

**Apostolic Chancery.** The apostolic chancery, created in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and discontinued in 1973, had the task of preparing and dispatching papal documents.

It is the most ancient office of the papal curia, and, in its early period, the only one, up until the establishment of the Camera apostolica (papal chamber) the Apostolic Penitentiary [absolutions and dispensations], and the Roman Rota. In the Middle Ages many offices emerged from it and then became its competitors: the Apostolic Signatura, the Secretariate, and the Datary.

The title of ‘chancellor’ appears for the first time in 1005. At that time this person directed the chancery under the formal authority of high dignitaries, for example the archbishop of Cologne, the arch-chancellor, or the suburbican bishop of *Silva Candida*, the librarian. From 1067 these honorific titles disappear. From then, the chancellor had to be a cardinal. The holder of the office was assisted by a vice-chancellor. The chancellor’s office was provisionally left vacant in the years around 1200, and again from the election of Honorius III in 1216. The head of the chancery was from then on the vice-chancellor, who was not a cardinal in the century that followed, but from 1320 the link between the vice-chancellorship and the cardinalate was restored.

The office of chancellor, with cardinal status, was restored by Pius X in 1908. The deputy of the vice-chancellor (after 1908 of the chancellor) was the *regens cancellariam*. From the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the senior officials of the chancery were assisted by a special notary called the *notarius cancellariae*.

In the earliest period the production of documents by the Holy See was closely linked to the notaries of the city of Rome, who were organised in a *schola* under the leadership of a *primicerius* and a *secundicerius*. The notaries were all called *scriniarii*. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century they found themselves in competition with ‘palatine notaries’, who travelled around with the itinerant popes and who then assumed the title of *scriptores*. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the connection with the notaries of the city of Rome was broken. Under Innocent III, the notaries [NOTE: not to be confused with the City notaries], 7 in number, were distinguished from the *scriptores*, who were more numerous and now occupied only with the task of writing documents. The vice-chancellor and the [papal] notaries were assisted in their work by *abbreviatores*, the number of whom was fixed at 25 in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and which would be increased to 72 by Sixtus IV at the end of the fifteenth century. At that time the *abbreviatores* were divided into three classes: 12 *abbreviatores de parco maiori*, 22 *de parco minori*, and 38 *primae visionis*. The number of scribes (*scriptores litterarum apostolicarum*) was also increased and rose to over a hundred at the end of the Great Schism. In 1436 they were brought together in a college of 101 members; this was dissolved by Pius VII.

Other posts were created: the *corrector* (introduced by Innocent III), the two *plumbatores* who under the direction of the *bullatores* added the seal of lead to documents; the three *magistri litterarum apostolicarum*; and the *auditor litterarum contradictarum*, who assessed objections [by defendants or interested parties] to papal letters before they were dispatched. Petitions were dealt with by *referendarii*, divided by Alexander VI into two colleges called *Signaturae*: the *Signatura gratiae* (70 members) and the *Signatura iustitiae* (30 members).

In the second half of the fourteenth century the *secretarii* make their appearance. These were scribes or trusted *abbreviatores* to whom the pope entrusted the preparation of high level documents, especially those which were political in nature; they kept personal registers. This period saw new ways of issuing documents: alongside the *expeditio per cancellariam* (for bulls written by the *secretarii*), certain confidential documents were dispatched *per cameram* (this word does not refer to the Camera apostolica, which was responsible for financial administration, but to the pope's apartment, the private chamber). The *secretarii* also sent out the briefs (documents sealed not with the leaden *bullae* but [on wax] with the 'fisherman's ring'. Among these *secretarii* were famous humanists. Within the body of the *secretarii* emerged the categories of *secretarii participantes* (under Callistus III), and *secretarius secretus* (under Paul II). In 1487 Innocent VIII created the college of *secretarii apostolici*, with 30 members. This would be dissolved in 1678. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the popes made use of a special secretary, at first called the *secretarius intimus* or *secretarius maior*, who would later become the secretary of state. Other secretaries and scribes who had specific duties - some established as colleges, some not - were introduced (then sometimes dissolved) in the course of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Under Boniface IX the Datary comes on the scene. Its function was to put the dates on documents, but the office became increasingly important in the early modern period. The Datary received petitions and registered them.

In the orbit of the Chancery and the offices that emerged from it were the proctors, who, though they did not belong to the staff of the curia, had the job of taking, on behalf of clients from all over the Christian world who could not come to Rome, the administrative steps required if their petitions were to be successful.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Chancery underwent profound changes. Pius X, with the Constitution *Sapienti consilio* of 1908, re-instated the office of chancellor (accordingly, the office of vice-chancellor was abolished), and he limited the remit of the Chancery to sealing consistorial benefices with the leaden bull. The Chancery, which was now a purely executive office without any power to make decisions; it received instructions from the Consistorial Congregation or from the pope. The *abbreviatores* were abolished and replaced by *protonotarii participantes*. The Datary dealt with minor benefices. Finally, the Secretariate of State was divided into three sections, the third of which was responsible for the dispatch of briefs and had the name *Cancellaria brevium apostolicorum*. In 1967 Paul VI, in the constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae universae*, reserved to the Chancery the dispatch of all decretal letters, apostolic constitutions, and apostolic letters in the form of a 'bull or brief of major importance' (while 'briefs of lesser importance' were assigned to the Secretariat of State). Finally, Paul VI dissolved the Apostolic Chancery and transferred its functions to the Secretariate of State.

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