

Francesco Cennini de' Salamandri

The purple-clad confidant of the Borghese

Born into an ancient family in Sarteano, apostolic nuncio in Spain, he came close to the pontifical throne on two occasions.

Francesco Cennini, born in Sarteano in 1566, was a powerful cardinal linked to the Borghese family. The second son of Curzio and Iacoma Franceschi, and the younger brother of Roberto (the first Marquis of Castiglioncello del Trinoro), he studied law in Siena. After taking orders in 1591, Bishop Ludovico Martelli of Chiusi assigned him the benefice of the Sarteanese parish of Santa Vittoria, rendered useless by the opposition of the Camaldolese Anselmo Venturi. In compensation, other responsibilities came his way: archpriest of the Cathedral of Chiusi and vicar general of the diocese. Having moved to Rome, he became an auditor of Cardinal Girolamo Bernieri, a collaborator of Camillo Borghese, who, in 1605, was elected pope with the name Paul V. The young prelate earned the esteem of both the pope and Scipione Borghese, who, upon Bernieri's death in 1611, welcomed him into his family.

With the demise of Antonio Maria Franceschini, Cennini became the auditor of Cardinal Borghese and the bishop of Amelia, inserting himself into the principal Roman congregations. He became such a reference for the Borghese (a family of Sienese origins) that he was entrusted with the supervision of the correspondence of the pope and the "cardinal nephew."

In 1618, Francesco Cennini was accredited by the pope as the permanent apostolic nuncio to the court of King Philip III of Spain. At the end of the same year, he added the title of Patriarch of Jerusalem to his episcopal title. In one of his last acts on January 11, 1621, Pope Paul V (who died on January 28) rewarded Francesco Cennini with the cardinal's purple. However, due to his delay from Spain, he did not arrive in time for the conclave, where Alessandro Ludovisi (Gregory XV), the main opponent of Pietro Campori, the candidate of the Borghese, was elected.

Cennini was soon recalled to Rome and excluded from the curial revenues; he was even denied additional income to those of the bishopric of Amelia. In the conclave following the death of Gregory XV in July 1623, the faction of Paul V seemed to dominate the scene, placing Cennini in an advantageous position. Once again, the support of Scipione Borghese turned against him. At the end of the conflict, the Ludovisi faction reached a compromise solution, that of Ma-eo Barberini. The new pontiff, Urban VIII, transferred the cardinal who had supported him in the conclave to the bishopric of Faenza, and, until 1627, as legate to Ferrara (where he was replaced by Giulio Sacchetti). He lived in Rome for about three decades, involved in the activities of congregations. In 1641, he moved to the episcopal see of Sabina. Upon the death of Urban VIII, during the lengthy conclave that followed, the candidacy of Cennini immediately gained broad consensus but was rejected due to his advanced age. It seems he received up to twenty-eight votes and was supported by the Spanish faction because he was considered hostile to Antonio Barberini, a supporter of France. The latter, in turn, supported the candidacy of Giovanni Battista Pamphilj, ensuring his election in 1644. The new Pope, Innocent X, passed on to Cennini his previous position as prefect of the Congregation of the Council. After a brief stint at the episcopal see of Porto, the cardinal died

in Rome on October 2, 1645. He was buried in the Roman basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, at the foot of the tomb of Paul V.