

## Papal Registers

Papal registers are volumes in which the offices of the papal curia (Chancery, Apostolic Camera, Apostolic Secretariat) recorded and preserved their correspondence. The oldest evidence, admittedly indirect, of papal registers dates from the pontificate of Leo the Great (440-461): they consisted of a series of tablets bound together by rings (*polyptych*), and were grouped according to the addressees: (emperor, bishops region by region, that is: *Italia, Gallia, Hispania, Oriens*, etc.) One can speak of registers in the full sense of the word from the pontificate of Gregory the Great (590-604), 800 of whose letters survive. The Archivio Apostolico Vaticano has a copy of the last six years of the pontificate of John VIII (872-882), in a manuscript copied at Rome in the eleventh century (*Reg. Vat. 1*). The first register surviving in its original form is that of Gregory VII (1073-1085), also kept in the Vatican Archives (*Reg. Vat. 2*), while the registers of popes between him and Innocent III are transmitted in part indirectly or in copies or completely lost. The more or less continuous series of *Registra Vaticana* go back to the end of the twelfth century (2042 volumes, from 1198 to 1597, which various gaps). They are kept in the Archivio Apostolico Vaticano and consist of a series of volumes heterogeneous in dimensions, support (parchment and paper), and in the very nature of the registers, which come from the Chancery [writing office], the *Camera Apostolica* [financial office], the domestic secretaries, and the *Secretaria Apostolica*. In the fourteenth century, when the papal curia was based in Avignon, was added the series of Avignon Registers (354 volumes, from 1308 to 1415), composed of paper volumes most of which were produced in the Chancery, though some originated in the Camera; they relate to the Avignon popes and some antipopes of the Schism period. The registers consist of substantial fascicules written up before being bound and subdivided according to a complex classification developed from the last years of the pontificate of John XXII (1371-1378). From these registers official fair copies were made on parchment, and added to the series of *Registra Vaticana*. Within the series, from the pontificate of John XXII, was introduced the sub-series of 'secret registers', copied directly on to parchment by what officials who came to be known as 'secretaries'; from the pontificate of Gregory XI (1371-1378), each secretary kept his own register, but from 1488 one needs to distinguish the register of the *secretarius domesticus* and those of the college of secretaries. Among the *Registra Vaticana* are found also the paper registers of the *Camera Apostolica*, in which, from the mid-fourteenth century, documents directly related to the office were copied. With Boniface IX (1389-1404) begins the third great series, the *Registra Lateranensia*, which was continued until 1897 and is also kept in the Vatican Archives. These registers, originally kept in the *Archivum Bullarum*, in the Vatican Palace, contain letters dispatched from the Chancery (*litterae communes et de Curia*). Transferred, not without grave losses, to Paris by Napoleon with the rest of the papal archives (1810), on their return to Rome (1817) they were deposited in the Lateran Palace: hence their name. The series is composed of 2467 paper volumes of uniform format, with a simpler classification system than that of the Avignon Registers. From the pontificate of Clement VI (1342-1352) we have the series of Registers of Supplications (7365 volumes, from 1342-1899), paper volumes in folio format, in which are transcribed the petitions presented to the pope and approved by him. They mostly deal with benefices and papal graces, but also with judicial matters (*commissiones*), and, in post-medieval times, marriage matters. After being dated, the petitions were sent on to the *registratura supplicationum*, where the names of the petitioners were entered into a list – called, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the *liber de vacantibus* – from which the supplicant, or his proctor) learned that his petition had been received; at this point it was up to him to ask for it to be registered. Registration was the task of 8 (later 12) scribes (*clerici* or

*scribentes registri supplicationum*) who according to Innocent VIII's bull *Etsi de cunctis* of 1490, were obliged to register every approved petition within three days, on pain of excommunication. Next to every entry in the register, on the left hand margin, were placed the first letters of the petitioner's diocese of origin and an indication of what the petition was about, while in the right hand margin was written the name of the *referendarius* responsible. One of the heads of the office (*registratores supplicationum* or *magistri supplicationum*) had the task of comparing every entry in the register with the original petition, which was then passed on to the vice chancellor. The petitions approved by the vice-chancellor (*per concessum*) were transcribed in separate volumes, while those signed by the pope (*per fiat*) or by the domestic referendarius (*per concessum in presentia domini nostri pape*) were collected together. Rejected petitions were usually destroyed, and yet the effort was made to make a copy of all the requests contained in them, and to countersign with a note [in the register] the rejected supplication; the same occurred when – as happened only rarely however – when individual supplications which had not been approved were registered [as approved] in error. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Register of Supplications two sub-series were separated out: the *registra secretorum*, maintained with some gaps for the years 1730-1823, and containing only petitions signed by the pope and, at the end of pontificates, by another prelate *ex delegatione apostolica* or *de speciali mandato*, and the *registra officiorum*, containing petitions concerning the nomination of Curia personnel. The office of the *registratura supplicationum* was abolished by Leo XIII in 1899.

Sergio Pagano, transl. D. L. d'Avray