

Correspondence

The Borgia and Syphilis

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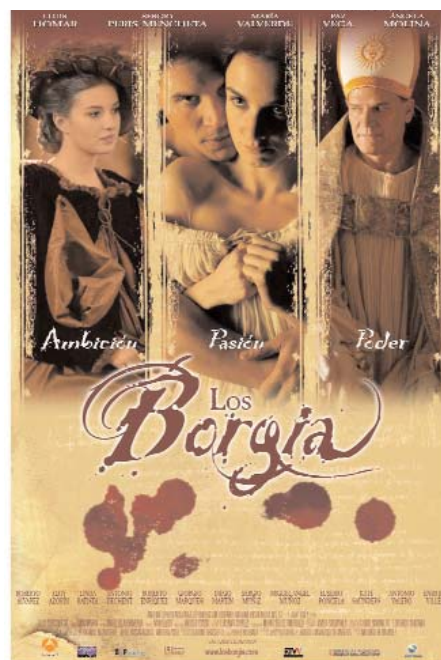
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To the Editors: *The Borgia/ Los Borgia* (2006) by Antonio Hernández is a film that tells the story of the Borgia family at the end of the 15th century, from Rodrigo Borgia's rise to the papacy as Alexander VI (Lluís Homar) to the death of Cesare Borgia (Sergio Peris Mencheta) in battle. The latter is presented to us as a warlike young man who is a womanizer. He wants to be captain of the Vatican armies but his father names him cardinal, whereas his brother Giovanni (Sergio Muñoz) is appointed captain. After Giovanni's death (murdered by Cesare?), Cesare is named captain and by order of the Pope seeks to conquer the whole of Italy. When he is about to conquer the last stronghold, Bologna, his enemies, gathered together to prevent Cesare from becoming King of Italy, say that "syphilis is driving him mad". On the death of his father, he is accused of his brother's death and detained by the Catholic Monarchs, although he manages to escape from prison and flee to Navarre, where, because of the deformities caused by syphilis, he always wears a mask.

Epidemic syphilis appeared at this time in Europe, of unclear origin, brought from America by Columbus or by a change in the endemic syphilis already present in the old continent. Syphilis affected many illustrious personages in the 15th and 16th century, such as the Kings of France, Charles VIII and Francis I; the popes Alexander VI, Julius II and Leo X; Cesare and Lucrezia Borgia, Erasmus of Rotterdam and Benvenuto Cellini, who, among others, survived syphilis without consequences¹. In the film *Los Borgia*, however, Cesare Borgia is shown to have deformities in his face, owing to which, when he is in Navarre, after fleeing from Rome, he always wears a mask, which he removes to fight his last battle. The type of lesions he suffered is not specified (syphilide, papules, necrotic lesions, gummas..).

In the film mention is also made of the possible effects of syphilis on the CNS, neurosyphilis, which can be manifested with disorders of the personality and intellect, although generally in advanced stages.



Technical details

Title: *The Borgia*

Original title: *Los Borgia*

Country: Spain

Year: 2006

Director: Antonio Hernández

Music: Ángel Illarramendi

Screenwriter: Piero Bodrato and Antonio Hernández

Cast: Sergio Peris-Mencheta, Lluís Homar, María Valverde, Paz Vega, Ángela Molina, Sergio Muñoz, Eloy Azorín, Roberto Álvarez, Linda Batista and Eusebio Poncela.

Color: Color

Runtime: 120 minutes

Genre: Biography and Drama

Production Company: Antena 3 Televisión

References

- 1.- Borobio MV; El enigma de la sífilis. Boletín de Control de Calidad SEIMC [serial on the Internet]. 2003 [cited 2006 Dec 1]; 15 (2): 25-37: [3p] Available from: <http://www.seimc.org/control/reviSero/pdf/sifilis3.pdf>.