

Joëlle Rollo-Koster. *Raiding Saint Peter: Empty Sees, Violence, and the Initiation of the Great Western Schism (1378)*.

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Raiding Saint Peter addresses two large questions: why and how the custom of looting and pillaging the dwellings of prelates during interregna evolved, and what was its relation to the specific disturbances of 1378 that preceded the election of Urban VI and the eventual outbreak of the Great Western Schism?

Rollo-Koster clearly and cogently argues for a reinterpretation of the schismatic cardinals' actions in the summer of 1378, stating that they were familiar with the tradition of looting both the home of a pope-elect and of the cells of the conclave, and thus had no excuse whatsoever for denying the validity of Urban VI's election (177). Less convincing is her persistent, even irritating, insistence on presenting interregnal violence as a "liminal phenomenon," and on the transformation of "custom" into "ritual." This weakness arises in part because neither she nor the cultural or historical anthropologists she cites can agree on whether liminal moments permit or create disruption (78, 92), or even on what ritual is (114–15, n. 23). Much hangs on the proposition that, as the people were denied their say in choosing a pope, they expressed their will through physical action. The generality that "Political transitions are periods of instability, in which . . . voices usually silent are heard" (79) is undoubtedly true, but gives rise to many questions left unanswered — for example, why were the homes or possessions of a defunct King of the Romans or the newly elected king not similarly ransacked, as that ruler's election by acclamation had also fallen by the wayside?

If the reader can take much of chapter 2, "The Empty See as Liminal Phenomenon," and the threads attached to it with mild skepticism, the book presents a

careful, engaging, and often brilliant presentation of both traditions and specific events. Beginning with “The Empty See,” Rollo-Koster examines vacancies and their attending *electio* (choice, not “election,” 23) as specific phenomena with their own peculiar histories and long-lived traditions. Her analysis of the changing roles of various actors (camerlengo, cardinals, officials, and crowds in a town hosting a papal election) and of the constitutions created to control both the administration of the church and the ambition of cardinals and aristocrats is compelling and fascinating, as is her precise reconstruction of the early chronology of looting the Empty See.

Finally, and most elegantly, she connects “the chronology of pillaging” (167) with the events of spring and summer of 1378 and reveals both the traditions and the innovations apparent during those crucial months. The *adventus* of Pope Gregory XI suggests that the Roman people saw the papal return as a time to renegotiate relations, and suggested as much mistrust and hostility as welcome on the city’s part (182–83). Clearly evident is the ambiguity the Romans had long felt towards the papacy, appreciating the revenues it brought while resenting its interference with their government (195). Equally evident and fascinating, however, is the shift, first noted by Lucius Lector and then by Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, away from raiding and sacking the property of a dead bishop or pope to raiding the property of the living, especially the pope-elect and the cardinals in conclave. This shift, together with the contemporary carnival festivities, meant that violence of 1378 was by no means extraordinary, was expected by camerlengo, cardinals, and city officials (200 ff.) and initiated a change in the symbolic role pillaged goods played to those pillaging (232–35).

Raiding Saint Peter offers a complex and generally rewarding view of both a long-lived tradition and of specific events. Rollo-Koster has raised many large issues of methodology and stretched the field of historical inquiry, albeit with mixed results. Her work should inspire further explorations into well-known but little investigated traditions and remind historians to review original sources and subsequent historiography with a careful and critical eye. The many errors that mar this fine work should also inspire, or shame, copy-editors to apply the same careful and critical eye.

ALISON WILLIAMS LEWIN
Saint Joseph’s University, Philadelphia