The Curia: Camera

Stefan Weiß

10.1 Introduction

“Camera apostolica” is the name given to an institution whose primary task was to administer papal finances but which, in the 13th and 14th centuries, gradually developed into the central authority of the entire papal curia. Its head, the chamberlain, has even been termed the papal “Prime Minister” (Mollat). The office of chamberlain was first established as part of the curia by Pope Urban II (1088–1099), who bestowed this title on a former monk from the monastery of Cluny and entrusted him with the administration of papal finances. The new office rapidly gained in importance within the curia: under Pope Callixtus II (1119–1124) envoys from the archbishop of York were already reporting on its considerable influence.1

Nonetheless, the papacy had boasted a financial administration long before Urban II. We are reasonably well informed about it during the pontificate of Gregory the Great (590–604). His extant registers contain numerous letters concerning the administration of finances.2 Papal revenues were mostly derived from sizable land holdings concentrated above all in Sicily;3 smaller estates could be found in Latium in the vicinity of Rome,4 while there were also some estates in Provence.5 Papal correspondence gives us the names of papal

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2 Gregory the Great’s registers have been edited: Gregorii I papae Registrum epistolarum. Libri I–VII, (eds.) Paul Ewald and Ludo M. Hartmann, MGH Epp. 1–2 (Berlin: 1887); S. Gregorii magni Registrum epistularum, (ed.) Dag Norberg, 2 vols., CCSL 140–140a (Turnhout: 1982).

3 Sources compiled in Dieter Girgensohn, Italia pontificia X (Göttingen: 1975), 8–14, 193–220.

4 Sources compiled in Paul Kehr, Italia Pontificia XI (Berlin: 1917), 2–13.

5 For a summary, see Edward Spearing, The Patrimony of the Roman Church in the Time of Gregory the Great (Cambridge: 1918); Erich Caspar, Geschichte des Papsttums (Tübingen: 1933), 2.329–352.
representatives charged with transactions in and the administration of rents as well as other details about the financial administration. We possess similar, if more fragmentary, information about Pope Gregory II (715–731). In this case our source is the *Collectio canonum* by Deusdedit (1080s), who in his day could draw on the pope’s registers, still extant (but they later went missing).

Then begins, however, a long period about which we possess only scant information. Financial issues are rarely dealt with in papal letters and documents, and then only sporadically and sketchily. Narrative sources, too, provide us only with snapshots and frequently treat the theme polemically or satirically. Then, toward the end of the 12th century, the first summary of the sources of papal revenue emerged in the *Liber Censuum*, the record of payments compiled by the papal chamberlain Cencius. Nevertheless, the activities of the camera, and also of the chamberlain, still remain rather shadowy in the 13th century, even if fragments of the files and account books from the camera have been preserved. The first complete camera account books to have survived stem from two years in the pontificate of Boniface VIII (1294–1303); we have a few more from the pontificate of Clement V (1305–1314). It is not until John XXII (1316–1334) and the relocation of the papacy to Avignon in 1316 that the almost uninterrupted series of account books from the apostolic camera begins; it then continues until the eruption of the Great Western Schism (1378). During the schism the chamberlain and the camera personnel were on the side of (antipope) Clement VII (1378–1394), who was to reside in Avignon. Here it is possible to observe seamless continuity in the financial administration and the transmission of sources. Our information about his opponent, Urban VI (1378–1389), who had to improvise a new papal administration, is far inferior.

The fact that after Gregory the Great papal finances were rarely dealt with in papal correspondence is clearly connected to a structural change in the papacy

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6 See notes 2 and 3.

7 See below, n.41.

