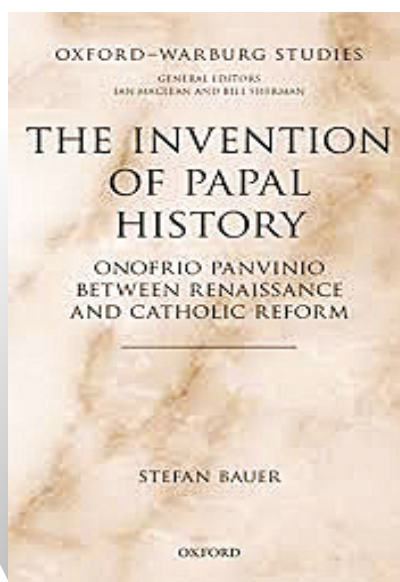


The Invention of Papal History



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STEFAN BAUER, *The Invention of Papal History: Onofrio Panvinio between Renaissance and Catholic Reform*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, Oxford-Warburg Studies, 2020, 288 págs, ISBN 978-0-19-880700-1.

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STEFAN BAUER'S EXCELLENT NEW BOOK examines the ecclesiastical history writing of Onofrio Panvinio (1530-68) in the context of the confessionalisation of the period. Panvinio played a key role in two related developments in sixteenth-century historiography. He was a central figure in what we know as the antiquarian movement that flourished in Rome around 1550, when historians established new methods of interpreting and documenting primary sources, and he was one of the first to apply antiquarian methods to the history of the Christian Church. He was also astonishingly productive: Bauer says, without overstatement, that «it would be hard to find another historian who had amassed such a large amount of material and written so many historical texts, on such a broad variety of subjects, by the age of thirty-eight» (p.2), Panvinio's age at his death. Except for Jean-Louis Ferrary's remarkably

detailed discussion of his work on pagan antiquities,¹ Panvinio's vast historical oeuvre has not attracted the attention that it deserves. Bauer adopts a three-pronged approach: he offers a new biography of Panvinio; he analyses in depth Panvinio's account of elections to the papacy; and he places some of Panvinio's other ecclesiastical history writing, including a study of St Peter, biographies of Renaissance popes, and an unpublished sweeping history of the Church, in the context of the period's confessional approaches to history. The result is insightful and enlightening, and it should inform all future investigations into the historiography, and especially the religious historiography, of this period.

In addition to his books, Panvinio left plenty of material for a future biographer, including lots of correspondence (most of it unpublished), letters of recommendation, a catalogue of his library, his own account of his life (written at the tender age of 34 for Girolamo Ruscelli's *Imprese di uomini illustri*) and even lists of expenditures and income. Paolo Panvinio wrote a biography of his elder brother, shortly after his death, and we have information about his efforts to secure Onofrio's manuscripts and belongings; we also have the judgements of the censors who reviewed Onofrio's works for publication. In fact, there is almost too much material: Panvinio was prone to rework and rearrange his writing, and so we often have several manuscript versions of the same piece. Some copies he created for publication, some he planned for manuscript circulation, and some are his rough drafts. On Panvinio's death, Pope Pius V banned the publication of his works as they stood – apparently there were «many things that need[ed] consideration and correction» (p.83), leading to the involvement of the censors – and so manuscript copies continued to circulate. Bauer's mastery of this Nachlass is admirable: there are huge quantities of material in the Vatican, but also in various Roman libraries, Milan, Munich, and elsewhere. Up until now, scholars have had to rely on the 1899 biographical study of Davide Aurelio Perini (“uncritical and erroneous”, according to Bauer [p.9])², and so Bauer's detailed engagement with the sixteenth-century sources for Panvinio's life and work, as well as his accounts of scholarship since, are very welcome.

Panvinio's letters and financial details are particularly valuable because they can help explain the forms that his scholarship took. Panvinio was born in Verona into a fairly modest family, lost his father as a child, and joined the Augustinian community in the city. He shone academically and won the attention of Girolamo Seripando, the Augustinian Prior General, who sent him to Augustinian houses in Naples and then Rome. He continued to stand out as a scholar, and in 1554 he received the very unusual privilege of being allowed to work *extra ordinem*, freed not only from regular observance, but also from the requirement to live with the Augustinians. While this was intellectually liberating, it meant that he had to find other means of support. Many of his letters inform his colleagues about his attempts to secure patronage in Rome and beyond. He won the backing of many prominent churchmen and princes: Cardinals Marcello Cervini, Alessandro Farnese, and Otto Truchsess von Waldburg; the merchant Hans Jakob Fugger; King Philip II of Spain and Emperors Ferdinand I

1. J.-L. Ferrary, *Onofrio Panvinio et les antiquités romaines*, Roma, 1996.

2. D. A. Perini, *Onofrio Panvinio e le sue opere*, Roma, 1899.

and Maximilian II. But while Cervini and Farnese especially provided Panvinio with access to sources and an entrée to intellectual life in Rome, the financial rewards that these figures offered never seem to have been quite enough. Panvinio did not secure a lucrative benefice and only briefly, in 1565, did he win a regular stipend, when he was appointed to the Vatican Library by Pius IV; Pius died less than a year later.

All this meant that Panvinio was sensitive to his patrons' wishes, and tailored his work to them. He tells us that Cervini steered him towards ecclesiastical history, and that Farnese, a would-be pope, encouraged his work on papal elections. In the 1560s, he sent Fugger enlarged manuscript copies of his works on the election of the pope and on the election of the Holy Roman Emperor, the latter of which had come out in print in 1558. On both occasions, he asked Fugger to keep them secret and not to allow them to be published, apparently worried both that his work would offend sensibilities in Rome, and that he would not be able to tempt other patrons with them. Most egregiously, in 1555, when Cervini had died and Farnese's support was not secure, Panvinio wrote a series of genealogical histories of Roman families, quite happily making tendentious connections between famous ancient and medieval figures and contemporary dynasties. Bauer shows that he even embellished an inscription to link Pope Honorius III with the present-day Savelli. When Panvinio wrote that the father of Pope Innocent VIII (Giovanni Battista Cibo, d.1492) was actually a doctor, rather than a knight, a sixteenth-century member of the family let it be known that Panvinio should fear for his life; in a later life of the pope Panvinio corrected his mistake. Clearly it would be wrong to suggest that other sixteenth-century historians were able to produce disinterested scholarship. But Panvinio must have looked with envy on contemporaries with more reliable sources of income, such as Fulvio Orsini, who enjoyed long-term positions with the Farnese family, Carlo Sigonio, who taught in universities, and Antonio Agustín, who had an ecclesiastical career.

Panvinio's attraction to potential patrons looking for attractive historical narratives was not because he had a reputation for flattery and the writing of attractive historical narratives. On the contrary, it was because he was known for his engaged and exhaustive historical research. He seems to have been drawn initially to questions of chronology. His first work, completed in 1551, was a chronicle of the Augustinian order, then Cervini appears to have proposed that he compose a universal chronicle early in the 1550s, before he completed his edition of the Roman *Fasti Capitolini*, first published in 1557.³ The last of these drew him into methodological questions about the evaluation of contradictory testimony, and of the reliability of ancient material evidence: were contemporary sources, or inscribed sources, necessarily more reliable than later accounts? On the basis of the reconstruction of Roman chronology in the *Fasti*, he went on to publish his *Reipublicae Romanae commentariorum libri*, which posed issues of interpretation and ordering – how was the

3. Onofrio Paninio, *Fasti et triumphus Romanorum a Romulo rege usque ad Carolum V*, Venezia, 1557, revised with commentary as *Fastorum libri V a Romulo rege usque ad Imperatorem Caesarem Carolum V Austriam Augustum*, Venezia, 1558.

historian to explain an institution that seemed to change over time, as well as explaining how that institution worked? – as well as of evidence.⁴ Panvinio's solutions, involving the citation of reams of sources, some certainly arcane, were not wholly satisfactory, but the effort involved and the value of the compilation were obvious. It is apparent from his letters that his grasp of evidence was valued by Agustín, Sigonio, and others.

In the same years that he worked on the framework for Roman history, he also published a chronology of Roman popes and cardinals, and a chronology of secular rulers in Europe from Julius Caesar to the present (this included the account of the election of the Holy Roman Emperor that he was later to expand and send to Fugger).⁵ It is hardly surprising that as he worked on all these projects, Farnese would encourage him to distil what he found about the election of the popes. As Bauer demonstrates, Panvinio brought the same concern with evidence to the question of papal elections as he did to establishing who was in control of what in which years. And just as he tried to chart the emergence of the institutions of the Roman republic over time, so he identified many different forms of election over time for the popes, perhaps excessively so: using a range of medieval accounts, he distinguished seventeen different modes up to the twelfth century. He also showed that different actors were involved. He claimed that one thread of continuity in the process was that changes were only made to the system by the authority of the popes themselves. But his sources demonstrated that this did not preclude the early participation of the Roman people, or of the emperors, who involved themselves in the election from the Carolingian period on; Panvinio quoted Liutprand of Cremona, for example, to show that in 963 the Romans promised Emperor Otto that they would not elect a pope without imperial consent. Only when the election was limited to cardinals, after 1179, did he land “on a more peaceful shore” (p.119). Once the system was established, Panvinio focused on records of the elections themselves, taking the story down to his own time.

Many aspects of this narrative had the potential to concern Panvinio's colleagues. His early books stressed change, rather than continuity, in the ways that popes were chosen. His accounts of medieval disputes over investiture raised questions about the relationship of emperor and pope that had ramifications for the sixteenth-century popes' claim to territory in Italy. His commitment to uncovering relevant testimony meant that he used sources that would have made churchmen uncomfortable, such as Johannes Aventinus, whose criticisms of the papacy were to find him a place on the Index, and Francesco Guicciardini, who recorded the simony that led to Pope Alexander VI's election. Panvinio was aware of the problems. He did not send his treatise to a printer, and he prepared different versions for different readers, such as Fugger, including an epitome for Cardinal Carlo Borromeo when his uncle, Pope Pius IV, was planning electoral reform. As with his account of the Roman constitution, the virtue of Panvinio's work lay in its range and close attention to primary sources.

4. Onofrio Panvinio, *Reipublicae Romanae commentariorum libri tres*, Venezia, 1558.

5. Onofrio Panvinio, *Romani pontifices et cardinales Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae*, Venezia, 1557; Id., *Romanorum principum et eorum quorum maxima in Italia imperia fuerunt libri IV*, Basel, 1558.

It “remains the only comprehensive source-based history of papal elections to have been written until today” (p.142). It made him a valued resource – on Pope Paul IV’s death in 1559, Farnese urged him to come to Rome to witness the conclave and offer advice – although not necessarily popular. Bauer compares Panvinio’s approach to papal history with that of a more emollient successor, Alfonso Chacón. Chacón realized the dangers of looking too closely at papal elections, and spent much more time discussing papal coronations instead.

Panvinio did publish a series of papal biographies, however, in two expanded editions of Platina’s *Vitae Pontificum* (1562 and 1568).⁶ Bauer shows clearly how potential biographers, who had access to a wide range of sources, had to be wary of political pressure from the deceased popes’ families and enemies, and of the Curia’s usual interest in suppressing evidence of imperfect behaviour. As a result, historians wrote lives of fewer renaissance popes than one might expect. Panvinio’s willingness to speak out – for example, he stated that Paul III, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese’s uncle, «excessively favoured his own relatives» (p.156) – seems brave. In the 1560s, Panvinio continued to gather material on St Peter, aiming to confirm that Christ appointed Peter as first pope, and also began working on a much more extensive history of the church, which he pitched to Philip II of Spain.⁷ Bauer focuses on the reception of these works. Panvinio understood his accounts would bolster the Catholic Church’s claims for papal primacy and for doctrinal constancy in the face of Protestant criticisms. In 1565, when he was working in the Vatican Library, he was appointed to a commission entrusting with refuting the *Magdeburg Centuries*, the Protestant history of Christianity. Pope Pius V’s decision to hold up the works’ publication, though, shows that Panvinio had not won himself an unblemished reputation. Panvinio had devoted much effort in the last years of his life to finding patrons and printers north of the Alps, a sign of his status in Rome. After Panvinio’s death, his brother Paolo and Cardinal Farnese attempted to have his works reviewed for publication. The censors admired his diligence, and his sober assessment of early popes in comparison with Platina, but they questioned him on details, such as his claim that it was Constantine, and not the bishops, who decided to convoke the Council of Nicaea, or his scepticism about the tradition that St Peter had been bishop of Antioch before Rome.

Paolo Panvinio did succeed in having his brother’s work on Peter published, but other manuscripts, most notably the work on papal elections and the church history, passed from ecclesiastical official to ecclesiastical official.⁸ In practice, as Bauer shows, Panvinio’s work had become less important to the Curia, and so less urgent for correction, because there was a new, more tractable historian in town. Cesare Baronio took on the task of producing an acceptable martyrology and ecclesiastical history, and he was much more committed than his predecessor to demonstrating the essentially unchanging nature of the Church. He

6. B. Platina, *Opus de vitis ac gestis summorum pontificum*, ed. with additions by Onofrio Panvinio, Köln, 1562; Id., *Historia de vitis pontificum Romanorum*, ed. with additions by Onofrio Panvinio, Köln, 1568.

7. Panvinio had dedicated a first version of the *De primatu Petri* to Cervini in 1553, which was not printed.

8. O. Panvinio, *De primatu Petri et Apostolicae Sedis potestate libri tres contra Centuriarum auctores*, Verona, 1589.

even recalled speaking to Panvinio in a dream, asking Panvinio to finish his church history, before being interrupted by a voice telling him to do it himself. In the 1586 *Martyrologium Romanum*, he dismissed Panvinio's attack on St Peter at Antioch as innovative (a bad thing) and false. Baronio was a less imaginative historian than Panvinio, but he did learn from the latter the importance of citation and documentation: his twelve-volume *Annales Ecclesiastici* drowns its readers in detail, while not allowing them to forget that central message of *semper eadem*. From a Catholic point of view, Baronio answered the *Magdeburg Centuries*. Bauer argues that its existence, and the fact that historical censorship was largely entrusted to theologians, dissuaded Catholics from large-scale ecclesiastical history of the sort that Panvinio envisaged. The great historical projects of the seventeenth century were the publication campaigns of the Maurists and Bollandists.

Behind his measured account of Panvinio's intellectual development, Bauer clearly admires his subject for his energy and commitment to research (Panvinio claimed to have visited over fifty archives, which even if it is an overstatement, demonstrates again his understanding of the importance of digging out primary sources). He points out that Panvinio did not necessarily massage the facts for his patrons. In the work on elections, for example, Panvinio argued that Ferdinand I's election as Holy Roman Emperor was not so much free as «practically forced»(p.140) by Charles V, Ferdinand's predecessor and brother. Bauer is indulgent of Panvinio's slips into the falsification of evidence and plagiarism. The inscription that Panvinio altered to connect the Honorius with the Savelli is almost certainly not the only example of invention on his part; Bauer links Panvinio with Pirro Ligorio and others, whose imaginative responses to the remains of the past were not condemned unambiguously by contemporaries. Plagiarism seems to have been viewed more seriously. Bauer shows how in his ecclesiastical works Panvinio tacitly lifted information from various sources, including both recently published liturgical texts and older sources such as Otto of Freising. Clearly today's attitudes to citation are very different to those in the sixteenth century, but even so Panvinio's approach was patchy. In one of his antiquarian works, he copied an account of the development of antiquarianism from Georg Fabricius. Fabricius responded by condemning Panvinio in the next edition of his work. Panvinio was writing quickly, for money, and sometimes that showed.

Bauer very ably demonstrates Panvinio's historical abilities and achievements. Panvinio's research for his chronological projects gave him a wide-ranging grasp of the connections between people and events. He was an astute interpreter of sources, and used his connections to gather material far and wide. The books he published, and completed in manuscript, are detailed and engage in depth with particular historical problems. Sometimes they seem to miss the wood for the trees, and slip into encyclopedism; his contemporary Sigonio, for example, was better able to illustrate central themes in the constitution of the Roman state. In ecclesiastical history, Panvinio's critical, thoughtful, but sympathetic approach to the story of Catholicism was not quite militant enough for some of his contemporaries and for the censors after his death. But from a more distant perspective, Panvinio's ability to balance the competing needs of his sources and his religious and political patrons is very impressive.

In the field of ecclesiastical history, future scholars will be able to use Bauer's work as a springboard to explore other angles. One, for example, is Panvinio's presentation of the Christian topography of Rome. Panvinio's most read work today is probably his posthumously-published account of the seven churches in Rome, because art historians consult it for information about individual structures, and he also wrote longer accounts of churches, including St Peter's.⁹ Another angle is Panvinio's understanding of the connections of early Christian and pagan procedure. In the last year of his life Panvinio wrote an account of Christian burial ritual; the book is based on literary sources, and compares Christian with pagan practice (Bauer follows other historians in suggesting this is primarily about the catacombs, though Panvinio betrays little first-hand knowledge of those in the book).¹⁰ And although Bauer provides some teasing analyses, it would be fascinating to know more about Panvinio's understanding of the relationship between ecclesiastical and secular authority outside the work on elections; in 1568 he also published a ecclesiastical chronicle «from the rule of the dictator Julius Caesar to Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II».¹¹

Given the extent of Panvinio's oeuvre, however, and the way Panvinio's life illuminates questions of patronage, politics and printing in the period, Bauer could certainly not have planned to provide the last word. His book shows how Panvinio's life and times created his scholarship, and how we can use that scholarship in turn to understand the confessional historiography of the period. It is a vital study of historical culture around the Council of Trent and beyond.

9. Onofrio Panvinio, *De praecipuis urbis Romae sanctioribusque basilicis, quas septem ecclesias vulgo vocant, liber*, Roma, 1570.

10. Onofrio Panvinio, *De ritu sepeliendi mortuos apud veteres Christianos et eorundem coemeteriis liber*, Köln, 1568.

11. Onofrio Panvinio, *Chronicon ecclesiasticum a C. Iulii Caesaris dictatoris imperio usque ad Imperatorem Caesarem Maximilianum II*, Köln, 1568.