

Electing the Pope in Early Modern Italy, 1450–1700. Miles Pattenden.
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Studies of the early modern papacy have paid much attention to the pope's unique dual role as universal spiritual monarch and secular prince. In *Electing the Pope in Early Modern Italy, 1450–1700*, Miles Pattenden shifts our attention to another feature of the papal office: the fact that popes were elected monarchs. How, he asks, did that reality shape the history of the papacy in the early modern period? For Pattenden, the electoral system of the papal monarchy was not just a distinguishing feature: it was a defining one. It had wide-ranging and significant consequences for the papacy as an institution; for the city of Rome; and for the process and apparatus of state-building, in particular. *Electing the Pope*, thus, does much more than simply illuminate an understudied dimension of the papal constitution: it offers a fresh examination of how and why the early modern papacy evolved the way it did.

Pattenden grounds his argument in the idea that the electoral nature of the papacy brought with it a host of challenges for the institution's political elite: problems regulating and running the elections and governing during a vacant see; problems confronting the cardinals as they selected a new pope; and problems facing the pope they chose as he sought to assert his authority. *Electing the Pope* illuminates how the early modern papacy evolved in ways that responded to these problems both directly and indirectly. That response, the book argues, was inconsistent and imperfect, and it led to some significant if unintended consequences: economic damage for Rome, crushing debt for the papacy, and political opportunity for the cardinals. Pattenden begins chapter 2 with an introduction to those cardinals as a political class and to the relationships that over time shaped their values, priorities, interests, and attitudes towards papal elections. He then unpacks one by one the problems inherent in the electoral model, exploring the responses they elicited and the repercussions that followed from there (chapters 3–7).

A final, critical chapter examines the consequences of the electoral monarchy for the institution of the papacy more broadly: how it contributed to a burgeoning bureaucracy, the growth of venal offices, and the explosion of public debt. Here, Pattenden is careful not to draw a straight line between these developments and papal elections; instead, he illuminates how each institutional change served to protect the interests of cardinals and popes and, significantly, the very ones compromised by the electoral constitution. That constitution, he concludes convincingly, must be seen as a significant contributing factor in the papacy's evolution. The book unfolds this thesis in sustained conversation with leading scholars and in particular Paolo Prodi, whose interpretation of the early modern papacy continues to define the field. Pattenden's work represents a compelling counterweight to Prodi's thesis, which identifies in the figure of the papal prince the engine of the papacy's evolution. *Electing the Pope* makes clear there is more to the story.

Complexity, in fact, is for Pattenden “the key to understanding the papacy’s history” (9), and his book offers a skillful defense of that claim. It does so by making this complexity visible, accessible, and understandable. That achievement is best illustrated in chapter 5, where, drawing on game theory, he immerses us in the dizzying process of decision-making inside the papal conclave. It is also clear when he discerns chain reactions in the maze of papal politics and explains how the problems inherent in papal elections could never be fully resolved. Thick with detail, the book at times creates its own information labyrinth; but even here, the inescapable complexity of the topic is only further underscored.

Pattenden anchors his arguments in a wealth of archival material, including ambassadorial dispatches, conclave voting records, treatises on election conduct, and news bulletins. He also mines the rich scholarship on the early modern papacy: indeed, his encyclopedic knowledge of this literature offers an invaluable introduction to the field. These sources span a timeframe of more than 350 years (despite its title, the book spills into the eighteenth century), though most address the years 1550–1700. Some readers may want a more detailed treatment of the earlier and later periods, but Pattenden’s focus is well justified by his arguments. A more useful supplement to his study might be a fuller discussion of his documents and of their authors and contexts.

Electing the Papacy makes a critical contribution to scholarship on the early modern papacy, but it offers still more. This is a book on both state-building and local politics; on the process of decision-making and the world of political elites; and on the value of studying constitutions and adopting interdisciplinary approaches to history. It deserves a broad audience and an enduring place in the historiography of early modern Europe.

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Erasmus on Literature: His “Ratio” or “System” of 1518/1519. Mark Vessey, ed. With Anthony Grafton, Brian Cummings, Kathy Eden, Riemer Faber, and Christopher Ocker. Erasmus Studies. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021. xx + 358 pp. \$95.

The *Ratio Seu Compendium Verae Theologiae* (A system or compendium of true theology) is one of Erasmus’s most important writings. It is a vast expansion of the (brief) *Methodus*, one of the preliminary texts of Erasmus’s first edition of the New Testament, the *Novum Instrumentum* (1516). This new text, *Ratio*, became one of the introductory texts of the edition of the *Novum Testamentum* of 1519, but foremost it had a life of its own. It is, so to speak, Erasmus’s version of Saint Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana* (On Christian teaching). Both texts deal with the interpretation of the Bible. Augustine’s work, divided into four books, sets the tasks for Christian preachers