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The Life and Times of Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI

Arnold Mathew

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There have been no shortage of controversial Popes who were accused by Catholics and other Christians of impropriety, but the most controversial of all was the Borgia Pope, Alexander VI. Born Rodrigo Borgia, the future Pope made his way up the ranks of the Catholic Church with an assist from nepotism, breaking his vows of chastity and fathering several illegitimate children along the way. The stories and legends attributed to Rodrigo and his children, particularly Cesare and Lucrezia, have made the Borgias one of the most notorious families in history. 500 years after Rodrigo's death, he and his family have come to be associated more with incest, political intrigue, murder and state-sponsored violence. While 21st century TV series have cast the Borgias as the first organized crime family, the rumors spread by the family's political opponents in the late 15th century have taken hold among a fascinated public. Did Rodrigo really have an incestuous relationship with daughter Lucrezia? Did he really throw lavish orgies? While Rodrigo may not have been as colorful or criminal as the enduring legends, there is no question he was manipulative, ruthless and, ultimately, effective. From an administrative standpoint, Rodrigo was a success as Pope Alexander VI, with a big assist from son Cesare. To the extent that the Borgias are still associated with murder and mayhem, it was the father and son whose actions can be credited with the lion's share of the perception. Not surprisingly, almost everything about Rodrigo's life is still up for debate.

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