

# Rechtsgeschichte Legal History

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Rg **20** 2012 344–346

**Irene Bueno**

## Avignon and the World

Cross-cultural Interactions between the Apostolic See and Armenia

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After the move of the papal curia from Rome to Avignon, the sojourn of the popes in the Provençal citadel gradually acquired the features of a permanent stay: the Pontiffs attempted to transform Avignon into a second Rome, importing the symbols of papal Rome and building a magnificent pontifical palace. Vast archival collections preserved in the Vatican Archives, such as the *Registra Vaticana* and *Avenionensia*, testify to the founding of a modern, centralized, and efficient bureaucratic machinery, which established the basis for the early-modern developments of the Apostolic Curia.<sup>1</sup> Whilst the feeling of remoteness of the Church from its natural seat, Rome, prompted negative characterizations – demonstrated by figures such as »exile« or »Babylonian captivity« – the court of Avignon rapidly became one of the chief cultural hubs in Europe, a dynamic and lively center, attracting diplomats, artists, and intellectuals.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, while Avignon was evolving into a second Rome, crucial changes modified the symbolic system through which Latin Christianity had been traditionally represented: Rome, the imperial and universal Rome, was no longer the centre of Christianity. The universalist ambitions characterizing the thirteenth-century papal apogee – and later re-energized through the expansion of Christianity in the New Indies – forcefully declined during the fourteenth century, while the papacy was obliged by international circumstances to shape a political discourse that was essentially enclosed within European borders.<sup>3</sup> The fall of Acre in 1291; the conversion of the Il-Khan to Islam in 1295; the incessant incursions of Seljuk and Mamluk tribes in the Eastern Mediterranean; and the permanent state of war which divided the Christian sovereigns; all noticeably reduced the potential for papal intervention in the *partes Orientis*, thwarting any opportunity of fostering a new crusade.

Despite the reduction of its actual sphere of influence, the Avignon curia continued to look for new ways to govern its relations with the Catholic, Christian, or potentially Christian East. Europe remained the only *de facto* stage upon which the Holy See was able to perform a leading role, but the Popes never ceased to implement new strategies to bring the entire world under Latin obedience. Despite the failing political and military strategies, papal claims for universalism could still rely on three essential, and strictly intertwined, tools: diplomacy, missions, and cultural transfers.

The focus on cross-cultural interactions between Avignon and the »Eastern lands« – the lands lying between China and the Eastern Mediterranean, according to Hayton's *Flos historiarum terrae Orientis* (1307) – represents a promising way forward for the study of the late-medieval Apostolic See. On the one hand, this focus calls for a reconstruction of the actual body of knowledge about the overseas lands and populations circulating in Avignon, drawing attention to the intellectual reception and understanding of Eastern cultures and religions within the papal entourage. On the other hand, it sheds light on the attempt to legitimize and re-vitalize the authority of the Holy See, through interaction and circulation across cultural, linguistic, and religious boundaries. Most importantly, this avenue of research seeks to overcome local approaches to the study of the Curia – even when inhibited in Avignon »captivity« – by regarding the Apostolic See as a chief agent of knowledge circulation between East and West.

The fields of cultural and intellectual history have benefited greatly from transnational and global approaches, which enable the reconstruction of flows of men, books, ideas, and values across the frontiers of politically bounded territories, emphasizing »processes« instead of »structures«, mobility instead of local and static phenomena. Theoretical reflection on the globalization of

1 ASV, Reg. Vat. 52–290; Reg. Av. 1–172.

2 These themes were explored at the conference held in Florence-Avignon

in April 2011, see BRILLI/FENELLI/WOLF (eds.) (forthcoming 2013).

3 PARAVICINI BAGLIANI (1996) 243.

history has sharpened particularly useful analytical tools: by discussing the notion of »cross-cultural interaction«; by dismissing local and Eurocentric perspectives and deconstructing traditional centre-periphery balances; and by suggesting the revision of traditional periodizations.<sup>4</sup> The inputs of this reflection still need to be fruitfully exploited for the study of the late medieval papacy. A wide range of recent historical investigations into the Avignon papacy have focused on the theological and juridical debates, judicial practices, and artistic manifestations taking place among the entourage of the Popes.<sup>5</sup> However, scholarly research on the Avignon period has been characterized by an overwhelmingly local approach, with the main geographic focus resting on the Provençal city and the French Midi.<sup>6</sup> Apart from rare exceptions,<sup>7</sup> contributions to research on the Avignon Pontificate have rarely widened their focus beyond western European borders.

In the light of the above mentioned analytical tools employed for global history, the particular case of Armenia proves a useful laboratory in which to empirically explore the features of East/West cross-cultural interactions and test the opportunity of new periodizations.<sup>8</sup> Unlike non-Christian contexts, where Catholic penetration was rare, Armenia was subject to an ambitious, though partial and ultimately ineffective, program of Latinization by the Apostolic See. As the most easterly Catholic outpost, the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia occupied a key strategic location: it was close to the Holy Land and surrounded by Christian Orthodox and Muslim dominions, functioning as a natural mediator between the Mongols and the West.<sup>9</sup> Yet, in spite of the formal union between the Armenian and the Latin Church (1198), the Armenian clergy was divided into unionist and anti-unionist factions and the Curia's interventions in this area were undermined by concerns of unorthodoxy in Armenian doctrine and liturgy.<sup>10</sup>

The consequent attempts to reinforce Latin obedience in Armenia took a number of forms: the flow of legates, missionaries, and theologians; the circulation, across the Mediterranean, of letters, books, and pamphlets, copied and translated in order to be used both in Avignon and Armenia;<sup>11</sup> the establishment of new dioceses overseas and the protection of Armenian communities in Italy;<sup>12</sup> and the encouragement to teach Latin and Armenian languages.<sup>13</sup> Armenian theologians and diplomats were invited to Avignon, and Latin missionaries were sent to Armenia. Treatises on Armenian »errors« were compiled both by Western theologians and Armenian unionists.<sup>14</sup> Not least, the program of Latinization designed by the Apostolic See implied a centralized resolution to local controversies (e.g. through marital dispensations), as well as the dissemination of the Church's normative order: the fundamental works on canon law (Gratian's *Decretum*, the *Liber sextus*, and the *Clementinae*) reached Armenia under Benedict XII and Clement VI.<sup>15</sup>

Overall, these interventions are a testament to the »cross-cultural« features of an interaction that equally affected two distinct religious, linguistic, and political regions such as Avignon and Armenia. Yet, this interaction had a much wider impact, Avignon and Armenia both acting as prominent agents of knowledge circulation on a »global« scale. In 1307, the Armenian Hayton submitted his *Flos historiarum terrae Orientis* to Clement V: this treatise, based on Mongol and Armenian sources that Westerners did not have access to, brought to the Curia a new and well-organized body of knowledge on the lands lying between the Pacific and the Mediterranean, which soon acquired a great popularity in Western Europe and was still well known to early modern readership.<sup>16</sup> As this last example suggests, the lens on knowledge circulation between Avignon and Armenia helps magnify the limits of local approaches to the study of the late medieval papacy. Moreover, it amplifies continu-

4 BENTLEY (1996); MANNING (1996); BENTLEY (2004).

5 Among numerous others, see, respectively, HAMESSE (2006); BOUREAU (2004); PIRON (forthcoming); CHIFFOLEAU (1984); ANHEIM (2007).

6 GUILLEMAIN (1962); see the series *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* (Toulouse).

7 HOUSLEY (1986); RICHARD (1988).

8 The relations between Avignon and Armenia are at the core of my current research project at Leiden University, funded by NWO and the Marie Curie Cofund Action.

9 BOASE (1978); MUTAFIAN, (1988, 1993).

10 TOURNEBIZE (1900).

11 See OUDENRIJN (1921, 1960).

12 OUDENRIJN (1940).

13 TAUTU (1952) n. 15, pp. 26–27.

14 TERRENI (1332–1342); FITZRALPH (ca. 1350); Balienz (1341).

15 TAUTU (1968) n. 55–56, pp. 114–118; TAUTU (1952) n. 107, p. 171.

16 Hayton of Korykos (1307); for a complete survey of early modern and modern editions and translations see Recueil des historiens des croisades (1906) II 122–130.

ities, rather than discontinuities, between late medieval and early-modern patterns of centre-periphery dialectics, claims for universalism, and

knowledge circulation between the Apostolic See and the ›World‹. ■

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