

SOMETIMES THE PAST COME BACK

THE GHOST OF GIROLAMO RIARIO

A MEDICI'S SETTLEMENT
FORGOTTEN BY HISTORY



I V O R A G A Z Z I N I

Ivo Ragazzini

The Ghost Of Girolamo Riario

«Tektime S.r.l.s.»

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The book is a historical novel born from a fact that really happened in 2010 in Italy, when some people told in the chronicles of local newspapers, that they saw a ghost in the town hall of Forlì, who was walking around with part of his head smashed, complaining. They also recounted the strangeness of having seen him hanging outside the wall of that building, near a window on the first floor, as if he was dancing suspended in thin air. But who was that ghost? What was he doing in that place? Why was his head bashed in? Who did he look like that? What was he complaining about? This book tells the story of a man called Girolamo Riario, nephew of Pope Sixtus IV, who was murdered over five centuries ago in the city of Forli, but few or no one seems to remember him. Sometimes the past comes back. This is an italian historical novel born from a fact really happened in 2010 in Forlì, north Italy, when some people told in the local chronicles, they saw a ghost in the old town hall, who was walking around with part of his head smashed, complaining about something. This book tells the story of a man called Girolamo Riario, first husband of Caterina Sforza, who was murdered over five centuries ago in the city of Forli for an aftermath with the Pazzi's conspiracy, and seems resurge from the past but no one seems to remember it. Get ready to discover secrets of the Italian Renaissance that you didn't even suspect.

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The Ghost Of Girolamo Riario

Italian historical novel

Ivo Ragazzini

Original title: Il Fantasma di Girolamo Riario

Translated by: Fatima Pretta

An aftermath with the Pazzi's conspiracy that continues to resurge from history

Get ready to discover secrets of the Italian Renaissance that you didn't even suspect

The Ghost Of Girolamo Riario

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Preface

This is the story of someone called Girolamo Riario, nephew or perhaps illegitimate son of Pope Sixtus IV, who ruled and was murdered over five centuries ago in the city of Forlì, but which few or none seem to remember anymore.

So this story is about a conspiracy that happened five centuries ago and since then, even if a lot has changed, it seems that sometimes the story keeps popping up.

Contrary to what one might think, this is not a new story, but an old story forgotten by everyone, which every now and then resurfaces and repeats itself over time.

It seems that, for some mysterious reason, these facts fluctuate and float over time as something that does not want to be forgotten.

Now, a question to ask to try to understand things like this could be:

Why does something that happened many centuries ago continue to fluctuate over time?

Or:

Why does something seem unwilling to cease and go beyond its time?

Well, there may be a couple of reasons for understanding these things.

One is that there are a lot of behind the scenes and things not well inspected on those facts.

And the other is that unclear and incomplete things seem to go on long and come back to the surface in time.

Which of the two will be the truth?

It could be a little one and a little the other and you will find out for yourself as you read the rest of this story.

Good discovery.

The author

Introduction

At the end of August 2010 a person, while under the town hall of Forlì, saw the shadow of a figure dancing on the external walls near a window on the first floor of that building.

Since it was evening, but it was still sunny, he believed it was a reflection on the glass and did not give it much importance.

But a few days later he saw that shadow moan with a deep cut in the head go out of a room in the city hall and run away into the corridor.

Later someone else told not only that he had seen the same shadow but also had heard it speak.

The testimonies said they saw a man with a part of his head split or missing telling and complaining about wanting to defend his lady in danger and asking for revenge against someone who had betrayed him.

Some details of these sightings were then told on January 31, 2011, on the front page in the local chronicles of Forlì and, to tell the truth, there were other people who trusted to have seen him even if they wanted to remain anonymous.

At a first glance some thought that it was Jacopo Feo, the second husband of Caterina Sforza, but according to the author, it was an old story forgotten by everyone's memory which dated back to 1488, when Riario was assassinated in the palace town of Forlì by three men who stabbed him on the first floor and then threw him in the square below, a story that many historians seem to have forgotten or put aside for some reason.

But what is known about Riario today?

Shortly. Currently it is known that an alleged image of him has remained, or rather has been saved in the Vatican, due to the fact that it was portrayed alongside his uncle, Pope Sixtus IV, by the painter from Forlì, Melozzo degli Ambrogi.

And even in Forlì, where he governed and was assassinated, almost nothing remains of him and although at the time he was the general commander of the pontifical army, very few still know today who was really this man, why he was assassinated and who were the real instigators.

Furthermore, as you will see later, many characters and details of this story were forgotten and buried under a kind of *damnatio memoriae*¹, that is condemned to be forgotten by people's and historical memory.

But memories cannot be completely erased and, as soon as you look at them well, they somehow seem to resurface and reaffirm their presence as if they were protesting that they had been put aside for too long.

And one could speculate that such a hunger for historical memory could create forgotten things that persist and resurface over time which can also be called ghosts of the past if you prefer.

Written quickly and fluently, halfway between essay and narration, this historical tale perhaps reveals for the first time in a frank and direct way many unthinkable facts, places and background, which happened to a person called Girolamo Riario, first husband of Caterina Sforza and nephew of Pope Sixtus IV, assassinated over 500 years ago by a conspiracy in the town hall of Forlì.

It also explains events never observed or completely forgotten for a long time which hardly anyone remembered anymore.

Here is a list of some things you will discover in this book.

Was a book of prophecy written that announced Riario's death?

Who Wrote It? On whose behalf?

Why did the ghost have his head split?

Who were the real instigators of the killers of Riario?

What had Riario done to end up murdered?

Did Lorenzo the Magnificent and his brother Giuliano de 'Medici, murdered ten years earlier in Florence, have anything to do with this story?

Was a company of hired assassins created to assassinate him? From who?

Why did Riario enter in church only surrounded by several guards?

What the killers of Riario do after killing him?

Is a true or a false story that Caterina Sforza would show her sex shameless from the stands of the fortress of Forlì, when her enemies asked him to surrender? What did she do instead?

And much more that you will discover and understand for yourself while reading.

So I wish you a good read and a good rediscovery of this completely forgotten historical event.

And, if after reading this book, someone accidentally encounters the ghost again, I'm sure he will understand it much better than before.

Forlì, autumn of 2010... the ghost appears

In a room not far from the historic city center, a researcher of biomagnetic phenomena, or a ghost catcher if you prefer and some witnesses of mysterious facts and presences, are interviewed by the researcher himself

“Have you seen the ghost yet, ma'am?” asked the researcher, while interviewing a lady who wished to remain anonymous.

“Yes. It looks better in the evening or maybe you see better in that hour”, replied the lady.

“Have you seen it several times?”

“Yes”, said the woman again.

“Where is he when you see him?”

“In the municipal building of Forlì. Once I saw it outside *Piazza Saffi*², it was suspended outside the wall, near a window on the first floor of the municipal building”, replied the lady.

“You mean he was standing on a window sill or on a ledge of the wall?” the researcher demanded for clarification.

“No. It was outside the wall and seemed to hang in the thin air”.

“Maybe it was suspended on an ancient framework that is now no longer in that wall?” commented the researcher.

“I do not know this”.

“I understand you lady. What did he do outside the wall?” continued the researcher.

“Nothing. It just seemed to dance near a window”, replied the woman.

“Which window?”

“It was the third window of the town hall, counting from the right”, replied the woman”.

“What was the ghost like?”

“Grey, a grey shadow and his head was open and split on one side, as if he were missing or they had cut off part of his head”.

“Wow. A good business card for introduce himself to someone. I guess you were at the least surprised lady?”

“Yes, surprised. You said well”.

“Okay lady. Have you seen it again and more?”

“Yes, sometimes he is in the corridor, another time he was in a larger adjoining room”.

“Do you see it when it's dark or there is little light?” the researcher asked more curious.

“No. I always saw it in the evening but never when it's completely dark”.

“All right, lady. What else have you seen about it?”

“I heard him say and moan something”.

“What did he say?”

“I didn't understand, his voice was weak and dimmering, and as well was his image”, explained the woman.

“Okay lady. What else have you seen?”

“Nothing else. That's all”, concluded the woman.

“Thanks for your information ma'am. If necessary, I will ask you more”, replied the researcher as he concluded the interview with the lady and was preparing to interview another witness present in the room.

“How did you manage to see the ghost?” asked the researcher, turning to the other witness who said he also saw it.

“I learned from friends about this presence in the building and went to look for it”.

“Why did you want to look him for?” asked the researcher curiously.

“I was only interested in seeing it”.

“And what have you seen?”

“More or less what the lady saw, but with a few more details”, replied the witness.

“What's more else details have you seen?”

“More than anything else, I heard him say something”, replied the witness.

“What did you hear saying about?”

“He was worried about his lady”.

“Did he speak directly to you?”

“No. Mostly he complained to anyone who could listen to him”, replied the witness.

“He complained about what?”

“Of what they had done to him and he wanted to take revenge against the traitors and conspirators who attacked him”, replied the witness.

“Did he tell you who his lady was?”

“No, but he said he had to rush to defend her because she was in danger in the next room”.

“So he was worried because her wife was in danger in the next room?”

“Yes, he more or less complained about it and demanded revenge for the conspirators who had done all this”, explained the witness.

“Did the ghost tell you what they had done to him?”

“He didn't say this but he knew who the conspirators were and demanded revenge them”, replied the witness.

“Did he also tell you who the hit men and the conspirators were?”

“Yes. And he also knew who were the real perpetrators”.

“Who were they?” asked intrigued the researcher.

“I'm not want to tell you that”.

“Why?”

“It's a long story and I don't think you'd understand me”.

“It is not so, but I respect your will. Anyway, do you have any idea who could be the woman he wanted to defend?” asked curious the researcher.

“Yes. She was Caterina Sforza the ancient lady of Imola and Forli”, replied the witness.

“So who would the ghost be? One of her three husbands, I supposed³”.

“That ghost was not just anyone of them but Girolamo Riario, first husband of Caterina Sforza and nephew of Pope Sixtus IV⁴, who was murdered in that palace 500 years ago by a conspiracy, while Caterina had locked and barricade herself up in the next room and desperately asked for help. And that is a story that has remained unclear and mysterious in many places until today”, the witness replied all in one breath.

The researcher remain slightly surprised for a while by what he had just heard. Then asked:

“But it could have been Jacopo Feo. As far I know, was he also a husband of Caterina Sforza and died in an ambush from a sword blow to the head”.

“No. It was Riario, and he was murdered in that palace. Jacopo Feo was murdered in the street in a place very far from there, halfway down *Corso Garibaldi*, where the *Morattini bridge*⁵ once stood” replied the witness.

“And why then did the ghost have his head smashed in one side?”

“Because someone smashed it down like that”, replied the witness.

“Why would someone do such a thing to him?” asked the researcher.

“You seem a bit naive. There may be many reasons in the world to do things like that to someone”. replied the witness smiling.

“Say them”.

“But I told you it's a long story”.

“Never mind. Recall it back”, the researcher urged him.

“All right. Officially, Riario was murdered towards evening in the *nymphs room* of that palace by three conspirators he believed to be trusted friends. One of them, while the other two waited outside, entered in the room, that no longer exists with an excuse and stabbed him in the body”.

“After the first stab, Riario fell to the ground and tried to take refuge under a table, but was immediately reached and finished by the other two conspirators, who took and stabbed him to death, while Caterina Sforza had barricaded herself with servants in the next room and cried out for help”.

“After about half an hour, or so, he was badly thrown out from a window by other conspirators, who in the meantime had taken the town hall and his body was torn apart by other insurgents shouting freedom as they dragged him through the square”, the witness reply in one breath.

“Sounds like a bad story”, answer the researcher, thinking about it for a moment. Then trying to guess more or less how things might have gone, he say:

“So, if I understood correctly, it could be that when Riario was thrown out the window, he fall down on his head smashing it in the soil?”

“No. I didn't say that, and I don't think it's true. In fact I believe that Riario fall down on his feet and not upside down on his head”, explained the witness.

“And how would he have gotten is head crashed out ?”

“There are many ways to crash someone's head”, replied the witness.

“So how would it have happened?”

“You need to know a few more facts to understand the whole things”.

“And you know them?”

“Many of them”, replied the witness.

“And how would you know all these things? Did the ghost explain them to you?” asked the researcher with a smile.

“No. I am the son of the son, of the son of the son, from many lives of home-born Forli people, and I have inherited something from them”, replied the witness.

“Come on... how can I believe you...” smiled the researcher again, “are you trying to hide the truth from me?”.

“No”.

“So the ghost must have told you all about it?” the researcher insisted.

“No, he only said a few things. Others happened after his death and maybe he didn't even know them”, explained the witness.

“And you know about them?”

“I already told you: several, yes”.

“Excuse me, but who is the ghost? You or him?” the researcher asked jokingly.

“Him, of course”.

“And who are you?”

“A citizen of these places” replied the witness.

“And how would you know all this?”

“I just know it and that's all”, replied the witness who seemed not to want explain more details.

“Perhaps you've read everything in the history books?”

“Some things I have tried to verify in the history books, but a lot of them are not written in any history book”.

“So how do you know all these things?” insisted the researcher.

“I already told you. I am the son of the son of the son of the son of people here native and I have inherited something...”

“You are very curious. What else did the ghost tell you?” asked the researcher who felt more and more involved with this story.

“He promised revenge and blood to those who killed him and did this to him”.

“Did you ask him anything?”

“Yes”.

“You are also very brave. What did you ask him?”

“I demanded him for some details”.

“And what did he reply to you?”

“He didn't answer me”.

“Wait a moment. Did you done spirit sessions or something like that for ask him those questions?” demanded the researcher, beginning to suspect that something like that must have happened.

“No, I haven't. I'm not a spiritualist”, replied the witness.

“Who else enquire him then?”

“Many people as far as I know, but they didn't do a damn thing”.

“Why aren't they here in your place then?”

It's been a long time and many of them are already dead”, replied the witness.

“Who were they?”

“I'd like not tell you that”.

“Why?”

“I'm afraid you wouldn't understand”.

“Come on... you can tell me. I'm a researcher and I've seen a lot of things in my life”.

“I think I had seen more of them, but if you really want to...” the witness added.

“I do care”.

“It's okay but I warned you. Make yourself comfortable because the story isn't short”, said the witness as he prepared to tell the rest of the story.

It wasn't the first time someone had seen the ghost of Girolamo Riario in the town hall...

...the witness explained to the researcher.

“As early as 1500 it was said that the place where Riario fell remain stained of his blood forever, and almost two hundred years later, around 1650, some chroniclers even wrote about it⁶”.

“In the 1700s there were some who spoke of Riario's spirit or soul and in the 1800s there were some tales telling how, after his murder, his ghost wandering around looking for someone”.

“In the second half of the 1800s there was a culmination and several groups of spiritualists and Freemasons said they were in contact not only with him, but also with Caterina Sforza⁷ and someone else who was staying in the *fortress of Ravaldino*⁸”.

“In a few words, after his murder occurred in the room of the Nymphs, a room that was destroyed and no longer exists today, that ghost had been seen in various periods several times wandering around the palace and someone said he had seen him in the fortress of Ravaldino. Only that most people preferred to forget or keep quiet about it”.

“Even the third window on the first floor, counting from the left in front of the facade of the town hall, was in the past considered cursed by many, because someone thought it was the one where Riario was thrown down after his murder under a screaming crowd that tore his body to pieces. But that was not the real window from which Riario was thrown after his murder”.

“Where was it thrown from?” the researcher asked.

“From another window. Riario was killed in the *Nymphs Room*, but then his body was dragged out and taken to another room”.

“And what was the window where it was thrown from then?” the researcher interrupted him.

“The window was on the opposite side of the building facade, the third window counting from the right”.

“But that's the window where the woman said she saw the ghost dancing”, said the researcher in amazement.

“Exactly, that woman saw him in that window, only he wasn't dancing at all”, replied the witness smiling a little.

“And what was he doing then?”

“It's too early to tell that. There are many other things you should know before”, explained the witness to the researcher.

“All right, so the *nymphs room* wasn't the one where he was seen dancing?” asked the researcher.

“No, that was just a window through which his body was dragged after his death. That room was destroyed by his wife Caterina Sforza after his murder and no longer exists today”.

“And after five centuries, you still know such things and details?”

“Actually, I know a more lot of it”.

“I understand, go ahead”, replied the researcher.

“Returning to the window from which he was thrown out, the spot where Riario fell on the under square was marked for a long time and many people in all ages and centuries knew this. Only today, no one remembers it anymore. Since then many people in all ages have seen his ghost and some even heard him”, explained the witness.

“How do you know all this?” asked the researcher.

“You run fast and go ahead too much. I already told you there's more to know”, replied the witness as he began to tell more.

Romagna five centuries earlier

*Faenza Market in early 1488. A fencing master approached a wealthy farmer from Forlì surrounded by friends in the middle of the square. The master want delivering them a book of black prophecies to be reported in Forlì*⁹

The fencing master arrived in front of the farmer and his friends and asked aloud:

“Sir, I need a favour from you”.

“Who are you?” answers the farmer.

“My name is Cesare *Scrimidore*¹⁰ from Faenza and I am a long-time friend of *Leon Cobello*¹¹, painter and chronicler of your town of *Forlivo*¹²”.

“I know it's a your friend, and I want delivering him something through you that I owed him for a long time. We will both very grateful if you do that.”

“Yes. I know the chronicler *Leone Cobelli*. Tell me what this is at all”, replied the farmer.

“He begged me to give him this book personally, which was given to me by a *soothsayer friar* minor of St. Francis, and since I don't have the opportunity to go to *Forlivo*, I ask you to give it for me”, said the swordsman.

“All right. Who should I tell him you are?” replied the peasant.

“Say him I am a swordsman from Faenza and I send him a book by an *astrologer friar* so that you know what kind of destiny is written of your lord Girolamo Riario and your lands in the heaven and in the stars”.

“But what heavenly destiny written in the stars are you talking about, sword master?” spoke a scribe of the peasant present at the speech.

“Sir, don't tense or argue with me about things decided and willed from the heights and heavenly spheres. It is all written in this book and no one can say otherwise¹³”.

“Reach over Sir *Leon Cobello*, give him this book and tell him that this is the destiny of what will happen to your lord and city and he will know what to do about it”, replied the swordsman threateningly.

“I don't wish to discuss with you in front of everyone, but know that many of the people of Forlì already know what is happening in our lands and our Count Girolamo Riario. And they don't need soothsayers nor astrologers to know what is happening in our lands¹⁴”, replied the scribe.

“Maybe You are talking about things you do not know. You must know that this book was written ten years ago by an astrologer of these lands and tells of things that have already happened and others that have yet to happen in the government of your city until the year one thousand five hundred”.

“So what? There are many prophecies in those lands runned across by invisibles Count Riario's enemies”.

“And that confirm the things that are still destined to happen there, willed by God and celestial mechanics¹⁵”, replied the fencing master.

“If you say it was written ten years ago, so tell me who wrote it? Who is the soothsayer who gave it to you?” asked the scribe.

“That is not for you to know”.

“So I bet it was the astrologer *Girolamo Manfredi*, friar and healer astrologer, related in its name to your lords of Faenza, friends of Florence and enemies of Riario¹⁶”, replied the scribe.

“This too is not given you to know, but what the matter?” replied the swordsman.

“The matter is: who has paid this astrologer friar to make this book? Astrologers and horoscopes cost a lot and someone rich must have paid for them”, asked the scribe even more critically.

“I don't know what's your problem, and I'm not want argue about it with you. But if you mean to say that I am a *ciurmadore*¹⁷ and you want to pass the truth on to the *tournament*,¹⁸ I will be well disposed to it”, replied the swordsman.

“I am a scribe and I do not intend to say that you are a swindler, nor do I intend to hold on you or pass with you at *tournament*, I just wanted to know how things were to take note for me and my citizens”, the scribe lowered his tone.

“Then let the Master *Leon Cobello* do this and let's end our discussion here that is better in this way”, concluded the fencing teacher with the scribe.

“You”, ordered the fencer at the farmer:

“Take and keep this book. Just give it to Master *Leon Cobello*, and he'll know what to do with it. We'll both be grateful for what you do for us”.

“All right, let's not quarrel again about it”, said the farmer, taking the book, turning is back to secure it in his travel bag.

“Listen, what did you say your name is?” asked the farmer, turning back again to the swordsman, but the swordsman had already quietly walked away in the crowd of the marketplace.

“When he arrived in Forlì the farmer handed the book to the chronicler *Leone Cobelli* telling him everything, but Cobelli, as hard he tried to remember who the swordsman and the monk might be, said he couldn't remember anyone who had promised such a thing to him. In any case the chronicler Cobelli was also an astrologer and held those prophecies in great consideration”.

“And as soon some strange sign appeared in the sky, he wrote that they arrived from Faenza or had been seen above the convent of the local Franciscan friars”, the witness concluded the explanation of his story.

The researcher had listened attentively him and asked:

“In a nutshell, do you mean say that this book was written by Riario's murderers to prepare the *Forlians* for his death and make the people believe that Riario was predestined to die?”

“Something like that, but planned a little bit better. A similar book was indeed ordered ten years earlier by people of Florence who run around Lorenzo de' Medici and contained the way and manner in which Riario should be die”, replied the witness.

“Lorenzo de Medici? Lorenzo the Magnificent ordered it?” asked the researcher in amazement.

“Yes, himself”.

“What does he have to do with Riario?” asked the researcher.

“He has a lot to do with it. It was in fact a settlement between them”.

“What are you talking about?”

“I'm telling you what happened. It all began when Pope Sixtus IV and his nephew, Girolamo Riario, try to take over Florence and overthrow Lorenzo de' Medici and his brother Giuliano de Medici”.

“And then what append?”

“And then Riario and the Pope found nothing better than trying to assassinate both during a solemn mass in Florence Cathedral, where they lying down Giuliano de' Medici in a pool of blood, while Lorenzo the Magnificent was missed and managed to save himself locking himself in a sacristy”.

“Are you talking about the conspiracy of Pazzi?” asked the researcher.

“Just that. The Pope, Riario and his followers organized it in Rome during a mass in the cathedral of Florence”, replied the witness. Then he added:

“The impact, the outrage and resentment at what a Pope and his nephew had organized in a church during a public mass, was enormous even at the time. And the reaction and revenge of the Florentines and Lorenzo de' Medici was equally proportionate to what had happened, so much that he set up a company of assassins or *'ucciditori'*¹⁹ with the aim of making a list of the people involved to take revenge on the conspirators who had taken part in that assassination”.

“And what about Riario?” asked the researcher.

“Riario was at the top of that list of murderers”.

“And what was the difference between a company of assassins and a company of ‘ucciditori’?”

“Not to much. At the time, assassins were considered murderers in the service of someone, while the ‘ucciditori’ were secret avengers with the task of settling crimes and avenging the work of conspirators and murderers. But apart from these small details, more or less both did the same things and operated in very similar ways”, replied the witness.

“So that book of prophecies was true?”

“Only in part, because it was not born as a real book of prophecies but as a kind of mocking in macabre verses that mocked and narrated the end that Riario should have and the fate that would fall over Forlì, immediately after his death”, replied the test.

“At the beginning, that book came from Florence and told facts and things that had to happen to Girolamo Riario and our city until 1500. They were more or less nothing else but the plans for revenge and the conquest of Forlì by Florence, disguised as verses and prophecies to take revenge for the conspiracy of the Pazzi in Florence”.

“What did that monk and that astrologer have to do with it?”

“Those Florentine verses were given to some friars of Florence and the surrounding area, as normal political propaganda of the time. So they would narrate and make well known to the people of those parts, the end that the enemies of Florence had to receive”.

“After a while these verse were also given to an astrologer followed and known in Romagna, so that he could read in the stars and explain *scientifically* to everyone what was about to happen to the Medici's assassins, because at that time astrology was considered by the people as science.

“Unbelievable”, replied the researcher.

“Not even that much. In truth, it was normal preparatory black propaganda, followed by the military conquest policy of the time”.

“And then what happened?” asked the researcher.

“Then, as the years went by and nothing of what the stars said was realized, someone ordered the Company of executors to realize what maybe was also written somewhere in the heavens, but for various reasons never happened on earth”, explained the witness.

“So what was Riario?” the researcher tried to ask.

“Girolamo Riario was the one who had organized the assassination of the Medici on behalf of his uncle Pope Sixtus IV”.

“And he was to take command of Florence, in place of Lorenzo the Magnificent, once he was assassinated. And that's why he ended up at the top of that company's list of *killers* or ucciditori if you prefer”, explained the witness.

“But why did Riario try to do such a thing?”

“For various reasons. One because he was *Captain General of the Church*²⁰ and the Pope had ordered him to take Florence”.

“The other, is that was interested in taking Florence and unite it with his lordships of Imola and Forlì and thus make a unique grand duchy adding Faenza, which stood between Imola and Forlì. at the time property of Florence”.

“That plan failed and only Giuliano de' Medici died, while Lorenzo the Magnificent saved himself from the attack of two priests assassin and you will soon understand the rest of the show”, replied the witness.

“Carry on”, nodded the researcher.

“Returning to the book of prophecies, before Riario's death mysterious inscriptions alluding something was found in Greek, on a column of the high altar of the church of *San Mercuriale in Forlì* and this made someone suspicious.”

“What was that inscription in the church alluding to?”

“According to many people of the time, they alluded to his death”.

“However the chronicler Leone Cobelli, took that book in verses that they had given him, wrote hesitantly about it and in fact talked about it doing, among other things, propaganda for the enemies”.

“But several suspected that it was a trick of the conspirators to disguise the murder they were preparing for he and bury Riario under a kind of *damnatio memoriae*,²¹” explained the witness.

“What is a *damnatio memoriae*?” asked the researcher.

Damnatio memoriae: The condemnation to be forgotten by history

“Have you ever wondered why you know a lot of things and facts about someone, while about others you only know some little things existed or happened but little or nothing is really well known about or what happened?” asked the witness.

“Yes, but I think it's due to the fact that in the place where he lived or where something happened, there were no good writers or reporters who decided to write the events. And so the memory of someone or something was lost”, replied the researcher.

“It may be almost true, but you said well at the end of your answer: in the end the memory of someone or something was lost”.

“Well, this is also possible for various reasons”.

“Yes, it is possible. But there are also some ways to make this succeed. It's almost impossible that something happen in one place and no one seeing nothing happen or forgetting all about, unless someone hard work to forget facts or make someone else forget everything”, replied the witness.

“I'm listening, continue your speech”.

“In contrast to events and characters from the past, of which we always know something, almost nothing is left about Riario and his exploits, including most of the official documents he wrote and signed”.

“Even the memories, sayings and tales that are usually handed down orally about someone, seem to be no longer present for Riario, while for his wife Caterina Sforza there are letters, written stories, sayings and memories that go on in time”.

“What's the cause?”

“*Damnatio Memoriae*, so the Latin people called it. It was a condemnation to be forgotten and removed from historical memory.”

“A practice that Romans and Egyptians had been doing for a long time and was used even after them to erase someone from history”, explained the witness.

“Basically every memory and thing the person had done in life was erased. Every writing he wrote, every image in which he was portrayed, every coat of arms and everything that remembered he. If the person had had coins minted with his name or image, it was forbidden to use them and they had to be handed over to be melted down or minted again in another form”.

“Even his properties were razed to the ground and stripped of all memory and that's what they did with Riario”.

“That was also what Caterina Sforza did in revenge for Riario's murderers when she took them and razed their houses and their property. So all memories and things about them would also disappear and they would be erased and forgotten from history too”.

“And where are these things written now?” asked the researcher.

“I have no idea where they are written now. But I can tell where they were written in the past”.

“Tell me”.

“The chronicler Leone Cobelli wrote some of them in his chronicles and, if you look at his original correspondence, you will see that some pages right in the spot that mention the facts of Caterina and Riario have been scratched and torn out”.

“Also another writer and chronicler from Forlì, very well known at the time, *Guido Peppo*, surnamed ‘*della Stella*’²², came to the same conclusions but now all of his writings no longer exist”.

“He had written many history books that told many facts and chronicles that happened in Romagna but all his writings disappeared, because he had been Riario's friend and his personal chronicler and perhaps for some other reason”, explained the witness.

“Who was this Guido Peppo, known as ‘*della Stella*?’”

“A writer and healer from Forlì, able to read and translate ancient Hebrew and Greek like few others in Italy”.

“Would a ghost have whispered all this in your ears?” asked the researcher.

“No, the first to tell me was my great-grandfather when I was eleven” replied the witness.

“Did your great-grandfather explain all these things to you when you were eleven?” asked again the researcher in disbelief.

“As strange as it seems to you, that's exactly what it is”.

Would you like to explain me who are you and what happened to you?

...asked more and more intrigued the researcher.

“My surname today is *Plaxxxxx* and the ancestors of my family in Riario's time were noble and in favour of the papacy, but back then we had another surname and we were called *Paosxxxx*”.

“We had residences and offices in Imola and Forlì by papal concession, then some members of my family took part together with other Forlì families in the conspiracy against Riario and were considered traitors, while others of our family remained faithful”.

“And so my ancestors were forced to change the surname to *Plaxxxxx*. to separate us from the original family who had not betrayed the trust they had received and remained a family of nobles. Then with the passing of the centuries, we went from fallen nobles to administrators and city officials and gradually became simple employees and workers of various kinds here in Romagna”.

“Is that all?” asked the researcher.

“It may not seem like much to you, but I assure you that buried down in a forgotten and fallen family is a condemnation to amnesia for me”, explained the witness.

“That may be true, but you have tried to remember and keep many things alive, and you don't seem a forgetful guy to me”.

“Yes, but a lot of people of my family became forgetful from a long time ago. And will not enough for me to remember everything for redeem and regain our lost family memories.”

“Do you have many relatives?”

“I had many relatives. Now most of them have a surname similar to mine and they don't even know any more who they used to be and that we were relatives”, the witness laughed.

“Why don't try to explain or tell something to them” said the researcher.

“Come on. Most people wouldn't even know what I'm talked about, and a few others wouldn't even care to remember if it is true what they heard. Men create their own prisons and then forget themselves in”.

“Maybe you're right”, said the researcher, thinking about it for a moment. Then he added, “Please continue”.

“At the end of 1700 an ancestor of mine, with French Enlightenment ideas, became an official collaborator with the Jacobins of the Napoleonic government, then settled in Forlì, and also wrote some reports and surveys on our population for their administrators”.

“He was apparently an esoteric masonic group with some Napoleonic officials in and began to study mesmerism²³ which had taken its roots in France at the time”.

“Carry on”, the researcher urged him.

“At night they used gathered together with Frenchmen in some rooms of the town hall and try to *mesmerize* many people to see what had happened in those places. And my enlightened ancestor also transcribed some things about what happened during those experiments”.

“Mesmerize”? The hypnotic practice discovered by Anton Mesmer?”

“Not really. *Mesmerizing* wasn't like hypnotizing and putting someone to sleep, but it was like *magnetizing* or tuning on, as we would say today, a person with someone or something”.

“Never heard of it before”, replied the researcher in amazement.

“Depends on how long time you means before. It existed in Mozart's time and only a century ago you would still have heard of this practice. Today it's no longer used, but back then it was used to *mental connect* a person with a place or another person”.

“You gives me some creeps just thinking about it. What happened anyway?” asked the researcher.

“It happened that some people *mesmerized* told what really happened in past and how some things had occurred in the centuries before, while others went over many details of what take place and told it like a heck.”

“Who were these people?”

“Some were Forli Jacobins in favour of the Napoleonic government that had settled for a short time in Forli, others were ordinary citizens and officials. And others were French military”.

“Carry on”.

“There were people who told many details, others who saw things that happened, others were a little reticent or frightened and told little or nothing”, explained the witness.

“And your great-grandfather would have told you all this when you were eleven?” asked the researcher.

“No. My great-grandfather was not yet born at that time, but he had heard from his father what had happened there and told me what they had done and what he still knew”.

“So your descendants told each other over and over the time what they knew and many of these things came from your ancestors in your hands?” asked the researcher.

“Pretty much, yes”.

“Tell me that”, said the researcher.

“After the Napoleonic government passed by, my Jacobin ancestor became an official of the municipality of Forli and died murdered by an his alleged illegitimate son in 1830”.

“Many years later another his nephews became custodian of the municipal warehouses which were then on the ground floor of the courtyard of the town hall. And he too, following in the footsteps of our ancestors, did esoteric research with other people in the late 1800s”.

“Did they only do esoteric research or did they something else too?” asked the researcher.

“They did something else too. So while they were there, they did some séances in the *fortress of Ravaldino*, that was the old fortress of Riario and Caterina Sforza, to which they had the access keys”, replied the witness.

“Séances in the late 1800s?”

“Sure. That was the heyday of those things all over the world”.

“That's true, but with all those mesmeric and séance sessions they did, what happened in the end?” asked curios the researcher.

“It happened that they tried to recall different people and not just Riario, to get him to tell them new things and many details”.

“Who did they recall?”

“Several people. One was Caterina Sforza, the others were some characters from Forli. Among other things, in the *fortress of Ravaldino* showed up the spirits of some French officers and Italian Jacobins who, eighty years before during the Napoleonic-Jacobin reign, had done mesmeric sessions inside that fortres, when they used as barracks for French soldiers”, explained the witness.

“Who were they?”

“French soldiers and some Forli officials from the Napoleonic era. The fact is that eighty years later, when the fashion for spiritualism arrived, other citizens towards the end of the 1800s, tried to summon people of all kinds to find out what had happened in past”.

“And these people who did the séances, eighty years after Napoleon's fall, who were they?” asked the researcher.

“I won't give you the names, but some of them were citizens. Others were former Garibaldians and Republicans. The keeper of the castle who took part in all this was my ancestor and, in 1957 when I was 11 years old, my great-grandfather told me a lot about what they knew and discovered then”.

“And what did they find out?”

“Many things about Riario and Caterina Sforza”, replied the witness.

“All right. Continue to tell me about Riario and Caterina Sforza then”, asked the researcher who was more and more raped and intrigued by the witness's account.

Who was Girolamo Riario and how did it happen in Romagna?

The witness begins to narrate:

“Girolamo Riario was born in Savona, his uncle was Pope Sixtus IV. So he became Count of Imola and *Bagnara of Romagna* by the will of his uncle who gave him those lands”.

“Moreover, Girolamo had a brother, Pietro Riario, who thanks to their uncle Pope or, according to some, their father,²⁴ became a very young cardinal and had a lot of ecclesiastical offices and numerous monasteries to manage”.

“Officially his brother was a cardinal, archbishop, pontifical and many other offices. He was as rich as he was young and it was not possible to understand how much he managed and how many assets he owned”.

“Just to give an example, at only twenty-six years of age his annual income came to sixty thousand ducats, which was then an enormous sum for anyone”.

“According to some he was also a little dissolute and lustful, but I would be cautious about that”, concluded the witness.

“Why?”

“Because he too was struck, along with Sixtus IV, by another kind of *damnatio memoria* that consisted of defaming them. He and his Uncle were part of the church and it was harder for those who dealt with these things to attack directly them”.

“Basically he was involved in some political scheming and gave Rome some historical festivals that, for cost and magnificence, ridiculed those ancient Romans, but it does not seem that he was a dissolute fool as many wanted pass him. On the contrary, like his brother and uncle, he was a fervent protector and observer of the Franciscans rules”.

“He died suddenly when he was only 28 years old and someone said he was poisoned or indigestion caused by too many revelries and memorable parties he had given, but it seems only that he fell ill during a journey and died”, explained the witness.

“So, at the death of Pietro Riario, Girolamo inherited his brother's economic and some of his ecclesiastical power, becoming administrator and manager also of his property, so much so that he was nicknamed the *Archi-Pope*, in contrast to the nickname of *Anti-Pope* which at that time the Pope's enemies received”.

“Probably in this days Girolamo Riario became one of the richest men in Italy, but Girolamo was more prudent and careful in managing money than his brother Pietro, so that he did not use give banquets or other pleasures than hunting”.

“Girolamo Riario was not a vain man, on the contrary he was a courageous and impetuous temperament, but a little reserved in character and, although his uncle was a protector of the Franciscans, he was more suited for the arms than for the church”.

“So, three years after the death of Cardinal Pietro Riario, Pope Sixtus IV, ran for cover his office and named Girolamo's cousin, Raffaele Riario, who was just 17 years old, as cardinal”.

“This young cardinal and Girolamo Riario recreated a copy of two trusted nephews in the service of Sixtus IV”.

“The Pope used them both well, one as his right-hand man in diplomatic and spiritual matters and the other in political and military matters. So he decided to use both them in the struggle for the fall of the Medici and the conquest of Florence”.

“Florence at that time was a beautiful and rich city, disputed by the Church which looking at Medici as their main enemies and considered the noble Florentine family of Pazzi, their main allies”.

“The Medici had become very rich and noble thanks to their banks and cash, while the Pazzi were less rich but more noble for centuries and faithful to the church”.

“In particular, the Pazzi's boasting descending from *Pazzino de' Pazzi*, a knight who had participated in the first crusade and, with his bare hands, had first climbed the walls of Jerusalem, thus opening the way for all the others crusaders to conquer the city”.

“*Pazzino*²⁵ Returning to Florence, with three fragments of stone from the Holy Sepulchre, received as a gift for his undertaking. Then he was celebrated with solemn honours and glory by all Florentines, and since then, their family has been considered noble and at the service of the Church”.

“So the Pazzi's family were the main allies of Pope Sixtus IV and Riario to attempt the fall of the Medici and try the conquest of Florence, by the famous *Pazzi conspiracy*²⁶”, concluded the witness his explanation.

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