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The Business Papers of a Great Roman Family

Two years ago the Baker Library made its first major excursion into the field of early Italian business source material when Mr. H. Gordon Selfridge deposited with it a number of account books belonging to a branch of the Medici family. This summer the Society acquired, through the generosity of Mr. Edward J. Frost, of Boston, some account books and other business records of the great Barberini and Sciarra-Colonna families of Rome. This collection of eighty-seven vellum-bound volumes, covering the activities one of Italy's most powerful families from 1618 to 1816, takes up the story of Italian banking almost where the earlier books left it.

The Barberini family were of Tuscan origin, and made their appearance in Rome with the elevation to the Holy See of Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, in 1623, as Urban VIII. Little appears as to their history before that time, except that they acquired some wealth in trade in the sixteenth century. Their rise to power and influence in the seventeenth came, like that of a number of the other princely families of modern Rome, through their connection with the Papacy, and the benefits conferred on them by their illustrious relative. Three of the Barberini were placed in the sacred college. The Pope's brother, and later, it would seem, the brother's son were given command of the Papal troops; and to the latter went the principality of Palestrina, an ancient stronghold of the Ghibelline family of the Colonna, and other fiefs.

Janet Penrose Trevelyan describes Urban, in her *Short History of the Italian People*, as a man of "cultivation and even of some learning, for he wrote indifferent Latin poetry and had studied mathematics." Leopold Ranke characterizes him, in his *History of the Popes*, as a brilliant and talented autocrat, who refused to convene the college on the grounds that he understood more than all the cardinals put together; set aside an objection drawn from the old Papal constitutions with the answer that an opinion pronounced by a living pope was worth more than the maxims of a hundred dead ones; and handled sacred subjects with wit and suppleness in verse, accommodating the songs and sayings of the Old and New Testaments to the Horatian metres, and fitting the song of praise of the aged Simeon to two Sapphic strophes. Learning, however, seems not to have been with him the ruling passion that it was with some of the Popes of the Renaissance, for it was under his leadership that Galileo was condemned for holding heretical views.

"The veteran astronomer," says Miss Trevelyan, "had run his own head into the noose by disregarding a solemn warning administered to him by the Inquisition in 1616, and had published a *Dialogue* on the Copernican and Ptolemaic systems in which the superiority of the former had been darkly hinted at. Such a breach of discipline could not be tolerated by the Holy Office, and in 1633 Galileo was cited to Rome and forced under threat of torture to 'abjure, curse and abhor' the opinions of which he stood suspected, viz., 'that the sun was the centre of the world and immovable, and that the earth was not the centre and had movement.'"

According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, the threat was not carried out, nor was it intended that it should be. It is supposed that Urban's anger was roused against Galileo on account of a fancied caricature of himself in the simpleton of the *Dialogue*, which had been pointed out to him by ill-wishers of the old astronomer.

Coming of a commercial family, Urban took an interest in industry. He established a manufactory of tapestries, the only one in Rom at the time. But more than an industrialist, he was a militarist, and aspired to make the Papal states a formidable temporal power. He recruited an army from the native population of his domains, and built new fortifications for the castle of Sant' Angelo. It is to his using part of the bronze work from the Pantheon to melt up into cannon for this castle that the proverb "what the barbarians left, the Barberini took" is usually attributed. Other authorities, how-



EXTERIOR OF BOOK

A ledger relating to the administration of Monte Libretto, a village in the Sabine hills, about forty miles from Rome and held at one time by the Barberini. These entries during the closing years of the 18th century will throw much light on the fast disappearing feudal holdings of the great princes of the Papal States.

ever, lay it to his stripping of the travertine from the classic ruins of Rome for his own extensive buildings.

But he was not so successful in his warlike enterprises as his great militaristic predecessor, Julius II. In a war against the Duke of Parma which combined "in remarkable degree the elements of the bravo and the stock exchange," he found his native levies a rotten reed. The war began in a feud between Taddeo Barberini and the Duke of Parma, who was also lord of the papal fiefs of Castro and Ronciglione.

"The Barberini," says Miss Trevelyan, resolved to ruin the Duke by striking at him first on the financial side. He had raised a loan of which the interest was secured on the revenues of Castro; the Pope prohibited the export of corn from Castro, and the revenue dropped to zero. The bond-holders, defrauded of their interest, sold their shares at a ruinous loss, and found purchasers in the Barberini; but meanwhile for his failure to pay the interest the Duke was excommunicated and declared forfeited of all his possessions." Boccardo's Italian encyclopedia describes the expectations of both sides. The Duke had gathered together his army, but having no money for his men, was counting on the enemy's paying them as they crossed his territory. The Pope's army under Taddeo Barberini, on the other hand, "never believed that a real fight was possible, and when these pacific soldiers saw that the enemy intended to strike with the edge rather than the flat of the sword, they beat a retreat, the example being set by the general."

The Pope retired to Sant' Angelo, and the Duke of Parma, assisted by a league which had meanwhile been formed by Tuscany, Venice and Modena for his assistance, pressed on half way to Rome. He would have had Urban at his mercy, had he followed up his advantage, but he let it slip, and the war dragged on in a series of small skirmishes for the next year, until it was settled by the intervention of France and Venice, on the basis of the *status quo ante*.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Barberini cardinals seem to have been closely concerned with the financial administration of the church. They also had much to do with the administration of the Monte della Pietà, and of the Bank of Santo Spirito. One member of the family seems to have been closely connected with the Bank of Naples, which was perhaps the most important financial institution in Italy before the Unification.

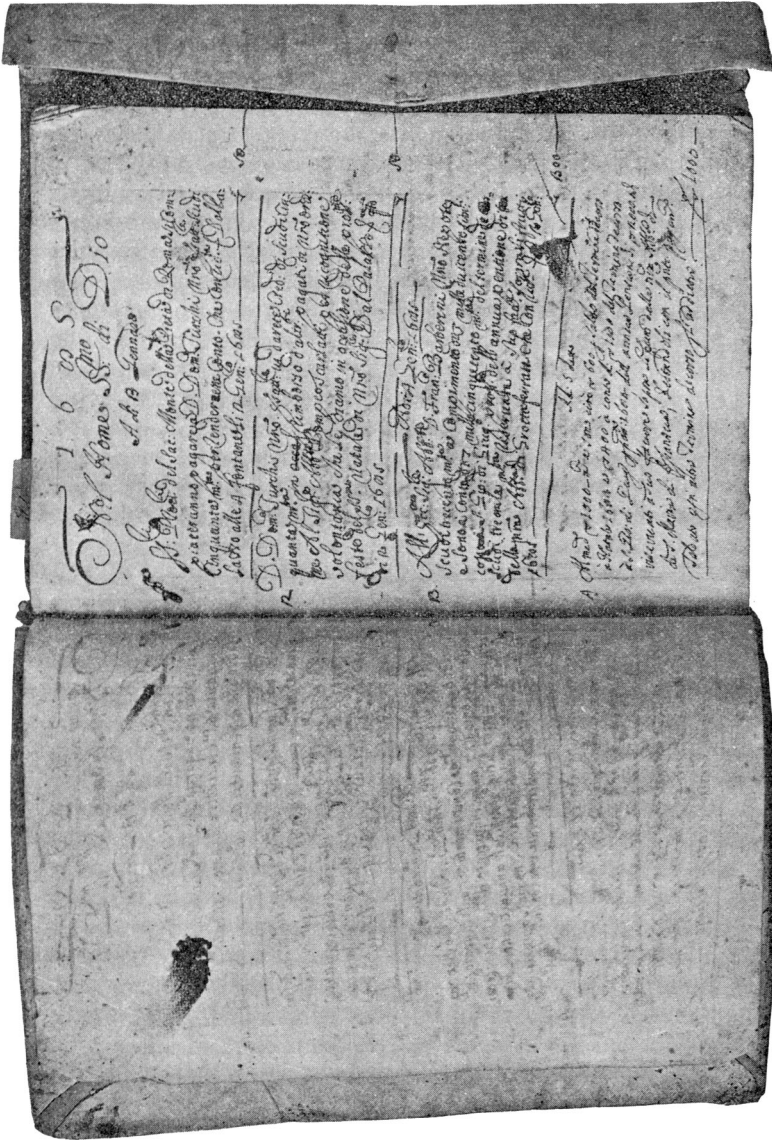
A preliminary examination of the volumes included in the Barberini Collection has revealed several outstanding facts as to their

content, chronology and, consequently, as to their value. The entries, letters, etc., are all in long hand, but the penmanship is clear and the vocabulary offers few difficult problems like those encountered in deciphering other early Italian business data, notably the Medici manuscripts. They belonged to the Barberini and Sciarra-Colonna families, and there is also included one volume belonging to Cardinal Federico Borromeo, brother of San Carlo of Milan.

Roughly speaking, these documents fall into five general classes: estate management, feudal accounts, banking transactions and records of general expenses. They cover the years from 1618 to 1816, and from 1650 to 1800, the year of Napoleon's final conquest of Italy, the record is gratifyingly continuous. The estate books are concerned with the management of various small principalities controlled by members of this family. Perhaps the most important of these relate to Palestrina and to Monte Libretto. Others have to do with Monte Maria, Basinello and so forth. The estate records are continuous from 1663 to 1679; from 1733 to 1760; and from 1767 to 1795. There are a few isolated volumes for the years lying between these dates. It is anticipated that these books will be valuable in the study of the period of transition between feudalism and the modern economic and political structure of society, since most of them date from the era before Napoleon's revolutionary rebuilding of Europe.

Some of the manuscripts are collections of *istromenti*, of miscellaneous documents, bills of sale, agreements and whatever relates to the management of an estate that is passing through the transition period from feudal tenure to independent ownership and freeholdings. In some we find records of rents paid in kind, and in others there are entries which imply that the holder was under obligation for a certain number of days' labor. The latter, however, will require careful study in order to determine just what is their significance. Only four of the manuscripts deal with feudal tenure, and these are not always as definite as one might wish. At times the amount of dues and the location of the property are definitely specified. Bread tithes and dues, and the use of the lord's mill and oven appear fairly frequently. There is a consistent implication that the "first fruits" are demanded. Wine and fees are required from the tenants. Certain levies are made at specified times and at definite intervals. Certain feudal tithes are recorded in the family expense books.

In the records concerned with sales and purchases there are items



INTERIOR OF BOOK

Page from a daybook of the Monte della Pietà. The Barberini were, at the time the book was kept, largely concerned with the administration of ecclesiastical finances. The first item relates to the magnificent palace in the via delle Quattro Fontane erected about the middle of the seventeenth century by Urban VIII, the Barberini Pope.

for wine, bread, grain, tobacco, carriages, horses, house furnishings, soap, coal, salt, kitchen utensils, clothing, agricultural implements etc. Sometimes these are definitely specified but without their prices. Sometimes they are given in such general terms that one can only guess at what the entries signify. There is in this group one unusually large volume, relating to the management of Monte Libretto, which covers a period of some twelve years, and is most satisfactory in its details. There has not been time as yet to make a thorough and careful study of these books, but a preliminary one has pointed out what one may hope to discover. It is not impossible that they will reveal the exact status of a family in its relation to the state, and will furnish much valuable material for a study of the evidences of feudal tenure persisting prior to the Napoleonic era.

The banking records present on the whole a picture of finance on a much larger scale than that of Florence at the time of the Medici records. These manuscripts vary in value. Some of them relate to the transactions of the Monte della Pietà, which, besides its regular banking business, carried on something like the activities of a popular savings bank, lending money to the poor at nominal rates. A few are concerned with the Bank of San Spirito, the official bank of the Papal States. These are less detailed and disappointingly meager in their entries. There are frequent mentions of transactions with the Bank of Naples. Others allude to letters of exchange on banks in Bologna, Florence and Milan. There is one register of letters of exchange, and a few loose documents that seem to be the equivalent of modern checks. One book is a register of deposits, which are usually recorded in scudi, but occasionally we find florins or soldi, reckoned in gold.

In the bank books are many records concerning labor, purchase and sale of produce, household expenses, etc. There are many items recording amounts "to be used at my discretion," that is the discretion of the Barberini, not the depositor. Money is advanced on crops. Debts are paid in kind. There are a number of deposits to the accounts of certain foreigners.

Some of the entries are quite satisfying as to detail. For instance, we have a record of four diamonds costing 554 scudi. Just below this is an entry of ten scudi given to the Franciscans. There are naturally many records of transactions with abbeys, religious orders, other cardinals, etc. Agreements between employer and laborer appear, and arrangements for the transportation of materials. There are records of the expenses of the Rota and Con-

gresses, of salaries and of loans. Sometimes the records are mere jottings without much value, and at other times they go into great detail. No mention is found as yet of a foreign country except Spain, although it must be remembered that Tuscany, Bologna and Rome were as distinct nationalities then as England and France are now.

The letter books are mostly written from Rome and deal with banking and general business. They are brief, largely lacking in any personal interest and are quite definitely dictated to secretaries, although once or twice there is a mention of something of a more personal character. Sometimes there is no name attached to the book, or at least none has yet been discovered. These documents will supplement the bank books, but do not seem at present to have any particular value in themselves.

The household records for the most part deal with expenses in Rome, and include every form of service rendered to the Barberini princes from the offices of the chamberlain to the cooking. Houses, carriages, wine, crystal, silver, linen, Flanders lace, gold, embroideries, damasks, perfumes and spices are listed, sometimes with satisfying detail, the entry at other times resembling a mere memorandum for a shopper. One of these books deals entirely with the rebuilding of a palace in the Piazza della Sciarra. The operations extended from 1790 to 1796 and there is a fairly good inventory of all the material used. The different kinds of stone for each story of the palace are mentioned, as well as that used for floors and interiors. The painters, the cabinet makers, the weavers etc., are all included in the record.

One of the specimen entries may be quoted: "Simeone Bucci Master Mason of Scarpellino, is under obligation to bring to Rome entirely at his expense stone for a pavement of travertino to be used in the loggia of the building two and one third palms long and also for the roofs which are fifteen palms in width, and the stone he is to bring at his own expense before the end of September, 1792. Moreover, these stones are not to be over one and one sixth palms each in size, and they are to be worth fifty scudi and this load is quite distinct from that included in the order of August 18th."

These documents will in all probability furnish material for a very careful and accurate study of bank transactions in the Papal States just before the decline of the temporal power. Some of the books contain records of assessments made during the Napoleonic occupation, but these are brief and of little value. The estates of

the Barberini were so large and so important in the history of the country that the records connected with the financial administration of them are of exceedingly great importance to students of economic history, and also to those interested in any aspect of the



**MONTE DELLA PIETÀ. THE BUILDING IS UNCHANGED,
INSIDE AND OUT, SINCE THE DAYS WHEN THESE
ACCOUNT BOOKS WERE KEPT WITHIN THE WALLS.**

temporal power of the popes. The translation and publication of this extraordinarily continuous and comprehensive set of documents, which the Society hopes to have completed at a future date, will undoubtedly add considerably to Italian and to economic and business history.