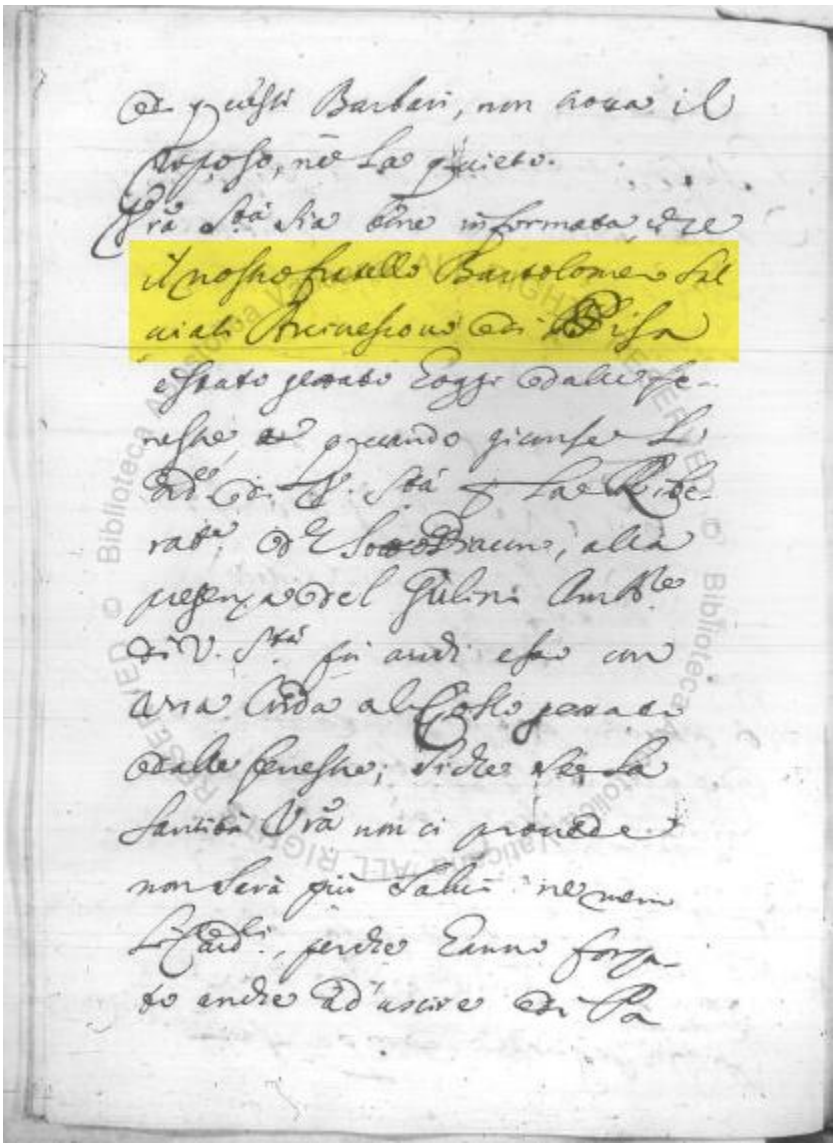


The Roman Ghost

UNCOVERING THE DUAL IDENTITY OF THE ARCHBISHOP SALVIATI

Carl Balowski | March 2026

Abstract

This article reexamines the identity of the Archbishop of Pisa executed in the aftermath of the Pazzi conspiracy of April 26, 1478. Although modern scholarship universally identifies him as Francesco Salviati, contemporary Roman sources preserve a striking alternative: Bartolomeo Salviati. The study focuses on two key witnesses: a report sent by Girolamo Riario to Pope Sixtus IV and the *Diarium Urbis Romae* of Stefano Infessura, both of which independently name the archbishop as Bartolomeo. Rather than dismissing this as a scribal error, the article argues that the discrepancy reflects a meaningful division between legal identity and lived social identity. It further contends that nineteenth-century positivist editors, committed to harmonizing archival inconsistencies, systematically normalized the Roman evidence in favor of the Florentine record, thereby obscuring an important historical reality.

To explain why Rome may have known the archbishop as Bartolomeo, the article situates him within the social and financial networks of the Salviati family, especially the prominence of his brother Bartolomeo Salviati, manager of the Salviati bank in Rome. It then advances the stronger possibility that Bartolomeo functioned as the archbishop's Roman name or persona within curial society. The essay concludes that the discrepancy reveals a geographic schism in identity: Florence preserved the archbishop's formal name, while Rome preserved the name by which he was known.

Introduction: The Noose and the Name

On the afternoon of April 26, 1478, the history of the Italian Renaissance was written in blood on the facade of the Palazzo della Signoria. Earlier that day, inside the Duomo, the Pazzi conspiracy had reached its murderous climax: Giuliano de' Medici was cut down beneath the vaults, and Lorenzo only narrowly escaped. In the savage reckoning that followed, the mob seized one of the plot's chief architects, the Archbishop of Pisa, still clothed in his ecclesiastical robes. Dragged to the upper windows of the Palazzo, a rope was fastened around his neck, and he was hurled outward to swing above the roaring crowd below.

In nearly every modern retelling—from the popular retelling of Christopher Hibbert to the scholarly treatments of Lauro Martines, Tobias Daniels, and Marcello Simonetta—the man is identified as Francesco Salviati.[1] The name is usually presented as settled fact, confirmed by Florentine baptismal records and by the papal bulls issued after the conspiracy. Yet once one steps outside the "corrected" histories of the nineteenth-century antiquarians and returns to the unvarnished ink of contemporary Roman testimony, another name emerges. In the secret dispatches surrounding the conspiracy and in the secretarial diaries of the Roman Senate, the man in the noose is called not Francesco, but Bartolomeo.

This was no mere scribal lapse. It reflects a documented split in naming that points to a deeper disconnect between the man's formal, legal identity in Florence and the social identity by which he appears to have been known in Rome.

The Primary Witnesses: A Pattern of "Error"

The clearest evidence for this naming discrepancy survives in two independent Roman witnesses whose apparent "error" has too often been brushed aside as a trivial lapse. Yet the convergence is too precise, and too contextually revealing, to dismiss so lightly.

The first source is a transcribed letter sent by Girolamo Riario to Pope Sixtus IV. Riario, the pope's nephew and one of the principal architects of the Pazzi conspiracy, was also the Archbishop's closest political ally in Rome (Figure 1).[2] The two had spent months moving within the same curial circles and helping coordinate the machinery of Medici overthrow. In the immediate and panicked aftermath of the conspiracy's collapse, a report was drafted for the pope describing the "barbarous furies" of the Florentine

[1] Martines, L. (2003). April Blood: Florence and the Plot Against the Medici. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press; Daniels, Tobias. "La Congiura Dei Pazzi Nell'informazione e Nella Cronistica Tedesca Coeva." *Archivio Storico Italiano*, vol. 169, no. 1 (627), 2011, pp. 23–76; Simonetta, M. (2008). The Montefeltro Conspiracy: A Renaissance Mystery Decoded. United States: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

[2] See Appendix I. Biblioteca Vaticana, Urbinate, cod. 1641 chart. p. 72. Sembra scrittura del secolo XVII. Senza data.

mob. Its wording is explicit: *"…Vostra Santità sia bene informata che il nostro fratello Bartolomeo Salviati Arcivescovo di Pisa è stato gettato oggi dalle finestre…"* — "…Your Holiness should be well informed that our brother Bartolomeo Salviati, Archbishop of Pisa, has today been thrown from the windows…"

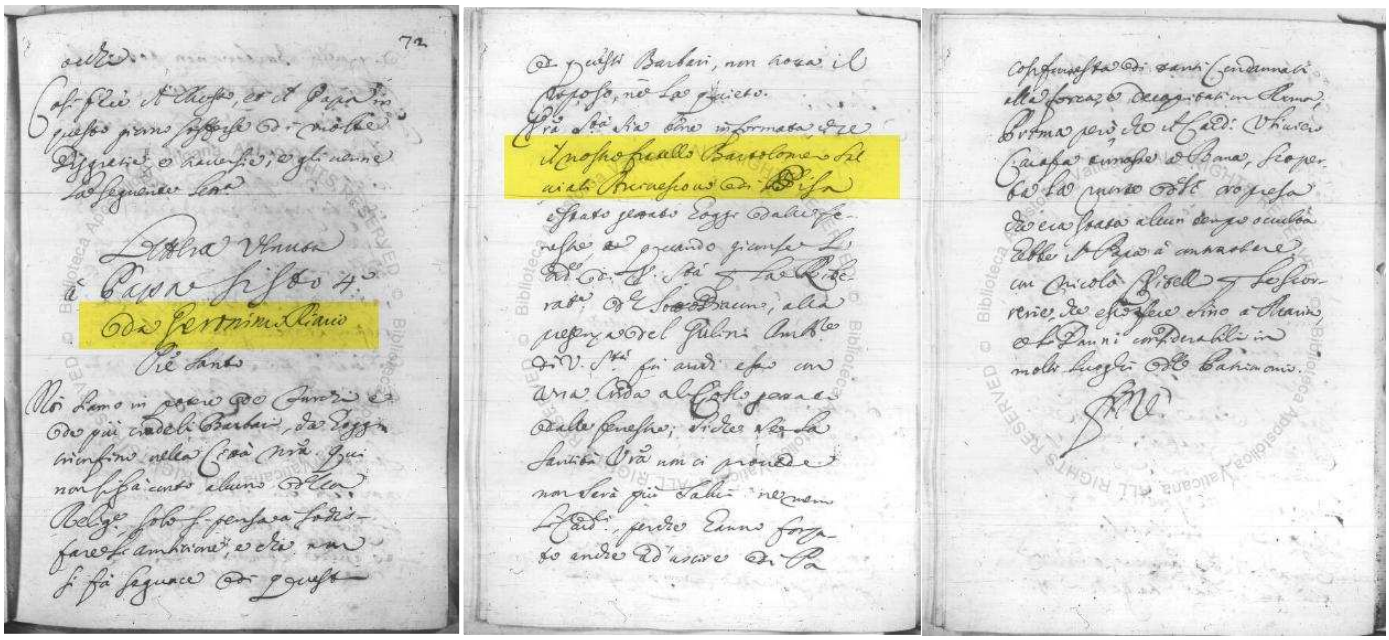


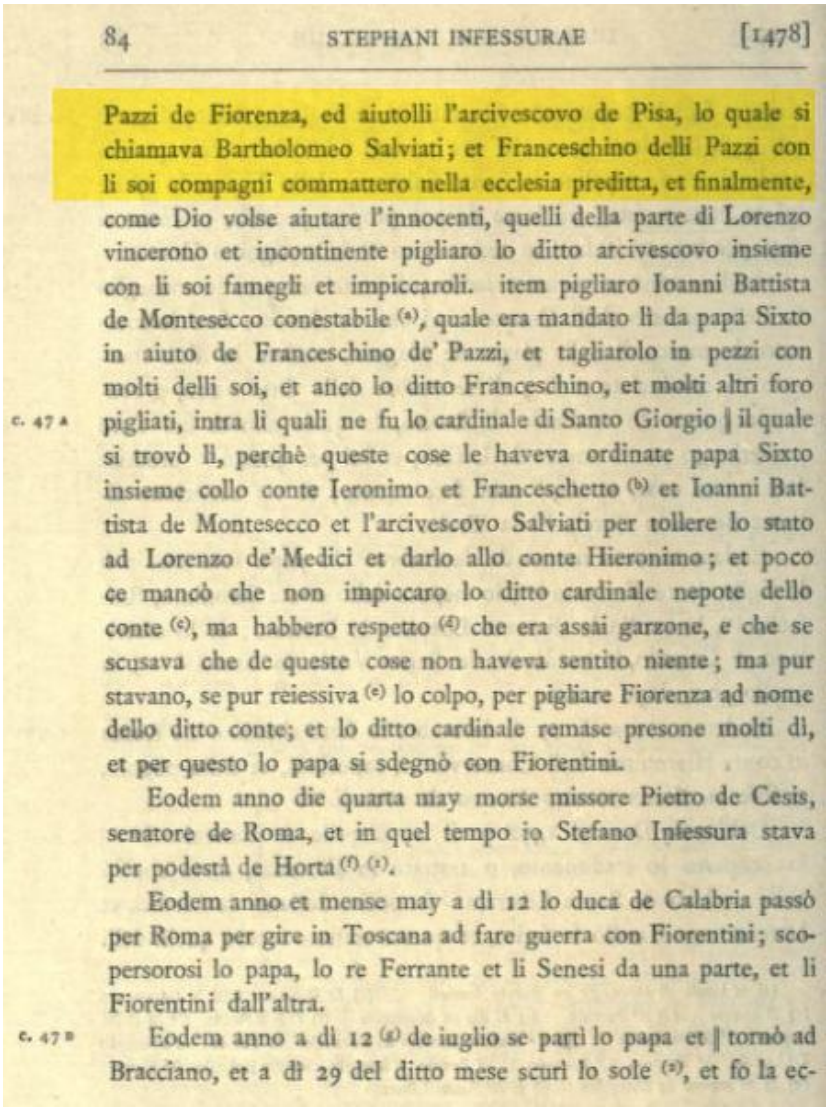
Figure 1

The second witness is Stefano Infessura (Figure 2), the Roman bureaucrat and senatorial scribe whose *Diarium Urbis Romae* remains a foundational source for fifteenth-century Roman history.[3] In his account of the conspiracy, he writes: *"…ed aiutolli l'arcivescovo de Pisa, lo quale si chiamava Bartholomeo Salviati…"* — "…and he was aided by the Archbishop of Pisa, who was called Bartolomeo Salviati…"

Had this name surfaced only once, it would still be difficult to dismiss as a mere scribal lapse. The Archbishop Salviati was no obscure cleric liable to be casually misnamed in passing. He was a prominent—indeed notorious—figure in Roman circles, known not only through the influence of the Salviati bank in Rome, but also through his own highly public role in the bitter and widely discussed conflict with Florence over Pisa only a few years earlier, a dispute in which Pope Sixtus IV himself was directly entangled. This was a man whose identity was politically visible, socially familiar, and institutionally consequential. The repeated use of "Bartolomeo" in such a context therefore carries real weight. When, moreover, both the archbishop's fellow conspirator and the city's official chronicler

[3] Stefano Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma di Stefano Infessura scribasenato*, ed. Oreste Tommasini (Roma: Forzani e c., 1890), 84.

independently identify him by the same “wrong” name, the explanation of accident becomes untenable. We are no longer dealing with a scribal error, but with a historical fact of Roman perception: in Rome, the Archbishop of Pisa was known, above all, not as Francesco, but as Bartolomeo.



84 STEPHANI INFESSURAE [1478]

Pazzi de Fiorenza, ed aiutolli l'arcivescovo de Pisa, lo quale si chiamava Bartholomeo Salviati; et Franceschino delli Pazzi con li soi compagni commattero nella ecclesia preditta, et finalmente, come Dio volse aiutare l'innocenti, quelli della parte di Lorenzo vincerono et incontinente pigliaro lo ditto arcivescovo insieme con li soi famegli et impiccaroli. item pigliaro Ioanni Battista de Montesecco conestabile (a), quale era mandato lì da papa Sixto in aiuto de Franceschino de' Pazzi, et tagliarolo in pezzi con molti delli soi, et anco lo ditto Franceschino, et molti altri foro
c. 47 a pigliati, intra li quali ne fu lo cardinale di Santo Giorgio | il quale si trovò lì, perchè queste cose le haveva ordinate papa Sixto insieme collo conte Ieronimo et Franceschetto (b) et Ioanni Battista de Montesecco et l'arcivescovo Salviati per tollere lo stato ad Lorenzo de' Medici et darlo allo conte Hieronimo; et poco ce mancò che non impiccaro lo ditto cardinale nepote dello conte (c), ma habbero respetto (d) che era assai garzone, e che se scusava che de queste cose non haveva sentito niente; ma pur stavano, se pur reiessiva (e) lo colpo, per pigliare Fiorenza ad nome dello ditto conte; et lo ditto cardinale remase presone molti dì, et per questo lo papa si sdegnò con Fiorentini.

Eodem anno die quarta may morse missore Pietro de Cesis, senatore de Roma, et in quel tempo io Stefano Infessura stava per podestà de Horta (f) (1).

Eodem anno et mense may a dì 12 lo duca de Calabria passò per Roma per gire in Toscana ad fare guerra con Fiorentini; scopersorosi lo papa, lo re Ferrante et li Senesi da una parte, et li Fiorentini dall'altra.

c. 47 b Eodem anno a dì 12 (g) de iuglio se partì lo papa et | tornò ad Bracciano, et a dì 29 del ditto mese scurì lo sole (2), et fo la ec-

Figure 2

The "Correction Trap": How History Erased the Truth

Why has this discrepancy been so consistently ignored? The answer likely lies in the habits of nineteenth-century positivist historiography. When editors such as Oreste Tommasini prepared Infessura’s diaries in the 1880s, they approached the past as though it were a puzzle with only one legitimate solution. Since Florentine archival records and post-conspiracy documentation identified the archbishop’s given name as Francesco, any Roman manuscript that preserved the name Bartolomeo was treated not as evidence to be

interpreted, but as an error to be corrected—a minor irritation confirming, in their view, the supposed unreliability of Roman scribes. The editorial response was therefore to normalize the text: "Bartolomeo" was relegated to a small footnote, silently emended, or replaced outright with "Francesco" in the main body so as not to trouble the reader with inconsistency.

The problem is that later scholars have often inherited these corrected editions as if they were transparent witnesses rather than heavily mediated texts. Many treat them almost as gospel, assuming that the great antiquarian editors had already done the necessary due diligence and settled the matter once and for all. But in "cleaning" the archive, these historians did more than remove confusion—they erased a meaningful trace of social reality. They assumed that the name preserved in baptismal or legal records must be more authentic than the name by which a politically prominent and socially visible man was actually known among his Roman contemporaries. Yet names do not always function so neatly. A formal given name may coexist with, or even be displaced by, another name in lived practice for any number of reasons: a childhood nickname that hardens into adulthood, the habitual use of a middle name, a family preference, a regional or dialectal variant, a Latinized or vernacular form, or a socially adopted name used in one city or circle more than another. In such cases, the state, the church, and notarial documents may preserve one identity, while friends, allies, and colleagues consistently use another. A man may thus remain one person in legal records and another in ordinary speech. By privileging bureaucratic identity over lived identity, these editors obscured precisely the kind of naming fracture that can reveal how a figure moved between different civic worlds, and how he was actually known within them. This is precisely the kind of split that may explain why the Archbishop, though formally Francesco in the records and certain environs, could nevertheless have been known in Roman usage as Bartolomeo.

The Other Salviati: The Banker in the Shadows

To understand why Rome may have preferred the name *Bartolomeo*, one must begin with the structure of the Salviati family itself. The Archbishop was the son of Bernardo di Jacopo Salviati, and he did in fact have a brother named Bartolomeo Salviati. Whereas the Archbishop pursued an ecclesiastical career, this brother Bartolomeo served as the manager of the Salviati bank in Rome, becoming the most visible representative of the family's financial power in the papal city. For Roman officials, curial clerks, and civic observers, the name *Salviati* may therefore have called to mind, first and most readily, the man who handled the family's money and public business in Rome: Bartolomeo.

This could help explain how a kind of social shorthand developed. In the minds of Roman observers, the "Salviati Archbishop" may have been perceived less as a wholly separate individual than as an extension of the same powerful Salviati presence already embodied by the banker-brother. When news of the hanging reached Rome, men like Infessura may not have reached instinctively for a Florentine baptismal registry, but for the familiar Roman name already attached to Salviati influence.

Yet this theory, by itself, does not go far enough. It may help explain the usage of a Roman chronicler, but it does not adequately explain why Girolamo Riario—who moved in the same intimate political circles and presumably knew the family well—would use the name *Bartolomeo* in a high-stakes communication to Pope Sixtus IV. That difficulty opens the door to a more provocative possibility: namely, that *Bartolomeo* was not merely a mistaken substitution, but an alternate name the Archbishop himself used, or at least answered to, in Roman society.

Such a possibility is far from implausible in the fifteenth century. Naming practice was often fluid, and men could operate under secondary names, family names, devotional names, or socially functional names that differed from their formal legal identity. In a Roman curial world crowded with prominent Francescos—not least Pope Sixtus IV himself, Francesco della Rovere, and the conspirator Francesco Pazzi—it is entirely possible that the Archbishop of Pisa adopted, or was assigned, *Bartolomeo* as a practical Roman persona. If so, the Roman sources are not confusing him with someone else at all. They are preserving the name by which he was known there.

The Geographic Schism

What emerges, then, is a geographic split in identity.

To Florence—especially to the Medici and to the civic world of lineage, taxation, and legal record—the man was the child Francesco: the specific Salviati fixed within the formal documentary order of the city. But to Rome—above all to the Curia and the social-political circles in which Salviati power was encountered—he was the adult Bartolomeo: the name attached to the family's Roman presence, the banking power that helped finance the plot, and the name by which he was known in curial and social life.

The discrepancy, then, is not random at all. It reflects two different civic worlds preserving two different truths about the same man. Florence preserved the legal identity of his early life; Rome preserved his adult lived one.

Conclusion: Restoring the Roman Voice

What hangs before us, then, is not merely the corpse of a conspirator, but the ghost of a divided identity. The man whom Florence fixed as Francesco and whom Rome remembered as Bartolomeo exposes a fault line not only in the archival record, but in the very way historians have been trained to read it. Modern scholarship, following the corrective instincts of nineteenth-century editors, has too often assumed that the most bureaucratically attested name must also be the most historically true. But the case of the Archbishop of Pisa suggests otherwise. It suggests that names could travel unevenly across civic worlds, and that a man's legal identity in one city might differ sharply from the social identity by which he was known in another.

Seen in this light, "Bartolomeo" is not an embarrassing mistake to be corrected away, but a surviving trace of Roman memory. It preserves the archbishop as he moved through the curial and financial society of papal Rome: not simply as the child Francesco of Florentine registers, but as the political savvy Bartolomeo known to fellow conspirators, clerks, and chroniclers. The discrepancy therefore matters far beyond a single name. It reveals how Renaissance identity could be layered, situational, and geographically contingent—and how easily later historians, in their hunger for a single stable truth, can erase the social realities that contemporaries took for granted. The man in the noose was Francesco in Florence. But in Rome, where power spoke through other channels and remembered through other names, he was Bartolomeo.

Appendix I

LETTERA VENUTA A PAPA SISTO IV DA GERONIMO RIARIO.

Padre Santo

Noi siamo in potere de' Turchi e de' più crudeli Barbari che hoggi trionfino nella Città nostra. Qui non si fa conto alcuno della Religione, solo si pensa a soddisfare la ambitione, e chi non si fa seguace di questi Barbari non troua il riposo nè la quiete.

Vostra Santità sia bene informata che il nostro fratello Bartolomeo Salviati Arcivescouo di Pisa è stato gettato hoggi dalle fenestre, e quando giunse l'ordine di Vostra Santità per la ribellione del Sottodiacono alla presenza del Gulini (sic) ambasciatore di Vostra Santità, fu anch'esso con una corda al collo gettato dalle fenestre, sì che se la Santità Vostra non ci prouede non serà più salui nè meno il Cardinali, perchè hanno forzato anche ad uscire di Palazzo il Cardinale di San Giorgio per ammazzarlo nella pubblica Piazza.

(Biblioteca Vaticana, Urbinate, cod. 1641 chart. p. 72. Sembra scrittura del secolo XVII. Senza data.)

English translation

Holy Father,

We are in the power of the Turks and of the most cruel barbarians, who today triumph in our city. Here no account at all is made of Religion; they think only of satisfying ambition, and whoever does not make himself a follower of these barbarians finds neither rest nor peace.

Your Holiness should be well informed that our brother Bartolomeo Salviati, Archbishop of Pisa, has today been thrown from the windows, and when the order of Your Holiness arrived concerning the rebellion of the subdeacon, in the presence of Gulini (sic), ambassador of Your Holiness, he too was thrown from the windows with a rope around his neck, so that, unless Your Holiness provides for us, not even the cardinals will remain safe, because they have even forced the Cardinal of San Giorgio (Raffaele Riario) to leave the palace in order to kill him in the public square.