

**LECTURES ON THE
HISTORY OF THE PAPAL
CHANCERY DOWN TO THE
TIME OF INNOCENT III**

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Lectures on the history of the papal chancery down to the time of Innocent III by Reginald L. Poole

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DOWN TO THE TIME OF INNOCENT III

by

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PREFACE

THE study of Papal documents has occupied me for many years. I began transcribing Bulls during the time when I held a post in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum so long ago as 1880, but I do not think that I published anything on the subject until 1892. At that time my interest was mainly historical and palaeographical, but when in 1897 I was called upon to give regular instruction in diplomatic in my own University of Oxford, I was led to pay closer attention to the forms of documents and to the modes of their transmission; and since then in most years I have given either a full course of lectures, or, if time did not permit, at least a shorter series, on the history of the Papal Chancery and on the characteristics of its literary productions. I welcomed therefore the opportunity, offered by my election by the Master and Fellows of Trinity College to the Birkbeck Lectureship in Ecclesiastical History in 1912, for applying myself to the improvement and extension of my lectures; and after I had completed my course in the Michaelmas Term of 1913 I looked forward to recasting what I had written so as to form a methodical treatise on the subject. In this hope I have been disappointed. An infirmity of eyesight for many months made it very difficult for me to perform my ordinary tasks and precluded the possibility of rearranging the materials of my

book, filled as it is with small details which would certainly have become confused had they been transferred and reinserted in different places without a more exact supervision than I could command. I was therefore obliged to leave the scheme of the work as it was at first composed, but I have done my best to revise the matter. I have rewritten nearly one-half of it, and have enlarged the book by about two-thirds. Originally it consisted of six lectures; but I removed some parts of the sixth and expanded them so as to form a seventh chapter. It was perhaps rash in the circumstances to venture upon publication at all; but I may plead in excuse that a book on the subject of which I treat is really wanted, for nothing at all dealing with it has ever been published in English. For this reason it will not be out of place to glance briefly at the course of its exposition in modern times.

The study of Papal as of other documents was founded in France. It is a part of the great learned tradition of the Benedictines of the congregation of St Maur. The illustrious Jean Mabillon first laid down the principles of diplomatic with a sureness of grasp which has made his treatise the model on which all subsequent work has proceeded. He had an instinct of critical divination which seldom allowed him to go astray, and the little that he says about Papal documents is pregnant with suggestions which have been turned to account by later scholars. His successors, the two authors of the *Nouveau Traité de Diplomatie*¹, dealt with the subject with much

¹ Their modesty forbade them from giving their names, but the survivor (R. T. Tassin) mentioned that of his colleague, Charles Toustain, in the preface to volume vi.

greater fulness. They may irritate us by their prolixity and by their constant attitude of defence against forgotten opponents; but their industry is beyond all praise, and the mass of material which they collected, especially with regard to the Papal Chancery, can never be neglected. But it would be idle to compare their critical initiative with that of Mabillon.

Nearly a century passed before a notable landmark in the study of Papal documents was fixed, in a Memoir on the Acts of Innocent III, by Léopold Delisle, a true successor of Mabillon in a large part of his varied activity. This short article, published in 1858, stands as the pattern for the exposition of the system of the Chancery and of the diplomatic of the later middle ages. Delisle's method is perfect; the main lines which he established have been established once for all, and even in details few of his statements have needed revision. His influence is apparent in the productions of the French School at Rome¹; but these, if we except the important editions of the *Liber Pontificalis* and the *Liber Censuum*, have been mainly occupied with the documents of a more recent period than that to which this volume is confined.

During the eighteenth century there was great and continuous activity in Italy in the publication of materials for history, and especially for ecclesiastical history, but less interest was shown in the criticism of documents.

¹ This is not less true of the late Comte L. de Mas-Latrie's *Éléments de la Diplomatique Pontificale*, which appeared in the *Revue des Questions Historiques* xxxix. (1886) 415-451; and of the relative sections in Arthur Giry's *Manuel de Diplomatique*, 1894. It is incorrect to speak, with Dr Bresslau, *Urkundenlehre*, p. 31, of Giry having emancipated himself from the Maurine influence and worked in close connexion with German researches; for Giry, like Delisle, was unfamiliar with the German language.