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Joëlle Rollo-Koster, *The Great Western Schism, 1378-1417. Performing Legitimacy, Performing Unity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. xiii + 406 pp. Maps, tables, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. $125.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781107168947; $125.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781316731901.

Review by Martin John Cable, Independent Scholar.

The Great Schism was like a case of double vision. In place of a single pontiff, two (and later even three) contenders vied for the papacy, all of whom looked and acted like genuine popes, but none of whom, despite their protestations and accurate portrayal of what constituted a legitimate pope, could exercise the universal power that their titles were supposed to convey. The schism revealed that what *really* mattered was whether a ruler was actually acknowledged by the governed and not authenticity of title, something which would have felt very troubling not just to the popes themselves, but also to all the entitled within society and to those among their subjects who were long habituated to an aristocratic state of affairs.

Research on the schism has often concentrated on how it was resolved and much less on how contemporaries felt about the divide or on its social aspects more generally. Instead of a focus on the institutional, political, or abstract aspects of the schism and concentrating chiefly on the period when two popes, one in Avignon and the other in Rome, contested the papacy, Professor Rollo-Koster seeks to humanize the dispute as a lived social experience; firstly by considering some of the ways that contemporaries experienced the schism and secondly by stressing its universal human characteristics as an example of social drama as defined by the anthropologist Victor Turner.

The opening chapter divides the history of the schism into sections corresponding to the four stages of Turner's social drama: a breach of a social rule (the disputed conclave of 1378); a crisis; a period of redress; and finally (in the case of the schism) reintegration. Where traditional studies of the schism might focus, for example, on the machinations of international politics or venality at the papal curia to attempt to explain the events of 1378, Professor Rollo-Koster draws attention to examples of all-too-human behaviour. For example, by revisiting published and unpublished witness testimony, Professor Rollo-Koster demonstrates the ignorance of some Romans concerning appropriate conduct during a conclave (one had not been held in Rome in living memory).

The next three chapters explore a crisis stage, which was characterised by its intensity and violence, during which the papal contenders asserted their respective claims in the only way

available to them: by 'performing' in ways befitting an authentic pope. The author here considers some of these tell-tale behavioural or other performative signifiers, as well as those things which, in contrast, marked out an illegitimate officeholder or tyrant (Professor Rollo-Koster wisely avoids the term 'anti-pope'). Such auto-identification was essentially passive. An observer did not deduce authenticity: the genuine or fake gave themselves away by their conduct or appearance. They performed their role and broadcasted it, so to speak, on every sensory channel to which the observer was attuned.

Making use, inter alia, of archaeological data, Professor Rollo-Koster considers several aspects of papal performance, including for example, the keepsakes that some of the faithful made from the lead seals that had once been attached to papal documents, as well as more intentional gifts, such as the perfumed golden roses that popes sometimes bestowed on the worthy. Such objects allowed their recipients to touch, feel, and even smell the authenticity of the papacy. The author also analyses ritual, particularly with regard to papal administration, a reminder that petitioners to the papacy may have sometimes been motivated less by obtaining the thing for which they petitioned than by the opportunities for contact with the papacy that petitioning afforded.

Professor Rollo-Koster also explores how the Avignon and Roman popes performed their legitimacy by promoting new feast days or sponsoring their celebration through liturgical dramas or musical or other spectacles. The music of the schism is itself generally kept out of scope by the author, although it complements the book's sense of papal performance as being very much a barrage to the senses. Matthew of St. John compared Clement VII to a flower more odorous than balsam in one motet, for example, a fragrance that was also used on the golden rose.

Sandwiched between chapters on the auto-identification of popes and tyrants, Professor Rollo-Koster considers the iconic works of Antonio Baldana and Ulrich Richental and makes a case for the Apocalypse tapestry in Angers to join them as works recognised for their connection to the schism. All three works are used to identify examples of how contemporaries could have experienced the schism viscerally during a stage in the social drama when it was a problem that could be felt but not yet addressed. The evocation of Richental's chronicle as a multi-sensory experience for its readers is particularly well done, and a rich world of movement, behaviour, and performance is nicely brought out. Professor Rollo-Koster helpfully provides illustrations from Richental's *Chronicle of the Council of Constance* and website links to the Angers tapestry and Baldana's *De magno schismate*.

In chapter four, Professor Rollo-Koster examines behaviours indicative of a tyrant, like the give-away of a ruler entering a city on foot, whilst the continued reluctance or inability of the popes to end the schism voluntarily began to look, for some, like another sign of how tyrants behaved. In addition to discussing papal 'tyranny' in the schism, Professor Rollo-Koster argues for the similarities between its rhetoric and that regarding schism-era secular examples such as that of Richard II of England and the defence of the assassination of the 'tyrant' Louis of Orléans to be acknowledged. Any conclusions concerning these similarities are left largely for the reader to draw. One could argue, for example, that the schism exercised a sort of social detoxifying effect which made it easier for tyranny to be identified and tackled elsewhere. Lawyers, for example, may have known all about the theory, but the schism rehearsed for them what addressing tyranny would *feel* like, rendering it more acceptable in that very human way by which it becomes easier for one group to accept something if others have experienced it already.

Professor Rollo-Koster turns to another case of similarity in the next chapter, examining two works (by François de Conzié from Avignon and Pierre Ameil from Rome respectively) concerning the treatment of a pope's corpse and conduct of papal funerals together with discussions of mortuary practice in order to demonstrate how far a pope continued to perform papacy even in death. The author argues specifically that this process helped to sideline the cardinals during the papal vacancy, whilst, more generally, bringing out the objectifying dominance of performance over person, or the compression of man and office.

Just as 'papacy' was projected onto the pope's body, so the schism was projected onto the two cities of Avignon and Rome, and two closing chapters are devoted to the experience of the schism in its rival capitals. Using chronicles alongside material from the municipal and departmental archives in Avignon (a recurring typo merges the two institutions) as well as the Vatican, the author examines how both popes performed their titles in Avignon and Rome and how others sought to copy or co-opt (particularly in the case of Ladislas of Naples) papal performance for their own ends. The author makes good use of these archives to corroborate chroniclers' remarks. Through the study of the character and itineraries of processions, the author conveys a strong psychogeographical sense of the importance of space, relative proximity, and place, showing how it was sometimes just as important where processions did not go as where they did. Maps identifying processional routes and important locations are reproduced in black and white which sadly makes their keys difficult to use. The chapters on Avignon and Rome are also important contributions in their own right to the histories of both cities in this period.

Seeking to identify, as the author does, the deeper or social meaning behind places, objects, and behaviours always comes with the risk that they will eclipse more everyday explanations. For example, although a discussion of the barriers erected during a siege of Avignon designed to crush its pope into submission does precede it, translating the *cancelli* in "*claves cancellorum*" (p. 336) as 'cancels' rather than, say, 'gates' seems to stress the poetical over the practical. Similarly, the author notes that Dietrich of Nieheim described French pilgrims as "pests" for having robbed, raped, and abducted women while attending a jubilee in Rome, which then experienced an outbreak of the plague (p.254). Although the associations between schism and pestilence are discussed in the introduction and the French were indeed schismatics from Rome's point of view, a concern for the possible resonances of the word pestilence appears to have supplanted a more matter-of-fact reading.

A certain unpacking would also be necessary of the "capitals" for which the author says Louis I pleaded when retreating from Naples (p. 320). These were presumably specific clauses (i.e. *capituli*) from the legal claims presented before the outbreak of war which Louis fell back on in order to salvage something from his campaign. Britain also replaces Brittany (both being *Bretagne*) on three occasions (pp. 247, 256, and 294), and there are a few other examples of this phenomenon (e.g., 'siege' [sic] of local government for "seat" on p. 243).

Overall, however, Professor Rollo-Koster's reanalysis of the great schism as a social drama not only represents a thought-provoking, behaviouralist corrective to political or institutional histories of the schism but could also give those studying many other medieval disputes pause for thought as to whether these conflicts, too, would benefit from being viewed in a more social or humanized light. Historians often continue to understand medieval disputes as motivated by the achievement of rational goals. It is a particular feature of the medieval period, however, how quickly groups and individuals could be roused to anger, how extremely and often violently they protested about seemingly very little, and yet how speedily they then could resume amicable relations. Might it then be that medieval society was far more harmonious than the bitterness of some of its disputes make it appear, simply because harmony could not be simply asserted from first principles, but had to be played out as a public process or drama and repeatedly so? How often, indeed, did combatants sense from the very beginning of their disputes that they would end up back in harmony but that a series of social steps had to be played out first? And how often was a dispute itself initiated by someone taking performance or appearances too seriously, triggering an auto-response by those affected which did not seek to clarify or correct but instead merely asserted (performed) their rights until, through a social process, peace and harmony were restored once more, all ready for the next time that someone mistook appearances for reality? Such episodes may indeed litter the historical record, their dramas still working their magic centuries later by seeming like examples of serious policy disagreements, factional infighting, or diplomatic negotiation.

Professor Rollo-Koster appeals for historians not to neglect the schism. One could argue that their hesitancy is due in part to the high barriers to entry imposed by the sheer quantity and extent of primary and secondary literature drawn from many different countries and across disciplines which study of the schism involves and of which she so impressively evidences her mastery. However could it also be the nature of the schism itself which deters scholars; its revelation of a society more concerned with protecting entitlement than with the practicalities of power? That is troubling to those who would like to view events as being motivated by narrative-friendly, rational decisions taken with the intention of achieving a desired outcome, rather than part of an elaborate performance designed to maintain social rank. Just how many, so to speak, of the petitioners in the volumes of papal registers were more interested in the seal to the document that they obtained than what its text contained? The revelations of the schism unnerved contemporaries, and they may do so still.

A sequel is promised which will take readers through to the final stages of the schism's social drama when the action would switch to the general councils. The structure of those councils provided a ready-made theatrical set: plenary sessions which were supposedly exhibitions of unanimity but where dissent was regularly permitted (provided that it was booed off stage); set-piece disputations (for example the dispute concerning the Donation of Constantine) where robust debate was more important than reaching a verdict;[1] or the 'play within a play' that saw Gregory XII's ambassadors temporarily take the council presidency before tendering his resignation.

The denouement came at an extraordinary conclave in 1417. As voting began, the singing of a procession of 150 choristers passing outside was heard inside the sealed chamber. One elector

remarked that the music was the most beautiful sound that he had ever heard, and perhaps this was genuinely the case, or perhaps the emotion of the occasion had just made him *feel* that it was. Some of his colleagues reacted similarly, falling to their knees in prayer as their eyes welled with tears.[2] Harmony without and harmony within. Four decades of the schism's double or triple vision were coming to an end. Henceforth what you saw when you saw a pope would be what you got. That the schism had shown how much this itself was an illusion was one more reason to rejoice.

NOTES

[1] Martin John Cable, '*Cum essem in Constantie ...' Raffaele Fulgosio and the Council of Constance, 1414-1415* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 238-50.

[2] Walter Brandmüller, *Das Konzil von Konstanz 1414-1418*, Volume II (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1992), p. 368.

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