Cardinal Moncada to the Marquise of Grana, Madrid, 16 May 1667, s. f.

The offended aristocracy needed a political impetus able to retaliate for the insult they had been on the receiving end of, and to create a government that would not allow for the recurrence of such offensive and politically inappropriate behaviour.

Considering that one of the main aims of the Jesuit favourite ministers' politics was to eradicate the Imperial party from Madrid; even if they did not form a compact, strong political group, Leopold's men had tried to establish an alliance with all of Madrid's ministers that, for the most diverse of reasons, were against Nithard and interested in getting him out of power.²⁶

As regards the Spanish members of the Imperial party, some of the most important ministers of that period are to be found among them: the Duke of Medina de las Torres, Cardinal Moncada and some other key figures united in a strong and solid brotherhood with the empire's main representatives in Madrid between 1665 and 1669 and these are the figures that can be looked on as the hyphen between the two courts. A study of the fragile relations which linked them to the emperor, to the Prince of Auersperg, as well as the colourful world of Madrid's court, can help reconstruct the complexity of the general situation and may be able to explain some stances which are, otherwise, difficult to interpret.

For example, the imperial ambassador in Madrid, the Count of Pötting, was one of the first at the Spanish court to be informed of Leopold's decisions regarding internal politics, especially concerning the decision to adopt the French model as from 1665. He was also one of the first to understand the consequences of such a decision: just a few months on from the death of Philip IV and subsequent resulting crisis, the prolongation of a regency and presence of a child king (especially in the case of Prince Charles whose precarious health conditions were well – known to all European rulers), who would be crowned king ten years from then, would inevitably result in serious political instability – the Hapsburg dynasty could be seriously weakened for a number of reasons; and lastly, the passing of full powers into the hands of an emperor who did not seem to be particularly qualified to exercise a power completely freed from the control of Vienna's ministers.²⁷

26 On the imperial faction in Spain, see Pavel MAREK, *La diplomacia española y la papal en la corte imperial de Fernando II*, *Studia Historica. Historia Moderna* 30, 2008, pp. 109–143, here pp. 127–128; Rubén GONZÁLEZ CUERVA – Pavel MAREK, *The Dynastic Network between the Imperial and the Spanish Courts (1556–1619)*, in: R. González Cuerva – A. Koller (edd.), *A Europe of Courts, a Europe of Factions Political Groups at Early Modern Centres of Power (1550–1700)*, Leiden – Boston 2017, pp. 130–156. The Auersperg opportunely underscore the absence of a unit and compact pro-emperor group. About Spanish international relations during the regency of Mariana see: Juan Antonio SÁNCHEZ BELÉN, *Las relaciones internacionales de la monarquía hispánica durante la regencia de doña Mariana de Austria*, *Studia Historica. Historia Moderna*, 20, 1999, pp. 137–172.

27 See some evidence of decline in Christopher STORRS, *The Resilience of the Spanish Monarchy 1665–1700*, Oxford 2006. See also J. BÉRENGER, *Léopold Ier*.

The most problematic aspect was the influence the French king had already exerted and could continue to exert on the emperor. This was what caused the ambassador greatest concern with him undertaking to reveal his worries to the other members of the pro-empire party residing in Madrid to come up with a line of action shared with members of the anti-French group in Vienna and led by the betrayed Prince of Auersperg himself.²⁸

The Imperial ambassador began to establish contact with those ministers who were known to be against the Jesuit Nithard and these included Cardinal Moncada. In May 1666, he wrote to his brother-in-law, the Marquis of Castelo Rodrigo, to inform him of Pötting's assertion to meet with him: "*The emperor's ambassador persisted in those last days to meet me, and I suppose it depended on the knowledge that the confessor treated me badly and that I am his enemy.*"²⁹

It did not take much for the roles to be inverted and for Cardinal Moncada to take over at the helm, including against the very Count of Pötting;³⁰ indeed, on the one hand, tired of the Spanish ministers' and imperial envoy's cowardly, wait-and-see attitude, and on the other, extremely disheartened by the whole situation, the cardinal wrote to his brother-in-law, the Marquis of Castelo Rodrigo that "*those ministers who thought of sharing the palace's offices, coercing his sad boy's will, and annihilating the regency's power.*"³¹

The cardinal had informed the emperor of the situation in Madrid and organised a meeting between the imperial ambassador and the queen to ensure the emperor would not be influenced by the decisions taken by the Council of State.

The political situation required an immediate reaction: the scenario had changed in the space of a year and, if the emperor had started to govern on his own, the government in Spain was still led by a favourite minister during a period when European public opinion had condemned such a political practice, labelling it despotic and typical of undeveloped states, such as Muscovy or the Ottoman Empire.³² Oddly, the Catholic monarchy was

28 See J. BÉRENGER, *La conjuration*, p. 368 and following.

29 "*El Embajador de Alemania ha hecho grandes instancias estos días por unirse conmigo, debe de ocasionarlo el conocimiento de lo mal que me trata el confesor y de ser su enemigo,*" BNE, Ms. 13.307, Cardinal Moncada to the Marquis of Castel Rodrigo, Madrid, 18 May 1666.

30 Rafaella PILO, *Juegos de Cortes en la época barroca: éxitos y derrotas de los duques de Montalto*, in: J. Martínez Millán – M. P. Marçal Lourenço (edd.), *Las relaciones discretas entre las monarquías hispana y portuguesa: Las casas de las reinas (siglos XV–XIX)*, I–III, Madrid 2009, here vol. II., pp. 1429–1442.

31 "*Han ganado mis compañeros cuando pensaban repartirse los oficios de la casa, tiranizar la voluntad de este triste niño, y aniquilar el poder de la Regencia,*" BNE, Ms. 13.307, Cardinal Moncada to the Marquis of Castel Rodrigo, Madrid, 30 June 1666. On the Marquises of Castelo Rodrigo and the *valimiento* see Santiago MARTÍNEZ HERNÁNDEZ, *Heredar la privanza. Los marqueses de Castelo Rodrigo y la vindicación del valimiento de sangre* in: Rafael Valladares (ed.), *Hijas e hijos de validos. Familia, género y política en la España del siglo XVII*, Valencia 2018, pp. 27–59.

32 J. BÉRENGER, *La conjuration*, p. 370.

controlled by a foreign favourite minister at that time, who was a Jesuit, and incapable of governing, according to numerous opponents.³³

Leaving to one side the fact that the negative image of Nithard which came from sources against him and expressed the opposition to his government that was building up in Madrid, many Spanish ministers hoped for the emperor to act in Spain which went well beyond the letters of support written to his sister Mariana. The Spanish ministers opposing the Jesuit were extremely concerned about Leopold's dangerous familiarity with France's foreign policy, to be feared by the Spanish monarchy and viewed with great mistrust by Madrid where it could be seen how many were not indifferent to the clinking of French money used to oil certain mechanisms and of great use to promote the French party. The French king's party in Madrid seemed to take on important dimensions, maybe a lot fewer (at least during that period) than appeared to the worried eyes of Madrid's anti-French faction. Even if it is true that Louis XIV did not encounter huge obstacles to his plan to gain followers in Madrid since neither Queen Mariana, nor the emperor were backed by a strong, united political group.³⁴

Ambassador Pötting let off steam with Madrid's pro-Empire ministers regarding the cowardly attitude and undefined political decisions taken by the emperor which tended to delay the opening of an anti-French front, with a view to creating a pro-Empire party led by him, able to win over all those who had not yet joined the French block which, in the meantime, was becoming larger and more compact throughout Europe, slowly but without having to deal with any obstacles.

According to Pötting, Leopold continued to avoid the problem and stopped encouraging his men to find a solution that would allow the Spanish monarchy to avoid becoming part of France. The ambassador's opinion was confirmed by the emperor's decisions and the empire's followers were left powerless by the emperor's policy, which did not seem to encourage support for the queen. The queen distanced herself from the Hapsburg party and the ambassador, however the ministers determined the solution was to assemble a supranational network of alliances, bringing together Madrid and Vienna.

The ministers most heavily involved in the conspiracy included both the Count of Pötting and the Baron of Lisola, as well as the young Marquis de Grana who was very close to Cardinal Moncada and had helped ruin the Jesuit's reputation in Vienna to facilitate the plan devised by Madrid.³⁵

33 See some analogies with the Holy Siege of Rome between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in A. MENNITI IPPOLITO, *Il tramonto*.

34 R. PILO, *Juan Everardo Nithard*.

35 *Ibidem*, p. 125. In Nithard's opinion, the ambassador and the baron provided Don Juan with few expectations for his marriage arrangement with the Archduchess of Tyrol. They then blamed the Jesuit for the failure of the marriage.

The Marquis, who was orphaned as a child, was protected and favoured by Nithard at Vienna's court, but he then decided to support the anti-Jesuit position adopted by the Prince of Auersperg during the years of the government of favourite ministers.³⁶

Indeed Nithard went so far as to say that the Marquis de Grana's arrival in Madrid was the result of an agreement between the emperor and Spain's pro-Hapsburg ministers, signed with Auersperg acting as go-between who, was interested in the mission in Madrid and the valuable information which he would have got hold of and would prove useful for defeating the Jesuit at a political level.³⁷

Meanwhile, the Count of Pötting and his wife, Marie Sophie de Dietrichstein, who remained in Madrid until 1673, acted as go-betweens for the imperial plans of action (mostly in favour of Louis XIV) and the maintenance of Spanish ties preceding the Nithard's affair.³⁸

Specifically, they intended to maintain relationships with the Marchioness (Espinardo's widow) and the Marchioness de la Fuente Ana Portocarrero, whom the ambassador visited to obtain confidential information.³⁹ The Marchioness had a rather lively circle, not only lovers, which included French ministers not directly linked to Louis XIV, as in the case of the Lord of Gourville, Juan Herault, a representative of the Prince of Condé, appointed to collect amounts due to the Catholic monarchy.⁴⁰ On 6 July 1673, near the end of his stay in Madrid, the imperial ambassador went to pay his condolences to Ana Portocarrero upon the death of her husband, recalling the Marquis de la Fuente as “*a very good friend of mine, who always has been, and was an instrumental reason for me coming to this Spanish embassy.*”⁴¹

36 Ibidem, p. 174.

37 Ibidem, p. 176. About the diplomatic advance of the Marquis of Grana as *gobernador de Flandes* between 1682 and 1685, see Carmen María FERNÁNDEZ NADAL, *La política exterior de la monarquía de Carlos II. El Consejo de Estado y la Embajada en Londres (1665–1700)*, Gijón 2009, p. 44 and following.

38 On her role, see Laura OLIVÁN SANTALIESTRA, *Egrecia virago: la mujer como agente del poder en la corte de Mariana de Austria*, in: XIII Coloquio Internacional de la AEHM, *La historia de las Mujeres: Perspectivas actuales*, Barcelona 2006, p. 19.

39 Married to Gaspar de Téves y Guzmán, I Marquise de la Fuente, the ambassador in Venice (1644), and then in Vienna (1656–1661), and a member of the *Consejo de Estado* since 1666, Feliciano BARRIOS, *El Consejo de Estado de la monarquía española 1521–1812*, Madrid 1984, p. 386; L. OLIVÁN SANTALIESTRA, *Egrecia virago*, p. 19.

40 G. MAURA Y GAMAZO, *Vida y reinado*, vol. I, pp. 181–182.

41 “*Singular amigo mio, que lo fue siempre, y causa instrumental de haver yo venido a esta Embaxada de España*”, Miguel NIETO NUÑO (ed.), *Diario del conde de Pötting, embajador del Sacro Imperio en Madrid (1664–1674)*, I–II., Madrid 1993, here vol. II., p. 361.

The apostolic nuncios in Madrid: Vitaliano Visconti Borromeo and Federico Borromeo.

The Apostolic nuncios, Vitaliano Visconti Borromeo and Federico Borromeo⁴² were other figures with whom the ambassador remained close and who performed a non-marginal role in resolving the problems inside Madrid's court.

The ambassador and the papal legates enjoyed an intense exchange of confidential information: to better understand Pötting's position, the nuncio maintained that the confessor could have remained in power for a long time, while the ambassador forecast the demise of favourite government in a short period of time.⁴³

The nuncio was intent on avoiding a crisis but was certain of the fact that the only way possible for a peaceful solution to the matter was to remove the Jesuit from Madrid and it was crucially important that, by February 1669, he had succeeded in the difficult task of convincing the Jesuit to abandon the government before the situation worsened.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Nithard continued to fear for his safety; this fear, which was anything but unfounded, was also shared by the nuncio himself who opted to make use of a guarantor who offered the Jesuit the certainty that everything would peacefully go back to complying with the queen's decisions and authority once he left Madrid. The nuncio and Cardinal Moncada reached the following agreement: the former would persuade the confessor and the queen to act carefully, while on his part the cardinal would convince John of Austria the Younger to accept the government of Flanders.

In the meantime, not a single voice of dissent had been heard in Madrid with regard to John of Austria the Younger and, in order to prevent the army led by the illegitimate son of Philip IV from encountering the favour of the population and causing unrest, the Admiral of Castile and the confessor (without any prior consultation with the Councils or Committees decided to put together a guard corps of around one thousand horsemen to defend the Jesuit. Clearly it was a move destined to meet with general disapproval and some ministers, including the Vice-Chancellor of the Council of Aragon, Cristóbal Crespi,

42 About the apostolic nuncios and their respective roles at the time of the Spanish crisis of 1668–1669, see Rafaela PILO GALLISAI, *España y Roma. Conflicto político e intervención diplomática durante la minoría de Carlos II*, in: P. Sanz Camañes (ed.), *La Monarquía Hispánica en Tiempos del Quijote*, Madrid 2005, pp. 615–625; Anna Elena GALLI, *Federico IV Borromeo (1617–1673). Tra l'Europa e il Gran Teatro del Mondo*, in: F. Repishti – A. Rovetta (edd.), *Studia borromaica. Saggi e documenti di storia religiosa e civile della prima età moderna. L'architettura milanese e Federico Borromeo*, XXII, Roma 2008, pp. 365–380.

43 ASV, SS, Spagna, vol. 136, ff. 337r–338r, Nunzio to Pope, Madrid, 26 January 1669.

44 Ibidem, ff. 352r–353r, Nunzio to Pope, Madrid, 9 February 1669.

asked the queen for leave to abandon court, fearing possible retaliation by the military should John of Austria the Younger and his men be defeated.⁴⁵

The nuncio tried to settle the crisis, warning the queen of the inappropriateness of similar situations during the period when the king was still a minor since the government would inevitably be weakened as a result. Mariana hurried to write to John of Austria the Younger, reassuring him of her complete non-involvement in the decision to put together an army.⁴⁶

At the same time, the nuncio attempted to convince the confessor of the risks connected with his position and that a peaceful solution was to be hoped for to prevent the situation from worsening and military action by Don John, and he tried, *inter alia*, to get the illegitimate son of Philip IV to pay heed to more cautious counsel.⁴⁷

However, what surprised and wrong-footed the papal legate was the determination with which Queen Mariana did not seem intent on reaching an agreement in a political context where even the ministers that backed John Joseph of Austria – with the end goal, as already stated, of removing Nithard from the government, but without any plans to carry out a *coup d'état* – had shown their willingness to take part in mediation coordinated by Nuncio Visconti, in order to prevent the situation from worsening with unpleasant consequences for all.⁴⁸

At this point, the nuncio called for Rome to adopt a position in favour of the cardinals that were working to resolve the problem since it would be fitting, also in the future, to keep under control Don John's "ambitious and restless" nature through the cooperation of Spain's valuable cardinals.⁴⁹

The crisis ended with Nithard's departure from Madrid on 25 February 1669.⁵⁰

45 BNE, Ms 5742, *Diario*, f. 413 and following. See also ASV, SS, Spagna, vol. 136, ff. 358r–361r, Nuncio to Pope, Madrid, 23 February 1669, ff. 358rv.

46 ASV, SS, Spagna, Vol. 136, ff. 358r–361r, Nuncio to Pope, Madrid, 23 February 1669, ff. 359r.

47 *Ibidem*, f. 359v. On the position and diplomatic role played by Cardinal Moncada and the *Almirante* of Castile, see Rafaella PILO GALLISAI, *Casi todos los hombres del cardenal Moncada. La conjura de otoño (octubre de 1668–marzo de 1669)*, in: J. M. de Bernardo Áres (ed.), *La Sucesión de la Monarquía Hispánica, (1665–1725). Lucha política en las Cortes y fragilidad económica-fiscal en los Reinos*, Córdoba 2006, pp. 255–275, here pp. 271–274.

48 ASV, SS, Spagna, Vol. 136, Nuncio to Pope, Madrid, 6 March 1669, ff. 362r–363r. About the relationship between Juan José and Nithard in Calderón's work, see Catalina BUEZO, *Utopía y antimodelo en el teatro aurisecular: de la comedia calderoniana "La estatua de Prometeo" a la mojiganga dramática "Merlín y los animales"*, *Teatro de Palabras*, 2, 2008, pp. 45–56; Cecilia BRAIN, *Juan Everardo Nithard, protagonista de "La estatua de Prometeo" de Calderón de la Barca*, *Anuario calderoniano* 6, 2013, pp. 31–47.

49 ASV, SS, Spagna, Vol. 136, Nuncio to Pope, Madrid, 6 March 1669, ff. 362r–363r.

50 BNE, Ms 5742, *Diario*, f. 413 and following. See Archivo General de Simancas, from now AGS, E, K 1645, *Decreto de la Reina Gobernadora notificando la salida del Padre Everardo Nithard, dirigido a don Pedro Fernández del Campo*, Secretario de Estado, Madrid, 25 February 1669, quoted in: Francisco TOMÁS Y VALIENTE, *Los validos en la monarquía española del siglo XVII*, Madrid 1982, pp. 176–177. On the

The government was reorganised during the spring and summer of that year with some of Nithard's proudest opponents playing leading roles. A new inquisitor-general was required and the Count of Castrillo was recommended for the position, forcing him to resign as president of the Council of Castile. The Count had many enemies; however he was the only person capable of being an antagonist to the Marquis of Aytona in the favourite government.⁵¹ The offices of President of Castile or Vice-Chancellor of Aragon were offered to the latter's brother-in-law, Cardinal Moncada: the two of them had made peace immediately after the conspiracy thanks to mediation by the nuncio who hoped to leave Madrid in a situation of relative governability in which none of the rival factions succeeded in prevailing on the other and so as the queen was free to reign.⁵²

If Moncada had chosen the position of vice-chancellor, the position of President of Castile would have conferred on the Count of Peñaranda; the Marquis of Castelo Rodrigo would have then replaced him on the committee. In this situation, a kind of triumvirate would have been created, comprised of Aytona and his two brothers-in-law: Moncada and Castelo Rodrigo. It would have been the ideal solution that also allowed Cardinal Aragón, freed from the factions involved, to side with the majority.⁵³

However, nothing was to come of the nuncio's plan as "*the fabrication made by me with great effort in gathered those trees in government benefit big fall had received.*"⁵⁴

As if not enough, Emperor Leopold – whose position, which was officially neutral, but actually in favour of the French hegemonic design, had helped determine the Spanish crisis – attempted to persuade his sister Mariana to once again hand over government to a favourite minister upon the fall of the confessor. The purpose of this choice was to place a figure alongside the Queen of Spain who was linked to the courts of Vienna and Paris and able to intervene in Spain's internal affairs. However, Leopold and Mariana failed to agree on a person and the emperor's plans were ended.⁵⁵

An unresolved question remains regarding the Nithard matter: what was the importance of Rome's role in the situation?⁵⁶ It is true that the destiny of the Spanish monarchy

Nithard ambassador in Rome see Julián José LOZANO NAVARRO, *Una embajada controvertida. El padre Nithard en Roma (1670–1681)*, Roma Moderna e Contemporanea 15, 2007, vol. 1–3, pp. 271–291.

51 ASV, SS, Spagna, vol. 136, ff. 416r–417v, Nuncio to Pope, Madrid, 19 June 1669.

52 Ibidem. Towards this objective, the Nuncio considered a reconciliation between Cardinal Moncada and the queen, see Ibidem, ff. 388r–390r, Nuncio to Pope, Madrid, 11 May 1669.

53 Ibidem, ff. 416r–417v, the nuncio to the pope, Madrid, 19 June 1669.

54 "*Gran crollo ha ricevuto la fabrica da me fatta con somma fatica in riunir questi tre a beneficio del Governo*", Ibidem, ff. 444r–445v, Nuncio to Pope, Madrid, 14 August 1669.

55 Ibidem, vol. 141, f. 524rv, Nuncio to Pope, Madrid, 26 August 1671.

56 Luca RICCARDI, *An outline of Vatican diplomacy in the early modern period*, in: D. Frigo (ed.), *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy. The structure of Diplomatic Practice 1450–1800*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 95–108.

continued to be crucial for the fate of the whole of Europe and this is the reason why Rome had always paid great attention to Spanish political matters.⁵⁷ It is also well-known how, inter alia, Clement IX's main interest during that period was to re-establish the pope's role as the architect of international peace.⁵⁸

Clement IX decided to interfere in Spain's internal politics, with the desire to redeem himself after the recent Candia crisis. However, the pope's position was not clear – even if obviously anti-Nithard – as it fluctuated between the vision of a French successor and the possibility of Don John Joseph succeeding his step-brother Charles.⁵⁹

The pope, extremely concerned for the fragility of this situation, had sent Federico Borromeo to Madrid in the capacity of extraordinary nuncio. He was a trusted aid that the pope hoped would be able to resolve the matter.⁶⁰

Borromeo, a close friend of Cardinals Aragón and Moncada and the Imperial ambassador, backed John Joseph's aspirations and supported this strategy. Despite this, he adopted the policy the pope held dear in a totally linear manner, hence an approach focused on maintaining peace and, above all, restoring peace within the Spanish monarchy which was indispensable to release the island of Candia from Turkish control.

The role of the Spanish ambassador in Rome, the Marquis of Astorga was crucial. He was politically close to Don John Joseph, had to help make the Jesuit's life difficult once he reached Italian soil.⁶¹ He delayed the confessor's appointment as extraordinary ambassador to the Holy See and forced him to extend his stay in Maccares beyond the agreed period.⁶² The marquis also attempted to impede the confessor's audiences with Pope Clement IX

57 Gianvittorio SIGNOROTTO, *Dall'Europa alla "crisi della coscienza europea*, in: C. Ossola – M. Verga – M. A. Visceglia (edd.), *Religione, cultura e politica nell'Europa dell'età moderna. Studi offerti a Mario Rosa dagli amici*, Firenze 2003, pp. 231–249. See also Thomas James DANDELET, *La Roma spagnola (1500–1700)*, Barcelona 2002, pp. 255 and following on the new (pro-Spanish) political position of the Court of Rome in the those '60.

58 A. MENNITI IPPOLITO, *Il tramonto*, pp. 50 and following. On the relationship between Rome and Vienna see Paolo PRODI, *Il sovrano pontefice. Un corpo e due anime: la monarchia papale nella prima età moderna*, Bologna 1982, pp. 338–344.

59 R. PILO, *Juan Everardo Nithard*, pp. 232–237.

60 Ibidem, pp. 237–243. See Gianvittorio SIGNOROTTO, *Lo squadrone volante. I cardinali "liberi" e la politica europea nella seconda metà del xvii secolo*, in: G. Signorotto – M. A. Visceglia (edd.), *La corte di Roma*, pp. 117 and following and A. E. GALLI, *Federico IV Borromeo*.

61 G. SIGNOROTTO, *Lo squadrone volante*, pp. 93–137. About the end of the *valimiento* and Nithard's embassy in Rome, see José Rufino NOVO ZABALLOS, *De confesor de la Reina a embajador extraordinario en Roma: La expulsión de Juan Everardo Nithard*, in: José Martínez Millán – Manuel Rivero Rodríguez (edd.), *Centros de poder italianos en la monarquía hispánica (siglos XV–XVIII)*, I–III, here vol. II., 2010, pp. 751–836.

62 *"He resuelto se le de título de Embaxador extraordinario a Alemania o Roma, donde eligiere"*, AGS, E, K, 1645, *Decreto de la Reina Gobernadora*, cit., in: F. TOMÁS Y VALIENTE, *Los validos*, p. 177 and following.

and to deflate the attitude of members of the Spanish faction, dissuading pro-Spanish cardinals from seeing him.⁶³ The reasons for this can be attributed to a lasting result of the aristocracy's reactions towards Nithard, a foreigner and an usurper, that extended from Madrid to Rome.⁶⁴

63 F. TOMÁS Y VALIENTE, *Los validos*, pp. 106 and following.

64 For a comparative perspective, see also Julián J. LOZANO NAVARRO, *Dos embajadores del rey católico en la Roma del siglo XVII: los cardenales Trivulzio y Nithard. Una perspectiva comparada*, *Chronica Nova* 42, 2016, pp. 137–166.