
0.0.1 The Italian Wars

(What follows is a lengthy explanation of the conditions behind the wars in Italy in the early 1500s; this is basically only important to the story insofar as it sets up why so many mathematicians were flung across northern Italy. You can skip this section and get to the relevant parts here.)

In 1494, the French king Charles VIII invaded Italy. That's where things really got out of control, because the Pope got involved. The Pope at the time was Alexander VI, who was about as irreligious of a figure as you can imagine. He had several mistresses with whom he fathered children, and his last name (Borgia) became synonymous at the time with nepotism and hedonism. You have to understand that during the Middle Ages and beyond, the church was not just a religious institution; it was basically a state of its own (the Papal States), with economic and military influence, and nearly every major kingdom tried to get control of the papacy at some point.

Alexander VI happened to be the Pope right around the era of Columbus's expeditions, and it was actually he who issued the *Inter caetera*, which as an official document by the church which basically granted Spain the entire West Coast of America and the Pacific Ocean. In the name of this document, the Spanish colonists attacked, subjugated, and slaved the indigenous peoples of America. The bottom line is, it was not at all unusual for the church to get involved in political conflicts at the time, no matter how bloody.

His successor's successor was the infamous Pope Julius II, who had the incredible epithet of "The Warrior Pope". And although Julius II forbade anyone from speaking about the Borgias, his actions were arguably even more blasphemous. He had an extremely active military policy, and he personally led troops into battle. Not exactly what you think about when you think "Pope". When Machiavelli was writing *The Prince*, he used Julius as an example to learn from for aspiring dictators and autocrats.

We return to the flashpoint of 1494. At the time, the king of Naples claimed that he had a claim to another territory, Milan. The Duke of Milan, anxious to get rid of this threat, played his trump card: King Charles VIII. You see, King Charles VIII had some claim to Naples (granted a couple of popes ago), so all he needed was some encouragement and he was ready to invade Naples. Luckily, he had that encouragement, from none other than the future Pope Julius II, who hoped that he could use this opportunity to do some damage to his enemy Alexander VI. All the pieces were in place, and in 1494, King Charles VIII invaded and brutalized Italy. At the urging of the Duke of Milan, Pope Alexander VI decided he had to step in. Thus began a half-century long conflict known as **The Italian Wars**. Are you confused yet? I don't blame you. The 1500s were an absolute mess.

Anyway, Charles VIII's invasion of Italy set off a series of wars which would ravage Northern Italy for 50 years and which included pretty much every major kingdom in Europe at the time (and also the Ottoman Empire in modern-day Turkey). And you can imagine with players like the "Warrior Pope" involved, the wars were pretty brutal. No alliance was set in stone, and there was constant betrayal on all sides. It was truly a dark time for Italy.