



The Borgias: Three Faces of Evil

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The Borgias were the most infamous family in Renaissance Italy, and their legend principally revolves around three individuals: Pope Alexander VI, his daughter Lucrezia and her brother Cesare. Thanks to the alleged actions of these three, their family name has become synonymous with a lust for power, corruption, greed, sexual depravity and murder.

The lives of Alexander, Lucrezia and Cesare make for a great story, and there have been numerous novels, plays, films and television dramas devoted to them. Unfortunately, the demands of popular entertainment do not necessarily make for accurate history.

Whether the renaissance clan were truly as evil as they have traditionally been portrayed is open to question. Much of the Black Legend, which surrounds them comes from rival families who were equally as hungry for power and position, as were the Borgias. In truth, the Borgias were despised in Rome not just for their success, but because their family roots were in Valencia, in the north-east of Spain.

Certainly, some of the charges levelled against the family were correct. Alexander was greedy and corrupt and wished to create a legacy for his family. Without a doubt, he used unsavoury means to acquire the papal tiara but he was also a genuinely devout man who wished to modernise the Catholic Church and was a skilful and astute diplomat. He did have several mistresses and at least eight children, but so did many other popes of the era.

Lucrezia has been portrayed as a scheming whore who indulged in murder and incest. She did marry three times and gave birth to eight children, possibly more. However, much of the propaganda about her was circulated by Giovanni Sforza, her first husband, who had been cuckolded by his young wife.

Finally, there was Cesare, who acquired a reputation as a military leader, but also for ruthlessness in the acquisition and maintenance of political power. In addition, the Black Legend contains accounts of Cesare's licentious lifestyle, him murdering enemies and opponents and his alleged sexual relationship with his sister.

Whatever the truth, there is much to cover in the lives of these three individuals.

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