



BRILL

JOURNAL OF JESUIT STUDIES 8 (2021) 617-637



brill.com/jjs

Was Niccolò Oddi a Jesuit?: Pamphlets, News, and His Disputed Deathbed Religious Profession

Vincenzo Lavenia

Dipartimento di Storia Culture Civiltà, Università di Bologna, Bologna, Italy

vincenzo.lavenia@unibo.it

Abstract

This essay explores the life and career of Niccolò Oddi (1715–67). Associated with Ludovico Maria Torrigiani, the pro-Jesuit secretary of state during the pontificate of Clement XIII, Oddi was not himself a member of the Society, but a man who would defend it in the years when the survival of the order was the principal issue that occupied the papal court, and when Europe was abuzz with polemical anti-Jesuit tracts. As papal nuncio in Switzerland, Oddi opposed the printing and circulation of anti-Jesuit publications; later, he became the archbishop of Ravenna and a cardinal. By some he is considered a Jesuit, for he seems to have joined the Society just before his death by making religious profession. Did this really happen? Or, was it part of propaganda employed by the Jesuits themselves? Or, was it a myth circulated by Society's enemies? Oddi's case may be considered informative for many reasons. His alleged religious profession before dying, which was discussed in the newspapers of the time, can be interpreted as an important episode in the political-religious struggle that accompanied the suppression of the Jesuits between real and fake news.

Keywords

Niccolò Oddi – Giambattista Agnelli – anti-Jesuit propaganda – Jesuit suppression – deathbed religious profession – Jesuit cardinal – anti-Jesuit literature

1 Introduction

In the years preceding the 1773 suppression, when the Society of Jesus was under sustained attack from the secular authorities, from the Jansenist

movement and from the children of the Enlightenment, the order had no cardinal. The last Jesuit wearers of the purple had been Giovanni Battista Tolomei (1653–1726),¹ Giovanni Battista Salerni (1671–1729), and Álvaro Cienfuegos (1657–1739). Moreover, since the pontificate of Benedict XIV (r.1740–58), the Society had become subject of growing hostility on the part of a section of the Roman Curia, and, by the time of the election of Lambertini's successor, the situation in Portugal had come to a head. Thus, the cardinal electors who gathered in conclave were divided into a group that supported the Society (under the leadership of Ludovico Maria Torrigiani, 1697–1777) and a faction that opposed it (inspired by, among others, Domenico Passionei, 1682–1761). The eventual choice of Carlo Rezzonico (Clement XIII, r.1758–69), an ex-alumnus of the Jesuit college in Bologna and a devout member of the Archconfraternity of San Teodoro al Palatino, seemed to augur a compromise between the pro- and anti-Jesuit parties, while, in the same period, the Society elected the Florentine Lorenzo Ricci (1703–75; in office 1758–73) as its new superior general. Ricci had been Torrigiani's personal confessor and the latter, once nominated secretary of state, soon showed himself to be a firm defender of both the Jesuits and the Roman Curia, coming into conflict with the Bourbon courts, with Portugal, France, and finally Austria.

Perugia-born Niccolò Oddi was his protégé and had been raised to the cardinalate in recognition of his diplomatic talents. He was not himself a Jesuit, but a man who would defend the Society in the years when the survival of the order was the principal issue that occupied the papal court, and when Europe was abuzz with polemical anti-Jesuit tracts. However, the historical tradition has numbered Oddi among the Jesuit cardinals because he seems to have joined the Society on his deathbed. Did this really happen? Or was it a bit of propaganda spread about by the Jesuits, who were very much on the back foot throughout Europe? Or, was it a myth circulated by the Society's enemies? And why, in any case, that specific cardinal from Perugia? We do know that, before Oddi, a number of cardinals had entered the Society subsequent to their creation. The most important case being that of François de la Rochefoucault (1558–1645), whose confessor was the Jesuit Étienne Bauny (1564–1649). But there is perhaps a more pertinent precedent for our reading of Oddi's deathbed decision: that of Alessandro Orsini (1592–1626), cardinal legate to Ravenna, as Oddi was later to be himself.

There would again be cases of cardinals becoming Jesuits after the restoration of the order in the nineteenth century, but no one else made the choice during that most difficult of periods for the followers of Ignatius of Loyola

1 Miles Pattenden, "The Jesuit Giambattista Tolomei (1653–1726): Cardinal and Philosopher," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 7, no. 4 (2020): 570–91, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/22141332-00704004>.

(c.1491–1556). In the span of a few years—in fact the very years during which Oddi was co-opted to the Roman Curia—the Society was suppressed in the Portuguese dominions (1759), France (1764), Spain and Naples (1767), and Parma (1768). Against the background of these events, the steps taken by Oddi to oppose the printing of anti-Jesuit publications during his missions as nuncio suffice to make his name worthy of inclusion among the cardinals of the Society of Jesus, more so, really, than a last-gasp religious profession for which we do not have hard evidence.² There is no comprehensive research on the deathbed religious professions gained by the Society of Jesus among the members of the high clergy before the suppression of the order (one can mention that of the bishop of Killala, Francis Kirvan [b.1589], in 1661). At any rate, Oddi's case is informative in many respects. It did not imply an extreme “conversion” to the cause of the Society, for Oddi had been a friend of the Jesuits throughout his career. If anything, his probable religious profession on his deathbed, which was discussed in the newspapers and magazines of the time, must be interpreted as an episode in the political-religious struggle that accompanied the suppression of the order between real and fake news.

2 The Career of a Papal Diplomat

Niccolò was born in Perugia on September 27, 1715 to Marcantonio Count of Schifanoia and the Countess Altavilla Ranieri.³ The eldest of five

2 Oddi's name can be found both in Jerome Aixala, *Black and Red SJ: A Study in Ecclesiastical Service, from Trent to Vatican II; Through the Jesuit Refusal or Acceptance of Ecclesiastical Dignities* (Bombay: Messenger Office, St. Xavier's High School, 1968), 356–58; and in Ángel Santos Hernández, *Jesuitas y obispos*, vol. 1, *La Compañía de Jesús y las dignidades eclesiásticas* (Madrid: Pontificia Universidad Comillas, 1996), 196–200. After Oddi, the prelates Carlo Odescalchi (1785–1841) and Paul L. Melchers (1813–95) would become Jesuits when they were already cardinals. For the story of the suppression of the Jesuits, I will cite here only the essays in Jeffrey D. Burson and Jonathan Wright, eds., *The Jesuit Suppression in Global Context: Causes, Events, and Consequences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). See also Paul Shore, “The Years of Jesuit Suppression, 1773–1814: Survival, Setbacks, and Transformation,” *Brill Research Perspectives in Jesuit Studies* 2, no. 1 (2020): 1–117, <https://brill.com/view/title/56670> (accessed August 1, 2021).

3 His life has never been the subject of a full study. See, however, Gaetano Moroni, *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica*, vol. 48 (Venice: Tipografia Emiliana, 1848), 259–60; Antonio Tarlazzi, *Memorie sacre di Ravenna* (Ravenna: Tipografia del Seminario Vescovile, 1852), 580–84; Remigius Ritzler and Pirminius Sefrin, *Hierarchia Catholica Medii et Recentioris Aevi*, vol. 6 (Padua: Il Messaggero di S. Antonio, 1968), 23–24, 46, 353, 412; Christoph Weber, *Legati e governatori dello Stato Pontificio: 1550–1809* (Rome: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Archivistici, 1994), 371, 372, 619; Weber, *Senatus divinus: Verborgene Strukturen im Kardinalskollegium der frühen Neuzeit*

brothers—Ercole, Enrico, Lodovico, Giulio, and a sister who would become an Augustinian nun—he belonged to a noble family from the Papal States with close links to the Roman Curia.⁴ One of his grandmothers was the sister of Antonio Banchieri (1667–1733), great grandson of Clement IX Rospigliosi (r.1667–69), created cardinal in 1728; while his father's brother Giacomo (1679–1770) enjoyed a glittering career that saw him too obtain a cardinal's hat in 1743, under Benedict XIV.⁵ It was this Giacomo Oddi who oversaw his nephew from his younger days: in fact, after completing his first studies at Perugia,⁶ Niccolò moved to Venice, where his aged grandfather lived, and where Giacomo was papal nuncio from 1735 to 1739. When his uncle left the Serenissima to take up the post of nuncio at Lisbon, Niccolò continued his studies at Rome's Sapienza University and graduated *in utroque iure* there on November 16, 1746. Shortly after, on December 15, he was appointed referendary of both Signatures. Shadowing his uncle, he took over from him as vice-legate when Giacomo moved up to become apostolic legate in Romagna.⁷ In that role, he sponsored the establishment of two academies (one for ecclesiastical history and another for philosophy) in the episcopal palace in Ravenna, where he brought together some of Romagna's leading *literati* and scholars during the years in which Ludovico Antonio Muratori's (1672–1750) methods and historical publications were inspiring lively discussion and efforts at imitation.⁸ In

(1500–1800) (Frankfurt am Main-New York: P. Lang, 1996), 519, no. 738; Ángel Santos, "Oddi, Niccolò," in *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús: Biográfico-temático*, ed. Charles E. O'Neill and Joaquín María Domínguez, 4 vols. (Rome/ Madrid: Institutum Historicum S.I./ Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2001), 3:2859–60; Weber, *Die päpstlichen Referendare 1566–1809: Chronologie und Prosopographie* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2004), 770; Urban Fink, "Oddi, Niccolò," in *Dizionario Storico della Svizzera Italiana* (2010), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/017910/2010-05-04/> (accessed July 10, 2021); Antonio Menniti Ippolito, "Oddi, Niccolò," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–2020), 79:119–21.

4 Sforza degli Oddi di Laviano, *Cenni storici della famiglia degli Oddi (de Oddonibus), patrizia di Perugia, Ferrara, Padova, Parma, Albenga*, 2nd ed. (Parma: La Nazionale, 1977), 59.

5 Antonio Menniti Ippolito, "Oddi, Giacomo," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 79:109–10.

6 As a teenager he may have been the author of the *Cantata per l'Annunziazione di Maria Vergine allusiva al discorso da farsi per le di lei solennità nella Congregazione de nobili di Perugia* (Perugia: Costantini, 1729).

7 See Angelo Turchini, ed., *La legazione di Romagna e i suoi archivi (secoli XVI–XVIII)* (Cesena: Il Ponte Vecchio, 2006), esp. Pierpaolo Piergentili, "La Legazione di Romagna' in Archivio Segreto," 437, 494, 509 (which also contains a detailed list of Niccolò Oddi's papers as vice-legate, legate, and nuncio, now kept in the Vatican's Archivio Apostolico).

8 Domenico Maria Saverni, *Elogia in honorem Nicolai Oddi [...] provinciae prolegati, artium scientiarumque Ravennae restitutoris a literatis viris conscripta ob institutas in Apostolica Aede ecclesiasticam et philosophicam Academias* (Faenza: Archius, 1749); Giuseppe Antonio

1751, Niccolò was awarded the title Domestic Prelate of His Holiness, and up until 1753 was *relatore ponente* of the Sacred Congregation of the Consulta. December 26–30, 1753, he received minor orders, subdeaconship, and deaconship in quick succession. On January 1, 1754, he was ordained priest, and, on January 14, became titular archbishop of Traianopolis, *in partibus*, being consecrated on January 20 in the Viterbo cathedral by his uncle the cardinal, assisted by Giacinto Silvestri (1692–1762), bishop of Nepi and Sutri, and Sante Lanucci (1686–1767), bishop of Ortona. His uncle had in the meantime become bishop of Viterbo and Tuscania, and Niccolò had for a period followed him to Tuscia. A turning-point in his career was his appointment as papal nuncio to Cologne on February 12, 1754.⁹ Flanked by a secretary, Filippo Evangelisti, and an auditor, Giambattista Donati, Niccolò reached North Rhine-Westphalia on August 9 with the aim of playing a diplomatic role in the years when the European powers were gearing up for the Seven Years' War.¹⁰ In that period, the demise of the imperial ecclesiastical principalities was also in the air, while the rise of a new Protestant force, Hohenzollern Prussia, was threatening consolidated German assets. The resourceful Oddi must have come up to Rome's expectations, as on December 4, 1759, the curia decreed his transfer to Lucerne as papal nuncio in Switzerland.¹¹ He set out on August 16, 1760, but remained only a short while at

Pinzi, *De Scientiarum Academiis a Nicolao Oddo Præsule amplissimo Ravennæ institutis atque a Jacobo Patruo Cardinali Æmilie Legato in Apostolicas Ædes receptis elegia ad virum clarissimum Apostolum Zenum* (Ravenna: Apud Landium, 1749); Luigi Giuseppe Amadesi, *Difesa del diploma di S. Gregorio Magno a Mariniano, arcivescovo di Ravenna*, in *Raccolta d'opuscoli scientifici e filologici*, vol. 46 (Venezia: Occhi, 1751), fol. A2^r (with a eulogy by Oddi); Gasparo Martinetti Cardoni, *Ravenna Antica, Lettera Decimasesta* (Faenza: Conti, 1877), 9. On his being nominated vice-legate various congratulatory compositions were printed; e.g., Silvio Pompili, *Per il glorioso arrivo in Ravenna dell'Illustrissimo [...] Monsignore Niccolò Oddi, sonetto* (Ravenna: Landi, 1747).

- 9 But the decision to send him as nuncio to Cologne must date back to the end of 1753, when a Perugian man of letters, Giuliano Salvatori, dedicated an operetta to Oddi: *La notte luminosa cantata per la solennità del S. Natale [...] dedicata al merito sempre grande di sua Eccellenza Reverendissima Monsignor Niccolò Oddi eletto Arcivescovo e Nunzio Apostolico in Colonia* (Perugia: Per li Costantini e Maurizj, 1753).
- 10 Oddi's diplomatic papers are conserved in Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Colonia*, 145, 147–152, 156–66.
- 11 Oddi's papers from his time in Lucerne are in Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 177–83. For a history of the Swiss nunciature, see Urban Fink, *Die Luzerner Nuntiatur, 1586–1873: Zur Behördengeschichte und Quellenkunde der päpstlichen Diplomatie in der Schweiz*, Nachwort von Karl-Josef Rauber (Luzern-Stuttgart: Rex, 1997). There is also some mention of Oddi in Giovanni Pozzi and Luciana Pedroia, *Ad uso di [...] applicato alla Libreria de' Cappuccini di Lugano* (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1996), 86–87;

his post, handing over his mission to the auditor Donati, as he was beginning to have serious health problems. He returned to Perugia for some months, from where he dispatched a series of letters to the secretary of state, but not wishing to appear negligent, he dragged himself back to Lucerne on November 21, 1561, and remained there until February 2, 1764.

3 Against Anti-Jesuit Pamphleteering

At Lucerne, Oddi had to concern himself with squabbles that were perturbing the diocese of Sion—directly under the jurisdiction of the Holy See—over the election of the new bishop, and to defend the cathedral chapter from interference by secular authority. He was also invested with the power to reform the chapter of the Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Fribourg, where serious abuses had been reported. But his chief task was to monitor the printing presses and to curb the circulation of anti-curia publications, not to mention the proliferation of numerous tracts hostile to the Society of Jesus (including a new edition of Blaise Pascal's [1623–62] *Lettres provinciales* with a new, particularly offensive introduction).¹² The nuncio homed in on the works from the presses of Fortunato Bartolomeo de Felice (an ex-friar converted to Protestantism and to the cause of the Enlightenment, who was active in Yverdon, 1723–89) and François Grasset (operating in Lausanne, 1723–89), although, over the months, his principal target would become the publishing activities of the Agnelli brothers of Milan, who had opened an office in Lugano in 1745. Having originally concerned themselves with literature, during Oddi's nunciature, the Agnelli brothers entered into a relationship with the Portuguese court. While keeping publishing their *Nuove di diverse corti e paesi d'Europa*, generally known as the *Gazzetta di Lugano*, they spotted commercial opportunity and began to print anti-Jesuit polemics for the Italian market, among which were some forty/ fifty pamphlets on recent events in Portugal (later collected in six volumes). In the meantime in Venice, some hundred booklets appeared with "Lugano" as their (false) place of publication, causing considerable alarm to Secretary of State Torrigiani.

Fabrizio Mena, *Stamperie ai margini d'Italia: Editori e librai nella Svizzera italiana, 1746–1848* (Bellinzona: Casagrande, 2003).

12 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 181, fol. 75^{r-v}, letter to the printer Agnelli of March 31, 1762, in which Oddi writes that he is "nauseated, sick and scandalized after reading the well-known Provincial Letters."

Abbé Giambattista Agnelli, based in Switzerland, was able to take advantage of the ban on publishing works either for or against the Jesuits in the Habsburg dominions (which included Milan), and he obtained the financial support of the Portuguese ambassador Francisco de Almada e Mendonça (c.1720–83), Marquis of Pombal's (1699–1782) agent at the Roman Curia during the years when the Society of Jesus was abolished and the Jesuit Gabriel Malagrida (1689–1761)—implicated in the plots leading up to the attempted assassination of Joseph I (r.1750–77) in 1758—was tried and condemned to death by the Portuguese Inquisition on charges of heresy, pretended sainthood, and debauchery on September 21, 1761. His clamorous *auto da fé* had repercussions throughout Europe, inducing Agnelli to publish (again with false place of publication) the *Summary of the Trial*.¹³ This was far from being the only text hostile to the Society to come from the Lugano presses: in the same year, Agnelli was suspected of being behind another—anononymously published—polemic concerning the Malagrida episode.¹⁴ The same was the case with the printing of the *Confutazione del tomo XI delle apologie de' padri gesuiti in cui pretesero convincere di falsità coloro, che dicono, che la dottrina del tirannicidio è dottrina di tutta la Società* (fictional place of publication, Melampigopoli, 1761).¹⁵ In 1762, it was the turn of the *Monumenti veneti intorno i padri gesuiti* by Antonio Tommaso Contin (1723–96)¹⁶ and, in 1763, Carlo Borromeo's (1538–84) *Terza*

13 *Sunto del processo, e sentenza del Santo Officio contra il gesuita Gabriele Malagrida colla sentenza della Camera di Supplicatione, e colla relatione del di lui supplizio, tradotta per la prima volta dal Portoghese* (Lisbon: António Rodrigues Galhardo, 1761). See Callisto Caldelari, *Bibliografia luganese del Settecento: Le edizioni Agnelli di Lugano; Libri – Periodici* (Bellinzona: Casagrande, 1999), 393–94.

14 [Pierre Curel Parisot], *Risposta del signor abate Platel data da Lisbona li 20 novembre 1761 a' superiori degli Ordini religiosi di San Domenico e di S. Francesco per motivo della falsità sparsasi nel pubblico, d'esservi stato a canto del gesuita Malagrida nel supplizio del fuoco, che dovette soffrire li 21 settembre ultimo, un domenicano e un francescano*. On this and other writings by Parisot, see now Dale K. Van Kley, *Reform Catholicism and the International Suppression of the Jesuits in Enlightenment Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). Giambattista Agnelli denied in his letters to Oddi that the book had come from his press.

15 Caldelari, *Bibliografia luganese del Settecento*, 155–56. Again, Agnelli denied his involvement.

16 There was a Venetian edition of 1762, the one to which the nuncio's letters refer, which precedes both that with Lugano as the false place of publication (printed actually in Venice by Giuseppe Bettinelli) and that of the same year published by Agnelli with a the real place of publication in Lugano. On this work and on Venice-printed anti-Jesuit publications in general, see Franco Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. 2, *La Chiesa e la Repubblica dentro i loro limiti, 1758–1774* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), 101–62, esp. 123; Mario Infelise, "Gesuiti e giurisdizionalisti nella pubblicistica veneziana di metà '700," in *I gesuiti e Venezia*, ed. Mario Zanardi (Padua: Editrice Gregoriana, 1994), 663–86.

raccolta di lettere inedite (a collection of letters demonstrating the saint's mistrust of the Society),¹⁷ and a translation of *Risposta del Venerabile Servo di Dio don Giovanni Palafox e Mendoza vescovo d'Angelopoli in favore della sua giurisdizione episcopale, fatta al Memoriale de' religiosi della Compagnia del Gesù, contro il detto Venerabile Servo di Dio*.¹⁸ Lastly, in 1764, Agnelli reprinted *I lupi smascherati* (that is a hotchpotch that reworked the famous *Monita secreta*), once again with a fictional place of publication.¹⁹ These publication choices brought relations with the nuncio to a head, Oddi having hitherto hung back from specific attacks on the printer.

It may be, as was insinuated even in the eighteenth century, that Oddi initially proceeded with caution, for he entertained hopes of gaining, through Agnelli, the goodwill of Ambassador Almada and of following his uncle Giacomo's footsteps by becoming nuncio in Lisbon through the favor of the court.²⁰

17 *Terza raccolta di lettere inedite del glorioso S. Carlo Borromeo arcivescovo di Milano in cui a' suoi luoghi sono citate le lettere già stampate, e si dà infine un indice* (Lugano: Per gli Agnelli, 1763). See Caldelari, *Bibliografia luganese del Settecento*, 130–35.

18 Juan de Palafox (1600–59), bishop of Puebla de Los Angeles, who clashed violently with the Jesuits in Mexico and was persecuted by the Inquisition as a consequence, was often deployed in propaganda hostile to the Society, particularly in Spain, where his writings were rehabilitated in 1761. The Jesuits, on their side, did their utmost to obstruct the campaign for his beatification. On him, see Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo, *Politics and Reform in Spain and Viceregal Mexico: The Life and Thought of Juan de Palafox, 1600–1659* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004). For polemics about Palafox in the Enlightenment and pre-expulsion Spain, I will cite here only Niccolò Guasti, *Lotta politica e riforme all'inizio del regno di Carlo III: Campomanes e l'espulsione dei gesuiti dalla monarchia spagnola (1759–1768)* (Florence: Alinea, 2006), 29, 51. The Lugano translation of the *Defensa canónica por la jurisdicción episcopal* (1st ed. 1652) was based on the text published in a complete edition of Palafox's works published in 1762 with the permission of the king of Spain.

19 *I lupi smascherati nell'appendice alle riflessioni del Portoghese, nella traduzione, e confutazione del libro intitolato Monita Secreta Societatis Jesu ed in altre aggiunte, e documenti rari, ed inediti* (Aletopoli: Stamperia del Disinganno, 1764), 271–72. On this work (which attacked the pro-Jesuit faction of the Roman Curia, went through several editions all over Europe, and was penned by Abbé Luigi Capriata or others of his circle who crossed swords with the Jesuit Francesco Antonio Zaccaria), see Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, 2:25–26; Sabina Pavone, *The Wily Jesuits and the 'Monita secreta': The Forged Secret Instructions of the Jesuits; Myth and Reality*, transl. John P. Murphy (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005), 80–82, 92–95.

20 Callisto Caldelari (with Beatrice Lampietti and Gianna Ostinelli-Lumia), *Bibliografia luganese del Settecento: Le edizioni Agnelli di Lugano; Fogli – Documenti – Cronologia* (Bellinzona: Casagrande, 2002), contains an article taken from the *Europa letteraria* of February 1, 1769, probably deriving in turn from the *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques* of December 20, 1768. In it, we read that in defending the Jesuits, Torrigiani was flanked in Lugano by the bishop of Como

It was certainly Agnelli who disingenuously kept Oddi informed of the latest publications and even provided him with copies of the texts in circulation, pretending for some months to have the interests of the Roman Curia at heart. This caused the nuncio to question Torrigiani's zeal—who favored taking a harder line with Agnelli—claiming to be waiting for the right moment to unmask him before the Swiss authorities.²¹ In the meantime, Oddi identified an enemy of the Society in the warden of the Capuchin friary at Lugano, Agostino Maria d'Origlio (dates unknown), who was shipping to Venice boxes of books from transalpine publishers critical of the Jesuits and Clement XIII's curia.

For all that the nuncio had written to Rome to recommend trusting no one, as the Swiss were: “An opaque and stubborn people given to talk,”²² he continued for some months to pass on information supplied to him by Agnelli, who did not hesitate on more than one occasion to mention the Jesuits in his letters, claiming in one to have found the introduction to the new edition of Pascal “truly infamous, extremely insolent, and full of falsehoods.” Sometimes, though, his antipathy to the Society got the better of him: people were saying—he wrote to Oddi—that the Jesuits enjoyed an income of forty million francs from the kingdom of France and its colonial possessions, news that had apparently come to his ears just in the months when the prospect of Louis XV's (r.1715–74) suppressing the order had led to an intensification of propaganda hostile to the Society of Jesus, called to defend itself from attacks on all fronts: Gallicans, Jansenists, and the Enlightenment.²³ Oddi was aware of Agnelli's subtle strategy, and indeed wrote to Torrigiani that the edition of Borromeo's letters had been an astute move because the Swiss Catholics “believe more

Giovan Battista Pellegrini (1760–64) but rather less enthusiastically by Oddi, who “aspired to be Nuncio in Portugal,” and for that reason maintained a close friendship with Giambattista Agnelli, knowing that he enjoyed “distinguished protection” there. Agnelli was ingenuous enough to trust the nuncio, who was aware of Torrigiani's distrust and therefore cautious in his correspondence with the printer. Simultaneously, Oddi had “so assiduously courted the Jesuits,” as to obtain a cardinal's hat, as well as the diocese and legateship of Ravenna (448–50). In the same volume, there are also published the letters of the papal secretary of state to which I will refer in the notes that follow.

21 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 179, fols. 69^r–70^v, letter from Oddi to Torrigiani, January 2, 1762, where he asks him to wait “until I gain his confidence” before denouncing Agnelli to the authorities.

22 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 179, fol. 83^{r-v}, letter of February 6, 1762.

23 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 181, fol. 57^{r-v}, letter of February 23, 1762. Agnelli attributed the introduction and notes of that edition of Pascal, perhaps printed in Neuchâtel, to some apostate priests living in Switzerland. He also alluded to the La Vallette affair. On the latter, see Andrew Dial, “Antoine Lavalette, Slave Murderer: A

in San Carlo than in the Gospels.”²⁴ Nonetheless, he continued to treat Abbé Giambattista with apparent kindness, hoping to smoke out other enemies of the Society. Agnelli exculpated himself by claiming to have refused to print numerous anti-Jesuit texts despite knowing that they would have found thousands of readers, and again denied being the publisher of the *Confutazione del tomo XI delle apologie de’ padri gesuiti* or of *Lupi smascherati*: this second book in any case circulated freely throughout Italy thanks to the printers in Lucca and Venice. He wrote to Oddi: “I have no doubt that I have many enemies in Milan too, because all you need to acquire them is that there be Jesuits there, or their abettors, and for you not to think like them.” By the spring of 1762, he was openly challenging the nuncio’s authority, making a mockery of the fact that the Jesuits were gathering information in Menaggio, Malagrida’s birthplace, in order to push for his beatification. As he reminded Oddi, the curia should not forget that the Agnellis enjoyed the emperor’s protection and were therefore as “free to sell anti-Jesuit works,” as any other printer.²⁵

Torrigiani, for his part, clearly did not totally trust Oddi, if he instructed Monsignor Giuseppe Garampi (1725–92) to interrupt his journey to the German lands, and assist him in monitoring book production for a few months, so that the nuncio again felt called on to justify his strategy to the secretary of state.²⁶ In any case, it was Agnelli himself who informed Oddi of the publication of the *Monumenti veneti*, a collection of documents painting the Jesuits “in particularly lurid colors,” perhaps to justify a second expulsion of the Society (the first one being the 1606 Interdict).²⁷

At this point, Oddi changed tack and denounced the printer to the Diet of Lugano, along with his “poisonous products,” which included many articles published in the *Gazzetta*. As he wrote to Torrigiani, “I fear that the ardor of the printer [...] derives from the encouragement of an important individual. In fact,

Forgotten Scandal of the French West Indies,” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 8, no. 1 (2020): 37–55, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/22141332-0801P003>.

24 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 179, fols. 98^r–99^v, letter from Oddi to Torrigiani, April 3, 1762.

25 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 181, fols. 76^r–77^v, letter of April 7, 1762.

26 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 179, fol. 116^{r-v}, letter from Oddi to Torrigiani of May 15, 1762: the nuncio had not yet induced Agnelli to confess his guilt but was allowing him to suppose he was not keeping too close an eye on him so as to give the impression that he “was indifferent to what emerged from his presses” and pounce at the right moment. It seems from the letter that Oddi may also have tried to introduce a youth into the printer’s as a spy.

27 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 181, fols. 80^r–81^r, letter from Agnelli of May 12, 1762.

he has hitherto launched his missiles with a hidden hand, for fear of repercussions, but has now abandoned the mask and dares show his face in public".²⁸ Oddi was not referring only to the Portuguese crown: the Confederation of the Swiss Cantons also protected Agnelli, making out that his printing permit was valid until 1766. The nuncio's chances of stemming the flood of anti-Jesuit publications were in any case minimal, while in the course of that summer his health took a turn for the worse. In a letter of November 20, 1762, he reported to Torrigiani that Agnelli, with the protection of the emperor, the king of Naples, and the duke of Modena was the only journalist translating and publishing all the articles hostile to the Jesuits that appeared in *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*, and that he was encouraged in this pamphleteering war against the Society by his partner, Abbé Giuseppe Vanelli (c.1736–97), who was even more rabid in his hatred for the Jesuits than he was.²⁹ Meanwhile, Agnelli's letters to Oddi were drying up as the printer realized that his position in the eyes of the curia was worsening. In fact, Oddi was by now convinced that Agnelli—doubly culpable as a member of the clergy himself—was covering "his own animosity against the Jesuits with a simulated devout fervor."

At the same time, the nuncio was forced to confess his helplessness, of which Agnelli was well aware, writing to the secretary of state that nothing more could be done without the intervention of the court of Vienna or some other secular authority.³⁰ The Holy See continued to place anti-curial and anti-Jesuit texts on the Index of Forbidden Books, already grossly swollen by Enlightenment writings, but the efficacy of such bans was highly dubious, as Oddi himself recognized. In December 1763, after months spent defending the Society of Jesus against its detractors, for the most part on the same wavelength as Cardinal Torrigiani, the nuncio was promised the archbishopric of Ravenna and informed that he would soon be leaving Lucerne to attend the Diet of Frankfurt, summoned to elect the new king of the Romans as extraordinary nuncio (Joseph II would be crowned on April 3, 1764). He was to be replaced in Lucerne by Monsignor Luigi Valenti-Gonzaga (1725–1808), whose arrival would soon have Agnelli missing the more pliable Oddi. As we read in a letter that Giambattista sent to Almada a few years later, Torrigiani—who had circulated in Oddi's absence a printed letter in which he looked forward to the ruin of the Agnelli printing works—had managed to get the dissemination

28 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 179, fols. 141^r–142^v, letter from Oddi to Torrigiani of August 3, 1762.

29 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 179, fols. 171^r–172^v.

30 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 179, fol. 242^{r-v}, letter of November 14, 1763.

of the *Gazzetta di Lugano* in the Papal States stopped, demonstrating that the Curia Romana had been transformed, thanks to its secretary of state, into a “Jesuit Sanhedrin.”³¹

Oddi was accompanied on his new mission³² by the learned Monsignor Garampi, who had already been sent to German lands,³³ and who kept a diary describing this second pairing with Niccolò.³⁴ Among the tasks assigned to the two nuncios was that of resolving a dispute that had arisen between the chapter of the cathedral at Speyer and its deacon, Count August von Limburg-Stirum (1721–97). In the prevailing circumstances, Garampi and Oddi quashed the idea of an appeal to the Holy See and, in order not to rile the elector Palatine—who had confiscated the lands of the chapter that fell within his principality—referred back the dispute to the judgement of the metropolitan archbishop of Mainz.

The German territories generally were being swept by a wind hostile to Rome, as would become apparent a few years later at the Congress of Ems (1786), but during the Diet of Frankfurt, Oddi did his best to defend the principle of “ecclesiastical liberty” and the nuncios’ right of precedence. He and Garampi also concerned themselves with the diffusion of a book that had appeared in 1763, shortly before his arrival in Frankfurt. This was the *De statu Ecclesiae et legitima potestate Romani Pontificis liber singularis*, immediately

31 This letter of September 27, 1768, conserved in the Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, is reproduced in Caldeleri, *Bibliografia luganese del Settecento*, 446–47. Caldeleri also writes that he has been unable to trace a copy of Torrigiani’s printed circular alluded to by Agnelli.

32 Oddi’s diplomatic papers, other than the Swiss series, are kept in Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Germania*, 646, 647 653. For Oddi’s German mission, see Ludwig von Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, 40 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 36:199–204; 37:399–400.

33 See Ignaz Philipp Dengel, *Die politische und kirchliche Tätigkeit des Monsignor Josef Garampi in Deutschland 1761–1763* (Rome: Loescher, 1905).

34 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Fondo Garampi*, 77: *Diario e viaggio del card. Garampi per la Germania nel 1764, allorché accompagnò in qualità d’uditore mons. Oddi che da nunzio di Lucerna andò nunzio straordinario alla Dieta di Francoforte per l’elezione di Giuseppe II a re de’ Romani*, with the staging points of the journey and several pages devoted to Oddi. For Garampi, see also Dries Vanysacker, *Cardinal Giuseppe Garampi (1725–1792): An Enlightened Ultramontane* (Bruxelles-Rome: Institut Historique Belge de Rome, 1995), esp. 83–112; *The Garampi Correspondence: A Chronological List of the Private Correspondence of Cardinal Giuseppe Garampi (1741–1792)*, ed. Dries Vanysacker (Leuven: Bibliotheek van de faculteit Godgeleerdheid, 1997); Pierpaolo Piergentili, “Giuseppe Garampi tra diritto, diplomazia ed erudizione archivistica,” in *Esperienza e diplomazia: Saperi, pratiche culturali e azione diplomatica nell’età moderna (XV–XVIII sec.)*, ed. Stefano Andretta, Lucien Bély, et al. (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2021).

translated into German and soon into other European languages, which circulated under the pseudonym “Justinus Febronius.” Its actual author was in fact Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim (1701–90), a priest who had studied with the Jesuits and at the universities of Trier, Leuven, and Leiden and become an auxiliary bishop, historian, and professor of law at Trier as well as adviser to Prince Elector Franz Georg von Schönborn (1682–1756). Taking his cue from Gallicanism, Hontheim espoused the cause of the German bishops against the Roman Curia and questioned the jurisdiction of the nuncios, in collaboration with Johann Caspar Barthel (1697–1771), Georg Christoph Neller (1709–83), and Jakob Georg von Spangenberg (1695–1779). In the original 1763 text, known simply as *Febronius*, Hontheim acknowledged that the pope was at the head of the hierarchy, but contested his claims to infallibility and the monarchical model of the church, while denouncing the abuses of the curia and the changes Rome had brought in over the centuries delegitimizing the ecumenical councils and the episcopal authority to which the government of the faithful belonged. The book, swiftly forwarded to Rome by the nuncios of Cologne and Vienna, was placed on the Index on February 27, 1764, but the author was still unidentified. Suspicion fell on Hontheim, but also on the bishop of Mainz, Ludwig Philipp Behlen (1714–77) and on a number of academics like Neller and Barthel at Würzburg. In the spring of 1764, however, Oddi learned for sure from the deacon of St. Leonhard in Frankfurt, Damian Friedrich Dumeiz (1728–1802), that Hontheim was the author and passed the information on to Rome.³⁵ Clement XIII moved cautiously in responding to the assault, fearing that an open controversy in German-speaking lands might weaken papal authority at a difficult moment. The first writings contesting Hontheim’s thesis began to appear there and on the Italian Peninsula only from 1766, but Oddi—whose health continued to be poor—was instructed to stir the German bishops into blocking their circulation. Not many pastors were inclined to toe the curia’s line, however, and Oddi was also criticized for having failed to bring the Diet of Frankfurt to heel. He defended himself by insisting that he had faced “a very hostile atmosphere.”³⁶ The mission to German lands was his last task as nuncio.

35 Heribert Raab, “Damian Friedrich Dumeiz und Kardinal Oddi: Zur Entdeckung des Febronius und zur Aufklärung im Erzstift Mainz und in der Reichsstadt Frankfurt,” in Raab, *Reich und Kirche in der frühen Neuzeit* (Freiburg im Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1989), 139–62.

36 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato, Svizzera*, 179, fol. 312^r, April 1764.

4 Briefly a Cardinal and a Jesuit: The Alleged Deathbed Religious Profession

Meanwhile, on February 20, 1764, Oddi had been appointed, as promised, archbishop of the rich metropolitan see of Ravenna. He had clearly made a good impression when he had served as vice-legate in the Romagna some twenty years earlier as his advent was received with a degree of warmth and, given his known literary sensibility, a number of eulogies, poetical compositions, and printed works of various kinds were dedicated to him. I will mention here only those of Anton Francesco Giovagnoli;³⁷ of the Camaldolese Mariangelo Fiacchi (1688–1777), custodian of the Biblioteca Classense;³⁸ of the members of Perugia's Accademia degli Eccentrici;³⁹ of the poets Pier Maria Ghini (1713–76),⁴⁰ Mauro Fattorini (1727–89),⁴¹ Giannantonio Montanari,⁴² and others.⁴³ For some months, still busy in the German-speaking lands and Rome, he was unable to take up residence in the diocese, nominating as his vicar Canon Francesco Malatesta Monaldini (1687–1765),⁴⁴ and in January 1765, as was customary among certain members of the curia, he distributed to his flock (or rather to the clerical part of it) a Latin pastoral letter of great piety, asking to be forgiven for being unable to perform his pastoral duties in person. In the same letter, Oddi grieved over the difficulties the church was facing at that time and over the circulating books that attacked the faith with honeyed words, in the name of noxious liberty. As head of the diocese he promised to see that his clergy carried out their tasks in a disciplined manner and that the dangerous new cultural trends from beyond the Alps would not spread to Ravenna.⁴⁵ He

37 *Vita di S. Margherita di Cortona*, 5th ed. (Rome: Eredi di Francesco Bizzarrini Komarek, 1766).

38 Biblioteca Classense di Ravenna, ms. 635 (misc. X), *Elogio del Card. Nicolò Oddi scritto dal padre M.A. Fiacchi*.

39 *Cantata in lode dell'Eminentissimo Signore Cardinale Niccolò Oddi, Legato Apostolico della Romagna, e Arcivescovo di Ravenna, umiliata [...] dagli Accademici Eccentrici* (Perugia: Costantini, 1767).

40 *Per la destinazione dell'Illustrissimo e Reverendissimo Monsignor Niccolò Oddi in Arcivescovo della Metropolitana di Ravenna, egloga* (Forlì: Per Antonio Barbiani, 1765).

41 *Per la promozione alla sacra porpora dell'Eminentissimo, Signor Cardinale Niccolò Oddi Arcivescovo di Ravenna, sonetto* (Faenza: G. Archi, 1766).

42 *Per la promozione alla sacra porpora dell'Eminentissimo e Reverendissimo Signor Cardinale Niccolò Oddi Arcivescovo di Ravenna e Principe, sonetto* (Faenza: G. Archi, 1766).

43 *Componimenti poetici dedicati all'Eminentissimo, e Reverendissimo sig. cardinale Niccolò Oddi Arcivescovo di Ravenna in occasione di sua promozione alla sacra porpora* (Viterbo: Zenti, 1766).

44 Giuseppe Luigi Amadesi, *Antististum Ravennatum Cronotaxis*, 3 vols. (Faenza: Archi, 1783), 3:108.

45 *Epistola pastoralis ad clerum et populum Ecclesiae Ravennatis* (Rome Typographia Hermathenaea, 1765).

finally arrived in the city on May 7, 1765, commissioned Andrea Barbiani (1708–79) to paint his portrait,⁴⁶ and began his pastoral rounds, taking a particular interest in the reorganization of the hospitals.⁴⁷ He also reformed the seminary and convened meetings of the clergy to discuss the more controversial cases of conscience in the diocese.⁴⁸ He established a close relationship with the local Jesuit college⁴⁹ and initiated a correspondence with the Pisan mystic Florida Cevoli (1685–1767), abbess of the convent of the Capuchin nuns in Città di Castello, to whom he commended his own fragile health.⁵⁰

On September 26, 1766, he was created cardinal priest, obtaining a special dispensation owing to the fact that his now aged uncle Giacomo was still a member of the Sacred College. He received his red hat on September 30 and, on December 1, the title of Cardinal of S. Maria in Aracoeli. He was appointed to the Consistorial Congregation, those of Propaganda Fide, Ecclesiastical Immunity, and of Ceremonies, but his health continued to decline,⁵¹ to the extent that he nominated his faithful collaborator Donati—who in the meantime had become bishop of Cervia—his vicar in Ravenna. On that same day of December 1, he was invested with the office of legate in Romagna, but in practice never performed as such, delegating his duties to the vice-legate Michelangelo Cambiasi (on May 8, 1767, Oddi was also appointed superintendent of the waters

46 See *La legazione di Romagna e i suoi archivi*, 176–77.

47 Carla Giovannini, “I luoghi dell’assistenza,” in *Storia di Ravenna*, vol. 4, *Dalla dominazione veneziana alla conquista francese*, ed. Lucio Gambi (Venice: Marsilio, 1994), 655–78, esp. 663, 675.

48 See his *Appendice alle costituzioni del seminario* (Ravenna: Stamperia Arcivescovile, 1765); and *Casus conscientiae quos in civitate et dioecesi Ravennatensi [...] discutiendos mandat Eminentissimus [...] Nicolaus Oddus [...] Archiepiscopus, et Princeps* (Faenza: Typis Archii, [1767]).

49 See *Per la promozione all’Accademia de’ Providi eretta nel Collegio de’ nobili di Ravenna diretto da’ padri della Compagnia di Gesù, nomi de’ signori convittori che dopo le consuete prove innalzati furono solennemente al magistrato della mentovata Accademia, o in essa ascritti avendo lor conferite in medaglia d’oro le insegne l’Illustrissimo e Reverendissimo Monsignore Niccolò de’ Conti Oddi Arcivescovo di Ravenna, e Principe* (Ravenna: Per l’erede del Landi, 1766).

50 See *Sacra Rituum Congregatio, Positio super introductione causae beatificationis et canonizationis Servae Dei Sororis Floridae Cevoli* (Rome: Ex Typographia Rev. Camerae Apostolicae, 1837), 206.

51 The cardinal’s poor health provided an occasion for some very minor bards to bolster his morale with their poetic compositions: Gioseffantonio Predieri, *Sua Eccellenza Reverendissima Monsignor Niccolò Oddi Arcivescovo di Ravenna e Principe, dopo una lunga pericolosa infermità, ricuperata avendo perfettamente fra l’universale allegrezza la sua prima salute col Salmo 29. rende a Dio grazie nella presente poetica corona* (Ravenna: Per l’erede del Landi, 1766); Gregorio della Torre, *Nella universale sospirata guarigione di Sua Eccellenza Monsignor Niccolò Oddi [...] Arcivescovo di Ravenna alludesi al paraggio delle virtù, e magnanimità di Giulio Cesare il dittator di Roma: Sonetto* (Ravenna: Landi, 1766).

in Romagna). In March 1767, while visiting Perugia, his physical condition worsened and, a few weeks later, he decided to embark on a journey to Arezzo to seek treatment from the celebrated physician Lorenzino Bresciani (dates unknown). Accompanied by one of his brothers (either Enrico or Ludovico), he reached that city on May 12, lodging initially in the local Capuchin convent and then in the Jesuit college outside the city center. Here, his condition declined, and he died—not yet fifty-two years old—on May 25, 1767. His corpse was laid out in the Jesuit church at Arezzo, where his funeral was conducted by the city's bishop, Jacopo G. Inghirami (1705–72). Before he was consigned to the ground, the Friar Minor Antonio Maria Negri (dates unknown) recited a fine funeral elegy of his own composition.

But dying only opened a new chapter in Oddi's dealings with the Jesuits, because in a few days the news began to get about that he made religious profession as a Jesuit shortly before his death, thus leaving this world as a member of the Society of Jesus, with the approval of Superior General Ricci. It is obviously not easy to establish what actually took place at his bedside. What we do know is that one of the newspapers of the day, the *Gazzetta toscana*, had originally announced the arrival of the cardinal in Arezzo, accompanied by his brother and a doctor from Perugia.⁵² The same paper, a few days later, was the first to carry news of his illness, recounting the last days of the cardinal without sparing details, as if relaying the terrible “passion” Oddi had undergone unflinchingly to expiate his sins before ascending into heaven as a regular man and no longer as a prince of the church. Indeed, the prelate had come to the city already

emaciated, prostrate, with a cadaverous look to him, feverish, and lacking voice, expectorating a fluid that did not bode well. His diarrhea produced liquid and abundant feces, his urine was meagre and thick, his legs and feet swollen due to an oedema. The doctors diagnosed an acute tuberculosis that would lead to his death within a fortnight at the most.

The situation had worsened on May 14, and a week later, there was nothing more to be done but administering the last rites, which occurred on the night of May 24–25.⁵³ A few days later, the *Gazzetta* added the news that the cardinal

⁵² *Gazzetta toscana* 21, May 12, 1767, 92.

⁵³ *Gazzetta toscana* 22, May 29, 1767, 99: “Si trovava estremamente emaciato, e prostrato di forze, in vero aspetto cadaverico, febbricitante, con continua e fiera tosse accompagnata da abbondante spurgo per due terzi marcioso e di vario colore: perdita avea affatto la voce, onde era, come dicono i medici, afono; difficile tal volta, e tal volta dolorosa era la deglutizione. Soffriva da ben molti giorni un abbondante, e colliquativa diarrea. I piedi e le gambe erano

had passed away in the Jesuit college, where he had been staying; that the body had been laid out with a rochet, a mozzetta, and a red cap, as was the usage for cardinals; that prayers had been recited over him by some mendicant friars and secular priests; and that the corpse, in pontifical vestments, had been transferred two days later to the Jesuit church, dressed in black “as he wished to be buried.” Bishop Inghirami had celebrated a sung Mass and Negri recited his eulogy before the late cardinal was buried in the church itself.⁵⁴

Neither the *Gazzetta*, nor the *Diario ordinario*, which reported the event on May 30, 1767, made mention of Oddi’s religious profession in relation to the Jesuits.⁵⁵ However, the cardinal’s death produced some fuss in the Roman curia, which we know about thanks to the dispatches of a Lucchese diplomat resident at the papal court since 1758. Already on that same day of May 30, Filippo Maria Buonamici (1705–80)—who had for some time reported to the republic’s authorities on what was going on in the Society of Jesus after its expulsion from Spain (despite the misgivings of the pope, some of the Jesuits

edematose, le urine scarsissime, rannose, e con pessimo sedimento. Il complesso di questi sintomi determinò il medico [...] a stabilire l’idea d’una tisi condotta all’estremo grado, ed a pubblicamente prognosticare, che non più lungo tempo di 15 giorni era assegnabile al termine di questa irreparabile malattia. Nel dì 14 detto intieramente mancarono le urine; riuscì però nei quattro seguenti giorni di rendere a quelli il quasi giusto e natural corso, e moderare la soluzione del ventre; ma la lenta febbre, la tosse e l’abondante sputo purulento andarono crescendo [...]. Per le quali cose dovette l’Eminenza Sua cedere alla violenza del male, e condursi all’estremo periodo, onde opportunamente munita dei Santissimi Sacramenti la mattina del 25, detto alle ore una passò agli eterni riposi.”

54 *Gazzetta toscana* 25, June 9, 1767, 107: “Avendo qui finito di vivere [...] l’Eminentissimo Signor Cardinale Niccolò Oddi nel Collegio de’ Padri Gesuiti, dove era venuto ad alloggiare, fu subito esposto a’ suffragj in rocchetto e mozzetta paonazza secondo l’uso dei cardinali defunti, e berretta rossa in capo sopra d’un alto letto funebre [...]. Dopo pranzo gli fu nello stesso luogo detto l’uffizio successivamente dalle religioni mendicanti, e nella notte da alcuni sacerdoti [...]. Fu subito la mattina dopo esposto in abiti pontificali nella Chiesa degli stessi Padri Gesuiti, nella quale volle esser sepolto, e che, quantunque in sì breve tempo, era stata tutta vagamente parata di nero [...]. Monsignor Vescovo Jacopo Inghirami [...] venne a’ intuonare pontificalmente la solenne Messa di requie, che fu cantata da scelta musica, dopo la quale fu letta l’Orazione Funebre dal Molto Reverendo Padre Maestro Antonio Negri Minor Conventuale [...]. Alle 4 poi della sera, spogliato il cadavere delle vesti pontificali [...], e rivestito di nuovo in rocchetto e mozzetta, fu [...] seppellito in mezzo della Chiesa. Il Signor Conte Enrico Oddi fratello del defunto cardinale [...], dopo essersi trattenuto altri tre giorni per le necessarie convenienze, è ritornato a Perugia.”

55 *Diario ordinario di Roma* [Chracas], no. 7788, May 30, 1767, 12: “Con staffetta giunta mercoledì 27 corrente si ebbe l’infausta notizia di esser passato a miglior vita [...] nella città di Arezzo in Toscana, ove trovavasi di passaggio, l’Eminentissimo Signor Cardinale Niccolò Oddi Perugino, del titolo di Santa Maria d’Aracoeli, Archivescovo di Ravenna e Legato di Romagna; essendo nella sua età di anni 51, mesi 7 e giorni 28; e di cardinalato mesi 8 meno un giorno, restando vacante per la di lui morte il sesto cappello cardinalizio.”

had disembarked at the port of Civitavecchia)—wrote that Oddi was mourned as a cardinal endowed “with exceptional qualities,” “amenable manners,” and a great ability “in dealing with the courts of Europe to the advantage of the Holy See.” But a week later, on June 6, he added that the solemn adhesion to the Society, made on the point of death in Arezzo, in the Jesuit house, had been the subject of heated debate, all the more so since the Jesuits had refused to offer the clergy of the city any contribution to the funeral expenses. Given the general atmosphere of hostility—Buonamici clarified—such stories “gravely damaged the cause of the Society in that they appeared to confirm the negative myth spread about by its enemies that the Jesuits, to extend their power, would turn anything, everywhere and at every social level, to their own ends.”⁵⁶ Lucca also produced the first (unofficial) biography of the cardinal, written by Bartolomeo Antonio Talenti, a man who was certainly *au fait* with the newspaper reports and Buonamici’s letters. According to Talenti, the Arezzo Jesuits

in the prevailing circumstances which saw their institution at the mercy of hostile circumstances, had sought to find a buttress in Cardinal Oddi’s religious profession made on his deathbed, as had happened before, when he feared he was dying during his sojourn at Lucerne: profiting also from the burial of his mortal remains in the church of their college first as a cardinal and then as a professed member of the order according to the usages of the Society.⁵⁷

56 See Giovanni Sforza, “Papa Rezzonico studiato ne’ dispacci d’un diplomatico lucchese,” *Memorie della Reale Accademia delle Scienze di Torino: Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, serie II, 65, no. 6 (1915): 1–54, Buonamici’s dispatches, 49–50, May 30 and June 6, 1767: “Egli è stato compianto universalmente, sì perché era un cardinale dotato di qualità singolari, e per le maniere facili, e per la stima che si era conciliato nell’essere Corti attissimo a trattare gli affari della Santa Sede, e sì ancora perché rapito dalla morte in verde età e sul principio delle sue fortune»; «Argomento di piacevoli discorsi è stata la professione solenne di gesuita che fece in Arezzo, nella casa de’ Gesuiti, poco prima di morire [...], onde essendo stato sepolto nella chiesa loro, negano que’ Reverendi Padri di dare al parroco la quarta del funerale. Tutto in queste circostanze nuoce mirabilmente alla loro causa, perché viensi a comprovare ciò che da’ loro nemici è stato più volte esagerato, cioè che questa Società, per dilatare la sua potenza, abbia in ogni luogo e in ogni ceto e in diverso abito li neri suoi satelliti.”

57 “[I padri gesuiti di Arezzo] reputarono a particolare loro conforto nel presente sbattuto sistema del loro istituto, che l’Eminenza Sua, prima di chiuder gl’occhi al mondo, professasse il loro istituto istesso, come altra volta aveva praticato in altro assalto sofferto a Lucerna ne’ Svizzeri: lucrando così le mortali di lui spoglie, alle quali doppio li funerali convenienti alla dignità e replicateli secondo il costume de’ professi nella Compagnia, diedero sepoltura nella chiesa del loro collegio.” In *Päpste und Kardinäle in der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts (1730–1777)*:

But comments of the kind were not long confined to Rome and Lucca: in the space of a few weeks, news of the cardinal's Jesuit religious profession and of his earlier similar attempt at Lucerne, where Oddi had fallen ill while combating the publication of anti-Society tracts, was all over Europe. Furthermore, the events at Arezzo, framed in this way, soon became a weapon against the Jesuits, accused of manipulating consciences even at the point of death, and, above all, of aiming to reach the highest levels of society and the hierarchy of the church. On December 2, 1767, some months after the event, the most famous of the pro-Jansenist newspapers, the *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*, decided to join in the exploitation of the story of Oddi's alleged deathbed religious profession and unleash a violent attack on the Jesuits. Isn't it true—asked the author of the piece—that the Society secretly manipulates men and women at every level of society, not excluding married persons, or sovereigns, or popes? We can be sure that it does—he went on—because we can read as much about it in the third volume of Christophe Coudrette's *Histoire générale des Jésuites*, or in the *Discours sur les Jésuites vivans dans le monde en habits séculiers* by Barthélemy-Gabriel Rolland d'Erceville, president of the Paris parliament; or in the *Compte rendu des constitutions de la Société* by Jean-Pierre-François Ripert de Monclar, the king's procurator-general at the Parliament of Provence (these three works had appeared in 1762 in a climate of pronounced anti-Jesuitism). But now we can add another example to those cited in these works, one that is causing a good deal of disquiet in Italy. The case in question—the author explained—is being reported here after a certain lapse of time, for this paper, before passing them on, wanted to be sure of the facts of what had taken place this May in Arezzo, when

Cardinal Niccolò Oddi, formerly nuncio in Switzerland and in Frankfurt, and lately archbishop in Ravenna and legate in Romagna, having fallen ill in the college of the Jesuits, and feeling himself close to his end, sent for the vicar general and the canons of the cathedral in order to declare in their presence that he was a Jesuit, whom the Superior General had exempted from wearing the habit, and wished to be buried as a professed father of the Society. This statement has been confirmed since in many letters and a certain informant has reported that the cardinal took such vows in Cologne, when he was nuncio in Germany. Furthermore, the Jesuits have quarreled with the cathedral chapter over the funeral expenses,

Das biographische Werk des Patriziers von Lucca Bartolomeo Antonio Talenti, ed. Sabina M. Seidler and Christoph Weber (Frankfurt am Main: Lange, 2007), 494–96.

which the fathers of the Society refuse to pay despite the cardinal being one of their own.⁵⁸

Leaving aside contemporary propaganda, it seems quite probable that Oddi did in fact make his religious profession in the Society of Jesus. Contrary to what the Society may have hoped, his gesture did not do the Jesuits any good though. Their enemies throughout Europe circulated a notion that one who defended the Jesuits so assiduously could only be a clandestine Jesuit himself (according to the rumors, the cardinal may already have entered the Society in Frankfurt, or Cologne, or Lucerne). But in his reply to the Jesuit superior of Arezzo, who had informed him of the affair, Superior General Ricci gave no hint as to whether the presumed religious profession had been accepted by the Society's superiors.⁵⁹ It is telling that the name of Niccolò Oddi—a

58 *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*, December 2, 1767, 196: "D'Italie. La Société des Jésuites peut-elle par la nature de son Institut comprendre dans son sein des hommes de tout les Ordres; des laïcs, des gens mariés, des Evêques, des Papes, des Rois? Cette question est traitée avec beaucoup de soin dans l'*Histoire générale des Jésuites*, tome 3 [...]. On y prouve qu'aux termes de l'Institut, la Société doit avoir & que, de l'aveu même des Jésuites, elle a effectivement des ces membres externes qui, sans en porter l'habit, lui sont néanmoins liés par des voeux, surtout par celui d'obéissance au Général ou aux Supérieurs par lui préposés. M. le Président Rolland fit aux Chambres Assemblées, le 2 avri 1762, un *Discours*, ou il prouva par des faits la réalité de cette classe de jésuites. Enfin M. de Montclar approfondit de nouveau cette question, de maniere à ne plus laisser lieu de douter qu'il n'y ait de ces sorts de Jésuites cachés sous un habit séculier [...]. Aux exemples cités dans ces différent ouvrages, nous en joindrons un récent, qui a fait beaucoup de bruit en Italie. Le desir de découvrir sur ce nouveau fait le plus de particularités qu'il nous seroit possible, elle cause que nous n'en avons pas parlé plutôt. Au mois de Mai dernier mourut à Arezzo [...] le Cardinal Nicolas Oddi, ci-devant Nonce en Suisse et a Francfort; ensuite Archevêque de Ravenne, et nommé depuis peu à la Legation de la Romagne. Ce cardinal étant tombé malade dans le Collège des Jésuites [...], et se voyant près de la fin, manda le Vicaire Général et plusieurs Chanoines de la Cathedrale, et déclara en leur présence qu'il étoit Jésuite, qu'il avoit été dispencé par le Général de porter l'habit de Jésuite, mais qu'il vouloit être enterré avec cet habit. Ce fait est confirmé par plusieurs lettres. Quelques-unes ajoutent que ce Cardinal avoit fait ses voeux à Cologne, pendant sa Nonciature en Allemagne; et qu'il y a eu dispute entre le Chapitre de la Cathédrale et les Jésuits au sujet de certaines frais funéraires, que se peres refusoient de payer, quoique, ce Cardinal étant leur Confrere, ils y fussent obligés."

59 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Rom* 47, fol. 452^v, letter to Father Teofilo Michel, June 6, 1767: "Learning of the loss of Cardinal Oddi was a great sorrow. I thank you for attending to him and for the news you have given me. However, I would like an account of the funeral and what happened after his death" ("Di sommo mio dispiacere è stat[a] [la perdita?] fatt[a] del fu signor cardinal Nicolò Oddi, e ringrazio V.R. dell'[assistenza?] a lui usata e delle notizie datemi; desidero però che mi si dia nondimanco ragguaglio e del funerale fatto e di quanto

hypothetical Jesuit cardinal and considered such by some historians of the Society—does not appear on the authoritative list of the order's deceased members or of its professed members.⁶⁰

è occorso doppo la di lui morte"). According to another document (*Rom* 210a, "Catalogus Provinciae Romanae," fol. 24), Michel was from Leghorn, entered the Society in 1733, and made his religious profession in 1752.

60 See József Fejér and Joseph De Cock, *Defuncti tertii saeculi Societatis Iesu (1740–1773)*, 2 vols. (Rome: Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, 2001); and Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Ital* 33, "Prof. 4 Votor. 1765–1773."