

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

Joëlle Rollo-Koster.

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The goal of Rollo-Koster's book is to rehabilitate for an English-speaking audience the awful reputation that the Avignon papacy has held from Petrarch to the present. In particular, she aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of the papal government and to recover the creativity and civic dynamism of the period. She also says that a "significant contribution" of the study lies in its retrieval of the complex interrelationships between the papal court and the city of Avignon. The book is essentially a work of synthesis. It breaks no new ground and is generally no better than the work on which it is based at any given point. Those familiar with the scholarship will usually be able to recognize who is being followed without looking at the references. The book does update the classic surveys of Guillaume Mollat and Yves Renouard. Were it available in English translation, Jean Favier's 2006 survey would be preferable to this one. Two aspects of the book mark

it as somewhat different from its predecessors. First, most general works stop in 1378 when Gregory XI died after returning to Rome late in 1377. Rollo-Koster usefully carries the story to 1417 when the Council of Constance deposed the last Avignon pope, Benedict XIII. Second, Rollo-Koster includes a succinct and interesting chapter on Avignon that treats the city itself and the impact of the papal court on it. She has a nice eye for details.

Following a brief introduction on sources and scholarship are three chapters that treat the popes from Clement V to Gregory XI (1305–78). The book's last substantive chapter — it precedes a very brief conclusion that mainly sings the praises of Avignon — surveys the Avignon popes from 1378 to 1417. The chapters present a fairly consistent organization around biographical sketches, attempts to mount a Crusade, Church reforms (whether achieved or only proposed), ecclesiastical governance, clerical education, and diplomacy that sometimes emphasized efforts to put an end to the Hundred Years' War between France and England. The chapters proceed pope by pope with the topics mentioned above sketched in more or less detail and in varying orders. I found this difficult to follow. Mollat, for example, emphasized almost exactly the same topics but he laid out each one integrally across the Avignon period.

I spotted little that was unconventional or controversial in Rollo-Koster's presentation. She does pay more attention to Avignon itself than most scholars have done. In addition to the chapter on Avignon (the fifth), the book's fourth chapter, "Constructing the Administration," when viewed with the several treatments of administrative material in the chapters on the popes, seems to reveal where Rollo-Koster really puts her emphasis. John XXII, she believes, was an administrative genius, and all of the Avignon popes, albeit to varying degrees, constructed awesome financial and documentary machinery. The chapter on administration will serve well the needs of nonspecialists who have no time for the massive tomes of, for example, Jacques Chiffolleau, Jean Favier (on finances, not his survey), or Bernard Guillemain. As with the other topics mentioned above, so too with administration: there is a lot of repetition. As a result of its stated intention to focus on the Avignon popes, the book's treatment of the Great Western Schism is perfunctory. Even so, I missed any account of the work of Francis Oakley and Brian Tierney.

The audience for the book appears to be nonspecialists. They will find the prose to be accessible and will perhaps note some lapses in syntax and diction. But they might not detect little errors here and there, for instance the year of Constance's conclusion: 1418, not 1417. And there are curiosities: Clement VI's funeral cortege seems to have departed without him (85). The popes were all old and frail except the energetic John XXII. Well, Gregory XI died at forty-nine and he was pretty energetic. When Rollo-Koster attempts to contextualize for her audience she sometimes makes generalizations that will raise the eyebrows of more expert readers. On balance, one or two cheers, not three.

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