

Bruno Boute*

*The Pope's Men.
Transnational Clerical Elites, Papal Universalism,
and Bureaucratic Practice*

It is not just skilled artisans and merchants that journeyed from North-western Europe to Rome and to other baroque capitals in the Mediterranean. Alongside the international group of members of the religious orders populating Roman convents¹, secular clerics pilgrimaged in large numbers to the Eternal City as well, out of a pious desire to visit the tombs of the apostles but also to cater for a wide range of other interests. This contribution seeks to present preliminary results of ongoing research into these secular clerics who sojourned for briefer or longer stays in Rome for a variety of reasons: as special or resident delegates of high church dignitaries, collegiate and cathedral chapters, or universities; as informal go-betweens for their patrons, kin and networks at home; as students and scholars; as professional lobbyists at the Roman curia; and so on and so forth. Clerical dynasties and networks in the Eternal City could not blend in with local communities through marriage, an option that was available to craftsmen and merchants, but relied on a continuous influx of kin and clients to stabilise their heft both in Rome and in their region of origin; on the other side of the spectrum, new arrivals relied on the know-how and contacts of wintered curialists.

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¹ Members of the religious orders flocked together at the numerous religious *studia* in Rome. They were also active as experts for the Roman Congregations. See for instance *Prosopographie von Römischer Inquisition und Indexkongregation 1543-1700*, edited by J. Hasecker, J. Schepers, Schöningh, Paderborn 2018 (forthcoming).

This entails that it is necessary to explore the stakes of expensive Roman adventures, notably the administrative practices that drew them to the Eternal City: the daily routine of the offices at the curia that, on a yearly basis, churned out thousands of bulls and briefs with dispensations and other types of papal graces. One specific issue will retain our attention here: the papal system of provisions (advowsons, i.e. appointments) for ecclesiastical offices (benefices), which had constituted the most controversial expression of the primacy of Rome over regional churches throughout the heyday of papal theocracy². In the High and Late Middle Ages, papal administrations in Rome and Avignon had intervened directly in local clerical job markets; not only in the nomination of bishops and high church officials, but also of canons, rectors and smaller offices in cathedral, collegiate and parish churches throughout Latin Europe. It was this interventionism that triggered a backlash against papal primacy in the 15th Century and in the resulting Concordats between the princes and the Holy See³. With respect to the early modern period, mainstream scholarship stresses the increasingly diplomatic nature of relations between Rome, itself the seat of an absolutist papal state⁴, and ‘national’ churches that held their ground against papal centralisation, or the ‘confederal’ nature of the Catholic Church after Trent⁵.

The problem is that the ‘diplomatisation’ of relations between Rome and the Catholic churches across the Alps might be partially a product of the sources historians of the early modern period tend to privilege. The latter did not bother, to date, continuing the tiresome travails of medievalists in sturdy papal registers but turned to the diplomatic dispatches of the Secretariat of State and the apostolic nunciatures instead⁶. Nuncios were

² The standard work remains G. BARRACLOUGH, *Papal Provisions. Aspects of Church History, Constitutional, Legal and Administrative in the Later Middle Ages*, Blackwell, Oxford 1935.

³ Compare A. MEYER, *Spätmittelalterliches Benefizialrecht im Spannungsfeld zwischen päpstlicher Kurie und ordentlicher Kollatur. Forschungsansätze und offene Fragen*, in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Medieval Canon Law*, edited by S. Chodorow, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1992 (Monumenta Iuris Canonici, Series C. Subsidia, 9), pp. 247-262, and the literature mentioned there.

⁴ See in this respect P. PRODI, *Il Sovrano Pontefice. Un corpo e due anime: la monarchia papale nella prima età moderna*, il Mulino, Bologna 1982.

⁵ The bottom-line in A. MENNITI IPPOLITO, 1664. *Un anno della Chiesa universale. Saggio sull’italianità del papato in Età Moderna*, Viella, Roma 2011.

⁶ Vgl. B. BOUTE, “*Que ceulx de Flandres se disoient tant catholicques, et ce neantmoins les hereticques mesmes ne scauroient faire pir.*” *The Multiplicity of Catholicism and Roman Attitudes in the Correspondence of the Nunciature of Flanders under Paul V (1598-1621)*, in *Die Aussenbeziehungen der römischen Kurie unter Paul V. Borghese (1605-1621)*, hrsg. von A. Koller, Niemeyer, Tübingen 2008 (Bibliothek des Deutschen Historischen Instituts

by no means a central gateway for the administrative and legal ties that connected regional and local churches with the Eternal City, which largely bypassed diplomatic channels. Secondly, research into the later Middle Ages has made it uncontestedly clear that posturing as a 'national' Church by no means excluded an intensification of administrative ties with the curia⁷. Both modes of engagement between Rome and the churches across the Alps should be considered registers to frame these relations rather than mutually exclusive, hard realities underpinned by the counterproductive belief that the history of (papal, princely) centralisation should necessarily be about winners and losers.

It is in this context that the presence in Rome of many *oltremontani* among the clergy should be situated: their networks were by no means barred from diplomatic channels of communication, as nuncios did recruit the personnel of their administrations among them, but they also sought to manipulate the 'medieval' papal system of provisions for their own benefit by manning the offices that were charged with the processing of thousands of supplications for ecclesiastical benefices into solid papal bulls. In the absence of in-depth research, rough statistics for the pontificates of Clement VIII to Urban VIII (1592-1644) seem to validate this assessment. The series *Per Obitum* in the Vatican Archives registers provisions for benefices by the Dataria Apostolica that had become vacant because of the death of their holder⁸, although many entries also concern other types of provisions (e.g. confirmations or the clearing of irregularities in local and papal appointment procedures). The series is by no means complete: preliminary research suggests that, in the 1620s, only 40% of entries concerning provisions of benefices for the Low Countries (see below) were registered in *Per Obitum*; French provisions were mostly registered elsewhere and illustrate the ongoing reliance of the proud Gallican Church on Roman bulls and briefs⁹. Nonetheless, it gives a rough impression of the dimensions, which are comparable with and may have even eclipsed those of the later Middle Ages.

in Rom, 115), pp. 457-492.

⁷ G.-R. TEWES, *Die römische Kurie und die Europäische Länder am Vorabend der Reformation*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 2001 (Bibliothek des Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Rom, 95), pp. 257-294.

⁸ The early modern Dataria Apostolica has not been studied properly. See N. STORTI, *La storia e il diritto della dataria apostolica dalle origini ai nostri giorni*, Athena Mediterranea, Napoli 1969. Compare Archivio Segreto Vaticano (from now ASV), *Dataria Ap.*, *Per Obitum*, 1-42.

⁹ ASV, *Dataria Ap.*, Expeditiones, 1-3 (1621-1624), notably the series *Ordinarius Galliarum* and *Extraordinarius Galliarum*, which are currently under investigation.

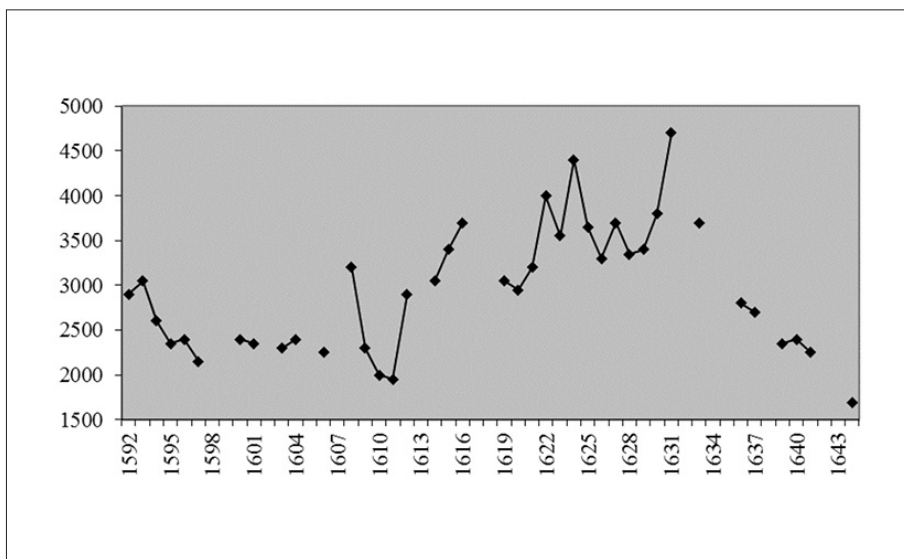


Fig. 1 – Papal Provisions 1592-1644 (*Per Obitum* Series)

The statistics in Fig. 1 call for further research in order to understand the dynamics behind changing ‘conjunctures’. For our purposes, it is necessary to stress that these dynamics should to an extent be situated at a local level, i.e. in the regional churches from which letters of supplications sprang and where papal provisions were put to use. To a large degree, papal administration was reactive: Canon Law, concordats and the Rules of the Apostolic Chancery stipulated which local offices could be affected by papal provisions; determined the criteria of eligibility and established strict rules of precedence. Papal administration stuck to processing, denying or granting requests. It is only after papal *authorisation* that papal *authority* became an agent on local clerical job markets and the petitioner a ‘passive’ beneficiary of papal graces. By consequence, papal bureaucracy and regulations did not develop a specific papal ‘nomination policy’ of sorts. Other actors did, however. To illustrate this, we will briefly discuss the results of preliminary research into clerics from the Low Countries (including the Prince-Bishopric of Liège) who flocked together in the confraternities of Campo Santo Teutonico, S. Giuliano de’ Fiamminghi, and the S. Maria dell’Anima, the national church of the Empire. On the ‘beneficent side’, we will focus on a sample of 16 years spanning the time period covered by the general statistics (1605-1644) above with respect to roughly 1400 papal provisions in the *Per Obitum* series destined at the

ecclesiastical provinces of Mechlin and Cambrai, and the diocese of Liège, a highly urbanised region with a dense clerical infrastructure¹⁰. Numbers seem, at face value, relatively modest in comparison with the overwhelming dominance of Spanish and Italian entries in *Per Obitum*.

The conjunctures in this graph call for an explanation. Just as much as in the general figures, an upward trend can be discerned with respect to provisions to benefices situated in the Habsburg Netherlands (i.e. the ecclesiastical provinces of Mechlin and Cambrai), in line with general

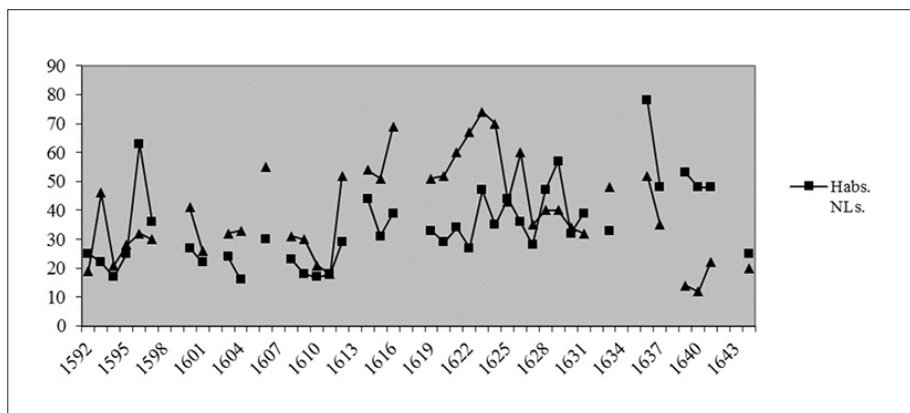


Fig. 2 – Papal provisions in the Habsburg Netherlands and the Prince-Bishopric of Liège

¹⁰ These included 13 cathedral churches, including the biggest cathedral church of the Holy Roman Empire at Liège, and roughly 120 collegiate churches. Compare A. PASTURE, *Les chapitres séculiers pendant le règne des Archiducs*, in «Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome», VI, 1926, pp. 5-70, specially pp. 23-69. Compare with numbers for France in PH. LOUPÈS, *Chapitres et chanoines de Guyenne aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris 1985 (Civilisations et sociétés, 70); and for Spain in C. HERMANN, *L'Église d'Espagne sous le patronage royal (1476-1834). Essai d'Écclésiologie politique*, Casa de Velazquez, Madrid 1988 (Bibliothèque de la Casa de Velazquez, 3). With respect to clerical populations as a proportion of the general active population in the Low Countries compare: S. VANDEN BROECKE, *Seculiere geestelijken in het 17de-eeuwse bisdom Gent: een prosopografie*, in «Trajecta. Tijdschrift voor de geschiedenis van het katholieke leven in de Nederlanden», III, 1994, pp. 193-208; G. DEREGNAUCOURT, *De Fénelon à la Révolution: le clergé paroissial de l'Archevêché de Cambrai*, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, Lille 1991; A. LOTTIN, *Lille, citadelle de la Contre-Réforme? (1598-1668)*, Éditions des Beffrois, Dunkerque 1984.

figures. As suggested before, the most obvious cause of this upward trend is regional: i.e. the normalisation of clerical job markets in the South Netherlands as the economy of the region picked up after decades of civil and religious strife, both in terms of a 'supply side' (with a rebounding clerical infrastructure turning many ecclesiastical offices economically viable again) and of a 'demand side' (with growing clerical populations and a revitalisation of institutions to train clerics). The resulting competition fuelled a demand for extraordinary legal instruments to obtain benefices such as academic nomination letters for university trained clerics and, indeed, papal provisions, both of which contained powerful legal clauses against competitors. This assessment is confirmed by the observation that papal provisions in the sample mostly concerned benefices (canonries and altars) situated in major clerical hubs such as cathedrals and major collegial churches in urban centres – indeed those benefices that integrated their holders into a promising career environment and that were worth the lengthy and costly procedures in Rome¹¹. With respect to those papal provisions that targeted benefices in the diocese and Prince-Bishopric of Liège, however, the picture is quite different. First, there are their sheer numbers: nearly 60% of the ca. 1400 provisions in the sample belong to this group, even though the benefices concerned were situated in a much smaller Principality and subject to a much more restrictive regime for Roman interventions, the Concordat of Vienna. Also, they were, in comparison with figures for the Provinces of Mechlin and Cambrai, more evenly spread over the territory and included 90% of the 168 parishes in the sample. In other words, the use of papal provisions seems to have amounted much more to 'best practice', not just to competition – an assessment that might, to an extent, also apply to the urban centres of the Habsburg Netherlands too. The more clerics applied for papal provisions to obtain ecclesiastical benefices, the more other clerics were inclined to do so in order not to jeopardise their chances on regional job markets. And this is where the Liège nationals in Rome enter the picture.

In the *Per Obitum* series, roughly 20% of the ca. 900 petitioners in the sample claimed presence in Rome when fielding submitting their

¹¹ 60% of the benefices thus claimed were situated in roughly three dozens of (mostly urban) locations. Parish churches were nearly absent, as far as the ecclesiastical provinces of Mechlin and Cambrai were concerned. Compare T. QUAGHEBEUR, *De concursus in het aartsbisdom Mechelen 1586-1786. Pastoorsbenoemingen in het beneficiale landschap van de Nieuwe Tijd*, Paleis der Academiën-Peeters, Brussel 2004 (Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, Nieuwe Reeks, 12), p. 117.

petition, 60% of whom made explicit that they had been around for many years. Occasionally, they also furnished information regarding their occupations in Rome: some of them were students; others *famigliari* of cardinals. A substantial group, however, indicated that they were active in the Dataria itself and in the Apostolic Chancery, vindicating thus the assessment of the archducal resident for the South Netherlands in 1615, that Liège nationals 'colonised' these offices and therefore constituted an interest group to be reckoned with within the papal curia¹². Curialists from the South Netherlands and Liège had already been numerous in the later Middle Ages, but the affiliation with Catholic princes and the loss of large swathes of the Empire to the Protestant Reformation had strengthened their position, among others with respect to those offices that were reserved to national clerics: the Auditorate of the Rota for the Empire, the Revisor of Supplications at the tribunal of the Signature of Justice, and the position of consistorial cleric for the Germanic Nation¹³. These were, in the 16th and 17th Century, largely the reserve of curialists who were affiliated with the Liège patriciate and who were on the boards of national and imperial foundations in Rome. Whereas the *Reichskirche* in the 16th and 17th Centuries underwent a profound process of aristocratisation, the Prince-Bishopric and its cathedral church constituted a transition zone to the 'bourgeois Church' in the Low Countries dominated by old boys' networks trained at the theological colleges at Leuven and Douai. The presence in Rome of a large contingent of university-trained Liège bureaucrats that catered for the needs of their families and clients strengthened the hand of the Liège patriciate in the ongoing competition with the nobility for high and lower church offices at Liège and in the Prince-Bishopric on the one hand, and with holders of academic nomination letters from Louvain on the other hand, who by virtue of (papal) privileges could claim, under specific circumstances, benefices situated in the Prince-Bishopric too¹⁴.

It is these conflicts that continued to haunt the relationship between

¹² «Pour cause des Liégeois desques estant la plus part comosee si bien la chancellerie que datarie» (Philippe Maes, Resident for Flanders, to the Brussels Archdukes, *Négociations de Rome*, 17 October 1615, in AGR, *Papiers de l'Etat et de l'Audience*, 449, f. 353r-v).

¹³ Cf. M. VAES, *Les curialistes belges à Rome aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles. 'I Lieggesi'*, in *Mélanges d'histoire offerts à Charles Moeller II. Epoque moderne et contemporaine*, Louvain-Paris 1914, pp. 100-121.

¹⁴ See B. BOUTE, *Academic Interests and Catholic Confessionalisation: the Louvain Privileges for Ecclesiastical Benefices*, Brill, Boston-Leiden 2010 (Education and Society in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, 35).

curialists and other groups in the Low Countries. On the epitaphs of their impressive funerary monuments in the S. Maria dell'Anima, curialist dynasties from Liège such as the Ursins de Viviers, de Waltheri, the Emerix de Matthys and many other individuals staged themselves as humble servants of the Pontiff in the administration of the Universal Apostolic Church. They were more than that, however, as they had an axe to grind in the local benefice pools they sought to manipulate to their advantage in the Prince-Bishopric and beyond. It is, in this respect, interesting to note that few clerics from other dioceses managed to obtain Liège benefices with the help of papal provisions, whereas these were, conversely, avidly used by Liège clerics to gain access to the clerical job markets of the South Netherlands: this suggests that the system of papal provisions was also used to bar entrance for non-diocesan clerics, despite the stereotypical rhetoric of local church magnates since the high Middle Ages that papal interventionism, in fact, opened the door for benefice-hungry foreigners. This calls for an explanation. Clerics were branded as foreigners when they claimed benefices by virtue of papal provisions, not because they originated from another diocese – a fate that was also bequeathed to the numerous Liège diocesan clerics at Louvain, students and teachers alike, who fell back on academic nomination letters for benefices in order to compete with ‘satans from Rome’¹⁵ and clerics favoured by local church magnates.

This entails that we should not envisage these those curialists as a fixed group with vested interests: Liège clerics, including those with affiliations in Rome, did not shun academic nominations during their stay at the university of Louvain; curialists could also fall back on local channels of support, among others to cater for their own and their clients’ interests in benefices; Liège patricians, in analogy to their counterparts elsewhere, eagerly sought to acquire feudal property with all the trappings of nobility. This entails that the identities of the individuals and groups involved shifted and depended on the configurations that emerged as a result, among others, of their practices to obtain benefices and above all of the roles they adopted in possible conflicts with other claimants. Group identities and interests did not precede these conflicts but were construed in the process, albeit in a highly formalistic and repetitive manner in order to keep such conflicts predictable and containable. A holder of a papal provision the claims of whom to a specific benefice were challenged became immediately a champion of papal primacy in the field, and conversely sought to engage the Roman legal machinery in order to

¹⁵ The term pops up in a letter from Cornelius Jansenius to Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, 2 June 1623 (J. ORCIBAL, *Les origines du Jansenisme*, I. *Correspondance de Jansénius*, Vrin-Revue d’Histoire ecclésiastique, Louvain-Paris 1947, p. 217).

protect both papal primacy *and* his own interests, just as much as academic nominees or local candidates gradually were fixed, through administrative and legal practice, in their roles of poor and disinterested scholars threatened by mighty princes of the church outside their universities and of champions of a 'national Church' respectively.

All this opens new perspectives for research into the performative nature of legal but nonetheless 'dramatized' conflicts that tended to follow familiar scripts, and into the performativity of the bureaucratic practices that had triggered these conflicts in the first place¹⁶. The bureaucratic and legal activities of 'the Pope's men' who presented themselves to Posterity in the funerary monuments of the S. Maria dell'Anima had the ability to 'cast' petitioners and curialists into specific roles. This suggests that bureaucratic and legal practice of officials involved in the administration of the universal Church were socio-technical instruments that could have effects similar to the liturgical and ritual performances they participated to in the national churches in Rome. The same assessment applies to the resulting conflicts, for that matter, as social conflicts had a cohesive effect in early modern decision processes: because they allowed to mobilise channels of mediation and meanwhile allowed for staging grand (in this case ecclesiological) models for the communities involved. At an individual level, the positions one occupied were open for negotiation and identities therefore shifted continuously, just as much as the grand schemes that were fielded in order to mobilise possible allies. Today's adversary could in no time become tomorrow's ally in another configuration, a fluidity that prevented escalation¹⁷, and that was also a hallmark in ceremonial law, which through legal practice established, in a strikingly post-modern way, that one's position was not fixed but was related to a specific situation¹⁸.

¹⁶ See in this respect the various contributions to *Little Tools of Knowledge. Historical Essays on Academic and Bureaucratic Practice*, edited by P. Becker, W. Clark, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 2001; in a religious context, compare P. QUATTRONE, *Accounting for God. Accounting and Accountability Practices in the Society of Jesus (Italy, 16th-17th centuries)*, in «Accounting, Organizations and Society», XXIX, 2004, pp. 647-683. With respect to the history of the papacy, see B. EMICH, *Bürokratie und Nepotismus unter Paul V. (1605-1621): Studien zur frühneuzeitlichen Mikropolitik in Rom*, A. Hiersemann, Stuttgart 2001 (Papste und Papsttum, 30).

¹⁷ Compare L. COSER, *The Functions of Social Conflicts*, The Free Press, London 1968, pp. 76-78; 139-149.

¹⁸ A trail-blazing study in B. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Rang vor Gericht. Zur Verrechtlichung sozialer Rangkonflikte in der frühen Neuzeit*, in «Zeitschrift für historische Forschung», XXVIII/3, 2001, pp. 385-418.

ABSTRACT

Roma era la 'Città della Grazia', un polo di attrazione per i chierici che visitavano le tombe degli apostoli e vi prendevano dimora in cerca di nuove opportunità di ascesa sociale con la speranza di ottenere benefici ecclesiastici o impieghi curiali. Questo articolo si inoltra in regni ampiamente ignorati dagli studiosi dell'Età moderna: le istituzioni 'medievali' del papato, che continuavano a sfornare migliaia di bolle e brevi anche agli esordi dell'epoca moderna. Le disposizioni relative alle province ecclesiastiche di Malines e Cambrai e al principato vescovile di Liegi forniscono un ottimo punto di partenza per esplorare alcune dinamiche attive nel mercato del lavoro dei chierici e i corrispondenti interessi dei burocrati romani che cercavano di manipolarlo.

Rome was the City of Grace, an attraction pole for clerics visiting the tombs of the Apostles and staying around for new opportunities to arise: as beneficiaries of papal graces or as possible employees of the Pontiff. This article delves into realms that have been largely ignored by modernists: the 'medieval' institutions of the papacy, which continued to churn out thousands of bulls and briefs in the early modern period. Provisions for the ecclesiastical provinces of Mechlin and Cambrai and for the Prince-Bishopric of Liège furnish an excellent point of departure to explore some of the dynamics on clerical job markets and the corresponding interests of Roman bureaucrats seeking to manipulate them.