

John Stewart, Duke of Albany, Lord Governor of Scotland, and his political role in 16th-century France: a reassessment in the light of new information

Dana Bentley-Cranch* & Rosalind K Marshall†

ABSTRACT

The discovery of three hitherto undocumented letters to John Stewart, Duke of Albany and Lord Governor of Scotland from the French government minister, Florimond Robertet, allows us to glimpse the diplomatic dealings of a powerful 16th-century personage who moved between the courts of Scotland and France. It also reveals something of his close personal relationship with François I's leading political adviser to whom, for example, he sent the touching gift of a crystal charmstone. Albany, this Scot who had been brought up in France, was indeed a cosmopolitan figure and the letters, recounting the latest news of the momentous Sack of Rome by the Imperial army of Charles V, place the Lord Governor in a wider European context.

BACKGROUND

Sixteenth-century history produced many personages whose peculiar circumstances of birth and upbringing succeeded in turning them into cosmopolitan characters. Such a person was John Stewart, Duke of Albany (1481–1536) (illus 1). His father Alexander, son of King James II of Scotland, fled to France in 1479 after family quarrels and married the Duchesse de Boulogne; their son, John (Jean), was born in France in 1481. Alexander died in 1485. From 1493 when, aged 12, John entered the French Court of King Louis XII his upbringing was that of a French prince, and his marriage in 1505 to his French heiress cousin, Anne de la Tour, consolidated his status in the ranks of the French aristocracy, bringing him the titles of Comte de Boulogne, de la Marche and d'Auvergne. But John Stewart was also a scion of the Royal House of Scotland, and

bore his father's Scottish title of Duke of Albany, the name by which his contemporaries designated him, while the marriage of his wife's sister, Madeleine, to Lorenzo de Medici in 1518 led to Albany being regarded as a kinsman by the powerful Florentine Medici family. With these international connections Albany was therefore always destined to play a part in the power struggles of the early years of the 16th century being waged by his country of birth and adoption, France, his father's country of Scotland, England, the Italian city states, and the Hapsburg Emperor, Charles V.

Albany came to prominence in Scottish affairs after his cousin James IV was killed leading his forces against the English at the Battle of Flodden in 1513. James had married Henry VII of England's elder daughter, Margaret, and their infant son now succeeded to the throne as James V. Queen Margaret promptly announced that her husband had

* 4 Pope Road, Eynesbury St Neots, Cambridgeshire PE19 2TG

† 11 St Clair Terrace, Edinburgh EH10 5NW



ILLUS 1 *John Stewart, Duke of Albany*, by Jean Clouet. Black and red chalk drawing, 25.1x19.7cm c 1525. Inscribed *Mons^r dalbanie; R de Broglie*. *Les Clouet de Chantilly* catalogue, no 52; Mellen (1971) no 36, pl 53 (Musée Condé, Chantilly, France/Bridgeman Art Library)

wished her to rule as Regent and act as guardian to their children. The Scottish lords accepted this, although she was the sister of their enemy, Henry VIII, but when she married Archibald Douglas, sixth Earl of Angus, after

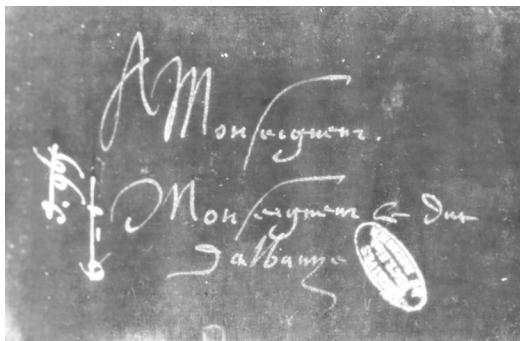
less than a year of widowhood, they declared that she had forfeited her position as Regent and called upon Albany to replace her. This was in keeping with Scottish tradition, for when a king died without nominating a

Regent, the heir presumptive – in this case Albany – was expected to rule on behalf of the child monarch; likewise, a Queen Regent's term of office was usually terminated when she remarried, so that the new husband would not gain control of the young King (Macdougall 1977, 271–6; Buchanan 1985, 60–80; 2002; Marshall 2003, ch 7).

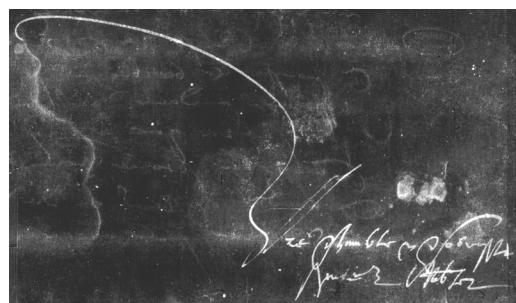
In the aftermath of the disaster at Flodden, the Scots had already urged Albany to 'come home' and lead them against the English, but French diplomacy delayed this move when the marriage of the French King, Louis XII, to Mary, the younger sister of Henry VIII, in October 1514, led to a treaty of friendship between France and England. However, Louis's death on 1 January 1515 and the accession of François I brought about a reversal of policy and Albany was despatched to Scotland with instructions to stir up trouble for the English (Knecht 1982, 18). He arrived in May 1515 and on 15 July the Scottish Parliament proclaimed him Lord Governor. His task in Scotland was far from easy, not least because Queen Margaret at first refused to hand over her sons. After a dramatic confrontation at Edinburgh Castle, she retreated with them to Stirling Castle, pursued by the new Lord Governor, a force of 7000 men and the famous cannon, Mons Meg. Only when she saw that a siege was inevitable did she reluctantly hand over the boys. Moreover, Henry VIII was constantly urging the Queen and Angus to rule the country in the English interest and the situation was complicated by Margaret's incessant quarrels with her new husband. Albany did his best to deal diplomatically with all parties, but he privately commented that he wished that he had broken both his legs before he ever set foot in Scotland. He was granted permission to return to France in June 1517, ostensibly to visit his sick wife but primarily to negotiate the Treaty of Rouen, which provided not only for mutual assistance between France and Scotland but also for the eventual marriage of James V to a daughter of François I.

Instead of coming to the aid of the Scots, however, the French renewed their peace with England. Queen Margaret was meanwhile engaged in a violent power struggle with the Scottish lords, who urged Albany to return and give the country the stability it had so notably lacked since his departure. François I, having decided that it was time for the Scots to invade England once more, finally allowed him to sail north in November 1521, while assuring Henry VIII that Albany had slipped away against his wishes. Because of her antipathy towards her pro-English husband, Margaret began to act with Albany in the French interest, much to Henry VIII's indignation. However, the Scots no longer had any enthusiasm for an attack on their southern neighbours, and Albany was forced to return to France for additional men, munitions and money. It was no doubt a welcome interlude for, according to at least one contemporary account, he was finding life in Scotland very unpleasant and Lord Dacre relayed to the English Court stories of him snatching off his Court bonnet (of the style shown in illus 1) and throwing it in the fire when particularly exasperated. The Lord Governor had, said Lord Dacre, burned more than a dozen bonnets in that manner during his most recent sojourn in Scotland. When Albany did come back with reinforcements, the Scots refused to follow him across the border to besiege Wark Castle in the autumn of 1523 and finally, on 31 May 1524, Albany left Scotland, never to return (Strickland 1850–9, i, 169; Teulet 1851–60; 1862; Stuart 1940; Fradenburg 1998; Marshall 2003).

Albany's struggles with Margaret and the troublesome Scots are well documented, but less is known of his place in French politics, and this study of three hitherto undocumented autograph letters (Appendix, and illus 2 & 3),¹ from the French government Minister, Flormond Robertet, written to Albany at the time of an event which had repercussions throughout Europe, namely the Sack of Rome and the imprisonment of the Medici Pope Clement VII



ILLUS 2 Letter 2 [AN J 966 40¹⁹] Superscription: 'A
Monseigneur Monseigneur le duc dalbanye'
(Archives Nationales de France)



ILLUS 3 Letter 2 [AN J 966 40¹⁹] Signature: 'Vostre tres
humble et tres obeissant serviteur Robertet'
(Archives Nationales de France)

by the army of the Emperor Charles V in May 1527, may help throw some light on the French side of Albany's life and in estimating his political role and possible influence in France.

Albany had been acquainted with Florimond Robertet (illus 4) since his childhood at the French Court of Louis XII. Robertet (d November 1527) was one of the 'new men' in France, a civil servant of bourgeois origins who served three French monarchs, Charles VIII, Louis XII and François I, rising under the last to become a powerful government minister and virtual director of France's foreign policy.² Under Robertet's guidance this policy had become centred on French hereditary claims to the Duchy of Milan. Albany's involvement in France's excursions into the complex world of Italy's city states began in 1507 when he and Robertet accompanied Louis XII on a military

expedition under the command of the Seigneur de Lautrec to subdue Genoa and participated in the French King's triumphant entry into that city on 29 April (Desjardins 1859–86, 2, 248–51; Trisolini 1974; Mayer & Bentley-Cranch 1983, 44–5, 47–8).

When François I acceded to the French throne in 1515 he and Robertet continued with the same policy of pursuing French claims in Italy, at first with resounding success at the Battle of Marignano in 1515 and then with disaster at the Battle of Pavia on 24 February 1525 where the French suffered complete defeat and the French King himself was taken prisoner by the Emperor's army. Albany had joined this French expedition into Italy after his return from Scotland, the objective being stated by François I to be the capture of the entire state of Milan and the Kingdom of Naples. To this end he sent Albany with a force of 6000 to conquer Naples, arming him with a brief to persuade the Pope to support the French by keeping himself and Florence out of the conflict. The Pope signed a treaty to this effect and allowed Albany unhindered passage through the Papal States. Albany's progress, however, was too slow to achieve his objective of Naples; after the defeat of Pavia he eluded the victorious Imperial army, seeking refuge with the Pope who granted him sanctuary, not as an ally since France was now discredited, but as a Medici kinsman. With Papal help by the end of March Albany and his almost intact army managed to get to Civita Vecchia where French galleys had been sent to pick them up and take them home to France (Knecht 1982, 177). Documentation confirms that Albany's rescue can be attributed solely to Robertet who, a few days after the disaster of Pavia, was sent a letter by Ludovico da Canossa, the French adviser in Rome, containing guidelines on future political ploys and, more immediately, advice on how to salvage as much of the French army, including Albany's force, as possible, 'The troops under the Duke will scarcely be able to save themselves unless you send the fleet to them'.³



ILLUS 4 *Florimond Robertet, Baron d'Alluye* by anonymous artist, after 1518. Oil on panel (*Hôtel d'Alluye, Blois*)

On his return to France Albany was soon involved in the policies of Robertet and the King's mother, Louise de Savoie, acting as

Regent during her son's absence, which centred upon the immediate controlling of the turbulent situation in France after such an

overwhelming defeat, the forging of a coalition of allies to prevent France from being attacked by her many enemies and in particular by England, and in obtaining the release of François I from prison in Spain. That Albany participated in all these three policies on France's behalf during 1525 has not been generally recognized. He was one of the four viceroys appointed to help in establishing order, as announced by the Paris *Parlement* on 8 May, and was given jurisdiction over Normandy.⁴ He was named in the Treaty of the More, masterminded by Robertet and Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, Henry VIII's chief Minister, and brought to fruition on 30 August, which effectively brought France and England together as allies against the Emperor. Albany, whose international usefulness was never far from the centre of French political thinking, figured in one of the clauses of the Treaty as being debarred from going to Scotland again during the minority of its King, James V, a gracious concession on the part of the French presented as a placatory gesture – which Albany himself probably welcomed and may even have initiated – towards Henry VIII whose uneasy relations with Scotland had led him to mistrust the Duke's influence with his near neighbour.⁵ In addition, another clause in the Treaty dealt with the financial payments to be made to the English King by which Henry VIII was to receive altogether two million écus paid in annual instalments of 100,000. Extracting the money from the coffers of the provincial *parlements* of a country devastated by war and defeat fell to Robertet; the agent he sent to confront the Languedoc *States-General* at their convocation at Montpellier in October and remind them of their financial obligations in this matter was the Duke of Albany.⁶ And the Duke played his part in the negotiations carried on by the Regent and Robertet to effect the release of the French King from his prison in Spain. The French countered the Emperor's demand that François I's two eldest sons should take their father's place by offering Albany as a hostage

together with the eldest son, the Dauphin François, a clear indication of Albany's elevated status at the French Court (Brantôme 1864–82, vol 3, 171). In the event the Emperor prevailed and Albany remained in France when the two young boys, the Dauphin and Henri, duc d'Orléans, then aged eight and seven, were exchanged for their father in March 1526.

The return of François I did nothing to promote peace between France and the Emperor since the French King refused to ratify the agreement made under duress, including the surrender of Burgundy, which had occasioned his release. By May 1526 the League of Cognac, in which Robertet was one of the French negotiators,⁷ united France, Venice, Florence, the Duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza, and the Pope against the Emperor, and fighting broke out in the north of Italy. By mid-March 1527, however, the lack of success by the League armies against the Imperialist troops forced the Pope, without consulting his French ally, to arrange an eight month truce with the Emperor's representative, Charles de Lannoy, Viceroy of Naples, whose troops were overrunning the Papal States. The immediate reaction of the French negotiators, of whom Robertet was one, was to tighten their bonds with Venice.⁸ However, a second Imperial army under the command of the Duke of Bourbon ignored the truce and marched on Rome with all speed. On 25 April the Pope in despair rejoined the League, but his allies could not halt the advance of Bourbon's starving and unpaid soldiers and the Sack of Rome became inevitable (Knecht 1982, 212–13).

THE LETTERS

The foregoing brief survey fills in the political situation forming the background to the three letters written by Robertet to Albany between early May and June 1527. Analysis of their style and content reveals, firstly, a close, almost intimate, relationship between the two men.

As regards the style, Robertet uses the normal polite formulae for beginning and ending the letters: '*Monseigneur*', 'your very humble and very obedient servant', but his sentences in between are couched in hurried, almost casual phrases. His handwriting itself is equally so hurried as to become illegible in places. Robertet was using what was known as 'secretary hand', a new style of writing which came into use on the continent and in England and Scotland in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, when the diversity of uses to which writing was put demanded a universally acceptable style, one which could be written quickly and read everywhere without difficulty (Hector 1966). Robertet's habit of illegibly tailing off the endings of some of his words may also have been due in part to his failing eyesight, to help which Albany had sent him, as Robertet acknowledges in Letter 1, a crystal. This gift not only confirms the intimate relationship between the two men, but demonstrates that Albany was conversant with the use in Scotland of rock crystal charmstones and amulets thought to have medicinal properties including strong healing powers. The balls of rock crystal were sometimes banded in silver and supplied with little silver chains so that they could be carried or worn (illus 5). Since Robertet writes about 'the lovely crystal' it would appear that Albany's gift could have been decorated in this way (Marshall & Dalgleish 1991, 33; Simpson 1862; Black 1893). As for the content, Robertet twice takes it upon himself to warn Albany not to speak of some undefined matter to François I and his mother Louise de Savoie (Letters 1 & 2), he assures him that if anything happens he, Albany, will be told (Letter 1), and he administers a warning that Albany would do well to come to Court, since nothing ever gets done for those who are not there (Letter 3). These remarks reveal the extent to which Albany was privy to French political thinking in the inner circle around the King, while the names scattered through the letters make it patently clear



ILLUS 5 Crystal charmstone belonging to the Stewarts of Ardsheal bound in silver, a metal also considered to have medicinal properties, and with a hanging silver chain which may have been used to dip the charmstone in water which could be sprinkled on the sufferer (© Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)

that Albany was acquainted with all the leading characters in France. Their significance and how they impinged on Albany's life in France require clarification.

One of these characters was the Duke of Bourbon, named three times in the letters. Charles, duc de Bourbon (1490–1527) was one of the richest and most powerful nobles at the Court of France who was always associated with the French excursions into Italy; he accompanied François I on his Italian campaign in 1515, distinguished himself at the Battle of Marignano and was appointed lieutenant-general in Milan. From 1522, however, Bourbon's personal grievances against the King led him to try to foster rebellion; when

this failed he had no alternative but to go into exile in the Emperor's territory. Bourbon's relationship with Robertet must have been close and of long standing, since when writing to Robertet in September 1523 asking him to plead his cause at the French Court, he signed his letter in a form used only for his intimates: '*Vostre Bourbonnien, Charles*' (Mayer & Bentley-Cranch 1983, 76–7). How Robertet responded is not documented; by that time Bourbon's intrigues with England and the Emperor had brought an English army to attack France. Bourbon was condemned as a traitor; his lands were appropriated by the Crown, and Robertet was one of the recipients when these lands were distributed (Mayer & Bentley-Cranch 1983, 158). Robertet's feelings, therefore, on conveying news to Albany of the death of Bourbon, a close friend who had turned into a traitor, in Letter 3, 'Bourbon was killed by a shot from an arquebus', may well have been mainly of relief. As for the reaction of Albany, equally well acquainted with Bourbon at the French Court and on the French excursions into Italy, it may have been relief of a different nature, that of realizing that his niece, Catherine de Medici (whose parents, Albany's sister-in-law Madeleine and Lorenzo de Medici, had died soon after her birth), would no longer be in danger from Bourbon, a fear expressed by Robertet in Letter 2, 'there is great danger that Monsieur de Bourbon has got hold of Madame your niece'. Albany's preoccupations, of which Robertet must have been aware, at that time were centred on making an advantageous marriage for Catherine, to whom he appears to have been acting as a father; several prospective partners had been mooted for the eight-year-old girl, namely Albany's own second cousin James V, King of Scotland, Henry VIII's illegitimate son, the Duke of Richmond, and the Dukes of Milan and Mantua. The abduction of Catherine by Bourbon's army on its march to Rome in April/May 1527 would have ruined Albany's plans, and for him Bourbon's death, confirmed by

Robertet in Letter 3, thus came at an opportune moment.

The rumours of Albany's own possible marriage to Queen Margaret, hinted at by Robertet in Letter 1, 'the news from Scotland mentioning yourself', had been circulating since October 1521, when reports reached the English Court that Albany was promoting Margaret's wished-for divorce from her husband the Earl of Angus in order to marry her himself and that she was in love with him (Gardner et al 1862–1910, vol 3, pt 2, nos 1854, 1883, 1886; Strickland 1850–9, 1, 145). To some extent these rumours had their foundation in Margaret's matrimonial vagaries, but they were also vigorously propagated by her enemies, especially Angus's uncle, Gavin Douglas, for political reasons. Because Margaret and Albany were ruling Scotland together they spent a good deal of time in each other's company and this encouraged the stories. Henry VIII was furious when he was told that, 'There is marvellous great intelligence between Queen Margaret and the Duke of Albany, as well as the day as much of the night. They are over tender...'. The Queen denied that she and Albany were lovers, and Albany himself 'swore by the sacrament...and prayed he might break his neck if ever he minded to marry her' (Gardner et al 1862–1910, vol 3, pt 2, no 1897; Hill Buchanan 1985, 173–4). Despite these protestations, Albany's temporary return to France, and Margaret's eagerness to marry her new lover, Harry Stewart, former head carver in her son's household, the rumours persisted. Margaret redoubled her pleas to Albany to use his influence with his Medici kinsman, Pope Clement VII, to help her obtain her divorce from Angus. This he obligingly did, and to such effect that the Pope granted the divorce in February 1527. Even so, the news took ten months to reach Scotland and was presumably not known in London any earlier, for in the spring of 1527 the stories of Margaret's desire to marry Albany surfaced once more. The enigmatic group portrait of Margaret, Albany



ILLUS 6 *Queen Margaret Tudor with the Duke of Albany and possibly Harry Stewart, Lord Methven* (Private collection)

and a third man who has been variously identified as Harry Stewart or as Margaret's first husband, James IV, was presumably painted in this context (illus 6).

A letter to Albany from Turenne, the French ambassador in London, dated 27 April 1527, retailed news current at the English Court to the effect that Margaret intended to retire to France, seek François I's help in obtaining her divorce and subsequently marry Albany.⁹ From Robertet's cryptic phrase to Albany in Letter 1, 'you will find exceeding strange the news from Scotland mentioning yourself', it would appear that he also had been informed by Turenne of this piece of news which, had it happened, would have had political consequences by causing a rupture in the friendly relations between the two countries at a time when France needed England as an ally. Turenne followed his letter by

a second missive to Albany a few days later on 1 May, relating his assurances to the English King that François I would never receive his sister and that Albany had no intention of marrying her.¹⁰ News of the Sack of Rome, which occurred a few days after these letters, and the subsequent preparations to free the Pope, diverted the attention of Robertet and Albany away from Scottish affairs. For this reason they appear to have been unaware that Margaret secretly married Henry Stewart as her third husband, early in 1528, within weeks of hearing that her divorce had been granted (Marshall 2003, ch 7).

Albany's life in France was very different from the turmoil he endured as Lord Governor of Scotland, for at the French Court he was among friends of long standing. He must have known Odet de Foix, seigneur de Lautrec, named in Letter 3, since his days at the Court

of Louis XII. Lautrec was born in 1483 and therefore almost the same age as Albany. They both went to Italy with the French army, and attended all important Court functions, being present at the marriage of Louis XII to Mary Tudor, sister of Henry VIII, in 1514 and at the coronation of François I in 1515. Lautrec's career continued on military lines, with most of his service being in the Italian peninsula. Robertet's remark, in Letter 3, that Lautrec had not yet accepted the post of heading the army being assembled to rescue the Pope but that he, Robertet, was sure that Lautrec would do so, could be considered tactless, since Albany might have expected this position himself. This choice had been supported by Henry VIII who was contributing men and money to fight against the Emperor's forces in Italy and whose unfavourable opinion of Albany had changed. Talking to the French ambassador Turenne, the English King declared that in his opinion the Marquis of Saluces was not competent and Lautrec was disliked by the Italians; Albany, on the other hand, was a wise, efficient and pleasant colleague and an experienced soldier.¹¹ In the event Lautrec accepted the command and crossed the Alps with the French army in August 1527; his initial successes turned to failure and Lautrec himself died of plague in his camp a year later.

Robertet's remarks in Letter 3 about 'the Cardinal' introduce another character equally well-known to Albany. Thomas Wolsey, Cardinal of York, had progressed at the English Court from being on the payroll of Henry VII to becoming the chief adviser and foreign policy expert of his son, Henry VIII, who came to the throne in 1509. Wolsey was therefore the English counterpart of Robertet in France; their personal relationship over the years became so close that when Wolsey sent his illegitimate son to study in Paris he asked Robertet to provide a house for the young man. The news of the Sack of Rome and the fate of the Pope brought England and France into a closer alliance. As papal legate Wolsey

was granted full papal powers in England for the duration of the Pope's captivity, and became the chief English negotiator in the talks to be held in Abbeville, Amiens and Compiègne in July–September 1527 which Robertet forecasts in Letter 3, 'but the Cardinal will come first and as far as Abbeville'. Robertet's optimistic remark that the preliminary negotiations with the English ambassadors had so far taken place 'without excessive ceremony or expense' was not to be repeated when the full talks between François I and Wolsey, in which Robertet was a participant, got under way. Contemporary French accounts give details of the huge company brought to France by Wolsey, the thousand French horsemen under the Duke of Vendôme who escorted him to Boulogne where street pageants depicted the rescue of the Pope by Wolsey and the Kings of England and France, the sumptuous festivities in Amiens and Compiègne, the cloth-of-gold hangings with which Wolsey's lodgings were decorated and the lavish gifts including a gold chalice and silk tapestries valued at 30,000 crowns which he took home (Guiffrey 1860, 58–9; Bourrilly & Vindry 1908–19, vol 2, 33; Joutard 1963, 109–10; cf Anglo 1969, 226–7; Ridley 1982, 186–90).

When the Duke of Bourbon set in motion the Sack of Rome on 6 May 1527 he had with him part of the Imperial army in Italy consisting of 3000 Italian foot-soldiers, 5000 Spanish infantry and 10,000 German mercenaries or *landsknechte*. In addition he could muster 800 light cavalry and 700 lances, a lance being a unit of one armoured man-at-arms, two archers and a couple of auxiliaries. This large force was, however, ill-equipped, unpaid, in rags and starving. Just after midnight Bourbon stationed his men at the northern approaches to Rome, delivered an encouraging address, and at 4am launched them in an assault on the walls; the Spaniards and the *landsknechte* were as usual sent in first. During the confusion of the fight Bourbon was shot while mounting a scaling ladder; his death only increased the

ferocity of his soldiers' attack and by 6am Rome had fallen and the Sack began. The Pope had been attending mass in the Vatican; he was rushed by his supporters along a covered way to the fortress of Sant'Angelo where he and his cardinals, together with some 550 citizens, took refuge, guarded by the city's commander Renzo da Cери and his force of 350 soldiers.

The repercussions of the Sack of Rome were felt throughout Europe (Dorez 1896; Omont 1896; Hook 1972; Chamberlin 1979; Chastel 1983). The first news apparently reached Paris on 25 May; Robertet's hurried scrawl to Albany of 26 May (Letter 2) expresses the immediate horror caused by these tidings, 'they say Rome has been sacked and ruined', while his next missive (Letter 3) goes into more horrified detail, 'countless acts of cruelty and undreamed of inhumanity...13 or 14 thousand people have been killed in Rome'. The sacrilege committed by Bourbon's army in the Roman churches, the slaughter of nuns and priests, the wanton destruction and the uncertain fate of the Pope were chronicled by contemporaries and depicted by artists, one of whom, Giulio da Urbino, produced a vivid allegorical image of the Sack (illus 7).¹² The dramatic death of Bourbon, a well-known figure in Europe both before and after his treachery and a flamboyant leader who always dressed in white and silver to be visible to his men, was recorded by contemporaries in confused details which were sometimes contradictory: he was struck by an arquebus shot either in the thigh or in the left eye; holding a scaling ladder or mounting it; and died instantly or three days later. One print gives a dramatic rendering of the event, showing Bourbon tumbling backwards down the scaling-ladder while Rome erupts in flames (illus 8). The artist Benvenuto Cellini, defending the walls of Rome during the first attack, believed that he was responsible for Bourbon's death:

I pointed my arquebus towards the thickest and most closely packed part of the enemy, taking



ILLUS 7 *An allegory of the Sack of Rome* 1527. Majolica dish, Giulio da Urbino, Gubbio, Umbria, 1534, diameter 26.7cm (© British Museum)

direct aim at someone I could see standing out from the rest... The enemy had been thrown into the most extraordinary confusion, because one of our shots had killed the Constable of Bourbon. From what I learned later he must have been the man I saw standing out from the others (Cellini, tr Bull 1956, 79–80).

After this exploit Cellini took refuge with the Pope in the Castel Sant'Angelo and passed his months of captivity there in melting down gold and silver ornaments for the huge ransom of 300,000 ducats which was demanded from the Pope by the Imperial army, as mentioned by Robertet in Letter 3, '*les ennemys demandent... iii c m escus pour la ranson du pape*'.

François I's immediate reaction on receiving the news of the Sack was to hurry on with assembling an army to rescue the Pope, the details of which were reported to Albany by Robertet in Letter 3, where his estimates match those recorded by a contemporary chronicler (Bourrilly & Vindry 1908–19, vol 2, 50–1). Robertet was not to see this enormous army cross the Alps; he died on 29 November 1527 in Paris, having been visited twice on his deathbed by François I and, according to the



ILLUS 8 *La mort de Charles, duc de Bourbon, au Sac de Rom en 1527*, by an unknown artist, showing Bourbon falling backwards from a scaling ladder after being shot. Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (Cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

correspondents who reported his demise to London, deeply mourned by the French King and his mother who, although France was at war, gave him a magnificent quasi-royal funeral in Paris (Mayer & Bentley-Cranch 1994, 17–18).

Albany survived Robertet by nine years, during which he had achieved one of his ambitions, that of contracting an advantageous marriage for his niece Catherine de Medici with the French King's second son Henri, duc d'Orléans. At the behest of François I Albany had spent almost a year in Rome

from November 1530 to September 1531 negotiating with Catherine's Medici uncle, Clement VII, restored to Papal power, concerning the Italian cities which would be handed over to France as Catherine's dowry.

The Venetian ambassadors to the Court of France who had commented sourly at that time that the marriage would never take place since it was promoted only by 'the Duke of Albany who is burning for novelty and such a result'¹³ were proved wrong. Albany succeeded in getting the Pope's signature on the marriage contract and on the secret articles

pertaining to it by April 1531, with the Cardinal de Gramont and Albany himself as the French signatories (Ferrière & Baguenault de Puchesse 1880–1909, 10, appendix), an achievement demonstrating not only the Duke's patience and diplomatic skills but the trust placed in him by the French King. Two years later when the bride reached the age of 14 Albany sailed in the French galleys which brought her and the Pope to Marseilles for the magnificent wedding ceremony in October 1533. That Catherine did regard Albany as standing in place of a father is confirmed by three affectionate letters she sent him immediately before and after her marriage; written in French and Italian the letters are inscribed '*A Monseigneur, Monseigneur et oncle, mon père le duc d'Albanie*', and signed '*figliola et nipote*' ('daughter and niece') (Ferrière & Baguenault de Puchesse 1880–1909, 10, appendix).¹⁴

The matrimonial negotiations Albany undertook for his niece may have assumed greater importance than usual in his life because, unlike Robertet who had sons who followed him in prominent government positions, he had no legitimate children of his own. However, his liaison with a Scottish girl, Jean Abernethy, had produced a daughter, Eleanor Stewart. Eleanor's date of birth is unknown, but by 1545 she was legitimized, advantageously married on 28 October of that year at Fontainebleau in the presence of François I and all his Court to Jean de l'Hôpital, sieur de Saint-Mesme and comte de Choisy-aux-Loges, and thereafter firmly established under the protection of her cousin, the Dauphine Catherine de Medici, whose affectionate letters to Eleanor were signed, '*vostre bonne cousine*' (Ferrière & Baguenault de Puchesse 1880–1909, vol 1, 560–1). Catherine took Eleanor into her household as one of her attendant ladies, a position she enjoyed until 1585, and in 1555 placed her in charge over her youngest son, the duc d'Anjou.

When Albany died in 1536 France was again in a state of war against the Emperor and fighting on two fronts. Possibly for this

reason one terse report of his death in France was accompanied only by details of the resulting disposition of the troops he had been commanding, by which his force was split in two and given to fellow-commanders.¹⁵ Another report, however, was more laudatory, expressing France's grief and praising the Duke for his good service to the French crown.¹⁶

Albany's death occurred either at Mirefleurs in the Puy-de-Dôme district near Clermont-Ferrand or at Lyons where François I had set up his headquarters to oversee the two French armies in action, and that it fell on 2 June meant that Albany did not live long enough to witness two events in the summer of 1536 which would possibly, in the light of his previous political manoeuvrings, have seen the realization of his highest ambitions. The first event was the sudden death of the Dauphin François in August, by which his brother Henri, duc d'Orléans, immediately became heir to the French throne. His wife Catherine, Albany's 'daughter and niece', was therefore destined to become Queen of France, a position she attained in 1547. The second event, which followed hard upon the first, was the arrival in France in September 1536 of Scotland's King, James V, Albany's close relative and for whom, as has been seen, he had undertaken the position of Regent during the young monarch's minority. Arranging a marriage for the Scottish King which would be advantageous to France had been another of Albany's preoccupations. Three months before he died Albany had been one of the signatories for the Scottish King in a Treaty, signed in France, for James's proposed marriage to Marie de Bourbon, eldest daughter of one of France's leading noblemen, the duc de Vendôme.¹⁷ But, notwithstanding the binding terms of that Treaty, when James V set foot in France he proceeded to François I's camp and asked the French King for the hand of his daughter Madeleine, which he obtained (Bentley-Cranch & Marshall 1996). For Albany this marriage – for which he had

already made provision in the 1517 Treaty of Rouen in a clause which specified this contract – which was solemnized in Paris on 1 January 1537, would have represented the ultimate union of the crowns of France and Scotland, the two countries for whom he had worked throughout his life.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the placing of the three letters from Robertet to Albany in their context of a crucial moment in European history, together with the detailed analysis of their content, has revealed Albany in a new light. Scots tend to think of him as the strong-minded Governor of the kingdom during the minority of James V, but he was also a significant figure central to French political thinking and of particular value to France in her pursuit of fame and land acquisitions in the Italian peninsula.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to dedicate this work to the memory of Professor C A Mayer, and to express their grateful thanks for valuable assistance to Professor Pauline M Smith, Dr Hilary Lavis and Mrs Mary Clarke.

NOTES

1 See Appendix: Archives Nationales, Paris, *Letter 1*, J 966 40,¹⁸ 5 May 1527, Florimond Robertet to the Duke of Albany from the Bois de Vincennes; *Letter 2*, J 966 40,¹⁹ 26 May 1527, Florimond Robertet to the Duke of Albany from the Bois de Vincennes; *Letter 3*, J 966 40,²⁰ undated (June 1527), Florimond Robertet to the Duke of Albany from an unspecified location. Illus 2, Superscription on Letter 2: *A Monseigneur Monseigneur le duc dalbanye*, AN J 966 40.¹⁹ Illus 3, Signature on Letter 2: *Vostre tres humble et tres obeissant serviteur Robertet*, AN J 966 40.¹⁹

2 On Robertet's political career see Mayer, C A & Bentley-Cranch, D 1994; on his patronage of poets and artists see Mayer, C A & Bentley-Cranch, D 1983; 1994, 107–46; Bentley-Cranch, D 1986; 1987; 1988.

3 Ludovico da Canossa, Bishop of Bayeux to Florimond Robertet, Rome, 8 March 1525; original in Italian in *Lettore di Principi*, I, 158; English translation in Gardner, J, Brewer, J S & Brodie, R H (eds) 1862–1910, vol 4, part i, no 1169; Mayer & Bentley-Cranch, 1983, 79–81.

4 Bourrilly, V L (ed) 205, ‘et qu'il y avoit quatre vices roys ordonnez en France, dont l'un estoit Monsieur de Vendosme qui estoit vice-roy en Picardie, l'autre estoit Monsieur de Guyse, frère puisné de Monsieur de Lorraine, qui estoit vice-roy en Champagne, l'autre estoit duc d'Albany qui estoit vice-roy de Normandie, l'autre estoit Monsieur de Lautrec qui estoit vice-roy de Guyenne’.

5 *Ordonnances*, vol 4, 400, ‘25 septembre 1525, Confirmation par la Régente [Louise de Savoie] du traité spécial conclu avec Henry VIII, le 30 août précédent, portant que le Duc d'Albany devra se tenir hors du Royaume d'Ecosse pendant la minorité du roi Jacques V’.

6 *Ordonnances*, vol 4, 397, ‘10 septembre 1525, Pouvoirs de la Régente à Jean Stuart, duc d'Albany... de se rendre à Montpellier devant les états de Languedoc, convoqués pour le 15 octobre suivant, et de leur demander d'accorder leur part de l'imposition de deux millions six cent soixante et un mille livres mise sur le royaume’.

7 *Catalogue des Actes*, vol 5, 18697, ‘Pouvoirs donnés à Charles, duc de Vendôme, à l'archevêque de Sens, à Odet de Foix, seigneur de Lautrec, à Anne de Montmorency, grand maître de France, à l'archevêque de Bourges, à maître Jean de Selve et à Florimond Robertet, pour conclure une paix ou ligue universelle avec le pape Clément VII, le roi d'Angleterre, la seigneurie de Venise et tous autres souverains, Angoulême, le 22 juin 1526’.

8 *Catalogue des Actes*, vol 6, 19118, ‘Lettres portant pouvoirs à Charles, duc de Vendôme, à l'archevêque de Sens, à Odet de Foix et à Florimond Robertet, pour conclure avec Venise de nouveaux arrangements, le Pape, leur allié, ayant conclu sans leur autorisation des trêves de huit mois avec l'Empereur, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, le 12 avril 1527’.

9 Teulet 1851–60, vol 1, 67: M de Turenne to the Duke of Albany, 27 April 1527, ‘La Reine d'Escosse...veut aller en France pour avoyer la faveur du Roy envers le Pape pour divorser le

- mariage d'elle et de Monsieur d'Angous [Angus], et après vous espouser'.
- 10 Teulet 1851–60, vol 1, 68–71: M. de Turenne to the Duke of Albany, 1 May 1527, 'Je luy [Henry VIII] respondis qu'il se pouvest tenir sûr que ledict Seigneur [François I] ne vouldroist recevoir personne vivant contre sa voulanté [ie against the wish of Henry VIII], mesmement qui le touchast de si près; et l'ay supplié de croire que vous [Albany] n'eustes onques voulanté à se party, d'autant que esté chrestien et si saige prince et homme de bien. . .'.¹³
- 11 Teulet 1851, vol 1, 70: M. de Turenne to the Duke of Albany, 1 May, 1527, 'il [Henry VIII] vouldroist que le Roy [François I] y envoyast ung bon chef, me disant le marquis de Salusses n'estre suffusant pour conduyre une telle chouse. Je luy demanda qui luy sembleroit bon qui y fust envoyé ? Il [Henry VIII] me nomma vous[Albany] ou Monsieur de Lautrec; et envoires trouveroit meilleur de vous, à cause que les Ytaliens n'ayment point ledict sieur de Lautrec. Et sur ce propos il [Henry VIII] vous loue d'estre saige et diligent et gentil compaignon et homme qui a veu beaucoup de la guerre'.¹⁴
- 12 The fierce half-naked soldier on the left represents the Emperor Charles V; he is pulling at the wing of a frightened cherub representing the Medici Pope Clement VII; the sphere on the cherub's shoulders refers to the six spheres in the Medici coat-of-arms. The three naked women may represent the delights and pleasures of Rome, and perhaps allude to the inscription on the back of the dish: *D'amorosi pe[n]sieri gli animi in gombro* ('I encumber men's souls with thoughts of love'). See Thornton 1999.
- 13 *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian*, vol 1534–54, no 1003, Sébastien Giustinian, Knight, Giovanni Antonio Venier and Giovanni Pisani, Procurator, Venetian Ambassadors in France, to the Doge and Senate, 9 February 1531, from Paris.
- 14 Ferrière & Baguenault de Puchesse 1880–1909, vol 1, 1–3: 2 September 1533 from Pistoye (in French), 12 September 1533 from Niza (in Italian), 3 December 1533 from Crémieux, Loire (in Italian).
- 15 Bourrilly & Vindry 1908–19, vol 3, 80, 'Juin 1536. Et en ce temps mourut Monseigneur Jean, duc d'Albanie, capitaine de cent hommes d'armes. . .sa compagnie [fut] partie en deux, la moitié fut donnée à Monsieur de Chabannes, baron de Curton, et l'autre moitié à Monsieur de la Fayette'.¹⁵
- 16 Guiffrey 1860, 189, '[1536] En cest an mesme-ment morut monsieur le duc d'Albanie à Lion, dont fut grant dommaige en France, car il avoit très bien servi le Roy comme ung chescun scet'.¹⁶
- 17 Gardner, J, Brewer, J S & Brodie, R H (eds) 1862–1910, vol 10, no 578, 'Treaty for the marriage of Marie de Bourbon, eldest daughter of the Duke of Vendôme, with James V, made at Cremieu, 6 March and confirmed on 29 March 1536. James's power to John Duke of Albany, James Earl of Moray, William Bishop of Aberdeen, John Lord Erskine, Thomas Erskine of Brechin, principal secretary and Robert Abbott of Kinloss, commendatory of Beauly, is dated Stirling 28 December 1535'.¹⁷

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APPENDIX: The Letters

[] indicates illegible, crossed-out and missing words

LETTER 1

A Monseigneur

Monseigneur le duc d'albany

Monseigneur, J'ay veu tout ce qu'il vous a pleu m'escripre, et que vostre secretaire m'a monstré de par vous et pour estre les choses de toutes pars et termes où vous les verrez par ce que est cy dedans encloz. Il me semble ne devoir dire aucune chose au Roy ny à Madame s'il ne vient à propos, ce que je feray au temps et heure convenable, vous avisant que on commence à faire toutes provisions pour le fait de la guerre, enquoy le Roy se tienne tresaffectionné esperant pour icelluy avoir messieurs ses cappitaines, veu que l'Empereur ne veut entendre à mille raisons et demourant en l'obstination et durté où vous l'avez jusques icy veu, sans avoir respect à nécessité que ait la propriété de la paix dont il a despleu et desplaye aussi tant qu'il est possible.

Monseigneur, sy aucune chose survient vous en seriez tousjours adverty. Vous merciant treshumblement du beau cristal qu'il vous a pleu m'envoyer duquel je m'aideray à la conservacion et soulagement de mes yeulx.

Monseigneur, vous trouverez bien estrange ce qui est venu d'Escosse qui fait mencion de vous [] aucune foy.

Monseigneur, après [] pour tousjours obeyr me recommandant à vostre bonne grace tousjours très humblement que je puis.

Du Boys de Vincennes le v^{me} de may de

Votre très humble et très obeyssant serviteur

Robertet

To Monseigneur

Monseigneur the Duke of Albany

Monseigneur, I have seen everything you wrote to me, and all that your secretary showed me on your behalf, and things are in all respects as you will see from the enclosures. It seems to me that there is no need to say anything to the King¹ or to Madame², unless the timing is right, when I shall do so, notifying you that all the preparations for the war³ are now in hand, to which end the King is very much involved and expecting to use all his captains, given that the Emperor for a thousand reasons does not wish to understand and remains as obstinate and obdurate as you have seen up to the present, paying no attention to the need for an appropriate peace, which he disliked and still dislikes to an unheard of extent.

Monseigneur, if something happens you will always be told about it. Thanking you very humbly for the lovely crystal⁴ you have been kind enough to send me, which I am using for the preservation and relief of my eyes.

Monseigneur, you will find exceeding strange the news from Scotland mentioning

yourself[] any credence.

Monseigneur, after [] always to obey you, commanding myself always to your favour as humbly as I can.

From the Vincennes Forest on the 5th of May

Your very humble and very obedient servant

Robertet

Notes on Letter 1

1 *the King*: François I

2 *Madame*: Louise de Savoie, mother of François I

3 *the war*: hostilities in Italy between the Emperor Charles V, and the League (France, the Pope Clement VII, Venice and Florence)

4 crystal: probably a charmstone with supposed healing properties

LETTER 2

A Monseigneur,

Monseigneur le duc d'albanye

Monseigneur, pour ce qu'on fait venir le Conte Petro Navarre en a fait le Roy qui envoie à savoir la [] pour demourer dedans la ville, car Monsieur de Morete pour avoir la charge des galleres [] en l'absens dudit conte.

Monseigneur, estans les choses es comme on vous les voiez, il me semble qu'il n'est nul besoing de parler au Roy ny à Madame du discours par vous demandé à vostre secretaire, car il ne se peut rien faire pour le Pape sur qui est fait, vous avisant qu'on fait grant double que sy Rome a esté sacquagée et ruynée comme on dit, que les lansequenetz qui sont tous Luteriens ne facent quelque oultrage au pape et aux cardinaulx pour [] car il y a grant danger que Monsieur de Bourbon ne se soyt saisy de Madame vostre niepce, ce qu'on saura [] par la premiere ou seconde nouvelle qui viendra de Rome ou de Venise ou de Monsieur le Marquis de Filippes.

Monseigneur, en entendant que vous ayez quelques nouvelles vous advertirez ce qu'il vous plaira qu'on fas[s]e, car sy vous voulez pour venir icy, car à vous parler franchement peu de choses se font pour ceulx qui sont absens. Parquoy vous y penserez car me commanderez votre bon plaisir pour les accomplir. Me recommandant à vostre bonne grace tout et très humblement que je puis, priant Dieu, Monseigneur, qu'il vous donne très bonne vie [et] longue. Du Boys de Vincennes le xxvi^e jour de may de Vostre très humble et très obeissant serviteur

Robertet

To Monseigneur,

Monseigneur the Duke of Albany

Monseigneur, Count Pedro Navarro⁵ has been summoned, the King has sent to know [] for staying in the town, Monsieur de Morete is to be in charge of the galleys [] while the said Count is absent.

Monseigneur, as things are at present, it seems to me that there is no need to speak to the King or to Madame about the report from your secretary, because he can do nothing for the Pope⁶ as matters stand, notifying you that if, as they fear, Rome has been sacked and ruined, that the Landsknechts⁷ who are all Lutherans have committed some outrage on the Pope and the Cardinals in order to [] and that there is great danger that Monsieur de Bourbon⁸ has got hold of Madame your niece;⁹ we shall know more from the first or second despatches coming from Rome or Venice or from the Marquis de Filippes.¹⁰

Monseigneur, when you have news notify us what you want to be done, and if you intend to come here, for to speak frankly to you little is done for those who are absent. Please consider this and command me to carry out your wishes.

Commending myself to your favour entirely and as humbly as I can and praying God to grant you a good and long life.

From the Vincennes Forest, the 26th of May

Your very humble and very obedient servant

Robertet

Notes on Letter 2

5 *Pedro Navarro*: Italian veteran in the French forces employed in 1527 in strengthening fortifications in Florence.

6 *the Pope*: Clement VII fled to the Castel Sant'Angelo on 6 May as the Imperial troops sacked and ravaged Rome.

7 *Landsknechts*: German mercenaries in the Imperial army under the Lutheran leader, George von Frundsberg.

8 *Bourbon*: Charles, duc de Bourbon, leader of the Imperial army in the Sack of Rome.

9 Madame your niece: Catherine de Medici.

10 *Filippes*: ?Filippo Strozzi, whose wife Clarice had Catherine de Medici in her care

LETTER 3

A Monseigneur

Monseigneur le duc d'albanye

Monseigneur, J'ay receu voz lettres et veu les discours qu'il vous a pleu me faire communiquer. Maiz par la nouvelle que avons eue par la voye de Venise, les choses d'Ytallie ont pris telle forme que sans que veoir plus avant et savoir à la Saincte Estat enqoy est le Pape il ne se peut prendre resolucion certaine en aucune chose. C'est pour le premier [] que vous entendez que l'ambassadeur de ladite Seigneurie de Venise a monstré et leu au Roy lettres de la Seigneurie par lesquelles elle luy fait savoir que Bourbon, avecques les Espagnols et lansequenetz qu'il a, est entré le v^rme de ce moys dedans Rome par la court de la Belvedere, sacquagé le bourg Saint Pierre et de là entré dedans la ville et avecques grande tuerie fait de mesmes en tant d'autres craultez et inhumanitez qu'il n'est possible de plus; car que ledict Bourbon a esté tué d'ung coup de harquebuse; car le Pape reduict et enfermé dedans le chasteau Saint Angelo avecques les cardinaulx et ambassadeurs et aussi Renze et quelques autres qui estoient hors dudit Rome.

Monseigneur, ladite nouvelle venue le Roy a justement commencé de donner ordre et pourveoir au secours, deffens et conservacion dudit Pape et de l'Eglise, et pour commencer a envoié lever x m Souyses pour justement marcher droit en Italie, plus a envoié lever x m autres hommes de pié tant François qu'Italiens et les fait assembler en [h]ast[e] et directe a bailli la charge totalle au conte Petro de Navarre et le fait venir ausi tost, puis fait passer de là les mons iii c iiiii xx hommes d'armes avec lesquelz est vostre compagnie du nombre de iii c chevaux legers qui sont audit lieu, ladite [] Seigneurie de Venise y aura x m hommes de pié. La gendarmerie icy [] qu'elle a acoustumé y avoir, et le Duc de Millan iiiii ou v m hommes de pié, car du côté où sera Monsieur le Marquis de Salusses se trouverez avecques luy xv m hommes de pié et la gendarmerie qu'il a tousjors eue, car avecques le Duc d'Urbin x m hommes de pié, ii c hommes aux armes et ung bon nombre de chevaux legers, et pour la Seigneurie de Fleurance suivant la cappitulacion et traicté faites avecques ledict Marquis et Duc d'Urbin ii c hommes d'armes v c chevaux legers et v m hommes de pié, qui sont forces tant grandes qu'elles sont souffisantes pour faire plusieurs bons et grans effortz, car pour chef s'est devisé de Monsieur de Lautrec, toutesfoys il n'y a riens encore arresté ny fait aucune declaracion de celluy qui le sera. Mais il se tient pour certain qu'il veut accepter la charge qu'il aura.

Monseigneur, depuis ceste premiere nouvelle venue il n'en est point venu d'autre, car ne se peut faire ce qui en est à la fin, tant de la mort dudit Bourbon que de ce que est devenu du Pape et que ont fait les ennemis de quoy le Roy est en grande peine, car vous entendez assez de quelle importance est la chose de heure en heure en est attendant ce qui en viendra dequoy vous serez justement adverty.

Monseigneur, quant au fait d'Angleterre les ambassadeurs qui doyvent venir pour veoir ratifier les traictés que ont esté faitz sont partis et sont [] lesquelz le Roy a deliberé honnorablement et grandement recuilli et traicté, et apres les recevoir bien compris et bien satisfaitz car au regard de la venue du Roy et du Roy d'Angleterre on va parler tousjors et jusques icy si bien qu'elle se fera sans pompte ny despense grande. Mais le Cardinal viendra premier et jusques à Abbeville et là se conclurra de la forme de ladicte venue. Monsieur de [] est retourné devers ledit Roy d'Angleterre et Cardinal en poste et retourne qu'il soyt le Roy pourra prendre conclusion de son partement d'icy pour aller en Picardie.

Monseigneur, jusques à ce qu'on sait bien certainement nouvelles dudit Pape et dudit Bourbon je ne voy pas qu'on puisse faire fondement certain sur aucune chose car neantmoins on continue tousjors lesdits conclusions.

Depuis ces lettres expres escriptes, il est venu nouvelles de Venise du xvi de ce moys, qui confirment les autres [] tant de la mort de Bourbon que du sacquagement de Rome et retranché du Pape et cardinaulx dedans le chasteau Sainct Angelo, car outre cela que le Pape a envoié audit Monseigneur le Marquis de Salusses et Duc

d'Urbin pour avoir autre secours, car a ne quoi du [] marchent [?vers] Rome avecques la force [], la Seigneurie de Venise fait xl galleres et vingt capitaines également sur la mer. Les ennemis demandent tout ce qui est dedans ledict chasteau et iii c m en escus pour la rancon du pape, et qu'il aille en Espagne.

Le Roy confirme les provisions dans ses aultres lettres pour mencion en la plus grant dilligence qu'il est possible. On dit aussy qu'on a tué dedans Rome xiii ou xiiii^m personnes.

Nous n'avons rien que dudit Venise [] c'est de la mesme main.

de Robertet

To Monseigneur

Monseigneur the Duke of Albany

Monseigneur, I have received your letters and seen the reports it pleased you to send me. But from the news which has reached here by way of Venice, matters in Italy have taken such a turn that without being able to look ahead and to know the state the Pope is in nothing definite can be done. Firstly [] you should know that the ambassador from the Venice Seigniory has shown and read to the King letters from the Seigniory informing him that Bourbon¹¹, with the Landsknechts and Spanish troops he had with him, entered Rome on the 6th of this month by way of the Belvedere courtyard, sacked St Peters and from there got into the town and carried out a massacre with countless acts of cruelty and undreamed of inhumanity; that the said Bourbon was killed by a shot from an arquebus; that the Pope was overcome and shut up in the Castel Sant'Angelo¹² together with the cardinals and ambassadors and also with Renzo¹³ and some others¹⁴ who were outside Rome.

Monseigneur, when this news came the King immediately began to set in motion orders and provisions for the rescue, defence and preservation of the Pope and the Church, and to start with he sent instructions¹⁵ to raise 10,000 Swiss mercenaries who would immediately march directly into Italy, then he ordered 10,000 other foot-soldiers, both French and Italian, to be levied and assembled immediately under the supreme command of Pedro Navarro and taken over the Alps into Italy, [and] 380 men-at-arms including your own company of 300 light cavalry who are also there, [and] the Seigniory of Venice will provide 10,000 foot-soldiers. The gendarmerie here [] what they are accustomed to muster, and the Duke of Milan 4000 or 5000 foot-soldiers, and the Marquis of Saluzzo¹⁶ at present has 15,000 foot-soldiers with him and the gendarmerie which he has always had, the Duke of Urbino¹⁷ has 10,000 foot-soldiers, 200 men-at-arms and a good number of light cavalry, and the Seigniory of Florence, following the capitulation and treaty made with the said Marquis and with the Duke of Urbino, has 200 men-at-arms, 500 light cavalry and 500 foot-soldiers; altogether these are sufficiently large forces to undertake several good and strong efforts, the overall command is designed for Monsieur de Lautrec¹⁸ although

so far nothing has been definitely fixed and no announcement has yet been made. But it looks certain that he will accept the responsibility.

Monseigneur, since the first news arrived here nothing more has come and the outcome cannot be guessed at, in as much as regards Bourbon's death as what has become of the Pope and what the enemies have done which is of great concern to the King¹⁹; you will well understand how important the matter is, waiting from hour to hour for whatever is coming and about which you will be immediately informed.

Monseigneur, as far as England is concerned the ambassadors, who have to come to witness the ratification of the treaties which had already been agreed, have departed and are [] having been honourably consulted and generously received and entertained by the King to mutual understanding and satisfaction; and as for the meeting of the King and the King of England²⁰ talks are going on and up to now so well that it will be done without excessive ceremony or expense. But the Cardinal²¹ will come first and as far as Abbeville and there the form of the said meeting will be settled. Monsieur de [] has returned posthaste to the King of England and the Cardinal and when he comes back the King can settle his departure from here to go to Picardy.

Monseigneur, until there are definitive news about the Pope and Bourbon I do not see any sure foundation for anything, nevertheless we are still going ahead with the aforesaid provisions.

Since these letters expressly written, news has come from Venice²² dated the 16th of this month which confirms the others [] about the death of Bourbon as well as the sack of Rome and the removal of the Pope and the cardinals into the Castel Sant'Angelo; and apart from that the Pope sent²³ to the said Monseigneur Marquis of Saluzzo and the Duke of Urbino for help, and an unknown [] are marching [on] Rome with a force [], the Seigniory of Venice has 40 galleys and 20 captains also at sea. The enemies are demanding everything in the said Castel and 300,000 escus²⁴ as a ransom for the Pope and that he should be taken to Spain.

The King confirms the provisions in his other letters with recommendation for the greatest possible speed. They say that 13,000 or 14,000 people have been killed in Rome.²⁵

We have no news except from Venice [] in the same hand.

Robertet

Notes on Letter 3

- 11 *Bourbon*: Bourbon addressed his Landsknbechts and Spanish troops at 4am and the attack began; although Bourbon was killed as he led the assault by 6am his army was in Rome and the Sack was under way.
- 12 *Castel Sant'Angelo*: a fortified tower connected to the Vatican by a raised corridor.
- 13 *Renzo*: Renzo da Celi, the papal commander who organised Rome's defences.
- 14 *some others*: 550 persons took refuge in the Castel Sant'Angelo, guarded by Renzo and his 350 soldiers
- 15 *he sent instructions*: numerical details of the army raised by François I.
- 16 *Michel Antonio, Marquis of Saluzzo*: a commander in the French army.
- 17 *Duke of Urbino*: Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino.
- 18 *Lautrec*: Odet de Foix, seigneur de Lautrec, Marshal of France.
- 19 *the King*: François I
- 20 *King of England*: Henry VIII
- 21 *the Cardinal*: Thomas Wolsey, Cardinal of York, sent to France by Henry VIII to negotiate; he arrived in Calais on 11 July and Abbeville on 22 July, met François I during July and August and left for England on 17 September.
- 22 *Venice*: news of the Sack of Rome reached Venice on 11 May.
- 23 *the Pope sent*: The League army under the Duke of Urbino was encamped near Orvieto where the Pope's appeal for help was received on 12 May. A faint-hearted attempt failed, by 24 May plague swept the camp, and on 1 June the army retreated, abandoning hope of rescuing the Pope.
- 24 *300,000 escus*: Negotiations between the Imperial army leaders and the Pope began on 7 May, with demands that the Pope be sent to Spain or Naples, and that the arrears of pay of 300,000 ducats due to the Imperial army be paid as the Pope's ransom.
- 25 *killed in Rome*: the number killed in the Sack is unknown, many succumbed later to plague and starvation. By 1528 Rome's population of 55,000 had been halved.