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In dialogue: responses to papal communication

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ABSTRACT
This essay examines responses to papal communication in Latin Christendom principally between the years 1100 and 1400. It introduces seven multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary articles in a special issue of the *Journal of Medieval History* on this topic, while also exploring further examples that reveal the range of responses to papal communication and the significance of these responses. It emphasises the ways in which papal communication was tied to papal authority, the importance of examining the wider context and life cycle of papal communication, and it considers some of the methodological challenges that this topic poses.

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To send a message is to engage in dialogue; it is the beginning of a conversation. But what of the *responses* that a message produces? While there is a rich and ever burgeoning body of scholarship concerning the medieval papacy and its communication with various audiences, it has largely attended to the message that has been sent and received by the papacy. This special issue therefore spotlights the dialogue that is initiated and what responses to papal communication – in all their diversity, complexity and sheer messiness – can reveal.

In so doing, this essay builds upon the foundations of an earlier special issue of the *Journal of Medieval History* devoted to papal communication that was published in 2018.[1] The earlier volume focused on papal communication in the period between 1100 and 1300 CE with a particular emphasis on England, France, Ireland and Italy, through eight multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary articles that centred upon papal Rome in some manner: the symbols, rituals and clothing of pontiffs, and the spatial and iconographic messages of the Lateran palace and the churches of Rome. Other contributions explored the visitor experience as mediated through textual accounts of the city or through its materiality (such as translating holy soil back to Ireland). Above all, this volume emphasised the plurality of papal communication and it joined a growing body of scholarship on this topic.[2]

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[1] The following abbreviation is used in this paper: *PL: Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*

Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt, William Kynan-Wilson, Gesine Oppitz-Trotman and Emil Lauge Christensen, eds., *Papal Communication in the Central Middle Ages*, special issue of the *Journal of Medieval History* 44, no. 3 (2018), reprinted under the same title by Routledge in 2021.

[2] Recent scholarship shows the breadth of papal communication in terms of media, messages and geographical distance. It includes Rosamond McKitterick, *Rome and the Invention of the Papacy: The Liber pontificalis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Joëlle Rollo-Koster, *The Great Western Schism 1378–1417: Performing Legitimacy, Performing Unity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); the contributions to Minoru Ozawa, Thomas W. Smith and Georg Strack, eds., *Communicating Papal Authority in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge,

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In many respects, the present special issue is in dialogue with that earlier volume: it works with a similarly broad definition of communication and concentrates on Northern and Western European material mainly (although not exclusively) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[3] But the papers presented here shift the focus towards the recipients of papal communication and their responses to it, while also exploring how the papal curia, in turn, came to reflect on and adapt to the way its communication was received.

While Rome inevitably looms large as a place and as an idea, many of the articles in this special issue work outwards from the papal city, unlike the earlier volume in which the direction of communication was largely centred upon Rome itself. Here, each article is concerned with the multi-directional and multi-layered nature of communication and how this can further our understanding of both the curia and the many communities with whom it interacted. Communication was cyclical, not linear; responses often fed back to the sender (the papal curia) and informed future acts of communication. In this way, messages had both a life and an afterlife; they could leave important and formative legacies; they could reverberate generations later in novel or modified terms and with unexpected and unintended audiences.

For several decades, scholars have rightly emphasised the reactive nature of the papacy, how it reacted and responded to appeals from the rest of Christendom, as opposed to simply initiating and enforcing its own vision of government.[4] This volume aspires to illuminate another aspect of the papacy's interactions with the wider world by attending to responses to papal communication. Understanding how papal communication was received in Western Christendom, how it was used and adapted by the communities and institutions with which the papacy was in dialogue – and how the papacy, in turn, responded to the reception of its communications, illuminates papal authority and power. The authority of the papacy was founded upon how its

2023); and Kirsty Day, 'Sorrow, Masculinity and Papal Authority in the Writing of Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) and His Curia', *Journal of Medieval History* 49, no. 2 (2023): 201–26. Among recent works emphasising responses to diverse forms of papal communication are Danica Summerlin, *The Canons of the Third Lateran Council: Their Origins and Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Emil Lauge Christensen, 'Visits from Rome: Papal Legates and the *Adventus* in English Accounts, *c.*1170–1250' (PhD diss., Aalborg University, 2019); and D.L. d'Avray, *Papal Jurisprudence, 385–1234: Social Origins and Medieval Reception of Canon Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[3] Theorists have defined and categorised communication in numerous ways. We use 'communication' in a broad semiotic sense to mean the transfer of information through various media, both verbal and non-verbal, with different degrees of directness and over different periods of time and space. For some useful introductions and overviews of this field from the perspective of medieval studies, see Marco Mostert, 'New Approaches to Medieval Communication?', in *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 18–21; Gerd Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale: Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003). See also Gerd Althoff, Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt and William Kynan-Wilson, 'Framing Papal Communication in the Central Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval History* 44, no. 3 (2018): 251–60. 'Papal communication' is understood as communications produced by, or relating to, members of the papal curia in some fashion. Individual authors in this special issue, *Journal of Medieval History* 49, no. 3 (2023), have characterised the communicative processes that they examine in their own terms.

[4] For an overview of this debate, see Patrick Zutshi, 'Petitioners, Popes, Proctors: The Development of Curial Institutions, *c.*1150–1250', in *Pensiero e sperimentazioni istituzionali nella 'Societas Christiana' (1046–1250)*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2007), 265–93, especially 265–8; central in this discussion has been Ernst Pitz, *Papst-reskript und Kaiserreskript im Mittelalter* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1971); and idem, 'Die römische Kurie als Thema der vergleichenden Sozialgeschichte', *Quellen und Forschungen aus Italienischen Bibliotheken und Archiven* 58 (1978): 216–345. For recent contributions, see for instance Summerlin, *Canons of the Third Lateran Council*; Benedict Wiedemann, *Papal Overlordship and European Princes, 1000–1270* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); and Jessalynn Bird, '"Theologians Know Best": Paris-Trained Crusade Preachers as Mediators between Papal, Popular, and Learned Crusading Pieties', in this special issue, *Journal of Medieval History* 49, no. 3 (2023).

communication was used and received in the world; it was sustained by the communities and institutions with which it communicated. In essence, this special issue offers insights into how papal communication worked: how it was expressed, negotiated, modified, mutually invested in, or rejected by various communities in the central Middle Ages.

Responses to papal communication

Papal communication took many forms. It included written, visual, material, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, emotional, bodily and spatial communication. Of these, written communication and its responses are perhaps most readily explored by scholars. Letters, treatises, sermons, historical writings and biographies composed by members of the papal court played an important part in the increasingly centralised and communicative curia that developed in the central Middle Ages. Papal documents, however, were not simply textual modes of communication to be read; their visual and material properties were vital, as several sources indicate. One example is from Sturla Thórdarson's saga *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* that recounts the Norwegian King Haakon Haakonson's (1217–63) pleasure at the 'beautiful letter' he received from Pope Innocent IV (1243–54).[5]

Sensory and bodily forms of communication such as gestures, smells, tastes, speech and non-verbal sounds are harder to recover. Occasionally, other sources (typically texts and visual and material culture) record, reveal and mediate these modes of communication and/or their responses.[6] An example, which illustrates the complexity involved in untangling these strands of communication, was recorded by Arnulf of Lisieux (d. 1184) who noted that King Henry II (1154–89) of England 'always received the letters of Pope Alexander [III (1159–81)] with reverence and grace'. In marked contrast, Arnulf included an extended account of how Henry demonstrated his disapproval of the antipope Victor IV (1159–64):

> [King Henry] refused to touch the letters that had come from the royal hand of Octavian [Pope Victor], treating them as if they were something foul and filthy. Contemptuously, he raised Victor's wooden tablet from the dust where it had been placed by the hands who had offered it. At once, he then threw the tablet over his head, as high as he could, in front of the messenger. This raised a laugh among all those who were present. Judging from acts like these, it is clear that Henry's will was firmly in favour of Lord Alexander without any ambiguity …[7]

As this scene demonstrates, responses are multi-layered. Note the physical and ritual reception of the message, the attention to its materiality and the king's bodily gestures

[5] 'bref Þat it fagra': Guðbrandur Vigfusson, ed., *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, in *Icelandic Sagas and Other Historical Documents relating to the Settlements and Descents of the Northmen on the British Isles*, Rolls Series 88. 4 vols. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887–94), 2: 239.

[6] Mostert, 'New Approaches to Medieval Communication?', 22.

[7] C.P. Schriber, trans., *The Letter Collections of Arnulf of Lisieux* (Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 58–9 (no. 1.20); F. Barlow, ed., *The Letters of Arnulf of Lisieux.* Camden, 3rd series, 61 (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1939), 42–3 (letter 28): 'Que tamen super hoc ipsius ab initio voluntas extiterit, multis declaravit inditiis et expressit, quoniam patris Alexandri nuntios et litteras cum reverentia semper exceptet gratia, nullumque se alium suscepturum, adhibita sepe coram omnibus asseveratione, predixit. Porro litteras Octaviani oblatas renuit manu regia, velut immundum aliquid sordidumque, contingere; sed in contemptum eius lignee tabelle, quam ipse statim coram nuntio post dorsum suum quam sublimius potuit, risu multitudinis que aderat prosequente, proiecit. Ex his igitur manifestum est voluntatem eius in favorem domini Alexandri sine omni ambiguitate firmatam … ' On the significance of laughter here, see Peter J.A. Jones, *Laughter and Power in the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2019), 159.

as textually mediated by Arnulf. Each facet contributes to our understanding of how this message was received and how this reception was communicated, even if certain nuances in the process of communication evade straightforward interpretation and neat categories today. The multi-layered aspect of responses briefly outlined in this example is evident throughout this special issue.

When discussing responses to papal communication, we need to think about what and to whom respondents are responding. Here, we have selected some broad categories to consider: first, the legitimacy of papal authority (for which it is rare to find outright rejection); second, the legitimacy of the current officeholder (as is evident in Arnulf's passage quoted above); and third, specific messages conveyed in an act of papal communication (where some but not all aspects of a message may be accepted). Recipients might respond to all three issues or just one or two of them.

When we scrutinise cases where papal communication was accepted, things quickly become more complicated. Reception is rarely explained by contemporary sources in neat terms. With this in mind, we have employed three wide-ranging terms ('celebration', 'adaptation' and 'critical acceptance') that move from clearly positive acceptance to more ambiguous, negotiated and/or selective acceptance. At the opposite end of the spectrum, papal communication is ultimately accepted albeit in ways that reveal contemporary critical attitudes towards the papacy.

In most of the examples discussed below, and in the essays that follow, celebration, adaptation and accepted criticism are mixed with one another to a greater or lesser extent. We employ our three broad terms to highlight aspects of reception, with the awareness that responses cannot be sorted into exclusive categories. Rather, they bleed into one another and frequently overlap. In what follows, we pick out some illustrations of these terms and how they are threaded throughout this special issue and other relevant case studies.

Celebration

By 'celebration' we mean examples of reception where an act of papal communication was clearly accepted and favourably received by at least one recipient *and* publicly announced or displayed in a manner which served to emphasise the pope's importance and position; in short, where self-conscious celebration was integral to the response. Such examples signalled both an acceptance of papal authority and celebration of the specific message conveyed by the act of communication. As a result, the pope's legitimacy and status was consolidated among the audience. Moreover, the recipient was often motivated to stage such a celebration by a wish to use papal authority and papal communication to strengthen their own local position.

The papacy was keenly aware of the way in which local rulers used its communications to build up their own status, and, in a positive feedback loop, how this in turn helped establish the local authority of the papacy. This may be illustrated by the development of the Golden Rose. From the eleventh century onwards, the popes adapted the tradition of giving a golden rose, a golden ornament in the shape of a rose and scented with chrism (or myrrh) and musk, on Laetare Sunday.[8] Originally a Rome-centred ceremony focused

[8] On the golden rose, see Elisabeth Cornides, *Rose und Schwert im päpstlichen Zeremoniell* (Vienna: Wissenschaftliches Antiquariat H. Geyer, 1967); Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, trans. Gesine Oppitz-Trotman, 'Innocent III and

on the Lateran Palace in which the pope granted a rose to the prefect of Rome, the chief secular official of the city, these gifts began to be distributed more widely to magnates and rulers across Christendom. The papal curia emphasised the precise meaning of the ceremony in sermons, in *ordines* and in the letters that accompanied golden roses sent to recipients who were not in the pope's presence. For example, writing to King Louis VII of France (1137–80) in 1163, Pope Alexander III underscored the closeness between rose and pope as well as the antiquity of the ritual: every year popes would carry the rose 'in their own hands', while also providing the kind of spiritual interpretations that *ordines* indicate would otherwise have been delivered in person.[9] The gift of the rose became, as Paravicini Bagliani has stressed, 'the most prestigious political present of the papacy … donated as a sign of papal affection', and also, simultaneously, an opportunity to perform papal legitimacy.[10]

The lay chronicler Ulrich Richental (d.1437), a citizen of Constance, offers a detailed description of one such ceremony during the Council of Constance (1414–18), when John XXIII (antipope 1410–15) gave Emperor Sigismund (d. 1437) a golden rose at Lent 1415. Ulrich described how the pope handed the emperor the golden rose to hold before Mass, and afterwards they walked up to the palace balcony and showed themselves to the people. Then the emperor rode through the city of Constance – rose still in hand – 'so that everyone might see it plainly', accompanied by nobles and musicians. He then placed it on the high altar of the city's cathedral 'as an offering to Our Lady, where it stands to this day'.[11] The emperor responded to the gift in accordance with custom: he honoured the gift and its message of papal favour. By publicly displaying the gift in the streets of Constance and in the cathedral, he also recognised John's authority and legitimacy. It was a visual celebration of the emperor's relationship with the pope and of their mutual support.

Ulrich Richental's text is also notable for its subtle shift of emphasis that hints at how such celebratory messaging could be adapted in its retelling. He devotes much attention to what Sigismund did with the rose after he had received it; in effect, the emperor is presented as chief giver (rather than the pope) and the city of Constance as the chief recipient (rather than the emperor). The rose was effectively given for a second time. Thus, in Ulrich's account, it is Sigismund who gives the golden rose to the city of Constance, demonstrating his humility, piety and affection towards the city. On the altar of the city's cathedral, the rose retained its value as a symbol of the honour paid to Constance even after John XXIII's deposition in May 1415. When a new pope, Martin V (1417–31), was finally consecrated on 21 November 1417, the rose was to be found on the altar alongside two mitres and 'all the relics that were then in Constance'.[12] Papal

the World of Symbols of the Papacy', *Journal of Medieval History* 44, no. 3 (2018): 261–79; and Rollo-Koster, *The Great Western Schism*, 97–110.

[9] J.-P. Migne, ed., *Alexandri III Romani pontificis, Opera omnia, id est epistolae et privilegia. PL* 200 (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1855), cols. 198–9: 'in manibus gestaremus'. See also Damian J. Smith, 'A Golden Rose and the Deaf Asp that Stoppeth her Ears: Eugenius III and Spain', in *Pope Eugenius III (1145–1153): The First Cistercian Pope*, eds. Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt and Andrew Jotischky (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 219–42.

[10] Paravicini Bagliani, 'Innocent III and the World of Symbols', 268.

[11] Thomas Martin Buck, ed., *Chronic des Konstanzer Konzils 1414–1418 von Ulrich Richental* (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2010), 42; Louise Ropes Loomis, trans., John Hine Mundy and Kennerly M. Woody, eds., *The Council of Constance: The Unification of the Church* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 112.

[12] Buck, ed., *Chronik des Konstanzer Konzils*, 110; Ropes Loomis, trans., *Council of Constance*, 168.

communication could have an unexpected afterlife, coming to play new roles in new contexts – sometimes wholly unanticipated by the sender.

The display of papal communication as a performance is also integral to the article 'Power, Celebration and Circuits of Legitimation: The Local Use of Papal Letters in Late Twelfth-Century Denmark' in this special issue, in which Emil Lauge Christensen, Kim Esmark and Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt analyse how papal letters were used in the local construction of papal and royal authority. They explore this through a close reading of a grand assembly at Ringsted in Denmark in 1170, orchestrated by the Danish king, Valdemar I (1157–82). Here, letters from Pope Alexander III played a prominent role, including a letter announcing the canonisation of King Valdemar's father, Cnut Lavard (d. 1131). The authors argue that the carefully staged event at Ringsted was a celebration of both the specific content of the papal letters and the wider relationship between pope and king. The context influenced the response: the setting, a public assembly, added further significance and authority to the papal letters. The authors suggest that through this the letters helped build the local legitimacy of both king and pope in a 'circuit of legitimation', a reciprocal exchange of recognition and glorification between pope and king.

Claudia Bolgia's article 'Italian and French Responses to Urban V's Visual Communications *c.*1368–1420' in this special issue similarly explores a celebratory response. She analyses how certain groups responded to a monumental reliquary-tabernacle in the Lateran Basilica commissioned by Pope Urban V (1362–1370); it was to house the revered relics of the heads of Sts Peter and Paul. The tabernacle was created shortly after Urban V's return to Rome in autumn 1367 and was intended to remind its audience of the centrality of Rome, the Lateran and the pope to Western Christendom. Bolgia traces the diversity of responses that papal art could evoke as it faced a range of recipients (both secular and ecclesiastic) with diverse attitudes to the papacy (both for and against), across a broad geographic area (from Rome to southern France), and over a long period of time (more than 50 years). She demonstrates that some groups responded with positive imitation, as when the Franciscan church at Apt in Provence created a tabernacle for the relics of St Elzéar modelled on the Lateran monument, while other groups responded with competitive emulation. In doing so, she offers a valuable insight into the ways in which the chain reactions of communication could be drawn out over vast distances and long periods. Through this case study, Bolgia reveals how a papal act of communication could be both celebrated and adapted by different groups through imitation and emulation.

Adaptation

By 'adaptation' we refer to the varied ways in which recipients used papal communication, sometimes consciously and selectively, and at other times not; they edited, manipulated, imitated, emulated, modified, misinterpreted and/or (re)interpreted papal messages in complex processes that made them mediators of papal ideas.

As the idea of the papacy as a source of political and religious legitimacy became increasingly accepted throughout Western Christendom from the late eleventh century onwards, acts of papal communication such as letters and gifts became ever more potent tools for making local claims about papal support. They were used to serve the

recipient's purpose, as when the Danish King Valdemar at Ringsted repurposed Pope Alexander III's letters to legitimise and consolidate his position.

Recipients sometimes repurposed papal messages across time and space, as a case of papal visual communication shows. The Lateran palace in the twelfth century contained several halls and rooms used for meetings and banquets; one of them, built by Pope Calixtus II (1119–24), was decorated with a series of frescoes that celebrated the reform popes' victories over their enemies. They showed the popes – from Pope Alexander II (1061–73) to Calixtus II himself – posing with their *pallium* and tiara as they triumphantly used their rival antipopes as a footstool (*scabellum*).[13] Located in a meeting room, the frescoes were seen not only by members of the papal curia but by a wide audience, and these politically charged images generated responses for decades after Calixtus II's pontificate. They were evoked in some of the many letters and encyclicals that were produced in favour of Pope Alexander III during the Schism of the 1160s. Writers who had seen the images at the Lateran first-hand during earlier visits used the images when promoting the Alexandrine cause. Among them were Bishop Arnulf of Lisieux and John of Salisbury (d. 1180) who were both active propagators of Pope Alexander's legitimacy and used the frescoes and their historical references as key points in the new contest between a pope and his opposers.[14] Both authors refer to these images as demonstrating that those who went against the papacy were ultimately defeated. They thereby ensured that Calixtus' frescoes became widely known among the learned ecclesiastical elite of the day, part of the clerical elite's joint frame of reference. The messages from the walls of the Lateran Palace were discussed in northern France, England and beyond.

The Investiture Contest generated a wealth of papal and anti-papal communication. One example of how communities responded to this crisis by selecting and editing papal communication is found in a case relating to the canons of Augsburg. In his article in this special issue, 'The Investiture Contest in the Margin: Popes and Peace in a Manuscript from Augsburg Cathedral', Erik Niblaeus explores a dispute between the canons of Augsburg cathedral chapter and their bishop, Hermann II (1096–1133). Records of this dispute were collected in a series of short texts preserved in the margins of a ninth-century manuscript, including excerpts of papal texts as the canons gutted papal writings for ideas and messages useful in an attempt to clarify their position. The texts in the margins speak as a collection. They speak to a specific moment in time and of a particular communal strategy for navigating a crisis. In this way, Niblaeus' article contributes to recent debates around the Investiture Contest, but his work also offers rich

[13] L. Duchesne, ed., *Le Liber pontificalis: texte, introduction et commentaire*. 2 vols. (Paris: E. Thorin, 1886–92), 2: 323; Christopher Walter, 'Papal Political Imagery in the Medieval Lateran Palace, Part 1', *Cahiers Archéologiques* 20 (1970): 162–6; see also Mary Stroll, *Symbols as Power: The Papacy Following the Investiture Contest* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 16–35. The motif of using one's enemy as a footstool resonates with biblical ideas (Ps. 110, Matt. 22:44 and Acts 2:34–5) and the Late Antique and Byzantine gesture of a victor trampling on a defeated enemy (*calcatio colli*): Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 57–8; Lucy Donkin, *Standing on Holy Ground in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022), 147.

[14] Barlow, ed., *Letters of Arnulf of Lisieux*, 30–3 (at 32, no. 24); W.J. Millor, H.E. Butler and C.N.L. Brooke, eds., *The Letters of John of Salisbury*. 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 1: 208, n. 11 (letter no. 124); it is noted that John may have seen the letter of 1159 from Arnulf of Lisieux. Abbot Suger also referred to the frescoes: Suger, 'Vita Ludovici grossi regis', in *Vie de Louis VI le Gros*, ed. and trans. Henri Waquet (Paris: H. Champion, 1929), 206 (chapter 27). For Arnulf and John as propagators for Alexander III, see Anne J. Duggan, '*Alexander ille meus*: The Papacy of Alexander III', in *Pope Alexander III (1159–81): The Art of Survival*, eds. Peter D. Clarke and Anne J. Duggan (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 13–49 (20).

material for wider discussions around the negotiation of local concerns and ideological dogma.

Half a century later, in the mid twelfth century, the volume and importance of papal communication had only grown. This was certainly the case in England where the clergy took pride in the direct flow of communication between their Church and the see of St Peter. The right to appeal to and write to the pope was among the freedoms for which Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury (1162–70), fought and ultimately died. Becket's martyrdom threw the light of spiritual glory on interactions between local churches and the papacy.[15] In his article 'Papal Communications and Historical Writing in Angevin England' in this special issue, Michael Staunton shows how papal letters were used in a variety of ways in historical accounts produced in Angevin England (1154–1216), creating a highly curated archive of papal letters. Focusing on the writings of Gervase of Canterbury, Roger of Howden, Herbert of Bosham and Gerald of Wales, Staunton analyses the plurality of responses from these authors towards papal letters, highlighting the variety of literary inclinations of historical writing in England during this period. He demonstrates that these papal letters were edited, manipulated and repurposed by these writers; they drew upon papal communication as a means of explaining ecclesiastical disputes, as sources for information and characterisation of papal figures, and as narratological devices. Staunton stresses that by the end of the twelfth century, the papal curia was in close and frequent contact with the royal English court and the English Church, and that papal letters had become an integral part of historical writing that could be used to great and varied effects by authors.

Equally, in her contribution to this special issue, '"Theologians Know Best": Paris-Trained Crusade Preachers as Mediators between Papal, Popular and Learned Crusading Pieties', Jessalynn Bird examines how preachers adapted papal communication on the crusades. Analysing crusade sermons from Paris in the early thirteenth century, she shows how preachers used papal crusade letters when preparing their sermons, choosing, modifying and interpreting papal imagery and metaphors to suit their own purposes in a finely tuned adaptive process. She details how these preachers acted as brokers between Rome and the locality, between lay and learned crusading pieties and discourses.

What emerges is a study into the complexities of controlling messages and the diverse agency of actors within and outside of the papal curia. Bird stresses the dialogic process between the papal curia and crusade promoters outside the curia; she emphasises how crusade promoters influenced papal ideas and communication by feeding back to the curia their adaptions and modifications of the papal message along with queries, local knowledge and local perceptions. The popes, she suggests, were responsive and reactive rather than mandating and dictatorial. Bird states '[i]deas and practices of crusading were therefore continually (re)fashioned between various individuals and groups in a multi-directional process.'[16] She argues that the study of the crusades would benefit if scholars started not with papal crusade letters but with the evidence showing how crusade

[15] See Z.N. Brooke, 'The Effect of Becket's Murder on Papal Authority in England', *Cambridge Historical Journal* 2 (1928): 225; Anne J. Duggan, '*Ne in dubium*: The Official Record of Henry II's Reconciliation at Avranches, 21 May 1172', *English Historical Review* 115 (2000): 643–58.

[16] Jessalynn Bird, '"Theologians Know Best": Paris-Trained Crusade Preachers as Mediators between Papal, Popular and Learned Crusading Pieties', in this special issue, *Journal of Medieval History* 49, no. 3 (2023).

promoters in various periods and regions served as mediators between different groups. This methodological point concerning the cyclic nature of communication and the multi-directional and multi-actor context of communication is of wider value.

Promoting the crusades was challenging for several reasons: it involved communicating with a broad and diverse audience, and it sought to move its audience to take up arms and risk life and limb in the process. Papal crusade letters were carefully crafted and yet there were still instances of ambiguities and misinterpretations. The complexity of papal crusade communication is highlighted in Christoph Maier's contribution, 'Papal Crusade Propaganda and Attacks against Jews in France in the 1230s: A Breakdown of Communication?' in this special issue, where he demonstrates how papal letters could be misconstrued. He discusses a series of anti-Jewish attacks in France during the preparations for the so-called Crusade of the Barons in the mid-1230s. He contends that this violence was, in part, provoked by the crusade message of Pope Gregory IX's (1227–41) letter *Rachel suum videns* of September 1234, and the subsequent dissemination of this message by crusader propagandists, even though Gregory never called for this violence in the first place and swiftly and furiously condemned it. Maier discusses how papal crusade letters and their ideas, imagery and arguments influenced public perceptions of crusading, including those that fostered the pogroms in France in the 1230s. His case demonstrates how Gregory IX's crusade communications at that point failed in relation to certain groups, because they indirectly and unintentionally fuelled an unwanted response among parts of the audience. It is therefore a study about the partial *breakdown* of papal communication: a disconnect between the intended outcome and the extreme reception of a message by a particular audience (or minority of an audience). Moreover, Maier's examination raises wider questions around the contexts into which messages enter, and how this plays a crucial role in their reception. This case study lays bare the extreme momentum of communication and the sheer impossibility for the sender to control a message.

Critical acceptance

As we have stressed, there is a sliding scale to consider in terms of reception and response – recipients could accept some but not all elements of a papal message; indeed, their response could communicate acceptance in tandem with some form of criticism. To reflect this complexity, we use the broad term 'critical acceptance', which implies that papal authority was accepted in principle, but sceptical questions might be raised about whether it was employed legitimately – actions and practices, decisions and ideas communicated by the papal curia might only be accepted by recipients to a certain extent.

Gift giving was a particularly vexed mode of papal communication from this perspective. As Lars Kjær discusses in his article 'Difficult Gifts: Gifts to and from the Popes in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century England' in this special issue, the exchange of precious objects as gifts was an important part of how the elites of Latin Christendom interacted with the popes and other members of the curia. On the one hand, gifts were the most concrete, tangible communication of favour and support imaginable. Recipients often took pride in papal gifts and responded with celebrations of their own, as in Sigismund's

display of the golden rose.[17] The exchange of gifts, however, was immersed in a highly developed framework of moral evaluation, in which the giving or receipt of gifts for any other reason than pure love was sometimes heavily criticised.[18] This affected the papacy (held to the highest of moral standards) more than any other princely court, and increasingly the curia attracted a reputation for greed and corruption. Kjær's article examines papal attempts to respond to this, but focuses on how English clerics and aristocrats navigated the challenges, how they responded to papal gifts and how they sought to present their communications with the papacy to avoid the accusation of involvement in a corrupt exchange of presents.

The St Albans monk and historian Matthew Paris (*c.*1200–59) was among the many observers who criticised the greed and corruption of the papal curia. He has often been held up by scholars as an arch anti-papalist,[19] but as Donald Matthew and Björn Weiler have both argued, Matthew's attitude towards the papacy was more complex than is often credited.[20] Indeed, Matthew is one of the best examples of how an individual could both accept and criticise papal messages in ways that may initially appear contradictory and yet were consistent with the ideals many sought to find at the papal curia.

Matthew Paris was not only highly critical of curial greed but also of papal interference in English affairs. He did, however, gladly accept the papal decision to authorise his mission to Norway in 1248–9. At the request of the monks of the Benedictine abbey of Nidarholm and with papal support, Matthew was appointed to help settle one of the abbey's disputes. Matthew took pride in the role he carried out: as Weiler observes, Matthew included accounts of his journey and the papal mandate authorising it not just in the *Chronica majora*, but also in the smaller redactions of the chronicle he produced.[21] Matthew's eagerness to associate his mission in Norway with the papacy may appear to clash with his criticism of many papal practices and ideas, but it was not simple hypocrisy. It was precisely because he understood that both he and the popes were part of the same institution, the Church, that he could not stay silent about the papal abuses that he perceived. It was his duty as a chronicler to inspect and interrogate in

[17] See also the contributions to Lars Kjær and Gustavs Strenga, eds., *Gift Giving and Materiality in Europe, 1300–1600: Gifts as Objects* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022). The precious material of the gifts meant that they presented a not insignificant contribution to papal finances: see Benedict Wiedemann, 'The Character of Papal Finance at the Turn of the Twelfth Century', *English Historical Review* 133 (2018): 503–32.

[18] On frameworks of interpretation, see, in particular, Gadi Algazi, 'Introduction: Doing Things with Gifts', in *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange*, eds. Gadi Algazi, Valentin Groebner and Bernard Jussen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), 9–27.

[19] Richard Vaughan, *Matthew Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1958), 140–1; Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*. 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1974), 1: 369–74; Maureen Purcell, *Papal Crusading Policy, 1244–1291* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 127; Suzanne Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the 'Chronica majora'* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 122–34; Robert Brentano, *Two Churches: England and Italy in the Thirteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 5; David Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), 137.

[20] Björn Weiler, 'Matthew Paris on the Writing of History', *Journal of Medieval History* 35, no. 3 (2009): 270, n. 169: Matthew was 'a great admirer of Pope Alexander III … and, in the *Vitae duorum Offarum*, [he] fully accepted the legitimising authority of the papal court'. See also Donald Matthew, 'The English and the Community of Europe in the Thirteenth Century'. Stenton Lecture 1996 (Reading: University of Reading, 1997), especially 9–10.

[21] Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, ed. H.R. Luard. Rolls Series 57. 7 vols. (London: Longmans, 1872–83), 5: 42–45; Björn Weiler, 'Matthew Paris in Norway', *Revue Bénédictine* 122 (2012): 153–81 (156). In his *Historia Anglorum*, Matthew's mission seems to have grown somewhat to encompass the reform of all the Norwegian Benedictine houses: Matthew Paris, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. F. Madden. Rolls Series 44. 3 vols. (London: Longmans, 1866–9) 3: 40–1, 304; Weiler, 'Matthew Paris in Norway', 158.

order that the most truthful account was set down for posterity and the instruction of his fellow monks.[22]

The same meticulous attention is evidenced in the representations of papal communication that feature in his *Chronica majora*.[23] Matthew depicted a multitude of small drawings in the margins alongside his text, including heraldic devices, crowns and croziers.[24] Among them are nine representations of documents, of which several relate to communication between the papacy and England in some manner.[25] While a small sample, it is notable that Matthew augments his textual references to papal communication through these drawings.[26] In each instance, Matthew quotes a version of the document alongside the marginal image or, in one instance (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 16 II, f. 45r), he reproduces it in his *Liber Additamentorum* (London, British Library, MS Nero D I, f. 122v).

The care and detail with which Matthew Paris depicts each document is striking. Every representation of a document is unique and individual in some manner. For example, consider his image of a papal bull of 1246 (Figure 1) in which he conveys the turn up at the bottom of the document and the distinctively tied cord by which the *bulla* is attached and how this differs from a later image of three documents with bright red cords that concern the withdrawing of papal privileges (Figure 2).[27] This suggests close observation of the genuine documents by Matthew.[28]

It has rightly been noted that these images direct the reader to other passages and/or versions of the content found in these documents. But there is even more at work here. These drawings indicate a hierarchy of significance in Matthew's mind, because not every charter or document that he quotes or reproduces in the *Chronica majora* is represented in the margins. The marginal images therefore denote importance while also acting as markers of authority; they are succinct and immediate signs of Matthew's methodology as a historian who has tracked down important documentary evidence. The individualised nature of the drawings underscores his care and attention as historian when dealing with primary sources. Moreover, Matthew includes these images to show the role of the papacy within English affairs; he uses them as a visual manifestation and mnemonic device to remind the reader of papal power and interference through the abstract authority of documents.

Matthew Paris' representations of documents highlight a further issue: senders and recipients of papal communication were keenly aware of the visual and material properties of papal letters. Christoph Maier has emphasised that papal letters were physically

[22] Weiler, 'Matthew Paris on the Writing of History', *passim*.
[23] The *Chronica majora* has long been dated 1240–5, but recently Nathan Greasley has argued that Matthew began working on it in 1247. Cf. Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, especially 52–63, 66–7, 102–3, 112–13; and Nathan Greasley, 'Revisiting the Compilation of Matthew Paris's *Chronica majora*: New Textual and Manuscript Evidence', *Journal of Medieval History* 47, no. 2 (2021): 230–56.
[24] For a catalogue of these marginal images, see Lewis, *Art of Matthew Paris*, 443–57.
[25] Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 16 II, ff. 35v (King John's charter of submission as he resigns his crown into the pope's hands), 42r (Magna Carta), 43r (forest charter), 44r (King John writing to the pope), 45r (charter), 181r (charter of the king of Scotland), 198v (papal privilege), 199v (withdrawal of papal privileges by Innocent IV in 1245) and 278r (Robert Grosseteste's letter of protest to the pope).
[26] Lewis, *Art of Matthew Paris*, 188.
[27] For the text, see Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, 2: 606. Lewis, *Art of Matthew Paris*, 190.
[28] Suzanne Lewis comes to the same conclusion regarding the papal bull of 1215 (f. 45r): Lewis, *Art of Matthew Paris*, 191. For the *Liber Additamentorum*, see Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, 78–91. See also Laura Cleaver, *Illuminated History Books in the Anglo-Norman World, 1066–1272* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 104–7.

Figure 1. Image representing the bull granting a privilege to the Dominicans by Pope Gregory IX (1227-41) in Matthew Paris' manuscript of the *Chronica majora*. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 16 II, folio 198v. Source: The Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International Licence.

Figure 2. Image representing the bull withdrawing papal privileges by Pope Innocent IV (1243–54) in 1245, in Matthew Paris' manuscript of the *Chronica majora*. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 16 II, folio. 199v. Source: The Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International Licence.

impressive objects that 'could be shown, seen and examined' – a point also discussed in the article by Lauge Christensen, Esmark and Fonnesberg-Schmidt in this special issue.[29] Furthermore, in her article in this volume, Jessalynn Bird shows how crusade preachers invoked 'images of messengers, charters, seals, contracts and courts' that resonated with

[29] Christoph T. Maier, 'Ritual, What Else? Papal Letters, Sermons and the Making of Crusaders', *Journal of Medieval History* 44, no. 3 (2018): 333–46 (336); and Emil Lauge Christensen, Kim Esmark and Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt, 'Power, Celebration and Circuits of Legitimation: The Local Use of Papal Letters in Late Twelfth-Century Denmark', in this special issue, *Journal of Medieval History* 49, no. 3 (2023).

the ritualised display of such messages and agents of the papacy.[30] Matthew's depictions of papal documents should be read in the same vein. Through his individualised images, Matthew effectively recreates the display and inspection of these documents as would have occurred when they were first received. In so doing, Matthew's response to these papal documents is double-sided: on the one hand, he celebrates them through re-enacting their ritualised performance in miniature. Yet, on the other hand, he is generally critical of what these documents signify. This example distils the layered response to papal communication; how elements may be broadly accepted even if other dimensions of the message are not.

Finally, as the images in the margins of Matthew Paris' *Chronica majora* indicate, much can be gained by considering the paratextual as a mode of communication. The organisation and categorisation of information through paratexts as a form of response is a significant topic, and one that is ripe for further consideration within the field of papal communication.

Challenges in papal communication

Over the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the popes became increasingly aware of the dangers and difficulties, both practical and reputational, that beset their communications. Papal letters remained a potent tool and forgeries were common; hence the validity of papal missives was often brought into question by interested parties.[31]

When in the 1190s the Norwegian King Sverre (1184–1202) clashed with Archbishop Eirik Ivarsson of Nidaros (1189–1213) over the liberty and rights of the Norwegian Church, the archbishop excommunicated the king. However, Sverre refused to recognise that this had been authorised by the pope and soon produced a letter (reputedly from the pope) that lifted his excommunication; the king ordered it to be read aloud in the choir and its seal shown. This letter was, however, almost certainly a forgery: in 1198 Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) wrote to the Norwegian bishops accusing Sverre of having obtained a forged papal letter and repeated the excommunication.[32] Forgeries were a key concern for Innocent III who sought to stamp out the rampant falsification of papal documents, through whose depraved ingenuity 'the whiteness of apostolic purity is blackened'. In his *De falsariis*, he described how his own careful inspections had revealed a letter issued in his name to be a forgery and offered guidance on how to recognise falsifications.[33]

[30] Bird, 'Theologians Know Best'.

[31] For a recent study on forgeries, see Levi Roach, *Forgery and Memory at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

[32] G. Indrebø, ed., *Sverris saga* (Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt, 1920), 130–4 (chapters 121–8); Eirik Vandvik, ed. and trans., *Latinske dokument til norsk historie fram til år 1204* (Oslo: Det norske samlaget, 1959), 120–1 (no. 37); Torben K. Nielsen, 'Pope Innocent III and Denmark, Sweden and Norway', *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* 28 (2001): 7–32, especially 16–19; and idem, 'Celestine III and the North', in *Pope Celestine III (1191–1198): Diplomat and Pastor*, eds. John Doran and Damian J. Smith (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), 159–78, especially 169–76.

[33] 'candorem puritatis apostolicae denigrare': Innocent III, *De falsariis,* in *Innocentii III Romani pontificis, Opera omnia*, vol. 3, ed. J.-P. Migne. *PL* 216 (Paris: Apud Garnier fratres, editores et J.-P. Migne, successores, 1891), cols. 1216–18, quotation at 1216; see Alfred Hiatt, *The Making of Medieval Forgeries* (London: British Library, 2004), 5–26; and Martha D. Rust, *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books: Exploring the Manuscript Matrix* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 97–8.

Thomas of Marlborough's account of litigation at the papal curia between 1204 and 1206 includes a tense description of Pope Innocent III and his cardinals closely scrutinising the papal documents that Thomas' abbey of Evesham possessed:

> He [Innocent] took them in his own hands and pulled between the bulla and the document to see if he could separate the bulla from the cord. Scrutinising them very carefully, he then handed them to the cardinals for them to scrutinise, and when they had gone the rounds of them all they came back to the pope. Holding up the privilege of Constantine, he said 'Privileges of this kind which are unknown to you are very well known to us, and could not be forged'; then holding up the letters, he said, 'These are genuine.'

Thomas records his relief at the pope and cardinals' judgement, for although he himself 'had nothing to be guilty about', he knew that the man through whom the documents had been procured and who 'happened to be an official messenger of the curia, was considered a forger'.[34]

This scene from Thomas of Marlborough's text forms a suitable coda to this introduction in two ways. First, it shows the papal curia's unsuccessful attempt to demonstrate its ability to control and validate its own communications. The papacy believed it had procedures for establishing the validity of documents, but Thomas shows that it was not always successful: doubts and challenges dogged dialogue with the papal curia. This example grasps in miniature the great, often unsolvable, challenges that the papacy and its partners across Europe faced in their attempt to craft a centre capable of shepherding a continuously growing flock of believers. Second, it highlights the cyclical nature of papal communication which is often only evident in the abstract; for instance, when local knowledge and ideas filtered back to the curia in response to earlier communication. But with the example of Thomas, it is apparent in a very concrete sense: these papal documents originally sent from Rome to England returned to the papal curia where they instigated further communication with the papacy.

Concluding remarks

This essay has showcased some of the important themes, issues and questions pertinent to the topic of papal communication and its responses. There is undoubtedly much more to be explored, but, above all, we hope that the sheer *messiness* of papal communication continues to be discussed and dissected. For instance, as Jessalynn Bird perceptively notes elsewhere in this special issue, it is difficult to trace the full life cycle of a message: where does it start and where does it end? By messiness, we mean the methodological challenges of disentangling communication: how to identify and address miscommunication, cross-

[34] Thomas of Marlborough, *History of the Abbey of Evesham*, eds. and trans. J. Sayers and L. Watkiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 298–99: Et diligentissime intuens ea tradidit cardinalibus intuenda, et cum per girum uenissent iterum ad dominum papam, ostendens priuilegium Constantini dixit, 'Huiusmodi priuilegia que uobis ignota sunt, nobis sunt notissima, nec possent falsari', et ostendens indulgentias dixit, 'Iste uere sunt'. See also Jane E. Sayers, '"Original", Cartulary and Chronicle: The Case of the Abbey of Evesham', in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Internationaler Kongreß der Monumenta Germaniae Historica München, 16.-19. September 1986*, Teil IV: *Diplomatische Fälschungen*. Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Schriften 33, no. 4 (Hanover: Hansche Buchhandlung, 1988), 371–95. For more on Thomas' litigation at the curia see Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt and William Kynan-Wilson, 'Smiling, Laughing and Joking in Papal Rome: Thomas of Marlborough and Gerald of Wales at the Court of Pope Innocent III (1198–1216)', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 86 (2018): 153–81. For an early fifteenth-century example where the materiality of a papal bull is explicitly commented upon, see Buck, ed., *Chronic des Konstanzer Konzils*, 41; Ropes Loomis, trans., *Council of Constance*, 111.

communication and failed messages; how to appreciate the number and variety of parties that could be involved, including the agents, mediators, recipients (intended and unintended, known and unknown); and how to work with an increasingly broad set of sources that ranges from textual documents to more immaterial forms of communication. This is not always straightforward, and these are only a few of the intriguing issues to explore.

Throughout this special issue, the contributors demonstrate that to understand the response and impact generated by papal communication fully, it is fruitful to analyse not only the content of the messages, but also their wider processual context, including the circumstances surrounding their mediators, ritualised contexts of reception, and how these acts of communication were later recorded and interpreted. In sum, the contributions indicate the importance of considering the full life cycle and biography of papal communication.

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