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### Rollo-Koster, Joëlle. Avignon and Its Papacy, 1309–1417: Popes, Institutions, and Society

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“without names” of the addressees), where Petrarch gathers his most politically compromising letters, and in general from the role of confidential counsellor of the mighty—a role he strove for in the 1350s.

From a literary point of view, the biographical profile illustrates with few (but firm) touches all works by Petrarch and their relative manuscript traditions and modern editions. In particular, Rico examines how Petrarch evolved from considering himself a poet and a historian at the age of the poetical coronation, in 1341, to claiming the title of philosopher after his transfer to Milan in 1353 (145). To resort to a botanical image that also mirrors an actual change in his practice as amateur gardener, Petrarch abandoned the leaves of the laurel, the tree of poetry, to embrace those of the olive tree, the plant of wisdom.

Counting on a profound knowledge of classical texts, Christian thought, and current questions, Petrarch constructs a synthesis that permeates all the writings that he shaped, or re-shaped, in his “maturity”: the *Familiars* and *Seniles* epistles, the *Secretum*, the invectives, and *De remediis utriusque fortune*. Petrarch founded, or contributed to found, the myth of Rome; he gave decisive support (later put into perspective) to Cola di Rienzo and his dream to organize a new government in the eternal city.

Based on an updated interpretation and reading of old and newly discovered data, Rico’s account of Petrarch’s figure and masterpiece is as close as possible to reality and not to the legend. As the critic repeatedly claims, it is impossible to turn all of the information disseminated in Petrarch’s works into a consistent picture. Rico’s attempt, however, deserves our high regard.

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**Rollo-Koster, Joëlle.**

***Avignon and Its Papacy, 1309–1417: Popes, Institutions, and Society.***

Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. Pp. xiii, 314 + 2 maps. ISBN 978-1-4422-1532-0 (hardcover) US\$75.

The Avignon papacy was not judged kindly by contemporaries. While chroniclers reviled the popes’ subservience to the French crown, poets and penitents vilified the papal court for its immorality and corruption. In a

well-known sonnet written between 1345 and 1347, Petrarch characterized it as a “fountain of sorrow, [a] dwelling place of wrath, [a] school of errors, and [a] temple of heresy.” A little over twenty years later, St. Catherine of Siena expressed her revulsion at the “stench of sins committed by the [...] curia”; and at about the same time, St. Bridget of Sweden deplored the harm that such venality was doing to the Christian faith.

For many centuries, these criticisms were accepted almost without question. With the opening of the Vatican Archives in 1881, however, it finally became possible for scholars to rescue the Avignon papacy from its baleful reputation. Drawing on a wealth of hitherto-unseen material, Guillaume Mollat and Yves Renouard demonstrated that the “Babylonian Captivity” of the church was distinguished not by venality, corruption, and passivity, but by administrative reform, political independence, and cultural vibrancy. They also succeeded in bringing to light the popes’ zealous pursuit of heretics, and enthusiastic reorganization of the religious orders.

Since the publication of their pioneering studies, our understanding of the Avignon papacy has been further enriched by a steady stream of new research—so much so that, in recent years, the need for a more up-to-date synthesis has become increasingly pressing. French readers are fortunate to have had this fulfilled—in masterful fashion—by the late Jean Favier’s *Les papes d’Avignon* (Paris, 2006). With *Avignon and Its Papacy, 1309–1417: Popes, Institutions, and Society*, Joëlle Rollo-Koster sets out to do the same for English audiences.

Structurally, Rollo-Koster’s book shares much in common with its predecessors. After a rather pedestrian introduction (1–22), there follow three long, but breathless, chapters covering the reigns of popes from Clement V to Gregory IX (23–148). Like Mollat and Renouard, Rollo-Koster then turns to examine the institutions of papal government (149–88). What marks this volume out as different, however, is Rollo-Koster’s decision to include two further chapters: one examining the papacy’s impact on Avignon itself (189–238), and the other extending the story of the Avignon popes down to the end of the Great Schism (239–86).

Rollo-Koster’s study is not without its virtues. Despite some occasional infelicities, it is clearly written, and accurately summarizes some of the more important developments in recent scholarship. Several chapters are enlivened by revealing vignettes, and complex topics are made more accessible by her sensitivity to the “human dimension.” Although there is no bibliography (in

the strict sense), there is a helpful guide to further reading, which will be of particular value to undergraduate students.

The book's merits are, however, outweighed by its defects. Though some generalization is to be expected in a survey of this nature, Rollo-Koster often tends towards over-simplification. Certain figures are reduced to cartoon-like caricatures, and theological debates are sometimes skipped over with an almost careless disregard. The subtleties of Italian politics—vital for an understanding of papal priorities in this period—are treated especially lightly. Rollo-Koster's discussion of the Guelfs and the Ghibellines is, for example, so superficial as to be actively misleading at times.

There are some rather surprising omissions, too. While Rollo-Koster's chapter on the papal court's impact on Avignon includes an exhaustive treatment of the city's parishes, for example, she scarcely mentions the Palais des papes, let alone its pivotal role in transforming the cultural life of the city. Aside from noting that the palace was "exquisitely decorated" (201), she says nothing whatsoever about the multitude of scholars, artists, musicians, and architects who were employed there. Such luminaries as Simone Martini, Pierre Peysson, Jean du Louvres, Philippe de Vitry, and Matheus de Sancto Johanne—to name but a few—are passed over in complete silence. This is surprising, to say the least.

There are also some gaps in the notes. Several important works of primary and secondary literature are inexplicably absent. Though Rollo-Koster often alludes to papal constitutions in the text, she does not refer to Emil Friedberg's *Corpus iuris canonici*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1879–81), or to Jacqueline Tarrant's *Extravagantes Iohannis XXII* (Vatican City, 1983). Nor, indeed, does she mention the work of such pioneering scholars as Brian Tierney, Michael Wilks, Frances Oakley, Johannes Helmrath, and Jurgen Miethke. One wonders if they have been consulted at all.

Most troubling, however, are the innumerable errors with which this book is littered. Though there is no space to mention them all, a small sample taken from just two pages (42–43)—dealing with relations between Clement V and Henry VII of Luxembourg—will suffice to illustrate both their frequency and their gravity. Robert of Anjou was the count, not the king of Provence (42); the bull *Rex glorie virtutum* was promulgated not "in August" but on 27 April 1311 (42); Henry VII did not "besiege" either Genoa or Padua at any point during his Italian expedition (43); Henry condemned Robert of Anjou for *lèse majesté*, for failing to do homage to Provence and Fourcalquier and rebelling

against imperial authority, rather than for supporting the Florentines *per se* (43); Henry died in 1313, not 1314 (43); and, while John XXII later declared a crusade against Ludwig IV of Bavaria, there is no evidence to suggest that Clement V ever considered using such a measure against the Luxembourg (43).

As such, it is difficult to recommend Rollo-Koster's book. While undergraduate students may find it an easy enough read, they should be advised to treat its claims with scepticism. Specialists will simply find it frustrating.

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**Ross, Sarah Gwyneth.**

*Everyday Renaissances: The Quest for Cultural Legitimacy in Venice.*

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016. Pp. 235. ISBN 978-0-674-65983-4 (hardcover) US\$49.96.

Building on a scholarly trend inaugurated by Christopher Celenza and followed, more recently, by Brian Maxson, Ross's remarkable study sets out to examine Renaissance humanism not only as the intellectual pursuit of learned elites but also as a cultural practice entrenched in the social life of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian cities. By interpreting a documentary corpus comprising inventories, testaments, account books, and other archival materials stored in Venice, Ross presents a strong and theoretically informed discussion of the benefits attached to the *studia humanitatis* and their pursuit among artisans, retailers, parish priests, physicians, and what Maxson has recently called "social humanists"—non-professional scholars who often strived to define and enhance their status through intellectual means. The goal of this pursuit—as the author, in a critical dialogue with Pierre Bourdieu, calls it—was "cultural legitimacy," that is, a fluid and socially diversified display of "belonging to a lineage defined by commitment to intellectual, literary, or artistic matters" (8).

The book is structured into two parts of two and three chapters respectively, which explore the problem at stake from a quantitative and qualitative angle. Chapter 1 investigates the references to books and other literary objects listed in household inventories of Venetian families. While the results as far as the spread of literacy in Venice are only mildly surprising if compared to other