In visual arts, cardinals are often represented in their red robes and red hats. In the late medieval and early Renaissance period, there were three types of hats for cardinals. One type, a wide-brimmed hat resembling a cowboy hat with two long sets of tassels, is called the galero (pl. galeri). Another and the most basic of the three is a skullcap called the zucchetto (pl. zucchettii), a simple round hat that resembles a beanie. But the most famous symbol of a cardinal in painted portraits is the biretta. The biretta is a taller, square-ridged cap with three peaks on top.

Historically, cardinals crossed the ambiguous boundaries between religious and secular powers. Granted unparalleled access to the Church and to private property, they spent considerable time, money, and effort on making exceptional collections of art and antiquities. Some commissioned artworks in churches in order to advertise their monastic or national connections, while others took Rome and the papacy abroad to enrich their own cities and countries. But theirs was a precarious dignity: while cardinals could thrive during one papacy, they could suddenly fall from power during the next. In 2004, a conference held in London focused on artistic patronage of cardinals and their papers, which was later published as The Possessions of a Cardinal: Politics, Piety, and Art. The new research represented by the sixteen case studies in the volume revealed how cardinals used their vulnerable position and spent their substantial wealth on personal and religious interests. These studies underscored the tensions inherent in their
position between the spiritual and the worldly.

Using archival sources detailing a cardinal’s life, essays in these volumes successfully demonstrated how cardinals used art and architecture to express their conflicting roles and loyalties, Julian Gardner published a crucial work on seals made for cardinals shortly after their elevation by closely examining a group of seals made in the thirteenth century. He focused more on stylistic changes in seal design rather than on the hagiographic meanings of the motifs associated with individual cardinals as is demonstrated by the seals of Romano Bonaventura (before 1216–1243), cardinal-deacon of Sant’Angelo in Rome.

Based on previous research like this, my thesis is that increasing emphasis is placed on cardinals’ individual ownership of illuminated manuscripts made for them, I have argued elsewhere that portraiture of monastic members in illuminated liturgical manuscripts resulted in strengthening their group identity rather than individuality based on a family lineage, In illuminated books acquired by cardinals or created for them, their family coat of arms was more prominent.

Cardinals as Art Patrons: Alessandro Farnese

Cardinals were powerful patrons of art (Figure 1), Pope Paul III commissioned Titian to paint a family portrait of the pope himself with his two grandsons, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese (1520 – 1589) and Duke Ottavio Farnese of Parma (1524 – 1586). Many speculated that this commission was to show Pope Paul III’s close relationship with Emperor Charles V whose son-in-law was Ottavio Farnese, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese seized the opportunity for Titian to paint his single portrait as well (Figure 2). With privileged access to artistic talents and church resources, cardinals were able to erect city palaces and countryside villas, family chapels and burial monuments; they amassed magnificent cloths and furnishings and, in particular, they passionately collected works of ancient and modern art, Like any ecclesiastical figure, cardinals needed personal devotional books. If they were cardinal-bishops or cardinal-deacons, they...