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Spaniards and Sbirri: Violence and Diplomacy in the Streets of Early Modern Rome

John M. Hunt

In the summer of 1627, a series of conflicts between the servants and soldiers of the Spanish ambassador and the papal police terrorized Rome and paralyzed law and justice in the city. The troubles between the two parties centered around the Piazza della Trinità dei Monti where the Spanish ambassador, Íñigo Vélez de Guevara, Count of Oñate, had rented the Palazzo Monaldeschi for the use of his embassy since 1622.¹ At the root of the violence was Count Oñate's defense of his diplomatic rights of immunity, the *droit du franchise*. Known as *franchigia* in Italian, this right held that an ambassador's residence and its surroundings were the sovereign territory of his prince and so shielded him and his household from the local laws and judicial intervention.² Accordingly, Oñate and his retainers treated the area around Palazzo Monaldeschi as an extraterritorial Spanish space, barred the *sbirri* (papal constables) and other officers from executing their duties within its environs, and mistreated the neighborhood's diverse residents, composed of foreign visitors, prostitutes, and hoteliers.³ Tellingly, in a phrase that would become commonplace in the 1630s, the servants and soldiers of the ambassador referred to the area as the "Quartiero di Spagnoli," a zone of Spanish royal sovereignty inside one of the most populous districts of the city that constituted a huge swath of urban territory that radiated out from Piazza della Trinità as far north as Via dei Greci, extended westward to the boundary with the Via del Corso, and projected to the southward from the monastery of San Silvestro in Capite to the Basilica of Sant'Andrea delle Fratte.⁴ In 1647, Oñate's son, also named Íñigo Vélez, as ambassador to the pope, purchased Palazzo Monaldeschi, making it the permanent seat of the Spanish embassy in Rome and quickly

¹ Piazza della Trinità is now known as Piazza di Spagna, after Palazzo Monaldeschi became the permanent seat of the Spanish embassy in 1647. The palace, purchased by Spain in 1654, still serves as the Spanish embassy to the Holy See.

² On diplomatic immunity in early modern Europe, see Linda S. Frey and Marsha L. Frey, *The History of Diplomatic Immunity* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1999) and Philippa Woodcock, "From Royal Hôtel to Street Brawls: The Location, Personnel, and Public Problem of Venetian Ambassadors in Seventeenth-Century Paris," *Legatio: Journal of Renaissance and Early Modern Diplomatic Studies* 1 (2017): 63–95. For the Roman context of the *franchigia* of ambassadors, see Irene Fosi, *Papal Justice: Subjects and Courts in the Papal State, 1500–1750* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 71–75; Laurie Nussdorfer, "The Politics of Space in Early Modern Rome," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 42 (1997): 175–77; and John M. Hunt, "I Giochi di Quartiere: Gambling and Diplomatic Rights of Immunity in Baroque Rome," *Giornale di storia* 36 (2021): 1–16.

³ The constables involved in these skirmishes belonged to the Governor's Tribunal of Rome. Led by a *bargello* (the chief constable), the police force of the Governor's Tribunal numbered between 120 and 300 men in the early seventeenth century and held jurisdiction inside the city. Infamous and hated for their corruption and heavy-handed approach to justice, they patrolled Rome's fourteen quarters (*rioni*), delivered warrants, inspected inns for vagabonds and petty thieves, and supplemented papal soldiers in quelling riots. They competed in the early modern era with several other Roman tribunals with their own police squads. On the governor's *sbirri*, see Irene Fosi, *Papal Justice*, 67–76.

⁴ The term "*quartiero*," a bastardization between the Spanish "*quartero*" and the Italian "*quartiere*," was used by the *sbirri* and other witnesses in the collection of trials related to the incidents between the papal authorities and the Spanish ambassador's men throughout the spring and summer of 1627. I use it here to demonstrate the preponderance of Spanish influence on early modern Rome.

altering the toponymy of the square from Piazza della Trinità dei Monti to Piazza di Spagna.⁵ This essay demonstrates how the events of the summer of 1627 were integral to these important developments in urban political space.

From the late sixteenth century onwards, matters of diplomatic immunity increasingly bedeviled diplomacy in Rome. Aggressively protective of these rights, ambassadors clashed with papal authorities from the pope's most powerful agents—the cardinal-nephew and the Governor of Rome—to the lowly *sbirri* on patrol. The rights of *franchigia* were an anxious concern of the rival ambassadors of France and Spain, who jockeyed for precedence and honor in the ceremonies of the court and the quotidian encounters of carriages in the streets.⁶ Slights to this honor were keenly felt by the ambassadors and their households and even attracted the attention of their respective governments in Madrid and Paris. The ambassador, as the virtual representative of his prince, carried the honor of his sovereign and his state on his person. The competition for honors in Rome dramatically increased from the second decade of the seventeenth century as tensions grew between France and Spain due to the start of the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) and its continuation as the Franco-Spanish War (1635–59).⁷ Although Rome escaped the wars that ravaged northern Italy during these international conflicts, French and Spanish ambassadors, understanding the value in a strong presence in Rome, the center of diplomacy of Catholic Europe, waged proxy wars in Eternal City during much of the seventeenth century. The defense of honor and privileges, although not concrete like winning wars and maintaining monopolies, were seen as an integral aspect of diplomacy, necessary to preserving and enhancing a state's reputation and power in the competitive world order that pitted Habsburg Spain against Bourbon France.⁸

This essay is based on three *buste* (bundles) containing an assortment of trials, depositions of witnesses, and police reports, all related to the violence perpetuated by Oñate and his men against the *sbirri* and the residents of Piazza della Trinità dei Monti.⁹ These *buste*, numbering more than six hundred folios apiece, that document these events were recorded by notaries for the Governor of Rome's criminal tribunal (*Tribunale del Governatore*), which by the late sixteenth century had come to dominate the vast and confusing array of other courts in the city.¹⁰ Hundreds of depositions—by constables, victims, and other witnesses to the Spanish violence—reveal the importance of diplomatic immunity to seventeenth-century ambassadors, their belligerent mobilization of soldiers to protect their rights, and, more generally, the disruptive impact of the Spanish embassy on its neighborhood. The testimonies found in the documents also make evident the ineffectiveness of the pope's urban authorities in the face of these assertions.

⁵ On the Palazzo Monaldeschi as the seat of the Spanish embassy, see Alessandra Anselmi, *Il Palazzo dell'Ambasciata di Spagna presso la Santa Sede* (Rome: Edizioni de Luca, 2001), esp. 53–76.

⁶ Thomas James Dandele, *Spanish Rome, 1500–1700* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); John M. Hunt, “The Ceremonial Possession of a City: Ambassadors and their Carriages in Early Modern Rome,” *Royal Studies Journal* 3 (2016): 69–89; Michael J. Levin, “A New World Order: The Spanish Campaign for Precedence in Early Modern Europe,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 6 (2002): 233–64; Toby Osborne, “The House of Savoy and the Theatre of the World: Performance of Sovereignty in Early Modern Rome,” in *Sabaudian Studies: Political Culture, Dynasty, and Territory, 1400–1700*, ed. Matt Vester (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University, 2013), 167–90; and Maria Antonietta Visceglia, *La città rituale: Roma e le sue cerimonie in età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2002), 191–238.

⁷ Nussdorfer, “The Politics of Space,” 170. On the Thirty Years' War in Italy, see Gregory Hanlon, *Italy 1636: Cemetery of Armies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁸ J. H. Elliott, “Foreign Policy and Domestic Crisis: Spain, 1598–1659,” in *ibid.*, *Spain and Its World, 1500–1700* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 114–36.

⁹ Archivio di Stato di Roma (hereafter ASR), Tribunale criminale del Governatore (hereafter TCG), Processi, Seventeenth century (hereafter Pro17), *buste* (hereafter b.) 224, 225, and 226.

¹⁰ For the most accessible account of the governor of Rome and his tribunal, see Fosi, *Papal Justice*, esp. 23–46.

Street Battles and *Sbirro*-Hunting

On the evening of July 27, 1627, a full moon hung over Rome, illuminating the city and drawing crowds into the Piazza della Trinità dei Monti, situated in Campo Marzio, a boisterous district where the city's inns and taverns were concentrated. A festive evening was taking shape as people came out to enjoy the evening air. Circles of young men gambled at dice and cards on makeshift tables set up next to the Palazzo Monaldeschi. Shortly after eleven, a carriage full of Frenchmen pulled up beside the embassy at the home of two courtesans, Venetian sisters known as the Belle Notarine. The men inside the carriage began to serenade the women and were soon joined by two other Frenchmen with violins. Suddenly, a volley of bolts from a crossbow coming from the palace window shattered the night's mood. The projectiles struck the carriage and wounded a bystander, causing panic, as everyone sought refuge in nearby inns or took cover in adjacent streets and alleys.¹¹

The French serenaders escaped down the Strada dei Borgognoni, which ran alongside the ambassador's palace, but returned a half hour later armed with swords and accompanied by compatriots.¹² The Frenchmen had no doubts that Don Felipe, Oñate's son, was responsible for the attack. That summer, on numerous occasions, Don Felipe had fired a crossbow at crowds in the square and had wounded a number of passersby.¹³ With tensions mounting in Rome in the shadow of the Thirty Years' War between the French and the Spanish and their partisans, the July event was no casual incident. Just months before, a troop of French servants had assailed a group of Roman youths who had playfully taunted them.¹⁴ The French servants had pursued the pranksters to the ambassador's palace where they clashed with his retainers, with injuries on both sides. Again, in July, Don Felipe probably resented this invasion of Spanish territory in Rome and deliberately aimed his crossbow at the French musicians.

Reinforced by armed men, most likely servants and soldiers of their own embassy, the irate Frenchmen rushed back into the square to meet the Spanish defenders, a mix of Spanish gentlemen and Italian servants, led by the majordomo's assistant, Captain Pedro Gonzalez. The two forces clashed at the foot of Pietro Bernini's Fontana della Barcaccia, where the Spaniards routed the Frenchmen. The Spanish wanted to give chase, but the majordomo of the palace, Captain Luigi Pavizza, sallied out with a great sword and ordered them back inside.¹⁵ Several Frenchmen were wounded, and one bystander had lost his broad-brimmed hat, which the assiduous majordomo returned, perhaps a bit crumpled, the next day.¹⁶

Disturbing as these events were, they were only a prelude to the fear and violence that would grip the "Spanish quarter" over the course of the next month and a half. The following night, the French amassed a force of men, as many as fifty according to one witness, to seek revenge.¹⁷ As

¹¹ This incident is described by several witnesses; see ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 225, ff. 391r–392r, 405v–406v, and b. 206, ff. 487v–488r, 538r, 547v–548r, 551r–553r.

¹² Strada dei Borgognoni, known now as Via Borgognona, ran along the left side of Palazzo Monaldeschi on its way to the Corso, the central thoroughfare connecting Piazza di San Marco (now next to Piazza Venezia) and Piazza del Popolo. The street was named for the community of Burgundian artisans who kept shops and homes there. See Sergio Delli, *Le strade di Roma* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1975), 200–1.

¹³ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, ff. 487v, 538r, and 552r–v.

¹⁴ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 222, ff. 997r–1010v.

¹⁵ On the role of the majordomo in Roman palaces, see Laurie Nussdorfer, "Masculine Hierarchies in Ecclesiastical Households," *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 22 (2015): 620–42; Cesare Evitascandalo, *Dialogo del Maestro di Casa* (Rome: Gio. Martinelli, 1598), 104–88.

¹⁶ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, ff. 548r, 552v–553r.

¹⁷ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 225, f. 392r.

they marched toward Piazza della Trinità, they met the governor's police chief, the *bargello di Roma*, and his constables on Strada dei Borgognoni. The *bargello* convinced the Frenchmen to leave in peace, but pockets of fighting occurred throughout the quarter during the night. One confrontation ended with the death of the ambassador's *maestro di sala*.¹⁸ As the Spaniards carried his body back to their palace, they encountered a patrol of constables on the Strada dei Condotti.¹⁹ When these papal officers ordered the Spaniards to stop, the latter responded with gunfire and the constables fled. Shots continued well into the night and left many injured, including the ambassador's barber, who later died of his wounds.²⁰

These insults to his household and sovereignty at the hands of the constables were too much for Count Oñate. His gentlemen and servants also keenly felt the dishonor. Throughout the next day, the Spaniards, led by Don Felipe and Captain Pavizza, fumed and plotted against the police chief and the ministers of the law, speaking openly of “volere andare a caccia a sbirri” (wanting to go hunt for some *sbirri*) and of making a “comunione nella faida” (a communion in the feud), that is, taking up a blood feud.²¹ They took a sacred vow—phrased in the terms of the Catholic mass—to embark on a vendetta, binding to all, against the constables for killing members of the ambassador's *famiglia*, which included his servants, grooms, and pages.

Later that night, armed contingents of Spaniards and Roman police approached each other in the northern reaches of the Corso. Don Felipe and Captain Pavizza gathered a posse of forty men, composed of Spanish gentlemen and servants, armed with swords, daggers, and *terzaroli* (small but high-powered guns that had been outlawed in Rome), and marched to the basilica of San Silvestro in Capite, about a ten minutes' walk from Piazza della Trinità. With reports from spies that the *bargello* was arriving with a sizable force of constables, the Spanish waited to ambush them. As the papal forces reached the church of San Carlo al Corso, Pavizza divided his troop into two parts, sending one group to wait further up on Strada Vittoria and leading another to directly face the constables.²² Upon meeting them, the Spanish majordomo demanded to speak to the *bargello*, who told Pavizza that he had nothing to fear. At that signal the Spaniards shot their guns at the Roman officers, with a clear aim of killing the police chief. Immediately, the appearance of the other Spanish troop prevented the constables from escaping. Several policemen and onlookers described the dramatic gun battle that ensued. While arquebus shots whistled past the constables' ears, the Spaniards hurled insults in a mixture of Spanish and Italian typically used against the papal police—“perros” (dogs) and “becchi fottuti” (fucking billy goats)—at them.²³ In the end, the constables fled to the Tor di Nona, the main prison of Rome, taking several captured Spaniards with them. The fray also left wounded several Spaniards and *sbirri*, including the corporal in charge of the area around the Trevi Fountain.

The night's altercation did not sate the Spaniards' thirst for revenge. The following day they continued their hunt, boasting that “volevano far macello di sbirri” (they wanted to butcher the

¹⁸ Infrequently used, the term probably corresponds to *maestro di camera*, a gentleman servant of a lord or cardinal in charge of the household's lower servants; in contrast, the majordomo (also known as the *maestro di casa*) had authority over the entire household; see Evitascandalo, *Dialogo*, 104–84.

¹⁹ Strada dei Condotti (now Via dei Condotti), one block north of Strada Borgognoni, likewise connected the Corso with Piazza della Trinità; see Delli, *Strade*, 309–10.

²⁰ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, b. 483r–484r, 540r–v, 548v, 552v–554r, 632r–v.

²¹ *Ibid.*, f. 594r. For the *faida* in early modern Italy, see Edward Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta and Factions in Friuli during the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 67–72. All translations are my own.

²² ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 225, depositions of the *bargello* of Rome (Giovanni Antonio Passeri) and his constables, ff. 1r–16r, 101r–114r.

²³ *Ibid.*, f. 21r.

constables).²⁴ And throughout the evening at an inn next to the ambassador’s palace, several of his gentlemen and servants came for wine, repeating their desire to “vendicarse dell’archibugiate tirate da d[ett]i sbirri” (avenge themselves of the harquebuses fired [at them] by the constables).²⁵ Indeed, Oñate’s men spent the next month hunting for constables who approached his palace. Several witnesses living near the Inn of the Leoncino in the neighborhood known as the Ortaccio, an area infamous for prostitution, reported to the Governor’s Tribunal that a Spanish gentleman went from house to house demanding “che quelle vicine segnattero le case delli sbirri et delli spioni” (that the women of the neighborhood show him where the constables and their spies lived).²⁶ Despite their engrained distrust of the police, the women of the Ortaccio refused to cooperate and, in the words of Marta da Urbino, the wife of a *sbirro*, “tutte noi altre donne del vicinato ce ne siamo fuggite via p[er] paura” (all of us women in the neighborhood fled in terror).²⁷ The Spaniard then vented his anger by beating several Jewish used-clothing vendors with the flat of his sword. The Spanish suspected everyone of colluding with the constables. On another evening, they chased a group of men making their way to spend an evening with a courtesan living near Piazza della Trinità dei Monti. When the men took refuge inside the courtesan’s house, the Spaniards, shouting, “Spie becchi fottuti adesso è il tempo” (Spies! Fucking billy goats! Now is the time!), kicked at the locked door.²⁸

Only having his immediate household at his disposal, a force of about fifty men, Oñate began to reinforce his palace and the Piazza della Trinità dei Monti with armed men. Throughout the month of August, the ambassador had several hundred soldiers come to Rome from the Kingdom of Naples to guard his palace, patrol the surrounding streets, and harass the papal police.²⁹ Rather than have the soldiers come to Rome all at once—an act that surely would have alerted papal authorities—he had them gradually enter the city at various times of the day through the city’s southern gates.³⁰ The soldiers, openly armed and dressed in their military cassocks, described as “alla spagnola,” simply walked into the city, “uno, et dui alla volta sino al numero de quattro o cinq[ue] il giorno et alle volte sei il giorno” (one or two at a time to the number of four a day, and at other times, six a day).³¹ Clemente Pizzi, gatekeeper at Porta San Giovanni, kept a running count of the soldiers, reporting that “alle volte ho visto cinq[ue] alle volte sei, alle volte sette, et un giorno quindici, ma però distributandosi in diverse partite...ma non entrati insieme” (at times I saw

²⁴ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, f. 549v.

²⁵ Ibid., f. 555r.

²⁶ Ibid., f. 480v. For other witnesses, see *ibid.*, ff. 481r-482v.

²⁷ Ibid., ff. 481r-v.

²⁸ Ibid., ff. 478r.

²⁹ The soldiers most likely came from the border between the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples. Viceroy of Naples generally stationed several companies of *tercios* at the confines between the two states in case of papal elections and other extraordinary events. In 1644, the Spanish viceroy supposedly kept 6000 soldiers at the papal border for the ambassador’s use as guards and possibly as a means to intimidate the cardinals during the conclave. See John M. Hunt, *The Vacant See in Early Modern Rome: A Social History of the Papal Interregnum* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 105–6. Although 6000 soldiers may be an exaggeration, since the number of Spanish *tercios* in the kingdom had declined to twenty-four companies of 2400 soldiers by 1636, the Spanish could easily augment these numbers with bandits and vagabonds in times of need; see Tommaso Astarita, “Istituzioni e tradizioni militari,” in *Storia del Mezzogiorno*, ed. Giuseppe Galasso and Rosario Romeo (Naples: Edizioni del Sole, 1991), 9:137 and Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567–1659* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21–41.

³⁰ The soldiers seemed selective in which gates they used to enter Rome. These included Porta Portese in Trastevere, Porta San Giovanni, Porta San Sebastiano (Appia), and Porta San Lorenzo (Tiburtina). The gatekeepers at Porta Angelica in the Vatican also reported the entrance of Spanish soldiers. All of these gates were part of the ancient Aurelian walls, except for Porta San Giovanni and Porta Angelica.

³¹ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 225, f. 343v. For similar testimony of gatekeepers, see *ibid.*, ff. 334r-346v.

entering five, sometimes six, sometimes seven and one day fourteen [soldiers] but then distributed themselves into different groups ... so that they did not enter together).³² Many of the Spaniards not make an attempt to hide that they were soldiers as they passed “allegramente” (cheerfully) into Rome and told the gatekeepers that they “esser soldati et venire dalla guerra” (were soldiers and were coming from the war).³³ Another small band even marched through Porta San Giovanni with a trumpeter with a banderole sporting the Spanish king’s coat-of-arms.³⁴

Rome’s chronically porous gates and river ports were sites of much smuggling and other crime.³⁵ Accordingly, the gatekeepers’ testimony demonstrated the ease with which the newly mobilized soldiers entered the city. Oñate had many soldiers disguise themselves in an effort to conceal their numbers. Thus the gatekeepers observed an unusually large number of Spanish pilgrims coming from the direction of Naples. Doubtful of their intentions, the Roman officers noticed that “havevano poi cera de soldati” (they then had the appearance of soldiers).³⁶ Similarly, another witness observed that, after the initial July skirmish between the Spaniards and the constables, soldiers began to filter into the neighborhood near the ambassador’s palace, “molti vestiti da Pellegrino” (many of them dressed as pilgrims).³⁷ In addition to resorting to disguise, Oñate slipped several soldiers by boat into the city via its principal river port, the Porto di Ripa Grande on the Tiber. Both the Spanish and the French ambassadors employed these stratagems repeatedly in the 1630s and 1640s, when their states entered into direct hostilities during the Franco-Spanish War. For example, in the spring of 1642, when Portugal rebelled against Spanish rule and allied with the French, the Spanish ambassador, the Marquis de Los Vélez, secretly brought hundreds of soldiers and bandits into Rome to threaten the Portuguese ambassador. In response, the pope garrisoned every city gate with twenty-five soldiers and ordered that all foreigners coming from Naples be turned back.³⁸ Perhaps the papacy had learned from the experience of 1627 and taken more rigorous precautions.

Once in Rome, Oñate placed the soldiers under the command of Captain Pavizza, who housed them in the palace and in inns and rented rooms in Piazza della Trinità and nearby streets. Soon the square was visibly full of armed Spanish soldiers standing guard and parading before the palace. Others remained masked, covering their faces with the hoods of their cloaks as they leaned against the walls of the palace. The soldiers frequented the inn of Jacomo Brugnoli, whose testimony supports the residents’ doubts that the ambassador was concealing their numbers. He told the governor’s judges:

quali soldati sono venuti anco spesso nell’host[ari]a mia, dove sogliono praticare sempre spagnoli et gentu del Palazzo del s[igno]r Ambasciatore, et perché con me ci confidavano perché io dicevo che sono Milanese et Vassallo de Re come è la verità mi dicevano di soldati che erano mandate a Roma dal Vice Re p[er] servitio di d[ett]o Ambasciatore, et il num[ero] di essi per quello io ho potuto giudicare che ho visto credo che potessero esser resto a cinquanta.

³² Ibid., f. 337v.

³³ Ibid., f. 334v. Presumably, the soldiers were referring to conflicts related to the Spanish involvement in the Thirty Years’ War.

³⁴ Ibid., ff. 337r–338r, 389r, 343v.

³⁵ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, ff. 597r–598r.

³⁶ Ibid., f. 344r.

³⁷ Ibid., f. 384r. Costanti also testified that he had seen some of the soldiers change out of pilgrim habits.

³⁸ Giacinto Gigli, *Diario di Roma* (Rome: Colombo, 1994), 1:355–57. For the conflict between the Spanish and Portuguese ambassadors in Rome, see Hunt, “Ceremonial Possession of a City,” 81–84.

The soldiers frequently come to my inn, where they usually spend time. They are always Spaniards and men of the ambassador's palace and because they trusted me, since I told them I was Milanese and a subject of the [Spanish] King, as is true, they told me that they were soldiers sent to Rome by the Viceroy of Naples for the service of the ambassador. The number of them, from what I can judge of those that I saw, could have been about fifty.³⁹

Another witness, Virgilio Costanti, a bandit who had stayed in the ambassador's palace and thus had some intimacy with his servants, testified that they had told him that Oñate kept some three hundred soldiers in the surrounding neighborhood. Although originally doubting the figure, Costanti admitted that many of them hid during the day. He added that the soldiers each received a loaf of white bread and three *giulii* a day—two *giulii* directly from the ambassador and one from “loro soccorso ord[inario] del Re” (their ordinary pay from the King)—revealing the importance of the ambassador's personal vengeance and subsequent aggression against the *sbirri* as a matter of the Spanish state.⁴⁰

The “Quartiero Spagnolo”

The summer's violent clashes between Oñate's household and the papal police, as well as the ambassador's subsequent mobilization of Spanish soldiers, must be placed in a broader context of the Spanish ambassador's belligerent defense of his embassy and quarter. In the months leading up to the initial conflict, the *bargello* of Rome had been receiving reports from constables and residents of Piazza della Trinità dei Monti of illicit gambling, daily brawling, and other disturbances that were too much even for an area known for its riotous taverns and inns. To restore peace and order, he began to have his constables patrol the area around the ambassador's palace at night in a forceful display of police strength. Several times during the spring and summer of 1627, the corporal responsible for the Ortaccio, Domenico Rossi, and his officers encountered Captain Pavizza with a band of servants making the rounds in the vicinity of the palace. Each time the majordomo warned the corporal to stay away. When Rossi explained that “non andammo p[er] dispiacere a Spagnoli ma per guardare il quartiere da tristi” (we didn't come to displease the Spanish but to guard the district from wicked men), Pavizza retorted: “io me andando guardando il quartiere da piccari” (I am guarding the neighborhood from rogues).⁴¹ Each group went its separate ways but a few weeks later, in March, Rossi encountered Pavizza again with his men at the entrance of the Piazza della Trinità. This time, the captain told Rossi that “io m'andassi con Dio di li che non ci havemo che fare, perché era il Quartiero di Spagnoli, che il Conte suo s[ignore] non voleva chela Corte andasse per il Quartiero di Spagnoli” (I should leave from here since we had nothing to do with the Quartiero di Spagnoli [and] that the Count, his lord, did not want the *Corte* [another name for the representatives of Roman law] to pass through the Quartiero di Spagnoli).⁴² When Rossi replied that the court must do its job, the piqued Pavizza and his men pointed their swords, still sheathed, at the constables, repeating several times that they should leave since “quello era il Quartiero di Spagnoli” (this was the Quartiero di Spagnoli).⁴³ These heated

³⁹ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, ff. 561v–562r.

⁴⁰ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 225, testimony of Virgilio Costanti, f. 385r.

⁴¹ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 224, f. 94r.

⁴² *Ibid.*, f. 93v.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, f. 94r.

exchanges escalated and explain the fury with which the ambassador's servants attacked the constables in July.

Captain Pavizza's use of the term, "Quartiero di Spagnoli," in defining the area around the ambassador's palace is telling. From the *bargello's* account it is clear that the ambassador's servants were asserting his right of *franchigia*, that is sanctuary, which accorded the residences of ambassadors and their immediate vicinity immunity from the law, an old privilege enjoyed by churches, monasteries, and the homes of cardinals in the Middle Ages. Criminals often fled to churches and monasteries since constables could not make arrests inside these sacred places. During the sixteenth century, this right had been permitted to ambassadors, who shared in the inviolability and sovereignty of the princes they represented. In the seventeenth century, ambassadors began to extend what became known as diplomatic immunity to encompass not only their palaces but also the nearby streets, alleys and squares. These claims provoked debate among jurists and political theorists, but, in practice, the papacy as well as other states grudgingly and fitfully accepted them.⁴⁴

Not only did Pavizza's words invoke his master's right to *franchigia*, but so did his actions. In another encounter, upon meeting Corporal Rossi near the Leoncino inn, Pavizza told him to leave the area and commanded that he "porti rispetto" "show respect [for the ambassador's *franchigia*]." ⁴⁵ Pavizza thus reminded the corporal that he was not in Rome, but on Spanish turf, that is, in an extraterritorial zone exempt from papal law. Ambassadors became progressively touchier about their rights of immunity and saw any violation as an affront to their honor and that of their monarch.⁴⁶ Later Spanish ambassadors followed Oñate in challenging the police conducting their duties in their self-designated *quartieri*. For example, in June 1635, when two constables arrested a woman next to the Spanish embassy, one of the ambassador's gentlemen intervened, telling them "che fosse offesa la persona del Padrone per esser seguito la caturra in luogo contiguo al suo Palazzo" (that this was an offense to the person of his master because the capture was made in a place next to his palace).⁴⁷ The ambassador, Manuel de Mura y Cortreal, Marquis of Castel Rodrigo, then sent his majordomo to the governor of Rome, Giovanni Battista Spada, to complain. Spada responded in turn that the claimed domain of *franchigia* "era una estensione troppo grande quella, che volevano introdurre hora" (was too great an expansion that they wanted to now introduce).⁴⁸ Again, in September 1637, two constables went to execute a civil mandate against a theorb-player who lived near the Roman College, in the same square where the Spanish ambassador extraordinary, Juan Cuamachero y Curillo, was then renting a palace. As the constables delivered the warrant, a servant rushed out of the palace and threatened them because "non portavano rispetto al Palazzo dell'Ambasciatore" (they did not show respect toward the palace of the ambassador).⁴⁹ The constables fled in fear and later the ambassador sent a gentleman to the governor to complain that "fusse stata violata l'immunità di quella piazza" (the immunity of the piazza had been violated).⁵⁰ The governor, again Spada, tersely replied that "la Giustizia

⁴⁴ See footnote 1.

⁴⁵ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 225, f. 94r.

⁴⁶ Frey and Frey, *History of Diplomatic Immunity*, 125–27, 149–50, 188–95, 223–26; Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (New York: Dover, 1988), 233–44.

⁴⁷ Giovanni Battista Spada, *Racconto delle cose più considerabili che sono occorse nel governo di Roma*, ed. Maria Teresa Bonadonna Rosso (Rome: Società romana di storia patria, 2004), 12.

⁴⁸ Spada, *Racconto*, 12. The issue remained unresolved since later that summer the constables were prohibited from making arrests in the area by the ambassador's majordomo and his servants.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

doveva haver per tutto il suo luogo, nè si ammetteva immunità alcuna nella città di Roma” (the Law must have its place for everyone and that he did not admit any immunity for any place in the city of Rome).⁵¹ He backed his words by having the *bargello* send a greater force of police to serve the warrant and to identify those who threatened his men in the neighborhood. Cumachero, much dishonored by the governor’s actions, attempted to leap over his authority by appealing directly to the cardinal-nephew of Pope Urban VIII, Francesco Barberini, but to no avail.

Oñate’s marshalling of troops after his servants clashed with his French enemies and the *sbirri* was an early example of the aggressive defense of the diplomatic immunity of the Spanish embassy in Rome as well as a blatant attempt to extend its extra-territorial space over a good deal of the quarter of Campo Marzio, which far exceeded the immediate area around this palace. With the newly mobilized soldiers from Naples, he stopped papal justice from entering the Spanish quarter by stationing guard posts at each of the entrances into Piazza della Trinità dei Monti, having watches composed of soldiers patrol the streets as far as the Corso. For more than three months the Spanish chased officers away from the broad area that they claimed as their quarter and prevented them from executing their duties, effectively halting papal justice in its tracks.

The reports of several officers testify to the aggression of the Spanish soldiers. The warrant officer (*mandatario*), Dionio Pancini, testified in late August that for three months he could “non se va seuramente a far cit[atio]ni ne altri ser[vi]ti della giustitia p[er] paura de Spagnoli li quali sono armati in truppe de spade, et pugnali, et ho visto anco che portavano terzaroli” (neither go [to the area] to deliver citations nor perform other services in the name of justice out of fear of the Spaniards, who were armed in troops with swords and daggers, and I also saw that they carried *terzaroli*). He added that of the *sbirri* “ogniuno ha paura” (everyone is afraid) because the soldiers had wounded another *mandatario*.⁵² One evening, while Pancino was near San Silvestro in Capite, two Spanish soldiers grabbed his warrants and ripped them to shreds, laughing as they did so. Similarly, while issuing a citation to a courtesan near the ambassador’s palace, the *bargello* of Ripetta and his men were attacked by Spanish soldiers, who chased them into the palace of Cardinal Gaspar Borgia, where they sought the protection of the pro-Spanish monsignor.⁵³ Several constables, veterans with years of experience, testified to the novelty of the ambassador’s assertive defense of the quarter. In August 1627, Francesco Marcolino stated that “ho sempre da d[ett]o t[em]po in qua de sei anni eseguito liberamente li mandati in ogni parte de Roma ma da un mese in qua non ho seguito mandati et altri verso la Ternità de Monti” (for about six years I have always been able to serve warrants freely in Rome but since about a month ago I have not been able to serve warrants or others [court documents] around the Trinità dei Monti).⁵⁴ Corporal Rossi reported further that “io ne altri mei compagni non possiamo stare poi in quel luoco da verso la Trinità de Monti dove siamo stato p[er] spasso p[er]ché da un tempo in qua le genti Spagnole vanno in truppa de notte armati, et assaltorno li sbirri che cercano d’ammazzarli” (neither I nor any of my men can remain in the area around the Trinità dei Monti where we used to patrol, because for some time now the Spaniards go out at night in armed troops and assault the constables and seek to kill them).⁵⁵ Rossi and his constables carried harquebuses and halberds and went out on patrol in larger squads because “non vogliono li Spagnoli che ci veadano li sbirri p[er] fare cosa

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, ff. 447v-448v.

⁵³ Ibid., ff. 527v-528v. For the tribunal of Ripetta, which oversaw the economic activities of Rome’s northern river port, see Fosi, *Papal Justice*, 32.

⁵⁴ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, ff. 449r-v.

⁵⁵ Ibid., ff. 595r-v.

alcuna” (the Spaniards do not want the *sbirri* to come to do anything).⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the papal police were powerless. The ambassador’s defense of his rights of immunity effectively stopped papal justice from operating in a large, bustling area.

Without the regular presence of papal law enforcement, the Spanish embassy and its quarter became not only a nest of foreign soldiers, but also a haven for men of different nationalities who had been condemned by Roman tribunals. Over the course of the spring and summer of 1627, over thirty men took advantage of the ambassador’s *franchigia* to avoid arrest or elude punishment by staying in his palace in the *sala dei palafrenieri* (room of the grooms) or by finding shelter in the inns that ringed the Piazza della Trinità. Charged or convicted of crimes both petty and serious, these men were *banditi*—men punished with exile from the Papal States who hid from papal authorities and thus were outlaws.⁵⁷ Thus Francesco Napolitano, a shoemaker who hid in the palace for two months, had heard the ambassador’s servants who “dicevano pubblicamente che loro stavano retirati li p[er] molte cose, et che li non ci potevano li sbirri, che era luogo sicuro et che alla pegio se erano presi potevano essere mand[at]i in galera” (spoke openly of those that withdrew there for many reasons, that the police cannot [enter] inside and that this is a secure place, and at worst, if they were taken, they would be sent to galleys).⁵⁸ Indeed, one Giorgio Strozzi, a professional cardsharp who took refuge in the Spanish embassy, was banned from the Papal States on pain, if captured in Rome, of a five-year stint in the galleys and a fine of five hundred scudi. Like many bandits, Strozzi slinked from *franchigia* to *franchigia* to avoid the authorities, “burlandosi della Corte et Iust[iti]a” (making a mockery of the court and justice), in the words of the judges who tried him for using loaded dice months earlier.⁵⁹

Most of these outlaws were Italians. Some were professional thieves and cheats, like Strozzi, but many were opportunistic part-time criminals whose primary occupations were as painters, bakers, barbers, and fishermen. While some simply hid in the ambassador’s quarter to escape Roman law, many others served in Oñate’s *famiglia bassa* as grooms, coachmen, pages, and personal servants. Captain Pavizza, who, as majordomo, was in need of cheap labor, oversaw the work of these bandit-servants and paid them two *giulii* a day. They performed an assortment of tasks, including making beds, serving meals, and running errands. For example, the exiled baker, Alessandro Paride, staying at the palace “p[er] paura della Corte” (out of fear of the court), worked in the pantry and the cellar and served the ambassador’s men. Paride testified that for this work at the embassy “mi davano qualche cosa da potermi sostentare” (they gave me something so I could take care of myself).⁶⁰ Oñate also employed “bandits” as *bravi* who accompanied his carriage in the streets and helped to defend his palace and its quarter. In particular, Pavizza gathered many of these to fight his French rivals and the constables in late July. Later in the seventeenth century, other ambassadors followed this practice. In 1649, the French ambassador employed a large number of Neapolitan bandits and rebels to instigate proxy battles against the Spanish ambassador.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Ibid., f. 595v.

⁵⁷ On banditry in the Rome and the Papal States, see Irene Polverini Fosi, *La società violenta: il banditismo nello Stato pontificio nella seconda metà nel Cinquecento* (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1985), 25–44.

⁵⁸ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, f. 591r.

⁵⁹ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 224, f. 179r. Strozzi had been tried in April 1627 but managed to hide from the court until September; for his earlier trial, see ASR, TCG (17th century), b. 205, ff. 1271r–1287r.

⁶⁰ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, 4 September 1627, ff. 545r–v; and

⁶¹ Biblioteca Casanatense, MS 1833, “Diario della città di Roma notato da Deone hora temi Dio,” ff. 113v–114r, 231r–v, 281r–v, 320r, 327v–328r.

Under the protection of the ambassador's *franchigia* and supervised by Pavizza, the bandit-servants also organized a series of illicit schemes to turn a profit. For example, Alessandro Paride and others, working with the palace steward, started selling white bread and wine (including the highly prized Lacryma Christi) at a much lower price than the taxed comestibles sold elsewhere in the city. As the seat of an embassy, Oñate's palace enjoyed an exemption from duties placed on wine and foodstuffs. Nevertheless, the papacy, like other early modern states, outlawed and sought to curb such sale of contraband at embassies. The Roman customs (*dogana*) sent officials to investigate the wrongdoings, but these were turned away by Oñate's soldiers.⁶² According to one officer, the bandits transformed the palace into "a *bettola*," a rowdy inn frequented by revelers and gamblers.⁶³

Although the cheap wine and bread attracted crowds to the palace, what really drew Romans from all over the city to the "Quartiero di Spagnoli" were several games of chance that had been established at the embassy for at least a year before the trial. Under the oversight of Captain Pavizza, several grooms—Diego the Spaniard, Marchetto di Spoleto, and the cardsharp, Fideletto the Florentine—organized games of cards, dice, and roulette. The grooms divided the gambling into two areas: the *gioco grasso* (the "fat game"), held in the *sala dei palafrenieri*, and the *gioco di piazza*, played outdoors to the right side of the palace on make-shift tables and even on the ground. The "fat game" attracted gentlemen, merchants, and well-do-to artisans in high-risk gambling, while the *gioco di piazza* tempted the working poor and soldiers. For the security that the ambassador's *franchigia* provided, the grooms charged a *grosso* and a *mezzo grosso* to gamblers respectively playing inside or outside the palace.⁶⁴ At the end of each day the grooms handed their earnings to Captain Pavizza, who kept most of the profits but shared a part with his accomplices. All involved in the scheme profited mightily. Diego could boast to an innkeeper of making fifteen *testoni* a day, the equivalent of 5 *giulii*, a princely sum for a servant making two *giulii* a day.⁶⁵ Pavizza, known as the "padrone di d[etti] giochi et emolumenti" (masters of the games and profits), raked in 150 scudi a month and over the course of at least eight months had amassed 1,500 scudi.⁶⁶

In order to elude police surveillance and to maintain order at the gambling tables, Pavizza instructed the bandit-turned-grooms to rough up anyone who caused trouble.⁶⁷ This entailed enforcing gamblers to pay the fee to play and to punish spies, who might report their illicit activities to the *bargello* and the constables. Both tasks provoked daily arguments and fights, especially at the *gioco di piazza*. Spies were a particular concern of the majordomo since the *bargello* of Rome had several *amici della corte* (friends of the court) at his disposal. With regards to police surveillance of gambling, the court employed gamblers, who had turned to spying to avoid severe punishment. During one evening's gaming, Diego and Marchetto accused a passerby of being a

⁶² For the selling of wine at the palace, see *Ibid.*, ff. 436r–438r, 545r-v. For the practice of selling contraband items at embassies, see Frey and Frey, *History of Diplomatic Immunity*, 221–26.

⁶³ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, f. 436r.

⁶⁴ For further detail on the gambling that took place at Oñate's palace, see Hunt, "I Giochi di Quartiere," 7–11. *Grosso* and *mezzo grosso* were silver coins, used in everyday transactions, common throughout Italy in the early modern era.

⁶⁵ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, f. 507v. Non-elite Romans made three *scudi* a month in the seventeenth century. One *scudo* was equal ten *giulii*. One *testone* was the equivalent of three *giulii*. For the monthly wages of servants and working-class Romans, see Renata Ago, *Economia barocca: Mercato e istituzioni nella Roma del Seicento* (Rome: Donzelli editore, 1998), 8–9.

⁶⁶ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, ff. 557r, 579r; 587r.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 226, ff. 587v.

spy and rained more than twenty blows on him with a club.⁶⁸ Later, the majordomo ordered his grooms to beat up Giovanni Battista Triceri, a carpenter who had once found sanctuary in the palace but had served as a spy for the *bargello* of Rome. The grooms eventually tracked Triceri down near the church of Santa Susanna. They proceeded to threaten him before walking back to their carriage, which bore the insignia of the ambassador. Triceri, quite shaken by the event, lamented to his friends that “io non ho da fare niente con l’Ambasciatore et stavo io in Terra del Papa” (I have nothing to do with the ambassador, I was on the pope's territory).⁶⁹

One witness to Triceri’s harassment by the grooms had even testified to seeing the ambassador inside the carriage. For the Spanish ambassador to take notice of a former pawn of the household illustrates how seriously he took both the right of his *franchigia* and various activities of his servants, including their ability to host games of chance within its space. But Oñate was not the only ambassador to permit gambling within the premises of his embassy. Beginning at the turn of the seventeenth century, taking advantage of the emerging idea of diplomatic immunities, grooms and other servants of the embassies of France, Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, and the smaller Italian states began organizing games of chance in the palaces, generally with the knowledge, if not outright approval, of their masters. Under the aegis of the *franchigia*, crowds of Romans gathered at ambassadors’ palaces to gamble in these protected spaces. This prevented constables from breaking up the games (as they did in taverns, inns and private residences), while worrying popes and their ministers of justice about public morality and safety. In 1636 Pope Urban VIII, a zealous opponent of gambling, had the governor of Rome outlaw gaming at the embassies. The move provoked the ambassadors of Spain and France to complain bitterly about this violation of their rights. They complied briefly but soon continued to allow their servants to sponsor the games. Governor Spada made exemplary arrests of servants in the palaces, but this only incited further protests and even violence against the *bargello* and the constables.⁷⁰ Papal justice found it hard to penetrate the protective *franchigia* of ambassador’s residences. Its ministers faced resistance and hostility when they tried to impose the laws of the papacy on this extra-territorial space in Rome, revealing a profound weakness of papal justice and governance.

Fear and Loathing in Piazza della Trinità dei Monti

Besides the bickering and brawling triggered by gambling, the sudden influx of armed soldiers, with their short military cassocks and broad-brimmed hats *alla spagnola*, brought fear and violence to the residents of Piazza della Trinità dei Monti. Women looked in trepidation from their windows. For example, the courtesan Caterina Razioli saw nothing but soldiers “passegiando inanzi et indietro” (marching forwards and backwards). She further recalled:

ho inteso poi dire pubblicamente che p[er] d[ett]a quelli soldati non vogliono che di notte ci passono sbirri si come con effetto si dice che non li vogliono per paura et ogniuno stava paura et io particolarmente spirito, perche simili genti sogliono dare fastidio alle donne se bene ancora ho inteso dire che il maggior domo del s[igno]r Ambasciatore ha ordinato non vole che si da fastidio a nesuno.

I heard it publicly said through the square that these soldiers don’t want the constables to pass through here at night, with the effect that it is said no one wants

⁶⁸ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, ff. 585v–590r.

⁶⁹ Ibid., f. 567r.

⁷⁰ Hunt, “I Giochi di Quartiere,” 11–16.

to go out for fear and everyone in these parts is kept in terror, and I am particularly spooked because similar men usually bother women, although I have heard that the majordomo of the ambassador has ordered that they should not trouble anyone, but still people remain in fear because everyone's hair is standing on end.⁷¹

Despite Pavizza's assurances, the soldiers harassed shopkeepers and artisans and committed assorted crimes. In particular, the ambassador's servants preyed upon innkeepers and women renting rooms in the square and its surrounding streets. Although many soldiers were put up in the ambassador's palace, most had to be quartered outside it, but within the *franchigia* and against the wishes of their proprietors. According to one witness, on ambassadorial orders and backed by soldiers, Pavizza had his steward intimidate neighbors, including women, to provide room and board.⁷² For example, Faustina da Spoleto was forced to accept eight soldiers for fifteen days into her son-in-law's inn after the steward asserted "siamo della famiglia del s[igno]r Ambasciatore di Spagna" (we are of the family of the Lord Ambassador of Spain).⁷³ Another innkeeper, Ascanio Groppetti, tangled with Pavizza himself. When the steward arrived at his inn, demanding a room for a gentleman, Groppetti, concerned for his wife and three children, refused because, he said, "io ho inteso che la volesse p[er] metterci soldati" (I heard that he wanted it to put soldiers up).⁷⁴ When the steward began unloading the soldiers' baggage, Groppetti barricaded himself in his inn and sent his wife out to plead for help from Cardinal Borgia, who, "movendosi a compassione" (moved to compassion), sent his gentlemen to remonstrate on the couple's behalf.⁷⁵ Even with the mediation of a powerful patron from the Spanish nation, Groppetti lost his bid to keep the soldiers out of his house, as the majordomo eventually threatened to sue him, asserting the rights of the ambassador over the square and surrounding area. The ambassador and his men were treating the quarter as an extension of the embassy, obliging its inhabitants to accept the kind of odious billeting seen during times of war and occupation.⁷⁶

The soldiers also used intimidation when refusing to pay their bills. One ruse they employed involved inviting tavern-goers to share in drinking a jug of wine with them and then bullying them with the threat of violence into settling the bill. The innkeeper Ambrogio Catani at the Inn of the Turchetto informed the court that eight or ten of the soldiers "facevano violenza a persone che passorno [sic] che vogliono a bere dicendo essi di voler pagare et poi bevuto se quelli no' pagano" (did violence against people who passed by, wanting them to drink and telling them they would pay, and then [having] drunk, these [soldiers] did not pay).⁷⁷ Some clients paid out of fear, but others demurred, provoking loud arguments and fights. One of Catani's customers was seriously wounded in the head with a sword for declining to pay for the soldiers' night of drinking. The soldiers passed from inn to inn attempting this trick so that, in Catani's words, "noi altri hosti ce restorno di mezzo" (we poor innkeepers found ourselves in the middle).⁷⁸ At another establishment, the innkeeper at the Stellata, Santo Tampieri, complained to the Governor's Tribunal that several Spanish soldiers refused to pay after eating and drinking at his establishment.

⁷¹ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b.226, ff. 464v–465r.

⁷² ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 225, f. 385r: "sforzavano diversi vicini a darli stantia."

⁷³ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, f. 617r: For another example of forceful quartering, see *Ibid.*, ff. 422r-v.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 641v.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 642r.

⁷⁶ On quartering soldiers, see Lauro Martines, *Furies: War in Europe, 1450–1700* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 166–69; Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road*, 80–83.

⁷⁷ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 225, f. 383v.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

When he demanded they cover the cost of their dinner, they told him that the ambassador would reimburse him. But when Tampieri took his grievance to Captain Pavizza, he was ignored.⁷⁹ Another innkeeper, Filippo Taddeteri at the Sign of the Golden Calf, was menaced by a soldier who refused to pay for some white bread. The soldier pulled out his dagger, shouting that he “havesse havuto ardito di negar il pane ad un gentilhuomo del ambassador” (had dared to deny bread to a gentleman of the ambassador).⁸⁰

With the Spanish soldiers dominating a good chunk of the Campo Marzio, the Roman police ceased their patrols in those areas, leaving the populace without recourse to the law. The soldiers also committed armed robberies—at least fifteen were reported. They tended to target lone individuals, holding them up with daggers and *terzaroli*, and demanding their money and their cloaks. Even a prosecutor of the Governor’s Tribunal, Lorenzo Serra, was held up after a meeting with the governor. As he walked home, two Spaniards accosted him and demanded, in a mixture of Italian and Spanish, “los dineros che noi chieremo beber” (your money, because we want to drink).⁸¹ Serra told them he did not have any money and that they should go to the Fontana della Barcaccia if they wanted to drink. Not liking his joke, they pushed a *terzarolo* into his stomach. He gave them a *giulio*, to which one of the Spaniards replied, “io chiero todos los dineros” (I want all your money).⁸² Upon giving up the contents of his pouch, they gave him back some small change. Shaken, the prosecutor fled to the shop of a friend, the baker, Domenico Succini, to borrow a sword for protection as he continued his way home. At Domenico’s shop, a gentleman and his wife arrived and recounted being robbed of his sword and her jewelry. After leaving their remaining money and other valuables with the baker, the couple returned home but they took a longer, twisting route to “discostarci da quelle strade dove noi pensavamo che si potessero essere spagnoli” (distance ourselves from the streets where we thought there might be Spaniards).⁸³

More generally, the soldiers compromised the commerce and sociability of the neighborhood. After the initial reports of robberies and the assault of a swordsmith and shoemaker, residents of the “Quartiero” became afraid to leave their homes at night and closed their shops early. The baker, Domenico Succini, who had loaned his sword to the prosecutor, deposed that “io adesso soglio serrare la bottega mia a bon hora di avemaria perche delle bande n[ost]re ogniuno ha paura di questi soldati spagnoli che s’intende dire pubblicamente che fanno dell’Insolente et da quale bande non ci è più nessuno che ardisca di andare di notte” (right now it is my custom to close my shop at the early hour of Ave Maria, because in our neighborhood everyone is afraid of the Spanish soldiers, because it is said they are causing trouble, and in these parts no one dares anymore to go out at night).⁸⁴ The innkeeper Tampieri lamented that “atorno quel vicinato dispiace tutto questo motive di soldati spagnoli p[er]che non parendo a nessuno di stare sicuro, ogniuno si ritira a casa più presto del ordinario et p[er] timore non si sta con quella sicurezza che si stava prima” (around this neighborhood everyone is upset about the doings of the Spanish soldiers because it appears to everyone that nothing remains secure, [and] everyone retires to their homes earlier than usual and out of fear no one feels the same sense of security as before).⁸⁵

Oñate’s claims to diplomatic immunity and importation of soldiers detached the square and its environs from the pope’s justice. In effect, the Spanish occupied Piazza della Trinità dei Monti

⁷⁹ ASR, TCG, Proc17, b. 226, f. 467r.

⁸⁰ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 224, f. 129r.

⁸¹ ASR, TCG, Pro17, b. 226, f. 450r.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., f. 476r-v.

⁸⁴ Ibid., f. 459v.

⁸⁵ Ibid., f. 465r.

like an invading army that lived off the land. The district turned into a Roman version of the Quartieri Spagnoli in Naples, a barracks district of the viceroy, full of swaggering, blustering soldiers who harassed the local populace. As in viceregal Naples, the ambassador's soldiers provided an ostentatious display of Spanish power in the Eternal City.⁸⁶

The tenor of the neighborhood changed with the arrival of Spanish soldiers in the summer of 1627. The area became a visible bastion of Spanish power once the embassy established its permanent seat at Palazzo Monaldeschi twenty years later in 1647. Previously, Spanish ambassadors rented residences near San Giacomo degli Spagnoli in Piazza Navona.⁸⁷ Although not displacing in importance the area near their national church, the embassy at Piazza della Trinità soon became the epicenter of the Spanish community in Rome: soon after the palace's purchase it assumed the appellation Piazza di Spagna, forming an island of Spanish sovereignty in the urban fabric. The evolution of Piazza della Trinità into Piazza di Spagna began with Oñate's conflict with the papal police in 1627, demonstrating the clout of Spanish power in Rome, even as its influence was progressively waning.

From the 1630s, embassies in Rome had acquired a reputation as dens of iniquity, harboring outlaws and hosting games of chance. Once France and Spain entered into formal hostilities in 1635, the rights of diplomatic immunity became even more important to the resident ambassadors of both kingdoms. Throughout the 1630s and 1640s, French and Spanish ambassadors clashed with each other and with papal police over the defense of these prerogatives. Like Oñate before them, they mobilized soldiers and bandits, housed them in their palaces and quarters, and used them to fight proxy wars in the streets and to assert their rights of immunity over large sections of the city. Indeed, I would argue that international tensions wrought by the Thirty Years' War and the subsequent Franco-Spanish War exacerbated these concerns. Assertions of extra-territoriality, like squabbles over precedence, ceremonial order, or the right of way in the streets, were barometers of diplomatic influence and state power, rather than the bravado of hot-blooded noble ambassadors.

Reform-minded popes took offense at these liberties and frequently had the governor of Rome patrol the *franchigie* and arrest malefactors, particularly ambassadors' servants who organized illegal gambling under the protection of their masters' immunities. These steps, however, only provoked protest among the ambassadors and jeopardized diplomatic relations with the papacy. In 1687, Pope Innocent XI outlawed the immunities on the pain of excommunication but, by then, the custom was too-well established to eradicate. The papacy could not assert itself over the claims of the greater monarchies of Catholic Europe, not even in its own capital. At best, the papal judicial authorities could make examples of egregious violations of its laws but could not put an end to its practice, demonstrating a true weakness in the papacy's efforts to centralize its authority and to curtail violence, even that of those sheltered by ambassadors. After the promulgation of Innocent XI's bull, an anonymous French guide to Rome described the papal campaign against *franchigie* in these terms: "la justice du pape n'y peut inquieter personne, bien des gens s'y retirent que plusieurs raisons ne laisseroient pas ailleurs en securété" (the justice of the pope cannot bother

⁸⁶ Stephen Cummins, "Encountering Spain in Early Modern Naples: Language, Customs and Sociability," in *The Spanish Presence in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Images of Iberia*, ed. Piers Baker-Bates and Miles Pattenden (London: Routledge, 2015), 49–50.

⁸⁷ On San Giacomo degli Spagnoli, see Susanne Kubersky-Piredda, "Chiese nazionali fra rappresentanza politica e Riforma cattolica: Spagna, Francia, e Imperio a fine Cinquecento," in *Identità e rappresentanza: le chiese nazionali a Roma, 1450-1650*, ed. Alexander Koller and Susanne Kubersky-Piredda (Rome: Campisano Editore, 2015), 17–64.

anyone, for many people withdraw there that for various reasons would elsewhere not be allowed to go in safety).⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Joseph Connors and Louise Rice, eds., *Specchio di Roma barocca: una guida inedita del XVII secolo* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1991), 49.