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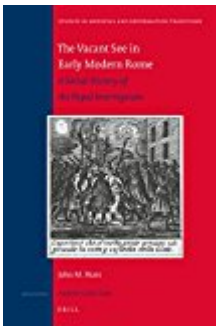

John Hunt. *The Vacant See in Early Modern Rome: A Social History of the Papal Interregnum.* Leiden: Brill, 2016. 300 pp. $199.99, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-31377-4.

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Commissioned by Matt Vester (West Virginia University)

At the death of a pope, most people think immediately of the secrecy of conclave and the drama of the white smoke. The early modernists add interregnal violence. John Hunt, in this rigorously researched book, has opened up the last of these to detailed analysis. His vibrant account of the vacant see between 1559 and 1655 gives us the papal interregnum from the perspective of the Roman populace. The vacant see, a topsy-turvy intermezzo characterized by ritualized rumor, violence, vengeance, protest, and speculation, had its own importance. Hunt's first argument is that the vacant see worked. The voice of the people was audible; it reached the pope and his associates, and influenced their immediate actions. More broadly, the vacant see provided a "regular check on the absolutist pretensions of early modern popes" (p. 265). His second argument, demonstrated in the body of his research, is that the vacant see should not be considered a period of simple chaos and disorder. Even at its most heated, Romans followed particular patterns of behavior, with varied but defined motives.

The introduction and first chapter offer a useful guide to the bodies and laws that governed early modern Rome. The rival powers of the College of Cardinals at the Holy See and the ***Popolo Romano,*** or civic government, had both suffered a gradual loss of influence as the papacy and papal families flourished in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Liberated during the vacant see, they battled each other for primacy and for the chance to impose their jurisdiction on an unruly populace. Hunt details the responsibilities and edicts that preoccupied each body--controlling gates, patrolling streets, issuing the decrees plastered in streets and markets--and the disputes that led each side to cancel out the other's attempts to impose order.

The second chapter analyzes popular responses to news of the pope's death. Hunt focuses on the way rumors of the pope's health and demise, and rituals surrounding his death and burial, revealed the populace's assessment of him. Aware of this, popes sought to conceal their ill health and their final actions. This including

transferring the most dangerous criminals away from city prisons, which would be opened during the interregnum. Hunt, building on Paolo Prodi's work in *Il Sovrano Pontefice* (1982), argues that the behavior of the populace at the papal death demonstrated their paradoxical stance: venerating the spiritual soul of the pope while hating his princely self.

Hunt analyzes types of violence and vengeance across the city in the subsequent two chapters. The population of the city swelled, and the gender balance tilted even further, as young men rushed to Rome to fill the sudden need for soldiers, bodyguards, and vigilantes. Hunt gives us the voices of men on the margins of society, seeking profit or fortune from Rome's turmoil. Violent rites that already characterized the city increased, such as the house-scorning identified by Elizabeth Cohen, and the surprising practice of recapturing wives fleeing broken marriages, along with the more usual rape, looting, and blackmail. But Hunt also shows that even as Romans used the vacant see to seek personal revenge and right perceived imbalances, they continued to follow scripted rules for seeking revenge.

The order in this disorder extended to the ritual pillaging of the vacant see. The final two chapters return to the populace's relationship to the pope himself. Hunt sees the vacant see as a time of collective protest, both in rhetoric and in actions. This is the moment when Rome's famous Pasquino statue, the locus of antipapal invective, stole the limelight as the populace vilified the dead pope's unpopular policies. It seems to have been impossible for any early modern pope to remain beloved in death. Hunt also distinguishes between general ritual pillage that took place habitually during the vacant see, and targeted, destructive ritual assaults, particularly on papal statues, as a form of direct criticism. Notably, these assaults united otherwise separate social classes. They also showed evolving perceptions of the papacy, increasingly emphasizing the pope's princely over his spiritual nature.

During the conclave that marked the closing of the vacant see--described here in detail--the watching Roman public fueled the news and gambling industries through their rumors and speculations. They expressed their opinions on what kind of pope they wanted next, and defied attempts to legislate their behavior. It would be helpful if in this chapter Hunt had discussed more explicitly the range and credibility of his sources, given their purpose. Hunt also argues that ritual pillaging (of the pope-elect's conclave cell and his family's palace) should be interpreted as an assertion of the *vox populi* and of varied popular opinions rather than an expression of the new pope's transformation (p. 241). In this way, even the lowest-born Romans could comment on and contribute to affairs of state.

This book will quickly and deservedly become required reading for students of early modern crime, protest, elections, and ritual, as well as, of course, the papacy, Rome, and Italy. Hunt has immersed himself in the trials and other archival records of Rome and given us a detailed and thoughtful picture of Roman behavior. That said, I must mention a few outstanding concerns. Hunt does not always clarify how much *sede vacante* violence differs from everyday *sede piena* violence. Some acts were specific to the interregnum, and others differenced in scope, but we need a better sense of scale. Equally, many acts of vengeance had a gendered aspect that is not fully explored. Neither does Hunt explain his use of terminology among "papacy," "Vatican," and "Holy See." The book also needed more copyediting than it received. Finally, Hunt presents a static picture of vacant see practices, with the exception of the profoundly hated Paul IV, whose welcome death in 1559 shows that unpopular leaders did not always get away with everything. More explicit discussion of change over time would help to anchor his larger argument about absolutism.

With this book, Hunt contributes to the long historiography of violence, ritual, and the public sphere, and joins the ranks of Laurie Nussdorfer and Thomas and Elizabeth Cohen as invaluable interpreters of early modern Rome's social history. He also offers a necessary complement to Miles Pattenden's current work on elite negotiations during the conclave, reminding us that even cardinals were subject in many ways to the needs and desires of the less privileged. Hunt's conclusions demonstrate the vacant see's contribution to the stability of the papacy, even as it revealed the papacy's weaknesses. The threat of the next vacant see--when the people's judgment of him would be revealed--also held each pope to certain standards of behavior and forced him to consider his local legacy. Above all, Hunt establishes that the early modern papal state, at least, did not always have a monopoly on legitimate violence, and that popular protest had a real and lasting effect.